

HIDEOUS CREATURES

BYAKHEE

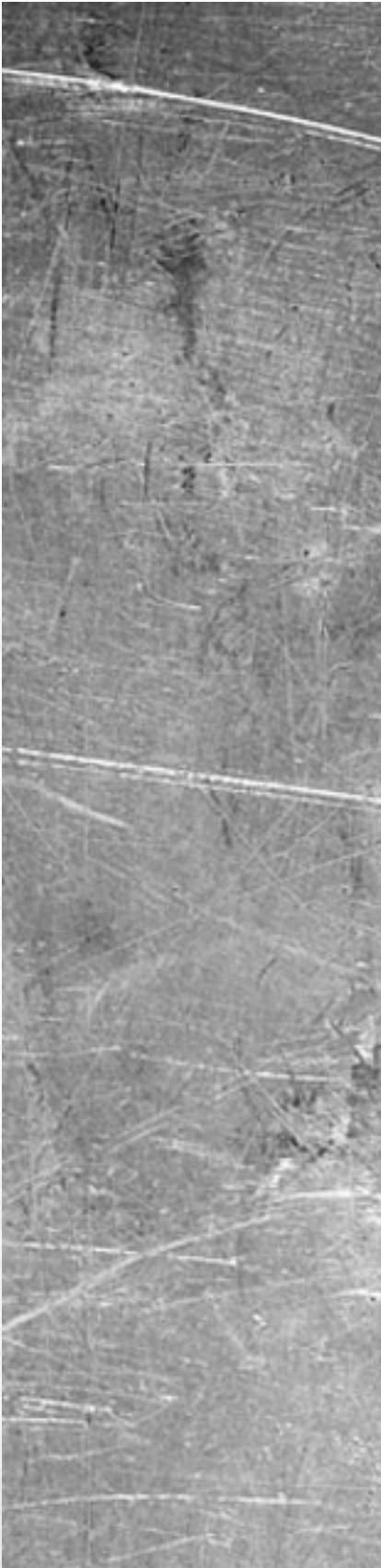
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HIDEOUS CREATURES: BYAKHEE

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KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

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Hideous Creatures: Introduction

Lovecraft created his various “shadowy congeners” because the stories of vampires, werewolves, and even ghosts had become too familiar and too formulaic to evoke true horror. Almost a century after he wrote, his own monstrous races have likewise begun to seem like comfortable story furniture rather than unnerving signals that the world is horrible and wrong.

Our goal with this series is to present a comprehensive look at Lovecraft’s hideous creatures, from as many angles as we can. Our goal is contradiction, surprise, and most especially the uncanny: the recognition of something familiar as something weird. As in the “Gods and Titans” section of the *Trail of Cthulhu* core book, this series deliberately contradicts itself, blurring boundaries and erasing certainties in the name of the uncanny. In your campaign, these variant truths might be misunderstandings, legends, heresies, or deliberate lies spread by the creatures to lull their foes into a false sense of familiarity.

Change anything and everything in these pages, most especially the ability scores. If you need a terrifying assassin, a brief but survivable fright, or a sanity-shattering horror, just add or subtract points at will.

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“WE ... FOUND OURSELVES ONCE MORE ASTRIDE THE HUGE BAT-WINGED CREATURES ... APART FROM THE CURIOUSLY REPELLENT FEELING OF HUMAN FLESH UNDER MY HANDS, AND FURRED WINGS, I WAS NOT ABLE TO ASCERTAIN WHAT THESE CREATURES WERE LIKE.”

-- AUGUST DERLETH, “THE HOUSE ON CURWEN STREET”

Byakhee are interstellar hunters, flying between the stars on vast membranous wings. They sometimes carry riders, usually one apiece -- though such riders need protection from the vacuum and cold from suitable spells or potions. Byakhee do not have bases on earth, but sorcerers summon them to perform foul deeds or to serve as steeds.

Derleth describes the byakhee very sparingly: they are black, winged, and furred. “Bat-like” is his most common adjective. More recent authors have attached to the byakhee various additional descriptors of the “trained, hybrid winged things” from Lovecraft’s story “The Festival”: decomposed, antlike, birdlike.

These “default byakhee” -- necrotic, insectoid vultures with bat wings -- may not have palled on your players, depending on how often they appear. However, it’s always a good idea to have some more possible horrors to present.

Vary the byakhee wings from their “bat-like” default:

- Bifurcated wings rather than a single pair
- Wings made of chitin or crystalloids, like enormous dragonfly wings
- Gelid oily sheen on the membranes, clinging in lysergic rainbow colors or crawling ultraviolet

- Wings that flicker in and out of geometric visibility, shifting forms from bat to crow to insect to manta ray
- Reflect and amplify starlight, reddish and bluish glows coruscating over the wings like phosphorescent rot on a log
- Wings are clearly made of eyes; faceted like insects’ or shiny like birds’ or wet like humans’
- Extended fins like a flying fish
- Wings (and body) clearly furzed over with mold and rot, crusted with ice, tattered by cosmic winds, alive with crawling alien lice

Vary the body and head:

- Enormous thorax and abdomen, like a wasp
- Skull head, or metal head and jaws, or just metal teeth and claws
- Human torso with chitin sprouting from under the peeling flesh
- Antennae, or long hair, or cilia, on the head
- Coated with long spines like a porcupine, the wings are very long spines joined by webbing
- Black flesh broken and pitted as if by smallpox or micrometeoroids

- Head is soft and featureless like that of a mole; a single hollow tooth emerges from the proboscis to puncture and drain foes
- Mouth on the long, whiplike tail
- Slablike, built of chitin or mica or sheet anthracite, resembling a somewhat organic helicopter gunship body

Note that the monstrous steeds in “The Festival” have webbed feet, not claws. The celebrants ride them into the underground river beneath Kingsport, not into the skies above it. Presenting the byakhee as enormous ducks, however justified by the text, is unlikely to maintain the mood of horror.

Byakhee

Abilities (on land/in air or space): Athletics 5/20, Health 8, Scuffling 6/11

Magic: The alpha byakhee in a flock has a Magic rating between 5 and 9. It will have Summon Byakhee, and possibly Call Hastur or Create Hyperspace Gate.

Hit Threshold: 4

Stealth Modifier: +0/+1

Weapon: +1 (claw), +0 (bite); following a successful bite, the byakhee will automatically drain 2 Health per round from its victim until killed or driven off.

Byakhee

In combat, byakhee can either strike with both claws for two attacks per round, or attempt to bite and drain blood.

Armor: -2 vs. any (fur and hide, and an absence of vitals)

Stability Loss: +1

Possible Byakhee Abilities

Mix and match these abilities for the byakhee in your campaign without fear. Lovecraft couldn't even decide what byakhee didn't look like, much less what they can do. If they're ad hoc constructs assembled by Hastur or genengineered by the Elder Things, they may have any number of possible forms and functions in addition to interstellar courier duty.

Space-mead should also grant immunity to byakhee "environmental" powers (Foulness, Interstellar Cold, etc.) in order to function correctly.

Cognitive Dissonance: The presence of the byakhee enforces belief in and knowledge of Hastur. Humans with Stability above 0 within 10' of the beast are automatically Shaken. For an even crueller version (or in places combining true despair and impossible hope), such witnesses take -2 Health damage per round from nausea, migraines, and mental anguish. Anyone who has read *The King in Yellow* is immune to either effect, but takes +0 Stability damage instantly upon seeing a byakhee, before rolling for any other Stability test.

Diving Attack: Byakhee can dive from thousands of feet high to Point-Blank in a single round, or vice-versa. A diving byakhee can spend Athletics points on Scuffling tests or to increase claw damage by 1 per point spent. (It must still spend all points before rolling.) For even deadlier byakhee, it can spend 2 more Athletics points to fly back out of range immediately after attacking.

Flock Attack: Up to four byakhee (or five in midair) may attack a single target in one round. The foe's Hit Threshold drops by 1 against the third, and by 2 against the fourth (and fifth) byakhee.

Foulness: All unprotected breathers around a byakhee must make a Difficulty 5 Health test or be Hurt until they return to clean air. Any food too close to the beast converts itself to dextroproteins or simply disintegrates.

Grasp: A byakhee can seize a foe in its claws with a successful Scuffling test (-1 damage); that foe must spend 2 Athletics (3 Athletics for greater byakhee, below) to do anything but writhe uncomfortably. A seized foe has her Hit Threshold lowered by 2. To free herself, she must defeat the byakhee in a contest of Athletics – but of course, the byakhee can simultaneously fly thousands of feet into the air in one round.

Greater Byakhee: For the immense (40' wingspan) byakhee mentioned by Howard, add +5/+10 to Athletics, +5 to Health, and +3/+6 to Scuffling. Hit Threshold drops to 3, claw damage increases to +2.

Interstellar Cold: The byakhee carries with it an aura of freezing cold. In addition to eerie effects on its surroundings, touching the byakhee with unprotected flesh costs 1 Health.

Iron Beak: Byakhee with iron or metal beaks bite for +2 damage. Their bite can tear through stone, concrete, wood, and all but tempered steel armor like a bank vault door. That takes two or even three bites.

Magnetic Manipulation: Byakhee can use their hune organ (or wings, or ...) to attract or repel ferromagnetic metals (iron, nickel, cobalt, etc.) at the cost of 2 Health or Magic per feat. This includes stopping cars (by bending

the axle or jamming the engine), and yanking guns or knives out of hands, but not diverting lead bullets.

Orbital Flight: Even without teleportation or wormhole effects, a byakhee can fly into orbit and come down anywhere on the Earth or Moon within 1 hour.

Paralysis: After scoring a Scuffling hit, a byakhee can spend (minimum 1) Magic points to force the target to make a Health test against a Difficulty total equal to the roll plus the Scuffling and Magic points spent. On a failure, the target is paralyzed; his Hit Threshold drops by 2 and he cannot move for the rest of the scene. (Kindly Keepers may allow an Athletics test against that Difficulty every round after the first to break the paralysis.)

Regeneration: The byakhee continues to attract and reshape new matter, either detritus from its earthly surroundings, or extraterrestrial matter through its hune, replacing any damaged parts. It refreshes 1 Health per round until dead.

Scorpion Sting: In addition to claws and jaws, the byakhee has a scorpion-like tail. When it stings, that is the byakhee's only attack for the round. Its tail can strike foes at up to Close range and does +1 damage. Every round after that, the target must make a test of Health or Stability (Keeper's choice) with a Difficulty equal to the total damage done by the strike as the agonizing pain burns through his veins. Only blessed unconsciousness ends the torment.

Teleport: The byakhee's hune organ (or wings, or ...) doesn't merely create folds in interstellar space, but also allows it to teleport while on a planetary surface. For 2 Health or Magic points, a byakhee can disappear and immediately reappear anywhere else – or nowhere!

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How Fast Are Byakhee?

Barring questions of relativity, folded space, or other chicanery, the source material gives a wide variety of answers:

- They are capable of interstellar flight from Aldebaran (65 light-years) to Earth in a few minutes.
- They carry Shrewsbury and Phelan the 3,800 miles from Arkham to Peru in “a very little time.”
- Conan’s byakhee travels 550-600 miles (five days’ nonstop ride at a horse-killing pace) in an hour.
- Sandy Petersen’s *Field Guide to Cthulhu Monsters* gives their top speed near sea level as ~45 mph, increasing as air density lessens. Their top interstellar speed is 400 c (a 60-day flight time from Aldebaran).

The answer is thus “as fast as they need to be for the story to work.” Tension and drama are more important than physics. A byakhee that can carry a wizard to New Guinea or Mars in a few minutes may have to win a contest of Athletics vs. Piloting (or Driving) to catch a group of Investigators in a fast airplane – or even a fast car!

- A unique paramagnetic organ called the hune occupies much of the byakhee’s opisthosoma, or abdomen. It generates a keim, a pattern in spacetime that the byakhee can enter for faster-than-light flight.
- The byakhee generate their keim as a flock, creating the pattern with their magnetic sail-wings.
- The hune is attuned to the galactic magnetic field, and is propelled by its flux. Byakhee manipulate the Earth’s magnetic field to hover in terrestrial gravity.
- Byakhee are shoggoth-like constructs built by the Elder Things as a bribe to Hastur for his aid in their great war against Cthulhu hundreds of millions of years ago. Their forms are thus protean and plastic.
- Byakhee are assembled by the Hastur-force from abandoned and degraded matter near the summoner: grave earth, industrial waste, oxidized metal, dead organic matter, beetles, etc.
- Byakhee are tulpas created by the belief in the Hastur meme complex, facets of the Hastur reality made visible and horrible, given shape by the viewer’s worst fear and disgust. Thus they cannot be described or remembered clearly.
- Byakhee are servants of Tulszcha, the shadow-forms cast in instants by his Green Flame and given hellish unlife.
- Byakhee are worm-beings built of dead animals by the cult of Kingsport.
- Byakhee are a species of shantak-birds; they carry riders through Dream and back to Earth. The

VARIATIONS

“THEY WERE NOT ALTOGETHER CROWS, NOR MOLES, NOR BUZZARDS, NOR ANTS, NOR VAMPIRE BATS, NOR DECOMPOSED HUMAN BEINGS; BUT SOMETHING I CANNOT AND MUST NOT RECALL.”

-- “THE FESTIVAL”

As with the “Gods and Titans” section in the corebook, this compendium is intentionally self-contradictory. Its facts and theories come from Lovecraft and Derleth, from later writers, and from the universe of possibilities opened up between them.

- Byakhee are servitors of Hastur, nesting in the space around his home near Aldebaran.
- Byakhee nest on (or inside) airless planetoids and comet nuclei. Swarms of byakhee nest in the Kuiper Belt of many solar systems, including our own.
- To summon a byakhee, drink space-mead, blow a whistle of extraterrestrial matter, and chant *Iä! Iä! Hastur! Hastur cf’ ayak ’vulgtmm, vugtlagln, vulgtmm! Ai! Ai! Hastur!* Byakhee appear out of the night.
- Imbibing space-mead is not necessary to summon a byakhee, but only to survive in interstellar space.
- Byakhee are vocal, cawing and screeching. Some savants can understand their speech, or claim to.
- To him who holds the Masterwords and Signs and the Knowledge underlying all, the byakhee are not malignant nor inaccessible. They can be called by such a one in their own language.
- Byakhee warp time and space around themselves to travel faster than light; time stands still while riding byakhee.

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Library of Celaeno exists in the Dream Pleiades, or in frozen Leng.

- Byakhee never leave the Earth; they nest on the highest peaks of Leng or the Andes. They bring riders to a fane of Hastur in the Nameless City of Arabia, where the traveler lies down in a crystal coffin and astrally projects to the desired interstellar destination.
- Their name comes from the Thibetan *bya-khyi* (“bird-hound”). The Thibetan Bön tradition of sky-burial is a cargo-cult imitation of

the byakhee habit of carrying off the priests of Leng to serve Hastur upon their first death.

Mythic Echoes

“THERE ARE CREATURES ... NOT ALONE OF EARTH AND SEA, BUT OF AIR AND THE FAR REACHES OF THE SKIES AS WELL, DWELLING APART, UNGUESSED OF MEN. YET TO HIM WHO HOLDS THE MASTER-WORDS AND SIGNS AND THE KNOWLEDGE UNDERLYING ALL, THEY ARE NOT MALIGNANT NOR INACCESSIBLE.”

– ROBERT E. HOWARD,
“THE SCARLET CITADEL”

The byakhee, at their most basic, are winged creatures ridden by wizards or warlocks. Therefore, any “demon of the air” from medieval witch-lore or of some remote people might refer to the “Byakhee birds” as Derleth’s Professor Shrewsbury calls them. As with the variations and possible powers above, any given byakhee might more closely match their various mythic depictions than Lovecraft’s fiction.

Akris (Antiquity)

The Greek word *akris* means “locust,” but is also applied to the winged, tormenting beasts of Revelation 9. The *akrides* are shaped like armored horses with metallic thoraxes and scorpion tails, sporting metallic projections and flowing tendrils from their human-bestial heads. “The sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses, running into battle.” They emerge from smoke – a space-warp opening? – and, unlike regular locusts, do not feed on grass and plants.

Camazotz (Oaxaca and Chiapas)

Not to be confused with the anthropomorphic Mayan god of the same name, these *camazotz* (“death bat” in Quiché Maya) dwell in Zotzilaha, the House of Bats within Xibalba, a dimension of death marked by incredible cold – the cold of interstellar space, perhaps. According to the *Popol Vuh*, these enormous, malevolent bats kill all those who come into their presence with weapons “like a dry point” (desiccated claws?). *Camazotz* have snouts “like a flint knife,” echoing the “iron beaks” often ascribed to byakhee. Their cry of *quilitz*, *quilitz* continues all night; one *camazotz* comes “from the sky” and beheads one of the Hero Twins.



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Guiafairo (Senegal)

Known as “the fear that flies by night,” this bat-like monster has a human face, clawed feet for snatching human prey, and an incredibly – even terrifyingly -- foul odor. It can appear inside locked rooms, but normally dwells on rocky crags or in the tops of dead trees. Similar bat-monsters haunt the night in the Congo (the kongamato, with a long snout), the Gold Coast (the sasabonsam, with fangs and eyebrow ridges), the Cameroons (the olitiau, with an apelike face), and Madagascar (the fangalabolo).

Harpy (Ancient Greece)

These winged and clawed monsters of Greek myth also carry a supernatural foulness with them, extending to all nearby food. They snatch victims and carry them to Tartarus or other mysterious destinations – their name comes from the Greek *harpazoi*, “snatchers.” The *Odyssey* mentions their kidnap habit, and connects them with wind and storm spirits. The *Aeneid* even gives one Harpy’s name as Celaeno (“the black one”), connecting them further to the Pleiades. Byakhee also closely fit the description of the Furies: bat-winged and dog-headed daughters of the dead sky god Ouranos, with snaky hair. Interestingly, the Harpies are first described as ugly beasts (as opposed to beautiful if foul women) in Aeschylus’ play *The Furies*, hinting at some early confusion in Greek lore.

Kenaima (Guiana)

These astral killers can possess any earthly thing from sticks to insects to people, although they are especially drawn to bats and birds. Death by kenaima resembles snakebite or similar poisoning. In Guiana, when the locals kill a whippoorwill or other nightjar, they burn every feather to destroy the

kenaima, implying that its “true form” is winged. The peaimen (shamans) of the Macusi tribe summon kenaima in the form of immense winged beasts, bribing or binding them with tobacco water.

Vetala (India)

Sometimes spirits who possess corpses, sometimes a subspecies of rakshasa or of ghoul, sometimes simply a monstrous sorcerer in the form of a bat, the vetala (or baital) haunts cemeteries. In its bat form it seems skeletal and hideous; in corpse form its hands and feet turn backwards. Its talons carry poison; its flesh is green and stinking. It drinks blood or eats intestines, favoring children and madwomen as prey. Wizards and magi bribe and consult vetala, who know the past and future as well as much occult lore. The only way to capture a vetala is to approach it in total silence.

INVESTIGATIONS

Keepers should treat this section, and use these elements, even more idiosyncratically.

Clues

Perforce, the clues in this section mostly point to “conventional” byakhee as painted in Derleth’s *Trail of Cthulhu* story sequence. Feel free to adjust them at will.

Accounting: The Professor put all his property – including his vacation home near Dean’s Corners – into a very complex trust. Essentially, his money just maintains the houses and pays all his taxes – it’s like he expects to come back after all these years and step right back into his life.

Anthropology: The tribe has kept this part of the jungle cleared

for generations; that implies a ritual purpose rather than the more normal slash-burn-replant cycle of the Amazon. But why a clearing, and why do they call it the “Door to the Sky?”

Archaeology: The Parthenon was oriented to the rising of the Pleiades – perhaps this temple shared the same alignment. In which case, the high altar should be over here. (Architecture, Astronomy)

Architecture: This whole roof swings away – could he have planned to land an autogiro here or something?

Art History: The black-winged demon tormenting St. Anthony in Matthias Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1515) is supposed to be the result of an ergot hallucination – so why does it perfectly match the eyewitness’ description of the “devil bird” that took Kerényi right out from under our noses?

Assess Honesty: He claims that the winged monsters and the flying through space was all a dream brought on by drinking “too much mead” – but he doesn’t believe his own denials! Is he crazy, or is he driving himself crazy thinking he’s crazy?

Astronomy: Celaeno is the dimmest star in the Pleiades Cluster near Taurus, about 440 light-years away. It was known as the “Hidden Pleiad” in antiquity because only those with very keen – or magical – sight could perceive it.

Biology: The grass here was frozen and then broken from the top down, as though something unutterably cold landed here. The spores growing here are new – I’ve never seen anything like them before, although they slightly resemble nitrogen-fixing fungi.

Bureaucracy: That’s odd – she says “Professor” Maitland has never actually

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belonged to the American Astronomical Society. See if your contacts at Yale can ask around and find out if he even has a real degree. Why do you suppose an impostor takes a job as an observatory director in Tucson?

Chemistry: The parchment and ink are absolutely authentic for a print struck in Colmar during Martin Schongauer's life (1440-1491). But why would he run off a print study of just one of the demons in his *Torment of St. Anthony*? And why would it be hanging behind the door in the house of an astronomer? (Art History, Document Analysis)

Cop Talk: We're tracking down a report that somebody heard whistling, like from a piccolo, right before the attack.

Credit Rating (5+): The only way to find out for sure what Von Brighoff is researching is to answer his advertisement for a "private secretary and amanuensis of breeding." That means you, college boy – your folks were Main Line, correct?

Cryptography: The symbol cut into the crystal is Agrippa's emblem for the Pleiades. (Occult, q.v.)

Evidence Collection: The prints generally resemble those of carrion birds, but are not deep enough to indicate anything heavy enough to batter a human ever stood in them. (Outdoorsman)

Forensics: The body is slashed and torn almost to rags, and blood spatter evidence indicates it was carried around the area *during* the struggle. Although the throat is ripped out, there is surprisingly little blood either on or in the corpse.

Geology: This whistle isn't made of any kind of stone I'm familiar with. It seems like iridium-bearing ore, rather than the natural alloy one expects to

find. It could be igneous rock or clay, subjected to intense heat – possibly meteoric in origin, as I've never seen anything like it on earth.

History: This whole Alsace-Lorraine region was a hotbed of witchcraft outbreaks from 1410 to 1690; testimonies (not all extorted by torture) record witches and wizards flying to the Bavarian Alps (or the court of the Devil) at unearthly speed on their demonic steeds after drinking a golden potion.

Languages: The tablet we found in her sink is inscribed in ancient Babylonian, beginning with MUL. MUL, the "Star of Stars" or the Pleiades. The basalt stone is incredibly weathered, but the cuneiform looks like it was carved yesterday. (Geology for stone)

Law: Someone has gone to a lot of trouble to make sure the Professor cannot be declared legally dead, no matter how long he stays missing. And it looks like they had the Professor's cooperation in doing so, given all the documents he signed or filed over the years.

Library Use: This is the 1511 Strasbourg edition of Euclid. It incorporates a number of "improvements" by the translator Bartolomeo Zamberti taken from Theon of Alexandria's *Catoptrica* – the study of mirrors – and "Alhazen's" *De crepusculis* – a treatise on shadows at twilight. Why go to the trouble to get this specific edition? Does it have anything to do with the mirrors set up to reflect the western horizon right on the Pleiadean alignment? (Astronomy)

Medicine: She's suffering from shock and severe hypothermia – and those red spots all over her skin are purpura from exploded capillaries. The dark tan indicates high ultraviolet exposure, too.

Occult: According to Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia* (1510-1530), a properly prepared talisman "with the Moon conjunct the Pleiades rising or at midheaven, preserves the eyesight, summons demons and the spirits of the dead, calls the winds, and reveals secrets and things that are lost."

Oral History: Talking to peasants and townsfolk all through the area, you notice that some families are – not shunned, precisely, but less connected to the rest of the region. More insular, apt to marry among themselves. The Weylands and the Müllers seem to be the leading families in that group.

Outdoorsman: "Investigators were unable to explain certain marks about the tent, suggesting the marks of bat wings, greatly enlarged ..." (Evidence Collection)

Pharmacy: I can't tell what this so-called mead is supposed to be, but it's not just fermented honey. Or if it is, the bees took pollen from a literally impossible collection of plants, fungi, and epiphytes, and then added some ethylene glycol and neurotoxic heavy metals to finish the job. This will either put you into a mild coma or give you the worst hyperaesthesia you've ever had. (Chemistry)

Photography: The camera in the telescope triggers every three minutes to capture possible comets – maybe it caught a glimpse of the thing flying by? (Astronomy)

Physics: I don't know how it works, but this scale or feather or whatever it is just drinks up ultraviolet light. It doesn't reflect it, or heat up, but that energy has to go somewhere. Even higher energies, like cosmic rays, might actually affect it – or it might just shunt them off to wherever, but even moreso.

Sense Trouble: A waft of icy air seems to rush past you, and an

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astrigent smell like rotting juniper stings your nostrils.

Streetwise: Sure, I know where you can get ahold of some golden-eye. Or flying honey or whatever you call it – it’s new enough that one name ain’t stuck yet, I guess. I gotta warn you, though – it’s not cheap, and the supplier is... well, he’s scary enough that Buccola hasn’t moved in on him yet, and Buccola hit Wallace and Solomon.

Theology: Shrewsbury’s work references the “earth-diver” myth of creation common amongst Siberian and Amerind peoples, in which a sky deity sends a (sometimes infernal or demonic) bird to the bottom of the ocean to raise up the land at the beginning of time. He thus postulates a primordial antagonism between Water-Chaos and Sky-Art, and implies these “demonic birds” also “dive” into our subconscious to raise up artistic and religious impulse.

Scenario Seeds

The most common use of byakhee in scenarios is as transport for evil wizards or lesser dangers in temples of Hastur. They come more fully into their own in adventures involving air travel, but can be surprisingly powerful foes even on remote Miskatonic Valley hilltops. These two scenario seeds offer a “standard” byakhee appearance, and byakhee as storm-crows of apocalypse.

Something in Platinum

Guillaume Desroches’ grandfather lost his metal refinery in Metz in 1871 when the Germans took Alsace-Lorraine. The Desroches devoted three generations to the study of the occult, hoping to undo their misfortunes. Guillaume was raised in Besancon, in a house of sorcery and madness, a



cultist of Hastur from birth. In 1919, the Peace of Versailles returned his family’s refinery to him, a looted shell. Desroches brewed space-mead and summoned byakhee, who carried him to a distant, platinum-rich planet. For a decade, he made constant trips back and forth, bringing platinum back to Metz, growing ever more addicted to space-mead and comfortable with the byakhee.

Now he no longer needs to travel the stars – constant maceration in space-mead gives him preternatural mineral senses, and he draws rare metals to

him through the earth on paramagnetic waves. Byakhee hang from his rafters, hungry and eager to see their soft brother Desroches glisten and harden: Under his yellow silk caftan, his flesh mummifies, his muscles atrophy, and he grows a hune of his own in his belly. He eats metal fragments and by now disbelieves in the existence of anyone outside his house. The Desroches et Cie senior managers pay off inspectors, keep the plant running, and don’t question the frequent deaths and disappearances of their workers ... or the night-time deliveries of cobalt, nickel, tungsten, and always platinum.

Byakhee

Just a Song at Twilight

This scenario plays out over the course of and in the margins of the rest of the campaign. A single byakhee flies across the moon in one adventure. Two appear when the cultists call. In a fourth scenario, a byakhee dives into the fray seemingly unprompted, eating a wounded (or dead) Investigator. Planes crash mysteriously. The Investigators' contacts report seeing even more of the things across the country. Sightings slow down between May and December – and then Aldebaran rises again, and astronomers describe a magnetic storm washing down on the Northern Hemisphere. Byakhee are everywhere; every adventure now seemingly features one – or a flock.

The byakhee are swarming. Their wings reshape and deform atmospheric signals: everything from radios to compasses to bird migrations to auroras goes mad. Even normal eyewitnesses now report “thunderbirds” and “giant crows” and “vampires.” The Investigators can follow the reports to find the byakhee staging grounds, where the ultra-terrene flocks gather, protected by a shell of dominated Hastur cultists and an expanding fog of solipsistic madness. But now what? Is there some Thing there, some massive alien call that must be silenced? Or can

the Investigators find some other way to send the star-steeds on to the next stop of their migration? The answer should tie into the ongoing campaign before the byakhee gorge themselves on the very reality of their nest and the city disappears from human memory, scavenged for ontological carrion by the steeds of Hastur.

The location of this disaster can vary. Promising epicenters of byakhee infestation include artistic meccas like San Francisco, Paris, Kyoto, Bombay, and Buenos Aires; loci of despair such as Madrid, Kiev, or Peking; or any Depression-blighted industrial wrack in the Midlands or the Midwest. If the Keeper has been using a fictional city – whether Arkham or one of her own devising – perhaps the byakhee “win” and devour it, explaining why it doesn't show up on modern maps or memories.

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The first bat-winged space-steed summoned by a sorcerer in the Mythos appears without a name in “The Scarlet Citadel” by Robert E. Howard. That creature likely inspired the similar, smaller beasts in August Derleth's “A House in Curwen Street,” the first of the linked stories in Derleth's novel *The*

Trail of Cthulhu. The creatures eventually get a name in “The Watcher From the Sky,” and appear throughout the novel.

Chaosium identified Derleth's byakhee with the “hybrid winged things” appearing beneath Kingsport in “The Festival.” Despite the lack of similarity between the two monsters, the depiction of byakhee in later fiction generally adapts this Lovecraftian taint. That said, very little later fiction centers on the byakhee – even more than in Derleth, they are convenient escapes or generic winged horrors.

The byakhee return to their sword-and-sorcery roots in Ben Thomas' “The Menagerie” in *Cthulhu Unbound Vol. 1* and (even moreso) in “Surely You Joust” by Patrick Thomas in *Cthulhu Unbound Vol. 2*. Enormous Howard-style byakhee ridden by evil magi appear all too briefly in Thomas Harlan's alternate-Roman-history *Oath of Empire* trilogy. Weirdly, the best modern fictional byakhee may be the patter-comic monsters starring in Lucien Soulban's “Good Breeding” in *Blood Lite II: Overbite*.

Finally, Adam Gauntlett's original and horrifying treatment of byakhee (and the Hastur mythos in general) in the *Trail of Cthulhu* scenario *Soldiers of Pen and Ink* is well worth a look-in.