# RAGING SWAN PRESS VILLAGE BACKDROP: Y'TARIS





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A stone circle marks the confluence of ley lines in this bleak and broken place. Among the ancient runes and onyx pillars burn secret powers hidden by gods and men alike. But to the people of Y'taris, the stone circle is just a tourist destination for the rich. Every year, hundreds of spellcasters make the long pilgrimage to the stone circle high in the Broken Mountains. The citizens provide food, shelter, baubles and entertainment, and all for exorbitant prices. Merchants bleed visitors of their gold, while pickpockets and scam artists take the rest. Y'taris is a nest of thieves. Anyone is welcome, as long as they have the coin.

Designed for use with the 5th edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

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A stone circle marks the confluence of ley lines in this bleak and broken place. Across its storied past, Y'taris has hosted spellbinding wizards and apocalyptic cultists, angelic battles and fey outcasts, abyssal legions and eldritch incursions. Among the ancient runes and onyx pillars lie secret messages, spells and powers hidden by gods and men alike.

But to the people of Y'taris, the stone circle is just a tourist destination for the rich. Every year, hundreds of mages and necromancers make the long pilgrimage to the stone circle high in the Broken Mountains. Between meditation and study, these spellcasters need a place to eat, relax and play. Y'taris provides it all for exorbitant prices. Those who are unwilling to pay may find their wallets missing all the same. And for the dark powers gathered here, the people of Y'taris offer some unusual services. Anyone is welcome, as long as they have the coin.

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

**Rulers** Ayred Guilespire, Girmark Flaskgut and Mulgin Kulon **Government** Plutocracy

**Population** 189 (57 humans, 16 dwarves, 24 elves, 39 gnomes, 14 half-elves, 7 half-orcs, 32 halflings)

Alignments LE, NE

Languages Common, Elven, Halfling

#### NOTABLE FOLK

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

- Ayred Guilespire (location 1; LE male elf acolyte) Gaunt and impossibly pale, Ayred owns nearly all the stalls in the Grey Market. He speaks for all shops and panhandlers, ensures their prices and methods are in line, and represents their interests in council meetings.
- Davyn Highhall (location 5; N male human wizard 1) Davyn is like a hundred other spellcasters who travel to Y'taris each year. Born from a noble family, he seeks to enhance his pitiful magical ability by studying the Confluence. Instead, he is being cheated out of his entire inheritance.
- **Girmark Flaskgut** (location 1; NE female dwarf **spy**) Girmark's years of thievery are mostly behind her. Now, she teaches and organizes the pickpockets and burglars, and represents their interests in council meetings.
- **Mulgin Kulon** (location 5; LE male gnome **commoner**) Mulgin is a disgusting, boil covered gnome who spits when he talks. He oversees operations at all taverns, inns and gambling halls, and represents their interests in council meetings.
- **Stockmaster** (location 9; LE male gnome **priest**) Stockmaster runs Onyx Hall, the premier provider of necromantic goods and services in Y'taris. He is taciturn and precise and expects his customers to be the same.

- **Xthelis** (location 3; NE female human **lich**) Xthelis is one of the few individuals actually worthy of the arcane power available. She spends her time solely at the Pit, studying runes and practicing her necromancy. She showers the citizens with gold and they give her whatever she needs.
- Yosrin Nimblefingers (location 1; CN male halfling spy) Yosrin is an expert pickpocket and something of a legend among his peers. He covers his good looks with dirty brown clothes, and sometimes clashes with Girmark Flaskgut over the appropriate distribution of stolen goods.

#### NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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

- The Grey Market: Filled with vendors, beggars, panhandlers and pickpockets, all magical goods can be found here (at exorbitant prices).
- The Confluence: The reason mages flock to Y'taris, this stone circle intensifies magical ability and enhances arcane study.
- The Pit: A conduit of necromantic power, the Pit draws powerful liches and other unsavoury spellcasters from across the world.
- 4. **The Gibbering Stone Inn**: This inn and tavern epitomizes everything about a cheap tavern except for its prices.
- Raven's Reach: Raven's Reach inn provides wealthy visitors with opulence and a reason to spend far too much gold on frivolities.
- Griffon's Call: This gambling hall is the third best place to lose money in Y'taris.
- Mage Society: Within the Mage Society, novices pay hefty dues in hopes of arcane revelations that never come.
- 8. **Trading Post**: At the trading post, the merchants of Y'taris buy alchemic ingredients from travelling salesmen.
- 9. **Onyx Hall**: Onyx Hall, which sells necromantic goods, is perhaps the only store in Y'taris worth the price.



#### VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Y'taris, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

**DC 10**: Y'taris is ruled by a council of three merchants: one for the inns, one for the shops and one for the thieves.

**DC 15**: Beneath the Confluence festers a pit of dark magic and great power. Only the citizens of Y'taris know the way.

**DC 20**: The powerful lich Xthelis has taken up near permanent residence at the Pit, and the villagers provide her with a steady stream of corpses.

#### VILLAGERS

**Appearance** The inhabitants of Y'taris are as stark as the surrounding mountains. They wax between cold annoyance and obsequious flattery, depending on if they have something to sell.

**Dress** Y'tarians dress in blacks and greys, and often wear cloaks or hoods. Many do not wish to be identified when performing their daily tasks, while others simply mimic the muted landscape.

**Nomenclature** *male* Belzor, Garhace, Hortran, Jodak, Kaswan, Panbul; *female* Arfin, Breni, Faybyn, Idalile, Yezlyn; *family* Calziver, Greyhand, Magespire, Totix, Uriwor.

#### WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Y'taris, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns an additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

D6	Rumour
1*	The Confluence has no true power, and is simply a means to draw visitors to the village.
2	The Onyx Hall sells corpses and human sacrifices in
	addition to other necromantic materials.
3	In ancient times, a powerful necromancer created the Pit
	to summon forth an undead army.
4	When visitors outstay their welcome, they are
	sometimes delivered to the necromancers.
5*	In the sky above the Confluence, an invisible celestial
	structure bestows divine power.
6	Raven's Reach has secret passages so the staff can more
	easily rid the guests of their possessions.

<sup>\*</sup>False rumour



#### 1: THE GREY MARKET

The Grey Market is unusually bleak for a bustling centre of commerce. Magi and sorcerers move between the shops and stalls, comparing goods, prices and the integrity of the vendor. Everything can be found here, and everything is overpriced. Dragon blood, fairy wings, troll fingers and other ingredients all sell for ten times their actual worth. Basic necessities like food, boots and weapons are equally expensive. Their increased cost is justified by woven runes, magic crystals or whatever else the merchants can say to scam gullible marks out of their money.

Anything can be purchased in the Grey Market, as long as a customer knows where to look. In the back alleys, taciturn halflings offer human eyeballs, elf ears and living pixies in jars. Merchants hide less savoury stock below trapdoors or chained up in basements. Such dark items are rare, difficult to get and perhaps the only thing worth the price in this foul place.

Pickpockets and panhandlers in addition to crooked vendors infest the market. They roam the plaza, looking for easy prey. Merchants often get in on the deal, expounding verbosely as a dagger opens the customer's purse. The vendors and thieves work in tandem—distracting and filching—and split their profits at the end of the day.

#### 2: THE CONFLUENCE

Without the Confluence, Y'taris would not exist. Nobody knows who built this stone circle, or if it was built at all. The structure itself is impressive: thirteen jagged obsidian pillars, some up to 20 feet tall, each covered in runes from a thousand different forgotten scripts. Glowing green symbols trace ley lines running from the columns to the sacrificial slab in the ring's centre. At certain sunsets throughout the year, including the solstice and equinoxes, the runes burn and smoke with green flame.

While the Confluence was once a meditative and aweinspiring place, it is now overrun with magical tourists seeking to enhance their skill. They come from across the realm to study the powers at work here, often boorishly and with little respect. At any given hour at least a dozen spellcasters loudly hypothesize, practice garish cantrips or carve their own arcane signets into the ancient rock. Meditation or true magical insight is impossible with these distractions.

Spells cast within the stone circle operate as if they were cast using a spell slot two levels higher than normal and have a 5% chance of not expending a spell slot.

#### 3: THE PIT

The Confluence is a well-known arcane wonder, but fewer individuals are aware of the Pit. Situated deep within the caverns below the famous circle, the Pit plunges through the bleak stone

into oppressive darkness. Here, the runes adorning the onyx walls smoke black and red. Partially fossilized skulls of ancient primordial beings litter the cyclopean spiralling steps. Whispers of madness echo from the darkness, and the screams of trapped spirits erode the listener's sanity.

This place writhes with arcane evil, and it attracts a certain unseemly breed of visitor; necromancers and liches, blood sorcerers and death speakers, only the foulest make their way to study in the Pit. Unlike the tourists above, the denizens of the Pit are often powerful and sometimes even equal to the darkness they seek. They mingle with the rest of the visitors during the day, then hire citizens to lead them, torch in hand, through the underground labyrinth to the Pit. The villagers are all too-willing to oblige these masters of evil for a handful of gold and a blessing of arcane favour.

Spells cast within the pit operate as if they were cast using a spell slot four levels higher than normal and have a 5% chance of not expending a spell slot.

#### 4: THE GIBBERING STONE INN

The Gibbering Stone Inn is Y'taris' cheapest inn, and it shows. A thick layer of grey dust coats every surface, black tar leaks from the walls and the thin smell of sour beer permeates the rooms. Yet the inn costs more than even the most luxurious inn in a major city. After all, the guests are paying for proximity to the Confluence, not comfortable beds or clean living quarters.

In the taproom, a rough stone about the size of a hound emits sounds not unlike the babble of a broken mind. This is the eponymous gibbering stone, an ancient relic from an experiment gone wrong. Angard (LE male half-orc spy), the inn's proprietor, endures its ceaseless babbling while taking orders and serving drinks. He's a busy man, but still has the time to mark the wealthy, notice hidden purses and direct his staff to where guests hide their possessions.

- Food & Drink meal (typically soup or stew with bread) 5 sp, ale
   1 sp, wine (pitcher) 5 sp.
- Accommodation A room costs 2 gp a night and is sparsely furnished, smells of sour beer and dust covers every surface.

#### 5: RAVEN'S REACH

Raven's Reach is an opulent inn designed for the wealthiest of travellers. Black satin curtains cover walls and windows, and the building itself is made of rich mahogany. The effect would be far more grand if the trappings were not stained and dusty.

Mulgin Kulon (LE male gnome **commoner**) owns the Reach, but leaves most of the day-to-day work to his employees. This disgusting gnome spends his time at the bar, drinking fine liqueurs and smoking cigars. The bar is the manifestation of luxury, complete with serving girls, magic lanterns and crystal cups. Through smiling women and well-dressed competition, wealthy patrons are pressured into throwing their money away on frivolities. Once a guest runs out of money (always quicker than they expect), they are ejected from the inn. Whatever they leave behind becomes property of Raven's Reach.

- Food & Drink meal (typically meat pie and vegetables) 1 gp, ale 2 sp, wine (pitcher) 1 gp.
- Accommodation A room costs 4 gp a night and comes with a large bed, dresser and table on which to perform experiments. Alchemical equipment and arcane books are available for a price. Each room also comes complete with a secret passageway for the staff to sneak in and out, stealing away possessions one item at a time.

#### 6: GRIFFON'S CALL

After crooked merchants and clever thieves, Griffon's call is the third best place to bleed gold in Y'taris. Apprentices and hedge mages toss dice to relieve stress after a wasted day at the Confluence. Within these stone rooms, dealers and croupiers distribute rigged cards and collect the winnings. Magic of any form is forbidden, a rule which is frequently broken and more frequently punished.

Griffon's Call stinks of sweat and beer. Weak torches discharge oily smoke into the air. Those who work the tables expertly harass their customers, provoking them into irrational spending and frustration. Brawls are a nightly occurrence, an encouraged disobedience punishable by hefty fine.

- Drink ale 1 sp, wine (pitcher) 3 sp.
- Brawl Fine 2 gp

#### 7: MAGE SOCIETY

The Mage Society is an immense waste of time. Peel away the empty rituals, obtuse rulebook and eye-watering membership fee, and all that is left is an overpriced bar and social club. The Society entices novices with promises of arcane secrets and hallowed halls. Instead of power, they find an entrance fee, the rank of "Initiate," and a secret handshake. Increase the donation, perform an absurd pseudo-ritual, and the Initiate can increase his rank to "Probationer." Probationers are taught the first word in a "fantastical" rite that will, they are promised, grant incredible power. They then ascend to "Conjuror," where they are allowed a simple puzzle (and increased entrance fee) to proceed. Then "Scion." Then "Clairvoyant." Then "Runewatcher."

There is no end to the intermediary ranks within the Mage Society, though with each step and increase in price the member feels closer to greatness. They are allowed to spend additional time mingling with the higher ups at the Silver Staff bar. They are allowed additional words of an arcane phrase that, when completed (they are told), grants secret power. They are given an ever widening view into the complexities of the order.

It's all a ruse. There is no way to progress to any meaningful level in the organization because there exists no meaningful level. Most Mage Society members are not spellcasters at all—merely practiced con artists who embrace this as the most effective method to separate marks from their gold.

#### 8: TRADING POST

Nearly two miles from Y'taris proper, the small wooden structure of the trading post overlooks the road. This is the only place in the village where trading is done fair and square. Large wagons rumble in from across the land, bringing spider venom, phoenix feathers and hundreds of alchemical goods. Corpses and other unsavoury items are not uncommon. Here, the Y'tarins pay honest rates for the high quality material, either trading in gold or magically crafted items. They triple these prices at the Grey Market.

Once the cargo is unloaded, it is covered in tarps or placed in mundane wooden crates. Then vendors use horses or donkeys to cart the merchandise up to Y'taris. It is crucial to keep the traders and the tourists far apart, out of sight and out of mind. If the spellcasters were allowed to purchase directly from the traders, the economy of Y'taris would be irreparably damaged.

#### 9: ONYX HALL

Onyx Hall is situated far from the Grey Market, down a dismal alleyway and behind an unmarked door. Interested customers are met with gruff responses, but if they can show enough gold they are invited in. The shop floor is small and almost completely barren—all merchandise is kept in a locked room in the back. A one-eyed gnome who goes by the name "Stockmaster" (LE male gnome priest) stands behind the counter. He expects his patrons to have specific needs, order specific products, pay with precise coinage and leave before they cause trouble.

Onyx Hall provides goods and services for necromancers and the undead. Its primary resource is onyx, but shadow-laden ingredients and corpses are also popular items. Stockmaster asks no questions as to the use of such items. Why bother? He knows the answer, and as long as it doesn't disrupt trade in Y'taris there's no need for concern.

If Onyx Hall values its secrecy, it is not for any fear of legal retribution (the councilmember Ayred Guilespire owns Onyx Hall, along with most of the shops in Y'taris). No, Onyx Hall does not advertise because it does not want to attract weak spellcasters and mere dabblers in the dark arts. It seeks only the most powerful and wealthy necromancers—the types of individuals who would be annoyed to wait for service.

#### LIFE IN Y'TARIS

Y'taris is a stark, grey place. To call it corrupted would imply there is a still some good left. No, Y'taris is built on evil and consumed by greed and violence. In the end, the village's only purpose is the exploitation of the rich and foolish, and the villagers work single-mindedly towards that goal.

#### TRADE & INDUSTRY

There is only one industry in Y'taris—tourism. Luckily, the Confluence draws wealthy tourists. They come in droves, pay handsomely for every expense and extend their stays when arcane power does not fall upon them.

Often these magi run out of money and must resort to crafting arcane items as payment. As a result, Y'taris has an unusually high number of magical items to keep the citizens happy. A decanter of endless water provides drink and bathing. Continual flame spells illuminate the streets. Potions of healing and scrolls of lesser restoration keep the inhabitants healthy. Some vendors even store their goods in bags of holding.

Such a preponderance of magical tools might make a better settlement into something of a utopia. But in Y'taris, these items only drive greed and a desire for more.

#### LAW & ORDER

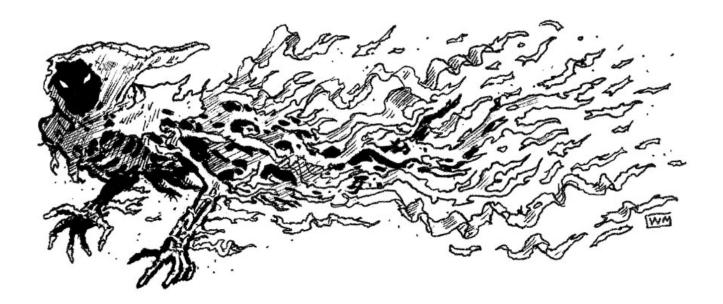
There is no organized law or guard within the village. Conflicts between citizens are resolved through council meetings or simple violence. However, the villagers are united in pursuit of gold. They work together to rob visitors of their riches, then divide the rewards unevenly. The powerful, such as the council and other successful merchants, take the lion's share. The weak are intimidated into subservience.

There are, however, a host of archaic laws which apply to outsider, almost all of which result in a hefty fine. Brawling is a fine. Mixing potions outdoors is a fine. Visiting the Confluence at sunrise is a fine, though special permits are available for a price. For the curious or sceptical, there is no rulebook available for perusal, and no government building at all. Instead, citizens impose these rules as they see fit to drain the tourists' wallets. The powerful and generous are, of course, immune to such tactics. Y'tarians know better than to provoke liches or suffer the wrath of true wizards.

#### EVENTS

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

D6	EVENT
1	For a split second the Confluence erupts into searing green flame. Any creatures within the ring suffer 2d6 fire damage (DC 15 Dexterity saving throw halves).
2	A low moan shudders from the earth beneath the Confluence, rising in pitch and then dying away entirely.
3	A tourist goes to pay for a bottle of troll dust, but realizes his wallet is missing.
4	A spellcaster goes missing from his room at night. No official investigation takes place, and the market sees a slight influx of human body parts over the next few days.
5	A man carrying a large bag of onyx emerges from an alleyway. His vendor is nowhere to be seen (he has just emerged from the clandestine Onyx Hall).
6	Griffon's Call is closed to outsiders for a few hours in the evening for the weekly council meeting between Kulon, Flaskgut and Guilespire.



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