

Shadows of the Rocky Mountains



THE YOKAIPEDIA
BOOK II

SPRING 2026

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the Rocky Mountains

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BOOK II

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For the past century, American institutes of cultural production have raided the cultural commons of folklore and the public domain for profit, all while fighting tooth and nail to keep anything new from going back into the earth of the commons to refresh it.

In exchange for this looting and commodification of our collective culture, we have nothing to show for it but institutions that provide dull, cheap, lowest common denominator slop. The spark of human connection within is diminished or outright smothered. But hey, this junk makes number go up.

We here at the Shadows Institute have a different vision of the future. There has been too much taking and not enough giving back. For too long have artists and audiences suffered simply to please the shareholders.

To that end, while the Institute claims copyright of published works (at a shorted interval of a decade), we want to make sure that if artists feel inspired to create, it will feel good and easy for them to contribute. So we pay human artists for their work and we hope you the reader will support us in pursuit of that vision.

In solidarity,
Corvus van Roodland

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Corvus van Roodland', with a small, stylized drawing of a face or mask to the left of the first few letters.

WHERE THE VEIL IS THIN

The biomes of the material realm that play host to yokai are all diverse and unique. Yet they also all share one common trait. Yokai settle into places where the Veil between our material realm and the realm of spirits is thin.

The neuroscientists at Colfax University theorize that it is an externality. Brought on by concentrations of low level human psychic energy, it is a by-product of humanity's theorized Class II hivemind.

The Esoteric Scholars of the Grand Umbra of Shadows will tell you it's just a bunch of higher order beings playing games with us.

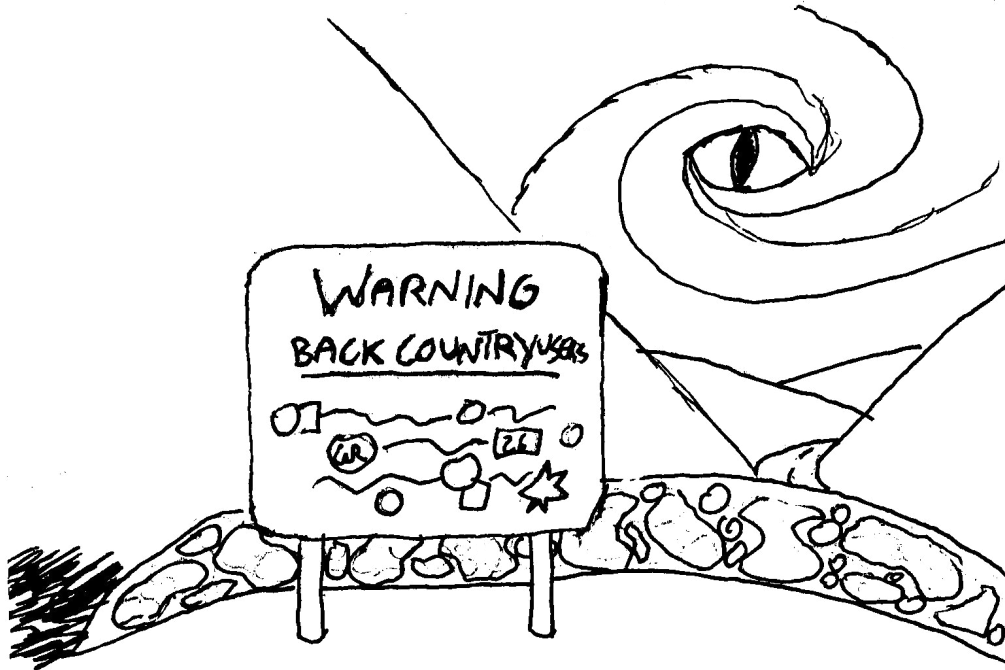
Regardless, what is known is that the rhythms of humanity's hustle and bustle are a part of the Veil's formation, and it is the day to day of life that keeps the walls up between the two realms. Where there are structures, expectations, and rigid assertions the Veil stands strong.

However, the light of structure casts long shadows. In the blind alleys and contradictions of the prevailing orders, the Veil is thin. There, yokai can pass out of the spirit realm and into our mundane reality.

The dusty supply closet in the back corner of the office invites in dust gnomes. A pristine lake at the center of a wooded clearing becomes the haunt of a leshy. The dark, unoccupied tunnels of a mine fill up with tommyknockers overnight.

Even where the Veil is strong, one can push against it. With signs or tokens, with screens or plants, islands within the routines of life can be made into shrines or grottoes. These respites cultivate a uniqueness that collects the psychic resonance of visitors and passerbys. As these places begin to develop their own gravitational pull, the Veil is pushed and pulled until it wears thin as an old pair of socks.

Imagine if you will, a road sign at the top of a mountain pass. Already a locale laden with potential. A sticker advertising some band or brewery is placed upon the sign, then another and another. Soon the sign on this pass takes on a power of its own. The sign becomes a site of pilgrimage unto itself and the pass becomes somewhere to commune across the Veil.



Beware! This knowledge is not to be used lightly. To play with the fabric of reality is to invite in chaos. Too much change, too fast, and the day to day of reality collapses in on itself as a castle made of sand. The void left behind is filled by terrible monsters. At least until heroes arise anew to slay them. Better though to make changes to the Veil slowly and iteratively, unless one has no other option.

Still, in your journey with the Veil, also beware those who come too quickly with mops and gray paint, speaking hollow words in pursuit of "restoring order". There is power in the spirit realm to change the way we see the world, and those who would sever your connection to it seek to control you.

NAVIGATING THE SPIRIT REALM

If you find yourself in places where the veil between the realms is thin and yokai have taken shape in our world and hold a presence, then remember that the opposite also holds true. In these places, humans with the skill and sight can also reach into the spirit realm.

Not physically of course. Our material bodies must stay grounded in the mundanity of the world. But our minds and spirits can take flight and soar through the other realm. Those who understand the spirit realm and its nature enough to engage with it are called Veil-rovers. The specialization grants a number of advantages.

First and foremost, the spirit realm exists outside the constraints of Cartesian space. With a strong enough will, one can make distant peaks move next to each other or put two neighboring homes on opposite arms of a galaxy.

Likewise, in the spirit realm one can also set time on its head. Bring spirits from the past forward into the present, peer into the many hallways of the future, and pass stories all along the river of time like messages in a bottle. It's worth noting that traversing into the spirit realm also allows for near instantaneous communication with anyone else plumbing its depths.



But, the most powerful of the skills available to Veil-rovers is access to the rich fabric of the realm itself. While we in the material realm subsist on watts and kilocalories, the spirit realm hungers for symbols and sigils, novelty and abstractions. In this sense, access to the spirit realm allows Veil-rovers to plant the seeds of ideas within it, foster them, and then ultimately watch them sprout as new yokai that cross back over into our world.

Thus, by shaping the Veil's strength in our world, and by reaching through it to plant ideas in the spirit realm, Veil-rovers can steward the cycle that ultimately brings yokai into our world, in a sense granting them an unseen hand in directing our reality.

MILK GERBLINS - (SUB)URBAN

Inside houses across suburbia you can find pesky little imps called milk gerblins. Denizens of the Demesnes of the Fae, milk gerblins sneak into the homes of new babies under the cover of night to intercept milk.



Drawn to families that have left half-empty bottles out on a coffee table or night stand, they know that the parents within are stressed, sleep deprived, and will be unlikely to notice if they trade places with the newborn.

Ferociously hungry, the imps cry constantly for food and will guzzle down any milk or formula with great abandon. They have no concern for spilling it or becoming so engorged as to burp it back up within seconds.

Possessing but a simple glamour to hide their horns from human eyes, a mere touch of the head will reveal the imps features. They also begin to develop a smell like garlic after a few weeks in the mundane world.

If you think a milk gerblin has infested your crib, while brandishing an iron rod demand that it return your child overnight. It should be enough to banish them from the home and have your fresh tyke returned safely.

THE AZIMUTH - CELESTIAL

SECRET KEEPER TO THE STARS

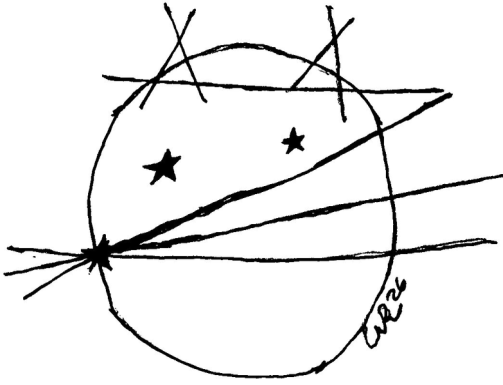
ENTRY BY: THADDEUS ILLEITH

Long before the arrival of Europeans, long before tourists with their selfie sticks, the mesas of the Four Corners were alive with a careful, deliberate light. Solstice shafts cut through spiral petroglyphs. Sun daggers split stone at noon. Someone (or something) taught the builders how to read the sky.

The Azimuth is that something.

A denizen of the heavens, its careful geometry maps the dance of the star bodies across the universe. Many of its other celestial peers are content to exist passively and drift alone on the great spiralings of the cosmos. What sets the Azimuth apart is its interest and proximity to the human sky watchers upon Earth. It is theorized that the Azimuth would be purposeless and formless without being seen, and that it is the incidental perception of the heavens by humans which bestowed whatever degree of agency or consciousness it possesses.

The more we gazed upon the void, the more the void began to gaze back.



We can see evidence of the Azimuth's influence in the Anasazi kivas of Chaco Canyon, the cliffs of Mesa Verde, and the Hovenweep, Chimney Rock, and Aztec Ruins sites. Here we can see how divine heavenly knowledge allowed the Azimuth to play king maker in ancient society.

Those humans who received gifts from the Azimuth were able to predict lunar cycles, solstices and eclipses. This allowed them to plant crops precisely, predict 18.6 year tidal patterns critical to ground water levels, and wield immense prestige by predicting heavenly events with extreme precision. We can only guess as to the Azimuth's purpose or agenda in these revelations, except to say that they are as mysterious to us now as they were then.

The Azimuth is not dangerous. It is, however, persistent. Those who demonstrate genuine understanding of celestial mechanics near its chosen sites may find it begins to follow them home. It will arrange objects on windowsills to indicate true north. It will wake you at 3am when a significant conjunction is overhead.

It simply cannot stand to watch someone sleep through something important.

HINDSIGNS - URBAN

ART AND ENTRY BY: 蒲松齡 (PU SONGLING)

Above busy roadways of roaring traffic,
 signs list street names that cars pass in an instant,
 but behind every sign, jonesing for minds,
 lurk wicked creatures that are called *hindsigns*.

These tadpole-like beasts come in many kinds
 and are visible only under moonlit skies.
 Road rage results in the drivers they find,
 swerving in anger as the *hindsigns* dine.

While they feed in the roads, they nest behind signs,
 gathering in groups, dozens or more at a time.
 Eventually they grow to six feet tall,
 with webbed appendages that can slash through walls,

But they do no slashing when they feed as adults,
 preferring possession of their unknowing hosts.
 The possessed appear as junkies who jerk and jolt,
 who gather below highways like deranged living ghosts.

There's no way to avoid them on city streets,
 and even no safety in the passenger seats.
 The best you can do is stay in your home
 and order Uber Eats from your cell phone.



MOSENTAURS - ALPINE

A distant relative of the more common Minoan yokai, moosentaurs are exactly what they sound like. With the bodies of humans and the heads of moose, these large creatures (most reach heights of between 7-10ft) tend to stick to the unpopulated timberlines of the Rocky Mountains, although they are known to descend into marshy willow groves when looking for food.



Like the apex megafauna they resemble, they are not to be trifled with. Getting between a mother and her child is an excellent way to get charged by the 1-ton creatures. In general though, if given distance and respect they will happily go about their day ignoring you if you happen to stumble across some in the wilds.

When westerners first came into the mountains for logging and mining around Leadville, a small band of the males in the area came into the camp to learn more about the strange humans setting up base there. They were convinced to work, dragging logs for a little bit. At least until they realized the money got them nothing they needed & that the humans planned to clear cut the whole mountainside. At that point the moosentaur wrecked the sawmill and fled back into the mountains to warn their kin.

MINOR GODS OF THE BEER LEAGUE - URBAN

On a cold January day in Glenwood Springs, a small crowd of friends and family gather to watch the Beavers (most of whom work for Bucktooth Brewing) play off against the Raptors (who all mostly work in Aspen and take the bus to work) in the local hockey tournament. On a hot July evening, a similar scene can be witnessed playing out on soccer pitches and ball fields across Denver.

These are the Beer Leagues that entertain the cities of the Commonwealth. And with all that attention, drama, and fervor (plus an altered state or twelve) it is no wonder that these low-league teams attract yokai.

Matching uniforms, coordinated chants, strange rituals concocted to curry good luck (why else would anyone willingly take a shot of Malort by the light of day?). The yokai eat that shit up!

And but so, on any given Saturday, you may find your local games graced by a minor god of the Beer Leagues. A flat of water appears on the sidelines from nowhere. Balls take strange arcs into the net. The eyes on your neighbor's beaver hat begin to glow on power plays.

Be sure to check out the parks next Saturday afternoon, you never know what (or who) you might find.

WASH TRAPPERS - PLAINS/DESERT

Be it the High Plains of the eastern Commonwealth or the rocky deserts of the western edge, both biomes are dotted with washes.

These sandy channels in the earth are made when an area with hard, impenetrable ground is hit with a

sudden down pour, flooding the surface with water.



The fast moving water flows downhill to a resting basin, carrying all sorts of junk in its wake. Then, as quickly as it started, the rain stops, the sun comes out, and the water quickly evaporates, leaving behind a wash.

Then along comes a wash trapper. Looking a bit like a crab with ten legs and nimble claws, these beasts are about the size of a medium dog.

They love to make little burrows in washes to trap and ambush any little creatures that come to pick through the detritus left over from the storm.

On the plains they tend to hide under dead tree trunks, while the wash trappers of the desert favor rocks to hide their burrows. While not usually prone to attacking humans, they still don't enjoy being trampled on, so mind your step when out hiking or risk a pinch!

FOREST MIMICS - ALPINE



Anyone with a passing understanding of yokai is probably familiar with mimics. Known for disguising themselves as inanimate objects, they lie in wait within caves and dungeons for unsuspecting adventurers to try and use them. These interactions tend to end poorly for the adventurers.

Forest mimics seem to take a slightly different approach to life. They will attempt to disguise themselves as hikers and blend in with groups passing through the forest. If you take a few minutes to stop and investigate, they are usually easy to spot. Blank, simple, features on their face; treadless boots; no canteens or water bottles; two cameras; that sort of thing. They always seem too rushed to get the details right.

Most reports suggest they are harmless, only looking for a little company and some attention. Some scholars have theorized that they are actually the juvenile form of some other forest denizen that has placed their young among a group of hikers for a bit of free babysitting.

DJINNI - DESERT/URBAN

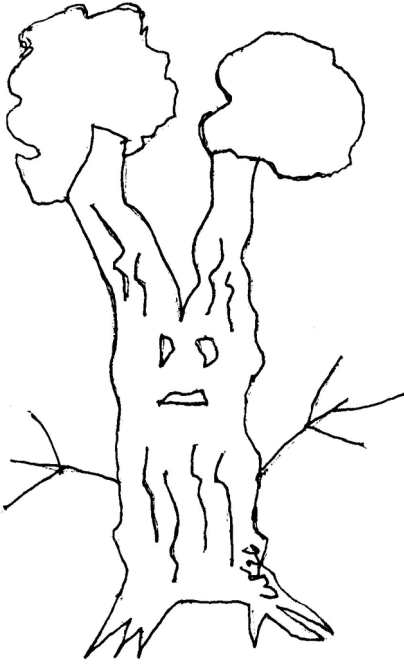
For centuries scholars have studied the djinni of the desert. Creatures of strange and immense power, they have traditionally hid deep in the desert. There they occupy the sort of cool & dry caves used for scroll storage, with access limited by heat & sandstorms.



Attracted to the light of knowledge (often symbolized by their fondness for oil lamps) they make their domains at the edge of knowledge networks, bartering favors for tidings of news. Although just as often they will use their knowledge and wits to cut down anyone brash enough to not think through their wishes properly.

As humanity has moved into the 21st century, the djinni have begun to adapt to the new information landscape that has developed. No longer content to only hide in the desert, many have begun to establish toeholds on the internet. There they set up shop in obscure chat forums and occluded chat rooms, continuing to trade information for favors to anyone brave enough (or stupid enough) to seek them.

COTTON-ENTS - PLAINS/ALPINE



Cotton-ents are a particularly short lived (for an ent) species found along the narrow, fast moving waterways of the Commonwealth's plains and mountains.

Unlike most ents, who as a broad species tend to find quiet, calm places where they can sit and think for a century or two, cotton-ents instead subscribe to a philosophy of fast-living (for an ent) seeking environs prone to flash-flooding & high winds.

While this risky behavior (for an ent) often leads to them being returned to the earth within a century of their sprouting, most cotton-ents hold a philosophy of rebirth, believing that experiences they have during their life are carried forward into the ent-lings that sprout from the soil they have returned to. This allows the whole species to quickly (for an ent) take in learnings about their rapidly changing environments and synthesize it into new adaptations.

That being said, you will still find cotton-ents that grow big and wide. These are very old and very wise ents to have made it so long, so treat them with respect.

Submissions are open for the next issue!

Summer 2026

The Yokaipedia: Book III

SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

July 3rd 2026 11:59PM MDT

Current pay schedule:

Short bio/description works (150-499 words) : \$10-\$20

Short stories (500-1500 words) : \$30-\$50

Accompanying B&W line art : \$10 per image

Questions, comments, concerns or submissions

send 'em all to:

corvus@shadows.institute

Previous Volumes

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