

THE SECRET OF SHADOW GROVE

by Lynne M. Meyer

CREATURE: *Hag* | **LEVEL:** 4

SYNOPSIS

Anamdael is a small town remarkable only for its peacefulness. However, the town harbors a dark secret: Long ago, a resident entered into a pact with a Night Hag, whose services come at a price. Travelers who once gave little thought to Anamdael now hear rumors of a strange cult in its woods. Your party is hired to locate and return a missing person, last known to be traveling to Anamdael. Before you may enter “Mother’s” land, you face your first test. Your responses determine more than you know and set the stage for an eerie adventure. *The Secret of Shadow Grove* is designed for level 4 characters.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party may be mercenaries having just completed a job in the growing city nearest Anamdael, Stagmore, where they attract the eye of a noble wishing to hire them, or they may answer a quest notice posted anonymously by this same noble; in either case, they are escorted by an aide to the noble’s audience chamber, where they begin their adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long ago, a woman from Anamdael made a pact with a powerful healer she met in the woods, who helped her escape the abusive marriage in which she had unwillingly found herself. Over time, others in distress sought out this mysterious healer; under cover of darkness, she tended their wounds, and avenged the wrongs done to them. They came to call her The Mother. For generations, she’s remained a secret to be shared only as needed, lest she be discovered by those who would harm the vulnerable. Her silent watch has kept Anamdael a safe haven — to the growing frustration of a certain noble in the nearby city of Stagmore.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **LORD V’LINDER ODAMI:** (NE male human **noble**) Stagmore’s most ambitious noble. He doesn’t tolerate being refused. Long, blond hair accents his amber eyes and lean face.
- **BROGOL GROTSK:** (NE male **veteran**) Odami’s gruff hired hand.
- **OLD HAZEL:** (CG **commoner**) A Mother devotee, this eccentric peasant woman has lived for years on the outskirts of Anamdael and watches the increasing number of travelers from Stagmore with a careful eye.
- **LUNELI MIRTHSPIRE:** (NG modified **acolyte**) Innkeeper of The Copper Kettle. Long, silvering, double braided hair; a lived-in, radiant face. She became head of the Mother’s cult after escaping a bad marriage with Mother’s aid.
- **CONSTABLE HAL HARGRAVE:** (LG male **veteran**) Graying, chestnut hair pulled into a ponytail; a lengthy scar along his right cheek. A child who survived to adulthood thanks to Mother. He prevents troublesome inquiries when mysterious deaths caused by her occur.
- **HAWK HARGRAVE:** (NE male **commoner**) Adult son of the Constable, he shares his father’s features — but not disposition. He’s been kept unaware of Mother, though he has suspicions. Anamdael’s bowyer.
- **MILSEE MEADOWBROOK:** (NG female **commoner**) Head server at the inn and Mother devotee. An astute young redheaded woman, she knows more about Anamdael and its residents than most people realize.
- **THE MOTHER:** A **night hag**. Kind to those who respect her ways and followers. Her judgement is fierce against transgressors.
- **TRUX AND TRYX:** **Imps**; night hag minions.

CHAPTER 1 — THE GUARDIAN AT THE GATE

The party's hired for a job that takes them to Anamdael. But can they enter?

THE QUEST BEGINS

Large, heavy doors open and you're ushered into an audience chamber. A man of noble status gazes thoughtfully out his window. He seemingly takes no notice of your arrival, until the doors close behind you. His amber eyes scrutinize each of you. Finally he smiles. *"Welcome, friends. I have need of your services."*

V'linder Odami provides the following information:

- Rumors suggest there's a strange cult in the woods near Anamdael. Some say the area's haunted; it's beginning to affect travel to and from Stagmore.
- He sent Brogol Grotsk there to investigate. Brogol was due back seven days ago.
- He offers the party 50 gp each to find and return Brogol — 150 gp if alive — and provides a map.

AT THE RIVER

The party finds a strange figure at the bridge into town.

Aided by your map, the past day and half of travel have gone well. You've begun to wonder how anyone might consider these beautiful woods haunted. Ahead, you see the ancient stone bridge that leads into Anamdael, and hear the river flowing beneath it.

Two ravens sit in a tree by the river. As you approach, a third joins them. You see a figure near the base of the bridge. She appears to be an old peasant woman, washing clothes.

Old Hazel calls out to the party, begging for coin and food. If ignored, she approaches them.

Characters casting *detect evil* discern an evil presence if they are within 30 ft of the ravens; one is actually Tryx, a shapeshifted **imp**. A DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that one raven isn't what it seems.

- If the party is rude or aggressive to Old Hazel, or attacks the imp, a **swarm of poisonous snakes** erupt from the stream to attack the party, along with the two **ravens**. Old Hazel attacks the characters with her fists, yelling obscenities. The imp leaves to report all party actions to the night hag.
- If the players are kind to Old Hazel, she wishes them "Mother's" blessing.
- If the players are especially kind to Old Hazel, she wishes them Mother's blessing, and gives them a small wooden token from around her neck. The token's symbol appears similar to a strophalos.

DEVELOPMENT

The party finds their way to Anamdael's only inn, The Copper Kettle.

CHAPTER 2 — NIGHT TERRORS

The party finds Brogol, who has an unexpected request.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Laughter, conversation, and the aroma of good food beckon you forward. The modest inn is a beacon of warmth and joviality - until you walk you through the door and enter the Main Hall. Hearing the pause in conversation, the innkeeper looks up from her work. *"Greetings, travelers."* She smiles. Conversations resume.

This is Luneli Mirthspire. Standing by her is Constable Hal Hargrave. Milsee serves patrons. A character visibly displaying Old Hazel's token receives a +5 bonus to Charisma-based interactions with them.

After some time, a disheveled man stumbles down from a room above, and moves about the common rooms. Luneli and Hal respond to Brogol as though he's intoxicated; a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check suggests they know he isn't.

Spotting the party, Brogol Grotsk pleads for help, saying “She’s going to kill me!” He offers the following information:

- Odami suspects there’s a witch in the woods; Brogol was sent to kill her.
- Brogol thought it was Old Hazel. Before he could strike, something invisible attacked him and told him to leave her alone. “My Mistress will find you,” it said.
- Then the nightmares started.
- The constable refuses to help.

He offers all his coin — 1,000 gp — to hire the party to save him. He begs the party to take guard in his room overnight.

A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he’s truthful; Tryx had taunted him, while Trux, polymorphed into rat form, inflicted a poisonous bite.

If they take his offer, the party can take shifts guarding him outside his door, or in his small room in pairs; Brogol obtains a room for the party’s use between shifts.

Exhausted and terrified, he does not willingly leave town. If the party refuses Brogol and forces him to depart for Stagmore, the following encounter happens when they make camp in the woods outside Anamdael; Brogol then insists on going back to Anamdael, telling the party that Luneli has information.

HELLO DARKNESS

A few hours pass. You’re beginning to suspect that Brogol’s fears may be unfounded. Suddenly, he begins to thrash wildly in his sleep, visibly terrified of... something.

“Mother” — the night hag — is, as she has for the past 10 nights at the same hour, exacting justice on Brogol by way of nightmare haunting.

- **If any character begins to cast a spell that would interfere with her efforts, risk her safety, or prevent her escape, the night hag plane shifts to her lair on the Material Plane.**

As the haunting begins, if anyone in the party was unkind to Old Hazel, they are ambushed by the Night Hag’s minions: the **imp** Trux, two **swarms**

of rats, and two **swarms of insects**.

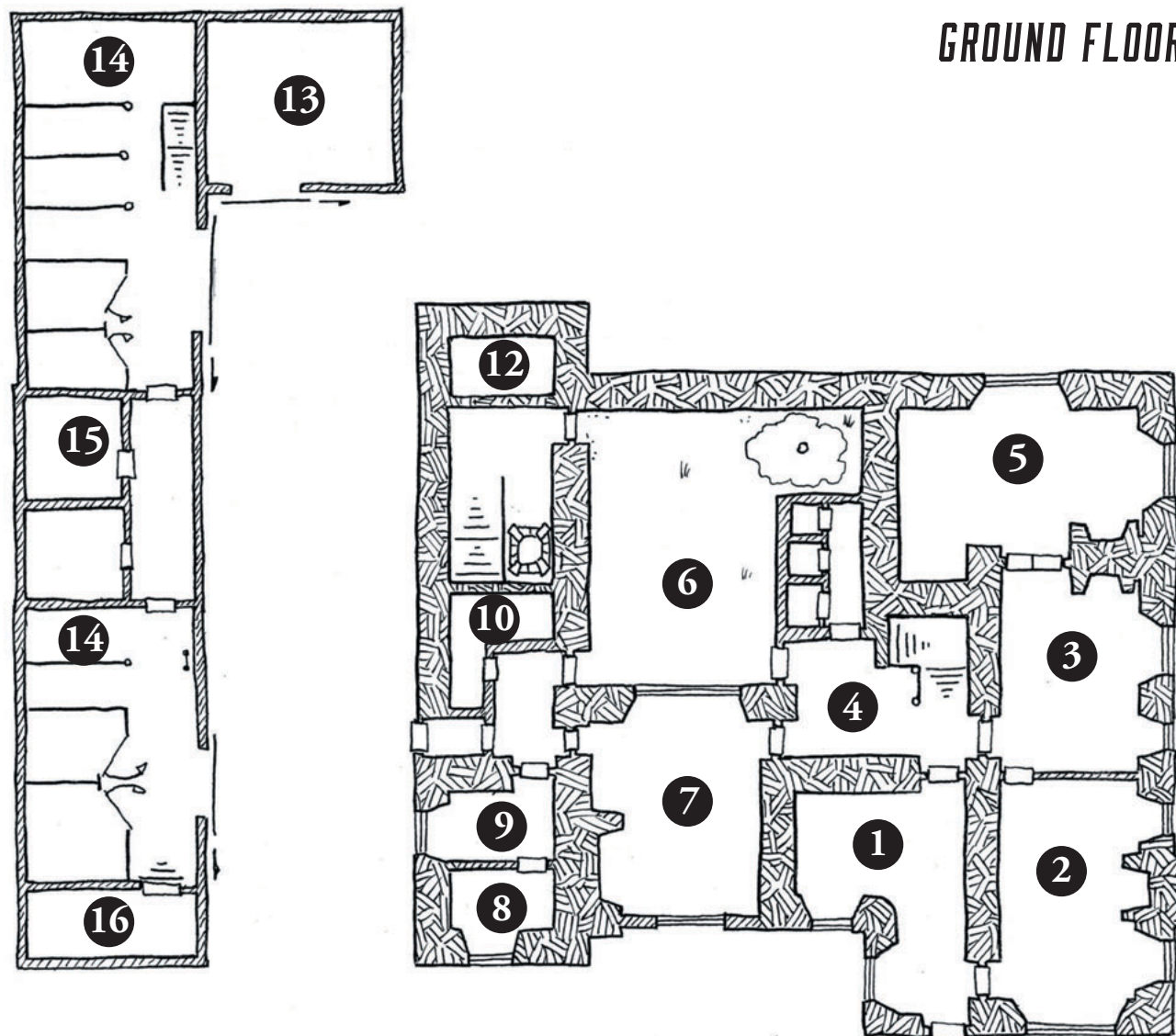
- If the party was kind to Old Hazel, they avoid the attack by night hag’s minions — unless they attack the night hag.
If combat begins and the party is visibly displaying the token given by Old Hazel, the night hag notes it and call off the minions before departing in a haste.
- If characters attempt travel from one room of the inn to the other (e.g., those not on watch trying to rush to Brogol’s room or trying to escape a swarm), Luneli — not in her quarters as expected, but instead peeking from the stairwell outside the guest rooms — attempts to hinder them by casting *thaumaturgy* to slam the doors shut.

DEVELOPMENT

Immediately following the encounter, the party realizes on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check that Luneli is awake. A DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check that night or the next day reveals that she’s rattled and concerned about the noise she heard; a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) suggests that she’s complicit.

If the characters search for clues: Luneli’s private chambers reveal three items on a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check: a single *sending stone* (DMG), one *oil of ethereality* (DMG), and a diary, which also details the history of Anamdael and the Mother. Its cover image matches the token from Old Hazel.

*THE COPPER KETTLE INN,
GROUND FLOOR*



*THE COPPER KETTLE INN.
UPPER LEVEL*

The floor plan of the upper level of The Copper Kettle Inn is a complex layout. It features a large room (10) on the left, a central area with rooms 1-7, and a right wing with rooms 2-4. Rooms 8-10 are on the left, and rooms 1-7 are in the center. Rooms 1-7 have thick, patterned walls, while rooms 8-10 have thin walls. Corridors are marked with small circles representing doors. A staircase is located in the top right corner.

MAPS BY DYSON LOGOS

THE COPPER KETTLE INN, GROUND FLOOR

1. **ENTRY HALL**
2. **MAIN HALL**
3. **SITTING ROOM**
4. **HALL**
5. **DINING ROOM**
6. **YARD**
7. **KITCHEN**
8. **LAUNDRY**
9. **HOT WATER**
10. **LARDER**
11. **WELL**
12. **CISTERN**
13. **COACHES**
14. **HORSE STALLS**
15. **STORAGE**
16. **TACK ROOM**

- **ENTRY HALL.** The walls are lined with hooks, from which hang various coats. Immediately to the right, it opens to the Main Hall.
- **MAIN HALL.** The aroma of good food and the sounds of conversation typically draw people here first. A fireplace fills the room with warmth and light. Guests sit at rectangular tables with bench seating or square tables with chairs. The majority of diners take their meals here.
- **SITTING ROOM.** With fewer tables and more chairs, this room is more for conversation and drinking.
- **HALL.** From here, guests can access the yard or the sitting room, head upstairs to their rooms, or enter the privies.
- **DINING ROOM.** Reserved for large dinners and rich guests, this room features the inn's longest table, decorated by two candelabras. A wrought-iron candle chandelier hangs from the ceiling.
- **YARD.** On nice days, this pretty space is an option for relaxing or taking meals. A large tree offers shade. Near it is a large rectangular table and two benches for seating.
- **KITCHEN.** This well-stocked kitchen has everything the inn needs to serve overnight guests and diners from in town.
- **LAUNDRY.** Tubs, lye, and ash are found here, along with a number of linens being laundered.

- **HOT WATER.** A great copper boiler with logs burning beneath it provides hot water for laundry and other needs.
- **LARDER.** The inn's well stocked pantry, from which Luneli and her cook produce delicious provincial dishes - hearty and comforting.
- **WELL.** The inn's source of potable water. A wooden bucket sits next to it.
- **CISTERN:** Pipes from the room collect rainwater into this storage tank.
- **COACHES:** If the characters travel by carriage, Luneli's staff keeps it here. No others are there currently.
- **HORSE STALLS:** Room and board for the PCs and visitors' horses. Straw covers the floor. Luneli's horse, Asteria, is in the stall closest to the Tack Room. The beautiful dapple gray mare is identified by a name plaque on the stall.
- **STORAGE:** A variety of items needed to run and maintain the kitchen, dining spaces, and coaching areas are here, including additional sets of dishes, oil for lamps, and tools.
- **TACK ROOM:** Characters find a saddle, reins, a bit, and other accessories for Luneli's horse.

THE COPPER KETTLE INN, UPPER FLOOR

1. **BROGOL'S ROOM**
2. **PCs ROOM**
3. **GUEST ROOMS**
4. **MORNING SITTING ROOM**
5. **LUNELI'S ROOM**
6. **STAFF ROOMS**
7. **MILSEE'S ROOM**
8. **UPPER STORAGE**
9. **SERVANT ROOMS**
10. **HAY & FEED**

- **BROGOL'S ROOM:** When you enter, it's clear that he has been here for a while, and in distress. The linens on his bed are askew, and his clothes and other belongings are carelessly scattered about the room. The head of the bed is along the wall opposite the door. There is a chest of drawers along the left wall, and a table and chair by the window to the right.

- **PCs Room:** Furnished like the other guest rooms, with the added convenience of being adjacent to Brogol.
- **GUEST ROOMS:** These modestly furnished chambers are currently unoccupied; no other out of town travelers are staying at the inn. In each room there is a bed, a table and chair, a chest of drawers, and a lamp.
- **MORNING SITTING ROOM:** A simple but comfortable room for guest relaxation, two large windows opposite the entrance let in the morning sun. There are four small square tables and eight chairs.
- **LUNELI'S ROOM:** Good quality furnishings and comfortable linens adorn this cozy room. Unlike other rooms, in a far corner, it includes a writing desk, ink, and pens. On a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check, a search reveals a single *sending stone* (DMG), one *oil of etherealness* (DMG), and a diary, which also details the history of Anamdael and the Mother. Its cover image matches the token from Old Hazel.
- **STAFF ROOMS:** Furnished much like the guest rooms, these are for the use of the Copper Kettle's senior staff. They contain general items indicating that they're currently in use by everyday people, including clothing, and pitchers of water and cups tables.
- **MILSEE'S ROOM:** Identical to the other staff rooms in most respects. On a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check, PCs can discover that, like Luneli, she keeps a diary. It contains observations of Anamdael's residents and travelers who come through town, and describes that she'd felt unsafe around Hawk until she came to know Mother.
- **UPPER STORAGE:** Here are all of the items necessary for maintenance of the sleeping spaces, including extra linens, and oil for lamps.
- **SERVANT ROOMS:** More simply furnished versions of the guest rooms, intended for use by inn staff.
- **HAY & FEED:** This space above the horse stalls is stocked with hay bales and sacks of feed.

CHAPTER 3 — MOTHER, MAY I?

The next morning, Brogol is near death. Does the party wait for “Mother” to return, or attempt to find her? At the inn, on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party overhears conversation between Luneli and Hargrave about a gathering taking place.

A man dressed in Craftsman’s clothing enters the inn, greets Luneli and Hargrave, and sits. A woman approaches his table with a drink, and smiles politely but insincerely. He curses under his breath, shaking his head, and takes a drink. He notices you, and grins curiously. “*New in town, eh?*” He studies you for a moment. “So, what do you think of Anamdael?” he chortles, casting his arms wide and laughing at a private joke. He leans in close and lowers his voice to a whisper, “*If you’ve come to do something about that blasted cult, I can help you.*”

The young woman, Milsee Meadowbrook, is unhappily serving Hawk Hargrave. He tells you the following:

- Strange things happen to those who don’t show Anamdael’s women proper respect. Someone protects them.
- Some of his customers have told him what they’ve seen or heard in the woods. Based on their stories, he thinks he’s figured out where to look: Shadow Grove.
- Few people like to go there; it’s long been considered haunted.

If the party leaves the inn, they instead meet Hawk when he encounters them on his return to his shop. Characters looking for a healer in Anamdael discover that it’s Luneli, who’s unable to restore Brogol.

Hawk can show the party the location of Shadow Grove on their map, or lead them to it. If not asked to accompany the party, Hawk trails behind at a distance unseen.

SHADOW GROVE

The party heads to Shadow Grove. At nightfall, they see it: Mother (the **night hag**), as her followers know her, is healing with her heartstone. Unseen, she carries the mate to Luneli’s Sending Stone. The followers — who include Old Hazel and Milsee — are speaking a password which must be uttered before entering this space.

On a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party hears them: “Mother, may I?”

Hawk, traveling on his own or with the party, remains behind the trees. If the party gets within 30 ft of a scarecrow without the password, that scarecrow targets them with terrifying glare; if the characters attempt to enter the space without permission being granted by Mother, or make any aggressive actions within the space, they trigger attacks by Luneli, the **scarecrows**, the three **mastiffs**, the **owl**, and a **swarm of ravens**.

TACTICS: The commoners flee. The scarecrows target the party, using *terrifying glare* and claw attacks. The mastiffs and owl move into range and attack, as a swarm of ravens descends from the trees and attacks the party. Luneli immediately protects Mother by targeting one character with *sacred flame*, and as a bonus action casts sanctuary on Mother; subsequent rounds she uses *bane* or *sacred flame*, and if necessary uses one of her torches as a club. Mother polymorphs into her terrifying night hag form; on her next action, she enters the Ethereal Plane, and flees.

DEVELOPMENT

Hawk sees the night hag’s transformation and realizes that Brogol was truthful. He emerges and tells the party that she’s surely going to torment Brogol again tonight. They must move quickly; if she succeeds, he dies. If the party wishes to save him, continue to next section.

If the party chooses to stop fighting, and let Brogol die, proceed to *Conclusion A*.

THE CONFRONTATION

Arriving at Brogol's room, the party finds Brogol alive, but asleep.

TACTICS: If Brogol remains asleep, the hag appears 1 minute after the party arrives. If the party awakens Brogol, she casts *detect magic* and, if it is safe, appears the moment he falls asleep. If the party attacks or begins casting a spell that risks her safety, the night hag plane shifts to her lair; if she succeeds, a few moments later, her imp Tryx arrives, invisible.

A devilish laugh fills the air. *"Greetings from my Mistress. You want to save your friend, she thinks."* The voice moves from place to place. *"He is wicked, and deserves to die. What would you give her in exchange for his life?"*

The party must bargain for Brogol's life, or let him die. Proceed to *Conclusion A*.

Mother is most interested in future favors, to be determined and claimed by her at a time of her choosing.

- If she cannot *plane shift* away, as a last resort she targets the party with her Weird Magic item (VGtM), a Charm of Mass Suggestion, instructing them to immediately leave her and the town in peace, and tell no one what they've learned here.
- If the Charm works, proceed to *Conclusion A*.
- If the night hag is defeated, proceed to *Conclusion B*.

CONCLUSION, PART A

The party returns to Stagmore, with Brogol either dead or alive — but Mother undefeated.

V'linder erupts into a rage. He picks up a chalice from his desk and throws it across the room, and stares out his window towards Anamdael. He mutters under his breath. *"You won't keep me out forever."* A moment passes as he seethes. He straightens suddenly, as if remembering that you're there. He looks to you with icy eyes. *"Tell me everything you know."*

On a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check, the party realizes that V'linder's only interest was Brogol's success, not whether he lived or died.

If the party admits to V'linder what they know about the night hag and the cult, read the following:

V'linder breaks into a broad smile. "Excellent. You've done well, my friends." He reaches into his desk, and pulls out a purse of coin, which he tosses to you. "As promised."

"There's more where there that came from, if you're interested. Together, we can rid Anamdael of that cult and bring progress to that backwater little town." He lets out a cunning laugh. A shiver runs down your spines.

If the party chooses to withhold information about the night hag and the cult, read the following:

He glares at you, scrutinizing each of you. *"I can't tell if you're lying, or incompetent. For your sake, you'd better be merely incompetent. It appears that I must find more capable adventurers to deal with this thorn in my side."* He reaches into his desk, pulls out a purse, and throws it to you. *"Take your coin. Tell anyone that I hired you and I will deny it."* He dismisses you with a wave of his hand, and you are escorted from his audience chamber.

CONCLUSION, PART B

The party returns to Stagmore victorious, telling V'linder Odami that the cult rumored to be in Anamdael has been defeated, and that it was behind Brogol's disappearance.

"Finally!" V'linder roars with unrestrained delight. "You've done well, my friends." He reaches into his desk, and pulls out a purse, which he tosses to you. "As promised."

"There's more where there that came from, if you're interested. Thanks to you, we can finally bring progress to that backwater little town." He lets out a cunning laugh. A shiver runs down your spines.

REWARDS

Characters who complete this adventure may earn the following rewards, in addition to coin offered by NPCs:

- Sending Stones
- Oil of Etherealness
- Heartstone
- Soul Bag

CHARM OF MASS SUGGESTION

Ring, Single-use, Weird Magic

This silver ring looks like a coiled serpent with a honey-colored vial mounted in its jaws. To cast mass suggestion, the wearer breaks the vial, releasing a swirling, powdery compound.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

In this story, I explore the Night Hag as a symbol of feminine power, and how that power is perceived depending on where one stands in relationship to it. As such, I intentionally subvert two aspects of the Night Hag as portrayed in *Dungeons & Dragons* specifically. First, her fearsome aspect is merely a guise worn when necessary. Secondly, she Haunts not to corrupt her victims, but to torment the wicked until they expire.

For further reading, I recommend the resources below, which provided inspiration and information that helped me craft this tale.

- Brannen, Cyndi. 2018. "Hekate: Guardian of the Marginalized." Patheos.
- Brannen, Cyndi. 2018. "Should We Fear Hekate?" Patheos.
- Spaeth, Barbette Stanley. 2014. "From Goddess to Hag: The Greek and the Roman Witch in Classical Literature." Essay. In *Daughters of Hecate: Women & Magic in the Ancient World*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bisexual interfaith and diversity educator and activist Lynne Meyer holds a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, and a Master of Jewish Studies from Spertus Institute. Lynne is a chronic illness warrior, devotee of Hekate, and lover of cats and good coffee.

LUNELI MIRTHSPIRE

Medium humanoid, neutral good

Armor Class	10
Hit points	9 (2d8)
Speed	30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	10 (0)	10 (0)	10 (0)	14 (+2)	11 (0)

Skills	Medicine +4, Religion +2
Senses	passive Perception 10
Languages	Common
Challenge	1/4 (50 xp)

Spellcasting. Luneli is a 1st-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *spare the dying*, *sacred flame*, *thaumaturgy*
1st level (3 slots): *bane*, *cure wounds*, *sanctuary*

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.