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VILLAGE BACKDROP:
SHROUDHAVEN



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: SHROUDHAVEN

Nestled in a deep valley, Shroudhaven has never seen sunlight in the centuries since its founding. A long-forgotten war drove refugees to the valley where a persistent thick fog had permanently settled, a side-effect of magical might employed during the war. The fog shields its residents both from the elements and from those who might seek to destroy them merely for who they are. For most of those dwelling in Shroudhaven are undead. A dark reputation—like the pervasive fog—hangs over the village, but those spending time with the villagers tell a different story, one in which the battle against the base urges.

Compatible with the 5th edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

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SHROUDHAVEN AT A GLANCE

Finding Shroudhaven presents certain difficulties, as no road leads to the village; wagon ruts serve as the only path. Thick fog makes navigation. Wolf howls and mad gibbering from all directions provide travellers constant companionship. The first indicator of civilization, signs spaced around the village proclaiming “No Necromancers, on Penalty of Death” and “Lawbreakers Will Be Eaten,” greet visitors.

Shroudhaven’s architecture, style of dress and dialects hearken back to its centuries-old genesis. Incredible, innovative artwork and artisanship contrasts oddly with the village’s quaint nature. The sky only manages to brighten to a gloomy grey at noon. Brass lamps lining the streets cast yellow glows barely penetrating the fog. When the fog thickens, one can only perceive the vague shapes of buildings and other beings.

While Shroudhaven’s undead inhabitants make no outward displays of their state, in order to make guests feel more comfortable, astute observers easily discern the truth. For such guests, the undead don’t bother to hide their state, and instead put their effort into convincing visitors of their civility.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler The Gloomhand (five-member council)

Government Council

Population 79 (22 humans, 11 dwarves, 27 elves, 6 halflings, 13 ghosts)

Alignments N, LE, NE, CE

Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven, Undercommon

Resources & Industry Alchemical supplies, clockwork devices, entertainment, exotic mushrooms

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are undead. A few, however, are of particular interest to adventurers:

Bertram Jinkin (location 1; N male dwarf **spy**) One of Shroudhaven’s few living residents, Bertram acts as the village’s “face” to newcomers.

Damiella Nightingale (location 8; CE female human vampire bard 11) Damiella is one of Zuzu’s prize pupils, with a voice capable of both shattering glass and soothing souls.

Keren Zaris (location 9; LE female vampire halfling) Keren spends her relative immortality perfecting various clockworks devices.

Quentin Roarg (location 3; NE male elf vampire **mage**) Quentin has spent decades formulating a blood substitute.

Sestra Vol (location 5; CE female ghost **berserker**) Sestra runs her shop when she is not patrolling outside Shroudhaven.

Yvaine Grau (location 10; N female elf cleric 15) Yvaine oversees her farm and Respite Lodge, where she provides aid to the living and undead alike, along with her wisdom.

Zuzu Mellavious (location 8; NE female halfling vampire bard 13) Proprietor of Theatre Mellavious, Zuzu develops new talent.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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

1. **Jinkin’s Bar and Grill:** The first stop for many visitors, Bertram Jinkin serves an array of food procured from the farm and the village’s mushroom fields.
2. **Manor House Inn:** Several residents have suites in this massive mansion, which also houses newcomers to the village.
3. **Roarg’s Alchemy:** An acrid stench permeates the air around this building, where Quentin Roarg creates alchemical supplies as a break from working on his passion project.
4. **The Cathedral:** Meeting place of the ruling Gloomhand council, the Cathedral also serves as a prison.
5. **Hunting Shoppe:** Sestra Vol’s shop contains a wide variety of hunting supplies, from simple weapons and snare traps to items suited to repel or destroy the undead.
6. **Yvaine’s Farm:** Yvaine Grau raises sheep and cattle near one of the mushroom fields, which provides surprisingly healthy fare for the animals.
7. **Mushroom Fields:** Since normal plants cannot grow without sunlight, Shroudhaven has turned to harvesting mushrooms.
8. **Theatre Mellavious:** Varied performances grace the stages of this magnificent theatre on a nightly basis. Zuzu Mellavious invites visitors who catch her eye to perform on stage.
9. **Gear and Gears:** Keren Zaris runs this general store, which has given over much of its space to the intricate clockwork objects Keren creates.
10. **Respite Lodge:** Due to the dangerous creatures outside Shroudhaven, visitors might stop here for healing on arrival.



VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Shroudhaven, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 15: Shroudhaven's remote location and the pervasive fog make it a mysterious place. The population is made up of relatives of refugees from an ancient war.

DC 20: Led by the Gloomhand, Shroudhaven is a destination for undead creatures. However, these creatures claim to be civilized and present no threat to living creatures. They scour the land of what they call the "feral undead".

DC 25: Residents of Shroudhaven can never leave the village for long periods. After a week's absence, a villager begins to suffer from a wasting disease. Despite this, representatives from Shroudhaven invite innovative artisans and artists to live there.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Thanks to the lack of sunlight, and the undead nature of most of the residents, everyone has a pallid complexion; hair colour ranges from white/blonde to brunette.

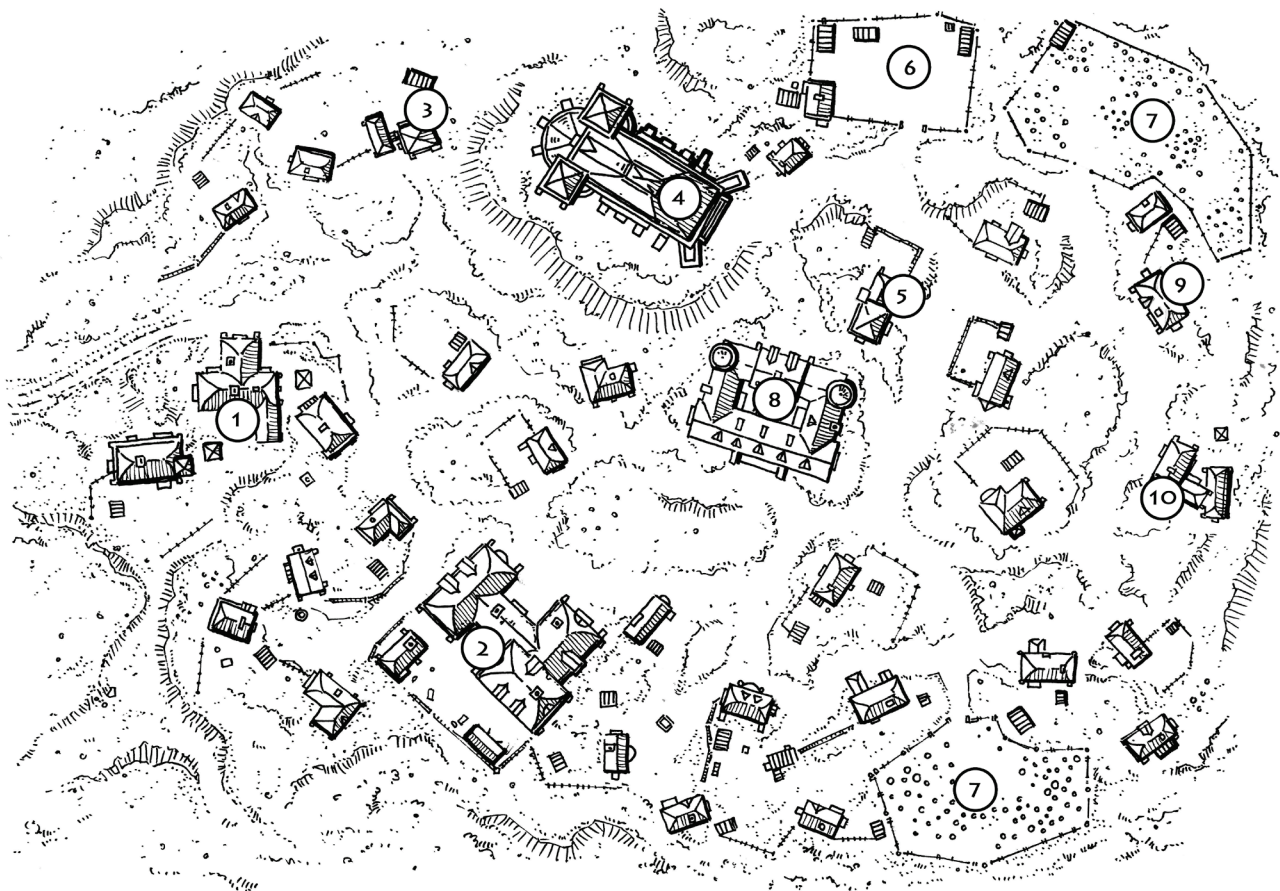
Dress The people of Shroudhaven wear stylish clothing for the historical period of its founding, but the fashion is outdated.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Shroudhaven, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns an additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

D6	RUMOUR
1*	A thin ray of sunlight penetrated the fog recently and followed Valdrienne around.
2	The Cathedral has a secret cellar where the Gloomhand inter feral undead they plan to recondition.
3	The fog became acidic and destroys crops and forces the villagers inside for a time.
4	One of the Gloomhand has spoken about stepping down from the council, the first such departure in sixty years.
5	Madame Mellavious has enticed an acting troupe to stage an original play on the main stage; devastating events occur after each performance.
6	The mining village of Silver Bluff has discovered the remnants of an engine of war; the Gloomhand has expressed concerns about the engine's reactivation.

*False rumour



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: JINKIN'S BAR AND GRILL

Standing at Shroudhaven's most accessible border, Jinkin's Bar and Grill has warm lights shining in all its windows as a welcome to visitors to the village. Bertram Jinkin (N male dwarf **spy**) greets newcomers from outside his restaurant and ensures he is the first local to meet people. Formerly a miner in Silver Bluff, Jinkin chafed at the conditions the mining company imposed on its workers. He travelled from Silver Bluff fifty years ago and stumbled upon Shroudhaven after a narrow escape from a pack of ghouls. In contrast to that harrowing experience, the residents seemed quite friendly, but it took him little time to realize they were also undead. Valdrienne Cort from the Gloomhand met with Jinkin and made his case for the village's burgeoning notion of ceasing to prey on intelligent beings. Jinkin, intrigued by what he heard and saw, accepted a job wherein he would introduce visitors to Shroudhaven and inform them of its residents' unusual natures. Jinkin has a shrewd eye for whether people will be accepting or not.

The tavern serves new arrivals and Shroudhaven denizens alike. It features meat from the livestock raised at Yvaine's ranch, as well as an array of mushrooms cultivated in the village. Jinkin has turned his alchemical skills toward fermentation of mushrooms into earthy, yet potent alcohol. For those who Jinkin believes would react poorly to Shroudhaven's secret, he cheerily puts them up in a couple of well-appointed rooms upstairs from the dining hall. Otherwise, he directs them to the Manor House Inn for lodging.

2: MANOR HOUSE INN

This three-storey stone building accommodates Shroudhaven's residents, invited guests and visitors who wish to stay longer than one night (and Jinkin has vetted). Hondra Van Veldt (CE male ghast **noble**), who has mastered suppressing the stench of decay, leads a staff of twenty workers who keep the manor house spotless and ensure they meet all guests' and residents' needs. Each room has a private bath, heated gradually by an alchemical process designed by Quentin Roarg. All guests and residents can receive meals in their rooms or join the others for formal meals, during which much of the village's gossip is shared. The manor house also serves afternoon tea, to which everyone in the village has a standing invitation. The two-acre grounds surrounding the manor house have space for horse riding, leisure activities and a number of outdoor games, some of which have fallen out of common practice.

3: ROARG'S ALCHEMY

Roarg's shop is not difficult to find thanks to the eye-watering stench pervading the air around the building. The stone comprising the building is blackened in spots, and, in others, the stone has partially melted. Smoke belches from a chimney and colours the fog above a sickly green hue. Quentin Roarg (NE male vampire elf **mage**) enthusiastically greets those who brave the noxious atmosphere and enter the building. He then quickly warns them to stay where they are while he sets down a bubbling beaker, which sometimes explodes. In this case, he cackles while picking out glass shards from his flesh. Roarg's skin is discoloured from the many experiments he carries out, making it hard to determine whether he is undead. He happily confirms he is undead with anyone who asks, and then immediately launches into an excited discussion about the artificial blood he has been attempting to synthesize. This typically leads him to ask for blood samples from living visitors ("purely for research purposes"). Anyone capable of diverting his attention can commission alchemical items which he sells at ten percent below the base cost, or twenty percent below for those who provide blood samples.

4: THE CATHEDRAL

The Cathedral is a daunting stone edifice standing four-storeys high replete with gargoyles along ledges at all heights. The building, also featuring a steeple disappearing into the fog, is one of two places inaccessible to visitors (the other being the hidden farm below the livestock farm [location 6]). The Cathedral is home to the Gloomhand, Shroudhaven's governing council, who make appearances in the village, especially when a promising visitor arrives. Often, Valdrienne Cort (NE female vampire halfling **noble**), Zuzu Mellavious's sister-in-law, acts as the Gloomhand's ambassador.

The Cathedral also holds Shroudhaven's prison, beneath the building itself. The prison is largely empty, but occasionally the Gloomhand uses the space to interrogate people they believe threaten the village. The Gloomhold also quietly ushers feral undead into the prison and attempts to break them of their atavistic urges and return them to what the council considers polite society. Many outsiders witnessing these attempts would liken the techniques used to torture. A guillotine stands behind the Cathedral; those found guilty of necromancy meet their fates here.

The steeple holds a staircase and reaches above the fog bank, nearly one mile high. Climbing the staircase is not as easy as gaining access to it. Ghostly creatures, pale remnants of former residents who perished here and abroad, are trapped in the fog and attack any who dares climb aloft.

5: HUNTING SHOPPE

This simple building is a two-room affair, containing a chaotically arranged shop and Sestra Vol's (CE female gha**st berserker**) room. The shop contains a jumble of gear and provisions for hunting trips in the surrounding wilderness. Sestra crafts her own traps for mundane animals, such as wolves and bears, and she willingly sells them along with normal gear to visitors who need an advantage when they leave the village. She also has an array of mundane and magic items hunting gear she uses to capture or kill feral undead. She will not part with these items, unless the buyers agree to go with her on a hunt or otherwise prove themselves to her satisfaction. Her stringy, grey hair and the hint of decaying flesh mark her out as unnatural. She laughs when someone brings it up and makes veiled threats when someone expresses disgust about her undead state.

6: YVAINE'S FARM

Sheep and cattle placidly graze on clumps of sickly grass in this large field. A group of five workers watches over the livestock. Thanks to Yvaine Grau's training, all five are adept at animal husbandry, and have taken druidic training to encourage plant growth. Recently, the Gloomhand permitted them the judicious use of *daylight* spells to strengthen the plants and make the livestock healthier. As more of Shroudhaven's residents turn to blood and meat to sustain them while they await a breakthrough from Quentin Roarg, Yvaine's crew makes greater effort in ensuring the food sources are hearty.

Provisions are also available for those who haven't given up their taste for humanoid flesh. Due to the distasteful nature of the source, and to prevent visitors from becoming outraged, a group of humans lives in a subterranean area underneath a barn at the centre of the ranch. Yvaine and Quentin devised a way to alchemically lobotomize children born to the humans, and the two workers tending the humans treat them as well as the livestock above get treated.

7: MUSHROOM FIELDS

The damp atmosphere and lack of light make perfect conditions for the mushrooms grown outside Shroudhaven. A riot of mushrooms thrives in the damp ground, and farmers (N various races **druid**) working the fields have cultivated different varieties. The majority of the fields host staple mushrooms, which are meaty and nutritious, but somewhat bland. Specialty mushrooms include those with spiciness comparable to eye-watering peppers, fermentable species used to create alcoholic beverages that even affect undead physiology and popular psychedelic sorts. Varieties unique to Shroudhaven have gained popularity outside the village and command royal sums.

8: THEATRE MELLAVIOUS

The centrepiece of Shroudhaven—at least according to its proprietor, Zuzu Mellavious (NE female halfling vampire bard 13)—Theatre Mellavious hosts amazing performances. Mellavious, a flamboyant halfling who wears a variety of ostentatious wigs and clothes, constantly watches for new talent. She follows local gossip, so she knows when newcomers arrive. She often turns up at Jinkin's place (disguising her vampiric nature, of course) and turns conversation with newcomers toward the arts. With luck, someone who performs exceptionally piques her interest. She is not above using her abilities to compel a favoured artist to remain in Shroudhaven and take the stage. Mellavious is also the most widely-travelled of the villagers, as she searches the world for talent she can poach (or cajole to move to Shroudhaven).

9: GEAR AND GEARS

In contrast to the village's other supplier, Keren Zaris's (LE female vampire halfling) home and shop are models of orderliness. Very little of the gear she sells overlaps with Sestra Vol's offerings. She prides herself on practical gear for adventurers, such as five-foot-long poles that can extend to ten feet (or longer) with the push of a button. Like many of the vampires in Shroudhaven, Zaris obsesses over a particular activity; in her case, she creates intricate clocks and clockwork devices. Many of her accurate clocks grace homes and businesses throughout the village. She nears completion on her largest project yet: a troupe of clockwork dancers. She hopes to feature the dancers on Madame Mellavious's main stage, but the impresario has not moved on her stance regarding the unnaturalness of what she considers mere machines.

10: RESPITE LODGE

Yvaine Grau (N female elf cleric 15), a golden-haired woman with sparkling emerald eyes, used to divide her time between her farm and this place of healing, but she has trained other residents to handle farming duties, allowing her to focus on being another ambassador to Shroudhaven. Respite Lodge stands at the opposite side of the village from Jinkin's Bar and Grill, a good location since the approach from the Lodge's side is fraught with danger. She serves a similar role to Jinkin for newcomers, but she often sends visitors to him after she has tended to their wounds. More importantly, she serves as an advisor for the undead living in the village. She relies on her connection to nature to provide guidance for those struggling to maintain their civility. Her 200 years of life also give her perspective on the near-immortality of the vampires she guides.

LIFE IN SHROUDHAVEN

The people of Shroudhaven enjoy their relative isolation from the world. They spend their days pursuing their passions or obsessions and resisting their desire to consume the flesh of intelligent creatures. They welcome visitors as a distraction from their day-to-day lives. Visitors who accept the truth of Shroudhaven face many questions from the villagers. Given their inability to leave the village for longer than a week, many of these questions concern the outside world.

As Shroudhaven's renown spreads, either regarding the nature of its inhabitants or the wealth of goods and entertainment growing out of their obsessions, the villagers must deal with an influx of newcomers. They are aware this potential increase in visitors comes with the downside of an increase in feral undead, as the creatures attack and "convert" those making the trek to Shroudhaven.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Shroudhaven's trade is emergent and depends solely on word of mouth from visitors who sample the village's wares. Mushrooms are the most common item mentioned by those who pass through the village. Shroudhaven commands a high price for particularly intoxicating mushrooms unique to the village. Second to the mushrooms, Theatre Mellavious has grown in reputation for its fine performances. Wealthy patrons take an expendable retinue with them to survive the trip. Finally, word about Quentin Zaris's alchemical concoctions and Keren Zaris's clockworks have reached interested adventurers and collectors.

LAW & ORDER

Shroudhaven has very few laws: no one attacks another villager, no one consumes the flesh of an intelligent being, and no one practices necromancy. The Gloomhand offers protection, extending to one mile outside the Shroudhaven's confines, to living creatures visiting the village. Depending on the severity of the first two crimes, the person committing the crime faces jail time or exile (virtually amounting to a death sentence, as ferals and hunters alike target the exiled villager). The sentence for necromancy is death by beheading, and the body receives cleansing to keep it from animating.

Inhabitants who find it impossible to keep their blood- or flesh-lust in check depart Shroudhaven and find settlements where they can prey on humanoids, at least until the time limit imposed by the village's curse allows them. The villagers somehow know when someone returns from a wild hunt and take pity on the one who succumbed. As long as the killing takes place outside a one-mile radius of the village, the killer receives no punishment.

EVENTS

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

D6	EVENT
1	One of the vampire residents attacks a visitor; a necromancer used powerful magic to control the undead. Everyone witnessing the attack is arrested.
2	A hunter returns, breathless, with news of a troop of paladins led by a mighty cleric of a sun deity who are a two-day march from Shroudhaven.
3	A human from the farm manages to escape from his pen. He stumbles into the PCs and babbles incoherently before a farm hand grab him.
4	An ancient elf arrives with a band of bow- and sword-wielding followers; he demands Yvaine's return to her homeland.
5	One PC hears occasional whispers from the fog. At night, freezing hands formed from the fog reach out to the PC, but no one else can see them.
6	Hurricane-force winds strike the fog bank, clearing it for a moment and exposing the village to direct sunlight.

THE SHROUDHAVEN CURSE

After undead creatures fled an ancient war to the supposed safety of the fog-shrouded valley where they founded Shroudhaven, a group of good divine spellcasters enacted a ritual, cursing the creatures to remain in the village or perish. The ritualists planned to attack the undead at their leisure or, at the very least, keep the undead from preying on their compatriots and innocent people. The curse carries a stipulation: should all the village's residents cease hunting and eating intelligent creatures, the curse ends. None of the cabal's members believed the residents of Shroudhaven would meet this condition, so they assumed the curse was unbreakable. Unfortunately for them, they never saw the fruits of their labours, since they were massacred a week after performing the ritual. The curse is still potent, though, and causes a resident to suffer from a terrible wasting disease after one week away from the village, from which the unfortunate dies shortly thereafter. With the village's remote location, this prevents ordinary travel, so powerful residents use teleportation magic to travel the world. Through trial and error, they have discovered the allotted time away resets after a decade, allowing infrequent excursions. The curse also affects new villagers, a fact none of the current inhabitants share with someone they court to join them in Shroudhaven.

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