HOBSIRE

BY VAIDENON OF HUSTAN, WARDEN OF THE INKHORN FELLOWSHIP

the Old Gaffer of the Hearth, the Millgaffer

> "No family with a hobsire will tell a stranger so, and I was a stranger in forty halls before one old reeve's widow took pity on me. Everything here was told me in kitchens, in a low voice, with a glance at the hearth."
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> — Vaidenon of Hustan, Warden of the Inkhorn Fellowship, Tashal, Morgat 720 TR

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Some revenants have kindly motives. A soul may make its death-journey, but its god delays its entry to the afterlife with a task, usually the protection of someone it loved (Ghosts 4: Guardians). In the old manors and mills of Hârn, that task is often a family. The founder of the house, who cleared the land, built the hall or raised the mill, stays to keep it. Country folk call such a guardian the hobsire, the "old sire of the hob". Most families who have one never speak of it outside the house, and I have learned not to ask twice.

THE WARDEN'S NOTE

The reeve's widow who first trusted me kept a bowl of ale on her hob every night for sixty years, as her mother had. I asked her whether she had ever seen the old sire. She said she had not, and that she would be a poor sort of housewife if she needed to. The ale, she said, was always gone by morning. I did not ask about the cat.

THE HEARTH HOBSIRE

A manor hobsire is the shade of a founding lord or lady, often six or seven generations dead. It dwells about the hall and its hearth (the hob, where the pot is kept warm), within AUR × 5 feet of the spot where it died (Ghosts 2), which is usually the great bed or the hearth itself. It knows the house, its people, and its land as no steward does. It warns of fire and of theft. It keeps the servants honest and the hounds quiet. Now and then it appears to the heir at a birth, a death, or a marriage.

THE MILLGAFFER

Mills pass from father to son more faithfully than manors, and many have a hobsire of their own, called the millgaffer. A millgaffer haunts the mill-house and the wheel. It listens to the stones. It wakes the miller when the leat floods or the bearings run hot. It is said to take its own toll from dishonest millers by spilling their stolen flour, and millers who are good to it grind true and grind fast. *(Inkhorn)* I have never yet met a miller who admitted to the first, nor one who did not claim the second.

HELP AND HINDRANCE

A content hobsire helps in small ways: warnings, a door shut on a draught, a lost key found, and a dream that tells the heir where the deeds are hidden. An offended one hinders: the fire smokes, the milk sours, the stones jam, the dogs howl all night, things go missing, and in the end the shade manifests in anger (Ghosts 2–3) and drives the offender out. A hobsire has no physical power beyond its manifestations, but it does not need any.

OFFERINGS

The customs are old and humble: a bowl of milk or ale left on the hob at night, the first loaf of every baking, a chair kept empty at the high table on the founder's death-day, and the founder's name spoken at every family wedding. Millers leave the first handful of every sack in the hopper. No church requires any of this, and most clergy prefer not to know. *(Inkhorn)*

WHAT OFFENDS IT

Neglect of the customs; selling the land or the mill out of the family; cruelty to the household and the tenants; moving or rebuilding the hearth or the wheel; and, worst of all, a priest trying to send it away against its will. A hobsire that sees the house fall to strangers may go quietly, or it may haunt them.

THE CHURCHES

Contact with souls and spirits is witchcraft and is punished in most kingdoms (Ghosts 1). Families with a hobsire therefore keep the custom quiet. Peonian priests are inclined to be kind. Laranian clergy distrust it but respect

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guardians. Morgathians would harvest it. Halean, Sarajinian, and Siemite families make little secret of theirs. Among the tribes, honouring the dead of the clan is open and ordinary animism (Religion; Folk Tales).

LAYING A HOBSIRE

A guardian rarely needs help to finish its death-journey once its mission is accomplished (Ghosts 4). The task ends when the family dies out, leaves the land for good, or freely releases it. The heir speaks the release before the hearth, and a priest of its own god performs the Passage of the Soul. Exorcism has no effect on a haunted site (Ghosts 1). Forcing the Passage on an unwilling hobsire requires first rendering it unconscious through Mental Conflict (Ghosts 4), and this is an offence to its god.

SPECIAL RULES

MANIFESTATIONS

As a ghost (Ghosts 2–3): touch, sounds, apparition, cold, and smells, with Fatigue as usual. A hobsire has no Drag and no fatal intent. Against an offender it escalates over days, from Intensity 2 manifestations to 5.

HOUSEHOLD FAVOUR (INKHORN)

Each month the customs are kept, the household gains +5 on one roll the GM chooses: a Steward roll for the manor, Milling for the mill, or a test against fire, theft, or accident. A month of neglect turns the bonus into −5. Three months of neglect, and the hobsire begins to manifest against the house.

WARNINGS

Once a month, before a disaster to the house or family, the hobsire gives a warning: a dream to the heir, or an apparition. The heir receives it on a successful Intuition roll, or at once if the danger is fire (Inkhorn).

RELIGIOUS VIEWS

- Peoni: kindly tolerated; Peonian priests may bless the hob without asking questions (Inkhorn).
- Larani: a guardian is honoured if its task is protection, but its family must confess the custom (Inkhorn).
- Morgath: a hobsire is a soul outside the afterlife and fair prey for Morgath's agents (Ghosts 1).
- Ilvir: Ilvir's soul-gatherers ignore guardians whose task is unfinished (Inkhorn).
- Siem and Halea: families of both faiths keep the custom openly (Inkhorn).

FOLK TALES

The Empty Chair

A new bailiff at a Kaldoric manor moved the founder's chair from the high table to make room for his own. That night the fire would not draw, the hounds would not stop, and his horse was found in the hall in the morning with its tail plaited. The chair went back.

The Miller's Thumb

A miller who took too much toll found every night that his stolen flour had been tipped into the leat. He laid a trap, and saw an old man in a white apron with his own grandfather's face. He kept an honest thumb after that.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- A manor passes by marriage to a stranger. The house turns against the new lord, and the old family is suspected of witchcraft.
- A miller asks the PCs to find out who is sabotaging his mill; it is his own grandfather, objecting to the sale of the mill to the abbey.
- A Laranian inquisitor wants to try a family for keeping a household spirit.

ENCOUNTERS

Ethereals (Campaign 14, subtable 16): Shade/Ghost/Astral Entity, in a manor house, hall, or mill. The Fellowship proposes that a result of "Shade/Ghost in an old house or mill" be resolved on this table:

D100	RESULT
01–50	Hobsire (hearth or mill), content
51–75	Hobsire, offended
76–00	Another ghost (Ghosts)

Underworld (the Fellowship's extended): Undead result in manor cellars or mills: hobsire (see Giant Vermin, Underworld table).

RUMOURS

RUMOUR	TRUTH	WHERE
The old hall has a hob; leave the milk out or the cream sours.	true	old manors anywhere
The miller grinds so fast because his grandfather helps.	partly	any shire
The new lord's horse was found in the hall with its tail plaited.	open	local

ECONOMIC DATA

ITEM	PRICE	SOURCE
A manor "with a good hob" (reputation)	sells for no less, but servants stay	Inkhorn

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THE FELLOWSHIP'S ADDITIONS

- The hobsire as a guardian revenant bound to a founding family (Ghosts 4), with its name and its hearth and mill variants
- Household Favour and Warnings; the offerings and offences
- The church attitudes, tales, and encounter additions

Everything else follows HârnMaster 3 and the Columbia Games articles cited, which the Fellowship commends to every reader.

CREDITS

Writer: Vaidenon of Hustan. Set down by Lesli of Bifel and his homunculus, Claudin.

Sources cited: Columbia Games' *Bestiary* (Ghosts: guardians, manifestations, haunts, dispelling), *Religion* (#4401: the Passage of the Soul; animism), *Folk Tales* (#4860: ghost stories; ancestor worship), *Manor* and the HârnMaster 3 core rules (Skills: Mental Conflict).

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STAT BLOCKS

HOBSIRE (HEARTH)

Habitat: A manor hall
Diet: None
Lifespan: Until its task ends
Group: 1

ATTRIBUTES

• Str	• Eye	13 Int	14 Move
• Sta	• Hrg	14 Aur	
• Dex	• Sml	16 Wil	
• Agl			

SKILLS

73 Initiative	70 Dodge
70 Manifestation	65 Mental Conflict
70 Intuition	70 Telepathy
70 Sensitivity	

ARMOUR

None (ethereal)

STRIKE LOCATIONS

None while ethereal. Only enchanted weapons, magic, psionics, and divine intervention affect it (Religion 17).

- Guardian revenant (Ghosts 4); INT, AUR, and WIL as in life.
- Knows the house, its people, and its land.
- Household Favour and Warnings (Inkhorn).

MILLGAFFER (MILL)

Habitat: A mill
Diet: None
Lifespan: Until its task ends
Group: 1

ATTRIBUTES

• Str	• Eye	12 Int	14 Move
• Sta	• Hrg	13 Aur	
• Dex	• Sml	15 Wil	
• Agl			

SKILLS

68 Initiative	65 Dodge
65 Manifestation	60 Mental Conflict
80 Milling[1]	65 Telepathy
65 Sensitivity	

[1] *Milling: as in life*

ARMOUR

None (ethereal)

STRIKE LOCATIONS

None while ethereal. Only enchanted weapons, magic, psionics, and divine intervention affect it (Religion 17).

- Haunts the mill-house and wheel.
- Spills dishonest toll; warns of flood and fire.

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