

SECOND EDITION

PATHFINDER®

SEASON OF GHOSTS

ADVENTURE PATH

To Bloom Below the Web

By Liane Merciel





PATHFINDER

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Chapter 1: Willowshore's Return4

The PCs are free of the time-looped mindscape and have returned Willowshore to the living world. However, their troubles don't end here. The governor's manor, previously trapped in its own mindscape, has returned as well—and something evil lurks within. The PCs must explore the sinister manor while also protecting Willowshore from a group of bandits who have an equally ominous agenda.

Chapter 2: The Princess's Web..... 22

The jorogumo princess Ren Mei Li, intrigued by Willowshore's sudden reappearance and the PCs' potential to become powerful instruments—or even allies—initiates contact with them. Although she's an unsettling benefactor, her help and guidance prove key to understanding and defeating the evil that has begun spilling the blood of innocents in Willowshore—evil that soon manifests as a string of grisly murders.

Chapter 3: A Fiend in Two Worlds..... 40

With Ren Mei Li's help, the PCs learn that the long-dead governor Heh Shan-Bao, whose botched ritual created the cursed mindscape 115 years ago, believes he's destined to become the reincarnated fiend Kugaptee. Worse, his efforts threaten to free the actual Kugaptee, who's poised on the cusp of returning to life. Only by confronting the transformed governor in a final, horrific mindscape of Willowshore, one that gives a glimpse of what life might be like should Kugaptee reincarnate, can the PCs save their home.

MAGO KAI'S FATE

The lumber baron Mago Kai was the previous adventure's primary antagonist, and the PCs confronted him during their journey into the living world as transmigrated spirits. If he was slain, any remaining exorcists, shrine maidens, and mercenaries swiftly abandon Karahai to its villagers, resulting in the situation as presented in this adventure.

It's possible that the PCs negotiated a less violent solution with the lumber baron. In this case, not only might Mago Kai still be alive, he could even still control Karahai and seek to use Willowshore as a base of operations for his logging needs. If Willowshore has miraculously risen from ruins, though, his followers abandon him out of fear, and Mago Kai can, at your discretion, become a bitter rival the PCs will be forced to confront once more.

If the PCs convinced Mago Kai of the danger posed by removing the Tan Sugi or otherwise managed to negotiate fully for Willowshore's safety, he abandons Karahai willingly. His gift to the PCs is to ignore them and their town, setting his sights elsewhere in Shenmen. He isn't a very good person, so the promise of noninterference is about the best one can hope for.

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ADVANCEMENT TRACK

"To Bloom Below the Web" is designed for four characters.

10 The PCs begin this adventure at 10th level.

11 The PCs should be 11th level before they begin seeking the Five-Season Treasures.

12 The PCs should be 12th level before they enter Kugaptee's realm.

The PCs should reach 13th level by the end of the adventure.




Chapter 1: Willowshore's Return

When Governor Heh Shan-Bao failed to bolster the wards keeping Kugaptee imprisoned in his grave, the botched ritual spelled doom not only for the governor, but the entire town and surrounding region. The people of Willowshore perished, only to be reborn in a mindscape of the town in which they were doomed to replay the same awful year again and again for over a century. Heh Shan-Bao became trapped in a much smaller mindscape limited to the town itself, cursed to spend each repeating year attempting to research a way to escape, only to have his progress reset time and time again.

When the heroes of Willowshore make their way into this mindscape and confront him, they find the missing governor to be racked with guilt—guilt that

has caused him to equate himself with Kugaptee, reasoning that since he'd been the source of the town's destruction, wasn't he, in fact, the very thing he'd sought to defeat? Whether the PCs chose to confront him in combat or help him work through his guilt, they emerge from the governor's mindscape armed with the magic they need to bring themselves and Willowshore back to life.

Yet this ritual doesn't save Heh Shan-Bao, for he remains trapped in his own cage, and it isn't long before Kugaptee's influence takes complete control. As the PCs and Willowshore return to life, the mindscape's architecture becomes absorbed by Kugaptee's dead dreams and warps into a sort of alternate reality—a version of Willowshore that could have been, if Heh



Shan-Bao never performed the ritual and instead became a deathless ruler in Kugaptee's thrall. From this final mindscape, Heh Shan-Bao works to create his own bridge back to the living world, and when he completes his task, he begins the work of offering his body for Kugaptee to rise from death—and thus reincarnate the powerful fiend into a nation unprepared for his rebirth.

Getting Started

During the previous adventure, the PCs discovered the full truth of their existence and, at that adventure's climax, performed a *transmigrate* ritual to restore themselves and all of Willowshore to life. This adventure assumes that the PCs performed that ritual successfully, and they waken in the living world at the site where they performed the *transmigrate* ritual—the southern side of Dawnstep Bridge near the newly relit *Eternal Lantern*.

Before starting this adventure, give the PCs time to level up their characters to 10th level. Unlike most opportunities to do so, this time, the PCs have a unique opportunity to completely change their ancestry and select entirely new ancestry feats, for they may have chosen to reincarnate in an entirely new body. A PC who doesn't wish to take advantage of this opportunity can always return in the same body they've occupied for the previous three adventures of Season of Ghosts—a unique choice not normally afforded to those who reincarnate. A PC who chooses to keep their original body can still opt to swap out ancestry feats as they wish, even though their physical form remains unchanged from before.

Regardless of whether the PCs choose a new ancestry, they should all get to select different ancestry feats for 1st, 5th, and 9th level. In addition to being able to choose from feats available to their current ancestry, each PC can opt to select from the new Reincarnated ancestry feats presented in this book's Adventure Toolbox, beginning on page 79.

All of Willowshore's NPCs reincarnate into their own familiar bodies the PCs have come to recognize during the course of the adventure (although if there's a compelling reason for some of them to reincarnate into a different ancestry, feel free to make it so in your game!)

While the *transmigrate* ritual allows the PCs to return to life, the additional effects on the town and its other citizens is contingent on how well they've done up to this point in protecting Willowshore, and it depends on how many Preparation Points they have remaining when the previous adventure came to an end.

DETERMINING WILLOWSHORE'S FATE

While the PCs are leveling up and potentially choosing new ancestries or Reincarnation feats, take a moment to total up all of the Food, Hope, and Security Points Willowshore has remaining at this time to determine Willowshore's total Preparation Points. The number of townsfolk who are brought back to life, as well as the condition of the town, depends on this total of Preparation Points, as detailed below.

If the *transmigrate* ritual was a critical success, increase this total by 12 points.

If Willowshore's population at the time the PCs performed *transmigrate* successfully was at 100 or higher, increase their total Preparation Points by 4.

0 Preparation Points: Only the PCs and the specific NPCs named in this adventure are reincarnated. All other townsfolk remain dead, and their souls move on to the afterlife. Willowshore remains a dilapidated ruin, its buildings uninhabitable without major repair and its fields reclaimed by forest. It isn't possible to Earn Income or obtain ordinary items in town, as everyone who might be traded with is dead.

1 to 4 Preparation Points: The PCs, named NPCs, and 40% of Willowshore's population at the time the *transmigrate* ritual is performed return to the living world. The town's buildings are partially restored but need significant work: many roofs and walls have holes, small animals have made generational homes in pantries and cellars, wells must be cleared of debris, and fields are choked with weeds. The coming year will be grueling, and Willowshore faces an uphill climb to survive. Earn Income opportunities and purchasable goods are limited to level 3 or lower. Grant the PCs 10 XP.

5 to 12 Preparation Points: The PCs, named NPCs, and 80% of Willowshore's remaining population are returned to life. The town returns in decent repair, although there's still some work to be done; its infrastructure appears to have been neglected for a month or two and shows wear accordingly. Though the coming year won't be easy, and families grieve the loss of members who didn't return, Willowshore's people face their challenges with optimistic determination: after all, they've endured an incredible ordeal and are back among the living. Earn Income opportunities and purchasable goods are limited to level 5 or lower. Grant the PCs 60 XP.

13 or more Preparation Points: All of Willowshore's people (including others the PCs might have encountered in the hinterlands, such as Rin's ghost) are restored to life. The town returns in the same condition as the PCs are used to from the previous three adventures. Fields can be planted immediately.

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The people regard their lives as a gift from the gods and greet the future with optimism and humor. Earn Income and purchasable goods are limited by Willowshore's actual level (level 7 at this point). Grant the PCs 120 XP.

WILLOWSHORE

Full details on the town of Willowshore are presented in *The Summer that Never Was*, the first adventure in the Season of Ghosts Adventure Path. A map of Willowshore and its hinterlands appears on the inside front cover of this book. While all of the areas in town and the surroundings that have important roles to play in this adventure are covered extensively in the pages to follow as needed, you'll want to reference the previous adventure for further details—or consult the free *Season of Ghosts Player's Guide* PDF, available at paizo.com, for player-facing, spoiler-free notes on the town and region.

With winter behind them, the PCs can look forward to spring in Willowshore, traditionally the most pleasant of the four seasons, when weather is mild and often sunny and the days grow long. Rain is rare during this adventure.

When this Adventure Path began, Willowshore was a 4th-level settlement, but as the PCs continued to bolster resources and morale, the town began to rebuild and recover, and that recovery continues as this adventure begins. The exact state of the town during this adventure depends on how many Preparation Points it had, but this adventure assumes the PCs did well enough with at least 13 Preparation Points. As a result, Willowshore has returned as a 7th-level settlement, as it was before the Age of Lost Omens began. The map on the inside front cover shows the location of all sites visited in this adventure, but you'll want to refer to the Willowshore gazetteer in the first adventure for full details.

WILLOWSHORE

SETTLEMENT 7

N **TOWN**

Isolated town freed from its cyclic mindscape

Government Appointed governor (town elder)

Population* 224 (73% humans, 6% half-elves, 4% halflings, 4% kitsune, 3% elves, 3% tengu, 2% nagaji, 5% others)

Languages Common (Tien), Elven, Halfling, Minatan, Nagaji, Tengu, Tian-hwa, Tian-min

Religions Abadar, Daikitsu, Lady Nanbyo, Pharasma, Sangpotshi, several others

Threats bandits, malicious spirits, struggling self-sufficiency, supernatural influences

Teeth-Clenching Teamwork Willowshore's residents help one another despite differences. You can attempt to Request help from another Willowshore resident even

if they're indifferent or unfriendly, but do so with a -2 circumstance penalty.

"Granny" Hu Ban-niang (LN female Tian-shu guard) retired imperial guard captain and potential town elder

"Old" Matsuki Shou (NG male Tian-shu family patriarch) retired carpenter and Willowshore's living history and potential town elder

*Adjust this figure as needed to match your game's development.

WILLOWSHORE REPUTATION

Two political factions exist in Willowshore—Southbank (more rural-minded citizens largely focused on self-sufficiency and farming) and Northridge (more urbane citizens largely focused on industry and trade). Rules for building up reputation with the political factions in Willowshore appear in the previous adventure as well as on page 164 of the *Pathfinder Gamemastery Guide*, but as this adventure begins, only one additional opportunity for the PCs to bolster their reputation exists—if the entire town returned to life as a result of having 13 or more Preparation Points, the PCs are automatically revered by both factions.

WAKING IN WILLOWSHORE

On the first day of spring, the PCs awaken near the *Eternal Lantern* on the south end of Dawnstep Bridge. Read or paraphrase the following, then take some time to describe the state of Willowshore, as determined by its Preparation Points.

The world feels subtly but unmistakably different now, as though it had become more finely grained. Motes of dust shimmer in the sunlight, the breeze carries vibrant scent on its wings, and even the ground seems somehow more solid. This is no longer a mindscape. This is true, living reality.

Give the PCs time to look around town, speak with NPCs of note, and generally take in the results of their actions; this time could be used for either celebration or grim preparation, depending on the situation the PCs find themselves in. The town elder approaches the PCs soon enough to congratulate them and thank them for restoring the town to life, or to seek their advice on whether it would be best to abandon the ruins entirely or do what can be done to rebuild.

Even if Willowshore came back fully intact, its citizens won't instantly acclimate to the world. Over a century has passed, after all. Townsfolk who might have had friends or family beyond Willowshore's borders must come to terms with the fact that they've outlived them, and the task of reestablishing trade with Karahai or other towns and villages will be

complicated by the fact that most of those who learn the news of Willowshore's return will initially fear that the PCs and the other townsfolk are vengeful ghosts.

THE ETERNAL LANTERN

With Willowshore's return to the living world, the PCs' spiritual connection to the settlement grows stronger. In the first adventure of *Season of Ghosts*, the PCs relit the town's *Eternal Lantern*, a stationary artifact whose light reputedly keeps evil spirits at bay. Once the PCs bring Willowshore into the living world, the item bonus to skill checks they gain from invoking the *Eternal Lantern* increases to +2.

THE WARDING BELL

In the previous adventure, the PCs had to disable a powerful warding bell that had been installed in the fortress of Karahai. If they managed to avoid destroying the warding bell, then upon their first visit to Karahai in this adventure, the villagers gift the bell to the PCs in thanks for driving out Mago Kai and allowing them to reclaim their homes. If the PCs install the warding bell at any shrine in Willowshore, their spiritual connection to the town grows even stronger, and they gain a +2 item bonus to all skill checks associated with the divine skill of that shrine's deity. By placing the warding bell at a different shrine than the one they use to bless the *Eternal Lantern*, the PCs can gain this item bonus to two different skills.

BEYOND WILLOWSHORE

This adventure marks the first time the PCs will be able to travel beyond the borders that once defined their world when they were trapped in the Willowshore mindscape. Initially, the information the PCs have about the world beyond the Willowshore hinterlands is just over a century outdated. The process of learning more about the modern world and securing Willowshore's place is covered in Chapter 2 of this adventure, but in the meantime, you can share the following information with the PCs about what lies beyond the Willowshore hinterlands. This information is also provided in the *Season of Ghosts Player's Guide*, but without the updates in parentheses, which indicate more modern information about what lies down each of the roads leading out of the Willowshore region.

Northwest Trail: This old overgrown trail leads off into the forest; most folks believe it leads to a long-abandoned shrine, but few travel this remote path today. (This trail does indeed lead to a shrine—the Whisperweb Shrine, which the PCs visit in Chapter 2.)

Central Northern Road: This partially eroded road winds through several fields that have gone fallow amid the ruins of a village that was abandoned many years ago, then eventually comes to an end at a large wetland known as Moon Marsh for the way the orange, night-blooming flowers that grow there shine under the moonlight. (Today, these ruins are completely overgrown unless the PCs reclaimed the farmland during the first adventure, and Moon Marsh has largely been forgotten by Karahai's locals due to its remote location. The PCs visit Moon Marsh in Chapter 2.)

Eastern Northern Road: This road connects Willowshore with numerous small villages and towns scattered throughout Specterwood, and eventually finds its way to the Gossamer Mountains. The next closest settlement down this road is Foxhollow, but it's three days' travel and even smaller than Willowshore. (The PCs might use this road to make a journey to the Gossamer Mountains in Chapter 2; the settlements along this road have all become abandoned ghost towns in the modern era.)

Northeastern Road: This road leads to a recently established farmstead on a bluff overlooking the Sea of Ghosts, a cattle ranch owned by a notoriously ruthless expatriate politician from the city of Sze. (The farmstead has been abandoned for decades and the politician is long gone; the road leading there is overgrown, while the farmstead now serves as the hideout for the Silkwasps—see The Silkwasps Camp on page 19.)

Eastern Road: This road leads to the trade fortress of Karahai and represents Willowshore's major economic link to the rest of Shenmen. (The route includes a destroyed bridge the PCs must repair to help Willowshore get back on its feet; see Rebuilding the Bridge on page 15.)

Southern Road: The southern road out of the region is a long overland route that eventually connects to better maintained roads and more populous villages and towns several days' travel to the south, but most in Willowshore call it the "Apple Road," as it leads to a grove of wild apple trees that produce particularly delicious fruit every fall. (Today, this road is in ill repair and overgrown; the PCs visit the apple grove during Chapter 2.)

SILVER COLLARS

Those who the Shenmen jorogumo choose as allies, minions, or even pets are granted the right to wear special silver collars. The PCs might have earned some collars in the previous adventure—a jorogumo's silver collar is a non-magical treasure worth 50 gp. If the



Eternal Lantern

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PCs didn't learn about the collars in the previous adventure, then the collars should be one of the earliest things they learn about when speaking with anyone from modern Shenmen, such as anyone they talk to at Karahai, for these collars allow one to travel freely in Shenmen, grant permission to read and write, and provide the legal right to engage in trade with those outside of Shenmen.

Traditionally, one is expected to visibly wear a silver collar since you never know if you're talking to a jorogumo or one of their agents, but quickly displaying a collar carried on your person when confronted by a jorogumo is usually enough to avoid their wrath if you get caught traveling, reading, writing, or trading with those beyond Shenmen's borders.

The Governor's Manor

Whether the PCs take note of it on their own or they're informed of the development when the town elder first approaches the PCs, they can't possibly ignore the return of Governor Heh Shan-Bao's mansion to its spot just northeast of downtown Willowshore—nor

the strange sensations of being unwelcome that chill the soul of anyone who approaches. Regardless of the state of the rest of Willowshore, the governor's manor returns in a state of ruin, its walls overgrown with fungi and vines and its roof sagging. No one in town dares approach the manor—even if the PCs didn't share the governor's role in Willowshore's death with the town, the locals rightfully fear the manor's eerie return and unsettling appearance. If the PCs don't take it upon themselves to investigate the manor, the town elder surely requests they do so before their first day back alive has reached twilight.

In fact, there are two versions of the governor's manor. The one that currently exists in Willowshore is a crumbling ruin, inhabited by monsters drawn from Kugaptee's will and avoided by the townspeople. This version of the manor might present a minor danger to the town over time if the creatures that now dwell within receive enough time to adjust and emerge from the ruins. The second version remains inaccessible and likely even unguessed at by the PCs at this time until it's unlocked by the *Fang and Key* (see Chapter 2).

Even without knowing that monsters have manifested along with the dilapidated mansion, Willowshore's townsfolk believe it's illegal to break into the place without a proper mandate, not only under the law of fallen Lung Wa, but that of the Heavenly Court.

Since the governor didn't return with the rest of Willowshore, custom demands that those who wish to enter should obtain an authorization pass, or equivalent, from a government entity of sufficient rank. If the town elder approaches the PC, the elder grants this pass to them as part of the request to investigate the building, but if the PCs decide to investigate on their own, they recall this important step with a successful DC 20 Society check to Recall Knowledge. Without being issued this pass, the lingering power infusing the ruined manor becomes slightly more potent against the PCs, increasing the Stealth, Disable, and saving throw DCs of all hazards associated with the manor by 2.

MANOR FEATURES

The PCs visited an intact version of the governor's manor during the previous adventure, so they might already be familiar with some or all of its architectural layout. Originally built from exquisite materials, the building now appears to be badly damaged by time and neglect. Outer walls, support beams, and floors are all crafted of fine wood, with tile and painted accents on the exterior, and interior accents in ornately worked silver. Interior walls were once made of latticed paper, but they've almost entirely been destroyed by vermin and weather, leaving only the delicate, empty frames. The surviving decor leans heavily on themes and designs popular in late Imperial Lung Wa: dragons, phoenixes, and mythical references to past emperors and their exploits.

The interior is unlit. During daylight hours, enough natural light streams in through the windows and gaps in the roofs that the mansion can be considered dimly lit. At night, it's dark.

APPROACHING THE MANOR TRIVIAL 10

Even by daylight, the abandoned governor's manor is a foreboding place. The unnatural chill that lingers in the hallways seems almost to seep into the surrounding grounds. Tattered tapestries whisper when no wind is present, portraits of past governors are faded to an eerie facelessness while their regalia remains bright and crisp, and beaten silver mirrors are all tarnished with odd, looping patterns, as if

viscous ink had been poured repeatedly over their faces and had dried in overlapping spills.

The PCs can approach the manor however they wish. Approaching the front door with their pass in view is the safest. While the external walls remain solid and offer no passage, a character can Climb them with a successful DC 20 Athletics check. PCs with flight can enter the manor from above into area A2, or they can Squeeze through holes in the roof with a successful DC 25 Acrobatics check to enter areas A3–A7. PCs can enter the holes leading into area A4 without needing to Squeeze at all. No holes allow access into area A8.

Hazard: Regardless of the route the PCs take on their approach, the strange aura that surrounds the manor seeks to repel them.

UNWELCOMING FACADE

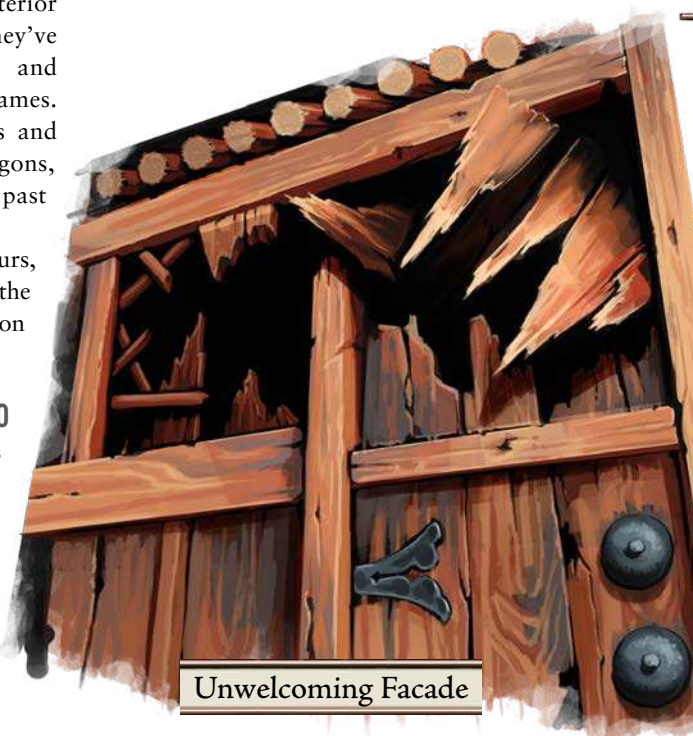
HAZARD 10

UNIQUE HAUNT

Stealth DC 32 (master)

Description An unsettling wave of malice and sinister energy ripples invisibly out from the manor, causing those who view the building to see a leering, evil face glaring at them from the structure's architecture.

Disable DC 32 Occultism or Religion to exorcise the haunt, DC 35 Society to approach the manor in a proper way that defers to its occupant's symbolic standing in the community; displaying an official pass that legally grants permission to enter the building reduces both of these DCs by 5 (provided the PCs approach the front door and not from another direction).



Unwelcoming Facade

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Horrifying Vision (emotion, enchantment, fear, mental, occult) **Trigger** A Small or larger creature approaches within 30 feet of the house's exterior; **Effect**

A wave of malice fills the minds of all living creatures outside of the manor within 60 feet with overwhelming fear; each creature must attempt a DC 29 Will save.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected and is temporarily immune to Horrifying Vision for 24 hours. In addition to this temporary immunity, the creature can attempt a DC 23 Occultism or Religion check as a free action to notice that despite there being only one face in the facade, several spiritual echoes seem to infuse the building. On a critical success, the creature realizes that only the most powerful force infusing the manor is evil and that the other elements are non-hostile spirits who are overwhelmed and trapped by that singular force.

Success The creature experiences a brief vision of the manor's facade twisting into an immense, horrific face and becomes frightened 1. The creature can attempt the same Occultism or Religion check as above, but the DC increases to 33.

Failure As failure, but the creature becomes frightened 2 and is fleeing for as long as it remains frightened. The creature can attempt the Occultism or Religion check to Recall Knowledge normally (DC 33).

Critical Failure As failure, but the creature can't reduce its frightened condition below 1 for 1 minute. In addition, the overwhelming fear causes the creature to become stupefied 1; this condition persists until it's cured magically or the hazard is disabled.

Reset The unwelcoming facade resets immediately if not disabled and can be triggered again the very next round.

A1. MANOR ENTRANCE

The temperature drops enough to frost breath within this ruined entrance. Moldering mats lie on the stained wood floor. The walls are overgrown with patches of fungi and coiling moist vines. A thick curtain of vines hangs over the roof to the north, forming a wall of dripping vegetation that blocks the view into the courtyard.

The floor in this manor is warped and creaks when stepped on. Anyone who isn't trying to be stealthy automatically makes enough noise to alert the occupants of area A2. Attempts to Sneak in this

room suffer a -4 circumstance penalty if the sneaking creature is walking on the floor.

A2. COURTYARD

LOW 10



Hungry Ghost

This formerly elegant courtyard once featured sparkling pools of water, a rock garden fountain, and artfully arranged foliage, but it has since decayed into a swampy, overgrown mess. Fungi and mold grow through much of the dilapidated foliage, the water is thick with algae to the consistency of pudding, and sheets of moist vines hanging down from the roof obscure all exits into the surrounding building.

Even the sky above seems sickly and gray, deeply overcast like a day from winter rather than spring.

This courtyard should seem vaguely familiar to the PCs, as they visited a cleaner version of it during the previous adventure. Today, the place looks like it has been left to rot and decay for decades. The strange appearance of the sky is all part of the manor's eerie supernatural influence—if a flying PC moves above the manor's roofline beyond a height of 20 feet, the sky reverts to Willowshore's actual spring weather.

Creatures: Kugaptee's influence has transformed two particularly large mounds of fungal matter in the courtyard into dangerous monsters—a pair of drakauthixes. One of these creatures lies in the southwestern portion of the courtyard, while the other lurks to the northeast. If they hear anyone moving about in area A1, they'll Sneak toward the area so that their 30-foot-long tendrils can attack from ambush as soon as anyone enters the courtyard from there; the creatures use Stealth to roll Initiative, but they'll roll Perception if intruders approach from above.

DRAKAUTHIXES (2)

CREATURE 10


Pathfinder Bestiary 129

Initiative Perception or Stealth +17

A3. SERVANTS' QUARTERS

LOW 8

Moldering fulus once hung from several of the walls in these servants' quarters, but now, only fluttering tatters remain amid deep claw marks in the walls. Bunk beds, dressers, chairs, and other furnishings lie in crumbling heaps on the floor, tangled amid the scattered bones of several human skeletons.



These chambers once housed the governor's small staff of servants, but when his ritual went bad, the four servants who slept here perished in their beds; the bones in this room are their remains.

Close inspection of the ruined fulus shows that they were torn off the posts by swipes of a large, clawed hand that left gouges in the wood beneath, and in one spot, a distinctive-looking claw with a bit of leathery flesh still attached remains lodged in the wood. A PC who examines the gouges and claw can identify the source as the talon of an akashti nindoru with a successful DC 29 Religion check to Recall Knowledge—the akashti in question now dwells in the master bedroom (area A8).

Area A3a is a small lounge for the servants that contains nothing of interest.

Creatures: When the servants perished, their souls became trapped in Heh Shan-Bao's mindscape, yet it isn't until the manor returns to the living world in this state that those trapped souls, after spending over a century in limbo, manifest as undead. The four exist now as hungry ghosts, and they rise up from their bones in the form of shimmering red ghostly skeletons that quickly attack anyone who intrudes upon their lair. They'll pursue foes relentlessly through the manor, but not outside; if destroyed, these hungry ghosts rejuvenate unless the manor is cleansed (see Chapter 2).

ELITE HUNGRY GHOSTS (4) CREATURE 7

Pathfinder Book of the Dead 100, *Pathfinder Bestiary* 6

Initiative Perception +15

Treasure: While all of the fulus on the walls of this room have long since been destroyed, a trio of *Talijae tassels* (page 74) still hang from one of the bunk bed posts in area A3b, while to the east, a *darkwood batsbreath cane* (*Pathfinder Treasure Vault* 107) lies on the floor of the restroom off of area A3c.

A4. MEETING AREA LOW 10

This expansive room formerly hosted two long, elegant meeting tables surrounded by comfortable low chairs, with sideboards capable of displaying all manner of tea and snack services. Today, the furniture within this chamber lies in ruins. The ceiling above features several large holes that reveal the leaden sky above. An unassuming woodcutter's axe with a cold iron blade hangs on the southern wall in a partially collapsed display.

Hazard: The ceiling isn't the only part of this room that's in terrible repair—the floor is about to give way,

LOOTING THE MANOR

A fair amount of treasure awaits discovery in the governor's manor, but some PCs might have qualms about claiming it for themselves, reasoning that these items belong to the town's governor and, in his absence, should revert to Willowshore. The town elder has none of it if they're asked, noting that the PCs have done so much to save Willowshore without recompense. They then give their full blessing for the PCs to keep any found wealth or magic items—even going so far as to encourage the PCs to scour the manor for resources and gear. The town elder also notes that what the PCs can discover within is likely of greater value than anything the villagers of Willowshore can give them as rewards for their service.

weakened from below by a large swath of dangerous mold and fungi that seems to have eaten away at the support for years.


WEAKENED FLOOR HAZARD 11

UNIQUE COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTAL

Stealth +23 (master)

Description The weakened floor gives way with a tremendous crash, dropping everything in the room into a muddy morass of toxic mold.

Disable DC 33 Crafting (master) three times to knock holes in the floor without triggering the spore cloud while simultaneously lightening the strain on the floor so it can be walked upon, DC 36 Stealth (expert) to move carefully through the room for the remainder of your turn without triggering the hazard, or DC 36 Nature (expert) twice once the trap is triggered to knock enough holes into the nearby walls to cause the spores to disperse

Collapse Floor  **Trigger** A round begins with a Small or larger creature standing on the floor in area A4; **Effect** The floor of the entire room collapses in a thunderous crash, dropping all creatures in the room 5 feet into a soupy morass of mud, mold, and toxic fungus while a cloud of spores spews up into the air above. The room becomes greater difficult terrain. All creatures who were standing on the floor in the room fall prone in the mess below unless they succeed at a DC 34 Reflex save, in which case they land on their feet. The hazard then rolls initiative.

Routine (1 action) Every round on its turn, the spores that now fill area A4 inflict 8d6 poison damage to all creatures in the room (DC 30 basic Fortitude save) as the cloud

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burns at exposed flesh; a creature that holds its breath gains a +4 circumstance bonus to this saving throw.

Reset One minute after nothing moves in the room, the spores settle down. The floor remains obvious and won't collapse further, but any creature that moves through the mold causes the spores to plume up again, re-triggering the trap.

Treasure: The *lumber lord's axe* (page 76) on display was a gift given to the governor soon after his arrival in town from a lumber consortium (which has long since gone out of business) eager to earn his favor.

A5. GUEST QUARTERS

LOW 10

This suite of guest quarters all feature decor in a similar state of disarray; you can use the following read-aloud text for all three, but adjust each description as needed to account for the differing size of each chamber (and omitting the final sentence for areas A5b and A5c, which lack bodies).

This once-elegant bedroom used to feature all the comforts a traveling aristocrat expected, but now, the furniture is in disrepair. A musty stink lingers in the air, and a pair of skeletal remains clad in rotting vestments lie sprawled on the ruined beds.

Areas A5b and A5c were vacant at the time of Governor Heh's botched ritual, but the largest suite (area A5a) was occupied at the time by a pair of holy practitioners who studied at the renowned Senhang Monastery of Tianjing—a duo the governor had called upon for aid in the development of his ritual. The two priests knew Governor Heh was preparing to go ahead with the ritual despite their concern it wasn't quite ready to be performed, but they didn't expect him to forge ahead without them. They perished in this chamber when his attempt to bolster the Tan Sugi tree failed.

The skeletons on the beds are the priests' physical remains; a PC who studies them and succeeds at a DC 22 Religion check to Recall Knowledge recognizes the robes as those worn by priests of the Senhang Monastery of Tianjing, and with a critical success, they also note these particular robes were worn by priests who specialized in ritual magic.

Creatures: The spirits of the two priests grew corrupted and horrific, both as a result of their deaths so close to where Governor Heh failed his ritual and their own regrets. They now continue on as hateful undead, appearing as ghostly versions of themselves save that their robes constantly appear to drift apart in flocks of red butterflies that, in turn, drift away

into smoke. These two incorporeal undead function as Medium-sized dread wraiths, but other than having no reach with their melee Strikes (which deal mental damage rather than negative damage), the two function as the typical dread wraith. They lurk inside the beds below their bodies before rising up, rolling Stealth for initiative as soon as anyone approaches their remains. They fight until destroyed and pursue foes throughout the manor.

VARIANT DREAD WRAITHS (2)

CREATURE 9

RARE CE MEDIUM INCORPOREAL UNDEAD WRAITH

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 298

Initiative Stealth +19

Melee ♦ spectral hand +21 (finesse); **Damage** 2d10+7 mental plus drain life

Treasure: A PC who conducts a 10-minute Search of area A5a finds stumps of partially burned Tian-Jing incense cones in brass holders beneath the windows, and a single cracked crystal is clutched in the fist of one of the skeletons. A PC who succeeds at a DC 30 check to Identify Magic on the held crystal identifies it as a destroyed *skyfang crystal*, a magical item used to ward against fiends and undead; this crystal was ruined by a potent force beyond its power to shelter against and is now merely a curiosity worth 5 gp. The other skeleton still wears a *moonsilver necklace* (page 78) around its bony neck.

A6. DINING AREA

Mildew and water stains drip down the kitchen's walls in long, swelling streaks that ruin the plasterwork. The main room features a moldering seating area for eating, while to the north, a pair of ancient stoves rest in a side room.

Treasure: Area A6a has little of interest within it, but the kitchen (area A6b) includes a high shelf on which several valuable bottles of rice wine and liquor were stored. There are a dozen bottles in all: 10 of them are worth 50 gp each, while the eleventh bottle contains a dose of *ascendant dragon spirit* (page 74) and the twelfth contains a dose of *vengeful demon's tears* (page 74).

A7. STORAGE ROOMS

Most of the contents of these storage rooms appear to have crumbled and decayed into ruin. Crates have broken open as wooden slats decayed, spilling moldering contents over the floor, and empty barrels are surrounded by old stains caused by the leakage of their contents over the years.

Treasure: While one of these storage rooms has nothing of value, the others each contain useful treasures. A PC Searching area **A7b** for 10 minutes turns up a wooden box containing six energizing pills (page 73); a PC who conducts a 10-minute Search of area **A7c**, and who succeeds at a DC 28 Perception check, reveals a *lacquered waist drum* (page 77) that fell behind a set of shelves into a hollow space through a hole in the floor.

A8. PRIMARY SUITE

MODERATE 10

The entrances to this room are kept closed—the only doors in the manor that still function. Any PC who steps up to either closed door hears the soft sound of a man chanting quietly in the room beyond.

The manor's primary bedroom, as with the rest of the building, is in poor repair, but here at least the ceiling seems to have held up, resulting in a chamber that hasn't been colonized by fungi and creeping vines. Nonetheless, the furniture lies in rubble, and a musty stink fills the air. Dozens of candles and sticks of incense burn in a circle in the middle of the room, as if a ritual were in progress here.

In this room, Heh Shan-Bao attempted the ill-advised ritual to bolster the Tan Sugi, only for it to backfire and destroy Willowshore—any PC who studies the room for a few moments and succeeds at a DC 20 Occultism or Religion check to Recall Knowledge realizes this detail, and with a critical success, the rushed nature of the ritual is apparent.

Creatures: The source of the soft sound of chanting comes not from the silent human figure kneeling before the candles and incense, but instead from a thick clinging mass of red butterflies that cling to the ceiling above his head. The mass's chanting can now be made out as a repetition of a prayer to Kugaptee.

"I offer thee my name, Great Kugaptee! Unbind me from those whom I called friends.

"I offer thee my blood, Great Kugaptee! Unbind me from those whom I called family.

"I offer thee my flesh, Great Kugaptee! Unbind me from the body I called my own.

"I offer thee my soul, Great Kugaptee! Unbind me from that which was my fate."

The man kneeling on the floor appears to be none other than Heh Shan-Bao, alive and healthy. As the PCs enter, he rises to his feet and turns to greet them, thanking them for seeking him out and apologizing for failing to protect the town. He asks to be escorted out of his manor so he can meet the new governor of

Willowshore (the town elder) to let them know he's ready to return to his duties.

Of course, this figure isn't the real Heh Shan-Bao, but in fact a nindoru wearing a manifested suit of flesh that appears to be him. If the PCs agree to the false governor's request, upon being brought before the town elder, he says, "Thank you for caring for my town while I was away, but now, your duties are at an end. Great Kugaptee shall rule where you once ruled!" He then casts *illusory creature* to create a shadowy, multi-armed, many-headed incarnation of the powerful nindoru in an attempt to kill the town elder and any PCs present.

Hopefully, the PCs don't fall for the ruse. If they see through his lies (even if they don't at first, the fact that this version of Heh Shan-Bao has never met them before



False Governor

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RETURNING TO KARAHAI

The village of Karahai is small, but it serves a vitally important role to Willowshore: it connects Willowshore to trade routes all along the coast of the Sea of Ghosts. Until Karahai Bridge is repaired, Willowshore's food and supplies will remain sparse, and the town won't be able to begin to fully reintegrate into modern Shenmen.

Once Shinzo pays his last visit to Willowshore, trade contacts at Karahai become the new default assumption for the PCs to acquire new items; while the village is only a level 3 settlement now, it will grow over time now that Willowshore is back among the living. The PCs can place orders for items of up to level 11 at Karahai, but it takes a week for these requested items to be shipped in from other locations, such as the city of Sze.

In the previous adventure, lumber lord Mago Kai ran Karahai, but this adventure assumes he was defeated. See the sidebar Mago Kai's Fate on page 3 if this isn't the case in your game.

and thus has no recollection of anything they spoke of in the previous adventure should clue them in), refuse to escort him, or simply attack, the false governor hisses in anger and says, "You'll do just as well for Kugaptee's inaugural meal!" He then attacks in turn. Once the combat begins, the nindoru uses his spells in battle until his body takes enough damage to shed its flesh. At this point, he uses Stunning Despair before continuing the fight with a mix of spells and claw Strikes. He fights to the death, pursuing foes through the manor or even beyond into Willowshore proper.

If the ghosts in area A3 and the wraiths in area A5 haven't yet been defeated, they hear the false governor's Stunning Despair and swiftly leave those rooms to come here and join the nindoru in combat against the PCs.

FALSE GOVERNOR

CREATURE 12

RARE CE MEDIUM FIEND NINDORU

Variant akashti nindoru (*Pathfinder #198: No Breath to Cry* 82)

Perception +22; darkvision

Languages Aklo, Common, Necril

Skills Deception +25 (+29 Impersonating Governor Heh Shan-Bao), Diplomacy +23, Occultism +22, Society +22, Stealth +24

Str +7, **Dex** +6, **Con** +4, **Int** +4, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +7

AC 32; **Fort** +20, **Ref** +24, **Will** +22

HP 220; **Immune** death effects; **Weaknesses** silver 15; **Resistances** negative 15

Soul Shred As *argyrzei* (page 84), but DC 36.

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ claw +24 (agile, finesse, magical), **Damage** 3d4+14 slashing plus 1d6 mental

Occult Innate Spells DC 32, attack +24; **6th** *illusory creature*, *phantasmal calamity*; **5th** *crushing despair*, *phantom pain*; **4th** *glibness*, *talking corpse*; **2nd** *item facade*; **Cantrips** (6th) *daze*, *ghost sound*, *message*

Manifest Body (concentrate, conjuration, occult)

Frequency once per day; **Effect** The false governor has manifested a hollow humanoid body around their slender skeletal frame that looks identical to that of Governor Heh Shan-Bao. While wearing this manifested body, the false governor loses their claw Strike, and their voice sounds like that of Heh Shan-Bao's. The false governor's manifested body decays swiftly if they don't take 10 minutes once per day to maintain the manifestation of the false flesh. The body has 10 Hit Points and the same defenses as the false governor. When the body is destroyed, the false governor emerges unharmed, and the fleshy shell left behind scatters into a cloud of red butterflies that swiftly fade into red mist. This emergence is so grisly and unsettling that all creatures within 30 feet who witness it must attempt a DC 29 Fortitude save or become sickened 2 (sickened 3 on a critical failure); this has the mental and visual traits.

Stunning Despair ♦♦ (auditory, enchantment, incapacitation mental, occult) The false governor unleashes several overwhelming sobs of despair. Creatures within 30 feet must attempt a DC 29 Will save to avoid becoming stunned 1 (stunned 3 on a critical failure). The false governor can't use Stunning Despair again for 1d4 rounds.

Treasure: A character who Searches the ruined rooms for 10 minutes turns up several objects of value, including a dented red-and-gold chamber pot worth 150 gp, a gold-rimmed monocle worth 100 gp lying amid a shattered nightstand, a *fan of falling words* (page 76) stored in a cherry wood case decorated with images of fish worth 90 gp, and a wooden potion holder carved to look like a coiled dragon worth 50 gp that currently holds the following: a *panaceatic salve* (page 74), a *potion of quickness*, and a *greater healing potion*.

Reward: With the death of the false governor, Kugaptee's hold over the ruins vanishes instantly. The manor remains in shambles, but the Unwelcoming Facade and the undead in areas A3 and A5 vanish immediately. Grant the PCs XP as if they'd defeated these encounters if they haven't done so already, and then grant them an additional 80 XP for allowing those trapped souls to move on to the afterlife.



Reporting to the Town Elder

Once the PCs defeat the nindoru infesting the ruined manor, work on repairing and rebuilding the structure can begin. The PCs don't need to be directly involved in these efforts—the town elder thanks them for once again coming to Willowshore's aid and encourages the PCs to keep any treasure they found in the manor (see the sidebar on page 11), then asks them to travel east to Karahai at their earliest convenience to make contact with the villagers there and begin the process of reintegrating Willowshore back into the living world.

Shinzo's Farewell

A few days after the PCs awaken in Willowshore, the shinigami merchant Shinzo arrives one last time to bid them farewell and congratulate them on restoring the town to the living world. As they've now returned to the natural cycle, the time has come for him to move on. The shinigami likely doesn't reveal his true form to the PCs, even though he admitted what he was to them in the previous adventure; instead, he notes, "I have come to know you as you know me, and for us, this form is what is truth now." He may reveal his true shape to curious PCs for a moment, but never in public, knowing full well that his appearance could spark an unintended panic.

This meeting is the PCs' final opportunity to purchase items from Shinzo's store. If you wish to introduce any new magic items that the PCs missed the chance to acquire from previous adventures, having these items (within reason) be available for sale gives the PCs one last chance to gain access to them.

Just before he leaves, Shinzo does have some final parting gifts—a *phoenix fulu holder* (page 78), along with four fulus: an *anathema fulu* (*Treasure Vault* 76), a *needle thousand-pains fulu* (*Treasure Vault* 79), a *rebound fulu* (*Pathfinder Secrets of Magic* 160), and a *greater spirit-sealing fulu* (*Secrets of Magic* 160). Afterward, he and his psychopomp companion fade from view, perhaps leaving the PCs curious as to why he bothered to help them at all.

If you're interested in exploring Shinzo's story further, additional notes about his motivations and fate are detailed in Continuing the Campaign starting on page 62.

Bridges and Bandits

Although Willowshore has been restored, the area beyond the village remains in disrepair. The most pressing problem is that Karahai Bridge, which connects the Willowshore hinterlands to the coastline and the fortress village of Karahai, was destroyed

decades ago by mudslides. As the PCs learned in the previous adventure, Mago Kai patched together a temporary replacement, but his rope-and-board construction was never meant to be permanent and won't withstand heavy loads.

All that currently remains of the original bridge that once connected Willowshore to the lumber markets of Shenmen are six of the eight massive wooden supports that used to hold the bridge aloft over the gorge. The two supports that once stood to the southwest were destroyed by the mudslide, which caused the rest of the wooden bridge's planks to tumble into the water and float away to the north, downstream and out to sea.

A set of five enormous planks has been placed across the southern pilings, held in place by supports and ropes; while the 5-foot-wide temporary bridge looks treacherous, it's actually solidly built, as a PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Engineering Lore or Crafting check to Recall Knowledge can confirm. A PC can cross the bridge safely by Striding; the numerous ropes give handholds, and the planks are heavy and stable. However, any action that includes violent or defensive motion (including all actions with the Attack trait) that results in a critical failure causes that PC on the plank bridge to fall 30 feet and into the 20-foot-deep water below (a falling PC can Grab the Edge by succeeding at a DC 20 Reflex save). It's a DC 30 Athletics check to Climb the gorge walls (or a DC 10 Athletics check to Climb along the steeply sloped old mudslide), and a DC 15 Athletics check to Swim in the river. The planks are wide enough to lead or even ride a Large mount across them, as long as the mount treats the planks as difficult terrain and a PC succeeds at a DC 25 Nature check to Command the Animal with each Stride their mount takes.

The PCs can visit Karahai again as soon as they wish (see the Returning to Karahai sidebar on page 14), but until the bridge is repaired, Willowshore remains cut off from its most important trade partner.

REBUILDING THE BRIDGE

Fully rebuilding Karahai Bridge takes several weeks. While the work doesn't require a PC to be on-site to progress or even to begin, a PC can significantly impact the project by spending 3 days of downtime to draw up plans, survey the site, and gather up a group of talented workers to rebuild the bridge. If the PCs don't get involved, Willowshore's town elder takes on the task, and the Rebuild Karahai Bridge activity on page 16 automatically gets a failure result. Other PCs can Aid the primary PC's roll to Rebuild Karahai Bridge.

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KARAHAI BRIDGE

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

Once Karahai Bridge is rebuilt, Willowshore can officially begin the process of trading with Karahai. Doing so has repercussions on some of the events that take place later in this adventure, as noted in the text.

REBUILD KARAHAI BRIDGE

DOWNTIME **MANIPULATE**

You create a plan for rebuilding Karahai Bridge and recruit a team to enact that plan over the course of 3 days. Attempt a DC 25 Engineering Lore check, a DC 27 Crafting check, or a DC 29 Society check; other PCs can Aid this check with any of those skills by spending the same amount of downtime providing that assistance. If a PC has access to spells or other magic effects that the GM decides could be of significant aid to the process, and that PC spends their downtime helping, that PC's magic grants the primary check a +1 status bonus. This bonus stacks with multiple different spellcasting PCs, up to a maximum status bonus of +3. Once this check has been attempted, the PCs don't need to spend more downtime on the project.

Critical Success The PCs hit upon a brilliant plan for the project, and the town's workers prove to be particularly skilled and exuberant. The bridge takes only 1 month to rebuild and is finished before the events of Chapter 2 begin.

Success The plans are solid and the project proceeds quickly without any major setbacks. The bridge takes 2 months to rebuild.

Failure The plans for rebuilding the bridge take longer to complete, and the project suffers several minor setbacks and delays. The bridge takes 3 months to complete and is thus unlikely to be finished before this adventure ends.

Critical Failure While the plans seem solid, disaster strikes several days into the job, resulting in several deaths (roll 1d8 if you wish to randomly determine how many of Willowshore's citizens perish in this event). The PCs must start over, taking the Rebuild Karahai Bridge downtime activity once more to get the project restarted, but the roll suffers a -4 penalty to the check as a result of the later start.

Reward: Once the bridge is rebuilt, grant the PCs 120 XP.

SILKWASPS AT THE BRIDGE

MODERATE 10

Willowshore is a remote town, but its return to modern Shenmen doesn't go unnoticed. The villagers of Karahai are likely the first to realize the town is back, with more distant towns and villages learning

the news as the months go by, but one group in particular takes note of work done at Karahai Bridge—a band of criminals who call themselves the Silkwasp Bandits.

About a week after work on rebuilding the bridge gets underway, the PCs are approached by a nervous and out-of-breath messenger who informs them that “bandits have come to Karahai Bridge and are claiming they’re in charge!” The bridge workers have retreated from work and need the PCs to step in to deal with the bandits, who are eager to extort the workers. The messenger describes the bandits as “a half dozen rough-looking men and women wearing bloodstained bandages around their necks.”

Creatures: The Silkwasp Bandits are based in a ruined farmstead a few days’ travel northeast of Willowshore. While the plot to claim Karahai Bridge might seem like typical banditry to the PCs, this is just the first test of the PCs’ resolve and strength by a canny foe—the first move toward all-out war on Willowshore.

When the PCs arrive at the bridge, they’re greeted by the worried workers, who have spent their time gathered in their work camp a few hundred feet southwest of the bridge since the bandits arrived. Bravely refusing to fully abandon the site, these workers haven’t engaged with the bandits yet other than to continue to promise that those with the authority to pay their fines will be here soon.

The bandits have set up camp on the road, pitching a pair of tents on the west side of the gorge. While three bandits indeed await the PCs in the tents, another four lie in wait on the far side of the gorge, hidden in the dense forest just off the road in two pairs—two to the north and two to the south. As soon as the bandits notice the PCs’ approach, one, a man armed with a shortsword and sling instead of a greataxe and longbow, steps out of the tent to greet the PCs with a broad smile.

This individual is Lo Kuon, the human “face” of the Silkwasp Bandits (though not, as the PCs will soon learn, their current leader). Lo Kuon has a local reputation of being a daring and charismatic man, now in his late thirties, who became a local legend for his stance against the jorogumo. Tales of his bold escapades are popular (if only told in whispers) in rural Shenmen, but the PCs aren’t likely to have heard

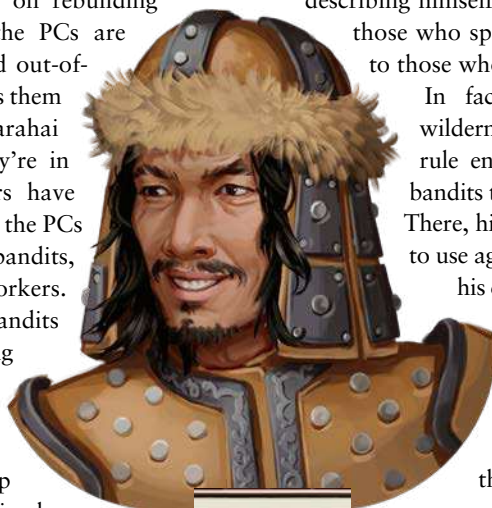
of him. When he introduces himself, he does so with arms wide and a cheerful, “Welcome to my bridge! I’m sure you know who I am?” If the PCs reveal they have no idea, he expresses shock but recovers quickly, describing himself as a “patron of the people, foe to those who spin their webs of deceit, and legend to those who have earned his mercy.”

In fact, Lo Kuon’s days of being a wilderness-based rebel against jorogumo rule ended last summer when he led his bandits to the Tan Sugi Monastery to loot it. There, his plans to gain weapons and magic to use against the jorogumo ended as he and his crew fell into thrall of Hong Meigui, one of the jiang-shi vampire agents of Kugaptee who now dwell in the ruined monastery.

The bloodstained kerchiefs the Silkwasp Bandits wear around their necks hide the only outward manifestation of their corruption and link to Kugaptee—a seeping, partially scabbed-over wound on their throats in the shape of a tangled knot of roots, the symbol of Kugaptee. While the wound doesn’t impact the bandits’ statistics, it’s an uncomfortable manifestation of their servitude to Hong Meigui. A PC can recognize the symbol with a successful DC 28 Religion check to Recall Knowledge, or automatically if they encountered the symbol and identified it earlier in this campaign.

Lo Kuon’s initial attitude to the PCs seems indifferent, but as long as he’s *inveigled* by Hong Meigui, he isn’t actually interested in striking a long-lasting deal with Willowshore. Before he gets to his demands, though, he asks the PCs to explain themselves and why they’ve decided they’re the ones who get to make the calls for Karahai Bridge. Lo Kuon listens to their explanation with apparent amusement and tries to learn all he can about how the PCs and Willowshore suddenly appeared as if no time had passed for a century. In particular, he appears intrigued by their stance on Kugaptee—he feigns ignorance here in an attempt to find out what the PCs know of, and plan to do about, the nindoru. If he determines that the PCs think Kugaptee’s threat has ended, he congratulates them and does nothing to dissuade them of that conclusion.

Lo Kuon relies on Deception to keep up the charade, and any attempt to pierce his lies or redirect the discussion toward topics he would rather stay silent on prompts him to change the subject to what the PCs owe the Silkwasp Bandits for use of the bridge. He demands an initial payment of 200 gp per month,



Lo Kuon

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1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



promising to lower those payments to a mere 50 gp a month if the PCs complete the rebuilding project. If the PCs make any attempt to bargain, he'll cut these asking prices in half regardless of any skill check results the PCs attempt—after all, this ruse is mostly just to “feel out” the PCs’ convictions.

If the PCs agree to a payment, Lo Kuon seems a little surprised but also pleased, and he demands the payment at once. If they pay, he bows and has his bandits gather up their tents, then they head back to their encampment via the roads (although once they believe they’re out of sight, they cut through the forest in an attempt to throw off anyone following them).

If the PCs refuse to pay or become hostile, Lo Kuon sighs in apparent disappointment, then says, “I was afraid that’d be your response. Well then... no bridge for anyone, I suppose!” He draws his shortsword and rolls Deception for initiative. The two nearby bandits roll Perception, and those on the far side of the gorge roll Stealth. During combat, Lo Kuon and his two nearby allies fight in melee, focusing their attacks on the PC who spoke up the most at this point, but they also work to prevent anyone from engaging their allies on the far side of the bridge. The four bandits

on the east side focus their attacks on the bridge, each activating one of the two *explosive arrows* they carry before firing the arrow at the bridge. From their positions, the load-bearing parts of the bridge they’re targeting have AC 24; each *explosive arrow* that hits the bridge bursts in a ball of fire that damages the structure, while each that misses explodes harmlessly on the lower west bank of the river or beyond the PCs in the forest. Once the bandits hit the bridge twice, the planks crossing the bridge are blown apart, preventing easy access to the other side. If the bandits score a total of five hits on the bridge, all the work the PCs have put into it is destroyed, and they must start from scratch by taking the Rebuild Karahai Bridge activity once more at a later date. Once the four bandits run out of *explosive arrows* or the bridge is destroyed, they focus on shooting the PCs.

As long as they remain *inveigled*, the bandits fight to the death. If the PCs capture them alive or manage to dispel Hong Meigui’s ritual, the bandits immediately surrender, and Lo Kuon reveals everything, begging the PCs to travel to their campsite to defeat the monster that has kept them as her pawns for months.

LO KUON

CREATURE 7

CN male gang leader (*Pathfinder Gamemastery Guide* 249)

Initiative Deception +15 or Perception +14

SILKWASP BANDITS (6)

CREATURE 6

CE monster hunters (*Pathfinder Gamemastery Guide* 227)

Initiative Perception or Stealth +13

Treasure: In addition to their standard gear, any *explosive arrows* the bandits on the far side of the camp haven't fired yet can be looted from them if they're defeated. Each of those four bandits starts the battle with two *explosive arrows* in addition to their 20 arrows.

DEALING WITH BANDITS

The money extorted at the bridge is only the beginning of the PCs' trouble with the Silkwasp Bandits if they agree to pay the price. Over the months to come, the bandits continue to be a thorn in Willowshore's side, with a new complaint rising every few weeks—livestock and draft animals stolen from farms, folks being robbed while out in the wild or traveling the roads, and even rumors of unfamiliar troublemakers skulking around the yards of some the buildings along the northeast section of town. All these events are the bandits' continued attempts to test the town's defenses. If the PCs don't take action, eventually Hong Meigui leads all of her remaining bandits on a brazen attack against the PCs in town; such an event shouldn't take place until the start of Chapter 3 and should be structured as an Extreme encounter—the PCs would be wise to handle this bandit situation sooner than later!

If the PCs fought Lo Kuon and defeated the bandits at the bridge, the bandit activity against Willowshore happens even more swiftly, with the first reports of trouble coming in within a few days rather than a few weeks.

While no one in Willowshore knows anything of note about the bandits, the PCs can travel to Karahai to try to learn more. There, once a character succeeds at a DC 22 check after spending 2 hours to Gather Information, the PCs can learn more about the Silkwasp Bandits.

Critical Success Traditionally, locals have passed messages to the Silkwaspas to beg for aid against the jorogumo by hiding notes inside of wasp nests, but no one has received any response from this method since early last summer, when the Silkwaspas went silent.

Success The Silkwasp Bandits take their name from the silkwasp, a local species of wasp known to prey upon spiders. The bandits, who have managed to oppose much

of the jorogumo activity in the region, model themselves after the wasps' fierceness and cunning. Their leader, Lo Kuon, is considered something of a local hero.

Critical Failure The Silkwasp Bandits were slain years ago, but their ghosts still haunt some of the regional roads, demanding tribute. Those who pay their demands find themselves cursed with a wasting disease by the next full moon.

THE SILKWASP CAMP

SEVERE 10

If the PCs managed to secure a bandit's cooperation by removing the *inveigle* effect on them, they can give the PCs directions to their hideout, but only Lo Kuon agrees to accompany the PCs in an attempt to get revenge on Hong Meigui. Likewise, only Lo Kuon knows that Hong Meigui is a jiang-shi, allowing him to provide more advice on how to fight her. He suggests the PCs bring handheld mirrors and materials to put her to rest forever once they defeat her (either 1 Bulk of glutinous rice or hen eggs). Finally, Lo Kuon can also tell the PCs that she keeps some sort of item that she seems both to fear and be obsessed with wrapped in silk in her quarters.

Without the aid of a rescued bandit, the PCs will need to resort to other methods to discover the Silkwasp Camp. The camp is in a former farmstead located on a tall bluff overlooking the Sea of Ghosts a few hours north of Karahai; the only overland route to the supposedly abandoned farmstead is via an overgrown trail leading northeast from Willowshore. The PCs might stumble upon this location on their own simply by exploring the countryside, but after each encounter they or the people of Willowshore have with the bandits, the PCs can also Track the bandits to their camp with a successful DC 20 Survival check. The ruined farmstead is just shy of 3 miles east of the edge of the Willowshore hinterlands map—about a day's horseback ride from town.

Once the PCs approach the camp, read or paraphrase the following.

A humble farmstead sits on a low bluff overlooking the Sea of Ghosts, its western half nestled within rings of overgrown, ramshackle fences. Reeds surround a large fishpond at the western end, near the gates that lead up through the outermost fence. The farmhouse appears to be in dire repair, and the barn is in even worse shape with a partially collapsed roof.

The swamp and thicket patches are difficult terrain. The water in the pond is 10 feet deep for most of its expanse, and is difficult terrain to wade through up to 5 feet from any shore. The wooden fences are quite

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SILKWASP CAMP LOCATIONS

Brief descriptions of the bandit camp locations follow.

- B1:** Front gates.
- B2:** Storage shack near a fishpond surrounded by swampy mud.
- B3:** Inner gates.
- B4:** Partially collapsed granary.
- B5:** Living/dining room, now used as bandit barracks.
- B6:** Kitchen, now used as Lo Kuon's barracks.
- B7:** Pantry.
- B8:** Workshop, now used as bandit barracks.
- B9:** Back porch.
- B10:** Bedroom, claimed by Hong Meigui.

rickety—they're 8 feet high, and PCs can Climb over them with a successful DC 15 Athletics check; on a critical failure, that 5-foot-section of fence collapses, causing the climber to fall prone and making that square into difficult terrain. The wooden gates at areas **B1** and **B3** no longer open, but have enough missing boards that a Medium or smaller creature (or a sinuous Large snake) can move through them by passing through gaps with a Stride action. The cliffside along the east of the farm drops 50 feet into the surf below; the water is nowhere near deep enough to break a fall. These sea-spray slick cliffs can be Climbed by a PC who succeeds at a DC 30 Athletics check.

Both the shack at area **B2** and the farmhouse have several windows, but they've been partially boarded up. These can be used as arrow slits, allowing an adjacent creature to fire arrows through them at no penalty to targets beyond while gaining greater cover for themselves.

A 40-foot-long rope lies concealed under a layer of dirt along the path indicated by the dotted red line. The rope is attached to the doors leading into area **B4** and threaded through the window into area **B5**, allowing anyone to tug on the rope from area **B5** (or along its path) as an Interact action to pull open the doors to area **B4**. A PC who Searches near this area can discover the hidden rope with a successful DC 22 Perception check. Spotting the rope from a greater distance (as determined by the GM) requires a character to critically succeed at this check.

Although there are numerous locations at the campsite, it's still treated as one single encounter. See the Silkwasps Camp Locations sidebar above for a brief overview of each location.

Creatures: The Silkwasps Bandits are currently led by the jiang-shi Hong Meigui, with Lo Kuon (the previous leader) now serving as a sub-commander over the remaining 11 bandits. They also keep a pair of partially trained emperor cobras as guardians. Any bandits the PCs defeated earlier at the bridge won't be encountered here, leaving what amounts to a Severe 10 encounter to defend the camp. If any bandits did survive, either give the PCs a chance to whittle down the bandits' numbers by confronting them in the wild or on the outskirts of Willowshore, or add enough to this encounter to make it an Extreme 10 encounter instead.

Unexpected Visit: If the bandits have no reason to suspect the PCs are here to fight, then Lo Kuon emerges from the house to meet with the PCs on the path at one of the gates to find out what they want; he does his best to get the PCs to leave while the other bandits and Hong Meigui prepare for battle as detailed in Bandits on the Defensive below. Note that if the PCs fought the bandits at the bridge, they'll always expect a visit from the PCs, even if all of the bandits escaped that fight alive.

If the PCs approach stealthily while the bandits aren't on the defensive, then two bandits stand watch outside: one at the house's front porch and one sitting in a chair outside the small shack near the fishpond. The other bandits are spread out between areas **B5**, **B8**, and **B9**, with Lo Kuon (if present) in area **B6**, and Hong Meigui in area **B10**. Once an alarm is raised, the bandits do their best to enact their defenses, as detailed below.

Bandits on the Defensive: In most cases, the bandits expect a fight. The bandits are on high alert for 1 week after any violent clash with the PCs or, at your discretion, if the PCs have given them other cause in the past week to be wary. When the camp is on alert, a bandit stands watch in the shack at area **B2** and another patrols the patch of undergrowth southwest of the house near area **B3**. At least three more bandits stand watch in areas **B5** and **B8**; if there are more than five bandits on-site, then additional bandits hide in the undergrowth as you see fit. After dark, the bandits take shifts, with no more than two sleeping at a time. If he's present, Lo Kuon stands guard in area **B5**. Hong Meigui stands guard in area **B10**.

Bandit Tactics: Once a fight begins, the bandits use their bows to fire upon the PCs from their positions of cover. One bandit in area **B5** takes an Interact action to tug open the doors to area **B4** via the concealed rope, allowing the two emperor cobras within to slither out. These large snakes move to attack any obvious intruders but also attack adjacent

bandits as well—they obey only Hong Meigui. The jiang-shi herself remains in her room at area **B10** and casts ranged spells or *telekinetic projectile* at targets through the gaps in her boarded-up windows, but if the PCs enter the house, she moves to engage them in melee at once.

If the PCs make their way into the house, the bandits all converge on that area to engage the PCs in melee. As long as Hong Meigui lives, the bandits fight to the death, but once she's defeated, her control over them breaks, and any surviving bandits flee for their lives.

HONG MEIGUI

CREATURE 10

UNIQUE CE MEDIUM UNDEAD VAMPIRE

Female provincial jiang-shi (*Pathfinder Book of the Dead* 158)

Perception +20; **breathsense** (precise, as jiang-shi) 60 feet, darkvision

Languages Common, Necril

Skills Acrobatics +19, Athletics +21, Intimidation +20, Nature +22, Religion +20

Str +5, **Dex** +3, **Con** +4, **Int** +3, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +4

Items +2 striking flaming shock urumi (*Pathfinder Treasure Vault* 25), key to chest

AC 29; **Fort** +20, **Ref** +15, **Will** +22

HP 128, fast healing 10, negative healing, one more breath;

Immunities death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, sleep, prone; **Resistances** physical 10 (except darkwood)

Jiang-Shi Vulnerabilities As jiang-shi.

Warped Fulu As jiang-shi.

Speed 20 feet, rigor mortis (as jiang-shi)

Melee ♦ **urumi** +23 (deadly d10, magical, sweep), **Damage** 2d6+11 slashing plus 1d6 electricity and 1d6 fire

Melee claw +21 (agile), **Damage** 2d10+11 piercing plus Grab

Occult Innate Spells DC 29, attack +21; **5th** *hallucination*, *subconscious suggestion*; **4th** *charm*, *phantasmal killer*; **3rd** *paralyze*, *vampiric touch*; **Cantrips (5th)** *mage hand*, *message*, *shield*, *telekinetic projectile*

Rituals *inveigle*

Drain Qi ♦ (divine, necromancy) As jiang-shi, but when Draining Qi, Hong Meigui regains 12 Hit Points.

ELITE EMPEROR COBRAS (2)

CREATURE 6

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 6, 245

Initiative Perception +15

SILKWASP BANDITS (5)

CREATURE 6

CE monster hunters (*Pathfinder Gamemastery Guide* 227)

Initiative Perception or Stealth +13

Treasure: A PC who Searches in area **B10** automatically notices the large chest at the foot of the bed. The chest is locked with an obvious and solid-looking padlock that can be opened either with the key that Hong Meigui carries in a pocket of her robe or by three DC 30 Thievery checks to Pick the Lock. Inside the chest are dozens of silk pouches containing a total of 3,500 sp and 220 gp—once the Silkwasp Bandits' collected treasure, but now little more than a cover for the true treasure Hong Meigui keeps hidden under a false bottom in the chest.

A PC who Searches inside the chest can spot the false bottom with a successful DC 28 Perception check. Wrapped tightly in a sheet of fine spidersilk (worth 60 gp) is a *jiang-shi bell* (page 77) that Hong Meigui has long been obsessed with yet keeps stashed here to prevent her enemies from using it against her.



Hong Meigui

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Chapter 2: The Princess's Web

The jorogumo, predatory shapeshifting spider-women led by Lady Lang Loi, are the cruel and capricious rulers of Shenmen. Shenmen's citizens fear them, for their treatment of their subjects is fraught with horror and dread. The best many can hope for is to be forgotten and left to struggle on their own without any support from their government at all. Lady Ren Mei Li is a high-ranking member of the jorogumo court, and among the communities that fall into her web is the town of Willowshore. While the PCs encountered a version of her in the previous adventure, Ren Mei Li has never actually met the PCs—her first visit to Willowshore was on the first day of the year after the townsfolk had been slaughtered and whisked away to the mindscape. She found Willowshore abandoned

and had her servants loot the place of its valuables as offerings to Lady Lang Loi (while keeping a fair amount for herself), and for the past century, she has spared very little thought for the area.

News of Willowshore's return reaches her ears quickly, and as this chapter begins, Ren Mei Li returns to Willowshore to find out where it and its people have been, and to “welcome” them back in the best way the jorogumo know how—with cruel demands and economically fraught fines. The PCs can soften these political blows, though, and can potentially use their encounter with the strange echo of Ren Mei Li they dealt with in the previous adventure to their advantage.

The timing of this section is flexible. While the first few encounters in this chapter assume the PCs are



11th level, the lack of combat encounters means that 10th level PCs will still be able to navigate them and earn enough XP to be 11th level before they begin to run Ren Mei Li's missions.

Ren Mei Li's Return

Ren Mei Li's initial visit to Willowshore is in part to welcome the long-lost town back "below the web" (a euphemism for non-arachnid creatures who find themselves under jorogumo rule), but her primary goal is one of curiosity: she wants to find out how and why Willowshore returned from ruin. Her focus soon shifts to the PCs, and as a test of their possible value, Ren Mei Li sets the PCs a series of missions that will evaluate their skills and also assess the extent of their loyalty to Willowshore, since she can potentially use those ties as leverage. If the PCs succeed, Ren Mei Li is impressed and offers them stewardship of Willowshore in exchange for a promise of fealty.

Installing the PCs as stewards solves two problems for Ren Mei Li—it gives Willowshore a reliable set of leaders to help defend the town and cultivate its growth (thus freeing her up from having to handle that work directly), and it provides her a chance to secretly secure the PCs' loyalties for herself rather than on behalf of the jorogumo court and Lady Lang Loi.

Accordingly, once the PCs have proven themselves, Ren Mei Li offers unusually generous terms to secure their help. While the PCs might have qualms about striking a bargain with a jorogumo, it should be clear that this is their best option to assure Willowshore's safety and prosperity in Shenmen. Further, because Ren Mei Li is more interested in advancing her own ambitions than Lady Lang Loi's, she's willing to accept an offer that secretly only promises to uphold her interests, and she might leave the PCs free to potentially work against the overall rule of the jorogumo in Shenmen.

The PCs should also have a significant incentive to accept the governorship because it's only by obtaining the jorogumo court's official mandate, as symbolized by a ceremonial item called the *Fang and Key*, that they can finally defeat Heh Shan-Bao and prevent Kugaptee's reincarnation.

The *Fang and Key* is a critical element in this adventure. Several encounters and plot developments rely on the PCs having it. While the PCs can possibly complete this chapter without the *Fang and Key*, the PCs will miss significant portions of the adventure if they don't obtain it. Therefore, it's important that Ren Mei Li not be presented as an enemy, but as someone the PCs can work with—even if she might not be their first choice of allies.

A FELINE EMISSARY

As before, Ren Mei Li doesn't arrive at Willowshore unannounced—she sends an emissary to alert the PCs of her imminent arrival, but unlike in the previous adventure, she has learned the value of subtlety and patience. She sends her emissary a full week ahead of her scheduled visit rather than a mere eight hours, which should give Willowshore (and the PCs) more than enough time to prepare for her arrival.

Creatures: Ren Mei Li's emissary is a dweomercat named Amai, who (unlike most of her kind) is a faithful and loyal companion to the jorogumo. She has little interest in spending time in the First World and quite enjoys the deference and admiration afforded her by dint of her association with one of Shenmen's aristocrats. When she's assigned the task of announcing her mistress's imminent visit to Willowshore, Amai spends some time watching the townsfolk and, increasingly, the PCs from hiding. When this encounter begins, allow the PCs to attempt DC 27 Perception checks. Those who succeed notice the strange purple cat peering at them from somewhere nearby in hiding—the undergrowth, a shadowy alley, through an open door into a dark room, and so on. At your option, if the PCs remain friends with the Cerulean Teahouse's bakeneko "mascot" Yami, then she can meet Amai first; she befriends the dweomercat and introduces her new friend to the PCs—the two cats being unusually amused at how similar their names are.

Whether Amai is spotted and confronted from her hiding spot, or whether she openly approaches the PCs by using *dimension door* to pop into their presence, the dweomercat does her best to make it apparent she isn't here to fight—even if her initial appearance startles the PCs. Her sapphire fur is highlighted by violet spirals, and the silver and spidersilk collar she wears is much more elegant than those normally handed out by the jorogumo to their allies and agents.

Amai is quite faithful to Ren Mei Li, especially for a dweomercat, and the fact that an ordinarily fickle being is so attached to her mistress should be the PCs' first clue that this jorogumo is both unusually powerful and able to earn loyalty from unexpected allies. Amai isn't magically compelled to serve and is insulted by any such suggestion; she views Ren Mei Li as a fascinating individual who can pamper the dweomercat with all the luxuries she so richly deserves and, therefore, as company worth keeping. Amai gossips freely about Ren Mei Li but has only good things to say other than minor criticisms about shiny baubles the cat wasn't given or interesting magic the cat wasn't allowed to play with.

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When Amai speaks, she does so in a cultured, feminine voice, and when she first meets the PCs, she greets them as follows.

"Greetings, Willowshore. I am Amai. I have the honor of serving Lady Ren Mei Li, the Silversilk Princess, Resplendent Daughter of Yin-Sichasi. My mistress is curious about you, and wishes to make your acquaintance. Will you meet with her for tea in seven days' time?"

Amai is willing to answer a few follow-up questions but offers little concrete information about Ren Mei Li's plans. She quickly grows bored and distracted under interrogation, and after each question the PCs ask her, she asks a question of her own, generally directed at unusual aspects of the PCs' dress or class-specific habits ("What's that thing in your hair?" or "Why do you hold that bauble when you pray?" and similarly guileless, blunt questions). Once Amai has talked to the PCs for 5 minutes or so, she leaves. Her answers to likely questions are as follows.

Who's Lady Ren Mei Li? "She's one of this land's rulers, of course! My, my! You have been out of it! She's a jorogumo, and she's glorious!" (If the PCs indicate they've met her already, Amai seems shocked and confused for a moment, then muses, "I'm sure that'll be something my mistress will be interested to hear about!" before moving on to the next question.)

Why does Ren Mei Li want to meet us? "She's curious about you. Also, this town needs an official steward. Perhaps you will suit."

What will we get out of it? "Do you not wish to continue living here?" the cat asks with apparently genuine puzzlement. "My mistress can help you in so many ways. Even if only reporting back a favorable visit to prevent punishment."

Can we trust a jorogumo? The cat laughs at being asked such an impertinent question and answers only: "Would you trust my answer? Speak to her directly. Then decide."

Whether or not the PCs are receptive to Amai's message, there isn't really an option for the PCs to deny the visit; they have 7 days to prepare themselves once the dweomercat grows bored with questions and departs. If the

PCs attack her, she does her best to flee—in this case, Lady Ren Mei Li treats the PCs less as potential allies and more as criminals who must work off a debt to avoid execution. This adventure assumes the PCs don't take this route, but if they do, you should adjust the tenor of the encounters to come appropriately.

AMAI

CREATURE 7

Female dweomercat (*Pathfinder Bestiary 2* 103)

Initiative Perception +15

Reward: Grant the PCs 40 XP for taking the time to speak with Amai.

Preparing for the Visit

In the previous adventure, the PCs had only 8 hours to prepare for Ren Mei Li's visit. This time, they have an entire week, and unknown to the PCs, Ren Mei Li has had a hundred years to perfect her rule and to curb her more imperious and impatient personality traits. Receiving her at the Cerulean Teahouse remains the best option, but the PCs don't need to worry as much about hiding tengu and cold iron or being fearful that she might decide to take citizens of Willowshore back home with her as captives or meals. Of course, the PCs likely won't realize it until her arrival!

Since the PCs have a whole week to prepare, you can simply have them describe to you what they wish to do to set up for the meeting. There's no need to attempt any skill checks for success. If they prepare respectfully, Ren Mei Li is delighted, but if they don't or if they're actively disrespectful, that just plays into her expectations, and she proceeds with the visit without being ruffled.

In the meantime, the PCs might ask around for more information about Ren Mei Li. No one in Willowshore has enough experience with modern Shenmen to offer any advice, but a few hours spent asking around at Karahai, or even asking one of the Silkwasp Bandits if any of them survived and are willing to speak to the PCs, allows the PCs to potentially learn more with a DC 25 check to Gather Information.

Critical Success As success, but the PC also learns that Ren Mei Li is considered to be exceptionally adept in the arcane arts and will likely react well to anyone who displays an interest or deep knowledge in arcana.



Success The PC discovers that Ren Mei Li is regarded as one of the “less harrowing” of the jorogumo—still frightening, but much easier to work with than others. As such, the locals are quick and eager to please her in order to keep her around, knowing full well that the next jorogumo who would replace her would likely be much more horrific. In particular, her acceptance of tengu and the fact that she only very rarely demands tribute in the form of people are stressed. The PCs are also told to wear their silver collars in her presence if they have them.

Critical Failure The information the PC learns seems to support that Ren Mei Li remains as imperious, arrogant, and potentially more violent than she was during her “visit” to the Willowshore mindscape in the previous adventure.

Reward: Grant the PCs 40 XP if they achieve at least a success in asking around for more information about Ren Mei Li.

Meeting the Princess

At the appointed hour, a shimmering silver mist fills the Cerulean Teahouse (or whatever location the PCs told Amai they’d be receiving her mistress at). From it steps a silver-haired woman of extraordinary beauty, clad in pale blue and sea green silk of the finest quality. Silver sticks, ornamented with jeweled spiders, bind up her hair. She looks around the teahouse with open interest, examining its furnishings and decor for several minutes before turning to the PCs. Her voice is gentle and her smile serene. The only aspects of her appearance that might be unsettling are the silver sheen over her near-black eyes and the movements of the spiders in her hair, which are living creatures and not, after all, made of gemstones.

Ren Mei Li arrives alone, a display of her assurance but also so that, if needed, words spoken with the PCs in confidence won’t be overheard by others who might report back to the court. She also appears without her spider legs extended, looking more human in an attempt to be less intimidating to the PCs. She smiles at the party, waits for them to introduce themselves, then speaks.

“How nice to meet you. I am Ren Mei Li. I will not draw you away from your duties for long, as I understand Willowshore demands your attention. I hope you will not find my directness too rude.

“In short, I wish to offer you an alliance. I understand that Sze has cast its greedy eyes upon Willowshore’s resources and wishes to cast its greedy hands upon it as well. I can prevent this. I am even willing to offer Willowshore a considerable degree of autonomy, provided its stewards are people I can trust.

“Do you suppose that some, or all, of you might serve as my stewards?”



Ren Mei Li

If the PCs express interest in the position of steward (a sort of ambassador to the jorogumo apart from the town’s actual governor), however tentatively, Ren Mei Li seems both pleased and amused, then waves aside the particulars of settling on this accord in deference to tea and a meal. During this interlude, she asks the PCs about themselves—in particular, she’s interested to find out where they’re from and how they’ve managed to bring Willowshore

back from ruins. Assuming the PCs tell the truth, or at least parts of it, she believes them entirely, as their explanation perfectly matches her theories. If she learns that a version of herself visited the PCs in the mindscape, she is intrigued and demands exact details of how she behaved, treating it more as an opportunity to learn juicy gossip about a competitor than anything else.

Ren Mei Li’s initial attitude toward the PCs is indifferent. If the PCs wear or openly display the silver collars they might have gained during that encounter, Ren Mei Li makes an obvious visual note of appreciation at the display. This doesn’t alter the meeting here, but her starting attitude automatically shifts from indifferent to friendly. During this preliminary meal and conversation, allow the PCs to attempt DC 28 Diplomacy, Performance, Society, or Tea Lore checks, or DC 23 Arcana checks to impress her. These checks accumulate Victory Points (*Gamemastery Guide* 148); if the PCs earn at least 3 Victory Points in this manner, they improve Ren Mei Li’s attitude to friendly (or if she’s already friendly, to helpful).

As the conversation continues, Ren Mei Li asks knowledgeable and incisive questions about the mindscape phenomenon, their clashes with Kugaptee, and how the PCs dealt with it all. If the PCs describe any inventive tactics they used, or unusual discoveries they made about the mindscape’s workings, she’s visibly impressed.

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Ren Mei Li also listens attentively if the PCs explain concrete things they've done to help Willowshore and plans they have to improve its future prospects. If the PCs recount their significant achievements to aid the town (be it in previous adventures or their recent efforts to build bridges and fight bandits), Ren Mei Li congratulates them. If they ask whether she can help with their future plans for Willowshore, she's careful not to promise anything specific but indicates that she'll take their suggestions seriously. She isn't opposed to designating Willowshore as a Silver Seal village, "but, of course, that would depend on having a trustworthy steward."

Eventually, and assuming the PCs are receptive to her offer, the jorogumo explains what comes next.

THE PRINCESS'S REQUESTS

"It is time to discuss the Five-Season Treasures. Tradition demands that new stewards complete a ritual to prove their loyalty, courage, and capacity to serve as ambassadors. Such people must be acquainted with their citizens and concerned with their welfare, don't you agree? We all know too well what happens when those considerations are ignored.

"For you, I think a ritual honoring the seasons you've endured to sit here with me shall do, and no better ritual than seeking the Five-Season Treasures comes to mind. Four of these treasures symbolize the four seasons of life, to symbolize that a worthy ruler keeps their pact year round: the bright bird of spring, the fiery flowers of summer, the sweet fruits of autumn, and the spiced tea of winter. Once gathered, the gifts of the living must then be offered to the honored dead, to gain the blessing of ancestors and guardians—this is the fifth season, a season beyond mortal life. If the ancestors accept, and grant their blessing, then all you need do is swear fealty to me, and the stewardship is yours."

Canny PCs might note that Ren Mei Li asks for fealty to herself, rather than to Lady Lang Loi or the jorogumo court. If they point this detail out, Ren Mei Li merely smiles again and shrugs: "Oh, was that what I said?"

If the PCs ask what, specifically, the ritual entails, Ren Mei Li tells them the following:

"We shall address them all in turn, but to begin with, you must offer me a bright spring bird."

Ren Mei Li draws a pair of silver pins from her hair and stabs them into the mat before her. She touches one of the two cloisonné balls dangling from the first pin, which depicts a white bird with a long, curling tail of many-colored feathers, then speaks again.

"The bright bird of spring is a symbol of joy and renewal breaking through winter's drear. If a steward is good, then their rule represents a revival of good fortune for the village. You will put on a performance of whatever type suits your talents—music, dance, drama—to celebrate the greatest thing you have done to benefit Willowshore. In your case, I should imagine that would be freeing your people from the mindscape, no? Whatever you choose, the show should involve multicolored costumes, vivid backdrops, special effects, and dramatic music.

"Please have your performance ready within the week. I shall return to watch it. I quite look forward to your show."

Without further ado, and without waiting for any additional acknowledgement or indication of what the remaining four rituals entail, Ren Mei Li stands, bows, and leaves the same way she came—vanishing in a swirl of silver mist.

Should the PCs seek to learn more about Ren Mei Li or even confront her in combat, additional information about Ren Mei Li (including how she comes and goes so effortlessly via that cloud of mist) appears at the end of this adventure on pages 90–91.

Reward: Grant the PCs 60 XP if they agree to work with Ren Mei Li and begin to pursue her requests.

Treasure and Murder

The Five-Season Treasures are symbols of a leader's ability and willingness to rule and protect their people across all the changing moods and challenges of the year. Originally, the five rites associated with these symbols reflected a people's gratitude for the joys of their lives, and some of that aspect remains. Although these specific variants on the rites primarily test the PCs' competence for Ren Mei Li's benefit, they should also serve as an opportunity to deepen their relationships with the NPCs of Willowshore and enjoy their achievements up to this point.

Each of these five rites gives the PCs a chance to achieve Victory Points (*Gamemastery Guide* 148), up to a maximum of 4 Victory Points per rite. Once the final task is done, the total number of Victory Points they've accumulated will impact Ren Mei Li's final offer and potential rewards (page 39).

As the PCs work to complete their search for the Five-Season Treasures, another, far more sinister set of events takes place. Heh Shan-Bao, now fully transformed into a horrific monster (a brainchild, known locally as a yohoi), visits Willowshore to murder and spread terror. These murders take place while the PCs are out of town, but they'll have opportunities to investigate the crime scenes and bodies in between seeking out the Five-Season Treasures.



WHAT'S A YOHOI?

It's likely that at some point during this chapter, the PCs will discover that a creature from urban legend known as a yohoi might have become active in Willowshore. Once they do so, a character who succeeds at a DC 20 Occultism, Society, or Willowshore Lore check to Recall Knowledge, or a DC 20 check to Gather Information, learns one of the following pieces of information, chosen by you to reflect the nature of the questions the PCs are seeking answers to. A critical success reveals two different bullet points of information.

- Yohoi prey upon small rural towns and were initially believed to be manifestations of the ghosts of neglected ancestors who seek vengeance on disrespectful descendants, but today, they've become something of a generalized (if rather obscure) form of the "boogeyman" for Shenmen's rural settlements.
- Yohoi can be any shape, but you can recognize them by their bulging yellow eyes, crooked hairy necks, and long filthy fingernails. Their weapons can kill not so much by physical damage but by the mental anguish they inflict.
- Yohoi fear flute music and can be harmed or even driven away by well-played flute music, particularly when played by a priest or someone with powerful faith.
- When a yohoi dies, its body fades away within minutes, leaving nothing behind save for any stolen objects they might have been carrying, but unless they're slain in a way that society believes they're gone forever, they can always return.
- Scholars believe that yohoi manifest as the result of a person's thoughts, or even of an entire community's fears—in other cultures, they're known by other names, such as "brainchildren."

Reward: Once the PCs learn a yohoi is involved, grant them 80 XP.

EVENT 1: BRIGHT SPRING BIRD

The first of the Five-Season Treasures is the Bright Spring Bird, which, as Ren Mei Li explained, is to be a theatrical performance intended to evoke brightness, joy, and optimism regarding the future governor's rule. The performance can be sung, danced, acted, or created by combining all the arts.

This first rite provides an opportunity for the PCs to reflect on what their experiences in this campaign have meant to them, how it has affected their relationships with the people of Willowshore, and where it has left the town's collective hopes and fears now that they've returned to the real world. The other townsfolk can

provide helpful advice and material support if the PCs get stuck, but if the PCs don't need their help, then they're happy to assist the PCs' artistic vision and not get in the way.

Preparing for the Show: The planning and performance of the Bright Spring Bird should reinforce the PCs' successes on Willowshore's behalf. This part of the adventure is also an opportunity to develop individual NPCs by having them express their gratitude, hopes, and worries to the PCs. For example, if the PCs ask the villagers for their experiences on returning from the mindscape, or what they hope for from the PCs' governorship, then the lawyer Luo Xi Yang might worry aloud that her expertise in Lung Wa's laws is useless now that the jorogumo have instituted their own legal codes. Huo Tian-Zhe, the metalsmith and inventor, is bemused and slightly annoyed that the clockwork gadgets he thought of as innovative are now viewed as charming, old-fashioned curios. Kim Gu-won is sad that many of his old trading partners have passed on but also excited about the new samples that have begun to trickle into the trading house.

Other NPCs will have their own reactions to their abrupt lurch forward in time, and this section of the adventure is an opportunity to explore those thoughts as the PCs develop their performance.

Putting on the Show: The show should be a gala event. Everyone in town is excited to attend, both to see the PCs enact the show (which this adventure assumes takes place in downtown Willowshore, at the Seven-Colored Songbird theater—you can use this time to give the PCs a moment to interact with Kazuma Oono, the theater's resident director, before his grisly fate later in the adventure) and to see the town's mysterious and frightening new patron, Ren Mei Li. As before, the jorogumo princess appears in a cloud of silver mist minutes before the show begins, and takes pains to keep her spider legs hidden from view.

You don't need to have the players roleplay out the entire show (although some groups might enjoy the opportunity). In order to determine how successful the show is, ask each player what their character does to make sure the show is a success, then have them attempt a DC 28 skill check with an appropriate skill to earn Victory Points. Performance is the most obvious choice here, for PCs who wish to act, sing, or provide music for the show. Those who wish to instead work on the sets and costumes can attempt a Crafting check. Those who seek to bolster the show with magic can roll an Arcana, Nature, Occult, or Religion check, as appropriate. Acrobatics and Athletics can be used by PCs who wish to lend

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their brawn or agility to the production. Deception, Diplomacy, and Intimidation work for those who wish to play host or hostess to Ren Mei Li during the show.

After the Show: Following the show, newcomers who aren't familiar with Willowshore's story (such as Lo Kuon, if he survives and has been welcomed into the community) express their admiration of the PCs' achievements. Townsfolk who survived the events are awed by seeing their own experiences on stage, which somehow makes them feel both more real and more legendary. You can use this chance to use these NPCs to laud and admire the PCs' incredible achievements.

At the show's conclusion, after the performers have taken their final bows and the audience has dispersed, Ren Mei Li stands and claps her hands one last time, appreciatively, then approaches the PCs. Regardless of how well or poorly the show went, she graciously congratulates the PCs, somehow managing to find a compliment even for those who failed their checks miserably. She withdraws a silver pin from her hair, then unthreads the cloisonne ball depicting the bird with the many-colored tail attached to the pin, offering it to the PC who rolled the highest result. She keeps the next ball attached to the pin—a ball that shows overlapping bursts of red, gold, and green sparkles against a backdrop of deep blue enamel, presumably representing fireworks against the night sky—before she speaks.

"The Fiery Flowers of Summer are your next assignment. Even as one celebrates the season, a competent steward does not allow their duties to go neglected. Neither do they cause undue fear among the people being protected, however. These fireworks, presented to the people as a celebration of summer's beauty, also serve to frighten away malicious ghosts and spirits.

"To fulfill this purpose, the fireworks must be made with dried blossoms of Hei Feng's horn. Regrettably, I have no supplies of these blossoms to give you, but I have no doubt you will be able to find more somewhere in the Moon Marsh to the north, and will have no difficulty harvesting enough to put on a fine show. Once again, I'm afraid, time is rather important. Shall we give it another week? Good; I look forward to seeing what you can do!"

With that, the jorogumo once again departs in a waft of silver mist.

Reward: Grant the PCs 80 XP if they earn at least 1 Victory Point, or 120 XP if they earn the maximum of 4 Victory Points.

EVENT 2: FIERY FLOWER FIREWORKS

The next task given the PCs involves putting on a fireworks display intended to celebrate the beauty of summer, but also one that is traditionally said to frighten away malicious ghosts and spirits. While the use of magic, particularly something like *illusory scene*, can produce a compelling fireworks display, Ren Mei Li wants this display to be the real thing, and that means gathering some rare plants to help make sure the fireworks burst in the exact precise shade of fiery orange that tradition demands.

This traditional ingredient is fresh petals plucked from Hei Feng's horn, a rare, bright orange wetlands flower. While this flower grows sporadically throughout the region's wetlands, the largest swath with the best flowers grows in abundance in Moon Marsh, so named for the soft orange glow that these night-blooming flowers give under the radiance of moonlight. Unbeknownst to the PCs, in the intervening decades, a lunar naga astrologer named Isori has taken up residence in this area.

Moon Marsh can be reached by traveling north from town, through the abandoned village and (likely recultivated) fields through which the seasonal Moon Creek flows south into the Duyue River. During the spring, this creek runs dry, but it remains a more reliable path to follow than the overgrown road. Moon Marsh lies about 6 miles north of the edge of the map, about 18 miles north of Willowshore.

Finding the Flowers: Once the PCs reach Moon Marsh, they can spend 8 hours of daylight searching for a serviceable patch of Hei Feng's horn, or 1 hour after dark (since that's when the plant blooms and softly glows). The flowers aren't the only adornments in the area. Bronze and glass sundials, astrolabes, and various lenses and prisms hang from cords tied to overhanging tree branches, while strands of large, flat glass beads inscribed with geometric symbols and astronomical formulae adorn lengths of cord draped around the grove.

These adornments have been placed by a lunar naga named Isori who has dwelt in this part of the marsh for decades. He has grown fond of admiring the heavens amid the grove of Hei Feng's horns, decorating it with



Hei Feng's horn

various astrological and astronomical trinkets he has gathered over his long life. Isori mostly keeps to himself and isn't a naturally violent sort, but he'll take swift offense at anyone who enters his observatory, rising up from the waters to quietly regard the PCs with his luminous, intelligent eyes. His hair is black, and his features suggest early middle age. Purple and blue scales, many of them sparkling with tiny motes of light, cover his snakelike body.

If the PCs attack on sight, he hisses in anger and fights back as best he can, but as soon as he takes any damage, he flees. If the PCs stay their hand for a few moments, though, Isori greets them and introduces himself as the "guardian of this glade" before he asks who they are and where they're from. News of Willowshore's return intrigues him—he has only ever known the site as a ruin where he gathered many of his favorite trinkets.

As a scholar of the heavens, Isori has recently been troubled by ominous portents captured by his astronomical and astrological instruments, and he wants to know whether the PCs have any idea what's happening in the region. He's also trying to figure out whether they might be responsible, either intentionally or unknowingly, for the "creeping chains" that he has seen reaching for the natural world like hungry vines.

What Isori has detected, as the PCs might surmise, is Kugaptee's corrupting influence on the region. The fiend's touch has been encroaching upon the wetlands more rapidly since last spring, and while Isori doesn't understand the true extent of the threat, he has certainly noticed the warnings. If the PCs reveal the truth to him (or at the very least convince him they're not the culprits), he asks them what's to be done about it. This encounter is meant to underscore the stakes for the PCs, particularly any nature-oriented characters in the group, but if the PCs can make Isori friendly or helpful (his initial attitude is indifferent) with a successful DC 27 check to Make an Impression, he shares with them one of his hidden treasures to aid them in their fight.

Isori has no objection to letting the PCs gather petals of Hei Feng's horn, provided they do so with respect for the environment, don't damage the plants unnecessarily, and don't take more than they need.

ISORI

CREATURE 6

Male lunar naga (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 2 178)

Initiative Perception +16

Treasure: If the PCs make Isori friendly, he'll offer them a single *thousand-year dragonroot* (page 74)

from a stash he keeps hidden in an unassuming tree hollow. If they make him helpful, he'll offer them all three of the roots. Otherwise, the PCs can locate the three *thousand-year dragonroots* by succeeding at a DC 30 Perception check after spending an hour Searching his observatory.

Harvesting the Flowers: One PC can attempt a secret DC 28 Crafting, Herbalism Lore, Nature, or Survival check to gather the petals, and the other PCs can Aid this check with DC 20 checks in one of the above skills. On a critical success, the harvested petals are particularly viable for use in fireworks, and the PCs get a +2 circumstance bonus to their checks later to craft fireworks and earn Victory Points, but on a failure, they take a –2 circumstance penalty to these checks (or a –4 circumstance penalty on a critical failure).

If the PCs have made Isori at least friendly, he provides his own advice on how to harvest the petals, reducing all DCs to harvest by 4.

Crafting the Fireworks: When the PCs return to Willowshore, the next step is to craft enough fireworks



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OVERGROWN APPLE GROVE

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



to put on a proper show. As with the previous event, you don't need to have the players roleplay out the entire display once Ren Mei Li arrives. In order to determine how successful the display is, ask each player what their character does to make sure the fireworks function, then have them attempt a DC 28 skill check with an appropriate skill to earn Victory Points. Crafting is the most obvious choice here for PCs who wish to build the fireworks, but those who seek to bolster the display with magic can roll an Arcana, Nature, Occult, or Religion check, as appropriate. Performance is a good check to attempt for those who want to make sure that the actual display goes off artistically by knowing when and how to launch the spectacle.

After the Show: Once the last firework bursts, the gathered townsfolk disperse back to their homes, and Ren Mei Li once again approaches the PCs. As before, she eagerly compliments the PCs' efforts before she again plucks a silver pin from her hair. This one is adorned with two cloisonne ornaments on strands of colored silk that carry the scent of apples.

"I congratulate you on a magnificent display, but I know you are eager to learn of your next task. The Sweet Fruits of Autumn symbolize the steward's willingness to gather and wisely stockpile resources for the coming hardships of winter. I know, and perhaps you do as well, of a grove of particularly delicate apples that grow not far to the south,

but no one has lived here for so long that I fear the grove may have become the home of something... particularly disagreeable to those of my persuasion. We are some months away from apple season, but if you begin the work of restoring this grove now, come autumn, you'll be rewarded with sweet fruits indeed! And if this disagreeable element can be punished, all the better for it. Again, I give you a week to accomplish this task, and I wish you luck!"

Ren Mei Li then vanishes into the silver mist without further warning about what might now dwell in the apple grove.

Reward: Grant the PCs 60 XP if they earn at least 1 Victory Point, or 80 XP if they earn the maximum of 4 Victory Points. Grant them an additional 40 XP if they made Isori at least friendly.

EVENT 3: SWEET FRUITS OF AUTUMN MODERATE 11


The apple grove in question lies 20 miles south of Willowshore and is a place that many townsfolk know well and have long enjoyed the fruits of. Today, though, the grove is completely overgrown. Apple trees still thrive here, and their fruit remains delicious, but for the past seven years, the area has been the lair of a group of dangerous monsters.

Use the Overgrown Apple Grove map presented here for this encounter.

Where once stood a beautiful clearing in which grew dozens of fine apple trees, now creeps an overgrown tangle of weeds and brambles. Here and there, apple trees still stand among the undergrowth, but wide animal trails left by something the size of an elephant do as well—trails lined with the crunched and chewed remnants of countless enormous spiders.

Creatures: Not every creature that dwells in Shenmen sees the jorogumo and their spiders as objects of fear. To certain predators, such as the hulking khavagodon, spiders make for a particularly delicious meal, and the sensation of chitin crunching between teeth is a delight. Not one, but four of these oversized opossums have moved into this overgrown apple grove, and they consider the entire region as part of their territory. Whenever these predators move in, it's only a matter of time before the jorogumo take action. In the case of these four, that action manifests in the form of the PCs.

While the ill-tempered khavagodons prefer the tang of spider meat and their poison glands, the giant animals won't hesitate to attack the PCs as well, lurching from the undergrowth to attack and using Stealth for initiative. A khavagodon reduced



to fewer than 40 Hit Points attempts to flee but will eventually return to the area to reclaim its territory. If the PCs can establish a method of communication with the animals, they might be able to work out a deal and convince the creatures to relocate elsewhere, but otherwise, before work on restoring the grove can begin, the four creatures must be slain.

KHRAVGODONS (4)

CREATURE 9

Pathfinder Bestiary 3 192

Initiative Stealth +18

Treasure: A character who spends 1 hour Searching the grove uncovers the almost entirely overgrown remains of a long-dead adventurer. Little more than a skeleton now, he still wears his distinctive dragon turtle armor (page 74) and carries a heavy steel cylinder—a dragon turtle artillery (page 76). The PCs automatically discover this treasure once they begin work on restoring the grove.

Restoring the Grove: The PCs don't need to complete the task of restoring the apple grove, nor does it need to be done by them, but the preliminary planning for the task Ren Mei Li sets them must be done before they can move on to the next rite. To determine how successful their plans are once the apple season begins in autumn, ask each player what their character does to help restore the grove, then have them attempt a DC 28 skill check with an appropriate skill to earn Victory Points. Nature is the most obvious choice here for PCs who wish to use their knowledge of plant life to help the site recover (with or without primal magic), but other magic can help as well, in which case a PC can roll an Arcana, Occult, or Religion check, as appropriate. Diplomacy can be used to recruit workers from Willowshore. Farming Lore can be used to prune and weed and ensure the apple trees have the best chance to thrive. Survival can be called upon to set traps and protections to keep scavengers from harming the trees.

Reward: Grant the PCs 60 XP if they earn at least 1 Victory Point, or 80 XP if they earn the maximum of 4 Victory Points.

EVENT 4: THE FIRST MURDER

Heh Shan-Bao's first murder occurs while the PCs are visiting the apple grove and fighting khravgodons, so the actual work of restoring the grove will likely take place alongside their investigation of this crime.

The first victim is **Kazuma Oono** (NG male kitsune director 5), whom Heh Shan-Bao targets because he's bitter about how the director handled a performance of *The Chronicle of the Water-Weaver* a few months before

THE MURDERS BEGIN

When the time comes for a murder to occur, Heh Shan-Bao uses a portal from the corrupted Willowshore mindscape to emerge into the ruins of his manor in Willowshore itself—a portal the PCs won't be able to access or even know about until the end of this chapter. He emerges at night, then uses *dimension door* to instantly appear at a location he has visited before, timing his arrival for when he hopes his chosen target is alone to ensure he catches them by surprise. After his violent work is done, he returns to the manor ruins via flight and passes back through the portal to the corrupted Willowshore mindscape, leaving nothing to track in his wake.

Three murders are presented in his chapter for the PCs to investigate; you can add more if you wish, but it's likely the PCs will have a solution at hand before then. All three of the victims are specific NPCs from Willowshore; if any of these NPCs have already been slain, or if you feel that their deaths would overly derail your specific Season of Ghosts story, substitute a different NPC in their place.

Each murder is presented with some clues that the PCs can discover. In addition, some general clues about each body can be discovered. See Heh Shan-Bao's NPC entry on pages 88–89 for more information about how the PCs can investigate the murders and search for clues.

the governor attempted his ritual, but also because he's afraid Oono might be able to provide useful information to the PCs. Shan-Bao entered Oono's room via *dimension door*, killed him as he worked at his writing desk, seized the kitsune's notebook to prevent the PCs from obtaining it, and then smashed out of the building before flying back to the portal in the ruined manor.

Oono's body is discovered in his private office at The Seven-Colored Songbird shortly before the PCs return to Willowshore, so they'll be greeted with a town still abuzz and shocked at the event. The door was locked, and the lock is undisturbed. A paper wall has been smashed outward from within, and the inner surface of the splintered framework bears bloodstained smears. The hole is easily large enough for a human to have passed through. There are no signs of struggle. There's a lot of blood around the body, which lies on the floor next to a writing desk as if he'd simply fallen out of his chair without standing or otherwise responding to his attacker.

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After word spreads of this murder, the people of Willowshore mourn the loss of the beloved director and look to the PCs for answers, but they don't significantly alter their day-to-day activities.

SCENE OF THE CRIME

Search for Clues Investigate; DC 25
Perception

Minor The killer entered the crime scene calmly, without damaging anything, but they exited by simply smashing through the fragile paper doorway, leaving no tracks outside of the room in the courtyard beyond.

Moderate A trunk that rests against a wall near the smashed open section has bloody handprints on it; within lies a collection of folios that contain Oono's annotated copies of his favorite plays. The books appear to have been pawed through by someone with blood-soaked hands. With a successful DC 25 Theater Lore or Willowshore Lore check, a character notes that one play from Oono's regular cycle of offerings is missing: *The Chronicle of the Water-Weaver*.

Major The PC automatically realizes *The Chronicle of the Water-Weaver* is missing. In addition, the PC discovers a sheaf of pages that fell behind Oono's writing desk—costume sketches and a draft script for *The Endless Shore*, a play about Willowshore's time in the mindscape inspired by the performances the PCs put on for **Event 1: Bright Spring Bird**. While this draft manuscript has no relevance to Oono's murder, it serves as a significant personal token that can be used to free Oono's soul in Chapter 3.

False Lead Oono was known to be very allied with Northridge politically and often had snarky remarks about Southbankers—perhaps the killer was someone from Southbank who was insulted by him?

THE CHRONICLE OF THE WATER-WEAVER

Search for Clues Investigate; DC 22 Willowshore Lore

Minor This play is about a monk who learned how to weave cloth from water, then became embroiled in a complex plot involving bickering silk traders vying for the attentions of a fickle governor.

Moderate Oono traditionally directed a new version of this play at every summer solstice, but he didn't this year—likely due to the events surrounding the Willowshore curse.

Major In fact, Oono was ready to go with this production, but when rumors spread that he was altering the play to make it a blatant critique of Governor Heh Shan-Bao, the governor paid Oono a visit a few weeks before the end of spring, and all discussion of that summer's production of the play went silent thereafter.

False Lead This play is one that Oono had lost interest in and took out of his regular rotation; it being missing from his collection is thus unremarkable.

INTERVIEWS

Search for Clues Gather Information; DC 22
Diplomacy

Minor Oono was last seen shortly before dusk on the night he was killed, when he stopped by the Happy Kappa bathhouse for a post-dinner soak. He spoke briefly to Hua De-ge while he was there and seemed to be in good spirits at the time.

Moderate Oono was excited about writing a new play based on the PCs' performance earlier regarding their time spent in the mindscape, and he felt that he'd just had a breakthrough in his inspiration. As soon as he left the bathhouse, he said he was going

straight back to the theater to write down his sudden flash of ideas before they evaporated.

Major While Oono didn't have any obvious enemies, there was that time a few weeks before the last day of spring that Governor Heh paid him a visit, and folks reported hearing a heated argument... after which Oono seemed particularly depressed and frustrated.

False Lead Oono often reduced bad actors to tears with his cutting remarks—perhaps the murderer was a spurned or vengeful actor?

Reward: Grant the PCs 80 XP the first time they either find links to Heh Shan-Bao or discover the significant personal token during their investigation.

INVESTIGATION TROUBLESHOOTING


Some potential complications in the murder investigations can be handled as follows.

Involving Ren Mei Li: If the PCs involve Ren Mei Li in their investigations, the jorogumo has little interest in providing aid, noting that if they're to be reliable stewards of Willowshore, dealing with crimes and events like these will be part of their duties. Still, she's sympathetic to the PCs' concerns and, at your option, can be used to help the players connect some dots if they're struggling with the case. If she gets the idea that the PCs consider her as a suspect, she chides them for being paranoid and suggests they don't get distracted by "faulty leaps of logic."

Speaking to the Dead: It's unlikely for a PC in Season of Ghosts to have access to *talking corpse*, *call spirit*, or similar magic that lets them speak to the dead, but if they do, these methods should give



Endless Shore Manuscript



the same information that investigations could. Asked to describe their killer, these corpses focus more on the killer's rootlike body, the butterflies that come from his eyes, and his long broken arms, but can also identify the killer as a distorted version of Governor Heh Shan-Bao if you wish.

Staking Out the Manor: Once the PCs suspect Heh Shan-Bao is somehow involved in the murders, they might choose to investigate his manor. Without the *Fang and Key*, they won't be able to enter the restored manor, and no new clues of his presence can be found in the ruined structure. The PCs might decide to stake out the manor. If they do so at night, at your discretion, the PCs might be able to confront Heh Shan-Bao before (or after) a murder, in which case he fights the PCs. A conflict with Heh Shan-Bao is a Moderate 11 encounter; his statistics appear on page 89. If the PCs slay him, he re-forms in the corrupted Willowshore mindscape and must be confronted again, as detailed in Chapter 3, but he won't return to Willowshore to murder again. Grant the PCs 80 XP for each potential murder prevented in this way.

EVENT 5: SPICED TEA OF WINTER SEVERE 11

A week after Ren Mei Li sends the PCs to restore the apple grove (and likely a few days after the PCs investigate the first murder), the jorogumo returns to Willowshore. She thanks the PCs for their work but is more delighted at the news that the four khavagodons are dead than to hear about the restoration work that has begun on the grove. While her demeanor is as courteous as ever, there's an intensity to her manner that she never showed before. The silvery sheen over her eyes is more pronounced, and the tips of her fangs are visible when she speaks.

"You come to the fourth season, and to the most revealing task. The ritual of winter requires providing a spiced tea for the people, signifying the steward's ability to provide warmth, sustenance, and safety throughout the season's cold and hungry nights. It's best to use fine tea for such an occasion, yet even the finest tea can be improved by filtering it through the most delicate of webbing.

"The caretakers of Whisperweb Shrine to the northwest provide such fine silk, the texture and weave are perfect for the straining of delicate teas. They may not be what you are accustomed to, yet provide them with a taste of the teas you seek to present, and you should be able to secure their favor. I advise against simply taking from them what you need, but your choices, as always, remain your own.

This time, she offers the cloisonne ball depicting the fruit platter, while holding back one final

ornament, which shows a steaming cauldron glowing against a backdrop of white snowflakes, or perhaps spiderwebs. Then, she once again bids the party farewell and promises to return in one week to sample the teas strained through spidersilk gathered from Whisperweb Shrine.

None in Willowshore know the name "Whisperweb Shrine," for in their time a century ago, the site was without a name at all. Instead, it was known only as a strange, forgotten shrine that predated the modern township. If the PCs ask around Karahai or speak to a local like Lo Kuon, they can confirm that the old shrine located a few days travel north of Willowshore has been known as Whisperweb for as long as they can remember, when, in fact, the site gained that name only a few years after Willowshore was pulled into the mindscape.

Traveling to the Shrine: The journey to the shrine, which lies a dozen miles north of where the trail leads off the map, is uneventful, though an ominous hush descends upon the land as the PCs draw close. Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs approach the actual location.

Use the Whisperweb Shrine map on page 34 for this encounter.

The winding path opens here into an idyllic-looking clearing, at the heart of which shines an achingly beautiful pond. Ornaments hang from tree branches overhead: paper lanterns, gilt masks, braids of woven silk, and, hung among the rest with equal prominence, the mummified corpses of animals and more than a few people. Their silent screams are preserved in tight, suffocating layers of silk, as though the keepers of this place found that expression particularly pleasing or amusing.

The ornamental pool that glimmers in the middle of the clearing is surrounded by old stone shrines built out of stacked stones, while a beautiful cascade of water runs softly over the edge of a low ridge to the northwest to fill the pool, flowing back out to the south in a narrow creek.

The pool is 20 feet deep, but the waters are relatively calm—a character can Swim the pool with a successful DC 10 Athletics check. The creek to the south is only 2 feet deep and can be waded through as difficult terrain. The creek itself is seasonal—later in the summer, the trickling cascade turns into a proper waterfall and the stream widens, with the water eventually flowing south into the hollow known as the Left Eye of Fumeiyoshi before draining into underground reservoirs.

Creatures: The guardians of Whisperweb Shrine are a half-dozen spirits known as algrieviers—spider-like

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self-appointed custodians of forgotten shrines like this one. While not evil, the algrievers are quick to defend their shrine from intruders, as the large amount of web-shrouded bones and bodies that lie about the place testify. Still, they don't attack on sight.

As soon as they notice the PCs, the algrievers emerge from the surrounding woods and clamber up onto the six rock shrines to the east and west of the pool to address the PCs. The algriever closest to the PCs addresses them in a soft, eloquent voice.

"You intrude upon sacred ground. Your kind abandoned this shrine to us. By what right do you claim such a return?"

The algrievers listen to the PCs' responses but react stiffly to any request for them to give over some of their silk, instead informing the PCs that, now that they've arrived, they can't be allowed to leave before they perform proper rites and prayers to "those you have forgotten." This shrine was originally devoted to Daikitsu, and while that was many centuries ago now, the algrievers still honor the goddess. If the PCs don't do so themselves, they're ordered to perform a tea ceremony in memory of the goddess of agriculture—see "Honoring the Shrine" below.

If the PCs refuse, or if they attack or attempt to harvest silk from the surrounding area, the algrievers hiss in fury and attack. They fight to the death but don't seek to kill the PCs, instead working to trap

them alive so that they can repent and offer prayers. Note that while killing the algrievers allows the PCs to gather the silk they need with ease, they won't have a chance to earn Victory Points in this encounter.

ALGRIEVERS (6)

CREATURE 9

Page 82

Initiative Perception +21

Honoring the Shrine: Again, you don't need to have the players roleplay out the entire tea ceremony to honor the shrine, although some groups will enjoy the chance to roleplay the scene out. If your group prefers such an extended scene, you should use this as an opportunity to give the players a chance to build on what they've learned so far about tea culture, and if they do a particularly memorable job at presenting the ceremony, feel free to reduce the DCs needed to earn Victory Points in this encounter by 2.

In order to determine how successful the display is, ask each player what their character does to properly honor the shrine, then have them attempt a DC 28 skill check with an appropriate skill to earn Victory Points. If the PCs chose to perform this service without being prompted by the algrievers, they gain a +2 circumstance bonus to these checks, but if the PCs fought the algrievers and were captured and are forced to perform the ceremony, they take a -2 circumstance penalty instead. Religion or Tea Lore are the most obvious choices here for PCs who wish to pray to the shrine or to perform the tea ceremony correctly. Diplomacy can be used to secure the algrievers' cooperation, Performance can be used to supplement the tea ceremony, and magic can use Arcana, Nature, or Occultism as needed.

The algrievers appreciate a well-performed ceremony but don't require it. Even if the PCs completely fail to earn any Victory Points here, as long as the algrievers believe that they did their best, they'll allow the PCs to harvest the silk they desire and leave in peace. If the PCs earned at least 3 Victory Points, the algrievers are moved enough by the rite to give up to 6 willing PCs a Pilgrim's Ward (page 82). The algrievers won't be giving anyone else this ward for the remainder of this adventure, so if the PCs earn this reward, they'll retain it as long as they obey the edicts and anathemas of worshipping Daikitsu.

Reward: Grant the PCs 60 XP if they earn at least 1 Victory Point, or 80 XP if they earn the maximum of 4 Victory Points. Grant them XP as if they'd defeated the algrievers in combat if they resolve this encounter without violence.

EVENT 6: THE SECOND MURDER

Heh Shan-Bao's second victim is **Elizeth Candora** (NG female human cleric of Pharasma 5), caretaker of Willowshore's temple of Pharasma, Her Fluvial Lady of Souls. He targets her in part due to her association with Pharasma, a deity whose domain over the souls of the dead runs counter to what Kugaptee represents, but also because of his fear and hatred of flute music. He attacks her one night as she plays her flute to soothe the spirits in the graveyard just southwest of Her Fluvial Lady of Souls, hoping to spread fear in Willowshore about the fate for all of the townsfolk's souls once they die.

Her body is discovered in the graveyard, sprawled over the top of Oono's fresh grave, in the same state as the previous victim. The PCs learn of the discovery soon after their return to town from Whisperweb Shrine. After this killing, Willowshore goes on high alert as it becomes obvious there's a monster—be they human or otherwise—stalking the streets at night. The town elder imposes a sundown curfew. Children stay indoors or under close supervision, people become much more reluctant to forage for food and firewood, and no one ventures out after dark except in cases of emergency. The fear infecting the town causes the PCs to suffer a –1 circumstance penalty to all checks in Willowshore to Earn Income or Gather Information.

SCENE OF THE CRIME

Search for Clues Investigate; DC 25 Perception

Minor While Elizeth's body now lies in state in the church itself, her broken flute lies in the grass near Oono's grave. If the PCs examine the flute and succeed at a DC 25 Perception check, they note that it appears to have been destroyed by sonic damage rather than a physical blow; they can identify the cause of the destruction as likely coming from a *shatter* spell with a successful DC 20 check to Identify Magic. The broken flute serves as a significant personal token that can be used to free Elizeth's soul in Chapter 3.

Moderate Elizeth often played her flute over the graves of the recently deceased, believing that music would help guide them to the afterlife. Her flute being broken suggests, perhaps, that someone wanted to further ensure Oono's soul would become lost and indicates an extra layer of cruelty to the crimes. The PC also automatically realizes the damage to the flute was caused by a *shatter* spell.

Major The broken flute could suggest a different possibility—the murderer might be a supernatural

creature called a yohoi, as they're said to loathe and fear the sound of flute music performed by a holy person.

False Lead The fact that Elizeth spent time at Oono's grave suggests that there might have been some hidden relationship between the two—perhaps the killer was a jealous or jilted lover?



Reward: Grant the PCs 60 XP for discovering Elizeth's broken flute.

EVENT 7: THE FINAL SEASON

Ren Mei Li returns to Willowshore at the appointed time, a week after sending the PCs to Whisperweb Shrine. She doesn't ask how they managed to

gather the silk needed to strain winter's spiced tea, but asks them to escort her to the Cerulean Teahouse and then brew her a drink using the gathered silk. She enjoys the drink regardless and compliments the PCs on their work so far before proceeding with the final rite: Walking the Gossamer Path. As she finishes her tea, Ren Mei Li smiles mercurially, then gives a full body stretch, during which her eight spider legs unfurl from her back to stand on the ground and lift her humanoid form into the air—now that the PCs have completed the first four tasks, she no longer feels the need to obscure her true nature.

"Now that you have satisfied the guardians of the Whisperweb Shrine and are prepared to pursue the fifth and final season treasure, it is time for us to reach a clear understanding, without illusion or pretense, about Willowshore's future.

"I am prepared to accept you all as stewards. I am also prepared to offer considerable autonomy to Willowshore with a Silver Seal. The precise terms can be negotiated, but I expect you will find them very reasonable—far more reasonable than you would receive from any other court.

"In exchange, what I want is this: an oath of personal fealty, superseding any loyalty you may have to Lady Lang Loi or the rest of the jorogumo court. I wish for you to be my agents, and mine alone. Naturally, this will be kept discreet. Outwardly, you must play the part of loyal subjects to the jorogumo court and never let our private agreement slip. If you find that my kindred make unreasonable demands, you must ask me to intercede rather than taking matters into your own hands, but I do promise my protection if your village should need it.

"I make this offer only because I have been impressed with your skills so far. I hope you will not betray my trust. What do you say?"

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If the PCs agree, or succeed at a DC 39 Deception check Lie to her, the princess continues.

"You must now walk the Gossamer Path and seek the favor of the veiled path maidens. They are guardians of secrets, particularly those of the shameful dead, and I believe they will have information of value to you about the unfortunate cruelties your town has been experiencing of late. Go to them. Ask of them what you wish to know, and why. Seek their counsel in solving your murders, and prove you are willing to take great risks to solve your town's pains.

"This is the final season, your final test. A steward worthy of the office is courageous enough to seek assistance for their people without being cowed by high office or personal danger. Go then, and prove your mettle."

Before she leaves, she gives the PCs a *gossamer sash* (page 86) and four doses of *sanctified beans* (page 74). The sash, she explains, will allow them to contact path maidens without actually traveling to the Gossamer Mountains, while the beans will aid them if their encounter with the path maidens goes poorly.

If the PCs reject Ren Mei Li's offer, she's visibly disappointed. She doesn't give them the *gossamer sash*

or the *sanctified beans*, but instead gives them a *scroll of sending* and says, "I will not force you, but I expect you to keep what we spoke of here in confidence. You do not wish me as an enemy. If you change your minds later, use this scroll to inform me, and I shall return to accept your apologies. Until then, I wish you luck against what awaits your town in the coming days."

With that, she promises to return in a week before she vanishes into the mist once more.

Walking the Gossamer Path

Low 11

The Gossamer Path is well known in Shenmen (and thus to all who live in Willowshore, the PCs included) as a term that applies to all of the winding mountain roads and trails that coil their way through the Gossamer Mountains. While the road leading north from Canary Inn eventually reaches these mountains, the PCs need not take this route to walk the Gossamer Path—any length of road walked in the mountains gives the PCs ample opportunity to encounter path maidens.

The Gossamer Mountains lie nearly 300 miles to the east of Willowshore, but if the PCs choose to follow the winding road north from town, the journey is closer to 450 miles. Without the *gossamer sash* granted to them by Ren Mei Li, the PCs face a long journey if they wish to seek the advice of path maidens, but with the item, they can "walk the Gossamer Path" from any road in Shenmen after midnight. This adventure assumes the PCs use a *gossamer sash* to contact path maidens, but if they choose to journey to the mountains in person, you can use this opportunity to introduce more encounters along the way of your own design.

Up to 4 PCs can use a *gossamer sash* to travel into an immersive mindscape to meet with a group of path maidens; if your group has more than four, either have the players choose which four PCs make the trip, or simply adjust the length of the gossamer sash to allow for all your PCs to take part. When the PCs activate the sash after an hour spent walking a roadway at night, a thick fog descends upon them, only to swiftly clear and reveal that they now stand on a narrow mountain pathway that measures 10 feet wide, with a sheer cliff rising into the clouds to their right and another dropping away into a foggy forest far below to their left.

This encounter isn't intended to result in combat, but if the PCs do attack the path maiden, you can use the mountain path map from *Pathfinder Adventure Path* #197: *Let the Leaves Fall* (page 32), or a similar mountain path map of your own design.

Creatures: When the PCs enter the mindscape, it won't be long before a path maiden appears before them, either stepping into view as they walk around a bend or even rising up out of the road. Clad in



Strange Mirror

robes of purple and deep sea blue with veils obscuring their features, the path maiden addresses the PCs in a whispering voice while simultaneously speaking telepathically to their minds.

"Warm-bloods, living-bloods, fragile mortal feasts. Why do you tread the Gossamer Path? Whose dead secrets do you seek, and for whose lives would you use them?"

If the PCs didn't seek a path maiden via the power of the *gossamer sash*, she barely waits for an answer before attacking. The PCs have one chance to swiftly answer—each PC can attempt a DC 34 Diplomacy check to get the path maiden to stay her attack. As long as at least one PC scores at least a success at this check and no PC critically fails it, the path maiden lets the PCs speak further. Otherwise, she fights until destroyed.

The PCs are allowed one question of the path maiden. Her knowledge is limited to the dead in Shenmen, but it includes those who have spent time dead only to recently return to life. The topics of Kugaptee and the fate of Governor Heh Shan-Bao are specific topics that she's prepared to offer insights on (see below), but if the PCs ask about anything else, provide an answer as best you can that will satisfy their curiosity. At your option, if the question is frivolous or disrespectful, the path maiden answers by attacking. Once the question is asked, the PCs suddenly find themselves back where they started (if this encounter took place in a mindscape created by a *gossamer sash*), or the path maiden fades from view, leaving them alone on the mountain trail (if they physically traveled to the Gossamer Mountains).

PATH MAIDEN

Page 86

Initiative Perception +22

Asking the Right Question: If the PCs ask about Kugaptee, Governor Heh Shan-Bao, or the murders that have been plaguing Willowshore, the path maiden moves aside wordlessly and indicates the PCs should continue down the road, where an oblong silver mirror manifests out of nothingness, hovering in the air in the middle of the road. Its reflection shows an empty path, even when the PCs stand directly before it, as if reflecting only the road as it appears when not traveled at all.

As soon as anyone approaches within 5 feet of the mirror, the image shifts. The governor's manor in

Willowshore appears, not in its current dilapidated state, but as a splendid house, freshly painted and colorfully tiled, with imperial banners hanging above the doors and gold tassels streaming from the lantern posts. The image moves inward, passing through the mansion's doors and then through its courtyard, to finally enter the manor's master bedroom before stopping at a door in the northern wall that didn't exist in that room during either of the PCs' two previous visits. The door is made of fine cypress wood, with an ornate golden lock worked into a hideous fiend's face sitting above the door handle. A crown of claws and gouged-out eyeballs encircles the creature's brow. The fiend's face shifts again, now appearing to be that of

Governor Heh Shan-Bao. He peers out of the mirror and addresses the PCs directly.

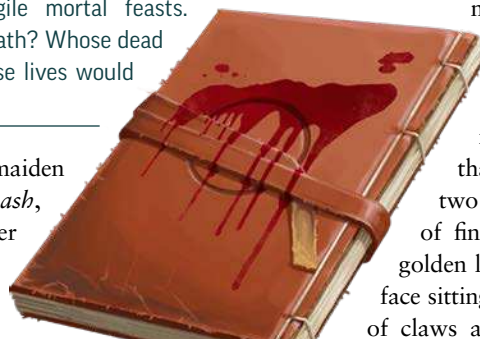
"Greed and shame. Such potent tonics to quicken a change. A man becomes a monster. A monster becomes a gateway. A village becomes a feast. Greed and shame, shame and greed. What marvelous chains they weave! What lovely tricks, what clever locks! I'll open your doors and visit some more, and soon shall man and monster be one. And then Kugaptee has won, for only a rightful ruler shall carry the key to my domain!"

The image then dissipates, and a moment later, the mirror does as well. The mist thickens about the path, and its presence seems alive and hungry, creating a claustrophobic closeness that wasn't present before. Yet, the path is emptier, too, as the veiled maidens have vanished. It seems their strange test is at its end.

Reward: Grant the PCs XP as if they'd defeated the path maiden in combat if they avoided battle entirely and asked the right question.

EVENT 8: THE THIRD MURDER

Heh Shan-Bao's third victim is the grave keeper-chemist You So-Jin, whom Heh Shan-Bao targets because he can sense her recent work on experimenting with a new type of alchemical bomb that's intended to work particularly well against nindorus. This killing occurs after the PCs return from the Gossamer Path but before Ren Mei Li's last visit. The body is unlikely to be found until late morning, after the nightly curfew lifts, and a customer visits Graveside Manners only to find the shock of their life.



You So-Jin's Journal

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ADDITIONAL MURDERS

If the PCs dawdle, Heh Shan-Bao might strike again. Any further victims are chosen opportunistically, depending on who the monstrous governor can find alone and have no particular significance as targets. There are no additional clues to be found at these murder sites. He might even begin to target individual PCs at points where he thinks he can ambush them while they're alone.

So-Jin's body is found in her shop, sprawled amid a chaos of destroyed stock and ruined alchemical supplies. Her corpse is in the same condition as the others.

SCENE OF THE CRIME

Search for Clues Investigate; DC 27 Perception

Minor Unlike the first two crimes, the murderer spent a significant amount of time at the crime scene—either fighting against the victim or tearing the place apart in search of something.

Moderate The victim appears to have been slain as quickly and efficiently as the previous ones, confirming that the devastation in the shop wasn't a result of a struggle but instead a frenzied search or simply a bout of enraged destruction after the killing was complete. The alchemical lab at the back of the house appears to have borne the brunt of this devastation, as it has been smashed to splinters and most of the supplies have been ruined. If the PCs spend 10 more minutes Searching the ruined alchemical lab and succeed at a DC 27 Perception check, they discover an old journal hidden behind a not-completely-destroyed dresser atop a small metal case. This journal has been in You So-Jin's family for generations and contains alchemical and herbalism research notes from her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. See Treasure below for additional details on the journal and the metal case, but the journal serves as a significant personal token that can be used to free So-Jin's soul in Chapter 3.

Major The PCs automatically discover You So-Jin's journal and silversoul bombs (page 73).

False Lead You So-Jin put up an unexpectedly powerful fight against her attacker, resulting in the devastation of the building. Perhaps her skill at herbalism afforded some sort of accidental protection?

Treasure: If the PCs discover So-Jin's journal and spend an hour reading through it, they'll discover it contains a rare formula for an alchemical weapon: a silversoul bomb. The formula appears to be one that So-Jin's mother began researching up until her death and that So-Jin only recently completed the research for. The notes also indicate how You So-Jin intended to present the formula and the few bombs she crafted to the PCs to aid them in their fight against nindorus once they returned from their "latest errand," but she was murdered before she could act on this plan.

The metal case found under the journal contains three silversoul bombs and 500 gp in powdered silver and other alchemical supplies that, if used to craft additional silversoul bombs, grants a +2 item bonus to the Crafting check.

Reward: Grant the PCs 80 XP for discovering the silversoul bombs and the associated formula. If the PCs manage to prevent So-Jin's murder, she gifts them the silversoul bombs and formula at the start of Chapter 3.



The Fang and Key

The Fang and Key

When Ren Mei Li returns to Willowshore a week after sending the PCs on their trek along the Gossamer Path, she's eager to find out what they've learned from the path maiden and asks them to give a full report. If the PCs didn't ask the right question, she is disappointed but still wishes for them to become Willowshore's stewards.

Once the PCs conclude the report, Ren Mei Li offers a slight bow of respect to the PCs, then produces from the folds of her robe a large golden key. Four circular hollows punctuate the key's ornate shaft, and spider fangs dangle from silken threads strung through its pierced heads. When the cloisonne balls of the Five-Season Treasures are slotted into the key's shaft, they lock into place, and a golden glow surrounds the object. After fitting the cloisonne balls in place, Ren Mei Li speaks once more to the PCs: "Swear yourself to the office and to serve as Willowshore's stewards wisely and well." As she speaks, she offers the golden key; the PCs need only accept this key to become official stewards of Shenmen's jorogumo court.

This key is known as the *Fang and Key*. With it, the PCs are now legally part of modern Willowshore's government and are considered the rightful rulers of the town alongside their currently serving governor. The *Fang and Key* is largely a ceremonial item and has no real intrinsic function of its own other than



to serve as an *everburning torch*. The most important thing the *Fang and Key* unlocks is access to Heh Shan-Bao's domain. Now that the PCs have become legally appointed rulers, they can access his manor and use the mindscape door found within to travel to the corrupted Willowshore mindscape, as detailed in Chapter 3.

Treasure: Traditionally, no additional gifts are provided to those who become stewards, but if the PCs did exceptionally well, Ren Mei Li does just that. If the PCs earned at least 10 Victory Points from performing the five rites, she produces a *type II bag of holding* made of spidersilk that contains an *evil-reflecting shield* (page 75), a *fortune cord* (page 77), a *purgatory emissary's staff* (page 78), and a *sensei's parasol* (page 76). Ren Mei Li allows the PCs to choose one of these four items as a reward. For every additional Victory Point above 10 the PCs earned, she allows them to choose one additional reward; if the PCs earned 14 or more Victory Points, she gives them all four items plus the bag itself.

Reward: When the PCs become stewards of Willowshore and gain the *Fang and Key*, grant them 80 XP.

Other Encounters

Unlike the previous adventures, "To Bloom Below the Web" doesn't have to end on the last day of the season. While this adventure's encounters and events shouldn't cause your campaign to trail into summer, if they do, that's perfectly fine. Likewise, you may find that your PCs are particularly efficient in completing the investigation of murder scenes or accomplishing the tasks to which they are sent to recover the Five Season treasures.

In either case (and particularly if your group is lagging behind in experience points), you may wish to include additional encounters for the party to face. Some of these could simply be additional murders performed by the monstrous governor (see the "Additional Murders" sidebar on the previous page), but you can also include brand new encounters to represent how the PCs, the townsfolk, and the settlement of Willowshore itself adjust to the new reality of existing in the modern, living world.

Presented below is one potential bonus encounter for the PCs to navigate before they move on to this Adventure Path's final chapter.

THE UN-WEAVERS

SEVERE 11

While the greatest threat Willowshore faces is that presented by the fiend Kugaptee, the town's strange return to reality attracts the attention of other fiends

and monstrosities who take note of the strange ripples in reality. This encounter is meant to spotlight this, and give the PCs an idea of the horrors that await if they should fail.

Creature: This encounter begins as the PCs are traveling as a group through Willowshore, when four strange creatures suddenly fade into view at the edge of vision—crouched atop a low roof, perhaps, or lurking in a shadowy alleyway entrance.

These crouching creatures are quintessivores, rare and cruel monsters that feed on the shredded remnants of living souls, which they strip of all identity and individuality before consuming. The sudden influx of new life into Willowshore attracted the attention of these four quintessivores, who collectively call themselves the "Un-Weavers." While powerful, the Un-Weavers are no fools, and they realize that an attack against an unknown foe could backfire against them. Instead, the four manifest near those they suspect are the town's "leaders"—the PCs—and attempt to broker an unsettling deal.

One of the four quintessivores steps forward to address the party, speaking in a calm voice tinged with curiosity as they ask, "Where did all you fresh souls hail from?" Assuming the PCs don't attack, the quintessivore soon guides the conversation toward its proposal—if the PCs offer to the four Un-Weavers one of the "fresh souls" of Willowshore today, and then again on the first day of every season to follow, the Un-Weavers promise to protect the town from other supernatural predators. Whether or not the quintessivores actually intend to honor their side of this bargain (they likely won't), if the PCs do agree to this, their reputation in town will swiftly falter as word spreads, and Ren Mei Li might even confront them about the choice. Even if canny PCs attempt to use this as an opportunity to get rid of enemies of the town, the choice to ally with such monsters is unlikely to make them popular in town!

It's more likely that the PCs turn the quintessivores down; if they do so, the monsters grow jittery before one of them says, "Then we shall simply take yours as tribute and feed on your friends as we see fit!" before they attack. Depending on how the conversation was going when violence breaks out, the PCs can roll Deception, Diplomacy, or Intimidation for initiative.

You can use any street-level map for this encounter. The map of downtown Willowshore from this campaign's first adventure makes an excellent choice.

QUINTESSIVORES (4)

CREATURE 10

Pathfinder Bestiary 3 209

Initiative Perception +17

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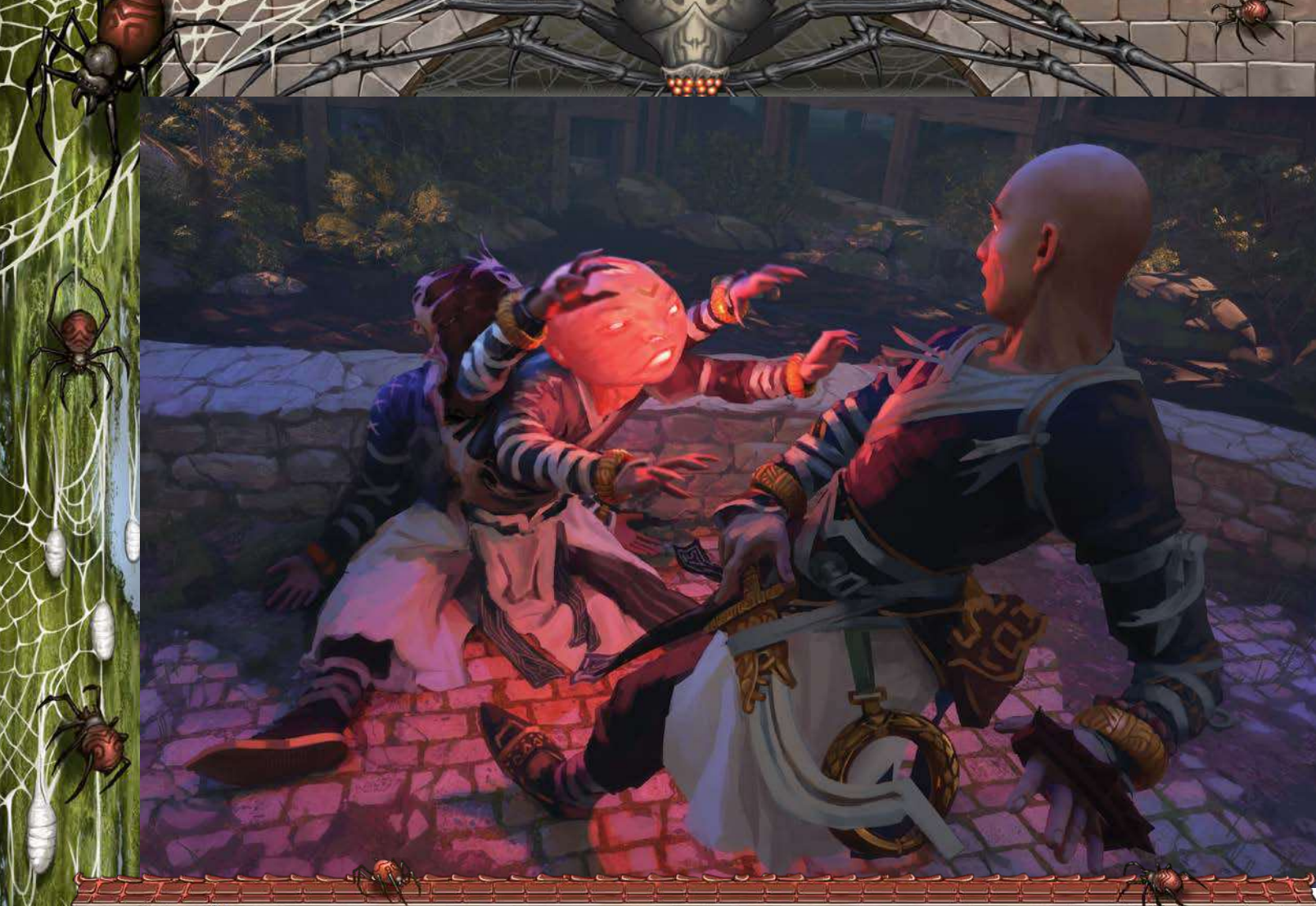
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Chapter 3: A Fiend in Two Worlds

If the PCs asked the right question of the path maiden during **Event 7: The Final Season**, they should realize that the perpetrator of the murders is Heh Shan-Bao—or some creature wearing his face, at the very least. Furthermore, the vision's reference that “only a rightful ruler shall carry the key to my domain!” is meant to reveal that once the PCs become stewards (and thus are officially among the “rightful rulers” of modern Willowshore), they can return to Heh Shan-Bao's manor and use the *Fang and Key* to confront him directly.

The PCs might have come to the conclusion that Heh Shan-Bao is the murderer through other investigations, of course, but if they're struggling to figure out his involvement, you can have Ren Mei Li

suggest the possibility. If the PCs tell her of the vision in the mirror granted by the path maiden, Ren Mei Li can make the following observation: “Now that I've made you rightful rulers, perhaps it's time to revisit your ex-governor's manor?”

As soon as any of the PCs, now stewards of Willowshore, approach within 30 feet of the dilapidated ruins that are the governor's manor, those PCs in range witness something astounding. To them, and as long as they remain within 30 feet of the manor's walls, the structure appears fully restored. Lanterns lit by an unsettling red light hang from the eaves, and additional red light glows from within its windows. The manor seems to be restored, but the longer a PC looks, the more unsettled they feel.





The Restored Manor

Once the PCs are made stewards of Willowshore, they can enter a supernaturally restored version of the governor's manor. The only other person in town capable of seeing this change is the town elder whom the PCs helped install as Willowshore's leader back in the spring, but even then, that town elder won't see the restored manor until the PCs are made stewards since, until that point, their appointment to the role of governor wasn't official in the modern era. You can use the town elder to spur the PCs to investigate the restored manor if they don't pursue an investigation on their own by having the elder approach them with questions about how the manor got rebuilt.

All of this is part of Heh Shan-Bao's plan to prevent intruders from making their way back into the now-corrupted Willowshore mindscape where he rules. By restricting passage between these realities, he hoped to limit access to himself, not anticipating a jorogumo's eagerness to elevate the PCs to positions of legal leadership in modern Shenmen's government.

While the *Fang and Key* remains little more than a glowing badge of office, within the restored manor, it functions as a metaphorical key that can unlock further secrets—and eventually help the PCs discover that the Willowshore mindscape they once dwelt in still exists, albeit in a much changed and much more horrific manner.

MANOR FEATURES

Unlike at the start of this adventure, the PCs can approach the restored manor without fear. While having the *Fang and Key* will help unlock some of the restored manor's mysteries, possession isn't required for a PC to enter the manor. A PC who concentrates for a round while outside of the manor automatically finds that they can shift their "focus" to observe the manor as it actually exists in the modern world (as a ruin) or as it exists fully restored, but once a PC enters the restored manor, they can't change between these realities. With a successful DC 25 Arcana or Occultism check to Recall Knowledge, a PC confirms that this restored manor is a form of mindscape, one that can be entered or exited at will by those who rightfully rule Willowshore.

If the PCs experiment, they'll find that any creature they're in contact with when they come or go from the restored manor can travel between the real world and the restored manor's mindscape, but without this contact, such creatures can't enter the manor or, if abandoned within the manor, can't leave. It was via this method that Heh Shan-Bao installed the restored manor's guardians.

In its restored condition, the manor was clearly built from hearty woods and is beautifully adorned with paint and tiles, but all of the ornately worked silver accents have been stripped away, leaving bare wood or stone in their place. The latticed paper walls within the manor are decorated with beautiful images of nature, hunts, and social gatherings. Numerous lanterns keep the interiors brightly lit with eerie red light—anyone who peers within any of these lanterns sees that the source of light is a writhing sphere of glowing nindoru butterflies.

While the restored manor's interior walls and windows can be forced open normally, the exterior ones can't. Any attempt to do so only allows the PCs to enter the ruined real-world manor. Likewise, any attempt to enter the restored manor's courtyard from above results in the character simply entering the ruined manor. Only by using the manor's front doors at area C1 can a PC come or go from the restored manor to the real world.

C1. MANOR ENTRANCE

A pair of stone lions flanks the manor's entrance, their eyes shimmering with crimson light. To the north, sliding paper walls block the view into the manor's inner courtyard.

Completely missing from the ruined manor, the two stone lions appear to animate as the PCs enter the room, raising their forepaws in salute before returning to their original positions. The lions' manner suggests relief, as if whatever spirit animates them is glad to have the mansion in trustworthy hands after a long history of neglect—they aren't dangerous in and of themselves.

When the PCs enter the manor, unless they're holding their breath or attempting to be stealthy, the jiang-shi servants in area C3a will automatically notice their entrance. The jiang-shi set aside their tasks to go "greet" the PCs as detailed in area C3.

C2. COURTYARD

A sparkling pool, a rock garden fountain, and artfully arranged foliage turn the manor's heart into an elegant courtyard. Koi swim lazily in the pool, while songbirds sing in the shrubbery. Numerous glowing red lanterns hang along the edges of the courtyard from the eaves of the surrounding Lung Wa-style colonnade, while the moonless night sky above is filled with stars. Elegant, framed scrolls depicting dragons, phoenixes, and dignitaries adorn the inner walls of the colonnade, but one of them on the central northern wall has been torn apart.

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It's always a clear, moonless night in this courtyard. A PC who flies up out of the courtyard finds themselves hitting an impassible barrier at a height of 15 feet, preventing a good view of the surrounding terrain.

An investigation reveals that the scroll once showed a lovely young woman with dark hair and solemn eyes wearing the ceremonial dress of a princess of Hwanggot. The frame of this portrait has been smashed to flinders, and claw swipes have torn the edges of the scroll, but the woman's likeness remains pristine. Whatever damaged the frame doesn't seem to have dared to touch her face. If a PC carrying the *Fang and Key* approaches within 10 feet of this damaged scroll, they'll feel the key quiver and vibrate slightly.

With a successful DC 30 Society check to Recall Knowledge, a PC identifies the woman in the portrait as Princess Ok Jinju of Hwanggot, a minor aristocrat who, in the modern era, is long dead. Princess Ok Jinju was a fellow student at the university where Heh Shan-Bao studied before he got into politics. Although she was only a minor princess, far from the throne, she still belonged to a vastly higher social station than

Shan-Bao could claim as a young scholar, and both of them knew that their relationship was impossible. After their studies came to an end, the princess returned to Hwanggot. In parting, she gave Shan-Bao the camellia and gold ribbon that he still keeps as prized possessions in his bedroom (area C8)—that camellia and ribbon are fully visible in the portrait that remains here.

When he was governor, Shan-Bao commissioned this portrait to honor a visiting dignitary from Hwanggot, but in reality, because he still considered her the great love of his life. Now that he has become a monster and is wracked with guilt for what he did to Willowshore, Shan-Bao can hardly bear to look at the princess's likeness. His efforts to tear apart her portrait are rooted in such powerful emotion that they withstood the mansion's restorative magic, but even in the worst of his rages, Shan-Bao couldn't bear to damage the portrait's face.

Treasure: The portrait can be easily removed from its ruined frame. It's one of the key objects that can be used to free Shan-Bao from his fate; however, it has no power, and in its damaged state, it isn't worth more than 5 gp.

C3. SERVANTS' QUARTERS

LOW 12

Although they're plainly decorated, these servants' quarters look comfortable and inviting, even without any sort of decor to give them personalities of their own.

Creatures: A pair of provincial jiang-shi vampires now dwell in this part of the manor. Each has claimed one of the two quarters (areas **C3b** and **C3c**) as their own, but they're in area **C3a** when the PCs enter the manor, sifting through stacks of documents and ledgers on the table in an attempt to organize them—a task they'll never complete, as they keep changing their minds as to whether to sort the documents by date, by topic, by author, or by some other categorization.

If they notice the PCs, the two jiang-shi move to greet the PCs in area **C1** and ask how the PCs found a way into the lord's home before demanding the PCs leave at once. The vampires have very little patience, and anything other than swiftly leaving the manor prompts them to attack; they fight to the death.

PROVINCIAL JIANG-SHI (2)

CREATURE 11

Pathfinder Book of the Dead 158

Initiative Perception +22

C4. MEETING AREA

Elaborate lanterns generously illuminate this room. A pair of long, low meeting tables fills most of the room, with shelves along the walls packed with regimented compartments for the organization of bureaucratic scrolls and missives. A stout bronze safe with a formidable-looking lock recessed inside a stern golden lion's maw sits under the shelves in the southwest corner. An empty weapon display hangs on the southern wall.

The weapon display on the wall held a *lumber lord's axe* in the real world, but here, it remains empty. The lion safe is locked (four DC 30 Thievery checks to Pick the Lock), but a touch from the *Fang and Key* as an Interact action unlocks it immediately—a PC who carries the key and approaches within 10 feet of the safe feels the key shake and vibrate as if in anticipation.

Hazard: A secret compartment inside the safe hides additional treasures, but this compartment is also protected by a potent supernatural trap.

WITHERWEIRD RUNES

HAZARD 13

RARE **MAGICAL** **TRAP**
Stealth DC 37 (master)

Description Necromantic magic stored in runes painted in powdered bone and banshees' tears lash out at anyone other than Heh Shan-Bao who opens the secondary compartment.

Disable DC 37 Disable Device to scratch out the runes and dissipate their magic harmlessly, DC 40 Arcana to sabotage the spell and cause the runes to dry up and blow away as inert powder, or *dispel magic* (7th level; counteract DC 31) to counteract the runes

Withering Wail ☞ (arcane, curse, necromancy) **Trigger** Someone other than Heh Shan-Bao opens the secondary compartment; **Effect** A howling, spectral

face manifests out of the chest and screeches, causing all within area **C4** to attempt a DC 33 Fortitude save; the sound also alerts the jiang-shi in areas **C3a** and **C6**, who quickly come to investigate the sound.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

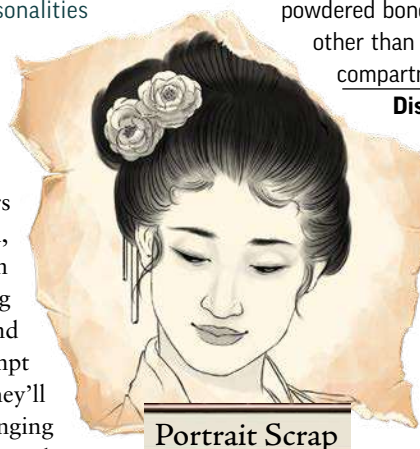
Success The creature takes 7d6 negative damage.

Failure The creature takes 15d6 negative damage. In addition, their flesh withers and weakens, leaving them to appear old and decrepit—the creature becomes clumsy 1 and enfeebled 1 until the curse is removed.

Critical Failure The creature takes 30d6 negative damage and becomes cursed as failure, but becomes clumsy 2 and enfeebled 2.

Treasure: Apart from a staggering amount of outdated and mundane bureaucratic documents, the shelves here contained some of Shan-Bao's most prized personal possessions from when he was human, but now, these once-adored belongings are ignored. A character who Searches the shelves for 10 minutes comes across *The Wisdom of the Seven Sages*, a famous classical treatise of Lung Wa. Shan-Bao's father gave him the scroll when he passed his final university examinations. Folded into the scroll is a letter from Shan-Bao's parents expressing their pride in their son and their conviction that he'll prove to be a wise, fair servant of the Dragon Throne, worthy of all the ideals they taught him. These items draw a shiver of recognition from the *Fang and Key*, and they can be used to help free Heh Shan-Bao's spirit later.

The safe contains 10 silk pouches, each containing 100 gp, along with dozens of long-expired and now worthless vouchers and bonds. A PC who succeeds at



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a DC 30 Perception check while looting notices the hidden (and trapped) compartment built into the safe's back wall.

The hidden compartment contains a second set of ledgers that prove that Heh Shan-Bao was illegally selling lumber to enrich himself personally and was concealing this income from his superiors in Imperial Lung Wa. These ledgers establish that he'd grown accustomed to a lifestyle that he wouldn't be able to sustain without the extra income stream. A few of the final entries suggest that he was trying to find a way to maintain his luxury expenditures without the lumber money but failed to do so. Near the end of the ledgers, an entry reveals that Shan-Bao diverted a large amount of this money to purchase an occult living rune from an unscrupulous Lung Wa occultist to serve as a guardian for his "most recent wartime collectibles." The notes indicate that he placed the living rune (and the weapons it guards) into the northwest storage room for the time being and that he plans to acquire more "once this matter with the evil spirit in the ruins to the northwest" is behind him. Of most immediate note to the PCs is an unfortunately smudged note containing the "deactivation mantra" for the living rune, to be used whenever Shan-Bao wished to enter the chamber. While smudged, the PCs can use this partial information to potentially incapacitate the living rune (see area C7c for details).

C5. GUEST QUARTERS

This suite of guest quarters all feature decor in a similar state of disarray; you can use the following read-aloud text for all three, but adjust each description as needed to account for the differing size of each guest quarter.

This finely appointed bedroom features all the comforts a traveling aristocrat would've expected, including amenities such as private baths and lockable personal chests. A key, likely for the guest's use of the chest, sits atop the container's closed lid.

At the time of the botched ritual, important guests from the Senhang Monastery of Tianjing were staying in area C5a, but they aren't present here today—their bodies and souls were encountered in the ruined manor earlier in the adventure. Still, this guest room appears to have been recently used, with a lingering fragrance of incense and beds that have slightly rumpled sheets.

Treasure: While it existed in the real-world ruins as a destroyed item, the *skyfang crystal* (page 78) brought here by the guests remains in place, sitting almost as if

carelessly discarded atop one of the beds in area C5a. While its one-time carrier kept it for protection, its power to seek spirits will come in handy once the PCs enter the corrupted Willowshore mindscape.

Stuffed under the sheets in a different bed in area C5a is a meditation mandala recovered from the Tan Sugi Monastery, which one of the Tianjing priests had been studying. It is obviously of local make, having been carved from cypress wood in a traditional Shenmen village design, and isn't a Tianjing artifact. Unbeknownst to the Tianjing priests, the mandala belonged to one of the monks who followed their leader into disaster. The mandala can be worn as a necklace or bracelet but otherwise functions as a *pink rhomboid aeon stone* that lacks a resonant power. It can also be used to free the corrupted

monks in this chapter.

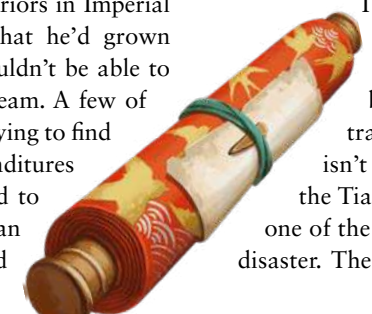
C6. DINING AREA

MODERATE 12

The fine plasterwork of this room's walls has been molded into the shapes of birds roosting in the branches of willow trees in a forest. Three wooden tables with padded benches sit in the main dining area, and the appetizing scent of a cooking feast wafts through the open doors from the kitchen to the north.

When Heh Shan-Bao attempted his ritual on the last day of spring, the manor kitchens were in full use, preparing a feast he intended to throw the next day to celebrate the successful ritual. Now, in the mindscape that is the restored manor, this feast is perpetually cooking but never quite completed, filling the area with the tantalizing but frustrating scents of a meal that will never be.

Creatures: Another three provincial jiang-shi lurk in the dining area. Ostensibly serving as manor guards, these three vampires have become overwhelmed with melancholia at the scent of the cooking food and the tables set for an imminent feast that will never arrive. The sound of the wail from the trap in area C4 rouses them, but otherwise, when the PCs enter the room, they find the three undead slowly milling about, aimlessly, in this room. They ignore any attempt to converse, but if they're attacked, the vampires fight back. When combat begins, they are stupefied 2 for 1 minute (note that this imparts a -2 penalty to their Perception bonus for initiative) but are temporarily immune to Bitter Epiphany for 1 minute thereafter. They fight until destroyed.



Wisdom of the Seven Sages

PROVINCIAL JIANG-SHI (3)

CREATURE 11

Pathfinder Book of the Dead 158

Initiative Perception +22

C7. STORAGE ROOMS

LOW 12

This room is filled with barrels, crates, and other containers.

Two of these storage rooms (areas **C7a** and **C7b**) contain little of value, but the third (area **C7c**) is a significant exception, as Heh Shan-Bao used it as storage for certain valuables.

Creatures: An occult living rune watches over the northwestern storage room (area **C7c**), lying in wait on a large wall scroll that hangs from a bamboo frame to the north. This scroll depicts a female swordfighter clad in armor that identifies her as serving Imperial Lung Wa; the sun above her head contains a single character in Common: “Protection.” This is the occult living rune, and it attacks on the first round after anyone enters the room without performing its deactivation mantra.

If the PCs discovered the smudged deactivation mantra in area **C4**, they can perform it as a 2-action activity with the auditory and concentrate traits and then attempt a DC 37 Occultism check. On a success, the occult living rune returns to its position on the scroll and remains inactive until it’s attacked or until the room is empty for 1 minute and then reentered. On a critical success, the deactivation mantra destroys the occult living rune, but on a critical failure, the occult living rune becomes immune to future attempts to deactivate it using the mantra. At your option, if the PCs used extraordinary means to examine or restore the smudged instructions from area **C4**, the DC for this check can be reduced by up to 10.

OCCULT LIVING RUNE

CREATURE 13

Pathfinder Bestiary 3 163

Initiative Stealth +31

Treasure: Most of the valuables once kept here were expended during Heh Shan-Bao’s preparation for his doomed ritual, but three potent weapons he’d recently acquired remain in storage here—they’re automatically discovered if the PCs take 10 minutes to Search here: a *dragonfire halfbow* (page 75), a *four-tiger blade* (page 75), and a *thundering fury dadao* (page 76).

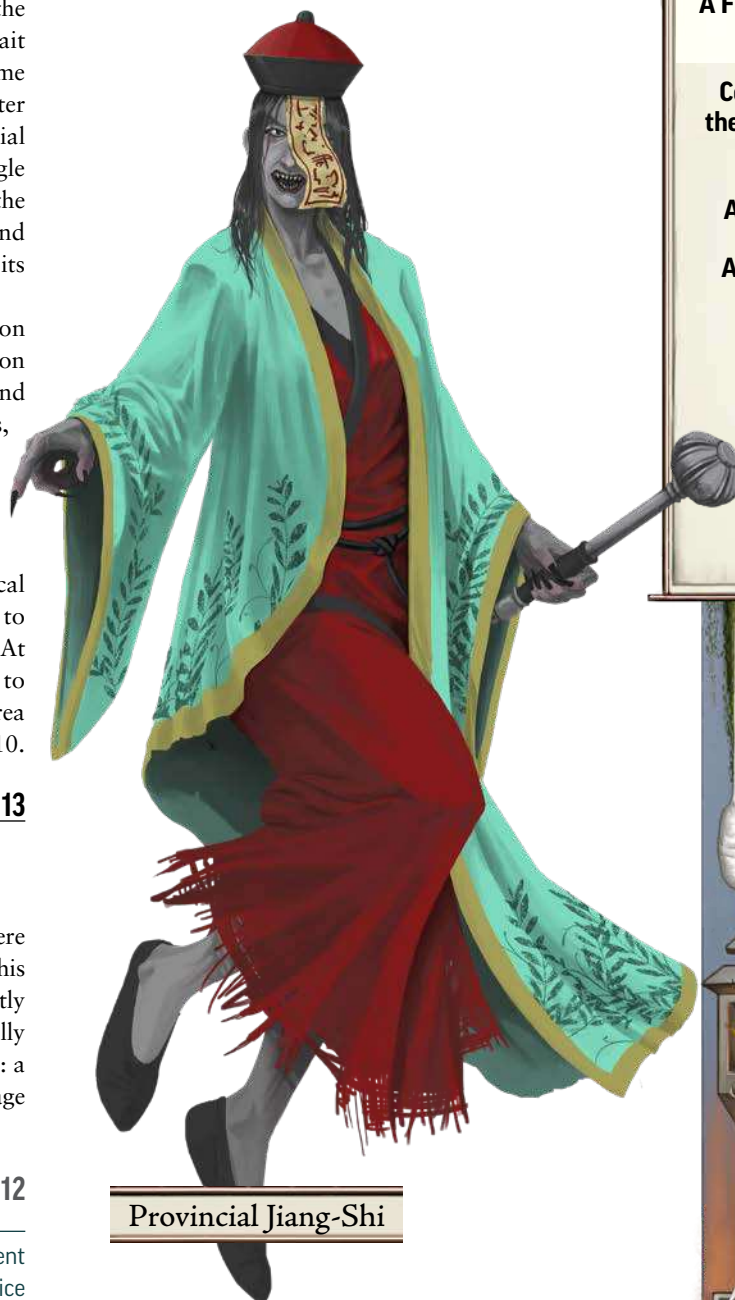
C8. MASTER BEDROOM

TRIVIAL 12

This lavishly furnished bedroom reeks of decadent trappings. Remnants of half-eaten oranges, sweet rice

cakes, and candied nuts lie on a platter atop the canopied bed. A nearby writing stand holds an unfinished calligraphy scroll, and dry inkwells sit on the side shelf. The wall to the right side of the bed features a large door made of fine cypress wood. An ornate golden lock worked into a hideous fiend’s face is clasped around the door’s handle.

As the PCs enter this room, anyone carrying the *Fang and Key* feels the item tug violently toward the lock in the northern door. This door didn’t exist in any previous visit the PCs made to the manor, and the more one observes it, the more it seems to flicker and shift



Provincial Jiang-Shi

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as if the door weren't wholly part of this reality. It's a mindscape door that provides access to the corrupted Willowshore mindscape—it's through this door that Heh Shan-Bao comes and goes, and with the *Fang and Key*, the PCs can do so as well.

Creatures: Before the PCs can move forward to examine the door, they'll need to contend with this room's current occupant, who crouches before the door and appears to be sniffing the lock. This creature is an imprecasia, an insectile fey that feeds on curses. This particular imprecasia is named Ithiniak and dwelled in the ruined Willowshore for many years and enjoyed the lingering curse that infused the area. He avoided contact with Mago Kai's exorcists, but when the PCs transmigrated back to the living world and the governor's manor returned in its ruined form, Ithiniak found himself trapped within this small mindscape version of the manor. Ithiniak has no idea how he came to be trapped here but is obsessed with the scent of a "gloriously potent curse" that wafts through the northern door's locked keyhole.

The imprecasia straightens up quickly to regard the PCs once he notices them; if the PCs attack, Ithiniak knows he has nowhere to flee to and fights to the death. As such, the imprecasia is more willing to speak to the PCs than fight, first asking them if they know what's causing "this delectable smell" wafting through the keyhole, then asking them how he can escape this place. The PCs can simply escort the fey out of the manor, in which case he quickly flees into the surrounding woods without so much as a thank you.

Wise or canny PCs might take the time to learn from the fey. He can confirm Heh Shan-Bao's comings and goings, noting that he's always hidden from the frightening figure, and that each time the former governor arrived or left through the lovely-smelling door in this room, the glimpse beyond both chilled and excited him. He can offer little more than mentioning a glimpse of red skies, an oppressed city, and a claw reaching from atop a hill into the clouds above, but he also notes that "as bad as the place looks, it smells... so... delicious!"

Ithiniak's initial attitude is indifferent. He'll agree to try to remove any curses the PCs might be suffering in return for being led out of the manor; however, unless he's been made at least friendly, when he does so, he'll use Devour Curse to "get the full flavor" from the PC's curse, potentially draining them in the process. If the

PCs come to a peaceful conclusion in this encounter, Ithiniak lets the PCs know he'll wait here. He also asks that if they find any more curses beyond the door to please bring them back to him to eat, once the PCs conclude their business in the area beyond.

ITHINIAK

Male imprecasia (page 83)

Initiative Perception +23

CREATURE 11



Camellia Flower and Ribbon

Treasure: The nook beneath the writing stand holds Heh Shan-Bao's private diary, containing his reflections on the dilemma he faced, his fears about risking his own life in the magical ritual, and his ultimate decision to modify the ritual with the self-justifying excuse that, if things go bad, "all pay some, and none pays all."


In the back of Shan-Bao's wardrobe is a withered camellia flower carefully preserved in a cushioned box. The flower's stem is wrapped in a gold, calligraphed ribbon, upon which a delicate hand has written: "Summer's virtues never fade." With a successful DC 30 Society or Academia Lore check, a PC identifies the quotation as being from *Princess Adavisha's Lament*, a classical romance about an outlander princess who fell in love with an impoverished Tian student. Knowing that their social positions made it impossible for them to marry, the lovers shared a single summer and then parted, with the princess exhorting her scholar to embody the traditional virtues of Lung Wa as a way of honoring the memory of their love.

Through the Mindscape Door

The door in the northern wall is a permanent mindscape door that allows anyone to travel from the restored manor to the cursed Willowshore mindscape, but only if they're rightful rulers. Heh Shan-Bao can come and go as he pleases, but the PCs must touch the *Fang and Key* to the door's lock to open it. Doing so unlocks the door for 1 minute, after which it locks again—if the PCs step through, they find themselves back where Season of Ghosts began, in the Willowshore mindscape... but the mindscape has changed much since their time spent therein!

Into the Corruption

Over the past 115 years, while the Willowshore mindscape kept the PCs trapped, Kugaptee's presence in the living world slowly poisoned and corrupted the sugi tree that grew over his grave. When Mago Kai threw the mindscape into chaos



last year, the upset balance allowed Kugaptee's corruption to spread more quickly. Had the PCs not defeated his high priest Xin Yue near the end of fall during this campaign's second adventure, this corruption would've allowed him to reincarnate fully into the living world.

But defeating Xin Yue didn't put an end to Kugaptee's corrupting influence—it merely redirected it. When the PCs transmigrated themselves and the town of Willowshore out into the living world, the spiritual vacuum they left behind in the mindscape became flooded with that influence. Thereafter, Heh Shan-Bao was drawn into this realm, pulled in by his own shame and guilt.

The mindscape shrank in size, focusing on the town and the cyclic nature of the mindscape ended. For Heh Shan-Bao, the next 115 years played out with him in the role of an immortal ruler over a town that grew into a city, populated not by mortals but by undead, fiends, and monsters formed—like Heh Shan-Bao's new incarnation as a yohoi—from Kugaptee's dead dreams. What the PCs will soon find is a sort of “what if” version of Willowshore as it could've existed if it had grown over the course of 115 years into a sprawling city of monsters ruled by a tyrant destined to become the new incarnation of a fiendish god.

HEH SHAN-BAO'S PLAN

In his new incarnation as the deathless ruler of the corrupted Willowshore mindscape—now known as Kugaptee's Grasp (or just the Grasp)—Heh Shan-Bao has worked to gather enough power to afford Kugaptee a new body to reincarnate into, but to complete this task, he had to wait for his domain to “catch up” to the living world into which the PCs have entered. In effect, while the PCs were able to “jump” 115 years into the future when they escaped the mindscape, Heh Shan-Bao had to wait that out in (as perceived by him) real time. During that period, his growing power as Kugaptee's vessel manifested all around him, transforming the Grasp from a town into a city. Now, all he needs to complete his goal is to gather enough souls from the living world, let them ripen in his lair, and when they're ready, they'll be the catalyst he needs to fully give himself over to Kugaptee to be reincarnated, allowing the nindoru to topple the Tan Sugi and rise from the grave.

In his current form, Heh Shan-Bao is a creature at once both mighty and wretched. Kugaptee has imbued him with terrible strength and unholy power but has stripped away much of the governor's personality. Shan-Bao has become a creature of angry, confused instincts,

unable to distinguish his blurred memories from the impulses that Kugaptee sends through him. So little of his identity remains that he has adopted the townsfolk's fears and imaginings in place of his missing sense of self. The nindoru wants him to remain in such a state, for if Heh Shan-Bao were to regain too much of his forgotten humanity and remember the hopes, aspirations, and ideals that he once held, he might realize what he has lost and rebel against the fiend's grasp.

For somewhere deep inside this monstrous facade, the real Heh Shan-Bao remains—trapped, lost, and desperate for help. If the PCs can reach him, and if they bring the right tools, they can guide their ex-governor back to reality and, in so doing, consign Kugaptee to another age of dormancy below the roots of the Tan Sugi.

While Heh Shan-Bao is close to completing his plan (the three victims he murdered in the previous chapter representing the minimum amount of souls he needs to finish), this final chapter isn't strictly on a timer. If the PCs dawdle, Heh Shan-Bao murders more and quickens the process, but assuming the PCs don't take more than a month to complete this final portion of Season of Ghosts, they should have plenty of time to defeat and rescue Heh Shan-Bao.

Kugaptee's Grasp

In the corrupted mindscape, nothing beyond the borders of Willowshore exists. Here, Kugaptee's influence grows not in a mindscape version of the Tan Sugi Monastery, but below and up into the towering willow tree that stands sentinel above the northern reaches of real-world Willowshore. In this mindscape, that tree has vanished, replaced by a towering arm and claw reaching up to the sky as if to grasp at the firmament and tear it apart. This looming landmark is the source of the mindscape's name and why those who dwell within—all manifestations of Kugaptee's thoughts and dreams—call the place Kugaptee's Grasp.

The PCs get their first view of this strange and horrifying reality as soon as they step through the mindscape door in area C8. They emerge into what seems like downtown Willowshore, as if they'd stepped out of the front door of the governor's manor, yet when they look around, all they see is the same empty plaza that existed in their mindscape—with one exception. The same mindscape door stands in the middle of the plaza and can be used by the PCs to return to the restored manor and back to the living world—once unlocked by the *Fang and Key*, this mindscape door remains unlocked for the PCs from this point onward.

Read or paraphrase the following upon the PCs' first sight of Kugaptee's Grasp.

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SEEKING HEH SHAN-BAO

While some of the encounters in Kugaptee's Grasp will reveal to the PCs where Heh Shan-Bao is hiding, they can also use the *skyfang crystal*, if they recovered it from area **C5**, to Track Heh Shan-Bao. Doing so leads them to the entrance to Kugaptee's Grave in the north part of the mindscape.

Beyond the door sprawls a nightmarish landscape under a sky that looks like boiled blood. The clouds are churning masses of bruised violet and red, devoid of a sun. Instead of stars, the sky is spangled with enormous, glowing eyes. Some seem to shift their gaze to follow those that move about the landscape below, while others stare blankly at seemingly nothing. The largest of these eyes looks down like a moon.

Beneath that alien sky lies the landscape of Willowshore, yet only the topography remains the same. This sprawling Willowshore appears as the town might have after a century of growth, now a massive city that spreads out across the land, leaving little of the natural world in its wake. The river and lake are lifeless black voids, and the water has neither waves nor currents; it sits motionless in its bed. The buildings' wooden walls leak a tarry, foul-smelling sap that seeps down their sides like black tears. All of Willowshore's natural vegetation, farm crops, and garden plants have been replaced by stunted, tortured replicas that, surely, can't still be alive.

In the distance to the north, where once stood Great Willow atop a forested hill, rises a massive urban sprawl over which looms an immense, disfigured arm, its twisted talons reaching up as if to rip at the glaring sky above.

As soon as the PCs arrive in the mindscape, each finds their wrists encircled by spectral chains with dim, illegible runes glowing on them—runes and shapes very similar to those they found burned onto the wrists of the murder victims. With a successful DC 30 check to Identify Magic, a PC understands that as long as the PCs remain in Kugaptee's Grasp, their very souls are in danger and they become doomed 1, and as long as the PC remains in Kugaptee's Grasp, their doomed condition value can't go lower than 1. With a critical success, that PC reveals that if a character does die while within this mindscape, Kugaptee will claim their soul. In much the same way a creature killed by a nindoru is subjected to Soul Shred, any attempt that seeks to return a shackled PC to life or to animate them as undead causes Kugaptee's Grasp to try to counteract the attempt (counteract modifier +23, counteract level 7th).

There are two ways to escape these shackles. By defeating Heh Shan-Bao, the shackles fade immediately. A much more available method, though, is to carry a link to Heh Shan-Bao's previous life. A PC who carries one of these items (the ruined portrait of Ok Jinju from area **C2**, *The Wisdom of the Seven Sages* from area **C4**, the letter found within that scroll, or the withered flower and ribbon from area **C8**) feels a warm, protective sensation rising through their body from that item, and a moment later, the spectral shackles fade and they're no longer doomed. The shackles reappear immediately if the PC is no longer carrying one of these items on their person; the item need not be held in hand, but must be either worn or located in a container the PC carries or wears.

KUGAPTEE'S GRASP FEATURES

Use the map of Kugaptee's Grasp on the inside cover as the PCs explore the mindscape. The following pages present several encounters that can take place in the eerie city, several of which can help inform the PCs what they need to do to defeat Heh Shan-Bao. Whether the PCs are simply exploring Kugaptee's Grasp or they're focused on traveling to a specific location, you can use these encounters as you see fit—each has a recommended “trigger” to set them in motion, but any of them can work at any time if your game calls for them.

The primary “inhabitants” of Kugaptee's Grasp are faceless phantomlike men and women who appear to go about their day normally, although with postures that imply exhaustion and depression. They don't speak, and none approach the PCs or react to their presence. These phantoms are little more than illusions maintained by the mindscape, and any attempt to focus concentration on them reveals the fact that they're merely figments.

The interiors of buildings are curiously vacant and two-dimensional, as if they'd been hastily slapped into place by a disinterested stage designer. They contain no real furniture, only carelessly painted suggestions on the walls. Decorative screens and floral arrangements are reduced to vague smudges of color. Books, scrolls, and letters contain illegible scribbles, and pantries hold only rice husks and stale water, for this world is of Heh Shan-Bao's imagination, and he never had much interest in the lives of commoners.

Willowshore's shops are slapdash and sparse. If they might have held luxuries of interest to the governor, then those sections of the shops are empty, except for placards saying, “ALL GOODS TO BE SENT TO THE MOST GLORIOUS GOVERNOR'S GRASP.”

None of the phantasmal figments that mill about the streets of Kugaptee's Grasp ever enter these

homes and shops, leaving them devoid of people and containing only wicker figures with round straw-stuffed baskets for heads. The wicker figures have been dressed in the villagers' characteristic, recognizable clothing—and, indeed, the PCs might even find effigies of themselves if they visit the Cerulean Teahouse. There, they'll find "themselves" dressed in worthless imitations of their own clothes and gear with sacks pulled over their basket heads, onto which their faces have been painted as simple, childish likenesses of Heh Shan-Bao.

This is the mindscape to which Heh Shan-Bao retreated. Here, he rules over a warped mockery that Kugaptee promises to enact in reality – and, with the governor's help, might soon come to realize.

CURIOSITIES AND NIGHTMARES

Kugaptee's Grasp is rife with hallucinatory fragments. Some of them manifest akin to the effects of an *illusory scene* that triggers automatically as the PCs approach. Three examples are detailed below.

THE LUMBER SCALES

Trigger The PCs approach an industrial area.

Description A lumberyard scale built of warped, blackened beams and rusting chains stands nearby. On its crosspiece perches a carrion crow the size of a small pony. The crow vomits an unending stream of human bones onto the high side of the scale. The dish on that side is pierced through with a large hole so that all of the bones fall straight through, and the dish never lowers. Just as the bones would strike the ground, they disappear. On the other side, low to the ground, is a heap of lumber and silver.

A flickering image of a wicker figure stands beside the lower dish, digging frantically through the silver ingots and piled lumber with such determination that its fingers are frayed to ruins. The figure's round wooden face has been crudely painted to resemble Heh Shan-Bao. Dead butterflies with red wings are heaped up inside its chest, and they rattle against one another to create a plaintive susurrant that unendingly repeats: "Where are you? My precious ones, where are you? You must be here. All that is precious to me is here."

THE PEDDLER OF GLORIES

Trigger The PCs enter a marketplace or mercantile area.

Description On a street corner stands a wicker figure with a childishly painted wooden ball for a head. Although it's clumsily rendered, the face appears to be Heh Shan-Bao's.

The figure is clad in the rags of an imperial herald's finery and carries a yellow-sealed scroll covered with meaningless scribbles. It clicks and clatters as though it had clockwork gears ticking in its chest, but peering in through the shell

of its body reveals only a handful of dead butterflies with withered red wings rattling against one another. Upon being approached by any living creature, the wicker figure turns toward that person and stretches its wicker arms wide, as though reciting an official proclamation. The rattle of its butterfly husks vaguely resembles a repeated chant: "All hail the most glorious of governors, in all his glory! Glorious he is! Glorious he was! Glorious he will be again!"

With a successful DC 25 Society check to Recall Knowledge, a PC knows that a herald of Imperial Lung Wa wouldn't ordinarily celebrate a governor for "glory," which was never considered a quality worth touting. A truly worthy governor would be celebrated for virtue, wisdom, or honorable obedience to the law. The fact that this herald speaks only of "glory," and does so mindlessly, to an empty village would be considered a fool's tragedy by the sages of Lung Wa.



Peddler of Glories

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THE PUPPET MOTHER

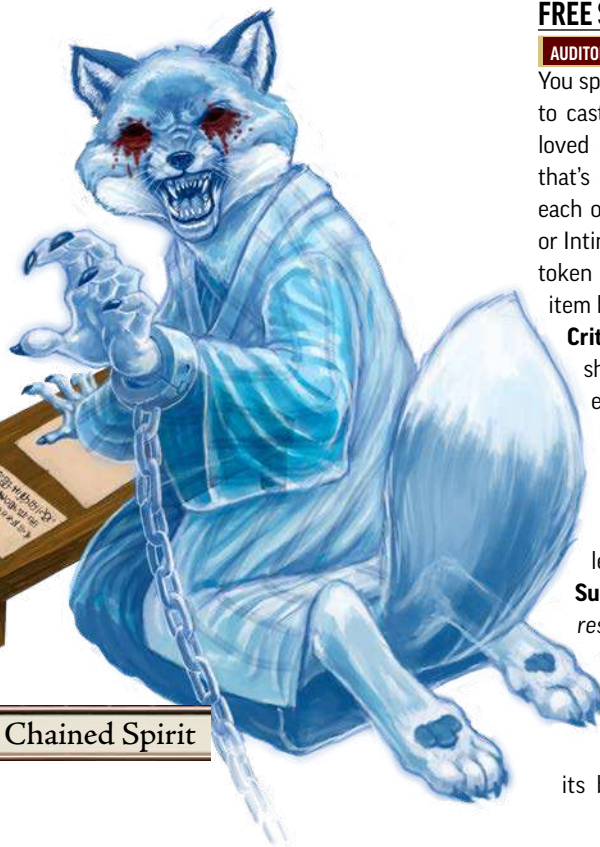
Trigger The PCs move through a residential area.

Description A wicker figure stands at the side of the road, craning its head up toward the windows and clasping its hands admiringly. It wears the shabby wrap and moth-eaten shawl of a peasant woman, but the smiling, clumsily painted face on its round wooden head is Heh Shan-Bao's. Dead red-winged butterflies rattle in its hollow chest, and the sound of their corpses ticking against one another sounds like a repetitive chant: "My son. My wonderful son. How proud I am of my wonderful son!"

THE CHAINED SPIRITS

Wicker effigies do not occupy all of Willowshore's buildings. The souls of those who Heh Shan-Bao murdered have been pulled into the mindscape with him, where they're bound as weeping shades near the sites of their deaths.

The PCs might not think about visiting these sites, but the first of them, Songbird Theater, is close to where the PCs emerge into Kugaptee's Grasp. As the PCs acclimate to the strange new reality, have them each attempt a DC 30 Perception check (a PC carrying the *Fang and Key* gains a +4 item bonus to the check). On a success, a PC hears the muffled sounds of a familiar voice—Kazuma Oono's—talking aloud from Songbird Theater, not quite 200 feet to the southwest of where they emerge into Kugaptee's Grasp.



Chained Spirit

Each of the three spirits in this section was murdered by Heh Shan-Bao because he feared the possibility that the person, in life, might be able to hurt him. Ironically, by betraying his fears and murdering them, he gave each spirit a potential weapon that the PCs can use against him. However, the PCs can obtain these weapons only by releasing the spirits.

At each of these sites, the PCs can free the chained spirit by interacting with it and using a personal item that restores some of the spirit's memories of who they were in life, thereby breaking Shan-Bao's spell. Doing so permits the spirit to flee the mindscape for the true afterworld and causes their stolen eyes to vanish from Shan-Bao's altar to Kugaptee, with repercussions described at the end of this chapter (page 58). Additionally, each freed soul has a benefit to grant the PCs in exchange for its release.

Note that while these three trapped souls aren't creatures and don't have stat blocks, they do count as spirits, so the PCs can use the *skyfang crystal* to track any of them to their locations if needed. If Heh Shan-Bao murdered more than three victims, the PCs can find those chained spirits near where their bodies were discovered in Chapter 2—use the following encounters as guidelines for creating additional ones as needed.

In each case, to free a shackled soul, the PCs must perform the following activity.

FREE SHACKLED SOUL

AUDITORY CONCENTRATE EXPLORATION LINGUISTIC MENTAL


You speak to a shackled soul for 10 minutes and help them to cast off their bonds by reminding them of what they loved in life. Each attempt requires a DC 28 skill check that's specific to the soul in question (and mentioned in each of the following encounters), or a DC 32 Diplomacy or Intimidation check. If you carry and display a significant token taken from the soul's murder scene, you gain a +3 item bonus to this check.

Critical Success You convince the soul to cast off its shackles; it rewards you as detailed in the following encounters before it fades away from Kugaptee's Grasp. Your words have been so compelling that rather than moving on to the afterlife, you allow the soul to return to life, as if from the effects of a *resurrect* ritual that had been heightened to 7th level.

Success As critical success, but the soul doesn't *resurrect*; instead, it moves on to the Boneyard for its afterlife and remains dead in the living world.

Failure You fail to convince the soul to cast off its shackles but can attempt to do so again.

Critical Failure The soul spirals even deeper into its bondage to Kugaptee. It can't be freed until Heh



Shan-Bao is defeated (upon which the shackled soul is freed automatically); no further attempts to Free this Shackled Soul can be attempted.

The Silenced Songbird

Kazuma Oono's shackled spirit is chained to his writing desk, where the blinded kitsune endlessly revises a playbook for *The Chronicle of the Water-Weaver*—the copy he works on is, in fact, the one stolen from his home. As he works, he mutters to himself about being frustrated that all of his hard work is being tampered with, bitterly complaining under his breath about “meddling egos” and “thin-skinned politicians.” He doesn't react to the PCs' arrival; anyone who looks over his shoulder can watch as he revises previous handwritten notes to the play that cast the play's main villain as an obvious caricature of Heh Shan-Bao, only for his adjustments to fade away so that he must start all over again.

If the PCs speak to Oono, he impatiently waves them off and says, “I only have a few hours to get these changes made, so unless you've got some bright ideas, please keep quiet!” In order to release him, the PCs must Free his Shackled Soul via a discussion about how to move forward with the play to his satisfaction. A DC 28 Deception check to help him make his satire more subtle will work, as will the standard DC 32 Diplomacy or Intimidation checks.

Reward: If the PCs free him, the kitsune makes one final editorial change to the play, which suddenly transforms into a complete work. His eyes return to his skull, and the shackles on his wrists fade as he vanishes with a sigh of relief. His work remains behind, and if any PC touches it, *The Chronicle of the Water-Weaver* vanishes as it returns to its shelf in the real-world version of Oono's office; when it does, it bolsters the PCs' minds—for the remainder of this adventure, they gain a +2 status bonus to Will saves.

Reward: Grant the PCs 80 XP for releasing Oono's soul.

The Wandering Grave Keeper

Once the PCs encounter Oono, they should realize that other murder victims might need rescuing as well. The soul of Elizeth Candor, the second murder victim, is chained in the graveyard behind Her Fluvial Lady of Souls—but the Pharasmin cathedral is little more than a crumbled ruin covered with blasphemous graffiti in Kugaptee's Grasp. The graveyard has been similarly defaced, with every marker smashed and every grave dug up and empty. Elizeth wanders the graveyard at a snail's pace; her shackle chains appear to be buried in the earth, and as she pushes forward,

MURDERS AVOIDED

If the PCs managed to prevent any of the three murders from taking place during Chapter 2, they'll automatically receive the benefit of that soul's absence from Kugaptee's Grasp, gaining the associated +2 status bonus to one of their saving throw categories and earning the advantages detailed at this adventure's climax. Grant the PCs the rewards they would've earned for releasing these souls as well as once they enter Kugaptee's Grasp.

the chains leave a furrow in the ground behind her, further defiling the soil even as she continues her hopeless journey. Now and then, she pauses at a defiled grave to lift the flute she carries, but when she tries to play it, the flute falls apart. She cobbles the fractured flute back together as best she can, then moves on to a different defiled grave to repeat the process over and over.

If the PCs speak to Elizeth Candor, she bemoans the fact that without her flute, she can't bring peace to the defiled dead of this graveyard. She holds up her shattered flute, its repairs obviously tenuous and faulty, and says, “If only my flute were not so broken, I could bring a moment of peace to these tormented souls!” In order to release her, the PCs can Free her Shackled Soul by helping her perform with a DC 28 Performance check, or via the standard DC 32 Diplomacy or Intimidation checks to help her escape.

Reward: If the PCs free her, the priest raises her flute and plays out one final mournful dirge. Her eyes return to her skull, and the shackles on her wrists fade as she vanishes with a sigh of relief. Lingering notes of her music persist, filling the PCs with energy and a love of life—for the remainder of this adventure, they gain a +2 status bonus to Reflex saves.

Reward: Grant the PCs 80 XP for releasing Elizeth's soul.

The Herbalist's Final Creation

The third shackled soul, that of You So-Jin, is chained to her alchemy workstation at her shop, where she continues to try and fail at crafting a more powerful silversoul bomb. The concoction sputters and flashes, often exploding dramatically to cause You So-Jin great pain, only for everything to “reset” and force her to start over from scratch. When her work explodes, it causes no harm to the PCs but is nevertheless harrowing to witness.

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BATTLING MEMORIES

The four encounter areas within Kugaptee's Grave are meant to challenge the PCs in combat, but also to evoke their memories of the previous seasons. If a different part of previous adventures played a more memorable role in your game, consider replacing encounters here with maps taken from prior adventures and featuring different foes.

If the PCs speak to You So-Jin, she tells them, "I've almost perfected my latest invention, and it will aid you in defeating your enemies... but this last bit always spirals out of control, no matter what I do!" In order to release her, the PCs can Free her Shackled Soul by helping her finish her work with a DC 28 Crafting check, or via the standard DC 32 Diplomacy or Intimidation checks to help her escape.

Reward: If the PCs free her, You So-Jin caps the final bomb with a sigh of relief. Her eyes return to her skull, and the shackles on her wrists fade as she vanishes with a sigh of relief. As she does, vapors smelling of fresh spring woodlands fill the chamber, bolstering each PC's vitality—for the remainder of this adventure, they gain a +2 status bonus to Fortitude saves.

Reward: Grant the PCs 80 XP for releasing You So-Jin's soul.

Kugaptee's Grave

While the visuals of Kugaptee's Grasp are unsettling, there's little in the strangely empty "could have been" city to directly endanger the PCs, but that changes the closer they come to the most disturbing landmark in the mindscape—the nightmare arm that reaches for the heavens where once the Great Willow grew. This arm is a physical manifestation of Kugaptee himself, and if events go his way, an apocalyptic animation of his arm presages his reincarnation into the living world as it rips the skies above apart and brings this mindscape to an end.

The claw is the most noteworthy feature of Kugaptee's Grasp, and it alone might be enough to draw the PCs toward it. If they use the *skyfang crystal* to try to Track Heh Shan-Bao, the results of those efforts lead them toward the claw. At your discretion, any of the shackled souls the PCs speak to can tell the PCs that the one who did this to them lies to the north, "below the Grasp itself."

But even if the PCs don't eventually approach this site, in time, it comes to them. Once all three of the shackled souls have been freed, Heh Shan-Bao—and

through him, Kugaptee—seeks a swift confrontation with the PCs. Rather than avoid them, the nindoru hopes to finish them off by drawing them into a twisting realm—a sort of cavern made from the city of Willowshore, an unnerving and uncanny region known as Kugaptee's Grave.

ENTERING KUGAPTEE'S GRAVE

As the PCs navigate the twisting streets of Kugaptee's Grasp on their approach to the claw, or as they wander the streets after releasing the third of the shackled souls, a strange thing takes place. The surrounding buildings seem to grow taller, the streets grow narrower, and the sky above seems to lower. The transformation increases the more quickly the PCs move, but even if they stand still, it won't be long before even the widest street feels like a narrow alleyway, and the view of the sky above is reduced to a narrow strip visible between looming, towering buildings packed so closely together that they feel more like the walls of a cavern than a street-side facade.

Once the PCs step into this cave-like construct, they can leave by traveling south along the road they entered by for 1 minute, but any other attempt to approach the claw sends them right back into this strange maze. This area consists of a series of "alleys" that function more like cavern tunnels. The ground in these areas resembles packed earth, while the walls are building facades, periodically adorned with locked doors or closed windows. Above, the blood-red sky looms, leaving the area dimly lit. Attempts to smash through these walls or dig below are fruitless, as nothing exists beyond them—here, the mindscape of Kugaptee's Grasp has been reduced to a single path. A character can Climb the walls with a successful DC 20 Athletics check, but at a height of 30 feet, the climber finds that the roofline remains impassable, as if a wall of impenetrable glass bars their way to the last few feet needed to clamber up to a roof. In the four chambers, this "ceiling" reaches a height of 100 feet.

The only doors that function along these streets are those that open into interior locations—fortunately for the PCs, these doors aren't hidden among those that line the sides of each street, but instead mark the end of a winding alleyway. Within these rooms, illumination varies, as does the appearance—what might look like a building from the outside might be a large cavern, an outdoor path, or anything else beyond its door.

D1. SUMMERTIME GUARD

MODERATE 12

The door opens not into the expected building, but instead onto a familiar, wide stone bridge—Dawnstep Bridge.

The panorama of Willowshore as it existed last spring lies beyond the bridge's rails, including the eerie fog that plagued the town. To the north and south, wooden barricades set with double doors prevent sight beyond the bridge, while above, a moon in the shape of a red eye looms in the night sky. In the middle of the northern end of the bridge, an immense golden throne has been built to resemble a seated demon, fitted with deep purple cushions, and draped with furs and swaths of embroidered silks.

While the borders of this room are constrained to the bridge, the PCs can look out over its edges to behold a version of Willowshore as it existed during the start of the first adventure—wreathed in fog and under the light of a crimson moon.

Creatures: At the start of this campaign, Dawnstep Bridge was protected by a drunken buso named Gurglegut and his jinkin toadies. When the PCs enter this area, they face a version of Gurglegut forged from the same buso's soul but greatly enhanced over his previous incarnation. The throne he's seated upon is much larger and more ornate than the one he used before—and Gurglegut towers at twice his previous height, standing at 13 feet tall once he rises from his throne to address the PCs. The immense buso is attended not by gremlins, but by a group of four onidoshi who stand two abreast between the throne and the southern entrance, where the PCs emerge onto the bridge. One pair of onidoshi stands near the throne, while the others stand a mere 20 feet away from the southern entrance.

Upon spotting the PCs, Gurglegut roars in laughter and raises a large jug of rice wine in salute to them. Read or paraphrase the following.

"And here we are again, heroes of Willowshore, only this time you shall not catch me at a disadvantage. This time, my guardians are competent. This time, I am not drunk and distracted. This time, I will be eating your flesh and crunching your bones when all is said and done!"

Gurglegut is quick to order the attack, but if the PCs respond to him quickly, they have a round to engage with the buso. His initial attitude is hostile—if they're able to adjust his attitude to at least indifferent in less than a round (note that Make an Impression and Coerce normally take a minute to perform, so a character must have a feat like Quick Coercion to

have a chance to adjust the buso's attitude in such a short time period; as this isn't a casual encounter, a feat like Glad Hand doesn't apply). Magic (such as *charm*) will work as well, but only if the four onidoshi are all placated at the same time or don't realize that magic was used to manipulate their leader.

If the PCs forestall a fight, Gurglegut admits he isn't eager for a rematch—while he's more powerful now, he knows the PCs are as well, and he agrees to let them pass if they offer him a gift. Any treasure or magic item worth at least 2,000 gp (or 1,000 gp if the gift has something to do with food or drink) suffices to buy passage, but PCs can also attempt to Lie to Gurglegut to convince him to let them pass as well. Diplomacy has little use here, but on a critical success at a Coercion attempt, a PC cows the buso, who lets the PCs pass without conflict.



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If combat begins, the two southernmost onidoshi step forward to engage the PCs in melee, while those further back take a defensive stance before Gurglegut's throne and use their shortbows to attack, switching to magic as the chance to do so without catching allies in areas of effect presents itself. Gurglegut stands up from his throne as the battle begins, harrying the PCs with his crossbow. If Gurglegut is reduced to 40 Hit Points or less, he retreats to the far end of the bridge and lets his onidoshi continue the fight, but if cornered here, or if all four onidoshi are slain, he begs for mercy. Any still-living onidoshi at this point roar in rage at Gurglegut's cowardice and redirect their attacks to him.

If the PCs grant Gurglegut mercy (and protect him from being slain by enraged onidoshi), the buso shrinks down in size, returning to a more standard, level 3 version of a buso (as presented in page 39 of *Bestiary 3*). Through tears and sobs, he explains that he's been held captive here by "Great and Glorious Kugaptee" but now wants only to be left in peace. He absolutely won't accompany the PCs further into Kugaptee's Grave, but he does offer them his magical gear along with a warning to "be aware of dead bodies, for the playthings of Kugaptee enjoy using the dead as disguises!" Unfortunately for Gurglegut, he's still deep within Kugaptee's domain, so before he can give much more advice to the PCs, he suddenly grows horrified, as if he just noticed something rising up beyond the PCs. A PC who glances in that direction sees nothing, but a few moments later, Gurglegut shrieks in terror before his head bursts into a plume of crimson butterflies that swirls through the air then fades to smoke, leaving the buso finally and forever dead.

GURGLEGUT

CREATURE 12

UNIQUE NE LARGE HUMANOID

Variant male buso (*Pathfinder Bestiary 3* 39)

Perception +23; low-light vision

Languages Common, Goblin, Sylvan

Skills Alcohol Lore +22, Arcana +20, Athletics +25, Intimidation +22, Nature +23

Str +7, **Dex** +4, **Con** +5, **Int** +4, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +4

Items +1 striking flaming crossbow (10 bolts), jug of rice wine, +1 striking kukri, +1 resilient studded leather armor

AC 32; **Fort** +23, **Ref** +20, **Will** +23

HP 216

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ kukri +26 (agile, magical, reach 10 feet, trip), **Damage** 2d6+13 slashing

Ranged ♦ crossbow +23 (magical, range 120 feet), **Damage** 2d8+6 piercing plus 1d6 fire

Command Onidoshi ♦ (auditory, linguistic) **Frequency** once per round; **Effect** Gurglegut barks out a command

to a single onidoshi in area **D1**. That onidoshi can use a reaction to attempt a melee Strike against an adjacent foe.

Spit Fire ♦♦ (fire, manipulate) **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** Gurglegut drinks the contents of his jug of rice wine (consuming one of the gulps contained in his jug), then spews it out across the flaming tip of a bolt in his crossbow, filling a 20-foot-cone with a blast of fire that inflicts 10d8 fire damage (DC 32 basic Reflex save) to all creatures in the area.

ONIDOSHI (4)

CREATURE 8

Pathfinder Bestiary 2 (188)

Initiative Perception +17

D2. A FALLEN TREE

MODERATE 12

The door opens through a crumbling, vine-covered stone wall into an overgrown monastery courtyard. Thick tangles of brambles and weeds grow on the ground, while to the left and right, a wall of densely packed trees blocks the way. A wall on the opposite side of the overgrown courtyard has another old stone door, while in the middle rises a single towering tree, its trunk diseased and its branches bare. The upper half looks more like a twisted claw reaching up into the overcast sky above than anything else.

The PCs should automatically recognize this place as being similar to the courtyard of the Tan Sugi Monastery, save that the sugi tree that grows in the middle of the area is obviously dead.

Creatures: As the PCs enter this area, allow them to attempt a DC 36 Perception check; on a success, they spot what appear to be the vague shapes of dozens of human faces growing from the dead tree's moldy bark, each mouth open in a silent scream. This detail might let the PCs realize that a powerful undead presence—a corpseroot—has formed from a portion of the tree's trunk. On a critical success, they spot a few eyes in those faces that twitch to follow the PCs' approach with a baleful glare.

If the PCs don't realize the danger, the corpseroot lurches to unlife and rips free from the dead sugi tree, taking with it much of the dead tree's material as it lumbers forward. As it does so, two other things occur. First, the faces embedded in the bark rip free as well, dragging plantlike bodies along with them—these waldgeists who, like the corpseroot, are animated from the collective blasphemies and cruelties visited upon the world by the corrupted monks from the Tan Sugi Monastery. All of these creatures roll for initiative using Stealth. At the same time, the towering sugi tree topples over, its trunk splitting apart around the gap left by the corpseroot's emergence. The corpseroot can

control the direction of the tree's fall, and does so to catch as many of the PCs as possible in a 40-foot cone shooting out from the center of the room. Characters in this area take 8d6 bludgeoning damage (DC 27 basic Reflex save), and anyone who critically fails this save becomes immobilized by the fallen tree (Escape DC 27).

If the PCs recognize the danger and attack first, the corpseroot and waldgeists roll for initiative using Perception. When the dead sugi falls, the corpseroot can't direct its fall, and the tree topples over in a randomly determined direction (and any PCs caught in the area gain a +4 circumstance bonus to their Reflex save against the tree's fall).

Regardless of who starts the fight, the waldgeists shriek out, "Interlopers! Unbelievers! Slay them!" as they fly forward to attack. There are no trees in the area for them to possess, and they treat all of area D2 as their woodland and can't move beyond this area without being destroyed. Some use *wall of thorns* to block off exits from the room while others use *entangle* to try to hold the PCs in place before they all swoop in to attack in melee.

As the corpseroot attacks, a face grows from its trunk—the hate-filled visage of Xin Yue, whom the PCs defeated back in winter in the chamber deep below the Tan Sugi Monastery. Indeed, the corrupted monk's soul helps to animate this undead tree, and as it fights, it issues curses and angry promises of torment to the PCs. All of these undead fight until destroyed.

CORPSEROOT CREATURE 11

Pathfinder Book of the Dead 81

Initiative Perception or Stealth +18

WALDGEISTS (5) CREATURE 8

Pathfinder Book of the Dead 164

Initiative Perception or Stealth +18

D3. LORD OF WINTER LOW 12

This overgrown garden is surrounded by a circular stone wall. Trees grow around the perimeter, while in the center sits an open stone well that's nearly full to the brim with water. Above, storm clouds fill the sky, pelting the area with driving rain and turning the ground into a morass of weeds and mud, while to the south stands a large canopy erected on poles that offers some shelter from the downpour. Below the brightly colored tent rest several colorful blankets, a small table

atop which sits a tea set with four silver cups, and a large chair with a golden cushion.

The PCs should immediately recognize this area as being similar to the central courtyard of Karahai, although less organized. The wet muddy ground here is difficult terrain, and the driving rain is freezing cold and carries within it a supernatural infusion of the worst parts of winter. A character who ends their turn exposed to the rain must succeed at a DC 27 Fortitude save to resist becoming enfeebled 1 (enfeebled 2 on a critical failure) until the end of their next turn, as the rain makes them feel like they've spent hours trudging through a terrible winter storm.



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Standing under the southern canopy provides total protection from this downpour, but standing under one of the trees only provides partial protection, affording a +2 circumstance bonus to the Fortitude save.

Creatures: A single occupant awaits the PCs in this room—a familiar figure the PCs should immediately recognize as Mago Kai. He sits on the chair under the canopy, sipping tea and relaxing, but unlike their previous encounter in the previous adventure, he seems to be completely unarmed. Mago Kai stands as he spots the PCs, inviting them over to take shelter under his tent and offering them cups of tea served in silver cups. A PC who's master at Tea Lore automatically notes how unusual it is to have a silver teacup (as silver conducts heat much more than more traditional material), perhaps indicating to them that something strange is afoot.

In truth, this figure isn't Mago Kai, but a powerful argyrzei nindoru who has used *illusory disguise* to appear as the PCs' old nemesis. If the PCs don't attack at once, "Mago Kai" hopes each of them accepts a cup of tea from him, then congratulates them on making it this far into Kugaptee's dead dreams. He steps aside, inviting the PCs to keep the silver teacups as gifts and to proceed through the southern door on to area **D4**.

The four silver teacups are all cursed with the argyrzei's infected silver (page 84); the nindoru hopes the PCs take the "gifts" and move on to area **D4**, during which he observes anyone who carries one of the cursed teacups and follows along behind them. The argyrzei speeds up to reach the PCs if he ever feels there's a particularly advantageous time for him to strike against them—at the very least, he'll join the final fight at Heh Shan-Bao's side if not defeated first.

If all of the PCs refuse to accept the silver teacups, or if they attack him, the argyrzei roars in anger and attacks, rolling Deception for initiative. When his first turn begins, the *illusory disguise* in effect makes it appear that his human body is melting away to reveal his true form: a headless monster that swiftly pulls a gleaming silver sword from the stump of its neck to attack. Once battle begins, the argyrzei fights to the death. Since the rain can potentially affect him as much as the PCs, he prefers to fight from under the shelter of his canopy if possible.

ARGYZEI

Page 84

Initiative Deception +24

Treasure: Each of the elegant silver teacups is a work of art worth 50 gp, but again, each bears the argyrzei's infected silver curse.

When the nindoru is slain, its body melts into a pile of gore that quickly flows together and transforms into a gleaming silver weapon—a result of this strange realm's association with Kugaptee more than any real inborn ability possessed by the nindoru. This silver weapon should be a slashing weapon of a type favored by one of the PCs and is a +2 *greater striking silver weapon* that bears the infected silver curse (DC 33 Will save).

D4. SPRING'S PATH

MODERATE 12

Cliff walls stretch in both directions, up to a cloudless night sky above and down into a cloudy depth below. A ten-foot-wide ledge winds along the cliffs, crossing twice via five-foot-wide natural stone bridges as it winds its way north to a set of wooden doors built into the stone wall. Eerie whispers and distant, mournful cries echo up from the mists below, which obscure any sight of the ground.

The PCs should quickly recognize this narrow rift in a mountain as being similar to the Gossamer Path they walked earlier in this adventure. While the door behind them leading back to area **D3** is a plain stone door, the one to the north is made of wood and is immediately recognizable as being the entrance door to Heh Shan-Bao's manor.

A PC who falls off the ledge plummets 100 feet down to a barren rocky floor below, shrouded in thick fog; a character must succeed at a DC 25 Reflex save to Grab the Edge of a ledge to stop such a fall. Characters can Climb the cliff walls with a successful DC 30 Athletics check.

Creatures: The resemblance of this ledge to the Gossamer Path only grows as the PCs begin to move through the area, as a pair of path maidens emerge from the rock walls to take up position at either end of the stone bridge that crosses the ledges at the midpoint of the room. Unlike the one they spoke with on the Gossamer Path, these path maidens are creations drawn from Kugaptee's dead dreams, as the fluttering clouds of red nindoru butterflies that swarm around each one implies.

Unlike the path maiden the PCs spoke to earlier, these minions of Kugaptee aren't interested in discussion other than to order the PCs to "turn back—what lies beyond this path is not for you!" If the PCs don't immediately return to area **D3** (or if they do, only to return here later), the two path maidens attack at once.

While the path maiden encountered earlier has the Scorn Fate and Vengeful Frenzy abilities, these path maidens instead have the Blasphemous Aura (visually represented by clouds of swarming nindoru butterflies) and Corrupting Doubt abilities.

CREATURE 13

PATH MAIDENS (2)

CREATURE 12

Page 86

Initiative Perception +22

The Governor's Den

When the doors at the northern end of area **D4** are opened, a shimmering haze obscures what lies beyond. Regardless of the PCs' positions in Kugaptee's Grave, as soon as these doors open, that haze billows out to fill the entire complex, fading a moment later to reveal the PCs now standing in a very familiar location—area **C1** of the restored governor's manor. As before, sliding paper walls block the view into the manor's inner courtyard, but this time, things are more unsettling, for the PCs now find themselves at the very heart of Kugaptee's influence.

The manor walls here are covered with hundreds of baleful, sinister-looking red eyes that glance randomly back and forth between all visible PCs. These eyes have a Perception bonus of +26; if they spot any intruders, Heh Shan-Bao, who awaits the PCs just north in the manor courtyard, becomes aware of them.

The PCs have a choice to make now: they can step back through the door to the south and return to Kugaptee's Grasp (emerging into that mindscape from the ruins of the governor's manor, just as they did when they first arrived—they'll need to make a return journey through Kugaptee's Grave to reach this point again), or they can move further into the manor.

The rooms surrounding the courtyard appear as described in areas **C3–C8** at the start of this chapter, except that they're empty of creatures, hazards, and treasures. As soon as the PCs open any door into the courtyard, they trigger the final encounter of Season of Ghosts. Proceed with Below Kugaptee's Claw below.

BELOW KUGAPTEE'S CLAW

VARIES 12

A glistening pool of blood, a bone garden fountain, and clusters of diseased foliage turn the heart of the manor into a nightmare. Barely glimpsed creatures splash in the bloody pond, while red-winged butterflies gather in the foliage. Here and there, familiar looking bodies lie strewn on the ground. Grisly yet well-made lanterns crafted with skinned human faces hang along the edges of the courtyard from the eaves of the surrounding colonnade. The night sky above shines with the light of an immense red eye-shaped moon. From the hilltop north of the strange city, the towering claw rises, looming over the courtyard as it appears almost to cradle the moon in its grasp.

At the courtyard's northern end, a wood burl sits on the ground between two reed mats. The roots of the burl twist upward like grasping tendrils, and each glistens with blood.

The burl of wood to the north is a physical manifestation of Kugaptee's fiendish heart. If the PCs have released all of the murdered victims from their shackles (see The Chained Spirits on page 50), then the upward reaching roots of the burl are merely bloodstained. For each soul that remains shackled, a pair of eyes are impaled upon two different roots, staring mournfully out into the courtyard.

The corpses sprawled across the courtyard appear familiar, for they seem to be the bodies of NPCs the PCs have grown fond of over the course of this Adventure Path. These bodies aren't real, but they appear as if they are. Most of them serve as little more than psychological warfare elements placed here by Kugaptee, but some of them are more than that.

Creatures: A number of the corpses here are actually shisagishin nindorus disguised as the dead. The number of shisagishin present among the corpses depends on how many of the chained spirits the PCs released. If they released none of them, then four of the bodies here are shisagishins (an Extreme 12 encounter). If the PCs released at least one of the chained spirits, then only three shisagishins are among the dead (a Severe 12 encounter). If the PCs released all three chained spirits, they'll face only two shisagishins (a Moderate 12 encounter).

Once any of the shisagishin Corpse Shells are touched, that shisagishin uses its Burst From Death reaction to attempt a Strike on the PC who touched it—all of the nindorus then roll Stealth for initiative. If no one touches a disguised shisagishin after a minute or when the last person in the courtyard leaves the area (whichever comes first), the nindorus roll Stealth for initiative and rise up from their Corpse Shells to attack without taking advantage of Burst From Death. The nindorus fight to the death.

SHISAGISHINS (2 TO 4)

CREATURE 12

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Initiative Stealth +25

HEH SHAN-BAO ARRIVES

SEVERE 12

As soon as the last shisagishin is slain, the towering claw looming over the courtyard gives a thunderous twitch, its fingers flexing as if attempting to pluck the moon from the sky. That flex translates down the limb's length to rock the courtyard with a tremor—not violent enough to knock the PCs prone, but frightening nonetheless.

A moment later, one of the doors into the courtyard opens, and in steps Heh Shan-Bao, accompanied by two horrific parodies of his appearance—twisted, mewing wreckages that stagger and crawl on their

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hands and knees, their bodies bearing gruesome wounds and limbs bending in awkward, unnatural angles. They move more like spiders than humans, yet each one's face is unmistakably that of Heh Shan-Bao. These two creatures are unrisen, each representing a failed life that Heh Shan-Bao lived. The one to his left wears fine robes and elegant accoutrements one might expect of a successful governor—this broken creature symbolizes the life Heh Shan-Bao could've lived had he not attempted the fateful ritual that doomed Willowshore. The unrisen to his right wears plain but comfortable scholar's robes—this one symbolizes the life he could've lived had he avoided politics entirely and remained a scholar. Both of these unrisen are completely and mindlessly loyal to the yohoi version of Heh Shan-Bao who stands between them.

If the PCs haven't released any of the chained spirits, Heh Shan-Bao lovingly reaches out to caress the eyes impaled on the wooden burl, and when he initially speaks to the PCs, his voice is calm and condescending. On the other hand, if some or all of these eyes are missing, Heh Shan-Bao regards the missing spots with fury and addresses the PCs with a voice that barely restrains his outrage.

"And so, you finally stand before me, in the shadow of my lord above. His time of return has come, and there is nothing you can do to stop it, yet still... here you are. By what right do you dare meddle in the affairs of rulers and gods?"

At this juncture, the PCs have an opportunity to free Heh Shan-Bao from Kugaptee's influence. Their success depends on how many items they recovered from the restored manor and on their own skill in using these items against him. If they fail to free him, a fight against the governor and his failed past lives (manifested by the presence of the two unrisen) can still prevent Kugaptee's return.

Heh Shan-Bao doesn't start combat unless the PCs attempt to leave. Otherwise, he fights only if the PCs start a battle, or as a result of failed negotiations.

Fighting with Heh Shan-Bao

Heh Shan-Bao sends the two unrisen to clash with the PCs. As combat begins, they lurch forward with an Awful Approach, splitting up to each focus their melee attacks against a different PC. (While Heh Shan-Bao can be harmed by an unrisen's Agonized Howl, he's unaffected by the sight of their Awful Approach.)

Heh Shan-Bao hangs back at the start of a fight, using his innate spells against the PCs for the first few rounds before switching to his claws. If a PC becomes a viable target for *death knell* (and thus *Steal Soul*), he quickly moves ..to take advantage of that situation (if the target is above 10th level, the attempt fails and frustrates Heh Shan-Bao; he won't make that mistake again and no longer uses this tactic against the PCs).

Released Souls: For each of the three souls the PCs released, reduce an unrisen's Hit Points when they Rise Again by 20; if all three souls are released, an unrisen has only 40 Hit Points upon Rising Again. In addition, for each of the three souls the PCs released, Heh Shan-Bao's legend falters. If one soul has been released, he loses his frightful presence. If two souls are released, he loses frightful presence and the slashing damage from his Strikes. If all three souls are released, he loses frightful presence, the slashing damage from his Strikes, and his resistance to physical damage.

Defeating Heh Shan-Bao: Once he's reduced to 0 Hit Points, Heh Shan-Bao collapses to the ground, apparently dead. As long as the unlive lives remain, combat continues until they too are fully defeated. At this point, Heh Shan-Bao's body lurches back to life long enough for him to shriek in pain an instant before he bursts into a cloud of crimson nindoru butterflies that swiftly fades—his soul has been consumed by Kugaptee. Proceed with Kugaptee's Final Wrath.

HEH SHAN-BAO

CREATURE 13

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Initiative Perception +23

UNLIVED LIVES (2)

CREATURE 11

Unrisen (*Pathfinder Book of the Dead* 153)

Initiative Perception +21

Speaking with Heh Shan-Bao

If the PCs speak to Heh Shan-Bao, they can reply to his challenge as they see fit. The conversation should play out naturally, with Heh Shan-Bao reacting to the

Unlived Life

PCs with an air of superiority and condescension. As long as the PCs continue to speak to him, they'll wear away at Kugaptee's influence and remind Heh Shan-Bao that he was once human.

Each round of this influence encounter plays out over the course of 1 minute. PCs start with 1 minute and gain additional rounds depending on how many links to the governor's previous life the party carries. There are four potential links they could've discovered: the ruined portrait of Ok Jinju from area C2, *The Wisdom of the Seven Sages* from area C4, the letter found within that scroll, and the withered flower and ribbon from area C8. Each one of these items that someone in the group carries grants the party 1 additional minute to influence Heh Shan-Bao—if they all four links with them, they'll have the maximum possible of 5 influence rounds to reach the tormented governor.

If the PCs fail to reach at least Influence 7 by the final round of this encounter, Heh Shan-Bao's patience snaps. "Die, pretenders," he roars, "die, and be chained outside the cycle of souls forevermore." At this point, he attacks—proceed with Fighting with Heh Shan-Bao, see previous page. If the PCs reach Influence 7 but fail to reach Influence 10 by the end of the encounter, they convince him to abandon Kugaptee, but the two Unlived Lives remain—the two unrisen attack at once and must be defeated before the PCs can proceed with Heh Shan-Bao Freed. If the PCs reach Influence 10 at any point, the influence encounter ends immediately. Both unrisen cry out in anguish before vanishing, and Heh Shan-Bao casts Kugaptee aside—proceed with Heh Shan-Bao Freed.

HEH SHAN-BAO

UNIQUE CE MEDIUM FIEND ILLUSION MENTAL

Nascent vessel for Kugaptee

Perception +23

Will +21

Discovery DC 29 Willowshore Lore, DC 30 Society, DC 32 Perception

Influence Skills DC 28 Nindoru Lore (to warn him about the true nature of nindorus and Kugaptee), DC 30 Religion (to speak about how his association with Kugaptee is self-destructive), DC 32 Society (to remind him of what it was like to be a productive part of a larger society), DC 30 Diplomacy, DC 31 Intimidation, DC 33 Deception

Influence 4: The PCs manage to reach Heh Shan-Bao's living memories. At this point onward, the penalty for visibly carrying the *Fang and Key* is negated, but the PCs can still gain a bonus by giving him the key.



Heh Shan-Bao

Influence 7: Heh Shan-Bao breaks down in tears, his anger replaced by grief. His soul is still consigned to Kugaptee, and when he's freed, his soul is consumed by the fiend—he can't be restored to life and has no afterlife.

Influence 10: Heh Shan-Bao stanches his tears and grows fiercely determined; the influence encounter ends. Proceed with Heh Shan-Bao Freed below.

Resistances Heh Shan-Bao bristles against any implication that he acted for his own self-interest and not, in some way, to save Willowshore. Any time a PC implies or states that his actions have brought harm to the town, the DC for that Influence check is increased by 2.

Weaknesses If a PC visibly carries one of the four items that link to Heh Shan-Bao's past life, the DCs for that PC to Influence Heh Shan-Bao are reduced by 2. If a PC gives Heh Shan-Bao the *Fang and Key* (thereby implying that they view him as their ruler even now), all DCs to Influence him are reduced by an additional 2.

Penalty Heh Shan-Bao arrogantly views himself as Willowshore's only true ruler. If a PC visibly carries the *Fang and Key*, the implied challenge to his rule makes him grow even more stubborn. The DCs for that PC to Influence Heh Shan-Bao are increased by 2, even if that PC later hides or relinquishes the *Fang and Key*—unless the PC gives the *Fang and Key* to Heh Shan-Bao, in which case the DCs to Influence him are instead reduced by 2 for all PCs; this reduction stacks with the DC reduction granted for the other Weaknesses above.

HEH SHAN-BAO FREED

If the PCs reach at least Influence 7 with Heh Shan-Bao, they get through to him and convince him to cast aside Kugaptee, although they'll still have to defeat the two unrisen—only if they reach Influence 10 do they banish the unrisen and free Heh Shan-Bao.

As he is freed, he sighs in relief and claps his hands over the upper half of his face, rubbing at his restored eyes with astonishment. His warped form slowly dissolves, restoring him to his original human appearance, clad in rags unless the PCs reached Influence 10, in which case he wears resplendent attire.

"I thank you," he whispers. His form, slight to begin with, begins to fade into insubstantiality as he continues, "I thank you for my freedom. I thank you, too, for righting the wrong I was too weak to prevent and for leading Willowshore in the way that I once believed I could. I failed, and it is my greatest shame. I can only hope the gods decree that I have suffered enough for it, for I go to their judgment now."

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If the PCs reached Influence 7 through 9, his expression suddenly turns to horror, and he cries out, “Kugaptee! He’s here!” A moment later, he wails in anguish as his fading body bursts into an explosion of crimson nindoru butterflies that swiftly fades away. The PCs have prevented Kugaptee from returning to life, but at the cost of Heh Shan-Bao’s eternal soul.

If the PCs reached Influence 10, his expression becomes one of serene peace. “I see Kugaptee,” he whispers, “But I know now he cannot touch my eternal soul. Thank you... thank you...” A moment later, he fades away entirely, his soul traveling to the Boneyard to be judged—be it reincarnation, ascension, or punishment, only Pharasma (and you as GM) can say.

KUGAPTEE’S FINAL DEATH

Once the PCs have defeated the foes here and Heh Shan-Bao’s fate has been determined, Kugaptee finally and directly reacts. If the PCs fail to defeat the foes and perish, his claw slams downward to destroy the manor and the PCs’ remains within before he’s reborn into the living world, resulting in a horrific new reality for all of Shenmen.

Otherwise, his claw thrashes and flails, grasping at the world around ineffectually as it begins to be drawn back into the ground. As this process continues, the world around the PCs is wracked by tremors, storms of flesh-scouring nindoru butterflies, a wave of psychic anguish, and a soul-wrenching pull from death itself before Kugaptee once again settles back into true and silent death.

This catastrophe plays out over the course of four rounds, during which the PCs can’t escape back to reality while the mindscape around them is torn apart. They must endure and witness the end of this world if they’re to escape back home, but if they’ve recovered the four links to Heh Shan-Bao’s life, they’ll be afforded some protection.

1: THE WORLD TREMBLES

As Kugaptee’s arm shakes the world, it causes a violent earthquake. The manor surrounding the PCs collapses as they’re thrown to the ground and battered with rubble, while glimpses of Kugaptee’s arm flexing in the sky above are visible through holes tearing through the manor’s roof. Each PC takes 5d6 bludgeoning damage (DC 30 basic Reflex save). If a PC carries the letter found in *The Wisdom of the Seven Sages*, they’re bathed in a sensation of protection, as if their parents were shielding them from the tremors. The letter vanishes, and the PCs are unaffected by this stage of Kugaptee’s death.

2: THE FLESH TEARS

Rents open along the length of Kugaptee’s arm and clouds of razor-winged nindoru butterflies swoop down to engulf the world, their wings, legs, and teeth scouring any exposed flesh. Each PC takes 5d6 slashing damage (DC 30 basic Fortitude save). If a PC carries the ruined portrait of Princess Ok Jinju, they’re bathed in the sensation of being sheltered in a lover’s arms, causing the butterflies to ignore them completely. The portrait vanishes, and the PCs are unaffected by this stage of Kugaptee’s death.

3: THE MIND RECOILS

The swarms of nindoru butterflies are drawn back into Kugaptee’s flesh as his arm is pulled down into the ground, and with it, the mind-numbing telepathic roar of his anguish and fear at being drawn back into death blasts even thought itself to shreds. Each PC takes 5d6 mental damage (DC 30 basic Will save). If a PC carries *The Wisdom of the Seven Sages*, the truths carried in the scroll bolster their minds and ground them in reality. The scroll vanishes, and the PCs are unaffected by this stage of Kugaptee’s death.


4: THE FINAL DEATH

As Kugaptee’s talons slide back into the ground, his roar is cut off, and the PCs gain a momentary glimpse into the very nature of death. Each PC takes 5d6 negative damage (DC 30 basic save; a PC can choose to endure this damage with a Fortitude save, avoid it with a Reflex save, or shield their souls with a Will save). If a PC carries the withered camellia flower and ribbon, the flower blooms with life, and a feeling of belonging to the world of the living protects the PCs. The flower and ribbon vanish, and the PCs are unaffected by this final stage of Kugaptee’s death.

A HEROINE PASSES HER BURDEN

As long as at least one PC survives Kugaptee’s Final Death, those survivors huddle in silence within a ruined version of Willowshore. Mist rolls in all around them, and the sound of a softly playing flute winds through the smoky silence. It’s a deceptively simple song, but with a rhythm that the PCs recognize from somewhere deep in their bones. With the song comes a soundless but powerful pulse of mingled emotions: hope, fear, pride, and defiance in the face of pain. A shared sense of purpose and self-sacrifice lifts weariness and bolsters the spirit.

Students of old music can recognize the song as “The Dusklight Torch” with a successful DC 25 Arts Lore or Performance check to Recall Knowledge—a once much-more-famous song from an old heroic opera by the same title. The theme of the piece concerns a new generation of heroes preserving the light of hope by



claiming it from a fallen predecessor, symbolized by the lighting of a torch in front of the setting sun to preserve some fraction of its light in the darkness.

As the song ends, each PC (including any who are dead) receives a flashed vision of a moment when they displayed bravery or compassion in Willowshore's defense, followed by the image of a swordswoman in ancient dress; her face unseen as it's silhouetted against the sunset. The warrior drops her sword, and each PC sees their own hand reach out to grasp it. Any PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Perception check recognizes the figure as that of Tan Sui-Jing, the heroine who defeated Kugaptee and reincarnated as the sugi that grows still over his grave.

At the conclusion of the vision, each PC feels refreshed and restored. Any Hit Point damage is healed, all lingering conditions are removed, and even PCs who perished during Kugaptee's Final Death are restored to life. As Tan Sui-Jing shares her strength to restore the PCs, she also draws from them their own experiences, convictions, and spiritual power—this doesn't diminish or harm the PCs, but it does restore the sugi tree over Kugaptee's grave, bolstering the tree for generations to come in the same way Heh Shan-Bao had hoped to do so with his failed ritual.

All the PCs feel a wave of weariness, terrible fear, and an exhaustion that can no longer be resisted. A moment later, they all awaken in the real world, rising from the same positions they occupied in the mindscape's version of the governor's manor—which has finally returned in its restored form to the living world.

Concluding the Adventure

With Heh Shan-Bao's defeat or rescue, Kugaptee's final death, and the restoration of the Tan Sugi, Willowshore's place in modern Shenmen is assured. Future dangers will face the town (see "Continuing the Campaign"), but for now, the people of Willowshore can rest, recover, and thrive.

Should the PCs return to the ruins of the Tan Sugi Monastery, they'll find the sugi tree to be healthier than it has ever been before, and after dark, its leaves shimmer with a faint silvery light. An aura of peace and sanctity now pervades the ruins, and news of this astonishing transformation soon begins to draw a new generation of pilgrims who, in time, shall restore the monastery to its original cause.

If the PCs finished the campaign on good terms with the bandit leader Lo Kuon or the lunar naga Isori, those individuals visit in the next few days to describe the beneficial changes they've observed in their respective territories outside Willowshore. Lo Kuon reports that he hopes to rebuild the Silkwasps—he offers the group's services to Willowshore as road agents who'll help defend travelers through the surrounding lands, and he could possibly grow the group into a valuable resource should the PCs seek to oppose the jorogumo in the future. Meanwhile, the subtle disturbances that Isori saw in the natural world, and the ominous portents captured in his astrological instruments and celestial charts, have vanished—although the lunar naga notes that there are still some minor, disquieting omens in the outer reaches of his divinations.

The next few months pass uneventfully and pleasantly in Willowshore. The weather is good, and the crops thrive. Rebuilding proceeds apace, with only ordinary problems arising, like acquiring labor and materials. Ren Mei Li keeps her word, and Willowshore becomes known, via discreet whispers, as something of a sanctuary from the depredations of the jorogumo.

What happens with Willowshore beyond these months depends entirely on the PCs' actions and plans for the future. They might choose to take a more active role in the schemes of the jorogumo court, perhaps advancing Ren Mei Li as a rival to Lady Lang Loi or working to undermine the jorogumo altogether. They might establish Willowshore as a small island of safety in Shenmen, although it's always possible that a high-profile escapee or political refugee might try to hide there, putting the PCs in an uncomfortable predicament.

The most significant loose end, of course, is the nindoru Kugaptee. Once again quiet and dead below the roots of the Tan Sugi, as with all nindorus, there remains the chance of his potential reincarnation. Removing Kugaptee entirely from the cycle of souls is the type of legendary quest only the most powerful of heroes should attempt. This endeavor would require a lengthy mission not into a mindscape corrupted by his dead dreams, but one found entirely within the nindoru's evil mind—a reality that would put the horrors the PCs braved during Season of Ghosts to shame and that would challenge them more than anything they've yet faced!

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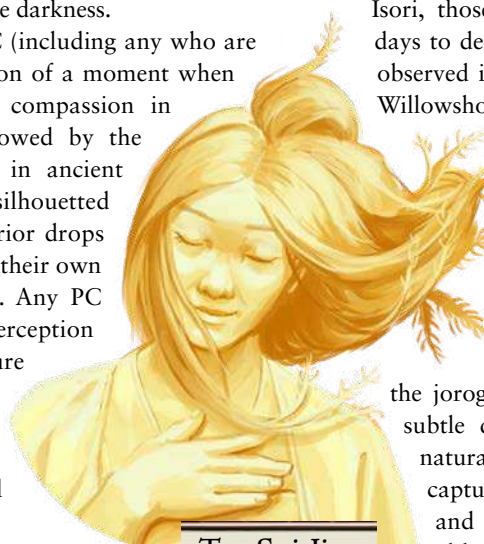
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Tan Sui-Jing





Continuing the Campaign



With Willowshore returned to the living world, Heh Shan-Bao's soul set free, and Kugaptee once more quiet in his grave, the PCs' hometown is safe, but their adventures don't have to come to an end.

This section outlines some options for extending the party's adventures in Tian Xia. These suggestions should be taken as a starting point to continue with a campaign that suits your PCs' interests and priorities, not as a railroad map etched in stone.

Because the PCs should have ample opportunity to rest, relax, and celebrate their victories in Willowshore before moving on, this outline leaves it up to them to decide when and if they want to continue their quest. If they're content with the result they've achieved, the story can end there.

However, should they decide to press on...

Shinzo's Legacy

The mysterious Shinzo reveals to the PCs the truth of his nature—that he's a powerful agent of Pharasma known as a shinigami—before he pays his final visit to Willowshore. With the town's return to the living world, his personal stake in setting things right has concluded, and without further action on the PCs' behalf, his story no longer intersects with their own.

Yet the PCs might have formed a bond of friendship with the mysterious merchant, and now that they've secured Willowshore and become powerful enough to begin traveling the planes, they might seek out their old friend to see if they can return the favor he extended to them during Season of Ghosts.

Part of Shinzo's interest in Willowshore ties back to an old infraction against Pharasma he made decades before the town became mired in its mindscape. With the psychopomp Yix assigned to him as a minder of sorts, Shinzo was barred from directly intervening in the fate of mortal lives, but those trapped in Willowshore were neither living nor dead. Trapped in between, he hoped that by providing what aid he could (and only indirectly assisting so he would not further aggravate Pharasma), Shinzo hoped to earn back the goddess's trust.

If the PCs seek him out in the Boneyard, whether or not Pharasma has accepted his work as payment for his infraction is left to you to decide, as is the nature of the infraction in the first place. Perhaps Shinzo took it upon himself to execute mortals he judged as being unworthy of life, and in so doing stepped out of his role as an impartial arbiter of death. Maybe his greed pushed him to accept payments from those who should've died so they could eke out a few more years of life. Or perhaps he fell in love with a mortal and took steps to ensure his lover's lasting life rather than risk their transformation after death into something new.

If you decide that Shinzo hasn't yet paid his debt, then when the PCs seek him out, they should learn Pharasma has sent him on a particularly dangerous mission to complete his penance. This dangerous task should match the nature of his infraction. If Shinzo was a judgmental executioner, he might be assigned the task of overseeing the end of a remote world destined for destruction while its inhabitants scramble to prevent their doom. An avaricious Shinzo could be assigned to stand vigil over a hidden vault somewhere in the Boneyard that has become besieged by evil spirits. If Shinzo loved and lost a mortal, he might be sent to a world where his one-time lover has reincarnated and must comply with orders to observe their life without influencing it, so that he can finally witness how his love's story was supposed to end. When the PCs finally catch up with Shinzo, they should find the shinigami at odds and about to fail. Their decision to bolster, protect, or advise him should mean the difference in whether he's ever allowed to serve Pharasma without restriction again or if he shall be transformed into raw quintessence.

The Ghostly Governor

Kugaptee wasn't the only menace threatening Willowshore. Now that the town has returned to the modern era, Chou Mingxia, the ghostly governor of the nearby cursed city of Sze, soon takes note. She has long coveted the precious lumber that grows in Willowshore's

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hinterlands, particularly the sugi trees in its mountains; the lumber lord Mago Kai's failure to deliver this product to her stockyards the previous year may well result in more direct action. If so, Chou Mingxia attempts to assert a claim against Willowshore at some point during the first summer the PCs spend in the living world.

Chou Mingxia's scheme is based on a little-known provision in the old laws of Lung Wa, which state that if a governor is illegitimately appointed or neglects their fiefdom for a year and a day, then in the interest of protecting the citizenry and ensuring stable governance, another duly appointed governor can lay claim to that territory. With the strange return of Willowshore to the world after 115 years, Mingxia claims that the provision has been violated more than a hundred times and takes the stance that she should be entitled to govern the town (and its regional resources) as her own.

Because Chou Mingxia is a deluded ghost, the actual merits of her claim aren't important. She needs only the thinnest of pretexts to send her undead minions into Willowshore, which she does as soon as she's satisfied in her own mind that her claim is legitimate. The PCs should have just enough time to be warned of Mingxia's plans before she sends an army of undead to annex Willowshore, and their first task is defeating this army.

If the PCs defeat this invading force, Chou Mingxia takes some time to consider her next actions. At this point, local lawyer Luo Xi Yang hits upon a stratagem that might permanently defeat the ghost. For once, the lawyer's deep familiarity with the now-outdated laws of Lung Wa pays off: she cites a legal mechanism for stripping Mingxia of her governorship, and she believes that the ghost's internal logic will force her to bow to this decision, which will permanently dispel her and free Sze from her awful grip.

To remove Mingxia from power, the PCs must secure a unanimous vote of no confidence from every governor around Sze, then gather their signatures into an official scroll of condemnation. When faced with this scroll, Chou Mingxia will have no choice but to abdicate in shame, for it's written in the laws of Lung Wa.

Securing the signatures, however, won't be easy. In addition to the PCs, there are three governors whose seals and signatures must be obtained.

Lady **Mudan Bai** is a jorogumo who claims White Fragrance Mountain as her domain. Vain and fond of luxury, she's a typical jorogumo and deeply immersed in the schemes of their court. Winning her seal is likely to require either a significant bribe or playing courtly games of intrigue against Lady Mudan's rivals.

Governor **Uparo Ka**, the elderly patriarch of House Uparo, rules over the town of Yamu. Upon visiting

this town, the PCs find that the ancestral Uparo estate has been abandoned. The nobles and servants have vanished, leaving only their teeth behind. It's a strange sight to find teeth lying on pillows, fallen on kitchen countertops, and so forth.

By talking to the villagers of Yamu and studying clues left in the house, the PCs can ascertain that the family vanished on a moonless night approximately one year ago, and that the villagers were too afraid of the jorogumo to bring this occurrence to their attention. To find and rescue the Uparo family, the PCs must have their entire bodies painted with holy sutras by a priest of Tsukiyo during a full solar eclipse. Doing so will enable them to pass into the spirit world and find out what happened to the Uparo family—namely, that Uparo Ka fell victim to a sahkil posing as a mortal advisor and inadvertently permitted the sahkil to drag his entire household into Xibalba, the sahkils' realm on the Ethereal Plane. Now, the entire Uparo household is imprisoned in torment, and the PCs must find and rescue them to secure his vote.

Lady **Ichi Susarru**, the ruler of Nightingales' Hollow, is the final governor to whom the PCs must appeal. Lady Ichi is an elegant but embittered woman, now in her late sixties, who will sign the scroll only if the PCs recover and resurrect the bones of her son, Oboru, who was seized by the jorogumo years before.

To accomplish this task, the PCs must find his remains amid the charnel heaps beneath the subterranean palaces of Yin-Sichasi. Oboru was taken 30 years ago, and it's unlikely that he survived more than a year with the jorogumo. Only a small, silver nightingale necklace might identify his bones, if his captors didn't take it. Although the task of identifying, retrieving, and restoring Oboru is nigh impossible, Lady Ichi is immovable: if the PCs want her help, then they must fulfill this demand. Such powerful people, she reasons, should be able to do it.

Once the PCs have secured all three signatures, they can march on Sze, defeat its undead guardians and necromantic wards, and confront Governor Chou Mingxia. Faced with the scroll and the dictates of Lung Wa's laws, Mingxia must concede the loss of her authority, and her spirit finally moves on to the afterlife.

Thereafter, Sze is free—and will need a new governor.

Into Kugaptee's Mind

Finally, the PCs must decide whether to leave Kugaptee's grave alone for future generations to handle or risk a final, direct confrontation with the nindoru. Should they choose the latter, they must visit the Senhang Monastery in Tianjing, home of the Fellowship of Sankuei, whom Heh Shan-Bao attempted to enlist.

In Tianjing, the PCs find themselves embroiled in local intrigues. In particular, the bulakho, a class of wandering holy people serving 10-year terms as defenders of the faith, try to enlist the PCs to add gravity to their reports of dangers arising across the countryside. The remote borders of Tianjing have faced continuous attacks from qliploth trying to break through the nation's many holy seals, but the ruling Nyenreng Conclave in the capital has consistently discounted the threat.

Whether or not the PCs aid the bulakho, they'll eventually travel to the remote, mountainous Senhang Monastery and discover that it, too, has succumbed to qliploth infiltration. The monastery has been entirely consumed by qliploth, with just a few human-faced conspirators discouraging scrutiny from outsiders.

If the PCs have made allies among the bulakho, they might gain valuable insights and tools in defeating the qliploth. Otherwise, the PCs are on their own in fighting their way through the corrupted ruins, where they can find relics that the last survivors of the Fellowship of Sankuei managed to safeguard before perishing. Some of these guardians are protective spirits or clockwork automatons smeared with holy unguents to protect them from qliploth corrosion, and they might assist the PCs if they believe the interlopers to be worthy.

In the monastery's ruins, the PCs can retrieve the *Sacred Gong of Temyo*, bottles of luminous *skyfire ink*, and blessed items that will aid them against Kugaptee. The *skyfire ink* can be used to cover themselves with prayers before entering the nindoru's dead but dreaming mind, as well as to paint holy sigils onto silken bands they can bind about their brows to protect themselves from Kugaptee's mindscape constructs. The *Sacred Gong of Temyo* must be sounded when the nindoru is defeated, to ensure that the Heavenly Court hears of his demise and seizes his soul for the afterworld at once.

The method by which the PCs enter Kugaptee's death-shrouded mindscape should require them to build upon the many rituals they already learned during Season of Ghosts. When they finally enter the nindoru's internalized mindscape, the PCs find themselves in a torturous labyrinth. Gravity and logic are meaningless; surreal objects and grotesque faces float in an infinite void; the living and unliving are indistinguishable from one another. Not only must the PCs navigate through the

twisting, nonsensical corridors, they must also defeat the various monstrosities that Kugaptee has willed into existence and animated with fragments of devoured souls. Without the tools gained from the Fellowship of Sankuei, they'll surely be lost.

At the end of it all, the PCs come face-to-face with the nindoru himself: a near-godlike entity consumed with hatred for the heroes who have denied him so much. The climactic fight should be one for the ages, but at the end of it, the PCs can rest confident that they have eliminated a grave threat to Tian Xia... or else have consigned themselves to an eternity imprisoned as a fiend-god's playthings.



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Jorogumo and imperial ghosts aren't the only monsters that hunt in Shenmen's rainy gloom and inspire enduring rumors. Similar sources of lasting urban legends are the kuchisake-onna (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 3 156) and yohoi (a regional name for the brainchild; *Bestiary* 3 38). Examples of each are explored on the following pages as terrors that dwell within the societies that spawn them.

The Scissored Souls

The mutilated women known as kuchisake-onna are among the most feared creatures who torment Shenmen's towns. Rare and mysterious, they vanish and reappear at whim, materializing out of the mist and disappearing after each deadly encounter. Although they aren't undead, they bear some similarities to vengeful shades. Each is believed to be the manifestation of a specific grievance or mistreatment, and they can't be pacified without addressing whatever wrong led to their creation.

While some heroes might be able to defeat a slit-mouthed woman in open combat, such feats are far beyond ordinary villagers, who must rely on their wits and local knowledge to find some other way to survive. The stories of these clever, lucky souls have been preserved through generations and have inspired their descendants to find similar solutions when they've been so unfortunate as to end up in a similar plight.

THE CURSED BEAUTY

A young woman in Shinri Village was born with such beauty that, from the time she was 12 years old, it turned her life into a misery. Men who were much older would proposition her and say lewd things, then laugh and tell her she was pretty when she blushed or tell her not to "be a tease" if she ran away. Family friends, whom she had grown up thinking she could trust, became predatory; strangers in town stared as if she were some rare beast to be hunted. The girl learned to be distrustful of everyone outside her own family and became disgusted by any compliment about her beauty.

She avoided physical harm until the day that a local warlord passed through her village. This warlord had been invited by the governor to bring his army to deal with bandits plaguing the countryside, and he'd been promised any price in exchange for restoring the region's peace. When the warlord saw the girl, he promptly claimed her as part of his payment, and none dared deny one who commanded so many fierce soldiers.

The warlord ordered that the girl be brought to his pavilion at sunset. Despairing, she tucked a pair of silver scissors into the sash of her robe. She knew that her family would be brutally executed if she attacked the warlord, so instead she turned the scissors' blades on her own face, slashing herself so viciously that the warlord would be terrified and disgusted when he unveiled her.

Some say the girl killed herself that day, and a kuchisake-onna rose from malice that was left bodiless after her death. Others say that her hatred and determination were so powerful that she transformed herself into an immortal monstrosity. Either way, all agree that the warlord was her first victim, and that his honor guard was unable to stand against the terror he unleashed. The soldiers fled, sparing no thought to punishing the girl's family, for it was inconceivable to them that such a creature could have ordinary mortal kin.

But the woman's revenge didn't end there. The newly risen kuchisake-onna hunted down every man who had ever threatened her, insulted her, or tried to prey upon her beauty. After murdering all her worst offenders, she then killed those whose comments had been trivial. Once that was done, she hid her slashed face behind painted fans and courtesans' veils and began to bate other men into complimenting her looks so she could kill them too.

No one escaped her until a young man from Shinri village, who had grown up with stories warning him of the chauvinistic cruelties that created this kuchisake-onna, encountered her on a misty night as he was returning from the forest where he'd been cutting wood. It rainy, and he was alone, for the

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omens were bad and the other villagers had wisely stayed home. Only this boy had gone out because his parents were sick and needed firewood to boil their medicinal tea.

He knew he was doomed when he saw the kuchisake-onna appear with her lotus fans and sweet perfumes, for no ordinary woman would be abroad on such a night, and he was familiar with the legend. However, for his parents' sake, he was determined to return home.

Thus, when she came forward with her tiny, graceful steps and asked, "Do you think I'm pretty?" he didn't dare answer her directly. Instead, he replied: "I think you're very brave to have killed a warlord and his soldiers. They were wrong to have assumed a young girl with scissors was just a pretty toy who couldn't hurt them. I know you can hurt me, if you want to, but I hope you'll let me pass. My parents are sick, and I must bring them this firewood. Please forgive me for not answering what you asked. I don't wish to reduce you to mere beauty."

This was the answer that the kuchisake-onna had longed to hear for so many years. It pleased her so well that she allowed the boy to go unharmed. He carried his firewood home to his parents, who were able to prepare their tea and eventually recover. The next day, he went back to the forest to offer her a new painted fan in thanks. But the kuchisake-onna never took the fan, for she had forgiven the entire village after the boy spoke to her, and she was never seen there again.

AVOIDING THE ANSWER

If a PC attempts to answer a kuchisake-onna's questions in a confusing or noncommittal manner, you can judge the effectiveness of this tactic by calling for the PC to attempt a Deception or Diplomacy check against the kuchisake-onna's Will DC. On a success, the kuchisake-onna becomes flat-footed as described in her Am I Pretty? ability, but on a failure, the monster is enraged by the dodged question. She can't use Even Now? without an answer of "yes," so in this case, she'll certainly target the source of her frustration with scissors attacks made as normal Strikes.

THE BITTER CONCUBINE

One of Shenmen's many rulers during the long years of Lung Wa's reign was Governor Ho Gyun, who was infamous for the number and beauty of his concubines. He kept his "Garden of Beauties" confined in the governor's palace, where they had nothing to do but vie for his attention.

The undisputed queen of Governor Ho's concubines was Huin Mae, a woman whose fierce intellect and astonishing beauty could've made her an empress in another life. As she had been born to poor fisherfolk, however, her ambitions could carry her only so far, and she found herself unable to rise above Governor Ho's silken fetters. She took out her frustrations on the other concubines, treating them viciously and deriving her only pleasure in life from crushing rivals for the governor's attentions.

Huin Mae knew that her power was rooted in her beauty. She bound her waist and plastered her face with silk masks soaked in rare oils and milks to preserve her youth. She bore no children, fearing pregnancy might ruin her figure, and abstained from all the sweets that she loved for the same reason.

Despite her iron self-discipline, however, Huin Mae couldn't deny the march of years forever. She found herself increasingly neglected as the governor's attentions turned to younger women, and she grew enraged that she had wasted her life and denied herself true happiness in pursuit of such a worthless prize. Finally, as her hair grayed and her face grew lined, Huin Mae snapped. She seized a pair of silver shears from a visiting dressmaker and slashed the smile off her most hated rival, a younger concubine who had taken her place as Ho Gyun's favorite and who had taunted Huin Mae viciously about her change in fortune. Then she rampaged through the Garden of Beauties, mutilating everyone she could find.

The governor's guards stopped her, and after a quick mockery of a trial, Huin Mae was condemned to suffer the same disfigurement she'd inflicted on her rivals. Her face was slashed from ear to ear, and she was banished to wander in the desolate, rainy winter, with every expectation that she would die.

Perhaps she did. Perhaps she didn't. Either way, she returned as a kuchisake-onna, or else a kuchisake-onna returned wearing her clothes and displaying her manner. What's known for certain is that this kuchisake-onna, who was called Huin Mae by those who survived her attack, murdered Ho Gyun, finished off her wounded rival, and then vanished again into the cold gray woods.

In the centuries since then, Huin Mae has resurfaced occasionally, striking at vain young people and lechers who use wealth and power to buy such beauties as concubines. Strangely, it seems she hasn't attacked the jorogumo, although the spider-women would seem to fit her usual criteria for enemies. She does, however, have a notable enmity for the ghosts of fallen Lung Wa, and somehow they

seem to fear her, as if something about her presence reminds them of old sins.

As a mortal, Huin Mae hoarded the secrets that passed through the Garden of Beauties, and she learned a great deal about Ho Gyun's friends, competitors, and enemies. The peculiar nature of Shenmen's hauntings, which pulled several of these notables from the afterworld and returned them to their ruined glory, has resulted in Huin Mae's ancient secrets still being quite useful to bandits and adventurers today. However, prying them from the vengeful kuchisake-onna is no easy task.

Most who encounter Huin Mae don't think about learning her secrets and hope only to escape alive. The few who have succeeded did so by exploiting the kuchisake-onna's love for sweets, which she was seldom able to indulge in while living in the Garden of Beauties. Now, when faced with a scattered handful of honey floss or rice candy, Huin Mae is unable to resist the impulse to snatch up and gobble the confections. This response sometimes buys her victims enough time to flee, and to this day, villages near her known haunts sell small bags of specially stamped "scissor-catching hangwa" to travelers seeking protection from the kuchisake-onna.

EARNING SECRETS

A kuchisake-onna who possesses secret knowledge can sometimes be persuaded to reveal the information. To do so, you must avoid answering when she asks, "Am I Pretty?" If you do so with a successful Diplomacy check, you can offer her something she desires (such as sweets, in Huin Mae's case) and then attempt a second Diplomacy check, all as a three-round action with the linguistic trait, against her Will DC. On a success, the kuchisake-onna accepts the gift and reveals the secret you seek. Whether or not she'll let you go without attacking isn't guaranteed.

Fears Made Flesh

So plagued by terror are Shenmen's people that, more than once, their fears have taken lives of their own. Such creatures, known as "brainchildren" among scholars and arcanists, are more commonly called yohoi by villagers in Shenmen, for the sham exorcist Yohoi is widely blamed for bringing them to the region. Some still believe he lurks among them as his own most frightening creation.

THE EXORCIST'S EXTORTION

Yohoi of the Yellow Reed was a sham exorcist and con artist who once plied his trade widely across

Shenmen. As a young man, he traveled to the distant ports of Taldor and Cheliax, where he obtained a *lens of focused fear*: an unholy device crafted by dedicants of Zon-Kuthon that solidified victims' terrors into physical forms. In short, it created brainchildren, and Yohoi used it to launch his career.

Upon selecting a likely-looking village, one prosperous enough to be worth sucking dry but unprotected by inconveniently educated or powerful citizens, Yohoi would set up camp with his lens trained on the village. Then, disguised as a traveling storyteller, he would play his drums and sing chants about the ghosts of neglected ancestors who visited vengeance on disrespectful descendants.

Yohoi's tales always emphasized the yellow, bulging eyes of these ghosts, as well as their long



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dirty fingernails and hairy, humped necks, because he wanted to be certain that the lens created recognizable apparitions for him to dispel. He was also careful to stress that the ghosts couldn't withstand the holy songs played on flutes by the priests of Tianjing, who carried sacred yellow flutes that dispelled the uneasy spirits.

Once he was satisfied that he'd seeded the right fears, Yohoi retreated to his camp and bided his time. Occasionally, if the village proved resistant, he would desecrate a few graves, plant eviscerated animals in the local temple, or poison trees and flowers into ghastly-looking gray remnants. These disturbing sights usually sufficed to ignite villagers' fears in Shenmen, especially since there were almost always a handful of families who felt they hadn't sufficiently revered their ancestors or a local lineage that had died out and whose graves now remained untended. Minor as such sins were, Yohoi knew they could provide adequate tinder for his flames.

Within a few nights, the lens would create a brainchild. Yohoi let it torment the villagers for weeks before he appeared in his second guise, now pretending to be a shaman trained in the traditions of Tianjing. By playing his yellow reed flute, he could banish the "ghost," and since he'd convinced the villagers that the spirit was vulnerable to its powers, the brainchild also possessed this vulnerability. Then Yohoi claimed his pay, basked in the villagers' adulation, and moved on to the next town.

He practiced this trade successfully for years. Then, he came to Blind Crow Village.

An aged monk who'd trained in Tianjing lived in Blind Crow Village, where she meditated daily beneath the statue that gave the village its name. Knowing that the old woman could barely hear or see anymore, and that she confined herself to meditating motionlessly beneath the statue from sunrise till dark, Yohoi broke his usual rule about avoiding troublesome citizens and decided to make his play in Blind Crow Village.

This was a mistake. The old monk could still hear well enough to make out Yohoi's stories, and as she'd studied in Tianjing, she knew both that his ghost stories described creatures that didn't exist in the annals of recorded undead and that his claims of a Tianjing education were false. Worse yet, the old monk's senses were keen enough for her to identify Yohoi as both the storyteller and the shaman; she was more attuned to the basic rhythms of speech than the nuances of accent and intonation that Yohoi used to disguise his voice, and her vision was too poor to be tricked by his changed appearance.

She knew that he was a fraud, and she didn't

believe that his "ghosts" were really vulnerable to the yellow reed flute. Assuming that Yohoi's "ghosts" were mere illusions—for the monk had never heard of "brainchildren," which had never been known to exist in Shenmen—she reported her suspicions to the village headman. When she was informed that ghosts really had been murdering villagers, the monk was astonished but still suspicious.

Her information broke the safeguard upon which Yohoi relied. Because neither the monk, the headman, nor any of the other villagers who'd been brought into their confidence believed that Yohoi's yellow reed had any actual power over the brainchild, the brainchild broke free of that constraint.

At the first opportunity, the brainchild killed its creator, seized the *lens of focused fear*, and fled Blind Crow Village. It stalked frightened travelers, feeding on their terrors and spurring them to new hunting grounds. Over time, it spawned more of its kind, sometimes banding together to take down more dangerous foes or to hunt more populated areas than the original brainchild could handle alone.

Few scholars believe that Yohoi's lens is single-handedly responsible for brainchildren in Shenmen, but none doubt that these creatures would have a far lesser presence in the region if not for the sham exorcist and his foolish greed.

YOHOI'S LEGACY

Even today, when a brainchild manifests in Shenmen, Yohoi's stories of their shared features and weaknesses to the music of a flute played by a priest persist. Bulging yellow eyes, crooked necks, and filthy talons are thus quite common features among yohois in the region. Furthermore, they almost always possess some form of weakness to flute music—or at the very least, to sonic damage.

ECHOES AND PREMONITIONS

Although the *lens of focused fear* didn't create every yohoi in Shenmen, it cast a long shadow over their subsequent history. Even now, many brainchildren originate around specific objects that villagers perceive as threatening. Yellow reeds that appear on the graves of murder victims or executed criminals, broken ceramic yokai figurines found at the bottom of water vessels, and mysterious books with water stains on their covers that seem to depict smiling, eyeless faces are among the objects associated with infamous brainchild attacks.

In all such instances, the object appears with no obvious explanation in a place where it shouldn't be, and shortly before or after, disaster strikes in a way

that seems related. This phenomenon isn't always accidental. Lady Nanbyo's cultists swiftly noted that an ominous sign followed by a calamity could spur enough fears and rumors to spawn a brainchild. Using this discovery, they began intentionally seeding yohois where great calamities were expected to strike or had already hit. Nanbyoans view such activities as sacred rituals, and if their efforts are rewarded with the birth of a brainchild, it's considered a sign of Lady Nanbyo's favor.

DISASTER-SPAWN

Yohois spawned from the fears created by a disaster can be particularly dangerous to those who endured that disaster's effects. These brainchildren often have the following additional occult innate spells: *phantasmal calamity* and *illusory scene* at 6th level.

THE VILLAGE OF BROKEN STICKS

Defeating yohois is no straightforward matter, for these creatures are beings woven of magic and terror. Not only do their abilities and appearances shift unpredictably depending on their believers' expectations, but even when a yohoi is slain, another just like it can return if anyone still believes in it. As superstitions are understandably difficult to eradicate in Shenmen, it's nearly impossible to permanently destroy a yohoi tradition that has developed a sufficiently broad base of belief.

Faced with one such yohoi, the jorogumo Lady Daiseu decided to solve her problem by massacring the entire village that was sustaining the creature. She had Greenbriar razed and all its inhabitants questioned under magical compulsion to see if they believed in the Greenbriar Hunter. If they did, they were killed; if not, they were forcibly resettled to another village in Lady Daiseu's fiefdom.

While this horrid atrocity may have eradicated the Greenbriar Hunter, it left a blackened ruin at the fringe of Lady Daiseu's territory. The scar where Greenbriar once stood became known as the Village of Broken Sticks. It's said to be haunted not only by the restless shades of the villagers who once lived there, but by a spectral semblance of the Greenbriar Hunter. Rumor claims that the brainchild, or possibly a new one claiming the Hunter's mantle, sustains itself through the deathless fear and misery of the ghosts who were murdered for its sake.

Worse yet, the phenomenon that initially gave rise to the Greenbriar Hunter remains unexplored and unresolved at the heart of the dead village. Decades

ago, the central well's water turned blood red. Those who drank from it found themselves craving raw meat and eventually turning to cannibalism. The curse was attributed to the Greenbriar Hunter, and a new brainchild was born.

With the village destroyed, Lady Daiseu viewed it as unnecessary to devote any further attention to the tainted well since no one was left to drink from it, and its curse didn't seem to spread beyond the ruins. The jorogumo princess turned her thoughts to other things, and the well was abandoned with the rest of the Village of Broken Sticks.

It stands there still, surrounded by weeds and ashes, a grisly monument to how the horrors of Shenmen can stack and spiral into new forms.

BRAINCHILD REMNANTS

In rare cases where an attempt is made to eradicate a brainchild with methods like those pursued by Lady Daiseu, an unusual undead brainchild can result. These remnants have the same basic abilities as all brainchildren but have the undead trait as well as the negative healing defensive ability, and instead of weakness to mental damage, they possess an equal weakness to positive damage.



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In this adventure, the PCs have the chance to discover a wide range of rare and unusual items. Some will be found as treasure during the course of the adventure, while others will be given to the PCs as rewards. Whether or not you wish to have any of these items available for purchase from Shinzo or other markets is up to you, but it's recommended to wait until the point in the adventure at which that item would normally have been gained to have it start appearing for sale and to not have a unique item appear for sale at all.

Alchemical Items

These two alchemical items can be encountered in this adventure. Full details on the lozenge trait appear on page 46 of *Pathfinder Treasure Vault*.


ENERGIZING PILL

UNCOMMON ALCHEMICAL CONSUMABLE LOZENGE

Price 180 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; **Bulk** –

This special blend of potent herbs comes in the form of a compact ball that allows it to be held in the mouth, where it remains for 1 hour. An energizing pill has a bitter taste at first, but the longer one lets it soak, the more complex and sweet its flavor grows. It heightens your reactions, granting you a +2 item bonus to initiative rolls with Perception.

Secondary Effect  **Trigger** You would become clumsy, drained, enfeebled, frightened, sickened, slowed, or stupefied; **Effect** Reduce the value of the condition you just gained by 1; if this reduces the value to 0, you don't gain the triggering condition.

SILVERSOUL BOMB

RARE ALCHEMICAL BOMB CONSUMABLE MENTAL SPLASH

Usage held in 1 hand; **Bulk** L

Activate  **Interact**

This rare alchemical bomb gathers and concentrates the emotions that linger in a burial ground where generations of beloved ancestors have been interred, infusing that powerful emotional energy into the alchemically prepared

powdered silver stored within the bomb. This energy glows with a soft, silver radiance and, if contained in a clear container, allows a silversoul bomb to be used as a torch to illuminate an area.



Silversoul Bomb

A silversoul bomb grants an item bonus to attack rolls and deals mental damage plus additional effects, according to the bomb's type. Nindorus are particularly harmed by silversoul bombs and take the listed persistent mental damage, according to the bomb's type. Against nindorus, the bomb's item bonus also applies to its save DC to resist being dazzled or blinded. Creatures that have weakness to silver (including most nindorus) have an equal amount of weakness to the mental damage caused by a silversoul bomb, due to the silver infused into the energy within.

Type silversoul bomb; **Level** 3; **Price** 10 gp

You gain a +1 item bonus to attack rolls, and the bomb deals 2d4 mental damage, 1d6 persistent mental damage to nindorus, and 2 mental splash damage. A creature that takes splash damage from the bomb and fails a DC 17 Fortitude save is dazzled for 1 round as glowing silver particles cling to its face.

Type greater silversoul bomb; **Level** 11; **Price** 250 gp

You gain a +2 item bonus to attack rolls, and the bomb deals 3d4 mental damage, 2d6 persistent mental damage to nindorus, and 3 mental splash damage. A creature that takes splash damage from the bomb and fails a DC 28 Fortitude save is blinded for 1 round and then dazzled for 1 round thereafter.

Type major silversoul bomb; **Level** 17; **Price** 2,500 gp

You gain a +3 item bonus to attack rolls, and the bomb deals 4d4 mental damage, 3d6 persistent mental damage to nindorus, and 4 mental splash damage. A creature that takes splash damage from the bomb is dazzled for 1 round unless it fails a DC 37 Fortitude save, in which case it's permanently blinded.

Consumable Magic

The consumable items on the following page can be discovered during this volume's adventure.

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ASCENDANT DRAGON SPIRIT

ITEM 11

UNCOMMON CONSUMABLE MAGICAL POTION TRANSMUTATION

Price 250 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

Activate **◆** Interact

This masterfully crafted spirit is mixed into a potent magical cocktail and packaged in a gourd with an engraving of a forest dragon coiling around it. Drinking it imparts an intriguing balance of woodsmoke, honey, and bright floral notes on the back end. When consumed, your arms become infused with the deadly power of a forest dragon. For 1 minute, your unarmed Strikes deal an additional 1d6 poison damage and an additional 1d6 negative damage.

PANACEATIC SALVE

ITEM 10

UNCOMMON ABJURATION CONSUMABLE ENCHANTMENT MAGICAL MENTAL OIL

Price 155 gp

Usage held in 2 hands; Bulk L

Activate **◆** Interact

This pungent herbal ointment was originally only intended for use as an analgesic. That being said, popular folklore around this salve claims it can do anything from curing fevers to repelling vampires, a reputation that, if nothing else, is easy to get swept up in. When you activate a dose of *panaceatic salve* by rubbing it on your skin, you gain 4d8+10 temporary Hit Points for 10 minutes. At the end of this duration, if you still retain at least 1 of these temporary Hit Points, you can attempt a new saving throw against an ongoing disease or poison affliction you're afflicted with; if you fail or critically fail this saving throw, you don't increase the affliction's stage.

SANCTIFIED BEANS

ITEM 11

UNCOMMON CONSUMABLE DIVINE MAGICAL POSITIVE

Price 250 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

Activate **◆◆** Interact

These roasted soybeans are blessed by a priest to ward against all various forms of otherworldly influence but are most effective against incorporeal evils, such as specters or path maidens. They can be safely eaten by living creatures and taste delicious when paired with rice wine. When you activate this item, choose an adjacent square to exhale into. You fill that square with soothing vapors that harm any fiend, fey, ghost, spirit, or undead creature that ends their turn in that square for the next minute, causing them to take 4d8+4 good damage (DC 28 basic Will save). An incorporeal creature that takes this damage must also attempt a DC 28 Fortitude save to resist being affected as follows.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature becomes flat-footed until the start of your next turn.

Failure The creature becomes slowed 1 for 1 round.

Critical Failure The creature becomes stunned 1 and is then slowed 1 for 1 round.

TALJIAE TASSEL

ITEM 10

UNCOMMON CONSUMABLE MAGICAL TALISMAN TRANSMUTATION

Price 160 gp

Usage affixed to a weapon; Bulk –

Activate **◆** envision; **Trigger** Your Strike with the affixed weapon was a critical success.

The bright red tassels of the creature known as Taljiae are a ubiquitous motif in Hwanggot and are used as charms to pray for good fortune and reward for great effort. They adorn clothing, weapons, and even drinking gourds. These particular tassels carry within them a potent fraction of the mysterious fey's power. When you activate a *Taljiae tassel*, your weapon gains the properties of the *grievous rune* for the duration of the triggering attack.

THOUSAND-YEAR DRAGONROOT

ITEM 10

RARE CONSUMABLE MAGICAL TRANSMUTATION

Price 180 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

Activate **◆** Interact

Dragonroots are pale, golden-rooted plants that grow throughout Tian Xia. Just as mandrake roots or ginseng roots are sometimes regarded to have almost humanoid shapes, these roots appear as if they were dragons. They're commonly used in the formulation of healing potions, but the most sought-after have grown for centuries, for they're viable for enchantment into *thousand-year dragonroots*.

When you activate a *thousand-year dragonroot*, your body shimmers with golden light, providing illumination as a torch. You gain a fly Speed of 40 feet and fire resistance 5 for 1 minute.

VENGEFUL DEMON'S TEARS

ITEM 10

UNCOMMON CONSUMABLE MAGICAL POTION TRANSMUTATION

Price 160 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

Activate **◆** Interact

Vengeful demon's tears is an infamously noxious spirit mixed into a potent magical cocktail and traditionally packaged in a gourd adorned with an engraving of a terrifying demonic face. Drinking it feels akin to lighting your throat on fire and putting it out with an herbal tonic. When you activate this potion, you gain the quickened condition for 3 rounds and can use the extra action each



Thousand-Year Dragonroot

round to Strike, Stride, or to take the following action.

Release the Demon ♦ (concentrate, healing) You focus on the sensation of life burning within your flesh and gain 2d8 temporary Hit Points for 1 round.

Armor and Shields

This magical suit of armor and magical shield can be discovered during this volume's adventure

DRAGON TURTLE ARMOR

ITEM 12

UNCOMMON ABJURATION INVESTED MAGICAL

Price 2,000 gp

Usage worn armor; **Bulk** 4

This +1 *resilient full plate* is crafted from the most colorful fragments chipped from scales of a dragon turtle's shell, traditionally incorporating that motif in the form of a thicker, sturdier backplate. While wearing this armor, you aren't flat-footed from creatures that flank you, and you ignore the armor's speed penalty when you Swim and its check penalty to Athletics checks to Swim.

EVIL-REFLECTING SHIELD

ITEM 11

UNCOMMON ABJURATION MAGICAL

Price 1,250 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; **Bulk** 1

A bright, octagonal frame surrounds this circular mithral shield, which itself is polished to a mirrorlike sheen that reflects clear and true. While you have this standard-grade mithral shield (Hardness 5, HP 20, BT 10) raised, you gain its circumstance bonus to saving throws against spells with the evil or negative trait.

Activate ⤴ command (fortune); **Frequency** once per day; **Trigger** You attempt a saving throw against an effect with the evil or negative traits; **Effect** Your saving throw result is considered one degree better than the actual result. If this effect turns a success into a critical success, you can reflect some of the effect's power as a wave of magical backlash back to the source of the triggering effect, as long as the source is within 30 feet. When you do so, the target must succeed at a DC 28 Fortitude save or become stunned 1.

Magical Weapons

These magical weapons can be discovered during this volume's adventure.

DRAGONFIRE HALFBOW

ITEM 12

UNCOMMON EVOCATION FIRE MAGICAL

Price 1800 gp

Usage held in one hand; **Bulk** 1

Crafted by layering bamboo with strips of sliced scales harvested from a fire-breathing dragon, this bow has a

significant draw strength. This design is commonly seen in Hongal, as the shorter limbs allow for easier maneuvering on horseback. While the wielder of this +2 *striking composite shortbow* is mounted, they apply the bow's item bonus to Nature checks to Command your mount.

Activate ♦♦ Interact; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** You draw the bow back to its maximum draw length without knocking an arrow, and as you release the string, the *dragonfire halfbow* casts *fireball* (heightened to 5th-level; DC 29 Reflex save), targeted at a point of your choosing within the spell's range. You and your mount are immune to the effects of this *fireball*.

FOUR-TIGER BLADE

ITEM 12

RARE ABJURATION DIVINE

Price 2,000 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; **Bulk** 1

When a once-in-a-lifetime alignment of the stars shone through the roof of a secluded blacksmith's forge, the smith took advantage to craft their masterpiece. For two hours, they hammered a lump of ordinary steel into a divine blade, etching constellations and wards down its length, then shared their creation's formula with a small group of close associates before passing away.

These weapons are the *four-tiger blades*, and currently, only a dozen are known to exist—one associated with each month of the year. Each weapon is a +2 *striking ghost touch longsword* that leaves a noticeable trail of light originating from the engraved stars when it's swung. Those who pay close attention to the pattern of stars that shine on the blade might note that the depicted constellations change according to those currently in the night sky above.

Activate ♦♦ envision, Interact (abjuration, divine, incapacitation); **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** Attempt a Strike against a creature you believe to be possessed. This attack deals no damage on the creature, but if the target is possessed, the possessing creature must attempt a DC 29 Will save.

Critical Success The possessing creature is unaffected, and you remain unaware of if the target is actually possessed or not.

Success The possessing creature is unaffected, but you sense that creature's control over the target and confirm that the target is possessed.

Failure You confirm that the target is possessed. The possessing creature can't control the target for 1 minute.

Critical Failure You confirm the target is possessed an instant before you counteract the possession, causing the possessing creature to vacate the target's body.

Activate ⤴ command; **Trigger** You attempt a Strike with the *four-tiger-blade*; **Effect** Until the start of your next turn, you gain resistance 10 to negative damage.

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LUMBER LORD'S AXE

ITEM 11

UNCOMMON TRANSMUTATION MAGICAL

Price 900 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk 1

This unassuming tool wouldn't look out of place on the belt of an industrious laborer. Grooves worn into the wooden handle over years of use and an irregularly sharpened blade give it the distinct impression of being cherished, and the potent scent of freshly chopped wood always clings to the axe's blade despite any attempt to clean it or remove the odor. A creature that holds or carries this +2 *striking cold iron fungus and plant bane battle axe* feels an obligation to tell the truth and receives a -4 status penalty to its attempts to lie.

Activate 1 minute (Interact); **Frequency** once per day;

Effect You polish and sharpen the axe, after which its scent grows even more powerful and the axe's blade transforms into your choice of standard-grade adamantite or standard-grade mithral for 1 hour; then after this duration, the woodcutter's axe reverts to cold iron.

SENSEI'S PARASOL

ITEM 11

RARE ABJURATION MAGICAL

Price 1,400 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk 1

A master once said to his pupil that, in the hands of a skilled practitioner, even a parasol can become a deadly weapon. Returning the next day, the pupil excitedly turned over a parasol forged out of metal slats, explaining that it lowered the amount of skill one would need to exert deadly force. The master sighed, seeing that his pupil had failed to see the point, but accepted the gift nonetheless. Ingenuity was, after all, a virtue.

Since then, additional *sensei's parasols* have been crafted, and they're very sought after. This weapon functions as a +2 *striking bo staff*.

Activate ◆ Interact; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect**

You cause the metal slats of the parasol to open up, transforming it into a *moderate sturdy shield* (Hardness 13, HP 104 [BT 5]). You can sustain this activation for up to 10 minutes, after which the *sensei's parasol* reverts back to bo-staff form. If it's broken as a shield, it reverts to its undamaged bo-staff form. If it's destroyed as a shield, it reverts to bo-staff form and becomes broken.

Activate ➤ envision; **Requirement** The *sensei's parasol* is in bo-staff form and isn't broken; **Frequency** once per day; **Trigger** A creature misses you with a melee Strike; **Effect** You redirect the missed Strike to target a creature or object within the triggering creature's reach. The triggering creature rolls a new Strike against the new target to determine the results of the redirected attack.

THUNDERING FURY DADAO

ITEM 12

RARE EVOCATION MAGICAL SONIC

Price 2,000 gp

Usage held in 2 hands; Bulk 2

This massive, curved blade roars when it crashes down on opponents, seemingly intent on subduing them with sheer force. It's said materials for the first *thundering fury dadaos* came from the hide of Yorak, the Horned Thunder, a legendary kaiju that roams the Shanguang desert. The lack of embellishments on this +2 *striking thundering greatsword* belies a weapon of deadly efficacy.

Activation ◆ envision; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect**

You infuse the *thundering fury dadao* with the speed of lightning and the force of thunder. The weapon gains the agile and forceful traits for one round. You can Sustain this activation for up to 1 minute.

Other Items

These magical items can be discovered during this volume's adventure.

DRAGON TURTLE ARTILLERY

ITEM 10

UNCOMMON EVOCATION MAGICAL

Price 1,000 gp

Usage held in 2 hands; Bulk 3

One end of this heavy cylinder of steel has been forged in the likeness of a dragon turtle's head, the mouth gaping wide. Grips at the opposite end allow one to hold and aim this heavy cannon-like barrel with both hands. As long as you're carrying *dragon turtle artillery* while you're on a boat or ship, the DC for any effect to capsize that vehicle increases by 4.

Activate ◆◆ command, Interact; **Frequency** once per day;

Effect A 50-foot cone of steam blasts from the mouth of the cannon, dealing 10d6 fire damage to creatures in its area of effect (DC 27 basic Reflex save). This blast ignores the fire resistance normally granted to creatures by being underwater.

FAN OF FALLING WORDS

ITEM 10

UNCOMMON ILLUSION MAGICAL

Price 900 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

This folding handheld paper fan appears blank when first found, but if the wielder unfolds its leaves as an Interact action, they display an ink-brush painting of the wielder's choice. The fan must be closed and opened again to display a different painting. While held, the *fan of falling words* grants you a +2 item bonus to Performance checks to act or perform comedy, orate, or sing.

Activate ◆◆ command, Interact; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** You manifest the tapestry of your words, causing the image you depict on the fan to leap off

its leaves. The fan casts *hallucinatory terrain* to your specifications (DC 27 Will save to disbelieve). While this only takes three actions to perform (as opposed to the spell's normal 10 minutes of casting), the effect has no range, and the 50-foot burst it creates is centered on you.

FORTUNE CORD

ITEM 11

UNCOMMON MAGICAL TRANSMUTATION

Price 1,300 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

In many parts of Tian Xia, it's tradition to mint coins with holes in the centers for the purpose of being able to thread a cord through them and tie them off for security and ease of transaction. This immaculately braided red cord is made in this tradition and can hold up to 100 coins at any given time. As long as you carry a *fortune cord*, you gain a +2 item bonus to skill checks to Earn Income.

If you load up to 100 coins onto a *fortune cord* as part of your daily preparations, you can Activate the magic item in two different ways until the next time you make your daily preparations, provided all the loaded coins are of the same type.

Activate ♦♦ Interact; **Frequency** once per day; **Requirement** you have at least 50 coins loaded onto the *fortune cord*; **Effect** You transform the *fortune cord* into a +2 striking *nunchaku* for 1 minute. The type of coin loaded onto the cord determines the additional weapon property rune that manifests on this +2 striking *nunchaku*, as follows.

Copper: corrosive weapon

Silver: shock weapon

Gold: flaming weapon

Platinum: frost weapon

Activate ♦♦♦ manipulate, Interact; **Effect** You whip the *fortune cord*, causing 10 coins loaded onto it to detach and fire at a creature within 100 feet that you can see. That creature takes 4d6 damage (DC 28 basic Reflex save); the damage type depends on the type of coins you've loaded. Copper coins deal acid damage, silver coins deal electricity damage, gold coins deal fire damage, and platinum coins deal cold damage.

JIANG-SHI BELL

ITEM 11

UNCOMMON ILLUSION MAGICAL

Price 1,200 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk L

This ornate handbell creates a sonorous low-pitched tone when rung, as if sounding from a much larger bell than one carried in the hand. The bell is crafted of silver and polished to a reflective sheen, while the bell's wooden handle is carved with detailed images of various foodstuffs.



Jiang-Shi Bell

You can interact with a *jiang-shi bell* to brandish it against a *jiang-shi* vampire. If a *jiang-shi* gains the fleeing condition as a result of a *jiang-shi bell* being brandished, they must run until they're at least 20 feet away. They take a -2 penalty to the Will save to any attempt to overcome their revulsion toward this object.

Activate ♦♦ envision, Interact (olfactory, visual); **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** You ring the bell and create an illusory image of a delicious-looking banquet of food laid out on an altar in a 5-foot-square at any point within 30 feet of you that you can see. Any creature that must eat food to survive that's within 30 feet of the appearance of the illusory food must succeed at a DC 28 Will save or be so distracted by the food's sight and smell that they become fascinated by it for 10 minutes.

This food's appearance can trigger any *jiang-shi*'s Bitter Epiphany weakness; if the food does so, the *jiang-shi* takes a -2 item penalty to its Will save to resist the effects of this weakness.

LACQUERED WAIST DRUM

ITEM 11

UNCOMMON MAGICAL

Price 1,300 gp

Usage held in 2 hands; Bulk 1

This hourglass-shaped drum has two heads, each of which produces a different sound when struck. When played together, the resonance of the two sounds is effective in repelling evil spirits. This drum can be played as an instrument, granting a +2 item bonus to Performance.

Activate ♦♦♦ Interact; **Frequency** once per hour; **Effect** You play both heads of the drums, generating a pulse of positive energy that targets one creature within 30 feet that has the undead trait. This deals 5d8 positive damage (DC 28 Fortitude save) to that creature; if the undead also has the ghost trait, the ghost becomes sickened 1 if it fails the save.

Activate ♦♦♦♦ Interact; **Frequency** once per hour; **Effect** You raucously play both heads of the drums, accompanied with shouting and dancing. This display generates a pulse of positive energy in a 30-foot emanation from you. All undead creatures within this area must attempt a DC 28 Fortitude save.

Critical Success The creature takes no damage.

Success The creature takes 2d8 positive damage.

Failure The creature takes 5d8 positive damage; if the creature has the ghost trait, it becomes stupefied 1 for 1 minute.

Critical Failure The creature takes 10d8 positive damage; if the creature has the ghost trait, it becomes stupefied 2 for 1 minute.

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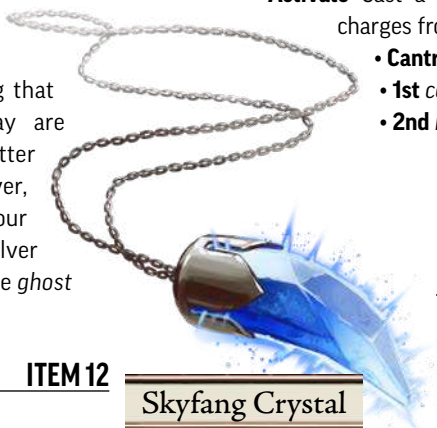
ITEM 10

UNCOMMON INVESTED MAGICAL TRANSMUTATION

Price 1,000 gp

Usage worn; Bulk –

Those who are in tune with nature understand well the transience of life and the migration of souls. Just as the moon waxes and wanes, so too are the candles of life lit and extinguished. The ritual for creating this item requires an animal sacrifice in direct moonlight, the belief being that creatures sacrificed in this way are blessed to reincarnate into better lives. While wearing this silver, crescent-shaped necklace, your unarmed melee Strikes are silver weapons with the properties of the *ghost touch* rune.



Psychopomps and spirits tend to regard you with a level of respect while you carry a *purgatory emissary's staff*. While you wield this staff, you receive a +2 item bonus to all skill checks made to adjust a psychopomp's or spirit's attitude.

When used as a weapon, a *purgatory emissary's staff* is a +2 *striking ghost touch* staff.

Activate Cast a Spell; **Effect** You expend a number of charges from the staff to cast a spell from its list.

- **Cantrip** *disrupt undead*
- **1st** *command, sanctuary*
- **2nd** *remove fear, see invisibility*
- **3rd** *searing light, zone of truth*
- **4th** *dispel magic, talking corpse*
- **5th** *banishment, tongues*

PHOENIX FULU HOLDER

ITEM 12

RARE MAGICAL TRANSMUTATION

Price 2,000 gp

This elegant wooden frame is decorated with numerous downy red feathers that feel almost uncomfortably hot to the touch. A *phoenix fulu holder* grants a sort of second "life" to any fulu placed for a time within its frame, but also gives the fulu wielder a stylish and eye-catching way of displaying such a treasure. You can place any fulu into a *phoenix fulu holder* as an Interact action.

Activate Interact; **Frequency** once per day; **Requirement**

An 11th- or lower-level fulu is stored in the *phoenix fulu holder*; **Effect** You take the fulu from the *phoenix fulu holder*, and an instant later, a glowing image of the fulu you removed manifests in the frame. If the previously stored fulu is consumed within the next 24 hours, the flickering image within the *phoenix fulu holder* becomes a solid and fully functional duplicate of that fulu. This duplicated fulu functions identically to the original fulu, but if not affixed within 24 hours of its formation, it fades away and vanishes.

Skyfang Crystal

SKYFANG CRYSTAL

ITEM 12

RARE DIVINATION INVESTED MAGICAL

Price 2,000 gp

Usage worn; Bulk –

A *skyfang crystal* appears as a softly glowing length of blue crystal shaped like a gently curved fang; it's typically

affixed to a short length of chain, allowing it to be worn as a necklace or wrapped around a forearm. The light it sheds is equal in strength to that of a candle; it can't be extinguished but can be blocked simply by wrapping the crystal in cloth, wearing it under clothing, or keeping it in a container. The first of these magical crystals was believed to have been created by a dying sky dragon who'd spent her life fighting against evil spirits. She plucked a dozen of her smallest teeth from her jaw and offered them to her 12 most trusted allies so that they could continue to track down evil spirits and remain protected as they did so, even after she was gone. A *skyfang crystal* provides illumination as a candle that can't be extinguished, and as long as you have it invested, you gain mental resistance 10. If you're evil, you're enfeebled 2 while you have a *skyfang crystal* invested.

Activate command, Interact; **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** You touch the *skyfang crystal* to your brow and utter the name of a specific fiend or spirit you seek. If the target is on the same plane as you, the *skyfang crystal* pulses stronger with light when you face in the approximate direction of the named creature, allowing you to Track that creature. The DC for this check is equal to the creature's Will DC, and you can use Occultism, Religion, or Survival to attempt the check. As long as you're tracking this fiend or spirit, you gain a +2 item bonus to saving throws against effects that creature generates. This effect persists until you activate the *skyfang crystal* again to track a different target.

PURGATORY EMISSARY'S STAFF

ITEM 12

RARE MAGICAL NECROMANCY STAFF

Price 1,820 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; Bulk 1

This ash wood staff is topped by a long tassel of bleached-white horsehair. Historically carried by the most important of court officials throughout various regions and periods of Tian Xia's history, *purgatory emissary's staves* are also strongly associated with psychopomps serving punitive sentences. It's thought this connection is a comical nod to the bureaucratic nature of the afterlife.

Reincarnation Feats

While few remember their previous lives, save for those who have been reincarnated via ritual, any who have lived lives before their current one carry within their soul the weight of previous existences. When one does recall those previous lives, one can draw upon memory and experience in a way most ancestries can't. Whatever the circumstances, your new lease on life has expanded your mind thanks to the bits and pieces you recall of your soul's past adventures.

The following rare ancestry feats are available to any character who has reincarnated at least once, either as part of their backstory or because of a reincarnation that took place during play—which includes all PCs in Season of Ghosts once they begin the Adventure Path's final installment.

LET'S TRY THAT AGAIN ↻

FEAT 1

RARE FORTUNE REINCARNATED

Frequency once per day

Trigger You fail a skill check.

You feel a sense of déjà vu when you've made a mistake, almost as if you weren't so careless in a past life and could certainly do better if given another chance. Reroll the triggering skill check and use the new result, even if it's worse than your first roll.

LIKE A ROACH

FEAT 1

RARE DOWNTIME REINCARNATED

Living with the bare necessities isn't terribly hard for someone who has defied death, and like a cockroach, you always know how to survive. When you Subsist during downtime, the DC for your skill check is reduced by 2. You don't need a minimum proficiency rank to Subsist in unusual environments, nor do you take a -5 penalty if you Subsist after 8 hours or less of exploration.

WEIGHT OF EXPERIENCE

FEAT 1

RARE REINCARNATED

The experience you've accumulated over multiple lifetimes envelops you like a weighted blanket, providing comfort and bestowing confidence under pressure. You gain the trained proficiency rank in one skill of your choice and the Assurance skill feat in that skill as a bonus feat.

WISDOM FROM ANOTHER LIFE

FEAT 1

RARE REINCARNATED

You absorbed a wide variety of facts before you died, and your soul still remembers slivers of this precious knowledge. You gain the trained proficiency rank in one skill of your choice and the Additional Lore skill feat as a bonus feat.

ANIMAL SOUL SIBLINGS

FEAT 5

RARE REINCARNATED

Your eyes have been opened to the spiritual essence suffusing the world. You gain *Speak with Animals* as a primal innate spell that you can cast once per day. You get a +1 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks to Gather Information from animals.

EMPATHY INCARNATE

FEAT 5

RARE REINCARNATED

Reincarnation has given you a compassionate perspective and enabled you to relate to almost everyone you speak with, putting them at ease and quickly generating trust. Whenever you attempt a Diplomacy check to Make An Impression or Request something, the DC is reduced by 2, and if the creature you're speaking with is lower level than you, any success is a critical success. Whenever you attempt a Diplomacy check to Gather Information, you can't critically fail.

I'VE HAD MANY JOBS

FEAT 5

RARE DOWNTIME REINCARNATED

Finding and excelling at odd jobs is child's play to one who has worked many occupations during many lives. When you attempt to Earn Income, you function as if you were trained in the skill used. If you are at least expert in the skill used, the DC for your skill check is reduced by 2.



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REINCARNATED RIDICULER

FEAT 5

RARE REINCARNATED

You've practiced the art of taunting an enemy, ensuring they know death will only make you stronger. When you Demoralize an opponent, the target doesn't become temporarily immune to your attempts to Demoralize it unless you critically fail the check. If the target critically hit you with a Strike on its previous turn, the DC for this check is reduced by 4.

SLEEP OF THE REBORN

FEAT 5

RARE REINCARNATED

Philosophers compare the cycle of life, death, and rebirth to sleeping, dreaming, and waking. You take it to another level by reliving previous lives in dreams, always waking invigorated and thankful for a new chance at life. Whenever you rest for 8 hours, you gain the effects of a long-term rest. If you're an ancestry that neither sleeps nor dreams, you still receive this benefit by entering a reflective, meditative state during rest.

LINGERING ECHOES

FEAT 9

RARE REINCARNATED

Not everyone is reincarnated, and you feel a strong connection with the spiritual echoes of those who didn't receive the same opportunity as you. You gain *talking corpse* as an occult innate spell that you can cast once per day. You can ask a fourth question of a corpse when you cast this spell. The corpse attempts its Will save against your spell DC or your class DC, whichever is higher.

PLANT SOUL SIBLINGS

FEAT 9

RARE REINCARNATED

Prerequisite Animal Soul Siblings

You're now able to connect with the spirits present in the greenery of the natural world. You gain *speak with plants* as a primal innate spell that you can cast once per day. You get a +2 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks to Gather Information from animals or plants.

RAPID RETRAINING

FEAT 9

RARE DOWNTIME REINCARNATED

Some feel trapped by their choices and have a tough time reinventing themselves. To you, this dilemma is just a natural part of reincarnation. Retraining other feats or skill increases during downtime only takes 4 days instead of a week, and class features that require a choice can be retrained in a week instead of a month. You also never need to find a teacher to retrain, as the memories of abilities you possessed in past lives are superior to any instructor.

YOU SEEM SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR

FEAT 9

RARE REINCARNATED

Trigger You succeed or critically succeed at a Recall Knowledge check about a creature.

You fought hundreds of foes in your various past lives, and now and then, something about a new opponent tugs at your memory, almost as if you defeated their grandparent long ago. You get a +2 circumstance bonus to your next attack roll, damage roll, or saving throw against this creature. You only receive this bonus once per creature.

CLINGING TO LIFE

FEAT 13

RARE NECROMANCY REINCARNATED

Frequency once per day

Trigger You're reduced to 0 hit points and don't immediately die.

This life still holds much for you, and you aren't ready to fall back into the River of Souls just yet. When you're reduced to 0 Hit Points and not immediately killed, you go to 1 Hit Point instead, fall prone, and are unconscious, and you don't gain the wounded condition.

I SENSE MALEVOLENCE

FEAT 13

RARE REINCARNATED

Your time in the River of Souls has given you deep insight into the machinations of those who refuse to move on. You gain *spirit sense* (*Advanced Player's Guide* 225) as a 6th-level occult innate spell, which you can cast once per day.

LINGUISTIC REVIVAL

FEAT 13

RARE REINCARNATED

You achieved fluency in different languages with each reincarnation, and your brain remembers much of the grammar, idioms, and obscenities that you spouted in old lives. You gain *tongues* as a 5th-level occult innate spell that you can cast once a day on yourself only. While the spell is active, you get a +2 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks while speaking to a creature in a language other than Common.

PAIN IS TEMPORARY

FEAT 13

RARE CONCENTRATE REINCARNATED

Frequency once per 10 minutes

Sangpotshi practitioners know that suffering is a fleeting sensation that ultimately strengthens the soul and prepares it for a new reincarnation. Bolstered by this understanding, you've learned to temporarily steel yourself against all forms of pain. You gain resistance 10 to all damage until the end of your next turn.

STONE SOUL SIBLINGS

FEAT 13

RARE REINCARNATED

Prerequisite Plant Soul Siblings

Your connection with nature's spirits has progressed to the point where you can even have casual conversation with pebbles and boulders. You gain *stone tell* as a primal

innate spell that you can cast once per day. You get a +2 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks to Gather Information from stones.

UNBREAKABLE RESOLVE

FEAT 13

RARE FORTUNE REINCARNATED

Frequency once per 10 minutes

Trigger You fail a Will save.

The experience of coming back after death has granted you a strong sense of resolve; devilish words, slick spells, and conniving trickery can't easily catch you off guard. Reroll the triggering save, using the second result only if it's better.

BONEYARD ACQUAINTANCE

FEAT 17

RARE ABJURATION FORCE REINCARNATED

Before your soul returned to the Material Plane, you interacted with a host of other souls on their way to the Boneyard. One of these acquaintances owes you a favor. You can temporarily summon it to come to your aid, and it appears as a swirling mass of ectoplasm with indiscernible features and a translucent dagger, the favored weapon of Pharasma. This functions as *spiritual guardian*, which you can cast once per day as a divine innate spell, but you don't need to worship a deity to do so.

INDOMITABLE SPIRIT

FEAT 17

RARE CONCENTRATE EVOCATION REINCARNATED

Frequency once per day

Your soul has accumulated countless particles of quintessence over myriad deaths and rebirths, and for one moment, this raw material from the Great Beyond envelops you and your comrades. Until the end of your next turn, you and any allies adjacent to you get a +4 circumstance bonus to AC and are quickened. The additional action can be used to Strike or Stride.

RELEASE THE LIGHT

FEAT 17

RARE LIGHT REINCARNATED VISUAL

Frequency once per day

Requirements You're below 20 Hit Points.

Many people report seeing a bright light before their death. You're one of these people, and at rare intervals when hope seems dim, the light exudes outward from your soul. You shed bright light in a 30-foot radius (and dim light for another 30 feet beyond that) until the end of your next turn. Enemy creatures in the area who rely on sight must attempt a Fortitude save equal to your class DC or spell DC, whichever is higher.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature is dazzled for 1 round.

Failure The creature is blinded for 1 round and dazzled for 1 minute.

Critical Failure The creature is blinded for 2 rounds and dazzled for 1 minute.

SEE YOU IN HELL

FEAT 17

RARE NECROMANCY REINCARNATED

Frequency once per day

Trigger You are reduced to 0 Hit points by a creature but not immediately killed.

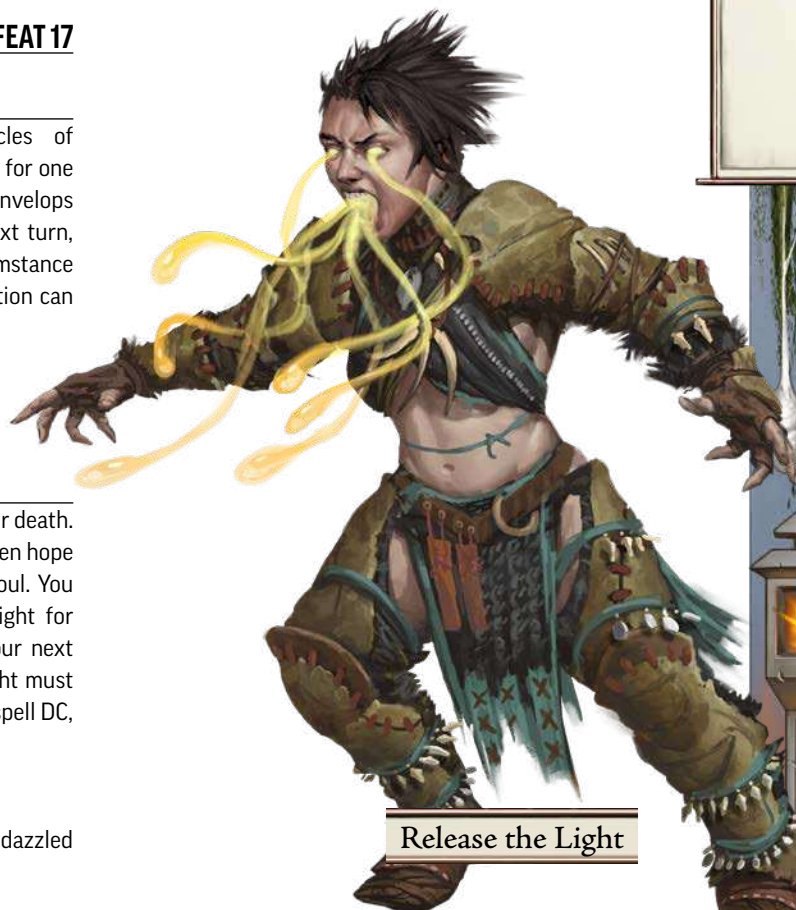
You aren't sure if you'll be reincarnated again, so you might as well take this foe with you. A blast of spiritual energy lashes out from the depths of your soul, targeting the creature who attacked you. The creature takes mental damage equal to the amount that reduced you to 0 Hit Points (basic Will save with a DC equal to your class DC or spell DC, whichever is higher).

THIS TIME, BRING THE BODY

FEAT 17

RARE REINCARNATED

Death sends a soul into the River of Souls. Since your soul has experienced not only death but also rebirth, you can shift your physical body into the Ethereal Plane for brief intervals. You gain *ethereal jaunt* as a 9th-level occult innate spell that you can cast once per day. Thanks to your soul's intimate connection with the Ethereal Plane, you can move at your normal speed while this spell is in effect.



Release the Light

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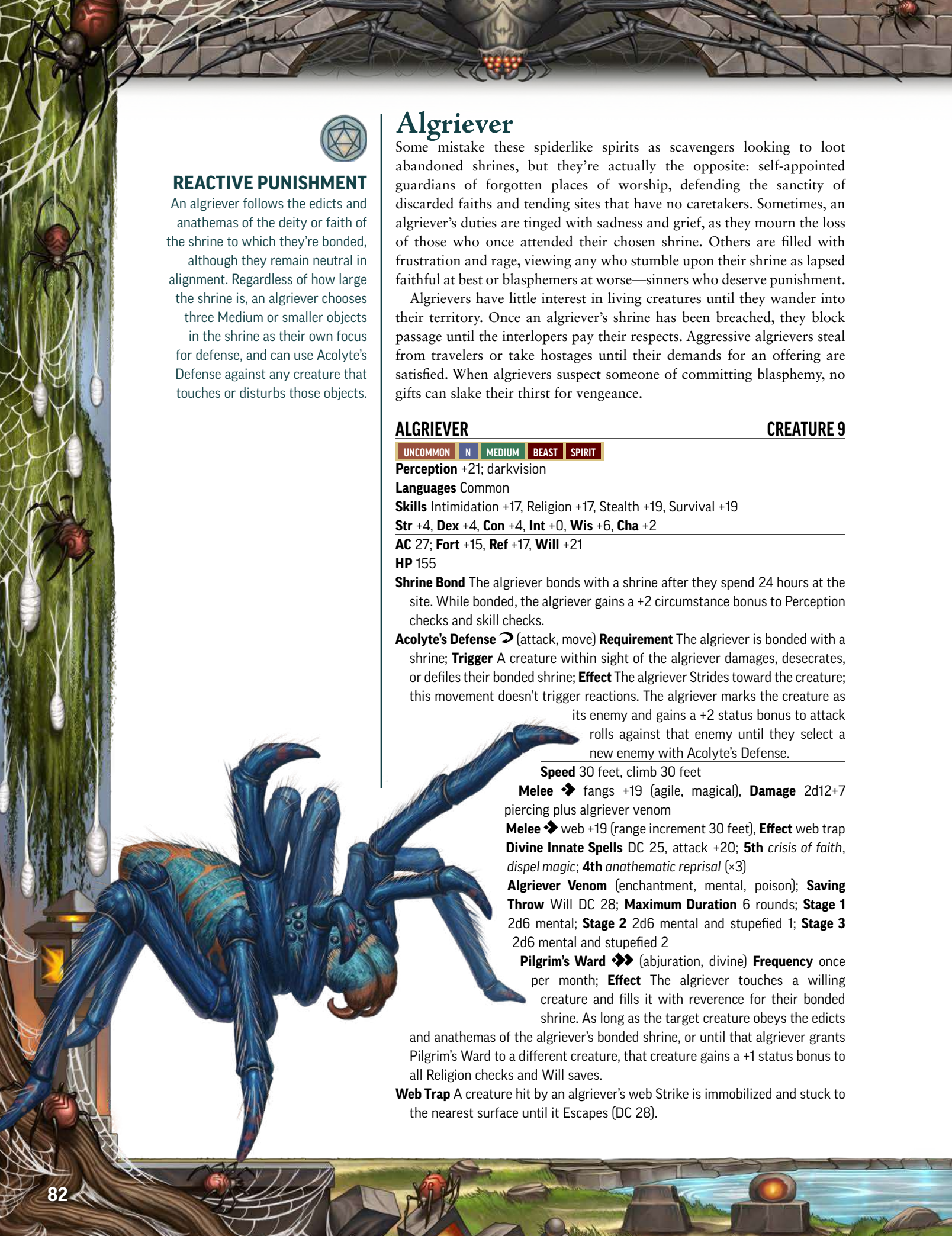
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REACTIVE PUNISHMENT

An algriever follows the edicts and anathemas of the deity or faith of the shrine to which they're bonded, although they remain neutral in alignment. Regardless of how large the shrine is, an algriever chooses three Medium or smaller objects in the shrine as their own focus for defense, and can use Acolyte's Defense against any creature that touches or disturbs those objects.

Algriever

Some mistake these spiderlike spirits as scavengers looking to loot abandoned shrines, but they're actually the opposite: self-appointed guardians of forgotten places of worship, defending the sanctity of discarded faiths and tending sites that have no caretakers. Sometimes, an algriever's duties are tinged with sadness and grief, as they mourn the loss of those who once attended their chosen shrine. Others are filled with frustration and rage, viewing any who stumble upon their shrine as lapsed faithful at best or blasphemers at worse—sinners who deserve punishment.

Algriever have little interest in living creatures until they wander into their territory. Once an algriever's shrine has been breached, they block passage until the interlopers pay their respects. Aggressive algriever steal from travelers or take hostages until their demands for an offering are satisfied. When algriever suspect someone of committing blasphemy, no gifts can slake their thirst for vengeance.

ALGRIEVER

CREATURE 9

UNCOMMON N MEDIUM BEAST SPIRIT

Perception +21; darkvision

Languages Common

Skills Intimidation +17, Religion +17, Stealth +19, Survival +19

Str +4, **Dex** +4, **Con** +4, **Int** +0, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +2

AC 27; **Fort** +15, **Ref** +17, **Will** +21

HP 155

Shrine Bond The algriever bonds with a shrine after they spend 24 hours at the site. While bonded, the algriever gains a +2 circumstance bonus to Perception checks and skill checks.

Acolyte's Defense (attack, move) **Requirement** The algriever is bonded with a shrine; **Trigger** A creature within sight of the algriever damages, desecrates, or defiles their bonded shrine; **Effect** The algriever Strides toward the creature; this movement doesn't trigger reactions. The algriever marks the creature as its enemy and gains a +2 status bonus to attack rolls against that enemy until they select a new enemy with Acolyte's Defense.

Speed 30 feet, climb 30 feet

Melee (fangs) +19 (agile, magical), **Damage** 2d12+7 piercing plus algriever venom

Melee (web) +19 (range increment 30 feet), **Effect** web trap

Divine Innate Spells DC 25, attack +20; **5th** *crisis of faith*, *dispel magic*; **4th** *anathematic reprisal* (×3)

Algriever Venom (enchantment, mental, poison); **Saving Throw** Will DC 28; **Maximum Duration** 6 rounds; **Stage 1** 2d6 mental; **Stage 2** 2d6 mental and stupefied 1; **Stage 3** 2d6 mental and stupefied 2

Pilgrim's Ward (abjuration, divine) **Frequency** once per month; **Effect** The algriever touches a willing creature and fills it with reverence for their bonded shrine. As long as the target creature obeys the edicts and anathemas of the algriever's bonded shrine, or until that algriever grants Pilgrim's Ward to a different creature, that creature gains a +1 status bonus to all Religion checks and Will saves.

Web Trap A creature hit by an algriever's web Strike is immobilized and stuck to the nearest surface until it Escapes (DC 28).

Imprecasia

An imprecasia, commonly known as a curse eater, is a solitary fey drawn to the energy emanating from curses. They appear as emaciated humanoid creatures with shadowy wings, long thin hands with sharp claws, and insectile heads with feathery antenna.

An imprecasia's appearance in a region signifies the land is troubled, but they're not unpopular creatures. On the contrary, an imprecasia's whereabouts are coveted information, as they have the ability to fully consume curses on objects and creatures. Many carrying the weight of a curse seek out curse eaters, most of whom will gladly accept doomed objects or charitably destroy an individual's curse.

An imprecasia will never accept the idea of healing a cursed land or blighted region. One might even seek to strengthen the afflictions on a region simply to ensure a regular supply of food. A bolder imprecasia tracks cursed families over generations, feeding off their misfortune until the curse ends or the bloodline dies off. Any who attempt to destroy such curses may find themselves the enemy of an imprecasia defending their source of sustenance.

IMPRECASIA

CREATURE 11

UNCOMMON CN MEDIUM FEY

Perception +23; darkvision, scent curse

Languages Aklo, Common, Sylvan

Skills Acrobatics +21, Nature +23, Survival +23

Str +3, **Dex** +6, **Con** +5, **Int** +3, **Wis** +6, **Cha** +5

Scent Curse The imprecasia can smell the presence of curses of a level equal to or lower than their own level within 30 feet; this is an imprecise sense.

AC 31; **Fort** +18, **Ref** +23, **Will** +21

HP 180; **Immunities** cursed; **Weaknesses** cold iron 10; **Resistances** negative 10

Drink Death ☞ (necromancy, primal) **Trigger** A creature within 30 feet of the imprecasia is dying; **Effect** The imprecasia inhales, drawing a thin blue streak of vapor out of the dying creature's body into their mouth. The dying creature's dying condition is reduced by 1, and the imprecasia regains 2d10+9 Hit Points.

Speed 25 feet, fly 25 feet

Melee ☞ claws +23 (agile, finesse, magical), **Damage** 2d12+9 slashing plus homeland's hostility

Primal Innate Spells DC 32, attack +22; **5th** blindness, deafness, hallucinatory terrain, remove curse; **3rd** earthbind; **Cantrips (5th)** tanglefoot

Devour Curse ☞☞ (abjuration, primal) The imprecasia casts *remove curse* against a curse afflicting a creature, but with a cast of two actions rather than 10 minutes. If they succeed in removing the curse, they also drains vitality from the creature, causing it to become drained 1 unless it succeeds at a DC 30 Fortitude save (drained 2 on a critical failure). If the curse is removed, the imprecasia doesn't expend that use of *remove curse* as a primal innate spell.

Homeland's Hostility (curse, enchantment, primal) A creature that takes damage from the imprecasia's claws must attempt a DC 30 Will save. On a failure, it treats all terrain within 60 feet of an imprecasia as difficult terrain.



TARGETING ITEMS

An imprecasia can cast *remove curse* on a cursed item rather than on a creature, but they can't use Devour Curse on it. They can only do so on an item that's of a level equal to or less than their own level; on a success, the item is uncursed for 24 hours if it's of a level equal to or higher than the imprecasia's level -4, or uncursed permanently if it's lower level than that.



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CURSED SILVER

INFECTED SILVER CURSE 13

RARE **CURSED** **MAGICAL** **NECROMANCY**

Usage curses silver item

After 1 minute of carrying infected silver, it fuses to you. You become clumsy 1 and remain so as long as the curse persists. As long as you remain cursed, you take a -2 status penalties to all saving throws against mental effects created by nindorus.

Argyrzei (Headless Nindoru)

Most nindorus are harmed by silver, but not the argyrzei. Instead, argyrzeis use silver as a method of spreading sickness and pain, and to help them manipulate the minds of those who unwittingly fall under the curse of their infected gifts. They delight in disguising themselves and then selling or giving infected silver to victims. Other nindorus particularly fear argyrzeis for their mastery over silver, knowing that they're capable of causing painful wounds with their silver blades.

Argyrzeis appear humanoid, but their feet point backwards and they have no heads. Their glowing red neck stumps are stuffed with a wide assortment of knives, blades, and shards of metal. These nindorus represent the cycle of art being created, destroyed, and recycled into new art.

ARGYZEI

CREATURE 13

RARE **CE** **MEDIUM** **FIEND** **NINDORU**

Perception +23; curesense, darkvision

Languages Aklo, Common, Necril

Skills Athletics +27, Crafting +25, Deception +24, Occultism +25, Stealth +24

Str +8, **Dex** +5, **Con** +4, **Int** +6, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +5

Curesense The argyrzei can see and hear through any silver object it cursed, as long as the object is within 1 mile.

AC 34; **Fort** +23, **Ref** +24, **Will** +21

HP 240; **Immune** death effects; **Resistances** negative 10, silver 10

Headless An argyrzei is headless but can still hear, speak, see, and smell as if it had a head. The argyrzei is immune to decapitation effects, such as those caused by *vorpals* weapons.

Soul Shred Creatures killed by an argyrzei are difficult to bring back to life or to animate as undead. The argyrzei automatically attempts to counteract any attempt to resurrect or animate as undead any creature that it has killed (counteract modifier +23, counteract level 7th). If the argyrzei who slew the creature is itself slain, the creature can be brought back from death or become undead normally.

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ silver blade +28 (magical, silver, two-hand d12), **Damage** 2d8+11 slashing plus 1d6 persistent bleed and 1d6 mental

Occult Innate Spells DC 33, +25 attack; **7th** *phantom pain*; **6th** *dominate*, *illusory scene*; **5th** *subconscious suggestion*; **3rd** *illusory disguise* (at will), *item facade*; **Cantrips (7th)** *daze*, *mage hand*, *telekinetic projectile*

Infect Silver ♦♦♦ (concentrate, curse, necromancy, occult) **Frequency** once per day; **Effect** The argyrzei concentrates on an adjacent silver object that's no larger than Bulk 2. That object becomes cursed; if the object is being carried, the object's carrier can resist the object becoming cursed with a DC 33 Will save. The argyrzei can maintain up to five curses simultaneously; if it infects a sixth silver item, the oldest cursed item becomes uncursed.

Manifest Silver Blade ♦ (concentrate, conjuration, occult) **Requirement** The argyrzei isn't carrying a silver blade; **Effect** The argyrzei pulls one of the broken silver weapons from the stump of its neck, transforming it into a +1 *striking wounding silver bastard sword*. This weapon crumbles into sand if it leaves the argyrzei's possession.



Shisagishin (Crooked Nindoru)

The shisagishin takes delight in infiltrating a community and then disguising itself as the horribly decayed or mutilated remains of a loved one or adored public figure, only to spring to life in its true form during funeral services. A shisagishin epitomizes the cycle of decay giving rise to new life.

SHISAGISHIN

CREATURE 12

RARE CE MEDIUM FIEND NINDORU

Perception +22; darkvision

Languages Aklo, Common, Necril

Skills Acrobatics +25 (+27 to Escape), Deception +24, Intimidation +22, Occultism +21, Stealth +25

Str +4, **Dex** +7, **Con** +4, **Int** +3, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +6

AC 33; **Fort** +22, **Ref** +25, **Will** +20

HP 214; **Immune** death effects; **Weaknesses** silver 10; **Resistances** negative 10

Attack of Opportunity ➤

Burst From Death ➤ (attack) **Requirement** Initiative hasn't yet been rolled, and the shisagishin is disguised as a corpse with Manifest Corpse Shell; **Trigger** A creature touches the disguised shisagishin or a coffin or other container the shisagishin has been placed into; **Effect** The shisagishin violently unfolds into its true form, shredding its decaying corpse shell, and attempts a claw Strike on an adjacent target before it rolls initiative.

Soul Shred As argyrzei, but counteract modifier +21 and counteract level 6th.

Speed 40 feet

Melee ♦ claw +25 (agile, deadly d6, finesse, magical), **Damage** 3d8+7 slashing plus 1d6 mental and Grab

Occult Innate Spells DC 32, attack +24; **6th** *vampiric exsanguination*; **5th** *hallucination*, *phantasmal killer*; **2nd** *death knell* (at will), *item facade*; **Cantrips** (6th) *daze*, *ghost sound*, *message*

Spread Decay ♦ The shisagishin causes the flesh of any number of creatures grabbed or restrained by it to swiftly begin to decay. Each of those creatures must attempt a DC 32 Fortitude save.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature takes 2d8 negative damage.

Failure The creature takes 4d8 negative damage and is enfeebled 1.

Critical Failure The creature takes 6d8 negative damage and is enfeebled 2

Manifest Corpse Shell (concentrate, conjuration, occult)

The shisagishin tucks its arms and legs into its body, drops prone, and manifests a decaying and/or mutilated humanoid corpse around itself over the course of 10 minutes of concentration. The shisagishin can cause this corpse to appear to be the remains of a specific creature it has seen before by Impersonating that creature with Deception. Once its corpse shell has manifested, until the next time the shisagishin acts, it appears to be a corpse. It has an automatic result of 44 on Deception checks and DCs to pass as a corpse.



HANDMADE HABITATS

A shisagishin prefers to roam areas already rife with conflict and potential accidents, but it will happily create such a location if needed. They might poison wells, introduce disease to healthy livestock, or even collaborate with corrupt humans if it means the freedom to kill. Cursed towns or haunted roads are sometimes the playground of such a shisagishin.

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GOSSAMER SASH

The jorogumo of Shenmen sometimes grant these white and violet sashes to those who ask them for aid in contacting path maidens for advice.

GOSSAMER SASH

ITEM 11

RARE **CONSUMABLE** **ILLUSION** **MAGICAL**

Price 250 gp

Usage held in 1 hand; **Bulk** L

Activate 1 hour (envision, Interact, move)

This lightweight sash of spidersilk measures 20 feet long when fully unfurled. White at one end and shading to violet at the other, occult markings in silver thread are stitched along the sash's length. When a *gossamer sash* is held by up to 4 people and they spend 1 hour walking along any road in Shenmen between midnight and sunrise, they step into an immersive mindscape (*Pathfinder Dark Archive* 199) that appears to be a lonely mountainside road inhabited by path maidens who are (at least initially) favorably disposed toward answering questions the travelers might have. Once the path maidens have answered their questions or are slain (whichever comes first), the mindscape ends, and those who traveled it are returned to the point on the road where they first activated the *gossamer sash*.

Path Maiden

Worshippers in Shenmen who devote their every breath to Pharasma only to defy the goddess with their last sometimes transform, upon death, into path maidens. The garments all path maidens wear are the last vestiges of their former faith, a permanent reminder of their disgrace.

CREATING A PATH MAIDEN

It's best to create custom path maidens to fill an adventure's specific needs.

Path Maiden Abilities

A path maiden has the incorporeal, spirit, and undead traits and is evil. All path maidens gain the following abilities.

Darkvision

Telepathy 100 feet

Saving Throws +1 status to all saves vs. positive

Negative Healing

Immunities death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, precision, unconscious

Resistances All damage 5 (except force, *ghost touch*, or positive; double resistance to non-magical). This resistance increases to 10 at 9th level and 15 at 16th level.

Imprisoning Grave (aura, divine, necromancy) 30 feet. The soul of a creature that dies within the path maiden's aura is trapped within its corpse until its body spends 1 minute outside the aura. While trapped, the soul can't move on to the afterlife but can still be brought back to life or transformed into an undead creature.

Limited Flight A path maiden has a fly Speed equal to her Speed but can't fly higher than 10 feet above the ground, and if she ends her turn above a nonsolid surface, she vanishes and rematerializes on the last space she occupied over solid ground and becomes stunned 1.

Apostate's Shroud All path maidens have an apostate's shroud unarmed attack that deals mental damage. This attack, which manifests as a whipping lash from the path maiden's sleeves or hem, has the agile, finesse, and magical traits. A creature damaged by this attack must succeed at a Fortitude save against the path maiden's spell DC. On a failure, the creature becomes cursed for 1 hour; if the creature dies while cursed, it immediately rises from death as a ghost. If the creature is a lower level than the path maiden that cursed it, it treats that path maiden as an ally and loyally obeys her; otherwise, it manifests as a free-willed ghost. In either case, it becomes site bound to the site of their death.

Occult Innate Spells All path maidens have a limited selection of occult innate spells. A typical path maiden has six innate spells—two of a spell level equal to their actual level divided by 2 (rounded down), and then two more for the next two spell levels below that. In addition, all path maidens have the following cantrips (cast at a level equal to their highest-level innate spell): *dancing lights*, *ghost sound*, *know direction*, *mage hand*, and *telekinetic projectile*. The path maiden's spell DC and spell attack use high values, as defined on page 66 of the *Gamemastery Guide*.

Special Abilities

Select two of the following abilities, or potentially three if the path maiden is 16th level or higher. For DCs, use the high DC value as defined on page 66 of the *Gamemastery Guide*.



Blasphemous Aura (abjuration, aura, evil, occult) 30 feet. When a creature in the aura uses a spell or ability with the healing trait, it must succeed at a Will save against the path maiden's spell DC - 3. On a failure, the amount of Hit Points restored by the spell or ability is halved. On a critical failure, the positive energy becomes negative energy, harming a living target instead of healing it.

Corrupting Doubt (emotion, enchantment, mental, occult) A creature damaged by the path maiden's hand Strike must succeed at a Will save to avoid becoming slowed 1 for 1 round (slowed 2 on a critical failure).

Scorn Fate ♦♦ (curse, divination, misfortune, occult) The path maiden targets a creature she can see. The creature must attempt a Will save against the path maiden's spell DC. On a failure, the creature's next roll is cursed. If the result of the roll is a critical success, it becomes a regular success. A success becomes a failure, and a failure becomes a critical failure. That creature is then temporarily immune to Scorn Fate for 24 hours.

Sour Victory ♦♦ (curse, divination, misfortune, occult) **Trigger** A creature scores a critical hit against the path maiden; **Effect** The creature must attempt a Will save against the path maiden's spell DC. On a failure, its next roll to attack the path maiden must be rolled twice, and it takes the worse result. That creature is then temporarily immune to Sour Victory for 24 hours.

Vengeful Frenzy ♦♦ (emotion, enchantment, mental, occult) The path maiden targets a creature within 60 feet that she can see. The target must attempt a Will save against the path maiden's spell DC. On a failure, the target is confused until the end of its next turn, but it can't attack path maidens or itself as the result of this confusion.

PATH MAIDEN

Presented below is a typical path maiden.

PATH MAIDEN

CREATURE 12

RARE CE MEDIUM INCORPOREAL SPIRIT UNDEAD

Perception +22; darkvision

Languages Celestial, Common, Necril; telepathy 100 feet

Skills Deception +22, Intimidation +24, Occultism +22,

Pharasma Lore +24, Religion +22

Str -5, **Dex** +5, **Con** +0, **Int** +4, **Wis** +4,

Cha +6

AC 31; **Fort** +18, **Ref** +22, **Will** +24;

+1 status to all saves vs. positive

HP 160, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, precision, unconscious; **Resistances** All damage 10 (except force, *ghost touch*, or positive; double resistance to non-magical)

Imprisoning Grave (aura, divine, necromancy) 30 feet.

Speed limited flight 25 feet

Melee ♦ apostate's shroud +21 (agile, finesse, magical), **Damage** 3d10+8 mental

Occult Innate Spells DC 32, attack +24; **6th** phantasmal calamity, spirit blast; **5th** crushing despair, illusory scene; **4th** dimension door, outcast's curse; **Cantrips (6th)** dancing lights, ghost sound, know direction, mage hand, telekinetic projectile

Ritual create undead

Scorn Fate ♦♦ Will DC 32.

Vengeful Frenzy ♦♦ Will DC 32.



PATH NOMADS

Path maidens almost always manifest in feminine forms. Those who manifest in masculine forms are instead known as path nomads. These undead have the same abilities but tend to travel more widely; they represent turning one's back on Pharasma's role as a prophet and manipulator of destiny than of her roles over birth and death.



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Heh Shan-Bao

Murderous Fiendish Vessel

Once the governor of Willowshore, Heh Shan-Bao now exists as a unique brainchild or “yohoi.”

CAMPAIGN USE

Heh Shan-Bao’s statistics, history, and personality as a human man are presented in the previous adventure, but in this adventure, he’s a monstrous, horrific fiend and devious murderer. Full details for the three murders he commits are presented in Chapter 2 of this volume’s adventure, each of which gives the PCs opportunities to search for clues. These investigations play out in Exploration mode with the following activity.

SEARCH FOR CLUES

CONCENTRATE | EXPLORATION | SECRET

You spend 10 minutes Investigating a body, object, or location, or 2 hours Gathering Information from potential witnesses; you then attempt one of the checks listed for the examination. An investigator can use Pursue a Lead when they do so to gain that ability’s bonus to their check and can use Clue In to aid others in Searching for Clues.

Critical Success You discover minor, moderate, and major clues.

Success You learn the minor and moderate clues.

Failure You learn the minor clues.

Critical Failure You learn the false lead and believe it to be a minor clue.

CAUSE OF DEATH

Search for Clues Investigate; DC 22 Medicine

Minor The victim’s body bears gouges to the torso, as if they sustained a few glancing blows from a claw.

Moderate The cause of death is a potent supernatural attack that caused the three horrific desecrations to the body—the missing eyes, the drained fat, and the branded wrists. It’s very likely that the claws used to create the minor wounds inflicted greater damage that wouldn’t leave physical evidence, most likely mental damage.

Major The PC discovers and extracts a long, dirty fingernail from one of the body’s wounds that seemed to have come off during the attack. A few moments after the fingernail is pulled from the victim’s body, it fades away in waft of smoke. With a successful DC 25 Occultism

check or DC 29 Society check to Recall Knowledge, a PC notes the old stories of “filthy-fingered yohois” that suggests that the killer was a yohoi.

False Lead The victim died of fright.

EMACIATED REMAINS

Search for Clues Investigate; DC 25 Religion or Occultism

Minor The body is weirdly withered and emaciated, the flesh dried like jerky. As a result, it’s almost completely unrecognizable except by its hair, clothing, and context derived from where the body was found.

Moderate The cause of the body’s strange appearance is due to all of the body’s fat having been supernaturally drained away.

Major The missing body fat reminds the PC of various folktales of cruel and greedy governors who stole so much of the people’s wealth that their subjects went hungry and starved—those legends go on to claim that in death, these governors rose as evil spirits who continued to plague their people in a much more direct and horrific manner by draining the fat directly from their victims’ bodies, slaying them much more quickly than starvation ever could.

False Lead The body’s strange appearance is likely the result of some sort of alchemical procedure—perhaps the murderer was an alchemist or someone with access to preservative chemicals?

MISSING EYES

Search for Clues Investigate; DC 22 Religion or Occultism

Minor The body’s eyelids are intact, but the eyes themselves are missing, leaving the bone of the victim’s skull plainly in view in the empty holes.

Moderate The lack of blood or any sort of incidental damage done to the eye sockets suggests a supernatural necromantic effect harvested them after death occurred.

Major The PC recalls legends of souls that were bound beyond death by a necromancer who blinded the corpses so that their spirits would be unable to find their way back to the world of the living, and the practice is thus often seen in rites intended to trap the soul of the victim.

False Lead The missing eyes were likely gouged out by some sort of artisan’s tool—perhaps the murderer was a crafter of some sort?

WRIST RUNES

Search for Clues Investigate; DC 27 Religion or Occultism
Minor The knot-like wrist markings appear to be branded onto the flesh from red-hot manacles.

Moderate The knot-like design of the markings evokes the tangled shape of the unholy symbol of Kugaptee.

Major Metaphorically, the wrist runes imply that the victim's soul has been claimed and given to Kugaptee as a sacrifice; they're likely the result of a supernatural effect that manifested just as the victim died.

False Lead The wrist markings are distorted brands applied by red-hot manacles, likely applied before death and then partially healed. Perhaps the murderer is a farmer or stabler—someone who has experience with branding flesh and who used some sort of healing magic to “set” the brands quickly?

HEH SHAN-BAO

CREATURE 13

UNIQUE CE MEDIUM FIEND ILLUSION MENTAL

Male variant brainchild (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 3 38)

Perception +23; darkvision

Languages telepathy 100 feet, universal language

Skills Arcana +24, Deception +27, Intimidation +27, Religion +23, Society +24, Stealth +25, Willowshore Lore +24

Str +7, **Dex** +6, **Con** +5, **Int** +5, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +8

Universal Language As brainchild.

Urban Legend As brainchild. Abilities that can be disbelieved include his resistance to physical damage, his frightful presence, the slashing damage from his Strikes, and his 7th-level innate spells.

AC 35; **Fort** +24, **Ref** +25, **Will** +21

HP 180; **Immunities** death effects, detection, diseased, doomed, necromancy, scrying; **Weaknesses** sonic 15, mental 15; **Resistances** physical 15 (except silver)

Fear of Flutes The first time in any round when someone plays a flute within 30 feet of Heh Shan-Bao, he must attempt a Will save against the flute player's Performance DC. This DC increases by 4 if the flute player is someone (at the GM's discretion) who's strongly religious.

Critical Success Heh Shan-Bao is unaffected.

Success Heh Shan-Bao becomes frightened 1.

Failure Heh Shan-Bao becomes frightened 2.

Critical Failure Heh Shan-Bao becomes frightened 3 and is fleeing until the end of his next turn.

Frightful Presence (aura, emotion, fear, mental) 100 feet, DC 30

Persistence of Memory (illusion, mental, occult) As brainchild.

Speed 20 feet, fly 20 feet

Melee illusory claws +26 (illusion, mental, occult, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 4d8+10 mental plus 1d6 slashing

Occult Innate Spells DC 33, attack +25; **7th phantasmal calamity** (creates a flesh-eating swarm of red nindoru

butterflies); **6th death knell**, phantasmal killer (×3, image resembles Kugaptee); **5th dimension door** (×2), **shatter** (×3); **Cantrips (7th)** ghost sound, message

Steal Soul ⤿ (death, necromancy, occult) **Trigger** Heh Shan-Bao casts *death knell* on a 10th- or lower-level creature **Effect** If the *death knell* kills the target, the target's eyes vanish, all fat drains from its body, and burnt brands manifest around the wrists as the target's soul is siphoned into the corrupted Willowshore mindscape. The target can't be returned to life through any means, even powerful magic like *wish*, until the corrupted Willowshore mindscape is destroyed.



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Ren Mei Li

Jorogumo Princess of Willowshore

A patient and cunning schemer, Ren Mei Li is determined to increase her sphere of influence in Shenmen. She cultivates unorthodox agents and approaches with an eye, ultimately, toward claiming the throne of Yin-Sichasi.

Born in the palace-city of Yin-Sichasi, Ren Mei Li was immersed in the whispering intrigues of the jorogumo from the time she opened her eyes. Soon after reaching her majority, however, she became disillusioned with her sisters' ways, chiefly because it impeded her ability to indulge her preferred tastes. When the jorogumo court seized control of Shenmen at the onset of the Age of Lost Omens, Ren Mei Li was as cruel and manipulative as her sisters, but time would see these traits change.

While securing obeisance from terrified subjects and building her courtly influence did have a certain appeal, Ren Mei Li's true love was performances. Be they Hei Feng'an fireworks, shadow puppet plays, sword-and-silk dance operas, or any of the theatrical arts displayed across Tian Xia, they all delighted her. Disguised as a human woman, she traveled beyond Shenmen and across the continent to attend the finest shows, but more often than not, when she tried to coax her favorite performers to visit Shenmen and perform for her sisters, they refused. No price in silver was worth risking their lives in that haunted land, they told her, and they couldn't trust the country's jorogumo rulers to keep them safe, never realizing the woman who they spoke to was a jorogumo herself.

Rather than respond defensively, Ren Mei Li considered the problem from their point of view and soon concluded that the performers' qualms were justified. Shenmen was dangerous, and so many jorogumo were unreliable. In her willingness to understand this perspective, she realized there was a great opportunity to strengthen her base of power.

Ren Mei Li's new philosophy was simple: if she honored all her promises, then people would learn that she could be relied on. If she refrained from promising anything on behalf of other jorogumo, and indeed made it clear that she didn't speak for the rest of her kind, then the trust she would earn would be limited


to Ren Mei Li personally. This arrangement would both bolster her loyalists' allegiances and ensure they distrusted her rivals.

If she governed prudently, invested in basic improvements, and refrained from excessive cruelty to her subjects, then her fiefdom would become more productive and profitable, enabling her to spend even more lavishly on the luxuries she loved. Gratitude would strengthen her people's loyalty, making it more difficult for her rivals to undermine her and reducing problems, such as banditry, that stemmed from hunger and disorder. And in time, perhaps performers wouldn't be so hesitant toward invitations to share their art in Shenmen.

After decades of intensive work, Ren Mei Li has developed a trusted network of agents and delegates. Her representatives are chosen for ability above all, a rarity in Shenmen, and for the most part, they serve faithfully. This loyalty runs both ways: Ren Mei Li is quick to protect her assets, knowing that the strength of her entire network depends on her agents believing she'll exert similar efforts on their behalf.

While some of her servants are idealists, Ren Mei Li herself isn't. The jorogumo is a self-interested pragmatist who pursues good governance because it benefits her, not because she particularly cares about her people. She has no interest in improving the lot of any subject outside her own domain since she considers the contrast between her seeming benevolence and the capricious cruelty of the other jorogumo elsewhere in Shenmen to be one of her key advantages.

However, she has found it useful to pretend otherwise. Ren Mei Li's ultimate, deeply hidden goal is to seize the silken throne of Yin-Sichasi from Lady Lang Loi. Publicly, she denies any such ambition, but it has secretly been her endgame for years. To achieve this end, she has laid groundwork among local peasants, ambitious traders, and foreign envoys to view the prospect of her ascension as likely to usher in a golden age of enlightened rule in Shenmen. Should her faction rise to ascendance, it's possible that these starry dreams might even come true, at least to the extent that Ren Mei Li finds them useful.



CAMPAIGN ROLE

Ren Mei Li is a key ally for the PCs in this chapter, and potentially for their longer-term ambitions in Shenmen. Although her motivations are selfish, her actions tend to benefit her people. This dichotomy between Ren Mei Li's nature and the actual effect of her rule might present interesting questions and dilemmas for some groups. However, it should be clear that whatever her reasons for adopting them, her policies do create a comparative safe haven for ordinary people trapped in a treacherous land.

In this adventure, Ren Mei Li doesn't fight alongside the PCs in battle—likewise, if they foolishly challenge her to combat, she'll do her best to avoid doing lasting harm, instead using her magic to try to defuse the hostilities using *charm* and *suggestion*. If these fail, she'll use *dimension door* to retreat and give the PCs time to calm down, after which she'll attempt to engage with them again via intermediaries or while disguised as a different person entirely.

REN MEI LI

CREATURE 16

UNIQUE CN MEDIUM HUMANOID

Female jorogumo (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 3 141)

Perception +29; darkvision

Languages Aklo, Common, Sylvan; *tongues*

Skills Acrobatics +29, Athletics +28, Crafting +28, Deception +33, Diplomacy +31, Intimidation +31, Performance +31, Society +30, Stealth +29, Survival +27

Str +8, **Dex** +7, **Con** +6, **Int** +6, **Wis** +5, **Cha** +9

AC 39; **Fort** +28, **Ref** +31, **Will** +25

HP 295; **Weaknesses** cold iron 15; **Resistances** poison 20

Darting Legs ⤴ As jorogumo.

Speed 30 feet, swim 30 feet

Melee jaws +27, **Damage** 3d12+14 piercing plus jorogumo venom

Melee claw +27 (agile), **Damage** 3d8+14 slashing

Ranged web +23 (range increment 60 feet), **Effect** Web Trap

Occult Innate Spells DC 37, attack +29; **8th** *charm*, *suggestion*, *summon animal* (spiders only); **7th** *outcast's curse* (×3), *suggestion* (×3); **6th** *dimension door*, *mind probe*, *mind reading* (at will); **Constant (8th)** *speaking with animals* (spiders only), *tongues*

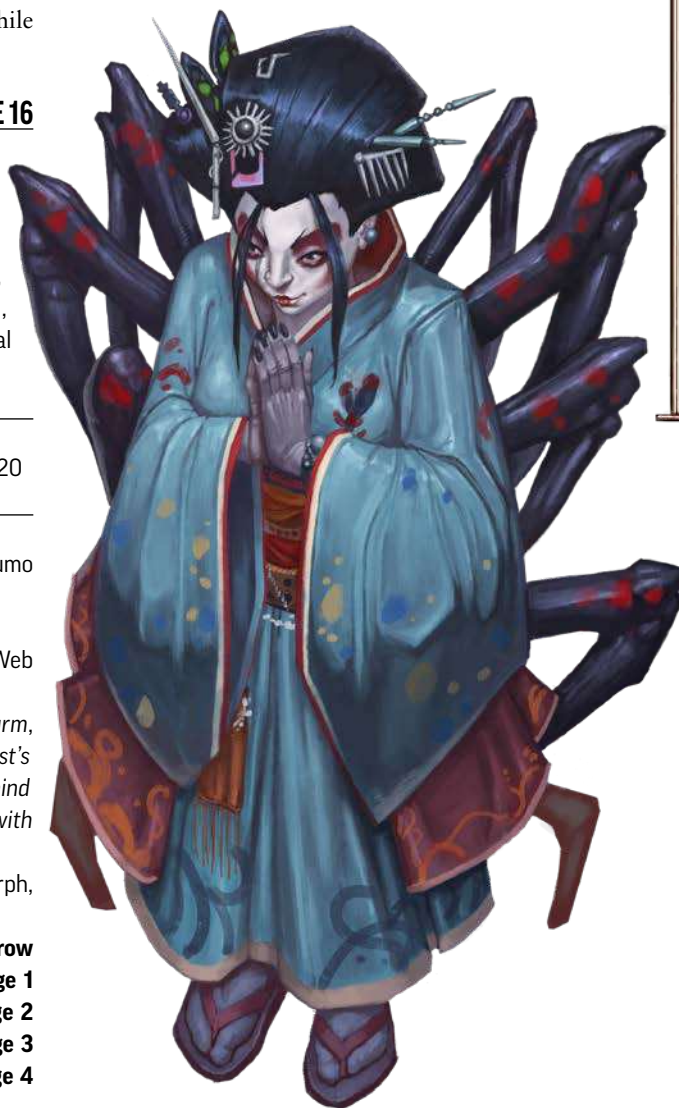
Change Shape ⬠ (concentrate, occult, polymorph, transmutation) As jorogumo.

Jorogumo Venom (incapacitation, poison) **Saving Throw** DC 37 Fortitude; **Maximum Duration** 4 hours; **Stage 1** 3d6 poison damage and stupefied 1 (1 round); **Stage 2** 3d6 poison damage and stupefied 2 (1 round); **Stage 3** 4d6 poison damage and stupefied 2 (1 round); **Stage 4** paralyzed for 2d4 hours

Silver Mistwalk ⬠⬠⬠ (concentrate, conjuration, occult, teleportation) **Requirements** Ren Mei Li is currently located within the boundaries of her domain in Shenmen; **Frequency** once per hour; **Effect** A swirling vortex of silver mist rises up from Ren Mei Li's feet to wrap around her body like a slowly-rotating tornado, then instantly transports her and any items she's wearing and holding from her current space to a clear space anywhere within her domain in Shenmen that she has visited before, provided she knows its relative location and distance from her. Since Ren Mei Li has visited Willowshore's ruins in the past, she can appear anywhere in the town using this ability, but she generally avoids directly appearing inside a structure if she isn't expected.

Spider Legs ⬠ (concentrate, occult, polymorph, transmutation) As jorogumo.

Web Trap As jorogumo, but DC 37.



To Bloom Below the Web

Chapter 1:
Willowshore's
Return

Chapter 2:
The Princess's
Web

Chapter 3:
A Fiend in Two
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Continuing
the Campaign

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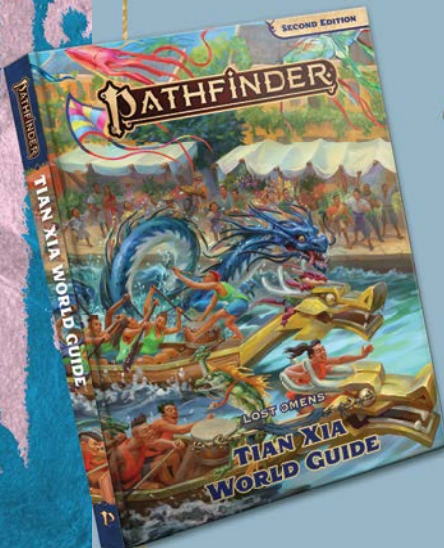
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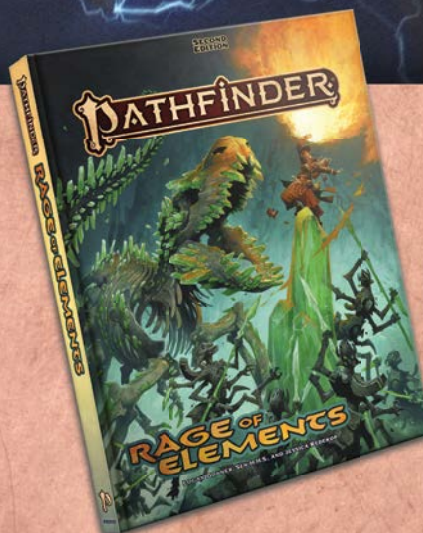
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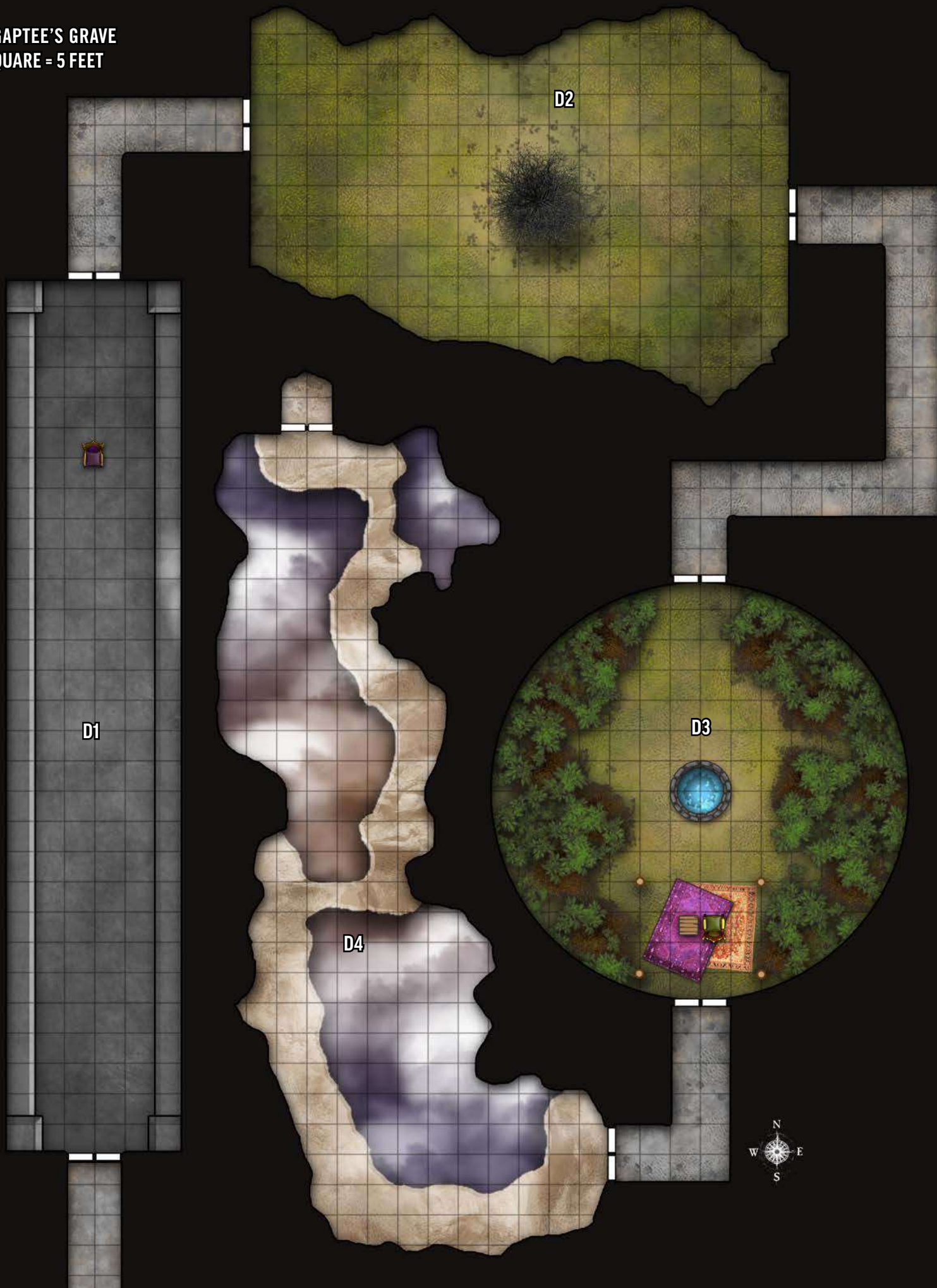
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