

PATHFINDER[®]

ADVENTURE PATH[™]



THE THRUSHMOOR TERROR

by Tito Leati



Like the noble that lives there, Iris Hill watches over the town of Thrushmoor. Also like its owner, the manor house is but a dim reflection of its former glory. Or so the rumors hold.

MY SEARCH CONTINUES

After my fruitless search of Briarstone Asylum, I had hoped to gain an audience with Count Lowls, a local noble and somewhat renowned dabbler in the occult. Unfortunately, I was repeatedly rebuffed by an unpleasant young woman who claimed to be the count's steward. Barred from seeing the manor's library, I turned to the town's bookstores, but I was once again stymied—Count Lowls had already purchased much of the local esoteric lore! Desperate, I was able to secure some time to search through Thrushmoor's governmental records, kept at its fort, but I still have no answers. How I long to leave this rainy, claustrophobic town!



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ON THE COVER



Artist Michal Ivan gives us a creepy look at Ariadnah, the Briarstone Witch. He also depicts the dangers of wandering out onto a dark pier at night where unsettling monsters can bubble up.



STRANGE AEONS

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REFERENCE

This book refers to several other Pathfinder Roleplaying Game products using the following abbreviations, yet these additional supplements are not required to make use of this book. Readers interested in references to Pathfinder RPG hardcovers can find the complete rules of these books available online for free at paizo.com/prd.

<i>Advanced Class Guide</i>	ACG	<i>Occult Adventures</i>	OA
<i>Advanced Player's Guide</i>	APG	<i>Ultimate Equipment</i>	UE
<i>GameMastery Guide</i>	GMG	<i>Ultimate Magic</i>	UM
<i>Horror Adventures</i>	HA		



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THE NIGHTMARE CONTINUES

Last month, when we launched the Strange Aeons Adventure Path, James Jacobs—easily one of the most enthusiastic fans in the office when it comes to H. P. Lovecraft and his writing—tackled the first foreword to introduce the story and give thanks and kudos to our friends at Chaosium. While my esteemed colleague came up with the idea for and outlined this Adventure Path, I'm the one steering this ship into madness for the course of this campaign. So let me take this opportunity to welcome you to the Strange Aeons Adventure Path myself.

As James mentioned in the foreword from last month, we've worked with elements of cosmic horror since the early days of Pathfinder, but this is the first time an entire Adventure Path has been devoted to the works of Lovecraft and his colleagues, who created this genre over a century ago. While I love these stories and the themes of hopeless dread and human insignificance they present, I don't have nearly the pedigree in the lore that James does. I'm thankful that he's two doors down, so that I can pop into his office at any time and find him

eager and willing to point me in the right direction or clarify some obscure detail.

And, oh boy, does the Cthulhu Mythos contain obscure details. Similar to how we built our own campaign setting, Lovecraft and dozens of other writers have added their own spices to the broth, though without a single chef to keep watch over it all. As it happens with shared worlds, especially ones managed through the mail over the course of a long period, sometimes details have ended up wrong, contradictory, or frankly silly at times over the hundred plus years that people have been writing in the Cthulhu Mythos. Thankfully, we have better methods of collaboration and improved production tools these days.

Since this is the first Adventure Path with me at the helm, I was happy to ask my boss, F. Wesley Schneider, to pen the first volume. His writing is always delightfully creepy and (not surprisingly) easy to work with. And that map was amazing! My biggest concern was that some of his encounters would prove too hard if a group of PCs just threw itself at them as if they were simply gangs

of goblins, but I figured that such encounters would help highlight the need for caution throughout this Adventure Path. Clever groups that wish to survive will quickly adopt methods of careful exploration, employ hit-and-run tactics using the chapel refuge as a home base, and learn to prudently run away from fights that threaten to overwhelm them.

Regardless, even in groups relying on these strategies, there's a chance that one of the starting PCs perished within the nightmarish halls of Briarstone Asylum. Since one of the core starting concepts of the Strange Aeons Adventure Path is that all of the PCs begin with no memory of who they are or why they ended up in the asylum, people joining the campaign will miss out on that particular mystery (which is resolved by the end of the third adventure). A new character needs to have a good reason to join the already established party. That character could be someone that wants to help the PCs find out what happened to them. After rescuing the other refugees from Briarstone's chapel, one of those unfortunate souls might be interested in helping his saviors find some important answers. This prospective party member might also be intrigued by the strange goings-on and want to find out more about the shady world of the supernatural. A player in need of a new character could even assume the role of Winter Klackza and come along with the party for the remainder of the campaign.

If no one wants to create a character that was another patient or orderly, this month's adventure provides the perfect opportunity to introduce a new face. Thrushmoor is populous enough that it contains potential characters from almost all walks of life. Also, the town is situated on the shores of Lake Encarthan, so a new character could be anyone that just happened to arrive when the horrific events of this adventure start to unfold. The new character also might have recently heard about strange occurrences in Thrushmoor or at Briarstone Asylum and could show up to investigate on her own, eventually meeting the PCs, who are after the same or similar clues. However the new character joins up with the rest of the party, this would be a good time to bring in PCs that are more attuned to the occult.

LOSING SANITY

Isn't starting the campaign in an amnesiac fugue state enough? *Pathfinder RPG Horror Adventures* includes an optional system for tracking the damage dealt to a PC's sanity by various stimuli, which can be a fun set of rules to use in this Adventure Path if you want to keep your PCs on edge. However, those rules were being created while the authors for this Adventure Path were already hard at work bringing you frightening and deadly adventures, so I wasn't able to include that system in this Adventure Path. (Though you can certainly add it

to your own campaign to ramp up the fear and danger. Check the messageboards to see how other GMs are incorporating the sanity system into their games.)

Instead, this Adventure Path makes use of another approach to representing the mind-shattering dangers associated with delving the depths of the Elder Mythos. Rather than tracking sanity damage, PCs need to deal with afflictions of madness that occur at certain points throughout the story as a direct result of significant events, using the madness system that first appeared in *Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide*, which is expanded upon in *Horror Adventures* to include more lesser and greater madresses. In addition to the scripted instances of these blows to the PCs' psyches, using this system gives you greater freedom to insert insanities into your own story or to inflict them on PCs when they take a great shock to their mental abilities. Whenever one of a PC's mental ability scores is reduced to 0, the PC has a chance to fall victim to a random madness (though the GM can choose a particularly appropriate one for the situation). The flexibility of this type of madness system allows you to adapt it as you will for your particular group.

WHAT ABOUT FEAR?

You can add some really fun elements to this campaign by adopting the alternative fear system presented in *Horror Adventures*, which expands the different levels of fear beyond the usual shaken, frightened, and panicked effects to seven conditions. This system introduces gradual penalties between each step, instead of restricting a character to just being kind of freaked out, running away, or running away after dropping her valuable sword. If you use this optional system for dealing with fear, make sure to let your players in on how it works. It's better to surprise them by building a terrifying atmosphere rather than springing new rules on them.

ON TO YOUR NEW NIGHTMARE

I hope you're all having fun so far in your Strange Aeons campaigns. In this adventure, Tito Leati provides a wealth of eerie encounters, dangerous antagonists, and battles with unnatural enemies, plus the chance to explore a creepy manor, all set in the tragic town of Thrushmoor. The PCs can also start their investigation into what happened to their memories and why they ended up in an asylum—but they might not like what they find!

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PART 1: RETURN TO THRUSHMOOR

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The PCs arrive in Thrushmoor after their ordeal in Briarstone Asylum and begin picking up the pieces of their shattered minds.

PART 2: MISSING MAGISTRATE

20

After learning that the town's magistrate and Count Lowls are both missing, the PCs must investigate Fort Hailcourse to figure out what terror has struck this gloomy area.

PART 3: AGAINST THE CULT OF HASTUR

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As the PCs delve deeper into the mysteries surrounding Thrushmoor, they finally confront the source of the problem—a cult of Hastur has taken up residence in the count's estate.

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

"The Thrushmoor Terror" is designed for four characters and uses the medium advancement track.

4

The PCs begin this adventure at 4th level.

5

The PCs should be 5th level by the time they are ready to explore Fort Hailcourse.

6

The PCs should be 6th level by the time they infiltrate Iris Hill.

The PCs should reach 7th level by the end of this adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long before the PCs were abandoned in Briarstone Asylum in a fugue state with their memories impaired, their former treacherous employer Count Haserton Lowls IV kept himself busy with his plans to redeem his shattered reputation in academic circles.

Increasingly obsessed with secrecy during his burgeoning occult research, he grew a tall hedge around his residence overnight to prevent the curious from getting too close, leaving a gatehouse as the only point of entry. As his studies deepened, his excitement welled, and Lowls intensified his efforts to gain as much esoteric knowledge as possible. The count hoarded more and more occult evidence in the form of books and artifacts, even hiring couriers to gather information in distant lands. Heedless of the consequences, Lowls began to allow his already questionable expenses for this expedition to siphon funds intended for the governance of Versex County.

This burst of lavishness exacerbated Lowls's long-lasting conflicts with his dependent civic leaders. Though the mayors thought keeping the count happy was a sure way to maintain their position, Lowls's wastefulness began to worry them, and they feared direct intervention from the capital in their affairs. The count's odd behavior had caused problems with the principality in the past, but his scrupulous magistrate, Tillus Padgett, had always assured a steady flow of cash into the count's coffers, keeping things under control. As Lowls spent more and more coin, however, he began to embezzle tax money due to the crown. In response to this highly suspicious incident, and after a secret request by Padgett, the authorities sent a state inspector, Royal Accuser Omari, to investigate the count's administration.

During this time, Count Haserton Lowls IV also studied the *Star Stelae* in Thrushmoor, leading him to the discovery of the fungal Great Old One Xhamen-Dor. The count became obsessed with finding and freeing the trapped deity in hopes that he would become the entity's champion on Golarion and further infect this world with the Great Old One's presence.

Count Lowls was close to learning what he needed to, but a few things were beyond his ken. From his interviews with a patient at Briarstone Asylum, Ulver Zandalus, he confirmed that there was a second triad of *Star Stelae* in a forgotten city in a remote desert, but he needed more details of this rumored location. He developed a friendship with the administrator of the asylum, plying her with promises of new research materials and subjects for her experiments. Through this relationship, Lowls was able to conduct long and frequent interviews with Zandalus until he was able to find the information that he sought. Lowls decided that researching the written word would only get him so far, and instead turned to a new method of research: dreams.

After learning of an occult ritual that would allow him to travel to the Dreamlands, Lowls spent evening upon evening casting his mind into the world of dreams to find the answers he sought. During his dream journeys, Lowls made contact with an entity known as the Mad Poet, who told him the name of the forgotten city and promised to show him the way there if Lowls would provide him with certain gifts. One such gift was the sacrifice of the minds and memories of his allies in the Dreamlands. The following night, the count brought the PCs with him on one of his dream journeys, and in front of the Mad Poet, he drowned them in a lake—and received in return the location of the hidden city Neruzavin.

In the waking world, the PCs stirred, but found themselves in a fugue state where they had no recollection of self and little motivation to do more than slowly rock back and forth as their lips mouthed silent words. Count Lowls made good on his agreement with Administrator Losandro and delivered the PCs to Briarstone Asylum before leaving on a ship headed to Cassomir, all before dawn broke.

Focused on preparing for his journey, the count had given less and less attention to the operations at Iris Hill, eventually giving full control of the estate to his assistant Melisenn Kororo. When Melisenn convinced Count Lowls to fire the staff at Iris Hill shortly before his departure, she had a plan in mind to replace them with servants and guards more in line with her own tastes. She put out the call first to those small cells of Hastur cultists she was aware of, including one in Absalom headed up by her longtime companion Risi Nairgon. Within days, the first of these cultists arrived in Thrushmoor. Melisenn housed many of them in the servants' quarters and other buildings at the estate, while other cultists found lodging in town. The cultists insinuated themselves into the town's everyday life so they could act as eyes and ears for Melisenn, keeping her apprised while she studied the *Star Stela* beneath Iris Hill. Not longer after, she unlocked the first mystery of the *Star Stelae*, finding she could power the sleeping artifacts with sacrifices to Hastur.

Melisenn knew she needed brute force in addition to her subtle agents, so she reached out to two different sources. She contacted an associate named Weiralai, a denizen of Leng and slaver. Through her business in Okeno, Weiralai had originally supplied the PCs to the count years before. The denizen of Leng agreed to sell more of her stock to Melisenn, and headed north with a boat filled with savage kuru cannibals. The second source Melisenn contacted was a group of skum who lived in the waters of Lake Encarthan. She promised the gang that they would have free reign to slaughter the people of Thrushmoor once she completed her tasks. The skum readily agreed and snuck into town, rallying at Fort Hailcourse.

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As the cultists, thugs, and monsters arrived, Thrushmoor's citizens began reporting their fellow townsfolk going missing. Melisenn and her cult were snatching a dozen citizens off the street to be sacrificed to Hastur and power the *Star Stelae*. Magistrate Padgett, Constable Cesyll, and the rest of the inhabitants of Fort Hailcourse were quietly slaughtered, and the constable was replaced by a shapeshifting outsider summoned by Melisenn. At the same time, disturbing murals depicting the black skyline of a dark city under a yellow sky began to appear on random walls of Thrushmoor's buildings—a result of one of the *Star Stelae*'s powers that allowed the cultists to supernaturally move about town unnoticed. When a delegation of concerned citizens went to Iris Hill to seek support from the count, they found he was gone. Melisenn Kororo, now in charge of the estate, refused to help, advising the citizens to wait for her master's return.

Instead, the townsfolk went to Fort Hailcourse to see if the magistrate could help protect the town. The shapeshifter, wearing Constable Cesyll's guise, told them Magistrate Padgett had left the town for some unknown reason, and when asked to set up a night patrol, answered that it was impossible. Her orders, she claimed, were to keep the fort safe with the few militia members who remained after most of them had left their posts following weeks of unpaid work. The townspeople were sent away.

Not long after, the artist Lelwyn Hasok, who was hired by the church to paint a mural in New Chapel, reported that the priestess hadn't shown up in the chapel for 2 days, and when he went to her residence to check up on her, no one answered. Lelwyn tried to report this disappearance to the constable, but was turned away after being told the event would be noted and investigated in due time. Since he's a newcomer and not well liked by the townsfolk, Lelwyn had no one else to turn to, so he reported the missing priest to the Sleepless Agency and returned to his studio to work.

Deprived of their traditional leadership, the population begged the Sleepless Agency to take charge of policing the town. Though not known for charity and good will, the Sleepless Agency was concerned about the behavior of the town's leadership and further alarmed by the impending arrival of a royal accuser. Leader of the agency Cesadia Wrentz took careful notice of the events, and suspected that something big was afoot, but she didn't have enough agents to take on the challenge.

When Royal Accuser Omari finally arrived in town, she came with a small group of investigators—including the Pharasmin cleric Winter Klaczka, whom the PCs met in the last adventure—intending to keep a low profile until she had a clearer picture of the situation. Instead of visiting New Chapel, the Pharasmin church in town, Omari met with Cesadia Wrentz of the Sleepless Agency

and requested that the office be the rally point for her and her investigators. Omari organized the party that left to investigate Briarstone Asylum, and asked for an audience with Melisenn Kororo, a request that received no answer. Warned by Cesadia Wrentz about the shady reputation of Lowls's minions and the danger that invading Iris Hill might pose, Omari decided to go first to Fort Hailcourse in order to force an inspection and enlist the support of the stubborn Constable Cesyll. When Omari went to the fort, however, her group was ambushed and overwhelmed. After a brief, bloody battle, all of Omari's group were killed, leaving only bloodstains and other signs of violence in the fort's lobby.

Since then, the gates of Iris Hill and Fort Hailcourse alike have remained shut, and the terror among the people of Thrushmoor has been growing day by day.

PART 1: RETURN TO THRUSHMOOR

At the end of the previous adventure, the PCs freed themselves (along with other survivors) from the crumbling and nightmare-besieged Briarstone Asylum. They learned that they had been committed to the asylum under the care of Administrator Losandro by Count Haserton Lowls IV. With no recollection of who he is—or even who they themselves are—the PCs head to Thrushmoor, the closest town to Briarstone Isle and the seat of Versex County, to find clues of their uncertain past.

Though they have escaped the strange mists of Briarstone Isle, the poor weather hasn't changed. Deep gray clouds loom like a low ceiling in a dark room, and driving rain soaks them through. The wind and rain make for choppy conditions on the water and limit visibility even during the day. As the small boat draws near Thrushmoor, one of the survivors points to the shore, calling out that they see lights glowing in the town's windows. Other survivors issue sighs of relief, hoping that their ordeal is over.

But the PCs' journey isn't so nicely wrapped up—they have only just begun to figure out who they are and what happened to them. The PCs left Briarstone Asylum knowing that Count Haserton Lowls IV brought them there, that he was causing enough trouble to warrant a visit by a Royal Accuser, and that they used to work for him in some capacity. Now they must explore Thrushmoor and unravel more of the mystery surrounding their bizarre condition.

THE STAR STELAE

These ancient monuments came to be known as *Star Stelae* due to the misshapen star etched alongside other non-identified runes on their weathered surfaces. The semicircular pieces of dark stone stand 12 feet tall atop two of the three hills in the town. Nearly all residents of Thrushmoor are aware of only these two ancient

monuments, though scholars from the Sincomakti School in Rozenport believe a third was destroyed or removed when Pragmus Lowls built the Iris Hill estate over 2 centuries ago. The truth is that the third *Star Stela* wasn't lost or destroyed, but rather this ancient monument was incorporated into the construction of Iris Hill and now resides beneath the main manor house.

Each *Star Stela* is mostly cylindrical, but the side of the stone facing the center of town has been ground down into a flat surface carved with enigmatic symbols. Most scholars believe the monuments to be unique, but some rare texts claim that similar stones stand in the heart of a lost city in a region of southwestern Casmaron called the Parchlands.

Though these stones have been studied over the years by many, few know their true origin. During the Age of Serpents, a storm of Hastur-worshipping flying polyps came to Golarion, using their mastery of wind to carry a shell of breathable air through space from their previous conquered world in search of a new world to infest. They claimed two sites on the planet as staging areas for this infestation, raising a triad of *Star Stelae* at each site. These monuments marked the land as the flying polyps' territory, but also linked the sites to Carcosa so that the flying polyps might offer sacrifices of new lands to that parasite city as supplication to their master, the King in Yellow. One such site was where Thrushmoor would eventually be founded, but there the flying polyps were confronted and defeated by a powerful group of serpentfolk in a pyrrhic battle that saw the destruction of both forces, leaving only the three *Star Stelae* as lasting evidence of their presence. The flying polyps were much more successful at a second site in southwestern Casmaron, building one of their eerie cities around the three *Star Stelae* they erected there. (More information about this other triad of *Star Stelae* can be found in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #113: What Grows Within*.)

Long after the creation and abandonment of the *Star Stelae*, Sarkorians happened upon the site and settled in the delta of the Danver River along the shores of Avalon Bay. The Sarkorians were devoted to a host of demigods and psychopomps, and saw divinity in many things. From their study and worship of the stones, these ancient people learned of far-off deities with names such as Lord of the Woods and the King in Yellow. Over the ages, various people made use of the stones as a way to confer with such powerful entities.

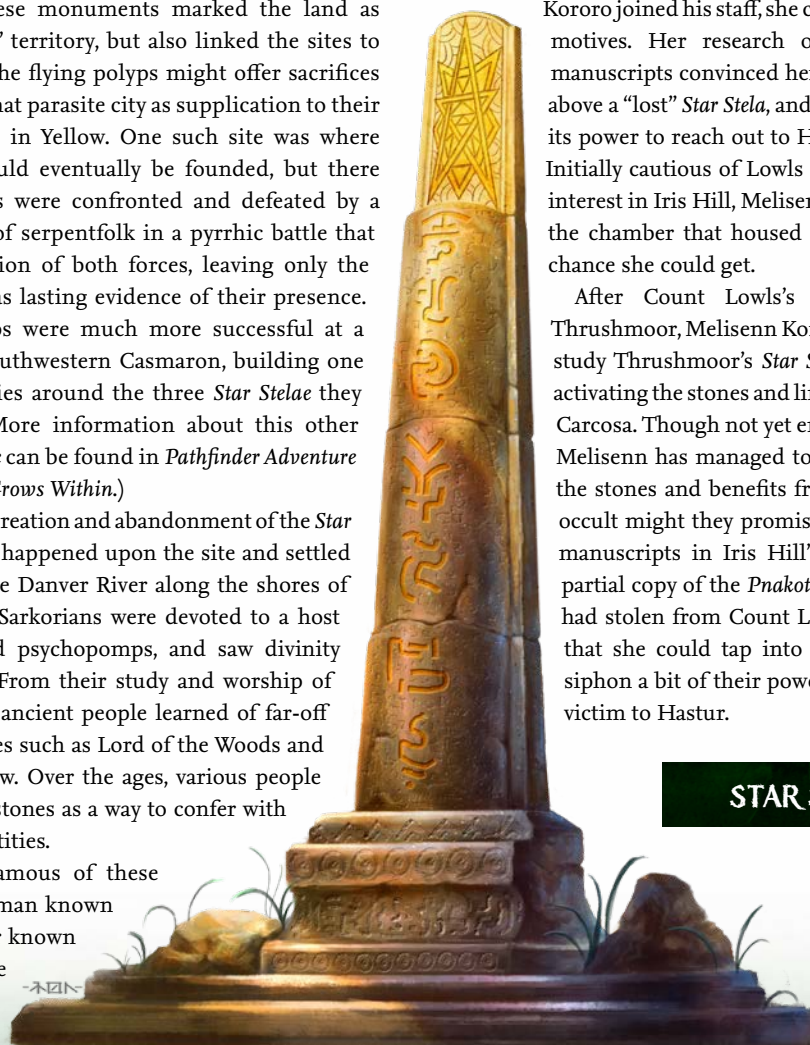
The most infamous of these figures was a woman known as Ariadnah, later known as the Briarstone Witch. Through the *Star Stelae*,

she called out to Hastur and turned one of his pets, the Tatterman, into a tool for her own use. Under Ariadnah's influence, many Sarkorians turned away from their old worship and began worshipping the gods of the Elder Mythos.

The cultists used rituals and divinations, calling out to faraway gods, to learn further secrets of the *Star Stelae*. They interpreted the stones' cryptic inscriptions, and even picked up telepathic transmissions from an interested group of yithians. With this knowledge, they developed a method to activate the artifacts, charging them with the life force of victims lashed to the stone and ritually sacrificed with a blade through the throat. The energized stones appealed to Shub-Niggurath, a contact that resulted in the Thrushmoor Vanishing in 4051 AR.

Count Lowls IV, along with several of his predecessors, were aware that Iris Hill was built atop one of these artifacts. As he grew up and became interested in occult affairs, he began researching the *Star Stelae* in hopes of activating them, but became distracted by other subjects over the years. However, when the cultist Melisenn Kororo joined his staff, she came with ulterior motives. Her research of long-forgotten manuscripts convinced her that Iris Hill sat above a "lost" *Star Stela*, and she hoped to use its power to reach out to Hastur in Carcosa. Initially cautious of Lowls realizing her real interest in Iris Hill, Melisenn snuck down to the chamber that housed the artifact every chance she could get.

After Count Lowls's departure from Thrushmoor, Melisenn Kororo continued to study Thrushmoor's *Star Stelae* in hopes of activating the stones and linking Golarion to Carcosa. Though not yet entirely successful, Melisenn has managed to partially awaken the stones and benefits from a taste of the occult might they promise. From studying manuscripts in Iris Hill's libraries and a partial copy of the *Pnakotic Manuscripts* she had stolen from Count Lowls, she learned that she could tap into the artifacts and siphon a bit of their power by sacrificing a victim to Hastur.



STAR STELA

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TRACKING CHARGES

When the adventure begins, each of the *Star Stelae* has a certain number of charges, as follows.

Stela of Alar: 15 charges

Stela of Carcosa: 30 charges

Stela of Yhtill: 20 charges

Keeping track of the exact number of charges each *Star Stela* holds is a minor complication the GM can ignore if she so wishes. In this case, she may simply assume that all the *Star Stelae* have a certain amount of charges, and that the cultists use their powers sparingly (at the most dramatic moments in the story) to avoid their depletion and the need of too many sacrifices to keep them charged. If the PCs learn how to use the stones and want to use them, the GM can assign it a number of charges, unless the PCs simply want to deactivate them by depleting the artifacts' charges.

Each of the *Star Stelae* has a connection to one of three strange cities on the shores of Lake Hali, all on a faraway planet. The stone on the small island in the southwestern portion of Thrushmoor is linked to Alar, the one on the hill near the center of town is linked to Yhtill, and the monument entombed beneath Iris Hill is linked to Carcosa.

The *Star Stelae* of Thrushmoor are capable of great feats beyond linking the town to Carcosa, though in their current state of partial activation, the following effects are all the stones are capable of. The *Star Stelae* at their full potential are major artifacts, but in their current state are only minor artifacts.

THRUSHMOOR STAR STELAE			MINOR ARTIFACT
SLOT none	CL 20th	WEIGHT 44,000 lbs. each	
AURA faint conjuration and transmutation			

The *Star Stelae* in Thrushmoor are partially operational and provide the following benefits to any creature bearing an unholy symbol of Hastur—the Yellow Sign. Each *Star Stela* has a number of charges that can be replenished with an appropriate sacrifice, and activating one of the artifact's effects expends a number of charges. Each stone can hold a maximum of 50 charges. Because these artifacts are damaged and not operating at their full potential, their auras register as faint instead of strong or overwhelming.

If a creature in possession of a Yellow Sign touches a *Star Stela*, it immediately receives a flow of telepathic impressions that it can attempt to interpret with a DC 25 Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (religion) check. If the creature succeeds, it understands what the *Star Stela* can do, and can attempt to tap into their power.

Any creature using a *Star Stela* for any of these effects is bombarded with strange images and distant whispers. If the

creature makes use of the teleportation effect, it steps into one wall and emerges into what looks like an abandoned and eerily quiet city filled with swirling yellow mist before exiting to its desired location.

A creature bearing the unholy symbol of Hastur can make use of the following effects.

City Stride: By touching one of the *Star Stelae*, a user can create a temporary portal on a wall within 200 feet of the stone. The user can then travel to another wall within 200 feet of one of the other two *Star Stelae* as if via *dimension door*. A sooty mural of a gloomy and abandoned city appears on any wall used for this manner of travel. This use expends 2 charges.

Sinister Whispers: By touching one of Thrushmoor's *Star Stelae*, a user can transmit a short, whispered message to any point within 300 feet of any of the three artifacts. All creatures wearing an unholy symbol of Hastur within that area hear the whispered message and can give a short reply. This use expends 1 charge. If the user and another creature are touching different stones at the same time, one of them can expend 2 charges to communicate telepathically for 1 minute.

If a stone is depleted of all its charges, it becomes inactive and can't be used anymore. An inactive *Star Stela* can be activated again only through the successful completion of a specific occult ritual (the same one that Melisenn used to originally awaken the stones).

Charges can be replenished through sacrifice. If a sentient living creature is killed in the name of Hastur while in contact with one of the *Star Stelae*, the artifact gains a number of charges equal to 1 per Hit Die of the sacrificed victim.

DESTRUCTION

Thrushmoor's *Star Stelae* can be destroyed by a flying polyp using its wind blast to deal 500 points of damage to each stone during a particular celestial alignment that occurs once per year.

EXPLORING THRUSHMOOR

As the PCs arrive in Thrushmoor, allow them to choose where they want to go first. There are a number of locations the PCs might want to visit. If Winter Klaczka accompanies the PCs, she might ask them to come along to the Sleepless Building where she was supposed to rendezvous with Accuser Omari. If concerned about the health of any of the other asylum survivors, Winter might opt to stop by New Chapel first to see to their care (see page 66 for more information on New Chapel). As they have nowhere to stay, the PCs first might want to secure lodging. For this, the best bet for this would be for them to visit the Silver Wagon (see page 67 for more information on this inn).

Arriving in Thrushmoor, the PCs find a town in barely bridled chaos. Most of the town's leadership has gone missing in recent days, kidnappings have been reported, and the people of Thrushmoor look at one

another with ever-greater suspicion through narrowed eyes. The people of Thrushmoor are convinced that the Briarstone Witch is responsible for the recent disappearances, and fear they will all be picked off, one by one, for her nefarious plans. Some are convinced a second Thrushmoor Vanishing looms. These fears, however, are unfounded—the Briarstone Witch isn't coming for Thrushmoor's citizens, but they are easy pickings for the cult of Hastur that has blossomed in the dreary town.

Apart from the long span of fog and bad weather, the town is not especially dangerous during the day, although the ominous presence of the strange charcoal murals on a few walls gives the disturbing impression that danger might spring at the party in every moment (and it can—see **Event 7**). After sundown, Thrushmoor becomes a place of extreme gloom and fear, where everyone heads home and bolts the door against real or perceived threats that wander the streets.

As the PCs wander around in town, you can use the Thrushmoor gazetteer (see page 62) to add flavor to the austere town. You can also find more information about Ustalav and Versex County in *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Rule of Fear*.

The PCs might want to go directly to Iris Hill, but it would be best for them to get their bearings in town before visiting the estate, as many of the threats there are difficult for a 4th-level party; see *At Lowls's Doorstep* on page 34 of this adventure for ways to redirect the characters. If the PCs catch wind of the shuttering of Fort Hailcourse and decide to visit the fort first, see *First Visit* on page 21 in Part 2. Otherwise, as the PCs look around town, talk to the townsfolk, and deal with some of the troubles plaguing the area, they will likely come across the following encounters and events.

Presented below are both event-based encounters and location-based encounters. Each of the events includes a suggested time for the event to take place, but feel free to adjust the timing of the events as you see fit, interspersing them with the location-based encounters. Some of these events are optional, but you should endeavor to run most, if not all of them, to make sure the PCs earn enough experience to face the more difficult challenges ahead.

SLEEPLESS BUILDING

At some point while the PCs are in Thrushmoor, they will likely visit the Sleepless Building, home of the Sleepless Agency and its leader, Cesadia Wrentz. Most likely, the PCs visit the Sleepless Building alongside Winter Klaczka after their ordeal at Briarstone Asylum. The large wooden building is dark and quiet, and it takes more than one knock upon the door to receive an answer. Cesadia doesn't personally answer the door, and instead the PCs are greeted by one of her agents, Meg Thalen.

Meg met Winter when she arrived with Accuser Omari, and extends a warm greeting to the Pharasmin priest, though her demeanor quickly sours when she notices the PCs. Regardless, she invites the group in and directs the party to a comfortable lobby to wait for Cesadia.

Even if the PCs don't visit on their own accord, they receive a summons from the Sleepless Agency if they convince Elgrior to stop his frightening demagoguery (**Event 2**) or help defuse the situation at Lelwyn Hasok's studio (area **B**). Cesadia may also send for them if she hears they were attacked in the street by cultists (**Event 7**), or if they follow their own leads to investigate the grotto outside of town (area **A**).

Cesadia is suspicious of the PCs, despite any kind words Winter might have to say about them and their efforts to free the survivors from Briarstone Asylum. She knows they had served as Lowls's flunkies for years before being committed to the asylum, and that they weren't considered to be good people. On one occasion a couple of years ago, one of the PCs traded insults with one of her agents in an exchange that nearly came to blows—though the PC in question has no recollection of the event. Nevertheless, Cesadia is curious to speak with the PCs to learn what occurred on Briarstone Isle, especially regarding supernatural events such as the strange mist and its effects on dreams. She is initially suspicious of their current condition, but after a few minutes of conversation she can tell that the PCs in fact have no firm memory of who they once were and the roles they played in Thrushmoor.

Obtaining more information from Cesadia during the first encounter should be difficult; the PCs need to earn the woman's trust before cooperation becomes possible. A sure way to impress Cesadia is with facts rather than with words, and to get a chance to improve her attitude toward them, the PCs might offer to help her out in following up on some of the clues in Thrushmoor.

During their meeting with Cesadia, it becomes obvious she is concerned about the things going on in town, and frustrated that she seems to be the only person in a position to address them. However, since any sense of leadership in town has collapsed, the responsibility has fallen to her, though it is too much for her to manage with only her skeleton crew of agents in the Sleepless Building.

Her biggest concern is the rash of kidnappings that have taken place in recent days. While many insist the Briarstone Witch is snatching up townsfolk, Cesadia knows there must be a more reasonable explanation. She has noticed there have been a number of newcomers to town and suspects cult activity is to blame for the missing persons, but she has no hard evidence. She's smart enough to know that the shuttering of Fort Hailcourse is highly irregular, even with the magistrate missing and the mercenaries' recent defection. Cesadia

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is convinced that Count Lowls's departure somehow ties into the town's misfortunes, though she doesn't yet suspect that Melisenn is the true catalyst of some of these events. However, she wonders why the count fired his servants and replaced them with peculiar foreigners brought to Thrushmoor by ship—one she rightly suspects was a slave ship.

Cesadia is further frustrated by the constant requests from Dena Gallegos at the Silver Wagon and Emman Gulston at the Stain, both proprietors asking her to convince Elgrior to stop scaring their clientele. And reports that people in town have spotted the apparition of Thrushmoor's previous countess (**Event 5**) are growing more frequent.

Cesadia is eager to address the town's problems, but knows she needs help. In order to test out the PCs and have them assist calming Thrushmoor, Cesadia asks them to follow up on Toli Remsatter's rumors (see area A below).

Creatures: Aside from Cesadia, there are only four Sleepless Agents here when the adventure begins. While the building serves as the agency's headquarters, most of the time the agents are out in the field. The agents currently present at the Sleepless Building are **Allard Hagely** (LN male human investigator^{ACG} 4), **Lucky Joslyn** (N female human rogue 5), **Shevan Toralin** (CN male half-elf rogue 2/sorcerer 1), and **Meg Thalen** (N female human rogue 4). Cesadia is fully detailed on page 56.

Development: Once the PCs handle and report back on one (or more) of the problems that concern Cesadia, her trust in them grows. If the PCs have been refused service at the town's inns (see **Event 1** below) and they have no place to stay, Cesadia offers to let them stay in the Sleepless Building—partially out of charity, but also to keep an eye on them and press them for more information about Briarstone (and Lowls by association). If the PCs significantly impress Cesadia, she might offer to help them piece together where Count Lowls is headed, greatly helping in their quest to find out more about their enigmatic condition. Cesadia encourages the PCs to seek out clues to their predicament, and while she doesn't come out and say it, her words should help steer the PCs toward investigating Fort Hailcourse before attempting to infiltrate Iris Hill.

A. GROTTO OF THE WITCH

With Thrushmoor in a panic over the recent kidnappings and lack of civic leadership, superstitions and old tales have climbed into the forefront of the townsfolk's minds. Fearing another Thrushmoor Vanishing, many of the people of Thrushmoor speak the name Ariadnah in hushed tones.

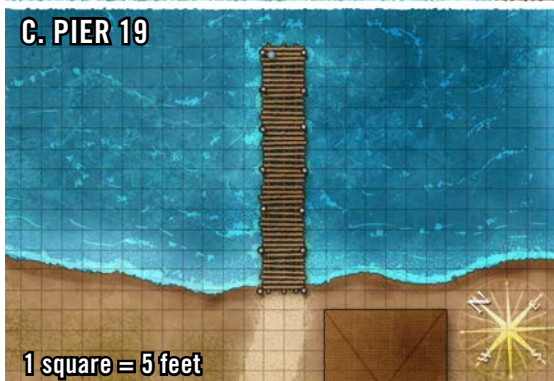
Just before the kidnappings started in Thrushmoor, a local fisherman named Toli Remsatter noticed a glowing light in a small cave along the shore a mile out

of town. Caught up in the fear sown by Elgrior Nasmeth (see page 16), the angler began to suspect that the light he saw means the Briarstone Witch has returned to once again take everyone in Thrushmoor into the bay. Later, Toli recounted this theory over drinks and cards at the Stain, spreading the fear to other patrons and thus throughout town.

This sighting outside of town is the only tangible evidence that could potentially link the Briarstone Witch to Thrushmoor's current terror. Of course, the Briarstone Witch has nothing to do with the kidnappings and disappearances, and though the Watcher in the Bay does still slumber beneath the lapping waves of Avalon Bay, no second Thrushmoor Vanishing is going to occur. Ariadnah isn't coming to haunt Thrushmoor, but another "witch" has taken interest in the town.

Only recently arrived in the Thrushmoor area, Daridela Cornett, also known as the Witch of Dreams, originally came from the forest near Illmarsh. Skilled with plants of all kinds, Daridela is particularly fascinated with fungus, an interest that initially bloomed from her experiences with a few psychotropic varieties. She believed her hallucinations provided greater insight into the world and allowed her to "see the truth beneath the surface." Daridela refined and brewed these mushrooms and molds into more potent drugs, and spent hours—if not days—under their effects as she tried to further open her eyes to the mysteries of the world. It was during one of these self-induced ecstasies that she first discovered Xhamen-Dor, the Great Old One of decay, parasites, and transformation. In another extended hallucination, the Witch of Dreams had a vision that put her on the path to learn more of the Inmost Blot.

This vision showed her that Xhamen-Dor lay at the bottom of a remote lake someplace far from Ustalav, and that if she could find it, the Great Old One would transform her into its champion so she might infect the rest of the planet. She also learned her path was not one she walked alone. Though Xhamen-Dor awakens slowly, its tendrils stretch far from where its body lies, twisting into the minds of dreamers and those who know of the Inmost Blot. Those who didn't go completely insane strive to fully bring the Great Old One into the world, competitors for the role the Witch of Dreams seeks. She learned that Count Haserton Lowls was one such soul on the path to find this remote lake and invite Xhamen-Dor into himself. Daridela reasoned that finding Lowls was her first step to unleashing Xhamen-Dor, so she traveled to Thrushmoor to present herself to the count, hoping he would take her along on his journey. If all went as she planned, she could slowly poison the count with a host of drugs to weaken his mind and body before they arrived at the lake, where Daridela intended to make Lowls the first sacrifice to her master.



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However, upon arriving in Thrushmoor, Daridela discovered the count had already left on an expedition to halfway across the world. Though initially turned away from Iris Hill by Melisenn's toughs, the Witch of Dreams made contact with the cult leader herself and offered drugs, poisons, and terrifying plant monsters in order to insinuate herself into the cult and learn more about the count's whereabouts.

Reluctant to stay in Thrushmoor, Daridela discovered this grotto less than a mile from town. Here, she brews her dangerous concoctions away from the prying eyes of the suspicious populace. She rarely, if ever, comes into Thrushmoor, and instead relies on cultists to come visit her when they need to resupply.

Used by smugglers, hunters, and addicts over the years, this small grotto is relatively unknown to most of Thrushmoor's citizens. Since it is normally only used for shady behaviors, most who know of its location remain tight-lipped about it. However, if questioned, Toli can provide directions to the grotto. If a PC succeeds at a DC 20 Diplomacy check and provides Toli with 2 sp per passenger, he will bring the PCs right to the cave.

The cave mouth opens to a small cave system containing three chambers. The limestone walls of the cave are slick with moisture and spotted with patchy clumps of moss, mold, and fungus. The ceilings in the grotto vary in height from 7 to 10 feet unless otherwise noted. This cave floods when the lake swells, washing in silt and mud and depositing it in a layer across the limestone floor. Tracks from the grotto's current

inhabitants crisscross this muck. For this encounter, use the Grotto of the Witch map above.

A1. GROTTO ENTRANCE (CR 5)

A small strip of muddy sand choked with reeds sits at the entrance of a low cave just at the lip of the bay. Scraggly vines drape over the top of the cave and hang like tangled hair over its mouth.

Obscured from casual observation by vegetation, this small cave mouth opens in the limestone face of the water's edge. This part of the shore is approximately 8 feet above the water level, so if the PCs approach this area from the shore, they have to descend to what serves as a beach in front of the cave.

Climbing down the damp limestone face of the shore requires a successful DC 20 Climb check to avoid falling. A pair of large rocks offers an easier path for more nimble characters: a PC can step or hop from rock to rock and end up safely in front of the cave if she succeeds at a DC 10 Acrobatics check.

The grotto's entrance is dark except for whatever outside light might be streaming in. The muddy floor is tracked with footprints, and a wooden barricade seals off the tunnel at the back of this area.

Creature: While most of the vegetation around the cave is natural and mundane, an assassin vine hides among the foliage that dangles in front of the cave mouth. Daridela lured the creature here to act as a

deterrent to any unplanned visitors. She's managed to keep the creature sated by bringing it meals of small animals as well as a farmer or two that she captured while foraging for plants in the nearby countryside. Mindless and eager for flesh, the assassin vine fights until destroyed.

Unless the PCs are quiet when fighting the assassin vine, Daridela likely hears the sounds of combat. Instead of joining the fight here, she waits for the PCs to move beyond the barricade, taking the additional time to prepare.

ASSASSIN VINE

CR 3

XP 800

hp 30 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 22*)

Trap: Daridela strung a tripwire across the cave entrance rigged to a spring-loaded blade that slashes at those who step into the indicated squares.

POISONED BLADES

CR 5

XP 1,600

Type mechanical; **Perception** DC 20;

Disable Device DC 20

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Reset** manual

Effect Atk +15 melee (1d8+1 plus malyass root paste); multiple targets (all targets in each of the two indicated squares)

A2. FUNGAL LAIR (CR 3)

This dark limestone chamber smells like wet mulch and is bare aside from a scattering of animal bones.

The opening to this unlit chamber is only 5 feet in diameter, forcing taller folk to duck in order to enter. The muddy floor is covered with various tracks. Some are from Daridela's boots, but the others are strange, stumpy marks from the room's current phantom fungus resident. A few humanoid bones are mixed in with the animal bones on the floor—all the result of Daridela feeding her plant minions.

Creature: Much like she did with the assassin vine

guarding the opening to the grotto, Daridela lured this phantom fungus to her lair. While the druid first brought the odd creature here to study and experiment on, she hasn't been able to find an effective use for the walking mushroom. The phantom fungus used to stay in the large cave (area A3), but after it got in the way too often, Daridela banished the creature to this cave to serve as an additional sentry in case anything got past the assassin vine.

The phantom fungus stands in the back of this chamber, keeping a clear line of sight and line of effect to the grotto's entrance tunnel. The phantom fungus remains invisible and motionless, waiting for prey to draw near. If one of the PCs enters the room, the

plant creature tries to slowly maneuver behind her to attack with its gaping maw.

If given a choice of enemies, the phantom fungus focuses on the PCs who make the most noise. Though as intelligent as an animal, the phantom fungus has no sense of self preservation and fights to the death.

PHANTOM FUNGUS

CR 3

XP 800

hp 30 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3 219*)

A3. BREWING CHAMBER (CR 6)

A wooden barricade made of small tree trunks lashed together with thick twine seals the entrance to this large chamber. Loops of rope that serve as handles are tied into the barricade on each end to facilitate dragging the 400-pound obstacle into and out of position, usually pivoting it to one side. The door is wedged in the passage in such a way that it cannot be pushed over.

Though the barricade prevents passage through the opening, anyone can peer through the gaps between the rough logs to view the room beyond.

The small cave system opens into a large chamber with a sooty ceiling. A table littered with cooking pots, glass flasks, and other tools sits against the wall in the southeastern part of the room near a smoldering campfire and a wooden crate.

Daridela refines the various plants and animal extracts she collects into an array of poisons in this chamber. The ceiling of this cave is only 7 feet high in the western end of the room, but



DARIDELA CORNETT

opens up to nearly 12 feet on the eastern side as the floor slopes gently down. The chamber is filled with the hazy remnants of smoke from the campfire's coals. A lantern on the worktable casts yellow light throughout the room.

A spiraling mass of tendrils with two long, descending tails is painted onto the wall in this chamber. A successful DC 25 Knowledge (religion) check reveals this is the symbol for the Great Old One Xhamen-Dor.

The wooden worktable against the wall holds a wide selection of containers and vessels to aid in cooking all manner of concoctions. Jars and tins hold reagents and materials to produce the poisons, drugs, and potions Daridela provides to the cultists in Iris Hill. A small tin pot sits cooling on the edge of table, and is filled with a nearly complete batch of id moss.

Creatures: This is the chamber Daridela spends most of her time in when she's not out gathering new materials. She takes great pride in her work, and is always working to improve upon her creations and create new intoxicants.

Daridela is joined in this chamber by a pair of fungal wolves that she created by infecting wild wolves with certain spores. The wolves fight at her side and attempt to keep her out of harm, placing themselves between her and her enemies. Though it is likely that Daridela might get caught within the area of effect of the fungal wolves' poison spore cloud, she prepares *neutralize poison* every day for exactly this circumstance.

DARIDELA CORNETT

CR 5

XP 1,600

Female human druid 6

NE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +5; **Senses** Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 15 (+5 armor, +3 Dex)

hp 42 (6d8+12)

Fort +6, **Ref** +7, **Will** +9; +4 vs. fey and plant-targeted effects **Defensive Abilities** bramble armor (1d6+3, 6 rounds/day)

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk spear +7 (1d8+3/x3)

Special Attacks wild shape 2/day, wooden fist (+3, 7 rounds/day)

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 6th; concentration +10)

3rd—*call lightning* (DC 17), *cure moderate wounds*, *neutralize poison*, *plant growth*^o

2nd—*barkskin*^o, *cat's grace*, *flame blade*, *summon swarm*, *warp wood* (DC 16)

1st—*cure light wounds*, *entangle*^o (DC 15), *magic fang* (2), *produce flame*

0 (at will)—*detect magic*, *guidance*, *mending*, *purify food and drink* (DC 14)

D domain spell; **Domain** Plant

TACTICS

Before Combat If Daridela is aware of the PCs in her grotto, she prepares for combat by casting *cat's grace* and *produce flame* before casting *magic fang* on the fungal wolves. She activates her bramble armor ability just before the PCs move the barricade and enter the chamber.

During Combat If Daridela didn't get a chance to cast any preparatory spells, she activates her bramble armor ability on the first round of combat. If the fungal wolves can successfully keep the PCs back, she attacks from a distance with *produce flame*. If one of the PCs closes into melee combat, she fights with her spear or casts *flame blade*.

Morale If reduced to fewer than 10 hit points, Daridela casts *obscuring mist* and attempts to flee the grotto.

STATISTICS

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

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 17

Feats Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes

Skills Craft (poison) +8, Handle Animal +3, Heal +8, Knowledge (geography) +8, Knowledge (nature) +10, Perception +12, Spellcraft +8, Survival +11, Swim +6

Languages Common, Druidic

SQ nature bond (Plant domain), nature sense, trackless step, wild empathy +5, woodland stride

Combat Gear *scroll of lesser restoration*; **Other Gear** +2 wooden armor^{np}, mwk spear, spell component pouch, key to the chest in area B4

FUNGAL WOLVES (2)

CR 2

XP 600 each

Fungal wolf (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 278, *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 4 116)

N Medium plant (animal)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+1 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 17 each (2d8+8)

Fort +7, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1

Defensive Abilities poisonous blood; **Immune** disease, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep, stunning

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee +1 bite +4 (1d6+5 plus trip)

Special Attacks create spawn, poison spore cloud

TACTICS

During Combat One of the fungal wolves triggers its poison spore cloud on the first round of combat, while the second wolf waits until the next round to activate the same ability. The wolves attempt to keep themselves between the PCs and Daridela.

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MUSCARIA

These small mushrooms, grown in dark forests, have red caps dotted with white spots. Able to induce strong hallucinogenic states, they have long been used by shamans and other spiritual leaders to enter trances to seek flashes of insight.

MUSCARIA

Type ingested; **Addiction** minor, Fortitude DC 14

Price 15 gp

Onset 30 minutes

Effects 3 hours; +1d6 alchemical bonus on a single Knowledge (any one), Perception, or Sense Motive check once per minute for the duration of the effect

Damage 1d4 Cha damage

Morale Dedicated to protect their master, the fungal wolves fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 13, **Con** 19, **Int** 2, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +1; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 15 (19 vs. trip)

Feats Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Acrobatics +1 (+5 when jumping), Perception +8, Stealth +5; **Racial Modifiers** +4 to Survival when tracking by scent

Languages Sylvan

SQ fungal metabolism, rejuvenation

Treasure: All of the equipment on the worktable is treated as an alchemist's lab. The crate near the worktable holds six *potions of cure light wounds*, three *potions of barkskin*, two *potions of hide from animals*, 4 doses of belladonna, 6 doses of bloodroot, 10 doses of flayleaf^{GMG}, and 1 dose of malyass root paste. A folded note sits on the table: a request for "more of your dream-inducing brews, as well as more of that oil," signed by a person named Melisenn.

A4. DARIDELA'S CAVE (CR 5)

A wooden barricade like the one closing off area A3 blocks entrance to this cave. The barricade here is half the size and weighs only 200 pounds.

Twenty feet across at its widest, this rounded cave contains a scattered pallet of blankets, a wooden washbasin of clean water, and a sturdy chest.

This is the chamber where Daridela sleeps, as well as where she enjoys her hallucinogenic trances. She keeps the barricade across the entrance to keep her plant minions out while she sleeps, but at other times the barricade is open. The floor in this room is less muddy than the rest of the cave system, and Daridela's sleeping

pallet is set up on a mound of straw to keep it dry. The chest holds her personal effects.

Trap: Daridela trapped this chest to injure anyone who might pilfer her things. One of the rivets surrounding the lock is a button that allows someone to bypass the trap.

POISON NEEDLE TRAP

CR 5

XP 1,600

Type mechanical; **Perception** DC 25; **Disable Device** DC 25

EFFECTS

Trigger touch; **Reset** manual; **Bypass** hidden switch

Effect Atk +15 melee touch (1d2 plus blue whinnis)

Treasure: This sizable chest once held the equipment that sits on the worktable in area A3. Now it holds a few changes of clothes, a clay jar with 4 doses of muscaria (see the sidebar), and a leather pouch containing 1,694 gp.

B. HASOK'S STUDIO (CR 5)

If the party decides to visit New Chapel, they find a raucous scene in the street nearby.

As peculiar charcoal murals of an abandoned city appeared overnight on the town's buildings, the people of Thrushmoor began to suspect a relative newcomer to town is to blame. Hired to paint a mural in New Chapel by the church's priestess, Lelwyn Hasok is a tall, thin half-elf with blond hair and deep gray eyes. Lelwyn comes from a wealthy family in Caliphas, and is educated and well spoken, if somewhat saturnine and unceremonious. Due to his job at New Chapel, the Pharasmin congregation knows him, but he is not much liked by others in Thrushmoor, whom he tends to shun. He considers the settlement a superstitious backwater, while many people in Thrushmoor find him aloof and overly critical of small-town life.

Since he is a newcomer and an artist with an unpleasant demeanor, the people of Thrushmoor are convinced that Lelwyn goes out in the night and vandalizes homes with his art. In confrontational conversations in the Stain, he has tried to address the accusations by mentioning that the art style and materials used in the graffiti are not even close to the kind of work he does, but every time a new mural appears on someone's wall, the anger and suspicion of the townsfolk grows.

Lelwyn, however, is not the source of the gloomy graffiti. The murals appear on the town's walls each time one of the cultists of Hastur use the *Star Stelae* to quickly travel throughout town, but no one outside of the cult is aware of this.

For this encounter, use the Hasok's Studio map on page 11.

Creatures: As the PCs arrive at New Chapel, they see a crowd of townsfolk congregating in front of Lelwyn's

studio to the north. They're shouting, calling for him to come out and fess up to the vandalism that has shown up on buildings throughout Thrushmoor.

No one in the crowd really wants to hurt the painter, but they are scared with everything going on in town and just want to make sense of the current disorder, even if it's just solving this minor mystery. The situation is tense, and people are letting their emotions get the better of them such that the slightest misstep could turn the volatile confrontation into violence.

If the PCs ask the gathered people why they think Lelwyn is to blame for the murals, a middle-aged man with a lazy eye replies, "He's the only artist here in town, and that vandalism didn't start showing up on our walls until he arrived. And now the priestess is gone! Some folks keep talking about how the Briarstone Witch is coming back for Thrushmoor, but I know that he's behind the troubles."

To drive off the assembled mob, a PC must succeed at either a DC 15 Diplomacy check (as a full-round action) or a DC 20 Intimidate check (as a free action). With the townsfolk worried and distrustful, the PCs take a -2 penalty on any Diplomacy or Intimidate checks against the mob. If a PC fails one of these checks by 5 or more, a scruffy young man in the crowd picks a stone off the road and throws it at Lelwyn, striking him in the head. After being struck, Lelwyn must succeed at a DC 15 Will save or attack the mob in return. A PC can attempt a DC 15 Diplomacy check as an immediate action to grant the artist a +2 bonus on his Will save.

If this conflict comes to blows, use statistics for a traveling merchant for Lelwyn, replacing the Profession (merchant) skill with Profession (painter).

LELWYN HASOK CR 5

XP 1,600

Traveling merchant (*Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide* 285)

hp 31

ANGRY TOWNSPEOPLE (11) CR 1/2

XP 200 each

Pig farmers (*Pathfinder RPG NPC Codex* 256)

hp 9 each

Gear club

TACTICS

Morale An angry townspeople flees upon taking any amount of damage.

Development: If the PCs successfully drive off the mob, Lelwyn invites them into his studio and gives

them a *bag of holding* (type I) and 500 gp as thanks for their help.

Lelwyn's studio is a small, two-room building cluttered with canvases, supplies, and partially completed paintings. When he is not busy painting in New Chapel, Lelwyn takes advantage of the rare moments of good weather to set up his easel on the shore and paints views of the bay. He has also painted portraits of some of Thrushmoor's wealthiest citizens, and was even scheduled to do a painting for Administrator Losandro at Briarstone Asylum once he completed the mural at New Chapel.

Lelwyn also paints his own dreams and fantasies, which are inevitably disquieting and lean toward the macabre. One of these works is a triptych prominently

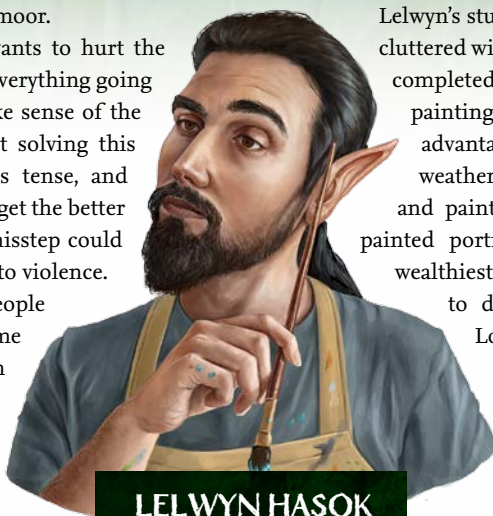
displayed on an easel in the middle of his studio. Lelwyn has been working on these paintings, still in their sketch phase, of four people in full figure, though their faces are incomplete. In the background, three different cities flow seamlessly into one another under a yellowish sky. The figures depicted in the painting are uncanny renditions of the PCs.

Caught up in the stress of having been in front of an angry mob, Lelwyn doesn't immediately realize that the figures he has been sketching are standing right in front of him. After talking to the painter for a minute, Lelwyn gasps, realizing he is looking into the faces he has had such a hard time getting just right.

Lelwyn claims to have never met the PCs, which is true. If questioned, he says he saw each of them in his dreams over the last few nights, and was immediately inspired to put brush to canvas. The painter says his visions (which he can't quite remember all of the details of) gave him the sensation that "Thrushmoor's destiny somehow depends on them." Lelwyn ecstatically offers the PCs 10 gp apiece if they agree to return and sit for his unfinished triptych.

If the PCs haven't yet secured lodging, Lelwyn mentions there is another building owned by the church next to his studio in which they could stay. It only has three beds, but he can provide enough blankets for additional party members to make up a pallet on the floor. He offers the place for free, mentioning that he doesn't really have the authority to provide it, but suggesting that the PCs leave a donation to the church in return.

If during their conversation the PCs ask about New Chapel, Lelwyn tells them it is mostly abandoned. The chapel's attendant priestess has been missing for days, and he has been the only person inside the quaint



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chapel since. He now serves as the chapel's de facto custodian, after Cesadia Wrentz asked him to keep an eye on the place during the cleric's absence.

Story Award: If the PCs defuse the situation without it coming to violence, award them 1,600 XP.

EVENT 1: REFUSED SERVICE

Securing lodging is something the PCs likely need to do shortly after arriving in Thrushmoor. This proves to be more difficult than normal for two reasons: the town's level of suspicion has peaked, and just last year the PCs were banned from the only place that rents rooms.

Seeing as how Thrushmoor is a relatively small place, it has only one official inn—the Silver Wagon. The Silver Wagon isn't a grand place, but it provides comfortable beds in secure rooms and the taproom downstairs often features live music. Unfortunately for the PCs, they were banned from the establishment after one of them ran up a large unpaid tab. Normally that wouldn't be enough to ban someone from staying, but the PC in question was also responsible for starting a bar fight, earning the PC an arrest and a night's stay in the holding cell in Fort Hailcourse. Evidence of this stay can be found in area **D10** in Part 2 of this adventure.

If the PCs deal with Elgrior Nasmeth (**Event 2**) and pay the outstanding tab (39 gp, 6 sp), the proprietor Dena Gallegos is willing to allow the PCs to stay, though she still eyes them suspiciously.

Thrushmoor's taproom, the Stain, has two bunkrooms that the owner sometimes rents out, typically to those who have had a bit too much, but both of the rooms are currently being used by two cultists of Hastur who arrived in Thrushmoor last week. Since they're dressed as nobles and have plenty of coin to spend, the Stain's owner Emman Gulston isn't willing to boot them in favor of new guests.

EVENT 2: DOOMSAYER

As the PCs have the chance to explore Thrushmoor, they come across a figure who has been increasingly upsetting and frustrating the townsfolk over the course of the last couple of weeks. If you wish, you can use the Thrushmoor Streets map on page 11 for this encounter, or you can draw your own map.

Creature: A well-known figure in town, **Elgrior Nasmeth** (CN male commoner 3) has always been eccentric. Obsessed with the Thrushmoor Vanishing, Elgrior is convinced the recent disappearances point to a coming recurrence of the event that led to the town

being depopulated overnight. Clad in shoddy clothes and wearing a signboard across his shoulders, Elgrior walks through town during the day shouting, "Doom is coming! The second vanishing is upon us! Pray for your salvation that the Briarstone Witch doesn't take you!"

Elgrior can be found in numerous places in town as he wanders about spreading his frightening propaganda. Most often, he wanders near places where many people gather, such as the Silver Wagon, the Stain, or one of Thrushmoor's markets.

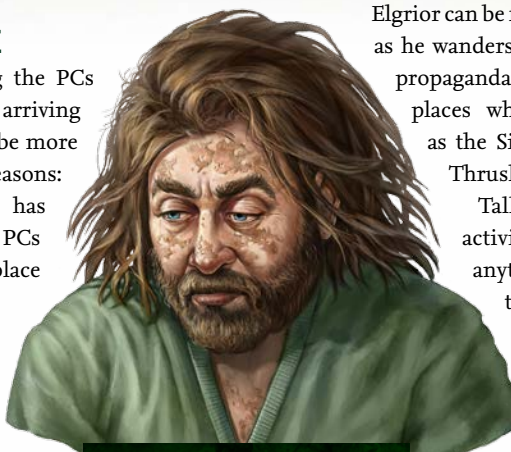
Talking to Elgrior is a frustrating activity, as the man tries to link anything said to him to the idea that the Briarstone Witch is going to come back to Thrushmoor at any moment and take everyone away into the depths of Lake Encarthan.

His rambling, conspiratorial screed is difficult to follow, and his logic has as many holes as his threadbare

shirt. Elgrior claims the missing authorities are the real ones responsible for this second vanishing and that they called to the Briarstone Witch before departing the town. He says they plan to come back after the deed is done so they can have full run of Thrushmoor and take all the spoils left behind. Elgrior seems especially concerned that they want to steal the collection of beetles he keeps in his small shack in the eastern end of the town.

If asked how he knows the Briarstone Witch is coming back, he tells the PCs he saw her in a dream rising up from Avalon Bay and plucking townsfolk from their homes with her wicked, long nails. The PCs might be sympathetic to his nocturnal visions after their previous experiences in Briarstone Asylum, but they can clearly see that Thrushmoor is not under the same effects as the asylum. If challenged with reason and facts, he shouts that he's not alone in his theories, bringing up one of the new rumors in town that the Briarstone Witch has been spotted in a cave outside of town by a local fisherman (see area **A** on page 10).

His ranting has whipped up fear and dread in a number of people in Thrushmoor. They take him seriously to varying degrees, but he's been successful to the point that one family is packing their belongings onto a wagon with plans to leave Thrushmoor for good. Others in Thrushmoor are less frightened by the apocalyptic ravings of this madman, but are instead increasingly annoyed at his message and methods. Elgrior has gained the attention of Cesadia Wrentz, who might ask the PCs to take care of the situation. Likewise, the innkeeper Dena Gallegos at the Silver Wagon wants Elgrior to stop his ranting near her establishment, and



ELGRIOR NASMETH

Emman Gulston, proprietor of the Stain, has similar feelings. Any one of these people might ask the PCs to see what they can do about Elgrior.

If the PCs choose to engage the ranting demagogue with diplomacy, his attitude begins as indifferent. He truly feels as if Thrushmoor's days are numbered and he's simply looking out for his fellow citizens—though he unabashedly calls them mindless sheep and ignorant fools. If the PCs can shift his attitude to friendly, requiring a successful DC 18 Diplomacy check, he agrees to tone down his speeches and not loiter outside of businesses, but he returns to his old behavior in 1d3 days (in which case, the PCs can try again). If the PCs can shift his attitude to helpful, all public ranting ceases. The PCs can also try to cow Elgrior through an Intimidate check. If they are successful, Elgrior goes home for the evening, but resumes his campaign about the threat of the Briarstone Witch the next morning. This time he incorporates the PCs into his rants, saying they are “agents of the witch come to mark people for the second vanishing.”

Development: If the PCs successfully get Elgrior to tone down his rants, Dena Gallegos lifts the ban on the PC who started the fight in her establishment and, assuming they pay the outstanding tab, allows the PCs to rent rooms, in addition to providing them with a free dinner on their first evening. Emman Gulston, upon hearing that the PCs discouraged Elgrior's rants, offers to buy each of the PCs a round at the Stain. When Cesadia Wrentz hears about the PCs' encounter with the doomsayer, the PCs earn more trust in her eyes, even if she wasn't the one to give them the task.

Story Award: If the PCs can successfully get Elgrior to stop frightening the people of Thrushmoor, award them 1,600 XP.

EVENT 3: FORGOTTEN FRIEND (CR 5)

Not everyone in Thrushmoor treats the PCs like strangers or worse. While about town, the PCs encounter what should be a friendly face—an old companion named Keldrin Mon, a stevedore who works the fishing docks of Thrushmoor. Choose one of the PCs to be the person who was once friends with Keldrin. Though that PC doesn't remember Keldrin, he and the character used to meet once a week for a few mugs of ale, a game of cards, and casual conversation. If necessary, use statistics for a shopkeep (*Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide* 284) for Keldrin.

Keldrin comes up to the selected PC, possibly while at the Silver Wagon or the Stain, and with a familiar and friendly tone asks about that character's well-being and

whereabouts for the last week. “Hey there! I haven't seen you around in a while. Where'd you get off to?”

He attempts to talk with the PC, engaging in small talk about the bad weather interspersed with casual questions about where he or she has been and why the PC has been gone. During the conversation, Keldrin asks questions such as, “Where did you go? Was it fun? Do you know what's going on with the count? I heard he left town just before you turned back up. Are you still working for him? It looks like he hired some new people at Iris Hill. Some of them are pretty creepy; certainly not from around here.” This last comment refers to the kuru now living at Iris Hill.

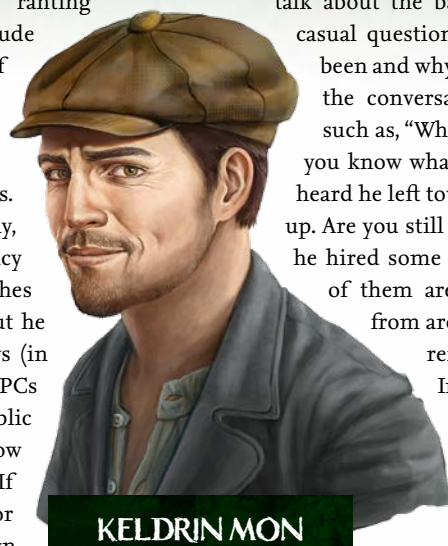
Roll a Sense Motive check for Keldrin (he has a +9 bonus on this check). If the PC reacts strangely to being approached by Keldrin, the

man picks up on it automatically. If

Keldrin gets a result of 25 or higher, he also notices the PC doesn't have the same mannerisms that he or she did before. The PC can attempt a Bluff check opposed by Keldrin's Sense Motive check to try to appear normal or hide the lack of memory. In any case, Keldrin obviously remembers the PC, and if he notices something is strange, he comments about how the PC doesn't seem the same as the last time they met. “There's something different about you. Your little trip must have been something. Ol' Meb said that you got shipped off to Briarstone Asylum, but he's always making up stories about folks.” He finishes with a questioning hesitation, “That's not true, is it?”

If the PCs admit to having no memory of their past and their connection with him, Keldrin becomes concerned, asks them what happened, and offers to help in any way he can. He doesn't know much about their particular situation, but he knows about the current events in Thrushmoor and can tell the PCs about the count's absence, the magistrate's disappearance, and the kidnappings that have been going on in town. Keldrin also mentions that there have been some new people in town aside from the new staff at Iris Hill. He says that a few folks who seem like minor nobles have come to Thrushmoor, and he suspects these people are here to take some of the count's flailing power after his departure—though he doesn't know that these wealthy newcomers are in fact cultists of Hastur.

Keldrin tells the PCs that he last saw them poking around Pier 19 (otherwise known as Worm's Hook). “It looked like you were stuffing something up underneath the dock. That's a pretty good place for safekeeping if you knew you were going to leave town for a few days.



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Everyone's still scared of that pier after that creature melted Jano, Mernil, and Keyrn a few years ago, so no one was going to go poking around your stuff." If the PCs ask Keldrin for more details, he explains that they were at the end of the pier with a leather-wrapped bundle, and they leaned over the edge and tucked it beneath the planks. For more information about the pier, see page 67.

C. PIER 19

If the PCs head to the weathered dock in order to retrieve the equipment Keldrin mentioned, read or paraphrase the following once they arrive. Use the Pier 19 map on page 11 for this encounter.

The driving rain pounds onto the decrepit dock's boards, with a sound like a score of out-of-sync drummers. Gentle waves lap against the barnacle-studded posts that hold up the sagging dock. A metal pail sits rusting at the end of the pier.

A gravel path leads from the road to the pier. A nearly collapsed shack sits at the edge of the water near the pier, a former bait house that was abandoned after the unfortunate event at Pier 19.

The pier stands 5 feet above the water and stretches 60 feet out into the channel. While the timbers creak and bow as the PCs walk across the pier, the stout planks can hold up without breaking as long as no more than 400 pounds are in any 5-foot square.

Creature: Lurking beneath the end of the dock is a horrific, fleshy mass of eyes and mouths. As the PCs begin searching for the hidden parcel, the monster quietly climbs one of the posts and slithers onto the pier. Allow the PCs to attempt Perception checks in order to notice the gibbering moulder as it climbs the post. If detected, the creature uses its gibbering ability in an attempt to prevent the PCs from acting on the first round of combat. It then uses its spittle ability on one PC and moves into melee range with the nearest character. Driven by hunger and madness, the gibbering moulder fights to the death.

GIBBERING Moulder

CR 5

XP 1,600

hp 46 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 153)

Treasure: Beneath the pier where the rusted bucket sits is the wrapped bundle one of the PCs left before his or her memories were erased. To find this bundle, a PC must lean over the edge of the pier and succeed at a DC 10 Perception check. The package contains a *potion of nondetection*, a *scroll of protection from energy*, a *wand of death knell* (18 charges), 120 gp, and 6 pp. At least one of the items in the parcel has the PC's initials printed

or carved on it to indicate that the PC once owned this gear. If you'd like, this bundle could contain a piece of equipment from each of the PCs—in this case, add some additional items suitable for the individual party members. Finding this equipment triggers a brief flash of memory for at least one of the PCs. They recall a more fond relationship with Keldren, but the details are still foggy. They also recall bundling up the equipment and sneaking down to the dock after sunset to stash it, but are left with an unclear recollection of why.

Story Award: If the PCs talk to Keldrin and retrieve their stashed gear, award them 800 XP for reclaiming some of their memories.

EVENT 4: RETRIBUTION (CR 6)

Though they don't recall the details, the PCs weren't always the people they now think they are. While they were employed for years by Count Lowls to act as peons and hired muscle, in recent months the PCs had performed a number of increasingly unsavory tasks for the unstable noble. When people came snooping around Iris Hill or otherwise posed some sort of perceived threat to the count or his work, Lowls would send one of the PCs to discourage that behavior, either through intimidation or violence. One of the unfortunate targets of this tactic was a local roustabout named Klyn Murik.

After discovering Klyn stealing food from the kitchen at Iris Hill, Count Lowls commanded that one of the PCs "teach him a lesson." The PC was only supposed to rough up the man to make a point, but the PC was overeager and ended up brutally beating Klyn to death.

After Klyn's body was discovered just off the trail to Old Chapel, Magistrate Padgett suspected one of the PCs was responsible for the man's death, and visited Iris Hill to demand that Count Lowls turn his employee over to Fort Hailcourse for justice. The count blamed the event on the PC's mental state, reassuring the magistrate that he intended to commit him or her to Briarstone Asylum, where the PC would be out of the way and would pose no threat to anyone else. The magistrate grudgingly accepted the count's word, but demanded that Lowls pay a small fee to have the victim buried in the pauper's field north of town.

Shortly after his burial, and just days after the PCs were shipped off to the asylum, Klyn rose as a revenant and clawed his way out of his grave. Klyn began haunting the fringes of the town in search of his murderer. Using his sense murderer ability, Klyn received fleeting sensations that the PCs were on Briarstone Isle, but the strange fog and unstable boundaries between the Material Plane and the Dimension of Dreams made tracking them down there largely impossible. Now that the PCs have arrived back in Thrushmoor, the revenant has picked up the trail of his murderer and seeks bloody vengeance.

This encounter should occur during the first couple of nights after the PCs return to Thrushmoor, likely in the streets or alleys of the town. You can draw a map for this encounter or use the Thrushmoor Streets map on page 11, or select a map from one of the many urban-themed Pathfinder Flip-Maps or Pathfinder Map Packs.

Creature: Once the revenant locates the party, he targets the PC responsible for his murder, but opens combat with his baleful shriek ability to include all of the PCs in the effect. A relentless foe, Klyn fights until destroyed or until he kills his killer.

KLYN MURIK**CR 6****XP 2,400**Revenant (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 2* 235)**hp 76**

Story Award: During the fight with the revenant, the PC responsible for murdering him has flashes of memories where she beat the man senseless with a club and her fists. Though this brief vision is certainly disturbing, it gives the PC a glimpse into her past. There is a possibility that more than one of the PCs were involved, in which case they all recall similar visions of this terrible memory. After this encounter, award the PCs 1,200 XP in addition to the experience earned from defeating the revenant.

EVENT 5: THE THRUSHMOOR HAUNTING (CR 7)

The people of Thrushmoor have seen a translucent, monstrous figure roaming the streets at night for the last 20 years. The apparition doesn't appear with any regularity and hasn't been spotted at all in recent years until the last few weeks.

This encounter can occur at any point during this adventure, and it works to foreshadow meeting Lowls's mother once the PCs begin exploring Iris Hill. You can use the Thrushmoor Streets map on page 11 for this encounter, or you can draw your own map.

Creature: The creature that Thrushmoor's townsfolk have spotted is not a ghost, but is instead the county's former countess—Lowls's mother Nemira Lowls. After delving into lore that should have been left alone, Nemira Lowls was transformed into an eldritch monstrosity and has been confined to the attic in Iris Hill for the last 20 years. Her condition, combined with long years of isolation, has left her unhinged.

As part of her transformation, Nemira Lowls has gained an ability to project her spirit outside of her body, and uses this to experience the world beyond her attic prison. Nemira can project her spirit once per day, and she can only roam up to a mile from her physical body, which easily includes all of Thrushmoor. She can cast spells while in this form, but she primarily wishes only to sow fear among the population.

Nemira appears while the PCs are out in Thrushmoor's streets, preferably at night. She approaches the PCs in her spirit form and uses her incorporeal touch attack to deal Charisma damage. If she is reduced to 0 hit points in her spirit form, the incorporeal form immediately returns to her unconscious body, or she may choose to return to her body at any time as a standard action.

If the PCs spend multiple days exploring Thrushmoor, this encounter can be a recurring event each night until the PCs finally slay Nemira in Iris Hill's attic (area F14). Nemira Lowls is fully detailed in the NPC Gallery on page 60.

NEMIRA LOWLS**CR 7****XP 3,200****hp 60** (see page 60)**EVENT 6: A REQUEST FOR AID**

Once the PCs do a few good deeds around town, the attitude toward them begins to shift and the people of Thrushmoor begin to be more trusting. A teenager named Holissa soon approaches the PCs, asking them if they can help find her older brother, Sholn, who was one of the victims of the recent spate of kidnappings. She even offers to accompany the PCs, eager to find her brother. (The PCs should be careful not to allow Holissa to come along, as Fort Hailcourse and Iris Hill are far too dangerous for a kid.)

Sholn was in fact kidnapped by the cult of Hastur, and is now being held in the cells in Fort Hailcourse (area D23c) awaiting sacrifice to the King in Yellow. If the PCs safely retrieve Sholn, Holissa offers the PCs her grandfather's mithral heavy shield as a reward.

Sholn isn't the only victim of the cultists, and other townsfolk in Thrushmoor might reach out to the PCs for help in finding their loved ones. Solving these other missing persons cases reveals only sadness, however, as most of the other victims have already been sacrificed to Hastur.

Story Award: If the PCs successfully rescue Sholn from certain death and return him to Thrushmoor, award them 2,400 XP.

EVENT 7: AMBUSH (CR 5)

At some point during the PCs' investigation of Thrushmoor, Melisenn and the cult of Hastur notice that the PCs are now poking around town rather than locked away in Briarstone Asylum. Once Melisenn learns the PCs are back in Thrushmoor, with no apparent recollection that they once resided at Iris Hill, she decides they are a threat to her pursuit of fully activating the *Star Stelae* and orders the cultists to kidnap them so they can be sacrificed to Hastur.

Creatures: The cultists keep track of the PCs' movements in town, trailing them from a distance. If the

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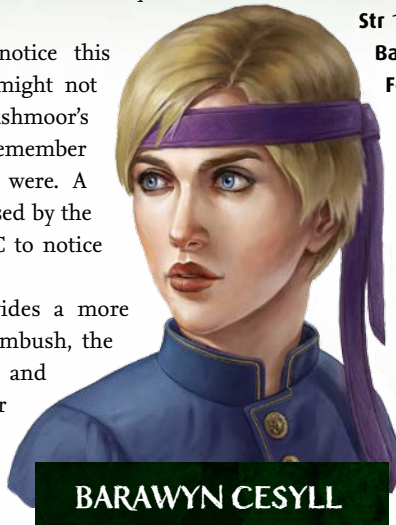
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PCs have a regular schedule, the cultists take note, and plan their ambush around that routine. The cultists also use the sinister whispers function of the *Star Stelae* to transmit messages to one another while they are spread throughout the town.

Give the PCs a chance to notice this additional scrutiny, although it might not stand out because many of Thrushmoor's residents recognize the PCs and remember the unsavory people they once were. A successful Perception check opposed by the cultist's Stealth check allows a PC to notice that they are being watched.

Unless the PCs' routine provides a more convenient opportunity for an ambush, the cultists plan to wait until dark and try to catch the PCs in a street or alley where they can use the city stride function of the *Star Stelae* to leap from a building's wall. The cultists don't have to emerge from the same wall, but those who don't arrive with the first cultist who triggered the *Star Stelae* arrive on the scene 1 round later. The cultists don't particularly want to kill the PCs right there in the street, since they are more valuable as a sacrifice to recharge the *Star Stelae*. Some of the cultists favor using saps for this reason, but switch to rapiers if the fight begins to go against them. If a PC falls in combat, one of the cultists works to stabilize her. Once the fight is over, the cultists work to bring the PCs back to Iris Hill for Melisenn. If all of the PCs are knocked unconscious or otherwise captured by the cultists, they awake in area D23 beneath Fort Hailcourse.



BARAWYN CESYLL

Morale If any of the cultists are reduced to 5 or fewer hit points, they all drink their *potions of vanish* and flee the scene before anyone else notices the attack.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 15, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 13

Base Atk +1; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 15

Feats Iron Will, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (rapier)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Bluff +6, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +5, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (local) +4, Knowledge (religion) +2, Perception +4, Sense Motive +4, Stealth +15, Use Magic Device +5

Languages Common

SQ rogue talent (finesse rogue), trapfinding +1

Combat Gear *elixir of hiding*, *nightdrops*^{UE}, *oil of magic weapon*, *potion of cure light wounds*, *potion of vanish*; **Other Gear**

chain shirt, rapier, sap, unholy symbol of Hastur, 10 gp

Development: If the PCs take any of the cultists alive, they have the chance to learn more about what's going on at Iris Hill. The cultists are dedicated to Hastur and somewhat afraid of Melisenn, but they value their lives. Since decadence falls within Hastur's portfolio—an aspect the cultists take seriously—they can be bribed with luxuries. If any of the cultists break down and give the PCs information about the cult in Thrushmoor, and the PCs let them live, the cultists flee town in search of less threatening locales.

The cultists can tell the PCs about the general layout of Iris Hill and some of the dangers within. Viewing the kuru as brutal subordinates, the cultists tell the PCs about them first, hoping that information is enough to buy their freedom. If pressured, the cultists then describe some of the otherworldly terrors within the estate, but it takes great persuasion for them to relate much information about Melisenn. To their credit, most of the cultists in Thrushmoor aren't fully aware of the extent of Melisenn's plans and only know that she spends much of her time in the basement studying the *Star Stela* there.

PART 2: MISSING MAGISTRATE

After the PCs spend time in Thrushmoor getting their bearings, resting up after their ordeal in Briarstone Asylum, and exploring the town, they are likely going to head to one of two places. The first of these is Iris Hill, which is detailed in Part 3 of this adventure on page 34. The other place is the seat of the town's government, Fort Hailcourse.

As the PCs learned either from talking to people in town or Cesadia Wrentz, Magistrate Padgett has

CULTIST KIDNAPPERS (4)

CR 1

XP 400 each

Human rogue 2

CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +2 Dex)

hp 18 each (2d8+6)

Fort +2, **Ref** +5, **Will** +1

Defensive Abilities evasion

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee rapier +4 (1d6+2/18–20) or
sap +4 (1d6+2)

Special Attacks sneak attack +1d6

TACTICS

Before Combat If the ambush takes place at night, the cultists each apply a dose of *nightdrops* and use their *elixir of hiding*.

During Combat The cultists fight well together, working to set up flanking with one another to make sneak attacks.



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been missing for days, and many of the mercenaries protecting the fort defected after not being paid for weeks (a side effect of Count Lowls diverting the county's taxes to pay his own expenses). In response to the lack of protection and the missing magistrate, second-in-command Constable Barawyn Cesyll ordered the fort closed and hasn't allowed in any visitors. As strange as this may sound, the real truth is even stranger.

D. FORT HAILCOURSE

Built entirely of stone on one of Thrushmoor's hills, Fort Hailcourse is the seat of the town magistrate and houses a small garrison to protect the town. Fort Hailcourse was the first target in Melisenn's plan to sow chaos in Thrushmoor.

As part of Melisenn's scheme, a gang of skum from Lake Encarthan and a special outsider summoned by Melisenn herself shortly after Lowls's departure invaded the fort. After slipping in through the town's aqueduct system, the villains quickly overpowered the meager garrison—all that remained after the Druman mercenaries defected, having not being paid for over 5 weeks—and made short work of the fort's occupants, including Magistrate Tillus Padgett and his second-in-command, Constable Barawyn Cesyll.

When Royal Accuser Omari suspected some kind of foul play and tried to force an inspection of the fort, she and her attendants were defeated in the building's lobby. Now everyone in town knows that something is

amiss in Fort Hailcourse, but they're too afraid to break into the building to find out what.

The main area of Fort Hailcourse is 20 feet high, with the five round towers and the donjon reaching a height of 40 feet. The ceilings inside are 15 feet high. Unless otherwise noted, the interior of the fort is only lit by exterior light (dimly illuminated by grated windows and arrow loops during the day and dark during the night). Unless otherwise stated, the doors are made of heavily reinforced wood (strong wooden doors, see page 413 of the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*) and can be locked with a set of keys (now in Itsqaal-Thoal's possession). The arrow loops of the fort are too narrow for Medium characters to squeeze through, although a Small character might slip in with a successful DC 30 Escape Artist check. All other windows are fitted either with bars (on the ground floor) or with shutters that can be bolted from inside. The dungeon under the fort has 10-foot-high ceilings and is completely dark, although the walls are fitted with torch sconces and lantern hooks at regular intervals.

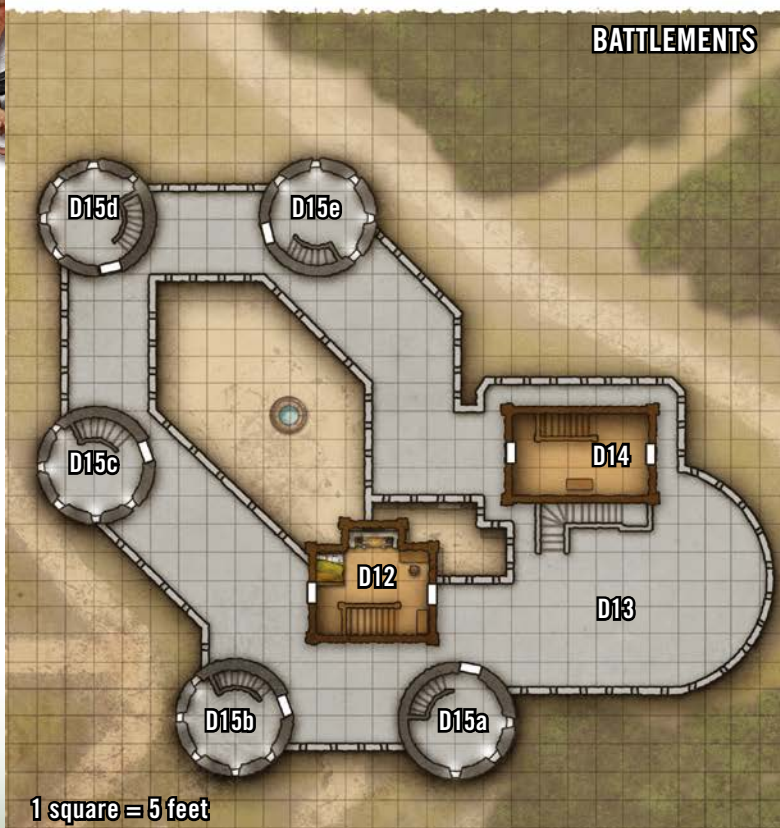
FIRST VISIT (CR 5)

The only entrance to the fort is a set of 10-foot-high double door located on the south side of this large stone building. Tarnished brass door knockers carved into the shapes of perching birds hang on the doors, and the hatch for the spyhole remains shuttered.

D. FORT HAILCOURSE



BATTELEMENTS



1 square = 5 feet

DONJON

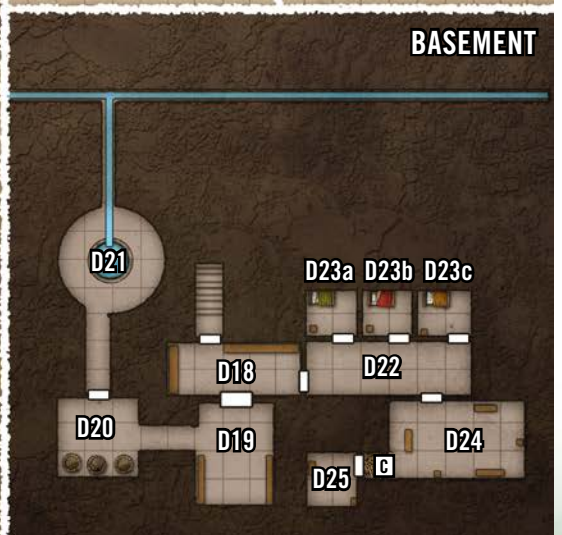


TOWER TURRETS

D17a-e



BASEMENT



When the PCs first arrive at the doors of Fort Hailcourse, they find the building on lockdown. Chances are they were already aware of the state of Fort Hailcourse after talking to people in town. Their first knocks on the main doors don't immediately draw a response, but after a few moments of persistence the spyhole opens, revealing a harried-looking Constable Barawyn Cesyll.

Creature: Few in town have seen Constable Cesyll since Padgett reportedly left town on his "important errand," and none of the townsfolk realize that this Constable Cesyll is not who she appears to be.

Before Count Lowls departed town on his journey to Cassomir, he and Melisenn concocted a plan to weaken Thrushmoor's defenses and throw the town into chaos. Obsessed with his occult research, Lowls was generally unconcerned with this plan, trusting Melisenn with the particulars—as he had done often in recent weeks. Melisenn, as a worshiper of Hastur, hoped to sow disorder, but by then she also knew that sacrificing people to Hastur on one of the *Star Stelae* might be a way to further awaken the ancient stones, opening up a source of power for herself. She made use of a *scroll of lesser planar binding* to call an extradimensional shapeshifter called a soulsliver from the realms between dimensions.

This creature, who goes by the name Tilsitari, is a skilled assassin and master impersonator with the ability to perfectly assume the form of anyone who looks into a mirror in which she resides. When offered the task of killing Fort Hailcourse's inhabitants and assuming the role of the constable, Tilsitari gleefully took the deal. In her assumed role as constable, she has locked down the fort and remains inside with the building's new protectors awaiting further orders from Melisenn. She then crawled into an exquisite standing mirror that Lowls sent (at Melisenn's insistence) to Magistrate Padgett as a way to placate the man, in hopes of buying time to leave town relatively unnoticed.

When the PCs first come to Fort Hailcourse, Tilsitari answers the door in her guise as the constable and tries to politely settle any of the PCs' concerns in order to drive them away from the building. If the PCs ask what's going on and why the fort is shuttered, she states she's just following orders from Magistrate Padgett, and only a command from Count Lowls could supersede them. If pushed, she goes on to explain that the fort can no longer perform its duties after the mercenaries defected, and Magistrate Padgett left her in charge when he left town. She claims the disappearances in town have everyone on edge, including her and the few retainers left in Fort Hailcourse. Acting exasperated, she continues, explaining she has spent sleepless nights trying to come up with a plan to deal with the situation, and that she sent messenger pigeons out days

ago seeking reinforcements, but as of yet no one has replied. If the PCs push her harder or don't buy any of her excuses, she grows agitated and slams the hatch closed after shouting, "Look! I'm taking care of it the best I can. Why don't you go talk to the Sleepless Agency and see what they're doing about all this?"

Tilsitari understands that the PCs are more than just disgruntled citizens, and doesn't want the conversation with them to escalate to violence. She does her best to do anything to just make the PCs go away. She excels at bluffing, but her perfect representation of Constable Cesyll has its flaws (though the PCs are unlikely to notice in this encounter). When a soulsliver takes someone's identity, it appears as a mirror image of that person. So far, no one who has seen her has noticed that the scar on her right hand should in fact be on the left, but a canny observer could pick up that deception if she has knowledge of the real Constable Cesyll and succeeds at a DC 20 Perception check.

If Tilsitari successfully sends the PCs on their way, they will likely encounter her again within Fort Hailcourse in any room that contains a mirror.

TILSITARI	CR 5
XP 1,600	
Female soulsliver rogue 3 (<i>Pathfinder RPG Bestiary</i> 4 250)	
NE Medium outsider (extraplanar, shapechanger)	
Init +8; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +10	
DEFENSE	
AC 17, touch 15, flat-footed 12 (+4 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 natural)	
hp 50 (6 HD; 3d8+3d10+21); fast healing 1	
Fort +7, Ref +10, Will +3	
Defensive Abilities evasion, trap sense +1; Resist acid 5, fire 5	
Weaknesses vulnerable to sonic	
OFFENSE	
Speed 40 ft.	
Melee +1 <i>short sword</i> +8 (1d6+4/19–20), +1 <i>short sword</i> +8 (1d6+2/19–20) or 2 slams +4 (1d4+1)	
Special Attacks death throes, sneak attack +2d6	
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd; concentration +6)	
3/day— <i>mage hand</i> , <i>open/close</i> (DC 13), <i>silent image</i> (DC 14)	
1/day— <i>mirror image</i>	
TACTICS	
Before Combat Hoping to get the drop on her enemies, Tilsitari watches from the safety of a mirror before attacking. To sow confusion, Tilsitari assumes the guise of one of the PCs before emerging.	
During Combat If other creatures are present during the fight, Tilsitari attempts to get into flanking position in order to deliver sneak attacks. To help with defense, she	

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uses her *mirror image* spell-like ability as she attacks with both of her short swords.

Morale If reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, Tilsitari retreats into a mirror (if possible) and travels to another mirror in Fort Hailcourse to allow her fast healing to mend any wounds before going after the PCs again.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 19, **Con** 16, **Int** 9, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +5; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 23

Feats Dodge, Improved Initiative, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +13 (+17 when jumping), Bluff +12 (+20 to mimic sounds listened to for at least 10 minutes, including accents and speech patterns), Disguise +12 (+16 when using change shape), Perception +10, Sense Motive +10, Stealth +13; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Disguise when using change shape

Languages Aklo, Common

SQ change shape (any humanoid; *alter self*), compression, mirror travel, perfect copy, rogue talent (finesse rogue), sound mimicry (voices), trapfinding +1

Gear +1 short swords (2), *amulet of natural armor* +1

Story Award: If the PCs see through Tilsitari's deception the first time they visit Fort Hailcourse, award them an additional 1,200 XP.

D1. LOBBY (CR 5)

The 6-inch-thick double door is made of reinforced wood and is bolted shut from inside (break DC 35).

Beyond the double door of the entrance, the fort's modest lobby contains only a long bench for visitors, a small, two-wheeled cart, and an attractive standing mirror. A faint briny smell hangs in the air.

A double doors leads to the courtyard via a vaulted passage, and another door stands on either side of this room, one leading to the barracks and the other to the magistrate's office. The small cart here was once used to ferry supplies to and from the fort, a task previously carried out by one of the mercenaries. During the day, the only light in this room comes from sunlight leaking in through the pair of arrow loops that flank the front doors, though with the stormy conditions outside, the lighting is dim at best. At night the room is dark.

Creatures: If the PCs force open the entrance, they immediately face some of Fort Hailcourse's current protectors. After installing her shapeshifting assassin in Fort Hailcourse, Melisenn waited for a progress report before slipping into the fort herself. There she slew the remaining mercenaries, killing them and raising them as juju zombies. In case any keen-eyed townspeople saw one of these mercenaries atop the battlements, Melisenn cast *gentle repose* upon the zombies to preserve

their living appearance. Even though these undead creatures have retained their skills and abilities as mercenaries and don't fight as mindless monsters, close observation reveals these creatures' true natures.

A patient being, Tilsitari doesn't attack the PCs in this room, but she watches from the standing mirror while they fight the juju zombies. She uses this time to note the party's tactics and she makes careful plans to ambush the PCs in one of the other rooms in the fort that contains a mirror. Tilsitari also relates information about the PCs' descriptions and tactics to Melisenn and her cultists.

UNDEAD MERCENARIES (2)

CR 3

XP 800 each

Human juju zombie fighter 3 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 291)

NE Medium undead

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16 (+3 armor, +3 Dex, +3 natural)

hp 33 each (3d10+12)

Fort +5, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2 (+1 vs. fear)

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4; **DR** 5/magic and slashing; **Immune** cold, electricity, *magic missile*, undead traits; **Resist** fire 10

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk longsword +9 (1d8+4/19-20) or slam +7 (1d6+6)

Ranged mwk longbow +7 (1d8/×3)

TACTICS

Before Combat The undead mercenaries stand guard in the lobby. If they detect the PCs trying to break in, they take positions on either side of the double door to ambush the PCs once they enter. If an opportunity presents itself, the undead mercenaries shoot at the PCs through the arrow loops, but they only do so after the PCs start trying to break down the door.

During Combat The undead mercenaries focus their attacks on obvious spellcasters, especially divine spellcasters, before moving on to attack the other PCs. If the PCs are easily hitting them, the undead mercenaries adjust their tactics to fight defensively. The undead mercenaries begin combat using Power Attack, but if after 2 rounds they find it difficult to hit the PCs, they instead attack normally.

Morale If still alive after 5 rounds, the undead mercenaries shout to call for reinforcements from the south barracks (area D2). They fight until destroyed.

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 16, **Con** —, **Int** 10, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 14

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 20

Feats Cleave, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Point-Blank Shot, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (longsword)

Skills Climb +16, Intimidate +6, Perception +4, Ride +7, Sense Motive +2, Survival +5, Swim +8; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Climb

Languages Common

SQ armor training 1

Gear studded leather, mwk longsword, mwk longbow with 20 arrows

D2. SOUTH BARRACKS (CR 5)

Overlooking the fort's courtyard, this spacious room is fitted with bunk beds, small chests, and stools. A rancid smell lingers in the room.

This part of the fort was used to lodge its mercenaries. The dormitory is sparsely furnished with bunk beds, wooden lockers, stools, and coal braziers. The beds are all carefully made and all gear is properly stowed in the chests as if the room were ready for inspection. An arrow loop opens on the southwestern wall and a door opens into the courtyard to the northeast. Two other doors allow passage to areas **D1** and **D3**. Archways open onto spiral staircases in the north and south ends of this room, leading to two of the fort's towers (areas **D15b** and **D15c**). Two doors lead out into the fort's courtyard (area **D4**).

One of the former mercenaries hired to serve as militia for Thrushmoor had a habit of sleepwalking to the kitchen for a somnambulant nighttime snack. The night Melisenn and her cultists invaded Fort Hailcourse, this mercenary sleepwalked into the kitchen, grabbed a jug of milk, returned to his bunk with the half-drunk pitcher, and unconsciously stored it beneath his bunk. Now, days later, the jug of milk has spoiled, leaving a thick curd floating atop the vessel and stinking up the barracks.

Creatures: Currently, two juju zombies guard this room, ready to assist the others if they hear the call. They fight using the same tactics as the guardians in the lobby, though they don't bother calling for reinforcements if the guards in the lobby have been defeated.

UNDEAD MERCENARIES (2)

CR 3

XP 800 each

hp 33 each (see page 24)

D3. SPARE BARRACKS (CR 6)

This L-shaped room is mostly empty, but holds a few neatly stacked piles of military-style camping gear sitting against the walls. A case of arrows sits near each of the arrow loops. An extinguished hooded lantern sits on the floor near the arrow loop in the western wall.

Swept clean on a regular basis, this spare room holds enough supplies to provide a place for up to 10 additional mercenaries to sleep, though Fort Hailcourse has never needed that many soldiers. Two arrow loops in this room allow views outside, and a spiral staircase in the northwest corner allows passage to one of the fort's towers (area **D15d**). The arrow loop on the west wall provides a clear view of Iris Hill, and the inhabitants of Fort Hailcourse have used this line of sight to send signals using a hooded lantern if other methods of communication weren't available. The lantern sits on the floor near the opening. In addition to serving as an extra place for lodging, this room also provided a place for the mercenaries to practice when the regular rainstorms that wash across Thrushmoor forced them inside.

Creatures: Three juju zombie mercenaries stand guard in here, one always peering through the arrow loop in the



UNDEAD MERCENARY

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western wall. One of the zombies has its longbow in its hands and fires at the PCs while the other two engage in melee combat.

UNDEAD MERCENARIES (3)

CR 3

XP 800 each

hp 33 each (see page 24)

Treasure: In addition to the juju zombies' gear, the PCs can collect the camping gear, the hooded lantern, and a box of 20 tindertwigs in the western arrow loop.

D4. COURTYARD (CR 5)

The fort's courtyard is muddy, with patches of grass and weeds sprouting from the soil along the walls. A brick well stands at the center of the courtyard and a grate for grilling food stands against a wall to the south.

A place for the mercenaries inhabiting Fort Hailcourse to train or simply get some fresh air within the confines of the fort, this courtyard has seen little use. More often, the kitchen staff would prepare part of the meals here on a metal grill just outside the kitchen. The oven inside the kitchen also has a hatch in the courtyard that allows access for baking or stoking the coals from here. Just to the east of the oven are four large doghouses, homes for the courtyard's guardians. The well is 60 feet deep, with the bottom 10 feet full of water from the aqueduct. Descending 10 feet into the well leads to a subterranean chamber (see area D21).

Creatures: Four stout Ustalavic hounds make their home here, usually lounging about in the open area near the well or nestled in their doghouses. They are familiar with Magistrate Padgett (who raised them from pups), Constable Cesyll, the mercenaries, and the rest of the staff. They immediately growl at all others, barking to alert their master and frighten the strangers. If the trespassers don't back down and leave the courtyard, the dogs attack. Recent events in Fort Hailcourse have put the dogs on edge. They are uneasy around the undead, even if they recognize them as people they were once familiar with. Since the hounds aren't getting the regular care they're accustomed to, they're starving and aggressive.

USTALAVIC HOUNDS (4)

CR 1

XP 400 each

Riding dog (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 87)

hp 13 each

D5. NORTH BARRACKS

This room was built in the same fashion as the other barracks (area D2), including an arrow loop and spiral staircase leading up to a guard tower (area D15e).

D6. HALLWAY

All three doors to this hallway are locked (Disable Device DC 25). Itsqaal-Thoal (see area D16) carries the key to these doors. This hallway connects the north barracks (area D5) to the dining room (area D9). The stairs lead down to the fort's dungeon, ending at the door to D18. The north wall features an arrow loop, and the door on the south wall opens to the courtyard. A couple of small, empty crates sit in two of the corners. Casual observation (Perception DC 10) reveals dirty, webbed footprints leading from the stairs to the door to area D9.

D7. MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE (CR 5)

This room is furnished with a wooden desk decorated with the Ustalavic coat of arms. The walls are almost completely draped with warm, woolen tapestries.

This room was used by Magistrate Padgett to perform administrative work, receive guests, and informally question citizens. The desk stands near the southern wall, while a small cabinet and chair sit against the northern wall. The cabinet is locked, requiring the key from Itsqaal-Thoal in area D16 or a successful DC 25 Disable Device check to access. To the south is a spiral staircase that leads up to one of the fort's towers (area D15a). Doors from this room lead to the lobby (area D1), the kitchen (area D8), and the dining room (area D9). A small mirror hangs on the door leading to the dining room. Tilsitari can emerge from this mirror to ambush the PCs (see page 23).

Trap: Always mindful of security, the magistrate rigged a trap in his cabinet to protect his personal items. The trap is only triggered if the lock is opened with something other than the proper key (which can be found on Itsqaal-Thoal in area D16).

POISON NEEDLE TRAP

CR 5

XP 1,600

Type mechanical; Perception DC 25; Disable Device DC 25

EFFECTS

Trigger touch; **Reset** manual; **Bypass** use key to unlock the cabinet

Effect Atk +15 melee touch (1d2 plus blue whinnis)

Treasure: The cabinet holds a *cloak of elvenkind*, a +1 *returning dagger*, and a leather bag containing 1,268 gp, 142 sp, and 343 cp.

D8. KITCHEN

This small kitchen is fitted with a cabinet and a stone worktable. A blackened iron cauldron hangs in the fireplace. A set of stairs leads up.

Nearly all the food prepared for the inhabitants of Fort Hailcourse came through this kitchen, the exception being the times when the weather was nice enough to cook in the courtyard. Since the kitchen shares a wall with Magistrate Padgett's office, the fort's cooks would exit the kitchen to the courtyard to deliver meals to the dining room or retrieve supplies from the pantry in the fort's cellar (area **D19**). A flight of stairs leads up to the stewards' lodging (area **D12**).

The cabinet here contains enough kitchen tools and cutlery for a couple of cooks, and enough dishes and flatware for about two dozen diners. The cauldron in the fireplace contains a greasy residue and some discarded humanoid bones—the remnants of the skum's last meal of a sacrificed townsman.

D9. DINING ROOM (CR 6)

This room contains a long wooden table and a dozen chairs. A pair of decorated chests and a display case featuring a collection of creations from some of Thrushmoor's artisans sit against the walls.

Primarily serving as a dining room for Padgett and the staff at Fort Hailcourse, this room also saw use as a meeting room for larger discussions not suited to the adjoining courtroom. Padgett also used this room for celebrations following civil marriages performed in the courtroom. The table settings are well crafted, but not overly elaborate; the chests in the room contain high-quality tablecloths and banquet supplies.

Creatures: Four skum lounge in this room awaiting orders. The skum in Fort Hailcourse are part of a cabal that Melisenn called to Thrushmoor in case she needed brute force. Once she had decided to infiltrate and take over Fort Hailcourse, she sent a message to Itsqaal-Thoal and Deggorhbaatha to bring their skum soldiers to Thrushmoor and aid in the process, promising that by the time she was done with the town, they would be able to run riot through the streets, killing and pillaging to their heart's content. The skum slipped into town at night, climbing down the central well and following the aqueduct north to the cistern at Fort Hailcourse, where one of Melisenn's agents welcomed them into the poorly defended fort. Since conquering the fort, though, the skum have grown restless and irritable, and are eager for a fight.

When the PCs enter the dining room, three of the skum move toward the PCs with their tridents ready. The fourth darts through the door to area **D11** to alert its allies.

SKUM (4)

CR 2

XP 600 each

hp 20 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 253)

Treasure: The tableware (goblets, platters, candlesticks, and more), decorations, and tablecloths in the chests are worth a total of 200 gp. A pair of crystal goblets, used for marriage ceremonies, rests in a velvet-lined box and is worth 250 gp as a set.

D10. ARCHIVES

Two wide cabinets with reinforced doors stand against the north wall and the ascending stairway in this room. A perforated metal bin sits near the fireplace in the northeastern corner.

This room, at the base of the fort's tallest tower, contains the archive of the magistrate's office. The stairs lead up to area **D14**. Documents detailing decades of the town's administration can be found in the two locked cabinets (hardness 5, hp 15, break DC 15, Disable Device 20; the key is in area **D12**). Older records are kept in the fort's basement. Here the PCs can find copies of trial records, building permits, ships' logs, notary deeds, contracts, and other such paperwork. Examining these documents, the PC can learn much of what happened under the eye of the law in or near Thrushmoor. The exact nature of this information is left to the GM, who should consider the party's requests about specific topics and decide if relevant information can be found within the cabinets.

The following finds related to Count Lowls and at least one member of the party are the most pertinent to the PCs' interests. It takes 2 hours of sorting through the various papers and logbooks to uncover any one of the following pieces of information, or 8 hours to discover them all.

- One cabinet contains records of a lawsuit presented against Count Lowls by a bookseller from Thornstep, who lamented not being paid for an occult book titled *The Revelations of Hali*. Lowls lost the case, and was ordered to pay the price of the book. A later note indicates that months passed before the payment was actually issued.
- A memo documents an official interrogation of Count Haserton Lowls IV about the unexplained death of his mother, Nemira, made at the request of her elder brother in Kerse. The response from the count was that his mother died suddenly of the same strange disease that claimed his father, and was buried privately in the family crypt under Iris Hill. Despite a strong protest from her family in Kerse (and the offer of a substantial bribe), the magistrate was unable to gain legal access to Iris Hill to investigate further.
- A document shows the record of arrest of one of the PCs after starting a brawl at the Silver Wagon. The arrest resulted in the PC spending the night in a cell below Fort Hailcourse and Lowls having to pay a fine of 50 gp to avoid any further inconvenience.

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- A memory summarizes the proceedings of the trial for high treason against a certain Dr. Clymes Prett, accused of having poisoned Count Haserton III, and sentenced to “die in his cell” (see area D25).

The record of the lawsuit against Count Lowls is evidence that he was overextending his coffers with his own research on the lost city of Neruzavin. The memo of his interrogation shows that something strange surrounded the death of his mother, and foreshadows the PCs’ encounter with her in the attic of Iris Hill. The arrest record of one of the PCs shows that they were not the best of people before their memories were sacrificed in the Dreamlands, and the trial record foreshadows the PCs’ encounter with Clymes’ ghost in the fort’s basement.

Treasure: A *bookmark of deception*^{UE} protects one of the books in this room. The bookmark lies in what appears to be a book of Pharasmin hymns, but is in truth a book about the Dreamlands, explaining the various denizens of that otherworldly realm (worth 75 gp to a collector).

D11. COURTROOM (CR 5)

The walls of this semicircular room are clad in wood up to half of their height, and decorated with murals of the

town’s civil life on the upper half. A bench runs along most of the curved outer wall, under three grated windows fitted with stained glass. Opposite the bench are a trio of high-backed chairs and a desk with a stool. Two more benches sit in the middle, near a central pillar that supports the ceiling.

This large room was used by the standing magistrate to hear complaints from Thrushmoor’s citizens, hold trials, adjudicate lawsuits, and preside over civil ceremonies.

Creatures: Three skum have been spending time in this room, watching Thrushmoor through the multiple barred windows and arrow loops in this room. The curved wall of the courtroom provides them with a variety of angles from which to spy on the town they eagerly await sacking. The skum are roused to fight when their companion from area D9 bursts in to warn of the PCs’ presence.

SKUM (3)

CR 2

XP 600 each

hp 20 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 253)

D12. STEWARDS’ LODGING (CR 6)

Everything in this room is in disarray. Overturned and broken furniture litters the floor, and sprays of dried blood mark the room’s stone walls. A cracked mirror hangs on the eastern wall at the top of the stairs to this room.

Formerly occupied by the head stewards of the fort, this room once sported the quaint trappings of a couple’s pleasant life together. The stewards worked as the fort’s cooks and household administrators, but they were killed when Melisenn’s skum invaded.

A portrait of an aging couple lies amid bloodied and torn bedclothes near a large double bed. The room’s wardrobe stands open, its contents spilled out in front of its mahogany doors. It is clear that in addition to the fight in this room, someone rifled through the stewards’ belongings in search of something.

Although the mirror is cracked, Tilsitari can still travel through it and use it to spy on the PCs.

Creatures: Deggorhbaatha came to this room in search of valuables. He has torn through the room, and is frustrated at the lack of quality items. So far his frustration is hindering his search, and has kept him from noticing the treasure stashed under the floorboards or the skeleton key in the desk (see Treasure).

Despite being dedicated to his search, Deggorhbaatha likely notices the PCs’ approach when they ascend the stairs (unless the PCs are being especially stealthy).

DEGGORHBAATHA

CR 6

XP 2,400



DEGGORHBAATHA

Male skum sorcerer 5 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 253)

LE Medium monstrous humanoid (aquatic)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +5

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 14, flat-footed 20 (+4 armor, +3 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 natural, +4 shield)

hp 68 (7 HD; 5d6+2d10+40)

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

Defensive Abilities stormchild; **Resist** cold 10, electricity 5, sonic 5

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

Melee mwk trident +6 (1d8+1), bite +5 (1d6), claw +5 (1d4)

Ranged mwk trident +8 (1d8+1)

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 5th; concentration +6)

2nd (4/day)—*defensive shock*^{UM}, *gust of wind* (DC 13), *invisibility*

1st (7/day)—*grease*, *magic armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *shocking grasp*

0 (at will)—*acid splash*, *detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*, *ray of frost*, *touch of fatigue* (DC 11)

Bloodline stormborn^{APG}

TACTICS

Before Combat If aware of the PCs' approach, Deggorhbaatha casts *mage armor*, *shield*, and *defensive shock*.

During Combat On the first round of combat, Deggorhbaatha casts *grease* on the stairs, hoping to slow or halt the PCs' ascent. He uses his damaging spells in combat, but if too many PCs draw too close, he activates his thunderstaff bloodline power and fights with his trident and natural attacks.

Morale Deggorhbaatha has no desire to die before he gets a chance to attack Thrushmoor. If reduced to fewer than 20 hit points, he casts *invisibility* and flees to the fort's basement or joins Itsqaal-Thoal in area **D16**, whichever seems the most prudent at the time.

Base Statistics Without his spells, Deggorhbaatha's statistics are **AC** 16, flat-footed 12.

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 17, **Con** 19, **Int** 12, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 13

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 19

Feats Combat Casting, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Multiattack^B, Toughness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +3, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Perception +5 (+9 when underwater), Spellcraft +10, Stealth +10 (+14 when underwater), Swim +14, Use Magic Device +5; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception when underwater, +4 Stealth when underwater

Languages Aboleth, Aklo, Undercommon

SQ amphibious, thunderstaff

Combat Gear *potions of cure moderate wounds* (2); **Other Gear** mwk trident, *headband of alluring charisma* +2, 53 gp

Treasure: A secret cache under the floor planks can be discovered with a successful DC 20 Perception check, and holds a pouch with 22 sp, 88 gp, and three freshwater pearls (worth 100 gp each).

In addition, careful inspection of the room's contents (Perception DC 25) reveals a skeleton key stuck to the underside of one of the desk's drawers with a wad of dark red wax. This hidden skeleton key opens all of the doors in Fort Hailcourse as well as the archive cabinets in area **D10**.

D13. BATTLEMENTS (CR 6)

Heavily weather-beaten, the open space on top of the fort and the walkways that connect the towers looks bare and bleak. An external wooden stairway leads up to the donjon, ending in the door to the magistrate's apartment (area **D16**).

Creature: Every couple of hours, a pair of juju zombies stationed in the towers (see areas **D15a–D15e**) patrols the battlements. Not trusting the abilities of the undead mercenaries, Deggorhbaatha and Itsqaal-Thoal also stationed one of their id oozes on the battlements to watch out for intruders. If the id ooze notices anyone who isn't Melisenn, a juju zombie, or a skum, it telepathically alerts the other id ooze in the basement (area **D20**).

ID OOZE

CR 6

XP 2,400

N Medium ooze (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 166)

Init +1; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft.; Perception –3

DEFENSE

AC 9, touch 7, flat-footed 9 (–3 Dex, +2 natural)

hp 62 (4d8+44)

Fort +11, **Ref** –2, **Will** –2

Immune cold, fire, ooze traits

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft.

Melee slam +8 (1d6+7 plus 1d6 acid)

Special Attacks acid, constrict (1d6+7)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 4th; concentration +1)

At will—*lesser confusion* (DC 8)

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 5, **Con** 30, **Int** 2, **Wis** 5, **Cha** 5

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 15 (can't be tripped)

Feats Improved Initiative, Toughness

Skills Stealth +1

Languages telepathy 100 ft. (other id oozes only)

SQ transparent

Development: If the id ooze telepathically alerts the other id ooze in the basement (see area **D20**), that creature leads three of the skum from below Fort Hailcourse (area **D19**) to the battlements to investigate, arriving in 4 rounds.

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D14. READING ROOM (CR 5)

This room is furnished with a large table, a few comfortable chairs, and a standing mirror. The room appears reasonably clean compared to the rest of the fort. A fireplace sits cold in the corner, and a pile of books and folios is spread across the table.

Up the stairs from the archives (area D10), this room provides a comfortable place to read. The chairs are well stuffed and the large table allows someone to spread out numerous documents and books for research. The stack of books on the table shows that someone was doing exactly that before the fort was compromised. The eastern door to this room opens onto the fort's battlements (area D13).

Creatures: The standing mirror in this room serves as a portal for Tilsitari, and if the PCs haven't fought her elsewhere, she takes the guise of one of the PCs, emerges from the mirror, and attacks.

TILSITARI

CR 5

XP 1,600

hp 50 (see page 23)



ITSQAAL-THOAL

Treasure: Searching the stack of books reveals a handful of scrolls sandwiched in between the pages. Included in this stash are the following: a *scroll of blink*, a *scroll of cat's grace*, a *scroll of remove disease*, a *scroll of silent image*, and a *scroll of zone of truth*.

D15. GUARD TOWERS (CR 3)

This round room in the tower is used for secure observation of the grounds outside via an array of arrow loops. A spiral staircase descends to ground level, while a circling wooden stair climbs upward to a trap door at the top of the tower.

The five towers of the fort are all identical in construction, and consist of a circular stairwell at the base, a sheltered room at the height of the battlements (20 feet), and an open turret. The sheltered rooms of the towers are substantially the same, and are sparingly furnished with a bedroll, a box for arrows, a stool, and a coal brazier.

Creatures: A juju zombie mercenary is stationed in each of the fort's towers. If alerted to nearby trouble, there is a chance they can join combat in any area the towers open into, such as the barracks (areas D2, D3, and D5), the battlements (area D13), or the tower's turrets (area D17).

UNDEAD MERCENARIES (5)

CR 3

XP 800 each

hp 33 each (see page 24)

D16. MAGISTRATE'S APARTMENT (CR 7)

Furnished with a double bed, two chests of drawers, a small table, and a couple of stools, this room also contains a bulky steel safe, its door standing open. A cold fireplace occupies the northeast corner of the chamber. The shutters of the three windows here have been torn from their hinges and lie broken on the floor. The smell of briny water is strong in the still air.

Accessible only from the battlements via an external stairway, the room at the top of the fort's highest tower served as Magistrate Padgett's lodging as well as the fort's treasury. The safe here, however, has been already opened and picked dry by the cultists, who took the spoils to Melisenn in Iris Hill.

Creatures: The skum leaders Itsqaal-Thoal and Deggorrhbaatha are obsessed with oozes, and they have trained a number of them to fight alongside them and their skum soldiers. Two of the oozes they brought to Fort Hailcourse are the id oozes that patrol the battlements and the basement of the fort, while the third is a strange, shapechanging creature known as a doppeldrek. Doppeldreks have the ability to assume

the form of another creature, a transformation that provides them with a temporary sense of intelligence. This doppeldrek has assumed the guise of a skum soldier and serves as a personal bodyguard for Itsqaal-Thoal. The skum leader and his strange bodyguard are currently relaxing in this room, awaiting the signal to attack the town from Melisenn.

If not previously alerted to the PCs' presence, Itsqaal-Thoal is sitting on the edge of Padgett's bed reading poorly written poetry from the magistrate's personal journal, which the skum found beneath the bed. The skum seems equally amused and confused. If the PCs make noise fighting on the battlements, Itsqaal-Thoal spies on them through one of the room's windows and prepares to ambush the PCs should they climb the stairs to this chamber.

ITSQAAL-THOAL CR 5

XP 1,600

Male skum ranger 3 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 253)

LE Medium monstrous humanoid (aquatic)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 13, flat-footed 17 (+5 armor, +3 Dex, +2 natural)

hp 50 (5d10+23)

Fort +6, **Ref** +9, **Will** +5

Resist cold 10

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

Melee bite +10 (1d6+5), 2 claws +10 (1d6+5)

Special Attacks combat style (natural weapon^{APG}), favored enemy (humans +2)

TACTICS

During Combat Itsqaal-Thoal attempts to stay within reach of a PC to make full attacks with all of his natural weapons. He focuses on human targets above all others.

Morale When reduced to fewer than 15 hit points, Itsqaal-Thoal begins calling out for reinforcements. However, he is prideful and arrogant, and even if no help comes, he fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 17, **Con** 17, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +5; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 22

Feats Endurance, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Multiattack^B, Rending Claws^{APG}, Toughness

Skills Acrobatics +2, Intimidate +6, Perception +9 (+13 when underwater), Stealth +10 (+14 when underwater), Survival +9, Swim +16; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception when underwater, +4 Stealth when underwater

Languages Aboleth, Undercommon

SQ amphibious, favored terrain (water +2), track +1, wild empathy +2

Combat Gear wand of cure light wounds (33 charges); **Other Gear** +1 chain shirt, amulet of mighty fists +1, key ring of Fort Hailcourse's keys

DOPPELDREK

CR 5

XP 1,600

hp 73 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 5 85)

D17. TOWER TURRETS

Topping each of the five towers of the fort is a round, open space accessible via a trap door. On top of each tower (areas **D17a–D17e**) is a light ballista (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Combat* 160). The ballista is fixed to a swiveling mount, and a wooden box nearby holds 10 bolts. At times, the juju zombie mercenaries in Fort Hailcourse stand sentinel atop the towers, but they mostly stay within the space below (areas **D15a–D15e**) so as to not be visible to the people of Thrushmoor.

D18. WOOD STORAGE

The walls of this cool and surprisingly dry subterranean room are lined with sturdy shelves laden with chopped wood. A couple of axes sit propped in the corner, and a small hatchet is driven into a stump used to split smaller logs and make kindling.

D19. PANTRY (CR 5)

The many wooden shelves in this room are stacked with wooden crates, paper-wrapped packets, and small clay jars sealed with wax. Smoked trout and other dried fish hang from metal hooks fixed to the ceiling. A number of boxes and containers have been emptied and smashed, and now lie in pieces on the floor, along with discarded fish bones and other refuse.

This room houses the fort's food reserves. Since the skum have been in Fort Hailcourse, their hunger has increased. They have been living off these supplies without much enthusiasm, dreaming of the banquet of human flesh that will follow their attack on Thrushmoor. Smoked fish, hard cheese, dried fruit, corn, oil, wine, vinegar, and other bottled or canned foodstuffs fill the untouched containers.

Creatures: Three hungry skum currently rummage through this pantry looking for something interesting to eat. One skum tears into the side of a large smoked trout, while another is using a small pry bar to open a crate of dried figs. Angry at having their meal interrupted, all three turn as the PCs enter and immediately attack.

Since the passage to area **D20** is open, a fight in this room is likely to draw the attention of the id ooze in the next room; however, its slow movement buys the PCs a couple of rounds.

SKUM (3)

CR 2

XP 600 each

hp 20 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 253)

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Treasure: One of the skum in this room carries a key to the jail (area D22).

D20. WATER STORAGE (CR 6)

This musty cellar contains a dozen wooden kegs, several demijohns, and dozens of empty bottles standing on shelves along the wall.

After drawing water from the well in area D21, attendants in Fort Hailcourse would bring the water into this room for use elsewhere in the fort. The room is filled with stacked vessels of all shapes and sizes. The door that leads to area D21 is locked. Without the skeleton key found in area D12 or the set of keys that Itsqaal-Thoal carries, unlocking the door requires a successful DC 25 Disable Device check.

Creature: The skum leaders posted an id ooze to alert the skum of any intrusion into Fort Hailcourse via the town's aqueducts. The id ooze remains motionless near the door to area D21, taking full advantage of its transparent special ability in hopes of a creature blundering right into its grasp. Once it attacks a victim, the id ooze sends a telepathic message to the other id ooze in area D13 to alert any nearby skum of the intrusion by manipulating its shape in a particular way and then slinking down the stairs toward the source of the warning.

If the creature detects a fight in area D19, it moves into the pantry to help the skum there.

ID OOZE **CR 6**
XP 2,400
hp 62 (see page 29)

D21. WELL (CR 5)

This room is built around a water well, which opens to the sky above at the apex of the ceiling and descends into a shaft at the middle of the floor.

The aqueduct tunnel connects with the well shaft 40 feet under the floor of this room, filling the bottom of the well with water up to 15 feet. A bucket tied to a rope allows someone to pull up water from the courtyard well (in area D4) 50 feet above this chamber, but also provides a way for someone to climb from the bottom of the well into this room. The rope and bucket are currently pulled to the top of the courtyard well. The inner walls of the well are rough, and can be climbed with relative ease (Climb DC 15). The door that leads to area D20 is locked, requiring a key or a successful DC 25 Disable Device check to open.

Trap: To protect Fort Hailcourse from anyone getting into the fort through the town's aqueducts, the skum

here rigged a trap on the door to area D20. If a creature opens the door without disabling the trigger, a freezing cold alchemical spray coats the character opening the door.

FREEZING SPRAY TRAP **CR 5**
Type mechanical; **Perception** DC 25; **Disable Device** DC 20

EFFECTS

Trigger touch; **Reset** none

Effect spray of alchemical liquid ice^{UE} (5d6 cold damage, Reflex DC 20 half); multiple targets (all targets in a 15-foot line)

D22. JAIL (CR 5)

The strong wooden door (hardness 5, 20 hit points, break DC 25) to this room from area D18 is locked (Disable Device DC 25).

This dark hallway leads to a row of three doors along the northern wall, each fitted with a small grate in the middle. A single door stands in the southern wall.

Aside from the dirt and grime in this neglected part of Fort Hailcourse, this jail hallway is empty of furniture. Even before the recent events in Thrushmoor, this jail saw little use. It's not that crime didn't occur in Thrushmoor, but the nature of the crimes was usually so minor that the cells typically held drunks sleeping off their stupor or provided a place to house a troublemaker until he calmed down. Most serious criminals were sent off to Caliphas after their trials.

Creatures: The skum in this room are guarding those kidnapped victims held in Fort Hailcourse until they are sacrificed to Hastur on one of the *Star Stelae*. The skum guards are locked in the room with their prisoners, and must bang on the door and call out to their companions in order to be let out. Though the ghost in area D24 rarely leaves that room, the skum here know about it and have heard eerie noises coming from that area. This has them on edge, but they each try to pretend they're not scared. Two of them seem to be in a boasting contest, periodically taunting the third skum for being a coward.

SKUM (3) **CR 2**
XP 600 each
hp 20 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 253)

D23. CELLS

These three cells are dirty, and the smell of waste and rotting flesh fills the area.

One of the cells (area D23a) is currently empty and the door is ajar. When long hours of guarding helpless

citizens inside of a locked jail become too tiresome or boring, one of the skum guards uses this cell to take a nap. The middle cell (area **D23b**) contains the partially butchered bodies of two humans—Thrushmoor citizens who had been recently kidnapped and sacrificed.

The last cell (area **D23c**) contains one victim awaiting sacrifice. Curled up in the corner of his cell is a young man named Sholn. The PCs may have encountered his younger sister Holissa, who pleads for the PCs to help find him in **Event 6** on page 19.

D24. STORAGE ROOM (CR 7)

The strong door to this room is locked. Without the key carried by Itsqaal-Thoal or the skeleton key found in area **D12**, the PCs must succeed at a DC 25 Disable Device check to unlock the door.

Motes of dust hang heavy in this room's stale air. Crates and barrels stand along the damp stone walls. A plastered portion of the wall in the southwest corner of the room has begun to crack.

Used as an interrogation and torture chamber years ago, this room was converted into a storage area after those cruel practices fell out of favor with Thrushmoor's leadership. However, the chamber has been clearly undisturbed for years. A heavy coat of dust lies on sealed crates full of old clothing, out-of-fashion furniture, outdated militia uniforms, disassembled weapon racks, broken furniture that someone had planned to repair at some point, tapestries in need of patching, extra bedclothes and chamber pots, and older files that have been moved from the archives to make room for more relevant records.

Careful inspection of the southwestern part of the wall in this room reveals unpleasant secrets. A successful DC 20 Perception or Knowledge (engineering) check reveals this portion of the wall used to be a corridor that was sealed up with stone blocks and plastered over long ago. The dampness in the room and the hasty stonework have caused the plaster to crack. Chipping at the plaster reveals gaps in the stones that were put up without mortar. The PCs can break through this masonry wall through brute force (hardness 8, hp 90, break DC 35), or by spending an hour cracking off the plaster and taking down the stone blocks.

Creatures: This room rarely sees traffic. Magistrate Padgett, Constable Cesyll, and the fort's stewards are aware of the danger in this chamber, but no one has been able to deal with it for good. The recent chaos at the fort has roused the tortured spirit that haunts this abandoned area.

When a younger Haserton Lowls IV was studying in Rozenport, his mother Nemira saw to the day-to-day affairs of Iris Hill. His father, Count Haserton Lowls III,

was a harsh and distant man who embroiled himself in governing Versex, often leaving town for days on end to meet with other politicians. In the count's absence, Nemira began meeting with a scholar from Rozenport. To any who would ask, she claimed that the scholar brought her obscure texts through which she could continue her esoteric studies, but this was only partly true. Clymes Prett was a student of occult lore and indeed brought many dangerous tomes into Iris Hill for Nemira to study—in fact, the two had known one another in Rozenport before Nemira married Lowls III. But Clymes was now also Nemira's lover. As their meetings grew more frequent, accusations of infidelity began crossing the lips of other aristocrats. When these rumors reached the count's ears, he became enraged and forbade Nemira from meeting with Clymes again. A month later, the count came down with a disease that doctors and the clergy could neither diagnose nor treat. The count suspected his condition was revenge from Clymes for stopping the affair with Nemira, and had the man arrested. Withering in a cell in Fort Hailcourse for weeks, after rigorous interrogation, Clymes eventually admitted his role in the count's deterioration. In a fit of anger and cruelty, the count—who was witness to much of the interrogation, even in his weakened state—killed Clymes and ordered his body sealed in his cell.

A year after his execution, Clymes Prett rose as a ghost and began haunting Fort Hailcourse. The ghost remains in the fort's basement rooms, rarely straying from the place of his murder. However, on the anniversary of his death, the ghost wanders the entirety of the building. Magistrate Padgett and many of the people that live in Fort Hailcourse know this and make a point to stay elsewhere on that night.

The ghost of Clymes Prett emerges from the wall he was buried behind when the PCs begin inspecting the crumbling masonry. He silently floats toward the PCs, reaching out to them with his corrupting touch, before flinging objects around the room with telekinesis. To keep Clymes from rejuvenating, his body must be extracted from his cell and given a proper burial.

CLYMES PRETT

CR 7

XP 3,200

Male human ghost expert 4/rogue 2 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 144)

NE Medium undead (humanoid, human, incorporeal)
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +19

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 18, flat-footed 14 (+4 deflection, +3 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 56 (6d8+26)

Fort +5, **Ref** +7, **Will** +6

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4, evasion, incorporeal, rejuvenation; **Immune** undead traits

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OFFENSE

Speed fly 30 ft. (perfect)

Melee corrupting touch +7 touch (7d6)

Special Attacks sneak attack +1d6, telekinesis (DC 17)

STATISTICS

Str —, **Dex** 17, **Con** —, **Int** 12, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 18

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 22

Feats Dodge, Mobility, Quick Draw, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +12, Bluff +13, Craft (poison) +10, Diplomacy +8, Fly +11, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +6, Knowledge (engineering) +6, Knowledge (geography) +6, Knowledge (local) +8, Knowledge (nature) +8, Knowledge (religion) +6, Perception +19, Sense Motive +8, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +20; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Perception, +8 Stealth

Languages Common, Skald

SQ rogue talent (finesse rogue), trapfinding +1

D25. WALLED-IN CELL

Sealed from the outside world for many years, this cell smells like a tomb—which it is. This cell was once used to detain prisoners the authorities wanted to keep separate from others, or those subjected to torture in the adjoining room. Following Clymes' murder, the corridor to this cell was stuffed with bales of hay and then walled in with stone blocks.

Once the wall has been broken down and the bales of hay removed, the PCs find a locked cell door (Disable Device DC 20). However, they can peer into the room through the grate in the door. Huddled in the middle of the floor, next to a bench, lies the body of Clyde Prett. The dessicated corpse is dressed only in a ragged loincloth, and has undergone a process of natural mummification. The most recognizable features of the corpse are several large tattoos on the torso and thighs, mostly depicting abstract, swirling monstrosities with too many eyes and too many mouths.

Treasure: Before being arrested and stripped by his captors, Prett swallowed one of his most precious items, a *scarlet and blue sphere ioun stone*, which can be found among his remains using *detect magic* or by inspecting the corpse and succeeding at a DC 15 Heal check.

PART 3: AGAINST THE CULT OF HASTUR

If the PCs want to prevent Melisenn from fully activating the *Star Stelae* in Thrushmoor and creating a link to lost Carcosa, they must break into Iris Hill, defeat the estate's protectors, and confront Melisenn herself.

AT LOWLS'S DOORSTEP

When the PCs first arrive in Thrushmoor, they likely want to get right to the bottom of their condition and confront the man who left them at Briarstone Asylum.

But whether they head there immediately upon their arrival in Thrushmoor or wait until they've learned more, when they arrive, the PCs find a massive hedge surrounding the grounds and a squat gatehouse standing as the only passage through it. The gatehouse is described in area E1 on page 36. The exterior double door of the gatehouse has a small hatch that the guard stationed here can open in order to speak with visitors. When the PCs knock on the gate, an impassive guard slides open the hatch and asks them their business. Any inquires about Count Lowls are met with a gruff response that the count is away on business, and in the wake of current events the estate isn't receiving any visitors. If the PCs insist on seeing someone or gaining entrance, the guard simply repeats himself in a deadpan delivery before shutting the sliding hatch on the door.

If the PCs make a nuisance of themselves, the guard relays their descriptions to Melisenn, who remembers them from before Lowls took them to the asylum. Afraid that their return to Thrushmoor will interrupt her plans to repair and activate the *Star Stelae*, Melisenn sends Risi Nairgon to assassinate the PCs during the next couple of days. See page 46 for Risi's statistics.

E. IRIS HILL GROUNDS

Iris Hill, the residence of the aristocratic rulers of Versex, was built in 4487 AR by Pragmus Lowls I, one of the current count's most illustrious ancestors. Once prosperous and tidy, it has begun to deteriorate in recent years as Count Haserton Lowls IV became more and more involved in his dangerous, esoteric studies. The decline in upkeep was exacerbated when Lowls, with some encouragement by Melisenn, fired his regular staff. The brutish kuru that Melisenn brought on to replace the longtime attendants of Iris Hill care little for cleaning and maintenance. Taking advantage of this neglect, weeds have sprung up throughout the estate's grounds, spreading out to colonize the place for themselves. Crows stand sentry on the building's eaves, periodically calling out their dreadful squawks and eyeing passersby. Inside, nearly every surface of the estate is cluttered and dusty. Resembling the abode of a deranged hoarder rather than that of a ruler of a county, Iris Hill is strewn with books and papers. Many of these manuscripts, pamphlets, and manuals are about esoteric subjects or questionable historical events, but others are simply encyclopedic collections of flora and fauna, gazetteers of nations within the Inner Sea region, and other mundane works. It is clear that much of the count's resources have gone into collecting as many disparate tomes as he possibly could, and no one since he left has bothered to tidy up this enormous collection strewn throughout the estate.

As Lowls delved deeper into his books and scoured his dreaming mind to unravel the mysteries he had



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discovered, his paranoia blossomed. The count paid a passing druid to quietly raise a 10-foot-tall hedge around Iris Hill using *plant growth*, and ordered his new servants to send away anyone who came calling, going so far as to station a guard at the front gate.

The ground floors of the various buildings that make up Iris Hill are built with solid stone blocks, and thick vines of ivy cover the walls with a verdant blanket. Sturdy timber-frame construction makes up the second floors of the buildings, jutting slightly from the thick walls below. The manor, with two large chimneys and circular dormer windows, is clearly the tallest building among the others on the estate. The ceilings of both the ground and main floors of the buildings are 10 feet high, and the attic stretches up to 15 feet at its apex. Unless otherwise noted, the buildings are illuminated by the sun when it shines, and oil lamps at night or when it is overcast—a frequent condition in Thrushmoor. The doors throughout the estate are good wooden doors, albeit somewhat worn, and are unlocked unless indicated otherwise.

The specific rooms and locations within the manor are described in detail beginning on page 42.

E1. GATEHOUSE (CR 7)

Breaking the thick hedge that surrounds the estate, this squat building sports a pair of heavy wooden doors bearing a small sliding hatch.

This squat gatehouse seems to be the only point of access to the hedge-enclosed grounds of the estate (other than hacking through the hedge or climbing or flying over it). Its exterior double door is closed, and bears no knocker or bell. However, a small 6-inch-by-10-inch sliding door is built into one side of the double door at roughly eye level. The exterior double door is sturdy and locked (hardness 5, hp 25, break DC 25, Disable Device DC 25), as well as trapped (see below). Only Melisenn Kororo and Risi Nairgon have a copy of this brass key, but the door can be unlocked from within. The interior double door has the same statistics, but it is unlocked.

Creatures: Melisenn posted a pair of kuru in the gatehouse to serve as guards, along with one of the cultists of Hastur (since the kuru don't speak Common), all vigilant against trespassers. Outfitted to appear less savage at first glance, the kuru guards wear polished breastplates and carry fine battleaxes. To deal with threats beyond the gatehouse doors, the kuru have heavy crossbows and a crate of bolts stashed in the corner of the small guard post. The guards remain behind the stout doors and let the cultist of Hastur do all the talking. The cultist guard only slides open the small hatch to tell people, in a gravelly voice, to go away.

If the PCs come back later and try knocking on the door again, the guards are gruffer and the cultist commands the PCs to go away, stating that there will be trouble if they don't. If the PCs try to pick the lock (or use Risi's key, if they happened to defeat the assassin before returning to Iris Hill) or break down the door, the kuru guards fling open the double door and attack. Savage and bloodthirsty, the kuru guards rage and fight to the death. The cultist fights until reduced to half his hit points, and then flees to the manor to warn the others.

KURU GUARDS (2)

CR 3

XP 800 each

Kuru barbarian 4 (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Isles of the Shackles* 51)

CE Medium humanoid (kuru)

Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+6 armor, +3 Dex, -2 rage)

hp 51 each (4d12+20)

Fort +8, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4; +3 vs. spells, supernatural abilities, and spell-like abilities

Defensive Abilities trap sense +1, uncanny dodge

Weaknesses light sensitivity

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk battleaxe +10 (1d8+5/×3), bite +4 (1d6+2 plus cannibalistic vitality)

Ranged heavy crossbow +7 (1d10/19–20)

Special Attacks rage (12 rounds/day), rage powers (scent, superstition +3)

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 16, **Con** 19, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 20

Feats Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack

Skills Acrobatics +3, Climb +5, Intimidate +6, Perception +8, Survival +5, Swim +5

Languages Kuru

SQ blood courage, cannibalistic vitality, fast movement

Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds*; **Other**

Gear breastplate, heavy crossbow with 20 bolts, mwk battleaxe, 15 gp

CULTIST OF HASTUR

CR 1

XP 400

hp 18 (see page 43)

Trap: The lock on the double door can be picked, but using the proper key is the only way to prevent springing the trap set into the lock.

POISON NEEDLE TRAP

CR 5

XP 1,600

Type mechanical; **Perception** DC 25; **Disable Device** DC 25

EFFECTS

Trigger touch; **Reset** manual; **Bypass** use the key to unlock the door

Effect Atk +15 melee touch (1d2 plus blue whinnis)

E2. ESTATE GROUNDS (CR 7)

Within the surrounding hedge, the garden of Iris Hill appears eerily shrouded in a thin mist that lingers over the grass despite the driving rain. All the buildings appear dark and quiet, and the odor of heather and ivy seems mixed with some sweetly sour, unwholesome essence.

Evidence of neglect lies strewn across this once-magnificent garden. The grass grows tall and yellowed, and weeds choke flowerbeds along the sides of the estate's buildings, leaving only a smattering of color from the few flowers that survive. A few overgrown bushes once trimmed to look like humanoids stand in a rough circle around a brick well in the center of the estate. A gravel path leads from the gatehouse and circles the well before branching off to each of the estate's buildings.

Creatures: Brought here by the druid Daridela Cornett at the behest of Melisenn, three living topiaries hide their true nature among the other sculpted shrubs. These plant creatures are intelligent enough to follow orders, and Melisenn has instructed them to attack anyone on the estate grounds who isn't a cultist of Hastur or one of the kuru thugs. The living topiaries remain perfectly still unless they notice intruders. In combat, they attempt to surround their enemies, but if they begin taking too much damage, one breaks off from the fight to consume foliage from the large patch of bushes on the eastern end of the grounds in order to heal. To confuse enemies, the living topiaries use their hedge stride ability to make quick strikes and then travel to the other side of the grounds and launch a new assault from a different angle.

LIVING TOPIARIES (3)

CR 4

XP 1,200 each

hp 42 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 4 181)

E3. GUESTHOUSE LOUNGE (CR 7)

This well-appointed lounge includes a brick fireplace, a mahogany table with three matching chairs, and an antique sideboard near the foot of the stairs.

As one of the newer additions to Iris Hill, this building was constructed to provide visitors to the estate with a place to stay. The conceit behind building guest quarters on the grounds of Iris Hill instead of adding onto the manor house was that the location afforded the visitors an element of privacy. In fact, Count Lowls IV renovated

this space for visitors because he simply didn't want guests snooping about the manor house.

Inside the lounge, a stone fireplace sits in the corner. The room is appointed with a fine, low table surrounded by comfortable leather chairs. A liquor cabinet stands against the wall at the foot of the stairs leading up to area E9.

Creatures: A couple dressed in the finery of nobles sits around the table in this room, sipping wine from crystal goblets. Asa Lalith and Daelene Spence are minor nobles and worshipers of Hastur from Caliphas, who came to Thrushmoor after hearing that a royal accuser was sent to investigate the erratic behavior of Count Lowls.

Always interested in a scandal, the two were particularly intrigued by the rumor when they learned that occult forces might be to blame. The two packed up some of their belongings in a trunk and boarded a ship heading north to Thrushmoor. Upon their arrival, Asa and Daelene surreptitiously asked around town about the veil cast over Thrushmoor.

As they heard more tales from the townsfolk, the pair of cultists visited Iris Hill and met Melisenn. During their conversation they dropped subtle hints that would identify them as fellow worshipers of Hastur, in hopes that Melisenn would reveal herself as like-minded devotee to the Great Old One. It took more than one visit for all to be revealed, but after realizing they shared a patron and that they were interested in helping with her plans in Thrushmoor, Melisenn invited the decadent nobles into Iris Hill and set them up in the estate's guesthouse.

Feigning surprise at the intrusion, Asa and Daelene invite the PCs to sit down and share some wine. If the PCs disagree or seem cautious, the pair tries to talk them into it, saying things like, "We were just about to open a new bottle. Take some glasses from the liquor cabinet and relax. Let us pour you all a drink or two. We rarely have visitors to Iris Hill these days." If the PCs agree, the cultists engage them in conversation while opening a new bottle of wine, wrapped with a label marking it as having come from a vineyard in Cesca. However, the two have expertly tainted this wine with oil of taggit (*Core Rulebook* 559). A PC who drinks this wine must succeed at a DC 15 Fortitude save 1 minute after ingestion or fall unconscious for 1d3 hours. If it seems necessary, Daelene attempts to surreptitiously cast *suggestion* to magically encourage the PC that seems to be the "leader" to sit down and have a drink, hoping the move will convince the others to join in. The couple attempts to keep the PCs engaged in lighthearted conversation for a minute in order for the poison to take affect.

They begin with small talk about the gloomy and rainy weather, and then break into more probing

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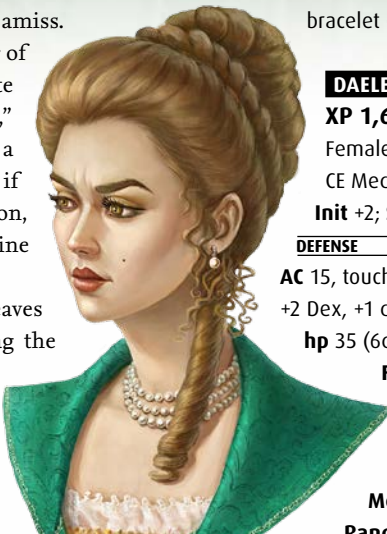
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questions to find what brings them to Iris Hill. If the PCs dodge their questions or answer untruthfully, Asa and Daelene gladly accept the redirection of the conversation and carry on as if nothing is amiss. If the PCs ask about Count Lowls, the pair of cultists claim that “the count left the estate days ago, before all these troubles began,” punctuating the statement with, “Quite a rude thing to do when you have guests, if you ask me.” The pair keeps up conversation, gently persuading the PCs to drink the wine they’re offering.

Once the PCs are unconscious, Asa leaves the guesthouse to get some kuru to drag the PCs to the basement of Iris Hill. If the PCs refuse the wine, the cultists ask more pointed questions about the party’s intentions at Iris Hill, hoping to unnerve or irritate them. If the PCs get aggressive, neither Asa nor Daelene hesitate to beat them to the punch and attack them by surprise.



DAELENE SPENCE

ASA LALITH CR 4

XP 1,200

Male human aristocrat 2/rogue 3
CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +3; **Senses** Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +3 Dex, +1 dodge)
hp 34 (5d8+8)

Fort +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +3

Defensive Abilities evasion, trap sense +1

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk dagger +7 (1d4+2/19–20)

Special Attacks sneak attack +2d6

TACTICS

During Combat Asa relies on sneak attacks in combat.

He tries to flank with Daelene, but if that tactic proves difficult in this small space, he drinks his *potion of invisibility*, positions himself near a troublesome PC, and attacks the following round.

Morale Asa is fanatically dedicated to Hastur and fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 17, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 14

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 19

Feats Alertness, Dodge, Quick Draw, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Disable Device +9, Knowledge (local) +5, Knowledge (nobility) +6, Perception +9, Sense Motive +9, Sleight of Hand +11, Stealth +11

Languages Common

SQ rogue talent (honeyed words^{APG} 1/day), trapfinding +1

Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of invisibility*; **Other Gear** mithral shirt, mwk dagger, thieves’ tools, matching gold necklace and bracelet (worth 350 gp together)

DAELENE SPENCE

CR 5

XP 1,600

Female human sorcerer 6
CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +2; **Senses** Perception +7

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 14, flat-footed 12 (+1 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge, +1 natural)

hp 35 (6d6+12)

Fort +3, **Ref** +4, **Will** +6; +2 vs. mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk dagger +3 (1d4–1/19–20)

Ranged mwk dagger +6 (1d4–1/19–20)

Bloodline Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th; concentration +10)

7/day—psychic strike (1d6+3)

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 6th; concentration +10)

3rd (4/day)—*suggestion* (DC 18)

2nd (6/day)—*hideous laughter* (DC 17), *id insinuation* ^{10A} (DC 17), *mirror image*

1st (7/day)—*charm person* (DC 16), *chill touch* (DC 15), *disguise self*, *mage armor*, *mind thrust* ^{10A} (DC 15)

0 (at will)—*acid splash*, *detect magic*, *disrupt undead*, *ghost sound* (DC 14), *mage hand*, *message*, *read magic*

Bloodline psychic^{0A}

TACTICS

Before Combat Daelene wasn’t expecting to get into a fight today, so she hasn’t cast any preparatory spells. However, if she notices the PCs prowling around the estate grounds before they enter the guest house, she casts *mage armor*.

During Combat Daelene casts *mirror image* on the first round of combat followed by *mage armor* if she hasn’t already cast it. She then uses spells like *suggestion*, *id insinuation I*, and *hideous laughter* to reduce the number of combatants in the fight.

Morale Daelene is a devout follower of the King in Yellow and fights to the death in service of her master.

STATISTICS

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

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 16

Feats Combat Casting, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Skill Focus (Bluff), Spell Focus (enchantment)

Skills Bluff +13, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Perception +7, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +6

Languages Common

Combat Gear *wand of scorching ray* (13 charges);

Other Gear mwk dagger, *amulet of natural armor* +1,

ring of protection +1, pearl earrings (worth 200 gp), key to the trunk in area E10.

E4. CARRIAGE HOUSE

The smell of freshly turned earth fills the carriage house. Behind the large black carriage that nearly fills this space, near a wall hung with tools and various pieces of tack, is a hole nearly 5 feet wide. Once the kuru arrived at Iris Hill, Melisenn ordered them to dig this hole so that she could speak with the alien creatures in the cavern below. The pit descends 30 feet down to the ceiling at the midpoint of the sloping cavern in area G9.

E5. STABLE (CR 6)

Blood stains the damp, musty hay scattered across the floor of this stable.

This stable was where the estate's groom and driver kept the two horses that pulled Count Lowls's carriage. Unfortunately, the driver was among the staff Lowls fired at Melisenn's insistence, and the horses were killed for meat shortly after his departure. Discarded beneath the hay is the bloodstained cleaver used to butcher the horses.

Haunt: The restless spirits of the butchered horses linger here, protective of the stable they once called home.

BUTCHERED HORSES CR 6

XP 2,400

NE haunt (all of area E5)

Caster Level 6th

Notice Perception DC 25 (to hear a horse whinny or snort)

hp 12; **Trigger** proximity; **Reset** 1 hour

Effect When a creature steps into the stable, a spectral figure of a horse manifests and kicks the creature as it passes the threshold. This +6 melee attack duplicates the effects of a *force punch*^{um} spell, dealing 6d4 points of force damage to the creature and pushing it back 15 feet.

Destruction The cleaver used to butcher the horses must be removed from the stable.

E6. KITCHEN (CR 6)

Long tables covered with various utensils and food line two of the walls of this large kitchen. A fire crackles in the massive stone hearth.

The largest of the estate's buildings aside from the manor, this house is remarkable from the outside for the big, cowed chimney that juts from the middle of the roof. The count's servants used this building to

provide meals for the entire estate, but now that the kuru have come to Iris Hill, this kitchen is a disaster. A pile of quickly spoiling butchered horse meat sits on the southeastern worktable, and the room smells like something else has gone bad long ago. A trap door in the eastern corner of the room leads down into the estate's ice cellar (area G8).

Creatures: Four kuru thugs occupy the kitchen. Two are currently making a mess trying to prepare a meal while the others simply reach into the pile of horsemeat and eat it raw. When the kuru spot the PCs, they immediately attack, letting out savage howls as they leap into action. There is a chance that combat in the kitchen can draw the attention of the kuru thugs upstairs in area E16.

KURU THUGS (4)

CR 2

XP 600 each

Kuru fighter 3 (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Isles of the Shackles* 51)

CE Medium humanoid (kuru)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +2



KURU THUG

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DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +2 Dex)

hp 33 each (3d10+12)

Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +2 (+1 vs. fear)

Weaknesses light sensitivity

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee club +5 (1d6+2), bite +1 (1d6+1 plus cannibalistic vitality)

Ranged club +5 (1d6+2)

STATISTICS

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

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 17

Feats Endurance, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Climb +4, Intimidate +3, Perception +2

Languages Kuru

SQ armor training 1, blood courage, cannibalistic vitality

Gear hide armor, club

E7. PANTRY

Shelves holding all manner of dry goods and fresh vegetables line the walls of this expansive pantry. Some of the foodstuffs here have obviously spoiled in recent days, and have yet to be cleaned up.

E8. BATHHOUSE

This one-story wooden building is outfitted with an outhouse and an external awning to shelter firewood.

A wooden bathtub and a fireplace are inside the service building. A small shelf holds bars of soap, towels, brushes and pieces of pumice stone.

Treasure: Among the mundane toiletries are three gray bars of *soul soap* (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Equipment* 320).

E9. GUESTHOUSE STAIRWELL

This small landing atop the stairs in the guesthouse has two doors to the building's other rooms.

E10. GUESTHOUSE BEDROOM (CR 4)

Overnight guests to Iris Hill would stay in this apartment. This tradition still stands, and Melisenn assigned the Hastur cultists Asa and Daelene to this room when they came to Thrushmoor. This lavish bedroom contains a plush, four-poster bed draped with lacy netting. A fire burns in a ceramic stove in the western corner of the room. A large, padlocked trunk (Disable Device DC 25) sits in the southern corner near a long writing desk. Daelene Spence (see page 38) has the key.

Trap: To protect their valuables on their travels, the cultists' trapped their travel trunk. This modified version of *explosive runes* is triggered whenever anyone opens the trunk without whispering the phrase "Lost Carcosa."

FORCE BLAST TRAP

CR 4

XP 1,200

Type magic; **Perception** DC 28; **Disable Device** DC 28

EFFECTS

Trigger touch; **Reset** none

Effect spell effect (6d6 force damage, Reflex DC 14 half); multiple targets (all creatures in a 10-foot-radius burst)

Treasure: Accustomed to a rich lifestyle, Asa and Daelene brought a large trunk filled with fine clothes, jewelry, and plenty of drink—a small fortune of finery. The trunk holds 24 nobles' outfits (worth 75 gp each), 12 bottles of wine (worth 150 gp total), and a jewelry box made of palm wood (worth 50 gp) containing 1,800 gp worth of rings, bracelets, brooches, and necklaces.

E11. SOLARIUM

Large windows span two of the walls of this whitewashed room, allowing in warm sunlight. This chamber was specially built into the guesthouse to provide luxurious amenities to Iris Hill's guests.

E12. CARRIAGE HOUSE STAIRWELL

Creaking wooden stairs lead from the carriage house to the quarters above.

E13. CARRIAGE HOUSE QUARTERS (CR 5)

This nicely appointed room contains a wide bed covered with a homey quilt, a low shelf, and a writing desk. Tapestries hang on the wall, and the room smells faintly of sandalwood.

This room was built atop the carriage house to provide quarters to the groom who was once employed by the estate. It contains a large bed, a writing desk and chair, and a bookshelf.

The count was delighted by Melisenn Kororo's knowledge of the occult, and treated her better than other members of Iris Hill's staff. The rest of the staff resented Melisenn for this, and were especially irate when she was offered the carriage house quarters instead of being made to sleep in the bunks with the rest of the servants. Now that the count has left on his expedition, she has moved into the manor house itself, but she still comes to her former quarters to meditate and pray to Hastur. On the back of the tapestry on the north wall of this room is Hastur's symbol, the Yellow Sign, painted in ochre and hanging above a makeshift shrine covered in ash from burned incense. This Yellow Sign has no magical properties; it only serves as a focus for Melisenn's meditations.

Creature: What appears to be a pitcher plant as tall as a person stands perfectly still in the middle of the room. With the help of the druid Daridela Cornett, Melisenn

lured this basidirond to stand guard over her former chambers. Melisenn used to come to this room every 2 days to bathe the plant in nutrient-rich water (often mixed with blood drained from the sacrifices), but with her current obsessions, she hasn't fed the basidirond in nearly 3 days. When the PCs enter the room, the plant senses them and takes a standard action to release its spores before moving in to attack.

BASIDIRON**CR 5****XP 1,600****hp 52** (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 28*)

Treasure: Although Melisenn brought most of her possessions to her quarters in Iris Hill, she left behind a few things. A small box of incense and four tindertwigs sits near the small shrine. While most of the pungent sticks are mundane, one among the others is a block of *incense of meditation*.

E14. CARRIAGE HOUSE LOUNGE (CR 4)

This slightly dusty room contains a pair of mostly empty bookshelves and a couple of comfortable chairs.

This room once stored additional tack for horses and tools to maintain and repair the carriage, but has since been converted into a quaint lounge.

The shelves in this room were empty when Melisenn moved into the carriage house. Melisenn added some of her own books and materials, but after relocating to the main house, she brought most of them with her. The one thing that still remains is the ledger where she records the accounts of Iris Hill. Lists and calculations of shipments received and pay distributed for the last month fill the pages of this leather-bound book. This ledger shows that the former servants were fired and new ones were purchased from someone named Weiralai. The other items of note show that weeks ago, before Count Lowls left for his expedition, a number of books were delivered to Iris Hill. The books in the shipping manifest include titles such as *Argument Against Reality*, *Delusion: A Pact with Sanity*, *Esoteric Delves into the Waking Mind*, and *Mystical Sites of Eastern Casmaron*.

Trap: Suspicious that some of the cultists living in Iris Hill had been snooping among her things, Melisenn had *sepia snake sigil* cast on the ledger. This trap has already claimed Melisenn's prime suspect, a cultist named Gorwyn who came to Iris Hill a week ago. After he was immobilized by the effect, she ordered the kuru to move him to the greeting hall of Iris Hill (area **F1**) to stand as a lesson to everyone else.

TRAPPED JOURNAL**CR 4****XP 1,200****Type** magic; **Perception** DC 28; **Disable Device** DC 28**EFFECTS****Trigger** spell (*sepia snake sigil*); **Reset** none**Effect** spell effect (*sepia snake sigil*, CL 6th); single target (anyone reading the ledger, Reflex DC 14 negates)**E15. KITCHEN STAIRWELL**

This stairway allows passage from the kitchen below to the sleeping quarters above.

E16. SERVANTS' QUARTERS (CR 7)

This large room looks like a bunkhouse for Iris Hill's servants. Eight beds line the walls, a few chairs sit in a semicircle around the large fireplace, and a bookshelf stands along the eastern wall between two windows. A few trunks sit in the corners of the room.

This room is where Iris Hill's former staff slept when not attending to the estate. Though quite plain, the beds are all outfitted with well-stuffed feather mattresses. The fireplace in the room is an extension of the large hearth in the kitchen below, but it burns with its own fire that warms the room against the weather. Simple wooden chairs crowd around the stone hearth. The shelf against the southeastern wall is stacked with a dozen uniforms left behind when the staff was dismissed. Now that the kuru have taken up this room as their living quarters, they have begun arranging the heads of their victims on this shelf in a macabre display. The shelf currently holds six human heads. The three trunks in the corners of the room have their lids flung open and have been thoroughly looted. A terrible smell of unwashed bodies, moldering food, and rotten flesh hangs in the room.

Creatures: With only eight beds in the servants' quarters, the kuru that live here have been forced to either sleep in shifts or bunk down on a pallet of blankets on the floor. Five kuru thugs are currently in this room resting. Though they're all laying down on beds, there is a 50% chance that any single kuru thug in this room is asleep. When the PCs enter, roll to see how many of the kuru here are awake, and roll Perception checks to see if the PCs' presence rouses any of the brutal cannibals. Accustomed to a rough life and ready for combat at any moment, all of the kuru sleep in their hide armor. As soon as any kuru detects an intruder, he leaps to his feet and engages the PCs, shouting to wake up any sleeping kuru. Likewise, if the kuru thugs hear combat in the kitchen below, they wake and scramble down the stairs to join their companions. The kuru thugs fight to the death.

KURU THUGS (5)**CR 2****XP 600 each****hp 33 each** (see page 39)**THE THRUSHMOOR TERROR**

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F. IRIS HILL MANOR

The largest single building on the estate, Iris Hill Manor stands two stories tall and has a high, peaked roof. The lower floor has thick walls made of rough stone. The upper floor is constructed from wood, and overhangs the lower floor by a few feet. The ceilings in Iris Hill Manor are 10 feet high, and all doors within the building are good wooden doors that are unlocked unless noted otherwise.

F1. GREETING HALL (CR 7)

This long hall, clad with fine wood paneling, looks like an oversized curio cabinet, with hundreds of items and art objects on display on small tables, in vitrines, and on benches. Dozens of paintings and tapestries of various sizes hang from the walls and muffle the echoes that would normally be present in this marble-floored chamber. A double door leads outside, while two other doors go deeper into the manor.

Although some of the hall's paintings have been removed from the walls and sold by Lowls in order to purchase occult tomes to fuel his research (leaving the hooks on the walls where they once hung), the collection of curios and artwork at Iris Hill remains impressive. More than quality, however, the Lowls family seems to have favored originality and oddity in their choices. Among many other things, the collection includes the following.

- Portraits in various artistic styles of the counts, their wives, and a few relatives and domestics wearing all kinds of expressions and outfits line the walls. Most people buried in the family crypt (see area **G4**) are portrayed here. A portrait in a freestanding picture frame on a small tea table with a single chair features Lowls as a child ("Haserton at age 5, 4681 AR," is written on the back of the frame) posing near a kitten at the foot of a luminous window, seemingly terrified. A successful DC 25 Perception or DC 15 Craft (painting) check hints that the painter intentionally created a frightening situation for the child and then expended great efforts to seize his wide-eyed expression. Lowls is in fact slightly ailurophobic, and may become frightened by a feline in close proximity.
- Marble busts of scholars from the Sincomakti School of Sciences, including three effigies of academically renowned ancestors of Lowls (also buried in the crypt) sit on small plinths. The sculptures with the Lowls name on their bases have been smashed against the floor and damaged.
 - Small-town perspectives of Thrushmoor and a half-dozen large paintings of the surrounding landscape hang here. The large pictures include a historic piece, in which the first settlers of Thrushmoor are shown living in two clusters of huts on low hills, hard at work to reclaim the surrounding land from the swamps. The *Star Stelae* have been depicted almost as an afterthought.
 - Statuettes of dragons, giants, and strange beasts litter the shelves. Among these is a poorly executed, 1-foot-tall, clay figurine of an elephant-legged, multi-mawed, tentacled aberration. A successful DC 24 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals that this hideous figurine is a representation of a dark young of Shub-Niggurath.
- Set on an ebony pedestal is a human skull that has been marked with elaborate carvings of geometric shapes and lines. Small, worked garnets are set in the teeth, and a thin line of silver rings the eye sockets.
- Porcelain and ceramic dishes, jugs, teapots, and vases, some of which are of excellent quality, are kept in a glass showcase. A small ceramic vial contains a silvery metallic dust (see Treasure on page 43).

CULTIST OF HASTUR

- Worthless, bizarre, and sometimes grotesque souvenirs from across Ustalav and beyond are displayed here: coffee cups made from uncapped monkey skulls; a stuffed three-eyed bat; multicolor-dyed freshwater sponges; a mummified ogre's ear; and more.
- A battered shield hangs on a wall, bearing the device of Mendev. According to a plaque fixed under it, the shield belonged to Fassimar Lowls, a cadet who died just beyond the northern border of Ustalav during the Second Mendevian Crusade. The shield is a nonmagical heavy steel shield.
- A man dressed in a fine noble's outfit appears frozen in a shimmering field of amber. The subject is in suspended animation after falling victim to a *sepia snake sigil* effect from Melisenn's trapped journal (see area E14), and will remain under this effect for another 6 days. Melisenn put him on display here as a warning to the other cultists who have gathered at Iris Hill.

Creature: Melisenn called a hound of Tindalos to serve as a mobile guardian for Iris Hill.

HOUD OF TINDALOS

CR 7

XP 3,200

hp 85 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 158)

TACTICS

Before Combat The hound of Tindalos uses its *invisibility* spell-like ability to remain hidden in the hall and get the jump on any trespassers.

During Combat The beast casts *haste* on itself before attacking with its ripping gaze. If cornered, it uses its angled entry ability to escape its attackers and find a new direction of attack.

Morale If reduced to 10 hit points or fewer, the hound of Tindalos teleports to Melisenn for healing. In this event, the hound of Tindalos may engage the PCs elsewhere in Iris Hill, perhaps even joining Melisenn in the final encounter.

Treasure: Lowls removed many of the true valuables and most precious items from the collection, selling them to fund his expedition. It would take the PCs quite some time to organize all of the remaining material for sale, and many of Thrushmoor's citizens would be uneasy purchasing these items if they knew they came from Iris Hill. With enough time, though, the PCs could garner 4,000 gp for the collection in this room. The metallic powder in one of the ceramic vials is a dose of *dust of appearance*.

F2. DINING ROOM (CR 6)

This room is furnished with a big table, eight chairs, and a glass-paned cupboard. The room smells of smoke from the fireplace, and a few dirty dishes, an emptied wine bottle, and used cutlery testify to a recent meal consumed at the table.

Most of the residents at Iris Hill take their meals in this room, but they rarely do so together. The fine furnishings in this room reflect the wealth of the Lowls family, despite being a few decades out of fashion.

The count used to take his breakfast in this room while going over the mundane daily affairs of Iris Hill (and to a lesser extent, Versex County). A flight of stairs in the northern corner of the room leads up to area F5 on the second floor of the manor. In a drawer near the bottom of the cupboard is a ledger with several handwritten delivery receipts tucked into it, listing a number of alchemical products sent by someone named Miacknian Mun from Cassomir.

Creatures: Lounging in the dining room, three cultists of Hastur leap to defend Iris Hill as soon as they spot the PCs. Depending on how the encounter in area F1 went, the cultists might have heard the PCs and are ready for them as they enter this room.

CULTISTS OF HASTUR (3)

CR 3

XP 800 each

Human cleric of Hastur 1/rogue 3

CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +7; Senses Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 17 (+5 armor, +3 Dex, +2 deflection, +1 dodge)

hp 28 each (4d8+7)

Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +5; +2 vs. mind-affecting effects

Defensive Abilities evasion, trap sense +1

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk rapier +6 (1d6+1/18-20)

Ranged mwk dagger +6 (1d4+1/19-20)

Special Attacks channel negative energy 4/day (DC 11, 1d6), sneak attack +2d6

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 1st; concentration +3) 5/day—touch of chaos

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 1st; concentration +3)

1st—*cure light wounds*, *protection from law*^b, *shield of faith*

0 (at will)—*detect magic*, *guidance*, *read magic*

D domain spell; **Domains** Chaos, Void^{ma}

TACTICS

Before Combat If the cultists hear the PCs approaching, they cast *shield of faith*.

During Combat The cultists attempt to flank their opponents in order to make use of sneak attack. Since using channel energy would affect their companions, they hold off from using that resource until it is tactically sound.

Morale Afraid of Melisenn's wrath if they let the PCs delve too deeply into Iris Hill, the cultists fight to the death. Once only one cultist remains in the fight, that cultist uses channel energy with reckless abandon.

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Base Statistics Without *shield of faith*, the cultists' base statistics are **AC** 19, touch 14, flat-footed 15.

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 16, **Con** 13, **Int** 8, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +2; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 17

Feats Combat Casting, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +9, Bluff +6, Diplomacy +5, Knowledge (local) +3, Knowledge (religion) +3, Perception +9, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +6, Stealth +9, Use Magic Device +8

Languages Common

SQ rogue talent (finesse rogue), trapfinding +1

Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of vanish*; **Other Gear** +1 *chain shirt*, mwk dagger, mwk rapier, silver unholy symbol of Hastur, spell component pouch, 400 gp worth of jewelry and fine clothing

Treasure: The silverware and porcelain dishes in the dining room are worth 200 gp in total.

F3. LIBRARY (CR 7)

The walls of this large room are lined with ceiling-high bookshelves laden with bound tomes, parchment scrolls, and stacks of paper. The shelves are stuffed full and sag under the weight of their contents. A dozen amber-colored crystal lamps are fixed to the walls, and three more lamps stand on two central tables and a desk. Stairs in the western corner of the room lead up to the second floor.

In this room are many widely known books on common areas of knowledge. Many of these titles relate to matters within Ustalav, but others detail subjects from throughout the Inner Sea region. Several printed of copies of both of Lowls's personal, widely derided publications (*A History of the History of Versex* and *The Stars Are Not Among Us: An Undeniable Refutation of the Works of the Doomsaying Pseudo-Scholar Dr. Henri Meirtmane*) are stacked in two crates near the fireplace. Among the more mundane works are a number of research books regarding dreams and how to manipulate them. These books discuss methods by which an individual can choose to appear in someone else's dream; one even includes an overview of the Dreamlands. Notes and marked pages indicate that Lowls was using dreams as a method of research, wherein he would project his consciousness into the Dreamlands to meet with people and creatures there. One such figure is someone he refers to as the Mad Poet, who offered to show him the way to a forgotten city in return for sacrificing his assistants' minds. There is more information on the counts excursions into the Dreamlands and the Mad Poet in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #111: Dreams of the Yellow King*.

On top of one of these crates is an envelope containing a letter signed by someone named Miacknian Mun,

which apparently accompanied a delivery of alchemical goods. In the letter, evidently answering a question posed by Lowls, Mun confirms that "It seems that the Mad Poet you met in your dream journey was right. The book you seek, the *Necronomicon*, is located in a special collection called the Mysterium in the Qadiran city of Katheer, though it is written in Necril. If you can find a way to retrieve it and bring it to me, I can certainly help you translate and research it. I look forward to seeing you again, my old friend." Details about the further adventures of Miacknian Mun and Count Lowls can be found in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #112: The Whisper Out of Time*.

A rug near the southeastern wall of this room conceals a locked hatch that leads to area **G1** in the basement of Iris Hill. PCs who succeed at a DC 20 Perception check notice a slight ridge in the rug outlining the hatch. The hatch is locked, though the lock can be accessed from above or below. A successful DC 25 Disable Device check opens the hatch, and Melisenn and Risi Nairgon both have keys to this lock.

Creature: When the penanggalen Rumatri (see page 47) arrived in Thrushmoor, she was famished, having had to purchase slaves to sate her thirst for blood during her journey. Nearly mad with hunger when the ship came to port, Rumatri immediately set out to search the town for a victim, and drained an unfortunate townspeople dry. After returning to Iris Hill, she begged a cultist to go retrieve the body, because she knew the following evening it would rise as a manananggal. Now, she and the manananggal keep their bodies in area **F7** while they prowl the grounds of Iris Hill. The manananggal spawn has been ordered to guard the library.

MANANANGGAL

CR 7

XP 3,200

hp 85 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 190)

Treasure: A *bookplate of recall* (*Ultimate Equipment* 284) sits among the books and papers on one of the library's tables. A number of the books in this library contain information that could help the PCs figure out more about what has happened to them and about the count's destination if they spend the time reading through them. Among these books is a collection of Lowls's journals that contains the Dreamlands excursion occult ritual, which Lowls used to transport himself and the PCs into the Dreamlands to meet with the Mad Poet. This ritual is fully explained in *Pathfinder Adventure Path #111: Dreams of the Yellow King*. Make sure the PCs pick up this book, as it will be necessary for the following adventure.

Development: If the PCs open the hatch to explore beneath the manor before they have explored the

upper floors, Nemira Lowls projects into the room to help defend her estate. See page 60 for the countess's complete statistics.

F4. NORTHERN STAIRWELL

The PCs can reach the second floor of the manor via a flight of wooden stairs, which creak ominously as they make their way up. The stairwell is otherwise unremarkable.

F5. SITTING ROOM (CR 6)

This room features a large fireplace and a round table with stuffed, high-backed chairs around it. The walls are decorated with patterned wallpaper and small paintings of the surrounding landscape. Against the walls are three large mahogany sideboards with brass candleholders.

Lowls used the large, round table in this room to host intimate dinners, to play cards, and to stage seance sessions and other parapsychological experiments. When the PCs enter here, the shutters of the windows are closed, and the room is lit by candles and by a shifting, soft light emanating from the surface of the table.

Creature: The current inhabitant of this room arrived at Iris Hill shortly after the *Star Stelae* were partially awakened. Hailing from the void of outer space, this star vampire sensed the activation of the *Star Stelae* and used them as a beacon to make its way to Ustalav. Melisenn managed to somewhat communicate with the creature and invited it into the manor to feed on one of the captives she was to sacrifice. The creature hasn't fed in a day, so it is invisible as the PCs enter the room, but they can hear its constant tittering noises.

STAR VAMPIRE

CR 6

XP 2,400

hp 67 (see page 90)

F6. MAIN CORRIDOR (CR 2)

This corridor connects all the rooms of the upper floor. The only two windows have been shuttered and nailed shut, leaving the space dark. A marble washbasin here is fed by the rainwater cistern in the attic, and pours greenish but potable water. The main drainage pipe of the manor runs under the washbasin between the first and second floors. When the PCs enter the corridor, they might hear the scampering of tiny creatures running inside the pipe and ceiling with a successful DC 15 Perception check.

Creatures: A rat swarm infests the space between the ground floor and main floor. This space is traversable only by Tiny or smaller creatures, and the swarm can regroup and attack in any of the rooms of the manor's second floor, emerging from rat holes and beneath loose floorboards scattered here and there. The rats are under

the influence of the rat king that lives under the well room (area G6), but they stay away from him and his dire rats, which tend to bully and sometimes devour their lesser brethren. Due to the influence of the rat king's plaguebringer special ability, the swarm's disease DC is 2 higher. The rats also do not ascend to the attic, because they are terrified by Nemira Lowls.

RAT SWARM

CR 2

XP 600

hp 16 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 232)

F7. RUMATRI'S BEDROOM

A strong smell of vinegar hangs in the air of this simple, but well-appointed, bedroom.

The guest bedrooms of Iris Hill are well furnished and reasonably tidy, though they suffer the same general state of neglect as the rest of the manor. When the PCs became the subject of the count's dream experiments, he moved them from the servants' quarters to the manor and put them up in this room and the guest room next door (area F8). Currently, the penanggalen Rumatri and her manananggal spawn use this room as a place to secure their bodies while separated from them. In addition to the two beds, writing desk, and cabinets, the room holds a wooden vat of vinegar. Rumatri's body is stretched out on one bed, and it appears to a casual onlooker to be a decapitated corpse. The manananggal's lower body is likewise laid out on the other bed. While this room might look like the scene of a pair of gruesome murders, a successful DC 22 Knowledge (religion) check reveals the bodies to be the separated parts of the two undead that reside within the manor. If the PCs have already encountered Rumatri or her spawn, reduce the DC of this check by 5.

As evidence that Count Lowls used these rooms to accommodate the PC during his dream experiments, one of the bedside tables holds four empty glass phials and a notebook penned by Lowls. The notebook contains the names of Lowls's test subjects, as well as a lengthy series of notes about his suspicion that Ulver Zandalus was the key to discovering Neruzavin, the lost city in Casmaron that holds three *Star Stelae* similar to those in Thrushmoor. The last entries in the notebook detail the PCs, identified by name and accurate data about race, gender, height, and weight, all of which the count referred to when administering the exact dose of a special sleeping drug (which the empty phials once contained), provided by Miacknian Mun.

Treasure: Rumatri stores the gear she can't carry while separated in this room. Her body is clad in a *mnemonic vestment*^{UE} and a chain shirt, and the cabinet near her bed holds two *scrolls of sepia snake sigil*, a *scroll of*

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see invisibility, a composite shortbow (+3 Str), 20 arrows, a short sword, and 329 gp.

F8. GUEST BEDROOM (CR 5)

Appointed in the same style as area F7, this bedroom was also used by the PCs when the count moved them into the manor. However, now a pair of Hastur cultists has claimed the room as their own.

Creatures: The cultists are relaxing on their beds when the PCs arrive, but if they hear combat in the hallway, they hide on either side of the doorway to sneak attack the PCs when they enter the room.

CULTISTS OF HASTUR (2)

CR 3

XP 800 each

hp 28 each (see page 43)

Treasure: In addition to their gear, the cultists have a small stash of treasure in a drawer in the nightstand. The drawer contains a pouch with 720 gp, a *pearl of power* (2nd level), an *oil of silence*, and a *stone of alarm*.

F9. LOWLS'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM (CR 6)

This bedroom looks like it once belonged to a child. Thick dust covers most of the furniture in the room, aside from a single wooden chair.

This is the room Lowls slept in when he was growing up in Iris Hill. With it being right across the hallway from his parents' room, his mother could check up on him when one of his regular bouts of bad dreams struck. The room has been kept pretty much the same since he was a child, and the amount of dust highlights how infrequently this room has been cleaned. The bed is still tightly made and looks as if it hasn't been slept in for years.

Lowls has always been protective of this room, and never let guests stay in it. However, once he left and Melisenn began drawing other cultists to Iris Hill, the room has found a new occupant. Melisenn's friend, the assassin Risi Nairgon, now uses the room to rest. Risi is a hard, no-nonsense woman who doesn't have much need for life's creature comforts. Always ready for an attack, Risi naps sitting up in a wooden chair, claiming that she always sleeps with one eye open. A half-empty clay mug of water sits next to the chair.

Creatures: If the PCs haven't encountered Risi during her attempts to assassinate them, they find her in this room. If the PCs are exceptionally quiet, they can get the drop on Risi as she naps in the chair. However, Risi is likely to notice any sounds of combat on this floor of the manor. If she hears the PCs fighting the cultists in the next room, Risi may join the fight. She hides and observes one of the PCs for 3 rounds in order to make use of her death attack.



RISI NAIRGON

RISI NAIRGON

CR 6

XP 2,400

Female human rogue 5/assassin 2
CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +7; Senses Perception +10

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +3 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 40 (7d8+5)

Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +2; +1 vs. poison

Defensive Abilities evasion, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +1

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk rapier +9 (1d6+2/18-20) or dagger +7 (1d4+2/19-20 plus poison)

Ranged hand crossbow +7 (1d4/19-20)

Special Attacks death attack (DC 13), sneak attack +4d6

TACTICS

Before Combat Risi keeps black adder venom applied to her dagger and three of her crossbow bolts. If she hears combat nearby, she attempts a Use Magic

Device check to activate her *wand of invisibility* and then begins to study one of the PCs.

During Combat Risi keeps moving during combat to keep her opponents off guard. If she gets cornered by the PCs, she looks for a route by which she can make a quick escape. She uses dirty tricks to blind opponents in order to get sneak attacks on them.

Morale If reduced to 10 or fewer hit points, Risi breaks away from combat and flees to safety.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 16, **Con** 10, **Int** 13, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +6 (+8 dirty trick); **CMD** 20 (22 vs. dirty trick)

Feats Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Dirty Trick^{APG}, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (rapier)

Skills Acrobatics +10, Bluff +8, Climb +10, Disable Device +13, Disguise +11, Escape Artist +10, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (local) +6, Perception +10, Sense Motive +8, Sleight of Hand +10, Stealth +13, Use Magic Device +10

Languages Common, Kelish

SQ poison use, rogue talents (bleeding attack +4, finesse rogue), trapfinding +2

Combat Gear *wand of cure moderate wounds* (14 charges), *wand of invisibility* (9 charges), black adder venom (5), padzahr^{UE} (2), striped toadstool, tanglefoot bag; **Other Gear** mithral chain shirt, dagger, hand crossbow with 10 crossbow bolts, mwk rapier, key to the gatehouse double door (area **E1**), mwk thieves' tools, sunrods (2), 143 gp

F10. MASTER BEDROOM (CR 6)

This room is decorated in a pseudo-Qadiran style, with intricate patterns carved in the wood paneling. A sumptuous four-poster bed with a minaret-like canopy sits against the southeastern wall. The furniture includes an ebony writing desk and a large, L-shaped armoire.

Since taking over Iris Hill from his parents, Lowls has resided in this room; however, now that he has headed south on his expedition, Melisenn occupies the master bedroom. Though she grew up in Katapesh, Melisenn is ethnically Qadiran, so she was pleased to find this room decorated in a way that appeals to her.

The spacious armoire is rather disorganized and grimy, and contains an eclectic collection of expensive clothing—an ample cloak, a fur coat, an Qadiran-styled frock, a couple of silk turbans, a wide-brimmed hat, and a half-dozen shirts with lace-trimmed collars and sleeves. In a worn-out greatcoat, hanging from a peg near the door to the corridor, is a folded piece of parchment—a permit to visit an inmate of Briarstone Asylum named Ulver Zandalus, issued by Administrator Losandro. On the writing desk lies a

disorderly stack of handwritten notes, drafted by Lowls in the immediate aftermath of his dream journeys. The last note mentions the Mad Poet, who told the count to look for a book called the *Necronomicon*. In the note, Lowls mentions the PCs as his companions in this revelatory dream, and says that “the sacrifice of their minds” put them into “a fugue state, but they lived, unable to remember their lives or react to outside stimuli.” Lowls concludes his last note saying that the PCs are to be turned over to the warden of Briarstone Asylum “according to our agreement.”

Creature: When she is not prowling the town in her human form, the penanggalen Rumatri has been put in charge of guarding Melisenn's room.

RUMATRI CR 6

XP 2,400

Female human penanggalen bard 6 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 216)

NE Medium undead (humanoid, human)

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +19

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 14, flat-footed 16 (+4 Dex, +6 natural)

hp 72 (6d8+42); fast healing 5

Fort +8, **Ref** +9, **Will** +7; +4 vs. bardic performance, language-dependent, and sonic

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4; **DR** 5/silver and slashing; **Immune** undead traits; **Resist** cold 10, fire 10

Weaknesses light sensitivity, sunlight vulnerability

OFFENSE

Speed fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee bite +8 (1d6+3), slam +8 (1d4+3 plus grab)

Special Attacks bardic performance 20 rounds/day (countersong, distraction, fascinate [DC 19], inspire competence +2, inspire courage +2, suggestion [DC 19]), blood drain (1d4 Con), create spawn, disease, wither

Bard Spells Known (CL 6th; concentration +12)

2nd (5/day)—*glitterdust* (DC 18), *heroism*, *hold person* (DC 18), *invisibility*

1st (6/day)—*charm person* (DC 17), *chord of shards*^{UM} (DC 17), *ear-piercing scream*^{UM} (DC 17), *hideous laughter* (DC 17)

0 (at will)—*dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *lullaby* (DC 16), *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*

TACTICS

Before Combat If she has time to prepare for combat, Rumatri casts *heroism* on herself, followed by *invisibility* just before the PCs enter the room.

During Combat Rumatri favors her spells in combat, and attempts to stay out of melee range as long as possible. She opens combat with *glitterdust*, hoping to blind as many PCs as possible. She then uses damaging spells such as *chord of shards* and *ear-piercing scream*, or spells that can take PCs out of combat such as *hideous laughter*.

Morale Unafraid of death, Rumatri fights until destroyed.

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STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 18, **Con** —, **Int** 15, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 22

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +7 (+11 grapple); **CMD** 21

Feats Combat Casting, Eschew Materials, Flyby Attack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +15, Diplomacy +15, Fly +16, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +10, Knowledge (engineering) +5, Knowledge (geography) +5, Knowledge (history) +5, Knowledge (local) +10, Knowledge (nature) +10, Knowledge (nobility) +5, Knowledge (planes) +10, Knowledge (religion) +10, Perception +19, Perform (act) +15, Perform (sing) +15, Sense Motive +15, Spellcraft +9, Stealth +21, Use Magic Device +15; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Bluff, +8 Fly, +8 Knowledge (arcana), +8 Perception, +8 Sense Motive, +8 Stealth

Languages Common, Kelish, Vudrani

SQ bardic knowledge +3, lore master 1/day, separate, versatile performances (act, sing)

Story Award: Reading the notes Lowls left in his overcoat triggers a brief memory in the PCs where they recall accompanying the count to a dreamlike desert and speaking to an old man called the Mad Poet. After receiving this memory, award the PCs 2,400 XP.

F11. SOUTHERN STAIRWELL

This stairwell leads down to area F3.

F12. PRIVATE STUDY (CR 5)

The walls of this room are lined with fine wood panels. The furniture includes a desk sitting under a window opposite the door, a high-backed chair, and a couple of small bookcases packed tight with scrolls, volumes, and notebooks.

Here the count keeps his most precious tomes and important documents. The collection contains a wide variety of books, though many of them focus on old cults and other occult lore. By spending 8 hours sorting and reading through the various books and papers, the PCs can uncover the following relevant pieces of information.

- A notebook holds an account of Lowls's interviews with Ulver Zandalus, which took place in Briarstone Asylum. Though Zandalus was mute, Lowls would interview him while he drew his charcoal drawings of the mysterious city, and during the process details would emerge which Lowls would interpret. In later interviews, Count Lowls made use of magic to read the man's thoughts. Through this process, Lowls was able to learn about a distant lost city in some nameless desert that reportedly featured three *Star Stelae*, identical in shape and arrangement to those in Thrushmoor. In the last pages of the notebook, Lowls stops relating what he learned from his interviews

with Ulver, and begins writing with maniacal fervor about his obsession with the city and his belief that its discovery alone can repair his academic reputation.

- An annotated map shows Lake Encarthan and the lands to the south. The count has drawn a route from Thrushmoor to Xer, traced a line down the Sellen River to Cassomir, and then marked the coast to Katheer, from which he plans to mount an expedition to the lost city of Neruzavin.
- A draft of the equipment, supplies, and number of slaves the count plans to purchase for the final leg of the expedition is scribbled on a piece of parchment.

These finds show that Lowls has been planning his journey for a long time, and the notes hint at his destination. There is more to learn from Lowls's collection, and the PCs can pack up many of the annotated books and notes and take them along as they begin the next adventure. The noted books are gathered in a small trunk whose contents are listed below in *Treasure*.

Trap: Melisenn cast *explosive runes* on a page of notes that she inserted into the collection of pages and books Lowls left on his desk. Anyone reading through the collection has a chance of triggering the spell.

EXPLOSIVE RUNES

CR 5

XP 1,600

Type magic; **Perception** DC 28; **Disable Device** DC 28

EFFECTS

Trigger visual; **Reset** none

Effect spell effect (*explosive runes*, 6d6 force damage, Reflex DC 14 half); multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft.-radius burst)

Treasure: Among the other printed works in the study is a slim spellbook bound in red leather. The spellbook contains the following spells: *blindness/deafness*, *dancing lights*, *detect thoughts*, *eagle's splendor*, *expeditious retreat*, *gust of wind*, *hypnotism*, *illusory wall*, *mirror image*, *owl's wisdom*, *protection from good*, and *shield*.

A small lockable trunk (Disable Device DC 25, currently unlocked) sits near the door to this room. The trunk contains research materials the PCs will need in the following adventure, as well as a few special items, including a *book of the loremaster*^{UE} and two *scrolls of psychic surgery*^{OA}. It also holds the following books: *Atop the Valley's Soul*, *The Codex of Three Prescriptions*, *Curses of the Black Lake*, *Dichotomous Translations of Aklo Syntax*, *Elements Through the Spirals of Time*, *Emotions of the Past*, *The Falling Silk*, *Festival of the Snake*, *The Forgotten Servants*, *The Illusion of the Weeping Ones*, *In Admiration of Keeping Pacts*, *Manual of Silence*, *Men and Vultures: Denizens of the Darkened Depths and Dead Skies*, *Monuments of the Forest*, *The Shadow's Ship*, *Shards of Sight*, *Spiders of Sin and Sky*, *Theological Agreements of the Kingdom*, *Tigers and Flies*, *The Unified Manual of*

Understanding, *Voyage of the Rainbow Servant*, and *The Wise Harmony*. That these volumes are among the few books provided with titles in this cluttered house full of reading materials should be enough to interest the PCs; ensure that they take them, as the books are necessary for the next adventure.

F13. ATTIC STAIRCASE

The staircase that leads to the attic is dirty, dusty, and draped in thick cobwebs. The PCs might hear a frightful moan coming from Lowls's mother as they ascend the creaking staircase.

F14. ATTIC (CR 7)

This large attic area has a slanted ceiling supported by wooden trusses, beams, and rafters. The ceiling slopes down from the highest beams in the middle to the lowest on the perimeter, where several ugly, fibrous plants sprout from clay pots, barely illuminated by a few dormer windows. The air smells of dust, mold, and decay.

The lofty peaked roof of the manor makes the ceiling in the attic 15 feet high in the middle, but it quickly tapers down to the edges of the space. The attic is mostly clear, with a few boxes and crates scattered here and there, and potted plants along the outer walls.

Creatures: This attic is where Lowls's insane and monstrous mother, the former Countess Nemira Lowls, has been confined for the last 20 years. In her more lucid moments, the thing that once was Nemira Lowls contents herself with exploring the outside world with her spirit body and tending to her collection of deformed potted plants. There is a chance that the PCs encountered her as she haunted them in the streets of Thrushmoor (**Event 5**) or in the manor's library (area **F3**) as she manifested there to halt their descent into the basement.

As the party ascends the stairs and begins to enter the attic, she retreats to its northeastern end, pleading with the PCs to stay away and not look at her. If the PCs pursue, she is eventually forced to reveal herself, which throws her into a bestial rage. Overwhelmed with shame of her current form, Nemira becomes enraged at seeing her reflection. Any PC carrying a mirror or bearing anything with a large reflective surface (such as shiny armor) becomes her primary target for attack.

If the PCs keep their distance, they can attempt to speak with and calm the demented abomination. Parleying with Lowls's mother can be more terrifying than witnessing her monstrous form, as grief, anger, frustration, and utter insanity slowly emerge in her rambling speech.

Nemira's attitude starts off hostile. If the PCs are able to shift her attitude to friendly (Diplomacy DC 28), there

is a 50% chance that Nemira might let slip an important fact about the history of Iris Hill, the current goings on in the estate, or information about Lowls—a phobia (such as his fear of cats) that can be exploited in later adventures, or the cache of his “toys,” one of which can turn out to be a magic item useful to the PCs. Choose something suitable to your particular PCs that they will like or find beneficial.

Even if the PCs manage to calm her down enough to talk, she is erratic and lashes out at the PCs after their conversation ends. If they get through the encounter peacefully, she visits them in 1d3 hours using her projection special ability.

NEMIRA LOWLS

CR 7

XP 3,200

hp 60 (see page 60)

Treasure: Hidden among one of the potted plants in the attic (Perception DC 25) is a folding leather pouch. The bag holds a finely cut emerald (worth 1,000 gp), a silver necklace set with garnets (worth 400 gp), a pair of black pearl earrings (worth 150 gp), a gold ring set with a large diamond (worth 2,500 gp), 13 freshwater pearls (worth 10 gp each), a jade comb (worth 100 gp), and a silver-and-amber bracelet (worth 120 gp).

G. UNDER IRIS HILL

When people began to resettle Thrushmoor 200 years after the Thrushmoor Vanishing, the *Star Stela* at what is now Iris Hill was covered by a large, artificially constructed hill. It's unclear why the other two stones were not also buried, and as Pragmus ordered the construction of Iris Hill, the crew discovered the buried monument. As the basement of the estate was coming to completion, Pragmus drafted a second, secret construction contract to build a chamber to house this mysterious artifact. None of this was on the books, and as far as most historians know, the third of Thrushmoor's *Star Stelae* was simply lost to time.

The basement of Iris Hill is built of limestone blocks carved from the local terrain. Unless otherwise stated, the ceilings are 10 feet high. Most of the rooms are dark, but the basement's walls include plenty of torch sconces and hooks for lanterns.

G1. WINE CELLAR

The trap door in area **F3** leads to the top of the stairs outside of the eastern door to this room.

The shelves in this cellar are neatly stacked with glass and clay bottles, tiny kegs, decanters, mugs, and crystal goblets.

Both doors in this room are closed and locked (hardness 5, hp 20, break DC 25, Disable Device DC 22).

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The cellar hosts a collection of fine bottled wines, ales, and liquors, all of good to excellent quality. The reserve is still mostly intact, for Melisenn has allowed no undisciplined minions of the cult into the room.

Treasure: The spirits here are worth a total of 500 gp.

G2. CELL

This dank, subterranean cell is empty aside from two heavy wooden pallets with manacles to restrain prisoners.

Recently, this small cellar room has been used to detain victims whose sacrifice was imminent, but it is now empty and the door has been left unlocked.

G3. SHRINE

The walls of this subterranean hallway are clad with yellow tapestries. On the east wall is a tapestry that has

been defaced with a faithful representation of Hastur's symbol—the Yellow Sign. A lantern sits on the floor of this room between the two hallways, shining light into other areas of the basement.

G4. FAMILY CRYPT (CR 7)

This elongated subterranean hall is decorated throughout with finely wrought Pharasmin symbols, which culminate in a seven-foot-high bas-relief of the goddess's face on the south wall. Against the other walls, whose surfaces are riddled with burial recesses, sit seven sarcophagi, four sealed and three uncovered.

This crypt holds the members of the Lowls family that died since the foundation of Iris Hill. Two generations prior to Haserton Lowls IV, including Lowls's father, his grandfather and grandmother on his father's side, a brother, and an aunt rest in the sarcophagi; their graves are marked as follows, respectively.

- Haserton Lowls III, 4631–4694
- Gordel "Brigandslayer" Lowls II, 4589–4655
- Ulunda Lowls, 4602–4661
- Cerilde Lowls, 4593–4659
- Elistor Lowls, 4672–4693

The remaining two sarcophagi are unmarked and uncovered.

The skeletons of older ancestors and of other dead people close to the family have been transferred into the recesses in the walls, incinerated and put in urns, or—in the case of a few—unceremoniously laid on the floor. None of the graves bears the name of Lowls's mother, Nemira. The four covered sarcophagi each contain a skeletonized body dressed in finery fitting his or her status.

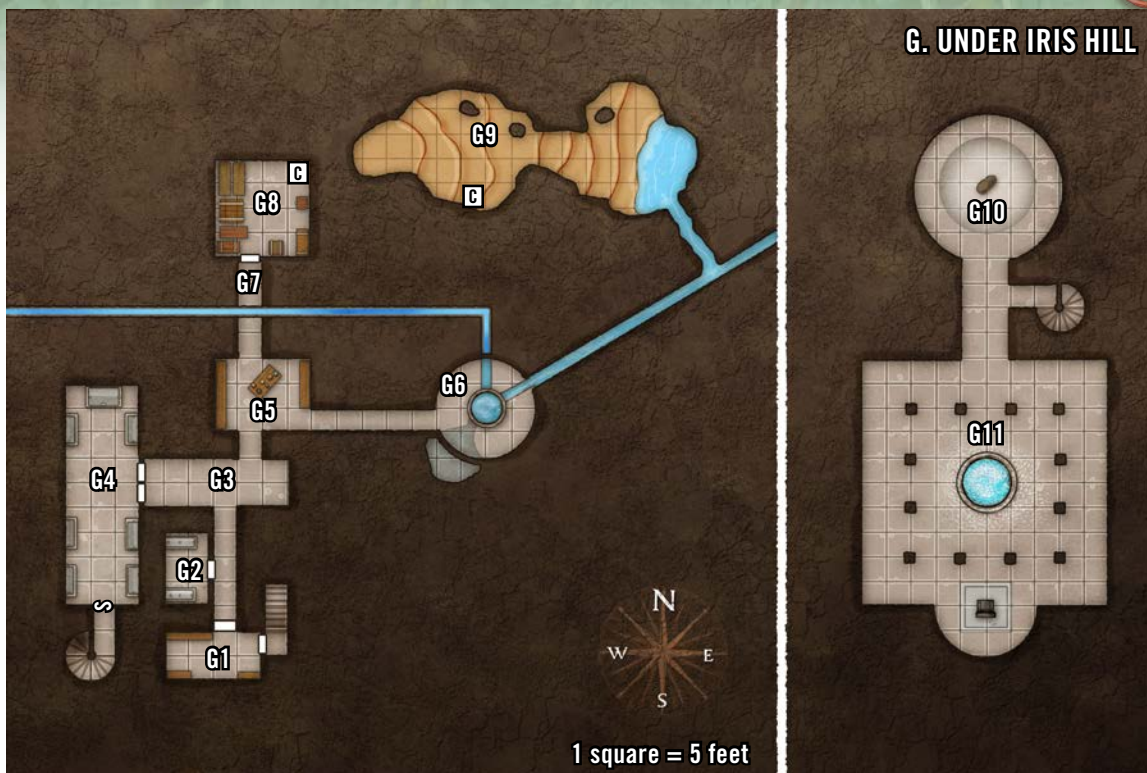
A human corpse dressed in the outfit of a royal accuser is laid out on top of one of the sealed sarcophagi. This is the body of Accuser Omari, retrieved from Fort Hailcourse after she and her party were killed in the building's lobby while inquiring about Magistrate Padgett and Count Lowls.

The bas-relief of Pharamasma's face can swivel on stone pivots, revealing a secret passage to a spiral staircase descending to area G10. A PC can discover this function with a successful DC 22 Perception check.

Creature: Weiralai, the denizen of Leng slaver who supplied the kuru for Iris Hill, is perched over Omari's body using a bizarre device to question the royal accuser's corpse. Weiralai was responsible for initially bringing the PCs—who she enslaved—to Iris Hill 5 years ago as servants and thugs for Count Lowls. Weiralai also knows that the PCs are back in town after being sent to Briarstone Asylum, and that they have been a thorn in Melisenn's side. She intends to deal with



WEIRALAI



what she considers a past mistake by bringing the PCs to Count Lowls. Weiralai doesn't bother reminding the PCs of their previous relationship, because she is aware of their current amnesiac state.

When the PCs enter the room, Weiralai stands up from Omari's body and addresses the PCs, saying, "You have made a grave mistake returning here. Lowls should have finished the job of sacrificing you instead of sending you to that... doctor. You won't interfere with Melisenn's work any longer." After concluding her short speech, Weiralai attacks the PCs so they don't interrupt the attempt to fully reawaken Thrushmoor's *Star Stelae*.

WEIRALAI CR 8

XP 4,800

Denizen of Leng (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 82)

hp 95

TACTICS

During Combat Weiralai attacks the closest PC with her natural weapons.

Morale Knowing that she will just reform on Leng if slain here, Weiralai fights to the death.

Treasure: The dead aristocrats still in the sarcophagi were buried with jewels and other precious trappings (such as rings, necklaces, circlets, scepters, and so on) for a total value of 4,500 gp. The sealed burial recess of Fassimar Lowls, a Mendevian crusader and one of the few honorable ancestors of the count, contains a

+1 *longsword* that sheds pale purple light equivalent to a *light* spell.

In addition to these valuables, the device attached to Accuser Omari is a rare device called *confabulation plates* (see the sidebar on page 52).

G5. ESTATE STORAGE (CR 6)

This underground storage room is furnished with two large wooden shelving units on the west and east walls, holding many small chests, caskets, and several loose objects. In the middle of the floor lies a wooden coffin.

On the shelves are the less valuable personal belongings of the victims of the cult—clothing, boots, and mundane equipment. Many items are damaged by wear, moisture, or combat, and only a few can be of any use to the PCs. The coffin was used to carry corpses by Lowls's minions, or even to smuggle live prisoners. Now the keeper of the Yellow Sign uses the coffin as a resting place.

Creature: A sinister servant of Hastur, the keeper of the Yellow Sign stands guard here, on the lookout for anyone who doesn't belong in Iris Hill. The keeper is a mobile monster as well, and is likely to hunt for PCs if they bypass this room to reach the subterranean court below. The keeper of the Yellow Sign taunts the PCs with his signature line, "Have you found the Yellow Sign?" before attacking. A fanatically devoted servant of Hastur, the keeper fights until destroyed.

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CONFABULATION PLATES

Created by mi-go (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 4* 193), *confabulation plates* allow the user to communicate with things not typically able to speak. Mi-go scientists use these devices to glean information from as many sources as possible.

CONFABULATION PLATES

PRICE
9,000 gp

SLOT none

CL 5th

WEIGHT 5 lbs.

AURA faint divination and necromancy

Approximately 10 inches on each side, these two square, brass-colored metal plates have rubber edges and screws at each corner used to tighten the plates like a clamp. In the center of the top plate is a fleshy tube that ends in a suction cup ringed with tiny teeth. Next to the base of the tube is a small winding key that powers the device and a toggle switch that selects the device's function (dead or plants).

To use the *confabulation plates* on a dead entity, the user must clamp the plates around part of the subject's body and attach the tube to the subject's bare skin. Then the user has to crank the winding key for 1 minute. Once this is complete, the user can ask the corpse two questions, and the response emits from the device in a metallic, buzzing tone. This effect is identical to *Speak with Dead*.

If the device is selected to be able to communicate with plants and clamped onto a plant, the user can communicate freely with the subject for 5 minutes as the spell *Speak with Plants*.

Confabulation plates can be used once per day.

CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

COST 4,500 gp

Craft Wondrous Item, *Speak with Dead*, *Speak with Plants*

KEEPER OF THE YELLOW SIGN

CR 6

XP 2,400

hp 66 (see page 88)

Treasure: A thorough search among the sundries reveals what might be the apparel of a public official and a silver seal matrix—a bell-shaped object with Thrushmoor's crest engraved on its flat bottom and a ring for a string or ribbon at the top. These items are the sole remaining evidence that Magistrate Padgett was killed by the cult of Hastur. The seal is worth just 10 gp as an art object, but Cesadia Wrentz will pay twice that amount to the PCs in order to give it to the next magistrate.

G6. WELL ROOM (CR 6)

A low, circular stone wall marks the lip of a well in the center of this room. A bucket sits beside a block and tackle attached

to a wooden frame near the wall of this round chamber. A corridor exits to the west.

The shaft here descends 50 feet to bottom of the well and holds 15 feet of water. The well receives water from both rainwater collected in the manor's gutter system and the aqueduct beneath Thrushmoor. The aqueduct tunnel is 4 feet wide and 6 feet high.

Just beneath the lip of the well, a fissure in the stonework opens to a roughly hewn cave that once was some kind of subterranean deposit. With a 2-foot-wide entrance and a 5-foot-high ceiling at the apex, this cave is too tight a space for Medium creatures, who must squeeze to enter and move around inside it. Covered in rat droppings, the cave is filthy and reeks. This contamination extends into the well itself, causing the water to smell and taste of ordure.

Creatures: A rat king and seven dire rats currently live in the cave. A recent addition to the horrors that populate Iris Hill, these rats have gone through all available food, and now they are hungry and restless. Bolstered by the rat king, the dire rats attack anyone who comes into this room. Due to the rat king's plaguebringer ability, the DC for the rats' filth fever is 2 higher than normal. The rat king prefers to stay back and let his dire rat minions to fight for him, though if they are killed, he fights to the death.

RAT KING

CR 5

XP 1,600

hp 57 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 4* 225)

DIRE RATS (7)

CR 1/3

XP 135 each

hp 5 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 232*)

Hazard: Although the contamination doesn't run upstream, anyone who drinks the water in the well or crawls into the foulness of the rat cave contracts bubonic plague (*Core Rulebook* 557) unless he succeeds at a DC 17 Fortitude save.

Treasure: Among the filth and remains in the rat cave is a pouch containing 17 gp, 43 sp, and a diamond ring worth 1,000 gp.

G7. CELLAR HALLWAY (CR 5)

This short hallway ends at the door to the ice cellar. Although the door is locked (see area G8), Melisenn didn't trust that the kuru stationed in the servants' quarters wouldn't just break down the door and come into Iris Hill's basement, so she placed a trap here.

Trap: Melisenn cast a *glyph of warding* at the end of the hallway to harm anyone passing through the hallway who doesn't worship Hastur. The cultists in Iris Hill were informed of this, but not the kuru.

GLYPH OF WARDING**CR 5****XP 1,600****Type** magic; **Perception** DC 28; **Disable Device** DC 28**EFFECTS****Trigger** spell; **Reset** none**Effect** spell effect (*glyph of warding* [blast glyph], 3d8 electricity damage, Reflex DC 17 half); multiple targets (all creatures within 5 feet)**G8. ICE CELLAR (CR 4)**

The walls of this bitterly cold room are clad with raw wooden boards. Many blocks of hazy ice and wooden crates of various sizes are stacked near the walls.

This ice cellar is insulated by a 1-foot-wide interspace filled with hay and sawdust between the stone walls and the wooden cladding boards. A ladder in the northeast corner leads to the kitchen (area E6). The door from the ice cellar to the rest of the basement of Iris Hill is locked (hardness 5, hp 20, break DC 25, Disable Device DC 25); Lowls didn't want servants having easy access to Iris Hill's basement.

Creatures: Two kuru thugs are currently rummaging through the crates in the ice cellar looking for something to eat. It's possible that if they hear combat in the kitchen above, they joined their fellow kuru for that fight; otherwise, they keep searching for ways to sate their appetites. One of them has just found a side of venison wrapped in waxed paper. When they notice the PCs, the kuru immediately attack.

KURU THUGS (2)**CR 2****XP 600 each****hp** 33 each (see page 39)**G9. CAVERN OF THE ELDER THINGS (CR 7)**

This natural cave, illuminated by large floor lanterns, extends from east to west, slightly ascending from a pool of water to a raised shelf.

Two adjoining nodes make up this cavern, narrowing at the center. The floor of the cave is irregular, rising in some places while dropping in others, but the rolling, uneven elevation doesn't affect movement.

Creatures: While researching the ancient history of Thrushmoor and the *Star Stelae*, Melisenn had a dream that revealed the presence of a pair of elder things in a large cavern below the estate. Subsequent dreams provided more details as to where on the property the cavern could be found. Once she was completely certain of the location, she ordered a hole dug in the packed dirt floor of the carriage house. When the kuru digger broke through to the cavern, Melisenn descended into

the cave on her own and discovered two elder things deep in hibernation.

The creatures had been resting in suspended animation since the ages-forgotten era during which the flying polyps came to Golarion and erected the *Star Stelae* to mark the planet. When the cavern was opened to the outside world for the first time in ages, the elder things slowly began coming out of hibernation. One of the elder things was roused from its slumber the day after the cavern was breached, but the other only regained consciousness the day before the PCs arrive.

Melisenn had difficulty speaking with the elder thing at first, so she prepared *comprehend languages* the following day and returned to the cave to interview the cosmic visitor. Over the course of an hour, Melisenn learned that the elder things were part of a larger contingent of elder things that followed the flying polyps to Golarion. The elder thing also told her about how a contingent of powerful serpentfolk sorcerers and priests fought back against the flying polyps, eventually driving them off.

If the PCs have ways to communicate with the elder things, the cosmic creature can relay the same information that it shared with Melisenn. However, after thousands of years of sleep following their arrival on Golarion, the two creatures are cranky and simply want to regain enough strength to leave the confines of this cavern. As such, the elder things have little patience for what they consider "lesser minds" and attack the PCs if they offend or hinder them in any way.

Story Award: If the PCs manage to communicate with the elder things and discover the ancient past of the *Star Stelae*, or if the PCs help the elder things escape, award them 3,200 XP as if they had defeated the elder things in battle.

ELDER THINGS (2)**CR 5****XP 1,600 each****hp** 59 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 4 85)**G10. STAR STELA**

In the middle of a circular, vaulted chamber, standing on a platform of natural bedrock, a black stone monolith similar to the two in Thrushmoor glows with a pale, yellow light. Blood stains the floor surrounding the monument.

Since the other two *Star Stelae* in Thrushmoor are out in the open, the cult has sacrificed all of their victims to this one beneath Iris Hill. Though the place isn't slick with gore, the smell of blood is strong in this circular chamber. As the cult sacrificed townsfolk to Hastur and charged this *Star Stela*, the monument began to glow with a pale yellow light, and the cultists believe that this effect is Hastur showing his favor. For more

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information about the operation of the artifact here, see page 8.

G11. COURT OF THE UNSPEAKABLE ONE (CR 9)

This large chamber resembles the courtyard of an ancient, subterranean palace, with columns supporting a 30-foot-high cloister dome. In the middle of the floor, a tile mosaic of the Yellow Sign emits a thin, yellow vapor that fills the room with a faint odor of chrysanthemums. The vapor rises to the concave dome of the vault, through which an image of the minarets, towers, and spires of a mysterious city silhouetted against a yellow sky can be seen. The image sways softly with a slow alternation of light and darkness, to the sound of invisible pipes and strings. At the far end of the chamber, a marble throne sits within a semicircular apse. A floor-to-ceiling band of gilded mosaics decorates the walls, depicting a fantastic urban landscape populated by figures in flowing robes and full-face masks.

Creatures: Melisenn Kororo retreats to this chamber to enjoy the mystical atmosphere of the alien city and to dream of her future as a decadent cult leader.

A horrid creature called a byakhee accompanies Melisenn. The vile creature appeared here in the subterranean court by stepping through the *Star Stela* from Carcosa. Even Melisenn was confounded as to how the creature accomplished such a feat, but she welcomes the additional support and considers it a gift from Hastur. The byakhee remains close to Melisenn in the fight, and tries to put itself between her and the PCs. In addition, if the hound of Tindalos survived its encounter with the PCs in Iris Hill's greeting hall (area F1), it joins the fight alongside Melisenn and the byakhee.

When the PCs arrive in the chamber, at the heart of her domain, Melisenn feels threatened. She is afraid that the PCs are going to disrupt her plans to reawaken the *Star Stelae*, but she's even more worried that she is going to be made to look weak in front of the cult she's working to foster.

As she sees the PCs, she shouts at them at the top of her lungs, her voice echoing under the vault: "If you think your condition means you're important, you're wrong. You are nothing! You are an ember floating from some putrid bonfire that will also wink out in the cold death of the universe. We are all worthless before the Unspeakable One! Even if he has marked you, I am the one who will open this world to him—not Lowls, and not you. You will not take my place—you will die! The King in Yellow is coming!"

MELISENN KORORO

CR 7

XP 3,200

hp 63 (see page 58)

BYAKHEE

CR 4

XP 1,200

hp 42 (see page 82)

Trap: Melisenn trapped the entryway to the subterranean court to prevent anyone who doesn't worship Hastur from entering safely. Any creature who enters the area between the stairs and the 10-foot-wide hallway who doesn't say, "Have you seen the Yellow Sign?" triggers the trap.

GLYPH OF WARDING

CR 5

XP 1,600

Type magic; **Perception** DC 28; **Disable Device** DC 28

EFFECTS

Trigger spell; **Reset** none

Effect spell effect (*glyph of warding* [blast glyph], 3d8 sonic damage, Reflex DC 17 half); multiple targets (all creatures within 5 feet)

Treasure: In addition to her gear, Melisenn has a copy of the *Pnakotic Manuscripts*, an ancient Aklo text that contains information about portals and conjuration magic. The book is relatively large, weighing 10 pounds and containing over 500 pages of parchment. The book also encompasses knowledge about flying polyps, yithians, and many other creatures associated with the gods of the Elder Mythos. Spending a week of continual study grants the reader a +4 circumstance bonus on all Knowledge checks pertaining to conjuration magic or the gods and magic of the Old Cults. In addition, the book functions as a spellbook and contains the following arcane spells: *gate*, *greater teleport*, *greater planar binding*, *interplanetary teleport*^{UM}, *lesser planar binding*, *planar binding*, *plane shift*, *teleport*, *teleport object*, and *teleportation circle*.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Now that they have uncovered Melisenn's cult in Thrushmoor and learned where their former employer is heading, the PCs can start making arrangements to follow him.

When they report their success to Cesadia Wrentz, she is relieved that the troubles facing Thrushmoor are coming to an end. She apologizes to the PCs for any disrespect or doubt she might have showed earlier and encourages them to seek out the missing Count Lowls. In addition, Wrentz offers to help the PCs in whatever way she can, including an offer to further research anything they discovered (though occult lore isn't her specialty, she has a large network of agents spread throughout the Inner Sea region).

Cesadia also offers to arrange ship passage for them to Cassomir so they can continue their pursuit of Count Lowls. As most of the vessels that dock in Thrushmoor



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are coal barges from up the Danver or simple fishing boats, finding a ship large enough to make the journey to Cassomir in decent time is hard to find, especially if the PCs are in a hurry to depart. Thankfully, Cesadia is aware of a ship called the *Sellen Starling* helmed by a feisty halfling named Skywin Freeling that is capable of making that journey and is set to arrive in Thrushmoor in 2 days. She offers the PCs lodging in Thrushmoor until the *Sellen Starling* comes to port. It is important that the PCs wait to travel with this vessel, as it is the setting of the following adventure, “Dreams of the Yellow King.”

Through the course of this adventure, the PCs should have learned quite a bit of new information. They should more or less understand that Count Lowls arranged for a journey to Cassomir, planning to meet up with his old friend Miacknian Mun to translate and research the *Necronomicon*. The count was then going to travel farther south to find the lost city of Neruzavin for some purpose, as yet unknown to the PCs.

The PCs should have also learned that the final stages of Count Lowls’s research took place through dreaming—and that an occult ritual sent him and the PCs into the Dreamlands to speak with a figure known as the Mad Poet, which is why the PCs can’t remember their past.

If the PCs missed any of this information, or failed to pick up the journal containing the ritual they’ll need

in the following adventure (area F3), one or more NPCs should encourage them to return to Iris Hill for more clues. The most important thing is that they gather as many of the count’s books regarding occult lore and beings and topics concerned with the Elder Mythos. The most important of these is the trunk of books found in the private study (area F12).

If the PCs go back into Iris Hill for more clues, they can still encounter some bizarre dangers even if most of the cultists and monsters have been defeated. You can still present encounters with outsiders and alien creatures attracted by the waking power of the *Star Stelae* even though most of the human threats have been dealt with. If the PCs haven’t reached 7th level by the time that they defeat Melisenn and her cult, provide the PCs with enough random encounters to bring them to that level.

At least one antagonist from this adventure—the denizen of Leng, Weiralai—will show up in a later adventure. If the PCs killed her beneath Iris Hill, she reforms on Leng and is capable of returning to this world to exact revenge on the PCs. If she managed to escape alive, the denizen of Leng quietly leaves town and makes her own way south, roughly following Lowls’s itinerary. If the PCs managed to find some way to take the denizen of Leng out of the picture, but not kill her, the PCs instead later encounter another denizen of Leng who worked with Weiralai.

CESADIA WRENTZ

Cesadia Wrentz has a pleasant demeanor and operates her agency like a skilled businesswoman. Her keen eyes scrutinize everything around her as if she's constantly collecting clues.

CESADIA WRENTZ**CR 6****XP 2,400**

Female human rogue 7

N Medium humanoid (human)

Init +3; **Senses** Perception +11**DEFENSE****AC** 16, touch 13, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor, +3 Dex)**hp** 56 (7d8+21)**Fort** +5, **Ref** +9, **Will** +4**Defensive Abilities** evasion, trap sense +2, uncanny dodge**OFFENSE****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** dagger +8 (1d4/19–20)**Ranged** +1 *hand crossbow* +9 (1d4+1/19–20)**Special Attacks** sneak attack +4d6**TACTICS****Before Combat** Cesadia prefers to talk her way out of trouble instead of launching into combat.**During Combat** Cesadia keeps her distance during a fight, firing on enemies from behind cover.**Morale** When reduced to fewer than half her hit points, Cesadia flees, potentially leaving allies behind. She does, however, have honor and pledges to return to save them.**STATISTICS****Str** 10, **Dex** 16, **Con** 14, **Int** 13, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10**Base Atk** +5; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 18**Feats** Deadly Aim, Deceitful, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Reload, Weapon Finesse**Skills** Bluff +12, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +8, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +6, Knowledge (history) +6, Knowledge (local) +11, Knowledge (nobility) +8, Knowledge (planes) +4, Knowledge (religion) +6, Perception +11, Sense Motive +11, Sleight of Hand +9, Stealth +13**Languages** Common, Varisian**SQ** rogue talents (canny observer^{APG}, finesse rogue, follow clues^{APG}), trapfinding +3**Combat Gear** *elixir of truth*, *potions of cure light wounds* (2), *potion of eagle's splendor*, *potion of**invisibility*; **Other Gear** +1 *leather armor*, +1 *hand crossbow* with 20 bolts, dagger, *cloak of resistance* +1, 48 gp

The founder of the Sleepless Agency, Cesadia Wrentz is a tall, fit woman approaching middle age. She has reddish-brown hair that she keeps trimmed short. Her eyes are big and inquisitive, and her pale skin is scattered with freckles across her cheeks and the bridge of her nose. Cesadia dresses in a fashion more befitting a businesswoman than an adventurer, though she keeps a slim dagger and hand crossbow hidden beneath her coat in case her usual tactics of diplomacy and guile break down into violence.

Cesadia Wrentz grew up in a working-class family in the Chelish city of Remesiana. Her parents weren't well off, but they also never worried where their next meal would come from. As she reached adulthood, Cesadia originally wanted to join up with the city's dottari, but after looking into it further, she became disillusioned with that much rigid order and completely turned off by the simmering corruption. So, instead of going into official law enforcement, Cesadia began taking on cases of missing persons and lost possessions.

With each case the freelance investigator solved, her renown grew. Before long, minor nobles in town were summoning her to their villas for more involved (and sometimes unscrupulous) matters. The people of Remesiana are uncomfortable with the supernatural, but curses, ghosts, or inexplicable magic never discouraged Wrentz as it did some of her fellow citizens.

As tales of her successes grew, she was hired by one of the city's nobles to go into his old estate, which some believed to be haunted, and find a silver locket—an heirloom that proved the family's right to a foreign property. The rumors turned out to be true, and Cesadia barely survived her first foray into the crumbling manor just outside of town. Determined to fulfill her contract (and collect the reward), Cesadia returned to the manor after using her burgeoning detective skills to research

the estate and the family's past. Back inside, Cesadia encountered another investigator in the basement just as she retrieved the lost locket.

Hired by a rival family, this investigator acknowledged that she had "won the prize," and that he had arrived just minutes too late to claim it. He then offered to purchase the locket from her. In the musty basement, the two negotiated. During the tense conversation, the pair realized that they had much in common, and that the other investigator, Dobrius Mathactar, was in fact commissioned to obtain the locket for the legitimate owner. Though Cesadia was reluctant to have a failure on her record, she didn't like the idea of helping yet another greedy noble family in another underhanded scheme. Besides, Dobrius was offering her just as much money as the nobles who employed her.

As Cesadia mulled over this moral and financial dilemma, the ghost of the manor manifested once again. Angered by not one, but two intruders, the spirit flew into a frenzy. However, Cesadia and Dobrius were able to handily destroy the ghost by working together, seemingly anticipating each other's actions. When the dust settled, Cesadia came to a conclusion: she agreed to part with the locket on the condition that Dobrius consented to becoming her business partner.

The two worked well together, quickly getting access to more important cases (and better commissions) all across the country. They continued on this path for a number of years, until an ongoing investigation ran up against House Thrune and threatened to become a death sentence. Dobrius suggested that they leave Cheliax and travel to his hometown of Thrushmoor in Ustalav, where he had inherited a small piece of property. Cesadia had been fostering ideas of expanding their partnership into a full-fledged organization, so she agreed.

Their dream was almost cut short when a pair of Thrune assassins caught up with them in Caliphass. Dobrius sacrificed himself in order to give Cesadia the upper hand in the fight. She dispatched one hired killer but sent the other one on his way (though missing an eye) to carry the message back to his masters that she wished to be left alone. House Thrune soon realized that it would be too costly to pursue its vendetta.

When she reached Thrushmoor, she founded the Sleepless Agency in honor of her deceased friend and began hiring other investigators. She has moved away from fieldwork and taken on more of a managerial role. Thorough to the end, she makes sure that her field agents are always fully prepared for the tasks she assigns them.

It has been almost a decade since Cesadia created the Sleepless Agency, and she continues to expand the range of the agency and the quality of cases they take. She keeps most of her agents out in the field, retaining barely half a dozen agents in the headquarters.

She has grown to actually enjoy living in Thrushmoor. Even though the place is always rainy and the people are superstitious, the size of the quaint town means that she and her agency are not often bothered by outsiders, and since gossip travels quickly through the town, she's usually quickly aware of any new rumors.

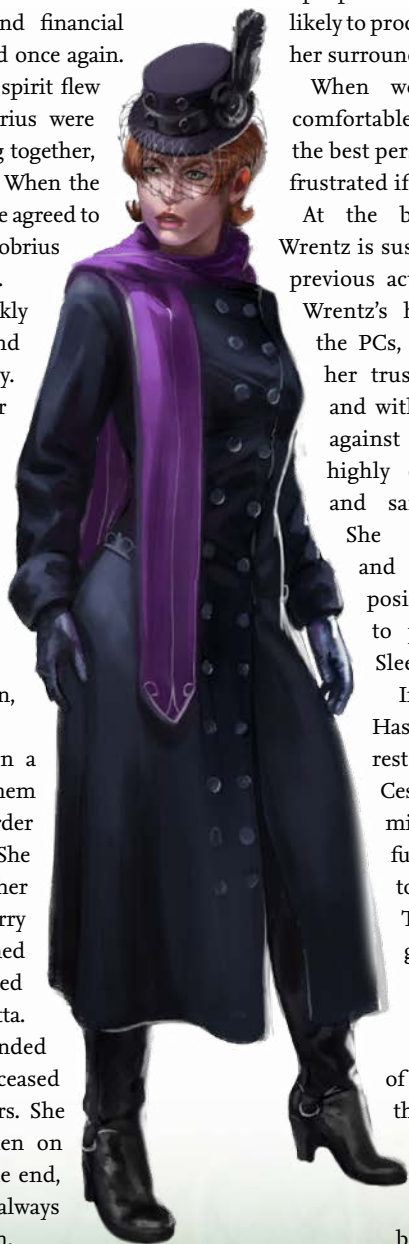
CAMPAIGN ROLE

Wrentz is attentive, calm, and usually soft-spoken. She is a business-minded person and does not easily confide in people. In a dangerous environment, she is likely to proceed cautiously, double-checking her surroundings for any possible threat.

When working with a group, she's comfortable giving orders and selecting the best person for the job at hand, growing frustrated if her companions don't agree.

At the beginning of the adventure, Wrentz is suspicious of the PCs due to their previous actions in Lowls's service. Since Wrentz's help can facilitate things for the PCs, they should prioritize gaining her trust, both with the right words and with their actions in Thrushmoor against the cult of Hastur. Wrentz is highly concerned with the stability and safety of her adoptive town. She has invested much time and effort to attain her current position and would do anything to protect Thrushmoor and the Sleepless Agency.

If the PCs eradicate the cult of Hastur in Thrushmoor and help to restore order in the troubled city, Cesadia Wrentz and her agents might provide the PCs with their full support as the PCs prepare to follow Lowls's tracks from Thrushmoor to Okeno, possibly giving useful tips about their prospective itinerary. Much later on, Wrentz could possibly even show up to give some kind of boon or clue to the party if they happen to get stuck in their investigation. Given enough time and resources, the Sleepless Agency can get to the bottom of any mystery.



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MELISENN KORORO

Full of lies and eager for power from worlds beyond, Melisenn Kororo insinuated herself into Iris Hill to learn more of the *Star Stelae* and to foster a cult dedicated to Hastur.

MELISENN KORORO

CR 6

XP 2,400

Female human cleric of Hastur 7

CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; **Senses** Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 16 (+5 armor, +1 deflection, +1 Dex)

hp 63 (7d8+28)

Fort +7, **Ref** +5, **Will** +9; +2 insight bonus vs. mind-affecting effects

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 rapier +7 (1d6+1/18–20)

Special Attacks channel negative energy 4/day (DC 16, 4d6)

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th; concentration +11)
7/day—blast rune (1d6+3 energy damage, 7 rounds)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 7th; concentration +11)
4th—*explosive runes*^o, *spell immunity*, *terrible remorse*^{um} (DC 18)

3rd—*blindness/deafness* (DC 17), *cure serious wounds*, *dispel magic*, *fly*^o

2nd—*cure moderate wounds*, *death knell* (DC 16), *hold person* (DC 16), *hypnotic pattern*^o (DC 16), *undetectable alignment* (DC 16)

1st—*doom* (DC 15), *entropic shield*, *feather fall*^o, *murderous command*^{um} (DC 15), *protection from good*, *shield of faith*

0 (at will)—*detect magic*, *guidance*, *light*, *read magic*

D domain spell; **Domains** Rune, Void

TACTICS

Before Combat To help with her disguise, Melisenn casts *undetectable alignment* every morning. If she is made aware of an imminent attack, Melisenn casts *shield of faith* and *fly*. If she witnessed the PCs during their investigation of Iris Hill using a particular spell frequently, especially a damaging spell or one that could hamper or control her, she casts *spell immunity*, selecting that spell.

During Combat Aware that she is not suited to physical combat, Melisenn prefers to stay out of melee range. She lets the byakhee stand toe-to-toe with the PCs. She casts *hold person* on the most obviously dangerous PC, and uses spells such as *blindness/deafness* and *hypnotic pattern* in order to hinder or reduce the number of active combatants. Should the PCs get too close to her in melee combat, Melisenn uses *fly* to keep out of their reach, and she uses her channel energy ability liberally to blast her enemies.

Morale A fanatic to the end, Melisenn isn't eager to give up all that she's worked for. She fights to the death.

STATISTICS

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

Base Atk +5; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 17

Feats Combat Casting, Improved Channel, Lightning Reflexes, Scribe Scroll, Toughness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +6, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Knowledge (geography) +2, Knowledge (planes) +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Linguistics +6, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +6

Languages Aklo, Common, Kelish, Kuru

Combat Gear *scroll of cure serious wounds*, *scroll of dismissal*, *scrolls of restoration* (2), *scroll of sending*;

Other Gear +1 chain shirt, +1 rapier, headband of *inspired wisdom* +2, *ring of protection* +1, silver unholy symbol of Hastur, powdered diamond (worth 400 gp)

Melisenn Kororo is a short woman in her early thirties, with long, smooth hair and deep, dark eyes. She usually wears her hair in a ponytail and sports a ferroniere with a large, teardrop-shaped topaz on her forehead. Melisenn's apparel is mostly modest and monotonous, for she almost invariably wears a corset top, a yellow silk blouse, and a long skirt, adding a woolen cloak when the weather is inclement. She can appear innocent and honest, if she so wishes, but she is extremely cunning and cruel and takes delight in the embarrassment and suffering of others. Her cult's ultimate goal is to unleash the power of the Elder Mythos.

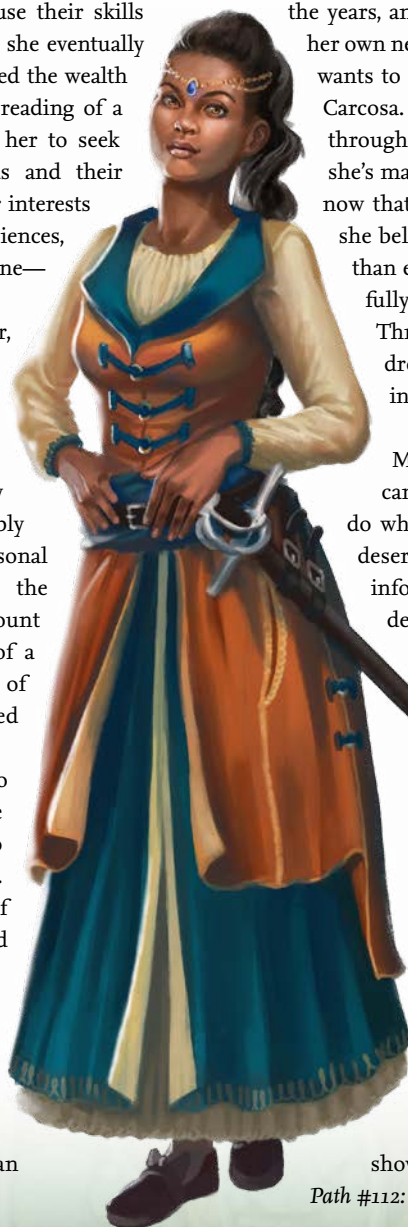
Once an orphan on the streets of Katapesh, Melisenn Kororo was adopted by a wealthy merchant as a child. Melisenn's adoptive father worshiped the Great Old Ones, and he had traveled to Katapesh and Osirion in search of a long-forgotten secret that might grant him immortality. A depraved cultist, he bought the little girl from a slaver with a bloody sacrifice in mind. However, matters played out differently than he initially expected.

Despite her age and innocent appearance, young Melisenn was oddly fearless before the most gruesome and ruthless acts committed by her adopted father and his fellow cultists. Furthermore, she actually seemed eager to become one of them. Thus, remarkably, Melisenn found the only possible way into the debased heart of her father and started her apprenticeship in the cult of Hastur.

From her father more than anyone else, Melisenn learned how to manipulate others and use their skills and talents for her own ends. In this way, she eventually took over her small cell of cultists and used the wealth they accrued to further her studies. Her reading of a fragment of *The King in Yellow* inspired her to seek further knowledge about the Old Gods and their influence on prehistoric Ustalav. Soon her interests brought her to the Sincomakti School of Sciences, which she attended as a student of medicine— and where she met Haserton Lowls IV.

As she had done with her stepfather, Melisenn used her unconventional charms to gain a powerful influence over the solitary count, craftily praising his genius while the academic community generally mocked him for his superficiality and intellectual dishonesty. After forcibly digesting Lowls's libelous and inept personal writings, Melisenn got her hands on the copy of the *Pnakotic Manuscripts* the count owned, where she found confirmation of a primordial connection between the cult of Hastur and the trio of *Star Stelae* erected in Thrushmoor.

When Count Lowls left Iris Hill to start on his expedition to Neruzavin, he entrusted his estate to Melisenn, who began to put her own plan into action. With the support of the small army of cultists and monsters she had assembled in the previous months, she intensified the kidnappings and sacrifices in Thrushmoor in order to repair the ages-old damage the *Star Stelae* and tap into the menhirs' full power. Melisenn believes that these ritual offerings will open a portal to Carcosa, where she can take her rightful place at Hastur's side.



CAMPAIGN ROLE

Though the PCs likely want to find Count Lowls IV and get revenge on him for sacrificing their minds and placing them in Briarstone Asylum, Melisenn Kororo is the primary antagonist in this adventure.

After moving into Iris Hill, she manipulated the obsessed count to more or less give her full run of the estate. She began her service to Lowls posing as a simple assistant and steward, directing the staff in their duties when not taking dictation from the rambling old count.

After working so closely with Lowls, she knows the full extent of his schemes, but she's doubtful that he will successfully find Neruzavin and release the slumbering Xhamen-Dor onto Golarion, though she suspects that he has already been touched by the Great Old One.

Regardless, she was delighted when she saw the wealth of occult lore the count had gathered over the years, and she uses the count's library for her own nefarious goals. Melisenn ultimately wants to serve at the side of Hastur in lost Carcosa. She has been building up a cult through the network of unsavory contacts she's made since she was a young girl, and now that she has access to the *Star Stelae*, she believes that she is closer to her goal than ever. Melisenn hopes to repair and fully activate the *Star Stelae* to connect Thrushmoor with Carcosa, so that the dreadful city can absorb Thrushmoor into itself.

If the PCs are able to subdue Melisenn and get her to talk, they can learn exactly what Lowls plans to do when he finally makes it to the lost desert city, though she doesn't give this information freely. She is fanatically dedicated to Hastur and believes that revealing her plan too early will doom her soul.

If Melisenn somehow is able to escape, she might follow the PCs, since she knows where Lowls went and knows that the PCs are after him. This could make her a recurring villain in future adventures if she were to continue her pursuit of the PCs. Over the course of other adventures, Melisenn could gain additional cleric levels so that she keeps pace of the PCs.

The most likely place she could show up is during *Pathfinder Adventure Path #112: The Whisper Out of Time*.

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NEMIRA LOWLS

Once an able and knowledgeable woman, Nemira Lowls is now an abomination wracked with insanity and confined to the attic of Iris Hill after prying into hidden lore that should have remained buried.

NEMIRA LOWLS

CR 7

XP 3,200

Female eldritch human aristocrat 4/sorcerer 3 (*Advanced Bestiary* 133)

CN Medium aberration

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 18 (+4 armor, +1 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge, +3 natural)

hp 60 (7 HD; 3d6+4d8+32)

Fort +5, **Ref** +4, **Will** +6

Defensive Abilities projection, eldritch abilities, **DR** 10/lawful

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee 2 tentacles +7 (1d6+3)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks long limbs (+5 ft.)

Bloodline Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd; concentration +6)
6/day—acidic ray (1d6+1 acid)

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 3rd; concentration +6)

1st (6/day)—*enlarge person* (DC 14), *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shocking grasp*

0 (at will)—*detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 13), *mage hand*, *message*, *resistance*

Bloodline aberrant

TACTICS

Before Combat Nemira Lowls exists in a state of confusion and madness, hardly conscious of what is going on around her. If aware of her attackers, Nemira casts *mage armor* before engaging. If unaware, she casts the spell on the first round of combat. (This bonus has been calculated into her stat block.)

During Combat Nemira attacks the PCs with *magic missile* and her acidic ray while trying to keep her distance. When the PCs get closer, Nemira casts *shocking grasp* and uses her long limbs ability to attack targets that are no more than 15 feet away. Nemira also moves each round she can in order to keep outside of the PCs' reach. If she is pressured by the PCs or needs additional reach,

she casts *enlarge person* on herself. When she does, the floorboards in the attic groan under her increased weight.

Morale Nemira has little grasp on reality and knows that only death has a chance to end her condition.

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 14, **Con** 16, **Int** 6, **Wis** 4, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 21

Feats Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Iron Will, Toughness

Skills Knowledge (arcana) +4, Knowledge (planes) +4, Perception +2, Spellcraft +4

Languages Common

SQ bloodline arcana (+50% duration on polymorphs)

Gear *belt of mighty constitution* +2, *ring of protection* +1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Eldritch Abilities (Ex) As part of the eldritch creature template, Nemira Lowls gains DR 10/lawful, a +3 natural armor bonus, and the projection special ability, plus her reach for her tentacle attacks increases to 10 feet.

Projection (Su) Once per day as a full-round action, Nemira can enter a trance that separates her spirit from her body. This splits her hit points in half between her body and her spirit. Nemira's spirit body gains the incorporeal subtype and special ability; otherwise, she retains the same statistics as her physical self with the following changes: **AC** 18, touch 18, flat-footed 14 (+4 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge), and a single incorporeal touch attack that deals 1d4 Charisma damage on a hit. Nemira's spirit projection can travel no more than 1 mile away from her body. When separated in this way, Nemira's body lies unconscious and helpless. If Nemira's body is injured while in this state, her separated projection immediately returns to her body. If her physical body is slain, her spirit body dies as well. If her spirit is reduced to 0 or fewer hit points, it returns to the physical body immediately. Nemira in her spirit body can end the effect at any time as a standard action, at which point her spirit immediately returns to her body. When her spirit returns to her body, add both the spirit body's hit points and the physical body's hit points back together to determine her current hit point total.

Thought to be dead by everyone in Thrushmoor, Lowls's mother, Countess Nemira Lowls, still lives, confined to the attic of her home at Iris Hill. Last seen clad in a black mourning dress in Thrushmoor 20 years ago at the funeral for her husband Count Lowls III, no one knew at that time that the countess had already begun to transform into something inhuman and terrible.

Born to a merchant family in Kerse, Nemira enjoyed a comfortable childhood, and as she grew into an adult, she moved to Rozenport to attend the Sincomakti School of Sciences. Nemira took well to the scholarly life, and with her wealth, she was able to stay in Caliphas instead of returning home during breaks. She met a serious young man named Haserton Lowls III in this leisure time. Though her studies were rooted in the sciences, she found herself enthralled with the occult and was delighted that Ustalav possessed so many sites of supernatural interest. She knew that Thrushmoor, where the soon-to-be count resided, held two such points of interest—ancient monoliths called *Star Stelae*—and began courting the young man. After returning to classes the following semester, Nemira researched what she could of the enigmatic stones. She suspected that the *Star Stelae* were not monuments erected by Sarkorian godcallers—as many believed—but were instead artifacts related to the cults of the Great Old Ones.

After her graduation, Nemira married Haserton and moved into Iris Hill, where she later discovered the third, hidden stela beneath the estate. After Haserton became count, he involved himself in the administration of the county and was away from Iris Hill for weeks at a time. In his absence, Nemira raised their son, and when young Haserton Lowls IV was old enough to attend school, she encouraged him to enroll in her alma mater. Alone at Iris Hill, Nemira continued studying the *Star Stelae*.

During this time, she ordered a steady stream of books from an occultist and bookseller in Rozenport—a man named Clymes Prett, whom she met at the Sincomakti School. The

two old friends discussed their mutual interests and eventually became clandestine lovers. Despite their efforts to hide the affair, rumors of the relationship began to spread. As the count's actions grew erratic and violent toward her, Nemira suspected that he knew of her secret relationship and conspired with Clymes to rid herself of her aloof and abusive husband. They used an occult ritual to infect the count with a deadly wasting disease, but something went wrong and some of the corruption spread to Nemira. After the afflicted count found concrete evidence of the affair, he had Clymes arrested, interrogated, and ultimately killed.

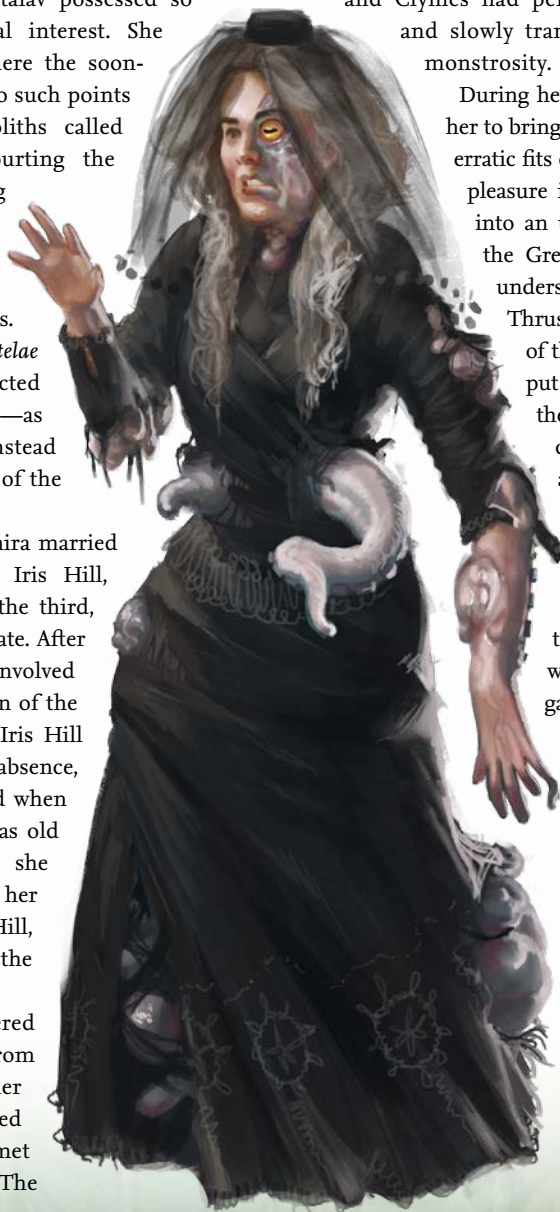
The sickly count died a few days later, and after his demise, the son returned, pausing his studies to look after his shaken mother. Nemira sequestered herself in the manor and delved deeper into her studies of the occult as the effects of the corrupt ritual she and Clymes had performed shattered her sanity and slowly transformed her into a hideous monstrosity.

During her isolation, only her son visited her to bring her food and to soothe his own erratic fits of conscience, if not his morbid pleasure in seeing his mother changing into an unwholesome manifestation of the Great Old Ones. Young Haserton understood that if people in Thrushmoor knew what had become of the countess, the estate would be put to the torch, so he concocted the story that his mother had contracted the same mysterious ailment his father had and passed in her sleep.

After years of bleak despair, tortured by a desire to flee from her own deformity and to walk again in the outside world, Nemira's warped mind gained the ability to project her spirit outside of her body.

CAMPAIGN ROLE

Though locked in the attic, Nemira can project her spirit into the world and roam Thrushmoor. She might become a haunting nuisance for the PCs before they ultimately discover her true monstrous form in Iris Hill. She serves as not only a real threat to the PCs, but also a pitiful example of the count's cruelty.



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Much as I love my work for the Agency, I wish it'd move from Thrushmoor. It's a nice enough town, I suppose, but for the people. There's something off about 'em. And not in the way you'd think either. They're friendly and fair, jovial and joyous, even. But there's something in their eyes—behind their eyes. With all my deductive skills, I figured I'd be able to put my finger on it better, but that's the best I can do. I dread going back to visit the Sleepless Building. Something deep in the back of my head knows there's a sinister secret there that's beyond my ability to truly comprehend. As someone who prides herself on getting at the truth of any mystery—hells, who makes her living at it—that scares me more than anything I've ever encountered in a dusty tomb or on the trail of a bloodthirsty murderer.”

—Blaggi Toronz, Sleepless Detective

Originally established by Kellid wanderers, a settlement has existed in some form at the mouth of the Danver River for nearly 7 centuries. Early settlers found a bounty of clean water and abundant fishing here, though many felt that the area was cursed. It seemed that even though the people had everything they needed to survive, danger lurked behind every shadow and something always seemed to go wrong with their efforts to tame the land.

Shortly after the first Ustalavs began building their homes on the river delta, a stranger named Ariadnah came to them. An able spellcaster, she claimed to know of strange gods and had a wealth of esoteric knowledge, though much of this was lost on the simple fisherfolk. Ariadnah eventually gained the trust of these people and shared her magical talents with them. Awed by her mystical abilities, the people began asking about the source of her power, and she responded by teaching them of the gods she revered. Today, the people of Thrushmoor continue to worship these mysterious deities, making them one of the largest populations of followers of the Old Cults in the Inner Sea region.

Thrushmoor is the seat of power of the Ustalavic county of Versex and home to the region's ruling family, the Lowls. The town maintains a veneer of propriety despite its sinister underbelly. Count Haserton Lowls IV takes a largely hands-off approach to rule, leaving much of the county's governance to elected or appointed mayors—in the case of Thrushmoor, this bureaucrat is Magistrate Tillus Padgett. The count's reclusive tendencies rarely impact Thrushmoor's daily activities, as the noble spends most of his time holed up in his estate, Iris Hill, poring over arcane tomes and ancient grimoires on unknown topics.

Thrushmoor is primarily a fishing town, as the temperate climate and fecund waters of Avalon Bay provide the anglers with profitable activity all year long. The boats stop moving only for the few days on which the surface of the lake freezes, and even then, the tranquil inlet of the port provides an ideal spot for ice fishing.

ACCOUNT OF THE THRUSHMOOR VANISHING

Grim mysteries surround the 4024 AR founding of Thrushmoor, a modest community on the banks of Avalon Bay in Ustalav's Versex county. The first residents were a dour but pious lot who raised their prayers to Pharasma and also worshiped her servants, the psychopomp ushers Dammar the Denied, Shadix Who Dreams, and Vonymos the Mourning Storm. These original settlers raised a settlement at this location not just for its seclusion, but also because of three great stones that rose from the shore. Etched with strange runes and crowned by graven stars, the settlers took them for totems—*godstones*—raised by the ancient

THRUSHMOOR

The following city stat block represents Thrushmoor at the start of the Strange Aeons Adventure Path, and some elements are likely to have changed by the time the PCs begin exploring the town. For more information on city stat blocks, see page 204 of the *Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide*.

THRUSHMOOR

NE large town

Corruption +1; **Crime** -3; **Economy** +0; **Law** +3;

Lore +2; **Society** -3

Qualities insular, rumormongering citizens, superstitious

Danger +5; **Disadvantages** cursed

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government overlord

Population 3,480 (3,394 humans, 56 halflings, 12 dwarves, 18 other)

NOTABLE NPCs

Count Haserton Lowls IV (NE male human aristocrat 2/bard 2)

Healer Sentilar Ruoy (CN male halfling alchemist^{APG} 7)

Magistrate Tillus Padgett (LE male human expert 4)

Priestess Trilliss Mavaine (N female human cleric of Pharasma 9)

Sleepless Agency founder Cesadia Wrentz (N female human rogue 7)

MARKETPLACE

Base Value 2,000 gp; **Purchase Limit** 10,000 gp;

Spellcasting 5th

Minor Items 3d4; **Medium Items** 2d4; **Major Items** 1d4

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Kellid clans that inhabited the land long ago. They reconsecrated the menhirs in the names of their deities and made lives in the pale stones' shadows. Yet their assumptions were utterly wrong.

The wanderer Ariadnah realized this. A Kellid practitioner of the ageless godcalling tradition, Ariadnah traced her lineage back to the Lacksong clan, a people who once claimed Thrushmoor's shores as their own. Though resentful that her people were wiped out in Ustalav's founding wars thousands of years before, she remained patient enough to enact a subtle revenge. It began with the whispers of one of her gods, the Lord of the Woods, an incarnation of the Outer God Shub-Niggurath, describing the stones within Thrushmoor—the *Star Stelae*. Through her vile communions, she learned that these obelisks were remnants of an ancient design destined to reach into unknown realms to bring beings of incredible power into the mortal world—beings like her deity, she believed. If she could harness that power, those that wronged her clan would finally pay.



Ariadnah made her home not far from Thrushmoor, upon a rocky speck of land in the Danver River known as Briarstone Isle. Amid its woods and rocks, she raised three new *godstones*, each attuned to a particular entity: the Lord of the Woods, Shadix Who Dreams, and the Tatterman. The first of these beings she hoped to call into the world. The second she'd use to enter the homes of Thrushmoor. The last was her slave, a deity in name only who answered Ariadnah's summons as it had her ancestors'. Soon after, she presented herself to the settlers as a wise hermit who knew much of the stones they lived near. She confirmed the stones' ancient religious power and encouraged the people to give praise to them. The community was wary at first, but when the people's prayers seemed to be answered with fearful but prophetic dreams and by the work of a tall, shadowy figure, they embraced their new worship with zeal. Unknown to them, though, Ariadnah and her servant, the Tatterman, were truly responsible for the supposed miracles in their midst. Regardless, the settlers were pleased and welcomed Ariadnah among them.

However, accusations of blasphemy and witchcraft threatened to shatter Ariadnah's fledgling congregation. A red-cloaked inquisitor of Pharamasma came investigating reports of strange practices and sacrifices being conducted in the goddess's name. What he found was worse than expected. The inquisitor decried Ariadnah as a witch and demanded the town's leaders submit to the priesthood for judgment. To Ariadnah's delight,

her followers drove out the inquisitor and cut ties not just with Pharamasma's church, but with Ustalav's capital, Caliphass, altogether. In the aftermath, Ariadnah deemed her people ready.

Under Ariadnah's control, the local faith underwent a dramatic change, supposedly to protect the townsfolk from their irreligious enemies. The Lord of the Woods openly became one of their pantheon's number, and Ariadnah soon shared her godcalling powers with them. The people were overjoyed, mistaking the Tatterman for a manifestation of a true deity, and eagerly listened when Ariadnah proposed using the *Star Stelae* to summon the Lord of the Woods as well.

Records claim that the Thrushmoor Vanishing occurred on the night before the Band of White, a mercenary company overseen by one of Ustalav's infamous Royal Accusers, planned to attack and subdue the rebel town. As the fires of the faithful burned high, their smoke lifting sacrifices of blood and worse, Ariadnah stood within sight of all three *Star Stelae* and called out to Shub-Niggurath. By the fathomless winking of the marks upon the *Star Stelae*, the Outer God heard Ariadnah's summons and sent a piece of herself forth.

The next morning, the Band of White found Thrushmoor empty. Only a few gory spatters suggested what the ancient magic had wrought. The village's structures, though, were untouched. Not a single survivor was found and, their work complete, the mercenaries hurriedly withdrew. Almost immediately,

Thrushmoor gained its reputation as a cursed place, and rumors began of something lurking in the nearby waters, a legend that would come to be known as the Watcher in the Bay (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* #46: *Wake of the Watcher*).

For centuries, the town traded hands between outlaws and lake pirates, but by 4288 AR, a new generation of settlers reclaimed Thrushmoor. Stories of curses and strange sightings persisted, but the generations-old evils were mostly (and purposefully) forgotten. Still, tales of the Tatterman and the Briarstone Witch became spook stories for children, and many youths and adults alike avoid Briarstone Isle to this day.

PROMINENT LOCATIONS

The following locations are the most notable sites in Thrushmoor.

Binter's Smithy: The center of Thrushmoor's tiny dwarven community, the town's smithy has been in business since it was repopulated in the wake of the Thrushmoor Vanishing. Nowadays the workshop is run by **Kletta Binter** (N female dwarf expert 3), who inherited it from distant relations who had run it for almost four centuries. A bit lazy and disorganized for a dwarf, Binter is more inclined toward creative handicraft rather than the noble (and lucrative) art of weaponsmithing. For this reason, she produces quaint ornaments such as lamps made from old copper pots and vases created with scrapped lead tiles, which she displays on the lawn in front of the workshop. The smithy has more than one anvil, and other dwarves pay Binter a modest fee to use one, which keeps the business afloat despite flagging sales of her odd wares.

The Booklayer: Until just recently, this cluttered and dust-laden bookshop was the primary supplier of books to Count Lowls. The shop's faded insignia (a bricklayer constructing a wall of books) is still visible from the street. The shop was forced to close when the owner went bankrupt because of Count Lowls's missed payments and had to move to Rozenport for a job. Unable to afford transport for his remaining stock, the bookseller left all but the most valuable of the store's books on the shelves, where they will remain until Count Lowls inevitably requisitions them for his own growing library.

Builders' Hall: This sturdy and elegant two-story edifice traditionally housed the skilled builders of Thrushmoor, who erected and repaired the homes of the town's well-to-do for more than 5 centuries. In recent times, many of the guild's members have moved away, and only a couple of skilled carpenters have maintained their old jobs here. The vacant space of Builders' Hall

has been occupied by **Prewyn Noddar** (LE male human aristocrat 5), who also acquired the honorific title of Thrushmoor's Master Builder, despite his scant knowledge of the art of construction. Rather,

Noddar is a businessman of few scruples, who profits from renting farmland, exacting protection money, and usury. Noddar's wife, **Mica** (LE female human aristocrat 2), is a tall, thin, and sour woman, whose own vulgar avarice often clashes with her husband's.

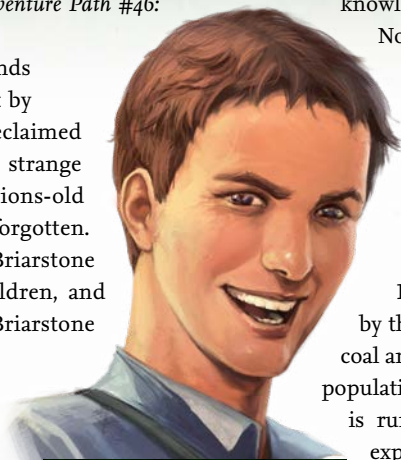
Depository: This large building is used by the population of Thrushmoor to store coal and lumber, both for retail selling to the population and for wholesale trade. The deposit is run by **Lenk Marris** (LN male human expert 2), a young, energetic worker and a former favorite of Magistrate Padgett. Marris is well liked by his neighbors and is on good terms with the Sleepless

Agency. Although he eagerly serves the community under any circumstances, he is despised by Prewyn Noddar, who would like to replace Marris with a person of his choice. Annexed to the depository is Thrushmoor's icehouse, a well-insulated, partially interred shed, where large blocks of frozen freshwater from Lake Encarthan are packed tight during the winter.

Farmer's Square: This series of buildings in eastern Thrushmoor houses a granary, a bakery, and an ox mill run by the community as a whole. The few halfling citizens of Thrushmoor reside here, as well as the town's freeholders. Most of the residents of Farmer's Square are rarely seen in town during the day, as their farmlands lie beyond the town's edge, sometimes as far as an hour's ride away.

Fish Market: Constructed in 4024 AR as Thrushmoor's first town hall, the building that now contains the town's fish market has been demolished and rebuilt many times over. Always a symbol of the community's prosperity, it now holds the stalls of three fishmongers' families, who have handed down their businesses for generations. The atrium shared by the stalls is illuminated by an amber-colored crystal lantern, which the townsfolk have nicknamed *Glowing Jill*. A local legend says that the lantern, brought by the founders of Thrushmoor, was part of the magical illumination of an underwater palace in the middle of Lake Encarthan, and that its slumbering magic sometimes awakens to cast a supernatural glow in the middle of Thrushmoor. In truth, the lantern is nonmagical, and the strange light is actually that of one of a trio of will-o'-wisps that feed off the people's superstitious fear surrounding the mysterious artifact.

Lately, the fishmongers have become worried by the curious and grisly appearance of many fish apparently



LENK MARRIS

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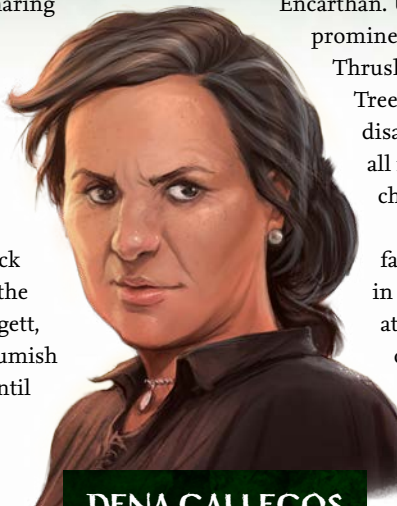
mutilated or tortured by some aquatic creature well before being caught. The abused fish are, in fact, victims of a band of skum nearby that vent their cruelty on the hapless creatures sharing their environment.

Fort Hailcourse: Built in the early days of Thrushmoor, Fort Hailcourse has been the seat of Thrushmoor's military garrison and of the town's magistrate for nearly 500 years. The present building stands on the eastern crest of the double hillock at the north edge of town. The fort, the residence of Magistrate Tillus Padgett, housed a small garrison of 20 Drumish mercenaries who served the county until recently; all but a handful of these soldiers left for other assignments when Count Lowls failed to pay them one too many times. The fort also serves as the town jail and the site where the magistrate performs civil ceremonies, hears trials, and conducts other business of the town. For more information on Fort Hailcourse, see page 21.

Gibbet: Perched on a tiny headland on the lake's shore, a wooden scaffold supports the town gallows. Mindful of the ruthless brigandage and piracy in former times, Thrushmoor has maintained a method of administering the death penalty by placing the sentenced criminal alive in a tight metal cage hanging as a sort of counterweight to the gallows. In addition to experiencing exposure to the elements, starvation, and dehydration, souls unlucky enough to find themselves in the gibbet are also likely to contract tetanus from the rusty bars.

Hasok's Studio: This small cottage, one of a pair that stands just north of New Chapel, is owned by the Pharasma's congregation. Used primarily to put up church visitors during their time in Thrushmoor (public lodging being noticeably scarce otherwise), the building currently serves as the studio and living quarters for Lelwyn Hasok (see page 14), a half-elven painter from Greengold whom the church commissioned to decorate New Chapel with exquisite frescoes. The chapel's second cabin currently sits vacant.

Healer's House: This modest home also functions as the workshop and clinic of the town's outspoken alchemist, Sentilar Ruoy. The aging halfling provides healing and other alchemical elixirs and tinctures to those townsfolk who, for whatever reason, prefer not to receive such services from the Lady of Graves. Ruoy has an ongoing feud with New Chapel's Trilliss Mavaine, whose reliance on a god, he says, makes her healing less practical than that derived purely from science.



DENA GALLEGOS

High Mart: This building houses an upscale covered market where the town's notables shop for goods imported from all the nations that border Lake Encarthan. Until some time ago, one of the most prominent market stalls was occupied by Thrushmoor's second bookshop, the Paper Tree. The shop closed when the owner disappeared and Count Lowls purchased all its books at a public auction for a very cheap price.

Iris Hill: The residence of the Lowls family since Pragmus Lowls I built it in 4487 AR, Iris Hill stands ominously atop a hill on the northwestern edge of town. Although it has fallen into a state of disrepair, the manor and its annexed buildings are by far the most impressive civilian structures within Thrushmoor. Decades ago, Count Haserton Lowls III descended into the ancient ruin beneath his residence, cleared it of dirt and debris, and unearthed a third *Star Stela* buried below the structure. The people of Thrushmoor do not know this, save for those who use the site in their rituals to the Old Cults. See page 34 for more information on Iris Hill.

New Chapel: A relatively recent addition to Thrushmoor's landscape, New Chapel is the center of Pharasma's worship in the town. The two-story wooden building features a sanctuary, an infirmary providing healing, palliative care, and other services. Newly commissioned frescoes adorn its interior. These works by artist-in-residence Lelwyn Hasok (see above) were inspired by Pharasma's holy book, *The Bones Land in a Spiral*, and depict the Lady of Graves pronouncing prophecies, judging the dead in the Boneyard, and overseeing births like a divine midwife.

New Chapel, though the primary center of worship in the town, has but one member of the clergy on staff, Priestess Trilliss Mavaine, who was the driving force behind the temple's recent revitalization. Mavaine often finds herself in conflict with Count Lowls, Magistrate Padgett, and Sentilar Ruoy, the first two because Mavaine feels undue pressure to tend to the townspeople's needs in the absence of a strong governmental presence, and with the latter because of his vocal denunciations of religion (specifically the Pharasma's faith).

Old Chapel: This temple of Pharasma has been abandoned for more than half a century, since the mad priest Causton Creed alienated his followers and met a mysterious death at the hands of some demonic entity. What exactly happened at Old Chapel remains a mystery, and the few citizens old enough to have witnessed the event are either forgetful or unwilling to talk about it.

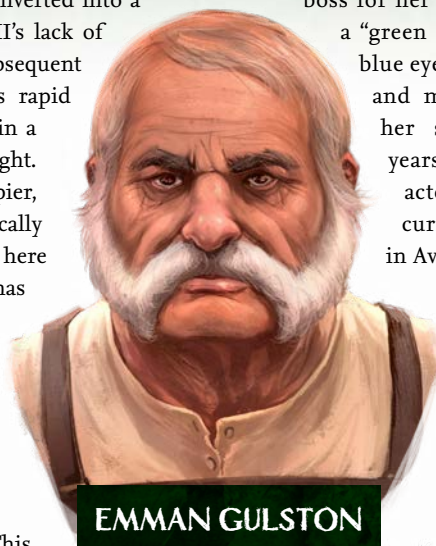
Old Manor: This was Count Pragmus Lowls's first residence in Thrushmoor while he oversaw the construction of Iris Hill. When Pragmus moved to the new building, the old manor was converted into a luxurious stable. Count Haserton III's lack of interest in horses and his son's subsequent impoverishment led to the stable's rapid decline, and the structure now lies in a state of neglect, with not a horse in sight.

Pier 19: This broken, half-rotten pier, also known as Worm's Hook, is locally infamous for the three anglers killed here a few years ago. A single, ruined boat has been moored to it for a few months, though none know the vessel's origin. During recent months, a few citizens, either youths eager to demonstrate their courage or drunkards evicted by angry wives, were using the abandoned boat as makeshift lodgings for the night. This practice quickly ceased when Gavol, one of the town's stevedores, disappeared while sleeping off a hangover in the boat.

The Silver Wagon: The Silver Wagon is Thrushmoor's only inn, and as a result, one of the town's most prosperous businesses. It offers comfortable beds in secure rooms, and the taproom downstairs often features live music. The innkeeper, **Dena Gallegos** (N female human commoner 5), is a boisterous and brash woman who is just as prone to knock you off your stool for telling a bawdy joke as she is to tell one herself. The Silver Wagon appears in the adventure on page 16.

Sleepless Building: Home of the famous Ustalavic detective agency, this two-story building has recently become a place of international renown for Thrushmoor after several capable members of the agency went abroad to perform their missions in neighboring nations. The agency's founder, Cesadia Wrentz, is a capable investigator and can often be found training new recruits, meeting with potential clients, or poring over case reports that make their way back to her desk from traveling agents.

Smokehouse: In Thrushmoor, fish caught beyond the community's immediate needs are sun-dried or smoked for preservation and export. Thanks to the bountiful waters in the lake and nearby reservoirs, the town's smokehouse is a busy establishment, where Thrushmoor's poorest boys and girls often slave away for years before becoming anglers on someone's boat. The director of the smokehouses is **Lysie Brilt** (NE female human witch^{APG} 5), a goggle-eyed 50-year-old woman who started working in the establishment at the age of 10 and never left. Brilt arrived in Thrushmoor from Illmarsh as an



EMMAN GULSTON

orphan, but she was found in the streets by Count Haserton III and has been on good terms with the Lowls family ever since. She is, however, a very harsh boss for her young subordinates, who call her a "green hag" for her oversized, greenish-blue eyes. In truth, Brilt's protruding eyes and malicious disposition come from her skum-tainted blood. For many years, the "green hag" has actually acted as an intermediary between the current count and a skum tribe living in Avalon Bay.

The Stain: The oldest tap house in Thrushmoor, the Stain has catered to local and foreign customers for longer than anyone in town can remember. The proprietor, **Emman Gulston** (LN male human expert 4), an ex-merchant marine captain and a man true to his word, has become something of an emotional anchor for his fellow citizens in the current crisis. When the weather is clement, Gulston rolls out a tent on the lakefront and mounts a few tables on a newly constructed patio, increasing the capacity of his small tavern and offering lunch at midday. If their pockets allow it, many customers enjoy the friendly ambiance after dusk, although no one dares to return home too late at night. The events of the past few months have soured the inn's atmosphere, but patrons always brighten up when Gulston's good whiskey starts to go round and fervent card games are played at the tables.

Star Stelae: This trio of ancient, 12-foot-tall, semicircular menhirs forms an equilateral triangle atop Thrushmoor's hills. Each stone is etched with unidentified, non-Kellid runes and a misshapen star. The runes seem to face a common point in the town's center, or they would have if one of the stones hadn't been buried during the construction of Iris Hill. For more information about the *Star Stelae*, see page 6.

Wailing House: Isolated at the end of a rocky outcropping on Thrushmoor's easternmost island stands Wailing House, so named for the otherworldly cries of despair and rage that emanate from it every Wealdy night. Abandoned generations ago as a result of the mysterious haunting, the house is completely boarded up and surrounded by a haphazardly constructed wooden fence. Children dare one another to spend the night in Wailing House's yard and even in the house itself, but only the bravest meet the harrowing challenge, and even then never on a Wealdy. Despite the townsfolk's relative acceptance of the phenomenon, Trilliss Mavaine of nearby New Chapel has vowed to eradicate whatever haunts the site in the near future.

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HASTUR THE KING IN YELLOW

There was not a soul in the park as I passed among the trees and took the walk which leads from the Garibaldi statue to the Hamilton Apartment House, but as I passed the churchyard I saw a figure sitting on the stone steps. In spite of myself, a chill crept over me at the sight of the white puffy face, and I hastened to pass. Then he said something which might have been addressed to me or might merely have been a mutter to himself, but a sudden furious anger flamed up within me that such a creature should address me... It filled my head, that muttering sound, like thick oily smoke from a fat-rendering vat or an odour of noisome decay...

“Have you found the Yellow Sign?”

“Have you found the Yellow Sign?”

“Have you found the Yellow Sign?”

—Robert W. Chambers, “The Yellow Sign”

Humanity exists on countless worlds throughout the universe, yet despite it being spread across disparate planets, the works of this fecund race are but shadows and fleeting gasps for air compared to those of the true heirs of reality. According to ancient legends and whispered myths, the human civilization that first made contact with Hastur existed long before humanity eventually rose on Golarion. In a distant time on a distant world whose name has been long forgotten, three great cities ruled from three different shores of the vast lake of Hali. The first of the cities was Yhtill, a place ruled by and for the aristocracy, where anyone and everyone could and did revel in the hedonistic and decadent life of the rich. The second of the cities was Alar, home to anarchists bound together in shared jealousy of Yhtill's wealth. The third and final was Carcosa, the empty city, built by unknown hands and abandoned by all. Carcosa was old and in ruins before people laid the first foundations of Alar or Yhtill alike, and those few who visited Carcosa's empty streets returned mad, distraught, and prone to self-destruction—if they returned at all.

The people of Alar coveted the wealth and comforts of the people of Yhtill, yet they could do little to earn or take from Yhtill what they desired. And so, one day long ago, the armies of Alar besieged the empty city of Carcosa, hoping to harness whatever

source of power that so fully emptied minds and ruined souls. By the next morning, the city of Alar and its population had vanished without a trace.

When news of Alar's vanishing reached Yhtill, the decadents of that city took note, yet they did not concern themselves overmuch with the event. If anything, the people of Yhtill rested easier knowing that their potential enemies had disappeared. Time passed, and memories of Alar and Carcosa faded. As the people of Yhtill grew more hedonistic, and all but the most eccentric or erudite of their scholars forgot the legends of Yhtill's sister cities, the city's rulers fought and schemed for control of civilization. Then, during a masked ball thrown by Queen Cassilda in an attempt to secure her rule, a stranger appeared wearing a pallid mask. The stranger revealed to the queen that he wore no mask and had come to announce the end of Yhtill's dynasty. Madness quickly swept through Yhtill, and with the dawn Yhtill vanished as well. Only the ghost city of Carcosa remained.

It is unknown whether the tale of the three cities of Hali and the menace of Carcosa is true; what is known is that Carcosa does exist. It continues to feed on and consume cities throughout the universe. And its lord, the one who wears no mask, is a very real threat indeed.

Game statistics for Hastur in his incarnation as the King in Yellow appear on pages 140–141 of *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 4*.



**Camilla: You, sir,
should unmask.
Stranger: Indeed?
Cassilda: Indeed it's
time. We all have laid
aside disguise but you.
Stranger:
I wear no mask.
Camilla: (Terrified,
aside to Cassilda.)
No mask? No mask!
—The King in Yellow,
Act 1, Scene 2.**

PERSONIFICATION AND REALM

As with many of the Great Old Ones, Hastur is imprisoned on a distant world. Yet unlike most of the bound Great Old Ones, Hastur can manifest an avatar on other worlds as long as the light from the strange star in the sky of his prison-world shines upon the targeted portion of the second world. He requires the assistance of powerful magic to manifest this avatar, known as the King in Yellow, but such magic need not be consciously wrought.

None know for certain what Hastur looks like, for the Great Old One has been imprisoned far longer than mortal life has existed. His manifestation as the King in Yellow is a man-shaped figure draped in tatters of yellow cloth and saffron robes, yet nothing of what hides beneath these robes can be seen except in nightmarish glimpses by the truly unfortunate. When Hastur does manifest in a world as the King in Yellow, it is always on the cusp of

a significant city's fall to Carcosa. A visitation from the King in Yellow doesn't guarantee such a fall, however, and the actions of heroes or martyrs can prevent such a doom from snatching away a portion of a world—for a time, at least, until Carcosa's attention is once again drawn to the world in question.

Whether Hastur dwells within the alien city of Carcosa, beneath that city in its deep and haunted sewers, or in the depths of Lake Hali is as unclear as Hastur's current state. Most texts indicate that the Great Old One is imprisoned, yet his ability to manifest his avatar with relative ease indicates that the boundaries of his jail are not well guarded. Perhaps the most disturbing myth regarding Hastur's prison holds that it is more akin to a cocoon, with the city of Carcosa acting as the physical manifestation of this cocoon's outer shell. As Carcosa continues to draw civilizations into itself, it grows in size, as does Hastur's realm. At some point, when the stars are right, this cocoon will burst and Hastur will emerge, fully free and transformed

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from mere Great Old One into the newest Outer God of the Elder Mythos. The expanded powers and influence such an entity would have are beyond the scope of this article, but such an event would surely come at a significant cost to the sanity of countless worlds.

Hastur is chaotic evil and his areas of concern are decadence, disorder, and nihilism. The favored weapon of his cult is the rapier. His domains are Chaos, Evil, Rune, and Void, and his subdomains are Dark Tapestry, Language, Stars, and Wards. His priests are primarily bards, clerics, oracles, and sorcerers.

DOGMA AND WORSHIPERS

The extreme age of Hastur's cult, which existed for millennia on many thousands of worlds before it came to Golarion, carries with it traditions that date back to ancient times. Yet these customs have remained curiously stagnant over the passage of the eons. While Hastur does not actively seek new worshipers, neither does he actively dissuade those who become obsessed with him. Many of the traditions honored and followed by the cult of Hastur are self-made, with the cult's reverence for Hastur's name being the most widely known. None who worship Hastur speak the name aloud if they can avoid it, calling him instead various epithets such as "Him Who is Not to be Named," or "The Unspeakable," or "The King in Yellow." They also associate him with the three cities of Hali, with Carcosa representing Hastur's nihilism, Alar representing the disorder his teachings encourage, and Yhtill symbolizing the decadence in which his worshipers wallow. His worshipers even sometimes regard him as a patron of shepherds, in that the bulk of humanity is but a flock of sheep to be gathered for an unknown future use.

His cultists are masters of subtle enchantments and hidden sorceries that can trick unsuspecting victims into opening the way for the King in Yellow. Hastur's symbol, the notorious Yellow Sign, is often used in conjunction with such magic, and those who find the Yellow Sign may become doomed to host the King in Yellow in their own minds and flesh, slowly transforming into eldritch agents of Him Who is Not to be Named.

Worship of Hastur is spread throughout the Inner Sea region, but is typically confined to a single extended family in any one area. The Ustalavic county of Versex, certain cities in Galt, Taldor, and Razmiran, and the cosmopolitan city of Quantum in Nex are the most likely places one might encounter worship of the King in Yellow, but his faithful can be found even in relatively remote locales such as Brevo's Restov, Thuvia's Lamasara, and Varisia's Riddleport. Keeping the cult's existence secret is paramount among the faithful, and those who learn of a cult cell's presence often find themselves hunted by an increasing number of assassins,

monstrous conjurations, and worse. In most cases, cells of Hastur worshipers feign being academic or political secret societies, and some who join such groups are not initially aware of the cult's true nature. Only those who ascend to the society's innermost circles ever learn the real goals of the group to which they have belonged, and at the point such revelations occur, those who balk at the truth invariably find themselves sacrificed to the King in Yellow at the earliest opportunity thereafter.

There exists another type of worshiper of Hastur, though—the lone lunatic. While many of Hastur's faithful are members of high society, there are those who dwell on the fringes, whether they're hermits who live in distant wilds or deviant recluses who live in the heart of a city yet keep their affairs strictly private. These individuals are no less destructive, for in many cases, they view humanity as sheep to prey upon, and think of themselves as shepherds with the right to determine who lives and who dies. Murderers and worse, these demented loners might not even fully comprehend that they serve the King in Yellow, but the damage they can do to society can be significant nonetheless.

TEMPLES AND SHRINES

Hastur's worshipers tend not to build cathedrals or temples to worship the Great Old One, instead venerating him in their own manors and estates during galas, masked balls, orgies, and other decadent festivities. Public halls for performances or concerts may find themselves unknowingly hosting worship of Hastur, for his followers are nothing if not cunning in hiding the true nature of their faith. In wilderness areas where Hastur's influence is strong, less-civilized worshipers raise towering rocks into stelae, often in triangular or V-shaped patterns inscribed with runes and sigils in Aklo to aid in the observation of a particular star in the sky—the distant red star around which the nameless planet holding Hastur orbits.

A PRIEST'S ROLE

The priest of Hastur is charged with, above all else, keeping secret the actions and identities of those who worship The Unspeakable. Many priests focus much of their time on developing hidden identities or masking the true nature of their worship, and may even maintain an outward facade of worship of deities such as Abadar or Dispaten (Aroden was another popular choice until his death). Worship of Razmir is also a favorite pretense, and the cult has had much success in infiltrating parts of this nation's state religion. The majority of these priests are clerics, although many use archetypes such as hidden priest (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Magic* 35) to disguise their true natures.

Beyond clerics, many of Hastur's priests are rogues, swashbucklers, and vigilantes. The ability to cast divine

CUSTOMIZED SUMMON LIST

As rewards for their servitude, priests of Hastur can use *summon monster* spells to summon the following creatures in addition to the normal creatures listed in the spells.

Summon Monster IV

Byakhee (see pages 82–83)

Summon Monster V

Keeper of the Yellow Sign (see pages 88–89)

spells is hardly a requirement for one who pursues a life of decadent hedonism or bleak ennui, but among vigilantes the zealot archetype (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Intrigue* 62) is quite popular. Inquisitors are uncommon among the faithful, but those who do exist are less involved in seeking out and fighting the church's enemies than they are in scouting areas where the cult or the Yellow Sign might take root. When an inquisitor of Hastur finds such a promising site, she seeks to eradicate or, at the very least, weaken potential opposition to infection before calling in more powerful agents of the church to begin the act of marking a city for Carcosa.

Bards play a special and key role among the priesthood, for they are the most capable of spreading Hastur's word and the attention of Carcosa through the perpetuation of the play known as *The King in Yellow*. While anyone can attempt a performance of this dangerous play, bards are singularly gifted at the task and can rise to great heights in the faith as a result.

HOLIDAYS

The cult of Hastur follows no set holidays, but delights in revelry of all sorts, often co-opting other religious events and festivals as covers for their own bacchanals. While the church does not venerate any significant days of their own, seasons in which the light of his distant world's star shines in the night sky are believed particularly fortuitous for the pursuit of cult goals. In the Inner Sea region, these nights takes place during the months of Neth through Pharast.

APHORISM

Hastur's worshipers revel in the rejection of typical religious and moral principles and seek pleasure in ever-increasing complexities. They enjoy inducting new worshipers by tempting them with offers of pleasure or promises of revelation.

Have you found the Yellow Sign? The Yellow Sign is the symbol of the cult of Hastur, but even when not truly empowered by the Great Old One or the magic of his most powerful worshipers, this three-armed triskelion intrigues and compels. By daring seekers of delight with the task of finding the Yellow Sign, the cult can lead a

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A HISTORY OF HASTUR

Hastur has had a complex development over the course of the last 125 years, when he was first invented by Ambrose Bierce in his short story “Haïta the Shepherd” in 1891. Since that time, other authors (particularly Robert W. Chambers and August Derleth, but also, of course, H. P. Lovecraft) have built upon the “Hastur Mythology.” Over the years, Hastur appeared in print as a god of shepherds, a city, a mysterious traveler, a symbol, and, of course, as a Great Old One. These stories all add to the Hastur Mythology and help create something that is disorganized, disturbing, and greater than the sum of its parts—a fitting result, considering Hastur’s nature.

The version of Hastur in this article and throughout the entirety of the Strange Aeons Adventure Path has been tailored, adjusted, and expanded specifically for use in the Pathfinder RPG, but it also strives to incorporate much of what has come before. It is not intended to be the last word on such a complex topic—Hastur has been haunting fiction for over a century, and all signs suggest he shall do so for many more.

If you’re interested in immersing yourself in more lore related to Hastur, the Yellow Sign, and Carcosa, seek out the writings of Robert W. Chambers (all of the *King in Yellow* stories), Ambrose Bierce (“Haïta the Shepherd” and “An Inhabitant of Carcosa”), August Derleth (notably “The Return of Hastur”), Stephen King’s short story “Gramma,” the first season of the HBO series *True Detective*, and Call of Cthulhu supplements published by Chaosium (particularly *The Great Old Ones*, *Tatters of the King*, and *Ripples From Carcosa*). Of course, not all of these will appeal to every reader equally, but they all helped build Hastur into the genre-transcending force he is today.

potential worshiper into an ever-increasing spiral of self-indulgence until the seeker has shed unneeded beliefs and is ready to become a devotee of the King in Yellow.

HOLY TEXT

Although many ancient and blasphemous texts, such as the *Necronomicon* or the *Pnakotic Manuscripts*, speak of Hastur and are of great interest to scholars and worshipers alike, one text stands above all others in its value and significance to Hastur’s cult—*The King in Yellow*. The contents of this book appear at first glance to be nothing more than a play that dramatizes the final days of the city of Yhtill, yet within and beneath the words of the play are the whispers of Hastur himself. Those who read *The King in Yellow* expose themselves to the Yellow Sign and Hastur’s influence. And when the play is performed, the city unfortunate enough to host the performance comes to the attention of Carcosa

itself—and in most cases, it is soon thereafter absorbed by the parasitic city. Authorship of *The King in Yellow* is a confusing subject, for on all the worlds where the play exists, the identity of its author and the timing of its creation vary, as if the words of the play predated the play itself, and manifest in the minds of those destined to reveal them to their world.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

The cult of Hastur has little interest in interacting with other religions for the most part. Worshipers of Hastur are self-centered and prefer to seek their own hedonistic pursuits or wallow in the nothingness of ennui and nihilism, and neither preference encourages interaction with those outside of their immediate circle. In most cases, such interactions occur only when the actions of Hastur worshipers impact other religions, whose members are forced to take action against the cult. The worshipers of Shub-Niggurath are a notable exception; fables hold that Hastur and Shub-Niggurath have at times been mates, and orgiastic rituals between the two faiths are not uncommon. The church of Groetus has some workings with the cult of Hastur, as well, although these tend to arise out of a grudging respect for their shared views on nihilism and rarely result in long-term alliances. While many of Golarion’s faiths oppose the teachings of Hastur when they learn of them, only the church of Desna actively fights against the cult. Of course, when it comes to the attention of other cults that a local worshiper of Hastur has been masquerading as one of its faithful, the offended church spares no expense in fighting the cult of the King in Yellow.

NEW SPELL

Clerics of Hastur can prepare *confusion* as a 4th-level spell and *insanity* as a 7th-level spell. His priests also have access to the following spell.

YELLOW SIGN

School enchantment (compulsion) [mind-affecting]; **Level** bard 6, cleric 9, sorcerer/wizard 9, witch 9

Casting Time 10 minutes

Components V, S, M (ochre and sulfur, plus powdered gold worth a total of 15,000 gp)

Range 0 ft.; see text

Effect one symbol

Duration see text

Saving Throw Will negates; **Spell Resistance** yes

This spell functions as per *symbol of death*, save that creatures that succumb to this spell become dominated (as per *dominate monster*) by Hastur. This causes such creatures to seek to aid any obvious minions or worshipers of Hastur in sight, and any true worshiper of Hastur can command the affected creatures as if that worshiper had been the one to

dominate them. In the case of conflicting commands issued from different true worshipers of Hastur, the commanders must attempt opposed Charisma checks, with the winner being able to command the targets for that round. If no worshipers or agents of Hastur are in sight, an affected creature can act normally. When affected by this spell's Yellow Sign in this way, the effects last for 1 round per level. Once triggered, the Yellow Sign remains active for 10 minutes per caster level.

There is a 1% chance when a creature fails its saving throw against this spell that Hastur takes note and, for reasons of his own, decides to control the target personally. In this case, the actions taken by the dominated creature are left to the GM to determine, but the effects of this spell's Yellow Sign persist for 1 day per level and the commands issued cannot be countermanded by any other creature, even if they are Hastur worshipers.

Regardless of how long the effects last or whether Hastur directly controls a victim, if a creature failed to resist this spell's effects, Hastur can target that victim for the rest of its life with his fulvous dreams ability (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 4 140). Whether or not the Great Old One ever chooses to do so is left to the GM to determine.

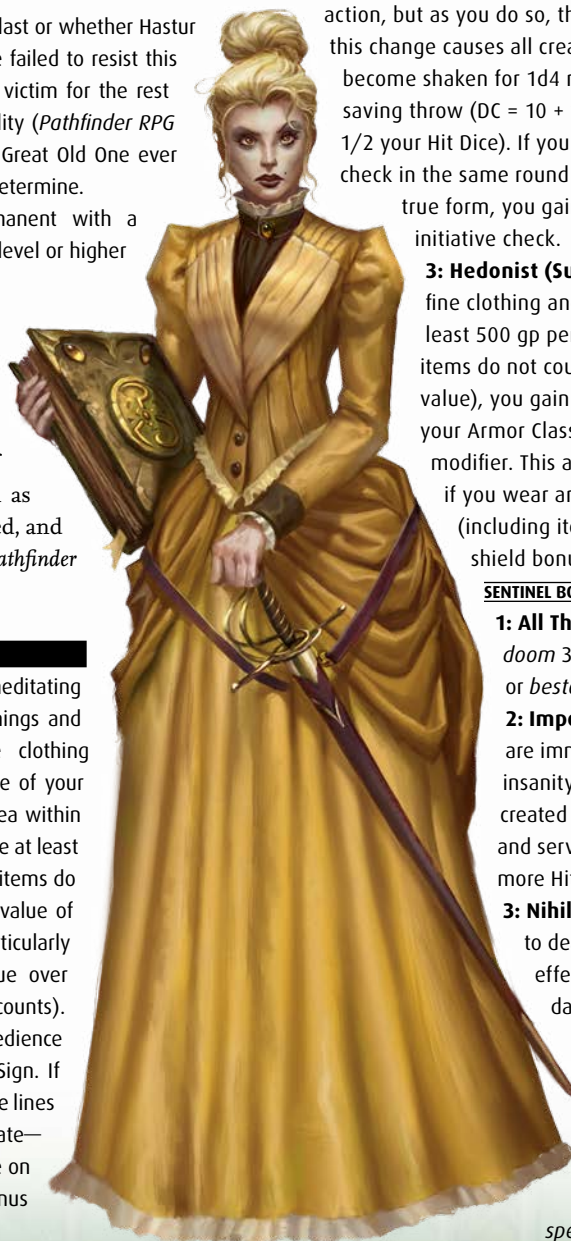
Yellow Sign can be made permanent with a *permanency* spell by a caster of 18th level or higher for the cost of 40,000 gp.

OBEDIENCE

The following describes the ritual a worshiper of Hastur must perform to take full advantage of the Deific Obedience feat, as well as the boons for the evangelist, exalted, and sentinel prestige classes found in *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Gods*.

OBEDIENCE (HASTUR)

Spend an hour in absolute stillness, meditating in an area surrounded by rich furnishings and dressed in elegant and expensive clothing and jewelry. The total combined value of your clothing and the furnishings of the area within 30 feet of your meditation spot must be at least 1,000 gp per character level (magical items do not count in determining the overall value of your surroundings unless they are particularly ornate, in which case only the value over and above the item's normal cost counts). Alternatively, you can perform this obedience in the presence of an active Yellow Sign. If you know them, you must silently recite lines from *The King In Yellow* as you meditate—otherwise, you can simply concentrate on nothingness. You gain a +4 profane bonus on all Perform checks.



EVANGELIST BOONS

1: Words of Disorder (Sp) *lesser confusion* 3/day, *hideous laughter* 2/day, or *rage* 1/day

2: Confusion Command (Su) As a swift action, you can issue a verbal command to a single creature within 30 feet that is currently suffering from a *confusion* effect or a similar effect. This allows you to choose how that creature is affected on its turn that round.

3: Yellow Sign (Sp) You gain the ability to cast *Yellow Sign* once per day as a spell-like ability.

EXALTED BOONS

1: Decadent Grace (Sp) *disguise self* 3/day, *eagle's splendor* 2/day, or *glibness* 1/day

2: No Mask! (Su) You gain the change shape (*alter self*, any humanoid of your size) ability, which is usable once per day. Transforming back to your true form is a free action, but as you do so, the unsettling effect of this change causes all creatures within 20 feet to become shaken for 1d4 rounds if they fail a Will saving throw (DC = 10 + your Wisdom modifier + 1/2 your Hit Dice). If you make an initiative check in the same round that you assume your true form, you gain a +4 bonus on the initiative check.

3: Hedonist (Su) As long as you wear fine clothing and jewelry worth at least 500 gp per character level (magic items do not count in determining this value), you gain a deflection bonus to your Armor Class equal to your Charisma modifier. This ability doesn't function if you wear armor or carry a shield (including items that grant armor or shield bonuses).

SENTINEL BOONS

1: All Things Must End (Sp) *doom* 3/day, *death knell* 2/day, or *bestow curse* 1/day

2: Impossible Mind (Ex) You are immune to confusion and insanity effects, save those created by Hastur or worshipers and servants of Hastur who have more Hit Dice than you.

3: Nihilist (Ex) You are immune to death and petrification effects. In addition, once per day if you are targeted by a death or petrification effect of any level that targets you alone, you can choose to reflect that death effect back on its source as per *spell turning*.

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CATTLE AND THEIR ALLIES

I can only speculate how these pages found their way into Fort Hailcourse's archives, but the being described within is disturbingly familiar. -JW

I will make no special effort to hide these pages, so it is likely they will be found within my little hut along with my remains before too long. It will probably be the girl who brings my salt and flour from the village who will first read these words. Then again, I have no idea whether or not young Lissa can read. Understandably, her people are far more concerned with simple survival—and with fighting against my old comrades in the Molthuni army—than they are with letters.

There. By my own hand I have condemned myself. If any of Lissa's family were to learn I was once a cavalry scout for their great enemy, they would cut me down in an instant. No matter that it was so long ago; no matter that I was mustered out of the army owing to a painful injury when I wasn't much older than Lissa herself is now. No matter that it was decades ago when I fled Molthune for these forests, vowing never to return to my homeland.

Because, Lissa, if it is you who finds this account, my being a former soldier of Molthune is not my great secret. No, that is something far darker, something far more terrible.

I was nineteen years old when I returned home from the wars against Nirmathas. I had been part of a light cavalry unit deployed along the Inkwater River for four years, and had resigned myself to a lifelong military career, when an arrow shattered my left knee. There, Lissa, now you know why I limp. Perhaps it was some great-uncle or distant cousin of yours who let that arrow fly.

My main companion during my army years was the mare I had taken into service with me when I left my home near Kar Station on the plains. Nell was a dappled gray of an old Chelish bloodline, light-footed and exceedingly intelligent. She had saved my life more than once in the wars, and bore as many scars as I did. But the years of fighting seemed to fall away from her as we traveled east, and she tossed her head like a colt when we rode home, there in the heart of the Plains of Molthune.

You have lived your whole life in these prisoning woods, Lissa, and you probably can't begin to imagine the treeless plains. League upon league of high grass

prairie, perfect for the fattening of beef cattle, beneath a great bowl of sky that stretches between horizons that seem impossibly far apart. I have come to fear the open sky in my old age, and am glad now for the stretching limbs of the oaks and hemlocks that shield me from the wide expanse of open air, but in the days of my homecoming, the windswept plains were a welcome and familiar sight.

The leather satchel I wore across my chest contained two documents. Bureaucracy and paperwork are exceedingly important in Molthune, where life is much more regimented than it is here, and those two documents were to dictate the course of my life for the next five years. One was my order of decommission, stating that I'd served honorably in the army of Molthune but that my service had ended. But as one gate closes, another opens, and the second document, unasked for but most welcome, named me the newly appointed bailiff of Kar Station and the farmlands surrounding it.

Bailiffs are civilian enforcers of law in Molthune, answerable to the various generals and princes who rule the nation as a whole. My new commission made me responsible for the keeping of the peace in tiny Kar Station and on all the numerous great cattle ranches in its district. I'd been born on one of those ranches, where my mother was an outrider and my father a smith, though they had both succumbed to white fever during my army years. So I returned home orphaned, but hardly friendless, as I learned within days of taking lodging above a dry goods concern in the center of town.

I remembered Imra, of course, from my childhood. She was much talked of on the ranches, because when a people live their lives so confined by tradition and law, as is the case with all Molthuni, anyone who, to all outward appearances, is unfettered is an object of great fascination. Imra was a druid, but not much like the forest priests of the Green Faith who live hereabouts. She had an official government position entered in the registers kept by the mayor of Kar Station—everyone in Molthune is either an employee or an outright slave of the government—but few knew her title. All knew her duties, though. Imra acted as a healer and protector of animals. She knew every outrider in the district, and

they all knew her, but more than that, she knew their many charges. Few colts or calves were birthed in that country without her attendance. She healed sickness and injury, consulted on breeding programs, and even monitored the grasslands on which the herds fed, ordering great cattle drives when an area had been overcropped or one of the springs that watered those prairies became overtaxed.

She was neither young nor old when I met her again on a low ridge-top trail a few weeks after I'd taken up my new duties. I was on my way to one of the more distant ranch houses to introduce myself and to check on the well-being of the inhabitants there when a rangy black gelding topped a rise a ways out. Even before I could make out the rider's features, I recognized the horse—Dward, who had served as Imra's trusty mount for years even before I left fresh-faced to join Molthune's fighting forces.

"Carrodan Dix!" said Imra, pulling short when we were within a few yards of one another. "A man now, and one who has seen some things by the look of you."

"I was a man when I left, Imra of the Plains, by the reckoning of the sergeants who took me, at least."

She swung down from Dward's back, leaving the reins hanging loosely over the pommel of the well-trained beast's saddle, and approached. She didn't look at me, but at Nell. Sadly.

"Ah, this one's a colt no more, either. Who was responsible for her healing when she took that spear wound there?"

I wondered how she could know the provenance of the scar along Nell's right flank, but answered, "All of the cavalry units have minor priests attached who see to healing of rider and horse alike with their magics. She didn't suffer long that time."

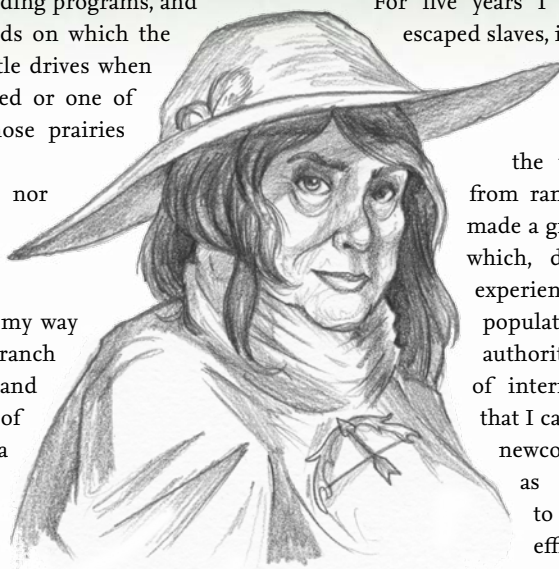
"That time," Imra snorted. "Ah, Nell, what a brave girl you are."

I smiled and patted Nell's neck. "Well and true, that. It's good to see you, Imra."

"And you, bailiff. The last person who held your position was a drunkard and a fool, though she mostly left me alone to do my work. I have higher hopes for you."

And though I didn't know it at the time, with that simple exchange we began a partnership to serve the

people and beasts of Kar Station well for half a decade. A partnership that would end in terror and death.



Skilled in natural magic and in the ways of healing animals, Imra was a significant figure in my life both before and after my time in the army.

For five years I pursued cattle rustlers and escaped slaves, investigated the rare theft and rarer murder, and reported any hint of sedition to my superiors. In truth, most of the time I spent simply riding from ranch to ranch in a route that made a great circle around the station, which, during my residence there, experienced substantial growth in population at some whim of the authorities, who enforced patterns of internal migration in Molthune that I can't claim to understand. With newcomers came new problems, as the ranches were unable to absorb all of the workers efficiently, leaving some listless troublemakers for me to keep watch over.

Imra served as my eyes and ears out on the deep plains, where only the hardest outriders traveled, and kept track of their bovine charges.

The summers lately had been hot, but bearable, while the last winter had brought harsh storms off the mountains that kept most of the district's residents confined to bunkhouse or homestead. Except for the few incidents I have outlined here, little of real note can be said to have occurred in all that time before Imra came to me with news of what she'd seen at the Imley ranch.

It was an evening deep in autumn, and I had been back for less than an hour from a week-long patrol on the plains. I was recovering by drinking strong mulled wine in one of the station's newer taverns, idly watching the other patrons to make sure their carousing didn't get out of hand. When the heavy wooden door suddenly swung inward, a cold wind caused the candles on the tables to gutter and raised a few curses from the grumpy crowd. I looked up, and was happy to see Imra, clad in a heavy cloak and riding leathers, walking in out of the night.

She didn't respond to the taverner's hail, instead peering about the gloomy room with something approaching desperation, something akin, even, to fear. Then she spotted me by the fire and approached. I moved my booted feet to the floor, making room for her on the bench where I'd been stretched out, but she didn't take a seat.

"Dix," she whispered. "There's trouble at Imley's. Trouble like I haven't seen before."

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The Imley ranch was one of the largest in the area, and one of the most remote. It sat to the west of Kar Station, headquartered in a low range of hills as barren of trees as the plains they rose from. Declan Imley, the old man who ran the outfit, had been a sometime employer of my parents before I was born. My family owed much to him.

I started to ask what kind of trouble—since I could not imagine what could have arisen on the nearby plains that Imra had not previously encountered—but the druid turned on a heel and stalked back out of the tavern. She paused at the door long enough to make sure I followed, but I still had to hustle to catch up with her at the stables across the gravel street.

“What’s got you so spooked, Imra?” I asked her. “Old Imley and his children are hardy folk. They’ve faced down trouble before.”

She was pulling my saddle out of the tack locker. “It’s them that *are* the trouble,” she said, then whistled. Old Dward trotted up from where he’d been drinking at the trough at the back of the stables, still wearing his old leather saddle and, I was shocked to see, lathered. Imra had come to find me before taking care of her mount and trusted companion, something that I would never have believed possible before that night.

“What is all this, Imra?” My trust in her was such that even as I asked, I had moved to the stall where Nell poked her curious nose through the bars. I opened the door and she stepped out, standing easily as the druid helped me with the bridle and reins. As Imra continued, I absentmindedly fed Nell a carrot.

“I don’t know, yet,” Imra answered. “Not all of it. But I saw enough to know I’d need your help. There’s something going on out on the plains, something...unnatural. Imley’s cattle herd has been brutally slaughtered to the last head, and he’s just left the carcasses rotting on the prairie. And Dix,” she looked me full in the eye for the first time since she’d arrived that night, “nothing has disturbed the corpses. Not a coyote, not a carrion bird, not a damnable fly, though it’s not so cold yet that those buzzing vermin are all gone for the year.”

I shook my head in confusion. “What do you mean the herd is slaughtered? The Imleys have a stock rota of three thousand head. It would take a butchering crew weeks and every outrider in the district to even keep the herd corralled.”

“It wasn’t a butchering crew,” said Imra, swinging into her saddle. “It was done in a single night. And most of the outriders in the district *are* out there. They are bunking at Imley’s right now, in fact.”

I thought of the lonely ride I’d had in from my patrol, trying to remember if I’d spotted any horse and rider in the distance. At that time of year, it wouldn’t have been unusual not to spy another soul on the plains; but for some reason, not being able to remember the sight of another human or horse chilled me more deeply than the wind that cut through my greatcoat as we rode out into the night.

It would take all that night and the next day to reach the Imley ranch house, though we would be on land assigned to the family long before we saw

their first outbuilding. Imra would have to use her magical gifts on the horses if she planned for us to ride straight through, and even then it would be hard going for them. And for us.

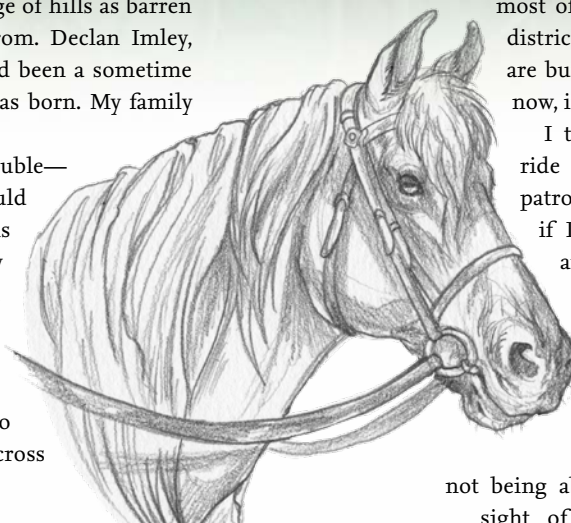
The druid didn’t seem fazed by this possibility as we reached the fringes of Kar Station, but she drew rein and turned Dward in a tight circle. “Look back there, bailiff,” she said. “Tell me if you notice what I noticed riding in.”

Kar Station, as I have said, had grown considerably over the previous few years. The core of the old town was now flanked east and west by new streets and raw wooden buildings laid out on a strict plan drawn up in the capital. It took me a moment to see what she was prompting me to see.

“The old town is dark,” I said, and indeed, except for a few lights along the thoroughfares, the heart of the town was as black as the plains we were about to head for. Lights blazed in the newer parts of town, though, behind the oilcloth-covered windows of homes and taverns alike.

“And empty,” said Imra. “I took a quiet walk through there before I came to find you. There’s nobody there. Nobody who’s lived in Kar Station longer than a few years is anywhere to be found.”

Nell whinnied softly, and a tremble passed along her flank as the first drops of a cold night rain began to fall.



Though her coat could be compared to an overcast sky, Nell is the most beautiful horse in the world to me. She saved me from death more times than I care to count, and it pains me to think about what might have happened to her.

It took us longer than a night and a day to reach the Imley ranch. The weather was against us, and after a bit of discussion, we elected to circle the compound and approach from the west. There was nothing beyond the bounds of the Imley-assigned grasslands before the Inkwater marking the border, and precious little beyond that before the lofty heights of the Mindspin Mountains. Your people claim the dry country west of the river, Lissa, but they don't hold it with anything beyond infrequent patrols. There isn't much to be reaped from such land.

So if this mysterious and unprecedented gathering of outriders—and we had to presume, townsfolk—kept watch at all, they would be less likely to be watching west. Imra remained quiet except to mutter dark thoughts about what they were likely up to, but I thought I knew what had to be happening. Rebellion. The people I'd grown up among had decided to rebel against the Molthuni government I represented. Dark visions of the struggle about to occur surfaced in my mind's eye.

"Doesn't explain the cattle," Imra said tightly when I voiced my theory.

"Maybe they're butchering a herd to provision themselves," I said, not sounding particularly convincing even to myself, but forcing myself to believe it.

And believe it I did until we came upon the first carcass.

The horses smelled it before we did, of course. One war trained and one the bound companion of a druid, Nell and Dward nevertheless slowed their steps on the cattle trail we were following along a dry creek bed arcing southwest of the Imley holdings. Then I caught the corrupt scent myself, and the hard biscuit I'd eaten in the saddle a few hours before threatened to rise from my gorge.

I had seen death aplenty in the wars, of course, your people and mine both, Lissa. And, child of an outrider that I was, I had of course seen cattle mauled by beasts and butchered for meat on countless occasions. I had seen too much to think that any death was "clean" when delivered by a blade or other sharp instrument, but what we found blocking the gully we rode up on then was something so far completely outside of my experience that I went pale.

The few cattle maintained by the foresters around these woods are shaggy little animals, kept for their milk more than their meat. They are nothing like the great black-and-red beasts of the Molthuni plains, where the bulls can stand over six feet high at the shoulder, with



I am no stranger to blood, having seen far too much of it during my short time fighting Nirmathi. However, the sight of these butchered—no, mutilated—cattle left my stomach churning and my mind swimming. Who or what could have done such a thing?

great down-sweeping horns framing their broad, furry faces. Our cows mostly have short hair and their horns are burned dead as calves, but the bulls are allowed their weapons so they might aid the outriders in defending the herds from various predators that roam the countryside.

Whatever beast had taken down the dozen cattle we came across then would not have been stayed by a simple set of horns. They were... flayed is the only word I can find for it. Great strips of skin had been raked away and the wounds were deep. Muscle and sinew had been gouged out in bands running from nose to tail, as wide as my hand and twice that deep. Those were the wounds along flanks and backs. Beneath, they had simply been opened with savage efficiency. Opened and emptied.

And marked.

A twisting sigil had been carved into each broad forehead.

"You shouldn't look at it too closely," warned Imra. "It's eldritch, some kind of powerful dark magic. I've heard tales of things like that winding their way around a man's mind like the roots of a weed and not letting go."

She kneed Dward and the old horse began gamely clambering up the bank to avoid the great mass of

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mutilated cattle. Her attention thus elsewhere, I could not help but study the rune on the closest carcass before I urged Nell to follow. The sigil did not disturb me in the manner Imra described. Instead, it tickled at the back of my brain. Despite the stomach-churning horror of what was before my eyes, for some unknowable reason deep within my gut I felt strangely comforted.

"Dix!" Imra called impatiently from the top of the wash. "What are you doing? Come look at this."

I quickly averted my gaze, wondering how long I had been staring at the branded corpse, and then clicked my tongue and patted Nell's shoulder. She obediently made the difficult scramble up to where the druid and her mount waited.

Imra had dismounted and indicated a tramped-down area in the autumn-brown grass. The tough growth was thin here, the ground muddy. Imra pointed again, and I saw a broad, round footprint. I swung down to take a closer look, finding the scant heel had struck much deeper than the bisected toe.

"Strange footwear, that," I murmured.

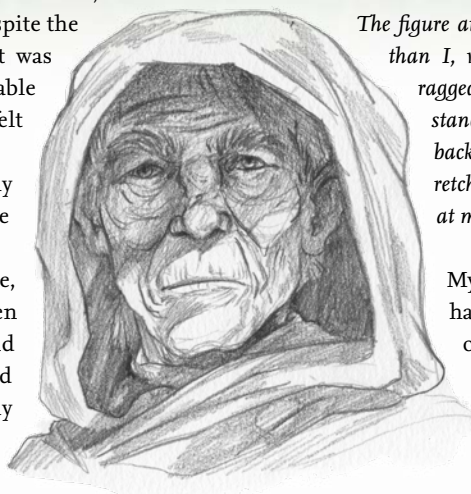
Imra made a warding sign. "What manner of foot must it have shod?" She narrowed her eyes when she spoke, looking at me closely. I realized what she was asking.

I sighed and nodded. "Just a moment." I turned and opened one of the bags hung behind Nell's saddle. Digging around among the trail rations and spare clothing, I eventually found the little leather pouch I sought.

The rain had slackened to almost nothing but the sky was so gray it was almost impossible to tell if it was dusk or dawn. The hours we had spent riding had fogged up my mind, but I knew that if I asked, Imra could easily tell me the time within a minute or two. Instead, I said, "Stand between me and the wind, would you?"

I opened the pouch and pulled out a bit of dried plaster the size of my thumb. It had hardened into the shape of a crude cylinder, but as I knelt next to the footprint, I rubbed it between my fingers. As I breathed words the scoutmasters in Molthune's army had taught me, the plaster slowly softened into a wet handful. I spread this across the footprint, closed my eyes, and bowed my head.

I felt the plaster disappear into smoke, but this was beneath notice compared to the image that came into my mind.



The figure atop the gully is about a head shorter than I, wrapped and draped with yards of ragged dun cloth from head to toe. It stands with its shoulders raised and its back arched, as if laughing, or perhaps retching. Then it abruptly turns and looks at me...

My face stung and I realized Imra had struck me, possibly more than once. I was sprawled on my back, wallowing amid the mud and dead grass. Nell let out a loud, fearful whinny.

"What was it?" Imra asked, crouched over me. "What did you see?"

"I don't know," I said. "Something old."

Something I somehow *knew*, though I could not remember where or when I had seen it before.

Not everything in my past is as I have told you, and there were those we came across on the Imley ranch who were of my own blood. And they were not in the least bit surprised to see me there.

It was long past midnight and we had been riding for over thirty hours, with only brief stops for Imra to work her healing and energizing magics on the horses, when we came to the bottom of a low rise. The various structures that made up the Imley homestead were on the opposite side of the low hill. If eyes looked down from atop the hill, we had not spotted them. If they were there, we could only trust they had not seen us in the dark and rain.

Some wordless agreement saw us unsaddling the horses and relieving them of the burdens of bridle and bit. Nell gave me the look I had always interpreted as curiosity and I found a dried pear in my bags to give to her. She munched this placidly as I rubbed her down. I had a brush and curry comb in my bags, but it would have been foolish to delay any longer to give her that small pleasure.

Imra hissed at me from the foot of the hill and I gave Nell, my oldest and truest friend, a pat before I left her.

I never saw her again.

I have told you, Lissa, three things about my parents. I have told you how they made their livelihoods on the ranches—as an outrider and as a smith—and that they had at one time been in the employ of Old Imley, the man who held the writ to the ranch that Imra and I crouched above on that cold night, now so long ago.



The air was brisk that night, but the chills I felt looking upon that scene had nothing to do with temperature. I cannot say anything much about the figure at the center of the ritual circle, except to describe its tattered wrappings, its monstrosously clawed fingers, and the enigmatic intelligence behind its haggard eyes. I hope to never see it again.

I have told you that they died of white fever during the years I was away at the wars.

Lissa, I have lied to you.

My parents were among the people we saw gathered in those interlocked, torchlit circles, marching slowly round and round between the Imley ranch house and a cluster of outbuildings. Friends of mine were down there. The mayor of Kar Station was there, as was the miller I bought Nell's feed from.

Indeed, except for the plains druid Imra, who gasped in ill-concealed horror at my side, every significant person I had ever met in my life outside of the army of Molthune was down there, standing before that uncanny being.

Seeing its unnatural presence in person, the feeling that the creature was familiar to me crystallized in my mind. It felt as if the thing was a distant relative I had met only once during childhood. Conversely, I was definitely known to it.

You see that I have been coy. The creature directing the profane rite, the cultists' master... my master, had, for the first time in my memory and for the second time in my life, come from some alien realm to these plains. For what purpose? I could not say.

It called, then, a long, low bellow, and the people of Kar Station ceased their circling trudge. They looked at their master, and then all of them, master and mastered alike, turned and looked at me.

Had I been overly long at the wars? Had my months working with the nature priestess Imra affected me? Had the many years that must have passed since my unholy baptism been too many for me to answer when the call came? I don't know.

I know that when the rangers of Nirmathas found me in the shallows on the northern bank of the Marideth River, they did not kill me. I know that I was half-naked and mostly starved and that I could only tell them what I thought was my name. My name, and the name of a horse that I still pray lived out a long and peaceful life on the plains west of Kar Station, free of any master's hand.

What might have occurred on that night before I fled, I do not know.

It can only be true that when I was called, I did not answer.

It can only be true that when they came for me, I left Imra behind.

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An illustration of a massive, brown, tentacled creature with a star-shaped mouth, coiled in a dark, cavernous space. Two explorers, one in a brown coat and the other in a blue tunic, are running away from the creature, holding lit torches. The scene is framed by a decorative border featuring octopus tentacles and metallic scrollwork.

BESTIARY

Humans have always been afraid of the dark—perhaps because, unlike our elven and dwarven brethren, we lack any ability to see the monstrosities that use the shadows to hide their ill intents. Few can guess how unthinkable horrid the foul and vile creatures that make the darkness their home truly are. Terribly evil things... Things made of eyes and tentacles and writhing flesh and the essence of blackness itself nest in the dark. And their silent master is Mordiggian, the Charnel God. Or, their master was Mordiggian, or will be. When exactly the Great Old One rules from is among his most sinister of mysteries. For how can we fight that which not only controls and inhabits the darkness, but which moves like a fish through the river of time, both upstream and down?”

—Professor Remie Demrast, Sincomakti School of Sciences

This Strange Aeons Adventure Path bestiary features an aberration from the depths of space, an invisible bloodsucker, a harbinger of Hastur, a monstrous shapeshifter, and a Great Old One made out of pure darkness.

ADDITIONAL ENCOUNTERS

The bulk of this volume's adventure takes place in and around the town of Thrushmoor, which has very few threats that aren't accounted for in the adventure. The following encounters found in the random encounter table can be used to expand the PCs' explorations of this eerie town.

Glowing Jill (CR 6): A string of will-o'-wisps (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 277) frequents the public building known as Fish Market (see page 65), feasting on the fear that pervades the town. The trio of haunting aberrations takes turns illuminating the amber lamp in the market's central atrium, their ghostly glow giving the object its colloquial name. The local superstitions about the ominous light keep the will-o'-wisps coming back, but were the truth of Glowing Jill ever to spread, the creatures would be forced to either move away from Thrushmoor or attack the townsfolk in a group.

Grimzelda (CR 5): The green hag (*Bestiary* 167) Grimzelda makes her home in the swamp east of Thrushmoor, approximately a half mile along the coastal road connecting the town to Illmarsh. She often visits the town in the guise of a beautiful Varisian merchant and frequents the Stain to watch the town's residents drink away their cares. She attempts to seduce upstanding or unsuspecting victims and entice them to her swamp lair, claiming that she prefers not to leave her wagon and wares unattended too long. The superstitious residents of Thrushmoor rarely fall for her wiles, never trusting outsiders trying to lead them away from home, but visitors are at risk of stumbling into the hag's grasp. Grimzelda finds the local rumors claiming that the Smokehouse's proprietor, Lysie Brilt (see page 67), is a green hag hilarious and takes every opportunity to spread them, thus deflecting blame for any of her own transgressions against the town.

If encountered in the swamp rather than in Thrushmoor, Grimzelda feigns helplessness, claiming her wagon has broken a wheel or sunk into the mud, attempting to lure well-meaning, foolhardy heroes into her den. If she finds herself outnumbered in her lair, either because an entire party comes to her aid or because her activities have raised the town's suspicion, she maintains her disguise and lets potential victims off the hook.

Grimzelda sees other hags as threats to her machinations and thus rarely congregates with those of her own kind. In times of great need, however, such as when she has been discovered or threatened by a victim

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d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-3	1d6 rabid dogs	4	<i>Bestiary</i> 87
4-11	1d6 goblin snakes	4	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 132
12-19	1 gibbering mouther	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 153
20-27	1d4 draugr	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 110
28-35	Grimzelda	5	See below
36-43	1d3 kelpies	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 172
44-51	1 saltwater merrow	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 189
52-59	Glowing Jill	6	See below
60-67	1d4 giant dragonflies	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 105
68-75	Wailing House Spectre	7	See below
76-83	1 Huge mud elemental	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 120
84-91	Grimzelda's coven	8	See below
92-99	1 marsh giant	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 129
100	1 faceless hulk	9	See page 84

she has underestimated, she seeks the assistance of her makeshift coven: Murlebonne, an annis hag (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 16) who makes her home in the moors between Thrushmoor and Rozenport, and Regskialla, a sea hag (*Bestiary* 243) who typically plies the waters of Avalon Bay nearer to Illmarsh but has been known to travel up both the Danver and Destach Rivers when the desire takes her.

Wailing House Spectre (CR 7): Thrushmoor's infamous Wailing House (see page 67) is home to one of the town's most dangerous denizens—a mournful spectre (*Bestiary* 256). This undead abomination is bound to the house in which it died and appears only on Wealday nights. As it cannot leave the house's yard, it shrieks in frustration from sundown to sunrise, which lends the house its name.

Unlike most spectres, the resident of Wailing House has a ghost's rejuvenation ability (see page 144 of the *Bestiary*) in place of its create spawn ability. For the spectre to be fully defeated, the body of the house's final owner, Cyris Vhont, must be laid to rest in a cemetery sanctified by the church of Pharasma. Vhont's corpse—now little more than a pile of bones wrapped in the rotted raiment of a Pharasmin pilgrim—can be found in the house's cellar. Vhont, coming home from a long journey to some of the Inner Sea region's most prestigious Pharasmin temples, stumbled upon a band of smugglers who had been squatting in the house during his absence and who were using the cellar to store their wares. Thanks to a cursed blade wielded by one of the smugglers, the victim rose again, but Vhont's dedication to the Lady of Graves now prevents his spirit from leaving the house. Unable to use the house for their illicit activities after that point, the smugglers left town to continue their operations elsewhere, leaving the place abandoned for decades.

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BYAKHEE

This nauseating winged creature combines the features of a carrion bird, an ant, a bat, and a decomposing human in a most hideous manner.

BYAKHEE

CR 4



XP 1,200

CE Medium aberration

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Perception +11

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14 (+3 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 42 (5d8+20)

Fort +5, **Ref** +4, **Will** +7

Immune cold, confusion and insanity effects, critical hits, hunger, sneak attacks, thirst

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (good)

Melee 2 claws +7 (1d4+3), bite +6 (1d6+3 plus grab)

Special Attacks blood drain (1d2 Constitution), bloodlust

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 16, **Con** 18, **Int** 10, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 15

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

Feats Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (claw)

Skills Fly +15, Perception +11, Stealth +11, Survival +11

Languages Aklo

SQ low metabolism, no breath, starflight, Yellow Sign affinity

ECOLOGY

Environment any air

Organization solitary, pair, or flock (3–12)

Treasure standard

Original Source August Derleth, "The House on Curwen Street"

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Bloodlust (Ex) When a byakhee successfully bites a living creature, it is swiftly driven to a frenzied bloodlust. For 1 minute after it bites a target, it gains a +2 morale bonus on attack and damage rolls against that target. A byakhee has no limit as to how many simultaneous bloodlust targets it can have at any one time, but it generally focuses on the same target once its bloodlust is engaged. It also gains these bonuses on attack and damage rolls against creatures taking bleed damage from any source.

Low Metabolism (Ex) While a byakhee craves blood if it hasn't fed within the last 24 hours, it doesn't suffer any negative effects from starvation, and it can, in theory, survive forever without drinking or feeding. It is immune to effects that induce magical starvation or thirst, yet it still seeks to drink blood whenever it can to sate its desire. Its strange metabolism and body also render it immune to critical hits, sneak attacks, and other forms of precision damage.

Starflight (Su) A byakhee can survive in the void of outer space, and it flies through space at incredible speeds. Although exact travel times vary, a trip within a single

solar system normally takes it 3d20 months, while a trip beyond normally takes it 3d20 years (or more, at the GM's discretion)—provided the byakhee knows the way to its destination.

Yellow Sign Affinity (Ex) A byakhee is immune to the effects of the Yellow Sign, and by concentrating, it can locate the nearest active Yellow Sign as per *discern location* (CL 20th). When an active Yellow Sign is visible, a byakhee gains fast healing 2 and a +4 enhancement bonus to its Dexterity. An active Yellow Sign is either one that was created by Hastur or by the *Yellow Sign* spell (see page 72). Inactive Yellow Signs, such as the unholy symbols carried by cultists of Hastur, do not bolster a byakhee, but these creatures generally treat those who openly wear such symbols as allies. A character who displays a Yellow Sign in this manner gains a +5 circumstance bonus on all Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks against a byakhee.

Byakhees are a race of interstellar aberrations that hail from the distant and alien city of Carcosa, where they serve Hastur. Vaguely humanoid in shape, their bodies combine elements of the forms of carrion birds, insects, and mammals, giving an outward appearance that, while horrific, might at first glance seem possible in the natural world. Yet, those who have studied dead byakhees know this to be a lie, for the creatures' bodies hold bizarre organs and masses of unknown tissue that seem to serve no purpose; the further into a byakhee's body one explores, the stranger its entrails become. The fact that portions of its body appear to be decaying or rotting away even as it lives only adds to the mystery of the creature's peculiar anatomy.

A byakhee is 6 feet tall and weighs 160 pounds.

ECOLOGY

Scholars have long argued that byakhees' somewhat humanoid shape suggests a relationship to a less aberrant form of life, and that these creatures may once have even been humans. Indeed, byakhees were created from the original human denizens of the ancient city of Alar. When that city declared war upon its neighbor Carcosa, Alar vanished without a trace on the next rising of its planet's red sun. In truth, the city and its citizens did not disappear—they were absorbed and transformed by Carcosa. Alar's inhabitants became the first byakhees, and ever since, their kind has unwaveringly served the lord of Carcosa, the King in Yellow.

Although a byakhee longs to consume the blood of the living, it doesn't actually ever suffer the effects of thirst or starvation and can live its entire life without ever tasting a drop of blood. Nonetheless, these creatures still feel something akin to hunger—albeit a sensation driven by a mental impulse other than a biological imperative. Some scholars theorize that this

hunger is nothing more than a remnant from the race's past, a sort of ancestral memory of starvation, perhaps, that drives them to drink blood out of a psychological need rather than a physical one. Certainly, byakhees' bloodlust is a powerful driving force; once a byakhee has bitten a foe, it has difficulty thinking of anything other than latching on and drinking its victim dry.

Byakhees' ability to fly between worlds through the depths of space is shared by several other types of creatures, many of which are tied in similar ways to the Elder Mythos. They are often called upon by spellcasters who use rare or forbidden magic to take advantage of such transport, yet unlike shantaks (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 244), who can impart some of their defenses against the depths of space to those they carry through the gulfs between worlds, byakhees can offer no such protection. The creatures delight in carrying ignorant spellcasters into the cold, airless void when foolishly commanded, as they feel no need to warn their would-be passengers of the dangers of interstellar travel.

A byakhee can live for centuries, although most perish from violence before attaining such an age.

HABITAT AND SOCIETY

Byakhees serve Hastur, his cult, and the city of Carcosa, driven by an ancient compulsion that is still as much a part of what they are as their claws and wings. The rare byakhees that manage to ignore this urge in order to serve another master—or even more remarkably, to obey no master at all—are particularly hated by other byakhees, and no efforts are spared in the pursuit of such enemies of Carcosa when their existence is exposed.

Priests of Hastur can conjure byakhees with the proper magic, as can spellcasters who use rare and eldritch spells (such as *contact entity I*, found on page 113 of *Pathfinder RPG Horror Adventures*, which uses a silver whistle as the material component). Once called to a new world to serve the cult of the King in Yellow, byakhees are quick to establish a colony. Young are hatched from noxious, leathery eggs and grow to maturity over the course of only a few weeks. Yet, once a local byakhee population reaches a few dozen, they lose the drive to procreate entirely. Only in rare cases, such as within the streets of the alien city of Carcosa or on worlds that have fallen fully under Hastur's control, are byakhees encountered in significantly larger numbers.

Despite their bestial appearance, byakhees are as smart as the typical human and much wiser and charismatic than most. As such, it isn't uncommon for leaders among their kind to grow in power by gaining class levels. Byakhees can excel in most

classes, although they tend to avoid taking levels in classes that grant companions, mounts, or familiars—they find the presence of creatures from the natural world unpleasant at best. Most byakhees that take class levels do so as barbarians, clerics of Hastur, psychics, or sorcerers with the aberrant or starsoul bloodlines (*Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide* 140).

ORIGINS

The byakhee has been a staple of Lovecraftian RPGs in large part due to their inclusion in Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* Roleplaying Game, and it is Sandy Petersen's take on byakhees that largely inspired their Pathfinder incarnation. The creatures first appeared in print in August Derleth's short story, "The House on Curwen Street." They never actually appeared in any of Lovecraft's writings, although Chaosium has taken the description of the nameless creatures from Lovecraft's short story "The Festival" as the basis for the monster's strange appearance.



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FACELESS HULK

This hairless, leathery giant has no discernible features aside from unsettling whorls across its skin and grotesque, slurping tongues where its face should be.

FACELESS HULK (UGOROTH)

CR 9

XP 6,400

CE Large aberration (shapechanger)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +17

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 9, flat-footed 18 (+9 natural, -1 size)

hp 119 (14d8+56)

Fort +8, **Ref** +4, **Will** +11

Defensive Abilities rock catching; **DR** 10/piercing or slashing; **Resist** cold 5, fire 5

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee mwk greataxe +18/+13 (3d6+12/x3) or 2 slams +17 (1d6+12 plus grab)

Ranged rock +10 (1d8+8)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks blood drain (1d2 Constitution), explosive expansion, rock throwing (120 ft.)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th; concentration +11)
Constant—*tongues*

STATISTICS

Str 26, **Dex** 11, **Con** 19, **Int** 16, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 16

Base Atk +10; **CMB** +19 (+21 bull rush); **CMD** 29 (31 vs. bull rush)

Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Deceitful, Improved Bull Rush, Iron Will, Power Attack, Throw Anything

Skills Acrobatics +3, Bluff +21, Climb +25, Disguise +25, Escape Artist +17, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (local) +7, Perception +17, Stealth +11, Survival +8, Swim +15; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Disguise, +8 Escape Artist

Languages Aquan, Common

SQ change shape (Large humanoid, *alter self*), compression, faceless

ECOLOGY

Environment any hills or mountains

Organization solitary, pair, or tribe (3–12)

Treasure standard (mwk greataxe, other treasure)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Change Shape (Su) A faceless hulk can assume the form of a Large humanoid at will but requires 10 uninterrupted minutes to alter its body. Performing this transformation is somewhat painful, but the faceless hulk can maintain its new shape indefinitely once it has achieved that form. It can change back to its true form as a swift action, and it gains a +2 morale bonus on attack rolls, damage rolls, skill checks, and saving throws for 1 round after it does so. A faceless hulk retains its own innate abilities when it assumes its new form and does not gain any of the abilities of the creature it mimics. A faceless hulk gains a +10 bonus on Disguise checks when using this ability.

Explosive Expansion (Su) In its natural form, a faceless hulk can expand rapidly as a full-round action. It grows one size category larger, pushing back any creature or object in its new space. The faceless hulk can choose which direction (or directions) it expands from its original space, and it can attempt a free bull rush combat maneuver check against any creatures in these squares of sizes Large or smaller. The faceless hulk uses its increased size (usually Huge) to determine its Combat Maneuver Bonus for these checks. At the end of its turn, it immediately returns to its original size, though it can choose which squares it occupies when it does so. This ability does not change the faceless hulk's weight.

Faceless (Su) In its natural form, a faceless hulk has no discernible facial features. It gains a +4 bonus on saving throws made to resist attacks or effects that target the senses. This includes gaze attacks, odor-based attacks, sonic attacks, and similar attacks. This bonus does not apply to illusions.

Ugoroths are monstrous, sadistic beings created by aboleths in their long war against the surface world. Alongside their smaller cousins, the faceless stalkers (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 122), they work to destabilize surface-dwelling civilizations from within. During the war, the destruction of the aboleth city Voshgurvaghol left them leaderless and without direction. Though they have long forgotten the beings that created them, faceless hulks continue their original mission, driven only by a hatred for humanity that was molded into their very bodies. Some believe that ugoroths still serve their veiled masters, even without their own knowledge.

Faceless hulks range in height from 10 to 14 feet and weigh anywhere from 1,200 to 1,700 pounds.

ECOLOGY

Ugoroths have flexible, boneless bodies that resist various forms of attack. While they prefer to forgo armor whenever possible, they typically use whatever weapons and equipment are most common among the race they are disguised as. Though they lack many of the special abilities that make each giant race unique, they have managed to adapt facsimiles of several, enough to pass the scrutiny of all but the most discerning of observers. Some older ugoroths acquire magical items and artifacts to bolster themselves with abilities they would normally lack.

They cannot digest solid food even when they assume the forms of creatures with mouths. Instead, they subsist on liquids, especially blood. In their natural forms, they have three hollow tongues, which they use to penetrate and lap blood from smaller humanoids.

Historians are unsure whether aboleths created the first faceless hulks as part of a larger plot to infiltrate the land-dwelling peoples of Golarion or whether the

enlarged faceless stalkers simply evolved from their Medium-sized kin over time. Some scholars of ancient Azlant believe faceless hulks were crafted intentionally to infiltrate the cyclopes the Azlanti enslaved (and the cyclopes of the long-extinct kingdom of Ghol-Gan). Others defend the theory of independent evolution, citing the existence of even larger, older ugoroths (ugolorothes, which are described below) as proof that the faceless hulks of today are simply the descendants of an exceptionally large strain of faceless stalkers. Despite their disagreements, sages recognize that faceless hulks and faceless stalkers now form two distinct species.

HABITAT AND SOCIETY

Faceless hulks were originally created to sow discord and animosity between giants and other surface-dwelling races, to further weaken both during the war with the aboleths. Toward that end, ugorothes disguised themselves among the various giant races to attack and spread mayhem in humanoid society. A lone faceless hulk may take the form of a fire or frost giant before attacking a humanoid settlement. Others infiltrate giant tribes and raiding parties, living among them for months or years and manipulating them into causing great violence whenever possible. Greater faceless hulks, which prefer to take the shapes of cloud or storm giants, spend decades in disguise, sparking conflicts that can span generations.

Unlike typical giants, faceless hulks leave very few casualties in the wake of their attacks. Instead, they favor mass destruction, taking special care to level centers of commerce and locations of political import. These attacks also give them the opportunity to take prisoners they may later feed on in private. Faceless hulks have been known to work together with faceless stalkers to great success. Their smaller kin ensure that humanoid settlements are unprepared for giant attacks, and they later whip the survivors into a frenzy, driving them to retaliate against the giants. By working together this way, the two races can transform minor conflicts into explosive wars.

Some ugorothes believe they are the divine creations of the god Ghlaunder, who reigns over parasites and stagnation, while others cleave to the atheistic nature of their true creators, the aboleths. A few have taken to worshipping chaotic evil giant deities. Strangely, many faceless hulks consider themselves kin to evil giants, favoring them over their own kind. In some rare cases, they willingly choose to spend their entire lives among giants, pretending to be hermits or wandering sages. This is a particularly dangerous lifestyle for an ugorothe—after generations of slavery, many giants are naturally distrustful of those they don't know. If they discover an ugorothe hiding among them, giants hunt it down without mercy.

GREATER FACELESS HULKS

Known as ugolorothes among their own kind, the largest and most ancient faceless hulks serve as spies and infiltrators within the societies of the largest races of giantkind, including cloud giants, storm giants, and taiga giants. An ugolorothe is a faceless hulk with the advanced and giant creature simple templates. It gains Combat Reflexes and Greater Bull Rush as bonus feats. It casts spell-like abilities as a 12th-level caster, and gains *levitate* and *undetectable alignment* as at-will spell-like abilities. When using its change shape ability, an ugolorothe can take the shape of any Huge humanoid. More so than their ugorothe kin, ugolorothes often take levels in classes such as barbarian, fighter, ranger, sorcerer, and witch to more easily pass as members of various giant races.



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GREAT OLD ONE, MORDIGGIAN

This massive wormlike creature appears to be made of solid darkness that sucks surrounding light into its body to be forever extinguished.

MORDIGGIAN

CR 30

XP 9,830,400

CE Gargantuan aberration (chaotic, evil, Great Old One, incorporeal)

Init +31; **Senses** all-around vision, darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness, *true seeing*; Perception +50

Aura unspeakable presence (300 ft., DC 40)

DEFENSE

AC 47, touch 47, flat-footed 31 (+13 deflection, +15 Dex, +1 dodge, +12 insight, -4 size)

hp 752 (35d8+595); fast healing 30

Fort +28, **Ref** +26, **Will** +31

Defensive Abilities absorb light, immortality, incorporeal, insanity (DC 40); **DR** 20/epic and lawful; **Immune** ability damage, ability drain, acid, aging, blindness, cold, death effects, disease, energy drain, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, and petrification; **Resist** electricity 30, fire 30; **SR** 41

OFFENSE

Speed fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Melee 6 +5 *tentacles* +43 (5d6+18/19-20 plus grab)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft. (40 ft. with tentacle)

Special Attacks constrict (5d6+13), dreams of darkness, engulf (DC 27, 20d6 negative energy and 1d4 negative levels), mythic power (10/day, surge +1d12), tentacles

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 30th; concentration +43)

Constant—*speaking with dead* (DC 26), *true seeing*

At will—*astral projection*, *create undead*, *death knell*[™]

(DC 25), *deeper darkness*, *dream*[™], *greater dispel*

magic, *greater teleport*, *nightmare*[™] (DC 28), *sending*[™]

3/day—*demand* (DC 31), quickened *deeper darkness*, *energy drain* (DC 32), quickened *feeblemind* (DC 28), quickened *slay living* (DC 30)

1/day—*destruction* (DC 30), *power word kill*[™], *symbol of death* (DC 31), *symbol of insanity* (DC 31), *true resurrection*

STATISTICS

Str —, **Dex** 40, **Con** 44, **Int** 33, **Wis** 34, **Cha** 37

Base Atk +26; **CMB** +45 (+49 disarm); **CMD** 81 (83 vs. disarm)

Feats Ability Focus (*slay living*), Blinding Critical, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Dodge, Greater Disarm, Greater Vital Strike, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Vital Strike, Mobility, Quickened Spell-Like Ability (*deeper darkness*, *feeblemind*, *slay living*), Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (tentacle)

Skills Acrobatics +53, Bluff +48, Diplomacy +48, Fly +55, Knowledge (arcana) +46, Knowledge (geography) +46, Knowledge (history) +46, Knowledge (local) +46, Knowledge (nobility) +46, Knowledge (religion) +49,

Perception +50, Sense Motive +47, Spellcraft +49, Stealth +41, Use Magic Device +48

Languages Aklo, Necril, *speaking with dead*; telepathy 300 ft. **SQ** no breath

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary (unique)

Treasure triple

Original Source Clark Ashton Smith, "The Charnel God"

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Absorb Light (Su) Mordiggian's presence causes all light levels within a 100-foot spread to be reduced by one category as long as he has at least 1 hit point. Anyone who attempts to cast a spell with the light descriptor in this area must succeed at a DC 30 caster level check, or the spell is lost as if it had been counterspelled.

Dreams of Darkness (Ex) Mordiggian can affect a creature that has been restored to life by a worshiper of Mordiggian, that has suffered negative energy damage while within the walls of a temple devoted to Mordiggian, or that has been in the area of effect of Mordiggian's unspeakable presence (whether or not the creature was affected by it) with dreams of darkness. When Mordiggian uses his *nightmare* spell-like ability on such a target, the victim endures what seems to be the passage of hundreds of years imprisoned in a lightless sarcophagus or coffin. Upon waking, the creature takes an additional effect beyond the normal effects of *nightmare*—it must succeed at a DC 40 Fortitude saving throw or contract an accelerated form of ghoul fever that inflicts its damage every hour instead of every day. This is a death effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Eldritch Insight (Ex) The whispers of all the world's dead echo in Mordiggian's mind, and as a result, he adds his Wisdom modifier as an insight bonus to his Armor Class and on all Initiative checks. If Mordiggian is on a planet or in a dimension where no creature has ever died, this ability does not function.

Engulf (Su) When Mordiggian engulfs a creature, he inflicts 20d6 points of negative energy damage and 1d4 negative levels. A successful DC 44 Reflex saving throw halves the negative energy damage, and a DC 44 Fortitude save removes the negative levels. The save DCs are both Constitution-based.

Great Old One Traits Rules for Mordiggian's Great Old One traits such as immortality, insanity, and otherworldly, as well as the rules for his mythic abilities and unspeakable presence can be found on page 306 of *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 4*.

Immortality (Ex) If Mordiggian is killed, the shadows that comprise his body lose all form and become a 20-foot-diameter roiling blot of churning darkness with a 300-foot fly speed and perfect maneuverability. This blot of darkness is incorporeal and cannot be harmed, but it cannot enter an area of bright light. The blot can sense

all undead creatures within a 100-mile radius, and if it finds an undead creature, it can attempt to infuse it. An intelligent undead can resist this attack with a successful DC 40 Will saving throw; unintelligent undead receive no save. Once this blot of darkness infuses an undead creature, it grants the undead creature the advanced creature simple template, but 24 hours later, the undead is destroyed, releasing a fully-healed Mordiggian back into the world. If Mordiggian cannot find a suitable undead host within 24 hours or is trapped by bright light for that duration, the blot of darkness fades away, only to manifest immediately on another world—perhaps in the distant past, in the distant future, or even in the present. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Tentacles (Su) Mordiggian's tentacles are primary attacks that inflict bludgeoning damage. He adds his Charisma modifier to damage done by his tentacles, which also gain a +5 enhancement bonus on attack rolls and damage rolls. These tentacles are treated as magic epic chaotic weapons for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction. If Mordiggian reduces a living creature to fewer than 0 hit points with a tentacle or with his constriction damage, he automatically casts *death knell* on the target as a free action.

Unspeakable Presence (Su) Failing a DC 40 Will saving throw against Mordiggian's unspeakable presence causes the victim to become permanently blinded. A creature that is killed while blinded by this ability immediately animates as a chaotic evil juju zombie (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 291). The save DC is Charisma-based.

Called the Charnel God by his worshipers, Mordiggian is one of the oldest and most powerful of the Great Old Ones. However, his tendency to move back and forth in time whenever he reincarnates makes the tracking of his age largely academic. None can say how long Mordiggian has existed, for as far as one can look back into the past or forward into the future, the presence of his cult can be found if one searches hard enough.

Mordiggian has no body. He appears as a cloud of mobile, malevolent darkness and shadow that can change its outline and shape at will. He is fond of appearing as an immense graveworm or limbless giant made of darkness, and when he desires a meal, he can form tentacles of solid darkness to pluck up his feast.

Ghouls, particularly those that dwell in Leng, often venerate Mordiggian with a ferocious zeal. They consider ghoulish worshipers

of other deities, particularly of the demon lord Kabriri, to be heretics and work to eradicate such blasphemers whenever they are found. Although worship of Mordiggian has become quite rare on Golarion as other death gods have gained more prominence, his cult is patient and willing to simply wait for the Charnel God's inevitable return to power.

MORDIGGIAN'S CULT

Mordiggian's worshipers venerate him as a death god, and his worship is openly allowed in some cities. In these cases, his temple also serves to dispose of all of the city's dead, yet the faithful's exact method for dealing with corpses is subject to fearful whispers among the nonbelievers. His temples consist of either underground vaults hidden below graveyards or towering cathedral-like structures containing mazes of rooms. Mordiggian grants access to the domains of Chaos, Darkness, Death, and Evil, and to the subdomains of Entropy (*Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Gods* 224), Loss, Night, and Undead. His favored weapon is the scimitar.



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KEEPER OF THE YELLOW SIGN

This black-clad figure has a pale, puffy face from which its yellow-irised eyes glare with equal parts intensity and insanity.

KEEPER OF THE YELLOW SIGN

CR 6



XP 2,400

CE Medium undead

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +10

Aura disquieting aura (30 ft., DC 17)

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15 (+2 Dex, +5 natural)

hp 66 (7d8+35)

Fort +8, **Ref** +4, **Will** +5

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +2; **DR** 5/magic or silver; **Immune** undead traits

Weaknesses sunlight powerlessness

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee 2 slams +12 (1d6+6) or

entropic drain +11 touch (energy drain)

Special Attacks energy drain (1 level, DC 17)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th; concentration +11)

3/day—*darkness*, *invisibility* (self only)

1/day—*bestow curse* (DC 17), *dream* (DC 19), *rusting grasp*, *warp wood*

STATISTICS

Str 22, **Dex** 15, **Con** —, **Int** 13, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 19

Base Atk +5; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 23

Feats Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Toughness, Weapon Focus (slams)

Skills Climb +11, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (religion) +8, Perception +10, Sense Motive +7, Stealth +12

Languages Aklo, Common

SQ Yellow Sign affinity

ECOLOGY

Environment any land

Organization solitary, pair, or cult (3–6)

Treasure standard

Original Source Robert W. Chambers, "The Yellow Sign"

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Disquieting Aura (Su) A keeper of the Yellow Sign is surrounded by an aura of gloom and repulsiveness. A creature that fails its saving throw against this aura takes a –1 penalty on attack rolls and on saving throws against fear effects while within the aura and for 7 minutes after leaving the affected area. Any creature that successfully saves against this power cannot be affected again by it for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect, and the save DC is Charisma-based. A creature within range of a keeper's disquieting aura can be affected by its *bestow curse* spell-like ability from a distance (not only by touch). If a target of the aura has seen the Yellow Sign, it takes a –2 penalty on its saving throws against the aura and the keeper's *bestow curse* spell-like ability.

Entropic Drain (Ex) A keeper's use of its energy draining ability can result in a surge of entropy that consumes its body and disrupts life all around it. Every time the keeper's entropic drain attack results in a creature's death, the keeper must succeed at a DC 17 Fortitude saving throw or be destroyed. If the keeper is destroyed, all sentient beings in a 15-foot radius around the keeper gain a negative level (Fortitude DC 17 negates). If any negative level bestowed by a keeper becomes permanent, the victim must succeed at a DC 17 Will saving throw or die after 1 hour of delirium. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Sunlight Powerlessness (Ex) A keeper of the Yellow Sign is powerless in natural sunlight (though not in an area of *daylight* or similar spells), and it cannot attack and is staggered. It can use its supernatural and spell-like abilities, but with a 50% failure chance.

Yellow Sign Affinity (Su) When the keeper of the Yellow Sign stays within 1 mile of an active Yellow Sign for 24 hours, it gains a +2 profane bonus to its Armor Class and a +1 resistance bonus on all saving throws. An active Yellow Sign is either one that was created by Hastur or by the *Yellow Sign* spell (see page 72). If the keeper leaves this range, it loses the bonuses immediately and can regain them only after once more staying within 1 mile of an active Yellow Sign for 24 hours.

A keeper of the Yellow Sign is the undead form of a cultist of Hastur who willingly sacrificed his soul to rise as his god's servant after death. A quiet but relentless champion of the Unspeakable One, a keeper brings anxiety and woe to the lives of any infidel who comes too close to the secrets of its master. Like a vampire, a keeper can easily pass for a living human, if it so wishes, although it tends to have a pale, unhealthy look and a swollen face that can give away its true nature to those who know what to look for. Feeble and sluggish in the sunlight, a keeper can easily be mistaken for a sickly vagrant or even a leper if seen in the open during the day. In the darkness, however, a keeper grows supernaturally strong and attentive, and its eyes glow with a malignant, yellow luminescence.

A keeper's primary purpose is to haunt and persecute unbelievers who witness the Yellow Sign or, worse, have a document or item that bears the dreaded symbol, such as a copy of *The King in Yellow* or another artifact of Hastur's cult. Against these favored victims, the keeper uses *dream* to create a sense of anticipation and awareness of its victim's forthcoming doom. Although a keeper's actions are mainly motivated by a sadistic eagerness to spread pain and misery, the creature can also perform special duties on behalf of a cleric of Hastur, such as slaying her personal enemies or harassing cultists she considers unworthy. These monsters also have an odd, morbid attraction for art in all its forms, favoring bizarre

and decadent creations. Since a keeper's energy drain ability can cause its own destruction, one interested in prolonging its own existence uses its touch attack sparingly. Typically, a keeper switches to touch attacks when it faces heavily armored adversaries otherwise difficult to hit, when it is reduced to half hit points (and therefore already facing destruction), or when it simply feels the urge to "taste" the energy of a victim, usually one with artistic talent (such as anyone who demonstrates particular skill in the areas of Craft or Perform).

ECOLOGY

As undead creatures, keepers of the Yellow Sign do not reproduce, though their existence in a given area can signify the presence of a cult of Hastur. Interacting with such creatures can sometimes influence other followers of the King in Yellow to undergo the transformation ritual and become keepers themselves. Keepers do little to proselytize and do not seek out potential converts to their faith or possible additions to their ranks. Rather, they are singularly focused on preventing evidence or knowledge of Hastur's cult from spreading to unbelievers, pursuing anyone who has seen the Yellow Sign, has an artifact bearing the powerful symbol, or has intimate knowledge of a cult's activities or plans.

A keeper of the Yellow Sign does not need to eat, drink, or breathe, but it nevertheless has an urge to consume the energy of those who show particular talent in the arts. When using its energy draining abilities to sate such a hunger, the keeper typically drops its normally dour demeanor in favor of one of ecstasy and satisfaction, a small hint at Hastur's predilection for decadence and depravity. The keeper generally regains its composure immediately after it is done draining its victim's energy, though in rare cases a keeper might become so enraptured by the experience that it does not stop before its victim dies, thus putting itself in danger of self-destructing as the essence of life drained from its victim overwhelms it.

HABITAT AND SOCIETY

A keeper of the Yellow Sign can be found anywhere there are active cults of Hastur or in ruins where a cult once existed, especially those locations marked by a Yellow Sign. Keepers rarely travel far from the site of their creation, preferring to live

reclusive, solitary existences in nearby communities. They seldom congregate with others of their kind, except when multiple keepers serve the same priest of Hastur. The undead retain their memories of life, and those rare independent keepers that share the company of other keepers often knew one another in life—likely they came from the same cult of the Unspeakable One and took part in the same transformation ritual. Despite this connection, however, even paired keepers yearn to be alone with their despair and insanity-wracked thoughts, coming together only for protection from outside threats or to overpower potential targets that are more powerful than a lone keeper could handle.

In the communities where they reside, keepers are often mistaken for vagrants, mendicants, and diseased beggars. They often sit on unoccupied stoops, on public benches, or in gutters, muttering to themselves for hours on end, all the while watching passersby for indications that their neighbors may have witnessed the

Yellow Sign. When offered charitable help by kind souls who encounter them, keepers of the Yellow Sign typically flee rather than risk giving away their true nature, which leads to the common belief that they are simply mad and either unwilling to receive aid or incapable of accepting it. Other

times, they take on jobs that the general populace deems unsavory or macabre, such as gravedigger or hearse driver. They can observe potential targets from afar in these roles, lurking in cemeteries or churchyards and turning their unnerving gazes on the targets of their ire.

By remaining on the fringes of society, however, a keeper of the Yellow Sign can exist unheeded in a single settlement or region for generations, as most residents pay so little attention to it that they fail to notice that the creature never ages or dies. As such, some keepers are old enough to remember past millennia—yet, they are rarely sane enough or willing enough to recount their knowledge to anyone but the most devout and powerful members of Hastur's faith.



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STAR VAMPIRE

An unnatural tittering issues forth from the fanged maw of this floating mass of talon-tipped tentacles, all as red as freshly spilled blood.

STAR VAMPIRE

CR 6

XP 2,400

CE Large aberration

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent blood; Perception +18

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 8, flat-footed 19 (–1 Dex, +11 natural, –1 size)

hp 67 (9d8+27)

Fort +6, **Ref** +4, **Will** +11

Defensive Abilities amorphous, blood healing, partial invisibility; **DR** 5/slashing

Weaknesses bleed effects

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (perfect)

Melee 3 talons +9 (1d4+4 plus bleed), bite +9 (1d6+4 plus grab)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Special Attacks blood drain (1d2 Constitution), loathsome embrace

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 8, **Con** 16, **Int** 9, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 15

Base Atk +6; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 20

Feats Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Fly +17, Perception +18, Stealth +7

Languages Aklo

SQ compression, flight, no breath

ECOLOGY

Environment any air

Organization solitary, pair, or clot (3–8)

Treasure incidental

Original Source Robert Bloch, “The Shambler from the Stars”

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Blood Healing (Ex) Whenever a star vampire starts its turn within 10 feet of a creature suffering a bleed effect (other than itself or another star vampire), it heals 5 points of damage as minuscule tendrils slither out from its body to leech away the dripping blood with disgusting efficiency.

Flight (Su) A star vampire’s ability to fly is supernatural and doesn’t function in areas where magic doesn’t work. Furthermore, when engorged with blood and thus visible, it takes a –10 penalty on Fly checks.

Loathsome Embrace (Ex) The slithering wet tentacles and suckered tendrils a star vampire uses to feed with and clutch its prey are particularly disgusting to experience. Any creature that is grappled by or that grapples a star vampire must attempt a DC 16 Will save to avoid being nauseated for 1 round. A new Will save is required each round the grapple is maintained, but

once a creature succeeds at its saving throw against a star vampire’s loathsome embrace, it becomes immune to the loathsome embrace of all star vampires for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Partial Invisibility (Su) A star vampire is invisible in its natural state, although the eerie tittering it constantly emits makes locating it easier than normal—treat a star vampire as if it were in combat or speaking for the purposes of Perception checks against it. When a star vampire feeds on blood (either as a result of a successful blood drain attack or by gaining the benefit of its blood healing), it becomes visible, its nauseating appearance laid bare by the blood that infuses its entire being. A star vampire that becomes visible in this manner remains visible until it takes 2 consecutive rounds of bleed damage or 10 minutes pass after it last drained blood or gained the benefit of blood healing.

Scent Blood (Ex) A star vampire has the scent ability against all living creatures that have blood, and it gains a +10 circumstance bonus on Perception checks against creatures currently taking bleed damage.

Weakness to Bleed Effects (Ex) When subjected to a bleed effect, a star vampire suffers wracking pain that leaves it sickened as long as the bleed effect persists. Consumed blood drains rapidly from a star vampire’s body when it is affected by a bleed effect, and after 2 consecutive rounds of bleed damage, a star vampire that had become visible after drinking blood becomes invisible once again.

Star vampires descend upon worlds to feed upon the blood of the living. Naturally invisible, star vampires expose their offensive shapes when they feed, for the blood they gorge upon infuses their bodies with a glistening crimson hue. Tangled masses of writhing feelers surrounding toothy maws, star vampires can extend three long tentacles tipped with talons to lacerate foes, allowing the aberrations to drink the blood from the air with thousands of tiny feeding tendrils.

A star vampire is approximately 10 feet in diameter, yet weighs a mere 300 pounds.

ECOLOGY

Star vampires are effectively immortal and can live forever if not slain through violence, accident, or disease. The bulk of these creatures drift through the vastness of the Dark Tapestry, but without the starflight ability (like that of byakhees; see page 82), thousands or even millions of years can pass before one manages to find a planet where it can descend to feed. Once a star vampire arrives on a planet, it adopts the new world as its personal feeding ground and very rarely, if ever, returns to space.

It is far more common for a star vampire to show up on a world after being conjured from the depths of

space via certain rare spells or rituals. Many of these rites are deliberately ambiguous promises of the aid of a powerful spirit from the depths of space—designed to serve up the unsuspecting occultist as a hungry star vampire's inaugural meal on the new world. The source of these dangerous rituals is unclear, for it is unlike the alien mind of a star vampire to conceive of such tactics. Likely, these treacherous spells were inflicted upon the world by a misanthropic lunatic eager to bring pain and doom upon those foolish enough to attempt to contact alien beings.

Star vampires either have no need or have lost the ability to reproduce, and thus their numbers in the universe are limited, dwindling as individuals perish. Yet, the sheer number of star vampires that drift through space, while spread thin, is vast enough that the vampiric race is in no danger of going extinct any time soon.

The strange noises issued by a star vampire seem to serve no purpose, although they tend to sound like mocking laughter at times. These creatures can speak if they wish (although few know any language other than Aklo), but their voices are wet and slobbery and do not prevent the tittering sounds they emit from continuing—only when feeding do these monsters fall relatively silent.

HABITAT AND SOCIETY

Ancient beyond most worlds, whatever realm first spawned these interstellar predators is long gone, vanished even from the memories of the star vampires themselves, along with any culture or name for themselves they may have once had. Yet, the star vampires do not mourn this loss. They have no need for companionship, no desire to leave a legacy, and no drive to colonize new worlds, for their minds and motivations are as alien as their strange shapes to most planet-bound societies.

Some star vampires grow mightier than the typical specimen presented here, gaining size and Hit Dice with no apparent limit—although when they grow particularly large, they are invariably hunted down and destroyed by great heroes on the worlds they infest. Other star vampires gain class levels to become more powerful, preferring to focus on classes such as oracle, psychic, and rogue, eschewing classes that place too much emphasis on the use of gear or the acquisition of companions. Star vampires with class levels tend to pose more of a threat than those that merely grow in size, for the former often develop all-too-human goals and desires beyond simply feeding. These creatures are fond of forming cults and playing

the role of gods to primitive societies or fanatics who are incapable of discerning the monster from a divine sending. It is rare for a star vampire to worship a deity, but those that do tend to venerate Nyarlathotep, Shub-Niggurath, or Yog-Sothoth.

ORIGINS

The creatures known now as “star vampires” were named such by Sandy Petersen in Chaosium's Call of Cthulhu Roleplaying Game, and they've gone on to drink the blood of countless inquisitive investigators and hapless heroes. The first star vampire noted in print lacked its name, appearing in Robert Bloch's short story, “The Shambler from the Stars,” which the author dedicated to H. P. Lovecraft—after receiving written permission to put Lovecraft into the story and have a monster eat him. Lovecraft returned the favor by having an equally grisly fate await a Bloch-inspired character in the short story, “The Hunter of the Dark.”



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NEXT MONTH

DREAMS OF THE YELLOW KING

By Ron Lundeen

The cult of Hastur no longer threatens Thrushmoor, and now the adventurers discover the final clues needed to crack the enigma of their pasts. Boarding a riverboat to Cassomir, the characters begin researching the manuscripts found in Iris Hill during the previous adventure. From these esoteric tomes, the PCs discover a ritual that allows them to explore the Dreamlands in order to reclaim the parts of their minds they lost and track down their obsessed and corrupted former employer. After completing a number of bizarre and demanding dream quests, the adventurers find their fragmented minds, but they learn a greater threat looms over Golarion. Can they survive the perilous Dreamlands, or will they be stranded in a dimension of nightmares?

SAILING THE SELLEN PASSAGE

By Liz Courts

This gazetteer explores Avistan's greatest river and notes points of interest as the waterway meanders from the

north into the Inner Sea. In addition being a travel guide to the Sellen, this article includes a number of encounters a GM can use to supplement this month's adventure or for any river-going campaign.

AND MORE!

A terrifying journey in the dark in the Pathfinder's Journal by Wendy N. Wagner! Plus, hideous monsters fill a fresh installment in the Strange Aeons Adventure Path bestiary.

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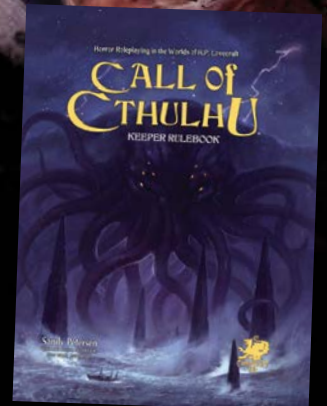
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SHIP OF DREAMS

Once the nightgaunts have driven me to the height of terror in my nightmares, they place me gently on the deck of a ship built of some strange, black material. Though the great dark sails flap, there is no wind. In fact, there is no sea, for the vessel floats through an inky void. The only other person aboard is a curious man swathed in loose robes, cloth covering even his face and hands. He introduces himself as the captain and describes himself as a native of a distant place called Leng. In his strangely accented speech, he offers to show me wonders, and I feel something begin to uncoil in the ship's hold underneath my feet.



FEAR IN THE STREETS

After escaping from the waking nightmare of Briarstone Asylum, the former captives venture to the dismal town of Thrushmoor to unravel the enigma of their lost memories. Upon arrival, the adventurers find that the town's leadership has either fled town or gone missing, and a rash of kidnappings and rumors of the Briarstone Witch spread terror among the townsfolk. As the adventurers investigate the unsettling mysteries, they uncover a secretive cult that plans to use Thrushmoor's ancient monuments to grow its power. Will the heroes discover the secret behind their affliction and find answers in an uninviting town, or will they fall victim to the ruthless villains who want to sacrifice the people of Thrushmoor for some terrible purpose?

This volume of Pathfinder Adventure Path continues the Strange Aeons Adventure Path and includes:

- "The Thrushmoor Terror," a Pathfinder adventure for 4th-level characters, by Tito Leati.
- A gazetteer of the dreary town of Thrushmoor, the setting for the events of this adventure, by Tito Leati.
- A look at the nihilistic cult of the Great Old One Hastur, by James Jacobs.
- Horror on the plains in the Pathfinder's Journal, by Christopher Rowe.
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