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VILLAGE BACKDROP: GREYSTONE





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VILLAGE BACKDROP: GREYSTONE

Civilisation's creeping tendrils did not linger long upon the vertiginous bulk of the Mottled Spire. A century ago, settlers from Languard founded Greystone as a fishing village and rebuilt the shattered ruin of the Shard as a lighthouse and watchtower. However, the harsh weather, isolation and events of a certain terror-filled night doomed their efforts to failure. A nameless aura of fear and decay now hangs over the crumbling, wind-blasted ruins. Seemingly perpetually shrouded in shadow, dark legends cluster thickly about the village. Stories of ghoulish hauntings, a sinister cult and myths of the degenerate, inbred survivors of the original settlers lurking amid the ruins along with the village's isolated position, conspire to keep decent folk away.

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SYSTEM NEUTRAL EDITION

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition Village Backdrop. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are wizards, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we've made no attempt to note their "class" leaving them simply as "female human" and so on.

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GREYSTONE AT A GLANCE

The sharp-pointed hills huddle closely together as the land rises inexorably through the deepening shadows toward the Mottled Spire's looming titanic bulk. Shrieking wind scours the desolate, treeless hilltops and fills the tangle of uncharted steep-sided, rock-strewn valleys cutting through the hills.

Civilisation's creeping tendrils did not linger long in such a hard place. A century ago, settlers from Languard founded Greystone as a fishing village and rebuilt the shattered ruin of the Shard as a lighthouse and watchtower. However, the harsh weather, isolation and events of a certain terror-filled night doomed their efforts to failure.

Now, the decayed ruins of Greystone yet cling to the vertiginous, landward flank of the Mottled Spire and are still visible from Languard's ramparts. Most of the buildings are little more than crumbling facades built over the mouths of the numerous caves riddling the rock. Linked by steep and narrow roads hacked from the Spire's living rock, these homes once sheltered almost 200 souls. Sickly briars and the flotsam of countless winter storms now choke many of the roads rendering them all but impassable—only the nimblest or strongest travellers find the going easy.

A nameless aura of fear and decay hangs over the crumbling, wind-blasted ruins. Seemingly perpetually shrouded in shadow by the Mottled Spire's looming bulk dark legends cluster thickly about the village. Stories of ghoulish hauntings and myths of the degenerate, inbred survivors of the original settlers lurking amid the ruins along with the village's isolated position, conspire to keep decent folk away.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Uljas Alanen
Government Overlord
Population 68 (68 degenerate humans)
Alignments NE
Languages Abyssal, Common

NOTABLE FOLK

Few folk dwell in Greystone anymore; those that do are the degenerate, inbred descendants of the village's original settlers:

Ilari Alanen (location 6; CE male degenerate human ranger 2)
Ilari stalks the Mottled Spire and knows its secret paths well.

Marja Alanen (location 6; NE female degenerate human wizard 4)
Uljas' wife, Marja is even more depraved than her husband.

Uljas Alanen (location 6; NE male degenerate human cleric [Dagon] 3)
The depraved leader of the Dagon cultists, Uljas enjoys sacrificing living victims to his dark god.

Vilho Alanen (location 6; CE male degenerate human fighter 2)
Bloodthirsty and hideous, Vilho loves fighting.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of Greystone comprises nothing but ruined buildings. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **The Docks:** Pummelled by winter storms and hide tides, the docks and their tumbled stone breakwater are battered and cracked.
2. **Hall of the Storm Mistress:** Dedicated to Serat, Mistress of Storms, this ruined building stands hard against the docks.
3. **Shrine of the Father:** The walls of this building still stand proud, but surely they must soon collapse. Fallen rubble hides the entrance to a forgotten crypt.
4. **Forge of the Dead:** A small cave-home at the back of this forge is home to several ravenous ghouls.
5. **Alanen Manor:** This ramshackle manor house hides a bone-filled shrine dedicated to the Shadow in the Sea in its cellar.
6. **The Caves:** Caves honeycomb the rock; Dagon's cultists yet use these as their home.
7. **The Twisted Path:** This precipitous path leads to the Shard.
8. **The Shard:** Destroyed decades ago, at the height of a vicious and prolonged storm of unnatural virility, the Shard juts from the Mottled Spire like a jagged, broken tooth. Occasionally, faint lights are glimpsed in its vicinity.

HISTORY

Born of a foolish, and ultimately doomed, attempt to bring civilisation to the Mottled Spire, Greystone's history is short and cloaked in sorrow, suffering and mystery. The village stood for only 20 years, before disaster overtook its folk.

Almost wholly dependent on traders for fresh vegetables, grain and other staples, the villagers were often malnourished and ill. A shortage of fresh water further exacerbated the villagers' health problems. Rumours, however, placed a strange invisible miasma over the village that made its folk sick with its noxious vapours. Such suffering and depredation created a fertile breeding ground for Dagon's sinister message. By chance, the Alanen's built their manor over an ancient place sacred to the Shadow in the Sea. Discovered when the foundations were laid, the family's patriarch—Armas Alanen—became obsessed with the shrine and quickly fell under its master's fell influence. From then, like a cancer, his worship spread slowly, but surely, through the populace until—in one terrible, bloody night—slaughter was visited on the unbelievers.

The few right-minded survivors of that terrible night fled while the remaining cultists made their homes among the bones of their slain neighbours. With no outside influence working to keep their souls safe from eternal damnation, the cultist' fall was soon complete and they became degenerate, twisted perversions of what they once were.

VILLAGE LORE

Through dint of their personal local knowledge or their efforts to gather information, the PCs likely know some generally accepted facts about Greystone.

- Greystone has been abandoned for decades, after a night of madness and slaughter.
- Although the ruins are visible from Languard, few bother to investigate the fallen village.
- The villagers lived in caves screened by normal building frontages. Passages and tunnels riddle the whole area.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Pale of skin and dirty the folk of Greystone are an ugly, loathsome folk. Inbred, they are aggressive and violent and do not venture out willingly during the day. They avoid contact with others and viciously defend their cavern homes.

Dress Dressed in a patchwork of rags and ripped clothes they wrap their feet in strips of scavenged cloth and leather.

Nomenclature *male* Atro, Jani, Raimo, Valto; *female* Aila, Emmi, Laina, Satu; *family* Aalto, Keto, Outila, Takala.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

The PCs might learn one or more rumours about the ruins of Greystone. If they do, consult the table below to discover what they uncover.

D8	RUMOUR
1*	The spirits of all those who died in the ruins haunt Greystone. It is a cursed place.
2	The nobles of the village—the Alanen—went mad and delved too deeply into ancient, best-forgotten lore.
3*	An invisible miasma hung over the village in the old days. It made the villagers sick; some went mad while others died young.
4	Something large and dangerous lives in Greystone’s harbour. After several fishermen disappeared in the harbour, no one voluntarily docks there anymore.
5	The nearby waters are particularly cold, but teem with fish.
6*	An invisible demon lives in Greystone and whispers maddening thoughts to those sleeping in the ruins.
7*	Expeditions to Greystone always end in disaster.
8	Lord Villamor dreams of re-establishing Greystone as a functioning settlement, but even if the place were made safe no one would voluntarily live there.

*False rumour



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Many of Greystone's buildings are little more than stone facades built across a cave mouth. Most are nothing but the abandoned home of a typical peasant family.

Within, the caves have been improved and expanded to meet the original settlers' needs. Living spaces, kitchens, storage areas and even craftsmen's workshops can all be found cut into the Mottled Spire's living rock. Narrow, rough-hewn tunnels link many of the homes to one another, and these enabled the settlers to move about freely during even the most savage winter storms. (See location 6, for more details).

1: THE DOCKS

A breakwater of jumbled, slick stones protects crumbling and cracked docks. Thick seaweed of unwholesome aspect grows in profusion across the stones and rotting wrecks of long-abandoned fishing vessels.

Crabs—some grown monstrously large on some unknown food source—swarm in the harbour's deeper water; swimmers have disappeared here and few local fishermen put in here even in the face of the worst winter storm. One crab in particular has grown to truly gargantuan proportions and unwary explorers have reported being attacked by veritable swarms of normal-sized crabs driven by some insane hunger.

2: HALL OF THE STORM MISTRESS

Dedicated to Serat, Mistress of Storms (CN goddess of the sea, storms and voyages), the Hall of the Storm Mistress stands close to the docks. At high tide, part of the temple is inundated and it was then her worshippers praised their patron. Now rubble from the collapsed roof chokes the sacred pool and seaweed of an unhealthy hue grows voraciously about the hall.

3: SHRINE OF THE FATHER

Here the followers of Conn, the Father (LN god of Community, Family and Rulership), gathered to pray. This building has suffered extensive damage and is little more than a shell. One of the only freestanding buildings in the village, the shrine's remaining walls stand stark against the gloomy sky. It will likely soon collapse.

A small crypt—its entrance masked by fallen rubble—remains undisturbed. Within lie the remains of several priests, a few magical traps of undimmed potency and the faithful's small store of treasures hidden when madness began to claim the villagers' minds.



4: FORGE OF THE DEAD

This building's crumbling façade masks a deep cave with a high, soot-stained roof. Within, all is dust and decay; the rusting tools of the blacksmith's trade lie forgotten. Several skeletons lie scattered about the chamber; all show signs of violent death.

A small network of caverns behind the main cave comprise the blacksmith's living quarters; protected by a stout, iron bound door set with deep hinges, they yet remain undisturbed. This is fortunate for previous explorers as the blacksmith's family—his wife and three small children—starved to death within and have transformed into ghouls. Tormented by their unending hunger, they savage anyone breaking into their home.

5: ALANEN MANOR

The heavily fortified manor-home of the Alanen family overlooks the village. Built atop a ledge of sorts, it huddles hard between a precipitous drop and a sheer cliff. The only way to access the demesne is through a steep, winding tunnel leading up from the village. At two points along its length, great wooden, iron banded doors warded the tunnel; their hacked and scorched remains now do little to deter interlopers.

The manor house was never a luxury abode and the years since Greystone's fall have not been kind. Its windows—once protected by fragile glass panes—are now open to the elements (with predictable results for the interior). Water damage, along with the actions of previous explorers, the leavings of the bats swarming in the attic and the bloody events of that terrible night years ago have rendered the manor's interior uninhabitable (and dangerous in places).

Occasionally, the degenerate remnants of the Alanen family creep up from their deep tunnels to wander through the ruin of their former greatness to stare up at the peeling, water damaged portraits of their progenitors.

The manor's most horrifying secret, however, lurks in the cellar where hidden deep among the shadows and echoes of an elder age lurks a small shrine dedicated to the Shadow in the Sea. The shrine stands in a cavern discovered when the Alanen sunk the manor's foundations. Here, they prostrate themselves before a huge and unknowably ancient carving of an open octopus eye set high up on one wall. The cavern links to the sea through a submerged tunnel and the smell of salt hangs heavily in the air. Heaps of pale green luminescent seaweed cover the floor, and strangely disfigured, malformed crabs swarm within. Bodies left in this room are flensed to the bone in a matter of hours.

6: THE CAVES

Caves riddle the Mottled Spire. The settlers used these caves for shelter and storage and over the years, connected and improved them so they could move about in even the worst weather. Explorers can easily note the signs of tools in many sections of these caves. The original caves were cut over millennia by streams and the inhabitants used these streams for bathing and fresh water—something in short supply in such a remote, foreboding spot.

The cultists' degenerate descendants dwell in the caves, and jealously guard them against all comers. They number but 68 folk now; few babies survive the rigours of their early years.

The cultists know the caves intimately and use the twisted, confused passageways to their advantage when battling intruders. Numerous pits, tripwires and deadfalls protect the caves and explorers often withdraw from their confines without ever clapping eyes on a cultist.

Notable sections of the caves include:

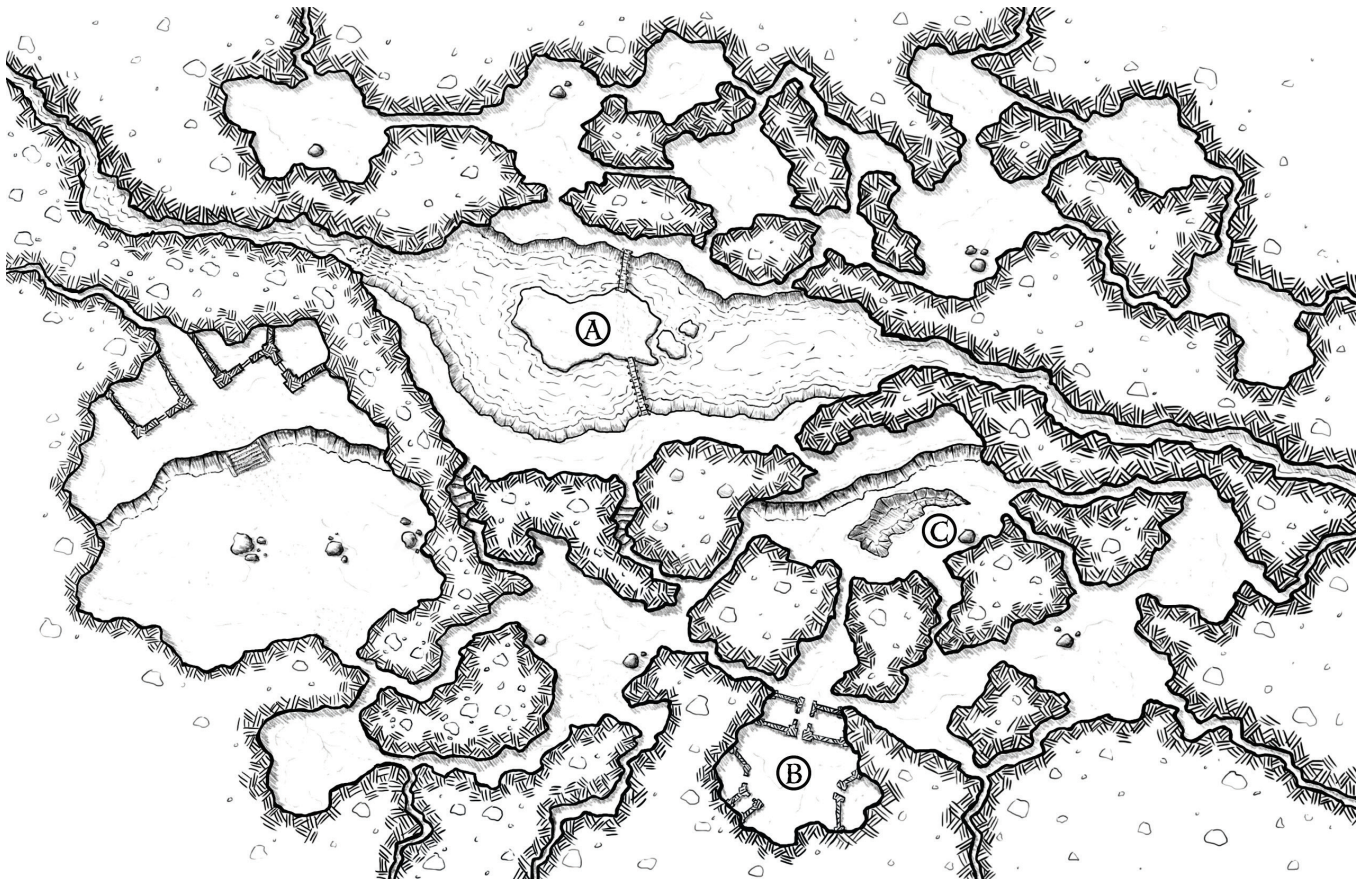
1. **The Shadow Fane:** Set upon a small, low island in the middle of a deep and wide pool, bones choke the surrounding area. Here the cultists venerate their terrible, ancient patron.

2. **Alanen Hall:** After moving underground, the Alanen's claimed this large cavern as their home. It is the most heavily trapped and protected area in the caves. The Alanens brought much of the wealth and possessions here from their manor, and the cavern (strangely) has the feel of a noble's mansion (all be it a mansion fallen into decay and squalor).
3. **The Pit:** Here the cultists incarcerate any travellers falling into their hands. This is a place of despair and death. The Alanens delight in torturing their prisoners. Often those sacrificed in the Shadow Fane have suffered days or weeks of brutalising abuse. Some welcome death, little knowing the torment their souls will face in the Abyss.

7: THE TWISTED PATH

A narrow trail—now all but disused and abandoned—leads from Languard upwards to the Shard. Once used by the villagers to supply and maintain the lighthouse, few now dare this twisted, overgrown pathway.

In places, minor landslides have blocked or partially blocked the route. The path takes a circuitous route up the Mottled Spire's flank following natural clefts in the rock and a riot of vegetation chokes the sheltered sections with thick, cloying bramble bushes.



8: THE SHARD

Destroyed decades ago at the height of a particularly vicious and prolonged storm of unnatural virility, the Shard juts from the Mottled Spire like a jagged, broken tooth. Occasionally, faint lights are glimpsed in its vicinity.

Standing alone upon the highest point of the Mottled Spire, far above the ruins of Greystone, the Shard was once a lighthouse built to warn of the treacherous rocks and shoals lurking in the surrounding waters. However, its history is much older than that of Greystone or even of wall-girdled Languard standing proudly across the bay.

To even the most casual observer it is obvious the Shard's architecture has two distinct styles. The lower — and undeniably older — portions are built in a time-worn cyclopean style. Oddly laid out for a watchtower or lighthouse the design suggests either the original structure was impossibly high—hence the wide, strangely-shaped base—or that two towers once abutted and supported one another. Blasted by wind and rain for centuries, the tower's huge stone blocks are worn. In sheltered places, faint suggestions of unwholesome and strangely disturbing carvings have survived nature's remorseless assault. What they represented or depicted remains a mystery.

On the surviving upper levels, the stonework is more modern and broadly in keeping with that found on the mainland or among the ruins of Greystone. Above the older portions of the ruin, the tower narrows abruptly. In bad repair and riven with great cracks, the upper levels become progressively more unsafe the higher one dares to climb.

Crudely constructed cellars, that roughly follow the path of a meandering natural cavern, lie under the Shard. Filled with sagging support pillars of once prodigious strength, they are of an elder design not conceived by human minds. Here, among the dust and shadows lurked carvings as sharp and detailed as the day they were cut out of the living rock. Something about the carvings so terrified Greystone's settlers that they destroyed all they could find before walling up the cellars so that none may stumble across what they had discovered. Of what they found within, there is no record; it is as if the community decided that what they had discovered was too terrible to commit to paper.

In the deepest part of the cellars, a sinkhole girdled by an ancient, timeworn and precipitous set of steps, descends into the darkness.

THE ILLUSION OF DETAIL

MINOR EVENTS

Use this table, to generate minor events to add atmosphere to the PCs' aboveground explorations.

D%	
1	A sudden gust of wind plucks at the PCs' cloaks.
2	A strong gust of wind blasts in from the sea, throwing spray into the PCs' eyes.
3	A faint clatter of falling rocks reaches the PCs' ears.
4	Thick shadows seem to gather in the doorway of a ramshackle home.
5	The sound of falling rock comes from inside a nearby home.
6	Thick clouds pass across the sun, plunging the ruins into chill shadow.
7	A huge seagull perches on a nearby rock and seems to glare at the party.
8	A huge seagull holds a crab in its beak and repeatedly batters it against the stone.
9	A furtive shadow moves amid the darkness of a ruined cave-home.
10	The cawing of the gulls reaches a maddening crescendo.
11	The wind moans through the ruins, seemingly to give voice to the desolation.
12	One of the PCs becomes convinced unseen eyes are upon the party.

DUNGEON DRESSING

Use this table, to generate details of minor discoveries the PCs make during their explorations.

D%	
1	A bleached skull lies amid a small pile of rubble.
2	Weeds wrapped around a stunted, discoloured bush grows against a tumbled stone wall.
3	Sparse brownish-red moss grows over the stones.
4	Faint carvings of some unidentifiable sigil decorate a large, wind-worn stone set into a home's façade.
5	The scorched bones of a bird lie amid the ash of an old campfire hidden in the lee of a large boulder.
6	Bones woven into a tattered fishing net form a door warding the entrance to a cavern-home. They clatter in the wind.
7	Shards of smashed, rotten wood lie amid rubble.
8	The remains of a crudely woven basket missing its bottom lies wedged among the rocks.
9	The bleached bones of humanoid clad in wisps of coarse fabric lie scattered about.
10	A crude carving of a lidless octopus's eye decorates a large boulder.
11	Seaweed is stretched over some rocks to dry.
12	A spray of brown across the grey rock hints at a terrible event in the past.

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