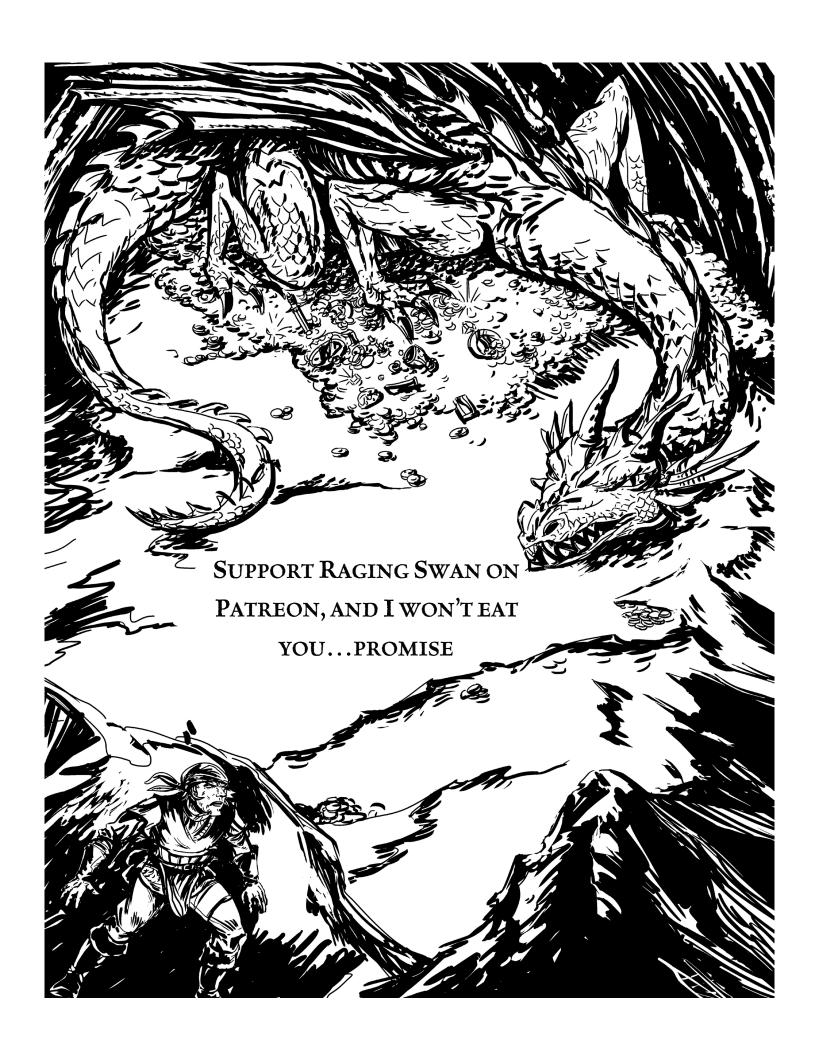
# RAGING SWAN PRESS VILLAGE BACKDROP: IDYLL





# Village Backdrop: Idyll

Idyll seems like the perfect place to live, but subtle signs something is not right are scattered throughout the village. Why are the residents reluctant to leave the village's precincts? Why are there so few children in such a prosperous place? How has the village stayed unspoiled with the wasteland surrounding it? Why is the seemingly empty Wardens' Lodge that once served as the centre of law for Idyll so ominous? Those who investigate too deeply into Idyll's mystery may discover plane-shattering implications. Whether the curious can share these secrets is yet another question.

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Situated in rolling hills and resting alongside a gently flowing river, Idyll lives up to its name. The villagers welcome all visitors and treat them to flavourful meals. Fine wines from Idyll's vineyards complement exquisitely flavoured meats butchered from the cattle and sheep the villagers raise. If any complaints arise from guests, they usually centre on the village's dullness.

However, there are hints not everything is at it seems. The foremost of these are the weathered monoliths standing at cardinal points on the village's borders. Etched with weatherworn sigils in numerous planar languages, none of the villagers can translate them but remark that nothing odd has occurred because of the monoliths. Additionally, strange artefacts littered all around, but well outside, Idyll's borders indicate the village was a focal point for ancient wars. Finally, rumours abound of strange metal people apprehending lawbreakers who subsequently disappear without a trace.

#### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

**Ruler** Tetrad Council

**Government** Council

**Population** 127 (64 humans, 4 dwarves, 2 elves, 1 gnome, 16 half-elves, 32 half-orcs, 8 halflings)

Alignments LG, NG, CG, LN, LE, NE, CE

Languages Abyssal, Aklo, Common, Celestial, Infernal, Sylvan
Corruption -1; Crime -1; Economy +0; Law -2; Lore +1; Society
+3

Qualities Magically attuned, prosperous

**Danger** 5; **Disadvantages** Extraplanar beacon (increases Danger by 5 and Lore by +3)

#### NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

- Adeline Cobb (location 2; NG female dwarf expert 2) Proprietor of Cobb's, Adeline is one of the few children who grew up in Idyll; thanks to Idyll's cornucopia, she charges low prices for sumptuous fare and comfortable beds.
- **Brie Ornth** (location 6; CG female gnome rogue 4) While some people in Idyll think this choice of councilmember is strange, as they see no need for gnome representation, Brie's decisions are even-handed.
- Constance Indra (location 6; LE female halfling oracle [flame] 7)
  If Indra had her way, Idyll's laws would be stricter, more punitive and there would be many more of them.
- Evangeline (locations 3 and 7; NE female elf druid 4/ranger 3) Caretaker of Grandmother Oak, this elf welcomes discussion about topics related to nature; she also makes it clear she has no time for those who despoil nature.
- **Mercius Grady** (location 6; LG male half-orc paladin 6) Gentle and kind, this councilmember seems too soft to govern the village, until he gets involved in an argument about which he is passionate.

Vaelin Smith (location 6; CE male human barbarian 5) This towering, tanned human has fiery hair and a shock of white near his forehead; his temperament matches his appearance.

#### **NOTABLE LOCATIONS**

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

- The Monoliths: Idyll's most notable feature, the monoliths stand at cardinal points marking a circular border around the village. Each monolith features inscriptions in a multitude of planar languages.
- Cobb's: Villagers direct visitors to this tavern. For astonishingly low prices, diners receive savoury drinks and meals.
- Grandmother Oak: This impossibly large oak stands at Idyll's heart, providing ample shade.
- Opalescent Pools: Nine pools, arranged in a square three-bythree pattern, glow softly during moonlit nights.
- Wardens' Lodge: Sealed shut, this building ostensibly serves as Idyll's law office; when questioned, villagers maintain the building is unnecessary as there is no need for law enforcement.
- Council Hall: In contrast to the peacefulness of Idyll's inhabitants, where everyone gets along, the council hall is home to intense arguments.
- 7. **Aid Station**: A cleric and a druid reside here and provide aid to inhabitants, villagers and animals alike.
- 8. **Storage Silos**: Ample supplies of grain, grapes and other materials, kept fresh using magic, fill these silos.
- 9. **Pinion River**: This deep, clear river winds southward into the village on its meandering route; it provides great fishing.
- 10. **Fields of Battle**: Just outside Idyll, dedicated archaeologists can find ancient instruments of war, rejected by the ground.

#### MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Farming, Winery, Artefact Trade

Base Value 750 gp; Purchase Limit 4,250 gp; Spellcasting 5th;

Minor Items 2d4; Medium Items 1d4; Major Items –

When the PCs arrive in Idyll, the following items are for sale:

- Potions & Oils cure light wounds (50 gp), nondetection (800 gp), protection from chaos/evil/good/law (50 gp)
- Scrolls (Arcane) calm emotions (200 gp), magic aura (25 gp)
- Scroll (Divine) goodberry (50 gp), hold person (150 gp)
- Rod splendour (30,500 gp; location 6)
- Weapons anarchic, axiomatic, holy and unholy weapons of various descriptions (18,000 gp + weapon cost; location 6)

# VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) may know information about Idyll. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser result.

**DC 10**: Idyll is a pastoral village where the inhabitants spend their time in agricultural pursuits.

**DC 15**: While the village is ideal, the toll of an ancient war still corrupts the surrounding land.

**DC 20**: Very few of the inhabitants ever travel beyond Idyll's boundaries. Another strange aspect of the village is the notable lack of children.

**DC 30 (Knowledge [planes] only)**: Idyll serves as a relocation centre for extraplanar beings wishing to stay hidden from powerful opponents.

# VILLAGERS

**Appearance** The villagers have no uniform appearance. However, when they first arrive a villager briefly displays an odd trait (glowing blue eyes, a barbed tail or curved horns) that quickly disappears.

**Dress** Befitting an agrarian lifestyle, the people of Idyll wear utilitarian clothing. Occasionally, someone wears ostentatious clothes, but no resident ever remarks on it.

#### WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about Idyll and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A PC exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below, to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1	If someone wishes to remain hidden from foes, Idyll is
	the place to go.
2*	An apocalyptic event (meteorite, flood or earthquake,
	depending on the person providing the rumour) will soon
	destroy the village and wipe out its inhabitants.
3	During the full moon, a shimmering light emanates from
	the monoliths, creating a dome around the village.
4	The council has been particularly contentious of late, and
	a couple of people have overheard Vaelin threatening to
	harm the other council members.
5*	The silos hide bodies from ages ago; the magic of the
	buildings has preserved them all these years.
6	When (rarely) inhabitant leaves the village, a new
	resident of the same race arrives shortly thereafter.

<sup>\*</sup>False rumour



#### 1: THE MONOLITHS

Four stone monoliths stand 20-feet tall at the exact cardinal points of north, south, east and west (a DC 15 Knowledge [nature] or Knowledge [geography] check confirms this).

- North: The northern structure is basalt and various runes in an ancient dialect of Celestial cover it.
- South: Carved from obsidian, the southern monolith has a mixture of Abyssal and Infernal.
- East: Granite comprises the eastern stone, which has Celestial and Infernal engraved on it.
- West: The western monolith is white marble with black marble veins running through it; a combination of Abyssal and Celestial runes covers the stone.

The monoliths date to the dawn of humanoids, when armies of demons, devils and angels warred with each other. The circular area bounded by the monoliths originally served as neutral ground for commanders who wished to parley with their opponents. After the armies withdrew to their home planes, the magic kept this area free from planar meddling, and a new purpose arose for the area: a haven for outsiders fleeing reprisals (or justice). The monoliths protect themselves and creatures and buildings within the boundary with nondetection and undetectable alignment (and radiate overwhelming abjuration and transmutation auras). They also sustain perfect wind speeds, temperatures and precipitation by means of control weather.

All of Idyll's residents have a new, if mundane, lease on life, and those who have chosen to live here prefer this existence to one where they might get snuffed out of existence altogether. They are free to leave, but they give up the protections offered by the village when they do so. When a visitor asks about the monoliths, villagers greet the questions with pat responses about the ages of the monoliths, and no one claims to have translated the stones' writings.

# 2: COBB'S

Bordered by the main road and the Pinion River, this inn and tavern, run by Adeline Cobb (NG female dwarf expert 2), is the primary destination for visitors. The two-storey building holds twenty large rooms furnished with down beds. A stable attached to the building suits nearly any mount. Adeline has a staff of three to seven (various races, expert 1), some of whom are temporary employees, depending on business. The staff serves food, maintain rooms, tend to stabled mounts and so on.

The most memorable feature is the tavern, where Adeline treats diners to delectable food and opulent wine. The tavern

also serves superb ales and mead, and all food and drink come from Idyll's fields and vines, or the Pinion River. Because of this, prices are astonishingly low for the fare.

- Food & Drink meal (selection of mutton, roast, turkey, fish or even vegetarian options with poppy-seed bread and spiced soup) 3 sp, ale or mead 1 cp, wine (bottle) 1 gp.
- Accommodations A room costs 1 sp per night. The room sleeps two comfortably, and a good lock (DC 30 Disable Device check to bypass) protects the room, even though Adeline assures guests that there is no need to lock the door.

Adeline was a astral deva who thwarted a balor's assault on an angelic host; she stays here to avoid the demon's revenge.

# 3: GRANDMOTHER OAK

This 100-foot-tall tree, ringed with flowing Sylvan script, provides shade for a large swath of the village. The tree is remarkable in that there are no other trees in Idyll nor in the wasted lands outside the border marked by the monoliths. The weather conditions provide it plenty of sun and water, so the tree thrives. It hosts a wide variety of bird species as well as chipmunks and squirrels. The druid Evangeline (NE female elf druid 4/ranger 3) tends to the tree and its inhabitants when she is not working with the occasional wounded animal at the Aid Station (location 7).

The tree is an extraplanar entrance to Idyll and ferries fey nobles who wish to escape deadly court intrigues. These nobles spend the shortest time in the village, as they grow bored and wish to return to their former lives, in the hope that whatever feud they have escaped has blown over. Evangeline is one such noble, and she has spent over fifty summers in Idyll.

# 4: OPALESCENT POOLS

The other way to arrive in Idyll from the planes is through these deep pools, each leading to a plane suited for the alignment represented along the typical lawful-to-chaotic, good-to-evil axes. The pools are clear during the day, but they give off a pearly glow when a full moon is directly overhead. Characters who bypass the *nondetection* spell can discover the pools can cast *gate* but only in one direction (from the plane to the pool in Idyll). However, clever characters who make a DC 40 Use Magic Device check can reverse the direction of travel. This potentially puts them in the arms of inevitables who oversee travel to the village.

When a resident forgoes his or her residency in Idyll, the inevitables prepare a replacement. As rigidly lawful creatures, they keep the population levels in the village the same, so the replacement must accept the race of the former resident.

# 5: WARDENS' LODGE

While the Tetrad Council ostensibly enacts laws from the neighbouring building, the residents of this building uphold the laws. Inevitables oversee Idyll from this building and respond to any major infraction or threat immediately.

The building itself is nigh impregnable. While it appears to be fashioned from wood, it has the hardness of adamantine, and the material repairs 50 hp worth of damage per round. The building has one entrance, with a door made of the same material and a high-quality lock (DC 50 Disable Device bypasses). If someone manages to breach the building, the inevitables monitoring the village *plane shift* to their home plane, leaving behind an empty building.

# 6: COUNCIL HALL

The Tetrad Council meets on a semi-regular basis in this luxurious building. The council must include one being of each alignment extreme (LG, CE, CG and LE), which ensures the council achieves very little. The inevitables devised this government to ensure no particular group gains the upper hand, and it allows the councilmembers to continue their philosophical battles through the proxy of government.

The council also entertains trade agreements, as they export the ample food and wine produced in the village. They also approve excavation requests from outsiders who wish to take artefacts from the ancient battlefield outside the village. The council takes a considerable amount of time to deliberate such requests, arguing about allowing creatures of certain alignments to obtain weapons that would tip the balance in their favour. Eventually, they decide on an exorbitant fee as a deterrent to the would-be acquirer, or they promise a large bounty for items turned over to the council.

Brie Ornth (CG female gnome rogue 4) is a former lillend who sung a melody so pure she broke a contract between an archdevil and a powerful soul; the archdevil promised horrific torments for the azata. Mercius Grady (LG male half-orc paladin 6) was a legion archon who deserted his unit and decided to run away rather than face punishment; he hopes to atone for his desertion and eventually return home. Vaelin Smith (CE male human barbarian 5) formerly led an army of demons as a demon lord, but treachery from an underling drove him into hiding. Rounding out the group is Constance Indra (LE female halfling oracle [flame] 7), a pit fiend who made an imprudent choice of political allies and fell out of favour with the archdevil she served.

# 7: AID STATION

Evangeline (NE female elf druid 4/ranger 3) and Melody Joon (LG female human cleric 5) tend to the wounded and injured in this building but are more than willing to make "house calls."

Typically, this involves Evangeline administering aid to livestock or Melody checking on a wounded visitor recuperating at Adeline Cobb's inn. Very rarely, one of the healers must patch up a resident.

A muddle of holy symbols covers the walls. If asked about the display, Melody and Evangeline deflect the questions or merely indicate they follow a philosophy and the symbols are there to make people feel at ease.

#### 8: STORAGE SILOS

A pair of silos stands adjacent to the two major fields in Idyll. The silos store all the food grown in the village. The silos use a variant of *purify food and drink* to maintain the flavour of items placed within them. Grain and grapes take up most of the space, but a refrigerated area for butchered meat occupies one of the silos. As these buildings are beginning to overflow, the residents have petitioned the council about erecting a new silo. After months of argument about the best placement for the silo, the council are poised to agree the request.

#### 9: PINION RIVER

The Pinion River got its name from its feather-like appearance as seen from the air. The river has lost that appearance thanks to the wars that rerouted it, but the moniker has stuck. Within Idyll's confines, water from the river is refreshing and pure. However, outside the village's boundary, it becomes polluted and disease-laden. New visitors often require a great deal of assurance the water is safe to drink within the village.

#### 10: FIELDS OF BATTLE

The former battlefield hosted wars between powerful extraplanar beings has never recovered from the devastation unleashed by the combatants. When the creatures retreated to their home planes, they left a poisoned land, littered with engines of war and powerful magic items. Over time, the earth more or less reclaimed the land with a layer of sediment that covers most of the items used in those ancient battles. Nothing edible grows in this hostile land. This roughly five-mile-diameter splotch of wasteland makes Idyll's existence all the more remarkable.

Those aware of the treasures buried in the earth, and willing to brave the poisonous land, must obtain a license from the Tetrad Council to search for treasure. Depending on the items found, the council may charge a kingly sum or may offer payment that exceeds the items' apparent worth. Those who decide not to deal with the council and obtain treasure unlawfully receive a visit from powerful inevitables who give the offender the chance to return the item or lose it by force.

Idyll is typically a tranquil place where the inhabitants work hard in the fields and vineyards. The weather is perfectly mild year round and gentle rains fall during the night hours so as not to disrupt outdoor work. Villagers are pleasant to visitors and readily engage in small talk. However, questions about Idyll's oddities are met with redirection and, for those who do not get the hint, an end to the conversation.

#### TRADE & INDUSTRY

Idyll notionally derives its wealth from the bounty of crops, livestock and wine. As the weather is mild all year, the villagers can grow crops throughout the year. Because of this abundance, the price for the fruits of the villagers' labour is quite low. So far, Idyll is a secret most traders like to keep to themselves, and the wasteland surrounding the village discourages caravans from making the trek. This keeps demand at a level where the villagers does not need to raise prices to meet demand.

Another relatively untapped economic resource comes from the surrounding land itself. As erosion or settling occurs, various items peek out of the ground and draw the interest of treasure hunters. Such prospecting commands great fees from the Tetrad Council, but they offer inordinate sums for specific items retrieved from the wastes.

# LAW & ORDER

The Tetrad Council governs Idyll, but the stalemate among the members usually means they enact very few new laws. However, the villagers usually treat each other peacefully. The occasional verbal argument might erupt between inhabitants; to a stranger, these arguments may seem much more philosophical than expected for ordinary farmers.

The Wardens' Lodge is the true centre of upholding the law. If a resident harms another resident, inevitables pour out of the lodge and whisk the offender away. This usually spells a death sentence for the offender, as he or she loses the protection afforded by living in the village. One of the councilmembers politely asks a visitor who harms a villager or steals from the village to leave. Noncompliance results in inevitables forcibly escorting the lawbreaker out of Idyll.



#### EVENTS

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

D6	EVENT	
1	A sheep escapes from the pen in which it was kept and runs beyond one of the monoliths; a giant worm bursts forth from the ground and devours the animal.	
2	A cloven-hooved man with a ram's head stands just outside Idyll and demands the villagers turn out someone whose name is unfamiliar to them.	
3	A team arrives from the nearby wastes with an axe in their possession; all members of the Tetrad Council rush out to greet the team and speak in hushed tones before ushering them to the council hall.	
4	The centre opalescent pool bubbles furiously as though it were boiling, and then ceases a minute later.	
5	While the characters are at Cobb's, they overhear someone announce an impending pregnancy; the villagers at the tavern grow quiet at the announcement.	
6	A sudden thunderstorm catches everyone by surprise; the villagers seem exceedingly troubled by it.	

### IDYLL: BEHIND THE SCENES

Inevitables act as agents of law in the planes, usually by destroying chaotic creatures or acting as a bulwark against incursions by such creatures.

Over two centuries ago, a bralani azata (a chaotic good outsider) fleeing the wrath of an archdevil sought protection at an inevitable outpost. The inevitables initially granted the request, but it became increasingly clear hosting a fugitive would bring trouble to their door. They turned their attention to other locations they could hide the azata. Eventually, they found a perfect location: an old battlefield on a Material Plane world protected by powerful towering monoliths. The protections offered by the monoliths withstood the passage of time and offered the perfect place to hide fleeing outsiders. The inevitables made a deal with the fugitive azata, promising the creature safety in return for its agreement to remain in the village of Idyll the inevitables would build to house it and other fugitives.

As an additional concession, the azata agreed to have its powers stripped and its memories partially removed. The process, used now for all Idyll's residents, preserves their essences, but renders them mundane and better able to fit in with the other residents. Every creature transferred to the village is aware of their situation and knows they can leave at any time, but doing so forfeits the village's protections.

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