

# THE HOFSTEDER HAUNTING

AN ADVENTURE FOR 2ND TO 4TH LEVEL CHARACTERS



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THE HOFSTEDER HAUNTING IS A FIFTH Edition adventure for **three to six characters of 2nd to 4th level**, optimized for a party of **four 3rd level characters**.

After the discovery of an old diary, a local ranch has suddenly become haunted, and its living occupants have been forced to flee lest they further anger the restless dead. Unbeknownst to them, the diary's discovery has awakened the spirits of the original owners of the ranch, who were murdered in cold blood over 100 years ago and buried beneath the property. Adventurers are needed to confront the spirits and do what they can to either destroy them or put them to rest. This adventure is set near the village of Southwold in the Siothas campaign setting but can easily be placed near a different village in almost any game.

### BACKGROUND

Over 100 years ago, all four members of the Hofsteder family were slain in the ranch that they built by their aggrieved relative Gavod Hofsteder. Gavod had always believed that the land the Hofsteder ranch was built upon belonged to him, despite the fact that his late father willed otherwise and gave it to his brother, Nargim. Gavod was incensed watching Nargim build a ranch and then raise a family on the property that should have belonged to him. Over the years, his rage festered as he descended into alcoholism. Finally, one night, knowing that the property would fall to him should his brother perish, he concocted a dark plan to murder his brother and the rest of the Nargim Hofsteder family. A week later, Gavod executed his plan, breaking into the Hofsteder ranch and murdering the family members one by one with a sharpened axe as they slept and then burying their bodies under the porch. In the days that followed, Gavod inherited the ranch as planned, however with no familial support system and a crippling alcohol addiction, he could not maintain the property, let alone his own physical and mental wellbeing, and drank himself to death just a year later.

The ranch was repossessed, and in the decades since, it has changed occupants many times, each occupant inhabiting the ranch without issue. Recently though, this has changed. The ranch's current occupant, Eastod Glint, has discovered that it is, in fact, haunted. It all started when Eastod found a hidden crawlspace in the wall of one of the ranch's bedrooms. Inside was an old diary, mostly filled with the mundane writings of an apparently teenage girl. Eastod thought little of it, so he put the diary on one of his bookshelves and carried on with his work. The next day, however, everything changed. Dishes flew around the kitchen. Strange sounds were heard in empty rooms. Blood appeared on the walls. Terrified and convinced the diary had something to do with it, Eastod put the diary back in the crawlspace. But the hauntings

continued. Unbeknownst to him, the ghost of Juliana Hofsteder, Gavod's daughter, was awoken by his discovery of her diary. Her rest disturbed, Juliana awoke the other family members, who are disgruntled by Juliana's rage more than the occupation of the ranch that once belonged to them. Eastod and his family were forced to flee the ranch and seek help in the village of Southwold. If the haunting cannot be stopped, Eastod worries that he and his family will lose everything they have.

### GETTING THE QUEST

The characters can be hooked into this adventure either by finding a notice offering a reward of a cow in exchange for clearing out a haunting or by being approached directly by Eastod Glint, who has been approaching random people in the local tavern who look like they might be adventurers. Eastod is a hard-working man in his mid-forties, with long brown hair in a ponytail and a wide, flat nose. His voice is deep, and he clears his throat often as he speaks. He explains:

"Aye, you've got to help me and my family. Our ranch is haunted – the thing is damn infested with ghosts. Not a single room is safe. And we've lived in it for years! Never had a problem 'till last week. Now the animals have lost their minds and the dishes move on their own. Please, if we can't get to the bottom of this, my family will lose everything. That ranch is our livelihood."

The characters will likely have questions for Eastod. He can share with them the rest of the following information:

- It all started when Eastod found what appeared to be a young girl's diary in a hidden crawlspace in one of the bedrooms. The diary contained some disturbing passages at the end that alluded to some sort of attack, but was otherwise uninteresting.
- After the hauntings started, Eastod put the diary back where he found it. But the hauntings did not stop.
- His family did not speak to the ghosts.
- The only form any of them have seen is the fleeting image of a young girl in her teenage years, with jet-black eyes. Eastod believes this is likely the owner of the diary.
- The ghosts have left strange written messages in blood on the walls, such as "appease Juliana" and "let us rest."
- Eastod knows little about the ranch's history, other than the fact that the previous owner reported no such disturbances, and after asking around the village, there is little information that can be uncovered about the ranch or its previous owners.

Eastod provides the characters with a set of keys to the property and suggests they be as thorough as possible; "there could be bodies buried behind the walls, for all I know," he says.

# GHOSTS OF THE RANCH

Multiple members of the original Hofsteder family haunt the ranch. The characters will find evidence of these ghosts as they explore the property. Much of the aggressive haunting is carried out by Juliana Hofsteder, the owner of the diary that Eastod found and by far the angriest member of the family. The other family members are only mildly disturbed, and mostly wish for Juliana to be at peace so the family can rest again. After the characters have investigated enough of the ranch to prove that they will not be scared off by Juliana's activity, the other family members will directly appear before the characters and appeal for them to give their bodies under the porch a proper burial in the hopes of appeasing Juliana. Throughout this adventure, when the characters enter a specific area, the GM may find reference to a "haunting presence." A haunting presence is an encounter with one of the ghosts of the Hofsteder family (usually Juliana). When the characters have experienced at least five haunting presences, the ghosts of the family decide that they can appeal to the characters for help. See "A Haunting Appeal" on page X. Once the family has appealed to the characters for help, the haunting presences cease until the family has been put to rest or 24 hours have passed, whichever comes first.

**Juliana Hofsteder.** Juliana appears as a girl in her late teenage years, with straw-colored hair and fair features. Her eyes are entirely black, with no discernible iris or pupils, and she bears a deep, gaping axe wound in her chest. Her voice is high-pitched to a near shrill and it echoes violently.

**Nargim Hofsteder.** Nargim appears as a man in his mid-forties, with salt-and-pepper hair and thick forearms. His left eye dangles out of its socket, and the left side of his skull has been caved in. He speaks with a deep reverberation that shakes any nearby furniture.

**Libbie Hofsteder.** Libbie appears as a woman in her late thirties, with long, wavy black hair and green eyes. There are ligature marks around her neck; Gavod strangled her instead of felling her with an axe as he did the rest of the family. Her voice is soft and almost melodic.

**Bram Hofsteder.** Bram appears as a young man in his early twenties, with a strong build and square face topped by tousled brown hair. The top of his skull is split open, revealing a portion of his brain beneath. In life, Bram was mute. His ghost does not speak; communicating only in writing or gestures.

## THE HOFSTEDER RANCH

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The Hofsteder Ranch is a sprawling property that includes the Hofsteder house, a grain silo, a windmill, a cow shed, a horse stables, and a workshop. These buildings are surrounded by sprawling wheat and vegetable fields, smaller household fields, an herb garden, and a corral for cattle grazing. The house itself is a single-story wooden building with a large porch that abuts the west and south walls. Doors

to the house are made from oak reinforced with iron bands, and can be unlocked using the keyring provided by Eastod. Interior doors are made from pine and are unlocked. Ceilings in the house are ten feet high. None of the buildings on the ranch are lit, though sunlight filters through windows during the day to provide dim light.

The following locations are keyed to the provided map of the Hofsteder Ranch.

### I. GRANARY

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A ladder runs up the south side of this granary and a door provides access through the east wall. The grain in this granary is infested with maggots; a consequence of the ranch's haunting. The maggots are disgusting but harmless.

### 2. CORRAL

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A few horse jump poles and water troughs occupy this fenced corral. The ground is muddy and well-worn.

Characters inside the corral with a passive Perception of 14 or higher notice the image of Bram Hofsteder watching them from beyond the fence in their peripheral vision. If they turn to face him, however, he disappears. The water in the troughs has mostly evaporated; it rises only about an inch from the bottom of the trough and is filled with grime.

### 3. COW SHED

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Characters who come within 30 feet of the cow shed begin to hear the sounds of panicked moos and the stomping of hooves. The doors to the shed are locked, but can be opened with Eastod's keyring. When the characters enter the shed, read aloud:

# HOFSTEDER RANCH



# RANCH UPPER LEVELS



This shed is lined with eight wooden stalls along its north and south walls. Three of these stalls are each occupied by a cow which moos, huffs, and stomps around violently, clearly in distress. A leather belt flies around the room as if propelled by an unseen force. Every few moments, it lashes out to strike a cow on its hind. A ladder in the middle of the shed rises to a second-story loft. Double doors exit to the east and west.

**Haunting Presence: Stirred Cattle.** The angry spirit of Juliana Hofsteder lurks temporarily in this room, hoping to disturb the characters. Juliana flies around the shed with a belt, repeatedly striking the cows. The belt uses the statistics of a small **animated object** (HP: 25, AC: 16, Attack: +6 to hit, 1d8 + 2 damage, Str: 6, Dex: 14) and attacks the characters if they attempt to stop it. Juliana herself does not appear to the characters and cannot be targeted. As a result of Juliana's harassment, each of the three cows is distressed and agitated. A cow can be calmed with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. A character who fails this check by 5 or more must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 9 (3d6) bludgeoning damage on a failed save or half that amount on a successful one as the cow bucks and kicks violently.

### 3A. BREAK AREA

Shelves in this portion of the loft hold farming tools and spare sacks and containers. A table is surrounded by four chairs and littered with playing cards.

In addition to acting as a break area, this part of the loft is also used for extra storage. The playing cards on the table were left there by the Glint family as they fled.

**Haunting Presence: Juliana's Cards.** The first time a character reaches out to touch any of the cards, an ace of spades flies off from the table as if thrown by an expert hand and wedges itself between the boards of the west wall.

### 3B. ADDITIONAL STORES

In this section of the loft, shelves and containers hold non-perishable food items and general homeware items that cannot be stored in the house. There is nothing of significant value here.

### 4. CHICKEN COOPS

Two distressed chickens occupy each of these coops. Characters who investigate the coops can notice that their feed is running low. The Glints tried to provide a stockpile for the animals before they left.

## 5. WINDMILL AND WATER TANK

A windmill churns lazily in the breeze. Beside it, a ladder ascends to a wooden water tank mounted above the ground on 12-foot-high support beams.

**Haunting Presence: Illusory Splashing.** A character with a passive Perception of 12 or higher who looks into the well can hear the splashing sounds coming from the water tank. A character who climbs up to the tank to investigate can see the image of a young girl lying at the bottom of the tank. Both the splashing and the image are an illusion manifested by Juliana; the bottom of the tank holds nothing but groundwater. A character who climbs into the tank to follow the voice must make a successful DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or take 8 (2d8) psychic damage as the spirit of Juliana lets out an abrupt, piercing wail.

## 6. WHEAT FIELD

This small fenced field is lined with rows of wheat.

This field provides a smaller crop for household use.

## 7. VEGETABLE FIELD

This small fenced field is lined with rows of vegetables – lettuce, carrots, potatoes, and others. Standing in the middle of the field is a scarecrow mounted to a stake, with a burlap sack for a head. It is surrounded by a small flock of cawing ravens.

The Glints grow vegetables here for household use as well as for animal feed.

**Haunting Presence: Haunted Scarecrow.** The scarecrow in the middle of the field can be temporarily possessed by the ghost of Juliana. When a character looks at the scarecrow and is within 60 feet of it, a scratchy, telepathic voice can be heard inside their head that offers to "share secrets" with them. This is the spirit of Juliana, attempting to deceive the characters into believing the scarecrow might have valuable information to provide them. In reality, Juliana is attempting to draw the characters closer to the scarecrow so that she can more effectively use it to attack. As soon a character enters the field, the **haunted scarecrow** (see page 9) attacks, aided by the **swarm of ravens**. It fights until it is destroyed. The swarm of ravens disperses if its hit points are reduced by half.

## 8. STABLES

The doors to the stables are locked and can be opened with Eastod's keyring. When the characters enter, read aloud:

These stables are divided into eight separate stalls against the north and south walls, each of which are empty save for drinking troughs and some mundane supplies. A ladder ascends to a second story loft.

The Glints took the four horses they owned into the village as they left.

### 8A. GENERAL STORAGE

Sacks of flour, bales of hay, un-weathered lumber, barrels of mead, and other general supplies are piled against the walls. A crank-operated winch extends outside from the west wall.

Lengths of rope extend from the arm of the winch, which the Glint family uses to load supplies into the loft storage area. A character can operate the winch without having to make a check.

### 8B. FARM HAND'S LODGING

A simple bed and small desk are tucked into the corners of this side of the loft, surrounded by extra crates, barrels, and spools of rope.

A farmhand who works for the Glint family lodged here to be closer to the horses and keep an eye on the ranch. He abandoned the ranch with the family when they discovered it to be haunted. The desk holds some writing supplies and a prayer book. The containers in this room are empty.

**Stable Owl.** An owl makes its home in the rafters above this area of the loft. If the characters investigate during the day, the owl is asleep. At night, the owl watches the characters inquisitively while they investigate the stable.

A character who casts *Speak with animals* or who can otherwise communicate with the owl can learn the following information from it:

- The owl goes by the name Wilfred. The farmhand named it.
- The ghost of a young man who does not speak spends much time in this stable. The ghost seems distressed that there are no horses here.
- The ghost of the young man is not currently in the stable.
- The disturbances on the ranch are seemingly caused by a single spirit — the other spirits are not nearly so angry.
- The owl had never seen the ghosts until a few days ago.

## 9. WORKSHOP

The door to the workshop is locked and can be opened with the keyring provided by Eastod. When the characters enter, read aloud:

The walls of this workshop are lined with shelves well-stocked with tools and supplies. A pair of cart wheels and other parts are piled against the east wall. Two workbenches are littered with clamps, saws, measuring devices, and scrap wood.

**Haunting Presence: Nagrim Hofsteder.** Immediately as the characters enter the workshop, they are briefly confronted by the spirit of Nagrim Hofsteder. Read aloud:

A middle-aged man tending to one of the workbenches turns around to face you when you enter. An eye hangs out from one of its sockets, and his skull is caved in. With a look of fright on his face, he disappears in an instant.

Nagrim is caught off-guard by the characters and has little interest in disturbing them. After Nagrim disappears, a character who appeals to his spirit and makes a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check can convince him to communicate. Though he remains out of sight, he will write the following phrases on the walls of the workshop in blood in response to general questioning:

- Our family hurts.
- She has awoken us.
- I mean no harm.
- Leave us be.

After these phrases have been written, Nagrim ceases his communication.

## 10. WEST VERANDA

This expansive veranda wraps around the west and south sides of the house. Two wooden lounge chairs, a doghouse, and some potted plants occupy the space.

The doghouse is empty; the Glint family pet passed away a year ago.

## 11. SOUTH VERANDA

A picnic table, two rocking chairs, and a pile of crates fill the south side of the veranda. An empty clothesline stretches from the roof of the veranda to the south wall of the house.

**Haunting Presence: Libbie Hofsteder.** The spirit of Libbie Hofsteder rocks gently on one of the rocking chairs, picking at her face and staring blankly out at the land beyond the ranch. She takes no notice of the characters and does not respond if they call out to her. If the characters persist and step directly into her field of view or attempt to get physical with her, Libbie flies into rage and attacks as a **specter**. She fights until reduced to 0 hit points, at which point she disappears.

## 12. PRIVY

Two stalls are lined with holed benches. There is nothing of value here.

## 13. MASTER BEDROOM

An unmade double bed flanked by night tables, a pair of dressers, and a writing desk fill most of this room. A standing mirror flanks the wall beside the door.

Eastod and his wife sleep here, just as Nagrim and his wife did originally. The dressers contain pieces of clothing that the Glint family left behind when they fled. Drawers of the writing desk are filled with parchment, ink, quills, and other mundane supplies.

**Haunting Presence: Nagrim's Image.** A character who stares into the standing mirror in this room can see the face of Nagrim behind them for a fleeting moment. If they turn to look, the space behind them will unsurprisingly be empty. Nagrim is otherwise non-responsive in this room.

## 14. KITCHEN

A cooking stove, preparation table, and cabinets and shelves lined with cooking utensils and dry ingredients fill this room. An open supply closet in the northeast corner holds mops, brooms, and buckets. A bag of flour has been spilled over the floor in the middle of the room.

Eastod's wife spilled the bag of flour after spotting a member of the Hofsteder family. The Glints left the ranch shortly thereafter.

## 15. DINING AREA

A bare, modest dining table surrounded by four chairs fills the middle of this room. A pair of shelving units holding dishes and utensils line the west and north walls. Hallways extend to the east and west. A door to the north exits outside.

**Haunting Presence: Take a Seat.** The first time the characters enter this room, the invisible spirit of Juliana pulls a chair out from the table as if offering one of the characters a seat. If a character takes a seat in the chair, the chair immediately flies into the air, driving the character's head towards the ceiling. The character must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 8 (2d8) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half that amount on a successful one.

## 16. LIVING ROOM

A couch, coffee table, and armchair are positioned near the west wall opposite a stone fireplace. An upright piano fills the southeast corner of the room. Hallways extend to the east and west.

**Haunting Presence: Face in the Flames.** The fireplace in this room burns at a steady pace and the flames lick at the top of the mantle. Characters with a passive Perception of 10 or higher will notice that the flames produce no heat. Characters who look into the flames see the brief image of Juliana Hofsteder, her face twisted into a scowl. The face disappears after a few moments.

## 17. BATHROOM

This room is partially split by a wooden room divider running north-south. On the west side of the room is vanity and a standing mirror. To the east, an iron washtub and a wicker laundry hamper fill the room. Cabinets line the south wall.

**Haunting Presence: Mirrors Are Always Traps.** The first time a character looks into the standing mirror in this room, its glass immediately shatters and flies outward. Creatures in a 10-foot-line directly in front of the mirror must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 8 (2d8) piercing damage on a failed save, or half that amount on a successful one. The shattered glass disappears, and the mirror returns to its normal condition after 1d4 hours.

## 18. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM

A pair of single beds, a chair and writing desk, and some shelving units fill most of this room. Against the west wall is a wardrobe that stands slightly askew.

**Encounter: Crawlspace.** A character who investigates the wardrobe finds a wooden panel in the wall behind it. Pulling this panel loose reveals a small crawlspace beyond, coated with dust. Lying in the crawlspace is a small leather-bound book bookmarked with a red ribbon and marked with the initials "J.H." A character who touches the diary immediately summons the **ghost** of Juliana Hofsteder, who appears in the bedroom with a hissing sound and a flash of light. "That does not belong to you," she screams as she attacks the party. Juliana fights until reduced to 0 hit points, at which point she disappears.

**Juliana's Diary.** A character who takes the time to read from Juliana's diary finds that most of the pages are filled with the mundane recordings of a teenage girl's daily life on the ranch. Closer to the end of the diary, many entries contain reference to a relative named Gavod, who had been visiting the property and getting into shouting matches with her father over who the property "really belonged to." The entries suggest that over time, the visits and arguments became more frequent. The last entry details an account of Juliana hiding in the crawlspace overhearing horrific violence occurring in the house. Juliana writes that she believes Gavod has broken in during the night and is attacking her family. She can hear screams and "crunching sounds." The last line of the diary ends abruptly with the words "I think he is com—."

## A HAUNTING APPEAL

After the characters have experienced at least five haunting presences, the spirits of Nagrim, Libbie, and Bram decide that they have seen enough. Their spirits appear before the characters; Nagrim stands in front, while Libbie and Bram stand just behind him. "You are persistent...and brave. Perhaps you can help us. Please forgive the actions of my daughter, Juliana. She is in great distress, and knows not what she does." Nagrim will introduce himself and the rest of the family members. He can then give the following information to the characters:

- Juliana is the cause of the insidious disturbances at the ranch. After her diary was found by the ranch's most recent occupant, she was awakened in a fury. She roused the rest of the family members.
- The family was murdered by a relative of theirs name Gavod, a drunkard who believed the property belonged to him. He broke in during the night and attacked them with a hatchet.
- To conceal the bodies, he dug a shallow grave in front of the west side of the house and then built the veranda over it. Because of their murders and their improper burial, the family cannot permanently rest.
- The characters should move the remains from the porch to a proper burial site on or near the property. This will allow the family to rest.
- Moving the remains is likely to further anger Juliana until they can be reburied. The characters should prepare for her presence.

## RESPECTING THE REMAINS

As Nagrim explains, the Hofsteder family's remains are buried under the west portion of the veranda. A character can pull loose the boards of the veranda with a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check, otherwise the party will have to cut through it or use other tools. Digging into the ground beneath will quickly reveal the bones of the Hofsteder family, thrown together haphazardly into a shallow grave. When the party finds the bones, the **ghost** of Juliana will make another appearance as Nagrim predicted. For a few moments, she will wail and fly about above the characters in anguish. Before she attacks, the characters can successfully calm her with a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check or by speaking a short prayer and making a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Religion) check. If Juliana is calmed, she bursts into tears, lamenting that "she just wants to feel safe." If the characters explain that they're here to help her, she falls silent and watches them for a few moments as they move the remains before she disappears. If the characters fail to calm Juliana, she attacks, disappearing after her hit points are reduced to 0. To ensure the rest of the Hofsteder family, the remains can be buried anywhere on or near the ranch in their own graves, each of which must be at least 6 feet deep. The characters can find shovels in the stable or workshop should they require them.



## AFTERMATH

If the characters have buried the remains of the Hofsteder family members in their own graves on or near the ranch, the spirits of the family have been successfully put to permanent rest. The spirits of the family appear one last time before the characters, this time in the way they looked in life before Gavod's attack. Each of them offers a smile and a word of thanks (except for Bram, who is mute). Juliana apologizes for her antagonism, explaining that she was only scared and angry. She gives the characters a spectral embrace if they let her. Nagrim then tells the characters that he buried the family's savings in a chest on the ranch many years ago — it remains there to this day. He tells the party that they should take it for themselves, and that they can find it one hundred paces north of the well, buried beneath an old sycamore tree. If the characters dig up the chest, they can find 120 sp, 46 gp, and a ruby worth 20 gp contained inside. When the characters return to Eastod and tell him of their success, he offers them a cow from his ranch as promised.

## HAUNTED SCARECROW

*Medium construct, chaotic evil*

Armor Class 11  
Hit Points 67 (9d10 + 18)  
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

**Damage Vulnerabilities** fire

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, unconscious

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**False Appearance.** While the scarecrow remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary, inanimate scarecrow.

**Innate Spellcasting.** The scarecrow's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). It can cast the following spells, requiring no components:

**At will:** *vicious mockery, chill touch*

**2/day each:** *silent image, color spray, hex*

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The scarecrow makes two claw attacks.

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened until the end of the scarecrow's next turn.

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