

ARKADE



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As a player and as a GM, I used to hold back my awesomest ideas. I would write down a secret that my character or an NPC had and wait for the perfect moment to reveal it. Amazing encounters came to me, and I would record them in my notebook. There they would stay for years hence as the pages browned, waiting for their time to come at the climax of a campaign. Plot twists! Unique NPCs! Original dungeons! Secret parentages! Enough tidbits to fill several little books, and later, smartphones—all waiting for the right time to be unleashed at the table and wow my fellow players. The problem was that most of the time, the perfect moment never came, and many of those ideas only ever lived in my brain and on the page.

Don't wait to use your best ideas. While saving one or two big reveals for the right time isn't a bad idea, holding on to every idea you have until the perfect moment isn't the way to go. How many things in life are perfect? Not a lot. But how many things in life are awesome? Many! You don't need to achieve perfection; you just need to achieve awesome.

There are a few reasons why held-back ideas never come to be. First, many games break up for one reason or another before the campaign's story ends. That means that cool reveal you had in mind is, at best, shared at a later date while everyone laments what could have been a good moment.

Second, the best laid plans of players and GMs often change because the other players do stuff we don't expect. Embracing those spontaneous, surprising moments is a huge part of the collaboration and fun of the game! We shouldn't stop them because it could ruin another moment down the line (one that may never happen). Saying, "No, let's not do that for ... reasons," or, "That happens, but its effects are immediately undone," or, "That was just a clone, not the real big bad!" can stop the fun like a record scratch as your fellow players realize they're not impacting the story at all. They're just playing through the story that you want.

Holding back our best ideas also comes at a cost. It means that we're only giving the rest of the people who showed up to play our second, third, or worse best stories. You might say, "This third trek through an abandoned mine full of goblins will be worth it when the players see how

the tunnels mimic the veins of the dead god they'll be traveling through 10 levels and forty sessions from now!" But there's no guarantee that will happen, and your friends showed up expecting a good time tonight, not an okay time for thirty-nine sessions until they get one cool dungeon.

You might worry that you only have a few good ideas, and use that reason to save one for a perfect moment. Remember those overflowing notebooks and smartphones I mentioned earlier? Thoughts and inspiration are free. You choose to play a game of shared imagination, because you like it. Odds are you've already got more great ideas than one human could use in a lifetime. Unleashing those ideas will give the other players their own, which in turn will fuel your imagination with even more stories to bring to the table. Sharing awesome begets awesome.

When I finally stopped holding back my ideas, you know what happened? Every game was epic! My friends showed up on time and wanted to stay late, because the run-of-the-mill was out. My ideas elevated the ones my friends brought to our collaborative stories. Every session left us awed as we learned the truth about Fizzlebottom Cloisternook's tragic warlock pact, battled wraiths atop the back on a flying dragon, or discovered that kindly Mother Sweetspruce was actually a brain-eating doppelganger. Was every moment pulled off perfectly? No. But they happened. They were memorable. And they were awesome.

This issue of ARCADIA presents several awesome moments you can use at the table. First, [Willy Abeel](#) is back and letting players create their own magic moments with Tiny and Large ancestries in "The Big and the Small." [Gwendolyn Marshall's](#) "Botanical Undead" brings memorable new plant-themed undead that stalk an overgrown, blighted forest. Finally, "The Afterparty" by [Sally Tamarkin](#) features an investigation, an unexpected curse, and a delicious villain with a flare for evil.

Here's hoping your games are brimming with awesome!

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

THE BIG AND THE SMALL

TINY AND LARGE-SIZED CHARACTER OPTIONS

by Willy Abeel

**NO MATTER HOW BIG,
NO MATTER HOW SMALL,
WE STAND TOGETHER
ABOVE IT ALL.**

—HELIOTROPE, LEGENDARY MOUSQUETAIRE CRICKET

ADVENTURERS AT ANY OTHER SIZE

In the core rules, a player has a choice of a Medium or Small-sized character, but the decision is relatively inconsequential, save for a few considerations to mobility and equipment use. When the player's selection is broadened to Tiny and Large, the choice is more impactful.

Tiny adventurers use unique mobility options to keep themselves safe from being crushed. They position themselves precisely, targeting weak points to accommodate for lack of power. Large adventurers are tough enough to take on the dangers they can't avoid and strong enough to manipulate the environment around them to avoid harm.

It's no small task, but it's no big problem, either!

SPECIAL SIZE RULES

The character options within this article represent a character's size by adding additional traits or adjusting existing ones (such as their movement speed). When these character options tell you to increase or decrease a die's size by one step, change the feature's normal die to the next die size.

Increased die sizes use the following progression: d3, d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, 2d6. For example, if a character's Hit Die is usually a d12, and you need to increase it by one step, it becomes 2d6. Treat the 2d6 as one die; a creature with a Hit Die of 2d6 rolls both dice when expending one Hit Die. If your Hit Die changes to 2d6 and, instead of rolling when you gain a level, you want to use a fixed value to determine your hit point maximum, the fixed value for a 2d6 Hit Die is $8 + \text{your Constitution modifier}$.

Decreased die sizes use the following progression: d12, d10, d8, d6, d4, d3. If a feature's die size decreases, and that feature usually requires rolling more than one die, continue using that same number of dice. For example, if a weapon usually deals 2d6 damage, but its die size decreases by one step, it decreases to 2d4 damage, not 1d12.

TINY CHARACTERS

The following traits apply to all Tiny player characters.

Equipment. You can't use equipment made for creatures larger than you by normal means.

Hit Dice. Your Hit Die decreases by one step.

Lilliputian (*li-luh-PYOO-shn*). You can move through and stay in the same space as another creature. You gain half cover while in an allied creature's space.

Any weapon damage dice you roll decrease one step. This doesn't include bonus dice from class features, such as Sneak Attack, or special traits.

Repurposed Gear. You can repurpose small objects to replicate larger weapons and items. This includes small gear meant to be used differently, such as a sewing needle for a rapier, or a chisel for an axe. If you replicate a weapon that has the heavy property, it loses that property.

You also gain proficiency with improvised weapons, and can use them as if they had the finesse property.



SMALL FLOURISHES

Tiny-sized adventurers can utilize their size to stay in the fray while out of harm's way. They can easily fit into most nooks and crannies, providing them with many more locations to hide or take cover in. This also allows them access to areas others can't reach fully equipped with their unassuming makeshift gear at the ready.

Consider treating Medium-sized and larger creatures as if they were moving terrain and mounts for Tiny-sized adventurers. Staying in an ally's space provides protection, while entering an enemy's is the hallmark of adventure! Tiny heroes swing from the shoulders of giants to gain the high ground or infiltrate an enemy hideout by hitching a secret ride in a belt pouch.

LARGE CHARACTERS

The following traits apply to all Large player characters.

Armor. You can't wear armor made for creatures smaller than you by normal means.

Hit Dice. Your Hit Die increases by one step.

***Broddingnagian* (brob-din-NA-gee-uhn).** You can move through and stay in the space of any creature that is two or more size categories smaller than you.

The area of effect for your features, traits, the properties of magic items you wield, and spells you cast that have a range of self is reduced by 5 feet in all dimensions (to a minimum of 5 feet).

Avaling Arms. You can wield a two-handed melee weapon in one hand, and when you wield a weapon with the versatile property in one hand, you use the larger die for damage rolls. While wielding either of these weapons, you can't wield another one at the same time.

BIG CONSIDERATIONS

Large-sized adventurers deal with large-sized problems. While squeezing into a 5-foot space, a Large creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and Dexterity saving throws, has to spend twice as much movement speed to progress, and attack rolls against them have advantage. Even when out in the open, they can be surrounded by several more enemies than their Medium-sized compatriots if they aren't careful.

It also takes a lot more surface area to cover a larger creature. As a guideline, if something grants three-quarters cover to a Small or Medium-sized creature, it only grants half cover for a Large one. Similarly, something that grants half cover to a Small or Medium-sized creature grants no cover to a Large one.

SIZABLE EQUIPMENT

Tiny and Large adventurers have different needs when it comes to armor, weapons, and assorted gear. Here are several suggestions to handle equipment:

- All starting equipment is made for the character's size.
- Smiths, armorers, and artisan spellcasters can modify the size of gear with a single day's work. Increasing the size requires more materials, while decreasing the size requires more intricate work. Modifications usually have an additional cost equal to half the original price of the equipment.
- Magical items resize to accommodate the wielder.
- Characters have disadvantage on attack rolls made with weapons sized for enemy creatures Large-sized and larger, unless they are of a size category larger than the intended wielder.

ENEMY WEAPONS

The GM can ignore the weapon suggestion, but their Large-sized adventurers will be significantly stronger than their allies if they loot enemy weapons. Consider that an ogre's Large greatclub can deal 2d8 damage in their hands because it was made for that ogre.

COALDERS

Deep beneath the mantle of the Material Plane, the hardy coilder people thrive. These Large humanoids have massive arms and walk on their knuckles. Long, oily hair adorns their stone-chiseled heads, hands, and feet. Their dusty skin is marbled, mixed with the primary minerals of their five birth parents.

Coalders came about as the plane's response to the tarrasque. They can withstand the harshest environments and stay close to the monster to keep it sated and asleep, knowing that if they fail, the world could be devoured. Their existence is so entwined with the tarrasque that some coalders worship it as a god.

Coilder society reveres the concept of fuel, the will to keep going, knowing full well that catastrophe could destroy them at any moment. They fuel their communities with acts of service and their loved ones with gifts, believing that their fuel will spark them to lead bright-burning and exciting lives. Dwarves and stone giants that share this ideal sometimes live among coalders, working together to keep their world and home thriving.

A coilder adventurer typically has two good reasons for leaving home. They need something to help quell the tarrasque, or they want to get far, far away from it.

COALDER TRAITS

As a coilder, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. Coalders that set off for adventure tend to burn out faster than those who lead quiet lives. After reaching maturity at 100, a coilder can live to be six thousand years old.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Large (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 35 feet, which increases to 45 feet when moving downhill.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were

dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Brace. When you take damage after making a Dexterity saving throw, you can use your reaction to reduce the damage you take an amount equal to your Constitution score. You can't use this trait again until you finish a short or long rest.

Coalder Composure. You can't gain levels of exhaustion from extreme heat or cold.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. Colate is a verbal and written language practiced by many coalders, known for its bountiful use of hard consonants and rumored to be understood by the tarrasque.

BUILDING COALDER CHARACTERS

You can use these sample aspects to help create a coalder.

Names: Coalder names are formed of “col” and sharp syllables, such as Coldon, Shacol, and Tarcolcon.

Increased Ability Scores: Strength, Constitution, Intelligence

Archetypes: Curious youth (neutral), hardened spiritulist (lawful), reckless juggernaut (chaotic)

Languages: Colate, Common, Dwarvish, Giant

Character Prompts: The following prompts can be elaborated on with your GM:

- Roccolate, a traveling chef that wants to share their lava cakes with the world
- Colegion, a tarrasque guardian who seeks their lost teacher's final sealing technique
- Diacol, a small village courier with a letter for a lost relative

TARRASCALS

Living in proximity to the tarrasque gifted coalders with the companionship of tarrascals. These tiny tarrasques help keep away vermin and tackle other small problems the coalder are too big to solve. The little monstrosities also serve as a barometer for the tarrasque's condition, becoming more agitated as the danger of it waking grows imminent.

TARRASCAL

Tiny Monstrosity, Unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 12 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 9 (2d4 + 4)

SPEED 35 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 8 (-1) | 12 (+1) | 14 (+2) | 3 (-4) | 9 (-1) | 10 (+0) |

SENSES blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 9

LANGUAGES understands Colate but can't speak

CHALLENGE RATING 1/8 (25 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

Reflective Shell. Any time the tarrascal is targeted by a *magic missile* spell, a line spell, or a spell that requires a ranged attack roll, roll a d6. On a 6, the tarrascal is unaffected, and the effect is reflected back at the caster as though it originated from the tarrascal, turning the caster into the target.

Sturdy Rascal (Recharge 6). If the damage from a spell or a magical attack would reduce the tarrascal to 0 hit points, they are reduced to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

Shriek. The tarrascal takes the Disengage action and attempts to recharge their Sturdy Rascal trait.

TARRASCAL COMPANION

If you're playing with MCDM's companion rules from *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*, you can use the following tarrascal companion to cause big problems on your adventures.

TARRASCAL COMPANION

Tiny Monstrosity, Unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 13 plus PB (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 7 + 7 times caregiver's level (the tarrascal has a number of d8 Hit Dice equal to the caregiver's level)

SPEED 35 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 8 (-1) | 16 (+3) | 14 (+2) | 3 (-4) | 9 (-1) | 10 (+0) |

SAVING THROWS Dex +3 plus PB, Con +2 plus PB

SKILLS Athletics -1 plus PB, Perception -1 plus PB,

Survival -1 plus PB

SENSES blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 9 plus PB

Sturdy Rascal (1/Long Rest). If the damage from a spell or a magical attack would reduce the tarrascal to 0 hit points, they are reduced to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Bite (Signature Attack). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 plus PB piercing damage.

Rolling Rascal (2 Ferocity). The tarrascal rolls into a ball and moves up to half their speed without provoking opportunity attacks. During or at the end of this move, they can make a signature attack against one target.

Tenacious Grip (5 Ferocity). The tarrascal makes a signature attack. If they hit, the tarrascal attaches to the target. While attached, attacks against the target have advantage, and the tarrascal can only attack the target.

The attached tarrascal moves with the target whenever the target moves, requiring none of the tarrascal's movement. The tarrascal can detach themselves by spending 5 feet of movement on their turn. A creature, including the target, can use an action to detach the tarrascal.

Tarrasque (8 Ferocity). The tarrascal grows with a mighty roar. Until the start of their next turn, their size is Huge, and their signature attack has a reach of 15 feet and deals an additional 1d6 piercing damage. The tarrascal then makes signature attacks against PB creatures of their choice. If the tarrascal lacks the room to become Huge, they attain the maximum size possible in the space available and still gain the other benefits of this action.

REACTION

Rasquey Maneuver. When either the tarrascal or the caregiver (while within 5 feet of the tarrascal) is targeted by a magic missile spell, a line spell, or a spell that requires a ranged attack roll, the tarrascal can attempt to reflect the spell back at the caster. Roll a d4. On a 3 or 4, the target is unaffected, and the effect is reflected back at the caster as though it originated from the tarrascal, turning the caster into the target. Otherwise, the tarrascal takes the damage instead.

When the tarrascal successfully reflects damage, they can't do so again until they complete a long rest.

MYSTIC CONNECTION

When a beastheart reaches 9th level with a tarrascal companion, they gain access to the following benefit:

Tarrascal. As a bonus action, your skin grows a layer of tough plates that lasts for 1 minute. While covered in plates, you have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and your attacks deal double damage to objects and structures. You can't use this benefit again until you finish a long rest.

MOUSQUETAIRES

Mousquetaires are slivers of powerful beings inside a Tiny creature or object. They come to the Material Plane at the behest of a higher authority, such as a god or archfey, to execute a single piece of a greater plan. Their size is critical to the task's success, minimizing the amount of influence and attention the authority has in the mortal realm. This peculiar union of Tiny mortal and powerful being results in the host performing feats that it could never accomplish on its own.

Though the name mousquetaire implies the prevalence of rodents as the targets of greater powers, these beings also inhabit insects, plants, and objects. When it comes into being, a mousquetaire bears an illuminated scar, bib, or cape. Mousquetaires can immediately identify other mousquetaires and recognize the entity that created them.

Mousquetaires come into being with a specific, completable task set upon them. When they have completed this mission, their spirit returns to their authority and their host returns to normal. A mousquetaire is free to abandon their task, but they may soon find that the authority's power begins to fade and they start to lose control of their host. Their time is typically short no matter what choices they make.

But surely, the mousquetaire will always leave a large impact on the world behind them.

MOUSQUETAIRE TRAITS

As a mousquetaire, you have the following traits.

Inhabited. You have two creature types: one provided by your base creature below, and your choice of Celestial, Fey, or Fiend. An effect that affects either of your creature types affects you.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. No matter their shape or form before becoming a mousquetaire, the base creature doesn't age.

Size. Your size is Tiny (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 20 feet, and you have a climbing speed equal to your walking speed.

Base Creature. Choose one of the following base creatures to inhabit. This body takes on a more humanoid appearance when you assume control:

Insect. You are a Beast. You have proficiency in the Athletics skill.

Object. You are a Construct. You do not need to eat, drink, or breathe. While you remain motionless, you are indistinguishable from an ordinary object.

Plant. You are a Plant. You do not need to eat. Each day at dawn, you grow a number of berries equal to your proficiency bonus. You can feed one of these berries to a creature (or it can consume the berry on its own) as a bonus action to restore 1 hit point. The berries lose their potency after 24 hours.

Rodent. You are a Beast. You have proficiency in the Perception skill.

Undead. You are an Undead. You do not need to eat, drink, or breathe. You have resistance to necrotic damage.

Bounding Body. You don't take damage as a result of falling.

Steadfast. When you take damage, you can use your reaction to immediately take on an otherworldly glow. For 1 minute, you gain the following benefits:

- Once on each of your turns, you deal an additional 1d4 force damage to a target when you deal damage to it with an attack or spell.
- When you make a saving throw, you can use your reaction to roll a d4 and add the number rolled to the saving throw.

You can't use this trait again until you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak one language of your choice and a second language based on your second creature type (Celestial for Celestial, Sylvan for Fey, and Abyssal or Infernal for Fiend).

BUILDING MOUSQUETAIRE CHARACTERS

You can use these sample aspects to help create a mousquetaire.

Names: Mousquetaire names have a poetic flourish to them granted by their higher authority, such as Falconi O'sta, Insen deAry, and Vellichor.

Increased Ability Scores: Strength, Dexterity, Charisma

Archetypes: Aberrant loudmouth (chaotic), unphased sage (neutral), valiant knight (lawful)

Languages: Celestial, Common, Infernal, Sylvan

Character Prompts: The following prompts can be elaborated on with your GM:

- Rats deBatz, mouse knight of nature, tasked with destroying a mysterious threat known as the seeds of chaos
- Dartologian, will-o'-wisp sage of knowledge, enlisted to coerce the titans to sing the Jotun Hymn and prevent the giant onslaught
- Reno S'marpee, the doll warrior of stars who must ignite the seven lights to restore peace to the land

OGRES

Somebody once told the world that ogres knew only hunger and marauding. They have no lands to call their home and fight to maintain any comfort or routine they've claimed for themselves. Ogres are even forsaken by the god of the giants, and languish below hill giants at the bottom of their social structure.

There's more to the ogre's story when the layers are peeled back.

Ogres stand nearly ten feet tall and their skin tones trend towards pale yellows, greens, browns, and purples. They possess an incredibly intricate musculature, allowing them to express a variety of subtle feelings and expressions that words can't capture. Their bodies burn energy at a breakneck pace, and many ogres need twelve hours of sleep to stay healthy (though adventuring ogres learn to adapt to the sleeping schedules of their fellow party members).

Ogre families typically stay small to make the best use of resources around them. However, some ogres settle within big gnome societies, offering the gnomes protection and helping with their infrastructure efforts. Ogres often take up performative wrestling, firework tossing, and the culinary arts when their needs are met.

Ogres have a unique emotion for setting off on adventure best described as a "happy frown." Little can stop an ogre from going after big dreams.

OGRE TRAITS

As an ogre, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. Ogres reach full maturity at 6 years old and can live to just beyond 100 years.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Large (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 40 feet.



Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Giant Toss. As a bonus action, you can throw a willing creature within 5 feet of you or a creature grappled by you a number of feet equal to 10 times the number of size categories smaller the target is than you (minimum 0). The creature lands on their feet.

Ogre Load. Your speed is unaffected by dragging or carrying a grappled creature one or more size categories smaller than you.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice.

BUILDING OGRE CHARACTERS

You can use these sample aspects to help create an ogre.

Names: Ogre names are simple and guttural words derived from Giant, such as Bror, Fruddin, and Zog.

Increased Ability Scores: Strength, Constitution, Charisma

Archetypes: Honest gambler (lawful), quiet giant (neutral), thrill-seeking instigator (chaotic)

Languages: Common, Giant, Gnomish, Goblin

Character Prompts: The following prompts can be elaborated on with your GM:

- Bog Bog, an oracle of the god of the giants, who needs to warn the cloud giants of their vision of a kingdom hurtling towards the ground
- Shump, a reclusive wax sculptor who wants to save their forest home from an encroaching eldritch blight
- Zoodoo, a professional wrestler looking to someday face the strongest fighter in front of a live audience

PIXIES

Rarely standing taller than a lark, diminutive pixies of the Feywild embody the impressions outsiders have of fey creatures: childlike, mischievous, and brimming with magic. These fairies flit through forests and over fields, spreading their pixie dust across plants to help them bloom. But given the pixies' exceptional ability to magically conceal themselves, their splendor can be easy to miss.

When pixies want to be seen, they appear as miniature elves with butterfly wings growing from their backs. A pixie's hair, skin, and wings take on fantastic, radiant colors and patterns depending on the environment where they were born; an arctic pixie might feature icy blue colors and furry wings, whereas an orange desert pixie could be covered in a dizzying display of red dots. Each new pixie looks radically different from the last, even when fey are directly related.

Unlike their more reclusive sprite cousins, pixies are known as socialites within the Feywild. Fraternizing with other fey allows them to generate natural energy. When stagnant or dull periods of life drag on for too long, pixies find it hard to resist a small prank on an unsuspecting target to kickstart some chaos.

A pixie might adventure at the request of a superior archfey, for the excitement of exploring a new world, or to tip the scales of an orderly society. While adventuring, most pixies prefer to use magic to tackle dangerous encounters instead of fighting outside their weight class. However, the might of any powerful fairy knight ready to lay down their life for a larger cause shouldn't be discounted.

PIXIE TRAITS

As a pixie, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Age. Pixies reach maturity around 20 years old and don't have a life expectancy. Many pixies meet their end around 300 to predators or disease.

Creature Type. You are a Fey.

Size. Your size is Tiny (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 10 feet, and you have a flying speed of 30 feet.

Fairy Spry. If you are sharing the space with another creature, you can attempt to hide as that creature obscures you.

Pixie Dust. As an action or bonus action on your turn, you can emit a cloud of dust that covers a creature you touch. Until the start of your next turn, the target can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to one ability check, attack roll, or damage roll of its choice. The dust then disappears.

You can use this trait a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak one language of your choice.

BUILDING PIXIE CHARACTERS

You can use these sample aspects to help create a pixie.

Names: Pixies use playful, nature-centric nicknames, such as "Babybell," "Dandy," and "Hollykiss" to hide their fey names from being used to hurt them.

Increased Ability Scores: Dexterity, Wisdom, Charisma

Archetypes: Heart of the glade (lawful), mischievous prankster (chaotic), sleepy dilettante (neutral)

Languages: Common, Druidic, Elvish, Sylvan



Character Prompts: The following prompts can be elaborated on with your GM:

- “Honey Honey,” an unseelie court miscreant who was given mysterious seeds by an archfey and wants to plant them across the land to see what happens
- Penet, a long-abandoned familiar out to erase their fey name from their old companion’s spellbook and make a new nickname for themselves
- “Wintersprigg,” a seelie court dancer tasked with teaching their dance to the Summer Lord

VARIANT OPTIONS

Every lineage is lined with people of all shapes and sizes. Elves have stood as tall as young dwarves, dragonborn have met eyes with driders, and humans have risen to every occasion of disaster at multiple heights.

Gnomes

One of the most proliferative, yet rarely encountered, gnomes are the garden variety. Tiny garden gnomes hide in plain sight amid flower fields and toadstools, seeing to the health and vibrancy of the rolling plains they call home. Making contact with folks other than bugs and little animals might jeopardize the safety of their large families, but a garden gnome would be hard-pressed to turn down the call to adventure when a threat shows its face.

GARDEN GNOME TRAITS

As a gnome, you have the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character’s ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Tiny (see “Special Size Rules”).

Speed. Your walking speed is 20 feet.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Airpedal. You fall at a rate of 20 feet per round. Before landing, you can use your reaction to take no damage as a result of falling.

Gnome Cunning. You have advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against magic.

Nature’s Blessing. You know the *druidcraft* cantrip.

Plant Bloom. As an action or a bonus action on your turn, you can instantly conjure a flower at your feet. The flower’s bloom launches you up to 20 feet in a direction of your choice.

Once you use this trait, you can’t use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. (Sample Languages: Common, Dwarvish, Gnomish, Sylvan)

HALFLINGS

Every five hundred years, a halfling experiences a phenomenon shared by few others before them: a growth spurt.

Perhaps a tincture of giant heritage can be traced through their lineage, or a god found an opportunity to leave any sort of impact on the impenetrably serendipitous people. Whatever the reason, the halfling becomes a one-and-a-halfling, with stature and weal invaluable for both small, secluded settlements and the bigger world beyond.

ONE-AND-A-HALFLING TRAITS

Your halfling character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Large (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 30 feet.

Lucky. When you roll a 1 on an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, you can reroll the die and must use the new roll.

Brave. You have advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Fluke. Whenever you are hit with an attack and a creature other than the attacker is within 5 feet of you, you can use your reaction to make either a Wisdom or Charisma saving throw (your choice) to have the attack target the other creature instead. The DC for the saving throw is equal to the result of the attack roll.

Once you successfully use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. (Sample Languages: Common, Goblin, Halfling, Undercommon)

TIEFLINGS

Archfiends aren't the sole progenitors of tiefling heritage. Fiends of all ranks and power can leave their mark on a family with the right contract, even including a lowly imp or a bullish balor, which result in implings and beeflings, respectively.

These fiendish influences have a more dramatic impact on tieflings. The appearance is often monstrous, closer to that of the fiend than the parents. Tiny, winged implings might end up needing doll clothing, whereas Large beeflings do their best not to melt their beds.

IMPLING TRAITS

Your tiefling character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Tiny (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 20 feet, and you have a flying speed of 30 feet.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Hellish Resistance. You have resistance to fire damage.

Infernal Legacy. You know the *thaumaturgy* cantrip. Starting at 3rd level, you can cast the *invisibility* spell on yourself with this trait. Once you cast that spell with this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest. You can also cast it using any spell slots you have of 2nd level or higher.

Spite. Whenever you touch a creature or hit with a melee attack, you can cause the target to make a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes an additional 1d4 poison damage whenever it takes damage from a successful attack for 1 minute. The DC for this trait equals 10 + your Proficiency bonus.

Once you successfully use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. (Sample Languages: Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Undercommon)

BEEFLING TRAITS

Your tiefling character has the following traits.

Ability Score Increase. When determining your character's ability scores, increase one score by 2 and increase a different score by 1, or increase three different scores by 1.

Creature Type. You are a Humanoid.

Size. Your size is Large (see "Special Size Rules").

Speed. Your walking speed is 35 feet.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You discern colors in that darkness only as shades of gray.

Hellish Resistance. You have resistance to fire damage.

Infernal Legacy. You know the *thaumaturgy* cantrip. Starting at 3rd level, you can cast the *misty step* spell with this trait. Once you cast that spell with this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest. You can also cast it using any spell slots you have of 2nd level or higher.

Overheat. As an action or bonus action on your turn, you can make your body incredibly hot to the touch for 1 minute. Whenever a creature touches you or makes a successful melee attack against you while within 5 feet of you, the creature takes fire damage equal to 1d4 + your Constitution modifier.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak two languages of your choice. (Sample Languages: Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Undercommon).

BOTANICAL UNDEAD

DENIZENS OF THE CORRUPTED FOREST

by Gwendolyn Marshall

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN
THE STAIN OF THE UNDEAD
SPREADS TO PLANT LIFE?
FROM THE POISONED
EARTH RISE FIVE FOUL
FLORAL FOES!**

THE CORRUPTED FOREST

The Corrupted Forest is a long-forgotten battlefield where druids once waged war against an army of necromancers. Thousands fell to foul magics, only to be buried in mass graves and forgotten. Centuries later, the battlefield is now a sickly forest, where roots and vines intertwine with undead flesh and bone, as necromantic energy despoils the very soil and corrupts each leaf and twig.

This article contains a location and a series of encounters for 8th-level characters that you can drop into your campaign. The characters could journey through the forest to reach their next destination, or a local community might entreat them to clear the corruption.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The decay of undeath that lingers in the forest's plants creates unique environmental effects throughout the Corrupted Forest.

DIFFICULT TERRAIN

The huge, twisted roots of the dense forest, along with the thick drapery of hanging vines, make overland travel difficult. A creature that doesn't reside in the Corrupted Forest moves through the forest at half their usual travel pace, including flying creatures if they are beneath the forest's canopy. When such a creature makes a weapon attack and rolls a 1 on the attack roll, it becomes snagged on thorny vines and is restrained until the end of its next turn.

Moreover, the very trees seem to impede creatures that are hostile to the forest's Undead denizens. Creatures that flee from the Undead might find that the ground becomes difficult terrain for them but not their Undead pursuers, and those who take to the trees might fall when branches suddenly snap and drop them to the forest floor.

ILLUMINATION

The forest is filled with sickly trees, many of them dead, with thick vines strangling their trunks and dangling from their branches. Even at midday, the forest beneath the thick canopy is only dimly lit at night, even a full moon can't penetrate the foliage, leaving the area in total darkness after sunset.

MIASMA OF DECAY

The air in the Corrupted Forest carries the scent of rot and death, making the simple act of catching your breath more challenging. Whenever a creature uses a Hit Die to recover hit points during a short rest in the forest, it rolls the die twice and uses the lower result. After a creature finishes a long rest in the forest, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain a level of exhaustion.

CORRUPTED FOREST LOCATIONS

The Corrupted Forest is about ten miles across in all directions and requires at least a day of travel to cross due to the difficult terrain. Two particular locations drive the corruption that spreads throughout the forest.

The stat blocks for creatures mentioned below can be found at the end of this article.

THE BLIGHTED HOLLOW

At the center of the Corrupted Forest is a small, bowl-shaped hollow 100 feet across, ringed by large dead trees. Only the withered remains of vegetation stick up from

oily black soil in the hollow. The stench of decay is strong here, and the whole area is desecrated ground; in the wake of the long-ago battle that was the forest's downfall, this site became an enormous mass grave.

Until the ground here is consecrated (see "Clearing the Corruption"), a **shambling corpse mound** emerges from the ground when Small or larger creatures that aren't Undead venture into the area for the first time each day. Due to the lingering desecration, this shambling corpse mound has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns Undead. At the GM's discretion, the shambling corpse mound is accompanied by a number of **thorn skeletons** equal to the number of characters minus one.



THE STRANGLLED SPRING

About two miles north of the Blighted Hollow, a valiant spring bubbles up from the sick earth. Some say the spring was once the center of a druid's grove and is all that remains of their nurturing presence. The water the Strangled Spring produces is clear and untainted, though it quickly takes on a viscous consistency and rotten smell once it touches the ground to form a struggling stream. This rivulet gradually disperses into the muddy black soil, and the forest itself absorbs what little vitality the spring brings. Drinking the water at the source before it touches the ground reduces the drinker's level of exhaustion by 1, though a creature can only gain this benefit once every 24 hours. A creature that drinks the water downstream after

it has touched the ground must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour.

Approaching the spring causes **fungal zombies** and **vine ghosts** to rise out of the thick mud around the spring and attack any creatures they can see that aren't Undead. For parties of four or fewer characters, one vine ghast arises. For parties of five or more, two do. Add enough fungal zombies to make the total number of foes in this encounter equal to the number of characters.

If the corruption is cleared from the forest (see "Clearing the Corruption" below), the spring surges with new vitality and clean water begins to flow in a stream southward to the once-Blighted Hollow, filling it and forming a placid pool.



CLEARING THE CORRUPTION

If the characters wish to rid the forest of its corruption, they must visit both locations above and destroy the undead they encounter there. Then they must perform an act of consecration at both locations, via the *remove curse* spell. More powerful spells that can purify an area, like *hallow* or *wish*, work as well. At the GM's discretion, holy water and good intentions (along with combat against the undead) might be enough.

Once the second act of consecration has occurred at either location, one of the forest's seemingly dead trees creaks to unlife. This **treant zombie** attacks the characters. If the characters have an easy time with this combat, a second treant zombie emerges from the wood and joins the first.

Because the treant zombie in the forest is the result of a mass death from necrotic magic, the echoes of those who died linger within it. When the treant zombie animates and at the beginning of each its turn, all creatures that aren't undead within 60 feet of the treant zombie must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be deafened until the treant zombie is destroyed. At the GM's discretion, other undead lurking in the underbrush can use this distraction to ambush the characters.

Once all undead are destroyed and the grounds consecrated, the forest and its unhappy spirits can finally rest. The air clears, the light from the sky penetrates the gloom, and the ground becomes navigable as the environmental effects disperse. Whether new, living plants someday regrow here is up to the GM.



NEW CREATURES

The following five creatures that populate the Corrupted Forest are each a different mixture of flesh plant matter animated by necromancy.

CREATURE TYPES

The creatures in this article have “Plant/Undead” listed as their creature type. They are subject to effects that target or include Plants as well as those that target or apply to Undead. For example, since they’re Plants, they take maximum damage from the blight spell, but they’re also affected by the cleric’s Turn Undead feature.

FUNGAL ZOMBIE

A fungal zombie is a corpse rife with fungal infestation and redolent with the smell of rot. Clumps of mold and small mushrooms cover what remains of the corpse’s decaying skin. A fungal zombie instinctively knows to move near as many foes as possible, use its bonus action to spew decay, and then make a Slam attack, favoring foes who have been poisoned by the vomit as targets.

FUNGAL ZOMBIE

Medium Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 12 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 51 (6d8 + 24)

SPEED 20 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 17 (+3) | 6 (-2) | 18 (+4) | 3 (-4) | 6 (-2) | 2 (-4) |

SAVING THROWS Wis +0

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES necrotic, poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

LANGUAGES understands the languages it knew in life but can’t speak

CHALLENGE 2 (450 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

Fungal Spores. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it bursts, emitting a cloud of toxic spores. Each

creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A humanoid creature killed by this damage rises as a fungal zombie after 1 minute.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

BONUS ACTIONS

Vomit Decay (Recharge 5-6). The zombie spews a foul liquid from its rotting mouth. Each creature within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) necrotic damage and be poisoned until the end of its next turn.

REACTIONS

Fungal Regeneration. When the zombie is hit by a melee attack that deals piercing or slashing damage, it can sprout a fungal colony at the site of the wound, regaining 5 hit points.

SHAMBLING CORPSE MOUND

This horrific abomination is a pile of dead bodies that have rotted together into a mass of decaying flesh, overgrown with roots and vines that intertwine among the broken limbs, holding the corpses together. The creak of straining wood and the sickening crack of snapping, rotten bone punctuates the creature's movements.

SHAMBLING CORPSE MOUND

Large Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 152 (16d10 + 64)

SPEED 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 21 (+5) | 8 (-1) | 19 (+4) | 3 (-4) | 10 (+0) | 3 (-4) |

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, fire, lightning

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES necrotic, poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, poisoned

SENSES blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

LANGUAGES —

CHALLENGE 7 (2,900 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +3

Disgorge Skeletons (1/Day). When the shambling corpse mound drops below half its hit point maximum (76 hit points), it disgorges 1d4 **thorn skeletons** into unoccupied spaces within 5 feet of it. The thorn skeletons take their turns immediately after the shambling corpse mound.

Necrotic Absorption. Whenever the shambling corpse mound is subjected to necrotic damage, it takes no damage and regains a number of hit points equal to the necrotic damage dealt.

Putrescent Aura. Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the shambling corpse mound must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be incapacitated until the start of its next turn. On a successful save, the creature is immune to any shambling corpse mound's Putrescent Aura for 24 hours. Constructs, undead, and creatures that are immune to poison damage or the poisoned condition automatically succeed on this saving throw.

Turn Resistance. The shambling corpse mound has advantage on saving throws against effects that turn Undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shambling corpse mound makes two slam attacks against the same target. If both attacks hit a Medium or smaller target, the target is grappled (escape DC 15), and the shambling corpse mound can use its Engulf on the target as part of the same action.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 18 (3d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Engulf. The shambling corpse mound engulfs a Medium or smaller creature grappled by it. The engulfed target is blinded, restrained, and unable to breathe, and it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of the corpse mound's turns or take 18 (3d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the corpse mound moves, the engulfed target moves with it. If the target ends the grapple, it is no longer engulfed. The corpse mound can have only one creature engulfed at a time.

BONUS ACTIONS

Unearth Corpse. If the shambling corpse mound hasn't moved yet this round and stands on nonmagical, unworked earth, it can sink its roots into the soil and draw up a rotting corpse or dead organic matter from the ground, incorporating it into its body. When it does so, its movement drops to 0 until the start of its next turn, and it regains 11 (2d6 + 4) hit points.

REACTIONS

Tripping Roots. When a Medium or smaller creature moves within 5 feet of the shambling corpse mound, the corpse mound can use one of its roots to attempt to trip the creature. The creature must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

THORN SKELETON

As the bodies of the warriors who battled in the Corrupted Forest rotted, flesh falling from bone, thorny vines twined around and through their skeletons, creating a dangerous, sinister amalgamation. The tips of the thorny vines sway around the skeleton's form and occasionally sprout small, blood red flowers.

THORN SKELETON

Medium Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 13 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 52 (7d8 + 21)

SPEED 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 17 (+3) | 12 (+1) | 17 (+3) | 4 (-3) | 8 (-1) | 3 (-4) |

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES blinded, deafened, exhaustion, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

LANGUAGES understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

CHALLENGE 2 (450 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

Thorny. At the start of each of its turns, the skeleton deals 3 (1d6) piercing damage to any creature grappling it or that it is grappling.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The skeleton makes one Ensnaring Slam attack and uses Thorn Burst once.

Ensnaring Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the skeleton can automatically hit the target with its Ensnaring Slam. The skeleton can have up to two creatures grappled in this way.

Thorn Burst. Thorns erupt from the skeleton. Each creature of the skeleton's choice within 10 feet of it must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

BONUS ACTIONS

Poisoned Bloom (1/Day). A blood-red flower sprouts on the thorn skeleton and opens with an explosion of spores. Each creature within 10 feet of the thorn skeleton must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned this way, a creature can't regain hit points. A creature poisoned this way can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success.

TREANT ZOMBIE

A treant zombie is a massive, frightening perversion of a majestic treant. These plants once fought alongside the druids to protect their forest, but now the zombie treant yearns only to propagate the foul wood's corruption.

TREANT ZOMBIE

Huge Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 16 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 200 (16d12 + 96)

SPEED 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 25 (+7) | 6 (-2) | 23 (+6) | 8 (-1) | 14 (+2) | 8 (-1) |

DAMAGE RESISTANCES bludgeoning, necrotic, piercing

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12

LANGUAGES understands Common and Sylvan but can't speak

CHALLENGE 12 (8,400 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +4

False Appearance. While the treant zombie remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a dead tree.

Siege Monster. The treant zombie deals double damage to objects and structures.



Rotten to the Core. When the treant zombie drops below 100 hit points, it opens its trunk, allowing two **fungal zombies** to shamble out into unoccupied spaces within 5 feet of the zombie treant. The fungal zombies take their turns immediately after the treant zombie.

Turn Immunity. The treant zombie is immune to effects that turn Undead.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the treant zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the treant zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The treant zombie makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d10 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, range 60/180 ft., one target. *Hit:* 33 (4d12 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Animate Dead Trees (1/Day). The treant zombie magically animates one or two dead trees it can see within 60 feet of it. These trees have the same statistics as a treant zombie, except they have Intelligence and Charisma scores of 1, they can't speak, and they only have the Slam action option. An animated tree acts as an ally of the treant zombie. The dead tree remains animated for 1 day or until it is destroyed; until the treant zombie is reduced to 0 hit points or is more than 120 feet from the dead tree; or until the treant zombie uses a bonus action to turn it back into an inanimate tree. The tree then topples to the ground.

BONUS ACTIONS

Poisoned Fruit. The zombie treant's branches drop rotting fruit on every creature within 10 feet of it. Each target must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the treant zombie's next turn.

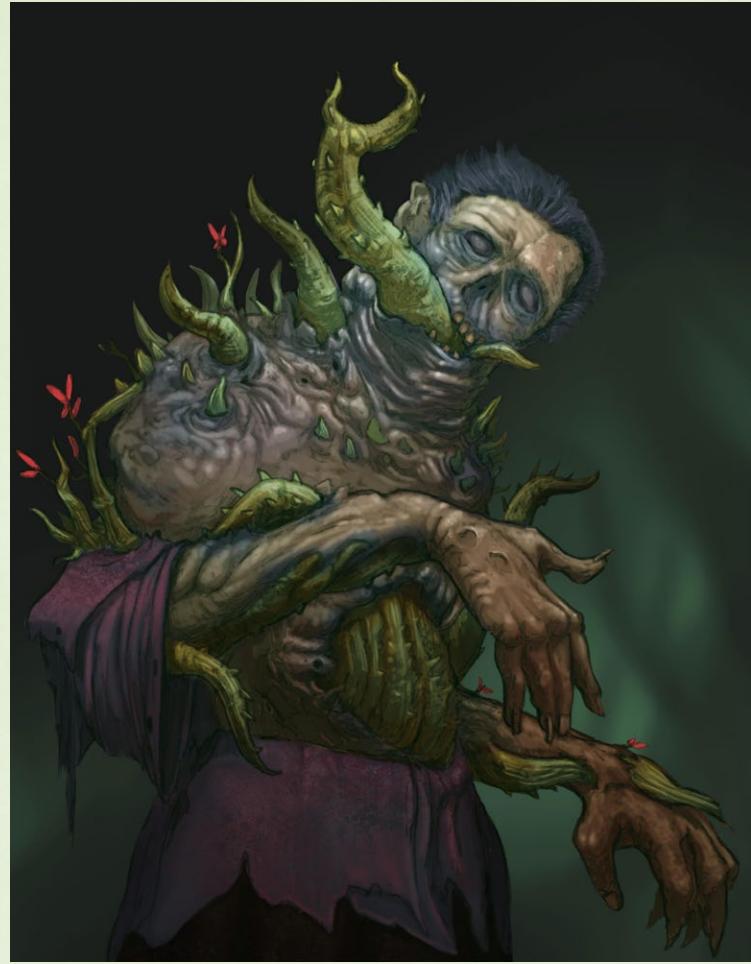
REACTIONS

Shed Branch. When a creature within 10 feet of the treant zombie hits it with a melee attack, it can drop a dead branch onto the attacker. The target must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage.

VINE GHAST

When a herd of ghouls fed on fungal zombies in the Corrupted Forest, the plants in the zombies' flesh infested the ghouls as well. Each vine ghast is a gray-skinned corpse with vines sprouting from its flesh and choking its limbs and torso. Sometimes the vines plunge into the corpse's eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, though this doesn't prevent the vine ghast from seeing—or attacking living creatures to devour their flesh.

In combat, the vine ghast attempts to grapple a target with its Tangling Vine attack, then follows up with Claw attacks to paralyze the grappled foe.



VINE GHAST

Medium Plant/Undead, Typically Chaotic Evil

ARMOR CLASS 15 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 84 (13d8 + 26)

SPEED 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 18 (+4) | 16 (+3) | 14 (+2) | 6 (-2) | 12 (+1) | 5 (-3) |

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, fire, necrotic

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

SENSES blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11

LANGUAGES understands Common but cannot speak

CHALLENGE 6 (2,300 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +3

Poisoned Sap. A creature that touches the vine ghast or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Turn Resistance. The vine ghast has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns Undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vine ghast makes one Tangling Vine attack and one Claw attack.

Tangling Vine. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the vine ghast has advantage on attack rolls against the grappled creature. The ghast has two tangling vines, each of which can grapple one target. The vine has AC 15 and can be severed by dealing 5 or more slashing damage to it on one attack. Severing the vine doesn't hurt the ghast, but it does end the grapple.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an Undead, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

THE AFTERPARTY

A MYSTERY ABOUT LEAVING HOME ... AND NOT LEAVING HOME.

by Sally Tamarkin

PEOPLE HAVE A TENDENCY TO GO AWAY ... AND I MISS THEM. AND SOMETIMES ... I WISH I COULD JUST MAKE THEM STOP GOING AWAY.

—DAWN SUMMERS (*BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, “OLDER AND FAR AWAY”)

A farewell gala goes awry in *The Afterparty*, a mystery adventure about a twisted wish and a party no one can leave. The characters race against the clock—and a pernicious fey force—to prevent everyone from being trapped forever. This adventure is balanced for four 3rd-level characters, but the final encounter can be adjusted for bigger or higher-level parties (see “Confrontation with Mire”).

Before you get started, talk to your players about the safety tools you’ll use (I suggest checking out [RPG safety tools](#) and [RPG consent checklist](#)) and make sure everyone has the same expectations for the tone and themes of the adventure. *The Afterparty* includes a pivotal moment in which the GM (temporarily) restricts the players’ agency, more than is usual in typical tabletop roleplaying games. While the text provides suggestions for helping the players still feel like they’re driving the story, some players may not be comfortable with any removal of agency, which is totally fine—an alternative path is also provided (see “Alternate Path” under “A Time for Toasts”). Clearly explain this aspect of the adventure and ask your players how they feel about it and whether they’d prefer the alternate path.

BACKGROUND

Aurelius Wray turns twenty at midnight tonight. Like their mother and their grandfather before them, Aurelius will set out at dawn on the first day of their twentieth year to begin what everyone expects to be a decorated military career, leaving behind Wray Manor and their beloved Wray Basin, the wetland just beyond their back door. Duke Cornelius Wray, Aurelius’ grandfather and only father figure, is throwing a farewell gala and invited his most influential friends and associates.

But one detail makes this farewell gala a little different than those of generations past: Aurelius dreads the idea of military service. They know they’ll miss their home and loved ones desperately, and Wray Basin has become the young noble’s favorite place to ride, collect plants, and think. While exploring the basin recently on their horse, Nibbles, Aurelius met a beautiful stranger named Fen, who introduced himself as a local birdwatcher and naturalist. In their conversation, the young noble confessed a wish to stay home—to never have to leave Wray Basin.

Unknownst to the naïve Aurelius, the enchanting birdwatcher is an illusory visage of the green hag Mire, who lives deep in the basin. Eager to sow chaos and misery, Mire delightedly interpreted the wish literally and cursed the farewell gala: no one at Wray Manor can leave.

SYNOPSIS

The characters arrive at the party either as guests or as security-for-hire. In chapter 1, they gather information about Aurelius and Wray Basin, then discover that a magical compulsion has trapped everyone inside the manor. In chapter 2, the duke offers the characters a hefty reward for figuring out why no one can leave. The characters investigate the manor, question Aurelius, and break the curse. In chapter 3, the characters and Aurelius head into the swamp to confront the hag.

NEXT-DAY OBLIGATIONS

No matter which hook you choose, have each player come up with at least one thing their character must do the next day—something they can't miss. Maybe they promised they'd deliver someone's medicine, provide help or protection, or meet with an informant. This commitment twists the knife when the characters realize they can't leave the manor. If you are playing this adventure as part of an ongoing campaign, the next-day obligations can be tied to the big bad—the clock is ticking and they have to get back out into the fight right away!

KEY NPCs

The following NPCs play pivotal roles in solving the mystery.

AURELIUS WRAY

Aurelius (they/them, age 20, human) is soft-spoken and contemplative. They spend their free time journaling or wandering Wray Basin, riding Nibbles, collecting plants, and watching for swamp birds. In most social situations, Aurelius is inattentive, preoccupied with a plant they recently collected or notes they need to make about their findings. But tonight they're more distracted than usual; their deployment is hours away, and they're terrified. Aurelius has only shared their fear with two people: their Aunt Frances (sister of the duke) and Fen.

DUKE CORNELIUS WRAY

When his beloved daughter and son-in-law died, Cornelius (he/him, age 75, human) brought their child Aurelius to Wray Manor and raised them. The duke, while not unkind, is a stern disciplinarian who believes in tradition, upholding the family name, and teaching hard, character-building lessons. He is now retired from the military but considers his time in the service the most important and influential chapter of his life, one that primed him for a successful future. Success is all he wants for his directionless, daydreamy grandchild—well, that and for the Wray line to continue its tradition of decorated military service.



ELLIOTT

Elliott (she/her, age 55, human) is a career butler who takes running Wray Manor seriously. She is snobby and looks down on anyone who isn't a noble. The butler doesn't dislike Aurelius, but feels burdened by their presence—they track in swamp mud, generate an astounding amount of laundry, and require the grooms to ready Nibbles for excursions at all hours. Elliott will be relieved when Aurelius leaves and she can reallocate the staff and resources to other things.

FEN/MIRE

Like many a green hag, there's nothing Mire (he/him, hag) enjoys more than causing chaos, especially if that chaos leads to suffering. And nothing will cause such delicious suffering as using Aurelius to unwittingly bring chaos and fear into their own household. Once misery is rampant, Mire will magically harness it to corrupt the basin, warping the flora and fauna and twisting the land into a hellscape.

As Fen, he is a handsome young man around age twenty with floppy blond hair he tosses out of his face often, a smattering of freckles across his nose, and a lopsided smile. He is always barefoot, his pant legs rolled up to his knees so they don't get wet in the swamp, and he wears a fine cloak the color of chocolate.

When the illusion fades, Mire is tall and gaunt. His green-tinged skin is always a little damp, his coarse brown cloak becomes worn and tattered, and his laughter is cruel. Since taking up residence in Wray Basin, Mire amuses himself by making Aurelius suffer. His latest gambit is one of his favorites—tricking a mark into expressing a desire, then granting the wish in the most literal and demented of ways. The hag awaits the exciting finale of this dirty ploy, but he also enjoys how the curse undoes Aurelius.

FRANCES WRAY

Cornelius's younger sister, Frances (she/her, age 72, human), is a free-spirited sailor who sails her pleasure craft, *Sappho's Embrace*, all over the world. Although she's always traveling, Frances stays in constant touch with Aurelius, stopping in ports just to pick up her mail and post letters to them. She thinks that her brother's fixation on the Wray military legacy is absurd, but has long given up on changing his mind and won't intervene on Aurelius' behalf. Still, she offers Aurelius love and support, and has come to town for their farewell gala.

STORY HOOKS

Pick one of the following story hooks to guide the characters into the adventure.

Manor Security. The duke has hired the characters as guards for the evening for 50 gp each. The characters report to Elliott, the head of the household.

Invited Guests. Characters with one of the following backgrounds are invited to the gala as guests: charlatan, city watch, entertainer, or noble. Characters with other backgrounds are guests of invited characters. Alternatively, decide with the players why the characters have been invited (likely because they are local celebrity heroes).

CHAPTER I: THE GALA

When the characters approach Wray Manor, read or paraphrase the following boxed text:

Welcome to the grand home of the Wray family: Wray Manor. It stands before a swampy wetland known as Wray Basin. Around the estate, the rich smell of wet earth fills the air. At the front door, a footman with a waterlily pinned to his chest welcomes guests with a wave and nod of his head into the manor's grand hall. When guests enter, they are handed beautiful ivory goblets of fragrant red wine. Jaunty musical stylings of a string band flow from the next room, as well as the clink of goblets, laughter and conversation, and the footfalls of household staff serving food and drink, emptying ashtrays, and aiding nobles.

The duke spared no expense for this event. He's uncorked his rarest vintages, served food and drink on dinnerware emblazoned with the Wray waterlily sigil, and hired the critically acclaimed string septet, Lyre, Lyre. His two hounds, Violet and Corky, are freshly groomed and wear kerchiefs with embroidered waterlilies around their necks as they greet guests for pets.

Toasts will begin at midnight, and in the tradition of Wray farewell galas, will continue until all those who wish to toast have done so. Once the toasts are done, likely around dawn, Aurelius will leave the manor with the guests following behind, who will see Aurelius off as the carriage takes them away, signaling the end of the party.



Elliott greets the characters in the grand hall (area M1). After orientation, the characters are free to explore the manor and mingle with key NPCs.

Unless noted otherwise, the guests use the **noble** stat block and the staff use the **commoner** stat block. Violet and Corky use the **mastiff** stat block.

ELLIOT'S REQUESTS

The characters get the following orientation from Elliott, who tells them everything they should (and shouldn't) do at the party and provides the following instructions:

TALK TO AURELIUS

Elliott requests that the characters speak to Aurelius so the young host is seen hosting as expected, saying:

"The child is more sullen than ever, gods know why, and I won't have them dulling what could be a fine affair on account of their moods. I presume they're not looking forward to the toasts—that child hates being the center of attention. Sometimes I wonder if they're a Wray at all."

ENGAGE MS. WRAY

The duke's sister, Ms. Frances Wray, is in town for the party and has been known to rile up otherwise polite guests with her rowdy, high-stakes poker games. Elliott asks the characters to engage her, which shouldn't be difficult—she is quite chatty—and steer her toward activities more befitting a party guest, sister of the duke, and person of her age, such as talking, dancing, or a harmless parlor game like Wray Wroulette (see "Appendix: Wray Wroulette").

OBSERVE THE RULES

Elliott asks the characters to obey the following rules during the party (and to enforce these rules if they were hired as guards).

No Second Floor or Cellar. Guests are free to move around the first floor, but the second floor and cellar are off-limits. If the characters were hired as security, Elliott adds, "This also goes for ... the help."

No Rear Gardens. Elliott explains that the rear gardens abut Wray Basin, and although the gardens were young Aurelius' favorite place, she discourages visiting them after dark, as "sojourns near the basin tend to be sodden, mushy affairs that result in great muddy messes."

Characters who succeed on a DC 10 Insight (Wisdom) check know there's more to Elliott's instruction about the swamp than she lets on. With convincing roleplay or a successful DC 18 Persuasion (Charisma) check, which is made with advantage if the character making the check succeeded on the Wisdom (Insight) check, Elliott reveals that for the last ten or so days, she's been hearing noises from the swamp as she does her evening chores—giggling, laughter, some squealing. She told the duke about it, but he put off anything "nonessential" until after the gala.

Elliott doesn't know that the laughter and squealing come from Mire, who has been scrying through a special "swamp rock" he gifted to Aurelius when they met in Wray Basin. Aurelius keeps the pebble on the desk in their room, and through it, Mire has watched them, soaking in their despair as they pace, weep, and stare longingly out the window, dreading their departure.

LOCATIONS

The key to solving the mystery is exploring the gala and talking to guests and staff. The following locations are keyed to the map of Wray Manor.

M1. GRAND HALL

The front door opens up into a cavernous foyer. An oil painting of the duke seated between his hounds, Corky and Violet, hangs on one wall; on another is an oil painting of the manor. The ceiling is ornately decorated with gold waterlilies, and hanging from the ceiling is a three-tiered chandelier holding dozens of candles that bathe the room in warm yellow light. A grand spiral staircase, painted bright white and also decorated with gold waterlilies, leads to the second floor.

Two guards stand at the staircase to prevent guests from going upstairs. The guards wear chain shirts under white tunics embroidered with waterlilies.

M2. KITCHEN

The kitchen is sweltering thanks to not only the ovens and stovetops all working at capacity, but also the dozen kitchen staffers buzzing about, chopping, stirring, kneading, and prepping. They wear white aprons embroidered with gold waterlilies. Household staff rush in and out, refilling empty trays with full goblets and assorted hors d'oeuvres. The smells of roasting game, sautéing garlic, and baking bread fill the room.

The staff gossip and talk shop as they work. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check overhears the head of the kitchen, Li, complain to one of the prep cooks that she hasn't slept well in almost two weeks thanks to the noises coming from Wray Basin. "Some kind of swamp hyena or a bog bird squawking in heat, who knows."

M3. STAFF QUARTERS

Located directly behind the kitchens, the staff quarters look out over the rear gardens. The room is empty, as the staff are busy working the party. This dormitory-style room has eight bunk beds, a trunk at the foot of each bed, and a small dresser at each head. The rushes on the floor are fresh, and dried flowers strung on the walls give the room a pleasant floral scent. A queen-sized bed belonging to Elliott, this one larger and plusher than the others, sits on the far wall in the center of the room. Characters who

search the quarters find staff's personal effects—books, letters, keepsakes, etc.

Cook's Journal. If the characters take time to rifle through the belongings, they find the cook's journal. A recent entry details everything they did to prepare for the gala and complains about being yelled at by Elliott, who, the cook writes, has been impatient lately. The entry concludes, "The butler found me later and apologized for shouting. Said she's been hearing noises from the swamp keeping her up all hours and her nerves are raw. Guess everyone's bothered by the noise coming from the basin."

M4. PARLOR

The parlor is hazy with smoke and full of guests mingling, drinking, and having a grand time. In the corner, two guests play speed chess while a small crowd watches, and a magician performs for a handful of onlookers. In another corner, a few guests have moved wingback chairs into a circle and are smoking cigars and chatting. At another end of the room, Frances Wray, a woman in a floor-length purple gown, plays a dice game with an excited crowd. She wears her bright blue hair in two braids and is clearly on a roll.

If the characters don't immediately engage Frances, she waves them over and asks them to join her game of Wray Roulette, a game of chance that uses dice instead of a spinning wheel (see "Appendix: Wray Roulette"). As she chats, she never stops playing, not even when she waves a server over to trade her empty ivory wine goblet for a full one. She asks the characters where they've traveled, what they think of the gala so far, and if they enjoy games of chance.

What Frances Knows. Frances easily shares her plentiful information. As a world traveler, she considers herself a collector of people and ideas. She speaks freely of her brother:

- "Cornelius has never known how to have a good time."
- "He is obsessed with the 'Wray name' and our family legacy and traditions."

She also freely speaks of Aurelius:

- "A lovely, tender child who isn't meant to wear the uniform."
- "A bit silly and more interested in plants than people—but then again, growing up with my brother, who can blame them?"
- "I do wish they'd learn to face life's challenges with a bit of grace, but I suppose they were always too sensitive for that. Not that my brother would ever notice. I've

told Cornelius that Aury isn't cut out for the military, that they'd be happy to spend their time in the basin and then off at university to study botany or whathaveyou, but of course my brother won't hear of it. 'The Wray name blah blah blah....'"

Characters who succeed on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check learn the following from Frances:

- She knows that Aurelius has always been sensitive, but she's never seen them this upset, saying, "I half expected them to run away or do something otherwise dramatic before tonight. Who knows? Perhaps they still will. It's early yet."
- "My brother believes the military will provide Aurelius with friends, colleagues, and a purpose, but he doesn't understand that Aurelius only needs Nibbles and the basin ... although they do seem quite interested in a young man—a fellow birdwatcher, you see—he met in the basin the other day."

M5. LIBRARY

Bookshelves packed with tomes, mostly political and military history, line three walls of this impressive library. These well-worn historical volumes are littered with notes in the margins and dog-eared pages. A few clusters of guests chat quietly, discussing literature and poetry and admiring the duke's collection.

One dusty shelf holds a selection of books on botany, swamp flora and fauna, and the natural world. A character who studies this section and succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the books on this shelf are pristine. No page corners are turned down, and no notes are written in the margins. If a character opens one of these books, a sealed card falls out, which you can find below and as a handout in the appendix.

Dear Grandfather,

This is my favorite book on swamp mosses. I met the author, T.K. Burch, when she was in town, and I asked her to sign this edition so that I could gift it to you. I think once you read about the beautiful rhythms of the swamp's ecosystem, you'll understand what I love so much about Wray Basin and why I hope to stay here forever.

With love and admiration,

Aurelius

Every book in the nature section holds a similar note. Aurelius gave the duke the books in the hopes they'd be a link of understanding between them, but none of these tomes have never been cracked open.

M6. BALLROOM

The ballroom is the grandest room in the manor. Huge picture windows overlook the rear gardens. Lit torches line the wall and bathe the room in a warm light. Lyre, Lyre, a seven-piece lyre band plays in the corner and dozens of people dance alone on the floor, their shoes tapping the marble floors. Staff zigzag the room, keeping glasses full for the upcoming toasts. Aurelius is in the corner, nursing their wine and swaying in place to the music. Occasionally, a guest approaches and Aurelius receives them with pleasantries, but for the most part, the young noble is alone, a distant and sad look in their eyes.

If the characters approach Aurelius (scout), the young noble is warm, though shy and distracted. If asked about their military service, Aurelius repeats the duke's talking points, saying, "The Wrays do not run away from duty, we march toward it," or "Growing up means making sacrifices," or "There's no honor so great as donning the uniform." A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check notices Aurelius merely repeats their grandfather's messaging and doesn't believe it.

Instead, Aurelius shifts the conversation to speak of Wray Basin. They talk about a new species of moss they found and how they hope they get to make notes before they leave, saying, "I'm calling it wintermoss. It's as white and fluffy as snow. I hope to get back to the cellar to finish up my notes." Then they speak excitedly of the rare swamp birds and the bog stork nest they just encountered. Bog storks, Aurelius explains, have beautiful reddish-orange and brown plumage in the fall, white in winter, and green in spring and summer. They produce a small leather-bound notebook and show their sketches.

If the characters listen to Aurelius talk about Wray Basin, the young noble reveals their true feelings about their departure to a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If a character demonstrated interest in or knowledge of plants, botany, wetlands, or any related topic (either through roleplay or succeeding on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature), Wisdom (Survival), or Charisma (Deception) check), the DC for the Charisma (Persuasion) check for that character to convince Aurelius to open up is 12.

If Aurelius opens up, read the following:

The young noble reveals that though they're scared of enlisting, they dread leaving Wray Manor more. They get teary-eyed talking about how much they'll miss their horse Nibbles and spotting swamp birds in the basin. They're even going to miss the duke who, despite being a real hardass, is the only parent they've ever had.

They admit that they have few friends aside from Nibbles and their aunt, but they recently met a fellow birdwatcher named Fen in the basin. They were looking forward to exploring the swamp with him, but they doubt they'll ever really talk to him again. Aurelius caps the thought by saying, "Fen is the first person I really opened up to, especially about leaving Wray Manor ... besides Aunt Frances, I guess."

APPROACHING CORNELIUS

If the characters approach Cornelius to lobby on Aurelius's behalf, Cornelius laughs off their concerns, insisting he knows his grandchild and they *want* to carry on the Wray name and military service. If the characters approach Cornelius about this after the curse has been revealed, he insists the conversation be tabled until the curse is resolved. If the characters escalate and threaten Cornelius or the guests, he relents and promises to hear Aurelius' concerns in exchange for the adventurers breaking the curse.

TIME FOR TOASTS

Once the characters speak Aurelius and Frances, they have the information they need for the next part of the story and you can make this transition when appropriate. If the characters want to explore, play Wray Wroulette, dance, or otherwise enjoy the party, they can, but once the clock strikes midnight, household staff usher guests into the ballroom for toasts.

The band has finished its set. Three quick raps announce the duke standing on the bandstand beside a white grand piano carved with waterlilies. Aurelius sits beside their uncle in a tall, straight-backed, white wooden chair.

The duke begins, "Tradition. Duty. Service. These are the principles that the Wrays have lived by for generations. And today we toast my grandchild Aurelius, who carries on the Wray legacy. Let the toasts begin."

Throughout the toasts, Aurelius appears embarrassed, touched, and deeply sad, their eyes wet with tears. The toasts last until dawn breaks, and when the sun rises, the duke takes the floor once more and announces, "And now, in grand Wray tradition, we accompany my grandchild to their carriage, which waits out front to whisk them away to their future."

One after another, guests approach the front door. Each time, they reach for the doorknob, only to seemingly change their mind at the last minute. The duke and Aurelius exchanged confused looks—just outside, Aurelius' carriage waits to take them away, but no one will open the door. Elliott pushes through the crowd and raises her hand to the doorknob, only to pause. Her arm drops.

The guests whisper to each other, urgency rising as more and more people try the door. Like Elliott, everyone drops their hand before they can open it. The characters can overhear NPCs worrying:

- "I have a breakfast engagement, I really must be going. But I ... I can't."
- "I'm meant to be downtown by luncheon, but something impels me to remain."
- "My father expects me at his shop this morning, but I find I have the urge to stay inside. I don't loathe my job, I swear."
- "All I've thought about all night is getting out of these shoes and into my nightclothes. *Ugh*, why can't I open the door?!"

If the characters attempt to open any door or window—or make any other potential egress from the manor—they feel an overwhelming urge to stay inside and can't go through with it. A character who attempts escape via destruction of the manor has the same result. Let the players know they can narrate attempts to escape, but none of their efforts will succeed. Allow the players to describe what it looks like as the characters give up mid-effort.

The urge doesn't completely erase the will to leave. The guests at the party—and the characters—feel they should want to leave, and on some level do want to leave, but

at the same time, something is pulling them to stay. That pull is so strong that they simply can't overcome it.

Because this plot twist removes some agency from the characters, give them opportunities to make the scene their own. Ask them to reveal what they planned to do the day after the party and how they feel when they realize they don't have the will to leave. Allowing them control of their emotional states and their failed attempts to leave the manor (which are fun to narrate for many players) leaves them agency in a situation where it has been taken from them.

ALTERNATE PATH

If you don't want to remove the characters' agency by trapping them in the manor, you can tweak this part of the adventure. In this scenario, Aurelius' wish was that their friends and family wouldn't be able to leave them. Because the characters were unknown to Aurelius before tonight, Mire's curse doesn't affect them, and they can open any door or window and leave the manor. They can even open any point of egress for other partygoers—however, the guests only stare longingly at the opening and mutter something about how they wish they wanted to leave.

CHAPTER 2: WE LIVE HERE NOW

The duke and Elliott ask the characters—as the only adventurers present—to investigate and do whatever it takes to free everyone. The duke doesn't offer a reward, but if the characters ask for one, he promises they'll be rewarded handsomely: 100 gp each. He grants the characters full access to the manor, including the basement and bedrooms on the second floor.

The key to understanding the situation is finding the pebble on Aurelius' desk in area A8 and discovering its true purpose. The characters can find a clue in the cellar (area M10) that leads to the pebble.

M7. CORNELIUS'S BEDROOM

This room is lavishly furnished. The shelves and walls are lined with awards and hunting trophies. On the desk are neat piles of papers and books—ledgers, correspondence, and a draft of a memoir. Over the fireplace is a fine rapier of military issue. It's been buffed to a high shine and a leather tassel, recently oiled, hangs from the hilt. Sitting on the mantle is an array of medals for bravery in combat, each free of dust and labeled with a small plaque noting a date and the name of a battle.

M8. AURELIUS'S BEDROOM

As you enter this bedroom, the smell of damp earth surrounds you. A four-poster bed in the corner is surrounded by potted plants, jars of swamp mosses, and notebook pages filled with field drawings. Papers and vegetation clippings are scattered across a large desk at the back of the room.

A character who explores the room notices that the only item on the desk that isn't papers or plant matter is a pebble on top of a small light blue silk cushion. The *detect magic* spell reveals that this pebble emanates auras of divination and enchantment magic. See "The Pebble" for more information.

M9. GUEST BEDROOM

The guest room is finely appointed. The desk holds only a travel journal and to-do lists for various ports of call. There's nothing of interest for the characters here.

M10. CELLAR

The duke stores food, wine, and firewood on labeled, organized shelves in his cellar. The dirt floor is well swept, and a large bowl of potpourri in the center of the room makes the area smell much less musty than a typical basement.

Lately, Aurelius has been coming to the cellar to journal when they want to get away from the cackling laughter they hear late at night in their bedroom. They use a sealed barrel as a desk and stack two crates to use as a chair, and a character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that in the far corner of the cellar, a barrel and a few crates are askew. If they search the area, they find that Aurelius has shoved their journal underneath the barrel. The journal is full of sketches of people and things they encounter with short descriptions of each, including:

- A bird with long legs and a sharp beak labeled "Swamp stork, sighted feeding"
- The duke and his hounds labeled "Back from the hunt"
- A furious Elliott with her hands on her hips and her brow furrowed labeled "Mud in the scullery once again"
- A handsome man about Aurelius' age with floppy hair and a wide-open smile labeled "New friend!" This entry is dated two weeks ago.
- A sketch of the magic pebble labeled "fragile, leave on desk, what is it??" This entry is dated nine days before the gala.

THE PEBBLE

This small, grey rock was given to Aurelius by Fen, the handsome young birder Aurelius met in Wray Basin. Fen told Aurelius that it's a rare "swamp rock" that, if studied closely with a magnifying glass and other instruments, can provide information about the ecological history of the basin. Unbeknownst to Aurelius, the stone is enchanted with Mire's divination and enchantment magic. The hag uses it to watch Aurelius' mounting misery and weave his enchantment spell over the guests. A character who casts *identify* on the pebble knows it is the source of the curse keeping everyone in Wray Manor from leaving, and that it allows whoever created it to magically spy on everyone in the building. Anything and anyone inside Wray Manor is subject to the curse, which means that objects inside, including the pebble, cannot leave or be removed from the manor.

WHAT AURELIUS KNOWS

If the characters question Aurelius about the pebble, the young noble shares the following information.

Fen gave the pebble to Aurelius nine days ago, and it's been on their desk ever since. They've been studying it daily, but have yet to learn anything from it. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (History, Investigation, or Nature) check knows nothing about the history of the swamp can be gleaned from this rock.

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes Aurelius isn't sharing everything about the pebble. Characters who took the time to talk about swamp flora and fauna while meeting Aurelius have advantage on the check. If pressed about withholding information, Aurelius reveals that Fen insisted the pebble is extraordinarily delicate, and that every time Aurelius asked Fen why they haven't been able to glean any information from studying the rock, the birdwatcher shrugged off the question, muttering that the pebble should remain out on a surface in Aurelius' quarters to make it easier to observe.

FOR SCRYING OUT LOUD

The pebble has AC 17, 5 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. A character who holds the pebble and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check can speak to Mire. The hag teases their villainous plot (see "Fen/Mire") and dares the characters to face him in the basin, which is now his turf.

Once the pebble is destroyed, the curse is lifted and the occupants of the manor once again have the will to leave. Any creature within 15 feet of the pebble when it is destroyed must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 11 (2d10) psychic damage. The creature who destroys the pebble also hears a loud, shrill shriek inside

their head accompanied by sharp pain and takes an extra 2 (1d4) psychic damage.

Until the pebble is destroyed, the creature holding it hears Mire's faraway laughter cackling from the basin whenever anyone expresses confusion or frustration in the pebble's presence. If the players are stuck figuring this out, have one of the NPCs express anger about the situation in front of the rock to help the characters connect the dots.

CHAPTER 3: TO THE SWAMP!

The characters have likely figured out that Fen is to blame for the enchantment. If the characters aren't motivated to hunt Mire down now that the curse is broken, the duke offers them 300 gp each for Fen's capture. Additionally, Aurelius begs the characters to dispose of Fen—they feel responsible for the curse and can't stand the thought of their beloved swamp being home to evil. Aurelius (scout) insists on joining the characters and can lead them into the swamp to where they met Fen. The duke thinks this is a splendid idea, and a great way for Aurelius to experience the thrill of the chase before their military career begins.

As the characters make their way to the basin, the skies darken and the air gets noticeably colder. Once they leave the rear gardens and enter the swamp proper, read the following:

The basin is a forested wetland under about a foot of water thanks to recent rains. A sticky mud with a rotten smell blankets the swamp floor, making your march unpleasant and difficult. The basin is dense with tall, reedy grasses and trees with skinny, gnarled trunks. A viscous green liquid drips down the trunks and into the mud, making it even stickier. Rocks covered in various mosses dot the terrain. Standing water gathers in some of the deeper pockets of mud, and the normally bright white lily pads on the surface of the water have started to blacken and dry at the edges. A chorus of ribbiting frogs rises around you, but their croaks are shrill and high-pitched.

TRACKING MIRE

Once the characters reach Aurelius and Fen's meeting place, they can follow Mire's tracks through the mud with a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a success, the characters reach Mire's location in four hours. On a failure, the characters take an entire day to reach Mire, and they each gain a level of exhaustion by the time they reach the hag. Aurelius is too scared to lead the way, but if the char-

acters ask for their help, they'll help as best they can and the characters gain advantage on the Wisdom (Survival) check to track Mire.

The deeper the characters go into the swamp, the darker and colder it gets, the tree canopy and vegetation thickening around them. . Aurelius starts muttering under their breath, "This isn't right. This isn't right. This isn't ... my swamp ... my swamp" They are shaking, pale, and terrified.

Before the characters find Mire, they hear him. The swamp winds carry his taunts about "falling for his little tricks," and he mocks the characters by imitating the voice of those who spoke in the magic pebble's presence. If Aurelius is with the characters, Mire shouts admonishments at them in the duke's voice about how they will disappoint the Wray family.



SWAMP ENCOUNTERS

To increase the difficulty of this adventure or zhuzh up the characters' time in the swamp, you can add an optional combat encounter or two by rolling on the Mire's Servants table. The characters experience these encounters before facing the hag.

MIRE'S SERVANTS

| d6 | ENCOUNTER |
|----|-----------------------|
| 1 | 1d3 + 1 giant spiders |
| 2 | 2d6 + 1 stirges |
| 3 | 1d6 + 4 giant lizards |
| 4 | 1d4 + 2 crocodiles |
| 5 | 1d3 + 1 ghouls |
| 6 | 1d3 + 1 giant toads |

CONFRONTATION WITH MIRE

When the characters reach Mire, a green hag, his Illusionary Appearance action gives him Fen's guise, and he sits on a fallen log, bare feet dangling in the murky water. He cuts an apple with a blade, stabbing each segment and delicately biting it off the tip of the knife. Two ettercaps loyal to Mire hide in trees above the hag and can be noticed by a character who succeeds on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check.

When Fen notices Aurelius, he shrieks, "Another souvenir for you, dear one!" As he says this, Mire reveals his true form: tall and gaunt, with greenish, pallid, damp skin and a ragged brown cloak. Fen's thick, bouncy blond hair turns long, grey, and stringy. After transforming, he cackles and raises his knife.

When combat begins, Mire hurls the poison-coated knife at Aurelius with a +6 bonus to the attack roll. If it hits, the attack deals 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage and Aurelius is poisoned for 1 hour. While poisoned in this way, Aurelius is unconscious.

The ettercaps open with their Web action to tie up melee combatants, then drop from the trees to interpose themselves between Mire and the characters. You can increase the number of ettercaps based on the number of characters or have more drop down from the trees later in the battle if the encounter is too easy.

Mire is delighted to fight the party and gleefully fights to the death. The hag targets characters from behind the ettercaps with the *vicious mockery* spell, then uses his claws to attack any character that closes the distance.

CHAPTER 4: AFTER THE AFTERPARTY

The confrontation with Mire can end in a few different ways. If your outcome is different, feel free to come up with your own ending by selecting details from the outcomes that fit your story.

MIRE'S ENDGAME

If Mire is defeated, the swamp returns to its former, uncursed glory. The trees stop leaking viscous slime and the canopy opens up, allowing the sun to shine through. The frogs croak in a decidedly not-malevolent way.

If Mire survives, the swamp darkens and gets colder. As the characters leave, they have the feeling they're being watched or even followed, but they see nothing except the thickening canopy and smaller plants starting to shrivel and die. Mire's cruel laughter rings in the distance. When they return to the grounds of the manor, the swamp is encroaching on the rear gardens: it has grown, and looks like it will continue to do so.

AURELIUS'S NEXT CHAPTER

If Aurelius survived the combat with more than one-third of their hit points, they thank the characters profusely for saving their life and "giving me the kick I needed." They add, "I see now that tomorrow is never promised and one must live for oneself—and one's swamp—not for anyone else. I shall talk to my grandfather posthaste and tell him of my plans to remain in the manor, cataloging the flora and fauna of the basin. Perhaps I shall become a great teacher one day."

If Aurelius ends the combat with less than one-third of their hit points, they weep the whole way back to the manor and need to be helped through the swamp and gardens by the characters. They mutter, "My friend ... my only ... swamp...." over and over.

THE DUKE REACTS

When they return, the duke is standing at the front door and demands a report.

If Aurelius survived, the duke pays the party the reward and adds an uncommon magic item for each character (any item within reason and at the GM's discretion), which he purchases through a dealer and has delivered to the characters. When the delivery arrives, it comes with a letter from the duke that reads "Dear brave friends, I do not believe that any gift could properly express my thanks and gratitude, but I hope these items to be a start. Coming this close to losing Aurelius has allowed me to realize that no tradition or duty is as important as the precious life of this dear child. I hope you will visit us at Wray Manor again. I've already begun converting the rear gardens into a greenhouse and laboratory for Aurelius. They'll go on to university soon, and I expect they'll be Professor Wray in no time at all. Yours, Duke Cornelius Wray."

If the characters bring Aurelius' body back to the manor or deliver the news that the young noble died, the duke falls to his knees and weeps. Frances comforts him. Through his tears, he asks the characters what happened. The duke has fought in battle and knows that no soldier's death can be blamed on any one person. So as long as he gets the true story of Aurelius' death or the characters succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check, the duke thanks the party for their valor and, if they killed Mire, for ridding the basin of such a foul presence. He motions weakly to Elliott, who approaches with a pouch of gold for each character.

APPENDIX: AURELIUS'S NOTE

Dear Grandfather,

This is my favorite book on swamp mosses. I met the author, T.K. Burch, when she was in town, and I asked her to sign this edition so that I could gift it to you. I think once you read about the beautiful rhythms of the swamp's ecosystem, you'll understand what I love so much about Wray Basin and why I hope to stay here forever.

With love and admiration,
Aurelius

APPENDIX: WRAY WROULETTE

Created by Mike Seeley

To play Wray Roulette, each player places bets squares of the Wray Roulette table below. Players can also bet if the result will be a blue square or a white square, a “big” column (columns 1–3 or 4–6), or a “big” row (rows 1–4, 5–8, or 9–12). As with roulette, the less probable the bet, the more it pays out. Once the players place their bets, the GM rolls two dice, 1d6 and 1d12. The d6 determines the result’s column, the d12 determines the row. Wray house rules dictate that the minimum bet is 1 gp, and the maximum is 10 gp.

- Winning a bet on a single square pays 72:1.
- Winning a bet on blue or white pays 2:1.
- Winning a bet on a “big” column pays 2:1.
- Winning a bet on a “big” row pays 3:1.

| | | 1d6 | | | | | |
|------|----|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 1d12 | | 1-1 | 2-1 | 3-1 | 4-1 | 5-1 | 6-1 |
| 1 | 2 | 1-2 | 2-2 | 3-2 | 4-2 | 5-2 | 6-2 |
| 3 | 4 | 1-3 | 2-3 | 3-3 | 4-3 | 5-3 | 6-3 |
| 5 | 6 | 1-4 | 2-4 | 3-4 | 4-4 | 5-4 | 6-4 |
| 7 | 8 | 1-5 | 2-5 | 3-5 | 4-5 | 5-5 | 6-5 |
| 9 | 10 | 1-6 | 2-6 | 3-6 | 4-6 | 5-6 | 6-6 |
| 11 | 12 | 1-7 | 2-7 | 3-7 | 4-7 | 5-7 | 6-7 |
| 1 | 2 | 1-8 | 2-8 | 3-8 | 4-8 | 5-8 | 6-8 |
| 3 | 4 | 1-9 | 2-9 | 3-9 | 4-9 | 5-9 | 6-9 |
| 5 | 6 | 1-10 | 2-10 | 3-10 | 4-10 | 5-10 | 6-10 |
| 7 | 8 | 1-11 | 2-11 | 3-11 | 4-11 | 5-11 | 6-11 |
| 9 | 10 | 1-12 | 2-12 | 3-12 | 4-12 | 5-12 | 6-12 |



RESOURCES

BOTANICAL UNDEAD

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/BotanicalUndeadMaps.zip>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheBlightedHollow-140dpi-Bleak-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheBlightedHollow-140dpi-Bleak-NoGrid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheBlightedHollow-140dpi-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheBlightedHollow-140dpi-Night-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheBlightedHollow-140dpi-Night-NoGrid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheBlightedHollow-140dpi-NoGrid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheStrangledSpring-140dpi-Bleak-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheStrangledSpring-140dpi-Bleak-NoGrid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheStrangledSpring-140dpi-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheStrangledSpring-140dpi-Night-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheStrangledSpring-140dpi-Night-NoGrid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/TheStrangledSpring-140dpi-NoGrid.jpg>

THE AFTERPARTY

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/LilyMansion-140dpi-GM-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/LilyMansion-140dpi-GM.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/LilyMansion-140dpi-Grid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/LilyMansion-140dpi-NoGrid.jpg>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/AureliussNote.png>

<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202203/WrayRoulette.png>



Be on the lookout for the specimen known as Willy-01. Willy was last seen ‘funposting online and having a good time’ on Twitter under the handle [@thewillyboo](#), although the creature has left their mark on game companies such as MCDM, 2CGaming, Ghostfire Gaming, and EN Publishing. If left unchecked, Willy will gonzoify any and all game systems with material such as frogs and clowns. Take all necessary precautions.



Gwendolyn Marshall (she/her) is a designer and writer of tabletop games. She is a designer with 2CGaming and, with her company, Arcanist Press, the author of [*Ancestry & Culture: An Alternative to Race in 5e*](#) and, more recently, [*SSE: Superheroic Roleplaying for 5th Edition*](#). Apart from games, she is a university professor of philosophy, a parent, and, allegedly, a human being.



Sally Tamarkin (she/her) is an editor, writer, podcaster, and sensitivity reader. She’s been a lifestyle journalist and a podcaster since 2014 and before that, she was a community organizer. She has a master’s of social work in community organizing. She loves playing and writing for TTRPGs and hanging out with her best friend, television. You can listen to her podcast [Oh, I Like That](#) and find her online on Twitter ([@sallyt](#)) and at [sally.gay](#).

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