

WARLOCK GRIMMIRE III



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Press



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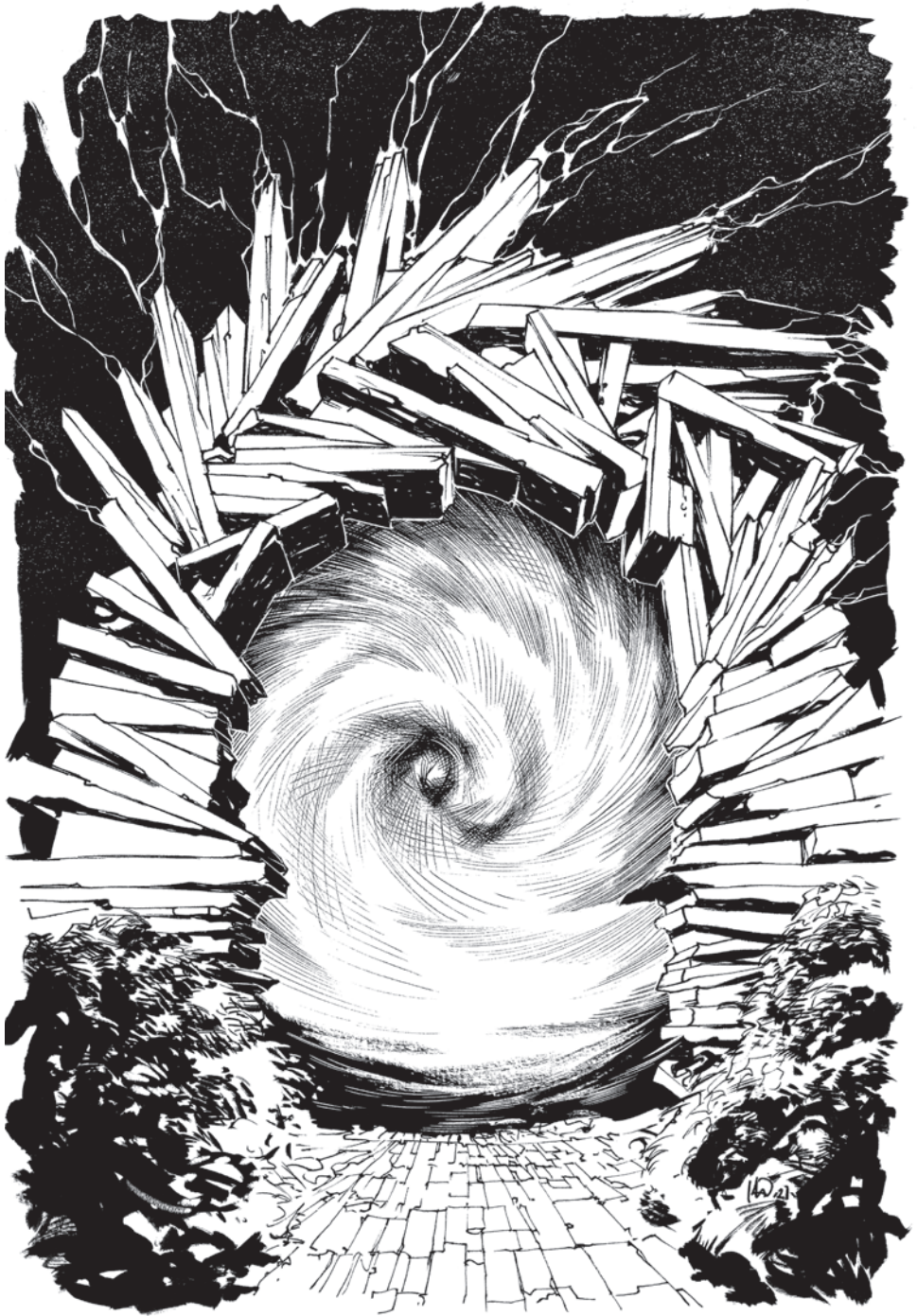


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IN THE BRANCHES OF YGGDRASIL

by Scott Gable

And then there were the planes!

Of course, *Warlock* readers have visited the planes before. You can find tons of general information in the *Midgard Worldbook*—with an entire chapter on the Shadow Plane—and we’ve had *Warlock* zines devoted to the World Tree, to Evermaw, to the City of Brass, even to the Eleven Hells. And now the *Warlock Guide to the Planes* provides a glimpse of the core cosmology of Midgard all in one place. *Warlock* has built the scaffolding for the multiverse, and I know that I, for one, am immensely excited about the possibilities this opens. What new lore and adventures? What new magics and machinations? What new *monsters*?!

But lo, our eyes are not fixed and immovable, always turned to the stars! *Warlock* designers are expertly detailing and telling the stories of the Midgard you already love: traipsing over lands and seas, spinning tales of those places that seem more myth than reality, like the infamous Stross Library and the strange Terminus Island, uncovering unexplored corners of the Southlands, and even bringing the village of Redtower, gateway to the Scarlet Citadel, to life. Here you will find collected stories from the proud bearfolk, from the aloof ravenfolk, and you

will learn secrets of the druids that they’d prefer go unnoticed. And yes, this volume delivers both the *dungeons* and the *dragons*! And we’re not stopping.

Yes, another year of *Warlock* is upon us, and truly, the team couldn’t have done it without our patrons. You’re the ones that have made all this possible, have helped us bring Midgard to life. So on behalf of all us kobolds, I say, *thank you!* And as you’re reading this, the patrons already know that we’re forging onward into the next year of *Warlock*—with giddy delight yet also jittery, furtive glances, like kobolds do.

We’ve collected here everything from *Warlock 20–28*, all the words, including any errata, and all the illustrations—and added the *Warlock Guide to the Planes* in its entirety, for the first time in hardcover! This is 5th Edition content from the amazing kobold artists and designers you’ve come to love. This is magic—and now it’s yours to explore and to spin into something greater. We proudly reveal *Warlock Grimoire 3*, the continuing secrets of the multiverse as we uncover them.

Yrs of the Dark and Fantastical,
Scott Gable
Editor, Kobold Press



LORE AND STORYTELLING

GUIDE TO THE PLANES

by Brian Suskind

Part One: Introduction

Listen, friend. Clearly you ain't got no idea which way the Ever River flows, so let me clue you in, right? The world you came from—its moons and stars and so forth—that's just one plane in an endless multiverse of planes. Each one its own sphere suspended in the branches of Yggdrasil, the World Tree, and touched by the twisting course of the Ever River.

The planes ain't worlds like whatever benighted rock you stepped off. These are infinite realities, dimensions of cosmological existence. You've got your hells and heavens sure. But you've also got marketplace worlds and endless forests. You've got your unending battlefields and your gloaming fields of undeath. And surrounding 'em all is the Yawning Void where elder things sleep.

I know not why you came, but out here, there's enough adventure, treasure, mystery, and peril to satisfy any band of would-be heroes.

So open your eyes to a larger cosmos, but watch your step, friend. For among the planes, delights and dangers await in equal measure.

—Cynemaer Varnhame,

Noble Guild of Larceners, Marketplace

What are the Planes?

The world of Midgard is but one plane in a sprawling multiverse of planes connected by the branches of the World Tree, the flow of the Ever River, and vibrations of planar resonance. Think of the planes as spheres, each its own infinite or definite universe

with interwoven connections to Midgard. Among the planes are the dominions of the gods, strange creatures, beings of power, and wonders beyond comprehension.

Yet it is also the home to countless mortals, individuals who are born, live, and die on the various planes. For these planars, philosophy and faith are not concepts—they are facts. The abstract is reality. The faithful need not question the truth of their religion, for they can visit and even meet their gods! Arcanists can explore the underpinnings of the universe. Blade wielders can challenge the greatest warriors of history, and rogues can attempt to steal treasures no mortals were ever supposed to possess.



THE ELEVEN HELLS AND THE SHADOW REALM

These two planes are detailed in other publications and do not feature in the *Guide to the Planes*.

The center of this cosmological web is the Prime Material Plane: Midgard, its moons, stars, and planets. The Midgard setting features eight greater planes, intrinsically linked to the Prime Material by interest, power, and fate. These planes are the Infinite Halls, Silendora, Valhalla, Klingedesh, Ravatet, Evermaw, the Eleven Hells, and the Shadow Realm—all surrounded by Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void. Countless smaller spheres, such as the elemental planes, exist like stars in the branches of Yggdrasil.

Midgardian Afterlife

The inner workings of the planes remain shadowed in mystery and speculation. Different pantheons have their own beliefs on what occurs when a mortal dies, though most believe the soul travels elsewhere. What is generally accepted is that most souls pass through the River Lethe, losing the memories of their mortal lives, before traveling onward into the planes. Sometimes the amnesiac spirits are escorted by psychopomps of their faith. These guiding spirits for the newly deceased, be they Khors's angels, gnoll-spirits of Ahu-Akma, or gilded devils of Mammon, shepherd the souls to their final destination.

What this entails remains a mystery, though some planar scholars speculate every soul eventually makes its way to the World Tree itself, the spiritual energy nourishing Yggdrasil and feeding the web of ley lines crossing the multiverse.

Exceptional mortals, such as great heroes, visionary artists, and renowned leaders, sometimes retain their memories and inhabit the palaces and realms of their gods or powers. Likewise, the fallen warriors chosen by the valkyries also remember their lives as do those brave heroes who climb Yggdrasil only to perish among the planes.

Planar Convergence Days (Optional Rule)

The connection of various planes to Midgard ebbs and flows, gaining its greatest strength during convergence days. At these times, random portals appear, and the entrances to the Ever River and the branches of the World Tree are easier to find. Additionally, creatures from convergent planes suffer disadvantage against spells that force them from the Material Plane such as *banishment* or *plane shift*.

CONVERGENCE DAY FESTIVALS

| FESTIVAL DAY | PLANE | OTHER CONVERGENT EVENTS AND LOCATIONS |
|------------------------|----------------|---|
| Axe Festival | Eleven Hells | Blood rites, ritual sacrifice |
| Ghost Festival | Evermaw | Funerals, open tombs |
| Harvest Dances | Silendora | Bonfire dances, fairy rings |
| Lantern Festival | Infinite Halls | Illumination magic ceremonies |
| Mustering | Valhalla | Battle, ceremonies on battlefields |
| New Year's Dawn | Infinite Halls | The first light of dawn |
| Night of the Open Road | Shadow Realm | Crossroads, lunar eclipses |
| Rites of Spring | Silendora | Blood or wine sacrificed on a verdant field |
| Slaughter Festival | Eleven Hells | Animal or human sacrifice, often via the hunt |
| Summer Festival | Klingedesh | Markets and trade fairs |
| Zobeck Midsummer Fair | Ravatet | Clockwork workshops |



In ancient days, convergence days were marked by festivals, and over time, many of these became the six intercalendar days of the Midgard calendar. Today, the original purpose of these special days has been forgotten, leaving only the festivals. Yet the influence of the planes remains. Apart from the festival days described below, other situations or locations can offer temporary passage to or from a convergent plane, though these portals are short lived and random. Opening a portal on purpose requires knowledge of the nature of the portal (gained through research similar to the formulae for magic item creation) as well as any material components required for the rite. Of course, accidental opening of passages to the planes can occur, but the details of such events are left to individual GMs to decide.

Traveling Among the Planes

Venturing into the realms beyond Midgard requires specific knowledge of portal alignments, hidden vortices, and sometimes, sheer luck. While there are powerful casters who make use of spells such as *plane shift* or *gate* to reach the planes, most would-be explorers make use of three planar roads.

THE WORLD TREE

Travel Time: Days

Inhabitants (most to least common):

Ratatosk (see *Tome of Beasts*), ravenfolk, giant eagles, giant elk, giant boar, kallikantzaros (see *Creature Codex*), planar flora (see *Creature Codex*) as well as other planar travelers, monsters, or creatures

Known Locations: The Eyrie, Squirrel Court of Yggdrasil, Well of Urd, Wotan's Gallows

The great Yggdrasil connects Midgard to all of the other planes, which nestle in its branches and roots like glittering ornaments. Where it manifests on Midgard, it appears as massive trees with roots as large as hills and trunks

reaching miles into the sky. These individual trees however are but tiny tendrils and twigs springing from Yggdrasil itself.

Traversing Yggdrasil's twisting paths requires the traveler to first climb a world tree and deal with any guardians along the way. During the two-mile climb, the traveler slowly transitions from Midgard to the planar highway of Yggdrasil's branches. For every half-mile climbed, the traveler (or the majority of the group if they climb together) must succeed at a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be forcefully returned to Midgard. Characters or groups who fail the check immediately attract the attention of one of the World Tree guardians (or **child of yggdrasil** from *Creature Codex*) and lose that half-mile of progress. After two miles, the transition is complete.

Once upon Yggdrasil itself, the traveler can traverse a twisting network of branches, each as wide as an imperial road, to any plane, making this a popular transit route. Reaching a destination can take many days of travel and is made worse by the confusing and constantly changing branches. Some paths have their own gravity or feature treacherous footing. Falling from a branch inflicts 5 (2d4) damage per 10 feet of height before impacting another branch. Portals marked with the Eiwaz rune and disguised as holes, wooden doors, or arches of entwined branches offer shortcuts for those with the knowledge to find them. The mischievous ratatosks often hire themselves out as guides for choice gossip, tasty tidbits of food, or shiny treasure.

THE EVER RIVER

Travel Time: Variable

Inhabitants (most to least common):

Travelers, traders, pirates, celestials, fiends, folk of leng (see *Tome of Beasts*), and aquatic creatures of all types

Known Locations: Field of the Drowned, Strait of Charybdis, various riverside establishments

Known by many names and possessing numerous tributaries, the Ever River is an ouroboros waterway flowing through Yggdrasil's branches and touching every plane. At times, it manifests as a sluggish ring around the Eleven Hells or as a gently flowing river in the Summer Lands or even as a raging waterfall in Valhalla. The river's flow absorbs a little of the power of every plane it passes through, giving certain tributaries unique attributes. Some known branches of the Ever River (and their powers) include Acheron (heals), Gjoll (cuts like blades), Lethe (removes memory), Phlegethon (burns with fiery blood), Sarasvati (grants wisdom), and Styx (kills).

Traversing the endless loop of the Ever River requires travelers first reach its banks. From Midgard, this entails a ritual conducted upon a dock, quay, embankment, or river shore. After 10 minutes of casting, the traveler must make a DC 15 ability check using their spellcasting ability (or primary ability for non-casters). Success transports the traveler and any willing creature within 30 feet to a sandy embankment on the edge of the Ever River. Nothing exists beyond this small beach but the glittering river stretching off into the Void in both directions.

From the Ever River's bank, a traveler simply hails some passing watercraft, bargaining with the crew for passage. Countless vessels ply the mystical waters, from devilish slave barges to divine pleasure junks, including Hel's longship of traitors, Baldur's golden galleon *Hringhorni*, or the rickety raft of Charun to name but three. Pilgrims, explorers, traders, smugglers, and even vacationers are common. The time required to travel from plane to plane via the Ever River is somewhat subjective. Some journeys appear to take days but only took hours while others feel as if only a few minutes passed but actually took days. Those who spend their lives upon the meandering paths of the river take such contradictions in stride. Vessels equipped

with a *helm of Loki* (see *Warlock 9: The World Tree*) can transition between the Ever River to a nearby plane.

One Ever River inhabitant of particular note is Charun the Ferryman, Guardian of Souls and Boatman of the Infinite. Found on every incarnation of the river, the God of Death appears as a pale man in black robes with snake tattoos on his forearms. While his usual task is to oversee the progress of souls crossing the Lethe, Charun is not averse to transporting passengers if the payment is to his liking. Be warned though, the Ferryman often demands far more precious things than golden coins for his services. He is one of the few gods worshipped universally by the inhabitants of the planes.

PORTALS

Travel Time: Instantaneous

Some Known Locations: Black Tower (Bleak Expanse), Cat-slide Alleys (Per-Bastet and elsewhere), Great Labyrinth (Kyprion), Great Library (Friula), Market Gates of Kel Azjer (Dominion of the Wind Lords), Portal of the Heavens (Ishadia), Red Portals of Nuria

Portals are doorways to and from Midgard, reaching out to connect to the various planes of the multiverse. Some of these gateways are stable, permanent fixtures while others are



EFFECTS OF THE LETHE

Each round that a creature begins within or touching the waters of the River of Tears, they must make a DC 12 Charisma saving throw. Each failed saving throw reduces their level by 1 and removes a year's worth of memories. After five failed saving throws, the creature can only remember their name, former occupation, and some basic skills. Only a *wish* spell or similarly powerful magic can restore the level and lost memories.

intermittent, appearing according to a set pattern or completely randomly. Typically, portals ground themselves in an arch, but this can take many forms: a cavern opening, the gaping mouth of a giant's skull, a canopy of vines, or even a simple doorway. Portals exist across Midgard, but they are not easy to find.

Travelers wishing to open and use a portal need only present a specific word, action, or material component. All of these are commonly called a "key." Most keys are particular to that portal and have some connection to the destination of the gateway. Before activation, portals do not look inherently magical and do not register any sort of aura while using a *detect magic*. A *true seeing* spell can perceive a portal, but it does not identify where that portal goes. When triggered by its gate key, the archway of a portal flares with light, often accompanied by some subtle environmental change, depending on the portal's destination. For example, a portal to Urgennos, the Luminous Hell of Fire and Sulfur, exudes a faint odor of

sulfur while a portal to Valhalla faintly echoes the clash of steel blades.

The exception to the description of portals presented herein has to do with Hune, the Doorlord. This enigmatic shadow of a dying god has no real mind left, only a purpose—the creation of magical portals. Encountered randomly across Midgard, Hune creates portals without archway or key. For those willing to pay his price, always something the traveler has on hand, Hune's portals offer passage to anywhere across the planes.

MORE PLANAR PATHS

Other methods of reaching the planes include shadow roads (see *Midgard Worldbook*), the House of Infinite Doors (a mansion that connects many planes), the Sky Stairs of Beldestan, the Tumbles in Corremel, the portals of Leng, and certain holy mountains of the Eastern Lands. Additionally, the voidships operated by the folk of leng and the spiders of leng can cross the Void from plane to plane.

Part Two: Planar Overview

*You wish to know everything about the endless planes? Sit then and listen.
This shall take several millennia.*

—The Silver Tree, Silendora

The deep mysteries of the realms beyond Midgard mean the information in these pages is but the first brush of the pen on parchment, the first dip of the quill into the ink.

The Infinite Halls, Seven Heavens of Celestial Light

The divine light of the higher realms emanates from the Infinite Halls. Also known as the Seven Heavens and the Celestial Realms, this endless plane houses the palaces of the gods and is inhabited by angels, archons, planetars, empyreans, and

all manner of celestial beings of light and goodness. Every mask of every deity has a home somewhere among the halls. Mortal travelers usually only have access to the lowest hall unless directly guided by a divine patron.

TAIVAS, THE HALL OF ELYSIAN DAWN

The lowest layer of the Celestial Realm is a land of sloped valleys and the sprawling bases of uncountable mountains. This is the only hall easily accessible by mortals. Animals

of every variety and biome populate the mountain slopes as do crumpled ruins. These fortifications are the remnants of the brief occupation by the *ahu-nixta* (see *Creature Codex*) and the rebellion of their enslaved celestial dragons during the Vanir War. Even after throwing their oppressors back into the Void and migrating to the eastern lands of Midgard, the eldest of the celestial dragons remain in Elysian Dawn, dwelling in caves, aeries, and towers arrayed around the plane to guard against future incursions. The largest city accessible to mortals in Elysian Dawn is Ulchin, the City of Penance. The city hosts pilgrims from across the planes under the direction of its overseer, Adriel, the Archangel of Hope.

COSMOLOGY OF THE INFINITE HALLS

Structurally, the Infinite Halls consist of numerous mountain peaks divided into horizontal sub-planes, forming stacked layers called “halls” or “heavens.” Only the lowest hall, called the Hall of Elysian Dawn, can be accessed by mortals. The names of the seven halls are known thanks to Ishadian aasimars, wheedling stories from their divine progenitors. Still other halls such as Asgard are known to exist in the Celestial Realm, but their exact location is known only to the gods.

REACHING THE INFINITE HALLS

Apart from the traditional methods of planar transportation, travelers from Midgard can reach the Infinite Realm through the Portal of the Heavens in Ishadia. This direct gateway from the mortal world to the first of the Seven Heavens is fiercely guarded, and its use is prohibited by law and custom except in the direst need. A less well-known route lies within the Lotus Road ley line. Ancient Cathayian texts such as the *Zhuangzi Codex* speak of a secret path within the Lotus Road, reaching out to the Hall of Elysian Dawn.

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

The following places can be found in the Hall of Elysian Dawn since it is the plane accessible by mortals.

Alabaster Arches

Slender ivory bridges span the sometimes miles-wide ravines between the various mountain peaks. Watchtowers anchor each end of an arch, and decorative alabaster railings provide some protection from the roaring winds.

Court of Heaven

As detailed in *Musings Upon the Celestial Mandate*, the Eastern deity August Personage of Dawn rules a divine court populated by all of the important gods in Cathay. Mirroring the mortal world, an extensive staff of immortal attendants, ministers, officials, and lesser gods manage the complicated laws of heaven and enforce the rules of protocol between gods and mortals. The court itself is a massive pagoda with walls of mithral and gemstones, guarded over by elder dragons and demi-god heroes. For those who worship the gods of the East, the Court of Heaven is the ultimate judgment of mortals and gods alike.



THE SEVEN KNOWN HEAVENS

The Seven Known Heavens are listed here in ascending order—the lowest, Taivas (which is the only one accessible to mortals), up through to Arabas:

- Taivas, the Hall of Elysian Dawn
- Raaquin, the Hall of Honored Rest
- Marum, the Hall of Moonlit Clouds
- Solalun, the Hall of Verdant Fields
- Naom, the Hall of Endless Stars
- Sejavaal, the Hall of the Angelic City
- Arabas, the Hall of Incomprehensible Divinity

Karibachi, Cliffside Sentinel

The fortified town of Karibachi extends sideways on the face of a sheer cliff as if gravity is turned on its ear. To those in the town, “down” points at the cliff. Karibachi offers the only official access to Raaquin, the Hall of Honored Rest, though many hidden portals are sure to exist.

Rengora, Monastery of Divine Cleansing

One tributary of the Ever River intersects Elysian Dawn as a massive waterfall cascading from an impossibly high cliffside. Upon a stone outcropping reaching out into the middle of the deluge, a monastery of red marble stands amidst the sacred waters. Rengora is a place of purification and atonement where holy monks cleanse magical treasures corrupted by darkness. Relics believed beyond redemption hang in cages below the monastery where the constantly flowing holy water can keep their influence at bay. A pilgrim road crosses Elysian Dawn, drawing pilgrims seeking atonement or renewal to Rengora.

Ruins of Ahu-Nixta Fortifications

Scattered across Elysian Dawn, these techno-organic ruins are shunned by the inhabitants of the plane and have largely remained undisturbed since the celestial dragons drove out their enslavers. Ahu-nixta soldiers lie where they fell, still clutching their lightning scepters and arcane cannons.

Wellspring of Life and Radiance

Existing both coterminously and coexistently with the Infinite Halls, the Plane of Radiance is the spiritual source of physical and mental illumination. This demi-plane is a world of blazing light, possessing no material terrain of any sort. Currents of inspiration, called sefirot, flow across the plane. In theory, it is possible to enter a sefirot from one location and exit it anywhere in the multiverse, but no evidence exists to prove this is possible or survivable.

PERSONAGES OF NOTE

A few of the interesting inhabitants of this plane are described below.

Apostolic Wardens of the Hallowed Conclave

A militant order of aasimar and human paladins, the wardens patrol the vast slopes of the Infinite Halls fanatically, eager to root out any slight hint of corruption or darkness. Members swear unbreakable oaths on their immortal souls to protect the Celestial Realms, a fact they often use to rationalize their uncompromising worldview and the harsh punishments they dole out. They also take new names to remind themselves to uphold moral qualities worthy of their stations. The wardens are led by Lord Commander Has-Unwavering-Faith Wudram (human **knight**) from the Fortress of the Hallowed Conclave.

Nihaam, the Penitent Fiend

Signs written in Enochian warn travelers away from an isolated mountainside pool where Nihaam, a **gilded devil** (see *Tome of Beasts*), sits in the middle of the shallow water. As part of a personal quest for atonement, the fiend struggles against his natural greed, resisting the gold, jewels, and magical items piled on seven flat rocks just out of his reach. Nihaam will desperately attack anyone who disturbs the treasure so as not to jeopardize his atonement. The gilded devil knows of a hidden portal from Midgard to the infernal city of Luret-Moire in Nakhol, one of the Eleven Hells.

The Sleeping Titan

In a sheltered mountain saddle, Ozlavos, an **ancient titan** (see *Tome of Beasts*), sleeps half buried in trees, earth, and stone. Centuries ago, the titan fled to the Infinite Halls from the Southlands when the rest of his kind fell into madness. In his massive hand, Ozlavos holds a granite stela inscribed in Primordial with the record of a hidden Umbuso vault.



Thoelle, Shepherdess of the Watchful Eyes

Though many deities make use of the celestial automata called the **eyes of the gods** (see *Creature Codex*), a cadre of these winged burning orbs float singly or in pairs across the entirety of the Infinite Halls. When they observe something amiss, the eyes report to Thoelle, a **song angel** (see *Creature Codex*), called the Shepherdess of Eyes. Her divine task is to keep a close watch for any incursion from the Eleven Hells or mortals venturing beyond the Hall of Elysian Dawn. There is little that Thoelle does not know about the Celestial Realm.

Zun-Jing Laozhu, Poetic Dragon Seer

The eldest of the celestial dragons, this ancient light dragon (see *Creature Codex*) manifests as a wingless white dragon with an elongated body, silver lion-like mane, and a graceful, carp-like mustache. Immensely wise, Laozhu remembers the dragons' arrival in the Celestial Realm, their enslavement by the ahu-nixta, and all that's happened since. He offers advice to any who venture into his mountainside library, but his wisdom is always given as haiku.

INFINITE HALLS MINI-ADVENTURE PATH

Adventures concerning this plane can take a variety of forms. One suggestion includes the following.

APL 1–4

The Crusade of Light pours out of various portals into Ishadia and Zobeck on a quest to purge the mortal world of the influence of the Eleven Hells. Led by Archangel Ibrael of the Burning Gaze, a zorya angel (see *Creature*



Codex), and comprising an army of Apostolic Wardens of the Hallowed Conclave, the crusade's public goals hide a deeper agenda. Either working with the crusade or acting to minimize its influence, the PCs come under attack by a rogue sect of Doomspeakers (see *Demon Cults & Secret Societies*) who claim the crusade's plans will lead to the destruction of the multiverse itself.

APL 4–8

Open warfare erupts between the Crusade of Light and various nations as the celestial host attempts to bring all of Midgard under their banner. The PCs venture into the Infinite Halls in order to infiltrate the Hallowed

Conclave and expose the true mission of the crusade. But what begins in the heavens descends into the Eleven Hells when the heroes discover an infernal agenda.

APL 9–12

Escaping or evading the demonic forces pursuing them, the PCs return to Midgard ready to unmask Archangel Ibrael, but first they must contend with an army of fanatical paladins, misguided angels, and vengeful demons. The final confrontation pits the heroes against an apocalyptic balor trying to remake the multiverse.

Silendora, Summer Lands of the Elves

Call it the Land of the Last Horn, Elfheim, the Bright Lands, or Faerie, Silendora is a sylvan reflection of Midgard where the fey rule over gnome, goblin, and halfling servitors. This plane is an ever-changing land of beauty and mystery that lies close to Midgard, overlapping in places such as the Arbonesse to give rise to tales of silver towers, elegant lords and ladies, and curious pixies, half glimpsed in dreams and remembered only in longing and wonder.

In theory, High King Alveric Finva Tanaquil and High Queen Lirazel Morrigen Aynwyn rule the various independent elven courts of the Summer Lands, but four years ago, they vanished while processing across their realm. With the lesser courts thrown into confusion, three nobles—the Birch Queen, the Oak King, and the Holly King—rule in their name while desperately searching for the missing rulers. The bond between the throne and the land is tangible and unbreakable in the Summer Lands. So until the high king and queen die, no new claimant to the Oberon Throne can become ruler. Without Alveric and Lirazel, the fey’s influence over Silendora fades, and dark things encroach at the borders.

COSMOLOGY OF SILENDORA

The ever-changing Summer Lands have no map. Though roughly similar to Midgard, the terrain is dominated by untamed expanses of ancient forests, majestic mountains, and surging rivers. In the air is spring’s promise tinged with the golden light of summer. The fey hide behind every tree, peek out of every bush, playing their intricate games. Some are friendly, many are mischievous, and still others are deadly.

REACHING SILENDORA

The ease or difficulty of traveling to the Summer Lands from Midgard depends greatly on location. In the Arbonesse, the walls of reality are porous, allowing travelers to cross easily. Some locations, such as the River Court, even exist in both planes coterminously. A few known crossings are the Birch Queen’s Fairgrounds, a millstone in Riverbend (see *Wrath of the River King*), and certain surviving elf roads. Elsewhere in Midgard, recent signs indicate the Pontoretto ley line once more connects to Silendora, yet none seem to know how or by whom. The Winter Tree in Domovogrod can theoretically reach the Elflands, but attacks by shadowy creatures discourage new explorations.

From the planes, Silendora is easily reached. Many branches of Yggdrasil touch upon its forests. No less than four tributaries of the Ever River flow into Silendora to slither through the woodlands.

THE FEY OF SILENDORA

The elves and fey of the Summer Lands are cruel by nature and violent, though rigidly feudal and beholden to complicated social rules and etiquette. They look down on humans, dwarves, and others as little more than speaking animals, creatures too foolish to understand the fey and proper behavior. Below the fey, though still higher than mere

mortals, are lesser creatures such as talking animals, lesser sprites, gnomes, halflings, goblins, and so forth. Everyone else exists at the bottom of the fey's rigid social hierarchy.

THE FEY COURTS OF SILENDORA

While the High Throne rules the Bright Lands, lesser kings control their own independent courts. The best known of these is the Court of the River King (see *Midgard Worldbook*). A few of the known courts are listed below:

- **The Birch Court.** Ruled by the Birch Queen, an elven woman of cruel humor and ambitious nature.
- **The Court of the Oak.** Led by the Oak King, a wise treant who struggles to remain distant from court affairs.
- **The Holly Court.** Controlled by the Holly King, a fey lord of fierce demeanor and a flashing blade. He defeated the forces of the Rowan King a year ago to establish a new court.
- **The Court of the Archon.** This is a symbolic court, usually comprising the high king and queen's immediate family and household.
- **The Court of the Quill.** The court of the missing high king and led by his younger sister the Quill Queen. Currently feuding with the missing high queen's house.
- **Court of the Mist.** The house of the missing high queen and led by her uncle the Mist King. Currently feuding with the missing high king's house.



MORE ON SILENDORA

The *Wrath of the River King* adventure contains more Summer Lands locations, NPCs, fey customs, and encounters.

LOCATIONS OF NOTE

The following are but a few of the notable areas found in Silendora.

Dienerin, Lesser City of the Folk

Across the river from the grand capital of Palsarian is a smaller, much humbler community for the gnome, goblin, and halfling servitors of the fey. Here the streets echo with happy chatter, the clink of ale steins ring out, and children race through the crowds with delight. Dienerin is almost rowdy in its cheer, and those who disrupt this face the stern cudgels of the Constituent Watch. Ferries cross the river regularly, bringing folk to or from the estates and palaces of their lords and ladies. The Lesser City of the Folk also supports a thriving community of craftsfolk, specializing in useful and practical items.

Inn of the Open Leaf, Welcome to the End

First of all, the inn is a lie. What appears to be a magical inn of plush decor and elegant accommodations is but the honey to lure in prey. The friendly innkeeper, the young stable boy, the buxom barmaid, and the gruff-but-kindly cook are nothing but fetches, created by magic to sell the deception. The "inn" is a predator, a hungry shapechanger (use **dune mimic** from *Tome of Beasts*), preying upon tired travelers. Most fey in Silendora know the inn's true nature and find it funny to watch visitors stumble into its welcoming maw.



A CHANGE IN RULERSHIP

Valeshi and Haldifelli, the former high king and queen (see *Midgard Worldbook*), stepped down 8 years ago, around the same time that the sea-god Nethus was restored. Since the fey see no need to inform lesser creatures of their business, word has yet to trickle down to the mortal world.

Kroshcha, Grove of the Crone

While journeying through the untracked forest, a traveler might happen upon a grove where an ever-present mist twists through gnarled oak and walnut trees. This is Kroshcha, a pocket of forest claimed by **Baba Yaga** (see *Creature Codex*), which she uses as one of the locations for her magical hut to rest its chicken legs. The grove's location changes all the time because it amuses the crone to have it be so. Despite her reputation and demeanor, Old Grandmother has a soft spot for the fey and wild things.

Palsarian, Silver City of Summer

The new capital of the Archon Court, Palsarian is an elegant city of graceful spires, rising high above ivy-bordered, alabaster domes, gently meandering canals, and majestic pillars. Elven magescrafters devote decades perfecting their arts while musicians and poets compose masterpieces. Palsarian proudly surrounds the Archon's Height, the summer palace of the high king. And the Conservatory Arcane instructs its students in fey magics unseen in mortal realms. This idyllic locale has tarnished recently with the completion of a shadow fey embassy.

Silver Tree, Ancient Witness to Creation

Deep in the ever-changing forest is a unique tree of no known species. Huge and with a massive canopy stretching for a mile or more, the trunk appears to be made of silver, the branches platinum, and the leaves white gold, electrum, and copper. The Silver Tree is one of the oldest entities in Silendora, having witnessed the dawn of creation, the first world, and now Midgard. The gods themselves come to hear its stories and tales. To the lucky, the tree may impart some of its wisdom.

PERSONAGES OF NOTE

A few of the interesting inhabitants of this plane are described below.

Kivok, the Dream Merchant

With a laden tinker's pack on his back, old Kivok wanders the trails of Midgard and the Summer Lands, stealing mortal dreams and selling them to the fey. The old man (use **dream squire** from *Creature Codex*) owes a debt to Baba Yaga and must tithe a portion of his stolen dreams to her.

Old Hox, Drunken Gossip

The tiny, wrinkled clurichaun (see *Tome of Beasts*) is usually drunk when encountered, but to those who supply him with wine, the stronger the better, he is a font of recent gossip and forgotten lore.

Sir Ailre Oakgate Derina, Knight of the Wood

This tall and imposing elven cavalier, use **green knight of the wood** (see *Creature Codex*), rides the borders of the Summer Lands, defending his home from any and all planar incursions. Visitors will often encounter Sir Ailre soon after arriving when he requires them to answer his questions about their intentions.

SILENDORA MINI-ADVENTURE PATH

Adventures concerning this plane can take a variety of forms. One suggestion includes the following.

APL 1–4

The seasons change, and the Bright Lands fade. Though magical divination cannot locate the lost high king and queen, newly found physical evidence points to kidnappers from Midgard. With the fey courts thrown into upheaval, the Birch Queen and the Holly King both send knights to the mortal world, but is it to rescue the lost rulers or kill them? The PCs become involved when the elven cavaliers

run amok across the Midlands. Matters turn serious when the high king's severed hand ends up in the possession of Lady Chesmaya of the Verdant Tower.

APL 4–8

Fallout from the elven knights' siege of Wendestal Forest and its lich-sorceress guardian spills summoned monsters and magical corruption into nearby towns and farms, prompting the heroes to enter the fray to resolve the issue. Contending with zealous elves is hard enough, but the shadow fey bring further complication by "finding" evidence pointing to Baba Yaga herself. With no way to counter the old crone, the Birch Queen and Holly King broker a deal with the Queen of Night and Magic.

APL 9–12

The Wild Hunt clashes with Baba Yaga's prodigious powers and capricious allies, bringing shadows and death among the bright fey of the Summer Lands. The PCs cross into Silendora to attempt a rescue of the kidnapped high king and queen only to discover Baba Yaga is innocent. This is all the work of the shadow fey and the high king and queen are prisoners in the Shadow Realm. With Baba Yaga's aid, the PCs arrive in the Shadow Realm to put a stop to the plot and restore balance to the Summer Lands.

Valhalla, the Storm Court, and Geirrhöth

The twin realms of Valhalla and Geirrhöth, also called the Plane of Battle or the Plane of Spears, consist of Valhalla's massive feasting hall surrounded by two battlefields, Hjahöth and Geirrhöth. The former is for the einherjar (see *Tome of Beasts*), honorable warriors chosen by the valkyries (see *Creature Codex*), and the latter is used by the vrakae (use stats for einherjar), blood-thirsty warriors who

revel in killing. All the triumph and tragedy of war rages here, a never-ending glory where the soldiers who perish today rise again to rejoin their battle again tomorrow, watched over by archdevils, archangels, and all the gods of war, though Mavros is first and foremost. The rivers and rain run bloody, the dreadful sound of screams and war cries echo everywhere, and the many swords and spears scattered underfoot are the only ground to be found. When night falls, the ghosts of the slain arise to drink, feast, and restore their flesh and bone for the following day.

COSMOLOGY OF VALHALLA

The battlefields of the Plane of Spears change daily; mountains, rivers, grasslands, oceans, forests, and deserts come and go, creating new tactical environments for the never-ending battles. The water and even the rain of Valhalla is always slightly tinged with blood from the countless slain each day. The Northern gods, as well as war gods such as Mavros, often meet in Valhalla and maintain floating fortresses and palaces high above the battlefields.

Created by the Vanir at the dawn of Midgard, Valhalla is a plane of punishment, preparation, and reward. The fields of Hjahöth and Geirrhöth represent the duality of the warriors' life and the thin edge between honor and bloodthirst. Valkyries gather the honorable slain warriors from the mortal world and bring them to Hjahöth where they become einherjar. A different sect of valkyries called svarkyries (or "dark choosers") gather slain warriors who delighted in blood and killing and bring their souls to Geirrhöth to become vrakae. Both groups of warriors train to fight by Odin's side when Ragnarok comes.

REACHING VALHALLA

Most planar travelers prefer not to have to die to get to Valhalla. From Midgard, the Raven's Road and Shield Maiden's Fancy ley lines provide a pathway to the Plane of Spears for

those knowledgeable in such travel. It is also said that in Vidim, the Kingdom of Ravens, the molting huginn of the Perch know of a secret road to Valhalla. Active battlefields occasionally spawn temporary portals to the Storm Court but only where the fighting is fiercest. The charismatic, or perhaps foolish, could also try bargaining with a valkyrie for transport. Finally, some believe the best way to visit the Storm Court is to fly into a raging thunderstorm; few return from that road.

From the planes, a branch of Yggdrasil leads directly to Glasir, a golden World Tree planted outside the doors of Valhalla. Said to be the most beautiful tree known to gods and mortals, the sap of Glasir provides part of the restorative ritual that brings the slain warriors back to life each day. The swift river Thund, a tributary of the Ever River, flows around the feasting hall and separates the two battlefields. Particularly sturdy craft may attempt a crossing on the Thund to reach the docks of Valhalla.

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

The following are but a few of the notable areas found in Valhalla.

Bifrost, Rainbow Bridge to Asgard

Once located in the Northlands, this magical bridge vanished from the mortal world when the first elves opened their shadow roads. Now the Bifrost descends in a multicolored arch to a stone plaza beside the World Tree Glasir. At the other end lies Asgard, home of the Vanir, a floating realm that dwells simultaneously in the higher levels of the Infinite Halls and in Valhalla. The triplet valkyries known as the Sisters of the Keening Blades guard the bottom of the Bifrost.

Gladshheim, Gods Hall of the Vanir

The meeting place and feasting chamber of the Northern gods overlaps the Storm Court of Valhalla, existing just out of phase from the more famous hall. Here the Vanir take their

ease upon high seats at a massive table laden with an unending supply of the finest food and drink. The gods can gaze upon Valhalla's hall to observe the revelry among the einherjar and vakrae. Reaching Gladshheim is difficult for those who are not gods. A draught made from the juice of Idunn's apples can provide access from Valhalla, though none who have attempted this have ever returned from intruding upon the gods.

Lake of Bloody Tears, Healing Waters of Lada

The goddess of love and mercy journeyed to Valhalla but once and upon witnessing the ferocity of the battlefields wept tears of blood before fleeing. Those divine tears collected in a great lake over 100 miles across, which is one of the few unchanging terrain elements on the plane. The red waters of the lake possess great healing powers and are used in the creation of the mead served in Valhalla. The Temple of Isis and the Bengtan Monastery of the Bloodclaw are perched on the shores of the lake, protecting the holy site from any who seek to despoil it.

Sessrumnir, Hall of the Valkyrie

Near to the Storm Court rises an elegant hall named Sessrumnir. Here the valkyries dwell when they are not gathering souls or carousing with the einherjar and vakrae in the feasting hall. Mortals are prohibited from entering Sessrumnir, and those who try risk the Curse of Freyja, instantly becoming vakrae and battling until the end of time.

Storm Court, Feasting Hall of the Fallen

The feasting hall of Valhalla is a massive building with a peaked roof made from the shields of the fallen and rafters crafted from bundles of spears. The doors are guarded by celestial wolves (use winter wolf), and giant eagles scout the skies above. The interior of the hall is an infinite space, mostly given over to a central hall running the length of the building. Fire pits and stout wooden tables

abound as do haunches of sizzling meat and flagons of mead. The warriors of both battlefields return to the feasting hall each night to eat and revel.

PERSONAGES OF NOTE

A few of the interesting inhabitants of this plane are described below.

Agnarr, Smith of Valhalla

An enormously fat thursir giant (see *Tome of Beasts*), Agnarr alternates between feasting and forging, enjoying each activity with equal gusto. The giant's skills are as prodigious as his stomach, and he can craft nearly any weapon or armor in the multiverse, including magical items up to a rarity of very rare. As part of his bargain with canny Wotan, Agnarr cannot craft legendary items of artifacts so as not to anger Brokkr and Eitri, the weapon masters of the gods.

Heidrun, Immortal Goat

This huge goat feeds on the leaves of Glasir all day. At night her udders produce enough milk that, when mixed with the healing waters of Lada's Tears, it produces mead for all of the einherjar and vrakae to enjoy.

Gedana Rothasdotter, Vengeful Valkyrie

This angry valkyrie stalks through the battlefields of Hjahöth and Geirrhöth, searching for one particular warrior. Gedana's sister Oma fell in love with an unworthy mortal warrior and hid the human's soul among the einherjar. As punishment, Wotan exiled Oma to the Eleven Hells, and the only way to return her sister to Valhalla is for Gedana to find this one soul and destroy him. But as yet she has failed to do so.



Saehrimnir, Immortal Boar

During the day, this colossal boar feeds on acorns dropped by Glasir, and as the sun begins to set, it flees into the woods to be hunted by valkyrie and einherjar. The meat of the boar, prepared by Andhrimnir, cook of the gods, is enough to feed all of the einherjar and vrakae. Each morning, Saehrimnir is brought back to life to begin the cycle anew.

VALHALLA MINI-ADVENTURE PATH

Adventures on this plane can take a variety of forms. Suggestions includes the following.

APL 1–4

Rumors come that Fenris has been chained somewhere in the Eastern lands. So in perhaps his greatest deception ever, Loki's alliance with Boreas and Chernobog creates false omens that Ragnarok is at hand. The PCs become involved, struggling against human and giantkin members of the Cult of Ragnarok as they enact rituals across the Northlands and Midlands to trigger omens: an unnaturally cold winter, earthquakes centered on various world trees, and fathers killing sons.

APL 4–8

While contending with panicked commoners, crazed Night Cauldron agents, interloping giants, and fanatical cultists, the PCs find evidence that the omens are false, but it is too late. Convinced by the omens, Wotan opens the gates of Valhalla, spilling the valkyrie-led armies of einherjar and vrakae into the mortal world while Loki's portals bring trolls, giants, and their allies to confront them. Midgard becomes the new Plane of Spears as the false Ragnarok rages on. When all seems lost, the PCs learn of a tincture that can make even Wotan see the truth behind Loki's schemes.

APL 9–12

Journeying to Valhalla, the PCs set about gathering the ingredients for their medicine. However, Boreas and Chernobog now control the plane, and the heroes must struggle against their forces. In the end, they must find a way to Asgard or Gladsheim and confront Loki himself before Wotan sounds the last horn, triggering Ragnarok for real.

Klingedesh, the Marketplace

One of the primary hubs of planar travel, the marketplace is a tangled nest of stacked shops, stalls, nooks, and crannies radiating out in all directions, connected by bridges of rope, wood, and bone. Visitors can walk the

entire way around and never see the same item twice, for every faire, sook, and bazaar in Midgard and the other planes, both now and in the past, is a road both to and from the Marketplace.

Very literally, anything can be found in the Marketplace if the shopper is willing to meet the price. Plane-traveling caravans arrive daily, mighty merchant guilds organize expeditions to collect exotic goods, and trading vessels from the Ever River, the Void, and beyond bring the best of the planes to the docks of the city-plane. The streets are thronged with travelers from every race across the multiverse. Strange red-cloaked constructs called Auditors (use the stats for **clockwork huntsmen** from *Tome of Beasts*) police the Marketplace to enforce its one law, "Trade Must Continue."

COSMOLOGY OF THE MARKETPLACE

This is a small plane, an ecumenopolis growing outward from a spherical core. Klingedesh is broken up into four levels. At the surface, the Uppermarket is a sprawling maze of shops, stores, and emporiums that mysteriously change position, making navigation problematic. Just below the paved streets is the Undermarket where gangs and powerful warlords deal in stolen, cursed, evil, or feared goods. Further inward is the Depths, a twisting labyrinth hewn from ancient buildings, shops, and structures where true monsters lurk. Finally, the heart of the Marketplace is the Core, a half-mile-diameter stone sphere. None but the Auditors know that the Core is the incubating heart of a new commerce god waiting to be born.

REACHING THE MARKETPLACE

Traveling to Klingedesh is eased by the nature of the plane, for commerce welcomes all. On Midgard, there is a 15% chance that any shop or trade fair hides a portal to the Marketplace. The city of Kel Azjer in the Dominion of the

Wind Lords maintains a permanent gateway connected to Klingedesh.

There are many routes to reach the Marketplace from the planes. A World Tree called the Golden Bough grows in the Uppermarket, watched over by Chitata, a **ratatosk warlord** (see *Creature Codex*). He offers passage to Yggdrasil for 5 gp per traveler. The Ever River descends as a waterfall into a harbor and splits to flow around both sides of the sphere before meeting at another harbor and flowing “up” in an inverse waterfall. Arrival and departure fees are set at 5 gp per traveler. Finally, portals abound in the Marketplace, including the four massive Thorn Gates that allow instant access to planar roads for a modest fee of 2 gp. Other portals come and go across the Marketplace, offering short-lived access to points on Midgard or other planes.

TRADING IN THE MARKETPLACE

There is nothing that cannot be bought or sold in the Marketplace, from crude torches to the most powerful magical artifacts. Most merchants offer their goods for the standard amounts; however, other types of trade are perfectly acceptable. Bartering is highly encouraged, and many shopkeepers will exchange items for valuables other than coin such as a day’s worth of voice, childhood memories, or even stranger things.

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

The following is a limited sampling of the places found in the Marketplace

The Aerie

Changing position every day, the Aerie is one of the most well-known buildings in the Marketplace. Resembling an inverted cone, standing on a point no larger than a coin, the Aerie is home to the Right Honorable Guild of Couriers and Guides. A guild of unseele pixies and other fey, the guides can find any building in the Marketplace for flat price of 5 gp.

Association of Alchemists, Artificers, and Arcanists

Devoted to exploration, experimentation, and distribution, the recreationally medicated guild more or less runs a large ward in the Uppermarket when they can be pried away from their labs and workrooms. The association is always eager to create custom items, the stranger the better. Recent clashes herald the opening moves of a hostile takeover by the rakshasa-controlled Char’x’dal Banking Consortium.

Chirurgeonate of Healing Hands

A squat gray building is the unassuming headquarters of a multi-planar order of fanatical herbalists, physicians, and clerics who bring their gifts of healing to battlefields across the planes. The surgeons, distinctive in their white habits and beak-like masks, treat any wounded regardless of permission, cause, or alignment. Those who dare to stand against them quickly fall, only to be just as quickly treated by the healing hands.

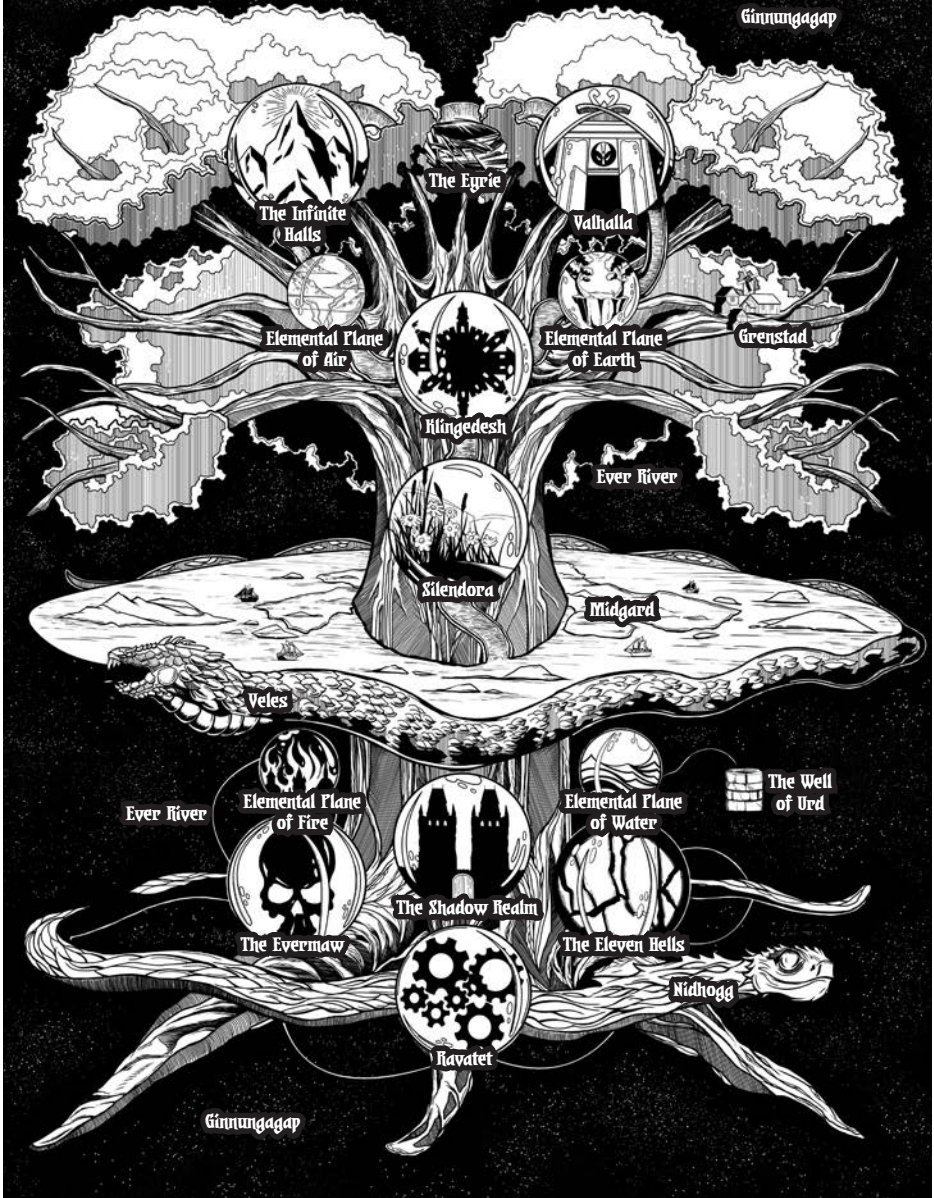
Honest Tenkar’s Relics and Artifacts

Thanks to advertisements seen across the Marketplace, most know of the gaudy shop decorated with signs declaring “No Guarantees” and “No Returns.” While the owner, Tenkar Ardlo (gnome gear mage, see *Creature Codex*), purports to offer authentic and powerful arcane artifacts and holy relics, the truth is most are common magic items with flashy one-use abilities. Behind the glitz however, Tenkar does have a few actual artifacts for sale.

Klamber’s Clockwork Curiosities

This establishment inside a crooked clocktower specializes in all manner of clockwork devices and arcane machinery. The owner, Zoldolpus Klamber (old **archmage**), appears to be an elderly human but is actually a construct created by the original Zoldolpus centuries ago. Unbeknownst to virtually everyone in the Marketplace, this Zoldolpus works to create a new race of sentient constructs.

Climbing the World Tree



Mr. Mott's Toys

Children of all races throng this small storefront, gasping at the sights on offer: clockwork figurines, lifelike animated dolls, magical puzzles, clever games of dice or cards, and other wonders. The enigmatic Mr. Mott (human mage) runs an interplanar chain of toy shops, each run by a clone of the original inventor. Though most of the wares on display are designed for children, Mott does have choice selection of very rare and legendary wondrous items.

The Trespasser's Club

A social club for daredevil explorers, thieves, swashbucklers, and adventurers, mementos of past expeditions cover the walls of the three-story brick headquarters. Members regularly challenge each other to gain access to places they are not supposed to enter, whether it is stealing into the lair of an ancient dragon or taking a nap in the bedchamber of a king. The current chairman is Wilhelmina Kandler, a **thief lord** (see *Creature Codex*). The club welcomes new members who can prove their daring with a sufficiently outlandish accomplishment.

BRIEF LIST OF MINOR LOCATIONS

A small sampling of the countless other establishment found on the Marketplace:

- **Bevi's Potion Trough.** Offers discount potions and experimental elixirs.
- **Corpses for Components.** Renders bodies into spell components.
- **Cuckoo's Bounty.** Buys and sells time.
- **Forgiveness and Indulgences.** Atonements for reasonable prices.
- **Madam Nova's Aspectorium.** Change your face or body with magic!
- **'Splosives and Such.** Fireworks and gunpowder by Four-Fingered Johan.
- **Temple of the Fallen.** Prayers to dead or lost gods and stranger beings.

- **Thogar's Meats and Cakes.** Rare cuts and sweet victuals from across the planes.

PERSONAGES OF NOTE

A few of the interesting inhabitants of this plane are described below.

Darvin Ghest, Vigilante Paladin

Disgraced paladin Darvin Ghest (human **knight**) leads the Arm of the Blind, a band of paladins from many faiths who use skills of the rogue and assassin to mete out their own version of justice on the harsh streets of the Marketplace. Hidden among the general population, Ghest and his band act in small cells to disrupt criminal organizations, working their way up the chain of command until they can dispatch the leaders.

The Feathered Seer

One of the most respected, misunderstood, and powerful inhabitants of the Marketplace, the Feathered Seer (awakened **giant owl**) possesses oracular sight rivaling the gods themselves. When she can be persuaded to speak, she reveals not the answer you want but the answer you need.

Phoebus the Scrivener, Contacts and Scribing

Scrounger, information broker, thief, and professional snitch, Phoebus (tiefling spy) is all that and more. His reputation is such that he has carefully balanced those who love him against those who hate him. For a modest fee, he will share his information or actively seek out some bit of gossip or secret for you.

Vaili the Efreeti, Lottery of Wishes

A reclusive and powerful genie, Vaili (**efreeti**) takes little to no interest in the affairs of the Marketplace, preferring to spend his time in the library of his magnificent golden palace called Shining Ascension. However, once per month, he offers a lottery with a prize of one free wish granted. It is said that those who win are not always happy with the results.

*Vissool Gaggaarth,
Gentleman Mimic Swashbuckler*

Inquisitor, thief-catcher, bounty hunter, and freelance spy, Vissool (**mimic**) possesses a genius-level intellect, impeccable fashion sense, a beguiling charm, and the ability to bite through bone. Respected and feared by friends and foes alike, his services are for sale if you have the coin.

**MARKETPLACE
MINI-ADVENTURE PATH**

Adventures concerning this plane can take a variety of forms. One suggestion includes the following.

APL 1–4

The Auditors come to the Prime Material Plane, collecting ingredients to finally awaken their new god. Across Midgard, strange constructs wearing red cloaks commit a rash of high-profile thefts and attacks. Relics, items, and even people of unusual power or bloodlines go missing. The PCs begin investigating these heists, clashing with the Auditors who appear to be “collecting” esoteric ingredients.

APL 4–8

The PCs trace the thefts to the Marketplace and travel there by one route or another only to find the various factions in Klingedesh in an open struggle. The Auditors have vanished, leaving control of the city-plane up for grabs. The PCs make allies and enemies before descending through the layers of the Marketplace to the Core where they witness the birth of Ekansu, Constructed God of Commerce.



APL 9–12

The newly born god manifests on the streets of Zobeck, spreading a fog of confusion and change. Portals disgorge Auditors and planar troublemakers, throwing the city into chaos. The PCs cling to a slim hope that destroying four crystal resonators, stationed around Zobeck might weaken Ekansu enough for the heroes to put an end to the Auditor’s constructed god.

Ravatet, Plane of Gears

Every plane has its secrets, though perhaps none as much as the Plane of Gears. Ravatet is a finite realm, a world of interlocked gears, cogs, and clockwork mechanisms clicking, turning, and humming according to some

unknown harmony. Some gears are the size of a hand, others as large as an island or even hundreds of miles across. Viewed from afar, Ravatet is a planet-sized, chronographic demesne akin to a vast machine.

The aspect of Rava as the Goddess of Fate leads to some speculation that the purpose of the plane of gears is to keep the mechanism of fate and destiny moving. Yet what of the Well of Urd and other spinners of fate? Perhaps mortal minds simply cannot grasp the enormity of Ravatet's divine purpose. Perhaps this is for the best. After all, every plane has its secrets.

COSMOLOGY OF RAVATET

The locations found on this plane occupy the faces of the gigantic gears—and are sometimes inside them. The atmosphere is breathable, though tinged with the smell of grease, and the grinding clank of moving gears is a constant background noise. Generally speaking, the largest gears generate their own gravity, so while standing upon them, “down” always points toward the surface of the cog. Travel between gears takes a wide variety of forms, all mechanical, from complicated suspension bridges to clockwork flying mounts to sliding along simple tension cables. The inhabitants of Ravatet are constructs for the most part, though a large number of mortals have settled here as well.

REACHING RAVATET

Travelers bound for the plane of gears do not have an easy journey ahead of them. From Midgard, few direct passages exist. In Longezza, City of Weavers, a monastic order of gearforged guard a clockwork cabinet rumored to be a portal to Ravatet. Skein-of-the-Way, a **gearforged templar** (see *Tome of Beasts*), runs a weaving shop in Zobeck and will open a brass door to the Plane of Gears for a price. If the tales are to be

believed, a shimmering portal in the Wasted West also provides transportation to Ravatet, but such routes are always guarded.

From the planes, travel is somewhat easier but only by degrees. As it nears Ravatet, the Ever River becomes a flood of rust laden silt, entering through a vast funnel at one end of the plane, cascading through a network of switchback tunnels before exiting out the other side. Calm waters are few, and those that exist are guarded by **automata devils** (see *Tome of Beasts*), **rust drakes** (see *Tome of Beasts*), and amphibious **clockwork myrmidons** (see *Tome of Beasts*). One of Yggdrasil's branches becomes the Mainspring, a massive clockwork tree at the center of the Burnished Grove. This route is guarded by the **moirai** (see *Warlock 14: Clockwork*), large spider constructs. By far the easiest path is by voidship as a dock and vast shipworks spread out around the Lighthouse. This towering edifice emits a beam of light into the dark, a boon to navigators of the Void. While few dangers threaten those arriving by ship, the docking fees can be steep.

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

The following are a sampling of notable locales found in Ravatet.

Burnished Grove, the Clockwork Forest

At the center of a field of brass, far from the nearest settlement, sprawls a copse of trees. This is no organic anomaly. This is the Burnished Grove, and every tree, beast, shrub, leaf, insect, and blossom of this ten-thousand-acre forest is made from exquisitely crafted metal and clockwork. Guarded by powerful constructs and fanatical druids, the grove is somehow connected to the ticking clock of fate and time. A world tree called Mainspring at the center of the wood produces the fabled nimalli fruit, which can repair constructs or produce oracular visions in organics. (See also *Warlock 14: Clockwork*.)

Desert of Rust

Covering a tenth of the plane of gears is a vast desert, an inhospitable wasteland of oxidized metal fragments, dust, and grit. At its heart, imprisoned titans labor to hollow out a continent-sized plateau of oxidized steel as punishment for losing the Vanir War. A clan of reaver dwarves (use **wolf reaver dwarf** from *Tome of Beasts*) guard the prisoners and battle the rust drakes and rust monsters who inhabit the desert. Above them all, an infinitely long crane lifts defective or worn-out parts from the rest of Ravatet, dropping them onto the desert without warning, sending shockwaves across the wasteland.

Hall of Inevitable Fate

Near the center of the Plane of Gears, a slowly rotating cylinder marks Rava's holiest site. The Hall of Inevitable Fate is a temple topped by a copper dome comprised of enameled plates, depicting the various aspects of the goddess. The hall contains courtrooms, libraries, prisons, living quarters, refectories, and so on. The judges welcome all to the Fated Courts: those with disputes find resolution, those who have committed crimes receive punishment. Justicars (use **algorithm** from *Tome of Beasts*), elite agents of the hall, roam the planes dispensing unwavering justice to those who wish it or not.

Junkyard of Broken Cogs

A massive landscape of metal, broken machines, and shattered devices, the Junkyard of Broken Cogs is a dumping ground for the refuse of countless planes. Scrap and treasures in equal measure fall from portals to form mountains and valleys. Most broken machines and devices from across the multiverse eventually find their way to the yard, many falling from randomly open portals. Living creatures who arrive in this manner emerge infected by the calcesplasia variation of rust disease (see *Warlock 14: Clockwork*). The yard is ruled by the Takasundur (or "Dismantlers"), a clan of rogues, tinkers,

artificers, and mages who turn rubble into clockwork creatures, half-formed golems, and other oddities. Recently, Vaerdalaga, an **adult wasteland dragon** (see *Creature Codex*) seized one quarter of the junkyard as her personal hoard and resists every Dismantler effort to remove her.

Ralkoff Planar Shipworks, Voidcraft Built, Bought, and Sold

The Lighthouse extends up from the highest point of Ravatet. Encircling this towering structure is a network of building slips, docks, forges, taverns, warehouses, barracks, and workshops. Here Vesilie Ralkoff, dwarf **gear mage** (see *Creature Codex*), oversees the construction, repair, and maintenance of voidships from across the planes. With a small army of gearforged workers and several **steam golems** (see *Tome of Beasts*), Ralkoff can produce almost any type of voidship given time and funds.

PERSONAGES OF NOTE

A few of the interesting inhabitants of this plane are described below.

Lanai Aynwyn, Archdruid of the Burnished Grove

An ancient elf with copper hair and deep brown skin, Archdruid Lanai (elf druid) has tended the clockwork grove for centuries with the aid of her Spindles, five powerful druidic agents. Recently, Lanai struggles to contain a new and mysterious outbreak of rust (see *Deep Magic: Clockwork*), afflicting her mechanical trees and threatening to disrupt the delicate balance of the grove.

Lord Toc of Tic, Mad Time Genius

This jolly gnome, in his leather apron and belt adorned with hourglasses, always has a smile on his cherub-like face as he sells small timepieces and pocket watches from a tinker's cart. Toc, a timekeeper mage (see *Deep Magic: Time Magic*), actually sells time. His one-use items dispense moments of time, like the

spell *time stop* but for a variety of durations. A round costs 1,000 gp, an hour costs 5,000 gp, and a day costs 20,000 gp. Unfortunately for the buyers, these timepieces all manifest strange side effects when used. Typically, they trigger a random spell-like effect at the worst possible moment directed at the user. When confronted, Lord Toc blames the Dismantlers of the Junkyard, temporal alignments, or even Rava herself and offers to fix the problem for free, which isn't very effective most of the time.

Ordinal Una, Examinant of the Multiverse

One of Rava's strangest creations, Ordinal Una is a human-seeming **algorith** (see *Tome of Beasts*) charged with correcting errors in reality. Bonded to an enchanted slate that mimics the powers of various high-level magic items (the *deck of many things* among them), Una "fixes" any perceived anomalies by rewriting existence. She wanders the planes. Saint. Scourge. Calamity. Savior.

Teeth-of-the-Gale, Dismantler Mayor

A planar dwarf **berserker**, Teeth is one of the most dangerous Dismantlers. Short and ill-tempered, he enjoys shattering objects and individuals with his maul. He forcibly elected himself to the role of "mayor" of the loosely organized Dismantlers, a job no one else really wanted. Now however, he finds himself with the unenviable task of dealing with the incursion of the wasteland dragon Vaerdalaga.

RAVATET MINI-CAMPAIGN SEED

Adventures concerning this plane can take a variety of forms. One suggestion includes the following.

APL 1–4

Xotho Kren, an insane gearforged, conspires with the ahu-nixta to invade the Prime Material in search of one of the lost Dragonkind Orbs. Across Midgard, gearforged and other clockwork creations begin acting erratically, turning against

their creators, allies, and the innocent. Each displays signs of a rust infection (see *Deep Magic: Clockwork*) and becomes a drone of the hivemind entity calling itself Xotho. The PCs first become involved when dealing with the fallout from Xotho's clockwork forces. The constructs murder and steal, fashioning strange eldritch machines in various locations. Investigating these sites, the heroes discover Xotho searches for an orb that can actually control dragons.

APL 4–8

Racing Xotho's minions, the PCs journey south from Nuria Natal, contending with clockwork assassins and other hazards. In an ancient dwarven ruin at the edge of the Great Sinkhole in Yawchaka, they manage to beat Xotho to the orb's last resting place only to discover the ahu-nixta waiting for them.

APL 9–12

With the Dragonkind Orb taken to Ravatet and installed in the Lighthouse like a transmitter, the heroes must follow. Reaching the Plane of Gears, the PCs find unlikely allies among the reaver dwarves and Rava's followers as they assault the Lighthouse while Xotho and the ahu-nixta stand poised to spread the hivemind intelligence and domination over the dragons across the planes.

The Evermaw, Plane of the Undead

The Plane of Undeath is an afterlife of ghouls and vampires, cannibals and gluttons. The Road of Fangs runs the length of the plane like a lolling tongue sprawled through a waterless desert of powdered blood and pulverized bone, pockmarked with half-buried ruins and the redoubts of powerful undead. Here ziggurats flow with the blood of daily sacrifices, liches study new necromancies of flesh and bone, and the cooks claim they can

skin and butcher anything from ghosts to gods. Uncounted multitudes of undead chant foul prayers, feeding the God of Undeath with their adulations. It is commonly held that the souls of those corrupted by undeath wash into Evermaw from the Lethe or Styx.

This plane, while certainly vast, is finite. The sands slope down at the edges to pour out into the Void where the titanic Drinker in the Dark feeds on the endless flow of blood dust. Most of Evermaw's inhabitants believe the plane was created by Mordiggian, a hunger demon-deity worshipped by the denizens of Leng, who was destroyed during the Vanir Wars. But all know the true master of Evermaw is Mot, the God of Endings and Undeath. (See also *Warlock 8: Undead*.)

COSMOLOGY OF EVERMAW

The sky of this plane is blood red, a never-ending twilight lit by the corona of a glimmering black sun. The cold and dry air always bears the slight reek of the grave. Jaundiced clouds hang above the blood and bone sands. Sinkholes and quicksand are common. Jagged spurs of rock rise up from the dust as do the ruins of obsidian or bone structures and the occasional settlement.

DENIZENS OF THE EVERMAW

Undead of every form, from skeletons and crawling claws to lichs and death demons, make up the vast majority of the inhabitants. The living don't often willingly come to Evermaw. A steady trade in living slaves feed the blood altars of the plane. Occasionally, powerful necromancers visit to commune with lich scholars or demonic warlocks.

REACHING EVERMAW

Traveling to the Plane of Undeath from Midgard is not difficult as many pathways exist. The spell *skull road* (see *Warlock 8: Undead*) opens a direct pathway between

any tomb and Evermaw. Traversing the Demon Mountain Road ley line can lead a traveler who survives to the blood deserts. A vril-powered archway in the ruins of Mardas Vhula-gai will open a portal to Evermaw provided the right sacrifice is made. In the Blood Kingdom, King Lucan works with his mages and necromancers to craft a permanent portal to Evermaw but, perhaps fortunately, has only met with intermittent success as yet.

From the planes, two branches of the Ever River flow into Evermaw. Branches of the Lethe, River of Tears, and the Phlegethon, River of Blood, cross the blood desert. Both waterways are regularly trafficked by ferry demons, angelic guides, and planar travelers. A withered branch of the World Tree called Charun's Oar rises out of a small island where the Lethe and the Phlegethon wander near each other. The portals from the planes and from Midgard leading to Evermaw are heavily guarded by physical opponents, traps, and spells, for few wish to see the undead use the pathway to enter the mortal world.

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

Aside from the ruins, tombs, and necropoli protruding from the blood desert like crooked teeth, a few notable locations are described below.

Cliffs of Gathered Memory

A honeycomb of niches pierces this miles-wide, 500-foot-tall cliff, each small chamber gathering memories from the undead of Evermaw. While the orange-and-white stone is soothing to the undead, any living creature who enters must succeed at a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or suffer 2d12 psychic damage and become immobile for 1 hour. The millions of voices echoing from the gathered memories whisper forgotten and forbidden knowledge.

Crystal Necropolis of Anu-Akma

The wondrous crystal pyramids and palaces of Anu-Akma's court rise like a shining oasis in the blood desert. However, looks can be deceiving. The crystal necropolis is not a place for the living. Within the guarded walls is a demi-plane within Evermaw where the honored servants of Anu-Akma find their final reward. The mummies and liches of the Assembly of the Worthy manage the day-to-day operation of the god's court while the undead gnolls of Akma's Fangs guard against any intrusions. At the heart of the necropolis, a book written on pages of gold holds the secret to eternal life.

Eternal Palace of Mot

The Eternal Palace is a maze within a tomb, boxed into a labyrinth, and hidden under miles of bone and dust. The entrance is a rather plain cavern set into a spur of obsidian and guarded by two enormous, hulking, rune-carved gnolls (treat as **void giants** from *Creature Codex*). Within, the interior is richly decorated but haunted by shadows, necrotic fire, and the smell of dust and decay. Within the Hall of Hunger, undead courtiers move in a dark parody of courtly life while **grim jesters** (see *Tome of Beasts*) provide grisly entertainment. Guarded by the power of the god himself, Mot's Treasury contains the wealth of the undead of Evermaw, past, present, and future.

Ossein Academy, Lyceum of Bone and Blood

Within this complex of bone buildings and domed rooftops crawling with skull-faced gargoyles, spellcasters come to learn the secrets of necromancy with the hope of prying the secrets of lichdom from the masters. The bodies of the unsuccessful dangle like wind chimes from the walls.

Sangarre, Crimson City of St. Caedis

A civilized and highly administrative vampiric community founded by the infamous,

blood-soaked saint of Marena, the parish straddles the Road of Fangs, extorting a "toll" in blood from merchants, slavers, and travelers. Mortal visitors are mostly safe in the "red city" by law as the vampire citizens feed from an indentured slave class. However, the punishment for transgressing the very complicated laws and social customs in the city is indenture, so "safe" is a relative term. The ruler of the city, Exarch Gwledd Parlak, an elegant **vampire patrician** (see *Creature Codex*), openly courts an alliance with King Lucan of Midgard's Blood Kingdom.

Vulture's Beyond, Osseous City of Hunger

At the heart of the plane is a yawning pit known simply as the Maw—and around it, the city of Vulture's Beyond. Built on the edge of the funneling sinkhole, the streets are home to undead, planar beings, sinful souls, and cannibalistic mortals. Slavers such as the denizens of Leng, the Arachni, and the like feed the city a near constant flow of living creatures. This is a city of butchers and tanners, of scrimshaw, rendered fat, and polished bones. Meat is both a commodity and a currency with flesh exchanged for goods and services in time of need with replacement parts purchased when available, regardless of aesthetics. The largest building in Vulture's Beyond is the Great Temple to Vardesan, patron of the city, where the undead cult, the Teeth of Gula and Abnegation, alternates between denying their hunger and gluttonous feasting—all in praise of the Hunger God.

PERSONAGES OF NOTE

A few of the interesting inhabitants of this plane are described below.

Abachum, Fallen Saint and Mystic

One of a number of insane religious stylites living atop enormous bones, rising like pillars from the blood dust, Abachum (**solar**) was once a venerated saint of Mavros. In death, he

ascended to the court of the Justice God but fell in love with a succubus and was cast out. He lives upon his pillar until his love fades, but as yet, it has not.

**Mother Melys,
Cannibalistic Culinarian**

A **night hag**, Melys is the owner and proprietor of the House of Esurience in Vulture's Beyond. She specializes in sentient meals that feel pain as you eat. For an extra price, she will transform clients into the same creature as their meal. This effect lasts for a period of days or weeks, depending on the bargain struck. While transformed in the manner, the client gains all of the abilities of the target creature, and no magical divination short of a true seeing spell can penetrate the disguise.

Radhak Pascha, Reborn Elder Thing

Once this disfigured rakshasa lich (use **lich hierophant** from *Creature Codex*) operated a successful gaming hall and gladiatorial arena named the Blind Tiger, but that was before his reawakening. Radhak experienced a vision after receiving an obsidian stela from one of his smugglers. In the dream, the rakshasa saw the true god of Evermaw is not Mot nor any death deity; it is an Old One named Mordiggian. Long ago cast down and shattered by Mot, pieces of Mordiggian's spirit endure, awaiting its rebirth. Sensing the power this shadow of an elder thing once possessed, Radhak immediately pledged himself to Mordiggian. Now the rakshasa lich searches the blood dust desert for more obsidian stelae, so he can bring together the pieces of Mordiggian's spirit and allow the elder thing to be reborn in Radhak's own body.



EVERMAW MINI-CAMPAIGN SEED

Adventures concerning this plane can take a variety of forms. One suggestion includes the following.

APL 1–4

An alliance between the Red Sisters of Marena and the Eternal Minions of Mot seeks to desecrate the Hagiolatry of Great Saints (see *Midgard Worldbook*, page 388) to bring down the Church of Mavros. The PCs are hired to investigate the theft of the Spear of St.

Brigantia from her crypt in Valera. The trail of the thieves puts the heroes up against red cultists while more saint burial vaults come under threat.

APL 4–8

The trail leads the PCs into the Blood Kingdom where they must contend with frequent attacks by undead forces. The lost Journal of St. Aethenea reveals the PCs' foes plan to use the stolen saintly relics in a ritual designed to imprison Mavros himself. The key to stopping the ceremony lies in Evermaw, but the portal is guarded by the reanimated and corrupted form of the ghoul St. Whiteskull of Bratislor.

APL 9–12

Once in the Plane of the Undead, the PCs race to recover the relics before they can be desecrated and fed to the great maw. Standing in their way are living avatars of Mot and Marena, who are not pleased by the PCs' meddling.

Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void

Surrounding Midgard, the planes, and the stretching branches of Yggdrasil is the Yawning Void. The thought of this formless abyss of darkness, cold, and madness evokes an image of vast emptiness, but in truth, the Void is far from empty. Far beyond the other planes, Ginnungagap harbors worlds and ancient empires. The voidships of the Lengfolk (**folk of leng**, see *Tome of Beasts*) and the Arachni (**spiders of leng**, see *Tome of Beasts*) trade and battle in the inky darkness. Creatures of unspeakable evil hunt the unwary or plot their fell plans. Dark gods from Addrikah to the White Goddess, from Chernobog to the Goat of the Woods, seem to draw strength from the abyss as do the

elder things, imprisoned beings of ancient and mysterious origins. The Void offers great power to those who swear their lives and souls to its causes, but those poor deluded beings who listen to such offers rarely live to see any promised rewards.

COSMOLOGY OF GINNUNGAGAP

The Void is an infinite, confusing abyss cast into perpetual twilight where the normal laws of reality break down or rewrite themselves. Churning clouds of burning phlogiston, snake-like eddies of lightning, waves of water and ice, and chunks of earth float through the darkness. Continent-sized pieces of terrain or even entire planets can be found in the Void, many with their own atmosphere, inhabitants, and dangers. Moving between these scattered points of life requires specialized magic or transportation on a voidcraft specially designed to travel in the Void.

EMPIRES OF THE VOID

Three plane-spanning empires wrestle for domination in the blackness of the Void:

- *The Leng Consortium.* This vast trading guild controls dozens of colony worlds and fleets of voidships. The worlds “owned” by the consortium pay tri-annual guild tithes amounting to a hefty percentage of each world’s wealth. As the folk of leng enforce their demands with powerful voidships, few choose to stand against them.
- *The Hive-Nodes of the Ahu-Nixta.* Once masters of a hundred worlds and several sub-planes, the rebellion of the organo-mechanoid’s two slave races (the celestial dragons and the folk of leng) shattered the Ahu-Nixta Empire. Today, the Concordant Chronosphere, the ahu-nixta’s hivemind prime intelligence, manages their homeworld and a collection of far-flung hive-nodes.

- *Webworlds of the Arachni*. The spiders of leng once ruled a plane-spanning empire, but it fragmented long ago into independent colonies and footholds. Each Arachni Cluster controls a webworld or a fleet of webships capable of traversing the Void.

DENIZENS OF THE VOID

The deep abyss hosts horrors such as nightshades, yithians, gugs, lengfolk, shoggoths, hideous void dragons, spiders of leng, hounds of tindalos, the shining children of Caelmarath, and many more.

CONDITIONS IN THE VOID

There is air to breathe, though it is thin and oddly scented. The temperature is bitterly cold, similar to conditions atop the highest mountains. Unprotected exposure triggers a DC 12 Constitution save every minute; failure means gaining a level of exhaustion. Most places in the Void are devoid of gravity, though most massive objects seem to exert their own gravitational pull.

REACHING GINNUNGAGAP

There are certainly many dangerous methods of traveling to Ginnungagap. Placing a *bag of holding* inside another *bag of holding*, for instance, or leaping off of one of Yggdrasil's branches or attempting to use the nexus in Voidreach. In terms of "safe" ways of transit, the list is much narrower. Aside from spells such as *plane shift*, travelers are limited to portals or voidships. Neither the World Tree nor the Ever River reach into the Void. The vessels of the folk of leng or the Arachni spiderfolk dock regularly in the Marketplace and trading ports across the planes as well as in their own cities on Midgard's Plateau of Leng.

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

The following is a limited sampling of the places found in Ginnungagap.

Biras Padir, Liminal Port

This multi-level port-city orbits just outside the immediate area around Yggdrasil, close enough to see the World Tree but far enough away to be independent. Biras Padir was originally constructed by disaffected celestials and fiends desperate to remove themselves from the endless cycles of good versus evil. Today, the free port is an established neutral ground doing a steady trade in piracy, thievery, and smuggling. Ruled over by the Tricouncilors (always one celestial, one fiend, and one mortal), the city offers a safe haven from the rigors of Void travel and is one of the few places constructing new voidships.

Horizon Conservatory, Chaotic Arcane Academy

A strange collection of towers, observatories, dormitories, and other buildings rests on an isolated chunk of terrain far from Midgard. This is the Horizon Conservatory, a guild of planar mages and arcanists dedicated to pushing the boundaries of magic and spellcasting. Led by the fanatical inventor-mage Anhrefn Selsam (**human mage**), the professors and students of the conservatory believe that in the pursuit of the craft no subject is taboo, nothing is forbidden, and no lengths are too far.

Locuissi, Palace of the Lost

A crumbling edifice of dark stone and strange architecture floats in the abyss, occluded from magical detection. Within the obsidian halls is a museum to the lost and broken, names abandoned by liches, cast-off sins of redeemed devils, hearts of forgotten gods, shattered relics, and fragments of arcane tomes. The Caretaker (**solar**) long ago gave up her station in the Celestial Realm to guard and preserve these forgotten things.

Node Primary

The homeworld of the ahu-nixta, Node Primary, is a small planetoid completely covered with arcane machines and factories. They rely on interplanar trade for the resources to maintain their technology. In return, the ahu-nixta will begrudgingly craft clockwork items of great power.

PERSONAGES OF NOTE

A few of the interesting inhabitants of this plane are described below.

Lady Arall Morleidr-Stross, Voidship Captain (and Pirate)

Sailing aboard her appropriated folk of leng vessel, the *Damned Trouble*, Lady Arall (human noble) stalks the abyss from Biras Padir to Midgard, searching for something called the Hramlea Working when she isn't plundering voidships or raiding other planes. She claims to be a direct descendant of Melathea Stross, though this seems unlikely.

Orerimong, the Eater

A mimic the size of a terrestrial mountain, the Eater long ago lost its shapechanging ability and is permanently locked into the guise of an asteroid or planetoid. As such, it lurks in wait for passing ships or void-swimming gargantuan beasts. Orerimong's mass creates a gravity field on his surface, complete with a Midgard-like

atmosphere and a limited ecosystem. The Eater loathes the spiders of leng who once attempted, and failed, to colonize it.

Mr. Vim, Exotic Victuals at Reasonable Prices

Vim, a steam mephit **voidwracked mage** (see *Creature Codex*) holds the title as the most dangerous chef in the known planes. From his voidship (half restaurant, half hunting lodge), the dynamic Vim offers coin and magical items for rare creatures as well as exquisite meals prepared from the most exotic ingredients. Visitors to Vim's can join



safaris or purchase esoteric components from his larder. Whispers suggest Vim hosts a monthly, highly secret dinner entitled “Feast of the Sentient.”

GINNUNGAGAP MINI-CAMPAIGN SEED

Adventures on this plane can take a variety of forms. One suggestion includes the following.

APL 1–4

The selang witch, Xiax Galleborne (see *Demon Cults & Secret Societies*), launches a massive campaign to throw down both the Arbonesse elves and the Court of a Million Stars by anointing the tree-like monstrosity Y’gurdraketh as the avatar of the Goat of the Woods. The PCs are pulled into the adventure while trying to deal with a rise in the cult activity of the Black Goat’s flock. The cultists enact rituals to open Void portals across Midgard, unleashing fell creatures.

APL 4–8

Realizing the flock’s power stems from beyond Midgard, the heroes follow evidence pointing to a lost fey road on the Void Path ley line. In the Shadow Realm, they must contend with the machinations of the Court of a Million Stars, Galleborne’s dark fey allies, and interfering folk of Ieng. A dangerous interview with the void dragon Phaerliggath provides crucial information about the connection between the Void and Y’gurdraketh, but the dragon’s price is high.

APL 9–12

Passing through the nexus in the Voidreach, the heroes must bribe or highjack a Leng voidship to travel to the eldritch machine feeding energy to the walker. Only after severing Y’gurdraketh’s link to the Void can the PCs return to Midgard and finally confront Xiax Galleborne.

Part Three: Magical Equipment for the Planar Traveler

I needed some luck. I needed a flagon of mead. I needed a voidship to boost me out of this damned place. What I had was a sword and my last potion. It would have to do.

—Domyar Anchar, planar adventurer

Those who walk among the planes often require special tools to deal with the unique obstacles to be found in the multiverse.

APERTURE ORB

Wondrous item, very rare

This fist-sized black sphere bears engravings of various planar conjunctions upon its glassy surface. You can throw the orb as an action up to 60 feet. The orb implodes upon impact and is destroyed, causing a 5-foot-radius portal to open to a random plane. Each creature within

a 10-foot radius of where the orb landed must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be pulled into the portal. Three Small, two Medium, or one Large creature can be pulled into the portal before it closes at the end of your turn.

BALEFIRE SIGNAL

Wondrous item, common

A boon to those needing to signal a passing voidship or Ever River vessel, this rod-shaped device has an opening at one end and a red

crystal at the other. As an action, you can smash the crystal on any solid surface, which causes the other end of the rod to launch a ball of brilliant light up to 1,000 feet away. The energy ball will hover in place for 2 hours before fading. Once used, the item crumbles to dust.

CLOAK OF THE ELEMENTS

Wondrous item, common (requires attunement)

A warm and sturdy cloak of finely woven cloth, when you wear this cloak you become resistant to extreme hot or cold climates and no longer have to make saving throws to resist the effects of such environments. This cloak does not protect you from taking damage from cold or heat due to attacks, traps, or other adventuring hazards.

FEATHER TOKEN—WORLD TREE SAPLING

Wondrous item, rare

This tiny object looks like a finger-sized tree sapling. You can use an action to touch it to an unoccupied space on the ground. The token disappears, and in its place, a tree sapling springs into existence. The plant is two feet wide and stretches up into the sky. Though only lasting 1 hour before crumbling away, you can climb the tree to transition to Yggdrasil with only half the usual climbing distance needed.

GIGGLING ORB

Wondrous item, rare

This glass sphere seems to contain a swirling yellow mist. You can use an action to speak the command word and throw the orb at a point you choose within 60 feet of you. Each creature in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or fall prone in fits of laughter, becoming incapacitated and unable to stand for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns,

ending the effect on a success. Once used, the item crumbles to dust.

HANDY SCROLL QUIVER

Wondrous item, common

This belt quiver is wide enough to pass a rolled scroll through the opening. Containing an extra dimensional space, the quiver can hold up to 25 scrolls and weighs 1 pound, regardless of its contents.

Placing a scroll in the quiver follows the normal rules for interacting with objects. Retrieving a scroll from the quiver requires you to use an action. When you reach into the quiver for a specific item, the item is always on top.

The handy scroll quiver has the normal limitations that a handy haversack possesses.

IMPULSE CRYSTAL

Wondrous item, common (requires attunement)

This small crystal is a clear spindle tinged with gray or black threads. While you have the crystal on your person, you can move through Ginnungagap at a rate equal to half your normal speed. This item has no effect while you are under the effect of a gravity well or on another form of Void transport.

MADDENING HORNS

Wondrous item, rare

This brass musical instrument resembles a double horn with such convoluted tubing that the eye cannot follow its path. You can use an action to speak this horn's command word and then blow the horn, which emits a cacophonous blast in a 30-foot cone that is audible 600 feet away. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature suffers the effects of a *confusion* spell until it rolls a 9 or 10 on its behavior roll for the spell. On a successful save, a creature is immune to the

effects of the maddening horn until it takes a long rest.

Each use of the horn's magic has a 15% chance of causing you to fall under the effects of the maddening song as well.



NECKLACE OF MONSTERS

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This necklace has $1d4 + 2$ magic beads hanging from it, made from bone and ivory. You can use an action to detach a bead and throw it up to 60 feet away. When it reaches the end of its trajectory, the bead expands to become a monster. The GM decides the type of each bead or determines it randomly. A necklace can have more than one bead of the same type unless indicated.

| d20 | SUMMONED CREATURE |
|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 1–6 | One giant centipede |
| 7–12 | One worg or two giant centipedes |
| 13–16 | One owlbear or four worgs |
| 17–18 | One bulette or two owlbears |
| 19 | One chimera or two bulettes |
| 20* | One young blue dragon or two chimeras |

**(only one bead of this type is allowed)*

The summoned creature is friendly to you and your companions, and it acts on your turn.

You can use a bonus action to command how

the creature moves and what action it takes on its next turn or to give it general orders, such as to attack your enemies. In the absence of such orders, the creature acts in a fashion appropriate to its nature. The creature lasts for 1 minute before vanishing.

ORACLE CHARM

Wondrous item, common

This small charm resembles a human finger bone engraved with runes and complicated knotwork patterns. As you contemplate a specific course of action that you plan to take within the next 30 minutes, you can snap the charm in half as an action to gain the benefit of an *augury* spell. Once used, the item is destroyed.

PLANAR LODESTONE

*Wondrous item, common
(requires attunement)*

This odd metallic stone is set into a circular metal frame similar to a traditional compass. When you make a DC 15 Intelligence check, you can discern the direction toward a portal within 1,000 feet of your current location.

ROD OF PLANAR TRAVEL

Rod, very rare (requires attunement)

This ornate rod has a crystal button halfway along its length. You can use an action to push the button and then make a DC 15 Intelligence check. On a successful check, the rod opens a gate (as per the *gate* spell) to another plane of your choice. On a failure, you and each creature and object within 15 feet of you are pulled into a random plane.

SLIPPERS OF THE SERPENT

*Wondrous item, uncommon
(requires attunement)*

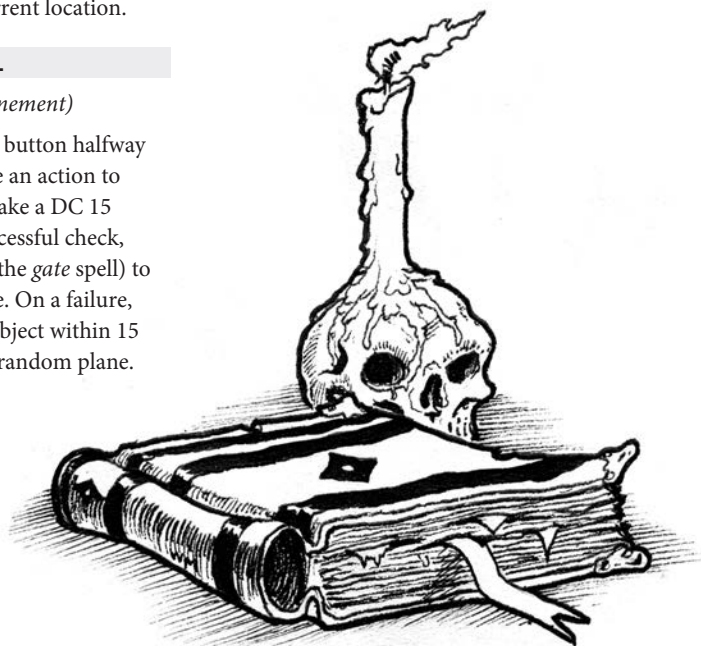
While you wear these slippers, you gain advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks to move silently. After using the item 3 times, you must take a long rest before using them again. The slippers do not function if you are wearing heavy armor.

VERSES OF THE DEATHBRINGER

Wondrous item, rare

This small book of poetry has 1d4 + 2 pages with a poem on each page. You can use an action to tear out a page and read it aloud to a creature within 60 feet. That creature takes 2d6 psychic damage from the horrific nature of the poem and must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed for 1 minute. While charmed, the creature is incapacitated and has a speed of 0.

The effect ends for an affected creature if it takes any damage or if someone else uses an action to shake the creature out of its stupor.



LOST LORE OF REDTOWER & THE SCARLET CITADEL

by Wolfgang Baur

Some dungeons are dug out with precision by massive hordes of undead workers or tribes of goblins, built in great chaos and energy to the plan of some cunning mind. The Scarlet Citadel is more of a peculiar growth of layer upon layer of tunnels, defensive halls, hidden crypts and labs, and many secrets buried deep below the surface.

This human settlement of the White Forest started very modestly at the nearby river village of Redtower. However, over time, both the village and the castle deeper in the woods became a site of importance to dungeoneers, arcane seekers, geomancers, and a certain breed of dwarven mystic. Read on and know the truth of its founding, its blood-soaked history, and its current odd decay.

Early Construction: House von Holzanger

The castle now called the Scarlet Citadel sits on the site of an ancient elven hunting lodge in the White Forest, claimed by a noble family after the Great Retreat 400-some years ago. The land was thus owned by House von Holzanger who owed fealty at various times to Illyria, to the Republic of Triolo, to the Canton of Melana, and (most often) to the Magdar Kingdom. Always rather deft in

politics and inclined to an unambitious policy of, “Just leave us alone with our books and hawks and hunting,” House von Holzanger might have remained a footnote if it were not for their control of the Scarlet Crow ley line and their willingness to annoy the fey lords and ladies of the forest.

Originally, the pretty lodge was visited each summer and fall for boar hunts, chasing deer in the White Forest, and fish-hawking along the Templine riverbanks. The family realized that the road to the lodge could also be utilized for timber transport, so the lodge became the manor for a new lumber village along the river. The lodge itself remained a place of blissful seclusion, though with some ability to gather servitors, various goods, and skilled craftsman from the village.

This village was named Redleaf. At first, they sold their finest oak, ash, and rowan either east to the city Melana or north to the Magdar merchants for barrels, barge masts, and much else. The trade was not without problems (the forest fey included some alseid and bothersome druids), but in all, it was a worthwhile little fiefdom for the Holzangers. Over time, the village grew, and then Gerhardt von Holzanger came along, the first of the Holzanger sorcerers.

The Wandering Crow

About 250 years ago, the young von Holzanger discovered a rich ley line tributary nearby, connecting easily to the White Road to the south and (with only modest arcane rituals) also to the shadow road to the northwest and even (with rather more strenuous and blood-soaked rituals) to the ancient Pontoretto ley line of Valera and its elven lords. The ley line itself seemed to pool and gather strength near the hunting lodge more than the village itself, and the isolated lodge was a good place for experiments that often involved chanting, arcane lights, and the strange smells of alchemical enhancements and distillations.

Gerhardt kept his secret for almost 10 years until he took an apprentice who later ran away to Schio and told his tale. A ley line that might connect other ley lines! Ley line philters and encasements that reacted to void power, to radiant magic, and to shadow! Ley line distillations that gave his cruel master much added strength of body and mind! The tales were wild and had the effect that the apprentice Waldmer intended—the privacy of the White Forest Lodge was a thing of the past.

With the wider understanding of the discovery, the area was suddenly of interest to geomancers, the shadow fey, and darker forces who wished to travel the fey roads between the three lines, to plumb the mysteries of why this backwater might connect ley lines in this way and how this

Scarlet Citadel and Redtower Timeline

- **600 years ago:** Elves built hunting lodge and used it for centuries.
- **482 years ago:** Great Retreat, elves depart.
- **450 years ago:** Holzangers claim White Forest lands under Gerhardt the Elder.
- **400 years ago:** Lodge becomes a manor house for Redleaf village.
- **250 years ago:** Gerhardt the Elder discovers linking ley line.
- **240 years ago:** Waldmer the Apprentice tells others about it.
- **230 years ago:** Lodge replaced by stone keep and outbuildings.
- **227 years ago:** Death of Gerhardt the Elder in a hunting accident, succeeded by Gerhardt the Younger.
- **202 years ago:** Death of Gerhardt the Younger by the plague, succeeded by Gertruda.
- **185 years ago:** Death of Gertruda the Weaver of old age, succeeded by Gunthar the Blind.
- **169 years ago:** Death of Gunthar the Blind by poison, succeeded by Gerhardt III.
- **150 years ago:** Dwarves arrive in Redleaf, ally with Gerhardt III.
- **145 years ago:** Dwarf Hall burns to the ground, dwarves build citadel.
- **140 years ago:** Owlbear breeding yields the dire owlbear.
- **139 years ago:** Death of Gerhardt III by owlbear mishap.
- **130 years ago:** Dwarves and Gerhardt IV turn to banditry.
- **110 years ago:** Faithful Knights of Khors burn out the keep, falls to ruin, owlbears released to White Forest, death of Gerhardt IV, disappearance of his children.
- **105 years ago:** Villagers discover red tower mysteriously built overnight, rename the village.
- **103 years ago:** The True Cult of Charun arrives, and Quendreth establishes temple, expanding the cult's influence from the

strong ley line might be harnessed. The first few visitors were greeted politely and told to go away. Later visitors were treated as foes. Over the years, the hunting lodge—at the ley line’s strongest point—was rebuilt with the red stone common to the area, first as a single tower and then as a small keep.

Arcane secrets were under frequent investigation. Gerhardt von Holzanger grew rich taking on various comely, cunning, and willing apprentices (some believe Arshin the Enchanter—see *Warlock 2: Dread Magic*—was one of them, more long-lived than most) and having built his redstone castle on the site of the ley line’s greatest resonance and generally making the most of it. He bound himself to the ley line, giving himself and his children greater strength in using its magic

but also making it difficult to wander far from the Wandering Crow. At first, he could travel as far as Zigistad, Melana, and Triolo itself, but over time, this narrowed to Peltzenheim and the town of Erdovar (before its ruin) and Schio. Some believe this same ritual binds the master of Demon Mountain to his own domicile, granting him great power in a highly limited space.

House Holzanger Thrives

Despite the lack of travel, Gerhardt’s private ley line offered strength and the seemingly boundless ability to study, learn, and tinker, delighting first Gerhardt and then his progeny (his wife was one Edelfrieda the Golden, said to be a druid, a sorceress, or an elfmarked



Septime cities into the cantons and connecting it with temples in Achillon and Harkesh.

- **92 years ago:** The people of Zobeck gain their freedom. A gearforged priestess comes to Redtower following dark void cultists of House Stross.
- **88 years ago:** Priestess Miskra al-Vellec drives Quendreth and the boat cult away, opens void portal.
- **80 years ago:** Gerhardt the Changeling returns to the Citadel, quietly on the Black River, a mature and steady arcanist with deep understanding of the Shadow Realm. He speaks Void Speech and Umbral fluently and is accompanied by shadow fey servitors. The satarre are nowhere to be found.
- **70 years ago:** Gerhardt the Changeling marries Melanchia of Raguza, and the two gather apprentices and restore a few owlbeats to the citadel as part of the family tradition.

- **65 years ago:** Gellert the Gruesome is born in the Citadel and anointed in the Black River. Melanchia dies in childbirth.
- **42 years ago:** Gerhardt the Changeling departs for the Shadow Realm’s Corremel and never returns.
- **41 years ago:** Gellert restarts his father’s experiments, seeks to open connections between void cults, Wandering Crow ley line, and the satarre and others.
- **33 years ago:** Mother Floressima, a priestess of the Charun cult, gives Gellert the Gruesome a son and daughter. The twins are said to live in the Shadow Realm with nobles of the shadow fey or bearfolk or with their grandfather.
- **Present Day:** Gellert the Gruesome rules and tinkers in isolation, rarely leaving the dungeons to visit Redtower.

petty noble of Dornig—some insist on all three). Within the reach of the White Forest, first Gerhardt the Elder and then Gerhardt the Younger and then Gertruda and Gunthar and Gerhardt III all had control over the ley lines, countering any foe or assassin skillfully, inventing new ways to charm a friend or turn an enemy into a bug. Over generations, their interests delved deep into newts and amphibians and then the family was obsessed with horology and celestial mechanics and then with flotation and levitation and then with night creatures and then angelic languages and on and on. Always seeking knowledge purely to possess it, rarely using it to better their small barony or even to enrich themselves or their peasantry.

For a fairly brief period, the area was quasi-independent, and each von Holzanger sorcerer styled himself the “Baron of Citarossa, Lord of the White Forest, and Master of the Scarlet Citadel.” So it went for nigh 200 years: always a tiny power, always independent, though sometimes paying tribute to one power or another, and always a strange little oddity known mostly to merchants, timberfolk, and the southern Magdar towns.

However, their overweening pride and their power drew attention, and in time, an unexpected arrival ended the first age of the citadel roughly 150 years ago.

The Dwarven Era

The dwarves of the cantons and of the city-state of Melana are makers, forgers of steel, imbuing weapons with the power of Mavros and Svarog—and even Ninkash and Rava—and durable armor, enchanted barrels and wondrous works in gold, steel, and stone. A few dwarves though, especially those of Nordmansch and Alpentor, still hew to the older ways, forging rings of surpassing power and loveliness, alive with the circling strength of runes, binding raw arcane might and turning it to fire and shadow, to glamours as durable as stone.

These dwarves, the ring wardens and the ring mystics, are the keepers of lore said to have been handed down by bearded Wotan himself. Their understanding of embodying magic in physical form is rarely surpassed, and they took a keen interest in House von Holzanger. When the human house was weak, they showed up one day, told Gerhardt III that they would be his new soldiers and providers, and somehow either charmed him (some say the gift of an enchanted ring secured Gerhardt III’s cooperation) or won him through bribery (others say that the ring mystics shared their secrets of binding arcane essences into circular form and that Gerhardt himself forged dozens of powerful rings in this manner).

In either case, suddenly there was a company of 100 dwarves and a half-dozen ring mages in the village of Redleaf—and many arguments with the locals over the paucity of ale and proper sausages. The dwarves chased down and tamed owlbears as hunting animals and guardians for the newly built Dwarf Hall in the village, a fine dwarven-style structure with a lookout tower. A palisade was raised to protect the village from woodland raiders. And relations between villagers and dwarves never improved. The dwarves followed Ninkash a bit too closely, often drunk and pissing in the streets or singing their endless songs late at night. The dwarven hall was a bit too fine and too imposing. Brawls were common, though the humans had much the worst of it. Complaints to Baron Gerhardt went unheeded. The owlbears ate local goats and chickens and once a beloved dog.

One night while most of the dwarves were digging at the old Scarlet Manor Hall, the Dwarf Hall burned to the ground. The streets of Redleaf glowed very bright, and the humans sang their own songs of Khors. Some of the Redleaf druids and doughtier men-at-arms mused about throwing the dwarves out entirely and “rescuing” Baron Gerhardt from their evil influences.

Baron Gerhardt finally saw the danger of further strife between the humans and dwarves. He called the dwarves to stay at the manor house and keep and told them to build it into a finer citadel with a new name: the Scarlet Citadel. The owlbears left the village of Redleaf to live with the dwarves, coming to the riverside village only occasionally when the baron's dwarves came calling. These grim-faced dwarves came twice a year to collect taxes or gather up barrels of ale from Peltzenheim or to send furs to their dwarven brothers in Melana and Brescia. The dungeons beneath the Scarlet Citadel were vastly expanded and improved to include owlbear stables, barracks, shrines to dwarven

gods, and a vast library and workspace carved out for the von Holzangers.

The dwarves brought more than rings and owlbears to the Scarlet Citadel. They also brought the faith of Charun the Boatman with them from Melana, and over time, they connected some elements of the citadel with the Black River of Tears, sacred to Charun and said to be a source of connection between the mortal world and Yggdrasil or between Midgard and the many realms of the outer planes.



Banditry and the Sack of the Citadel

About 130 years ago, the dwarves of the Scarlet Citadel grew impatient with what seemed like plentiful coin and ale, plus the fine magical treasures they occasionally gained from the von Holzangers. Tired of hunting and guarding and drinking, and led by the canny Captain Chansar the Pale, they began to take empty carts pulled by enormous tamed owlbears out to the Schio-Wagenstein Road where they plundered merchants and rolled away with fine steel from Melana, copper bars, leather hides from Trombei, spices from Triolo, barrels of salt fish from Friula, and strings of Septime coin. This banditry was small at first, a trader here, a lone peddler there, but it quickly grew into a business of serious danger for trade between the Seven Cities and the Crossroads.

Trade is always dangerous of course, especially among the Septime cities, so the usual precautions were taken. Merchants hired guards, which slowed the banditry but made some trade quite difficult; the price of salt fish won't support a squadron of lancers. Rewards were posted.

For years, various cantonal dwarves and the dwarves of Melana were blamed, for the canny dwarves of the Scarlet Citadel displayed shields and banners of Tjino, Juralt, and Melana or of famous mercenary companies within the Seven Cities. In time, however, it became clear that these dwarves lived to the east of the road, and that they operated from some stronghold in the White Forest. Given the notorious strength of the forest's owlbears and the well-known dangers of the sorcerers of the Scarlet Citadel taking offense at trespassers, the merchants all agreed that someone else should seek out the bandit stronghold and put a stop to the whole mess. The rewards grew larger.

The end of the bandit era came in a different way when canny Captain Chansar bragged a

bit too loudly at Redleaf's tavern, the Cage. A young squire of the Faithful Knights of Khors was visiting the village as part of a simple devotional journey to the shrine there, and she overheard this boasting about pillaging a full mule train, so Squire Emmalyn told her sergeant of the bragging dwarven bandit. The paladins and faithful knights of Khors had recently had one of their own wine shipments from the Smolten Hills plundered by bandits, and the order's commander was incensed. A wing of knights, a squad of the Wands of Khors battle mages, and the high priest of Khors in Zigistad himself all followed the young squire Emmalyn into the White Forest to Redleaf village and then to the citadel.

When the dwarves refused to hand over Captain Chansar and his accomplices to the king's justice and the mercy of Khors, the knights laid siege to the citadel for a month. In time, owlbears within the citadel ate all there was to eat, and canny Chansar sent the starving beasts out the citadel gate, expecting to make short work of the knights. He was quite mistaken; High Priest Tadeas Toller struck the owlbears with holy fire, the Wands of Khors unleashed lightning, and the countercharge carried the knights into the citadel courtyard.

The battle might yet have gone to the dwarves with their crossbows firing into the courtyard from well-built arrow slits if not for the fine timbers of the keep catching fire when a lucky fireball went through an arrow slit into the interior. The Scarlet Citadel floors, stairs, rafters, and tapestries burned bright and strong, and the conflagration quickly poured smoke into the buildings, the dungeons, and the courtyard. It became impossible to shoot through the smoke and soon to breath within the tower. The smoke and flames drove a few dwarves into the deeper tunnels, though most were forced to surrender to the waiting company of knights. Captain Chansar's body was never found, and his ring mystic lieutenant Valence Hellhand is known to have

survived and fled to Nordmansch. The citadel walls still stood, blackened with smoke, and the dungeons below were no longer home to dozens of owlbears.

But the age of the Scarlet Citadel as a functional fortress were over and done, and the cracked, blackened mortar and missing rafters meant that the walls themselves were



weakened. Soon other inhabitants came to the citadel, and the villagers of Redleaf came to gather up useful stone blocks and take them by wagon to reinforce their own keep and palisade. Their scarlet stones, carried for miles and used with care. And one morning, a mysterious red tower was erected, making such a fine impression overlooking the village, which was soon renamed Redtower, and it has kept that name ever since.

The Followers of Charun & the Void

The sack of the Scarlet Citadel affected the village of Redtower very little indeed. Timber was still cut, some logs rafted down to Triolo to build the fleets, many of the finest timbers going north to the Magdar plain for houses, barrels, all the things one wants stout oak and maple and ash for. A few arcanists came to sniff around at the ruins, though most left quickly once they met the feral owlbears or were vexed by the sprites and pixies and alseid who guarded the forest paths against intruders.

However, one group came not by forest path but by shadow road, powered by the Wandering Crow ley line. These were the cultists of Charun, the boatman between the living and the dead, whose followers took a pilgrimage from Kammae-Straboli along the Black River (as they call their temples' shadow roads) and wound up underneath the citadel. The whole company of pilgrims was quite confused at first, but the shadow fey wizard Quendreth the Wise immediately saw the power and strange geomantic convergence of the site. He insisted that a shrine be built immediately, and he brought in shadow fey guards and mages to embed it with power and bind the ley line.

The small community could not find its way back to Kammae via the river, but with Quendreth's help, they did establish shadow river connections far and wide,

both deep into the Shadow Realm and to the three titanic ley lines to the west, north, and south-east. Sometimes the Black River flowed south, powered the Wandering Crow to the White Road and thus to Revskaya, Raguza, Achillon, and occasionally Harkesh. Other seasons brought connections west and north to Brescia and even St. Mischau along the shadow road, once even to Zobeck. The most difficult connections were those along the Pontoretto, sometimes to Trombei and sometimes as far as Capleon. Charun's faithful used the Black River connection quietly and without fuss, retaining it as a secret of the deeper initiates of the Temple of Charun. And even to those who never traveled the shadow rivers, it knit the community together with a physical embodiment of their faith, though only Quendreth truly seemed to understand how to pilot a vessel to connect the shadow roads, a secret he shared with no others. Or at least with no humans.

With the cult of Charun ensconced in the lower levels of the citadel, trading with inhabitants of the underworld and using the ley line to strengthen its presence from the Seven Cities to the heart of the Dragon Empire, things changed. The arcane power of the von Holzangers was passed to the Boatman's followers. Quendreth was suddenly held in very high esteem among the congregants who had once made their pilgrimages entirely on the surface world, and he was granted the title of Ferryman within the church. A period of 15 years kept him at the forefront of Charun's works over a vast territory.

Alas, Quendreth was as susceptible to hubris and arrogance as many of the shadow fey, and he dabbled in void magic, opening portals to other planes entirely, speaking to demons and devils and inviting the satarre priestess Miskra ai-Vellec to advise him. This went about as well as you might expect, for even a less zealous priestess such as Miskra was delighted

to have such power in her hands—a tool for her own plans—though she also shared much lore with Quendreth, and the two were allies of convenience for a decade. In time though, the satarre void cultists and the true believers of Charun fell out with each other but not before Miskra realized that she could use the waters of the Black River for certain dark rituals and malign enchantments. In time, the void cult arrived in force, and Quendreth was forced to leave quickly.

When the shadow fey wizard departed, he did... something to the ley line that entirely removed its ability to easily connect to the Pontoretto or the shadow road, and its connection to the White Road remained flickering at best. At the same time, Quendreth brought one of the von Holzangers back to the Scarlet Citadel, the child of Gerhardt IV, to hold the place and the White Forest in perpetuity (more precisely until their return). He was called Gerhardt the Changeling and had a definite elfmarked look to him. He lived for 100 years, and at 70, he took a human wife from Raguza, said to be a pirate captain and certainly a hellraiser. Her name was Melanchia the Reaver, and Gellert the Gruesome is her son.

The Present Day

In the current age, Gellert the Gruesome is a man of years and deep experience, certainly an older sorcerer, though still full of wild energy and fanciful plans, always striving to learn something new and to keep the power of the citadel close. He is frankly too forgetful to always remember to chase away some of the Charun River cultists or to seal the void portal when he's done with it, and horrible things creep into the citadel without him really paying attention. His son and daughter—Garent and Vespertina—are said to await the day he dies and his personal bond to the Wandering Crow ends, giving them power to use ley line energies for their

friends among the fey and the cults.

The decaying dungeons, crypts, and stones of the old Scarlet Citadel remain to be explored, their many years of rich magic interwoven with blood and betrayal. Surely some great treasures still remain, and a few of the inhabitants of Redtower, perhaps those who remember when it was Redleaf, can point a daring soul in the right direction or warn of some of its better-known dangers.



WHITE FOREST: THE UNTAMED WOOD

by Ashley Warren with Wolfgang Baur

This enormous forest of pine and elm separates the Magdar Kingdom from the White Mountain Marches and was once part of the same elven lands as the Gennecka Forest to the east. As with other ancient forests of its size, the White Forest remains a relatively untamed place filled with beasts and the ruins of elven settlements, both of which occasionally attract explorers and willing adventurers. For the most part, the area is ignored or bypassed by travelers seeking an easier journey.

The White Road ley line bisects the western portion of the White Forest, dipping south over the mountains toward Zlato Mine and snaking upward toward the east, connecting the magical wellsprings of the Magdar Kingdom to the Dragon Empire. The Magdar Kingdom's city of Cronepisht is the only settlement of any size with an interest and the resources to exploit the forest. Melana and Triolo, nearby polities of the Seven Cities, are focused elsewhere, and the Mharoti have their hands full subduing the White Mountain Marches to the south. So the White Forest remains largely wild, deeply magical, and privy to secrets it rarely shares.

Within the Trees

Though the White Forest is deeply wild and the vast majority of the forest remains primal and overgrown, it does enfold numerous ruins, small settlements, and native humanoids of various kinds, including gnomes, alseids, humans, and occasionally river elves, cousins to those in the Arbonesse. Those who choose to make their home in the White Forest often live in harmony with it and have sought it out precisely for its wildness, though some, like Gellert the Gruesome and the Magdar city folk in Cronepisht, prefer to harness, hunt, and study it.

In botanical terms, both gnome and human artisans make use of this abundant bounty. Bushy, round hazelnut and walnut trees surround towering, ancient pines with trunks large enough for one to live inside. Birch trees grow along clearings and borders of the forest. And the occasional twisted-trunked willow marks a clearing, which may be occupied by the remnants of fey settlements.

The White Forest is well known for its singular and usually silent grove of treants at the eastern edge of the foothills. These tree shepherds keep the forest's deepest reaches unsullied by roads, axes, and settlements, but they are far too old and sleepy to care about humans and dwarves at the forest's eastern

and western extremities. Their leader is Gatherer-of-Moss, a fine treat of many centuries age whose limbs have a tendency to crack and pop when she moves. Some believe she also guides a community of pineys, plant-like creatures also seen in the Margreve.

The climate leans toward cooler temperatures, especially along the Griffoncrag foothills. During the winter, a thin blanket of snow coats the ground, but the soil remains fertile year-round. The rivers keep the soil saturated, and verdant moss covers much of the ground. Ley lines flow strong and sure, and magical springs, glades, and stone circles can be found in Erdovar and near Redtower and Margado.

Many druids seek out the White Forest precisely for its potent magic. Alchemical supplies are aplenty for use in a wide array of tinctures, tonics, and poisons. There is much to eat although knowledge of foraging is helpful as similar varieties of plants can have very different results on a person.

A few pocket communities of servitor gnomes inhabit the White Forest, families making their homes in the rotted trunks of dead trees, restoring the cavernous wooden bases into cozy and comfortable abodes. When nestled inside their houses with their moss-covered doors pulled shut, it's easy for explorers to overlook these families entirely, and that is how many gnomes prefer it. Though the presence of a laundry line or a small woodcutter's axe may betray a gnome hamlet. They see themselves as caretakers for the departed elves, and some touch of magic from the Court of Winter Love in the Summerlands is said to protect their settlements from outside observation. These gnomes are not sworn to the Eleven Hells as



those of Niemheim are, though they rarely leave the boundaries of the forest either. Some who've had reason to speak with a gnome chieftain or reeve claim that the majority of their trade is still with the elves through portals to the Summerlands.

Center of Turbulence

The forest's location and the presence of the White Road ley line has attracted many arcane practitioners over the years.

Those wizards and druids who protect it as a neutral, wild zone are often at odds with others from Triolo or Cronepisht who leverage its strategic location as a beacon of importance. The druids are usually gnomes or

humans in the western or northern sections of the forest; the more practical, timber-and-power-harvesting practitioners are wands from Cronepisht, wind mages from Triolo, or ring mages from Melana, seeking owlbear hearts and enchanted bezoars for their mercenary endeavors.

Notable Locations in the White Forest

Much of the forest is home to small villages and communities although some of the region's most notable locations are also found here. Most keep to themselves, but there is occasional conflict among those who attempt to infringe on other's land.

CRONEPISHT

On the outskirts of the White Forest, where the tree line ebbs to verdant plains, is the great city of Cronepisht. Nestled within a bend of the River Cirkno (and primarily on the far bank away from the forest), this capital city is known as the "Jewel of Magdar." Home to more than 30,000 citizens, Cronepisht has spilled over into the White Forest since the construction of the Queen Malaya's Bridge—and the resulting conflict with eastern forest druids and gnomes is occasionally violent. Many citizens have formed small hamlets among the trees near the city. Wealthier Cronepisht residents choose instead to live on the hills on the far side the River Cirkno, less rustic and more secure from forest wolves, hungry bears, double eagles, or bands of goblins.

According to local legend, the forest west of Cronepisht was once home to a community of "wild women"—or perhaps hags or

alseids or elfmarked druids. Tales alluded to these strange women who lurked among the thickets, and their homes were said to be under ancient walnut trees or in caverns near an ancient stone circle. Although hags and alseids do live in the White Forest, most keep to themselves and are only hostile to those who provoke them (which the occasional adventuring party is inclined to do). The tales do attract explorers and elderly women from neighboring areas who seek to find this settlement of wise women and join it. Some do vanish into the forest and never return.



Another notable event at Cronepisht is the Queensmeet, which is an annual tournament that takes place in Low Summer. The primary spectacle of the Queensmeet is the grand melee, though many visitors use the event as a chance to mingle, socialize, and make deals. The gnomes of Middlebrook and the alseid often come to the Queensmeet as “representatives from the Summerlands,” claiming the right to compete in contests of archery and magic and selling both herbs and skilled woodcarving. At the end of the fair, gnomes and alseid alike wander back to the west and enter the forest for another year.

MARGADO

Known as the Town of Ink, Margado makes good use of the White Forest’s resources, including its walnut timber and iron. But it’s the ink they’re most proud of: produced at the Thoth-Hermes monastery, it is revered for its smooth, satiny texture and for drying quickly without fouling quills. This ink is sold throughout the Seven Cities and sometimes as far away as the Mharoti lands or Bemmea. Still, Margado’s main export is oak, walnut, and ash timber for Magdar barrels and spears.

Most of its inhabitants are the monks who live at the monastery. An old stone structure with grand stained-glass windows, the monastery remains in good condition, and devout volunteers make occasional pilgrimages to it both to engage in faithful practices and to help in occasional repairs, expansion, and upkeep. The ink cellar alone is worth visiting. Black ink is the most popular, and the monks make it entirely from components from within the White Forest: walnuts and gall and iron of course but also petrified wood shavings ground to a powder, and a unique blend of oils is added to give the ink its unique qualities. The cellar is stocked with an array of colorful bowls of powdered dyes. Any ink color can be made, and although the monks offer their skills freely to

the illiterate, their inks are put toward making new books glorifying Thoth-Hermes, lord of words and magic.

As a monastery of Thoth-Hermes is always associated with both trade and scribes, the building’s sizable library houses numerous titles on religions and politics of the Seven Cities, on inkmaking and alchemy, and on dragons and creatures of the forest and plains as well as sacred texts and the life books of prior abbots and monks of Thoth-Hermes. These old tomes remain shackled to shelves and cannot be removed although visitors can freely peruse the stacks.

MIDDLEBROOK GNOMES

The “largest” gnome village in the White Forest is a settlement of perhaps 100 or 200 souls in a place called Middlebrook, located along the banks of the Templine River, in alignment with the White Road ley line and connected to the west by a game path called the Old Elf Road by humans in Triolo. Certainly, gnomes are rare in Midgard—and those not connected to Niemheim even rarer—so it is frequently assumed that Middlebrook gnomes are in fact somehow related, but Middlebrookers take great offense at such suggestions.

Even stranger is the relationship between these gnomes and the river elves who live nearby. Historically, gnomes were one of the primary servitors of the elves, and the elves’ departure left many gnomes without a purpose or a cause to serve. Along the Templine River however, these gnomes hold on to the old ways, and they share a mutual enemy with the river elves: Gellert the Gruesome, sorcerer of the Scarlet Citadel.

Middlebrook gnomes make their homes in tree trunks, they keep to themselves, and they wish others would do the same. Their leader, one High Reeve Shendoltz Berryman, follows a course of isolation and patience, trading only with elfmarked or gnomish

visitors and driving humans and dwarves away with entangling spells, clouds of spores, endless traps, thefts, and ambushes. As a result, sightings of gnomes are surpassingly uncommon. One may glimpse a Middlebrook gnome while on a mushroom-foraging excursion, but it is highly unlikely.

When spotted in one of their enclaves, the gnomes seem far more sedate and harmless than their reputation. They still grow the traditional elven strawberries (the size of a human fist), they carve wooden scrollwork in doorways and pillars and totems, and they protect the local wildlife from wandering into Gellert's clutches. In particular, they keep a few forest drakes and lantern dragonettes as pets, scouts, and guardians—apparently these were beloved by the elves, and they remain loyal to the gnomes. Although this doesn't always work, Middlebrook is well-fortified, preventing the White Forest's gnomes from ending up at the Scarlet Citadel as involuntary apprentices.

SCARLET CITADEL & THE RUINS OF ERDOVAR

In the northwest of the forest sits the Scarlet Citadel and the ruins of Erdovar. The area is lorded over by Gellert the Gruesome, the Keeper of the White Forest as far as the feudal Magdar is concerned. Gellert is the sorcerer who resides in the Scarlet Citadel, a towering stone fortress perched on a small hill (see *Warlock 20: Redtower*).

Rumors abound of Gellert's contributions to the fall of Erdovar. Located on the Templine River, it was once a bustling town due to its timber trade as well as its role as an elven center of the worship of Yarila and Porevit. Timber, walnuts, and venison were sold and sent north to the Magdar Kingdom and west to elven Valera. Fine houses and wooden temples in Peltzenheim and Neusonnenstein are built from timber sourced from Erdovar, and nut-based dishes and delicacies are still prominent in much of the cuisine found in these cities. However, Erdovar is now a ghost

town compared to its heyday with little left to show of its twin temples, its wineries, or its famed spinners and tapestry weavers.

The town was torched many years ago, and a great cave dragon all but demolished the area. Some claimed that Gellert had kept the dragon captive beneath the town; others blamed the Mharoti or the darakhul for bringing the beast, named Bulukanna and sometimes referred to as "grandmother" to avoid speaking its name. Regardless of who brought it, the attack was followed by a wave of undead soldiers chasing the survivors, and the resulting chaos led to a fire that brought Erdovar to its knees. The town was quickly abandoned by humans, gnomes, and elfmarked, and the dragon Bulukanna lived there for many decades. Some believe she remains there still, though like many cave dragons she hunts by night or underground and is rarely seen.

Presently, the occasional bandit party ventures through Erdovar, but those who linger often meet ghosts or more sinister undead. Some believe a particularly dark cult has taken the ruins for its own. Certainly, shadow goblins, wights, and evil priests have been seen there, perhaps seeking some profane object or some elven relic for their own ends.

TEMLINE RIVER & THE WESTERN EDGE

This labyrinthine river weaves like a snake in the northwestern section of the White Forest down toward the Triolo coast. At one time, it was said to be part of the seat of a river elf lord near the village of Redleaf (now Redtower), and the last of these lords, Yngerassos the Elder, is said to be buried beneath the Templine in a riverine tomb as was the custom of many river elves. Finding any such tomb is another matter; this portion of the White Forest is particularly lush as the banks often break, leading toward marshy conditions.

This ever-present moisture inspires the growth of fungus, and during the spring, the river is surrounded by a vibrant spectrum of colorful mushrooms not unlike a field of pastel wildflowers. These unique mushrooms attract alchemists and naturalists from all over: the frilled bonnet mushroom is a delicacy among the elves and their followers, and the meaty stonepizl is beloved among the gnomes. Both fetch stunning prices in Middlebrook, Triolo, and Valera.

Those who understand these mushrooms best are the local gnomes and river elves, though both seem quite eager to keep the harvest for themselves. A few of the more outgoing elves here choose to serve as guides and lead mushroom foraging excursions for interesting visitors, especially for elfmarked or humans with a connection to the wilderness.

Some timber from Redtower does float down the water to Triolo and the coast, but most of the time, it is easier to get oxen to pull a wagon than to guide logs down the sluggish sections of the Templine. It is a popular area for hunters, rich in waterfowl along the western forest edge, and full of ponds and fish within the forest proper.

WHITE ROAD

It's impossible to talk about the White Forest without talking about the White Road, which shares its namesake and draws many seeking to harness its power. Despite being off the beaten track and farther away from the more heavily peopled areas, this ley line's usage rises in direct proportion to the ongoing tensions between human and dragonkin, and its presence was crucial to the Mharoti in the invasion of Illyria. Adventuring parties might quickly find themselves roped into some political scheme or other—whether or not they want to be involved.

Random Encounters in the White Forest

The White Forest provides no shortage of activities for adventuring parties. Adventures may put the characters in the middle of an arcane scheme, an encounter with a ferocious beast, or a pleasant stroll through the trade fair or a day at the Queensmeet. Roll on the table below to determine what characters may encounter while traveling through or near the White Forest.

d6 ENCOUNTER

- 1 A river **elf** named Bella invites the party on a mushroom foraging excursion near the Templine River. The characters can spend downtime to collect edible mushrooms to add to their rations. After this excursion, characters are able to identify safe-to-eat mushrooms with a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Nature) check. Failing this check means that picked mushrooms have a 20% chance of being poisonous.
- 2 An injured **goblin** named Greggo has escaped from Gellert the Gruesome's clutches at the Scarlet Citadel. The goblin may be hostile at first, but if the party makes no further attempt to harm him, he warns them of the "evil mage who lives in the citadel."
- 3 A group of 1d4 **bandits** attempts to rob the party.
- 4 A band of Mharoti **spies** lies in wait. Bound for Valtros with the intent to infiltrate the castle, the dragonborn approach the characters and ask for their help to "deliver a package." (The package contains a magic stone that acts as a mobile scrying sensor to spy on the goings-on within the castle.)
- 5 A group of intoxicated revelers makes their way to the Queensmeet and invites the party to join them.
- 6 An old pilgrim heading to the Thoth-Hermes monastery asks the characters for help safely reaching the monastery. In exchange for this help, the pilgrim gives the party a healer's kit and teaches one character how to use it.

ELVEN DRUIDS OF MIDGARD

by Mike Welham

When you think of nature, you inevitably picture the elves and their empires, whether current or past. The forests they claim are testaments to the power they held over the natural world. Before the splintering of the elves, druidic practices remained largely unchanged, barring the rare shift among their leaders. But once the majority of elves retreated, those same awe-inspiring forests began to dwindle, so the remaining elven druids adapted, changed their relationship to the wilds and to the creatures living among the trees, owing to their new circumstances.

Druid Aesthetes of the Arbonesse

The elven druids of the Arbonesse Forest hearken back to the days of elven dominance. In defiance of the decline of elven civilization in the Arbonesse, the druids strive to create vibrant displays of beauty among the plants and animals within the woods they maintain. They used to take their cues from the Imperatrix's Court, but Her Majesty's current incapacitation has given them considerable autonomy in their aesthetic dictates. Gold and orange flowers have given way to vibrant purples and blues. The druids exert extensive control over the trees in the Arbonesse, extending autumn to maintain their glorious coloration. They further use their magic to blunt the destructive effects of winter to preserve the leaves. A tree that sheds its leaves before the druids deem it acceptable becomes

firewood instead of standing as an eyesore. In late winter, the druids encourage new leaf growth, which pushes out the preserved autumn leaves.

Animals receive similar treatment at the druid's hands. The elves husband the animals to ensure pleasing appearances, from animals' coats to the shapes and sizes of tails and ears and even minute details like eye color. The beasts often have coloration and patterning found nowhere else on Midgard, making tales of purple-striped tigers seem unbelievable. The animals' beautification makes them seem less threatening, but the druids do very little to blunt the instincts of predators, except perhaps to ensure the animals leave elves unmolested.

The druid orders wield considerable influence among the elves populating the Arbonesse. Since they control the forest's plentiful beasts and plants, druids have significant resources at their disposal if disputes arise with the other elves. They generally don't abuse their implicit power since they are more concerned with the forest's appearance than with waging war. However, they do ensure clothing worn by inhabitants and visitors alike does not clash with their carefully curated color schemes.

Concurrent with their goal of aesthetic perfection, Arbonesse druids cultivate poisonous and aggressive plants that hide behind an attractive facade. The flowers of these plants release pollen that entices prey to

come close, so then the plants can puff out a more concentrated packet of toxic pollen or otherwise attack. The druids use their magic to ensure the plants recognize elves and refrain from harming them. Likewise, the animals roaming the Arbonesse have an appealing and harmless mien, making it easier to trick potential prey into underestimating their capacity for violence or focusing on them to the exclusion of hidden predatory animals. The druids of the Arbonesse teach other elves about the locations and properties of the plants and animals. Though the elves enjoy protection from the dangerously enhanced flora and fauna, they need to know about them in the rare case they entertain non-elf visitors.

NEW SPELLS

Druids of the Arbonesse have potent magics.

CHARMING AESTHETICS

3rd-level enchantment (druid)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (a preserved flower or tuft of animal fur)

Duration: 1 day

You affect a group of the same plants or animals within range, giving them a harmless and attractive appearance. If a creature studies one of the enchanted plants or animals, it must make a Wisdom saving throw. If it fails the saving throw, it is charmed by the plant or animal until the spell ends or until another creature other than one of its allies does anything harmful to it. While the creature is charmed and stays within sight of the enchanted plants or animals, it has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks as well as checks to notice signs of danger. If the charmed creature attempts to move out of sight of the spell's subject, it must make a second Wisdom saving throw. If it fails the saving throw, it refuses to move out of sight of the spell's subject. It can repeat this save

once per minute. If it succeeds, it can move away, but it remains charmed.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, you can target one additional group of plants or animals for each slot level above 4th.

TOXIC POLLEN

2nd-level transmutation (druid)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (allergenic or poisonous pollen)

Duration: 1 year

Upon casting this spell, one type of plant within range gains the ability to puff a cloud of pollen based on conditions you supply during casting. If the conditions are met, an affected plant sprays a pollen cloud in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on it. Creatures in the area must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. At the end of a poisoned creature's turn, it can make a Constitution saving throw. On a success, it is no longer poisoned. A plant can only release this pollen once within the duration.

Druid Militants of the Gennecka

While the druids of the Arbonesse are concerned with the appearance of their forest and its inhabitants, elven druids of the Gennecka Forest concern themselves with the inherent weaponry in the plants and beasts populating their forest. Gennecka elves shape trees to maximize the elves' camouflage, to form hidden stands from which they can comfortably shoot at trespassers, and to act as potential weapons waiting for the druids to animate them.

If the druids encourage any sort of plant growth, they do so with an eye toward harming their foes or impeding movement. Brambles and thick overgrowth cover the forest floor, and nettling bushes crowd forest

trails. Similarly to their counterparts in the Arbonesse, the elves guarantee the plants can't slow down or inflict harm on elven inhabitants who don't have the druids' ability to move through hazardous plants.

Gennecka druids primarily raise predatory animals to protect the woods. These beasts have more aggressive temperaments than their ordinary counterparts and possess sharper teeth and claws (giving beasts an additional 2 points of damage with their melee attacks). Again, the druids work to

protect other elves from predation by the beasts, but they haven't perfected their control. They usually destroy animals known to have harmed elves, or they transplant them in cases where they can't bring themselves to destroy perfect killing machines or when they can unleash a violent animal on their unsuspecting foes. When an animal becomes old or infirm to the point where their magic can't heal it, the elves also destroy the animal.

The druids recognize the necessity for prey animals and stock the forest with rabbits,



deer, and other such beasts. However, they train prey animals to respond to their commands, permitting them to override the flight response and instead stampede targets to create a distraction or, in the case of hooved or antlered animals, inflict grievous wounds. Prey animals that become ill or (more rarely) old meet a similar fate, but one consistent with nature's course.

Gennecka elves are already on a war footing, so there is much cooperation between the druid orders and the other elves. The druids keep everyone apprised of dangerous hunting grounds and make sure their efforts don't accidentally hinder the archers' ability to launch their arrows. They also craft and bequeath tokens, so the elves can animate plants or escape the notice of dangerous predators. A token is keyed to a particular elf to ensure it loses its effectiveness if it falls into the wrong hands.

Should Queen Osilessi return from the Summer Lands to reclaim the Gennecka Forest, the druids plan to restore it to its former glory, reducing its innate danger and making it more inviting to visitors. They feel like they don't have that luxury while they protect the woods from the Mharoti Empire's depredations, but they reason the queen will understand the forest's current state.

NEW SPELLS

Druids of the Gennecka wield potent magic.

RISE OF THE GREEN

8th-level evocation (druid)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 180 feet

Components: V, S, M (a cutting from a treant)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

The spell gives life to existing plants in range. If there are no plants in range, the spell creates undergrowth and trees that persist for the duration. One of the trees becomes a treant friendly to you and your companions.

Roll initiative for the treant, which has its own turn. It obeys any verbal commands that you issue to it. If you don't issue it any commands, it defends itself from hostile creatures but otherwise takes no actions.

The animated undergrowth creates difficult terrain for your enemies. Additionally, at the beginning of each of your turns, all creatures that are on the ground in range must succeed on a Strength saving throw or become restrained until the spell ends. A restrained creature can use an action to make a Strength (Athletics) check against your spell save DC, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature is restrained by plants at the beginning of your turn, it takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

Finally, the trees swing at each enemy in range, requiring each creature to make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 6d6 bludgeoning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

You can use a bonus action to recenter the spell on yourself. This does not grow additional trees in areas that previously had none.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a 9th-level slot, an additional tree becomes a treant, the undergrowth deals an additional 1d6 bludgeoning damage, and the trees inflict an additional 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

Freerunner Druids of the Rothenian Plain

Rather than bend nature to their will as other elven druids do, the elven druids in the Rothenian Plain work with nature, seeking only to protect the grasslands and the animals inhabiting them. Outside elven observers view this approach as proof of the elves' feral existence and question whether the plains elves have any druidic ability at all.

The druids' approach to nature involves noninterference in the course of life on the plains. They acknowledge their role in the

overall lifecycle as simultaneous consumers and protectors of the plains' resources. Thus, they make sure their numbers don't grow to unmanageable levels, where they are forced to make a decision between their own people and the food they eat. Freerunner elves have a more carnivorous diet than other elves, which has become a necessity owing to their nomadic lives. Even if they remained in one place, the druids would be loath to farm the land, which opposes their decision not to intervene with the natural balance for their benefit. Very few druids wish to discuss their belief that many of the woes inflicted upon the elves are repayment for their hubris at exerting their will over nature.

This is not to say the druid orders completely leave the plains to their own devices. When fire spreads among the grasses, the druids snuff it out after deliberations among their number to determine whether the fire is ultimately harmful. They also produce water when they see signs of drought and manipulate the weather to avoid killer frosts or temperature extremes detrimental to the plains' plants and animals. Additionally, the elves help reduce the number of horses diseased by black strangles, and they intercede in cases where predators overhunt prey animals or where grazing animals destroy the grasslands in their hunger. When reducing the population of either type of animal, the druids use the meat to feed their tribes.

The druids of the Rothenian Plain carry tremendous spiritual clout among the elves, who are taught how to hunt to preserve the herds of grazing animals and the best methods for leaving little trace of their passing through the grasses. They were instrumental in the elves' retreat to the east, spurred in part by the centaurs' black strangles affliction. The druids have lately turned their attention to a cure for black strangles because they fear the disease will spread from the centaurs to others.

Given their attitudes toward other elves, it is unlikely for the plains' druids to return to the forests if the elves were ever to reclaim their might in Midgard. Their tribes see them as spiritual leaders, so most elves in the Rothenian Plain will follow suit. In kind, the elves living in the remaining great forests desire nothing to do with their undomesticated kin and would hardly consider inviting them back into the fold.

NEW ITEMS

The druids of the Rothenian Plain wield potent magics.

FREERUNNER ROD

Rod, rare (requires attunement)

Tightly intertwined lengths of grass, bound by additional stiff, knotted blades of grass, form this rod. While you hold it, you leave behind no tracks or other traces of your passing while you move through grasslands. Additionally, you move through plants in the grassland without being slowed by them and without taking damage from them if they have thorns, spines, or a similar hazards. Finally, beasts native to grasslands must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw if they wish to attack you.

The rod has 10 charges. You can use a bonus action to expend one charge to increase your land speed by 10 feet or by 20 feet if you are in grasslands. You can use a reaction to expend two charges when you become paralyzed or restrained, negating that effect. The rod regains 1d4 expended charges daily at dawn. If it is reduced to 0 charges, roll a d20. On a 1, the rod collapses into a pile of grass seeds. Among the grass seeds are 1d10 berries, useable per the *goodberry* spell.

If you inflict fire damage to grasslands or kill a grasslands beast without eating at least half of its flesh (yourself or sharing it with others), the rod's magic ceases to work for you, and you can never attune to this rod again.

BEARFOLK BARONIES AND WANDERING TRIBES

by Sarah Madsen

The Grand Duchy of Dornig is a patchwork of holdings with nobles of various lineages governing baronies of varying sizes, all ostensibly swearing fealty to the three main houses of Dornig—House Hirsh-Dammung, House Vann Rottsten, and House Aldous-Donner—and ultimately to the Imperatrix herself. Also within the boundaries of Dornig is the Arbonesse Forest, a sprawling, primeval woodland that houses the River Court of the elves. Bearfolk are just as uncommon in these lands as any other region outside of the Moon Glade and the Northlands, but several of them have made their mark on these territories.

Bearfolk Baronies

Though it is nearly unheard of for individuals not of elf, elfmarked, or human parentage to obtain peerage, at least two such bearfolk baronies exist within the borders of Dornig. The opinions of the other nobles on such things are, unsurprisingly, highly varied.

HOUSE STONEFIST (HIRSCHBERG)

Seat: Shadowbane Estate

Ruling Noble: Lord Bhurri Stonefist, First of His Name, Renderer of Shadows and Stalwart Defender of the Realm (N bearfolk fighter 10)

Swears Fealty to: Hirsh-Dammung

When Bhurri Stonefist arrived in Dornig, it was to crack skulls—no two ways about it. He traveled from city to city, hiring himself out to anyone who would have him, joining up with any even moderately armed group he thought might see battle. Lucky for the jet-black grizzlehide, he happened to sign on with a contingent in Hirschberg just as a horde of undead from Krakovar mounted a poorly advised attack on the outer holdings of House Hirsh-Dammung (later disavowed by Princess Hristina, naturally). Bhurri's prowess in battle won him the admiration of his fellow soldiers-in-arms, and his strategic mind won him the attention of the ruling house.

Not content to allow Bhurri to run off and join a potential rival's household, Prince Octabian Hirsh-Dammung made the distasteful decision to award Bhurri with a barony. Shadowbane Estate, named by Bhurri, is a relatively small holding with sickly lands and a crumbling manor (of *only* five bedrooms) that sat empty for years due to its claim being in (rather half-hearted) dispute between two relatives of the former baron. Bhurri's ascension to the estate won him several enemies but allowed Octabian to wash his hands of the whole affair and conveniently turn the two families' ire toward the bearfolk instead of himself.



Bhurri seems oblivious to the fact that, out of all the possible lands he could have been gifted, he was given a rather poor one, and on farthest outskirts of Hirsh-Dammung's holdings at that. However, since gaining his title, Bhurri has brought several of his family members and friends from Björnrike to live with him, and the sleuth of bearfolk make quite a spectacle when they visit the city in all their courtly finery. Bhurri has thrown himself enthusiastically into what he perceives as his role as gentry, dressing in the clothes of the local courtiers rather than the traditional garb of Björnrike and affecting an air of importance and haughty arrogance. So enraptured by his newly noble blood, he does not notice that most of his peers are laughing at his ridiculous, overstuffed bearing, overly flowery title, and decrepit holdings.

HOUSE REDMAW (BAD SOLITZ)

Seat: Redmaw Manor and Winery

Ruling Noble: Baroness Dotti Redmaw
(NG bearfolk bard 14)

Swears Fealty to: House Vann Rottsten

A pale-brown-furred grizzlehide, Dotti Redmaw's fearsome deed name comes not from her jaws being coated in the blood of her enemies, as one would expect, but from the perpetual stain on her teeth from drinking so much wine.

Dotti arrived in Dornig as a young bearfolk, searching for her calling. Though many assumed said calling would include adventuring and many victories in battle, as it so often does with bearfolk, it turned out Dotti did not have the stomach for combat: she instead possessed a refined palate to rival any elven vintner. Her taste and talent naturally led her to Bad Solitz, where she was a frequent customer at many of the taverns and wineries throughout the area. After a while, she took on a job at the winery owned and operated by House Larentil, a small but notable elvish barony, and eventually made somewhat of a name for herself, scandalizing

and intriguing the elves and elfmarked around the city in equal measure.

Dotti's ultimate rise came about rather unceremoniously. Prince Dimitor vann Rottsten, angered by a late shipment of wine from the Larentil winery to one of his parties, removed the offending vintner, Tomoran Larentil, from his position (and his barony). Tomoran and his family quickly fled Vann Rottsten's reach, fearing the young prince's wrath would not stop with the removal of a title. Prince vann Rottsten, irritated by the Tomorans' cowardice, gifted the former Larentil lands to Dotti, in part because he'd heard of her talents in winemaking but mostly as a snub to Tomoran—the elf would no doubt see it an insult for his holdings to be placed in the hands of a “talking bear.”

Dotti, for her part, has flourished in her new role, and if she's concerned that the spoiled and mercurial prince might tire of the novelty of having a bearfolk-held barony, she does not show it. She has yet to miss a delivery of wine, and indeed, the prince often loudly claims Redmaw vintages are his favorite—though whether the statement is honest or simply meant as an amusing barb aimed at the other courtiers is unclear. Dotti seems happy to continue running her winery, unperturbed by the political machinations of the other houses around her, reading and painting in her spare time.

The Wandering Tribes of the Arbonesse

While bearfolk are an uncommon sight outside of the Northlands or their stronghold in the Shadow Realm, they nonetheless travel, adventure, and seek out distant shores as much as any other. Given their fierce opposition to the shadow fey, they will sometimes form counter-settlements wherever the shadow fey take root in Midgard. One such location is the primeval Arbonesse Forest within Dornig.

Though it houses the River Court, an elven city on the eastern side of the forest, much of the Arbonesse is still wild and untamed. Recently, shadow fey have seized portions of the forest, and while the elves of the River Court avoid these areas, several tribes of bearfolk have taken it upon themselves to police the edges of these strongholds, pushing back the darkness.

The three wandering tribes were originally one unified group of several hundred bearfolk who followed the Arbonesse shadow fey out of the Shadow Realm and into Midgard when they slipped through the cracks. Once they arrived in the Arbonesse, however, they split into three smaller groups to better monitor and combat the shadow fey throughout the forest.

While most bearfolk prefer to put down roots in settlements, the tribes in the Arbonesse remain largely nomadic out of necessity. Even still, there are a few favored sites where these tribes settle for shorter periods of time, staying in one place for several weeks or even months in well-constructed but simple homes before moving on to where the threat is the greatest. There are three main tribes within the forest, typically called by the sites within the Arbonesse where they originally settled (and to where they return when given the choice): the River Glen Tribe, the Copsse Hollow Tribe, and the Dark Mire Tribe. Often, when the tribes settle, they will intermingle for a period of time before splitting back into separate groups with members shifting from one tribe to the other as it suits them. Unions are common, and children are born... the tribes function within the forest here the same as they would in the Northlands or the Moonlit Glades. Because of this and their unified beginnings, there is little rivalry between the three tribes and the disparate groups are viewed more as extended family rather than separate communities. Each tribe has their own chieftain and hierophant, and

all six leaders come together to form a ruling council when larger issues require attention.

Along with maintaining a close eye on the shadow fey in the Arbonesse, the three tribes have set upon themselves another duty: protect the mysterious white hart. These two tasks often go hand-in-hand, and a sighting of the hart is considered a good omen—and a signal to prepare for a fight as the shadow fey are often not far behind in pursuit of the creature. None of the bearfolk know what the white hart may be—though the one with the closest notion may be Fjorli Starsdottir, hierophant of the Dark Mire Tribe—but the tribes recognize there is something sacred about her and know that if the shadow fey want her dead, the bearfolk will do everything in their power to keep her safe.

The wandering bearfolk tribes of the Arbonesse have a calm peace with the Arbonesse exiles and the other citizens of the River Court. The River Court itself counts a few bearfolk amongst their numbers, and although the River King's stance on the shadow fey's rising power is currently undecided, he does not begrudge the three tribes their more aggressive approach (that is, of course, unless it threatens him and his). The three tribes travel to and trade with the River Court freely and have earned the respect of many of its citizens. Occasionally, one of the tribes' members will decide to settle in the River Court, and on even rarer occasions, someone from the River Court will leave the city to join one of the tribes—and their fight against the shadow fey.

The baronies of Dornig have no official stance on the wandering tribes of the Arbonesse. In all honesty, none of them are quite sure what, if anything, to do about the bearfolk that have taken up residence in the forest. The three main houses are content to let them be, seeing them as a problem for the River Court to contend with, and are happy to let them fight off the shadow fey as long as they keep themselves within the boundaries of

the Arbonesse. The nobles consider them little threat and are more concerned with their own political squabbles—though they keep an eye on each other, wary of any one house forming any alliances with this unknown element.

THE RIVER GLEN TRIBE

The River Glen Tribe is as peaceful a tribe as you will find within the borders of the Arbonesse. With the serene Björka Honeytongue as chieftain and the often-distracted Urvul Moonseer as hierophant, the tribe has few internal conflicts, preferring to partake of story and song rather than suffer strife within their ranks. But the cheerful bearfolk can quickly take up arms when a threat arises, and the songs they sing become war cries when the shadow Fey are on the move.

CHIEFTAIN BJÖRKA HONEYTONGUE

The chieftain of the River Glen Tribe, Björka is a hulking, black-furred grizzlehide. Though her stature is intimidating, her dark eyes are soft and kind, and she speaks with a calm demeanor. This does not mean she is incapable of violence however, and though she maintains a nigh-unflappable sense of serenity, she nonetheless brooks no threat to her family or friends. She will just as quickly dismember a foe as any other and has no qualms about meting out punishments or justice where necessary, though she will do so stoically and with a no-nonsense sense of duty. She has a surprisingly entralling singing voice, which she uses to tell tales of her tribe's battles and victories. That, paired with her love of a mug of mead after a long hunt, earned her deed name: Honeytongue.

HIEROPHANT URVUL MOONSEER

The River Glen Tribe's hierophant, Urvul Moonseer is a red-furred purifier from the Moonlit Glades. With a deep understanding of the Shadow Realm from his early years there, he remains vigilant for any signs of

darkness amidst the trees or his tribe. He is often found communing with the forest, whether through deep meditation or by receiving a message from a passing songbird, and he counsels Björka on their tribe's movements. Sometimes, he will disappear for days on end, only to reemerge with stories the trees have told him.

THE COPSE HOLLOW TRIBE

If a younger bearfolk is looking to prove himself, the Copse Hollow Tribe is where they make their home. Filled to the brim with warriors itching to prove their mettle, the tribe presents a tumultuous exterior but boasts nigh-unbreakable bonds between its members. Much like squabbling siblings, those who number amongst the tribe will bicker, feud, and test each-other's boundaries—all to make each member stronger for the inevitable battles to come—but the moment an outside threat shows itself, they present a nearly impenetrable unified front.

CHIEFTAIN ANGAL SNAPJAW

The younger brother of Björka Honeytongue, this grizzlehide chieftain of the Copse Hollow Tribe is the opposite of his sister in nearly every way. Short (for a bearfolk, at least) and golden-furred, Angal Snapjaw is loud, brash, and quick to anger. His sister's stoicism often frustrates him, and he tends to view her quiet thoughtfulness as inaction. Nevertheless, he is a fierce protector of his tribe and the forest, and his flashfire temper belies a keen and cunning mind.

HIEROPHANT DONGHAL SUNHEART

Donghal Sunheart is a brown-furred grizzlehide of average height and build. A skilled healer, Donghal is the spiritual heart of the Copse Hollow Tribe. With not much mind for martial tactics and combat, he instead focuses on helping the injured, the sick, and the lost, and he works to purge the darkness

wherever he finds it. Whether counseling a fellow tribe member through a difficult life choice, granting blessings over a new birth, or calling upon Freyr and Freyja to smite the shadow fey, Donghal is level-headed and wise in all matters.

THE DARK MIRE TRIBE

The Dark Mire Tribe is perhaps the most eerie of the three tribes of the Arbonesse. These bearfolk warriors prefer stealth and subterfuge to direct attacks, materializing out of the darkness to strike at their enemy, only to disappear into the foliage as if they were never there. Their hit-and-run tactics confuse those who have come to expect a more head-on approach from the bearfolk, and more than one elf of the River Court tells tales of the “swamp ghost” bearfolk. Within their camp however, these impressions quickly fall apart. The Dire Mire Tribe is just as friendly and welcoming as any other community of bearfolk. They value crafting and the arts, and their members create amazing textiles, weaving, pottery, and weapons.

CHIEFTAIN JARLA STEELCLAW

Chieftain Jarla Steelclaw is a massive brown-and-gold grizzlehide who towers even over Björka Honeytongue. The only member of the three tribes’ leadership who did not originate in the Moonlit Glades, Jarla is quick to laugh and just as quick to offer up her clan’s hospitality to visitors, though woe be to anyone who takes advantage of her



good nature. She considers the Arbonesse Forest to be far too temperate for her liking and thinks the Arbonesse exiles (and many of the bearfolk from the Moonlit Glade, though she would never say it out loud) are all soft for never weathering a Northlands winter. She came to the Arbonesse searching for adventure, lived for a bit within the borders of the River Court, and then gleefully joined with the three tribes when they emerged from the Shadow Realm, taking leadership of the Dark Mire Tribe in short order.

HIEROPHANT FJORLI STARSDOTTIR

Another purifier from the Moonlit Glades, Hierophant Fjorli Starsdottir of the Dark Mire tribe is slight of stature and pale of fur and is the youngest of the tribes' leadership. Blind since the day she was born, Fjorli claims to be able to "see" the essences of everything around her, from the smallest plant to the largest Dread Walker, and can tell much about the nature of an entity by studying this aura. Because of this, she is

highly insightful and empathic... getting a lie past her is a trick few have managed to successfully pull off, though she may let the deception pass unremarked-upon simply because she understands the motivation behind it. Fjorli has only seen the white hart a handful of times, but each experience has brought her to tears, evoking a loneliness and selflessness she's been unable to adequately explain or express.



DANCING WITH DRAGONS: INTRIGUES OF THE MHAAROTI

by Richard Pett

Perpetual war, the interminable policy of the Dragon Empire. Conquest in the name of the Dread Sultan.

The endless machinations of the dragons of the Dragon Empire are counted not only in physical and military might but also through the dragons' innate cunning and narcissism. A great general knows that an army is not always beaten by force but also by weakness of heart and spirit. A cowed enemy is no longer an enemy—it is a servant.

Countless agents of the Dragon Empire are scattered across Midgard to spread poison and seek conquest through subtler means—the seeding of alliances, the venom of terror, the breaking of friendships, and the greedy gathering of ancient and powerful magic. These plots stir constantly and can be encountered anywhere across Midgard, making marvelous potential intrigues that can be woven into your adventures or perhaps subtly—or overtly—as the focus of entire adventure paths. This article gives you some further adventure outlines to expand upon the adventure ideas in the *Midgard Worldbook*, and it also provides you with a few ready-made villains to use, hint at, or incorporate into your campaign backstory.

The agents of the dragons—and the dragons themselves—make for fascinating foes who often hide behind honeyed words, forked tongues, and untrustworthy faces. Here is

detailed a trio of such dragons, their agents, desires, and motivations. Use them to drift rumors into your campaign or as inspiration for your adventures, perhaps allowing your PCs' paths to cross some of these dragons and their minions and be drawn in, perhaps becoming unwitting tools of some darker plot. We have deliberately designed these foes and where they are encountered to be flexible, to lurk behind your own adventures and machinations and to drive evil and the need to conquer. They can thus be used in any area of your campaign in vast, beautiful Midgard. The reach of the Dragon Empire is strong...

The Unseen Queen

Agent of Glauvistus the Scourge. The Unseen Queen, Facade, the Dragon of Many Masks—adult green dragon.

Motivations. Sow chaos to precede alliance or conquest.

Techniques. Spreading lies and intimidating treachery to destroy alliances, forging false friendships on the way.

Rumors. The edges of the empire creep ever forward, and her newest conquest bends to the temper and avidity of the newest morza of the Dragon Empire—Glauvistus the Scourge, Conqueror of Rumela, Morza of the Fire Prophet, and Breaker of Legions. The flame

dragon lives up to her terrible immolating reputation, stomping on her conquests while her hidden hands spread dissension among the subjugated nobility she plays with, as well as her many foes—both real and imagined—in countries nearby, morsels waiting to be plucked.

Weaver of plots, betrayer, seducer, murderess, the Unseen Queen is one of Glauvistus's hidden cohorts. A devotee of Mammon, Lord of Greed, she seeks to spread lies and corrode alliances in preparation for future invasions and dominance. Sometimes named the Facade or the Dragon of Many Masks, her dragon form, like her alignment and intentions, is often hidden behind the mask of magic as she and her agents work to break friendships, wreak havoc, and cause anarchy through carefully plotted intrigues. Her most usual form when clothed in illusory or transformative magic is that of a painfully pale and delicate woman of great beauty, a form she uses to dupe her targets by suggesting fragility. She is no such thing. Although immensely strong, the Unseen Queen is not one to often sully her claws with combat: hers is the battleground of courtly intrigues, spreading literal poisons and laying subtle plots across a dozen places until they reach their delicious conclusions—often with her finally devouring her foes or sometimes lustily seeing them supplicate themselves to her wishes and whims.

She uses her prowess through her innate enchantment and illusion spellcasting to disguise her features, to soak her words in sweetness, and to charm and dominate. She



is mistress to many, and her followers—the majority of whom are kobolds—act as her hands when they need to be dirtied. These kobold agents ingratiate themselves to hundreds of dupes, often portraying themselves as humble fools, insignificant slaves, or amusing distractions. Yet each is deadly and obsessively enamored—or perhaps terrified—of the Unseen Queen herself. Their loyalty is unquestioning.

The Unseen Queen is an abominable bigot: she views all human and non-draconic humanoid flesh as nothing, mere insects to be used or disposed of at her merest whim. She uses her presence to strike terror into her followers and playthings, stoking a thousand, thousand stories about herself, reveling in fulfilling her own narcissistic legend. To those

who have the misfortune of usefulness to her, she often lures them to some remote spot with promises of love or wealth or secrets and then reveals herself to them in her appalling glory, delighting in telling her victims what will happen to them if they cross her—in even the merest way. With their fear guaranteed, the dragon then uses these unfortunates to further her plots, reminding them that somewhere not far away is a dragon who, should they disobey her every wish and instruction, would be angered and exact an appalling revenge upon them, their families, and friends until none were left that are not dead or horribly broken.

The Unseen Queen particularly likes to use those in lower stations of life that have access to those higher—maids, guards, and the like. She finds these individuals particularly easy to scare and dominate, and that amuses her. Such victims often dig themselves deeper and deeper into trouble by obeying the Unseen Queen's instructions at a terrible cost to their friends, employers, and allies. Murder and betrayal from the most unexpected quarter is often the mark of the Unseen Queen's hand.

As poisons sometimes play a part in her plots, many of her followers are drawn from the ranks of rogues and assassins, alchemists and sorcerers. These followers take subtle paths in their classes, such as duelist and fixer rogues (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook*) and shadow bloodline sorcerers (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook*) and others. Motivated by terror or worship, the bond between these followers is often surprisingly strong, and small tight groups offer unswerving support to each other in their fear or reverence. Chief agent among the kobolds at present is the outrageously confident Ender of Days (kobold shadow sorcerer 7), a one-eyed kobold whose charred back is proof that angering a dragon is never wise. The kobold spreads the story that it was Glauvistus the Scourge herself who caused this wound and was so impressed he survived that she immediately granted him royal favor and assigned him to the Unseen

Queen to reap chaos. This is a lie. Deranged and psychotic, the sorcerer has a reputation for acts of madness that make even his followers terrified of him, and the kobold uses this fear to demand absolute obedience as intimate agent of the terrible Unseen Queen herself. Ender of Days is typically found in some normally repulsive subterranean lair which he transforms into the caricature of opulence and noble normalcy with countless servants rushing to serve his every whim. From this position, the kobold typically inveigles allies and ultimately overwhelms petty local crime lords in places useful to the Dragon Empire and Glauvistus's plots.

ADVENTURES

Three Sides of a Coin. This is set in a small trio of petty kingdoms (or fiefdoms, baronies, demesnes, as fits the adventure) within striking distance of Rumela: these might be places you have created in your campaign or those named in the *Midgard Worldbook*.

The Unseen Queen has arrived at the court where the PCs serve or are friendly with and has inveigled herself in with the staff, rapidly dominating several to her whim and hiding in plain sight: a bland maid who seemingly jumps at her own shadow. Wrapped in concealing magic of great power, she has come to this petty land not initially to conquer but to weaken, to spread chaos amongst their much more influential and powerful neighbors, to whom the present king of this petty kingdom is not only related but is also greatly favored. His advice is greatly appreciated, and his wisdom respected by his kin who rule the two more powerful adjacent fiefdoms.

This trio of small kingdoms occupy a strategic spot somewhere beyond the borders of Rumela, and Glauvistus has indicated that she would very much like to have each tasty morsel under her benevolent control. The Unseen Queen, who relishes intrigue and

research, has learned that the two other petty kingdoms are ruled by twin brothers who in truth have little love lost between them. Only their respect for their elderly kin and statesman keeps peace.

So she uses the dominated and terrified staff to slowly poison the old king, who rapidly falls into a coma.

She then coordinates apparent betrayal by arranging a series of outrages carried out by a force of men under the rule of one brother but who now serve the Unseen Queen, who has terrified the men into servitude. She uses this band to inflict barbarities that are initially blamed on the kingdom's draconic neighbors,



but when the true villains are identified, the subsequent reprisals threaten to cause war among the three petty kingdoms.

At her later instruction, the poisons the king imbibes are weakened, and he awakens with whispered desire to bring the two warring kin to his home to coordinate a treaty of peace between them. With all three rulers under one roof and in her grasp, the Unseen Queen could swat all these flies in one deadly day. Unless her plots are unmasked and her terrified victims revealed and brought to confess, that day may soon be upon them.

If all goes as planned, a small invasion force lies ready across the border to enter the chaotic remains of the three kingdoms to conquer them with ease.

Bastoria the Beleaguerer

Agent of Rüzgar, Lord of Fog and Hungers, Ruler of Zaldiri. Bastoria the Beleaguerer, the Scourge, the Hammer—adult black dragon.

Motivations. Conquest, wage a covert war against the followers of Glauvistus the Scourge to destabilize Rumela, reputation, sadistic joy in violence.

Techniques. Endless war, extreme violence, kidnap, torture, threats.

Rumors. Only true dragon blood is of any worth and consequence, and only those with such blood can form the ranks of the forces of Bastoria. The warriors of the black dragon are found souring lands, small lightning-fast groups that orchestrate campaigns of destruction and terror. There is no subtlety with these agents of fear, who revel in the title of the Firestorms.

Usually, Bastoria and his demented dragonkin followers are found burning and destroying just behind the edges of the Dragon Empire, and in particular raids and actions against the Magdar Kingdom and Perunalia. Sometimes, however, their talents are employed in greater battles or actions farther afield. Rüzgar's favored prize is, of

course, Rumela, but open conflict between the morza is unacceptable, so a covert war is fought by proxy and destruction.

Bastoria regards even the fine flesh of dragonkin expendable, even the deadly dracotaur that sometimes sour his forces, and has personally slaughtered dozens of often fiercely loyal followers to show his ruthlessness and revel in his paranoia. He fears challenge and as such cannot allow anyone's reputation to grow too far. Only his semi-legendary follower, the alchemist Crone (dragonborn wizard 8) escapes his wrath. Strangely, the dragon treats this adviser with kindness, perhaps respecting the tale that the withered staff she leans upon is actually a fingerbone of Baal-Hotep, which she tricked him of during a game of rhymes. Or perhaps the kindness masks fear?

Crone is a sadist and genius, who fashions the cruelest weapons of war based upon the wickedest acids. The names of her machines of warfare have passed into the annals of conflict and are whispered of with fear and awe: names like the Breath of Dissolution, a great iron head able to breath storms of acid, and the Anger of the Lord of Fog, a semi-arcane weapon of war that births corrosive, semi-aware, mists. In battle, the insane followers of Bastoria use her weapons and acids liberally to further engender terror and reputation. That the ruler of Zaldiri has shared laughter in destruction with the Dread Emperor and mentioned her name merely adds to her aura. Some say Bastoria both dotes on and fears her in equal measure. The two are considered sides of a coin, never far apart.

ADVENTURES

Candles Across the Kingdom. This potentially longer campaign pits the PCs against the lightning forces of Bastoria as they seek to end the vile acts of wanton destruction plaguing a kingdom. Here, the Firestorms have scattered across the twisting edges of some difficult terrain—perhaps a forest or series of narrow

valleys—and from their lairs launch strike after strike. The raids seem coordinated in some sophisticated way and are armed with insider knowledge of the kingdoms strengths as well as dreadful new corrosive weapons.

The information is coming from a troupe of performers, among whom are many kobolds loyal to the Lord of Fog and Hungers. The kobolds have been quietly spying for months now and steadily heading back to their master to bring further news. Are the PCs distracted by the endless raids and seek simply to violently halt them, or do they dig for subtler clues? If they capture the valuable agents of Rüzgar, do they learn even greater information about the strengths and motives and aims of Bastoria and his master?

aim of reducing it all to ashes. His arcane sisterhood, known as the Thirteenth Veil, work as his eyes and ears across all lands. The leader of this sect—the semi-divine genius Charnax the Preceptor—operates a vast network of wizards, scholars, and spies to seek out items and knowledge worthy of her lord. This group is likely to be encountered anywhere across Midgard but are always drawn to ancient secrets, sites, and magic. Entirely female, this devout sect sees their work as heralding the fiery apocalypse to be wrought at Ateshah's burning claws. This is their joy and obsession.

Charnax is fearfully focused on her ruler's desire and knows that he is unforgiving and impatient. This brings huge pressure upon the

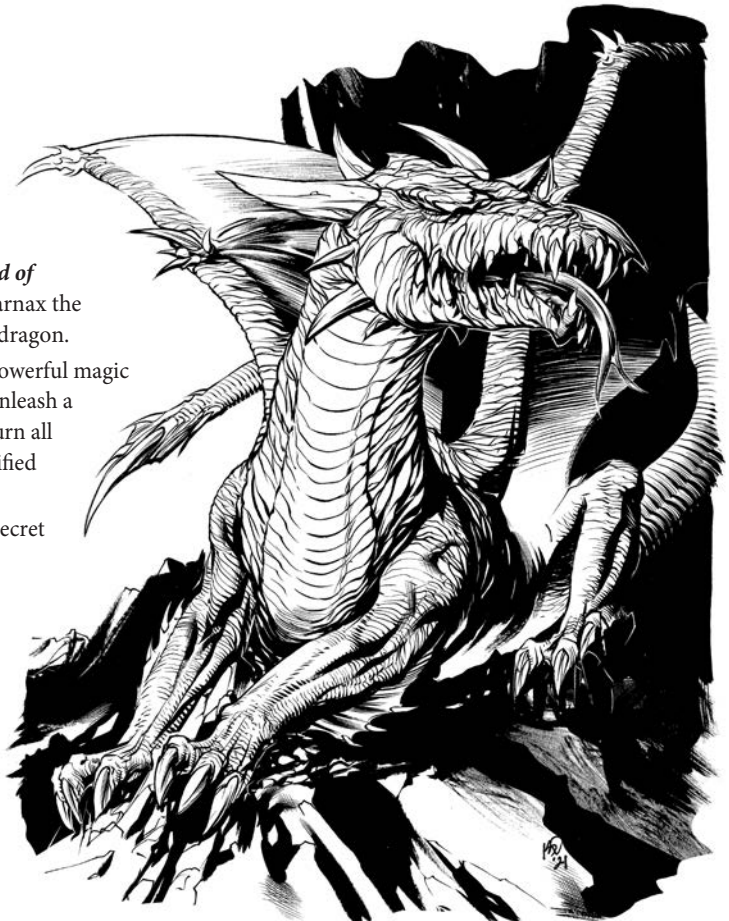
Charnax the Preceptor

Agent of Ateshah, Lord of Gizmiri Province. Charnax the Preceptor—adult red dragon.

Motivations. Gather powerful magic and artifacts, seek to unleash a fiery apocalypse and turn all of Midgard into a calcified wasteland.

Techniques. Work in secret to collect artifacts and arcane power.

Rumors. Ateshah's endless search for ancient knowledge drives his goal to increase the reach of his presence across the world, with the ultimate



dragon, causing her wits to often fracture; she has been known to immolate her countless servants for merely standing in her line of sight when she is focused or for coughing in her presence. The dragon is as vain as she is intelligent and many of her plots seek to further her aim to become morza, planting seeds of conflict and lies to fracture alliances and nurture discord among those already in that lofty station.

She has numerous faithful followers of her own spread across Midgard, some of these sleeper agents waiting for a trigger—a morsel of information or a rumor of an apocalyptic device or artifact. Her chief consort, most beloved and valued of her followers, is Qamar-ak-Ishmall (female efreeti wizard 5), a seasoned explorer, archaeologist, and intellect. The efreeti's own network of spies feeds information through arcane messages to her dazzling tower overlooking Sorrow's Bridge in Capleon where she has made her staggering home. That she is able to shed her skin and appear as any human she wishes makes her the almost perfect tool for Charnax. From here, the Supreme Sister of the Veil watches, learns, and instructs. She coordinates the more subtle parts of the ultimate plan to burn all of creation, her mostly human female operatives toiling on behalf of her fearsome benefactor.

The dragon herself rarely soils her claws with work but lurks in the backgrounds of plots ready to appear at their climax if her terrible presence is required.

ADVENTURES

The Broken City. A huge archaeological dig is taking place in a remote location: this could be a rainforest, a distant desert, or any location that fits into your campaign setting and imagination. The sponsors of the dig, hardly above villains themselves, have taken a quasi-military approach to the site, which is rumored to contain vast treasures.

Charnax knows more, the site is also said to contain one of the legendary *Orbs of Dragonkind*. For Charnax, the potential discovery of the orb is both a boon and a bane, and she greatly desires to have it in her claws to ensure it doesn't fall into anyone else's. She flies to a nearby location to coordinate the work of Qamar-ak-Ishmall and the sisterhood, who ingratiate themselves into the dig by offering seemingly mundane help. The PCs may be asked to help in the dig or hired to secure the area from potential rivals and any monsters that may arise from the ruins. They might alternatively be an inherent part of the dig itself and work with friends to explore the area.

At first the sisterhood are happy to lurk in the background, with Qamar ingratiating herself with the senior archaeologists. Then accidents begin to happen, and these hasten as the dig continues—with Charnax happy for the treasure hunters to do all the hard work and take all the risks. As the dig nears its climax, the dragon sends for help to attack the site's operatives and further weaken the dig group before appearing herself to claim whatever treasure is within—and hopefully secure the orb itself.

Further Agents

Do not think these dragons are the only tools and servants of the morza? They are merely a taste: a great dragon enjoys unbending kudos and many followers, and the dragons listed are but one servant of each. And when dragons come together, it can only be a matter of time before their egos cause them to turn upon each other in whatever way suits them best.

It is always dangerous to dance with the desires of dragons.



ADVENTURE AND DUNGEONEERING



KILLER DUNGEONS: AN OLD-SCHOOL RETROSPECTIVE

by Steve Winter

I've grown tired of "killer dungeons in the old-school style."

For starters, there is no definitive "old school of gaming." I was excited to see that term gaining use a few years ago and embraced it, but that was more because of the sense of community it encompassed than because the term itself had objective meaning. In almost every case, "Old School" means "back when I started playing RPGs." If you started in 1975 with the original three little brown books, then that's old-school. If you started in 2001 with edition 3.5, then that's old-school. If you started in 1985 with *Vampire: The Masquerade*, then that's old-school. Everyone wants to own "old school," so as a defining term, it's pretty useless.

Furthermore, even in the 1970s, people didn't just play D&D. Scattered around every gaming table, you were likely to find copies of D&D, AD&D, countless unofficial D&D/AD&D variants from magazines, fanzines, and independent publishers, plus *Empire of the Petal Throne*, *Tunnels & Trolls*, *Traveller*, *Villains & Vigilantes*, *The Fantasy Trip*, *RuneQuest*, *DragonQuest*, *SpaceQuest*, *Chivalry & Sorcery*, *Bushido*, and even *Bunnies & Burrows* all being referenced and used pretty much interchangeably. All those games approach their subjects differently.

Some of those games are rules-heavy, others are rules-light. Some emphasize storytelling and roleplaying; others focus on tactical combat on a grid. Even D&D and AD&D differed in their details in ways that made them subtly incompatible with each other—and referencing the details is the reason why people kept the rulebooks at the game table in the first place.

In my "old school" days (the 1970s), wilderness adventures were more common than dungeon crawls among me and my friends. Even the dungeons tended to be more like wildernesses than people sometimes admit. They leaned toward sprawling subterranean worlds complete with societies and ecosystems rather than a compact series of connected rooms in an abandoned or haunted castle.

Probably the best dungeon designer in the 1970s was Jennell Jaquays. Look at some of Jennell's adventures from that time, like *Caverns of Thracia*, *Dark Tower*, and *Hellpits of Nightfang*. Those aren't killer dungeons. They're well-thoughtout environments where adventures take place. Look at the best of the early TSR adventures, like *Vault of the Drow*, *Dwellers of the Forbidden City*, and the *Giants* series. Again, no killer dungeons.

But wait! What about *Tomb of Horrors*, I hear you asking. Wasn't that the ultimate killer dungeon?

Yes, but *S1* is in every way an exception. Acererak's famous trap-filled tomb was created specifically to bypass *character* prowess and be the ultimate *player* challenge. In the late 1970s, players were cropping up at games and at conventions with godlike characters: wielding Thor's *Mjolnir* in one hand and *Blackrazor* in the other, casting multiple *wish* spells per day, commanding demonic and angelic servants, and being impossible for mortal enemies to injure. In creating *Tomb of Horrors*, Gygax was saying, "All you players

reveling in your outrageously overpowered characters, this is the ridiculous extent to which you've pushed GMs and adventure designers. Now let ye reap what ye have sown!"

Even so, there's no shortage of players



who claim to have fairly beaten *Tomb of Horrors*. To be honest, I'm not sure that's even possible. Every time I ran it, half the characters died before they got inside the tomb. When characters finally face Acererak—the handful who survive to that point—the things they must do to defeat the lich are so obscure and non-intuitive that I have a hard time imagining anyone hitting on the correct solution in the moments they have before the lich absorbs everyone's soul. People say they succeeded, and I'm not here to judge. Given typewriters and infinite time, a roomful of monkeys will eventually hammer out *King Lear*, right?

The point is, from its inception, *Tomb of Horrors* was a parody of itself. It was never meant to be the ultimate dungeon but only the ultimate expression of “pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” in dungeon form.

Dungeon of the Bear (1979) is another highly lethal dungeon, but its lethality was pure “gotcha!” It's a classic Tunnels & Trolls module, and it may be the archetype of the makes-no-sense, kills-you-without-warning dungeon. It has fans, but I've never understood why. DotB is filled with arbitrary death and ambushes that serve only to wreck everyone's joy. That's not an opinion formed by looking back across years of accumulated wisdom; it was obvious the first time we cracked it open way back when.

It does connect us to Tunnels & Trolls, the game that was most notorious for killing PCs indiscriminately. That's partly because T&T's combat rules are so unforgiving to the weaker side in a fight but also because Tunnels & Trolls was well suited to solitaire play, and Flying Buffalo (T&T's publisher) went all-in on the solo adventure market. T&T solos were often brutal excursions with appropriately dire names such as *Deathtrap Equalizer* and *Naked Doom*.

Solo adventures always have the potential for sudden death, even when it isn't the designer's intent. With only one character, just a few unlucky dice rolls in a tough situation can spell doom. Balancing that somewhat is the fact that since you're the only person at the table in a solo adventure, a character's demise doesn't need to be forever. You can simply back up and make a different choice or reroll the dice until you get a lucky break. Assuming that doesn't bother your conscience, no one else is going to complain or even know. Perhaps there were players who never cheated during solo outings, but I didn't know any of them. You can fairly ask what came first: cheating because the adventures were so overwhelmingly lethal or the adventures becoming so lethal because writers knew players had infinite do-overs for those death scenes anyway. I suspect equal parts of both were involved.

Also worth mentioning is that most solo adventures were for low-level characters. That's probably because low-level adventures are always easier to write: rookie characters have predictable abilities while veteran adventurers vary wildly in their powers and magic items. But it's also true that for players, losing a low-level character to bad luck or a bad decision is just a bump in the road whereas losing a high-level character can be traumatic. This was especially true in the 1970s and early 1980s, when generating a new 1st-level character for most RPGs took no more than five minutes; for some games, it took substantially less than that. If Erik the Red died in the second room of the dungeon, it took just moments to whip up Erika the Red and try again (with the bonus that Erika would find and pick up everything left on Erik's corpse in Area 2).

The early practice with the worst reputation is “save or die.” This did exist and was widely used. I maintain, however, problems didn't come from using save or die but from *abusing* save or die.

Experienced GMs always preferred more interesting results over save or die. Killing a character with one unforeseen shot isn't interesting. Keeping them alive while dropping them into ever-deeper, ever-hotter water is interesting.

That word "unforeseen" is important. Any player, then or now, would be justifiably upset if they lost an experienced character to a gotcha! trap such as a goblin soldier's footlocker that's inexplicably protected by a save-or-die poisoned needle. Cheap burns like



that are a breach of player/GM trust.

If, however, you play in a world where save-or-die poisoned needles are known to exist, then you need to take that risk into account when dealing with the unknown. Characters shouldn't need to be concerned about lethal poison on every container they find; a rank-and-file goblin wouldn't put a death trap on a chest he opens and shuts a half-dozen times every day. But when the stakes are high—when that chest potentially contains a scroll the lich really, really doesn't want anyone else to have—then characters must weigh the decision whether to try opening the chest against that possibility. How much do you want what might be in there, and how much are you willing to risk getting it? A save-or-die trap that lunges out of nowhere is unfair and uncool. A save-or-die trap that characters had good reason to suspect before choosing to plunge ahead and take the risk anyway is just one of the workaday dangers of the adventuring life.

Finally, the adversarial nature of RPGs is a factor here too. The current philosophy in RPGs is that the GM is a storytelling partner and facilitator working alongside the players, not against them. Some modern games take pains to narrowly define the GM's role and limit their authority. Under old-school conditions, the GM's power was nearly unlimited. It wasn't truly unlimited, no matter what some writers claim. It couldn't be because the GM was more adversarial in the early years of roleplaying than now. An adversarial relationship was a natural outgrowth of roleplaying's origins in wargaming.

A tug of war constantly played out between the GM's role as an all-powerful facilitator of the growing story and the GM as an adversary. You can't have both at the same time: an all-powerful adversary would make the game pointless. However, the balance point between all-powerful story engineer and ruthless-but-restrained adversary is unstable, to say the least. When the roles are ill-defined to begin with, that instability became a big factor in many RPG campaigns crashing and burning, especially with an inexperienced or immature GM at the helm. It was easy for a GM to get caught up in the rush of power and lose sight of the need for not only impartiality but, to be blunt, mercy.

Any sort of design, game or otherwise, is simplified if there's no concern for fairness, balance, or the feelings of the end user. Designing a puzzling, challenging, tense roleplaying adventure is hard work. That's why killer dungeons were and are typically found in the hands of lazy and inexperienced GMs. In the early years of RPGs, *everyone was inexperienced*. Enthusiasm is no substitute for time and hands-on experience when it comes to mastering something new.

As everyone gained experience in the new medium of roleplaying games, the GM's value as a storytelling partner rather than as a foe became clearer. Fast-forward to today, and no one but die-hard reactionaries committed to reliving the glory days of 1975–76 sees the GM as primarily the opposition. We all simply learned better.

AN ODE TO RANDOMNESS

by Steve Winter

“Introduce a little anarchy. You know the thing about chaos? It’s fair!”

—*The Joker*

In the quest for creativity, writers and game designers—and everyone, really—resort to all sorts of techniques to “get the juices flowing.” At the very beginning of my career, I bought a book titled *A Whack on the Side of the Head* by Roger von Oech, Ph.D. The subtitle was “How to Unlock Your Mind for Innovation.” It covers ten major concepts on how to free your mind from conventional thought limitations, plus a host of minor ones. It’s a useful and insightful book, but it’s aimed more at business innovators in general and at Silicon Valley in particular than at creative writers. Similar books specifically for writers are also common of course; *Whack* just happens to be the first book on creativity I ever bought or read, so it looms large in my experience.

Creating material for roleplaying games isn’t the same as engineering a new smartphone or finding ways to speed up an assembly line. Those tasks are tethered to the real world. The most revolutionary manufacturing idea ever conceived is in fact worthless if it depends on technology that can’t be built. RPGs, on the other hand, can be flights of pure fancy. Anything you can imagine can be put to use.

The challenge is to imagine things that are exciting, challenging, and above all fresh.

When we sit down in front of a blank sheet of mapping paper or a blank word processor screen with the task of creating something exciting, challenging, and fresh for players, we face many hurdles. I won’t even try to enumerate them all. No matter how exhaustive I make my list, I’d leave out something important. Instead, the one problem I’m focused on here is the fact that our thinking falls into patterns. When facing that blank sheet of paper, we fall back on the same favorite, familiar ideas and tropes over and over. Your ideas and tropes probably are different from mine, but we all have them. I, for example, grew up reading pulp stories and juvenile horror, and those tales loom large in my subconscious. I still love them, and their common archetypes and stereotypes—bold heroes, egomaniacal but cowardly villains, improbable situations, melodrama, and narrow escapes—always intrude into my ideas when I’m planning a new fantasy adventure or set of rules. That’s true regardless of the theme, tone, or setting. It’s just who I am. That doesn’t mean I only create pulp material. It just means a “pulp aesthetic” is always in my mind, whether it’s front and center or skulking on the sideline.

This is mostly a positive thing. Our influences and predilections help give each of us a unique voice when it comes to creating an RPG adventure, designing a rules supplement, or writing fiction. Readers enjoy getting a glimpse into the writer's mind as long as it's not too frightening a place.

After you've dipped into that same well of favorite ideas three, four, or a dozen times however, players and readers may start losing interest. Even you may start losing interest when you find yourself writing essentially the same ideas over and over.

If you're a GM, here's a good exercise to try: ask your players what themes, motifs, and events they've spotted multiple times in your adventures. Sometime when you're sitting around the (probably virtual) table before the game begins or after it's wrapped up for the session, ask for honest feedback on this. Don't debate, and for god's sake don't argue. Just listen. Asking questions is okay, but the point is to hear the players' opinions, not to give yours. And you're not looking for opinions on what you do right or wrong as a GM; that's an important but separate conversation. You just want to hear their answers to the question, "What are my tropes?" You might even raise the question at the end of one game session and ask players to bring their answers to the next session. People tend to come up with better insights when they have time to think.

If you're the type of GM who thinks about these things much, many of the answers shouldn't surprise you. But I'd be surprised if a few don't cause at least one of your eyebrows to arch upward.

There are two reasons why an answer could surprise you. Reason one is obvious: players mentioned something you're not even aware you do. This could be as trivial as all your bartender NPCs having Scottish accents or as detrimental to suspense as important NPC allies almost always turning out to be secret minions of the villain who betray the heroes just before the climactic scene. Reason two is

less obvious: players mentioned something you're aware of, but you didn't think you do it that often. Only you do, and they couldn't help but notice.

Let's get out of that rut.

It's Out of My Hands

A wonderful way to redirect your creativity into new paths is to take some of the decision-making out of your hands. This won't necessarily break old habits. It just short-circuits them or redirects around them; choose your own metaphor.

To accomplish that, all you need to do is make a few key decisions randomly.

For example, instead of making your top villain a dragon, make a list of a half-dozen other creatures that aren't dragons and let a d6 decide. Or if you simply must have a dragon, then instead of putting its lair in a mountainside cave, make a list of a half-dozen other locales—ruined abbey, abandoned quarry, flooded village, big-city sewer, monumental hypostyle, ash-choked forest—and let the die choose.

By letting fate decide, you're no longer in a position to let your preferences and favorite tropes steer the outcome. They're out of the decision loop.

My first serious encounter with this type of random decision-making occurred in the game *Skyrealms of Jorune*. *Jorune* is a unique setting for an RPG, created by writer Andrew Leker and illustrator Miles Teves. It combines elements of fantasy and science fiction, and it features a mix of PC and NPC races unlike those in any other game. The closest comparison might be to *Empire of the Petal Throne*. The two games take completely different approaches, but they're somewhat similar in atmosphere.

Skyrealms included tables to randomly generate encounters. Random tables for generating almost everything were common in the early years of RPGs. They produced more than just a type of creature and

whether it was friendly or hostile. They told you the type of creature, its background, what motivated the NPC to approach the characters, one or two quirks the NPC might display, and what's happening nearby that could affect the encounter.

I had a low opinion of such tables at the time (circa 1985), but everything else about Skyrealms impressed me, so I decided to give these a chance. On my first pass through, the tables spat out a bronth NPC (think of the bronth as a bear-man). Its quirk was "hates a race." Okay, my bronth is a racist. The table didn't specify which race it hated, so I rolled again on the race table and got... bronth.

At that point, my reaction was, "That makes no sense." My keen affection for Jorune wasn't diminished, but that result confirmed all the reasons why I disliked these kinds of tables in the first place. I skipped over that section of the book.

A few days later, in a conversation with a co-worker, he said something that completely changed my thinking on the subject. He said, "If it doesn't make sense, you haven't thought about it enough."

That simple statement is more profound than it sounds, so let me repeat it: *if it doesn't make sense, you haven't thought about it enough.*

The reason it's so profound is because that philosophy is one of the fundamentals of creativity. Creativity isn't just coming up with new images, ideas, or objects from whole cloth. It's also taking two or more ideas and exploring all the ways they can work together.

I dismissed the bronth-who-hates-bronth because it didn't instantly make sense to me. It didn't fit easily into any of the preexisting fantasy cubbyholes in my mind. It wasn't one of the familiar tropes I habitually fall back on.

I can't say why that co-worker's simple-seeming comment stuck in my mind so persistently, but I'm grateful it did. Shortly afterward, I was again perusing Skyrealms, and the ridiculous bronth came back to mind. *If it doesn't make sense, you haven't thought*

about it enough. It certainly didn't make sense, so I thought about it.

What if the bronth doesn't hate all bronth, it only hates itself? A self-loathing bronth...

That notion hit me like thunder. It was a concept I would never, ever have come up with for an NPC if left solely to my own ideas. And it would be a terrific character to roleplay as the GM. What fun I could have with an NPC like that!

My eyes were opened to vast possibilities in that moment.

I realized no one's creativity needed to be a prisoner to their own habits and patterns. The phrase "think outside the box" was gaining currency at that time. Here was a way you could literally force yourself to think along lines you'd never follow on your own.

The key—the piece of the puzzle that completes the picture—is, *If it doesn't make sense, you haven't thought about it enough.*

Designer Matt Finch wrote a massive collection of random tables called the *Tome of Adventure Design*. They're intended to aid the GM who wants to come up with more engaging adventure scenarios. It's over 300 pages of randomly selected jolts to the brain. In the introduction, Finch states that the point of incorporating randomness into your adventure writing is "to deliver cryptic results designed to shock the reader's creativity into filling in the gaps." So obviously, I'm not the only person to arrive at this realization.

Let me emphasize his use of the word "shock" in that passage. It's perfect. The moment when two, three, or more nonsensical, fragmentary, contradictory notions gel into a coherent and fresh idea is shocking. It's revelatory. It's magical. And it's inspiring.

Random, Not Senseless

Early RPG adventures often felt as if they were thrown together from random elements with no thought to why those creatures coexisted in the dungeon or how all those chests of gold

and magical items the monsters guarded got there in the first place. One of my friends related a story of how, as teens, he and his gaming group designed a dungeon that had a magically powered treasure generator hidden on the lowest level. Monsters traveled from their level of the dungeon down to the generator, picked up treasure, and hauled it back to their zone where they got locked into a chamber to guard it. If characters were stealthy enough to infiltrate into deep regions of the dungeon without being detected, they might actually see these treasure caravans on the move. Ambushing a treasure caravan as it marched through the corridors was the ultimate prize; it meant you could seize the valuables while they were relatively lightly guarded and before they were protected by room traps, curses, or entombed undead.

That approach to designing a dungeon was obviously meant to be ridiculous, but it was in reaction to some almost equally laughable and artificial “adventures” that people sold and played in the 1970s. Just to be clear, no one thought these types of things were any good. But novice roleplayers were desperate for anything, and a senseless, paint-by-numbers dungeon was better than no dungeon at all.

That sort of design is an example of random choices used poorly as a fill-in-the-blanks substitute for creativity and imagination. We’re after something much more: using random selections to spur creativity and broaden your imagination.

There’s no great secret or trick to doing it. The entire method really is summed in that phrase, *If it doesn’t make sense, you haven’t thought about it enough.*

Using random prompts in your scenario design requires making a commitment to seeing it through. Generating the prompts is fun and exciting. Figuring out how they fit together can be hard work. It can be frustrating. Sometimes it can seem downright impossible, that there’s no way to make sense of a particular combination, and if you ever

used it, you’d look like an idiot. You’ll want to abandon that assortment and start over or cherry-pick a few items that make more sense to you.

There’s a film from 2005 called “Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World,” starring Albert Brooks. It’s a mockumentary with Brooks playing himself as a comedian investigating what Muslims in Pakistan and India find funny. The movie didn’t fare well at the box office or in reviews. I liked it better than most reviewers did, but that’s neither here nor there.

One of the movie’s best scenes involves Brooks trying to do some improv in India. He uses the technique of asking the audience for suggestions: a place, a person, a situation, etc. Once he’s built the list of audience suggestions, he’s supposed to weave a comedy sketch on the spot from those components.

But when the list is done, Brooks starts making changes. The suggested person’s job isn’t funny enough, so he changes it to something else. The audience’s place doesn’t fit with the new job, so he changes that too. Before he’s even tried to turn the components into a story, Brooks has changed every element the audience suggested to better fit his notion of what would be funny.

Of course, that’s the joke right there. It’s all a bit that Brooks is trying out, but the style of humor is so foreign to the audience that no one even begins to get it. They all just think he’s not very good at improv.

Most people seem to think that scene is either hilarious or painfully stupid. I find it hilarious, but whichever side you fall on, it’s also a perfect illustration of exactly what you don’t want to do when building up a plot, an encounter, an NPC, or any other story element from random pieces. Remember the whole point of this approach is to break out of your habitual creative patterns. Rejecting an element because it “doesn’t fit” or because you just don’t like it undermines the goal and steers you right back into the same old ruts

you've traveled a dozen times before. That's how they got to be ruts in the first place.

Although this type of planning takes place outside the game session, it's constructive to think of it as no different from random results that occur during play. Once someone rolls dice to resolve an action, it's very bad form for the GM or the player to declare, "I don't like that outcome. Let's all pretend the roll was a 20 instead." If a die roll was called for, then its outcome should be respected.

No matter what the random elements turn out to be, stick to them! There is an answer, and you'll find it if you think about it enough.

That's Why, but How?

The simplest and most obvious answer to the question of how is with dice and a few tables.

The world of RPGs is filled with tools for exactly this type of exercise. We've already mentioned Matt Finch's *Tome of Adventure Design*. It truly is a tome with over 400 tables created specifically to goad your mind into fresh patterns. Don't expect to find a use for each and every one of them—they get a bit esoteric—but whatever you're looking for, you'll probably find a table that addresses it in this book.

Going back to the roots of RPGs, you'll find that every edition of the D&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* (except the 2nd Edition version—the one I worked on, ironically) includes an appendix with tables for randomly generating dungeon contents and layouts. The earliest version of the book also includes tools to randomly create wilderness terrain, monster encounters of every conceivable kind, demons and devils (not encounter lists but random generation of what they look like and what they can do), traps and tricks, dungeon dressing (lighting fixtures, furnishings, smells, sounds, etc.), herbs and medicines, magical substances, conjured and summoned creatures, and parties of NPC adventurers covering everything from their class, race, and level to

how they're equipped, what languages they speak, how pious, brave, and honest they are, and even their height and weight.

From that same period (the 1970s—the golden age of random tables if you're willing to consider that a thing) come two books from Judges Guild: *Wilderlands of High Fantasy* and *Ready Ref Sheets*.

Wilderlands is a pack of hex maps, displaying the Judges Guild campaign world. The maps portray the setting in broad strokes. Details about towns, villages, farms, ruins, and other adventure opportunities in each hex are left for the GM to fill in. To help with that, the accompanying book is crammed with tables for generating those details.

Ready Ref Sheets is a horse of an entirely different color. It's a grab bag and a celebration of all things random. A look at the table of contents gives a good idea of just how scattershot the entire book is. It starts with tables for determining the social rank of NPCs encountered in cities and proceeds through civic proclamations, trials and punishments, the usefulness of beggars, reasons why NPCs might attack, odd statues, quests PCs might be compelled to undertake if they're hit with a *geas* spell, features found in the wilderness (borrowed from *Wilderlands*), and types of plants by terrain, to name just a few samples. Possibly the oddest and most amusing table is NPC Cutups, which gives 48 social faux pas your NPC allies might commit to drag you into unexpected trouble. These run the gamut from accidentally tripping someone to sneezing on them, pushing them, making an off-color comment, or even barfing on someone. If you can't turn these magic beans into encounters, you're just not trying.

If you're looking at the bigger picture—coming up with the plot for an adventure, for example, rather than just an encounter with NPCs—many games and supplements cover that too. Setting books for the Savage Worlds game often include an "adventure generator" geared toward that book's specific

genre. Typically these consist of six to eight categories, each with a short table of possibilities. A die is rolled for each category. When the results are strung together, they provide the keywords to inspire a plot for a short adventure.

For example, the adventure generator in the supplement *Mars* from Adamant Entertainment uses six categories to determine the villain's identity, the villain's goal, a hook that draws PCs into the plot, the locales for important scenes (this table can be used more than once), the type of henchmen the villain employs, and one or several twists the characters and possibly even the villain didn't see coming. In contrast, *Beasts & Barbarians* by Umberto Pignatelli (published by Studio 2 Publishing, Inc.) uses eight categories: the primary setting, villain or chief adversary, nature of the conflict, reward for victory, a hook for the PCs, the overarching mood of the adventure, a plot twist, and the type of action that will define the climactic scene. Between those two examples, some categories are the same, others are similar, and a few are unique to each product.

The beauty of these adventure generators is that, while they're packaged in Savage Worlds games, nothing about them is tied exclusively to Savage Worlds rules or settings. The *Beasts & Barbarians* adventure generator would work just as well for D&D, Pathfinder, Dungeonslayers, 13th Age, Shadow of the Demon Lord, Dungeon World, Swords & Wizardry, Dungeon Crawl Classics, or whatever other fantasy RPG you prefer. It can be used for games set in Midgard, the Forgotten Realms, Golarion, Glorantha, Mystara, your own homebrew setting, or any other world.

They're also infinitely expandable and customizable. Even the simpler *Mars* adventure generator is capable of churning out over 80,000 unique plot threads, but if that isn't enough for you, it's easy to expand each table with a few new entries of your own.

Alternatively, you can keep the tables the same size but tailor the entries to reflect more of the character and atmosphere of your specific setting and campaign style. Just remember that building and modifying the tables is the easy part. Making sense of the results they generate is where the challenge lies. As always, *If it doesn't make sense, you haven't thought about it enough.*

Dice and tables aren't your only tools here either. Decks of cards are fantastic randomizers. Some decks exist for this specific purpose, such as the harrow deck from Paizo. It can be used similarly to a tarot deck to generate the bare-bones outline of an adventure by "foretelling its future." The tarokka deck from *Ravenloft* serves a similar but more thematically limited purpose.

For that matter, an actual tarot deck or even a standard deck of playing cards can be used to randomize almost anything. With customized tools for interpreting the results, a deck of cards can create story plots, generate NPCs, or form the layout of a dungeon, a building, or a city; I wrote about that idea in detail in the "Howling Tower" blog series at KoboldPress.com. A set of obscure products from publisher Better Games (1990) uses tarot cards and standard playing cards to generate long and impressively detailed fantasy and science fiction adventure plots with clear beginning, middle, and end phases, detailed NPCs, multiple events and locales, and setbacks and twists along the way. These are hard to find in their original printed versions, but they're still available as PDFs. The Better Games system takes considerably more effort than just rolling a few dice, but it produces inspiring and useful results.

The internet with its vast array of countless roleplaying blogs, vlogs, and podcasts, PDF repositories, retailers, and publisher's websites is a treasure trove of resources. Products that are long out of print, like the scenario generators from Better Games mentioned above or the older Judges Guild titles, can still

be had in PDF form at modest prices. Literally hundreds, if not thousands, of amateur game designers share their ideas and their creativity tools via blogs, videos, interactive web generators, and apps. Websites offer tools that can instantly spin up randomly assembled maps of dungeons, countrysides, cities, ruins, and spaceships in a variety of graphic styles.

Some of these tools not only generate entire dungeon layouts but fill them with monsters, traps, and treasure. These randomly diced-up “adventures” aren’t much better than the ones from the 1970s discussed at the beginning of this article, but remember our mantra: *if it doesn’t make sense, you haven’t thought about it enough*. As ready-to-play adventures, entirely random dungeons leave a lot to be desired. As foundations to support your own modifications and stories, they’re wonderful time-savers when you need a quick adventure for an evening or for a pickup game at a convention.

Two closely related resources deserve special mention here because they’re among my favorites: Risus Monkey’s *Dungeon Words* and *Wilder Words*. These are nothing but lists of words that are, or can be with some imagination, related to dungeon or wilderness settings. When you need a quick concept, you roll a few dice to select two or three words, mash them together, and see what ideas that inspires. You might, for example, get the words *ashes* and *warped*. You can ponder the combination for hours or treat it like an inkblot test and run with the first idea that pops into your head. For the sake of creativity, it’s best to respect the dice no matter what and remember, *If it doesn’t make sense, you haven’t thought about it enough*.

Finally, the vast image resources of the web are a whole other category of inspiration. If you’re thinking about a jungle adventure, type “fantastic jungle” into a search bar and filter for image results. Roll a d20 and pop that result into a new browser tab. Repeat with slightly different search terms, such

as “swamp ruins.” Use two or three images randomly selected from those searches the same way you’d use results from a table. Look for ways they synchronize with and amplify each other and ways they contradict each other and consider how they could become scenes in a story. You can lock them into a particular sequence or arrange them as you like. They can serve as general inspiration to you or they can be so specific that you show them to players during the adventure or the encounter.

These methods are geared toward the same end: breaking out of the habits and patterns that restrict creativity. We all have them, whether or not we’re aware of them. Even if we’re not aware, the friends, acquaintances, and possibly customers who play the adventures we write and who use the rules supplements we design probably are.

No matter how you arrive at your creativity prompts, the heart of the method is selecting two or more elements randomly and then searching for the means to link them coherently. It sounds simple, but linking two randomly selected ideas can be difficult. At the risk of nagging, we’ll state it one last time: *if it doesn’t make sense, you haven’t thought about it enough*.




REDTOWER

by Victoria Jaczko

The village of Redtower has grown somewhat since its days as Redleaf, adjusting to and even taking advantage of the new influx of adventurers, but it still has much of the same rustic, self-determined earnestness that it always had. Located on a tributary of the Templine River in southern Magdar between Peltzenheim and Schio, Redtower is an unremarkable logging settlement by itself but is better known as a launching point for adventuring expeditions into the infamous ruined castle and cave complex nearby—the Scarlet Citadel.

Approaching Redtower from the northwest goes through lowland prairie toward the White Forest where Redtower is nestled within the tree line. A wooden palisade surrounds most of the village with platforms and small watchtowers attached to the palisade at each entrance. On the far southeastern corner of the village, a curious redstone tower rises over the wall, itself connected to the wall via rampart. A small tributary of the Templine flows from the southwest to the northeast on the far side of the village.

Redtower's principal export is lumber, but the residents have adopted an entrepreneurial spirit around its status as an adventurers' destination. While many of the villagers are honest, pioneering people, it also houses plenty of opportunists, looking to take advantage of adventurers flush with coin. Redtower thrives off this sort of "adventure tourism," simultaneously warning travelers away from the Scarlet Citadel while peddling wares guaranteed to—supposedly—allow them to survive it. While predatory, these adventure peddlers are not lying about the dangers of the citadel: everyone in Redtower knows that few who venture into the citadel ever return.



Population: 550 humans, 25 riverfolk halflings, 10 dwarves, 5 elfmarked, and 10 of other races.

Government: Reeve Wislaw Broz leads Redtower by virtue of being supported by many of the village's most notable and wealthy citizens.

Defense: Constable Roch heads Redtower's law enforcement and defense with a small militia of 20 volunteers and the battlemage Kondrad of Runkelstad in reserve.

Commerce: Redtower's primary export is lumber, but it sustains itself on the patronage of adventurers.

Organizations: Temple of Rava.



Coming to Redtower

There are more than one reason why the party might venture to Redtower:

- The Scarlet Citadel is nearby and is a primary point of interest for adventurers visiting the village.
- Ley lines abound in the area, many weak and uncharted. Investigating these ley lines or the inert shadow gate nearby could be a reason for the party's interest.
- Goblins and bandits are common around Redtower, particularly along the roads where they harass traveling merchants. The party could be working to quell these attacks.

Locations in Redtower

The village of Redtower welcomes you.

R1. THE STABLES

Redtower's stables stretch along the northwest palisade just outside the front gate. They are of simple, sturdy construction but larger than typically needed for a settlement of Redtower's size due to the village's attraction to adventurers. At any given time, there are 1d6 of the village's adolescents (**commoners**) here, maintaining and cleaning the stables but mostly gossiping. If the party spends time here chatting, roll on the **Gossip Table**.

R2. MANOR HOUSE AND CONSTABLE

A cluster of stately buildings embraces travelers coming from the northwest into Redtower, of which the manor house is

the largest. It is built in a U-shape, facing east, made from sturdy wood-and-stone construction. Both the reeve and the constable have their offices here, larger and better furnished than either of them needs for a village of Redtower's size.

Reeve Wislaw Broz (**noble**) is often here and more than happy to receive visitors. He is a glib, rosy-cheeked human with a notable paunch under stylish clothing imported from Zobeck.

The Reeve's Authorization. If the party doesn't visit the manor house on their own, Wislaw sends them an invitation within a day of their arrival to Redtower. When they arrive, he's eager to make the acquaintance of these new adventurers in the village; he makes pleasant conversation, plies them with food and drink, and welcomes their expedition. He plays up the threat of the Scarlet Citadel and the dangers roaming the woods but assures them they're in the best place to get equipped to face it. He claims to be so impressed that he authorizes them to use his name at the local merchants for a "special" discount.

Dropping Wislaw's name among the merchants is actually a signal that the characters are promising marks, and the merchant raises their prices accordingly and gives the reeve a cut. Raise the cost of goods and services by 10% whenever the PCs use the reeve's name; if they inquire, merchants explain that demand is too high in Redtower, and without the reeve's go-ahead, prices would be higher. Otherwise, goods and services are priced as normal.

The only merchant who doesn't respond to the reeve's authorization is the smith, Agnieszka (**R8**), who scoffs if he is mentioned and doesn't alter her price from the standard.

The other wing of the manor house rests the constabulary. Constable Roch is a suspicious and taciturn middle-aged human who constantly smells like smoke from his frequent pipe use. He has little to say to the party, preferring to watch for adventurers

who slip up in the village for him to arrest. (See "Arrested" in the **Random Social Encounter Table**).

R3. RUINED TEMPLE OF KHORS

Between the Cage Tavern (**R4**) and manor house (**R2**) is a prominent landmark in the village's center: a disused temple of Khors. The octagonal walls of the temple remain strong as do the stoic-faced knightly statues flanking the doors on the temple's northwest face. Once inside, the temple's neglect is obvious: the elements have partially eroded the roof, leading to a section of collapse just beyond the door. Despite the added debris, the stone pews and large frescoes inside the temple are mostly intact as is the altar standing at the southeast wall. The temple sits on a large patch of cleared, flat land intended for use as a training ground, but nature is reclaiming it with patches of grass and wildflowers.

There hasn't been a priest in residence at the temple in decades, so its upkeep has waned. Nonetheless, some faithful still attend on high holy days, and the temple has, for the most part, been shown respect, but some of the walls have evidence of stone taken for use elsewhere in Redtower.

R4. THE CAGE TAVERN & INN

The Cage is the most visibly imposing structure upon entering Redtower by virtue of its unique construction and namesake: a row of curved bones, much like some massive ribcage, protrude from the ground in a corridor to the tavern's southern-facing wall and side entrance. The last few ribs are incorporated into the inn's construction, acting as supporting rafters visible on the inside of the building. The rest of the Cage's construction is eclectic with the older parts of the inn—the space immediately connected to the enormous ribcage—of the wood-and-stone construction typical of the region but with newer elements showing more distant touches: sweeping iron gables



from Zobeck, a dwarven-style hearth from the Ironcrag, Perunalian motifs in the columns, and so on.

Considering Redtower's small size and populace, the Cage is surprisingly full-featured: it boasts several rooms from comfortable to aristocratic in quality, though it has only one aristocratic suite. Owing to its adventurous—and often wealthy—patronage, travelers can find lodgings and fare suitable for up to a wealthy lifestyle.

The Cage's name—and unique construction element—supposedly dates back to the village's earliest days as Redleaf when the proprietors' ancestors, Milena and Henrik Gjorski, slew a mighty giant on the spot the

inn now rests. The toll of the fight would mean the end of their adventuring career, but they returned to this site of their last great battle to retire. They found the giant withered and scavenged to little more than a massive ribcage and decided to build an inn around it, preserving it as their final—and biggest—trophy.

This story is told and retold on command by their descendants, sister and brother Ariadna and Ambrozy Gjorski. They are adventurers of a sort (human **scouts**), as most of their family has been, but found they prefer the company of adventurers more than the escapade itself. The family business continues to appeal to adventuring types as



evidenced by the monster-hunting trophies on the walls—the stories of which erupt if anyone asks about them—and the *very* sturdy construction of the tables and chairs.

The Cage is the best place in the village to gather gossip. Every hour spent carousing here allows two rolls on the **Gossip Table**, at least until it gets too late for the locals.

R5. WAREHOUSES

Behind the Cage Tavern (R4) is a row of three long warehouses, only populated during prime trading seasons and otherwise only accessed for stored foodstuffs.

R6. SWEET SAP BREWERY

Next door to the tavern, an enterprising, happily drunk riverfolk commoner couple—Remy Argentford and Mags Halfbottle—run the local brewery. Casks of Sweet Sap brews have reached as far as Peltzenheim, but true success eludes them. The pair arrived in Redtower as boat workers, wound up overdrinking at the Cage with some adventurers, and missed their boat to leave. Deciding to put their vice to good use, the two brewed up some concoctions that won over visiting adventurers and took over the brewery, naming it the Sweet Sap. Not being forest folk, they insist the name was a nod to Redtower's livelihood and nothing to do with

the ingredients. As their savings grow, they've sent for more of their kin, and now there's barely a halfling in the village that isn't related to them somehow.

R7. LUMBER MILL

The mill is on the far eastern side of Redtower, up against the Templine River where logs go downriver on barges. The huge waterwheel powering the sawmill churns on the river's edge and fills the area with enough racket to impose disadvantage on sound-based Perception checks. Away from the riverbank, a long building is used for processing timber, and north of that is a lumber yard stacked with logs.

R8. SMITHY

The local smith, Agniezka, is a stocky woman in her fifties from Cronepisht where she once maintained and traveled on Magdar war wagons in battle against the Dragon Empire. Her arms are thick and covered in scars—some from the forge but many from her experience in war. She ended up in Redtower after retiring, thinking it would be somewhere quiet to practice her trade for adventurers that would appreciate her skill. While the latter is true, Redtower turned out to be more dramatic and beset with difficulties than she imagined, a fact she grumbles about regularly.

Agniezka's shop is function over form, littered with tools and scrap metal she's argued over with the Rava priestesses. She's most often at her forge, busy with commissions or perfecting her own style.

Agniezka dislikes getting involved with the village drama, but a skilled character could impress her with a DC 10 Intelligence (artisan's tools) check if related to blacksmithing or a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If successful, she cautions them about the charlatans in the village—and suggests, if they tried dropping the reeve's name for a discount, to not.

R9. FURRIER AND TANNER

A series of buildings set against the edge of the forest just up a trail off the southeast road is home to the furrier and tanner, Witek, and his hapless apprentice, Hubert. The main building has an awning adorned with tokens and charms, and an outbuilding with an unbearable stench contains Witek's tools and tanning chemicals.

Witek is a superstitious human **commoner** fond of protection and luck charms; he'll offer to sell characters one of the rabbit's feet he makes for $2d4 + 2$ gp each.

R10. THE RED TOWER

South of Agniezka's smithy (**R8**), past the gate over the southeast road, a squat stone tower sits on a little hillock where it connects to the village's timber palisade. It is a defensive fortification but also the village's namesake: the stones of the tower are somewhat faded but still a deep crimson. Even Ariadna and Ambrozy at the Cage don't know how the tower was constructed. Theories and rumors abound however and can be heard on the **Gossip Table**.

R11. TEMPLE OF RAVA

The temple of the Gear Goddess is an odd, circular building in the southeast of the village. Eight double windows protrude at even spaces around the temple, and its center is a small clearing, giving it a cog-like appearance from above. The building itself is a blend of wood and stone construction that, unlike the temple of Khors, has been well maintained. Reaching the temple of Rava from the road requires wading through a collection the Spinner's "sacred" scrap: broken things, metal bits, and discarded items are given places of honor here.

The interior of the temple opens into a large chamber that circles to the left and right. An archway ahead leads into the courtyard, containing an altar and doorways to the temple's looms and quarters. Junk, again, is given a place of honor along the walls and

shelves alongside masterfully created tapestries of spiders, clockworks, and gears.

Cecylia, a human **priest**, and Norneth, an elfmarked **spy**, maintain the temple. Cecylia handles any questions and duties of the temple while Norneth is a fresh acolyte who brings her stealth skills to the temple; originally from Dornig, Norneth left under some unmentioned disgrace. Cecylia is helpful but serious and studious; she prefers to devote her attention to her work and goddess. Norneth does not speak to the party unless spoken to and occupies herself evaluating the temple's latest junk arrivals.

A perceptive character succeeding at a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices her surreptitiously studying them—or more precisely their equipment. When adventurers fail to return to Redtower, Norneth is the one who scavenges whatever remains. If confronted, she blithely plays off her interest and tells them they need better gear to survive the citadel and invokes Rava to bless them.

Cecylia will cast spells for the party at a fee of 50 gp per level of the spell and sells scrolls for triple the cost of the charge to cast it. She also offers to buy any interesting “junk” the party recovers from the Scarlet Citadel. Cecylia offers 2d4 gp for any unusual scrap or trinkets the party brings back, but truly exotic material could fetch up to 50–100 gp.

R12. KONRAD'S HOME

This L-shaped home sprawls over a generous lot next to the southwest road out of Redtower. Flourishes adorn the joints and arches of the house's doors and windows in spiraling, arcane motifs, and a crown of silvery wands surmount the home's prow-shaped roof. The home beyond those luxurious, glass-paned doors has five rooms on the bottom and a staircase to a second-floor loft with a study and bedroom.

Konrad of Runkelstad lives here, a retired battlemage who made a tidy fortune first in service to his kingdom and then as a mercenary (human **mage**). His last

assignment came from a group of noble thrill seekers from Cronepisht, looking to conquer the Scarlet Citadel; some sinister trap unleashed waves of undead on them before they made it far, and Konrad barely escaped with his own life—and what treasures they'd found before the end. He chose a long life against an adventurous one and settled in Redtower, pursuing the entrepreneurial opportunity he saw in appealing to an adventurer's greed for power.

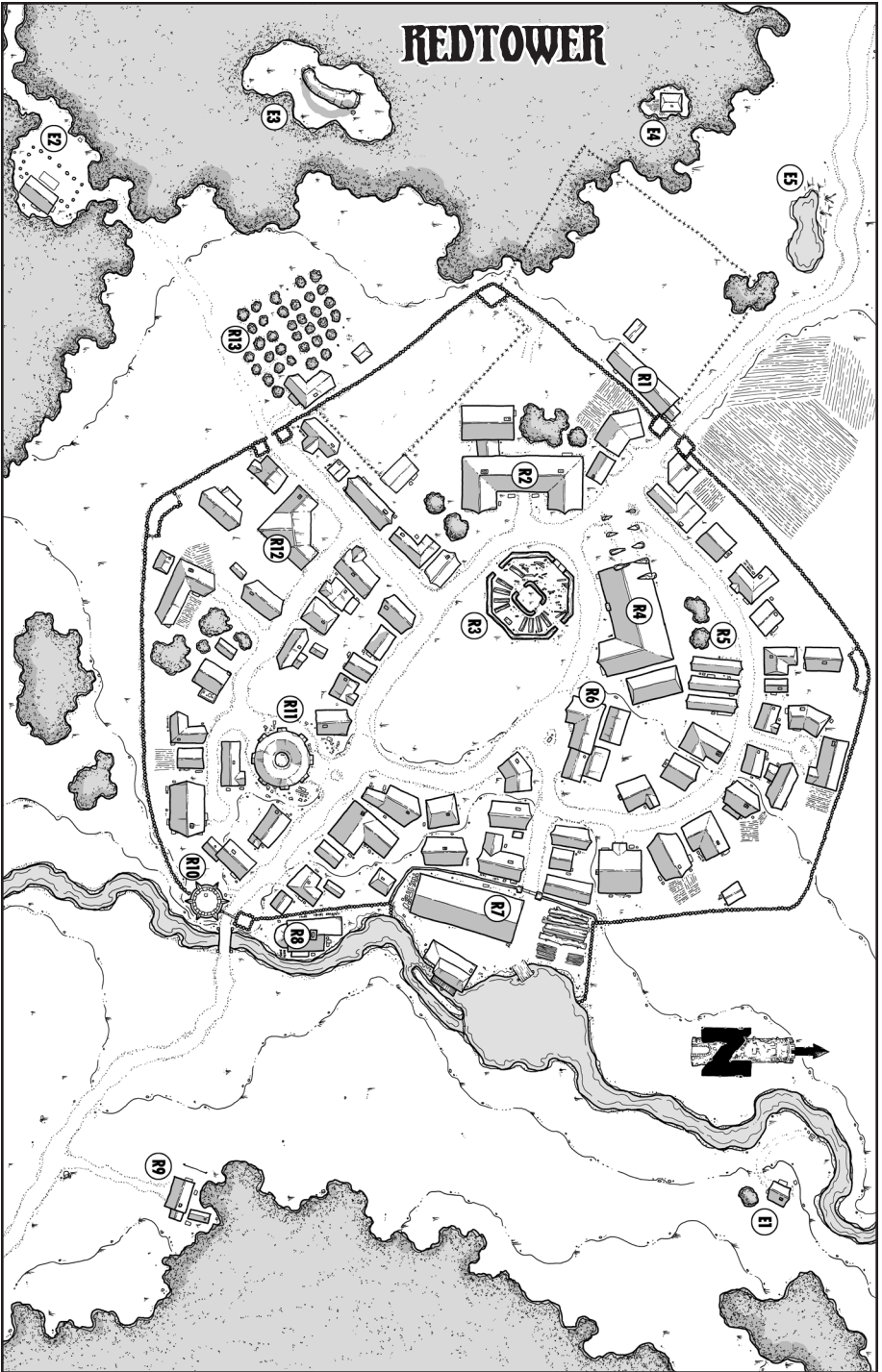
He keeps to himself, paying for his privacy with the good graces he's purchased from the reeve. On occasion, he'll send personal invitations to new adventurers in the village—or welcome them if they come to visit of their own accord—and sweep them into his parlor. The large room is decorated with fine couches and surfaces bearing a wealth of trinkets he has made or acquired in his career. Dominating the room is a massive painting, depicting the towers of Runkelstad, which something characters can't miss wherever they sit in the room.

If the characters visit Konrad on their own, initiate the “battlemage bargain” encounter from the **Random Social Encounter Table**.

R13. ORCHARD

Redtower's orchard is just outside the southwest wall, consisting of several neat, well-maintained rows of apple trees surrounded by protective hedgerows. A small house and storage shed nestle close to the wall where Cibor and Eva live with their son, Gabe. They maintain the orchards and hedges and, in the winter, produce cider with the Sweet Sap Brewery (R6).

Cibor seldom goes into the village, preferring to stay around the orchard or venture into the forest outskirts to gather food and visit with the alseids at the temple to Yarila and Porevit nearby (see E2 under “Beyond Redtower”). His wife and son however are more social: Eva is often one of the forces behind Redtower's festive gatherings, and Gabe is something of a leader to the adolescents in the village.



Eva doesn't hesitate to welcome in the party if they visit and treats them with ciders, apple pies, and nosy questions. She is an excellent source of gossip about Redtower; whenever the PCs spend at least an hour visiting Eva, roll twice on the **Gossip Table**, limiting the rumors to locals only. Of course, being the village's greatest gossip, anything told to Eva is spread around the village within a day or two.

Gabe's Nightmares. With a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party notices Gabe lurking about the orchard. He's alone and rubbing his temples, muttering to himself. If they engage him, he plays it off with a confident, teenage swagger as nothing being wrong, but a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals he's exhausted. If pressed, he admits he went to the arch at the lifeless clearing (see E3 in "Beyond Redtower") and spent the night there on a dare; he'd done it a year ago and nothing happened, but this time, he had awful nightmares, and he hasn't slept well since. He begs the party not to tell his parents since he's not supposed to be going there.

SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS AROUND REDTOWER

Adventurers are a source of excitement in Redtower, drawing the attention of those hoping to profit from them or those who could use their help. Check for a random social encounter once per day when the PCs are in Redtower.

RANDOM SOCIAL ENCOUNTER TABLE

| d8 | ENCOUNTER |
|----|----------------------|
| 1 | no encounter |
| 2 | ailing villager |
| 3 | argument |
| 4 | arrested |
| 5 | battlemage's bargain |
| 6 | brewery sample |
| 7 | contest |
| 8 | stuck travelers |

Ailing Villager. A villager, most likely a woodsman, hunter, or trader, has fallen victim to tainted food or water or one of several mundane toxins in the environs. Suffering obvious effects, the villager stumbles into the party. A DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check is enough to diagnose and treat the malady. If the party does so or pays to have them treated at Rava's temple (R11), they are warned about one of the hazards around Redtower. Roll on the **Terrain Encounter Table** to determine which hazard the villager knows about; if the party encounters that hazard in the future, they have advantage on rolls to notice or avoid it.

Argument. The party witnesses an argument happening in the street between villagers, merchants, or even a different adventuring band threatening to split up. They don't have to get involved, but if they do, have them make a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to mediate the situation. On a success, they win over some of the villagers who then spread the word for merchants to stop fleecing the party. This won't end all predatory behavior, but merchants won't charge the party more than standard prices anymore.

Arrested. When this encounter is rolled, see if any of the characters are unconscious or very inebriated outside an inn room or have been involved in an argument, altercation, or other activity that Constable Roch can construe as "disturbing the peace." If not, reroll the encounter. Otherwise, the constable has the offending character arrested; if they were unconscious or inebriated, they wake up in the jail cell attached to the manor house but are "generously" offered release if they pay a 25 gp fine. For other transgressions, they get the option to spend the night in jail or pay the fine there.

Battlemage's Bargain. An invitation to Konrad's home (R12) always results in food, drink, being regaled by Konrad's memories of military service and mercenary adventuring—

and a sales pitch to buy one of his “treasures.” Konrad dabbles in magic item creation in his spare time now and loves offloading them onto adventurers since they are—not that he tells them—imperfect. The first time the party visits Konrad and every time this encounter occurs thereafter, he has a new “treasure” he offers them: either choose or randomly determine uncommon magic items. The result is what Konrad *claims* the item is, and he charges 100 gp. He’ll allow the party to haggle him down as much as 50% with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, letting them feel like they got the better end.

Every item he sells is faulty: the item fails after 1d4 uses, the enchantment on it fading (if the item was a container, it ejects anything that was in it) and the item reverts to a mundane object, and additionally decrease any numeric-based effects of the item by half. Konrad doesn’t expect the party to survive future encounters long enough to complain to him, but if they do, he feigns surprise at any item’s faultiness and acts contrite, claiming he needs perhaps to refine his enchanting skills—but no *other* adventurers had complained (being dead and all).

Brewery Sample. Remy and Mags are standing outside the Sweet Sap Brewery (R6), offering samples of their newest concoction. The characters can choose to try it. If any do, they must succeed a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain the poisoned condition for 1 minute from the faulty brew. Otherwise, the brew tastes awful but has no ill effects. The halflings are embarrassed and give the party 1d4 gp for the trouble. If any of the characters agree to try the sample again the next time they receive this encounter, the brew works and is delicious—the grateful halflings allow the characters to name the new drink.

Contest. Some sort of competition erupts at the Cage (R4) and everyone is invited. Whether darts, knife juggling, or guessing where the monster trophies on the wall came from, there’s drink and food flowing

and gold to be won. The type of competition determines the check, such as Dexterity (Acrobatics) for darts or Intelligence (Nature) to guess the monsters. Set the DC to a moderate difficulty, 14–16; the character wins 1d6 gp for every point the DC is exceeded. If more than one PC is competing, the highest of the successful results wins the entire pot.

Stuck Travelers. A few travelers come into the village, distressed their cart got stuck in the muck when it came too close to the swampy pond to the north (E5). Rescuing the cart could require pushing it out of the muck with brute force or using ropes or animals to pull it clear. It is a DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check with brute force alone, but the party can reduce the DC by 1 for each additional measure they take to make it easier. If they succeed, the grateful travelers give the group 1d10 + 3 gp. If this encounter is rolled again, the circumstances can change: a trader cart ready to leave breaks a wheel or a storm rolls in that gets a wagon stuck outside.

Gossip

Gathering village gossip not only allows the party to get familiar with Redtower and its occupants but also to be forewarned about some of the dangers awaiting them.

Beyond Redtower

Outside of Redtower, the tame prairie grasslands to the northwest give way to the thick woodland of the White Forest to the south of the settlement. A tributary of the Templine River feeds the village, and the road southeast out of the village leads to the Scarlet Citadel deeper within the woods.

Although Redtower has carved out a niche of relative safety on the borders of the White Forest, the area is plenty dangerous even without the citadel. The flora and fauna here are changed by the influence of magic and Gellert the Gruesome, and some mysteries here might be better left buried.

d8 RUMOR

- 1–5 Give the characters some gossip about a random villager: choose or randomly determine which person the party gains a bit of information about.
- 6 There's a witch in the woods nearby who sells potions and healing remedies, but no one in the village likes to visit her. While she acts friendly, the dead animals on her porch are very off-putting.
- 7 There's an old man living by himself on the outskirts of the village. Sometimes he comes screaming into the village when an owlbear knocks down his hut again, but for the most part, he seems to dislike everybody.
- 8 Gellert the Gruesome has a small army of monsters and bandits at his command, and they roam the woods and roads looking for easy marks. Redtower rarely comes under attack, but travelers aren't so lucky.
- 9 Alseids (see *Tome of Beasts*) tend to the temple of Yarila and Porevit outside of the village, near the orchard. Only Cibor talks to them much, but the produce he brings back from trading with them is enormous.
- 10 Constable Roch is suspicious of adventurers, and it's best not to get caught being drunk or difficult around the village.
- 11 The red tower (**R10**) was made from the bones and teeth of the fallen giant that Milena and Henrik slew, and his blood soaked the stones placed there forever.
- 12 Each time an adventurer perishes in the Scarlet Citadel, an unknown artist slips out by nightfall and paints a stone red at the red tower (**R10**) in their honor. Over time, the stones of the tower have been painted red many, many times.
- 13 The stones to build the red tower (**R10**) came from the ruins submerged beneath the pond to the north. Before they were covered in water and moss, there was a property to them that makes them red—possibly even some strange magical energy protecting them from the ravages of time.
- 14–15 Give the party information to warn them of one of the villagers who will try to take advantage of them. Either choose or randomly determine who they are warned about: Reeve Broz, Constable Roch, Konrad, Witek, Eva, or the merchants.
- 16–19 The party gets warning about one of the hazards from the **Terrain Encounter Table**. Randomly determine which one they hear about; if that hazard is encountered, they receive advantage on rolls to spot or avoid it.
- 20 The party is alerted to the existence of the lifeless clearing in **E2** and the suspicion that Gabe from the orchard (**R12**) snuck out there recently and has been acting strangely since. Additionally, Gellert's henchmen have been spotted in the area more often.

The looming presence of the citadel itself also can't be ignored as Gellert's henchmen and experiments do not always stay contained.

The area around Redtower can be a place for adventure all on its own, though many of the locales and encounters point to the Scarlet Citadel for further exploration.

E1. TOBIASZ'S HUT

A small hut cobbled together from loose stone and reclaimed wood perches on the opposite side of the riverbank northeast of Redtower. The hut looks like it's been knocked down and rebuilt multiple times, evidenced by the scattering of half-buried debris around it. On the south side of the hut is a large, gnarled tree

with a sturdy, covered platform nestled in its branches. It is of much better construction than the hut below.

This is the home of Tobiasz, an elderly human **commoner** hermit that once lived in Redtower but grew horrified by the complicity of the villagers in letting adventurers run to their slaughter in the Scarlet Citadel. He takes it upon himself now to warn people away, which is why he hasn't left yet; he goes into Redtower only for supplies and to shame the villagers and otherwise spends his time writing letters to Queen Dorytta to bring an army to raze the citadel once and for all. Tobiasz's trade is carpentry, and he built both the hut and tree stand, which is where he

flees to when monsters inevitably attack. The hut on the other hand has been ransacked so much he only bothers with "good enough."

The party may sometimes run into Tobiasz shouting for help from a monster attack and in need of rescue. See "Tobiasz the Hermit" under the **Creature Encounter Table**.

E2. YARILA AND POREVIT TEMPLE

Set in a small clearing in the woods southwest of Redtower is an airy temple to the Twin Gods, Yarila and Porevit, Mother Field and Father Harvest. The temple itself is a roomy structure with few walls and has archways instead of doors. The roof supports come from wooden posts wrapped in ivy and vines,



most of them in perpetual bloom. An altar to the Twin Gods is set before the temple structure, an elevated stone block skirted by flowers and bountiful fruits and vegetables. In a rectangular periphery around the altar is a “fence” of stakes in the ground, marking growth stands of tomatoes, berries, grapes, and other seasonal crops.

A group of four alseid **druids**, Synnana, Bellenor, Ammanis, and Kashyna, maintain the temple here and are friendly to visitors. They do most of their business with Redtower through Cibor of the orchard (**R12**) but are glad to trade. If the party is friendly, the alseids allow them to rest at the temple whenever they wish, safe from harm; while they are aware of the forest’s hazards, hostile creatures don’t trouble them here, and they do not seek them out. Camping here does not prompt a random encounter check.

E3. THE LIFELESS CLEARING

A bizarre little clearing west of Redtower has a prominent place in local lore, primarily among the village’s children as the place they should not go, but a rite of passage among Redtower adolescents is to spend the night here.

The clearing is abrupt, cutting into the surrounding trees as though the edge of the woods reached an invisible line. Nothing grows in the clearing. Birdsong and insect chittering are silenced, and no living animal willingly crosses into it. Mounts and animal companions must be coerced with a DC 13 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to enter the clearing where they remain nervous and ill-at-ease.

The focal point of the clearing is a weather-worn stone arch, lopsided and half-sunk into the ground, its engravings faded with the passing of eras. A withered black vine winds around both sides of the arch, never blooming but neither never crumbling. The vines are unyielding and cold as iron when touched, and the stone itself imparts such a frigid sensation that, even in the hottest summers, the chill to the skin lingers for hours.

The strange arch once led to a shadow road that fed into the greater White Road nearby. At some point, the connection collapsed, and the arch went dormant. Recently, however, the archway has been showing signs of life, prompting interest from others in the region.

Roll a d6 when the party enters this area: on a 1–4, it is empty, and on a 5–6, they find 1d4 + 1 **bandits** serving Gellert the Gruesome, investigating the arch and complaining about their orders.

The bandits tell the party to go away and mind their own business. They attack if the characters don’t comply.

If questioned, the bandits can’t answer much about the archway. Orders came down to check the clearing and see if anyone else was looking into it and make sure they stopped—permanently. They don’t know why there’s any interest as it’s supposed to have been dormant for decades if not centuries.

If the party lingers in the clearing long enough, they’ll notice at sunset and at midnight the arch’s engravings will briefly glow with pale blue light and fade erratically with a slight scent of electricity left behind in the air. Nothing else happens, and no detections or investigations reveal anything further.

Besides the unnatural coldness to the stone and the scheduled flare-ups of energy, nothing else happens in the clearing. Characters who sleep here however are afflicted with nightmares of a shadowy, desolate wasteland. If they don’t succeed at a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, they wake up with a level of exhaustion.

E4. ZULA’S COTTAGE

No path leads to Zula’s cottage in the woods near the northwestern road into Redtower. The party might stumble into her cottage clearing or perhaps notice the trail of hearth smoke above the trees. Villagers in Redtower can also direct the PCs to her, though they seldom discuss her; no one visits Zula unless they need special potions or healing and the Rava temple’s fees are too steep.



The cottage is small, even quaint looking, with a white-painted porch and balustrade, walls and roof in good repair, and patches of bright wildflowers growing around it. The effect is diminished by the bodies of small animals dangling from the porch awning, ready to be gutted for entrail reading.

The witch, Zula (human **priest**), has a mutually beneficial arrangement with Gellert the Gruesome: in exchange for occasional deliveries of unusual reagents for use in her potion-making experiments, Zula uses her magic to contact Gellert about any unusual

news in or around Redtower, including things like the arrival of new adventurers.

She does not have any personal stake in working with Gellert; she simply has flexible ethics when it comes to pursuing her research and livelihood. Zula is a cheerful, rosy-cheeked, wizened old woman constantly puttering about her cottage, and she offers the party slightly discounted (10%) *potions of healing* and access to her limited repertoire of healing magic in exchange for any news from the village.

ES. THE SUNKEN POND

Just south of the northwest road into Redtower is a large depression, sunken and filled with brackish water, the corpses of a few bare trees, and thriving colonies of fungi, weeds, and insects.

Beneath the algal muck, moss-covered stones protrude from the water, resembling the corners and angles of what might have been a stone structure at one time. Any carvings are long worn away, however, leaving just the shell of a large structure buried beneath the water.

The edges of the pond provide good harvesting for peat, planting soil, and certain plants and mushrooms, but it's hazardous as well. Immersion in the pond requires an immediate DC 12 Constitution saving throw to avoid developing an itchy, red rash and taking a level of exhaustion within the hour. A short rest alleviates the rash as does any effect that removes poison or a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

Under close inspection, the stones have a notable crimson hue beneath the moss. Touching the moss encrusts it on the investigating character's skin, the spores attempting to take root within the character's body, inflicting 1 (1d3) poison damage every

hour until a successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw is made. The spores can also be removed via a remove poison effect or a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check.

Random Encounters

Each day the party spends exploring the outskirts of Redtower, check to see if they encounter anything unusual. If they make camp or take a long rest in the outskirts, unless they are in a safe location like the temple to Yarila and Porevit, make another check while they are resting. Characters might encounter special terrain, one or more creatures, or a combination of the two.

A random encounter while PCs are camped is automatically a creature encounter.

RANDOM SOCIAL ENCOUNTER TABLE

| d20 | ENCOUNTER |
|-------|--|
| 1–13 | no encounter |
| 14–15 | terrain (roll once on the Terrain Encounter Table) |
| 16–17 | one or more creatures (roll once on the Creature Encounter Table) |
| 18–20 | terrain encounter featuring one or more creatures (roll once on the Terrain Encounter Table and once on the Creature Encounter Table) |

CREATURE ENCOUNTER TABLE

| d12 + d8 | ENCOUNTER |
|----------|---|
| 2–4 | corpse with swarm of insects (reroll if the party is camped) |
| 5–7 | 1d4 + 1 giant centipedes |
| 8–10 | 1d3 + 1 human commoners |
| 11–12 | 1d6 goblins |
| 13–14 | 1d4 bandits |
| 15 | Tobiasz the hermit |
| 16–17 | 1d6 + 1 wolves |
| 18 | 1d3 bandits with bandit captain |
| 19 | 1 gargoyle |
| 20 | 1 owlbear |

Creature Encounters

Keep the party's level in mind when fleshing out these encounters. Characters should be able to retreat from or avoid an encounter that is too difficult, even if at some sort of cost (abandoning supplies in camp for example).

Corpse with Swarm of Insects. The party stumbles across a dead body left in the wilderness. Identity and cause of death are impossible to determine as it has been ravaged by elements and scavengers. It's easy to hear the buzzing of insects around it, but only a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the rippling bulges and swelling of a swarm inside the cadaver.

A swarm of insects explodes out of the body as soon as a creature comes within 5 feet, and the swarm makes a surprise attack against the closest target unless they succeeded on the Perception check.

There isn't much left to gather from the body, but a search of the area turns up 5d10 gp worth of coin and goods.

Giant Centipedes. The ley lines also have a bolstering effect on some local fauna, including these centipedes. They are hungrily consuming anything in its path, including the party when they come across them.

Human Commoners. The party comes across a small group of local woodsmen or hunters. If friendly, they're willing to share a camp for a rest; if the party accepts, don't check for a random encounter during that rest. They'll also warn the party of an area of the woods where things can be treacherous from sinkholes, tree falls, or poisonous plants. The next time the party would roll on the **Terrain Encounter Table**, it is negated.

Goblins. This small band of goblins proudly—or fearfully—serves Gellert the Gruesome. They wear his sigil, torn and tattered, on their flimsy armor. They are one of his patrols in the woods and attempt to kill anything that might be threatening, which to a goblin includes most things.

Bandits. These bandits also serve Gellert the Gruesome, though they operate with more independence than his monsters. They simply have a lucrative deal robbing traders and foolhardy adventurers and only occasionally needing to follow Gellert's orders. They are used to running the forest and decide everything the party has is rightfully theirs. The bandit groups can also be encountered being led by a bandit captain, notably tougher and getting orders more directly from Gellert.

Tobiasz the Hermit. This encounter occurs around sundown or at night. Tobiasz (E1) runs into the party, wild-eyed and shouting about an owlbear, and points frantically in the direction of his hut. If the party has this encounter while already near his hut, he instead shouts for help from his tree stand.

An **owlbear** is in the process of knocking down Tobiasz's home, sniffing for food. It reacts slowly to the party's presence, giving them a surprise round, but then it lumbers to attack them. If the battle is going poorly, Tobiasz shouts for them to climb the tree with him; there is no check needed to scale it, but only one character can go at a time. The stand has enough room for four Medium-sized creatures close together, and the other branches can hold up to two more. After a few rounds of growling and sniffing at the tree, the owlbear moves off into the woods in search of an easier meal.

He is grateful to the party for rescuing him but resigns himself to the knowledge it will happen again. Nonetheless, he sets right to rebuilding. If the party talks to him or helps him set up his hut, he can tell them a great deal about the creatures in the woods. The party gains advantage on their attack rolls during their next encounter from the **Creature Encounter Table**. Unfortunately for Tobiasz, this encounter can occur multiple times, requiring him to go running for help again.

Wolves. This pack of wolves has had its game run off by larger predators in the forest lately and hungrily eyes the party. The wolves

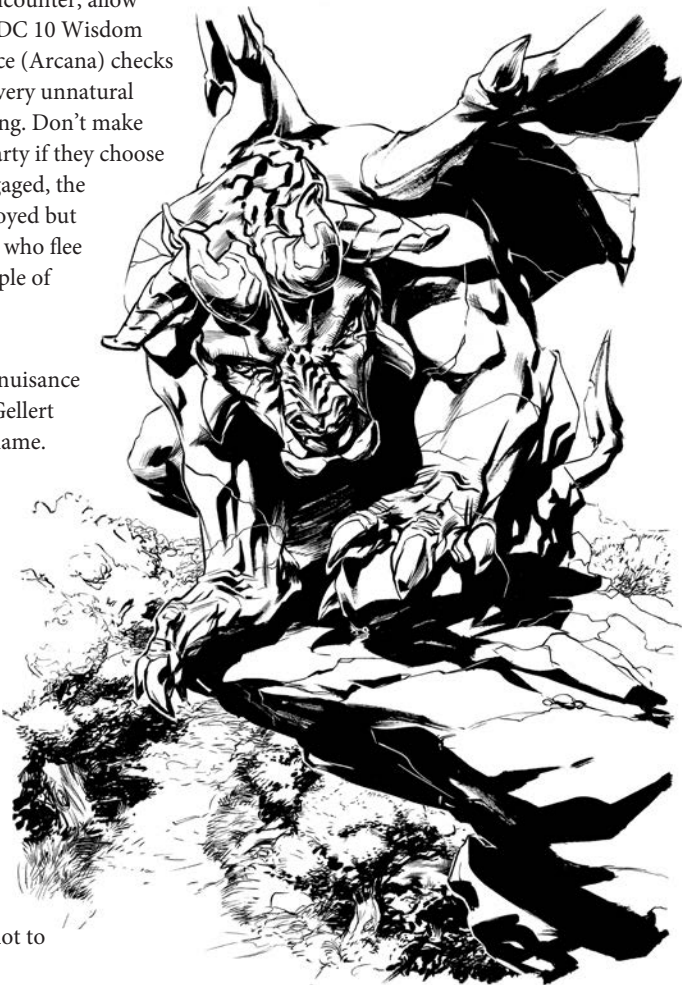
prefer to attack the party while at rest and attempt to stalk them to strike when they let their guard down.

Gargoyle. One of Gellert the Gruesome's creations, this **gargoyle** has wandered out of the Scarlet Citadel after a dry spell of interlopers to destroy, and now it roams the woods, seeking to slaughter anything that draws close to the citadel. When it thinks it is near people, the gargoyle will use its False Appearance ability to resemble a statue and encourage the party to come investigate it before it surprises them by attacking. If this would be a difficult encounter, allow the characters to attempt DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Arcana) checks to notice the statue looks very unnatural and gives them a bad feeling. Don't make the gargoyle pursue the party if they choose not to investigate it. If engaged, the gargoyle fights until destroyed but will not pursue characters who flee to Redtower or to the temple of Yarila and Porevit.

Owlbear. Owlbears are a persistent and dangerous nuisance in the White Forest, and Gellert the Gruesome bears the blame. Encounters with owlbears mostly happen at night when they hunt, and their hoots and screeches make them heard long before they are seen and can serve as a warning for the party to leave the area. Owlbears are relatively simple creatures as well, and the party might be able to draw it away or placate it with food to make it leave them alone should they prefer not to confront it.

Terrain Encounters

This area of the White Forest is home to some unusual terrain and hazards, potentially influenced by the nearby ley lines or perhaps the arcane experimentation overflowing into the environment from the Scarlet Citadel. Special terrain rules are explained after the table. If the party received warning of particular encounters from villagers in Redtower, they gain advantage on their rolls to spot, identify, or avoid the negative effects for that encounter.



TERRAIN ENCOUNTER TABLE

| d20 | ENCOUNTER |
|-------|----------------|
| 1-3 | briar growth |
| 4-6 | hidden cache |
| 7-8 | shelter |
| 9-11 | sinkhole |
| 12-13 | tangled canopy |
| 14-17 | toxic flora |
| 18 | tree fall |
| 19-20 | wild mists |

Briar Growth. The bountiful magical energy in some areas of the forest have resulted in overgrown briar walls, blocking access to parts of the woods. Noticing the briar growths is easy: these walls can be several hundred feet wide, growing around trees and brush, and up to 3d10 feet thick. The party can move around them, but doing so adds 1d4 hours to their travel time toward a destination. Attempting to navigate the massive briars is difficult: reduce speed to a quarter of normal movement, and every square of movement requires a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw to avoid taking 3 (1d6) piercing damage. Cutting through the briars with a slashing weapon provides advantage on this saving throw for every character that follows.

Hidden Cache. While in the woods, make DC 15 passive Perception checks for the characters. On a success, one of them notices a tree with part of its trunk or roots hollowed out artificially. On investigation, they find a hidden cache: there is a 50% chance they find 1d4 trinkets; otherwise, they find 2d10 gp worth of small gems.

Shelter. The party stumbles across a dug-out hollow or empty den with enough room for all of them to take a long rest. While in this shelter, they can rest without any chance of a random encounter.

Sinkhole. Noticing a place where the earth is depressed and unsettled, a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check spots the sinkhole, enabling

the party to go around it. If not spotted, a random party member steps on and collapses the sinkhole and must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling into a 20-foot-deep pit and taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage. Climbing out of the pit requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

Tangled Canopy. The trees grow so thickly together here that light is one step dimmer than it should be, and orientation becomes difficult. To avoid getting turned around and lost requires a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check. Once lost, the party must attempt a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to get back on course; on a failure, it takes 1d6 hours to attempt the check again. While the party is lost, roll on the **Random Encounter Table** every hour, ignoring friendly encounters.

Toxic Flora. The party runs afoul of some of the unusual flora around Redtower, mutated by the proximity of ley lines and the Scarlet Citadel. Roll a d4 on the **Toxic Flora Table** to determine which one the party encounters.

Tree Fall. A hazard the lumberjacks of Redtower know well: trees fall in the forest without any help and sometimes without warning. A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the telltale cracking and snapping of wood as a tree plummets toward the party. Those who succeed at this check receive advantage on the DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to dive out of the way. Those who fail take 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage and are pinned under the tree, as if grappled. A successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check is enough to get out from under the tree, made with advantage if non-trapped creatures help. Make an immediate roll on the **Creature Encounter Table** to see what is attracted to the area within 1d10 minutes to investigate the noise.

Wild Mists. Some areas of the forest develop light mists of no apparent origin. These mists are harmless, but a DC 15 Intelligence

(Nature) check reveals they are unnatural. These mists are in fact side effects of the magical energy seeping from the surrounding ley lines. Spellcasting characters may make DC 13 Intelligence (Arcane) checks to notice a strange feeling in the air as they pass through the mist as if their magical abilities are being affected. Casting a spell within the wild mists that expends a 1st-level or higher

spell slot causes a surge: there is a 50% chance the spell is cast as though one level higher, a 25% chance it fizzles, and a 25% chance it morphs into a different spell entirely, randomly determined from the character's spell list (while using the originally intended spell slot). Spellcasting returns to normal as soon as the characters leave the mist.

TOXIC FLORA TABLE

| d4 | FLORA |
|----|------------------|
| 1 | corrosive sap |
| 2 | poison blooms |
| 3 | sleeping fields |
| 4 | surprise berries |

Corrosive Sap. A DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check indicates the sap oozing out of these sickly trees is responsible for their condition; something is wrong with it and touching it would be unwise. Moving through the trees requires a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw to keep from touching the sap. On a failure, the character takes 1 (1d3) acid damage per minute for 2d6 minutes; spending 1 minute cleansing the affected area also ends the effect.

Poison Blooms. These vibrant-colored flowers bloom on the vines dangling from the trees and can exude toxic pollen when movement is nearby. Spotting the pollen bloom before walking through requires a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. To resist the toxin, the character must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. Affected characters develop a rapid-onset, dry, hacking cough, suffering a level of exhaustion and making a new saving throw each minute until they succeed or die from exhaustion. The poison can be either removed by an appropriate spell effect or treated with a DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine)

check, which grants advantage on the affected creature's next saving throw to slough off the poison bloom.

Sleeping Fields. This pocket-meadow is blanketed with wildflowers and enchantment. A DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check notices something odd about these flowers as they don't resemble other blooms in the area. Moving through the fields carefully (no more than half speed) will not disturb the flowers. Moving through at a faster pace will stir up clouds of pollen. Those in the pollen must make DC 13 Wisdom saving throws or be overcome by *sleep* lasting one hour if not dispelled or removed sooner. The flowers also release pheromones into the air to attract wandering creatures to the meadow; roll or choose a creature from the **Creature Encounter Table** that is attracted to the meadow in 5d10 minutes.

Surprise Berries. These berries resemble an edible variety so strongly that the villagers nicknamed them and avoid picking either variety. A DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check differentiates them, but otherwise they look exactly like an edible species of berry. Upon consuming one, stomach pain and nausea set in within 10 minutes, giving the character a level of exhaustion that persists until their next long rest. It can also be cured by any effect that removes poison.

FORSETI'S AXE

by Lou Anders & Jon Sawatsky

Where the waters of the Uttermoest Sea flow across the Lost Arbonesse and enter the Nieder Straits, sailors' hushed whispers and scraps torn from ancient nautical maps hint at a mysterious island, an ephemeral landmass that is sometimes here, sometimes there, sometimes nowhere to be found.

Known as Forseti's Axe to those who know it at all, the isle is a lost realm unto itself, set adrift long ages past to flow across more than mere waters as it shifts between Midgard and the Shadow Realm.

This mystical island was once said to appear in times of dire need, manifesting out of the ocean fog to steer the destinies of those who are lost or in extreme peril. The isle is sacred to the northern god Forseti, the son of Baldur and god of justice and rightful retribution. Said by some to be a mask of the darker Hunter, Forseti in this aspect is a minor deity. Though he is the patron of many paladins, he is not venerated to the extent of such major gods as Volund or Thor. It has been foretold that this might change one day however, and the island that bears his name is said to play a part.

Legend has it that over five thousand years ago, before the fall of the first great dwarven kingdom, before the time of the Reaving when the Nieder Straits were shaped into their current form, there was a dwarven hold by the name of Thul Garuhm, a small

hold but a strategically important one that lay on the edges of the great kingdom of Nordheim. In Thul Garuhm there dwelt nine wise law-speakers, masters of the tongue Law Dwarvish, which is also called Anvil Dwarvish by some. There also was a great forge known as the Lægh Eldr, which means the "law fire," where the pronouncements of the law-speakers were held so that oaths might be forged and bound with enforcing magics.

But the hold of Thul Garuhm was an early casualty when the war between the elves and dwarves grew heated. It was taken in the war and claimed by the long-eared ones. Then it was that the nine law-speakers refused to bow to the authority of their new elven masters, standing intractable if not tall before their conquerors. And so they were given a choice: they could be put to swift death by the blade, or they could select to be set adrift at sea in a rudderless boat. One chose death and was summarily executed, but the other eight opted to be set adrift. The cruel elves summoned a magical wind that blew the law-speakers in their boat far from land. The law-speakers prayed to Volund and to Thor for deliverance, but neither god acknowledged their prayers. They drifted on for nine times nine days and would soon have died from sun and lack of food and water.

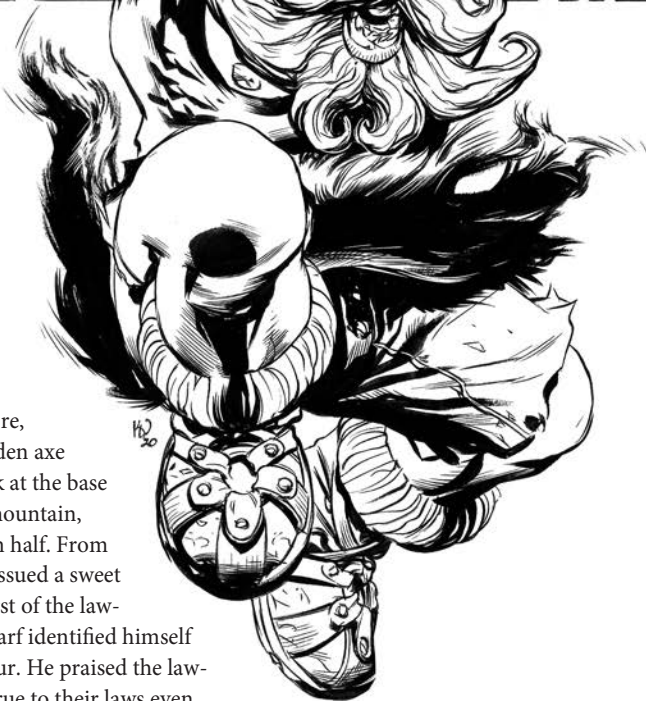
But on the eighty-first day, a ninth dwarf appeared in their midst. Flaxen bearded



and with features so hard as to be chiseled out of stone, this dwarf bore with him a great golden axe that he used as a rudder to steer the ship, and the ninth dwarf piloted the boat to an uninhabited island.

Leaping onto the shore, the dwarf took his golden axe and struck a great rock at the base of the island's single mountain, splitting the boulder in half. From this new-cloven rock issued a sweet spring to quell the thirst of the law-speakers. Then the dwarf identified himself as Forseti, son of Baldur. He praised the law-speakers for keeping true to their laws even unto the end. And then he vanished.

The island proved to be verdant and rich in resources. After they had recovered from their ordeal, the dwarves decided to remain, naming it Forseti's Axe in honor of the god that saved them. They soon tunneled into



its mountain and were delighted when it proved to be rich in precious metals. The law-speakers built a great hall of silver, named Glittrnhalla, and at its center was a great shrine to Forseti, at the heart of which they built a magnificent forge.

Over time, Glitrnhalla became a bastion of law and justice, a place where great warriors and even kings would seek mediation, and stories told that on more than one occasion the god Forseti manifested in order to broker reconciliation between bitter rivals and former foes.

Then the Reaving came, and the great kingdom of Nordheim fell. Waters of the Uttermost Sea broke across the land, and thousands upon thousands were lost beneath the waves.

By all accounts, Forseti's Axe should have been destroyed in that deluge. Most thought that it was. But instead, the island slipped away from Midgard and into the Shadow Realm. Whether a miracle from Forseti himself or an accomplishment of darker magics or simply a result of twisting ley lines in the upheaval of land and sea, the cause is unknown. But drift from the world it did. However, in the years since, reaving dwarves began to return from their voyages with stories of a mysterious island, appearing in waters where no land was known before.

Thus Forseti's Axe became a place akin to its divine namesake, appearing to those who were lost and adrift, steering them back onto the paths that fate had chosen for them. And thus it remained for centuries.

But the tales the mariners told grew dark some hundred years ago. These more recent stories tell of a fallen hall, inundated with monsters from the Shadow Realm. They speak of a land overrun with *scheznyki* (see *Tome of Beasts*), a hall haunted by shadow oozes and other denizens of dark planes, and a ghost dwarf, said to be the mournful spirit of the one law-speaker who chose death millennia ago, returned to the world to wreak bitter havoc upon any who set foot upon the isle.

Recently a renowned law-speaker named Breca the Brooding has claimed that she had a vision from the god Forseti. If his axe, the great golden weapon with which he steered the rudderless boat five thousand years ago,

can be found and brought to the shrine in Glitrnhalla, then the island will cease its aimless drifting and root itself permanently in the material world. Forseti himself will rise in importance in the northland pantheon, and Forseti's Axe will again become a place for the dispensing of justice and law. Breca believes she has been gifted with the knowledge of when and where the island will next appear, but as to the location of the golden axe, who can say? She seeks adventurers to find it and bring this place of justice and reconciliation back to Midgard once and for all.

In Search of the Island

While searching for the island, adventurers may encounter one or more of the following:

d6 PHENOMENA

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | A 60-foot-diameter cloud of sparking fog that causes no damage but manifests visions of Thor on the deck of the ship. |
| 2 | Cries for help and panic in Dwarvish that have no discernable source. |
| 3 | A spectral barge that dissipates into a great warhammer of light when approached. |
| 4 | A lone voice, reciting the old dwarven laws in Dwarvish. |
| 5 | An unapproachable whirlpool from which fish from the Shadow Realm are ejected. |
| 6 | The solitary sound of an axe felling an unseen tree. |

Sparks of the Lægh Eldr

Though the law-fire forge has been cold for an age, the products of its once majestic fires can still be found throughout Midgard. The law-weapons, also known as Sparks of the Lægh Eldr, uniformly have the following characteristics:

- A minor sound or visual effect occurs when the weapon damages a target.
- They must be attuned by a lawfully aligned creature.

- Attacks made with these weapons are considered magical for the purposes of overcoming resistances.
- Attacks made with these weapons do an additional 1d6 damage to chaotically aligned creatures.
- Each weapon is associated with one major law affecting its bearer. If the bearer of the weapon breaks the law that the weapon is associated with, they lose attunement and cannot attune to it again for one week. This effect is called a decree.

LONGBOW OF THE LÆGH ELDR

*Weapon (longbow), rare
(requires attunement by a lawful creature)*

This bow is made of silvery-white wood and bound with polished bands of steel. Arrows fired from it make a quiet bell-ringing sound when they strike a target.

Attacks with this bow are magical for the purposes of overcoming resistances. Attacks made against chaotically aligned creatures do an additional 1d6 radiant damage.

Decree: Treason. If the bearer commits an act that is treacherous (GM’s discretion), the bearer instantly loses attunement and cannot attune to it again for 1 week.

THE AXE OF FORSETI

The *Axe of Forseti* is the material manifestation of the god’s principal weapon. It has two appearances: the first is a dull and damaged battleaxe with the old dwarven rune for “law” etched into its blade. It most commonly appears in this manner, especially when handled or seen by evil creatures. Its second appearance is that of glowing golden battleaxe with two heads. The shaft of the axe is riddled with glowing dwarven runes that dance and flash audaciously. The axe appears in this second form only when approached by lawfully aligned creatures (good or neutral) or when wielded by such a creature.

Split. Forseti and his axe were separated when the god’s followers waned. The deity drifted away from Midgard, and his axe took physical form in the roots of Yggdrasil before passing from bearer to bearer. The god and his axe wish to be reunited.

Light in the Dark. The axe wishes to be found and returned to Glitrnhalla and will shine brightly if it might be recovered by creatures without evil agendas.

THE AXE OF FORSETI

*Weapon (battleaxe), unique
(requires attunement by a lawful good or lawful neutral creature)*

Attacks made with the *Axe of Forseti* receive a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls.

Justice. Whenever a chaotically aligned creature takes damage from this weapon, that creature must make a successful DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or take 1d10 radiant damage. Creatures who fail this saving throw take 1d10 radiant damage at the beginning of each of its turns for 1 minute. The creature may repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on a successful save.

Retribution. You may use your reaction to target one creature that attacked you since the end of your last turn. The targeted creature receives disadvantage on its next attack made against you until the beginning of your next turn.

HAMMER OF DECREES

The law-fire forge was worked by many smiths over the centuries. Any blacksmith might petition the Law Fire Council for use of the forge, and most were given permission in time. The greatest limiter on the forge’s use was the dearth of tools strong enough to handle the requirement of the fire. Though several such tools existed, only the Hammer of Decrees survived the reaving. The Lægh Eldr may be cold, but the hammer still contains some of its power.

HAMMER OF DECREES

Wondrous item (smith's tools), unique (requires attunement by a creature proficient in smith's tools)

This adamantine hammer is pitted and appears damaged. The oak handle is split and bound with cracking hide. While attuned to the *Hammer of Decrees*, creatures receive advantage on skill checks to perform smithing using this hammer. Additionally, the time to complete smithing projects is halved.



OATHROT WRAITH

The oathrot wraith appears as a normal wraith carrying a spectral tome attached to its waist by tendrils of shadow.

OATHROT WRAITH

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 6 (-2) | 14 (+2) | 15 (+2) | 12 (+1) | 14 (+2) | 15 (+2) |

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Aura of Oathbreaking. Any creature that begins its turn within 30 ft. of the oathrot wraith must make a DC 13 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the creature becomes cursed. While cursed, the creature loses its resolve in important beliefs and oaths it has taken. To represent this, the creature loses any proficiency bonus it has to its saving throws. A creature that successfully saves against this ability is immune to the effects of this creature's aura for 24 hours.

Incorporeal Movement. The wraith can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Oathseeker. The oathrot wraith automatically senses the presence and precise location of paladins and clerics within 100 ft.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the wraith has disadvantage on attack rolls as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 20 (4d8 + 2) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

THE NIEDER STRAITS & THE DROWNSTONE ROAD

by Lou Anders & Jon Sawatsky

Shielded from the boreal cold by the western edge of Thule, the waters of the Nieder Straits are warmer and calmer than those of the Uttermost Sea but still present a treacherous nautical challenge to those unfamiliar with its ways. At its northwestern end, waves threaten to smash ships against the rocky cliffs of Jotunheim or the ice-covered rocks of the Frozen Reach while the Trollbane Coast of Stannasgard is an area of active volcanoes, the surrounding waters rife with underwater vents that belch magma and sulfurous steam into the sea. Longships bearing reaver dwarves bent on pillage ply the waters while dangerous merfolk and stranger abominations occasionally rise up from the depths.

The straits formed over five thousand years ago in the Reaving where the waters of the Uttermost Sea came crashing in, some say at the behest of the god Thor, to bury a large portion of the once great dwarven kingdoms below the waves. Many are the island that dot the straits, ranging in size from Smuggler's Isle (nearly seventy miles from west to east) to tiny islands barely a mile across. Common wisdom holds that many of these islands are actually the peaks of sunken mountains brought low by the god Thor when he raged against the dwarven folk for the offense they gave him, that of forsaking their warlike natures in favor of craftsmanship and the

forge. Whatever the reason, these patches of land are all that is left of their once proud kingdom, and the dwarves still mourn their lost glory and drowned kinsfolk, aching in their hearts to brave the sunken ruins and claim ancestral treasures that surely must lie in watery chambers beneath the waves.

Notable among these myriad islands is the Rock of the Selkies, an arc of boulders worn round by the waves and shrouded by seaweed. Here, sea-folk gather once each summer for a great þing where matters of no concern to air-breathers are discussed and debated at length. The rest of the year, the rock serves as a platform from which the selkies and their ilk attempt to entice sailors to their doom, and indeed, the broken stones are littered with both the bones of butchered northerners and the glittering treasures and trinkets cast aside by the sea-folk as if without a care for their value.

The Isle of Swords is claimed by legend to be the location of the first hólmganga, the duel practiced by the northern folk as a legal alternative to the þing, where the seriousness of matters demands disputes be settled not in words but in blood. Small groves of pine dot the island while numerous barrow mounds mark the final resting place of countless a human, trollkin, and dwarf. Many of the moldering corpses therein date from ancient times, though some are more recent, for the

Isle of Swords is still a site for holmgöngur, and many a dispute finds its end here. Wotan's shield maidens appear to ensure that those who set foot on the shingle beaches can fight without interference, and the one-eyed god himself is said to bestow his curse on any faint heart that attempts to leave the isle before their matter is settled in blood.

But perhaps most mysterious of the islands is the sunken peak that supports the darkened ruin known as Black Tooth Tower. Beneath the crashing waves that flood in and out of the gaps in its ancient stones, strange lights glimmer on and off below the waterline. These witch lights illuminate still-surviving glass windows, perhaps from submerged chambers shored up against the sea. When the moon is a sickle in the sky, strange shadows move across these windows and stranger chanting echoes up from the depths. Those who brave the dangerous landing and pick their way through the tumbled-down stone might find a path below to gods know what riches and horrors, perhaps maybe even a route into the Drownstone Road.

The Drownstone Road

None living know for sure what caused the fall of the great northern dwarven kingdom. Some say that the dwarves lost their way.



Forged on the adamantine anvil by the smith god Volund and the thunder god Thor, they were created to be warriors in Wotan's battle against the wild elves of Thorn. As they cut down giants, fey, and elves alike, it is said that they became too proud, and this pride was their undoing. Others claim that the fire in their hearts burned less for battle and more for the forge, that as they laid down their axes and took up the crafting hammers, favoring Volund over Thor, and the thunder god became angry and punished them for

forsaking their purpose and allowing their worship of him to fade.

Whatever the cause, know that more than five thousand years ago came the Reaving, and the great northern kingdom fell. Now the dwarves are split between the reavers in the north and the cantons in the south, and between them, the Nieder Straits. The great bulk of that once proud kingdom was buried in the deluge known as the Reaving, and the bottom of the straits are crisscrossed with a maze of sunken buildings, flooded holds, ancient palaces, and subterranean caverns—ruins enough to house the detritus and treasures of an entire civilization.

Describing the full extent of the Drownstone Road is beyond the humble limits of this discourse, but a portion merits elucidation here. Black Tooth Tower does indeed lead to the road, but the tower itself is the jutting prominence above a now sunken fortress, and the area has become the domain of a nihileth (see *Tome of Beasts*), returned from its eons-long journey across the golden heavens and nine hells to spread its void corruption on the world of Midgard. The nihileth dwells in the bottom reaches of the fortress, but its minions, nihilethic zombies, roam the upper corridors. These ghoulish beings exist in a dual state, shifting between the material and the ethereal. They stay in their ethereal form most times, but when the moon is a sliver, it is they whose ghastly shadows are seen crossing the ghost lights in the water's depths. Any who would visit the Drownstone Road from here must find their way by stealth or strength past these unfortunate souls and their monstrous master.

But the fortress itself sits at a nexus on the Long Road, the subterranean passage between two vast holds. Partially flooded, home to abominations and deadly sea creatures trapped in pools of water between pockets of air, the road connects Mótsognir's Hall and Glámr Hall. Once proud dwarven holds,

now they are the domain of undead vættir. Both great kings in life, Glámr is a wrathful, miserable creature, jealously guarding the cursed treasure in his hoard against any who disturb his unquiet rest. But Mótsognir is a rare, bone-white vættir, full of regret for the lost honor of the dwarves, who reserves his fury for those of a faithless and deceitful character. Stern and unyielding, if Mótsognir can be enticed into dialogue, it is said that he knows many secrets and sagas from the days of the fallen kingdom. But whether he would share such knowledge depends on his estimation of the character of the seeker, and should he suspect dishonorable motives, woe betide any that come into his hall.

Recently, Jorunn of Skaldhome went into a trance and sang a ballad not in his repertoire. In it, he appeared to suggest that Mótsognir or Glámr, one or the other, possesses a rare weapon, a soul-forged hammer that contains a remnant of the soul of an ancient dwarven law-speaker. This hammer, should it be claimed, is said to know the present-day location of the golden *Axe of Forseti*. But anyone brave or fool-hearted enough to seek such a treasure would have to brave the nihileth fortress, the horrors of the Long Road, and the two vættir halls.

Hazards of the Nieder Straits

The following hazards may present themselves when navigating the Straits.

SULFURIC STEAM

A geyser of steam rises violently out of the water nearby. Your nose and eyes sting instantly as the caustic vapors threaten to blind and suffocate you.

A 10-foot-radius cloud of persistent and spreading sulfuric steam rises from the water within 30 feet of the party. Each creature requiring air must immediately make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1d4 minutes.

The radius of the cloud grows by 10 feet each round until it reaches 60 feet in diameter at which point it disperses. Creatures requiring air to breathe who begin their turn in the area of the steam take 11 (2d10) acid damage. Additionally, the creature must succeed a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn.

The cloud is not magical and can be dispersed and affected by spells that can move air.

LAVA GOUT

From below the water, a sudden spewing of lava rises high into the air nearby. The lava cools almost instantly, and large chunks of volcanic rock threaten to pummel you.

The lava gout appears 100 feet from the party. The flash of heat requires all creatures within 200 feet of the gout to succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

For 1 minute, large pieces of cooling lava rock fall from the sky within 200 ft. of the lava gout. A creature that begins its turn within this range must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d8) bludgeoning damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. Objects in range may also take this damage (GM's discretion).

BOILING WHIRLPOOL

Ahead, the water churns menacingly. Steam rises from a great whirlpool, and you spy the boiled bones of animals and fish caught in its current.

A 10-foot-radius whirlpool appears 60 feet from the party. Any creature that begins its turn in the water within 90 feet of the whirlpool must succeed a DC 11 Strength (Athletics) check or be drawn 20 feet toward it. Creatures swim at half speed while within 90 feet of the whirlpool. Objects such as boats or similar craft move 20 feet toward the whirlpool at the beginning of each round unless its operator succeeds a DC 11 skill check (GM's discretion)

Creatures who end their turn inside the whirlpool take 11 (2d10) fire damage.

WOTAN'S SNEER

Creatures who flee a sacred duel (hólmanga) on the Isle of Swords soon regret their choice. Wotan has little mercy for cowards, and the ancient practice of settling disputes with blood is beloved to him. Eleven hours after the creature flees the duel, it is cursed by the one-eyed god, whose divine sneer robs the creature of any future bravery.

Curse: Wotan's Sneer. This curse imparts the following effects upon its bearer:

- After each long rest, the cursed creature rolls 1d4 and subtracts that amount from its proficiency bonus until the end of its next long rest.
- In the first round of any combat, the cursed creature may only use the Dodge action.

NIHILETHIC DOMINATOR

The nihilethic dominator is large, slimy-fleshed zombie whose fish-like head is ensorcelled with currents of void magic.

NIHILETHIC DOMINATOR

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 14 (+2) | 8 (-1) | 16 (+3) | 3 (-4) | 7 (-2) | 10 (+0) |

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison; bludgeoning, piercing and slashing from nonmagical weapons (only when in ethereal form)

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands Void Speech and the languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Dual State. Like its nihileth creator, a nihilethic zombie can assume either a material or ethereal form. When in its material form, it has resistance to nonmagical weapons. In its ethereal form, it is immune to nonmagical weapons. Its ethereal form appears as a dark purple outline of its material form with a blackish-purple haze within.

Zombie Nature. Unless noted otherwise, a nihilethic zombie has the same traits as a zombie, including their Undead Fortitude.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The nihilethic dominator makes two tentacle slam attacks or two tendrils of the void attacks.

Tentacle Slam (Material Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the creature must succeed a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Tendrils of the Void (Ethereal Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d12) cold damage and 4 (1d8) necrotic damage.

Form Swap. As a bonus action, the nihilethic zombie can alter itself, shifting between its material and ethereal forms at will.

Void Body. As a reaction, the nihilethic zombie can reduce the damage it takes from a single source by 1d12 points. This reduction cannot be applied to divine damage.

MEGINGRIMMR

Megingrimmr is a sentient warhammer, containing the essence of a dwarven law-speaker. Its head is made from the metal of a defeated golem guardian, reforged in the fires of the law-fire forge. Seven rare gems are set in the shaft and pommel of this axe, each etched in dwarven with the name of its seven previous bearers.

Personality. *Megingrimmr* is happiest when wielded against those who have committed crimes or defiled sacred sites. The hammer was forged to assist a law-speaker in enforcing the sacred laws of the old dwarven ways, and

when used to bring criminals to justice, the hammer sings ancient battle songs in the head of its bearer. The hammer telepathically resists being used for mundane purposes and exhibits disdain if used in this way (smashing open a door or chest for example).

Secret. *Megingrimmr* knows where the *Axe of Forseti* is hidden. If the bearer of this hammer develops a positive relationship with it, the hammer will reveal this location as a gesture of appreciation and goodwill.

MEGINGRIMMR

Lawful neutral weapon (warhammer), sentient, unique (requires attunement)

Attacks made with this magical weapon receive a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls.

Sentient. This hammer has the following ability scores.

| INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|
| 12 (+1) | 16 (+3) | 16 (+3) |

Telepathic. *Megingrimmr* communicates by sending its emotions telepathically toward its bearer. It has the capacity to play music in the mind of its bearer, which it uses to further communicate its feelings about any given circumstance.

Senses. *Megingrimmr* has normal vision and hearing out to 30 feet.

Crushing Blow (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If an attack with this weapon would damage a creature, you may choose to reduce that damage to 0; if you do, the target's armor class is reduced by 10 (to a minimum of 1) until the end of your next turn.

Disrupting Blows. Creatures damaged by your attacks with this weapon automatically fail checks to maintain concentration on spells.

THE STROSS LIBRARY

by Lou Anders & Mike Welham

Many things were gained in the Great Revolt, but so too was much lost when the slaves and workers of Zobeck threw off their devil-trucking masters and proclaimed their once-feudal city “free.” Ninety-two years ago when Abelard the silversmith and Marcenzo the journeyman wizard rallied an angry mob to storm the barracks of the Stross guards, then subsequently struck a bargain with those same guards in a battle against the Order of the Undying Light, there began a massive sacking of Stross holdings, from their warehouses to their counting houses to their ships and barges, even to the city palace in Crown Square. More was pillaged or burned when the battle spread to Strossheim, the family seat in the Margreve. But one asset that was never satisfactorily accounted for was the Stross Library. It was always supposed to have been a part of Castle Stross, but the burnout and rather small chamber on the second level of Brandor’s Keep fell far short of expectations of what should comprise the athenaeum of a family charged over a thousand years ago by the Moonlit King to govern the Crossroads. Surely, the Stross Library of such renowned infamy would hold a collection of priceless tomes, magical scrolls, and ancient artifacts, should be a veritable treasure trove of infernal knowledge brimming with the promise of great and terrible power. Thus, rumors persisted that

the demolished study in Strossheim was not in fact the *true* library, which somehow remained shrouded from the world, its secrets still intact and waiting to be uncovered by the clever, the bold, and the foolhardy.

In point of fact, though many are the exaggerated rumors and fabricated legends attributed to the Family Stross, this one contains more than a kernel of truth. The Stross Family Library was indeed the academic jewel in that dreadful family’s crown, an archive of everything: personal chronicles and genealogies, historical treatises on major world events and distant realms, arcane treasures and ancient artifacts hard-won or skillfully pillaged from across the world. It was the domain of Gorman Stross, an elder of the once-proud noble family that delighted with a miserly lust in the acquisition of rare disquisitions and forbidden volumes, objects arcane and execrated artifacts. And Gorman’s bibliotheca was not in Strossheim. No, that small archive in Brandor’s Keep was home only to a few historical records and annals of note, along with the expected dark tome or two of not inconsiderable power, suitably damning to the unwary. But the bulk of the Stross collection was housed elsewhere. The true Stross Library was kept in a building unto itself, originally positioned on a street in Zobeck’s Market District. The building was not inconsiderable in size and



was architecturally equal to its task but not so opulent as to be conspicuous alongside its neighbors. Furthermore, Gorman Stross took great pains to reinforce and expand certain peculiar wards cast by those bibliognosts who preceded him. These obscure magics lowered the library's prominence in the observations of passersby and onlookers such that the building was hard to affix in the attention, and the eye tended not to dwell on its doors and windows. Thus, only those with business at the library would seek it out, and others would for the most part pay it little to no heed. Furthermore, there were, as might be expected, several thaumaturgic portals to other places inside the library, and one of these was a passage from the Stross Library in Zobeck to the smaller study in Castle Stross. Doubtless it was Gorman's frequent use of same, his comings and goings between the city and the castle, coupled with these obfuscating wards, that exacerbated the confusion as to the true library's location.

But when the Great Revolt commenced, Gorman Stross was taking no chances and deigned not to rely solely on these wards to protect his priceless collection. Calling upon the powers of a mysterious shadow fey music box—the *Black Nightingale*—Gorman strove to shift the Stross Library wholly into the Shadow Realm where he thought it would be a welcome and protected refuge to the Stross Family's shadow fey allies. Instead, his inept fumbling with matters beyond his skill resulted in the library becoming uncoupled from reality, and the Stross Library and all within was set adrift to wander the mystical currents between Midgard and the other planes, ever shifting between darkness and light. Worse, his inept handling of the music box resulted in a calamity that rent his very soul, splintering it into two damaged shards. One of these became his intellect and reason, a ghost haunting his precious stacks, while the other was a chattering embodiment of his fallen pride, the summation of his madness,

passion, assumed privilege, and entitlement. Those unfortunate beings in the library with Gorman at the time were transformed and bound forever to the library's perambulations through the planes.

Over the years, the memories of the Stross Library were supplanted by legends of the Wandering Bibliothe, a haunted library that appears and disappears at random, carrying away curious interlopers and taunting would-be treasure hunters with the promise of occult secrets and transmundane lore. Then, fifteen years ago, Zora von Zeerghast, eldest daughter of one of Zobeck's last remaining noble families, herself expelled from the Arcane Collegium for her unhealthy fascination with these rumors, crafted an incantation that she believed would summon the Wandering Bibliothe under a lunar eclipse, calling it to manifest in its original location. But when she put her theories to the test, von Zeerghast vanished, taking whatever esoteric knowledge she had gleaned with her. Still, should the Stross Library reappear, manifesting either in its original location in the Market District or in some other locale in Midgard, it would present quite an opportunity for the brave adventurer. Furthermore, there may be other ways to access the Bibliothe. Stories claim that a splinter aspect of the Stross Library has become attached to the Great Library of Friula, a portal to the library is known to exist in Fandorin Keep, and though it has never been found, logic suggests there may still be yet another portal in the wrecked study in Brandor's Keep in Strossheim. The library itself has a magical connection to the Vaults of Ruddermere, that great storehouse of Stross wealth. A portion of the vast vaults, already magically connected to the library, was torn free of the larger complex in Gorman's failed enchantment and affixed itself to the Bibliothe, meaning that whoever found the library might find their way to the famed vaults as well.

But prospective bibliophiles take warning: the library is now home to doomed and trapped shadow fey, transmogrified servants, gargoyles, golems, haunts, and the twinned shade of Gorman Stross himself. If it is true that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, this great trove of arcane erudition must be deadly in the extreme.

Magic from the Stross Library

Some secrets of the Stross Library have made their way to the world at large.

EXCHANGED KNOWLEDGE

3rd-level divination (bard, cleric, wizard)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a book containing lore about any subject, which the spell consumes)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

When you cast this spell, you open a conduit to the Stross Library, granting access to difficult-to-obtain information. For the spell's duration, you double your proficiency bonus whenever you make an Intelligence check to recall information about any subject.

Additionally, you can gain advantage on an Intelligence check to recall information. To do so, you must either sacrifice another lore-filled book or succeed on a Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, the spell ends, and you have disadvantage on all Intelligence checks to recall information for 1 week. A *remove curse*, *greater restoration*, or *wish* spell ends this effect.

INCONSPICUOUS FACADE

4th-level illusion (sorcerer, wizard)

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 100 feet

Components: V, S, M (2 pounds of granite, shale, or other unassuming rock)

Duration: Until dispelled

By means of this spell, you make a target building seem much less important or

ostentatious than it is. You can give the target an unremarkable appearance or one that blends in with nearby buildings. By its nature, this spell does not allow you to specify features that would make the building stand out. You also cannot make a building look more opulent to match surrounding buildings. You can make the building appear smaller or larger than its actual size to better fit into its environs. However, these size changes are noticeable with cursory physical inspection as an object will pass through extra illusory space or bump into a seemingly smaller section of the building.

A creature can use its action to inspect the building and make an Intelligence (Investigation) check against your spell save DC. If it succeeds, it becomes aware the building has been disguised.

In addition to you dispelling *inconspicuous facade*, the spell ends if the target building is destroyed.

CATALOGUING BOOK

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

The Wandering Bibliotheque contains several copies of *cataloguing books*, allowing visitors to readily find a book within its stacks.

While holding the book, you can take an action to touch the book to an object you wish to catalog. The book inscribes the object's name, provided by you, on one of its pages and sketches a rough illustration to accompany the object's name. If the object is a magic item or otherwise magic-imbued, the book also inscribes the object's properties. The book becomes attuned to the object and denotes its location within its pages and tracks its location, provided the object is not protected by *nondetection* or other magic that thwarts divination magic.

If you and a catalogued object are on the same plane, you can teleport to the object's location as if you cast *teleport* with a familiarity of "very familiar." You can't use

this property again until 7 days have elapsed.

You can also take an action to speak a command word that encrypts the book's entries, which you and up to ten designated creatures can understand without difficulty. With another action and command word, you can return the entries to readable text (typically Common, but you can choose the language).

When you become attuned to the book, all catalogued items disappear from the book.

NIGHTINGALE'S SHADE

*Wondrous item, very rare
(requires attunement)*

The *Black Nightingale* deposits shadowy copies of itself wherever the Wandering Bibliotheke travels. The birdcage portion of the music box is absent at least one bar.

While holding the music box, you can take an action to wind it, allowing it to play for 1 minute, cumulatively up to a total of 5 minutes. All creatures within 30 feet of the music box playing its tune have disadvantage on saving throws against enchantment and illusion magic.

Curse. This item is cursed. Attuning to it curses you until you are targeted by the *remove curse* spell or similar magic. As

long as you remain cursed, you are unwilling to part with the box, keeping it within reach at all times.

In addition, while the music box is on your person, you must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw at the beginning of combat or other tense situations. On a failed save, you take an action to wind the music box and let it play.

Finally, at dawn, you must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become affected by the *geas* spell, which compels you to locate the *Black Nightingale*. You must be targeted by an additional *remove curse* spell or similar magic to end this effect.



WANDERING BIBLIOLETHE GATEWAYS

Beyond its propensity to sweep up victims in its travels, the Wandering Bibliothe leaves invitations to curious folk in the form of a mysterious book containing a ritual to summon the library during a lunar eclipse. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals the next lunar eclipse.

The Bibliothe also creates hidden gateways in buildings with which it temporarily shares space. Either way, the library expects intentional visitors to put forth effort to gain access to it, even if it never intends to release such visitors.

A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check learns of an existing gateway to the Bibliothe. Additionally, a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check while within a building containing a gateway uncovers the gateway's presence. Since gateways to the library are hidden, a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check is required to find the gateway. Other than the building inhabitants, which may provide obstacles to entering the gateway, a dangerous or deadly magic trap guards the gateway. The gateway's final hazard is its one-way access. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes this aspect as well as the 2d20 month duration before the library's return to its current plane. Time within the Bibliothe flows at the same rate as time in the Material Plane.

Regardless of how one becomes trapped within the Wandering Bibliothe, a *plane shift* or *gate* spell allows a creature to escape the library.

CALL BIBLIOLETHE

6th-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: 500 feet

Components: V, S, M (a cornerstone belonging to a library, academy, or other place of learning)

Duration: 10 minutes

If you cast this spell during a lunar eclipse, you bring the Wandering Bibliothe to a location you designate within range. Creatures entering the library (including you) must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature remains within the library for the duration. When the spell ends, each creature within the Bibliothe must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or remain trapped within the library while it travels to its next destination. A creature that previously failed its Wisdom saving throw has disadvantage on its Dexterity saving throw.

If the spell's duration overlaps with another creature's casting of call Bibliothe, make a Charisma check contested by the other creature's Charisma check. If you win the contest, the Bibliothe remains in place for the entirety of the spell's duration.



TERMINUS ISLAND

by Lou Anders & Jon Sawatsky

At the far reaches of Midgard where the waters of the Western Ocean spill in a colossal cataract over the lip of the world to plunge for mile upon mile until they splash on the lower coils of the World Serpent, there looms a miles-high menhir, a marker that is the last piece of solid land before the atmosphere gives way to the surrounding ether and the eternal void.

This is Terminus Island. A standing stone one mile tall with a flat-topped peak a third of a mile in width. Few have glimpsed this colossal structure, and fewer still have successfully navigated the powerful currents at the world's edge to moor a boat and explore. But those who do find a staircase cut into a groove in the stone on the opposite side and a five-mile descent to a second landmass. This is World Descent Island, a massive shelf that juts from the side of Midgard like a gargantuan barnacle.

Those who know of Terminus Island and its hidden sister would think that no such place could arise from nature alone, and they would be correct in their suppositions. For Terminus Island and World Descent Island are artificial, conjured by magics and pacts long ago.

Before the creatures known as the aboleths taught the basics of civilization and magic to the early humans of Midgard, there ruled the Green Coven, protectors of sacred fruit-bearing trees called the Verdant Vessels,

the fruit of which was said to have many wondrous properties: the ability to restore the dead, to transform the undead back into true life, to grant immortality and luck, to reveal impossible secrets and long-buried knowledge.

Rightly fearing and mistrusting the seemingly benevolent aboleths, the Green Coven retreated from the world, taking the Verdant Vessels into hiding with them. But they were betrayed and hunted down until only a handful of their members and a few paltry examples of the magical trees remained. These remnant coven members survived by infiltrating the bureaucracy of the Ankeshel, that great and misguided ur-civilization founded under the direction of the aboleths. When the Ankeshelians eventually rose up against their otherworldly masters and cast them out, the bureaucracy was cursed and became the first of the merfolk. Those in the Green Coven endured this curse as well, and taking the last pits of a single Verdant Vessel, they left the other merfolk behind and fled in their new state to the edge of the world.

Eventually, they came to an island at the world's edge where they planted the pits and from them grew the Ruby Plum Tree. Worried though that they would be discovered by either human or inhuman foes, these Green Coven merfolk invoked a great and terrible ritual. They called upon the World

Serpent, and Veles, the Father of Serpents who encircles all Midgard, answered. Summoning this eternal power, they pushed the island over the edge of the world, so it clung to the side on a colossal shelf. Their last druid caused the bedrock of Midgard to rise up, forming the menhir that is Terminus Island and the staircase on its western flank. Unfortunately, the pact with Veles mutated the merfolk (now called adaro), who took on a shark-like appearance and forgot their own history, living only to hunt, to kill and feed, lingering as mostly mindless guardians of the tree whose importance they no longer understood.

Those who brave the difficult landing and the arduous journey find Terminus Island and its sister isle, World Descent Island, to be a daunting and inhospitable place, full of wild creatures and mad elementals.

At the top of the menhir, smaller menhirs and trilithons form a henge, laid out in the shape of an ancient glyph. Those who can decipher ancient Ankeshel might read something of the history of the Green Coven, though they may take warning from the vague references to a terrible guardian on the path to World Descent Island in the other glyphs and symbols carved into these rocks. Those who chance to set foot upon Terminus Island on the night of any full moon might glimpse the twisted remains of the coven dancing and singing in sluggish ritual around the henge. But provided they journey on, they will come to a great grove some fifty feet deep and one hundred feet wide that contains the staircase over the edge of the world.

Just before the staircase begins, there is a sunken area, some four hundred feet square, where a gargantuan catoblepas is chained. This is the fearsome guardian alluded to in the ancient writings on the henge above. Provided explorers make it past this beast, they will find the staircase difficult going. Wet rocks and high winds make for a treacherous climb as the staircase descends over the world's edge in a series of switchbacks. Fortunately, a series

of small ledges offer temporary rest or even a precarious campsite before the stairs finally terminate at World Descent Pier. Here, a moored raft can be used to cross the roughly one mile of water to World Descent Island.

But the island itself is no safe haven. It is rather the domain of prehistoric megaflore and megafauna, cut off from Midgard and from time and not glimpsed by mortal eye in eons. These strange gargantuan plants and creatures are not all that have been severed from the rest of the world. Geomancers and other sensitives will discover no ley lines here as the ritual that moved and reshaped this island cut it permanently from the world's energy.

A great river originates from the pool at the staircase's base, splitting in twain and flowing slowly toward the edge of the island. Between them lies Sweet Clover Glade, hidden in swirling brine mists. But at the center of the glade, the Ruby Plum Tree stands tall. To brave the glade in search of it means facing wild elementals, horrendous megafauna, and the twisted remnants of the Green Coven. Lastly, at the very edge of World Descent Island stands Kongamato Peak, named for the sole creature that lives at its summit. It is said that somewhere in the bowels of this lone half-mountain is a series of hidden chambers, lost and sealed from the world for millennia. None know for sure what treasures reside in these chambers, but the Ankeshelian scholar known only as Po, who claims to be nine hundred eighty-six years old, has said that it might contain the golden *Axe of Forseti*, rescued from an empty longship, spilling over the edge of the world, by the Green Coven before their degeneration.

There are those who claim one final wonder among this realm of wonders. It is said by certain astrologers, thought wise by some and mad by others, that a silver bridge stretches from the very edge of World Descent Island. This bridge, these fantastical claims purport, can take one to the moon!

Awakened Verdant Vessel

The ancient guardians of the Ruby Plum Tree watch with infinite patience. These awakened verdant vessels are awakened trees with an AC of 16, 85 (10d12 + 20) hit points, and a challenge rating of 5 (1,100 XP). Additionally, the trees gain the following:

- **Succor of the Ruby Plum.** The awakened verdant vessel heals itself for 26 (4d12) hit points. Attacks against the tree are made with disadvantage until the end of its next turn.
- **Multiattack.** The awakened verdant vessel makes three slam attacks.
- **Slam.** Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 15 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.



Fruit of the Ruby Plum Tree

The tree bears three distinct types of fruit, each with its own beneficial effects. The fruit grows randomly, and it is not uncommon for the tree to bear all three at once.

Smoldering Plum. This plum is hot to the touch and emits visible waves of heat. A creature that picks the smoldering plum must succeed a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or be lanced by the red-hot branches nearby, taking 9 (2d8) fire damage on a failed save. The plum may be eaten as an action, conferring immunity to fire damage for 1d4 minutes.

Glittering Plum. This plum glitters and shines in even the dimmest of light. Its skin reflects light to produce deep violet and green hues. Picking the plum presents no challenge, but its charming appearance makes it difficult to eat. A creature may use an action to try to eat the glittering plum and must succeed on a DC 11 Charisma saving throw to do so. The creature's action is wasted on a failed save. Creatures who eat the glittering plum gain truesight to a range of 120 feet for 1d4 hours.

Singing Plum. The purple-grey singing plum hums a quiet melody while growing on the tree. When plucked, the plum emits a captivating atonal song that can be heard within 60 feet. The plum continues to sing indefinitely, ending its song only when eaten. A creature may use its action to eat the singing plum. Provided they can cast 1st-level spells, the creature gains the ability to cast *silence* (DC 13) at will for 1d4 minutes.

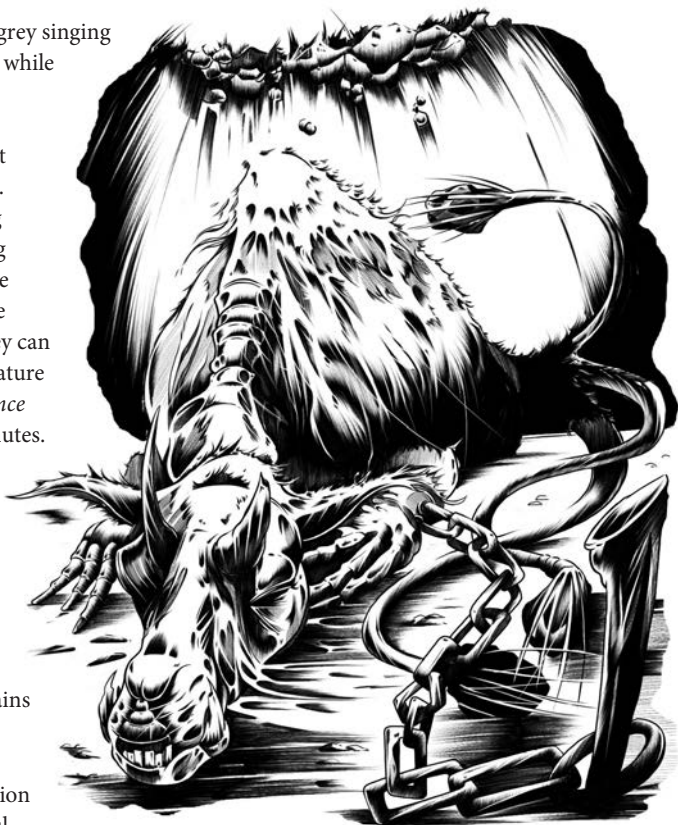
Adaro

The twisted adaro function as **merfolk** with an AC of 14, 33 (6d8 + 6) hit points, and a challenge rating of 1 (200 XP). It loses its spear attack and gains the following:

- **Primal Rake (3/Day).** The adaro uses its reaction to empower a successful claw attack. In addition to the normal damage, the target must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 slashing damage on a failed save.
- **Multiattack.** The adaro makes two claw attacks.
- **Claw.** Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Thok-Wrottos, Guardian of the Stair

The slumbering guardian is chained to the center of a great stony pit. Thok-Wrottos appears as a massive catoblepas whose tail has split and grown into three distinct lengths. The creature's matted black hide emits a powerful stench, filling the air with toxic fumes. Its



yellowed tusks are broken and splintered from countless battles, and a dreadful snore rises from its snout as it sleeps.

THOK-WROTTOS

Large monstrosity (catoblepas), unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 144 (17d10 + 51)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 20 (+5) | 14 (+2) | 16 (+3) | 9 (-1) | 14 (+2) | 10 (+0) |

Saving Throws Str +9, Dex +6, Wis +6

Skills Perception +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages none

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Immortal. Thok-Wrottos reappears in good health chained to its place each morning at dawn, regardless of what happened to it the previous day. Only a *wish* spell has the power to end the catoblepas's eternal guardianship.

Keen Smell. Thok-Wrottos has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Thok-Wrottos fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Stench. Any creature other than a catoblepas that starts its turn within 10 feet of Thok-Wrottos must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the creature's next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the stench of any catoblepas for 1 hour.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Thok-Wrottos makes two tail attacks.

Tail. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 22 (5d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of Thok-Wrottos's next turn.

Ray of Primordial Magic (Recharge 5–6).

Thok-Wrottos targets up to two creatures that it can see within 30 feet of it. Each target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) force damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the target is immediately affected by a *banishment* spell. The duration of the banishment is 1 minute and requires no concentration to maintain. Creatures banished by this ability may choose to repeat the saving throw at the beginning of each of its turns,

ending the effect on a success and appearing in an unoccupied square within 10 feet of Thok-Wrottos.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Thok-Wrottos can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are regained at the start of each round.

- **Ray of Primordial Magic.** Thok-Wrottos uses its Ray of Primordial Magic ability, provided it is available.
- **Stampede.** Thok-Wrottos moves its speed toward an enemy.
- **Stench Cloud.** Thok-Wrottos expels a cloud of toxic gas from its moldering hide in a 20-ft.-radius sphere. Creatures caught in the cloud must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 13 (2d12) poison damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

Primordial Winds

World Descent Island is cut off from the ley lines that govern the magic in the rest of Midgard. Here, magical winds blow across the land, imbuing the giant ferns and primordial fauna with raw magic. Casting spells in this place is a dangerous and unpredictable endeavor. Each time a spell is cast, roll randomly or choose from the following table to determine the effect.

d6 RESULT

- 1 The spell fails and both spell slot and action are wasted.
- 2 The spell warps into a different spell from the druid spell list, cast at the same level (GM's discretion).
- 3 The spell fails and instead summons an earth elemental that appears in an unoccupied space next to the caster. The caster may use their reaction to take control of the elemental with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) or Charisma (Persuasion/Intimidation) skill check. On a successful check, the elemental follows the caster's commands until it dies or returns to its plane after 1 minute. A failed skill check results in the elemental attacking the nearest creature until it dissipates.
- 4 The spell is cast normally but uses an additional spell slot of equal or lesser level, if available. Otherwise, roll again.
- 5 The spell fails, and the caster is affected by the *enlarge* spell for 1 minute.
- 6 The spell is cast normally.

THE WILD OZKU HILLS

by Lou Anders & Jon Sawatsky

Five thousand years ago, when the Reaving reshaped the face of Midgard, drowning mountains, burying civilizations, and carving out new valleys in a great deluge, it likewise fashioned the oddly shaped peninsula that is today the northern half of Courlandia, that small realm ruled over by the ancient and idiosyncratic flame dragon Zennalastra, the Red Queen.

Along the topmost edge of her realm, surrounded by the waters of the Nieder Straits on three sides, lay the Wild Ozku Hills, a forbidden range populated with monsters and dark-willed, unfortunate folk banished from the civilized places of Courlandia. But the hills are home to more than these, for scattered across their slopes and summits are the godstones.

Thought to be surviving relics of lost Nordheim or some other fallen dwarven civilization, these stones were torn from their original stations, tossed in the tumultuous waters, and eventually scattered upon the hills to stand or lie in their present positions. The stones are varied in both size and shape. Some sit visible in the grass and copses of trees that grow on the hills. Others are lost in the tunnels and caves that thread through the region like the roots of a tree. The stones are said by priests and seers to be connected to some of the northern gods of Midgard, each to a different deity, and they both grant

boons and affect the land around them in ways that conjure the respective god's essential character. However, perhaps due to the intensity of the divine aura in the hills, the area around the stones have attracted strange elementals whose purpose there is unknown. But those who brave the godstone monstrosities and outcasts who call the Wild Ozku home, may find health, healing, fame, and fortune among these scattered menhirs and monoliths. Here then are some of the major godstones and their attributes, though the list is by no means complete.

Stone of Loki

The vocalizations of wolves are often heard around this lone menhir, though no beasts are present—or at least none that you can see. Those who hear the animals' howls often experience a sudden uptick in their fortunes, though misfortune is said to swiftly befall those who hear the wolves growl. Lesser told tales speak of individuals transformed by the Stone of Loki. Reportedly, when the moon shines full on a Moonday at midnight, one who touches the stone with three, and only three fingers, of the left hand may experience a change of genders, a gift of the god of cunning who is no stranger to such transformations himself.

In addition to any unique boons, Deception skill checks made within 100 feet of the stone are made with advantage. Creatures capable of casting 1st-level spells that touch the stone learn *disguise self*. The creature may cast the spell even if it is not on their class list. The creature loses the ability to cast this spell after 24 hours.

The stone lies within the territory of a large pack of **wolves** and their **winter wolf** leader.

Stone of Forseti

Standing alone in a cavern under the Ozku Hills, this stone to the son of Baldur is unmarred except for the image of an axe inlaid in gold. Attempts to steal the precious metal have all failed as the golden sigil can neither be pried loose from the stone nor melted by mundane or magical means. At the base of the stone, a small spring issues from the rock of the cavern floor. Its waters are sweet, and some have claimed that those who drink of it can tell no lies for a fortnight afterward. Occasionally, those who spend the night in the cavern with the stone avow to have received visions from the god, though it is ill advised to attempt this on moonless nights when they say he comes not as Forseti but in his mask as the Hunter and as such never leaves without claiming prey.

In addition to any unique boons, creatures that drink the spring water found in the cave come under the effects of a *zone of truth* spell that lasts for 1 hour. The magic affects only the imbiber. The imbiber is aware they have been affected.

The cave containing the stone serves as the lair to an old polar bear that can be befriended with a large quantity of meat or berries from the hills.

Stone of Sif

This tall stone, carved with braces of arrows on three-quarters of its circumference but only runes on its remaining portion, is

sacred to the mistress of the valkyries. Young couples who marry here are often blessed with multiple children while female archers who pray at the Stone of Sif find that the next arrow they loose invariably flies true. Beer quaffed in the afternoon shade cast by the stone is said to restore lost vigor or at times exhibit other healing properties.

Recently, someone has been leaving bouquets of snowdrops at the foot of the stone, doubtless in honor of Saint Adelind of Yarosbirg, but offerings of libations are more traditional.

In addition to any unique boons, for one day in mid-Winter and mid-Summer, at a rate of one each hour, the arrows etched into the stone manifest as +2 *arrows*. Any creature that takes damage from one of these divine missiles must make a DC 12 Charisma saving throw or become charmed by the creature who fired the arrow for 1d4 rounds. Competition to claim the arrows is fierce.

The stone is regularly attended by would-be archers who live in a permanent camp in the region. The archers in training (**scouts**) clean the stone and the ground around it and make offerings of adorned arrows and small game.

Stone of Thor

This stone stands upon the very edge of a cliff, facing the waters of the Nieder Straits. In earlier times, goats, sheep, and occasionally people were said to be cast off the hills to be dashed on the rocks below in sacrifice to the Thunderer. These days, dwarves often bring warhammers and greataxes to be blessed by the Slayer of Monsters, and those of dwarvenkind who favor Volund over the son of Wotan are said to feel frightened and even grow ill in the stone's presence.

An oft-disputed tale claims this stone arrived on the hills separately from the rest. Not cast up by the tumultuous seas of the Reaving at all, it is instead said to be a *Thorstan*, a thunderbolt cast by the god of lightning himself, that petrified when it struck the earth



and split the hill. Indeed, a powerful current can often be felt by those who touch the rock, a tingling of the flesh that make the hairs on the hand and arms stand erect.

In addition to any unique boons, during storms the stone acts as a lightning rod. Any creature that touches it at this time must succeed a DC 14 Charisma saving throw. Creatures who succeed the save are blessed by the stone, and their weapon attacks do an additional 1d4 lightning damage for 3 days. A failed save results in a judgement of unworthiness, causing 10 (2d8 + 3) lightning damage.

Approaching the stone is dangerous. Any creature wishing to touch the stone must succeed a DC 14 Dexterity ability check or plunge 60 feet onto the rocks below.

Stone of Wotan

The Wotan Stone stands highest of any stone upon the hills. It is uncarved, without markings of any kind, though a perfectly circular hole bisects the stone midway up its height. Those under the age of thirty-three who thrust their head through the hole are said to receive immunity to certain diseases, and newborn infants who are passed through the hole often develop the gift of prophecy in

later life. Legend tells of a farmer who walked on her knees nine times round the stone at midnight on a full moon and opened a portal to a hitherto unknown shadow road. But as the farmer was never seen again, this feat has yet to be attempted by anyone else. Or perhaps it has, and those unknown unfortunates vanished as well.

In addition to any unique boons, divination spells cast within 30 feet of the stone resolve at the casting level plus two. If an offering of valuables (at least 50 gp) is left at the stone, the offerer is automatically cured of all diseases after completing their next long rest. Duels (to the death or otherwise) fought within 30 feet of the stone are witnessed by the god, and the duelists receive advantage on all melee attacks during this combat.

The stone is often visited by a clan of wild-touched humans (**berserkers**) who tend to the site and consider it within their territory.

Apart from these major standing stones, countless smaller stones dot the hills, many stacked into cairns or arranged into rings. Fey are said to dance among them on moonlit nights, and sightings of ghosts and other spirits are claimed by those who walk the hills on darker evenings. Worth noting too is the *herrsteinakr*, a field of small, low stones in a valley between hills. The rocks are said to be the transformed remains of an army of lost Nordheim whose commander had a vision of the coming Reaving and sought to flee it before the god of War and Strength could take his vengeance. Whatever the truth of this, the stones here are strangely anthropomorphic, and the shadows they cast at dusk and dawn often look like the silhouettes of dwarven soldiers, all fleeing southward.

Finally, it must be said, there are those who believe the stones weren't cast upon and beneath the Ozku Hills by happenstance. These naysayers—defamed scholars, disgraced priests, and mad hermits for the most part—swear that the stones were arrayed in their odd positions by ancient

design. They say each stone marks the location of a nexus point in the dormant energy of a buried creature of colossal size. The stones, taken together, form a net of arcane energy, trapping this unknown titan in a state of perpetual slumber. The disparate magical effects of each stone is not due to any inherent property of the individual menhir itself, nor to any god of Midgard, but are due to that stone's location above the body of this sleeping being, manifestations of the power it slowly leaches off its subterranean prisoner. Should a sufficient number of the stones be removed or destroyed, these naysayers warn, then whatever unknown entity lies beneath the Wild Ozku Hills will wake up, destroying the hills in the process and then undoubtedly much of the wider world.

Godstone Elemental

The godstones scattered across and underneath the Wild Ozku Hills attract all manner of creatures and spirits. Most dangerous among these visitors are the strange elemental pilgrims that move from stone to stone, changing shape and nature to reflect the current mood of the god the stone is linked to. The godstone elemental is a chaotic and swirling mass of elemental energy that protects whatever stone it might be visiting.

GODSTONE ELEMENTAL

Large elemental, neutral

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 98 (13d10 + 26)

Speed 30 ft. (see Changing Aspect)

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| 20 (+5) | 15 (+2) | 14 (+2) | 11 (+0) | 14 (+2) | 6 (-2) |

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

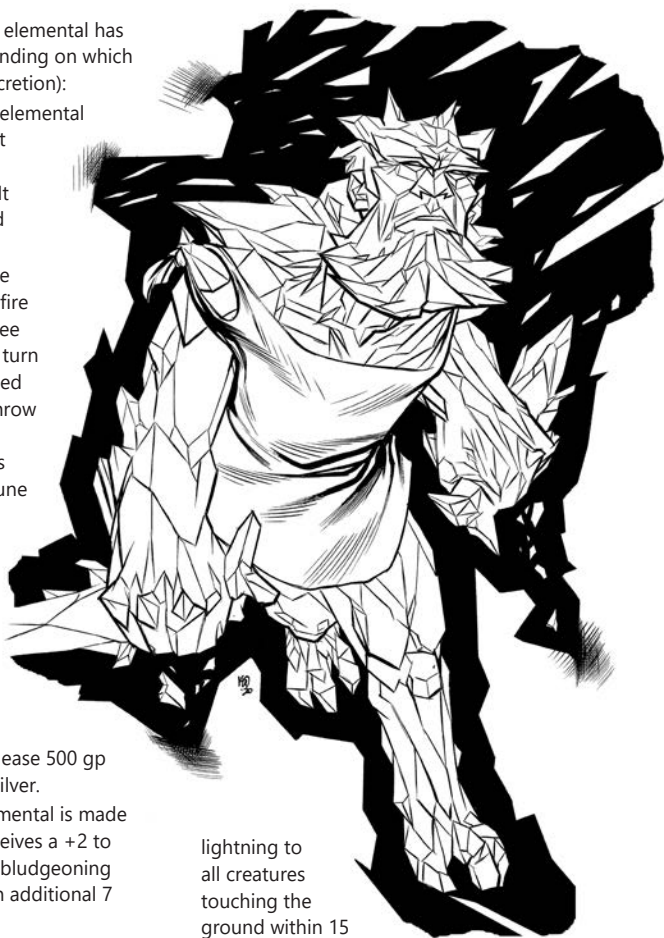
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages one primordial dialect (Aquan, Auran, Ignan, or Terran)

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Changing Aspect. The godstone elemental has one of the following traits depending on which godstone it is visiting (GM's discretion):

- **Aspect of the Cold Moon.** The elemental is made of pale glittering ice. It receives a +2 to its AC, and its slam attacks do cold damage. It is immune to cold damage and vulnerable to fire.
- **Aspect of Fire and Passion.** The elemental is made of flashing fire and light. Creatures that can see the elemental and begin their turn within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn. Its slam attacks do fire damage, and it is immune to fire and radiant damage.
- **Aspect of Gold and Silver.** The elemental is made of earth run through with veins of gold and silver. It receives a +3 to its AC, and its slam attacks do bludgeoning damage. It gains a burrowing speed of 10 feet. When defeated, its remains release 500 gp worth of unworked gold and silver.
- **Aspect of Retribution.** The elemental is made of spiked stones and ice. It receives a +2 to its AC, and its slam attacks do bludgeoning damage. Its slam attacks do an additional 7 (2d8) cold damage.
- **Aspect of Storms.** The elemental appears as a humanoid made of lightning. It is immune to lightning damage, and its slam attacks do lightning damage. It gains a flying speed of 40 feet (hover).



lightning to all creatures touching the ground within 15 feet for 6 (1d12) lightning damage (DC 13).

Ice Lance (Cold Moon and Retribution Aspect Only) (3/Day).

The elemental summons a sharp column of ice from the ground under one creature it can see within 30 feet. The creature must succeed a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 13 (2d12) piercing damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

Ignition (Fire and Passion Aspect Only) (1/Day).

The elemental explodes in a cloud of burning cinders, spreading out in a 30-foot cone. Creatures in the area must succeed a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 13 (2d12) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. Creatures that fail this save take 6 (1d12) fire damage at the beginning of each of its turns for 1 minute. A creature may use its action to end this effect.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The godstone elemental makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) damage (type of damage varies, see Changing Aspect).

Discharge (Storms Aspect Only) (1/Day).

The elemental arcs lightning to all creatures touching the ground within 15 feet. Creatures in the area must succeed a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 13 (2d12) lightning damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. Creatures that fail this save continue to arc

THE MAD SPRING AND THE SPAWNING STORMS

by Jeff Lee

Supernatural storms are common in the Western Wastes, and most of them have dangerous, often deadly, side effects. One of the more unusual types brings an unexpected boon to such a dread place: spawning storms. At random intervals—typically no more than twice annually but often not recurring for several years—spawning storms brew in the Wastes, dangerous thunderstorms that unleash torrents of rain from clouds flickering with multi-colored lightning. Flash floods sweep through the barren hills and across the dust-laden plains, everything awash in uncontrolled magic and imbued with a wild fecundity. This is known as the mad spring.

In the wake of these storms, there's an explosion of growth, both of native plants and those originating elsewhere, such as being carried as spores or wind-borne seeds from Carnessa, lying south beyond the Wall. Normally unable to grow in the harsh conditions of the Wastes, these non-native varieties have adapted, lying dormant until activated by the spawning storms. Much of the plant life, warped remnants of the greenery that once thrived here, rejuvenates and twists in the strange magics carried by the spawning storms. A mad spring brings unprecedented resources to an otherwise barren area, and those that survive the terrible storms and floods seize upon the bounty which comes after.

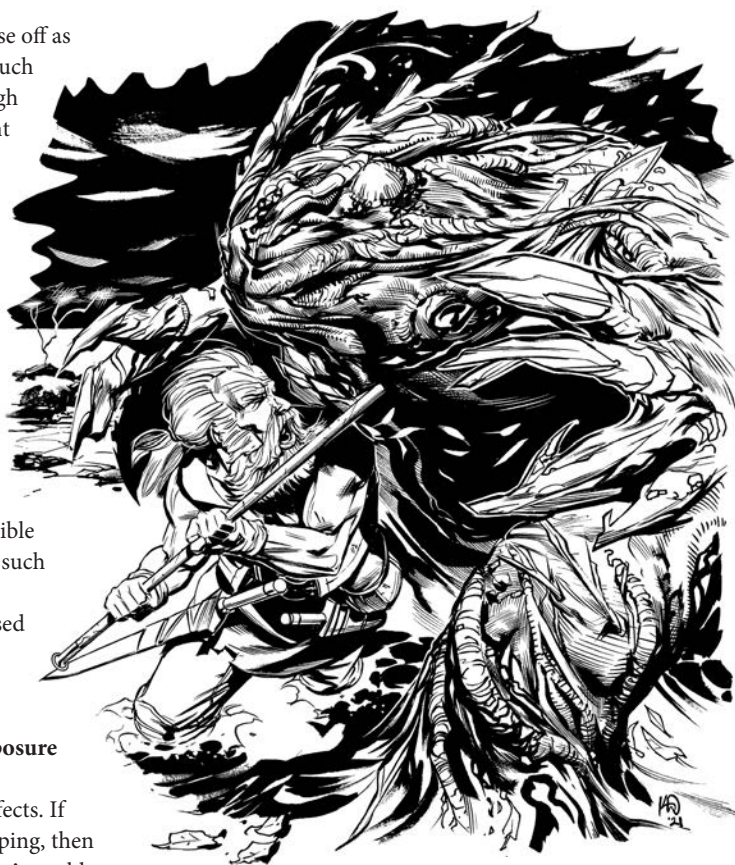
The growing season of the mad spring is unnaturally swift with plants reaching full-size and fruiting in a matter of weeks, feeding off the water from the floods. Once the storms are over and the water used up, the plant life quickly shrivels and dies as the region's normally brutal environs reassert themselves. Local inhabitants are quick to forage for the great bounty that awaits them amid this strange but welcome time. The price can be high though as many of these plants are dangerous—as are the creatures that feed on and live in them. However, the Wild Harvest, as the locals dub this time, can feed a group for the better part of a year if they move fast enough. Wastelanders are willing to risk everything to gather up this versatile and wondrous bounty.

Body Warping. Exposure to a spawning storm can cause unchecked body warping. Not all effects of the spawning storm are permanent, but the longer a creature remains exposed to the storm, the more likely it is that the changes remain. This can manifest in a number of ways. Some of the most common are the spontaneous growth of extra limbs, eyes, or even heads. Existing limbs may lengthen or increase in mass. Rapidly growing tumors and other growths can occur. Many creatures that suffer these effects do not survive long after. Those that

do are frequently worse off as the disadvantages of such warping often outweigh the benefits. Intelligent creatures often shun others of their kind that display such deviations, driving off or killing those altered by the storms. Some residents of the Wastes though, especially cults of the Dread Walkers, see such changes as gifts from their terrible masters and welcome such abominations openly.

If a creature is exposed to a spawning storm for at least 10 minutes, roll on the **Spawning Storm Exposure Effects** table below to determine possible effects. If the result is body warping, then roll on the **Body Warping** table to see what sort of warping the creature develops. The GM may substitute any roll on the **Body Warping** table with their own unique warping effect. With the exception of warping, the effects of a spawning storm on creatures are usually temporary. Any effect rolled for an exposed creature, other than warping, has a 5% chance of being permanent. Otherwise, the effects last 2d12 hours. For every hour a creature is exposed to the storm, the effects last an additional 2d12 hours, and their chances of becoming permanent increase by 5%.

Unchecked Growth. Vegetation is the least likely to be adversely affected by a spawning storm. Seeds and spores that have lain dormant in the ground germinate and grow. Existing plant life is often strengthened by



a spawning storm, growing larger and more verdant, feeding on the magical energies in the rainwater. Much of the vegetation is strange, often sporting colors not normally seen in nature. Weird characteristics are often found in the plant life spawned in the mad spring—plants that move of their own volition, expanding and contracting as if breathing, releasing clouds of pollen or spores that glow or have strange effects on creatures—giving the landscape an alien and eldritch appearance.

Other creatures are affected by the spawning storms in a number of ways. Some experience growth beyond the norm for their species. This causes them to become giant versions of their kind. During the mad spring, it is not unusual to encounter giant ants, scorpions,

spiders, and other vermin, and other giant versions of normal beasts can also be expected. This growth is often painful, and such giant creatures are often irritable and violent when encountering other creatures.

Spikes in fertility and reproduction are another effect of exposure to the spawning storms. After such a storm, many smaller creatures experience a population boom, resulting in hungry swarms that roam the landscape in search of sustenance.

Notable Areas During a Mad Spring

Melano River. Normally a twisting river of festering black sludge, the deluge of a spawning storm quickly dilutes the soupy

contents of the river and causes it to overflow its banks. The lands to either side of the river for up to a mile become flooded, sometimes up to 6–8 feet deep but usually 2–4 feet. One advantage to this is that Seelys, the qwyllion that claims the river as her home, is often quiescent during a mad spring and rarely seen. However, the River Rats—the dust goblin tribe that claims the river—range far and wide through the flooded lands, eagerly taking advantage of the expanded hunting grounds while it lasts and raiding any travelers they find in the area. Likewise, the oozes that normally confine themselves to the river also widen their hunting territory.

Roatgard Forest. The druids that tend this evil wood rarely leave its borders, allowing victims to come to them. During a mad spring

Table 1: Spawning Storm Exposure Effects

| d% | EFFECTS |
|-------|---|
| 01–15 | Creature increases in muscle mass, becoming stronger but clumsier. Its Strength increases by 2 and its Dexterity decreases by 2. |
| 16–30 | Creature's body swells, causing pain, discomfort, and lack of motion. It has disadvantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution checks. |
| 31–45 | Creature suffers from headaches, minor hallucinations, or other mental maladies. It has disadvantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma checks. |
| 46–60 | Creature's flesh grows especially dense. It gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical sources, but its speed (for all modes of movement) is reduced by 10 feet, and it loses any swim speed for the duration. |
| 61–70 | Creature's body produces growths and tumors. It gains a +1 to its natural armor and gains advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks, but it has disadvantage on other Charisma checks. |
| 71–80 | Creature experiences growth of claws, horns, and teeth, and it deals +2 damage on such attacks. |
| 81–85 | Creature experiences a painful but swift period of growth. It is treated as if enlarged by the <i>enlarge/reduce</i> spell for the duration. This effect can be negated by <i>dispel magic</i> . |
| 86–90 | Dormant spores and seeds on the creature begin to sprout, covering it in fungal or plant growth, adding a +1 bonus to AC and providing advantage on Stealth checks made to hide in areas of thick plant growth. If this effect becomes permanent, the plants begin to subsume the creature. It loses 1 point of Charisma each hour. When the creature's Charisma reaches 0, it is fully subsumed, and the creature becomes a shambling mound . |
| 91–95 | Lightning strikes the creature, dealing 35 (10d6) lightning damage. The creature must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking half damage on a successful save. In addition, roll again for a second effect. |
| 96–00 | Body warping. Roll again on the Body Warping table. |

however, the attending druids occasionally do leave its borders to explore the surrounding territory. They harvest useful plants and herbs and shepherd any plant monsters they find toward the Roatgard, providing a place to grow and flourish once the Wastes wither back to their usual state. These ventures make them no more sociable than before though, and if given the opportunity, they will capture outsiders to take back and transform into their cursed trees.

The spawning storms appear to have little effect upon the forest itself, though witnesses have reported seeing strange sights on the outskirts, like seeing trees, when struck by the storm's multi-colored lightning, suddenly uprooting and running off "screaming."

The Savage Oasis. Once the complex of a wizard who specialized in magical botany, this hidden area is typically as barren as the rest of the Western Wastes and has little to attract creatures other than its remote and secret location. The only entrance, other than flying or climbing sheer and treacherous cliffs, is through a single door in the ravine where the Hungering Cocoon resides. During a mad

spring, a waterfall feeds into the bowl-shaped valley, and an abundance of useful vegetation grows here, including remnants of the ancient wizard's botanical experiments.

The Savage Oasis is currently held by a group known as the Fallen Children. This band of outcasts and exiles is led by a former slaver named Nazaire. The group harvests edible and useful plants that grow in the valley. Nazaire's true goal is to harvest the Shrine Tree. This magical plant grows a seed every 20 years that is said to have miraculous healing properties. Nazaire hopes to use the seed to cure himself of terrible deformities he suffers from his time in the Wastes.

Nazaire has allied himself with Acraecea, a qwyllion. The corrupted nymph lairs in the Savage Oasis and guards it from intruders, allowing the Fallen Children to return during a mad spring to harvest the bounty while Nazaire watches to see if the Shrine Tree bears its seed.

Silk Thicket. The chelicerae seem to take no special interest in the outside world during a mad spring, though it is said that they hold a special ceremony after a spawning storm,

Table 2: Body Warping

d10 BODY WARPING

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1-2 | Unsightly pustules grow from the creature's skin. If the creature takes piercing or slashing damage, all creatures within 5 feet take 3 (1d6) poison damage per point of the warped creature's proficiency bonus and are poisoned for 1 minute. An affected creature must roll a Constitution saving throw (DC 10 + warped creature's Con modifier + warped creature's proficiency bonus). On a successful save, the creature takes half damage and is not poisoned. |
| 3-4 | Creature gains +2 to natural armor. The source of this armor can be thickened skin, scales, bony growths, or any other similar warping effect. |
| 5-6 | Creature grows an extra limb. It can take an extra attack with that limb as a bonus action. |
| 7 | Creature grows extra eyes, gaining advantage on all sight-based Wisdom (Perception) rolls. |
| 8 | Creature gains resistance to one of the following types of damage: acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder. |
| 9 | Creature is infused with magic. It gains resistance to nonmagical damage of one of the following types: bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage. Its natural attacks are considered magical. |
| 10 | Creature gains magic resistance, giving it advantage on all saving throws against spells and other magical effects. |

ritually feeding upon the webbed form of Acqarak upon the storm's passing. Rumor says that such storms stir the Dread Walker and that the ceremony is to drain the mighty abomination back into acquiescence.

The monstrous spiders that inhabit the wood, however, are quite willing to expand outside the boundaries of their territory when the mad spring hits. They eagerly spin new webs to trap fresh prey and lie in wait to ambush the increasing number of travelers during this time. Likewise, the dust goblin tribes that ride such spiders are often out in force, raiding and hunting.

Throne of Mavros. Already a veritable oasis in the badlands of the Western Wastes, a mad spring makes a pilgrimage to the shrine both easier and more difficult. With the Melano washed clean, pilgrims need not fear Seelys, yet they are more vulnerable to the wider-ranging dust goblin pirates of the River Rats Tribe. The verdant growth and now-abundant water ease some of the burdens of travel through the Wastes but also subject travelers to the hazards and creatures that are abundant during this brief season. At the settlement itself, there are those willing to sell harvested foods and items to new arrivals as well as those eager to hire brave souls to go and seek such treasures, especially after they have made the proper sacrifices at the shrine and possibly gained the favor of Mavros.

Creatures of the Mad Spring

The fantastic growth of a mad spring causes a chaotic change in not only the landscape but also the local food chain. And with such abundance comes additional danger. Creatures not normally seen in the wastelands come forth to feed, whether on the plants or on the creatures coming to eat those plants. Swarms of all kinds are common during a mad spring, and such creatures angrily defend their resources when other creatures blunder into their feeding grounds.

In the days immediately after a spawning storm, **shambling mounds** can be found wandering the wettest and most overgrown regions. They seem to form spontaneously, and some have speculated that the magical lightning strikes of a spawning storm are the catalyst for such creation.

The Wastes also see a rise in flying monstrosities. **Cockatrices**, **griffons**, and **manticores** are among those attracted by the mad spring. Few such creatures stay once the season has passed.

ANATHEMA LOCUSTS

Dark red with patterns of black splotches on its carapace, an anathema locust is about 3 inches in length. Its bite secretes an acidic spittle that melts organic materials. A single anathema locust is a dangerous pest, but these insects never show up alone. In groups of hundreds or thousands, these creatures slumber beneath the dust of the Wastes, awaiting the spawning storms and the mad spring that follows. Then the locusts awaken from hibernation and tunnel to the surface to feed on the abundant plant life. Most inhabitants of the Western Wastes loathe these creatures, which can strip the bounty provided in the season to nothing.

Dangerous Pest. Countries that border the Western Wastes keep close watch for these vermin during the mad spring. While they remain in the Wastes and feed on the wild growth there, they are tolerated. However, should swarms seek to fly into Allain or other border realms, defenders are quick to destroy them. Allowing anathema locusts to gain a foothold outside the Wastes could lead to famine as the invasive species has no natural predators outside of its regular territory.

Hunters and Hunted. While swarms of anathema locusts feed mainly on plant life, they will not hesitate to attack and devour creatures that disturb their feeding or happen to be in a chosen feeding ground when they

descend. The denizens of the Wastes are a frugal and hardy people however and will take their food wherever they can find it. Some hunt swarms of anathema locusts for food as the insects provide a rich source of protein. Finely woven nets of silk vine (see “Items of the Mad Spring” below) are used to ensnare a swarm, which is then quickly drowned, smothered, or killed by some other means.

SWARM OF ANATHEMA LOCUSTS

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 36 (8d8)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 3 (-4) | 12 (+1) | 10 (+0) | 1 (-5) | 8 (-1) | 1 (-5) |

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing and 3 (1d6) acid damage or 5 (2d4) piercing damage and 2 (1d4) acid damage if the swarm has half its hit points or fewer.

Defensive Retreat. The swarm can move on its turn while the locusts spray their acidic spittle, leaving behind a cloud of acid droplets that lasts until the start of the swarm's next turn. Any creature that begins its turn in the cloud takes 14 (4d6) acid damage or 7 (2d6) acid damage if the swarm has half its hit points or fewer.

ASP VINE

The asp vine appears as little more than a cluster of thick creepers or ground vines—until it attacks. Hidden under its bundles of heart-shaped leaves are thin, curving thorns that resemble snake fangs, giving the plant its name. When prey blunders into the asp vine, it lashes out, catching the creature in its coils and scoring it with its poisonous thorns. Once the creature is dead, the poison helps break down the body, providing sustenance to the vine, which draws nutrients from the remains through its roots.

Ambush Predator. Asp vines typically root themselves in a spot and wait for prey to come to them. If there is little in the way of food or if conditions become unsuitable—such as flooding—the vine will uproot itself and move to another area to await prey.

Incidental Treasure. Items belonging to victims of an asp vine often linger long after their owners have decomposed. This works to the asp vine's advantage as new victims are often lured into the clutches of the plant by the prospect of easy treasure.

Native Weapons. Asp vine thorns remain poisonous even after the plant is dead. Humanoids native to the Western Wastes often harvest asp vines, dry them, and weave the woody, twine-like vines into whips. Treat these weapons as whips that deal an additional 2 (1d4) points of poison damage on a successful hit. The poison in the whips maintains its potency for 1 week, after which the weapon ceases to deliver poison damage.

ASP VINE

Medium plant, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 55 (10d8 + 10)

Speed 10 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 14 (+2) | 12 (+1) | 12 (+1) | 1 (-5) | 3 (-4) | 1 (-5) |

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing
Condition Immunities blinded,
deafened, frightened

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind
beyond this radius), passive
Perception 6

Languages —

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

False Appearance. While the asp vine remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal cluster of vines.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The asp vine makes four vine attacks.

Vine. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and 5 (2d4) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and must succeed on a new saving throw each round it remains grappled or take another 5 (2d4) poison damage. The asp vine can grapple up to four targets at a time, though it can still make vine attacks against other targets even if it has four grappled opponents.

HAMMER HOLLY

These holly trees appear as others of their kind: waxy leaves of deep green and clusters of bright red berries. However, these trees respond to the approach of creatures by swinging their branches, clubbing at anything that moves within range of their senses. Victims of a hammer holly lie where they fall, becoming compost to feed the tree.

Experiment Gone Wild. Some scholars believe hammer hollies were magically engineered in Carnessa when the magocracy still thrived. They theorize the trees were early attempts to weaponize plants, acting as a passive security measure for the gardens and grounds of wealthy wizards. Their



presence in the Western Wastes is used as proof of the dangers present south of the Wall. Those that hold this position warn that dangerous plants have already migrated north and that more will certainly follow. While they only grow during a mad spring, it is thought that those short periods are enough to allow such plants to continue to spread and that it is only a matter of time before they reach areas where they can thrive longer and become a major menace, such as the Ironcrags, Allain, and even the Arbonesse.

Hammer Holly Wine. Like most hollies, the berries of the hammer holly are toxic. They are not poisonous to dust goblins however, and those humanoids enjoy a fermented beverage brewed from the berries that might generously be called wine. Hammer holly wine is a great delicacy for dust goblins and a rarity considering the difficulty in harvesting the necessary ingredient. Creatures who seek peaceful relations with dust goblins will find their chances greatly increased should they

have hammer holly berries to offer in trade or as a bribe. Any creature other than a dust goblin that drinks hammer holly wine is poisoned for 1 hour. A successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw negates the poisoned effect. Each serving beyond the first causes a creature 3 (1d6) points of poison damage and increases the duration of the poisoned condition by an additional hour; a successful save halves the damage and negates the poisoned effect, but the DC for the saving throw increases by 1 for each additional serving drunk.

Incidental Treasure. Items belonging to victims of a hammer holly often linger long after their owners have decomposed. This works to the hammer holly's advantage as new victims are often lured into range of the tree's attacks by shiny objects glinting among the tree's roots.



HAMMER HOLLY

Huge plant, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 60 (8d12 + 8)

Speed 0 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 18 (+4) | 10 (+0) | 12 (+1) | 1 (-5) | 10 (+0) | 1 (-5) |

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, frightened

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

False Appearance. While the hammer holly remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal holly tree.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (5d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and target is stunned for 1 round. If the target succeeds on DC 12 Constitution saving throw, it is not stunned.

MAD SPRING BEHEMOTH

This massive, warped giant stands nearly half again as tall as others of its kind. Its hairy hide is covered in large, oozing sores and swollen pustules, and one arm is longer than the other, knuckles trailing on the ground.

Many of the unfortunate creatures caught in spawning storms are deformed and often debilitated or killed by the terrible transformations that wrack their bodies. Rarely, a particularly durable or

lucky specimen is warped into a mighty monstrosity by its exposure to the storm. Greatly increased in size and strength, and favored by (mostly) beneficial warping effects, these creatures are known as mad spring behemoths—or simply behemoths.

Raging Colossi. Most behemoths are solitary creatures motivated by two things: pain and hunger. The common reaction to other creatures is violence, as the behemoth lashes out in rage or in an attempt to kill or consume intruders to sate its constant hunger. Occasionally a behemoth will develop the presence of mind to cooperate with other creatures. Most often, a behemoth will ally with creatures of its original type, but any creature clever enough to meet a behemoth's needs has a chance to gain a powerful ally so long as they keep them happily fed. Unfortunately, behemoths are impulsive in the extreme and will occasionally kill and devour an ally in a fit of pique or hunger.

HILL GIANT BEHEMOTH

Gargantuan aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 145 (10d20 + 40)

Speed 40 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 25 (+7) | 8 (-1) | 19 (+4) | 3 (-4) | 9 (-1) | 4 (-3) |

Saving Throws Str +14, Dex +3,

Con +13, Cha +5

Skills Perception +2

Damage Resistances

bludgeoning from nonmagical attacks

Senses passive

Perception 12

Languages Giant

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Virulent Pustules. When the hill giant behemoth takes piercing or slashing damage, the pustules on its hide erupt in a noxious spray. Each

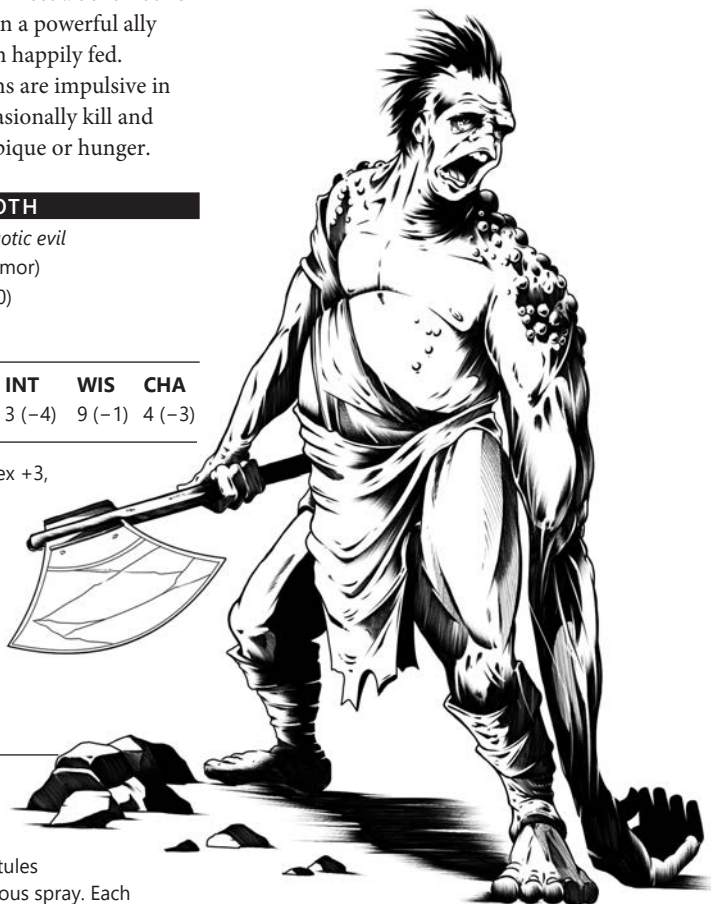
creature within 5 feet of the behemoth must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 14 (4d6) poison damage and is poisoned for 1 minute. On a success, the creature takes half damage and isn't poisoned. A poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The behemoth makes two battleaxe attacks, two slam attacks, or one of each.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 15 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 25 (4d8 + 7) slashing damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 20 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 20 (3d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.



MAD SPRING BEHEMOTH TEMPLATE

A beast, fey, humanoid, giant, or monstrosity can become a behemoth. It keeps its statistics, except as follows.

Type. The behemoth is now an aberration.

Armor Class. The behemoth gains +1 natural armor.

Size. The behemoth's size increases by two categories if Tiny or Small or by one category if larger.

Senses. The behemoth makes any adjustments to its senses based on the warping effects gained from the template.

Ability Scores. The behemoth increases its Strength score by 4 and reduces its Intelligence and Charisma scores by 2.

Skills. The behemoth gains proficiency in Athletics and Intimidation.

Resistances. The behemoth retains any resistances and adds any granted by the warping effects gained from the template.

Immunities. The behemoth retains any immunities it has. If the behemoth already has resistance to a particular type of damage and

gains it again from warping effects, it instead gains immunity to that form of damage. In the case of weapon damage, it becomes immune to all nonmagical forms of that damage.

Body Warping. The behemoth gains two warping effects from the Behemoth Body Warping table, rolled randomly or chosen by the GM.

Challenge. The behemoth increases its challenge rating by 1, recalculating its proficiency bonus as necessary. (If the body warping chart provides especially advantageous effects to a particular creature, such as adding multiple resistances to a base creature of challenge rating 3 or less, consider increasing the challenge rating by 2 instead.)

SPAWN OF ROGGSOOTHOF

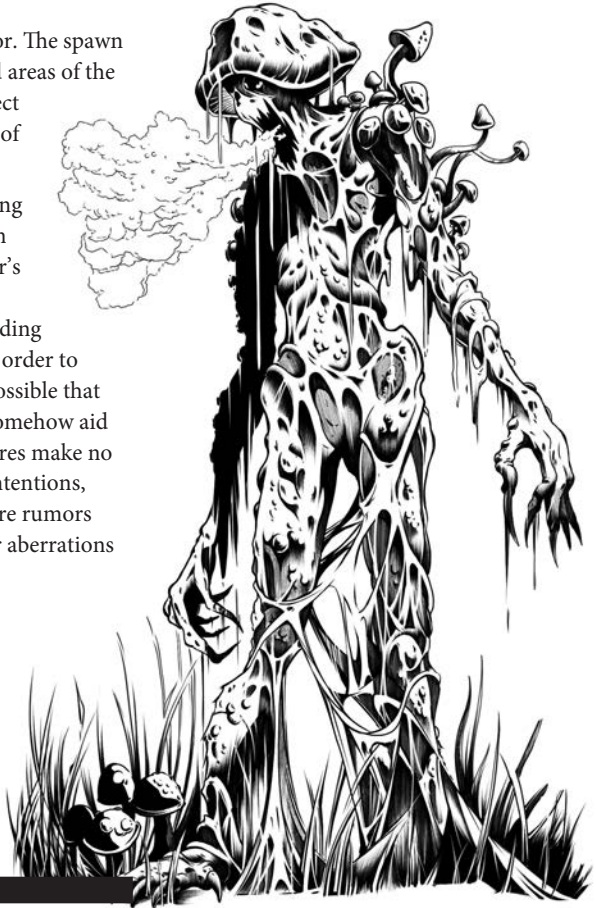
Roggssothof, the Fungal Horror, is one of the Dread Walkers of the Western Wastes. A massive, vaguely humanoid creature with a mushroom-like cap, Roggssothof is constantly surrounded by a cloud of yellow spores. During a spawning storm, some of these spores germinate and grow into terrors that

Table 3: Behemoth Body Warping

| d10 BODY WARPING | |
|------------------|--|
| 1 | Creature gains +1 natural armor. |
| 2 | Creature gains resistance to one of the following damage types: acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, or thunder. |
| 3 | Creature gains resistance to nonmagical damage of one of the following types: bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage. The creature's natural attacks are considered magical. |
| 4 | Creature gains darkvision with a range of 60 feet. If the creature already possesses darkvision, its range is doubled. |
| 5 | Creature gains a climb speed equal to its land speed. If the creature already has a climb speed, then double it. |
| 6 | Creature grows wings, giving it a fly speed equal to its land speed. |
| 7 | Creature grows multiple eyes, gaining advantage on all sight-based Wisdom (Perception) checks. |
| 8 | Creature gains magic resistance and has advantage on all saving throws against spells and magical effects. |
| 9 | Creature develops an oversized limb, gaining a slam attack with an extra 5 feet of reach and damage based on size (1d6 for Medium, 1d8 for Large, 1d10 for Huge, and 1d12 for Gargantuan). If the creature already has a slam attack, increase its reach and add an additional damage die. |
| 10 | Creature is covered with virulent pustules. This acts as the first warping effect in Table 2: Body Warping . |

resemble their colossal progenitor. The spawn stalk the night and underground areas of the Wastes, seeking creatures to infect with their spores to create more of their kind.

Wayward Children. Despite being sired by Roggsothof, most spawn are heedless of the Dread Walker's presence and ignore its current plight. Instead, they focus on finding suitable hosts for their spores in order to create more of their kind. It is possible that increasing their numbers may somehow aid Roggsothof, but since the creatures make no attempt to communicate their intentions, this is mere speculation. There are rumors of spawn cooperating with other aberrations toward unknown ends.



SPAWN OF ROGGSOTHOF

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 16 (+3) | 13 (+1) | 17 (+3) | 6 (-2) | 12 (+1) | 8 (-1) |

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities psychic

Condition Immunities exhaustion

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Deep Speech

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Silent Stalker. The spawn doubles its proficiency bonus before applying it to Perception and Stealth skill checks. This bonus is already included in its statistics.

Sun Sickness. While in sunlight, the spawn has disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws. The spawn dies if it spends more than 1 hour in direct sunlight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The spawn makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Maddening Spores. The spawn ejects spores at one creature it can see within 5 feet of it. The target takes 21 (6d6) psychic damage and must succeed at a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or be charmed for 1 minute. While charmed, a creature will take its turn to attack the nearest creature that is not a spawn of Roggsothof or also charmed by a spawn. Each round, a charmed creature may make a new saving throw, ending the effect on a success.

Hazards of the Mad Spring

The rampant, wild growth of a mad spring brings myriad new dangers to the Western Wastes. In addition to dangerous creatures, hazardous plants and conditions abound. In the days following a spawning storm, quicksand is a common hazard as the dust and sand of the Wastes become saturated with water. Included in this section are other hazards that can endanger travelers during a mad spring.

Flash Floods. Ditches, ravines, and other low-lying areas can be dangerous to travel when spawning storms are nearby. Massive amounts of water released at higher elevations quickly find their way downstream, rushing to fill in these areas without notice and sweeping away anything in front of them.

When creatures are in the path of a flash flood, their first warning is typically a distant roar or rumble, the sound of the oncoming water. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check allows a creature to hear the sound and understand its source. The water will arrive $1d4 + 1$ rounds later, a wall of dirty water pushing a mass of debris ahead of it. Creatures in the path of the water are swept away and must succeed at a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage. The creature is then swept away with the flood. A creature that is braced against or grasping an object or physical feature that cannot be swept away with the flood (such as a boulder, cliff face, or other similar feature) can make a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to avoid being swept away.

Creatures caught in the flood waters are moved 80 feet at the beginning of the round in the direction of the flood and take 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage as they are battered with debris and obstacles in the water's path. A creature must succeed a DC 15 Strength check each round to avoid going under or to resurface after going under. With a DC 20

Strength check, a creature can swim for the bank or some other immobile object and pull themselves from the water.

Iron Brambles. These thick, thorny shrubs are common impediments during a mad spring. A square in which iron brambles grow is considered difficult terrain. Worse, their thorns catch and tear. Creatures moving through iron brambles take 2 (1d4) piercing damage if wearing light or no armor. Creatures in medium armor or that have 1 point of natural armor take 1 point of piercing damage. Creatures in heavy armor or that have 2 or more points of natural armor are unaffected. Tiny creatures are small enough to move through iron brambles without being affected.

Additionally, creatures moving through iron brambles must succeed at a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained. Restrained creatures can attempt to free themselves by succeeding a DC 12 Dexterity or Strength check. A 5-foot-square patch of iron brambles has an AC 11, 10 hit points, resistance to bludgeoning damage, and immunity to piercing damage.

Iron brambles are one of the few hazards of a mad spring made worse by its passing. When they die, iron brambles dry and harden, becoming tough, inflexible, and more difficult to bypass: DCs for saving throws and checks made against iron brambles increases to 14, AC increases to 13, hit points increase to 20, and they gain resistance to slashing damage and immunity to bludgeoning damage. In their dry state, they are vulnerable to fire damage, but large swaths of iron brambles (and other dead and dry vegetation in the area) make using such methods risky as wildfires could easily result.

Quash Moss. This thick, deep-green moss grows quickly after a spawning storm, typically in shaded areas. A typical patch of quash moss covers a 10-foot square. It appears as completely normal moss until pressure is applied to its surface, as when a creature

walks upon it, and it then rises up and wraps around whatever is on it. The target creature must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw to jump clear; otherwise the quash moss rolls up tightly around it. A captured creature is restrained and takes 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage and 5 (1d10) acid damage each round on its turn. A captured creature may make a DC 13 Dexterity check each round, slipping free on a success. Quash moss cannot otherwise move. Any effect that causes fire damage or 48 hours exposed to direct sunlight will destroy an average patch of quash moss.

Vampire Grass. This tall, tough grass grows in large swaths where water travels or collects. The roots of the grass grow wide and deep, making the stalks difficult to uproot. While water is in plentiful supply, the grass is harmless. However, once water sources dry up, vampire grass will attempt to derive moisture from any possible source, including living beings. A creature that enters a square occupied by vampire grass must succeed a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or become entangled, becoming restrained. Each round a creature is restrained, the sharp leaves of the grass slice in and absorb moisture from the creature's body, inflicting 11 (2d10) necrotic damage. A restrained creature may attempt a DC 12 Strength check to break free. Any square occupied by vampire grass is considered difficult terrain to any living creature.

Items of the Mad Spring

One of the draws to the Western Wastes during a mad spring, despite the dangers, are the myriad useful items and materials produced by the rampant growth in the area. Adventurers often risk expeditions in order to harvest such goods and sell them in Allain, Verrayne, or one of the other civilized areas bordering the Wastes. There is always a market awaiting the bounties, just as there

are always wary natives ready to end the lives of interlopers seeking to raid and make off with such bounties.

Choke Mushroom Tea. A species of dark-brown mushrooms with white pustules on the caps, choke mushrooms are so named because of their awful, bitter taste. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine or Survival) is needed to successfully identify them. These mushrooms can be dried and brewed into a health-boosting tea that tastes as awful as the mushrooms from which it is made. If a creature completes a short rest within 24 hours of drinking this tea and spends Hit Dice to regain hit points, it rolls two dice and uses the higher of the two rolls. If a creature completes a long rest within 24 hours of drinking this tea, it regains one extra spent Hit Die.

Moon Melon. This small, round melon has a bright yellow rind with orange spots and weighs about 1 pound. The flesh of a moon melon is sweet, juicy, and white in color, with a cluster of ovoid black seeds at its center. Moon melon flesh glows when exposed to air, giving off bright light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for another 10 feet. A creature that eats moon melon also glows softly. For 1 hour after eating at least 6 ounces of moon melon, a creature will give off bright light in a 5-foot radius and dim light for another 5 feet. One additional side effect is that, after the glow has worn off, the creature's urine becomes phosphorescent for the next 4 hours.

Silk Vine. These thread-like yellow growths are a type of fungus, despite their name. They have a slightly oily feel to them and smell slightly briny. When cut and dried, they can be woven into useful rope. Rope made from silk vine has the statistics of silk rope but also has resistance to acid and fire and sells for 15 gp for a 50-foot length.

STAFF OF THE WILD HARVEST

Staff, legendary (requires attunement)

This twisted staff of ancient, bleached wood sprouts long, spatulate leaves of silvery green and strange, many-petaled purple flowers from its head an hour before the advent of a spawning storm if you are within 100 miles of its origin, and you can sense the direction and distance to that location for up to 72 hours after the storm has ended so long as the staff contains at least 1 charge.

The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 20, the staff regains 1d4 + 1 charges.



Spells. You can use an action to expend one or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC: *call lightning* (3 charges), *control water* (4 charges), *create or destroy water* (1 charge), *entangle* (1 charge), or *speak with plants* (1 charge). You can also cast *druidcraft* and *pass without trace* from the staff without using any charges.

Harvester. You can use an action to expend one charge from the staff. Any and all vegetation in a 60-foot radius will gain limited animation, following you with a speed of 30 feet. This can be the whole plant or just the parts of the plant you choose (fruit, leaves, flowers, and so on). The vegetation will follow you for up to 8 hours.

VERDANT ELIXIR

Potion, uncommon

Multi-colored streaks of light occasionally flash through the clear liquid in this container, like bottled lightning. Certain wizards from the Magocracy of Allain have discovered ways to bottle rain from a spawning storm and retain some of its potency. If the bottle is broken or emptied on a spot, it acts as the one-action casting of *plant growth*, centered on the point where it was opened.

If the verdant elixir is applied to a creature with the plant type, the target increases in size and vigor. For the next hour, the target's size increases by one category, it gains 11 (2d10) temporary hit points, gains advantage on all Strength checks and saving throws, and a bonus of +2 on all damage rolls.

Adventures During the Mad Spring

The Wasted West is completely transformed during a mad spring, providing new dangers and opportunities for adventurers. Whether seeking the strange and wondrous bounties offered during the Wild Harvest, fighting the sudden surge of new creatures that stalk the lands, or making a pilgrimage along the Bone Road while the land does not reek of death, there are plenty of opportunities for adventure during a mad spring:

- A master alchemist in Bourgund seeks new, exotic scents to sell to their customers. They seek adventurers willing to travel into the Wastes during the mad spring to find flowers, fruits, and other plant life that would make marvelous new perfumes. The alchemist is willing to pay well for any useful samples brought back from the wasteland.
- The scions of three noble houses in Dornig have gone missing. Each was leading a band of pilgrims along the Bone Road to the Seat of Mavros. There has been no word from the nobles. However, a traveling merchant recently arrived at the manor of one of the nobles, bearing their daughter's signet ring. The merchant claimed to have bought it from a strange traveler. The ring continues to grow a strange fungus that returns despite being removed and the ring cleaned. The elders of the noble houses have put aside their squabbles to assemble a team of heroes to take the Bone Road into the Wastes and find their children, encouraging them to scour the path of pilgrimage for any sign of their lost offspring.
- Rumor has it that during the mad spring, the enchanting piping of the selang becomes more insidious and powerful. Survivors of the Wild Harvest tell of the alien satyrs playing on pipes of ghostly white wood that give off a phosphorescent glow. The music from such instruments seems too powerful to resist. A bardic order in Dornig wishes to acquire samples of this wood and if possible an instrument crafted from it. Adventurers are hired to delve into the Western Wastes during the mad spring to do exactly that.
- While participating in the Wild Harvest, the adventurers are caught between two rival tribes seeking to claim the bounty of a particularly rich area. Both sides try to hire the adventurers to help enforce their claim on the area, while continuing to fight with one another. As the hostilities ensue, the battles trample plants that could be harvested, and the small window of time for the Wild Harvest grows short. Will the adventurers side with one faction or the other? Will they manage to mediate the dispute? Or will they decide to take what is there for their own and rebuff both sides in the conflict?
- A wizard in Allain with an interest in botany recently discovered copies of the research notes of the wizard that created the garden and research lab now known as the Savage Oasis. She is offering a sizeable reward to anyone willing to venture into the place during a mad spring and return samples of the plant life that grows there. Should the delvers find and return any other research notes or tomes once belonging to the original owner, she will throw in a hefty bonus.

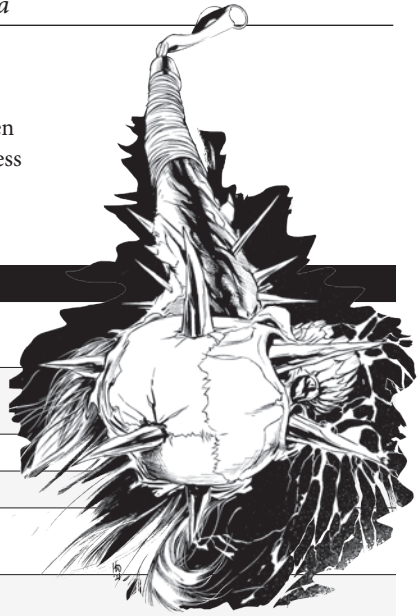
WEIRD LISTS

by Mike Shea

Life—and adventuring—just gets more interesting when it's weird and random. So here's some weird randomness for your adventures.

d20 MOONS OF THE ASTRAL PLANE

- 1 Torven, the Diamond Moon, surrounding a titanic demonic head
- 2 Kalkaron, Moon of Desert Storms, surrounding a portal to the city of brass
- 3 Sivix, the Coiled Moon of the black serpent sorcerers
- 4 Yiveneras, the Gray Moon of the hermit god
- 5 Qor, the Dead Moon of the Vruush, a race of planet devouring insectoids
- 6 Eden, the Forest Moon of an isolated people protected by god-forged golems
- 7 Wrennes, the Storming Moon of acidic water surrounding the ruins of a fabled astral skiff
- 8 Pavara, the Palace Moon of the succubus warlock Queen Aranya
- 9 Ulchyn, the Dungeon Moon, holding the defeated aberrations of the War of Black Glass
- 10 Calavax and Kasar, the Twin Moons, between which flows a massive chain through two portals
- 11 Ebon, the Lost Moon of the deep astral sea, now hollowed out by the arch-lich Tryne
- 12 Voru's End, the floating head of a decapitated demon prince surrounded by an acidic ring
- 13 Hasanbrae, home of the goblin skyship fleet of Ovylar
- 14 The Phrage, the formless gray moon of a sentient god-eating disease
- 15 Tyranu, the moon of the warring ziggurat tyrants following the dragon king Kastalar
- 16 Xevel Lyre, a hollow moon of caves leading to Ix the worm queen
- 17 Denben, Moon of the Eternal Lycanthrope, ruled over by the Black Blood council of werewolf lords
- 18 Natelve, a river-crossed moon where bearfolk gondolas travel between worlds
- 19 Justifar, a war-torn wasteland where two titans guard a gateway to the heavens
- 20 Gan, a sentient moon that seeks the destruction of life in the multiverse





d20 OLD BONES

- 1 Jawbone with three gold teeth, each one etched with a tiny sigil
- 2 Jawless skull with only one eye socket on its left side, the other side perfectly smooth
- 3 Battle-worn femur filled with black iron, heavy enough to wield as a club
- 4 Necklace of toe bones, each exactly the same size
- 5 Skeletal hand with twice the number of joints, woven together with silver thread
- 6 Ribcage with gemstones embedded on its sternum pre-mortem
- 7 Glyph-covered humerus wrapped with three golden bands
- 8 Blood-covered fangs torn from the mouth of a werebeast
- 9 Vertebrae whip that sounds like laughter when cracked
- 10 Fiendish skull with cold-iron rings piercing through its curved horns
- 11 Axe formed from a femur and scapula and woven with leather, all taken from the same victim
- 12 Teeth carved into dice that roll whatever number is whispered into them
- 13 Chandelier built from the bones and skulls of a traitorous family
- 14 Crocodile-toothed sacrificial saw with a spiked handle that cuts its wielder along with the victim
- 15 Child's skull with glowing yellow agates for eyes and two sets of teeth
- 16 Vertebrae carved with prayers to a dead god
- 17 Twin tibia-bladed daggers etched with the names "Juliet" and "Sabrina" in elven
- 18 Skull pierced through with spiked crown whose spines continue to grow inward
- 19 Goblin-skull lantern that cackles when its light falls upon living beings
- 20 Fingerbone candles that cast shadows of a grasping claw on the ceiling

d20 PAINFUL JEWELRY

- 1 Platinum fishhook earring that causes one's ear to continually bleed
- 2 Necklace of serrated teeth that slowly bites into one's chest
- 3 Toe ring that makes it ever more painful to walk
- 4 Ring with a shiny gemstone too painful to look at
- 5 Boa constrictor bracelet that twists one's arm in an unnatural position
- 6 One-way thumb ring you can never quite pull off
- 7 Ankle bracelet that grows heavier with each step taken
- 8 Burrowing earring seeking out the tasty knowledge of the one who wears it
- 9 Barbed bracelet, slowly growing into the bone
- 10 Amulet that grows ever hotter in the sun
- 11 Singing earring that distracts its wearer with off-tune melodies
- 12 Ankle bracelet that causes its wearer to randomly twist their ankle
- 13 Eyeglasses that shift focus just when things become clear
- 14 Ring that randomly dislocates the finger upon which it is placed
- 15 Bracelet that slowly presses in on the tendons of the wearer's wrist
- 16 Nose ring that feeds peppery spices into one's nose at inopportune moments
- 17 Heart-seeking amulet that burrows slowly into one's chest
- 18 Connected ear and nose ring, arcing with just enough electricity to put one's hair on end
- 19 Shifting octopus rings whose tentacles twist one's fingers
- 20 Eye clamps that force open the eyes of the wearer who sees things they wish they hadn't

d20 RELICS DEEP IN THE ICE

- 1 Primeval altar to a star-devouring elder evil
- 2 Fiendish masthead of a ship last seen thousands of miles away
- 3 Twisted asymmetric skull of a beast only heard of in legend
- 4 Perfectly preserved robed corpse over a half-million years old
- 5 Megalith engraved with ancient drow glyphs
- 6 Icy hollow containing a tropical garden that surrounds a blooming white rose
- 7 Mammoth skull with enchanted, steel-lined tusks
- 8 Burning brazier with blue fire that burns cold
- 9 Unholy greatsword embedded in a block of glyphed stone
- 10 Ruins of a dwarven city never before heard of
- 11 Half of an obsidian mask that peers into other worlds
- 12 Cold-iron bell that rings a deathly toll
- 13 Cavern containing an army of ten thousand decaying skeletons awaiting orders
- 14 Icy creche holding a giggling child with quicksilver eyes
- 15 Burning-hot, sigil-covered meteor from the outer planes
- 16 Statue of a king long forgotten
- 17 Frozen undead dragon sleeping away the millennia
- 18 Ancient portal holding a teleporting wizard stuck in a loop
- 19 Black cathedral imprisoning a forgotten arch-devil
- 20 Huge necrotic war machine of a war long forgotten

d20 GRANDMOTHER'S CRAWLSPACE

- 1 Bottle of poison and the portraits of three dead sons
- 2 Sword and armor from the losing side of a blood-soaked crusade
- 3 Portal to the bedchambers of the faerie prince
- 4 Undamaged doll resembling the local queen and a box of long needles
- 5 Map to the back entrance of a green dragon's lair
- 6 Three of grandmother's unanimated simulacra
- 7 Love letters and risqué paintings sent from the king
- 8 Journal with entries dating after grandmother's own death
- 9 Pirate's map of sunken vessels and their manifests
- 10 A lock of hair, a 1,000-gp diamond, a scroll of resurrection, and a note to be resurrected in 99 years
- 11 An infernal contract binding grandmother's soul to hell unless a certain quest is undertaken
- 12 Scrapbook that goes back over 1,000 years
- 13 Accepted invitation to a vampire's ball from 50 years ago
- 14 An iron maiden from which a weak voice begs for release
- 15 Skeleton wearing the amulet of the hobgoblin king Krovush Bloodletter
- 16 Sixteen clockwork cats who feed off of gemstones
- 17 Ancient stone archway filled with swirling shadow, carefully moved from Castle Shadowcrag
- 18 Tiny living sapling from the heart of the Old Margreve
- 19 Collection of carved miniatures of each of the Old Ones of the Western Wastes
- 20 Advanced degree from the most prestigious wizards' academy in the land

d20 TRASH IN THE WIZARD'S REFUSE PIT

- 1 Dark lantern swimming with angry shadows
- 2 Two shattered vials of liquid that combined into an ochre jelly
- 3 Cracked wand that has a 15% chance of backfiring on the caster
- 4 Scroll of a heavily restricted *wish* spell
- 5 Torn portable hole that loses items placed inside 10% of the time
- 6 Grind the incompetent flesh golem
- 7 Torn robe of useless things
- 8 Everburning half of a broken staff of power
- 9 Skull that continually talks after dark
- 10 Gemstone prison of a trapped devil
- 11 Crystal ball containing an entire tiny living city
- 12 Cursed idol of an ancient and powerful cult
- 13 Half of the pieces of a living chess set
- 14 Bottled genie who is owed one wish
- 15 Artificial eye through which the wizard still sees
- 16 Figurine of a wondrous yet angry dire wolf
- 17 Limitless ink pen that slowly and continually leaks
- 18 Crystal ball that shows only random events
- 19 Mechanical mouse that does the opposite of what you tell it to do
- 20 Small figurines of the characters exactly as they currently are

d20 TREASURES OF THE OTYUGH'S BELLY

- 1 Golden tentacled idol, tentacles still wriggling
- 2 Lost sending stone with a scorned lover continually calling on the other end
- 3 Prosthetic foot wearing a single boot of springing and striding
- 4 Signet ring of a king who went missing 20 years ago
- 5 Prized hat of a local wizard
- 6 Weapon used in the murder of a local lord
- 7 Opaque cookie jar filled with swarms of beetles
- 8 Single cracked bead from a necklace of fireballs
- 9 Skull carved with an intricate rose and thorn that drips real blood
- 10 Jeweled hairclip belonging to the richest woman in the land
- 11 Unopened bottle of 90-year-old spirits
- 12 A pair of wedding rings from a couple who disappeared after their marriage
- 13 Glass eye with golden iris belonging to a local mage who still sees through it
- 14 Street sign from a city 140 miles away
- 15 Famous lucky coin from a gambler who supposedly won big and retired on an island
- 16 Local dancer's prized waist chain
- 17 Ten gold teeth from the same side of two different mouths
- 18 Everburning lantern that drove the otyugh mad
- 19 500-gp diamond and a scroll of *raise dead* sealed in a brass tube
- 20 Key to a nearby fey gate thought dormant for centuries

d20 VAMPIRE'S POSSESSIONS

- 1 Fanged skull of the vampire's first master
- 2 Glass case containing a red rose with one petal left on the stem
- 3 Locket containing the portrait of the vampire as human with her wife from 700 years ago
- 4 Vial of blood from the first vampire
- 5 The annotated vampire's instruction manual of human anatomy
- 6 Red gemstone amulet containing a tiny screaming skull
- 7 Ornate platinum spiked pinky thimble
- 8 Book journal with ratings for over 57,000 books
- 9 Stack of unsent letters to the editor of the nearest city's newspaper
- 10 Detailed maps and notes of the tunnels beneath the city
- 11 Names and descriptions of the region's most beautiful people with notations for those currently charmed
- 12 Rhinestone angelic costume ball mask
- 13 Hand mirror etched with the vampire's idealistic visage
- 14 Pocket watch that keeps perfect time for sunrises and sunsets anywhere in the world
- 15 Wind-up marionette of a famous dancer who disappeared 20 years ago
- 16 Collection of vials of blood from each of the vampire's victims
- 17 Detailed portrait of one of the characters sleeping
- 18 750-year-old drawings from the vampire's children, addressed to the vampire
- 19 Small globe containing a diorama of the vampire's castle with the sun high above it
- 20 Collection of dozens of different holy symbols across the centuries

d20 VILLAINOUS ARMAMENTS

- 1 Scythe blade that murmurs with the voices of every mortal it has killed
- 2 Greatsword that leaves shadowy moaning faces flowing in its wake
- 3 Sacrificial dagger encrusted with a small ruby for every life it ended
- 4 Battleaxe carved from the shoulder bone of a frost giant chieftain
- 5 Leather armor stitched from living skin
- 6 Helm that makes wearer's head appear as a skull
- 7 Spear with a head carved from the silvery bone of a celestial being
- 8 Poisonous darts shaped like abyssal hornets
- 9 Charred, smoking longbow that fires flaming arrows
- 10 Serrated, black-bladed shortsword with blood swirling within the blade
- 11 Shield emblazoned with the seal of a doomed kingdom
- 12 Obsidian dagger that turns those it kills into dust
- 13 Barbed arrow that continually burrows deeper into those it strikes
- 14 Skull-topped warclub that still has hair hanging from its scalp
- 15 Cleaver and mace pair connected by a spiked chain
- 16 Wand that emits children's cries
- 17 Boots that leave eternally bloody footprints
- 18 Glaive with a smoldering blade that sets flammable objects alight
- 19 Eel-skin gloves that silence those whose mouths it covers
- 20 Dagger with a hilt shaped like a weeping angel whose tears fill the blade with poison

WONDROUS LOCALES OF THE SOUTHLANDS

by Richard Green

The Southlands are filled with both wonder and danger, with incredible sights to behold. There are still countless locales that remain hidden to outsiders. And those who would keep it that way.

Bones of the Titans

South of the Youma Hills, a dragon or kongamato flying over the Fendeel Jungle might spot a sudden break in the rainforest canopy, indicating a large clearing down below. Moving in closer to have a better look, our aerial observer would see what appear to be two giant humanoid shapes, lying on the ground, overgrown with foliage and locked in an embrace. The figures are around 60 feet long and are covered from head to toe by creepers, strangler figs, brightly colored orchids, and flowering bromeliads, making it hard to determine where one ends and the other begins.

Fallen Giants. The huge shapes are the plant-covered skeletons of Chibueze and Otieno, two titans of Glorious Umbuso who fought a deadly battle on this site three thousand years ago. Their ancient empire fell when the titans of the Southlands succumbed to a magical plague that drove them insane. Some realized what was happening in time and imparted their divine spark—the source of their

divinity—to a mortal disciple before entering a deep slumber or escaping to the islands of the Tethys Ocean to the east. Others, including this unfortunate pair, fell victim to the plague so quickly that they were unable to prevent its onslaught and simply tore each other apart.

Battle raged between Chibueze and Otieno and their mortal followers across the southwestern grasslands for several weeks until only the titans themselves were left standing. Taking the fight into the Fendeel Jungle, the pair slugged it out from dawn to dusk, destroying countless trees and plants as they clashed. Eventually, the exhausted titans' conflict culminated in a final showdown, each dying with their hands tightly gripped around their opponent's throat. When they expired, the titans left their divine sparks behind, glowing spheres around the size of a crystal ball. It wasn't long before these sparks were discovered.

The Fate of the Sparks. A few weeks after the titans fell, an okapi, a peaceful forest herbivore related to the giraffe, wandered into the newly formed clearing their fight had created. Feeling himself strangely drawn to the glowing ball of light—Chibueze's divine spark—lying on the ground among the fallen trees, he reached out with his long black tongue to lick the sphere. The spark flared briefly before absorbing into the

animal. Magically awakened by the spark, the okapi gained the ability to speak. He also became immortal.

Naming himself Kayode, the okapi soon realized that the divine spark had given him the ability to affect others. Kayode cast the *awaken* spell on the first leopard he saw, turning a would-be hunter into his protector, and then also awakened the leader of a troop of chimpanzees. The first task Kayode gave the apes was to hide Otieno's divine spark in the caves behind a nearby waterfall.

In the centuries that followed, Kayode has awakened and befriended hundreds of animals. He sees it as his duty to safeguard the jungle and its inhabitants from harm and to keep Otieno's divine spark hidden from those who would abuse its power.

Exploring the Clearing. The characters might stumble across the Bones of the Titans by chance while traveling through the Fendeel Jungle or come to the clearing in search of a divine spark.

Anyone studying the vine-covered giants for a few minutes and succeeding on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check will realize that the two figures are positioned as if strangling each other, rather than in an amorous embrace. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (History) check allows a character to determine their size matches the height of the legendary titans. Their ancient skeletons are covered in thousands of years of plant growth, but single-minded characters can clear enough foliage from a section to reveal the bone beneath.

Visitors to the clearing are greeted shortly after their arrival by Nkiru, a talking chameleon (**lizard**). She welcomes the newcomers to the Bones of the Titans and asks them their business. Meanwhile, the other awakened denizens of the clearing begin to slowly emerge from the

trees and gather around. Wangari the leopard (**panther**) appears first, followed by Tendai the chimpanzee and the rest of his troop (**apes**), a family of **baboons**, and several small **deer**. Last to arrive is Kayode himself—the other animals stand respectfully aside to let the okapi through.

KAYODE

The awakened okapi stands 5 feet tall at the shoulder; his body is just over 8 feet long. Kayode has a long neck similar to a giraffe's but shorter, large ears, and short, horn-like protuberances on his head. His coat is reddish



brown with white zebra-like horizontal stripes on his legs.

Kayode uses the **riding horse** stat block with the following changes: he is neutral good, has AC 15, 44 hit points, Intelligence 18 (+4) and Charisma 16 (+3), can read and speak Titan and the Southern Trade Tongue, and has the following trait:

Innate Spellcasting. Kayode's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no spell components:

- 3/day: *awaken*

DIVINE SPARKS

Over three thousand years old, thanks to Chibueze's divine spark, Kayode has watched over this part of the Fendeel Jungle for centuries, keeping the existence of his own spark and Otieno's a closely guarded secret. If visitors to the Bones of the Titans come in peace and seem trustworthy, Kayode and his awakened animal friends offer their hospitality, showing them where they can find edible fruits and fresh water. They do their best to keep strangers away from the nearby waterfall lest they become too curious and discover the caves where Otieno's spark is hidden.

Kayode denies knowing anything about divine sparks, but characters who make a Wisdom (Insight) check contested by the okapi's Charisma (Deception) check (made with a +3 bonus) can tell he knows more than he's letting on. Succeeding on a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check can convince Kayode to open up to the characters slightly. He says nothing about his own spark but admits that he is keeping "something magical" safe from those who would abuse its power.

Tosculi Threat. Over the centuries, Kayode has thwarted attempts by murkscale lizardfolk, **millitaur**s (see *Tome of Beasts*), and jungle explorers to steal Otieno's spark. Now, he is worried that the spark is about to fall into

the hands of a much greater threat—a nearby tosculi hive.

Under the control of a **tosculi hive-queen** (see *Tome of Beasts*) named Lhezzeeth, this relatively small hive sprung up a few months ago and already has a population of over 1,500 tosculi, all with iridescent green carapaces. Several winged drone scouts have visited the Bones of the Titans, and Kayode believes that a full-strength raiding party of **tosculi warriors** will arrive next to seize the divine spark. If the okapi believes the characters to be good-hearted and powerful enough to keep Otieno's spark safe, he may freely offer it to them in exchange for their help in defeating the tosculi raiders.

Rules for divine sparks can be found in the *Southlands Worldbook*. Otieno's spark grants the holder the ability to innately cast *stoneskin* three times per day.

Spark Theft. Unscrupulous adventurers may decide to investigate the caverns behind the waterfall and attempt to steal Otieno's spark themselves. Those that do so must take care to avoid the numerous deadly traps built by Kayode's chimpanzee allies. These include pits filled with poisoned spikes, deadfalls, snares, and even a giant rolling boulder.

Evil and ruthless adventurers who somehow determine that Kayode also holds a divine spark might decide to kill the okapi and attempt to absorb his spark as he dies (see *Southlands Worldbook*). Attacking Kayode brings the full wrath of his animal allies to bear on the characters.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Rumors of divine sparks may lure adventurers to the Bones of the Titans. Here are a couple of other possible hooks:

- The owner of Ige's Forbidden Incantations in Nangui's Market of Found Wisdom needs a sliver of titan bone as a spell component for an important customer. Ige offers the characters a rare magic

item if they can obtain the sliver. He has a rough map of the Fendeel Jungle, showing where Chibueze and Otieno are said to have fought their final battle.

- While the characters are in Morreg, they hear a ruuxa (or living reliquary) issue a cryptic prophecy from its obelisk. The prophecy warns of a tosculi hive-queen “searching for the might of fallen Umbuso.” And those wanting to stop her should “seek the counsel of the animals of the jungle.”

Land of the Ragged

Almost forgotten by all but the Scribes of Thoth-Hermes and other sages, the ancient oasis town of Dencaru lies deep in the desert mountains to the southwest of Mhalmet. When Siwal, City of Gardens, broke away from Nuria Natal 1,000 years ago, much smaller Dencaru followed suit, declaring itself an independent city-state under the rule of the autocratic Queen Nethyrr III.

This bold (many would say foolish) move was but the first sign that Queen Nethyrr was succumbing to dementia. As her health continued its inexorable decline, even the soothing hands of her slave-lovers could not take her mind from the pain. With her physicians and priests unable to prevent her impending death, Queen Nethyrr issued a terrible final decree: when she became a mummy, all of her subjects would join her in undeath.

In a series of forbidden rituals of the dark god Mot, Lord of Undead, the queen and Dencaru’s entire population—around 3,500 humans, basteti catfolk, dwarves, and gnolls—were interred in the town’s Red Pyramid and mummified while still alive.

The populace arose as undead not long after. Queen Nethyrr became a **mummy lord**, and her court became **mummies**. The rest of her subjects became weaker **lesser mummies**.

LESSER MUMMY

Medium undead, lawful neutral or lawful evil

Armor Class 11 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)

Speed 20 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 14 (+2) | 8 (–1) | 13 (+1) | 6 (–2) | 10 (+0) | 12 (+1) |

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages the languages it new in life

Challenge CR 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Rotting Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with mummy rot. The cursed target can’t regain hit points, and its hit point maximum decreases by 7 (2d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the curse reduces the target’s hit point maximum to 0, the target dies, and its body turns to dust. The curse lasts until removed by the *remove curse* spell or other magic.

Dreadful Glare. The mummy targets one creature it can see within 60 feet of it. If the target can see the mummy, it must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or become frightened until the end of the mummy’s next turn. A target that succeeds on the saving throw is immune to the Dreadful Glare of all lesser mummies (but not of standard mummies or mummy lords) for the next 24 hours.

UNLIFE IN DENCARU

Becoming a mummy lord reinvigorated Queen Nethyrr, and she laid claim to the mountains surrounding Dencaru, which came to be known as the Land of the Ragged. Refusing to accept that she was now dead, Queen Nethyrr demanded her subjects did

the same or face instant immolation. Confused and frightened, her vassals did as they were told.

In the centuries that followed, the inhabitants of Dencaru have simply forgotten that they are dead. Today, “life” goes on almost—but not quite—as it would in a normal settlement: artisans make tools and throw pots that nobody needs, farmers grow crops that no one eats, and the townsfolk still sit in the coffee houses, chatting over un-drunk glasses of mint tea or playing games of twenty squares. At night, they lie down in their beds, unsleeping, until dawn breaks.

Meanwhile, Queen Nethyrr rules the Land of the Ragged from her palace where she presides over her grotesque court. This impressive stone building is surrounded by beautiful gardens filled with frankincense and myrrh trees. An avenue of stone sphinxes leads up to the entrance.

Queen Nethyrr is advised by her vizier, Hepteterres, the One Who Speaks to Strangers (LE **mummy** with the spellcasting ability of a **mage**), and protected by Mahthep the Sacred Guardian (LE **mummy** with 116 hp, wielding a *flame tongue khopesh*). The queen likes to keep herself and her court entertained with blood sports and other brutal spectacles. Dangling human captives over the crocodile-infested lake in the middle of the oasis is a particular favorite.

Such diversions require a regular influx of living victims, so the queen dispatches her merchants north to purchase slaves from



gnoll slavers and other unscrupulous traders. Calling themselves the Ragged, these lesser mummies can sometimes be seen in Siwal and at caravanserais along the Mhalmet Road. They wear deep crimson robes that cover their bodies from head to toe, leaving only their eyes visible, to conceal their undead nature as past experience has taught them their funerary wrappings scare people. Characters encountering the Ragged and succeeding on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check can smell the sickly sweet scent of embalming fluid if they get too close to the merchants.

Sometimes, the Ragged are unable to find suitable slaves to purchase. When this happens, the mummies will use brute force to seize half a dozen unwilling victims and drag them back to Dencaru in chains.

VISITING THE LAND OF THE RAGGED

Unfamiliar gold coins bearing the head of Queen Nethyrr III circulating in Siwal and rumors of an ancient lost city in the mountains have prompted a few bold adventurers and enterprising merchants to seek out the Land of the Ragged. Travelers face a grueling trip of around 275 miles across the desert, following the trail used by the Ragged from the God King's Mirror Oasis to Dencaru. When they get within a few miles of the town, they start to notice the region's strange effects.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The Land of the Ragged is warped by Queen Nethyrr's unnatural presence, creating the following effects:

- The queen is aware as soon as strangers enter the Land of the Ragged. If she desires, she can conjure a sandstorm in the intruders' location that imposes disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.
- Undead creatures believe themselves to be alive. Convincing an undead creature that it is dead requires a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Even then, the creature goes back to believing it is alive after 24 hours.
- A creature that removes treasure or rescues slaves from the Land of the Ragged is cursed until the stolen property is returned. A cursed creature is vulnerable to necrotic damage and cannot regain lost hit points. In addition, the queen knows the creature's location and will send **mummies** after the thief to recover her treasure. If the treasure is not returned, the curse lasts until removed by the *remove curse* spell or other magic.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Adnan Yasin is a jewel merchant in trouble. A regular at Mhalmet's Salon of Mysteries, he's been on an unlucky streak and his gambling debts are piling up. He needs to raise some cash fast or someone will break his legs—or worse.

He's heard stories of the queen of the so-called Land of the Ragged who will pay amazing prices for exquisite jewelry, more than enough to clear Adnan's debts. He just needs to hire some muscle to keep him safe on the dangerous desert trip and watch his back while he negotiates with the queen. Characters that accompany Adnan will need to decide whether or not to rescue him when he accidentally insults Queen Nethyrr.

Oasis of Figs

As is sometimes the case with my (mis) adventures, I never intended to visit the Oasis of Figs. I'd used a Red Portal on the Angel's Road to travel back in time to the day of the dragon attack on Avaris. I couldn't resist the opportunity to watch God-King Aten-Atman slay four blue dragons single-handedly and invoke his death curse, thereby creating the five-mile-high Black Spire. Witnessing this great moment in history was as awe-inspiring as I'd hoped. But that is a tale for another time.

When I stepped back through the portal, instead of finding myself in the same sand-swept desert ruin, I was standing in a lush oasis. Towering date palms and spreading fig trees surrounded a large pool of crystal-clear water, sparkling in the sunlight. Beyond stood a splendid palace of sky-blue marble, its towers topped with golden domes.

Disoriented, I looked around, assuming the portal had transported me somewhere new, but I could still see the Black Spire in the distance. The oasis had somehow manifested in the exact spot I had left. Intrigued, I strode toward the palace entrance where two unblinking jinnborn stood guard.

“Welcome to the palace of His Magnificence, Sultan Hajani the Benevolent, Potentate of the Oasis of Figs, blessed be his name!” they said in unison, speaking in strange, sing-song voices. Giving the pair a polite nod, I stepped inside...

—excerpt from the *Nine Chthonic Papyri of Heknusret the Temerarious*

The Travelling Oasis. The legendary Oasis of Figs drifts along the Angel’s Road ley line, manifesting at a different desert location each sunset. It appears in the barren lands between the Ishadian capital of Mardas Adamat and the Harbor City of Prezhan in the east, and in the northern Sarklan Desert and Mushmes Hills as far west as the Nurian border. On rare occasions, the oasis has even been seen on the islands south of Mezar at the eastern end of the Middle Sea.

Predicting the oasis’s movements is difficult. Although it generally travels from east to west, it rarely revisits the same spot, and sometimes appears on other ley lines, such as those between Siwal and Fahaheel or between Siwal and Per-Maraut. Travelers seeking the oasis must rely on powerful divination spells to track it down.

The Sultan’s Palace. The Oasis of Figs is ruled with absolute authority by Sultan Hajani the Benevolent from his magnificent palace. Constructed from marble, its colored stone changes to match the time of day: sky blue in the daytime, crystal-flecked black at night, burning red at dusk and dawn, and dusty brown during the violent storms

that frequently sweep across the region.

Enchantments ensure that the palace always faces approaching travelers.

Upon entering the palace, visitors are offered glasses of mint or hibiscus tea by glassy-eyed servants. The tea is refreshing and delicious, but anyone who drinks it has disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws for the next 8 hours.

The servants escort visitors through a shady courtyard filled with flowering shrubs and orange trees. Brightly colored birds sit in the branches; the sultan has taught them to talk, and they often greet newcomers with a cheery squawk of “Welcome to the Oasis of Figs!”

Beyond the courtyard lies the sultan’s audience chamber where platters of fruit have been laid out, along with flagons of wine. The servants encourage visitors to have something to eat and drink while they await the arrival of the sultan. Treat this invitation as a *suggestion* spell; visitors that fail a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw help themselves to the refreshments. Creatures that can’t be charmed are immune to this effect.

SULTAN HAJANI

The sultan is a handsome, well-muscled noble djinni with blue skin and eyes like glowing sapphires. A light breeze constantly wafts around him, gently stirring his long beard and his shimmering silk robes.

Sultan Hajani is a **djinni** with 224 hit points, can cast the additional spells *chain lightning*, *dominate person*, and *geas* (7th-level spell slot)



FIG OF THE BENEVOLENT SULTAN

Wondrous item, very rare

When you eat this wonderfully sweet ripe fig, it cures any disease afflicting you, and it removes the blinded, deafened, paralyzed, and poisoned conditions. Eating the fig also reduces your physical age by 1d6 + 6 years, to a minimum

of 13 years, and reverses all the supernatural aging caused by a ghost, no matter how long ago it occurred.

The fig shrivels three days after it is removed from the Oasis of Figs, losing its magic.

1/day each using his Innate Spellcasting, and has the following trait:

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the djinni fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The djinni can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The djinni regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

- **Thunderclap.** The djinni claps his hands together, and creatures within 30 feet of him must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or fall prone.
- **Zephyr Step.** The djinni teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.
- **Cast a Spell (Costs 3 Actions).** The djinni casts a spell from its list of innate spells, consuming a use of the spell as normal.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the djinni takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects. The djinni cannot use the same effect 2 rounds in a row.

- A cloud of illusory sand swirls about in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on a point the djinni can see within 120 feet of it. The cloud spreads around corners. Each creature in the cloud must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.
- A wall of strong wind rises from the ground at a point up to 120 feet from the djinni. The wall is up to 50 feet long, 15 feet high, and 1 foot thick. When the wall appears, each creature within its



area must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. A creature takes 3d8 bludgeoning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. The strong wind keeps fog, smoke, and other gases at bay. Small or smaller flying creatures or objects can't pass through the wall. Loose, lightweight materials brought into the wall fly upward. Arrows, bolts, and other ordinary projectiles launched at targets behind the wall are deflected upward and automatically miss. Creatures in gaseous form can't pass through it. The wall vanishes when the djinni uses this lair action again or when the djinni dies.

- An illusion of whatever they most desire appears before one creature within 120 feet of the djinni and that can be seen. The creature must succeed on a DC 15

Wisdom saving throw or become charmed until initiative count 20 on the next round. While charmed by this spell, the creature is incapacitated and has a speed of 0.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The Oasis of Figs and the palace are warped by the sultan's magic, which creates the following effects:

- Creatures cannot leave the Oasis of Figs without the sultan's permission as long as the sultan remains alive. See "Reluctant Guests" below.
- Time flows strangely in the palace—creatures who spend a day there might find that a year or even just a single hour—has passed in the outside world while they've been gone.

THE SULTAN'S COURT

Sultan Hajani likes to make a dramatic entrance, flying down the vertical shaft in the audience chamber's ceiling from his apartments above with an impressive whoosh. He hovers in the air 15 feet above the heads of his visitors to convey his superior status.

Hajani greatly enjoys flattery and loves receiving gifts from his mortal admirers. He considers gems, jewelry, spices, cloth, or perfumes worth 1,000 gp or more and rare or very rare wondrous items to be suitable presents. Anyone who gives the sultan an appropriate gift wins his favor and is offered one of the oasis's famous iridescent figs (see sidebar). Lesser gifts are met with a look of mild disdain.

Either way, the sultan invites the visitors to enjoy his hospitality as long as they desire. They can take advantage of the palace's splendid cuisine, well-appointed guest chambers, luxurious baths, and sun-drenched terraces, and spend time mingling with their fellow guests.

There is of course a catch: everyone is welcome at the Oasis of Figs, but visitors can only leave with the sultan's consent, and those

who stay too long find themselves enlisted into his service. Hajani believes he is acting magnanimously by allowing mortals to repay his generous hospitality with the honor of becoming his slaves.

Reluctant Guests. Visitors who failed to offer an appropriate gift or who indulged in the sultan's fruits and wine without first offering their gifts, do not have his permission to leave. If they attempt to walk, fly, or teleport out of the oasis, they find themselves standing back at the pool with the palace in front of them.

Visitors who presented Sultan Hajani with a suitable gift are able to leave the oasis at any point during the first 24 hours. After this time, these visitors also risk becoming trapped.

- Visitors leaving before sunset return to the same desert location they were in when they entered the oasis.
- After sunset, the oasis will have moved to a new location—typically 1d100 miles further along the Angel's Road, moving from east to west, skipping the section that crosses the Middle Sea. When the oasis reaches Nuria's eastern border, it usually travels to somewhere between Mardas Adamat and Harrapo-Dar next.
- After 24 hours at the oasis, visitors must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to be able to leave. On a failed saving throw, they are stuck there.

Guests at the oasis lose 1 point of Wisdom for each full day after the first 24 hours they spend eating and drinking the sultan's food and wine. When their Wisdom score drops to 3, they stop losing Wisdom points and become members of the sultan's staff until they are released from his service after a year and a day.

Creatures who escape from the Oasis of Figs regain lost Wisdom points after completing a long rest, retaining only hazy memories of their time at the sultan's court.

The Sultan's Attendants. Sultan Hajani is attended by his loyal **jann** (see *Warlock 6: City of Brass* or *Warlock Grimoire*) courtiers and by

his dream-bound slaves—former guests who spent too long at the oasis. The jann are beings of striking appearance, made of multiple primal elements, and take up positions of power within the court:

- The capable and scholarly Farouk serves as the sultan’s vizier. A **jann** of the House of Smoke with a heritage of primordial fire and air, Farouk’s fingertips smolder constantly as he talks.
- Rasha, an unflappable and formidable **jann** warrior, acts as the sultan’s guard captain. Blue-eyed with pure white hair, Rasha belongs to the House of Ice, where water meets air.

Other jann run the household, taking charge of the near-mindless unfortunates the sultan has enslaved. These slaves are a mixture of jinnborn, humans, dwarves, basteti catfolk, and gnolls. Most are **commoners** but **veterans** serve in the sultan’s guard under Rasha’s command, and there are former **mages** and **scouts** among the ranks. All have Wisdom scores of 3. They stare unblinking with only the whites of their eyes visible.

Fellow Travelers. Visitors to Sultan Hajani’s court may run into other travelers on the Angel’s Road who have made a stop at the oasis:

- Saphael is a **deva** disguised as a shaven-headed dwarven priest of Ptah, here to meet with a fiendish informant who has intelligence on the dark cults of Sar-Shaba.
- Demu is an earth jinnborn windspeaker, a sorcerer (**mage**) who draws power from the elemental spirits. She has come to steal an obscure tome of genie lore from Sultan Hajani’s private library.
- Cepos Zohar is a human **spy** for the Emerald Order, posing as a perfume merchant. His gift disappointed the sultan, and he is desperate to escape.

Paying the Sultan’s Price. Visitors finding themselves kept as unwilling guests at the

Oasis of Figs must find a way to win their freedom before they join the ranks of the sultan’s slaves. Defeating Hajani in combat is one possibility open to more powerful characters, but there is another option, for the sultan is nothing if not beneficent.

Hajani sometimes allows guests to leave the oasis under a *geas* spell to make amends for their earlier foolish oversight by fetching him a suitable gift. Gifts can be a gem or an item of jewelry or art worth 5,000 gp or more, but the sultan may demand a specific treasure—perhaps a valuable item belonging to Sa Mellah (see “Restless Prophet” below) or the fingerbone of a titan (see “Bones of the Titans” above).

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Although travelers often arrive at the Oasis of Figs by accident, others may deliberately seek out the magical oasis:

- Golamesh Abu Karim, the desert troll gravedigger at Siwal’s Grand Necropolis, aged forty years after seeing a ghost—even trolls must bow before age—and his arthritis is making it painful for him to do his job. The Oasis of Figs has recently been seen near Siwal. Can the characters obtain a *fig of the benevolent sultan* for him?
- The Nurian ambassador has not returned from his latest trip to Sultan Hajani’s court. The characters are dispatched to the oasis by God-King Thutmoses XXIII’s vizier to bring him back safely.

Restless Prophet

The Restless Prophet is an enormous camel, bigger than most buildings, that wanders the gnoll lands of Dabu and beyond. A sizable clan of gnolls, known as the Prophet’s Kin, makes its home in a makeshift village on her back. This ramshackle settlement is a mishmash of wooden shacks and platforms, ropes, and canvas that hangs and sways atop the huge beast as she plods across the barren landscape.

The Restless Prophet was first sighted in Dabu around 60 years ago by Zigru, a druid of the Fenu-Na clan, who befriended the giant camel and persuaded her to let him live in a shack built between her two humps. When Zigru found a mate and started a family, the population atop the Restless Prophet grew and so did the number of structures. She's grown used to the gnolls living on her back over the years and has become very protective of them. Now quite elderly, the Restless Prophet travels slowly, moving up to 18 miles per day, often less.

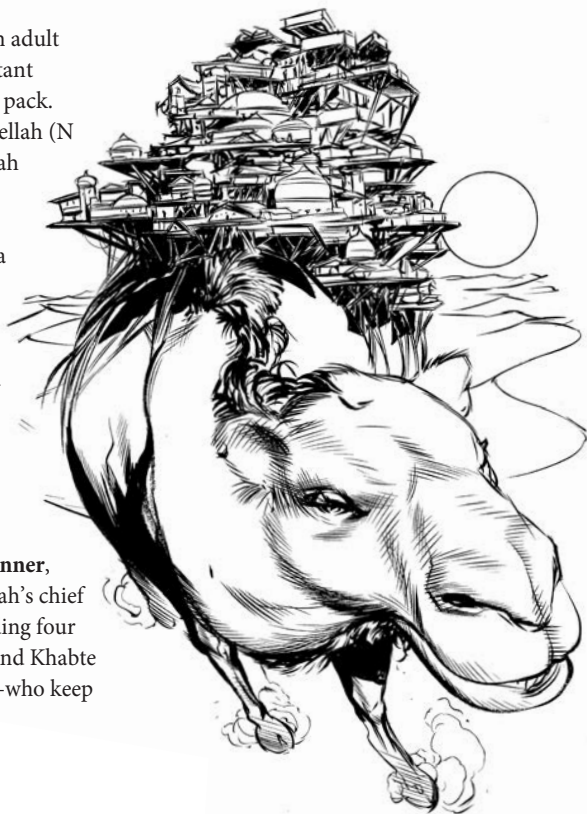
The gnolls see the Restless Prophet as much more than a huge beast that carries their mobile settlement through the desert. Instead, they revere the huge camel as an embodiment of their god Laughing Nkishi. The Restless Prophet guides the pack through the randomness of life, taking whatever paths the camel desires, allowing the gnolls to scavenge as she wanders.

Prophet's Kin. Around three dozen adult gnolls and twenty or so non-combatant children make up the Prophet's Kin pack. Their leader is the charismatic Sa Mellah (N gnoll **druid**). Just 15 years old, Mellah has very pale, dirty-white fur with dark brown spots. She became the pack leader when her predecessor Sa Mogdoul met a violent end in an ill-fated blood raid against the Skin Stealers a year ago.

Sa Mellah is a great talespinner and knows much desert lore, but unlike her mentor, she isn't a bully, instead impressing the pack with her strong spiritual connection to the Restless Prophet, whom she speaks to each dawn. Moztezzu (CN gnoll **havoc runner**, see *Tome of Beasts*) serves as Sa Mellah's chief scout and fiercest warrior, commanding four hunters—Hakrud, Biskra, Alemok, and Khabte (**gnoll slavers**, see *Creature Codex*)—who keep the rest of the pack in line.

The pack lives in a dozen wooden shacks atop the Prophet, supported by heavy beams lashed across the camel's back and connected to each other by a bewildering network of narrow staircases, ladders, and ropes. Sa Mellah's house stands above the rest and is built from the upper section of an old windmill. At the settlement's highest point is a mast stolen from a jinnborn sandship, complete with crow's nest. A great sail, painted with a yellow paw with black spots, hangs from the yard, serving as the pack's battle standard but doing nothing to increase the Prophet's speed. The gnolls have mounted a trio of ballistae on the crow's nest and have armored the Prophet with metal plates studded with sharp spikes. They keep thirteen hyenas tethered to the Prophet on long leashes.

Encountering the Restless Prophet. The characters are most likely to come across the Restless Prophet in the gnoll realms, but she



wanders wherever she wants to go, following no particular pattern. She always spends at least half the year in Dabu but sometimes travels north through the badlands into the Dominion of the Wind Lords or east across the Mukupe Sahel into the Crescent Desert.

Once per year, Sa Mellah asks the Prophet to head for Chemeksa, the gnoll capital, so she can bring gifts to Ama Ninshu and pay her respects to the oracle. As tensions rise between the Ama's two daughters, Kasa Isha and Sa Shiru, Sa Mellah remains wisely neutral.

In the past, the Prophet has been spotted as far afield as Per-Anu, Per-Bastet, and even near Mhalmet. Her constant perambulations offer the Prophet's Kin many excellent raiding opportunities, and the pack's coffers are always filled with loot, often including a number of exotic items.

Adventurers who run into the giant camel may find themselves targeted by Moztezzu and his hunters, looking to take them as slaves. Captured characters will likely find themselves tied to the Prophet by long leashes like the hyenas until they can find an opportunity to escape. Alternatively, the party might seek out the Restless Prophet to consult Sa Mellah, well known among the gnolls for her ancient knowledge, to gain information to help them on their current quest, to obtain a valuable item in her possession, or to rescue a captive of the Prophet's Kin.

Getting up to the gnoll village involves a 60-foot climb to the top of the camel's back if the characters lack suitable magic. The gnolls throw rope ladders down to invited guests; climbing these requires a successful DC 5 Strength (Athletics) check. Otherwise, the characters must climb up one of the hyena's leashes (DC 10) or the Prophet's fur (DC 15). The Restless Prophet is quite a docile creature, and she pays little attention to attempts at scaling her legs or even fighting in the village on her back. However, hurting the beast and provoking her into combat is not a good idea—she is a formidable opponent.

RESTLESS PROPHET

Gargantuan beast, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (armored plates)

Hit Points 231 (14d20 + 84)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 28 (+9) | 10 (+0) | 23 (+6) | 6 (–2) | 12 (+1) | 10 (+0) |

Condition Immunities exhaustion

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 11

Sure-Footed. The Prophet has advantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws made against effects that would knock it prone.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Prophet makes one bite attack and one stomp attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (4d8 + 9) bludgeoning damage.

Stomp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 31 (4d10 + 9) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 21 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Spit (Recharge 5–6). The Prophet regurgitates its stomach contents, spitting the foul material at a creature within 30 feet. The target must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

A year ago, Sa'taii Ma'rai of the Skin Stealers killed Sa Mogdoul, the previous pack leader of Prophet's Kin, and skinned her corpse. Sa Mellah is worried that if Ma'rai performs the Ritual of Skin Stealing and dons Mogdoul's skin, she will gain the former leader's ability to communicate with the Restless Prophet and try to usurp control over the creature. If the characters are willing to travel into the Skin Stealers' territory and recover the skin, Mellah will give the characters the vital information or item they need for their current quest.

TROLLKIN OF THE VIPER'S BASIN

by Basheer Ghouse

For three hundred years, the trollkin peoples of the Viper's Basin have lived a harsh, brutal life. The basin is a parched, tree-less savannah with scarce resources and many threats. Gnoll raiders, human treasure seekers, rampant monsters, and the simple ravages of nature all took their toll upon the trollkin. But they endured it all, protecting the protean ruin at the Viper's Tooth, no matter how miserable it kept them. So they suffered, bemoaning whatever ancient sin bound them to their duty.

Or at least they did. The basin is changing.

Viper's Basin

Viper's Basin is a large, arid savannah located north of Lignas and south of the Djibbar Plains. It is surrounded by low mountains and the Viper's Tongue ley line, ringing an area approximately 170 miles in diameter. The relatively flat landscape is broken up by watering holes, shallow streams, and the occasional low hill.

The basin is dominated by tall, sickly grasses and thorned shrubs interspersed with the occasional watering hole or malnourished tree. This drained landscape is inhospitable to most forms of life. Most crops don't grow while the plants that do survive are either toxic or devoid of nutrition. Attempts to graze livestock result in cows and goats starving to death,

bellies full of grasses they can't digest. Instead, the ecosystem is based on subterranean mushrooms being eaten by burrowing animals, in turn to be predated upon by others.

This ecosystem largely consists of anteaters, **bilby** (see *Tome of Beasts 2*), meerkats, and ravenous **leech swarms** (see *Tome of Beasts 2*). **Wyverns** lair in the less-hostile mountains around the basin while giant ants and **megapedes** (see *Creature Codex*) terrorize the savannah.

Notable titan ruins are scattered across the southern part of the basin, almost never consisting of more than a structure or two. The largest of which, the Tooth, lies at the basin's center and is the reason the trollkin remain in this inhospitable place.

TROLLKIN

Three thousand trollkin call the Viper's Basin home. They survive on the scarce resources of the savannah, cultivating patches of sickly shrubs with edible berries while hunting moles, aphids, and centipedes for food. They are nomadic by necessity since any large settlement would quickly starve. They have no mounts and must make everything they own from slain beasts, clay, and tall grasses. But they live a vibrant life regardless. Stones are covered in trollkin art, their campsites leave shattered statues and whittled bone behind,

and the night air fills with poetry and song.

This lifestyle makes them vulnerable though. Lone herders are easy prey for gnoll slavers, tosculi raids, and hungry wyverns while a bad harvest or the loss of a herd can easily result in mass starvation. As such, while there were once six tribes of trollkin in the basin, there are now merely two: the Red Wind and Tooth

Guard Tribes. The rest have long since fled to the coast and the Djibbar Plains where life is less relentlessly hostile.

The trollkin believe that they are the destined guardians of the Tooth. Their shamans teach that the Great Viper, master of the Tooth, had leashed a great evil in its depths and charged the trollkin tribes with the site's protection on



its death bed. Without their master to provide magical healing, the servitors starved, but their descendants lived on. So long as the trollkin persevere in guarding the Tooth and the basin, the abomination will remain leashed, and they will be rewarded for their suffering after they die. The trollkin who fled to the Djibbar Plains are viewed as oath breakers and traitors, yet the fish and other food they trade to their loyal kin are too valuable to cut ties entirely.

The tribes' dedication to this mission waxes and wanes with time. There have been centuries where the Tooth was little more than a common meeting ground, only a token force protecting it from treasure hunters. There have been centuries where the Tooth was a fortress more than a shrine—art, statues, poetry, all forgotten by the rule of fanatical shamans or cruel kings. At other times, other sites in the basin have been declared sacred and outsiders barred from their borders: reliable watering holes, the sites of great battles, or particularly intact ruins.

Currently, the Tooth is a temple, a communal meeting ground, and the only permanent settlement of the trollkin in the region. While it can't feed itself, the tribes supply it with the food it needs even when they near starvation themselves, and its shamans provide magical aid and divine guidance in return. The Tooth Guard Tribe claim stewardship of the Tooth, for their leader is its high priestess, but in truth, they are as much nomads as the Red Wind, and neither tribe exerts true control of the site.

THE TOOTH

The Tooth is a tremendous triangular ruin carved from granite. It scythes into the air, visible from dozens of miles away, and continues underground. It was the lair of a titan once, guarded by his six servitor giants (as **dvarapala**, see *Creature Codex*) and the trollkin tribes they sired, who ensured he was not bothered in his research. The facility was

abandoned when Glorious Umbuso fell, but even as the servitors were ravaged by age and vicious looters, the trollkin remained.

The Tooth is weathered by age but still remains a magnificent testament to the old glories of Umbuso. Its aboveground floors have been turned into a vast temple by the trollkin, who preserved all that they could of the old titan's work and turned the rest into shrines and living quarters. The underground layers of the tooth are filled with the rampant experiments of the old titan, sealed and left alone by the trollkin. **Akaasit** (see *Tome of Beasts 2*) and a variety of aberrations lurk these halls, guarding a hoard of untold arcane treasures and ancient lore.

KING IRON

Five years ago, Iragh of the Red Wind Tribe, a zimwi-kin, rediscovered the process of forging iron, one of the basin's few natural resources. At first thought of as a curiosity, Iragh swiftly discovered the potential of his discovery. Iron was abundant in the basin, and ore was often close to the surface, easy to mine by hand or with tools looted from raiders. With it, the trollkin could make better weapons, better armor, and better tools. They could match the gnoll slavers and Lignas's cruel-eyed researchers in arms, if not in magic or numbers. They could fight off monsters who could take their pick of prey, only to flee before the trollkin could rally. Most importantly, they had rediscovered a vast field of innovation.

Swiftly, the trollkin began rediscovering processes the rest of the world took for granted. They had no coal and little lumber, so steel was not an option—but so much else *was*. Iron jewelry, household objects, hammers, and shovels. Trollkin could carve out new tunnels, allowing the harvest of mushrooms and creating safer caves for their odd herds. No longer were the trollkin at the mercy of the elements. No longer were they

outmatched by their tormentors. After two years, Iragh slew a wyvern with an iron axe, and the legend of King Iron spread.

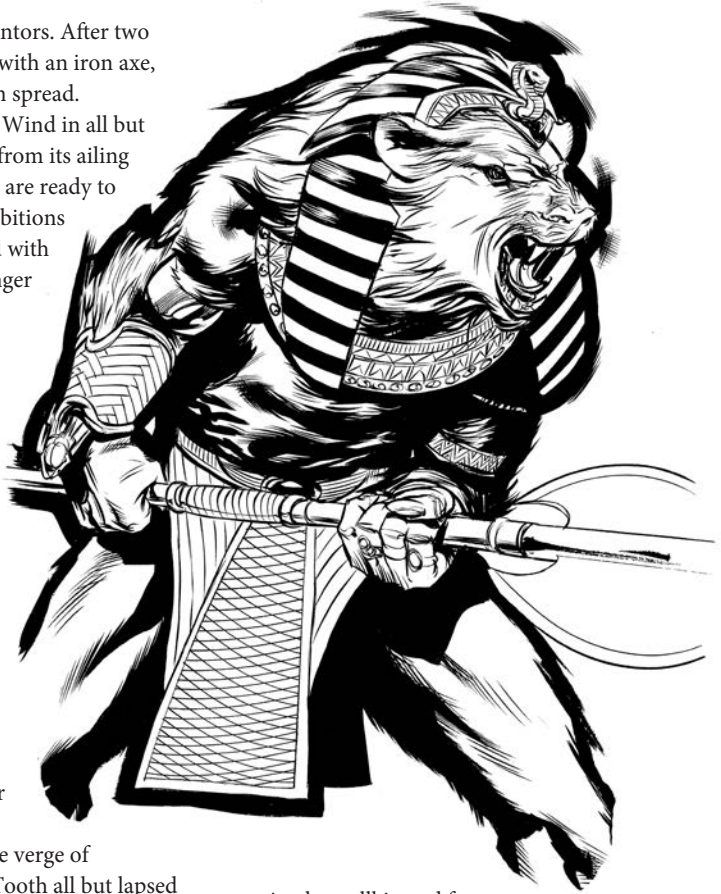
Now, Iragh leads the Red Wind in all but name. He is due to inherit from its ailing chief, and already his peers are ready to proclaim him king. His ambitions are simple: a basin guarded with iron, where his tribe no longer needs to fear starvation, predation, or outsiders.

THE LADY OF ANTS

Shaman Hapash of the Tooth Guard Tribe was born into a precarious position. The Tooth Guard were legendarily fractious, and as she reached adulthood, a segment of the tribe demanded that they abandon the basin for the relative ease of the Djibbar Plains. When she became the elder shaman, she found herself administering a tribe on the verge of collapse, their duty to the Tooth all but lapsed and her authority nearly worthless.

It took her years to mend her role—and more to mend the tribe—but when she emerged, Hapash was a skilled mediator, managing the bruised egos of tribal politics to allow for progress and, when that didn't work, incinerating holdouts with her magic. She was the functional leader of an impoverished, starving, but united Tooth Guard, and she was filled with endless ambition.

To her, the near collapse of her tribe showed the failure of their way of life. The trollkin were scattered across the plains and easy prey. She learned that an isolated leader was a dead leader and that so long as the trollkin remained as they had since their master died, they were doomed. Her life's work has been



to unite the trollkin and forge them into something new and lasting, worthy of the Tooth and its remaining wonders.

Her first step on this journey was to repopulate the Tooth itself. When she took power, it was almost abandoned, home to a few hermits and a token guard—diminished by adventurers—but little else. Over the course of years, she rebuilt it, replenishing its guard, bringing in more shamans, and eventually making it her home. Her efforts earned her the scorn of the shaman Uropo of the Red Wind Tribe, who compared her efforts to ants building a colony. Hapash appropriated the insult as her title, out of pride as much as spite.

Now, she sets her sights beyond the basin. The Tooth Guard have opened proper trade

with their wayward brethren in the Djibbar Plains. Raiding parties have ranged into the mountains, both for food and to test the defenses of their neighbors. Trespassers have been enslaved instead of killed, interrogated for what they know of the outside world or put to work for the tribe.

FROM THE OUTSIDE

To outsiders, the basin is a hellscape, of interest only to slavers and adventurers.

To slavers, the nomadic trollkin have been easier prey than their plains-bound cousins for hundreds of years. To adventurers, the basin's ruins are sources of ancient treasure and forgotten lore. To all, the trollkin are an obstacle to be captured or killed.

To the world, the trollkin of the Viper's Basin are barbaric even for their kind, butchering without mercy anyone they catch. To the trollkin, the world is filled with bloodthirsty monsters with fantastical weapons and powerful magic who desire nothing more than to butcher them and plunder their holy places.

Despite this hostility, the basin attracts a regular stream of trespassers. Gnoll slavers risk trollkin blades to bring home powerful slaves. Lignas's academics mount expeditions into the basin, studying its malignant soil and searching for titan lore. Mercenaries and treasure hunters try to sneak into the holy sites of the trollkin, stealing ancient titan treasures or reclaiming the lost gear of less fortunate adventurers. Those who succeed gain respectable wealth. Those who fail, until recently, were killed by the locals.

The introduction of iron and Hapash's ambition have begun to change all this. Some captives have escaped and returned to their homelands, spreading mad stories of a trollkin queen extorting knowledge from her slaves. Tosculi and gnoll raiding parties tell stories of furious, iron-clad trollkin hacking through their warriors. The immediate result has been a sharp decline in expeditions to the basin as

outsiders try to understand what's happening. Most assume that some outsider is supplying them, a fiend, cultist, or giant who has taken command of the disparate trollkin.

Few are even close to the truth: that the trollkin are organizing and that something new is about to be born in the Viper's Basin.

PLOT HOOKS IN THE BASIN

Need to get your adventurers to Viper's Basin? Here are some possible hooks:

- A yearly research expedition into the Viper's Basin has been captured by the Tooth Guard Tribe. Their sponsors in Lignas are willing to pay handsomely for the return of their research and, if possible, any survivors.
- A desperate shaman of the Red Wind Tribe has reached Narumbeki, looking for help in rescuing his family from gnoll slavers.
- A gnoll pack leader believes that trollkin iron could give her an edge over her sisters. She wants adventurers to enter the basin and arrange for a truce and a trade deal with the trollkin.
- A general in Narumbeki wants a magic item rumored to reside in the lowest levels of the dragon's tooth. Infiltrating will involve getting past the trollkin guards, finding a way into the underground levels of the Tooth, and surviving the dangers within.
- Probing raids led by **trollkin ironmongers** (see below) have begun to test the basin's borders. A nearby lord wants to know why. They are willing to pay mercenaries to investigate and learn if this is a true threat or just seasonal border raiding.
- Land bordering the basin has begun to turn sour, killing crops and starving livestock. Locals are panicking, desperate to learn what's causing the blight and how they might stop it.

Types of Trollkin

Several new types of trollkin can be found in and around the basin.

CROCOTTA-KIN

These trollkin are descended from **crocotta** (see *Tome of Beasts 2*) and gain the following ability:

Mimicry. The trollkin can mimic animal, human, and environmental sounds they have heard. A creature that hears the sounds can tell that they are imitations with a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check.

DVARA-KIN

These trollkin are descended from **dvarapala** (see *Creature Codex*) and gain the following:

You Shall Not Pass! The trollkin gains an additional reaction that may only be used for opportunity attacks.

TROLLKIN NPCs

There are new varieties of trollkin out there that you best be prepared for.

TROLLKIN FIRE SHAMAN

This trollkin is wiry and wizened, clad in thick leather robes and covered in religious trinkets. Its brethren give it a wide berth, and as it raises its staff to the sky, fire coalesces around its hands.

The fire shamans are Hapash's most trusted servants. They are junior shamans, taken aside from their brethren and entrusted with ensuring their fellows remain true to Hapash's vision. They specialize in fire magic, capable of shielding their fellows from its touch and incinerating any who dare to

oppose her. They are feared by their fellows, many of whom vividly remember Hapash's rise to power and the charred corpses she left in her wake.

COMMITTED SERVANTS. Fire shamans appear when Hapash has taken personal interest in a situation. That they're accompanying a group means that Hapash either suspects someone within of acting against her or is looking to accomplish one of her objectives. They often guard sacred sites or lead attacks on intruders, directing which foes to kill and which to capture and deliver to their mistress.

TROLLKIN FIRE SHAMAN

Medium humanoid (trollkin), neutral

Armor Class 14 (leather armor)

Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 10 (+0) | 14 (+2) | 14 (+2) | 9 (-1) | 16 (+3) | 8 (-1) |



Skills Arcana +1, Perception +5, Religion +1
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Trollkin
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Regeneration. The trollkin gains 3 hp at the start of its turn. If the trollkin takes acid or fire damage, this ability doesn't function at the start of the trollkin's next turn. The trollkin dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hp and doesn't regenerate.

Thick Skin. The trollkin's skin is thick and tough, granting it a +1 bonus to Armor Class. This bonus is already factored into the trollkin's AC.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The fire shaman uses Mark Foe. It then uses its Hurl Flame twice.

Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

Hurl Flame. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Mark Foe. One creature the shaman can see within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be wreathed in magical fire for 1 minute. While wreathed in magical fire, it can't take the Hide action or become invisible. The next time the creature takes damage, it takes an extra 7 (2d6) fire damage, and the magical fire ends.

REACTIONS

Fiery Escape (2/Day). When the shaman takes damage, each creature within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) fire damage. The shaman is then wreathed in flames and teleports up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

TROLLKIN IRONMONGER

This trollkin is clad head-to-toe in rugged iron armor. It hefts a greatsword in one hand and carries a set of throwing axes at its hip.

Iron weaponry is still rare in the Viper's Basin, and trollkin warriors are expected to earn each piece of iron equipment they use. Most have little, a shield or a blade or javelins or arrowheads. Ironmongers, however, are

veteran trollkin whose armor makes them resemble golems. They are clad head to toe in brutal, shining metal and armed with great blades and whirling throwing axes. In battle, they are the invulnerable vanguard for their less-armored kin. Ironmongers wade into melee, hacking away with their greatswords and using their own armored bodies as supplementary weapons to knock foes prone or crush them outright.

TROLLKIN IRONMONGER

Medium humanoid (trollkin), neutral

Armor Class 19 (plate)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| 18 (+4) | 13 (+1) | 17 (+3) | 11 (+0) | 12 (+1) | 9 (-1) |

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Trollkin

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Regeneration. As the fire shaman, but it regains 5 hp.

Thick Skin. As the fire shaman.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ironmonger makes three attacks: one with its greatsword and two with its slam. Alternatively, it makes two ranged attacks with its throwing axe.

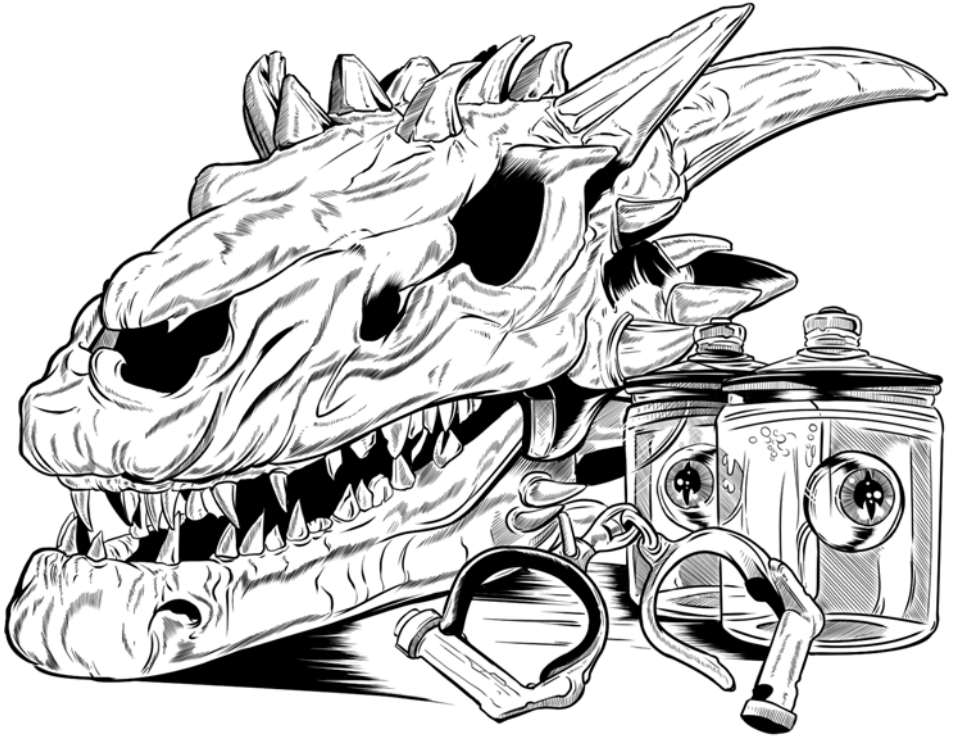
Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Throwing Axe. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Impregnable Counter. When a creature within 5 feet of the ironmonger misses a melee attack against it, the attacker must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone





MONSTERS



DRAGON TEMPLATES

by Celeste Conowitch

Dragons are perhaps the best-known and most loved of all fantasy creatures. But fully harnessing the mystique, power, and danger that dragons embody can be a challenge in any game. As written, standard dragons can feel a little lackluster, especially to an experienced party that has fought them before. Presented here are a collection of templates that can be applied to any existing dragon stat block (even to the dragon lords of Midgard). These templates allow you to take a standard dragon and jazz them up with a new array of special abilities. Your players are sure to be terrified when a mighty dragon starts slinging spells or rallying allies to charge the adventurers.

Presented below are a variety of options to modify existing draconic creatures. Four templates are provided if you would like to increase an existing stat block's potency dramatically. If you aim to increase the power of a dragon just a little, refer to the list of advanced dragon abilities below and grab one or two that suit your purposes.

Dragon Mage

Dragons are long-lived and inherently magical creatures. Both these facts make dragons the perfect candidates for learning the arcane arts. Spellcasting dragons might

turn their lairs into arcane sanctums stacked with scrolls instead of treasure. Or perhaps a dragon got fed up with being the target of wizard tricks, so they decided to learn a few of their own. Whatever the specific reason for their studies, this template allows you to make a dragon a master of the arcane arts.

You can create a dragon mage by taking the statistics of any dragon and making the following changes. An example creature to which this template has been applied, an adult white dragon, can be found below.

HIT POINTS. The creature gains 10 additional hit dice and recalculates its hit point maximum, adding these hit dice.

ABILITY SCORES. The dragon's Intelligence score increases by 10. An ability score cannot be increased above 30 using this feature.

SKILLS. The dragon gains proficiency with the Arcana skill.

CHALLENGE RATING. The dragon's challenge rating increases by 6.

NEW TRAIT: DRAGON MAGE. If the dragon uses its attack action to Multiattack, it can choose to forgo one of its attacks to cast a spell instead.

NEW TRAIT: SPELLCASTING. The dragon mage is a 9th-level spellcaster, and its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (calculate spell save DC and bonus to hit with spell attacks using the new ability score). The

dragon mage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *fog cloud*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (4 slots): *misty step*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *ice storm*, *polymorph*

5th level (1 slot): *wall of force*

DRAGON MAGE VARIATIONS

If you would like to change up the dragon mage's spellcasting class, you can do so easily. Simply choose the spellcasting class you would like to use instead and calculate the spell save DC and spell attack bonus with the appropriate spellcasting ability. You can easily swap out the spells listed in the spellcasting section to spells drawn from the appropriate class list.

If you would like to make the dragon mage more particular to Midgard, swap out some of the spells on this list for spells from the Dragon Magic list, which can be found in *Deep Magic*.

SAMPLE DRAGON MAGE

Here's a ready-made dragon mage for your game.

ADULT WHITE DRAGON MAGE

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

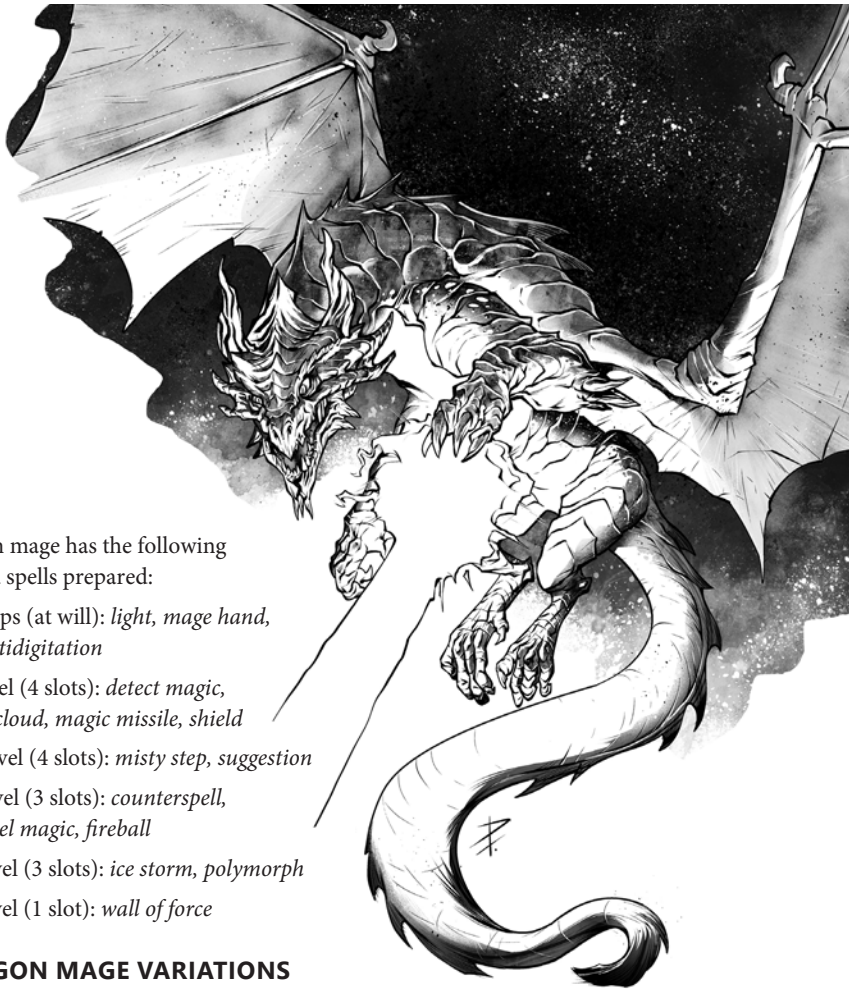
Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 265 (26d12 + 96)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 22 (+6) | 10 (+0) | 22 (+6) | 18 (+4) | 12 (+1) | 12 (+1) |

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +12, Wis +7, Cha +7



Skills Arcana +10, Perception +12, Stealth +6
Damage Immunities cold
Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 19 (22,000 XP)

Dragon Mage. If the dragon uses Multiattack, it can choose to forgo one of its attacks to cast a spell instead.

Ice Walk. The dragon can move across and climb icy surfaces without needing to make an ability check. Additionally, difficult terrain composed of ice or snow doesn't cost it extra movement.

Legendary Resistance (3/day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Spellcasting. The dragon mage is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). The dragon mage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, mage hand, prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, fog cloud, magic missile, shield*

2nd level (4 slots): *misty step, suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, dispel magic, fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *ice storm, polymorph*

5th level (1 slot): *wall of force*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage plus 4 (1d8) cold damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +12 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Cold Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales an icy blast in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 20 Constitution saving throw, taking 54 (12d8) cold damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 10 ft. of the dragon must succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or take 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

Dragon Priest

Like other sentient races, dragons have gods and religious principles that they ascribe to. A variety of draconic gods exist in most pantheons, ranging from hellish villains to paragons of good. And of course, where there are gods, there are the priests who worship them. You can use the dragon priest template to bestow a measure of holy power on any dragon. Dragons who follow the path of a priest usually spend their lives trying to emulate their chosen deity's actions. So a dragon priest aligned with an evil god would seek to bring destruction upon enemies, raise armies of vicious creatures, and perhaps even seek means to bring their gods directly into the material world. A dragon priest aligned with a good god might serve as an emissary between dragons and humanoids, working with others to ensure peace and prosperity.

You can create a dragon priest by taking the statistics of any dragon and making the following changes. An example creature to which this template has been applied, a blue dragon wyrmling, can be found below.

HIT POINTS. The creature gains 10 additional hit dice and recalculates its hit point maximum adding these hit dice.

ABILITY SCORES. The dragon's Wisdom score increases by 8. An ability score cannot be increased above 30 using this feature.

SKILLS. The dragon gains proficiency with the Religion skill.

CHALLENGE RATING. The dragon's challenge rating increases by 4.

NEW TRAIT: DRAGON PRIEST. As a bonus action, the dragon priest can expend a spell slot to cause its melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 16 (3d10) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If the dragon priest expends a spell slot of 2nd level, the damage increases by 1d10.

NEW TRAIT: SPELLCASTING. The dragon priest is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (calculate spell save DC and bonus to hit with spell attacks using the new ability score). The dragon priest has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, guiding bolt, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, silence, spiritual weapon*

DRAGON PRIEST VARIATIONS

If you would like to give the dragon priest different spells, you can do so easily. Simply swap out any of the presented spells for spells from the cleric spell list. Remember that casting a standard spell may not be the best use of a dragon's full turn, so focus on choosing spells with a reaction or bonus action casting time.

If you would like to flavor your dragon priest to belong to a specific domain, choose one and include the specific domain spells in your choices for swapping out given spells.

SAMPLE DRAGON PRIEST

Here's a ready-made dragon priest for your game.

BLUE DRAGON WYRMILING PRIEST

Medium dragon, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 97 (18d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 15 ft., fly 60 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 17 (+3) | 10 (+0) | 15 (+2) | 12 (+1) | 19 (+4) | 15 (+2) |

Saving Throws Dex +3, Con +5, Wis +7, Cha +5

Skills Perception +7, Religion +7, Stealth +3

Damage Immunities lightning

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Draconic

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Dragon Priest. As a bonus action, the dragon priest can expend a spell slot to cause its melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 16 (3d10) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If the dragon priest expends a spell slot of 2nd level, the damage increases by 1d10.

Spellcasting. The dragon priest is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The dragon priest has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, guiding bolt, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, silence, spiritual weapon*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) lightning damage.

Lightning Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales lightning in a 30-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Dragon Warlord

Some dragons are not content to sit in isolated lairs accruing treasure. Instead, some are driven by ambitions to conquer lands and peoples with their might. The dragon warlord provides the template to create a dragon of such aspirations. Unlike the standard adventuring dragon, dragon warlords always fight surrounded by minions under their control. Perhaps the dragon warlord seeks to conquer solely for its benefit, or maybe they are a dragon general in the service to a larger nation. Whatever the case, a dragon warlord excels at combat and is no stranger to claw-to-claw combat.

You can create a dragon warlord by taking the statistics of any dragon and making the following changes. An example creature to which this template has been applied, a young red dragon warlord, can be found below.

HIT POINTS. The dragon gains 18 additional hit dice and recalculates its hit point maximum, adding these hit dice.

ABILITY SCORES. The dragon's Strength score increases by 10, and it gains 12 ability points. Each ability point can be used to increase an ability score of its choice by 1. An ability score cannot be increased above 30 using this feature.

SKILLS. The dragon gains proficiency with the Intimidation and Persuasion skills.

CHALLENGE RATING. The dragon's challenge rating increases by 8.

CONDITION IMMUNITIES. The dragon is immune to the charmed and frightened conditions.

NEW TRAIT: COMBAT TRAINING. A melee weapon attack deals 2 extra die of its damage when the dragon warlord hits with it.

NEW TRAIT: DRAGON HEART. The dragon warlord regains hit points equal to its Constitution modifier at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point but fewer hit points than half its hit point maximum.

NEW TRAIT: STRIKE FORCE. The dragon warlord can use a bonus action to direct one

ally to strike. If the allied target can see and hear the dragon warlord, the target can make one weapon attack as a reaction and gains advantage on the attack roll.

DESIGNING ENCOUNTERS

When building an encounter with a dragon warlord, consider adding several low CR minions to the fight. Dragons are most frequently encountered as solo boss monsters, but the dragon warlord works much better if it has hordes of minions to boss around. Kobolds, dragonborn, and cultists are particularly good monsters to include with the dragon. Even though low CR monsters don't seem like a threat at higher levels, having a large volume of them running around the field still causes problems for even the most skilled PCs.

SAMPLE DRAGON WARLORD

Here's a ready-made dragon warlord for your game.

YOUNG RED DRAGON WARLORD

Large dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 288 (35d10 + 96)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 30 (+10) | 16 (+3) | 21 (+5) | 14 (+2) | 16 (+3) | 20 (+4) |

Saving Throws Dex +9, Con +11, Wis +9, Cha +10

Skills Intimidation +10, Perception +9, Persuasion +10, Stealth +9

Damage Immunities fire

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Combat Training. A melee weapon attack deals 2 extra die of its damage when the dragon warlord hits with it (included in the attack).

Dragon Heart. The dragon warlord regains hit points equal to half its Constitution score at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point but fewer hit points than half its hit point maximum.

Strike Force. The dragon warlord can use a bonus action to direct one ally to strike. If the allied target can see and hear the dragon warlord, the target can make one weapon attack as a reaction and gains advantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 32 (4d10 + 10) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) fire damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +16 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d6 + 10) slashing damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales fire in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 56 (16d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Dragon Sovereign

Every so often, a dragon is born with capabilities far beyond those of normal dragons. These dragon sovereigns are gifted with intellect and athleticism, which makes them remarkable even by draconic standards. Often these sovereigns rise quickly to positions of power and influence, coercing other dragons to rally behind them. These paragons of dragonkind are rare indeed but make for ferocious allies or fearsome enemies, depending on which side of their favor you fall. Whether the dragon sovereign is an ancient being from the dawn of time, the supreme ruler of an empire, or a demigod, dragon sovereigns must not be introduced lightly. The world shapes itself around the will of such powerful creatures.

You can create a dragon sovereign by taking the statistics of any dragon and making the following changes. An example creature to which this template has been applied, an ancient brass dragon, can be found below.

HIT POINTS. The dragon gains 24 additional hit dice and recalculates its hit point maximum adding these hit dice.

ABILITY SCORES. The dragon's Strength score increases by 8, and its Constitution score increases by 8. It also gains 12 ability points. Each ability point can be used to increase an ability score of its choice by 1. An ability score cannot be increased above 30 using this feature.

SKILLS. The dragon gains proficiency with three skills of your choice.

SAVING THROWS. The dragon gains proficiency with all saving throws.

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES. The dragon is immune to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.

CONDITION IMMUNITIES. The dragon is immune to the charmed, frightened, paralyzed, and poisoned conditions.

SENSES. The dragon gains blindsight out to a range of 60 feet. If it already has blindsight, it increases the range by 60 feet.

CHALLENGE RATING. The dragon's challenge rating increases by 10.

NEW TRAIT: ADVANCED ABILITIES. The dragon sovereign gains two advanced dragon abilities from the Advanced Dragon Abilities options below.

NEW TRAIT: DRAGON SOVEREIGN. A melee weapon attack deals 3 extra die of its damage when the dragon sovereign hits with it.

NEW TRAIT: ELEMENTAL AURA. All creatures that begin their turn within 30 feet of the dragon sovereign take 2d8 damage. The damage type matches the damage type of the dragon's breath weapon.

NEW TRAIT: LAST STAND. If the dragon sovereign is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, its body floods with adrenaline, and it regains hit points equal to its CR and moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

NEW TRAIT: MAGIC RESISTANCE. The dragon has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

NEW TRAIT: SUPERIOR COORDINATION. When a creature tries to enter a space adjacent to the sovereign dragon, the dragon can use its reaction to make a melee weapon attack with its tail. If the dragon does not have a tail attack, it can instead make a claw melee weapon attack.

NOT JUST A MONSTER

Dragon sovereigns possess extraordinary powers that make them far superior to other dragons, which means they shouldn't be treated like a standard creature. Dragon sovereigns make for fantastic campaign NPCs because they are so capable. Introducing a dragon sovereign as a reoccurring ally or villain in your campaign is a fantastic way to showcase their abilities without making them feel like "just another creature." These dragons are strong enough and smart enough to run away from a fight when the odds are against them, so having them fight the party several times throughout a campaign increases their mystique. Perhaps a dragon sovereign is the right-hand bruiser of your campaign's big bad, maybe it is the leader of a draconic cult hoping to resurrect their leader, or maybe the dragon sovereign is the leader of a kobold rights movement. Whatever you decide, their story should be as unique as the creature itself is.

SAMPLE DRAGON SOVEREIGN

Here's a ready-made dragon sovereign for your game.

ANCIENT BRASS DRAGON SOVEREIGN

Gargantuan dragon, chaotic good

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)

Hit Points 721 (37d20 + 333)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 30 (+10) | 15 (+2) | 28 (+9) | 16 (+3) | 18 (+4) | 20 (+5) |

Saving Throws Str +19, Dex +11, Con +18, Int +12, Wis +13, Cha +14

Skills Athletics +19, History +12, Intimidation +14, Investigation +12, Perception +16, Persuasion +14, Stealth +11

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Damage Immunities fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses blindsight 120 ft., darkvision 120 ft., truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 26

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 30 (155,000 XP)

Advanced Abilities. The dragon sovereign has the following advanced dragon abilities from the Advanced Dragon Abilities options below: arcane sight, tooth and nail.

Dragon Sovereign. A melee weapon attack deals 3 extra die of its damage when the dragon sovereign hits with it (included in the attack).

Elemental Aura. All creatures that begin their turn within 30 feet of the dragon sovereign take 2d8 fire damage.

Last Stand. If the dragon sovereign is reduced to 0 hit points, it doesn't die or fall unconscious. Instead, its body floods with adrenaline, and it regains 30 hit points and moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Legendary Resistance (3/day). If the dragon sovereign fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. The dragon sovereign has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws. Because of its tooth and nail ability, the dragon can also make one additional bite or claw attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 37 (5d10 + 10) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (5d6 + 10) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +19 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 46 (5d8 + 10) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 22 Wisdom

saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Breath Weapons (Recharge 5–6). The dragon uses one of the following breath weapons:

Fire Breath. The dragon exhales fire in a 90-foot line that is 10 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 26 Dexterity saving throw, taking 56 (16d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Sleep Breath. The dragon exhales sleep gas in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 26 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious for 10 minutes. This effect ends for a creature if the creature takes damage, or someone uses an action to wake it.

Change Shape. The dragon magically polymorphs into a humanoid or beast that has a challenge rating no higher than its own, or back into its true form. It reverts to its true form if it dies. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (the dragon's choice).

In a new form, the dragon retains its alignment, hit points, hit dice, ability to speak, proficiencies, Legendary Resistance, lair actions, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, as well as this action. Its statistics and capabilities are otherwise replaced by those of the new form, except any class features or legendary actions of that form.

REACTIONS

Superior Coordination. When a creature tries to enter a space adjacent to the sovereign dragon, the dragon can use its reaction to make a melee weapon attack with its tail. If the dragon does not have a tail attack, it can instead make a claw melee weapon attack.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 15 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 27 Dexterity saving throw or take 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

Advanced Dragon Abilities

Perhaps you aren't interested in adding a full template to a dragon, but you still want an easy way to make dragon fights a little more interesting. If that describes your situation, you can pull from one of the advanced dragon abilities below. Some of these abilities require an increase to the dragon's CR. Adding more than one may require further consideration of the dragon's CR.

ADAMANTINE HIDE

The dragon's scales have hardened like adamantine. Any critical hits made against the dragon become normal hits.

ARCANE SIGHT

The dragon gains truesight out to a range of 60 feet. If the dragon already has truesight, the range extends by 60 feet.

CONTROLLED BREATHING

Prerequisite: Has a breath weapon attack

When the dragon uses its breath weapon, it can choose to shape the cone as a 60-foot line that is 5-foot wide or as a 60-foot cone. These options are in addition to any breath weapon option the dragon already has.

DRAGON HEART

As long as the dragon has at least 1 hit point but fewer hit points than half its hit point maximum, it regains a number of hit points equal to its Constitution modifier at the start of its turn. (This ability increases the dragon's CR by +1.)

ELEMENTALIST

Choose a damage type from this list: acid, lightning, fire, poison, or cold. The dragon becomes immune to that damage type in

addition to any damage immunities it already has. In addition, whenever a dragon would deal acid, lightning, fire, poison, or cold damage as dictated in its original stat block, it can choose to deal the new damage type instead. (This ability increases the dragon's CR by +1.)

ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION

The dragon gains one of the following movement speeds in addition to any movement speeds it already has: 40 ft. swim speed, climb speed, burrow speed, or fly speed.

FLIGHT MANEUVERS

Prerequisite: Has a flying speed

While the dragon is in midair, attack rolls against it are at disadvantage unless the attack is made from within 5 feet.

FORCE OF NATURE

The dragon's given DC for all existing abilities increase by +2. (This ability increases the dragon's CR by +1.)

JAWS OF DEATH

Prerequisite: Huge or Gargantuan size

The dragon gains the swallow action.

Swallow. The dragon makes one bite attack against a Large or smaller creature. If the attack hits, the target must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw (DC equals 8 + dragon's proficiency bonus + dragon's Con modifier) or be swallowed by the dragon. A swallowed creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the dragon, and it takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of the dragon's turns. The dragon can swallow only one creature at a time. (This ability increases the dragon's CR by +1.)

MAJESTIC PRESENCE

Prerequisite: Has the frightful presence action

The dragon replaces its Frightful Presence action with the Majestic Presence action. Use the DC of the dragon's existing Frightful Presence to determine the DC for the Majestic Presence ability.

Majestic Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and is aware of it must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or become charmed by the dragon for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns and each time it takes damage, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Majestic Presence for the next 24 hours.

REFLECTIVE SCALES

If the dragon makes a successful saving throw against a spell, or a spell attack misses it, the dragon can choose another creature (including the spellcaster) it can see within range of the spell. The spell targets the chosen creature instead of the dragon. If the spell forced a saving throw, the chosen creature makes its own save. If the spell was an attack, the attack roll is rerolled against the chosen creature.

TOOTH AND NAIL

Prerequisite: Must have a bite and a claw melee weapon attack

The dragon can make one additional bite or claw melee weapon attack when it takes the Multiattack action. (This ability increases the dragon's CR by +1.)

TOUCH OF MAGIC

The dragon learns the cantrips from the bard, cleric, druid, sorcerer, warlock, or wizard spell list. In addition, the dragon learns one 1st-level spell from that same list. Using this feature, the dragon can cast the spell once per day at its lowest level. The dragon's spellcasting ability for these spells depends on the class list you chose from: Charisma for bard, sorcerer, or warlock; Wisdom for cleric or druid; or Intelligence for wizard.

MY MONSTER: SCARLET CITADEL EDITION

by Mike Welham

In 2019, Kobold Press ran the My Monster contest on the Kobold Blog, in which contestants drafted the flavor text for some brand-new monster. The four finalists (John Burkett, Robert Fairbanks, Jonathan

McAnulty, and Adam Meredith) had their winning “monster flavors” crafted into the fully statted creatures below. Adventurers beware!



CECUM DEVIL

A tall, exquisitely robed figure glides silently forward, hand outstretched, beckoning. You've never seen anything so flawless, so sensuously beautiful, as that elegantly gesturing hand. You step forward, your comrades' muffled warnings distant and childlike. There's no horror when the hood falls back, only cold, reptilian perfection—six, jewel-eyed viper heads gleam and sway hypnotically atop writhing, serpentine necks. Blissfully you reach out your hand...

Personal Demesne. A cecum devil has access to a pocket dimension large enough to fit a mansion and a quarter acre of grounds outside the purview of Hell. The devil keeps its home away from home well-appointed and stores its favorite treasures as well as its mortal captives here.

Hostage Takers. Usually at the behest of arch-devils, cecum devils use their coercive abilities to collect high-profile targets, granting their

employers leverage on bargains with mortals. A few cecum devils quietly apply this kidnapping scheme to build their own power base.

Hydra Affinity. Cecum devils closely guard the secret of the physical similarities between them and hydras. They often entice lesser creatures to live in their pocket dimensions while allowing the hydras to hunt hostages who no longer have use or whatever prey the devils think might prove a challenge to their “pets.”

CECUM DEVIL

Medium fiend, lawful evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 189 (18d8 + 108)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 19 (+4) | 23 (+6) | 22 (+6) | 21 (+5) | 18 (+4) | 24 (+7) |

Saving Throws Dex +12, Con +12, Cha +13

Skills Arcana +11, Deception +13, Insight +10, Perception +10, Persuasion +13, Stealth +12



Damage Resistances

bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities

fire, poison, psychic

Condition Immunities

charmed, poisoned

Senses

darkvision 120 ft.,

passive Perception 19

Languages

Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge

17 (18,000 XP)

Devil's Sight.

Magical darkness doesn't impede the cecum devil's darkvision.

Magic Resistance.

The cecum devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Multiple Heads.

The cecum devil has six heads. As long as it has more than one head, the devil has advantage on saving throws against being blinded, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

Whenever the cecum devil takes 30 or more damage in a single turn, one of its heads dies. If all its heads die, the devil dies.

At the end of its turn, it grows one head for each of its heads that died since its last turn unless it has taken acid damage since its last turn. The devil regains 15 hit points for each head regrown in this way.

Personal Pocket Dimension. The cecum devil can move to and from its pocket dimension as a bonus action. While attacking from its pocket dimension, it has advantage on attack rolls, and other creatures have disadvantage on saving throws against spells and effects originating from it. If the devil dies, its pocket dimension collapses, instantly transporting each other creature to the location from which it originally accessed the dimension.



Innate Spellcasting. The cecum devil's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 20). The devil can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person*, *enthrall*

1/day: *dominate person*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The cecum devil makes a bite attack with each of its heads. It can instead replace a bite attack with an eye beam attack with up to half of its heads (rounded down).

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) poison damage, and the target must

succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, the creature has disadvantage on saving throws against spells and abilities that inflict the charmed condition. The poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Dimensional Shunt (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The cecum devil opens a portal to its pocket dimension, and a willing creature or one charmed by the cecum devil uses its reaction to move through the portal. The portal remains open for 1 minute. A creature can find the entrance to the devil's pocket dimension with a successful DC 19 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

Eye Beam. The cecum devil fires a beam of energy at a creature it can see within 90 feet of it. The targeted creature must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) psychic damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

The devil can use one of its eye beams to instead target a creature with a *charm person* spell.

JACK OF STRINGS

Clad in fine clothes of black and red, this tall, slim figure steps forward. With a clawed hand grasping a crossbar, it makes its eyeless marionette dance. A chuckle escapes its fanged maw as it turns its caprine head. Like jack-o-lanterns in the void, its eyes fall on you, gleaming with cruel delight.

Court Entertainers and Punishers. A jack of strings uses its collection of marionettes to amuse shadow fey courts. It is adept at tailoring its performances to the crowd, switching effortlessly between charming plays to delight children, ribald performances meant to titillate older audiences, satirical pantomimes making fun of court rivals, and terrifying tales intended as warnings or threats. Most horrifying, the jack of strings can take control of a creature to enact justice in the form of humiliation, torture, or even death, effectively self-inflicted by the controlled creature.

Uncanny Valley. When a jack of strings establishes a link between a marionette and another creature, the marionette becomes lifelike while the jack's victim takes on a wooden appearance. The puppet gains the victim's eyes, which disappear from the victim's face. Though the linked creature is effectively blind, this doesn't impact the jack's ability to manipulate the creature.

Masters of Puppets. Jacks of strings have several marionettes at their disposal. They painstakingly craft their first puppet, to which they establish a powerful psychic connection. Subsequent puppets derive from victims linked to their original creation and who perish while linked. To avoid retribution by powerful shadow fey, jacks of strings stalk mortal lands to add to their collections. They harvest their prey under the guise of traveling entertainment, either alone or in the company of carnivals or acting troupes. Jacks try to keep the disappearances in their wake to a minimum and to target creatures who won't be missed.

JACK OF STRINGS

Medium fey, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 93 (11d8 + 44)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 14 (+2) | 23 (+6) | 18 (+4) | 15 (+2) | 14 (+2) | 21 (+5) |

Saving Throws Dex +9

Skills Acrobatics +9, Performance +8, Sleight of Hand +9

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't made with cold iron

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Create Puppet. Any creature that dies while linked to the jack's puppet becomes an inert puppet

that the jack can animate with its Animate Puppet action.

Magic Resistance. The jack of strings has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Ram. *Melee Weapon Attack:*

+6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 23 (6d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Animate Puppet

(Recharge 4–6). For 1 minute, the jack of strings gives life to one of its puppets, which has the stats of a clockwork servant (see *Creature Codex*). It is a Small creature, but its statistics are otherwise unchanged. The jack of strings can command all puppets it has animated as a bonus action.

Puppet Link. A jack of strings can establish a telepathic link between its marionette and a target it can see within 90 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become linked to the marionette. A linked creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself with a success.

While a target is linked, the jack of strings can control it as a reaction at the beginning of the target's turn. This allows the jack of strings to make the target move, manipulate objects, attack, or take other purely physical actions. The target moves awkwardly and has disadvantage on attacks and ability checks. If the jack of strings causes its target to take an obviously fatal action (walking off a cliff or making the target attack itself when below half its hit points for example), the linked creature immediately gains another saving throw, for which the creature has advantage, to overcome the effect.



KAFLIGKAAL

Long and thin, winged like some great, desiccated black mantis, this creature wears a ghastly mask fashioned from the dried and stretched face of a man. Black eyes glitter behind the empty eye sockets of its macabre mask. Its wings move slowly against one another, emitting a dry, keening moan.

Victims of Polymorph. Humanoids who die while unwillingly transformed into another creature and horrified by their

transformation return as kafilgkaals. Despite the circumstances of their change of shape or the actual shape they took when they died, kafilgkaals have a uniform appearance. Scholars speculate that an insectoid demon lord with the ability to polymorph was responsible for the undead creatures' visage,

a reflection of the demon lord's true form. If not for the kafilgkaals' murderous nature, it might seem tragic that they remain locked in their gruesome shapes regardless of any magical attempts to revert them to their former appearances.



Homicidal Denial. A kafligkaal deludes itself in the belief it still retains its humanoid exterior and often attempts to comport itself as an ordinary member of society. A newly created kafligkaal that sees its reflection briefly realizes its horrific nature, which forces it to murder to maintain its facade. The kafligkaal doesn't care from what victim it harvests a face, and it often takes multiple faces in order to more effectively "blend in."

A Spreading Curse. Kafligkaals curse their victims with similar transformations, inadvertently at first but relishing the cruelty of the change once they understand the effects. Rather than kill their victims, the undead prefer to excise their prey's faces and turn their prey loose after conversion. Unable to speak due to their insectoid natures, these victims run afoul of villagers or adventurers seeking to dispatch what they see as horrific abominations. Regrettably, this merely marks the genesis of more kafligkaals.

Undead Nature. The kafligkaal doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

KAFLIGKAAL

Large undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 142 (15d10 + 60)

Speed 40 ft., fly 20 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 23 (+6) | 12 (+1) | 18 (+4) | 6 (-2) | 15 (+2) | 21 (+5) |

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Create Kafligkaal. Any humanoid that dies while transformed by a kafligkaal rises 1 hour later as an independent kafligkaal.

Immutable Form. The creature is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The kafligkaal makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16).

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (3d6 + 6) slashing damage.

Despairing Drone (Recharge 5–6). Each creature within 60 feet of the kafligkaal must succeed on a DC 16 Charisma saving throw or become unable to attack or target any creature with harmful abilities, spells, or other magical effects for 1 minute. An affected creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Face Removal. If the kafligkaal begins its turn grappling a creature, it cuts at the creature's face. The creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 22 (4d10) slashing damage, loses its face (reducing its hp maximum by an amount equal to the slashing damage taken until it receives a *regenerate* or similar spell), and permanently polymorphs into an insect creature of the kafligkaal's choice (as the *polymorph* spell; it can be reversed by a *polymorph* spell). On a success, the creature takes half as much damage, retains its face, and does not polymorph.

Horrifying Visage. Each non-undead creature within 60 feet of the kafligkaal that can see it must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the frightened condition on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to the kafligkaal's Horrifying Visage for the next 24 hours.

LIMINAL DRAKE

A shadow drifts gently over the castle walls, quietly sliding over its faded banners as though cast by an unseen cloud in the midday sun.

A faint shimmer traces through the shade, probing its corners before settling beneath the skull of a great beast. The shadows draw inward, learning from the old bone to forge a body of glimmering void.



Void Dragon Offspring. When an ancient void dragon (see *Tome of Beasts*) dies and imitates a collapsing star, some of the material composing the dragon cleaves from its body to produce liminal drakes. Though possible for the component drakes to recreate the void dragon, the fiercely independent drakes refuse to cooperate with each other to do so.

Portal-Filled Stomachs. As a side effect of their origins, liminal drakes are linked to multiple planes and worlds. They use these linkages to their advantage, swallowing pesky foes to divert them to other locations with little chance for their enemies to return. In an emergency, the drakes can turn themselves inside-out to pass through one of their own portals.

Ominous Aurora. The combination of starlight and void composing a liminal drake's body is repulsive to many observers. Madness cults relish a drake's appearance in the night sky as a sure sign their dark patrons will soon arrive.

LIMINAL DRAKE

Gargantuan dragon, neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 297 (22d20 + 66)

Speed 0 ft., fly 90 ft. (hover)

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 7 (-2) | 16 (+3) | 16 (+3) | 15 (+2) | 18 (+4) | 21 (+5) |

Damage Resistances cold, fire, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Draconic

Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The liminal drake can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Nauseating Luminance. A creature that starts its turn within 120 feet of the liminal drake and is able to see the drake must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns with disadvantage if the drake is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the drake's Nauseating Luminance for the next 24 hours.

Unless surprised, a creature can avert its eyes to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. Until the start of its next turn, a creature that averts its eyes has disadvantage on attack rolls against the drake.

Void Dweller. The liminal drake does not require air, food, drink, or sleep. It travels quickly through the void between stars, making immense journeys in impossibly short times.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The liminal drake makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage and 28 (8d6) cold damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 18).

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage, 18 (4d8) cold damage, and 18 (4d8) radiant damage.

Swallow. The liminal drake makes one bite attack against a Large or smaller target it is grappling. If the attack hits, the target takes the bite's damage, the target is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the drake, and it must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On the first attempt, the creature has advantage on the saving throw. On the second attempt, the creature no longer has advantage on the saving throw. On the third and subsequent attempts, the creature has disadvantage on the saving throw. On a failure, the creature is affected by a *plane shift* spell and sent to a random plane. If the creature is sent to the plane currently occupied, the creature instead appears 5d100 miles away in a random direction.

Warp Space. The liminal drake can fold in on itself to travel to a different plane. This works like the *plane shift* spell, except the drake can only affect itself and not other creatures, and it can't use the effect to banish an unwilling creature to another plane. Creatures swallowed by the drake appear in a space of their choosing formerly occupied by the drake.



MAGIC



RUNE MAGIC OF THE RAVENFOLK

by Sarah Madsen

The ravenfolk possess a singular affinity for rune magic. Rivalled only by the dwarves—who claim to have learned it at Wotan’s knee—the cunning ravenfolk have secret ways of channeling the power of runes. Able to sketch more complex runes and create rune-based magic items, the ravenfolk’s aptitude with rune magic far surpasses those not of their lineage. Many ravenfolk will claim that even if they wished to teach others, only ravenfolk have the knack and insight needed to master the skill.

No one knows exactly why it is that the ravenfolk are so skilled in this particular arcane school. It may be that in their creation Wotan himself gifted them with a special inclination, all the better to serve him. No ravenfolk ever forgets their origins as spies for Wotan—indeed, even if they wished to, the citizens of Midgard would never allow it. And so this prejudice and distrust leads most ravenfolk to be even more secretive about their extraordinary skill with rune magic, lest they face even more persecution at the hands of the land’s other races out of fear or suspicion.

Ravenfolk doom croakers (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook*) have honed their rune magic even further than the average ravenfolk and can commune with nature, the World Tree, and Wotan himself in order to gain deeper insights into the world around them. They are particularly taciturn when it comes to

their rune magic secrets, typically only offering their wisdom and visions to other ravenfolk.

Perched Among the Branches of Yggdrasil

Created as spies for Wotan and, according to legend, formed from the feathers of his faithful ravens Huginn and Muninn, ravenfolk are at home in the World Tree. It is said the first ravenfolk would walk among the peoples of Midgard and then scale the World Tree to whisper their secrets to Wotan or to carve or paint cryptic, runic messages in the branches of Yggdrasil itself. The ravenfolk of today no longer freely roam Yggdrasil, a result of some ancient war or curse they do not speak of, but still communicate with one another by leaving rune carvings in the self-healing bark of the World Trees they inhabit. Only the ravenfolk know the key to deciphering these runes.

OPTIONAL LANGUAGE: RUNIC CANT

Prerequisite: Ravenfolk

Along with their languages Huginn’s Speech and Feather Speech, the ravenfolk have ways of leaving cryptic, runic messages for one another. Similar to thieves’ cant, this code looks like simple runes to those who do not understand the hidden meaning. Ravenfolk often use it to indicate if a town is friendly

toward their kind, where to find safe haven, and where the most notorious gossips in a city can be found. Some particularly wily ravenfolk even imbue their runic cant with rune magic, causing the scribed symbols to serve dual purposes or to even function as a *complex rune* (explained below).

Complex Runes

Rune magic uses the power found in ancient runes to create magical effects, bolstering an adventurer and their allies, hindering and harming their enemies, and even affecting animals, the land, and the weather. Most practitioners can only invoke one rune at a time, but the ravenfolk have learned to combine runes to craft a new sigil and produce an altogether different result. These runes are, of course, a secret closely guarded by the ravenfolk.

CASTING COMPLEX RUNES

Prerequisites: Ravenfolk, *Rune Knowledge feat* (see Deep Magic)

You can combine two or more runes you know to create a complex rune and produce new, unique effects. If a complex rune gives you the ability to cast a spell, you can do so without needing any components, and the spell is always cast as if using the lowest-level spell slot possible (unless otherwise indicated). When a complex rune power calls for a saving throw, the DC equals 8 + your ability bonus + your proficiency bonus. Typically, the ability that applies to the DC calculation is the same as the ability used for the saving throw. Some of these complex runes are listed below; if you wish to create your own complex rune, talk with your GM.

RUNE OF ANCESTRAL COMMUNION

Runes combined: *Eiwaz, Ingwaz*

Once per day, you can sketch this complex rune in the air. When you do so, you can speak with the spirits of your ancestors and

ask them questions as with the *commune* spell. Sketching this complex rune takes 1 minute and lasts for 1 minute.

RUNE OF BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

Runes combined: *Jera, Nyköping*

Once per day, you can sketch this complex rune on a fruit tree or on the ground within a field of wheat or other crop, forcing them to ripen at an astounding pace. Over the course of the next hour, the marked tree or crops within a 30-foot radius grow and bear fruit, regardless of the season. After an hour, the resulting bounty can be harvested and consumed as usual. Sketching this complex rune takes 1 minute.

RUNE OF DARKNESS

Runes combined: *Algiz, Perto, Uruz*

Once per day, you can sketch this complex rune on the ground. When completed, a bubble of magical darkness springs forth in a 30-foot radius from the rune. Darkvision does not penetrate this darkness, though you can see through this darkness as if it were dim light. Sketching this rune takes 1 action, and it lasts for 1 minute, with concentration.

RUNE OF HALLOWED GROUND

Runes combined: *Ansuz, Dagaz*

Once per day, you can sketch this complex rune on the ground, tree, wall, or other stationary object. Once completed, undead cannot come within 30 feet of the rune, and undead have disadvantage on attacks made against any living creatures within the affected area. Any living creatures within the affected area have advantage on any saving throws made against charm effects from undead. Sketching this complex rune takes 1 minute, and it lasts for 1 hour.

RUNE OF IMPRISONMENT

Runes combined: Isaz, Mannaz

Once per day, as an action, you can sketch this complex rune in the air. When you do, choose up to five humanoid within 30 feet and force them to make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, they are affected by the *hold person* spell. This complex rune lasts for a minute, with concentration.

RUNE OF REJUVENATING FEAST

Runes combined: Gebu, Naudiz, Wunjo

Once per day, you can sketch this complex rune on any horizontal surface. Once completed, a great feast spring forth from the rune. Up to ten creatures can partake of the feast. A creature who spends an hour consuming the feast heals up to their maximum hit points and can recover from one level of exhaustion. Sketching this complex rune takes 1 minute, and it lasts for 1 hour, at which point the remaining food disappears in a puff of pink smoke.

RUNE OF SECRETS

Runes combined: Ingwaz, Ootalan, Perto

Once per day, you can sketch this complex rune in the air. When you do so, you can hear the thoughts of those around you, as with *detect thoughts*. Additionally, you have advantage on Charisma (Deception) checks. Sketching this rune takes an action, and it lasts for 1 minute, with concentration.



RUNE OF THE BOLD

Runes combined: Sowilo, Tewaz

Once per day, you can sketch this complex rune in the air. When you do, all of your allies within 30 feet of you can choose to roll one attack with advantage while the rune is active. Once they do so, they cannot use the benefit of this rune until it is scribed again. Sketching this complex rune takes an action and lasts for 1 minute, with concentration.

RUNE OF THE TRICKSTER

Runes combined: Eiwaz, Perto, Wunjo

Once per day, as an action, you can sketch this complex rune in the air. When you do, choose up to five creatures that you can see within 30 feet of you and force them to make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, they are affected by the *hideous laughter* spell. The rune lasts for 1 minute, with concentration.

Runestaves

Not only are ravenfolk able to combine runes into more complex patterns for immediate effects, but they have learned to infuse items with a longer-lasting version of rune magic. Basic rune magic is typically limited to one rune at a time, and the desired effect often fades quickly. Creating a runestaff imbues a weapon with effects that last for several days or, in the case of personal runestaves, combines multiple runes on a quarterstaff to create new and unique results that last until changed or dispelled. Only the ravenfolk know the secrets of creating runestaves, and they refuse to teach the skill to others.

RUNE MAGIC FEAT: RUNE CARVER

Prerequisite: Ravenfolk, Rune Knowledge feat (see Deep Magic)

You know how to create runestaves and runespears, imbuing a mundane quarterstaff or spear with the magic of Wotan's runes. You can carve one rune that you know into a quarterstaff or spear. When a hit is made with the imbued weapon, it does an additional 1d4 damage of the rune's type: radiant (*Sowilo*), cold (*Isaz*), fire (*Kaunen*), or lightning (*Turisaz*). The rune takes an hour to inscribe and lasts for a week.

Additionally, you can craft a special runestaff for yourself that can only be wielded by you. If it is wielded by a creature other than yourself, it functions as a mundane quarterstaff. Your runestaff takes 7 days to complete, and the ritual requires 100 gp worth of incense that is consumed during the creation of the runestaff. You can inscribe any rune into the staff, even those you have not yet learned. You may change the runes on your staff at any point, but doing so requires another 7 days and 100 gold worth of incense. You can only have one personal runestaff created at one time. If you create a new runestaff, the old runestaff becomes mundane.

When you cast a spell from your personal runestaff, you may do so without material

components, and the spell is always cast as if using the lowest-level spell slot possible (unless otherwise indicated). When a spell cast from your runestaff calls for a saving throw, the DC equals 8 + your ability bonus + your proficiency bonus. Typically, the ability that applies to the DC calculation is the same as the ability used for the saving throw. When you create your runestaff, choose one of the following.

BALEFUL RUNESTAFF

Runes carved: Algiz, Jera, Tewaz, Uruz

When wielding this runestaff, you gain +1 to attacks.

This staff has 5 charges and regains all expended charges at dawn. You can expend 2 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from the staff: *inflict wounds* (2 charges), *shatter* (3 charges), *vampiric touch* (4 charges), or *blight* (5 charges).

Additionally, you can expend 5 charges and sacrifice the staff, destroying it. If you do so, a blast of necrotic energy bursts from you in a 10-foot-radius sphere. All creatures in the affected area must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, they take 5d6 necrotic damage, or they take half as much damage on a success.

CHARMING RUNESTAFF

Runes carved: Berkanan, Nyköping, Otalan, Perto

When wielding this runestaff, you gain +2 to your Charisma checks and saving throws.

This staff has 5 charges and regains all expended charges at dawn. You can expend 2 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from the staff: *charm person* (2 charges), *suggestion* (3 charges), *fear* (4 charges), or *confusion* (5 charges).

Additionally, you can expend 5 charges and sacrifice the staff, destroying it. If you do so, you can cast *sleep* as if you were casting it at 5th level.

DIMINISHING RUNESTAFF

Runes carved: Dagaz, Ingwaz, Isaz

When wielding this runestaff, you gain advantage on Wisdom saving throws.

This staff has 5 charges and regains all expended charges at dawn. You can expend 2 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from the staff: *bane* (2 charges), *dispel magic* (3 charges), *glyph of warding* (4 charges), or *banishment* (5 charges).

Additionally, you can expend 5 charges and sacrifice the staff, destroying it. If you do so, you can cast *dispel magic* on up to three targets in a 10-foot radius.

ELEMENTAL RUNESTAFF

Runes carved: Isa, Kaunen, Laukaz, Turisaz

When wielding this runestaff, you gain resistance to cold, fire, and lightning, and thunder damage.

This staff has 5 charges and regains all expended charges at dawn. You can expend 2 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from the staff: *thunderwave* (2 charges), *flaming sphere* (3 charges), *call lightning* (4 charges), or *fireball* (5 charges).

Additionally, you can expend 5 charges and sacrifice the staff, destroying it. If you do so, you can force up to five creatures you can see within 30 feet of you to make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, they take 8d8 damage of the type of your choosing: cold, fire, lightning, or thunder, or they take half as much on a success.

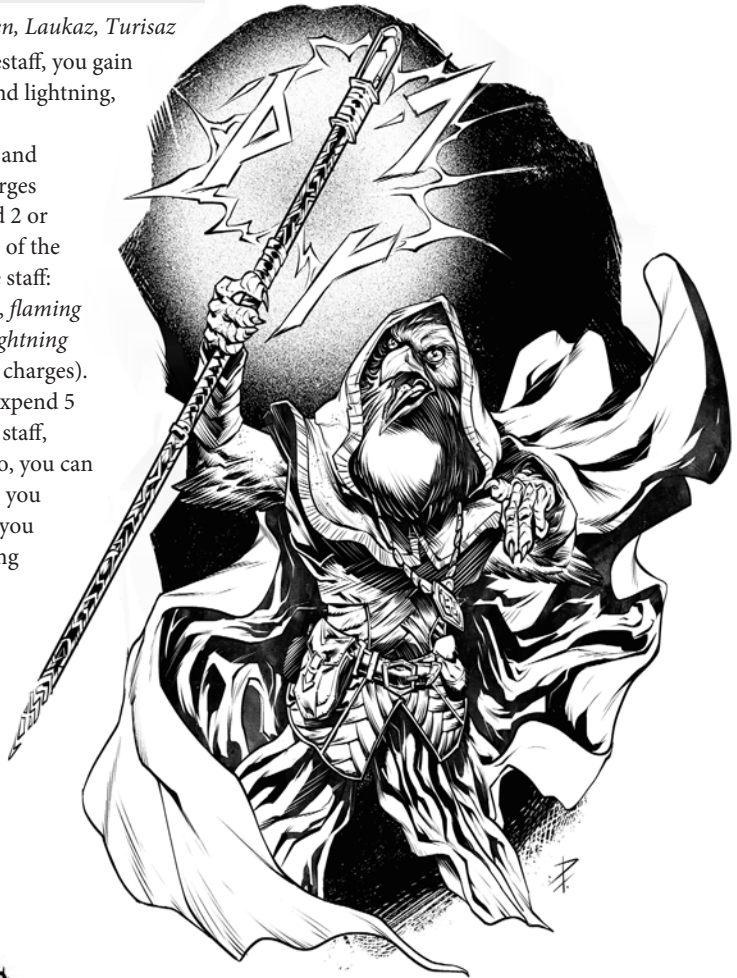
SHIELDING RUNESTAFF

Runes carved: Ansuz, Jera, Raido, Wunjo

When wielding this runestaff, you gain +1 to your AC.

This staff has 5 charges and regains all expended charges at dawn. You can expend 2 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from the staff: *shield* (2 charges), *protection from energy* (3 charges), *death ward* (4 charges), or *tiny hut* (5 charges).

Additionally, you can expend 5 charges and sacrifice the staff, destroying it. If you do so, you can bestow +2 AC to up to five creatures that you can see within a 60-foot radius. This effect lasts for 8 hours.



ZEPHYROUS RUNESTAFF

Runes carved: Hagalaz, Nyköping, Turisaz

When wielding this runestaff, your base speed increases by 5 feet.

This staff has 5 charges and regains all expended charges at dawn. You can expend 2 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from the staff: *expeditious retreat* (2 charges), *gust of wind* (3 charges), *fly* (4 charges), or *wind wall* (5 charges).

Additionally, you can expend 5 charges and sacrifice the staff, destroying it. If you do so, you can cast *haste* on up to three creatures within 30 feet of you.

Ravenfolk Relics

The ravenfolk don't have many relics to their name, but a few have found their way into the wider world. Primarily found in the hands of ravenfolk, these magic items nonetheless sometimes end up in the possession of others, whether by chance or by force.

SET OF RUNES

Wondrous item, rare

Inside this drawstring pouch is a set of 25 runes. Carved into smooth stones or pieces of yew all cut from the same branch, the runes can be used to attempt to divine the future, garner insight into a situation, or glimpse the fate of another. You can spend 10 minutes focusing on a target or subject and then draw three runes from the bag and

set them before you. When you do so, make a Wisdom (Insight) check. The level of success determines the outcome of the reading.

SNOKKI'S STEIN

Wondrous item, legendary

Snokki was a particularly charming and entertaining ravenfolk bard who once traveled the lands, receiving a warm welcome anywhere he went despite the prejudices other ravenfolk faced in those same regions. Able to repeat any song perfectly after only hearing it once—or able to mimic any voice with eerie precision—Snokki carried with him his infamous stein, which honeyed his tongue and loosened the lips of those around him. Unfortunately for Snokki, he honeyed the tongue of a jarl's wife and found himself fleeing town with barely the clothes on his back, leaving his precious stein behind.

This quart-sized ceramic stein is carved over with the runes *Gebu, Isaz, Jera, Kaunen, Naudiz, Otalan, and Wunjo*. You can use an action to name one liquid from the following: beer, wine, hot cocoa, fresh water, salt water, grape juice. The stein then produces up to two quarts of the chosen liquid and keeps it ice cold or piping hot, to your preference.

Additionally, once per day, when you drink from this stein, you gain advantage on Charisma checks and gain the ability to cast *charm person* at will. This effect lasts for an hour. Once used, this ability cannot be used again until the next dawn.

CHECK OUTCOME OF READING

| | |
|-------|---|
| 0–14 | The reading fails. The runes provide no aid. |
| 15–18 | You gain a vision of your target. It is hazy, and you do not know if the vision is of the past, present, or future. |
| 19–25 | You gain a vision of your target. It is hazy, and you do not know if the vision is of the past, present, or future. You may ask one yes-or-no question about your target, as with the <i>commune</i> spell. |
| 26–30 | You gain a vision of your target. Though it may be only a momentary glimpse, it is clear, and you are aware of its orientation in time (past, present, or future). You may ask three yes-or-no questions about your target, as with the <i>commune</i> spell. |

BEARFOLK MAGIC

by Mike Welham

Others may look at the physically imposing bearfolk and assume they rely solely on brute force to solve their problems, particularly in combat. While this is true in general—and bearfolk clearly value physical might over magical prowess—they have learned to embrace magical traditions. Hitting something with an axe or a paw doesn't always overcome obstacles presented by the hostile environments in the Northlands or the Shadow Realm where they reside. At the same time, atypical bearfolk who show an aptitude for magic still focus most of their time on combat training.

Bearfolk magical traditions vary by location. Those in the Northlands tend toward druidic traditions with a sizable percentage opting to become rangers to marry druid spells with combat expertise. Druids of the Northlands work with nature to ensure good harvests, to blunt the worst effects of bitter winters, and, most crucially, to tend honeybees and their hives. The importance of honeybees among the Northlands bearfolk has spurred the development of a bee-centric magic tradition among their druids. They also use their magic to summon animals in their defense, alter the weather to their advantage in combat, and manipulate the earth to create shelter or thwart enemies. Clerics who devote themselves to nature and martial deities are the second most common spellcasters.

Bearfolk warriors greatly respect these clerics because of their ability to apply powerful healing during heated battles. Wizards and other spellcasting bearfolk use their spells to overwhelm their enemies, calling forth energies that prove more effective than steel. Against trolls, giants, and werewolves encroaching on their borders, bearfolk sorcerers, wizards, and (the rare few) warlocks use straightforward magic.

In the Moonlit Glades and elsewhere in the Shadow Realm, druidic magic has even more prominence than in the Northlands, owing to the mighty druids who made the first incursions into the Shadow Realm. Druids work to purify the outer boundaries of their realm and keep meticulous watch over land even deep within their borders to counter any corruption attempting to creep in. Bearfolk in the Moonlit Glades worry that non-druid, non-cleric casters are more prone to falling to the corruption pervading the realm, so they have inherent mistrust toward such casters, even among their own kind. However, they recognize the power these magical practitioners can wield against umbral vampires and other shadow denizens.

The relatively small number of bearfolk inhabiting the Rothenian Plain deal with less hardship in terms of environment but tend toward a nomadic lifestyle common to many people of the plains. Plains bearfolk

deem druids and rangers the most valuable spellcasters as they can use their magic to find the least treacherous paths when journeying to a new location and ensure their tribes have access to plentiful meat and grain. Traditions involving bees and other pollinating insects follow from the druids in the Northlands, though the plains druids either tend mobile hives or establish colonies in select fruitful locations.

Bearfolk Druid Circle

At 2nd level, a druid gains the Druid Circle feature. The following option is available to all druids but is especially suited to Northlands bearfolk.

CIRCLE OF BEES

Druids of the Circle of Bees are friends to all stinging insects but focus their attention on honeybees and other pollinating insects. When not adventuring, they tend hives, created by the insects or themselves. They tap into the horror inherent in stinging insects to protect their allies or the fields hosting their bee friends.

CIRCLE SPELLS

Your bond with bees and other stinging insects grants you knowledge of certain spells. At 2nd level, you learn the *true strike* cantrip. At 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th levels, you gain access to the spells listed for those levels in the **Circle of Bees Spells** table.

Once you gain access to a circle spell, you always have it prepared, and it doesn't count against the number of spells you can prepare each day. If you gain access to a spell that doesn't appear on the druid spell list, the spell is nonetheless a druid spell for you.



CIRCLE OF BEES SPELLS

| Paladin Level | Spells |
|---------------|--|
| 3rd | <i>blur, bombardment of stings</i> (see below) |
| 5th | <i>fly, haste</i> |
| 7th | <i>giant insect, locate creature</i> |
| 9th | <i>insect plague, telepathic bond</i> |

BONUS PROFICIENCY

When you choose this circle at 2nd level, you gain proficiency in Acrobatics or Stealth.

BEE BOND

Starting at 2nd level, you can speak and understand the Bee Dance language. Bees refuse to attack you (even with magical coercion) while other stinging insects must succeed on a Charisma saving throw against your spell save DC or have disadvantage on their attack rolls against you. Additionally, you can expend one use of your Wild Shape as an action to grow a bee's stinger, typically growing from your wrist. The stinger deals 1d4 piercing damage, and if you hit, the target must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC, taking 1d6 poison damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. If the target's saving throw is successful, it is immune to poison damage from your stinger for the next 24 hours.

The stinger lasts for 10 minutes or until you use your Wild Shape again.

FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLEBEE

At 6th level, you can Dash as a bonus action. When you do so, creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against you.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

HIVE MIND

At 10th level, when you cast *telepathic bond*, all creatures in the link have advantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma ability checks if at least one creature in the link has proficiency in a skill that applies to a check. Additionally, if one creature in the link succeeds on a Wisdom (Perception) check to notice a hidden creature or on a Wisdom (Insight) check, all creatures in the link are treated as if they succeeded on the check. Finally, a linked creature can use its reaction to grant advantage on an attack roll to another linked creature it can see.

MANTLE OF BEES

At 14th level, you can spend an action to cover yourself in bees. While you have a mantle of bees, you gain a +2 bonus to AC. Additionally, any adjacent creature that hits you with a melee weapon must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC, taking 1d6 piercing damage and 1d6 poison damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. A creature that fails its saving throw is poisoned until the end of its next turn. You also have advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks while covered in bees.

You can spend an action to direct the bees to swarm a 10-foot-radius sphere within 60 feet of you. All creatures in the area must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC, taking 4d6 piercing damage and 4d6 poison damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. A creature that fails its saving throw is poisoned for 1 minute. When you use this ability, you dismiss the mantle.

The mantle lasts for 1 hour or until you dismiss it.

Once you have used this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Bearfolk Magic Items

The following magic items are suited for or inspired by bearfolk.

BRAWN ARMOR

*Armor (hide armor), rare
(requires attunement)*

While you wear this armor crafted from a grizzly bear's hide, you gain a +1 bonus to AC, and you have advantage on grapple checks. The armor has 3 charges. You can expend 1 charge as a bonus action to inflict your unarmed strike damage to a creature you are grappling. The armor regains all expended charges at dawn.

CHIEFTAIN'S AXE

*Weapon (battleaxe), very rare
(requires attunement)*

Furs conceal the worn runes lining the haft of this oversized battleaxe with a silvered head. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it.

You can use an action to raise the axe while shouting a rallying cry. All allies who can hear and see you can use a reaction to make a melee attack. You can't use this property again until you finish a long rest.

If you are a non-bearfolk, bearfolk who see you carrying the chieftain's axe have a starting attitude of hostile. You also have disadvantage on Charisma checks to influence a bearfolk. However, if you turn the axe over to bearfolk, provided you haven't used the axe against bearfolk to their knowledge, they have a starting attitude of friendly.

HEALTHFUL HONEYPOT

Wondrous item, rare

This clay honeypot weighs 10 pounds. A sweet aroma wafts constantly from it, and it produces enough honey to feed up to 12 humanoids as if they had consumed 1 day's worth of rations. You can use an action to

eat one of the remaining portions of honey to regain 1d8 hit points. The honeypot replenishes its uses at dawn.

You can use the honeypot's magic to create a resplendent honey-based banquet, including an exquisite mead. Up to twelve creatures can feast on the banquet, which requires an hour to consume. After the hour is over, each creature that participated is cured of all diseases and poison, becomes immune to poison and being frightened, and makes all Wisdom saving throws with advantage. These benefits last for 24 hours. If the honeypot is used in this way, it loses all of its magic for 1 week.

Bearfolk Spells

Bearfolk from a variety of spellcasting traditions can choose from these spells.

ABRUPT HUG

1st-level transmutation (ranger)

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when you or a creature within 30 feet of you takes an Attack action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V

Duration: Instantaneous

You or the creature taking the Attack action can make an unarmed strike. If the spell's subject hits, it can grapple the target in addition to dealing damage to the target.

BEAST WITHIN

4th-level transmutation (druid, ranger, warlock)

Casting Time: 1 round

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (fang or tooth from a lycanthrope)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You imbue a target creature with a touch of lycanthropy. The target must be a willing bearfolk or other creature with a shared ancestry with lycanthropes. For

the duration, the target gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered. Additionally, the target has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell, as appropriate to the lycanthrope. Finally, the creature gains a claw attack that deals slashing damage equal to its unarmed strike damage and a bite attack that deals piercing damage equal to its unarmed strike damage +2. The target's bite damage does not inflict lycanthropy.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 5th level or higher, you can target one additional creature for each spell slot above 4th.

BOMBARDMENT OF STINGS

2nd-level evocation (druid, ranger, sorcerer, wizard)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (30-foot cone)

Components: V, S, M (a handful of bee stingers)

Duration: Instantaneous

Each creature in a 30-foot cone must make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 4d6 piercing damage and is poisoned for 1 minute on a failed save or half as much damage and is not poisoned on a successful one.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 2nd.

FIND THE MOONLIT PATH

2nd-level divination (druid)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (sliver of stone from a Moonlight Glades border marker)

Duration: Concentration, up to 8 hours

Bearfolk from the Moonlight Glades share this spell with known allies but otherwise guard the spell's secrets. For the duration,

you can sense the location of shadow roads leading to the Moonlight Glades. When in sight of such a shadow road, it glows silver.

JARRING GROWL

1st-level enchantment (ranger, warlock)

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: Self

Components: V

Duration: Instantaneous

You loose a growl from deep within the pit of your stomach, causing others who can hear it to become unnerved. You have advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks you make before the beginning of your next turn. Additionally, creatures adjacent to you must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, you have advantage on attack rolls against that creature until the end of your turn. You are aware of which creatures failed their saving throws.

LESS FOOL, I

1st-level divination (bard, cleric)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

A creature you touch becomes less susceptible to lies and magical influence. For the duration, other creatures have disadvantage on Charisma checks to influence the protected creature, and the creature has advantage on spells that cause it to become charmed or frightened.

At Higher Levels. If you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the duration is concentration, up to 1 hour. If you use a spell slot of 5th level or higher, the duration is 8 hours. If you use a spell slot of 7th level or higher, the duration is 24 hours. If you use a 9th level spell slot, the duration is 1 year. Using a spell slot of 5th level or higher grants a duration that doesn't require concentration.

NEVER SURRENDER

3rd-level abjuration (bard, cleric, paladin, ranger)

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when you or a creature within 60 feet of you drops to 0 hit points.

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

When the spell's subject is reduced to 0 hit points, the spell allows them to fight looming death to stay in the fight. The spell's recipient does not fall unconscious but must still make death saving throws as normal. However, they need not make a death saving throw until after the end of their next turn, but that first subsequent death saving throw is at disadvantage. Additionally, massive damage required to kill the subject outright increases such that the damage must equal or exceed twice the subject's hit point maximum. Should the target's hit points be increased to 1 or greater, the effects of this spell end.

At Higher Levels. If you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, the spell's subject does not have disadvantage on its first death saving throw.

OVERSIZED PAWS

2nd-level transmutation (druid, ranger)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (claw or talon from a bear or other large animal)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Until this spell ends, the hands and feet of one willing creature you choose within range become oversized and more powerful. For the duration, the creature adds 1d4 to damage it deals with its unarmed strike.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, you can target one additional creature for each spell slot above 2nd.

SHARED FRENZY

3rd-level enchantment (bard)

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You yell defiantly as part of casting this spell to encourage a battle fury among your allies. Each ally in range must make a Charisma saving throw; a creature can choose to fail this saving throw if it wishes. If a creature fails its saving throw, it gains resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage and has advantage on attack rolls. However, attack rolls made against the creature have advantage.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, you can designate one creature for each slot level above 3rd. The spell does not give advantage on attack rolls against the designated creature(s).

SILVERSHOUT

2nd-level abjuration (bard, cleric)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (30-foot cone)

Components: V, S, M (ounce of silver powder)

Duration: Instantaneous

You unleash a shout that coats all creatures in a 30-foot cone in silver dust. If a creature in that area is a shapeshifter, the dust covering them glows. Additionally, each creature in that area must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, all weapon attacks against that creature for 1 minute are considered to be silvered for the purposes of negating resistances and immunities.

SUDDEN SLEUTH

4th-level conjuration (druid)

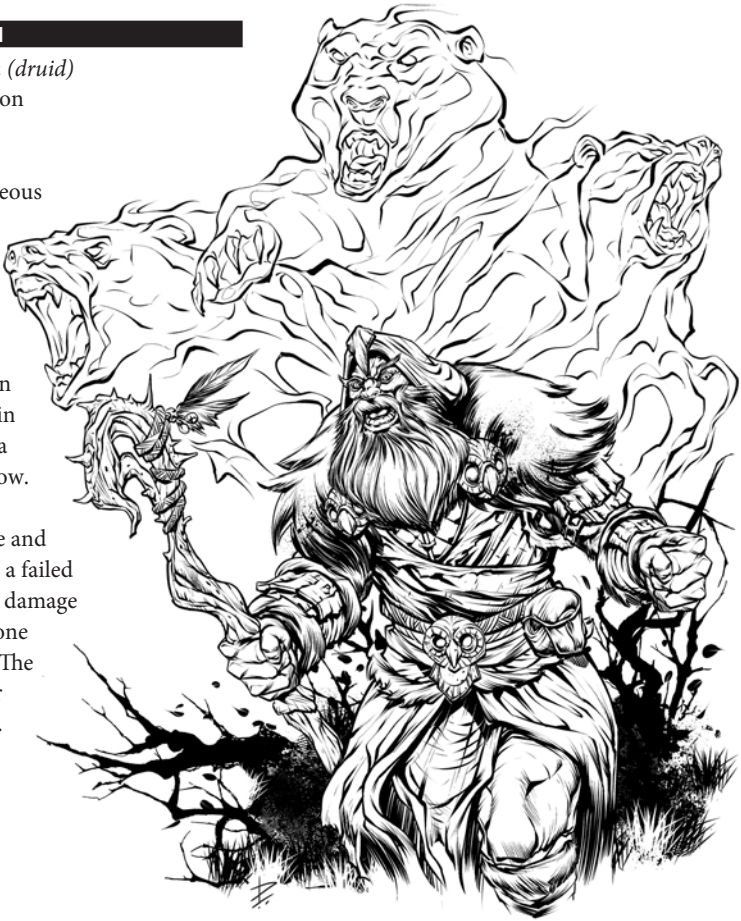
Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

With a growl, you call forth dozens of bears you direct to overrun all creatures in a 20-foot square within range. All creatures in the area must make a Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 6d6 bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone on a failed save or half as much damage and not knocked prone on a successful one. The bears disappear after making their charge.



SUPPRESS REGENERATION

1st-level transmutation (ranger, sorcerer, warlock, wizard)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (skin from a troll or other regenerating creature)

Duration: 1 minute

You attempt to temporarily remove the ability to regenerate from a creature you can see within range. It must make a Fortitude saving throw. If it fails the saving throw, it can no longer regenerate damage (through Regeneration or a similar trait). It can receive magical healing as usual.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you can target one additional creature for each slot level above 1st. The creatures must be within 30 feet of each other when you target them.

Modifications to Existing Spell Lists

Bearfolk druids add *tiny hut* to their spell list. The spell must be cast in an area with sufficient space to hold a cave, and it creates a cave per the spell's dimensions that lasts for the duration.

DECORATING YOUR DUNGEON: NEW OBSTACLES FOR ADVENTURERS

by Kelly Pawlik

Midgard is a world full of lost tombs, ancient kingdoms, vicious intrigues, and limitless potential for exploration. The tales told by adventurers are full of lost opportunities, sudden reversals of fortune, monstrous threats, and strange phenomena. And where better to set the stage for such odyssey than in the dungeon!

Environmental Hazards

There are numerous possible origins for the environmental hazards that follow: manipulation of the ley lines crisscrossing the world, dark rituals gone awry, interference by creatures outside the scope of humanity's understanding, or a thousand other things.

The phenomena detailed herein are particularly suited to campaigns and adventures set in the many and varied regions of Midgard.

SUPERNATURAL REGIONS

The supernatural regions detailed are suffused with mystery and a sense of the magical or impossible and can be any size from a few square feet to a mile across or more. Characters traversing the region may note its strange effects immediately, or the area may require some action or inaction to trigger its effects. Potential triggers could be:

- Being reduced to 0 hit points
- Entering the area
- Taking injury
- When a group of creatures finishes a short or long rest
- When a spell is cast

ARCANE INSTABILITY

Throughout history, great magic has been worked across the face of Midgard. In many cases, these remain as a monument to the ingenuity and talent of their creators. Some

ARCANE INSTABILITY IN MIDGARD

Magical disasters have occurred in all the known lands, making arcane instability a relatively common supernatural hazard. The Wasted West is peppered with areas of instability as a result of the reality-warping magic used to summon the Dread Walkers.

In the heart of the Red Wastes, where a flying city of Sikkim detonated, there is a large area of instability. Small regions along the River Nuria are unstable as a result of the magical properties the water once held.



ARCANE INSTABILITY EFFECTS

d10 EFFECT

- 1 When a creature casts a spell of 1st level or higher, a different spell of the same school and level is cast upon the caster's intended target instead. The caster's spell slot is expended.
- 2 When a creature casts a cantrip, it deals one extra die of damage.
- 3 When a creature casts a spell that deals damage, they add the modifier of their ability score that governs their spellcasting as extra damage to each creature targeted.
- 4 A creature that uses a wand must expend an additional 1d4 charges each time it uses the wand.
- 5 All magical items that are attuned to a creature cease to be attuned. The item cannot be attuned again until 24 hours after the area has been exited.
- 6 Every time a spell is cast, it deals 1d8 force damage in addition to its normal effect.
- 7 At the beginning of each of its turns, a spellcaster gains 1d10 temporary hit points. This effect lasts for 1 minute.
- 8 Each creature in the area that has spell slots recovers 1d4 expended slots. At the beginning of its turn, a spellcaster must roll 1d100. If the result is 1–75, the slots they recover must be of the lowest levels they have expended slots. On a result of 76–100, the slots they recover are of the highest level that they have expended.
- 9 Each time a spell is cast in the area, it is potentially interrupted as if *counterspell* had been cast upon it. Spells of 3rd level and lower fail and have no effect. A caster who casts a spell of 4th level or higher must succeed on a DC 13 ability check using their spellcasting ability; on a failure, their spell fails and has no effect.
- 10 If a spell that effects one target is cast, it also effects all creatures within 5 feet of the target. Each creature affected must make its own saving throw if applicable.

though, have been unworked, dispelled, or destroyed, either intentionally, in a surge of arcane power along a ley line, as a fluke confluence of events, or at the divine imperative of the gods. In areas where this has occurred, an area of arcane instability can form, making magic act in unpredictable and sometimes, dangerous ways.

Consider rolling on the Arcane Instability Effects table below when the following events occur in the region:

- A creature attunes itself to a magic item
- A creature prepares spells after finishing a long rest
- A creature must make a Constitution saving throw to maintain concentration on a spell
- A sorcerer uses metamagic
- A wand or rod is used to cast a spell

CURSED EARTH

Some entire regions fall under the evil eye of malediction. This often happens due to the thwarted ambitions of some fell presence. Even once the threat to the land and its people is gone, its influence can be felt for generations. Some cursed lands are the result of an oath sworn by a righteous or innocent individual. These tend to be the longest lasting and most devastating. When such an effect occurs, the words or feeling that enacted the curse resound through the minds of the creatures affected by it. Dungeons are particularly common places for cursed earth. The suffering that befalls those who perish in their depths often causes them to curse their tormentors before their voices are silenced forever.

CURSED EARTH EFFECTS

d8 EFFECT

- 1 A gloomy pall settles over all creatures in the region, giving them disadvantage on saving throws against being frightened.
- 2 Creatures traveling through the area have difficulty deciding what to do when events get dicey. At the beginning of its turn, a creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be unable to take actions or reactions until the beginning of its next turn.
- 3 Each creature hears a persistent irritating noise. A creature that casts a spell with a duration of concentration must make a Constitution saving throw (DC 10 + the level of the spell) or expend the spell slot with no effect. A creature that is maintaining concentration on a spell must make a saving throw with a DC as calculated above or lose concentration, which ends the spell's duration.
- 4 A faint miasma hangs in the air, catching in the lungs and hanging over creatures caught in it. Creatures that finish a long rest in the area do not gain any benefits from doing so.
- 5 The longer creatures stay in the cursed area, the more tired they get. A creature that finishes a short or long rest gains one level of exhaustion that can't be removed while it remains in the area.
- 6 The air of the region catches at creatures, slowing them. A creature must choose to either move or take an action on their turn; they cannot do both.
- 7 When a creature casts a spell with verbal components, the curse empowers those words, treating them like an oath. Targets of the spell cast have disadvantage on their saving throws against it.
- 8 All characters that have a quality or experience in common with the creature the original curse was sworn against suffer bleeding wounds while they are in the affected land. For example, at the beginning of each of their turns, all characters from Zobeck in the area take 1 point of slashing damage. Resistance to slashing damage doesn't reduce the damage to 0.

Consider rolling on the Cursed Earth Effects table below when the following events occur in the region:

- A creature attacks an innocent or beast
- A creature becomes angry or initiates a barbarian's rage
- A creature becomes frightened
- A creature must make a Wisdom saving throw
- The characters enter the area
- Two or more creatures argue.

DEVASTATING RUIN

In places where buildings or monuments of importance to the gods are destroyed, the site can forever after remember the events. Similarly, where entire settlements cease to be in a single brutal instant, the supernatural can take hold, reminding those who traverse the ruins of what once was but no longer is. The

landscape and objects tend to be transitory in areas of devastating ruin.

Consider rolling on the Devastating Ruin Effects table below when the following events occur in the region:

- A creature attacks an object or construct
- A creature scores a critical hit
- A creature takes damage it has resistance to
- A spell from the school of conjuration or transmutation is cast

LIVING BATTLEGROUND

Some places have seen more than their fair share of warfare and conflict. Over time, the lingering psychic residue of the hundreds or thousands of creatures that have hated, fought, and died in an area is absorbed into the land before being reflected out at the creatures that bring new conflicts there.



DEVASTATING RUIN EFFECTS

d6 EFFECT

- 1 Physical items and structures seem to soften. Objects in the area have no damage threshold and are easily damaged and destroyed by weapon attacks and spells.
- 2 Creatures in the region either become very resilient or soft and easily injured. Each creature needs to roll 1d100. Creatures that roll a result of 1–50 have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage. Creatures that get a result of 51–100 have vulnerability to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.
- 3 Weapons wielded become sharper and harder. Every attack that hits its target is a critical hit.
- 4 Metal armor and shields swiftly turn to rust. Creatures wearing armor made primarily of metal must reduce their AC by 2 while they are in the region.
- 5 The magic that governs constructs breaks down. At the beginning of a construct's turn, it must roll 1d100. On a result of 1–50, it does nothing at all for the round. On a result of 51–100, it attacks the closest creature to it.
- 6 The weight of objects, including all items carried by the characters, is doubled in the area.



CURSED EARTH IN MIDGARD

The most notable area suffering under a curse is arguably at Tannenbirg Castle in Krakovar. The dying vows of the knights and guards slaughtered there on the night the darakhul force poured through from the Underworld and took the castle for King Lucan echo endlessly in its rebuilt depths.

LIVING BATTLEFIELD EFFECTS

| d8 | EFFECT |
|----|---|
| 1 | Each creature in the area hears a horn blaring. Roll 1d100. On 1–50, a creature hears the clarion call to charge and acts under the effects of the <i>bless</i> spell for 1 minute. On a 51–100, a creature hears the horn sound a mournful retreat and acts under the effects of the <i>bane</i> spell for 1 minute. |
| 2 | Each creature wielding a martial weapon hears the clash of weapons on armor. The weapons wielded by these creatures are considered magical and deal an extra 1d4 points of damage. |
| 3 | Spectral banners bearing the symbol of one or more gods of war appear for a moment before fading. Each creature bearing a matching holy symbol restores additional hit points, equal to their Charisma modifier, to targets when casting a spell or using a feature or magic item to heal themselves or another creature. |
| 4 | The ground radiates the cold chill of death. Creatures have disadvantage on death saving throws made in the area. |
| 5 | The resonance of past battles affects the living. At the beginning of its turn, each creature in the area must make a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or take 1d10 psychic damage. |
| 6 | Blood seems to rain from the sky for 1d4 minutes. While it rains, creatures must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the beginning of their turn or take 1d6 acid damage and be poisoned until the end of their next turn. |
| 7 | Each creature in the area receives a brief mental image (the subject of their bond characteristic) and gains advantage on saving throws against being frightened for 1 minute. |
| 8 | The ground erupts as though it has been struck by catapult shot. Each creature in the area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw as a space near it bursts in a spray of soil and metal. On a failed save, a creature takes 1d8 points of bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone. |

Consider rolling on the Living Battleground Effects table below when the following events occur in the region:

- A creature is killed
- A creature is reduced below half its hit points
- A creature scores a critical hit
- A spell deals damage to multiple creatures
- Initiative is rolled
- The first attack is made

Ciphers

Puzzles are a fantastic way to customize your dungeons and add some interesting challenges to get your characters thinking about their environment and how they might interact with it. Presented herein are some new puzzles you can present, either as a planned part of your adventure or on the fly if you need to add an element of surprise or mystery.

LIVING BATTLEGROUND IN MIDGARD

Each of the Dread Walkers roaming the Wasted West has a living battleground nearby. The constant warfare in the region of the Seven Cities has created hundreds of small living

battlegrounds as well as a large one nearly 20 miles in diameter between Valera and the Fist of Mavros.



SIMPLE SUBSTITUTION CIPHER

Difficulty: easy

This puzzle can be included anywhere you want and can be presented in many different ways. Perhaps the characters need to gather a few things to gain the grudging assistance of a sage. Instead of giving them a simple list, the sage uses a cipher hoping the characters lose interest or can't figure it out. As the players decipher the list, they gather the items and force the cantankerous old woman to help them. Or perhaps you use a substitution cipher to represent an unfamiliar language that uses the same alphabet as the Common tongue, allowing characters to learn and decipher texts written in the tongue without them needing to have proficiency in the language itself.

For the example, we'll use a locked door that requires a phrase be deciphered to open it.

PUZZLE FEATURES

A locked door is set into the dungeon's stone wall. It is made of stout oak and banded in steel. A small horn etched with a stylized gust of wind is fastened to the door, jutting out at the height of the average human's face. An inscription has been chiseled into the wall:

Solve the riddle and speak the command to enter. A chilly reception will meet the one who does not speak truly.

"YLIVZH ZOOLD NV KZHHZTV."

SOLUTION

Substitution ciphers are one of the oldest types of puzzles. To create one, the maker creates a cipher alphabet wherein each letter of the regular alphabet corresponds to a different letter of the same alphabet. For the example, we will reverse the alphabet to make our cipher, so the letter *A* is written as the letter *Z*, and the letter *Z* is written as *A*. The complete alphabet, numbered for ease of use, is as follows.

REGULAR ALPHABET

(1)A (2)B (3)C (4)D (5)E (6) F (7)G (8)H (9) I (10)J (11)K (12)L (13)M (14)N (15)O (16)P (17)Q (18)R (19)S (20)T (21)U (22)V (23)W (24)X (25)Y (26)Z

CIPHER ALPHABET

(1)Z (2)Y (3)X (4)W (5)V (6)U (7)T (8)S (9) R (10)Q (11)P (12)O (13)N (14)M (15)L (16) K (17)J (18)I (19)H (20)G (21)F (22)E (23)D (24)C (25)B (26)A

In order to unlock the door and move on, the characters need to decipher the script, which using the cipher alphabet above reads, "BOREAS ALLOW ME PASSAGE." Once they know the solution, a character needs to speak it into the horn, which unlocks the door. A freezing bolt shoots from the horn toward the speaker if anything other than the solution to the cipher is said directly into the horn. The cold blast has +4 to attacks and deals 4 (1d8) cold damage.

HINT CHECKS

Any character has the option of making one of these ability checks to receive a hint:

- **Intelligence (Investigation).** With a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check, the character deduces the lower part of the inscription is a substitution cipher and that something unpleasant may occur if the wrong words are spoken into the horn. If their check meets or exceeds a 12, they understand how the alphabet used in the inscription corresponds to the actual alphabet.
- **Intelligence (Religion).** With a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Religion) check, the character recognizes the etchings on the horn match the symbol of Boreas. If their check beats a DC 12, they realize the first word has the same number of characters as Boreas's name. If their check beats a DC 15, they know the pass phrase is an entreaty for entry to Boreas.

CUSTOMIZING THE PUZZLE

The easiest way to customize a substitution cipher is to change the cipher alphabet, which can be done in a variety of ways. Once you have created a cipher alphabet, you can use it or alter it easily for future use.

Most simply, instead of having each letter correspond to a different letter, have it correspond to a number instead. This can be done by having the number 1 symbolize the letter *A* if you want to keep it easy, but 1 can represent any letter, such as *R* or *J* to make it more complex.

In keeping with the above suggestion, have letters correspond to runes, symbols, or pictograms instead. This is a great option if you wish to use the cipher to represent an unusual or unfamiliar language.

In addition to having letters, numbers, or symbols relate to the actual letters you're using, have some of them symbolize commonly used letter groupings, such as *AI*, *EA*, *ING*, *EE*, *EL*, or *OO*. This is easier if you're using numbers, symbols, or pictograms and can add quite a bit of complexity to the puzzle. Finally, if you really want to make your cipher difficult, create a cipher alphabet out of letters, numbers, and symbols or pictures. This should stymie even a group who really loves this type of puzzle.



BEARFOLK HONEY ITEMS

by Celeste Conowitch

The bearfolk of the Northlands, the Rothenian Plains, and Dornig are renowned for their love of honey. No other race in Midgard can claim a matched knowledge of the cultivation of bees and the resources they produce.

The material benefits from beekeeping are obvious, but the bearfolk have also honed the craft to produce various powerful items, and the Bear King, in particular, has led the efforts in the brewing of magical meads.

Presented here are a collection of items developed by the bearfolk, using their intimate knowledge of bees, both magical and mundane. Some of these items enhance beekeepers' capabilities, others were forged by bee-like fey, and some are infused with the natural potency found in domestic hives.

Equipment

This is a collection of non-magical items developed by the bearfolk, including equipment to harvest and raise bees.

BEE VENOM

Poison

This poison must be harvested from the giant bees common in Björnrike. A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be

poisoned for 1 minute. The poisoned creature is paralyzed. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Bee venom must be delivered via injury. Injury poison can be applied to weapons, ammunition, trap components, and other objects that deal piercing or slashing damage and remains potent until delivered through a wound or washed off. A creature that takes piercing or slashing damage from an object coated with the poison is exposed to its effects.

BEEKEEPING TOOLS

Tool

Using beekeeping tools, you can establish, maintain, and harvest beehives. Tending hives requires space and regular maintenance, but the process yields several valuable commodities, including wax, venom, and honey.

Components. Beekeeping tools consist of protective gear, a smoker, hive tools, a bee brush, and extracting equipment.

Nature. Proficiency with beekeeping tools gives you additional insight on Intelligence (Nature) checks concerning flowering plants and stinging insects.

Animal Handling. Proficiency with beekeeping tools gives you additional insight

on Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks concerning bees and bee-like creatures.

Medicine. Proficiency with beekeeping tools gives you additional insight on Wisdom (Medicine) checks concerning venom.

Honey Production. If maintained, you can harvest 2 pounds of honey each week from a standard beehive.

ACTIVITY

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Harvest honey | DC 10 |
| Repair or construct a new hive | DC 15 |
| Diagnose and treat a sick hive | DC 20 |

CHANDLER'S TOOLS

Tool

With chandler's tools, you can use beeswax and other materials to make and sell candles. Candle making (or chandlery) requires access to raw materials and storage space to cure but can be a lucrative profession.

Components. Chandler's tools consist of storage containers, wicks, molds, essential oils, and a cauldron.

Religion. Proficiency with chandler's tools gives you additional insight on Intelligence (Religion) checks about religious rituals.

Survival. Proficiency with chandler's tools gives you additional insight on Wisdom (Survival) checks concerning starting, stopping, or controlling non-magical fires.

Nature. Proficiency with chandler's tools gives you additional insight on Wisdom (Nature) checks concerning the properties of wax, soaps, oils, and similar materials.

Candle Production. With access to proper materials and time, you can make 100 tapered candles each week.

ACTIVITY

| | |
|--|-------|
| Make a basic candle | DC 10 |
| Make a special type of candle | DC 15 |
| Identify the origin and components of a candle | DC 20 |

INSECTBANE CANDLE

Adventuring gear

This heavily scented candle is repellent to insects. While it burns, non-magical insects will not come within a 5-foot radius.

This candle burns for 1 hour and sheds bright light in a 5-foot radius and dim light for an additional 5 feet.

SWEET VENGEANCE

Poison

This sweet poison is distilled over a long time and requires a great deal of the venom produced by worker bees. It is indistinguishable from honey in taste. A creature that ingests this poison must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature crystalizes and is instantly petrified. Otherwise, a creature that fails the save begins to turn to crystalized honey and is restrained. The restrained creature must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn, becoming petrified on a failure or ending the effect on a success. The petrification lasts until the creature is freed by the *greater restoration* spell or other magic.

A creature must swallow an entire dose of sweet vengeance to suffer its effects. The dose can be delivered in food or a liquid. You may decide that a partial dose has a reduced effect, such as allowing advantage on the saving throw.

Magic Items

This is a collection of magic items developed using honey. Several common and magical varieties of bees exist in Midgard, providing ample sources for these treasures.

BEAR PAWS

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

These hand wraps are made of flexible beeswax that ooze sticky honey. While

wearing these gloves, you have advantage on grapple checks. In addition, creatures grappled by you have disadvantage on any checks made to escape your grapple.

BIG DIPPER

Rod, rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster)

This wooden rod is topped with a ridged ball. When active, the ridges flow with delicious honey. The rod has 7 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the rod's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the rod melts into a pool of non-magical honey and is destroyed.

Spells. While holding the rod, you can use an action to expend some of its charges to cast one of the following spells (save DC 17): *hold monster* (5 charges) or *hold person* (2 charges).

Sticky Stick. While holding the rod, you can use your reaction to expend 1 charge and magical stick it to any surface. Until you use an action to end the effect, the rod remains stuck. The rod can hold up to 8,000 pounds of weight. More weight causes the rod to deactivate and fall.



FIGURINE OF WONDROUS POWER (AMBER BEE)

Wondrous item, rare

A figurine of wondrous power is a statuette of a beast small enough to fit in a pocket. If you use an action to speak the command word and throw the figurine to a point on the ground within 60 feet of you, the figurine becomes a living creature. If the space where the creature would appear is occupied by

other creatures or objects or if there isn't enough space for the creature, the figurine doesn't become a creature.

The creature is friendly to you and your companions. It understands your languages and obeys your spoken commands. If you issue no commands, the creature defends itself but takes no other actions.

The creature exists for a duration specific to each figurine. At the end of the duration, the creature reverts to its figurine form. It reverts to a figurine early if it drops to 0 hit points or if you use an action to speak the command word again while touching it. When the creature becomes a figurine again, its property can't be used again until a certain amount of time has passed, as specified in the figurine's description.

Amber Bee (Rare). This amber statuette is of a honeybee. It can become a giant bee for up to 6 hours. Once it has been used, it can't be used again until 5 days have passed.

GIANT BEE

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 14 (+2) | 16 (+3) | 16 (+3) | 2 (-4) | 12 (+1) | 8 (-1) |

Senses Perception +5

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The giant bee makes two attacks with its stinger.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

GOLDEN BOLT

Weapon (crossbow, heavy), uncommon (requires attunement)

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Immediately after firing a bolt from this weapon, another golden bolt forms to take its place. This crossbow does not have the loading property.

GUARD HIVES

Wondrous item, rare

A guard hive is a 100-pound structure that can be placed on any flat surface able to sustain its weight. Once placed, the hive populates with large bees (use giant wasp statistics) in 1d4 days. Once populated, any creature that comes within 30 feet of the hive triggers 20 bees to emerge and attack all creatures that they can see. Any slain bees regenerate in 1d4 days.

The bees do not attack creatures who regularly consume the honey generated by the hives (eat it at least once per week). Only a creature proficient with beekeeping tools can harvest the honey from guard hives.

The hive has AC 15, 50 hit points, vulnerability to bludgeoning damage, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Reducing the hive to 0 hit points destroys it and the bees contained within it.

HONEY BUCKLE

Wondrous item, varies (requires attunement)

While wearing this belt buckle, you can use an action to magically assume the shape of a creature determined by the variety of buckle. Once you use this property, you cannot transform this way again until the following dawn.

The transformation lasts for 1 hour, until you choose to revert to your normal form, or until you drop to 0 hit points or die. Your game statistics are replaced by the statistics of

the creature, but you retain your alignment, personality, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores.

You assume the hit points of the new form. When you revert to your normal form, you return to the number of hit points you had before you transformed. If you revert as a result of dropping to 0 hit points, any excess damage carries over to your normal form. As long as the excess damage doesn't reduce your normal form to 0 hit points, you aren't knocked unconscious.

You are limited in the actions you can perform by the nature of your new form: you can't speak, cast spells, or take any other action that requires hands or speech.

Your gear melds into the new form. You can't activate, use, wield, or otherwise benefit from any of your equipment.

Honey Buckle

| TYPE | CREATURE | RARITY |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|
| Black Honey Buckle | Black Bear | Uncommon |
| Brown Honey Buckle | Brown Bear | Rare |
| White Honey Buckle | Polar Bear | Very Rare |

HONEY TRAP

Wondrous item, rare

These jars are made of beaten metal and engraved with honeybees. Each honey trap has 7 charges. While holding the jar, you can use an action to expend 1 charge to hurl a glob of honey at a target within 30 feet as a ranged weapon attack. If the attack hits, the glob expands, and the creature is restrained.

A target restrained by the honey can use an action to make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check (target's choice). On a success, the creature is no longer restrained by the honey.

The honey trap regains 1d6 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the jar's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the jar shatters and loses all its magical properties.

HONEYPOT OF AWAKENING

Wondrous item, uncommon

If you place one pound of honey inside this pot, it transforms into an ochre jelly in 24 hours. It requires an action to dump the jelly from the pot, which must be placed within 5 feet of you. Once dumped, the ochre jelly is hostile to all creatures, including you.

Only one ochre jelly can occupy the pot at any time.

RING OF URSA

Ring, rare (requires attunement)

This wooden ring is set with a strip of fossilized honey. While wearing this ring, you gain the following benefits:

- Your Strength score increases by 2, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks made to interact with bearfolk.

In addition, while attuned to the ring, your hair grows thick and abundant. Your facial features grow more snout-like, and your teeth elongate.

If you aren't a bearfolk, you gain the following benefits while wearing the ring:

- You can now make a bite attack as an unarmed strike. If your bite hits, you deal

1d6 + your Strength modifier piercing damage.

- You gain a powerful build and count as one size larger when determining your carrying capacity and the weight you can push, drag, or lift.
- You can speak, read, and write Northern.

STINGER

Weapon (dagger), rare

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

When you hit a creature with an attack using this weapon, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed for 1 minute. At the end of each of its turns, the target can make another Constitution saving throw. On a success, the target is no longer paralyzed. Creatures immune to poison are not affected by the dagger.

Once this property is used, it cannot be used again until the venom recharges the next dawn.

Magical Consumables

This is a collection of consumable magic items created by the bearfolk. The efforts of the reigning Bear King Mesikammen are responsible for driving the creation of many fantastically imbued meads.

GOLDEN DAWN (MEAD)

Potion, uncommon

This amber mead is flecked with edible gold and has a sour taste.

When you drink this mead, you immediately reduce your exhaustion level by one. If you do not have any levels of exhaustion, this mead has no effect. Once consumed, you cannot benefit from *golden dawn* again until 24 hours have passed.



MAIDEN'S TEARS (MEAD)

Potion, very rare

This fruity mead is the color of liquid gold and is rumored to be brewed with a tear from the Bear Maiden herself.

When you drink this mead, you regain 10 hit points at the start of your turn if you have at least 1 hit point. This effect lasts for 1 minute.

QUEEN BEE (MEAD)

Potion, rare

This spicy mead is brewed from the Bear King's royal hives and shimmers with a rose-gold hue.

When you drink this mead, your Charisma score changes to 20 for 8 hours. The mead has no effect on you if your Charisma score is already equal to or greater than 20.

ROYAL JELLY

Potion, uncommon

This oil is distilled from the pheromones of queen bees and smells faintly of banana. The oil can cover a Medium or smaller creature, along with the equipment it's wearing and carrying (one additional vial is required for each size category above Medium). Applying the oil takes 10 minutes. The affected creature then has advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks for 1 hour.

SWEET SUBJECTS (MEAD)

Potion, rare

This aromatic floral mead is pale yellow and sweet to taste.

After you drink this mead, for 1 hour, all beasts that see you must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by you for the duration. If you or one of your companions harms a beast charmed by you in this way, the creature is no longer charmed and is immune to effects of this mead for 24 hours.

WINTER COAT (MEAD)

Potion, uncommon

This syrupy mead is deep brown in color and smells of honeyed ham.

When you drink this, you sprout a shaggy coat of fur, 6-inches thick. The fur lasts for 8 hours, after which time it falls off harmlessly. This fur mimics the effects of cold weather gear, protecting from extreme cold.

HONEY AXES

The most well-known of the bearfolk's magical creations are the powerful honey axes. Bearfolk legend tells that when their people first emerged from the forest, several powerful weapons known as "honey axes" were gifted by the fey to the most accomplished warriors. Whether or not this legend is true, possessing one of these powerful weapons is viewed as a symbol of might. The various chieftains of the bearfolk often go to great lengths to find these magical items, sometimes hiring adventurers to follow leads as to their locations.

Presented here is a list of honey axes known to have existed in Midgard, though many of their locations are currently unknown.

AXE OF THE GOLDEN QUEEN

*Weapon (greataxe), artifact
(requires attunement)*

Legend tells of a day long ago when Bengta the Bear Maiden was surveying the reaches of the Northlands. On this journey, she encountered a magnificent queen bee, mortally wounded. Despite the tense relationship between bee and bear, Bengta used her magic to heal the dying creature. As the queen healed, she transformed, and the Maiden was suddenly in the presence of one of the fey animal lords. In return for her kindness, the fey lady promised to forge Bengta a regal weapon to solidify a new friendship between bear and bee.

The fey lady kept her word and forged the *Axe of the Golden Queen*, spun from the honey of her own hive.

The *Axe of the Golden Queen* possesses a blade that shines like an amber-colored diamond. Its grip is formed of swirling black-and-gold metal, imprinted with a honeycomb pattern. The axe is a magic weapon that grants a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. When you hit with an attack using it, the target takes an extra 3d10 radiant damage.

Blessings of the Queen. If you are a good character and attuned to the axe, you gain the following benefits:

- You can't be charmed or frightened.
- You are immune to poison damage.
- Your Charisma score increases by 2, to a maximum of 24.

Majestic Visage. While you are holding the greataxe, you can use an action to force any creatures you can see within 30 feet of you to make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the target is charmed by you for 1 hour or until you or your companions do anything harmful to it.

Summon Drone. While you are holding the greataxe, you can use an action to summon a spirit that assumes the form of a giant bee. The bee appears within 30 feet of you and has the statistics of a giant bee (see above) but assumes the fey creature type. The bee has an Intelligence of 6, and it has the ability to understand one language of your choice that you speak.

The bee serves you as a mount, both in combat and out, and you have an instinctive bond with it that allows you to fight as a seamless unit. While mounted on the bee, you can make any spell you cast that targets only you also target the bee.

When the bee drops to 0 hit points, it disappears, leaving behind no physical form. You can also dismiss the bee at any time as an action, causing it to disappear. Only one bee can be summoned at any time.

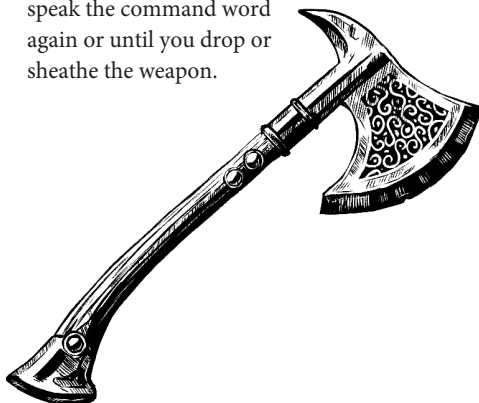
Once this property has been used, it cannot be used again until the following dawn.

Destroying the Axe. The only way to destroy the axe is to feed it to one of the fey animal lords. Only the animal lords possess the strength to digest the honey spun by another of their kind.

BUZZING BLADE

Weapon (any sword or axe), rare (requires attunement)

You can use a bonus action to speak this weapon's command word, causing the blade to emit a loud buzzing sound. The buzzing noise is audible out to 100 feet. While the sword is buzzing, it deals an extra 2d6 thunder damage to any target it hits. The buzzing lasts until you use a bonus action to speak the command word again or until you drop or sheathe the weapon.



CANDIED AXE

Weapon (battleaxe), very rare (requires attunement)

This battleaxe bears a golden head spun from crystalized honey. Its wooden handle is carved with reliefs of bees. While attuned to the battleaxe, you gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Blessing of the Bee. While you are attuned to the *candied axe*, you have immunity to poison damage and advantage on all

Charisma-based skill checks made while interacting with beasts.

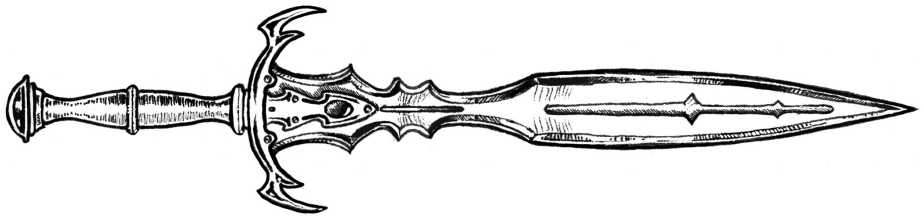
Honey Drip. While you are holding the battleaxe, you can use an action to cast the *slow* spell (save DC 15) from the weapon. This action can't be used again until the next dawn.

Curse. The axe bears a curse that affects any non-bearfolk that attunes to it. Even if the attunement ends, the curse remains. With each passing day, the creature's physical appearance and stature become more bearlike. After 7 days, the creature looks like a typical bearfolk, but the creature neither loses its racial traits nor gains the racial traits of a bearfolk. The physical changes wrought by the axe cannot be dispelled, but they can be undone by any effect that removes a curse.

GLAZED BLADE

Weapon (any sword or axe), common

A pleasant scent emerges from this weapon. While it is on your person, you have advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks made to interact with humanoid and fey.



SWEET NATURE

Weapon (battleaxe), uncommon

You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Sweet nature is a +1 battleaxe that deals maximum damage when its wielder hits a humanoid creature. If the wielder attempts to use the axe to damage a plant creature or an object made of wood, the axe's blade liquifies into harmless honey and takes a day to reform.

URSA MAJOR

*Weapon (battleaxe), legendary
(requires attunement)*

When a powerful guardian of the forest passes from the world, a bearfolk preserves a piece of the great beast's soul into an axe. The beautiful battleaxe is missing a triangular shard from one of its honey-colored blades.

You gain the following benefits while holding this magic weapon:

- You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it.
- You have advantage on Constitution checks. You also gain 2d6 temporary hit points each dawn, which are lost when the sun sets.
- You can't be surprised by beasts while you're not incapacitated. You are also aware when beasts are within 120 feet of you and aren't behind total cover although you don't know their location.
- While you are wielding *ursa minor* in your other hand, attacks with *ursa major* are made with advantage.

Sentience. *Ursa major* is a sentient, chaotic neutral weapon with an Intelligence of 8, a Wisdom of 16, and a Charisma of 10. It has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet.

The axe communicates by transmitting strong emotion to its wielder, though it can send images to its wielder's mind using limited telepathy.

Personality. *Ursa major* contains the bound spirit of a mighty mother bear. As such, *ursa major* desires nothing more than to be reunited with her lost shard who is bound

into the handaxe *ursa minor*. *Ursa major* does all she can to persuade her wielder to find *ursa minor*. Otherwise, *ursa major* primarily expresses primal emotions, often communicating hunger, rage, and the desire for rest.

URSA MINOR

Weapon (handaxe), legendary
(requires attunement)

A shard of the blade of the battleaxe known as *ursa major* was broken off when that axe was made. *Ursa minor*, this handaxe, was created from the broken, honey-colored shard of that greater weapon.

You gain the following benefits while attuned to this magic weapon:

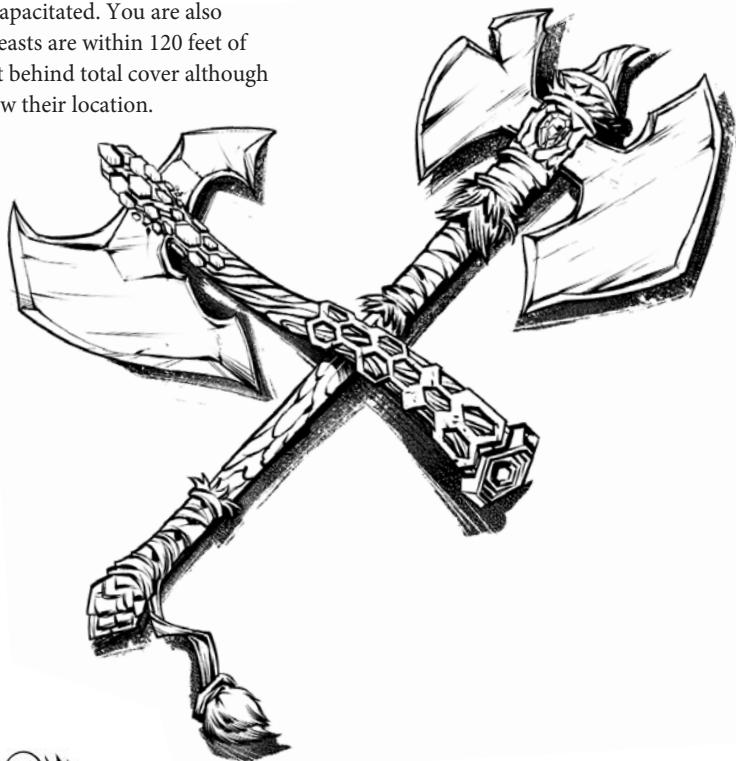
- You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it.
- You gain 2d6 temporary hit points each sunset, which are lost at dawn.
- You can't be surprised by beasts while you're not incapacitated. You are also aware when beasts are within 120 feet of you and aren't behind total cover although you don't know their location.

- While you are wielding *ursa major* in your other hand, attacks with *ursa minor* are made with advantage.

Sentience. *Ursa minor* is a sentient, chaotic neutral weapon with an Intelligence of 6, a Wisdom of 10, and a Charisma of 8. It has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet.

The axe is barely sentient since it is a fragmented part of the magic weapon *ursa major*. It can communicate emotions to its wielder, though it is incapable of speech.

Personality. *Ursa minor* contains a small piece of the spirit of a mighty mother bear. As such, *ursa minor* desires nothing more than to be reunited with its mother who is bound into the battleaxe *ursa major*. *Ursa minor* does all she can to persuade her wielder to find *ursa major*. Otherwise, *ursa minor* primarily expresses primal emotions, often communicating hunger and fear.



BAUBLES OF THE DARKENED DRUIDS

by Jerry LeNeave

Druids are some of the most resourceful individuals you'll find, always managing to take what is readily abundant around them and create something useful. Not just useful, according to certain tales some of the creations of druidic circles can be credited for saving the world more than a time or two. The Circle of the Weald druids are no exception, and some of their elders, soothsayers, and nomads wander Midgard selling baubles and other magical items as part of the path laid before them by the Ancestor.

Below is a sampling of these magic items.

ASH OF THE EBON BIRCH

Potion, uncommon

This salve is created by burning bits of bark from a rare tree unique to the groves of the Circle of the Weald and then mixed with oil and blood to create a cerise pigment used to paint the body with profane protections.

Sigils. The following sigils can be painted on your body for a specific effect:

- *Antlers*—You gain the effect of the *see invisibility* spell (save DC 13).
- *Beak*—You are immune to being charmed and cannot be scryed upon for 1 hour.
- *Claw*—You cannot be surprised for 1 hour.

- *Hoof*—Your remains are prevented from rising or being animated as an undead for 24 hours.

Smear. Swathes of your body can be smeared with the ash for a specific effect:

- *Arms*—You gain a +2 bonus to Strength for 1 hour.
- *Chest*—You gain advantage on one type of saving throw (your choice of Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma) for 10 minutes.
- *Eyes*—You gain truesight to 30 feet for 10 minutes.
- *Legs*—You increase your speed by +10 feet for 1 hour.
- *Stomach*—You gain a +2 bonus to Constitution for 1 hour.

BRAMBLESEED

Wondrous item, uncommon

You have a handful of tiny seeds that resemble pinecones. When a command word is spoken (no action required), they sprout into hardened clumps of bramble, acting as caltrops. Creatures injured by these caltrops must succeed a DC 13 Strength check or become restrained until the end of their next turn.

CINCH OF THE WOLFMOTHER

*Wondrous item, uncommon
(requires attunement)*

This belt is made of the treated and tanned intestines of a dire wolf, enchanted to imbue those who wear it with the ferocity and determination of the wolf.

While wearing this belt, you can use an action to cast the *Speak with Animals* spell at will. You also gain the use of the *Druidcraft* cantrip and have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Cursed. This belt is cursed. Attuning to it curses you until you are targeted by the *Remove Curse* spell or similar magic. Removing the belt fails to end the curse on you.

If you are reduced to 0 hp while the belt is worn and fail two death saving throws, you die immediately as your body violently erupts in a shower of blood as a **dire wolf** emerges from your entrails. You assume control of the dire wolf, and it gains additional hit points equal to half of your character's maximum hit points prior to death.

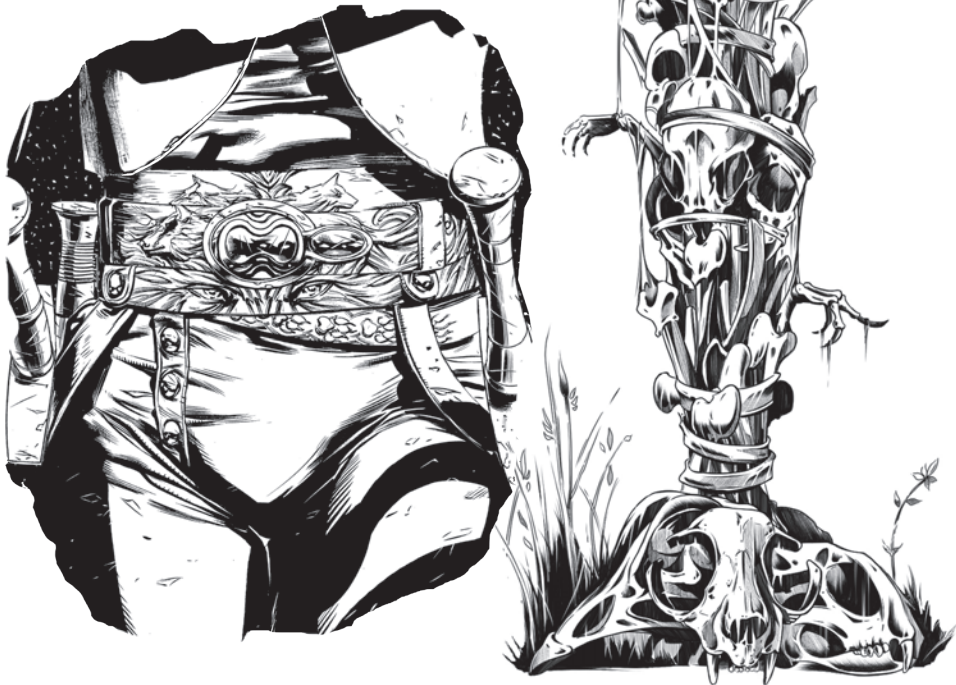
If the wolf is targeted by a *Remove Curse* spell, then the dead character will be reborn when the wolf dies, just as the wolf was born. However, if the curse remains after the wolf dies, the character remains dead.

HALLOWED EFFIGY

*Wondrous item, rare
(requires attunement)*

These small totems, crafted from animal bones and the skull of a tiny woodland creature, all bound in thin leather strips, serve as a boon for those loyal to nature and as a stinging trap to those who threaten it.

You can use an action to secure the effigy on any natural organic substrate (such as dirt, mud, grass, and so on). While so planted, it pulses with energy in a 15-foot-radius sphere, and at the beginning



of each of your turns, it activates to effect all within range: you and any creature friendly to you regain 1d6 hit points, and any creatures hostile to you must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 1d6 necrotic damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

This totem has 9 charges. Each round it activates, it uses 1 charge. While planted, it activates automatically each round unless you pick it up, it runs out of charges, or it is destroyed. It regains 1d6 + 3 charges daily at dawn. If it ever runs out of charges, it must be purified once again by a druid of at least 5th level to be reused.

LUPINE CROWN

Wondrous item, rare

This grisly helm is fashioned from the leather-reinforced skull and antlers of a deer with a fox skull and hide stretched over it. It is secured by a strap made from a magically preserved length of animal entrails.

While wearing this helm, you gain a +1 bonus to AC, and you gain a +5 on Dexterity (Stealth) and Wisdom (Survival) checks.



MANTLE OF THE FOREST LORD

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

Created by village elders for druidic scouts to better traverse and survey the perimeters of their lands, this cloak resembles thick oak bark but bends and flows like silk.

While you wear this cloak, you can use an action to cast the *tree stride* spell on yourself at will, except trees need not be living in order to pass through them.

OCULI OF THE ANCESTOR

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

An intricately depicted replica of an eyeball, right down to the blood vessels and other fine details, these items are carved from sacred hardwoods by soothsayers using a specialized ceremonial blade handcrafted specifically for this purpose.

When the orb is placed within the eye socket of a skull, it will reveal the last thing that was experienced by the person before they died. This lasts for up to 1 minute and is limited to purely visible and audible elements and no other perceivable senses. The flashback is delivered telepathically to you.

PRIMORDIAL PODS

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement by a druid)

These seemingly innocuous pellets are actually a mixture of leaves, spores, sacrificial ash, and rare powders made from the ground bones of ancient beasts, and they bring power to those willing to suffer. Sowing pods beneath the flesh gives them purchase to blossom as fungus covers the body in a layer of hardened growths. This disease is curable by a casting of *lesser restoration* in the first month. After that, *greater restoration* or more powerful magic is required. Once cured, unless the pods are removed or otherwise destroyed, they will reinfect the host after 1 week of dormancy.

DURATION EFFECTS

| | |
|----------|--|
| 1 month | You have a +1 bonus to AC and blindsight to 20 feet. However, your hit point maximum is reduced by $2d4 + 2$. |
| 2 months | You have a +2 bonus to AC and blindsight to 40 feet. However, your hit point maximum is reduced by $4d4 + 4$. |
| 3 months | You have a +2 bonus to AC, resistance to nonmagical damage not from an adamantite weapon, and blindsight to 60 feet. However, your hit point maximum is reduced by $8d4 + 8$. |

To activate the pods, you must embed them within your flesh, dealing 1d4 damage to yourself and creating a wound to house them. After 24 hours, the spores will begin to suffuse the surrounding tissue and a thickened, bark-like fungus will spread across your skin, granting a +1 bonus to AC. This process itches immensely and is extremely uncomfortable. As the fungus spreads, the changes become more dramatic. After 4 months, unless cured, if you ever drop to 0 hp, you can't be brought back—but your corpse provides the perfect nursery for another generation of spores.

TENEBOUS FLAIL OF SCREAMS

Weapon (flail), rare (requires attunement)

The handle of this flail is made of mammoth bone wrapped in black leather made from bat wings. Its pommel is adorned with raven's claws, and the head of the flail dangles from a flexible, preserved braid of entrails. The head is made of petrified wood inlaid with owlbear and raven beaks. When swung, the flail lets out an otherworldly screech.

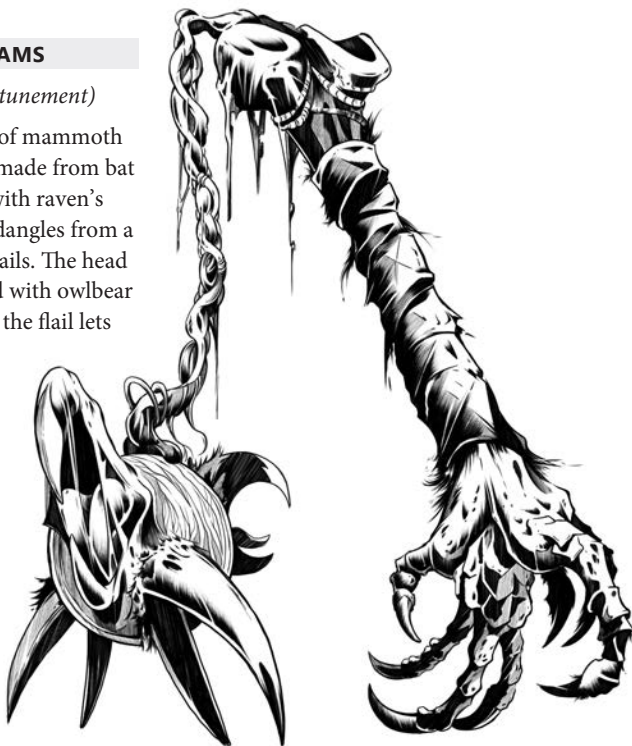
You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon, and the target takes an extra 1d6 psychic damage.

When you roll a 20 on an attack roll made with this weapon, the target must succeed a DC 15 Wisdom save or be incapacitated until the end of its next turn.

WENDIGO TALLOW CANDLE

Wondrous item, rare

Lighting one of these translucent, milky-white candles lets off an immensely foul smell, the flame bending toward the nearest lone traveler while the caustic black smoke drifts off in the direction of the nearest evil-aligned creature. After one of these candles is snuffed out after being lit for at least 10 minutes or burns through, it will begin to snow in the area for at least an hour, regardless of the current climate or the time of year.



WRAITHSTONES

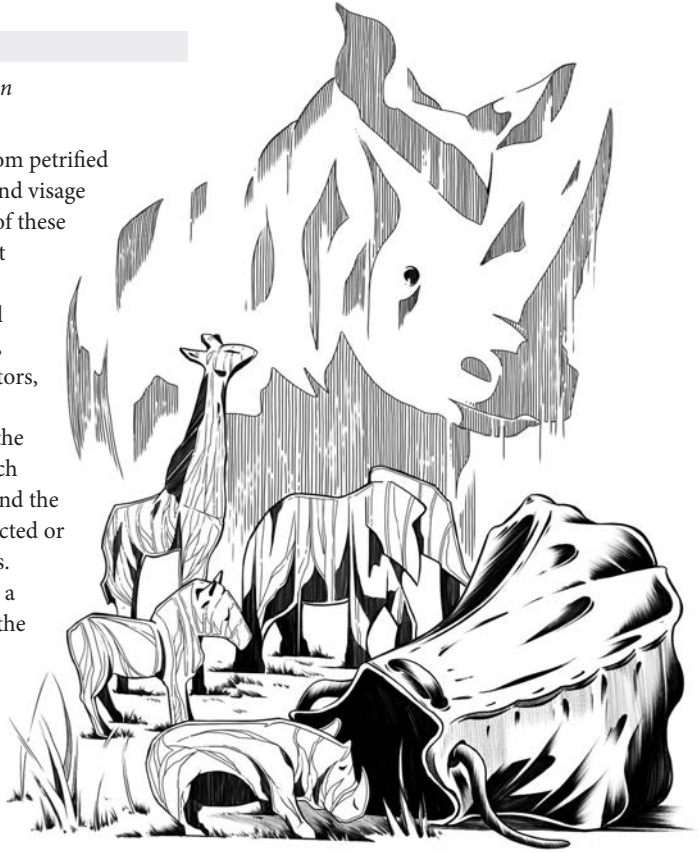
*Wondrous item, uncommon
(requires attunement)*

These stones are carved from petrified roots to reflect the shape and visage of an animal. Within one of these stones is the soul and spirit of a sacrificed beast. They are used to grant immortal life to animal companions, banish troublesome predators, and more. The creature's essence stays within until the stone is broken, upon which point the soul is released and the creature cannot be resurrected or reincarnated by any means.

While carrying this item, a spectral representation of the animal shows up beside you, resembling the creature's likeness while in its prime. The specter follows you at all times and can be seen by all. It can be dismissed and brought back as a bonus action. So long as you carry this stone, you can interact with the animal as if it were still alive, speaking to it if able, though it cannot physically interact with the material world. It can gesture to indicate directions and communicate very basic single-word ideas to its user telepathically.

Wraithstones have a number of charges, depending on the size the creature stored within them. Note that the more charges, the bigger the beast, the more expensive the stone will be. See **Wraithstone Charges** table.

| CREATURE SIZE | WRAITHSTONE CHARGES |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Tiny or Small | 6 |
| Medium or Large | 8 |
| Huge | 10 |
| Gargantuan | 12 |



As a bonus action, you can activate a wraithstone to perform one of the following:

- **Bestial Vigor.** You can deal an additional 1d6 damage on your next melee attack.
- **Natural Selection.** You can gain advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and increase your speed by +5 feet for 1 minute.
- **Wisdom of the Wilds.** You can gain advantage on your next Wisdom (Animal Handling) or Wisdom (Survival) skill check.

Each time a wraithstone is activated, it depletes some of the soul of the animal preserved within and consumes 1 charge. After all of the stone's charges are used, the animal's spirit is completely drained, and the stone becomes a mere bauble.

WEIRD FANTASY ITEMS

by Jeff Lee

Magic is capable of so very much. Here are some potent and flavorful magic items of particular weirdness that can quickly spice up your adventuring.

BINDING OATH

Scroll, very rare (requires attunement by a cleric or paladin)

This lengthy scroll is the testimony of a pious individual's adherence to their faith. The author has emphatically rewritten these claims many times, and its two slim, metal rollers are wrapped in yards of parchment. When you attune to the item, you rewrite certain passages to align with your own religious views.

You can use an action to throw the scroll at a Huge or smaller creature you can see within 30 feet of you. Make a ranged attack roll. On a hit, the scroll unfurls and wraps around the creature. The target is restrained until you take a bonus action to command the scroll to release the creature; this, or missing the target, causes the scroll to reroll itself. If the restrained target's alignment is the opposite of yours along the law/chaos or good/evil axes, you can use a bonus action to cause the writing to blaze with light, dealing 7 (2d6) radiant damage to the target.

A creature, including the restrained target, can use an action to make a DC 20 Strength

check to tear the scroll apart. On a success, the scroll is destroyed. Such an attempt causes the writing to blaze with light, dealing 7 (2d6) radiant damage to both the creature making the attempt and the restrained creature, whether or not the attempt is successful. The restrained creature can also use an action to make a DC 20 Dexterity check to slip free of the scroll. This action also triggers the damage effect.

Once the scroll is used, it cannot be used again until you have completed a long rest.

DOPPELGANGER OINTMENT

Wondrous item, rare

This ceramic jar contains 1d4 + 1 doses of a thick, creamy substance that smells faintly of pork fat. The jar and its contents weigh 1/2 pound. Applying a single dose to your body allows you to change your appearance, as per the Change Appearance option of the spell *alter self*.

If you add a piece of a specific creature (a single hair, nail paring, or drop of blood is enough), the ointment becomes more powerful, allowing you to flawlessly imitate that creature, so long as its body shape is humanoid and within one size category of your own. You gain advantage on Charisma checks made to convince others you are that specific creature, provided they have not seen

you change form. While the ointment is in effect, you can use a bonus action to return to your regular form and an action to return to the form of the mimicked creature.

The effects of the ointment last for 24 hours or until washed off with an alcohol solution.

EFFIGY DOLL

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This Tiny, crudely fashioned doll can be used to attack an enemy from a great distance. You must possess a piece of a creature—blood, hair, scales, or something similar—or a small, unique item belonging to the creature that it values: a ring, scarf, or other possession. You combine this item with the doll in a ritual, during a short rest, attuning it to the target. (This attunement is not the same as typical magic item attunement and does not count toward the total number of items to which the target can attune.) Once attuned, you can use an action to attack the doll in some manner, typically driving a pin into a limb or briefly applying flame to it. Doing so causes pain in the attuned creature, causing 10 (3d6) psychic damage to the target. The target must be on the same plane as the doll for this attack to succeed. A *remove curse* cast on either the target or the doll will break the attunement, and a new piece or item must be obtained to reattune the doll to the target.

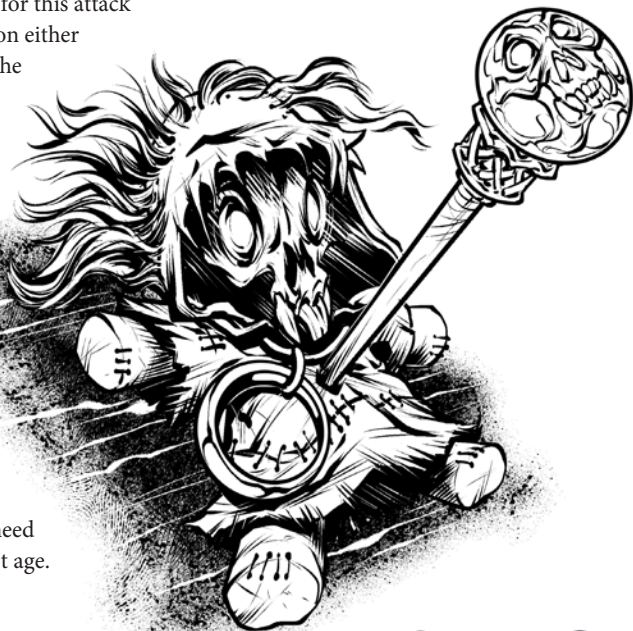
You can also attune yourself to the doll. This counts toward the total number of magic items to which you can attune. As an action, you can transfer your soul into the doll, animating it. While your soul inhabits the doll, your body is unconscious and in a state of suspended animation, without need for food or water, and it does not age.

As the doll, you are Tiny and have a speed of 20 feet, 3 Strength, and 16 Dexterity. You have the full range of senses you normally possess in your body. You gain advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks. You do not need to breathe and have immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and falling damage. You cannot speak and cannot cast spells as the doll's limbs are not refined and articulated enough for somatic components. While you remain motionless, you are indistinguishable from a normal doll. As long as you are within 500 feet of your body, you can use a bonus action to leave the doll and return to your body. As the doll, you have an AC 14 and 5 hit points. If the doll is destroyed, your soul returns to your body at the end of the round.

ELIXIR OF THE OOZE

Potion, rare

When you drink this cloudy, gelatinous green-gray liquid, your body becomes extremely malleable and flexible, and your flesh turns slightly translucent. For the next hour, you become immune to bludgeoning damage. Due to the flexibility of your skeleton,



your gait becomes awkward, reducing your movement by 10 feet. However, you do not need to expend any extra movement to crawl, and you can stand up from a prone position using only 5 feet of movement.

You can compress your body in order to move through spaces that would normally restrict your passage. You can move through areas large enough for a creature one size smaller than you without having to squeeze. You can squeeze through spaces large enough for a creature two sizes smaller than you.

MI-GO BATTLE HUSK

Armor (husk), very rare (requires attunement)

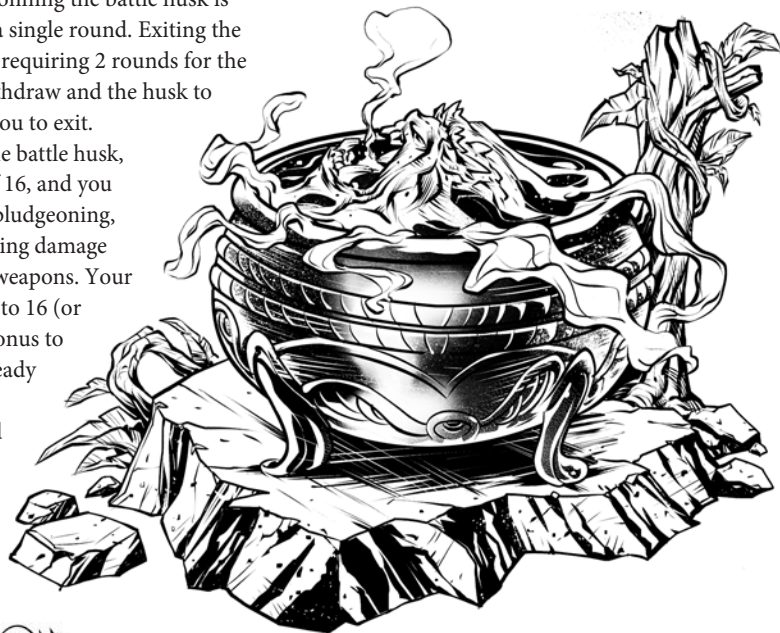
A bizarre biotechnical creation of the space-faring mi-go, this armor is actually the husk of a Large humanoid creature, preserved, reinforced, and animated with precisely grown fungus. The head, internal organs, and many of the bones have been removed, leaving a hollow area inside. If you are Small or Medium, you can step into a standing husk, and it will seal itself around you, extending fungal attachments that allow you to control the husk as if it were a part of your own body. Donning the battle husk is swift, taking only a single round. Exiting the husk takes longer, requiring 2 rounds for the attachments to withdraw and the husk to unseal and allow you to exit.

While wearing the battle husk, you have an AC of 16, and you gain resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical weapons. Your Strength increases to 16 (or you receive a +2 bonus to Strength if it is already 16 or higher), and you are considered to be Large while wearing the husk.

MIMIR CAULDRON

Wondrous item, legendary

To use this ancient, patinated-bronze vessel, you must fill it with expensive wine mixed with rare herbs as well as powdered gemstones and precious metals worth a total of 1,500 gp. You then immerse the severed head of an intelligent creature of Medium size within the cauldron's contents. The magic of the cauldron animates the head, which floats to the surface. The creature's head knows everything it knew when it was alive. You may consult the head and garner information from it. If the creature was hostile to you in life, it will be unwilling to work with you and will need to be coerced. When you require information on a particular subject, roll a DC 15 Charisma check (or specific skill check as appropriate). If you can provide appropriate incentive—threats against the creature's loved ones or offers to assist those they care about, for example—then you gain advantage on the roll. The head of an indifferent creature requires a DC 10 Charisma check. If you fail a Charisma check by 5 or more, the head



may lie to you or offer incorrect information. The head of a friendly creature requires no checks and will freely give information to assist you as it can for as long as it remains in the cauldron. A head remains active in the cauldron for up to 7 days before the magical effects end. The effects can be ended early by dumping out the contents of the cauldron. You must complete a long rest before using the cauldron again, and each time a new head is used, you must replenish the material necessary to activate the cauldron.

MURGEN'S LOST MARBLES

Wondrous item, rarity varies

Once a powerful wizard and leader of a famous group of adventurers, Murgan met his demise in the Western Wastes, fighting a cult attempting to free one of the Dread Walkers from its temporal prison. The wizard and his allies won the battle by the closest of margins. The very laws of reality were bent beyond their limits, and Murgan was briefly exposed to the full countenance of the Dread Walker's presence. This event shattered the man's mind, both figuratively and literally. The essence of Murgan's psyche was blasted from his head, the fragments taking physical form in the shape of tiny spheres of varying

colors and sizes, each embodying a small sliver of the brilliant wizard's mind. How many of these spheres exist is unknown, but the number is speculated to be hundreds, if not thousands. Some believe that if all—or nearly all—can be gathered together, then Murgan's mind can be restored. There are those that quest to do just that, though few do so out of altruism; most seekers wish to bend the wizard's disembodied mind to their own will and empower themselves with his lost secrets. Others warn that absorbing too many of the marbles could allow enough of the wizard's psyche to meld together, repairing itself and taking over the body of the one who gathered them.

To use a marble, a creature must attune to it, though attuning to one does not count against the total number of magic items to which the creature can attune. At the end of the attunement period, the marble is pressed to the creature's head, and it is absorbed. A single marble can be removed during a short rest.

Arcane Knowledge (Rare). This marble is clear with blue starbursts suspended in it. You learn a single wizard spell from 4th–6th level, chosen randomly or by the GM. If you are a spellcaster, you always have this spell prepared in addition to the normal number

| d% | MANIFESTED QUIRK |
|-------|--|
| 01–05 | You start smoking, preferring a meerschaum loaded with an herbal mix, heavy on the sage. |
| 06–15 | You become rather fond of rabbits, preferring them as pets (or familiars). |
| 16–30 | You enjoy the company of children and delight in entertaining them with antics or magic. |
| 31–40 | You start collecting unusual statuary. |
| 41–50 | Green becomes your favorite color. |
| 51–60 | You like to impress people with flamboyant displays of magic. |
| 61–70 | Hazelnuts are a favorite of yours, especially in candies or pies. |
| 71–75 | You begin talking to yourself, sometimes carrying on extended conversations. |
| 76–80 | You experience déjà vu quite frequently. |
| 81–90 | You start recalling vivid memories of events you never participated in. |
| 91–95 | You refer to people with wrong names that sound naggingly familiar. |
| 96–00 | You experience frequent bouts of altruism and charity. |

of spells you know or can prepare; you cannot cast this spell unless you normally know or can prepare spells of that level. Otherwise, treat this as the *spell marble*.

Arcane Knowledge, Greater (Very Rare).

This marble is clear with green starbursts suspended in it. You learn a single wizard spell from 7th–9th level, chosen randomly or by the GM. If you are a spellcaster, you always have this spell prepared in addition to the normal number of spells you know or can prepare; you cannot cast this spell unless you normally know or can prepare spells of that level. Otherwise, treat this as the *spell marble*.

Arcane Knowledge, Lesser (Rare). This marble is clear with red starbursts suspended in it. You learn a single wizard spell from 1st–3rd level, chosen randomly or by the GM. If you are a spellcaster, you always have this spell prepared, in addition to the normal number of spells you know or can prepare; you cannot cast this spell unless you normally know or can prepare spells of that level. Otherwise, treat this as the *lesser spell marble*.

Arcane Knowledge, Minor (Uncommon).

This marble is clear with white starbursts suspended in it. You learn a wizard cantrip, chosen randomly or by the GM. If you are a spellcaster, you can cast this spell as normal. Otherwise, treat this as the *cantrip marble*.

Cantrip (Uncommon). This incandescent orange marble grants you a random cantrip from the wizard spell list. You can cast this cantrip innately once per day, requiring no material components.

Intelligence (Very Rare). This golden marble grants you a +2 bonus to Intelligence, to a maximum of 20.

Inspiration (Rare). This glowing green marble grants inspiration. Three times per day, you gain advantage on an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check.

Inspiration, Minor (Uncommon). This mossy-green marble grants inspiration. Three times per day, you can roll 1d4 and add the result as a bonus to an Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma check.

Language (Uncommon). This pearly-white marble gives you the ability to speak, read, and write a single language. Roll 1d6 to determine the language:

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| 1—Draconic | 4—Primordial |
| 2—Dwarvish | 5—Sylvan |
| 3—Elvish | 6—Undercommon |

If you already know the language, you can roll again.

Skill (Uncommon). This cloudy blue marble grants you proficiency in a single skill. Roll 1d4 to determine the skill:

- | | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 1—Arcana | 3—Insight |
| 2—History | 4—Investigation |

If you already have proficiency in the skill, your proficiency bonus is doubled.

Spell (Very Rare). This incandescent yellow marble grants you a random spell of 4th–6th level from the wizard’s spell list. You can cast this spell innately once per day, requiring no material components.

Spell, Lesser (Rare). This incandescent red marble grants you a random spell of 1st–3rd level from the wizard’s spell list. You can cast this spell innately once per day, requiring no material components.

Quirks. Inserting fragments of an eccentric wizard’s psyche into your own mind can have unintended consequences. There is a 25% chance that, when you absorb a marble, a fragment of Murgan’s personality is overlaid onto your own. This chance increases by 5% for each additional marble you absorb. If you develop a quirk, roll on the table below to determine what quirk manifests. Alternatively, the GM can assign a quirk they think would belong to a goodly, brilliant-but-eccentric wizard.

SCENT SPONGE

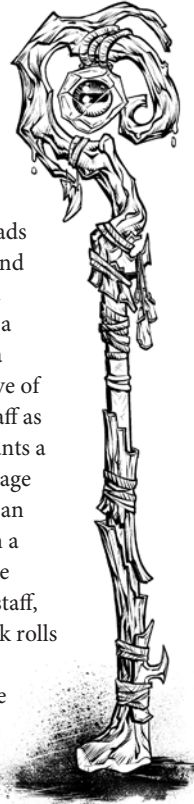
Wondrous item, uncommon

You can use this sea sponge to collect the scent of creatures and objects. You use an action to touch the sponge to a creature or object, and the scent of the target is absorbed into the sponge. You can use an action to wipe the sponge on another creature or object, masking its natural scent with the one stored in the sponge. The target will retain the scent for up to 1 hour or until it is replaced by another scent from the sponge or is cleaned away, requiring a vigorous washing of at least 10 minutes with soap and water or similar materials. When a creature or object has its scent absorbed by the sponge, it gives off no smell and cannot be detected or tracked by scent for 1 hour.

STAFF OF THE SCION

Staff, very rare (requires attunement by a cleric, druid, warlock, or wizard)

This unwholesome staff is crafted of a material that appears to be somewhere between weathered wood and dried meat. It weeps beads of red liquid that are thick and sticky like tree sap but smell of blood and is topped with a crystalized yellow eye with a rectangular pupil, like the eye of a goat. You can wield the staff as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it and deals an extra 7 (2d6) fire damage on a successful hit. If you take fire damage while wielding the staff, you gain advantage on attack rolls with it until the end of your next turn. While holding the staff you are resistant to



fire. The staff has 10 charges for the following properties. It regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the eye liquifies as the staff shrivels and twists into a blackened, smoking ruin and is destroyed.

Ember Cloud. You can use an action to expend 2 charges to release a cloud of burning embers from the staff. Each creature within 10 feet of you must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. Anything within the area of the embers is lightly obscured to creatures outside of the area. The ember cloud lasts until the start of your next turn.

Spells. You can use an action to spend 1 or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC: *augury* (2 charges), *barkskin* (2 charges), *confusion* (4 charges), *entangle* (1 charge), or *wall of fire* (4 charges).

WAND OF RELIEVED BURDENS

Wand, uncommon

This wand has 7 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges and touch a creature with the wand. If the creature is blinded, charmed, deafened, exhausted, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, or stunned, the condition is removed from the creature and transferred to you. You suffer the condition for the remainder of its duration or until removed. The wand regains 1d6 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the wand's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the wand crumbles to dust and is destroyed.

DIRE CREATIONS OF THE DERRO ARCHITECT

by Christopher Lockey

Presenting a deadly assortment of devious mechanisms and arcane accoutrement for dungeons (and other unsavory locations)...

The Mad Architect of Old Hammerheim

Here is introduced a selection of bizarre dungeon features designed by the deranged trapsmith Revok Moldheim Zmythe—a derro torture artist of ill repute whose devilish traps, rare grotesques, and other mechanical oddities are studied the worlds over. A vast array of insidious chambers hosts these diabolical creations, united in their themes of chaos, madness, perversion, and greed.

From the workshops of his extraplanar lair, the Mad Architect cultivates a reputation of cunning malice amongst the patrons who sponsor his creations... spiteful wizards, cruel despots, and rapacious collectors to name a few. Anyone who would see a Moldheim trap installed in their facility would pay a handsome price—and rumor has it that the Mad Architect prefers remittance of a distinctly eldritch variety.

His Dire Creations

Here are but a few of the Mad Architect's most famous creations. The boutique nature of his feats of insidious engineering guarantee that only the most seasoned of adventurers are sure to encounter them during their travels. In fact,

some trap-springers seek out these legendary mechanisms merely to conquer them, though many do not live to tell the tale.

INSIDIOUS HOURGLASS

Complex trap (level 11–16, deadly threat)

This complex trap resembles a plain, domed chamber with a door opposite the entrance. In fact, it is an automated ruby ooze incubator situated at a dangerous dead end.

The insidious hourglass is actually a symmetrical, stack of two domed stone chambers, connected by an aperture where they meet (not unlike an hourglass). This aperture remains closed and concealed until the trap is triggered. Each domed chamber is traditionally 15 feet high and 20 feet in diameter. A successful DC 30 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check notices the hidden aperture.

This trap is activated when a character attempts to open the false door opposite the chamber entrance. A successful DC 24 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the door is trapped. A successful DC 30 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check disables the door harmlessly. On a failed check, the trap triggers. The door is false and leads to a stone wall, revealing the domed chamber to be a dead end.

When the trap is triggered, the entrance door slams and locks in place. The entrance door is an 8-foot-high, 3-foot-wide, 10-inch-thick

slab of a strange metallic alloy. A successful DC 30 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check unlocks the door. It cannot be pushed open. The entrance door has AC 18, 100 hit points, and immunity to acid, cold, fire, lightning, poison, and psychic damage. The false door on the opposite wall is an identical facsimile.

Additionally, the concealed aperture in the ceiling opens, and a stream of what appears to be red sand begins steadily pouring into the room from above. The red sand is in fact a group of at least three ruby oozes (see *Creature Codex*), which pour into the room one by one over the course of 3 or more rounds, one creature per round. These oozes have advantage on initiative rolls and become hostile to any creatures in the room as soon as they are discovered or once the final ooze has descended. In addition to the characters, the ruby oozes will attempt to consume any nonmagical metal and wood in the room.

After an hour has passed, a third component to the trap is revealed when the aperture closes once more, and the insidious hourglass begins rotating on a horizontal axis, effectively swapping the original domed chamber for an identical one that was above, concealed beyond the aperture. The original domed chamber, now inverted, becomes the new reservoir for the ruby oozes—which sit and wait for their next hapless victim. The domed chambers of the insidious hourglass must come to a full stop in their normal resting positions in order for the entrance door to align with its neighboring chamber. This means escaping an insidious hourglass during its rotation phase is highly improbable without the intervention of powerful magic or other abilities. The elaborate machinery and stonework that powers this part of the trap is hidden behind the chamber walls and is beyond the scope of simple destruction or disarmament.

Although ruby oozes are one of the most popular agents used in phase two of this complex trap, other oozes, slimes, and other

hazards have been used to great effect. Should an ooze or other hazardous material become too large for the hourglass chamber, a dungeon keeper will siphon off the excess for other menacing implementations elsewhere.

MINE CART OF MUTILATION

Complex trap (level 5–10, deadly threat)

The centerpiece of this inconspicuous trap resembles a simple hand-powered rail cart, often staged in a convenient location.

Once the cart is mounted and the central lever pushed or pulled for locomotion, multiple effects occur: bladed shackles pierce and pinion the hands of the character who triggered the trap, and a secret door opens to release a contingent of deadly creatures from a nearby lair. Regrettably for the would-be rider, the cart itself does not move. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check notices either the hidden clamps or the secret doors. A successful DC 18 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check disarms the rail cart's lever harmlessly. On a failed check, the trap triggers.

The first character who attempts to manipulate the rail cart's handle must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 9 (2d8) slashing damage and become restrained by two spring-loaded saw-tooth clamps that pinion the character's hands to the handle. A character can use their action to make a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, freeing themselves or another character within their reach on a success. A character can also attempt to disable the clamp's spring mechanism with a DC 18 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check, provided that the clamps can be reached and the character can see them. The clamps have AC 16 and 40 hit points each.

Additionally, when the trap is triggered, a secret door nearby opens to reveal a hidden chamber full of deadly creatures (determined by the GM), which immediately advance upon the restrained character and their allies to attack. If the secret door is spotted,

a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the mechanism used to open it. The hidden chamber is usually only large enough to house the deadly creatures, and its proximity to the rail cart is determined by the size of the main chamber housing the trap. (These specifications are frequently determined by precisely how much the dungeon owner wants their interlopers to suffer before being fully consumed by the advancing enemies.) The most effective creatures for this second stage of the trap are those to whom physical age is not an issue: these ranks have been known to include undead, such as zombies, ghouls, or skeletons; immortal oozes; weird aberrations; menacing constructs; or strange beasts. The GM can also roll on the following table to randomly determine what kind of deadly creatures have been installed in the hidden chamber:



| D6 | ENCOUNTER |
|----|----------------------------------|
| 1 | 5d4 + 5 skeletons and/or zombies |
| 2 | 5d4 + 8 quasits |
| 3 | 3d3 ghouls and a ghast |
| 4 | 2d2 mummies |
| 5 | 2d2 black puddings |
| 6 | 3d2 gibbering mouthers |

Any time a character fails an attempt to escape or disarm the saw-tooth clamps, the restrained character takes an additional 5 (2d4) points of slashing damage as the clamps tighten.

Although they have proven to be effective deterrents in their own right, the combination of these two simpler traps into one elaborate

design has proven itself to be deliciously sinister. Variants of this combination have been known to exist with terrain centerpieces like fountains, thrones, and even doors serving as the first phase mechanism. Additional secret doors and hidden chambers are also common.

This trap is naturally much harder to reset than other, simpler mechanisms and often requires the use of vassals or other servitors to herd the deadly creatures back into their hidden corrals.

WELL OF WOES

Complex trap (level 5–10, deadly threat)

This complex trap resembles a dry wishing well, sitting above a cavern full of treasure, but the slick shaft—lined with pressure plates, tripwires, and spinning blades—actually leads to a junk-filled oubliette.

The standard depth of a well of woes is 90 feet, including a 60-foot shaft of masonry followed by the 30-foot height of the vaulted chamber below. The well is always 10 feet in diameter, and the oubliette beneath is usually a rough-hewn circular chamber with a 20-foot radius or larger.

The trap is activated when an intruder touches one of several hidden pressure plates lining the stone walls of the well, which releases numerous spinning blades from their concealed seams. The trap is also activated when an intruder disrupts one of several invisible tripwires crossing the vertical expanse.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the pressure plates while a DC 20 check spots the invisible trip wires and concealed seams of the spinning blades. Any character who attempts to climb the slick vertical expanse of the well must succeed on a DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check or fall, taking damage based on the well's depth. Characters have a 50% chance of touching a pressure plate each turn they spend climbing the well. The trap activates when more than 5 pounds of weight is placed on a pressure plate, causing the spinning blades to extend horizontally from their concealed seams. Each creature inside the well's 60 feet of masonry must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) slashing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one; a creature who fails this save also falls to the ground below, taking damage based on the well's depth. A character who falls through the spinning blades while they are active takes 5 (1d10) slashing damage for each 10 feet of masonry they travel.

Any character who falls at least 10 feet down the well must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to avoid triggering a tripwire during the fall. For each 10 feet of masonry in the well, wedging iron spikes or other objects under the pressure plates *and* cutting the tripwires with successful DC 15

Dexterity (thieves' tools) checks prevents the trap from activating. Once triggered, the spinning blades remain active for 6 hours before retracting to their at-rest positions as the trap begins to reset.

The treasure at the bottom of the well is little more than junk, consisting primarily of iron pyrite coins and the mundane equipment of dead adventurers. Characters who survive their descent to the bottom of the well of woes and spend at least 1 minute searching through the refuse have a 20% chance of discovering an assortment of random treasure on a rotted corpse.

Moldheim's Minions

When he isn't scrying from untold places, Zmythe is known to monitor and maintain his creations with a dutiful legion of vassals and servitors. One variety of these creatures is presented here and has been known to frequent locations where the Mad Architect's artistry can be found.

VILE RECONSTRUCTOR

A small, lithe humanoid with pale skin and a maw of needle-sharp teeth looks up at you through the eerie sheen of a monocular fused to one of his cruel and beady eyes.

An assortment of curious tools and strange devices are affixed to a belt wrapped around its waist. Curiouser still are the three rod-tipped mechanical arms that protrude from this stranger's back—each one whirring and gesticulating in odd concordance with the weird creature's erratic motions.

The Architect's Assistants. Cousins to the sinister siabhra (or vile barber, see *Tome of Beasts*), these impish unseelie fey are often tasked with resetting the triggers of complex traps and other contraptions. The ability to traverse shadows—combined with their uncanny mechanical acumen and eldritch implants—allow vile reconstructors to ingress many places considered dangerous and

otherwise unreachable. And they do seem to rather enjoy doing it.

Bad Science. Upon enlistment or enslavement, vile reconstructors are subjected to a series of intense physical and mental modifications under the supervision of the Mad Architect himself. These painful arcane medical procedures bestow upon the subject an array of heightened abilities and a macabre complement of skin-grafted tools and weapons (along with a variously fractured mind). And while the specimen classified here has come to be known as a standard variety, stranger and more unique types of vile reconstructors have certainly been encountered in the wild.

Inconvenient Saboteurs. While they are often found in the action of repairing or resetting traps and other mechanisms, vile reconstructors have been known to happen upon adventurers during the most awkward and ill-timed of circumstances. Reconstructors delight in making those moments as deadly (and humorous) as possible in an effort to please themselves and the maniacal whims of their dark creator.



Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Inhumanly Quick. The vile reconstructor can take two bonus actions on its turn, instead of one. Each bonus action must be different; it can't use the same bonus action twice in a single turn.

Mending Rod. The vile reconstructor can use an action to cast the *mending* cantrip at will, using one of its rod-tipped arms.

Monocular Graft. The vile reconstructor has advantage on Intelligence (Investigation) and Wisdom (Perception) checks that require sight.

Nimble Escape. As a bonus action, the vile reconstructor can take the Disengage or Hide action on each of its turns.

Shadow Step. As a bonus action, the vile reconstructor magically teleports from an area of dim light or darkness it currently occupies, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 80 feet to any other area of dim light or darkness it can see. The reconstructor then has advantage on the first melee attack it makes before the end of the turn.

VILE RECONSTRUCTOR

Small fey, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (leather armor)

Hit Points 28 (8d6)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| 12 (+1) | 18 (+4) | 10 (+0) | 10 (+0) | 8 (-1) | 12 (+1) |

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with cold iron or silvered weapons

Skills Perception +6, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4

Condition Immunities frightened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Undercommon, Sylvan, Umbral

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vile reconstructor makes two attacks with its torch rods.

Torch Rods. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) fire or 7 (1d6 + 4) lightning damage.

Mock Box. As a bonus action, the vile reconstructor targets a creature that can hear it within 60 feet. That target must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Disquieting Technology of the Derro Architect

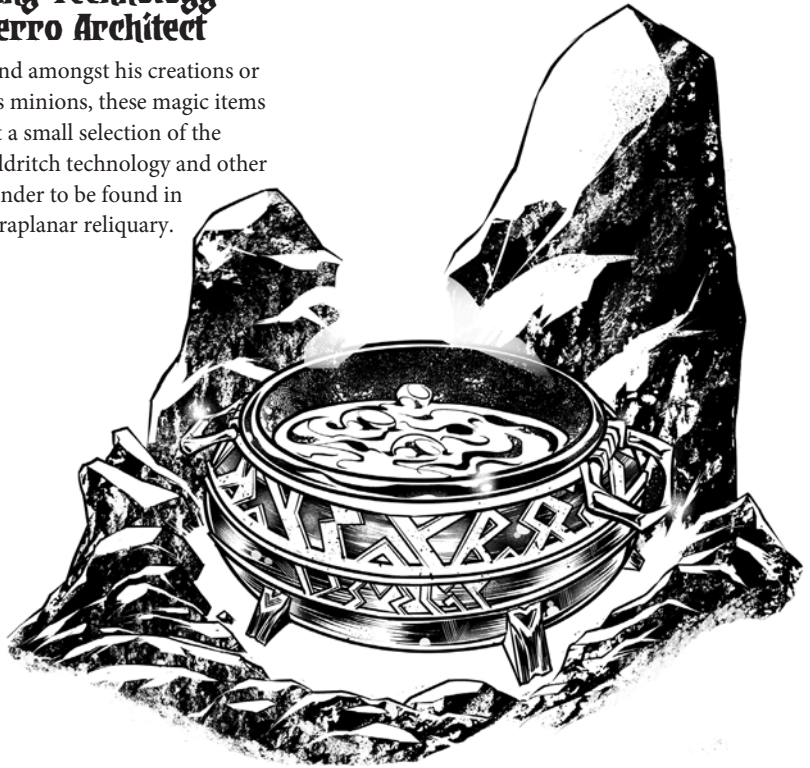
Whether found amongst his creations or carried by his minions, these magic items represent but a small selection of the disquieting eldritch technology and other objects of wonder to be found in Zmythe's extraplanar reliquary.

CAULDRON OF CURIOUS SMELTING

Wondrous item, very rare

The interior of this black rune-etched cauldron appears able to hold 1-1/2 cubic feet of mass. Its mouth is 13 inches in diameter, and it weighs 13 pounds.

As an action, you can place one or more components from the table below into the cauldron, causing the cauldron to produce specific transmogrified objects based on which components are used.



COMPONENTS

Any metal items (other than coins)

Any stone, gemstone, or glass

Coins

Three ingots of any metal transmogrified by the cauldron

A still-bleeding humanoid heart and 333 gp in powdered precious gemstone

TRANSMOGRIFIED OBJECTS

An equal value of the same metal, powdered

An equal value of the same material, powdered

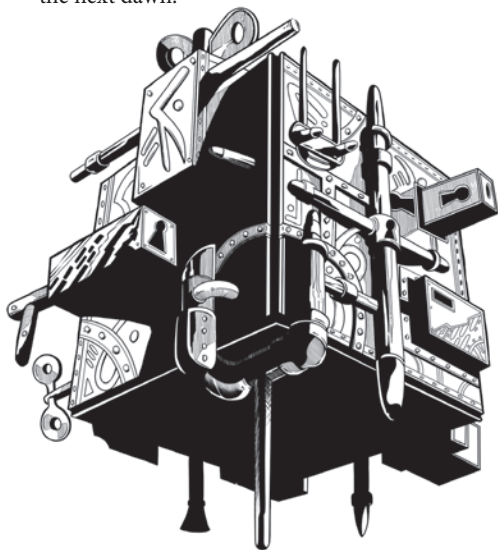
One solid ingot per 100 coins of the same metal

A dagger made of the same metal (with a +1 bonus to damage that lasts only until then next dawn)

A quasit companion (DC 13 Charisma check to gain its fickle allegiance)

Additionally, you can fill the cauldron with 3 gallons of fresh blood and use an action to cast the spell *scrying*. This ability can only be used once every 3 days.

Once any ability of the cauldron has been used, the cauldron can't be used again until the next dawn.



MOCK BOX

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

While you hold this small, square contraption, you can use a bonus action to target a creature within 60 feet that can hear you. That target must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or any attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

VOID LANTERN

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

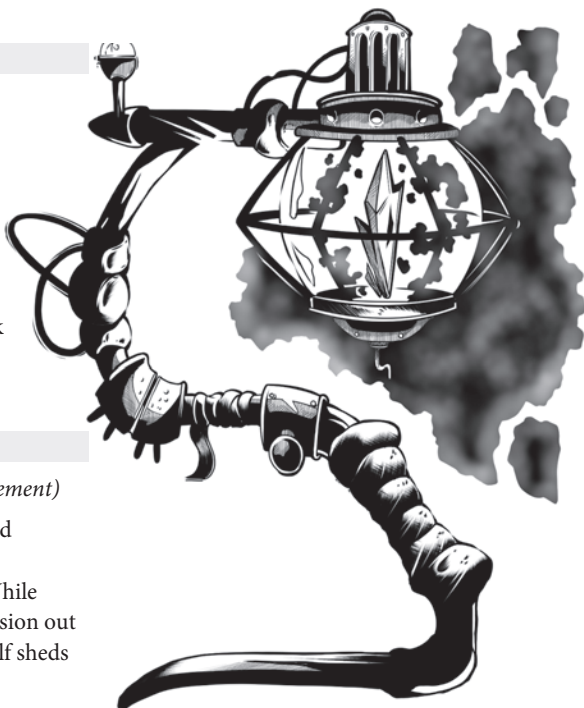
The eerie light of this lantern is fueled by a shard of tenebrous reality from Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void. While holding the lantern, you have darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. The lantern itself sheds dim light in a 20-foot radius.

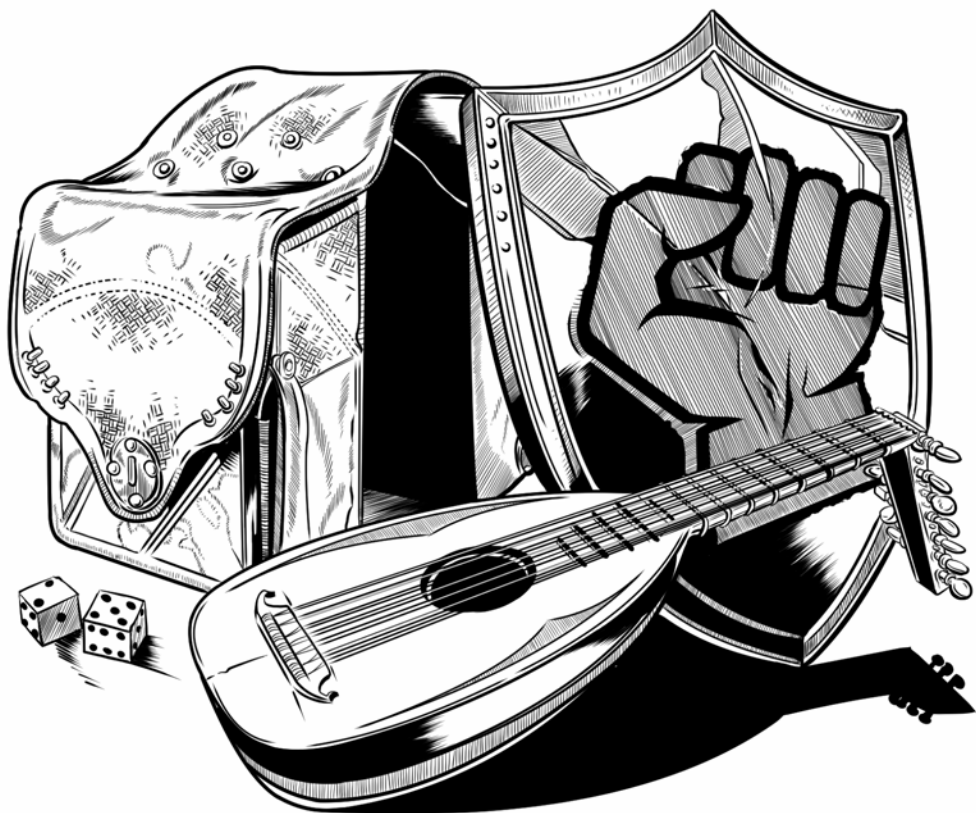
As an action, you can speak the lantern's command word. For the next 10 minutes, you have truesight out to 120 feet when holding the lantern. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Additionally, while holding the lantern, you can use an action to cast the spell *locate object*. Once this property is used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Curse. The lantern is cursed, a fact that is revealed only when an *identify* spell is cast on the lantern or when you attune to it. Attuning to the lantern curses you until you are targeted by a *remove curse* spell or similar magic. As long as you remain cursed, you are unwilling to part with the lantern, keeping it on or near your person at all times.

Whenever you use an action to activate one of the lantern's abilities, you have a 20% chance of becoming subjected to the effects of a random short-term madness. Constructs, derro, and undead are immune to this effect.





PLAYER



BENGTA THE BEAR MAIDEN

by Celeste Conowitch

Bengta the Bear Maiden is the keeper of healthy communities and the champion who stands against all their threats. She is the ferocious aspect of Lada, the Goddess of Dawn, who takes the form of a radiant bearfolk. The Bear Maiden is much beloved in the Northlands where she is primarily worshipped. In addition to righteous wrath, Bengta presides over dawn, strength, and of course honey.

The Bear Maiden is one mask of the Goddess Lada, though Bengta has her distinct and rich tapestry of legend and myth perpetuated by the citizens of Björnrike. Though most championed by the bearfolk, who share the god's form, human and dwarf healers, community leaders, berserkers, and merchants also worship Bengta's golden radiance. In opposition to the gentle-hearted Lada, Bengta represents the righteous guardian who protects communities. The Bear Maiden is a leader who encourages order and cohesion, ensuring all members contribute to creating a successful whole, much like a colony of bees. The other side of this

cohesive leadership is the staunch devotion to destroying threats that would threaten the community. This commitment to swift and righteous wrath is what sets Bengta apart from Lada's kinder divine masks.

Tales of Bengta often depict her traveling the rough terrain of the Northlands, battling monsters that infringe upon the people she is sworn to protect. There are many tales centered on her dealing with the fey, in particular the great animal lords. The Bear Maiden's weapon is said to be spun from the honey of the Queen of Bee's herself, though none of the god's enemies have survived to confirm this rumor.

Worshippers

Building and maintaining prosperous communities is a crucial aspect of the Bear Maiden's worship, so she is becoming more popular amongst merchants of all stripes. Her straightforward devotion to making good things for good people is highly appealing to most dwarves, and it is not uncommon to find her worshippers amongst their ranks.

GODDESS OF DAWN AND HONEY

Symbol: honeysuckle, bee, radiant eye

Divine Domains: Keeper, Life, Strength

Alignment: Good

Favored Weapons: Battleaxe and greataxe



Bengta's reputation as a keeper makes her popular amongst all people who travel in large nomadic units. Many human berserkers, bearfolk warriors, hunters, and devoted parents are drawn to the Bear Maiden's strength to protect what is most important to them.

Shrines and Priests

The city of Bjeornheim is the center of the Maiden's worship, and it is widely populated with her temples, shrines, and statues. Though Bjeornheim is the only city so devoted to the Bear Maiden aspect of Lada, her shrines and followers can be found wherever the Bearfolk have passed through. Homage to the golden-hearted defender is paid throughout the Northlands, the Rothenian Plains, and even small pockets of the Shadow Realm.

Shrines to Bengta often double as functioning apiaries. Bee products are produced and sold to local communities with a portion always reserved to offer to the goddess. It is not unknown for meaderies to also donate part of their profits to the Bear Maiden's holy sites to cultivate good fortune.

Priests of the Bear Maiden often hold key jobs in their communities. Bengta's devoted most commonly serve as dedicated warriors, government leaders, healers, and farmers. Worshipping the goddess requires active participation in improving one's social landscape, which means her priests and shrines rarely fit the cloistered model of other faiths.

What Bengta Demands

The Bear Maiden demands placing those who are cared for above all else. She requires selfless action and constant vigilance against evils that would affect close-knit groups. The Bear Maiden encourages her chosen to create joy and prosperity for all within their reach. And whenever this prosperity is threatened, she demands swift action to destroy the cause. A follower who spends their time industriously is likely to receive the god's full favor.

Keeper Domain

The Keeper domain focuses on social bonds and well-regulated communities. These communities might be as small as an adventuring party or as large as a city, but all require safety and comfort to thrive. Clerics of the Keeper domain excel in leadership positions and are the first to take up arms when their homes or allies need protection.

KEEPER DOMAIN SPELLS

| Cleric Level | Spells |
|--------------|---|
| 1st | <i>command, hunter's mark</i> |
| 3rd | <i>calm emotions, warding bond</i> |
| 5th | <i>beacon of hope, spirit guardians</i> |
| 7th | <i>death ward, guardian of faith</i> |
| 9th | <i>hallow, telepathic bond</i> |

BONUS PROFICIENCIES

At 1st level, you gain proficiency with martial weapons. You also gain proficiency in the Persuasion skill.

BLESSED CHOSEN

Starting at 1st level, you can assert your divine will to protect your allies. When an enemy within 30 feet of you that you can see attacks one of your allies, you can use your reaction to impose disadvantage on the attack roll before it hits or misses.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (a minimum of once). You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

CHANNEL DIVINITY: DIVINE INITIATIVE

Starting at 2nd level, you can Channel Divinity to enhance your allies' potential.

As an action, you present your holy symbol and choose a number of creatures you can see and that can see you within 60 feet of you, up to a number equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of one). Each of them gains 5 temporary hit points. When a target gains

these temporary hit points, they can immediately use their reaction to make one weapon attack.

The number of temporary hit points increases when you reach certain levels in this class, increasing to 8 at 6th level, 11 at 8th level, and 14 at 17th level.

CHANNEL DIVINITY: FIGHTING FIT

At 6th level, you can use your Channel Divinity to end harmful conditions affecting your allies.

As an action, you present your holy symbol and choose a number of creatures you can see within 60 feet (this can include yourself), up to a number equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of one). Any charmed, frightened, paralyzed, or stunned conditions affecting the target end.

HOBBLING STRIKE

At 8th level, you gain the ability to infuse your weapon strikes with divine energy. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a weapon attack, the target must make a Strength saving throw against your spell save DC or be knocked prone. When you reach 14th level, the target's speed is also halved until the start of your next turn.

DUTY OVER DEATH

Starting at 17th level, you can exert your power to call companions back from the brink of death. When an ally you can see within 60 feet of you is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, they instead remain conscious and regain hit points equal to your Wisdom modifier. You can use this feature only if you aren't incapacitated. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.



Oath of the Guardian

The Oath of the Guardian is sworn to defend the community. Those who take this oath always do so with a particular group, town, region, or government in mind. Taking the mantle of a guardian is a solemn vow to place the needs of the many before the needs of yourself and requires constant vigilance.

TENETS OF THE GUARDIAN

Encourage Prosperity. You must work hard to bring joy and prosperity to all around you.

Preserve Order. Order must be protected and preserved for all to enjoy. You must work to keep treasured people, objects, and communities safe.

Decisive Action. Threats to peaceful life are often nefarious and subtle. The actions you take to combat such threats should not be.

OATH OF GUARDIAN SPELLS

| Paladin Level | Spells |
|---------------|--|
| 3rd | <i>litany of sure hands</i> (*), <i>shield of faith</i> |
| 5th | <i>mantle of the brave</i> (*), <i>spiritual weapon</i> |
| 9th | <i>beacon of hope, create food and water</i> |
| 13th | <i>banishment, invested champion</i> (*) |
| 17th | <i>creation, inspiring speech</i> (*) |

* see *Deep Magic*

CHANNEL DIVINITY

When you take this oath at 3rd level, you gain the following two Channel Divinity options.

Inspired Leadership

You can use your Channel Divinity to inspire your allies with your faith. As an action, you can choose a number of creatures you can see within 30 feet of you, up to a number equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of one). For 1 minute, all the chosen creatures have advantage on Strength, Constitution, and Charisma saving throws.

Turn the Uncivil

As an action, you can cause wild creatures to flee from your presence using your Channel Divinity. Each creature within 30 feet with a Charisma score of 6 or less that can see or hear must make a Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is turned for 1 minute or until it takes damage. A turned creature must spend its turns trying to move as far away from you as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of you. It also can't take reactions. For its action, it can only use the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

AURA OF AWARENESS

Starting at 7th level, allies around you are more alert and ready to act. You and friendly creatures within 10 feet of you have advantage on initiative rolls. In addition, you and any of your companions within 10 feet of you can't be surprised, except when incapacitated.

At 18th level, the range of this aura increases to 30 feet.

HOLD THE LINE

You can turn an ally's success into an opportunity. When you or another creature you can see within 20 feet of you is forced to make a saving throw, you can use your reaction to grant a bonus to the target's save, potentially causing it to succeed. The bonus equals your Charisma modifier (minimum of +1). If the save is successful, you or the allied target can make one weapon attack against the attacker as part of your reaction, provided the attacker is within the weapon's range.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of once), and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

BAND OF HEROES

At 20th level, you gain the ability to charge your allies with divine heroism. As an action, you can target a number of creatures equal to your Charisma modifier (this can include yourself). They gain the following benefits for 1 minute:

- The creature is cured of all disease and poison and becomes immune to being frightened or poisoned.
- The creature makes all Wisdom and Constitution saving throws with advantage.
- The creature gains 2d10 temporary hit points.

HERUTI OF THE STARLESS PINION

by JB Little

Much blood has been spilled on the bright sands surrounding Nuria Natal—a great deal of it justly deserved. Called assassins by some, zealots by others, and revered as heroes in Makuria, Horus need only call upon the Starless Pinion to see his bloody justice be done.

The Starless Pinion comprises no fewer than two hundred heruti (ravenfolk) assassins that have sworn complete allegiance to the True King and follow the will of Horus's clergy without complaint or remorse. While many sects and adjuncts of Horus's vast congregation wage war to safeguard Nuria Natal, the Starless Pinion are called upon to eliminate singular threats to Horus's clergy, be that threat a beast, a demon, or a heretical nobleman. When assassination of a humanoid is required, it is done publicly and swiftly with such terrifying efficiency as to strike fear into the hearts of those that witness it—a message meant to dissuade reprisal or those who would take up the slain's mantle.

Each member—called a “pinion” by the people of Nuria Natal—is trained to be an expert in stealth, subterfuge, and disguise, often possessing the skill to perfectly mimic others' voices and prepared with magic to disguise their form. Each pinion carries a “talon,” a short, curved *dagger of venom*, forged to resemble a khopesh as yet another

homage to their great patron. Often, pinions utilize a *hat of disguise* but sometimes may rely on prosthesis, makeup, extravagant garb, or spellcasting to blend into gathered crowds without rousing suspicion. In addition, each member has a feather blessed by Horus himself, so completely black as to reflect no light at all, hidden within their own plumage or clothing.

History of the Starless Pinion

The name, Starless Pinion, was coined by a humble priest of Horus named Amsi. His temple overtaken by bandits and his congregation scattered or worse, he prayed to Horus for justice, for protection, and for vengeance against the brigands responsible. The god answered in the form of giant soot-black falcon that hunted and devoured those who ransacked the temple. On the fourth night of the bird's great hunt, the bandits were all slain, the temple's treasures returned, and only a single black feather remained, which transformed into the leader of the Starless Pinion: Midnight Lightning.

The Starless Pinion operates outside of the bounds of mortal law and morality and sees themselves as the chosen instruments of divine will. They have learned to strike first against those who threaten Horus's sects and temples with ruthless efficiency. When

travel is necessary, the assassins take on the guise of merchants or diplomats who may be beyond reproach by curious locals. Pinions seldom operate alone or even in pairs, instead moving in units of three or four assassins to ensure their operation is successful. Before the pinions will move on a target, a raven feather must be offered at a temple of Horus and the name of the target spoken aloud: if the feather's healthy sheen disappears, leaving it unnaturally dark, Horus's judgment has been passed, and death is all but certain.

CONFLICT

The forms and faces the Starless Pinion have taken over the 15 years they have been operating are innumerable, but it has not stopped their legend and infamy from growing within Nuria Natal. It is rumored that the Starless Pinion have operated, unmolested, as far as the Seven Cities. However, when the public assassination of a silk merchant named Ormlahu Dorega took place in the free city of Zobeck, the Free City Consuls demanded a response, going so far as to threaten the imprisonment of the Priests of Thoth-Hermes and the dissolution of hard-won trade agreements with Nuria Natal.

When God-King Thutmoses XXIII turned his ire upon the band of bloody assassins and attempted to disband them to save face with the rulers of Zobeck, it drew the relentless anger of Horus himself, nearly sparking a civil war between the house of Thutmoses and Horus's devout all across Nuria Natal. Luckily, though oddly, Aten, the Sun God—Horus's rival—intervened to protect the fickle peace of Nuria Natal and pronounced the Starless Pinion beyond the god-king's concern... for now, at least.

As such, the Starless Pinion are rarely seen beyond the Southlands. Only in the direst of circumstances would Horus see fit to send the assassins north of the Middle Sea.

ALIASES

The Starless Pinion have a wide assortment of monikers and aliases inherited by locals east, west, and south of Nuria Natal. Such aliases, when translated to common, include:

- “Small Knives” in the Kingdom of Parthia
- “Faceless Crowd” in the Free City of Siwal
- “Bloody Flock” in Dabu
- “Name Takers” in Shibai



TALONS OF HORUS

The Talons of Horus are a righteous order of knights, paladins, and holy slayers dedicated to Horus that serve the justice of God-King Thutmoses XXIII. They consider the Starless Pinion to be dangerous outlaws, accountable to no one, and as such, they are a direct threat to the king. The Talons have attempted to root out the Pinions but to little success, always seemingly one step behind. The Starless Pinion's own ties to Horus combined with growing support in the populace to their brand of dark justice only infuriates the Talons toward more aggressive, if not reckless, tactics.

The Starless Pinion has so far been able to avoid the brunt of the Talons' ire. They refuse to strike back however, though whether this is due to some sense of respect for fellow followers of Horus or simply clever politicking is unclear. It is obvious though that the Starless Pinion feel the Talons simply aren't willing to go the lengths necessary for true justice. It is whispered that High Priestess Halima Soltawaresi is secretly behind the emergence of the Starless Pinion—or at least knows more than she lets on—in an effort to better serve the justice of Horus and to offer a check against potential abuses by the king.

There may yet be others, whispered in alleyways or shouted in alehouses by those who have witnessed the assassins. Regardless, outside of the Southlands, the Starless Pinion are thought to be criminals, fiends, and murderous zealots with little regard for life or decency. Some believe their actions to be acts of war, though few rulers are so naive.

CREED

Only citizens of Makuria understand the Starless Pinion beyond rumor and conjecture. Some believe that only High Priestess Halima Soltawaresi understands their means and motives completely—a rumor she finds humorous, though flattering, publicly at least.

In truth, the pinions live by a simple, unbending creed that has maintained their status as a symbol of Horus's justice: "Only those who must die shall die."

Through hundreds of assassinations and savage bloodshed, not once has an innocent been killed or even severely wounded by them. However, numerous instances have been cited in which pinions have given their life to ensure their creed was upheld. Such selflessness, even in the direct proximity to brutality and murder, has kept the Starless Pinion unassailable to foreign political powers and domestic rulers critical of their actions. In the current political landscape, filled with turmoil as it is, there are few Southlands nations that even bother investigating a death attributed to the Starless Pinion, a comment on their efficacy.

GROWING THE FLOCK

Ravenfolk who seek to become part of the elite assassin order must travel to Makuria and seek out Ukwa Ushteq, the Beloved of Horus—one of only a few heruti to have ever spoken with the voice of Horus himself. The priest may set fledgling pinions on a certain number of trials: such as killing a fiend that desecrated a temple, slaying a poisoner, guarding a traveling priest. When five such trials are completed without incident, a grueling year of training as part of

a flock begins to hone the applicant's skills to razor sharpness, culminating with the forging and enchanting of their own talon.

Only ravenfolk may lead within the Starless Pinion. However, madness or true devotion may drive non-heruti to attempt to alter their form to that end, and it is possible—even Master Graceful Wind, a high-oracle within the order, was once human. Those of such mettle and determination must travel to Khepri Khnum in the Chelamite Mountains, a trek that has doomed hundreds. Once the elements have been braved, the peaks climbed, and the perils of the road conquered, travelers are offered the chance to stay among the 10,000 birds of Horus for a time, which watch such devotees and carefully weigh their hearts and minds. Like Master Graceful Wind, should the traveler be found worthy, they are thrown from the peak and awoken in a temple of Horus, forever changed into heruti and welcomed into the Starless Pinion with open arms.

Members of the Starless Pinion

More than two hundred heruti make up the entirety of the Starless Pinion, but their order is led by a group of three elders sometimes called the Destined. Each of the three have proven themselves time and time again, and though only Horus himself may command the Starless Pinion, the Destined are offered trust and consideration far beyond their peers.

Graceful Wind (LN ravenfolk doom croaker) is a trusted oracle and infiltrator responsible for multiple missions in the Kingdom of Parthia. Graceful Wind was once a human servant of a powerful Parthian diplomat. When the diplomat became a target of the Starless Pinion, Graceful Wind found himself free of their bondage. In return, they devoted their life to aiding the Starless Pinion, a quest that took 4 years and brought them to the summit of Khepri Khnum. There, they abandoned their name, body, and past to be reborn as heruti, as Graceful Wind, master of the zephyr step, Destined of the Starless Pinion.

Graceful Wind uses the statistics of a **ravenfolk doom croaker** (see *Tome of Beasts*) with the following changes:

- They wield a *dagger of venom* instead of a runestaff. Their dagger attack has a +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 4 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 (1d10) poison damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.
- **Horus's Blessing.** Graceful Wind can use a bonus action to cast the *misty step* spell at will.

Croak and Claw (CN ravenfolk **assassin**) has a unique mind for theatrics and showmanship among the Starless Pinion. Often found draped in lavish clothing and wearing the visage of diplomats through a *hat of disguise*, Croak and Claw makes friends quickly and often grows close to targets over the course of several months before executing them in a fashion that draws attention from a wide audience, such as the poisoning of a queen at her wedding or the slaying of a warlord in their command tent. Brought into the Starless Pinion at a young age, Croak and Claw's methods may be chaotic, but their loyalty to Horus and the heruti is beyond debate. From personal assassinations to the usurpation of thrones and impersonation of kings, Croak and Claw is the most active of the Destined and arguably the most dangerous.

Croak and Claw uses the statistics of an **assassin** with the following changes:

- They wield a *dagger of venom* instead of a shortsword. Their dagger attack has a +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 27 (5d10) poison damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.
- Croak and Claw carries a *ring of invisibility* and wears a *hat of disguise*.

- **Horus's Blessing.** Croak and Claw can innately cast the *hold person* spell (DC 16) three times per day.

Midnight Lightning (LN ravenfolk **assassin**) is the leader of the Starless Pinion and a child of Horus's justice. As dark as soot, no part of Midnight Lightning carries color or reflects light. It's rumored even the heruti's blood is black as the void. Though she has led the Starless Pinion for 15 years, she has not aged a day and never will, so long as Horus walks the plane. Midnight Lightning does not share the flock's flare for theatrics or desire to be seen. Often, her targets are slain so ruthlessly and efficiently that few even know what happened. Recently, she has relegated herself to wandering the sands of Nuria Natal, searching for wayward heruti and heretics. She travels in the guise of a ravenfolk with all-white plumage and draped in silver jewelry, offering water and food to travelers. Those who treat her with kindness are watched over as friends of the heruti for their time in Nuria Natal. Those who seek to take from her are left for the vultures to feast upon. Only for purposes of great importance will Midnight Lightning travel from Nuria Natal, and even then, she can return with a thought.

Midnight Lightning uses the statistics of an **assassin** with 98 hit points and the following changes:

- She wields a *dagger of venom* instead of a shortsword. Her dagger attack has a +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit*: 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 27 (5d10) poison damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.
- Midnight Lightning has advantage on saving throws against spells and magical effects.
- **Teleport (1/Day).** Midnight Lightning can magically teleport herself and up to five willing creatures she can see within 10

feet of her, along with any equipment they are wearing or carrying, to any temple of Horus in Nuria Natal.

- Midnight Lightning's challenge rating is 9 (5,000 XP).

Background: Fledgling Pinion

You were brought up in the shadow of the Starless Pinion and have spent great time and effort attempting to become a member. Loyal to Horus and Nuria Natal, you have labored for years to gain traction with the enigmatic and often frightening assassin's order, and still there is much to do before being awarded your talon. It has shaped you in many ways and given you a particular set of skills that many would find dangerous. The responsibilities you hold to Horus and the Starless Pinion may bring conflict when you are called upon to enact swift and unbending justice, particularly should your comrades be haphazard in their dealings with those in Nuria Natal—you may never know which friend may become a foe.

You are likely ravenfolk, as only they can ascend the ranks and lead the Starless Pinion. However, exceptions though rare do exist.

The heruti have long known that excluding other races might leave them vulnerable, blind to the needs of those peoples. If you are not a ravenfolk, you must have taken an unbreakable oath to never harm an acolyte, adjunct, or servant of Horus or take the life of a ravenfolk, regardless of the circumstances. To do so would welcome a joyless, swift death at the hands of the Starless Pinion.

Skill Proficiencies: Performance, Stealth.

Tool Proficiencies: Disguise kit, Poisoner's kit.

Equipment: A black feather (token of your guild), a disguise kit, a steel mirror, a set of common clothes, a set of fine clothes, and a belt pouch containing 18 gp.

FEATURE: OF A FEATHER

As a sworn member of the Starless Pinion, you are afforded a singular luxury: the assistance of your flock. You and your adventuring companions can expect to be given the benefit of the doubt in dealings with ravenfolk of all types, so long as they know of the Starless Pinion. Such heruti will offer you and your adventuring party shelter, food, or simple provisions at your request, within reason. They will not fight or die for you but will otherwise

d6 BOND

- 1 I owe my life and soul to my order—no one is above them.
- 2 Out there is a family that I have abandoned, but I watch over them from afar.
- 3 I seek revenge on a noble who condemned me to death. I'll repay that kindness.
- 4 My actions got a member of my order maimed. I'll never make that mistake again.
- 5 Those who aid me along my path deserve my unbending friendship—strangers are dust and blood.
- 6 One day I hope to become a leader of my order.

d6 FLAW

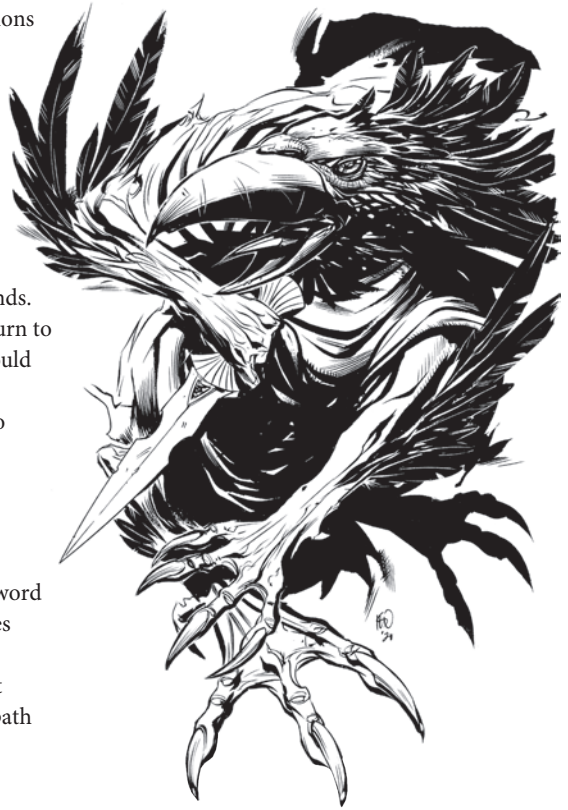
- 1 I am obsessed with collecting strange trinkets, even if I must steal them.
- 2 Now that I've left the nest, I've become slovenly and remiss in my duties.
- 3 No one can understand me. There's no point in even bothering to explain.
- 4 Those who slight me feel my wrath immediately.
- 5 I lack piety and presentation. I simply do not care what others think of me.
- 6 There's no need for caution if my actions attain my goals.

treat you and your adventuring companions in a respectful and friendly manner.

You can also beseech the Starless Pinion to aid you directly, though only in times of great need. With a few days' notice (GM's discretion), two ravenfolk can be made ready to travel with you until a particular task is complete. They are loyal to the Starless Pinion and the creed but otherwise follow your commands. When the task is done, the ravenfolk return to their duties elsewhere. Such requests should be made with great care as abuse of your position as a fledgling pinion may lead to excommunication or worse.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Fledgling Pinions are led by their creed, their flock, and their desire to dispense justice. Their devotion to the letter and word of Horus's will often eclipses their desires as an adventurer, shaping many of their relationships. Their flaws often highlight doubts or unsteadiness in their chosen path but conversely may appear as a fanatical obsession with the order's teachings.



d8 PERSONALITY TRAIT

- 1 I enjoy being on the fringe of conversations—never the center of attention.
- 2 I am a quick judge of character and slow to change my opinion.
- 3 I follow multiple, complex codes of honor and enjoy holding others to those standards.
- 4 I start and end every day with quiet, sometimes unsettling, prayers or meditation.
- 5 Surprisingly, I am quite disarming and very kind...
- 6 Never in my life have I argued with my companions.
- 7 I seldom speak more loudly than a whisper, even when the jaws of a hydra snap around me.
- 8 Everyone I meet gets the same title: "My friend."

d6 IDEAL

- 1 **Grace.** Through kind action, I believe that I can change the world. (Good)
- 2 **Honesty.** To lie is to kill the truth—the most despicable murder. (Lawful)
- 3 **Devotion.** My word, fortune, and life are fickle compared to the wellbeing of those I serve. (Good)
- 4 **Fanaticism.** The commands of my order are often meek—they should be more severe. (Chaotic)
- 5 **Morality.** I see a balance in all things and urge others to use caution. (Neutral)
- 6 **Service.** I do not question the will of my order, no matter what they are. (Any)

SHADOWFEATHER RAVENFOLK: WATCHERS IN THE SHADOWS

by Jonathan Miley

Spread throughout the Shadow Realm, there are ravenfolk acting as the spies of Wotan. They lurk in the shadows, listening to hushed conversations, always on the lookout for secrets to report back to their leader, who in turn passes them on as tribute to the Rune Father himself. These ravenfolk follow a life of watching but of never interfering, only gathering the secrets from the shadows.

Wotan's Shadow Realm Agents

The shadow fey courts are known for their love of secrets—and of gossip—but all in court are quick to peek over their shoulders, making sure a Shadowfeather isn't eavesdropping. A clandestine sect of ravenfolk based solely within the Shadow Realm, the Shadowfeathers hide away on the edges of civilization, in small frontier outposts and lone towers in the shadows of cities. What brought these ravenfolk to the Shadow Realm is lost to time, but the most popular legend is that when Wotan first let the feathers of his two pet ravens fall to Midgard, the one from Muninn fell to the Shadow Realm, which led to the birth of the Shadowfeathers. Some believe that Wotan just didn't wish to leave anything unknown—especially in the shadows.

The Shadowfeathers maintain a strong devotion to their faith: all knowledge flows back to Wotan. With the constant tribute of their collected secrets, Wotan has blessed

them with immunity to shadow corruption (see *Midgard Worldbook* for more on shadow corruption). Otherwise, these seekers of secrets are very similar to others of their kind: they have a fondness of shiny things, are very unobtrusive, and have an insatiable curiosity. They do however avoid direct action, preferring merely to watch and listen. They often say, "We are Wotan's eyes and ears, not his talons." It is their purpose to avoid any interference in the matters of others—unless a situation arises that damages the flow of secrets to Wotan, in which case they will fight beak and talon.

Some have attempted to force the ravenfolk to share their secrets but to no avail. The Shadowfeathers share their gained knowledge with Wotan alone. Even allies of the ravenfolk best learn that quickly.

Cloak and Dagger Acquaintances

The Shadowfeathers have unique relationships with the inhabitants of the Shadow Realm.

Shadow Fey. Even though the ravenfolk are known for ever-watchful eyes and curiosity, shadow fey know of their stance of non-interference. The Queen of Night and Magic herself has even shown interest in them, for hushed is rumor that these ravenfolk know even the secret nature of the Moonlit King's supposed madness. Instead of being threatened, some shadow fey have turned

it into a game of being able to have a secret conversation without being spied upon by the Shadowfeathers, which has led to at least one ravenfolk being invited to every court event.

Ghouls. The Twilight Empire ghouls do not allow any of the Shadowfeather ravenfolk within the Black Iron Depths, and all ghouls are ordered to kill them on sight. The story goes that Emperor Vilmos Marquering invited the head of the ravenfolk to a banquet. During dinner, the emperor made an offer to open the knowledge of his kingdom to

the ravenfolk in exchange for his choice of secrets. The leader of the Shadowfeathers, Shimmergale, is said to have finished her wine before rising from the table and politely refusing the offer. In a dreadful rage, the emperor ordered the Shadowfeathers killed, which led to Shimmergale and her accompanying ravenfolk fleeing the Twilight Empire in a desperate escape, never to return.

Bearfolk. The proud bearfolk of the Moonlit Glades have opened their sanctuaries to the Shadowfeathers. Word spread quickly about



how the Shadowfeathers turned down the Twilight Empire's offer of power for secrets, ensuring that the ravenfolk were keeping their word as watchers only. To keep relations open, the bearfolk maintain an ambassador at the Shadowfeathers' main headquarters, a tower called "Muninn's Vigilance," located within the City of Lanterns. The ravenfolk have earned a respectful place within the Moonlit Glades community, and the bearfolk have even shared the ritual magic they use to renew the stone and silver cairns that mark the borders of the Glades.

Shadowfeather Outposts

Muninn's Vigilance. The Shadowfeathers have built small outpost rookeries throughout the Shadow Realm, mostly just outside major cities. The main headquarters is in Corremel, a large tower on the River Lethe called Muninn's Vigilance, which has a large raven gargoyle on the tower's top—one onyx eye open, looking upon the city. The ravenfolk gather information from visitors to the City of Lanterns, plentiful due to the traffic from the shadow road. The leader of Muninn's Vigilance is also the leader of all the Shadowfeathers, an elderly ravenfolk named Shimmereale: she has one eye and uses a walking cane.

Below are some of the features of Muninn's Vigilance:

- The Shadowfeathers use the *Occultation Orb*, a magical sphere that their leader, Shimmereale, uses in rituals to give tribute of their secrets to Wotan.
- The ravenfolk have a well-guarded library they call the Shadowhollow Archive, where all their secrets are stored. Protection runes have been carved on the outside of the library, making it impossible to scry within its walls.
- The tower has numerous tunnels that connect to various buildings throughout Corremel, which the Shadowfeathers use to quietly come and go.

- One of the top levels of the tower is a large rookery where messenger ravens are kept. Each raven has a small silver collar that has been etched with various runes. The runic collars hold small amounts of magic that disrupt attempts to monitor or track the ravens by magical means.

Muninn's Vigilance may be the most important, but it is not the only home to the Shadowfeathers. Some of the more notable are below.

Despair's Spear. Built in the Mistcall Mountains, this outpost has dealings with the Tower of Horn and Gold. The ravenfolk were called to settle here by Wotan, leading them to a cave running deep into the mountain. They discovered burial chambers filled with ancient tomes, the contents of which they have not shared with anyone. This outpost is led by a ravenfolk wizard named Shar Delvesden.

Detestation's Morrow. A small, hidden frontier outpost in the Flesh Mires of the Twilight Empire, these ravenfolk take great pains to hide themselves from the ghouls that patrol the area. The leader is Mar'vel Echoheart, a ravenfolk Shadow Watcher (see below). The ghoul patrols have been more constant of late, greatly worrying the ravenfolk.

Leaf Craven. A large wooden fort in the Blackwood, this structure is built out of a large dead tree carved with runes of protection by the Shadowfeathers. The fort is led by a ravenfolk ranger named Var Moonstream. It has come to light that the dead tree was actually a massive, long-dead treant, and its oddly glowing saplings have since grown into a threat and assault the fort regularly.

Pallid Valor. The Shadowfeathers took over some stone ruins in the Gloaming Fens that appear to pre-date the arrival of the shadow fey in the Shadow Realm. The many glyphs are still being transcribed. An ominous tunnel leads deep underground, but its exploration has been slow due to the many deadly traps. The leader of this outpost is a ravenfolk fighter named Krell Axeleave.

Adventure Hooks

There are many ways to put PCs in the path of the Shadowfeathers:

- The Twilight Empire has captured a Shadowfeather spy and plans to interrogate them for secrets. Mar'vel Echoheart of Detestation's Morrow is seeking adventurers to help cause a distraction while he leads a rescue operation to free them.
- The ravenfolk of Despair's Spear have recently discovered a hidden chamber in the crags of the Mistcall Mountains. Once breached, shadowy tentacles lashed out, stopping any further investigation. The Shadowfeathers have put out word for hired hands to help deal with the situation.
- The tower of Muninn's Vigilance in Corremel, the City of Lanterns, is seeking mercenaries to escort ravenfolk emissaries in a pre-arranged meeting in the Queen's Wood with an unnamed group of shadow fey.

Notable Shadowfeather NPCs

Whatever it is you're doing in the Shadow Realm, chances are fairly good that there's a Shadowfeather hidden nearby, watching and listening. Here are a few notable ravenfolk.

Shimmergale Auga (Leader of the Shadowfeather Ravenfolk). *An elderly ravenfolk stands in a massive chamber, waiting for a servant to gather her for her summons. She wears simple ropes of blues and purples. Where her feathers show, they are greying with age. One of her eyes is milky white while the other still hints of curiosity. She leans on her walking cane, which bears a silvered raven head for its grip, and she has a lit smoking pipe in her free hand. The shadow fey servant motions to her that their lord is*

ready to see her. A bemused look alights her face as she heads off to meet with Hander Svenk, the Black Prince of the shadow fey.

At a young age, Shimmergale excelled at gathering knowledge for the order, and she quickly came under the watchful eye of the then leader of the ravenfolk. It wasn't long before she was instructed in the ways of the Shadow Watchers (see below) and continued to stand out among the flock. When the previous elder passed on, Shimmergale took her place as the leader of the "secret collectors" of the Shadow Realm. Under her leadership, the Shadowfeathers have continued their goal of collecting information for Wotan by gaining entrance to the various



factions within the realm, excepting the ghouls of the Twilight Imperium. More recently, she has received repeated summons from the Black Prince, and among the shadow fey, rumors are spreading that there is a secret that the prince wants to remain just that.

Krell Axeleave (Leader of Pallid Valor). *The ravenfolk impatiently paces in front of the cavern. The stone entrance is surrounded by ancient glyphs of some unknown origin. She is dressed in worn leather armor, many obvious repairs, the colors almost blending into her own dusky plumage. The holstered throwing axes jingle as she grows more impatient, but she stops as two ravenfolk emerge from the shadows to tell her they found the next entrance. Finally, something to do with her time, Krell Axeleave draws her axes and moves into the cavern.*

Krell was an expert ranger that has spent much time scouting the Gloaming Fens. The settlement of Pallid Valor, established in partly sunken stone ruins, is the newest for the Shadowfeathers. What started out as just more lost secrets quickly ramped up to burning curiosity once the caverns were discovered with their strange glyphs. The ravenfolk quickly established a settlement and tasked the rangers to scout the extent of the caverns.

The exploration has been perilous: many ancient traps, both mundane and magical, are about and have taken the lives of a dozen scouts so far. Krell keeps a token reclaimed from each of the fallen, which she hangs in her chambers, always a reminder to herself of the price the settlement has paid for its secrets.

The three sisters that rule Nightbrook Court have welcomed the Shadowfeathers with an open invitation. They view the work of the Shadowfeathers with respect and admiration.

Mar'vel Echoheart (Leader of Detestation's Morrow). *Two Twilight Imperium guards drag an unwilling "guest" through the hallway—the prisoner's identity hidden behind the bag covering their head. The highly fashionable clothing suggests someone who attends many a shadow fey dinner party. The ghouls toss*

the prisoner into a cell and lock the rusted door shut as they leave. A moment of silence passes before the ravenfolk emerges from the shadows on the wall. He wears all blacks and blues, only carrying a single dagger on his belt. Peering into the cell, the silver necklace on the prisoner catches the ravenfolk's eyes. A devilish confirmation marks Echoheart's eyes as he slinks away.

Detestation's Morrow is one of the Shadowfeathers most precarious settlements, hidden as it is in the Flesh Mires, right on the doorstep of the Twilight Empire. The ravenfolk are not welcome in the lands of the ghouls and are killed on sight. But the Shadowfeathers can't resist the urge to keep eyes on the ghouls though. The outpost's leader, Mar'vel Echoheart, has volunteered to lead a deadly mission to spy on the ghouls. He is the youngest ravenfolk to ever become a Shadow Watcher (see below) and is said to have Wotan himself watching over him. He prefers to get his hands dirty with solo missions, and his cockiness has earned him a bounty on his head, placed by the ghoulish emperor himself.

Ranger Archetype: Shadow Watcher

As one of the Shadowfeathers, you are a ranger that has developed magical abilities to aid in gathering secrets from those who hold them dear. You are a scout of the Shadow Watchers, and your abilities are said to come from the magic once part of Wotan's feather that first dropped into the Shadow Realm.

You slink around in the shadows and use your abilities to overhear whispered conversations. And once those secrets have been plucked from the air, you are quickly away. You excel in urban settings or places with highly guarded secrets.

SHADOW WATCHER MAGIC

The shadow magic of Wotan fills you. You gain access to the following Shadow Watcher

spells at the level listed. The spell counts as a ranger spell for you, but it doesn't count against the number of ranger spells you know.

| LEVEL | SPELLS |
|-------|-----------------------------|
| 3rd | <i>comprehend languages</i> |
| 5th | <i>invisibility</i> |
| 9th | <i>sending</i> |
| 13th | <i>private sanctum</i> |
| 17th | <i>scrying</i> |

WOTAN'S VISION

At 3rd level, Wotan has blessed you with sight to better find secrets in the darkness. You gain darkvision to 60 feet. If you already have darkvision, then when using the Shadow's Observation feature, you have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

SHADOW'S OBSERVATION

At 3rd level, while in dim light or darkness, you gain the ability to magically project your senses to another area of dim light or darkness within 60 feet. You can see and hear normally in this new area, using your senses until the start of your next turn and gaining the benefits of any special senses that you possess. During this time, you are deaf and blind with regard to your senses originating from your own person.

CLOUDED MINDS

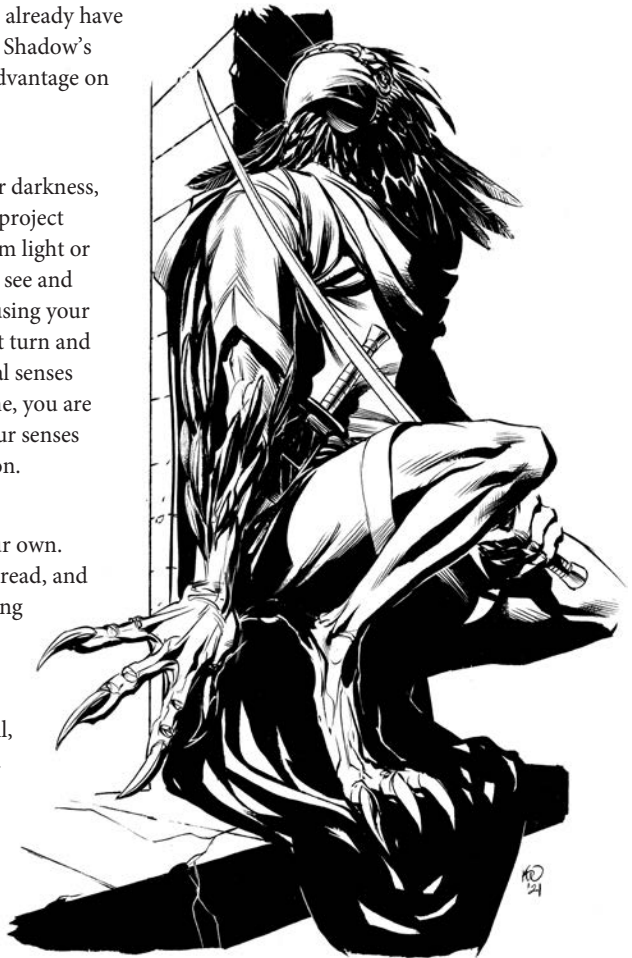
At 7th level, your secrets are your own. Your thoughts can no longer be read, and you now have advantage on saving throws against any effect that would cause you to lose control of your mind or your actions, such as the *dominate person* spell, the incapacitated condition, or a ghost's Possession action.

CUNNING OBSERVER

At 11th level, you can gain an edge on foes by studying them for weakness. If you observe a creature for 1 minute, you have advantage on attacks and ability contests against that creature until you roll a natural 20 during such an attack or ability contest or until you use this feature on a different target.

WOTAN'S FORESIGHT

At 15th level, you can no longer be surprised. In addition, when you use your Cunning Observer feature, it only takes an action to observe a target instead of 1 minute.



ORDER OF SKY'S PASSAGE: AN UNKINDNESS OF RAVENFOLK

by Ben McFarland and Prakash Upadhyayula (KP11 Studios) with Brian Suskind
(special thanks to Wade Rockett)

The twin feathers of Thought and Memory fell to Midgard to guide the world along the gods' purposes. So goes the story of the creation of the ravenfolk and the birth of their faith. How poetic and concise—how incomplete. Many do not know the trials, the hardship, the many ascents and falls the Feathered Folk endured.

Origins of the Ravenfolk

In Midgard's youth, ravenfolk lived on Yggdrasil as descendants of Huginn and Muninn, or Thought and Memory, the two great ravens who carried messages for Wotan, acting as his eyes and ears across the realms and even venturing into Ginnungagap. They served in Vanaheim (of the Infinite Halls), built what would be known as the Lost Roost, and sought glory among their god's host. They witnessed the rise and fall of Glorious Umbuso in the Southlands, observed the fate of long-drowned Ankeshel's orichalcum spires, and circled far above the Ahu-nixta hordes while they waged war against the celestial dragons of Cathay.

High above the clouds, on what some would call the Tree that Connects the Sky, better known as Wotan's Tree, sits a strange structure. A building of interlaced branches come together to form an intricate building, rising higher and higher as it reaches upward,

almost as if longing to pierce the very clouds and into the beyond. Called the High Roost, or the Lost Roost, it served—and in legends, still serves—as the source of faith for the Ravenfolk, their center of worship, and the one thing tying these nomads and wanderers together. While not directly accessible by those climbing a World Tree on Midgard, those who make the journey to Vanaheim might reach it. (See *Warlock Guide to the Planes*, or pages 10–12, for details on using such portals.)

Envoy's War

Wotan began to rely on the ravenfolk with increasing regularity. The ratatosk grew jealous of the god's shifting favor and complained to the Vanir, claiming they carried the messages on Yggdrasil. The ravenfolk mocked them, claiming their flights hardly constituted travel on the World Tree. Tempers flared. No one knows precisely who started the war between ratatosk and ravenfolk, but it raged across the branches of Yggdrasil for generations, watering canopy to roots with the blood of both species. The ratatosk knew the World Tree far better and gained the upper hand over time. The ravenfolk suffered terribly, and a great unkindness of ravenfolk died against the squirrel-folk. As the outcome became a foregone conclusion, Wotan intervened and

demanded a truce. The war ended, but the price of peace came with the ravenfolk's exile from the celestial realms.

Ravenfolk on Midgard

In order to keep the ravenfolk safe and honor the armistice, Wotan took them out of Vanaheim, out of the High Roost and Yggdrasil, and brought them to Ravenheim in far Sirtya, the Land of Frost of Bears, in the distant northeast of Midgard. To make them mortal, he needed to take their ability to fly, so the ravenfolk entered Midgard on uneasy, taloned feet. The remote hills and forests of Sirtya gave the ravenfolk time to establish themselves, adjust to mortality. With their memories still fresh, they built anew in the image of the High Roost, though imperfect: a stylized construction of a vast, thick tower vaguely resembling an immense redwood or baobab tree, the banners of various unkindnesses of ravenfolk flutter in the wind.

There, the ravenfolk preserve their traditions and practice their faith to the All-Father, Wotan. A crooked path leads to an altar in the center of the main spire, where a statue of a hunched, cloaked figure sits, head slightly tilted to the side. Its features remain shadowed, save for one twinkling eye, gently staring into the beyond. The left hand is visibly holding a branch of what is said to be the World Tree, Yggdrasil, while the right holds two feathers, one each from his two pet ravens, Huginn and Muninn.

Tales claim Wotan first used this branch of the World Tree to draw the Runes of Power, symbolic magic he gifted to the magically talented mortals of the world, while the feathers represent where the ravenfolk come from. Thought and Memory. These represent the All-Father and the tenets ravenfolk carry forward. One of its greatest wonders becomes visible when the sunlight hits the structure just right, telling a story through the magical play of shadows and light. Their greatest legends and heroes on epic journeys battle

monsters and evils long forgotten in a living, moving account of their history. These silent images change depending on the time of day and season.

Occasionally though, Wotan's former task to them manifests: random ravenfolk become gripped by divine purpose. Bound by compulsions they cannot explain beyond the traditions that claim this as their celestial heritage, they travel and deliver the messages of the gods. As a species, ravenfolk embraced this phenomenon and claimed Wotan wanted ravenfolk to scatter across Midgard, seek out new World Trees, and build new roosts. Their efforts resulted in structures and communities located in Vadim, in Nuria Natal, even deep in the Southlands and in Great Khandiria. No nation in Midgard remains unaware of the ravenfolk, though Ravenheim's location in Sirtya remains a closely held secret of their wisest elders.

However, one sect of priests did not forget their war with the ratatosk, and they cling to the memory as messengers of Wotan, as couriers from the mortal to the immortal world, linked to Wotan and Valhalla. They grew obsessed with bringing worthy souls to Vanaheim and created the Order of Sky's Passage. This sect of death priests and psychopomps believes ravens help bring the best souls to serve for Ragnarok and should complete this task when an individual exemplifies their worth, even if this isn't exactly the time of the worthy one's natural or battlefield death. Most priests of Wotan see the Order of Sky's Passage as misguided children, and valkyries actively hate them for their interference.

The order hopes, by bringing the worthiest souls to Valhalla at the optimal moments, Wotan will eventually bring the sect members back to Vanaheim. Other ravenfolk remain mostly unconvinced and have driven the order from Ravenheim. The splinter religious group wanders in small clusters, teaching where and when they can but often meeting

resistance and operating in secret. Members have recently been spotted in Krakovar, Wolfheim, Vadim, and Per-Bastet.

Cleric Domain: Open Sky Psychopomp

“Thank you, High Priest Kaua. I am honored that you could perform the last rites”—the widow hesitated—“and, I’m sorry. I know it must not have been easy, what with the opposition you face...”

As a cleric of the Order of Sky’s Passage, you serve as psychopomp, assassin, and zealot. Your sect is a fringe element in the worship of Wotan and in the preparations for Ragnarok—some of your number may even join or found Ragnarok cults, trying to bring the final battle about sooner, some feel the end of Midgard means the return to Yggdrasil. Members become clerics who follow the Open Sky Psychopomp Domain.



OPEN SKY PSYCHOPOMP DOMAIN

The Open Sky psychopomp is the messenger between this world and the next. They hasten the journey for those found worthy, and they help others on to the next life. Particular dogmas may dictate when this journey occurs, or they may not. The transition between life and death particularly interests the Open Sky psychopomps and tends to color their personalities, making them often gloomy and intense.

OPEN SKY PSYCHOPOMP DOMAIN SPELLS

| LEVEL | SPELLS |
|-------|--|
| 1st | <i>grim siphon*</i> , <i>withering smite*</i> |
| 3rd | <i>animal messenger</i> , <i>ray of enfeeblement</i> |
| 5th | <i>blinding smite</i> (deals necrotic damage), <i>glimpse the end*</i> |
| 7th | <i>deva’s wings*</i> (soot-black wings that deal necrotic damage), <i>ray of life suppression*</i> |
| 9th | <i>dream</i> , <i>souleater*</i> |

* see *Deep Magic*

SMOOTH THE WAY

When you choose this domain at 1st level, you embrace the roles of both messenger and reaper. You gain the ability to cast the *message* cantrip at will and gain the sneak attack ability (and its damage progression), as per the rogue class ability.

CHANNEL DIVINITY: PURIFYING BURST

At 2nd level, you can use your Channel Divinity to cleanse surrounding creatures, preparing them to pass on to the next world. As an action, you present your holy symbol while reciting a passage from your god's scripture. Each creature within 30 feet of you takes radiant damage equal to 2d6 + your cleric level and becomes vulnerable to necrotic damage, or half as much damage and no vulnerability with a successful Wisdom saving throw. On a successful save, the target cannot gain vulnerability from this ability until you finish a long rest. The damage increases by 2d6 when you reach 10th level (4d6) and 14th level (6d6). Any creature that dies while vulnerable to necrotic damage due to this effect cannot become undead.

CHANNEL DIVINITY: ANCESTRAL RECOLLECTION

At 6th level, you can use your Channel Divinity to access the knowledge or memories of a specific target, through their remains or through a living target who willingly allows you to touch them. This permits you to make a single skill check of a skill possessed by the touched creature. If you possess this skill yourself, you may make the check with advantage; if you do not, you may make the check as if you had proficiency. At 10th level, when touching a creature's remains, you may use this ability as per the *contact other plane* spell, with all the answers being short phrases as appropriate.

HASTEN THE JOURNEY

At 8th level, when you use your sneak attack ability, the damage you inflict is considered necrotic. In addition, if the target

is a living creature, it takes 1 hit point of necrotic damage at the start of your turn until it is magically healed or succeeds on a Constitution saving throw (DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier). Every additional successful hit on this creature after the successful sneak attack increases the necrotic damage suffered each round by 1 hit point. A critical hit increases it by 2 hit points.

REAPING NIMBUS

At 17th level, on your first turn of combat, when you make a melee or ranged weapon attack against a creature that has not yet acted, you can instead choose to assassinate it, making your attack with advantage. On a hit, your attack becomes a critical hit, and the damage you deal is necrotic in addition to any other types of damage.

The Bargain for Souls

As Wotan brought the ravenfolk to Midgard, the Southlander god Horus approached him. The Nurian Lord of the Sky, the Desert Falcon, watched the war of huginn and ratatosk, admiring the ferocity of the All-Father's servants, the dedication to their purpose, and the nobility they demonstrated as they campaigned. It saddened the Master of the Sun, the Moon, and the Heavens to see the ravenfolk so defeated, but Horus felt such glory merited a reward. He knew the ways of symbolic magic, of the hieroglyphs, and of the lesser secrets of ritual death and rebirth. The stories claim Wotan eagerly accepted this barter and gave nine unkindnesses of ravenfolk to Horus. The Vigilant One led these ravenfolk, now called heruti, into Nuria and told them to find their new path among the people there. They wasted no time and scattered among the dunes and palm groves of the god-kings, though the homes they built still resembled roosts: tall, ring-like structures with rooms built into the walls, which the Tamasheq call ksour.

Those who did not become performers, artisans, or laborers remained in service to Horus. Some of the more magically inclined joined the ranks of the Temple of Thoth-Hermes, and many members of the Order of Sky's Passage found a welcome place in the cults of Anu-Akma as well as those of Horus. They took to the new realm and its gods with zeal, becoming trusted blade masters who taught the gnoll champions, occupying garrisons in necropoli, and being entrusted with the safeguarding of the pious and powerful during their death-sleep. Heruti in Thoth-Hermes's sworn circles regularly pursue the lost *Emerald Tablets of Wisdom*. And in seats of power, such as the hierarchy of the temples of Horus in Per-Xor, Djehutihotep the Farseer, a potent heru sorcerer and dogged enemy of the Golden Falcon Antiquities Trading House (though their leader woos God-King Set-Amun's vizier, and Djehutihotep has been unable to move against them openly). Overwhelmingly, the ravenfolk flourish in Nuria Natal, and many believe the nearly forgotten tales of an exodus from Vanaheim to be simply borrowed from visiting huginn of the Midlands and Northlands.

Sorcerous Bloodline: Raven-Blooded

The ancient blood of Huginn and Muninn flows strong within you, and your magic springs forth from the well of these ancient corvid servants to Wotan: you draw upon secrets, infuse your blades with magic, and sail among the clouds. Before the war on Yggdrasil and the exile from Vanaheim, your ancestors held great favor and power among the Unkindnesses of the All-Father, and you are an heir to that legacy.

Except as noted below, raven-blooded sorcerers function as sorcerers and use the sorcerer spell list.

BLADE OF EIWAZ

At 1st level, your deep connection to the symbolic magic of Midgard, such as runes and hieroglyphs, allows you to imbue your specially marked weapon with one of your spells. The spell uses a slot normally and cannot be higher than 4th level. Imbuing the spell consumes the spell slot, and it cannot be augmented with sorcery points at the time it is imbued. When you make a successful attack with the imbued weapon, you may discharge the spell on the target and may not augment the discharged spell with sorcery points. The imbued weapon loses the spell if used by someone you do not designate as an ally. You cannot imbue ammunition, like arrows or bolts. Imbued weapons lose their effect when you take a long rest, and any spent spell slots are recovered.

In addition, you are proficient with khopesh, longswords, and shortswords.

TRICKSTER'S LESSON

Beginning at 1st level, as a bonus action, you may sacrifice a spell slot or a sorcery point to gain advantage on the next Charisma skill check you make. You lose this benefit if you take a long rest. You may use this ability a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest. If you roll a 20 when making this check, the use of the ability is not expended.

In addition, you speak Huginn's Speech, or Ghuraab as it is called in the Southlands.

READ THE SKEIN OF FATE

At 6th level, you have advantage on saving throws against divination magic, and you may spend a sorcery point to gain advantage on a Dexterity saving throw.

In addition, you may cast *anticipate attack*, *divination*, *major image*, or *sidestep arrow* (see *Deep Magic*) as a reaction by spending 2 sorcery points.

RIDE THE WINDS OF THE NINE REALMS

At 14th level, you gain the ability to once again swiftly traverse the skies. You may spend 3 sorcery points to cast *wind walk*.

In addition, when you cast an illusion spell, you may spend 2 sorcery points to increase the DC by 2.

READY BLADE OF RAGNAROK

Beginning at 18th level, there is no limit to the level of the spell you can imbue in your weapon using your Blade of Eiwaz ability. You may maintain this spell in the weapon between long rests by spending 4 sorcery points at the end of your long rest. As a part of a successful attack where you discharge the spell, you may augment it using sorcery points.

New Feats of the Ravenfolk

Ravenfolk have their own rich beliefs and customs and that is reflected here in three new feats.

BORN OF HUGINN

Prerequisite: Ravenfolk

You trace your ancestry back to Wotan's raven Huginn, who embodied Thought. You are not easily dominated by the magics of others, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma or Intelligence score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- Once per long rest, you may decide to reroll the result of a saving throw against an enchantment or illusion spell effect, even after you know the results. Alternatively, you can use your daily use of this ability to permit an ally within 30 feet to reroll their saving throw instead, but this use must be after they have made their saving throw and before the results have been announced.

Special. You may not take this feat if you have taken either the Born of Muninn or Scion of Horus feat.

BORN OF MUNINN

Prerequisite: Ravenfolk

You trace your ancestry back to Wotan's raven Muninn, who embodied Memory. You have an amazing recall, and your sense of physical self is immutable, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- When making Intelligence checks to identify a creature or recall information about an enemy, you have advantage on those checks.
- Once per long rest, you may decide to reroll the result of a saving throw against a transmutation or necromancy spell effect, even after you know the results.

Special. You may not take this feat if you have taken either the Born of Huginn or Scion of Horus feat.

SCION OF HORUS

Prerequisite: Ravenfolk

You trace your ancestry to the ravenfolk embraced by Horus and settled in Nuria Natal. You strive to demonstrate the glory, nobility, and magical might evident in the avatars of the hawk-headed god of the River Kingdom, gaining the following benefits:

- Increase your Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on all Intelligence checks made to gather information about aberrations.
- Once per long rest, you can force the target of one of your spells to roll their saving throw at disadvantage, or if the effect requires an attack roll, you may make the attack with advantage.

Special. You may not take this feat if you have taken either the Born of Huginn or Born of Muninn feat.

CIRCLE OF FERMENTATION: LIFE IN THE WINEWOOD

by Ashley Warren

A strange and pleasant, if not slightly funky, Ascent emanates from the Winewood. Neither one of the larger nor smaller forests in Midgard, the Winewood is renowned largely for its main export, which is more its main influence upon the world: fermentation. The Winewood has an abundance of wild yeast that permeates the air, turning berries sour even after they've ripened. Travelers may accidentally kick over a jar filled with unidentifiable sludge—containers of flour and water, capturing these natural yeasts to use in other efforts like bread and beer. Brewers around Midgard send barrels of their finest brews to the forest to age and to infuse with that unique, intangible atmosphere.

Those who live in the Winewood are affected by this atmosphere in mostly positive ways. A circle of druids, known as the Fermenters, make use of the "strange air" of the forest to brew and ferment, well, nearly anything really, from varieties of beer and wine to funky, sometimes foul teas, from aged meats and cheeses to pickled produce. But beyond just brewing, these druids leverage fermentation as a magical effect, harnessing the passage of time on organic materials to reap its benefits

while wielding its dangers, like rot, to inflict harm upon their enemies. The circle is guided by an elder known only as Mother, who is the chief fermenter and master of the circle's starter, an ever-fermenting vat of yeast and bacteria. Every member of the circle receives a vial of the starter, which infuses the druid with the magical effects of fermentation.

As a member of this circle, your magic is influenced by the processes in nature that cause organic material to change. You as well may be at the whim of these unpredictable patterns.

BONUS PROFICIENCY

When you choose this circle at 2nd level, you gain proficiency with artisan's tools (brewer's supplies). If you already have this proficiency, you gain proficiency with artisan's tools (alchemist's supplies).

EFFERVESCENCE

Inspired by the bubbling, fizzy side effect of many fermentative processes, you lift and strengthen your comrades' spirits. Starting at 2nd level, you can use a bonus action to expend one spell slot and touch one creature

other than yourself to bestow a pleasant, giddy sensation that improves their stamina and focus. The creature can roll a 1d4 and apply the result to an ability check or saving throw. This Effervescence die lasts for 1 minute or until used, and a creature can have only one such die at a time. You gain an additional die to give away per level of the spell slot expended.

MOTHER'S GIFT

Starting at 2nd level, you can use a vial given to you by Mother. The vial is filled with a sample of the circle's starter, a slimy, sour-smelling, yeasty mixture. Consuming this starter gives you an additional slot for 1 day. Upon consumption, roll 1d4 to determine how many days the vial takes to refill. The result of this roll also determines the level of the spell slot obtained on consuming the next dose; the result must be of a level you can cast, so if you roll higher, use the highest level you can cast from 1st–4th level. Only you can gain this benefit in consuming this mixture.

CIRCLE SPELLS

Your connection to wild fermentation in nature grants you access to certain spells. At 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th level, you gain access to circle spells related to alchemy and fermentation. Choose from the list below.

Upon selecting a new circle spell, you always have it prepared and this spell doesn't count against your daily prepared spells.

CIRCLE OF FERMENTATION

| Druid Level | Circle Spells |
|-------------|---|
| 3rd | <i>gust of wind, protection from poison</i> |
| 5th | <i>plant growth, speak with plants</i> |
| 7th | <i>blight, control water</i> |
| 9th | <i>contagion, mass cure wounds</i> |

BRINY MURK

When you reach 6th level, you can use your reaction to saturate the ground around you with a potent brew, creating a noxious, marshy area of difficult terrain in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on you. Creatures not in contact with the ground are unaffected. You can dismiss the effect as an action.

Additionally, you can use a bonus action to expend one spell slot to further charge your briny murk for 1 minute per level of the spell slot expended. When so charged, each creature that is within the area at the start of its turn must succeed on a Constitution saving throw, or their movement is reduced to 0. Creatures that don't need to breathe or are immune to poison automatically succeed on this saving throw.

All members of your circle are immune to these effects.

FERMENTATIVE ENGINE

Starting at 10th level, you are immune to necrotic energy, and you can't be frightened.

TOUCH OF ZYMURGY

By 14th level, you have learned to better direct the "strange air" both within you and without. You can use your action to end one condition on yourself or on another creature that you touch.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (a minimum of once). You regain expended uses when you finish a long rest.



New Spell

The following spell was developed by druids inspired by fermentative processes.

ZYMURGIC AURA

7th-level necromancy (druid)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, M

Duration: Instantaneous

A wave of putrefaction surges from you, targeting creatures of your choice within a 30-foot radius around you, speeding the rate of decay in those it touches. The target must make a Constitution saving throw. It takes 10d6 necrotic damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful save. Its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the creature takes a long rest.

Druid Background: Zymurgist

You are a naturalist who has studied the fermentation process and its effects on organic materials. Yours is a community of druids, alchemists, witches, and various artisans and crafters—though many others regularly seek out your expertise. You appreciate that change is a part of life everywhere in the multiverse. Rather than resent that, you see the beauty and potential to apply these processes to your life, and to your magic.

d8 PERSONALITY

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | I love being out in nature and learning as much as I can about new biomes. |
| 2 | Nothing grosses me out, and I'm not afraid of germs. |
| 3 | I'm enthusiastic about strange things in nature and often go off the beaten path, literally, to investigate something. |
| 4 | I'm resourceful and sometimes this makes me snobby toward city folk who can't rough it outdoors. |
| 5 | I'm known for being a bit kooky and eccentric, even among others in the community. |
| 6 | I'm a collector and often have lots of interesting things on my person. Usually in jars. |
| 7 | I'm always looking for the next cool thing to try, to ferment that thing no one else ever has. |
| 8 | I prefer to perfect one thing, to make it the best, and then to carefully tweak the recipe to see what happens. |

Skill Proficiency: Nature, Medicine

Tool Proficiency: One type of artisan's tools (alchemist's supplies or brewer's supplies)

Equipment: A set of artisan's tools (either alchemist's supplies or brewer's supplies), an apron, glass vials and jars filled with bubbling substances, and a pouch containing 10 gp

FAVORED FERMENTS

All who follow the call of fermentation have a certain specialty, some favorite variety of fermented substance they tend to focus on. Select a specialty from the Favored Ferment table or roll randomly.

d10 FAVORED FERMENT

| | |
|----|--|
| 1 | wine |
| 2 | beer |
| 3 | mead/cider |
| 4 | cultured dairy (yogurt, cheese, kefir) |
| 5 | kombucha |
| 6 | pickled vegetables |
| 7 | vinegar and brine |
| 8 | beans/bean paste |
| 9 | fish |
| 10 | bread (sourdough and natural yeast breads) |

FEATURE: LOCAL SOURCING

You have a knack for sourcing food anywhere you go, even if the nature of that food might be distasteful to your fellow party members. You can make something palatable out of almost nothing and can preserve whatever you make for weeks and even months. This makes you a resourceful traveling companion, especially for longer journeys where finding sustenance may prove difficult.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

There is no one type of zymurgist although you all share a passion for living sustainably on the natural world. You are curious folk. Those who are outgoing may become evangelists for the benefits of fermentation, urging their party members to seek out fermented substances to aid in skill development and even healing. Those more introspective love to get lost in their brewing. Your personality may be similar to that of a studious wizard or to an eager alchemist.

d6 IDEAL

- 1 **Health.** Making and consuming fermented substances revitalizes our bodies and improves our health, which is a must-do.
- 2 **Change.** Change is intrinsic to nature, and I revere the natural cycles of life.
- 3 **Experimentation.** The best way to learn is to study using the scientific process and try new things.
- 4 **Nature.** The natural world gives us everything we could ever need.
- 5 **Survival.** We can't rely on others to meet our basic needs, we must take this upon ourselves.
- 6 **Abundance.** I always want to share with others and make sure to always produce more than I need for this purpose.

d6 BOND

- 1 We can best understand our world through study and scientific experimentation.
- 2 I do everything I can to live sustainably alongside nature.
- 3 There are many dangers in the world, and I can use fermentation to keep myself and my friends as healthy as possible.
- 4 I want to make Mother proud, in everything I do.
- 5 I once made someone sick through of my "experiments," and I never want that to happen again.
- 6 I am devoted to my chosen biome and want to conserve and protect it.

d6 FLAW

- 1 I don't understand why people find fermentation gross. What's gross about pulling back a sheet of mold to get to a tasty dollop of fermented cabbage?
- 2 I'm often a bit stinky and sour smelling, but I can't detect my own smells anymore, nor do I care very much.
- 3 I am always pushing for change and flux, and I struggle with anything being "predictable."
- 4 I struggle when forced to be "outgoing." I'm happier being on my own or with my community.
- 5 I force people to see what I see in fermentation and get frustrated when they don't care or don't understand it.
- 6 I sometimes befriend people to rope them into my experiments rather than being friends for friendship's sake.

CIRCLE OF THE WEALD: BLOOD ON THE LEAVES

by Jerry LeNeave

Druids of the Circle of the Weald dwell in the areas where the trees grow so thick that the forest's undergrowth is starved for life, the sunlight nearly choked out by the gnarled canopy above. Within these copses, you'll find an order of druids who consider themselves warriors, soothsayers, prophets, and catalysts for keeping the fate of the natural world in balance. They consider their faithful to be the most devoted among those who would worship the very lands themselves. They adorn themselves with raiment of blood and bone, embracing death as a path to enlightenment, and they consider it the ultimate way to enter into true symbiosis with nature. They erect macabre effigies of sacrificial animals around their groves, further ostracizing them from society as well as other druidic circles.

Typically hailing from regions such as the outskirts of Björnrike or the northernmost uncharted forests of Midgard, druids of the weald are typically motivated to venture out of their communities in search of adventure out of what they see as necessity. Though their groves are most commonly known in these northern regions, they can also be found in the depths of the Southlands amid oases of palm trees and dressed in the hides of hyenas and goats. Of all the variations of their order, two things remain central to them regardless of region: a penchant for sacrifice and a belief in a relatively unknown and elusive god.

Animal Worship & Sacrifice

Circle of the Weald druids covet and cherish their animal friends and companions, though in a different way than most. They believe that beasts sometimes best serve their order when used as a food source or as vessels for becoming closer to nature. They often sacrifice animals for this purpose and believe that consuming them gives them some of that creature's stamina, strength, and speed—that creature's very essence. When complete, these carcasses are used as ceremonial displays in their camps and on the borders of their lands, also doubling as a grisly warning to those who might encroach.

Another common practice among their kind is that of preserving aging animal spirits within trinkets they create called *wraithstones*. Typically when an animal is reaching the age when it would die naturally, the beast is euthanized in a special ritual consisting of sacred ashes, powders, and salves in order to preserve the creature's essence within one of these stones. *Wraithstones* are carved from the petrified roots of their most ancient trees into the shape and likeness of the creature being immortalized within. This process, while usually done in order to preserve faithful companions and longtime family members, can also be used to trap tainted or corrupted animal spirits in order to stop them from

causing harm or else to harness their volatile spirit for future use in rituals.

Aside from sustenance and ceremony, animal parts are also harvested to create unique items only found within the circle and sometimes with those who trade with them or adjacent hubs of commerce. Many a specialized candle, powder, and pigment have been created throughout the ages of the circle's existence, and they are always finding new ways to leverage blood, bark, and bone to mix with natural elements in order to create brand new creations and concoctions. No part of an animal ever goes to waste within a Circle of the Weald community.

Circle Initiation & Beliefs

Unlike others, those of the Circle of the Weald typically worship only one god, the one they call the Ancestor, who serves as the embodiment of all of nature itself. The Ancestor appears genderless as a tall humanoid with the head of an obsidian-eyed stag. They wear long earth-toned robes and bear a round shield made of taugh hide stretched over a section of oak trunk and smeared with bloody sigils. In their other hand, they wield a long wooden club carved into the shape of a femur and inset with angular glowing amber sigils.

In the Ancestor's wake, a trail of sinew and dark-red blood is left behind as it ambulates with the grace of a deer and the speed of a charging boar. It is said that what is hidden beneath the robes of the ancestor is neither form of beast nor person but instead a glistening mass of floating viscera, pulsating rhythmically and dripping with blood.

In order to complete the initiation process and become a full member of the circle, those who aspire to join must undergo what is referred to as the Catharsis, wherein they must crawl within the carcass of a beast they themselves have sacrificed to the Ancestor. A circle elder will sew the carcass shut, leaving

a space for the initiate to breathe from within, and there they must remain for a full 48 hours. During this time, it is said that initiates first undergo an intense dream state where they are the closest to the spirit of the Ancestor, granting them portents not only of their own life paths but of the future of the world itself.

These brief glimpses into the future can provide the initiate with a lifetime of contemplation—and sometimes trauma. Those who follow the circle claim that the Ancestor only ever answers inquiries with responses so vague that they only beget more questions. The second stage of the Catharsis is often said to be extremely peaceful, a form of astral projection where the initiate wanders beyond time and space in what is often described as an emerald dreamland, or hellscape, depending on one's perspective.

Ongoing Practices

After joining the circle, its members still sometimes utilize the Catharsis, hoping for portents to guide their hand, especially when situations are dire. Unfortunately, after the initiation, the experience loses some of its potency and only provides slivers of guidance, which are not always helpful.

Being so close to death, whenever an animal or one of their own dies, it is considered a celebration. Animals that aren't used for other means or placed within *wraithstones* have their bones displayed within the trees above to watch over the community always, serving as eerie wind chimes to outsiders. Whenever one of their own dies, they are buried in more traditional manner with the exception of the skull, which is removed and placed within the gaps and hollows of trees to help watch over their community. When elders die, their skulls are placed within sacred trees grown specifically to display them and where over time the subsequent fungal growth resembles the elders' mortal forms.

Circle Features

As a member of this circle, your magic is influenced by the ecstatic fervor with which you celebrate nature.

MARROWBARK FORM

When you choose this circle at 2nd level and are transformed by Wild Shape, the beast form you choose also has the antlers of a stag (sized relative to the creature), and it is covered in tree bark and the bones of its own kind. The beast is granted a gore attack if it does not already have one as well as +1 bonus to its AC. While in this form, you may use your Wisdom bonus plus your proficiency bonus for attack rolls if it is better than that of the beast's form.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +X to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Alternatively, you can choose to expend a use of Wild Shape in order to instead remain in your humanoid form with the following: you gain a +1 bonus to your AC and 1d6 temporary hit points, and you can use your Wisdom bonus for attack rolls in place of Strength or Dexterity. This duration is the same as if you transformed into a beast.

CIRCLE SPELLS

Your connection to the deepest wood grants you access to certain spells. At 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th level, you gain access to circle spells related to the dying lands, viscera, and the spiritual journey of death. Choose spells from the list below.

Upon selecting a new circle spell, you always have it prepared and this spell doesn't count against your daily prepared spells.

CIRCLE OF THE WEALD

| Druid Level | Circle Spells |
|-------------|--|
| 3rd | <i>inflict wounds, misty step</i> |
| 5th | <i>fear, major image</i> |
| 7th | <i>blight, confusion</i> |
| 9th | <i>antilife shell, commune with nature</i> |

DREAMLAND TRAVERSAL

Your initiation with the circle has taught you how to leverage the Catharsis, and you employ it to gain insight when needed. At 6th level, you may re-enter this state by spending 8 hours of uninterrupted rest within the carcass of an animal that you've hunted or trapped and sacrificed yourself. The animal must be at least the same size or larger than you, and you must have another willing participant to sew or otherwise close the animal up once you are inside of it. Once inside, you focus on asking the Ancestor for guidance regarding a specific course of action you plan to take. Once this process is complete, you awake with a number of bone fragments in your hand equal to your Wisdom modifier (a minimum of one), and you emerge from the carcass having gained an omen per the *augury* spell.

When events transpire pertaining to the omen delivered by the Ancestor, you can evoke one of the bone fragments as a bonus action to gain advantage on an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw related to the omen's outcome. Once used, the bone fragment dissipates back into dreamstuff. If you have at least one unused bone fragment remaining at the end of a short or long rest, a new bone fragment will materialize (up to a total maximum of your original starting number).

You may perform Dreamland Traversal once every 6 days, when any previously unused bone fragments dissipate. If your rest is interrupted or other circumstances cause this to fail, it does not count as being used, and you may try again in another 8 hours.

WRAITHSTONE CREATION

Like the elders within your circle, you've gleaned enough knowledge of the natural world to be able to preserve the spirits of beasts. Beginning at 10th level, you can trap

the soul of a natural beast inside a piece of petrified wood or a stone carved to resemble it. This is called a *wraithstone* (see *wraithstone* in "Baubles of the Darkened Druids" page 225).

In order to create a *wraithstone*, you must spend 1 minute focusing on the beast's spirit and transferring it into the stone. If the target



creature has died within the last hour or is at or below 1/4 of its maximum hit points, the process automatically succeeds. Otherwise it must succeed a Will saving throw, in which case you cannot try again for another 1 minute. Successful creation of a *wraithstone* binds the creature's soul to the stone.

While anyone can receive the benefits of a *wraithstone*, as an adept of the weald, you gain the following additional options when using their charges, which others do not:

- **Consult Specter.** As an action, you can commune with the animal's spirit, asking it a question regarding something it would have known or observed in life or something it can currently observe within 30 feet using truesight from beyond the grave. It answers you telepathically.
- **Imbue Senses.** As a bonus action, you can call upon the spirit of the creature within to grant advantage to your next ability check, attack roll, or saving throw.
- **Siphon Fortitude.** As a reaction, you can borrow from the beast's spirit, granting yourself or a friendly creature within 5 feet of you 2d6 temporary hit points.

Additionally, as part of the Circle of the Weald, you can call upon the spirit within the stone in a way that extends its charges: in your hands, a *wraithstone* has twice the number of charges it normally would.

ANCESTRAL POSSESSION

At 14th level, you can expend two uses of Wild Shape to manifest not only the likeness but also some of the powers of the Ancestor. You grow to a height of 8 feet tall, your head becomes that of a stag, your feet become cloven hooves, and a club and shield manifest in your hands, merging whatever was previously held into your new form. You gain the following bonuses for a number of hours equal to your druid level divided by 3, rounding down:

- Your AC can't be less than 18 for the duration of your new form, otherwise as the *barkskin* spell.
- You can speak and understand Sylvan, even if you did not previously, and can cast spells as normal.
- Beasts, plants, and undead creatures will not attack you.
- Your speed increases by +10 feet.
- Difficult and hazardous terrain made up of natural organic elements such as vines, brambles, or cacti no longer slows you down or hurts you.
- You wield a club that counts as a +3 club, and when unnatural creatures are struck by this club, they must succeed a Strength saving throw or immediately become restrained to the ground, as the *entangle* spell.

BARBARIAN SUBCLASS: PATH OF THE DRAGON

by Celeste Conowitch

Few creatures embody the power and majesty of dragons. By walking the path of the dragon, you don't solely aspire to emulate these creatures—you seek to become one. The barbarians who follow this path often do so after surviving a dragon encounter or are raised in a culture that worships them. Dragons tend to have a mixed view of the barbarians who choose this path. Some dragons, in particular the metallic dragons, view such a transformation as a flattering act of admiration. Others may recognize or even fully embrace them as useful to their own ambitions. Still others view this path as embarrassing at best and insulting at worst, for what puny, two-legged creature can ever hope to come close to the natural ferocity of a dragon? When choosing this path, consider what experiences drove you to such a course. These experiences will help inform how you deal with the judgment of dragons you encounter in the world.

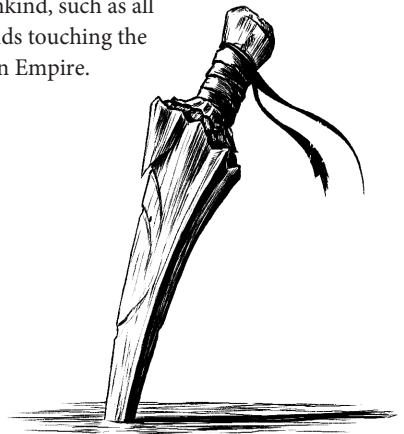
Barbarians who adopt this path gain fearsome abilities that allow them to manifest draconic features during combat. They can transform their jaws to deliver fearsome bites at early levels. They eventually gain a fragment of the dragon's legendary ability to resist the worst of magical effects. They can assume various draconic features at later levels, enabling them to heal, fly, gain superior vision, or toughen their skins to a scaled exterior. And the

culminating feature is the ability to unleash a devastating breath weapon truly worthy of these majestic creatures.

In Midgard

Within the Mharoti Empire, dragon barbarians are prized and take up positions as vanguards in the legions or as intimidating heralds of the dragon lords. Similarly, dragon-worshipping communities—like the Children of Veles in the Southlands and those devoted to Nidhogg or Jormungandr in the Northlands—consider this path a respected expression of their beliefs.

Outside of those communities, it can be riskier to express such abilities, especially in those lands in constant conflict with dragonkind, such as all the lands touching the Dragon Empire.





Path of the Dragon

Dragons are raw elemental power given flesh. These unyielding engines of aggression and majesty inspire both fear and devotion. This path will let you realize the dragon within.

TOTEM DRAGON

Starting when you choose this path at 3rd level, you choose which type of dragon you seek to emulate. You are resistant to the damage type of your chosen dragon.

| Dragon | DAMAGE TYPE |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Black or Copper | Acid |
| Blue or Bronze | Lightning |
| Brass, Gold, or Red | Fire |
| Green | Poison |
| Silver or White | Cold |

WYRM TEETH

At 3rd level, your jaws extend and become dragon-like when you enter your rage.

While raging, you can use a bonus action to attempt to bite one creature of your choice that you can see within 5 feet. Your jaws deal 1d8 piercing damage plus damage of your chosen dragon type equal to your proficiency bonus.

LEGENDARY MIGHT

Starting at 6th level, if you fail a saving throw, you can choose to succeed instead. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

ASPECT OF THE DRAGON

At 10th level, you can manifest additional aspects of the dragon. Select one of the below aspects to manifest. During a long rest, you may replace your chosen aspect with a new option from this list.

Dragon Heart. You can use a bonus action to gain temporary hit points equal to 1d12 + your barbarian level. Once you use this feature, you must finish a short or long rest before you can use it again.

Dragon Hide. Your skin becomes covered in scales. Your armor class increases by 1.

Dragon Sight. You can shift your eyes to see as a dragon does. You gain blindsight out to a range of 60 feet.

Dragon Tongue. You can speak and read Draconic. You also have advantage on all Charisma based ability checks.

Dragon Wings. You sprout a pair of wings that resemble those of your totem dragon. While the wings are present, you have a flying speed of 30 feet. You can't manifest your wings while wearing armor unless it is made to accommodate them, and clothing not made to accommodate your wings might be destroyed when you manifest them.

WYRM LUNGS

At 14th level, you can use an action to make a breath weapon attack. You exhale your breath in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking 12d8 damage of your chosen totem dragon type or half as much damage on a successful one.

After you use this feature, you can't use it again until you complete a short or long rest.

WARLOCK PATRON: THE GREAT DRAGONS

by *Gabriel Hicks*

You may be a follower of the dragon gods by heritage, like many kobolds and other dragonkin, for whom their precepts are second nature, or you may be someone from outside, perhaps one who discovered a fragment of draconic might and offered up your presence in return for their blessing. Or perhaps they sought you out with a particular task in exchange for their patronage. The significance is that you chose to embrace power from not simply one but from all of them.

In Midgard

Sometimes a god has need of a cleric or a paladin. And sometimes they need a warlock.

In the world of Midgard, worship of the Great Dragons can be rare outside of the Dragon Empire—and within dragon-worshipping communities like the Children of Veles in the Southlands and those devoted to Nidhogg or Jormungandr in the Northlands—and it is there we see the grandest shrines and the most notable of clergy, usually devoted to only one of the gods or another. However, some solutions must come from outside the typical doctrine, outside of the usual priesthood, and maybe outside of the church altogether, so a pact is made with the Great Dragons, often for purposes that don't fit neatly with the needs

of church and empire, the needs of the immediate community.

Warlocks of the Great Dragons act as emissaries. They aren't typically as entrenched in a given dogma as a cleric or paladin might be. Though their pact creates a strong bond with the gods, they are rarely fanatics and are often more capable of navigating the often-conflicting goals of the various dragon gods. That said, rarely do they feel quite as devoted to all, choosing to favor one or two over the others, so knowing where one stands in relation with each of the dragon gods can be of great importance.

The Great Dragons

You have made a pact with the dragon gods, the Great Dragons, wielding a control over the elements and insight into their deep mysteries.

Azuran. Azuran is the god of wind, an embodiment of the creation and the awareness of what comes next. With wisdom, sight, and awareness, one can follow their path of exploration and inspiration. When you choose Azuran as your focus for the day, you are primed to seek out new discoveries, to explore all that you see. You may speak boldly, proudly, and with confidence. You may move ahead with declarations and avoid holding your tongue. Creation comes through action and voice, embodying the truth that



Azuran lives. This enables the piercing of the veil, discovering the mysteries, guiding you to new wisdom, seeing the world as Azuran wills.

Baal. Bold and rapid action embody Baal. Sacrifices are willingly given in the form of gold, jewels, and even blood. Each sacrifice is more fuel for the blaze that is Baal's spirit. Far from mere flame and violence, Baal is a figure that also represents celebration, the excitement and joy that comes with

spontaneity. When you choose Baal as your focus for the day, you may act rashly and boldly. You understand that rage itself can be a true aspect of worship, and this is Baal's embrace. "Fires must be fed" is an oft-heard scripture.

Khespotan. Khespotan sees fate as a road to follow. Though you may stray, yet you will find your way back, again and again, for this is the path you follow. When danger lies ahead, when a challenge seems too great, there will

be a solution, and it is reliant upon you to find that solution. When you choose Khespotan as your focus for the day, you may find comfort in the earth and be grounded in the fates. You may seek out answers, only to find a greater destiny. You may see fate unfolding before you, and rather than fight it, you'll instead embrace whatever lies ahead.

Seggotan. Knowledge is eternal, never truly forgotten. And oaths are binding, never broken. From this, power arises, from knowledge and oath. Seggotan exists as the ocean tide, reaching out to wherever water resides. Bathe in the waters and be forever beholden to them. Seggotan notices those that eliminate his foes. When you choose Seggotan as your focus for the day, your fortune may be best when on the water. You may see the world anew, awash in the body of Seggotan, welcoming of a life more unpredictable, a life without certainty.

Veles. Power beyond imagining, Veles rarely shows favor, even to those considered their children. By embracing this power, you like to think you've gained a sliver of that attention, and in return, you wield your given power in Veles's name. The end is coming, of that inevitability there is no doubt, and Veles will be there to see it. How will you prepare for the end?

EXPANDED SPELL LIST

The Great Dragons let you choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

| LEVEL | SPELLS |
|-------|--|
| 1st | <i>inflict wounds, magic missile</i> |
| 2nd | <i>heat metal, scorching ray</i> |
| 3rd | <i>dispel magic, lightning bolt</i> |
| 4th | <i>greater invisibility, ice storm</i> |
| 5th | <i>cloudkill, flame strike</i> |

DRAGON TONGUE

Starting at 1st level, you can speak and write Draconic.

WYRMLING BLESSING

Also starting at 1st level, your patrons bestow upon you a blessing based on an offering you make each day. You can choose a new blessing after a long rest. If you maintain the same blessing on consecutive days, you do not need to make additional offerings. You only need to make a new offering if you are calling for the blessing of a different dragon god.

Blessing of Azuran: Sight of Creation. You gain darkvision to 60 feet and are in control of an invisible sensor. The sensor is an extension of your own senses, allowing you to see and hear through it as if you were in its place. You gain the benefits of any special senses you have while using the sensor. As a bonus action, you can move it anywhere within 30 feet of you. The sensor is incorporeal and can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain, and if it ends its turn inside an object, it is shunted to the closest unoccupied space that it already passed through.

Blessing of Baal: True Ignition. When you deal damage with a spell, you can choose to replace the damage type with fire damage, adding your Charisma modifier to the damage.

Blessing of Khespotan: Absorb the Essence. When you reduce a hostile creature to 0 hit points, you regain one expended spell slot.

Blessing of Seggotan: Aquatic Nature. You gain a swim speed equal to your movement and the ability to breathe underwater. You can also communicate with underwater creatures as the *speak with animals* spell.

GIFT OF VELES

At 6th level, you can harness a portion of your patrons' power to overwhelm foes. As an action, creatures of your choice within 30 feet must make a Wisdom saving throw (equal to your warlock spell save DC) or take 3d10

psychic damage and fall prone. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or a long rest.

ASCENDED BLESSING

At 10th level, your connection to your patrons increases. After a long rest, you can choose an ascended blessing in addition to your wyrmling blessing. You must still make daily offerings, as Wyrmling Blessing.

Ascended Blessing of Azuran: Voice of Creation. When a spell requires somatic or material components, you can instead cast it with strictly verbal components. (If a material component with a gp value is required, you must still expend the gold, or another item of equal or greater value.)

If you choose Sight of Creation as your other blessing, as a bonus action, you can sprout dragon wings from your back, gaining a flying speed equal to your current speed. You can't manifest your wings while wearing armor unless it is made to accommodate them, and clothing not made to accommodate your wings might be destroyed when you manifest them. You can maintain your wings for a number of hours equal to half your warlock level (rounded down) or until you use another bonus action to end the effect. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Ascended Blessing of Baal: All in Flame. As a reaction to being damaged, you can make a spell attack, without expending a spell slot, that deals the damage you take back to the attacker as fire damage, if the attacker is within 30 feet. You can do this a number of times per day equal to your charisma modifier.

If you choose True Ignition as your other blessing, you also gain resistance to fire damage.

Ascended Blessing of Khespotan: Crystallized Core. When you slay a creature, you can crystallize it to create an essence gem. This gem functions as an *ioun stone of protection*, but only for you; it has no value. You can destroy the gem as a bonus action to restore a single spell slot. You can possess only one essence gem at a time and can create a new one after a long rest.

If you choose Absorb the Essence as your other blessing, as an action, you can also transform yourself to gain a burrowing speed equal to your current speed. This ability lasts until you dismiss it as an action, and while activated, you cannot cast spells that have material or somatic components.

Ascended Blessing of Seggotan: Sea Drake Emissary. You can summon a sea dragon wyrmling (see *Tome of Beasts*), as the *conjure minor elementals* spell, except you don't need to maintain concentration for the duration. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

If you choose Aquatic Nature as your other blessing, as an action, you can also cast *control water* without expending a spell slot. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

DOMAIN OF VELES

At 14th level, you explode with the might of Veles. As an action, an overwhelming presence shoots out from your body as you cast an *antimagic field* spell with the following changes: the range is self (30-foot-radius sphere), the duration is concentration, up to 1 minute, and you may select what creatures are affected. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish 1d4 long rests.

A SURVEY OF SOUTHERN OCCULTISM

by Basheer Ghouse

Beyond the skein of the material, beyond the ken of mortal senses, are creatures powerful beyond imagining. Gods. Archfey. The living jungle of Kush and the dread titans of the Wastes. Powerful undead or the lingering will of a million wronged souls. Such entities can bestow power upon those foolish enough to seal a pact with them. This relationship is what distinguishes occultists from clergy, and this power has been the focus of occultism since time immemorial.

The most prominent occultists are warlocks, who have long and storied histories throughout the nations of the Southlands. Their reasons are as varied as their number, but desperation links all of them. The history of occultism is also a history of the dispossessed, the oppressed, and the madly hubristic. Those who could not find—or would not accept—power by other means.

In a world where magic is relatively common, stealing power and making dangerous pacts in the throes of desperation are the frontiers of established magic—the “dirty underbelly” of magic, more deserving of the term *occultism* when compared to the norm of more accepted magics. This is a shake-up of our expectations for a warlock.

Aspirants of Nuria Natal

Though the god-kings disapprove, Nuria has long been a hotbed of Occultism. The Cult of Set and adherents to dead god-kings are the oldest warlocks in the lands while the Doomspeakers are a recent source of more traditional warlocks.

Even in death, a god-king has immense influence. Their followers in life become a cultural institution, their tomb a holy place, their memory a hallowed thing by which their descendants are judged. This influence begets new followers, especially among those who disapprove of a god-king’s successor.

These organizations are breeding grounds for occult societies, each developing pacts with the nascent, undead consciousness of sleeping god-kings. These occultists are often nobles on the losing end of some conflict, heirs not picked to succeed their parents, and other well-connected Nurians. Such warlocks were more often political figures than adventurers, and the consequences of their actions could become disastrous.

During the reign of Thutmoses XI, three separate warlocks attempted to secede from the kingdom via the orders of their sleeping patron. Over eleven hundred years ago, Khensu attempted to depose his king and

take the throne through his demonic patron, leaving behind an undead-infested pyramid full of ancient treasure when he failed. Even now, the awakened God-Monarchs of Nuria have found entire cabals in court dedicated to helping them. These conspirators are a driving force behind the swirling rumors assailing the throne and the passive erosion of Thutmoses XXIII's authority.

The Cult of Set has an equally ancient but far more ambiguous occult tradition and is rooted not in political hopefuls but in the teeming masses, victimized whenever Nuria goes to war. Farmers traded stories of the sigils to carve and the offerings to make to

keep harvests safe. Occult sigils entered the farm-lore of village elders, a thousand homesteads garnering the pieces of unsigned pacts. Midwives talked of the creatures that might ensure a safe pregnancy, and messengers traded the names of fell things whose talismans might scare crocodiles. Occasionally, someone desperate and genuine enough would put enough clues together, find a sign of Set in a moment of desperation, and make a deal.

Many of these deals were frauds, signed by fiends and fey looking to extend their hold over the desperate. Still, some found servants of Set and became warlocks unlike anything



else in the Southlands. These near-divine warlocks are a vital part of the cult's resurgence in recent days, but the true agenda of their masters remains unknown. Rumors abound that it is in answer to the Children of the Radiant Orb and that they are murdering priests of Aten in the night and feeding their bodies to the wind.

The Doomspeakers house the most recent of Nuria's occultists—and so far the least impactful. These occultists, like the rest of the Doomspeakers, are those who have decided that they are willing to rule a burned world so long as they rule. They have universally thrown in with fiends, for what could one ask for that they are unwilling to give?

These warlocks are symptoms of their times. Soldiers who lost everything in battle against the Mharoti, unable to adjust to civilian life or terrified of their own obsolescence. The families of those butchered by the Children of the Radiant Orb, maddened by the horrific fate of their loved ones. Survivors of burned cities and broken towns, utterly disenchanting with their nation. While the anti-paladins and fallen clerics of the Doomspeakers are figures of endless rage, empowered by their hatred, their warlocks are more tragic figures, though no less deadly for it. Some of the Doomspeakers' most brutal atrocities were orchestrated by Barag Baksh, a **ssadar** (see *Tome of Beasts 2*) who serves as Narn the Crucifier's chief occultist.

Nurian Invocations. Add Scouring Light to your list of available invocations (see below).

Cry for Freedom

Slavery is endemic in Midgard, and the Southlands are no exception. Hundreds of thousands, deprived of freedom, of dignity, of choice, labor across the continent. They do not have the opportunities of the rich and the free, cannot rely on academic magic or equipment or a thousand institutional advantages possessed by so-called self-made heroes. For

many, there was but one option: reach out to horrors in the dark and take their hand.

A dozen secret societies claim to be the first occultists in the Southlands, the first occultists in Midgard. They are all liars, secure in their falsehoods because they wrote the history books. The first warlock in Midgard was a slave, looking for a knife with which to cut their chains.

That it fit neatly into their master's back was fortuitous.

Three thousand years ago, as Glorious Umbuso fell, a slave named Awa drew upon her pact with a djinn and seared her enslaver's twenty-ton skull from his neck. Eight hundred years ago, when Saph-Saph declared her independence, her slaves rose up and channeled the powers of sleeping god-kings into their rebellion. Just over four hundred years ago, when the Uata marched upon their kin and demanded their nation, freed slaves wielded demon-forged blades to demand better from the Ama. Today, when Yasamin the Scarred's sentinels strike at slaver plantations, they channel the unknowable will of alien intellects.

Slave occultism is a deeply varied tradition, passed along by rumor and hearsay among the great flesh markets of the world. Survivors speak of the thing they saw summoned in the night or the tale passed down from slave to slave for five hundred years. Sigils and names, many useless, some not, are whispered in the night.

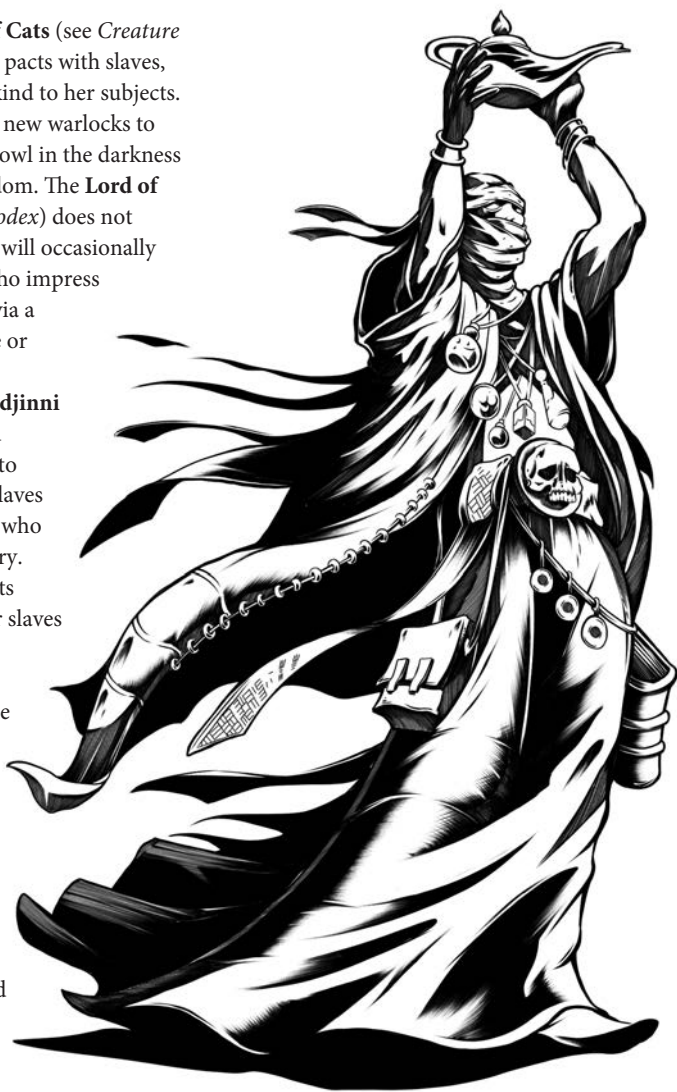
Even in occultism, deprivation rears its head. Many patrons, especially fiends, prefer more powerful targets. Ones who could afford the leather-bound books that have their names, who already have money and connections and status to twist to their ends. The slave's patrons are a different breed entirely. Jungle fey who care for purity of purpose, genies who value a well-spoken word more than a thousand lives, and things from the far realms who deign not explain their motivations but who have never refused a slave's appeal.

Of the fey, the **Queen of Cats** (see *Creature Codex*) is known to strike pacts with slaves, especially those who are kind to her subjects. However, she expects her new warlocks to fight the monsters that prowl in the darkness once they have their freedom. The **Lord of Vultures** (see *Creature Codex*) does not respond to summons but will occasionally draw a pact with slaves who impress him on his travels, often via a particularly daring escape or kindness to his subjects.

Of the genies, Zilaam, a **djinni** known for his cruelty and capriciousness, is known to answer the summons of slaves and sign pacts with those who can amuse him with a story. More rarely, djinn servants of Khamsin will empower slaves when their master is in a generous mood.

Perhaps the most reliable patron of slaves—though also the most feared—is Un-Za-Esh, an ancient intelligence who reaches out to the most devoted and desperate slaves in their dreams. It sends them visions of the untold millions who have died in bondage, offering them the power to take their freedom if they but continue to use that power for the rest of their life. Un-Za-Esh's warlocks are especially common on the spice coast and the Free Cities of Tethys where they turn their new powers against the entrenched slavers of the region.

Un-Za-Esh Invocations. Add Freedfolk's Reversal and Hate Springs Eternal to your list of available invocations (see below).



Jinn's Chosen

There are genies throughout the southlands, but none are more prominent and more influential than those in the Wind Lords' domains. From the patrons of jinnborn tribes to the genie-monarchs of extradimensional manses, these are the greatest of their kind and offer their power to the worthy (see *Deep Magic: Elemental Magic*).

These contracts are unique in occultism, for there is no search for hidden knowledge, no books of arcane lore or ill-advised rituals in the dead of night to strike a deal with the unknown. The genie lords can be approached as any monarch might, and most will hear out a petition for power from any they think interesting. The history of occultism here is the history of the genies of the north and their relationship to the mortals in their domain.

The jinnborn have always had a great many warlocks among their number. Their patrons would reward great poets, valiant warriors, and promising youths with a pact and a promise of service, creating a social class of poet-warriors who could speak of the history of their clan and the glory of their patron. The madness of Boreas and the passage of time have eroded this. Every generation, fewer jinnborn are considered worthy, turning what was once a vaunted social class into yet another rarity. Still, these jinnborn have made their mark on history.

Among the Tamasheq, warlocks are synonymous with adventure and wanderlust, even by the standards of a nomadic people. A pact with a genie lord can allow a warlock to enter and leave the Dominion of the Wind Lords at will, no longer constrained by secrecy and tribal rotations. Such figures are icons of freedom and heroism but also resented as potential threats. The Tamasheq remember Sahlu Rihmiq, a warlock who sided with Boreas and attempted to sell the Tamasheq's secrets to the Mharoti before he was killed. Similarly, they remember a thousand tales of genie-pledged heroes who returned with treasure or arcane secrets, who speak with the elements and guide their tribes, or who rescued the desperate from trouble in the nick of time.

As for non-natives, warlocks of the genie lords are eclectic, their backgrounds and effects on history almost scattershot. A traveler releases a genie from a lamp and wins favor

from a king of the djinn. A half-dead man is thrown into a pit to die, only for a dao to offer power and a second chance. A princess is exiled from her home and finds succor, a wife, and the arcane power to take back her throne in the court of an efreet. They have not had a grand impact on history but are a regular occurrence in tales of great deeds.

Genie-Lord Invocations. Add Elemental Lens to your list of available invocations (see next page).

Thieves of Power

Twenty-nine hundred years ago, the tosculi first arrived in the Southlands. Twenty-eight hundred years ago, Golieze Bok robbed them.

She snuck into the first tosculi hive, posing as paralyzed prey. She evaded their guards, plumbed their secrets, and she took with her a carapace focus from their infernal masters. Golieze Bok became one of the great adventurers of the Abandoned Lands, her exploits ranging across its breadth before her disappearance. She is the first known thief-warlock, but she taught many of her secrets and would not be the last.

To be a thief-warlock is to become a magical parasite, siphoning power from a patron through a stolen pact. Its practitioners are alchemists tapping into the sleeping will of chthonic horrors, dashing thieves who've outwitted fiends or fey, and narcissists who desire power but have the hubris to believe they can escape its consequences.

Few thefts are as bold as Golieze Bok's, and not all thief-warlocks have an adversarial relationship with their patron. Many is the young adventurer who won a game of wits with a fiend out for their soul and took lasting power as their payment. Many is the researcher who found a sleeping, powerful thing beneath the ground and siphoned its power for herself.

But the risk is always there. Many think they have evaded the fey only for their new power

to ruin their life. Many think they have broken a fiend only to be pursued by monsters the rest of their short lives. Many think they have a sleeping source of infinite power only for it to awake, incensed at the transgression.

In the Southlands, the fiendish masters of the tosculi, the Green Walker, and the Egg of Veles are common targets of thief-warlocks.

The hives are a known threat: their fiendish masters have few allies among settled peoples, and the myth of Golieze still inspires many. When the Great Hive burned, it is said that hundreds took symbols of tosculi power as loot. Some became thief-warlocks then, others passed heirlooms down, only for a descendant to unlock their power by fateful circumstance.

The Green Walker is a terrifying target for a would-be thief. The jungle with its vine lords and the threat of infection—and its own telepathic might—could easily result in a fate worse than death. But as many consider the treasures of Yawchaka worth its monstrous risks, a cutting of the Green Walker is the centerpiece of a powerful pact. The successful thieves talk of pieces left behind by the titan or of surviving its voice in your head long enough to pull bark from its body. Most, however, return as tendril puppets if they return at all. Still, some reckon the few successes worth it, that if the jungle is ever to be beaten, the Walker ever slain or banished to whence it came, its own power will be needed for the task.

The Egg of Veles is stranger still, discovered only two hundred sixty years ago and still unknown to most in the Southlands. This branch of occultism is endemic to the lizardfolk, and in truth only they know that other eggs have been discovered, which is a tightly held secret. And even as heretics actively seek to breach the egg to steal its power, some clever occultists seek instead to siphon its power now.

A handful of lizardfolk, largely of the builder and laborer castes, steal chips fallen from the

minuscule cracks and plaster moss against the egg to absorb its essence. This is a fringe religious belief, but those few have gathered enough to create an Icon of Secrets (see below). Such warlocks are novices who have not yet had the opportunity to make history, but their time is now.

Pact of the Thief. You have stolen an Icon of Secrets from your patron, a focus of your patron's temporal power. This icon allows you to tap into their might and memories without their knowledge. As long as the icon is on your person, you gain access to the Arcana and History skills as well as a single feat of your choice. Whenever you level up, you may change the feat associated with your Icon of Secrets.

If you lose your icon, you can perform a 1-hour ceremony to siphon a replacement from your patron. This ceremony can be performed during a short or long rest. The icon returns to the patron when you die.

The icon's form is always obviously magical and tied to the nature of your patron. A fiend's icon may be a still-beating, monstrous heart. A genie's may be a brass star that coruscates with elemental energy. A fey's may be a gilded pelt of an impossible beast, still whispering the secrets of its master. A Great Old One's may be a simple wooden carving that bends space and light, making it difficult to look at.

New Invocations

These invocations are available to warlocks of particular patrons (GM's discretion).

ELEMENTAL LENS

Prerequisite: *Pact of the Genie Lord* (see Midgard Heroes Handbook), *eldritch blast* cantrip

You can spend stored damage in your token equal to your level to reroll all damage rolls from one casting of *eldritch blast*. You can't do so again until you finish a short or long rest.

FREEDFOLK'S REVERSAL

Creatures damaged by your *hellish rebuke* reduce their movement speed by 20 feet until the start of their next turn. The range of *hellish rebuke*, and of attacks that fulfill its casting condition, is increased by 60 feet.

HATE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Prerequisite: 3rd level

You may cast *hellish rebuke* without spending a spell slot. Once you use this ability, you cannot use it again until you complete a short or long rest.

SCOURING LIGHT

Prerequisite: 7th level

You cast *guardian of faith*, which takes the form of your patron instead of your deity. You can't do so again until you finish a long rest.



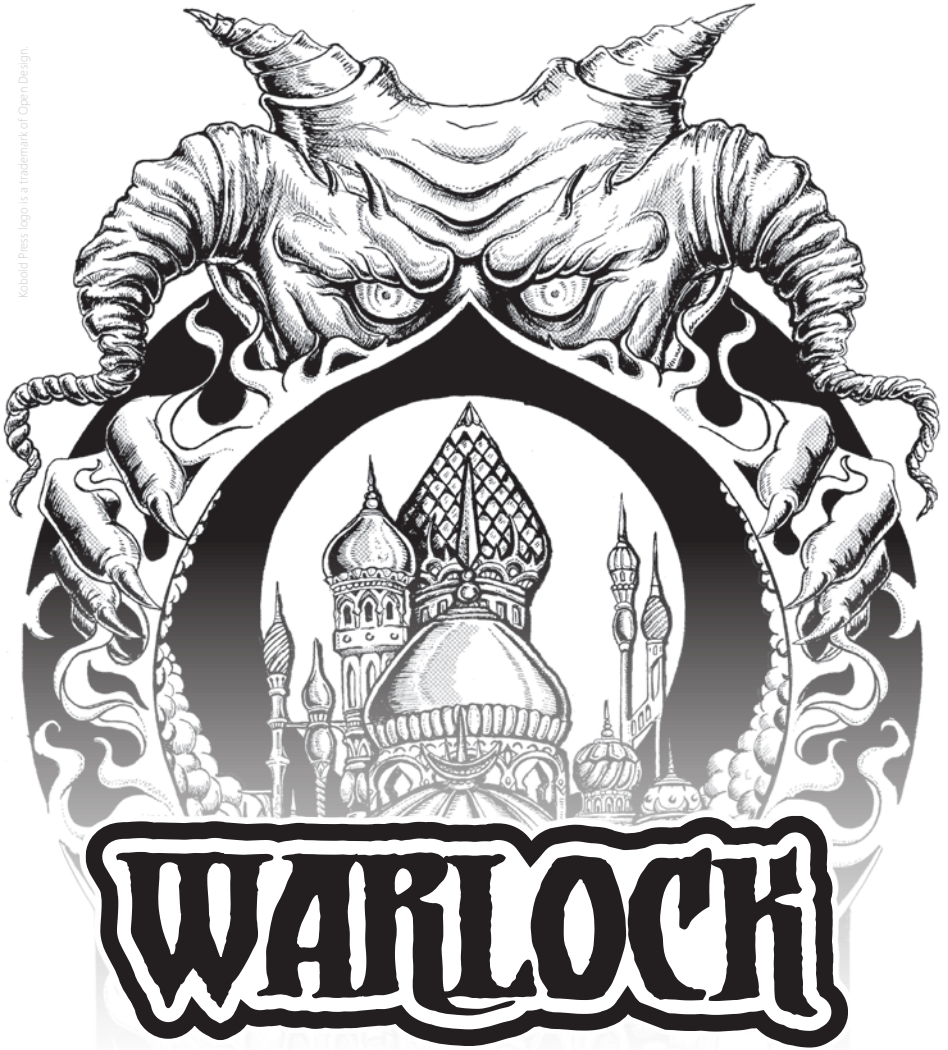
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