

OVER THE NEXT HILL ROAK CREEK

OVER THE NEXT HILL IS A multi-author series focusing on small settlements that can be dropped into a campaign with minimal preparation. Each article in the series presents several detailed NPCs, points of interest, and loose plot hooks that can be developed during play.

This installment of the series details Roak Creek, a community of artists and musicians built in a small forest clearing.



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OVERVIEW

Not far from the bustle of civilization, nestled in a picturesque clearing in a thick wood, is the town of Roak Creek. Created decades ago by the eccentric Lord Childe, Roak Creek is an artist community for those who wish to pursue their creative endeavors amongst like-minded individuals, though anyone who has an appreciation for the arts is welcome. Located by the creek of the same name, this town boasts an amphitheater, an inviting inn, and a library featuring works from some of the greatest artists and writers in the land.

What no one knows is that Lord Childe made an enemy of the devious night hag, Auntie Mudwillow. He stole her *heartstone*, the black gem that allows her to become ethereal. While she eventually killed him, he never divulged where he hid her *heartstone*, and she has searched for it ever since.

GEOGRAPHY

Roak Creek's temperate climate brings more pleasant days than bad, even during the winter. The town is located in a clearing of oaks and maples alongside the creek after which it is named. Travelers will hear Roak Creek well before they lay eyes on it as the wind carries the sounds of musical instruments or a cheering audience to anyone approaching. Wildlife avoids the noisy community, though the birds seem to take the musical cacophony as more of a challenge than anything else.

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While the land is fertile, and many of the houses have small gardens on the property, most of the town's food is imported from local villages or cities. Anyone who dips a toe into the creek will realize it is too fast to safely swim in for all but the best swimmers, and the ice is thin in the winter.

SIGNIFICANT NPCs

Ril Sonagio (male half-elf bard)

This middle-aged half-elf has sharp features, a well-trimmed goatee, and multiple gold hoops in his ears. Ril has served as the town's Master of Ceremonies—essentially the town mayor—for nearly two decades. He settled in Roak Creek after a youth filled with adventure, and seeks out visiting adventurers to swap stories with.

His excitement and passion for the arts is contagious, and he's turned more than one tone-deaf fighter or barbarian into a novice bard. He knows everyone in the town by name, and is a very shrewd gambler. More than one group of adventurers has left Roak Creek with light pockets after playing a few games of chance with Ril.

Zerial (female high elf noble)

Zerial moved to Roak Creek at the request of the previous head librarian upon his deathbed. They were old friends, though Zerial will not mention how they knew one another, only that she owed him a debt and considers curating his collection her fulfillment of that. It's difficult to tell how old she is as her elven features hide any signs of age. She carries herself with dignity and reserve. If you need to find a buyer for a manuscript of ancient draconic poetry, or want to study the artistic stylings of the fey, Zerial can help you. But those who peruse her collection merely to find hidden treasures rather than appreciate its artistic merits are promptly shown the exit. She rarely leaves the library, and her few trips out into town are the subject of gossip for the rest of the week.

Derwyn Vielle (male human commoner)

Derwyn looks like the sort of man who hasn't smiled in a long time. His hands are calloused from his life-long work of crafting musical instruments, a trade he has pursued for the last fifty years. His skin is tanned and weathered, his head bald, and his back a bit bowed. Derwyn moved to Roak Creek a decade ago after his daughter, who would have succeeded him in the family business, died. He spends much of his time in his shop, practicing his trade, though he'll often watch performances in the Amphitheater if they're using his instruments. He recently acquired a pet raven, and has become more withdrawn than usual since.

Holly Petrar (female human acolyte)

This optimistic young woman runs the Crimson Lyre with her wife, Terza. She has bouncy reddish-brown hair and freckles to match. She is a devotee to the god of poetry and song, and met Terza when the tiefling bard spent a few nights at the temple where she trained. She followed Terza to Roak Creek, where Ril oversaw their nuptials. Holly runs the Inn, being the better cook, and leaves the general store to Terza. She often brings Derwyn food, and she considers him a good friend.

Terza Petrar (female tiefling bard)

"Aggressively energetic" is how most describe their first encounter with Terza, the tiefling co-proprietor of the Crimson Lyre. Her solid gold eyes stand out against her dark skin and hair. She wears short sleeves to reveal the stylized tattoos on her arms and along her tail. Terza can often be heard playing one of her many instruments while minding the general store section attached to their inn. She is also a friendly rival of Ril's, and they can be found playing cards together at the inn once the sun has gone down. She's noticed Derwyn's change in behavior, and knowing how close her wife is to the old man, is interested in what might have caused it. She's been discreetly keeping an eye on him.

Anderst Brushpot (male halfling commoner)

A down-to-earth, middle-aged halfling, Anderst owns the Brushpot Resident Houses where long-term visitors to the town can rent rooms for months at a time. He is good friends with Ril, though he no longer plays cards with the half-elf in the interest of preserving that friendship. He gets along well with most everyone in Roak Creek save Zerial ever since she refused an invitation to dinner shortly after she first arrived. He holds the culinary arts above all others, and has a taste for fine dining. He lives on the bottom floor of his western-most house, where he keeps a large vegetable patch.

SIGNIFICANT AREAS

1. Roak Amphitheater

The pride of Roak Creek is its outdoor amphitheater. The north-facing stage measures 40 feet across and 3 feet high. Seating forms a semi-circle around the stage and rises upward toward the open sky. Awnings can be pulled over the top in case of rain or snow. It can seat 500 people, but only a major production attracts that many. There is standing room in front of the stage and boxes for important visitors, and two private dressing rooms and storage space in the back. The theater was built by the town's founder, Lord Childe, though he died before its completion. It is here that he hid the *heartstone* of the night hag known as Auntie Mudwillow. Ril manages the stage's schedule and the small crew tasked with its cleaning and upkeep.

2. The Library

This narrow, three-story house was converted into a library a few decades ago by its previous owner. It houses a large collection of poems, music, and art pieces, many of which are first editions or rare.

Zerial keeps a set of rooms on the first floor. The rest of the first floor is dedicated to poetry and other writings, and also has a quiet area for studying. The second floor holds the music and visual arts collections. Its shelves are filled with ballads and songs



while the walls are covered with canvases. The most valuable items are kept locked away on the third floor, to which Zerial has the only key. Tales of hidden treasures and lost empires, the origins of ancient villains and returning evil, can all be found here.

3. Crimson Lyre

Run by Holly and Terza Petrar, this two-story building is one of the largest in Roak Creek. They have enough beds for twenty people, an expansive bar, and hearty meals at fair prices. Attached to the inn and accessible from its common room is a small general store. They stock common goods such as rations or rope, but they also have a full selection of artisan tools kits. Behind the inn is a stable for boarding horses and other animals.

4. Brushpot Resident Houses

These four houses located around town are owned by Anderst Brushpot. Each has a small garden with vegetables and herbs, as well as a set of outdoor tables and chairs where the residents of each house can often be found enjoying the weather or talking about a recent performance. For those who do not want to be kept up all night by the residents practicing music or reciting soliloquys, it is recommended they stay at the Crimson Lyre.

5. Derwyn's Workshop

The workshop is a plain, single-story building with a bedroom and small kitchen in the back. On display are expertly crafted musical instruments for sale. While not enchanted, Derwyn's instruments are of superior quality. If a creature using it to make a Charisma (Performance) check is proficient in the Performance skill, it adds its proficiency

bonus to the check twice. Derwyn can be found working on his next instrument under the shade of a tall oak tree, his raven on his shoulder.

6. Ril Sonagio's Home

This large, two-story building traditionally belongs to the Master of Ceremonies and functions both as his home and the town hall. A balcony encircles the second floor, overlooking the green where a statue of the town's founder stands. Much of the first floor is a large ballroom. It's extravagantly decorated, lit by three chandeliers and a giant fireplace. The wood paneling is carved with scenes from famous heroic tales, though hidden amongst them Lord Childe recorded his conflict with Auntie Mudwillow and clues that point to where he hid her *heartstone*.

RUMORS AND PLOT HOOKS

Level 1-4 (1d6)

1. Hearing about Roak Creek's reputation as a haven for superb performers, one of the Archfey has "requested" the town put on a show to entertain him and his court. An elven warlock named Herzelle arrives a few days ahead of the Archfey's party to ensure that all preparations proceed as planned. He expects there to be fine dining, a play written specifically for his Lord's visit, and a wild after-party.
2. The annual Roak Creek Arts Festival, a week-long celebration that culminates with a competition, has just begun. One of the competitors is a sculptor whose statues are eerily lifelike; he is a **medusa** in disguise.
3. An artist is found dead in front of one of his canvases. The scene he painted is identified as one of the levels of the abyss. And the devil that once stood in the middle of the painting is no longer there.
4. Ever since he found his new raven, Derwyn Vielle has been acting strangely. The lights in his workshop are on well after dark and he refuses to tell anyone what he is working on. His pet raven is actually an **imp** in disguise, urging him to make cursed instruments.
5. The Roak Creek Library holds the last copy of a song containing clues to the location of a lost ruin. But Zerial doesn't like adventurers and suspects their only interest in her collection is finding treasure. What she doesn't know is that Anderst Brushpot once owned the house that became the library, and knows of a secret way inside.
6. Silence descends upon Roak Creek one morning as everyone in the town has suddenly lost their voice. This curse is the work of Auntie Mudwillow, and she will lift it if her *heartstone* is returned. She is, of course, lying.

