

LEGENDARY ADVENTURE 5

The Murmuring Fountain

BY JASON NELSON

WITH THE LEGENDARY GAMES DESIGN TEAM



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GAMES

LG 5 ED

Credits

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Welcome to Legendary Adventures!

This adventure is a part of our line of support materials for the Next edition of the world's most famous roleplaying game! This adventure doesn't feature any dungeons, nor any dragons for that matter, but it provides an excellent opportunity to introduce your characters into a campaign with more than a touch of the mysterious and the macabre. It is an adventure that can easily stand on its own, set in a small village where things go bump in the night, and it bows to some of the tropes of the horror genre as well as traditional adventure. The PCs have a chance to earn the trust and admiration of the townsfolk for their heroic deeds, and perhaps even gain a unique spectral pet, building their sense of community with a town that may become their home base as they move on to their further adventures.

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The Murmuring Fountain is a short adventure designed to be set in any small gothic town where low (1st-3rd) level PCs may find themselves a-hunting. The adventure does not provide enough experience in and of itself for the PCs to increase in level, but it provides several challenges and rewards, as well as a unique boon—a spectral pet for the party who bonds with one of the PCs. It also adds an optional Lovecraftian tone to the campaign, which could be easily omitted if unwanted or that could be expanded upon. The adventure also gives the PCs a mystery to solve.

Adventure Background

Some years ago, the traveling merchant Antrellus Varagus sought to increase his wealth and notoriety beyond his modest local successes. He made contact with robed priests of the Yellow King, a strange mystery cult who promised him power and wealth beyond his imaginings in return for his cooperation in a blasphemous rite to their alien patron—a ritual neither his mind, nor his unsuspecting wife, survived. While Antrellus believed it was he who had sought out the priests, in truth it was they who had sought him, or more specifically, her. Antrellus himself was entirely irrelevant to their nefarious plans. It was the sacrifice of his wife that was their true aim, and the dawning realization of his tragic miscalculation as he sat helpless and uncomprehending robbed the merchant of his sanity.

The cultists had discovered a secret Antrellus himself did not know; his wife Marisol had been a witch in her youth, and in her adventures had discovered certain elder secrets that so horrified her that she gave up adventuring, dismissed her familiar, and left her old life behind, taking a new name and finding contentment and eventually love with Antrellus. The servants of the Yellow King, seeking the elder secrets she had discovered, uncovered her trail years later, and after a few delicate inquiries were rebuffed, they worked through her foolish husband, plying him with gifts and promises to join their supposedly harmless devotional meetings and to bring his wife as a guest. Once they had the couple in their clutches, their eldritch chants called many-legged tentacular abominations from beyond. Their experiments sought to inseminate body and mind with the larval spawn of these alien horrors, enslaving them to the will of the Yellow King and his priests and extracting their secrets either willingly or excruciatingly.

The spawn implanted within Marisol engrafted itself as expected, physically and psychically bonding her as she offered up her long-suppressed knowledge to her captors. Delighted at their success, they took her as their lobotomized bond-slave, a plaything for their cultic masters. Antrellus' implantation was less successful, seemingly stillborn within him, or perhaps hibernating in a prolonged gestation. While deemed an experimental failure, Antrellus was ultimately immaterial to their goals, and the psychic shock of the ordeal and the depraved violations he and especially his wife were forced to endure seemed to break the merchant's mind quite as effectively as any supernatural torment they could have devised. They left the town and abandoned the merchant to his fate, resolving to check back on him periodically to see if their experiment ever bore fruit. Year by year the blighted embryo has grown within him, a grotesque alien parasite that has slowly consumed what little was left of his sanity as it ripened toward maturity.

Fleeing into the swampy woodlands wild, the locals now know him as Antrellus the Mad, a phantom figure creeping around the outskirts of town, gibbering and ranting about the robed priests and the many-legged beast which he saw feed that night to any disbelieving townsfolk or traveler patient enough to listen to his demented ravings. Too pitiful to slay, and too deranged to drive away permanently, Antrellus has lingered near the town for a decade. As he has done no harm to any, the pitying townsfolk grudgingly tolerate his presence, though children and old women invoke his name as a bogeyman and sometimes utter rhyming chants of warding when they see him. While he has been mostly harmless, the time is now approaching when the horror within him will hatch.

Shortly before the arrival of the PCs in town, Antrellus observed a group of yellow-clad travelers passing through, one asking questions about him. Believing that these priests were the same ones responsible for his wife's death years ago and that they had returned for him, he saw one of the travelers apparently talking with a raven in the town. While the raven is the pet of Lereia, one of the local town children, Antrellus became convinced the bird is actually the cultist's familiar. After seeing the little girl talking with the bird as well, his paranoia cemented the notion that the girl herself is a cultist in disguise, masquerading as the child. Obsessed with the animal and believing it to be constantly watching him, he tracked it and eventually captured it at its favorite roost by the Murmuring Fountain, tying it in a sack and stuffing the squawking package under the drain grate of the fountain's lower basin. What might otherwise have been a simple act of insane compulsion, however, has become something else as eldritch energies have seeped into the town and caused the spirit of the murdered pet raven, named Eronel by Lereia, to awaken, along with a darker haunting at the town's heart.

AN UNWANTED GUEST

Antrellus the Mad may watch the PCs from a distance wherever they are in town. He can be spotted with a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. He may shout some strange phrase, such as "the beast has many legs, the beast has many legs" or "from Leng they will come, it is written, you will see," and any other persons present tell the PCs to disregard his insane ramblings and that he is a harmless and pathetic madman. If approached, Antrellus quickly departs.

SUDDENLY THERE CAME A TAPPING AT MY CHAMBER ... WINDOW

On the first night the PCs are in the town, there comes a tapping at a chamber window. The PCs may attempt a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to hear the tapping, and then a subsequent check (DC 15) to determine which window of the house it is coming from. If they fail the check, they misidentify the window and go to the wrong one. They hear the tapping again and may make another check until they are successful, should they wish to continue searching for the source of the continued tapping. PCs identifying the correct window may open the curtains to reveal a spectral bird of some sort which immediately flies away. A DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check identifies the bird as a raven, and with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, a PC can spot that it has a small object in its mouth (a DC 25 reveals it as a ring).

PCs also see the spectral bird (and may identify it) if they go outside to investigate the tapping. If pursued, the raven flees.

If the PCs correctly identify the window where Eronel is tapping, they may spot Antrellus lurking in the shadows (DC 16 Wisdom [Perception] for PCs with darkvision, DC 21 without), slinking away from the house.

ERONEL THE GHOST RAVEN

Tiny undead, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 2 (1d4)

Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR 4 (-3) **DEX** 16 (+3) **CON** 11 (+0)

INT 2 (-4) **WIS** 15 (+2) **CHA** 11 (+0)

Resistances (damage) acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Immunities (conditions) charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious; (damage) necrotic, poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge Rating 1/8 (25 XP)

Incorporeal Movement: Eronel can move through objects and other creatures, but can't remain within them.

Phantom Noises: Eronel can use minor illusion at will (DC 10), but is limited to creating sounds he could make in life, including the tapping of his beak against solid objects, rustling feathers, and cawing. Each day, Eronel may utter a single word, repeating it up to three times throughout the day; the next day, Eronel may choose a different word.

Rejuvenation: If Eronel is destroyed, he regains all of his hit points in 1 hour unless the Raven's Roost haunt has been destroyed.

ACTIONS

Corrupting Touch Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +5 to hit, 1d4+3 (5) necrotic damage.

Developments: Attempts to capture or follow the raven are likely to be unsuccessful due to its ability to pass through solid objects while fleeing. The ghostly raven was drawn to the house by the presence of Antrellus, his murderer, who was slinking around the manor having seen the PCs earlier.

Awarding Experience Points: If the PCs follow the sound to the proper window and observe the ghost raven, divide 25 XP equally among the PCs.

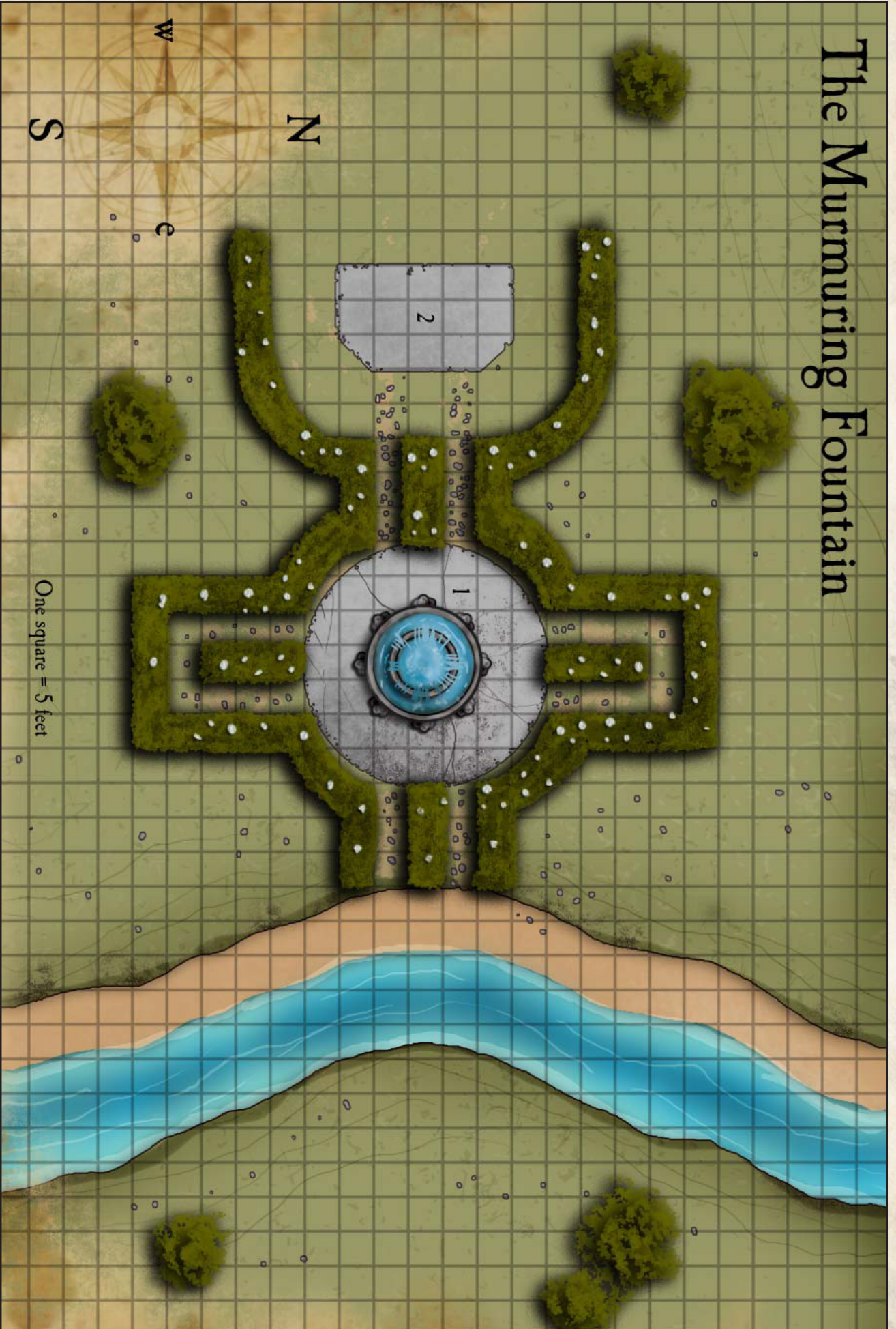
FLOWERS FOR THE DEAD

The PCs hear local rumors of a ghostly girl who was seen in the vicinity of the Murmuring Fountain near the Memorial. If that does not move them, a young couple, Bryn and Mellum, sees her the next night while trysting near the fountain; fleeing in panic, they beg the help of the town guards and the PCs to deal with this apparition.

The "ghostly" girl is, in fact, Lireia, the eight-year-old former owner of Eronel, the dead raven. Garbed in white, she comes to lay flowers at the well at midnight in his honor at the Murmuring Fountain, the raven's favorite perch in life. On the day of Eronel's disappearance, a scattering of his feathers found near the well seemed to indicate that her bird had been savaged by some town cat or perhaps an owl. Though her parents insisted the bird was only injured and would soon return, Lireia knew instinctively that her pet was dead and suspected it had been murdered. Unknown to her parents (who would be mortified), Lireia has been sneaking out of her house in her finest dress to conduct her midnight memorial and intends to continue it each night for a week. Note that Lireia may have been encountered by the PCs during daylight hours, skipping rope and singing local songs.



The Murmuring Fountain



One square = 5 feet

THE MURMURING FOUNTAIN

The Murmuring Fountain (1) is located in a small, overgrown garden in front of the town's Memorial (2). The garden's hedgerows of white roses have become wild and half-merged with the surrounding undergrowth from lack of tending, but lend a fey beauty to the memorial park, and it is popular for romantic rendezvous with a hint of danger. The pale gravel of the footpath is half-overgrown with grass, weeds, and wildflowers, while fountain and memorial alike show marks of weathering to accompany a patina of dirt and clinging moss.

The fountain itself is in two parts, a lower cruciform basin with four pools surrounding a central pillar. The 4-foot high pillar supports an upper basin 8 feet across and ringed by four stone gargoyles (1a) which sit at each of the ordinal directions (NE, SE, SW and NW) and support the basin's fluted lip, where water spills between the gargoyles into the lower basins toward a central drain and thence into the nearby river.

Water burbles a few feet in the air from the upper bowl, from which clean water can be drawn for drinking while the lower basins can be used for bathing or washing. The fountain is in disrepair, with several of the gargoyles having suffered large chips and broken stonework, though the basins are intact.

The Murmuring Fountain is so named for the strange, susurrant voices intermixed with the gurgling of the fountain water. No two persons listening to the strange murmurings ever agree on the words that seem to be spoken by the just barely indecipherable whispering voice. To one, it may seem the voice of a lost love, to another the voice of a hated rival. Despite local attempts to repair the stone gargoyles, they quickly crack or suffer some sign of damage. Locals have given up trying to repair the fountain and nearly all believe it is haunted in some way.



LEREIA THE GRIEVING CHILD

Small humanoid (human), neutral

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 1 (1d4)

Speed 20 ft.

STR 8 (-1) **DEX** 12 (+1) **CON** 8 (-1)

INT 10 (+0) **WIS** 8 (-1) **CHA** 12 (+1)

Senses Perception 9

Languages Common

Challenge Rating 0 (10 XP)

Developments: PCs watching near the well or memorial may see Lireia (Wisdom (Perception) DC 13) approaching slowly and silently in her ghostly pale dress, white flowers clutched in her hands and her head reverently bowed. PCs may attempt a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check (characters proficient in Religion gain a +2 bonus) to recognize her as a living girl (and one of the townsfolk they have seen) and not undead. PCs failing the check may well believe her to be the apparition the frightened townsfolk have described. Lireia may notice PCs moving to attack (Wisdom [Perception] -1); if she does, she shrieks in terror and drops her flowers. PCs may then make another Wisdom (Perception) check as above to recognize she is not undead; characters about to make a melee attack may turn their blow aside, but ranged attacks cannot be recalled once PCs realize their error.

A young, innocent child, Lireia tells PCs the story of her missing pet raven and how she does not believe what everyone says, that her bird was killed by an animal. She thinks crazy old Antrellus did it. He always yelled strange things at her and her bird, and since Eronel disappeared Antrellus scurries away every time he sees her, like he is afraid of her, but he doesn't run from any of the other children. Through her tears, she implores the PCs to help prove he is a pet-killer. A DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check calms her down enough to convince her to let the PCs take her home, and a second check (DC 15 Charisma [Intimidation or Persuasion]) persuades her to stop sneaking out at night, though she insists on leaving flowers for her bird at the well one last time.

Awarding Experience Points: If the PCs recognize Lireia is not undead and do not harm her, divide 200 XP equally among the PCs. If they convince her to return home and interact with her horrified but grateful parents, award the party an additional 50 XP. If the PCs harm Lireia and the town learns of that harm, they gain a -2 penalty on Charisma checks to interact with or influence the townsfolk. If they kill her, they have disadvantage on Charisma checks to interact with or influence the townsfolk, who they may need to convince not to put them in gaol.

THE RAVENS' ROOST

Anyone who comes within 10 feet of the Murmuring Fountain triggers the haunt. Characters can make a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice a ghostly image of torn black feathers falling into the fountain. On the next round, three bloodravens appear with a dreadful caw and attack for 3 rounds before disappearing without a trace. In a dark subversion of Eronel's affection for Lireia, the bloodravens attack female children (or creatures protecting them) in preference to other targets. The haunt can be fooled by illusions, including *invisibility*. The haunt manifests no more than once per hour.

If the fountain takes 10 points of radiant damage, the haunt is temporarily disrupted and cannot manifest for another hour. To permanently destroy the haunt, the body of Eronel must be removed from the fountain and his murder avenged—either by slaying Antrellus or by having Antrellus come to the fountain and apologize to Lireia—and then burying Eronel in blessed ground and tossing a spadeful of earth from his burial plot into the fountain.

Creatures: A PC wishing to shield Lireia from attack by the bloodravens may use the Help action instead of their move to grant her three-quarters cover.

BLOODRAVENS (3)

Small beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 13 each (2d6+6)

Speed 10 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR 12 (+1)	DEX 15 (+2)	CON 16 (+3)
INT 2 (-4)	WIS 14 (+2)	CHA 9 (-1)

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP)

Keen Eyes: Bloodravens have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to see things.

ACTIONS

Bite Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +2 to hit, 1d4+1 (3) slashing damage.

Claws Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +4 to hit, 2d4+1 (6) slashing damage. On a critical hit, the target is blinded until all the damage from the critical hit is healed (DC 12 Con save negates).

Developments: When the bloodravens attack, the PCs may hear an answering caw echoing up from the fountain (DC 15 Wisdom [Perception]). At the beginning of the next round, Eronel the ghost raven flies out of the fountain and fights to protect Lireia. It may attack the bloodravens directly but will instead use the Help action to assist the attack roll of a creature protecting her, if possible.

If it survives the battle, Eronel's ghost perches on the lip of the fountain and PCs can clearly hear the squawk of a raven calling "Murder! Murder! Murder!" Eronel's beak does not move as these words are uttered, and after using its phantom noises ability to create the words, it plunges into the fountain (without disturbing the water's surface) and disappears.

A search of the fountain (DC 15 Intelligence [Investigation]) reveals that something is blocking the drain beneath the grate of the lower basin and that the grate itself has been recently disturbed. If the grate is removed by a DC 10 Strength [Athletics] check, the PCs discover a moldy brown sack roughly tied with cord. If opened, inside can be found the remains of a bird, mostly bones, black feathers and rotting flesh—Lireia's pet raven, Eronel. Also in the bag is a gold signet ring (200 gp) belonging to Antrellus the Mad which can be found out with DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check to gather information about the town. A second check against the same DC reveals that Antrellus lives in the woods and is believed to have a hidden cabin somewhere south of the town.

In the struggle to stuff the raven into the sack, the bird grasped the ring in its beak and pulled and clawed the ring from his finger, causing him much pain and damage to his hand. The ring was in the bird's mouth when it drowned and the spectral form of the bird still seems to have something in its mouth. If the PCs remove the ring from the bag, the next time they see the spectral raven it will no longer seem to have anything in its mouth.

Rewards: If Eronel observes any creature using the help action to protect Lireia, he forms an attachment to that PC and may manifest after the battle, seeking out the PC and hovering by their shoulder. If no character distinguished themselves by protecting Lireia, he gravitates to any character carrying or wearing Antrellus' ring. He follows his bonded character, helping them in combat until the sun rises, at which point he disappears into the fountain until it sets again. Eronel refuses to go underground or to go inside buildings, and while unable to speak he can understand Common and can indicate yes or no to questions asked to him (within the bounds of his limited intellect).



THE MADMAN'S CAMP

Under the direction of the spectral raven (who can sense the direction of his murderer) or following rumors from the town, the PCs may venture into the southern woods. After an hour, they find a game trail leading deeper into the forest; a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check (or DC 17 Wisdom [Perception]) allows PCs to spot bare human footprints along the trail, left by Antrellus during his roamings to and from the town. Antrellus has a number of sleeping places, but this trail leads to his favorite campsite about 2 miles south of the town. Here he has constructed a rough lean-to shack 10 feet square and 5 feet high in the midst of a grove of cedars at the edge of a deep ravine. He has constructed a rope bridge across the ravine to a treehouse in a tall cedar, with the lower branches cut off to prevent others from climbing up towards him.

Creatures:

ANTRELLUS THE MAD

Medium humanoid (human), neutral

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 18 (4d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (-1) **DEX** 10 (+0) **CON** 10 (+0)

INT 14 (+2) **WIS** 2 (-4) **CHA** 3 (-4)

Skills Arcana +4, Religion +4

Senses Perception 6

Languages Aklo, Common, Elvish

Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP)

Special Equipment: Antrellus has a *guardian moppet (aberrations)* and a *lesser ring of sustenance*.

ACTIONS

Morningstar: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +2 to hit, 1d8-1 (3) piercing damage.

Crossbow: ranged, 80 ft./320 ft. +3 to hit, 1d8 (4) piercing damage.

GUARDIAN MOPPET

This simple doll of burlap, rags, and old wool, with bone button eyes, is crudely sewn with dark thread in the semblance of a child or animal. They are crafted to protect their owners against one type of creature (or subtype, if humanoid). While you are holding or wearing the moppet and are attuned to it, you have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened by the type of creature it protects against. In addition, if a creature of that type is seen by the moppet (treat the moppet as having darkvision and a Perception score of 12), it alerts you with a silent mental alarm which wakes you if you are asleep.

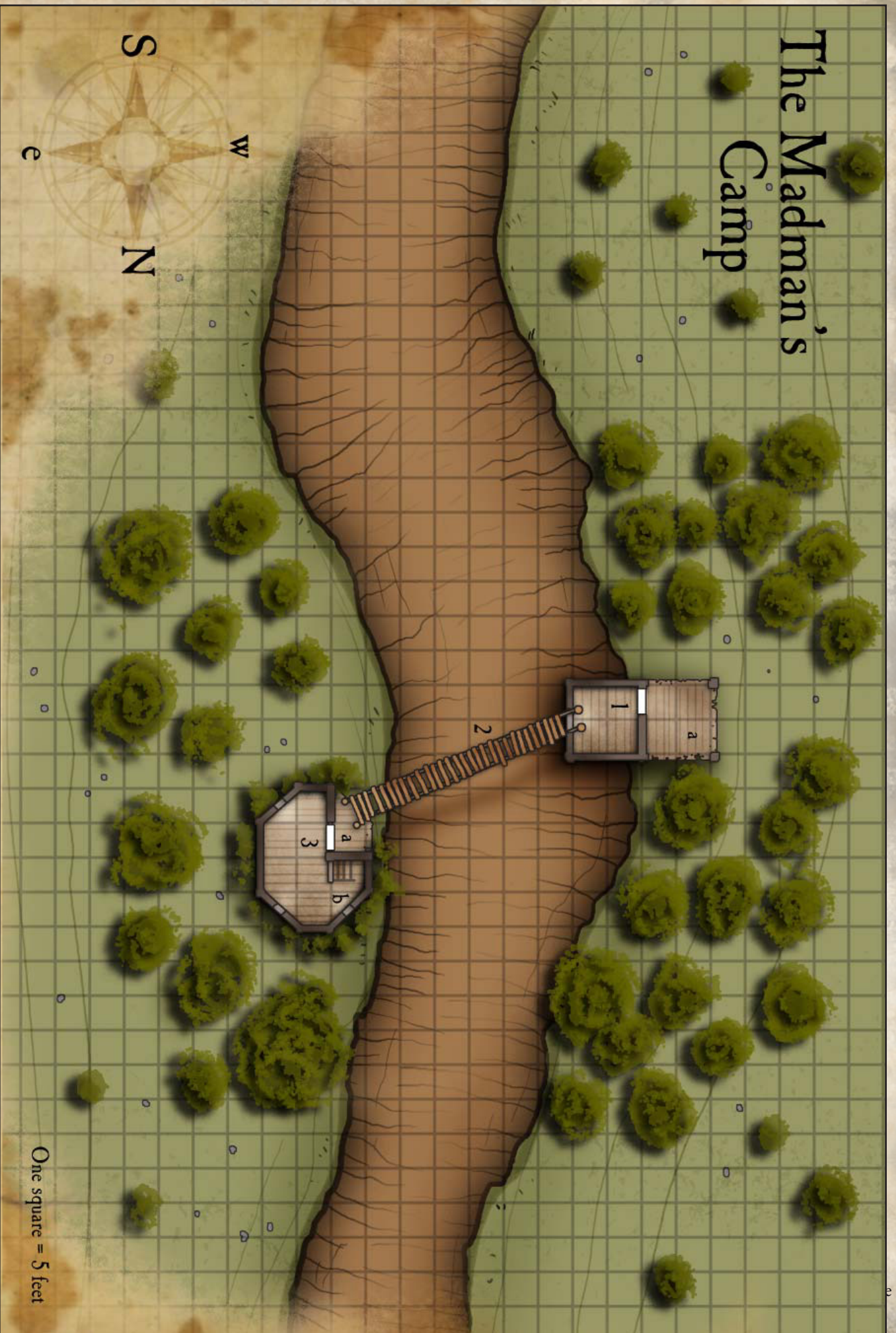
Once per day, you can use a bonus action to present the moppet to a creature of the type it protects you against to gain the benefits of sanctuary (Will DC 11) for 1 minute against creatures of that type.

LESSER RING OF SUSTENANCE

While you are wearing this ring and are attuned to it, you are continually provided with life-sustaining nourishment and need neither food nor drink.



The Madman's Camp



1) SHACK 2) ROPE BRIDGE 3) THE TREEHOUSE

One square = 5 feet

paranoid with the passing of years and has taken to setting traps around his camp. Allow Antrellus a Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the PCs once per minute they spend exploring the shack and its vicinity, or once per round of combat or moving up the rope bridge. Antrellus is unfriendly, but if he notices creatures approaching his camp without hailing him first, he becomes hostile. He hides behind narrow-shuttered windows or cracked-open doors and peers out at those below, shouting for them to go away, to leave him alone, and that he's "ready for them this time." "You won't get me like you got her. My love, forgive me, but they won't get me like they got you." If attacked while sheltering in his treehouse, he gains three-quarters cover (+5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws).

When the PCs draw close, if Eronel is with the PCs in ghost form, or if Lereia is present, Antrellus will cry out in terror and become enraged, attacking the PCs for bringing doom with them to his "safe place" and fighting to the death.

If made indifferent with a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check (DC 26 if he is hostile), Antrellus can be coaxed out onto the balcony, which grants half cover (+2 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws) against those on the ground. He grudgingly admits that the PCs are not cultists, but insists that cultists are everywhere, that they have been through the town recently, that they are coming back for him. He repeats his tale of the cultists and the "multi-legged horror" that took his wife. He says they tried to "put the worms in him," but that he keeps a now-ragged doll his wife made for the child they were planning to have (his *guardian moppet*). He says it is his good luck charm, and as long as he has it "they can't find me, and the worms can't get out."

If made friendly or helpful with another Charisma (Persuasion) check (DC 11 if he is indifferent, DC 16 if he is unfriendly), Antrellus invites the PCs to come up to his treehouse, which features a bewildering array of scrawled notes, map fragments, and strange equations scratched into or tacked up on the walls, beams, and ceiling of the shack, with a labyrinth of strings and threads tying them together in an incomprehensible network. Antrellus attempts to explain his careful observations the past decade since his wife's death trying to reconstruct the path of the Whisper Cult, their movements, and their secret crimes, desperate that no one believes him about their sinister plots, or even that they exist at all. He frequently strikes himself in the head as he explains, sometimes out of sheer frustration but also, as he says, "to stop the voices, I CAN'T TAKE IT MUCH LONGER!"

While much of his story is little more than paranoid rambling and obsessed perseveration about robed cultists, worms, and the "many-legged beast," there are enough legitimately useful observations recorded in Antrellus' shack to grant a +2 bonus to Intelligence (Investigation) checks about the town and to Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to identify aberrations for 1 week.

If asked about the raven, Antrellus insists the raven was watching him, spying on him, and it looked just like the raven one of the cultists had when he passed through town a week ago.

"They left it behind for a spy! I knew that bird saw me, and I knew those cultists would come back, so's I watched where it liked to perch, right on the fountain. Then I snuck up and GRABBED him! Oh how that bird scratched and pecked, tore my arm up real

good, like it was possessed or something, hungry for blood. It near snapped my finger off. Snatched my ring even, trying to carry it off to its masters. But I fixed him, stuffed him in a sack and drowned him to boot. If they're buried under running water, it makes it so the wizards can't find em, see? Their magic don't work. And if they can't find the bird, they won't know the bird found me! It won't be doin' no spyin' now! Hah!"

No amount of persuasion can convince Antrellus that Eronel was not the same raven as the one he saw with the cultists.

1. SHACK

Perched on the edge of a deep ravine, this rude lean-to shelter is roughly constructed, with clapboard and scrap wood nailed or lashed together with rusty nails, tattered ropes, and woven branches and vines. Its far end hangs out over the ravine, propped on tree stumps. Rain barrels catch water from an improvised gutter on one side of the shack.

The front entrance to the shack is guarded at **1a** by a pit trap. The timbers collapse under 50 or more pounds of weight. A search of the shack for traps can spot the covered pit with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. A creature that triggers the trap can attempt a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to catch the edge. On a failed save, the creature falls 20 feet to the dirt floor of the pit, taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage and landing prone. While there is no clear footing around the pit to safely approach the door, it is possible to climb along the front of the shack (DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check) to avoid falling in. If Antrellus is bringing a slain animal or other large object into the shack, he uses loose boards inside the shack to span it.

There are two giant centipedes that live in the ground near the bottom of the pit. If a creature falls into the pit, there is a 50% chance each round that the disturbance attracts the attention of a giant centipede; continue checking until both centipedes emerge or all creatures exit the pit. The centipedes attack creatures they find in the pit and will climb out of the pit to pursue creatures on the ground above.



GIANT CENTIPEDES (2)

Small beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 4 each (1d6+1)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR 5 (-3) **DEX** 14 (+2) **CON** 12 (+1)

INT 1 (-5) **WIS** 7 (-2) **CHA** 3 (-4)

Senses blindsight 30 ft.; Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +4 to hit, 1d4+2 (4) piercing damage, plus 5 (2d4) poison damage (DC 11 Con save halves the poison damage). If the target is reduced to 0 hit points by this poison damage, the target is stable but paralyzed and poisoned for 1 hour.

Developments: The rain barrels contain nothing but murky though drinkable water. The shack contains a rough oven built of river stones and mortar and an improvised smoker. Several barrels hold jerky of indeterminate origin, and the floor is scattered with rusty tools and numerous stained and worn sacks of burlap and canvas, as well as a hammer, hatchet, shovel, and a set of artisan's tools for building traps. At the back of the shack is a large shuttered window with a bench beneath it, allowing egress to the rope bridge.

PCs wishing to climb to the rope bridge without going through the shack must climb along the side and back of the shack, which have fewer handholds than the front side (DC 15 Strength [Athletics] check), or down into the ravine (DC 10), then back up the trees (DC 20) and the back of the shack (DC 15). PCs attempting to climb onto the shack's roof may notice it is unstable (DC 10 Intelligence [Investigation] check); any Small or larger creature walking on it will break through and fall inside, suffering 1d6 points of damage.

2. ROPE BRIDGE

A pair of ropes links the back of the shack to a tall cedar across a deep ravine, where a ramshackle treehouse can be dimly seen amidst the higher branches, though the lower branches have all been hacked off.

The rope bridge itself is not difficult to climb (DC 10 Strength [Athletics]); however, to dissuade trespassers Antrellus has trapped the bottom end with a swinging axe trap. When a PC gets 15 feet across the bridge, a weighted greataxe swings down on a rope from a concealed location in the trees above, and attacks the triggering PC with a +10 melee attack that deals 1d12 slashing damage. A search of the rope bridge for traps can spot the hidden trigger line with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check.

If the axe hits a PC, they may be knocked into the ravine (DC 10 Dexterity save, or DC 15 Strength [Athletics] or Dexterity [Acrobatics] check as an immediate action; player's choice). Those falling into the ravine take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage from the fall and end up 1d3 x 10 feet down a steep slope.

If the axe does not hit a PC, it has a 50% chance to sever one rope (increasing the Strength [Athletics] DC to 15) and a 50% chance to sever both ropes. A PC adjacent to the rope can try to catch it (DC 15 Dexterity save); otherwise, the rope falls slack along the trunk of the cedar tree containing the treehouse. It can be used to help climb up to the treehouse if PCs can cross the ravine. PCs may cross the ravine using a grappling hook and their own rope, or they can climb down into (Strength [Athletics] DC 10) and back up out of (DC 15) the ravine, which is 40 feet deep.

If Antrellus notices the PCs and is hostile, he will shoot his crossbow at any creature attempting to climb the rope bridge or cross the ravine. If Antrellus sees PCs approaching the base of the tree he will use a full-round action to pull up the rope if it has been cut. He will also attempt to cut the rope bridge while they climb. He can cut one rope with a standard action; once both ropes are cut, PCs must climb the tree or use their own rope to ascend to his treehouse.

3. TREEHOUSE

A ramshackle platform sits in the upper branches of a tall cedar, some 30 feet above the ground. The lower branches of the tree have been pruned and scorched to prevent regrowth, but the treehouse itself is shrouded in greenery. The rope bridge ends at a small balcony, where a door leads within.

Combat: Antrellus may parley with PCs from inside the treehouse (if hostile or unfriendly) or the balcony at **3a** if made indifferent or better. He prefers to shoot his crossbow at targets below, but will resort to his makeshift morningstar (a club with many long nails driven through it) if pressed closely. Inside of his shack, he has set up two poisoned dart traps that fire at a character who trip the wire when stepping inside. Each dart attacks the triggering PC with a +10 ranged attack that deals 1d4 piercing damage, and characters damaged by the dart must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution check or take 1d4 poison damage. A search of the interior of the shack for traps can spot the trip wire with a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Antrellus can move through the areas of the traps without setting them off and he will try to lure PCs into following him and setting them off; however, his furtive glances at the traps and irregular movements may tip off PCs to the presence of the traps. Each round, a PC may attempt a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check to gain a +2 circumstance bonus to AC, saving throws, or skill checks made against Antrellus' traps for that round; a character proficient in Insight may make this check as a bonus action, but other characters must use their action to gain this bonus.

Antrellus will flee up the staircase at **3b** if pursued. If PCs are weakened, he will climb out onto the roof and lie in wait at the top of the stairs and shoot down at those ascending. If PCs are clearly too strong for him, he will let down a knotted rope ladder and try to flee into the woods.

Rewards: Antrellus has few possessions of value, but a search of his treehouse turns up a magnifying glass, steel mirror, hourglass, and merchant's scale that he uses to 'test' things that he finds for signs of aberrant star-spawned taint. He keeps a small box with 15 sheets of parchment and 7 bottles of ink to record his findings and scrawl his journals.

Over the past decade, Antrellus has collected a strange miscellany of 'lost' objects from the townsfolk, gathering and

studying them to see who might be a cultist in disguise and then discarding them into a battered crate (though a dozen broken items and bits are incorporated into his addled tapestry as he insists they are vital clues to the secret cultic conspiracy, if only he could find the missing piece that links them all together!). Though dusty and scratched, returning these lost items to the townsfolk gains the PCs a monetary reward (made up of small gifts and rewards) equal in gp value to twice the result of a single Intelligence (Investigation) check (assisted by all party members), representing their ability to return lost items to their proper owners.

THE THING EMERGES

If Antrellus dies, the embryonic neh-thalggu maturing within his body is jolted into independent awareness. It extends its tendrils and begins absorbing his brain, extracting it from within. This takes 1d4 rounds, during which a character closely examining Antrellus may notice something moving inside his body (his head seeming to cave inwards, then his neck bulging, then something swelling within his torso) with a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception or Medicine) check; creatures may attempt one check (against either skill) per round that they are adjacent to Antrellus' body. After this brain extraction has been completed, the abomination bursts forth from the unfortunate merchant's belly and attacks any creatures nearby, focusing its attacks on arcane spellcasters present (using Intelligence [Arcana] to identify their spells).

If PCs have avoided combat with Antrellus, this event may instead occur in the midst of their conversation with the madman or even after they have left. Likewise, if the PCs had too hard a time battling Antrellus, you might choose to delay the thing's emergence until after they have had a chance to recuperate, though they do have a chance to heal themselves during the 1d4 rounds that the monster is swallowing and storing Antrellus' brain. If the creature emerges later, it is able to recall Antrellus' interactions with the PCs and will use this knowledge to hunt them in the town, setting up an ambush wherever they might be staying.

Erupting in a spray of gore from the shattered torso of the slain madman is a thing out of nightmares, almost like a shell-less crab with too many legs and a fanged maw dripping with greenish venom. Tiny winking eyes cover its body and limbs, but most horrifying of all, within a distended, pulsating, translucent rubine sac on the creature's back is a glistening human brain.



EMBRYONIC NEH-THALGGU

Tiny aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 40 (9d4+18)

Speed 10 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR 8 (-1) **DEX** 18 (+4) **CON** 15 (+2)

INT 13 (+1) **WIS** 12 (+1) **CHA** 13 (+1)

Skills Arcana +4, Stealth +6

Immunities (conditions) charmed

Resistances (damage) bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 11

Languages Aklo, Common

Challenge Rating 4 (1,100 XP)

Brain Blister: An embryonic neh-thalggu can use its action to swallow the brain of a humanoid that has been dead for no more than 1 minute. It does not digest a humanoid brain it eats—rather, the brain lodges in a bulbous blister on the creature's back and helps to increase its intellect. It must spend 1d4 rounds budding the blister pod and is incapacitated during this time. A stored brain grants an embryonic neh-thalggu a +1 bonus to its Armor Class, to Constitution checks to maintain concentration, and to Intelligence checks.

Innate Spellcasting: An embryonic neh-thalggu with a stored humanoid brain can cast spells as a 1st-level Intelligence-based spellcaster (**Attack** +3, **Save** DC 11), without requiring material components. It knows the following spells from the wizard's spell list:

- Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights, mage hand, ray of frost*
- 1st Level (2 slots): *shield, color spray*

ACTIONS

Multiattack: An embryonic neh-thalggu can make one bite attack against a target that it first hits with its claws

Bite Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target: +5 to hit, 1d4+4 (6) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage (DC 13 Con save halves the poison damage). If the target is reduced to 0 hit points by this poison damage, the target is stable but paralyzed and poisoned for 1 hour..

Claws Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +5 to hit, 2d4+4 (9) piercing damage.

If enemies are close by, the embryonic neh-thalggu uses *sleep* to disable as many as possible; otherwise, it begins by casting *shield* before closing with opponents. If enemies threaten it directly, it flies out of melee reach and casts *ray of frost* on enemies that resisted its initial assault. If brought below 10 hit points, it flies into the forest to hide but will follow the PCs as able and plot a return attack. Once the PCs are eliminated, it will leave the town behind and seek more interesting prey.

RETURN TO THE FOUNTAIN

After dealing with Antrellus, as the PCs peruse his notes they may learn about ‘haunts of vengeance,’ and with a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check can piece together the means for laying the fountain’s haunt to rest (see Raven’s Roost above). Traveling to the town’s cemetery, a DC 15 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check allows them to purchase a plot for Eronel for 1 sp..

If the PCs return to the Murmuring Fountain to complete the ritual, the ghostly raven accompanies them, perching on the fountain and cawing “Rest! Rest! Rest!” Approaching the fountain triggers the Ravens’ Roost haunt; however, tossing the spadeful of earth into the fountain inflicts 3d6 points of radiant damage to the haunt as it tries to form. If reduced to 0 hit points, the bloodravens are not summoned.

However, the haunt’s spiritual energies do not simply dissipate when the haunt is destroyed. Instead, these energies cascade over the fountain and create spectral versions of the four gargoyles supporting the fountain. Each spectral gargoyle rolls a separate initiative, stepping out of the stone gargoyle and attacking on their turn. The spectral gargoyles will slowly take to the sky, hovering and attacking creatures within reach. These spectral gargoyles appear only once, when the haunt is destroyed.

SPECTRAL GARGOYLES (4)

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 15 each (2d8+6)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR 11 (+0)	DEX 15 (+2)	CON 16 (+3)
INT 6 (–2)	WIS 11 (+0)	CHA 7 (–2)

Immunities (conditions) charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious; **(damage)** necrotic, poison

Resistances (damage) acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren’t silvered

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception 10

Languages Terran (can’t speak)

Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP)

Incorporeal Movement: A spectral gargoyle can move through objects and other creatures, but can’t remain within them.

Sun Blindness: While in sunlight, a spectral gargoyle is blinded.

ACTIONS

Corrupting Touch Attack: melee, 5 ft. reach, 1 target. +4 to hit, 2d6 (7) necrotic damage.

EPILOGUE

Once Eronel’s remains have been interred and the haunting of the Murmuring Fountain has been eradicated, Eronel’s ghost is freed and able to slip off to the afterlife. However, the next morning a raven with a single white feather flies to Lireia’s windowsill and perches on it, tapping at her window until she opens it and then hopping inside as if it were his own home. She adopts the raven as her new pet and names it Eronel, believing it to be her beloved pet come back from the dead, and she will try to find the PCs before they leave the town to thank them for all they have done for her and her beloved bird, whose curious eyes regard the PCs with a knowing warmth and appreciation.





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