

Hawksmith Academy

A STARTER CAMPAIGN

MATTHEW PHILLION

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Welcome to the Hawksmith Academy!

Once a school for wizards, the Hawksmith Academy has become the premiere training ground for spellcasters of every variety. Students learn to hone their skills in preparation to go out into the world and seek adventure.

Who attends Hawksmith Academy?

Anyone with magical aptitude can attend, whether they are a book-learned wizard, a naturally talented sorcerer, or a divinely imbued cleric or druid. In recent years, Hawksmith has even begun admitting those who are more martially inclined, such as rangers, paladins, even eldritch knights and arcane tricksters. While the school outwardly states that this is because all magic users deserve a proper education, the Academy also selfishly realizes that their students benefit from associating with students who bring other talents—namely physical prowess—to the table as well.

The school's only requirement is that the student studies magic, regardless of specialization, as it fosters learning and education about the arcane, the unseen, and the dangers and beauty that exist beyond the mortal realm.

Who founded Hawksmith Academy?

According to legend, the Academy was founded by four mystical creatures, from whom the school's four schools of philosophy, or "houses," stem from. These founders were:

- A silver dragon named the Gleaming Sentinel
- An azure sphinx named the Lady of Secrets
- A ruby naga named the Whispering Queen
- An emerald treant named Old Memory

These creatures, though often opposed philosophically, saw the benefit of passing on their knowledge and wisdom to mortal being and felt these lessons would make for if not a better, at least a more interesting world.

Their original disciples traveled together as an adventuring party, the Hawksmith Conclave, for several decades, with a rotating cast of heroes and anti-heroes working toward the same goals, though often in different ways or for opposing reasons. When these disciples eventually grew weary of adventuring, they chose a location at the tip of the Kraken's Fang, a narrow inlet leading out to the sea, and here, they lay the foundation for the grand castle that has become the Hawksmith Academy.

The schools and their philosophies

Upon joining the Hawksmith Academy, each student is selected based on their nature to join one of the four schools (or houses, as they are often called). They are selected by each house dependent upon how they answer a series of questions. The questions themselves vary, but in the end, the core of what those questions are asking is a simple one: why do you adventure?

The school philosophies are best summarized like this:

- The Silver Dragons seek adventure because adventure is in their soul. They crave excitement and variety, regardless of the reason or result. They love a just battle.
- The Azure Sphinxes seek adventure because they crave knowledge. They choose their expeditions based on what can be learned or uncovered in their travels.
- The Ruby Nagas adventure for gain. Whether that gain is personal wealth or power, or to strengthen their status in the world, every adventure begins with a prize to obtain.
- The Emerald Treants adventure to keep others safe. They are protectors, and choose their adventures based on how they can help the greater good with their deeds.

Schools and class options

While a student from any of the schools or houses may be of any class, certain classes have a definite inclination toward one school or another.

The Silver Dragons, being more aggressive than bookish, tend to attract those who have an innate ability rather than earned through studies. Sorcerers are more common among the Silver Dragons than wizards, for example, and those wizards who do join this school often study more combat-ready magic, such as evocation or abjuration.

The martial classes are frequently found among the Dragons as well. Eldritch knights, particularly, have found a home there, as have many paladins, particularly Oath of Devotion paladins.

Silver Dragon clerics most often subscribe to domains such as Light, Fire, or Tempest.

The Azure Sphinxes are hunters of knowledge, so naturally wizards are highly concentrated in this school. Their wizards often choose schools like divination or transmutation, the former to uncover secrets and the latter to make something new from something old. Warlock pacts are not uncommon among Sphinxes.

There are fewer martial classes among the Sphinxes, though there is an interesting gathering of arcane tricksters among them—the treasure-hunting aspect of the quest for knowledge attracts the more cerebral roguish types.

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Sphinx clerics often pursue the Knowledge or Arcana domains.

The Ruby Nagas tend to attract a wide variety of classes, as almost any combination of abilities can help with the pursuit of power. Wizards of course are abundant, and skew toward specialties with a certain ruthlessness to them, such as necromancy or illusion. Warlocks are extremely common among the Nagas, arguably their most common class, as pacts with powered beings enable the user a true advantage. Almost no party of Nagas is without a warlock.

Martial classes are common among them, with a fair number of eldritch knights, and a high concentration of Oath of Conquest obviously being the most common. Arcane tricksters are common among the Nagas as well.

Clerics among the Nagas tend toward non-traditional domains, like Trickery or Death, and less frequently War.

The Emerald Treants are most often inspired directly by the being who founded their school. Druids are incredibly common among the Treants and more often than not hold leadership roles. In fact, it's rare, though not unheard of, to find druids among the other three schools.

Naturally, the most common martial class to join his school are rangers, though any who seek to protect others might find themselves in this school. Oath of the Ancients paladins find a welcome home here, as do Oath of Devotion paladins. Barbarians are rare at Hawksmith, but many of those who do find themselves there join the Treants.

Treant clerics have a strong tendency toward the Life and Nature domains, of course, and, interestingly, the Grave domain as well, as this school has ties not only to protecting the living, but also looking over the sanctity of the dead as well. Tempest clerics are not uncommon either.

A note about bards: All four schools highly value bards, as both a means of conveying their message as well as documenting their deeds. Bards can be found among all the schools, with College of Swords bards favoring the Silver Dragons, Lore bards the Azure Sphinxes, Whisper bards the Ruby Nagas, and Valor bards the Emerald Treants, though they are not limited to these combinations.

[SIDEBAR]

Alternate Rules: The Fates Choose Your School

If your players aren't sure which house they want to belong to, or if you want to create additional drama to the choosing process, have the player roll percentile dice to determine their house:

1-25: Silver Dragon

26-50: Azure Sphinx

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51-75: Emerald Treant

76-100 (00): Ruby Nagas

DMs can feel free to toy with the percentages based on the character's class and alignment at their discretion. For example, if the player is intending to play a Neutral Good druid, clearly someone who would lean toward the Emerald Treants, you might stack the percentages as:

1-20: Silver Dragons

21-40: Azure Sphinxes

41-80: Emerald Treants

81-100: Ruby Nagas

[END SIDEBAR]

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The geography of Castle Hawksmith

The Docks

This is where visitors arrive, if by sea. There is room enough for a dozen small ships and two larger moorings. A path leads up a winding hill to the castle itself, atop a craggy peak.

The Main Gate

From the outside, it simply looks like a powerfully constructed but ordinary portcullis. The main gate however is powerfully warded with defensive magic, and is often guarded by trained monsters like griffons.

The Quad

An open, eternally green area often filled with students. The space can, when the school needs it, be temperature controlled, but for the most part it is open-aired and at the whim of the weather.

The Hearth (main building)

An ancient, central stone building. Castle Hawksmith was in fact built around this original structure, which is built to withstand an assault from the outside, complete with powerful doors, arrow slit windows, and a high, peaked roof with hatches for spellcasters and archers. Within the Hearth are:

The Headmaster's Office

A spacious, enchanted apartment that conforms to the whim of its current occupant.

The Great Hall

A vast dining hall that seems capable of growing or shrinking based on the needs of the student body.

The Kitchens

At first glance, a large, but traditional kitchen. Spend enough time here and students will see air elementals for cleaning; fey creatures for service tasks; and cooking instruments seemingly enchanted to prepare meals without need of a human hand to guide them.

The Four Towers

Each of the four schools has its own tower with sufficient housing for its own students as well as any faculty who are aligned with a specific house. There is additional faculty housing in the Hearth for unaligned or guest faculty.

- The Dragon Tower

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- The Sphinx Tower
- The Naga Tower
- The Treant Tower

The Stables (Ground)

For housing of horses and other, more exotic steeds. The stables can house up to two dozen horses, or rearrange itself for larger beasts if needed.

The Stables (Air)

Many visitors arrive by flying creature; the school is capable of stabling more than a dozen large-sized flying creatures.

Academic Buildings:

Each academic building has a unique flavor and is designed to work with the needs of the subjects taught within.

The Menagerie

This blocky building has barred windows and, should a player roll an extremely easy (DC 10) perception check, is clearly warded with magic intended to keep things in. Conjunction is taught here, as are classes on monsters and other creatures. A small bestiary of exotic beasts is contained within, maintained with great care by several Emerald Treant grad students.

The Sanctum

This building, with its stained-glass windows and high ceilings, appears to be a place of worship—and it once was such a place, a beautiful church that has been converted to a teaching facility for divine magic, healing, and nature studies. It is imbued with a magical aura of peace and tranquility. Anyone attempting combat within its walls must pass a Wisdom save (DC 15 if initiating; DC 12 if defending) or be unable to attack.

The Boom Room

This building looks like a prison from the outside, and while the implication is unintentional, the truth is that the design is meant to keep whatever happens inside from impacting the surrounding area. Destructive magic such as evocation or battle magic is taught here, as is enchanting, as, while a delicate process, can result in catastrophic disasters if done wrong. Students began calling it the Boom Room centuries before and the name as stuck.

The Shadow Chamber

A palpable sense of dread emanates from this dark, grim building. It is smaller than the other academic buildings, and is often less occupied. Dark arts, such as pact magic and necromancy, are taught here, as is the study of all things Infernal or Abyssal. In fact, to study here, a student

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must be able to speak at least rudimentary Infernal or Abyssal language, as the door and chambers are locked with passwords in such speech.

Exterior Areas:

Outside the castle walls are several key areas worth exploring where players may find themselves.

The Pitch (the Skuabdah Field)

Obviously, this is where games of Skuabdah are played. There are massive bleachers on both longer sides of the field, and a magically controlled scoreboard. Huge spheres float in the area in the evening, and are enchanted with super-charged Light spells for night games. **What is Skuabdah? Find out more on this magic-based competitive game later in this volume.**

The Grim Woods

A wild territory filled with danger. The school patrols the edge to keep the many, many denizens of the woods from harming their students, but otherwise leave the forest alone as a natural location for trained students to test their skills.

The Forest Keeper's Hut

The Forest Keeper, Annagrum Widehand, has a private residence on the edge of the Grim Woods, as he is in charge of monitoring the creatures that come and go from here. Often students will take a short internship with him to learn more about the beasts of the woods or to earn points as guardians of the school.

The Grotto

Not too deep into the Grim Woods is a beautiful grotto students are fiercely warned to avoid. It is home to a sisterhood of naiads who, while benign if left alone, have been known to charm and steal away students who either cause trouble in the grotto or whom the naiads take a fancy to. Because they are otherwise not malicious, the school takes great pains to ensure their students leave these fey alone.

Raven's Folly

Raven's Folly is a small town at the foot of the rocky hill Hawksmith Academy looks down from. It is a place to escape the rigors of school, to shop for the basics, to have a drink with friends, and, of course, to hunt for illicit goods and other kinds of trouble.

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The Market

Even magicians need the basics, and the Market provides this. From blacksmiths to leatherworkers to farmers from the neighboring communities, this outdoor market is a combination of artisans in residence and traveling merchants.

Lest-Ye-Forget Tavern

A homey, folksy tavern often frequented by Academy students. Run by a charming half-elf—a former adventurer himself—the tavern is a great place to pick up gossip, have a few rounds, or peruse a board where requests for adventurers are posted. These are unsanctioned by the school, but many students have been able to elevate their status, or at least improve their skills, by resolving the requests on this board. Tradition states that the request is written on a piece of parchment and pinned to the board with a dagger. Successful adventurers return the dagger with proof of their success to the quest-giver for a reward. DMs can feel free to create side-quests or adventure hooks using this board.

The Eye of Truth

A small shop in Raven’s Folly is home to a famous, or possibly infamous, seeress named Mixalia Chat. Students have long sought out Mixalia’s readings into their futures, though her predictions are as often dire as they are optimistic. Players may choose to go here to have their cards read, offering the DM hooks for future adventures.

The Dancing Hand

Hidden in an underground speakeasy in Raven’s Folly is the Dancing Hand, the local thieves’ guild. More greedy than violent, the guild is constantly on the lookout for ways to pilfer items from the Hawksmith Academy. A spellbook or scroll from the school has massive value on the black market. They also act as a source of “investment opportunities,” or more accurately, locations of tombs, barrows, or other dangerous locations worth exploring. Players wishing to partake in one such job can either buy the map and details outright, or barter for a cut of the profits if they survive, depending on the opportunity. In rare cases, they may fund an expedition if the stakes are high enough and the adventurers worthy.

A player character with a criminal or charlatan background may choose to have an existing relationship with the Dancing Hand. This does not guarantee work or better deals, but the DM, at their discretion, may let this roleplaying opportunity lower DCs for Persuasion or charisma checks, or open up opportunities not otherwise available to newcomers.

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Key NPCs

Faculty

Professor Wyndas Silvanos (aasimar cleric; Arcana domain) is the current headmaster of the school. They are almost impossible to categorize. Ageless, with skin the color of brass and eyes pale blue and without irises, their voice is both commanding and comforting. As an Arcana cleric, Professor Silvanos merges both the arcane and divine schools of magic, a specialty that led to their selection as the headmaster of the school four decades ago. Wyndas Silvanos is one of the few people on campus all four house heads seem to respect, or possibly fear, equally.

Professor Ferret Carr (human sorcerer; wild magic) is the current head of the Silver Dragon house. An affable, charming man, young for his role, he is a former full-time adventurer and occasionally goes on sabbatical to return to his roots. Wild magic, the source of his sorcerous powers, has left him slightly disfigured, with one pointed ear and one round; a green eye and a purple; and a tendency to conjure feathers when he sneezes. For all his comical timing and laid-back personality, Ferret is a ferocious fighter and watches over his students with care.

Professor Hecate Shan (high elf wizard; transmutation) is the current head of the Azure Sphinx house. One of the most learned members of the faculty, she is considered among the finest transmutation specialists in the world. Dispassionate but not cold, cerebral but not detached, there is a rumor that Professor Shan is in fact the Azure Sphinx herself hidden behind a polymorph spell. This is not true, though Shan does nothing to quash the rumor.

Professor Anders Lither (tiefling warlock; Pact of the Chain, Fiend patron) is the current head of the Red Naga house. A stern man in his early fifties, he is an intimidating presence, though not unkind to students he favors. He is often seen with his familiar, an imp named Boilblood, a disconcerting creature who stares at students until they are compelled to look away. More alarming, however, is when the imp is not with Professor Lither, as that generally means the imp is spying for his master. Lither is said to have traveled more of the world than any other current faculty, though he never speaks of it.

Professor Margaerith Bough (halfling druid; Circle of the Land) is the current head of the Emerald Treant house. Her age is difficult to determine as she has begun to reach the stage in her powers where druids become nearly ageless. She is a warm, calming presence, though disrespect of the school, the land surrounding it, and blatant disregard for one's fellow students will incur a level of wrath that makes even the other heads of houses blanch.

Annagum Widehand (goliath druid; Circle of the Moon), the groundskeeper (or more formally, the Forest Keeper), is charged with keeping the creatures of the Grim Woods from spilling over into school territory. He spends much of his time in beast shape, usually as a massive grizzly bear. Scarred and terrifying to behold, Annagum is a gentle soul, and has a soft spot for

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earnest students who respect the woods. He is unaligned and did not train at Hawksmith Academy.

A rare non-magic user at Hawksmith Academy, **Squint Browbatter is (rogue; Inquisitive)** head of security, specializing in investigation. The students at Hawksmith Academy, as burgeoning adventurers, are given a lot of leeway, but if someone breaks a serious rule, it is rare that Squint doesn't catch the perpetrator.

Townfolk

Lestus Gray (half-elf ranger; hunter) is the retired adventurer who runs the Lest-Ye-Forget Tavern. Older now, Lestus is still good in a fight, but is more useful as a source of rumors and information. His patrons love to share stories of the goings-on in the surrounding areas, and as a ranger, he's seen a lot and is happy to share if he thinks it'll help keep new adventurers worthy of his trust alive.

Mixalia Chat (gnome sorcerer; favored soul) is a tiny, wizened, purple-haired gnome and owner of the Eye of Truth. For a fee (25 gold), she will read someone's fortune. Mixalia is a gifted diviner, and no charlatan, though she tinkers with the truth if she needs to—occasionally to soften the blow of a particularly terrible reading, or to inspire a hint of caution for a risk-laden one. But mostly, she provides the truth in an obscure, poetic, veiled way for the customer to figure out on their own. She also sells minor potions (legitimate) and small trinkets for luck (these, unlike her divination readings and potions, do not work, but a woman's gotta make a living after all).

Carlyle (half-orc rogue; thief) and **Carleigh (half-orc rogue; assassin)** are a pair of orcs who run the Dancing Hand branch in Raven's Folly. They're good-natured criminals, quick to laugh, but suspicious and distrusting of strangers. It's impossible to tell which, if either, is truly in charge; in speaking with them, it's as if they share a psychic connection, reading each other's minds. In truth, they are masters of a subtle form of thieves' cant. An observe may roll a Perception check (DC 20) to spot the brother and sister using their private sign language, though it's more of a parlor trick than anything else. If called on it, they grow cold—add 5 to the DC for any charisma checks going forward if players give them a hard time about their secret language.

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Skuabdah

Overview

A game of Skuabdah takes place over four quarters, 10 minutes each (10 rounds of in-game time). It takes place entirely on flying brooms and plays a bit like airborne soccer. High score after four quarters wins.

Teams gain one point per shot successfully through the opposing team's goal post. They also gain 10 points if you catch the Platinum Stirge (see below).

The field

A Skuabdah field is 300 feet long by 150 feet wide. There is no limit to how high the brooms can fly, but because the goals, located at either end of the narrow side of the pitch, are only 15X15 feet wide and 30 feet from the ground, players rarely fly more than 60 or so feet from the ground.

The players on the field

The Hunter:

The Hunter's goal is to catch the Platinum Stirge. It is not illegal for the Hunter to act as a Lancer, but if so, all the Hunter's Perception checks for the Stirge are at disadvantage.

The Lancers (X2)

Each team has two Lancers, who are charged with scoring by shooting goals through the opposing team's net.

The Defender

The defender's job is to block shots at their team's goal.

The Rooks (X2)

The Rooks have the entertaining job of attempting to prevent the Lancers from scoring.

How to score

There is one sphere on the playing field which can be carried by any Lancer. To attempt to score, the Lancer must make a ranged attack (30/60), using their proficiency bonus plus strength or dexterity (adding their Athletics bonus if proficient), versus the Defender. The Defender rolls a check to block and using their dexterity bonus plus Perception (including proficiency bonus if proficient). If the Lancer rolls higher, they score; if the Defender rolls higher, they block the shot.

The Platinum Stirge

The Platinum Stirge offers a chance to swing the game wildly in your team's favor. If your team catches the Stirge, you gain an additional 10 points. The Hunter is in charge of watching for, and attempting to catch, the Platinum Stirge.

The Platinum Stirge has a movement speed of 50 feet per round. To attempt to catch it, the player must pass a Perception check, DC 18. A critical success on the Perception check may, at the DM's discretion, allow Advantage on the catch check.

If they pass the Perception check, a catch attempt may be made. To catch it, the Hunter must pass a Dexterity check, DC 22 (beginner level – may be escalated at DM's discretion).

The roll of the Rooks

The Rooks are there to add a level of complexity to the game. They act as protectors, launching blunt, heavy balls at the other players. A successful hit **stuns** the opposing player for one round.

To hit, the Rook makes a ranged attack (30/60), including proficiency bonus (strength or dexterity, player's choice), against the opponent's AC. If successful, the opposing player makes a constitution check to avoid being stunned (DC 12+ the Rook's strength modifier).

Upon critical hit (by the Rook) or a critical failure (on the save) at the DM's discretion, the opposing player may make an Acrobatics or Athletics save to avoid falling off their boom.

Note: The referees all have Featherfall prepared in the event a player falls from their broom to prevent grievous injury. If a player falls, it takes 1 + 1d4 rounds to regain their boom and reenter the game.

Note to the DM:

The key to a good Skuabdah match is pacing. If your players take too long to make decisions, consider using an hourglass or timer to make sure they make snap decisions rapidly. It's a game of instinct much more than planning.

Stat Block: Broom of Flying

Stat Blocks: One for each position as needed – use stats for apprentices, acolytes, nobles, or bandits as needed

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Optional Feat: Broomrider Specialist

If the DM allows for Feats, a player may optionally choose Broomrider Specialist. Players with this Feat adds 10 feet to their broom speed, and has advantage on saves from falling off their broom.

Encounter 1: The Bully Wizards

It's possible that your player characters don't even know each other at this point in the game. If this is the case, this encounter offers a chance for them to band together and become a party.

A first-year member of the Ruby Nagas, Knightly Ashburn (**human apprentice**), has taken a strong disliking to one player character. He has a bias against the smaller races, so if your players have a halfling or gnome among them, he'll target them first. If no smaller races are present, he'll next target anyone with a poor or working class background (urchin, sailor, etc.).

Knightly, a dashing handsome, smug, vicious young man, has a cadre of hangers-on with him at all times. His two primary enforcers are Croak and Crumpett (**human bandits**), but he is also often accompanied by other apprentices. Scale his group to match your players as needed.

Knightly and his crew will try to provoke the targeted character to a fight. Skirmishes are common among young students at Hawksmith, but fatalities are strongly frowned upon. Knightly will flee and his crew will follow if he drops below half his hit points. Knightly doesn't want to be expelled, however, so he will not kill a PC. Reducing one player to unconsciousness will cause him to ask the party to yield.

No punishment will follow, but a victory will draw the eye of the **headmaster**.

Stat Blocks:

Wizard Bullies – use stats for apprentices, nobles, or bandits to taste.

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Encounter 2: The Death Dog

Your characters have been assigned a research project by their Divine Magic instructor. They are sent to the library to explore for more information. This is a good place to provide the players with some lore about Hawskmith, or about their own classes if they wish to research while at the library.

A low DC Perception check (DC 10) will alert the players of a strange sound from below them. Following a hidden alcove and spiral staircase, they find an area of the library not on the floorplan.

Upon reaching the bottom of the staircase, they are set upon by 1d12+3 **bats**. The bats will stay and attack for one round before disappearing.

Another perception check (DC 12) will inform the players they are not alone in this area. Players can create their own light or proceed in the darkness. Take note if they proceed with stealth or not to determine surprise.

Following a short (15 foot) tunnel, they will then encounter a death dog chained in a large, square chamber. The dog is chained, so it cannot leave the room, though it does have enough slack to reach all areas of the chamber.

The death dog can be reasoned with (Animal Handling, DC 18; DC 16 if food is offered).

Assuming the PCs defeat the death dog, they will find that beyond his chains, he was guarding a hidden room. The room is full of knickknacks, old books, a tall mirror. An Investigation check (DC 13) will indicate that there is something unusual about the mirror, though it gives off no magic (even with a Detect Magic spell). A very high roll (DC 18) will identify a phrase in Deep Speech carved into the back of the mirror. If a player is proficient with Deep Speech, it reads: "From the depths/we rise."

If the players touch the mirror, four guardians (use the **skeleton** stat block) rise from beneath canvas tarps. These protectors of the mirror will fight to the death.

If the players search the room for treasure, an Investigation check of 13-15 will reveal one magic item, 16-20 two magic items. Roll a d6 to determine which item is discovered. For two items, if you roll the same item twice, roll again until you reveal a different item.

1-2: Potion of Speak with Animals

3-4: Endless Rope

5: Decanter of Endless Water

6: Bag of Holding

Stat Blocks:

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Bat

Skeleton

Death Dog

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Encounter 3: An Ogre in the Kitchen

At some point after Encounter 2, the players will want to seek answers about the clues they've discovered. Next time they're in the dining hall, interrupt their discussion with a loud racket from the kitchens [MAP].

Assuming they investigate, they'll find the gnome cooks (**commoners**) fleeing from an adult male **ogre** in the kitchen. The creature is tearing the space apart, roaring "Where is it? Where is my master's thing?" over and over again.

An Insight check (DC 13) will tell the players that this ogre is not entirely in control of his faculties—he's either being mind-controlled, or previous mind control spells have damaged his already limited mental facilities. He cannot be reasoned with and will fight to the death or at least until driven unconscious.

The ogre carries no treasure, but an Investigation check of his body will turn up a piece of parchment with a strange symbol drawn upon it. Any character looking at this symbol will need to succeed a wisdom saving throw (DC 15) or fall unconscious for one hour. Lesser Restoration can negate this effect.

Stat Blocks:

Ogre

Encounter 4: Game, Set, Match

Tryouts! Players are invited to join the Skuabdah league. At Hawksmith Academy, the Skuabdah teams are not limited to the individual schools or houses. Each house has its own team, but there are also two “independent” teams. These are in part meant to foster inter-house relations, but also, smartly, they are a method to lessen tensions between the houses by not tying every victory to one school or another. These two independent teams are the Hellhounds and the Griffons. There is also at this time tryouts for a third independent team and new squads are invited to participate in early exhibition games to test their skill.

Depending on your party makeup, your players could be their entire house team, join one of the independent teams together, found their own team, or even play against each other on rival house teams. DMs are free to involve the players in any way they feel would be most engaging for the match.

Players not wishing to participate in the game itself may take part by helping their teammates cheat from the stands (using sleight of hand checks to attempt to sway the match), or to notice any of the goings on happening during the match. Several potential subplots arise involving characters hoping to use the exhibition match as a distraction.

The deal. Players not involved in the game—or particularly perceptive Skuabdah players—may spot an illicit magic item deal happening high in the bleachers. See the [SIDEQUEST] to pursue this thread.

The cheater. A member of the Ruby Nagas is acting during the match to influence its outcome. It is up to the DM’s discretion which team this character, [NAME], is helping or hindering, but players who investigate further will uncover an entire gambling operation at Hawksmith. See the sidebar [The Gambling Ring] to dig deeper.

The mysterious stranger. Players may also see a cloaked figure observing the match intently. If the players try to investigate or approach, he will flee. They may attempt a Stealth check to remain unobserved, but the mysterious stranger should roll a Perception check to spot them (+5). If the players catch him, he will fight to the death. If they restrain him, his eyes will flash red once and he will immediately perish, his final words saying “the fifth shall rise.”

[SIDEBAR]

Side Quest: The Gambling Ring

If the players notice the Ruby Naga cheater Hatch Hamish (**Stat Block – Human Mage or Acolyte depending on PC level**) referenced above during the match, they can choose to pursue him. He will try to escape. If they kill him, there will be disciplinary action taken against the

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group (per DM's discretion). If they capture him, they can interrogate him (Intimidation or Persuasion DC 18) to reveal what he knows about the cheating.

There is a group of mages manipulating the matches using spells. This is not exclusive to the Nagas – in fact, members of all four schools are involved, and worse, they're working with outsiders (bookies in league with the **Dancing Hand** in town) to profit from bets on Skuabdah matches.

The players can pursue this side quest in any number of ways. They can go to town and try to put a stop to it (either through non-violent role play with the Dancing Hand or through violence), or try to get in on a piece of the action. If they are Skuabdah team members, they could even attempt to profit from their status and throw matches. (This side quest can become an ongoing part of the overall story, beyond the arc of the starter campaign.)

[END SIDEBAR]

Encounter 5: The Owlbear Egg

Annagrum Widehand needs some able-bodied students to lend a hand. There are poachers in the woods, and they're targeting rare creatures. They need to be stopped before they kill again.

Annagrum will accompany the players briefly before taking on his wild shape to split up, in order to "cover more ground." The players should roll a Survival check (DC 15) to try to find traces of the poachers. If more than one player possesses the Survival skill, they may each roll, or Help for advantage.

On a failure, roll a d8 to determine what monsters the PCs encounter.

- 1: 1d4 Giant Spiders
- 2: Dryad
- 3: Giant Boar
- 4: Shambling Mound
- 5: 1d8 Stirges
- 6: 1d4 Giant Wasps
- 7: 2d4 Twig Blights
- 8: Banshee

The players, upon retreating or defeating the above encounter, can roll another Survival check to track the poachers. On a success, they find four **bandits** and a **bandit captain**.

The poachers can be reasoned with—an appropriate Persuasion or Intimidation check (DC 15) will convince them to leave the forest. They are hesitant to give up their ill-gotten gains. An Insight check (DC 12) will let players know they are hiding something valuable. A Perception check (DC 15) will draw the player's eye to a round object in one of the poacher's bags. This is **an owlbear egg**, still viable.

At some point during the encounter, one of the poachers will mention that they were paid by someone "at the school" to hunt for specific animals. Players may use Persuasion, Intimidation, or brute force to get more information out of the poachers, who will tell them under duress that they were told to seek "pure" creatures like unicorns or fey, but were poaching other creature while in the forest for additional profits.

If the players defeat the poachers, they will find the egg. A Persuasion or Intimidation check (DC 18) will convince the bandits to surrender the egg. In either case, Annagrum will locate the players after the fight, or at the DM's discretion, may arrive to assist if the battle goes poorly. He will lead them to a cave where he knows of an owlbear mother. It is up to the DM if the players should face additional random encounters from the table above along the way.

Led by Annagrum, the players will find the owlbear mother dead and desecrated. Annagrum will volunteer to watch over the egg and raise the cub. Players who wish to keep the owlbear

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egg will need to truly convince Annagrums (Persuasion, DC 20) that they are ready for that responsibility.

Stat Blocks: as above.

Encounter 6: Thieves at Hawksmith

Depending on the results of the last encounter, the players may pursue the leads they find themselves, approach the Headmaster, or discuss it with their house lead. Wyndas Silvanos or the other house leads will encourage the players to continue to observe and search for the traitor without revealing themselves.

Whether through investigation or luck, the players will discover that there is a heist coming up within the walls of the school. In fact, the heist will involve the room discovered in Encounter 2, where the thieves intend to steal an otherwise nondescript magic item the players overlooked in their previous search.

Background: The thieves are in fact cultists of a previously unmentioned fifth “house” at Hawksmith Academy—another immortal being who was rejected by the other four at the start of the school. This Cult of the Onyx Aboleth seek to open a hidden portal into Hawksmith, posing as students and one teacher, the Professor of Necromancy, Haddeus Hylo.

These cultists are attempting not only to steal a specific magic item, a talisman of great power; they will attempt to turn a mirror into a portal for other cultists to access the school.

The mirror can be destroyed through physical or magical attacks (AC 14, 15 HP). The talisman is unusable by the player characters, but if a character of good alignment handles it, they take 1d8 psychic damage per round until they drop the item.

Haddeus Hylo will raise a number of **skeletons** equal to the player characters he faces. He is accompanied by a number of cultists, dressed as students, equal in number to the player characters as well. Hylo will not immediately fight the party until he completes the ritual to create the portal (requiring six rounds).

Professor Hylo and his acolytes will fight to the death.

Stat Blocks for:

Mirror of Capturing

Talisman of the Forgotten School

Stat Blocks:

Haddeus Hylo (human wizard; necromancy – use standard mage stat block as placeholder)

Cultists (standard stat block)

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Notes on the campaign arc

Milestone Leveling

By completing Encounter 1, players should advance to level 2.

Completing any two encounters from Encounter 2, 3, and 4 should bring the players to level 3.

Completing the remaining encounter from the previous three as well as Encounter 5 should bring players to level 4.

And lastly, upon the completion of Encounter 6, the players should achieve level 5.

Hawksmith Academy – a Starter Campaign

Where to go from here

This starter adventure should set up the player characters for a long career at Hawksmith Academy. They can further investigate the Cult of the Onyx Aboleth, take on adventures from sources in Raven's Folly, continue their studies at the school itself, and receive missions from faculty.

If they successfully stop the cultists, they gain the interest of Headmaster Wyndos. This comes with a cost, however; if one or more of the schools is not represented among the party, members of those houses may act against the players to sabotage their studies or adventures. This may also foster the creation of rivalries among the students who seek to steal some of the glory heaped upon the players themselves. Even the heads of the houses may become involved, acting as masterminds assisting their students to gain an advantage over the players.

Lastly, the Cult of the Onyx Aboleth is not finished with the Hawksmith Academy. The cult is spread out throughout the land and working to undermine the school from within and without.