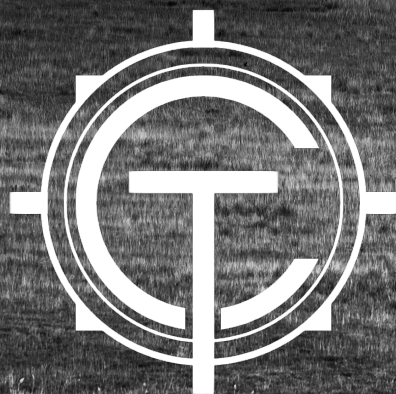


HAUNTING OF THE BURIED SHADOW

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 4TH TO 6TH LEVEL



HAUNTING OF THE BURIED SHADOW

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 4TH TO 6TH LEVEL



HAUNTING OF THE BURIED SHADOW IS A Fifth Edition adventure for three to six characters of 4th to 6th level, optimized for a party of four 5th-level characters. When a minor earthquake unearths a long-forgotten dagger from its resting place beneath a

family farmhouse, the spirits of its victims flock to the site to ensure that it may never be used again. Can the party find the answers behind their presence, and will they wield the weapon or return it to the earth to satisfy its casualties? This adventure takes place in the Cartosia campaign setting, but the names of people, places, and things can be changed to adapt the adventure to any other setting or ongoing campaign.

BACKGROUND

Eighty years ago, in the darkness of a warm summer night, an assassin named Caelum Nightshade, breathless and on the run, stumbled upon an empty farmhouse. His last job had gone awry, and he sought refuge among the shadows, hoping to disappear for a time. Before fleeing the region, Caelum buried his dagger, along with a few other personal effects, beneath the stones of the farmhouse cellar, intending to return when the danger had passed. But that night, Caelum saw the farmhouse for the last time, for fate had other plans. He was soon captured and executed, his secrets left buried in the countryside.

Years later, a humble family by the name of Stronghide purchased the derelict farmhouse, unaware of the history that slumbered beneath their new home. They restored the building, worked the land, and raised their children, cultivating a life of prosperity and joy in the once-forgotten dwelling. Several generations of Stronghide tended to the farmhouse and its surrounding land, and the assassin's secrets lay at peace for decades.

This peace was disturbed a few weeks ago when a minor earthquake rattled the region. The Stronghide farmhouse, a bastion of warmth and love for generations, was badly damaged in the tremors. In the upheaval, the assassin's dagger was unearthed from its long-forgotten resting place, stirring the restless spirits of Caelum's countless victims. The Stronghides returned to their village, shaken by the sudden devastation. Determined to rebuild their home, they made plans to repair the damage, but as they surveyed the remains of their farmhouse, they began to notice strange, ghostly occurrences. Shadows flickered in the corners of their vision, eerie whispers echoed through the night, and a cold, unseen presence lingered like a specter over their once-happy home.

Unbeknownst to the Stronghide family, the unearthed dagger has become a beacon for the spirits of the Caelum's victims. Drawn to the site by the spectral pull of the weapon that has now been pulled free from the earth, the vengeful

spirits now haunt the farmhouse, seeking to prevent the dagger from ever being discovered and used again. Bound by sorrow and rage, they will stop at nothing to ensure the blade remains hidden from the world. If the party does not intervene, they will continue to cast a shadow over the Stronghides and the surrounding countryside.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are numerous reasons the party may be interested in investigating the disturbance at the Stronghide farmhouse. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

The Suspecting Historian. A local historian approaches the party with tales of the legendary assassin, Caelum Nightshade, whose final resting place remains a mystery. After the earthquake, rumors of a hidden treasure buried beneath an old farmhouse reach the historian's ears, and they ask the adventurers to investigate the site, promising a share of any riches found.

The Concerned Council. The village council, alarmed by the ghostly disturbances plaguing the Stronghide family and their farm, enlists the party's aid to put an end to the supernatural occurrences. They offer a generous reward for the successful cleansing of the farmhouse and the restoration of peace to the village.

The Missing Child. A local child, having wandered too close to the haunted farmhouse, has vanished without a trace. Desperate, the child's family pleads for the party's help in finding their daughter, believing that the ghostly occurrences are responsible for the disappearance.

GENERAL FEATURES

The Stronghide farmhouse is a modest, single-story building of aged wood and thatched roof, surrounded by acres of crop fields. It lies only a few miles from the nearest village, amidst a countryside dotted with numerous other farmsteads. Though much of the building still stands, the earth tremors have caused significant damage, causing a portion of the roof and pieces of the walls to collapse, exposing its interior to the elements. The building is surrounded by a picket fence that also encircles a nearby vegetable patch and storage shed. Unless otherwise stated, its features are described as follows:

Ceilings, Floors, and Walls. Walls throughout the farmhouse are half-a-foot thick, and constructed of wood panelling, same as the floor. Ceilings are eight feet tall. The farmhouse's cellar is constructed of hewn stone blocks, and the ceilings are at a lower height of seven feet.

Doors. Doors throughout the farmhouse are made of oak and reinforced with iron bands. Any doors still standing are unlocked. They have AC 13 and 27 hit points.

Light. During the day, sunlight pours into the farmhouse from collapses in the ceiling and facade, but the structure is otherwise unlit. The cellar is dark at all times, except for the general storage room, which receives dim light during the day as a result of the roof collapse.

Structural Instability. The recent earthquake has left the farmhouse in unstable disrepair. As a result, some spells or activities may have consequential effects. A spell such as fireball or thunderwave has a 10 percent chance of causing a ceiling collapse twice the size of the spell's area, dealing 16 (3d10) bludgeoning damage to all creatures in the area. This collapse might block or bury objects or exits.

Haunting Presence. The presence of the dagger has brought the haunting presence of numerous spirits to the area. Many of these spirits only temporarily peek between the barrier between the Material and the Ethereal Plane, appearing to witnesses as moving shadows, indecipherable whispers, and cold winds. Corners of rooms in the farmhouse seem darker than normal, and a subtle, lingering sense of dread simmers in the minds of those who encroach upon the property.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the Stronghide farmhouse:

I. VEGETABLE PATCH

Before you are the neglected remains of a small vegetable patch, just outside the deteriorated structure of the farmhouse. Ostensibly once a source of nourishment and pride for the family that tended it, the patch now lies in such a state of decay as to suggest supernatural influence. Withered vines and twisted, desiccated stalks reach out from the dry, cracked earth like skeletal fingers. Rotted vegetable husks emit a sweet, stinking smell that hangs in the area.

A character who makes a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Nature) check can confirm that the level of decay in the vegetable patch is unlikely to have been caused naturally. Closer examination of the vegetable patch reveals a pair of mangled rat corpses lying amidst the rot, their carcasses undulating with maggots.

2. HATCH

The doors of this hatch are worn and splintered. They squeal and groan as the wind jostles them in their hinges.

This hatch is unlocked. It leads to a staircase that descends to the cellar's main storage area (area 9). Despite the damage to the farmhouse, the staircase remains in stable condition.

3. STORAGE SHED

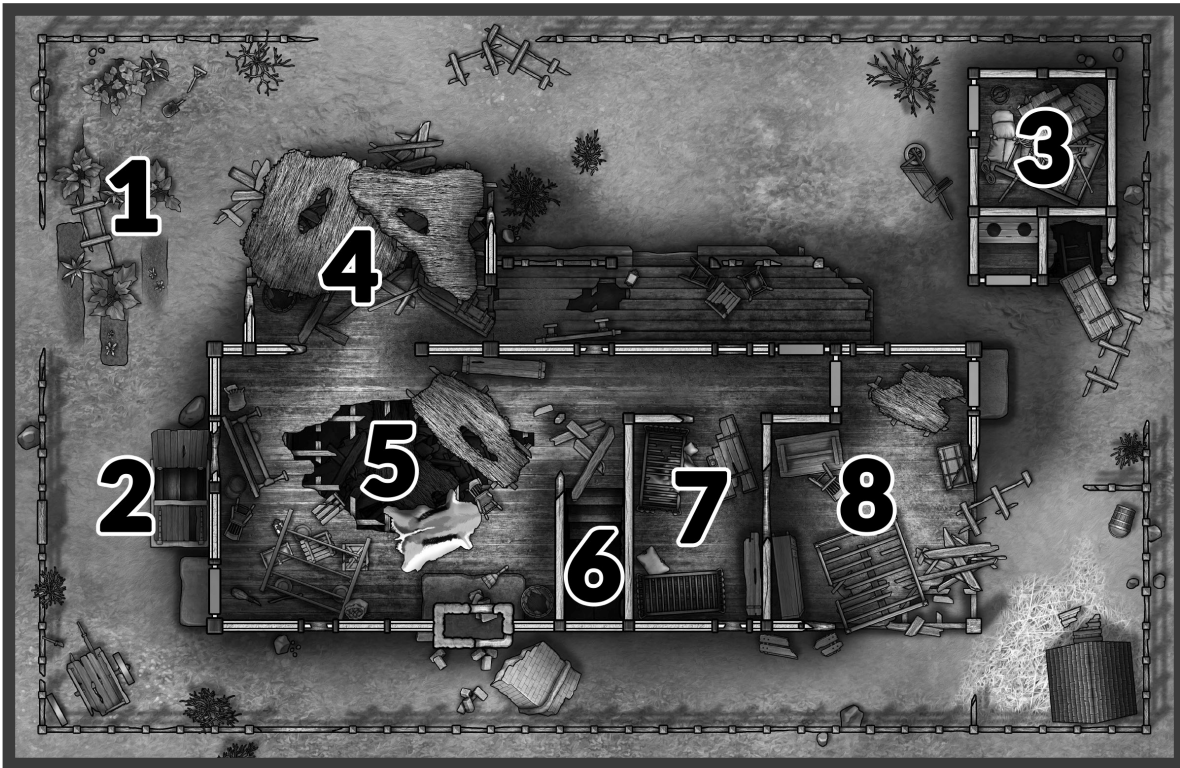
Characters who come within twenty feet of this storage shed with a passive Perception of 14 or higher can hear shuffling sounds coming from within. When the party enters the shed, read aloud:

The interior of this storage shed is a labyrinth of fallen shelves and piled farming supplies. Splintered wood surrounds a hole in the floor of the southeast corner of the shed, ostensibly where a trap door leading to the cellar used to be.

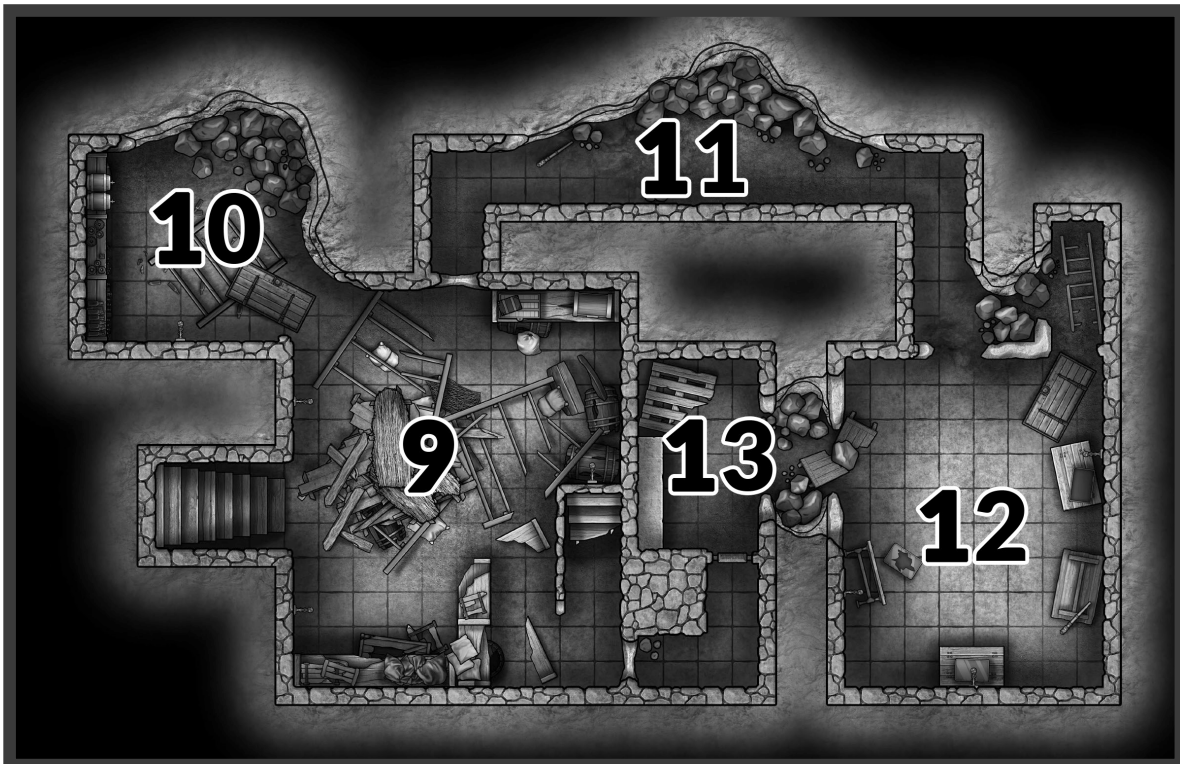
The equipment and supplies in this room are mundane and of little value. Characters with a passive Perception of 14 or higher notice a pair of yellow eyes staring out at them from amidst the high pile of clutter.

Glimshard the Imp. The eyes belong to an **imp** named Glimshard, who works in the service of a local hag named Vexilira. Vexilira heard of the recent earthquake and subsequent spiritual presence, and, knowing the history of the area and Caelum Nightshade, correctly assumes that his dagger may have been unearthed. She has sent her imp Glimshard to retrieve the dagger, but Glimshard is a cowardly sort, and has been repelled by the spirits that occupy the farmhouse. He has since retreated to the storage shed, where he has been attempting to muster enough courage to venture into the farmhouse and retrieve the dagger. Glimshard attempts to remain hidden unless the party confronts him, at which point he reluctantly comes out of hiding and attempts to fabricate a story about his "just passing through." Characters who make a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check see through this flimsy lie, and can convince Glimshard to reveal the truth of his presence with a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check. At GM discretion, Glimshard may remain in the storage shed and then attempt to steal the dagger from the party, if applicable, once they have recovered it from the cellar.

STRONGHIDE FARMHOUSE



FARMHOUSE CELLAR



4. COLLAPSED PORCH

A ruinous scene greets you at the front porch of the farmhouse. The entryway has become a tangled mess of splintered wood and fallen thatch, as a significant portion of the roof has collapsed, obstructing the front door and main entryway to the building. A network of spiderwebs can be seen filling the gaps in the debris.

A partial collapse has nearly entirely obstructed the front door to the farmhouse. The debris can be cleared, but doing so requires at least an hour of physical labor. Alternatively, creatures of Medium size or smaller can attempt to crawl their way through the debris and beyond the doorway with a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. Failing this saving throw means the character takes 1d6 piercing damage on their way through from splintered wood and jutting nails.

5. LIVING ROOM

A gaping hole dominates the center of the room, where the floor has given way to reveal the dark, musty cellar below. To the south, a cold hearth sits silent and lifeless. Overturned shelves and furniture lie strewn about the space, their broken forms casting eerie shadows across the floor. The remnants of household belongings and debris are scattered throughout the room.

Collapse from the roof above has fallen through the floor of the living room. The household items scattered about are weathered and mundane; the family was sure to retrieve anything of significant value or importance when they left for the village.

Haunting Manifestation. Upon entering this room, characters with a passive Perception of 12 or higher immediately notice a large, distinctive shadow running floor to ceiling in the middle of the south wall, in the shape of a hook-tipped dagger. A character who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check can confirm that nothing in the area should be casting such a shadow—its appearance is unnatural. Any characters that come within 5 feet of the shadow feel a sudden prick of pain in one of their fingers; a real puncture wound that slowly leaks blood.

6. STAIRCASE

This staircase has almost entirely collapsed in the destruction of the quake. What few portions still remain crumble under the weight of any creature sized Medium or larger.

7. CHILDRENS' BEDROOM

Two bedframes, knocked askew by the tremors, occupy this room. A door, shaken loose from its hinges by the force of the quake, lies in the doorframe, evidence of the turmoil that shook the farmhouse. Bedding, now dirtied and disarrayed, is strewn about the floor, a casualty of the upheaval.

There is nothing of value or interest in this room.

8. MASTER BEDROOM

The walls of the southeast corner have crumbled entirely, leaving the room exposed to the mercy of the elements. Toppled shelves and furniture, displaced by the seismic event, lie in disarray, their contents strewn across the space. A large piece of the roof, torn from its supports, rests fatefully on the floor.

Previous rainfall has afflicted the structure and contents of this room with water damage; the floorboards are slightly spongy under the weight of any who travel across them. There is nothing of value or interest in this room.

Encounter: Angry Spirits. A few moments after the party enters this room, they begin to hear ambient whispers that rise in volume at a feverish pitch. Characters listening attentively can hear the phrases “leave it rest,” “there’s nothing for you here,” and “what’s buried must stay lost.” After a few more moments, three ghostly apparitions appear before the party, each with their throats slit and each dressed in finery suggesting noble lineage. These are the spirits of a baron’s family which was assassinated by Caelum Nightshade nearly a century ago. The spirits are a **ghost** and two **specters**. They attack upon their appearance, screaming threats and warnings at the party throughout combat and resisting any attempts at negotiation. They fight until they are destroyed.

9. CELLAR STORAGE ROOM

Collapse from the roof above has left a gaping hole in the ceiling of this room, as well as a maze of obstruction debris, including toppled shelves and their spilled contents. Other shelves still stand, their surfaces laden with sacks, barrels, and crates filled with non-essential household provisions. The air is musty and thick with dust.

The Stronghides keep dried produce and preserves, tools, and general household items in this room. There is nothing of value here.

Encounter: Reanimated Rats. Moments after entering this room, the party begins to hear a chorus of chittering. After a few more moments, four **swarms of rats**, rotting and emaciated, crawl forth from the debris and assault the party. The rats are undead, reanimated by an angry **ghost** who appears in the room and joins in the assault. The ghost is an elderly man dressed in the robes of a scholar, his throat slit open and his face twisted permanently in an expression of rage. He exchanges no words with the party. He and the rats fight until they are destroyed.

Secret Door. A secret door in the west wall of this room leads to the Stronghides’ panic room. A character who investigates

the room can notice the seam of this door with a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check. It has no handle; opening inward after sufficient pressure is applied.

10. WINE CELLAR

Shelves along the west wall of this room hold casks and wine bottles, though some of their contents have undoubtedly been disturbed. In the center of the room lies a toppled shelf, its wooden frame twisted and broken, its contents now shattered and littering the floor. The north wall has partially collapsed, a mountain of rubble spilling into the room.

The Stronghides did not bother to take any of their wine with them; only their essentials. As a result, this storeroom is still well-stocked.

Treasure: Rare Vintages. Discerning characters with knowledge of wine may discover two bottles of a rare vintage worth 10 gp each on one of the shelves. The bottles were left behind by Fabius Stronghide, who purchased them in secrecy from his wife and left them in the farmhouse after the quake to avoid a confrontation about his reckless spending.

11. SECRET TUNNEL

Characters approaching this tunnel can hear the faint sniffing sounds of a child crying. When the party enters the tunnel, read aloud:

This narrow tunnel is unlit and partially filled with rubble from the deteriorated north wall.

This secret tunnel has been in place since before the Stronghides purchased the farmhouse. Its secret stone doors were damaged in the quake, revealing its presence. The Stronghides used it to help conceal their vault and panic room in the event of bandit raids.

The Lost Child. A dark-haired five-year-old child named Mellanny from a nearby farmstead went missing a day ago after wandering into the Stronghide farmhouse and finding her way into the cellar. The spirits that haunt the farmhouse, lucid enough to avoid harming an innocent child, have mostly left her alone. Mellanny, however, was spooked by one of the undead rats in the storage room and fled to this tunnel, where she is now too terrified to move from. The party is likely to find her in the fetal position, tired, thirsty, and face wet with tears. She can be calmed enough to follow the party outside of the farmhouse with a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Once beyond the Stronghide property, and perhaps reinvigorated with water and snacks provided by the party, Mellanny can confidently direct the party back to her home, where her family is sure to be waiting.

12. STRONGHIDE VAULT

This spacious room is mostly empty. A few overturned tables line the east and west walls. Against the south wall, a metal strongbox rests atop a modest wooden pedestal. The strongbox's lid is flipped open, revealing its empty interior.

The Stronghides used this room to store their modest fortune and family heirlooms. They made sure to empty it when they left for the village.

Haunting Manifestation. If the party has not already discovered Caelum Nightshade's dagger, each creature that enters this room for the first time must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. Creatures that fail this saving throw feel a sharp, sudden pain in their side, as if they have been stabbed, and take 8 (2d8) psychic damage. Creatures that succeed on this saving throw feel the pain but take no damage. In either case, the pain fades after a few moments.

13. PANIC ROOM

A single stone bench and a dilapidated wooden pallet fill this small and otherwise empty room. Flagstones in the cellar floor are cracked and dislodged, revealing a shallow cavity beneath. Amidst the dirt and debris, you notice the glint of metal from within the cavity, partially exposed.

The Stronghides used this room in the event of any bandit attacks or raiding of the countryside. In this room, nearly eighty years ago, Caelum Nightshade hid from his pursuers and buried his dagger. The glint the party can see is the hilt of the dagger, *shadowstrike* (see page 7), its blade still lodged in the earth. Upon further investigation, lying partially submerged in the dirt beside the dagger is a crusty leather journal, its pages damp and soiled, but many still readable. A character who spends some time reviewing the journal can learn the following information:

- Caelum Nightshade was once a respected member of a local assassins' guild, known for his skills and cunning, but eventually went rogue, seeking greater power and influence.
- He discovered a cursed dagger, which he named the Shadowstrike, during a contract in the Feywild, taking it as a prize and willingly becoming a servant to its dark power in exchange for its gift.
- Shadowstrike granted Caelum the power of invisibility, but at a cost: it trapped the spirits of those he killed with it on the Material Plane, tormenting them for eternity. Caelum was happy to pay this cost.
- The later entries of the journal include Caelum's thoughts on his most recent contract, in which a botched assassination attempt has made an influential sorcerer a powerful enemy.
- Caelum was on the run, fleeing from his pursuers and hoping to remain concealed for a time in the abandoned farmhouse. He wrote about his plans to bury the dagger

and journal to hide any evidence in case he was caught, with a promise to himself to return once the coast was clear.

THE GHOST OF ELARA SILVERWIND

Assuming the party has recovered the dagger, they are confronted by one final spirit before they leave the farmhouse—a translucent elven figure with a radiant, yet sorrowful expression, her once fine mail armor now tattered and battle-worn, a shortsword hanging at her hip. This ghostly spirit is the figure of Elara Silverwind, the most recent victim of shadowstrike. Elara was a young (for elven standards) adventurer who sought to bring an end to Nightshade's dark deeds, which were destabilizing the realm. Bound to the Material Plane by the dagger's power like the other spirits that haunts the farmhouse, she is the most lucid among them and similarly desperate to prevent others from falling victim to its curse. She may apologize for the hostile actions of the other spirits, explaining that they are tormented by their suffering. If she has to, she will attack the party and fight until she is destroyed. Elara uses **wraith** statistics with the following modifications:

- She has 100 hit points.
- She has one legendary action with which she can use her Life Drain action.

There are a few ways the party can resolve the situation with Elara:

Bury the Dagger. This is Elara's first suggestion, and the easiest path. If the party agrees to rebury the dagger where they found it, Elara is satisfied, and she will provide them with a heartfelt thanks before fading away.

Promise to Destroy the Dagger. The party may attempt to persuade Elara that they will seek a way to destroy the dagger or cleanse it of its curse, thus freeing the spirits it has trapped. Elara is highly sceptical this can be done, and convincing her of this requires a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Exorcise Her Spirit. The party may attempt to specifically exorcise Elara's spirit with a *dispel evil and good* spell, or similar magical means. This is not Elara's preference, for she selflessly wishes to protect others and keep the dagger forgotten. However, if her spirit is exorcised, the party will be able to leave the farmhouse unobstructed.

At GM discretion, there may be other creative ways the party can come up with to resolve the situation with Elara and the dagger. The GM is encouraged to consider these options and their potential consequences, keeping in mind the goal of bringing closure to Elara's spirit and preventing the dagger's evil from spreading further.

AFTERMATH

The aftermath of this adventure may vary greatly depending on the party's actions throughout. If the party recovered Mellanny and accompanied her back to her parents, they may

be provided a modest monetary reward as well as the family's eternal gratitude and debt. If the party agreed to rebury the dagger, Elara and the other spirits fade away and restore peace to the Stronghide farmstead—but only for as long as the dagger stays buried. If the party promises to destroy or cleanse the dagger, related adventures are sure to follow. If they break this promise, however, they are sure to invoke the wrath of Elara and potentially many more angry spirits. The specifics of those hauntings, if necessary, are left to GM discretion. If the party encountered Glimshard, depending on how the party dealt with the imp, he may report back to his master Vexilira. At GM discretion, the hag may make an attempt to recover the dagger from the party, or, alternatively decide that it isn't worth the trouble.

SHADOWSTRIKE

Weapon (dagger), rare (requires attunement)

This elegantly crafted dagger has a blackened, slender blade with intricate silver inlays that seem to capture and reflect the shadows around it. It once belonged to the notorious elven assassin Caelum Nightshade, who used it to carry out his dark deeds.

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Invisibility. As a bonus action, you can speak the dagger's command word to become invisible for up to 1 minute. This effect ends early if you attack, cast a spell, or are hit by an attack. Once you use this property, you can't use it again until you finish a short rest.

Spirit Bind. When you reduce a humanoid to 0 hit points with this weapon on the Material Plane, the humanoid's spirit is bound to the plane, unable to pass on to the afterlife. The spirit remains trapped until the dagger is destroyed, or until a creature casts a spell such as *dispel evil and good* on the bound spirit. The trapped spirits are not under your control and may become restless, haunting the area where they were slain or the dagger itself.

REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

CREDITS

Written by: Alexander LeFort of Tavern Tales

Map by: Tom Cartos

Imp Art: Fat Goblin Games

Other Art: Shutterstock

InDesign Base Template: Nathaniel Roux