

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®
2nd Edition



Elminster's Ecologies



FRED FIELD 94



Explorer's Manual

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Introductory Remarks

Now that bottle ought to hold thee for a time. Now, settle down! Don't get they antennae in an uproar — and do stop screeching at me.

Uhh, excuse me? Elminster?

Huh? Oh, sorry. I didn't see thee. Elminster, aye, that's me. Well, don't stand there gawking. Come in, come in. Just don't get too close to this table. And stand clear of the bottle.

Why? It's only a cockroach.

A cockroach? A cockroach? Not hardly. Looks like thou arrived just in time.

You know why I've come?

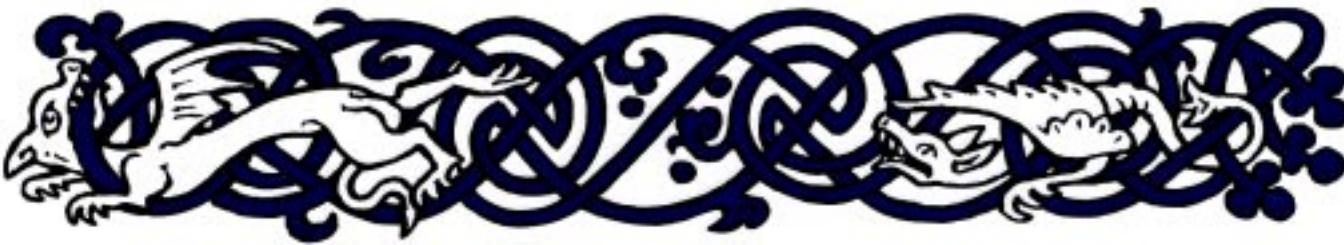
Do I know why thou've come? Listen, youngster. I know why a snappersaw turns green in a rain-storm. I know the names of the meanest dog in Shadowdale and the last 20 people she bit. Of course I know why thou've come.

You read my mind! Your magic is strong!

That it is. But, er, actually thy mother told me thou were coming. I ran into her last week when I was buying eggs at Bestil's farm. She told me her oldest child was itching to see the world. She says thou know the ways of people—at least enough to get by—but thou art somewhat ignorant of the ways of the wilderness.

Now take my great-nephew. Very brave, but a little





empty in the attic, if thou gets my drift. If he had come to me before he tried to net that thing in the jar over there . . . well, that's another story for another time.

What's wrong, child? Are thou deaf? I said come in! Take a seat and make thyself comfortable. Move those books off the bench.

That gray book's on fire!

What gray book? Oh, *that* gray book. It always smokes a little. Just pick it up—carefully!—and set it by those herb barrels.

There thou go. Now, where were we? Ah, yes. A restless youth, eager to make thy mark. I know the type. Thou has heard stories about the Thunder Peaks and the Farsea Marshes, but thou wants to see for thyself if the stories are true. Mind if I ask of thine intentions? Once I get thee educated, what are thy plans? Explorer? Tracker? Trader?

I haven't made up my mind.

Treasure hunter?

Could we proceed?

Hmph. I see thou could use some manners, too. But don't count on Elminster to teach thee everything. Where were we? Ah, yes. Thy mother tells me thou

are a hard worker and as sharp as a slaad's tooth. She says thou art good with a sword. Thou can read a map and hast mastered a language or two. And thou hast sense enough not to shake hands with a revenant. But if thou plan'st to go tromping through the wilderness and expect to get home in one piece, thou need'st to know thine animals. And I've got some books around here—some- place—that'll teach thee all about the natural order.

The natural order?

There's a reason why corn doesn't grow in the Great Glacier, and why polar bears don't live in the Desertsouth Mountains. The world is designed so that every organism has its own place and its own role. A balance exists between all living things and their surroundings. Put simply, everything affects everything else.

Is that important to know?

It is if thou want to live to have grandchildren. Come over here—careful of the bottle!—and take a peek out the window.

See the old man pushing the wheelbarrow? The one with his arm in a sling? That's Fletcher Bockmann, a good wheat farmer, but a poor student of nature. A giant raven mauled him, nearly ripped his arm from its socket. Ravens are docile for the most part, but Fletcher didn't know they get grumpy this time of the year when they're looking for girlfriends.

Does that answer thy question?

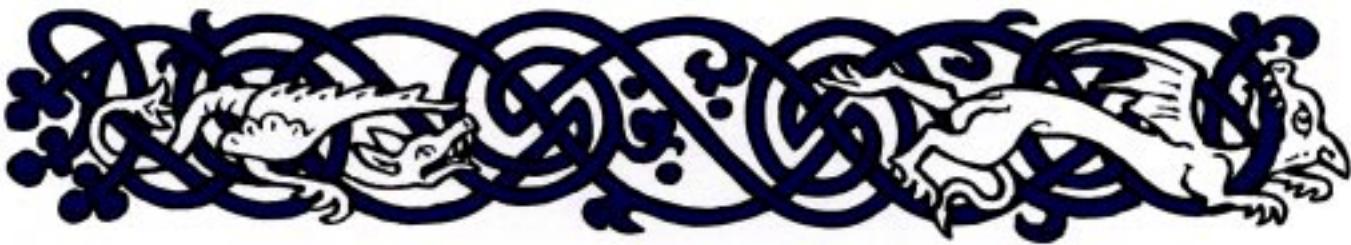
Give me the books.

Keep thy trousers on. Thou remindest me of the ranger who thought he could make friends with a hydra because he was sure a couple of the heads would like him. They liked him, all right. They liked his arms, legs, toes . . . So sit still and listen. The books won't be of much use if thou knowest not what thou read'st. And I haven't the time or the patience to explain every line.

Sorry . . .

That's better.

First of all, there are nine books. I wrote only the first, which accounts for the variation in styles and



approaches. The authors, however, are experts, as each has studied a particular region in depth. Since all of them are friends and colleagues, I can vouch for the accuracy of their information. But be forewarned that personal prejudices may sometimes color the facts. Bryn Ohme, for instance, the gentleman responsible for the book on the settled lands, thinks the world revolves around farming. As a result, Bryn looks at the natural order from an agriculturalist's point of view, and his work reflects his bias. Note, too, that the authors acquired their information from many sources, including direct observation, local legends, ranger reports, and bits of gossip. For this reason, contradictions may exist between authors' versions of an identical phenomenon. Where such contradictions occur, assume the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

Ultimately, thine own experiences will verify or disprove the authors' conclusions. While I had neither the time nor the inclination to rewrite my co-authors' efforts, I insisted that each follow the same format for the convenience of the reader. They complied, for the most part. So, with the exception of this book—which I'll discuss in a moment—the volumes comprise these sections.

Each opens with an autobiographical note, explaining the author's background and credentials, and what prompted him or her to write about that particular area. I encouraged them to say whatever they wanted here, within reason. The only one who gave me any trouble was Lyra Sunrose. She included a lot of flowery reminiscences about an—er—alleged relationship with me. I cut out most of that claptrap to spare her embarrassment.

Next comes an overview of the area, a general discussion of the geography and the climate, and a look at points of interest.

Following the overview is a look at the area's common flora and fauna—trees, flowers, birds, and beasts. Of course, even though they're common, they can still be nasty. One bumblebee might not be too troublesome, but I'd hate to run into a hundred.

The next section I consider the most critical.

This concerns monsters—the magical ones, the brutish ones, the ones thou want not to mess with. Thou will learn their activity patterns: when they migrate, when they hibernate, when they're in the mood to snack on strangers. Thou will learn how they interact with other creatures in the region, who they terrorize and who they fear, who they eat and who eats them. Why do they live where they do? Are they territorial? How do they behave during mating season? What do they think of humans? In short, thou will learn what makes these creatures important to the region's natural order, and what thou need to do to get along with them.

Of course, not every entry will address all these questions. Some information isn't especially important, some simply isn't known. And the books don't discuss every single monster in the region. There wasn't enough room for all of them, so I told the authors to pick and choose, concentrating on the most important, most unusual, most dangerous.

Finally, each book ends with a few rumors about the area. Most are from reliable sources, some are educated guesses, the rest may be just good stories. Are they all true? Are any of them true? Who's to say? Find thou the answers, and let me know.

So there it is. I'll fetch the proper books if thou tell'st me where thou want to go.

Everywhere.

Everywhere? I don't have a book for that.

Ever seen an amphisbaena? It's a serpent with two heads, one on each end. If one head wants to crawl into a cornfield and hunt mice, and the other wants to crawl up an oak tree to chew on sparrows, know thou what happens? It goes nowhere. It just writhes on the ground and ties itself into a knot.

Suppose we try this. I'll tell thee the regions covered in each book, and maybe that'll aid thee in making up thy mind. Now pay attention.

Book One: *An Investigation into the Natural Systems of Organisms and Their Surroundings.* That's mine. I'm not quite finished yet—perfection takes time, know thou that!—but when it's done it





will be the definitive treatise on the science of natural order. The information I've gathered applies to the entire world, not just a particular region.

Book Two: Cormanthor. Cormanthor, also known as the elven woods, was perhaps the mightiest elven kingdom of all time. The book isn't concerned with the elves, but rather the forest itself and the wildlife that lives there—some of it mighty wild indeed. This is probably the most complex natural system discussed in the books, as it comprises not only the forests (several of them, in fact), but also the ruins of Myth Drannor. The magic of Myth Drannor has had powerful effects on the elven woods, some good, most bad.

Book Three: Anauroch. Anauroch, the Great Desert, is dry, desolate, and deadly. A steppeland where water is more precious than diamonds, a cool day as rare as an educated orc.

Book Four: The Storm Horns and the Thunder Peaks. These are two of the world's most formidable mountain ranges. Nearly impenetrable, home to vultures, desperadoes, and dragons. The weather here is nearly as treacherous as the peaks themselves, with pounding windstorms strong enough to level the tallest trees and blizzards that can dump ten feet of snow in an hour's time.

Book Five: The Cormyrean Marshes. Marshlands and swamps of staggering size, a haven for snakes, a nightmare for men. Hot, humid, and miserable.

Book Six: The Stonelands and the Goblin Marches. A pair of desolate plains, the first a dried-out dust bowl, the second a boulder-strewn wasteland. Both are crawling with monsters.

Book Seven: The Sea of Fallen Stars. A coastal locale, rife with creatures of the land and water.

Book Eight: The Great Gray Land of Thar. Hast thou a heavy coat? This is a bitterly cold steppeland where the temperatures sink low enough to freeze thine eyeballs.

Book Nine: The Settled Lands. This covers the farmlands of Cormyr, Sembia, and the Dalelands, where humans attempt to live in harmony with the

natives. In this instance, the native include a wide variety of animals and monsters, some of them less than ecstatic about having humans for neighbors. That's it. So, tell me—where dost thou want to go?

I'm not sure. . . .

Still not sure? I think thou've some amphisbaena blood in thee, my friend.

Here's an idea. Take the whole stack. Begin with my book, *An Investigation into the Natural Systems of Organisms and Their Surroundings*. In it, thou will find concepts that apply to all regions discussed in the subsequent volumes. It will give thee a foundation for understanding what the other authors have to say. I've marked the relevant passages.

After thou have finished, go on to any of the other books that strike thy fancy. Thou need not read them in order. Thou need not read them all. Concentrate on whatever looks interesting. How does that sound?

Great. I'll do it. But may I ask a question first?

Of course.

What about the cockroach?

The cockroach? I told thee, that's no cockroach!

Come over here. Take thou a good look. Does that look like a cockroach's head?

It looks like a skull.

That, my friend, is a lichling, one of the world's most loathsome creatures. It has the body of an insect, the head of a human skull, and the disposition of a rattlesnake. Hear it hissing? If thou ever see one of these in thy kitchen, pack thy bags.

This particular specimen was crawling around the Flour Pot, one of Shadowdale's finest bakeries. My nephew, who fancies himself a great collector, tried to catch it with a net. It went straight for his throat. By the time I arrived, it had nearly separated his head from his neck. I'm planning to study it for a time, then send it on a one-way trip down Mount Bandalin.

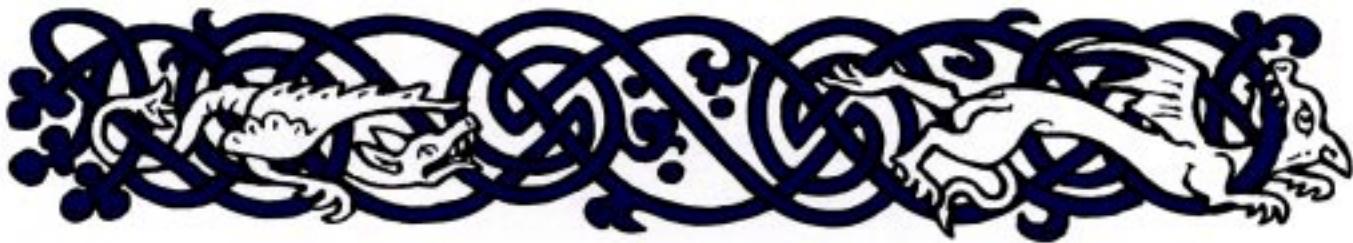
The volcano?

Thou knowest thy geography, at least.

How did a lichling get into a bakery?

Keep reading. Thou will find out.





Excerpts from

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE NATURAL SYSTEMS OF ORGANISMS AND THEIR SURROUNDINGS

by Elminster of Shadowdale

DIVERSITY

The world is vast and varied, comprising towering mountains, dense jungles, and sprawling seas. There are regions so cold that their snow never melts, others so hot that their rain turns to steam as it touches the ground.

It is this variety of environments that accounts for the variety of life. In my travels I have noted 73 distinct types of pine trees, from the blue snowwood of the Great Glacier to the locust needle of the Pirate Isles. I estimate the number of fishes at well over five thousand. The number of insect species likely exceeds the number of grains of sand on the shores of Dragon Reach.

Every environment, no matter how hostile to humankind, is compatible with some form of life. The diversity and adaptability of organisms are staggering. . . .

CONSUMPTION CHAINS

Organisms occupying a particular environment can be arranged in a chain according to what they consume. The dragon eats the boar, the boar eats the black snake, the black snake eats the field mouse. Much can be learned about an organism's role in its environment by determining its place in the consumption chain.

In most natural environments, organisms can be assigned to the following hierarchy. The * should be read as "consume," as in "plant eaters consume vegetation." The "Major meat eaters" category

refers to the area's largest and most vicious carnivores; "Minor meat eaters" are smaller and less aggressive. The parenthetical entries indicate representative species of a typical jungle environment.

Major meat eaters
(couatl)
*

Minor meat eaters
(weasel)
*

Plant eaters
(chipmunk)
*

Vegetation
(acorn)

For more precision, meat eaters can be subdivided into major (couatl), intermediate (carnivorous ape), and minor (weasel) categories. Further subdivisions are possible.

This consumption chain model can help determine which species dominate their environment. Generally, the higher an organism on the chain, the more freedom of movement it enjoys, and the more of a threat it poses to the organisms below it. In this example, the couatl dominates the weasel, the chipmunk fears the meat eaters above it.

Some organisms may not fit neatly into this model. Technically, an omnivore belongs to both the meat-eating and plant-eating categories. Special abilities—such as magical powers—and high intelligence can effectively move an organism into





a higher category. It could be argued, for instance, that humans dominate any environment they inhabit. Still, when trying to understand how a creature fares in relation to its neighbors, this model can be a useful tool.

A second type of consumption chain ranks organisms by quantity. The $>$ symbol should be read as "is greater than," as in "the number of plants is greater than the number of animals."

Number of plants
(wild flowers, grass)
>
Number of herbivores
(deer, baboons)
>
Number of omnivores
(opossums, giant slugs)
>
Number of carnivores
(tigers, crocodiles)

The model helps us assess the general size of populations. The higher an organism is on the chain,



the more of its kind there will be. Vegetation essentially supports the entire food chain; if too few plants are available, eventually the herbivores will die out, leaving the omnivores and carnivores nothing to eat. Most natural systems, then, contain more plants than herbivores, more herbivores than omnivores, and more omnivores than carnivores. A traveler investigating a region that supports only a handful of herbivorous species can expect to encounter even fewer omnivorous species. Conversely, if a large variety of carnivores are present, the traveler can expect to find a greater number of omnivores.

Two cases merit special attention: the matter eater (such as the galeb duhr, which eats only rocks) and the energy eater (like the eyewing, which presumably subsists on magical energy). On a consumption chain, matter and energy eaters have about the same status as plants. Just as an oak tree absorbs minerals from the ground, so does a galeb duhr feast on the stones of the earth. As a daisy is nourished by the sunlight, an eyewing draws sustenance from the energy around it.

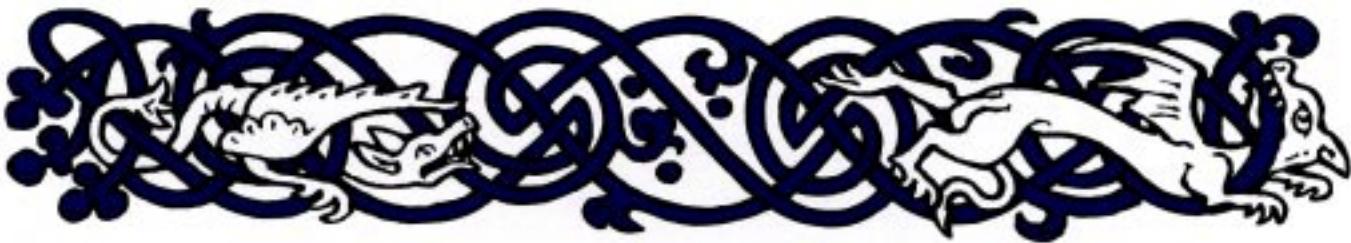
But unlike plants, the galeb duhr and the eyewing are rarely eaten by other creatures. The availability of rocks and energy, not the presence of predators, regulates their populations. An environment where all matter emanates magic—rumored in certain alternate planes of existence—could theoretically sustain an infinite number of eyewings. A frightening thought, indeed . . .

Population Control

In addition to consumption chains, nature has a variety of other methods for regulating populations. Some examples follow.

Suppression

Many organisms, plants in particular, have developed ways to inhibit the growth of their own off-



spring. The mature retch plant produces pepperlike dust on its leaves, which washes off into the surrounding soil. The dust poisons most retch seedlings in the area, reducing competition for nutrients and water.

Competition

In general, two species depending on an identical food source cannot inhabit the same environment indefinitely. Eventually, one species comes to dominate, usually by sheer number, and forces the other to vacate or become extinct. Occasionally, the less populous species will adapt by changing its diet. Thousands of years ago, a species of umber hulks and a strain of fire toads competed for ankheg larvae in the caverns beneath Giantspire Mountains. As the umber hulk population swelled, consuming virtually all the larvae, the fire toads adapted by learning to eat beetles and other insects. No longer competitors, both species continue to thrive in the area.

Seasonal Cycles

Climate changes regulate certain populations on a cyclical basis. Springtime in the Duskwood produces an abundance of ash wheat, which results in a population explosion of badger mice (rodents the size of small badgers). The increased number of badger mice gives puff adders more to eat. By the end of summer the following year, the puff adder population peaks, increasing competition for the badger mice. A harsh winter invariably takes its toll on the puff adders, and the population shrinks. When spring arrives, the ash wheat grows, the badger mouse population swells, and the adders begin to multiply.

Rules of The Rabbit

Years ago, I undertook an expedition into the forests near Myth Drannor. I had not seen a human face—or a face remotely human—in several

weeks and longed for company. As a youth, I had raised rabbits as pets and knew them to be amiable, if somewhat dispassionate, companions. Throughout the day, I had noticed dozens of red-furred rabbits frolicking in the underbrush. I decided to befriend one.

I spotted a suitable specimen, a handsome buck with a powder puff tail and bright green eyes. I extended my hand, palm open, so as not to frighten him. To my surprise, he cawed like a crow, stood erect, then bounded away on his hind legs.

That night, I pondered my experience with this unusual hare. I concluded that my failure to make contact was entirely my own fault, the result of false assumptions. There and then, I began to formulate what I call the Rules of the Rabbit, general principles applicable to all creatures of the wild, animals and monsters alike. A traveler would do well to remember these principles when encountering creatures outside his homeland.

Rule One

A rabbit isn't always a rabbit. That is, a rabbit from one region doesn't necessarily behave like a rabbit from another, even though they may look alike. I discovered a rabbit in the Hullack Forest that sleeps on its back, its feet straight in the air. A species from Harrowdale can rotate its eyes in opposite directions. I have heard of a rabbit from Brynwood that not only whistles like a canary, but can be taught an impressive repertoire of tunes. A hippogriff from the Dragonspine Mountains may be docile, even passive, while his cousin from Ring's Reach may be quick to take offense. It is often impossible to make these distinctions from casual observations. As in the case of the excitable hippogriff, experience can be a cruel teacher.

The physical form of an animal can also vary dramatically from region to region. The pseudo-dragon presents a striking example, evidenced by the sketches elsewhere in this chapter. All variants





exhibit virtually identical mannerisms and attitudes. They differ only in appearance.

Rule Two

A rabbit doesn't want to be rich. Foolish is the traveler who assumes that all creatures share his motives and emotions. A squirrel may covet a silver bracelet, but only because it admires the sparkling metal, not because it desires wealth or wants to impress its companions. Who would doubt that a crocodile basking in the sun feels pleasure? But it seems unlikely that a crocodile experiences passion or pity. Ah ankheg cannot be stirred to sentiment. A gelatinous cube will not respond to flattery.

Observing, experimenting, and perusing scholarly texts are valid ways to learn the nuances of animal behavior. But wondering how a man would act in a similar situation is rarely the best approach.

Rule Three

A rabbit doesn't always stay put. Though I've never

actually seen a rabbit at the beach, it wouldn't surprise me if I did. Though most animals are associated with specific habitats, they can turn up virtually anywhere. Colleagues have told me of gibberlings that live in crude houseboats on the Lake of Dragons, and I have it on good authority that a rare species of couatl nests in the mountains of Anauroch.

Some use the phrase wandering monsters to describe creatures encountered in unusual locales or those who have strayed from their lairs for no apparent purpose. The reasons for this wanderlust, however, are many and diverse. A roving gorgon may be attempting to expand its territory. An urge to explore may motivate a curious bullywug. Male leucrotta have been known to journey hundreds of miles to locate a suitable mate. In any case, travelers are advised to approach all such wandering monsters with caution; whatever their purpose, these creatures may not take kindly to human interference.





Encounter Tables

Ghe following pages contain tables relevant to each book in this boxed set. Note that each section is color-coded to match the book to which it refers, for ease of reference. The DM may use the tables to generate random encounters, or to give players an idea of the diversity of species in each region. The tables are by no means complete. DMs should feel free to supplement them with appropriate species from other AD&D® products or creatures of their own design.

The MONSTROUS MANUAL™ accessory and various MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® accessories serve as the primary sources for the tables; DMs should refer to these volumes for statistics and behavioral information. Creatures' treasure, if any, is left to the DM's discretion.

Cormanthor

See *Cormanthor* for the definitions of rimwoods, midwoods, and starwoods. That booklet also contains important information about the creatures listed in italics.

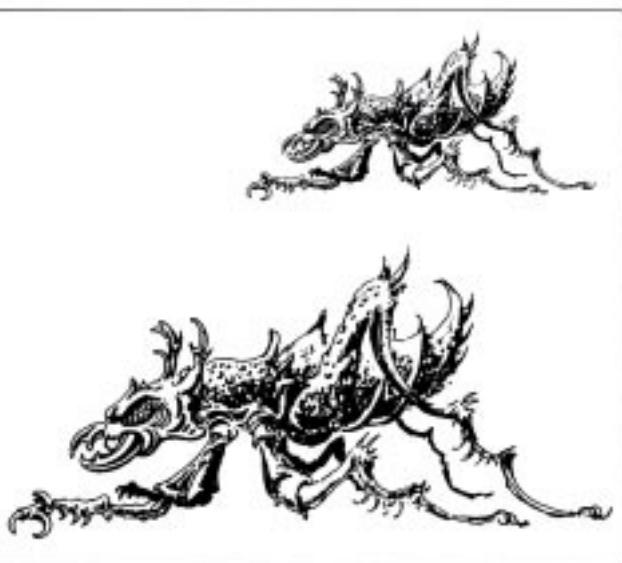
The DM's Choice: Special Monsters table includes exceptionally dangerous or unusual creatures. The Small Mammals and Avians tables might be useful when player characters forage for food. The Aquatic Monsters table covers the Ashaba River, the Elvenflow, Lake Sember, and all other bodies of water in Cormanthor.

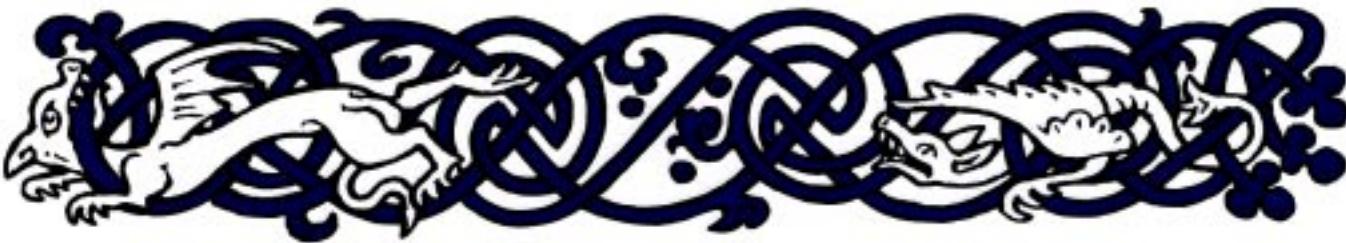
When determining the number of creatures appearing in an encounter, the DM should consider the size and strength of the party, and proceed accordingly.

Rimwoods Encounters

d20 Roll Encounter

1-3	Insect (roll 1d6: 1 = giant ant, 2 = bumblebee, 3 = giant hornet, 4 = assassin bug, 5 = giant wasp, 6 = giant horsefly)
4	Herd animal (roll 1d4: 1 = deer, 2 = sheep, 3 = wild cattle, 4 = antelope)
5	Wild dog
6	Wolf
7	Rat (roll 1d4: 1-3 = normal, 4 = giant)
8	Leucrotta
9	Fyrefly swarm
10	Unusual vegetation (roll on or choose from Unusual Vegetation table)
11-14	Small mammal (roll on or choose from Small Mammal table)
15-17	Avian (roll on or choose from Avians table)
18-19	Midwoods creature (roll on or choose from Midwoods Encounters table)
20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from DM's Choice: Special Monsters table)





Midwood Encounters

d100 Roll Encounter

1-3	Wild boar
4-5	Aurumvorax
6-8	Snake (roll 1d4: 1-3 = normal constrictor, 4 = normal poisonous)
9-11	Wolf
12-15	Bat (roll 1d8: 1-3 = common, 4-5 = large, 6 = huge, 7 = azmyth, 8 = night hunter)
16-18	Beetle (roll 1d4: 1 = bombardier, 2 = boring, 3 = fore, 4 = stag)
19-21	Herd animal (roll 1d4: 1 = deer, 2 = sheep, 4 = wild cattle, 4 = antelope)
22-23	Cheetah
24-25	Blink dog
26-27	Pseudodragon
28-29	Troll
30-31	Hobgoblin
32-33	Wild cat
34-35	Wild horse
36-42	Insect (roll 1d6: 1 = aratha, 2 = horax, 3 = giant tick, 4 = giant harvester termite, 5 = pernicon, 6 = gargantuan praying mantis)
43-45	Centipede (roll 1d6: 1-3 = giant, 4-5 = huge, 6 = megalos)
46-49	Rat (roll 1d4: 1-3 = normal, 4 = giant)
50-51	Satyr
52-53	Sprite (roll 1d6: 1-2 = standard, 3-4 = pixie, 5 = atomie, 6 = grig)
54-55	Living web
56-63	Unusual vegetation (roll on or choose from Unusual Vegetation table)
64-72	Small mammal (roll on or choose from Small Mammals table)
73-80	Avian (roll on or choose from Avians table)
81-85	Rimwoods creature (roll on or choose from Rimwoods Encounters table)

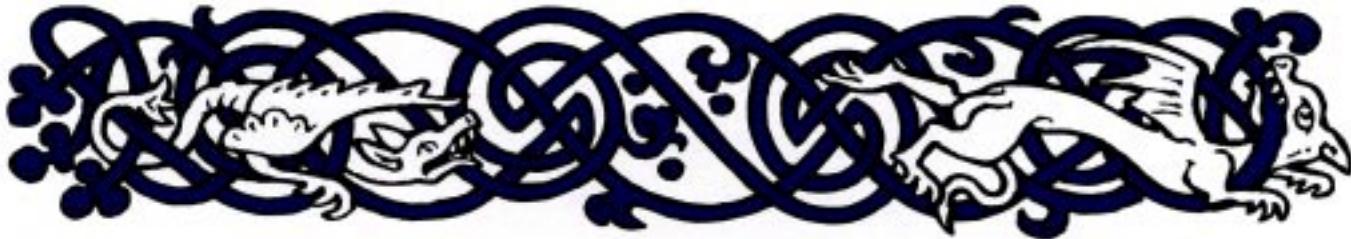
d100 Roll Encounter

86-95	Starwoods creature (roll on or choose from Starwoods Encounters table)
96-00	DM's Special (roll on or choose from DM's Choice: Special Monsters table)

Starwoods Encounters

d100 Roll Encounter

1-4	Orc
5	Bulette
6	Centaur
7	Gibberling
8	Gorgon
9	Pyrolisk
10	Shambling mound
11-12	Owlbear
13	Cormanthor water naga (roll 1d6: 1-4 = adolescent, 5-6 = mature)
14-15	Worg
16	Cockatrice
17-19	Dire wolf
20-22	Stirge
23	Basilisk
24-26	Bear (roll 1d4: 1-3 = black, 4 = brown)
27	Ettercap
28	Elven cat
29	Pseudodragon
30-31	Dryad
32-33	Lycanthrope (roll 1d6: 1 = wereboar, 2 = werebat, 3 = werefox, 4 = were-raven, 5 = werewolf, 6 = werebear)
34-35	Gnoll
36	Boalisk
37	Bonebat*
38-40	Undead (roll 1d6: 1 = ghoul, 2 = ghast, 3 = skeleton, 4 = common zombie, 5 = monster zombie, 6 = ghost)
41	Feystag**
42-43	Forest gnome
44	Jackalwere
45	Dark naga*



Starwoods Encounters, CONT'D.

d100 Roll Encounter

46-48	Kobold
	49 Bone naga**
50	Wild stag
51	Nymph
52-53	Ogre
54-55	Scorpion (roll 1d6: 1-3 = large, 4-5 = huge, 6 = giant)
56-60	Snake (roll 1d6: 1-2 = giant constrictor, 3-4 = giant poisonous, 5 = amphisbaena, 6 = winged)
61-64	Spider (roll 1d6: 1-2 = large, 3-4 = huge, 5 = giant, 6 = gargantuan)
65	Wolfwere
66	Aratha**
67-70	Giant mammal (roll 1d4: 1 = skunk, 2 = porcupine, 3 = weasel, 4 = warthog)
71-76	Unusual vegetation (roll on or choose from Unusual Vegetation table)
77-83	Small mammal (roll on or choose from Small Mammals table)
84-87	Avian (roll on or choose from Avians table)
88-95	Midwoods creature (roll on or choose from Midwoods Encounters table)
96-00	DM's Special (roll on or choose from DM's Choice: Special Monsters table)

*See FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting.

**See *Ruins of Myth Drannor* Campaign Expansion.



DM's Choice: Special Monsters

d20 Roll Encounter

1	Manticore
2	Treant
3	Chimera
4	Green dragon
5	Other dragon (roll 1d6: 1-2 = red, 3-4 = black, 5 = copper, 6 = gold)
6	Serpentine shambling mound
7	Couatl
8	Wyvern
9	Banshee
10	Behir
11	Unicorn
12	Broken one
13	Firbolg
14	Forest trapper (lurker)
15	Dark naga
16	Pegasus
17	Will-o-wisp
18	Beholder
19	Greenhag
20	Dracolich



Small Mammals Table

d12 Roll Encounter

1	Spiny rabbit
2	Porcupine
3	Skunk
4	Weasel
5	Fox
6	Hedgehog
7	Opossum
8	Wild pig
9	Rabbit (normal)
10	Raccoon
11	Squirrel (roll 1d6: 1-3 = normal, 4-5 = flying, 6 = giant black)
12	Badger

Avians Table

d12 Roll Encounter

1	Swallow
2	Woodpecker
3	Bluebird
4	Wild turkey
5	Blood hawk
6	Falcon
7	Owl (roll 1d6: 1-4 = normal, 5 = giant, 6 = talking)
8	Raven (roll 1d4: 1-2 = normal, 3 = giant, 4 = huge)
9	Vulture (roll 1d4: 1-3 = normal, 4 = giant)
10	Pheasant
11	Wild goose
12	Boobrie



Aquatic Monsters Table

d20 Roll Encounter

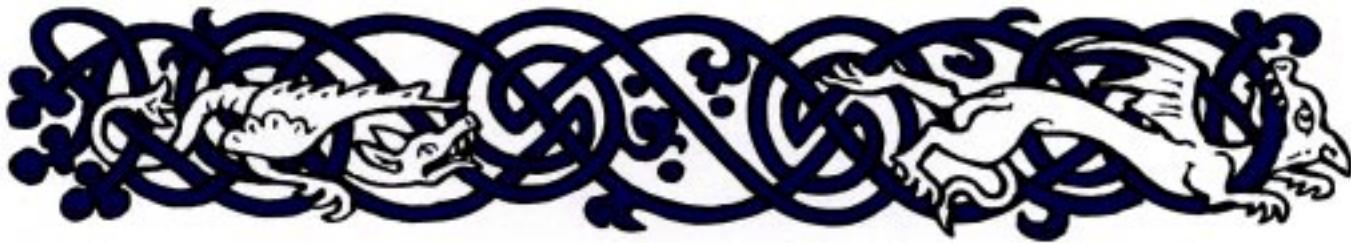
1-9	Game fish (roll 1d6: 1 = trout, 2 = bass, 3 = carp, 4 = catfish, 5 = bullhead, 6 = sunfish)
10	<i>Immature Cormanthor water naga</i> (roll 1d4: 1-3 = egg, 4 = hatchling)
11-12	Giant catfish
13-15	Frog (roll 1d4: 1-2 = giant, 3 = killer, 4 = poisonous)
16	Giant crayfish
17	Giant gar
18	Giant pike
19	Giant water spider
20	Throat leech

Unusual Vegetation Table

d10 Roll Encounter

1	<i>Cormanthor violet fungus</i>
2	Obliviax
3	Hangman tree
4	Yellow musk creeper
5	Choke creeper
6	Quickwood
7	Giant sundew
8	Mantrap
9	Retch plant
10	Thornslinger





Anauroch

DMs should take note of the tables' organization. Because these tables are so detailed, the encounter name is listed first, then the d100 roll results for each category. For example, using the Deep Desert table: "Bedine traveler, 52-55, —" means that on a percentage roll of 52, 53, 54, or 55, parties traveling in the deep desert during daylight hours will encounter a Bedine. There is no chance for such an encounter in the deep desert during nighttime.

Sword encounters comprises three sections, each divided into daytime and nighttime encounters. These sections cover deep desert, oases, and mountains and hills. For Plain of Standing Stones encounters, there are daytime and nighttime divisions. This section also contains a minor table for use in or near the River of Gems, which is so titled.

The third section, on High Ice encounters, is again split into daytime and nighttime listings. The Notes section contains helpful information for tailoring encounters to the DM's plans (or whims).

Italicized creature names are referenced in the Anauroch booklet.

SWORD ENCOUNTERS: Deep Desert

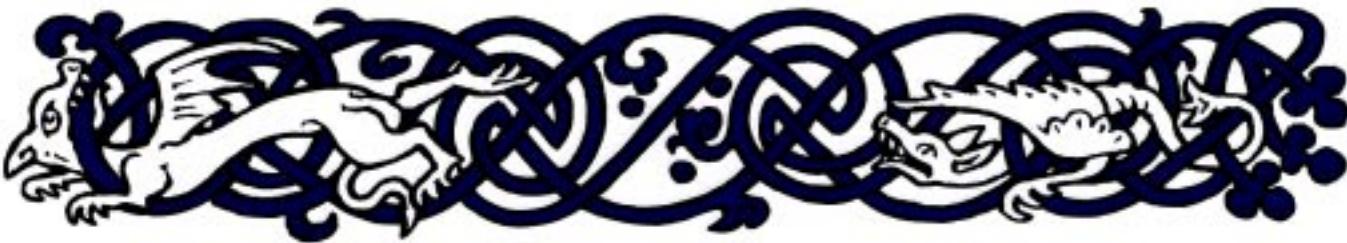
Encounter	Day	Night
Insects	01-10	01-08
Insect swarm	11-14	09-12
Hawk/vulture	15-22	13-18
Spider, poisonous	23-25	19-23
Scorpion	26-30	24-30
Snake	31-32	31-35
Lizard	33-34	36-40
Bat	35	41-49
Rodent	36-38	50-52
Jackal	39-40	53
Antelope	41-44	—
Lion	45-46	54-55
Wild camel	47-51	—
Bedine traveler	52-55	—

Encounter	Day	Night
Bedine witch	56	56
Bedine tribe	57-60	57-59
Outlander	61-62	60
Giant spider	63-64	61-63
Giant scorpion	65-68	64-67
Giant snake	69-70	68-70
Orpsu	—	71
<i>Laerti</i>	71	72-76
Ghoul	72	77-78
Ghast	73	79
Ghost	74	80-81
Wraith	75	82
Spectre	76	83
<i>Lamia</i>	77-79	84-86
Basilisk	80-81	—
Hatori	82-83	87
Dragon, blue	84	88
Dragon, brass	85-86	89-90
Dragon, yellow	87-88	91-92
Dragon, brown	89-90	93-94
Dragonne	91-92	95
Androsphinx	93-95	96
Gynosphinx	96-97	97
Shedu	98	—
Mind flayer	99	98-99
Beholder	00	00

SWORD ENCOUNTERS: Day

Encounter	Day	Night
Insects	01-10	01-09
Insect swarm	11-13	10-11
Hawk/vulture	14-18	12-15
Spider, poisonous	19-21	16-18
Scorpion	22-25	19-25
Snake	26-29	26-29
Lizard	30-33	30-34
Bat	34	35-40
Rodent	35-39	41-44
Jackal	40	45
Antelope	41-42	46
Lion	43-44	47-48





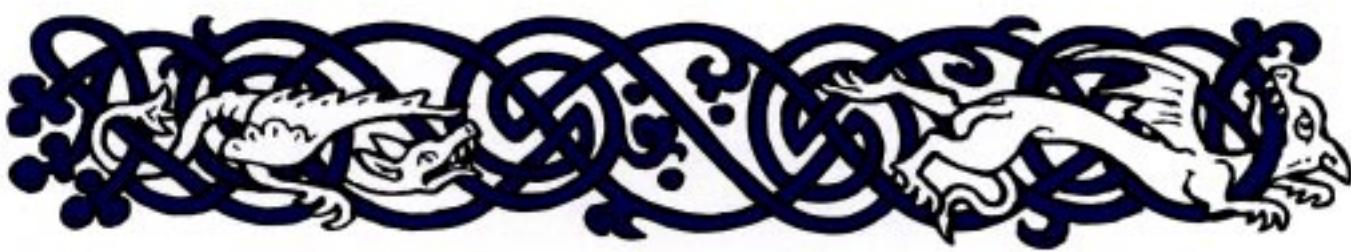
Sword Encounters: Oases, contd.

Encounter	Day	Night
Wild camel	45-49	49-50
Bedine traveler	50-54	51
Bedine witch	55	52
Bedine tribe	56-61	53-57
Outlander	62-63	58-59
Giant spider	64-65	60-63
Giant scorpion	66-68	64-69
Giant snake	69-72	70-73
Heway snake	73-74	74
Orpsu	—	75
<i>Laerti</i>	75	76-79
Ghoul	—	80
Ghast	—	81
Ghost	76	82
Wraith	77	83
Spectre	78	84
<i>Lamia</i>	79-81	85-86
Basilisk	82-83	87
Dragon, blue	84	88
Dragon, brass	85-87	89-90
Dragon, yellow	88-89	91-92
Dragon, brown	90-91	93-94
Dragonne	92-93	95
Androsphinx	94-95	96
Gynosphinx	96-98	97
Shedu	99-00	98
Mind flayer	—	99
Beholder	—	00



Sword Encounters: Mountains/Hills

Encounter	Day	Night
Insects	01-09	01-07
Insect swarm	10-12	08-10
Hawk/vulture	13-17	11-15
Spider, poisonous	18-21	16-18
Scorpion	22-28	19-22
Snake	29-32	23-25
Lizard	33-36	26-30
Bat	37	31-37
Rodent	38-40	38-41
Jackal	41-42	42
Antelope	43-44	43
Lion	45-48	44-47
Bedine traveler	49-50	—
Bedine witch	51	48
Bedine tribe	52-54	49
Outlander	55	50
Giant spider	56-59	51-52
Giant scorpion	60-64	53-56
Giant snake	65-68	57-59
Orpsu	—	60-64
<i>Laerti</i>	69	65-70
Ghoul	70	71-73
Ghast	71	74-75
Ghost	72	76-77
Wraith	73	78-79
Spectre	74	80
<i>Lamia</i>	75-77	81-82
Basilisk	78-80	83
Hatori	81-82	84
Dragon, blue	83	85
Dragon, brass	84-86	86-87
Dragon, yellow	87-88	88-89
Dragon, brown	89-90	90-92
Dragonne	91-94	93-95
Androsphinx	95-96	96
Gynosphinx	97-98	97
Shedu	99-00	98
Mind flayer	—	99
Beholder	—	00



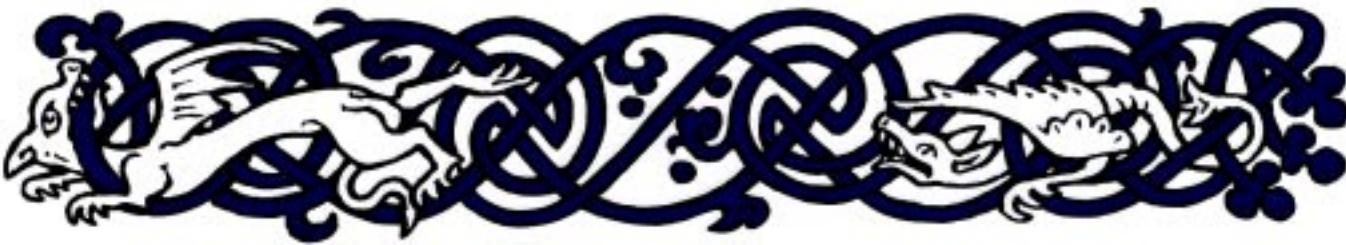
Plain of Standing Stones Encounters

Encounter	Day	Night
Insects	01-06	01-04
Insect swarm	07-08	05
Hawk	09-11	06-09
Vulture	12-13	10-11
Spider, poisonous	14-16	12-14
Scorpion	17-20	15-20
Snake	21-22	21-23
Lizard	23-24	24-26
Small mammal	25-26	27-28
Jackal	27	29
Bat	28	30-32
Rodent	29-30	33-34
Wild boar	31-32	35-36
Antelope	33	37
Crag sheep	34-36	38-39
Mountain goat	37-39	40
Lion	40-41	41
Bedine traveler	42	—
Outlander	43	42
Bandit	44-46	43-44
Hobgoblin	47-49	45-47
Ogre	50-51	48-49
Death dog	52	50-51
Leucrotta	53	52-53
Giant spider	54-55	54
Giant scorpion	56-57	55-56
Giant snake	58	57-58
Giant badger	59-60	59-60
Giant skunk	61	61
Giant weasel	62-63	62-63
Giant raven	64	64-65
Roc	65	66
Giant bat	—	67-68
Orpsu	—	69-70
Desert troll	66	71
Hill giant	67-68	72
Fomorian giant	69	73
Ghoul	70	74-75
Ghast	71	76
Ghost	72	77

Encounter	Day	Night
Wraith	73	78
Spectre	74	79
<i>Lamia</i>	75	80
Manticore	76-77	81-82
Gargoyle	78-79	83-84
Griffon	80-81	85
Manscorpion	82	86
Medusa	83	87
Hippogriff	84-85	88
Basilisk	86	89
Dragon, blue	87-88	90
Dragon, brass	89	91
Dragon, yellow	90	92
Dragon, brown	91-92	93
Dragonne	93-94	94
Androsphinx	95	—
Gynosphinx	96	—
Shedu	97	—
Mind flayer	98	95-96
Beholder	99	97-98
Dark naga	00	99-00

Encounters in or Near The River of Gems

Encounter	Day	Night
Use Normal Table	01-35	01-38
Fish, normal	36-59	39-60
Quipper	60-62	61-63
Giant gar	63-64	64-66
Giant carp	65-66	67-69
Giant frog	67-69	70-71
Giant water btle.	70-72	72-73
Lacedon	73	74-75
Eel	74-81	76-84
Merrow	82-85	85-89
Scrag	86-90	90-95
Water naga	91-92	96
Kelpie	93	97
Nymph	94-95	—
Sirine	96-97	98
Nereid	98	—
Morkoth	99-00	99-00



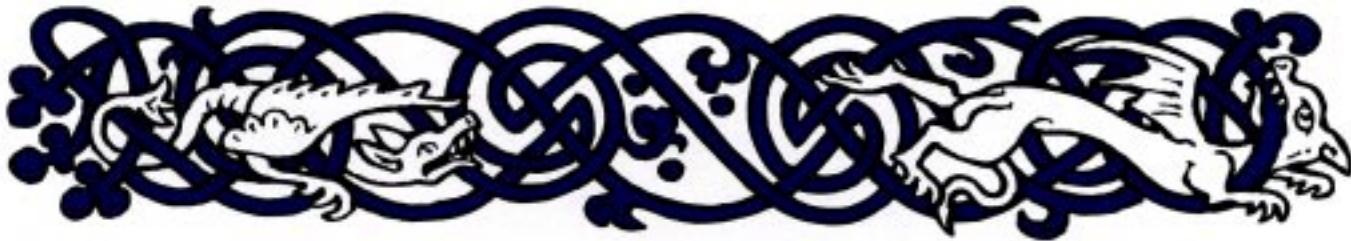
High Ice Encounters

Encounter	Day	Night
Icejack	01-20	01-19
Small mammal	21-35	20-31
Snow owl	36-41	32-39
Great soarer	42-44	40-41
Arctic fox	45-50	42-48
Caribou	51-60	49-57
Snow snake	61-64	58-61
Bear	65-68	62-65
Yeti	69-71	66-69
Ghoul	72	70-72
Ghast	73	73-74
Ghost	74	75-76
Wraith	75	77-78
Spectre	76	79-80
Snow cloaker	77-78	81-82
Ice toad	79-83	83-85
Winter wolf	84-89	86-90
Remorhaz	90-93	91-92
White pudding	94-96	93-94
Dragon, white	97-99	95-98
Dragon, crystal	00	99-00

Notes

- Insect, rodent, snake, small mammal, and lizard encounters may or may not be dangerous, depending on the DM's whim.
- Hawk/vulture encounters have a 50% chance of being one or the other, but never both.
- Bedine traveler encounters are with one to four Bedine, of levels 1-8.
- Bedine witches can be male or female outcast wizards, of levels 4-13.
- Outlander encounters include any nonnative intelligent beings, such as humans, elves, dwarves, etc. They can be of any class and any level. This result includes Zhentarim agents as well.
- Undead encounters can be replaced with other sorts of undead if the DM chooses.
- Mind flayers and beholders encountered will be on phaerimm-sponsored missions 90% of the time.
- Dark nagas encountered will be on phaerimm-sponsored missions 70% of the time, and have a 50% chance of being accompanied by 1-10 human or goblinoid underlings.
- Merrow encountered are accompanied by 1-2 scrags 50% of the time.
- Scrags encountered are accompanied by 1-4 merrow 50% of the time.





The Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks

General Temperate Mountain

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Dragon, copper or red
3	Bear, cave or hydra
4	Bear, brown or lyc., bear
5	Bugbear
6-7	Gnome
8	Wolf or worg
9	Tribesman or NPC party
10	Tribesman
11	Giant, hill
12	Giant, hill or stone
13	Ogre or troll
14	Goblin or orc
15	Ghoul or wight
16	Hobgoblin or troll
17	Will-o-wisp
18	Giant, frost or fire
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Cave, Upper Levels

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Fungi, violet
3	Dog, death
4	Weasel, giant, or sandling
5	Ochre jelly
6	Beetle, boring
7	Slug
8	Bat, huge (mobat)
9	NPC party
10	Lizard, giant
11	Ogre
12	Minotaur
13	Spider, huge
14	Scorpion
15	Centipede, megaloth
16	Doppelganger
17	Ghoul

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

18	Ankheg (5-6 HD)
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Cave, Lower Levels

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

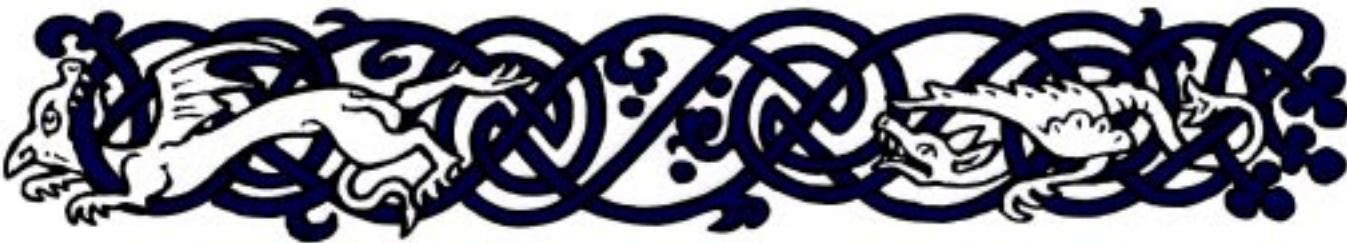
2	Lurker above
3	Hydra, 17-20 heads (pyro- or cryo-)
4	Elemental, earth (15HD)
5	Bulette
6	Dragon, red (ancient)
7	Dragon, blue (ancient)
8	Vampire
9	Lich
10	Golem, stone
11	Xorn
12	Beholder
13	Rust monster
14	Couatl or guardian naga
15	Gas spore
16	Dragon, black (ancient)
17	Deepspawn
18	Tarrasque
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Thunder Peaks, Northern Region

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Gnome
3-4	Dragon, white
5	Tribesman or NPC party
6	Gnoll
7	Bear, cave
8	Aarakocra
9	Herd animal
10	Owl, giant (night)
11	Wolf
12	Ogre or ogre mage
13	Troll or troll, 2-headed
14	Giant, frost





Thunder Peaks, Northern Region, cont'd.

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

15	Wolf, winter
16	Remorhaz
17	Yeti
18	Lion, spotted
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Thunder Peaks, Mid-Region

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Dragon, copper or red
3	Bear, cave, or hydra
4	Bear, brown or lyc., bear
5	Bugbear
6-7	Gnome
8	Wolf or worg
9	Orc tribesman
10	Troglodyte tribesman
11	Giant, hill
12	Giant, hill or stone
13	Ogre or troll
14	Goblin or orc
15	Ghoul or wight
16	Hobgoblin or troll
17	Will-o-wisp
18	Giant, frost or fire
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Thunder Peaks, Southern Region

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Pyrolisk
3	Cockatrice
4	Pilgrim
5-6	Herd animal
7	Merchant
8	Wolf
9	Aarakocra
10	Tiger

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

11	Dog, wild or wolf
12	Medusa
13	Bandit (slaver)
14	Leopard
15	Rakshasa
16	Snake, poisonous
17	Yuan ti
18	Manticora
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Storm Horns, Northern Region

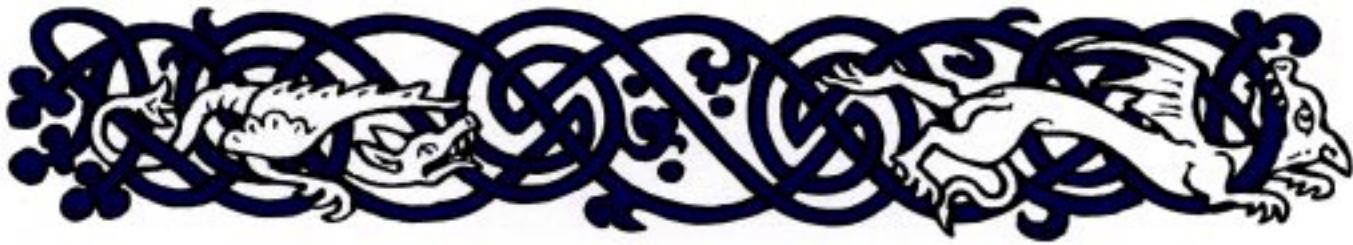
d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Gnome
3-4	Dragon, white
5	Tribesman or NPC party
6	Gnoll
7	Bear, cave
8	Aarakocra
9	Herd animal
10	Owl, giant (night)
11	Wolf
12	Ogre or ogre mage
13	Troll or troll, 2-headed
14	Giant, frost
15	Wolf, winter
16	Remorhaz
17	Yeti
18	Lion, spotted
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Storm Horns, Southern Region

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Pyrolisk
3	Cockatrice
4	Pilgrim
5-6	Herd animal
7	Merchant
8	Wolf
9	Aarakocra



Storm Horns, Southern Region, cont'd.

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

10	Tiger
11	Dog, wild or wolf
12	Medusa
13	Bandit (slaver)
14	Leopard
15	Rakshasa
16	Snake, poisonous
17	Yuan ti
18	Manticora
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

High Hills

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	NPC party
3	Remorhaz
4	Bear, brown
5	Gnoll
6	Owl, giant or rat, giant
7	Bear, cave
8	Orc tribesman
9	Verbeeg
10-11	Wolf
12-13	Herd animal

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

14	Troll
15	Giant, hill
16	Cat, big
17	Ogre
18-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Low Hills

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Wyvern
3	Lyc., wolf or wolfwere
4	Giant badger
5	Snake, poisonous or spitting
6	Cat, big
7	Herd animal
8-9	Mountain dwarf
10	Griffon or hippogriff
11	Orc or gnoll
12	Hobgoblin or goblin
13	Wolf
14	Bugbear
15	Aerial encounter
16	Ghoul
17	Spider, large
18	Giant, hill
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Weather Conditions, Thunder Peaks and Storm Horns

d10 Roll	Spring/Fall	Summer	Winter
1	Sunny	Sunny	Sunny
2	Sunny	Sunny	Light breeze
3	Overcast	Sunny	Overcast
4	Windy	Overcast	Windy
5	Windy	Overcast	Rain
6	Rain	Windy	Rain
7	Mild storm	Windy	Mild storm
8	Mild storm	Mild storm	Heavy storm, hail
9	Heavy storm, hail	Heavy storm, hail	Heavy storm, hail
10	Lightning storm	Lightning storm	Lightning storm





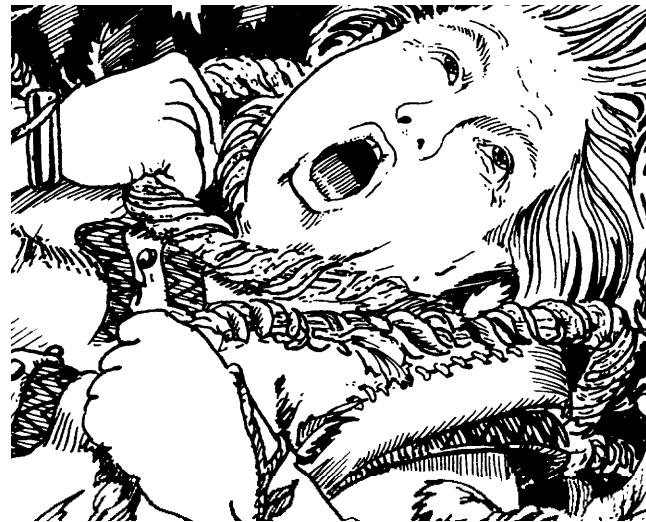
The Cormyrean Marshes

Italicized creature names are referenced in the Cormyrean Marshes booklet.

The Farsea Marshes Encounters

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

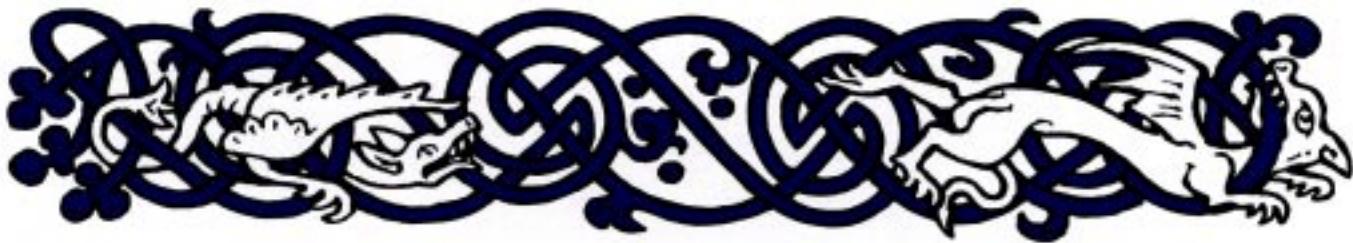
2	Trolls
3	Centipede (roll 1d6: 1-3 = huge, 4-5 = giant, 6 = megalos)
4-5	Leech (roll 1d4: 1-2 = giant, 3-4 = swarm)
6	<i>Hydra</i> (roll 1d6: 1-3 = common, 4-5 = pyrohydra, 6 = lernaean)
7	<i>Catoblepas</i> (domesticated)
8-9	Man (<i>Marsh Drover</i>)
10	Mammal, small (roll 1d10: 1-2 = beaver, 3-4 = chipmunk, 5-6 = muskrat, 7 = otter, 8 = rabbit, 9 = raccoon, 10 = squirrel)
11	Mammal (roll 1d10: 1 = badger, 2-3 = goat, 4 = osquip, 5-6 = porcupine, 7 = skunk, 8 = sleek, 9 = weasel, 10 = wolverine)
12-13	<i>Bullywugs</i>
14	Cat, great (roll 1d6: 1-4 = mountain lion, 5-6 = lynx)
15-16	Insect (roll 1d10: 1-2 = worker bee, 3 = soldier bee, 4 = bumblebee, 5-6 = giant dragonfly, 7 = firefly, 8 = pernicon, 9 = giant tick, 10 = giant wasp)
17	Giant frog
18	Undead (roll 1d10: 1-5 = skeletons, 6-8 = zombies, 9 = wraith, 10 = lich)
19	Giant crayfish
20	DM's Special



Marsh of Tun Encounters

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Black dragon (<i>Skurge</i>)
3-4	<i>Darktentacles</i>
5	Trolls
6-7	Giant frog
8	Gibbering mouther
9-10	Men (<i>Tun bandits</i>)
11	Lizard man
12	<i>Hydra</i> (roll 1d6: 1-3 = common, 4-5 = pyrohydra, 6 = lernaean)
13	Mammal, small (roll 1d10: 1-2 = beaver, 3-4 = chipmunk, 5-6 = muskrat, 7 = otter, 8 = rabbit, 9 = raccoon, 10 = squirrel)
14-15	Mammal (roll 1d10: 1 = badger, 2-3 = goat, 4 = osquip, 5-6 = porcupine, 7 = skunk, 8 = sleek, 9 = weasel, 10 = wolverine)
16	Leech (roll 1d4: 1-2 = giant, 3-4 = swarm)
17	Bird (roll 1d6: 1 = wild eagle, 2-3 = falcon, 4 = kingfisher, 5 = owl, 6 = talking owl)
18-19	Giant crayfish
20	Undead (roll 1d10: 1-4 = skeletons, 5-7 = zombies, 8-9 = wights, 10 = lich)



Vast Swamp Encounters

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

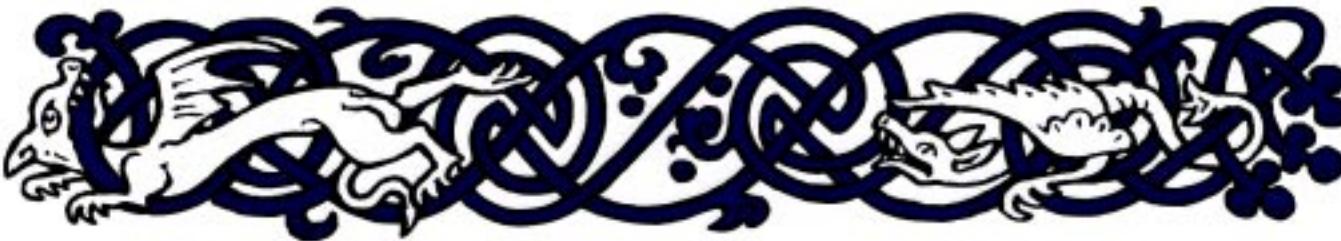
2	Snake, poisonous
3-4	Hobgoblins
5	Beholder
6	<i>Darktentacles</i>
7-8	Mind flayer
9	<i>Meazel</i>
10	Muckdweller
11-12	Goblins
13	Leech (roll 1d6: 1-4 = giant, 5-6 = swarm)
14	Giant frog
15-16	Centipede (roll 1d10: 1-4 = huge, 5-8 = giant, 9-10 = megalos)
17	Grell
18	Lizard man
19	DM's Special
20	Black dragon



DM's Special Table

d100 Roll Encounter

01-07	Giant toad
08	Behir
09-14	Giant rat
15-16	Flind
17-18	Ice toad
19-21	Hobgoblin
22-24	Ghast
25-27	Oliphant
28	Known NPC
29	Ogre mage
30	Cyanohydra
31	Lernaean hydra
32	Black dragon
33	Will-o-wisp
34	Hailstorm
35	Lich
36	Storm giant
37	Talking owl
38-39	Catoblepas, domesticated
40	Man (Marsh drover)
41	Hill giant
42-45	Wild cattle
46-47	Constrictor snake
48-51	Giant owl (night)
52	Orc
53-54	Giant lizard
55-56	Poisonous toad
57-66	Catoblepas, domesticated
67-70	Hobgoblin
71-72	Lizard man
73-82	Troll
83-90	Man (Marsh drover)
91-92	Giant toad
93-94	Roll on or choose from Vast Swamp table
95-97	Roll on or choose from Farsea Marshes table
98-99	Roll on or choose from Marsh of Tun table
00	Will-o-wisp



Stonelands and Goblin Marches

DMs should take note of the tables' organization. Because these tables are so detailed, the encounter name is listed first, then the d100 roll results for each category. For example, using the Goblin Marches Encounters, Open Plains table: "Antelope, 41-44, —" means that on a percentage roll of 41, 42, 43, or 44, parties traveling in the open plains during daylight hours will encounter an antelope. There is no chance for such an encounter in the open plains during nighttime.

Goblin Marches encounters comprises three sections, each divided into daytime and nighttime encounters. These sections cover open plain, hills, and caves. For Stonelands encounters, there are open area and caves divisions. Open area encounters are divided into daytime, nighttime, and storm encounters. Cave encounters are split between daytime and nighttime.

The Notes section contains helpful information for tailoring encounters to the DM's plans (or whims).

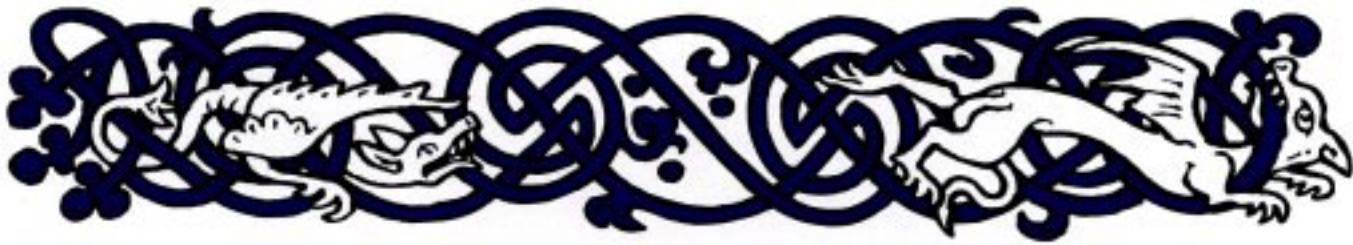
Goblin Marches Encounters: Open Plains

Encounter	Day	Night
Small animal	01-10	01-08
Small bird	11-14	09-12
Hawk/eagle	15-22	13-18
Spider, poisonous	23-25	19-23
Bat	26-30	24-30
Snake	31-32	31-35
Wolf	33-34	36-40
Worg	35	41-44
Wild horse	36-40	45
Antelope	41-44	—
Lion	45-46	46-47
Bear	47-51	48-50
Human	52-55	51-55
Wemic	56-59	56

Encounter	Day	Night
Giant owl	60	57-59
Giant eagle	61-62	60
Giant spider	63-64	61-63
Goblin	65-68	64-67
Kobold	69-70	68-70
Orc	71-75	71-75
Hobgoblin	76-77	76-79
Gnoll	78-79	80-81
Bugbear	—	—
Ogre	80	82
Giant, hill	81-82	83-84
Giant, ettin	83	85
Peryton	84	86
Doppleganger	85	87
Behir	86	88
Chimera	87-89	89-90
Medusa	90	91
Leucrotta	—	—
Hieracosphinx	91-92	92
Dragon, silver	93	93
Dragon, red	94	94-95
Dragon, mist	95	—
Firedrake	96	96-97
Dinosaur	97-98	98
Giant animal	99-00	99-00

Goblin Marches Encounters: Hills

Encounter	Day	Night
Small animal	01-10	01-09
Small bird	11-13	10-11
Hawk/eagle	14-18	12-15
Spider, poisonous	19-21	16-18
Bat	22-25	19-25
Snake	26-29	26-29
Wolf	30-33	30-34
Worg	34	35-40
Wild horse	35-37	41
Antelope	38-42	42
Lion	43-44	43-45
Bear	45-47	46-50
Human	48-50	51



Goblin Marches Encounters: Hills, cont'd.

Encounter	Day	Night
Wemic	51	52
Giant owl	52-56	53-57
Giant eagle	57-60	58-59
Giant spider	61-62	60-63
Goblin	63-66	64-69
Kobold	67-70	70-73
Orc	71-74	74-76
Hobgoblin	75-76	77-80
Gnoll	77-78	81-82
Bugbear	—	—
Ogre	79	83
Giant, hill	80-81	84-85
Giant, ettin	82	86
Peryton	83-84	87
Doppleganger	85	88
Behir	86-87	89
Chimera	88-89	90
Medusa	90	91
Leucrotta	91	92
Hieracosphinx	92-93	93-94
Dragon, red	94-95	95-96
Dragon, mist	96	—
Firedrake	97-98	97-98
Dinosaur	99	99
Giant animal	00	00

Goblin Marches Encounters: Caves

Encounter	Day	Night
Small animal	01-12	01-12
Small bird	13-14	13-15
Hawk/eagle	15-17	16-17
Spider, poisonous	18-25	18-25
Bat	26-35	26-32
Snake	36-37	33-36
Wolf	38-39	37-38
Worg	40	39-41
Wild horse	—	42
Antelope	41	43

Encounter	Day	Night
Lion	42-44	44-47
Bear	45-48	48-49
Human	49	50
Giant owl	50-54	51-52
Giant eagle	55	—
Giant spider	56-59	53-54
Goblin	60-69	55-66
Kobold	70-75	67-69
Orc	76-78	70-73
Hobgoblin	79-82	74-78
Gnoll	83-84	79-80
Bugbear	85-87	81-83
Ogre	88-89	84-85
Giant, hill	90	86-87
Giant, ettin	91	88-89
Peryton	—	90
Doppleganger	92	91
Behir	93	92
Chimera	94	93
Medusa	95	94
Hieracosphinx	96	95
Dragon, silver	97	96
Dragon, red	98	97
Firedrake	99	98-99
Giant animal	00	00

Stonelands Encounters: Open Areas

Encounter	Day	Night	Storm
Small animal	01-10	01-08	01-06
Small bird	11-14	09-12	07-10
Hawk/eagle	15-22	13-18	11-14
Spider, pois.	23-25	19-23	15-17
Bat	26-30	24-30	18-23
Snake	31-32	31-35	24-26
Wolf	33-39	36-40	27-28
Worg	40-44	41-44	29-34
Lion	45-46	45-47	35-36
Bear	47-51	48-50	37-38
Human	52-55	51-55	39-40
Border raiders	56-58	56-60	41-44



Encounter	Day	Night	Storm
Giant owl	59	61-64	45-46
Giant eagle	60-62	—	47
Giant spider	63-64	65-67	48-49
Goblin	65-68	68-70	50-53
Kobold	69-70	71-72	54-55
Orc	71-75	73-75	56-59
Hobgoblin	76-77	76-77	60-61
Gnoll	78-79	78-80	62-64
Ogre	80	81	65-66
Giant, hill	81	82	67-69
Giant, cloud	82	83	70-73
Giant, storm	83	84	74-83
Giant, stone	84	85	84-88
Undead	—	86-87	89-90
Peryton	85	88	91
Behir	86	89	92
Chimera	87-88	90	93
Medusa	89	91-92	90-91
Hieracosphinx	90-91	93	92
Dragon, silver	92	—	93
Dragon, copper	93	—	—
Dragon, amethyst	94	—	—
Dragon, red	95	94-95	94-95
Dragon, mist	96	—	96
Firedrake	97	96-97	97
Dinosaur	98	98	98
Giant animal	99	99	99
Beholder	00	00	00

STONELANDS ENCOUNTERS: CAVES

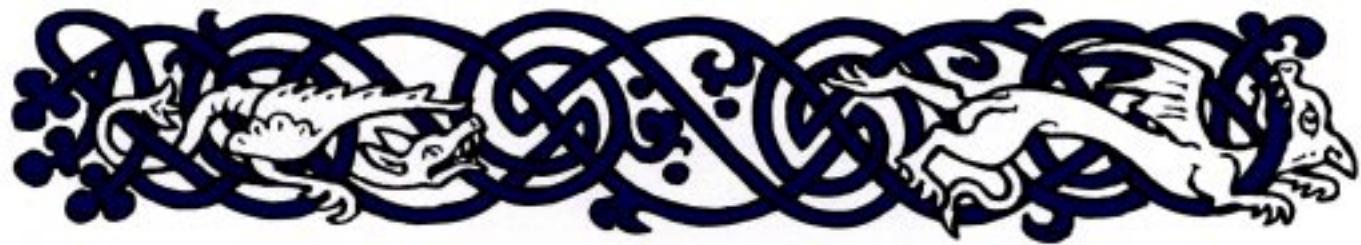
Encounter	Day	Night
Small animal	01-12	01-12
Small bird	13-14	13-15
Hawk/eagle	15-17	16-17
Spider, poisonous	18-25	18-25
Bat	26-33	26-32
Snake	34-35	33-36
Wolf	36-37	37-38
Worg	38-40	39-41

Encounter	Day	Night
Lion	41-44	42-47
Bear	45-48	48-49
Human	49	50
Border raiders	50-53	51-54
Giant owl	54-55	55-56
Giant spider	56-59	57-58
Goblin	60-67	59-64
Kobold	68-73	65-67
Orc	74-76	68-70
Hobgoblin	77-79	71-73
Gnoll	80-83	74-78
Ogre	84-85	79-82
Giant, hill	86	83-84
Giant, cloud	—	85
Giant stone	87-89	86-88
Undead	90	89
Peryton	—	90
Behir	91	91
Chimera	92	92
Medusa	93-94	93
Hieracosphinx	—	94
Dragon, silver	95	95
Dragon, copper	96	96
Dragon, red	97	97
Firedrake	98	98
Giant animal	99	99
Beholder	00	00

Notes

- Snake and small animal encounters may or may not be dangerous, dependent on the DM's whim.
- Hawk/eagle encounters have a 50% chance of being one or the other—never both.





- Human encounters are with 1d4 adventurers of levels 1-8 45% of the time, with a merchant caravan of 5d10 members (including guards) 50% of the time, and with Zhentarim agents 5% of the time.
- Undead encounters can comprise 1d20 skeletons, 1d4 ghouls, 1d2 ghosts, and 1 ghost, wight, or wraith, or whatever sort of undead the DM desires.
- Beholders encountered are on Zhentarim-sponsored missions of random destruction 95% of the time.
- Goblins encountered have a 40% chance of being accompanied by 1d4 orcs, 2d5 worgs, or 1 ogre.
- Orcs encountered have a 40% chance of being accompanied by 1d2 ogres.
- Gnolls encountered have a 25% chance of being accompanied by 1d2 flinds or 1d2 hyenadons.
- Ogres encountered have a 50% chance of being accompanied by 1d4 orcs or 1d8 goblins.
- Border raider encounters often comprise mixed races. There is a 25% chance of each of the following races being present: goblins, orcs, kobolds, hobgoblins, gnolls, and humans (brigands). There is also a 5% chance of a giant.
- Hill giants encountered have a 10% chance of being accompanied by 1 ettin.
- Ettins encountered have an 80% chance of being accompanied by 1d2 hill giants.
- Medusae encountered have a 3% chance of being accompanied by 1 maedar.
- Sixty percent (60%) of all dinosaurs encountered are herbivorous, and they include anchisaurus, camptosaurus, trachodonts, triceratops, stegosaurus, and ankylosaurus. Forty percent (40%) of the time the dinosaurs encountered are carnivorous; these include allosaurus, compsognathus, and deinonychus.
- Giant animals encounters include titanotheres, hyenadons, axebeaks, baluchitherium, phororhacos, and wooly rhinos.





Sea of Fallen Stars

Salt Water Encounters

Cold Water Surface

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Dragon turtle
3	Sea lion
4	Selkie
5	Scrag
6	Depths encounter
7	Warship or fisherman
8	Narwhal
9	Merchant
10	Shark
11	Whale
12	Pirate or killer whale
13	Hazard (ice)
14	Dolphin
15	Aerial encounter
16	Ghost ship
17	Will-o-wisp
18	Seawolf, greater
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Temperate Water Surface

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Dragon turtle
3	Ghost ship
4-5	Otter, sea
6	Depths encounter
7	Pirate ship
8	Sea lion
9	Eel, giant
10	Shark
11	Merchant
12	Whale
13	Dolphin
14	Warship or fisherman
15	Aerial encounter
16	Will-o-wisp or seaweed
17	Seaweed (strangleweed 10%)
18	Seawolf, greater

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)
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Tropical Water Surface

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

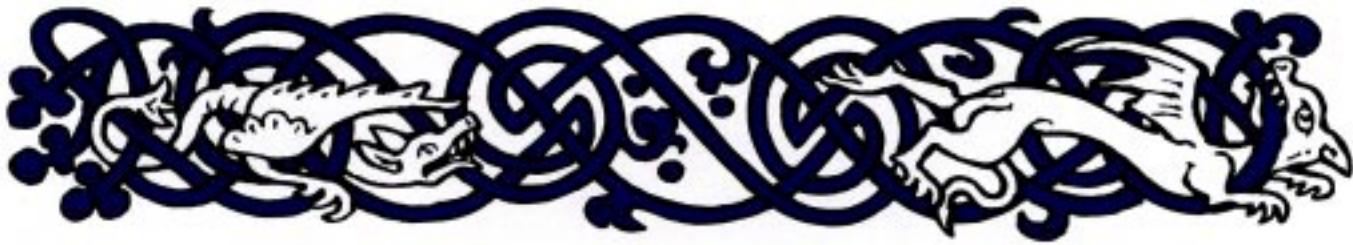
2	Ghost ship
3	Strangleweed
4	Pirates, small boats
5	Pirates, warship
6	Depths encounter
7	Shark, giant
8	Crocodile, giant
9	Seaweed
10	Whale
11	Merchant
12	Fisherman
13	Shark
14	Barracuda
15	Aerial encounter
16	Warship
17	Seawolf, greater
18	Triton
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Fresh Water Encounters

Cold Water Surface

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Dragon turtle
3	Greenhag
4	Otter, giant
5	Lacedon
6	Depths encounter
7	Swan (swanmay 10%)
8	Pirate
9	Land encounter
10	Hazard (navigational)
11	Fisherman or trapper
12	Merchant
13	Otter or beaver
14	Aerial encounter



Fresh Water Encounters, cont'd.

Cold Water Surface, cont'd.

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

15	Nixie
16	Merrow, ogre
17	Scrag
18	Naga, water
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Temperate Water Surface

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Crayfish, giant
3	Nymph
4	Otter, giant
5	Lizard man
6	Depths encounter
7	Swan (swanmay 10%)
8	Merrow, ogre
9	Land encounter
10	Frog, giant or leech, giant
11	Hazard (navigational)
12	Otter
13	Fisherman or merchant
14	Aerial encounter
15	Pirate or warship
16	Beetle, giant water

d8+d12 Roll Encounter

17	Lacedon
18	Scrag or sea hag
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Tropical Water Surface

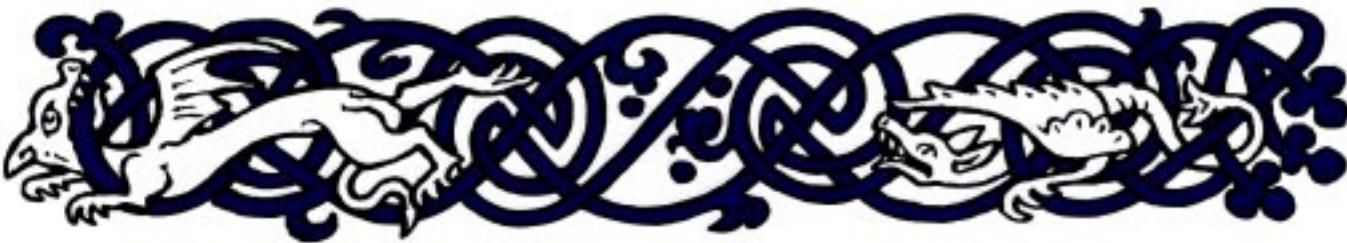
d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Crystal ooze
3	Kelpie
4	Nymph
5	Electric eel
6	Depths encounter
7	Snake, giant constrictor
8	Pirate, small boats
9	Crocodile
10	Hazard (navigational)
11	Fisherman or merchant
12	Piranha
13	Frog, giant or poisonous
14	Aerial encounter
15	Seaweed
16	Seaweed (choke, creeper)
17	Frog, killer
18	Naga, water
19-20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from any table in this section)

Weather Conditions for Coastline

2d6 Roll	Spring/Fall	Summer	Winter
2	Rain	Rain	Sunny
3	Rain	Rain	Light breeze
4	Rain	Overcast	Overcast
5	Overcast	Overcast	Overcast
6-7	Sunny	Sunny	Rain
8	Sunny	Sunny	Sleet
9	Mild storm	Mild storm	Snow
10	Heavy storm	Mild storm	Hail
11-12	Heavy storm	Heavy storm	Heavy snow





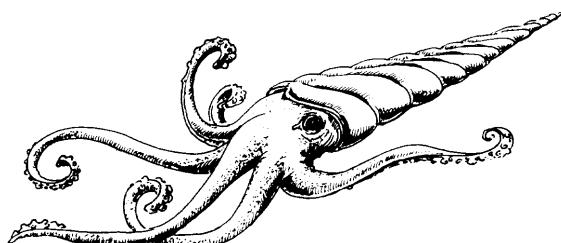
The Great Gray Land of Thar

Italicized creature names are referenced in the *Great Gray Land of Thar* booklet.

Thar Wilderness Encounters

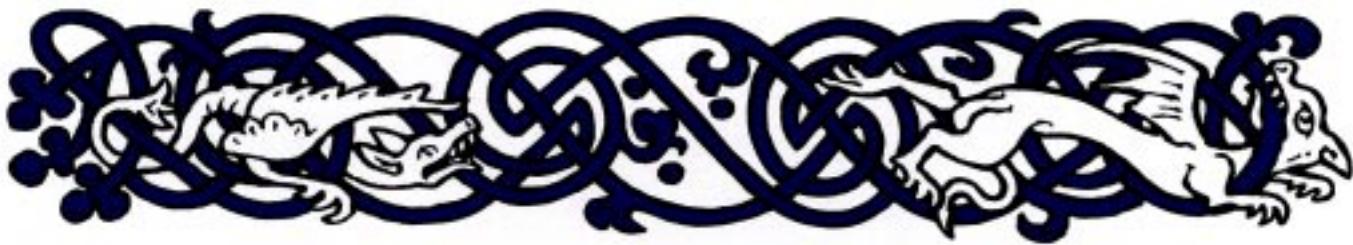
d8+d12 Roll Encounter

2	Hippogriff
3	Basilisk (roll 1d6: 1-4 = lesser, 5-6 = greater)
4	Ankheg
5	<i>Ibrandlin</i>
6	Bear (roll 1d6: 1-4 = brown, 5-6 = cave)
7	Ogre
8	Manticore
9	Orc
10	Man (merchant, trader)
11	Mammal (roll 1d6: 1-2 = badger, 3-4 = wild boar, 5 = skunk, 6 = wolverine)
12	Mammal, small (roll 1d8: 1 = ferret, 2 = fox, 3-4 = gopher, 5 = opossum, 6-7 = rabbit, 8 = squirrel)
13	Bird (roll 1d10: 1-2 = blood hawk, 3-4 = common eagle, 5 = giant eagle, 6 = falcon, 7 = large hawk, 8 = owl, 9 = giant owl, 10 = raven)
14	<i>Leucrotta</i>
15	<i>Bulette</i>
16	<i>Peryton</i>
17	Giant scorpion
18	Behir
19	<i>Chimera</i>
20	DM's Special



DM's Special

d100 Roll	Encounter
01-07	Gnoll
08	Beholder
09-14	Berserker
15-16	Brownie
17-18	Wolf
19-21	Jackal
22-24	Displacer beast
25-27	Blink dog
28	Dust storm
29	Known NPC
30	Wild horse
31	Troll
32	Nomad
33	Wild cattle
34	Snake, poisonous
35	Mountain lion
36	Bugbear
37	Spider, large
38-39	Gorgimera
40	Giant, cloud
41	Giant, storm
42-45	Harpy
46-47	Hornet, giant
48-51	Imp
52	Lich
53-54	Werebear
55-56	Jackalwere
57-66	Wererat
67-70	Werewolf
71-72	Worg
73-83	Men, patrol
83-90	Owl, talking
91-92	Pegasus
93-94	Pseudodragon
95-97	Phase spider
98-99	Giant wasp
00	Will-o-wisp



Settled Lands

The settled lands of Cormyr, Sembia, and the Dales comprise such a diverse area—including plains, forests, hills, and mountains—that the lists below provide only a small sampling of the indigenous animal life. The DM is encouraged to add creatures discussed elsewhere in this product, especially in Cormanthor, the Storm Horns and the Thunder Peaks, and the Stonelands and the Goblin Marches.

See *The Settled Lands* for information about the creatures in italics. The table for the cultivated lands includes encounters in fields, on farms, and in orchards.

The table of forest encounters applies to the region's smaller forests and the fringes of the larger ones. (The interior of the Hullack Forest, for instance, is home to creatures more monstrous than those included here.)

The DM's Choice: Special Monsters table features unusual and exceptionally dangerous creatures. Characters foraging for food might find the Small Mammals and Avians tables helpful.

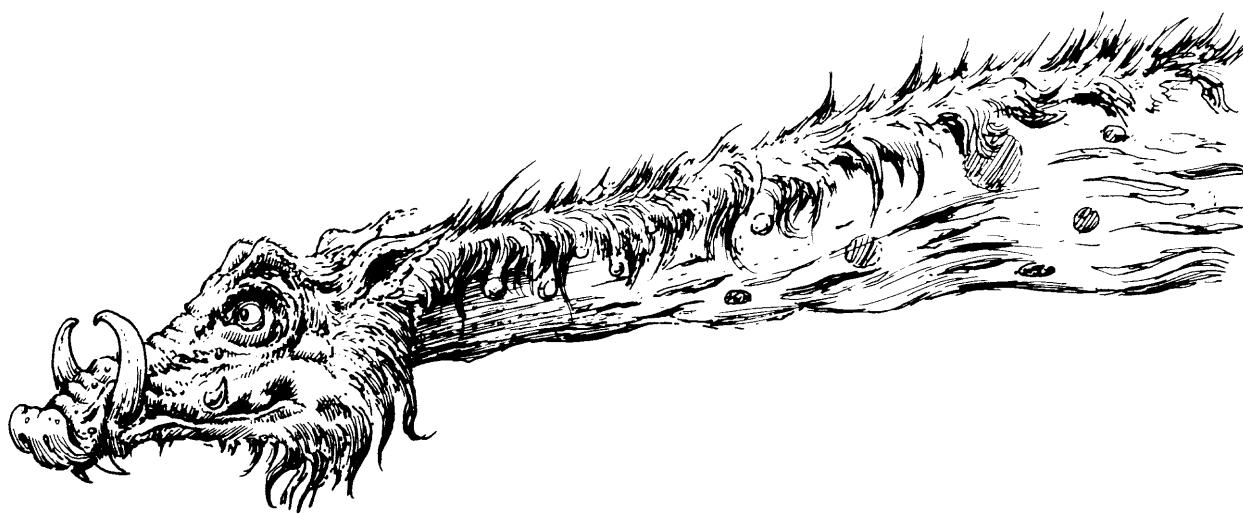
Refer to the FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting for entries marked*.

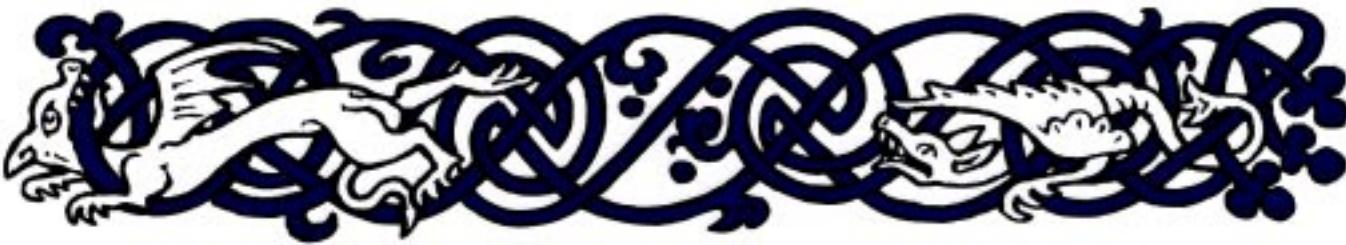
Refer to MC11 *FORGOTTEN REALMS Appendix* for entries marked **.

City and Village Encounters

d20 Roll Encounter

1	<i>Catoblepas</i>
2	Homonculous
3	Doppleganger
4	Horse (roll 1d10: 1-2 = draft, 3 = heavy, 4 = medium, 5-6 = light, 7 = pony, 8-9 = riding, 10 = mule)
5	Steel dragon
6	War dog
7	<i>Lichling</i>
8	Ghoul
9	Domestic cat
10	Medusa
11	Ochre jelly
12	Bat (roll 1d6: 1-4 = common, 5 = large, 6 = huge)
13	Kenku
14	Lock lurker*
15	Gremlin
16	Feyr
17	Harrla**
18	Lycanthrope (roll 1d4: 1 = werefox, 2 = werewolf, 3 = wererat, 4 = werebat)
19	Gnoll
20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from DM's Choice: Special Monsters table)



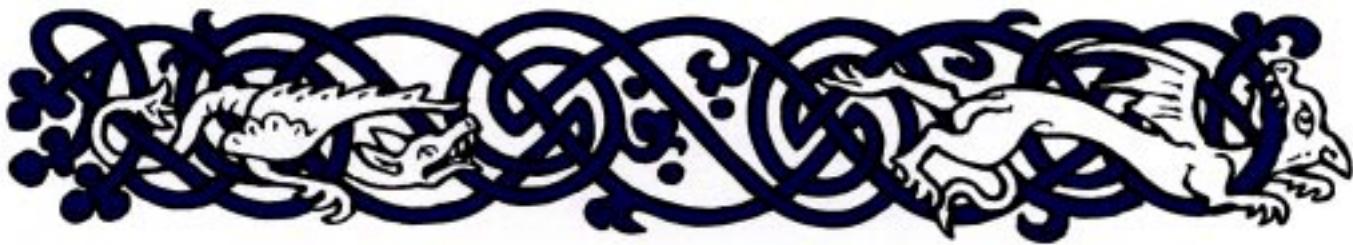


Plains Encounters

d20 Roll	Encounter
1	Rat (roll 1d4: 1-3 = normal, 4 = giant)
2	Wolf
3	Herd animal (roll 1d4: 1 = deer, 2 = sheep, 3 = wild cattle, 4 = elk)
4	Blink dog
5	Gambado*
6	Orc
7	Sympathetic**
8	Loxo**
9-10	Insect (roll 1d6: 1 = giant ant, 2 = bumblebee, 3 = giant hornet, 4 = assassin bug, 5 = giant wasp, 6 = giant horsefly)
11	Jackal
12	Wild boar
13-14	Avian (roll on or choose from Avians table)
15-16	Unusual vegetation (roll on or choose from Unusual Vegetation table)
17-19	Small mammal (roll on or choose from Small Mammals table)
20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from DM's Choice: Special Monsters table)

Rough/Hills Encounters

d100 Roll	Encounter
1-4	Spider (roll 1d6: 1-2 = large, 3-4 = huge, 5 = giant, 6 = gargantuan)
5-6	Aurumvorax
7-8	Dragonne
9-10	Wild dog
11-12	Centipede (roll 1d6: 1-3 = giant, 4-5 = huge, 6 = megalos)
13-14	Cyclops
15-16	Ettin
17-18	Verbeeg
19-20	Firbolg
21-24	Goblin
25-26	Griffon
27-28	Wyvern
29-30	Hill giant
31-34	Hobgoblin
35-36	Jackalwere
37-38	Hippogriff
39-41	Kobold
42-43	Leucrotta
44-48	Bear (roll 1d4: 1-3 = black, 4 = brown)
49-50	Manticore
51-52	Ogre
53-54	Zombie treant
55-67	Plains creature (roll on or choose from Plains Encounters table)
68-75	Avian (roll on or choose from Avians table)
76-82	Unusual vegetation (roll on or choose from Unusual Vegetation table)
83-95	Small mammal (roll on or choose from Small Mammals table)
96-00	DM's Special (roll on or choose from DM's Choice: Special Monsters table)



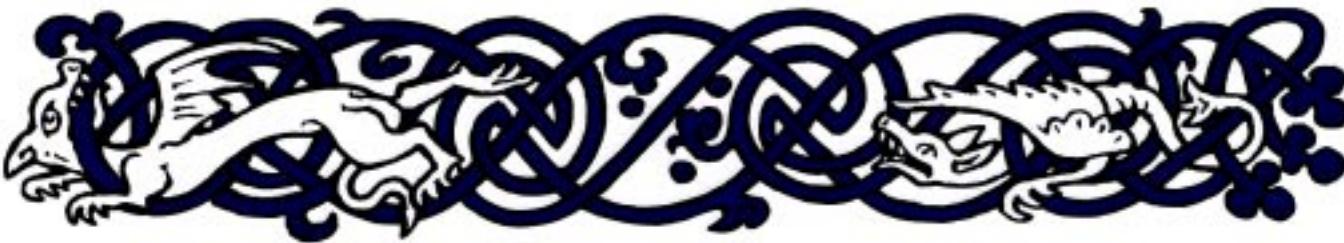
Cultivated Lands Encounters

d20 Roll	Encounter
1	Ankheg
2	Wemic
3	Gargantuan (Ashaba) amphisbaena (roll 1d4: 1-3 = immature, 4 = mature)
4	Hydra
5	Brownie
6	Lichling
7	Wild cat
8	Lhiannan shee**
9	Insect swarm (roll 1d4: 1-2 = grasshopper, 3 = locust, 4 = velvet ant)
10	Stag beetle
11	Stirge
12-14	Plains creature (roll on or choose from Plains table)
15	Rough/Hills creature (roll on or choose from Rough/Hills table)
16	Avian (roll on or choose from Avians table)
17	Unusual vegetation (roll on or choose from Unusual Vegetation table)
18-19	Small mammal (roll on or choose from Small Mammals table)
20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from DM's Choice: Special Monsters table)

Forest Encounters

d20 Roll	Encounter
1	Treant
2	Satyr
3	Sprite (roll 1d6: 1-2 = standard, 3-4 = pixie, 5 = atomie, 6 = grig)
4	Dryad
5	Ettercap
6	Tressym*
7	Korred
8	Beetle (roll 1d4: 1 = bombardier, 2 = boring, 3 = fore, 4 = stag)
9	Wood giant
10	Centaur
11	Forest trapper (lurker)
12	Wood rohch**
13	Owlbear
14	Troll
15	Snake (roll 1d4: 1 = normal poisonous, 2 = giant constrictor, 3-4 = giant poisonous)
16	Rough/Hills creature (roll on or choose from Rough/Hills table)
17	Avian (roll on or choose from Avians table)
18	Unusual vegetation (roll on or choose from Unusual Vegetation table)
19	Small mammal (roll on or choose from Small Mammals table)
20	DM's Special (roll on or choose from DM's Choice: Special Monsters table)





DM's Choice: Special Monsters

d20 Roll Encounter

1	Chimera
2	Basilisk
3	Fire giant
4	Dracolich
5	Beholder
6-7	Dragon (roll 1d8: 1-2 = green, 3-4 = red, 5 = black, 6 = copper, 7 = silver, 8 = gold)
8	Vampire
9	Banshee
10	Behir
11	Bulette
12	Dark naga*
13	Cockatrice
14	Ghost
15	Hamadryad*
16	Couatl
17	Unicorn
18	Will-o-wisp
19	Pegasus
20	Greenhag

Small Mammals Table

d10 Roll Encounter

1	Squirrel (roll 1d6: 1-3 = normal, 4-5 = flying, 6 = giant black)
2	Rabbit
3	Porcupine
4	<i>Farrowdale</i> mouse
5	Copper opossum
6	Osquip
7	Weasel
8	Porcupine
9	Skunk
10	Wild pig

Avians Table

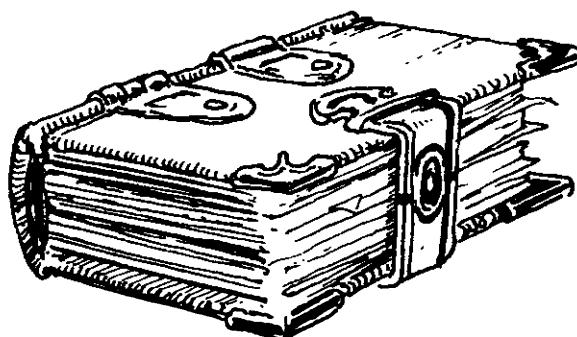
d10 Roll Encounter

1	Giant owl
2	Boobrie
3	Talking owl
4	Raven (roll 1d4: 1-3 = normal, 4 = giant)
5-7	Game bird (roll 1d6: 1 = wild chicken, 2 = pheasant, 3 = duck, 4 = goose, 5 = quail, 6 = wild turkey)
8	Giant vulture
9	Falcon
10	Blood hawk

Unusual Vegetation Table

d10 Roll Encounter

1	Strangleweed
2	Thornslinger
3	Retch plant
4	Thorny
5	Obliviax
6	Choke creeper
7	Snappersaw
8	Yellow musk creeper
9	Hangman tree
10	Quickwood





Cormanthor

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Words From an Old Friend



lminster says that the secret of happiness is having as many interests as stars in the sky, and the only way to find out if something interests you is to see it first hand. To him, that means travel, and plenty of it. "There's more to the world than the backsides of all these trees!" he always yowled at me. "Get out of the woods!"

No thanks. Everything I want is here. Why would I want to leave? To me, traveling means hours of boredom and discomfort, punctuated by an occasional ambush, robbery, or mauling. I've lived all my life in

the elven woods—Cormanthor, if you prefer—and I intend to die here some day, preferably later than sooner.

Elminster likes to tease me about my attitude. He calls me "Little Miss Lemon." So I'm sour. It's part of my charm, and I came by it honestly.

I grew up in a tiny elven village called Alyssim, about 50 miles east of Essemore in the Tangled Trees. It was a pretty place, filled with violets and wild roses, but the villagers liked their flowers a lot more than they liked me. As far as they were concerned, I was an embarrassment from day one.





First, I had the audacity to be born half-elfen. Half-elves may be common in the rest of the world, but not in Alyssim. I couldn't have stood out more if I'd been born with wings. Though the village elders resisted the urge to drown me in the Elvenflow, they made their displeasure clear by declaring my human father guilty of polluting the race and sentencing him to a decade of hard labor. He fled a day after the sentencing. I never got to meet him.

Second, I had the bad judgment to be born female. In Alyssim society, a woman was considered less useful than a good mule. Those few males who attempted to flaunt this foolish belief in my presence learned to swim a little faster than their much wiser—and silent—friends.

Third, I had the bad taste to reject Alyssim religion. The villagers worshiped Rillifane Rallathil, whom they believed gave them everything from the food in their bellies to the hair in their noses. My mother took a broader view. She worshiped the Sacred Hexad—my mother's term—of Rillifane Rail-lathil, the Great Mother Chauntea, Silvanus of the Wilderness, Mielikki, the Lady of the Forest, Eldath the Quiet One, and Aerdrie Faenya, goddess of the air. I still worship the Hexad today, fervently and passionately.

I suppose my disgust with the prattle and prejudice of my fellow elves is what nudged me to seek solace with animals and why I eventually became a ranger. Animals don't sell their loyalty for money. Animals know instinctively that life is for enjoyment, a fact that seems to have eluded most humanoid races. The Alyssim elves certainly took any sign of happiness on my part as a sign to make my life more difficult.

I left Alyssim as soon as I was old enough to lace my own boots. I never looked back. Alyssim is long gone now, overrun with weeds—stinkweeds, appropriately enough.

A few years later, I met a human explorer named Ruke Diggot, a young scholar from Mistledale who was studying the butterflies of Cormanthor. He stood as tall and straight as an oak, his smile as bright as the crescent moon. Within a month, we were married. We roamed the woods together for a blissful eleven years until a giant frog leaped from an alder thicket and swallowed him whole.

We had eleven children, one for each year of our

marriage. From Ruke, they got common sense and curly red hair. From me, they got stubborn streaks and a love of the wilderness. They're grown now, with families of their own. All still live in these woods.

After Ruke's death, I spent most of the next decade feeling sorry for myself. I wandered the forest from one end to the other and back again, accumulating the information that graces these pages, just to fill the days. My children had lives of their own. I had no community, no friends. I ached for my husband.

Then I met Elminster. I caught him skinny dipping in the Elvenflow, soaping himself vigorously and singing in a voice so tuneless I expected squirrels to pelt him with acorns. When he spotted me, he shrieked like a cat with its tail in a trap, then scrambled for his clothes, red as a spring tomato.

If you've met Elminster, he's probably told you a lot about himself, but I bet he didn't mention a thing about that summer. How he made honey pudding for me on our very first day together. How he braided my hair with daisies. How we [manuscript deleted by Elminster] . . .

That was—my, that was at least 40 years ago. I've changed since then. My hair's gone gray, and I can't fit into the blouse El made for me—did you know he's good with a needle and thread?

Ordinarily, I couldn't be bothered to write a book like this, not while there are sick bear cubs to feed and grandchildren to take on unicorn rides. How could I refuse you, El? Besides, I've seen too many people die out here—including a couple of my own kin—from carelessness, misinformation, and ignorance.

I hope this helps, and El, look me up next time you get out this way. Bring daisies.

— Lyra Sunrose



Part One: Trees, Trees, and More Trees

Dou may think you've seen big forests, but you've never seen one that comes within a worg's whisker of Cormanthor. On a map, it just looks like a green splotch between the Desertsmouth Mountains and the Cold Field. Take a closer look. Cormanthor covers more territory than the Thunder Peaks, and you could plop the Moonsea into here with enough room left over for the Lake of Dragons.

It's dense, too. Put a monkey in a branch just north of Highmoon, and it could swing its way to Elventree without ever setting foot in the grass. You could use the wood to make arrows for every archer from Calimshan to Vaasa, with enough left over to build a boat for all the sailors on the Inner Sea.

The Hexad must have truly loved Cormanthor, for it was the finest forest they ever created. Chauntea made beds of rich black soil, which Aerdrie Faenya fed with sunshine and soft rain. Mielikki and Rillifane Rallathil planted countless species of trees, ranging in size from the knee-high fairy pine to mighty oaks towering four hundred feet. Silvanus nurtured the forest like a loving gardener, shaping each leaf and painting them every color of the rainbow. Aerdrie Faenya sent gentle winds to caress the trees and thunderstorms to strengthen them. Eldath made them heavy with flowers and fruit.

It was a paradise, but like anything too good to be true, it didn't last. Not all of it, anyway. Cormanthor once encompassed a much greater region, stretching from the Storm Horns Mountains to the Sea of Fallen Stars. As cleanly as a scythe shears a wheat stalk, civilization cut it down.

The humanoid natives of the woods—the elves, half-elves, a few human tribes—have always harvested trees for homes, weapons, and trinkets. The forest shrugged off the damage. As the kingdoms of Cormyr and Sembia developed and grew, the forest

was forced to surrender. The trees could withstand dozens of axes, but not thousands. The settlers regarded the trees as nothing more than weeds—sturdy weeds, perhaps, but weeds nonetheless. Some elves abandoned the woods for the new cities, others left in the great Retreat to Evermeet. A few die-hards, including yours truly, hung on.

Despite the settlers' shortsightedness—future generations will also need wood for their treasure chests and rowboats, but the settlers apparently didn't consider how long it takes for a new tree to grow—I don't begrudge them their actions. Humans need to build cities like bees need to make hives. If humans are dumb enough to wreck everything in their way—well, that's just their nature. Anyway, they did me a favor by scaring off the elves. Cormanthor is a nicer place to live now than it was before Cormyr and Sembia came along, at least for an old crab like me. Elminster says I'm not only an old crab, but an old fool, that if I think the days of human expansion are gone, I'm out of my mind. Maybe so, but for now, all's quiet. I can't mourn for what was or what might be.

OLD SETTLEMENTS

If you've spent any time at all in or around Cormanthor, you've undoubtedly heard of the four elven communities: Semberholme, the Tangled Trees, the Elven Court, and Myth Drannor. If you're like most people, you've heard the legends and wonder if they're true. On our first night together, Elminster insisted on grilling me about Myth Drannor until I dumped a bowl of honey pudding on his head to shut him up.

As far as I'm concerned, the legends are more interesting than reality. Maybe they used to be bustling centers of art, science and commerce, but now they're





mostly crumbling stone and rotten wood. I suggest that you avoid them. Places this famous invariably attract troublemakers. At best, you may run into an elven geezer bent on boring you to tears with stories about the good old days. At worst, you may find monsters so nasty they make dracoliches look like bunny rabbits.

Go if you must, but be careful. If you're looking to get rich, you can find plenty of people to sell you information and treasure maps. I'm not one of them, but I'll tell you—free of charge—about some things you might otherwise miss.

The Elven Court, for instance, is littered with old buildings of every conceivable size and shape, from box-sized shacks to spectacular palaces big enough to hold a convention of storm giants. Most have been picked clean.

You want treasure? Keep going until you get to an oak grove about 50 miles south of Elventree. It's thick with bats, most of them ordinary insect-eaters, with a few assorted azmyths and sinisters. Find an oak whose trunk diameter equals exactly half the wingspan of one of the male sinisters; male Elven Court sinisters have white mouths. Scrape the bark from the oak—the “tree” is solid gold. An elven mage accomplished this before his death, apparently to keep his treasure safe from grave robbers.

Which oak, you ask? Beats me. Good luck.

The hills of Semberholme are still riddled with the limestone caves that the original residents used for shelter. Some contain pools of fresh water fed by underground streams. Don't be put off by the odor. Some smell like spoiled milk and dead fish, but they're all drinkable.

You'll find a scattering of oat fields near the west shore of Lake Sember, which the elves maintained for food and trade. The fields now attract wild horses, especially in the autumn. If you're in the market for a new mount, you could do worse. Be careful though—if even a single horse considers you a threat, expect them all to attack as a herd. A nephew of mine was killed when he spotted a mare drinking from a brook and tried to lasso it. The rest of the herd surrounded and charged. They stomped him so brutally that there was nothing left to bury.

Hundreds of elves still call the Tangled Trees home. Unless you're elven, stay away—they're as ornery as

bee-stung badgers and don't take kindly to trespassers. Most prefer to fire arrows first, then ask questions during the funeral. If by circumstance or stupidity you find yourself in these parts, bring along a canary—specifically, one of the emerald throated canaries that nest in the butternut trees along the southwestern shore of the River Duathamper. They're easy to catch. Hold out a handful of lemon or orange peelings and sooner or later, one will land in your palm.

The Tangled Tree elves—some, not all—consider themselves devout worshippers of Rillifane Rallathil. An elven priest by the name of Makk Fireseed has convinced his followers that the canaries are Rillifane's favorite creature; the yellow feathers stand for the sun, the green throat represents the leaves of the trees, or some such nonsense. If you run into a band of elves with a bad disposition, try offering them a Duathamper canary. If you can supply a silver cage or a gold band for its foot, so much the better. The elves may not become your best friends, but with luck, they'll let you pass.

By the way, when traveling through the Tangled Trees, you may notice the occasional oak tree with an outline of a canary carved in the trunk, usually about two feet from the ground. Let it be; it's an elven shrine to Rillifane Rallathil. If you chop it down, tie your horse to it, or even lean against it, a whole flock of canaries won't save your neck. Need convincing? Look up. In the highest branches, you'll see the dangling skulls of previous defilers who mistook the shrine for just another tree.

Somebody could write a book about Myth Drannor—I think Elminster may have tried—but not me. I've made it a point to stay out of Myth Drannor altogether. When I was young and too dumb to know better, I decided to check it out. I had some half-baked notion that I'd find a secret cache of gold, as if the same idea hadn't occurred to every avaricious soul from here to Amn. To be on the safe side, I recruited a pair of black bears to go with me.

When we got within ten miles of the place, the bears were growling and snorting. Every few minutes, they stopped to sniff the air, then shook their heads in confusion before reluctantly padding on. By the time we reached the outskirts of the city, one bear had already bolted into the brush, scrambling in the general direction of Anauroch as fast as his paws could



take him. The other bear was whining like a whipped kitten, digging his claws into the ground and refusing to move. I had my arms around his neck and was trying to drag him forward when I heard something thunder overhead. A red dragon was roaring out of Myth Drannor, wings beating furiously, its face wrenched in stark terror!

I didn't wait to see what was chasing it. I dived into a clump of brambles, squirming underneath as far as I could, ignoring the thorns that ripped my back. I cowered there shaking, waiting for the end. The bear bolted into the trees and disappeared.

Gradually, the roar receded. I stayed where I was, listening to the crickets chirp and leaves rustle. Three hours later, I wriggled out of the brambles, half-expecting some hellish monstrosity to swoop from above and carry me away in its claws. It didn't happen, but I kept one eye cocked toward the sky all the way home, just in case.

I never found out what was chasing the red dragon. I hope I never do.

So what do you need to know about Myth Drannor? Just this: Ages ago, they called it the City of Love, an elven paradise where beauty reigned and peace prevailed. Then came the Army of Darkness, an onslaught of fiends and brutes bent on grinding the city to dust. The elves defended themselves by erecting shields of magic and recruiting dragon guardians. In the end, the effort failed and the kingdom collapsed. The elves fled, leaving behind a graveyard of collapsed buildings and abandoned dreams. Myth Drannor now exists as a refuge for predators and a breeding ground for monsters. The City of Love? The City of Death is more like it.

Anyone who rests his neck on the executioner's block deserves to have his head removed. I have no advice for navigating Myth Drannor, nor suggestions for surviving its many dangers. I will, however, share some observations about how Myth Drannor has affected the rest of Cormanthor.

So powerful is the magic of Myth Drannor that it's spilled over into the surrounding countryside, drenching the creatures, the trees, and the very soil. I don't pretend to understand the reasons for or even the extent of these effects. To be honest, I probably wouldn't have realized that the elven woods were so different from forests elsewhere in the world if Elmin-

ster hadn't educated me. Now I'm convinced. You need to know about them so you don't think you're going crazy when your *potion of healing* goes flat or you see a chicken trying to eat a mouse.

According to Elminster, the magic of Myth Drannor has had three major effects on Cormanthor. Briefly:

The Weather: Summers aren't as hot and winters aren't as cold as they ought to be. The temperature differences between Cormanthor and similar forests are subtle, only a few degrees in some instances. Normal factors—shade, precipitation, winds—can't account for the favorable climate, which prevails nearly all year long.

Diversity: The number of animal and plant species in Cormanthor far exceeds that of other temperate woodlands. Virtually any organism that could survive in a forest environment can be found here. You won't find locathah or frost giants, but such otherwise rare creatures as bulettes and chimerae turn up in surprising numbers. We have far more than our share of oddities, many of them refugees from Myth Drannor.

Edgelands: They don't look unusual, but these patches of wilderness scattered throughout Cormanthor affect magic and its wielders in extraordinary ways. Elminster theorizes that the edgelands were created by magical energies that drifted from the *mythal*, the web-work of living magic enveloping Myth Drannor. I'll take his word for it. Suffice to say, if you depend on spells to rustle up food or defend yourself from angry ogres, don't camp in the edgelands.

We'll get into the details of the edgelands a little later. Right now, let's talk about where you can take a bath.

Two Rivers

Two major rivers wind through the elven woods: the Duathamper, or the Elvenflow, which runs along the southwestern border, and the Ashaba, which cuts the forest in half from Shadowdale to just east of Semberholme. Both are suitable for swimming, boating, and bathing, though I prefer the Elvenflow for the latter, as it provides more privacy. Of course, that's what Elminster thought, too; he was soaping himself about 10 miles north of Hammer Ford when I





saw him—all of him—for the first time.

Though most maps don't show them, dozens of narrow streams branch off the Elvenflow, many ending in small ponds. The streams usually run clear and are rarely more than a few inches deep, perfect for cooling your feet on a hot day.

You'll never touch bottom in most sections of the Elvenflow proper. I tied a stone to a 30-foot vine to measure the depth at various points, and I usually ran out of vine before I ran out of water. It's also wide, hundreds of yards most of the way, but every few miles it narrows and shallows out enough to wade across. Black granite bridges span the river at three places, courtesy of some enterprising elves—I didn't say they were *all* bad.

The Hexad must have made the Elvenflow for fishing, as they stocked it with bass, catfish, and trout, some as big as a ponies. The fish are so thick that a raccoon could cross the river by walking on their backs. For fishing, a cane pole or even a simple hand line will suffice. With fish practically flinging them-

selves ashore, if you can't catch your dinner, you deserve to go hungry.

Bait? Worms, animal fat, or even a scrap of colored cloth will work. If you want to land the big ones, try the button fungus that grows on the undersides of birch limbs; it looks like tiny mushrooms covered with brown fur and smells like month-old cheese. The fish love it, especially those pudgy trout.

The Ashaba is as wide as the Elvenflow and nearly as deep. I know of only one granite bridge, about 30 miles south of Mistledale, but it's in bad shape thanks to a nearsighted black dragon who mistook it for a rival and tried to smash it to pieces. The banks of the Ashaba slope much more sharply than those of the Elvenflow, a straight drop in some places.

If you're lucky, you might spot an orc on his belly, leaning over the bank to hand-fish. Watch long enough, and you may see him lean too far and fall in. If you're *really* lucky, you might see a giant carp break the surface and suck him down like a worm. The carp around here, by the way, have perpetually empty





stomachs. They've been known to chew up canoes and pick their teeth with the oars.

Truth to tell, it wouldn't bother me if the carp grew legs and chased down every orc south of Ashabenford. The Ashaba used to be as rich a fishing ground as the Elvenflow. No more. On a good day, a patient fisherman can still snag enough walleye and bullhead to feed his family, particularly in the southern waters. Up north, in a section Elminster refers to as "The Barrens," you can cast your line for hours on end and have nothing to show for effort except a skinny sunfish the size of your little finger. The orcs overworked the northern section of the river, using trawling nets to scoop up fish by the hundreds. To get rid of the giant carp, they dumped in wagonloads of a special herbal poison. Not only did the poison fail to get rid of the carp, it turned them black and made them meaner.

The orcs' attempt at wildlife management decimated the game fish population. For nearly a year, the waters reeked so badly from dead fish that you could smell it ten miles away. The water has cleared up some, but the carp are still practicing a little management of their own, so be careful when wading out into the Ashaba.

A pair of streams in the southern woods, the Semerflow and the Deeping, also provide relief for the thirsty traveler. Their crystal waters teem with bass and catfish in quantities rivaling the Elvenflow. It is an otherwise unremarkable area, drawing too many human tourists for my taste.

The westernmost stretch of the Deeping, however, serves as a spawning ground for a tasty variety of freshwater shrimp. The Deeping shrimp, nearly a foot long and brilliant red, can be caught by dragging nets along the river bed. The halflings living in the area manufacture special trawling nets for just this purpose, consisting of finely-woven mesh attached to weighted boards. The boards are buoyant enough to make for easy trawling, but not heavy enough to sink. The halflings are excellent net-makers, but dismal businessmen. You should be able to buy a net for a couple of silver pieces. As a bonus, the dried shrimp shells emit a soft pink light for up to two days and can be used to mark trails.

Weather

A forest the size of Cormanthor needs the right amount of rain and sunshine. Too much water washes away delicate seedlings and topsoil. If there's not enough water, the soil dries up and everything starts to die. Excessive heat causes the ground water to evaporate and plants to wither.

Fortunately, the climate couldn't be better. In part, this is due to the moderating effect of the Myth Drannor energies, but it's also due to the way the Hexad designed the terrain. According to Elminster, the sun strikes Cormanthor at precisely the right angle to warm the trees without scorching them. Precipitation falls lightly but steadily all year long, keeping the ground moist and the air cool. Thanks to the forest's sheltering canopy, which provides both shade and protection from harsh winds, we're spared the temperature extremes of the surrounding areas. A fur jacket and a good pair of leather trousers, and I'm cozy on the coldest winter day.

In short, compared to other regions—especially other forests—Cormanthor has warmer winters, fewer gale-force winds, higher humidity, and more than its share of rain. As to how hot it gets and how much rain falls, I've never kept track, but Elminster has, and he's slipped some figures in here somewhere. Those figures aside, I'd say that if you spend a couple of weeks in these parts, plan on getting rained on a day or two. Otherwise, enjoy the sunshine—we've got plenty of it.

Climatic Averages for Cormanthor

Temperature (Spring)	72 degrees F.
Temperature (Summer)	78 degrees F.
Temperature (Autumn)	65 degrees F.
Temperature (Winter)	43 degrees F.
Low Temperature/Year	15 degrees F.
High Temperature/Year	86 degrees F.
Annual Precipitation	70 inches
Days With Snow on Ground	25 days





Daily Weather

To determine the temperature on a particular day, find the average temperature of the current season listed in the Climatic Averages section above. Roll 1d10. If the result is odd, subtract it from the average. If the result is even, add it to the average. For example, if the season is autumn and the roll is 7, the temperature is 58 degrees (65 - 7).

To determine the prevailing weather, roll 1d20 and consult the following table.

Prevailing Weather in Cormanthor

D20 Roll	Weather*
1-7	Clear
8-11	Partly Cloudy
12-15	Overcast
16-19	Precipitation ¹
20	Extreme weather ²

* For random determination of wind velocity, roll 1d6; 1-3 = less than 10 mph, 4-5 = 10-20 mph, 6 = more than 20 mph. To determine the direction of the wind, roll 1d4; 1 = north, 2 = east, 3 = south, 4 = west.

¹Roll 1d6; 1-2 = up to 1/2 inch; 3-4 = 1/2 to 1 inch, 5 = 1-2 inches, 6 = more than 2 inches.

²Hailstorm, blizzard, heavy fog, tornado, etc., as decided by the DM.

The DM may make adjustments to this list when special events exist (such as magical manipulation of the weather), when unusual conditions prevail (such as long droughts), or in exotic terrain (such as mountain peaks).

Seasons

Unlike Anauroch or the Great Glacier, where every miserable day is pretty much like the next, Cormanthor experiences distinct seasons. The inhabitants adapt accordingly; bears hibernate in the winter, caterpillars spin cocoons in the spring, wild ducks

migrate in the autumn. Though rare, a bad stretch of weather can wreak havoc on the animals.

Eighteen years ago, we experienced a summer drought that just about killed off the rye grass, which in turn starved most of the region's red deer. The autumn before last hit us with an earlier-than-usual frost, destroying nearly all the wild flowers and berry bushes north of Highmoon, which wiped out most of the rabbits and gophers. The leucrotta in the area had less to eat, and turned on Casckel, a village of peaceful halflings. By spring, there was nothing left of Casckel but empty huts and halfling bones.

Fortunately, seasons tend to be pretty much the same from year to year. This summer should be about as warm as the one before, and I'd be surprised if the amount of rain varies more than an inch or two from spring to spring.

Spring comes calling in Ches and lasts until Flamerule. Thawing begins in the first few weeks of Ches, and by mid-Tarsakh the cottonwood trees are already sprouting buds and daffodils are beginning to flower. The lengthening day, providing nearly 16 hours of direct sunlight by Flamerule, allows vegetation to grow quickly; most seedlings mature before summer begins. Rain is frequent but light. Skies remain bright and clear during most spring storms.

Summer arrives in Eleasias and extends through Marpenoth. Temperatures peak in late Eleasias, but we experience only a handful of days I'd consider uncomfortable. For perhaps half of Eleasias, an old horse might risk exhaustion from overheating, or a traveler might find the shade of an oak tree more appealing than the arms of her lover. Calm winds and blue skies predominate, but you should stay on guard for thunderstorms. A summer storm can come and go in an hour's time, pounding the earth with sheets of rain and shattering trees with lightning spears. Pockets of fog often shroud long stretches of the forest, particularly near the northern Elvenflow. Oppressive humidity, common in Eleint, can sap the strength of the mightiest warrior; wear loose clothes, drink plenty of water, and if possible, travel at night.

Autumn, occurring in Uktar and Nightal, brings lower temperatures, shorter days, and an avalanche of falling leaves that hides most of the ground within a few weeks. Rain falls infrequently, but winds blow



almost daily, often with enough force to flip the hat from your head or stir up a whirlwind of fallen leaves. The first killing frost, usually arriving in the final days of Nightal, marks the beginning of winter.

Winter consists of the months of Hammer and Alturiak. Hammer tends to be dry and cool, but by early Alturiak, most of the forest has been blanketed by an inch or two of snow. Temperatures remain cold but tolerable. Icicles dangle from bare limbs of oaks, and pheasants huddle beneath huckleberry bushes for warmth.

Don't look for bears or grasshoppers; they're sound asleep, the former in secluded caves, the latter in rotted stumps. Thick, fluffy fur makes rabbits and badgers appear larger than normal. The Semberholme ferret, brown in the spring, now sports a white coat to make him less visible to hungry wolves. You may see a jackalwere rubbing pyrolisk bones together to melt the ice from its paws. Scare away the jackalwere and steal the bones. You can't start a fire with them, but stick them in your sleeping bag at night and they'll keep you toasty.

Adaptations

Ever heard of the communal tower east of Suzail that looked like twenty brick houses piled on top of each other? The bottom layers were reserved for laborers and other common folk while the highest levels—the ones closest to the gods—were home to rich merchants and big shots. A great idea, until a stiff wind blowing off the Lake of Dragons leveled it like a kid swatting a stack of building blocks.

Cormanthor is like that tower, only without the snobbery—and it's a lot sturdier. The height of the trees, hundreds of feet in some places, offers numerous living environments, one atop the other. High-flying falcons make nests in the tree tops. In the branches below, owls live in the hollows, squirrels snooze in the limbs. All manner of animals, ranging from tiny mice to lumbering aurumvorax, lair in the shaded meadows and valleys. Worms and beetles feast on the decayed matter in the ground, much of it derived from rotting leaves.

Cormanthor boasts a good food supply, plenty of water, and ample living space. Still, the creatures who

have thrived are those who have enhanced their survival chances with physical adaptations, such as:

Coloration: A chipmunk that glows in the dark or a rabbit with bright red ears might as well hang a sign around its neck that says, "Eat Me." Most species are colored shades of brown, gray, and green, the better to blend in with the surrounding terrain. Some, like the naga and the boa constrictor, sport patterns of blotches for camouflage.

Senses: With so many trees and bushes for hiding places, predators can't rely on eyesight alone to locate their prey. Most forest creatures, predators and prey alike, have sharper-than-average senses of smell and hearing. A behir can distinguish between the scents of a raccoon and a possum at 100 yards. A giant black squirrel can hear a constrictor slithering in the next tree. Likewise, forest dwellers observe a strict code of silence so as not to draw attention to themselves; you will hear few roars, hisses, or tweets, even if surrounded by a zoo full of creatures.

Movement: Because moving through woods this dense can be difficult, maneuverability is valued more than speed, climbing more than flight. Antelope and similarly slender herd animals capable of darting around trees do well; bulky buffalo are better suited to the open ground. Claws for climbing are favored over claws that tear and shred. Woodpeckers and wrens who can swoop through webs of branches fare better than giant eagles.

The Cormanthor Woods

Although many consider Cormanthor to be one big forest, it's actually made up of four forests; Semberholme, the Elven Court, the Tangled Trees, and the Vale of Lost Voices. I've divided Cormanthor up into three areas I call the rimwood, the midwood and the starwood. Admittedly, it's hard to tell where one ends and the next begins, but if you know what to look for, you'll know where you are.

What do you look for? What else? You look for trees. The rimwood consists mainly of pines. The midwood are predominantly white ash and beech. Gigantic oaks and maple make up most of the star-





wood. The farther into Cormanthor you go, the denser the vegetation—the rimwood are relatively barren, the starwood are as thick as a jungle.

Rimwood: The rimwood serves as a 10-20 mile border between the elven woods and the rest of the world. Because of the sandy, mineral-poor soil, the rimwood supports little vegetation. Blueridge and needleleaf pines, the primary species of trees, seldom exceed 20 feet and are spaced wide apart; you'll look all day to find two trees whose branches touch each other. The pines continually drop needles that are slow to decompose, inhibiting the growth of other plant life. Softwood ferns, brownish in color and as tough as shoe leather, sprout near the pines, but that's about it. Clumps of wiregrass adorn a few hillsides, as do some droopy willows and stubby spruces.

Because of the lack of vegetation, the area attracts few herbivores, which also accounts for the absence of meat-eaters. You might see a solitary wolf wandering about, or a tortoise pawing the dirt for grubs, but few animals settle permanently in the rimwood. With the lush midwood a few miles away, why would they?

Insects flourish in the rimwood, however, since there aren't many creatures who want to eat them. Beetles scuttle down hillsides like an avalanche of black pebbles. Mosquitoes swarm in clouds so thick you can barely see the sky. Many a traveler who's camped in the rimwood has awakened the following morning with her tent infested with red ants or her sleeping bag crawling with lice.

After a long day's journey through the rimwood, I remember seeing what I thought was an apple tree, heavy with plump fruit. My mouth watered at the thought of apple dumplings, and I rode toward the tree as fast as my horse would carry me. Turned out that it wasn't an apple tree at all, but a pine filled with red leafhopper larvae, hanging from the limbs in squirming clusters.

Aside from its usefulness as an insect haven, the rimwood acts as a buffer zone. It discourages animals from wandering out of the midwood, and makes travelers from the outlands think twice about taking shortcuts through Cormanthor. The major roadways winding through the rimwood—including Rauthauvyr's Road, Moonsea Ride, Moander's Road, and Hal-faxe Trail—remain relatively free of pests. You can use them without fear of waking up with a mama tick lay-

ing eggs in your hair.

Midwood: Just under half of Cormanthor can be considered the midwood. These are the trees separating the rimwood from the starwood, including a thick stretch along the Moonsea Ride that cuts Cormanthor in two. So dense is the midwood that a high-flying bird would be looking down on a sea of solid green. If the bird had bad eyes, it might think the midwood to be a single, sprawling tree.

That bird would be surprised to discover how diverse the midwood truly is, as its rich soil supports hundreds of species of trees, flowers, and plants. White ash and beeches line the gentle valleys along the Ashaba. Chestnuts and red maples crowd the hills north of Mistledale. Vast meadows near Essemore blossom with honeysuckles and snapdragons, bordered by groves of cherry trees and blue cedars. Ivory moss and moonfern decorate groves of alders, hickories, and bitternuts.

Tree trunks provide homes for giant constrictors, while rotting logs give shelter to salamanders and scorpions. Thrushes, cuckoos, and swallows nest in the limbs. The hammering of woodpeckers mingles with the sweet singing of bluebirds. A traveler setting up camp under a canopy of redbud trees might be startled to discover an audience of curious squirrels and warthogs. The traveler may also be puzzled by some of the odd vegetation. A few examples:

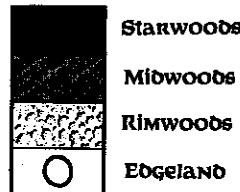
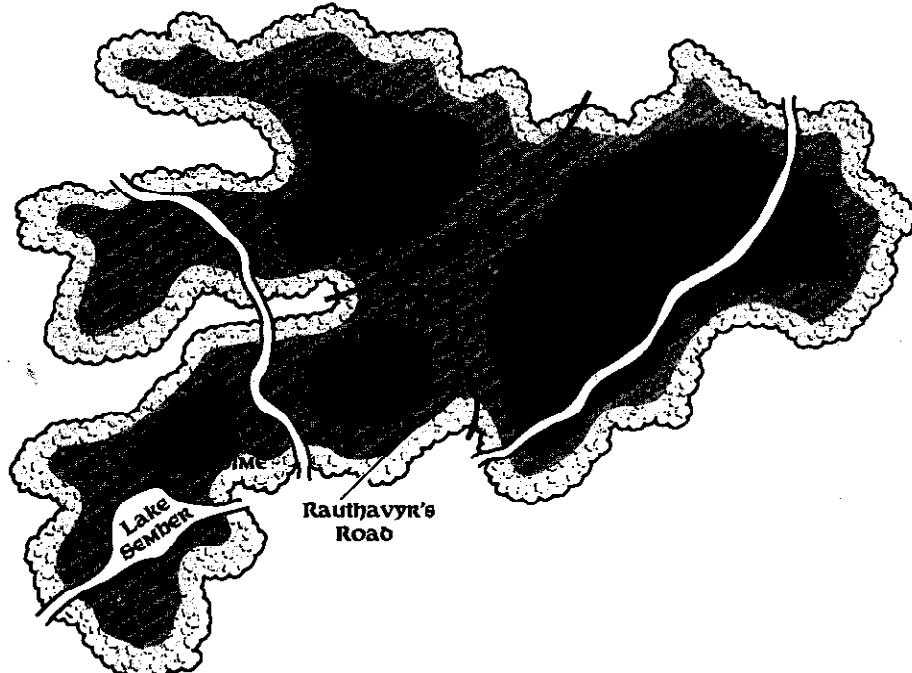
Beetle palm trees, named for the black bark that looks like a beetle's shell, grow to heights of 100 feet or more. Clusters of spindly, leafless branches crown the otherwise smooth trunks. The wood contains oily deposits that make it exceptionally flammable. It burns nearly three times as long as other types of wood and produces about half the amount of smoke.

Foxberries, resembling bright yellow grapes, grow on snaky vines found throughout the midwood, typically near beech trees. Foxberries are greasy to the touch and smell like cooked steak. One of the world's few fruits digestible by carnivores, they make an acceptable meal for wolves and other meat-eaters in times of scarce game. Humans can eat them, too, but don't be misled by the aroma—they taste like dirt.

Roseneedle pines thrive along the banks of the Ashaba, growing there the year round. They resemble miniature evergreens, seldom exceeding three feet



CORMANTHOR



- 1 = North starwoods
- 2 = West starwoods
- 3 = Central starwoods
- 4 = East starwoods

tall. A roselike blossom, pink or white, sprouts from the end of each tiny needle. A roseneedle's roots extend ten or more feet into the ground, each ending in a fat tuber the size of a potato. Chunks of the tubers make excellent fishing bait; a fisherwoman can easily double her day's catch when using them.

Starwood: I came up with the name when I was settling under a maple tree to go to sleep. The maple was so high, it looked like its branches could pierce the stars.

Okay, so the trees aren't really that high, but they're certainly impressive. I'd guess the maples average 200 feet with some of the taller oaks being twice that. If an oak trunk were hollow, it could hold a small farmhouse.

The starwood consists of four distinct areas. All have towering oaks, hickories, and maples, but each also has its own signature species. West starwood, the area containing Semberholme, boasts thick groves of poplar and gum trees. Spruce and hemlock are common in the central starwood, west of the Ashaba. East starwood, roughly divided into the Elven Court and

Tangled Trees regions, feature firs and elms, particularly where the starwood border the midwood. Cedars line the perimeter of the North starwood, home to Myth Drannor.

The starwood soil, as moist as that in the midwood but nearly black, gives rise to all variety of shrubs and thick grasses. The dense underbrush can make traveling difficult. The waist-high wood ferns are as thick as corn stalks, and traversing the carpets of mushy peat feels like wading through mud. Gray mist permeates much of the forest, particularly in the north and east, reducing vision to a few hundred feet. The humid air encourages the growth of lichens and mosses, which drip from tree branches like shredded velvet.

The profusion of grasses and brush supply an endless food source for grazers, such as elk and deer. Well-fed manticores sleep on beds of violets, owls chase screeching finches, and wood rats scramble for the cover of zebra grass. Ground-dwellers include both normal and gargantuan porcupines, skunks, and weasels. The fog-shrouded groves of the North and East starwood conceal roving packs of dire wolves. A





careless traveler may mistake an emerald constrictor for a mossy tree branch.

As in the midwood, much of the starwood vegetation may be unfamiliar. For example:

Medquat is a crimson lichen found inside hollow logs, particularly camphor. The soft lichen tastes like lemons and is highly prized by Cormyr gourmets. Be careful when groping around in camphor logs; scorpions adore the scent of medquat and like to cover themselves in it.

Chime oak trees thrive in the northern sections of the East starwood. They resemble normal oak trees made of clear glass. Aside from their appearance, chime oaks are indistinguishable from other oaks; birds nest in their branches, they sprout and grow from seedlings, their limbs can be cut and burned for firewood. Unlike normal oaks, however, chime oaks don't lose their leaves in the autumn. Instead, the leaves freeze solid, remaining frozen throughout the autumn and winter until they thaw in the spring. Light breezes cause the frozen leaves to tinkle like wind chimes, producing a soothing, pleasant sound especially attractive to basilisks. These creatures may be found curled up near the trunks, eyes closed, completely relaxed.

Hinnies are forest flowers that look like giant buttercups, 10 feet in diameter, with bright blue petals. Normally, a hinnie's petals are closed tight, giving it the appearance of a huge ball. The closed petals protect a pool of sweet nectar, two or three inches deep. Any attempt to pry the petals apart, pierce them with a sword, or otherwise gain access to the nectar by force causes the hinnie to crumble to dust and its nectar to instantly evaporate. The petals open by themselves for one day in the first week of spring. It's also possible to open the petals by warming them, such as by holding a torch near the petals or building a small fire next to the base. This must be done carefully. If the hinnie gets too hot, it ignites and disintegrates.

If a traveler manages to open a hinnie, or is fortunate enough to find one open in the spring, he may sit in its pool and allow the nectar to be absorbed into his body. The results are usually beneficial, but not always. A few years ago, a sister-in-law of mine was found floating face-down in a hinnie pool, the blood drained from her body.

Worth the risk? Not for me.

Hinnie Nectar Effects

A character may attempt to open a closed hinnie as described in the text, using either natural or magical heat sources. If the heat is applied directly to any part of the plant, however, the hinnie automatically disintegrates. Otherwise, roll 1d4; 1 = the plant disintegrates, 2-4 = the petals open.

To be affected by the nectar, a character must sit in the pool for 10 rounds. At the end of this period, all of the nectar will be absorbed into his body; there is enough nectar in a hinnie to affect a single character. It takes about a year for the hinnie to replenish the nectar supply.

To determine the effects of the nectar, roll 1d10 and consult the following table:

D10 Roll	Effect
1-4	No effect
5-6	Can <i>speak with plants</i> (as per the 4th-level priest spell) at will for the next 1-4 hours.
7	Can fly, as a <i>potion of flying</i> .
8	Skin toughens, giving character AC 2, even without armor; effect lasts 1-2 days.
9	Skin turns blue; character suffers 2 penalty to Charisma checks; effect lasts for 1-2 days.
10	All blood evaporates from character's body; character dies unless he successfully saves vs. spell, in which case he retains 1 hit point.

EdgeLands

My first encounter with the edgelands came 44 summers ago. I was exploring the midwood south of Elventree, looking for a place where my niece could set up her refuge for abandoned centaur colts. Seven weeks of searching had been in vain. The land was simply too barren for centaurs, despite the abundance of sunshine and clean brooks.

Another long day was coming to an end. Misha, my wolf cub companion, was hungry and in a bad mood. Rabbits and gophers were scarce, and if Misha



didn't get something to eat soon, I was afraid she might develop a craving for horse flesh. I had only one horse, an old mare named Geldi, and I needed to keep her flesh attached to her bones if I was going to get home.

I cast *locate plants and animals*, hoping to scrounge up some foxberries for Misha, who was now circling an increasingly uncomfortable Geldi. Then the oddest thing happened.

The spell fizzled.

I've cast this particular spell hundreds of times, and I can count on one hand the number of times it failed. Maybe I was more tired than I thought. I tried it again.

Another dud.

I sat in the grass, confused and—I'll admit it—a little scared. I reviewed the spell in my head, trying to recall if I'd left out a step, when I saw something that made me forget what I was trying to remember. Not five feet away from me, Misha was munching sunflowers, pulling petals from stems and chewing them up as

if it were the most natural thing in the world. Behind her, Geldi was kicking at a chipmunk. The chipmunk lunged like a cobra, determined to take a chunk out of Geldi's leg.

I shooed away the chipmunk and gathered Misha in my arms, a sunflower stem drooping from her mouth. I mounted Geldi and we galloped away. My niece would have to find her own refuge.

A month later, I told Elminster about my experience. "You're not alone," he said. A cottonmouth snake near the rimwood east of Semberholme had choked to death trying to swallow an apple. North of Highmoon, grasshoppers were seen feasting on the corpse of a cow.

Elminster explained that all of these were natural events—natural, that is, for Cormanthor. Apparently, energy drifts from Myth Drannor were creating regions where magic goes haywire and animal diets are turned upside down. He called these regions "Edgelands," as they only occurred on the borders of two different forests, say, a stretch between the rim-





wood and the midwood.

Casual inspection of these areas reveal nothing out of the ordinary. Fortunately, they don't last. Elminster says that an edgeland appears in the early spring and vanishes when the first autumn frost arrives. It may or may not reappear in the same place the following spring; usually, it doesn't. He has no idea how many edgelands exist at any given time, but says he'd be surprised if there were more than three or four.

So how do you identify an edgeland? Here are some signs. Not all apply to every edgeland, but if you notice more than one, I'd assume the worst.

- The area faintly radiates magic. (All edgelands do this.)
- Spells don't work the way they should, or they don't work at all. The same for magical items.
- The diets of small animals are off-kilter; herbivores eat meat, carnivores eat fruit.
- The area experiences unusual weather effects; raindrops feel warm, a breeze abruptly changes direction, a snow flurry blows up on a summer day.

Aside from some inconvenience—it's frustrating not to be able to cast spells, but hardly the end of the world—what's so bad about an edgeland? Well, consider the ramifications of a swarm of bees with a craving for meat—and you're the only meat available. Stay on your toes when crossing from one forest into another, and if you see a squirrel licking its lips, get out fast.

More About Edgelands

An edgeland may occur in any area of Cormanthor where two forests share a border (a rimwood and a midwood, or a midwood and a starwood). An edgeland can be any size, but it usually encompasses a roughly circular area, no more than 60 miles in diameter.

An edgeland arises in early spring and disappears when the first frost occurs in early autumn. In most cases, it will not reoccur in the same area the following year. In any given spring or summer, the elven woods typically has two or three active edgelands.

An edgelands may have any or all of the following features, as determined by the DM:

Unusual weather: See text for examples.

Dead magic: No magic, including magiclike monster powers and any psionic powers that affect objects outside the body of the user, operates here. At the DM's option, other magical prohibitions and modifications, such as wild magic, may also occur; these effects duplicate those associated with the mythal of Myth Drannor (see the *Ruins of Myth Drannor* boxed set for details).

Modified diets for animals: All nonmagical animals in the area with 1 HD or less are affected. Herbivores eat meat, carnivores eat plants, omnivores eat anything other than their normal diet (a piglet, for instance, may eat nothing but ants). The DM decides exactly which animals are affected, as well as the nature of their new diets.

An animal must be capable of getting its new food into its mouth and swallowing it; a gopher can't eat rocks, a butterfly can't eat an elephant. The magic in the area also affects the animals' physiology, allowing them to digest their unusual meals. The magic doesn't affect the animals' behavior, though starving animals may be willing to attack anything that looks edible; meat-eating sparrows might attack frogs, carnivorous field mice might attack humans.

Beware of The Dog

You know enough not to grab a chimera by the tail or poke a sleeping wyvern with a stick. You also know to expect the unexpected when encountering monsters in the wilderness—otherwise, you wouldn't be reading this book.

Remember that so-called "normal" animals can be just as dangerous as the monstrous ones, particularly those living in the relative isolation of Cormanthor. The less contact animals have with humans, the less they fear them. Some animals are merely curious, like an owl who eyes you from a tree top or a raccoon who joins you for a swim. A few are even friendly, such as the parrot who may flutter out of an elm tree to perch on your shoulder and hitchhike for an afternoon. Most animals are suspicious at best, hostile at worst. After all, this is their territory you're invading.

Consider, for example, the wild dog, normally skit-





tish around humans unless starving or provoked. A particular Cormanthor version, a tough, sinewy canine recognizable by its mottled hide, has a foul temper. If awoken by a thunderstorm, a Cormanthor wild dog will snarl and snap at the raindrops. If it survives a hunter's attack, it will track the hunter for weeks. One such vengeful dog tracked a hunter all the way to Arabel, chewed its way into the hunter's bedroom door, then killed the hunter in bed. Though omnivorous, the wild dog prefers the flesh of mammals, and makes no distinction between a baby opossum and a human infant.

It's unclear whether the black or brown bear is more vicious. The black is smaller and faster, the brown larger and stronger. Both are relentless killers. Cormanthor bears consider humans just another type of monkey, annoying and easily dispatched. The bears prefer blueberries and gooseberries to most other food, but when supplies are low, particularly in mid-to-late autumn, they'll eat anything that walks, flies, or crawls. A hungry bear will knock down your horse with a swat of its paw, chase you up a tree, and break your sword in two with a single snap of its jaws.

Interestingly, I've probably heard of more unprovoked attacks from wild boars than any other "normal" animal within Cormanthor. Our boars seem to be born mean; one of my sons reported seeing a litter of newborns rip out the throat of their own mother. Unlike the omnivorous boars elsewhere in the world, Cormanthor boars eat nothing but meat, and they're hungry 24 hours a day. Boars will excavate graves to get to the corpses and swim across rivers to attack boats.

Finally, consider the story of the young elf who discovered a rabbit outside of Myth Drannor. Except for the red fur and bright green eyes, it resembled and behaved like a normal rabbit. The elf put the rabbit inside his coat, where it snuggled against his chest, content and docile. He brought the rabbit home to his family and showed it to his younger brothers and sisters, who fed it clover and stroked its soft fur. That night, he took the rabbit to his grandmother, who shrieked in terror when she recognized the animal for what it really was. The shriek startled the rabbit, causing three spines on its stomach to become erect. The spines pierced the elf's arm, and he fell to the ground, unconscious. He died within an hour.

Spiny Rabbit

Int animal; AL N; AC 6; MV 18 (for up to 10 consecutive rounds, the spiny rabbit can sprint on its hind legs at a rate of 24); HD 2 hp; #AT 1; Dmg 1; SA otherwise flaccid spines on belly become erect when the creature is startled; if normal attack roll succeeds, victim suffers an additional point of damage and is poisoned (no modifier to save, onset in 1-6 rounds, 3-12 points of damage unless saving throw succeeds); THAC0 20; SZ S; ML 5; XP 35.





Part Two: Monsters



lminster always says that the first step to knowledge is admitting how little you know. I always say, if you're knowledgeable too often, people will expect you to be that way all the time. We're probably both right.

If you think you're as smart as you need to be, you're free to ignore the following information. The last person, however, who declined to take me seriously wound up as powder in a bulette nest.

Powder?

Bulette nest?

Maybe you *do* have a few things to learn!

Aurumvorax

I sprained my ankle so badly I had to use a crutch for a month because of an aurumvorax. The rimwood plains east of the River Lis are riddled with aurumvorax holes. Most of the holes are overgrown with weeds and wild flowers, making them just about impossible to see.

I was chasing a sand hen, a rare type of quail that makes the best soup stock you've ever tasted. It was inches from my fingers when I stepped in an aurumvorax hole. I slammed to the ground, my body going one direction, my foot in another. Howling in pain, I gripped my twisted ankle and watched the sand hen trot off into the brush, cackling with glee.

It could've been worse. The hole could've contained an actual aurumvorax, in which case a sprained ankle would've been the least of my problems. I've seen an aurumvorax strip the flesh from a war horse, and it can hold its own in a fight with a chimera.

The odds, however, of encountering an actual aurumvorax in Cormanthor are about as slim as a ruby dropping out of the sky and bouncing off your head. They're here, of course—I can show you the holes—you just never see them. I've always felt that aurumvorax spend half their waking hours looking for

food, the other half trying to find a way out of Cormanthor.

You see, aurumvorax aren't native to Cormanthor. They don't belong here, and they don't particularly like it here, either. For one thing, they're the wrong color for life in a green forest; their golden hides make them stand out like coal on a snow drift. There's little for them to eat; Cormanthor has plenty of mice and gooseberries, but not much gold.

A group of avaricious treasure hunters from Ylraphon introduced aurumvorax to the elven woods three centuries ago. Rumors of gold lured the hunters to the eastern rimwood, and they brought six pair of aurumvorax to sniff it out. The aurumvorax went to work the moment they were released, hungrily digging up rich veins in the hills and plains, gorging on ore while the hunters congratulated themselves on their brilliance.

Unfortunately, the aurumvorax had no intention of sharing. When a hunter attempted to examine one of the gold veins, an aurumvorax sprang, sinking its jaws in the hunter's back. In short order, the aurumvorax polished off the remaining hunters, then returned to the business of excavating their glittery cuisine.

With so much to eat and few predators to bother them, the aurumvorax multiplied like rabbits. Within a decade, they had pretty much depleted the gold, turning the plains of the eastern rimwood into a sea of holes. They spread west, searching for gold in the midwood, then north and south, hoping to find deposits like those in the eastern rimwood. Unfortunately, gold was scarce—the rich deposits in the eastern midwood turned out to be a one-of-a-kind aberration—and life became an unending quest for something to eat.

Survival required a change in diet. Gradually, the aurumvorax digestive system adapted to handle metals other than gold, as well as gems and minerals. The aurumvorax learned to eat the iron ore found in the hillsides south of the Tangled Forest, and the onyx deposits hidden in the rosemary valleys north of Hap.



Some suspect aurumvorax of devouring the secret jade caches of Myth Drannan royalty, hidden in subterranean vaults near the Standing Stone. The Cormanthor aurumvorax have also increased the proportion of red meat in their diets, favoring groundhogs, wild cats, and ferrets.

The changes in diet have also brought about changes in appearance and behavior. The Cormanthor aurumvorax have mottled coats, their golden fur streaked with dull reds and blues. While normal aurumvorax hides may fetch as much as 15,000-20,000 gold pieces, an elven woods aurumvorax hide might bring half that amount. When burned in a forge, a Cormanthor aurumvorax leaves behind about 50-75 pounds of gold. The claws are usually bright green or violet; collectors have paid up to 100 gold pieces per green claw, ten times that for the rarer violet claws.

To minimize the need for food, the Cormanthor aurumvorax hibernates for about three months, usually in the autumn and winter. A hibernating aurumvorax buries itself in mud or dirt, then curls into a ball with its head tucked beneath its legs. Though an active aurumvorax breathes through its nostrils, a hibernating aurumvorax absorbs air through pores in its hide. A patch of skin about three inches in circumference remains exposed during hibernation. Unwary travelers may mistake this exposed skin for gold. The slightest disturbance—a touch, a loud sound—and a hibernating aurumvorax snaps to life, snarling and clawing at whoever had the misfortune to wake it up.

During the spring, many Cormanthor aurumvorax suffer from allergies. The allergies result in fits of sneezing, which merely annoy the aurumvorax, but may seriously inconvenience a traveler. An aurumvorax's spittle, expelled when the creature sneezes, can corrode metal, reducing a suit of armor to worthless rust in a matter of minutes.

Special Properties of The Cormanthor Aurumvorax

An aurumvorax hide may be worn as armor; the heavier the hide, the better the Armor Class. A 50-pound hide gives the wearer AC 3, a 40-pound hide provides AC 4, and a 30-pound hide furnishes AC 5. The wearer receives a +3 bonus on saving throws vs. normal fires and a +1 bonus on saving throws vs. magical fires.

Additionally, the hide grants nearly complete immunity to all nonmagical weapons made from a particular metal or mineral. For example, if the hide grants immunity to jade, the wearer suffers minimal damage (1 hit point) if attacked by a blade made of jade, a jade-tipped arrow, or a hurled chunk of jade.

The DM may randomly determine the metal or mineral by rolling on the following table, or he may select a particular substance. If he wishes, he may augment this list with other metals or minerals.

Metal/Mineral Immunity from Aurumvorax Hide

D8 Roll	Metal/Mineral
1	Silver
2	Gold
3	Copper
4	Onyx
5	Jade
6	Turquoise
7	Opal
8	Azurite

About 20 percent of Cormanthor aurumvorax suffer from allergies in the spring. During an encounter, an allergic aurumvorax has a 1 in 6 chance in any given round of sneezing instead of making a normal attack (sneezes are involuntary; the aurumvorax can't sneeze on purpose). The expulsion of spittle extends in a foot-wide spray about 10 feet long. The spittle has the same effect on metal as gray ooze (corroding chain mail in one round, plate mail in two, and magical armor in one round per each plus to Armor Class).





BULETTES

Everything about the Cormanthor bulette is awful—the way it eats (by swallowing live prey feet first, sometimes leaving the head), the way it sleeps (often napping in the middle of a meal, a victim squirming in its jaws), even the way it breathes (wheezing when it inhales, drooling when it exhales). Nothing is more awful than the way it mates.

At the end of summer, the male stakes out its territory in the starwood, ringing the boundary with corpses of deer and wild boar. The corpses usually attract predators, which the bulette destroys and adds to the ring. With the boundary complete, the bulette digs a shallow pit, then lines it with bones extracted from the corpses. For the next week or so, the bulette sits in the pit, chewing the bones and grinding them to a fine powder. It spreads the powder over the bottom of the pit, then tunnels underneath.

Within a month, a female bulette arrives, drawn by the odor. As she settles into the powder, the male bursts from the tunnel. They mate. The male wanders away. The female rests.

Gestation occurs in a matter of hours. By the following evening, the female has laid up to a dozen rock-hard, spine-covered eggs. By morning, the eggs hatch. While they're hatching, the female announces the event by bellowing like an elephant. Once hatched, the young immediately attack the mother, attaching themselves to her feet, her tail, her snout. The mother responds by gobbling up as many of the infants as she can. The battle rages until the mother eats all the infants, or the infants kill the mother. Usually, the infants win, although it's rare that more than two or three survive. Those left alive celebrate their victory by devouring their dead siblings and whatever's left of their mother.

I told you it was awful.

Still, despite the obvious risks, should you hear the female bulette's distinctive birth roar, I suggest that you investigate. After it's been saturated with the fluid inside the eggs, the bone powder in the nest makes a potent fertilizer. A handful of powder applied to a seedling will result in a tree twice its normal height. The powder may have additional applications yet unknown; I suspect it may cause an apple tree to bear twice the normal amount of fruit, a rose to

bloom in winter, and wheat to sprout in sand. Act quickly; the powder loses its special properties if it isn't removed from the nest within 48 hours after the eggs hatch.

CENTAURS

You wouldn't know it now, but Cormanthor once teemed with centaurs. In the old days, if you rode a mile or two in any direction, chances were that you'd spot a centaur giving a lift to a hitchhiking halfling, or frolicking in a sunflower field with an elven child.

Not any more. A century ago, a plague swept through the midwood that caused several generations of centaurs to be born with their left hind feet three inches too short. The crippled colts could barely hobble, let alone run, making them easy pickings for dragons and other predators. Pleas for help went unanswered; the elves and halflings kept their distance, fearing they'd join the centaurs on the dragons' menu.

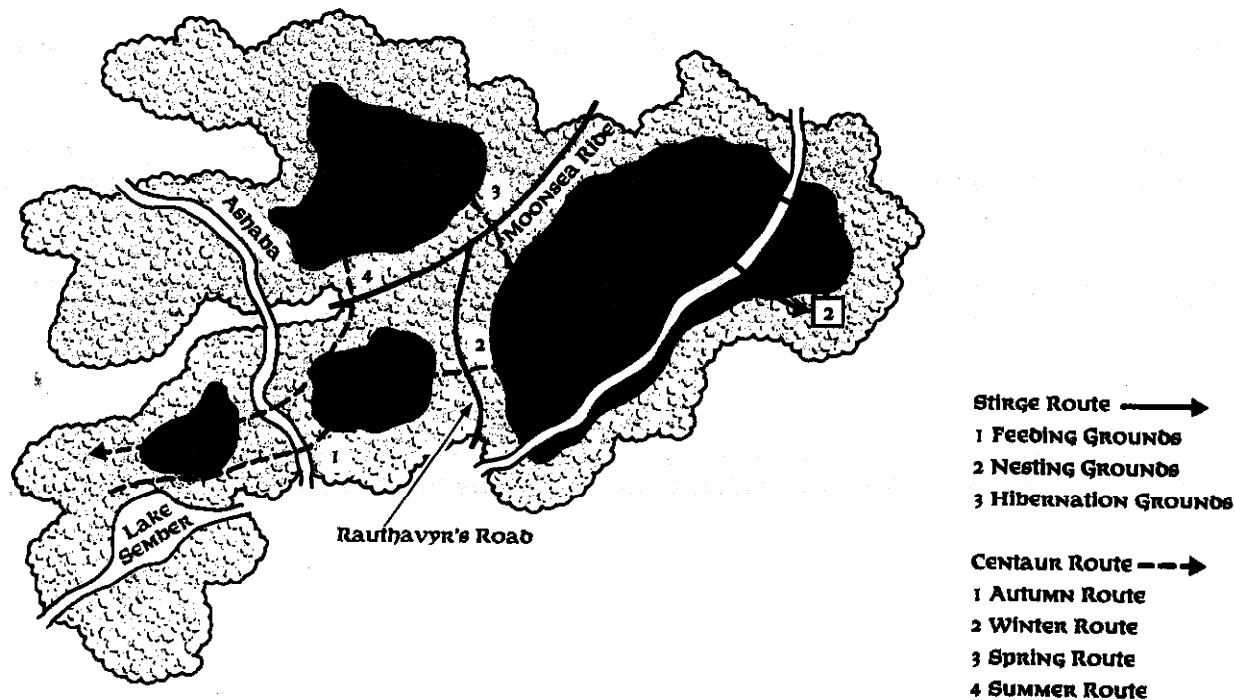
Within a few decades, the centaurs were all but wiped out. A population that had numbered in the thousands had been reduced to three tribes, each consisting of about a dozen families. Though eventually the plague played itself out and the dragons left for greener pastures, the legacy of death dramatically affected the behavior of the survivors.

Elsewhere in the world, centaurs tend to form self-contained communities, settling in glades and valleys which they seldom leave. The centaurs of Cormanthor, vowing never to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors, are constantly on the move. Staying in one place too long, they believe, invites trouble. The three tribes travel separately, each about a week behind the other.

Migrating centaurs follow a more or less fixed route. In the summer, they settle in the midwood south of Semberholme, a relatively reclusive area that provides ample clover for grazing and cool water from Lake Sember for drinking and bathing. They journey east at the end of summer, stopping in central starwood pastures for the autumn, then continuing into the East starwood where they spend the winter. In early spring, they move to the West starwood, circle



MIGRATION PATTERNS



Myth Drannor, then return to the Semberholme mid-wood before summer begins.

The centaurs have carved out trails through the starwood that enable them to quickly traverse the dense forest vegetation. Any traveler following these trails can expect to cross the starwood at about twice his normal speed—providing, of course, he can find the trails in the first place. *Hallucinatory terrain* interrupts the trails at regular intervals, making them indistinguishable from the surrounding trees and brush. The centaur leaders create these illusions with magical amulets, gifts from a friendly human priest sympathetic to their plight. An observant traveler, however, may detect the illusions by looking for abnormalities. In some places, the illusory maples are free of birds. In others, the illusory bluegrass doesn't move when the wind blows.

Unlike their amiable ancestors, Cormanthor centaurs are anxious, distrustful, and hostile. They refuse to associate, let alone cooperate, with other sentient creatures. Strangers are greeted with volleys of arrows tipped with fungal poison; earthen mounds along

their secret trails mark the graves of former trespassers. The tribes also maintain small flocks of falcons which they use as scouts and guards.

Despite their foul attitudes, centaurs live in harmony with the environment, taking care not to overgraze a clover field or deplete a favorite catfish pond. They particularly enjoy pears and peaches, and will stray from their migratory routes if they catch the scent of an orchard. If you're thinking of luring a centaur with fresh fruit, don't bother. With a single sniff, he can usually tell if a peach has been contaminated by a human's touch, even if the human was gloved.

Chimerae

Two types of chimerae stalk Cormanthor: the mean ones, and the really mean ones. You can't tell one from the other, except for their lips. The mean ones have black lips, the really mean ones have red lips.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.





For a chimera of any lip color, life in Cormanthor is one long picnic. Everywhere it goes, it has something to eat. The goat head can munch crabgrass in the rimwood. The lion head can hunt antelopes in the midwood. The starwood provides a veritable banquet for the dragon head; it can begin with an appetizer of wild dog, have a warthog or two for a main course, then snack on a halfling for dessert.

While chimerae in other parts of the world tend to remain in territories of 20 square miles or less, the Cormanthor chimera is a true nomad. It wanders from place to place, seemingly at random, led by its stomach. A chimera who welcomes the spring with a wolf dinner in Semerholme might drift east for three or four days, scoop trout and dogfish from the Ashaba, then flap toward Ashabendford. After a hot meal—perhaps an elven explorer, fried crispy black with dragon breath—it may head to the central starwood, lured by the aroma of bear cubs. By late autumn, it could end up in Elven Court, where it might evict a badger family from a hollow oak trunk, eat the badgers, then move in for a snooze. It may slumber for as long as two or three weeks before its rumbling stomach awakens it for another cycle of snacks.

It's no surprise that the Cormanthor chimera is easy on the environment. It never stays still long enough to deplete a food source, leaving plenty for other predators. It has a generally positive effect on animal populations, preferring to eat weak and dying animals instead of strong and healthy ones. Like all scavengers, the chimera helps reduce disease and keep the forest tidy by consuming corpses, bones, and other debris.

Because the Cormanthor chimera favors no particular habit and is usually too lazy to maintain its own lair, it can pop up anywhere. It can pounce on a traveler from a tree limb or burst from a pile of fallen leaves. To cool itself in the summer, the chimera likes to bury itself in soft mud. That lump by the river bank might decide to have you for lunch.

Thankfully, the surplus of food in Cormanthor has dulled the chimera's hunting skills. As often as not, a chimera would rather wait for new prey than pursue a victim with a head start. It would rather withdraw than continue a difficult battle. If injured, it would rather look for a soft bed of ferns than search for the enemy who harmed it.

A hungry chimera can be an angry chimera. Like many of the monsters in Cormanthor, the chimera has had little contact with humans and doesn't know enough to fear their weapons or magic. The average chimera considers the average human about as threatening as a butterfly and much more filling.

A chimera prefers to attack by swooping from the sky with slashing claws and snapping jaws, but the dense vegetation discourages aerial assaults. Instead, the chimera hides in tall grass or behind a thick oak, then charges, leading with its lion head. Using its forepaw, it swats with the force of a war hammer. While the roaring dragon head keeps the victim's companions at bay, the lion head sinks its teeth in the victim's neck, snapping it with a single yank. A mature chimera attacks so smoothly and efficiently that its goat head may sleep through the entire procedure.

Fortunately, the chimera seldom cooperates with others of his species, so travelers will rarely have to face more than one at a time. Only during mating season, typically late in the spring, do chimerae get together. Females hate everything about the process and do their best to elude the males. Mating usually takes place in the rimwood, where there are fewer places for the females to hide. Good thing, too, since the female thrashes and spews fire during mating, and there isn't much in the rimwood to knock down or burn. Should the couple spot a potential meal—say, a curious adventuring party—they'll interrupt their courtship, have dinner together, then resume their romance. The male will be just as eager as before, the female just as hysterically reluctant.

The female gives birth to as many as six young the following spring, depositing them wherever she happens to be at the time. A chimera makes a poor mother; though she produces black milk for several months, she nurses her brood for only a few days before abandoning them. She releases the excess milk while sleeping, often waking up in a pool of thick, dark liquid. Though most humanoids find chimera milk sour and undrinkable, orcs prize it as an intoxicant; a jug of chimera milk will often buy cooperation from an unfriendly orc party.

Now, about those red-lips . . .

All Cormanthor chimerae, regardless of lip color, like to fly to the top of the highest elms in the star-



wood, settle down in the leaves, and bask in the sun. About 10 percent of these chimerae are born with light pink lips. Invariably, the pink lips become sunburned, an indignity not suffered by their black, lipped cousins. The burned lips make eating extremely painful. Unable to enjoy their favorite pastime, the sunburned chimerae vent their frustration on any creature who gets in their way. They attack giant spiders, manticores, and even dragons, working themselves into a rage so out of control that their own well-being is no longer of consequence. A red-lipped chimera will not only fight to the death, it will pursue you the length of Cormanthor for the opportunity.

Dragons

A side from the red dragon I saw high-tailing out of Myth Drannor, I've had few other firsthand experiences with dragons. While I haven't actively looked for them—a practice as risky as juggling wasp nests—neither have they found me. Either I'm too old to eat, or there aren't that many here in the first place.

Since I'm sure a hungry dragon would be more than happy to have me for breakfast, I've concluded that dragons don't find Cormanthor all that hospitable. Why? Three reasons:

No Room: There's too many trees. A dragon couldn't fly 100 yards without colliding with an elm or bumping his head on a maple. While seemingly an ideal home for greens, the density of vegetation makes it difficult to get around. I suspect that the younger the green dragon, the more likely it is to lair in Cormanthor; by the time it reaches adulthood, it's probably ready for a roomier habitat.

No Food: A cousin of mine, who's made a study of such things, told me that a hundred years ago Cormanthor was crawling with green dragons. The dragons had a fondness for centaurs, who also occupied the forest in unprecedented numbers. The dragons feasted freely on the hapless centaurs and nearly drove them to extinction. The greens blamed each other for overharvesting their favorite food, culminating in an all-out war where they killed each other by the dozens, destroying a good chunk of the central starwood in the process. To this day, the

aroma of chlorine breath still lingers. The acres of toppled hickory trees now serve as lairs for adders and wood beetles.

Today, the few remaining dragons find themselves in competition with chimerae and other large carnivores for the same food. A Cormanthor dragon may be forced to spend most of his time hunting; it takes a lot of hedgehogs and woodchucks to fill a dragon belly.

No Treasure: If dragons lusted for pine needles and daffodils instead of diamonds and gold pieces, Cormanthor would be a godsend. These woods lack the quantity of jewels and precious metals necessary to keep an avaricious dragon content, and with the exception of Myth Drannor, Cormanthor has few suitable cities to raid.

Of course, dragons do exist here, as they do virtually everywhere in the world. I discovered one quite by accident about a day's ride north of Myth Drannor. On a gorgeous spring morning, I had climbed to the top of a birch-covered hill in search of catmint to season a stew. In the valley below, I saw a gold dragon roughly the size of a small castle, head in hand, listening intently to a pair of elves at his feet. The elves gestured wildly, pointing accusing fingers at one another; I was too far away to make out their words. An hour later, the dragon lifted his head into the air and roared loud enough to rattle the trees. The dragon snatched one of the elves, then soared away into the clouds, leaving the other elf gaping in astonishment. Elminster later told me that I had witnessed a trial adjudicated by His Resplendence Lareth, the King of Justice, ruler of the gold dragons. The King had settled an elven dispute by carrying off the guilty party, probably to a prison in the Great Desert.

Undoubtedly, a few dragons still roam Cormanthor, but you're going to have to look hard to find them. A few observations, courtesy of my cousin, you might find useful:

- The green dragons of Cormanthor retain their love of centaur flesh. Unlike, say, red dragons, who devour centaurs whole, the greens find the tails distasteful. Should you see a tail that appears to have been ripped or nipped from a centaur's body, take it as a sign of a green in the area.
- Satyrs of the elven woods consider it good luck to





spot a dragon in a rainstorm. Though I don't believe such a sighting actually affects one's fortune, this information may still come in handy. If you can convince a group of satyrs you've seen a rain-soaked dragon, they may more inclined to cooperate, hoping your "luck" will rub off on them.

- If a green dragon's eyes dart from side to side, it's in the mood for vegetation. If the eyes stare straight ahead, it's hankering for meat. Remember, though, that a hungry dragon will probably settle for whatever food happens to be available.
- If you think you saw a dragon, you probably did.

Fyreflies

Cormanthon must have the world's dumbest insects. To cool off, shrub beetles jump into the Ashaba, float until their spongy wings become engorged with water, then sink and drown. Seeking shade, horse crickets march into the open mouths of bluetail snakes where they're promptly swallowed.

Cormanthon fyreflies make shrub beetles look like geniuses. Most of the time, fyreflies are content to flit about the rimwood, gorging on cornflower pollen by day, flickering themselves silly by night. On clear summer evenings, however, fyreflies gather in frenzied swarms, rolling across the landscape and zig-zagging through the sky like uncontrollable fire-balls. The swarms scorch everything in their paths, leaving behind broad swaths of smoking grass, blackened trees, and incinerated animals. The random devastation continues until the swarms dissipate from sheer exhaustion, or they scatter in the rays of the rising sun.

Have you ever seen an evening sky so rich with stars that it looks as if the gods had strewn the heavens with buckets of diamonds? It's just such a night that drives fyreflies out of their minds. They mistake the stars for rival flies trespassing on their territory. When attempts to drive off the stars with fiery displays and threatening motions invariably fail, the swarm's frustration turns to blind rage.

The flies' reaction could be dismissed as humorous, even pathetic, were it not for the tragic consequences. Fyrefly swarms cause more fires than lightning, care-

less travelers, or any other forest creature; even chimerae and cockatrices have enough sense not to burn down their own habitats.

Two summers ago, a swarm ignited a pine forest in the rimwood south of Shadowdale, destroying the primary nesting ground of the needle wrens. As the needle wrens were primarily responsible for keeping the area's locust population in check, Shadowdale farmers now fear a locust plague; a swarm of locusts can chew up a corn field in a matter of hours. Nearly all the game fish in an Elvenflow tributary were killed following a fyrefly fire that burned down a beech grove; the fish that weren't poisoned by ashes died from the high temperatures. A rimwood fire east of Hap not only wiped out every last blade of peppergrass, it also seared the topsoil; autumn winds dried out and blew away the upper layers, spring rain washed away the rest. The area now consists of 40 square miles of dust.

Efforts to control the fyreflies have been futile. Rangers introduced giant wasps into fyrefly territory, hoping the wasps would eat the flies' favorite cornflower pollen and force them to move on. The fireflies learned to eat dried pigweed and quack grass instead. Fyreflies lay eggs in such massive quantities—I saw a wild pig suffocate when it fell into a hole filled with wriggling larvae and couldn't get out—that destroying their nests is a waste of time. I heard of an elven mage named Horquine who spent years trying to breed azmyths with a taste for fyreflies. Though each Horquine azmyth reportedly consumed triple its weight in fyreflies every day, the effect on the fyrefly population was incidental at best. Worse, the azmyths were unable to digest the flies' abdomens, the source of the magical flames. The azmyths expelled the organs as a blast of fire. Having never seen one, I can't say if these fire-blasting azmyth actually exist, but in the witch hazel groves of the eastern rimwood—a favorite azmyth roost—I've seen enough charred branches to make me wonder.



Fyrefly Swarm

Int animal; AL CN; AC 8; MV FL 18 (A); HD see below; #AT 1; Dmg see below; THAC0 see below; SZ individual 2" long; swarm, see below; ML 6; XP see below.

To determine the size of a fyrefly swarm, roll 1d100 and multiply the result by 100. To approximate the volume of a swarm, assume there are 10 fyreflies per cubic foot. Generally, fyrefly swarms form only on starry nights. They attack randomly until the sun rises, they're defeated in combat, or 2d4 hours pass, whichever occurs first. The swarm sets afire all flammable substances it touches.

A victim in contact with the swarm has an 80 percent chance per round of being stung or bitten, suffering 1 point of damage. Additionally, he has a 100 percent chance of suffering 2d4 points of fire damage, unless he saves vs. spell, in which case he suffers no damage. A victim within five feet of the swarm must save vs. spell or suffer 1d4 points of heat damage.

Each point of damage inflicted on the swarm kills 1d20 fyreflies. If half the swarm is killed, the survivors scatter. *Darkness, 15' radius* and similar spells that completely or partially obscure the swarm's view of the stars also scatter them. If an entire swarm is killed, award 3,000 experience points.

GORGON

Heady spring rains can cause the Ashaba and Elvenflow to rise, spill over their banks, and flood the surrounding areas. The shallow floods don't do much damage, however, aside from washing out some flower beds and a few ant colonies.

Within a week or so, the water recedes. Left behind are hundreds of fish and frogs, flopping helplessly in the mud. Some manage to find their way back to the water, but most die of exposure.

The aroma invariably attracts curious gorgons, who love the taste of fish but ordinarily have no access to them—gorgons swim like cows fly. The gorgons spend a few days stuffing themselves with grounded fish

before depleting the supply. Most of the gorgons wander back into the woods, but a few remain on the shore, gazing longingly into the river. The lure becomes too great for some; they ease themselves into the water, gulping minnows and tadpoles, edging out a little farther, then farther yet, until finally they're in up to their noses. One slip on the muddy bottom, and it's all over; the gorgons plunge helplessly into the river and are swallowed by the currents. Unable to swim, they sink like bricks.

The benevolent Hexad have imbued Cormanthor gorgons with a safeguard. Within minutes after submerging, the gorgons turn to solid stone and enter a state of dormancy. The dormant gorgons settle on the bottom of the river where they can exist indefinitely, requiring neither air nor food.

Occasionally, powerful currents may wash a dormant gorgon ashore. If rain cleans away the grime and the sun warms its hide, the gorgon will revive, refreshed and as good as new, though perhaps a bit disoriented. More likely, however, a dormant gorgon will remain underwater until someone retrieves it. A diver may mistake it for a valuable statue. A fisherman may snag it, believing he's caught the world's heaviest bullhead. If cleaned up and allowed to dry out, a dormant gorgon will come roaring back to life, usually to the shock of its rescuers.

Owlbear

Like too many selfish, short-sighted species, the owlbears of Cormanthor ate up all the rabbits, serpents, and wolves in their starwood habitats as fast as they could. About a decade ago, it dawned on them that the days of unlimited food were gone. Faced with a dwindling population—and perhaps extinction—they'd either have to move on or wise up.

Too stubborn to relocate and too pea-brained to get any smarter, the owlbears blundered into salvation by becoming insect farmers. On a routine hunt in the central starwood, an owlbear pack chanced across a pit containing a fallen oak tree, the rotten wood infested with giant harvester termites. The owlbears killed a few termites by smashing them with rocks, then fished them out with sticks. They found the termites reasonably tasty but not particularly filling.





A month later, the owlbears returned to the pit. Now it was crawling with larvae. Thousands of termites had hatched since the owlbears' previous visit. The owlbears dumped in some rotting limbs and wet leaves, then sat at the edge of the pit, fascinated by the tiny insects chewing on the soft wood. Occasionally, the owlbears scooped up and swallowed handfuls of larvae. By the day's end, the owlbears had decided the larvae weren't half bad, and were certainly much easier to catch than wolves.

In the following weeks, the owlbears continued to dump rotten wood in the pit, and the termite colony continued to grow. The owlbears killed the soldier termites as soon as they hatched, since the soldiers had the annoying habit of spewing flammable liquid. The owlbears created more colonies by digging new pits and adding adult termites. The practice spread to other owlbear packs. Soon, owlbears throughout the starwood were subsisting on homegrown termites. The owlbear population stabilized, then slowly began to expand.

Owlbears eat adult termites by crushing them, eating the tender innards, then tossing the empty shells back in the pit. Owlbear saliva mixed with the decomposing termite shells has the fortuitous effect of attracting wild horses, who are irresistibly drawn to the aroma. Owlbears learned to hide behind trees near the termite pits, wait for a horse to investigate the odor, then dash from the trees and shove the horse into the pit. If the horse happened to be carrying a rider, so much the better. With a regular diet of termites, horses, and riders, the owlbears have never been more content—or better fed.

Interestingly, pyrolisks are also attracted to the termite pits and use them as nesting grounds. The owlbears despise the trespassing pyrolisks, but leave them alone—the owlbears would rather give up a pit than risk incineration. Once a pyrolisk hen finds a suitable pit—usually a smaller one, no more than 5 feet in diameter—she makes herself at home by eating all the adult termites, then scatters a few gems and other shiny objects around the rotten wood for decoration. After laying one or two speckled eggs, the hen abandons the nest. The hatchlings subsist on the termite larvae until they're old enough to fend for themselves, a period lasting a few weeks.

Should the gems scattered among the wood tempt

you into disturbing the nest, think again. Though hatchling pyrolisks can't attack—and the termite larvae pose no threat—panicky hatchlings can still cast *pyrotechnics*. The spell can ignite the soldier larvae, causing the pit to spew flames and roast the hatchlings, the larvae, and anyone who happens to be standing around.

Termite Pit Fires

If ignited, a larval harvester termite pit spews a geyser of fire 10-20 feet high. The geyser burns for 2d4 rounds. Any creature in contact with the geyser suffers 4d4 points of damage; assume all termite larvae and pyrolisk hatchlings are incinerated. Any creature or character within 5 feet of the geyser suffers 1d4 points of damage.

Shambling Mounds

You wouldn't think the width of a blueberry stem could cause so much trouble, but it did.

In the depths of the East starwood, a few miles north of Halfaxe Trail, grows a hundred acres of blueberry shrubs. Until they ripen, the berries are inedible, pale green and hard as stone. By late spring, the berries turn purple and swell to the size of watermelons. And the taste—imagine the sweetest blueberry you've ever eaten, glazed in honey with just a hint of cinnamon. Truly exquisite.

At one time, a small tribe of elves and dozens of shambling mounds subsisted on these berries. It was an unusual living arrangement, to say the least, since shambling mounds rarely congregate with others of their kind, let alone with other species. Thanks to the abundance and quality of the berries, the mounds and elves got along just fine. They ate at their leisure from summer through autumn, then stockpiled berries to get them through the winter. Spring brought a fresh crop.

One starless summer night, a couatl spiraled from the sky and crashed into the berry field. It died on impact, but not even the force of its landing could explain its strange markings and coloration. Both the mounds and the elves refused to examine the creature's remains any closer, convinced that they'd seen



too much already. The superstitious elves were afraid of it, and the mounds, who might be tempted to eat it in other circumstances, were suspicious of its strange smell and stuck with the berries. In time, the corpse decomposed and was absorbed into the earth. The mysterious couatl was soon forgotten.

The following spring, the blueberries blossomed as usual. Days before the berries matured, their stems stretched and broke, and the unripened berries fell to the ground. The elves and mounds watched helplessly as one by one, the berries dropped, the thin stems unable to support their weight. Within a month, the entire crop was ruined.

The elves examined the bushes and discovered a brown dust covering the stems. The decomposing couatl had infected the field with a form of vine blight that had caused the stems to elongate.

The elves blamed their leader for the crop loss, and at the urging of the leader's lieutenant, crushed his skull with a rock. The lieutenant, an evil priest who called himself Blackjackal, assumed leadership of the tribe. He convinced several of the shambling mounds to become allies. The elves and mounds now roam the starwood, assaulting innocents in the name of the dark god Talos.

The remaining mounds stayed behind, hoping the field would recover. Eventually it did, but not before the impatient mounds ate the old berries. The tainted berries caused the mounds' bodies to stretch until they resembled immense serpents, head and hands on one end, legs on the other. These serpentine shambling mounds still dwell in the area, nesting in mossy trees, guarding their blueberry field from trespassers.





Serpentine Shambling Mound

Int low; AL CN; AC 0; MV 9; HD 11; #AT 2 or 1; Dmg 2-16/2-16 or constriction; SA constriction (normal attack roll to encoil, then victim automatically suffers 2d4 points of damage per round, unless freed with 60 total points of Strength, victim's Strength included); SD immune to fire and blunt weapons, suffers half damage from cold (no damage if saving throw succeeds), half damage from piercing and slashing weapons; each lightning-based attack used against it adds 1 foot in length and 1 HD (plus appropriate hit points); regeneration (fully recovers lost hit points in 12 hours) THAC0 9; SZ L (30' + long); ML 18; XP 10,000.

Stirges

Stirges roost everywhere; where there's a blood supply, there's probably a stirge colony. Each colony follows its own migratory route, beginning in a forested area staked out by the adult feeders. A map elsewhere in this book shows the route of a typical colony.

A colony's feeding grounds usually comprise a square mile of trees occupied by a sizable population of birds and mammals. By day, the stirges hang by their feet from the highest limbs in the area, sound asleep. By night, they suck blood from slumbering dogs, goats, and pheasants, avoiding bears and other large animals who might put up a fight.

Within a few months, the stirges will have begun to deplete the food supply. Prey becomes harder to find. Older, weaker stirges begin to die off. Fortunately, female stirges outnumber males, ten to one; by summer's end, half the females are ready to lay eggs.

Stirges won't lay eggs in their feeding grounds, fearing competition from their own young. Early in the fall, the pregnant females migrate to a distant locale to deposit their eggs. Since they prefer barren fields, they often choose a site in the rimwood. Each female lays hundreds of eggs in a shallow hole, which she sloppily covers with a few inches of dirt and brush. The exhausted females then fly to a secluded forest for a few weeks of hibernation. Meanwhile, badgers and wild pigs are busy digging up the unprotected stirge

eggs. All told, the stirges will lose about 90 percent of their eggs to predators.

By the beginning of spring, the dozing mothers awaken and fly back to their feeding grounds. In the interim, the bird and mammal population has revived somewhat, providing the returning females with fresh food. The food supply is almost always less than it was the year before. Sooner or later, the region will no longer be able to support the entire colony. Some stirges engage in cannibalism. A few relocate while others simply starve, too lazy or too dim-witted to move on.

Meanwhile, the hatchling stirges, who emerge from their eggs in midsummer, migrate in a random direction. This frequently means flying 100 miles or more to establish their own feeding grounds. The cycle continues.

The broken shells of stirge eggs usually contain droplets of a greasy green jelly that developing stirges use for nourishment. Adult stirges find this jelly repulsive, possibly because they associate it with the demands of parenthood. A traveler can repel stirge attacks by smearing this jelly over his exposed flesh. The jelly from a dozen eggs will protect an average-sized human for an entire day. It smells bad, sort of a cross between pig's breath and rotten cabbage, but if you're truly interested in avoiding a nest full of stirges, you'll get used to it.

Treants

Treants thrive in Cormanthor, and not just because of the environment. Sure, the sun keeps them warm and well fed, and the frequent rains give them more than enough to drink, but if the treants hadn't established mutually beneficial relationships with other species, there might be a lot fewer of them.

Like a normal tree, the treant depends on the health of its wood for survival. While the wood may appear to be as solid as stone, it's actually laced with tiny tubes. The tubes transmit food, manufactured in the leaves, throughout the treant's body. The tubes also carry water from the roots. If the tubes break down, the treant dies.

It's no wonder, then, that treants fear *tube wilt* more than any other disease. Caused by tiny spores in the soil, tube wilt enters the treant through the roots. Once inside the trunk, the spores multiply rapidly and



become fungal growths that feed on the heartwood, the core of the trunk that contains most of the food tubes. The treant literally rots from the inside out. Within a few months, the treant collapses, its trunk too weak to support the weight of its limbs. It dies an agonizing death shortly thereafter.

Cormanthor treants have successfully combatted tube wilt by serving as hosts to a special species of rot grub with a voracious appetite for rotten wood. A treant suffering from a tube wilt infection opens a small crack near the base of its trunk, then stuffs the crack with decaying bark. Rot grubs, attracted by the bark, enter the crack and worm their way inside the treant. The grubs burrow through the trunk, eating both the rotten wood and the fungi. Thereafter, the grubs remain inside the treant, keeping the treant free of decay and preventing a recurrence of tube wilt. The grub burrows don't harm the treant; in fact, they seem to enhance the flow of water and nutrients. Older treants may house hundreds of grubs. A woodsman attempting to chop down a treant may be greeted with a shower of grubs when his ax splits the bark.

Bark-eating creatures, such as woodchucks and certain types of wild horses, also pose a threat to treants. To scare off predators, many treants surround the bases of their trunks with a special species of violet fungus. Unlike normal violet fungi, which are 4-7 feet tall and almost exclusively subterranean, Cormanthor violet fungi rarely exceed 3 feet in height and grow on the forest floor. Tiny tendrils extend from the base of the fungi, tap into the treant's roots, and worm upward into the treant's trunk. The fungus lives on the treant's sap.

Should a predator threaten the treant, the fungus flails with its branches, attempting to rot the predator's flesh. A treant may be surrounded by as many as six violet fungi, but two or three are typical. When the treant moves, its fungi move with it.

Treants also risk damage from bark beetles, which burrow under the bark to lay eggs, and leaf ants, which chew holes in the leaves. To deal with these pests, treants encourage azmyths and large bats to nest in their limbs. The azmyths and bats enjoy the privacy of the treant's leafy crown, and feast on banquets of fat beetles and crunchy ants.

Black squirrels also make their homes in the treant's thick foliage. The squirrels enjoy nibbling on the female treant's off-shoot stalks. The stalks that survive

the nibbling eventually become new treants. Since Cormanthor treants almost always generate more stalks than the forest can support, the squirrels help limit the population.

So what are the chances of finding a treant with all of these creatures? It depends on where you look.

The birch treants of the rimwood—identifiable by their smooth white bark—usually have rot grubs in the trunk, purple fungi around the base, and azmyths and black squirrels in the branches. These treants grow exceptionally long roots to get to the deep water table, anchoring them in place for periods as long as six months; they need all the help they can get to survive. The sap of the birch treants has a delectable aroma, a combination of lemon and mint. It can be used to make perfumes and food flavoring.

Most midwood treants resemble golden willow and black locust trees. Webs of deep grooves cover the bark. The midwood treants share the attitude of treants elsewhere in the world: generally passive, but quick to confront evil. Many have violet fungi guardians, necessary to protect them from brush rats bent on digging nests under their trunks. Black squirrel tenants are also common. Midwood treant bark can be boiled to produce gold and black dyes.

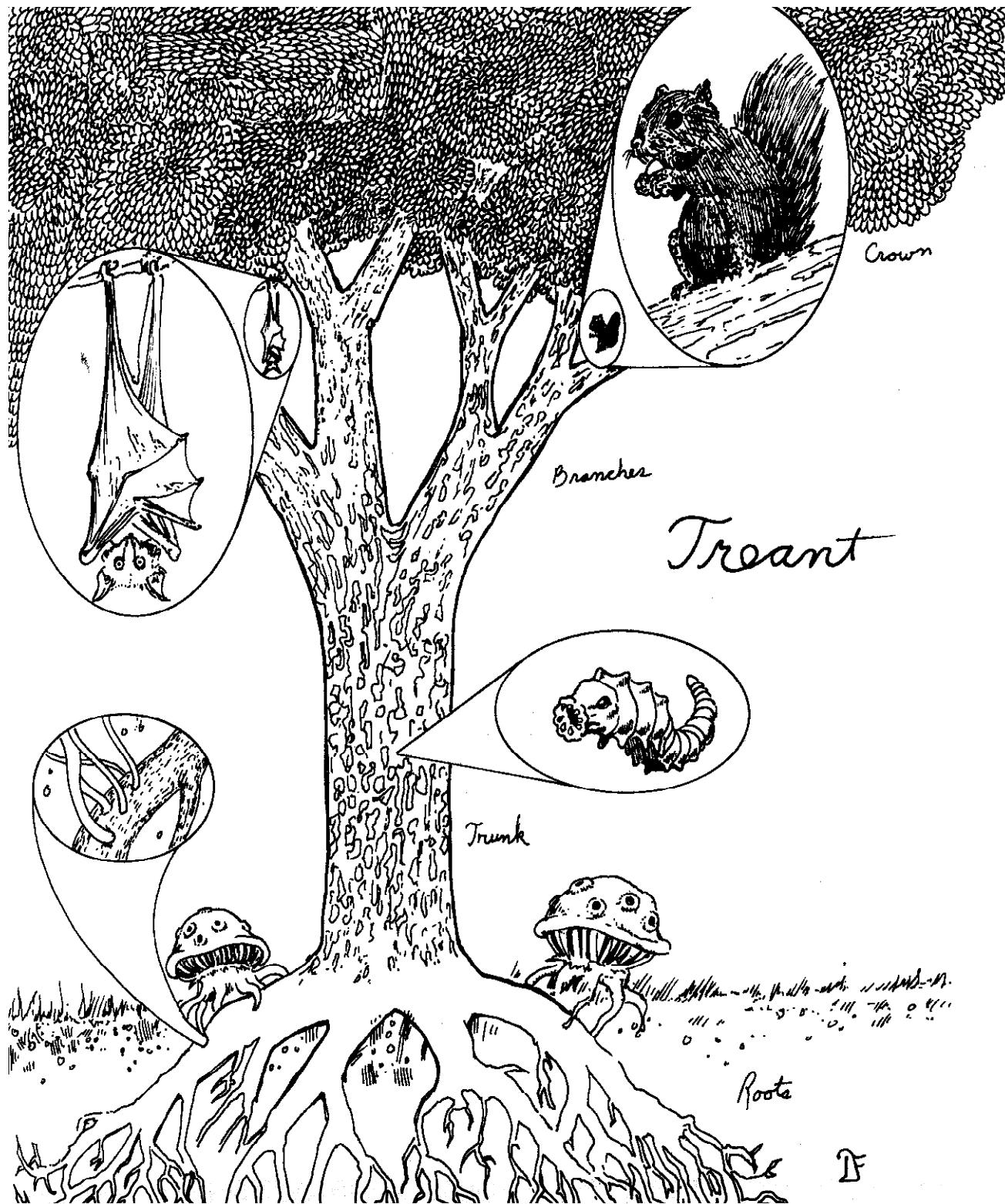
Starwood treants look like dark brown oaks and mist gray elms. All have diamond-shaped patterns etched into their bark. About half share the midwood treants' docile personality and hatred of evil. The other half tend to be hostile; the starwood contain so many potential enemies that the treants prefer to strike first and negotiate later. A starwood treant may contain any combination of rot grubs, violet fungi, azmyths, and black squirrels. The leaves, when eaten, will cure certain fever plagues.

Cormanthor Violet Fungus

Int non-; AL N; AC 4; MV 1; HD 2; #AT 1-2; Dmg successful tendril attack rots flesh in one round unless a successful saving throw vs. poison is rolled or a *cure disease* spell is used; THAC0 19; SZ S (3'); ML 12; XP 120.

Cormanthor violet fungus flails with 1-2 tentacles, each 1 foot long. Except for the smaller size, it resembles a normal violet fungus in all other respects.







Water Nagas

The water naga undergoes a rigorous—some would say gruesome—series of transformations from egg to adult. To the unwary, each state poses a threat.

Adult water naga spend the winter hibernating in deep holes dug in the floors of ponds or rivers. They emerge in early spring and, after eating a hearty meal of frogs and fish, mate underwater. The female lays 100-500 eggs in the deepest area of the pond, then covers them with mud. The mud conceals the eggs and keeps them warm.

Water naga eggs resemble dark green spheres, about 3 inches in diameter, coated with a protective layer of clear jelly. The jelly provides nutrients for the developing naga and also deters predators. If touched, the coating attaches to the predator's flesh. In a matter of minutes, the predator's body transforms into naga egg jelly. Despite this unique defense, rarely do more than half of the eggs hatch; about 30 percent are infertile, another 20 percent fall victim to low temperatures and various diseases. If you fish an egg from the water—use a staff or a metal pole—the coating will dry out and become inert in about an hour. The dried coating can be used as an antidote for crystal ooze poison. By mid-spring, the naga eggs begin to hatch. A typical hatchling looks like a foot-long black worm with a pointed head and a circle of spikes around its neck. It breathes water with four pair of gills under its chin.

Hatchlings spend the daylight hours resting on the floor of the pond, then rise at night to feed on minnows and decayed plants. When a predator approaches, the hatchling becomes as rigid as stone. The rigid hatchling thrusts itself at the predator like a tiny spear, its neck spines erect. If the predator survives the attack, the hatchling can withdraw and try again. Perhaps a fourth of the hatchling naga survive this stage; the rest are consumed by giant carp and other carnivorous fish.

If you catch a hatchling—they occasionally attach to fishing lines—strip off the neck spikes with a sharp blade. A handful of spikes, when ground to powder and consumed, gives you the effect of a *true seeing* spell, enabling you to see all things as they actually are.

The hatchlings grow quickly, reaching a length of 10 feet in a matter of weeks. During this time, their neck spikes fall out, and they begin to acquire their characteristic scales (emerald green in reticulated patterns with pale jade green) and red spikes along the length of their spine. They also grow lizardlike legs, a pair at each end. Lungs develop, enabling the adolescent naga to crawl ashore and breathe air. Though it can still breathe water, the naga spends most of its adolescence on land, creeping through the grass for rats and slithering up trees for bluebirds.

All but the most ferocious predators, such as chimerae and dragons, avoid the adolescent naga. If the naga can't frighten them away, it can usually outrun them; the naga's legs allow it to move as fast as a jackal. The intact hide of an adolescent naga, including the leg skin, can bring as much as 5,000 gold pieces from collectors.

By late summer the adolescent has grown to its full 20-foot length. At this time, the naga enters its final stage by shedding its outer layer of skin. It scrapes against rocks or other sharp projections until the skin peels off in a single piece. Its head comes off as well, along with its legs. A tiny bud resembling a miniature human skull appears where the serpent head used to be. Over the next few days, the skull expands and becomes covered with scaly flesh. The water naga is now mature. The shed skin, complete with serpent head and legs, can fetch 35,000 gold pieces or more.

The mature water naga can breathe both water and air. It kills prey, usually mammals such as wolves and wild dogs, with its poison bite or constrictive coils. It often lures victims with magically created traps. The water naga of the Elvenflow lurk in shallow tributaries obscured with *wall of fog*. Those living near the Ashaba hide in elm trees, ensnare victims with *web*, then drop from the branches. I've heard of water naga mating with couatl north of Myth Drannor, their offspring having the abilities of both parents, but as far as I know, it's only a rumor.





Elven Forest Water Naga

Egg: Int non; AL N; AC 8; MV 0; HD 2 hp; #AT 0; Dmg nil; THAC0 nil; SA if touched, the coating attaches to living flesh and turns the victim to jelly in 1-4 rounds (no resurrection possible); does not affect wood, metal, or other nonliving materials; victim can save himself by scraping or cutting off the jelly, freezing it, or burning it; *cure disease* destroys the jelly; SD takes half damage from blunt and piercing weapons; SZ T (3" diameter); ML nil; XP 35.

Hatching: Int low ; AL N; AC 7; MV Sw 12; HD 1 + 2; #AT 1 (if attack is successful, the hatchling must spend the following round pulling itself free from the victim's flesh); Dmg 2d4; THAC0 18; SZ T (1' long) ML 7; XP 65.

Adolescent: Int average ; AL N; AC 6; MV 12, Sw 15; HD 4 + 4; #AT 2; Dmg 1-2 (bite)/1-4 (constriction); THAC0 17; SA if victim is encoiled on a successful hit, the victim is constricted every round thereafter, suffering an automatic 1-4 points of damage; constricted humanoids can escape with a successful open doors roll at a -2 penalty; SZ L (10' feet long); ML 9; XP 270.

Mature: Int very ; AL N; AC 4; MV 9, Sw 18; HD 11; #AT 2; Dmg 1-4 (bite)/2d4 (constriction); THAC0 9 SA if victim is encoiled on a successful hit, the victim is constricted every round thereafter, suffering an automatic 2d4 points of damage; constricted humanoids can escape with a successful open doors roll at a -4 penalty); can cast spells as a 5th-level wizard; SZ H (20' feet long); ML 11; XP 5,000.

Worgs

The worg occupies an enviable position in the food chain. It's large and strong enough to bring down wild boars, yet small and quick enough to elude chimerae and other predators. No wonder the worg thrives here, particularly in the North starwood where they're as thick as rabbits.

Though the starwood provide a comfortable habitat for the worg, with plenty of game and more than enough brush for lairs, it also poses a problem. Every autumn the oaks cover the forest floor with a carpet of leaves as high as the worg's neck. Not only do the leaves hamper the worg's movement, they also make it difficult for the worg to stalk prey. An alert deer can hear a worg crunching through brittle leaves a hundred yards away.

The worg has solved this dilemma with a clever adaptation, the result of a gift from the Hexad, the effect of residual magic from Myth Drannor, or perhaps a combination of both. Worgs of Cormanthor have developed the ability to walk on top of fallen leaves, hovering a fraction of an inch above the surface. Additionally, they can walk on fresh snow without sinking, run through a muddy field without leaving tracks, even dash across the surface of a pond without getting their feet wet. Worgs can use this ability at will; a worg can swim or bury itself in leaves whenever it likes.

Worgs occasionally allow goblins to use them as mounts. However, Cormanthor worgs are notoriously cranky. Should a goblin make excessive demands of a worg—such as ordering it to leave the comfort of the starwood—it is as likely to devour its rider as comply.

Worg Surprise Bonus

When a Cormanthor worg moves across the top of fallen leaves, fresh snow, water, or similar surfaces, its opponents suffer a -4 penalty to their surprise rolls.



Part Three: Rumors

Below, I offer an assortment of tips, speculations, and dispatches regarding Cormanthor, some from reliable sources, some just idle chitchat. I haven't had the time or, to be honest, the inclination to verify any of these. Consider them interesting leads or dire warnings, and proceed accordingly.

War of The Oaks

The otherwise docile dryads of the central starwood have been rallying sympathetic satyrs, pixies, elves, and druids to stave off an impending attack by an army of gnolls who want to demolish the dryads' oak grove for a gnollish cemetery. The gnolls' effort has attracted the interest of a nearby community of jackalweres, who wish to re-establish their dominance in the area.

Theft of The Treasure Tree

A band of ogres has discovered the golden treasure tree south of Elventree. One of the ogres flung an ax at a deer, missed, and hit a large oak. The split bark revealed the gold beneath. The band's chieftain, an exceptionally intelligent ogre named Horukk, used a magical pendant recovered from the ruins of Myth Drannor to enslave a family of unicorns. He is forcing them to haul the treasure tree to the ogres' lair in the East starwood.

Cool Wolfwere

A species of wolfwere residing in the midwood south of Lake Sember has developed a unique ability to keep away insects. The wolfwere's fur radiates cold, lowering the air temperature sufficiently to kill fleas and lice. Entrepreneurs are offering sizeable rewards for samples of this fur, which they believe can be used to manufacture self-cooling coats and trousers.

Strange Magic

A band of evil druids in East starwood have created bizarre new spells that will enable them to triple the reproduction rate of chimerae, poison the waters of the Semberflow, and create spontaneous ice storms at any forest location. The druids' motives are unknown, but it is feared they will attempt to extort treasure and allegiance from the sentient beings of Cormanthor.

Aquatic Menace

Underwater choke creepers in the Ashaba threaten to deplete the river of frogs and fish. Animals that depend on these creatures for food risk starvation. Worse, without frogs and fish to eat them, the insect population may swell. An increase in insects may result in an increase in diseases, particularly those carried by mosquitoes.

Fire Bug

A vengeful priest, angry at the lack of interest in his Talos cult, has vowed to burn down Cormanthor. He employs a special *summon insects* spell to gather immense swarms of fireflies in areas of dry brush, then drives them into a frenzy with *faerie fire* and *light* spells. The aggravated insects ignite the brush, and the fire soon spreads to the surrounding trees. The priest has already incinerated hundreds of acres of beech trees in the midwood west of the River Lis. Next, he plans to burn a willow grove in the midwood south of the Standing Stone, said to be the homeland of benevolent sprites.

Armed Naga

Explorers have found dozens of wild horse skeletons in the midwood along the western banks of the Ashaba. Huge spears, fashioned from black walnut limbs, were lodged in the horses' ribs.





A previously unknown type of spirit naga used the horses for target practice. Crossbreeds of normal spirit naga and Cormanthor water naga, these creatures resemble 15-foot serpents with human heads, stringy hair, black scales, and functional arms. They have the poisonous bite, *charm* gaze, and evil disposition of spirit naga, along with the spellcasting abilities of water naga. They are also learning to use weapons, beginning with crude spears tipped with a poison made from the jelly covering water naga eggs.

Though normal egg jelly hardens when removed from water, the naga have treated the jelly to remain moist and potent indefinitely. Additionally, instead of turning the victim's flesh to jelly, the coated spears rot the flesh, leaving nothing behind but bones. The naga are also rumored to be developing an arrow that changes into a poisonous serpent moments after being fired from a bow.

Noisy Neighbor

A family of elves in the western starwood is being tormented by the ceaseless screams of a cockatrice nesting in the hollow of a nearby oak. While the cockatrice was away hunting, a band of grigs stole her eggs as a practical joke. The despondent cockatrice has been shrieking ever since. The elves can't stand the racket, but they're afraid to go near the cockatrice and are also leery of the grigs. They're willing to pay a sizeable reward to anyone who can shut up the cockatrice, either by returning her eggs (the elves know where the grigs live) or destroying her.

Rendezvous with Kyrach

Kyrach, an eccentric druid who lives in the central starwood, seeks help in capturing a dragonne, which he intends to tame and use for a mount. He will reward his helper with a map that shows the location of a secret cache of rubies in a cavern beneath Myth Drannor. However, Kyrach refuses to cooperate with anyone who uses metal weapons or armor, which he deems "unnatural."

Those seeking to associate with Kyrach will have to leave sword and shield behind.

The 100-Yard Behir

An immense granite statue of a behir, nearly 100 yards long, winds through the starwood west of Myth Drannor. Is it a sculpture created by ambitious artisans, or perhaps the idol of a long-defunct serpent cult? Is it a genuine couatl, its gargantuan size and stony body the result of bizarre experiments by Myth Drannan wizards? Explorers may enter the behir's open mouth to find out what's inside. The behir may contain vast treasures, deadly creatures, or a combination of both. Removal of a particular treasure may trigger a reaction that transforms the granite body back to flesh, enabling the gargantuan behir to live again.

Vanished Centaurs

One of the three known centaur tribes of Cormanthor has disappeared. Not a single member of the tribe has been seen in a month. The remaining centaurs are understandably concerned. Some say that a magical disease infected the tribe and caused them to shrink; a friendly elf swears he saw chipmunk-sized centaurs galloping through the underbrush of the central starwood. Others fear that a recent thunderstorm caused a portal to appear; the portal swallowed the tribe and transported them to another plane of existence. Still others fear that green dragons have again infested Cormanthor; the dragons ate the entire tribe, and it's only a matter of time before the rest of the centaurs fall victim.

Unwelcome Tenant

Families of stirges have taken up occupancy in the branches of a grove of rimwood treants, driving out the azmyths and black squirrels who used to live there. Without the azmyths and squirrels, the treants are more susceptible to disease and destruction. As fast as the treants drive the stirges from the branches, others arrive to take their place. The treants believe that the green jelly from stirge eggs may solve their dilemma; if the jelly is applied to the treants' trunks, the stirges will be repelled. Because travel is difficult for the treants, they need someone else to find the eggs and retrieve the jelly.



Anauroch

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A Great Man's Journeys

Ghe man known as Ibn Al'Arif was not easy to track down. Once found, he remained largely and maddeningly deaf to entreaties for cooperation. His stubbornness and pride are great faults, not only of the individual, but of all his people; in fact, these characteristics demonstrate the failure his folk will always make of diplomacy and coordinated endeavors . . . but I digress. Nevertheless, Ibn Al'Arif's aid in compiling information regarding the strange desert of Anauroch proved invaluable. In fact, I would deem it impossible to attempt a similar task without his aid. There exists, in all likelihood, no one who knows as much about the desert, and the secrets

that it holds, as does he. These secrets are many, and some are quite startling. To be sure, more stirs in the savage realm of Anauroch than first meets the eye.

Ibn Al'Arif—translated, the name means Son of the Great Lore—refused to speak of his life's history in an organized fashion. He would tell what he had seen and learned, but nothing of what he has done. I, however, have learned—through sources varied and numerous (and some suspect)—much of his sordid past, and relate it here now.

Born son of the sheikh of the tribe called Maurani, Ibn Al'Arif is of the people called the Bedine. Among them, he is known also by the title the Wandering





Son; no one speaks his true name. The Bedine are desert nomads, the only humans to call Anauroch their homeland. Almost without exception, the tribes remain in that region of vast Anauroch known as the Sword.

The Maurani were once a large, powerful tribe. They roamed the entire length and breadth of the Sword in their quest for survival. At a tender 16 years, Ibn Al'Arif became sheikh of this powerful people when his father was turned to stone by the fearsome gaze of a basilisk.

No one with knowledge of what happened next will speak of it, and the thread of the story wears thin to breaking. How long Ibn Al'Arif remained as sheikh is unknown to me, but he lasted at least a full year—no small accomplishment for a green boy, you will agree, once you have read his report on the Great Desert—probably longer. But the desert is harshest on the passions of youthfulness. The end of his reign came abruptly when the Son of the Great Lore made a serious mistake, a bad decision, likely prompted by his fierce temper.

His tribe abandoned him. Barbarous as it seems, such is their right, by custom, when they disagree with their leader.

Ibn Al'Arif found himself alone in the desert, too proud to retract his blunder, watching his people go. Loyal retainers and immediate family may choose to remain with their sheikh, but none of the young man's family did so. It is said of this precipitous moment the tribe actually split into two tribes, both

of which still exist today. Neither tribe speaks of its former sheikh.

When a man is left alone in the Great Desert, even if he is Bedine, it is assumed he will not survive long. The desert has a way of swallowing lone individuals, and they are never seen again. Not so with Ibn Al'Arif. He wandered Anauroch alone—traversing not just the sandy Sword, but the far, obscure regions known as the Plain of Standing Stones and the High Ice as well. He braved elements whose battering has crushed many a larger, less tenacious adventurer. He faced creatures whose magical natures make them feared and reviled by his own people.

He was even captured by the insidious evil forces dwelling in the Underdark below Anauroch. Instead of surrendering to their will, the Wandering Son bided his time, recruited his strength and his cunning, and escaped—and from them gained knowledge that he alone, among humans, possesses.

No other man is as well-equipped to tell the tales of all those myriad creatures that dwell in the Great Desert. Even what I know of these mysteries comes in great part from my discussions with him. The following account, in Ibn Al'Arif's own words, shares all the information he would give regarding the ecology of Anauroch.

Elminster





Part One: The Lands of Anauroch



Despite what outlanders think, Anauroch is not all sand dunes and days of endless heat. Only the region called the Sword fits such a description—and even then, the statement does not prove true for the entire Sword. However, *berrani*, or strangers to our land, often cling to poetic generalities and ignore specific truths. This is why they do not live long in Anauroch. The Bedine often say, “survival is in the details.” (For a lengthy discussion of desert survival, see FR13 Anauroch.)

The Sword

The Sword sweeps around the southern part of Anauroch like the curved blade of a Bedine warrior. It surrounds the other desert regions and provides a buffer between them and the outer lands. To enter Anauroch is to enter the Sword.

It is a realm of dunes and dry heat, with only a few, widely scattered oases to provide the blessing of water. Occasionally, one encounters the white, glaring crust of a salt pan, a scoured, pebble-covered plain, or barren, rocky mountains and hills (whose rumored-to-be gold-filled interiors often draw foolishly unprepared, soft, honorless outlander prospectors and miners) . . . but for the most part, the Sword is an endless sea of sand.

It is also the realm of the Bedine, a proud, noble people unknown to most outsiders. A word of warning to those entering the Great Desert: You will find the Bedine a greater potential danger than any of the fearsome beasts which roam the naked waste. Do not cross the Bedine—you will not survive the experience.

With this caution always in your mind, let me tell you briefly what a *berrani* must know of my people. Do not dislike them out of hand. Unlike outsiders, the Bedine are an open-minded people. They only react with hostility if they are angered.

The Bedine always give strangers a chance to prove they can act with trustworthiness and honor. Most outsiders they encounter, however, are brigands and evil wizards (whom the Bedine call “Black Robes” and you may be more familiar with as “Zhentarim”), so a

few among my people have a prejudice against pale-skinned strangers.

In a way, however, this prejudice is a blessing. Because my people assume a stranger to be without honor (until he has proven otherwise), they usually allow him a chance to surrender should he anger them to the point of battle. No such offer is extended to another Bedine.

What constitutes honor? I should not have to describe what every child learns as easily as sand spills over a dune, but *berrani* can be dumber than cactus. Do not attempt to trick or steal from my people. Such actions are punishable by death. Also, avoid a Bedine tribe that is in water-pains. A Bedine does not refuse another water or food if he has it to give. But if he thirsts or hungers himself, he does not hesitate to kill to get sustenance.

Lastly, if you are a practitioner in the foul arts of sorcery, do not display such base talents among the Bedine if you wish to keep your head. It was magic that made the desert, and we will not abide its use. Most Bedine tribes simply banish spellcasters—but not all are so kind. And do not depend on some outsider’s notion of mercy. There is no exception to any tribal rule. The Bedine craven enough to use magic does so secretly, or is outcast, living alone in the desert—a punishment the tribes consider as good as death.

One last caution: Travelers in the Sword should try to somehow learn the locations of such oases as exist. It is almost impossible to carry enough water to cross the desert without the blessing of an oasis.

The Plain of Standing Stones

Inside the sandy arc of dunes that is the Sword, the Plain of Standing Stones occupies most of the south central part of Anauroch. Despite its name, this region is hardly a flat, featureless “plain.” The rocky, windswept area is filled with numerous stony outcroppings carved into pillars, spikes, and stranger shapes by the ceaseless, winding wind.

At first glance, the Plain of Standing Stones seems as





devoid of vegetation and water as the Sword (and perhaps even more barren, which is why the Bedine never come here). It is not so. Sheltered valleys, deep gullies and other hidden spots hold cool streams of melted ice from the north. In these areas, life is abundant.

The High Ice and Beyond

North of the Plain of Standing Stones stretches a vast wasteland, covered with ice and dry, powdery snow. It is a land of perpetual winter. The barren emptiness is compounded by the disaster of bone-killing cold. The flatness is broken occasionally by deep crevasses and jagged rifts. Neither I nor anyone else knows how far north this frigid sweep extends, nor what might lie beyond.

Southwest of the High Ice, frozen sand dunes stand in rigid waves—a frigid extension of the Sword. Known as the Frozen Sea, the area is noted for the ancient cities that lie buried beneath its crusted sands. My travels have shown me that the Frozen Sea is not unique in possessing uncharted ruins. Indeed, such mysterious, hidden places can also be found within the High Ice, and even in the Sword itself.

Weather and Seasons

Although it may be hard for ulugarr—outlanders—to believe, every native inhabitant knows the weather and seasons are not uniform in Anauroch. The Great Desert is famous for its dry winds and deadly hot sun, but these are only one facet of the weather here. Wetstorms blow across the landscape, although they are rare, brief, and fierce as a giant eagle defending her nestlings. They often drench a small area with many inches of rain. It is difficult to imagine water as other than a precious treasure, but the sudden raging of runoff through a wadi can drown a camel, or sweep away an unwisely pitched camp.

More commonly, the hazards are scouring winds and the grains they fling before them. Sandstorms forming in the deep desert plague the region as a whole. Dust obliterates the sky. Dunes shift, and landmarks disappear, sometimes forever. Entire tribes can be buried alive by the shifting sands. The wind, flying

across the surface of the dunes, roils in the troughs between them, rendering it all but impossible to maintain a steady direction.

In sandstorms, characters' line of sight shrinks to 0'-3' and each must successfully save versus petrification or take 1-2 points of choking damage per turn. Such storms last 1d20 turns.

The temperatures drop considerably at night among the sand and rocks. Each reflects At'ar's burning glance by day, but neither holds her spiteful heat long when she is absent. Though I have traveled in the lands outsiders leave behind, where vegetation chokes the horizon and evenings are gently warm, I still cling to my boyhood delight in the chill of desert nights. The heat of the day may bake clay into bricks, yet third watch sentries just as easily see their breaths hanging like little sand clouds in the air before them. It takes only a little daylight for the sun to warm the land to scorching again.

Of course, the Great Desert experiences larger climatic changes beyond the day-to-day variations of storm and sun. The *ulugarr* El'Minster claims his home has four seasons, but I know he exaggerates. There are really two seasons, as we have here in the Great Desert—hot and cold, summer and winter. The winter is short in the dunes, being only three months long, but during that span the temperature plunges and the wind increases so as to make the Sword inhospitable to human life. Occasionally, a dry snow falls, white like the salt pans but lighter than dust. It does not last. Any moisture binds the sliding sand grains into a hard, slick surface. Most Bedine flee underground during this time, to fight the living beasts in the caverns under the sand, rather than waste away in the breathless chill above.

Climatic Averages for Anauroch*

Temperature (Summer)	101° F**
Temperature (Winter)	33° F.
Low Temperature (Year)	11° F.
High Temperature (Year)	110° F.
Annual Precipitation	14 inches

* For the High Ice, average temperature is 18° F., Low temperature is -50°, while high temperature is only 31°.

** Daytime average. Nighttime average is 62° F.





Part Two: Ecology of the Sword

Ghe sandy dunes of the Sword are home to a great variety of life, often to the surprise and horror of newcomers. This populatedness, where ulugarr thought to find only sand and sun, is due in part to Anauroch's surprisingly close proximity to regions with more hospitable climes and large sources of water. (Many Bedine, who rarely, if ever, leave the Sword, would be shocked by the luxurious and forgiving climates of nearby lands. Sight of the great seas of water to the south would stun them senseless.) It is from these regions that the Sword acquires many of its inhabitants. Though they may not have chosen to come here—often they were chased or driven by some predator or circumstance—and though they may not survive as long as the hardy native creatures, still the Mother Desert accepts all who choose to tread her sands. If they are clever, they can thrive.

Another source of Anauroch's diversity is less appealing to consider—indeed, to the Bedine it is the root of evil. That is magic. Wanting no truck with magic, nevertheless I have been forced by circumstance to observe it more closely than any Bedine should, or would ever wish to. I suffered these indignities because life, and revenge, are precious to me, and that is all I will say of the subject. I pass on information about foul magical creatures so that others may have warning. The very words leave a bitter taste in my mouth.

Many creatures found within the Sword are not found in other deserts, I am told. (Though I have seen much of the Realms, I have not journeyed to the place called Zakhara, nor do I wish to.) Other creatures are well known to frequent arid regions, and informed travelers will not be surprised to find them in Anauroch as well. Sometimes our monsters have slightly different habits than their cousins from other regions. It is best not to assume familiarity. Learning the nature, habits, and secrets of those beasts which prowl its scorched earth is essential to surviving the

desert. As the Bedine say: "A careful warrior will make a wise elder."

Common Creatures

The first creatures a berrani encounters are most likely those insects that fly or crawl across the sandy wasteland. Flies, ants, termites, moths, and locusts are all common pests.

Few travelers pay insects any attention, however, unless they are engulfed in dangerous swarms. (For the statistics of swarms, refer to the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ accessory.) Whatever their behavior in outlanders' territories, insect swarms feed on any living thing they find in the desert, including plants, animals, and humans. Although quantities of fire and water are useful for dispatching swarms, there is an easier (and, in the case of precious water, less costly) way of warding them off. There is a *nabat*, or plant, called *ularimil* which grows in patches within salty, flat areas of the Sword. This reddish grass, when mixed with sparing amounts of water, forms a thin paste which repels insects of all kinds. Although inedible and strongly acrid, the paste has no ill effects upon the skin.

Like insects, spiders are quite common, although not as numerous nor as visible. Most spiders of the desert are poisonous, using their venom to immobilize their prey. Only the extremely large among their kind regard men as food (see Rare Beasts, below). Smaller spiders, such as the *reikh'irud* (known in other tongues as the tarantula), are truly a danger only if somehow disturbed or accidentally agitated. Spiders often ambush their prey (be they insects, scorpions, or even small desert rats) by hiding in the sand. Some build hidden traps with their webs. Careful travelers are watchful of stepping onto such a trap, for an angry spider always bites.





Another tiny but dangerous desert dweller is the scorpion. The Bedine highly respect scorpions for their hardiness and tenacity. It is a compliment to be compared to one, though many *berrani* are ignorant of the status implied by such a remark. These creatures behave alike to poisonous spiders—a watchful desert traveler is careful not to disturb them. Unmolested, they pose little threat. If a man is foolish enough to sleep with his *gizam*, or boots, off in the open desert, however, he should be wise enough at least to shake out those boots when he awakens. Many a desert creature considers the sheltered confines a perfectly comfortable cave or crevice to rest in, nest in, or defend with his utmost powers. The Bedine check their *gizam* for night visitors even when they have slept in the safety of their own tents.

The desert snail is a strange creature that dwells in the sand. Most active in the more moist and cooler winter season, these creatures mark the onset of the hot weather in an unusual way. They seal their bodily moisture into their shells with a viscous membrane and abandon them upon the surface of the sand, working their soft bodies deep into the ground to hibernate away the hot months. I do not know how, with the blowing winds, they expect to ever find those shells again, or if they will simply take whatever shell is handy when they resurface. I only know that sometimes the desert is white with snail shells. Desperate travelers have been known to break them open and suck out the stored droplets of water. The tiny bit of moisture recovered hardly makes such actions worth the effort, but there are times when even a few drops keep a water-poor body alive long enough to reach a real source of liquid.

Anauroch has its own breed of bats that fill every night sky. Where do they come from, in this bleak, featureless land? I have discovered bats individually and in small groups tucked into the smallest gaps between rocks on a windswept ridge, or clinging to the underfronds of oasis palms. Their wingspan is deceptive. Bat bodies are often smaller than a fist, and they fly great distances.

Though they primarily feed on insects, bats are not averse to drinking the blood of sleeping larger prey, such as camels, antelope, and even humans. When asked which creature is most numerous in the desert, a Bedine usually ignores insects and their ilk, and replies, "Bats." Though universally disliked, the creatures are regarded almost as one regards the sun, the

heat, and the sand. They are simply a part of the desert and everyday desert life.

Few birds dwell in the Sword, but hawks and other carnivorous avians occasionally find dinner near oases. They might dine on small lizards, rodents, and even large insects. Vultures, of course, most often feed on carrion, and willingly follow a potential victim deep into the desert, circling it as it moves. Among my people, some claim a certain type of vulture is actually a demon that seeks the soul of a soon-to-be-dead man rather than his flesh. These large, brightly-colored bird-creatures are extremely rare, and are said to hunt only humans. (In fact, they may be purely myth—I have never seen one with my own eyes.)

Lizards and snakes do live in the Great Desert, but they bury themselves deep in the shifting sand to escape the heat of the day. Almost always, a traveler stumbles upon them at night. Like most of the creatures in Anauroch, desert reptiles eat meat almost exclusively. Their venom is concentrated poison to help them subdue their prey. Cobras and spitting snakes present a very real danger to all night travelers, while vipers and other species are found most frequently near oases. The Oasis of Vipers is, of course, avoided by man and beast alike because of the prevalence of poisonous snakes. (More can be found on snakes in the Rare Beasts section, on page 7.)

Near an oasis, the relatively hospitable local climate supports more life. The larger animals can survive where there is water enough, and food. They will brave such proximity to predators that I have heard outlanders remark with amazement—all to keep access to drink. Antelope, especially gazelles, graze in small herds. Jackals roam in hunting packs, feeding primarily on what antelope they can catch (usually the weak and infirm). Sometimes a bold or desperate pack savages the domesticated camels and horses of resting travelers and Bedine camps.

More dangerous yet is the shrewd desert lion, which stalks any large game it finds, including men. These cats are master hunters and extremely stealthy, efficient killers. The only defense against them is a watchful eye and some training with a strong weapon. Bedine camps are not guarded merely against the jealous raids of neighboring tribes. Faced with prey that demonstrates the ability to skillfully defend itself, most lions choose to search for easier game rather





than enter into a prolonged fight. If a man is foolish enough to corner a big cat, however, or threaten its young cubs, he finds himself in a fight to the death.

Herds of wild camels frequent oases even as their domesticated brethren do, but these well-adapted beasts can be found deeper in the desert than any other nonmagical beast. Although they can be broken to camp life, it is *much* easier to train the young of an already "tame" camel. Wild camels do not hesitate to lash out with vicious kicks and bites to defend themselves.

Rare Beasts

Aside from common animals, as I have said before, monstrous creatures roam the Great Desert. These are creatures to be feared. Many are too powerful both in strength and in sorcerous powers to be fought by even the greatest warrior. Against these foul foes, it is not cowardly to flee.

The Basilisk

I speak first of the basilisk, not because it is most prevalent or most powerful, but because I hate it most of all creatures. I lost my father, the great Asiru, son of Misarud, to a basilisk, whom the Bedine call *hagar motab*, bringer of stone-death.

My travels have shown me that these monsters are not only horrors of The Great Desert, but common in other lands as well. I have never met the beast elsewhere but merely listened, with grim memory, to ballads and recollections that goad my rage afresh. The Anauroch variety basilisk is brown-skinned. Like most desert-dwelling lizards, these creatures are active only after the heat of the day has passed. During sunlit hours, they hide underground in their cave-lairs. They are almost never encountered among the endless dunes of the deep desert, preferring to crawl about where either an oasis offers easy access to water, or a mountainside surrenders its sheltering angles of stone. Basilisks are not only evilly cunning, but lazy and cowardly as well. They prefer to lair where food, water, and shelter all lie





within an easy dash.

In my experience, these creatures are irrational and insane half of the time, and shrewd hunters the other half. A desert basilisk is easily angered, but it never fights to the death if it can avoid doing so. When angered, it hisses like a cobra. The lizard may attack prey, of course, but if the initial attack fails, a basilisk usually retreats and waits for an easier victim. Many Bedine have avoided a fierce (and probably hopeless) battle with a basilisk by stoutly fending off the initial attack and then falling back, rather than foolishly pressing on to slay the creature.

When hunting, basilisks pounce from a hiding place and attack their victims with their hideous gaze and strong, toothy bite. If they are able to kill a victim before the effect of the gaze turns it to stone, they drag the carcass back to the (always nearby) lair and devour it. Most basilisks need only eat a large meal—a kill the size of a man or antelope—once per month due to their slow metabolism. They are gluttonous, however, and eat any and all meat available. I have heard tell that, presented with enough fresh meat, a basilisk will literally gorge itself to death. I should think this would require a great deal of flesh, however.

If it turns a victim to stone, and if the lizard currently has a brood of young, the desert basilisk returns to its lair and leads its young to the petrified victim. The tiny reptiles (only one to three inches in length when newly hatched) then actually devour the stone, worming their way slowly through it with tiny but powerful jaws.

Apparently, these creatures have something in their bellies that allows them to digest petrified flesh as if it were in its original form for nourishment. Meat turned to stone is all the young eat, however, and they seem to lose this ability once they mature. I have never heard of a stone-eating adult.

If a desert basilisk petrifies a victim and has no young, it ignores the new “statue.” A greater basilisk (of which rumors number only one or two in all Anauroch) is more likely to smash any immobilized victims with a contemptible lash of its tail.

Dragonnes

These foul creatures are, in my opinion, the obvious result of magical crossbreeding. They display the physical characteristics of both lions and brass

dragons—too many to be mere coincidence. Dragonnes lurk within the Scimitar Spires and among any of the northern hills in the Sword. They are found as well throughout the Plain of Standing Stones. Extremely territorial, the beasts are never encountered in numbers or even near others of their own kind. As dragonnes do not eat humans unless they have to, the only people who need worry about them are those who invade dragonne territories. Simply passing nearby, as the nomadic Bedine might, is not likely to anger a dragonne, but anyone or anything looking to settle permanently in a creature’s territory is soon savagely attacked.

Of course, in times of great famine, when antelope or camel herds are scarce, a hungry dragonne may be driven to attack humans, so travelers should always be wary. More, they must guard their pack animals from predation. While the creature is unlikely to attack a man, it makes no such exception for his beasts. Bedine who travel through the known territory of a dragonne often put worn, sweat-covered clothing on their camels and goats to give them the odor of man. This seems to slightly discourage a dragonne from attacking domestic animals—although it is by no means foolproof.

Dragonnes are most dangerous to travelers during their mating season, which is the first month of fading heat. In this time, they lose their senses. Even the other beasts of the desert know to avoid a dragonne’s territory when it is overcome by the mating drive. Any creature it sees, other than a dragonne of the opposite sex, it attacks. Oddly, mating-mad dragonnes rarely strike directly at their targets. One might fly to a high, rocky place and push boulders down upon its foes. I have even seen a dragonne swoop down from the sky, grab a man off his camel, and fly back up into the air, merely to drop the victim from a greater height.

Giant Spiders and Scorpions

These creatures are rare, but they may be encountered anywhere in the Sword or the Plain of Standing Stones. Scorpions come in a variety of sizes. The largest I have heard of was eight feet long. At one time, a tribe of *asabis* (laertis, to outsiders) attempted to capture a number of these vermin, to train them as attack creatures and possibly even mounts. Although they had a certain success with a few of their captives,



generally the beasts proved far more trouble than they were worth.

Those giant spiders found in the desert are huge, hairy brutes, which do not bother with web making as practiced by their smaller cousins. They feed on small rodents and large insects, relying on speed to pounce, and attacking with an especially virulent poison that completely (and permanently) paralyzes prey, causing all bodily functions to cease.

Characters attacked by giant spiders suffer -4 to all saves if the attacker is size S or M, and -2 to all saves if the creature is size L.

Many Bedine tell camp tales of epic battles between giant scorpions and giant desert spiders. Though *ulugarr* consider them legends, these tales are most always true in the essential, observed facts, however they are decorated with morals. The creatures seem to be natural enemies, and gladly feast upon each other's flesh.

Laertis

Asabis, as these beasts are named in the tongue of my people, are serpentine humanoids unique to Anauroch. Primarily subterranean creatures, these fiends often rise to the surface at night to raid Bedine tribes for food. Like lamias, they feast upon the flesh of men—although *asabis* prefer the internal organs, or “soft parts,” as they hideously call them.

I have encountered two varieties of *asabis*. The more common, and I suspect more intelligent, are warriors, and the larger, more monstrous my people know as “stingtails.” The difference will become obvious as I continue.

Common *asabis* are brown or gray and narrow-skulled as the little swifts that dart across the dunes. Their yellow eyes flash malevolently in the night when they leap to attack. They dress in crude armor and fight with weapons that they fashion themselves. Occasionally, some take up the equipment of their fallen human foes. Those *asabis* that carry scimitars are often particularly favorite targets of young Bedine warriors. A recaptured sword is especially blessed.

Laertis can burst up out of a dune as if from nowhere—it is their favorite method of attack. What

stops them from being a worse menace than a greedy Bedine sheik is their inability to attack under At’ar’s burning gaze. As it is to Anauroch’s lesser lizards, so too is the heat of the sun injurious to *asabis*. Indeed, a very little exposure can kill them. So, they only come out at night.

But this does not mean the creatures are not mobile. Their underground passages create huge catacombs beneath the desert. In the dank darkness, they can travel far. If one is caught above ground by daylight, or if a band is preparing an ambush, they dig themselves several arms-lengths into a soft duneside, where they hide from the heat of the day. *Asabis* organize themselves into tribes, each ruled by a council of elders and a war-leader.

Stingtails seem to be a strange, mutant form of *asabis*. Brown or reddish, rather than gray, they loom head and shoulders above their smarter brethren, yet seem content to merely follow. They are always found among an *asabi* tribe, never on their own. Stingtails can wield weapons both with their hands and in their prehensile tails.

Those sinuous, pebbled tails have a worse function. If a creature uses its tail to slap a foe in combat, instead of merely slicing at him with an extra blade, it can secrete a liquid poison onto its victim. Thus they acquired their name.

Though both *asabis* and stingtails themselves are immune to it, this poison is very effective against other creatures and against men (it yields terrible consequences, both physical and mental). Some Bedine warriors coat their blades and points with stingtail poison.

In their lairs underground, *asabis* cultivate fungi to feed upon when meat is not plentiful. These creatures, despite their evil nature, never war among themselves. Unlike many of the desert-dwellers, they never resort to cannibalism.

Though few humans realize it, most *asabis* are not acting merely on their own whims and strategies. A majority of laertis are actually mentally controlled by illithids and beholders that dwell under Anauroch (see The Underdark of Anauroch for details).

A few tribes remain autonomous. Even these free creatures hire themselves out to the Black Robes or other evil masters. Apparently, they prefer the security of working for outsiders to being forced to fend for themselves.

Asabis can be found throughout the Sword. There





is a great *asabi* force gathering under the ruined city of Rasilith. Those monsters, however, are under the direct control of the evil creatures that dwell in the Underdark. In contrast, many "free" *asabis* dwell in caves under the rocky spires of Azirrhat. Despite the gold that can be found there, the Bedine avoid Azirrhat for just this reason.

Laerti: Int Very; AL LE; AC 5; MV 18, Br 8; HD 3+3; #AT 3; Dmg 1-2 (or by weapon) x2 (claws)/1-6 (bite); THAC0 17; SZ M; ML 15; XP 120

Stingtail: Int Low; AL NE; AC 3; MV 14, Br 10; HD 7; #AT 4; Dmg 2-5 (or by weapon) x2 (claws)/2-7 (bite)/2-8 (tail); SA tail hit causes *confusion* for two rounds and carries Type M contact poison; SD immune to enchantment/charm spells; THAC0 13; SZ L; ML 18; XP 1400

For more details, see FR13 *Anauroch*.

Lamias

These vicious devils have slaughtered whole tribes of my people. Using their evil spells to bewilder and slay their prey, they feast upon the flesh of humans. Fortunately, for the Bedine and for the outlanders who roam the face of the Great Desert, they are fairly rare. From all I have heard and observed, a new lamia is born only infrequently.

Common lamias always appear to be females—attractive, desirable females—from the waist up, but their lower quarters are animals. And not only one species; the animal portions vary greatly. I myself have seen lamias with the bodies of lions, goats, antelope, and once, even a camel. I have heard tales of even more exotic aspects. Could I picture monsters with the nether parts of giant lizards, wolves, or even large cats not native to the desert? It strains my belief, but I cannot say that it is not so.

As there are two kinds of *asabis*, so too are there two varieties of lamias. A lamia noble, however, always has the lower body of a giant serpent. Horribly, the torso that tops this snakelike lower portion can be either sex.

It is said that normal lamias are begotten by the mating of lamia nobles. But no one I have met can tell the tale of the nobles' origins. Most likely, any-

thing so cruel, so grotesquely formed must be a magically created abomination from ages long past. Perhaps it would be a fitting quest to attempt to slay all lamia nobles, for if the rumors are true, that would spell the end of the whole race.

Any traveler can be unlucky enough to run across a lamia in rocky, mountainous regions of the Sword. Beware the naked beauty beyond the crest of the hill! A Bedine woman would never be so immodest as to greet a man without her veil, but there is a further giveaway. Lamias refuse to wear jewelry of any kind. A Bedine is decked with all her wealth: rings, chains, and beaten ornaments jangle at her neck, dangle from her arms, and weight her *keffiyeh* against the tugging of the wind. If she is jewelless, if she is veilless, turn away.

Even greater numbers roam the Plain of Standing Stones. A lamia prefers to live alone and she makes her predations on a traveling party one at a time. The creatures also like to lair among the ruined, mostly buried cities of the distant past. Unfortunately, such ruins are common throughout Anauroch. It is my theory that perhaps the nobles are actually survivors of the great cataclysm which swallowed those cities. If this is true, then noble lamias have much lore that has been forgotten—magical lore—thus foul, dangerous information probably best left "lost."

A single lamia is a curse upon those she dwells near, but far more horrible is the lamia noble which organizes a large force of these normally solitary creatures. This has happened only once during my lifetime. But two entire tribes were destroyed before a great council, led by my father, organized half the tribes of the Sword to destroy this threat. Hundreds of Bedine died in this war, but the threat was extinguished. The pair of lamia nobles which had led the attacks was slain.

Today, lamias can be found in concentrations only within the Lion's Eye Oasis and the far northern ruin of Hlaungadath. My people avoid these areas, naturally. The lamias that control the Lion's Eye Oasis are ruled by the powerful and cruel Glaendra, a female noble nine feet in height. She uses a great many sorcerous artifacts, and commands a formidable force of lamias. It may be of some value to note here that even before the lamias came, Bedine legends tell of horrific monsters dwelling in the surprisingly deep lake formed by the oasis. I know this to be true. At least one reptilian creature—a dragon



turtle—resides there, controlled by a powerful, sorcerous water naga. The naga possesses a great hoard of treasure, which it keeps within the submerged ruins of an ancient castle.

The ancient city of Hlaungadath is said to be home to as many as one hundred lamias and a dozen lamia nobles. Rumor has it that there is more treasure there than a man can imagine, both in terms of wealth and dread magic. From what I learned in the underground regions, the phaerimm consider these lamia a major threat. The passages below the city seethe, a constant battleground between the two evil forces (see The Underdark of Anauroch, later in this book).

Lycanthropes

The only shapeshifting were-beasts that I have ever seen in the Sword are were-rats. A small tribe of Bedine, calling themselves the Nasaba, are in actuality were-rats in human form. Somehow, long ago, the entire tribe was infected with lycanthropy. Unlike the were-rats that I have heard tales of when I visited the outlanders' cities to the south of the Mother Desert, these creatures most resemble the small, quick, desert rats which commonly skitter hieroglyphic trails in the dunes of the Sword.

Most *ulugarr* fear were-beasts with a deep and irrational passion. The tales told in other lands about them are so gruesome, so villainous, that no outlander would hesitate to commit murder on a man he suspected of carrying the lycanthropic curse. I know this because I heard it, around camp fires and in common rooms and taverns throughout the Realms.

But we in the desert are more open-minded than you *berrani*. Until I traveled, I had not even heard of the existence of were-beasts. And I want to you to hear the tale I am about to relate without your native prejudice. Put it aside.

The Nasaba are extremely insular, and attempt to pass themselves off as a cautious Bedine tribe that avoids contact with strangers. Only their small, wiry appearance (though that physique alone is not terribly uncommon for Bedine), and the presence of so many normal desert rats in the camp might give them away. Strangers who insist on spending the night with this tribe must all too soon discover the ratmen's secret—and then they are devoured. Other than the occasional stranger, however, these creatures tend to eat only the foods a normal Bedine tribe would

gather.

I only know their true nature because I stumbled upon them as they were being attacked by a dark naga and a force of *asabis*. The entire tribe transformed into their ratman shapes. The surprise alone was enough to turn their foes away.

Since they do not hunt humans, and discourage the presence of strangers whom they would be forced to slay, I will not think of the Nasaba as evil beings. I wish them no harm.

Serpents

The number of giant serpents and monstrous lizards in the Sword is not large, but they are a menace nonetheless. Huge snakes, such as the giant cobra, are a rare but very real danger, but the heway snake is the most feared.

My travels in the outlanders' countries have convinced me that none have as hated or as deadly a foe as the heway. Monsters are monsters the Realms over: they kill folk, they ravage towns, they terrorize livestock. But the heway's special talent is more horrific than any other.

This twelve-foot, slimy-scaled beast secretes poison from its skin into a well or oasis, fouling the water so that any creature drinking from it is paralyzed. It does this in a cowardly attempt to weaken its prey, but its selfish act has far-reaching consequences. Without the blessing of good water, whole tribes, whole regions, are condemned to death.

To defend itself, the heway can hypnotize its foes with a sorcerous stare. It moves only in twilight. Not only Bedine, but all herd animals as well, will kill a heway on sight.

Heway: Int Low; AL CE; AC 7; MV 12, Sw 6; HD 1+3; #AT 1; Dmg 1-3; SA victims drinking poisoned water must save vs. poison at +2 or suffer 30 points of damage within 3d6 minutes and paralysis lasting 1d6 hours; stare victims save vs. paralyzation or follow heway to its lair; SD skin poison, if ingested, follows poisoned water effects, above; THAC0 19; SZ M; ML 5-7; XP 175

On the subject of serpents, it may be good to add a small bit on dragons. Drakes are rare in the Sword, but they do exist. A venerable brass dragon whom the Bedine call *Tayyib-kher* dwells at the eastern end of





the Scimitar Spires. A rumor that I have heard swears a number (up to as many as a dozen) of other, younger, brass dragons live nearby. This rumor goes on to claim that these brass dragons slew any and all blue dragons (for these are enemies of brass dragons, the way basilisks are enemies of Ibn Al'Arif) that once lived in the area.

This is not entirely true, for I have seen a blue dragon in the Hills of Scent myself, although it was still young and quite small for a dragon. In any event, *Tayyib-kher* is known to the Bedine as a benevolent protector of the Spires, although he has an annoying habit of waylaying entire tribes so as to talk at length with the elders. Such an encounter can lead to a delay of many days for a traveling tribe.

To the east, a mated pair of copper dragons has begun the habit of flying in from the Desertsmouth Mountains to hunt hatori. Normally, these dragons ignore humans, but occasionally they swoop down to play some strange joke upon a traveler, as is their nature. Most humans have nothing to fear from them, but I once saw them attack and destroy a caravan of Black Robes. Whether the dragons wreaked such destruction because the Zhentarim are evil or because they perhaps showed no appreciation for humor, I do not know—or care to ask.

Not every dragon in the Sword is kind-natured, of course. Though most outlanders are unaware of their existence, the Great Desert is home to a breed of yellow dragons—evil to the bone. They enjoy feasting upon the flesh of men. Their greatest delicacy is another race, however. Yellow dragons seem especially fond of munching on D'tarig, a dirty dwarf race that dwells on the southern and eastern fringes of the Sword (use normal dwarf stats, see FR13 *Anauroch* for more details). I have seen these fiendish creatures most frequently darting around the fringes of the Saiyaddar, a semi-fertile plain known for its antelope, and for Bedine antelope hunters—either of which the dragons happily devour.

Lastly, I have heard tales of a great wyrm red dragon, trapped for some reason in a cave on the

northern edge of the Sword, near the Oasis of Vipers. This fiendish dragon is depicted in all the rumors and legends to have advanced magic-using ability, even for one of his twisted kind, and he uses spells to summon monsters from other worlds and turn his foes into terrible undead. He sends his creatures out to wreak havoc and chaos as revenge for his mysterious entrapment—which the legends all agree occurred long before the desert was even created.

Sphinxes

Both andro- and gynosphinxes may be found in the Sword. My people have long used sphinxes as characters in our tales and cautionary parables relating to the differences and relationships of men and women. It is considered a virtue among Bedine men to resist the lure of women and of love, just as the androsphinx avoids the gynosphinx.

In real life, sphinxes roam the desert in seclusion and solitude, avoiding all other creatures—a fairly easy task in the deep desert. Both types of creatures seem to be completely magical in nature and need food or even drink only once every few months. For this reason, they may even be encountered in the Shoal of Thirst, where all is dust and salt.

Some sphinxes, of both types, know spells which can create water. If encountered in the deep desert, some are willing to make a deal with a traveler. They cast their spells if travelers can give them something of value.

Not all Bedine would take advantage of this opportunity. Though my people picture sphinxes in our tales, they are nevertheless tainted by forbidden magic. But you outlanders have fewer fears about magic, so I tell you this in case it is of use.

Gynosphinxes are almost solely interested in locating androsphinxes, or in some magical item or spell that will help them eventually find one. Androsphinx motivations are far less focused, and their desires vary greatly. Many wander without any purpose at all.





Part Three: Ecology of the Plain of Standing Stones



In contrast to the Sword, the Plain of Standing Stones is less a traditional desert—or, a desert in the way that outlanders think of one, all drifting sand and burning sun—and more a rocky, barren wasteland.

The native animals and beasts that dwell there are more varied than in the sandy desert, but they must make adaptations to survive the rough, rugged terrain. There are fewer refugees from the lands beyond Anauroch here. After all, even if the outlander beasts know where they are heading, in the way all beasts have to sense shelter and safety, most of those perish in the dunes, or become fodder for some cunning indigenous life along the way. It is the will of At'ar.

There are still foul, magic-tainted beasts stirring in the Plain of Standing Stones. Many of the creatures that frequent the Sword region also roam through the Plain—except for humans.

Bedine tribesmen generally believe the Plain to be more hostile to life than the Sword. In this case, my people are mistaken—it is not more dangerous; it is simply different. In fact, in some protected, secluded valleys, the land of the Plain of Standing Stones is lush beyond a Bedine nomad's dreams.

Like everywhere in Anauroch, winters in the Plain are especially cold and harsh. The winds scour the pillars and rock formations with stinging lancets of ice, and glittering crystals rime surfaces to unearthly beauty and slickness. Most creatures have caves or rock-hidden lairs to protect themselves from the death-dealing cold. Some even delve down so far as to break into the network of underground tunnels that make up Underdark Anauroch.

But the very presence of the lumps and misshapen monuments of stone means that there are lee spaces out of the force of the wind, and snug cracks where

tinder can be lit and not whipped away from frozen fingers. Compared to the Sword, the Plain of Standing Stones offers a stranger the ghost of a chance of surviving the fierce winter season.

Common Creatures

Rodents and the lively small mammals, including rats, raccoons, gophers, hedgehogs, badgers, even foxes, thrive in this rough area. Their tracks crisscross any small pockets of dust or earth, their discarded seed hulls and downy shed hairs nest in crevices and fill hollows with the litter of life. Most stay near the occasional fertile valleys, like Aerithae's Rest, but many, particularly rats, can be found in practically every ravine, cave, and crag.

Insects, spiders, and scorpions are as common here as in the Sword, but rather than digging in the endless sloughs of dunes, they crouch among the rocks waiting for prey.

Wild crag sheep herds live in the region, keeping to the greener valleys. Jackals, coyotes, lions, and even wolves, make these herds the targets of their depredations, as do giants, hobgoblins, outlaws, and the other more intelligent races of the area.

The fertile areas, with their myriad small denizens, in turn also support larger animals: boars, wild dog packs, skunks, squirrels, warthogs, goats, and a few bears. More rarely, ordinary creatures grown to giant size, including boars, badgers, porcupines, and skunks, as well as huge spiders and scorpions (discussed previously in regard to the Sword region) may be found.

Birds are more common in the Plain of Standing Stones than in any other part of Anauroch. The





rocks give them resting places, nesting sites, and hunting ground where the prey below might venture to think themselves safe. How clearly a ground squirrel might follow the progress of a hawk circling the wide sky above a dune, endless blue punctuated by the naked silhouette of death. But among the narrow crenellations of stone, how safe it must think itself—a dash from shelter, a crack everywhere at hand. I have seen the hawks batter themselves with fury against a wall of stone, and heard their piercing shrieks of rage. But I have also seen them rise triumphant from a seam of rock, dinner clutched in their powerful talons, when the crevice proved too shallow, or the prey too slow.

Vultures, hawks, desert owls, ravens, eagles, and other hardy birds scour the skies. Again, some few have reached giant size. But even a Bedine can tell you that no bird spends both seasons here as a matter of course. A great number of birds of all sizes and species fly from the area to avoid the cold, windy winters—even those that are not normally considered migratory by outlanders. Some days in the Sword, the sky darkens as before a sandstorm. But it is only birds fleeing from winter in the Plain of Standing Stones.

Snakes, lizards, and tortoises are common anywhere in the Plain of Standing Stones. Cobras, rock pythons, spitting snakes, and gila monsters are the most dangerous creatures of their ilk. They have even been used as weapons.

The hobgoblin tribes that dwell among the Standing Stones often capture poisonous snakes and keep them in tightly-knit baskets. Thus armed, they wait atop a high cliff for their enemies to approach, ready to drop the snakes upon their foemen to sow confusion and panic in their ranks. While the targets hop about, flinging snakes out of their midst and groaning over unfortunate bites, other hobgoblins in the tribe press forward the attack from below at the same moment. I have seen these tactics in action, and the hobgoblins were the victors of the engagement, suffering only three snakebites among their ground forces from poorly-aimed baskets.

I was also once told by the outlander wizard El'Minster—who, by great At'ar the Merciless is no friend of mine—that the eyes of a small lizard called the jer-jer-ub are valuable in the distillation of sorcerous potions which make a man extremely agile for a short time. The jer-jer-ub, whose name comes

from the hobgoblin tongue and means rock-hopper, is a dexterous little beast and is quite difficult to catch as it leaps about rocks on high cliff faces and stony crags.

Never mind the dread purpose of sorcery—I have not been so undignified as to scramble among the stones, chasing lizards, since I was a small boy.

Rare Beasts

Dragons

There exists in the Plain of Standing Stones a rock known as the Pillar of Tauros. This tall, crooked column of stone serves as a sacred place for dragons of all kinds. I myself have seen the great beasts flying toward the pillar, ignoring all else. Once there, dragons perch atop the rock and spend hours in what appears to be some sort of meditation.

A *berrani* explorer by the name of Jo'tull supposedly climbed the Pillar of Tauros, and found an inscription of magical runes. He claims that the inscription is like unto a foul sorcerer's spellbook, and from these runes, dragons can learn new spells—including, as these tales always say, many unknown to human wizards.

I do not know how greatly this rings of truth, but I do know that I intend to never find out for myself. Dragons come from the farthest realms to visit the Pillar of Tauros, and they often engage in fantastic battles over the right to "nest" on the pillar. It is magnificent and chilling to see the aerial dance of fighting dragons. Little sand lizards are but a parody of the flashing, swooping grace of the great wyrms. Whatever is on top is definitely a prize they feel is worth risking their lives.

Blue dragons are the most commonly found of their kind in the Plain of Standing Stones. They have few or no enemies there, and so they hunt without fear. One blue dragon, Ghondalaath, dwells within a rocky pinnacle known as Heroes' Helm. I give the area wide berth since I chanced across it when the beast was returning from a gorge. This great wyrm is a master of magic, and his lair is guarded by magical traps and gruesome undead which he has created.



Giants

Among the rocky convolutions of the Plain, a surprisingly large number of hill giants make their homes. They normally hunt hobgoblins, humans, sheep, and goats. Occasionally even more dangerous game takes their fancy, such as cliff-dwelling hippogriffs, giant insects, and those monstrous-sized mammals (including giant badgers and porcupines) that fit their stature. I suppose for a creature that large, it takes too many sheep skins to make a cloak.

Normally, these giants dwell in groups of ten to twenty, but occasionally they gather in even greater numbers, called together by their king, Derrnog. This Derrnog is a surprisingly intelligent warrior for a giant. He stands over twenty feet in height.

I was at first mystified to see such a turn-out of monsters, but since my initial discovery of the council, I have found that the giants often wage a concentrated war against hobgoblins (who are much more numerous), or attack the much rarer but powerful

fomorian giants that also lair among the rocky crags and caves.

These actions may have provocation, but I have never seen or heard tell of an instance of aggression from either foe that would account for the force of the hill giants' revenge. It could be there are feuds of long standing. But I suspect that Derrnog has some grander plan than mere retaliation.

Hill giants greatly fear both cloud and storm giants. I overheard a pair muttering darkly about these other monsters, who they believe live in secret cloud castles above the desert.

Of the sky-giants, I know nothing. I have, however, had the unfortunate mischance to encounter the foul fomorian giants. These behemoths are malformed and hideous—personally I believe their origin is the mad experimentation of some ancient sorcerer. In fact, as I have alluded to before, I believe such experimentation explains the blighted existence of many of the strange creatures in Anauroch. It is further proof why magic is to be feared and avoided.

Though smaller than their hill giant cousins,





fomorians are stronger and more cunning. Worse than that, from the point of view of all who dwell in the Plain of Standing Stones, they feed upon the same sorts of prey as hill giants do.

But fomorians also eat the flesh of their fellow giants. That hill giants are not happy either to compete for foodstuffs or to become them may well explain the occasional wars between the races.

Fomorians like to torture their prey before eating it. This barbaric custom gives rise to an occasional wail of pain that is carried on the wind, and to the Bedine mother's observation to errant children, even when it is truly the wind's whine, that "Fomorians are feasting today." The giants' large, deformed hands do not allow them to make precise or delicate movements. Therefore, torture victims are usually killed very quickly, though accidentally.

Hobgoblins

The few humans that dwell in the Plain of Standing Stones speak of the barbaric hobgoblins with hatred in their eyes and fear in their voices. These marauders tend to kill all they come across, either to steal from it, in the case of intelligent victims, to eat it, or just for pleasure. Even the giants in the region have reason to be wary of hobgoblins, as the latter have devised ingenious hunting and trapping techniques to bring down any foe.

I have seen a force of hobgoblins destroy three hill giants by the simple strategy of attacking them as they passed through a narrow gorge. The hobgoblins struck from above and below at the same time, laying about with spears, bows, and crude blades. Those above also pushed large boulders down into the gorge to strike the giants, even though this tactic resulted in harm to some of their fellow warriors.

These ruthless creatures are masters of surprise and ambush. Their encampments are always well hidden, and surrounded by skulking guards—and possibly a few crude traps. I have been told hobgoblins never fight in an open area if they can help it, and that they flee or surrender if attacked when unprepared.

There are at least a dozen tribes of hobgoblins in the Plain, each numbering a hundred or more. Each tribe splinters into smaller war parties for most of the summer months, reuniting during the winter.

It is not completely unknown for a few humans (usually thieves or brigands) to join up with a war

party of hobgoblins, but such alliances are usually short, and they are always in the summer. When a tribe masses for the winter, outsiders are not welcome—the tribe carries only enough food and shelter for hobgoblins, and much of the time, they fail to collect even that.

Hobgoblins in this region capture other creatures and use them as beasts of burden, or even as weapons. One tribe, the Bonegnashers, is said to have captured a gorgon a few years ago. Apparently, the shaman of the tribe fashioned some masks from a rare plant known as *huvremba* that allows one to breathe the petrifying breath of a gorgon safely.

Wearing their masks, the beast's keepers herd it from its cave into a dead-end ravine. Then, the hobgoblin warriors drive their enemy's forces down the ravine—right into the gorgon.

Leucrotta

These beasts are among my least favorite creatures of the myriad species I have encountered in my travels. They—But I can describe them better with a tale.

Once, while traveling the Plain of Standing Stones, I was in the company of a young *ulugarr* of little honor (a murderer and a thief, but a tolerable companion for a short time) named Tirug. We were looking for shelter, both from the wind and from a hungry band of hill giants, and darted into a ravine.

Upon descending into the darkest portion of the gully, we both heard the shrill pitch of a woman crying out in pain. Tirug wanted to ignore it, and now I see the sense in his lack of compassion. I was young, and full of noble impulses. I insisted we find the woman and save her, and so we followed the cry.

We found no trace of human passage. There were only the tracks of some sort of stag—Tirug was actually more familiar than I with such beasts. Those tracks should have alerted me to danger, as certainly they alerted him—anything mysterious in Anauroch can only be dangerous.

But I was naive. Without warning, we were attacked by three leucrotta, who had been mimicking a woman's cry to entrap us.

I escaped the foul ambush, but Tirug did not. In the fight, I saw one of the hideous beasts bite right through Tirug's shield and armor with the bony ridges



that it has instead of teeth. The tales that I had heard of such beasts did nothing to prepare me for their incredible ugliness or their foul smell. I am told that their lair is even more odorous, and I have no desire to ever test the knowledge.

After I escaped up the ridge, I watched as our pursuing giants entered the gully. The leucrotta interrupted their horrid feast of Tirug to hide—and commenced to imitate the cry of a giant in pain. The giants paused, and then fled. Apparently, even those dim witted fools had learned the leucrottas' tricks.

The leucrotta returned to their former feast. But my companion's death was not entirely in vain. Since that hard lesson, I too have tricked a number of giants into running from me. I hide snug in a crevice and mimic a giant in pain—or rather, a leucrotta imitating a giant in pain. It was a difficult skill to master, but it has saved my life twice.

Leucrotta seem willing to feed on anything, but in some perverse way the beasts prefer to eat the flesh of intelligent creatures they can deceive. I have heard their hide is useful in the construction of magical *boots of striding and leaping*, and that their spittle can be imbibed as an antidote for certain non-lethal poisons and potion-based charms, but I know little of such matters. I have fought them off once. The next time I might not be so fortunate.

Manticores

Those manticores in Anauroch display traits that differ slightly from others of their kind living in the outer lands. These beasts are known as *gared-guur* among the hobgoblins and giants in the region, which means "slayer from the skies."

I am told that manticores outside of the Great Desert prefer human flesh to feast upon. In the Plain of Standing Stones, such meals are few and far between. Perhaps because of this lack, our manticores have taken up a new favorite prey: giant eagles. Most manticores in the region make their lairs near the high nesting areas of these huge, elegant birds.

Manticores hunt in packs of three to twelve creatures, and can bring down giant eagles in flight with their sheer numbers. Eagles are also handicapped by a manticore's tail spikes. The bird is forced to close with its attacker in order to bring to bear its sharp talons or

tearing beak, but the manticore can throw its tail spikes from a distance outside the reach of the eagle's defenses.

The manticores of the Great Desert are still not able to resist the taste of humans, however, and attack all travelers that come near them. When manticores cannot find a meal of humans or eagles, they settle for hobgoblins or even small animals.

Great numbers of manticores are known to gather near a huge mountain known as the Swordpoint. The creatures are also reputed to generally hate lamias, and are known to attack them on sight. Lamias, on the other hand, often use sorcery to enslave manticores and force them to act as guardbeasts.

Trolls

Rarer than hobgoblins, desert trolls are still a threat to all creatures, intelligent or otherwise. These rocky, brown-skinned cousins of the much more common troll of the outer lands are able to slightly modify their color to better blend in with their surroundings.

Desert trolls are exclusively carnivorous. In fact, they do not even drink water—only blood. Water is poison to them, and merely touching it causes them harm. No outlander's troll suffers this condition. Again, I find evidence that leads me to think our desert creatures are created or mutated by sorcery.

Any contact with water causes a desert troll 1d6 points of damage per round. The damaged flesh cannot be regenerated.

Luckily, desert trolls are usually solitary, and can be content feeding on crag sheep and small birds and mammals. A troll is not afraid to take on a creature that can fight back, however, and does not hesitate to attack a giant scorpion—or a band of men. I have heard tales that a starving troll may even attack some of the creatures from the Underdark, like beholders or illithids (though normally it would seal its fate by doing so). Desert trolls have at least learned not to bother their giant neighbors.

These creatures do not seem to keep lairs, but wander the Plain of Standing Stones, thinking only of their next meals.





Though crafty and shrewd in the ways of stalking, hiding, and hunting, they are generally not as smart as normal trolls (or so I am told—I have not encountered enough of either variety to make a careful study, nor can I see any point in seeking them out). Most desert trolls can speak only a few words, and those are hard to understand.

Very rarely, a family of up to six trolls may be found together, parents and young. These groups remain bonded for only about two years. When the young trolls are able to make their own way in the world, the group disintegrates. Each heads off in its own solitary direction.

That I know of, nothing feeds on trolls—even the foully-scented, carrion-eating leucrotta find troll flesh too distasteful to ingest.

Water Creatures

The River of Gems and the surrounding valley it creates are home to many strange and sometimes terrifying creatures. This river forms at the southern border of the High Ice and runs with the frigid temperatures of melting snow into the Plain of Standing Stones. Fierce At'ar's gaze warms the surface water as the river travels to the edge of the Sword, where it disappears into a large sinkhole called the Throat. The river remains narrow throughout its course, and in places depths of 50 feet or more are not uncommon. In the bottoms, the water is still as cold and clear as the ice from which it came.

Both merrow and scrags lair in caves under the surface of the river, and form one of its hidden threats. These creatures live and hunt together, cooperating very well. They spend much of their time gathering gemstones found on the river bottom. They also hunt fish, and those animals that come to drink at the shore. Merrow and scrags most enjoy attacking groups of intelligent beings—humans, hobgoblins, and even giants—for these beings provide both food and the treasure they love.

Though interbreeding appears to be impossible, the two races intermingle in every other manner—and on equal terms. Both decorate their bodies with tattoos and scars to show age, prowess and position in their dual society. I once spoke with a woman who claimed to have actually spent time with the merrow and scrags, and who apparently understood the tattoos. As a general rule, she said, the more

markings on an individual's body, the older and more skillful he or she is.

Merrow use primitive spears, while scrags rely on their natural weaponry. Both are adept at setting crude traps along the river's edge to aid them in catching prey. Though both races can survive out of water for an hour or more, they prefer not to leave their element, especially during the day when At'ar the Merciless beats down upon the Great Desert.

The river is also home to many sorts of fish—small remnants, mute reminders of a time when Anauroch was a fertile land filled with lakes, streams, forests and life. Though most of my people find it hard to accept this history, after all I have seen in the Realms and in my own land, I know it to be true.

The River of Gems is full of what my merrow-loving acquaintance calls river fish, amphibians, and reptiles. These may be the normal inhabitants of a liquid environment, but they are creatures of which I really know very little. Oasis species are altogether different. I have seen as well animals even a dune-dwelling Bedine would recognize as unusual: giant frogs, huge water beetles, giant gar, and a ferocious fish called a quipper which, when found in groups, can devour a man in just a few short minutes.

Perhaps it is just a Bedine's natural fear of so much water in one place, but I find the River of Gems to be a deadly locale, and one that should be avoided.

No better example for my distrust exists than the creature called the morkoth. I have been told by reliable, honorable men that these creatures are only found in deep parts of the sea. Once again, the Mother Desert disproves the shallow knowledge of the *berrani*.

There are numerous tunnels, both above and below the water's surface, that open within the ravine carved out by the river. Many of these passages lead to the Underdark, an area of subterranean horrors deep below Anauroch (and, I am told, under many other parts of the world as well). Unwary explorers attempting to access the Underdark through these routes often end up becoming lost within a series of identical, winding tunnels. Some strange effect of these underground passages draws them ever deeper in until they reach a large, central chamber which is their doom. In this chamber lives a morkoth.

Morkoth somehow hypnotize their victims as they



stumble through the labyrinthine twists above, and devour them once they reach the central chamber. When not luring human adventurers, they probably feast upon the more plentiful merrow, scrags, and perhaps even the larger of the river fish.

One legend says that once every ten years, all morkoth leave their lairs to find mates. During this time, great ill is inflicted upon all those dwelling near the river through blights, disease, and misfortune. Dead fish float up to the surface of the river and are washed away.

At the Throat, a three-mile-wide sinkhole in which morkoth are even more common, there are said to be creatures called water nagas, supposedly related to dark nagas, which I will describe to you later. Unfortunately, I know little of these water creatures. I know merely that they are not necessarily evil beings, and are better off left alone.

Rumor has it that directly below the Throat, at a depth of water I cannot conceive of, there is a hidden city of aboleth, creatures in league with the other foul subterranean horrors. These also will I detail later, when I finally reveal the secrets found in the Underdark...





Part Four: Ecology of the High Ice

Din the north, the frozen plain known as the High Ice stretches farther than any man knows. Within this frigid wasteland, life is uncommon. The ice covers a number of ancient, well-preserved cities, however, rumors of which draw adventurers and explorers to the region on a continual basis. Most do not return.

I myself have only traveled through the High Ice once. It is not a place for casual visitors. At the time I chose to explore it, I was searching for the rare sisareya bloom—the only cure for an illness my second wife gained from drinking at a well poisoned by a heway snake.

Though I was unsuccessful in my quest—to my sorrow, the plant blooms only once every five years and grows only amid ice and snow—I did learn much about the region during my sojourn there.

Common Creatures

Animals common to the High Ice are few. Travellers are most likely to encounter harmless, thick-furred icejacks, which resemble plump, slow-moving hares. These creatures feed only on snowflowers, hardy plants that push their way up through the snow.

This vegetation seems susceptible to the tearing winds, or perhaps an icejack's nibbling weakens its grip in the snow. Whichever, the rounded, wiry shrubs are sometimes blown about like the tumbleweeds which roll in the Plain of Standing Stones. They nourish the icejacks, which in turn form the basis of the northern food chain, as they are extremely abundant.

A white-furred constrictor, called a snow snake, is another frequently encountered creature. It waits buried in powdery snow for its prey. Occasionally

these snakes actually burrow into the depths of a snow bank, but usually they scurry along on top of it.

Small badgers, arctic foxes, caribou, a few bears, and other, small creatures make their homes here, feeding on either snowflowers, icejacks, or each other, as is their taste. Snow owls, great soarers (huge, white-feathered condors), and other predatory birds spiral overhead, watching for twitches and shadows that disturb the vast, pale expanse below.

Rare Beasts Dragons

Dragons of various types, including red, topaz, brass, blue, and others, lair near a peculiar phenomenon known as the Smokeholes, when traveling across the High Ice. Away from the tempering influence of these oases in the cold, it is rare to find any but white dragons. But that declaration is too hasty—crystal dragons are not unknown, either. Usually, if a white and a crystal dragon encounter one another, they fight—although the white dragon is nearly always perceived as the aggressor in such a battle.

The hill giants of the Plain of Standing Stones tell a tale about frost giants who came from the mysterious north to settle in the High Ice. The arrogant—or in other tellings—foolhardy frost giants encountered a number of crystal dragons in their new territory, and attempted to enslave them. The dragons slew the giants, and now no giant of any sort dares enter the area.

White dragons prefer to hunt outsiders, whether human or animal, as most of the native creatures are, by adaptation or design, resistant or immune to their breath weapons. I have seen, however, a dragon attack and kill a small remorhaz—and later, the same wyrm slew a group of yetis.

There is a powerful white dragon named Augaurath who dwells within the region. She is the undisputed



lord over all dragons in the High Ice, and it is rumored that some of the other creatures in the area, such as yeti, winter wolves, and even some semi-intelligent remorhaz, worship her as a god.

Ice Toads

No Bedine should ever be forced to endure the savage cold of the High Ice. It is such a change from the broiling heat of the Sword that it is hard to believe the two regions are so close. Creatures like ice toads make the too-frigid air of the High Ice even colder.

These beasts grow to be eight feet long and dwell in small groups in icy rifts throughout the High Ice. They feed on practically anything, and attack with their vicious bite.

Worst of all, though, they radiate a cold so intense it can kill a man, instantly—a cold so bitter it out-chills even the harshest arctic wind. You are not daunted by monsters? The mere presence of these beasts has slain many desperate, unwary explorers as they searched a toad-inhabited rift for food.

Mostly, since explorers are themselves so rare a species in the High Ice, the toads feed on small mammals like icejacks and arctic foxes. They feast when an occasional caribou herd wanders across the southern edge of the region.

Ice toads are said to be intelligent, and to have their own language. As good a weapon as it is against yeti—another hazard common to the frozen wastes—fire is useless against ice toads. Heat draws ice toads, and drives them into a frenzy. A simple campfire is enough to launch a single monster into a fight to the death with whatever opponent might be handy. A larger fire could draw perhaps dozens of the creatures, all insane with rage.

Remorhaz

These beasts, which resemble nothing so much as huge worms, are probably among the most feared creatures in the High Ice. I myself encountered one once, as I journeyed across the ice with five *ulugarr* gnomes who were seeking the area known as the Smokeholes, where they had heard rare minerals might be found.

Long before we reached the Smokeholes, one of these terrible polar worms erupted from the snow in

front of us and attacked. The beast we confronted was almost thirty feet long, although I have subsequently learned that they can grow to a length of almost fifty feet.

It immediately swallowed one of my companions whole, while the rest of us attempted to fight it. One of the gnomes attacked the beast from the rear, but the creature's back grows incredibly hot when aroused—hotter than At'ar herself, it seems—and the gnome's stout *shef* weapon melted as he struck the worm.

Though we managed to kill it eventually, our victory came at the cost of a further two gnomes' lives. I had foolish hopes that the remorhaz' first victim might yet live, having not been chewed or squeezed in the suddenness of the monster's attack. Sad, what unfamiliarity with a monster can lead one to believe. It was not to be. The swallowed gnome was of course instantly suffocated by the creature's unbelievable inner body temperature.

The leader of the gnomes, being somehow knowledgeable about such things, drained a liquid from the beast's body that he called *thrym*. He claimed that it was a useful substance in the making of heat-related magical items. Even among outlanders, I ask who would count foul magic worth such a cost?

In the aftermath of our battle, we had the bodies of the monster and our companions, and a great hole rimmed with refrozen ice. I left the gnomes to their death rituals, whatever those might be. I felt sure they would prefer to face their grief alone.

Curious, I backtracked instead down the slippery tunnel the creature had made or chewed or melted through the ice. Eventually, my fearsome trail lead to a series of passages, and then onto a central lair. Here I found the indigestible possessions of those intelligent beings the beast had eaten previous to our fateful encounter, and a number of eggs. I took one of the eggs, and soon afterward sold it to an adventurer who thought that he could raise the creature and train it to serve him. *Ulugarr talab ghashim tariq*—Outlanders seek strange paths.

Salamanders

I am told it is another of the great ironies of Anau-roch that heat-loving beings like salamanders have a place in the High Ice.

As previously mentioned, there is a region in the





High Ice known as the Smokeholes. These holes mark the exit points of hot, volcanic gases which escape upward through the ice sheet, producing great amounts of steam. The air around these vents is extremely hot, and the very earth surrounding them is warmer than the rest of the region.

Salamanders dwell within the Smokeholes and wait for other beings to tread close in a dangerous search for warmth. The salamanders attack whatever comes near, hoping to pull a victim into their holes.

Dwarves and gnomes like the group with which I was traveling are forever mounting expeditions down into the holes following tales of great, rare ore veins. It is said these veins decorate the Caverns of Burning Ice beneath the Smokeholes. So far as I can tell, these legends simply provide various salamanders with humanoid meat.

Salamanders wield magical weapons and keep fire snakes throughout their lairs as guardians. It has been told to me by a mysterious traveler that the salamanders guard the Smokeholes because some powerful entity commanded them to protect something buried in the caverns. What this treasure could be is a mystery to me...

Snow Cloakers

These beings are very rare, existing in small numbers in and around the particular rift known as Llashloch, the Lake of Ice. It may be that they exist nowhere else. When I brought up these creatures in my brief conversations with the outlander wizard, El'Minster, he mumbled something about the race nearing extinction. Good riddance, I say—if it be true.

Snow cloakers, which have a subterranean counterpart in other parts of the Realms that I have also had the misfortune to encounter, glide over snow and ice and drop upon unsuspecting victims to devour them. When they are at rest, they are almost impossible to see. Even when they are gliding about, their sinuous movements are difficult to pick out of the snow-filled winds. They apparently are immune to the High Ice's harsh cold.

White Pudding

As life adapts to the burning sands of the Sword, so too does it adapt to the drifting, dune-like snows. One great danger of the High Ice is that most creatures

that live there are hard to detect because of their coloration or their stealth in concealment. None is more difficult to perceive than the white pudding, a creature sometimes known among adventurers as the snowmound beast.

White puddings are huge masses of flesh, three to eight feet in diameter, that move by oozing their way across the snow. Never elsewhere have I seen such a thing with my own eyes (though there is said to be a similar creature in the Sword that has the appearance and consistency of sand).

The monster feeds on all kinds of animal and plant matter, as well as absorbing ice and snow. White puddings secrete some sort of acid which eats through clothing and flesh with alarming speed.

Noise in great quantity and at great volume is said to ward these creatures off. Of course, these same sounds may attract predators of a different kind! The reverse is also true. Sometimes a white pudding—usually a small specimen; perhaps they are less sensitive—follows the baying, howling, or growling exchanges of other beasts, such as a pack of white wolves or a bear, and devours what they leave behind.

Legends told round the cookfires of hardy explorers and the sentry fires of bundled trekking parties picture a huge white pudding, hundreds of feet across, that never moves. This awesome—and in my mind, likely mythical—beast said to exist in the far north simply waits for prey to come to it.

Winter Wolves

Equally as intelligent as the dread ice toads are winter wolves, the toads' chief predator. Immune to ice toads' cold emanations, these lithe creatures have no problem in slaying their prey.

Huge, beautifully white animals, much more impressive than the skulking jackals of the hot desert, a pack of winter wolves can nevertheless be extremely deadly. They breathe frost as a white dragon can.

These beasts always travel against the wind, so that their prey is unable to scent them. Watchful travelers in the snow country therefore always note the direction the wind is blowing. Upwind is where the wolves are. Winter wolves have no need to practice tactics like surprise or ambush. Their speed, strength, and power are sufficient to defeat any foe or bring down any game.

Their packs are well organized. Unlike his cousin



wolves in many other parts of the Realms, a winter wolf pack leader is usually the smartest animal, rather than merely the largest or strongest member of the pack.

It has been said that if a human were to offer a pack leader something it would value, that human could gain the service of the wolf pack. I am suspicious of such a nebulous promise; it smacks of braggarts and wishes. What a human explorer could offer a winter wolf of the High Ice is something I would love to know.

Yeti

Though fierce hunters in their own right, yeti are perhaps best known in the High Ice as the primary food source of the remorhaz. These well-adapted apes are intelligent and crafty, cunningly burying themselves in snow banks and holding motionless to ambush their prey. Remorhaz, however, have some way to detect them while they are hidden, unmoving and invisible to the naked eye. The great polar worms attack the hapless yeti from underneath.

Yeti have been seen using weapons they have stripped from intelligent victims, but they make no tools or weapons themselves. It is said that one should never look directly into their eyes, for the icy blue orbs of a yeti can paralyze a man with fear.

They live in small packs of extended families. Like some Bedine tribes, these families consider every other living being, including other yeti, as enemies. Unlike my tribesmen, yeti also consider everything else beyond their family members in the light of possible foodstuffs. Yeti risk an attack only if they believe they can successfully kill their chosen prey—they are not foolish.

The fur of a yeti has some sort of heat-absorbing property. Because of this, they are dangerously cold to the touch (heat from your body is pulled from you when you touch one), and they can withstand great amounts of damage from fire. However, I have found in my own travels that a simple torch swung about will ward off numerous yeti. If you can manage to slay one of these creatures, skin it and take its pelt. It can save you from the death-bringing cold.

Denizen of The Lost Cities

No discussion of the creatures of the High Ice can be complete without mentioning the Lost Cities: Ascore, Hlaungadath, Spellgard, and Oreme in the Frozen Sea, and Anarath, Baulaea, and still others under the ice itself.

These places are, in general, filled with magic and death. Any sort of creature may be found within their boundaries, even those not necessarily native to ice and snow, sand and stone. Many monstrous inhabitants are leftover remnants of a forgotten age, preserved by magic or their ability to adapt.

As is the case in the ruined cities in the Sword, the most common sort of monster in the Lost Cities is undead. These restless spirits of ancient times still guard the Lost Cities from intruders. Magical creatures beyond a Bedine's worst nightmare, such as lamia, hags, dragons, medusae, beholders, even other planar beings, are also frequently encountered, either living among the ruins or exploring, for these foul abominations were, in their heyday, places of powerful magic.





Part Five: The Underdark of Anauroch



save this discussion for last, because I like to speak of it least of all things. There is no more terrifying place than the Underdark, and it holds secrets regarding the Great Desert that are both difficult to tell—and difficult to hear.

Winters are harsh all across Anauroch, even in the Sword. When the winds howl and the temperatures plummet, the Bedine retreat into subterranean tunnels beneath the sands. We have no choice. To stay above ground would be to freeze, for there is no shelter in the endless dunes. The wind harries all before it.

This is the most trying time for any tribe, for there are beasts below ground that resist our intrusion with fearsome powers and surprising organization. These forays into underground caverns are a constant fight, but death above, in the cruel winter winds, is certain. The Bedine have only to endure the horrors of the Underdark, and count the days till they can emerge once again.

The first time I lead my tribe into the dark underworld, we entered through the caves south of the Shoal of Thirst. Immediately, eye tyrants attacked us and barred our way. Many of my people died, and only our sheer numbers drove the foul creatures back.

One victory did not secure us lasting peace by any means. The eye tyrants later retaliated by sending endless hordes of orcs and hobgoblins to assault us in our makeshift camps. Apparently, these gobblinoids were under the mental control of the beholders. No matter how bravely we repelled them, more came.

Still, we held our ground. Many more brave Bedine warriors died, and their wives sang the songs of *mot'azim*, or death, for many days. Finally, the creatures gave up. Although occasionally one of our peo-

ple disappeared, wandering too far from the fire we kept stoked night and day (for what are night and day in perpetual darkness? The firelight held back the noisome little beasts), we made the best of it, and awaited the coming of summer with the same eagerness with which a hawk springs into flight.

That was my last winter as sheikh of my *khowwan*. I did not return to the Underdark for many years after that, for I knew I could not survive there alone. It is not in my nature to seek death in so cowardly a fashion. Little did I know that when next I journeyed there, I would indeed travel alone. It was on my second sojourn that I learned the horrible secrets I will now reveal.

An ancient, inhuman race called the phaerimm rules Anauroch's Underdark and controls, one way or another, all of its inhabitants. These monsters control many of the events on the surface of the Mother Desert as well. Most of the *asabis*, and even some of the Bedine tribes, are directed by phaerimm magic.

It is the phaerimm who have made Anauroch into the waterless, lifeless region that it is. Even were I to reveal this secret to the Bedine sheikhs who were once my equals, however, the power of the phaerimm is too great. Even a united Bedine force, astonishing as such a prospect is (but remember, too, that my own father once united half the tribes of the Sword), powerful and brave though my people are, is too weak to ever confront them.

Perhaps no one can stop them—and they seek to spread the desert over all the Realms!

I know this to be true, for I have beheld these monsters with my own senses. They had control of me for some little time, as well, but I managed to break free and flee to the surface.

Knowing these facts, a traveler from the outlands may at last truly understand Anauroch and why





things are the way they are in the desert. It may be that no man in Anauroch can truly be trusted, due to phaerimm influence. I have faith, however, that my people—more than soft outlanders and greedy adventurers, more indeed than any other people—have a chance to resist such evil sorcery for at least a short time longer.

They are a strong race, the Bedine. They reject magic absolutely, and they abhor the very idea of slavery. How long this desert-honed strength can last, I do not know.

For those actually wishing to enter the dark realm of death after all the warnings I have given you, I will relate what I have seen of the most commonly encountered beings.

Creatures of the Underdark

Beholders

More commonly called eye tyrants among my people, beholders are an evil race. They arrogantly believe themselves to be masters of the Underdark (a place my people call *ard'amiq*). Few eye tyrants realize that their own leader, Rilathdool, an Elder Orb, is a mere phaerimm pawn.

Upon seeing an eye tyrant for the first time, my thought was "how could such a thing exist?" Years later, I still find the same question burning in my mind. Beholders and their kin (for, much to my horror, I have discovered there are many types of beholders) are unlike any creature I have ever encountered. They are not natural, they are abominations of nature.

Most of them are completely limbless, and they fly hideously ungracefully, by some sorcerous ability. The strangest thing about eye tyrants is, of course, their ability to fire magical blasts of energy like spears from their many eyes.

Beholders of Anauroch have developed a magical item called an eye-ring. In my dreams I have gathered all of these foul constructs and flung them into a remorhaz's maw, to melt in the infernal heat.

What a quest that would be! What a fitting end for base magic! But I must tell you what these *eye-rings* can do, so that you will recognize the justice of my

dream vision.

These magical rings fit onto the eyestalks of a beholders' many eyes. Each ring is keyed to a specific power of a beholder's eye, and changes the ray fired by the eye it is worn on to the power designated. What this means is that if a particular beholder likes the sleep ability of one of its eyes, it can wear "sleep" eye rings on the nine other eyes so that they all fire rays of sleep.

The eye tyrants of Anauroch dwell mainly in a city called Dakspur, roughly below the Dragon's Back Peaks in the Plain of Standing Stones. This city is ruled directly by Rilathdool, and has many different beholder-kin types, including gauth, spectators, and even death kiss beholders. Despite rumors to the contrary, beholders are able to coexist, and they do so in Dakspur in numbers of at least a thousand.

Gauth, those beholder-kin that consume magical power, are rare, but often hold positions of authority in the subterranean beholder society. Spectators are extremely rare and serve only as guards. Death kisses are often sent as assassins or special agents.

The beholders of Dakspur keep both orcs and hobgoblins among them as slaves and soldiers. Almost every beholder has charmed at least one such slave/bodyguard. These slaves become the "hands" of the beholder, allowing the master—through the slave—to manipulate objects they otherwise could not. Other slaves are organized into military units, each commanded by an eye tyrant which has charmed all of the orcs or hobgoblins in its unit.

Beholders, as far as I could tell in my time among them, do not distinguish at all between orcs and hobgoblins. Occasionally, a charmed Bedine like myself may also be discovered among the slaves. We humans are treated the same as any other slave. Apparently, eye tyrants do not bother to recognize any differences among other races. They seem to think only in terms of "us and them."

Some small-minded Bedine feel that way about outlanders, but observing beholder society has shown me the folly of such narrow thinking. That is a weakness among both the eye tyrants and the Bedine—they are quick to underestimate that which they are unfamiliar with.

Beholders never imagine any human is a threat until they are shown otherwise. A smart adventurer can use this arrogance to his advantage. Once a slave or foe demonstrates a great deal of ability or skill,





however, beholders will be on their guard, for they are quick to recognize power. Power is the one thing they respect.

Since the Bedine are familiar with the eye tyrants that dwell in the Underdark, having encountered them every cold season in their underground sojourns, displaying a dead beholder or some vestige of it, such as an eye, is a quick way to gain a small amount of respect from a desert tribe. But do not be too ostentatious. A cloak tasseled with beholder eyestalks, the way some northmen trim their fur capes with tails, is more likely to turn stomachs than to inspire respect among the tribes. Many great Bedine warriors have eye tyrant trophies, but they are rarely displayed openly. To speak of the denizens of the Underdark any more than necessary is considered bad luck and bad taste.

Dark Nagas

Dark nagas are evil agents of the phaerimm that operate above ground as well as below. Unlike beholders and illithids, these creatures are both aware of their masters and serve them willingly—there are no spells which force a naga into servitude. I am told by those more knowledgeable about such things than I that these creatures obtain a feeling of security by working with, or for, others.

Perhaps nagas feel more secure knowing the awesome power of the phaerimm supports them and their actions. On an even more practical level I have observed that nagas often learn new spells from the phaerimm as rewards for duties smartly completed and missions accomplished. Given the limitless magical knowledge the phaerimm possess, I imagine a power-hungry creature like a dark naga has no reason to ever leave service to a generous master.

Dark nagas serve most often as a kind of field commander, leading a group of lesser slaves in combat or on other important missions. They are almost never encountered without a retinue of orc, hobgoblin, *asabi*, or human underlings. However, there must be some friction or jealousy within their species, as they also never operate with other dark nagas. Their masters teach dark nagas spells to charm and control these lesser troops.

Some dark nagas appear to serve the beholders in in their foul city of Dakspur. They operate as slave unit commanders for eye tyrants, just as they do for

the phaerimm. It is my belief that these Dakspur nagas are actually spies and infiltrators sent by the phaerimm to make sure the beholders do as the phaerimm wish.

Dark nagas are not fastidious, and they eat all types of flesh, even that of other nagas if they must. In a desperate situation, a naga does not hesitate to kill one of those under it for food. They are selfish in the extreme. But they do have some concept of loyalty—at least enough not to turn on those in positions of authority.

Dark nagas have fully adopted the goals of the phaerimm as their own—these being the complete domination of both the Underdark and the sunlit world. Each naga has its own individual plans as well. Some scheme simply to gain more personal power, others develop plans so esoteric they are difficult for humans to comprehend.

In their quest for more power, dark nagas value magical items above all else. They always plunder their foes for such booty. If they find treasure worth taking, they swallow it, placing it in what would seem to be some special storage stomach whence they can regurgitate it later.

Dark naga lairs are usually filled with magical items. Unfortunately for the would-be wizard, these base leftovers tend to be weapons and charms that were not worth the creature's time or that they could not use. An item a naga finds useful is kept on (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say *in*) its person.

Naga, Dark: Int Exceptional; AL LE; AC 6; MV 13; HD 9; #AT 2; Dmg 1-4/2-8; SA Casts spells as a 6th-level wizard; tail stinger poison inflicts 1-2 points of damage and sleep for 2-8 rounds; THAC0 13; SZ L; ML 15; XP 4000

For more details, see FR13 *Anauroch*.

ILLITHIDS

Illithids—or mind flayers—are for the greatest part directly controlled by the phaerimm. There is no illusion here, as there is in the eye tyrant's lairs, that the species chooses its own destiny.

Phaerimm control is not absolute, however. There are supposedly a few independent, rogue illithid bands—particularly near the frozen city of Anarath.



The number of illithids in Anauroch's Underdark is actually small, being less than a few hundred. Because of this, the phaerimm use their illithid slaves sparingly, and rarely in groups. Instead, mind flayers serve as the phaerimm's special enforcers.

Illithids may occasionally even venture onto the surface of the Great Desert, carrying out some mission for their masters. Usually, they act as spies, trying to discern the meaning and probable outcome of Zhen-tish activities, the plots of lamias, and directives of any other active power group in the desert. (The phaerimm usually disregard my people, for which forebearance the Bedine would no doubt be grateful, if they were aware of it.)

In the Underdark, a mind flayer is sent by its phaerimm masters to investigate whenever a powerful threat enters their dark domain. I have heard that sometimes when a Bedine tribe flees underground to avoid a harsh winter, an illithid may be sent to spy on and perhaps harass them. If a powerful band of adventurers begins killing large numbers of phaerimm servants, they too might gain an illithid spy as an unwanted and most likely undiscovered companion.

Everyone has heard stuttering noises in the dark, and inexplicable rustles, then a pause in the small noises that whisper through a living tunnel. In the blackness, it is almost impossible to discover all the hiding places, all the listening crevices. Much as a person dreads the possibility of total isolation, neither can he be sure he truly is alone.

A mind flayer spy uses its mental powers to confuse and mislead any intruders into its assigned territory. If it can, it isolates them one by one from their companions, and kills them. Even though an illithid's will is not its own, mind flayers are still a cowardly lot, without honor of any kind.

The tales you might have heard are true—these monsters really do eat the brains of other creatures. I had heard they regard humans as humans might in turn regard their goats. This, however, is not true, at least not in the case of Anauroch mind flayers. They are cautious, and actually overestimate their enemies (again, they differ from beholders in this respect). They do not attack unless they are sure they can win.

I believe the mind flayers' extreme respect for human powers comes not from the sparse confrontations with Bedine and *ulugarr* adventurers of the current Anauroch. Though I value my own worth in fighting highly, I have seen too much of the world to

imagine that I am among the most fearsome creatures in it. I think perhaps the mind flayers are recalling far earlier contacts with the Netherese, that race of powerful sorcerers who once lived in what is now the Great Desert.

Since illithids almost never see each other, there is no illithid culture to relate to you. How they procreate is beyond me. I suspect from some incidents whose details I will not bore you with, however, that mind flayers are actually incredibly long-lived. Perhaps their natural life spans have been lengthened by some dark phaerimm magic.

If this be true, then the illithids that run such foul errands for the phaerimm now may even be the original mind flayers captured and controlled by their masters over a thousand years ago.

Orcs (and Hobgoblins)

Most of the goblinoid creatures under Anauroch are slaves, probably taken from the sunlit world above in raids and wars. Orcs are more common, with hobgoblins being fewer in number. *Asabis* are frequently slaves of the phaerimm as well.

All of these races are kept and all are treated as slaves, but they are magically charmed or controlled, so there is little discontent or rebellion. Slaves' wills have been so successfully taken from them that they exist only to serve. Their masters encourage them to breed, in order to increase their numbers.

Orcs in particular have been slaves so long and have adapted to the life of servitude so well that even though the species has all but disappeared from surface Anauroch, they are a common odor in the Underdark.

Phaerimm slaves are almost never encountered alone. They would not know what to do by themselves, so degraded are they. Usually some more intelligent creature, perhaps a beholder, a dark naga, or rarely even an illithid, commands a group of twenty to thirty slaves.

Slaves most likely carry the same sorts of weapons and equipment that their above-ground brethren use, for those are the tools they had when they were captured. But since no attention and no pride is paid for the armaments of servants, the weapons are almost always of poor quality.

Since their masters do not care for their welfare, it is not uncommon for these creatures to be underfed





and sickly, as well. Many turn to cannibalism, even eating their fallen foes if their masters allow it.

The Phaerimm

The phaerimm are the black masters of the Underdark of Anauroch. It is they who cast the dreadful *lifedrain* spells that have dried the surface world above them into the husk that today is the Great Desert Anauroch. Magic has done this! My people are right to despise its gruesome workings! To be sure, some creature or power, greater even than the phaerimm, slows and hinders their actions, but the monsters remain a threat to all that lives nonetheless—in the desert and beyond.

How can I describe these most inhuman villains? Their unnatural physical appearance is nauseating even to imagine. Phaerimm float and fly through the air as beholders do, but where an eye tyrant is rounded, the hideous phaerimm is shaped like an antelope horn stood on its point. The narrow end dwindle to a barbed tip. The widest end is surrounded by jaws lined with vicious teeth. Waving

around the cruel lip of this maw sprout four amazingly humanlike arms.

When first I beheld one of the beasts, in fact, I thought it had failed to swallow its previous meal. But the limbs are its own, retractable, and ending in deformed grips. Such a monster is clearly the result of dread magic, gone horribly wrong.

Many are the servants of the phaerimm. They influence beholder society through their elder orb leader. They control other creatures directly: illithids, orcs, hobgoblins, *asabis*, umber hulks, giants, dragons, undead, doppelgangers, a few drow, and even humans and other upperworlders. Some few slaves, such as dark nagas and aboleth, serve the phaerimm willingly. Servants are most commonly encountered in the Underdark (where their masters control almost everything), but they can be found spying and fomenting trouble above ground as well.

Indeed, phaerimm accomplish most of their goals through their servants. From the numbers of slave parties I saw set out, and the objects I caught a glimpse of when a group returned, I fear their chief short-term goal is the accumulation of ever more new





spells and magical items.

To accomplish their foul ends, they not only send out their servants to pillage and steal, but they also bid them spread word among the surface races that great wealth can be had in Anauroch. Rumors spread with every campfire, and of course, they only grow more alluring with each telling. By these rumors the phaerimm obviously hope to draw to themselves those armed with even more powerful items.

Like every other creature of dark power, phaerimm rarely collaborate together, although each individual does keep a large force of servants with it to do its bidding. There is no true leader or king among their kind. Instead, they revere and honor those of their number whose skill in sorcery is greatest, and those who develop new spells.

Phaerimm eat whatever servant is handy when they get hungry. If an explorer penetrates deep into their lairs, a strange and horrible sight confronts him—living humans, completely paralyzed, floating in the air through magical levitation. Each of these victims is injected with a phaerimm egg. (Occasionally, the victims may be other creatures, but humans are apparently preferred.)

As the foul larva grows, it devours its victim from the inside. Though paralyzed, these poor souls appear to feel a great deal of pain. I suppose it is possible magic may be able to save the incubators from their dread parasites. It must be capable of some good. But the easiest and most honorable thing to do is to put these tortured people quickly out of their misery. However, to insure the immature phaerimm is dead, the host body should be burned to ashes.

That I know of, phaerimm have no weaknesses to exploit. Their power can only be matched with equal power. Each phaerimm is a sorcerer, and most have developed unique spells for their own use. I myself have seen phaerimm magic drain all of the life-sustaining fluids from an enemy, turning him into a dry, dead husk in just a few minutes. Those magics involving charms and mind control are among their most powerful. Faugh on magic! Even El'Minster, who counts himself a powerful sorcerer, says he must be wary lest he fall prey to a phaerimm charm.

Phaerimm are supremely arrogant and self-confident, positive their magic can overcome any threat. I am not so sure that they are wrong.

Phaerimm: Int Supra-genius; AL NE; AC 2; MV F1 9(A); HD 9; #AT 6; Dmg 1-4 (or by weapon) X4 (arms—if at least two hit, bite is automatic)/3-12 (bite) /2-8 (tail); SA Cast spells as a 22nd- to 27th-level wizard; tail sting (if attack roll is 16 or greater, sting impales for another 1d6 points of damage, and victim must save vs. poison three times: first to see if paralyzed, second to see if levitated off the ground, third to see if egg injected is fertile—if so, victim takes 1 point/day after 1d6 days until dead); SD spell attacks that a creature's resistance overcomes are used as healing (the damage they would have dealt is gained as 1 point per spell level, points gained last 12 rounds) or can be reflected back at the source; THAC0 11; MR 44% (77% versus petrification and polymorph); SZ L; ML 17; XP 10,000

For more details, see FR13 *Anauroch*.

Tomb-Tappers

Beneath much of Anauroch there exist strange beings known as thaalud, or tomb-tappers. These creatures are oddly shaped, being in a man's general form, but with a faceless head. Large, tooth-filled maws are located in their midsections, and they appear to be sexless as well as hairless. Their skin looks to be of granite, and it is said that their claws can burrow through solid stone at an amazing rate.

Tomb-tappers, known among the few Bedine that have seen them as the Faceless, do not live on the surface of the desert, nor even in the caves and caverns of the Underdark. Instead I can report—because I have seen them with my own eyes—they tunnel up to our land from the very bowels of the world. They seek the ancient tombs of those long dead sorcerer-kings who ruled in ages past.

Why do they come? The creatures revere magic. Like the phaerimm, they seek magical items—but unlike those sorcerous monsters, the Faceless do not seek to use their treasures. They choose only to honor them.

Unlike all other creatures of the Underdark, thaalud are not servants of the phaerimm. In fact, they do not seem affected by the dark lords at all. The Faceless completely resist phaerimm mind-controlling magic, and the monsters know it. Because of this failure, the phaerimm have a special hatred for the Face-





less. They are always looking for methods to interfere with or destroy thaalud.

For myself, I have neither seen nor heard of a young thaalud. I suspect that they are incapable of reproduction, which explanation would fit with creatures of a solely magical origin.

An *ulugarr* priest by the name of Demoiliss once told me he had read in a book called the *Bestiary* written by someone named Hlammech the Naturalist. (He graciously offered this slender, leather-bound volume up for my inspection, not knowing books and reading are somewhat beyond me. I would never embarrass a priest by pointing out his error, so I just nodded and smiled.) The text tells a little of the nature of thaalud.

According to this clever and learned book, tomb-tappers eat stone, although they can extract nutrients from blood and bone if they have to. I shudder at the thought. They can also absorb water directly through their skin.

Demoiliss began to tell me thaalud reverted to stone when they were killed. This was not news to me. I had learned about the reversion some time ago on my own. In fact, I beheld the phenomenon with my own eyes on that ill-fated journey across the High Ice.

An unfortunate encounter in that frigid land put

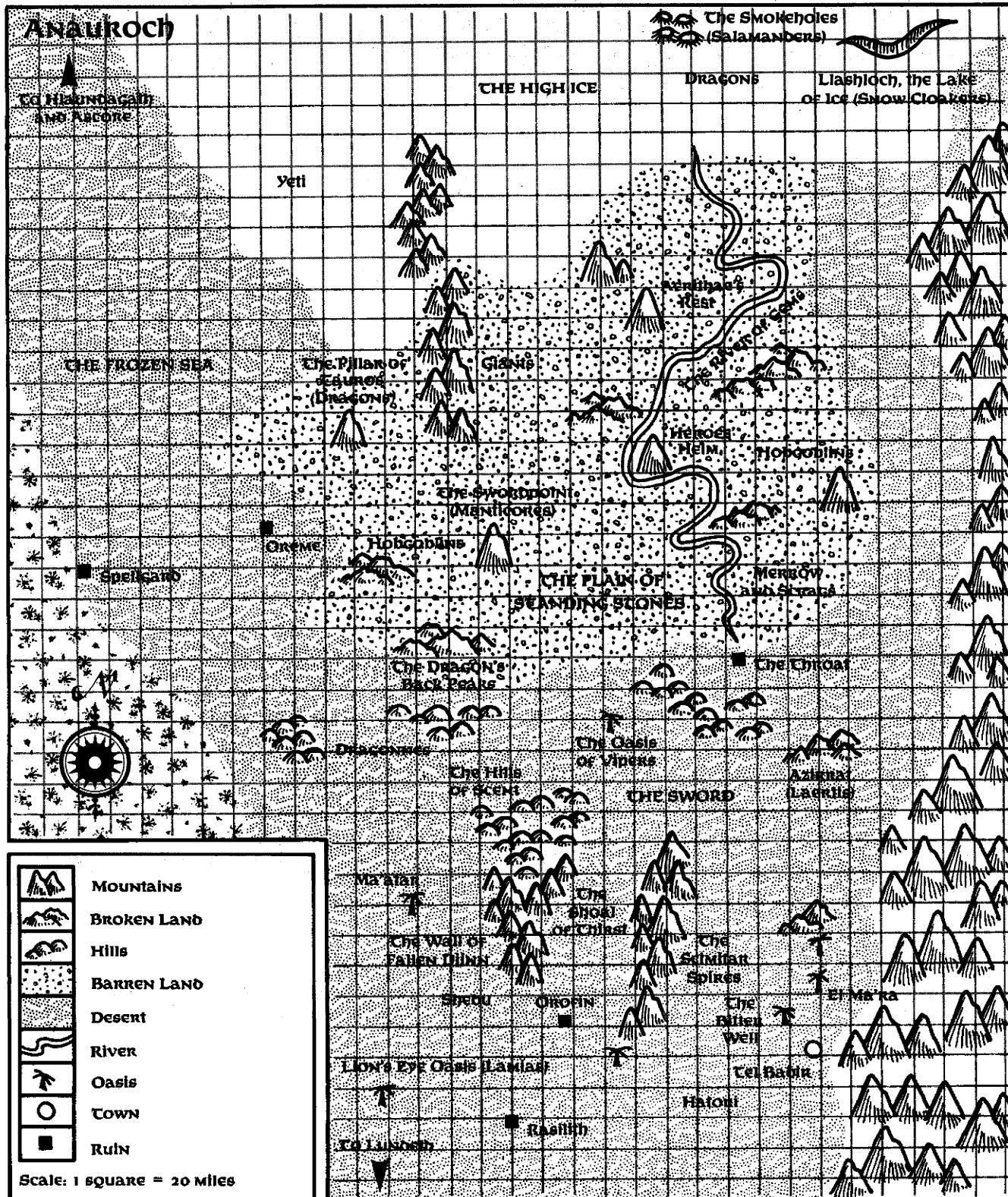
me in a fight with two thaalud. Both had the huge metal hammers that tomb-tappers always seem to carry, which proved to be formidable weapons. My companions and I slew one, and ran from the other. But our flight was to no avail. If only Demoiliss had read his book to our traveling party before that day. Just as the book confirmed to me when Demoiliss read from it, these beings can sense magic (almost like a camp dog scenting lizards). Unfortunately, my gnomish allies were not willing to part with theirs. The tomb-tappers insisted.

A word to the wise: If you encounter thaalud, and they demand that you hand over your magical possessions, do not refuse. Do not lie to them, either—it does not work. You are better off without the taint of magic in any case.

Tomb-Tapper (Thaalud): Int High; AL LN; AC -2; MV 10 Br 1-4; HD 8+8; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 4-24 (hand)/+24 (hand) /10-21 (bite) or 7-18 (hammer); SA Throw hammer (+2 to hit) or use one-handed (-2 to hit); SD Immune to visually-oriented magic, enchantment/charm magic, and fire and cold. Electrical attacks do half damage (or if save is made, none) THAC0 13; SZ H; ML 16; XP 8000

For more details, see FR13 *Anauroch*.







Part Six: Legends and Rumors

Lshall end by imparting those tales I have heard that I cannot prove, or those I would not wish to try to prove. Take these bits of information for what they are—I have no idea how much truth they hold.

- There is an oasis in the Frozen Sea (an odd thing in and of itself) that is home to a herd of pegasi. These winged horses are aloof and leery of strangers, but extremely intelligent and honorable. If a human of good nature approaches them and gives an appropriate reason for needing their aid, they may allow themselves to be ridden.
- Some Bedine claim to have seen a creature that fits the description of a remorhaz, but burrowing its way through the hot sands of the Sword! It may be a mutant or a new adaptation, or perhaps the testing of a new magically-created breed of creature by the evil Zhentarim.
- A human wizard, a dark naga, and a band of questionably sane Bedine have taken it upon themselves to try to change the course of the River of Gems. Rather than allowing so much precious water to disappear into the Throat and be lost forever, they wish to force the river's flow out into the Sword, and water that dry realm. If this plan is truly what they are attempting, surely the forces of that dark, inhuman evil below will try to stop them.
- Goblins, brigands, and bugbears from the Stonelands have recently been attacking Bedine encampments in the southeast. Rumor has it that some foul evil drives these noisome creatures from their lairs and homes and forces them into the desert. Of course, the newcomers have no provisions and no sense of desert ways and dangers. Their only hope of survival is to raid among Bedine encampments.

- There is a location known as "The Secret Place in the Sands" somewhere in the southern part of the Sword. Difficult for anyone not born to the desert to find, it is said of this place that a creature of awesome might, known as a tarrasque, sleeps below. The creature supposedly can be awakened by some special ritual, but its power could destroy the entire region.
- Titans supposedly wander the Plain of Standing Stones, uncovering veins of special ores with which to forge items of incredible power. Humans helping them are said to receive wondrous gifts.
- Until now, the only surface access to the realm of the thaalud has been in the frigid, nearly unreachable barrens of the High Ice. Recently, however, some of these strange, faceless beings have been seen near the oasis of Ma'atar. Not only are they present in the hot desert, I have heard they have a great many base magical items with them. But their purposes and their methods are unknown.
- An ancient sorcerer, in the form of a lich, has recently been seen in or around the ancient ruins of the city of Oreme. This lich's goals are no less than to raise all of the city's dead inhabitants and re-establish the place as a major center of magical and political power.
- This last rumor was not even told to me in Anaurroch, but it concerns the desert nevertheless. In a small tavern outside Neverwinter, a slender, elf-like man hailed me. By my robes, he said, he knew my homeland. He asked that I find his elder brother, who had traveled into the Sword years before, and bring him home. An *ulugarr* wandering the desert alone? I replied he would not have lasted two months—but the man insisted his brother was a learned mage. Of course, I refused the task—I want no part in hunting foolish magicians' bones. Still, the Neveren believed his brother lives. And he stands heir to a fortune.





Costal Aquatic Lands: The Sea of Falling Stars

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Introduction

he coast of the Sea of Fallen Stars along Cormyr and Sembia has been my home for over 30 years now. I am Lucas Surin, captain of a unit of Purple Dragons currently stationed in Suzail. I was born a loyal subject of the king of Cormyr in the tiny village of Kallamarn, a day's ride from Suzail. As soon as I was old enough, I left the farm my family cared for and headed to Sembia, for I had heard that they were hiring able-bodied folk as mercenaries, and my heart longed for the life of the sword.

I traveled to Yhaunn, learning what I could about sword play and street fighting along the way. By the time

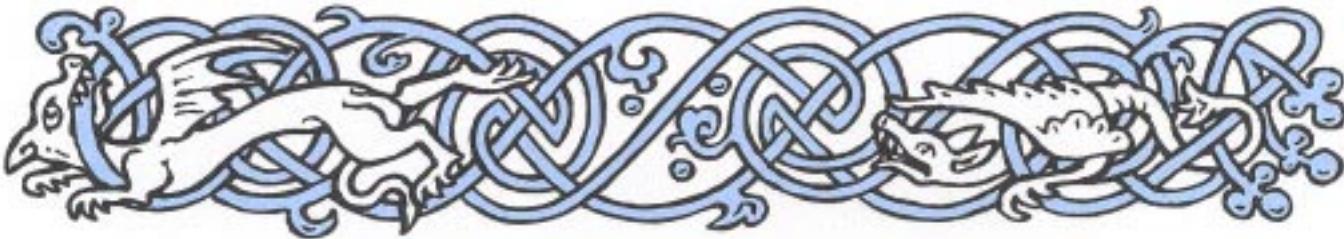
I got there, I was able to handle myself well with steel.

My new life began on the coast. I escorted caravans and cleared monsters from the land, but always I was drawn to the sea. I began to think my life would become that of a sailor, but I could never shake the need to fight on dry ground (versus bobbing on the sea in a wooden ship far from home).

After my journeymanship in life and in battle, I returned home to visit my family. While in Cormyr, I learned that the crown was soliciting for positions within the Purple Dragons, Cormyr's standing army.

The thought of enlisting intrigued me. Bearing steel in the name of the crown was appealing, and it





rested better upon my conscience to use my sword for a cause that would benefit Cormyr, rather than simply using it to better my employer, which was the situation I had just left as a sword for hire.

I signed on with the Dragons.

Fate locked its grip upon me, and I found my assignments kept me close to coastal areas. I was also given tasks that took me into Sembia, where I met with old friends who had enlisted in the Sembian army.

Over the following two decades, I lived a life of adventure all along the coast, outwitting wily creatures native to both land and sea, all in the name of King Azoun IV. During that time, I learned a great deal about the people who live along the coast and the astounding number of creatures that dwell just below the surface of the water, coming ashore at times for reasons both benevolent and malign.

One autumn day I paid a visit to the best place to find rare shells on the coast of Cormyr, an isolated and small stretch of sand about an hour's ride off Dragoneye Way between Suzail and Marsember. It was a place I thought only I knew of.

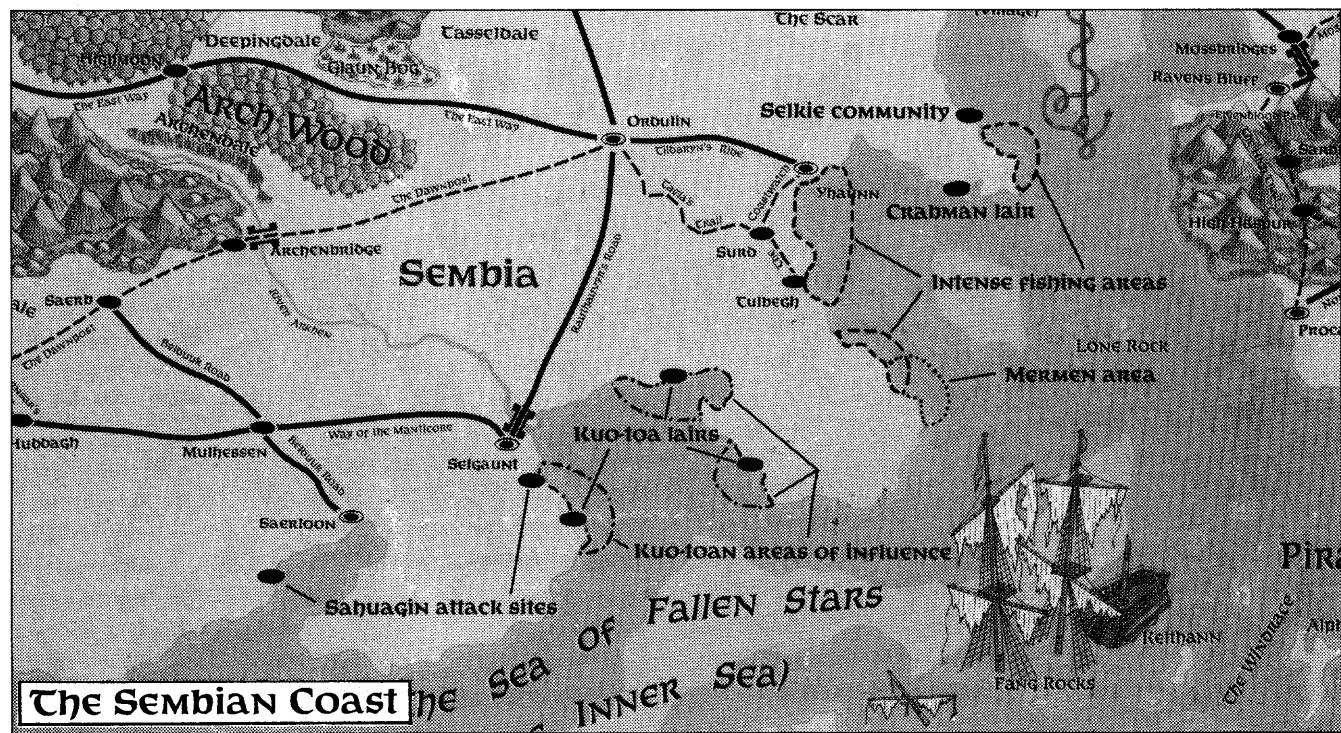
When I arrived I spotted a man who had long white hair and a long beard. He was dressed in robes and a peculiar hat. He was collecting shells with one hand while he puffed distractedly on a curved pipe he held in the other. From his trappings I took him for a

mage. I realized he must be familiar with shells and the sea to know to come to that particular stretch of beach. I was impressed, for I had believed I was the only one aware of this precious wealth of shells.

I struck up a conversation with the old man about shells. He had been collecting them for many more years than I had, and he knew much about them. Whereas I would pick shells based on their beauty alone, he was trying to assemble perfect representatives of every species. This mage, who called himself Elminster, showed me more about my own shells than I ever would have discovered left to my own devices.

When he asked me if I knew of any other good shell beaches, I told him of a few secluded stretches of sand I had discovered. As I did, I related some of the adventures I had had while looking for these beaches. Impressed with the amount of time I'd spent along the coast, he asked me to write down the things I'd observed over the years.

What follows are some of the experiences he asked me to record. The Sea of Fallen Stars is truly vast, and describing the coasts around it would require many pages. Instead, this work concerns itself only with the coast of Sembia and Cormyr, a very long stretch of land with a coastline boasting many natural inhabitants.





The Sea of Fallen Stars

The coast of the Sea of Fallen Stars, from the edge of Scardale in the Dales to south of the Storm Horns in Cormyr, can be broken down into different regions. Note that the following regions are generalized and that features of a particular region can also be found elsewhere throughout the coast.

Scardale To Yhaunn

This coastline is as harsh as the cold winds that blow across it. The winds have turned the coast into a most inhospitable stretch of land.

The most distinguishing characteristic about the coastline is the jagged rocks that bite like fangs into the water below them. Black and dark brown rocks, cliff faces, and assorted small islands extend between Scardale and Yhaunn. Cliff faces are scattered along the coast. These black walls of rock are an imposing sight.

Not a great deal of plant life exists here compared to other sections of the coastline. The rocky surface and the violent waves upon the seashore prevent most things from making a home out of it. But unusual and mundane creatures and plants do make their homes amid this terrain.

What plant life there is collects along the tops of the jagged faces where the soil is. Still, most of the plants are bashed and swept away by the tides and do not have a chance to take deep root.

Very little sandy beach is found between these two towns, and likewise not a great deal of gently sloping terrain either. This makes building a dock or any port facility difficult along the great majority of the coast.

The lack of hospitable coastline also prevents a great number of people from living there. A few of the individuals who build homes near the coast stay because of the view; they make their livings farther inland. Fewer still are hobbyist sailors who like to fish. But given the time, expense, and danger required to

build along the coast, most of the coast residents are either rich or desperate—or pirates.

Weather along the coast between these two cities is very cold and unforgiving. Winds blow almost constantly from the sea-cold winds that spare no one from their bite. This has discouraged many people from living there. In rare locations, especially during winter, the tide pools have been known to freeze in shallow parts of the coastline. This has had the noticeable effect of breaking up the rocky coastline and making traveling along such places very hazardous, for the shards of rock left behind impede walking.

Yhaunn To Selgaunt

This stretch of land is similar to the previously described coast. The shoreline is almost as rocky, and the shape of everything on the beach is determined by the harsh surf. But some differences are worth noting. The primary difference is that as one travels southwest down the coast, the terrain begins to even out and become less jagged and austere.

Just near Yhaunn, plant life is sparse. The waves and the barren rocks harbor little in the way of plants other than mosses and various clinging vines that can withstand the action of the waves.

Toward Selgaunt, though, the plants become more prolific as the shore becomes more hospitable. The tides are gentle and the rocks and beaches are more able to accept plants, affording them a real chance to take hold and grow. It is here that one finds very colorful plants and flowers, as well as the most diverse kinds of flora, as land plants have taken root in the soil near the sand. And only feet away, strangely colored mosses drape themselves over small, smooth rocks.

The beaches of Selgaunt begin just a few miles east of the city, and they are not the luxurious long beach





fronts that crop up in sections of Cormyr. Instead, these are scraggly, small stretches of sand that don't have much to offer in the way of scenery. In fact, they are just plain ugly and unproductive. The soil is too poor to support farming. However, the land is strong enough to support buildings, and for this purpose the area provides excellent places for docks and ports. Selgaunt is built on just such ground.

People along this stretch fish for a living, a lucrative profession. Surd and Tulbegh both support fishing communities that are active in the area. The large amount of flat, easy-to-build-on land in this area has made the construction of villages and fishermen's houses along the coast easy. While the terrain leaves much to be desired in the way of scenery, life there is easy when compared to parts north. The weather along this coastline is temperate to cool. The winds blowing off the sea bring all manner of weather to the shore, but it is often cloudy and rainy in some parts. This makes for gloomy, dismal days (at least, it was so during my visits to the area).

SELGAUNT TO URMLASPYR

This coast is filled with rocky terrain similar to that found north along the coast. An almost equal distribution of rocky shorelines, small beaches, and smooth, not-so-rocky surfaces is found.

Areas of this coast closely resemble the land near Scardale, as well as beaches that are warm and resemble places much farther south. It is difficult to pin down a predominant feature of the shoreline, other than to say that diversity rules.

For this reason, I would recommend this coast as the place to go to see the greatest collection of plant life and wildlife. With all of these differing habitats, one is sure to find whatever one is seeking. Many species of migratory birds, for example, take advantage of the pockets of terrain they favor. And, although it is out of my area of expertise, I am told that the plants and berries along this stretch are rich, and that there is a lot to be discovered in the way of new fruits, roots, and the like. The weather becomes more temperate and stable the farther southwest one travels. The winters and summers become less harsh, and the coast just begins to even out around Urmlaspyr.

URMLASPYR TO THE TUN RIVER

This coastline, which represents the entire coastline of the Kingdom of Cormyr, is largely dominated by beaches and spotted with rocky shores. Also along this stretch are a few nonsandy beaches. These are places where the plains and relatively even terrain of the land meets the sea. These areas are being eroded by the sea and present a problem for those who live and farm along the coastline.

During storms, in particular, the vulnerability of these locations becomes apparent. The area surrounding the river leading from the Vast Swamp is a good example of this type of terrain.

Two types of weather predominate on the Cormyre coast. From Urmlaspyr to about Hermit's Wood, things are even and temperate, though harsh storms and harsh winters come every few years. From Hermit's Wood to the Tun River, terrible storms rumble out of the Storm Horns mountains that influence the weather in Marsember and Suzail. They bring heavy rains and blinding snowstorms in months that are otherwise calm. Generally, though, the location is livable and pleasant.





Natural Aquatic Life



A variety of creatures live along the Sea of Fallen Stars that factor into the survival of the humans and demihumans living on the coast. What they are like and what their relationship is with land dwellers is explained below. I'll begin this area of discussion with the tiny creatures that have always been closest to my heart.

Crabs

Many types of crabs live along the coastline discussed in this work. Among them, those that venture onto shore are the most interesting.

Along the coastline near Scardale lives a particularly brightly-colored crab known as Finialian's crab, named after the fisherman who once specialized in trapping the creatures.

The shell of this crab is usually bright blue on those specimens native to the Scardale area, deepening to a shade of purple as one travels south from there. The greatest concentration of these crabs is around Scardale, however.

Finialian's crab is best known for being able to burrow under the sand when threatened. It has two large, scoop-shaped pincers that it uses to dig. It's able to completely bury itself in less than a minute. A person can walk right over the top of one that has buried itself and not know it—unless you know what to look for: They leave a tiny portion of their shell poking up from beneath the sand.

These crabs are caught by baiting them with the flesh of other species of crab, though they will not eat that of their own.

Their shells are sometimes used as decorations by seadwelling races such as the mermen.

Crocodiles

The fierceness of this reptile is legendary. There have been many stories of gruesome deaths caused by these malicious animals.

The climate they live in is generally warm and

tropical, but some have been seen near the Tun River. Crocodiles are armored reptiles and this tough hide has kept them safe from many attacks. Only a sharp spearhead can be counted on to pierce the skin.

It's this same toughness that has led some in the kingdom of Cormyr to incorporate crocodile hides into their fashions and armor. A contingent of Purple Dragons uses crocodile hide on its shields, for example. Also, the hide has found a place as padding and other related uses onboard ships, as the hide is water resistant.

Although the crocodile seems to be creeping up the coastline toward cooler climes, its numbers are kept consistently low by steady hunting.

Dolphins

There are two types of dolphins: those that are fish, and those that are mammals. The difference between the two, outside of physical characteristics, is most pronounced in their intelligence.

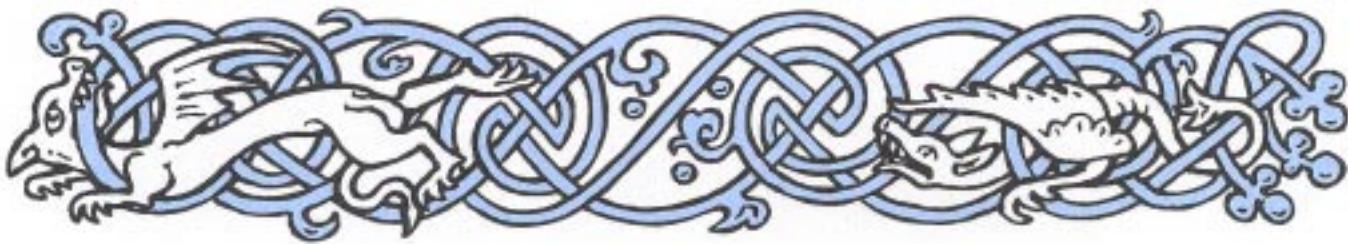
Dolphin fish are much like typical sea fish. They can grow to be large-sized and can swim very quickly. They are well known as excellent meal fish and are much sought after by fishermen. They are difficult to catch, for when they initially take bait, they tend to swim quickly away. As they do so, they leap out of the water and back in again. Why they do this is unknown, but it effectively tries the endurance and skill of all fishermen. Dolphin fish are common near Selgaunt.

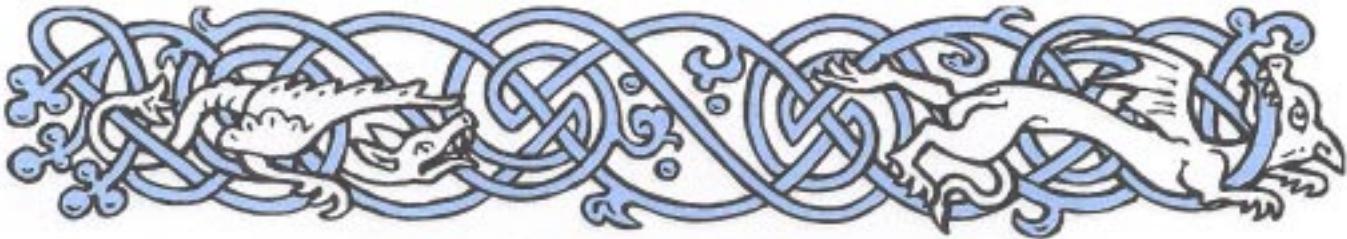
Mammalian dolphins are more widely known, especially among sea-dwelling races. Sleek, air-breathing bodies, pronounced noses, and a high degree of intelligence set this aquatic creature apart from all others.

Nearly all races that are intelligent have attempted to use and train dolphins for one purpose or another. Some have been more successful than others, but the mermen have displayed the greatest prowess. Whether this is due to a racial repertoire or an innate skill (or neither) is unknown.

With their ability to be trained and their association with legendary sea races, dolphins are the subject of numerous heroic tales. Hardly a child who lives on







a coast hasn't heard tales of dolphins bearing messages from the gods, helping stranded fishermen, or warning land dwellers of dangerous seas.

Eels

Several types of eels are found along the coast. Most common are the freshwater eels that are delicacies in parts of Suzail. The Tun River is another location where eels are commonly found.

Freshwater eels have bad reputations, for their snakelike appearance and behavior frightens most folks. Witnessing a snake slithering out of the water and over a patch of mud is unnerving to be sure. Freshwater eels aren't very common, and travelers are especially subject to having to cope with them.

Naturally, the most famous eel is the electric eel. Its reputation is widely known, though sightings of electric eels are particularly rare.

Electric eels have not presented a real threat to land dwellers. News of a death caused by one is a significant event. Sea-dwelling races share a different history with the eels. Since they occupy the same environment, a greater number of encounters, and hence deaths, are associated with these sea creatures.

Rumors have it that the kuo-toa are attempting to capture and train electric eels to defend their lairs.

Fish

Without a doubt, fish serve as the economic strength of nearly every port town. Fishing is responsible for feeding many people and creating an entire culture and history.

More vast than all the stories and histories of fishing and fishing communities is the variety of fishes. This work can't begin to address the scope of discussing the fish along the coast, but some interesting facts and stories are worth noting.

In Scardale there was a fisherman who insisted he had found a school of fish with golden scales. He said that when he tried to net one, it was too heavy for the net and its weight tore through it. He used this as proof that the golden fish was truly made of gold.

This sparked a frenzy. Fishermen from all along the coast descended on Scardale's waters, looking for golden fish. Ultimately, one was caught and examined. To everyone's surprise, the scales did in fact

have tiny amounts of gold in them. It turns out, though, that the amount in the scales is generally not enough to make casting for the fish worthwhile. With that, many fishermen left the waters to go back to their regular pursuits.

A few have remained and are studying these golden fish. They believe that these fish, like the aurumvora, can serve as indicators for underwater deposits of gold. How to retrieve the gold once discovered has yet to be worked out.

Flying fish are another source of legends and stories. Most of these have been forgotten or treated as fairy tales and are not grounded in fact. More recent efforts have concentrated on using flying fish as indicators for danger. Many fishermen believe that when flying fish are seen, there must be a significant danger below the surface. They note that according to logs of ships that have been ambushed by huge sea creatures such as kraken, flying fish were seen a few minutes before the fateful attack.

Some fishermen have attempted to train flying fish. They keep buckets of bait, and when they come across a school of flying fish, they continually dump small amounts of the bait into the water to coax them to follow the ships.

Fishermen

A great many fishing communities dot the coastline. All of them have some kind of port, dock, or landing site for their boats.

Fishing is good all along the coastline. The only variation in this livelihood involves the types of fish that are caught. Those fish that prefer cold water are found off Scardale, and those that like warmer waters are found off Marsembur.

I have heard some talk about there being too many fishermen in the waters and of the possibility that fish might be depleted from the oceans. Hardly the case, I think. Not until I see coastal fishermen take to boats bound for deeper waters will I think there are not enough fish to go around.

Among the types of fishermen, boat fishers in the shallows are the most common. They take to small, five-person crafts and troll with large nets.

This netting practice yields a great number of fish at a time and is the most economical. Starting such an enterprise is costly, for the nets are very expensive. But after a while, there is enough profit from





the venture to make things worthwhile. Cormyr is toying with the idea of taxing fishermen. They mean to impose a yearly fee for owning a fishing boat. Should this happen, the discontent will be widespread to be sure. Already there is talk among the thieves' guilds about sabotaging the royal navy's ships in protest.

The beings you are more likely to encounter along the coast are human fishermen, and as a Purple Dragon, I can say that you're most likely to face the greatest danger from them. Their mood swings from day to day depend on whether or not they have had luck fishing. If much was caught, they'll be jovial and rowdy. If fishing was poor, they'll be angry and looking for a fight. Many of my nights on watch duty were spent quelling some rabble-rousing fishermen who were discontent about the poor catch of the day or harassment from pirates. It's a difficult life, one that I don't envy.

Kind souls are found among every profession, including fishermen, and I have run across my share. A bit north of Scardale lives Noral Kier, a fisherman who lives simply but has a complex mind. Should you be in distress or need some information about the area—especially the sea—seek him. He lives in a wooden hut with a clay-shingled roof five miles north of Scardale. He won't hesitate to help you, given that your own heart is good and your intentions honest.

Lampreys

These are parasitic fish that deserve special mention. Lampreys attach themselves to fish larger than themselves and suck blood out of their hosts. Lampreys are special for they ultimately kill their hosts, whereas other parasites die when their host does.

Every few years, a serious lamprey problem plagues the rivers that empty into the oceans. Dead fish turn up by the score, and salmon and other fish that swim upriver are particularly affected.

Worse, live fish caught with lampreys attached to them are almost always inedible, for the lamprey seems to inject some kind of poison into its host. Though not harmful to land dwellers, the substance sours the taste beyond any hope of making the fish marketable. There have been many efforts to rid the seas of lampreys, but none have proven successful.

Sea Otters

Small mammals, sea otters are crafty sorts that live in salt or fresh water. They sometimes venture upriver in search of food.

They come ashore during storms, seeking whatever protection the land might offer in crevices and small caves. Fishing communities use the sea otter as an indicator of how severe a storm will be. Sea otters seem to have an innate sense about the strength and duration of storms. They will swim upriver and hide in alcoves or merely wait on the banks for the storms to pass. But weather folklore claims the farther they swim upriver and the more huddled they are on the bank, the longer and more severe the storm will be.

Travelers would do well to keep an eye out for sea otters near the coast. Their actions can send signals that can save lives.

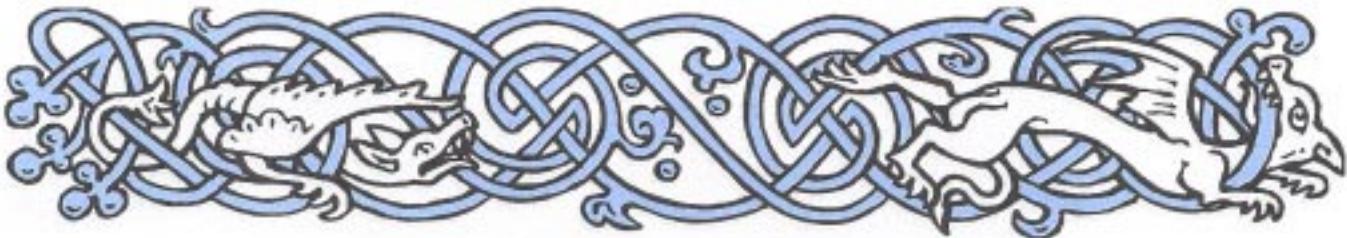
Pirates

No discussion of aquatic life would be complete without some mention of that most-feared, widest-spread threat to life on the seas—pirates. One of the most recent seafaring villains to menace the coasts is Lukar, a dwarf pirate. He has gone against all the traditionally held notions of dwarven culture and become an expert seafarer. He is said to prefer the flamboyant life in the open air to the careful life of the stereotypical underground dwarf.

Lukar is best known for capturing a gold-bearing ship from the kingdom of Cormyr. He attacked in the classic place for a pirate assault: the Neck, near the Lake of Dragons. A substantial reward is offered by King Azoun IV for his capture.

Another famous pirate is Wishera, a woman known to have a number of females among her crew. She is human and generally thought to be the richest pirate still sailing the seas. Her expertise lies in raiding fellow pirate ships. Her view seems to be, "Why should one bother raiding ships under heavy guard when one can raid a pirate ship, which usually operates alone?"

Her big scores have come from raiding ships that have themselves conducted more than one raid. When she finds a ship with more than one bounty, it's a target she considers hard to resist. Knowing which pirate ships are laden with treasure requires an extensive information network, and Wishera certainly has the best one of all. She uses women in the surreptitious acquisition of information. They charm unsus-



pecting sailors into revealing the shipping routes of gold-bearing ships. It is rumored that her beauty has won the continued obedience of a Cormyrean naval captain.

There have been rumors that Wishera has begun to dabble in the spy business, using her crew to gain information that is of use to statesmen alone. It's more likely that some other kingdom has begun using her techniques, for Wishera is driven by wealth and has a true love for combat on the seas. Dealing in mundane things like state secrets is not her style at all.

Over the years, there have been various anti-pirate campaigns launched by Cormyr. The coasts have seen the remnants of shipwrecks wash ashore. Despite these campaigns, pirates still rule parts of the ocean. In light of this, most kingdoms have taken to heavily guarding individual ships rather than conducting regular patrols. This concentration of resources has so far proven to be successful.

This latest measure has convinced some pirates to ally with others so their strengths can be combined in the assaults. However, this works quite poorly for them: There is a great deal of mistrust among the various bands, enough so that successful cooperative raids then degenerate into contests among the pirates themselves for the booty. If a particularly charismatic pirate comes along who can sway those under him or her, the situation may change.

There was some talk that such a pirate may have been found. His name is unknown, but he went by the nomenclature "the Terror of the Neck." He aligned two pirate factions but after a defeat on the sea was not heard from again.

Sharks

Anyone who has been lost at sea can tell you that the primary concern after food and water is shark attack. For sea-dwelling races, sharks are either an enemy or an ally. More than one race has trained sharks to act as guards for their lairs, and such guards are very effective.

Once sharks are assigned, they will not leave their post. Baiting them and tricking them is not easily done, depending on the level of training they've had. There have been stories of sharks that did not desert their posts even when they could smell fresh blood not too far away.

Sharks attack anything smaller than themselves, and some will eat anything that will fit into their mouths. A shark's belly can be a treasure-trove. The most famous case of this involved a shark captured near Selgaunt that had a hand wearing the signet ring of a noble of Cormyr in its belly. That noble's fate had been a mystery for many years—until the shark was cut open.

Sharks are encountered all along the coastline discussed in this work. They do not seem to prefer any particular location. However, the growing consensus is that the sharks are beginning to follow pirate ships, for they seem to know that where those ships go, bloodshed and stranded sailors (in other words, food) are bound to follow.

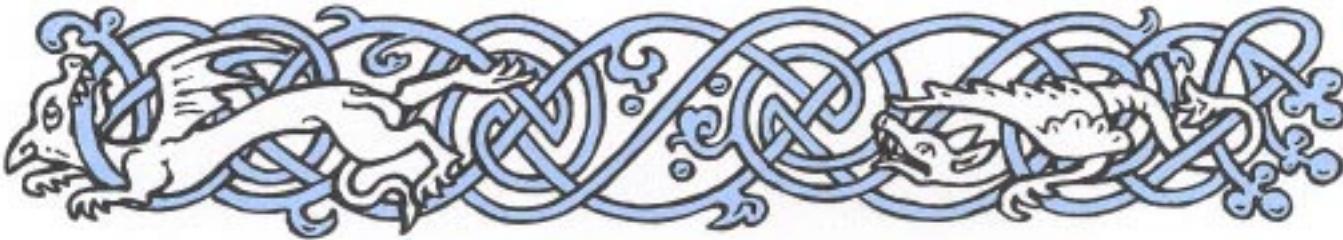
Squids

These are the source of the greatest number of giant sea creature legends. Indeed, nearly all monster-at-sea tales are of giant squids that reach up from the bottom of the sea with tentacles strong enough to crack a ship's hull. In fact, squids are much more benign (giant ones notwithstanding). They feed on small ocean creatures and are fearful of both land- and sea-dwelling races. Squids have gained favor over the course of history because of their flesh. It carries, when prepared properly, a pleasant taste that is favored in coastal towns. Just to the west of Urmlaspyr, a fisherman has opened a shop specializing in squid and octopi. He is an expert at catching them alive and in using them in excellent culinary creations. The shop is known as the "eight and ten" for it has as its sign a squid and an octopus with their tentacles swirled and braided in a complex and beautiful filigree, giving the impression the two sea creatures are dancing underwater.

Frogs and Toads

These tiny animals, mundane when compared to legendary krakens and whatnot, bear a place in this work because of their importance and the fondness that is shared for them up and down the coast. Toads and frogs are best known for the croaking sounds they make. These croaks have earned the animals their place in popular culture. In places along the coast, near Yhaunn and the Tun River, for





example, the croaks are actually considered melodious. These melodies have been transcribed in poetry, some of which I have written myself. Also, toads can be used as guards. In general, they stop croaking whenever an animal appears. Some travelers who are used to the croaks purposely bed down near toads, using the cessation of their throaty chorus as a warning. Toads are also sources of food, though their popularity has yet to catch on, perhaps because of their ugliness.

A number of wives' tales have been spun about toads. The most famous one about getting warts from them has not been proven. Some stories do have validity. The toads near Hermit's Wood are said to be able to see invisible creatures—even those from other planes. An incredible tale, to be sure, but one that I've been witness to myself. I had occasion to be in the area with a thief. The thief had a magical ring that made him invisible. We were part of a hunting party stalking a deer. We caught the trail, and the thief elected to use his ring to scout ahead and sneak up on the quarry. He did so, but when he walked near a patch of frogs resting in the sun near a stream, they sent out a cacophony that I'm sure was heard in Suzail.

We abandoned the hunt and chose to study the frogs instead. They were green, but had reddish striations and unusually large eyes. When the thief took off his ring, their agitation ceased.

Urchins

Sea urchins are poisonous threats to land dwellers. They have toxin-covered spikes that present serious problems for any barefoot villagers. This seems to be a purely defensive measure, though, as the urchin seems unable to move by itself.

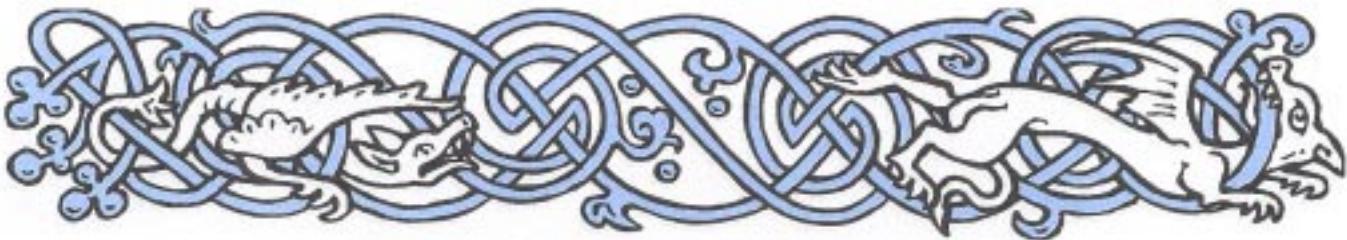
Urchin poison has been an ingredient in assassins' potions for as long as there have been thieves' guilds. It's also used as a part in other toxins, such as for the solutions that arrowheads and blades are dipped into. If a collection of urchins is found, one can be sure the location is also known by assassins and other poison-seeking rogues.

A naturally occurring antidote for urchin poison is the Kalimarin flower that grows near the beaches. Preparation of the antidote is fairly simple. Pulverize the petals and add a trace amount of water to create a paste. This should be applied to the wound not more than five minutes after the toxin has been introduced.

Other Sea Life

In my travels, I have encountered many different types of unusual sea life that have had an impact on my life. While in Cormyr, near Marsember, I came across a type of lily pad that caught my eye. It was light green with orange stippling. I poked at it with the butt end of my spear, and the pad suddenly enveloped it, attaching itself to the spear handle. I was able to kick it off without any trouble, but when I examined the spear, there were several tiny tooth marks in the wood, as well as a sticky sap lining the gashes. This pad, which I don't know the name of, is surely poisonous and threatening to those who walk the swamps near Marsember.

Not too long after my stint near Selgaunt I heard tale of a person who had died from a beach snake bite. Intrigued by something I hadn't heard of before, I went to the village from where the tale had come. As far as I know, the snake is found only near Selgaunt. It is sand-colored and slithers silently along the surface. When the tides recede, it crawls inside tidal pools and eats whatever it finds there. The snake's jaws are extremely powerful and can pulverize crustaceans in one bite. The villager's toe had been bitten off, and he apparently died trying to return to the village for aid.



Monsters of the Deep

Ghe world above the ocean holds many great kingdoms and races, as does the sea; it's an entire world of its own that never sees the light of the sun. This section discusses some of that realm's inhabitants, and how they affect those of us living on land.

Crabmen

We were enjoying a bit of leave near Sembia when I became acquainted with crabman artifacts.

I found the pieces very beautiful and wondered how I might acquire some artifacts of my own. I hoped to take a few examples back to Cormyr with me, and I could not afford the ones I saw for sale. I had to find my own. The lairs of crabmen are kept secret by those who know about them. They serve as repositories of wealth to anyone clever and lucky enough to slip treasures out of them. Finding a lair on one's own is difficult. I had only one bit of information: The crabmen leave large round pellets of sand and dirt near their lairs.

I searched as best I could for underwater caves near the coast and found that the terrain south of Scardale was rife with them. Most held creatures that were less than hospitable. On a hunch, I laid out a collection of silver pieces to bait one of them, and it worked. They could not resist the shiny objects. I followed the one who collected the coins back to its lair. I swam into the lair, and to gain their favor I presented another handful of silver pieces. Except for one crabman, they were all fearful of or hostile to me, and they certainly didn't want to trade anything. However, there was one among them who was reasonably friendly, and I was given a sculpture, which I still have today.

The crabmen are largely a peaceful group. They keep to themselves, which precludes them from being a threat to the settlements. But, crabmen are tasty creatures, and some humans are wont to hunt them for their flesh. After being with the crabmen, and seeing how they live, I cannot advocate dining on any.

Kelpies

Someone new to the unit was overdue, and I was assigned to look for him. He had been away visiting his lover, who lived in a town nearby our post, which was near the Wyvernflow River.

I was walking along the coast, which was slightly rocky, trying to retrace his steps. I assumed he had been journeying to the village where she lived. I found his body lying belly up, pushed by the surf against the rocky beach. I went quickly to him, hoping there might be some breath of life in him. But I could soon tell he had drowned.

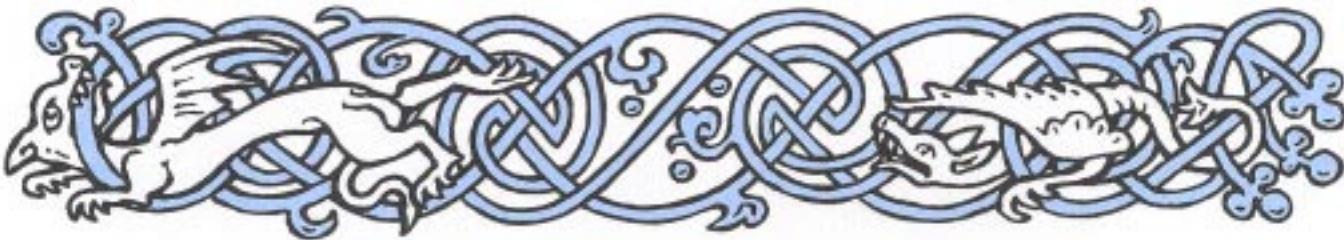
His body was covered with a strange kind of seaweed I had not seen before. It was green, but the strands were oddly shaped, mostly composed of even strips and rather featureless and strangely lacking in detail.

I looked around at the place where I found his body and saw a cluster of the same seaweed. In the sunlight, the seaweed was particularly beautiful. So striking was it that I actually felt lightheaded for a moment. I had a brief vision of my comrade's girlfriend just beneath the water, entwined in the seaweed. Suddenly it occurred to me that I had encountered kelpie, an intelligent and enchanted seaweed, which takes the forms of women to lure men to their deaths.

I jumped away from the area in horror and relief that I had somehow resisted the enchantment. I went to the body to see why, if he had died, he had not been dragged below like other victims of the kelpie.

Gripped tightly in his hand was a sprig of hermit berries, a plant that grows just around the Hermit's Wood. It has a most pleasant aroma and is often given between lovers in area villages as a sign of affection. With sadness I realized my charmed comrade had given the kelpie the same sprig his lover had given him. Apparently, the sprig's aroma has some bitter effect on the kelpie, which repulsed it enough to let him go. But the release had come too late, for he had died anyway.





Know the hermit berry by its yellow color and tiny bluish dots that cover it. Always keep some handy while walking near Wyvernflow.

Kuo-Toa

This race of fishmen is a threat to a variety of creatures, but they take special hatred toward drow, mind flayers, and especially humans.

Their animosity regarding humans is one that extends beyond any written record. It's believed that in ancient times, there was a land-dwelling race of kuo-toa, but they were driven into the sea by consecutive and concentrated military campaigns. There are other theories that could justify their hatred of humankind. These range from retribution for vendettas against the kuo-toa for their slave raids, to kuo-toan jihads against humans who don't worship their god. Such reasons have been retold so often, the actual foundation for their feelings has, perhaps, been lost to time. Whatever it is, their hatred is kept alive and burns deep in the bellies of these peoples.

Kuo-toa live underground exclusively. They harbor an extreme hatred for the sunlight and are only found on the surface in daylight on rare occasions.

Kuo-toa, like humans, practice slavery. But unlike humans, slavery for them is a fact of life that pervades their culture. Where slavery is illegal in Cormyr and in the parts I know of Sembia, the kuo-toa consider it a necessity of their livelihood to keep slaves. In fact, some scholarly estimates have put the number of slaves at about 25% of the total of the kuo-toan population. This is significant for two reasons. It indicates that kuo-toan raids for slaves are a constant activity and that they must have extreme control over their slaves to maintain such a large number of them.

Twenty-five percent of the populace united in a common cause should be enough to effect a revolt—or to at least secure the escape of many of the slaves. It is a mystery why the kuo-toa have such a hold on them. It may be simply that they are excellent masters and have enough experience to prevent any sort of organized rebellion. Other scholars have surmised that the kuo-toa excrete a substance that, over time, affects the mind, making it weak and docile. Those kept in the company of the slimy fish-creatures cannot withstand the constant influence of their bile

slick. This same substance makes netting the monsters difficult.

The facts that kuo-toa conduct constant raids searching for slaves and that they hate sunlight mean that kuo-toa are encountered almost universally at night—frequently near roads that follow coasts close to their lairs. Fortunately, the most heavily traveled roads along Sembia and Cormyr are usually too far inland for the kuo-toa. They instead rely on raids upon villages and towns that are close to the coast, and upon less traveled roads between those towns that are not usually mapped.

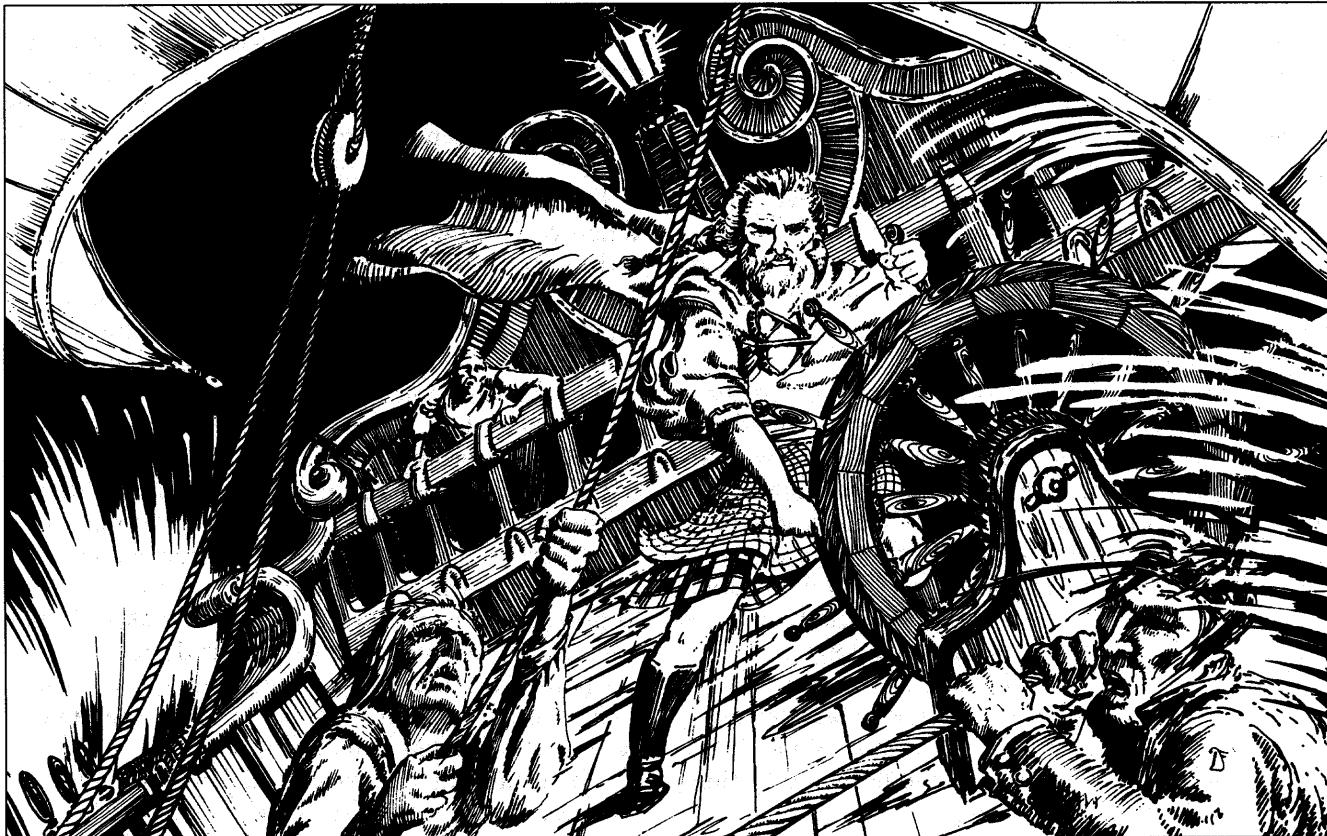
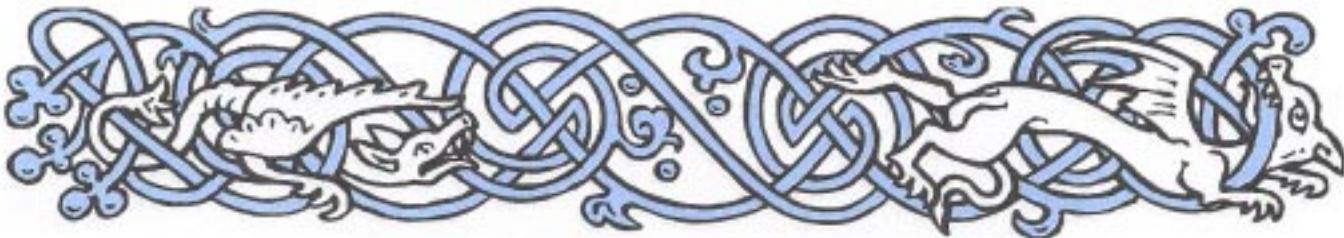
Kuo-toa raiding parties are well-organized and executed affairs. The creatures raid with a specific purpose. If they are searching for slaves, they will make every effort to drag off as many people as they can as quickly as possible. If their aim is to inflict casualties, they will attack with a ferocity that matches any other creature's I have seen.

The fishmen make their lairs exclusively in subterranean caverns. Not enough information exists to say whether such caverns are usually filled with air. Some lairs are completely submerged, some are partially under water, while others are dry. I know of four kuo-toan lairs along the coast of Sembia and Cormyr. They are all small lairs, and two of them have been recently cleaned out. I am unsure of the strength of the remaining two, but I have heard stories that one of them, located near Selgaunt, has recently been growing stronger and posing more of a threat.

The kuo-toa also make lairs deep within mountain ranges in caverns and lattices that connect to the sea. Certainly if one were to investigate one of the four kuo-toan lairs I have mentioned, one of them would lead to a wondrously complex and grand network of tunnels and caves teeming with all manner of foul beasts.

In Selgaunt, an effort is underway to duplicate the mysterious glue that the kuo-toa use on their shields. This glue is strong enough to cause weapons to stick to it even during combat. One out of four men will find himself suddenly weaponless during battle because of it, which represents an advantage for the kuo-toa. To date, the effort to duplicate this glue has been unsuccessful. The strength of the glue *has* been duplicated, but the substance dries out too quickly to be of practical use: It hardens into a solid block in just a few minutes.

Fortunately, work with the glue has not been completely futile. It is being used as a restraining device



for difficult prisoners. When a convict's hands are dipped into the glue, it can function as a type of restraint if the prisoner's hands are forced together. Eventually, it is hoped the glue will save the iron workers time and allow them to re-create other, more useful items such as weapons rather than manacles. How to dissolve the glue after it hardens is still being worked on, however.

Lacedons

Traveling along the coast of the Lake of Dragons, one has the opportunity to see shipwrecks caused by pirates, monsters, and treacherous weather. All of the wrecks, unless destroyed or salvaged by the sponsoring merchant company, become home to thousands of various marine plants and animals that enjoy feeding on or attaching to wood, or curling up in whatever small spaces the wreck provides.

Other creatures seek wrecks because of the bodies of dead crewmen that lie in the hulls. Such wrecks are home to the lacedons, the marine variety of the ghoul. More foul waterborne creatures cannot be

found. They are horrid, ugly creatures whose very appearance is nauseating, and are best described as bloated corpses of hideous color and harsh, ravenous eyes. . . . My nightmares of them are the most vivid ones I have.

My talents have been called upon when there has been a series of ghoul attacks upon villages on or near a coast. If the remains of a ship wash up on a coast near a graveyard, one or more ghous will smell the fresh death and claw their way out of the grave to climb aboard as soon as the wreck floats to shore. The promise of flesh spurs the ghous—the feasting upon the bodies of the dead sailors can begin in as little as an hour after the ship meets land. Those sailors not completely devoured turn into lacedons themselves.

These ghous, after feeding upon the crew and officers, find their food supply depleted. They turn their attention elsewhere, usually toward the next and nearest collection of corpses. I cannot fathom how they are able to pick out the location of corpses, even at far distances. There must be some inherent, magnetic quality in corpse blood—or souls—that draws lacedons to scenes of death. I surmise the nostrils of





ghouls are uniquely adapted for seeking out death and disaster, making them more capable than vultures in locating flesh.

Lacedons also feed upon large fish, but since most lacedons live in wrecks that are coastal, an insufficient supply of fish large enough to satisfy everyone's appetite forces them to seek other food.

When the ghouls begin menacing villagers, I and my ilk are called upon to dispatch the wretched creatures. My experience comes from raiding the wrecked homes of the lacedons.

We attack always during the morning, so the sunlight will serve us. The ghouls are always found on the lower decks, out of the sunlight where it is relatively cool. It is easy to find the sleeping ghouls, for the water around their bodies is fetid and overwhelming in its stench—particularly when you discover the lacedons in standing water. The disgusting, slimy film that clings to the surface usually can be seen leaking out the windows and oar ports of multi-decked ships. Care should be noted to see which way the current is flowing. One should not make the mistake of assuming that since there is more slime floating on one side of the ship, the ghouls are collecting toward that side.

Many ghouls do not like slumbering underwater. Perhaps their undead minds are more comfortable resting in an atmosphere "above" versus "below" the water's surface. These ghouls will submerge all but their noses if necessary. Because of this, we have sometimes approached the lacedons from the underside of the wreck, through the water. With spears, underwater fighting is not terribly difficult. But it's not exactly easy, as the lacedons—as opposed to the other, normal, land-based ghouls—are adept at fighting in the brine. They can stay underwater throughout the duration of the melee. I have yet to see a lacedon surface during combat.

Given that some lacedons do not sleep underwater, one will find that they have packed themselves into every available space that's above water and in the shade. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage for someone attempting to clear a wreck of ghouls. Their packed condition makes it more difficult for them to respond to a threat, for their mobility is significantly reduced. However, it also means that any rooms or containers opened will often result in a shocking surprise for the explorer. Having two lacedons fall out of a cook's cabinet and onto one's chest isn't pleasant. I know from experience.

Once awake, the lacedons fight with a fierceness that matches no other. They will enter sunlight without hesitation, though it is obvious that the sun is causing them pain, though apparently without bodily harm.

The lacedons fight in packs as do other ghouls. When confronted on their home wrecks, they attack with a special fierceness and cunning. They are, of course, completely familiar with the wreck, and they use every tactical advantage they can. I have even seen lacedons near the Wyvernflow attempt to lure people through complicated mazelike wrecks until they become lost, then set upon them when their prey's back is turned.

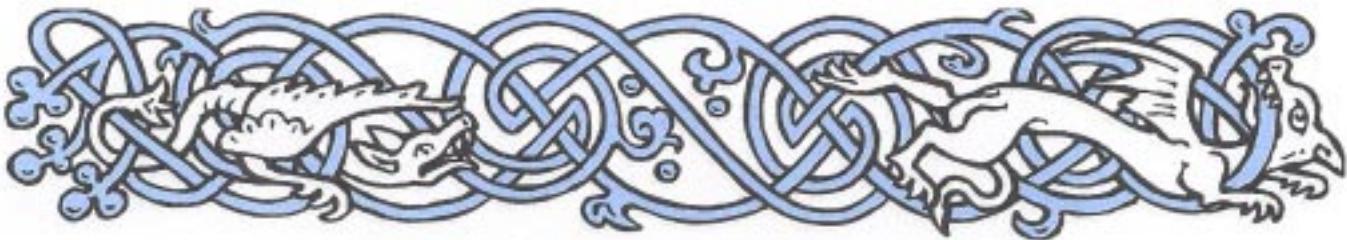
The lacedons can be killed like any other ghouls. Thankfully they have no special properties that make them more of a threat than conventional ghouls.

Lacedons, when traveling to shore in search of corpses to feed upon, always stick to waterways. They seem drawn to water to a very great degree, even to the point of going well out of their way to ensure their constant contact with it. However, the draw of fresh meat will often lead them anywhere.

When traveling up a river, lacedons walk hunched over and in single file. Unlike other undead, the lacedons make noise. When wandering, they slosh through the water with abandon, unconcerned about the possible need for stealth. However, they are capable of being quiet when attempting to surprise those living beings they might come across.

When they have the scent of the dead upon their nostrils, they'll follow it directly over any terrain in as straight a line as possible. They mean to get to their prey and back again to the water as quickly as they can. It should also be noted that lacedons will rarely venture far from a stream or other body of water. However, if they find a supply of corpses in a lakeside graveyard, for example, they will change their lair from the site of a shipwreck to the lake. They have no possessions, so not much is involved in changing lairs. They merely return to the lake every dawn instead of the shipwreck.

One final thing I noticed about the lacedons. Perhaps it is because they were once all sailors that they continue to congregate with each other even after death. They are able to withstand illusions, traps, and terrain that tax a person's sense of balance. They are also able to climb ropes with amazing speed.



Lizard Men

I heard about lizard men in stories my parents told. They were the stuff of fireside tales and nothing more to me. In each story, the beasts made their homes in swamps and dragged bodies of humans back to their lairs as food. Since there were never any swamps close to me, I never gave lizard men a second thought.

During our trek around the coast, I had occasion to give them second, third, and hundredth thoughts. The stories I heard said nothing of lizard men making their homes in caves under the sea, along coasts, which is something they often do. The southeastern tip of the Storm Horns is an ideal location for just such a dwelling.

We had just made our camp, having walked for a long time during the day and even through dusk. It was late, though I did not know the hour. I heard a scrabbling over the rocks toward the water, and bade Irovar to take cover behind an outcropping.

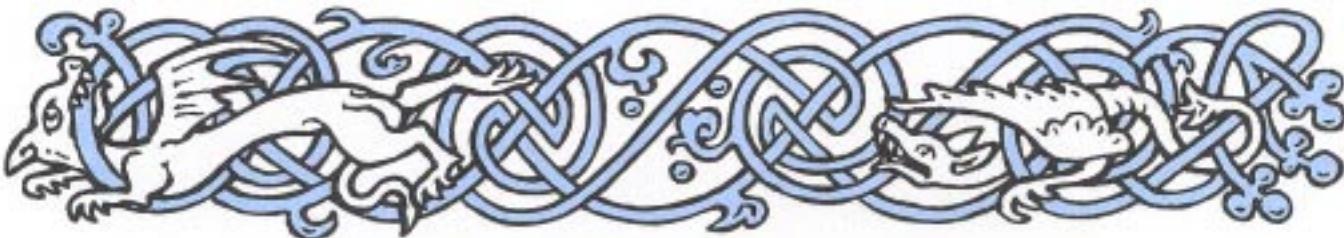
My first sight of one began with the reflection of our campfire in its yellow eyes. I saw that long before I

saw anything else. The eyes floated in the air before me, two dots of light fixing me in their glare. I could also hear the water running off its smooth-skinned body. Soon, I saw two more such pairs of eyes. The lizard men seemed to know what our number was, and thought the three of them would suffice to take us down to their lairs. The battle was over with quickly, thanks to Irovar's magic. I was unscathed, and the three lizard men were dispatched.

Irovar looked at the fallen monsters and was able to tell a great deal about them. They each had bracelets of teeth around their thighs, which she informed me was the insignia of their tribe. Their clothes, such as they were, were very shabby and unkempt, even by lizard man standards, she said.

This meant the resources of their tribe were scarce. Their weapons—spears—were very crude and were barely one step above clubs with rocks at their ends. Irovar suggested that they may have sent only three men out of shorthandedness. She also suggested that if we were to attempt to find their underwater lair, removing them would not prove overly difficult for the two of us. She offered a magic that would enable me to breathe despite my submersion. With that, I





agreed to invade the lair. Finding it wasn't difficult, for it was close to our camp. The entrance was underwater but easily reached. It was to our advantage that the cave interior was dry. The tribe was indeed small, numbering no more than a dozen. Half of them were warriors. Unfortunately, one half that number had weapons in hand. Still, with Irovar's magic and my skills, killing them proved to be easy.

I soon began to regret the deed, for it seemed more a slaughter on our part than a struggle for survival. My spirits lifted a little when I found the cache of items they had stored from their raids on unsuspecting campers along the coast. I could tell that they had raided at least one small caravan, for many of their stores, now rotted, looked like they must have belonged to a merchant. There were bottles of spices, bags of grain, small kettles, baubles of glass, and reams of fabric.

The lizards had not seemed to care about or even know what to do with the things they had. There was a ball and chain as well as a crossbow among the items, but it was obvious they had never been used. Also among that cache was a great deal of fish bones with the characteristic tooth marks of lizard men on them. They were apparently supplementing their diet of humans and demihumans with fish, presumably because they could not find enough other meat to sustain them. This was a new discovery for me, for I had never heard of lizard men resorting to this.

My conclusions were that while there may be other lizard men along that stretch of coast, it is not their preferred habitat, and any lizard men encountered are not likely to be as threatening as the fabled ones in the Marsh of Tun or the Vast Swamp. Irovar agreed, and we moved on.

Locathah

These fishlike creatures are similar to the kuo-toa in many ways. They have similar physiques (though the color of their scales does not resemble the kuo-toas'), and they lair in basically the same locations. However, the locathah are less likely to go into caverns deep inland, preferring to stay as close to the sea as they can.

The locathah are especially different from the kuo-toa in their fighting philosophy, style, and capability. They will fight to the death only if they have no other choice. They are wise tacticians and will try to

use any situation to its best advantage. Still, the locathah lack natural weapons such as teeth and claws, and they must depend upon other sources of weaponry for combat.

If they lose whatever weapons they might have, they are forced to retreat, for they no longer possess any means of protection. This also explains why it is unusual to find a locathah that is minimally armed.

Locathah will fight only if their opponents use weapons similar to theirs. During such encounters, they will grapple with opponents, and in this the locathah have proven to be adept. If caught underwater with a locathah, it may be very difficult to win the contest, for the locathah are expert wrestlers. Only someone using magic to counteract the encumbrance of water has any hope of defeating a locathah in that environment.

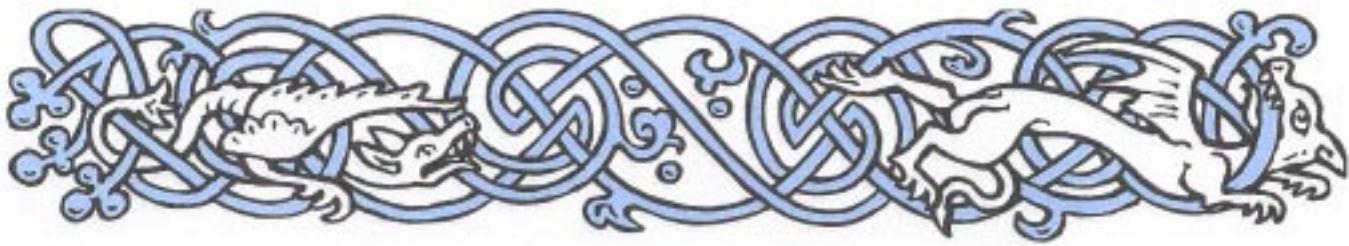
Another significant difference between the locathah and kuo-toa is that the locathah cannot go onto land. Their bodies are too used to the buoyancy of water, and they are unable to breathe for any amount of time on dry ground. This physical trait also prevents them from being concerned over land-related issues. At the same time, they take pains to prevent the surface world from affecting them.

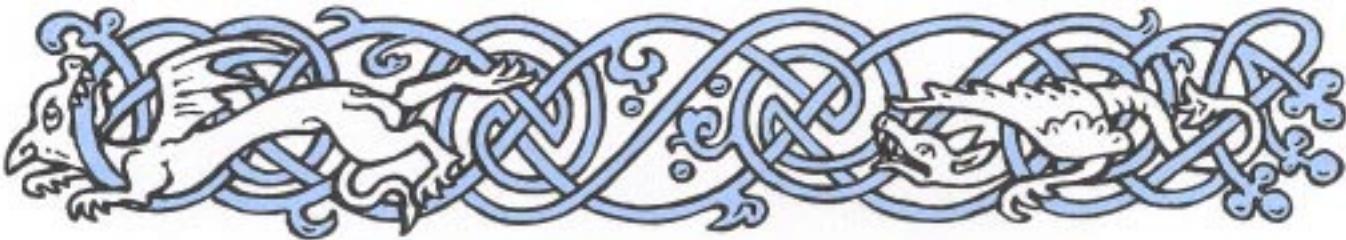
There was a small tribe of locathah that was forced to leave the Saerloon area because the heavy shipping to and from there was disrupting their fish supply. This caused much discontent among the locathah, and a few ships along that route were sabotaged, but eventually the surface dwellers won out and the locathah moved on.

I do not know what happened to that tribe after they left. I do know that their castle lair was taken over by the kuo-toa. This incident illustrated how it is often better to appease the locathah than aggravate them. Although news of serious kuo-toan raids have not met my ears, the creatures are most certainly planning slave raids.

There has been some speculation that the kuo-toa were encouraged by another race of aquatic creatures to take over the locathahan lair, but this seems unlikely, for the kuo-toa would not need any special encouragement to take control of a castle lair that is close to human settlements.

Some locathah enjoy more favorable relations with surface dwellers. Tribes have arranged for tolls to be collected from fishermen who use waters claimed by the locathah. This works best when the locathah are in a position to cause serious damage to trespassers'





ships. Near major cities, like Saerloon, such measures generally do not work well. For this reason, one will usually not find a locathah lair close to a metropolis.

Even though the locathah are sea-bound, they are very open to trading. Their level of industry and technology is rather primitive, and they put most of their efforts toward making weapons. They are also adept at fashioning jewelry and crafts, and the objects of their artful labors are beautiful enough to command high prices and also to serve as a type of bartering currency for materials the locathah cannot manufacture themselves.

The locathah scavenge sunken wrecks and the like for precious items, but they are extremely hesitant to trade these treasures. When dealing with locathah goods, I've found that one has to be careful of forgeries. In a market in Saerloon, I found a merchant selling what he said was authentic locathah jewelry. However, the shells used in the jewelry were common ones found on the beach.

It takes a keen eye, experience, and common sense to spot fakes. The locathah only use shells and materials that are found deep beneath the surface of the sea. Make a trip to the beach surrounding the area the merchant occupies. One never sees genuine locathah jewelry composed of anything resembling shells found on the beach or in shallow waters.

Mermen

A community of mermen lives just off the coast of Yhaunn. I have seen this community myself, and it is indeed a very beautiful thing to behold. There was some pirate activity near Yhaunn that was being attributed to mermen. The activity was coastal, and I, too, believed mermen were responsible. Many have witnessed attacks involving mermen approaching the shoreline.

After spending a great deal of time along the coast near Yhaunn, I discovered a merman couple sunning themselves on the rocks. They were young and probably naive. I took advantage of this to approach them. They didn't run. The female knew the Common language and we conversed. I learned that mermen are not able to walk on land like other creatures with arms and legs, but are only able to swim and climb onto rocks. They use their arms on land for locomotion. I told them what humans were saying about mermen, and the pair was taken aback.

With these two new friends, their resources, and a few days of investigation, I was able to learn that certain creatures were conducting their own attacks and posing as mermen, to shift attention from themselves and onto their hated enemy—the mermen. These new creatures turned out to be sahuagin, described later in this work.

The mermen community exists to this day, and a small but vocal contingent wishes to have closer relations with surface dwellers. This group, mostly composed of younger mermen, is trying to sway the community toward a better relationship between themselves and the land dwellers in the interest of trade.

Constant topics these mermen use to support their argument include fishing and defense. Both the mermen and the surface dwellers fish a great deal and depend upon the sea for food and commerce. To prevent either group from fishing in areas where the other has ownership, proper relations must be established.

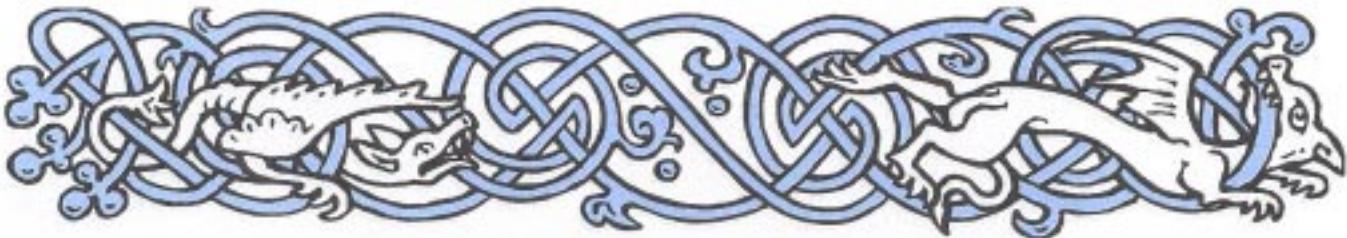
Also, the sahuagin are threats to both groups. The sahuagin raid surface caravans, fishing villages, and sometimes even fishing boats as well as merman communities. Cooperation between mermen and surface dwellers would prove very beneficial. Mermen might also be able to assist in preventing pirate attacks. For certain, they would make exceptionally good spies for the government of Sembia. If the mermen are to establish relations, it will be with Sembia, for their community is mostly within that nation's territorial waters.

Mudmen

My first assignment as a Purple Dragon involved guarding the possessions of a mage conducting research near Suzail. The mage, Irovar, was looking for the location of a keep where she believed another mage had once kept a study. I was escorting her and her belongings along the coast of the Lake of Dragons, beside the Storm Horn mountains. Not the choicest of assignments, I thought, but after I spoke with Irovar and became familiar and comfortable with her, I didn't care where I was as long as she was my companion.

The tide had gone out, leaving a generally even terrain to cross. I suggested we make our best speed across the area, for it offered an easier route than the land farther from shore.

We crossed trying to avoid the many pools of water



and mud the receding tide had left. We continued for a few hours, then rested near a pool. A second after Irovar sat on the sand, a mudman rose quickly out of the pool. I had only heard of such creatures before. I had never even seen a painting of one, so I was very shocked to note its incredible speed and unique form.

The creature acted before I could lift a finger. However, Irovar was much more levelheaded and cast a quick spell. The creature flew apart into large chunks of mud, caking us both. The mud hardened and was tough to remove. It was dark tan in color, matching the rocks of the surrounding beach.

While I was trying to calm down after the incident, Irovar began poking around in the pool. She smiled and told me she had been looking for a pool that held a mudman. She insisted that we delay our journey so she could take some of the pool's water. I asked why she found it so important and she said it indicated that the keep she was looking for must be somewhere nearby. She explained that water running through a magical place, like the keep, is often enchanted. When the water forms pools, the mud and silt within those pools also becomes enchanted, and will inevitably lead to the birth of mudmen.

We followed the pool away from the shore, looking for others. It was my sharp eye that discovered a tiny stream connecting the mud pool and other pools as well. It was spring, and the stream was apparently formed by melting snow from the Storm Horns.

Irovar found a trail of similarly colored mud leading from the original pool to another. I reminded her of my role as her guard, but she seemed flip about her ability to quell the threat of any mudmen. We went to the pool, discovered more mudmen, and she dealt with them as easily as the others. We followed the stream and found subsequent pools with an increasing number of mudmen in each.

With each new pool, the mudmen seemed to rise more quickly. The stream was more concentrated the farther inland we walked, suggesting that the enchantment was stronger and responsible for the increasing number of mudmen. As that number climbed, so did our expectation of finding the keep.

Nereid

A threat to males walks the coastline of the Sea of Fallen Stars: the unusual water creature, the nereid. A nereid, I am given to understand, is formless

until it presents itself to the air, whereupon it takes the form of a beautiful woman. Men are slaves to this temptation and will succumb to it most assuredly. In fact, this hold upon men is so strong that no man has ever been able to harm a nereid.

Women are not affected by the charms of the nereid, however. It has been said that nereid attempt to take the form of beautiful men when in the presence of women, but women are easily able to see through this disguise. This latter phenomenon is what brought the attention of the Purple Dragons and hence myself to a small coastal village east of Marsember.

The son of the village mayor had been seduced by a nereid. The son said that he had kissed the nereid and experienced pleasure unlike anything he had ever dreamed of. He also said that he had been let free of the nereid's grasp because the nereid and he had fallen in love, and that he was going to be transformed into a creature that could follow the nereid to whatever fate they were going to share. His father, the mayor, naturally attempted to talk his son out of this situation, but could not. He followed the son down to the coastline and was subsequently brought under the spell of the nereid as well. The wife of the mayor summoned the Purple Dragons, hopeful that we would find a method of saving her husband and son.

We traveled to the village in the company of a unit of expert female Purple Dragons. We hoped that they would be able to remedy the situation. They found the two men on the beach, waiting for their nereid to return. Sure enough, the creature did return, but the females were immune to her charms. They assaulted the nereid without delay and were able to capture its shawl. The shawl contained the essence of the nereid, and the Purple Dragons destroyed it straight away, which caused the nereid to fade from existence.

During the combat, the women were assaulted by a variety of attacks from the nereid. It seems the creatures are apparently able to control water, and they use it to cause all manner of havoc even upon coastal land. This particular nereid used waves to keep the warriors at bay, to cause deafening crashes, and to create servant water snakes. These measures proved to be effective, but they were hampered by the fact that the water quality the nereid was formed in was not as clear as water along the beach of other villages on that coast. Therefore, the nereid was not as strong as





she might have been. The village had recently had a coastal fishing competition and had used bits of foul flesh and blood to draw predatory fish to the coastline. There were assorted impurities floating in the water, and this seemed to have a negative effect on the nereid's ability in combat.

Nymph

Another creature that is deadly to males in particular is the nymph. However, these creatures aren't as evil by nature as the nereid can be. Instead, it is their intense beauty alone that strikes males dead.

Nymphs can be encountered in any naturally beautiful setting, and the coast is no exception. Many areas along the coast of the Sea of Fallen Stars are stunning in their serenity and awe-inspiring in their beauty. I encountered a nymph while visiting a monkish retreat in Sembia, along the peninsula near Tulbegh. The nymph had made her home in a small but perfect grotto. I was investigating the grotto simply to see what was inside. I noticed as I approached that there were several varieties of sea life congregating near the entrance, creatures that would otherwise be fighting each other to the death. This concerned me as I entered, but I did not think of the reason for such a strange gathering of creatures until it was too late. It was then that I set my eyes upon the most beautiful creature ever to walk the land. Although I caught only a glimpse, the nymph was enough to blind me instantly. The glimpse brought a sudden wave of lightheadedness that swept over me and I passed out (during which time I dreamed of nothing but her beauty). When I regained my senses, I realized I was being carried on the back of some ocean creature.

I was greeted by a man who explained what had happened, and said that I would be cured of my blindness through magic. I was taken to a room and heard the voices of many people. When the man was done with his spell, I opened my eyes and was able to see. I discovered that I had been cured in the monastery I had been looking for.

The experience was profound, and I learned a great deal about the relationship between nymphs and the men who had built the monastery. The monks explained that nymphs, like some druids, take a particular interest in areas of great beauty, and that the nymph I encountered watched over the land the

monastery was built on. She taught one of their number the secret to reversing the curse of blindness.

The nymph, I learned, had since moved on, but I was also told that nymphs tend to tell each other about certain choice locations, so the possibility that another nymph will return to that exquisite grotto remains. Until then, I have the eternal picture of her magnificent beauty etched in my mind.

Sahuagin

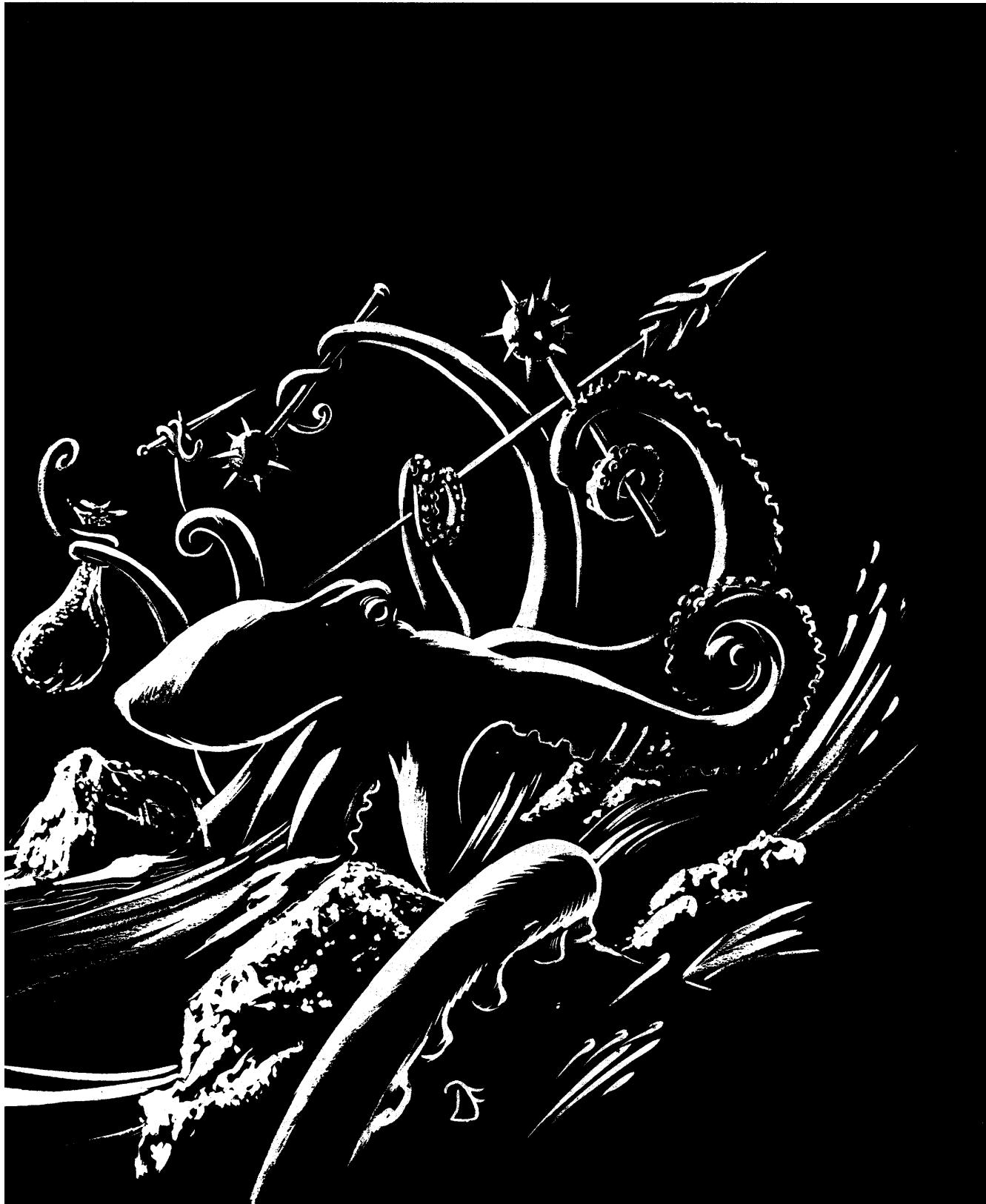
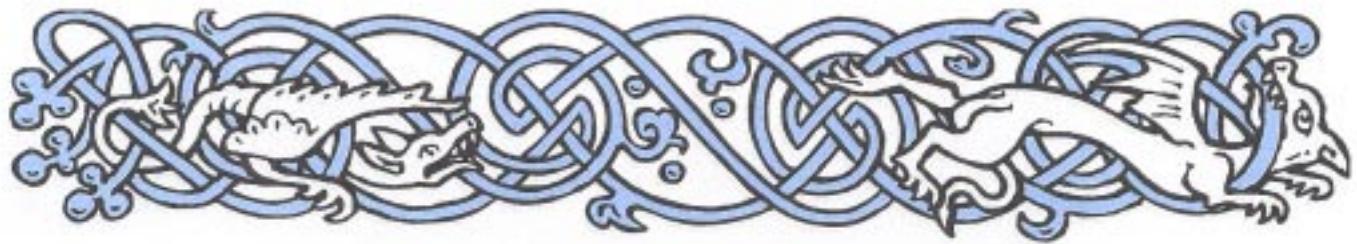
This race of fishmen represents the greatest threat to the coastline. The sahuagin are as brutal as the kuo-toa, but they do not harbor an intense hatred of humans alone as the kuo-toa do. Instead, they hate all life in general, and they are chaotic enough in their philosophies to think nothing of decimating whole villages and towns.

The sahuagin have a most terrible reputation on coasts other than the Sembian and Cormyte. That is not to say that these coasts have gone untouched by the sahuagin, but that these foul creatures have cut far greater swaths of destruction on other shores. Their raids have influenced the growth and history of various regions. Rulers have made their names campaigning against them while others lost holdings and fortunes struggling to resist them.

Despite their political effect on the surface world, there seems to be no overriding purpose to the sahuagin practice of raiding and pillaging, other than the occasional attempt to gain booty. There has been speculation that they desire sole control over the coasts, but this seems impractical, given that sahuagin can only survive out of water for a few hours. Nevertheless, a real concern is that control is their ultimate goal.

In recent memory, there have been two known significant sahuagin attacks on both Sembian and Cormyte coasts. The Sembian attack was near Yhaunn, and the Cormyte near Suzail. Two things make these attacks worrisome. First, the sahuagin are fond of warm water and rarely venture out of tropical and temperate waters. The attack near Yhaunn occurred during the winter, when the water was near-freezing. In fact, sahuagin tracks were left in the snow that fell on the rocky beaches there.

Also, the many different groups of sahuagin are politically well organized, with a central king and several nobles. The warriors encountered near Suzail





were wearing pieces of jewelry that looked uniform enough to have been a primitive type of insignia, perhaps. This means that there were two groups of sahuagin attacking the coastline at either end. I have no doubt that a concentrated attack by the sahuagin will come in the near future, one that will be a group effort by more than one sahuagin noble house.

These attacks were just preliminary actions precluding a much larger campaign. The sahuagins' aim, I believe, is going to be destruction of the coastline, as it has been so many times in the past.

We land dwellers still have two significant advantages. The sahuagin intensely dislike bright light. They never attack during sunny weather and absolutely never during dawn or dusk when their attack would be facing the sun. Magically generated light also repulses them. It has been observed to cause pain and force them to retreat.

In addition to the problem with light, sahuagin have a phobia of mages. They will not tolerate the use of magic in combat and will concentrate their efforts toward removing the threat of magic from the battle scene. Although this is generally unfortunate news for a mage who is caught in a sahuagin melee, it also means that sahuagin fears of magic are still very much intact. While they might have overcome their aversion to cold temperatures, they have not gotten past their fear of the supernatural.

As I mentioned before, the sahuagin have a central king who lives in a location unknown to land dwellers. It is believed that some prisoners might possibly know where it is, but their knowledge is perhaps forever out of reach to the rest of us, for any prisoner who sets eyes on the grand palace of the king is assumed to have been killed a short time afterward. The bodies of these poor souls are disposed of unceremoniously, left to float or drift with the currents. Should a corpse be found, communication with the soul of the owner might possibly reveal a few interesting secrets.

This central government represents the most serious threat to coastal security. With this level of organization, it is possible to conduct sharp military campaigns that have systematic goals and targets. Also, it is possible to have grand plans masked by simple deceptive actions.

The sahuagin have several natural enemies that prevent them from ruling the seas. The ixitzachitl, giant squid, kraken, triton, aquatic elves, hippocampi, dolphin, and of course every surface-

dwelling creature, have all made their dislike of the sahuagin very clear. The combined antagonism of all these communities is the only thing that has kept the sahuagin numbers truly in check. And, it is fortunate that the demand for supplies needed to protect themselves from other races has kept surface military actions lower in number than what they might otherwise be.

They have few allies in the deep. Sharks are perhaps the only creatures that will aid the sahuagin, but that is only because the sharks are not intelligent enough to know better. The sahuagin have a racial ability to control sharks, and because of this sharks are used as sentries and for entertainment. The sahuagin's level of technology and industry is roughly the same as that of other fishmen races, though the sahuagin take more pride and care in construction of their lairs. They are built to be fortresses and are often camouflaged. In addition, each lair, no matter how minor in importance, is kept secret, and its location never revealed, even if a member of the lair is tortured by the enemy for information. The foul beasts rightfully assume that if the location of their lairs were known, they would be attacked immediately.

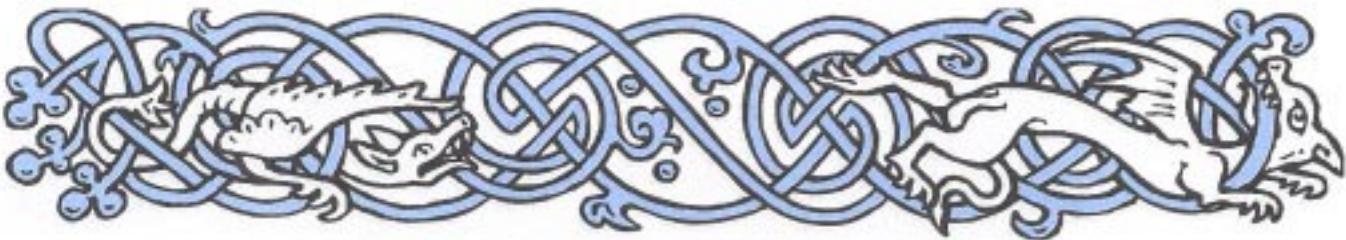
Interrogating sahuagin prisoners is a lost cause. The warriors who come ashore are brutal, evil, and totally devoted to their leaders. As soldiers, they are accomplished. Only magical and alchemical methods of truth extraction have any chance of success. Torture, for certain, does no good. The beasts are used to seeing torture performed on prisoners and even to having it performed on themselves by angry leaders. It's difficult to fathom conventional parlay with such savage creatures.

Scrags

Two varieties of this kind of troll threaten the coast: freshwater and saltwater. The freshwater trolls are called scrags (also river trolls), the saltwater are called marine scrags (and sometimes sea trolls).

Scrags are very dangerous, devious creatures that hunt for living flesh. Although their intelligence isn't high, they are nevertheless very cunning hunters and some even are able to cast spells. River trolls tend to frequent a particular region and cause a substantial amount of terror. They hunt in packs and lie in ambush at secluded locations.

The Purple Dragons were called to protect the



Calantar Bridge over the Starwater River in Cormyr. Scrags were ambushing travelers and attacking in large groups, killing many at a time.

The scrags were very tough and vicious, striking swiftly and with practice. We drove many attacks away and even began camping at either end of the bridge to protect travelers. Naturally, their attacks turned from caravans to us, but we were able (only barely) to repel them. They left the bridge.

All was quiet until we heard of more attacks up and down river from the bridge. The scrags had started to move, expanding their hunting territory.

A massive effort was launched to clear the area of scrags once and for all. I fought in six battles myself, and we won three of them by a slim margin, and only because we had a strong advantage in numbers. Nevertheless, the overall campaign was a success. The scrag, once in water, is able to recover from wounds right before one's eyes. Our strategy shifted during the campaign to luring the beasts out of the water, and this was done with fresh meat. With the scrags unable to recover, we were able to destroy enough of them to cause the survivors to flee the river. When all the units began using this technique, numerical superiority became less of a priority and the tide shifted to our advantage quickly. Attacks on the river and even sometimes on the bridge continue, but retribution is always swift. However cunning scrags are as hunters, though, their memories are short, and they are slow to learn over the long term.

Sea trolls present an altogether more threatening force. They attack ships en masse and rend their way through the crew at a terrible, bloody rate. A successful way of dealing with these trolls has not yet been developed. Diverting their attention with fresh meat is too expensive, for sea trolls attack in groups of ten, and getting enough meat to lure them is difficult. They are selective in what fresh meat they seek, and they prefer a substantial amount. Also, they attack without any warning. Finally, sea trolls are intelligent enough not to attack the same locale more than two or three times.

They swarm over the deck of a ship, kill as many people as they can, and drag the bodies off to be eaten later. Marine scrags will attack the same dock or bay or commonly used area perhaps once or twice more, then move as many as 50 miles away before launching another strike.

To my knowledge, there has been only one roving

group of scrags that terrorized a coastline. Attacks began in Marsember and went east to every city along the coast until Tulbegh. At Tulbegh, there were enough soldiers, sailors, and mages waiting for the impending scrag attack to not only repel the trolls, but kill enough of that pack to eliminate it as a threat. This sweep did not happen quickly, but took place over several months. It was not until Saerloon that the connection among the attacks was made, and it was not until Tulbegh that enough people were gathered and organized.

What this means, I believe, is that while river and sea trolls are intellectually slow, they do adapt and are constantly trying, in their disadvantaged way, to learn new methods of attack.

Trolls regenerate; this elevates the troll to a new level of concern. Most combatants focus only on killing the troll and neglect burning the corpse, or forget that its regeneration can be rapid enough to cause a melee to stretch beyond the endurance of nontrolls. These facts are sometimes lost even on Purple Dragons. Unless the patrols set closer watches and apply more seriousness to their duties, many more sailors and coastal fisherman will die before we can respond. If even a sign of a troll is found, there should be an instant and concerted effort to track it down and destroy it completely.

Seawolves

I was walking along the beach with three of my comrades. We were keeping a general watch, for there had been reports of pirate activity. We were scanning for ships and landing craft approaching the beach. The night had a full moon, so we had plenty of light to see by.

We spotted a group of naked men lying in the surf on the beach ahead of us. We thought it might be a pirate trap, so we approached cautiously. It was indeed a trap, but what happened was far beyond our expectations.

The men changed shape in front of our eyes. Their bodies shrank and bulged, and before we knew what was happening we were surrounded by five lycanthropic seawolves. They charged us, propelling themselves along the sand with their hugely powerful clawed frontal fins. They launched themselves at us, their gaping wolf muzzles flashing with rows of sharp teeth.



One of us was seized upon by two of them. My other comrade started running for the sea—a serious mistake. I started running for the forest, hoping that it would prove too difficult for them to traverse.

I never knew what happened to my two friends. Their corpses were never found, and I'm sure the one who went into the water was killed easily, for the seawolves are powerful and deadly in the water.

The forest was indeed too difficult for my pursuers to travel through. The brambles caught and snagged on their skin and their flippers weren't able to get through the brush. As soon as they were a few paces in, they stopped. I thought my chance had come, but I waited to see what they were up to before I continued on. I thought perhaps they were waiting for me to reveal my location with some movement or noise, so I kept perfectly still. I didn't have trouble doing so, for what I saw next frightened me so I couldn't move. They shrank, curled up on the ground, and started a low groaning sound. I heard what sounded like vomiting and a horribly sickening wash of fluid cascading onto the ground. Their bodies shook and convulsed, tearing at the brush surrounding them. In the moonlight, all I could see were their trembling, growling shapes shuddering in the brush. Suddenly they fell silent and seconds later they rose in human form, their naked bodies silhouetted against the moonlight. They were standing, but clearly disoriented. I took advantage of this and ran deeper into the forest and laid in wait for them by climbing a tree. When their heads cleared, they followed me. One passed underneath me without knowing I was above him. (I was fortunate that in human form they don't have the special senses they would otherwise possess.) I dropped from the tree, swinging my sword at its head as mightily as I could. Its quick death surprised me, for I had heard many tales about werewolves being immune—even in human form—to mundane weapons. I was hoping that my sword would at least act like a club and stun the beast, allowing me time to get away, since the edge would not be able to cut through the creature's enchanted fur.

The other lycanthrope heard his comrade's death cry and ran toward me. I stood my ground and we set at each other with tremendous ferocity. My blood was boiling and the lycanthrope was fueled by vengeance for his fallen partner. Even in human form, it had slavering jaws and extended sharp fingernails that I'm sure carried the disease of lycanthropy. But, I pre-

vailed, and with a practiced move, I feinted, turned, and sent my sword through its midsection.

When I returned during the day with a party to recover the bodies of my comrades (a fruitless search), I took note that there wasn't a trace of the conflict from the night before, save for pockets of broken twigs and branches. I expected to at least see blood on the sand from where the first of us fell, and blood on the leaves in the brush, but there was nothing. My best guess as to what happened is that the seawolves returned to the spot before dawn and took the bodies and possessions back into the sea. They did not want to draw any more attention to themselves than they had to, and taking evidence of the previous night's attack was their way of covering their tracks. As to the blood, it must have disintegrated in the purity of the sunlight.

How numerous the seawolves are is impossible to tell. They strike fast and retreat quickly, and they seem to be intent on destroying everything they contact. Our advantage rests in their preference for using weapons that are ineffective against our own.

Selkies

These kind-natured creatures resemble seals while in the water, but they are able to transform to human shape for going ashore.

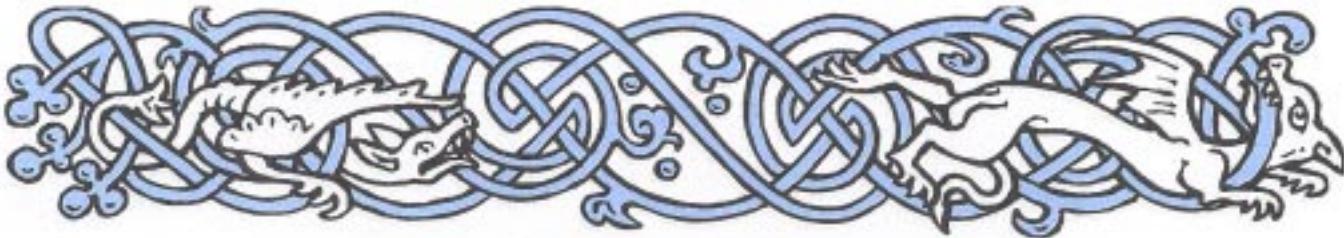
A selkie community lives not far north of Scardale. Although the water is a bit more warm than they are used to, they seem to have adapted well.

The selkies are peaceful and exist in harmony with the fishermen near Scardale and Harrowdale. Normally, neither bothers the other. However, there have been moments when the selkies and the "overworlders" have clashed.

There was a sinking of a merchant vessel in the Dragon Reach, a body of water near Scardale. The ship was sunk near deep waters and its booty was unassailable by the pirates that sunk the ship. The selkies, however, were able to get to the ship with ease and recover the treasure.

When this became known to the sponsoring merchant company, they offered a bounty to anyone able to recover the sunken goods. This caused a great deal of friction, and because of it the selkies have taken a position that causes them to be less cordial to overworlders.

Still, some selkies have suggested that they ally



themselves with the mermen and form a group of power that would have to be reckoned with. With the selkies' ability to go ashore in human form and relate to overworlders on their own terms and in their own locales, and with the inclusion of the mermen communities in the bargain, establishing new relations would be easy. The help of the selkie is a factor which is luring some mermen over to the idea of establishing relations with surface dwellers.

Strangleweed

While swimming near the Neck, that stretch of water that is a favorite ambush site for pirates, I came across the most dangerous plant life I have yet encountered.

Six members of my unit were at the coastline on leave. I was sitting on a rock but had my feet dangling in the water, letting them be caressed by the surf, which was gentle in that area. I was paying no mind to the passing day and was just enjoying the sun, when a scream came from one of our number who was likewise positioned. I looked over in time to see his feet jerk forward and his head and torso fly back hard enough to strike him unconscious. We quickly realized what had happened: Strangleweed had crept up to him and taken hold of his ankles. He was being pulled under the water. Three of us went to him and got hold of his arms and started pulling back. I went to fetch my sword to cut him loose.

But one of my companions was thinking ahead. He jumped into the water away from the strangleweed and began thrashing about. He made as though he was himself caught in something, but he tried to swim closer to the strangleweed patch.

The deadly weed took notice of it and part of it started to move toward him. The swimmer told those who had hold of the victim to let go, which they hesitantly did. Sure enough, the strangleweed floated toward the thrasher, letting go of the unconscious victim. The swimmer was easily able to avoid being snared by the living weed, and we left the area. It served as a warning to us that we should never so completely relax that we don't notice floating plants near us, and that if one keeps calm, escaping strangleweed is possible.

Tako

I was south of Scardale where I first encountered tako. To see these large, multicolored octopoid creatures rise up out of the sea and come ashore to attack with axes and spears is a sight both amazing and horrifying. Tako were menacing a king's caravan from Cormyr, so we were sent to protect it. We set an ambush on the top of a cliffside with archers.

The tako came ashore when we thought they would, which was during the normal time when the caravan passed a certain area along the coast. There were nine tako altogether, and they rose up and took to the land all at once.

We shot at them with arrows from our ambush site, but it was very difficult to target them. Their squirming tentacles were impossible to hit, and their undulating central bodies were hard to land blows on. When they realized the ambush, they simultaneously changed color before our eyes. They blended in with the rocky background, and all but one of them simply disappeared from my sight.

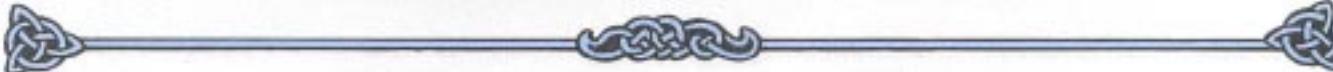
They worked their way through the rocks and confounded us all. They blended perfectly. A few of the archers continued to shoot, able to pick out movement here and there.

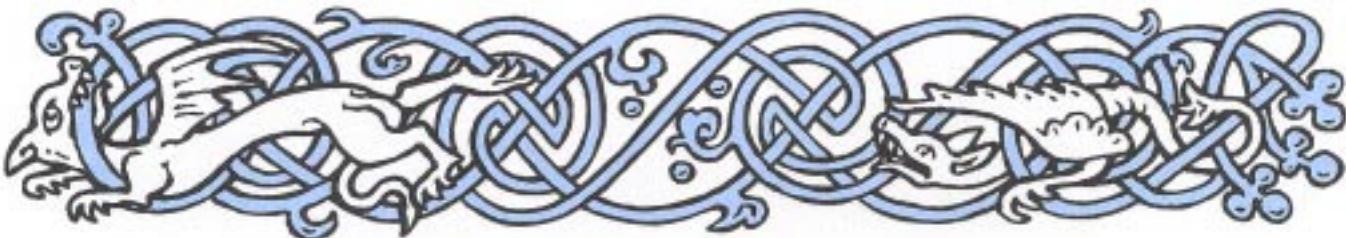
They reached the base of the cliff and started ascending it without effort. I spotted the lot of them only briefly, for they changed their color to match the cliffside almost instantly. Most surprising to me was that they kept their weapons with them. They were able to climb the cliffside with only a few of their seven tentacles. One tako, instead of tossing his ax down, threw it up over the cliff, wounding one of the archers.

Fear crept into us, for we had not expected them to camouflage themselves so well, nor to climb as swiftly as they did. We retreated just a bit and prepared for the assault. It came, and it was bloody. As soon as they were atop the cliff, each one threw axes and spears at the archers, which finished off half my companions.

Although they moved slowly on land, we couldn't approach them because their tentacles kept us at bay. The archers did their best, but it was difficult to target them.

One of the wagons from the caravan was rolled over by two of them, causing our first casualties. It was then we realized we were outmatched, for our





weapons and skills weren't as effective as the weight of a wagon. Melee was too difficult for us. Retreat was our only option.

We did return with a good force of Purple Dragons and Sembian troops, but the tako had ceased to raid that area. I learned that the tako are fierce and cunning combatants on land, and that one should never underestimate them when they set tentacle on soil. I shudder in fear at the thought of trying to attack even one of them underwater.

Tritons

The tritons are a mysterious and fantastic community of sea-dwellers. They, like the mermen, are reclusive and will not deal with anyone outside their own communities. Unlike the mermen, however, they have no contingent among them wishing to change the status quo.

Tritons are known for eventually capturing those who invade their territory, and this has prevented me from visiting their communities. Still, those who have

visited the cities have told me many tales about wonderful castles and achievements.

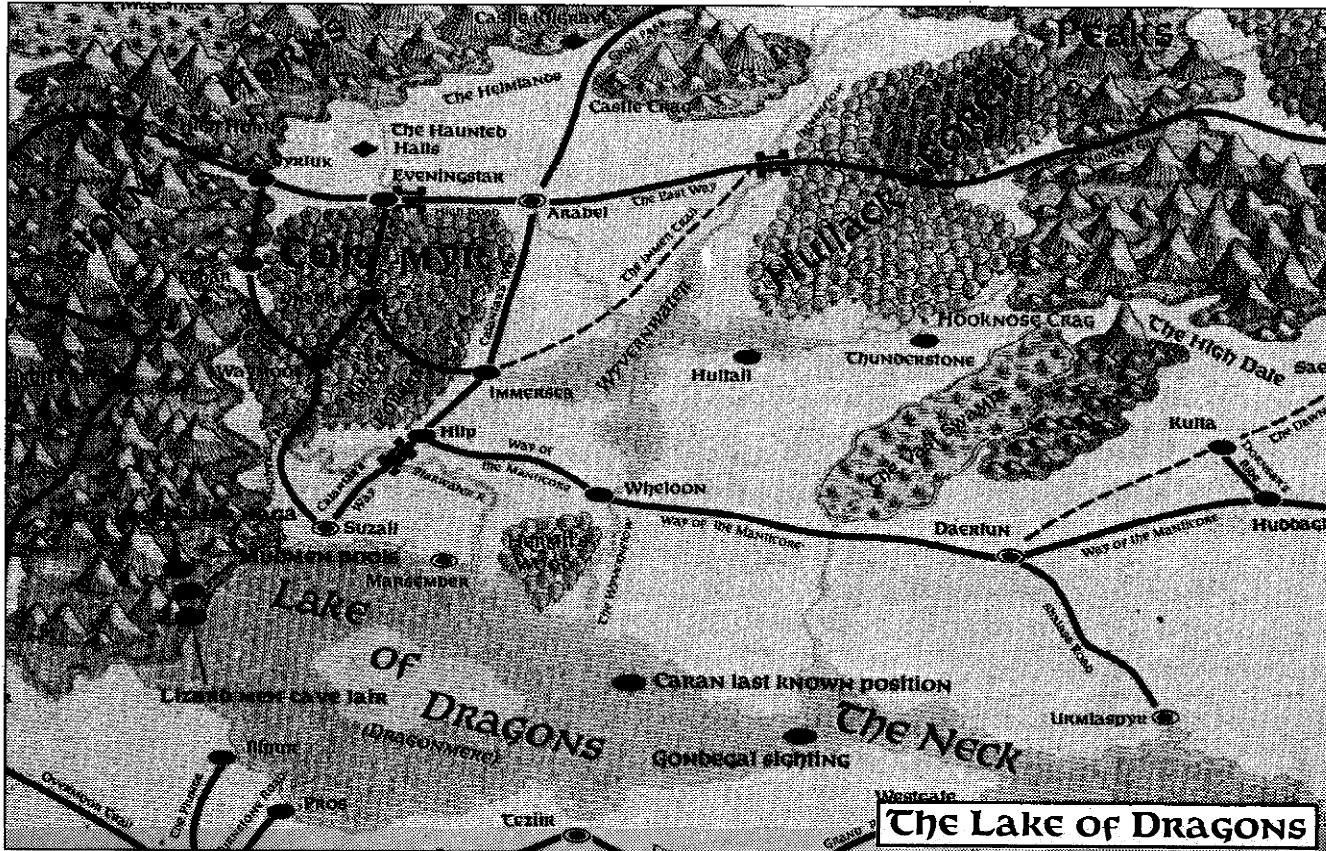
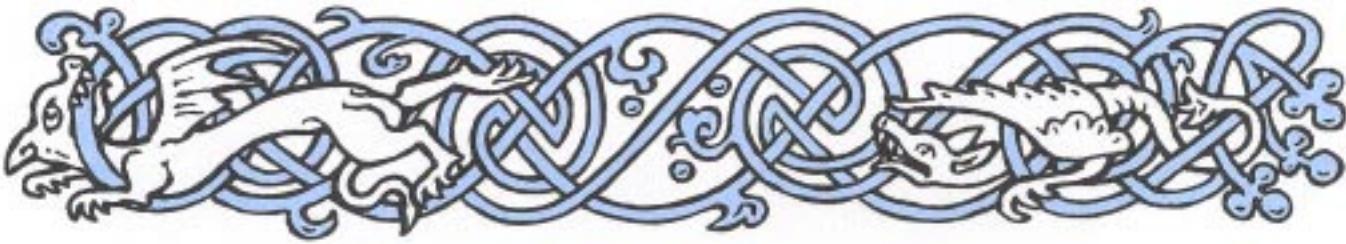
Despite their reclusiveness, the tritons seem to share a special affinity and closeness with hippocampi, sea lions, and giant sea horses, which are the creatures summoned when tritons use their conch shells.

The legend that tritons come from the elemental plane of water to this world for a purpose known only to them is familiar to many. What begins to give credence to this is the tritons' preoccupation with the aforementioned creatures.

They are highly secretive and do not pay much attention to others with the exception of a few specific animals. It has been theorized that the summoned animals are being bred and trained as pets. Until the tritons' plan becomes more apparent, we shall most likely never know the true reason for their visit.

Water Nagas

Our trek up the stream bed lasted a few days. Oddly, the stream became wider the longer we



walked along it. The stream diverted several times, and the part we were following was apparently a creek leading in to the river.

At last we came upon our goal: the keep. It was a small dilapidated structure that was on the verge of collapse. Running through it, however, was the stream we had been following.

We were taking in the sight of our prize when a long and beautiful emerald-green serpent flowed down the stream toward us. Irovar was quicker to get to cover than I was, for I was enthralled by the gorgeous scales that danced and sparkled in the sunlight just under the clear water. When the serpent came out of the stream and faced us, I knew immediately that it was a water naga. It was guarding the keep, I thought, and it had come out to keep us away. I had no idea of what to expect from this magical, beautiful, and deadly creature of legend.

Irovar's smooth talking prevented hostilities. We spoke rather amiably together for a while. The naga, whose gender I could never determine, was interested in talking with us rather than killing us. It recognized Irovar as a mage and knew why she had come, and

the naga did not seem to care about my companion's purpose, which delighted Irovar to no end.

The naga had lived in the keep all its life and was actually the pet of the mage who had built the keep.

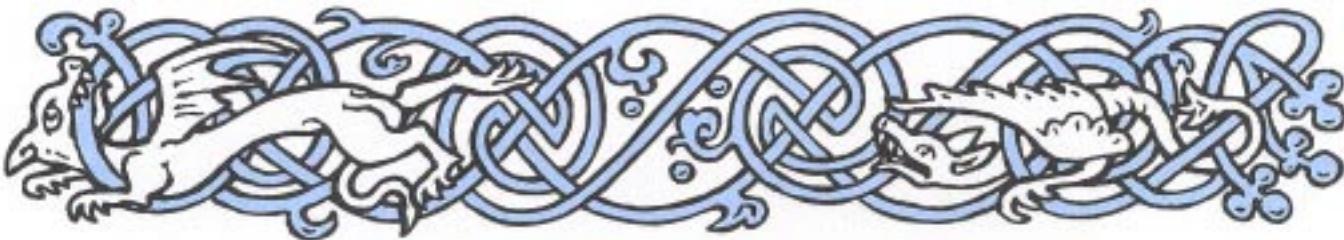
I learned from this encounter that naga can be reasonably dealt with, something handy to know. It's worth the effort to at least attempt to gain the confidence of guardian creatures like the naga.

Water Weirds

During my early mercenary years, I was near Tul-begh waiting to go out with a caravan to Selgaunt. I was one of the many hired to protect it from raiders along Rauthauvyr's Road.

The trek itself was uneventful, until we reached the bridge leading to Selgaunt. While crossing it, we were set upon by a huge serpent composed of water. It had no features other than the contiguous clear-colored flowing shape of a snake. The "water weird" reared up dramatically, then lashed down upon the bridge. It wrapped itself tightly around a comrade of mine and





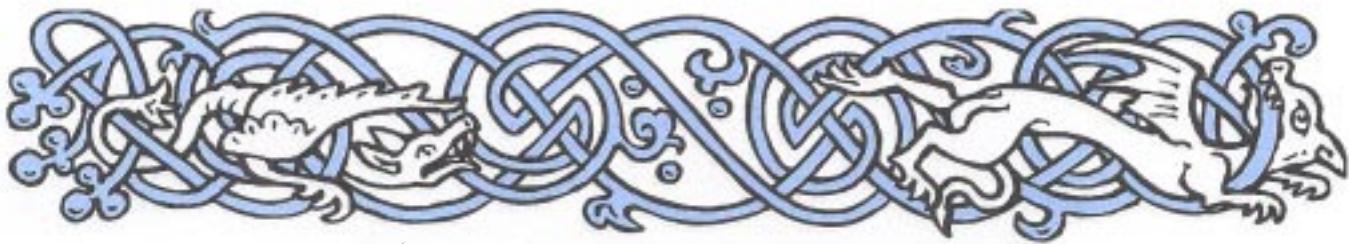
snatched him into the water. We could see the struggle just below the surface. It was as if my companion were struggling against an invisible enemy. Even the surface of the water was eerily calm. But when we saw his body go limp and sink toward the bottom, we knew that the serpent would be back. Indeed it was, seconds later.

Our mage cast a spell and ice formed all around the thing. We cheered, for we thought that would be the end of it. Instead, it resisted and dove slowly toward the mage, its frosty faux-serpentine head gaping, ready to eat him whole. Luckily, the dive was slow enough that the mage was barely able to get out of the way. We took the mage's lead and all fled from the bridge. The water weird kept everyone off the bridge for a long time, until a priest could be summoned. I stayed to see what a priest could do where a mage had failed, but all that was needed was for the priest to purify the water weird. It instantly lost its form.

Since that time, I have learned other facts about the water weird. The most unnerving is that there is

no forewarning before one appears. Magical forms of detection sensitive to invisible creatures only suggest some strange activity in the water, but don't offer more specific information. It takes a moment for the weird to form, and one would think this would be the best time to flee from it. However, the weird is intelligent, and forms in a location that is hidden from view, so that it can spring upon its targets in ambush. Also, once formed, the weird can travel through and under the water and appear elsewhere without having to spend time reconstituting its form. In this way, it is able to conduct sneak attacks and dodge incoming blows.





Sea Stories

Being a mercenary and then a Purple Dragon for many years, and having had the opportunity to travel a great deal, I've had the occasion to hear a few tales about mysterious and interesting things happening along our coasts.

The Scardale Slayers

The village of Scardale had a rather bad run of dead farm animals to contend with. Farmers would come out in the morning and find their animals had been mutilated. There was a great deal of talk, both open and whispered, that suggested many reasons for the killings. There was an expedition sent out to comb the area for new monstrous lairs and the like, but nothing came of it. Before a reason could be found, the killings stopped. Over time, the incident was largely forgotten about until the past year when the incidents started up again.

The theory getting the most attention is that the creature responsible for this is coming from the sea. The previous exploration efforts on the land to find the lair of the mysterious creature failed to find anything—so now people are turning their attention to the waters. Complicating this theory is the fact that no traces of the usual kind are left behind by visitors from the sea. No creature I'm familiar with could walk ashore that distance and not leave seaweed, scales, or some other souvenir.

The village has offered a hundred-gold-piece reward for the eradication of this mysterious menace. The attacks always come during the night, but never in any discernible pattern. The corpses are mutilated, but not eaten. The animals slain are generally small, about wolf-sized or smaller. The attacks never happen in the village itself, only on isolated farms.

Surdish Art

The town of Surd is a weigh point between Tulbegh and Yhaunn. As such, it sees a lot of caravan and merchant traffic. There was a story of a most unusual merchant passing through Surd I must relate.

A wagon came into the market, and a stand was set up that sold sahuagin and locathah jewelry. The pieces were beautiful, and among them was a coral sculpture that was as tall as a dwarf. This impressive collection was worth a lot of money, yet the merchant was selling the objects at prices that were but a fraction of their worth. Still, this was expensive for the people of Surd.

He heard greater prices for his wares could be had in a larger city. He declined, saying that he wanted to bring the beauty of the sea to a town like Surd, and he wanted the people there to be able to acquire things they might not otherwise have the chance to own.

This was a noble cause, to be sure, but it raised skepticism nevertheless. If the objects were so inexpensive, the people asked, how could they be authentic? All they had was the merchant's assurance. A few pieces were bought and he went on.

It turns out that the merchant was telling the truth, that the pieces were authentic. However, it was not long before the people of Surd got word that a tribe of sahuagin were seeking the return of their stolen items, including the dwarf-sized sculpture. A reward is offered for the return of that particular piece, and the people of Surd as well as Yhaunn and Tulbegh are offering rewards for the capture of the merchant, who has damaged relations with the sahuagin.

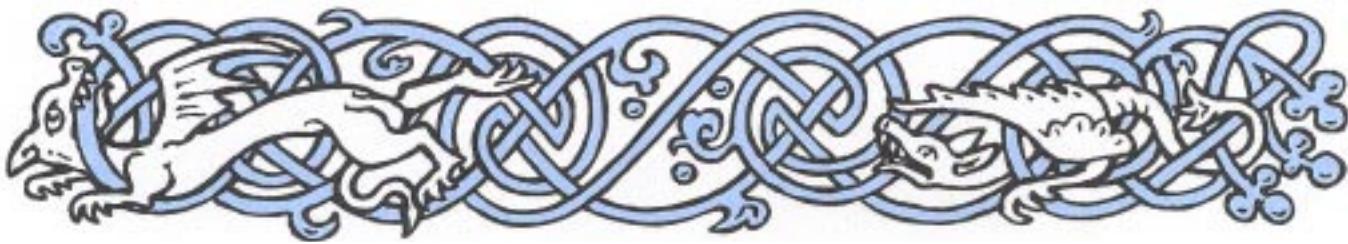
The descriptions of the merchant vary, but the characteristics that are commonly listed are: human, short, dressed in robes, and wearing at least two magical rings.

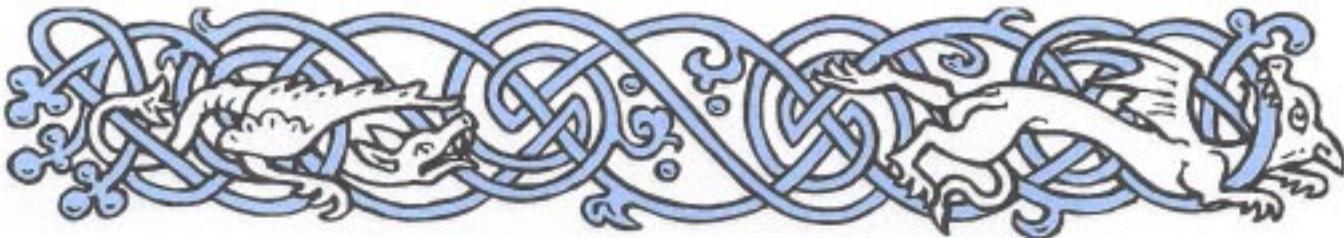
I believe that the merchant isn't really what people say he is. My thoughts are that the magical ring he wears casts some illusion upon his person to make him look human. I think a grander plot is afoot, one that involves stressing the relationship between the sahuagin and the human settlements. What would be accomplished by doing this is unknown.

Wrecks and Strange Ships

No tales delight people and bait adventurers—such as myself—more than the tales of lost ships and their precious cargoes. Naturally, many such stories cover an area as large as the coastline, and that is the subject of my discourse.







Gondegal's Severed Neck

Gondegal, that legendary lost king, is believed to be alive by a great many people. Whether he is, however, is anyone's guess, but there is no shortage of activity attributed to him.

Two years ago during the winter, a large sailing vessel was attacked by pirates as it passed through the Neck on its way into the Lake of Dragons. The vessel was boarded by pirates who outnumbered the crew two-to-one. During the melee, the captain of the ship under attack came out on the deck to join in the melee. One of the pirates proclaimed that the captain was Gondegal himself. This caused a brief pause in the battle, for the sighting of Gondegal would be a legendary thing indeed. Taking advantage of this pause, the captain dove into the water and was able to make his escape.

The cargo was taken and the ship was sunk, for it was in too poor condition to be of any valuable. Adding credibility to this sighting was the fact the ship was carrying nothing but weapons, swords mostly. They were of goblin design, and given that Gondegal used a large percentage of such demihumans in his assault on Cormyr, the connection was made that he was attempting to reinforce his army and begin his campaign anew.

Some of the crew of the vanquished ship admitted to knowing that their captain claimed to be Gondegal, but they could not say where his base of operations was. They also said that Gondegal had amassed a fortune and was going to use it to hire the troops he was planning to arm. The location of the fortune was known to the captain and the first officer only, for the first officer seemed to be a very trusted individual as far as the captain was concerned. The first officer of the ship was captured and questioned, but he escaped, taking knowledge about his captain and the fortune with him.

The only clue as to the alleged Gondegal's whereabouts is that he was believed to be heading for Westgate, and that he is human but has red, dwarflike hair.

The Specter Ship of Urmlaspyr

During the fog that sometimes rolls into Urmlaspyr, the sighting of a mysterious ghostly ship seen plying the waves from west to east against the wind is sometimes reported.

The ship is old and tall and is of a design unfamiliar to any that have seen it, though a scant few have said it resembles a design of a kingdom far to the east. Strangely, there seem to be no oar ports or the like. It flies no flags or banners.

The rigging and sails are silent, as is the crew, but a strange creaking is heard from its ancient planks. The creaking is very ominous, as I can personally attest. These sounds, when I first heard them, reminded me of the opening of a wooden coffin lid. Others have likened it to the popping sound made by burning wood.

The only indication that the ship is actually there is that one can also hear the lapping of the sea against the hull. The crew seems to be working steadily on the deck. But one can't get a good look at them, and they appear only as misty blobs through the fog. The ship travels for some miles, then disappears into the mist.

The story would end here were it not for a most unnerving experience I had a few days after my sighting. I was in Urmlaspyr searching for a prisoner who had escaped the king's dungeons. Urmlaspyr guards said that they had captured him, but that he had died while in their care. I had to see the body to make sure they had the right person. When they opened his coffin, the creaking from the uprooted nails exactly matched that sound made by the ghost ship.

I feared the person might be the target of something unnatural, so I had the body burned that night. A fog rolled in, but I could not go to the coast to see if the ghost ship was there.

Eldritch Cargo

A merchant vessel from a place far to the east was sunk in a storm about a decade ago. Dragoneye Dealing, a merchant house in Marsember, is intent on finding the wreck. The story has leaked that an especially valuable piece of cargo is aboard. It isn't precious like gold or jewels, but some kind of device used for navigation. It has leaked that the device makes sailing as easy as finding one's way in a city.



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The Cormyrean Marshes

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The Journal of Brother Twick

Compiled by The Humble Cleric from Verdusk



wick of Verdusk is a halfling cleric of Chauntea who is known for his work among the human villagers of the Tun and Farsea Marshes. While he claims to be a somewhat timid soul with no love of adventure, like most halflings he is possessed of a sturdy constitution and an insatiable sense of curiosity, both of which served him well during his journeys.

My experience with the marshes in and around Cormyr began the better part of a decade ago, when my high priest dispatched me from our temple at Arabel with orders to minister to the swamp-dwelling humans known as the Marsh Drovers, reputed to live in the depths of the Farsea Marshes. When he learned of my

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task, Elmdaerle, master of the Naturalist's Guild, called me to his home, where he regaled me with legends and tall tales of Cormyr's swamplands, and ended by asking me to investigate some of them.

Mind you, I am no adventurer. My duty is to Mother Chauntea, and to all those creatures, lands, and beings under her gentle protection. While I did not quail at the thought of serving Chauntea in the marshes, neither did I relish the thoughts of dodging deadly swamp creatures, risking horrific disease, capture by barbaric humans, or any of the dozen different grisly ends that might await me.

All the same, Elmdaerle's accounts fascinated me. Stories of lost kingdoms, ancient ruins, rare creatures, and supernatural events—all these and more rose up from the swamps, yet few other than the Marsh Drovers had ever looked into them.





So it was that, armed with little save faith and the simple garb of my order, and mounted upon a sturdy steppe pony, I set out on the High Road through the Storm Horn Mountains, bound for my new home. I also bore a large brass-bound volume, quills, and a supply of ink, intending to record my observations.

My journey was long and, in comparison to what was yet to come, relatively uneventful. I am certain that there are those readers who might be interested in hearing about the various minor incidents that occurred during my travels before I arrived in the marshlands, but I will refrain from going on excessively. It was true that I visited a multitude of unusual inns, not only those of a pleasant sort, and I had the pleasure to learn many details of the lives of my fellow wayfarers, some of whom were thoroughly remarkable in their own rights. I had glorious meals and I had common travelers' fare. Be all this as it may, none of it is germane to the current work, and I will avoid it.

Elminster's notes: This is what passes for restraint in a halfling. I never thought I'd see it!

I parted company from my caravan at Eagle Peak, venturing down into the marshlands alone. The caravan-master advised me against such action, claiming the land to be infested with predatory monsters and bandits. I firmly placed my faith in Chauntea and continued.

At long last, the vast green expanse of the Farsea Marshes spread out before me. The region was mostly water, crisscrossed here and there by causeways of solid earth. Eerie birdcalls echoed from thick rushes, and black swarms of insects rose from the water. With growing uncertainty, I led my pony along one of these causeways, looking always for any signs of habitation. After several hours, the sun hung low in the sky. My mount and I were well within the confines of the marsh and, I am sorry to say, thoroughly lost. Several causeways had proved to be dead ends, forcing us to backtrack repeatedly. As yet another pathway ended in soft ground and shallow water, I considered stopping where I was and making camp for the night.

Then disaster struck. The weight of me and my pony proved sufficient to make the seemingly-solid earth collapse, dropping us both, to my horror, into a deep mud pit.

My pony shrieked and struggled, succeeding only in

dragging itself in deeper. I fought to remain calm, but with each of the horse's frantic thrashing motions, I sank farther into the foul muck. I uttered a brief prayer to Chauntea, for it seemed that both my animal and I were doomed.

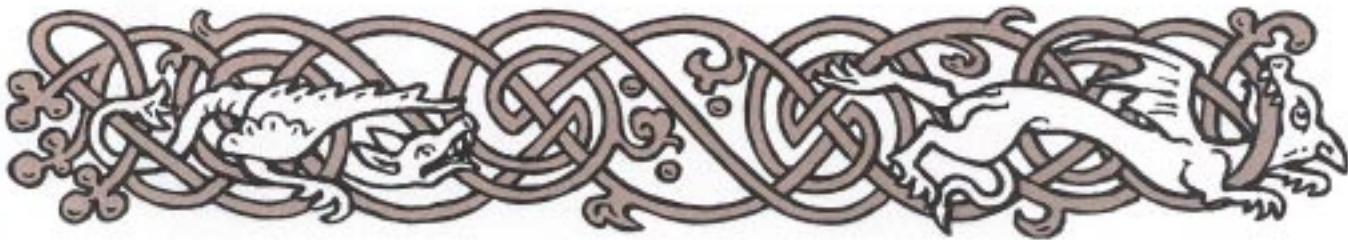
Then it seemed that Great Mother Chauntea granted us both a miracle, for when I looked up I saw a pair of human figures mounted in a small, flat-bottomed boat, poling down the shallows nearby. As one of the humans pulled me to safety, the second leaped into the water and laid his hands on my pony's head. To my surprise, the pony grew calm, and allowed the humans to free it from the mud, and lead it to solid ground.

As we watched the gasping horse, now black with mud, make its way onto the causeway, one man grinned at me and said, in heavily accented common, "A good day for a mud bath, eh, master halfling?" It was my first introduction to the humans I was soon to call my friends, the Marsh Drovers.

An Aside To My Readers

Before progressing further, let me explain that I am, by inclination, an organized person. My experiences in the Cormyrean Marshes, however, were less so. To satisfy my need for personal order, I have arranged my essays about places and monsters in alphabetic form. In this way, I hope that scholars and researchers will benefit from a ready ease of reference.

However, I did not encounter the folk and creatures that people my narrative in so orderly a fashion. Thus, I have been forced to discuss events out of their chronological order, and this may be confusing to some. I might have cause to describe my rescue from bandits when, in the section before, I had not even been at risk. When first I bring up the names of informants and companions, I endeavor to give a thumbnail sketch of introduction, but the accompanying event might not be when I first made their acquaintance. Let me assure the reader that all is explained in its proper place, and this humble cleric will ever be grateful for your sufferance.



Part One: The Cormyrean Marshes

Ghe popular view of swamps and marshes is not a positive one. The average citizen of Cormyr sees the wetlands that surround his land as dark, forbidding places, where evil festers and foul creatures lurk in murky water to devour the unwary. Black, twisted trees and vines stand guard over brackish stagnant ponds, insects swarm through the air spreading foul diseases, and everywhere is the stench of rotting plants.

While this image is largely true of the deadly Vast Swamp (see the following entry), it is an incomplete and misleading portrayal of the marshes west of Cormyr—the Tun and Farsea.

A marsh is a living, growing place richly endowed with both animal and plant species. Rivers typically flow through, or originate in, marshlands, which act as natural filters, retaining poisons, sediments, and other substances, keeping rivers clean and healthy. As per your request to describe the biologies of the major Cormyrean marshes, I will begin by listing the general features of each in turn.

The Farsea Marshes

Thus my first “adventure” was in the Farsea Marshes, home of the friendly and colorful Marsh Drovers. When I arrived in late spring, the Farsea was a rich, green expanse, full of bogs, shallow ponds, stands of swamp-growing trees, and occasional islands and causeways of solid earth. It is on these islands and in floating villages built on wood stilts or platforms that the Drovers make their homes.

The Farsea Marshes nestle at the foot of the Storm Horns, and abut the High Moor nearby. To the north lie the Goblin Marches, home to various humanoid groups that occasionally strike south, raiding Marsh Drove settlements or the Storm Horn trade routes.

The Tun River originates in the Farsea Marshes.

Flowing south, the Tun carves a broad valley between the peaks of the Storm Horns and the Far Hills. The Tun valley is damp and inhospitable, its soil far too soft and marshy for much farming, and regularly flooded by the Tun.

Eagle Peak, a fortified trade-city inhabited by tough mountain-dwellers, is the only settlement of any size near the marshes, and its inhabitants rarely venture down into the valley. The Tun’s flood plain is left to humanoids and the few humans hardy (or foolish) enough to live there. The latter are mostly peat cutters and farmers who till the occasional small plots of dry land. Trading caravans out of Cormyr pass through the foothills of the Storm Horns, but most of the region is relatively inaccessible. And then there is the humanoid problem, of course.

Weather and Seasons

The seasons pass quite strikingly in the marshes. Spring brings rains and melt-off in the Storm Horns. The region floods, often submerging the few dry islands, swamping Drove villages, toppling ancient trees, and completely changing the course of the River Tun. Summer grows hot, as hordes of insects fill the air, animals mature to adulthood, and the river and ponds grow smaller and shallower. Often, large sections of the marsh are rendered dry and as hard as stone by late summer. Fall brings more rains, and frenetic activity as both humans and animals prepare for winter.

Temperatures drop below freezing for weeks at a time in the winter. Ice covers ponds, and the river flows but sluggishly. Snow is a rarity at lower elevations, although the portions of the marsh that border on the Storm Horns are sometimes buried under up to a foot of snow, and fierce storms sometimes howl down from the mountains. Animals and humans alike suffer during the winter, and all look forward to the rains and melt-off of spring, despite the occasional disasters they bring.

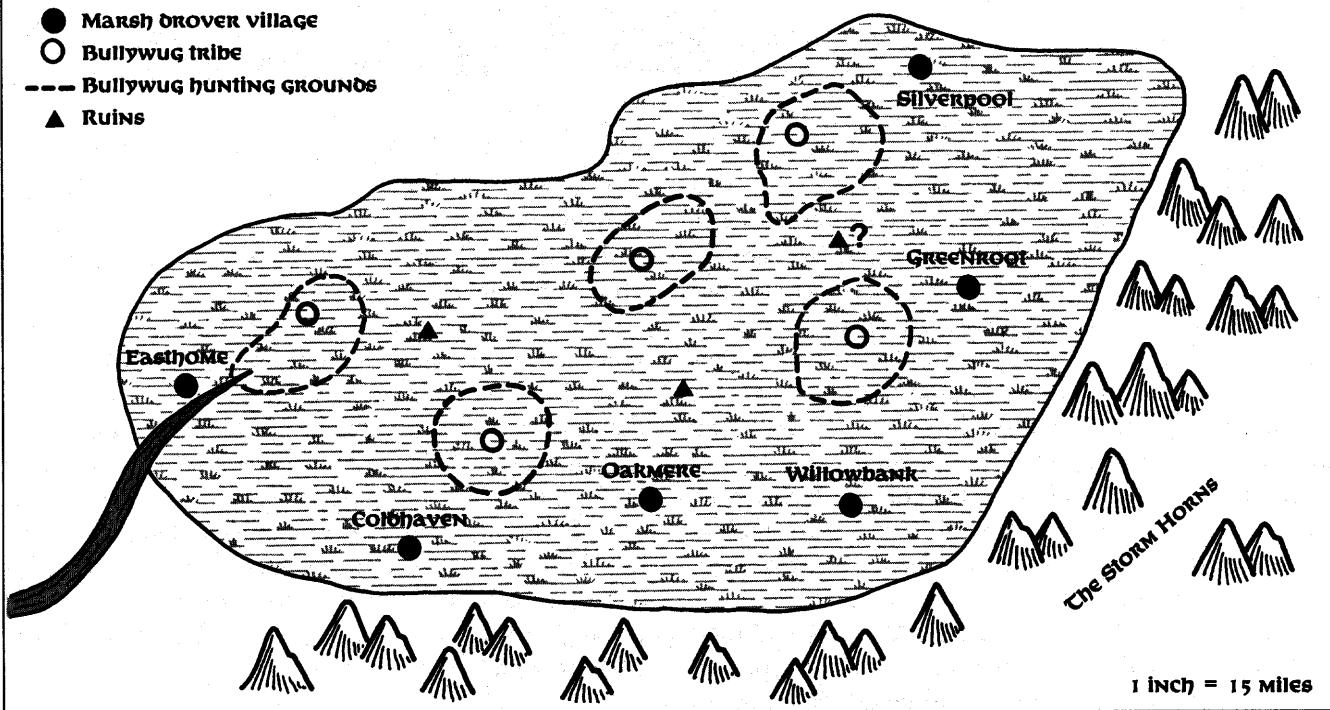
The floods also sometimes uncover evidence of the ancient kingdom that is said to have flourished here



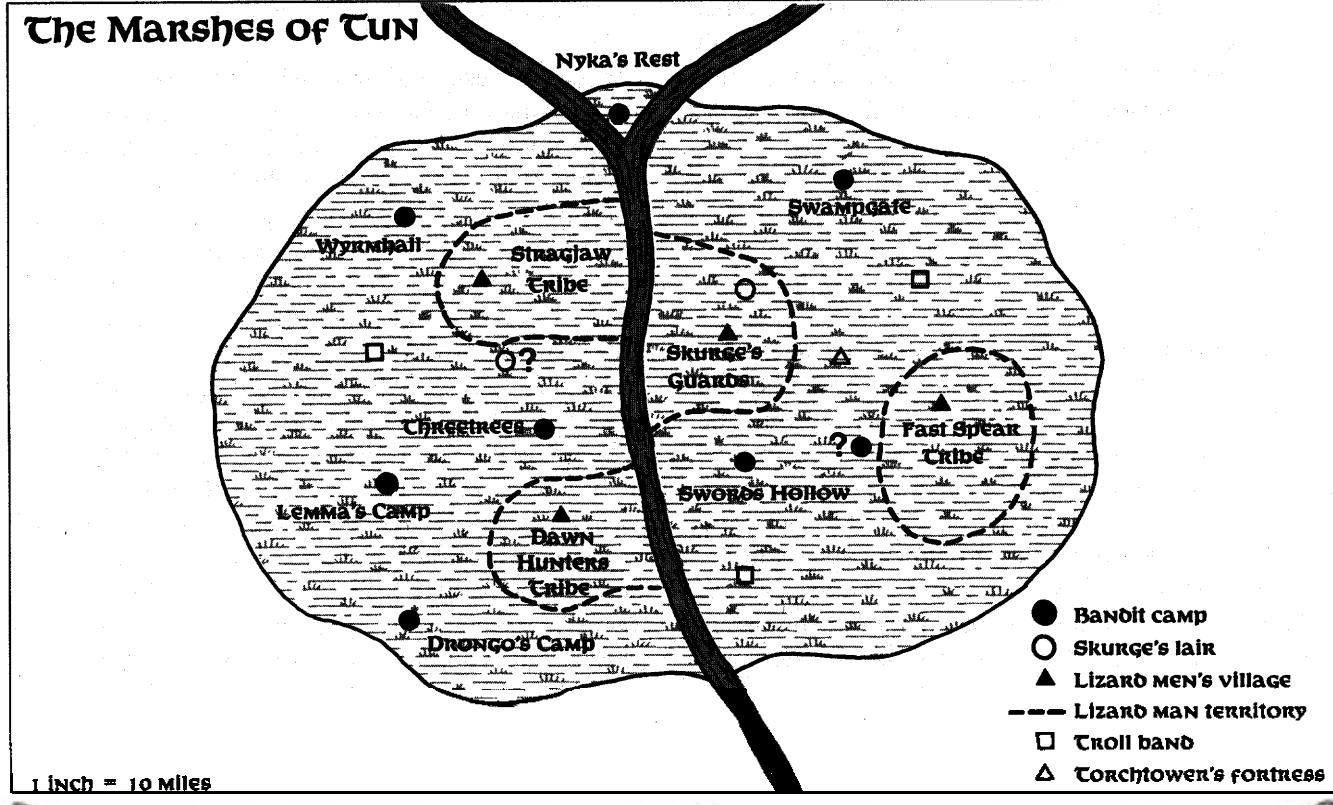


The Farsea Marshes

- Marsh drover village
- Bullywug tribe
- Bullywug hunting grounds
- ▲ Ruins



The Marshes of Tun





centuries ago—ruined buildings, roads, or even treasures. Several extensive ruins exist in the swamp, and often yield valuable treasures. One unfortunate side effect of the ancient kingdom's presence is the occasional appearance (or, in many cases "eruption") of undead creatures released from imprisonment deep beneath the marsh. Most of these are undead of the mindless sort—skeletons or zombies—but others are self-willed and very dangerous. The Marsh Drovers tell many frightening stories of these unnatural things, and I myself was unfortunate enough to actually witness several of their predations.

Climatic Averages for The Farsea Marshes

Spring	70 degrees F.
Summer	80 degrees F.
Autumn	60 degrees F.
Winter	45 degrees F.
Low Temperature (year)	30 degrees F.
High Temperature (year)	90 degrees F.
Annual Precipitation	80 inches
Days with Snow	15 days

Plants and Animals

The Farseas themselves are a vast area. Plant species such as cattails, rushes, ferns, and reeds flourish in its shallow waters, while the sturdy gray willow and marsh oak help to form solid islands amid the soft, muddy terrain.

Many animal species live and thrive in the marshes. The region is alive with amphibians such as the red newt, Cormyr salamander, and redeye frog, from which a potent paralytic is extracted by the Marsh Drovers. The songs of the numerous frog species fill the air at sunset, and in many areas can be near-deafening.

The frogs feed on the clouds of flies, gnats, dragonflies, and other species that swarm in huge numbers, especially in spring and summer. Despite my affection for the region and its inhabitants, the presence of massive clouds of stinging flies, gnats, and mosquitoes is one feature I could do without. In addition, many insects carry diseases, for which the region is justifiably infamous. The Drovers avoid the disease problem by making an effective insect repellent from the bark of the gray willow, however, and travelers are advised to obtain large quantities before venturing too deeply into the marsh.

As I will make clear later in this work, the swamp harbors many unusual and dangerous creatures, but travelers should keep in mind that even ordinary beasts demand the respect of the alert traveler. In addition to the large, dangerous, or monstrous creatures that dwell in the swamp (and there are many), the Farsea is full of familiar species. Some of these beasts help to maintain the marshes as a balanced biological community. Squirrel, raccoon, fox, deer, rabbit, and lynx are all found in the Farseas. In addition, a large, predatory subspecies of mountain lion roams the area. This creature is known to the locals as a "panther" although it is totally unrelated to the black tropical leopard. From time to time one may even encounter black bears, and I for one would hesitate to dismiss them as unworthy of attention.

Many bird species make their homes in the Farseas, although the more colorful songbirds seem to prefer the milder climate of the Tun Marshes to the south. Waterfowl like loons and ducks are seen often, and wading birds such as egrets, herons, and avocets are quite common also.

Less familiar creatures inhabit the marsh as well. The catoblepas, whose gaze can kill, is a constant hazard, as are roaming bands of trolls and the rare but deadly darktentacles. Orcs and their allies have been known to raid into the swamp from their homes in the Goblin Marches, but these raids frequently end in disaster for the attackers, who wind up lost in the swamp and cut to pieces by its inhabitants. The deadliest hazards in the swamp include hydrae—several are said to make the Farsea their home—and large tribes of bullywugs, or frog-men.

During my time in the Farsea Marshes, I came to see the land as a vast web of interrelated plants, animals, and climate. Far from being repulsed by the inhospitable region, and despite its occasionally unpleasant features, I came to love the land, and see that it needed protection and shepherding every bit as much as the plains and forests of Faerûn.

The Marsh of Tun

To the south, in the center of the Tun River Valley, lies the Marsh of Tun. Similar in many ways to the Farsea, the Tun is also inhabited by a rich panoply of living things.





Weather and Seasons

Tun's climate is somewhat milder due to its lower elevation. Autumn and winter are virtually indistinguishable, with cold, drenching rains and high winds. The rain continues into the spring with decreasing intensity, as grasses sprout, flowers bloom, and trees grow green with foliage. Summer is muggy, humid, and unpleasant, with many disease-bearing insects swarming through the air.

Climatic Averages for The Tun Marshes

Spring	65 degrees F.
Summer	75 degrees F.
Autumn	60 degrees F.
Winter	45 degrees F.
Low Temperature (year)	30 degrees F.
High Temperature (year)	85 degrees F.
Annual Precipitation	85 inches
Days with Snow	5 days

Plants and Animals

Most of the plant and animal species of the Farseas are also found in Tun; in addition, many colorful species of songbirds nest in the rushes and trees of this southerly marsh, drawn by the preferable weather conditions. These include redwing blackbirds, which fill the air with their cheerful cries, meadowlarks, goldfinches, and swallows.

Dangerous species include several carnivorous plants, relatively uncommon in the Farsea, as well as a powerful black dragon known as Skurge. She is old, sleeps much of the time, and rarely raids in her own territory. Her predations have taken her as far away as western Cormyr, and to the human villages near Proskur. No expedition has ever been mounted to slay Skurge, since her home region is so inaccessible. In addition, Skurge has a sort of mutual defense agreement with the Tun Bandits, making a foray against her that much more dangerous.

The place of the Farsea's bullywugs has been taken in the Tun Marshes by the lizard men. These tribal creatures are insular, but rarely openly hostile. From time to time, the lizard men clash with the Tun Bandits, but for the most part the two groups leave each other alone.

Trolls, catoblepas, and basilisks make the Tun haz-

ardous, but the greatest danger in the swamp arises from its human inhabitants. The Tun Bandits are a lawless, violent band of outlaws, totally unlike the peaceful Marsh Drovers. The bandits are united under the leadership of the self-styled "King of the Marshes," Thaalim Torchtower. This so-called "bandit kingdom" has become a serious danger to the Cormyrean caravans who traverse the Storm Horns. If their rumored alliance with Skurge proves to be a reality, Torchtower may yet prove to be a major threat to King Azoun IV's authority.

As will be seen later in this narrative, my experience with the Tun Bandits was not a good one, but I feel every bit as strongly about the Tun Marshes as I do about the Farsea — they are important, living places, completely unlike the dark, forbidding image most outsiders hold. Regrettably, there is one swamp-land in Cormyr that conforms in every way to the grim popular image of marshes, and it is my painful duty to describe it here.

The Vast Swamp

As I have said, many of the popular conceptions of swamps — as dismal places of great danger and quick death — are borne out in the haunted depths of this foul region. A large, relatively shallow marsh, the Vast Swamp feeds the wide, sluggish Darkflow River.

Unlike the other two swamps, the Vast is thoroughly polluted by its inhabitants, and by generations of evil magic, serving only a minimal function in cleaning and filtering the Darkflow. As its name implies, the Darkflow's water is black with sediment, foul, and bad-smelling, and harbors numerous dangerous creatures.

In area, the Vast is almost as large as the Farsea and Tun Marshes combined. One of its few positive functions is that of safeguarding Cormyr's eastern border, for no army could possibly pass nearby unscathed.

Weather and Seasons

The Vast Swamp's climate is harsh and unnatural. A sticky mist hangs in the air constantly — hot in summer and cold in winter, clinging to the black branches of trees, gathering in hollows and depressions, flowing like a living thing.



Rain falls regularly, drenching the ground, swelling the Darkflow, and flooding the region. These rains have no real season—they seem to fall when most uncomfortable and inconvenient.

Seasons vary primarily by temperature, stiflingly hot in summer and autumn, bone-chillingly cold in the winter and spring. With the constant discomfort of the rains and the fog, the Vast Swamp is a miserable and dangerous place no matter what the season.

Climatic Averages for The Vast Swamp

Spring	55 degrees F.
Summer	70 degrees F.
Autumn	60 degrees F.
Winter	50 degrees F.
Low Temperature (year)	40 degrees F.
High Temperature (year)	90 degrees F.
Annual Precipitation	70 inches
Days with Snow	None

Plants and Animals

Plant species include the common marsh-reed and cattail, as well as swamp grass and several rare species of water lily, some of which provide components for spells, and magical or healing potions. Trees include willows, gall oak, and a number of dangerous carnivorous species, such as thornslinger and black willow. All of these plants seem somehow twisted and dark, often diseased, hung with trailing moss and embraced by the region's pervasive mists. Many claim that the swamp was once the site of wicked magics or the worship of forbidden gods, but this has never been proven. Just

the same, no better hypothesis has been advanced to explain the festering evil of the Vast Swamp.

Likewise, the Vast Swamp's mundane animal species are all of unnatural mien and appearance. Black squirrels and other rodents scurry along the branches of trees, or fight for possession of the few bits of solid ground. Poisonous snakes are a constant danger, as are the lynx and swamp panther, which hunt here without apparent fear of man. Even normally shy species such as raccoon, fox, and otter behave in an aggressive manner in the Vast, sometimes attacking humans with deadly ferocity. Many of these animals are diseased, carrying such dreaded ailments as rabies and swamp fever.

Not surprisingly, the other inhabitants of the Vast Swamp are truly terrifying. My few journeys to the swamp (to further the Naturalists' Guild's understanding of its biology, and to see if the swamp contained any potential converts) were always exercises in caution and fear, interrupted by moments of stark horror.

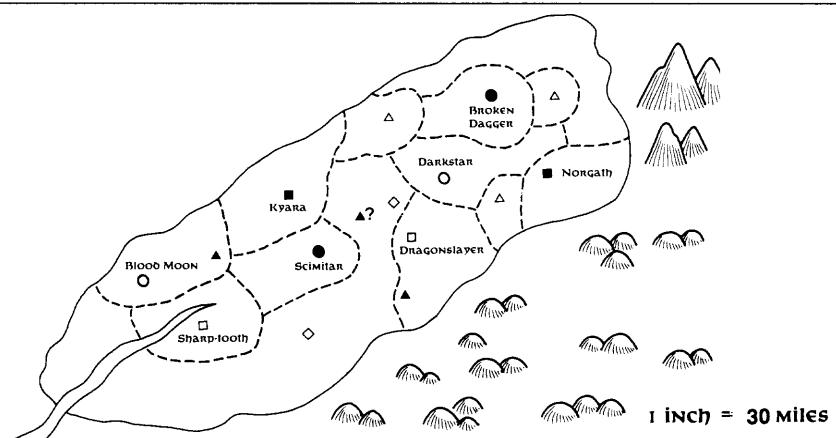
Tribes of lizard men, hobgoblins, gnolls, orcs, goblins, and trolls inhabit the swamp, warring continuously upon each other and, from time to time, upon the outside world. At least two young black dragons (the get of Skurge, dragon of Tun) inhabit the swamp, along with even more evil creatures such as beholders, undead, and even illithids. As might be expected, my visits to the swamp yielded few new Chauntae-worshippers.

I cannot subscribe to the common belief that swamps are evil, undesirable places. Nevertheless, honesty demands an accurate recounting of my words here, and I am forced to remind would-be travelers to beware of a terrible evil that does indeed fester deep within Cormyr's Vast Swamp. . . an evil that may, in time, spread to taint all its surrounding lands.

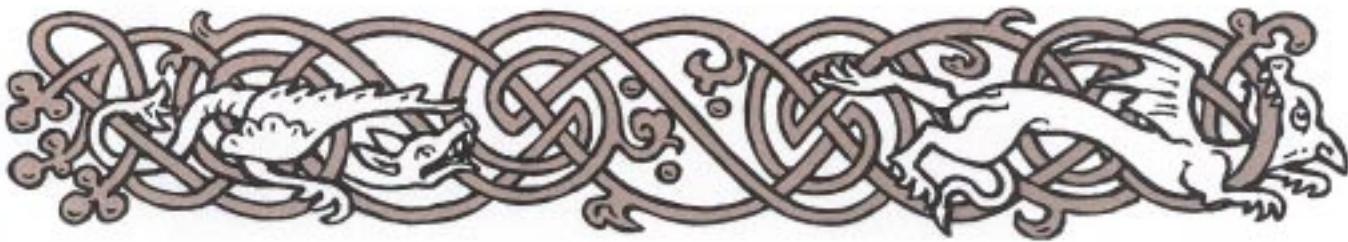
The Vast Swamp

Key:

- Orc tribes
- Goblin tribes
- Lizard man tribes
- Hobgoblin tribes
- △ Troll bands
- ▲ Ruins
- ◊ Dragon's lair
- Territorial boundary







Part Two: Monsters

All the marshland dwellers, whether intelligent or animal, are part of a vast and complex biological community. Some do not understand or care what role they play there—by which I mean the Tun Bandits, trolls, bullywugs, and some others. These have an entirely disastrous effect on the swamplands, threatening the fragile community they depend on. Others, such as the gentle Marsh Drovers, love and respect the swamplands. These folk have proven benevolent or helpful, and are a fully integrated part of the marshes' intricate web of life. Some of the more important, interesting, or dangerous of the swamps' inhabitants I describe in some detail below.

The Black Dragons

The most powerful inhabitant of the Tun Marshes is an old female dragon known as Skurge. In conversations with my Drover friends and others, I learned much of the dragon and her habits. However, my most useful informant turned out to be one of Thaalim Torchtower's own minions. (I will devote an entire later section to detailing my knowledge of "King" Torchtower and his Tun bandits.)

Three weeks had passed since my adventure escaping the bandits in the Tun Marshes, which is another story I will recount fully in a later essay. My companions of that time—the Cormyrean merchant Thaldo and his daughter, Rysilla—had seen enough adventure for a while, and so they set out for Eagle Peak with an escort of Farsea hunters. The journey was uneventful, but when the hunters returned, they encountered a lone traveler, a Tun Bandit named Skola, who claimed to have been exiled from the marshes when she rejected Thaalim Torchtower's romantic overtures.

While suspicious of Skola's motives (she could easily have been a spy), the hunters took her to Greenroot, but blindfolded her while they did so to keep her

from learning any secret routes through the swamps. After she arrived, I interviewed her and, through the application of various techniques both magical and intuitive, proved to my own satisfaction that she was telling the truth, and had genuinely rejected Torchtower and his bandit kingdom. Skola and I were to become good friends over the intervening weeks, and I soon learned much of the bandits' history and, more important, of the dragon Skurge and her relationship with them.

The Dragon and The Bandits

Skurge is the unquestioned mistress of the marshes, and could easily have exterminated the bandits long ago. Before Torchtower's arrival and unification of the bandits, she never considered them to be much of a threat. Once the human warrior began to forge the disparate bandit tribes into a single force, Skurge began to consider destroying the human upstarts, but the wily Torchtower stole a march on the old dragon, gaining the upper hand.

Unbeknownst to Skurge, Torchtower and his bandits had discovered the location of one of her secret lairs in the swamp. While she was away raiding in western Cormyr, a small team of bandits entered the lair and made off with one of Skurge's eggs, which was then placed in temporal stasis by one of Torchtower's wizards. (Needless to say, I was quite alarmed at the thought of such a spell being available to Torchtower's wizards, until Skola reassured me that the spell had been cast from a scroll, and not by a high-level magician.)

When she returned, Skurge was furious but could do little. Torchtower held her precious egg hostage, and she was eventually convinced that an alliance between her and the bandits would be advantageous. Since that time, Skurge and Torchtower have cooperated well, if not entirely willingly. The bandits have kept the egg safe, but have not returned it.





Skurge and The Swamp

Very little is known about the biology of black dragons, a decidedly dangerous species. My interviews with Skola gave me considerable insight into the secret lives of Skurge and her offspring—and by extrapolation, something of her kin.

Of the many known species of dragon, black dragons are generally thought to be the weakest. Those who encounter the cunning and dangerous Skurge are likely to dispute this conclusion—that is, if they survive that long.

Skurge is a very old dragon, over 900 years at the very least, and she is quite powerful. Nevertheless, her impact on the Tun Marshes has been minimal, because she is intelligent enough not to despoil the territory where she lives.

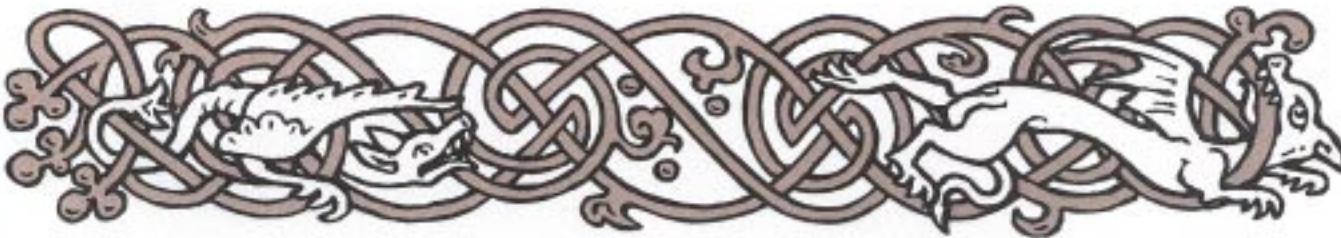
As dragons grow older, their need for sleep increases. Due to her age, Skurge spends perhaps two-thirds of her time sleeping. A dragon's great mass also causes extreme strain on its joints and vertebral structure, making larger creatures move more slowly and

painfully than young specimens. Needless to say, the chronic pain that plagues older dragons does not improve their tempers one iota.

Like most black dragons, Skurge is a petty, cruel, and aggressive creature—all the moreso due to her advanced age and array of skeletal problems. In her case, these unpleasant qualities are tempered by high intelligence and a surprisingly patient nature. She has several lairs and ambushes hidden throughout the swamp. Many of these hideaways are submerged deep beneath the water, hollowed out after years of labor and with the use of her extensive repertoire of wizard spells. It was only a turn of bad luck that resulted in Thaalim Torchtower's discovery of the brood-cavern.

Although she is old, Skurge is still fertile, breeding and laying a single egg every decade or so. Her mate's identity is unknown, but Skola claims that he lives in the jungles of Chult, many leagues distant. This information is consistent with many theories purporting to describe the nature of dragons' life cycles. Specifically, these theories propose that, as a result of dragons'





needs for vast hunting territories, the creatures must travel long distances from their lairs to mate.

During my reading and research, I found an account by a Tethyrian mariner describing a pair of black dragons engaged in a graceful courtship flight high over the Shining Sea, roughly midway between Cormyr and Chult. I suggest that these two dragons were Skurge and her unknown male consort, but this cannot be positively confirmed.

Skurge lays only a single egg at a time, and keeps it beneath the swamp in a magically-heated cave known as a brood-cavern. Incubation time is considerable—12 to 18 months. During this time, Skurge spends most of her time with the egg, emerging only to hunt. It was during such a hunt, of course, that Thaalim Torchtower's bandits stole one of Skurge's eggs, but this sort of opportunity is very rare.

The possession of an egg is perhaps the only real leverage that might be used against a dragon. Despite their evil nature, black dragons are instinctively protective of their eggs, and they will do virtually anything to keep them safe. Moreover, even if the egg should be safely returned, the thief or thieves are still not out of the woods. Only one who was naive in the extreme would believe himself secure after such an act—and a black dragon's vengeance is a terrible thing to behold. For all these reasons, and because Thaalim Torchtower is anything but naive, it is unlikely that "King" Torchtower will be anywhere in the vicinity on the day he arranges for one of his minions to return Skurge's egg—if indeed that day should ever come.

Besides her mutual defense pact with the bandits, Skurge maintains a bodyguard drawn from a large tribe of lizard men, who worship her as an emissary of their god, Semuanya. They are quite loyal to her, and since the abduction of Skurge's egg, serve as guards for her various lairs. I will recount more about the lizard men and their society in pages to come.

At least two of Skurge's progeny live in the Vast Swamp. Relatively young, the pair hunts mostly within the swamp itself, but has begun to raid into neighboring Cormyrean territory. Several adventuring companies have ventured into the Vast with the intention of robbing or slaying the two dragons. Given the other dangers found in the swamp, few of these companies have emerged unscathed, and many have never been heard from again.

Hunting

Dragons' appetites are legendary and prodigious, but tend to wane somewhat as the creatures grow older. Skurge now emerges only every one to three months to feed. When she does, however, she causes serious damage in the regions where she hunts. When young, it is said that Skurge accumulated a massive hoard of treasure, which is hidden deep beneath the swamp. Like her physical appetite, however, Skurge's desire for riches seems to have declined as she grew older, as well, and she rarely carries treasure home with her anymore.

Skurge's favorite hunting grounds are the lands between Proskur and Eversult to the south, the farmlands of Cormyr to the east, and the Goblin Marches to the north. She varies her raiding habits to avoid drawing too much attention to herself—some Cormyreans (or Cormytes, as the king would have it) are unaware that the several "dragons" that have plagued their farmlands over the centuries are actually a single creature. Skurge herself has perpetuated these stories, often attacking while disguised as a red, green, or even—out of spite—a gold or silver dragon.

Skurge and Her Offspring

The undisputed queen of the swamp is the black dragon Skurge. She is a very old dragon—perhaps as much as 1,000 years. The centuries have sharpened her wits and made her a very crafty creature, who prefers to leave combat to her subordinates such as the lizard men of the Marshes of Tun. Better yet, she will simply remain so well hidden that her enemies cannot find her. She has not survived this long by being stupid, and is quite willing to abandon a fight that is going against her.

Skurge, Black Dragon: AC -5; MV 12, Fl 30, SW 12; HD 17; hp 90; THAC0 -1; #AT 3+ special; Dmg 1-6+10/1-6+10/3-18+10/20d4+10; MR 35%; XP 18,000; SA *water breathing*; *darkness* 3× per day (100' radius); *corrupt water* 1× per day (100 cubic feet); *plant growth* 1× per day; *summon insects* 1× per day; SD immunity to acid

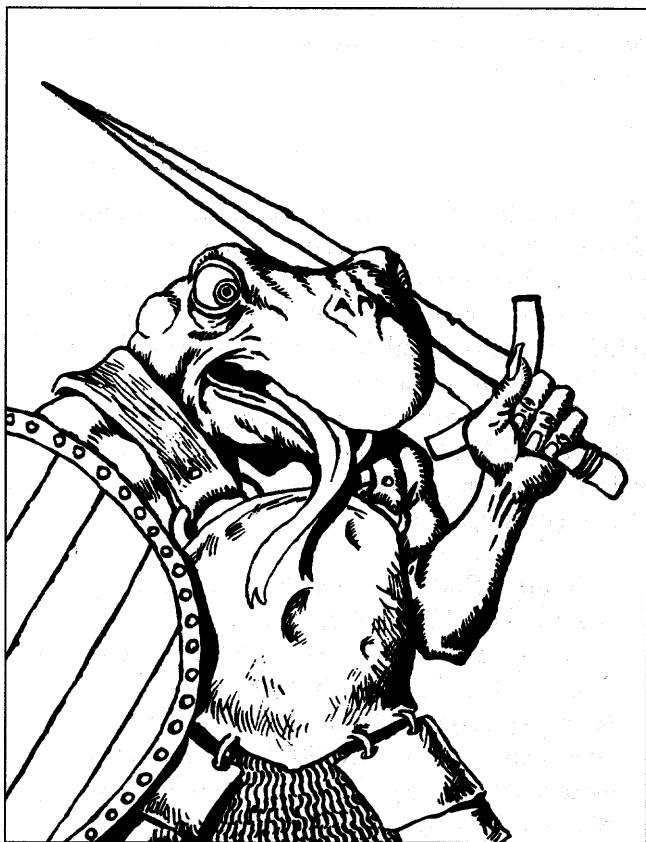




Tyra and Despayr, Black Dragon: AC 1; MV 12, Fl 30, Sw 12; HD 12; hp 60; THAC0 9; #A 3+special; Dmg 1-6+4/1-6+4/3-18+4/8d4+4; MR Nil; XP 10,000; SA water breathing; darkness 3× per day (40' radius); SD immunity to acid

The Bullywugs

The other major threat to the Marsh Drovers comes from the batrachian humanoids known as bullywugs. Several tribes of these disagreeable creatures live in the Farsea and, I am told, in the Vast Swamp as well, but I have been unable to confirm this. While the undead are only an intermittent threat, endangering the Marsh Drovers once or twice in a generation, the bullywugs are a constant enemy, and continuously vie with the humans for control of the region.



Culture and Society

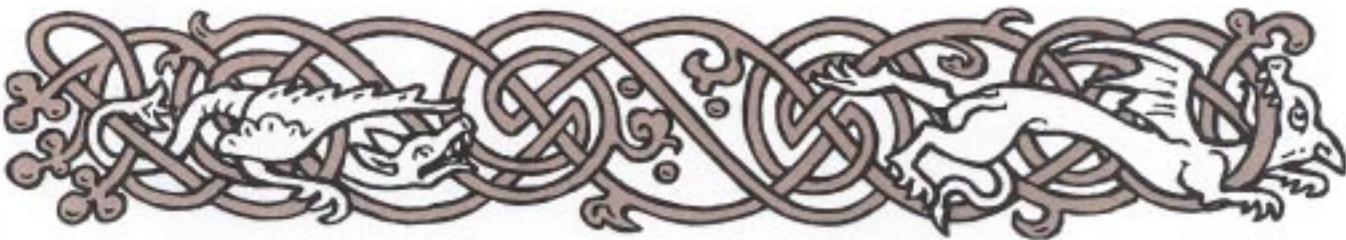
Farsea bullywugs are good-sized, averaging over six feet in height. They are broad-bodied, their skins a rich emerald green, mottled with olive and gray. Although they are relatively intelligent, they do not live in permanent settlements, nor do they produce permanent artifacts. Bullywug warriors will sometimes wear armor, or wield swords and weapons captured from the Drovers, or salvaged from the swamp. However, most rely on their natural weapons, their natural camouflage, and their special hop when in combat.

Bullywugs travel in tribal groups of up to 50 individuals. These groups are organized along totalitarian lines, with absolute authority vested in a male chieftain and his subleaders. A bullywug chieftain treats his subjects like possessions, making use of their labor, freely killing and even eating followers when they do not instantly follow his wishes.

Long-term bonding among bullywugs is unknown. A female lays a clutch of up to 200 eggs once per year, and the tribe keeps watch over their breeding pond until the young bullywugs emerge. Resembling large tadpoles, bullywug spawn are entirely non-intelligent, feeding upon insects, small amphibians, and each other until they have developed sufficiently to emerge from the breeding pond, usually six to eight weeks after hatching. Thereafter, a bullywug is entirely on its own, forced to defend itself against its larger fellows. With luck and strength, it may eventually grow into a full-fledged adult, although fewer than one in a hundred bullywug hatchlings survives to adulthood.

The bullywugs' impact on their immediate environment is indeed dire. Indiscriminate in their hunting practices, they have been known to strip acres of swampland bare of life, leaving behind a muddy morass. Fortunately, they do not poison the land permanently in the same manner as undead, and life usually returns to despoiled regions within a year or two. Many different tribes of bullywugs inhabit the Farsea. They generally stay out of each other's way, and do not fight one another. Conversely, they are only too happy to seek out and hunt humans, whom they see as rivals and enemies.

Normally respectful of life in the swamp, the



Drovers periodically organize campaigns against the bullywugs, especially when their populations grow too large and the frog-people actually begin attacking Drover villages. Battles with the bullywugs are fierce, but the amphibians are not very intelligent and have little stomach for extended combat. After inflicting a few casualties on their attackers, they melt away into the swamp.

Bullywugs' Ale

I observed bullywug raids on several occasions while staying in the Farsea marshes, and was even the victim of one myself. This particular incident provided me with an interesting bit of information regarding bullywugs' biology.

Having been notified of the arrival of a shipment of precious Chauntean ale, I, along with a pair of acolytes, ventured to the edge of the swamp, where a nervous merchant handed over the casks. We loaded the casks onto a raft and set back toward Greenroot.

Approximately an hour into the swamp, a warning croak sounded from nearby, and instantly the water was alive with bloated amphibian bodies clambering onto our raft, attempting to overturn us. Joined by my acolytes, Tayth and Sayla, I called upon Chauntea and cast spells sufficient to distract our attackers, allowing us to scramble out of the boat and swim for firm ground.

Once we had gained solid ground, I turned and prepared to help my acolytes drive off the bullywugs, only to observe a curious thing. Having dislodged us from our vessel, and seeing what powers we had at our command, the bullywugs did not choose to pursue. Instead they contented themselves with swarming all over the boat, inspecting the casks and probing them with their soft, suction-cup-tipped fingers. At length, one discovered the tap and turned the handle, unleashing a flood of amber liquid.

My heart sank, for the loss of good ale is nearly as tragic as the loss of a brave warrior. And this ale was consecrated to Mother Chauntea!

Elminster's notes – Typical halfling attitude, wouldn't you say?

We watched in horrified fascination as the bullywugs fell upon the liquid, gulping down huge mouthfuls. They seemed to have completely forgotten us, and now descended into what can only be described as a drinking frenzy, swallowing huge quantities of our blessed ale, and spilling even more.

For several minutes the revel continued, and then an even stranger thing happened. One of the first bullywugs to reach the raft and drink the ale fell to the floor of the raft and began convulsing, almost comically. In a few moments, all the bullywugs had been seized by the same contractions, some falling into the boat, others slipping overboard to splash helplessly in the water.

We watched in silence, too amazed to speak. Within five minutes, all motion had ceased, and our attackers lay still in the boat, or floating in the water. Cautiously, we returned to the boat and inspected the bullywugs. To my surprise, several were dead, and the remainder were in a deep stupor, showing every sign of a deep coma. Once more thanking Chauntea, we flung the corpses and unconscious bodies out of our raft and continued on to Greenroot.

Later experimentation showed an interesting fact—the thick-headed bullywugs were irresistibly drawn to human liquor, but having drunk the stuff, they slipped into unconsciousness or death, depending on the quantity consumed. The village elders of Greenroot thanked Chauntea and me profusely for providing them with a potent new weapon against the bullywugs.

From that day forward, each Marsh Drover village was equipped with a cask of ale, to be opened in the event of a bullywug attack. I have since heard that the tactic has worked, and large-scale assaults by the frog-people have declined considerably.

Darktentacles

These solitary, amphibious, and highly intelligent predators have been encountered in both the Tun and Vast swamps. Lurking beneath the surface of the water, they emerge, a frightening mass of eye-studded tentacles, to seize prey and drag it to its doom.

These creatures are perhaps the most dangerous predator in the swamp. Fortunately for the region's inhabitants, they are also very rare. A single dark-





tentacles can eliminate all the fish and birds in a region within a matter of weeks, after which it necessarily moves on.

Once the swamps' inhabitants are aware of a darktentacles in the region, it is scrupulously avoided. Even direct confrontation with the beast is avoided, since it almost invariably results in high casualties. The bandits of Tun have, on occasion, gone after a darktentacles, well reinforced with magic, weapons, and armor, hoping to sell the creature's body to a wizard in need of the components for *wall of force* and similar spells. These expeditions meet with, at best, mixed success, causing "King" Torchtower to grow more reluctant to mount new ones.

Several informants suggested to me that the number of darktentacles in the swamps appears to be increasing—possibly due to some lingering aftereffects of the Time of Troubles. Unfortunately, I was unable to observe one of the darktentacles at close range, so most of my information comes secondhand.

Gibbering Mouthers

Several areas of the swamp are known to harbor mouthers. These amoeboid creatures are covered with rudimentary eyes and mouths, and they typically attack their prey from ambush. More frighteningly, they can camouflage themselves as solid ground to trap the unwary. The bandits often try to herd enemies or attackers into the regions of the swamp where the creatures are known to live—and let the mouthers do the dirty work for them.

These foul creatures, rare at best, actually seem to have established a breeding population in the Marshes of Tun. Exactly how or why they have done so is not known. My informant Skola claimed that Skurge the black dragon helped to create and perpetuate the things, but she had no proof of this.

Grell

The dark reaches of the Vast Swamp harbor a colony of these repulsive creatures, whose evil has clearly influenced and been influenced by the wickedness that festers there.

While I have not personally dealt with these diabolical creatures, I am indebted to my friend Aerilaya, an elven priestess whose experiences in the Vast Swamp form the basis for much of the information in this document. The following account is heavily based upon facts provided by her.

Hive in The Swamp

Diabolic creatures resembling disembodied brains with biting beaks and ten thick tentacles, the grell live in communal hivelike groups, favoring ruins, swamps, and wilderness areas far from the prying eyes of humans.

Grell are divided by a strict hierarchy, with the powerful patriarchs at the top and common workers at the bottom. The caste known as philosophers mediates between the two and is often found in command of raiding parties of workers.

Possessed of an evil and arrogant outlook, the grell of



the Vast Swamp are hated and feared by the region's other inhabitants. At least four hives, with a total of perhaps sixty individuals, occupy the swamp, preying on other swamp denizens, intelligent and otherwise. Lizard men and hobgoblins are especially favored prey.

The Patriarchs

Each grell hive is controlled by an absolute ruler known as a patriarch. Larger, stronger, and far more intelligent than ordinary grell, the patriarchs of the Vast Swamp have many unusual powers, which make them particularly dangerous.

In addition to their well-known ability to paralyze their opponents, Vast patriarchs are known to have substantial psionic abilities. Aerilaya told me of one encounter in which she witnessed a grell patriarch's psionic abilities.

"With the sceptre I had liberated from the hobgoblin chieftain safely tucked into my belt, I made my way through the misty reaches of the Vast Swamp. I hoped that Queen Amlaruil's gratitude for my service would be con-

siderable, for the sceptre had once been the property of a lord of Myth Drannor, and it was my intention to return it to its rightful owners, the elves of Evermeet.

"Of course, nothing ever goes as smoothly as one might hope, and my escape from the swamp was punctuated by encounters with several of its denizens. Less than a day's journey from the swamp's edge and safety, however, I stumbled upon one of the most fearsome beasts I had yet encountered.

"As I cautiously made my way through a bare stand of black oak trees, a nightmarish creature hovered into view nearby. I had dealt with grell before, but nothing could have prepared me for my first sight of a patriarch – like a normal grell but larger, more powerful, with heavy, muscular tentacles and a tangible aura of menace surrounding it.

"What a patriarch was doing on its own, far from its hive, I can't say. What I can say is that it wanted the sceptre I carried. It did not speak, but in my mind I felt a deep and malevolent desire, as well as a complete lack of pity or mercy.

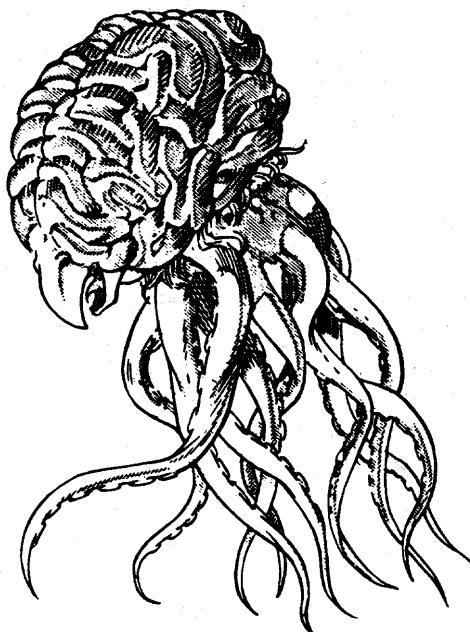
"Not surprisingly, I fled. The thing gave chase, moving effortlessly through the trees, over the black water, in close pursuit. When it became apparent that I couldn't escape, I turned, drawing my weapon and facing the approaching horror.

"To my surprise, it did not move to attack, instead hovering silently, ten feet away. Then I felt a terrible, aching pressure deep inside my head, a compulsion to walk forward and hand the sceptre to the hovering grell. A corner of my consciousness resisted, and I was able to overcome the compulsion.

"The grell was without expression, but waves of rage washed over me, and a burning, white-hot pain filled me – the thing was trying to slay me with the force of its mind alone. I fell to my knees, my weapon falling to the ground. Desperate to defend myself, my hand closed on the scepter at my belt.

"Instantly, the pressure vanished, and a silvery beam of energy lanced from the scepter to strike the grell. With a shriek, it too fell into the brackish swamp water and there it lay, writhing.

"Needless to say, I used the opportunity to escape from the thing. Whether it was hurt, wounded, or dying, I cannot say. I was later to learn that the scepter had the ability to reflect magical and psionic assaults back on an attacker, an ability for which I was extremely grateful."





The Imperator

The grell of the Vast Swamp do not profess to any religion, but instead revere a powerful being which they call the Imperator. This creature, said to dwell beneath the surface of the swamp itself, is a grell of gigantic size, with dozens of tentacles and nearly unbelievable psionic abilities.

Whether the Imperator is actually a unique god-like being or simply a very powerful grell is not known. The grell themselves appear to believe that an Imperator is of sufficient stature and ability to unite all grell and lead them in a great war of conquest. They also claim that, under the command of an Imperator, they have actually conquered entire worlds.

Several hobgoblin legends tell of a gigantic, evil, and highly intelligent grell that supposedly dwells in caves beneath the swamp. These are clearly inspired by tales of the Imperator, but whether they are true or not is a matter of conjecture.

Grell Patriarchs of the Vast Swamp: Vast Swamp grell patriarchs are similar to normal grell patriarchs, save

that they have considerable psionic abilities, as follows:

Psionics Summary:

Level: 6

Dis/Sci/Dev: 3/2/3

Attack/Defense: PsC, PB, MT/M-

Score: =Int

PSPs: 200

Vast Swamp patriarchs always know the following powers, and there is a 15% chance that they will have one more science and two more devotions in the psychokinetic discipline.

Clairsentience: *Devotions:* Clairaudience, Clairvoyance

Psychokinesis: *Sciences:* Detonate, Project Force, Telekinesis; *Devotions:* Ballistic Attack, Soften

Telepathy: *Sciences:* Domination, Mindlink, Mind-wipe; *Devotions:* Contact, Awe, ESP

Hobgoblins

Several tribes of these objectionable humanoids inhabit the Vast Swamp. They are even more violent and xenophobic than most hobgoblins, attacking all outsiders who venture into their territory and engaging in ferocious wars with each other. Many have enslaved some of the primitive goblins and kobolds that dwell in the swamps, making them servants and battle-fodder.

The hobgoblins of the Vast may prove especially dangerous to Cormyr due to their unusual religious beliefs. The tribes claim that their constant warfare is intended to unite them under the banner of a single leader, and they will then emerge from the swamps in a holy war against the surrounding human lands. The hobgoblins claim that the evil god Cyric himself will lead them in their crusade, and that no human force can stand against them. It is further claimed that, when Cyric arrives to lead the united tribes, he will bring with him a weapon of such might that entire armies will flee at its sight, and castle walls will crumble at its touch.

The Hydræ

These legendary creatures inhabit distant wilderness areas, and so are rarely seen by civilized



races. This is probably for the best, for hydrae are as deadly as they are bizarre. My informant Skola told me of the hydrae of the Tun Marshes. I have also heard reports of hydrae dwelling in the dark depths of the Vast Swamp, presenting yet another hazard to travelers and adventurers in the region.

The Nature of Hydrael

There are several types of hydrae known. The common hydra resembles a large, brownish dragon, whose scaly neck sprouts anywhere from five to twelve heads. The common hydra is the type most often encountered in the Tun and the Vast. Apart from its multiple heads, it has no special abilities.

Less common are the pyrohydra, which breathes fire like a dragon, and the feared lernaean hydra, which actually regenerates any heads separated from its main body. The ice-breathing cryohydra is unknown in the area of Cormyr, which is probably for the best.

As reports indicate that common hydrae can give birth to any of the other types of hydrae, I am of the opinion that the pyro-, cryo- and lernaean hydrae are normal (if rare) variations of the common hydra.

The habits and biologies of the various types of hydrae are similar. They are solitary, semi-intelligent predators that prefer swamps and subterranean lairs. Their multiple heads enable hydrae to hunt efficiently, feeding on a wide variety of swamp species, including birds, snakes, deer, and the occasional orc, human, or other sentient species. Pyrohydrae use their flaming breath to kill prey before consuming it. Some hydrae are said to have a special taste for elf-flesh, but the Tun hydrae do not seem to behave in this manner.

Hydrae are relatively slow, but are well adapted to movement in marshy regions such as the Tun and Vast swamps. Their large size prevents bogs or ponds from causing difficulty, and they can move slowly even in relatively deep water, always keeping at least one head near the surface. More than one adventurer has been surprised when the apparent single-headed creature cruising along a lake suddenly erupts into a monstrosity with nine or ten heads.



Mating and Family

As noted, hydrae are solitary creatures. In the mid-to late spring, however, pairs of hydrae come together to mate. Hydra courtship behavior is spectacular, loud, and sometimes very dangerous. Male and female dance about each other in a ponderous ballet, their heads snapping and biting at each other. After a time, the two hydrae are completely enmeshed, heads tangled together. The courtship dance continues even so, with the two great bodies rolling together, splashing through the water, smashing trees, and even crushing those creatures luckless enough to be in the way.

If the pair survives this grueling process (and some do not), mating occurs, after which the female lays a clutch of up to six eggs. At this point, the male departs, and can be a deadly hazard to the young hydrae—with a fine lack of paternal devotion, he may view them as food. Usually, only one hatchling in a dozen survives to adulthood.





Hunting The Hydra

While they are efficient and dangerous predators, hydrae are not immune to predation themselves. Although Skurge the black dragon does not hunt her own territory very often, when she does, she prefers hydrae as prey.

The bandits of Tun and the humanoids of the Vast Swamp all fear hydrae, having too-frequent concourse with the creatures. The bandits, however, have developed several successful strategies for dealing with the beasts. Once again, my information is based on tales related by the former bandit, Skola.

Terrifying though they are, hydrae are not very intelligent. While they resemble dragons in terms of appearance, temperament, and abilities, they lack their reptilian cousins' malign and cunning intellect. Most of the strategies employed by the bandits against the hydrae take advantage of this fact.

A popular ruse is to bait a hydra with a favored food item—a cow, goat, or even an intelligent creature such as an elf or human, usually in the form of an unfortunate captive staked out and bound for the hydra's pleasure. The victim is set out for the hydra in an area suitable for an ambush or trap—a wooded area, a patch of solid ground where pits could be dug, a rocky outcropping, etc.

Pit traps and deadfalls are set along likely approach routes. A hungry hydra will often blunder directly into a stake-lined pit and be impaled, or be crushed beneath tons of boulders set to fall from a rocky prominence. Such prominences are rare in the Tun, and all are well mapped-out and identified by the bandits for just such occasions.

Should these contingencies fail, the hydra will usually simply advance on its helpless prey and proceed to dine. At this point, the bandits employ more direct measures, including assault by armored warriors, magical spells, and attack by archers armed with specially-treated arrows.

A few renegade priests and herbalists have joined the Tun Bandits, bringing with them considerable expertise in the area of poisons and soporifics. Several plant species in the swamp are effective against hydrae, including a nondescript gray plant known as burrwort. This substance, pounded to a paste and reduced to a fine powder over a fire, creates a powerful

sedative that is especially potent against hydrae.

The bandits use arrows treated with burrwort against the hydra, but unfortunately the substance is only effective if it actually penetrates the mighty creature's flesh; arrows stopped by the beast's scales have no effect at all. This means that only the strongest bows, shot from relatively close range, or at a vulnerable spot on the hydra, such as its eyes or—more frighteningly—directly into its open maw, can hope to penetrate and thereby sedate the creature.

Once struck by a burrwort-treated arrow, a hydra lapses into a soporific state within a few seconds, and is fully asleep within a minute. At this point, the bandits may dispatch the beast at their leisure.

Trade in burrwort and the by-products of the slain hydra is one of the bandits' few legitimate business enterprises. Many organs of the hydra are used by wizards in the preparation of magical spells and potions, while its hide and scales may be converted into armor and some types of clothing. "King" Torchtower himself owns a pair of hydra-hide boots, supposedly made from one of the monsters that he claims to have slain himself. Many bandits fight in armor crafted from the glossy black scales of a hydra.

Interestingly enough, hydra flesh is relatively tasty and nutritious—the bandits claim that it tastes like chicken, although I was unable to confirm this. A single hydra can feed a bandit community for days or weeks. Preserved hydra flesh has become something of a delicacy in western Cormyr, but few there suspect where the meat comes from, or the identity of its hunters.

The Lizard Men

Normally shunned or reviled by the ordinary humans of Faerûn, lizard men abound in the swamps and marshes of the region, and present some fascinating biological and cultural aspects. My experience with the lizard men of the Tun was quite enlightening, and went far to expose my own prejudices.

Earlier in this narrative I mentioned, briefly, that I had occasion to flee from the Tun Bandits, accompanied by the Cormyrean merchant Thaldo Sar, and his daughter, Rysilla. While making good our escape, we had the misfortune to be seen by a pair of trolls, who sensed easy prey and gave chase. Although



rumor has it that trolls are quite fond of halfling, my short legs are not made for running, as you well know. With my two human companions exhausted and weary beyond belief, I was certain that we would all end our days in a troll's stewpot.

Desperately, I called upon Chauntea, asking her assistance and preparing a spell, hoping to at least throw our pursuers off the trail. As I turned to unleash my goddess's might against the trolls, however, I was shocked to see one of them stumble, and splash to the marshy ground, a thick-shafted spear projecting from its green, warty chest. In an instant, a dozen more shafts whirled through the air, with many of them striking our pursuers.

Trolls' regenerative powers are, indeed, potent, but in the face of such a furious attack, even they can lose heart and see the possibility of a messy death. In the dim recesses of their minds, even as more missiles rained down upon them, they realized that the prospect of a halfling-feast was not worth the risk, and they instantly fled the scene.

When I looked to see the identity of our saviors, I half-expected to see some of Torchtower's bandits driving the trolls away from potentially valuable captives. What I saw was more astonishing and, to me, even more terrifying.

A war party of nearly 20 scaled, powerful creatures, sporting heavily muscled tails, clawed hands, and large vicious jaws, stood before us. Lizard men they were, arrayed in a most barbaric fashion: in feathers, stone fetishes, bone ornaments, and similar items. They held slings and the thick-shafted spears I had seen flung upon the trolls. The spears, as I inspected them in the full moonlight, seemed to be great works of primitive art, painstakingly carved with pictographs, painted and hung with feathers and other ornaments.

Despite my fascination with the weapons, I realized we had escaped from one danger, and were now confronted with another. As one of the creatures strode forward, I heard Rysilla gasp in horror, and I felt a sinking sensation deep in my stomach.

To my astonishment, the lead lizard man could speak a crude form of the common tongue, and informed us that if we were enemies of the bandits, he could help us.

Like many in the Realms, I have heard fearsome stories about lizard men and their dietary habits, so it



was with reservations that I agreed. The lizard man, whose name turned out was Ssahh, escorted us to his village, and provided a guide to get us out of the swamp. Thus began a brief, but extremely enlightening visit to a lizard man settlement, which showed me many fascinating things that were subsequently elaborated upon by my friend Skola, the Tun refugee who came to live with us in the Farsea.

Culture and Society

Many popular assumptions regarding lizard men are, indeed, true. They are semi-aquatic tribal creatures with a relatively primitive material culture. While widely thought of as evil and predatory, many tribes maintain good relations with neighboring human and demihuman communities.

The lizard men of the Tun turned out to be a relatively civilized group, living on patches of high ground in huts constructed of thatch, vines, and piled stone. Skola informed me that their villages have populations of between 20 and 50. Some are under the leadership of lizard kings, advanced lizard men





possessed of high intelligence and powerful combat abilities. Unlike lizard men in other regions, the lizard kings of Tun do not demand weekly sacrifice from their followers, and do not appear to be of an evil disposition. The lizard men themselves believe that their lizard kings are created by the relatively benevolent god Semuanya, rather than the evil demigod Sess'innek, whom they openly revile.

As I guessed from Ssahh, there is great antipathy between the lizard men and the Tun Bandits. Although the two groups occasionally have serious clashes, usually they are content to raid or ambush their foes to keep them off guard. A tactic especially favored by the lizard men is to lurk beneath shallow water on either side of a road, then rise up to attack enemies from all sides at once.

Raiding parties of lizard men number from two to a dozen individuals, each armed with clubs, stone knives, or the carved, flint-headed spears that I found unique to the Tun tribes. They do not go out of their way to hunt humans and demihumans, but they will not hesitate to feast on captured bandits.

The conflict between the two groups has, fortunately for the lizard men, not resulted in widespread loss of life, for they are not a terribly fecund race. They do not form lasting bonds, with mated pairs remaining together through the spring when the female lays a clutch of up to six eggs. The pair takes turns guarding the buried clutch until the young ones hatch. Usually only one in three eggs hatches successfully, causing the lizard men's population to grow quite slowly.

When not in conflict with the Tun Bandits, the lizard men pursue lives as hunters and gatherers, with individual communities generally leaving each other alone, and only clashing occasionally over prime hunting grounds. Preferred prey includes wild mammals such as pigs, as well as lizards and frogs. Warriors and hunters may gain great status by hunting the dreaded hydra or the hideous gibbering mouther, both of which are considered to be great threats. Weapons and crude armor are fashioned from hydra bones, scales, teeth, and such.

Conflicts also erupt with the various bands of trolls who frequent the marshes, as evidenced by the furious attack our rescuers unleashed upon our pursuers. While they show a deep hatred for the Tun Bandits, whom they believe have usurped their hunting grounds and are damaging their beloved swamp, the

lizard men have little hostility toward casual travelers, and will even help them if they are obviously enemies of the bandits. Obviously, my friends and I were beneficiaries of this attitude.

One tribe of Tun lizard men serves as the bodyguards of Skurge, the black dragon. Since the theft of her precious egg, they guard her lairs with fanatical devotion. Due to the outrage which Torchtower's ruffians committed against Skurge, whom the lizard men believe is a personal emissary of Semuanya, their hatred for the bandits is especially intense, but they do not act on it out of fear for Skurge's egg.

Tun Lizard Men: AC 4 (shields); MV 6, Sw 12; SZ M; HD 2+3; Int Avg; THAC0 19; #AT 3 or 2; Dmg 1-2/1-2/1-6 or 1-4 (darts)/1-6 or 1-6 (javelins)/1-6 or 2-8 (clubs)/1-6; AL N; XP 65.

Tun Lizard King: As above, but HD: 8+3; Int: High; XP 975.

Lizard Men of The Vast Swamp

The lizard men of the Vast Swamp are considerably less civilized than their Tun cousins, and conform to the popular view of the creatures. These savage beasts live in nomadic tribal groups of a dozen or so, and do not build permanent shelters. The malign influence of the Vast seems to have seriously affected the marsh's lizard men, making them virtually psychotic, attacking any outsider who ventures near them, and pursuing human, elven, and halfling prey with single-minded intensity. They do not worship Semuanya, but instead venerate a group of evil nature spirits and fiends, including the tanar'ri lord Sess'innek, who seeks to corrupt the lizard men, and transform them into a truly evil race. Lizard man shamans conduct savage rituals utilizing bizarre altars and religious icons crafted from the bones of sacrificial victims and swamp creatures.

Several lizard kings have been reported in the Vast, and these are even more evil and sadistic than is usual for their kind. True creations of Sess'innek, these kings demand sacrifice of intelligent beings such as humans or elves, but have been known to slay and feed upon their own followers.



The Marsh Drovers

The human inhabitants of the Farsea Marshes are little known and rarely seen. Scholarly writings regarding the Marsh Drovers consist primarily of statements that the marshes are inhabited by a race of barbaric humans, and nothing more.

As I wrote in my opening, upon entering the Farsea Marshes, my horse and I were sucked into a mud pit, and I despaired for our lives before we were both rescued by a pair of Marsh Drovers. After extricating us from the foul trap and making certain that we were alive and well, the two Drovers actually seemed amused by the entire incident.

When I identified myself, naturally stating my relationship with my goddess, both grew solemn, bowed their heads and begged my forgiveness for their laughter.

I was quite astonished, and informed them that there was no need to beg my pardon. Quite to the contrary, I apologized for inconveniencing them so. In the course of our mutual apologies, I was surprised to learn that the Marsh Drovers were, in fact, worshippers of a pantheon of nature deities, including our own Great Mother Chauntea. At present they lacked a real priest, and so were twice as pleased to find me here. In turn, I uttered a brief prayer of thanks, along with a joyful realization that, clearly, Mother Chauntea had intended that I minister to these gentle people all along.

I humbly asked to be shown to their village. We tied up the Drovers' boat and led my pony toward the settlement, passing along a maze of solid causeways, which my companions knew in intimate detail.

I was welcomed into the vast, floating Drover village, and feted with great rejoicing. Many of the humans there had never seen a halfling before and were quite surprised at my appearance. Nonetheless, the entire settlement seemed delighted and thankful that I had appeared. In my heart and soul, I felt a deep sense of happiness and satisfaction, and I realized that I had at last found a home.

The People

The Drovers are a race of humans, apparently occupying the region after an ancient disaster shattered the region's previous civilization. I theorize that the Drovers once inhabited the region known today as the Goblin Marches, but that the area's changing climate and pressure from the orc and goblin kingdoms drove them into the marshes, where they make their home today.

Physically, the Drovers are short for humans (men average 5'2", women average 4'10") and are dark-complected with black hair and deep brown eyes. They wear bright-colored clothing made from natural fibers, all of which are harvested from the Farsea Marshes and surrounding lands.

These are a happy people, at peace with their land, fond of music, dancing, and singing. They do not drink to excess, although their liquors, made from the fermented juice of various berries and fruits, are tasty and potent as I learned on several occasions. While their own liquor is excellent, they have developed a fondness for imported beverages, and our own Chauntean ale proved a favorite.

The Drovers live in small villages of up to 100 inhabitants. These villages are located on solid islands in the marsh, or are built on wooden stilts, or on occasion, floating platforms. Houses are constructed of thatch or light lumber, but are quite sturdy and cozy, remaining relatively cool in the heat of summer, and retaining heat in the depths of winter.

Travel between villages is accomplished on rafts, flat-bottomed pole-barges, or footgear known as marsh-shoes, which allow their wearers to actually walk (slowly and carefully) on the water's surface.

Most Drover villages are led by a council of elders, mostly older women and a few men who reach decisions by consensus, and whose wisdom is respected by all. A few of these maintain some clerical or druidic abilities, and low-level divine magic is not unknown. True priests, such as myself, are comparatively rare, so my presence was taken as a gift from the gods themselves.

Drover culture is an interesting combination of matriarchal rule and strict division of labor. Women are generally considered heads of households, and govern villages with advice from the males, but only





men are allowed to hunt and tend village herds. (Of the nature of their "cattle," I devote an entire entry, following.) Should an enemy threaten the entire Drover community, however, women and children are expected to help defend their homes.

Upon consultation with the elders of the village of Greenroot, I was allowed to start construction of a temple. I billeted with one of my rescuers, a Drover named Dillik, his wife, and two children. My horse was allowed to roam free on a nearby island, watched over by youngsters from the village.

The Herds

The most amazing aspect of Marsh Drover life was revealed to me the morning after my arrival. As the sun rose and Greenroot awakened, I said my morning prayers and began to brew a pot of tea. As I did so, one of the village elders, a small woman named Rokera, approached and asked me if I would be so kind as to bless the village's herd. Imagining that the Drovers raised cattle of some sort, I readily agreed,

and followed her to a large enclosure near the center of the village.

There I noted several massive creatures lolling about in deep mud, their backs arched like islands. As I watched, a snaky neck emerged from the muck, topped by a hideous head that I can compare only to the ugliest tusk-boar I had ever seen. Soon, a second creature's head appeared, then lowered down to tenderly nuzzle Rokera, who responded with words of affection.

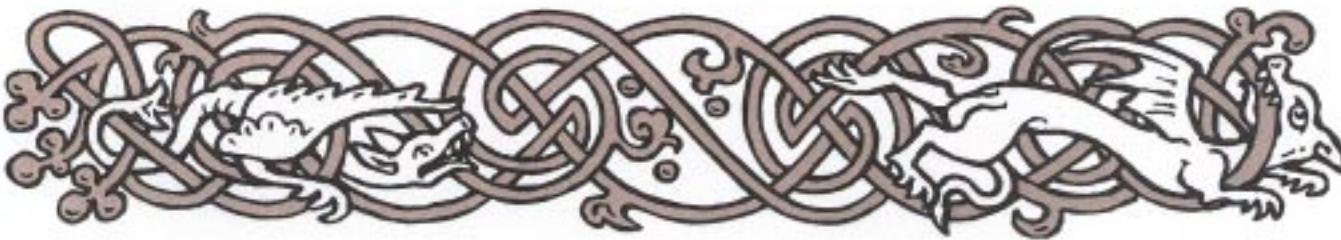
I stared for a moment, then realization came crashing down. These were catoblepas, creatures that could normally kill with a glance! Here they were, rolling about in the mud like domestic pigs, and showing puppyish affection to a woman whom they would normally kill, instantly and mercilessly!

I made some incoherent noises, and finally choked out words of astonishment.

Rokera looked at me mildly. "Oh, we've domesticated them. They don't use their death-gaze on us—we're part of their herd. I thought you knew."

I replied that I didn't, and after several more





moments of astonishment, intoned a ritual blessing over the Drovers' deadly herd.

Over subsequent weeks and months, I learned much more of the Drovers and their relationship with the catoblepas. The more I learned, the more amazed I grew.

The domesticated catoblepas have been bred by the Drovers for many generations. They have not lost their deadly gaze power, but seem capable of using it voluntarily, and will not do so against the humans who herd them. It is as if the humans have been adopted into the catoblepas herd, for the death gaze is used against the orcs, trolls, and bullywugs who sometimes trouble the Drovers.

Herding behavior is unknown among wild catoblepas, but the Drovers have managed to breed out this instinct for solitude. Their villages maintain herds of up to 20 of the great beasts. This concentration of catoblepas has affected the swamps in several areas, driving out native plant and animal species, but so far the damage has been minimal.

As a domestic animal, the catoblepas has proved to be highly successful. Its meat and milk are tasty and nutritious. The milk, in fact, is made into several products, including butter and cheese. This cheese, marketed in the Realms as "Death Cheese," has attained some notoriety through Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue. While some of the cheese is, as rumored, made from milk collected by adventurers, much of it is actually purchased from the Marsh Drovers in the marketplace of Eagle Peak.

Other items, such as the eyes, heart, and brain of the catoblepas, are used by wizards in the production of spell components, and sold in settlements such as Eagle Peak and Proskur.

Domesticated Catoblepas: The catoblepas kept by the Marsh Drovers as herd animals are somewhat different from those found outside the Farsea Marshes. They are encountered in groups of 2-20; their AC is 3, and their HD is 5+2. In addition, domesticated catoblepas will use their death gaze ability only if attacked, and then only if a standard morale check is failed.

Faith and Magic

As I discovered, the Drovers worship a pantheon of gods, both familiar and unfamiliar, including Eldath of the Singing Waters, Lathander Morninglord, Mielikki of the Forests, and of course, our own Mother Chauntea. Several other minor deities exist. Some are well-known deities masquerading under different names—an evil being known as Bale in Drover legend is clearly descended from the now-dead deity Bhaal. Other deities, such as Bright Nydra, goddess of the winter moon, are apparently unique to Marsh Drover culture.

Low-level druidic magic is known among the Drovers, but clerical magic of higher than second level is very rare. My own modest abilities were considered nothing short of miraculous, even by those Drovers who themselves practiced magic.

Cantrips and minor spellcasting are also used sometimes, but true wizardry is unknown in the Farseas. A few minor enchanted items are also used, but these are usually obtained outside the marshes, or dredged up from the swamp itself, where the water has covered the remains of earlier civilizations.

Meazels

These small, malevolent creatures are apparently common in the Vast Swamp but are unknown, fortunately, in the Tun and Farsea Marshes. Meazels are solitary creatures, living in rude shelters deep within the swamp, emerging to hunt and feed upon the orc, goblin, and kobold bands that live in the Vast.

While their numbers are too small to have any real impact on the ecology of the Vast Swamp, meazels have taken on an important role in orc, kobold, and goblin mythology. Due to their solitary nature, secretive ways, and dietary habits, meazels are considered supernatural spirits who snatch away humanoids and devour them. Solitary orcs and goblins often carry numerous charms and fetishes to ward off meazels, while kobolds have been known to take sacrificial victims from their own tribes and leave them, bound hand and foot, to appease the wicked meazels. Needless to say, the meazels are only too happy to accept such gifts, which do little to dissuade them from stalking kobolds.





Trolls

As my human companions and I discovered, the Tun Marshes are home to several small bands of trolls, ranging in size from two to six individuals. Although individual trolls are quite powerful, their total population is too small to represent a real threat to the lizard men or the Tun Bandits. Even so, both lizard men and bandits actively hunt trolls, with the express purpose of *keeping* the numbers of trolls small.

Tun trolls are larger, but also appear to be less intelligent than those found elsewhere in Faerûn. The varied vegetation in the Tun seems to have affected the trolls' coloration—such exotic complexions as blue, black, and gray are known, although the predominant skin tone is still a sickly green. Some individuals are a mottled combination of several colors; the trolls consider these to be touched by the gods, and often make them tribal leaders or shamans.

A small number of trolls also exist in the Farsea, sometimes going so far as to raid Drover villages. They are only too vulnerable to attack by catoblepas, however, and the humans use their herds to defend against such raids. As a consequence, troll raids are rare, and the troll population in the Farsea is low.

The Tun Bandits

Unlike the gentle Marsh Drovers, the bandits of the Tun Marshes proved to be less than receptive to Chauntea's message of peace and understanding. Ignoring the pleas of my Drover friends to avoid the region, I was determined to follow my mission and minister to all the inhabitants of the valley. I left my floating thatch temple in the capable hands of Tayth, my newly-appointed human acolyte, mounted my pony, and rode south.

As I have previously discussed, the Tun marshes are similar to the Farseas, save that their climate is somewhat milder. It was a bright and pleasant spring day as I approached the marshes, and I was greeted by flocks of brightly-colored songbirds and was fortunate enough to glimpse a lordly stag bounding out of a

nearby thicket.

My first view of the marsh's humans was less savory, however. A raiding party of Tun Bandits was just returning to the swamp as I approached. Keeping the Drovers' warnings in mind, I was careful to hide myself as they passed.

It was well that I did. They were a grim lot, clad in dirty black leather and rusty armor, their features disfigured by ugly scars, tattoos, and eye patches. Both men and women were represented in the raiding party, all similarly gruesome-looking, all shouting and singing drunkenly. They were laden with sacks and chests, and pulled a crude wagon filled with booty. In the wagon, I was horrified to see the tattered, dispirited figures of two humans—a man and a woman, both bound in chains.

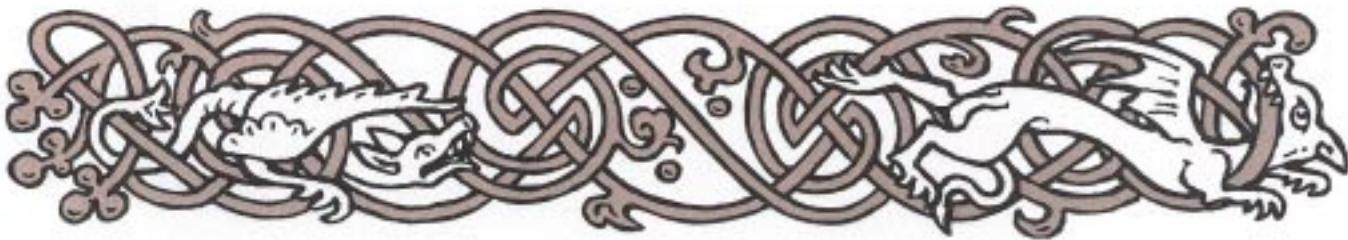
As the bandit party disappeared into the swamp, still singing and chanting, I found myself in a dreadful dilemma. Clearly, my original intent to minister to these humans had been foolish—they were as likely to gut me or sell me into slavery as look at me.

But were there other humans in the swamp, perhaps enemies of the bandits? Would they be any more receptive to my mission, and would I be able to help them in any conflict with the grim humans I had just seen? And what of the captives?

At length, I decided that Chauntea was with me, and that I was honor-bound to enter the bandits' lair and determine whether I could do anything for the unfortunate prisoners. I tied up my pony, and set off into the marshes.

While I know my duty to the Great Mother, I am neither a wilderness scout nor a great warrior. It was not long before I blundered into one of the bandits' many pit-traps. After several hours of fruitless escape attempts, I was soon found by a party of bandits every bit as ugly and dangerous-looking as the first. My limbs bound, I was taken to the bandits' camp.

Once there, I was taken before the humans' leader, a warrior named Thaalim Torchtower. He was a surprisingly handsome man. From the look of his armor and heraldry, I surmised that he had once belonged to the Cormyrean Purple Dragons. With a harsh laugh, he ordered me thrown into a guarded pen with the bandits' other captives.



Bandit Society

In the miserable confines of the pen, I made the acquaintance of my fellow captives, a pair I was to share harrowing times with. The man was a merchant from Cormyr, named Thaldo Sar, and the woman was his daughter, Rysilla. Like me, they were to be ransomed, but if Thaldo's business partners were at all slow paying the ransom the bandits demanded, they were to be sold into slavery. I knew my order was not a wealthy one, and I despaired ever being a free man again.

I passed the time by discussing the society and nature of our captors with Thaldo and Rysilla, who seemed to know quite a bit about them, owing to their frequent trips through the region.

The bandits are indeed a desperate and dangerous group. Though most are humans, there are several goblins, orcs, and half-orcs among them. All are outlaws, escapees from prison, or fugitives from Cormyrean justice. These are not the noble outlaws of legend—indeed, anyone seeking refuge with the Tun Bandits must prove his or her willingness to commit the most violent and despicable of crimes before even being considered for membership. Those who show any hesitation are slain, driven out, or sold into slavery, thus assuring that all members of the bandit kingdom are among the most ruthless, violent, and antisocial individuals imaginable.

Once, the bandits consisted of several tribes of a few dozen members. Then came Thaalim Torchtower, a renegade Cormyrean soldier condemned to death for killing one of his fellows. He united the tribes into what is now commonly called a bandit kingdom with a population of over 1000. Torchtower rules with savage efficiency, surrounded by a bodyguard of human, half-human, and humanoid warriors who are completely loyal to him. Two renegade sorcerers also serve Torchtower—a man named Thylash (apparently from Thay), and a half-elf woman named Khyssaria. They assist him in battle and work tirelessly rooting out plots against him.

Bandit raiding parties set out regularly for the Storm Horns caravan routes, using information supplied by Torchtower's spies in Eagle Peak. The bandits have grown prosperous from their stolen booty, and have forced the caravans to increase the number of

their guards and other defenses. King Azoun IV and his Purple Dragons have finally turned their attention to the bandits' depredations, but thus far the Tun Marshes' inaccessibility has prevented them from taking any decisive military action.

The Bandits and The Swamp

The bandits' unification has had a highly detrimental effect on the swamp and its environment, for their camps are invariably filthy places that produce much waste, smoke, and noise, frightening off many species and killing many plants. Trees are felled for shelter and woodfires, animals hunted and slaughtered wholesale, ponds drained and streams dammed with little concern for the effects on the marsh.

Near the center of the swamp (apparently with help from the black dragon, Skurge), Torchtower and his followers have begun construction of a fortress with materials quarried from the Storm Horns or stolen from passing caravans. Much earth and stone have been transferred to this location, causing much disruption throughout the marsh. If the fortress is ever completed, it could prove a major threat to Cormyrean authority.

The dragon Skurge presents an interesting enigma. Thaldo and Rysilla were fully aware of the beast's existence, and openly wondered why the dragon allowed (and possibly even encouraged) the bandits to stay in the marshes. An apparent alliance of convenience has sprung up between these two evil forces—an alliance that may yet cause considerable grief to King Azoun.

From my companions' tale, it became clear that the Tun Marshes were undergoing a crisis of serious proportions. The bandits' presence has driven many animals from the marshes, and caused serious harm to its delicate web of life. As the sun sank and gloom descended over the swamp, I watched the bandits' revelry—singing, dancing, drinking, quarreling, and fighting—and wondered what the future held.

Escape

As evening faded into night and darkness enveloped us, the bandits' celebration degenerated into chaos and finally exhausted sleep. Even our guards lay in





drunken stupors, and I realized that we now had a chance to escape.

Although my foolish, misspent youth is now far behind me, I do retain some skills from my old life. Taking a fine wire stiffener from Lady Rysilla's collar, I made myself busy with the brass lock that secured our pen. The lock was old and primitive, and in a few moments I had sprung it. I led the two humans from the encampment, now full of the sounds and bodies of somnolent humans.

Our flight through the swamp was a terror. We encountered several of the swamp's horrific denizens, and only escaped the fate of ending up in a troll's cookpot by a fortuitous encounter with the swamp's resident lizard men. Of course, I have recounted that adventure elsewhere, and (rather than repeat myself) I encourage any reader to see that entry for more details on the incident and on the lizard men.

It was days later that we finally reached the safety of the Farseas and the welcome aid of my friends the Drovers. Exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and on the verge of collapse, we were escorted back to Greenroot, leaving the sad, embattled Tun Marshes behind. I realized that the evil in that swamp could not be ignored by Cormyr forever, and that conflict there may be inevitable.

The Undead

Legend tells of ancient twin civilizations that once occupied the lands known today as the Tun and Farsea Marshes. For some reason (which varies depending upon who's telling the story), the two lands were cursed and sank into the earth. The truth of these legends is open to conjecture—and I reserve my theorizing on this for a subsequent section. Nevertheless, the periodic appearance of ruins, treasures, and—more significantly—various species of undead, lend some credence to the notion that something ancient lies beneath the two swamps.

The appearance of undead in the Farsea and Tun is cause for great concern among both the Marsh Drovers and Torchtower's bandits. Relatively weak undead creatures such as skeletons and zombies appear with regularity, but in small numbers. These are

hunted down and destroyed individually by bands of hunters or warriors. Larger infestations, or the appearance of more powerful undead, often lead to the mobilization of dozens or hundreds of warriors, and the use of spellcasters and highly-treasured enchanted weapons.

Several different undead species appear out of the western marshes. I recount what I have learned about the most common ones below.

Skeletons

These are the type of undead most often disgorged by the swamps of Tun and Farsea. In most cases, only a single individual rises to the surface to drag itself out into the open air, covered in swamp muck, dirt, and moss. Such an individual is truly a frightening sight, but it is easily disposed of, for skeletons freed in this manner generally do little save wander aimlessly about, rarely if ever actually attacking anyone. These skeletons are sometimes clad in the remnants of clothing or rusting armor.





When larger numbers of skeletons emerge from the depths, however, the danger is far greater. On occasion, dozens or even hundreds of skeletons may rise up from the swamp with murderous intent. Bands of skeletons roam the swamp, killing any living thing they encounter. Entire villages or encampments have been overwhelmed in this manner. In the face of such horrors, the Drovers and bandits both send out large numbers of fighters, hunters, and spellcasters to find and destroy the marauders. Such battles are invariably violent and deadly, with quarter neither asked nor given.

Needless to say, such incursions are rare, but they inflict serious damage upon the swamps and their inhabitants. Large stretches of the marshes are scoured clean of life—animals are slain, trees uprooted, plants killed, water fouled, and so on. Some sections of the Tun Marshes are virtually sterile as a result of undead incursion, and the Drovers claim that it can take decades for a region to recover fully.

Zombies

These creatures, more recently dead than skeletons, are rarer than their fleshless “cousins.” Whether as solitary individuals or members of large groups, zombies sometimes rise from the swamps, behaving similarly to the skeletons already described.

In a particularly horrifying twist, those marsh warriors slain in battles with other undead have been known to rise up themselves as zombies, sometimes shambling with apparent malice into their own villages to trouble their former friends and family, who are left with the distasteful task of dispatching them.

Wraiths

No one knows from where these horrific, evil beings come. All that the Marsh Drovers know is that they periodically appear to trouble their communities, seeking to absorb the life energies of living humans.

Wraiths do not seem to bother with animals as prey, and so have little effect on the overall ecology of the Farsea. Like all undead, they are immune to the death gaze of the Drovers’ catoblepas herds, and



therefore they represent an uncommonly serious threat to the human communities where the creatures appear. Wraiths’ life-draining abilities can cause a considerable loss of life before the Drovers can mobilize adequately to defend themselves.

Some of the Drovers claim that the presence of wraiths proves that there are burial grounds or other ceremonial sites deep below the marshes. Others feel that the wraiths are endemic to the entire region, and are simply attracted to the marshes due to the presence of humans.

Regardless of their origin, wraiths always prove difficult to eliminate, especially given their resistance to normal weapons. The Drovers rely heavily on their small store of enchanted weapons, which are always brought out when a wraith must be dealt with. Not surprisingly, the Drovers have a great interest in obtaining silver weapons.

Wights

As the Farsea Marshes are troubled by wraiths, so the Tun Marshes are haunted by these solitary creatures,





the wights. As with wraiths, the presence of wights is taken as evidence that the Tun was once the site of burial mounds, graveyards, or mausoleums. This theory has been confirmed, so my friend Skola confided, by reports of wights clawing their way out of overgrown mounds deep inside the swamp.

Fortunately for the bandits, wights are solitary creatures, and never plague the swamps in large numbers as do skeletons and zombies. Able to drain and feed on the life energies of their victims, wights are dangerous creatures, and the bandits are grateful that they appear only one at a time.

Like the Drovers, the bandits are forced to use enchanted or silver weapons against wights. The bandits have an advantage over the Drovers, however, in the person of their spellcasters and renegade priests, who can use their abilities to defeat wights when they appear.

Lich

By far the rarest of undead species in the marshes is the lich. So far, only one such creature has ever ap-

peared, and that in the Farsea Marshes. As my acolyte, Tayth, told the story, this single creature was more than enough, and almost proved to be the Drovers' doom. The highlights of his account I have copied here below.

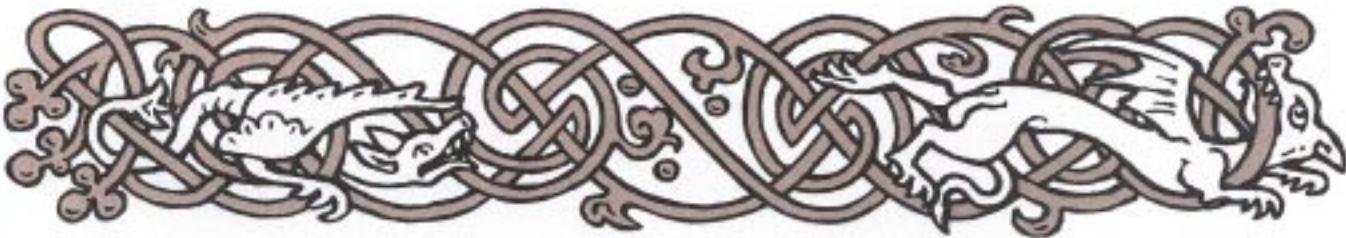
"It was on a day much like this, nearly ten years ago, that it all began. I was still a child then, but I saw the terrible events with my own eyes, and I saw how they affected my father, my family, and my people.

"A foraging party under the huntress Althea returned one evening, reporting that a cluster of previously unknown ruins had risen from the swamp nearby. As these sites often contain treasure, weapons, and other valuable items, preparations were made to explore the ruins. My father, Rehar, was to lead the party.

"A day passed and the party did not return. Some began to worry, especially my mother. Near sunset, a commotion erupted at the edge of the village, and we hurried to investigate.

"A single raft approached the shore, poled along by a solitary figure. As he grew near in the gathering twilight, I saw that it was my father, and rushed forward with a cry. He was clearly wounded and at the limit of his strength.





In the bottom of the boat, coated with mud and slime, was a scabbarded broad sword, which my father clutched to him as he stumbled ashore.

"A tumult of questions greeted him. What had happened? Where were the others? What had he found? Had he been ambushed? What was the sword? My father's only response was to fall to his knees, gasping a few incoherent words.

"'We awakened it,' he said. 'It killed Syvo. It's coming here. The sword... It fears the sword...' Then he collapsed, insensate.

"Even before we could recover from the shock of my father's arrival and collapse, a fearsome sound echoed through the village—a bubbling, agitated sound, emanating from the shallows around our island. In horror, we watched as dozens of animated skeletons, hung with marsh weeds, glistening with mud and slime, emerged from the water. I heard my mother scream.

"But the greatest horror was yet to come. An eerie blue glow appeared from beneath the water, and slowly rose to the surface. It was like a corpse-light, or will-o'-wisp... a sick, unclean color that nauseated me simply by its appearance. Like a long-sunken bubble of marsh gas, the source of the glow emerged from the water, and the people gathered on the shore drew back as one, gasping with fear.

"It had once been human, but now it was a twisted shell, a rotted amalgam of bones, slimy flesh, tendons, and hair. Twin green flames flickered in its empty sockets, gazing at us with tangible malice. Clad in a long robe which had once been red and gold, it wore a silver circlet on its bony brow. A single green gem glittered and winked from the circlet, the only item on the entire creature which was not coated with slime or mud. It rose above the water, floating freely in the air.

"A rotted arm rose, stabbing a bony finger at my father, who still lay unconscious on the shore. A deep, crackling voice issued from its throat.

"'I am Nyrax, Lord of the Eight Thrones. Return what you have stolen,' it rasped, 'and your deaths will be quick and painless. Otherwise, be assured your fate will be less pleasant.'"

"For an instant, no one moved. Endless tales of horror filled my mind, telling of such creatures that rose up from their burial grounds to plague the living. In my heart, I knew that the creature would not spare us, no matter what we did.

"Suddenly, my father's words echoed in my mind. 'It fears the sword.'

"Without further thought, as if my very limbs were driven by the strength of Lathander Morninglord himself, I sprang forward, seizing the scabbarded blade.

"The thing saw me, and drew back with what might be called fear. 'No, boy!' it shrieked. 'You don't know what you're doing!'

"I did not reply, but pulled the weapon from its scabbard. It shone with a white light that virtually blinded me, and I felt myself dragged out into the shallows toward the necrous horror that floated before us.

"'Stop!' the thing screamed. 'Spare me! I will serve you! I will be your slave! Please—'

"I did not heed the monster's pleas, but swung the sword, cutting effortlessly through its robes, its rotted skin, and its brittle bones, shattering the Lord of the Eight Thrones into a thousand pieces.

"I do not recall much past that. My fellow villagers told me that, with Nyrax's destruction, the skeletons collapsed and sank back into the swamp. My father, upon his recovery, praised me to the skies. Since then many tales have been told and retold of my confrontation with the lich-king.

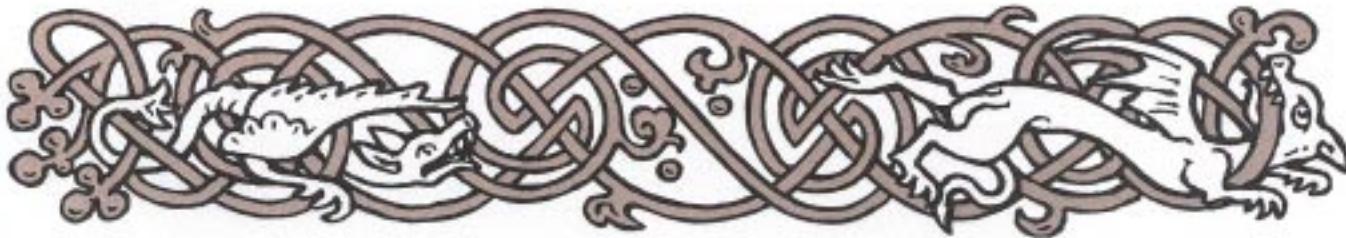
"But, my brother, I am no hero. I was inspired by the strength of the Morninglord, and by our mother Chaunteea, and did only their bidding. Nyrax, Lord of the Eight Thrones, is slain now, but the sword remains in my keeping, should any creature like him ever again rise from the swamps to threaten our lives and freedom."

Undead in The Vast Swamp

Along with its other horrors, the Vast Swamp harbors huge numbers of undead. All known types of undead have been encountered here, including mummies (normally found in more arid regions) and revenants. Many claim that a lich or group of liches is behind the insidious evil in the Vast Swamp. Some tales tell of a large complex of ruins near the center of the swamp, inhabited by numerous skeletons and zombies, as well as one or more liches clad in tattered black garments and armed with a variety of ancient and exotic weapons.







Part Three: Rumors and Legends



ot surprisingly, myriad legends surround the marshes of Cormyr: tales of lost kingdoms, secret treasure, and ancient curses. To my surprise, I found that many of these legends had some basis in fact.

The Tun and Farsea

In Cormyr, many tales are told about these marshes and their origins. Most claim that the regions now occupied by the Tun and the Farsea were once the lands of two prosperous kingdoms. Legend claims that the prince of one kingdom fell in love with the princess of the other, and stole her away in the night. This triggered a steadily-escalating war between the kingdoms, culminating in the magical destruction of both. In some tales, the kings were urged on in their mutual destruction by a mysterious female advisor, who is in the end revealed to be the goddess Talona.

The names of these kingdoms, the names of the principals, and other details change, depending upon who is telling the story. The Marsh Drovers claim that a kingdom once occupied the marshes many thousands of years ago. It was destroyed to punish its rulers' wickedness, and so that the Drovers themselves could then occupy the land. The bandits of Tun have no legends about the swamps, but do believe that riches are to be found beneath them.

There is surely reason to believe that an ancient civilization once flourished in these lands. The periodic appearance of ruins, treasures, and artifacts, dredged up by the natural upwelling of the marshes, is convincing proof, and a compelling reason for further investigation.

The ruins that rise from the swamp are odd structures of seamless stone, with fragments of metal, glass,

or crystal. What little I could glean from their architecture indicated that the buildings were tall, graceful, and quite slender. Pigments still adhering to the buildings showed that they were once white.

As to the purposes of these ruins, I cannot say. Those that rise are usually little more than single walls or partial enclosures. One Marsh Drove told me of a full building that had once risen up, and described what could only be a temple, with a long, bench-lined hallway, tall windows, and graceful buttresses. The Drove also said that the building contained a number of foul-tempered zombies. Sadly, he reported that the whole of it vanished beneath the marsh only hours after it appeared.

The malevolent undead that sometimes appear in the Tun and Farsea are further evidence of what lies below. If an entire population was suddenly entombed in this manner, especially through evil magic, it is not surprising that individuals live on past death and sometimes make their way to the surface with ill intent.

The appearance of the lich Nyrax was a fascinating incident, leading me to suspect that the inhabitants of the vanished kingdom did indeed practice wicked magics. The obscure reference to the "Eight Thrones" is also intriguing, suggesting that there were more than just two kingdoms in the region, and that others may still lie beneath the marshy ground, awaiting rediscovery.

Those few items dredged from the swamp are also remarkable—fine sculptures and jewelry of gold and silver, cunningly crafted weapons, and an occasional enchanted item such as the sword used by my acolyte to slay the lich Nyrax. Other unusual enchanted items are said to have been found in the swamp, including an item that, by its description, could only have been a *rod of lordly might*. Regrettably, it was lost several decades ago.

Actual treasure in the form of silver and gold pieces has also been found. I saw several of these items—gold





coins bearing the image of a sun on one side, and crossed staves or wands on the other. A string of strange characters was etched along the outside of the coins—characters that resembled no known alphabet in the Realms. The Drovers are superstitious about these items, and will not trade them. In addition, they refused to allow me to copy down the lettering, a request I respected.

The Vast Swamp

This dark and dangerous place is shunned by the people of Cormyr, who tell many fearsome stories about it. Several tales claim that a cabal of liches inhabits a ruined necropolis deep within the swamp, and from them flows an incessant evil, which seems to infect everything that lingers in the region. Others claim that the region's inhabitants once harbored an evil demigod and were cursed for it. It has been suggested that this so-called "demigod" is actually a vastly powerful beholder or grell Imperator. Still other legends tell of how the god Cyric once sought refuge here, and his evil presence remains.

Many famous adventurers and their companies have ventured into the Vast, but few have returned. Sylara of the Moon's Twelve, a Cormyrean adventuring band, was the sole survivor of a disastrous expedition into the swamp ten years ago. She told me of encountering an unexpectedly large number of ilithids, who were apparently allied with one or more powerful eye-tyrants. Ambushed, the Twelve fled from the swamp after finding a complex of ruins easily as extensive and ancient as Myth Drannor. She claimed to have seen several murals and carvings depicting elven kings and sorcerers, suggesting that the Vast was once home to a previously-unknown elven kingdom.

As previously noted, evil humanoids of all kinds—orc, goblins, hobgoblins, ogres, trolls, and more—are found in this swamp in abundance. Several tribes have legends that speak of a coming unification and holy war against the humans of Cormyr and surrounding regions, and it may only be a matter of time before an ambitious warlord, sorcerer, or other powerful individual decides to twist these legends to his own ends and form the Vast tribes into an army.

Several Cormyrean researchers actually claim that the Vast Swamp is expanding, and that its foul influ-

ence affects those around it. To be sure, the rate of violent acts—murder, arson, brawls, and feuds—seems to be increasing in the region. Whether this is due to the turbulent nature of modern times or to the swamp's increasingly close proximity cannot be ascertained for certain.

Those treasures that have found their way out of the Vast seem intriguing enough. Several items are clearly of elven manufacture, featuring ancient espruar runes and images familiar to scholars. These things lend credence to Sylara's story about the ruins of an ancient elven kingdom. Surely, a closer look into these things and the places they come from would produce a fresh understanding of the past, hidden from knowledge for so many years. Given what I have seen of the marshes myself, and what my friends and informants have contributed likewise, I find it hard not to lie awake nights and wonder what these now-forbidding lands have seen.

Other items have been discovered over the years—ornate crowns, scintillant armor, weapons of strange shape and manufacture, and spectacularly memorable gems. These seem to have been drawn from many different times and cultures. They may simply be booty carried into the swamp by humanoid raiders, or additional evidence of forgotten kingdoms lying below the boggy surface of the marsh.

At present, the extreme levels and variety of dangers in the Vast Swamp inhibit those who would engage in extensive exploration. Too many expeditions launched in years past have failed to return. The few researchers who bring word out of the swamp bring little good news, however alluring are the occasional treasures discovered. Yet I can foresee there may come a day when King Azoun and his advisers can afford to ignore the Vast no longer.



The Stonelands and The Goblin Marches

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A Few Notes About Me



here is so much to tell you in such a small amount of space. I am not quite sure where it is best to begin—perhaps the beginning? Yes, of course you are right. My name is Maris Khorma Terrabin, but I am known to some as the One-Eyed Mistress, and to others as Maris of Daggerdale. That last title is odd because I have never . . . well, that is a long tale, and Elminster wishes me to be brief.

I am a wizard of great skill and ability—not to mention modesty! I must admit, though, it is no surprise to me that Elminster should seek my aid in detailing the Stonelands and the Goblin Marches. I am not

bragging, but I dare say no other person in the history of the Realms has spent as much time in those uncomfortable, unfortunate places, or so committed herself to learn their secrets. But I am getting ahead of myself.

When I was much younger, I lived in central Cormyr, apprenticed to a wizard named Felbour. I heard all the tales surrounding the Goblin Marches and the Stonelands, I lapped up all the legends of beasts and monsters and mysterious beings that might be found there. When I was old enough, I accompanied a group of adventurers into the Stonelands. They had dreams of finding the legendary Citadel of Seligonil. Was it myth or history? I caught the flame of their passion,





and it burned bright within me. Of course, finding the place was not as simple as finding the new wines in the market. We spent many months in conflict with the border raiders that skulked along the rough edges of Cormyr, making sorties into civilization, and dashing back into their Stonelands warrens. And raiders were not all we encountered. There were other creatures, even less savory creatures, as well. Not a vial of perfume for miles.

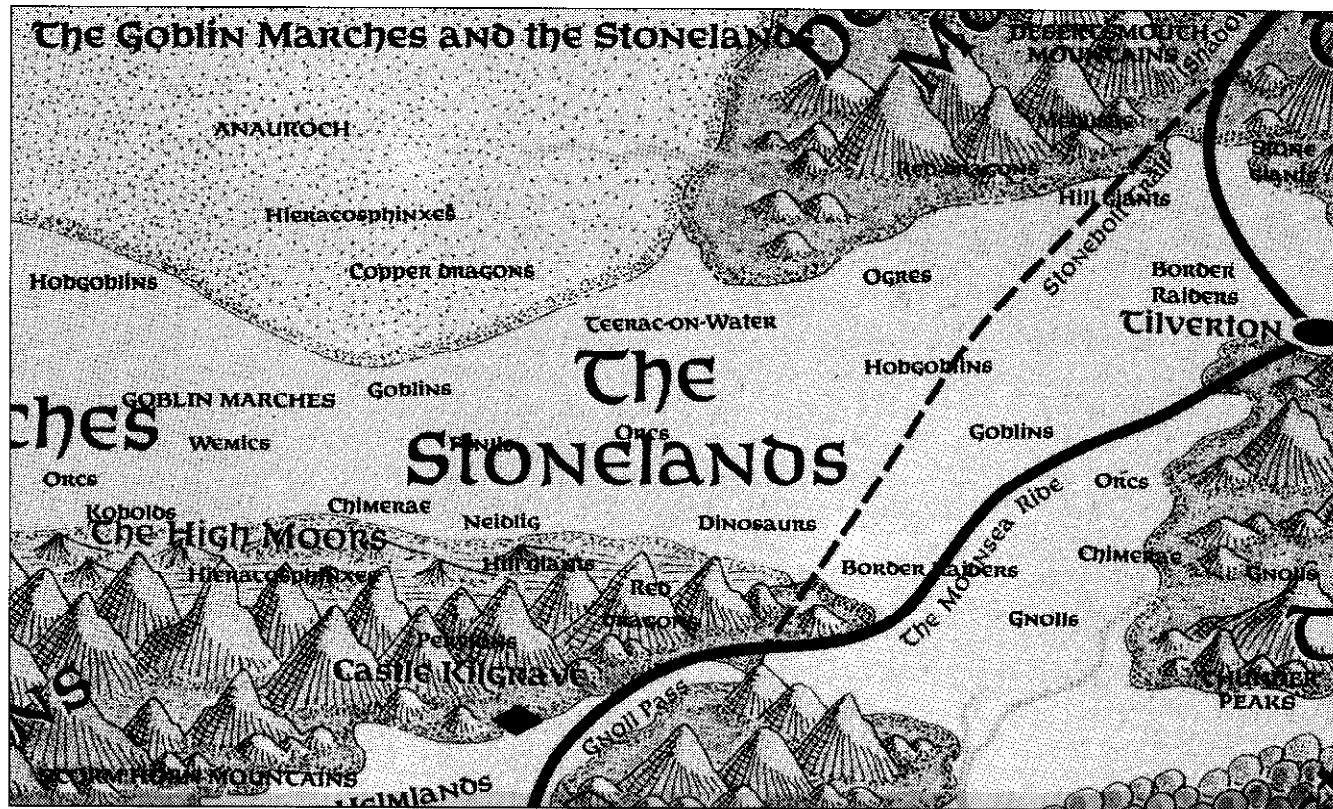
Although we never found the Citadel, I learned enough about the Stonelands to make me want to stay. This was an area ripe with secrets. Few remembered its treasures, left over from the ancient kingdoms—kingdoms which at one time sprawled over all that is now Anauroch, the Great Desert immediately north of the sullen wastes we wandered. History called, legends whispered. Treasure fanned the flame.

I and a few companions built a small wooden keep just north of the High Moors. From there, we launched our forays into the Stonelands and the Marches. Our travels took us from the Thunder Peaks to the Farsea Marshes, from Skull Gorge to the Storm Horns, and even into Anauroch, to find the ancient

ruins of Rasolith. We have been grubby, frozen, waterlogged, desiccated, wounded, bruised and exhausted.

Though my allies have come and gone, moving on to other climates, going down in battles, falling out over minor squabbles, or major ones—come now, who truly thinks all's fair in love?—I have spent most of my life in this desolate region. And I have more than enough to show for my labors, thank you. I know the Stonelands and the Goblin Marches like a Wyvern-spur knows Immersea, like King Azoun knows Suzail—perhaps, I dare say, better. I have solved many of the mysteries in the sullen wastes. I have found much of its treasure.

But don't let this prideful tone, this puffed self-consequence, put you off. There is more treasure to be had here, even yet. The Marches and the Stonelands boast many more secrets to uncover. I no longer reside in that snug little keep beyond the Moors. New adventure has led me to the far west. But Elminster was persuasive—and flattering. That long-ago flame still flickers. So I am relating now what I learned, that others may blow its coals once more to life.





Part One: Regional Details

Ghe Goblin Marches and the Stonelands are desolate areas that few humans venture into—for fear, no doubt, of the goblins, orcs, and other humanoids dwelling in the region. The inhabitants are not the only discouraging features, either. The land is rather infertile, and the climate is hot and humid in summertime, cold and windy in winter. Due to the position of the surrounding mountains, and the proximity of that unnatural desert to the north, strange, dangerous storms appear with little warning—particularly in the Stonelands. In point of fact, neither place has anything to recommend it to a reasonable person. And reasonable folk don't see a need to distinguish (unless they are map-makers) between the two. But there are differences.

The Goblin Marches

The Goblin Marches are a narrow strip of land between the Storm Horns and Anauroch. Although technically a part of the Kingdom of Cormyr, this rind of land is all but devoid of human inhabitants. As its name implies, the masters of this region—if you could call them that—are the goblinoid races. Fortunately for the civilized lands to the south, these goblins are disorganized and would rather fight among themselves than attack well-trained Cormyrean soldiers, particularly those who stand guard in the passes through the Storm Horns.

The Marches are primarily rough grassland, their meager vegetation broken by small streams, rocky outcroppings, an occasional gnarled copse. There is a great deal of subsurface water here, and underground streams and pools have etched caves and tunnels into the underlying bedrock, some of which rise very near the surface. These caves provide homes—lairs is the better word—for many residents.

The soil is poor and consistently stony. Despite

abundant rain and ground water, few plants find the Marches a comfortable home. Tough, hardy grasses, flowering weeds, prickly ground vines, and various fungi straggle sparsely throughout the plain. Low scrub brush, such as the tiny lorach bush (as the goblins call it), can be found everywhere. Certainly a farmer would despair of raising crops here.

The Stonelands

This area is actually more fertile than the Goblin Marches, but that advantage matters very little. The frequent, violent storms that lash the surface make any sort of agriculture impossible here as well. Hail and fire are just not healthful for croplands—but I am getting ahead of myself.

The Stonelands are named for the large, monumentlike spires which are scattered haphazardly across an otherwise unremarkable landscape. Some number of these rocks are hundreds of feet high, but most are much smaller. All of them give the impression that they fell from the sky and landed awkwardly.

That appearance is not mere bardic fancy. Unlike the Goblin Marches, the earth here is not rocky—the stones do not belong. Many jut at strange angles and lean dangerously off kilter. A traveler passes below these tilted megaliths at his own peril. Have I seen one fall? No. Do I dance at their feet, flouting their stability? Not on my life.

The same plants grow here in the Stonelands as haunt the Goblin Marches. In the Marches, the vegetation seems cowed and sullen. Here however, lusher, greener grasses tuft around the rocks in shy celebration, while plush mosses and lichens cling tenaciously to their sides. The larger plants are not so happy with their situation. Trees are still fairly uncommon, their welcome height and shelter limited to a narrow edging on a stream bank or a thin fringing around one of the rare lakes. Where there are trees, there are also





plenty of deadfalls, downed limbs, and lightning-scored trunks attesting to the hazards of Stonelands weather. At least gathering firewood and tinder in these fringe woods is never a problem.

Storms thrash the area with high winds, hail, and frequent lightning strikes—sometimes so frequent as to seem continuous. Rumor has it that occasionally these tempests rain down acid or even fire, but I have never seen such a thing in my time here.

That is not to say it doesn't ever happen. I could imagine such an environmental effect to be the remnants of an ancient magical experiment gone wrong, or the lasting aftermath of a wizards' battle of incredible power. Given the proximity to the old, magical kingdom of Netheril, I never completely ignore such legends.

Storms in The Stonelands

The chance of encountering a storm is 1 in 12, with a single check made each day.

Normal storms produce heavy rains and wind, slowing all movement by 50%. There is a 1 in 10 chance of a nearby lightning strike, which panics horses and other animals for 2d10 rounds.

There is a 1 in 100 chance, if a lightning strike is rolled, that it hits a random player character. Such strikes should be treated as 6d6 lightning bolts, with a chance to make a save and so take only half damage.

One storm in 100 in the Stonelands is magical in nature. These rare storms (occurring once every three years or so, although there have been occasions when they are more frequent) can be very dangerous to wildlife, plants, and intelligent inhabitants, and especially to travelers without shelter. If such a storm strikes, roll 1d12 for the specific nature:

1-4 Firestorm. All within a 1-mile radius take 2d6 points of damage from fire per round if in the open, half to no damage if adequately sheltered (DM discretion). Storm lasts 1-6 rounds. These are accompanied by normal storms 90% of the time, so the chance of a grass fire is very small. If the storm is not accompanied by rains, there is a cumulative 30% chance for a grass/scrub fire to start each round. Such a fire kills all plant life and drives away monsters and animals.

5-7 Icestorm. All within a 3-5 mile radius are pelted with huge hailstones, many of which sport iciclelike points. All those exposed take 2d6 points of damage each round. Stone shelters are the safest bet. Only the sturdiest wooden constructions can withstand the storm. Constant battering destroys most structures and anyone inside takes full damage thereafter. Icestorms last 1-12 rounds, and are always accompanied by thunderstorms.

8-10 Acid Rain. All within a 1-6 mile radius take 1d6 points of damage if exposed to acidic raindrops. Wooden or stone shelters can protect a character, which is fortunate since these storms last 1-20 rounds. They are always accompanied by thunderstorms.

11 Anti-Magic Storm. These dreaded storms do no physical damage, but any magic items caught in such a storm must save vs. magical fire or have their powers completely drained.

12 Magic Storm. The effects of this storm are always different and completely unpredictable. Those caught in the storm can be teleported, altered, cursed, put to sleep, or affected by any other effect chosen by the DM. Such storms have been known to summon monsters, create magic items (rain-filled pools become potions, sticks become wands, etc.), and alter animals and plants into never-before seen mutants.

Ruins

Throughout the Goblin Marches, and especially in the Stonelands, ruined castles and remnants of ancient cities can be found in the wilderness. In the Marches, these structures are often goblin fortresses of the more organized past. In the Stonelands, ruins are even more prevalent, and are most frequently the remains of Anauria and Asram, those powerful ancient cultures that once controlled the area.

It is fairly common to encounter creatures, particularly magical beasts, among these ruins. It may be the comfortable ties of a familiar place, or the remnants of a holding spell, or even the draw of magical energies, that keeps inmates prowling around the dead and disintegrating structures. Most ruins, however, have long



been plundered of their treasures. Nothing of worth survives in them.

Still, rumors abound of new discoveries of gold or magic within some previously obscure find, and they are a draw for adventurer traffic in the region. Between the regular influx of hopeful explorers, and the frequent discovery of further baleful monsters which dwell or propose to dwell in many of the ruins, these crumbling sites are actually an important facet of the ecology of the area.

The numbers of natural animals are waning in any case from overhunting by the goblinoids. The sight of game is rare. But even the slim possibility of finding game drops to nil near a ruin that contains such vicious predators as chimerae. In fact, I find it a good bet that ruined castles or towns surrounded by an area of lifelessness are plagued by the heavy predation of some monster (or several) which dwells there. An ancient ruin with animals nearby can fairly safely be presumed unoccupied.

Weather

Even dismissing the terrible storms which plague the Stonelands (and occasionally the Marches), weather in the region is inhospitable and unrelentingly harsh. Although rainfall is heavy, the blazing summer heat, fueled in part by unnatural winds blowing off the Great Desert, makes it impossible for any but the hardiest plants to survive. Humidity fluctuates greatly, as whatever moisture the summer storms bring is quickly absorbed northward into always-thirsty Anauroch.

The orcs of the Marches sometimes say, "In the summer, if you are not too hot, you're cold and wet. In the winter, you're just cold." Winters are indeed cold, but at least it is a dry chill, crisp and razor-sharp. Powdery snows fall in the heart of winter, but the winds common to the season blow them about like so much dust. They rarely pile up to dangerous levels except in the drift-filled corners of the standing stones.

Climatic Averages for The Stonelands and Goblin Marches

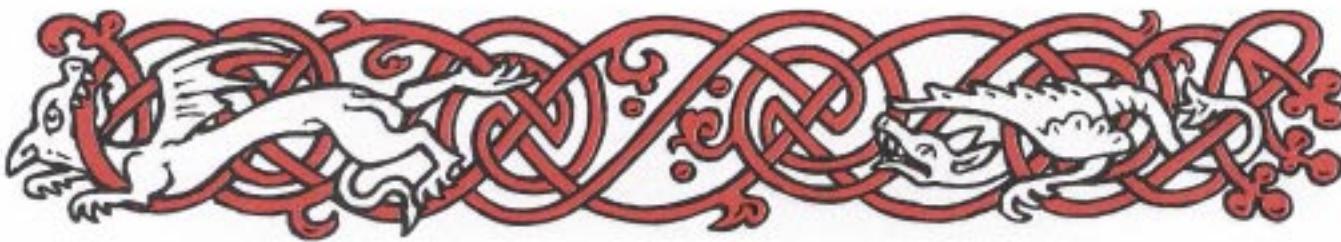
Temperature (Spring)	68° F.
Temperature (Summer)	86° F.
Temperature (Autumn)	62° F.
Temperature (Winter)	40° F.
Low Temperature (Year)	2° F.
High Temperature (Year)	101° F.
Annual Precipitation	63 inches
Days With Snow on Ground	18 days

Seasons

It would seem that there are only two seasons in the Stonelands and Goblin Marches—summer and winter. Spring and autumn are transitory periods of temperatures somewhat lower than in summer, and of precipitation a bit higher than in winter. With little plant life, and so few trees to mark the seasons by their changing foliage, the landscape looks about the same year round. Perhaps the grass swells greener in the quick warmth of spring, but summer heat bakes it tough and sere again all too soon.

This monotony of aspect does not have much bearing on a particular month's weather. The individual details of seasonal conditions can vary greatly from year to year, particularly in the Stonelands. There, the vagaries of rainfall can cause flooding in lowland areas, or deny the earth any moisture at all for months. One summer I shivered through unseasonable coolness, and several winters ran strangely hot, while all our efforts at disguising our tracks churned to mud, and no one wore the thick wool cloaks I'd paid so much to have boiled for windproofing the year before. I attribute these wild year-to-year swings of climate to the unnatural influence of Anauroch, as much as to the usual natural factors of geography, topology, and all the rest.





Part Two: The Vanishing Wildlife

Dard as it is to believe if one has actually visited the stony skeletons that pass for wilderness now, once the empty wastes of the Goblin Marches and the Stonelands teemed with life of all kinds. Herds of antelope, deer, wild oxen, and sheep roamed a green-furred countryside, the air darkened with birds, and shy, defensive animals, such as rabbits, foxes, and badgers dug their homes in the coarse soil. Even mighty dinosaurs and those huge mammals, the titanotheres and woolly rhinos, coexisted with the more common sorts of wildlife.

Wolves, the occasional bear, giant owls, and eagles were the region's major predators. Less commonly a firedrake or a giant spider cast its fearsome shadow across a meadow, and thinned the ranks of an unlucky herd. The area was balanced in respect to predators and prey, and all species flourished.

That idyllic time, however, was thousands of years ago. Change always comes. With humankind's interference, it oftentimes comes sooner and more abruptly than nature can adapt. Human empires with powerful magic arose, such as Netheril and its successor states. Their proximity to the wilderness brought an influx of dragons, chimerae, medusae, perytons, and other "unnatural" predators to the undeveloped land.

The Marches and the Stonelands were never lush, but they were full. The new monsters swung the balance from occasional fright to frequent terror. Life in the area became more of a struggle, both for the herbivores to survive, and for the native predators to find suitable prey.

The beginning of the end of any harmony in the ecosystem truly came as the goblinoids and their allies (gnolls, ogres, etc.) increased in number. Predators stalk prey to feed themselves. Once they have gorged, they abandon the hunt. Goblinkin show no such restraint. They kill everything they are able to, out of spite and contempt. Even creatures they do not need to eat are slain and left to rot.

Now, after centuries of the most abandoned hus-

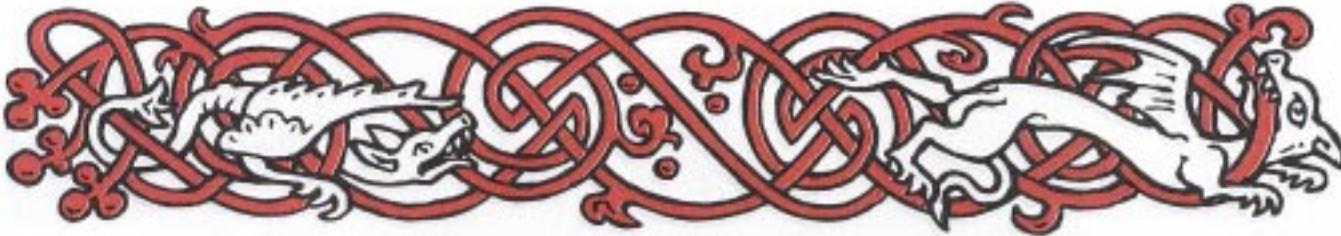
bandry by callous killers, and over-crowding by too many, overly-efficient predators, the region has been completely depleted of many species of game. The results are what you might expect. Prey is scarce for hunters, both intelligent and natural. Now, the predators have begun preying on each other.

The goblins and their kind, in their murderous slaughter of all of the lower animals, have by default placed themselves as the major food source remaining to the larger predatory monsters. They have remade the food chain, and in their short-sightedness, short-temperedness, and stupidity, exchanged their right to a top link for one near the bottom.

Although an adventurer can still find wildlife in the area, trust me, it is scarcer here than a Sembian merchant's altruism. Those creatures that still survive are often those more equipped to defend themselves, such as the giant forms of common animals—badgers, porcupines, skunks, etc. Titanotheres, axebeaks, balucitherium, phororhacos, and woolly rhinos, with size and natural defenses on their side, still frequent the area as well. Dinosaurs roam the plains, at least in the summer months—but their numbers dwindle like those of everything else.

Many natural predators, particularly wolves and bears, have moved out of the area. These mere physical beasts are unable to compete with the fiery breath of the chimera or the skill and power of the hieracosphinx.

Two influences are poised to save the area's ecology from completely falling apart. First, as I noted before, the predators now prey upon each other. Second, human, dwarf, and elf heroes are moving into both the Marches and the Stonelands, and slaying the monsters as they come. The indigenous wildlife is not altogether gone—yet. A sharp decrease in the number of carnivorous beasts might still allow the natural, grazing animals a chance to repopulate.



Part Three: The Goblin Threat

Ghe area known as the Goblin Marches can merely skirt the southern lip of Anauroch, or it can stretch to embrace the whole empty vastness of the High Moors and the Farsea Marshes, depending on whom you ask. It is primarily a flat, untamed plain. The place is named for its most predominant—if not its most universally reviled—residents, the goblinkin.

In the days of the great kingdom of Anauria (over 1,000 years ago), a powerful goblin nation existed here, made up for the most part of goblins, kobolds, orcs, hobgoblins, and gnolls, and leavened by a few bugbears and the occasional human. A powerful, sorcerous being from another plane controlled the vast forces of this dark nation. To them, it was named Hludadim.

Little is known about this being. What history goblins keep is difficult for a human sage to gain access to, for what I hope are obvious reasons; what history they have lost is doubtless beyond recreation. Even whether the controlling being was male or female (or neither) remains a mystery.

But I should not heap too much contempt on the goblinkin. Their loyalty to this being defies all reports of cowardice, stupidity, and shallow loyalty. The goblins and their ilk still evoke Great Hludadim when in peril. To listen to them, one would think Hludadim actually cared for the miserable creatures.

In those far-gone days, both orcs and goblins attacked their neighboring human nations in huge armies. Often enough, they won. In its glory, the ancient goblin realm sacked great cities and devoured traveling caravans.

Orc shamans, in units called *ularim*, held their own against many human wizards. You may well snort your disbelief—but I have seen the records writ by the ancient sages. I have studied their spellbooks. Only well-organized armies supported by powerful wizards were able to stop them. Hludadim's power was great,

and its cunning tactics and battle lore were greater yet.

The goblinkin were based in a huge fortress called Araugul, or Goblin Mount, constructed in the center of what is now the Goblin Marches. They had other strongholds as well, of course. Goblinkin commanded a powerful presence in the areas then known as the Border Forest, the Hunter's Hills, and even the Teshan Mountains (now called the Desertrouth Mountains).

When the Great Desert to the north began to expand, huge clouds of loosened earth blew into this ancient goblin realm. And some things seem never to change. For all their power and cunning, for all their master's control, the ancient goblinkin were not braver than the sniveling specimens we battle today. Terrified by the roiling clouds raining earth and stone, the goblins fled from what most believed was their impending doom.

Well, perhaps I can't blame them entirely; the effects must have been spectacular, and even I have chosen to seek safety first, and complete my calculations later, on occasion. Anauroch did indeed swallow the northernmost portion of the goblins' realm. But the desert did not come as far south as they had feared.

The damage was done, however. Hludadim had disappeared, the goblin strongholds had been abandoned, and their organization was lost. Many goblinkin returned to their homes, once the weather normalized. But far more stayed cowering in the Stonelands, the Storm Horn Mountains, and the western lands to which they had fled.

It took years—many, many years of continual work—for the goblins that returned to feel they were succeeding in restoring their great past. That they even tried is what intrigues me. Tenacity is not the first trait on anyone's lips when they speak of goblins. Perhaps the breed has degenerated as history grows older. Perhaps the best and brightest, if one can imagine goblinkin harboring any such creatures, are too often the first to fall.





Whatever the case, the more steadfast, more greedy, more power-hungry natives of the Goblin Marches made an attempt to recapture their old heights of glory. Three hundred years ago, a great army of orcs, goblins, hobgoblins and kobolds amassed within Skull Gorge and prepared to make war against the lands to the west. Orc shamans, once again formed into *ularim*, managed to summon fiends and tanar'ri to aid them. A combined force of humans and elves opposed the monsters at what is now referred to as the Battle of Bones.

Though they inflicted great losses upon their foes, the goblins and their allies were thwarted at the last. Only a tenth of the once-massive army remained alive and able to flee back into the Marches. All semblance of organization was lost. Remember what I said about the best and brightest? Here lies proof of that speculation. Only minor attempts have been made to unite the dark forces since the infamous Battle of Bones.

The Goblin Tribes Today

At first glance, it would appear there is little to say regarding goblins and their allies after so many defeats. Though they are constantly on the minds of merchants transporting their goods, as well as in the nightmares of those people living in small, undefended villages near goblin territory, the horrid creatures have gained an almost comedic reputation within certain circles. Cormyrean Purple Dragons (as the soldiers of my native land are known) serving as border guards in the north have a whole barrelful of jokes about the stupidity and ineptness of goblins.

I admit, I am as guilty as the next person of mentioning goblins with contempt. But I have more than rumors and tavern tales on which to base my opinions. While it may be true that a large goblin attack force with no proper leadership could be held off by a small unit of Purple Dragons, there is much more to the creatures than most people allow. They are not brilliant, but they are cunning—and vindictive. If the local settlements are not careful, another goblin invasion could figure in their futures.

Although not even the goblins themselves know

exactly how many tribes there are in the Marches, I have encountered or heard of at least 48. Given the typical size of those clans I have run into, and the culture I have observed, I would estimate from this figure there are at least 7,000 adult goblins in the Goblin Marches—and that does not include orcs, kobolds, and other goblinkin.

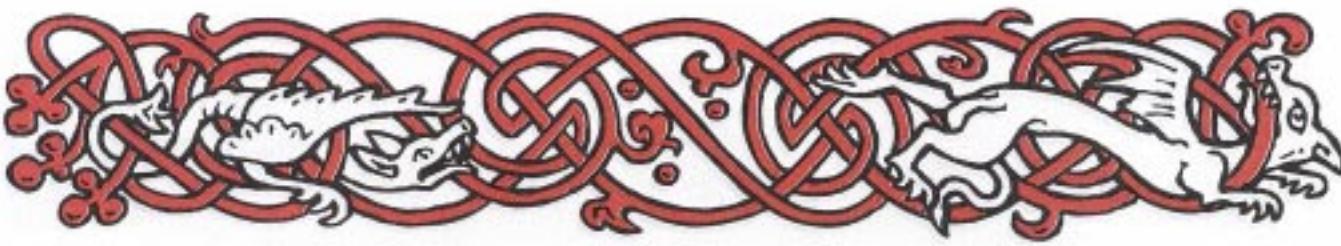
My time adventuring has made me something of a scholar about goblins and their ilk, from self-preservation and from my native curiosity about the world. You might almost say I am a connoisseur, not of wines or silks, but of monsters. Ah, that conjures a picture. How amusing it would be, to trade anecdotes on goblins in the fashionable noble houses of Cormyr. But I digress.

The Goblin Lair

Each tribe controls an area of from 10 to 30 square miles—depending on the size of the tribe—with their main lair in more or less the center of their territory. Anyone entering the area should expect it to be patrolled. Goblins are not *that* stupid. Most goblin territories sport at least one small, secondary lair which is used solely as a military camp. These secondary lairs are often situated in small, wooded areas or high-placed caves—generally locations that have a good command of the surrounding area and yet still remain concealed.

Particularly now, the goblins' strength does not lie in force of arms. Instead, subterfuge, hit-and-run tactics, and an intimate knowledge of the lay of the land are their chief advantages, against both predators and adventuring parties looking for an easy target to practice upon. Lairs are the focus of, and a chief tool in, exploiting these advantages. The Marches region is riddled with natural, small tunnel and cave complexes that lie very near to the surface. This bounty was a major factor in the ancient goblins' original decision to settle the area over a thousand years ago. Goblins have always preferred to lair in caves.

A goblin lair has a number of entrances and exits. Not all of these are obvious, and at least one is extremely well hidden. Favorite sites for this hidden egress include next to a small stream, under or behind an outcropping of rock, or in the midst of a thicket of thorny trees common to the area. Choose a place that looks innocent of disruption or impossible to traverse. It's a good bet goblins have marked it for a secret exit.



The Purple Dragons' Goblin Joke Scroll

How many goblins does it take to break through a siege wall?

One hundred. Ninety-nine to soak up the boiling oil, and one to tunnel underneath.

Two goblins rode out hunting for the tribe's dinner. For days, all they could bring back were skinny lizards. Then, somehow, they found themselves in a hidden valley. Antelope grazed unperturbed, trout leaped in a crystal lake. In no time, the hunters caught all they could carry.

"We have to come back," said the first goblin, "But how will we find this place again?"

The second goblin thought a moment, then dipped his fingers in the scum on the lakeshore. He wiped a grimy green 'X' on his dire wolf's fur.

"What's that for?" the first asked curiously.

"That marks our spot. You figure out how we get the same wolves tomorrow."

A goblin slinks into a mercenary dive, and orders Suzale. Pretty soon, another goblin joins him. The second goblin says, "I'll bet you two coppers you can't make me flinch."

"You're on," says the first. "What do we do?"

The second goblin spreads his fingers out against the stone wall next to the bar. "I'll hold my hand like this, and you punch it. If I flinch, you get the two coppers."

Like lightning, the first throws his fist forward. The second jerks his hand back, and the first goblin's fist crunches hard against the stone wall. He howls and rubs his aching knuckles.

"I flinched," the second goblin grins, tossing the first two coppers as he leaves.

Slowly, the first goblin's anger—and his pain—fades. Looking around the tavern, he spies a lone orc at a table in the middle of the room. He decides to try out his new trick. Swaggering over to the orc's table, he plants his feet wide. "I'll bet you two coppers you can't make me flinch," he crows, spreading his fingers in front of his face.

Exits include both naturally occurring caves and goblin-dug tunnels. Every exit is guarded, or at the very least watched. A lair never has more openings than a tribe can handle. If their numbers dwindle, unguardable exits are filled in. The tribe cannot risk an enemy or a monster gaining access to its lair.

It is in a goblin's nature to attack, destroy and kill. Out of necessity, he has *learned* to defend. Still, a goblin likes to be able to let his guard down when in his lair even as a drover likes to share a pint in his tavern without worrying about his stock, or a lady likes to putter about in her garden without fear of kidnaping or invasion. Lairs are made to be defensible without a lot of work or attention from those goblins otherwise occupied inside.

First of all, lairs are difficult to find. Goblins are never seen simply milling about outside their lairs. They have too much cunning for that, whatever a Purple Dragon tells you. They rarely even come and go except under cover of darkness. Oftentimes, the entrance to a lair is specifically placed in a rocky area or where the ground is very hard, to avoid any possibility of tracks leading right up to the front door, as it were.

If this luxury of location is not possible, or, if it is winter and there is fresh snow to reveal even the most careful woodsman's trail, the residents do their best to cover up the tracks or disguise them. Some Marches goblins have displayed amazing ingenuity in disguising their footprints to resemble deer, bear, or similar animal tracks.

Second, lair entrances are very small, compared to the more standard door width and height in a human dwelling. Entrances are often so small that most of the tribe has to crouch or even crawl to get in (crawling is not considered awkward or unseemly by goblin standards). This keeps out large predators and most goblin foes like humans or elves. Obviously, meager size cannot prevent dwarves, gnomes, halflings and the most common goblin foe—other goblins—from gaining access, but it is easier by far to defend an entrance when the attackers are forced to scramble in on all fours.

Almost all goblin lairs have one large entrance, or one that can be made large quickly either by rolling aside a boulder or perhaps tripping a simple mechanism-driven gate, so that vast numbers of the tribe can get in or out quickly. Naturally, these entrances





are always the most heavily guarded.

Entrances are very often trapped. Though goblin brains are not clever at designing a new trap, goblins' nimble fingers are good for building simple mechanisms they have been taught or they have seen and copied. Some goblin trap-lore extends back hundreds of years to the time of Hlundadim's reign, when they attacked and gained control of dwarven holds.

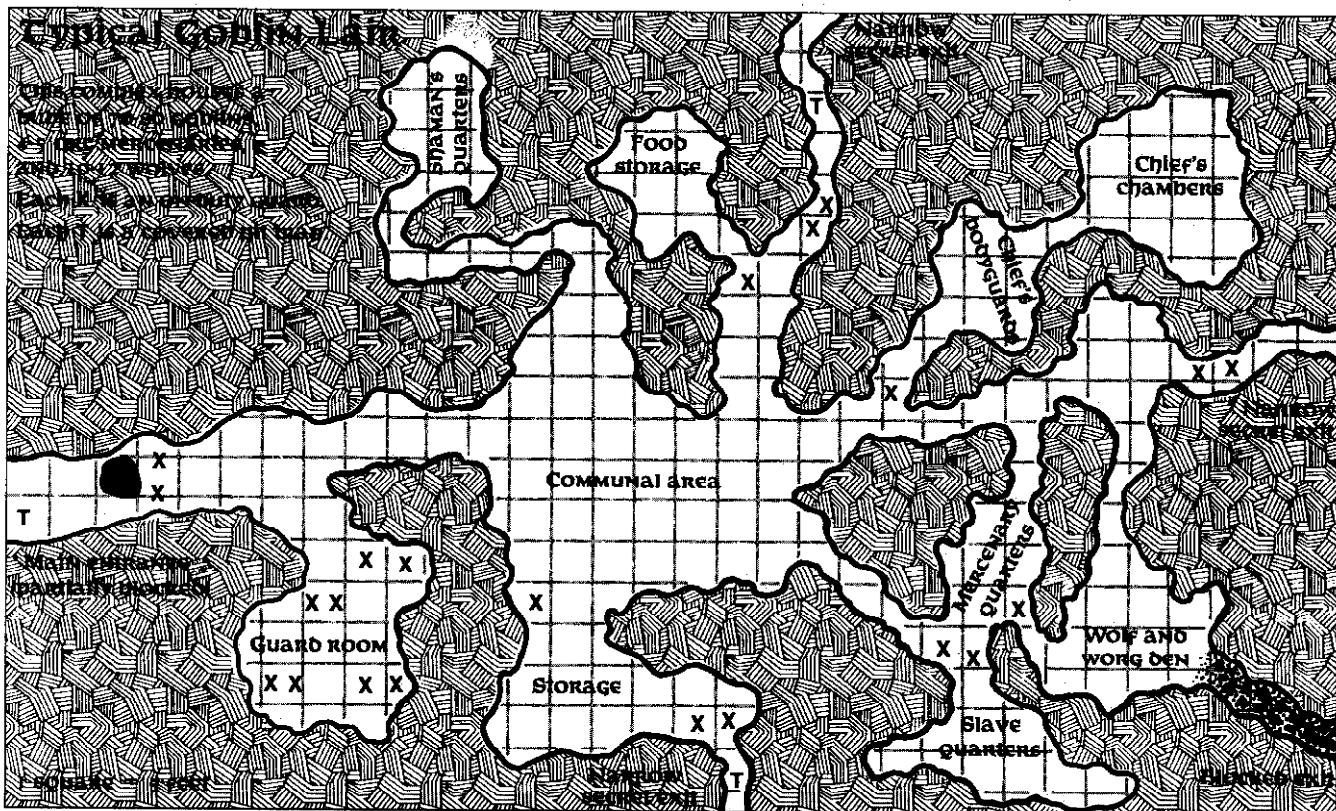
The most common styles of entrance traps found around a goblin lair are in fact the oldest standards in defense the Realms over: leaf or litter-covered pits, large stones suspended or wedged above a portal and connected to a trip wire, or any of the number of similar unsubtle, simplistic tricks that fall in a builder's repertoire.

Those goblins that employ traps are, of course, quick to take advantage of their victims' predicaments. They do not hesitate to attack foes pinned under rocks and to fire missiles down at victims at the bottom of a pit. I have many times seen goblins link their traps and "house pets" in a gruesome combination: for instance, a tribe which kept dire wolves in its lair rigged up pit traps that dumped their victims

directly in the wolves' den.

Lastly, to keep the entrances to a lair secret, every tribe occasionally, and randomly, changes them. The original entrances are blocked with boulders and covered with smaller stones, vegetation, or other camouflage. New entrances are dug out, or more rarely some older passage that was previously blocked up is re-opened. This changing of entrances happens only once every few years or so, since it is time- and temper-consuming work. But goblins will undertake the task more often if their burrow has been discovered by a foe that might return.

As I mentioned before, anyone entering the area controlled by a tribe is subject to attack. It may not always happen that a traveler is worthy enough game to risk the abandoning of assigned guard posts. If, however, a force is patently looking for the lair, such as a rival tribe's raiding party, they are always harried by goblin patrols. Confrontations, especially in defensive maneuvers, are most likely to be quick smash-and-fade raids, so that the goblins can inflict as much damage as possible while maintaining an element of surprise. Using their knowledge of the region, the harassing gob-





lins strike, then seek a safe hiding spot before the invaders are able to organize and fight back.

Often, the secondary lair is used to launch such attacks and to hide in during a retreat. Other times, local caves and tunnels (not part of the lair itself) make snug hideouts. Their superior knowledge of these tunnels allows the native goblins to attack, flee underground, and then emerge again to attack from a different direction. Attempts are always made to lead the invaders away from the lair—perhaps into a trap or an ambush if the defenders are really prepared.

The typical goblin lair itself is an unfathomable maze by human standards. Usually, a central chamber serves as a common room. Here the majority of the tribe eats, sleeps and for the most part, lives. Large tribes may have several such rooms. Only leaders, shamans, and other tribe members of importance have the right to claim private chambers.

The bulk of a lair is made up of winding tunnels, small guard rooms, storerooms, worg dens, slave chambers, and other nameless places. If invaders gain access to a lair, the native goblins show no hesitation in using these abundant small rooms to ambush the attackers and harass them as they did outside.

Tenacious ambushers that they are, goblins never fight to the death in defending their homes. When faced with an obviously superior force, goblin morale always breaks—and usually in one massive tide of panic. Suddenly, the vicious guerrillas of only moments ago have turned tail. The natives use one or more of their many exits to flee.

Each tribe usually has designated a regrouping area somewhere in their territory. Of course, many of their number flee in such abject terror when routed that they lose the presence of mind to make for that area once they have left the lair.

A goblin tribe driven out of its lair can lose nearly one fifth of the *survivors* to such panic. Goblins alone in the wild usually end up as a meal for a wandering chimera or similar beast, although some make it back to their tribe eventually. Many who cannot find their own tribe are captured by or surrender to another tribe. One such creature of my acquaintance explained in a servile whine that life as a slave is better than no life at all.

Though you would not think creatures of such low intelligence are sophisticated enough to even conceive

of an information network, you would be dangerously wrong. Consider a ground squirrel's whistling signals. Remember that herd animals flick various appendages in warning. Goblins are natural creatures, too.

In fact, the entire defense of a goblin lair requires rapid communication. Patrols need to send word back to the lair to warn the rest of the tribe of approaching invaders, and those goblins organizing the direct defense of their lair must be able to relate news to one another very quickly.

Goblins accomplish this transfer of information in two ways. First, they use runners. Certain, particularly fast individuals are chosen to serve as messengers. Each patrol has at least one designated runner. Runners are used when the distances are great, or when some amount of stealth is involved.

Otherwise, goblins use the second, easier method of communicating—loud noise. Goblin ears are somewhat more sensitive than humans', and they are able to hear sounds from a great distance, especially sounds reverberating underground. Most guard posts are equipped with drums, gongs or horns for sending signals. Many tribes require all adult males to keep a horn or whistle with them at all times. Messages and signals are kept short and simple among goblins, just as they are among ground squirrels. A goblin brain is not equipped to handle sonnets.

I know that you have already formed your own opinions as to the decoration and upkeep of a typical goblin home, and I am sure my description will not disappoint you. A lair itself is filthy. Goblins are disgusting creatures with little knowledge of personal hygiene, and no concept of sanitation. As the main portion of the tribe shares a single chamber, so filth and waste are found right next to food and bedding.

Treasure and important valuables belonging to the tribe are stored in the chief's quarters. Personal possessions of individuals, which are few, are stored on their persons. Everything else is considered property of the tribe and freely used by whomever pleases. Even the piles of bedding, which usually consist of knots of stolen or plundered rags, straw, or leaves, have no individual owner.

The Tribe

Goblins have no family units. No mating rituals or emotional bonds exist. They simply breed, and what





young are born get raised collectively by all of the females together. Being selfish creatures, older goblins care for the young only with the idea that babies can grow up to help provide for and protect the tribe. Infirm or weak young are left to die.

Likewise, old goblins that are unable to fend for themselves are also left to die. The frequency with which elderly goblins are abandoned is amazingly low, however. Of course, this statistic paints too rosy a picture of the race's health in the twilight years. Actually, there are so few elderly goblins because individuals are most likely to be killed—either in a raid, by some giant predator, or in a fight with their own tribesmen—long before they reach a debilitating age.

Males dominate goblin society only because they are physically stronger. Positions of authority are always held by males, and hunting and warfare are their areas of influence. Females have young and care for them—they are responsible for, and allowed to accomplish, nothing else. Invaders attacking a goblin lair soon learn that the females cannot be discounted entirely, however, and they do fight long and hard in their lair's defense.

Interpersonal relationships such as friendships are beyond the mental and moral capacity of the average goblin—even beyond the capacity of the above-average goblin. Don't be fooled by a plaintive snivel. Goblins are completely self-serving, and staying alive is their major goal. To a goblin, a life of pain and misery is better than no life at all.

In this horrid society, the strongest rule over their fellows. There is a distinct "chain of command" that includes every goblin in the tribe. Each tribe member knows at all times who is above him in the chain, and who is below.

The chief, obviously, is the first link in this chain. Although the position of supreme leader is generally hereditary (a chief's sons are kept apart from the rest of the brood so that they can be distinguished and offered training not given to the run-of-the-litter regulars), this humanlike favoritism survives only because goblin genetics are not very complex. Large, strong individuals usually beget large, strong young. When this is not the case, and the heir to the chieftainship is sickly, or merely a small specimen, the chief's son is killed (usually by his father) for disgracing him. When a chief has no "heir," however, the

succession is not so clear (nor the target so obvious). A new leader is not chosen until after the current chief's demise.

A chief's life is difficult, as one might begin to suspect, for he must always be on his guard. Anyone strong enough and bold enough to kill the current chief is likely to become the new one, so the chief's life is always in danger, even within the supposed safety of the lair. The chief usually chooses the most powerful goblin warriors as his bodyguards, both to protect him, and to keep them on his side—for they would otherwise be his main threats.

In turn, the chief gets the best of everything the tribe has to offer, and his word is law. There is no one to question him, and anyone displeasing him dies if he so wishes.

Under the chief, if the tribe is large, ranks one or more subchiefs. Like the chief, these privileged individuals have bodyguards protecting them from potential challengers. Subchiefs are great warriors, and often serve as military leaders. However, their power is not absolute. Any decision they make can be immediately overruled by the chief himself.

Some tribes have acknowledged "leaders" as well, which rank rates below the subchief, but above any other goblin in the tribe. This third tier leader is usually the biggest, strongest goblin in any given group of 40 to 50 adult males. Leaders enforce decisions made by their superiors and make small-scale decisions of their own.

A shaman holds a special place within a goblin tribe's structure and hierarchy. Since he usually wields powers that mystify the others, he is regarded with awe—a terror-induced awe he carefully fosters with judicious use of spectacle and manner.

Goblin shamans are the best argument for the educability of the race, for I have rarely seen one who does not use his native cunning, nastiness, and grasp of goblin culture to the fullest. Not that a goblin shaman is unbeatable—far from it. Some are the worst cowards of the lot. But within their capabilities, they are masters of mob control. They have to be.

Though he has no real political power within the tribe, a shaman's commands are usually followed and his advice is always heeded. Not all tribes have shamans—in fact, slightly less than half do. Those without them simply ignore religion altogether.



Goblins have no real philosophy (other than self-preservation at all costs), and their religion is crude and simplistic, sometimes to the point of farce. Maglubiyet is the goblin deity they revere, though only out of fear and loathing—fear of Maglubiyet, and of what life might be without him. This horrible god is offered sacrifices of animal blood by the tribal shaman at least once a month. There are no other religious services of any kind. The religious life of a shamanless goblin tribe consists simply of fear.

Goblin Allies

The goblin tribes today raid and make war upon each other more often than on their more traditional enemies—humans, dwarves, gnomes and elves. Only a few tribes are actually joined in any sort of alliance, and even such meager agreements as those are often broken.

Due to their long history, however, many goblins still have ties to other races. I have seen tribes working in cooperation with orcs, hobgoblins, kobolds, even occasionally gnolls and ogres. Goblins in the Stonelands ally themselves with all of these races and worse, with humans as well, to form the multiracial plague known in my native Cormyr as border raiders.

Of all other creatures, however, worgs and dire wolves are the chief allies of goblins. These ferociously evil creatures share the same hateful, destructive mentality that goblins do. They often live in dens right in the goblin lairs, not as pets the way a noble keeps lap dogs, nor as slaves, nor even as beasts of burden the way a huntsman keeps hounds. No, most often they are treated as cousins, even honored guests. Out of respect they are often given better food than the majority of a tribe's members. Some goblins train to ride their companion dire wolves. Otherwise, the wolves simply accompany their allies into battle.

Goblins also keep slaves of various races, although most longterm servants are goblins of other tribes. Slaves of other races end up dying too frequently from harsh treatment, petty jealousies, or—much to their masters' disgust—simply from despair. A few slaves might be kobolds, dwarves, gnomes, orcs and even humans. These slaves are forced into mining and other dangerous, hard labor.

Goblin "Culture"

As I previously stated, the goblin mentality places self-preservation above all else. Comfort and happiness are a distant second, and in fact, perhaps unattainable by human standards. I cannot pretend to have an unbiased opinion of the race, nor have I conducted interviews in the accepted scholarly fashion. But I have known more of the creatures than any three of my sometime allies, in my years in the Marches. The most a goblin can hope for is to simply exist—perhaps that is why they are so hateful and so enjoy killing and stealing from others.

Goblins despise light, particularly sunlight. They rarely venture out during the daytime, preferring to skulk in the dank, dark closeness of their lairs. If some plan requires them to bestir themselves in daylight hours, they only attempt it on cloudy, cold days. Their reasoning is simple: goblins have very good infravision. Why should they waste one of their few natural abilities? As for comfort, they *prefer* to work, and for that matter to live, in a climate that is cold, and even a little wet.

Human slaves in a goblin's favorite environment succumb rapidly to illness and death. Not so their masters. They apparently have a great resistance to disease, for not only are goblin lairs filled with disease-spreading waste, but fleas, rot grubs, rats, and other unclean creatures inhabit their living quarters as well. I heard one creature defend the—well, unkemptness is far too pale a term—conditions by observing that snacks were readily available, and one needn't depend wholly on the womenfolk for dinner.

Although their infant mortality rate is high, goblins reproduce in litters like animals, each female having three to seven young per birth, at least every other year. With the lax mothering, perpetual lair strife, and adult preoccupation with raiding and violence, it is a wonder that any young survive to mature adulthood.

Goblins have no concept of husbandry. They eat anything, as long as it is raw. Cooked food they disdain, although principles go out the window when supplies are short. They prefer fresh meat, and hunt any moving life form in the tribe's territory to virtual extinction (another reason they have become a race of raiders and robbers). They even eat the flesh of





other intelligent beings, including other goblins.

If forced to by lack of game or besiegement, the creatures eat fungus, leather, and even plants they know to be poisonous. I have heard that a starving, lone goblin will eat dirt if nothing else presents itself. Goblins feel starvation is the worst way to die.

Most of what goblins have, they have stolen. They can manufacture their own crude weapons and tools from wood and stone if they have to. Generally, however, if they don't have something, they simply do without—there is little ingenuity within the race.

In brief, goblins are disgustingly evil, selfish, mean-spirited cowards that delight in killing and destruction. They have learned how to protect and defend themselves and their society out of a sense of need and fear. They feel few emotions other than hate, despair and loathing. If they ever organize into a large nation again, it will be dangerous—they would murder all other life if they could.

The Orc Horde

Though not as numerous as goblins, the orcs of the area are a vicious and powerful threat to travelers. Many orcs can be found living among goblin tribes, acting as mercenary muscle in raids and protecting the lair in between actions.

Orcs on their own live in small villages of wooden huts, usually surrounded by a deep trench, and often hedged with a log palisade. Each village is home to anywhere from 50 to 500 orcs.

Orc villages are often located in secluded, hidden areas. Warfare is the orcs' chief pursuit, so their villages are defended by patrols and traps, while a force of soldiers remains ready at a moment's notice. These creatures have fought all their lives for generations—they know what they are doing.

Orcs are not racial isolationists. Usually, some five to 20 ogres can also be found in these communities, along with a few goblins, hobgoblins, and half-orcs (crossbred with humans or any of the races found in the village).

The orc village is led by a chieftain and his assistants (who also double as bodyguards). Often, villages boast a shaman and perhaps a witch doctor with some minor wizardly abilities. These individuals do

not command much power by human spell-casting standards, but they hold the respect and fear of all of their brethren. The chief usually does his best to limit the political power of these individuals, whose capacity for exciting admiration may surpass his own. More than one group of orcs has been completely taken over by a shaman or witch doctor.

Unlike goblins, orcs are capable of accomplishing more than just basic survival. Orcs craft their own weapons, cultivate crops, and have developed a fairly complex society. They are surprisingly intelligent, and are capable of original design and creation. Unfortunately, they are lazy and prefer to steal the creations and ideas of others. Their native abilities are hampered by their animalistic tendencies.

Despite this, orc culture is sophisticated when compared to the bulk of their goblinoid relatives. They have developed a complex worldview wherein they themselves are the center of all things. All other living creatures, according to their belief, exist to be exploited by orcs in one way or another.

Powerful and well-skilled members of other races are particularly loathsome in orc eyes, as power and skill should only be wielded by their own hands. Orcs fervently believe such abominations should be destroyed, and their power should be taken from them and used by orcs.

Orc social structure actually mimics human culture fairly closely. Orcs marry, hold worship services for their gods, have codified laws, and even teach their young in a crude educational system. They desire to prove, to others and to themselves, that they are a sophisticated race. Perhaps the squalor of their goblin cousins spurs this need to acquire (or refine, as the orcs would have it) their own cultural identity.

Oftentimes, however, their true, bestial nature comes forth. Marriage vows are rarely upheld among orcs, the strong dominate and exploit the weak, and orc children are taught the skills of murder, thievery, and destruction long before any elevated cultural lessons come their way.

Orcs are excellent miners and control a number of iron ore mines in the Marches and the Stonelands. They use this ore themselves to craft weapons, armor, and tools. I have never discovered ore for export, I think because of two insurmountable obstacles. First, what rational outlander would trade with orcs, and



second, what orc would deign to ship his merchandise to an inferior race?

The accomplishments of the orc race are not, like goblins' talents, limited to the violent arts of rapine and murder. Orcs are also expert hunters, and passable farmers. Again unlike goblins, they do not keep dire wolves, or any other domesticated or allied creatures. Sometimes an orc village or family may capture an animal or monster and force it to serve them, but they are a race too cruel and selfish to be able to tame or befriend such creatures.

Even those of other races that orcs occasionally may ally themselves with need to be wary of betrayal or exploitation from their erstwhile friends. Although orcs are willing to interact and interbreed with all the other goblinoid races—and even with some human border raiders—they seem unlikely to actually respect these other races. Orcs have a great deal of racial pride and hubris. They are confident that they are the dominant people in the world—or at least that they should be.

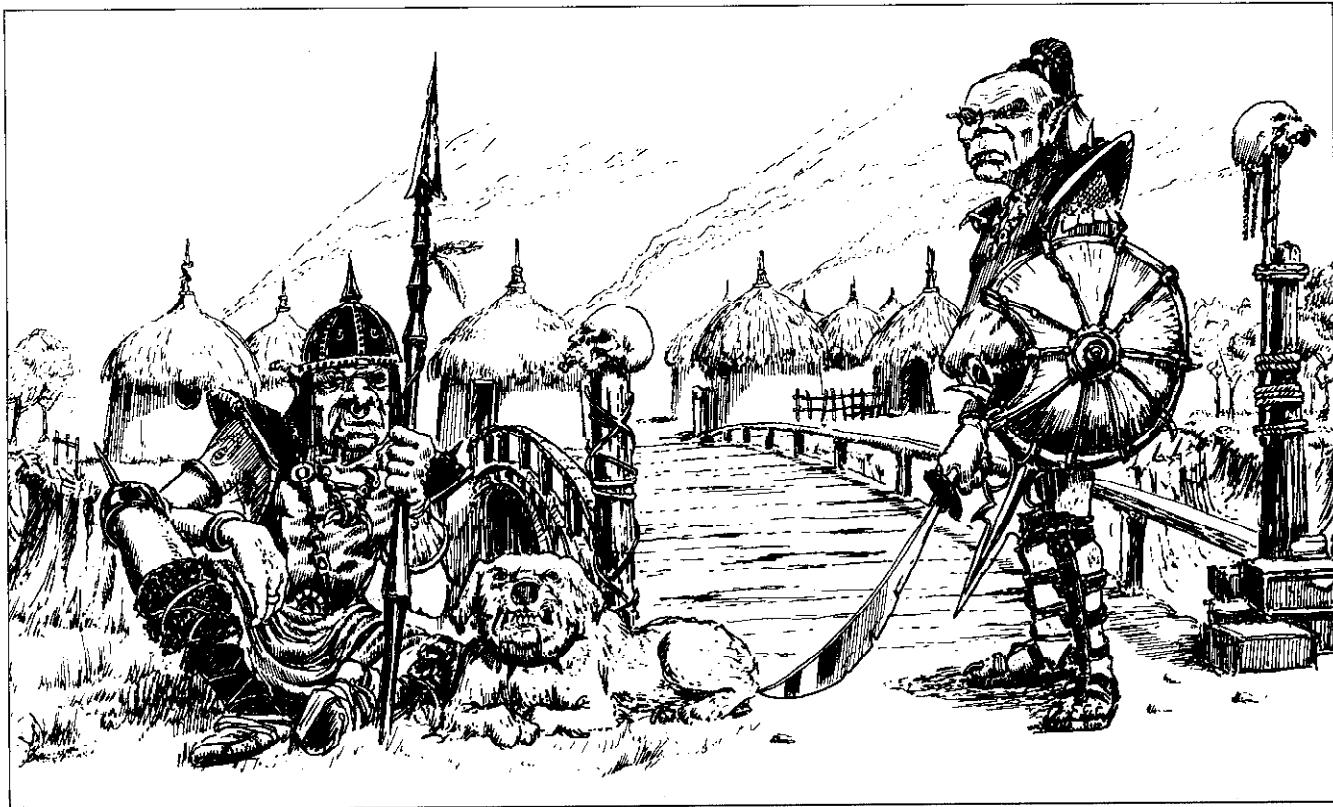
Other Goblinoids

Hobgoblins

Hobgoblins are pretty common in both the Goblin Marches and the Stonelands. There are separate tribes of hobgoblins in the region but most often the creatures are found in the company of orcs, goblins, or humans. When they travel or shelter with goblins, hobgoblins consider themselves the masters. Orcs and humans they are more likely to treat as equals—albeit equals they do not completely trust and at least somewhat resent.

At the time of the Battle of Bones, about three hundred years ago, hobgoblins were a much more plentiful race, far outnumbering orcs. In that terrible, bloody war, however, it was the hobgoblin ranks that sustained the most terrible casualties. The vast majority died in Skull Gorge.

It is certain that hobgoblin shamans have never again attained the levels of mastery and of power that they brought to that fateful conflict. Only legends recall the times when hobgoblins were able to summon servants from the lower planes, and cast extremely powerful spells.





Kobolds

Kobolds are also rare in the Marches and the Stonelands today, but their numbers were not diminished by heroic massacre or battlefield betrayal. Most have simply relocated to deep caverns under the surface to avoid the raids and attacks of their goblinoid cousins. I guess retreat is always the better part of kobold valor. Some hardy—or greedy—individuals remain, joining the border raiders or orc mercenary groups that exist in the area.

Entirely kobold tribes are very few in number, but those that exist are most likely to be found in or around the Farsea Marshes. These tribes number 50 to 200 kobolds, and they live a very primitive existence, even for their race.

Farsea kobolds dwell in tiny, domelike huts of dried mud. When not simply attacking with claws and teeth like any predatory animal, these little beasts hunt with weapons made of sharpened wood. They have few accomplishments or blessings. At least their relative poverty frees them from goblin or orc attacks, and so they live largely unmolested. The almost gnomelike ingenuity and fondness for mechanisms displayed by most kobolds I have heard tales of in the Realms is nowhere in evidence among the Farsea creatures. These kobolds are simple pests.

Ogres

Those ogres in the Stonelands or Goblin Marches, being creatures of greed, hunger and laziness, have found it more profitable and easier to dwell with tribes of smaller creatures, such as orcs or goblins, than to form their own society. It is not uncommon to find a handful of ogres (both male and female) lodged among a tribe of goblins or orcs. More rarely the creatures condescend to patronize hobgoblins. Perhaps it is the other way around—more rarely, hobgoblins suffer ogres in their midst.

Too chaotic to fit into whatever organizational structure the host tribe accomplishes (and too powerful to be forced into any social mode or title), ogres usually do as they please in such a situation. They are not required to perform menial tasks, and they do not have to obey or show respect to the chieftain or the local shaman.

In fact, they treat other tribe members quite badly, bullying and tormenting them out of spite. All ogres

actually do is accompany their host orcs or goblins when they make raids, and help defend the tribe's home when it is attacked. In return they usually demand the best spoils—both food and treasure.

Despite this unfair situation, tribe members of the lesser races are usually glad to have an ogre or two around, for defensive benefits if nothing else. Remember, most goblinkin admire raw power more than any other attribute. What are ogres, if not might? Their added power often makes the difference between victory and defeat, and their mere presence serves as a deterrent among would-be raiders.

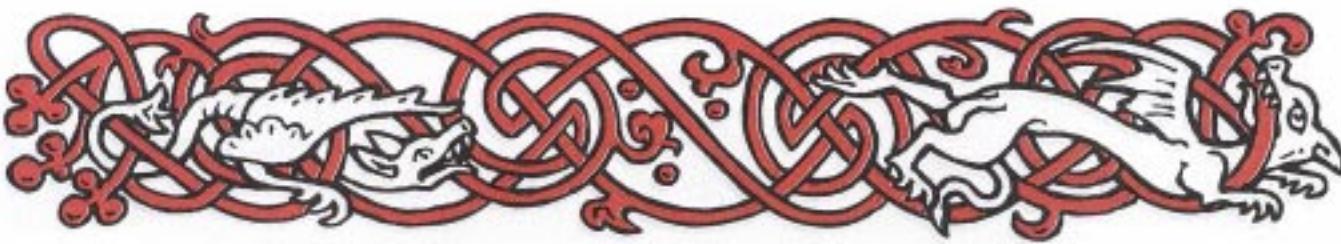
There is another phenomenon I think worth mentioning. Tribes of goblins or orcs that include ogre companions are far more likely to attack human travelers and settlements, both because of the greater physical power they can field, and because of the ogres' fondness for human flesh.

The ogres of this region do not make anything, preferring to steal or coerce whatever supplies they require to meet their needs. They generally do not revere any gods, and have no shamans. Having lost what small amount of culture and racial unity other ogres in the Realms may retain by living among members of their own race, Marches and Stonelands ogres, like orcs, seem quite willing to interbreed. Of particular note, those individuals with orc tribes breed with their companion orcs, creating orc/ogre crossbreeds known sometimes as orogs.

These progeny were once looked down upon by ogres, but orogs are slowly becoming as numerous as ogres themselves, among the goblinkin. Orogs, particularly those that favor their ogre parent, are now accepted by other ogres and often mate with them. These second-generation offspring are very close to ogres both in physique and temperament, but usually a bit smaller and smarter.

Orogs that are three-quarters ogre blood or more may eventually supplant ogres altogether in the Marches as the pure bloodline gets more and more diluted. Orcs always look upon orogs as a blessing, for they are bigger and stronger than orcs, and not as cruel (to other orcs) as pure-blood ogres.

Ogres within goblin tribes do not—yet—breed with goblins, that I know of. It is not unknown, however, to encounter orc-goblin crossbreeds (especially in goblin communities that use orcs as "hired muscle,"



rather than ogres), and these halfbreeds can and do mate with both ogres and orogs, creating strange racial mixtures.

Gnolls

These creatures usually live and operate separately from all the other evil humanoid creatures in the region, repudiating goblins, ogres, and orcs alike. There are exceptions to this general rule, and in particular, some gnolls can be found among the border raiders.

Though gnolls were once allied with the goblinoids, it was a thousand years ago. That time has passed. Gnolls have made no attempt since to join the other races in forming huge armies. Perhaps they've had enough of grand schemes. They are content to perpetrate their small raids upon whatever human, dwarf and elf travelers are brave enough to tread the area. Occasionally, gnolls may make a sortie against local goblin or orc tribes.

In general, these creatures occupy the eastern section of the Stonelands and the Storm Horn Mountains. They are not numerous, and actually try to raid without drawing attention to themselves.

They bitterly hate stone giants, however, and always attack them, even if the odds are not in their favor. Gnoll tradition has it that a stone giant slew their greatest historical figure, a gnoll called Grrat. Because of that act, their legends lament, gnolls are forever doomed to relative insignificance in comparison to humans, elves, and other races.

Gnolls tolerate the presence and machinations of almost all the other evil races in the area when they must. Their preference is to fade away from intruders. They simply move elsewhere if the interference looks to be permanent, like a new lair or fortification. But if the invaders are merely a small scouting or raiding party, gnolls have no qualms about attacking them for food and wealth.

Each gnoll tribe numbers between 75 and 200 individuals, at least half of which are male warriors. As is the case across the goblinoid races, males dominate gnoll society. The gnolls of the Stonelands and the Storm Horns are almost all nomadic in nature and establish no permanent lairs.

There are a few gnoll-like flinds in the Stonelands, but they are quite rare. Gnolls revere these stockier and smarter individuals. Find a flind, and you have dis-

covered a tribe of gnolls as well, for the former always hold a position of authority in the latter's society.

Aside from flinds, gnolls are also often accompanied by hyenadons. These beasts serve as guards when the tribe makes camp, and as hunting companions when a meal is in order. They are rarely taken on raids and offensive actions—simply because they are too valuable to lose. There are a few wild hyenadons in the Stonelands, but almost all have been domesticated by gnolls.

Bugbears

Bugbears in the Goblin Marches and the Stonelands are always encountered in the company of goblins. They serve as mercenary guards for their smaller cousins, tending to bully and mistreat them much as ogres do in the same position. Their advantage as paid muscle is surely offset by their abusive behavior, but as I have noted before, goblin intellect is not strong, and they revere might, even when it is directed against them.

There is a further hazard in employing bugbear mercenaries that goblins never seem to recognize. All bugbears eventually try to take over any tribe of goblins they work with, and make the smaller creatures their slaves.

Bugbears encountered with goblins are always male. They usually only stay on the surface a few months out of the year, before returning to their deep, lightless lairs in the Underdark. Only deep in the earth can females and young be found.

Specific Tribes and Groups

There are a few individual tribes of goblins and their ilk that stand out from the grubby masses of their kind. These bands warrant specific attention due to their wide influence, potentially lethal deviations, or simply interesting quirks. Know these groups, and you know the movers and shakers of this desolate little slice of the Realms.

Border Raiders

All of the bands of goblins, hobgoblins, orcs, ogres, kobolds, evil humans, and gnolls within the





Stonelands are referred to as border raiders by outsiders. But that generosity of labeling defeats any accurate assessment of the situation almost from the beginning.

The groups I designate as raiders earn their name by the fact that their existence seems to revolve completely around attacking nearby human, dwarven and even elven settlements, as well as any parties unlucky enough to be traveling through the area. They raid eastward into the Elven Woods, range north to attack dwarves in the Desertrouth Mountains, and strike southward to prey on humans in Cormyr. The westernmost Dales are not safe from border raiders, either.

The membership of the raiders, goblinoid and otherwise, is interracially tolerant, even more so than any "pure" tribes found in the Goblin Marches. Bands are almost always comprised of at least two races, and sometimes compass as many as four or five. They seem almost to strive for diversity, the way an adventuring group solicits mages and clerics to round out the talents of its fighters.

Some examples will make it clearer. One group of border raiders I dealt with was lead by a small party of humans, who had a dozen ogre bodyguards. Under them were six commands of about 20 goblins, each lead by an orc. There was also a group of orc archers, and nearly 25 kobold servants/guards. These raiders even had a troll and four bugbears that worked with them as well.

Another band of border raiders is almost exclusively gnolls and kobolds, commanded by a surprisingly intelligent hill giant. Still another numbers exclusively crossbreeds as its membership, including human/orc, orc/ogre, orc/goblin, orc/duergar, goblin/kobold, orc/hobgoblin, and even human/ogre mixes.

Unknown to most of their victims, these groups have a secret. Many, but not all, of the border raider bands operate under the control of a venerable red dragon named Grinnsira. She is a particularly adept spellcaster (even when compared to Great Wyrms), and she has used charm spells to ensnare the raiders—as well as a vast spy network that extends through Cormyr, Sembia, and the Dalelands. Her ultimate goals are unknown to me, but carving out an empire does not seem beyond her scope.

The Servants of The Zhentarim

Grinnsira's influence in the Goblin Marches is being undermined by the Black Network of the Zhentarim, who are becoming more active in this region each day. They hope to bring the border raiders, as well as the goblinoids of the Marches, under their own influence, so they can exploit them to their own dark ends. This evil organization figures to use the goblins and their ilk to establish a foothold in the region. I can think of few less appealing plans.

From here, the Black Network intends to direct its inhuman armies to attack key positions in Cormyr, the Dales, and the lands to the west. Since that is what many of the goblinoids are doing anyway, the goal may not be that hard to achieve. The main obstacle the Zhentarim face is getting these goblinoid troops to take orders from humans.

To manage this, they have so far used an effective and unexpected technique. A number of captured and mind-controlled dopplegangers have been planted within certain tribes, and groups of border raiders, sometimes replacing leaders and even chieftains. Through these plants, the Zhentarim are able to coerce the goblinoids into following their commands without the tribes even knowing. Some of these dopplegangers have been discovered by tribe members, but goblin minds are not clever. They see no concerted threat, only the random predation of a natural menace. Word of the dopplegangers' existence has not spread far.

Even if the Zhentarim never assume clandestine control here, they plan on at least de-stabilizing the region. A precarious border situation would tie up Cormyrean resources, allowing the Black Network freer reign within that kingdom. To tip the balance and foment open conflict, the Zhentarim have been bringing other, powerful monsters, like beholders, to the forefront of the region. These invaders cause trouble and draw forth the Cormyrean border guard.

The Neidlig

Of all the goblin tribes, the Neidlig are the most powerful—that is, they are the most numerous and they hold the greatest amount of territory. Based in the southern part of the Goblin Marches, the Neidlig tribe hunts and raids throughout the High Moors as well.



The lair of this tribe is actually a ruined citadel, one of the few remnants of an ancient goblin army that once controlled the area. The walls have long since crumbled away, but some of the towers, as well as the main keep, are relatively intact. The whole goblin tribe, numbering almost 600 by my estimation, dwells mainly in the dungeon under the keep and in the natural caves connected to it.

Unlike most goblin tribes, the Neidlig do not feel it necessary to hide their lair—no other tribe would be so foolish as to attack them. Aside from huge numbers of goblin warriors, the tribe also employs a group of orc mercenaries to help protect their citadel, and a surprising number of ogres accompany the Neidlig on their raiding missions.

A medium-sized tribe of hobgoblins known as the Merrowdrinkers lairs not far from the citadel and has allied itself with the Neidlig. An orc community called the Colchar is also on friendly terms with the goblins.

The multiracial nature of the force that the Neidlig represent is due in part to a vision of the past which Neidlig's chief Srubaash—or King Srubaash, as he prefers to style himself—had. He claims a mysterious spirit explained to him the urgency and importance of rebuilding what once was lost.

The Neidlig represent the greatest threat that a vast goblin empire might again rise up from its long-cold ashes. Seeking instead to unite goblins, orcs and others, they actually avoid raiding and warring with other tribes. Certainly the number of tribes that ally themselves with the Neidlig will continue to grow, as King Srubaash spreads his visionary message.

The Fenlis

Since the rumors of Srubaash's vision began to be disseminated throughout the Marches, another tribe has also attempted to unite the goblins. The Fenlis, as they are called, are not allies of the Neidlig, however. They despise the latter's inclusion of other races in their plans for rebuilding the past. The Fenlis are racial elitists, believing that orcs, kobolds, and other humanoids are destined to fall before their own goblin superiority in the same manner as the races of humans, dwarves and elves are doomed to do.

The Fenlis, whose lair lies due north of the High Moors, are a large tribe of 400 or so goblin members.

Their ranks are not supplemented with orcs or ogres, like the Neidlig, although they do not hesitate to employ other races as slaves. Even more than other tribes, the Fenlis use cunning and ingenuity to aid and protect themselves. Their secret lair is surrounded by well-hidden traps of devious and deadly design. They war with nearly all other races, particularly the Colchar orcs.

The Melial

This mixed community of orcs and hobgoblins coexists near Skull Gorge, and represents the last vestige of that vast force of goblinoids that warred against the humans in the Battle of Bones. Of all goblinkin in the region, the Melial are the most adept at magic, and there are a number of powerful shamans and witch doctors among them.

I find this tribe fascinating. Fascinating and oh, so dangerous. These are not clumsy oafs toying with magical baubles, as likely to burn themselves as the objects of their attacks. These are serious practitioners, mages bent on recapturing the powers their people no longer wield except in legend.

Indeed, the Melial use magical items left over from ancient times. These devices help protect them from other tribes and aid them in their attacks against nearby human settlements. They even sometimes journey into the desert of Anauroch and make raiding strikes against the town of Lundeth, as well as any convenient camps of nomadic Bedine.

They are especially interested in gathering more magical items and spell knowledge, so sometimes the Melial can be found scouring various ruins in the Marches or even in the Great Desert. Particularly brave orcs even dare to tread the haunted battlefields that once echoed the war screams of the Battle of Bones, willing to stave off undead in order to glean magical weapons or armor.

They are not just randomly recovering these fragments of ancient history, either. They have a specific quest. The shamans of the Melial tribe are seeking an armored fragment known as the Darkhelm. Its powers supposedly allow the wearer to summon forth fiends from the lower planes.

Whether it is a result of an old curse bequeathed upon them during the Battle of Bones, or some unrelated cause, there are those among the Melial





inflicted with the disease known as lycanthropy. This fact is usually suppressed so as not to alarm or forewarn other goblinoid tribes. Nevertheless, I myself have seen a Melial orc transform before my very eyes into a misshapen, humanoid wolf. These werewolves are just as powerful as humans so cursed. It is a Melial tactic to use their lycanthropic members as a surprise attack upon their enemies.

Despite the fact that they hide their shapechanging ability from outsiders, it is a symbol of importance and status to be a werewolf in Melial culture. Lycanthropy has not spread willy-nilly to everyone—in fact, new were-creatures are chosen, not randomly created when the hunger arises. That fact argues more discipline than most of members of either species possess. Not surprisingly, the affliction is more common among the orcs than the hobgoblins in the tribe. Melial leaders, as well as many of their shamans and witch doctors, have the curse, which they ironically call “the Blessing.”

Teerac-on-Water

An oddity among goblins, this small tribe displays several unique characteristics that distinguish it from all others. It occupies an area that straddles the border between the Marches and the Stonelands and encroaches into both, though it is a very small territory.

The tribe gains its strange-sounding name from the secluded lake upon which it makes its home. At the center of the lake, which is formed within a large crater, there is a small island. The only way to reach the island is by boat. The tribe occupies this island, as well as a flotilla of wooden barges and rafts tethered to it. Squat wooden houses and buildings cover both the island and the attached flotilla. It is nearly impossible to tell from a distance where land gives way to water, because of the density of buildings over both.

Teerac-on-Water goblins are well skilled in navigating their small boats around the lake. It helps, no doubt, that the surface of the lake remains calm virtually all of the time.

The members of this tribe, unlike all other goblins I have met, can tolerate the light of the sun without compromising their health, and are often found abroad at hours during which any of their cousins would be fast asleep. Then, too, Teerac goblins seem

perfectly comfortable wearing chain armor. They demonstrate other qualities of civilization and sophistication foreign to their brethren as well—but do not welcome them into your hearts and homes just yet. They are still goblins in appetite. Teerac-on-Water raid other tribes, keep slaves, and unfortunately still possess that gruesome, goblinish delight for killing and destruction.

Although they harpoon fish as a dietary staple, they actually eat a surprising number of the fruits and leafy plants which grow near or in the lake. Goblins interested in a balanced meal? I didn't believe it myself when first I observed it. But in time I noticed there is one particular plant, the blood red lily, which they cook (again, an odd behavior among goblins) and eat regularly.

I have discovered through my own studies that this plant, which I have found nowhere else, actually prolongs the life span of goblinoids. Many goblins of Teerac-on-Water are well over 100 years old. Perhaps it is this extended life span that enables them to become more sophisticated, or perhaps intelligence boosting is another effect of the plant that I have never isolated.

The Teerac goblins have tunneled deep under their island. Their delving discovered a force of bugbears. They quickly allied themselves with the subterranean creatures, and have (recently) discovered the extensiveness of the Underdark. They have trained giant and killer frogs for use as guardians around the perimeter of their floating lair, and are attempting to gain other creatures, preferably amphibious ones, as help as well.

Teerac-on-Water do not fear raids from other goblinoids since others of their kind feel the difficulty in assaulting them in boats is not worth the effort. The tribe numbers around 200. They revere and protect a powerful shaman whose responsibility it is to oversee the construction of the wooden dwellings, the barges and the boats, none of which are typical goblin creations.

Teerac Goblin: Int average; AL Lawful evil; AC 5; MV 6; HD 1; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (by weapon); SA Nil; THAC0 20; SZ S; ML 10; XP 35



Part Four: The Great Beasts

Boarately, there are other horrible, dangerous monsters inhabiting the regions known as the Stonelands and the Goblin Marches besides the goblinoids. Because so many of the gentler animals have been hunted to near extinction by the goblins and their ilk, those beasts that remain in these areas are primarily those too terrible for the goblinoids to challenge. Travelers who hear a rustle in the rocks or find tracks half-filled in swampy mud don't have the luxury of supposing the unseen creature is a mere marsh hare. It's vicious. And all too likely, it knows they're there.

Behir

These dangerous beasts are the subjects of an interesting legend which seems to predate even the goblin kingdom of a thousand years ago. I first dismissed the tale as a mere fancy, the sort of nurse's tale that parents and family servants tell their children at bedtime, with a neat moral at the end for the young to memorize. But I've since met the beast. So I'm repeating the tale here, for those of you deficient in nurses, who might not have heard it.

Apparently, in the days when even ancient Netheril was young, a number of mages, wizened elders, and priests set out to try to reason with a blue dragon of incredible might that had been plaguing their communities. The dragon rebuffed their attempts at parley, and many men and women were slain by its retributive attack. A god (which god is unknown today; it may even be a deity who no longer exists) decided to "help" the humans, and created creatures known as behir, amalgamated from the dead remains of their fallen comrades and the old scales of the dragon.

It is true these behir, then great in number, slew the blue dragon in a desperate, pitched battle. But of course, as often happens in legends and in life, the

monsters then turned on the very humans and other fair creatures they were made to save. These found the behir as great a foe as the dragon had once been.

One evil was replaced by another. The bard who originally told me this tale said that the moral was one cannot trust the help of the gods in overcoming evil, but I am not so sure of the accuracy of his interpretation. That is just the sort of man he was.

In any event, behir are undoubtedly real. Further, they are sworn enemies of dragons, although they do not aggressively hunt them. They simply do not abide drakes within their territory, and likewise never enter the realm of a dragon.

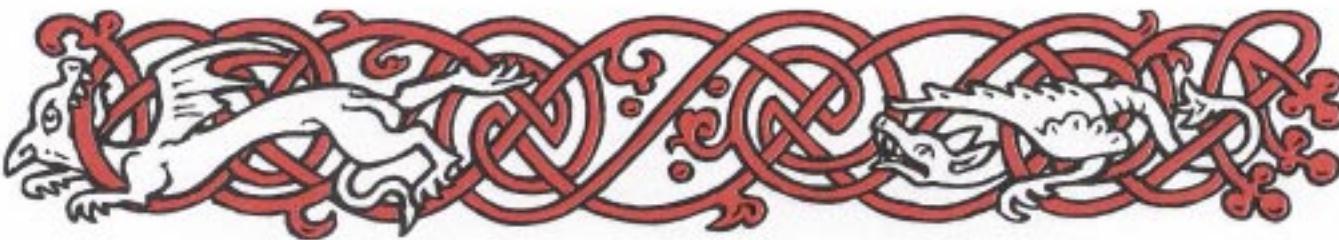
A behir's territory usually covers a 10-mile radius and centers around its lair. The lair is almost always one of the caves found within the Goblin Marches. I find it significant that behir are more common in the Marches than in the Stonelands, while dragons are more likely to be found in the Stonelands than in the Goblin Marches.

Although full-grown behir are said to have a dozen legs, in fact, they may have many more than twelve. I have discovered that as the creature ages, the number of its legs continues to increase. Theoretically, a behir never ceases to grow in length—or in number of legs.

Behir eat almost anything, although they enjoy the warm blood of mammals best of all. As with most creatures in this blighted region, the preferred lifestyle and ecosystem of behir is threatened by the constant depletion of available prey by the local ravenous—and ravening—goblinoids. More and more, orcs and goblins are finding themselves the next-most-succulent meal for behir.

I've also discovered it is fairly common knowledge that a behir's horns, talons, and heart are valuable to alchemists and mages for making scroll ink. It is not so widely known, however, that the scales of a behir are also useful for their magical properties. I modestly report that I have discovered the scales can be used to make an armor which provides limited protection from electricity.





Never mind how I happened upon the knowledge. It is not, unfortunately, wildly useful, but more a curiosity—a footnote, if you will. Behir scales are not so easy to come by. And there is the matter of curing them. The scales must be soaked in a solution of blue dragon's blood first, before they are hinged together, to achieve their unusual ability.

The spells which can be recorded on scrolls in behir ink are *lightning bolt*, *neutralize poison*, and *protection from poison*.

Chimerae

There is perhaps nowhere else in the Realms that these terrible beasts are more common than the Marches region. They ravage the countryside, and bring fear to all who dwell here, with the possible exception of dragons. Chimerae can be found mostly in the Goblin Marches, dwelling in the shallow caves that honeycomb the area. Sometimes a chimera commandeers an abandoned goblin lair—oftentimes, it was the very beast that drove out the previous occupants.

Chimerae are obviously the creations of some ancient sorcerer as their different parts (goat, dragon and lion) do not seem naturally combined at all—they do not even appear to coexist peacefully. I would guess that the stress of their own self-loathing drives most chimerae insane early in life, making them even more dangerous and destructive to others.

Occasionally two chimerae mate, but thankfully offspring are rare—another sign of their magical rather than natural origins. Interestingly enough, however, chimerae seem to be immune to most diseases and aging. They live to terrorize the world until they are slain.

That rare offspring of two chimerae infrequently will be an entirely new beast, different from both its parents. Something goes wrong in the development of the unborn creature, or some twist of magic gets the upper hand. I don't presume to explain, I merely record my observations. You can recognize a chimera-spawn by the twin dragon heads which flank the central lion's head (instead of the more usual triad of goat, lion, and dragon).

The "new" dragon head breathes a lightning bolt in

battle, while the other dragon head spouts flame as usual. The entire body of this beast, except for the lion head, is covered in serpentine scales. It is a hideous sight.

These chimera-spawn are usually short lived, however, for they disregard their own safety while attacking and destroying the countryside and its inhabitants. The only one of these beasts that I have ever seen myself was already dead—in its frantic attempts to slay a group of minotaurs underground, it collapsed the cave that it was in as well, crushing itself under the fallen rocks (I have no idea what became of the minotaurs). I have never heard of these creatures existing anywhere other than here.

Grinnsira the red dragon has made pacts with at least two chimerae, promising them treasure and food in return for service.

Chimera-spawn: Int Semi-; AL CE; AC 2; MV 9, Fl 18 (E); HD 10; #AT 6; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d4/1d4/2d4/3d6; SA breathe fire for 3d8 points of damage, breathe lightning for 3d8 points of damage (save halves damage for both); THAC0 11; SZ L; ML 14; XP 6000

Doppelgangers

As mentioned previously, the Zhentarim have managed to charm and control a number of doppelgangers in order to infiltrate the border raiders and other goblinoid tribes. Other individual members of this race exist in the area independent of the Black Robes, however.

Free doppelgangers dwell in subterranean caves under the Goblin Marches, and there assume their natural form. Usually, they work together, and make plans for infiltration and impersonation, for that is how they survive.

A successful doppelganger finds a humanoid community to infiltrate, and either lives off the resources of that community or uses its position to steal food and treasure. They are not choosy about what humanoids they impersonate, but they usually avoid goblins. Goblin life is generally harsh and unpleasant. Who would deliberately plot to share it?

The best position for a doppelganger to obtain,



from its own point of view, is that of an old or infirm human. Such a person is taken care of by the rest of the community and is not expected to work or contribute to the common good.

Doppelgangers are lazy and refuse to fend for themselves if they don't have to. They do not farm, manufacture, mine, or produce any goods of any kind. Any items, treasure, or tools that they may have are invariably stolen. The most a doppelganger does on its own is use its shapeshifting ability to put itself in a position where it can attack and kill others, in order to take their possessions.

Doppelgangers hire themselves out for various infiltration or assassination missions, and so allow themselves to be approached in their lairs by those who know where to look. They do not willingly enter into permanent service to anyone.

Although they sometimes work together, and are helpful toward one another, there is no doppelganger society, as it were. These beings leech off the societies of others, and make use of others' accomplishments and successes. Orcs, hobgoblins and even gnolls are not surprised to find one of their tribe is a doppelganger, and perhaps has been for years. They are not surprised by the discovery, but they are not tolerant, either. Such an individual is immediately killed.

Dragons

There are a few dragons which call the Goblin Marches their home. Drakes are found in greater numbers in the Stonelands. Red dragons are the most prevalent type, much to the dismay of all who live in the region.

Only one red dragon, a venerable female by the name of Grinnsira, has attained great age or power that I know of, but that does not keep the younger dragons from terrorizing both the native goblinoid tribes and the rare traveler. Of course, firedrakes can be found throughout the Stonelands as well, and they are often mistaken for red dragons.

The only race that can do more than stoically endure dragon raids are giants. Unfortunately, a united, vigorous giant society is sadly lacking in the region. What few giants inhabit the Marches and the Stonelands are scattered, without any organization.

Nonetheless, red dragons usually avoid attacking giants, preferring prey that cannot fight back. Red dragons enjoy human flesh more than goblinoid, and try to get it when they can. For this reason, dragon attacks are not unknown to the populace, from the wildest wastes even up to—and within—the Cormyrean city of Tilverton.

Red dragons almost never enter Anauroch. In fact, they avoid speaking of the desert or its inhabitants altogether if they can. Perhaps they know of a power there that we do not. I have heard only the vaguest hints and whispers in that vein. There is said to be a place holy to dragons deep within the Great Desert; venerable Grinnsira claims to have been there. Other dragons in the Stonelands may make pilgrimages as well, but when they do, they do not speak of them. Make of this what you will.

I have made it a practice to at least attempt establishing friendly communications with dragons when I encounter them, but I must say that the red dragons in this area make such attempts difficult. They are aggressive, voracious, and downright rude.

In my experience, copper, silver, and amethyst dragons can all also be found in the Stonelands, and less frequently in the Marches to the west. What copper dragons I have met are simply those traveling out of Anauroch for their own inscrutable reasons. The silver dragons seem to have made their homes here for specific defensive purposes.

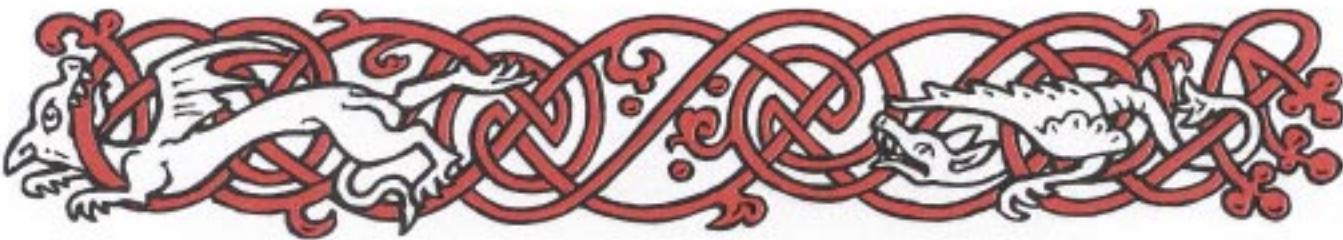
The only silver dragon I spoke to at any length chose to lair in the Stonelands to directly oppose Grinnsira the red dragon and her attempts at organizing the goblinoids into an army. This silver dragon, whose name was Fi Lendicol, was aided by a human ranger known as Dreik Lorne and a dwarf warrior by the name of Thurn, son of Doulm.

Fi Lendicol often takes the form of a human wizard, and the threesome can be encountered working on various missions. They travel throughout the Stonelands planning how to stop the border raiders and their dragon mistress. Other silver dragons may be found in the area, but I do not know any of them personally.

The Cloudlands

Supposedly, more silver dragons live in the clouds above the Stonelands. There also dwell mist dragons,





as well as giants and other beings such as ki-rin. There are many local legends regarding this magical area in the clouds. Some tales offer explanations for the huge stones scattered below it on the blasted earth.

In fact, of the myriad such tales, many conflict in specific details. I've tried to distill the gist of their meaning, to separate true fact from what are obviously some fanciful bard's epic exaggerations and pretty images to make a more palatable—and longer—story.

Most legends agree that there was once a powerful magical kingdom above the Stonelands, kept secret from those races who dwelt below it on the ground. This kingdom, which supposedly existed 1500 years ago or more, boasted a society comprised of dragons, giants, sylphs, pegasi, asperii, giant eagles, and even some winged, elflike beings whose name is no longer remembered (and who are now apparently extinct). These races coexisted in peaceful harmony among the clouds, avoiding the decadent human realms of the time, especially Asram.

These beings came down to the surface of the Realms only to gather or trade for food and other necessities, and quickly fled back upward to their cloudy haven. The giants, ever industrious, even brought huge stones up with them. They built magnificent fortresses and cities in the sky, hidden by the clouds.

It wasn't until the Cloudlands were discovered by the mages of Asram and Anauria that disaster struck. The sky-dwelling races had been right to avoid their earthbound neighbors. The great and powerful wizards of these nations intended to conquer the Cloudlands, for they knew that such a kingdom would be a safe haven from the encroaching desert that was soon to destroy their earthbound realms.

In the war that ensued, the Cloudlands were destroyed. The fortresses and cities so carefully crafted by giant artisans fell to the earth. You see their forlorn remains scattered over the plain now called the Stonelands, a mute relic of war.

Most of the enchanted places in the clouds that once supported solid surfaces are gone. Supposedly the great spells that were unleashed in this earth/sky war linger on in the form of powerful storms that frequently lacerate the area.

While I do not know how much truth is contained in these stories, mist dragons and other sky-dwelling

creatures are occasionally seen in or above the Stonelands, gathering food on the surface in the form of wild plants or herd animals, and quickly ascending back into the sky.

If the tales of the Cloudlands and its demise are true, perhaps these creatures are relics living among the ruins. Castles on the surface are rarely so completely smashed that nothing remains, and so might it be in the air above. Some of the enchanted places in the sky might have escaped the ravages of war, remaining to this day.

Giants

Sightings of cloud giants, and even storm giants, are more common even than tales of mist dragons. These beings are encountered in the Stonelands as they gather food, or more rarely, as they trade or interact with the other giants in the region (for instance, the stone or hill giant races). Cloud giants hunt native game such as wild sheep, elk and other animals, though their preferred prey is getting harder and harder to find. The goblinoids have hunted most such animals to extinction. If for no other reason, these giants are no friends to the evil races that dwell on and under the surface. Sometimes the giants go so far as to attack goblinoids when a chance encounter arises. In the event that they cannot find game, sky giants hunt more dangerous (and less savory) prey such as dinosaurs, behir, giant spiders, etc. They do not eat either goblinoids or humans under any circumstances.

Cloud giants, though still very rare, are more commonly encountered than their storm brethren. The two seem to coexist peacefully and are often working in concert when seen together—which indicates that the cloud giants are of the good variety. I *have* heard one tale of a few evil cloud giants attacking a merchant caravan. It might be sour grapes, or mistaken identities.

Storm giants are three to four times as likely to be found on or near the ground during one of those infamous storms of the Stonelands. Usually just one of their number is seen at a time, but occasionally they travel in small groups. If there is a group of storm giants, it is a good bet they are accompanied by at



least twice as many cloud giants. The same proportions apply to merchants' daughters and Purple Dragons in the streets of Suzail, but likely for vastly different reasons.

Cloud and storm giants are usually seen in the company of giant eagles, and even rocs (which the storm giants ride as mounts). A campfire tale reports that giants have been seen in the company of a silver dragon as well.

I know for certain that some of these giants lair in the high peaks of the Storm Horns to the south, but if one believes the stories about the Cloudlands, some of them are sure to dwell there. Of giants' lairs—wherever they are—and the society that sky giant races have formed among themselves, I know nothing. They seem to be noble beings, inclined to arrogance and haughtiness. Very rarely do they even pay attention to the events and people of the ground, unless some incident directly concerns them.

Hill Giants

Far more common than their lofty brethren are the baser, cruder hill giants. Hill giants can unfortunately

be found throughout the Stonelands and the Goblin Marches, particularly in the High Moors. Additionally, and with increasing regularity, hill giants are keeping company with goblin and orc tribes. Typically their positions in these are as leaders or as mercenary help, in much the same role that ogres play in other tribes.

These giants are evil and cruel. They exploit those weaker and smaller than they are—when they are not slowly killing and then eating them, that is. Though they sometimes work with other races—the goblinoids already mentioned, ogres or trolls—hill giants generally tire of the effort cooperation takes. When it gets too tedious to bear, they turn on their allies, making them into slaves or dinner.

The only thing saving these allies from gradual annihilation is a hill giant's total lack of subtlety. The smaller races, dull and stupid as they may be, are nevertheless aware enough to see such betrayal coming. They hide, they attack first—many times, they simply slink away, and start another lair.

Hill giants live in small tribes, led by the largest male in the group. They lair in caves, though they





rarely go deep underground. Primarily nocturnal, these giants hunt the bigger creatures in the area for food, raiding humans or goblinoids when they can. They eat any living creature, and seem to have no real preference for one foodstuff over another.

Leaving aside their lack of intelligence, hill giants are fearsome foes. It does not take brains to wield a quarter-ton club convincingly. Even dragons usually avoid attacking one of their tribes.

Most goblin, orc and hobgoblin tribes have developed techniques to fight the monstrosities, including huge traps, clever ruses and careful ambushes. One goblin tribe whose lair is close to the High Moors has placed their main entrance at the end of a narrow chasm. Too tight in places for giants to pass through, the chasm is their first line of defense. If a hill giant were ever so foolish as to pursue tribe members into the gorge, he would most likely get wedged between the narrow walls part-way in. Then the goblins could attack from above and below, trusting the canyon walls to at least partially immobilize their foe.

STONE Giants

Although they normally live in the mountains, some stone giants have taken up residence in the Stonelands. For the most part, these beings avoid both hill giants and border raiders.

Their presence in the area is due to a sacred feeling they hold for the megaliths scattered over the landscape. I do not know any specifics about their beliefs regarding these stones, but I have heard that stone giants do not permanently dwell in the Stonelands. Those encountered are pilgrims of a sort.

Many so-called experts on giants refute these claims. They believe stone giants are too unsophisticated in their thinking to have developed so complex a religious dogma as to require a pilgrimage of any sort. Nevertheless, the giants are here. The experts are not.

While in the region, stone giants hunt what little game that they can find, and gather edible plants. They travel in clans, and make their (temporary) lairs in whatever sheltered area they can—caves, crevasses, etc. Some stone giant clans have been seen traveling with giant goats to keep them supplied in milk and cheese, which they love.

A wizard by the name of Thergeis once told me of

an encounter he and some men-at-arms had with some stone giants. He claims that one among their opponents' number cast spells of surprising power. I had heard of certain giants having meager wizard capabilities, but Thergeis claims the one he faced was extraordinarily powerful. He swears the stone giant wizard had a number of magical items as well—all giant-sized, indicating they were constructed by a giant, for his own use.

Thergeis has always been an accurate source before. If his tale is true, perhaps there is more than meets the eye in these new pilgrims of the Stonelands. The wizard also insisted that the skin of a stone giant is a useful ingredient for a potion that makes one resistant to petrification attacks, like those of a medusa's glare. I have not tried it—I prefer to stay away from medusae, when I can.

ETTINS AND TROLLS

Ettins are sometimes found in the company of hill giants, or even orcs. I have never heard of two or more ettins living together year-round as other giants do, though they do dwell together for short periods at their time of mating. Of all giants, they are the least frequently seen.

I have heard of one orc tribe near the Storm Horns whose witch doctor has managed to bewitch an ettin. It now serves as the orcs' slave. Its strength allows it to construct walls and such in a very short time, and in battle, the orcs actually fit it with a harness so that two of their archers can ride on it, chest and back.

Ettins are, if possible, even stupider and more bestial than hill giants. Beside the uniqueness of having two heads, these giants are best known for their horrible stench and filthy countenance. Because they and their lairs are so disgusting, ettins often carry parasites and diseases. Although they do not have a value system, as such, ettins seem to regard filth as a good thing, and fear cleanliness, purity, and bright light. Their fear of washing extends to water in general. They absolutely refuse to enter a pool, lake or river that runs deeper than mid-thigh on their own bodies.

The possession of two heads is not a troublesome thing to an ettin, for even with both, they do not own enough intelligence or self-awareness to question their dual existence. The right head is generally dominant



Troll Repellent (Evocation)

1st-level Wizard's Spell

Range: 1 yard/level

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 1 turn + 1 round/level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: 20 foot-radius sphere

Saving Throw: Neg.

This spell creates a thin, greasy, greenish mist that carries a potent odor. While this odor is unpleasant to most creatures, it is horrible to trolls, and if they fail their saving throw at +4, they leave the area of the mist for the duration of the spell, refusing to enter again until it is gone.

The mist, unfortunately, is easily dispersed, making it useless in even a light breeze. The spell-caster must concentrate during the duration of the spell, or the mist instantly disperses. The material components for this spell are a bit of ragweed, some troll dung, and an open flame.

when cognizant abilities are required. I have read in some mage's public notes that a left-side-dominated ettin was found. As I recall it was actually more intelligent than an average member of the species—but not by much.

Occasionally, an ettin uses any treasure that it has accidentally found as a bribe, or as trade, to goblins or orcs in return for aid. These smaller beings build traps around the ettin's lair, help defend the ettin from foes, hunt or gather food, dig tunnels, or accomplish any other sorts of tasks the two-headed giant asks of them.

Surprisingly enough, ettins wishing such help always pay for it—they do not collect slaves. Perhaps this is because the ettin does not want the responsibility of watching his slaves to make sure they do not escape, or perhaps it is because the creature just has never imagined the possibility. Orcs and goblins usually are happy to do the work, for often, an ettin offers them payment far beyond what the job is worth. The goblinoids rarely stay long, working only a few months, at most.

Trolls are rare near the surface. Sometimes a gnoll tribe has a troll bodyguard to protect its chieftain, and

occasionally trolls can be found assisting hill giants or goblinoid tribes. More frequently, they appear as aggressors, coming up from the Underdark to raid goblin and orc lairs that extend too far into their dark realm. For this reason, most deep lair egresses are either well hidden or quickly blocked off.

Some orc shamans have discovered a minor spell that creates a strange odor. This odor repels trolls much of the time. I subsequently learned this spell (seemingly a worthwhile investment when I first encountered it), and I can attest that it works—some of the time.

Trolls in this area usually regard orcs, goblins, and their kin either as weaklings to steal from and exploit, or as food. They respect gnolls, and fear giants.

Giant Spiders

These creatures are both hunter and prey in the Goblin Marches. They come in many varieties.

Large spiders build web-nests in the tall grass which grows irregularly across the region. In its web a spider can catch small animals and birds. The web threads are so strong that even goblinoids and humans may potentially be ensnared long enough for the spiders, which dwell in groups of two to 20, to swarm over them.

The orcs call these spiders *terruk-ukl*, and make it a practice to keep both spiders and their webs cleared from the area surrounding their communities. Once a month, six to ten warriors make a perimeter check, slaying any spiders they find, while burning or chopping their webs as well. In this way, they do not have to worry about patrols, young at play, etc. falling accidentally into spider snares. It is exceptionally good housekeeping, and a technique to which the lower goblinkin have not yet caught on.

At least one orc tribe has discovered the root of a particular plant, called the hundir, is poisonous to giant spiders. They often feed hundir root to small animals and then throw them into *terruk-ukl* webs. When the spiders drain the animal of its blood, they ingest hundir poison as well, and die.

Another type of spider found throughout the Marches and the Stonelands is the giant flying spider. This creature makes its home in underground caves





but sometimes comes up to the surface—particularly at night—to hunt. It spins no webs, but flies on insectoid wings and swoops down upon its prey. Its preferred victims include small animals, goblins, kobolds, and even other spiders.

Generally, flying spiders do not attack humans unless they appear to be easy targets. Perhaps that advice is too vague. I can hear Elminster admonishing even as my pen leaves the scroll. All right, if it is details you want, then details you get.

To a flying spider, an easy target is one that is alone, unarmored, and does not keep a significant amount of fire nearby. These spiders are afraid of flame and dislike bright light. A campfire is sufficient to deter them. They are not intelligent enough to recognize a spell caster or realize the inherent dangers such a target holds for them.

Phase spiders are somewhat more intelligent than giant flying spiders. They, too, prefer easy targets, like the flying spider, but flamboyant spell effects, such as lightning bolts, fireballs, even walls of fire or ice, etc., usually frighten them off. Phase spiders spin webs in underground caverns and among the trees of the Farsea Marshes. I have heard that explorers have encountered them in the Stonelands, where they use the huge standing stones as anchors for the webs they build.

With their ability to go back and forth from the Ethereal plane to our own, these monsters can attack their prey, phase out, leaving a bewildered foe with no target to hit, then phase back in and resume the attack, again with surprise. They are there, then they are not, then they are back. Using such tactics, phase spiders are successful preying on even such large and vicious targets as ogres, trolls, and giants.

Due to their abilities and their unnervingly human faces, these spiders are feared and avoided by all of the humanoid population in the region. In fact, hobgoblins revere phase spiders as minor godlings, servants of the divine sent to exact retribution against those that offended them.

Sometimes, a hobgoblin tribe (especially one with a powerful or influential shaman) sets up camp near, but not within sight of, the web of a phase spider. These hobgoblins attempt to capture victims for their "godlings." There are some hobgoblins near the southern edge of the Desertsouth Mountains that

travel northward to capture dwarves as their favored sacrifices. Other hobgoblins settle for travelers or other goblinoids.

It is rumored that the heart of a phase spider is actually a ruby of incredible size and worth, but the treasure must be removed from the creature on the Ethereal plane or it will shatter into worthless shards.

Hieracosphinxes

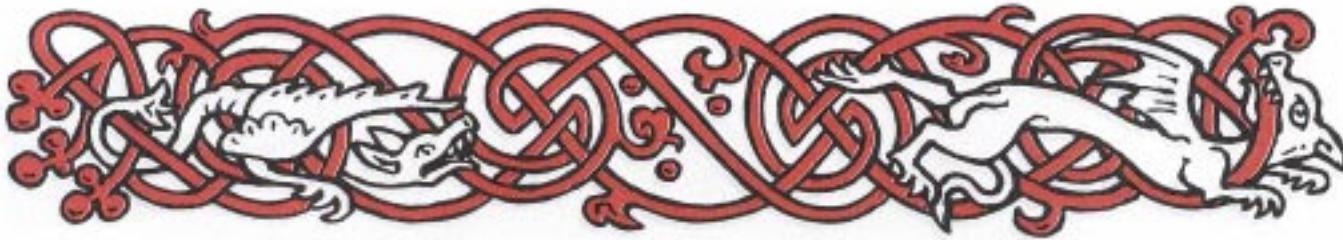
Hieracosphinxes are vicious, winged predators that dwell along the northern edge of the Storm Horn Mountains. Their hunting forays often take them deep into the Goblin Marches, for they prefer to feed on goblins, kobolds, and even orcs. They also fly into the desert of Anauroch. There they hunt androsphinxes, which they hate more than anything, and search for gynosphinxes with which to mate.

Hieracosphinxes are cruel, evil, and intelligent. They usually operate alone in this region, forming groups only to hunt down a hated androsphinx. I have heard that sometimes powerful humans of evil disposition can convince a hieracosphinx to serve as a mount and a companion, but I do not know of the validity of this rumor.

Medusae

Hidden away amidst the caves of the Goblin Marches and the crude obelisks of the Stonelands are terrifying medusae (and their extremely rare male counterparts, whom I will discuss soon). These horrible beings have no enemies in the area, as all creatures fear their petrifying gaze.

A typical medusa spends most of its time in its lair, which is often a remote cave, an abandoned goblin lair, or even a simple wooden cottage in a remote ravine. Like snakes, they do not eat often. This small appetite is helpful, for their gaze often turns potential meals to stone. It seems contradictory that a creature could have an ability which actively hinders its survival, but such is the case for many a magically created monster. Because of this curse, a medusa often seeks out a maedar.



Maedar

Maedar are a personal discovery of mine. They are incredibly rare—so rare, in fact, that very, very few individuals even know of their existence. Few medusae ever find maedar to mate with, but when they do, they mate for life.

A maedar provides food for himself and his mate by smashing her monument-sized victims with his great strength. He has a natural ability to turn the petrified shards back to flesh.

The ties between the two creatures are not purely practical, though. There is a true emotional bond, found only rarely among such evil monsters. A maedar is protective of his mate to the point of obsession. He will hunt her killers until they are dead—nothing deters him except his own demise.

If a maedar and a medusa have offspring, nearly all the unfortunate hatchlings are normal human children—strangely enough—who die when they see their mother. A rare few male babies are maedar. These live, immune to their mother's gaze, as well as to the venom of her snaky locks.

When a maedar and a medusa mate, 99% of the resulting eggs hatch as normal human children. The other 1% of their eggs hatch as maedar, with all of the noted immunities.

Maedar may be encountered outside the company of a medusa, if they have not yet found a mate. It seems the frequency of medusae draws maedar to the Stonelands and the Marches, for they wish to bond as much as medusae do. Bachelor maedar sometimes live among orc or goblin tribes as welcome guests.

In exchange for shelter and food, a maedar can offer his hosts his abilities to move through stone. Using this ability, a maedar can find ore deposits, hidden chambers, or new underground water sources. Maedar are also useful allies in combat, being intelligent tacticians, very strong, and fearless.

But I have not finished with medusae. Without a maedar—and most medusae live their whole lives without a soulmate—a medusa is forced to procreate by seducing humanoid males. She hides her terrifying visage—for a time. (Apparently, for her fabled gaze to work, the victim must see most of the medusa's face

while meeting her stare.) Once a man completes his task, most medusae reward him with petrification. It seems a harsh treatment for a lover.

These offspring, like those of medusa and maedar, hatch snakelike, from eggs. But they look human enough as babies—chubby, pink-skinned girls with a cap of green, stubby hair-tendrils. They always mature into medusae.

A medusa's lair houses no more than three individuals. Those without maedar mates seek other medusae to live with, for companionship and mutual gain. Although it is true that a medusa can turn herself to stone if she sees her own reflected image, she is immune to the gaze of others of her kind.

"Spinsters" medusae must either hunt wearing masks or (more frequently) use bows at ranges great enough that their intended prey does not first fall victim to their gaze. They can wield other weapons as well, and I have met some armed with daggers and even short swords. The bows they favor are short bows—they do not like large, bulky weapons, nor are they particularly strong.

The spinster medusae that I have encountered or heard about do not like to be reminded of their petrifying abilities, and so do not keep their victims in their lairs. In fact, it would seem that these sad, lonely creatures despise their power. Unfortunately, they direct their anger and hatred outward, vilifying most other beings. If not hungry, a medusa is likely to petrify any living creature she comes upon.

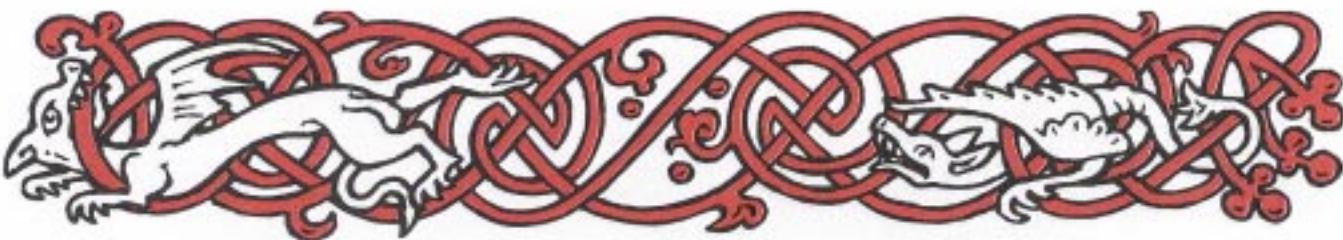
A medusa's value to alchemists and mages wishing to create magical items is great. Her eyes and blood are both used in making ink for spell scrolls. The venom produced by hair/serpents is renowned by assassins and their ilk for its deadliness.

Medusa eyes are used to make ink for *protection from petrification* scrolls, while their blood is used to create potions of *human and mammal control*.

I have heard that some medusae use their own venom to coat their weapons. I also have heard that certain, older medusae have learned to brew a potion which can change stone back to flesh. They use this remedy to restore targets they accidentally petrify. Medusae often trade or sell these potions to others of their kind. Apparently they are popular nostrums, a fact for which many an adventurer has been grateful.

If a fighter falls foul of the monster's gaze, he or she





is petrified. But all is not lost. When (that is, *if*) his companions manage to slay the medusa, most adventuring teams now search the creature's lair for the likely vials of this convenient potion. Finding it, they can restore their stony friend to flesh, not too much the worse for wear.

Although I do not know the exact time limit—nor would I wish to take part in further tests to find out—I do know that a person can survive petrification if she is restored back to flesh soon afterward. Oh, the rewards of personal experience! The gaze of a medusa petrified me. I remained in that state, alive but unconscious, for almost five minutes before my allies were able to transform me back to flesh with an appropriate spell.

There is a snakelike creature known as a boalisk that seems, like maedar, to be immune to a medusa's gaze. Often kept as pets and guardians by medusae, these 25-foot-long snakes not only possess deadly constriction abilities, but also demonstrate a dangerous gaze themselves. A boalisk's stare causes a rotting disease in those it attacks.

I have recently heard the Zhentarim are trying to

gain the aid of both medusae and maedar (*they* apparently know of the males' existence). Rumor has it the wizards of the Zhentarim have uncovered an ancient spell that protects a potential victim from a medusa's gaze. Armed with this spell, the Black Network has made offers of aid, treasure, and power in return for medusae aid as special destructive agents. The Network wishes to send the monsters south to assassinate key individuals and in general sow fear and disorder in the Cormyrean ranks.

I do not know if they have been successful in their recruitment, but they must know that neither medusae nor maedar will long serve human masters. A medusa's contempt for other life is too strong, and a maedar's protectiveness for his mate will draw him to her side—away from any duties entrusted to him.

PERYTONS

Few creatures are a more constant danger to goblins and other races in the Stonelands and southern Goblin Marches than perytons. These





evil, magical creatures prefer to hunt humans; when they cannot be found, other humanoids are the next best target.

Perytons swoop down upon their prey and attack ruthlessly—usually surprising their targets. Their hides are immune to any blows save those by magical weapons, so few orcs or goblins can even wound them.

Sages claim the monsters need human hearts to insure their own fertility. They point to this gruesome requirement, coupled with the fact that perytons have both the scent and the shadow of man, as proof that the creatures were once human. These scholars suppose the ancestors of the peryton race were cursed or magically altered eons ago. I find myself in complete agreement with their reasoning. And I add these further observations, gleaned from years of harrowing encounters.

Perytons are intelligent, crafty, and patient. They are wont to make detailed plans which they follow through to the letter—even if long waits are involved. A goblin will get bored, a hill giant confused. Not so a peryton. Like a cat at a mouse hole, a peryton may look relaxed, but all the time it is watching for its prey to break. Any error can be a fatal error.

Perytons can eat anything, although usually the flesh of those whose hearts they tear out suits them just fine. They do not need to waste time hunting for dinner if they are successful in their first pursuit.

On one of my trips back to civilization—or at least what passes for civilization in Tilverton's high frontier streets—I came upon a disturbing rumor about perytons. I have not been able to establish its truth, but I find it significant enough to repeat it.

It is said that somewhere in the Stonelands, a lowland nest of perytons keeps a mixed group of orcs, humans, elves and ogres captive. These are not simply slaves to be worked to death, or food stockpiled for a macabre feast. The monsters care for their captives as a human drover might tend a herd of beef cattle. Some humanoids are slaughtered for their hearts, and as food for the nest. But enough members of each species are kept alive, and bred, so that they can reproduce and replenish the “herd.”

Wemics

Although there are no traditional centaurs in this area, their rarer cousins, wemics, do roam the plains of the Goblin Marches. These leonine centaurs are enemies of most goblin, orc and hobgoblin tribes, although they have established uneasy truces with a few of their foes.

Each of the numerous prides of wemics is lead by a chieftain, who is always male. Like most of the cultures in the area, wemic society is strongly male-dominated. The reasons for this commonality are not clear. My guess, based on my years of study, and on my own experience leading an adventuring group, is that the male leaning toward warfare may be a determining factor. The Marches are a region of constant strife.

In any event, wemic society is primitive in comparison to human civilization, although these beings are by no means unintelligent. They do make weapons and tools from stone and wood, and they create clay pottery as well. Any metallic items a wemic carries have probably been salvaged from the battlefield, usually off slain orcs.

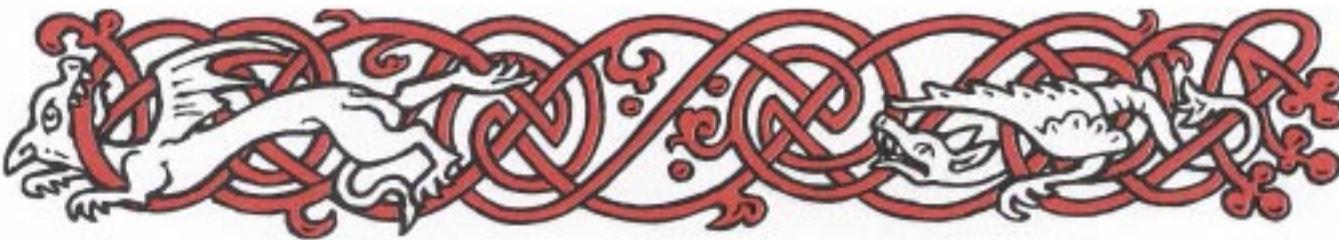
Surrounded by the constant danger of living in the open spaces of the Goblin Marches, a wemic tribe is focused on defense. They are well-skilled in ambushing would-be attackers. Females and even children are taught to fight hand to hand (or should I say tooth and hoof?), although they usually do not wield weapons in battle. Many wemic females do learn to use such tools when they help in hunting.

Wemics are primarily meat-eaters. They stew roots, wild berries, and certain grasses with their kills. Although they usually try for smaller game, a band of wemic hunters may target such powerful beasts as dinosaurs or behir if easier prey is lacking.

Wemic prides are nomadic, and they travel the length and breadth of the Marches. Younger males may offer to guide travelers in exchange for a weapon, shield, or other metal item. They also accept money, knowing that other races value it.

In times of great danger, wemic prides unite into a single nation. A king is chosen from among the chiefs, and he then has complete control over all members of the nation. Such a gathering has not happened in generations, and would probably only occur in response to a major threat—say, the formation of a goblinoid army.





Part Five: Rumors and Events

Ghe regions known as the Goblin Marches and the Stonelands are filled with legends of the ancient past and current happenings. Travelers in the region need to be aware of both. The following are rumors and legends which may or may not be true, but are important to note. They have been gleaned from various sources—tavern tales, goblin legends, dragon secrets, and old forgotten manuscripts.

- An evil human cult has an underground temple in the center of the Goblin Marches. Supposedly they hire mercenary orcs and ogres, and have built a huge labyrinth with the help of kobold and goblin miners. This cult worships Cyric, the Prince of Lies and God of Death. They have many undead servants. These cultists are now attempting to create a dracolich to honor their god, but first they need a willing dragon and some magical formulae from the Cult of the Dragon. They may try to trick otherwise altruistic adventurers into obtaining these formulae for them under false pretenses.
- An ancient book called the *Yielding Tide* speaks of a forgotten city-state that may once have existed in the High Moors. Supposedly the powerful wizards of this city captured a minor goddess in order to steal her power. While the city and its wizards are long gone, those who know the legend (and they are few in number) believe the unnamed goddess is still buried under the city's ruins. She might grant her rescuers their heart's desire—or she might slay them in retributive anger.
- A powerful band of human and dwarven adventurers recently scoured the Goblin Marches, killing all goblinoids they found. Whole tribes were destroyed or forced to abandon their lairs. In the band's wake, displaced goblins roam the countryside, and other creatures, such as medusae, claim the empty cave complexes.
- An orc prisoner captured by Cormyrean soldiers

south of the Storm Horns claims that orc and goblin tribes are much closer to uniting than anyone believes. He boasts that Cormyr will run red with blood shed by orc weapons within two years. He would not give more details—other than to snarl that the goblinoids were not being led by an outside force. If there is any truth to this, the Neidlig goblin tribe must be stirring.

- Travelers from the north say the Great Desert has begun to spread southward again, and that the sand dunes are expanding at a measurable rate. Dust storms and high winds are said to be increasing in the area.
- Rumors of extraordinarily large worgs are spreading throughout the Marches. Supposedly, a tribe of goblins crossbred their worgs with some other creature (some claim a spell or magical item must be involved) to make them more dangerous. These beasts are said to stand almost 10' at the shoulder.
- Huge numbers of undead have begun to appear in the Stonelands, their source or creator unknown. Some blame the Zhentarim, while others claim these are the long-dead inhabitants of an ancient empire which once ruled the area.
- A creature heretofore unknown in the region, probably unknown in all the Realms, has been spotted in the Goblin Marches. This four-armed, insectlike being stands only five feet tall but possesses the strength of a giant. Eyewitnesses report it is cutting a swath of destruction and screaming in an unknown language. A cleric who cast a *tongues* spell says that it is demanding to be returned to its own world.
- A gnoll/orc border raider band found a wooden war galleon amid the huge rocks of the Stonelands. Although the obviously misplaced ship shows signs of incredible age, it is basically intact. Some say it is a magical flying ship, left over from the decadent Asramian assault on the Cloudlands. Others claim the vessel can sail to other worlds.



The Thunder Peaks and The Storm Horns

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Introduction



reetings! You have opened a book that has taken many years to write, for it is the compilation of notes and sketches I made during my many explorations into the Thunder Peaks and Storm Horns. In those mountain ranges I investigated the flora, fauna, monsters, and general wildlife. And I put quill to paper to record my observations for posterity.

During one sojourn I met Elminster, who happened to be attracted to the same patch of rare wildflowers that I was studying. I discovered that,

like me, he came to the mountains to appreciate the plants and to sketch—though he was there more for artistic pursuits.

My concentration was upon the science of the wildflowers, their role among other plants and how they affected the insect life. Elminster frowned slightly when I told him my reason for sketching, and he asked whether I ever paid attention to the beauty in the things I drew. It was then I realized what a true contribution my drawings could make, and that I should take note of when I beheld such pretty sights as the flowers we both prized. I was





intrigued by Elminster's perspective and decided to speak with him further.

Naturally our talk ran through flowers, sketches, and our respective travels over the land seeking rare things to behold and record. When I told him of my exploits in the Thunder Peaks, he perked up and said he was compiling a work that sought to detail the life around him. No one had yet produced anything related to the peaks or the Storm Horns, so he asked if I would submit my notes to him, which I have done, and which you are reading.

Before you read further, allow me to introduce myself and detail my expertise, so the things I say hereon will be taken at their proper value.

I am Nibulus Loral, a sage who has made it his life's work to study the natural things of this world and relate that knowledge to others. I have used my skills as a spellcaster to aid me in my studies and to facilitate my traveling over the two mountain ranges described in this book.

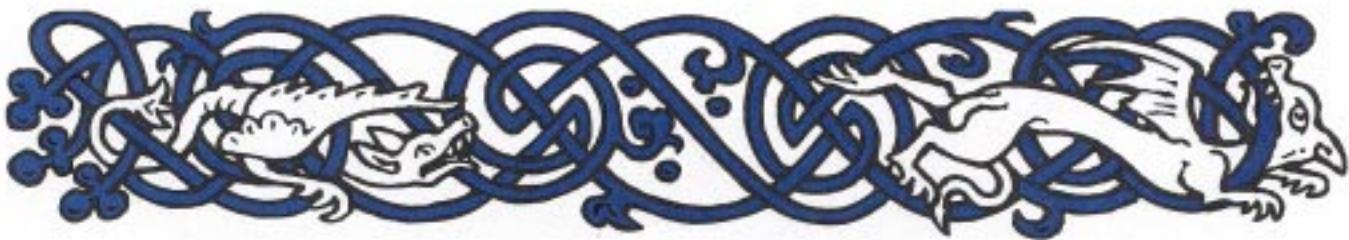
I am a wizard by trade. I spent many years doing the things that wizards are best known for: casting

spells, enchanting weapons, and repelling hoards of orcs and slavering beasts. But, as I aged, I gained a greater appreciation for the simpler things in our lives, those things which are most often overlooked. I began to take note of the variety and beauty of the blooms that grew around my home, and I took up sketching so I could enjoy the images of the flowers year-round.

This led me to the notion of traveling to other parts of Cormyr to see more flowers and plants, and to sketch them as well. This, in turn, took me to study greater subjects, living creatures, and it eventually lead to the creation of this work you have now.

Hopefully this book will reveal new things about creatures with which you are familiar. Also, these writings are sure to tell you things about creatures you never have seen before, or have only heard about in whispered legends. This book might dispel those legends—or build upon them. Either way, I trust it will be of use in your endeavors as you walk through the majestic towers of the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks.





The Mountain Ranges



ecause they are the geographic borders of the Kingdom of Cormyr, the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks mountain ranges have had significant impact on that proud country.

The Thunder Peaks form the eastern border of Cormyr. Even for mountains they're high and are difficult for any creature to traverse. One passage cuts through the Thunder Peaks, named appropriately enough—Thunder Gap. The Gap is not a pleasant walk. Raiders concentrate on it as it's the only pass, monsters live all around it, and the harsh weather makes sure no one has an easy time in the mountains.

Those who have seen the Storm Horns up close quickly realize why the range is spoken of in gritty terms and with cursed breath. It coils around half of Cormyr, preventing the kingdom from expanding farther north or west. The Storm Horns are jagged, rough, and utterly inhospitable to any but the most hearty creature.

The Mountain Peaks

The Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks are unusual in their appearance and form. They are more jagged and steep than most other ranges.

With their steepness, the mountains are unusually difficult to traverse. There are but a few passes through either range and only one road in the entire Storm Horns, the High Road.

A great deal of loose rock of all sizes particularly hampers travel. The rocks, like the peaks, are jagged and sharp. They are notoriously difficult to break, putting anyone who mines in the ranges to the limits of their endurance.

In each range you will find the grandest of peaks which hold secrets known only to dragons and titans, and you will find small rocky hills, insignifi-

cant even to a slug.

The grandest peaks tower above the other mountains in the range. They reach above the clouds and naturally attract the attention of the largest, grandest creatures. Because of this, the tallest peaks have seen the greatest amount of battle by the most powerful beings.

These peaks also inspire song and poetry that have formed styles all their own. Verse about mountains takes on an especially distinctive flavor. Bards singing about them can't help vocalizing in a slightly deeper timbre, reflecting the majesty of the spires.

This beauty can only be seen from a distance. Few passes wind through the ranges. Trekking through them is an arduous task to say the least. Aside from the obvious difficulty terrain represents, the ranges are filled with tribes of orcs and all manner of powerful monsters that welcome visitors.

Hidden Cities

Not well known are stories of cities hidden within the peaks, secreted away by distance.

Of the ones I am familiar with, the only one which recurs is a story of a silver city that is at the base of a tall mountain. All of the stories say the city is between Tilverton and Thunder Gap. The founders of the city are said to be monks who are seeking an inner peace purported to grant them the ability to walk to other planes. This method of travel surpasses the distances allowed by magical spells. Many of these lesser known tales center around the dimension-crossing abilities of the monks.

The Atmospheric Storms

Both mountain ranges share a common characteristic that birthed their respective names.







Throughout the year, regardless of season, they are plagued by the most awful thunderstorms anyone could have the misfortune of being caught in.

The storms are sudden and forceful. They blow in from the horizon with no warning, descending upon weary travelers who struggle through the few passes that have been established.

Frequently, the weather in the ranges will be tolerable, but some wind always blows—from a slight breeze to a strong gust—testing the strength of caravans' ropes that hold the wares to the wagons. If a storm is coming, it might be seen along the distant horizon—if an observer can manage to get a clear, unobstructed view. Even so, such clouds may appear as harmless, fluffy puffs.

The next morning, however, an overcast sky is likely to greet the traveler, and there is no doubt as to what will shortly follow. Within half a day, the storms will arrive in force.

The overcast sky brings with it chilling, forceful winds that test the endurance of the traveler. Gusts sting the skin and threaten to blow away protective clothes. The chill is sometimes frigid enough to cause death for those without protective furs and hides. Uncovered skin becomes numb after only a few minutes of exposure.

During the course of a few hours, the storms make their entrance. Suddenly, the sky appears to fall. The clouds which have blanketed the heavens in an icy grip descend, bringing themselves to the level of the peaks or lower. Massive forces push and squeeze them down to the mountains and upon whomever is unfortunate enough to be caught on the towering spires of rock.

The wind increases in severity in both force and chill. At this stage the frosty blasts of storms are cold enough to freeze standing water. At the highest altitudes, even water secured away in skins will freeze, and the wind here carries a bite only those with magical protection or the finest survival clothes can withstand.

The winds herald violence. Echoing between the peaks, thunder dances along the ground. Standing within the peaks prevents anyone from telling where the storm or thunder is going to or coming from. There's only a constant echoing boom of thunder, threatening to deafen all who are foolish

enough not to cover their ears and take shelter deep inside a cave. So noisy are the peals of thunder that vibrations are felt—painfully so—with one's chest and ribs. Teeth rattle at the sound of the storm's footsteps upon the peaks.

This episode of thunder is short compared to the actual tempest of the storm. Without warning, lightning strikes the tops and sides of the mountains. Terrific bolts stab from the rolling clouds and into the black rock of the peaks. Harsh burn marks are left, and if the lightning should strike a wagon or person, nothing remains. In the open, no measures will prevent one from getting struck by the lightning. Only sheltering deep within a cave or crevice will do. Even those with magical protection or who claimed to have an affinity for the elements have been reduced to ashes and blown away.

For a firsthand account of a storm, the following is offered from Lars Kun, a merchant:

"We became lost from the High Road. We were traveling during a full moon, trying to reach the Bridge of Fallen Men as quickly as we could, as our mission was urgent.

"The moon was guiding us well, and we were confident our goal would be reached soon. We had thoughts of camping at dawn. Then clouds moved over the sky and hid the moon completely from us. Suddenly we were in pitch blackness.

"Then we felt the winds. They picked up and blew out four of our six lanterns. I admit we should have kept calm, but our trepidation got the better of us, and we walked off the High Road and into unmapped terrain, to where we thought a cave might be.

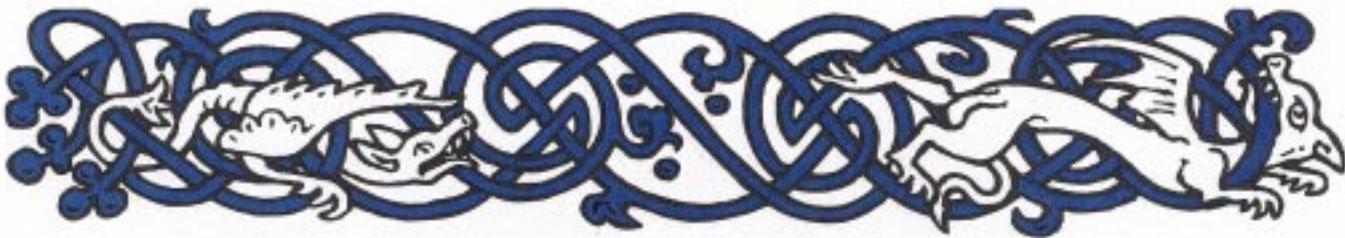
"The winds became suddenly colder, and we decided to make our camp where we stood, rather than stumble in the dark hoping to find a crevice or overhang. We had to make a camp soon or be caught in the storm without any shelter.

"We anchored our tents with rocks, and we arranged ourselves as best we could against the direction of the wind.

"We grouped ourselves in pairs and huddled together for warmth. The winds clawed at our tents, trying to find a way to get to us. It was as if invisible harpies were ripping at the canvas, clamoring to find some morsel inside. The cold knifed through the fabric of our tents as if it were made of sheer silk. I felt as though I







was standing naked in an icy lake at winter. My companion and I held each other tightly against the cold and wind. Our tents started flapping so loudly we could barely hear shouts from other tents, shouts that were frantic prayers.

"The cold worsened and we heard thunder. It seemed to come from the east for a few seconds, but then the sound was quickly all around us. Horrific booms assaulted our ears. We lost contact with the people in the other tents, and I had trouble hearing my companion.

"Real fear of whether we'd be able to survive this storm filled me. The tent was dark, the lantern having been knocked over and the frame blown out. The thunder and wind accosted us from all sides and made our tent walls into drum skins. The storm hammered us and slammed against our ears mercilessly.

"A blinding flash of light and a brutal crack that made the mountain sound as if it were breaking in two flooded us with terror. We foolishly opened our tent flap to see what had happened and saw that one of our tents had disappeared. A black patch of ash washing down the mountain was the only evidence of my companions' fate. All around us constant flashes of lightning brought light to the dark. It was a light brighter and more constant than the full moon that had guided us earlier. Brilliant flashes all around us with cracks of thunder both loud and distant assailed us. One of our number went screaming into the rocks in a fit of terror. His fate is unknown.

"The rains came shortly after that, and my companion and I held onto each other for fear of being swept away in a flood. We did not know what to expect next from this terrible storm. With our hearts racing and bodies trembling, we managed to endure the storm without becoming deaf or going insane from fear.

"The storm lasted until morning. We saw the lightning flashes go away, then the thunder, and finally the black skies. The horror was replaced by the golden embrace of the sun.

"We lost much equipment and several members of our party. The most important lesson I learned from the incident was that sheltering in a cave is perhaps the only way to avoid the wrath of the cursed mountain range."

Weather in The Storm Horns

The Storm Horns experience most of their rainfall on their eastern side. This is also where most of the

plant growth is as well. Winds almost always blow from east to west across the Storm Horns.

The temperature of the mountains is cool most of the year, especially at higher altitudes. However, in the summer the area near the Farsea Marshes can be extremely hot and humid, and the heat can test the endurance of all who pass through that locale. Snow falls in the winter over much of the Storm Horns, but only at the higher peaks.

The summer is usually a season where no new snow falls even at higher elevations, but blowing snow makes its way down the mountains during the late fall.

Weather in The Thunder Peaks

Two weather patterns seem to influence this mountain range. Both sides of the range see rain, as well as a current of air blowing onto the range from the east and west, though the wind from the west is noticeably weaker than the eastern wind. Because of this, a great variety of plants grow on both sides of the range.

The winds coming to the Thunder Peaks are usually constant throughout the year, making for a much cooler year-round temperature than that in the Storm Horns. Winters, especially in the northern regions of the Thunder Peaks, can be especially cold and brutal. While snow may not fall all through the winter, enough of it blows down from the higher peaks to cause serious hazards for those passing through Thunder Gap and Tilver's Gap.

The Thunder Peaks also have a greater annual rainfall than the Storm Horns. This abundance of water forms the source of three major rivers leading out of the range: the Immerflow, the Semberflow, and the Arkhen.

The Thunder Peaks are also subject to a greater degree of weathering than other mountains in Cormyr. This has resulted in some spectacular formations and views, especially, of course, during sunset. Find a concentration of such wonders in the southern area of the Thunder Peaks near Hooknose Crag and the High Dale. The sights beheld there have inspired many bards to praise that beauty in song.





Special Rules for Storms and Weather

General Weather Conditions

The weather in each mountain range can be very unpredictable. A day can start warm and sunny in the morning and be below freezing by afternoon. Roll on the tables below every six hours of game time to determine what the weather conditions are like on either mountain range.

Wind Conditions

d6 Roll	Result
1	Calm, 0 mph
2	Light breeze, 5-10 mph
3	Gusting, 0-50 mph
4	Windy, 30-40 mph
5	Strong wind, 50+ mph
6	Storm*

Gusting Winds: Gusting winds are characterized by periods of calm breezes lasting 1d10 minutes followed by short bursts of strong wind lasting 1d10 minutes.

Windy: Windy conditions make it difficult to travel through the mountains. All movement is reduced by half.

Strong Winds: Strong winds can blow some characters over. Those with Strengths of 15 or less must make successful Strength checks to remain standing against the winds. Movement is reduced by 75%.

* See storm section to determine the effects of a storm.

Mountain Temperatures

Generally the temperatures in the mountains decrease with altitude. The higher up one goes, the colder it gets. During a storm the temperature can change dramatically due to massive air currents sweeping in rapidly. The Storm Temperature Conditions table shows how much the temperature changes during a storm. The DM will need to determine a starting temperature based on the season of the year and the altitude

of the characters when a storm hits. Temperatures tend to take a slightly more drastic change toward cold than toward hot because of the effects of altitude. Obviously, when temperatures drop below 32° F, precipitation during a storm changes to sleet, freezing rain, or snow.

Storm Temperature Conditions

d6 Roll	Result
1	Hotter, +2d10° F
2	Warmer, +1d10° F
3-4	Same, up or down 1d4° F
4	Cooler, -1d10+3° F
6	Cold, -2d20+3° F

Storm Severity

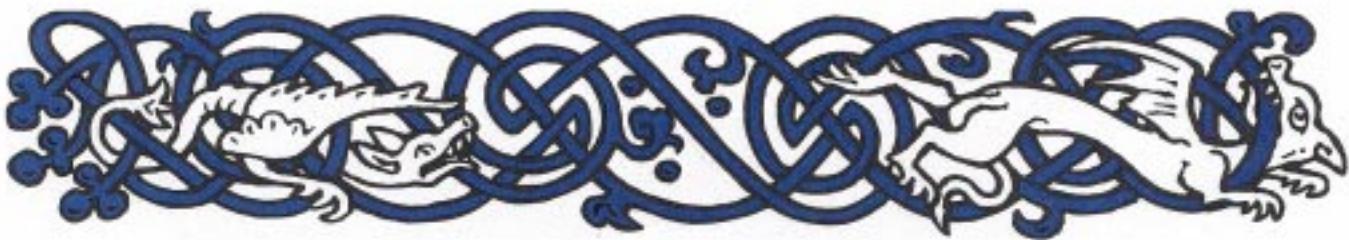
When a storm is indicated by the Wind Conditions table, the PCs are in for severe weather, with all of the usual characteristics (rolling thunder, heavy rain, etc.). The severity of that storm is indicated by the number of times lightning strikes near the party. To determine this, roll 1d10. The result indicates how many lightning bolts have a chance of striking the PCs within the next 15 minutes (roll once for every 15 minutes of game time for the duration of the storm). For each lightning bolt that has a chance to hit, roll an attack against a random PC. Lightning bolts have a THAC0 of 18, and inflict 3-36 (3d12) points of damage. Note that certain materials make a PC more susceptible to lightning attacks. Characters in metal armor, especially plate mail, and those carrying pole arms are particularly threatened. Against such characters, the lightning is considered to have a THAC0 of 9 and to cause an additional 1d6 points of damage.

Precipitation

With the storms come a great amount of rain. The rains are always heavy and obscure vision, restricting it to 10 feet.

Storm Duration

Storms last from 15 minutes to one hour. Roll a four-sided die to determine how many 15-minute blocks of time the storm lasts.



Common Life in The Mountains

Before we entertain discussion regarding the flamboyant, significant, and bizarre creatures inhabiting the Thunder Peaks and Storm Horns, we must establish a foundation on which to build. That is because before one talks about the unusual, one needs to speak of the usual, so the difference between the two will be made more clear.

This chapter deals with normal plant and animal life in the mountain ranges. It details what one would find if one never encountered a vile monster or fabled creature from another plane. These are things everyone will see, hear, smell and face most everyday. This text is important because of the knowledge it imparts. With it, you will be better equipped to withstand the natural trials of the two mountain ranges of Cormyr.

Flora

The amount and diversity of growth on the mountains is great. A number of factors influence what grows where, but each plant serves some function in the ecosystem.

The greatest factor when discussing plant life in the mountains is the altitude. In general, the higher the altitude, the less plant life one is likely to encounter.

At lower altitudes, the plant life basically resembles that of the surrounding non-mountainous environment. The Thunder Peaks near Hullack Forest are themselves heavily forested up to the timberline. In fact, were it not for the gradually steepening grade, a traveler would never realize that a mountain was being walked upon. Likewise, the Storm Horns—next to the Farsea Marshes—teem with species that do not require the rich swamp environment and can survive on the comparatively arid soil of the mountains.

As the altitude becomes greater, the size and frequency of plants decreases. Trees become smaller, especially those close to the timberline, and plants become tiny.

Above the timberline, which is generally the point at which only moss and tundra grow, sometimes inch-high flowers are found. Each stage of altitude has plants unique to that level.

Notable Plant Products

Many plants found in the mountains are not generally located in other areas. The reason they grow so well on the mountains is because of the thinner air and increased exposure to sunlight.

Bowen's Flower: This is a small flower that has tiny red and light purple petals and very thin stems. It grows very much like a weed and can be found everywhere. But, it cannot reproduce well—it never spreads over a large area, instead claiming just tens of square feet here and there. The plant is used in the concoction of potions designed to tranquilize humans. Such elixirs are also very effective for bugbears. The drink made from this flower has a mild sedative effect and is not very suitable for putting people to sleep against their will. The exception is bugbears. If the potion is slipped into their ale, they'll almost assuredly fall asleep within minutes.

Kirin's Leaf: This reddish-brown leaf is found on small trees called kirin near the timberline in the eastern ridges of the Thunder Peaks. The leaf is also used in potions, and when combined with certain chemicals and imbibed, the leaf has the effect of changing the temperament of the drinker. The effect is to generally reverse whatever mood the drinker is in. Sad people will become happy, angry folks will settle down. The potion never has been made strong enough to cause someone to behave or feel completely contrary to their nature. Good people do not suddenly start thinking about or enacting evil acts, for example. However, the leaf is an





essential part of an elixir that can aid in the treatment of disturbed individuals, and it might be used to stop a bar fight here or there.

Bark of the Turis: This is an effective healing agent. The bark is very tough and difficult to peel from the turis tree, which is found at the top of the timberline in both mountain ranges. However, its removal is worth the effort. The underside of the bark is coated with a sap which when applied to cuts aids in their healing. Although the effect on a wound is hardly as rapid as magical healing, use of the bark over the passage of time prevents scarring.

In addition to unusual plants, you can enjoy a plethora of beautifully colored grand flora with large leaves, delicate flowers, and stems strong enough to be woven into cloth. A great variety of fruits and edible plants provide sustenance for many who live alongside the mountains.

Rules for PLANT Products

Bowen's Flower

This flower, when powdered and mixed in a drink, will put someone to sleep in a number of minutes equal to the individual's Constitution score divided in half. For example, a person with a Constitution score of 18 will fall asleep in nine minutes. The subject will remain asleep for 1d10 minutes and can be roused by any stimuli louder than normal conversation.

Kirin's Leaf

When powdered and mixed with a drink, the leaf will change the mood of the subject in the number of minutes equal to the subject's Constitution, plus an additional 1d10 minutes.

Bark of the Turis

The sap will heal overnight any individual wound that is less than 4 hit points in severity. Further, it will heal scars caused by normal weapons at double the usual rate, leaving the skin unblemished. However, it cannot prevent scarring caused by magical weapons.

Spices

The lower regions of both mountain ranges harbor unusual plants that can be ground and made into spices. These spices sometimes can be difficult to find, but pockets and hidden areas exist where each spice described here can be found in abundance.

Ateris: Ateris is a good friend to those who journey to Marsember during the warmer months. This spice carries a heavy perfume that lingers and clings to clothes unlike anything I have thus experienced. The plant is ugly and thorny, being brown in color and covered by sharp, tough bristles over almost its entire length. But it has a blooming flower that has within it a bud that holds a powerful fragrance. This bud secretes an invisible substance, nearly intangible, yet if a bud is dabbed or wiped across any surface, that surface will smell pleasant for about two days. Ateris has a special use for when one needs to venture into an area that smells particularly bad. A small dab below each nostril will mask anything in the air, leaving one to smell only the sweetness of the plant. I would liken the smell to that of roses, but with only a tinge of the muskiness most roses carry. Ateris is much sweeter and more potent.

Care should be taken, however, not to get any pieces or dust of the bud actually inside the nostrils. The particles will likely overload the nose and cause a burning sensation. This happened to me once, but forcing water into my nose (no easy task) helped a great deal. Unfortunately, I lost my sense of smell for the rest of the day.

I have met only one person, a human, who is allergic to the plant. When he applied it under his nostrils his face broke out in a terrible rash that lasted a week. Other than this one unfortunate incident, I have not encountered any difficulty with the fragrance, and I keep a handful of buds secured in a cork-topped vial. Even releasing the cork for a few seconds is sometimes enough to rid any room of foulness.

Unfortunately, the buds do not last very long after being uprooted or removed from the host plant. The longest I have been able to preserve a bud in a corked vial is two weeks.

Ateris grows naturally in many areas of the



Thunder Peaks near Tilverton. When a patch of this plant takes hold on a hillside at the foot of the mountains, the scent will carry for three miles easily. The patches are not terribly difficult to find—especially if one has a keen nose and the wind is right.

Bentilan: Bentilan is a spice that was made famous by one of the more expensive restaurants in Arabel. It is found only in the eastern reaches of the Storm Horns, but is also grown by the restaurant as well, though where is a closely guarded secret. The plant appears as a small thin-stemmed flower that bears a tiny red-brown berry. This berry, when pulverized, makes a wonderful powder that greatly enhances the taste of most beverages, including water. When added to drink, it dissolves and brings a pinkish hue to clear drinks and turns most alcoholic drinks red. Whatever taste the drink is known for will come to the tongue in greater quantity. The spice carries a faint scent that dissipates quickly in the air.

If consumed by itself, however, the powder has a violently bitter taste that can even cause illness. If you are in the eastern portion of the Storm Horns, and a dull almond smell fills your nostrils, you are close to a patch of bentilan. The berries from the plant, uncrushed, are worth two Cormyrean silver pieces per pound. Merchants know places in Marsember and Suzail where the berries will command higher rates.

Maxoris: Maxoris is the favorite preservative of the caravans owned by a small merchant company based in Proskur. Maxoris is a white powder similar to salt, yet it has slightly larger grains and carries with it a faint aroma of musk. Meat covered and packed in maxoris will remain preserved for many weeks, far longer than meat will last when preserved with salt or other spices. The larger grains of the spice easily wash off the meat they cover.

However, this spice has a drawback associated with its benefit. No matter how thoroughly the meat is washed, it will carry a musty taste. This taste is not wholly unpleasant, but it detracts from the natural flavor of the meat.

Some people have a particular aversion to the maxorian taste, a severe enough revulsion to pre-

vent them from eating meat packed in it.

This unpleasant taste has so far prevented it from becoming a commercial success for those who deal with it, but it does have its uses and following. Maxoris is most commonly used by travelers who must venture a long distance, yet who want to enjoy a healthy portion of meat during the journey and don't or won't have the opportunity to hunt.

Arctic explorers, I have heard, are especially fond of maxoris. In the cold regions they can't taste much of anything anyway.

Maxoris is actually the seed from the maxor plant found almost exclusively along the southern Storm Horns, near the banks of the Tun River. It is also grown near Proskur, along the Tun. Know maxor plants by their shoulder height and long, thin, drooping leaves that are almost fernlike. The seeds are contained at the top, within the bulb. Ten plants are needed to produce enough maxoris to thoroughly pack one pound of fresh meat.

Peral: Peral is a clinging vine that is the scourge of farmers and gardeners everywhere. It grows across the ground and literally chokes other plants at their base. Only trees with a diameter greater than half a foot can withstand the vine's assault.

While this vine is lethal to other plants, it contains a sap which is useful to humanoids. The sap is sticky and sweet, much like honey, and makes a wonderful ingredient in cooking, but only when a trace amount is used. It is most sought after for its adhesive characteristics. A touch of the stuff is enough to seal envelopes or other small items. The glue lasts for up to a week before crystallizing and crumbling to dust.

This glue is expensive because the vines are difficult to grow. The vines will only produce the sap when among other plants. The sap must play a role in the vine's strangulation. It takes three seasons of consecutive growth for the vine to mature enough to produce sufficient sap to make farming it worthwhile. Its expense makes it popular among the wealthy. A person, especially a merchant, who is able to deliver a note before the glue has crystallized is someone with connections and efficiency, and worthy of respect.





Fauna

As in most regions of Faerûn, fauna in the mountains of Cormyr encompasses natural wildlife and monstrous creatures. I shall treat the animals first; the monsters require a section to themselves. (Would that it were so simple to separate them in life as it is on paper.)

Hill Animals

The hills that form the skirts of the mountains have their share of abundant wildlife. This wildlife is really no different from that found on any other hillside in any part of the world. But the effect the animals have had on those who live near the hills is worth mentioning.

There has been a great deal of trapping of hill animals in recent years, and a particular demand for marsupials such as the opossum. It has become popular for people to sport purses made from the pouches of marsupials and other soft furry creatures. I am not one to advocate the complete banning of trapping and hunting, but the concept of storing my coins in a purse that once held babies is disturbing. I shall never fully understand the rationale of the fashion-conscious "elite."

Hunting and trapping of hill animals has likewise increased and branched out to include nearly anything with fur. This itself has had the result of depleting the native population of small animals that normally serve as a food supply for larger creatures. With the elimination of their food source, these animals have ventured closer to small towns and villages seeking food—perhaps drawn there by the scent from the carcasses of their usual prey.

Pelts are an exceptionally popular business in towns like Espar, Waymoor, Suzail, Thunderstone, and Tilverton, as they are closest to hill regions wherein the more popular animals live.

Burrowing Animals

As the mountains of the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks are made of rock, burrowing animals are rare. The hills around the mountains have many deposits of soils and loose ground in which all manner of small burrowing animals make their homes.

It is important to mention these animals for they,

too, have had an impact on life around them—particularly in the area of Hooknose Crag, a pass in the southern area of the Thunder Peaks. These creatures serve as the only reasonable explanation for some recent events.

Just to the south of the pass is the Vast Swamp. Apparently many burrowing animals have actually dug their tunnels into the swamp. Their tunnels quickly fill with swamp water and assorted muck, and the animals dig farther in the opposite direction. Unfortunately, the muck has had the tendency to flow through the tunnels as well, resulting in large pools of fetid swamp muck collecting in areas of Hooknose Crag.

This has attracted all sorts of insects and vile creatures, and in some places along the pass it has changed the environment slightly, making it much less hospitable than it once was. Why there is a good deal of burrowing around the swamp, and why the digging itself seems to have taken a dramatic increase is unknown. I have surmised that there might be some threat in the hill country in the Thunder Peaks that has driven the poor animals south, toward the swamp.

Land Animals

This rather broad category of wildlife applies to those creatures that live not only in the mountains and hills, but those that live on the plains and travel into the mountains.

The Storm Horns boast a high population of such animals, mostly because of the security the king's forest provides. Deer is the most often encountered animal of significance to travelers on the plains near the Horns.

Black Bears

Although not an unusual creature to find in the lower regions of either mountain range, the bear has some interesting effects on the other animals living in the ranges, which need mention here.

The black bears are the most commonly encountered species in both ranges. They are not a threat to civilization, nor does the activity of humanoids appear to threaten the species. However, it has been discovered recently that some as yet unidentified predator has chosen the black bear as one of its



primary sources of food.

Black bear carcasses are found regularly by mountain men in the Thunder Peaks near Hooknose Crag. The carcasses have been terribly mutilated, and most of the flesh has been eaten away by massive, powerful jaws equipped with long, sharp teeth.

The manner of creature that could be causing this is a mystery, for no known animal has a penchant for black bears.

Black bears are technically omnivores, being able to eat other animals and nuts and berries. But vegetation is their main source of food. Small animals are usually targets of opportunity for the bear. They rarely eat anything humanoid-sized.

Cave Bears

Adding to the strangeness, there have been no discoveries of cave bears in such a mutilated condition. If a creature were living in the mountains and had a taste for bear, it would seem cave bears would be a natural, prime target, for they generally remain in one place and would be easily accessible.

Part of the reason why cave bears are spared might have to do with the fact that stone giants have a fondness for cave bears and regularly use them to guard their lairs, and the giants take care of their pets well.

Except in the company of stone giants, cave bears are rarely found in either mountain range. If angered, they can be ferocious and able combatants even without training. If trained, they won't hesitate to attack something larger and more fierce-looking than themselves.

Cave bears are also omnivores, but their diet weighs heavily toward flesh, making them natural guards.

Brown Bears

Brown bears have been hunted in greater numbers by humans and demihumans in the past few years, thanks to a new industry in Thunderstone. It has become fashionable for some in Thunderstone to create clothing out of bear hides. The primary buyers of the clothes are travelers who pass through Thunderstone and the High Dale on their way in and out of Cormyr. It is these hunters who were

gathering hide for clothing who discovered most of the mysterious black bear carcasses.

The brown bear has a greater taste for small animals than the black bear, but otherwise their diets are the same. Brown bears are more easily agitated than black bears and are more likely to attack a humanoid than not. Whereas a cave bear would likely eat its prey, the brown bear will usually just maim it and leave it to die.

Mountain Wildlife

Each mountain range has a large population of wildlife existing in the higher altitudes, surviving on whatever plants grow at and above the timberline. These animals are hardy, able to withstand cold temperatures, high winds, and meager foraging diets.

Red Sheep

One of the more unusual creatures of this ilk is the red, sheep, so called because of the red-brown tint to its woolly hair. It's usually found in the Thunder Peaks.

These are bizarre crosses between sheep and goats. They eat plants, but they have been known to eat cooked meat. They never have been seen eating raw meat, however. A large herd of red sheep lives in the Thunder Peaks along the banks of the Semberflow. Travelers to the area note that hundreds of red sheep can be seen at one time, all crowding for the lush greenery that grows along the river banks. When approached, the herd will bolt quickly back into the Thunder Peaks, seeking the sheerest face they can. With startling nimbleness, they scale the face and take refuge on the smallest of ledges.

Alas, they are truthfully easy to hunt, for a crossbow bolt or well-aimed arrow can seek out even the most inaccessible red sheep. Once they find their ledge, they seem unwilling to move any farther away, feeling their sanctuary safe enough. These unmoving targets are easy shots for even novice archers. The hair of red sheep is extremely coarse and tough, almost to the point of being woolen. Their coat is wonderful material for winter cloaks and other protective clothing. It is warm, easy to weave into cloth when using the proper techniques,





and (unlike common sheep's wool) does not smell when wet. More, it is unusually resistant to moisture. Red sheep blankets are also very popular, and they are sold in quantity in Tilverton.

Wild Yaks

The wild yak is another unusual creature inhabiting the Thunder Peaks. The yak resides mostly in the northern reaches of the Thunder Peaks, north of Tilver's Gap. They are also found in the higher peaks and in the southern Thunder Peaks as well.

I make the distinction between the wild yak and the domestic yak because there are significant differences between them. The yak is not usually found in either mountain range, so it is odd for domestic ones to be encountered here. Yet farmers in Thunderstone and Kulta swear by their animals, claiming they are superior beasts of burden. These domesticated yaks are very calm and sedate and do indeed make placid carriers.

But the yaks found in the peaks, those untainted by the influence of civilization, are wild beasts with fire in their hearts. They are not wont to investigate new things or wander into campsites. They stick to themselves and consider anything as big or bigger than they are a threat. When confronted, which to them could amount to a traveler merely standing on a hillside looking at the herd, the entire group of yaks, outnumbered or not, will charge to attack.

Their large horns and their practiced, nimble footing on rocky terrain make them a real threat to people. Once the charge is begun, any number of things could happen. The yaks could charge and not stop, throwing themselves toward the threat with abandon. They could charge just once, then flee with great speed, or they may charge, wait, then charge again. Yak behavior has been difficult for me to grasp, even after hearing numerous eyewitness accounts of their attacks.

Wild yaks change their locale with the season. During summer, they stick to the highest areas of the peaks, trying to find snow. They eat whatever grows there and will also venture downhill to where lush plants are, but only during the cooler dusk and dawn hours. For the winter, they go to

the warmer valleys in the Thunder Peaks and sometimes travel along the banks of whatever streams are still flowing.

The wild yak has a thick fur coat that is highly protective. It is extremely warm and enables the yak to survive blizzards with relative ease. When caught in a blizzard, the yak will turn so its hind end faces the direction of the wind, whereupon it merely waits until the wind dies down and then continues on its way.

This behavior, even present in domesticated yaks, has resulted in the saying of "go yakward" and variations of it among the folks of Thunderstone and Kulta. It has come to mean "avoid danger or unpleasantness." It is also used to refer to town leaders who refuse to see the farmers' point of view or who seem to ignore impending issues. When that happens, the farmers start talking about the "yaks" in office.

Serow

The serow is a rare creature found in the southern regions of the Storm Horns. They enjoy the warmest weather they can find, and so do not venture very far north at all. However, travelers to the region, especially near the coast of the Lake of Dragons, are likely to spot them.

Serow are small, goatlike creatures which have daggerlike horns. They can be found at pretty much any altitude in that region, though they tend to keep themselves in areas of thick growth—which limits them to lower ground.

Serow can be an especially helpful aid to travelers. Serow enjoy sheltering in caves, for the caves are good defenses against the elements, are always cool, and are generally safe from some certain (especially airborne) predators. Following a serow to its cave can be the measure that saves a group of travelers from an approaching storm.

Unfortunately, serow do not allow strange creatures into their caves. Anyone attempting to get into such a cave is likely to be attacked by the dominant male of the group. However, if the dominant male is defeated, the visitor will be seen as superior and allowed to shelter in the cave without being harassed. In my experience, defeating a serow is best done by putting it to sleep. A simple



sleep spell cast upon the leader displays sufficient superiority to the rest of the group. The sooner this is done the better, for the serow respect prompt subdual.

Mountain Lions

It would be remiss of me not to mention the large cats that inhabit the Storm Horns. These large cats have been encroaching farther into civilized areas of Cormyr during the past few years. The largest number of them still live in the mountains, particularly in the northern parts of the Thunder Peaks. But reported sightings closer to towns and villages have increased.

This suggests that their natural prey, small animals, has been diminishing of late. Part of the reason for this might be the displacer beast attacks in the Tilver's Gap region of the Thunder Peaks. As the mountain lions moved (or fled) from that region and went south, they encountered more civilization and therefore easy access to food. They also have been seen venturing into the eastern portions of Hullack Forest, seeking to eat some of the food stores of the monster-clearing parties therein.

Wolves

Cormyr, like all kingdoms, has animals that seem to hang on without consuming a great amount of food because prey is scarce or because of the encroachment of mankind. These animals will rarely see a "good year" as far as their food supply or increasing their range is concerned.

Cougars used to be resented most by Cormyte farmers, shepherds, and ranchers because of their raiding. Mountain wolves now hold that position. They live in the lower regions of the Storm Horns near the king's forest and also in the Thunder Peaks near Tilverton. They come out of the mountains during the night and feed upon farm animals.

An official hunting effort against the wolf is likely to take effect soon, similar to the one previously organized against cougars. The success of this effort remains to be seen, considering most mercenaries and fighting persons are accepting offers for more glamorous assignments, such as clearing monsters from the Hullack Forest.

Scavengers

Flying high above the lower peaks and hills of both ranges are mountain-dwelling winged scavengers.

Vultures: Several breeds of vultures have taken well to the environment offered by the ranges and thrive on the remains of the numerous deaths that occur there. Vultures are most often seen feasting upon the remains of the battles between the orc tribes in the Storm Horns. Further, they prey upon small animals in their natural setting, and they also rely on the demise of unwary travelers for food.

Human Scavengers: In addition to winged scavengers descending upon battle sites, a fair number of people seek fields of struggle to scavenge equipment and belongings from the fallen. These men have taken to using vultures and their like to find where battle sites are. Some of these greedy individuals have become adept at "reading" the vultures and can tell just by observing their flight and behavior how many creatures have died, and of what species.

I have been told by these men that the easiest reading is one that tells whether the fallen prey is already being picked over by land-based scavengers.





Monsters of The Peaks

Ghe two mountain ranges have their share of creatures which claw their way through the jagged peaks. In my travels, I have had the opportunity to view creatures from various parts of this world, and I have taken note of distinct differences between like creatures that inhabit the Storm Horns and the Thunder Peaks.

Winged Creatures

The high peaks of the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks are populated by all manner of avians. With a proliferation of standard birdlife found in other ranges comes a strong and interesting collection of unusual winged animals that merit description.

Aarakocra

My first encounter with these bizarre crosses between bird and demihuman was during an expedition to search for a rare flower. I had just located the species I was seeking and had begun to sketch it. I was situated just a few feet above the timberline, near a spring that issued from the side of the mountain. There was a patch of grass and loose soil, and in that—my flowers.

I heard the flapping of wings and felt a rush of air about me. I looked and saw a large bird that had a 20-foot wingspan and an odd-shaped, slightly snubbed-nosed beak. But the creature also had muscular legs like a human and clawed birdlike feet. It had humanoid arms, but with exceptionally curled and long fingers ending in claws. From its arms grew its wonderfully red wings. Its body was likewise red, though a little darker shade.

It looked very much like someone had dressed up in a bird costume. I would have assumed just that, were it not for the fact that I saw it in flight. The aarakocra came up to me and peered at me strangely. It made a series of chirping grunts which might have even been words, then bent down and ate half of the

rare flowers I was in the process of sketching. That inspired me to begin sketching the strange bird. But before I could get an outline, it flew away.

I returned to that spot many times and eventually was able to meet one again. I was prepared with a magical talisman that enabled me to communicate in any tongue. And it was my fortune that indeed the chirping grunts were the bird creature's native language. I spoke with this second bird and established good relations with it.

Aarakocra are a race of solitary intelligent birds. They range in color from deep to light red for males and deep to light brown for females. There is very little size difference between the males and females.

Their tribes number from 10 to 30 and are led by the eldest male. I do not know how many tribes of aarakocra exist in Cormyr, for even this aarakocra did not know. They stay away from civilization and other tribes of all creatures as much as possible, save for their hunting prey.

The hunting territory they claim seems to have no bounds. They use their ability to fly great distances to hunt wherever they can. I did hear this aarakocra speak about domestic animals as easy prey. When I told him that those animals were property, he seemed unable to grasp the concept of herding.

They live in glorious vine nests which are decorated with beautiful pennants, flags, and banners. They seem interested more in the color of such things, rather than the designs that appear on them. I noticed several Purple Dragon pennants among their collections, as well as signets from Suzail, Eagle Peak, High Horn, Tyrluk, and even Castle Crag.

A wondrous feature of these avians is their ability to summon air elementals. Their second eldest male serves as the tribe's shaman. He, along with others, is able to call an elemental by dancing in a circle and chanting. The chanting is a terrible noise that is difficult for human ears to endure, but the summoning process is fascinating.

Once summoned, the elemental will do the tribe's bidding. It was explained to me that the ele-



mental is used by this tribe primarily to investigate caves in the Storm Horns, for the aarakocra are terribly claustrophobic and will not enter caves.

To my great misfortune, they described a time when the elemental found a huge cache of shiny objects and colorful vines—a prime treasure for the aarakocra. They have not gone to the cache or recovered anything from it because of some great fear of retribution from whoever or whatever owned the objects, but I could not get out of them what exactly it was that they feared. They would only speak of a “great power” that would destroy the tribe if anything was taken from the cave. The cave, they naively told me, is located “a few peaks” west of what I surmised is the Bridge of Fallen Men.

The aarakocra, while terribly shy and private creatures, will sometimes choose to interact with others, including humanoids. The price for such interaction is always shiny material and colorful vines or cloth.

Although I was not able to see them in combat, the aarakocra seem very capable of handling themselves, even against armed humanoids. Their claws are sharp enough to tear through the toughest rope as though it was a strand of fine hair, and their beaks can crush a goat’s skull as easily I would a pea pod.

Griffons

These majestic avians have a much-deserved reputation. They are menaces to anyone on a horse, and their fearlessness in battle is legendary.

Most of my knowledge of the griffon prides of Cormyr comes from a man-at-arms of the Purple Dragons. It seems our king desired to have a griffon mount at one time, and he was among the group of Purple Dragons sent to attempt to find and bring a griffon to Suzail.

The attempt failed. The troop was set upon by a dozen griffons—the largest force any of them had seen attacking at once. Many believe the griffons had foreknowledge of the Purple Dragons. Who betrayed the soldiers—and how—remains a mystery. Their screeches panicked the horses the Purple Dragons were on and prevented the men from maintaining formation or order.

Nearly all of the horses were taken away in the first lightning-fast swooping attack. This ended the

effort to secure a griffon for King Azoun IV. However, my friend was assigned to investigate the extent to which the griffons infested the area where the Purple Dragons were attacked, which was several miles northwest of Castle Crag.

It appears the griffons have staked a claim close enough to Gnoll Pass and the Moonsea Ride to seriously harass caravans. Their threat is growing, and it is likely the Purple Dragons will be assigned soon to destroy as many griffons as possible to allow safe travel.

The central lair’s location is not known, though there have been many stories and suggestions as to where it might be. The most common thought is that a large cave exists due north of Castle Kilgrave, near the High Moors.

Hippogriffs

Obviously related in some strange way to griffons, these are crosses between eagles and horses. They are more tolerated, for they present less of a threat to civilization around the Thunder Peaks, which is where the strongest concentration of hippogriffs seems to be. It is believed that a herd of hippogriffs lives somewhere close to the source of the Immerflow River, which winds through the Thunder Peaks.

These creatures are more sought after as winged mounts than griffons, as the calmer nature of the hippogriff means easier training and more competent and trustworthy beasts to ride upon.

It was some years ago that I heard King Azoun owned a hippogriff mount. Still, I have not heard any news about it recently, so I do not know if it still exists, if it suffered some accident, or if it was forgotten about by the king and sold to someone else.

The Purple Dragons have taken a keen interest in the hippogriffs and are making a concentrated effort to secure enough young ones to make a special troop of winged mounted Purple Dragons. This force would be used to respond quickly to raids and, more likely, to serve as messengers between Suzail and locations on Cormyr’s borders like High Horn and Tilverton. I am certain that the Purple Dragons know the location of the hippogriff herd, but they are jealously guarding that secret.

Perytons

This foul cross between eagle and stag is a menace





in the northern regions of the Thunder Peaks. These avians actively seek humanoid prey, particularly humans.

The perytons are fond of attacking caravans that pass through Tilver's Gap. In fact, it is not too uncommon for a large caravan to be attacked multiple times by perytons from different nests.

The peryton threat, combined with that of the occasional griffon attacks closer to Gnoll Pass, has made traveling from Arabel to parts east rather dangerous. This has increased the drive to have a special troop of wing-mounted Purple Dragons, described previously.

The fact that perytons cannot be harmed by weapons that aren't magically enchanted increases their threat to everyone. Perytons have been very selective in establishing their nests. They are careful to avoid contact with other winged creatures, even though they have no natural predators to be concerned about. They are using their intelligence to ensure that they have an unobstructed path to their prey and that their hunts will be made with minimal interference by others. It is because of this that the perytons are thought to have nested over Tilver's Gap instead of closer to Castle Crag. They do not want to compete with the griffons for food, nor do they want to attack prey that is constantly on guard for ambush by other winged predators.

Elminster's Notes: Interested readers may wish to reference the "Peryton" entry in the booklet about the Great Gray Land of Thar, there to read Talyssa Strongbow's insightful commentary.

Rocs

This gargantuan bird is, according to my research, exclusive to warmer climes than what is usually found in either the Storm Horns or Thunder Peaks. Still, I believe a reason for their presence so far north of their usual habitat is yet to be found.

Rocs are sometimes tamed by giants: storm and cloud giants specifically, for various reasons. I know of at least one group of giants in the southern regions of the Thunder Peaks and I theorize that this group has or had a male and female roc with them. Perhaps those rocs made their escape or were let loose, but now for certain a nest (likely only one) of them lives in the Thunder Peaks.

I was living near Thunderstone when I heard stories of huge birds swooping down upon herds near Kulta. At first it was feared that hippogriffs from up north had come down south, but as reliable descriptions came in I knew it had to be rocs that were on the hunt.

They have tremendous appetites, especially where young are present. For this reason, I feared a quick depletion of the area's livestock. I decided to make an expedition into the Thunder Peaks to see if taking a mercenary force to the roc nest would be feasible. I found the location of their massive nest with surprisingly little difficulty. The nest was composed of whole trees.

I beheld a sad sight. Although rocs are a threat to our livelihood and are dangerous, they are majestic creatures worthy of admiration and respect. The nest had only two rocs, a male and female, which were in pitiful shape. They looked to be suffering from some sickness, for their feathers were matted and falling out. Their eyes, each as big as my chest, were dull and lifeless. I crept up to them and they made no effort to repel me from their nest. I examined them closer, and saw several half-eaten cattle and horse carcasses. I surmised that someone had tainted or cursed their own livestock and set some out as bait for these birds, hoping that they would eat them and become sick and die. Although a clever plot, the result was a loss to nature.

Taking pity on them, I healed them magically, though my skills weren't enough to allow the massive animals to recover completely.

Pawed Creatures

The mountains of Cormyr are also home to a variety of pawed animals which thrive in the environment.

Aurumvorax

This eight-legged, furry, badgerlike animal is one of the most unusual creatures I have seen. It is renowned for two things: its ferocity and its hide.

The aurumvorax is a carnivore, but it also supplements its diet with gold and other precious ores. The introduction of these metals into its body results in a stunningly beautiful golden hide and



dense bones. It has silvery eyes and coppery claws and teeth. The aurumvorax lives a solitary life in hills and along the timberlines on mountainsides. It should be noted that no aurumvorax comes near aarakocra tribes, for the shiny coat is too great a prize to resist and the birds will go to any length to acquire the beautiful gleaming hide of an aurumvorax. For this reason, the aurumvorax cannot be found around Skull Crag and a few other places in the western Storm Horns.

This hugely valuable animal has had a significant effect on both animal and humanoid alike. When word leaks that even one of these creatures exists, a massive effort to become the first to acquire it becomes paramount. Troops of mercenaries dash out of their homes and cities and head for the hills in search of "walking gold," as the aurumvorax is often called.

The nobles of Suzail often fund expeditions to find an aurumvorax, for to arrive at an official function or party clad in the pelt of a golden animal is a fine thing to experience, I am told. For this reason, seeing an aurumvorax is an exceptionally rare thing near Suzail. Nobles' efforts to secure pelts have depleted nearly all aurumvorax in the southern Storm Horns. Aurumvorax still can be found in the northern regions of the Storm Horns and the southeastern portion of the Thunder Peaks.

There have been recent tales of aurumvorax taking on new prey. Generally, the animal seeks prey that is of the same size or smaller than itself. However, there have been some strange tales about aurumvorax chasing and overtaking small horses. It is apparently using its speed to greater advantage to garner meals.

In addition, although the aurumvorax has only the most basic animal intelligence, there appear to be some of them who have been able to seek out stores of gold in caravans and from passing travelers, having learned that most of them carry at least some amount of precious metal on their person.

Thus far, I have heard two tales from people who claim they were ambushed by aurumvorax. The animals ran out from under cover and went straight for the horses' legs. Once the mounts were felled, the aurumvorax sniffed out any precious metals and ore on the person of the travelers, generally ignoring the flesh in favor of the richer-smelling ore.

Both of these ambushes were said to have occurred just west of Archenbridge, along the Dawnpost Road. Whether they are true is anyone's guess. The knowledge to be gained is not worth the journey.

I have had the occasion to view an aurumvorax lair. It was a very small, narrow tunnel leading to a tiny natural cave no bigger than a closet. The aurumvorax had burrowed through the solid rock to reach the cave it must have somehow known was there. Within the cave were the bones of many small animals and their hides. The aurumvorax seems to eat only the fleshy insides of its prey, discarding the rest. Because of their low numbers, they do not present any sort of threat to their supply of food. They will never overhunt their territory.

The eyes of the aurumvorax have been used in talismans associated with seeing into the future. I myself have not had the occasion to test this theory, but I have heard much praise from a merchant in Arabel, who insists his talisman can give him information on nearly anything associated with silver, such as whether an expedition to find a new vein of silver in the Storm Horns will be successful.

Chimerae

We classify this multiheaded creature as pawed, due to its leonine forequarters. The hindquarters of the chimera are those of a large goat. The chimera has three heads: a goat's, a lion's, and a dragon's.

Chimerae lurk only in the deepest lairs of the Storm Horns. They are known in the Thunder Peaks, but more of them seem to live in the western mountain range. The dragon head of the chimera influences the whole creature to live in a subterranean environment, while the lion head urges the creature to leave its lair and hunt for prey wherever it can find it. For this reason, chimerae may be encountered anywhere within a cavernous structure in a mountain range.

It is not unheard of for a chimera to make its way outside a mountain and search for prey on the surface. However, since the chimera is an omnivore and adaptable, it will eat vegetation when there is no meat available. The main motivation for leaving a mountain or venturing close to the surface would be influence from one of the other heads—most likely the lion.





Once on the surface, the dragon head influences the others to allow it to use its wings to take to the air, and from there the dragon and lion heads cooperate in hunting for prey. The chimerae do have a language, but no one to my knowledge has tried to communicate with them to any extent.

Displacer Beasts

These green-eyed, six-legged panthers of death have had surges of terrible activity in the Thunder Peaks north of Tilver's Gap. Even a raiding party based in that section of the range has a heraldic-styled displacer beast as its symbol.

No one is certain how, but a few years ago displacer beasts were introduced into that area. They started traveling throughout the range between the Moonsea Ride and the Northride. Because of this, the region has a much lower population of natural life than it would normally have, with the exception of winged creatures which have been able to escape the wrath of the displacer beast.

All animals smaller than a displacer beast, which is generally 10-12 feet long and 500 pounds, were hunted with a vengeance. For this reason, many have theorized that the introduction of displacer beasts was done for a specific purpose—to clear the area. But why anyone or any group would want to accomplish such a task is yet unknown.

Reptilian Creatures

The population of reptiles in the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks is low. Although unusual, some reptiles are very interesting, deadly, and certainly worth discussion.

Basilisks

Famous all over the world as a creature that can turn one into stone, the basilisk should also be known for its two other lethal features: its poisonous bite and its ability to spit acid.

Basilisk poison has been made famous ever since the death of the chief host of the Silver Knife restaurant in Arabel. His demise brought attention, as he was a popular socialite in town. The cause of his death was determined to be basilisk poison, a toxin

not commonly used. Where basilisks were once feared, and the very mention of them made people stay far away from reported sightings, the basilisk is now being hunted actively. With the introduction of its poison into increasing popular use, the demand for basilisk venom sacs has increased.

An active trading market for basilisk poison sacs thrives in Arabel. A call grows for the creatures' eyes for use in magical ingredients (though such a use seems to have its origins in fancy more than any sound technical need).

The location of a basilisk is difficult to ascertain, for they are solitary creatures and tend to roam throughout the ranges at will. Nyaril, a merchant house in Arabel, is said to have maps indicating the travel routes used by basilisks.

Minotaur Lizards

This lizard, so-called because of its large protruding horns, is an unusual find in the southern Storm Horns.

A tribe of aarakocra told me about a red dragon that threatened them, and that the dragon lived in the southern reaches of the Storm Horns. Minotaur lizards are often found near red dragons, and it might be the case that the lizards followed the red dragon from wherever it came, preferring to keep close to it and suffer through the clime of the Storm Horns, which is unlike their usual tropical haunts.

The lizards are known because of their horns. The horns are impressive indeed, but aren't used in hunting. Instead, the horns are used by the lizards for mating and by humanoids for various purposes. A prophet is said to be living in the Storm Horns who uses the minotaur lizards in his predictions and has been able to train one of the lizards to do his bidding.

Humanoid Creatures

Despite the proliferation of creatures which fly or walk close to the ground, a great number of humanoids live in the Thunder Peaks and Storm Horns which have an effect upon each other, civilization, and the animals living near them. They have differing levels of societal organization and



intelligence, but they are all best grouped into the humanoid category.

Bugbears

These creatures are well known throughout all the world, for they are found everywhere. They dwell in subterranean lairs, but just about any underground dwelling will do as far as they are concerned.

I found many bugbear lairs within the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks. These bugbears are much like bugbears all over the world, but they perhaps have to contend with a greater variety of other hostile and powerful creatures than bugbears of other mountain ranges face.

Bugbears are being constantly harassed by grimlocks. The foul grimlocks have been conducting many raids against bugbear lairs searching for bugbears to eat. Repelling these raids has taken up a great deal of most bugbear tribes' resources. They can no longer effectively raid caravans going through Tilver's Gap or Gnoll Pass, each of which are historically heavy with caravan activity.

Because of this, their stores of treasure are depleted—a terrible thing for the bugbears, who prize shiny, valuable objects. As a consequence, bugbear morale is lower than normal. Their ferocity and hatred toward the grimlocks has increased, and this has slightly unbalanced them and diverted too much of their energy.

Doppelgangers

I was looking for a pool of water rumored to exist near High Horn, a pool that some said had special properties that, if not magical, certainly had some kind of natural medicinal value. While searching, I came across the camp of a traveler. The nature of the equipment and how it was laid suggested that the camp was at least semi-permanent. There was no one there, but all the equipment was still in place and unpacked. I looked through the wares and found my attention drawn to the person's clothing trunk.

There were all manner of sizes, shapes, and colors of dress within. They were all of very high quality, yet there was only one of each garment represented. I surmised that the clothing had been stolen and I had happened upon a thief.

I was about to walk away when I discovered movement out of the corner of my eye. Until I die, I will swear that the shape changed form from a smooth gray, thin object to that of a Purple Dragon soldier.

The "soldier" and I talked for a while, and he gave me some excuse for the camp. I walked away and there was no hostility between us.

Giants

These gargantuan humanoids are rarely seen. They tend to live generally secluded lives high in the mountains, away from civilization. Finding evidence of them is difficult. Actually finding their lairs is nearly impossible.

Cloud Giants

Dwelling in the clouds, these giants do indeed live in the Thunder Peaks. I myself have seen the castle of one clan of cloud giants. The castle itself was small by their standards and was really not much more than a large stone house. Still, since it was built to their scale, it was vast indeed.

This clan lives in the southern regions of the Thunder Peaks and stays away from civilization as much as possible. However, one among their number is seeking to establish regular trade with Thunderstone. Apparently some merchants in Thunderstone have been contacted, but they are keeping their conversations with the cloud giant secret.

The cloud giants I met are a peaceful, happy lot. They do not differ much in their behavior or mentality from noble Cormyreans.

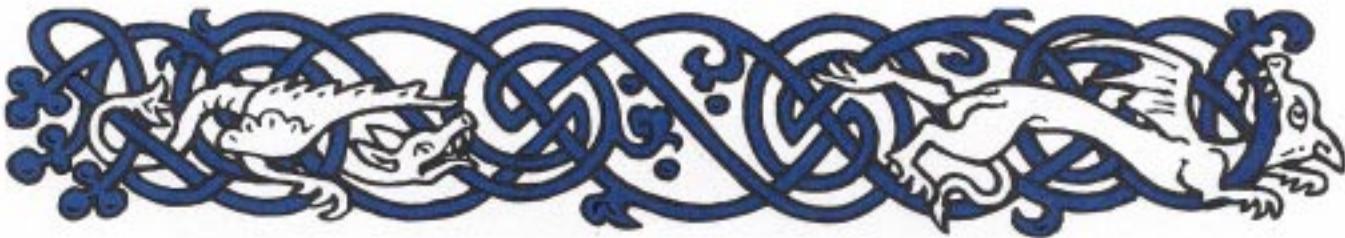
My relations with them were brief, but very good. I found them hospitable and would not hesitate to attempt to visit them again. They said they know of other cloud giant clans in the Storm Horns, but I could not get any more information than that from them. An interesting aspect of their world view is that they, for some reason, tend to have at least a kind of minimal respect for Cormyrean law. One of them commented that he would be reluctant to walk the streets of a Cormyrean city with his sword, given the law that prohibits the open wearing of arms.

Cyclopskins

These one-eyed giants are a dying breed in the Thunder Peaks. At one time many of them may







have lived in the Peaks, but they have been hunted by humanoids and many other potential predators to such a degree that they are unable to maintain their strength in numbers. I would also add that their low intelligence hampers them from formulating effective strategies for preservation.

Most of the remaining cyclopskins live in a nomadic tribe that wanders along the eastern edge of the Thunder Peaks. There might be other cyclopskins, but they have hidden themselves well from the rest of Cormyr and have no effect on other tribes. No true cyclops are known to walk in either mountain range.

Ettins

Ettin have lived in the stories of tots for many years. All manner of fables have been constructed about the loathsome, disgusting two-headed beasts. As for reality, only vaporous, fleeting stories of sightings here and there reach anyone's ears. I myself never have seen one in person, I only gazed upon the sketches of other mages fortunate enough to have met one and lived.

The only accurate historical account of an ettin involves one that was able to raise a band of goblins and orcs and use them to conduct raids against Thunderstone and Hultail. But this was many years ago, and that ettin is most assuredly dead.

Fomorian Giants

This disgusting race lives up to its reputation as the most wicked and loathsome of giantkind. Unfortunately, The Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks are not without a small native population of them.

These giants have typically taken over many abandoned dwarven mines found in both ranges. They hunt whatever passes near their lairs and kill whatever is still within the mines when they enter. Their appetite is not equal to other giants of the same size, which is fortunate. They nearly always torture their prey before eating it, and the horror they could spread if they had ravenous appetites would be devastating. Instead, they eat a living animal once every few weeks and subsist on plant life, including fungi and the like, for the rest of the time.

These giants appear to have no value whatsoever to other living things around them. They seem to

have no predators, for nothing even wants to eat them. Their bodies are completely deformed, head to toe, and this probably dissuades anything from actually biting into their flesh. They taste rancid, no doubt, and are likely toxic.

Their greatest impact on society is the capture and torture of those adventurers unlucky enough to explore an abandoned mine that has a tribe of these ugly brutes in it.

Hill Giants

Hill giants are common in both mountain ranges, for the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks have ample places for them to live. Also, the ranges have an abundance of the kind of food they usually hunt for, which means any animal—even dragons—large enough for their giant stomachs.

Hill giants are known to hunt green dragons and vice versa. Green dragons live in both ranges, so ongoing, active fighting between the two groups continues, though it's nothing so large scale as a war.

Given that hill giants fear magic and have been known to kill mages with great ceremony and celebration, I have not made a great effort to discover where their lairs are—or where they are mostly concentrated. My various sources of information suggest that they are essentially scattered throughout both ranges, not populating any one region more than another.

Mountain Giants

Mountain giants represent more of a threat to humanoids and other creatures. They are more intelligent than average giants, and they are able to organize themselves more efficiently. But this threat is contained by the nature of mountain giants, which is generally peaceful. They could easily subjugate other, lesser races into raiding parties, and combined with their intelligence, they would be a formidable force. However, they are hesitant to trust anyone from outside their own families. They prefer to hide themselves from affairs of others.

These giants have the natural ability to summon other large creatures to their aid. Such creatures usually include ogres, trolls, and even hill giants. But, such a summoning usually only takes place when the mountain giants believe they are going to





be facing a serious threat in combat, and when they feel added manpower, however inferior to their own, is needed.

Stone Giants

Stone giants are the most civilized of giants outside of the nearly mythic cloud and storm giants. They are of average intelligence and live in communities for protection. They have art, contests, trading, and many other trappings of organized civilization that other giants lack. The number of stone giant communities in both the Storm Horns and in the Thunder Peaks is most likely not more than a dozen, so the total number of stone giants is very low.

Grimlocks

These are intelligent, savage communities of subterranean creatures that feast on raw humanoid flesh. They are a scourge to many races both within the mountain tunnels and caves and to those who enjoy the warmth and relative security of surface life.

Grimlocks have adapted particularly well to their environment-induced blindness. They can hear and smell well enough, so that they can effectively "see," though for only a short distance. But many things which we humans and other humanoids cannot smell or sense are known by the grimlocks.

They feast upon any raw flesh they are able to find. They regularly conduct raids into other humanoid subterranean lairs searching for young, old, and otherwise abandoned living bodies.

They are fierce in combat and enjoy many natural abilities which enable them to withstand all but the most competent adversaries. Unfortunately for them, their level of organization during actual combat is poor. Though they attack en masse, they lack the discipline of other races and do not manage themselves well. More intelligent and disciplined races are able to overcome their natural abilities and defeat them in combat.

Dwarves, who have an extensive mine network in both mountain ranges, are often forced to defend themselves from the grimlocks. The dwarves have come to know how the grimlocks fight, for the savages seem never to vary their tactics, or as most dwarves might say, seem never to develop any in

the first place.

At first look, it might be thought that grimlocks are ripe for education in the ways of war, that a particularly charismatic leader might be able to sway them over, and a new and terrible raiding force might be created. This cannot be the case, however, for the grimlocks are fearful of dealing with other races in such a manner. Indeed, there have been dwarves who have attempted to do just such a thing, as well as giants and other races who dwell within the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks who have tried. None have met with success.

There appears to be no solution to dealing with the grimlocks in either mountain range. While they are sometimes easy to defeat in combat when they attack, it is difficult to find their lairs to carry out extermination campaigns, for their natural abilities include blending in with their surroundings, making them virtually invisible to passersby. The only hope lies within tainting the food they eat. I have heard reports of the foul creatures being ravaged with disease from foul meat.

Kobolds

Many kobolds lurk within both ranges. They are particularly concentrated along the Thunder Peak mountains bordering Hullack Forest and the Storm Horns along the king's forest.

As kobolds are wont to do, they menace humans and demihumans alike. They spare no one from their tiny but ferocious wrath. Although certain forces like the Purple Dragons tend to overlook kobolds and their involvement in affairs, the small race has been playing a larger part in Cormyr.

Their primary involvement has been with the troglodytes that also raid Hullack Forest. The kobolds recently have been under the employ of the troglodytes as spies, saboteurs, and scouts for proper ambush sites. Ambushing is the preferred troglodyte method of attack.

This cooperation between the two groups is very unusual, for troglodytes are not known for hiring any other races, let alone kobolds. The two races have not historically associated with each other much, except from opposite ends of swords. It is therefore theorized that a charismatic leader is influencing both the troglodytes and the kobolds to



associate with each other and to work together.

A strong concentration of urd kobolds lives within the Storm Horns. Their numbers cannot be determined, but they have been the focus of worry for some of the other subterranean races living there. Goblins have been requesting help from their brethren in the Goblin Marches to aid in their attacks against urd kobolds.

Although kobolds have an intense hatred of gnomes, this has not been a major factor in their behavior in the past few years. My memory conjures images of times when kobolds would take on raids against villages or towns when even a few gnomes lived there. No more. They seem to be applying themselves to other tasks. They still attack gnomes on sight, but they seem not to be going out of their way to do so anymore.

If a charismatic leader is influencing certain tribes of kobolds, no one has a clue as to who or what that leader could be. The best answer anyone has developed thus far is that Gondegal, the Lost King, is still alive and is using these foul races as pawns in his game to recapture the throne.

Orcs

Probably the most populous of the less-intelligent humanoid races, orcs are everywhere in Cormyr and are certainly thick in the mountain ranges.

Orcs are used as pawns by every race in the world, most often employed as foot troops in battle. Most orcs that are used for battle by other races live on the plains of Cormyr and generally avoid the mountains. This is so they will be usable as troops. By living in the mountains, their mobility and ability to respond quickly to the desires of their leaders would be hampered. In addition, once orcs come to live on the plains and see what territory and treasure there is to acquire, most prefer to stay close to the action.

Mountain orcs involve themselves mostly with acquiring more subterranean territory. This means fighting dwarves, grimlocks, troglodytes, and any number of other subterranean races. Orcs divide their time between battling for new territory, usually large caverns, and fortifying what they have already captured.

Mountain orcs conduct raids onto the plains, of course. They do so most often when they are in

need of weapons and supplies, and when they need treasure to finance their fortification efforts.

The tribes of orcs living in the Thunder Peaks have developed close ties. They are cooperating with each other since subterranean space is becoming more difficult to come by as the years pass. They are not allied with each other by any means, but they have taken less to killing each other and instead work together every now and then to combat a common foe.

However, reports indicate that each tribe could be gearing up to attempt a major clash against the other. It is generally accepted that once one of the larger tribes thinks it has amassed a sufficient force, there will be a grand attack against the remaining orc tribes. Until then, each tribe is being patient with the other, not willing to lose too many of their members in battles which will not have as much consequence as the forthcoming war.

There have been rumors circulating that a tribe of orcs is at work building a grand fortress within the Thunder Peaks, and that this fortress will serve as a launching point for an invasion of neighboring subterranean lairs of other races.

The orcs in the Storm Horns have shown less of an interest in cooperating or offering truces with neighboring tribes. War is as common there as ever with constant losses on both sides.

Troglodytes

These barbaric creatures are similar to the grimlock in that they seem to live for war. The difference between the two is that the troglodytes are far more capable tacticians than the grimlock.

Troglodytes prefer human flesh for food, but they value steel above all else. These desires, as well as their ability to conduct raids effectively, have led to problems for people attempting to settle near Hullack Forest. A known troglodyte lair is situated in the Thunder Peak mountains from which many raids have sprung.

King Azoun IV has already ordered Hullack Forest cleared of monsters so that it can be used safely by his subjects. However, the troglodytes present a serious threat even to these monster-killing parties. They conduct continuous raids and are getting progressively bold, reaching farther and farther from their lair.





Dragons

There could be no text describing the life on the Storm Horns and the Thunder Peaks that did not also describe the influence of the types of dragons that inhabit the highest peaks and the deepest subterranean lairs. Dragons have an ancient history and lay claim to nearly all the lands on the world—and the two mountain ranges are included in that claim. In fact, each range has been home to many dragons over the millennia.

Please note that the text describing the dragons is the culmination of all the stories I have heard regarding dragon presence in the two ranges. For each dragon actually living in the ranges, a hundred stories portray the creature as an army descending upon the whole civilization. It has been difficult to sift through the tall tales and falsehoods to find truths, but I think I have an accurate view.

In both ranges combined, no more than three ancient dragons live. They are described below. No more than five adult dragons, each one having never more than three young, are positively known to live in Cormyr.

Although these numbers are small, they are spread out among the different types of dragons. Also, I cannot say with any certainty how many dragons live in the deep subterranean levels of the mountain ranges, for the only way to take note of such dragons is to explore the ranges personally—a task for which I am ill-equipped.

Copper Dragons

The northern regions of the Storm Horns, next to the High Moors and near the Goblin Marches is an adequate home for the copper dragons who live in those peaks.

The giant scorpions they prize often can be found in the Great Desert near the Storm Horns. However, most copper dragons in the region prefer to live in the Desertsouth Mountains. Still, a few copper dragons prefer to live somewhat farther away from the desert so they can be closer to the towns and have a greater opportunity to interact with people by playing pranks and sharing jokes.

The copper dragons of the Storm Horns have little tolerance for the goblins, orcs, and other dull

and stupid humanoids that inhabit the Goblin Marches—except the monsters are sometimes fun to tease and harass.

Crystal Dragons

The northern Thunder Peaks are cool enough to support one gem dragon: Yiarni. This dragon takes advantage of the visiting young white dragons and attempts to shape their inherently cruel natures into more pleasant personalities.

If you should meet with her, treat her kindly, for she has a most gentle heart and is willing to share information or help stranded travelers—so long as they swear never to reveal where they see her. She is far unlike the stories of other crystal dragons I have heard. What her true purpose is in the Thunder Peaks I cannot say, for she would not go that far in her discourse with me. I do theorize however, that she knows Tarlacoal, the gold dragon of the Thunder Peaks, and that they are cooperating somehow for some purpose only they know of.

Gold Dragons

Gold dragons can live in nearly any clime, and the Thunder Peaks is not inhospitable to them. Tarlacoal is a gold dragon who has gained a small amount of fame. He has been helping the causes of good by manipulating political events for as long as Cormyr has been a kingdom, or so they say.

The most famous tale about this dragon involves King Azoun IV. It is believed that when Gondegal made his raids across Cormyr, Tarlacoal was among those who whispered in the king's ear that he should personally lead the attack against Gondegal.

This kind of manipulation, especially done by a dragon in a polymorphed state, is a good deception. But it seems Tarlacoal favors taking a direct hand in things while keeping his true nature a secret. No one has even advanced a theory as to where Tarlacoal's lair is. It is assumed that he spends most of his time among the people anyway, polymorphed into forms more pleasing and convincing to the eye.

Red Dragons

Red dragons are the best known to populations near their lairs, thanks to their covetous and influential natures. Multiple red dragons are thought to live in the



highest peaks of both mountain ranges, though how many is unknown. Tales reveal at least two, however.

A subtle difference exists between red dragons in the Storm Horns and those in the Thunder Peaks. The Thunder Peak dragons have more to contend with, since they are surrounded by a greater population on both sides of their range. Storm Horn red dragons are generally surrounded by more wilderness and under less pressure from outside sources, and they are therefore free to concentrate less on defending their lairs and spend more time acquiring treasure.

Known Red Dragons

At least one red dragon lives in each mountain range: Nevalarich in the Thunder Peaks, and Shorliail in the Storm Horns.

Nevalarich: Nevalarich is living in the southern regions of the Thunder Peaks and has been the more visible of the two dragons. He has been raiding ships that pass through The Neck and taking their treasure. It has been reported that he has taken smaller ships whole to his lair, scooping them up from the sea in his massive jaws.

However unusual this behavior might be, Nevalarich definitely has all the abilities attributed to normal red dragons. Those ships he does not take with him he burns with his fiery breath.

It is not known how old Nevalarich really is. He is certainly an adult, but not as old as Shorliail. Combat with Nevalarich has been brief and sporadic, and obviously never successful.

King Azoun IV is worried about the presence of a hostile red dragon in his kingdom, and has offered a title of nobility to whoever is able to defeat it. However, he does not publicize this boon frequently, as the number of ships lost to the dragon is really no greater than the number ordinarily lost to storms or pirates.

The king and his court do worry about the future, however. They fret that Nevalarich will become tired of preying on ships and the odd caravan, and that he will make more bold attacks into the larger cities.

Others within the court ponder the reasons why Nevalarich hasn't already become more bold.

They theorize that a greater power may be lording itself over the dragon. This power may be letting Nevalarich out to raid only when it deems suitable. Whatever this power is, be it a creature from another plane, a sickness Nevalarich has, or whatever, the court continues to mull over the possibilities.

Shorliail: A great, aged dragon known as Shorliail lives in the Storm Horns. She has maintained a lair within the mountains for centuries—in fact, for as long as most elves who have not left for far-off Evermeet or other elven havens can remember.

Her demands for treasure are sated in intervals. Rather than conduct searches every few weeks or months like Nevalarich, she undertakes massive raids every few decades. These raids are grand even by red dragon standards. No known depository of gold or magic is untouched. She flies with swiftness and a vigor unseen in dragons her age. Most say that she saves her strength for all those years and lets it out at once upon the people below her.

After each raid, the holders of whatever treasure remains move the location of their stronghouses. This never does any good, for she knows where the new ones are constructed. Whether she uses magic or employs scouts (or whether she assumes humanoid form to scout herself) is unknown.

There has not been a raid for many years, and no one can say when the next one will be. Shorliail is able to trick all those who would attempt to predict when she'll fly next.

Shorliail's lair is still a secret. Despite numerous expeditions to find it and recover lost treasures, no one has been able to discover her cache and report the information back to civilization. Naturally, King Azoun IV is offering a substantial reward including a title to the person able to come back with the information.

Sapphire Dragons

Among the dwarven tales I have come across is the story of a sapphire dragon deep below the surface of the Storm Horns. The tale is ancient, dating back many generations, but not so old as to be legendary.

The sapphire dragon was hunted for some time by dwarves who viewed it as a racial enemy. The dwarves were finally able to determine where its lair





was, but were unable to ultimately defeat the dragon. Its treasure hoard was never discovered, and it is believed that it is either too well hidden or has been made inaccessible by normal means.

White Dragons

The climate of both ranges does not readily support the constant frigid conditions demanded by white dragons. However, the winter season of the northern Thunder Peaks can be very cold and sometimes lasts longer than a normal winter. A few young dragons have been known to make temporary homes in those peaks.

As the warmer season approaches and the white dragons retreat northward to more hospitable climes, sometimes a white dragon will be "caught" in the warm spell, flounder, and fail to retreat soon enough. Such dragons are generally lethargic and some may even not gather enough energy for the long flight back to colder climes. If such a dragon is encountered during the summer, it can be easier to trick.

Other Creatures

This section deals with those creatures which do not fit in any of the above categories.

Carrion Crawlers

This huge, grotesque creature serves an important function in the mountains. It digests the fallen prey of the mountains' many battles. Carrion crawlers see a great deal of food presented to them in both ranges, for in each place rage many ongoing battles between races for territory and domination, as well as a multitude of struggles for survival among predators and prey. It is also common for crawlers to be used by races as weapons and as a kind of cleanser for newly acquired territory. Orcs are especially fond of using them to clean up a battle site and also of using them as tools of torture and as entertainment when they eliminate prisoners. Crawlers are looked upon as filthy parasites by most other races within the mountains. They have no natural predators, which can be a problem especially after a string of large battles. Crawlers will sometimes

attack living targets when they have run out of dead prey to eat.

To address this problem, orcs have been trying to herd crawlers out of their subterranean lairs to the outside. Carrion crawlers are unaccustomed to the outside environment and quickly die from exposure to the elements. This has proved a relatively successful way of disposing of the crawlers.

However, recently some crawlers have been lasting longer in the elements. Some have seemingly been able to adapt to the above-ground environment and survive for a few weeks at a time, living off the carcasses yielded by the hunts of wilderness creatures. This could have implications for the future of the mountain ranges and the surrounding areas, for it means a new monster could be roaming the land searching for food.

My personal fear is that a pair of crawlers will be forced from underground simultaneously, then reproduce immediately afterward. The offspring would then have the opportunity to reproduce with each other and with any other crawlers that happen to be released. This could create a stock capable of surviving the elements and be the catalyst for their introduction into the list of hazards travelers face each day.

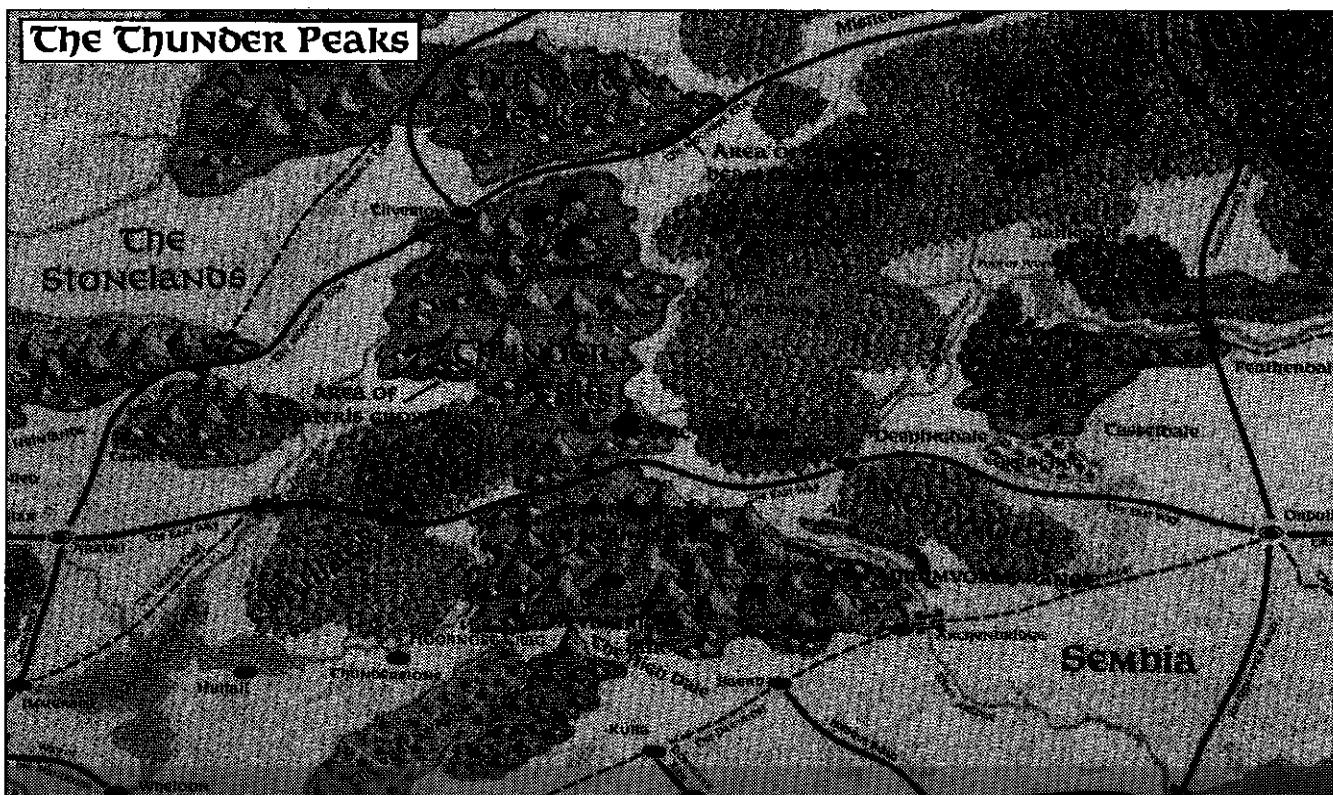
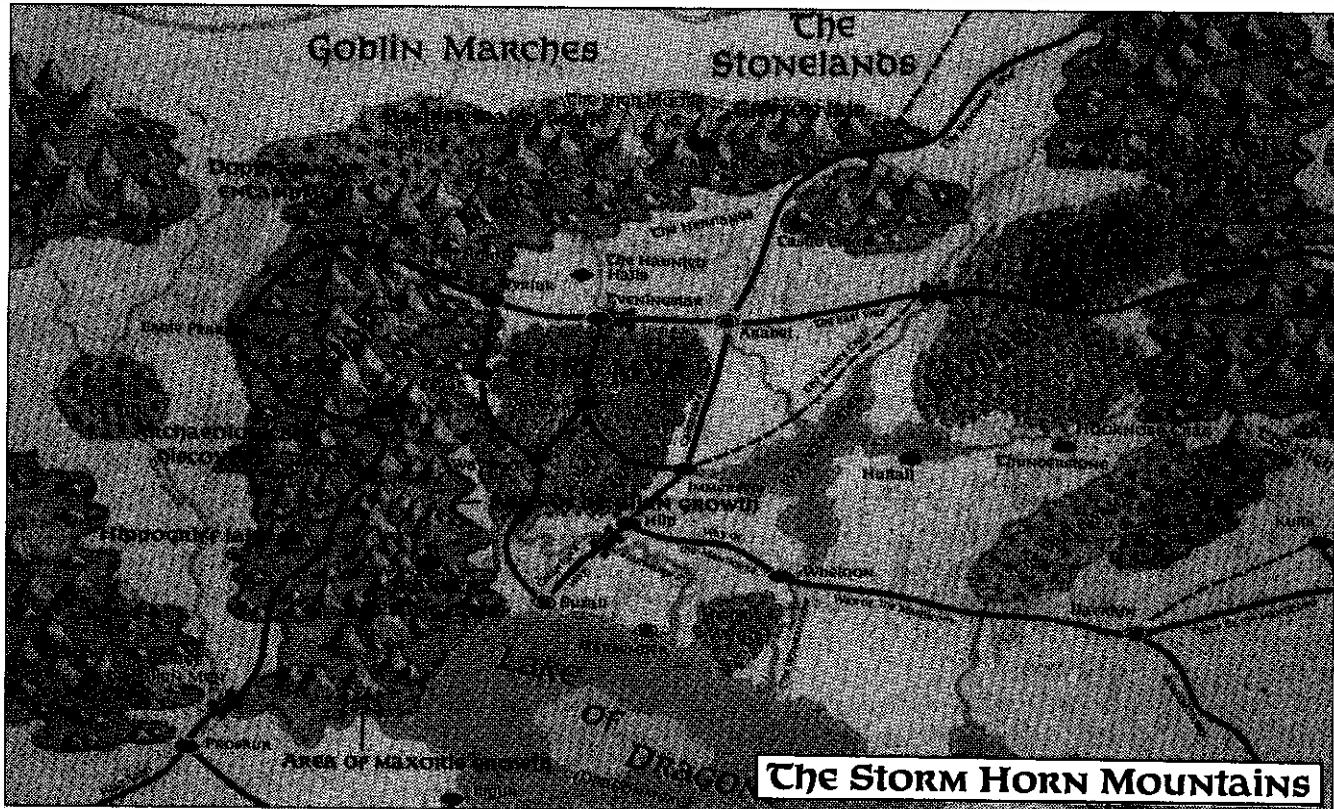
Cave Fishers

These rare crosses between spiders and lobsters have made comfortable homes for themselves in the Storm Horns and Thunder Peaks. They have an ample supply of food to sustain them and meet the needs of an increasing population.

It seems they would be able to enjoy a relatively good life within the mountains, for they have no natural predators and are able to feed upon passersby. However, the fact that their filaments are much sought after by thieves and alchemists means they are doomed. Humans and demihumans are likely to overhunt them to extinction.

The Storm Horns have been particularly drained of their supply of cave fishers. They have been hunted for many years, and since thieves' guilds are not decreasing in number, there seems to be no end in sight to the hunting.

Cave fishers have been seen retreating deeper into the mountains, seeking to keep away from





entrances and places where they may be easily found. However, the deeper they go, the more threatening the native residents become. Having nowhere to run, most cave fishers seem to hole up wherever they find a good home, and do their best to prevent themselves from becoming a resource.

A thieves' guild from Arabel, the name of which I pledged not to reveal, has decided to attempt to capture a cave fisher and bring it back to the city. The guild intends to use it to produce its filament and adhesive in quantity, thereby avoiding the expense and danger of hunting for the creatures in the Storm Horns.

In luring the cave fishers from their lairs, the guild has discovered that the creatures are especially fond of winged prey, for they see them as easy targets, which indeed they are. The wings are easily snared in filaments, and the beasts lack the strength or physiology to resist being pulled in by the fishers.

The guild has taken to using winged animals as bait to lure the fishers from their lairs and into more vulnerable positions.

Cloakers

These fiendish creatures could represent a very serious threat to life within the mountains were it not for their chaotic nature and method of attack.

Cloakers almost always lie in wait for some creature to approach them, whereupon they will launch themselves and attempt to envelop their targets. This method means there can be prolonged waiting periods between meals. Cloakers, for unknown reasons, do not seem prone to traveling very far at all.

Detailed knowledge about the cloaker isn't widespread, but I was able to spend a good deal of time with Silin Marilus, a mage who has made the cloaker his subject of study for the past several years. He says that cloakers are highly intelligent and will attack their prey in ingenious manners. Their language, which he is able to understand and speak, is very complex and shows unusual levels of organization. It is very difficult to predict the movement or behavior of cloakers, and for this reason study of their future impact upon the mountain ranges is nearly impossible.

However, Marilus predicts that with the increasing population of warring tribes within the moun-

tain ranges, the cloakers will migrate deeper into the mountains, seeking other more dangerous and ambitious targets. One of the most startling things he told me was of a rare conversation he had with a cloaker. (They prefer to eat people instead of talk to them, but Marilus was able to persuade one not to eat him.) In any event, during that alleged conversation the cloaker intimated that it would be able to travel from the Storm Horns, which is where it was at that time, and visit other cloakers in the Thunder Peaks. It also intimated that this would not involve using any special abilities. The cloaker would be able to essentially walk the distance. This suggests that the cloakers might know of a subterranean passageway that links the two mountain ranges, perhaps a network of deep underground caverns or the like.

Cloakers will eat anything, and Marilus suspects that cloakers might not have to eat to survive, but do it for some unknown reason—not necessarily for pleasure.

Deepspawn

I know of only one deepspawn. It lives far within the Thunder Peaks and is beginning to earn a reputation for itself. This is not to say that there may be other spawn living in the Thunder Peaks, but I shall speak of the one I know about, so that anyone who should encounter one may be forearmed with at least some knowledge about them.

Deepspawn are able to produce all manner of violently evil creatures. They are terrible menaces, and entire tribes have pledged themselves to their destruction.

I was able to gather enough knowledge about the deepspawn from an encounter described to me by a fellow mage, Touchik Kapil. Kapil was with a party of explorers sent to map out a cavern and search for resources for a merchant house in Marsember. The group happened upon a cave that was rich in treasure and was very likely the lair for a dragon. Within the treasure strewn about the floor of the cave was a deepspawn.

During the combat with this vile monster, Kapil was able to learn some very important things about it. Deepspawn are totally evil. It should be reinforced upon everyone's mind that they will do any-



thing diabolical to achieve their goals, which usually involve the violent, torturous death of anyone they see. They are also exceptionally intelligent and will use their keen wit to the maximum in attempting to gain every possible advantage.

However, deepspawn seem to prefer to let their offspring do the melee fighting. Kapil surmised that one reason for this might be a desire for self-protection. By occupying attackers with its offspring, the deepspawn itself would be free from attack. This theory led to two important discoveries. It is possible to rattle a deepspawn by attacking it and attending to its spawn in a secondary manner, if possible. Also, deepspawn, at least the one Kapil and his party fought, seem unusually susceptible to psionic attacks. The attacks rattled the malign creature to the degree that its spawn became less coordinated in their own attacks. This led Kapil to believe that the offspring of deepspawn might be controlled or at least encouraged mentally by the creator deepspawn. The party was semi-victorious. The deepspawn got away, but the offspring didn't.

Fungi

Many types of fungi grace the mountainous regions of the Thunder Peaks and the Storm Horns, both above and below ground. There are so many, two lifetimes would not be enough to categorize them all. Nevertheless, some types are more common or noteworthy than others, and have special notes of relevance.

Violet

Purplish-hued fungi known simply as violet fungi are ambulatory mushrooms that feed upon living and dead tissue. They are often found in the company of shriekers.

This partial symbiosis has resulted in an interesting community of fungi that presents a formidable threat in some areas, particularly in the southern regions of the Storm Horns. Shrieker and violet populations have risen lately, and their natural predators—which include purple worms and shambling mounds—do not seem to be eating them fast enough.

I believe this is because the internal alchemy of the fungi has changed slightly. Something about

the food they have been eating has made them distasteful.

Gas Spores

Gas spores long have been a problem with explorers who have had experiences with beholders. The two are often mistaken for each other, and each requires a different method of effective attack.

These fungi kill by choking victims in a cloud of spores, which latch onto skin and immediately begin growing. Magical methods are effective in preventing a victim's death. However, there appears to be another solution. The spores are averse to extreme dryness. If the spores come in contact with a dry surface, they remain dormant.

It is possible, therefore, to prevent death if one is able to reduce the moisture on one's exposed skin enough to prevent the fungi from growing. Thieves from Suzail have developed a powder that, when applied to the skin immediately after exposure to the spores, dries the skin considerably and chokes the spores to death before they can gain a hold over the victim. Unfortunately, the powder itself has serious side effects that cause pain and sometimes scarring.

Galeb Duhr

These solitary creatures have a most unusual ecology. They are difficult to deal with, but some facts about them have become known through research (aided by payment in gems).

Their harmonious "music" is likely to be a reaction to the atmosphere. The storms that frequent both the Storm Horns and the Thunder Peaks seem to have an effect upon the creatures, for they will sometimes come out during the storms and sing. One theory is that galeb duhrs sing to ward off the storms, to prevent the terrible lightning strikes from harming smaller rocks and boulders, in which the galeb duhrs are known to take a motherly interest.

It is also believed a substantially large community of these creatures is deep within the solid rock surface of the mountains.





Rumors

- I have heard multiple stories about a tribe of aarakocra living close to Castle Crag. One story goes that a group of them were soaring in the air as they are wont to do, when they spied a very bright and shiny object down below. It's said that this was the magical sword belonging to a captain in the Purple Dragons, and that he was training with it on a lonely outcropping of rock. The birds swooped down in a surprising ambush, stunned the guard and took the sword. This event is not widely known, for the sword is believed to have been previously stolen from the lair of a dragon (a dragon that is still alive and searching for both the sword and the soldier), so the soldier could not raise too much of a ruckus about losing his sword when he was not supposed to have it in the first place. It may be possible to persuade the aarakocra to surrender the sword in favor of something more brilliant and shiny.
- Something terrible is mauling bears in the Thunder Peaks. This creature, whatever it is, is obviously terribly ferocious. A merchant traveling along the plains between the peaks and Hullack Forest saw something in his path that appeared to be a mound of dirt. It was curiously shaped so he went up to it. Suddenly, the mound moved. A large tarp-like creature, brownish, flat and roughly square-shaped, moved off the carcass of another dead bear. It flowed silently and smoothly like water off the carcass and undulated quickly away from the merchant like a brown sheet carried by the wind. He was too frightened to pursue the creature on his horse. This is a new creature, probably created by an evil mage.
- The displacer beast raids in the northern region of the Thunder Peaks took place for a reason. Someone wanted to cause a great deal of havoc among the native wildlife population. I have not been able to return to the area to see what has taken the place of what was cleared by the beasts, but I have heard many rumors about strange lights visible at night in that area. A great sense of foreboding looms over Tilverton. There is fear that a creature from another dimension has decided to take residence in the peaks.



The Great Gray Land of Thar

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A-Ranging I Will Go



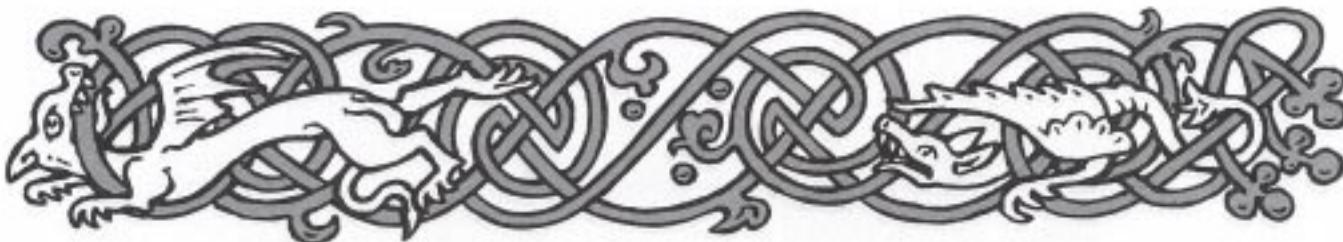
Talyssa Strongbow is a ranger who has traveled extensively throughout the Forgotten Realms. A sailor on the Moonsea, an adventurer in the Reaching Woods and the Forest of Wyrms, and a mercenary scout who fought against the hordes of Dragonspear, she has most recently made her living as a guide in the Great Gray Land of Thar. Talyssa is a flinty, somewhat grim woman who nonetheless shows deep human feelings when she is of a mind. The Land of Thar is widely reputed to be a barren wasteland with little to recommend it to adventurers, explorers, or merchants, but her account, given in her typically cynical and world-weary style, may go far

in changing the region's reputation. I present her account in its entirety, with a few of her choicest expletives removed and replaced with less offensive language.

The Great Gray Land of Thar is a region most sensible individuals will tell you to steer clear of. Mind you, the average "sensible" inhabitant of Faerûn is probably a seedy country bumpkin fresh off a turnip cart, chewing thoughtfully on a week-old stalk of grass as he scratches his filthy, vermin-infested head and ruminates on how much he can sell his prize possum-hound for.

I've never put much stock in the pronouncements of such people, and when I discovered the consensus





among the hayseed-and-huckleberry crowd was to avoid Thar, I immediately made plans to go there. You see, after what I had foolishly considered a "life of adventure," I had decided to settle down and live the gracious country life. Unfortunately for me, I found myself in a tiny Cormyrean community where the farmers lavished more adoration on their dogs than on their wives, no one had ever even seen a book let alone bothered to learn how to read, and the most exciting event was getting together and watching old Uncle Melf's barn burn down.

After about six months of sampling the questionable luxuries of the back country, I had to face the fact that I was intensely unhappy. Accordingly, I dismissed my servants (who seemed inordinately delighted at the chance to get back to wallowing with their pigs on the family farm) and sold my villa to the local robber baron, who had been drooling over the place for months.

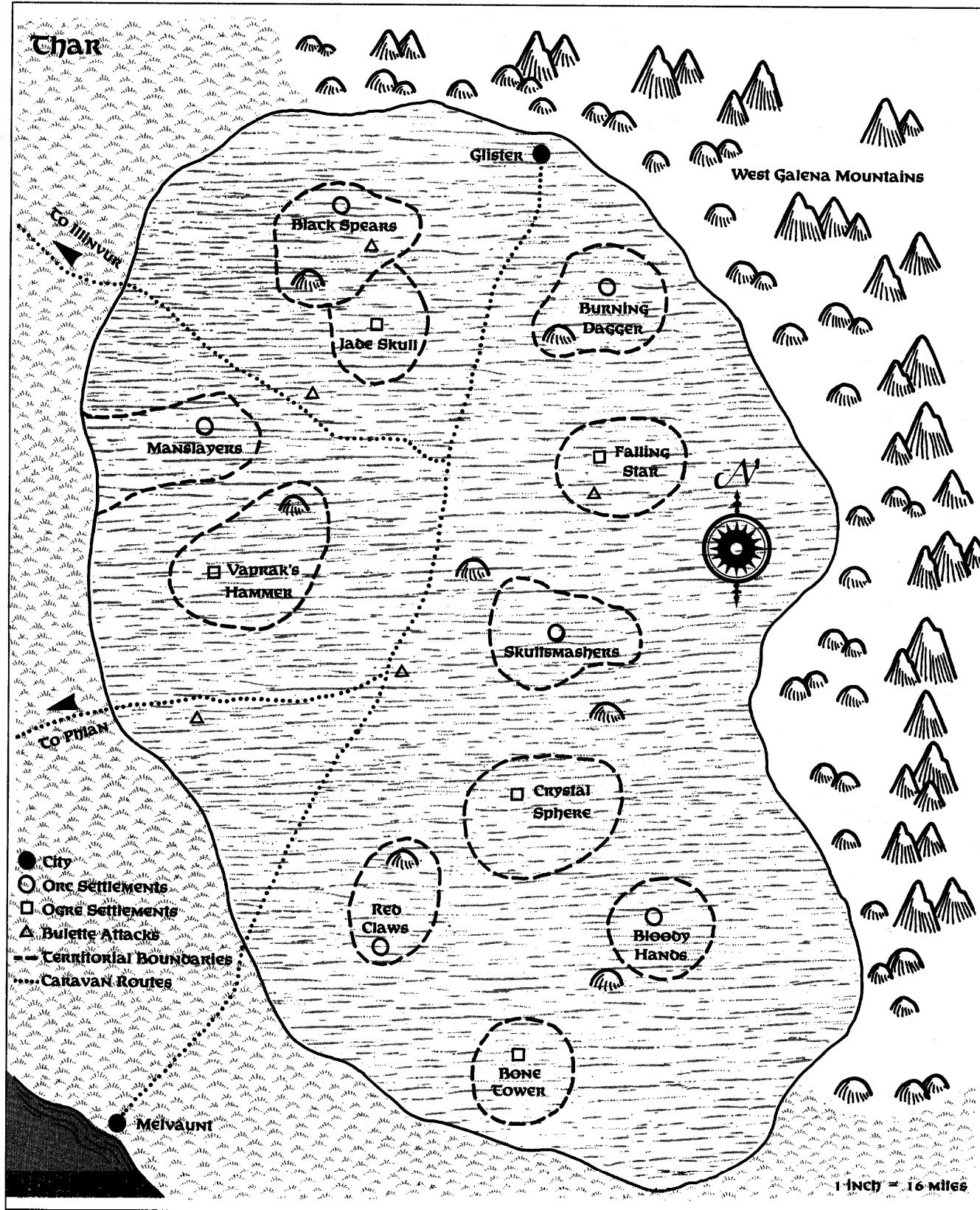
My travels took me northeast to Hillsfar. (I avoided Zhentil Keep as its rulers seem to have placed a price

on my head for some unfathomable reason.) By carack I traveled across the Moonsea to Melvaunt.

Once in Melvaunt, I discovered that the bumpkins' view of Thar was somewhat flawed, as the views of bumpkins often are. Activity in the Gray Land has increased enormously in recent years, with the discovery of rich mineral deposits in the West Galena Mountains. Caravans across the treacherous terrain to the frontier settlement of Glister were regular, if not exactly common, and there was much work for experienced wilderness scouts like me. The Thay Rangers—an informal organization of scouts, guides, rangers, and hunters—protect and look after the interests of freelancers in the region, and its leader, an aged mercenary named Khalvo, seemed delighted to accept me as a member.

With this in mind, I joined a large northbound caravan and, after forcibly convincing the caravan master that my services as a scout did not include services as his "special friend," began a lucrative career as a Thay Ranger.







Part One: The Land of Thar



At first glance, the Great Gray Land seems about as welcoming and fertile as an orc's armpit. Vast, seemingly endless steppe-lands covered in gray-brown grasses, with occasional stands of shaggy pines, rocky outcroppings, and marshy wetlands, Thar has the added onus of a reputation as home to vast bands of orcs and ogres.

While the region is inhospitable, to say the least, I found it a place of great fascination and adventure, especially for a bored ranger grown tired of village life. The steadily-increasing human activity in the region has led to a steadily-increasing interest in Thar, especially by merchants and those looking to exploit the mineral wealth of the West Galenas.

The Seasons

Thar's climate is best described as typical of a high steppe region, with its altitude contributing to its relatively harsh climate.

Spring brings heavy rains and a profuse bloom of wildflowers and grasses. This period, which often lasts less than a month, comes late, even as the rest of Faerûn is sweltering in summer's heat. At this time, the Great Gray Land is actually sprinkled with patches of bright green.

Summer comes quickly, ravaging the steppes with heat and humidity. Grasses wilt and flowers die. A few weeks after the advent of spring, Thar is back to being the Great Gray Land.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when summer ends in Thar, or when fall finally turns to winter. Gradual cooling grips the plains, further stressing the surviving plants, and sending animals into a frenzy of feeding or food-storing. Among the caravans, winter officially begins with the first frost.

Once temperatures reach the point that the ponds and streams actually freeze, winter descends quickly, blanketing the land with snow. Caravan traffic ceases, and the region's intelligent residents hunker down in shelters.

Wildlife

Undane wildlife in the regions follows the predator-prey pyramid I grew so familiar with during my early adventures. Hordes of rodents infest the grasslands—mice, voles, shrews, and rabbits—and they make life miserable for the idle camper. They invade tents, devour supplies, gnaw leather, and generally make themselves a serious nuisance. The ogres of Thar, superstitious beings that they are, ascribe the damage done to the works of evil spirits and such, but the average adventurer is fully aware of the culprit's identity.

Climatic Averages for Thar

Temperature (Spring)	65 degrees F.	Low Temperature (Year)	10 degrees F.
Temperature (Summer)	75 degrees F.	Low Temperature (Year)	10 degrees F.
Temperature (Autumn)	50 degrees F.	High Temperature (Year)	90 degrees F.
Temperature (Winter)	40 degrees F.	Days with Snow	100 days





Large hooved mammals such as deer and antelope are uncommon. Where they do exist, they run in herds of up to a dozen individuals, but pickings in the region are scarce and predators must be cunning and merciless, whether human, humanoid, or animal.

Small mammals are preyed on by larger ones like foxes, coyotes, and wolves that travel alone or in small packs. These predators have a bad reputation among the bumpkin set who regard them as vicious killers of humans, raiders of hen houses, or competitors for game. Unsurprisingly, my view of these creatures is more charitable. I have seen the valuable role they play keeping down pest populations, culling sick or dying animals, and maintaining the natural order.

Top predators include a variety of raptors. The majestic steppe eagle, a handsome beast with a lordly white-crested head, is probably the best-known, although it is among the rarest. Other avian predators include kestrels, falcons, kites, and owls, as well as the shrike, a perching bird similar in appearance to a jay, whose beak and talons have been adapted to a predatory lifestyle.

These birds also feed on the rodent population of the steppes, as well as on the numerous perching birds that inhabit the region, filling the area with their songs in spring and summer, but migrating to warmer southern climes in the fall.

Humans in Thar

Although I took considerable interest in the ecology of Thar, my primary duties involved guiding caravans, accompanying adventuring parties, and assisting hunting parties. I also took part in such miscellaneous tasks as rescue expeditions, exploratory scutings, and punitive raids against the humanoids of the region. I've seen the damage done to the fragile environment.

Several caravan routes crisscross the land, and are now marked by permanent wheel ruts and barren stretches where delicate grasses have been per-

manently destroyed. Only a few regions remain hospitable enough for encampment, and even those have been suffering under the carelessness of travelers whose idea of foraging seems to consist of killing everything that moves or grows, then sorting out the edible stuff later.

Game larger than rabbits has been nearly exterminated along caravan routes. Predators like foxes and wolves have also been systematically killed, causing massive explosions of the mouse and vole populations. Of course, the vast increase in rodent numbers has caused vast problems for caravans, with spoiled supplies and damaged equipment only the most obvious consequences. When the usual boneheaded caravan master gripes about the pests, he never realizes that his own short-sighted practices created the problem.

Several adventurers, especially the solitary guides and rangers who frequent Thar, have turned this surplus to their advantage, creating new recipes for roast rabbit, vole steak, and mouse stew, using the savory herbs that grow on the steppes. While a meal of mouse and shrew does not exactly compare to dinner at King Azoun's palace, it will keep you alive. I have resorted to such things on occasion and, although I can't recommend the experience, a starving woman can't afford to be choosy.





Part Two: Monsters

Ln addition to the usual critters I've already described to you, a lion's share of monsters dwells in the Great Gray Land. Thankfully there are only a few major species to deal with, but those few make life plenty difficult for those of us who make our living traveling through the region (and more so for those few hardy souls who live there, by choice or by fate). I present them here in alphabetical order, for clarity's sake; do not construe this order to mean anything as regards ferocity, perilousness, or abundance. One bulette is more than enough for anyone to deal with; a tribe of orcs, however, might not be the worst thing you can encounter. (Then again, I could be mistaken.)

Bullettes

These voracious predators are, fortunately, rare in the Thar region. At least one breeding pair presently exists in the area, however. My single experience with a bulette was enough to convince me that this beast is to be avoided at all costs. (The term "landshark," popularly applied to the creature, is entirely appropriate. Take it from someone who knows.)

Nablus's caravan set out from Melvaunt on a hot summer day two years ago. Loaded with lumber and food for Glister, we intended to return with iron ore, silver, and raw copper.

Nablus was a canny trader from Chult, who had fled from the region to escape the wrath of a local witch doctor. He was known for his extreme caution, and that he was willing to pay top price for guides and guards. This practice paid off for Nablus, and he had never yet lost a caravan to ogre or orc raiders.

This particular caravan was better protected than most. Orc raids along our route had been increasing

in frequency, possibly due to a food shortage in the tribal lands. Accordingly, Nablus hired (at great expense) a squadron of armored knights from a mercenary company called the Steel Lords. These soldiers, veteran fighters encased in plate armor, rode with the caravan, providing a heavy strike force against any assaults from either orc or ogre tribes.

The first few days proved uneventful, and I began to wonder whether Nablus had wasted his coins hiring the Lords. I found them all to be stern, humorless men who had seen battle and less formal conflict all across Faerûn. In short, I got along with them quite well.

Four days out of Melvaunt, one of our light cavalry outriders reported sighting a curious formation: a tented crest of earth moving rapidly toward us, as if a large animal was burrowing swiftly just beneath the surface. None of us had ever heard of such a thing, but Nablus decided that it was worth investigating, and ordered the Steel Lords forward.

I watched as, in the distance, the great moving mound of earth approached the Steel Lords, magnificent in their gleaming armor. As the earth-wave drew near, a large triangular crest broke the surface of the ground, like the fin of a shark slicing through calm water. Suddenly, I realized what we were facing.

"Nablus!" I shouted. "It's a bulette! A landshark!" I told him I had never seen such a creature, but I knew it was a deadly predator. With this information, Nablus ordered the caravan into a defensive posture, and watched the Lords' encounter with the beast.

It was horrific. The great, turtle-like body heaved from beneath the ground, dirt and stones cascading from its armored back. Two Steel Lords galloped toward it, lances lowered. To my horror, the weapons simply snapped off against the beast's impenetrable shell.

The creature struck back, biting furiously and





lashing out with two heavy front claws. A fully armored knight flew through the air to land with a crash nearly twenty feet away.

The surviving knights pressed the attack, with no more success. The bulette surged forward, jaws snapping, making for the caravan. Two more knights found death beneath the landshark's claws and in its gnashing maw before the knights finally made the beast angry.

Hissing loudly, the beast shook its head back and forth violently, intensely annoyed by the Steel Lords. At that, its triangular crest—that which I had seen break the surface of the earth—rose up, revealing soft skin beneath.

One of the Lords swiftly dismounted, staggering forward in his clumsy armor, and swung his sword at the exposed flesh. Black blood gushed, and the creature turned with a painful hiss, dispatching the brave knight instantly.

The single attack had been enough, however, for the monstrous beast turned aside from its efforts to

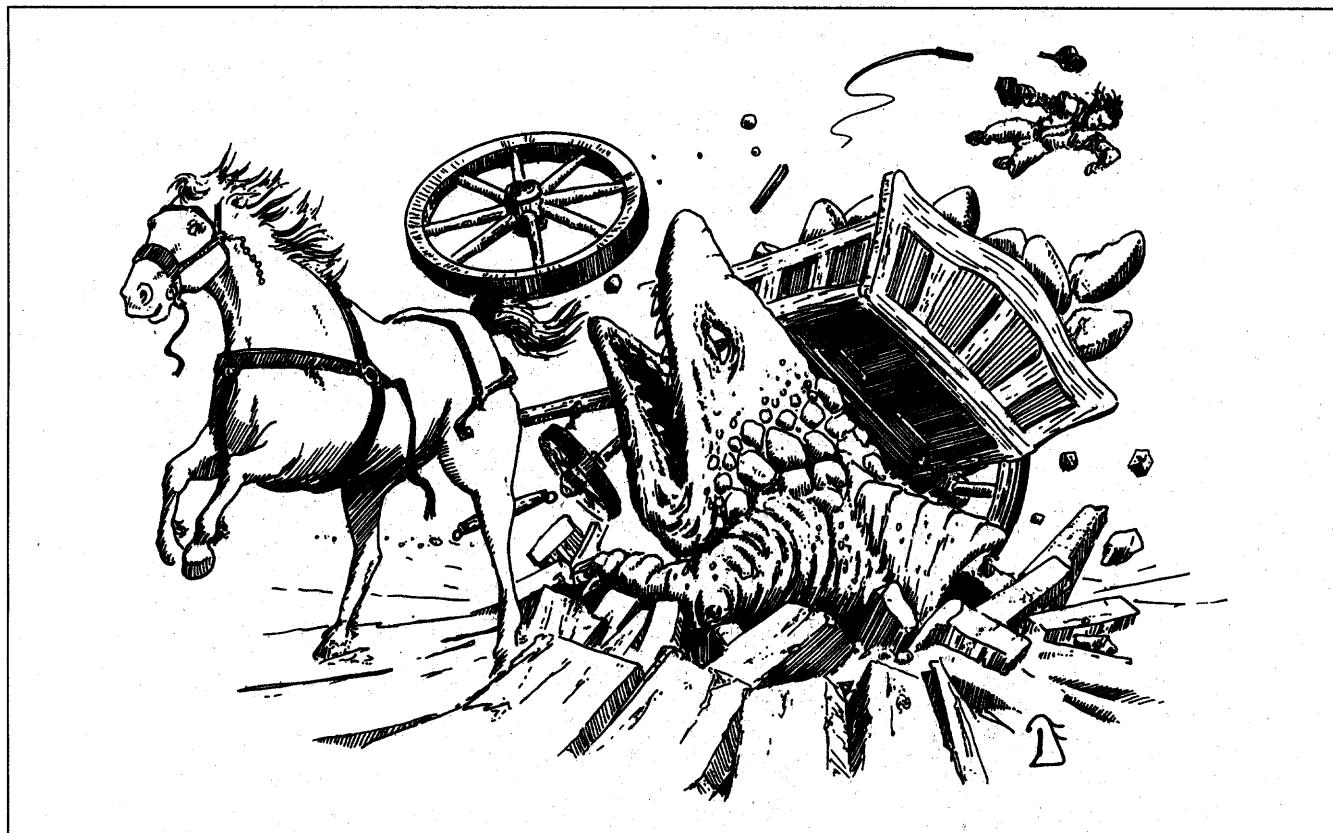
reach our caravan, pausing only to snatch a couple of dead horses and consuming them in a matter of seconds. Then it plunged once more below the ground and vanished.

Half our cavalry unit had been slain and the remainder wounded. Fortunately, the orcs and ogres did not raid us, and we arrived at Glister without further incident. Nevertheless, what I had seen convinced me that the bulette is one of the most dangerous creatures in all Faerûn.

The Eating Machine

The bulette is (thank all the gods) a solitary creature, hunting in territories as large as 30 square miles in area. In this domain, nothing is safe, for the bulette is virtually an eating machine, preying on anything unlucky enough to cross its territory.

This elephantine predator is known to weigh as much as four tons. Its highly energetic hunting practices require a relatively active metabolism—





high respiration, large lungs, and a powerful heart. A bulette can tunnel at high speed with very strong front claws, and also moves and jumps with lightning swiftness above ground.

As a result, the bulette must eat constantly, stalking and consuming protein-rich animal flesh. Large prey such as deer, antelope, horses, and humans are favored. Elves are the only prey a bulette refuses, and it seems to dislike dwarves, though it will devour one if hungry. Orcs, worgs, and ogres are also eaten with enthusiasm.

A bulette spends an inordinate amount of time on the hunt. When not doing so, however, the creature lies dormant beneath the earth, its breathing and heartbeat slowed. These dormant periods can last a number of days, especially after a large meal. The bulette's sophisticated digestive system seems capable of dissolving virtually any substance, given time, including swords, armor, rocks, and earth. It is evidently capable of extracting nutrition from some inanimate substances, but it needs a constant flow of animal protein to thrive.

While on the hunt, a bulette burrows beneath the surface of the ground. Highly sensitive to vibrations, bulettes make immediately for any regular rhythmic sound such as hoofbeats of animals. Multiple vibrations, such as those produced by a herd of animals or a caravan, invariably attract a bulette's attention.

Mysteries

Almost nothing is known about courtship and breeding behavior among bulettes. Theories abound, especially among armchair naturalists who have never seen one. Do bulettes lay eggs? Do they bear live young? Do they mate for life, or just associate like ships passing in the night? Do they keep growing as long as they live, or is there an upper limit to their size? How many young in a litter? What kind of parents are bulettes? On and on the debate goes, with little or no solid information.

As I've dedicated most of my life to separating fact from hayseed-spewed fiction, I pursued information on our burrowing friends while I was in

Thar. I gained little in the way of facts, but what I did learn was intriguing.

One orog scout who deigned to speak with me claimed that a pair of bulettes wrought havoc on his tribe not many years past. This interested me, since few observers have ever claimed to see more than one bulette at a time.

The orog told me that the bulettes seemed to attack together, rather than being two individuals hunting separately. The larger bulette was perhaps 12 feet in length, and silvery-blue in color, while the smaller one was approximately two feet shorter, and a glossy green. After ravaging the orcs' encampment and eating at least ten tribal warriors, the bulettes abruptly broke off the attack and vanished beneath the ground.

Were the bulettes a mated pair? A few accounts speak of two bulettes hunting together. Perhaps they were parent and offspring—I can't say. The bulette that attacked our caravan was bluish in color, leading me to speculate whether it might be the same one that destroyed the orcs' camp, as the orog described.

A caravan-master from Amn once told me a story from her days as a freelance adventurer, which might also shed light on the bulette's biology. While exploring a cave complex once inhabited by a troublesome tribe of goblins, she and her companions came upon a small chamber containing a dozen gray oval objects. Before they could investigate the items further, a wall collapsed, and a ravenous bulette burst in. The creature dragged one of her companions to his death before the adventurers could escape. The entire cave section then came crashing down, and my employer barely escaped with her life.

Was the chamber a nest? Were the objects eggs? Was the bulette defending its progeny or simply attacking the adventurers for food? Again, the results are open to speculation.

Elminster's notes – See Lyra Sunrose's notes in the Comanthor volume for some intriguing answers to the mysteries of bulette breeding.



Ogres Against Landsharks

Although the bulette is one of the most voracious and dangerous predators known, the ogres of Thar claim to know some surprisingly innovative tricks to turn the tables on the adorable creatures. Such hunts are very rare; to my knowledge, no ogre tribe has killed a bulette in this fashion for some time. However, disturbing rumors from the interior claim that two or three new bulettes have recently appeared—possibly the offspring of the two camp-destroyers. The ogres have begun to think about a new bulette-hunt, and the tricks they would employ bear repetition here.

Although they move through earth easily, bulettes are more at a loss when it comes to solid rock. My orog contact told me that, in past years, the ogres have used this disadvantage against bulettes. Several low hills or rocky outcroppings dot the wilderness of Thar, forming a relatively secure base of operations against the landsharks.

Given the bulette's extreme rarity, ogres have limited opportunities to hunt and kill them. Ogre tribes will hunt a bulette if it moves into their territory, and the entire tribe joins in despite the hazards. Individual warriors may win a considerable degree of prestige.

First, a dozen or so ogres begin rhythmically pounding the ground with clubs to attract the landshark. Inexorably attracted to the pounding, any bulette in the region will appear within a short time, ranging from a few minutes to as much as an hour, moving steadily beneath the earth, its crest ominously breaking the surface. Once the beast has been sighted, the ogres retreat to their rocky outcropping, knowing that once it detects potential prey, nothing short of death will deter a hungry bulette.

For all its speed and ferocity, a bulette is at a distinct disadvantage in the close confines of these rocky regions, and it moves much more slowly and deliberately. Were the bulette more intelligent, it would probably break off pursuit of the ogres once they reached restricted ground, but once in hunting mode, the beast is running on instinct alone.

The ogres scramble up the rocky slopes, the bulette in hot pursuit. Steep slopes are favored, for the more perilous the ascent, the greater the ogres' advantage.

Finally, the fleeing ogres reach the formation's craggy summit. At this moment, with the bulette completely intent on its prey, another group of ogres emerges from the far side of the outcropping, bearing stout wooden poles. Without hesitation (for surprise is their greatest advantage), the burly ogre warriors jam their poles beneath the bulette and push, adding just enough impetus to overbalance the beast and send it tumbling end over end down the slope.

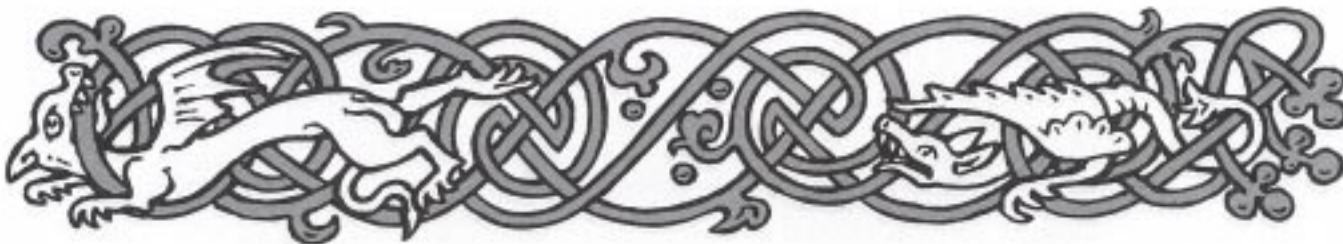
There are many dangers inherent in this. If the bulette avoids the poles, if it does not topple, if it does not land on its back—if any one of these desired results fail to occur, the ogres are in deep trouble, and they are likely to emerge from the encounter minus a few members. But if the bulette lands on its back, the ogres have the advantage and are quick to exploit it.

I find it ironic that the ogres, reputed by one and all to be slow and stupid, have discovered the bulette's one weakness—a fact that has evaded all the great minds of Faerûn for centuries. Very simply, an upended bulette has a great deal of trouble righting itself.

Mind you—given time, an inverted landshark will be able to flip over. Much scholarly speculation has been devoted to the landshark's "fin," with as many theories as there are crackpot theorists. Some proclaim it a vestigial organ that serves no purpose; that it is used by the landshark to mark territory; or that it is used in mating (always a popular explanation for seemingly useless appendages). None of these babbling academics has ever, to my knowledge, even bothered to suggest the most obvious use of all—that the bulette raises its fin simply to regain its feet if it is unlucky enough to find itself overturned onto its back.

This process normally takes several minutes, for the musculature that moves the crest is weak, and the ogres are quick to take advantage of it. They rush





down the slopes, their poles at the ready. In addition to their use in upending the unfortunate landshark, the ogres' poles are sharpened, and are driven by the ogres' incredible strength into the creature's belly, eyes, and mouth, or into the soft flesh beneath the crest as the beast struggles to right itself.

Even now, things can go wrong: the spears may not go home; their impetus might actually help the bulette to turn over; they may miss. All the same, the ogres' bulette-tipping practice appears to be the only real way of dealing with these deadly creatures if one needs to undertake such a deliberately risky hunt. Not my idea of an afternoon's merry jaunt, let me tell you.

Ibrandlin

These massive creatures, magically bred from ordinary fire lizards by the priests of Ibrandul, appear to have gained a foothold in Thar, dwelling also in the foothills of the West Galenas. Resembling nothing so much as wingless red dragons, they lack the cunning, intelligence, magical abilities, and malevolence of that species. Nevertheless, an ibrandlin is always a terrifying opponent, and several have begun preying upon human caravans in Thar.

Origins

How the ibrandlin came to inhabit Thar is not known, although some ogre territorial stelae portray human-seeming clerics summoning the creatures to attack and slay helpless ogres. As no scholars have thus far speculated on the ibrandlin's origins in Thar, it's up to me to call upon common sense and my practical experience to construct a reasonable theory. Ancient ogre history is uncertain, but many of their legends speak of an invasion by humans led by the hero Beldoran, who supposedly slew the last Tharkul. Perhaps these invaders included priests of Ibrandul among their numbers, and these priests created the beasts to protect themselves and help exterminate the ogres

of Thar. This is a bit odd, since Ibrandul's worshipers are generally confined to those who travel and explore below ground, but I can think of no other explanation.

Whatever their origin, the fact is that the ogres hate the ibrandlin with a rare passion. The orcs consider them a nuisance, but occasionally raise large parties to hunt them. One tribe decorates all its banners and clan totems with ibrandlin bones and bestows honors of special significance on those warriors who slay ibrandlin.

Habitat and Biology

Ordinarily, ibrandlin are found in caverns, especially in the Underdark. They can be dangerous, using their overwhelming weight to crush their foes. Whether magical or deific in origin, ibrandlin have long served as guardians, watchbeasts, or adventuring companions. Bred as defenders of Ibrandul's followers, they show a decided preference to dwell underground and defend anyone wearing the purple robes of those who serve the god Ibrandul.

What is remarkable about the ibrandlin in Thar is that they have largely overcome their original imperatives. The way I see it, they have "gone feral," returning to a more natural way of life and adapting their habits to suit their habitat.

The ibrandlins of Thar have retained their preference for dark places and their aversion to bright lights. They live under cairns or in caves in the foothills of West Galenas, and emerge at night to hunt. Surprisingly swift for such large creatures, wild ibrandlin favor goats, deer, antelope, and other large prey. They also attack orcs, ogres, and humans. Domestic horses, often hobbled or tied up when a caravan stops for the night, are especially easy targets.

Family Life

The ibrandlin of Thar have uncomplicated breeding practices, with pairs of ibrandlin mating once a year. The female lays a clutch of up to a dozen eggs, which hatch in the spring. Ibrandlin pairs defend their



nests—usually located in talus piles, caves, or shallow holes—and care for the hatchlings until they are old enough to fend for themselves. This period usually lasts one to three months after hatching. Once they have grown to adulthood, young ibrandlin strike out on their own, finding a lair, and staking out hunting territory.

The Priesthood

An obscure deity known only to those who range the Underdark and its environs, Ibrandul supposedly protects humans who venture into such areas. Ibrandul's priests claim to have created the ibrandlin, and the "domestic" creatures still may be found in subterranean regions.

The presence of "feral" ibrandlin in Thar has evidently come to the attention of the priests of Ibrandul. I learned of the interest in the ibrandlin from a fellow caravan guard who claimed to be a worshiper of Ibrandul. His tales of the creatures' presence in Thar made their way to several high priests who served the god in a secret temple complex located in the Underdark. According to my fellow guardsman, these priests began making plans for an expedition to the region, intending to study and, if possible, re-domesticate the ibrandlin of Thar.

The expedition has not yet been launched, but my informant told me that outside adventurers might be hired, especially if they have local experience. This fact may be of considerable interest and use to adventurers in the area. I might even consider signing on, myself.

Leucrotta

The leucrotta are ugly, ill-tempered beasts that haunt desolate regions and prey on anything they can get their bizarre teeth into. Needless to say, these creatures thrive in the Gray Land, and their cunning nature makes them a danger to both travelers and inhabitants.

While I'm the last to call these nasty little crea-

tures cute, cuddly, or in any way pleasant, I have taken some interest in the leucrotta and its biology. As with most of my projects, this is mostly in the intent to know my enemy, but my information should prove of interest to sages and scholars as well.

Physiology and Nature

A large creature, the leucrotta stands up to seven feet tall at the shoulder. Its body resembles that of a stag, save for a lionlike tail, and its head is similar to that of a badger. It does not possess teeth in the normal sense; in fact, the leucrotta skull has nothing to indicate the beast's ancestors ever had ordinary teeth or sockets. Instead, the creature is equipped with sharp bony ridges that, powered by the powerful jaws, easily slice flesh, break bone, and even tear metal.

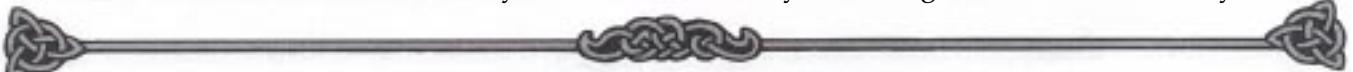
Nasty as they are, these pseudoteeth are probably of great interest to the curious naturalist. They resemble no other dental formation in nature, being extensions of the leucrotta's skull rather than distinct formations. The skull is huge, with a heavy sagittal crest and thick cheekbones, which anchor the powerful muscles and tendons that close the beast's jaws.

While it seems evident that the leucrotta is a mammal, its exact heritage is uncertain. Several sages have concocted complex evolutionary backgrounds for the leucrotta. I find these theories highly doubtful, containing huge gaps as they do, and an equal dose of hypothetical ancestral creatures and pure guesswork.

Personally, I think that the leucrotta is an unnatural creature, possibly created by magic in the same manner as were the griffon, pegasus, and hippocriff. Exactly how this came about is impossible to say, but my guess is that they were the result of a magical catastrophe much like the recent Time of Troubles, or that they were created by an evil power—wizard or god—to trouble its enemies.

Breeding and Family

Leucrotta run in packs of up to four individuals, usually consisting of a male and as many as three





females. This appears to be the rule, but I'm sure exceptions are possible, as leucrotta genders are quite similar. (The females are only a bit smaller than the males, but every bit as vicious.) Sexing the creatures is a process I'd rather leave to more dedicated students of natural history.

Females give birth in the spring, and are relatively good parents. By fall a young leucrotta has grown large enough to be a threat to its own pack, and it is driven off. Those young leucrotta that survive the winter form new packs in the spring and summer, or force their way into existing packs, killing or displacing any challengers among the former members.

Adolescent leucrotta sometimes band together in temporary packs, hunting together for mutual benefit. The so-called bachelor packs are very dangerous, as their members are often hungry.

Diet and Hunting

Leucrotta are voracious carnivores, using their high intelligence and talent for mimicry to lure prey animals virtually into their jaws. Ordinarily, leucrotta eat large mammals such as deer and antelope, but they will subsist on mice, rabbits, and voles if necessary. It is the leucrotta's taste for intelligent prey such as orcs, humans, and even ogres that makes it infamous, however, since these victims give the leucrotta full opportunity to use its unnerving vocal skills.

Leucrotta can imitate a wide variety of sounds, including the voices of intelligent creatures. In the wild, this is used to mimic the cry of rutting male deer or elk, the cries of young animals in distress, or the sounds of prey animals. All these vocalizations are intended to attract creatures to the leucrotta, which then attacks (usually from ambush), and dispatches its victim with savage bites from its powerful jaws.

While this might be an interesting curiosity if it was confined to hunting other animals, the leucrotta's mimicry represents a real danger to unwary human and humanoid travelers. Experienced leu-

crotta have learned many words and phrases in sentient languages, and know what to do to attract their preferred prey. They know humans will follow the sound of one of their fellows in pain, more so if the voice seems to come from a child or a member of the opposite sex. Orcs and ogres will come to the aid of a fellow clan-member, or will respond to a challenge to battle or an insult. Leucrotta's tricks in this vein are legion, and they will rarely use the same ploy twice in a row.

Of course, lone individuals are especially favored targets, but a pack of leucrotta may take on several creatures at once. A small caravan, an orcish raiding party, or a pair of ogres might be menaced by these creatures, whose attacks can be utterly devastating.

Should mimicry fail, leucrotta will generally abandon the hunt. If they are hungry enough, though, they may choose a more direct attack, usually from ambush. In these cases, the leucrotta imitate the sounds of birds or other natural creatures to lull their victims into a false sense of security before launching their attack.

Interview with The Leucrotta

Much ink and parchment have been wasted in scholarly debates regarding the intelligence of the leucrotta—or the lack of it. Are these beings truly intelligent, the dusty scholars wonder, or is their cunning mimicry merely an instinctive process? If they are intelligent, do they have a language, and what sort of society do they have? Many supposedly-learned individuals vehemently deny that leucrotta are intelligent, claiming that they are simply clever animals.

These armchair scientists will, with this record, get the comeuppance they deserve. (If you haven't figured it out by now, I despise such driv- elers for their groundless theorizing when they might pursue demonstrable facts instead.) I am pleased to say that, by my experience, I have cleared all the scholarly detritus from this issue and have proved conclusively that leucrotta are



intelligent, and that they are fully capable of meaningful communication.

As I mentioned previously, extremely hungry leucrotta will attack their prey directly. On one trip, I was working one caravan stalked by such an individual, which tried repeatedly to draw members from our party with sounds of humans in distress, children crying, or similar ploys. The first time this happened, a large armed party left the caravan to search for the distressed individual, and found nothing. Evidently the leucrotta fled, thinking the party was too powerful for it. It returned later to try again, of course.

Eventually we stopped responding to its pleas and went our way, hoping that it would desist. Of course, we were hoping for too much, and after a couple of days the nasty beast was so hungry that it ambushed us, hoping to drag off a horse or drover and make its escape.

Fortunately for us all, our caravan master had hired a combat-skilled wizard for the journey, and his spells quickly rendered the beast unconscious. I

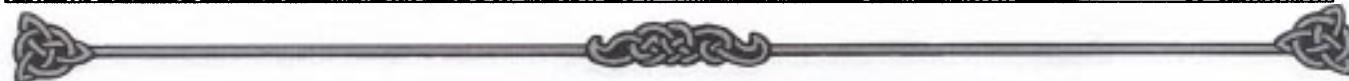
prevailed upon the caravan master not to kill the leucrotta—not right away, at any rate—and, instead, imprisoned it in heavy chains and loaded it onto a wagon.

As the one who pleaded for the leucrotta's life, I was given the unenviable duty of guarding it, leading me to wonder if I'd been too generous.

After riding alongside the wagon for a time and dealing with the loud complaints of the driver (who made no secret of his dislike for the cargo), I noted that the leucrotta was stirring.

Unfortunately for the driver and me, my first clue was a wave of nauseating odor that washed over us as the thing's breath quickened. At this point the driver refused to cooperate any further, demanding either that I kill the leucrotta, or that I take the reins and let him ride my horse.

I agreed reluctantly, and boarded the wagon. Curiously, dividing my attention between keeping the wagon in the caravan and inspecting my captive, I watched as the leucrotta's eyes flickered open and its foul-smelling mouth opened even wider,





revealing a lolling, pink, doglike tongue.

"Help me," it whined in a passable imitation of a wounded human.

I shook my head. "It won't wash, love," I said. "You're ours now."

"No," it continued, its tone turning conversational. "Set me free, human. I'll leave you in peace."

I must admit that my jaw dropped.

"Are you talking to me?" I asked. "Really?"

It snorted, sending another wave of stench over me. I took this as a chuckle.

"You didn't think it possible, did you, female?" it said slyly. "Yes, I talk. Will you set me free, human?"

One track mind, I mused, rapidly overcoming my astonishment. I returned its pleading gaze with a sly look of my own.

"Perhaps, beast," I said. "If you cooperate with us. Otherwise, you might spend the rest of your days in a circus. Or possibly decorating the floor of my study."

This didn't seem to faze the creature. "I've been threatened with worse. So you want to bargain, do you? I've heard that humans like to bargain. What would you like from me, female? I warn you, I can't give much."

"You can tell me about yourself," I replied. "Tell me your secrets."

It made a giggling sound, midway between a human and a hyena. "You humans puzzle me. All I care about another creature is whether I can eat it or not. I don't care about its secrets. But if that's the price I must pay, I will do so."

In this way, much to the astonishment (and in many cases, the disgust) of the other members of the caravan, I struck up a conversation with the captive leucrotta, the highlights of which I will relate here.

The creature seemed amused by the sound of the name "leucrotta." The leucrotta themselves, it seemed, do not have spoken names, relying instead on each individual's distinctive odor to reveal its identity. Not being equipped to make such a fine

distinction, I decided to call my informant "Olaf," after an old boyfriend whose personal habits were only marginally better than the leucrotta's.

Leucrotta do have a society of sorts, based upon interactions between packs. Each pack is identified, like the individuals within it, by its distinctive combination of odors, which persist in a region long after a pack has gone. These odor-markers are used to stake out territory, and are generally respected by other leucrotta packs.

All this was quite fascinating, but it was not what I was really interested in.

"So tell me," I said at last, "how do you see the world? What makes you the way you are?"

I would swear that Olaf grinned at me, its eyes reflecting both surprise and respect.

"Your claws bare my heart with one stroke, female," he said. "You ask much in exchange for freedom."

I remained silent.

"Very well," the leucrotta said at last. "You people think we're animals, don't you? By now you know that we're far more. We 'leucrotta,' as you call us, do have some unique ways of looking at the world. We see through the eyes of the Pack, and the Pack guides us."

"The Pack?" I asked.

"Yes. They are our—what's your word of it?—our gods."

RUNNING WITH THE PACK

That the leucrotta are intelligent was a revelation. That they worship a previously unknown pantheon of gods and goddesses was nothing short of unbelievable.

According to Olaf, the leucrotta worship a group of archetypal predators known as the Pack. This Pack is led, not surprisingly, by the great leucrotta, Toknana. The Pack ranges across the plains of the Abyss, preying upon the tanar'ri, sending prey animals to deserving leucrotta, and defending the species against its enemies.

Toknana is assisted by a number of other arche-





typal creatures, such as Hruba the Chimera, Ylarria the Red Dragon, and Voal the Hydra. In addition, numerous leucrotta, chosen from the finest and most cunning hunters on Faerûn, also run with Toknana across the Abyss, and are sometimes dispatched to the Prime Material Plane to assist mortal leucrotta if they are threatened or need new tricks to help them deceive and capture prey.

The heroic example of Toknana and his Pack, who fear nothing and hunt even the most powerful of prey, form the basis of the leucrotta's world view. They have been awarded the world as their hunting ground, and those who prove the most dangerous and resourceful (which in the leucrotta's mind also means "most deceitful") will be united with Toknana in a land where they can hunt without fear of death or reprisal.

A streak of nobility in a species noted for its vicious and often cowardly behavior came as yet another revelation. I looked at my captive with renewed respect. Beast he may have been, and in other circumstances a hated enemy, but at this moment I felt something like kinship.

Some days later, after our arrival at Glister, I took my prisoner deep into the wilderness. I had worked with a local wizard to create a spell that would automatically release Olaf's chains several hours after I left it. (Even I did not trust my charge so much that I would release it while I was anywhere nearby!) The leucrotta did not seem happy at the notion of being left, chained and helpless, for hours in the wilderness, but at this point it had no choice.

As I stopped the wagon and unhitched my horse, I turned to the leucrotta.

"Two last questions," I said. "How did you learn to speak?"

Olaf chuckled again. "For a time I was the victim of the same fate you threatened me with," it said. "I was displayed in a traveling circus. Unknown to the owner, I learned how to speak by listening to the gawkers, then tricked him into opening my cage and. . . well, I'll leave the results up to your imagination."

I shuddered.

"You said two questions," the leucrotta said. "What is the last?"

I grinned. "I never did ask you. Are you a male or a female?"

Another laugh, louder this time. The leucrotta fixed me with the sly expression I had grown familiar with over the last few days.

"Wouldn't you like to know," it said. "Wouldn't you like to know."

To this day, I don't know the answer to my last question.

Manticore

Another unnatural creature—magically or diabolically created—the manticore is an unpleasant combination of a human head, a lion's torso, a dragon's wings, and a spiked tail. While they certainly existed before the Time of Troubles, manticores' numbers have steadily increased, especially in wilderness regions such as the Gray Land of Thar.

At least three breeding pairs of manticores have been reported in the area. I myself have only observed one solitary individual, and this at a distance. Nevertheless, several caravan guards told stories of the increasing problems caused by such creatures. The information in this section is based largely on their statements—at least those statements I believe to be true.

Hunting and Eating

Although they are unnatural creatures, manticores have taken their place in Thar's ecology, using their flying ability to range all across the land. Although clumsy fliers, manticores nonetheless attack prey from the air, and thus avoid melee with an enemy. Typically, a hunting pair will circle their prey, flinging tail spikes, then swooping down to attack with claws. Only after an opponent has been badly wounded in this fashion will the manticores descend to finish off their victims with a vicious bite.





Among caravan guards and masters, manticores have a reputation for cowardice, refusing to engage at close quarters, and flying off if opponents respond with missile weapons or magic. In all honesty, I'd say this response represents good sense rather than cowardice. Refusing to attack a caravan protected by archers, spellcasters, or powerful fighters seems thoroughly reasonable to me. Perhaps this is one reason manticores continue to thrive in Thar.

Small groups, such as foraging parties, adventurers, or explorers are in far more danger from manticores. A pair of these beasts can do untold damage, especially to inexperienced groups. Orcs and ogres familiar with the beasts' hunting habits always travel in large, well-armed groups in regions known to be inhabited by manticores.

Defenses

It is almost inevitable that small groups of travelers will find themselves beset by manticores. The natives and residents of Thar—orc, ogre, and human—have developed several tactics for dealing with these troublesome beasts. In my continuing effort to bring enlightenment to the ignorant, I record some of these tactics, which might be of use to the traveler who wishes to be prepared.

As manticores always precede their assaults with a rain of tail spikes, travelers in their territories are advised to carry large shields or armored mantlets. In the event of a manticore attack, these shields may be raised to ward off the flying spikes. Additional shields may also be carried and held over the defenders' heads in the manner of the ancient *testudo* formation.

Manticores have a well-known dislike for missile weapons. All forms of bows are effective in discouraging their attacks, especially crossbows. (The bolts penetrate so powerfully that the attacking creature is particularly daunted.) Of course, archers will find it useful to have gaps or firing slits in the party's mantlets.

Magic also discourages manticores, although I have heard rumors suggesting certain spells actually

enrage the beasts and cause them to attack even more ferociously. My informants were uncertain and inconsistent identifying the exact spells, so I find the reports doubtful—the information should not be depended on too heavily.

Once on the ground, manticores must be kept at bay, for their melee attacks are deadly. Good results can be had using long thrusting spears or pikes in the manner of the ancient phalanx. Care must be taken that the second manticore does not circle around to attack from the air while the first is being held off.

Orc Treaties

An interesting element of the manticores' effect on the residents of Thar is the agreements made with them by several orc tribes. Fearful of the manticores' predations, the orcs offer sacrificial victims every month or so in the hope that the beasts will leave them alone.

These sacrificial victims—not terribly different from the maidens supposedly offered to placate dragons in ages past—may be captives such as humans, ogres, or orcs from rival tribes. If no such victims are available, goblin slaves or condemned orc criminals are offered instead.

Victims are left in the wilderness, bound hand and foot. Gongs and drums are pounded, and torches lit to summon the predators. Although manticores are not noted for their high intelligence, they quickly grow accustomed to the orc tribes' offerings, and arrive within minutes.

Whether these sacrifices actually placate the manticores is not certain, but the tribes continue to make their sacrifices regularly. The manticores, opportunists that they are, accept readily.

The Ogres

Long ago, Thar was home to a powerful ogre kingdom, united under the bone-banner of a great leader known as the Tharkul. Trolls, yeti, orcs,





and goblins all paid homage to the Tharkul, but the great kingdom plunged into chaos upon the death of the last Tharkul, Maulog, at the hands of the human hero Beldoran. Not surprisingly, the ogres claim that Beldoran slew Maulog through treachery, but who can know the truth after so long?

My study of ancient texts—dry and thirsty work, let me tell you—has led me to believe that the ancient Thar ogres were remarkably advanced, both socially and technologically, and that their kingdom actually represented a major force in the region.

The Ancient Kingdom

Although ogres are widely believed to be stupid and unsophisticated creatures with just enough sense to bash each other over the head occasionally, the few artifacts left behind by the ancient kingdom of Thar prove them to be a surprisingly sophisticated race.

A series of stone fortresses once dotted the Gray Lands, built of stone quarried and transported by slaves from the West Galena Mountains. A network of roads facilitated travel. Near the center of Thar rose a great, multilevel palace where the Tharkul lived. This palace consisted of a series of cylindrical towers linked by underground passages, and surrounded by an earthen wall bristling with spikes and traps.

These ancient buildings offer a degree of proof that ogres are not merely the drooling mouth-breathers of popular imagination. Today, little remains but some battered foundations and grassy mounds out in the middle of nowhere. The killing of the Tharkul plunged the ogre kingdom into chaos and civil war, during which all the fortresses and palaces were abandoned or destroyed.

The exact date of the ogre kingdom in Thar is uncertain, but its downfall seems to have taken place at least 1000 years ago. Since then, the ogres have returned to their traditional tribal ways, although they continue to speak of the day when the Tharkul will return and once more lead them to greatness.

Appearance and Culture

The ogres of Thar differ from their Faerûn relatives somewhat, lending credence to the theory that they are a more advanced group. They are slightly smaller than ordinary ogres (averaging about eight feet in height), and their heads are somewhat larger. Thar ogres' skin color ranges from lavender to brick red, and they lack the distasteful odor usually associated with the species.

Ogre tribes range in size from two to a hundred, united under a chieftain and his tribal warlords. Tribes will sometimes band together in alliances numbering several hundred. These alliances rarely last for very long, but while they do, they can be quite dangerous.

As in orc tribes, chieftains attain their position through combat, but they rule only with the continuing approval of their people. A bad chieftain may be overthrown by force, with the entire tribe rising against him. Ousted chieftains are either killed or exiled. Thereafter, a few may manage to subsist as hermits, dwelling alone in huts, holes, or caves, emerging to prey on passing animals and luckless travelers.

Females have somewhat more influence among ogres than among the orcs, but they are still forbidden to rule. Some ogre legends speak of female chieftains, so the notion is not completely alien to them, but in fact it has not been seen in modern times.

Restrictions on rulership by female ogres are somewhat mitigated by the fact that only an ogress can serve as a shaman. Powerful in their own right, they cast useful spells, receive visions from the ogre gods, and create the scar-patterns that portray the heroic deeds of other ogres.

Tribes subsist by hunting, foraging, and raiding. An ogre can eat virtually anything (including, some claim, rocks and dirt, although I personally do not believe that). Cannibalism, though, is not unheard of.

Ogre villages are an assemblage of stone or hide huts, sometimes surrounded by a crude palisade. Orcs





raid ogre villages regularly, and all tribe members are expected to fight. Unlike orc females, ogre females face no restrictions against serving as warriors or hunters.

As discussed above, a few ogre tribes actually keep orcs as slaves. They do not think much of the green-skinned "mad ones," as the orcs are called, but will sometimes trust them with menial tasks. Orcs will raid ogre settlements from time to time to free orc slaves.

While ogres are unquestionably a dangerous and murderous race, they are surprisingly indulgent parents, treating their offspring with considerable affection. Ogres dote upon their children, denying them little, ignoring temper tantrums and misbehavior, and engaging in corporal punishment only rarely.

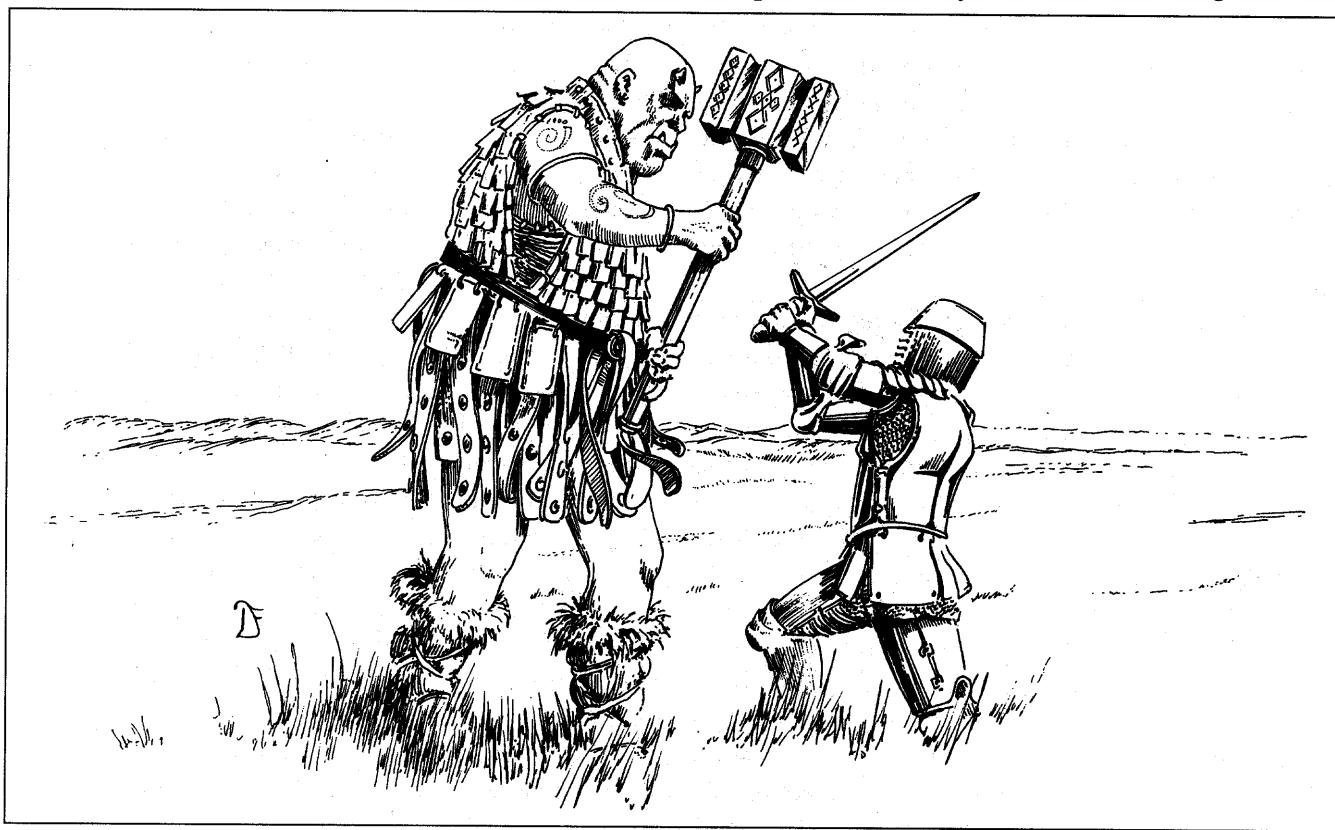
Young ogres mature rapidly, and join their tribes as adults once they have engaged in battle or have slain a large animal such as a deer or antelope. Once accepted as an adult, the ogre participates in hunting expeditions, battles, and raids.

Adult ogres mark their achievements by the creation of ritualistic scar patterns on their faces, arms, and backs. These are created solely by ogresses, who select appropriate patterns based on prophetic dreams and visions, which they claim are sent by Vaprak, god of the ogres.

Vaprak and The Gods

Like other ogre groups, the Thar tribes worship Vaprak, the mighty god of ogres. Normally portrayed as a gigantic, hideous ogre with exaggerated claws, eyes, and teeth, Vaprak is seen by the Thar ogres as a tall, surprisingly noble-looking individual clad in scale armor and carrying a mighty war hammer. This image of Vaprak has a long history, with some ancient artifacts recovered out of the wilderness portraying the ogre god in this manner. Invariably, he is shown vanquishing numerous enemies of various races.

Vaprak is served by a number of demigods and





heroes unknown to other ogre tribes. Chief among these is the last Tharkul, Maulog. Ogre legends describe him as a brave and honorable ogre leader, treacherously slain by a human assassin named Beldoran—the same Beldoran called a hero among humans, and widely reputed to be the founder of Glister. It all depends on who you're talking with, it seems.

Other servants of Vaprak include Ysshara, goddess of healing and heroic deeds; and Mirklak, another ancient hero reputed to have slain a thousand orcs in a single battle.

Many ceremonies surround the worship of these gods, most involving the sacrifice of captured enemies. Orcs and humans are preferred for these sacrifices, but other ogres are used when nothing else is available.

Tribes' female shamans are responsible for communication with Vaprak, usually in dreams or waking visions. They perform the sacred rituals and sacrifices, heal wounded warriors, and create the scar-patterns with which adult ogres portray their deeds and heroic battles.

Tribes and Boundaries

Dozens of ogre tribes inhabit the Great Gray Land. They have names like Jade Skull, Vaprak's Hammer, Falling Star, and Crystal Sphere, all names which hark back to the sophisticated civilization the ogres once possessed.

Tribes control territories up to 100 square miles in area, and mark their boundaries with carved stone stelae. These monuments are surprisingly accomplished works of art, portraying such things as Vaprak vanquishing his enemies, ancient heroes and monsters, all in a style that is reminiscent of both the Ffolke and the Northmen of the Moonshae islands.

Stelae are often carved with runic script, but these designs seem to have been created for aesthetic purposes rather than as meaningful written messages. This leads me to believe that the ogres of Thar once had a true written language, but have

forgotten it and now they use its marks solely for decoration. Each tribe also has a distinctive rune, which is marked on its stelae. This rune is also chalked or carved on trees, stones, and other formations in the tribe's territory.

Although art collectors would probably pay a great deal for one of the ogre stelae, adventurers are advised against disturbing them. Not only will the ogres who created the stelae stop at nothing to avenge the theft (even going so far as to pursue the wrongdoers beyond Thar), many of these stelae carry curses that were placed on them by tribal shamans. The terrible curses lead to misfortune, disease, or even death, and they are very difficult to remove once they have taken effect.

The Jade Skull Tribe

One of the most powerful of Thar's ogre tribes, the Jade Skulls occupy a territory southwest of Glister, adjacent to the Black Spear orc tribe.

There are over 100 Jade Skull ogres. They are led by the chieftain Okkmog, assisted by his two female shamans, Kurraakkha and Vazgrhaa.

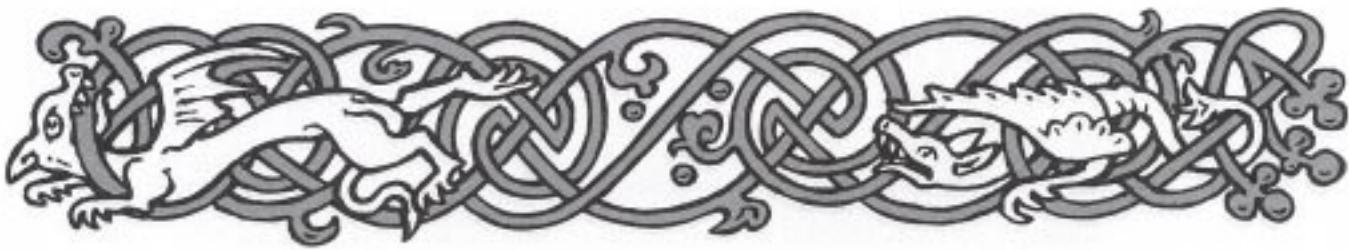
Okkmog, Ogre Chieftain: AC 4; MV 9; HD 8; hp 50; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10+9 (*two-handed sword +3*); SA +2 to damage; XP 975

Kurmakkha, Ogre Shaman: AC 5; MV 9; HD 4+1; hp 24; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10; SA +2 to damage; XP 975; Clerical Spells: 1st Level: *cause light wounds* ×2; 2nd Level: *spiritual hammer*

Vazgrhaa, Ogre Shaman: AC 5; MV 9; HD 4+1; hp 26; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10; SA +2 to damage; XP 975; Clerical Spells: 1st Level: *cause light wounds, detect magic, faerie fire*; 2nd Level: *aid, enthral*

Okkmog is rumored to wield an enchanted sword that can cast lightning bolts. The Jade Skulls extort protection money from caravans traveling to and from Glister, and are engaged in a long and bitter struggle with the neighboring Black Spear orcs.







An Ogre's Outlook

Although I've sent a few of them to their final reward, the average ogres of Faerûn and I have never bothered to discuss philosophy. However, I have been in some interesting places in my day, and thus I've learned that the ogres of Thar have quite an interesting view of the world.

They see the world as a testing place, where Vaprak sets obstacles in the path of his children. Only the truly faithful will tolerate the world's pain and unfairness, marking them as worthy of eternal service to their deity. Those who fail are sent to a horrific afterlife of continual suffering and punishment, making each ogre all too eager to tolerate Vaprak's tests and torments. The fall of the ogre kingdom is seen as one of Vaprak's greatest tests, and the current chaos and primitive level of ogre civilization are punishment for the prideful ways of those ancient days.

This does not, of course, excuse Beldoran's treachery, nor does it diminish the guilt of humans in general. The Thar ogres' hatred of humans springs from a desire for vengeance, and the memory of the destruction of their great kingdom. That Beldoran is perceived to be Vaprak's agent in this matter does not seem to concern the ogres. All humans, they feel, deserve punishment for the offense of one.

Other races—orc, goblins, humans, elves, and dwarves—are also sent by Vaprak. The agonies they inflict upon the ogres are further examples of Vaprak's stern benevolence toward his children. To tolerate the injustices visited by non-ogres is considered noble; to take vengeance for them is the act of a true ogre hero.

The ogres believe that if they tolerate the cruelties of this dark age, Vaprak will find them worthy once more. He would allow a single Tharkul to unite Thar, and lead his followers to greatness. The restoration of the ogre kingdom of Thar would be the ultimate sign of Vaprak's blessing.

The Orcs

Imagine an ugly, green-skinned tax collector who always has a toothache, and you've got a

pretty good picture of what an orc is like—or at least an orc from the Thar region. Being the considerate and enlightened individual that I am, I will not condemn an entire group, race, or species on the malevolence of one group, but even I must admit that my feelings toward the Thar orcs are somewhat less than charitable.

Virtually every caravan that travels through Thar has to deal with orcs at some time. This may mean spotting orc riders at a distance, having to pay tribute to some petty orc lordling, or withstanding a raid by an entire tribe, backed up by orog elite warriors and goblin auxiliaries. None of these experiences is pleasant, but the longer one lives in Thar, the more the orcs become a nasty and unavoidable fact of life.

Origins and History

Legends regarding the origins of orcs are as numerous and varied as are the orcs themselves. Some of the stories I've heard claim that the orcs are the offspring of cursed elves who turned their backs on Corellon Larethian and the gods of the Seldarine. Others believe that orcs are the descendants of a warrior race bred by denizens of a forgotten kingdom. Still others promote the theory that orcs are natural creatures, evolved from the same root-stock as humans and halflings—an assertion that, needless to say, both humans and halflings find quite distasteful.

The orcs themselves tell a number of heroic tales of how their race came to be. The most common story presents the claim that Gruumsh One-Eye created the orcs, intending that they dwell peacefully with the other races. Unfortunately for Gruumsh, the other deities sought to cheat him, and cut the orcs out of the deal when they divided the world among themselves and their creations. Gruumsh, of course, was not fooled by the other gods' deception, and decreed that his people would dwell and prosper in the barren and unwanted corners of the world, there to multiply and eventually emerge to conquer the lands that were denied them.

In my eyes, it's all a load of manure, no matter who tells the stories. The orcs of Thar are a violent,





warlike race with little subtlety and absolutely no compassion. I grant them no quarter in battle, mostly because they would never grant such to me.

Thar's ancient history is fragmented and hard to follow, but it is well known that the region was once united under an ogre chieftain known as the Tharkul. Depending upon who is telling the story, the orcs were independent kingdoms living side by side with the ogres, skilled mercenaries who voluntarily served the Tharkul, or cringing slaves who obeyed their ogre masters' every whim. I find the last a bit hard to believe—whatever orcs' bad qualities, no one can ever accuse them of "cringing." If you strike off an orc's arm in battle, he will likely laugh at you, and taunt you for not killing him outright. I know—it happened to me.

When the Tharkul Maulog was slain by the human Beldoran, Thar was plunged into chaos, with all the tribes going their separate ways. The orcs founded their own dynasties, allying with or enslaving each other as they chose. Goblin tribes were absorbed and enslaved, and ogres were gener-

ally killed. Today, many tribes and proto-nations of orcs exist in Thar, all constantly fighting against each other and the humans of the region without prejudice or favoritism.

Culture

Most Faerûn inhabitants believe that orcs have less culture than yogurt, but this attitude springs from prejudice and lack of understanding. The orcs of my acquaintance may have been uniformly obnoxious, paranoid, homicidal, or all three, but they definitely possess a distinct culture. While I admit there are those who feel that spending so many words about orcs is a waste of good parchment, I firmly believe that knowledge of one's enemy provides important advantages—and I have no doubt that the orcs of Thar are among the deadliest of enemies.

The disparate orc tribes of Thar share similar cultural attributes, which I see as evidence that they are all descended from the same basic stock of tribal ancestors. While dissimilar from that of other





Faerûn orc nations, the culture of the Thar orcs retains some common orc characteristics, and there is no difficulty recognizing them as "typical" orcs.

The fundamental orc unit is the clan, and an individual's ultimate loyalty is to his or her clan. A tribe consists of one or more clans, united under a single strong leader. The different clans of the tribe may be traditional allies, they may have banded together for political or geographic reasons, or they may even have been dragged into the tribe by force.

Tribal chieftains are chosen strictly through trials of strength, and any able-bodied male may challenge a chief for rulership. Leadership duels are invariably bloody affairs, for orcs have little stomach for fair fights, rules of good conduct, or sportsmanship. Any tactic used to win is acceptable, even if it involves having one's opponent ambushed and murdered before the fight even begins.

Clan leadership is determined in much the same way, although some clans have ritualistic or ceremonial trappings associated with their succession battles. Some allow battles without weapons, while others restrict combatants to daggers. Still others practice the no-holds-barred testing, with the same rules (or lack of them) as is usual in battles for tribal rulership.

In both tribe and clan, society revolves around conflict. All tribe members receive training as warriors, including females, although they are allowed to fight only if the entire tribe is at risk. Ordinarily, females are considered chattel, useful only for breeding and domestic chores.

SETTLEMENTS

The orcs of Thar follow a number of different living patterns. Some tribes are semi-nomadic and others entirely so. Still others live in permanent settlements.

The hard ground of Thar is not suitable to orcs' preferred underground dwellings, so they are forced to live on the surface, dealing with the harshness of daylight, weather, and so on. For this reason, Thar orcs suffer few ill effects from the sunlight, and can be active at any time of the day or night.

Nomadic orcs travel light, using giant wolves, called

worgs, as pack animals. Camps are built of hide tents, lean-tos, and other temporary shelters. These are often decorated with clan symbols, depictions of famous battles, great leaders—I've seen stranger things, too.

Sedentary orcs live in longhouses constructed of wood and stone. In these houses, entire clans live and eat communally. A large tribe may have up to a dozen longhouses, one for each clan. Settlements of this nature are often surrounded by wooden palisades, earthworks, or even low stone walls.

Orcs and The Ecology

A few words about the effect of orcs on the ecology of Thar are appropriate here, given the overall purpose of this document.

Normally, orcs have nothing short of an utterly disastrous effect on the regions they inhabit—lands despoiled, forests destroyed, streams and lakes poisoned, and so on. In Thar, where the land is as tough and resilient as the orcs themselves, they have a less devastating effect.

Orc hunting and foraging affects animal populations much the way caravan traffic does, but most tribes have learned not to overexploit the lands they inhabit. Tribes that hunt or forage out their lands find themselves weakened and quickly conquered, or completely extinct.

Shamans

The religious life of orc tribes is in the hands of their shamans, low-level clerical spellcasters, who claim to hear and interpret the words of Gruumsh and the other orc gods. Shamans' healing and combat abilities are vital to the tribe. However, one of their most important roles—something rarely if ever mentioned by outside observers—is to be the tribe's storyteller.

Orc clans have long and varied histories, memorized and retold by the clan shamans. Great battles are recounted around the tribal campfire, and the deeds of clan founders and ancestors are described in loving detail. Shamans and storytellers are not above revisionist history, either—disastrous defeats deliv-





ered by elves or dwarves often become glorious victories when retold to the tribe. Even if the shaman tells the truth about a defeat, it is almost always cast in heroic terms, with the enemy successful only through treachery or with heavy losses.

Clans retain artifacts, battle trophies, and souvenirs with near-fanatic devotion. The battle banners, armor, and weapons of traditional enemies are treated with special care, to the point that they are rarely used in combat. Skulls of enemies or fierce monsters frequently decorate clan standards, armor, and weapons. In other instances, they are part of the costume for tribal shamans, who are responsible for keeping the precious tribal artifacts safe from harm.

Worgs

Some orc tribes travel entirely on foot, and carry their possessions—that is to say, the slaves, females, and young do most of the carrying while the males stand ready to defend the tribe if it is attacked. Nevertheless, most tribes have at least one breeding pack of worgs, and these also bear their share of the load.

Worgs are giant, muscular wolves bred especially for battle and as beasts of burden. In the chill climate of the Gray Land, worgs thrive and are an important part of orc culture.

The health and well-being of a tribe's worgs are left in the hands of the worg-master, a skilled animal trainer who dotes on his charges and treats them with a tenderness that seems completely inappropriate for an orc. Believe me, I've seen them: the sight of a fanged, green-skinned orc billing and cooing over his worg puppies is as disgusting a sight as I wish to see.

I'm well aware that this contradicts the popular image of orcs and worgs, which pictures the wolfish beasts as being foully tortured and warped by their goblin or orc owners, transformed into psychopathic killing machines. If worgs were really treated this way, they would be totally unreliable and as apt to turn on their masters as on the enemy. In fact, worgs are trained with relative kindness and only occasional sharp rebukes. As mounts and beasts of burden, they serve their orc masters faithfully—so faithfully that

riderless worgs also fight for the tribe, attacking with a fury normally reserved for the defense of their own offspring. Some claim the worgs see the orcs as their own puppies, or at least as pack members, and that this explains their loyalty and ferocity.

Goblins and Other Slaves

Numerous small goblin tribes once roamed the lands of Thar, warring on each other or being enslaved by the powerful ogre dynasties. After the ogres' fall, the goblins either fled Thar or were absorbed by the ascendant orcs. Today, goblins exist only as a slave race, bred in captivity and cruelly treated by their orc masters. Most orc tribes have goblin slaves, who are considered the lowest order of being—lower even than females, which in orc society is pretty low.

Orcs also enslave other orc tribes in wars of conquest. These captives are treated somewhat better than goblins, being considered a more advanced form of life. Some individuals even earn the right to be adopted into their tribe as free orcs, usually through heroic actions in battle.

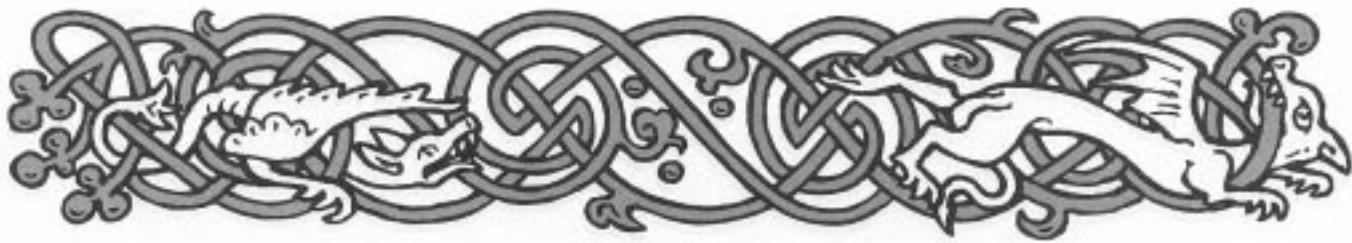
Other races are considered unsuitable to be kept as slaves. Humans are considered "untrainable," while elves are thought to be too frail for real labor, and dwarves are simply despicable. These races are usually slain out of hand or, rarely, held for ransom.

Nasty creatures that they are, the Thar orcs have no qualms about enslaving or murdering other races, but they are usually horrified by the possibility of being enslaved themselves. (Their attitude about orc slaves appears to be, "Hey! You guys can't have orc slaves—we're the only tribe that can keep orcs as slaves!")

Several ogre tribes keep orc slaves, which the orcs of Thar find completely unacceptable. Raids against the ogres to free orc slaves are common, although the orcs are reluctant to admit that the "liberated" captives often end up enslaved to their rescuers.

Orogs

These so-called "great orcs" appear occasionally among normal orc births. Some have speculated





that orogs are the result of orc-ogre crossbreeding. Considering the Thar orcs' former relationship with the region's ogre rulers, this may not be far from the truth. Personally, I find the notion slightly revolting, and try to think about it as little as possible.

About ten percent of the tribes of Thar have orog warriors and, in these tribes, orogs make up about ten percent of the tribes' total population. Orogos are always males. Females evidently carry the traits, but never actually express them.

Those tribes with orog contingents are invariably hated and feared by neighboring orc tribes. The orogs represent a serious threat both to nearby ogre groups and to human caravans in the region.

Orogs are bigger, faster, and stronger than normal orcs, and their presence in battle is a potent boost to morale. They always receive the first choice of booty after a battle, and invariably lead their tribes.

Several orog bands have struck out on their own, fighting as mercenaries and even trying to create all-orog clans through selective breeding. So far, this has not proven successful.

One of the more bizarre aspects of orog culture is the practice, recently begun by some caravan masters, of hiring orog mercenaries as guards. These mercenary orogs are known for their faithful service. Once they have given their word to defend a caravan, they keep it to the best of their ability.

Personally, I dislike this practice intensely, since it puts more gold and weapons in the hands of the orcs. On too many occasions I have seen orc raiders well armed with trade weapons or items obtained through the orog mercenary trade. If you live next door to a homicidal killer, I don't think you should sell him a sword, but who listens to me?

The Orc View

Many people talk about how violent and disagreeable orcs are, but few really care to find out why. I must admit that I was once in this category, but my experiences in Thar have led me to understand our green-skinned foes a bit better.

The hostile world view of the orcs of Thar springs

from their belief that the other races of the world betrayed and shunned them. In the orc creation myth, the gods cheated Gruumsh and his people of their birthright. As a result, the orcs foster a bitter hatred of other intelligent races, whom they see as trespassers on the places that should belong to orcs.

Dwarves and gnomes are disliked because they occupy mountains and caverns, usurping the land's mineral wealth. Elves are hated because they live in beautiful forests and—at least in the orcs' eyes—live an indolent life of ease. Ancient, bitter wars between the two races have only increased orc animosity.

Humans and halflings are spared the brunt of orc wrath. The orcs rationalize that, while these creatures are widespread and hostile, they can also display favorable characteristics (cruelty, violence, and savagery, for example), and sometimes even make useful allies.

The other major aspect of the orcs' culture involves the value they place on strength and perseverance. The orcs believe that the strongest and fiercest are blessed by Gruumsh. Survival is the ultimate goal: human-style fair play and honor are alien concepts. Only the strong will survive, orcs believe, and only their descendants will live to take back the lands rightfully theirs.

The Tribes

Dozens of orc tribes inhabit the Thar region. As noted above, an orc "tribe" might better be described as an "alliance," since tribes consist of one or more clans banding together for mutual defense or greater glory.

Tribes vary in size from a dozen individuals to over a thousand. Like most orcs, these tribes find sustenance in a region infamous for its barren, hostile conditions. Despite the hardships, their numbers seem to be increasing.

Some of the more prominent orc tribes include the Black Spears, the Manslayers, the Skullsmashers, and the Red Claws. These tribes have hundreds of members, keep many slaves, and verge on attaining the status of a true nation. Many have legends, similar to those of the ogres, that a charismatic orc warrior will someday unite their tribes and make





Thar a great orc nation again.

Until then, the tribes fight each other with great abandon. Many smaller tribes exist, with grand names like the Death-Dealers, Grummsh's Champions, and the Dragon-Masters. Some rise to prominence and become major tribes themselves. Most often, however, small tribes are absorbed or exterminated by their more powerful orc or ogre neighbors.

The Black Spear Orcs

The Black Spears are one of the most widespread and successful caravan raiders in Thar. The tribe boasts over 200 warriors, 30 orogs, 100 worgs, and 100 goblin slaves. Their territory is adjacent to the Jade Skull ogres, with whom they fight constantly.

The Spears are under the rulership of the crafty chief Zurig, and his twin sons Julik and Treg. He is assisted by the orc shaman Tharg and his two "pet" hellhounds, Slavver and Druul.

Zurig, Orc Chieftain: AC 4; HD 5; hp 32; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10; XP 65

Julik, Orc Leader: AC 5; HD 4; hp 24; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; XP 35

Treg, Orc Leader: AC 6; HD 3; hp 20; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; XP 35

Tharg, Orc Shaman: AC 6; HD 5; hp 18; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; XP 650; Spells: [5th level]

Slaaver and Druul, Hellhounds: AC 4; HD 6; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10; SA breathe fire; SD stealth, immune to fire, see invisible; XP 975

Perytons

The last of my favorite creatures is an ugly, ill-tempered beast that looks like an eagle that suffered a tragic collision with an unfortunate stag. The peryton's temperament is every bit as unpleasant as its appearance, and my experiences with the creature have been all bad.

From its glittering red-orange eyes to its razor-sharp talons, the peryton is a truly frightening creature. Although its head resembles that of a stag, its teeth are sharp and jagged, and its form resembles that of the gray-green eagle, a creature with which it shares a similar diet.

Origins

Like the other beasties I've discussed here, the peryton is clearly of magical or unnatural origins. Many theories have been advanced regarding the thing's ancestry, but a document I discovered at a monastery near Verdusk sheds some light on the matter. Authored by a Brother Delf, a priest in the service of Deneir, the document purported to tell the origins of several magical creatures. The section on the peryton read, in part:

...and so it was that the Khala of Imaskar did serve Bane the Unclean, the Black Lord of a Thousand Fears. Such was their service to Bane that the gods of law took notice, and visited a curse upon the Khala.

Lord Lathander Morninglord looked upon the Khala and said, "You have been swift as an eagle in your flight from justice, so I curse you each of you with the body of the eagle."

Lady Mystra, Mistress of Magics, looked upon the Khala and said, "Fierce as a wolf have you been in your persecution of the innocent, so I curse you with the teeth of the wolf."

Torm the True, Lord of Duty, looked upon the Khala and said, "Foolish as a stag in rut have you been as you shunned what is true and good, so I curse you all to bear the head and horns of the stag."

Ilmater the Crying God, who defends those in torment, looked upon the Khala and said, "You have tormented and torn heart and soul from your victims, so I curse you with unnatural appetites, so that you may only live and prosper after devouring the hearts of your prey."

Finally, Mielikki of the Forests looked upon the Khala and said, "While you acted as beasts, your heart contained evil which only humans can know. I curse you to always cast the shadow of the humans you once





were, to always remind you of your terrible deeds and of the souls that you have lost."

So were the wicked Khala transformed and given the form of a hideous beast – the head and horns of the stag, the teeth of the wolf, and the body of the eagle, forced to consume the hearts of their victims, but continuing to cast shadows in the form of men, to remind them of their transgressions. . . .

While this may simply be a retelling of ancient legend, with no basis in fact, it is the only record of the origins of the peryton that I know of. That they were once an evil race of humans (evidently dwelling in the lost empire of Imaskar), cursed by the gods for their wicked practice, and their worship of the now-slain god Bane, would explain many of their unusual traits.

The human-shaped shadow cast by the peryton has been a mystery for centuries, but if the creatures were once humans, the shadow's form makes a bit more sense. Further evidence of the peryton's origins lies in the beast's scent, which creatures possessing a sharp sense of smell claim resembles that of a human. The notion of such a bizarre-looking creature bearing so many human traits only serves to confirm the details cited in Brother Delf's manuscript.

The Heart of The Matter

Creatures possessed of many unusual and disgusting features, peryton are best known and reviled for their taste for the hearts of humans and other intelligent creatures. Like many predators, they select warm-blooded prey to kill and eat, favoring deer, rabbits, and horses. In a most unusual fashion, however, female peryton can only reproduce after consuming the fresh beating heart of a humanoid.

Humans are preferred, although the hearts of elves, dwarves, orcs, and ogres will suffice. Once the heart has been consumed, the female's shadow

becomes normal – that is, it resembles the shape she wears – and she will be able to mate and lay fertile eggs for several hours.

(It occurs to me, on rereading Brother Delf's words, that the gods who so cursed the peryton could have prevented the female's reproductive cycle from requiring humanoid hearts – at least those of elves, dwarves, and humans. It is ironic, wouldn't you agree, that the curse laid upon them for their cruelty should render them just as savage in their transformation, and just as likely – perhaps even more so – to kill the same kinds of people whose murders originally led to the gods' wrath. I find myself questioning the wisdom of gods whose vengeance merely alters the evil done by the victims of that vengeance.

I suppose this explains why I live my life as I do; my respect for nature has been strengthened as much as has my disdain for "civilization."

Society

The peryton that hunt across Thar dwell on the peaks of the West Galenas. They are not especially social creatures, living in family groups of up to four individuals. Although young peryton stay with their parents for up to a year, eventually they depart to build their own nests.

Peryton eggs take up to a month to hatch, and mated pairs trade nest-sitting duty. Peryton young grow to maturity in three months, but must be fed for the first month of life. Sadistic and evil, peryton often bring living prey to their nests, watching with approval as their young kill and consume the victim.

While peryton appear to have their own language – a bestial combination of roars and human-sounding screams – no one has yet bothered to decipher it, mostly due to the fact that peryton will not tolerate humans nearby and attack them immediately.





Part Three: Rumors, Mysteries and Legends

Being an ancient land once inhabited by a prosperous ogre kingdom, Thar has attracted its share of legends and rumors. While most of them can be dismissed as the ravings of wine-besotted caravan trash, there are those tales, confirmed by contemporary writings and reliable witnesses, that may be true. Most of these revolve around the lost ogre kingdom and its ruler.

The Lost Kingdom

There is abundant evidence that the ogres of Thar once ruled a prosperous kingdom. While this probably comes as a shock to most outsiders, who think of ogres as being somewhat less than civilized, the signs of the lost kingdom and its inhabitants are overwhelming.

My caravan friends never tired of telling tales about the kingdom, and since there was no real way to distinguish fact from fancy, I will relate them all in relatively chronological order.

It is said that Thar was once home to numerous chaotic and uncivilized ogre tribes. These tribes preyed ceaselessly on each other, and on the orcs, goblins, and trolls who also inhabited the region.

This state of affairs persisted for centuries, with the inhabitants thinking little of it. The Great Gray Land of Thar was considered worthless wilderness by the human and elf kingdoms of the region. Although the dwarves dug mines in the West Galena Mountains, the area was generally ignored and, on the whole, its inhabitants were left

to their own devices.

Over the years, small kingdoms rose and fell, with individual ogre or orc warlords gaining prominence for a time before being crushed by rivals or assassinated by pretenders. It was not until the first Tharkul emerged to become monarch of the region that things finally changed.

Tales told by both humans and ogres focus on a lone ogre warrior, either cast out from his tribe or the last survivor of a massacre. The warrior's name was Vorbyx. As he crawled through the wilderness, and at the end of his strength, he came upon the tomb of an ancient ogre chieftain. As he prayed to Vaprak for strength, Vorbyx was confronted with the shade of the departed chieftain. Being a brave ogre, Vorbyx challenged the spirit to battle, though his strength was almost gone.

The chieftain's spirit was pleased by this display of ogre nobility, and gave Vorbyx a mighty weapon—a war hammer of gigantic size that only he among all ogres could lift. With this weapon, Vorbyx emerged from the tomb and set out on a course of conquest, eventually uniting all the ogres of Thar and enslaving all the orcs. (The orcs disagree with this last part, of course.)

It is said that Vorbyx's hammer also granted him unusual intelligence and enlightenment. Under his rule, the ogres transformed Thar into a single kingdom, building cities, hollowing out underground networks for storage, transportation, and habitations. The clerics of Vaprak gained unusual powers, the sign of a true blessing from the ogre gods. It is even suggested that the ogre clerics were the equal of human priests in power.

Many wicked deeds were attributed to the ogres





of Thar, including the destruction of the dwarven colonies in the West Galena Mountains, disturbing the dragons of the region to the point that they raided surrounding human lands, and even uniting the forces of the region to destroy the human citadel of Northkeep.

Of course, it wasn't long before the ogres' evil came to the attention of the peoples of the surrounding lands, and an army representing several nations was formed and sent to punish the inhabitants of Thar. The ogres claim that they were invaded by covetous humans who wanted to steal their gold, naturally. For myself, I'm sure that the ogres offered provocations enough, for they seem to have engaged in evil and destructive acts just for the fun of it.

This invasion, which ended inconclusively, was only the first of many. Humans refer to the numerous raids, campaigns, sieges, and battles of the period as the Ogre Wars. The ogres call them the Bandit Wars, seeing the humans as marauding thieves interested in sacking Thar for its riches.

Whatever they are called, the wars lasted for half a century, and ended with the complete collapse of the ogre kingdom. The final stroke against the ogres occurred when the human hero Beldoran slew Tharkul Maulog in single combat. Vorbyx's Hammer seems to have availed Maulog little, for in the end its powers deserted him. The ogres believe that this was because Vaprak was punishing his children for growing decadent and arrogant, and there may be some truth in this.

The history of the region since this time I have already covered. The region's legends and secrets are under consideration here, and they are almost entirely associated with the lost kingdom and its riches.

Thar's Secrets

The ogres see the collapse of their kingdom as both a punishment and a test sent by the stern yet benevolent god, Vaprak. They believe that a day will come when the ogres are once again

united under a Tharkul. Then, the ogres claim, will be a time of vengeance for the injustices visited upon them by the human "bandits."

The sign of the Tharkul's return that the ogres await will be the recovery of Vorbyx's Hammer, lost in the final battle with Beldoran. This gigantic weapon, larger than a large human, can only be lifted and wielded by an ogre of proven bravery and strength. Any ogre who possesses the hammer (and can prove that it is authentic) will certainly be acclaimed Tharkul by the ogres of the region. All the ogres would bend their efforts, then, to the rebuilding of the ogre kingdom. Given the region's remoteness and the minimal power of humans in the region, a united ogre kingdom could become a significant force.

Many tales are also told of the Tharkul's palace, a bizarre collection of cylindrical buildings and flying bridges, with extensive underground passages and chambers. The prosperity of the ogre kingdom brought many riches to the Tharkul, and the ogres say the location of his palace has long since been forgotten.

Tons of gold and many powerful enchanted items are said to be inside the walls of the Tharkul's palace, but the ogres also claim that Vaprak sent many monstrous guardians to protect the treasure, in anticipation of the reunification of the ogre kingdom. When the kingdom is restored, ogres say, the location of the palace will be revealed and its treasures will go to make the ogre kingdom powerful and influential again.

Enchanted items rumored to be hidden in the palace include the Tharkul's Armor, a suit of enchanted plate armor built for an ogre or ogre-sized creature; Tharkul's Mount, a dragon-shaped crystalline beast said to be virtually indestructible; and the Books of Vaprak, volumes said to allow humanoids to gain magical and clerical power far greater than that normally possible.





Legends of the Orcs

The orcs claim that they too controlled powerful kingdoms in years gone by. The ogres were not their masters, the orcs say, but their allies, with the orcs serving as faithful and brave mercenaries. After the ogre kingdom fell, of course, the orcs sought to regain the territory their god Gruumsh promised would be theirs. The orcs laid claim to large tracts of territory formerly belonging to the ogres, and enslaved the few goblin tribes living in the region.

Like the ogres, the orcs look forward to a day when a single charismatic leader will unite them into a single powerful nation. Some even say that this event will be concurrent with the discovery of Vorbyx's Hammer. Although they currently fight bitterly with the ogres, many orcs would be only too willing to unite with their former enemies to create a potent new alliance.

The notion that orcs and ogres might ally is a disturbing notion to many, for both possess potent magic and efficient military machines. Should this ever happen, Glister will certainly come under immediate attack, as the city has long been seen as a thorn in the side of both ogre and orc. The various cities of the Ride and the Dragonspines might also be threatened.

Of course, the threat would also shadow Zhentil Keep and its crew of deviant troublemakers, so I guess every cloud has a silver lining. However, widespread death of innocents, and destruction of their property, might be too high a price to pay just so the Zhentarim should be "taken care of" by the united Thar humanoids. And more's the pity.





The SETTLED LANDS

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DON'T CALL ME A CRANK



I'm a farmer first, an elf second. I've also been called an over-the-hill crank who prefers the company of vegetables to people, but that's not fair. True, I live in the outlands of Mistledale, a good 50 miles from the nearest village. True, I'd rather listen to the wind rustle than merchants haggling over the price of cucumbers or would-be warriors jabbering about the dragons they're going to kill someday. I figure when you get to be my age, you deserve a little peace and quiet.

Did I mention I'm an old farmer? I can't say *how* old—I stopped counting when I hit 300. I'm old enough to remember when the Dalelands were mostly forest, a sea of trees as far as the eye could see; the same for Cormyr and a good chunk of Sembia. Now the Dalelands are

mainly roads and villages, cattle pastures and corn fields. Sometimes I think the only reason people haven't ruined the moon and the stars is they haven't figured out how to get there yet.

Of course, if Nature gets the notion, she could shrug off all these villages like a wet hound shakes off water. Maybe one of these days she will.

For now, civilization looks like it's here to stay. If you want to get along, it wouldn't hurt to educate yourself. You don't have to approve of all the changes—I certainly don't—but you can learn why and how they've occurred. Most important, you can learn how to cope with the creatures who call it home. Here's three centuries of observations to get you started.

—Bryn Ohme Thornwood





Part One: Back and Around

Human arrogance never ceases to amaze me. For instance, who decided to call the Dales, Cormyr, and Sembia the "settled lands"? Like they weren't "settled" before people started chopping down trees and ripping up the land with plows? Have we forgotten that the elven woods once stretched from the Storm Horns Mountains to the Sea of Fallen Stars, and were "settled" with deer, rabbits, and wrens? Maybe "unsettled lands" would be a more appropriate name, at least as far as the animals are concerned. Since I was knee-high to an osquip, I've heard people whining about dragon raids and medusae attacks. How can you blame the monsters? After all, it's the humans who are the trespassers.

Humans have built cities and villages since the dawn of time, so I guess the monsters must be getting used to it. Elminster claims he found sealed pots of wheat germ in the Lost Vale, the remnants of a primitive society that existed thousands of years ago. I've heard tales of similar discoveries elsewhere in the world—bone bowls buried in the plains of the Cold Field, records of rice harvests on cave walls beneath the Deserthmouth Mountains.

No one, not even Elminster, knows exactly *when* it occurred to people to establish villages, but the *why* is pretty clear. Ancient tribes were faced with two strategies for survival. First, they could live like nomads, stripping an area of all edible plants and animals, then moving on to a fresh site. It was a tough life. Tribes were brutalized by bad weather, hungry predators, and sore feet—annual treks of a thousand miles or more were common.

Alternatively, tribes could settle down and learn to grow their own food and raise their own animals. Much trial and error was necessary to get it right; it's rumored, for example, that a community of stubborn dwarves spent 50 years trying to raise hogs in the Glaun Bog before alligators and giant serpents finally

drove them off. In the long run, the advantages outweigh the frustrations. Which would you prefer: trudging across the frozen tundra in hopes of finding a scrawny deer, or butchering a homebred cow in the comfort of your own back yard?

Elminster theorizes that the populations of early villages rarely exceeded a hundred or so residents. They probably would've remained that small forever if not for farming techniques—irrigation and tilling in particular—that allowed them to build up surpluses of food. Easy access to food encouraged families to have more babies; villages soon began to swell like sprained ankles. Some villages merged to form cities so they could minimize military expenses and share religious and commercial facilities.

Cities such as Suzail and Arabel undeniably offer economic opportunities and cultural advantages that small villages can only dream of. Cities have a tendency to get bigger, and the bigger they get, the more headaches they generate. Taxes inevitably go up, not only to finance military and civic projects, but also to fill the coffers of corrupt administrators. Walls and partitions meant to provide security instead contribute to a sense of isolation, even imprisonment. As the population grows, new homes eat up every available space. People suffocate, if not literally, then certainly spiritually.

As for animals, they're faced with four alternatives: They can fight back, adapt, move on, or die off. Many have succumbed to the last. More and more, I predict, will opt for the first.

The Dalelands

Of all the so-called settled lands, the Dales are by far the most hospitable. For the most part, these are places of peace, where farmers are valued more than soldiers, where a man can toil in his rose garden



from sunrise to sunset and consider it a day well spent.

The Dalelands comprise a sprawling land mass bordered on the south by Sembia, the west by the Thunder Peaks and the Desersmouth Mountains, the east by the Dragon Reach, and the north by Moonsea and the Border Forest. Currently, the Dales consist of Archendale, Battledale, Daggerdale, Deepingdale, Featherdale, Harrowdale, High Dale, Mistledale, Scardale, Shadowdale, and Tasseldale. Each community has its own history, government, and outlook; an experienced traveler would no more confuse Battledale for Featherdale than he would an apple for a lemon.

Still, the Dales share as many similarities as differences. They all occupy broad stretches of rolling hills and lush valleys, blanketed with farms, fields, and orchards. All depend on agriculture for economic survival. Each boasts a major town in an accessible location that provides administrative agencies and trade services. Isolated villages, tiny hamlets, and family farms dot the countryside. I've found the people to be self-reliant, independent, and utterly content with their lot in life. It's common for generation after generation to not only live in the same village, but in the same home.

The Lay of The Land

Cormanthor, with its mind-boggling variety of vegetation, probably boasts the world's most fertile soil, but the Dales finish a close second. In the north, Daggerdale and Shadowdale in particular, the topsoil reaches a depth of several feet. The smooth black earth, which gives off an aroma of new grass and spring rain, is so moist that you can pack it into rich clumps. The soil in the south, especially near Tasseldale and Archendale, feels drier, and you'll have to bury your nose in it to enjoy the woody aroma. It's rich enough to grow poppies and pumpkins and everything in between. An acre of Tasseldale farmland can support as many apple trees as two acres anywhere else in the world—the elven forest, perhaps, excepted.

Natural deposits of gems and minerals are as rare in the Dales as friendly feyrs. However, heavy rains

in Featherdale recently uncovered what look to be hills of copper ore, and prospectors in Mistledale claimed to have discovered pebble-sized bits of turquoise lining the floor of an Ashaba tributary. Salty minerals in an offshoot of the Deeping Stream have colored the water dull orange and killed nearly all the fish. Featherdale ranchers turned what could've been a calamity into a profitable enterprise. They collect the water in broad, flat tanks, and leave the tanks in the sun. When the water evaporates, the minerals are left behind. The ranchers use the minerals to make salted pork, one of Featherdale's most popular exports.

The Rivers

The Dalelands' rivers—primarily the Ashaba, Tesh, Semberflow, and Deeping—serve as sources of fresh water for drinking, bathing, and recreation. The rivers also supply water for irrigation, a technique pioneered by Shadowdale corn farmers.

A few hundred years ago, a long drought threatened to devastate the corn crops in western Shadowdale. Attempts to dig wells proved futile, as did efforts to haul water from the Ashaba. A young ranger named Lenn Syrrus hooked up a plow to a team of friendly centaurs and dug a ditch from the Ashaba. Syrrus died before completing his work, having suffered a fatal reaction to a wasp sting, but the following spring, Shadowdale farmers pitched in and finished the job. The slope of the land was such that water flowed from the river to fill the ditch. Additional ditches distributed water to the fields. To this day, many still refer to these irrigation ditches as Syrrus canals.

The Haddenbils brothers of Deepingdale were among the first farmers of the settled lands to use dams. The dams, made of granite blocks bound with a waterproof plaster of clay and the webs of giant spiders, retained water in deep pools, dug with the use of a *spade of colossal excavation* on loan from a gracious warrior. The pools supplied more than enough water for the Haddenbils' thirsty oat fields.

Keltin, a small village of dimwits in northern Featherdale, reportedly built a huge wooden water





tower, then commissioned a less than reputable mage to create a spire permanently enchanted with a *create water* spell. The spire kept the tower filled with water, which farmers could tap as the need arose. It was a good idea, but it came with a high price: The mage demanded half of every year's harvest for rental and maintenance. After they made their payment, the Keltin farmers were left with fewer crops than they'd have had without the water tower. What a deal!

Keltin wasn't the first Dales community to be disappointed by a misconceived water project. Farmers in southern Archendale thought it'd be a good idea to dam up a tributary of the River Arkhen, then divert the water to their apple orchards with a system of small canals. It worked. Then the farmers built bigger dams to create even larger reservoirs, and expanded their orchards until they crowded the river banks. The first big spring storm caused the reservoirs to overflow and flood the orchards. Worse, pressure from the swelling reservoirs eventually caused the dams to collapse. The torrents washed away dozens of farmhouses and drowned nearly a hundred head of cattle before the farmers called it quits and started over again farther south.

Move Over, Mold Men

Some people don't have enough sense to stay out of places they don't belong. For example, a century ago, the elders of Lowdner, a tiny but growing community in eastern Battledale, decided to annex a tract of shallow swampland that they planned to lease to young farmers as homestead property. While filling in the swamp with earth, the farmers were confronted by a tribe of mold men. The mold men, who lived in caverns in the adjacent hills, explained that they used the swamp as a burial ground. They pleaded with the farmers to leave it alone, but the farmers had no intention of abandoning their project and told the mold men to get lost. The mold men resisted at first, but were no match for the farmers' weapons and magic. The mold men withdrew from the area and were never seen again.

Within a few months, the farmers finished filling the swamp and began to construct houses. By the end of the year, nearly all the farmers were dead.

The swamp was indeed a burial ground, but not for mold men. The mold men raised thornslingers, deadly carnivorous plants, as companions. The thornslingers routinely produced more seedlings than the mold men could feed. Rather than destroy the excess seedlings, the mold men treated them with special herbs and interred them in the swampy water where they sank to the bottom.

The fresh earth used to fill the swamp activated the dormant seedlings. The thornslingers sprouted in corn fields, in flower gardens, even on the stone walls of farm houses. The thornslingers replaced themselves as fast as the humans could burn, slash, and uproot them. Today, Lowdner exists as a silent garden of pale yellow blossoms. Dusty skeletons entwined with spidery white vines are all that remain of the original occupants.

The villagers of Perekat also sowed the seeds of disaster when they appropriated a pine forest in western Deepingdale. Once the trees were gone, they reasoned, the empty field would make an excellent place to raise pumpkins and watermelons. Within days of felling the first trees, they were approached by a clan of angry korred. The korred used the forest as a site for sacred dances, performed on nights of a half moon. The dances, they claimed, appeased the gods of nature, who in turn supplied them with an ample supply of clear, sunny days for hunting rabbits.

The korred's pleas fell on deaf ears. The Perekat villagers had no intention of sharing the forest and told the korred to stage their dances somewhere else. The korred refused. A week of bloody conflict ensued. The korred attacked with hair snares and stone cudgels fabricated by *animate rock* spells. Perekat warriors responded with swords, daggers, and spears, augmented by the magic of mercenary wizards from Highmoon. In the end, the korred were no match for *fireballs* and *lightning bolts*, and withdrew. As they left, the korred warned the Perekat villagers to expect the wrath of their gods for destroying the dance site. The villagers laughed off the warning; with the korred no longer a nuisance, they resumed clearing the forest.

Today, Perekat is still there, but just barely. Fewer than a hundred die-hards live there now, struggling to



eke out a living from their miserable crops. The fields produce dull yellow watermelons the size of sweet potatoes. The pumpkins look like rotten apples, so soft you can push your finger through the skin.

Cormyr

The farmland of Cormyr may be less fertile than that of the Dales, but it'd take an expert to tell the difference. It's a land of rich pastures and lush fields, with corn, oats, and wheat in such abundance that farmers boast that a good autumn harvest could fill the Sea of Fallen Stars with grain. Two mountain ranges serve as borders: the Storm Horns on the west and north, the Thunder Peaks on the east. Not only do the Thunder Peaks inhibit travel, their violent storms ravage the area with lightning powerful enough to incinerate wyverns. Violent weather also plagues the Storm Horns, with pummeling hail that can break bones, and winds strong enough to scatter horses like leaves.

The Lake of Dragons, home to kraken, killer whales, and dragon turtles the size of warships, borders Cormyr to the south. Merchant ships have easy access to Cormyr via the Starwater River, which also supplies fresh water to Waymoot, Eveningstar, and other communities.

Like the Dalelands, Cormyr was originally covered with forest. Decades of clearing trees for farmland has left the King's Forest and the Hullack Forest as the main woodlands. The King's Forest surrounds the cities of Waymoot and Dheolur; Starwater Road, the Way of the Dragon, and Ranger's Way divide it into four neat sections. Most of the dangerous predators have been banished from King's Forest, which now serves as a refuge for deer, wild goats, and similarly docile species. In contrast, green dragons, chimerae, and other monsters stalk the Hullack Forest in frightening numbers, making it Cormyr's most dangerous region. Hullack's rich timber tempts only the courageous and the foolhardy.

The Cormyreans' relationship with the environment has been both exploitative and respectful. Royal decree limits the amount of trees that may be harvested from the two major forests. In Eveningstar and Waymoot, commercial fishermen must obtain permits before casting their nets into the Starwater.

The Wyvernwater, centrally located between the King's Forest and the Hullack Forest, remains as clear and blue as the day the gods created it, thanks to restrictions on garbage dumping and magical experiments.

Still, in many places the land bears the scars of human indifference. For centuries, the community of Whloon used a pond fed by a tributary of the Wyvernflow as a burial ground for war heroes. The bodies decomposed, but not their armor; the rusty water is now unsuitable for fishing or drinking. Priests have blocked efforts to clean it up, fearing retribution from the spirit world.

A few decades ago, rumors of emeralds in the mountains west of Espar generated a mining frenzy. Though no emeralds were found, the prospectors disfigured the mountains with deep trenches and jagged gouges. The rain-filled trenches became rancid pools that contaminated the ground. Today, the area supports scrubweed, a few stubby pines, and little else.

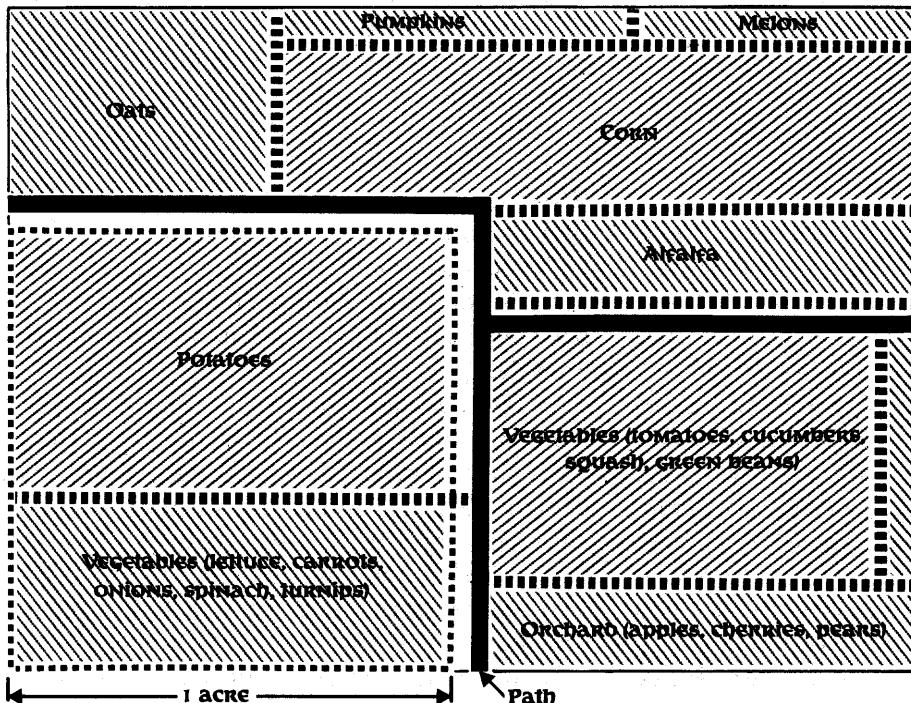
Some of the beautification efforts of Cormyrean aristocrats have also backfired. For the last couple of decades, wealthy landowners in Arabel have sheared away the crabgrass, dandelions, and other natural vegetation on their property, replacing it with gardens of chrysanthemums, geraniums, and roses. The gardens usually require more water than rain alone provides. The landowners make up the difference by arranging to tap hundreds of gallons from the city reservoirs. Farmers without the landowners' resources or connections must make do with whatever water remains.

To maximize the number of flowers per square foot, Arabellan aristocrats saturate their gardens with herbs and magical concoctions of dubious value. The soil absorbs only a fraction of these substances. Rain washes the rest away. The patricians shrug off accusations that these practices have adverse consequences, but a stream near Calantar's Way, less than 100 yards away from Arabel's largest private rose garden, contains no aquatic life aside from a few tadpole-sized sunfish. Sludge from a snapdragon field a few miles east of Marsember has run off into an adjacent pond for the better part of a decade. Travelers who camp near the pond often awaken to discover that all of their body hair has fallen out.





A Typical Family Farm



Farms with livestock operations may have up to 10-50 additional acres of corn, oats, alfalfa, and other grains.

Sembia

A few years after I'd established my own farm, I was visited by a smooth-talking stranger dressed in velvet robes and shiny leather boots who professed admiration for my agricultural skills. While jabbering about how opportunity rarely visited a man in my position—a veiled reference, I assumed, to my modest means—he eyed my onion bed, my tomato patch, and the cart from which I sold my wares. Without bothering to ask permission, he uprooted an onion and began counting the roots. I yanked it out of his hand. "The onions are two copper pieces a dozen," I said, resisting the temptation to smack him. "How many do you want?"

"Young man," he said, "I have no interest in your scrawny onions. I wish to buy your farm." He held out a bulging cloth bag. "Seventy-five gold pieces. That will buy a lot of ale."

"Ware! A dragon!" I yelled, pointing behind him. He turned to look. I booted him in the seat of his fancy britches, sending him sprawling into the

onion bed.

I clenched my fists, ready for a fight, but he'd gotten the message. He picked himself up, brushed himself off, and mounted his horse. "The day will come when you'll beg to be a field hand in Daerlun," he hissed, then rode away.

That was my first contact with a resident of Sembia. Any desire I had to visit Sembia vanished that day.

The little I know of Sembia comes from traveling merchants and chatty rangers. The land itself resembles that of the Dales and Cormyr, a verdant quilt of broad plains and rolling hills. The forests that once stretched from the Cold Field to the Neck of the Sea of Fallen Stars have given way to endless acres of farms. Busy seaports dot the coast. A handful of crowded cities, chief among them Daerlun and Ordulin, are home to wealthy traders, ambitious politicians, and struggling commoners. Because of their tradition of detachment, nurtured by the arrogance of the leaders, Sembians view outsiders like mice view cats—or perhaps, more appropriately, like



cats view mice.

Despite their arrogance, Sembians have proven to be reasonably attentive caretakers of the land. Most farmers rotate their crops so as not to exhaust the soil, and many allow elk and deer to share their fields, resisting the temptation to reach for their bows. Some villages establish hunting seasons with rigid limits so animal populations can recover. I've heard of game reserves spanning dozens of square miles, including one west of Umrlaspyr reputed to be the world's largest refuge for giant opossums.

Farms

It seems like you can't walk ten yards in the settled lands without stepping in a wheat field or pumpkin patch. I'd guess that 70 percent of Cormyreans make their living from farming. In parts of the Dalelands, it may be closer to 90 percent.

Farm sizes vary according to the quality of the land and their proximity to villages. In the isolated regions of northeastern Sembia, where the sandy soil supports only the hardiest grains, farms rarely exceed a few acres, producing enough food for a small family and a couple of horses. In Cormyr, where the soil is more fertile, farms may comprise 20-80 acres. In some instances, a village may claim ownership of all farmable land within a mile circumference; village elders assign plots of 2-10 acres to selected families. The families keep a percentage of the crops, usually about half, and turn over the rest to the elders, who trade it with neighboring villages for tools, weapons, and other goods. Some of the communal farms in Featherdale cover 100 acres, while the government-supported estates of Suzail average two or three times that size.

Farms near cities usually fare the best. Cities can muster the economic resources to build dams and finance irrigation projects. It's easier to sell crops and livestock in a city, and easier to buy equipment and supplies. Progressive communities, including Suzail and Arabel, will loan farmers money to buy land or see them through lean years. The inns, taverns, and shops provide outlets for information; you're more likely to hear about innovative irrigation techniques and new markets for cattle while making business

contacts than by enjoying the solitude of your fields. If a farmer without access to a city wants to get rich, he'd better find a diamond mine in his corn field.

Just as settled lands' farms come in all sizes, they also come in all types. Fruit and vegetable farms proliferate in the Dalelands. Mistledale and Battledale farmers raise celery, tomatoes, onions, potatoes, carrots, and watermelons, while Cormyr produces hundreds of acres of apples, peaches, grapes, raspberries, and blueberries.

Fruit and vegetable farms usually require smaller amounts of land to generate acceptable profits—in Cormyr, an acre of raspberries earns as much as twenty acres of wheat—but they also require a lot of labor. While a corn farmer relaxes in the winter, an apple grower is busy pruning dead branches. A wheat farmer uses scythes and other tools to help harvest his crops; a blueberry farmer picks his fruit by hand.

Wherever there's a meadow for grazing, there's bound to be a dairy farmer. Most raise cattle and goats, though farmers in Deepingdale have prospered from selling deer milk. Tulbegh farmers are renowned for their osquip milk, which is mixed with seaweed mulch to make baby food. A dairy farm operated by a single family usually maintains 4-15 head of cattle, or about twice as many goats. Cattle and goats are milked twice a day, deer once a week, and osquip about once a month.

Farmers milk livestock by hand, though goat herders in Harrowdale have experimented with trained banderlogs. The banderlogs compete with each other to see who can milk the most goats in the shortest amount of time, which frees the farmer to pursue other chores. Goats seem to prefer a banderlog's touch to that of a human, and often fall asleep on their feet while the banderlogs merrily milk away.

Poultry farmers, common throughout Cormyr and parts of Sembia, not only raise chickens, but quail, ducks, and turkeys. A typical poultry ranch handles anywhere from a few dozen to a few hundred birds, though Colton Bachman, who operates a ranch east of Waymoot, raises 3,000 chickens every year. Bachman makes his money from eggs and meat, as well as the chicken manure he sells by the wagonload to affluent Cormyreans for garden fertilizer. Bachman's cousin, Geremi Bergo, claims to have the world's





largest boobrie ranch, located south of Dheolur. When Bergo's plans to market roast boobrie fell through—boobrie meat is as tough as leather and tastes like old parchment—he rented them out as exterminators. Snakes, lizards, and other vermin have been virtually eliminated from Dheolur homes, thanks to the voracious appetites of Bergo boobries.

Grain, however, remains the principal money crop for farmers across the settled lands. Oat, alfalfa, and wheat fields fill hundreds of acres around Cormyr, while corn, barley, and rye feed families throughout the Dales. Farmers from Shadowdale to Selgaunt employ the same agricultural techniques, which haven't changed much in the last hundred years. They begin the new season by plowing the ground to stir up the soil, then space the seed grain far enough apart so new plants won't have to compete with each other for nutrients. Fields are regularly watered and weeded. Farmers preserve the soil by alternating the type of crop grown in a particular field every year or so.

Farmers have not always been this conscientious. In the early days, primitive farmers would locate a promising field or forest, clear out all the vegetation and trees, then plant whatever they felt like. Sometimes the crops grew, sometimes they didn't. The next year, they'd try again in the same place, moving on when crops refused to grow. This crude technique literally sucked the life from the ground. Flourishing sunflower fields and hickory forests became bleak plains of dust, suitable for dung beetles and ragweed, and not much else.

If left alone, depleted fields eventually recover. Consider the stretch of land informally known as Black Plain, located midway between the East Way and the Immer Trail, 40 miles east of the Hullack Forest. As old-timers may recall, Black Plain once was the site of a towering oak forest. About 50 years ago, homesteaders from Cormyr burned and chopped down the oaks, hoping to turn the area into farmland. When digging irrigation ditches from the Wyvernwater proved too difficult, they abandoned the project.

Today, Black Plain consists of three distinct sections. The northern section was deforested last, and will therefore be the last to revive. Currently, the land

is barren, except for some ant hills and scattered burdock. The middle section, however, shows more signs of life; milkweed and thistle have replaced the burdock, attracting butterflies, goldfinches, and wild rabbits. Chokeberry shrubs and tangled honeysuckles have spread over the hills and valleys, providing cover for wild chickens and deer. Badgers and wolves, lured by the smell of prey, are moving in and raising families.

Since the southern section was the first to be cleared, it will be the first to renew. New oaks are peeking through the soil, the seeds carried by the wind and dropped by squirrels and birds. Recovery, however, proceeds at a snail's pace. Few of these oaks have grown more than a foot or two, and the animal population remains low. It may be centuries before the forest returns to anything resembling its original glory, but it will return eventually, providing, of course, farmers keep their distance.

Weather

Except for clouds that bark like dogs and lightning bolts that can be picked up and carried, the weather in the settled lands is pretty much like that in other temperate areas of the world. Summers are hot and winters are cold, but not intolerably so. Most spring days are as soothing as a warm bath. Rain falls steadily throughout the growing season. Compared to undeveloped regions like the elven forest, the settled lands are less humid and a bit drier. Since we have a shortage of dense forests to act as wind breaks, we're also subjected to stronger winds.

Travelers may be shocked to discover the weather disparities between the cities and the surrounding countryside. Hardwood buildings and stone walls retain heat, so cities tend to be warmer than open fields. Because buildings block and redirect air currents, cities experience fewer strong winds.

Elminster has compiled climatic averages for the region where I live. Though Cormyr is a little colder in the winter and parts of Sembia receive more rain, these figures should give you an idea of the temperate conditions prevailing in the settled lands.



Climatic Averages for Mistledale

Temperature (Spring)	69 degrees F.
Temperature (Summer)	80 degrees F.
Temperature (Autumn)	62 degrees F.
Temperature (Winter)	38 degrees F.
Low Temp. (Year)	-20 degrees F.
High Temp. (Year)	98 degrees F.
Annual Precipitation	50 inches
Days With Snow on Ground	40 days

Daily Weather

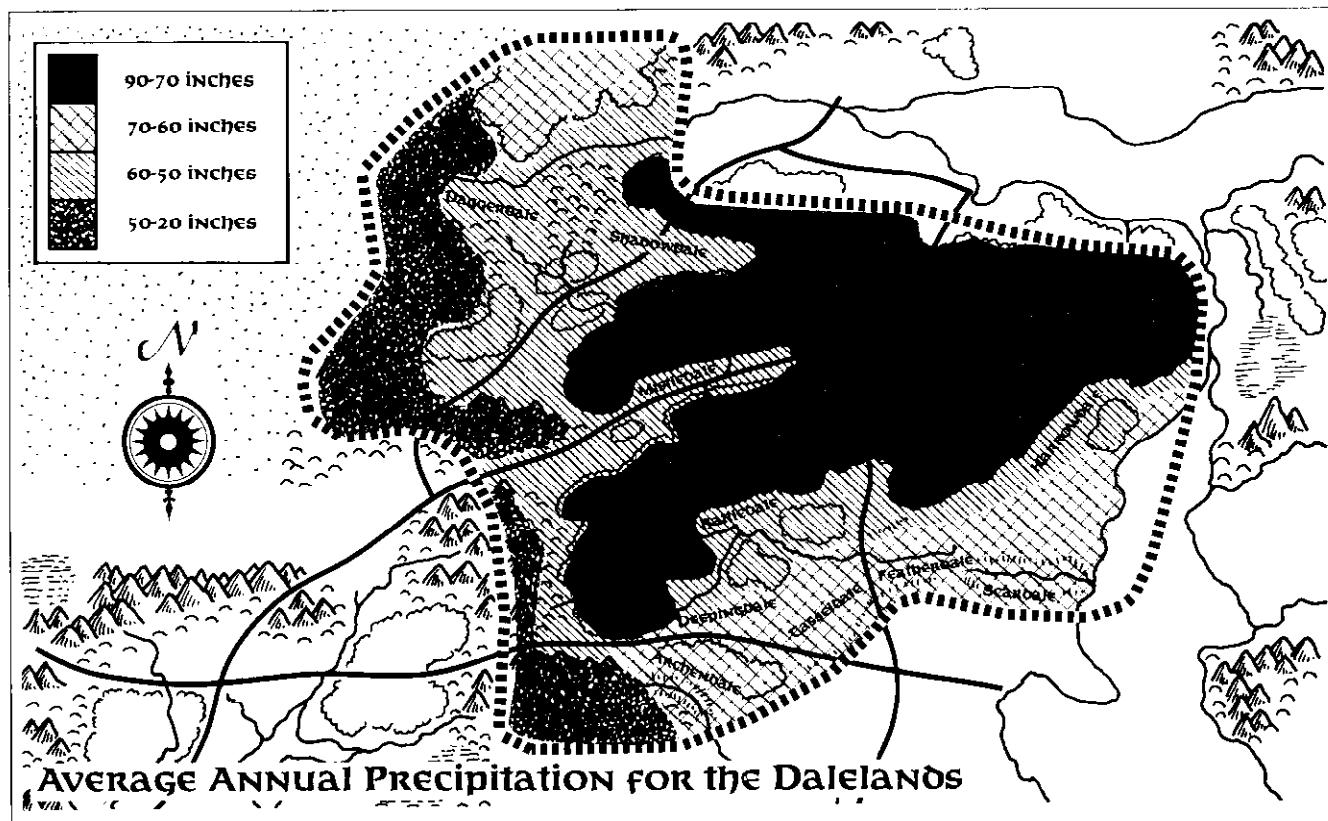
To randomly determine the prevailing conditions on a particular day, use the Daily Weather formula and table in the *Cormanthor* booklet. Base the temperatures on the Climatic Averages for Mistledale above.

summer day can get hot enough to cook an egg in its shell. Winter can get cold enough to make a white dragon wear mittens.

Storms are likewise unpredictable; a soft breeze in the morning can precede a gale-force wind at night. Autumn can bring hail the size of apples. A spring tornado can siphon up a farmhouse in Daggerdale and dump it into Lake Sember.

Attempts to control the weather have met with mixed success. To ensure sufficient rain, elven farmers south of Spiderhaunt Woods offer pots of honey to their gods before spring planting. Sometimes the rain comes, sometimes it doesn't, but the honey almost always attracts bears and badgers. In Blustich, a small community east of Hermit's Wood, the villagers stage elaborate dances with gourd rattles and log drums to conjure up winds strong enough to blow nuts off the hickory trees. The villagers usually end up with enough nuts to feed an army of squirrels, but I suspect their good fortune has more to do with Blustich's proximity to the winds blowing off the Lake of Dragons than a divine response to bad music.

"Temperate," however, is somewhat of a misnomer. A typical year can bring dizzying temperature swings. A





Many farmers fear heavy rains as much as droughts, as excessive precipitation can wash out crops and cause floods. Farmers in southern Harrowdale once addressed the problem by hiring Kaymendale Skrip, a well-meaning but inept Sembian wizard who claimed he could conjure an apparition that would frighten away storm clouds. The apparition, resembling a cloud bank shaped like an overweight war dog, howled and snarled whenever a dark sky threatened heavy rain. The storm clouds ignored the howling apparition and dumped rain as fiercely as ever. Kaymendale skulked out of town, leaving the apparition behind. To this day, the dog cloud continues to float over the fields of southern Harrowdale. It whimpers like a puppy a few hours before light sprinkles fall, barks like a hound prior to a typical summer rain, and howls like a wolf to herald a major thunderstorm. Area farmers are still at the mercy of heavy rains, but at least now they know they're coming.

Kaymendale had better luck in the Thunder Peaks. Ranchers north of the Hullack Forest were fed up with the lightning storms that rolled off the mountains; it was not unusual to lose dozens of cattle in a single storm. Kaymendale convinced the ranchers he could permanently enchant the atmosphere to generate lightning bolts so heavy they'd fall out of the sky before they could do any damage.

The enchantment succeeded—to a point. A few lightning bolts did indeed solidify and drop like rocks, but anyone who touched a fallen bolt risked a fatal shock. Some of the fallen bolts could be handled without fear of injury, and could even be thrown like spears, but most of the lightning was unaffected and remained in the sky. The storms continued to lay waste to the ranches. Kaymendale had again failed to deliver, and was forced to flee the area before the angry ranchers impaled him on one of his own bolts.

Undeterred, Kaymendale retreated to a secluded laboratory in the wilds of Arch Wood. He is rumored to be working on a spell for elastic snow, which bounces back to the sky as soon as it strikes the ground.

Kaymendale Effects

D6 Effect

1-3 If the bolt is touched or otherwise physically disturbed, it vibrates and emits a shower of soft sparks for 2-5 (1d4 + 1) rounds. The sparks are harmless. At the end of this period, the bolt disappears in a flash of light. If left alone, the bolt vanishes in 1-2 days.

4 As above, except at the end of 2-5 rounds the bolt explodes. All characters within 10 feet of the bolt must save vs. spell. Those failing the roll suffer 6d6 points of damage; those succeeding suffer half damage. If left alone, the bolt vanishes in 1-2 days.

5-6 The bolt may be handled and carried. It may also be thrown like a spear and used as a weapon. The target must be at least 10 feet away; if closer, the hurled bolt does no damage and disappears in a harmless flash of light on impact. If not using the weapon proficiency rules, make a normal attack roll with a -3 penalty. If using the weapon proficiency rules, characters with the spear proficiency have their normal chance to hit; others suffer the penalties shown on the Proficiency Slots Table in Chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*.

If the bolt hits, the target suffers 6d6 points of damage; half damage if he makes a successful save vs. spell. The bolt may also be thrown against any solid object, such as a stone wall; an object suffers half damage if it successfully saves against electricity (use the Item Saving Throws Table in Chapter 6 of the DUNGEON MASTER® Guide).

A Kaymendale bolt can be thrown only once; it disappears on contact, regardless of what it hits. A bolt will not ignite combustibles, nor will it reflect from a solid surface (like some versions of the *lightning bolt* spell).

If not used as a weapon, a Kaymendale bolt disappears in a flash of light within 1-2 days after its discovery (or as determined by the DM)





Kaymendale Lightning Bolts

The atmosphere in and around the Thunder Peaks still produces an occasional Kaymendale lightning bolt. A Kaymendale bolt may be lying on the ground, lodged in a tree, or even floating on the surface of a pond. In most cases, Kaymendale bolts will only be found within 50 miles of the Thunder Peaks.

Typical bolts are 5-10 feet long and resemble jagged spears of smoky glass that radiate a soft golden light. Bolts that can be handled (see below) weigh only a few ounces and feel like sticky cotton. These bolts are as flexible as bamboo; if broken, they dissipate in a flash of light.

When a character encounters a Kaymendale bolt, the DM should secretly roll on the following table to determine its effect. A character can't tell a bolt's effect merely by looking at it; he'll have to discover it by magic (a *true seeing* spell would work) or by trial and error.

Seasons

The Dales experience distinct seasons, each lasting about three months. Though Cormyr has longer winters and shorter summers, and more rain falls in Sembia during the spring, seasons are pretty much the same throughout the settled lands.

Spring lasts from Ches through Mirtul, with temperatures settling in the 70s by the end of Tarsakh. Most days feature blue skies and gentle breezes, though thunderstorms become more frequent in the season's waning weeks. Mirtul brings an occasional tornado, most often in southern Harrowdale and the plains north of Cormyr. On clear days, farmers keep busy with planting, which must be completed by the end of spring to maximize the chances of a good harvest.

Summer lasts from Kythorn until Eleasias. Rain drenches the plains throughout Kythorn, sometimes as often as every other day. Temperatures peak in late Flamerule, hovering in the high 80s for the rest of the season. Most crops mature in the summer, and to ensure their survival, farmers must remain vigilant for weeds, insects, and diseases. Carrots, lettuce, and other vegetables are harvested; what the farmer

doesn't set aside for personal use, he markets at the nearest village.

In autumn, lasting from Eleint through Uktar, farmers race to bring in their grain before the first frost. The chance of severe weather increases as autumn draws to a close, particularly in the areas adjacent to the Thunder Peaks and Storm Horns. Hailstorms can shred corn stalks, and torrential rains can turn wheat fields to pools of muddy water. As Marpenoth approaches, temperatures drop steadily and skies become bleak and gray.

Winter hits in mid-Nightal. By the end of Hammer, light snow dusts most of the settled lands. Temperatures hover around freezing and snow rarely exceeds a few inches until early Alturiak, which brings long stretches of sub-zero weather and blizzards that can dump mountains of snow overnight. Since few crops can grow in snow-covered fields, farmers pass the winter by tending to ailing livestock, hobnobbing with neighbors, and planning next year's harvest.

Plants

Norl Maywren, a retired elven carpenter living in a small cottage north of the Hullack Forest, has spent the last decade carving life-size busts of his great-grandchildren. He carves each bust from a different type of wood. So far, he has 43 busts, and is still working on the boys. Considering the variety of trees in the area, he expects to run out of kids before he runs out of wood.

The number of tree species in the settled lands may not match that in Cormanthor, but I bet it's close. The Dalelands are lush with birch, ash, poplar, and walnut. Cedar, hickory, hawthorn, crabapple, peach, and pear trees flourish in and around Cormyr. Sablewood and chestnut groves dot the plains of Sembia. Oaks, pines, maple, beech, and fir are everywhere. The variety of shrubs, herbs, and flowers is similarly staggering; if it blossoms, bears fruit, spouts leaves, or makes you sneeze, it probably grows somewhere in the settled lands.

The settled lands also have their share of unusual plants. A few examples:

Chuichu trees resemble miniature hickories, about three feet tall. Found mainly in the forests near





Battledale, chuichu trees produce cone-shaped yellow berries that dissolve in water to make a delicious, cinnamon-flavored beverage.

Blueleaf trees, which can be found in large groves in the northern edge of Hermit's Wood, look like large maples. Their leaves radiate a faint blue light. The processed leaves produce a rich blue dye; when burned, the wood generates immense blue flames.

Eldella ferns sprout near the bases of giant mushrooms growing near the perimeter of the Hullack Forest. If lightly toasted, the ferns may be fed to catoblepas, who find them quite tasty. A meal of eldella neutralizes a catoblepas's deathray for 24 hours.

Barausk trees, located in Harrowdale and Deepingdale, resemble beeches, their black branches and white trunks covered with three-inch thorns. When cut from the trunk, the branches turn as hard as iron in 24 hours. Soldiers and hunters find that barausk branches make excellent—and deadly—spears, arrows, and staffs.

Not all of the Settled Land vegetation is native to the region. Humans have intentionally introduced some plants, others have been introduced by accident. In most cases, non-native vegetation has had no significant effect on the environment. Moon corn, a strain with crescent-shaped kernels imported from Vaasa, grows side by side in Sembian fields with regular corn. Giant sunflowers, reaching heights of 20 feet or more, were brought in from Spiderhaunt Wood to beautify the estates of Cormyrean aristocrats. Despite warnings that the immense plants would require inordinate amounts of moisture, it turned out that the giant sunflowers required no more water than daisies. Rosecork trees, native to the Isle of Prespur, now flourish in the southern tributaries of the Wyvemwater, thanks to the efforts of a Wheloon importer. Rosecork wood is virtually fireproof and is becoming increasingly popular with builders.

In other instances, however, the introduction of non-native vegetation has had unexpected—even tragic—consequences.

A swarm of bees contaminated a Daggerdale clover field with the pollen from jade cocoa, a rare plant from the Border Forest. The pollen created a new species of clover with triangular brown leaves and the scent of mint. Cattle found the brown clover irresistible; unfortunately, it was also poisonous.

The skypine, a slender conifer with bright blue needles, was introduced to Cormyr from the Borock Forest. The deep-rooted skypines were planted along the banks of irrigation ditches to prevent soil erosion. Unknown to the importers, the skypines are also a favorite roost of stirges, which arrived by the hundreds when the skypines matured.

Animals

Why do some animals get along with people, while others remain hostile and wild despite all efforts to domesticate them? Why does a dog lick your fingers, a wolf nip them off? Why will a horse agree to pull a plow, while a zebra would rather be whipped than harnessed?

Animal dispositions seem to be as innate as fur color and food preference. A dog comes when called, a cat sits and stares. A monkey can learn to open locks with a key, but a minotaur lizard can't figure out how to push open a door. Animals with a natural distrust of humanoids will usually resist all efforts to be tamed. You can cage a giant weasel in your backyard as long as you like, but he'll probably run for the woods—or lunge for your throat—at the earliest opportunity.

Domesticated Animals

Of all the animals that live and work with people, none has proven more useful than the horse. Originally, the horse was considered to be little more than a tall cow, its flesh used for meat, its hide for leather. A few small villages along the Deeping Stream still raise horses for meat, but elsewhere people have learned to prize horses for their speed, intelligence, and strength. A good horse can plow a small corn field in a day's time or drag a sleigh through 40 miles of snow without a rest. It can find its way home on the darkest of nights, alert its owner to a fire in the barn, and defend a fallen rider from a pack of hungry wolves.

Even in the largest cities, horses remain valuable commodities. They provide transport for soldiers,



companionship for peasants, and recreation for aristocrats. Affluent citizens often build elaborate stables for their steeds, with separate rooms for water troughs and hay stacks. Following a fever epidemic in Eveningstar that killed off most of the horses, many of these stables were sold to enterprising businessmen who converted them into luxury apartments.

If horses are the most useful domesticated animals, cattle must be the most popular. Any farmer with a pasture raises at least a few head of cattle, because they're virtually maintenance-free. Leave them alone, and cattle will spend their days turning grass into milk and beef; add a fruit tree and a vegetable garden, and a farmer has all the food his family will ever need. Large cattle can be taught to pull wagons and plows. While they lack the strength and stamina of horses, they're also less temperamental; point a cow in the right direction, poke her with a stick, and off she goes.

Pigs won't do any work—they're too stubborn and probably too smart—but their meat is delicious. They can be raised just about anywhere, because they'll eat just about anything. Pigs thrive on corn, fish, snakes, insect larvae, worms, eggs, fungi, seedlings, or garbage. Many claim that foraging pigs taste better than those raised on grain. Some Scardale farmers let their pigs run wild in the woods, eating whatever they can find. When butchering time arrives, they lure the pigs back to the farm with the smell of roasting corn.

Many other domesticated species can be found throughout the settled lands. Chickens are raised for meat, eggs, and protection; the fierce fighting hens of Arabel, with claws as sharp as razors and beaks like tiny spears, can chase away small wolves. Farmers keep cats in their barns to hold down the mouse population. Sheep provide mutton and wool. Beekeepers in Eveningstar sell honey to bakers for pastry, the wax to healers for medicines, and the stingers to wizards for magical research. Cormyreans raise ferrets and bluebirds as pets. Sembian sailors keep roosters on board ships for good luck.

Dangerous Animals

Many so-called “normal” animals seem bent on making life for humanoids as miserable as possible. Some are merely annoying, such as the rac-

coon who slips through your kitchen door in the middle of the night to rummage through the cupboards, or the squirrel who chews the shingles off your roof to make a nest in the attic. Others, however, can be as mean as a troll with a toothache, like the wolverine who'll chew off your foot if you step in its lair, or the covetous raven who may mistake your eyeballs for gems.

Of all the animals that plague the settled lands, none causes as much trouble as the common rat. Apparently, rats believe farms exist for their benefit. They infest barns, storehouses, even pigsties in staggeringly high numbers. Their appetite knows no limits; they'll eat grains, fruits, vegetables, chickens, kittens, and each other.

Sinda Kayhill, a friend of mine who farms in Shadowdale, opened the door to her stable one morning and was greeted by a tidal wave of rats. The rats knocked her down and stampeded across her back. Sinda hugged the ground and said her prayers, expecting the rats to eat her alive. Instead, the rats thundered toward the woods and disappeared. Still trembling, Sinda rose and stumbled into the barn. No wonder the rats had left her alone—their stomachs were full. They'd stripped the flesh from a dozen cattle.

In addition to damaging property, rats carry diseases that can wipe out humanoid communities. Five years ago, the chicken farms of Beaverwood, a small village on the western shore of the Wyvemwater, attracted hungry rats by the thousands. The rats brought a contagious lung disease that infected the entire population. By summer's end, all of the villagers were dead. Cormyrean administrators wouldn't let anyone enter the infected village, including relatives of the deceased. After consulting with religious leaders, who conducted funeral rites from platforms overlooking the village, the administrators ordered Beaverwood burned to the ground. About half the rats were incinerated. The rest escaped.

Livestock farms, particularly those near forests, are as likely to be victimized by wolves as rats. Wolves have a voracious appetite for sheep, pigs, and calves, and won't let a couple of farmers stand in their way of a meal, even if the farmers carry battle axes and long swords. Wolves pose a particular threat in winter when wild game becomes scarce.





Though rare in most of the settled lands, baboons thrive in the Hullack Forest and in parts of the Arch Wood. They've learned to count on humanoid communities as sources of food the year round. Baboons strip fruit orchards in the spring, raid corn fields in the summer, and break into homes in the winter, smashing windows or gnawing down doors if necessary. Generally, baboons remain oblivious to humanoids. If left alone, a baboon will pick apples alongside a farmer, or nibble an ear of corn while hitching a ride in a farmer's wagon. If harassed, a docile baboon becomes a vicious aggressor, leaping on its tormentor in a rage of screeches and slashing teeth. If you encounter a female baboon, leave her children alone. Should an infant baboon die at the hands of a humanoid, the mother will replace it with a humanoid baby, preferably one of the perpetrator's offspring. If necessary, the mother baboon will enter the perpetrator's home at night and snatch an infant from its cradle.

While most experienced travelers are familiar with poisonous serpents and insects, I'd be remiss if I didn't warn you of some of the unusual venomous creatures in settled lands. For instance, a field mouse that dwells in the forests of Farrowdale sports a pair of curved incisors that continually drip a milky fluid deadly enough to fell a war horse. The mice lair in rotten logs and abandoned gopher holes, eating insects and grubs. Farrowdale mice are whirlwinds of frenzied activity. They dart after blowing leaves, pounce on blades of grass, and snap at any creature who wanders by, regardless of its size.

The copper opossum, a native of the Cormyr foothills, is as shy as the Farrowdale mouse is aggressive. It spends most of the day eating weeds and seedlings, rolling itself into a tight ball whenever it feels threatened. If handled, the opossum kicks with its hind legs, piercing its oppressor with tiny spikes located just above its feet. The spikes secrete poison that causes paralysis. Incidentally, the opossum's fur contains actual copper; if processed by a knowledgeable craftsman, the fur of a mature copper opossum yields 2-5 pounds of metal.

Poisonous Creatures of The Settled Lands

Gray Flatfish: Int Non; AL N; MV Sw 3; HD 1 hp; #AT 1; Dmg nil; THAC0 20; SA victim has an 80 percent chance of being poisoned if he steps on or handles a flatfish (spines can puncture leather or equivalent); SZ T (1' long); ML 2; XP 35.

Cobra Trout: Int Animal; AL CN; MV 1, Sw 12; HD 2 hp; #AT 1; Dmg 1; THAC0 20; SA poison; SZ T (2' long); ML 5; XP 35.

For the Farrowdale mouse and the copper opossum, use the normal mouse and opossum statistics (award 15 experience points for the Farrowdale mouse, 35 for the copper opossum). If either creature makes a successful attack, the victim is poisoned.

Poison Effects Table

Onset	Result of Failed Saving Throw *
Farrowdale mouse	
1-4 rounds	Victim doubled over in pain for the next 2-5 (1d4) hours; can take no actions during that time.
Copper opossum	
1 round	Victim suffers effects similar to those of a <i>temporal stasis</i> spell. Effects persist until victim benefits from <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>neutralize poison</i> , <i>temporal reinstatement</i> , or a comparable spell.
Gray flatfish	
2-8 rounds	Victim experiences intense pain throughout his body for next 2-8 days. During that time, he makes all attack rolls and ability checks at a -2 penalty.
Cobra trout	
1-4 turns	Death

* A successful saving throw means no damage.

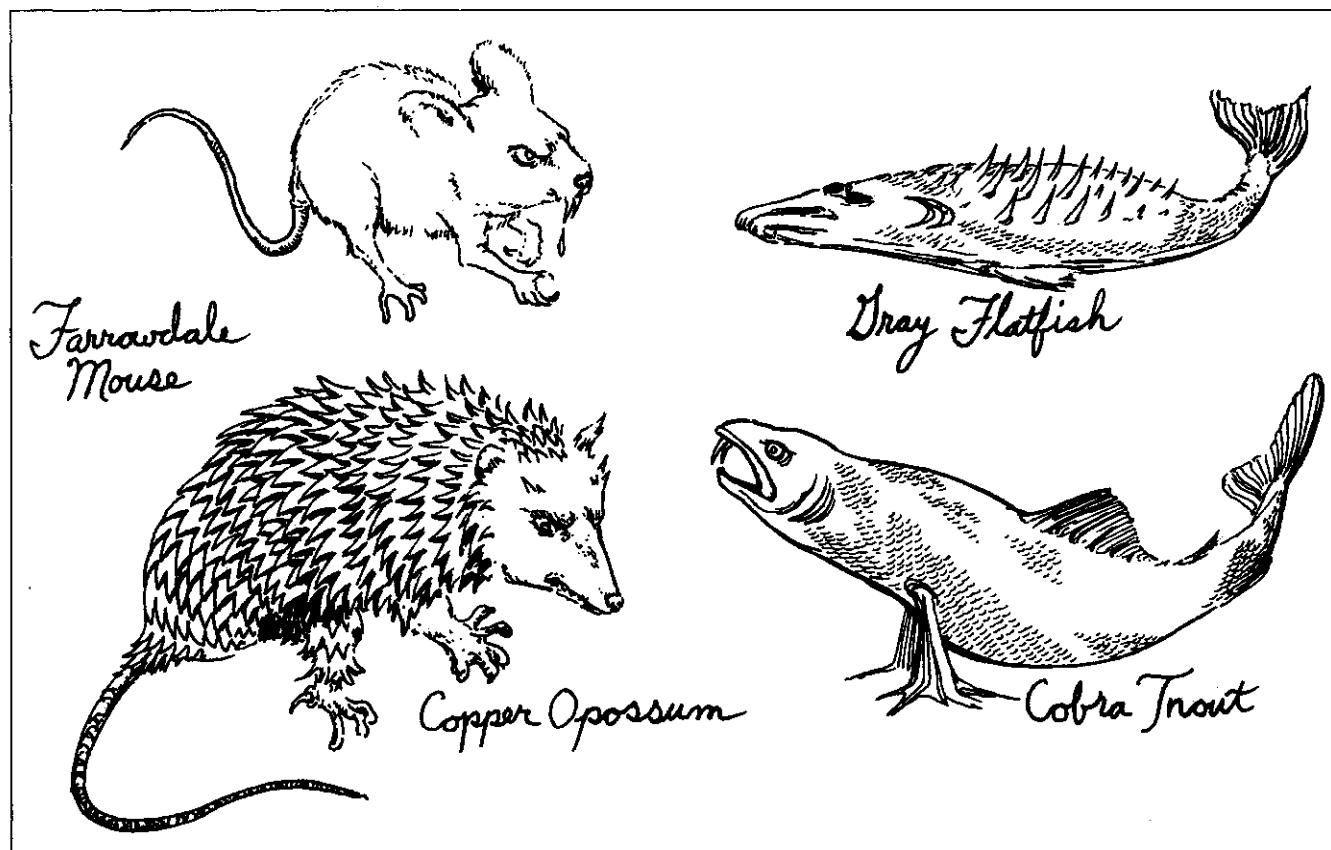
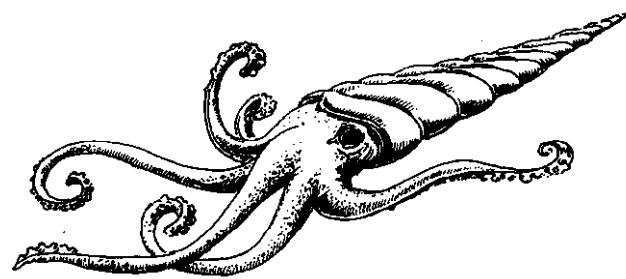
Victims of the Farrowdale mouse, copper opossum, and gray flatfish receive no modifiers to their saving throws. Cobra trout victims receive a -4 modifier.





The gray flatfish of the River Arkhen resemble granite stones about a half-inch thick and a foot in diameter. They lie perfectly still on the bottoms of shallow streams, eating any algae or refuse that happens to drift by. Travelers wading across streams may step on these fish by accident, as they're virtually indistinguishable from stones. Pressure on the flatfish's back causes dozens of inch-long spines to become erect; the tough spines can easily penetrate shoe leather. The spines inject poison that inflicts extreme, debilitating pain lasting as long as a week.

The cobra trout, which lives in the Deeping Stream, is one of the few fresh water fish with a poisonous bite. Extremely territorial, the cobra trout lunges at any creature that comes within a few feet. This fish can exist on dry land for as long as an hour, using tiny fins to haul itself along the ground. Fortunately, its bright silver scales make it easy to recognize and avoid.





Part Two: Monsters

Lere's some information to help you outrun, outfight, and outsmart the monsters of the settled lands. I assume you're already familiar with garden-variety gorgons and run-of-the-mill red dragons, but how about canal-dwelling electric eels and exploding ankheg larvae?

Amphisbaena

The life cycle of the amphisbaena goes something like this:

In the summer, the mama amphisbaena lays her eggs, then leaves.

In the autumn, the baby amphisbaena hatch and explore.

In the winter, the baby amphisbaena hibernate and mature.

In the spring, the mature amphisbaena awaken and eat.

Sound innocuous?

Depends on where you live.

Chariton was once a prosperous village in a remote section of eastern Battledale. In its prime, Chariton's potato and corn crops were so bountiful that the number of residents doubled every few generations. To accommodate the growing population, Chariton administrators hired local builders to construct a tract of new homes in a daffodil meadow bordering the Ashaba River, less than a hundred yards from Chariton proper.

On the first day the builders carted lumber into the meadow, they spotted two crimson hoops rolling down a grassy hill. As the hoops neared, the builders saw their eyes, then their mouths—the "hoops" were actually amphisbaena, and they were heading in the builders' direction. The builders dropped their lumber and fled. The bite of an amphisbaena could fell a hill giant, and because of its twin heads, an amphisbaena could kill twice with one strike.

The builders told the administrators of their dis-

covery. Unwilling to abandon the project, the administrators agreed to double the builders' salaries, then supplied them with long swords and battle axes. Kill the amphisbaena, they said, then proceed with construction.

Nervously, the builders returned to the meadow. A half-dozen amphisbaena were perched on a hill, tails in mouths, ready to roll. The builders raised their weapons and waited. The amphisbaena eyed them for a moment, then released their tails and yawned. They settled into the grass and went to sleep.

Rather than slaughter the passive serpents, the builders spent the next two days watching them. None of the amphisbaena seemed hostile. They spent a few hours a day chasing grasshoppers and mice, the rest coiled in the shade, fast asleep. There were four or five dozen amphisbaena in all, each about four feet long. A builder who stepped on one was bitten on the shin, but the bite barely penetrated the skin. The builder broke out in blisters from head to toe, a reaction to the bite, but the blisters disappeared the next day.

Most of the amphisbaena remained indifferent to the builders. A few were downright friendly. Some nuzzled the builders' legs like cats, begging for a scrap of bacon or a tickle under the chin. Others allowed the builders to roll them like toys. Except for a giant owl, which swept from the sky to grab a squirming amphisbaena in its claws, predators ignored them.

Construction proceeded. By the end of summer, dozens of new homes lined freshly graded streets. Autumn was spent moving in and deciding what crops to plant next spring. During the final weeks of autumn, the amphisbaena disappeared into deep holes to hibernate for the winter.

The following spring, grass sprouted, daffodils blossomed, and the amphisbaena emerged from their holes, but these were not the benign creatures that had begged for table scraps and played with children. Over the winter, the serpents had grown at an astonishing rate. They were now 30-foot monsters, hissing and snapping.

Within two weeks, the monstrous amphisbaena had



eaten nearly every villager in the meadow. The survivors fled to Chariton proper. The amphisbaena followed. In the subsequent carnage, hundreds of villagers were killed, with only a few dozen escaping into the Dun Hills. The amphisbaena stuffed themselves on the corpses, then migrated to the forests near the Pool of Yeven where they allegedly remain to this day. Chariton is now a ghost town.

As far as I know, the Ashaba amphisbaena of Battledale are the only ones of their kind in the settled lands, although a ranger friend of mine claimed to have seen a pair swimming in the Deeping Stream, and another snoozing on the shore of Lake Sember. According to Elminster, Ashaba amphisbaena could theoretically be found in any river or lake, as they like to make their lairs near fresh water. They hunt for fish by holding one of their heads underwater, keeping the other head as erect as a cobra to watch for intruders.

As its final action before dying, an Ashaba amphisbaena opens one of its mouths and swallows its other head. If left alone, the corpse hardens. The corpses of infants—the four-footers that the Chariton builders thought were so cute—form hoops as hard as granite.

The hardened infant corpses are worthless except to collectors, who may pay up to 100 gp apiece.

Mature Ashaba amphisbaena corpses become as hard as the hide of an adult red dragon. Daleland military strategists considered using the nearly impenetrable hoops as weapons—perhaps as battering rams—but at 10 tons, the hoops proved to be too unwieldy. Now I hear they're toying with the idea of using the hoops as bulwarks. If you can find a buyer, which is admittedly difficult, a hardened corpse of a mature Ashaba amphisbaena can fetch 5,000 gp.

Ashaba Amphisbaena

Immature Ashaba Amphisbaena: Int animal; AL N; AC 6; MV 15; HD 2; #AT 1; Dmg nil; THAC0 19; SA if attack is successful, victim is subjected to a mild poison (onset time 1-2 hours; victim must make a successful save vs. poison or break out in a rash of blisters for 1-2 days; victim suffers a -1 penalty to his Charisma checks during this time); SD immune to cold-based attacks; SZ S (4' long); ML 8; XP 120.





Mature Ashaba Amphisbaena: Int animal; AL CN; AC 4; MV 12; HD 11; #AT 2; Dmg 2d4/2d4 + poison; THAC0 11; SA poison (onset time 2-5 rounds, victim must save vs. poison or die; victim receives -1 modifier to saving throw; SD immune to cold-based attacks; SZ G (30' long); ML 11; XP 5,000.

If a dying gargantuan Ashaba amphisbaena is allowed to grasp its tail and form a hoop before it expires, then sits undisturbed for 48 hours, the corpse hardens. The hardened corpse, shaped like a hoop about 10 feet in diameter and 3 feet thick, has an Armor Class of -4. If the hardened corpse suffers 50 points of damage, it crumbles.

soil with passages for rain and air, making crops easier to grow—but they're murder on livestock. A pair of young ankhegs killed off an entire flock of sheep, 107 in all, in a Deepingdale pasture. An adult ankheg on a ranch near Hultail destroyed 42 head of cattle in a month.

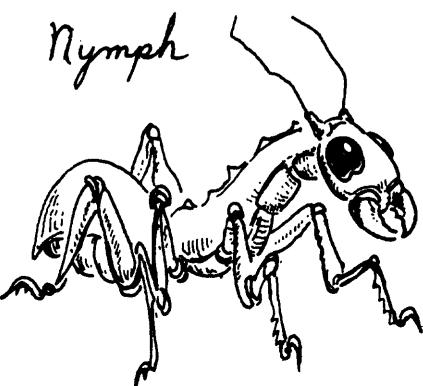
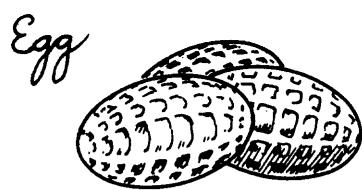
Compounding the problem, ankhegs are hard to kill. Poisons tend to do more damage to crops than ankhegs. Attacking with conventional weapons invites confrontations that ankhegs usually win.

The best way to get rid of ankhegs is to kill them before they mature. To accomplish this, you have to know what they look like and how they defend themselves.

Begin by looking for the corpse of an adult male ankheg, distinguished from the female by its straight antennae (females' antennae are forked). In the autumn, a female seeks out a suitable male, mates with him, kills him, rips him open, then deposits 2-12 eggs in his slit abdomen. The eggs look like dull green pecans, each about the size of a man's foot. Don't attempt to smash or slice the eggs; if even slightly

Ankhegs

Most farmers I know would prefer a swarm of locusts or a month of hail storms to an ankheg. True, ankhegs benefit fields—their tunnels lace the





damaged, the eggs emit clouds of toxic green gas. Instead, coat the surfaces of the eggs with paint or wax. The eggs absorb air through their shells; if the shells are sealed, the developing ankhegs suffocate. Return to the corpse the following day, and you'll find that the eggs have disintegrated, leaving nothing but green powder behind. Take a handful of powder while you're there; you may be able to sell it to a mage for 100 gp, as it's often used as a component for an *elixir of madness*.

Failing to destroy the eggs, keep an eye out for ankheg larvae, which usually appear in the second or third week of autumn. The larvae resemble caterpillars, two feet long, covered with dull green scales. Again, refrain from using weapons; any damage to the larva's skin causes the creature to explode in a shower of acid. A sprinkle of salt on the larva's back kills it instantly. Within an hour, the larva will be reduced to a puddle of thick green fluid. Immediately cover the fluid with dirt or otherwise dispose of it; gorgons are attracted to the fluid and can smell it from miles away. Unless you're in the market to lure gorgons, the larval fluid has no value.

It takes about two weeks for larval ankhegs to become nymphs, which look like two-foot versions of adults. Nymphs lack the size and strength of adults, but are just as vicious. Rather than engage nymphs in battle, it's easier to let them destroy themselves. Nymphs have a voracious appetite for meat, but are too slow and too small to catch anything but mice and toads. Place the corpse of a freshly killed goat or pig where a nymph can find it. The nymph will eat itself to death. Nymph shells, when dried and cured, can be made into small shields.

Ankheg Life Stages

Egg: Int non; AL nil; AC 4; MV 0; HD 2 hp; #AT 0; Dmg nil; THAC0 nil; SA if an egg suffers 1 or more points of damage, it emits a cloud of toxic green gas out to a distance of 5 feet; those within the cloud take 1d4 points of damage (save vs. poison for half damage); the egg disintegrates after expelling the gas; SZ T (1' long); ML nil; XP 35.

If sealed with paint, wax, or a similar substance, the egg dies and turns to powder within 24 hours.

Larva: Int non; AL N; AC 4; MV 1; HD 1/2; #AT nil; Dmg nil; THAC0 nil; SA any attack that damages the larva's skin, inflicting 1 hit point of damage or more, causes the larva to explode in a shower of acid to a distance of 10 feet; victims affected by the acid suffer 2d4 points of damage (save vs. poison for half damage); SZ T (2' long) ML 4; XP 65.

Nymph: Int animal; AL N; AC 2 (underside AC 4); MV 3; HD 1 + 2; #AT 1; Dmg 1-2 (bite) + 1-2 (acidic enzymes); THAC0 19; SA can squirt acid for 2d4 points of damage to a distance of 10 feet; SZ T (2' long) ML 7; XP 120.

Nymph shells can be made into shields with an Armor Class of 2.

Catoblepas

Thanks to the discovery of the eldella, a knee-high green fern growing on the perimeter of the Hullack Forest, farmers from Cormyr to Sembia have enjoyed considerable success domesticating catoblepas. Catoblepas can smell eldella toasting from a mile away and will cross snake-infested swamps and bramble-filled forests to get a sample. A few mouthfuls of toasted eldella neutralizes a catoblepas's death ray for a full day, making the creature significantly less threatening. If approached calmly, a catoblepas will allow itself to be harnessed and led from its swampy domain, providing, of course, its captors keep the eldella coming.

Happy catoblepas are cooperative catoblepas, and their trainers take great pains to keep them content. In addition to daily helpings of eldella, catoblepas are fed wagonloads of straw and oats, along with plump swine carcasses, buckets of catfish, and troughs of mice and snakes. Mated pairs fare better in captivity than bachelors; solitary catoblepas often become sullen and aggressive. Trainers comb their fur with wire brushes, and polish their tusks and claws with rabbit skin cloths. Because their feet aren't used to the hard surfaces common in humanoid villages, catoblepas are fitted with special shoes lined with cleats to improve traction.

Catoblepas are about as easy to train as oxen, and





can be taught to pull plows, haul wagons, and even uproot stumps with their tails. They're less loyal than horses, however, and much less companionable than dogs. Given an opportunity, a catoblepas may abandon its trainer and wander in the general direction of its homeland.

Catoblepas have no interest in play; toss a ball at a catoblepas and it'll probably swallow it. In the wilderness, a catoblepas near death may be eaten by its companions. A catoblepas will respond the same way to its human trainer; should a trainer hit his head and lose consciousness, he may be awakened by a catoblepas gnawing on his arm.

The female catoblepas will allow herself to be milked, but only under specific conditions. She must first be fed a large meal (a couple of goats or boars will do), she must be alone except for the person doing the milking, and the milking must be done outdoors under an evening sky so she can enjoy the night air and look at the stars. She can be milked about once a month. Catoblepas milk has the texture of syrup, the color of cranberries, and the aroma of baked ham. Though most find it too rich to drink, catoblepas milk can be processed into a delicious cheese—fancifully called “death cheese” in some parts of the world—that fetches up to 5 gp per pound.

Dragons

A quick look at three of the settled lands' notable dragons:

Secret Scholar: Marek Salerno, one of Arabel's most respected citizens, looks exactly like what he pretends to be: a retired professor, soft-spoken and portly, his nose perpetually buried in a book of poetry or philosophic treatise. Salerno is, in fact, a venerable steel dragon. Only a handful of sages know his secret, and they've been sworn to silence. Salerno goes about his business discreetly, shopping for antique books to add to his vast collection, engaging priests in friendly theological debates, and relaxing under the shade of an apple tree while composing sonnets.

Salerno claims to know the location of every scientific, mystical, and literary volume from the Storm Horns to the Great Gray Land of Thar. Should you seek a particular book, Salerno will probably be happy to help, providing he perceives you to be a scholar.

Salerno has no use for self-styled warriors, greedy treasure hunters, or power-hungry mages. Impress him with your knowledge of Sembian novelists or the elven madrigals of Semberholme, and he'll tell you where—and possibly how—to find what you're looking for. Don't give any indication that you believe him to be anything other than a normal human. Salerno zealously guards his true identity, and will send feyrs—which he's learned to conjure and control from his study of arcane magic—to dispatch anyone whom he suspects knows his secret.

Salerno has a weakness for giant rats, and about once a month reverts to his natural form to scour the countryside for his favorite meal. Not only can he conjure feyrs, he can also get rid of them by swallowing them whole, a talent he exercises in private on behalf of his human friends. Like all steel dragons, Salerno resides at the top of the food chain and has no natural enemies.

Phony Footprints: A family of green dragons living in the Dun Hills has odd-shaped feet that make footprints resembling those of gargantuan rabbits. The dragons intentionally leave their footprints in mud or soft earth. Hunters spot the prints, conclude they're on the trail of a giant bunny, then follow them into the brush where the dragons are waiting for them. The dragons have lured scores of Deepingdale and Tasseldale elves to their deaths with these phony tracks.

Dun Hill Green Dragon Footprints

The tracks of the Dun Hill green dragons described in the text look almost exactly like those of a gargantuan rabbit. If a ranger or character with the tracking proficiency makes a successful identification check (see the Tracking proficiency rules in Chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*), the DM should make a 1d10 roll in secret; if the result is 1-7, the character believes the tracks were made by a gargantuan rabbit; 8-10, the character believes the tracks were made by some kind of large reptilian creature, possibly a dragon. Characters without the tracking proficiency have a 90 percent chance of mistaking the tracks for those of a gargantuan rabbit.



Guardian of the Carp: Scalewater, a pond near the southern edge of the Thunder Peaks, not far from the High Dale, contains a school of unusual giant carp. The carp resemble their giant cousins elsewhere in the world, except for their glistening golden scales and their knack for polishing gems and jewelry. Toss a ruby or a silver necklace in the water, and chances are that a carp will surface to claim the treasure. The carp will roll the item around in its mouth for an hour, then expel it and submerge. The expelled item retains a lustrous gleam as if it had been polished by a master jeweler, which usually increases its value.

An old red dragon residing in the hills considers the pond and the carp her private property. Whenever she acquires new gems or jewelry, she dumps them in the pond for the carp to polish. Later, she scoops the newly shined treasure off the bottom. To keep the carp happy, she feeds them serpents, fawns, and goats, along with the leftovers of her own meals, usually bears and wild horses.

Many consider golden carp to be a symbol of success, and some Cormyrean aristocrats will pay 10,000 gp for the corpse of a giant golden carp, three times that amount for a live one. Should you be tempted to fish for carp in the Scalewater Pond or have the carp polish your treasure items, be aware that the dragon has little patience for trespassers. Chubby ones are eaten. Skinny ones she feeds to her fish.

Scalewater Carp Notes

A character can attempt to improve the value of nonmagical jewelry and gems by dumping them in the Scalewater Pond. Each individual jewelry piece or gem must be less than 3 feet in diameter and weigh less than 50 pounds. The jewelry and gems must not be inside a bag or other container.

There is a 30 percent chance that any given gem or jewelry piece will be snapped up by a carp. The gems and jewelry ignored by the carp sink to the bottom. If a carp snaps up a gem or jewelry piece, it rolls the item in its mouth for about an hour, then releases it. To determine the percent increase in value, roll 1d6. If the roll is 6, the value of the polished item hasn't been increased.

If the roll is 1-5, multiply the result by 10 to determine the percent increase. For instance, a roll of 3 means the value has been increased by 30 percent; a silver necklace originally valued at 200 gp will be worth 260 gp.

It's up to the character to recover the gem or jewelry piece once the carp spits it out. If he likes, the character may tie a heavy cord to the gem or jewelry piece before tossing it in the pond; there is only a slight chance (10 percent) the carp will sever the cord.

Electric Eels

Nesmyth, a tiny village in southern Cormyr, was desperate. The villagers had spent a fortune digging irrigation canals from the Starwater River, but water kept seeping through the floors and the canals wouldn't stay filled. The villagers tried lining the canals with pebbles and sand, but to no avail.

A visiting ranger suggested that popper crayfish might help. The foot-long crayfish, natives of the Wyvernwater, shed their shells once a month, literally popping them off their backs. The shells settle on the floor of the Wyvernwater and turn to mush in a few weeks. The shell mush mingles with mud and sand to create a gummy substance that water can't penetrate. The ranger reasoned that if enough popper crayfish shells were shed in the irrigation canals, they would form a waterproof lining.

The villagers took the ranger's advice. Over the next six months, they made dozens of trips to the Wyvernwater to hunt popper crayfish. Hundreds were captured, then dumped into the canals. Sure enough, within a few months, the dissolved shells had produced a gummy lining that eliminated the seepage problem.

Unfortunately, nobody had thought about how much hundreds of crayfish might eat. By the end of the first summer, the poppers had devoured all the tadpoles and snails in the canals and were making their way to the Starwater River to find more. By early autumn, fishermen were complaining that the poppers had acquired a taste for bass and other game





fish. The poppers were also multiplying like cockroaches, and they had little commercial value; their oily, sour flesh was inedible.

Inedible to people, perhaps, but not to eels. A species of fresh water electric eel came swarming by the dozens from the Lake of Dragons, lured by the poppers in the canals. They gobbled the poppers like candy. The popper population dropped, then stabilized. In time, the canals became a balanced system, with just enough poppers to feed the eels, just enough minnows to feed the poppers, and just enough popper shells to keep the canals lined.

Unfortunately, there was more bad news. The eels were not only deadly, but extremely aggressive, especially toward humans. A reckless fisherman found this out the hard way when he grabbed an eel by the tail and jerked it out of a canal. The eel shocked him so badly that the buttons popped off his suspenders and his trousers fell to his ankles. Still clutching the squirming eel, he attempted to stagger forward when he tripped on his trousers and toppled into the water. A dozen eels, crackling with electricity, set on the shrieking fisherman and dragged him underwater.

Friends found his body two days later bobbing on the surface of a shallow canal, a popper sunning itself on his back.

Help arrived that autumn. A traveling merchant brought samples of *stelk*, a shrub grown commercially in Hilp as fish bait. A stelk shrub looked like a cluster of tiny brown cabbage heads, each about the size of a man's fist. All types of aquatic life, ranging from goldfish to dragon turtles, relished it. More important, an eel eating a head of stelk was unable to discharge electricity for a week.

Despite the mounting deaths—53 the previous summer—not all the villagers were convinced that neutralizing the eels was a good idea. Earlier in the year, a local mage had made a remarkable discovery. When a bucket of canal water that had been subjected to an eel's electric discharge was poured into a glass jar, the jar glowed as if enchanted with a *continual light* spell. Only water from the canal achieved this effect. The mage believed that a fortune could be made selling the light jars. Many villagers agreed with him. Others were appalled. The scheme was too risky; the eels had already claimed too many lives.



The controversy has divided Nesmyth into three factions. One faction wants to leave the eels alone and begin marketing light jars. A second faction wants to invest in stelk to neutralize the eels and make the canals safe. A third faction wants to get rid of the eels, fill the canals, and develop other types of crops that don't require irrigation.

A compromise seems unlikely, as the factions are becoming increasingly militant. Unless the matter is settled soon, Nesmyth may be the first community to fight a civil war over eels.

Eel Water Light Jars

To make a light jar, about a quart of water must be obtained from a Nesmyth irrigation canal. An electric eel must have discharged electricity in the water within the previous 10 minutes; suitable water can be identified by its temperature (it's several degrees warmer than water elsewhere in the canal) and appearance (it sparkles as if containing thousands of tiny stars). Usually, all water within 10 feet of the discharging eel is suitable. If more than 10 minutes have passed since the discharge, the water won't work (it reverts to its normal temperature and loses its sparkles).

The water must be placed in a jar or other container made of clear glass, then sealed. The sealed jar must be exposed to direct sunlight for six hours. At the end of this time, the jar functions as if it had been enchanted with a permanent *continual light* spell. The effect persists until the jar is broken or cracked, or any of the water is spilled.

Hydrae

Once in a while, a farmer rises above the herd. Case in point—Del Geery, a prosperous farmer from Thunderstone whose fields stretch from the foothills of the Thunder Peaks to the edge of the Vast Swamp. His pioneering research has enabled him to triple the output of his corn fields and to grow wheat in soil that shouldn't be able to support ragweed. He's worth untold thousands, maybe millions, of gold pieces, and he's earned every one.

Twenty years ago, however, things weren't so rosy.

Geery's efforts to improve the yields of his clover and carrot fields had lured hundreds of hungry rabbits, which in turn attracted a parade of wolves, badgers, and other predators. Conventional pest control methods, such as poison and traps, proved futile. For every animal killed or captured, two more arrived to take its place.

Out of answers, Geery turned to his neighbor, an explorer named Hadley Erridge, for advice. Erridge suggested that Geery finance an expedition to the Vast Swamp to capture a live hydra and bring it back to the farm. The hydra, said Erridge, would eat or scare off all the unwanted animals, then return to the swamp when it ran out of prey. The farm would suffer some damage, Erridge admitted, but not nearly as much as it would if the population of unwanted animals kept growing. Though skeptical, Geery agreed.

Geery invested 20,000 gp in the expedition. Erridge hired a 30-man team, set out for the Vast Swamp, and returned two months later with an adult hydra in an iron cage. Geery paid each of the men a 100-gp bonus and dismissed them. After Geery was safely secured in a nearby cave, Erridge released the hydra. The hydra lunged from the cage and began to slither about the farm, roaring and snorting as if it owned the place. Wolves, rabbits, and badgers scattered in every direction. Within a few days, the only unwanted creature remaining was the hydra.

Despite Erridge's assurances that the hydra would return to the swamp, it refused to leave the farm. Erridge saw the hydra digging a pit by the edge of a pond, lining it with sticks and weeds. Erridge told Geery that the hydra appeared to be building a nest and was about to give birth. Furious, Geery hired another band of warriors to kill the hydra. Erridge was sent on his way.

Geery was now out nearly 40,000 gp, including the 15,000 it cost him to have the hydra killed. Where other men might have written off the loss to bad luck, Geery invested another 40,000 gp to hire some of Cormyr's finest rangers and wizards to assist him in the most ambitious project of his life. Simply put, Geery intended to squeeze every last copper piece he could from the corpse of the hydra.

Here are a few of the farm-related products Geery developed from the hydra corpse:

- The teeth were used to make nearly unbreakable blades for hoes, plows, and saws.





- The dried skin was used to make coverings for raspberry, blueberry, and strawberry plants. The coverings kept the air around the plants at 70 degrees. Although the coverings disintegrated when the temperature fell below freezing for more than two consecutive days, they still extended the growing season well into the fall. (The coverings worked only on these three types of plants. They had no effect on fruit trees, for instance, nor did they keep animals or people warm.)
- When hung in the wind like flags, dried hydra tongues could predict the weather. When a tongue turned red, it meant the temperature would rise as much as 10 degrees within the following 24 hours. A green tongue indicated that freezing temperatures were on the way. A black tongue meant that rain would fall sometime the next day.
- When ground to powder, a pound of hydra bones absorbed all the moisture in a small grain bin, preventing rot and mold.
- When stuck on the end of a pole and erected in a field, a hydra head frightened away most birds and small mammals. Treated with preservative herbs, a head resists decay for six months.
- Hydra fat mixed with cornmeal proved irresistible to rats. The mixture caused the rats to get so fat that they could barely walk, let alone run, making them easy to catch and kill.

To this day, Geery continues to finance hydra hunting expeditions into the Vast Swamp. Geery estimates that within a few years, the amount of money he earns from hydra products will exceed the money he earns from crops.

Lichlings

Barely six inches long from the tip of its antenna to the nail of its big toe, one of the settled lands' most loathsome creatures is also one of the smallest. Resembling a coal-black cockroach, the lichling sports human arms and legs, a pair of gauzy wings, and a grinning human skull for a head. Its chitinous body feels like cold, greasy glass and smells faintly of rotten meat. Lichlings are spawned from the brain cells of demiliches, who use arcane magic to transform their bodies into incubating husks. They

have no need for food or water; lichlings thrive on the fear of their victims.

Lichlings were introduced into the settled lands following the destruction of Woolover's Keep, located in a desolate mountain range northwest of Cormyr, about 50 miles west of the Farsea Marshes. A demilich named Icelia was using the keep as a spawning ground for thousands of lichlings, which she planned to use to help her conquer the world. Fortunately, a band of adventurers thwarted her scheme by exploding the keep. The explosion rained lichling corpses on the surrounding hills and valleys. Most of the corpses were absorbed into the soil, but some of the lichlings survived and still turn up—maybe in your next loaf of bread.

The surviving lichlings scattered throughout Cormyr, a few settling in the eastern foothills of the Storm Horns, others terrorizing travelers along Gnoll Pass. Some were drawn to the wheat fields on the outskirts of Eveningstar and Arabel. Wheat proved to be a potent and addictive intoxicant. The lichlings would stuff their skulls with wheat until they lapsed into unconsciousness. The comatose lichlings dropped to the ground, where they would lie in a drunken stupor, sometimes for years.

Most farmers who come across comatose lichlings simply toss them aside, believing them to be dead insects. Careless farmers harvest the lichlings right along with the wheat. Kernels, stems, leaves, and lichlings are all dumped into bags, then sent to mills, bakeries, and inns to be processed into flour. The hard-shelled lichlings come through the wheat process without a scratch. Because Cormyr wheat is shipped all over the settled lands, the contaminated bags could wind up just about anywhere.

If a customer doesn't recognize the lichling in his bag of wheat, he might throw it in the trash or toss it in a river. As long as the customer shows no fear, the lichling remains unconscious, but a customer who recognizes the lichling is likely to panic. This display of fear revives the lichling, usually resulting in the customer's death and a reign of terror in the customer's village until the lichling can be hunted down and killed.

Most people scoff at the idea of dormant lichlings showing up in baked goods. I'm not so sure, considering the sloppy habits of some of the third-rate bakeries in Cormyr and Sembia. I had a muffin once with a bolt



baked inside, so who's to say? There'd be nothing to stop a malevolent baker—or for that matter, a practical joker with a twisted sense of humor—to make a cake or loaf of bread with a dormant lichling inside. If a victim biting into the loaf panicked when he saw the gauzy wings and little antennae, the lichling could be down his throat before he finished his first scream.

Lichling

Int animal; AL CE; AC 1; MV 3, F124 (B); HD 2 + 2; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (bite); THAC0 19; SA after a successful attack, the lichling hangs on and continues to chew, inflicting an automatic 1d6 points of damage every round thereafter until it is killed or lets go; if killed, it remains attached to its victim, inflicting an automatic 1 point of damage per round until removed; SD can only be struck by +1 or better magical weapons; immune to *charm*, *sleep*, *enfeeblement*, *polymorph*, *cold*, *electricity*, *fear*, *insanity*, and *death* spells; SZ T (6" long) ML 19; XP 270.

Lichlings don't normally consume organic matter of any kind. Instead, they are nourished by the fear of their victims. A lichling left alone to stuff itself with wheat will become comatose within an hour, and remain in that condition until it senses fear. For more about lichlings, see FA2 *Nightmare Keep*.

Medusae

As if the violent weather of the Storm Horns weren't enough, the village of Minroe, located in the foothills east of Waymoot, must also contend with medusae. Minroe citizens make their living by harvesting the pixie cap mushrooms covering the floors and walls of the caves outside of town. The mushrooms, which taste like walnuts and melt on the tongue like delicate pastry, are dried in the sun and sold to Cormyrean gourmets for as much as 50 gp each. Unfortunately, the caves also serve as the nesting grounds for a colony of medusae, who lurk behind stalagmites to ambush mushroom hunters, and sneak into the village at night to entice guileless males.

Despite the danger, the citizens persevered even after the medusae had claimed dozens of lives. The

mushroom trade was simply too lucrative to give up. Surrounding the village with female guards didn't work; the medusae dressed like peasants and slipped right past them. Arming the mushroom hunters with mirrored shields didn't work either; the medusae hid in the shadows and hurled stones to crack the mirrors.

Salvation came in the form of hedgehog shriekers, a fungal life form discovered in the caverns' deepest recesses. The hedgehog shriekers were identical to normal shriekers, with two exceptions. First, the stalks were covered with a hedgehog-like fur that tasted like sugar; the mushroom hunters later found that when fairy cap mushrooms were glazed with the sticky fur, they'd bring twice their regular price. Second, instead of screeching in reaction to light or movement, the hedgehog shriekers reacted only to the presence of medusae. Medusae loved to eat shriekers of all types; the hedgehog shrieker had developed a natural defense to keep them away.

The Minroe citizens domesticated the hedgehog shriekers by feeding them a paste of beetle larvae and decayed choke creeper vines. Unlike normal shriekers, the hedgehog shriekers thrived in sunlight as well as darkness. Many citizens began to keep gardens for the shriekers outside their homes. A typical garden consisted of rich black soil mixed with dead fish and rotten vegetables, a small pool of fresh water, a stone trough of beetle paste, and two or three shriekers.

Since the discovery of the hedgehog shriekers, medusae attacks have fallen off considerably. If a medusa approaches a house with a shrieker garden, the shriekers scream loud enough to make the medusa hold her hands over her ears and flee. Mushroom hunters rarely enter the caves without shriekers, which ride on wooden carts or crawl alongside the hunters on tiny tendrils.

Aside from their fondness for fungi, the diet of Minroe medusae remains a mystery. Some speculate they subsist on vermin, citing the lack of rats and snakes in the Minroe area. A mushroom hunter claims to have seen a medusa munching on the serpentine hair of a dead companion.

Medusae corpses have little commercial value, except as souvenirs for eccentric collectors. Mages who can stand the stench of the dead serpents from a medusa's head—imagine rotten eggs in an open sewer—use the scales for *potions of reptile control*. Evil





priests use crumbled stone from a medusa victim's body as a spell component for communicating with entities from other planes of existence.

Ochre Jellies

When they're not slurping sewage or putrefying explorers, ochre jellies make pretty good weapons. In ancient times, Grymmar, royal lieutenant of the King of Cormyr, pioneered the military use of jellies. Faced with an incursion of brigands in High Horn and lacking the troops to intercept them, Grymmar captured an ochre jelly in a stone coffin, then hid the coffin under a ledge in High Horn Pass. A contingent of friendly druids joined Grymmar in his elevated hiding place, watching as the brigands made camp in the pass. When night fell, Grymmar crept to the coffin and loosened the lid. While the jelly slithered toward the slumbering brigands, the druids summoned thunderstorms. Lightning strikes separated the jelly into a swarm of smaller ones. By sunrise, the jelly swarm had turned the brigand camp into a mass of puddled flesh and glistening bones.

Many communities, especially those lacking the manpower or economic resources to support their own armies, still use ochre jellies for defense. Residents of Dirx, a tiny halfling village in the Thunder Gap, hide stone coffins above the gap's narrowest passages; lookouts spill the contents of the coffins on approaching intruders. Soldiers in Tyrluk surprise invaders with airborne jellies flung from immense stone catapults. A deep trench containing a pair of jellies surrounds the elven village of Tachepp in Daggerdale; citizens use the trench to dispose of garbage and trespassers.

Those who've had the misfortune to come face to . . . er . . . face with ochre jellies know how difficult they can be to dispatch. Some jellies, however, have a unique vulnerability of which few hunters are aware. Allow me to quote from Hlammerch the Naturalist's *Bestiary*:

"Ochre jellies require water for nourishment, as well as to cleanse themselves of undigested debris. A jelly absorbs water through the membrane covering its body. A puckered valve, the size of a small dinner plate, expels excess water. If the valve fails to function, the membrane will continue to absorb water and

the jelly will eventually burst.

"On most jellies, this valve is nearly invisible, indistinguishable from the outer membrane. On a small percentage of jellies, however, the valve appears as a dark orange indentation. If the valve is damaged, the jelly will die if immersed in a stream or exposed to a rainstorm. . . .

"Even after a jelly dies, its membrane and body fluids can be harmful if touched. If allowed to sit overnight, the membrane and fluids become inert. While the membrane has no commercial value, the fluid makes a remarkably versatile cleaning solution when mixed with water."

Ochre Jelly Notes

About 5 percent of small ochre jellies (4-5') and 10 percent of large jellies (6-7') have visible water expulsion valves. To attack the valve, a character must attempt a called shot (requiring a +1 penalty to his initiative, and a -4 penalty to his attack roll; see Chapter 9 of the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* for details). If the attack succeeds, and the valve suffers at least 2 points of damage, the jelly dies if submerged in a lake or pond (for a half hour), exposed to a rainstorm (for an hour), or doused with water (30-40 gallons). The jelly swells and bursts, spraying fluid to a distance of 10 feet. Anyone touched by this fluid suffers 3-12 (1d10 + 2) points of damage. If the jelly survives the encounter, the damaged valve heals normally.

Fluid from a dead jelly becomes inert in 24 hours. The inert jelly fluid fetches about 20 gp per gallon as a cleaning solution. One part jelly fluid mixed with ten parts water can clean the grime from just about any solid surface, including gems and armor.

Stag Beetles

Most Dalelands farmers consider stag beetles a greater threat to their crops than disease or bad weather. A single stag beetle can clear out an acre of vegetables overnight, a half-dozen can strip a corn field in a weekend. Stag beetles aren't particularly hard to kill, especially compared to ankhegs, but



they're awfully difficult to track down, thanks to their ingeniously fortified lairs. I've sketched a typical stag beetle lair, one I came across near a willow grove in western Mistledale. Here's how it breaks down:

1. The main opening, just big enough for an adult stag beetle to squeeze through, resembles a gopher hole. While a gopher hole tends to be circular, a stag beetle hole looks more like a flattened oval, about twice as long as it is wide.

2. The secondary opening, nearly identical to the main opening, is mainly used as an escape route. Here, a gargantuan praying mantis, the stag beetle's primary predator, attempts to dig its way into the lair but finds the opening too small.

3. When possible, stag beetles construct their lairs near trees infested with stirges. The stirges feast on intrusive mammals, like this giant rat, and leave the beetles alone.

4. Unlike stag beetles elsewhere in the world, Dalelands stag beetles form small colonies, usually consisting of 4-8 adults. One adult always lurks in this area, which functions as sort of a guard room.

5. The guardian beetle is charged with keeping out other insects, particularly stag beetles from rival colonies. The guardian identifies members of its own colony by touching antennae, which contain olfactory organs.

6 and 7. The colony allows predators with no taste for beetles, such as this juvenile fire lizard and giant badger, to share their lair. The predators help defend against intruders.

8. This is a false nest, lined with rotting leaves and small sticks to make it resemble the real thing. Female beetles chew the leaves in their mandibles, soaking them with a colorless, odorless acid, creating yet another obstacle.

9. This is the colony's actual nest, covered with a foot of leaves and sticks. It contains dozens, sometimes hundreds, of tiny black eggs and squirming larvae.

A determined warrior with a sharp sword and a bright torch—some, but not all, stag beetles recoil from fire—can probably destroy a stag beetle in a fair fight. Trouble is, most stag beetles don't fight fair. They attack from behind whenever possible. What's more, they don't have the sense to retreat.

The best strategy for exterminating stag beetles? Kill them in their lair.

Prepare a bucket of stag beetle poison by mixing five parts animal fat, one part dried fire toad skin, and one part crushed retch plant globe. Spread the mixture on a few corn stalks or pumpkin vines. A beetle takes the poison into its body as it eats the tainted grain or vegetables. The beetle spreads the poison in its lair when it excretes or chews leaves for its nest. Eventually, the entire colony will absorb the poison. All of the beetles should be dead within a week.

Stag Beetle Nest Acid

A character in contact with the chewed leaves of a stag beetle nest (common in both the false and actual nests described in the text), suffers 1-2 points of acid damage per round.

Undead

Just as all regions of the world wrestle with hostile undead, so do the settled lands. Unprotected cemeteries occasionally attract ghouls who wander into the nearest village when they run out of corpses. Vampires feast on errant travelers, especially in the more desolate regions of Sembia. A ship of zombies sails off the coast of the Sea of Fallen Stars east of Yhaunn, accompanied by an undead giant octopus. An evil mage once used skeleton farmhands to work the gardens of his secluded estate in eastern Scardale. The mage has long since died, but the obedient skeletons still plow the dirt, pluck the weeds, and harvest the crops, which are said to consist of bizarre strains of strangleweed and mantraps.

The settled lands also has its share of unusual undead. Two of the more chilling examples:

Mean Trees: A century ago, a human army faced a horde of zombies on the plains of southern Tassel-dale. A cult of evil priests sent the zombies to drive the humans out of the region, which the priests coveted as a burial ground. The humans persevered, destroying the zombies and repelling the priests. The humans hacked the zombies to pieces and scattered the remnants across the battlefield. Within a month, the trees, weeds, and flowers in the area withered and died.





STAG BEETLE LAIR





Shortly after the zombie battle, a fire in the Dun Hills threatened to incinerate a grove of young treants. One of the treants fled east, eventually settling in the zombie battlefield. Two weeks later, it died from contact with the contaminated soil, but not before spawning a dozen offshoots. The stalks took root and grew, developing into a grotesque new species that locals call zombie treants.

The mature zombie treants continue to stalk the forests of the Dun Hills as relentless, mindless killers. Like ghouls, zombie treants can cause paralysis with the merest touch. They play no role in the natural order, other than a destructive one; wherever a zombie treant sets down, it kills all the natural vegetation up to 500 feet away.

Zombie Treant

Int non; AL N; AC 0; MV 6; HD 10; #AT 2; Dmg 3d6/3d6; THAC0 11; SA touch causes humanoids (except elves) to become rigid unless a saving throw vs. paralysis succeeds (paralysis lasts for 1d6 + 2 rounds or until negated by a priest); SD immune to *sleep, charm, hold, and death magic* spells, immune to all poisons and cold-based attacks; fire-based attacks against a zombie treant are + 1 to hit (and cause normal damage); a zombie treant saves against all fire-based attacks at -1; SZ H (13-18' tall); ML 15; XP 6,000.

When a zombie treant remains in the same place for a full day, it kills all the natural vegetation within a 10-foot radius. The radius increases 10 feet for every day the treant stays in the same place, up to a maximum of 500 feet (which takes about 7 weeks). The spoiled soil remains incapable of supporting vegetation for a year after the treant moves on or dies. A handful of this soil can be substituted for any of the seven ingredients needed to create a dracolich.

Weapons made of zombie treant wood inflict the same amount of damage on vampires as on normal creatures; that is, a vampire struck with a club or spear made of zombie treant wood suffers 1-6 points of damage.

Headless Avenger: About 30 years ago, a band of drunken ogres was stumbling down a lonely section of the Moonsea Ride in Mistledale, looking for trouble.

They came upon a giant constrictor writhing in the road, painfully giving birth. The ogres hid in the bushes, waiting for the last snake to be born, then set upon the mother and children with swords. They slaughtered dozens of the tiny snakes, then turned on the exhausted mother. With a single blow, an ogre lopped off her head with a battle axe. Howling with laughter, the ogres abandoned the corpses and continued on their way.

Woodland deities steered the ogres in the direction of a starving red dragon, then resurrected the constrictor to avenge the death of her offspring. To this day, the constrictor haunts the Moonsea Ride across Mistledale, attacking anyone she deems a threat. She looks like a normal constrictor made of clear glass, her head resembling the creature she most recently killed. She attacks with the special abilities of her current head, and can squeeze her victims with enough force to crush a tree.

The spirit constrictor plays no role in the natural order, though it apparently can consume any creature it can kill, regardless of species. The bones of its babies can be used to magically summon serpentine aides.

Moonsea Ride Spirit Constrictor

Int animal; AL CN; AC 6; MV 15; HD 6 + 1; #AT 2; Dmg (see below for head attack)/3d6 (constriction); THAC0 15; SA encoils victim on successful hit, victim suffers an automatic 3d6 points of damage every round thereafter; victim can be extricated with the combined efforts of 60 total points of Strength; SD immune to *sleep, charm, hold, and death magic* spells, immune to all poisons and cold-based attacks; SZ L (30' long); ML 18; XP 4,000.

The spirit constrictor has the head of its most recent victim. The head, which looks like clear glass, can't speak, but it can make attacks similar to those it could make in life. To determine the constrictor's current head, roll on the following table or create your own based on the following examples:





D4 Head (damage from attack)

- 1 Giant raven (bite causes $1d4 + 2$ points of damage)
- 2 Jackalwere (bite causes $2d4$ points of damage; creatures meeting the head's gaze must save vs. spell or suffer the effects of a *sleep* spell)
- 3 Wild stag (horn causes $2d4$ points of damage)
- 4 Medusa*

*The Medusa's head causes no physical damage. A successful attack against an opponent within 30 feet means the victim has looked into its eyes and will turn to stone unless he makes a saving throw vs. petrifaction.

The spirit constrictor only appears at night, and only on the Moonsea Ride in Mistledale. It will pursue its victims, but not more than 100 feet into the terrain on either side of the Ride.

The bones of the constrictor's babies can be used to summon nonmagical serpents, the effect similar to that of the *animal summoning* spell. The user rubs the bones between his palms for one round; the bones disappear, and the serpent, if available, arrives as soon as it can.

Each inch of bone summons 1 HD worth of serpent; for instance, 3 inches of bone summons one 3 HD serpent, three 1 HD serpents, or one 1 HD serpent and one 2 HD serpent. The user can request serpents of a particular type and size, but the final choice is up to the DM. Serpents only arrive if they exist within a one-mile radius of the caster. Summoned serpents aid the caster as conjured or summoned creatures; for more information refer to the various *monster summoning* spells.

nal or antisocial behavior. In other instances, the wemics may have left voluntarily, preferring the freedom of a shepherd's life to the constraints of the pride.

Satisfied with the company of their sheep, shepherd wemics avoid contact with all other sentient creatures. Unless you have turquoise to trade for wool—and don't expect a bargain from the tough wemic negotiators—or know how to cure hoof rot, stay away. A wemic can spear a sprinting wolf at 50 yards, or drop a charging grizzly bear with a single blow from a stone club.

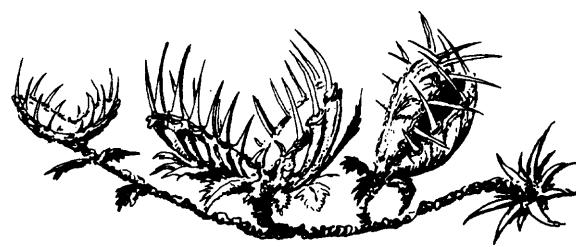
Rather than keep their flocks in fenced pastures, wemics allow them to roam wherever they like. They train wild cats to round up strays and nudge the sheep in the same general direction. Human shepherds who've tried to use wild cats invariably discover that the cats kill more sheep than they guide; apparently, training cats to herd sheep is a talent exclusive to wemics.

Wemics often allow their flocks to overgraze, leaving depleted fields that may take years to regrow. Still, many humanoids tolerate, even welcome wemic flocks. Wemics feel honor-bound to protect their animals and will relentlessly track down and destroy any predator who helps itself to a single lamb. Considering the impact that wemics have on predators, humanoid farmers are usually more than willing to sacrifice a field or two.

Wemics rely on their own flocks for food. They also enjoy deer, wild pigs, and porcupines, which they dequill with hooked knives and boil in pots of sheep milk. The hair from a wemic may be used to make *brooms of animated attack*. Bullywugs fancy wemic claws as decorations for shields and armor.

Wemics

Wemic shepherds tend their own flocks of sheep in remote Tasseldale, Mistledale, and Harrowdale fields. A typical flock consists of 100-300 sheep, overseen by as many as a dozen adult wemics or as few as two. Shepherd wemics live as nomads, having severed all ties to their former communities. In some cases, the wemics may have been banished for crimi-





Part Three: Rumors



Imminster wanted to know of any events that might be interesting to young adventurers. Although it's against my better judgment, I have included some of the rumors that have drifted my way. Use them at your own risk.

As long as I've got your attention, I want to remind you of your own home towns. Remember the people who will still be tending to their own gardens when you've gone off chasing your next big adventure. Remember the faces of their children and the singing at the taverns. Treat them with the respect they've earned.

Cleanup Time

A mage in Suzail crossed a gelatinous cube with an ochre jelly, which he domesticated and trained to clean streets. The plan worked for a few weeks until the cube developed an appetite for horses and had to be destroyed. When the mage attacked the jelly cube with a *fireball*, the creature disappeared.

Horses are still vanishing from the streets of Suzail, causing many to wonder if the jelly cube still exists. Did the *fireball* cause the jelly cube to become invisible? Or did the mage invent the story about the *fireball* to conceal a sinister motive for creating the jelly cube?

Sick Fish

An explorer discovered the corpse of a giant golden carp on the bank of a pond south of the Thunder Peaks. A Thunderstone sage determined that the carp succumbed to a gill rot disease. Unless the pond is treated with an antidote—made from the shells of popper shrimp, which thrive in the Wyvernwater, as well as the irrigation canals in the village of Nesmyth—all of the carp will be dead by the end of the year. If the carp die, the sage fears that the red dragon who guards the pond will retaliate against the villages in the area.

Deaf Medusa

A mushroom hunter from Minroe claims to have seen an earless medusa in a cave in the foothills of the Storm Horns. If the medusa can't hear, she won't be repelled by the shriekers that the Minroe citizens have stationed in their village. Minroe needs someone to track down the earless medusa and destroy her before she can reproduce.

Kelpie Revolt

Sembian farmers on the coast of the Sea of Fallen Stars have developed a strain of self-harvesting kelpie. The farmers supply the mature kelpies with boars and other edible game; in turn, the kelpies round up and destroy their immature brethren, leaving the corpses on the beach. Farmers process the kelpie corpses into mulch and sell it as fertilizer. The farmers are now teaching their kelpie aides to use sickles and knives to facilitate the harvests.

There is growing concern that the kelpie aides may be on the verge of a revolt; the kelpies are becoming more reluctant to cooperate with the harvests, preferring instead to practice with their weapons.

Scavenger Hunt

Shadowdale seers predict an early frost that will have devastating consequences for crops. A wizard says he can create an enchantment to delay the frost if someone gathers the components, which include a lichling's wing, a scale from a gargantuan amphisbaena, and a cup of body fluid from an ochre jelly.

Manticore War

A pride of manticores has appeared on the outskirts of northern Cormyr to reclaim a parcel of land they say was stolen from their ancestors. City records verify that a century ago about a dozen manti-





cores were destroyed when Cormyr administrators annexed the property for commercial development.

The current administrators, however, have no intention of returning the property to the manticores. The manticores have warned the administrators that failure to comply will result in all-out war; the manticores claim ogres, trolls, and black dragons as allies.

Bat Orchard

Seventy years ago, the eight Cender brothers farmed 200 acres of plum trees on the eastern edge of Suzail. One summer evening, Tryss, the eldest Cender, attempted to poison the youngest brother, Ermyn, whom he suspected of embezzlement.

Ermyn retaliated with his sword. The remaining brothers chose sides and joined the battle. By morning, all eight were dead.

Today, the eight brothers occupy the farmhouse as ghosts. The ghosts squabble every night, their shouts and screams audible a mile away. The deteriorated plum trees are now home to thousands of bats, including a sizable number of sinisters. The bats are a nuisance to travelers, and they occasionally swoop through the city on their nightly hunts. Local farmers are reluctant to do anything about the bats, as they keep the area free of crop-destroying insects.

Still, more bats arrive every year, and some believe the growing population spells trouble. Where will the bats go when there are no longer enough insects to feed them? What if the plum trees begin to attract mobats and night hunters—or worse? If the bats feel threatened, how will the ghosts react?

Dead End

A Featherdale mage's ambitious but ill-conceived plan to create a network of underground irrigation canals literally fell through when his first tunnel collapsed, trapping the mage inside. The mage had enchanted a female ankheg to do the digging. It's suspected that the ankheg and mage survived for a day or two, taking shelter in a cavern at the tunnel's end. Both are now presumed dead. The mage's family has offered a sizable reward for the mage's body. As yet, no one has attempted to recover the body, deterred by rumors that the ankheg gave birth before she died.

Assault on Blessus

A group of evil druids are trying to convince a venerable green dragon living in a forest east of Harrowdale to allow them to turn it into a dracolich. The green dragon will agree if the druids unearth the remains of two of its children from a corn field outside of Blessus, a nearby elven village. The dragon wants to inter his children in the Sea of Fallen Stars, the final resting place of their mother. The druids are considering a number of ways to bring Blessus to its knees: storms of skull-sized hail, swarms of stag beetles, attacks from undead hill giants, or perhaps a combination of all three.

Kaymendale!

The various effects of Kaymendale's magic seem to be going haywire. The dog-cloud's accuracy seems to be failing, and the cloud is beginning to bark with great voice in the early morning hours. The citizens, demanding a peaceful night's rest, want Kaymendale to come back and repair the apparition.

In the Thunder Peaks, the farmers have reported bolts of electricity exploding with the force of fireballs. Not wishing to have their crops suffer any more losses, they're searching for the reclusive wizard as well.

Rendezvous

A nkhegs have reported to be massing at the edge of the Desertsouth Mountains, some 40 miles southeast of Daggerdale. Speculation persists that some mad wizard has discovered a way to lure the beasts, and is preparing an assault on Daggerdale.

Still other rumors claim that the area is an ancient mating ground that decreases gestation time, allowing the ankhegs to reproduce young in as little as two weeks. Such an increase in the population would be necessary to carry out a war, some believe, or for perhaps even darker tasks.

Daggerdale is offering a sizable reward for information on the ankhegs' activities.

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Elminster's Ecologies

An Excerpt from

An Investigation into the Natural Systems of Organisms and Their Surroundings,
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The world is vast and varied, comprising towering mountains, dense jungles, and sprawling seas. There are regions so cold that their snow never melts, others so hot that their rain turns to steam as it touches the ground.

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Every environment, no matter how hostile to humankind, is compatible with some form of life. The diversity and adaptability of organisms are staggering. . . .

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- contains the whole of the above excerpt from Elminster's work-in-progress about Realmsian biodiversity, and
- provides color-coded encounter tables for the eight other booklets along with instructions for their use.

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