

# DESOLATION SURVIVORS

Post-Apocalyptic  
Fantasy Roleplaying



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*"The best way out  
is always through."  
— Robert Frost*



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



<i>Chapter 1: Oruskans</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Goblins</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Kobolds</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Orcs</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Chapter 2: Building Character</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Skills</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Talents</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Flaws</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Chapter 3: Magic</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Blood Rune Magic</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Shadow Magic</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Chapter 4: Equipment</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Common Items</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Melee Weapons</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Ranged Weapons</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Armor</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Chapter 5: Cynosure</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Life in Cynosure</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Notable NPCs</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Places Within Cynosure</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Chapter 6: Communities</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Chapter 7: Friends &amp; Foes</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>Chapter 8: Bestiary</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>130</i>



# Introduction

Welcome to the *Survivors* supplement to *Desolation*, a post-apocalyptic fantasy role-playing game. A roleplaying game is an interactive storytelling game in which one person tells a story that includes the other players. The actions of the players influence the outcome of the story.

The *Desolation* core book is needed to play the game. It describes the high-fantasy world before the Night of Fire nearly destroyed it; details eight races, multiple regions, cultures and magical traditions; and includes all the rules needed to create characters and play the game. *Survivors* expands upon the world as it exists after the Apocalypse.

## The Post-Apocalyptic Genre

There are many examples of post-apocalyptic fiction in popular culture. Perhaps the most common are set after a nuclear war in modern times or the near future. The *Desolation* roleplaying game is set in a fantasy world, but has many similarities with other post-apocalyptic works of fiction. Here are some guidelines that can help set the stage:

- No one is sure what caused the Apocalypse, but many old enemies blame one another for it.
- Life is generally not good, but that doesn't stop people from making the best of things or trying to recreate what was lost.
- A power vacuum has been created, and conflict will often ensue to see who can fill the void.
- Without laws and social mores, the true nature of survivors will come to the fore.
- The environment is more dangerous than it was in the Before because of aftershocks and new, strange beasts.

For more information on the genre and roleplaying in it, see the Storytelling chapter of the *Desolation* core book.

## What's Inside

On the following pages you will discover how to take on the roles of the Oruskan races. Considered to be little more than animals by the more "civilized" races in the Before, kobolds, goblins and orcs are poised for greatness in the new world where civilization has fallen. You will learn the ancient history of each race, how they interact with one another and with the other races, and how they plan to thrive in the After.

Though the Ascondean Empire and other nations have fallen, new rulers and communities are beginning to build their way up from the ruins. The largest of these, Cynosure, is the anchor of the Warlands. Cynosure has always been a city of political intrigue, though the destruction of Ascondean, the city's chief rival, has turned Cynosure's paranoia in on itself. Adventure awaits you in the rubble-strewn ruins of the outer city, the mud flats of its now-dry harbor and the shanty town that grew up outside its walls. *Survivors* includes more than 20 distinct communities, big and small — each with their own history, secrets and motivations for you to explore in the interactive story the gamemaster creates.

You can also choose from the new Skills, Talents, Flaws and magical traditions in *Survivors* to help your characters as they face more than 50 pre-generated non-player characters and strange new beasts, in addition to what your GM creates. Arm your characters with new, exotic equipment and learn how to scavenge everyday items that your character can turn into weapons or items to trade.

*Survivors* tells the story of the lucky few who survived the Apocalypse. It details the places your character can help rebuild or conquer, and the people they can choose to befriend or enslave. You are one of those lucky few. What happens next is up to you.

## What You Need to Play

- A copy of the *Desolation* core book, which includes all the rules and the setting information.
- A gamemaster (GM) to create adventures, roleplay non-player characters (NPCs), adjudicate the rules and keep the story moving.
- Two or more players to roleplay characters who are part of the story. The GM will determine how many players will participate. Between two and six players are usually optimal.
- A character sheet, which is included in the core book.
- Pencil and paper to take notes and track changes on the character sheet.
- Dice to roll to determine how well characters do during the game.
- Something to use as Style points to reward players for good roleplaying.



# A SURVIVOR'S STORY

The farmer looked at his new shovel with pride. Neither a woodworker nor metalsmith, Grahm Sikes had carved the shovel's head from a split log and shaped its haft from an ashwood branch. He had done his best to affix strips of tin along its edge, which he pounded out from a crushed cup. His first thought was to show it to Merriam, but then he remembered.

His wife had been struck blind during the Night of Fire when a brilliant ball of light, like a tiny sun, flashed right in front of her face. It exploded without heat, thankfully, taking only her sight and not her life. Grahm was grateful for that. Looking around, he was even grateful she couldn't see what was left of their farm, though their property had been spared more than those surrounding it.

The chicken coop was destroyed, the corn crib had burned and the farmhouse Merriam had made into a cozy home had partially collapsed. Many of the fields in the valley were still flooded with melting snows, while just a half mile to the west the land was cracked and dry. The cattle stalls held more people than livestock now. During the Long Winter, his homeless neighbors trudged through the snows toward the Sikes' red barn. He took them in, of course. They had precious little to share, but they made do by slaughtering animals and using what was in the root cellar. In all, 22 people from six families joined Grahm, Merriam and their two children during the Long Winter. They lost only six to the cold and sickness.

"Daddy, daddy!" Marie ran up, breaking Grahm away from his thoughts.

"What's wrong?" Grahm jumped up from the stump he had been sitting on, shovel in hand. Just last week a pack of wild dogs had chased one of the children in from the fields. They were driven off with thrown stones and clubs.

"Nothin'," said the little girl, her blond hair falling across her face as she came to a stop in front of him. "I finished my chores. Can I go down to the creek?"

"No," Grahm said, sitting back down. "It's not safe. It's not like Before."

Playing in the creek had been the six-year-old's favorite pastime. She was a bit of a tomboy, much to her mother's dismay. She liked to catch crawdads, skip stones and feel the mud between her toes. But the melting snows had turned the creek into a swollen river.

"I know, but Rom thinks there might be fish in there," she said. "Maybe we can catch some to eat."

"And how are you going to do that, Marie?"

"With these," Rom said, walking up behind his father. He held a thin branch in each hand. From the tip of each stripped branch hung a string, and on the end of the line dangled a bent nail. "Mom braided some of her threads together so they won't break when we get a big fish on."

"Uh-huh," Grahm said. He stood up, looking critically at the fishing poles. "You make these?"

"Yes, sir," Rom said. "They'll work well enough."

"I dunno," said Grahm, unconvinced.

"You get your shovel finished?" Rom asked.

Grahm reluctantly handed it to him.

"I dunno," his son said, trying to mimic his father's critical look.

"Grahm," Merriam called from the doorway of the house.

Grahm hurried to her, leaving his children near the wood pile.

"Is everything all right?"

"No, not really," she said as he got to the door. "Just cause I can't see doesn't mean I can't hear you being a mother hen. That's supposed to be my job."

"Dear, you don't know ..."

"I know your kids want to help you provide for this family," Merriam said. "I know your son is old enough to watch over his sister."



## A SURVIVOR'S STORY

"That boy's gettin' too big for his britches," Grahm said. "You shoulda saw how he looked at my shovel."

Merriam smiled. "I'm sure it's a beautiful shovel, dear."

"It's good enough to dig some ditches to drain those eastern fields," he said. "The other families have been gathering seeds from what was left of their farms. We think we can start planting here — you know, throw in together and share the harvest."

"But that means planting and waiting," Merriam said. "Children are impatient. You won't let Rom hunt with the other men ..."

"He's not old enough to hunt," Grahm said. "Besides, half those men don't know an arrow from a sling. I wouldn't be surprised if they speared each other chasing down a prairie dog."

"Well, then let him fish," Merriam persisted. "You can't protect us all the time and be the only provider. You need to let us help."

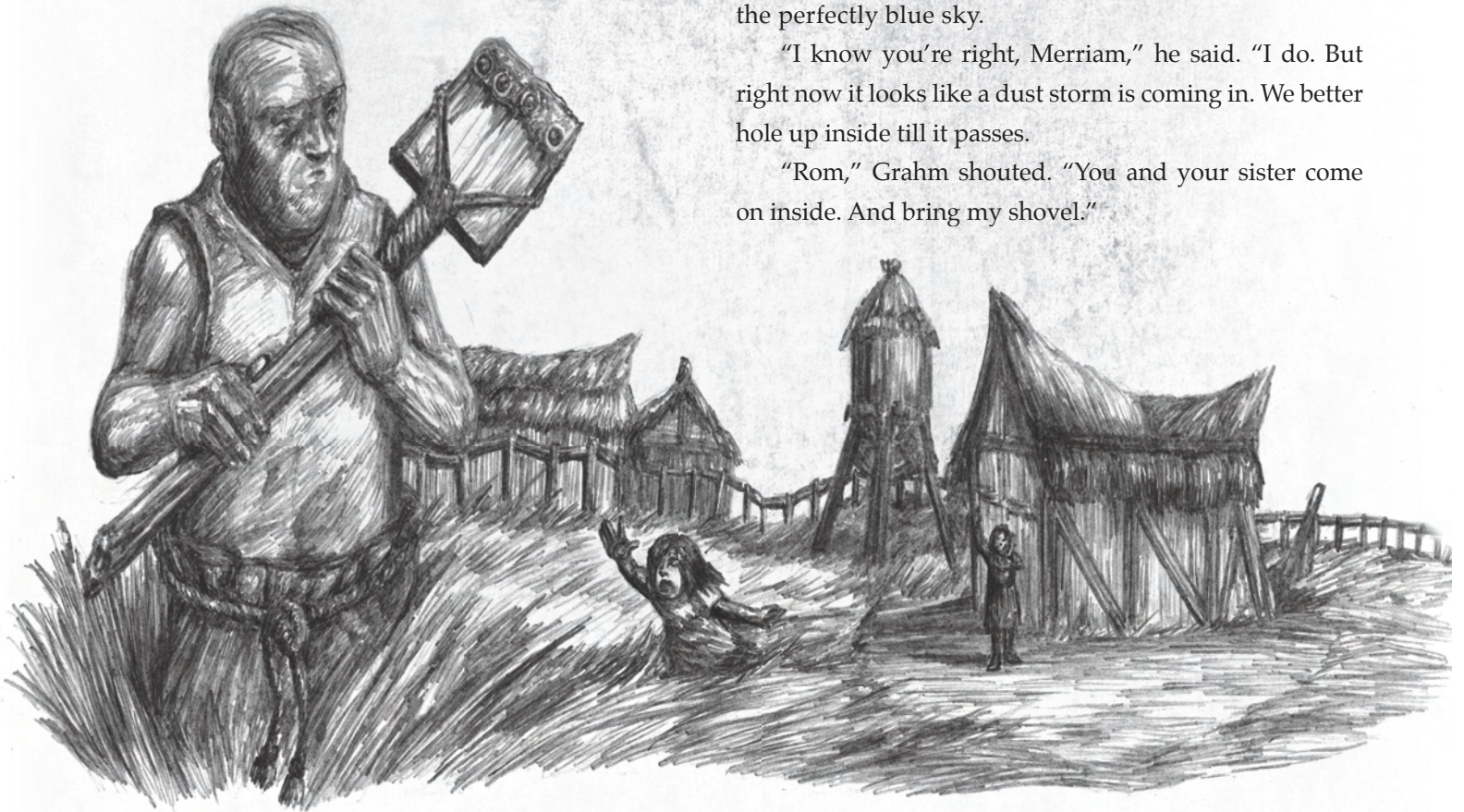
Grahm looked at his wife's face and knew she was right. Her skin was tight against her cheekbones. Her staring eyes were sunken in their sockets. She was hungry. They all were. Everyone had to help now, even though that meant letting his children risk some of the new world's dangers. They had plenty of those to worry about. Freak storms came on fast these days, sometimes dropping hail the size of apples and other times lighting up the sky with hundreds of lighting strikes. The hunting parties had reported strange tracks nearby, and just last night Grahm had heard some animal calls he had not recognized.

Grahm realized he was waiting for the other shoe to drop. He and his family had been so fortunate to survive the Night of Fire, he just had a bad feeling that something would happen to even the scales. Of course, the sun was shining brightly now. It was a peaceful day. If the kids would promise to be back by dinner ...

Then he noticed the cloud of dust to the west. It hung just over the rim of the valley, like a brown smudge on the perfectly blue sky.

"I know you're right, Merriam," he said. "I do. But right now it looks like a dust storm is coming in. We better hole up inside till it passes."

"Rom," Grahm shouted. "You and your sister come on inside. And bring my shovel."





# Chapter 1: Oruskans

*“Civilization had its chance.”*

Lying north of the Empire and Warlands are vast stretches of forests and tundra that are filled with dangerous creatures and uncivilized races. This land was called many different things by those who lived there, but an Imperial cartographer was the first to give it a name on paper. As he recorded his best approximation of the features and boundaries of the untamed land, Jeremiah Orusk seized the opportunity for fame and named it for himself. And so the Oruskan Wilderness was born.

In time, the name was used to describe the different races dwelling in the Northlands. Before being known as Oruskans, these “uncivilized races” were called monsters, inhumans, savages and beastmen. Traditionally, the term Oruskan only included orcs, goblins, trolls and kobolds, despite legends of other races such as giants, ice men and fey folk. Even mongrels, with their obvious Oruskan heritage, are not actually considered to be Oruskan thanks to the “civilized blood” that runs through their veins.

Despite the inclusive label, Oruskans are not a single people. In fact, they clash with one another more than they do with non-Oruskans. Each race has its own unique culture and place in the wilderness, rarely uniting in common goals. Although they have learned to accept being called Oruskan, most prefer to be known by the names of their own races or tribes.

Many southerners think of the Oruskans as mindless hordes who are a part of the wilderness itself. They consider them primitive brutes who have more in common with animals than mankind. But this is untrue. Although not as cultured or advanced, the Oruskans are made up of individuals who have their own motivations, personalities and histories.

Once separated from the civilized races by political borders and cultural divides, Oruskans

will find new opportunities to interact with other peoples in the After. Oruskans possess the skills and resilience needed to survive in the new world, and will prove to be boon companions to the softer races. By the same token, they can also learn and grow from others. Fate often takes unexpected turns — and in these uncertain times, even the strangest of company can grow into allies.

## Goblins

For many, goblins are the stuff of legends — the villains in children’s stories who were blamed for everything from animal attacks to runaway children. Few Ascondeans had ever seen a goblin in the Before, though reports of northern caravans and villages being raided by them were common. Trappers, traders and legionnaires stationed on the northern front knew goblins were real enough, to be sure, but for most of the civilized world, goblins were merely responsible for the things that went bump in the night.

In reality, there is much more to be known about the goblin race than even the wisest scholars of the Ascondean





Empire could find in their libraries. The learned knew only an inkling of the history of goblins. They knew the goblins and ancient elves had fought for centuries to control the forests, long before humans had began to clear the trees and till the land. They knew the ancient elves had been jealous of the goblins' relationship with Nature, and even theorized that the Banishment of the elves from Nature all those years ago was somehow arranged by the goblins. Here's what they didn't know.

## Ancient History

Ancient goblins didn't love Nature like a winemaker loves his vines or a poet loves a sunset. They worshipped Her. They glorified Her. And they hated anyone who abused Her, especially human farmers, lumberjacks and hunters who took more than their share. In the ancient world, only the elves stood between the goblins and the small human settlements the goblins saw as attacking Nature. The elves and goblins competed for Nature's affections for thousands of years, until something akin to a sibling rivalry emerged. When the humans arrived, the ancient elves began protecting them — if for no other reason than to prevent the goblins from destroying the humans.

Countless battles were fought in a seemingly never-ending war. Both goblins and elves used Primal magic and guerrilla warfare tactics against each other. Back and forth the battle lines were drawn. All the while, the human settlements thrived, barely slowed by the occasional goblin attack thanks to the protection, and distraction, of the elves. In time, the elves gained the upper hand, driving the goblins farther north into wild territory long held by orcs.

The orcs did not accept the goblin leaders' offers of alliances. They were already fighting the dwarves for control of the holy underground. They lashed out, trying to force the goblins back. There were simply too many goblins for the orcs to drive away, but the two-front war further fractured the goblins' focus. Still, they fought on, losing ground all the while.

Then, 600 years ago, the goblins won the war against their ancient elven enemies. How or why the elves' druid leaders went insane has been lost to time. The goblins have very few written records, but legends handed down from elders through generations point to two possible reasons. In one tale, a secret force of goblins infiltrated the elves' forests and poisoned their streams with a concoction called Gur'ook Fen, which is Oruskan for Glory Crazed. In another popular story, the goblins stopped fighting the

elves for one month, which they spent in prayer to Nature. At the end of the month of obedience, the goblins asked Nature to cast out the elves and were rewarded for their prayers. Elven history gives no credence to either of the tales from goblin folklore.

Whatever the cause of the elves' Banishment, the goblins suddenly found themselves the victors in a war they thought would never end. However, they had paid a price. Their numbers had been diminished and they had lost much of their ancestral territory to the fast-expanding human settlements. Still, the humans could now be dealt with.

The goblins and orcs settled on an uneasy truce that eventually culminated in the Invasion of the Black Wing (see *Desolation*, page 9), which nearly crushed the humans who were organizing on former goblin land. Though the goblins failed to retain control of the southern lands, their truce with the orcs and kobolds held, more or less.

## Goblins in the Before

The period after the invasion and before the Apocalypse was a time of relative peace for the goblins. Their population soared once again. However, without a war to unify them, three separate groups of goblins emerged.

Some, mostly young, goblins still wanted revenge on the humans. These became known as the Harriers, thanks to their propensity to harass the northern-most human settlements and sometimes mount attacks deep inside the Empire. While never a true threat to the mighty force the Empire had become, the Harriers refused to give up the ancient fight.

Other goblins realized that the Empire had changed the world. The humans had won. These goblins no longer measured wealth and status by the number of trees in their territory or their ability to fell a hummingbird with an arrow. They measured success with the Empire's coins. These goblins were known as Sellers, not only because many of them became merchants, but because other goblins accused them of selling their souls to the Empire. Sellers made significant inroads with all the races of Scondera. They were mostly tolerated, though rarely accepted, by other races because they often traded in hard-to-find (and sometimes illegal) items. Always on the move so as not to overstay their welcome, the Sellers became vagabond emissaries of the goblin nation.

The majority of goblins still followed the ancient traditions. These goblins came to be known as the Green Bloods because of their reverence for Nature. They still took only what they, as individuals, needed. For example, they would consider it arrogant for a hunter to take down a deer be-

# ORUSKANS

cause a deer provides more meat than the hunter could consume. It was only acceptable to take down larger game to feed those incapable of hunting for themselves: the very young, the sick and the very old. This may be one reason goblins have a reputation as excellent archers. They have been taught to take down small game for their meals. Green Bloods would leave berries on bushes for other goblins and animals to find, ignore large animals so that larger predators could hunt them, and wouldn't think of scarring the ground to plant crops. This is how they showed their love for Nature.

Green Bloods stayed in the Oruskan Wilderness, content to take in its beauty and explore its mysteries. They lived in small tribes led by elder Primalist Shamans. The Green Bloods led a fairly peaceful existence in the Before, though some were conscripted into orc or Warland armies.

## *Goblins in the After*

The Night of Fire did not spare the Oruskan Wilderness. Tens of thousands of acres burned, or were felled by high winds, or turned to stone. Goblins, like everyone else, suffered terrible losses. Many of their tribal leaders died during the Night of Fire while trying to use their magic to shelter their followers. Though rudderless and confused,

the goblin nation was not decimated like the Empire.

For many goblins, the Night of Fire was seen as Nature taking its revenge on the human interlopers, just as it had done to the elves during the Banishment. With the Legion in disarray, human towns and cities are ripe for the picking. Harrier tribes are racing to take back as much of the goblin's ancestral territories as possible. In the After, the Harrier tribes swell with new members. Many Green Bloods saw the Night of Fire as a signal from Nature that the time to take up the bow in Her defense is now.

Other Green Bloods are of the opinion that the Night of Fire proved Nature could defend herself just fine. They continue to revere and serve Her. Not much has changed for them. In the After, when there is less to be had in civilized lands, the Green Bloods have all the skills needed to survive and thrive. Some have even taken pity on other survivors and are trying to teach them how to live in the new world.

Of all the goblins, Sellers bear the brunt of the Apocalypse. The valuable network of trading partners they had established is gone. Coins are nearly worthless, and it's more dangerous than ever to be on the road. Some have given up on the idea of trade altogether and have returned to the forests. Others press on, hoping that civilization as they knew it still exists somewhere. Those who continue to travel may be amazed at what they find. Now that the

### A Bedtime Story

In a time not so long ago there was a boy named Edvar Greenvale. Edvar's dream was to become one of Jherlind's famous Unshattered warriors. But he was afraid he would not be able to pass the initiation rite: A leap of faith off Mehra's Tears into a small pool below. He was afraid of jumping — but even more afraid of not jumping. Refusing the rite of initiation would bring shame to his family.

And so Edvar had sneaked away one night to face another fear, hoping to build his courage. He would spend the night in the Oruskan Wilderness, the home of goblins, orcs, kobolds and trolls. He hadn't gone far past the narrow river that separated Jherlind from the wilderness, but it seemed like a different world. Mammoth trees towered over him, and strange sounds could be heard in the blackness. Little Edvar placed his back against one of the great trees and held his father's Kherah tightly, wishing the morning would come.

He had the feeling he was being watched. He knew all about goblins. How they could travel via treetops using their long, gangly arms and legs the way spiders skitter across a wall. How they could run across the forest floor without making a sound. How they could command plants and wild animals to attack innocents. And those teeth — the ones they use to eat human babies — their teeth were as long as daggers and twice as sharp.

It was too much for Edvar. He was literally trembling at the thought of those teeth. He heard a clicking sound behind him and ran away as fast as he could. Branches and briars scratched his face, roots threatened to twist his ankles and tears filled his eyes. Then suddenly, he realized he didn't know where he was or which direction he had run. He stopped and tried to catch his breath.

He thought he saw something move out of the corner of his eye as he wiped away his tears. But the moonlight-mottled darkness was still blurry. He closed his eyes to rub them. When he opened them he saw ... a goblin. Its lanky, sickly green body loomed right in front of Edvar. It looked down at him and smiled, and the moonlight glinted off its teeth.

Edvar screamed, and that's the last anyone ever heard from him.



Apocalypse has brought the other races low, humans, dwarves, island folk, rovers and even gnomes are more likely to treat Sellers the way only mongrels once treated them: with guarded acceptance.

**First impressions:** Goblins still fill most non-Oruskans with fear and loathing when they first meet. With their wide mouths filled with sharp teeth and scratchy voices, it's hard for non-Oruskans not to remember the scary folktales their parents once told them about goblins. However, goblins, especially Sellers, can be quite charming when given a chance. Of course, it might not behoove other races to give Harriers any chance at all. Unfortunately for the peace-loving Green Bloods, most non-Oruskans think of all goblins as killers, rapists and looters.

**Common names:** Goblin names are often based on Oruskan words for various aspects of Nature. Oruskan is a guttural language of short words joined by contractions. Examples include Hil'kite Ner, Co'ran'kol Nok and Guk'lanor Fi'el.

**In brief:** Known by most non-Oruskans as monstrous killers, goblins actually have an ancient history of serving Nature that still affects their actions today. Most goblins will have trouble trusting elves, their ancient enemies, but will give other races the benefit of the doubt if they are treated fairly.

## *Goblin Physiology Traits*

- Natural: +1 attack vs. plants and animals.
- Innate balance: +2 balance, reduce Difficulty to break a fall by 1.
- Gangly: maximum starting Strength of 3.
- Scary visage: -2 to any rolls where appearance to non-Oruskans is a factor.
- Distinct: -2 to disguise because of body type and voices.

## *Roleplaying Tips*

In many ways, goblins are a paradox. They have both the woodland survival instincts of their ancestors and a better chance of being accepted by the "civilized" races than other Oruskans. They revere Nature, even as they fear it. Goblins' stooped build, gray-green skin and rough voice cause many other races to treat them as toadies, though at the same time many are intimidated by their toothy smiles.

Most people underestimate goblins, which is a mistake. Goblins are not the smartest or strongest of the Oruskans, but they are well-equipped to survive in the After. They know enough to use peoples' pre-conceived notions about goblins against them.

## *Kobolds*

For the few humans ever troubled by the "cold bolds," far in the north, these small fierce creatures are something of an enigma. Most of the time, the tribes of the Kal'ari, as kobolds call themselves, are isolated in groups that fish and hunt on the cold, inhospitable shores of the far north. When threatened, the tiny Oruskans either move on to a new area, or turn against the encroaching threat. They fight with silent, savage attacks that seem to be as well coordinated as any legion in the Grand Army. If you see three kobolds, they say, there are six more you can't see.

As unpredictable as kobolds seem to be, they are in truth a simple and uncomplicated race, caring only for themselves. They do not seek conquest or riches, power or territory. Isolated as they are, very little was known about the kobold race until the Long Winter brought them deeper into the ruins of Scondera in greater numbers than before. The Oruskans may have benefited somewhat from the Night of Fire, but only the kobolds found the Long Winter to be their long-awaited time of ascension.

## *Ancient History*

The kobolds have always lived near the sea. The fact that they resemble seals may be a hint to their true origins and is certainly stronger than their resemblance to the other Oruskan races. It's entirely possible that they are not directly related to goblins, orcs or trolls at all.

The kobolds never felt a kinship with any race, let alone the other Oruskans, but they tolerated the presence of goblins more than orc, and human more than goblin. That's not to call their history "peaceful," as kobolds have always had a reputation for being cunning hunters not afraid to take what they needed in desperate times. They were never foolish enough to openly attack anyone significantly stronger than they were, especially orcs. However, they were possessed of a single-minded confidence and sense of righteousness overshadowing any Ascondean's.

They watched in silence as the goblins and elves battled through the endless forests. The goblins knew better than to come to ask the kobolds for military aid, though they could sometimes appeal to kobold Shamans for assistance — brothers and sisters in magic that they were. The kobolds kept away from the orcs, though some would get captured or enslaved by their violent cousins. Few kobolds ever stay slave for long, often outsmarting their captors in the end.

When they first encountered humans, kobolds weren't



# ORUSKANS

terribly impressed by them. They did respect human ingenuity, but saw their large numbers and casual disregard for one another as serious character flaws. The kobold shaman considered human Sorcery to be as heavy-handed and unsubtle as the humans themselves. However, the humans understood subtle threats, which actually resulted in more peace than conflict. There was no reason to interact with humans, so the kobolds didn't.

When the goblins and orcs eventually learned to work together, they turned their eyes on the humans. Few kobolds took part in the Invasion of the Black Wing. Those who did were dragged along for the ride. They fought unwillingly and fled whenever possible.

For most humans, this was their first real experience with the tiny Oruskans. It was usually their last; some were killed at the paws of a dozen overheated and angry kobolds. Others watched them flee the battlefield leaving their Oruskan cousins to die, or killing their goblin and orc masters.

When the Oruskans were driven back into the northern forests by the legions, the kobolds had already fled back to their cold coastal villages. During the period that followed, some of those settlements were destroyed and burned by humans seeking revenge for the Invasion. This only served to make kobolds bitter toward the Ascondeans for their ignorance and stupidity, and toward their Oruskan cousins for drawing attention to the children of Father Sea in the first place.

## *Kobolds in the Before*

For a while, there was peace. The human expansion seemed never-ending, which worried the tribes. They learned to move more often, heading farther north into even colder lands and living closer to Father Sea. The world was clearly getting smaller and more crowded, and the kobolds found it hard to adapt. Like Mother Ice, the kobold race was slow to move forward, slow to melt. However, there were some changes in kobold society after the Black Wing fiasco.

The kobolds held a great and secret conclave of their leaders and shamans at the place they considered to be most holy — the spot where the first children of the Father came ashore. There, they discussed what should happen next. A few kobolds said they should stand their place and fight and kill. That included showing no more tolerance for the other Oruskans. These Isolationists had a loud voice within kobold society, and could point to recent events as a good reason to cut off ties with the rest of the world.

Another group wanted to reach out to their cousins

and more fully integrate into Oruskan society. The only reason the Black Wing Invasion failed, they said, was because the orcs, goblins and mongrels did not have the kobolds fully committed to the cause. The humans would now master the world, they said, because of the kobolds' lack of family spirit. The Integrationists' argument was considered long and hard by the Kal'ari because they knew that the brute force of the other Oruskans, combined with the intelligence and cunning of the kobolds, could result in an unstoppable force.

The final position was taken by the oldest and most respected of the Kal'ari, who were all in agreement. Let every neighbor prove themselves, they said. Let human, goblin, orc and mongrel be judged by their actions. The worthy — those who left the kobolds alone while respecting their land and culture — would be tolerated; the unworthy would be destroyed, or left alone to perish. Living in peace was sacred not just to the Kal'ari, they said, but to all races. The Empire and their legions were perhaps not the best example of the human species, they told their people — just as the orcs were not the best example of Oruskan society.

The Shamans' position won out. It was clear that the humans and mongrels living beyond the borders of the Empire were a different sort from the Ascondeans. Many just wanted to be left alone like the kobolds and were not part of a more violent or expansionist culture. Thus it was not uncommon in the decades before the Night of Fire to see a pair of kobold fur traders bartering for grain or steel in human and mongrel villages in the vast northern reaches of Scondera. The goblin Sellers were not happy with this, but even they were not stupid enough to interfere. Instead, goblins began to push kobold leaders to trade with them, too. The kobolds let the Sellers set up outside their settlements, either trading with them or not.

At the same time, the kobolds kept moving. The incursion of humans farther north and the legion's regular sweeps through the Oruskan Wilderness forced kobolds to relocate often. They stayed one step ahead of the swords and steel of the Grand Army, and out of the grasp of their more violent Oruskan cousins. They carefully kept all other races at arm's length, respected the privacy and distance of those who practiced the same respect, and tore the hearts out of those who threatened their existence.

It's entirely possible that, had the Night of Fire not happened, kobolds would have continued to integrate slowly with the more trustworthy communities around them.

But the Night of Fire did happen.



## *Kobolds in the After*

The things that give kobolds the most pause are heat and fire. They never build fires bigger than those needed to heat water or cook food. They hate the summers and love the winters.

Fire pouring from the skies — scouring the ice and boiling the oceans — was a very special kind of Apocalypse for the kobold race.

Those living on the eastern coast were almost all killed, wiped out by their Father's fury as a vast destructive wave of water crashed upon their settlements. A few survivors were swept deep inland. Far from sea and glaciers, they were still alive — and grateful for their Father's mercy.

The kobolds living alongside rivers or lakes within the Oruskan Wilderness were surrounded by burning forests, with fire raining down upon them. They sought cover in the water, and many survived because of Father Sea's freshwater blessing. By the time the destruction reached the western coastline, it had abated slightly. Western kobolds survived in greater numbers than other races, thanks

to the ice and the sea so nearby. Still, the hissing of the fiery rain upon the snow and ocean was a harsh sound that broke the hearts and minds of many.

Many kobolds perished. Half the race was destroyed at a time when they had never been so numerous. Those who survived gave thanks to Mother Ice and Father Sea, and wept for their dead.

No one's passing was lamented more than the Shamans of the tribe. Their often violent and strange destruction as they tried to work their magic was seen as an important sign from the Mother and Father: Magic was not to be used anymore, at least for a while. The surviving kobold mages were not rejected or blamed, but they voluntarily held back on their use of magic, waiting for a sign that all was well again.

The strange beasts and aftereffects of the Night of Fire were regarded with equal indifference. The world had always been bigger and stranger than the coasts, glaciers and lakes, so the kobolds didn't think anything of new oddness. The places where the oceans had pulled back were more worrisome. The kobolds followed the new coastlines and did their best to rebuild on the Father's edge.

### **Mother Ice, Father Sea**

Even monsters have legends. We kobolds have mythologies that would surprise the average human. The brutal orcs have their buried god and they delve endlessly and pointlessly after it. There is only fire below the earth and they are welcome to it. May they burn in it. The goblins have their own mother, but she is a whore — you can't be the trees and the forests and the grass plains without giving yourself away to everyone. They can have the green; ours is the white and the blue. The trolls? They are the children of the mountains, and as dumb as the rocks from which they come.

There are really only two things that matter. Father Sea, who gives us all life, and Mother Ice, who gives us succor and comfort for all our days. The ocean feeds us. The ice flows and glaciers are our homes. Truly, we are given everything we need and we have no need of more. We have a saying, "Greed is for goblins." We have another saying, "Leave us alone."

In the beginning, Father Sea wept for the world, for it was empty of worthy children. The elves and goblins existed, endlessly squabbling over who their slut mother loved best. The orcs fought and bit and burned within and out. The humans scurried and bred and infected everything with their filth and noise. The dwarves dug their holes. No wonder our Father cried. But the tears of the ocean are not like ours. They are solid things, full of earth and flesh, even as our tears are salt water. Father Sea's tears became our race, the Kal'ari, and we arrived on the ice flows with his tears running through our veins. We are all of his tears and are of one tribe. We do not fight with others of our kind. Together we are stronger, and nothing shat out by a false god or lifeless mountain can defeat us.

The humans call us "cold" and "bold," and we quite like that. Those words have the truth of us. But they also call us Oruskan, like the goblin and orc (and, Mother save us, even the troll). Our cousins are not our brothers, however. They huddle together against the onslaught of the human vermin that has overrun these lands, falling beneath their steel and Sorcery again and again. We stay out the way. We harm no one, we care for no one save ourselves. We hunt and we fish, giving thanks to the Father and Mother every day. We are not hot-blooded. We are cold, calm, peaceful. When we are roused, we are like the Father's great wave. When we must wait, we are like the Mother's endless patience.

We don't need others. Just Father Sea, Mother Ice and each other.



# ORUSKANS

When the Long Winter came, it was a sign from Mother Ice that all was forgiven. The world had been cleansed and was now being made ready for the ultimate kobold blessing. While the other races dreaded the cold and feared the worst, the kobolds gave thanks. The year-long winter was a time for breeding and expansion. Kobolds found themselves ranging far to the south, into broken empty lands under deep snow.

As the Long Winter came to an end, the kobolds were sad but grateful. They'd had a glimpse of a perfect world, and Mother Ice had given them much. With temperatures returning to normal, many kobolds are retreating north with the ice, but some remain in the lands where the Mother led them, waiting for the next sign.

Some have even taken to the road, searching for signs of their Mother's cold embrace. While it's rare to see a solitary kobold, it does happen, especially if he has been accidentally or tragically separated from his clan or hunting party. They do prefer to be in groups, large or small, and gravitate to like-minded individuals of other races when fellow kobolds cannot be found.

**First impressions:** Still something of a mystery to most people (aside from those few who have had dealings with

them), kobolds initially seem harmless. They are tiny, furry folk and are, may the Two Above forgive you, almost cute. That impression never lasts long. Their snarling speech and mouth full of needle-like teeth quickly dispel any illusions one might have. Watching kobolds hunt is like witnessing a perfectly coordinated dance of death. Those who get the chance to get a second impression find kobolds to be clever, quick and cunning — but direct and honest. Trading with kobolds can only be done fairly. Double-crossing them will get you either killed or forever ignored.

**Common names:** Kobold names are based on Oruskan words for the sea, ice and snow, twinned with words describing the nature of that individual. Examples include Kal'bror, Lar'ket, Pral'doror. Their names translate into Ascondean phrases such as Snow-dancer or Ice-runner.

**In brief:** Kobolds are silent, efficient hunters that live in isolation — and that's just how they like it. Alone, they are fragile, but together they are to be feared. They are fiercely proud of their race. They do not like being grouped in with other Oruskans, but are grudgingly loyal to their cousins. They believe in the tenet "live and let live," but don't expect a kind word — or any help at all.





## *Kobold Physiology Traits*

■ **Dual wield:** Reduced penalties when fighting with two weapons.

■ **Quick witted:** +2 Initiative.

■ **Acclimated:** -1 damage from exposure to cold environments.

■ **Small:** -1 to Size.

■ **Coldborn:** -2 to all skill checks in environments over 90°F.

■ **Flight response:** If blood is drawn and you don't have overwhelming odds, you must succeed on a Will-power check vs. amount of damage taken during the fight, or flee.

## *Roleplaying Tips*

When playing a kobold, your first question should be, "Where are my brothers and sisters?" A single kobold, away from his tribe, is either lost or on a very specific mission. They do not like being away from other kobolds and will bond quickly — out of necessity — with anyone else they can trust. Kobolds are naturally intelligent, and only the gnomes match them for cleverness. They are also

incredibly nimble and quick, and will use these advantages at all times. They work best in a group, helping to whittle away at a larger creature's defenses. Indeed, a dozen kobolds working together can take down a much larger opponent.

Kobolds don't like heat and will do whatever they can to cool off. They don't complain about what they can't change, but they find it hard to tolerate stupidity, especially if it endangers the tribe (or their small group of companions).

## *Orcs*

The best known and most vicious of all the Oruskan races, orcs can be found wherever there is land, blood and violence. While their numbers are concentrated in the expansive northern wilderness, they have migrated as far as the Saikin Wastes. Whether by nature or by design, orcs find themselves constantly expanding their sprawling tribes and conflicts into the spaces between civilization — almost as if they're always running out of space to contain their bloodlust.

Unlike their other Oruskan cousins, the existence of





# ORUSKANS

orcs has never been in question. They have always made their presence known and have been at odds with the “civilized races” (and uncivilized races) in one way or another since the dawn of time. That is not to say that rumors and exaggerations don’t abound — they do. But in the case of orcs, these stories have proven to be mostly true.

Brutish. Savage. Bloodthirsty. These are the most common words used to describe orcs — and while accurate, they do not paint a full picture of the hulking Oruskans. Like any other race, they have goals and desires, beliefs and superstitions, even fears and demons. These facets have mostly been ignored, or perhaps they have simply been obscured in the haze of destruction orcs have delivered on all who get too close.

## *Ancient History*

Like all things involving orcs, their origins begin with blood and fire. In a time before memory, when gods still walked and the oldest races were infants, Baranthum emerged fully formed from the heart of a living volcano. Like a force of Nature, the first of the orcs stepped from the burning lava and claimed dominion over all that he surveyed. With his first words, he declared war on the world.

For countless years, Baranthum attacked those who did not kneel before him. Most cowered and ran from his fury. Dwarves buried themselves beneath the mountains. Elves vanished into the forests. Gnomes scurried into their hidden warrens. Those who tried to stand against him were destroyed before history could record their existence. Even the gods took flight, preferring to dwell in the sun or clouds rather than face his wrath.

In time, his opponents lay dead or scattered and his blood cooled. His thoughts turned to creation instead of destruction. Gathering those who had knelt before him and fought at his side, Baranthum transformed them into his own image using his blood. He carved sigils into his subjects’ flesh, infusing them with his own blood, lust and strength.

Now with a race to call his own, he called to the other gods and demanded they recognize his divinity. He had their fear and power, but he desired their respect and brotherhood.

Some were willing, but the dwarven pantheon denied him. Although their race was happy and prosperous beneath the earth, each of the Five Pillars held bitterness in their hearts toward Baranthum for different reasons. Aldwair looked down at him as a presumptuous upstart. Hirnir was angered at his corruption of her runes. Uylr

was jealous of his creation of an entire race. But Greulk was the most opposed, hating the first orc for forcing him to flee from battle. Their refusal reignited Baranthum’s anger, and he set his race against theirs.

This new war raged for generations. Orc and dwarf knew no goal other than to end the existence of the other. Orcs were born and raised beneath, never seeing the light of day while they harried and assaulted the indomitable dwarves. Each of their numbers dwindled. What happened next is a tangle of contradictory legends from each race.

The dwarves claim Greulk challenged Baranthum to single combat and won, tossing his corpse into the deepest and blackest hole. It was from his festering corpse that the Deep Horrors were born. Without their father and leader, the orcs were expelled to the surface — where they remain to this day.

Orcs know this is a lie, of course. They agree that Baranthum and Greulk fought, but their legends differ on the results. Their stories tell that the two battled one another for an orc’s lifetime without a victor. But other dwarven gods grew tired of the duel. Fearful of her brother’s defeat, Vyernir turned to treachery. She traveled into the depths of the earth and made a pact with something terrible. In exchange for their aid in Baranthum’s defeat, she would allow their children to reside in the lowest of the tunnels. More fearful of the orcs than the Deep Horrors, she made the bargain. The next morning, Baranthum was “swallowed by the earth.” Stories differ on what, exactly, that means, but all agree that he ended up imprisoned beneath the earth, the weight of the mountains holding him in place. His struggles shook the world and his shouts caused volcanoes to erupt. But he remained in place and has yet to free himself.

Since his entrapment, his children have multiplied and fought with the same ferocity of their creator. However, they found themselves without leadership and purpose. Their wars often turned inward and they lost the unity that other races seemed to retain. Instead of a single people, they became a nation of tribes competing against one another — and anyone else who lies in their path.

## *Orcs in the Before*

In recent history, orcs have remained unchanged. With the exception of the Black Wing Invasion, they have always followed the same pattern of violence and domination against one another. Some Imperial scholars have called orcs a dark reflection of humankind, lacking the fundamental capacity for enlightenment. They point to

the Warlands as an example of the races' shared aptitude for ambition and aggression. Few, however, have taken the time to understand why the orcs seem unable or unwilling to adopt the civility, foresight and nobility that could lift them from their vicious cycle.

Perhaps the greatest influence to orc culture is their short lifespan. Not only are they more likely to die young in combat, but even the healthiest orcs seldom live past the age of 35. Maturing at a much quicker rate than other races, they are considered an adult by the age of 10 and have children soon after. Their growth and development is accelerated compared to other civilized races. Some scholars believe it resembles the life cycle of a wild animal more than a person.

Orcs are also quick to be born. The normal gestation period for an orc is around seven months. Some orc mothers have been known to give birth three times in a two-year period, performing their duty by filling the ranks of their tribes. In addition to the short birthing cycle, almost all births produce twins and sometimes triplets. These "litters," as other races derogatorily call them, produce three males to every female.

Orcs believe that one's birth can help foretell their destiny. For example, a single male orc birth is expected to do great things, while twin sisters (with no brothers) are harbingers of doom to whomever they marry. The method of birth is also important — with most orc young being cut out of their mothers. An orc mother displays these scars as proudly as a warrior displays those received in battle. Female orcs are expected to have children as well as fight, pairing with fellow warriors to produce the strongest offspring possible.

With their short lifespan and brutal environment, orcs do not have the luxury of introspection and long-term thinking. They must deal with the harsh realities of the here and now, unable to dedicate time to anything that is not a necessity. Music, arts, sciences and other intellectual pursuits were set aside. Even practical skills such as smithing or woodworking were unable to be perfected or elevated within their limited lifetime. Only the art of warfare saw advances and innovation within orc culture, and it has been a painful and slow process.

While there are an incredible number of orcs thanks to their rapid birth rates, there is also an incredibly high attrition rate. Unlike other races, most of whom can expect to see old age, most orcs perish in early to mid-adulthood. In addition to the inter-tribal conflicts and dangerous environs, the Empire made great efforts to thin the orc population.

Although almost forgotten by the current generation of orcs — now more a legend than history — the Black Wing Invasion still festers and nags at the pride of the Empire. Khran'doral and his unified tribes nearly succeeded in toppling and controlling the Southlands. Despite the fact that Khran'doral was a mongrel and his army contained Oruskans of all races, the orcs received the brunt of the blame and retribution. These "cullings," as the orcs call them, have been in effect since the Black Wing invasion.

Another unified orc nation was one of the Empire's greatest fears. If the orcs were to set aside their warring, allow their population to explode and set their sights southward, their military might would be unstoppable. To prevent this, the legions consistently swept through the Oruskan wilderness and attacked any orc chieftain with too much strength, charisma or ambition. These raids managed to prevent any new Khran'dorals from springing up, but also created an intense hatred for the Empire and other humans.

## A Good Death

Vurl, son of Tuhr'mak'ral, walked into the tall grass without looking back at his tribe. To do so would have brought shame on what little name he had. He had lost his arm in his first battle at the age of 10, falling before he could even wound his opponent. He entered battle months later with only one arm, but was captured and ransomed for just two rabbit furs. He never tried again. Now, 22 years later, he was defeated again — this time by age and infirmity.

He had never taken the life of an opponent, so had lived his life as one of the D'ynth — a half-orc who served the tribe instead of his own glory. His name was dead to future generations. The few whelps he sired were claimed by the chieftain. Still, he had forged many weapons, hunted many beasts, and known his fair share of women. His life was worth ending on his own terms.

With only a knife in his hand, he headed into the night knowing he would never return. He knew he would never be given the naming honors of a great warrior or be placed beneath the earth closer to the Buried Father. The best he could hope for would be a bloody death at the hands of a beast as they both fought to survive. This ritual of self sacrifice was his last chance to be strong ... a last chance to be known as Vurl'ha, even if only to himself.



# ORUSKANS

Despite this disdain, orcs have often found themselves in the employ of other races and nations. Although few need more than some coins and an opportunity to spill more blood, some orcs have other motivations. The most frequent is extending their short lifespan. While the search for a fountain of youth is universal, orcs have a more pressing need. Simply living as long as a human would allow glories and opportunities unseen by any orc.

In order to achieve this longevity, orcs have been willing to ally themselves with people they would otherwise avoid or destroy. Their most common employers were the Necromancers of Kar'Danan, who actually delivered on their dark promises and granted extended life. Orcs have also been known to seek employ with those who can provide Loslolin brews and potions, which proved less reliable than the Necromancers' magic.

## *Orcs in the After*

Of all the Oruskans, the orcs were hit the hardest by the Night of Fire. Dominating the northeastern quarter of the continent, they were not protected by the mountains and suffered the full force of the Apocalypse. Whole tribes and towns were lost in the fiery rain and flooding that night, but the orcs endured. While the weaker races to the south saw only a small number survive that night, the orcs lost more than half of their kind. Most had seen and survived similar conditions in their lifetime. Sudden violence, burning villages and mass slaughter were met with the same survival instincts and resilience that a life of war demanded.

The following months took a much harsher toll on the orc population. Battles to absorb one another's people raged across the wilderness, taking additional lives and leaving them ill-prepared to face the coming winter. As the snows began to fall, some of the remaining tribes forged an uneasy alliance to share resources, women and warriors. Some even turned to the lesser races — goblin, mongrels and humans — for aid.

Originally, many of the orcs thought the Empire had launched a magical attack on all Oruskans, trying to finish the job they had started with their reprisals and cullings following the Black Wing Invasion. Most bore a hatred for the soft Southlanders, but were too busy fighting one another and trying to survive to worry about what the next wave of the Empire's attacks would entail. Still, a few of the stronger tribes kept an eye toward the south and saw something they had not seen for many generations: weakness.

When the spring thaw came, things had changed for the orcs. The smaller tribes were reluctant to end their alliances.

Ostensibly, they remained united in order to hold back the larger tribes and protect their lands. But in truth they enjoyed the lack of constant warfare and understood that the survival of their tribes depended upon one another. Despite the dire situation the Apocalypse had left, many of the orcs knew more peace and prosperity than in the Before.

Griv'doral'kir, chieftain of the Burning Stone tribe, stood strongest among the orcs. His tribe was twice the size of his next largest rival's. It swelled with warriors, was blessed with many Shamans, and its women were heavy with children. He found himself without a worthy enemy in the Northlands, so his eyes were set on a larger prize. He would do what Khran'doral could not. He would sweep across the Southlands and destroy the Empire, ensuring his place in history as the greatest orc since Baranthum.

To accomplish this, he would need more than an army at his back. He would need a nation. He sent Shamans to speak with the other tribes and organized a great moot. He explained his plan and offered glory and riches to those who would follow him. The other chieftains were promised power, warriors and voices in the coming war.

The broken tribes saw the wisdom of this unified nation and accepted immediately. A few of the larger tribes also joined, but most of them balked at the notion of bowing before another and were allowed to leave. Those who remained promised allegiance to Khran'doral and became a part of what is now called The Doral'makkir.

The army of Griv'doral'kir is still growing and moving southward. They can smell the fear and weakness coming off what's left of the Empire, and are eager to repay them for all the blood the legions have spilled over generations. Despite the new alliances, old feuds and animosities between tribes have not been fully laid to rest. But more human blood is being spilled than orc blood — which is a first since the time of the Enlightenment.

In addition to their expansion, some orcs have occupied themselves with the return of Baranthum. With the knowledge that the Night of Fire was not an attack from the Empire, minds turned toward their imprisoned father. Shamans were quick to point to the earthquakes and volcanic eruptions as signs of his imminent return. A resurgence of belief has occurred, making the Cult of Baranthum more powerful than it has been since the Black Wing Invasion.

Those who did not join together scattered across the wilderness and continued the same as always: breeding and fighting. They kept clear of the unified tribes and expanded into the voids left by the Apocalypse. Although there are fewer enemies, the world is a more dangerous and unpredictable

place. It is a world suited for the orcs, who are thriving and growing while others struggle simply to survive.

**First impressions:** Orcs have an almost palpable aura of violence about them, and tend to give even the heartiest and most experienced warriors pause. Not only do they look like monsters with their intimidating muscles, superior size and feral smiles filled with sharpened teeth, they also tend to act like monsters with their short tempers, brutish manners and lack of education. Despite all this, orcs are not all monsters. Getting people to see past their race has proven difficult and frustrating to those rare orcs with a peaceful agenda. And with rumors of new tribal alliances and reports of coordinated attacks, the orcs' reputation isn't getting any better.

**Common names:** Names are very important to orcs. It is the one thing that wholly belongs to its owner and can never be taken away. Typically, orcs are given a name with only one syllable at birth. Longer names are reserved for those believed to have a special destiny or are born to powerful parents who expect greatness from their children.

Examples: Hrek, Dar, Genk, Soth, Vurl

Throughout the course of their lifetime, an orc can earn honorifics that become a part of his name forever. It is a great point of pride to earn these descriptors, which are added to the end of their existing name. These extensions can also be given to label someone's personality or mark a memorable event. Great warriors and chieftains often have names that run on for many syllables.

Examples: 'mak = fierce, 'ral = killed 10 foes, 'doral = killed 100 foes, 'nan = gave birth of many warriors, 'ha = strong, 'ook = crazy, 'kir = unusual bravery

**In brief:** While orcs' reputation as savage killers is well deserved and accurate, a fundamental understanding of their culture is missing. Short-lived, the orcs do all they can in a lifetime to give themselves personal glory and leave a legacy for their offspring. With their swelling numbers and competition for supremacy, orcs threaten all around them in order to prove their dominance and ensure the survival of the fittest.

## Orc Physiology Traits

■ **Brute:** Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Strength-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

■ **Natural weapon:** +1 point of lethal damage when using the Brawl skill because of claws, fangs or another natural weapon.

■ **Darkvision:** Ignore any Perception penalties from darkness.

■ **Killer instinct:** If blood is drawn, you cannot leave the fight without succeeding Willpower vs. amount of Damage taken during the fight.

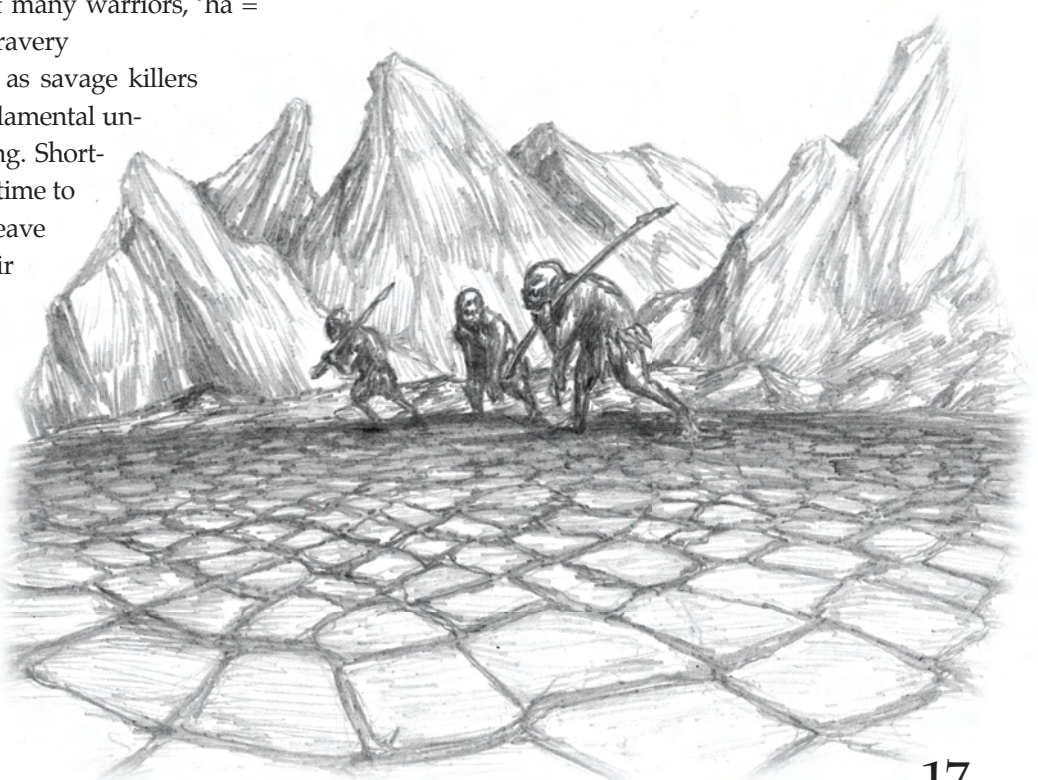
■ **Blind spot:** Poor peripheral vision causes a -1 Perception penalty when opposing Stealth rolls.

## Roleplaying Tips

Regardless of other races' perceptions, orcs are not just mindless savages. They simply believe that every action should be purposeful and effective. Focusing on accomplishing the task at hand, they seldom give thought to the long term consequences or indirect ramifications of their actions. In the world of orcs, the quickest solution happens to come at the end of their spear.

Despite all this, orcs are not inherently stupid. With their short life span and quest for glory, orcs do not believe in wasting time or over thinking problems. They are direct people with little patience for games of intrigue or elaborate plans, especially if they must rely on others.

In dealing with new situations and people, most orcs will first view them as something to be conquered. Others must prove themselves before being accepted as a peer, and even then they will be looked upon as friendly rivals at best.





# A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Warlord Kreel let the sound of pounding hooves lull him into a state of calm before the storm of battle, as he often did when his riders began a charge. The dozens of hooves behind him beat like drums of war against the dusty ground, creating a great cloud that the wind whipped up into the sky.

He was most comfortable on horseback, probably because he had been riding for 25 years — almost as long as he could walk. That was the way of his people. Horses were revered for their speed, power and grace. Horses made them hunters, rather than prey.

His father had been such a hunter — and his mother, a slave, had been prey. His warrior father left a seed in her and she became fat with baby before she could be sold. As was the custom of his people, his father was forced to purchase the woman from his warband. Kreel barely remembered her. As soon as young Kreel was able to ride, his father sold his mother. She was no longer needed.

And so it was in the Warlands, where unemotional practicality was simply a means of survival. His father trained him in the art of war, not out of concern for his safety, but because the warband needed another fighter. Kreel learned quickly. At 10 years old, he was easily the best rider in the warband, and few people challenged him in battle by the time he had come of age.

When the Great Storm decimated the mountains, Kreel wanted his father, who by then had risen to the rank of lieutenant in the warband, to lead a force east to claim territory there. But his father wanted nothing to do with the civilized lands of the east, saying they were full of weakness. The warband survived over time by conscripting the best of those they conquered. His father said the easterners would eventually make the warband weak. Better to grow stronger by fighting and conscripting worthy opponents in the west, his father said.

Kreel disagreed completely. The barrier to the riches of the east was finally down. He found 50 other warriors who would follow him east toward easy prey. He left in the night, without a word of parting to his father. He no longer needed him.

The rumors of the eastern lands being easier than a drunken whore proved true. Kreel and his followers defeated village after village. He had to admit, though, that his father was right about the weak easterners. They were often half-starved and didn't put up much of a fight. Some didn't fight at all. There were a few large settlements that appeared to be too well fortified for the warband to take quickly. Kreel had his scouts mark their locations on their maps. He would return to conquer them when his warband was larger — though that was taking longer than expected. Very few of their eastern captives were fit for conscripting into the small warband. Even as slaves, they were so sickly that they would not fetch high prices. Not yet.

Like a true child of the Warlands, Kreel adapted to his circumstances. He treated his captives well, giving the especially thin ones double rations to fatten them up, letting the lame ride horses until they healed, and keeping his warriors from laying with any of the captives. His followers grumbled and cursed. It was not their way to treat slaves so well.

Kreel knew they gossiped about how the easterners' weakness was wearing off on their leader. But he also knew they would be sated when the slavers paid them with double the weapons and horses that the frail, sickly captives would have fetched. Soon they would be well armed enough to conquer other warbands that had come east, and his power would grow.

The sight of the small settlement his scouts had found snapped him out of his reverie. He hoped these people would at least try to resist. It had been weeks since he had a good fight.

Beside and a few strides behind Warlord Kreel, his lieutenant, Garn, held up one finger, then three, then five. Kreel didn't notice that the order had just been given to kill him.



# Chapter 2: Building Character

*“Times like these will meddle with your mettle.”*

Every player chooses certain Skills, Talents and Flaws when creating a character. Together they add depth to your character and are used in the game to determine the outcome of many of your character’s actions. Information on character creation and descriptions of many more Skills, Talents and Flaws can be found in the *Desolation* core book. For your convenience, we have reproduced the full Skill, Talent and Flaw tables in this chapter.

On the following pages are additional Skills, Talents, and Flaws you can use when creating your character, or add to an existing character when leveling up. This list also includes updates to Skills, Talents and Flaws found in the *Desolation* core book.

## Skill Descriptions

### Academics/Knowledge (Broad)

**Base Attribute:** Intelligence

Academics/Knowledge represents both the hands-on experience and academic knowledge of a particular subject area. In the After, the academic institutions of the Before are gone. What matters now is the knowledge you have picked up on the streets, in the wilderness and from those in the know. The skill check is made to determine how much detail the character knows about a particular discipline. This skill expands the Academics skill found on page 76 of the *Desolation* core book by allowing players to focus on disciplines not covered by a particular academic subject. Your character must focus on a specific discipline, such as:

- Academic subject
- Particular city

- Particular group
- Particular region

### Bureaucracy

**Base Attribute:** Intelligence

Bureaucracy represents a character’s knowledge and understanding of administration, procedures and organization. It also includes familiarity with different types of power structures, such as guilds, governments, tribes, academic institutions, cultures and the military. Characters with this skill know how to manipulate the system to get what they want. Your character may specialize in the following:

- Academia
- Guilds
- Government
- Military
- Particular culture





# BUILDING CHARACTER

## Craft/Profession (Broad)

**Base Attribute:** Intelligence

Craft/Profession represents your character's ability to build, repair or modify items, as well as any other professional knowledge they may have. In addition, it allows characters to have knowledge of the people, materials and organizations that are important to their craft or profession. This skill expands on the Craft skill found on page 79 of the *Desolation* core book by including professions that don't necessarily involve crafting.

Your character must focus on a specific discipline, such as:

- Brewing
- Innkeeping

- Mining
- Smithing

**Note:** Some crafts or professions may be better represented by other skills, such as Farming, Merchant, Performance or Sailing. Players need not take both skills. The Craft/Profession skill is designed for craftsmen and professions not covered by a specific skill.

## Farming

**Base Attribute:** Intelligence

An essential skill in the After, farmers are knowledgeable about weather, soil conditions, livestock, irrigation, pest control, and other aspects of farm management. The Farming skill can help a character produce more food,

Skill	Attribute	Examples of Specializations and Disciplines
Academics/Knowledge*	Intelligence	Academic Subject, Particular City, Particular Group, Particular Region
Acrobatics	Dexterity	Balance, Breakfall, Contortion, Juggling, Tumbling
Animal Handling	Charisma	Birds, Dogs, Farm Animals, Horses
Archery	Dexterity	Blowguns, Bows, Crossbows, Nets, Slings
Art*	Intelligence	Music, Painting, Sculpture, Writing
Athletics	Strength	Climbing, Jumping, Running, Swimming, Throwing
Brawl	Strength	Dirty Tricks, Grappling, Kicking, Punching, Throws
Brew Magic Potion**	Intelligence	—
Bureaucracy	Intelligence	Academia, Guild, Government, Military, Particular Culture
Con	Charisma	Bluff, Fast Talk, Lying, Tricks, Seduction
Craft/Profession*	Intelligence	Brewing, Innkeeping, Mining, Smithing
Create Magic Item**	Intelligence	—
Diplomacy	Charisma	Etiquette, Leadership, Negotiation, Persuasion, Politics, Trading
Empathy	Intelligence	Body Language, Emotions, Intuition, Lies, Motives
Farming	Intelligence	Particular Crop, Particular Environment, Particular Livestock
Gambling	Intelligence	Cards, Cheating, Dice
Intimidation	Charisma	Interrogation, Orders, Stare-down, Threats, Torture
Investigation	Intelligence	Crimes, Enigmas, Interview, Research, Search
Larceny	Dexterity	Lockpicking, Pickpocketing, Security, Sleight of Hand
Linguistics	Intelligence	Codes, Deciphering, Gestures, Lip Reading, Translation
Magic**	Variable	Animism, Beguiling, Blood Rune Magic, Elemental, Necromancy, Primal Magic, Rune Magic, Shadow Magic, Sorcery
Medicine	Intelligence	Chirgery, Diagnosis, First Aid, Herbalist, Veterinary
Melee	Strength	Axes, Clubs, Knives, Spears, Swords
Merchant	Charisma	Appraisal, Contracts, Economy, Hagglng, Hawking
Performance*	Charisma	Acting, Dancing, Musical Instrument, Oratory, Singing
Ride	Dexterity	Bulls, Camels, Elephants, Flying Mounts, Horses
Sailing	Dexterity	Boats, Canoes and Rafts, Large Ships, Small Ships
Scavenge	Intelligence	Battlefields, Businesses, Institutions, Rural Areas, Urban Areas
Stealth	Dexterity	Camouflage, Disguise, Hiding, Shadowing, Sneaking
Survival	Intelligence	Foraging, Hunting, Navigation, Shelter, Tracking
Warfare	Intelligence	Logistics, Organization, Strategy, Tactics, Terrain

\* Broad Skill, \*\* Magic Skill

# BUILDING CHARACTER

choose healthy livestock, predict the weather, or make soil arable, for example. Characters with the Farming skill often also have the Animal Handling skill. Examples of specializations:

- Particular Area
- Particular Crop
- Particular Environment
- Particular Livestock

## Magic

**Prerequisite:** Magical Aptitude Talent

**Base Attribute:** Intelligence or Charisma, based on magic tradition

Magic represents your character's knowledge of a particular arcane art. It is acquired through cultural or formal education. Characters with this Skill are able to cast spells. You have a general understanding of how magic works.

Your character must focus on a specific tradition:

- Animism: The ability to barter with the spirit world. Based on Charisma. Requires Magical Aptitude: Animism Talent.
- Beguiling: The ability to read and affect others' minds. Based on Charisma. Requires Magical Aptitude: Beguiling Talent.
- Blood Rune Magic: The ability to carve magical runes in flesh. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Blood Rune Magic Talent.
- Elemental Magic: The ability to tap into elemental

## The Diplomatic Merchant

Previously you may have been using the Diplomacy or Con skill instead of the Merchant skill. These skills can still provide a synergy bonus to the Merchant skill (and vice versa) if the appropriate situation calls for it.

powers Based on Charisma. Requires Magical Aptitude: Elemental Talent.

■ Necromancy: The ability to speak to, raise and command the dead and siphon others' life force. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Necromancy Talent.

■ Primal Magic: The ability to channel primal powers via totems. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Primal Magic Talent.

■ Rune Magic: The ability to create and use runes of magical power. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Rune Magic Talent.

■ Shadow Magic: The ability to shape and manipulate shadows. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Shadow Magic Talent.

■ Sorcery: The ability to tap into the magical power lines of the world. Based on Intelligence. Requires Magical Aptitude: Sorcery Talent.

## Merchant

**Base Attribute:** Charisma

Merchant represents the talent for buying, selling and trading. It covers dealing with customers, handling merchandise and evaluating trade situations. Characters with this skill can often spot a bargain (or sucker) and understand how to make the best deal possible. They are shrewd businessmen with the ability to inflate the value of their own goods and deflate the value of others'. See Bartering on page 46 for more information on trading in the After. Examples of specializations:

- Appraisal: ascertaining the quality and value of an item.
- Contracts: creating lasting and binding relationships with customers or suppliers.
- Economy: understanding the supply and demand of an area.
- Haggling: getting the best price or trade possible.
- Hawking: drawing attention to your wares in a crowd.





# BUILDING CHARACTER

Normal Talents	Prerequisite	Benefit
Accuracy	—	Reduced called shot penalties
<i>Agile*</i>	—	+1 Dexterity rating
Alchemy	—	Create chemical reactions
Alertness	—	+2 Perception rating
<i>Aquatic*</i>	Rover	Breathe underwater
Attractive	—	+1 Charisma with people
Blind Fight	—	Reduce poor visibility penalty
Block	Brawl 4	+2 Defense vs. unarmed attacks
Blunt Strike	Melee 4	Do nonlethal damage with lethal weapons
Bold Attack	Charisma 3	Use Charisma with a combat Skill
<i>Bold Defense</i>	Charisma 3	Use Charisma for Defense
Calculated Attack	Intelligence 3	Use Intelligence with a combat Skill
<i>Calculated Defense</i>	Intelligence 3	Use Intelligence for Defense
Captivate	Performance 4	Temporarily entrance targets
<i>Charismatic*</i>	—	+1 Charisma rating
<i>Chieftain's Blood</i>	Strength 5, orc	Use Strength as Base for some social skills
<i>Combat Aptitude</i>	Intelligence 3	Exchange attack and Defense dice
Combat Skill	Skill 4	+2 Defense with a non-combat Skill
<i>Danger Sense</i>	—	Reduced surprise penalty
Diehard	—	Improved death threshold
<i>Direction Sense</i>	—	Improved sense of direction
Dual Wield	Dexterity 3	Reduce two-weapon attack penalty
Evade	Dexterity 3	+2 Defense vs. ranged attacks
Fearsome	Intimidate 4	Frighten opponents
<i>Final Stand</i>	—	Make free attack before falling
Finesse Attack	Dexterity 3	Use Dexterity with a specific combat Skill
Flurry	Dexterity 3	Reduce multiple strike penalty
Focused Attack	Willpower 3	Use Willpower with a specific combat Skill
<i>Focused Defense</i>	Willpower 3	Use Willpower for Defense
<i>Giant*</i>	—	+1 Size rating
Guardian	Intelligence 3	Defense bonus to allies
<i>Headstrong</i>	Willpower 3	Use Willpower for Stun rating
High Pain Tolerance	—	Reduce wound penalty
Inspire	Diplomacy 4	Provide Skill bonus to allies
<i>Instant Reload</i>	—	Reload weapon as free action
<i>Intelligent*</i>	—	+1 Intelligence rating
Iron Jaw	—	+1 Stun rating
<i>Iron Will*</i>	—	+1 Willpower rating
Keen Sense*	—	+4 Perception rating with a specific sense
Knockout Blow	Brawl 4	Improved knockout ability
Know-It-All	Intelligence 4	Ignore or reduce untrained skill penalty
Lethal Blow	Brawl 4	Do lethal damage with Brawl
<i>Lifesaver</i>	Medicine 4	Improved healing ability
<i>Long Shot</i>	—	Double weapon ranges
Lucky	—	+2 dice to one roll per session
Mobile Attack	Dexterity 3	Move and attack at same time
<i>Mounted Combat</i>	Ride 3	Attack from a mount without penalty

Normal Talents	Prerequisite	Benefit
<i>Natural Path</i>	Dexterity 3, goblin	No penalty to Move rating in woodlands
<i>Pack Hunter</i>	Intelligence 2, kobold	+2 bonus when hunting or fighting with tribe
Parry	Melee 4	+2 Defense vs. armed attacks
Provoke	Con 4	Provoke opponents
<i>Quick Draw</i>	—	Draw weapon as free action
<i>Quick Healer*</i>	Body 3	Double the normal healing rate
Quick Reflexes	—	+2 Initiative rating
Rapid Shot	Dexterity 3	Reduce multiple shot penalty
Robust	—	+2 Health rating
<i>Run</i>	—	Improved running speed
Seller's Diplomacy	Charisma 2, goblin	+2 to Empathy checks during negotiations
Skill Aptitude	—	+2 Skill rating to one Skill
Skill Mastery	Intelligence 3	Expertise with one Broad Skill
Spirit of Battle	Orc	Bite attack at -2
<i>Spring Up</i>	—	Stand up as free action
Staggering Blow	Brawl 4	Improved knockback ability
<i>Stalwart</i>	—	+2 Body to resist disease, poison and hold breath
<i>Strong*</i>	—	+1 Strength rating
<i>Strong Defense</i>	Strength 3	Use Strength for Defense
<i>Style Study</i>	Intelligence 3	Take advantage of opponent's weaknesses
<i>Subsist</i>	—	Survive without food and water longer
Subtle Strike	Stealth 4	Make sneak attacks
Swift	—	+2 Move rating
<i>Time Sense</i>	—	Always know time
Tinker	Craft 4	Ignore improvised penalty
<i>Total Defense</i>	Dexterity 3	Improved Total Attack ability
<i>Total Recall*</i>	—	Never forget anything
<i>Tough*</i>	—	+1 Body rating
Tough Attack	Body 3	Use Body with a combat Skill
Vigorous Defense	Dexterity 3	Reduce multi-attacker penalty
Weave Hunter	—	+1 when hunting and fighting Weave-touched, -stained, -borne or -cursed
<i>Weave Warped</i>	—	Cause casters more Burn

Faith Talents	Prerequisite	Benefit
<i>Blessing</i>	True Faith	Bless others with Style points
<i>Divine Intervention</i>	True Faith	Style points after a roll give others automatic successes
<i>Higher Faith</i>	True Faith	+2 Willpower in religious situations
<i>Holy Ground</i>	True Faith	+1 to all Skill rolls when on holy ground
Prayer Circle	True Faith	Lead others in prayer
<i>Righteous Presence</i>	Charisma 3	+2 to Charisma when dealing with like-minded believers
<i>Righteous Purpose</i>	—	Extra die to prevent injury in name of belief
<i>Righteous Warrior</i>	Strength 3	+2 in combat when fighting for beliefs
<i>True Faith</i>	—	Style point after a roll to gain an automatic success

## Talent Descriptions

### Alchemy

**Prerequisite:** None

Your character has learned some of the secrets of ancient gnomish alchemy, which allows him to create three wondrous mixtures that can alter physical properties.

**Benefit:** Your character knows how to mix certain natural elements to create minor chemical reactions. For example, he can create a very small explosion, make a liquid that glows, smokes or turns to gel, bind sand together to create a stone, change the color of fire, make sparks by throwing elements in the air, combine elements that create heat or cold, and many other reactions. The player must

Magic Talents	Prerequisite	Benefit
Battle Mage	Magical Aptitude	+1 Spell Damage to do harm
<i>Braiding</i>	<i>Magical Aptitude</i>	<i>Can take additional magical aptitude</i>
Burn Conversion	Magic 8	Take 2 Burn for 1 success
Burn Diversion	Magic 6	Tap Strength to fuel spells
Burn Reduction	Magic 6	Ignore 1 point of Burn
Burn Transfer	Magic 8	Share Burn with willing people
Enhance Potency	Magical Aptitude	Increase Potency of spells
Inconspicuous Casting	Magical Aptitude, Dexterity 3	Accept 1 Burn to not be noticed when casting
Magical Adept	Magical Aptitude	Style points before casting to gain automatic successes
Magical Aptitude*	—	Cast spells from one tradition

Mystic Talents	Prerequisite	Benefit
<i>Ancestral Stream</i>	Gnome	Tap into the Ancestral Stream
<i>Borrow Skill</i>	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Learn or improve a skill from the Ancestral Stream
<i>Borrow Talent</i>	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Learn or improve a talent from the Ancestral Stream
<i>Conversation</i>	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Speak with members of the Ancestral Stream
<i>Focused</i>	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Activate Mystic Talent in combat or stressful situations
<i>Future Glimpse</i>	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Limited visibility into the future
<i>Improved Connection</i>	Gnome, Ancestral Stream	Tap into the Ancestral Stream with greater ease

\* This Talent is only available during character creation  
*Unique Talents are listed in italics*  
*Skill prerequisites refer to Skill Ratings, not Skill Levels*

choose three such reactions that the character knows how to create when buying the Talent. The GM must approve the reactions.

**Normal:** Your character has no knowledge of chemicals or how they react with one another.

**Advanced:** You may buy this Talent multiple times, learning three additional reactions your character can create each time.

### Braiding

*Unique*

**Prerequisite:** Magical Aptitude Talent

Your character has been affected by the chaos of the Weave or has learned to unravel the tangled Weave.

**Benefit:** Your character can learn a Magical Aptitude after character creation or take an additional Magical Aptitude. To cast spells in the new tradition, you must purchase the appropriate Magic skill. Any spell cast using the new skill is cast at one Difficulty higher than normal. A non-magic user who wants to take the braiding Talent must find someone who will teach him the appropriate Magic skill. Braiding cannot be taken at character creation.

**Normal:** Your character can only have one Magical Aptitude, which must be taken at character creation.

### Chieftain's Blood

*Unique*

**Prerequisites:** Orc, Strength 5

Your character's lineage is of kings and chieftains, and it shows in his strength and leadership abilities. Your character's enemies will cower before him.

**Benefit:** Your character may use his Strength rating as the Base Attribute for Diplomacy, Animal Handling, Performance, Con and Intimidation.

**Normal:** Social skills are based on Charisma.

### Focused

*Unique*

**Prerequisites:** Gnome, Ancestral Stream

Your character is more adept at connecting to the Ancestral Stream than others. He has an uncanny ability to concentrate and focus when accessing the Stream, especially during stressful situations.

**Benefit:** Your character can activate any of the Mystic talents during combat or other stressful situations just by paying the requisite Style points.

**Normal:** Connecting to the Ancestral Stream requires deep concentration that cannot be attained during combat or stressful situations.



# BUILDING CHARACTER

## Future Glimpse

*Unique*

**Prerequisites:** Gnome, Ancestral Stream

Through focus and mediation, your character is able to travel upstream into the near future and gain information about events yet to pass. She can try to determine how the future will unfold for a particular course of action.

This Talent is activated by spending two Style points and focusing on a question regarding the immediate future. Future Glimpse cannot be activated in stressful situations, such as combat, as it requires deep meditation.

**Benefit:** The GM makes a secret roll based on your character's Intelligence+Willpower and uses the table on the next page to determine whether your character was able to travel the Stream and glean information regarding the future. You (but not others) may spend Style points to roll additional dice.

The future is difficult to glimpse and has a Difficulty of 4 to pierce in even the slightest way. Depending on what the GM secretly rolls, varying information — perhaps even incorrect information that seems to be correct — may be returned.

**Normal:** You cannot see into the future.

Successes	Outcome
0	Botch – Receives vision that is wrong, but seems correct.
1	Great Failure – Receives clear, misleading vision.
2	Failure – Receives simple, yet vague answer that is wrong.
3	Minor Failure – Receives no answer.
4	Minor Success – Receives simple, yet vague answer.
5	Success – Receives simple vision, cryptic answer.
6+	Great Success – Receives vision, information clearer, less cryptic.

**Note:** The GM may predetermine that no information can be gleaned from the future on a topic for plot purposes. If this is the case, any Style points spent on the Talent should be returned to the player.

## Holy Ground

*Unique*

**Prerequisite:** True Faith

Your character is filled with increased confidence when his feet are on holy ground.

**Benefit:** Your character gains +1 to all Skill rolls (including combat Skill rolls) when he is standing on ground consecrated as holy by his faith.

**Normal:** Your character gains no bonuses when on holy ground.

## Magical Aptitude

*Only available during character creation*

**Prerequisite:** See table below.

Your character has a magical aptitude for a particular magical tradition.

**Benefit:** Your character can learn to cast spells from that one tradition.

Tradition	Prerequisite
Animism	Loranthian race
Beguiling	Rover race
Blood Runes Magic	Dwarven or orc race
Elemental	Elven race
Necromancy	Human race
Primal Magic	Human, Oruskan or mongrel race
Rune Magic	Dwarven race
Shadow Magic	Human race
Sorcery	Human race

**Normal:** Your character cannot perform magic without an aptitude for that type of magic.

## Natural Path

*Unique*

**Prerequisites:** Goblin, Dexterity 3

Your character's affinity with the forest allows him to use natural features in his path to his advantage.

**Benefit:** When moving through natural forested terrain, even that which might be considered a "major problem" (see *Desolation*, page 183), your character suffers no penalty to her Move rating.

**Normal:** Your character would suffer a -4 or -5 penalty to her Move rating.

## Pack Hunter

*Unique*

**Prerequisites:** Kobold, Intelligence 2

Your character is so in tune with his tribe that he gains insight into their actions when hunting or fighting.

**Benefit:** Your character automatically gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls when hunting or fighting with his kobold tribe. This bonus drops to a +1 if your companions include non-kobolds.

**Normal:** Your character receives no specific bonus to attack rolls based upon the company she keeps.

## Righteous Presence

*Unique*

**Prerequisite:** Charisma 3

Your character radiates the aura of a holy person, gar-

# BUILDING CHARACTER

nering respect and deference from most people. Unless opposed to your faith, people generally trust your character and hold him in high esteem. Enemies of your character's faith also recognize his holy nature and act accordingly.

**Benefit:** Your character gains a +2 to all Charisma-based Skills when dealing with others who follow his faith.

**Normal:** Your character receives no bonus to his Charisma-based Skills.

## *Righteous Purpose*

*Unique*

**Prerequisite:** None

Your character has always had a connection to a higher power who watches over her.

**Benefit:** Your character gains one extra die whenever you spend a Style point to increase a Skill or prevent injury while directly furthering her church's mission or deity's philosophy.

**Normal:** Your character gains a single die for each Style point spent.

## *Righteous Warrior*

*Unique*

**Prerequisite:** Strength 3

Your character can feel his deity's strength flow into his own body and guide his blows.

**Benefit:** Your character gains +2 to his combat Skills when fighting to protect his deity's followers, defeat its enemies or further its goals.

**Normal:** Your character receives no combat Skill bonus.

## *Seller's Diplomacy*

**Prerequisite:** Goblin, Charisma 2

A worn-out welcome in the Oruskan wilderness can get your character killed. He knows when it's time to move on, and whether his haggling is about to get him into trouble.

**Benefit:** Your character gets a +2 bonus to Empathy checks made during negotiations (trade or social), and will quickly realize when he has either worn out his welcome or has pushed negotiations too far. The GM may ask for subsequent Empathy checks based upon your character's actions, which may result in your character discovering that he is in trouble if he stays or continues negotiations.

**Normal:** Your character gets no bonus to Empathy checks. The GM may not offer Empathy checks to allow your character to determine the mood around him.

**Advanced:** You may buy this Talent multiple times, gaining a +2 bonus to empathy checks made during negotiations each time.

## *Spirit of Battle*

**Prerequisite:** Orc

When in battle, your character becomes possessed with blood lust, the Spirit of Battle. May the gods protect those before him.

**Benefit:** When engaged in melee combat, your character may (if in range) bite an opponent as a second attack at a -2 penalty without making a Total Attack.

**Normal:** Your character may attack twice by making a Total Attack with a -4 penalty to his primary attack and a -6 to his secondary attack.

**Advanced:** You may buy this Talent twice to receive no penalty when biting as a second attack, without making a Total Attack.

## *Weave Hunter*

*Unique*

**Prerequisite:** None

Your character is experienced at battling Weave-touched creatures. She is skilled at finding, capturing and defeating them.

**Benefit:** You gain a +1 bonus when tracking, trapping or attacking Weave-touched, -borne, -stained or -cursed creatures and people.

**Normal:** No bonuses are received when dealing with Weave-afflicted creatures.

**Advanced:** You may buy this Talent up to three times, gaining an additional +1 bonus each time.

## *Flaw Descriptions*

### *Allergies*

Your character suffers from serious, often debilitating allergic reactions to things in the environment. These triggers could be pollen, fur, dander — or even stranger things such as magic. The allergic reaction can last moments or days. Your character suffers a -2 penalty to all actions while he is in the presence of the trigger. You earn a Style point if your character's sniffles, coughs and sneezes cause him, or his companions, serious trouble.

### *Branded*

Your character is permanently marked in such a way that causes him shame or puts his life in danger. You may be marked as a criminal, coward, magic user, liar or slave, for example. You receive a Style point whenever someone noticing your brand causes serious trouble for him or his companions.







# BUILDING CHARACTER

## *Charitable*

Your character puts others' needs before his own. Sharing limited resources, refusing payment and encouraging others do to so are part of his giving nature. You gain a Style point whenever your character's efforts to help someone less fortunate are at a detriment to himself or his companions.

## *Cheerful*

Your character's chirpy manner and upbeat attitude, no matter what, inspires only scorn and irritation in others. She runs the risk of getting a punch in the face, or worse. Few take her seriously. You earn a Style point whenever your character's cheerful attitude gets her, or her companions, in trouble.

## *Dependent*

Your character is woefully unprepared for life in the After. He has few skills that are useful in the new world and must rely on others to survive. You earn a Style point whenever your character's dependency on others causes him, or his companions, serious trouble.

## *Flashbacks*

Your character experiences past trauma in vivid and powerful detail. Usually triggered by other acts of similar violence, these flashbacks take your character out of the moment. She loses her next action as she reorients herself to her surroundings. You earn a Style point whenever your flashback strikes and results in serious problems.

## *Greedy*

Your character is driven by greed. Her greed may take on many forms. She may want more gold, weapons, food or some other item she considers to be valuable. Whatever it is, she never has enough and doesn't like to share. You earn a Style point whenever your character's greed causes her, or her companions, serious trouble.

## *Haunted*

Your character cannot forget the Night of Fire and the resulting horrors. Seemingly small or random things can trigger emotional outbursts or deep depression. You earn a Style point whenever your character's memories causes her, or her companions, serious trouble.

## *Short-tempered*

Your character has a short fuse. He often flies off the handle at even the smallest slight. His explosive anger may cause him to get into socially uncomfortable situations,

arguments, fist fights or deadly combat. You receive a Style point whenever your character's short temper causes serious trouble for him or his companions.

## *Weave-cursed*

Your character attracts the interest of Weave-touched creatures, people and entities in the vicinity. He is the first person in his group that they attack. Even peaceful and harmless Weave-touched beings will be aggressive toward him. You receive a Style point when this causes serious trouble for your character or companions.

## *Weave-stained*

Your character has been altered by the breaking of the Weave during the Night of Fire, or by a later Weave storm. Rather than being killed outright or granted a beneficial ability, she is now deeply inconvenienced by a mild, or occasionally serious, magical effect. See the list below for examples. You earn a Style point whenever your character, or her companions, are inconvenienced by this effect.

■ **Shadow Touched:** Your character is occasionally rendered insubstantial, for a brief moment. This is never convenient, though it is rarely directly harmful. Suddenly becoming insubstantial while climbing a wall may cause her to fall, for example, but she is also unable to be hurt by the impact. Fading out during a fight results in your character's weapon dropping from her hand, leaving her unarmed when she flickers back into existence.

■ **Burning Hands:** One or both of your character's hands sometimes ignite into flame, just for a second. She isn't hurt, but the book she's holding may catch fire or she may drop what she is holding in surprise (a Willpower check will prevent an instinctual reaction to let go of whatever your character is holding).

■ **Glowing Eyes:** Blue magical energy sparks from your character's eyes at times of stress or frustration. A Willpower check (Difficulty 4) can be made to suppress this effect.

■ **Song of the Harpy:** Sometimes, when your character tries to speak, strange high-pitched screeching emerges instead. These sounds may not always be audible to humans, elves or dwarves, but they greatly agitate nearby animals.

## *Wildborne*

Your character was raised in the wilderness and has never been around civilized folk. He is unfamiliar with many customs and uncomfortable in all but the most humble of villages. You gain a Style point whenever your character's social lapses or ignorance causes him, or his companions, trouble.



# A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Merriam Sikes knew they were being attacked before any of her family and neighbors knew. Without her sight, her other senses had become heightened. She could literally feel the pounding of hooves vibrating through the farmhouse's floorboards beneath her bare feet. At first she wasn't sure what it was. A hailstorm? Another earthquake? But as the vibrations got stronger, it dawned on her.

"Marie, I want you to hide under those fallen beams and don't make a sound, no matter what."

The young girl looked confused, but did as she was told and hid in the fallen timbers where the home had partially collapsed during the Night of Fire.

"Merriam, what's wrong?" Grahm asked.

"Can't you hear them? The horses?"

Grahm looked at his wife as if she were mad, but then he too heard the pounding. He grabbed his shovel.

"Rom, help your mother hide and then hide yourself."

"No," said the boy. "I'm going to fight."

"Rom, now is no time to argue ..."

"I'm not going to argue. I'm going to fight."

Rom was holding a broken table leg. Merriam was holding a small knife she normally used to peel potatoes. Grahm knew they were doomed. Then a spark of hope flared.

"It could be some legionnaires bringing aid," he said hopefully. After all they had survived, all they had endured, surely the Divine Mother would show mercy ...

Then he heard the screams.

Grahm flung open the farmhouse door in time to see old man Strohm trampled beneath the hooves of a red horse. There were dozens of riders. Some wore hideous masks made from branches and leather. Others were covered in paints or mud. There were humans and mongrels and orcs and goblins. He saw one chase down Mrs. Nevins, pull her over his saddle and club her in the head until she stopped moving. It was so quick — like one practiced motion. Grahm was horribly fascinated. He was frozen in place.

Rom rushed past him.

Grahm yelled and chased after his son, but was too late. The boy was already swinging. He connected — table leg to horse leg. The horse bucked and the rider jumped free. Rom backpedaled from the rearing horse, but the rider closed and swung a heavy wooden club at the boy. It slammed into Rom's temple with a sickening thud. The force of the blow flung Rom off his feet. He flipped like a leaf in the wind and then landed in a crumpled heap on the dusty ground.

"Gahhh!" a guttural growl of anger and sadness burst from Grahm's mouth as he charged the rider.

The farmer swung his shovel at the attacker's face with all the strength he could muster. The warrior simply lifted his thick club and blocked the blow. The shovel handle connected with the club and broke. The Warlander advanced and Grahm stabbed at him with the broken shovel handle, but it simply slid off the rider's leather armor.

And then the world went dark for Grahm Sikes.

The sounds of fighting faded away. Warlord Krel removed his battle mask and inspected his horse's injured knee. The damn boy could have lamed his horse. Normally he would have gone easier so as not to kill a potential slave, but he was angered by the cowardly attack on his mount. He kicked at the shovel wielder, satisfied that he had pulled his blows enough to merely knock him unconscious.

He turned to check on his warriors had collected but instead saw Garn and a group of archers leering at him.

"Fire!" Garn said.

One arrow slid along Krel's skull, three pounded into his shoulders and chest, and five took out his legs.

Krel dropped to his knees, badly wounded. Without a word, Garn rode forward and laid Krel low with a club to the face.



# Chapter 3: Magic

*“We were the light. Now we hide from it.”*

**M**agic users were once highly respected members of every culture. The often haughty human Sorcerers of Ascondea, together with their dwarven counterparts, were the architects and artillery of the Empire. The dwarven Rune Casters built unbelievable cities below the mountains, tamed the desert and armed the Empire and Warlands with magic. The Shaman of the less civilized lands were wise counselors and savage chieftains whose tribes depended on them for survival. The Necromancers of Kar'Danan ruled their lands with a skeletal fist. Almost as feared as Necromancy was the curse magic of the island folk's Listeners, which was so powerful it caused mainlanders to tread lightly around their entire race. Only the rovers' Beguilers and the elves' Elementalists had a taste of what was to come for all casters.

The rovers, with their mind control magic, were highly sought after by the kings, chieftains and wealthy merchants of Scondera. But they were also shunned by those who feared theft of their thoughts. The pitiful elves, who were well accustomed to being ostracized, had been without magic for centuries. They finally tasted its power just before the Apocalypse. It gave them some value, but brought them no respect.

After the magical chaos of the Night of Fire, most survivors blame magic users for nearly destroying the world. Never mind that magic users suffered the most as the powerful among them were consumed by the Weave. What the survivors of that horrific night remember could only have been caused by magic: mountains exploding, people mutating into terrible creatures, fire raining from the sky. To the laymen, it appeared that magic users had ended their world.

In the After, most people hate magic users. Some survivors will have enough practical common sense — or raw ambition — to attempt to use casters as tools. Others are simply trying to rid the world of magic

users before they can finish the job they started during the Night of Fire.

Magic users who survived need to be wary about using their powers in the After, or even talking about them. Casters from two magical traditions knew the importance of keeping their magic a secret even before the Apocalypse. Blood Rune magic and Shadow magic casters often lived in hiding, practicing their arts in secret, fearful of being caught. For them, not much has changed.

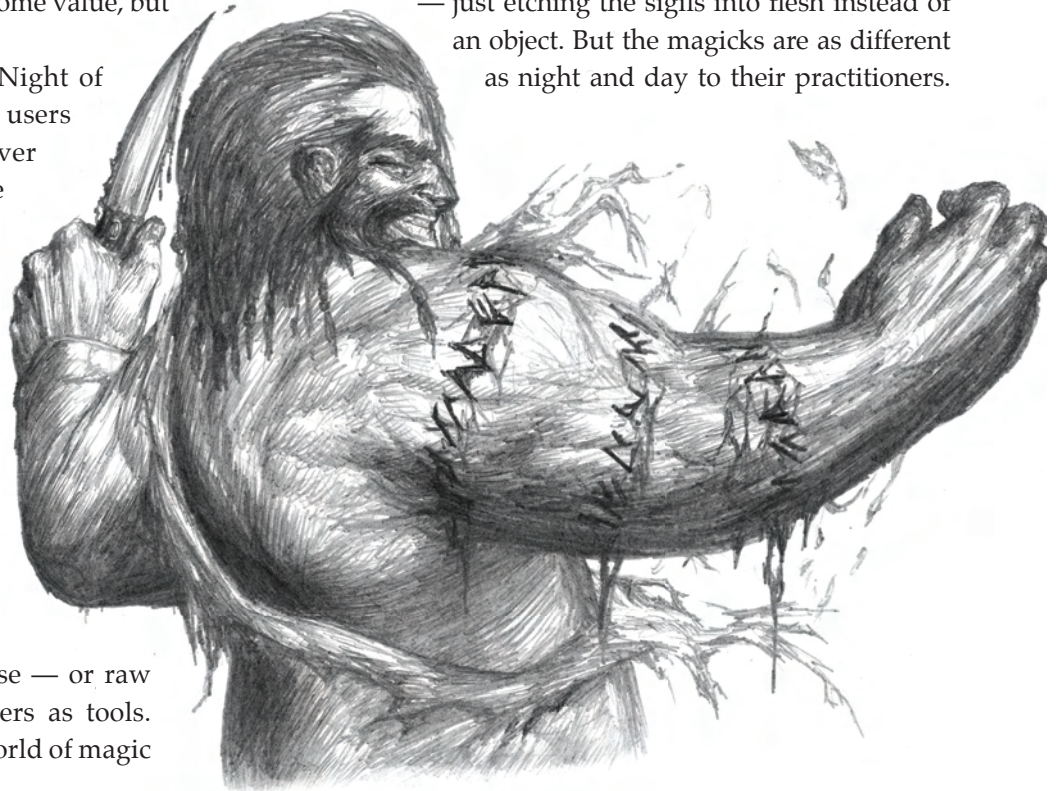
## Blood Rune Magic

**Tradition:** Dwarves, Orcs

**Primary Ability:** Intelligence

Blood Rune Writers are also known as Butchers because they carve a runic language directly into their skin — or the skin of others. They believe the deeper the cut, the stronger the magic. Many are covered with scars, which have become a mark of strength in the After. To an outsider, Blood Rune Writers appear to be casting the same Rune magic as other dwarven casters (see *Desolation*, page 145)

— just etching the sigils into flesh instead of an object. But the magicks are as different as night and day to their practitioners.





# MAGIC

A Rune Magic caster cannot cast Blood Rune spells, nor vice versa. Butchers have their own arcane language they incant as they perform their bloody work and use a separate set of runes.

While orcs have used Blood Runes openly for as long as anyone can remember, it was only practiced in secret by dwarves. When the great peaks of Cair Dhurn buried the dwarves' ancestral home, their dark secret was uncovered. According to ancient dwarven history, Aldwair, the Mountain Father, forbade Blood Rune Magic as a way to keep his youngest son, Greulk, the Blooded, from attempting to usurp the god's throne. Through the ages, High Theocrats have enforced the decree by excommunicating anyone caught practicing Blood Rune Magic. But with no High Theocrat and many once-faithful dwarves believing the Mountain Father had forsaken them during the Night of Fire, Blood Rune Magic is coming out of hiding.

Orcs have no such illusions as to the origins of Blood Rune Magic. They see the infliction of pain through carv-

ing into flesh as the source of the magic's power. Those who believe in Baranthum say Blood Rune Magic is a way to make themselves stronger so that they can use that strength to free Baranthum from his underground prison. Either way, it has been handed down for generations, from one Blood Rune Writer to the next.

## *Rune Magic and Burn*

Some dwarven Blood Rune Writers have not let the Night of Fire destroy their faith. They believe the events were the result of Greulk battling his father and brother Uylu, to take the throne. This belief is particularly prevalent among younger mountain dwarves who felt stifled in Cair Dhurn's community, where the experience of elders was so highly valued. They relish Burn as the birth pains of Greulk's new reign. Other, less faithful dwarves and orcs see Burn as the mental pain that mirrors the physical pain inflicted when carving runes into flesh. Most orcs, however, don't even acknowledge the minor pain associated with Burn. If it doesn't make them bleed, it's not important. There are also dwarves who reluctantly use Blood Rune Magic only in the most dire of circumstances. They view Burn as Aldwair's way of punishing a rebellious child for disobeying his laws. Desert dwarves may see Burn from Blood Rune Magic as a small penance to pay for the benefits the magic brings.

## *Roleplaying Tips*

Rune Writers are a splintered group, with many opposing beliefs on how their magic works and how it should be used. Some dwarves may be reluctant to break old laws by using the forbidden magic. They might hide the scars inflicted during casting. Other Blood Rune Writers — orcs and dwarves alike — may flaunt their scars as a way to intimidate anyone who dares to cross them. A Butcher with hundreds of scars has been Burned many times and has lived to tell about it.

Some desert dwarves study Blood Rune Magic as a way to put a final stone on the tomb of the High Theocrat. Others think Blood Rune-enhanced dwarves using rune-enhanced picks and shovels is the only way to save their buried brethren. It can be viewed as a necessary evil in desperate times, a practical solution to problems in the After, or a precious gift.

Even the origins of Blood Rune Magic cannot be agreed upon. Dwarves and orcs both claim Blood Rune Magic as their own. Orcs even believe standard dwarven

### **Blood Rune Magic Spell Examples**

#### **Easy (1 success required)**

**Modify Skin Color** — You can change the color of your skin or someone else's.

**Hide Blemishes** — You can temporarily hide scratches, scars and tattoos.

**Cause Pain** — You can cause an irritating, distracting pain to your target.

#### **Average (2 successes required)**

**Extract Flesh** — You can remove a small amount of flesh, leaving a gaping wound.

**Harden Skin** — You can increase a person's or animal's Defense.

**Strengthen** — You can cause a person to be slightly stronger.

#### **Tough (3 successes required)**

**Mend** — You can mend a broken bone.

**Enlarge** — You can increase a target's size.

**Levitate** — You can cause a target to become significantly lighter, to the point of making it levitate.

#### **Hard (4 successes required)**

**Increase Resistance** — You can make a target more resistant to magic.

**Invisibility** — You can cause a target to disappear from sight for a short time.

**Seizure** — You can cause a target's muscles to cramp.

#### **Very Hard (5 successes required)**

**Detach** — You can cause a limb to become dismembered.

**Turn Flesh** — You can turn a small amount of flesh into another material, such as stone or air.

**Delay Rune** — You can delay the effects of a rune you carved until you trigger it verbally.

#### **High Impossible (6+ successes required)**

**Brittle Bones** — You can make a target's bones so brittle that they break with the slightest stress.

**Permanency** — You can cause a rune's effect to be permanent.

**Polymorph** — You can turn one living creature into another.

Rune Magic is an offshoot of the orcs' Blood Rune Magic. Ascondean scholars once debated the issue, theorizing how the two cultures might have ancient common subterranean roots, or whether one race once held sway over the other. Most dwarves and orcs simply accuse one another of stealing their magic.

No matter the origin, Butchers in the After had to learn their craft from someone or something — be it a cult leader, an elder who had kept his art a secret until the Night of Fire, or even ancient tomes discovered in the ruins of Scondera.

Regardless of the origin or the casters' reasons for using Blood Rune Magic, they all face the social stigma that accompanies self mutilation. Even more than other casters, Butchers are met with pity, disgust and hatred.

## What Blood Rune Writers Can Do

Blood Rune Writers can etch crude sigils into living flesh and speak strange words to enhance, modify, transform or otherwise affect a person or animal. These runes can affect man and beast in many ways, such as strengthening or weakening muscles and bones, turning flesh into another material, or making people and animals bigger, lighter or more agile, for example.

Blood Rune Magic can heal wounds, but cannot cure diseases or sickness, remove poisons or resurrect the dead. The magical effects of Blood Runes are usually temporary, but can be made permanent by master Butchers. The scars left by etching runes into skin or hide never fade. Blood Rune Magic will not work on plants or any creatures without blood.

### *Blood Rune Magic Example (Average)*

*The orc had Tunard pinned to the ground. The dwarf's dagger was tantalizingly close to the orc's neck, but he didn't have the strength to break the orc's grip and drive it home. The orc chuckled as he leaned in close to finish him off with a bite to the neck. Tunard saw his only opportunity to survive. He was able to maneuver the tip of his dagger against his attacker's neck — not enough to cut the orc's throat, but enough to scratch in a rune. The orc's teeth pierced Tunard's neck as he shouted the magical words that caused the rune to glow fiercely. Both combatants cried out, Tunard from the Burn that shook through his body and the orc from the pain of his neck constricting. The orc's cries were soon silenced as his throat closed. He clawed violently at his neck, rolling on the ground until his face turned a bluish gray and he lay still.*

## Shadow Magic

**Tradition:** Humans (warlands)

**Primary Attribute:** Intelligence

Like all things that lie in the shadows, this magical tradition has remained hidden to those around it. Existing secretly among the people of the Warlands, no one is really sure when it first came into existence or how it was discovered. Imperial scholars only became aware of Shadow magicks in the last 30 years and have yet to unlock its secrets. In fact, only one practitioner had been captured for study and she vanished in less than a week's time — her abilities untested and unobserved.

Most easterners have never heard of these "Shadow Whisperers," and those who have consider them to be little more than figments of imagination or folklore. But the people of the desert and bloody scrublands know better. Primarily female, those born to the shadows are considered both gifted and cursed. In the Before, those with the ability vanished during their infancy, never to be seen again by their parents or loved ones. Superstition says they fell into their own shadow, but in truth they were kidnapped by one of several cult-like





# MAGIC

organizations that find and gather fellow whisperers.

Once taken, little is known of their training, upbringing or allegiance. The comings and goings of shadow magicians have always been a mystery — as have their homes and motivations. Numerous chieftains and generals have tried to find and recruit young Shadow magicians, but their efforts usually fail. Oddly, however, whenever their services are needed or a situation suits their cause, Shadow Whisperers have a habit of showing up.

The true number of Whisperers is unknown, but they are believed to be a fairly small group relative to other casters. In addition to the enigmatic cabals, there are also a handful of independent Shadow magicians who sell their services to the highest bidder. They deal in businesses that thrive in the shadows, such as secrets, assassination and spying. These “rogue shades” typically lead short lives, victims of other Whisperers who jealously guard the shadows’ secrets.

## Shadow Magic Spell Examples

### Easy (1 success required)

**Darkvision** — You can see perfectly in shadows and darkness.

**Deepen Shadows** — You can make shadows darker, giving you a bonus to hide.

**False Shadow** — You can cast the shadow of a different animal or person.

### Average (2 successes required)

**Shadow Pummel** — You can animate your opponent’s shadow to attack its owner.

**Shadow Skin** — You can cover yourself in shadows, protecting your identity.

**Shadow Knife** — You can create a solid weapon out of shadow.

### Tough (3 successes required)

**Shadow Cloak** — You can become invisible in shadows.

**Shadow Limb** — You can use your shadow’s limb to grab, hold and retrieve things.

**Shadow Senses** — You can see and hear through your shadow.

### Hard (4 successes required)

**Shadow Servant** — You can animate your shadow to perform simple tasks.

**Shadow Step** — You can move to any spot your shadow touches.

**Shadow Reach** — You can reach through shadows, ignoring barriers.

### Very Hard (5 successes required)

**Shadow Speak** — You can send your voice through the shadows to a target.

**Shadow Merge** — You can flatten and hide yourself in a shadow, regardless of size.

**Shadow Scry** — You can look through shadows to view a different location.

### Nigh Impossible (6+ successes required)

**Living Shadow** — You can become a living shadow.

**Shadow Move** — You can teleport from one shadow to another.

**Shadow Respite** — You can rest in the stuff between shadows.

## Shadow Magic and Burn

All things cast a shadow when illuminated. Multiple sources of light can create multiple shadows. Whisperers are able to see the shadow created from the invisible light of the Weave. This Unseen Shadow overlays and merges with all normal shadows, allowing shadow magicians to control and manipulate its substance. Almost alive, the shadows respond to their whispers and follow their commands.

In the Before, the Unseen Shadows were crisp and distinct, a perfect silhouette that could be easily seen and manipulated. They were docile and pliable, eager to serve. In the After, the Weave’s light is fractured and inconsistent, creating multiple shadows that are thin and unresponsive. Erratic and temperamental, the shadows of the new world often resist commands. They must be combined to cast more powerful spells and bent to obey through sheer force of will. Sometimes the Unseen Shadow claims a part of the Whisperer, resulting in pain and injury.

## Roleplaying Tips

Whisperers dislike bright lights or total darkness, feeling uncomfortable without shadows surrounding them. Most consider their shadow to either be an extension of themselves or like a twin sister. Some even go so far as to address their shadow as a separate person or require others not to stand on it. Although these eccentricities are the exception, almost all Shadow magicians whisper directly to their shadow when casting a spell.

Perhaps more so than other traditions, Shadow Whisperers rely on their magicks to define themselves. In the Before, most belonged to organizations with defined goals, structures and codes of conduct. The Night of Fire laid ruin to most of these organizations, leaving their members to fend for themselves and chart their own course. For many Whisperers, this will be the first time in their lives they will be truly alone ... or truly free.

Accustomed to hiding their abilities and lurking in the shadows, Whisperers may find themselves at an advantage over other spell casters in the After when blatant acts of magic can cause a caster to be persecuted. Used to suspicion and a lack of trust, Shadow Whispers are adept at disguising their capabilities and intentions. Many are trained to cast their magicks subtly. Because of the dark (literally) nature of their magic, however, Whisperers will often be mistaken for Necromancers and suffer appropriately when revealed.

## What Shadow Whisperers Can Do

Shadow Whisperers possess the ability to create, manipulate and control shadows — especially their own. They can give it form and substance, imbuing it with magical properties, controlling its shape and movement, and even gifting it with limited sentience. In addition to their own, they can also control the shadows of other living creatures.

They have a less refined, but deep affinity with shadows cast by plants, trees and non-living objects. They are able to change their shape, depth and size. They can use them to hide and protect themselves, blind and deceive their enemies, or confuse and obfuscate a situation.

Their final gift is the ability to negotiate the Unseen Shadow, to which all shadows are connected. Every shadow is a dark window that leads to other shadows, which a Whisperer can reach through, step through or even see through. Between these windows lies the “stuff between

shadows,” a black void through which only the most powerful Shadow magicians can enter.

The Unseen Shadow and darkness are not the same. To negotiate the Unseen Shadow in the After requires a strong source of light to create a deep shadow.

### Shadow Magic Example (Tough)

*Rholla followed her intended victim down the crowded street, stalking the young warrior through the streets of Cynosure like a panther. The son of a powerful warlord, he thought he was above the law, that he was untouchable. But he was wrong. Her sisters would not tolerate his kind to soil a holy woman, even if her Divine Mother was from the east. As the sun fell low in the evening sky and the shadows lengthened, she made her move toward her prey and whispered her eldritch commands. Cool shadows wrapped themselves around her like a protective cloak, drawing her in and making her a part of them. Unassuming to begin with, no one took notice as she vanished into the shadows and drew a pair of serpentine daggers.*

*Hidden within the black folds of the shade, the world's colors vanished and its noises muffled. The warrior's screams sounded distant as her blades plunged into his neck and back. Bystanders looked in horror as the man fell to the ground in a pool of blood, seemingly killed only by the shadows. They never noticed a slight girl reappear down the street with a smile on her lips.*

### Starting a New Tradition

Gamemasters can easily create new magical traditions within the world of *Desolation*. The spell casting system is open and flexible enough to handle different concepts and effects without special adjustments.

When creating a new tradition, there are several important considerations:

- What is the theme? What kind of spells can members cast? Although there is some overlap among traditions, the core concept must stand apart from existing traditions. Make sure the spells are useful, but balanced.

- Who can use the tradition? This is often limited by race or geography. Special training or religious ties can also be required.

- How is Burn handled? Each tradition views Burn differently. Try to create a unique, and well-reasoned explanation of why spell casting hurts.

- How is the Weave viewed? All traditions have beliefs that are passed down regarding the source of their magic. A spell caster's perception of the Weave is a personal truth that fuels their abilities.





## A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Shivers shook Graham awake. He was cold and wet with dew. He opened his eyes, or thought he did. The night sky he stared into was so dark it was hard to tell. His head throbbed as the ugly reality of what had happened fought with the sweet ignorance of unconsciousness. Then the fog was lifted and he remembered.

He stood on wobbly knees and started to run toward the house as best he could.

A crumpled figure on the ground stopped him cold. The image of Rom being clubbed flashed into his head.

"Rom," he whispered, knowing his son must be dead, but too afraid to confirm it. Tears streamed down his checks.

A groan from the darkness answered his cries.

"Rom, Rom!" he yelled excitedly as he rushed toward him. But it wasn't Rom.

A large man, wearing nothing but undergarments stained with blood, was lying in the dirt. Graham could make out at least three arrows broken off in the man's shoulders and leg. As the clouds parted, the man's face — the face of a westerner — was illuminated in the moonlight. He coughed and Graham stumbled backward.

His mind raced as he backed away. The man needed help, but all this was too much for the farmer to accept. He just kept backing away until he tripped over a table leg.

He landed with a thud on the cold, wet ground and stared into his son's lifeless eyes.

Kreel's world was filled with pain and white light. He could have ignored both, but not the sound: thump, scrape, shuffle, thump, scrape, shuffle ...

His eyes flickered open, if for no other reason than to put an image with the sound. He squinted in the harsh light of day and gritted his teeth against the increased pain that came with consciousness.

A man knelt on the ground. A boy's body lie nearby. Kreel recognized them. The man held the wooden head of his broken shovel in both hands. He brought it down against the ground with a thump, scraped up a small amount of dirt and flung it onto a pile behind him. Thump, scrape, shuffle. The grave in front of him was already deeper than his elbows.

Kreel moved to stand, but pain jolted from his leg. He gasped and closed his eyes until it passed. When he opened them again the man was standing over him, shovel head clenched in dirty, blistered hands.

"Where's my wife and daughter?" he asked through clenched teeth.

"Slaves," Kreel said in halting Ascondean.

"Slaves," the man said the word as if it was foreign to him. "Not dead?"

"No," Kreel said.

"How do you know?"

It was Kreel's turn to look confused. He looked down and saw his wounds. Four arrows had penetrated his armor. Only one, the one in his right thigh, had made it deep enough to touch bone. His armor, sword, horse — everything that marked him as a warrior — were gone. Garn had taken them along with his position. And, in the ultimate insult among his people, his former lieutenant had left him to die. A warrior couldn't be reborn if he wasn't killed in battle. "Were you a slave?" the man asked.

"Yes. Yes," Kreel lied smoothly. "I ran. They shot me."

"I must find them," the man said, his voice soft and desperate. "I must free them ... after I bury my son."

"I can help," Kreel said. "I am a hunter. You must heal me."

The man ran a shaking hand over his bald head and looked to the east.

"They will go slow," Kreel said, trying to remember enough Ascondean to convince the man. "Many slaves ... on foot. I can tell you plants to speed healing. We will hunt them."

The man nodded and his eyes filled with tears. He turned without a word and went back to his work. Thump, scrape, shuffle ...

Kreel smiled, closed his eyes, and drifted back to sleep.



# Chapter 4: Equipment

*“One man’s trash is another man’s lunch.”*

The After is awash in the remains of the past. The everyday items that were taken for granted in the Before are now highly sought after for supplies, trades and improvised contraptions. Like carrion reapers following the scent of death, scavengers need to know where to look — and hope no one has beaten them to it. Most items have been broken, burned, melted or mangled during the Night of Fire. But even broken items may find new life.

Items made from rare materials in the Before, including coins, are not always valuable in the After. Soft metals, such as gold and silver, may be scarce, but they’re also more difficult to trade in the After. Of course, even fools survived the Apocalypse, some of whom may be willing to trade a sword for a half-burned book, for example.

Some items are more difficult to find than others, depending on the character’s location. It’s usually harder to find a plow in a run-around ship than in a burned-out barn, for example. Geographical and cultural differences must also be considered. For instance, certain clothes and materials may have been in fashion, and therefore much more common, in one region than another. Socioeconomic status can also help determine what will be found. Some items were common to the rich, but completely unknown to the poor. Other items were often made of fragile materials, which may be difficult to find intact after the devastation caused by the Night of Fire.

## Scavenge Attempts

### Step One: Declare Actions

The player describes where his character is looking and what he is trying to find.

### Step Two: Roll Dice

The player rolls his character’s Scavenge Skill and makes note of the result (see *Desolation*, page 82).

### Step Three: Check for Specialty Items

If there are particularly rare or valuable items in the area, or items that are intrinsic to the story, the gamemaster will have already recorded their locations and Difficulty as part of the story creation. Skip to Step Five.

### Step Four: Determine Difficulty

The GM uses the information and table on the following pages to determine whether there are location bonuses and/or Difficulty penalties for the type of material and condition. The GM is free to assign a greater Difficulty to unusual Scavenge attempts. Looking for a fish hook in the desert? A painting on a battlefield? The GM will add to the Difficulty.

### Step Five: Determine Success

If the character’s Scavenge Skill roll is greater than the total Difficulty needed, he has found it. If the character fails his Scavenge roll, the GM may permit him to find a variation of the item or a damaged version of it. See page 38.

### Step Six: Describe the Outcome

If the scavenging attempt is successful, the GM describes the item, including its size, shape, material, color and condition.





# EQUIPMENT

## Determining Difficulty

To determine the difficulty a character has in finding an item, the GM will begin by determining an item's Base Difficulty. As a general guideline on how common or rare an item was in the Before, the Base Difficulty is modified by location, material, condition and number of the items being sought in the After.

A Base Difficulty of 1 is equal to a very common item in the Before, while a Base Difficulty of 6 equals a nearly unique item. This is the starting point for finding an undamaged item in the After. If the item being sought is part of a set consisting of multiple items, add 2 to the Base Difficulty to find the set with no missing or damaged items. For other modifiers, see Location, Materials and Condition modifiers below.

Difficulty	Description in the Before
Easy (1)	Very common
Average (2)	Everyday/common (many per household/village)
Tough (3)	Uncommon (few per village)
Hard (4)	Rare (few per city)
Very Hard (5)	Very rare (might be one per city)
Nigh Impossible (6+)	Unique/Nearly Unique (one/few in the world)

## Location Modifiers

It's easier to find certain items in locations where they were commonplace in the Before. For example, it would be easier to find a cask of flour in a bakery. However, not every village had a bakery. Larger towns and cities often had more specialized tradesmen and merchants. People in small towns were more self-sufficient. They ground their own grain and baked their own bread, so it is unlikely a small town would have a bakery or other tradesmen. Specialized tradesmen such as apothecaries, artists, bakers, bowyers, brewers, butchers, candlemakers, carpenters, cartographers, cobblers, farriers, glassblowers, jewelers, masons, potters, shipwrights, smiths, tailors, tinkerers and weavers could only stay in business in larger towns and cities where enough demand for their services existed. Likewise, small towns and villages probably wouldn't have government buildings, a library or museum, and may not even have a school or church.

If an item is likely to be found where a character is searching, such as the locations listed in the Location Modifiers column, reduce the Scavenge attempt Difficulty by 1. Conversely, if the item is very unlikely to be found

### What Did I Find?

It is up to the gamemaster to determine not only what items are where, but how difficult they are to find. Items that are intrinsic to the game or extremely valuable should be placed in the scene by the GM in advance and assigned a Difficulty rating. To determine what everyday items are discovered by scavenging characters, the GM can consult the tables on page 40 and the descriptions below.

where the character is searching, increase the Difficulty by 1 or more.

The GM may also raise the Scavenge Difficulty by 1 or more if the area has already been picked over.

## Material Modifiers

There are two material considerations to make when determining scavenging success: 1) How common was the material used to make a particular item in the Before, and 2) How fragile is the material?

Material modifiers vary by item because some items — a sword, for example — are more likely to be made of a particular material than other items. Both a sword and a bucket could have been made from steel, but it is less likely that a smith wasted good steel on a bucket. Likewise, a bucket could have been made of clay, but a clay bucket would be more fragile than one of wood and therefore less likely to be found intact.

There are times when materials and fragility cancel each other out. For example, bowls were commonly made of clay in the Before. Clay bowls were so common that a character searching for one will not receive a penalty for the material's fragility because it is likely they can find at least one that survived intact.

The Difficulty modifiers in the Materials column of the chart on page 40 take both rarity and fragility into account.

## Examples of Materials

### Cloth

Listed in order from most to least common in Ascondean in the Before:

- Burlap: A coarse woven cloth made of fibers of jute, flax or hemp. It was often worn by elves in the Before.
- Russet: A coarse reddish-brown to brown homespun cloth. Russet was the favored material for commoners' clothing in Verelanar and Kar'Danan.

# EQUIPMENT

■ **Fur:** The hairy hide of an animal, often worn in the Oruskan Wilderness and Warlands.

■ **Wool:** Fiber derived from sheep or goats. Wool from Jherlind was famous for its density and warmth.

■ **Serge:** A twilled type of wool that originated in Jherlind or Cushulain.

■ **Linen:** A light thread made from the flax plant, or material made of such thread. The finest linens were made in Nascency, and used to create the tabards worn by those who followed the Argent Path.

■ **Cotton:** A soft material derived from fibers harvested from cotton plants and spun into yarn or thread to make fabric. Cotton was prized in the Saikin Wastes for its light, breathable qualities.

■ **Flannel:** A soft material made by weaving cotton and wool together. Successful farmers in Cushulain would often wear flannel instead of wool to set themselves apart from those who were unable to both grow the cotton and raise the sheep used to make the material.

■ **Leather:** The tanned hide of an animal, often a cow or deer. Leather was used by all classes of people to make watertight cups and buckets, armor, belts and straps.

■ **Canvas:** A heavy, coarse, closely woven fabric of cotton, hemp or flax, often used for tents and sails. It is said that the rover's canvas contained silk, making it even more strong and water-resistant.

■ **Satin:** A slick, thick cloth with a glossy finish made from yarn. Before rovers arrived in Scondera, satin was the most luxurious fabric.

■ **Silk:** A slick, thin cloth with a glossy finish made from silkworm secretions. The

rovers brought silk and silkworms to Scondera, along with their secret knowledge of how to make it waterproof.

■ **Brocade:** A heavy fabric interwoven with raised designs, often highlighted with satin or silk. Brocade is a favored fabric of wealthy merchants and nobles.

■ **Taffeta:** A crisp fabric made of silks; it's often used for women's garments.

■ **Velvet:** A soft fabric made of densely piled silks. Only the most well-to-do nobles could afford velvet in the Before.

## Metals

Listed in order from most to least common in Ascondeia in the Before:

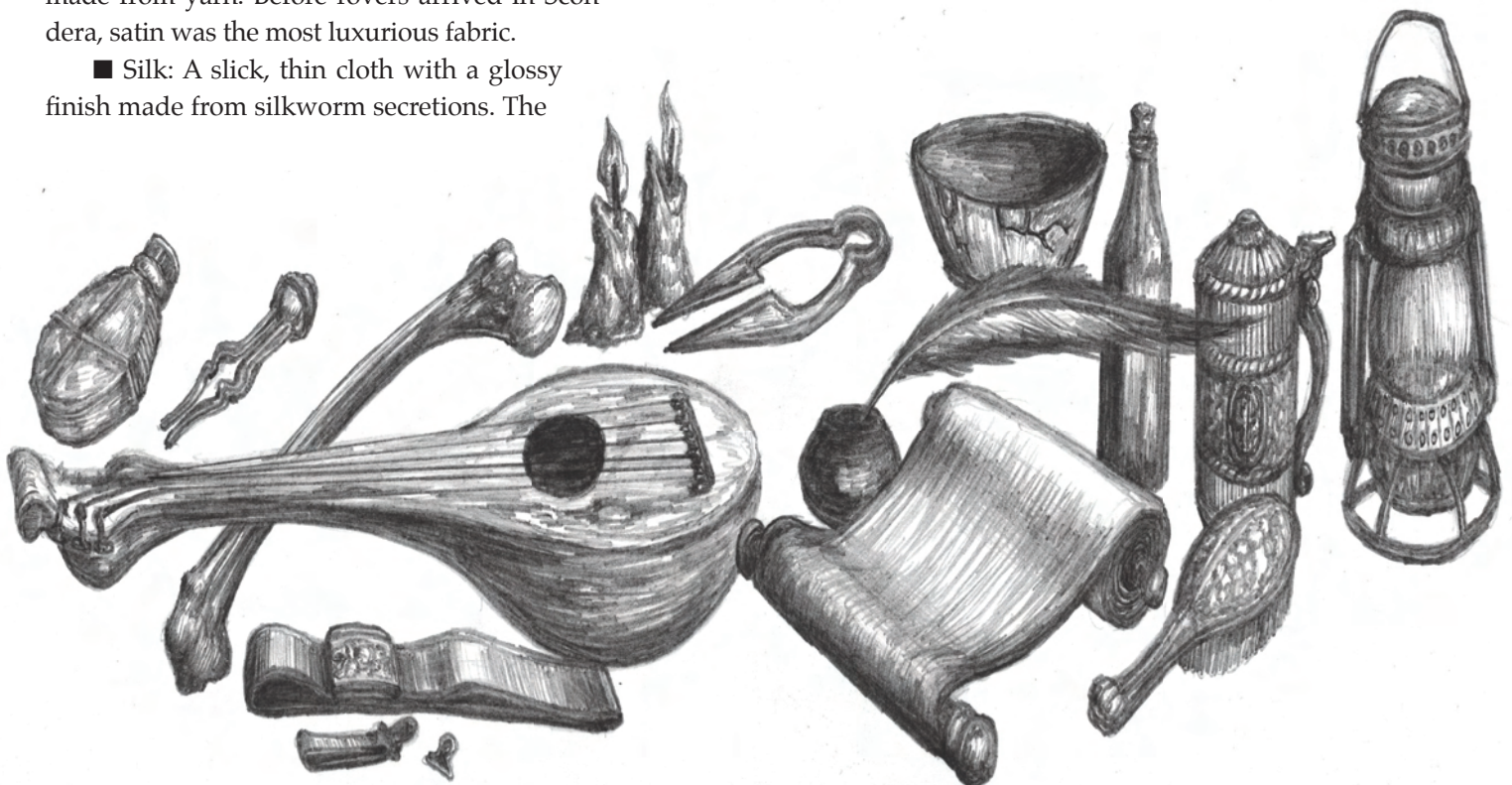
■ **Copper:** A malleable, reddish-brown metal. Low-value coins in the Before often contained copper.

■ **Bronze:** An alloy of copper and tin that is harder than copper. Bronze was used to make weapons and tools by small-town smiths who had not mastered steel production.

■ **Iron:** A malleable silver-white metal. Iron becomes brittle when hardened, but is more ubiquitous as weapons and tools because it requires no alloy.

■ **Lead:** A soft, dense, bluish-white metal. Lead is too soft to be useful for making good tools, but was used for many items because it was so easy to shape.

■ **Tin:** A silvery metal used to prevent corrosion and





# EQUIPMENT

as an alloy in other metals. Tin was the common man's steel in the Before, used to make everything from blades for wooden shovels to shears to cups and plates.

■ **Steel:** A strong, durable alloy of iron and carbon worked together at high temperatures. Good steel requires just the right amount of iron and carbon worked together again and again at the proper temperature. For this reason, pieces of steel are often melted down in the After as a shortcut to making new steel tools and weapons.

■ **Pewter:** An alloy of tin mixed with copper or lead.

■ **Silver:** A soft precious metal often used to make jewelry. Mid-value coins in the Before often contained silver.

■ **Gold:** A soft, dense and rare precious metal that was prized in the Before for jewelry and ornamentation. High-value coins in the Before often contained gold.

## Starting Equipment

In *Desolation*, it is customary for a newly created character to begin the game with a certain amount of equipment. After all, he is not a newborn babe. He has past experiences that will shape the type of clothing, personal items, weapons and armor he may own. However, because *Desolation* can be played before, during or after the Night of Fire, the amount, condition and type of equipment a starting character should own can vary greatly. In the Before, characters are often well-supplied, but in a campaign that begins in the After, they may be left with only the clothes on their backs. During the Night of Fire, any character using their magical items could get killed ... or worse.

GMs should allow players to choose starting equipment based on their character's history, and then approve the choices that fit their character and the campaign. As a general rule, a character starting in the After would likely have two combat-related items, with one being in good condition, one sentimental item from the Before, and one practical, non-combat item. A character starting in the Before should be given much more leniency. Life was good. Depending on the character's backstory, she could have almost anything she needs.

The GM must also be careful to treat all players equally when approving starting equipment so that all characters begin the game on the same footing. It may help to remind the players that heavily armed characters are a much more tempting target to the desperate survivors of the Apocalypse.

## Scrolls and books

■ **Parchment:** A thin skin, often from a sheep or goat, that is stretched and dried to be used as a sheet.

■ **Vellum:** A fine parchment often made of calfskin, lambskin or kidskin.

## Other materials

■ **Clay:** Fired and sun-baked clay could be very durable when thick. Clay bricks were used in many cultures for building. Thinner, more fragile clay was often used to make plates, bowls, cups and other containers.

■ **Grass, reed, wicker:** Often used by Loranthians, rovers and Loslolinites to create baskets, roofs and even clothing, in the case of grass and reeds. Wicker was often used to create lightweight furniture.

■ **Glass:** A luxury item in the Before, often used to make many of the same items more commonly made with clay. Its fragility makes glass even more rare in the After.

■ **Horn and bone:** Animal horns and bones were used by many rural cultures in the Before. They could be shaped into all manner of items, from buttons to containers to eating utensils and more. Bone is less fragile than horn.

■ **Ivory:** A relative rarity south of the Oruskan Wilderness, ivory came mainly from the few traders who had made inroads with the kobold tribes of the North, or with goblins who had ties to the kobolds. It was prized for its beauty.

## Condition

It is always assumed that a character is scavenging for an undamaged item. However, if a player misses his Scavenge roll by 1, his character may find a damaged, but usable version of the item. This is at the GM's discretion and typically only occurs for items common to the environment. For example, the character finds the stein he was looking for, but its handle is broken. He can still use it to drink from, however. If a character is looking for a set of items and the player misses the roll by 1, the character may only find a partial set.

If a player misses his Scavenge roll by 2, he is unlikely to find anything. The GM may instead allow him to find the remains of the item that is no longer usable for its intended purpose. For example, he may only find pieces that clay stein he was trying to find. The discovery is not necessarily useless because imaginative players may find ways to use what they find in new ways.

When scavenging for arms and armor, the GM may allow the character to find a Worn item if the player

misses his Scavenge roll by 1. Worn arms and armor may be chipped, dented, dull or weak. Worn weapons and armor are one botched roll (a roll with no successes) away from breaking.

## Using Scavenged Items

What good is finding a scavenged item if you can't use it? In the After, most economies have failed. Once-precious metals such as silver and gold are no longer as valuable as practical items like tools and food. What can no longer be bought, however, can still be bartered because scavenged items can be traded to those in need of a particular item. In *Desolation*, value is a subjective measurement of how much an individual wants or needs a particular item. See page 46 for more on bartering.

By and large, items are worth more when they're in good repair. But just because your character has found a broken item doesn't mean he shouldn't keep it. Finding the broken remains of items provides a +1 bonus to repair a similar item. For example, if a character already had a broken stein and found some stein fragments while scavenging, the player would receive a +1 bonus to his Craft/Profession roll to repair the stein. These bonuses

can stack if multiple broken items are collected before attempting a repair; however, no more than a +3 bonus can be gained.

Characters can also use broken weapons, armor and other items to create improvised items. Items are considered to be improvised when they are created from something not normally used for that purpose, and the creator lacks the necessary tools or materials to create the item properly. For example, a steel shovel blade tied to a stick could be used as an axe. This is an improvised item because the character did not have a forge to melt down the steel and reshape it, or the time to carve a proper axe handle and affix the blade.

Improvised arms and armor do one less die of Damage and provide one less die of Defense bonus, respectively, than their properly made counterparts. All improvised items are one botched roll away from breaking, unless otherwise noted. Improvised items are also less valuable than well-made versions when bartering.

Players should be encouraged to create new items from the ruins of Scondera. If a character has everything needed to create an improvised item, including the skills, materials and tools, the player ignores the normal damage and defense penalties associated with improvised weapons.





# EQUIPMENT

Item	Base Diff	Location Modifiers	Material Modifiers	Condition	Variation
Alcohol	2	Brewer's, Church, Tavern, Vinter's, Military encampment, Ship	Beer, Wine: +1   Liquor: +2	Spoiled: -2,   Stale: -1   Good	Grog, Mead, Red Wine, Spirits, Sweet Wine, Whisky, White Wine,
Apron	2	Home, Inn, Shop, Smithy, Tavern	Russet, Serge   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Canvas, Leather + 2   Brocade +3	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Blacksmith's, Carpenter's, Cook's, Maid's, Shopkeeper's
Bag	2	Apothecary's, Barn, Home, Warehouse	Burlap, Fur, Russet, Serge, Wool   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Canvas, Leather: +2   Satin, Silk, Brocade, Velvet: +4	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Backpack, Beaded, Embroidered, Sack, Various colors and sizes
Barrel	3	Barn, Brewer's, Merchant's, Ship, Vinter's	Wood, Clay, Stone: +1	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Keg, Canister
Basket	2	Bakery, Barn, Home	Grass, Reed, Wicker, Wood: +1	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes and shapes
Bed Pan	3	Healer's, Home, Inn	Clay, Wood: +1   Glass: +2	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Clean, Dirty, Ornate, Plain
Bedding	2	Home, Inn, Military encampment, Weaver's	Russet, Serge, Wool   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Satin, Silk, Brocade, Velvet: +3	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Blanket, Bed Tick (down- or hay-filled), pillow (down- or hay-filled), Embroidered, Knitted, Quilt, Sheet
Belt	2	Battlefield, Home, Tannery	Rope, Leather   Fabric: +1	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Beaded, Embroidered, Knitted, Studded
Belt pouch	2	Battlefield, Home	Canvas, Leather   Burlap, Russet, Serge, Wool, Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Satin, Silk, Brocade, Velvet: +3	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Beaded, Embroidered, Knitted, Purse
Bone	1	Battlefield, Urban environment		Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Animal, Human, Unknown
Book	4	Cartographer's, Church, Government building, Library, School	Parchment, Vellum: +3	Burned: -2   Ripped: -1   Undamaged	Hardback, Illuminated, Loose-bound
Bowl	2	Apothecary's, Bakery, Home, Inn, Military encampment, Potter's, Ship, Tavern	Clay, Wood   Bone, Stone, Horn, Lead   Tin +1   Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Steel, Glass: +3   Silver, Pewter, Gold: +4	Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Food, Mortar, Wash
Bucket	2	Barn, Home, Ship	Leather   Clay, Tin, Wood: +1   Copper, Bronze: +2   Steel: +3	Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Cinder, Milking, Slop, Water
Butter Churn	3	Home, Barn	Wood: +1	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes
Candles	2	Barn, Candlemaker's, Home, Inn, Tavern	Tallow, Wax: +2	Melted/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes
Cleaning Supplies	3	Home, Inn	Varies: +1 for fragility	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Broom, Brush, Feather Duster, Scrub Mop, Soap
Clothing, Dress	1	Home, Merchant's, Tailor's	Burlap, Fur, Russet, Serge, Wool: +1   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +2   Satin, Silk, Brocade: +4   Taffeta, Velvet: +5	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Embroidered, Various colors and lengths

# EQUIPMENT

Item	Base Diff	Location Modifiers	Material Modifiers	Condition	Variation
Clothing, Footwear	1	Battlefield, Cobbler's, Home, Merchant's, Military encampment, Tailor's	Leather   Furs, Linen: +1   Satin, Silk: +3	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Boot, Sandal, Shoe, Slipper, Various colors and sizes
Clothing, Gloves	1	Battlefield, Home, Merchant's, Military encampment, Tailor's	Leather   Linen, Cotton, Wool: +2   Satin, Silk: +3   Velvet: +4	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Cold-weather, Dandy, Elbow-length, Work, Various color and sizes
Clothing, Headwear	1	Home, Merchant's, Military encampment, Tailor's	Burlap, Straw, Fur, Russet, Serge, Wool   Linen, Cotton, Flannel, Leather: +1   Satin, Silk, Brocade: +3   Taffeta, Velvet: +4	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Bonnet, Broad-brimmed Hat, Cap, Caul, Headband, Hood, Nightcap, Scarf, Veil, Various colors and sizes
Clothing, Outerwear	1	Battlefield, Home, Merchant's, Military encampment, Tailor's,	Burlap, Straw, Fur, Russet, Serge, Wool   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Canvas, Leather: +2   Satin, Silk, Brocade: +3   Taffeta, Velvet: +4	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Apron, Cape, Cloak, Embroidered, Gorget, Robe, Scarf, Surcoat, Various colors and sizes
Clothing, Trousers	1	Home, Tailor's, Merchant's, Battlefield, Military encampment	Fur, Russet, Serge, Wool   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Leather: +2   Satin, Silk, Brocade: +3   Velvet: +4	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Breeches, Hose, Embroidered, Various colors and sizes
Clothing, Shirt	1	Battlefield, Home, Merchant's, Military encampment, Tailor's	Fur, Russet, Serge, Wool   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Leather: +2   Satin, Silk, Brocade: +3   Taffeta, Velvet: +4	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Collared, Embroidered, Long Tunic, Long-sleeved, Short-sleeved, Toga, Tunic, Various colors and sizes
Clothing, Skirt	1	Home, Merchant's, Military encampment, Tailor's	Burlap, Straw, Fur, Russet, Serge, Wool   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Leather: +2   Satin, Silk, Brocade: +3   Taffeta, Velvet: +4	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Beaded, Embroidered, Various lengths and colors
Clothing, Undergarment	1	Battlefield, Home, Merchant's, Military encampment, Tailor's	Linen: +1   Silk, Satin: +3	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Hosiery, Girdle, Smock, Under-tunic
Coin	3	Government buildings, Home, Merchant's, Moneylender's, Tavern	Clay, Wood, Bone, Stone, Horn, Lead, Tin, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +1   Silver: +2   Pewter, Steel: +3   Glass, Gold: +4	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes and engravings
Container, Liquid	3	Apothecary's, Glassblower, Home, Inn, Merchant's, Military encampment, Potter's, Ship, Tavern	Clay, Wood, Bone, Stone, Horn, Lead   Tin, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +1   Steel, Glass: +3   Silver, Pewter: +4   Gold: +5	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Bottle, Decanter, Flagon, Flask, Inkwell, Phial, Pitcher, Vase
Cooking Utensils	2	Apothecary's, Home, Inn, Merchant's, Military encampment, Ship, Tavern	Tin, Wood: +1   Clay, Bone, Stone, Horn, Lead, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel, Glass: +4   Gold: +5	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Ladle, Large Spoon, Pestle, Rolling Pin, Spit,
Cooking Vessel	2	Apothecary's, Glassblower, Home, Inn, Merchant's, Military encampment, Potter's, Ship, Tavern	Clay, Stone: +1   Bronze, Tin, Copper, Iron: +2   Steel: +3   Glass: +4	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Cauldron, Kettle, Pan, Pot
Crate	2	Barn, Home, Merchant's, Mine, Ship, Tavern, Warehouse	Wood: +1	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes
Cup	2	Home, Inn, Merchant's, Potter's, Ship, Tavern	Tin, Wood: +1   Clay, Bone, Stone, Horn, Lead, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel, Glass: +4   Gold: +5	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Glass, Goblet, Horn, Mug, Stein
Eating Utensil	1	Home, Inn, Merchant's, Ship, Tavern	Tin, Wood: +1   Clay, Bone, Stone, Horn, Lead, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel, Glass: +4   Gold: +5	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Fork, Knife, Spoon



# EQUIPMENT

Item	Base Diff	Location Modifiers	Material Modifiers	Condition	Variation
Fabric	2	Cobbler's, Home, Tailor's, Tanner's, Weaver's	Burlap, Fur, Russet, Serge, Wool   Linen, Cotton, Flannel: +1   Canvas, Leather: +2   Satin, Silk, Brocade: +3   Taffeta, Velvet: +4	Burned/Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Bandages, Beaded, Embroidered, Rag, Raw, Various colors and lengths
Farm Implement	3	Barn	Wood: +1   Bronze, Tin, Copper, Iron: +2   Steel: +3	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Hoe, Plow, Shovel, Yoke
Fastener	1	Home, Tailor's shop, Tinkerer's	Bone, Stone   Clay, Wood, Horn: +1   Tin, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel, Glass: +4   Gold: +5	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Buckle, Button, Hook,
Figurine	4	Church, Glassblower's, Museum, Upper-class home	Bone, Stone   Clay, Wood, Horn: +1   Lead, Tin, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel, Glass, Gold: +4	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Engraved, Gem-encrusted, Painted
Fish hook	3	Fishmonger's, Ship, Waterfront home	Bone, Horn: +1   Tin, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Steel: +3	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes
Fishing pole	3	Fishmonger's, Ship, Waterfront home	Cane, Wood: +1	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various lengths
Food	3	Baker's, Butcher's, Fishmonger's, Home, Merchant's, Miller's, Tavern	Varies: +3 for spoilage	Spoiled: -2   Stale: -1   Good	Beans, Cheese, Crackers, Dried Fruit, Dried Meat, Grain, Nuts, Preserves, Roots, Salt, Salted Fish, Spices
Furniture	2	Carpenter's, Home, Inn, Tavern	Wood, Stone: +1   Wicker: +2	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Bed, Bench, Chair, Table, Various sizes
Grooming Utensil	3	Home, Inn, Jeweler's, Merchant's, Stables	Wood, Bone, Horn: +1   Bronze, Tin, Copper, Iron: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel: +4   Ivory, Gold: +5	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Comb, Hairbrush, Mirror, Razor, Tweezers, Toothbrush
Jewelry	3	Home, Jeweler's	Clay, Wood, Bone, Stone, Horn: +1   Tin, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel, Glass: +4   Ivory, Gold: +5	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Bracelet, Brooch, Earrings, Hairpin, Necklace, Ring
Lantern	3	Barn, Home, Inn, Mine, Tavern	Tin, Copper, Bronze: +1   Iron: +2   Steel: +3	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Handheld, Hanging, Tabletop
Loom	3	Home, Weaver's	Wood: +1	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes
Millstone	4	Miller	Stone	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes
Musical Instrument	3	Music shop, Tavern	Varies: +2 for fragility	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Bells, Horn, Flute, Harp, Lute, Drum, Tamborine
Needle	2	Home, Tailor's	Bone, Horn: +1   Tin, Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Steel: +3	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Circular, Curved, Double, Straight
Painting	3	Artist's studio, Inn, Upper-class home	Canvas, Linen: +1	Burned/Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Abstract, Battle, City, Portrait, Landscape, Still Life, Wildlife
Paint/dye	2	Artist's studio, Tanner's, Weaver's	Plant-based: +1   Animal-based: +2   Lead-based: +3	Spoiled: -2   Stale: -1   Good	Various Colors (red and purple are rare)
Picture Frame	3	Carpenter's, Museum, Upper-class home	Wood: +1   Silver, Pewter: +3   Ivory, Gold: +5	Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes and shapes

# EQUIPMENT

Item	Base Diff	Location Modifiers	Material Modifiers	Condition	Variation
Plates	2	Home, Merchant's, Ship, Military encampment, Tavern	Tin, Wood, Clay   Bone, Stone, Horn, Lead: +1   Copper, Bronze, Iron: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel, Glass: +4   Gold: +5	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Plate, Platter, Saucer, Tray, Various sizes, colors and designs
Quill	3	Cartographer's, Church, Government building, School, Upper-class home	Reed: +1   Feather: +2	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Goose, Swan
Religious symbol and/or item	3	Church, Holy site	Bone, Stone   Clay, Wood, Fabric: +1   Tin, Copper, Bronze, Iron, Horn: +2   Silver, Pewter: +3   Steel, Glass, Gold: +4   Ivory: +5	Burned/Broken/Torn: -2   Cracked/Bent/Tattered: -1   Undamaged	See <i>Desolation</i> , page 152. Various shapes, sizes and colors
Riding Accessory	3	Barn, Battlefield, Farrier, Military encampment, Stables	Leather, Rope   Iron: +1   Steel: +2	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Bit, Bridal, Blinders, Horseshoes, Saddle
Rope	2	Barn, Home, Merchant's, Shipwright's, Ship, Stables	Hemp, Jute   Sinew, Hair, Linen: +1   Silk: +3	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Various lengths, thicknesses and strengths
Scroll	3	Cartographer's, Church, Government building, Library, School, Tanner's	Vellum, Parchment: +2	Burned: -2   Ripped: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes
Seed	3	Barn, Granary, Root cellar	Seed, Nut: +1   Root: +2	Spoiled: -2   Stale: -1   Good	Berry, Flower, Grain, Herb, Fruit Tree, Tree Nut, Vegetable
Spindle	3	Home, Weaver's shop	Wood	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	
String	2	Barn, Bowyer, Home	Hemp, Sinew, Hair, Linen   Silk: +2	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Various lengths, thicknesses and strengths
Tapestry	3	Upper-class home, Church	Woven thread: +2	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Abstract, Battle, City Scene, Landscape, Still Life, Wildlife
Tent	3	Military encampment	Canvas: +1	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Various sizes
Thread/Yarn	2	Cobbler's, Home, Tailor's, Weaver's	Linen, Sinew   Wool: +1   Silk: +2	Torn: -2   Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Various colors, lengths, thicknesses and strengths
Toiletry	3	Apothecary's, Inn, Merchant's, Upper-class home	Varies, but +1 for fragility	Spoiled: -2   Stale: -1   Good	Makeup, Perfume, Soap
Tool*	2	Barn, Bowyer, Carpenter's, Farrier, Mason's, Merchant's, Mine, Shipwright's, Stables, Smithy, Tinkerer's	Wood: +1   Tin, Copper, Bronze: +2   Iron: +3   Steel: +4 * Specialized tools: +1 to +3	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Auger, Adze, Chisel, Crowbar, Mallet, Hammer, Nails, Shears, Shovel, Tongs, Trowel
Torch	1	Inn	Wood	Used Up/Broken: -2   Cracked/Used: -1   Undamaged /	Various sizes
Toy	3	Tinkerer's, Upper-class home	Cloth, Plant Fibers, Wood, Stone,   Lead, Tin: +1   Copper, Bronze: +2   Iron: +3   Steel: +4   Ivory, Gold: +5	Broken/Torn: -2   Cracked/Tattered: -1   Undamaged	Doll, Stuffed Animal, Carved Figurine, Ball
Trap	3	Furrier, Military encampment	Wood: +1   Iron: +2   Steel: +3	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked/Bent: -1   Undamaged	Small game, Fowl, Waterfowl, Large animal
Vehicle/Watercraft	3	Barn, Stables, Waterfront home	Wood: +2	Burned/Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Boat, Buggy, Cart, Chariot, Carriage, Raft, Ship, Wagon
Whetstone	2	Home, Inn, Camp	Stone	Broken: -2   Cracked: -1   Undamaged	Coarse, Fine, Various sizes and shapes



# EQUIPMENT

## Arms & Armor

In the After, gold may or may not be worth much, but well-tempered steel hasn't lost its value — especially when it comes in the form of armor and weapons.

A list of common weapons and armor can be found starting on page 196 of the *Desolation* core book. The arms and armor found on the following pages are more exotic, and therefore more difficult to find. What makes them rare? They may be used primarily by certain races, be found in certain regions, be ancient versions of more modern equipment, or be improvised from other items found in the After. The Difficulties listed in the tables represent how hard it would be to find each item in the Before. It can be adjusted by the GM, up or down, depending on where the character is looking in the After.

The descriptions of the special weapons and armor that follow explain what they look like, how they are used and any special properties they may have.

## Melee Weapons

■ **Anelace:** A long, light dagger made of whale bone with both edges sharpened that is traditionally wielded by island folk and kobolds.

■ **Blade Bands:** A pair of metal armbands that provides +1 Defense. One armband contains a hidden, spring-loaded blade that can be extended by releasing a latch that can be tripped by the wearer.

■ **Boatman's Staff:** Two sticks about 1 inch in diameter and 1 ft. long attached together at one end with a 6-inch length of rope or chain. The wielder holds one of the sticks, while swinging the other at incredible speeds before directing an attack. The Boatman's Staff can also be used to strangle an opponent. To strangle an opponent, the wielder must make a successful Melee touch attack. If the attack is successful, no damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage your character would have done vs. your opponent's Strength rating. If you rolled more damage than his Strength rating, the opponent is being strangled and must succeed in a Strength roll to break free on the next turn. For every round the opponent fails to break free, he takes 1N damage until he breaks free or falls unconscious. If you rolled more than twice your opponent's Strength rating, he takes 2N damage until he breaks free or falls unconscious.

■ **Caltrops:** Two sharpened spines twisted together in such a way that one tip always points up. Caltrops

are used to slow or redirect armies, and are particularly effective against cavalry. They can be avoided, but doing so halves Movement.

■ **Club Sword:** A wooden sword with razor-sharp shards of obsidian embedded along its blade. Lighter

Melee Weapons	Dmg	Str	Dif	Wt	Origin
Anelace†	2L	1	5	1 lb.	Kobold/ Loranthian
Blade Bands*†	1L	1	5	1 lb.	Gnomish
Boatman's Staff*†	2N	1	6	1 lb.	Rover
Caltrops†	1L	1	4	1 lb.	Ascondean
Club Sword, short†	2L	1	3	2 lbs.	Mongrel
Club Sword, long	3L	1	4	3 lbs.	Mongrel
<i>Club Sword, two-handed</i>	4L	2	6	6 lbs.	Mongrel
Core Delver Tooth*†	1L	1	6	1 lb.	Cushulainer
Cutter*†	1L	2	3	1 lb.	Rover
Dwarven Battle Axe*†	4L	3	6	10 lb	Dwarf
Flameblade*†	2L	2	4	3 lbs.	Dwarven, Mountain
Glass Dagger†	2L	1	6	1 lb.	Dwarven, Desert
Glass Shards	plus 1L	—	5	—	Dwarven, Desert
Glass Sword, Long	4L	1	8	3 lbs.	Dwarven, Desert
Glass Sword, Short†	3L	1	7	2 lbs.	Dwarven, Desert
Kerah	2N	2	6	4 lbs.	Jherlind
<i>Man Catcher*</i>	1N	2	4	8 lbs.	Lanarian
Mercygiver†	1L	1	2	1 lb.	Nascentite
Morning Star	3L	2	4	4 lbs.	Kar'Danen
<i>Morning Star, Heavy</i>	4L	3	4	8 lbs.	Kar'Danen
<i>Oar Staff</i>	1L/1N	1	4	3 lbs.	Loranthian
<i>Rope Hammer*</i>	2L/2L	1	6	3 lbs.	Rover
Scourge†	1N	1	5	1 lb.	Lanarian
Socket*†	1L/1N	1	4	1 lb.	Gnomish
Spiked Gauntlet†	1L	1	4	1 lb.	Warlander
Thruster*†	2L	2	5	1 lb.	Dwarven, Mountain
Tusk Dagger	1L	1	6	1 lb.	Kobold
<i>War Scythe</i>	5L	2	4	10 lbs.	Warlanders
Whistlade*	3L	2	5	4 lbs.	Elven
Witch Fire	plus 1L	—	6	1 lb.	Loslolinite

\* See weapon description for special rules.

† Weapons can be wielded in one hand by Size -1 characters without penalty.

Weapons in italics must be wielded in two hands.

# EQUIPMENT

and more fragile than metal swords, club swords require less strength to wield.

■ **Core Delver Tooth:** These dagger-like teeth are nearly impossible to break. They never become Worn or Broken when botches are rolled.

■ **Cutter:** A short, punching dagger with a horizontal hand grip that places the thick blade directly above the wielder's knuckles. It can be used to punch through armor, negating one point of an opponent's Defense bonus when used against full plate, breastplates, chainmail or splint mail.

■ **Dwarven Battle Axe:** This wide, double-bitted axe has a short handle that fits perfectly into the grasp of a dwarven warrior. They use their powerful shoulders and stout build to swing the heavy weapon with devastating results. The Damage rating is only 3L for non-dwarves.

■ **Flameblade:** A short sword with undulating edges resembling flames. The specially designed blade increases the weapon's cutting surface. It was created to cut through wood-hafted weapons, such as spears and polearms. A successful disarm attack with a flameblade against a wood-hafted weapon renders the wood-hafted weapon useless.

■ **Glass Shards:** In the After, fragments of Desert Dwarves' glass blades are often used in improvised weapons. They can easily be embedded in clubs, the ends of spears and wooden hammers, adding 1L to the weapon's normal damage and ignoring the normal improvised weapon damage penalties. Only the relatively rare and weapon-grade glass of the Desert Dwarves will provide such a bonus.

■ **Glass Weapons:** Rune magic-enhanced forges and special materials allowed the desert dwarves to create glass weapons that were nearly as strong as steel — but lighter and could hold a much sharper edge. The Desert Dwarves also made bludgeoning weapons from glass, but their ratings are the same as their metal and wooden counterparts. A botched attack with a glass weapon will cause it to break, regardless of its condition.

■ **Kerah:** Curved, horns of mountain goats that are filled with lead and used as clubs.

■ **Man Catcher:** A polearm with two semi-circular prongs on one end and a spring mechanism that, when tripped by coming into contact with an opponent's torso or neck, would cause the prongs to close and encircle the opponent. Man Catchers are often used to unsaddle mounted opponents or to control uncooperative slaves and prisoners.

■ **Mercygiver:** A long, slender-bladed knife used to deliver the killing blow to a mortally wounded friend or foe as quickly and painlessly as possible. It can also be used in close combat to slide between gaps in full plate and splint mail. A mercygiver negates one point of an opponent's full plate or splint mail Defense bonus.

■ **Morning Star:** A spiked ball on the end of a thick shaft that does bludgeoning and piercing damage.

■ **Morning Star, Heavy:** Made with a thicker handle and a larger spiked ball, the heavy morning star is a two-handed weapon that does bludgeoning and piercing damage.

■ **Oar Staff:** A modified oar common to the Island Folk, an Oar Staff is essentially a double-paddled oar with the paddles sharpened along the edges. The wooden edges can inflict 1L to non-armored opponents or 1N to any opponent when used as a bludgeoning weapon. The paddles are also concave, allowing the wielder to scoop up and throw sand, dirt, rocks, water and other nearby small projectiles at an opponent within 20 ft. Most such projectiles will not do damage, but will cause the opponent to lose his next turn upon a successful attack.

■ **Rope Hammer:** Consisting of two weighted balls attached to either end of a 10-ft. length of chain or rope, a Rope Hammer is traditionally swung around the wielder at incredible speeds before one (range





# EQUIPMENT

of 10 ft.) or both weights (range of 5 ft.) are directed at a target. Both weights can be used to attack a single opponent or two different opponents in the same round at the wielder's discretion. An attack must be rolled for each weight. One weight is often swung in front of the wielder in a defensive manner, while the other is used to attack. Because of this flexibility, Cautious Attacks made with a Rope Hammer suffer only a -2 penalty on their single attack rolls, as opposed to the standard -4. Rope Hammers can also be used to entangle opponents, as per the Chain melee weapon listing in *Desolation*, page 197.

■ **Scourge:** A multi-thonged lash often used to inflict pain upon slaves and prisoners.

■ **Socket:** A dagger with a hand guard designed to mimic knuckles. The socket blade can be used to inflict lethal damage using your character's Melee rating, or the

hand guard can be used to inflict non-lethal damage using your character's Brawl rating.

■ **Spiked Gauntlet:** Any type of armor can include spiked gauntlets, which allow melee attacks to be made without drawing a weapon.

■ **Thruster:** A short, punching dagger with an X-shaped cross section that gives the blade four sharp edges and amazing strength. A thruster negates 1 point of an opponent's Defense bonus when used against opponents wearing full plate, breastplates, chainmail or splint mail.

■ **Tusk Dagger:** A sharpened tusk, often from a walrus, that is used like a punching dagger.

■ **War Scythe:** A scythe blade attached to a polearm so that the blade extends up from the pole. War Scythes have a perpendicular handhold attached to the pole to make it easier to wield. They are used by and against mounted combatants.

## Bartering

With the economies of Scondera in shambles after the Night of Fire, the gamemaster is faced with the task of determining what the items scavenged, stolen and crafted by the characters are worth in trade. "Worth" is a subjective term, especially in the After when a bite of food may be as valuable as an ounce of gold. Because the needs of every community and every person differ, it is not possible to know what will be valuable.

To help determine an item's value, the GM must consider what it's worth to the non-player characters (NPCs) he has created, where the characters are in the world and what other uses the item might have. Decisions on the part of the NPCs should be driven by their motivations, personalities and histories. Use the Resources and Needs section of each of the communities in Chapter 6 as a guide to what is considered valuable in a particular area.

Characters can attempt to modify the perceived worth of an item for sale or up for trade. To do this, the two sides of the transaction make an opposed roll using their Con, Diplomacy or Merchant skill. If the Merchant skill is being used against someone with only Con or Diplomacy, the character with the Merchant skill gains an additional die bonus. The winner of this opposed roll changes the others' perceived worth of the item by one step on the table below. If the winner wins by more than twice the opponent's Intelligence rating, the perceived worth changes by two steps.

Perceived Worth	Description
Worthless	Characters have no interest in the item or do not want it in their possession.
Minimal Worth	Characters have a slight interest in the item. They would find it mildly useful or see future uses or trade possibilities for the item
Valuable	Characters have a definite interest in the item. There is an immediate need for the item, which could improve their current situation or be of greater value in the future.
Very Valuable	Characters are very interested in the item. There is a great and immediate need for the item, which could improve a dire situation or solve a continuing problem.
Priceless	Characters have a desperate need for this item and will do almost anything to get it. Possessing this item will fulfill a lifelong dream, save lives or ensure the continued survival of community.

Look at bartering as an opportunity to enhance roleplaying as player characters and NPCs interact to make a deal. One party might drive a hard bargain that could get them a better deal, extract a favor or get them killed. This is an excellent situation for a merchant's (or a rogue's) skills to shine. It's also an excellent opportunity for the GM to create plot hooks that drive the story.

■ **Whistlade:** A longsword with a series of holes along its blade that creates a whistling sound when swung in a wide arc. Once common among ancient elves, whistlades were used as signaling devices and to intimidate enemies as battle was about to be joined.

■ **Witch Fire:** Found in the swamps of Loslolin, this black, viscous liquid is flammable. It sticks to any metal weapon and can be ignited to inflict extra damage before going out in three turns.

## Ranged Weapons

■ **Bolt Thrower:** A heavy crossbow modified with a crank mechanism that allows it to shoot up to three crossbow bolts per round. Bolt Throwers normally take a full round to reload.

■ **Bounding Axe:** An axe with a strongly arched head and a short haft. Wielders often throw the axes while rushing to engage an enemy in hand-to-hand combat, then draw melee weapons. The shape and weight of the axe increases the chance of the blade hitting the opponent. If it misses its initial target, the Bounding Axe has a tendency to bounce up from the ground as it spins, thus providing a chance to strike someone behind the initial target. Wielders who miss with a thrown Bounding Axe may reroll at a -2 dice penalty to hit another enemy who may be behind the first.

■ **Chakram:** An 8-inch metal disc with a sharpened edge all around that can be thrown without being affected by wind.

Ranged Weapon	Dmg	Str	Range	Rate	Dif	Wt	Origin
Bolt Thrower*	4L	2	30 ft.	1	7	6 lbs.	Gnome
Bounding Axe*	3L	2	30 ft.	1	7	3 lbs.	Orc
Chakram*†	1L	1	40 ft.	1	6	1 lb.	Warland
Decurved Bow**	1L	1	25 ft.	1**	7	2 lbs.	Kobold
Quill Ape Quills†	1L	1	40 ft.	2	6	.25 lbs.	Loranthian
Recurved Bow**	4L	4	150 ft.	1**	7	3 lbs.	Goblin
Rock	1N	1	30 ft.	2	0	.5 lb.	—
Rope Dart*	1L	1	10 ft.	1	6	1 lb.	Rover
Spear Thrower**	plus 1L	1	plus 30 ft.	1**	7	1 lb.	Kobold
Staff Sling	2N	1	50 ft.	1**	2	4 lbs.	Jherlinder
Throwing Stick*†	1N	1	30 ft.	1	2	1 lb.	Loranthian
Toggling Harpoon*	1L	2	25 ft.	1	6	2 lbs.	Kobold
Whirlbat†	3L	2	40 ft.	1	5	2 lbs.	Dwarven

\* See weapon description for special rules.

\*\* Characters with the Instant Reload Talent double this weapon's rate of fire.

† Weapons can be wielded in one hand by Size -1 characters without penalty.

Weapons in italics must be wielded in two hands.





# EQUIPMENT

■ **Decurved Bow:** A bow with tips that curve toward the archer, thus diminishing energy transferred to the arrow and strain on the bow. Decurved bows are easy to pull and can be made from materials that would break under normal bow pressures, but they have less range than normal bows.

■ **Quill Ape Quills:** Hollow quills from the Quill Ape can be used in blowguns. Because they are light, they travel farther than darts.

■ **Recurved Bow:** A long bow with tips that curve away from the archer. When pulled, the curves provide more energy to propel the arrow, increasing range and damage.

■ **Rock:** Perhaps the oldest weapon known to Scondera, good throwing rocks can be found just about anywhere.

■ **Rope Dart:** Consisting of a 1-lb. hook or dart attached to one end of a 10-ft. rope, the rope dart can deal damage, but is often used to entangle. To entangle an opponent, make an archery Touch Attack. If your character's attack is successful, no damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage your character would have done vs. your opponent's Strength rating. If you rolled more damage than his Strength rating, the opponent is entangled and must succeed in a Strength roll to break free on the next turn. If you rolled more damage than twice the opponent's Strength rating, he is entangled and may be disarmed, pulled or knocked down.

■ **Spear Thrower:** While not a weapon, per se, a spear thrower is a tool that can be used in conjunction with darts or javelins to dramatically increase their effective range. It consists of a concave shaft with a cup at the end to hold the projectile. The shaft acts as an extension of the thrower's arm, providing increased power to the throw. While a dart or javelin thrown using the tool may travel 300 ft., it is only accurate at ranges up to 60 ft. Despite its common name, spear throwers can only be used with javelins and darts, not spears. A spear thrower adds 1L to the projectile's Damage rating and 30 ft. to its Range.

■ **Staff Sling:** A sling attached to the end of a 6-ft. staff, capable of hurling heavier stones than a typical sling.

■ **Throwing Stick:** Including straight and curved wooden sticks of dense wood originally used to hunt small game, throwing sticks are thrown end over end. Curved throwing sticks can be thrown at opponents who are around corners, negating some forms of cover, and will return to the thrower when an attack misses.

■ **Toggling Harpoon:** A form of javelin attached to a 25-ft. length of strong woven sinew, a toggling harpoon has a two-part barbed tip. The first tip is a cap on the harpoon point and is attached by sinew. Upon entry into a tar-

Armor	Def	Str	Dex	Dif	Wt	Origin
Bone Armor*	+2	1	—	4	10 lbs.	Kar'Danan
Buckler*	+1	1	—	4	3 lbs.	Goblin
Shell Mail	+1	—	—	5	10 lbs.	Loranthian
Splint Mail	+2	1	—	5	8 lbs.	Loslolin
Stonewyrm Hide	+2	1	—	8	8 lbs.	Orc

\* See armor description for special rules.

get, the first tip twists under the skin and muscle, making it impossible for the victim to pull away without cutting it out, causing 2L damage, or succeeding at an opposed Strength roll. Even if the target pulls the harpoon string out of the attacker's hands, he must still cut out the barb (for 2L damage) to remove the harpoon. Kobolds use them to harpoon seals and then haul them in. Even whales can be killed and hauled to shore by a group of hunters using toggling harpoons.

■ **Whirlbat:** A small axe with a pointed haft that is thrown at opponents. Whirlbats are traditionally constructed entirely of metal, with the end of the haft sharpened like a spear tip.

## Armor

■ **Bone Armor:** Bone is a common material in the After, so it is often used to make armor. In the Before, it was used in Kar'Danan, the Warlands, and by orcs to intimidate opponents. Bone armor adds +1 to Intimidate rolls when trying to frighten opponents.

■ **Buckler:** A small shield attached to a forearm. Unlike shields, bucklers do not allow a character to use his full Defense against two attacks per turn. However, when worn, bucklers allow Cautious Attacks to suffer only a -2 penalty on attack rolls, as opposed to -4.

■ **Shell Mail:** Armor made from tortoise and seashells attached to reed tunics. The shells are specially selected for maximum durability.

■ **Splint Mail:** Lightweight armor created by overlapping splints of hardwood. It is used in Loslolin, where tough swamp tree bark is plentiful and metal armor could be a death sentence for anyone who gets mired in the mud. Its buoyancy makes it favored by rovers and other ship-going peoples. It provides a +1 Body rating for purposes of determining drowning in situations where the character can float to the surface.

■ **Stonewyrm Hide:** Scale mail armor made from the carefully prepared hide of the stonewyrm. It provides a +2 Stealth bonus when worn in rocky environments or stone ruins.



## A SURVIVOR'S STORY

The rabbit froze at the sound of footsteps. The former farmer flung the oddly weighted throwing club with a flick of the wrist, just as Kreel had taught him. It tumbled through the air, end over end. The heavy end slammed into the rabbit, which squealed. Its legs shook wildly as it died.

Grahm smiled and put the rabbit out of its misery with a twist of its neck. They would have meat for their evening meal. He retrieved the club Kreel had carved using Merriam's potato-peeling knife, which was the only blade they had found before leaving the farm.

As the westerner said, the plants he directed Grahm to find helped speed his healing. Still, Kreel's leg wound was deep and two days had passed before the waiting was too much for Grahm and he insisted they leave. Kreel wasn't able to walk on his own, so Grahm pulled him for two days on a litter he made from barn wood and leather straps. It was slow going, but Grahm knew Kreel would die if he left him alone. Besides, the westerner did seem to know how to live off the land in a way Grahm could not have done without a plow and seeds or livestock.

At first they had eaten berries, roots and even some bugs that Kreel said would sate their hunger. It was true, Grahm had no appetite for an entire day after eating the red-backed beetles. As they walked, Grahm collected more leaves that Kreel needed to make the poultice for his wounds. The hunter, who now walked with the aid of a gnarled tree branch, was able to kill some small game as they traveled and built a trap that Grahm set each night before they slept. Grahm was amazed at the westerner's resourcefulness, and grateful for his presence.

He tucked the rabbit into a burlap pouch. It felt good to be able to contribute. It eased his feelings of helplessness and took his mind off the dark thoughts that threatened to steal his hope. Though Kreel said they were gaining on the warband, the tracks looked the same to Grahm. It had been 10 days since he had seen his wife and daughter, and Grahm couldn't shake the nagging fear that he would never see them again.

He made his way back to their camp. Kreel was standing on a large, jagged rock, staring east. Grahm saw nothing and assumed he was lost in thoughts of his own — of vengeance or saving his own people. Grahm wasn't sure exactly what motivated Kreel. He didn't talk much.

Grahm began stacking twigs to build a fire so he could cook the rabbit.

"No fire," Kreel said.

"But I bagged a hare," Grahm said, trying not to let his pride show in his voice.

"Look," Kreel pointed to the horizon.

At first Grahm saw nothing out of the ordinary. Then he saw a snaking wisp of smoke, too vertical to be one of the fingers of clouds in the darkening sky.

"Is ... Is that them? The warband?"

"Yes," Kreel said, turning to face him. "There will be scouts. We must kill one. Tonight."

"What? Why?"

"Need weapons, armor, horse," Kreel said.

"But how will that help?" Grahm said. "We can't kill them all."

Grahm was suddenly struck by the fact that he had never truly believed they would live to find the warband. Lost in memories and musings of happier times while they had trudged along through the broken landscape, day after day, he had not once thought about what they would do if they caught up with their attackers.

"I have a plan," Kreel said.

"But, but I'm a farmer," Grahm said more to himself than to Kreel. "I'm not a killer ..."

Kreel walked up to him, took the burlap pouch from his hand and pulled out the dead rabbit by the ears. It swayed gently in front of Grahm's face.

"You are a hunter."



# Chapter 5: Cynosure

*“The Empire is dead. Long live the Empire.”*

It's been called many things, by many people. “The Jewel of the West” was one such name, given in sarcasm perhaps, though in truth, the city was probably the one thing more precious than gems or gold in the entire Warlands. A neutral place that often had to fight to keep itself independent, Cynosure sat on a deep natural harbor between the Warlands and the Saikin Wastes (better known as the Vastlands to the people of Cynosure), and was the one of the few safe ports outside the Ascondean Empire.

A firm hand was needed to rule the city, it was said. Anyone who wanted to master the city had to protect it from all threats, inside and out.

## *A Change in Leadership*

In the Before, Camson Hurle was the leader of a mercenary company known to be reliable and well organized. Moving among citadels in the Warlands, Hurle's Company was hired for a variety of missions. Some of those who hired him would refuse to pay the agreed-upon fee and would find themselves at the receiving end of lightning raids a few weeks later. The remaining payment value would be taken in goods — or blood.

The leadership of Cynosure had taken notice. The master of the city, Warlord Gal'Rood, offered Hurle's Company a long-term contract to protect the city. This was during a time when Cynosure had been facing almost daily raids from pirates based out of the Bitter Reach, along with dozens of lesser warbands. The city's own guard had been pushed to the limits. Gal'Rood was also facing some problems from within the city. He had just put down a silent insurrection and attempted coup by a group of disgruntled officers within the City Guard, and had placed his own elite bodyguard in charge of the defense of the city — something that made him very nervous.

Hiring a well-respected mercenary company (and making sure they were paid) seemed like a good option.

Hurle thought it was just another job for his soldiers. He had no loyalty to Cynosure or to Gal'Rood, but the money was good. Being based in one location for a few months probably wouldn't hurt, and Hurle also thought it would a good chance to give his warriors some naval experience fighting

the pirates at the city's expense.

As the work began, Hurle quickly began to realize that Gal'Rood's city was seconds away from open rebellion. Cynosure was barely under control. Instead of merely supporting the existing operation, Hurle's Company had to take over everything.

Gal'Rood demanded to meet with Hurle daily, asking for reports and updates on every aspect of the Company's work. Initially, he offered suggestions to Hurle about how to run the operation, only pulling rank when it came to things that had a direct impact on the defense of the city. Soon, the suggestions became orders as Gal'Rood began to tell Hurle how to run his mercenary company. Hurle had seen what Gal'Rood's leadership had done for Cynosure, so ignored him for the most part. Eventually he was ignoring most of the Warlord's orders and began drawing up his own plans for defending the city.

Over a period of several months, Hurle's effective defense of the city resulted in a devastating attack on the pirates of Bitter Reach, which set their operations back several years. Hurle's warriors reinforced the walls and began patrolling the Warlands near the city, openly carrying Cynosure's banner. They would escort merchants coming into the city and slaughter anyone camped nearby who looked like they were preparing for a raid on Cynosure.

With the attacks and raids diminishing, and with the reputation of Cynosure returning to its former high levels, the mood in the city changed. The few remaining members of the city guard began to report directly to Hurle, openly ignoring Gal'Rood's elite officers, who nervously reported Hurle's rising status back to their own leader. Gal'Rood was far from pleased.

One night, Gal'Rood summoned Hurle to the oldest building in the city, the obsidian Tower of the Broken Sword, where he had his residence and office. It is whispered that Gal'Rood accused Hurle of being a traitor and dismissed him and his Company from the city. He also refused to pay the remainder of Hurle's fee. Hurle said nothing, and left the room. He returned 10 minutes later with his great axe, and 10 of his best men. They killed all of Gal'Rood's elite guard, and then, without a word, Hurle cut the former leader of the city in two.







# CYNOSURE

He took Gal'Rood's head and stuck it on a spike in front of the tower, informing all that Cynosure was under new leadership. If they didn't like it, they were welcome to leave, but if they would give him their loyalty, he'd make sure they were not held responsible for their part in Gal'Rood's negligent rule over the city. Few chose to leave. Most were relieved to see Gal'Rood's head adorning the spike outside the Tower of the Broken Sword.

Hurle then spoke to the citizens of Cynosure, simply telling them that things would be different now.

"Cynosure is under new management," he said, searching for the right words to continue. "I will make sure you are able to carry on your lives without interference, as long as you do not cause me any trouble."

It seemed enough. Business as usual, most people realized. Perhaps this ruler would not be a paranoid lunatic, like so many who came before him.

## Distant Early Warning

Cynosure, the relatively calm eye of the chaos storm that was the Warlands, could not remain so during the Night of Fire. Like most in the west, Hurle knew something was terribly wrong when he saw the red sky to the east where darkness should have been. Like many others, he assumed the Empire was behind it. Unlike most others, he knew what to expect.

Hurle had reluctantly sent out his own spies into neighboring nations years before. Subterfuge wasn't a game he liked to play, but it had been a necessary move in the unending political intrigue that went along with the military power he exercised over Cynosure.

It wasn't much of a warning, but it was enough. "Magical firestorm. Hide ..." was the only message transmitted back from his network of spies in the Empire. Those three words saved thousands of lives.

Stunned by what he assumed was a preemptive attack by the Empire, Hurle recalled his patrols, and ordered Cynosure's people to prepare for the Empire's attack. He had the known Ascondean spies rounded up and interrogated them himself. They either claimed ignorance or said their own communications with the Empire had been cut off. Hurle executed these prisoners, unwilling to take any chances.

When the fire rained down, Cynosure's streets were nearly deserted. Hurle ordered his best mages outside to protect the city and told the apprentices to take shelter with the rest of the city. Buildings were locked down and shuttered. Hurle's forces were ordered to take to the deepest dungeons of the tower as well as in sheltered cellars across the city.

It helped. A little.

## The Night of Fire

The fire still destroyed the city's many wooden structures and their occupants. The earthquakes toppled most of the city's battlements and damaged the Tower of the Broken Sword, though it still stood by the end of the night. The ocean pulled back from the natural harbor that had made Cynosure an important trading center for centuries, leaving it nearly dry. The deep harbor was left as a muddy pit filled with the wrecks of ships, and a waterfall where the once-languid Leren River met the sea. The Leren River was transformed from a slow, wide river into a raging torrent that rushed toward the hole that had been left by the retreating ocean.

When it was over, Hurle discovered that nearly 500 of his elite mercenaries had survived. Hundreds more had died as buildings collapsed upon their hiding places. He accepted this loss, and was grateful that so many had been spared.

Many citizens had died that night. As Hurle took stock of the damage to the city he had spent years defending, he con-

### Camson Hurle

Leader Warrior (NPC 5)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 5	<b>Health:</b> 9
<b>Body:</b> 4	<b>Dex:</b> 4	<b>Str:</b> 5
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 4	<b>Wil:</b> 5
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 9	<b>Stun:</b> 4
<b>Per:</b> 9	<b>Init:</b> 8	<b>Def:</b> 10

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	5	3	8	(4)
Brawl	5	3	8	(4)
Diplomacy	3	4	7	(3+)
Intimidation	3	4	9	(4+)
Linguistics	4	2	6	(3)
Melee	5	7	12	(6)
Survival	4	3	7	(3+)
Warfare	4	4	8	(4)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Die Hard:** Improved death threshold

**Flurry:** Reduce multiple strike penalty

**Iron Will:** +1 to Willpower

**Skill Aptitude, Intimidation:** +2 to skill

**Vigorous Defense:** Reduce multi-attacker penalty

**Vengeful:** Bent on revenge

**Vow:** Sworn to an action or organization

Ascondean, Oruskan, Warland Pidgin, Saikin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Cestus	1N	0	9N	(4+)N
Sword, Long	3L	0	15L	(7+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chainmail	+2	2	—	

scripted many of the survivors into the Cynosure Guard to replace those who had died. Anyone strong enough to swing a club was considered, and most joined willingly. Defending the remains of the city was not the driving force behind this conscription. Hurle was filled with vengeance against those responsible for the Night of Fire, and most of his soldiers, old and new, were of the same mind.

No one thought such a rag-tag force could defeat the Empire, but maybe a few legionnaires would die. Besides, it was better to fight and die than be killed by the Empire's magical storms. Hurle's Crusade would certainly perish, he realized, but he would make the Empire pay for its crime.

## *The Crusade*

Hurle left one in 10 behind to guard the injured and dying. Within a week of the Night of Fire, the Crusaders were on the march, tromping through ash — some of which, surely, had once been people they knew. Within a month, they were where the Primea Mountains used to be. It was then, while looking at the rubble of the once-great peaks, that Hurle knew whatever attack the Empire had planned had gone awry. Cynosure had gotten off easy. The further east they traveled, the worse the destruction became.

Hurle's mood changed along the way. His righteous fury turned first to a bitter anger, then to a stony resolution. As they reached the border of what had been the Empire, Hurle's Crusade stopped at the remains of a village. It had been one of the most distant outposts of the Ascondean Empire, and Hurle had long planned what he was going to do when he arrived at such a place. He had spoken long about the pyres he would set, and the fate that would befall those citizens of the Empire he would find. He had spoken at length about the tortures he would visit upon the Empire, and how the first town would be the example that would be set for all.

Instead, he found three dozen men, women and children starving and thirsty, desperately attempting to rebuild their small village. They stood against Hurle's thousand-strong army, thinking a warband had come to take them. With spear and shovel in hand, they were prepared to die to protect their children and what was left of their home.

Hurle realized then that the Empire had forsaken these people too. He did not want to be just another warband. He had a reason for being here. His righteous anger returned, but now it was tempered with a sense of justice, of reason, that had not been there before.

He put away his sword and stepped forward, putting out his hand to the people of the ruined village.

"I am Camson Hurle. Come with me," he implored

them. "Come back with me to Cynosure, and I will never lie to you or betray you, like the Empire did."

The people of the village considered his words, nervous and unsure. Hurle told them about the message he'd received from his spy in the Ascondean capital, and how the Empire had long had spies and agents in his city. He told them how the peace of the Empire had been paid for by the lives of the Oruskans and the people of the Warlands, and how Cynosure had been in the middle, and how it would no longer be that way. He told them that, if they promised to pledge their lives to Cynosure, he would promise to protect them, and that was how it should always be. The city for the people, and the people for the city.

The survivors were unbelieving at first. How could their Empire have done this? But Hurle's words moved them, and in the end, most took what meager possessions they had and joined the Crusaders. Though some joined reluctantly.

Hurle started back to Cynosure, visiting a dozen or so settlements on the way. After three weeks, the snow began to fall and there were 2,000 people by his side where there had once been 1,000. A few weeks later, they were back.

He had been away too long.

## *The Siege*

Word had spread that Cynosure had survived the Night of Fire mostly intact, and the city was under siege.

Nearly 1,000 Warlanders were waiting for the remaining guards inside to starve, and the several hundred other survivors to die. Once Cynosure had fallen, they would fight among themselves to take mastery of the city. For now, they would work together to finish off the protectors.

The guards defending the city had not given up on Hurle's return. They had nursed many of the sick and wounded back to health, and instead of merely 100 or so armed men and women, there were perhaps 250 now, each capable and willing to fight and to die to protect what they had. The outer walls of the city had fallen, but the inner walls around the tower were strong and easy to defend. Moreover, the people of Cynosure knew their city better than their attackers, and could lead them into blind alleys where they would be ambushed, 10 men overwhelmed by three in moments.

In a strange way, the city had also started to defend itself. The ruins of the outer city would, from time to time, spawn Weave-touched creatures. The burnt, charred remains of people who had once walked the streets of Cynosure would emerge, pulling themselves out from the rubble. They seemed to attack strangers first, before turning on the city's residents. These few moments of respite were often long enough for



# CYNOSURE

citizens to flee or gather necessary reinforcements. After all, should the creatures slay any invader or stranger, they would turn immediately upon any other living creature.

The siege had gone on for nearly a month by the time the Crusaders returned, and Hurle brooked none of it. He and his army swept down into the warbands, crushing them against the walls of the city like a wave against a shore, scattering them in one day. He captured the leaders of the warbands, and executed two of them. The third, he sent back into the Warlands with a message for every warband that might try to take the city.

“Try it again, and the Warlands will be renamed Camson’s Kingdom.”

The homecoming of the Crusaders was joyous. Hurle allowed himself and his people a day of celebration as the snow continued to fall in earnest, even this far south. He then sent scouts out into the devastation, telling them to take word to any Ascondean settlements they could find that Cynosure was an alternative to the Empire. But if a settlement had any significant number of legionnaires or Imperial bureaucracy, they were to make note of it, and to just make contact without revealing anything about Cynosure. Hurle would deal with those settlements later. The scouts were ordered to investigate the Warlands and to contact any warbands with whom Hurle had previously enjoyed good relationships.

The scouts also reported that the sea had pulled back about 50 miles or so — the Leren River meandered across a fetid plain of sea mud to a new delta that was devoid of anything except seaweed and horrid mud creatures. It would be decades, perhaps, before any ship could sail up to the city that way. At the very least, they reported, Cynosure faced no army or navy from that direction.

However, it was clear that a bad winter was coming. Hurle wanted to build Cynosure’s numbers. There was much work to be done, and while the population numbered around 4,000 people, that was a fraction of Cynosure’s original population of more than 200,000.

Hurle had no idea that Cynosure was now the largest remaining settlement in the world, even at that number.

## *Winter Preparations*

After sending out the scouts, Hurle ordered that the city should be cleaned up and the wreckage should be sifted through for both the dead and anything useful. Some of the survivors from the Ascondean settlements offered to help with inventory and burying the dead, which pleased Hurle. The next few weeks saw some of the new citizens lost to the rubble rousers and other strange new creatures that were

waiting in the ruins or in the mud of the Pit (just the Pit; as names go, it was simple and it had stuck). Archers stood on guard almost full-time, waiting to shoot the horrors that would emerge from the mud and try to crawl up the sides of the harbor. Many wore the faces of sailors who had died during the Night of Fire.

Hurle ordered 100 men to sweep around the region, gathering food. If they found a settlement with food, they were to offer the people the protection of Cynosure in return for half their food. They could pledge allegiance to the city and join them for a fair ration, and the city would take all their food. They’d get strong walls, strong soldiers and magic in return. There were many who agreed, and few who refused.

More food was discovered at abandoned settlements and farms, though warbands had taken much of what could be found. Hurle’s orders regarding warbands were merely that trade was permitted — fair trade. A warband that attacked first was to be destroyed, if possible. But he hoped that wearing the symbol of Cynosure — a circle with another circle in the center (representing the outer walls and inner walls of the city) would be enough to ensure peaceful negotiations. For the most part this was true, but not every warband had heard of Cynosure. This was a kind of process of “natural selection” as far as Hurle was concerned — those smart enough to know who Hurle’s people were and to deal with them accordingly would survive and prosper. The rest would be destroyed. Only those who were clever and forward-thinking enough would remain, and that was probably good for the region and for Cynosure in the long term.

Hurle worked with some of the farmers who had agreed to join with the city to clear and set aside allotments of land within the city walls to cultivate. With the help of a small handful of Primal magicians, they began to speed up the growth of the first crops, and built greenhouses heated with rune stones to keep out the deepening cold. Guards protected the inner-city farmland from the rubble rousers and the other scavengers while the outer walls were rebuilt, and within two months the first harvest was reaped. Needless to say, the few elves given shelter within Cynosure were given duties far from the allotments. Still, a significant portion of the plants grown were twisted or stunted, inedible by human or animal, though enough good food was gathered to help bolster the City’s granaries.

Work began on repairing the tower. The outer walls were badly damaged, but could be patched, so that was the second priority. The ruined fields of city buildings between the inner and outer walls were so extensive that it would be impossible to go through them all and rebuild even a fraction before the winter really hit home — indeed, it was probably

years of work. The most important buildings (the smithies, stables, guild halls, woodwright shops, etc.) were scavenged first. All the usable wood was gathered: the beams, supports, struts and roofs all placed into several dozen piles in various spots around the city. These supply caches were carefully guarded, as they were essential to providing fuel and materials for repair. Stone for the wall patches was easily found, and the Sorcerers worked hard at moving the giant blocks into place to fix the walls as best they could.

The body of a giant sea creature was discovered by one of the scouts, about a day's ride west of the city. It had been beached during the Night of Fire, and had been stripped by animals and scavengers. Hurle was interested, and had the bones brought back to the city. The rib cage and jaw bones of the beast were enormous. Hurle had the jaws and tusks built into the new gates of the outer wall.

The Tower of the Broken Sword was fully repaired just as the year ended, and a blizzard struck the city — the first one in recorded history. Hurle ordered his people into shelters and began to ration supplies and firewood. The walls of the city kept the worst of the winds out, and while the snow fell, the city felt like more than just a shelter. It felt like home.

## Life in Cynosure

### Before

Cynosure in the Before was a cesspit of intrigue and barely contained violence. While outright war was almost unthinkable, a thousand petty battles were fought every day in the alleys, bars and shadows. The Empire had spies everywhere, pulling strings and setting fires where and whenever it suited them. The Empire's agents played the ultimate game of "let's you and him fight," where the warbands were the pawns in their endless game of distraction. There was nothing they wouldn't do to keep the Empire safe, and everyone in Cynosure was expendable.

The Empire wasn't the only nation with interests in Cynosure, of course. Other nations, and some of the more cohesive factions within the Warlands, also had spies in permanent residence. The cloak-and-dagger game was very different from the sword-and-shield game. Not everyone played it as well as the Ascondeans, but it wasn't as violent as the alternative. As rough and tumble as Cynosure was, as darkly unpleasant the shadows could get, it was always better than the alternative. All-out war was avoided over and over again thanks to the actions of the unseen silent warriors.

The Empire was there, of course, in many other guises. Although the Legion would rarely walk the streets openly, sometimes they'd be there protecting merchant caravans and escorting "diplomats" to "official meetings." But while the spies and the agents of the Empire were there, they lived among the people mostly unknown and undetected. The Ascondean agents were the ones really making a difference, observing and acting when necessary. It wasn't like Verelenar, where the Legion had made so many mistakes, especially with having a puppet leader. They had tried to warn the Legions about that, but no one had listened.

The Legion had never really been the ones running the show in Cynosure, so it was done with a more gentle touch and a longer view. There may have been the occasional knife in a back or across a throat, but it was the exception rather than the rule. The truth is the Empire needed Cynosure to work, and supported the city and its leaders with a light hand for decades, silently removing obstacles and threats, and smoothing over problems that few ever knew existed. That's why it worked.

It would have worked forever, perhaps, except for the Night of Fire and for Camson Hurle's hatred of the status quo. He was smart enough to know that the city owed part





# CYNOSURE

of its success to the Empire, and never really trusted its motivations — but he was certain that the Empire was using Cynosure, and he was right.

Still, daily life in Cynosure was fairly civilized. It was a far cry from the heady wonders of the Ascondean cities, with their ubiquitous magic and everyday miracles, but it was also more certain than the chirs-eat-chirs world of the Warlands. Money was to be had — riches even, and hard work reaped benefits. Merchants came and went, and the city thrived on those souls willing to take a chance on adventure — as long as they weren't too fussy about politics or morality. Strong leadership helped keep the warbands at bay, and the sheer number of people flowing through the city kept it neutral and worth more intact than as a prize to be fought over.

Hurle ruled over the city from a distance. The common people looked to him, not as a savior from Gal'Rood's rule, but as someone who had earned the right to lead. There was a measure of trust. Everyone assumed that Hurle would, eventually, be murdered by someone stronger. They tried to make the most of their leader's presence while it lasted.

## *After*

The Long Winter was hard on Cynosure, but they were better prepared than most. With food, wood and other supplies in the well-preserved remains of the city, survival was not only possible, it was nearly ensured. Hundreds flocked to the city during the first few months of the Winter and Hurle took most of them in, turning away only those who were clearly sick, insane or unrepentant Ascondean loyalists.

There was even some trade during the Winter. Cynosure had been a trading hub for many long years. It seemed natural to come there looking to barter for supplies, even during the Winter. As the snow stopped and spring came, trade continued, though at a mere fraction of Before. The city, it seemed, still had a place in this broken world.

It's not the same city, of course. At the very least, the majority of the population is now made up of people who have only recently come to Cynosure. The remaining minority of survivors are those who called the city home Before, and they have a particular kind of status. They aren't quite elite, but they are often the officers of the guard — and sometimes have homes that were theirs before the Night of Fire. The newer citizens have to make do with shacks in the shanty neighborhoods or whatever they can build from the ruins. The arguments of "I was here first" have already started.

There is much less intrigue than Before. No one has the patience or stomach for it, given the events of the last couple of years. There's little to spy on anymore. The survivors who used to spy for various nations are keeping their heads down

and their noses clean until they get new orders from their superiors. They are smart enough to realize those orders may be a long time coming. The remaining Ascondean spies, in particular, are expert players of the long game, and have had the best training to resist the intrusive mental magic of Beguilers, as well as torture.

The city is ruled by Hurle, as it was before. However, he has taken a council of advisors to his side to deal with the daily needs of the city. He has even allowed some ordinary citizens to become part of the council, including some Ascondean citizens who were hand-picked by Hurle for their loyalty and trustworthiness. They deal with repair schedules and the horticultural demands of the farmers, while Hurle and a few trusted captains deal with the defense of the city. It worked well during the Long Winter, and continues to allow the city to function and, indeed, prosper.

The day-to-day concerns of survival are what take up most of the average citizen's time. The safest farmlands exist inside the walls, and they need watering and fertilizing, as well as tilling and magical care, though that often comes at a high price. The Primalists, who try hard to keep the crops edible and the land continuously productive, suffer badly from Burn. They are often out of commission for days at a time. The carefully constructed greenhouses inside the inner walls require expert attention, as well as guarding. The work of clearing the ruins continues, as does the work of rebuilding. The city walls are still a priority, but the sea walls, which now look out over leagues of flat, fetid mud plains, are of less concern. Some military advisors warn against this, hearing rumors of vessels that can sail across the mud as easily as ships used to across water, but it may take an actual sighting — or an attack — for such worries to be taken seriously.

The city does find itself under attack every few days from rogue warbands or mindless creatures seeking sustenance or water. The walls and gates are constantly manned — not just with well-trained guards, but with citizens undergoing training. Sometimes the city's defenses are overwhelmed and the attackers get inside, running amok within the outer walls for a short time. Hurle's elite guard respond quickly to neutralize any threats that get within the walls, but it does happen. If an average citizen hears the alarm, they retreat to cover, grab a bow, and get ready to use it. Every citizen knows how to use a bow and a sword, and spends a portion of their week guarding their city or in training.

At the heart of it all, in the ancient Tower of the Broken Sword, sits Camson Hurle. His scouts bring him scraps of maps every few days and he tries to piece it all together: What did the Empire have to do with this? Why did the sky catch fire? What is left of the world?

His passion for keeping Cynosure alive is matched by his need to know what happened. He still believes the Empire was behind the Night of Fire, though he now has doubts that it was an attack on the Warlands. If he were to ever be given evidence that it was some kind of weapon, his advisors worry what he might do to the Ascondeans in Cynosure, loyal or not. Then the Crusade would be born again — this time as an inquisition that would burn the world anew.

## Loyalty in Cynosure

Some of the survivors (especially Ascondeans) realized they had made a mistake coming to Cynosure. Hurle's bitterness toward the Empire was evident in the speeches he made. While he treated everyone fairly, he could not hide his true feelings or the belief that the Empire had destroyed the world. He could not accept that magic was to blame, for instance,

### Shin Jo

Watcher (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Rover	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 5
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 2	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 5	<b>Int:</b> 4	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 4	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 7	<b>Init:</b> 6	<b>Def:</b> 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Con	5	2	7	(3+)
Diplomacy	5	2	7	(3+)
Empathy	4	3	7	(3+)
Investigation	4	4	8	(4)
Linguistics	4	1	5	(2+)
Magic/Beguiling	5	5	10	—
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Exotic:** Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Charisma-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

**Farsight:** Ignore moderate (-2) Perception roll penalties for distance.

**Waterborne:** +4 to Swim rolls and the length of time you can hold your breath.

**Burn Reduction:** Takes 1 less point of Burn.

**Inconspicuous Casting:** Pay 1 Burn to cast unnoticed.

**Magical Aptitude, Beguiling:** Cast spells from Beguiling tradition

**Slight:** -2 to feats of strength, such as heavy lifting, pushing or breaking items. This does not affect Melee or Brawl rolls.

**Susceptible:** -2 to resist disease.

**Condescending:** Thinks he is better than everyone else.

Ascondean, Warland Pidgin, Rover

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Quarterstaff	2N	0	7N	(3+)N
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

or that perhaps the Balance had shifted — or that any other reason could be behind the Night of Fire. He allowed the surviving mages to use their magic more-or-less openly, something that made a lot of people nervous — especially those who had witnessed magicians try to stop the fire and die in destructive ways. Each time one of Hurle's mages suffers Burn, or someone spits out an anti-Empire sentiment, an Ascondean survivor would be pushed a little further.

Rather than let bitterness fester, Hurle has "people" to deal with it. Those who no longer wish to be part of Cynosure are asked to leave. It's really exile, as they are never able to return, and will be killed if they are found inside the city again. If they have been open about their feelings, they are encouraged to leave of their own free will, and are given some supplies and time to say goodbye to friends and loved ones. Hurle believes it is important to show that such people do not "vanish" in the middle of the night. After all, they have openly said they are unhappy in the city.

Hurle has had to execute a few traitors, including those who have actively sabotaged city efforts or helped enemies of the city. While such things are unforgivable, execution is not public or surrounded by any kind of pageantry. People hear about it, and they are told about why it happened. One thing Hurle doesn't do is make examples of people. He figures people make examples of themselves, good or bad.

To pledge allegiance to Hurle and to Cynosure is forever. Once you don't feel it in your heart, once it's not truly there, Hurle figures, you shouldn't be there. You become a liability to the City and to the people within it, whether you want to or not. Despite your best intentions, you have become a risk, like faulty stonework or a badly constructed building.

Hurle uses Beguilers to root out these kind of bad feelings, but he never uses magic to enforce loyalty. He truly believes that loyalty is earned, and is genuinely regretful if he has lost that loyalty in another.

The Watchers, as he calls them, are led by Shin Jo. They don't just wander the city, checking on people's loyalty. Instead, they take part in the same daily activities as everyone else. They are just ordered to report back if they uncover any signs of dangerous dissension within Cynosure.

This is a fairly well-kept secret. Hurle doesn't want his people to feel nervous. Also, he knows the difference between people who are upset at him as a person, or at a decision he's made, and those who are no longer faithful to the overall plan. Those who present a risk to the city are the ones who need to be dealt with quickly and directly. He feels strongly that the success and security of Cynosure is evidence enough that his way is the right way and will prove to any doubters that loyalty to Hurle is neither misplaced nor a mistake.



## Notable NPCs in Cynosure

### Phelan Ruusk

A human male in his late 40s, Phelan Ruusk did not expect to survive the Night of Fire. As a Magister in the 12th Legion, he was edging closer to retirement, and had taken on a mostly academic and teaching role within the Legion. He trained new mages when they were assigned to his rotation and tried to analyze artifacts picked up by the Legion's scouts when they took on the pirates of Bitter Reach. His most recent adventure had been going undercover to spy on the pirates, before sinking a dozen ships as he escaped. Phelan's expertise with Sorcery was well-known, and his creativity with Weave energy had been something he thought he could retire with into a comfortable Academy job.

When the fire began to rain down, he threw a shield around the civilian staff attached to the Legion, and nearly died as a result of the unexpected backlash of shattered Weave energy. His skin split apart, blood pouring like rivers from the lesions and rents upon his body. He was unconscious for a week.

The shield he created was so powerful it remained in

place for the entire night, and the three dozen people beneath it tended to his wounds and kept him alive, bandaging his entire body and doing everything they could to keep him breathing. In the morning, the shield flickered out.

By the time Hurle's Crusade found them, two months later, fewer than 10 people were left.

Ruusk was a broken man, in many ways. The shattering of the Weave had not only ripped his body apart, it had reduced his ability to use magic to that of an apprentice.

The legionnaires refused to join Hurle, and instead set off deeper into the ruins of the Empire. Ruusk, still crippled magically and physically from his experience during the Night of Fire and covered in hundreds of slowly healing scars, had little choice but to go with Hurle.

He and his wife (he had married one of his nurses during those weeks of recovery) made the journey back to Cynosure. Hurle instructed Ruusk to supervise the work of the few other mages that had joined the city. While not quite the retirement Ruusk had imagined, the work was rewarding, and for a while he felt like he was achieving something. When he was asked to be a part of Hurle's advisory council, however, this sense of achievement was replaced with dread. Hurle told Ruusk that he would be representing the ex-patriot Ascondeans in Cynosure, and was to ensure that they remained loyal to the city and to Hurle. Any that would stumble into the city over the coming months would have to be very sure they knew what they were getting into, and Ruusk had proven himself the man for the job.

Ruusk's daily life now involves meeting with disgruntled Ascondeans, listening to their problems and trying to put a positive spin on things for the council meetings. He also tries to persuade unhappy Ascondeans to put any thoughts of treason out their minds — literally. Ultimately, Ruusk has found what he was looking for: a position of status and respect. It just happens to be in a city far from home, and with a citizenry suffering from a growing feeling of unease.

### Clyan Moon

When the ocean pulled back from the coastline around the Warlands, leaving Cynosure as a landlocked city with cliffs instead of shores, many ships were left stranded. Others were sucked back along with the retreating sea, violently shaken apart and scattered upon the seething tide.

There were few survivors of these shipwrecks, but in Clyan Moon's case, she was washed ashore just miles from the walls of Cynosure.

An attractive girl in her early 20s, Clyan was found by some of Hurle's scouts the day after the Night of Fire. The raven-haired girl was brought back to the city and immedi-

#### Phelan Ruusk

Imperial Spy (NPC 4)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 4	<b>Health:</b> 6
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 3
<b>Cha:</b> 4	<b>Int:</b> 5	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 6	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 10	<b>Init:</b> 8	<b>Def:</b> 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Con	4	4	8	(4)
Empathy	5	2	7	(3+)
Investigation	5	4	9	(4+)
Linguistics	5	1	6	(3)
Magic/Sorcery	5	6	11	—
Melee	3	4	7	(3+)
Scavenge	5	2	7	(3+)
Warfare	5	2	7	(3+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Alertness:** +2 to Perception.

**Battle Mage:** +1 Spell Damage.

**Burn Reduction:** Takes 1 less point of Burn

**Magical Aptitude, Sorcery:** Cast spells from Sorcery tradition.

**Paranoia:** Anxious and distrustful of everyone around him.

Ascondean, Saiken, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Sword, Short	2L	0	9L	(4+)L

ately put into a jail cell, under heavy guard, with three crossbows pointed at her at all times. Bright magical light filled the room, almost hurting her eyes. Hurle refused to speak with her directly, but spoke to her through a second person, who stood in front of her cell, trembling in fear.

Clyan was equally as frightened by her treatment, as she had no idea why these brutes would be so frightened of her. But then, she had no memory of her life past age 16, and did not realize she was wearing the tight black clothing of the Consorts of Shadow.

Unable to answer questions about where she'd been before the Night of Fire, and how she'd come to be wearing the clothes of the Consorts, it took some time before they believed that she might be telling the truth.

Certainly, she showed no signs of magical talent, and Phelan Ruusk theorized that she may have lost her abilities as a side effect of Burn or other event she experienced during the Night of Fire. Hurle and Ruusk concocted a scheme, telling her that she had a highly infectious disease that could kill the population of the city if she were allowed to get out. She was a carrier — but immune to the disease herself.

Eventually, Clyan was allowed some small freedom, wandering around a locked building that was under guard at all times. She was beautiful, petite and apparently innocent, with her memories gone. Hurle felt strongly attracted to her — though he knew that could be a part of her scheme.

For now, Hurle watches — and talks — to Clyan from a

safe place. He no longer uses a go-between. He talks to her about his day, and tries to make sure she is comfortable. Her prison is now probably one of the most comfortable homes in the city, even if she is not allowed to leave. Inside, there are magical light runes set up everywhere so she cannot find a shadow big enough to hide in — or escape by. She is a bird in a golden cage, and she belongs to Hurle.

For her part, Clyan is still confused by much of what has happened to her, but believes Hurle's story about the disease. She is even grateful for being protected and looked after.

## Places Within Cynosure

### *The Gate of Bone*

Built from the bones of a gigantic sea creature, the main gates of Cynosure are impressive indeed. While no one is quite sure what the creature looked like when it was alive (one of the rover Beguilers called it a Brotula, while making a sign of protection in the air), it makes for an intimidating first impression of the city — which is precisely the intention.

To walk into the city, one must walk through the jaws of the beast, which have been propped open. The gateway itself is made from tall arching ribs built into the stone and wood of the outer wall of Cynosure. One story has it that Hurle is seeking the services of a Necromancer who can animate the creature. It is rumored that Hurle will ride it into battle, should he ever feel the need to take on either the Empire or the rest of the Warlands.

### *The Tower of the Broken Sword*

Before there was a city by the sea, there was a tower. It was built, initially, to watch over the ships that anchored in the deep, natural harbor that made this area so valuable for pirates and traders alike. Over the centuries, the tower, constructed from black obsidian and local granite, stood against the storms and swords of invaders and warbands, changing hands over and over again.

Eventually, a village, then a town built up around the base of the tower, which had always been one of the more difficult citadels to take — hence its nickname. Cynosure was born of this settlement, and the tower was the seed.

The tower has been damaged over the years by earthquakes, storms and war. The Night of Fire did the most damage, of course, but the tower was well constructed and well designed. Standing several hundred feet high, it is actually a fairly squat building with a wide base narrowing only a little to a flat top. The walls are more than a dozen feet thick, and are not much narrower where the few windows and doors

### Clyan Moon

Shadow Whisperer (NPC 2)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 2	<b>Health:</b> 4
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 4	<b>Wil:</b> 2
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 5	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 7	<b>Def:</b> 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Acrobatics	3	3	6	(3)
Athletics	2	2	4	(2)
Magic/Shadow	4	4	8	—
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Stealth	3	4	7	(3+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Attractive:** +1 Charisma with people.

**Magical Aptitude, Shadow Magic:** Cast spells from Shadow tradition.

**Amnesia:** Lost her memory and may have flashbacks. Ascondean, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Dagger	1L	0	5L	(2+)L



## The Consorts of Shadow

Consisting entirely of women, this secret organization had committed themselves to the continued existence of the Warlands. They use their gifts to watch and manipulate events, perpetuating the chaos and violence to ensure no single man rules the west. Experts at politics and intrigue, the Consorts never sell their services or pledge their loyalty. Rather, they interfere at their own accord, offering information or taking action that will push the situation to suit their needs. Leaving as suddenly as they appear, they rarely leave any trace of their presence — if anyone knew they were there to begin with.

exist. Long, thin channels allow light to filter in from outside, while rune-carved stones, built into the construction, still give out a soft light within the claustrophobic corridors inside the tower itself.

Hurle makes his base and home within the tower. The basement levels are where the majority of the city's food stores are secured.

## The Greenhouses

Although there are a few meager farms in the lands around Cynosure, and even two large areas within the walls of the city, the greenhouses are the pride of those who live here.

Two Ascondean farmers given shelter and citizenship within Cynosure noticed there was a great deal of glass being stacked up alongside wood and stone, all recovered from the debris fields and rubble. It occurred to them that they could construct some greenhouses to extend the growing period and, with the help of some rune stones to provide heat, there would be a chance of providing a significant amount of food within the safety of Cynosure's walls.

Hurle was intrigued and gave the farmers the resources they needed to build a greenhouse. Within a few weeks, the first seeds were planted and some plants were transferred to the safety of the new building.

The experiment was a complete success. The greenhouses are now seen as a major resource by Hurle. He sometimes gives fresh fruit as a diplomatic gift.

## The Farms

There aren't too many cities with farms inside their walls, but then again, there aren't too many cities left. Hurle never visited the capital of the Ascondean Empire. Had he done so, he would have seen farmland within those walls, used by the Imperial Academy of Horticulture for research.

The farms set up inside the walls of Cynosure are a long way from the IAH farms, but the theory is the same: Protected from the elements and outside influence, the farms are a safe way to grow crops, albeit in limited form. But a protected crop is a certain crop — the Warlands were a poor place to be a farmer even Before.

Irrigation for the farms is provided by channels cut and redirected from the raging River Leren. The city walls provide a great deal of protection for the crops and the farmers who work daily on the land.

The land for the largest farm, in the northern part of the city, was reclaimed from stables and corrals. It had been growing grass to feed horses for decades in the Before. The land was understandably quite fertile, and made for good growing. Its proximity to a large expanse of rubble requires guards to sometimes protect farmers from attacks by undead.

The other significant farm is located just north of the eastern Sea Wall. It is being used to grow cabbage and potatoes. This land was once part of gardens belonging to a particularly wealthy merchant, which has been cleared for the new crop. The house, which mostly collapsed during the Night of Fire, is now used for storage.

Aside from these two major farms, there are hundreds of smaller allotments for personal or family use. Some are the size of a barn, while most are no bigger than a handful of graves. They are scattered throughout the city, wherever sunlight finds a patch of safe, fertile ground that's not being used for something more important.

## The Pit

Many would argue that Cynosure owes its existence to the deep natural harbor that once nestled within the south bay. Ships of all kinds, though usually pirates or merchants, used the harbor to ply their trade or wait out storms. Over time, this was useful enough to garner the attention of warlords. A citadel was inevitable. A city was an unexpected surprise.

The deep waters allowed ships to dock close to shore, unloading goods, passengers, slaves and supplies in safety under the watchful eye of the Tower of the Broken Sword.

When the Night of Fire swept across the world, the ocean pulled back, leaving boats and vessels stranded like sea creatures. The deep harbor became a muddy bowl, a pit of no use to anyone. The River Leren that had once flowed in stately splendor into the cove now rushes over a stony brink, creating a loud and powerful waterfall into a small pool that was a meager memory of the harbor that had gone before.

The ocean, now leagues away, took away the original purpose of the city. However, the stinking mudflats offered a

line of defense that the city needed. No pirate or mercenary could attack from that front for now, so the city could concentrate on shoring up its landward defenses.

But the Pit, as it was known, is a reminder of what was lost. Strange creatures sometimes crawl up the rocky walls, Weave-touched survivors of the wrecked ships lost in the mud below. The shipwrecks that remain are rotting hulks, but a few hardy souls are still tempted by the thoughts of the supplies remaining in their holds. None have returned from such a salvage mission, though a few nights later, new muddy monsters attempt to crawl up from the Pit, hungry for blood.

## *Debris Fields*

While rebuilding has carried on almost without pause since the Night of Fire, except for some significant slowdown during the depths of the Long Winter, much of the city remains in ruin. Attempts have been made to clear the worst of the collapsed buildings — not just to scavenge useful materials, but to produce open, clear spaces. Even if these spaces are just rubble, it's important to Hurle and his guard to have line of sight where there are no useful buildings. The only thing worse than unused buildings are ruined unused buildings, and there are few of either any more.

The debris fields are the term for not just the cleared expanses of the city, but for the large fields of rubble that have yet to be picked through. Sometimes they are piled high with trash and debris. These are the most dangerous places to scavenge for those citizens with license to do so (and yes, you need a license to scavenge here — Hurle takes 80 percent of anything useful that you might find). The aptly named “rubble rousers,” the undead residents of these shattered homes, sometimes pull themselves out of the ruins to kill and feed upon any who would trespass.

## *Inns*

### *Hurle's Mug*

As one of the oldest inns in the city (and one of the only ones left), Hurle's Mug has had many other names over the years — as many names as the city has had leaders, in fact. When someone new takes over, the owner heads out with a brush and a pot of paint and changes the first word in the sign to accommodate the city's new leader, and business goes on as usual. Most of the patrons have found this practice fairly amusing. The current owner,

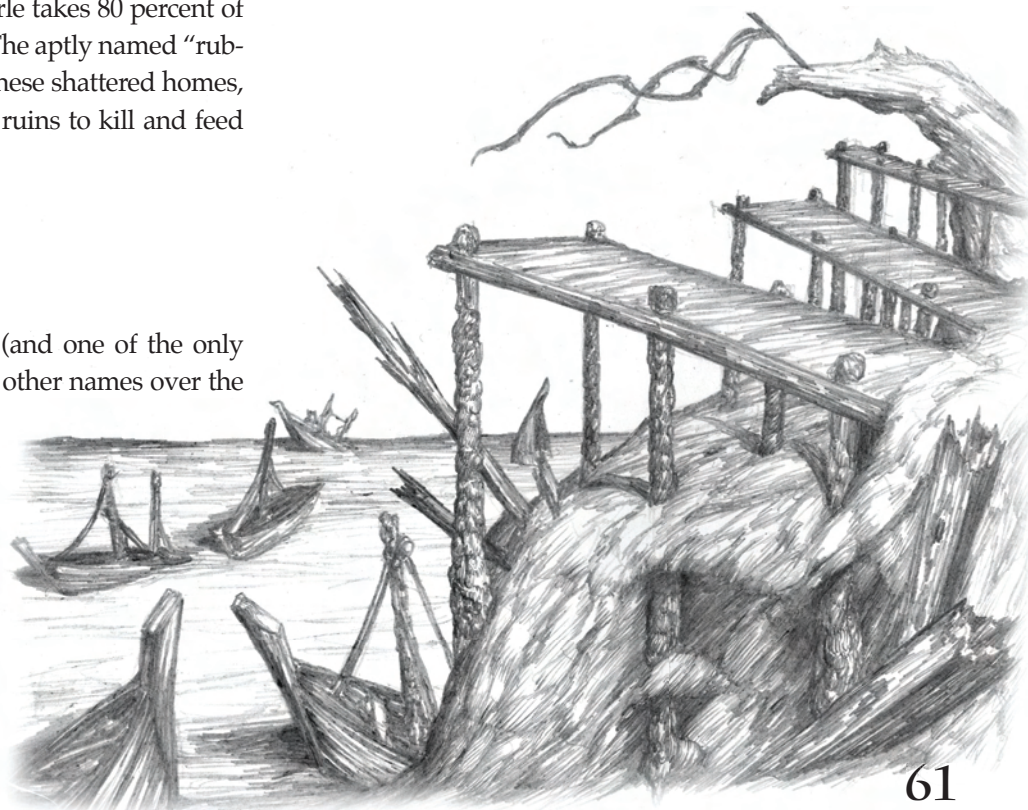
Blarington Lurryworth, is a gnome of some foresight and repute. He bought the inn from the previous owner three years before the Night of Fire for a huge amount of money. He then began reinforcing the basement level and setting aside brewing supplies. Many are glad that he did, and have decided not to ask too many questions about why.

These days, with silver and copper being almost worthless, the Mug uses barter for room and board. But the first drink is free, just as it always has been.

### *The Drunken Chir*

Since the Night of Fire, several small inns have sprung up and vanished almost overnight. Not everyone likes to drink in a shack, or under canvas tents. The Drunken Chir has outlasted them. The innkeeper, Mayra Chen, is also the owner. As an attractive rover woman in her late 40s, she brings the customers back over and over with great alcohol, attractive rover girls and some amazing music. The inn itself is built in the ruins of a temple, mostly in the basement, under a cracked-open floor that is covered with canvas. When it rains, which isn't often, water runs down the walls, and is collected into barrels to make more rover wine.

There is, in fact, an actual chir. Thew is chained at the entrance down into the inn. It is muzzled, but fairly tame, and enjoys accepting drinks and food from the clientele. Mayra has not told anyone, but she believes the chir is Weave-touched. When it detects a Beguiler walking past, it passes gas, silently but awfully. The inn has been cleared out more than once by one of Hurle's Watchers trying to sneak in.





# A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Kreel leaned against a tree, tired from the day's journey and the evening's preparations. His right leg throbbed from his arrow wound. But the night was young. If things went well, it would be a glorious one. If not, it would be short and Kreel would sleep forever. The farmer stood out in the open. Kreel could see the whites of his eyes flash as he nervously glanced toward Kreel's hiding place, then into the darkness, and then at the fallen logs and gully behind him. Not for the first time, the westerner wondered how the Empire had stood on the backs of the likes of Graham for so long.

Still, Kreel knew he would have bled out if not for the farmer bandaging him and collecting the trowel root and blood leaves that helped his wounds heal cleanly. He owed him his life, and would repay him by bartering back his wife and daughter, if they still lived. Kreel had seen tracks yesterday that indicated the warband had met up with slavers from the north. Surprisingly, it looked as if only women and children were sold. Kreel guessed Garn was going to use the male captives in battle. That idea formed the seed of Kreel's plan to retake his position. Since Garn had an army of captives, Kreel would attempt to turn those numbers against him.

But looking at Graham — a prairie dog ready to jump in his hole — Kreel was not sure the captive easterners would be willing to fight, even if it meant their freedom. If they were too timid, his plan would surely fail.

Then he thought he heard something — maybe the faint creak of leather boots in stirrups. He motioned for Graham to begin. Graham struck the flint, and blew on the glowing ember. He dropped it onto the dry grasses and kindling he had built earlier. The fire licked at the small branches, then flared up and crackled.

Tense moments went by as light replaced the darkness in a growing radius around Graham. Kreel moved deeper into the shadow of the trees and waited for the scout to arrive. He hoped Garn hadn't doubled the patrols. He only planned for one.

The masked rider did not rush in. He approached the fire slowly, warily. Kreel recognized the mask of one of the archers who had shot him. The wooden mask was painted a deep red and had a toothy grin painted on it that reached from ear to ear. As planned, Graham stood, Kreel's walking stick held ready.

"Ka'fure degak," Graham yelled with all the might his shaky voice could muster. Kreel had taught him the ancient curse, which involved fathers laying with horses. It seemed even more insulting with an eastern accent.

The rider looked momentarily confused, then he charged. Graham held his ground for a second, then backedpedaled. He pretended to fall into the gully and hid beneath the fallen logs. The scout dismounted and drew a short sword. Kreel made his move.

As the scout slashed at underbrush and poked at the still wildly cursing Graham, Kreel limped, slowly and quietly, toward the horse. He gritted his teeth at the pain in his leg as he swung himself into the saddle.

To his credit, the rider almost turned in time to grab the reins, but the spooked horse took off. Kreel held on.

"Kreel!" the scout yelled, surprise in his voice.

He broke and ran before Kreel had regained control of the horse. When he spun the roan to face its former master, the scout was a few strides away from the relative safety of the dark woods. Still, Kreel was reluctant to risk the horse's legs by galloping in the dark. He needed the horse if his plan had any chance to succeed.

Suddenly Graham emerged from his hiding place. He and the scout disappeared into the darkness. Kreel heard a scuffle and trotted after them.

The farmer turned hunter stood over the scout, who was still breathing.

"I think he'll live," Graham said. "I clubbed him pretty good ..."

"No," Kreel said as he dismounted. "He will not live."

Kreel took the scout's sword and cut the man's throat with it.

Graham was so shocked by the act that he forgot to ask Kreel how the scout knew his name.



# Chapter 6: Communities

*“Together we are stronger ... and a bigger target.”*

The races of Scondera are social by nature, gathering together to share resources, defend against a common enemy or simply to stave off loneliness. Not even the end of the world has changed this simple fact. Although the vast majority of cities, towns and villages were destroyed or damaged during the Night of Fire, many survivors have found one another. Whether it be in a newly formed community or a settlement from the Before that managed to survive, the people are forging a new life in a dangerous and unfamiliar world.

## *Building a Community*

When creating a community, consider the purpose of the settlement — not just in the context of the devastated ruins of Scondera, but in terms of the story.

Does the story require that the characters find a safe place? Do they need to face some kind of moral or physical dilemma? Or does it exist to hold a mirror up to the player characters and their recent actions? A group that has suffered betrayal will not trust anyone they meet, while a group that has suffered starvation or injury will likely ignore some of the worst aspects of a community, as long as they can stay there and recover.

Ultimately, a community in the After survives because of the wits and resourcefulness of its inhabitants. The survivors of the Night of Fire and Long Winter have learned tough lessons about what it takes to stay alive. Few communities are naive or innocent. Most have had to make very difficult decisions. This can range from turning injured and starving people away, watching their citizens die painfully, or even executing people for crimes that would have been minor offenses in the Before.

As with regular character generation, gamemasters should consider the overall concept of the settlement before thinking about more specific details. You can develop the motivation, personality and history of the community as you think about how and when it was founded, how it survived the Long Winter and aspects of its history and residents. Was it there before the Night of Fire? If so, how has it changed since the world ended and what does it have going for it?

## *Questions to Ask*

Answering the questions below will help you create a feasible community.

■ **Population:** What’s the overall population and how does it break down along racial lines? Consider the geographical location, but don’t let it totally define the population. The Night of Fire resulted in significant — and often unaccountable — geographical shifts. People and races who were once enemies have come together in the After.

■ **Survival:** How does this place survive? Where do they get their food, water or supplies? Why hasn’t it fallen apart or been destroyed?

■ **Motivation, personality and history:** Much like in character generation, consider the MPH of the settlement as an abstract definition. Aside from sheer survival, what’s the purpose of the village? What are its immediate needs? You can determine whether the settlement is relaxed, kind or cruel, and think about how that came about and how its culture influences the inhabitants’ individual personalities and motivations.

■ **Attitude toward magic:** Because most survivors either blame magic outright for the Night of Fire, or view it with suspicion, a settlement’s attitude toward magic is an important defining element. Characters using magic may quickly ascertain this attitude, one way or another. Some communities are less hostile than others, but few places openly welcome magic without any kind of caution.

■ **Government:** Who is in charge, and why? With few nations surviving the Night of Fire and Long Winter, most settlements find that they must govern themselves. Smaller settlements rarely worry too much about this, with small councils or elder family members making decisions in a way that has remained unchanged over thousands of years. Larger communities may require more organization in order to function. Often, it’s a matter of might makes right, but many communities try to follow the laws and structures that they are familiar with from Before. Newer communities may be governed by their founders, whether they are charismatic individuals, or military (or religious) groups.

■ **Background:** How was the community formed and why? Expand on the MPH of the settlement. Important members of the community (which could include player



# COMMUNITIES

characters) should be outlined along — with whatever parts they played in keeping the place alive throughout the Long Winter. Any problems or challenges the settlement has faced should be included at this point. A successful settlement will have rivals, while a struggling community may have other problems. How are these problems being solved, and what does the future look like for this place?

■ **Traditions:** What common traditions do community members share that bring them together? Settlements formed after the Night of Fire will quickly develop habits and quirks of their own that could be held as strongly as some ancient traditions. Some of these traditions will be born out of need or desperation. The euthanasia of the sick or old, or the imprisonment of fertile women are two darker examples.

■ **Geography:** What's around the community? It's important to remember how much the land has changed after the Night of Fire. A settlement could be in a forest in the middle of the desert, or on an island halfway up a mountain. These are extreme examples, but they can tell you much about a place, how it survived and what kind of chances it has for the future. Often, communities are formed around or located near unique landmarks or geological features that would have been impossible in the Before. These features can lead to future storylines, or simply showcase the newly changed world.

■ **Resources and needs:** What can player characters find in the community? What is valuable there? A community may have plenty of food, surrounded as it is by fertile land, but it could have no metal or wood, forcing the farmers to literally dig the dirt with their hands. A place like this would kill for steel or lumber (see page 4 of the *Desolation* core book). Another community could have almost everything it needs, but if everyone in the town is old (or a child), they clearly need a different kind of help.

■ **Important Non-player Characters:** Who are the community's main characters? As previously mentioned, the founders of a newer settlement often remain in positions of power or influence. But newcomers can quickly rise in status, either as paragons or hated exiles. From a more practical point of view, it's a good idea to have a few names and notes jotted down (at the very least) to give the settlement a rich and realistic feeling before the characters get there.

Ultimately, the most important thing when building a community is to try to portray a living, breathing place. Every settlement, no matter how desperate or shoddy, has something that gave it an edge over all the places that failed. People stayed for a reason. Find that reason, portray it in the story, and the community should come to life.

## Communities in the After

### Blossom

■ Population: 73 (53 mongrels, 15 humans, 5 gnomes).

■ Survival: Hunting and gathering.

■ Motivation: Survive, fortify the village, seek potential trading partners.

■ Personality: Relaxed yet vigilant.

■ History: Perched on the edge of one of the great oases, in the Before, Blossom was considered neutral territory for travelers and nomads to relax, refill waterskins and conduct trade. Now the oasis is cooled by the shade of a single apple tree, which bears fruit year-round and has become a place of shelter for survivors.

■ Attitude toward magic: Wary. The people of Blossom watch magic users carefully, but give each visitor the same chance to prove either friend or foe.

■ Government: Blossom is governed by a council composed of representatives from each of the races in permanent residence. Currently comprised of Affernell Winsolin (female gnome), Patric Hays (human) and Stith of Algiz (mongrel).

### Background

Hidden deep among the dunes of the Saikin Wastes, the village now called Blossom by its inhabitants started out as the Zolun Oasis, frequented by travelers and the nomadic tribes of the desert sands. As one of the great oases, fresh water flowed to the surface in quantities generous enough to allow for the growth of plants and trees along its banks. Pausing in the shade of the trees for a drink of cool water was a moment of rare luxury for people crossing the harsh terrain of the desert.

The Night of Fire is called the Night of Storms by the mongrel tribes of the Saikin Wastes. In place of falling meteors, the desert was wracked with storm after storm. Tornadoes, dust storms and howling torrential rains beat down on the sands with elemental fury, causing flash floods or sweeping up anyone (or anything) unfortunate enough to be caught in the path of the tempest. While the rest of the world suffered from the Long Winter, the Saikin Wastes were drenched by constant rainfall. The desert became a churning sea of quicksand that made it nearly impossible to cross. Whole communities were sucked under the surface of the sands. The homes and people who sought shelter

within them were forever encased in sandy graves.

By chance, one of the larger mongrel tribes had set up their tents around the Zolun Oasis, alongside a group of humans and gnomes who were crossing the desert. When the Night of Storms began, the wind blew away the mongrels' tents — and only the quick thinking of the gnomes saved the community that would become Blossom from immediate destruction. From within their covered wagons, the gnomes produced odd, metal boxes that they used to pack the wet sand of the oasis into bricks. Once the bricks were treated with a foul-smelling chemical, they proved sturdy enough to build temporary structures that withstood the savagery of the storms. Human, mongrel and gnome alike watched in awe as the trees around the oasis were blown over or carried away by the storms, leaving the fertile ground around the Zolun Oasis bare.

Near dawn, something miraculous occurred.

## Affernell Winsolin of Blossom

Diplomat (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Gnome	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 4
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 5	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> -1	<b>Move:</b> 3	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 8	<b>Init:</b> 8	<b>Def:</b> 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Bureaucracy	5	2	7	(3+)
Diplomacy	3	4	7	(3+)
Empathy	5	4	9	(4+)
Investigation	5	3	8	(4)
Linguistics	5	3	8	(4)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Scavenge	5	2	7	(3+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Gnomish Subconscious:** Ignore the -2 penalty for using Academic and Linguistic Skills untrained.

**Heaven Sense:** Gnomes always know the time of day and the season, and can visualize the heavens with remarkable accuracy.

**Mental Acuity:** Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Intelligence-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

**Ancestral Stream:** Tap into the Ancestral Stream.

**Alchemy:** Turn sand to stone, create glowing liquid, purify water.

**Conversation:** Speak with members of the Ancestral Stream.

**Reject Magic:** The Forgetting forces gnomes to resist even beneficial magic. Spells to heal or enhance must be resisted.

**Small:** -1 Size.

**Slow:** Movement rate is reduced by 2.

**Cheerful:** Overly happy.

**Curious:** Fascinated by the unknown.

Ascondean, Dwarven, Gnomish, Saikin, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Dagger	1L	+1	6L	(3)L

A bright light appeared in the sky, and with it came the smell of flowers. Soft, white petals rained down on the oasis and stuck in the fertile soil like seeds planted in tilled rows. As they watched, the blossoms grew sprouts and apple trees began to shoulder their way out of the earth, each growing to full height, blooming and dropping apples to the ground before decaying and withering away. This process was repeated again and again, and each time fewer of the trees appeared. Each time the trees became larger, almost as if they were devouring the essence of their fellows. Finally only one remained: a massive apple tree with a trunk the thickness of a house and branches wide as boulevards. The tree blossomed into life and from every branch, apples began to grow.

The branches of the tree sheltered the community from the merciless rains of the Long Winter, and the apples — supplemented with fish and whatever game they could find — provided them with a ready source of food. Each time an apple was plucked from the tree, a new one grew to replace it within an hour.

Munching on the tree's bounty, the humans, mongrels and gnomes made a pact to protect this wonder and named their new village Blossom in honor of the tree. Using the dead trees scattered around the oasis, the residents carefully constructed their new village in the boughs of the tree itself.

When the rains finally ceased, the placement of the village in the tree proved to be a sound strategic decision when raiders pounded into the oasis, seeking to enslave any survivors. From their positions in the branches, the people of Blossom had little difficulty driving off their attackers with dropped rocks, arrows and fire-hardened spears. This encounter set the pattern for life in Blossom to this day. Bands of ragged marauders periodically make attacks on the village — and are soundly defeated by its citizens, safe in their elevated homes. The council that was formed (consisting of one mongrel, one human and one gnome) to determine the way forward for the people of Blossom realize that they'll eventually have to deal with the raiders on more even terms, however, and have begun to explore the idea of contacting other, non-hostile tribes in the area to form an alliance.

Strangely, a few of the raiders have returned to Blossom singly or in pairs and petitioned the village for admittance. The turncoats say they've seen the error of their ways and claim to want nothing more than to live in peace among the branches of the tree. The council has yet to make a decision on what exactly to do with these "reformed" raiders, but have allowed them to dwell near the base of the tree for the time being.



# COMMUNITIES

## Traditions

The citizens of Blossom honor the tree that provides them with food and safety by tending to it with loving care. Each citizen is expected to spend at least one hour out of every day pruning away dead branches or shooing off beasts and insects (especially Weave-touched ones) that might cause the tree to sicken.

## Geography

Blossom is located deep inside the Saikin Wastes, with the shade of the gigantic tree throwing a long shadow over the sand dunes. The Zolun Oasis itself is the size of a large pond, and is filled with fresh, clean water and a number of small fish. The homes of the villagers have been built into

crooks of the tree with care not to disturb it. A cluster of tents has grown up near the base of the tree, housing the raiders that have turned their backs on violence and now seek to join the community of Blossom. Access to and from the village in the tree is gained by use of a rope ladder. The council is debating the merits of creating a lift to bring heavier items into the village (and help out elderly and infirm citizens).

## Resources and Needs

The village doesn't lack for fresh fruit or wood (the tree sheds enough smaller branches to provide), but it does lack for pretty much everything else. The council desperately wants to find a source for meat other than fish, and the village as a whole is beginning to run shy of common, everyday items (hammers, cooking utensils) that can't be replaced with carved, wooden substitutes.

### **An Apple a Day**

The apples that grow from Blossom's tree have a number of strange qualities as a result of the tree being touched by the Weave during the Night of Fire. People can survive happily on a diet of these apples alone. Normally this kind of diet wouldn't be good for long-term health. Regular consumption (more than one apple a day for at least three days) of the apples makes people more docile and easy to get along with, as well as producing a mild euphoric state. This translates to a +2 bonus to Empathy rolls and a positive attitude that simulates the effects of the Charismatic Talent. Regular consumption of the apples also becomes addictive. This addiction is treated like a disease (see the *Desolation* core book, page 187) with an Infection rating of 3 and Recovery of 4. The symptoms of the addiction manifest as an inability to concentrate, which results in a -3 penalty to all actions.

#### **Fire Pit Baked Apple**

- 1 apple
- 2 tbsp. dried fruits
- 2 tbsp. nuts
- 3/4 tsp. honey
- 1/2 tsp. butter

1. Core the apple, leaving the bottom intact. Stuff the cavity with fruits and nuts of your choice, packing it fairly tight. Coat with honey and dot with butter.

2. Wrap the apple in leaves and place directly on coals or place the apple right side up on a thin, flat rock sitting on the coals. Bake for 12 to 18 minutes, turning occasionally, or until the apple yields slightly when pushed with a gloved hand. Before serving, let the apple cool for a few minutes. Makes 1 serving.

## *Carris*

■ Population: 155 (134 humans, 21 mongrels).

■ Survival: Farming, hunting/gathering. Willing to trade.

■ Motivation: Rebuild, reclaim the mines and land lost to the undead, protect what's theirs.

■ Personality: Tense, alert, militaristic, slightly paranoid, oddly jubilant at times. The townsfolk celebrate life in the face of death.

■ History: In the Before, a mining town near the Carrick Hills in Kar'Danan dominated by the local Necromancer. The Night of Fire not only changed the town, but also moved it elsewhere. Now they struggle against the uncontrolled undead that regularly assault Carris, and work to maintain their tenuous hold on the farms they've reclaimed.

■ Attitude toward magic: Violent hatred and fear. After finally escaping the rule of Necromancers, the townsfolk have no patience for magic or those who use it. Otherwise friendly to outsiders, magic users are turned away at best — or burned at the stake at worst.

■ Government: A benign military dictatorship. Mayor Zavancy makes all the important decisions for the community, but the majority of day-to-day life is unencumbered by military rule.



## Background

In the Before, the town of Carris was ruled by Mayor Rufus Thorington, with “oversight” provided by the local Necromancer. So long as the townsfolk paid their taxes and met their monthly quota of iron ore mined from the Carrick Hills, they were largely left to their own devices. Still, people whispered about missing loved ones and despoiled graves, and the necromancer’s tower was given a wide berth. When the Night of Fire came to Carris, the undead servants of the Necromancer went mad. Boiling out of the tower in greater numbers than the townsfolk ever suspected, the undead attacked the town, slaughtering the living in droves. The necromancer himself came down from his tower and cast a spell. For a moment, the people of Carris thought they were saved — then the magic went wrong. The spell bent and warped out of control, killing the Necromancer and surrounding the town with a nasty, green fog that blocked out the countryside. Anyone who went into the fog didn’t come back. The undead did stop attacking the town, though, and began to stream up toward the mines of Carrick Hills.

The fog persisted for nearly a week. When it finally dispersed, the townspeople didn’t recognize the countryside anymore. It seemed as though the mutated spell had somehow gouged out a section of Kar’Danan, moving it elsewhere. A good portion of the Carrick Hills came with the town, as did most of the surrounding farmlands. The undead stood in ranks before the mines of the Carrick Hills and attacked anyone who attempted to get past them.

It was about this time that Annalise Zavancy (pictured at left) showed up in town. Annalise told the townspeople that she’d been traveling to Carris when she was trapped by the fog, but had managed to find shelter in an abandoned mine. Eventually the undead forced her to flee from her refuge, which is when she made her way to Carris. The town was still in a state of shock when she arrived, so she helped the townsfolk heal their wounded, set about to organizing repairs and generally took charge of the situation. It was Annalise who raised and led the militia that cleared nearby farms of the undead and Annalise who saw to it that everyone was fed. The people of Carris were so grateful for her leadership that they proclaimed her mayor of the town.

Recently, a patrol returned from their rounds with strange news. While battling undead near the mines, one of their members spotted a pair of what looked like zombies observing the fight from the top of a hill. When the patrol moved to engage the pair, a squadron of skeletons — marching in formation and armed with spears, shields

and bows — clattered around the hill to protect the zombies. Outnumbered and unprepared to fight such organized opponents, the patrol fell back and was astonished when the skeletons didn’t give chase. Apparently following the orders of the zombies, the skeletons fell back into defensive positions, acting as a rearguard for the zombies’ retreat. Mayor Zavancy is desperate to learn more about the pair and the townsfolk have been unnerved by this new development. She tells the townfolk that if the undead were to cease their random attacks and fight with any sort of coordination, Carris would be doomed.

In reality, Annalise was the senior apprentice of the Necromancer. Since she rarely came into town, no one recognizes her as such and she’s kept the information to herself. When the time is right, she intends to use her magic to bind small numbers of the free-roaming undead to her will and attack the inhabitants of any nearby towns or villages. With the help of the Carris militia, she’ll then ride to the “rescue” of the town, dismissing the undead to scatter before her. She intends for the attacks to weaken the villages enough for them welcome her militia and the security it brings, placing them under her authority. Annalise plans on slowly expanding her territory in this manner with the eventual aim of declaring herself queen of a new kingdom.

## Annalise Zavancy of Carris

Necromancer (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 6
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 2	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 5	<b>Wil:</b> 4
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 4	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 9	<b>Init:</b> 7	<b>Def:</b> 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Con	3	4	7	(3+)
Empathy	5	3	8	(4)
Investigation	5	3	8	(4)
Magic/Necromancy	5	4	9	—
Medicine	5	2	7	(3+)
Melee	5	4	9	(4+)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Burn Transfer:** Share Burn with willing people.

**Calculated Attack:** Use Intelligence for melee.

**Magical Aptitude, Necromancy Magic:** Cast spells from Necromancy tradition.

**Haunted:** Emotional outbursts due to memories of the Night of Fire. Ascondean, Kar’Danish

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Club	2N	0	11N	(5+)N
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chainmail	+2	2	—	



# COMMUNITIES

The zombie duo are the Weave-twisted remains of another pair of the necromancer's apprentices: twins named Gernot and Bede. When the master left the tower to defend the town, they were told to follow after gathering magical items that would allow them to control the undead. The twins were hurrying toward the town when the fog overtook them. Recognizing necromantic magic at work, Gernot and Bede attempted to dispel the effect and their magic went haywire. The magical nature of the fog was twisted by the backlash of Burn and turned them into intelligent zombies with the ability to control other undead by thought alone. Gernot and Bede were the real reason the undead left the town, summoned by the agony of the two apprentices.

As soon as the fog had dissipated, Gernot and Bede moved quickly to secure most of the sheep and goats in the area. They had learned their new forms required them to feed from the life force of the living, and sought to feed from animals rather than people.

Now that Annalise has learned about Gernot and Bede, and their ability to control the undead, she wants to use them to control the undead and set about conquering the lands around Carris. In secret, Annalise attempted to use necromancy to control Gernot and Bede, but discovered they were immune. Incensed by her attack, Gernot and Bede sent their undead servants to kill her, but she managed to escape. Now Annalise plots new ways to bring Gernot and Bede, and with them the horde of undead, under her control.

## Traditions

Other than the requirement that every able-bodied citizen take turns patrolling Carris and the nearby farms with the town militia, every sixth day the town gathers to celebrate its continued survival and freedom from the necromancers of Kar'Danan with a communal meal, followed by singing and dancing.

## Geography

The piece of Kar'Danan that was gouged out during the Night of Fire contains both the town of Carris and a fair sized chunk of the Carrick Hills. It is vaguely circular and about 5 miles in radius. The terrain is lightly wooded, with gentle swells of grassy hills that eventually give way to more rocky features surrounding the mines. Carris sits on the western edge of the gouge, and the mines lay more or less in the center. The area in between is dotted with farmsteads that, except for a few near the town, are in the process of being reclaimed by nature. A ditched and paved road runs east to west through the area, beginning at

Carris and passing by Carrick Hills until it stops abruptly at the edge of the transplanted terrain. Multiple other smaller paths crisscross the area, though these aren't as well defined as the main road.

The isolated geographical description of Carris is intentional, leaving the current location of Carris for the gamemaster to decide. This allows interested GMs to drop the town into their campaign with little effort.

## Resources and Needs

In theory, Carris has everything it needs to support itself in the After. The town has arable farmland, herds of domesticated livestock and trees to provide firewood and lumber. What the town lacks is numbers. Mayor Zavancy wants to clear the mines of the undead, giving the community access to valuable iron ore and the weapons it can be used to create. She attempts to recruit visitors to the town and has sent long-range patrols into the surrounding lands to seek out other communities.

## *Emerald*

■ Population: 155 (103 humans, 17 elves, 12 dwarves, 23 mongrels).

■ Survival: Agriculture.

■ Motivation: Survival.

■ Personality: Paranoid; they know they are lucky and they suspect outsiders of scheming to steal their city.

■ History: A group of survivors has found an ancient relic that imbues the soil around it with fertility, but refuse to acknowledge a growing danger.

■ Attitude toward magic: Accepting; magic is just another tool to be used for the benefit of the community.

■ Government: Emerald is ruled by a council of elders made up of the oldest, wisest and most charismatic survivors. They are responsible for determining who will be allowed to join the community and who will be turned away. They make all decisions about defending Emerald and dividing up its resources.

## Background

When the spring came at last, a group of survivors from all over Cushulain made their way south from the lake of magma where they had weathered the Long Winter. They



discovered a mile-wide circle of land where the broken rock was covered with all manner of lichen and grasses. Before long, they deduced the cause: The brass tower in the center of the circle — unearthed by the Night of Fire — possessed some sort of magic. They decided to settle there and take advantage of it. Because they knew others would covet what they had and try to take it from them, defending their community was a top priority. Walls and gates were built before they began to cultivate the fields.

A few months ago, a gnomish traveler came to Emerald. He tried to warn the council of elders that the tower was an unstable gnomish relic that needed to be destroyed. The elders convinced themselves that he was scheming to take Emerald for his people and had Davin Bron (pictured at left), the son-in-law of one of the elders, kill the gnome and throw his body in the lake of fire.

Complicating matters is that Davin is now blackmailing the council. He knows the people of Emerald would be disgusted by the gnome's murder, and many of them might choose to accept his warnings. Fortunately, Davin's desires are modest — more food and luxuries for himself and his wife — but the situation is a disaster waiting to happen.

Emerald has also been the center of several earthquakes since the gnome was killed. So far, no buildings have been destroyed and no one has been hurt, but the council of elders is beginning to wonder if they were wrong to distrust the gnome.

## Traditions

Any survivors who reach Emerald must prove themselves to the current inhabitants by demonstrating some useful skill — or at the very least, extraordinary stamina and dedication. Because the power of the brass tower trumps the curse of Nature upon the elves, the council of elders has been willing to accept elven refugees. After the incident with the gnome, however, the council of elders turns away any gnomish travelers. Any gnome found attempting to sneak inside the city will certainly be killed in secret along with his or her companions.

Although Emerald remains loyal to the Divine Mother, the inhabitants have also made the brass tower itself the center of some of their worship. All holidays of the Divine Mother are held in the tower's shadow. The tower has several holidays devoted to it, during which it is praised in song and used as a giant brass maypole.

## Geography

Emerald is situated at the eastern edge of what was once Cushulain, among the foothills of the Primea Mountains.

The center of Emerald is the gnomish relic that gives the community its name: a 50-ft.-tall brass tower with a huge glittering emerald at the top. The base of the tower is buried in the ground. The council of elders has forbidden anyone to disturb the tower, so no one knows how far into the earth it descends or what it is connected to.

Emerald is circular, built to take maximum advantage of the tower's magical properties. The interior of the community is a mile-wide circle of farms and gardens. The homes, workshops and storehouses of the populace are built around that circle in three concentric rings. Beyond the outermost ring is a crude wall made of broken stone and sharpened wooden stakes.

A river runs through the center of Emerald. In the interior of the city it is broken into numerous irrigation canals, then gathered together again on the far side to flow out of the city and across the blasted ruin of Cushulain. Rather than deal with a potential weak point in their defenses, the builders of Emerald have constructed the city's only two gates around the river's entry and exit points, which are guarded day and night.

To the north of Emerald is a lake of magma where some of the populace migrated during the Long Winter, using its heat to fight back the cold. To the south and west, the landscape is dominated by broken rock. The terrain is easier to the east, and several other communities have sprung up along the river that flows out of Emerald.

## **Davin Bron of Emerald**

Blackmailing Scoundrel (NPC 2)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 2	<b>Health:</b> 5
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 5	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 6	<b>Def:</b> 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Con	2	3	5	(2+)
Gambling	3	2	5	(2+)
Larceny	3	3	6	(3)
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)
Stealth	3	4	7	(3+)

## **Talents/Flaws/Languages**

**Style Study:** Take advantage of opponent's weaknesses.

**Subtle Strike:** Make sneak attack vs. Passive Defense.

**Greedy:** Greatly values wealth and material possessions.

**Secret:** Has an embarrassing or shameful secret.

Ascondean, Lanarian

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Dagger	1L	0	6L	(3)L
Sap	1N	0	6N	(3)N



# COMMUNITIES

## Resources and Needs

Emerald is nearly self-sufficient. Between the river and the tower, they have everything they need. The only material resource Emerald will trade for is seed. Emerald is dependent upon a narrow variety of crops, many of them cultivated wild varieties, and the farmers in the populace know this is a liability.

Emerald's biggest need is security. Its people are becoming increasingly paranoid, seeing plots to take over Emerald in the angry face of every survivor they turn away.

## *Fair Trade*

■ Population: 62 (42 mongrels, 11 humans, 6 goblins, 2 orcs, 1 rover)

■ Survival: Hunter/gatherers, traders

■ Motivation: Trade their survival skills and goods for comfort

■ Personality: Practical but arrogant. Only the best archers and trappers are allowed to join the tribe. Meht lets Chun deal with any other visitors.

■ History: Former caravan owner saved by mongrels tries to use his trading skills in the After.

■ Attitude toward magic: Useful magic items are accepted in trade, but magic users are not trusted.

■ Government: Tribe led by Chieftain Meht, a mongrel



## Background

Heshune Chun (pictured above) was once a rover. Technically, he still is, but for all intents and purposes the fire that engulfed him during the Apocalypse left him a disfigured, misshapen mongrel. That's what everyone sees, and Chun has done nothing to correct them. He considers it a penance of sorts.

In the Before, Chun had employed mongrel guards to get his caravan safely around the Warlands. He had not been kind to them. He had cheated them on wages, beaten some and generally treated them like animals. After the Night of Fire, when Chun lay blistered and broken, it was a mongrel who had bandaged him with reeds soaked in poultices that made the burning pain stop. It was a mongrel who carried him to the meager shelter the half-burned caravan wagons afforded. And who had hunted game and fed him during the Long Winter.

That mongrel, who Chun knew only as Meht, had been one of the caravan guards when the Apocalypse struck. Meht wouldn't say why he had saved Chun. Whether it was to ease his physical suffering or prolong his emotional suffering, Chun never knew. What he did know was that his looks and charm — the basis of his personality and how he earned his living in the Before — were gone. There was nothing to sell, no one to sell it to and money was useless. Heshune Chun, the silver-tongued rover trader, was dead. Chun the mongrel had been born.

Over the course of the Long Winter, others, mostly mongrels, joined them. Chun, like a child, was in awe of their survival skills. He watched them track and snare game. They made arrowheads and spear tips from rocks. They turned hides into clothes and plants into poisons or medicines. The remains of the caravan became shelters. Meht became the tiny tribe's chieftain. Chun survived at their whim, without anything to contribute to the community.

By the time the snows started to melt, and more survivors wandered upon the settlement, Chun knew how he would repay them. The mongrels had the only thing of value in the After: survival skills. Chun would trade

## **Heshune Chun of Fair Trade**

Disfigured Scoundrel (NPC 2)

<b>Race:</b> Rover	<b>Style:</b> 2	<b>Health:</b> 5
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 2	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 4	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 5	<b>Def:</b> 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Con	3	4	7	(3+)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Merchant	3	4	7	(3+)
Performance/Acting	3	2	5	(2+)
Scavenge	3	3	6	(3)

## **Talents/Flaws/Languages**

**Exotic:** Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Charisma-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

**Farsight:** Ignore moderate (-2) Perception roll penalties for distance.

**Waterborne:** +4 to Swim rolls and the length of time you can hold your breath.

**Combat Skill, Con:** +2 Defense with skill

**Provoke:** Provoke opponents.

**Slight:** -2 to feats of strength, such as heavy lifting, pushing or breaking items. This does not affect Melee or Brawl rolls.

**Susceptible:** -2 to resist disease.

**Disfigured:** Ugly, unattractive and repulsive to others.

Ascondean, Rover

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Quarterstaff	2N	0	6N	(3)N

them for the creature comforts mongrels never had Before. He made a crude sign and posted it on one of the burned wagons that circled the tribe. It reads “Fair Trade.” Meht, always tight-lipped, has done nothing to stop him.

## Traditions

Chun has instituted a monthly bazaar on the morning after each full moon. So far it consists of a single table of potions, salves, arrows and hides. However, he has high hopes for it. He invites anyone passing through — though visitors have been few — to trade and bring their best back to the community to trade. Chun sees Fair Trade as a future nexus of commerce in the After. He has access to what people need. He is sure they will come, eventually. So far he has traded some rattlesnake antidote for a breastplate from a snake-bitten legionnaire. He gave it to Meht with all the pomp he could muster, but the mongrel merely sharpened its edge and gave it to the women to help them dig a well.

## Geography

Situated along what was once a well-traveled trade route through the Marches, the tents and wagons that comprise Fair Trade sit on a rise overlooking a vast plain. A half day to the west is a fast-running stream that the mongrels use for water. Meht is considering moving the settlement closer to the stream, but he suspects it is only swollen by the melting snows and will soon be dry. He has sent scouts in all directions, but they have only reported a series of hot geysers three days to the north, a great tar-filled canyon four days to the east and nothing but more plains to the south. Still, there are many elk and small game in the area. Meht is trying to get a handle on the strange weather patterns before he decides whether he needs to move the community.

## Resources and Needs

Fair Trade needs customers and more traders if it is to become the crossroads of commerce that Chun envisions. He needs to get the word out that Fair Trade has items useful in the new world and is welcoming to anyone who wants to trade fairly. He also needs to keep the roads near Fair Trade clear of bandits.

Meht, on the other hand, is not convinced that trade will be able to support his people. He doesn’t oppose Chun’s plans. In fact, he would like to be able to stay put because travel is more dangerous now than ever before. If Chun’s plans fall through, though, Meht wants to ensure a close source of fresh water and plenty of game. He is interested in any information about the surrounding area.

## *Falling Tower*

■ Population: 139 (122 humans, 6 mongrels, 5 dwarves, 4 rovers, 2 Loranthaiaans.

■ Survival: Ranching, farming, large stock of Legion supplies left over from Before.

■ Motivation: Protect what’s left of the Empire, build peaceful relationships with communities and raise cattle.

■ Personality: Strict but fair. Potential visitors are carefully evaluated before allowed entry.

■ History: Once a Legion guard tower and garrison on the border with Kar’Danan. Well-stocked with supplies and equipment in case of war.

■ Attitude toward magic: Cautious, but attempting to uphold the traditions of the Empire. Fiercely opposed to Necromancy, and wary of Primal Magic, unless the tribe or Shaman has a peaceful and diplomatic outlook.

■ Government: Military dictatorship commanded by Kentin Palanur (pictured above). The Legion is in command, though they attempt to give the civilian population a say in what goes on. There isn’t quite enough people in the settlement to enact the Council structure of the Empire, but the Legion leadership is eager to do so.

## Background

Before the Night of Fire, the Ascondean Empire had few enemies, and fewer things to fear. However, the Kingdom of Kar’Danan to the north had long given them pause. The necromantic powers of the Circle of Dust were enough to give even the might and magic of the Ascondean Empire the shivers. While Kar’Danan offered a buffer zone between the Oruskans in the far north, it would hardly stand in the way of another unified invasion such as the Black Wings (see *Desolation* core book, page 9). The Empire had more than one reason to fortify the border.

The community of Falling Tower was once designated “Border Garrison 15” and was typical of many such border bases. Built around a 100-ft.-tall stone tower, the outpost had several smaller towers and a long, wide wall reaching several hundred yards east and west from the central structure. The main tower allowed for guards to view across the border into Kar’Danan. They could clearly see the silent skeletal guards alongside the road — a horrific visual reminder of the kind of land one was entering.





# COMMUNITIES

When the Night of Fire occurred, the legionnaires were sure that the tower and the garrison would be destroyed. Indeed, the tower began to topple over as strong winds rushed through the area. But as soon as the tower began to fall, it suddenly stopped as a thunderclap of pure Weave rippled out from the base of the tower. The whole structure seemed to freeze in place. Stones that had started to fall from the top levels halted their descent, and to this day, there are about two dozen stones of varying sizes hovering in mid-air between the tower and the ground.

The tower itself seems impossible. It's leaning so far over that it must be mid-topple. When visitors first set eyes upon it as they come over the rise near the village, it can take a few moments for their eyes and minds to understand what they are seeing. The tower is stable, and with some reconstruction within the stairwell and the now-precarious observation deck (which was rebuilt at a new angle to take the tower's lean into account), it serves its purpose: a watchtower protecting the settlement against the unexpected, despite being so unexpected itself.

After the Night of Fire, survivors began to flock to the garrison and the legionnaires took them in, carefully ascertaining who could be trusted. They asked which direction the survivors were coming from, and those who came from across the Kar'Danan border were searched and set

to one side until Kentin was sure they weren't members of the Circle of Dust. No such members were ever found, and so as the town of Falling Tower began to grow, the residents began to trust one another.

## Traditions

"The Price of Admission" is a test that the leadership of Falling Tower requires of anyone asking to enter the settlement, even for the night. Anyone politely refusing is allowed to stay outside the walls under the watchful eye of the Legion. Those demanding entry are first asked, then warned, to leave. Then they are killed.

Those who undertake the task are usually allowed into the settlement if they show any kind of grace or initiative. If they have useful skills, they are offered food and a place to stay in return for work. Some may be offered permanent residence in the village if they are a good fit.

## Geography

Falling Tower is nestled in a small valley, alongside a fast west-east flowing river. There's a broken bridge nearby that is just about possible to cross with the use of wooden planks laid across from the Falling Tower side. Outside the settlement are a few acres of grazing land, along with some corn fields that are just seeing some growth. Some irrigation from the fast-flowing river has been set up through a series of channels and an artificial pond.

About two hours to the west are some hills, and a cold lake from which the river flows. A goblin tribe has based itself in the hills while it investigates the presence of their totem in Falling Tower. To the east, the river keeps flowing. It becomes passable about 10 miles farther downstream.

North lies what used to be Kar'Danan.

## Resources and Needs

One of the first things that survivors brought to the town were cattle. The rich flood plain around Falling Tower makes for perfect grazing ground, though during the Long Winter the cattle had to be fed from the garrison's own supplies. That's not to say that the cattle weren't useful during the year-long winter. In fact, of the 50 head that were brought before the snow started to fall, less than 20 made it to the Thaw, though the residents of Falling Tower were certainly grateful for the herd's sacrifice.

The one bull that was not sacrificed, and in fact, who was — and is — better treated than any non-bovine resident of Falling Tower, is Gus.

Gus is a Broken and Weave-touched bull that made his way to Falling Tower during the Long Winter. No one is

## Kentin Palanur of Falling Tower

Legionnaire (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 8
<b>Body:</b> 4	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 4
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 2
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 7	<b>Stun:</b> 4
<b>Per:</b> 5	<b>Init:</b> 6	<b>Def:</b> 9

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	4	3	7	(3+)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Intimidation	2	3	5	(2+)
Melee	4	6	12	(6)
Survival	3	2	5	(2+)
Warfare	3	2	5	(2+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Combat Aptitude:** Exchange attack and defense dice.

**Robust:** +2 to Health rating.

**Skill Aptitude, Melee:** +2 to skill.

**Vow:** Sworn to action or organization.

Ascondean, Lanarian

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Sword, Long	3L	0	15L	(7+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chainmail	+2	2	—	

quite sure how he had survived the first few months without being eaten, though it's safe to say that few creatures could have safely tried. When he arrived at Falling Tower, he gently tapped on the gates to be let in. It took a week to rebuild the gates and the wall around them after that.

Gus is gigantic — about 20 ft. high from hoof to shoulder and weighing in excess of 20,000 lbs. When angered, Gus' bellow is so loud that it can literally shatter wooden planks and knock people to the ground, sometimes rendering them unconscious. However, only the nearby use of Sorcery can anger Gus. Otherwise, he's the most passive and friendly animal any resident of Falling Tower has ever encountered. If attacked, Gus defends himself but does not attack in return, except to stop whatever's hurting him. It's only the use of magic that really upsets him, and then things get very nasty. One visitor found this out the hard way, and their grave is well tended out of a sense of astonished guilt on the part of the townsfolk of Falling Tower.

What Falling Tower needs are more people who know about farming, especially breeding and handling cattle.

The nearby tribe of goblins have taken to worshipping Gus as their Totem. They are led by a particularly dedicated Bull Shaman. Anyone with Diplomacy or knowledge of goblin society would be useful to the leaders of Falling Tower.

## Groundswell

■ Population: 56 (23

desert dwarves, 16

mountain dwarves, 11

humans, 4 mongrels, 2 gnomes).

■ Survival: Foraging and friendly trading.

■ Motivation: Rescue, and salvation. The desert dwarves are on a mission to help their mountain-dwelling brethren.

■ Personality: Sincere, devout and caring. Groundswell is about helping one another. It opens its arms to those whose intentions are pure.

■ History: Sent by Oukal to rescue their kin who have fallen beneath the Primea Mountains. Its numbers have grown as others joined their mission.

■ Attitude toward magic: Accepting (mostly). The desert dwarves who founded the settlement value any assistance. The opinions of others who joined are less predictable.



■ Government: Theocratic communism. Groundswell is funded and overseen by the priests from Oukal, the highest ranking of whom is named Berith Othell (pictured at left). Although in charge, she prefers to let the community run itself and takes action only when an unpleasant or controversial decision needs to be made. It is expected that everyone shares and contributes to the welfare of others.

### Background

After the Night of Fire, there were factions within Oukal who felt the dwarves of Cair Dhurn got what they deserved for ignoring Valin Stoneson's words (see *Desolation*, page 15). Others, however, felt more compassion for their cousins. Debates raged on for several months about whether to send relief. In the end, it was decided to send several groups of both military and humanitarian aid.

The journey from Oukal to the Primea Mountains was long and dangerous. The leagues of reshaped landscape, extreme temperatures and awoken creatures — all through the heart of an unstable and reinvigorated Warland — prevented two out of three groups from reaching their goal. Those who made it to Cair Dhurn found the destruction far worse than they feared.

Groundswell, as it later came to be known, is situated where the entrance to Gruensel used to be, on the southeastern side of the Primeas. Located close to the surface, Gruensel was a popular and easily accessible town that served as a merchant's hub. Wide paths and well-marked routes made Gruensel a favorite destination for the merchants below the mountain and above. It was not uncommon for a city of tents to spring up near the entrance as other races would peddle their goods.

When Berith and her team arrived, they found the area to be a barren sea of rubble. Boulders, pebbles and stones of every size in between covered the area; filling in any crevasses and burying most vegetation and life, save an occasional tree top. How she knew this was once the entrance to Gruensel was never revealed.

In time, a small area was excavated and the entrance was discovered. Many corpses and collapsed tunnels where initially found, but no survivors were unearthed. Still, the group pressed on.

Word of their efforts spread across the ravaged mountains and others came to join their cause. Some came because they simply had nowhere else to go and needed food, shelter and companionship. Some came to help find buried brethren, inspired that there was still good in the new broken world.

Regardless of their motivations, all were welcome as long as they worked and did not cause trouble. A few were



# COMMUNITIES

ousted for causing trouble (some claim they were spies from a nearby city of caves), but most found their life in Groundswell to be rewarding and less dangerous than from where they had come. Other than the occasional beast or earthquake, life has been uncomplicated. There are some in the community who are concerned about potential threats that could be uncovered (such as Deep Horrors) or come from outside communities. But Berith seems unfazed by these worries and continues on her mission undaunted. She has been heard to say that they are doing the Pillars' work and they will support and protect Groundswell.

Except for the rubble-strewn terrain, the area looks much like it did in the Before. A city of tents and other makeshift structures surround the entrance to Gruensel, resembling the merchant fairs that were once so common. A few permanent structures and a low wall have been constructed from the ample supply of stones, but more effort is spent on excavation than construction.

## Berith Othell of Groundswell

Desert Dwarf Missionary (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Desert Dwarf	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 7
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 2	<b>Str:</b> 3
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 4
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 4	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 7	<b>Init:</b> 5	<b>Def:</b> 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/Religion	3	3	6	(3)
Bureaucracy	3	1	4	(2)
Diplomacy	3	3	6	(3)
Empathy	3	3	6	(3)
Magic/Rune	3	5	8	—
Melee	3	3	6	(3)
Performance/Oratory	3	2	5	(2+)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Darkvision:** Ignore any Perception penalties from darkness.

**Hardy:** One extra die whenever you spend Style points on Body-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

**Resistance:** +2 to any check to resist poison. You are immune to the poison of the Deep Horrors and the fungi they carry.

**Burn Reduction:** Take 1 less point of Burn.

**Magical Aptitude, Rune Magic:** Cast spells from Rune Magic tradition.

**True Faith:** Style points after a roll to gain an automatic success.

**Day Blindness:** -1 to Perception rolls in bright light.

**Dense:** -4 to all swim attempts.

**Slow:** Movement rate is reduced by 1.

**Charitable:** Puts other before herself.

Ascondean, Dwarven

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Mace	2L	0	8L	(4)L

## Traditions

A daily service is held to honor the Five Pillars, although attendance is not mandatory. However, whenever a new victim is found, a full memorial service is held that everyone available must attend. It is important to make sure the gods know where to find the soul of the fallen, rather than it being lost among the ruins.

Anyone wishing to join the community is welcomed with a celebration in their honor. If possible, fresh meat is provided, along with dancing and song. Although their work is serious (and often depressing), the people of Groundswell do not want to forget the joys of life.

## Geography

Located in the heart of what remains of the Primea Mountains, Groundswell is isolated and difficult to reach. While the plain of shattered stones is the only terrain for a day's travel in any direction, the ground is not level or even. A small stream is an hour's journey to the east, although it eventually grows into a river that is fishable. Upon the bank of that river is a small, but peaceful community with which Groundswell has begun to trade. To the north is nothing of real interest except rumors of an unsavory city of caves. The east and south have proven to be the hunting grounds of at least one family of stone wyrms. Those areas have been avoided.

## Resources and Needs

Groundswell is in need of many things, but food is at the top of the list. The area is not suitable for farming and the local hunting is sparse at best. As more and more people have gathered, the need for craftsmen, foragers and protectors has grown. Perhaps their greatest resource is their optimism and generosity. There are few places in the world where a stranger can find a friendly welcome, warm bowl of soup, or even a home.

## Isle of T'sol

■ **Population:** The survivors of a shipwreck, namely 4 elves, 8 gnomes, 15 rovers, 16 mongrels, 23 humans along with 42 remaining island folk natives, with an unknown number of other inhabitants. These are probably Weave-touched.

■ **Survival:** Foraging and fishing, rationing of supplies from recent shipwrecks, especially from the *Oceanic Princess*.

■ **Motivation:** Split. Survival and escape for the shipwrecked Ascondeans. The native island folk wish to prevent the survivors from escaping, in order to protect the island.

■ **Personality:** The survivors of the *Oceanic Princess* are desperately trying to maintain a sense of order and decorum. The island folk natives, who worship a spirit called Dahar Mha, are violently opposed to any attempt by the survivors to leave the island, while at the same time are dedicated to the well-being of those who wish to stay.



■ **History:** Survivors of a shipwreck try to escape a mysterious island, while the Loranthian natives do everything they can to prevent them from leaving.

■ **Attitude toward magic:** The survivors are cautious of magic, given that their Magister seems to have caused an entire island to shift through time and possibly space. The Magister, for his part, is content to sit and drool wherever he is left. The survivors are nervous about Listener magic, especially because many of them have been on the receiving end of strange and bizarre curses since arriving.

■ **Government:** The survivors maintain a military structure, with Captain Keye (pictured above) in charge, and his remaining officers still in their previous positions. The rest of the crew, including civilians and two elven prisoners, are given daily foraging duties, while others do their best to carry out continuing repairs on the *Princess*.

The island folk answer only to their Listener, a now-crazed individual who will only answer to the name Neb. Since the Night of Fire, Neb has lost touch with more than reality. The shattering of the Weave has resulted in the Listener becoming seriously deranged.

## Background

The Isle of T'sol was once one of many small islands that formed Loran's Scythe. It lay far to the south of the main island chain, far from major trade routes. As such, few ever ventured to the island to visit, and the island folk natives had little reason to visit their neighbors. They spent their time worshipping a spirit they called Dahar Mha, a name in their tongue meaning "the smoke that whispers," though that may have had more to do with the powerful hallucinations granted by the herbs and leaves used in the Listener rituals.

When the Night of Fire swept across the ocean towards the Scythe, an exploration vessel of the Ascondean Navy

was sailing close to the island. It had been knocked off course by magical interference caused by the first shocks to the Weave, hours before the more apocalyptic effects took place.

The captain of the *Oceanic Princess*, Harucan Keye, ordered the ship to anchor just off shore of the island in order for the Magister on board to recalibrate the enchanted navigational lodestone. Just then, the ship's watch spotted an enormous wall of water rushing toward both the island and the ship, as the sky itself seemed to crack open. Fire began to pour from the broken heavens as the Weave shredded apart. At that moment, the Magister reactivated the enchanted lodestone onboard the ship. A flash of purple light erupted around the Magister, along with the sound of loud chattering whispers — and the entire island seemed to shudder. The sea heaved, tossing the massive ship onto the beach like a child's toy, while the native island folk watched in awe and horror. The stern of the ship broke, leaving the vessel stranded on shore, helpless but mostly intact.

Massive lashes of magical energy whipped out from the sky, killing some island folk and Ascondeans alike. They transformed dozens of natives into horrific mon-

## Captain Harucan Keye, Isle of T'sol

Imperial Navy Officer (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 7
<b>Body:</b> 4	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 3
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 6	<b>Stun:</b> 4
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 6	<b>Def:</b> 8

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Diplomacy	3	4	7	(3+)
Brawl	3	3	6	(3)
Intimidation	3	2	5	(2+)
Melee	3	4	7	(3+)
Sailing	3	4	7	(3+)
Survival	3	1	4	(2)
Warfare	3	2	5	(2+)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Flurry:** Reduce multiple attack penalty.

**Fearsome:** Frighten opponents.

**Tough:** +1 to Body rating.

**Vow:** Sworn to action or organization.

Ascondean, Loranthian

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Cutlass	3L	0	10L	(5)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	



# COMMUNITIES

strous beasts that ran, insane, into the jungle. Other animals were changed, Weave-Touched or Broken, by the storm of magic.

All the while, the searing purple light grew brighter until it overwhelmed everything. When those who survived could see again, they realized that the wall of water had never hit the island and they had not been roasted by the rain of fire. The island had been spared the destruction. In that instant, it was evening instead of morning. Time itself had skipped, like a stone across water, and whatever dark event had been starting appeared to have stopped — or passed by.

No one on the island knew what had just happened or what had just been avoided, save for one creature.

The island had long been home to a colony of lesser drakes, including one particularly intelligent individual named Dahar Mha. For many long years, it had been studying and guiding the island folk. As a particularly gifted shapechanger, it would sometimes appear as one of the island folk — all the better to learn more about these fascinating creatures. Eventually it realized that the island folk were aware of the other forms it took, and had begun to worship it, even using its actual name. Dahar Mha wasn't overly concerned with being a god to these people, and even indulged in some "personal appearances" from time to time. This was all part of its ongoing study of the island folk.

Since then, Dahar Mha has been investigating the survivors of the *Oceanic Princess*, sometimes appearing as members of the crew, or as their dead relatives. The drake prefers its form as a dark, smoky mist, allowing it to move around without anyone realizing they are dealing with a descendant of dragons.

The crew of the *Oceanic Princess* dedicate most of the day to repairing the badly damaged ship, though the time spent on this has been decreasing over the last few months. Instead, the survivors are now spending more time gathering food and dealing with the sabotage of the natives. A few survivors, especially the civilians, are becoming more comfortable with the idea of staying, while the military crew are having to become stricter and more forceful in their attempts to get the Princess seaworthy again.

## Traditions

The island folk have many traditions relating to their worship of Dahar Mha, but since the Night of Fire and the arrival of the shipwrecked crew, their traditions have changed. Now they are dedicated to preventing the Ascondeans from leaving, sabotaging their ship repairs at

every turn. However, they also do their best to subtly show the survivors that the island can support them. Sometimes, random crew from the ship will be kidnapped, but left near sources of food or fresh water so they can report the discovery back to the rest. A subtle battle for hearts and minds is under way.

The island folk sincerely believe Dahar Mha sent the Ascondeans to save the island, and that only their ongoing presence on the island is stopping the Apocalypse from proceeding. It has not occurred to them that they have, instead, just missed it.

For their part, the Ascondean survivors follow the traditions of the Empire as best they can, and defend themselves when necessary. They are reluctant to journey too deep into the jungles of the island, and keep to the beaches.

## Geography

The island is about five miles long, with lush jungle and grassy hills. A high ridge of mountains split the island down the middle. There are sandy beaches on the eastern side of the island, with rockier shores on the west.

## Resources and Needs

The island is a self-contained ecosystem. Fresh water and food is plentiful, as is wood and wildlife. Raw materials such as minerals and ore are probably present in the mountains and hills, but no equipment exists to exploit such resources.

## Kesh'Har Baranthum

■ Population: 946 (593 orcs, 114 goblins, 109 kobolds, 78 humans, 32 dwarves, 20 trolls).

■ Survival: Raiding.

■ Motivation: Religious fervor.

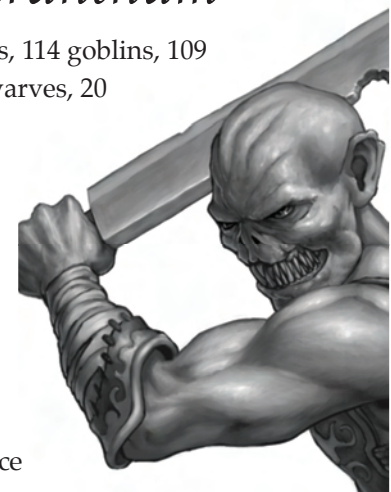
■ Personality: Fanatical

■ History: Founded by a charismatic warleader shortly after the Night of Fire to excavate what some believe to be the resting place of the orc god Baranthum,

but is probably the prison of something much worse.

■ Attitude Toward Magic: Hostile; all magic — especially Primalism — is an affront to the glory of Baranthum.

■ Government: Autocracy with theocratic leanings toward Baranthum.



## Background

This is the story Banith Harrik tells of the origin of his city:

"Before the Night of Fire I was no true Son of Baranthum! I lived in Lesh'Tar and I was a mercenary. Yes, I sold my soul for filthy gold and took dwarves and men as my brothers.

"When our Lord Baranthum rattled the foundations of the earth, I watched as that city of filth was ravaged by burning ghosts who fell from the sky, scorching away the flesh of those they touched. Then, Baranthum chose me as his avatar, taking me in his great hands and carrying me from Lesh'Tar. He showed me the place where his struggles to be free had torn the earth. He whispered in my ear, immortal words that will ring in my heart forever:

"You dig, I rise."

"So keep digging, boys! Our true god is down there, pushing his way toward the sun. Dig like your souls depend on it!"

No one knows how much of Harrik's story is true. Most of his followers know that he came in out of the ashen blizzard in the days after the Night of Fire and took charge immediately. Within a week, he had turned or killed anyone who resisted him — including the greater part of Baranthum's established priesthood — and began work on his excavation. Harrik gave the tribe something to believe in, and most of them are still fanatically loyal to him and his revelation.

Since the end of the Winter, Harrik has redoubled his efforts and the city of Kesh'Har Baranthum — "for the glory of Baranthum" — has sprung up around the widening and deepening pit. Harrik's raids into the surrounding territory has made the city rich, and several surrounding tribes already tithe them metal and slaves to avoid further attacks.

## Traditions

Banith Harrik (pictured at left) is the unquestioned leader of Kesh'Har Baranthum. He is the city's temporal authority and high priest of Baranthum, a title he claimed after murdering most of the god's existing priesthood, one at a time, until he found a priest who was more afraid of him than of Baranthum. Harrik has learned to delegate, but he has a hand in all important decisions.

Kesh'Har Baranthum has a firm informal pecking order. Orcs are higher on the totem pole than anyone else thanks to numbers, physical strength and closeness to Baranthum, but anyone can gain status by professing faith in Baranthum or lose status through any other faith. Beating up a perceived superior or doing something that benefits the community and earns Harrik's respect can also improve someone's status. Anyone officially labeled a slave — and marked as such with a heavy iron collar — has few

rights and little status. Slaves belong to the community, and killing or maiming a slave for no good reason is a crime, punished by anything from enslavement to a sound thrashing, depending on Harrik's mood.

The orcs do not rely on their slaves for the most dangerous and demanding work of expanding the delving itself, which is seen as holy labor. Instead, slaves are put to work carrying earth and maintaining the city. Those who were once carpenters or blacksmiths might be tasked with bracing the walls of the delving or forging new tools. The orcs keep their slaves fed and adequately housed because that way they work harder.

There are worse places to be in post-apocalyptic Scon-

## Banith Harrik of Kesh'Har Baranthum

Orc Warrior (NPC 4)

<b>Race:</b> Orc	<b>Style:</b> 4	<b>Health:</b> 8
<b>Body:</b> 4	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 6
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 2	<b>Wil:</b> 4
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 9	<b>Stun:</b> 4
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 5	<b>Def:</b> 9

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Archery	3	2	5	(2+)
Athletics	6	3	9	(4+)
Brawl	6	4	10	(5)
Diplomacy	6	2	8	(4)
Intimidation	6	3	9	(4+)
Linguistics	2	1	3	(1+)
Melee	6	6	12	(6)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)
Warfare	2	2	4	(2)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Brute:** 1 extra die when spending Style points on Strength rolls.

**Darkvision:** Ignore Perception penalties caused by darkness.

**Natural Weapon:** +1 lethal damage with claws or teeth.

**Chieftain's Blood:** Use Strength for social skills.

**Parry:** +2 defense vs. melee attacks with a weapon in hand.

**Strong:** +1 strength and maximum strength rating.

**True Faith:** Spend a Style point after a roll for an automatic success.

**Killer Instinct:** Must make a Willpower to leave a fight once wounded.

**Poor Peripheral Vision:** -1 to Perception rolls vs. Stealth.

**Short Temper:** Loses his temper easily.

**Wildborne:** No social graces.

**Zealot:** Dedicated to spreading his religion, to a fault.

Ascondean, Oruskan, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Axe, 2-Handed	3L	0	15L	(7+)L
Bow	2L	0	7L	(3+)L
Fist	1L/N	0	11L/N	(5+)L/N
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chainmail	+2	2	—	



# COMMUNITIES

dera than Kesh'Har Baranthum, and some refugees have chosen slavery and safety over freedom.

Recently, strange and terrible omens have been seen throughout Kesh'Har Baranthum. Diggers who sleep in the delving hear whispers and see visions. Eizol, the surviving priestess of Baranthum, tracks the omens and miracles with growing dread. In her mind, they have nothing to do with the Baranthum she worships. As the omens become stranger and more frequent and Eizol is increasingly sidelined in favor of reverence for Harrik himself, Eizol fears for her life and soul, and the souls of Kesh'Har Baranthum.

## Geography

Kesh'Har Baranthum sprawls in a huge crater in the western Oruskan Wilderness. The orcs have fed much of the surrounding forest to their furnaces and forges and cut iron and copper mines into the earth. The air is full of smoke and noise, and by night, light from the underground foundries lends the sky a hellish color. The city changes constantly as buildings are torn down to make way for new delvings or cannibalized for materials when their owners die or are killed. The only permanent fixtures are Banith Harrik's fortress, the slave barracks and the great delving itself.

The delving is a huge pit in the center of Kesh'Har Baranthum. The pit is merely 10 yds. wide and more than 100 ft. straight down. At that point, the delving divides into numerous shafts and tunnels following fractures in the bedrock and expanding on natural caverns.

## Resources and Needs

Kesh'Har Baranthum has an endless hunger for metal for digging, wood to shore up the walls of the delving, and slaves to do menial tasks. Some of these resources Harrik and his followers make for themselves: They clear-cut the Oruskan Wilderness for wood, mine for copper and iron, and raid surrounding tribes for slaves. Harrik is also willing to negotiate. Several tribes are engaged in more or less friendly trade or tribute relationships with Kesh'Har Baranthum.

## *Ki-chan's Village Ship*

- Population: 62 rovers.
- Survival: Trading and robbing riverside settlements.
- Motivation: Filling the ship's stores so that there is enough to undertake a long ocean voyage.
- Personality: Polite, respectful, secretive.
- History: When Zamai was scattered by the storms that signaled the coming of the Night of Fire, Ki-chan sailed his ship of entertainers to what he hoped would be the safety

of calmer waters in the Rappian River. Still, its hull was cracked and its stores were washed away or ruined when the ship ran aground. Ki-chan began trading the services of the ship's Beguilers for food and materials.

- Attitude toward magic: Accepting of Beguiler magic, wary of other types of casters.
- Government: Dictatorship.



## Background

The hull of the rover ship creaked rhythmically as it slowly rocked back and forth, blown by the bitter-cold winds that created little white caps on the river waters.

A smiling Keil Meckler reclined on silk pillows in the dim hold of the ship, but in his mind it was a sunny spring day. He and his family were having a picnic beside the river, as were most of their neighbors. It was the planting festival two years ago, when the town of Wellshold celebrated the start of another farming season. His wife, son and daughter were alive and well as the family enjoyed the day of leisure before the hard spring farming labor began. It was a vivid memory. Keil could hear the sweet sound of his children's laughter clearly, see the brilliant color of his wife's yellow dress that matched her blond hair and set off the emerald necklace she wore. He could feel a soft breeze against his face, the rough wool blanket they sat upon and the smooth clay cup in his hand. And he could taste foods he thought he might never taste again: sweet breads and strawberry jam, blueberry wine from the mountains, veal cutlets from Cushulain. His wife, the only woman he had ever loved, looked at him and smiled.

"I wish this day would never end," she said. The sun glinted off his mother's necklace that he had given her on their wedding day. He had buried her with it, beneath the only tree still standing after the Night of Fire decimated their farm. He had buried his entire family there before the Long Winter.

But the day did end, as did the vivid memory, leaving Keil crying in the hold of the ship.

"Please, just a bit more," he begged.

"I am sorry," said Shu-lan. "The memory magic is taxing. I can do no more right now. Come back tomorrow with more grain."

Keil was gently escorted off the rover village ship by a young boy who walked him down a rope bridge to the ruined town of Wellshold. Some of its buildings were still under the flooded river's waters. Others that were still standing were full of mud left when the worst of the flood receded. Keil had dug his family out from one of those buildings, but he and the other surviving townsfolk had been too late. Most of the residents of Wellshold had been swept away, drowned or buried in the muddy tidal waves that seemed to usher in the Night of Fire.

The boy bowed to Keil and returned to the ship to take Shu-lan's instructions.

"There is a necklace of emeralds buried beneath a large oak tree on a hill east of town," Shu-lan said. Her voice was tired and her tattooed face was speckled with drops of sweat despite the cold. It was physically and mentally exhausting to navigate her clients' memories and steer

them toward revealing information. "It is on a body that is wrapped in burlap. There are three bodies in the shallow grave. The necklace is on the tallest corpse. Tell Ki-chan I can do no more memories today. I must rest."

The boy wrote the location of the necklace down on thin parchment below a long list of other treasures and blew softly on the ink until it dried.

"Ki-chan said tonight will be Last Night here," he told the Beguiler. "We have many treasures to collect. You will be able to rest until we find another settlement."

## Traditions

The night before the village ship leaves port is known as Last Night. It's the night that Ki-chan (pictured at left) sends his treasure hunters into town to take whatever valuables the Beguilers have found hidden in the survivors' memories. While all of Ki-chan's crew are thankful that he cleverly discovered a way for them to survive in the After, some are fearful that a treasure hunter will soon be caught and will have to kill or be killed. This would be against rover traditions, and could lead to a mutiny. Rovers respect clever ruses used to outwit others, but using violence to take advantage of others is considered ugly and dishonorable.

Beguilers on the ship, who in the Before were not completely trusted by other Rovers, are treated with the respect normally only afforded a ship's captain. Even Shu-lan, the youngest of the three Beguilers who has seen only 14 years, needs to bow only to Ki-chan. She and the other Beguilers have personal assistants to see to their every need and ensure they stay healthy and well-fed.

## Geography

Ki-chan's village ship navigates the river once known as the Rappian. It is nearly unrecognizable to Ki-chan and other ship captains who once knew its every bend. The river was forced to carve a new course by the many floods and earthquakes that shifted the landscape. Still, in some places old riverside towns are still located near its banks and new communities have formed near the fresh water that is still filled with fish.

## Resources and Needs

In the After, Ki-chan was faced with a mutiny after the ship's stores were ruined and the ship's crew could no longer earn money from entertainment. It was nearly impossible to convince people to trade food, materials and tools in return for a beautiful song and dance. He took stock of his resources: the ability to travel long distances

### Captain Ki-chan

Rover Pirate (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Rover	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 6
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 4	<b>Str:</b> 3
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 2	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 7	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 5	<b>Init:</b> 8	<b>Def:</b> 8

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	3	2	5	(2+)
Con	3	3	6	(3)
Intimidation	3	2	5	(2+)
Larceny	4	3	7	(3+)
Melee	4	4	8	(4)
Sailing	4	3	7	(3+)
Stealth	4	3	7	(3+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Exotic:** Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Charisma-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

**Farsight:** Ignore moderate (-2) Perception roll penalties for distance.

**Waterborne:** +4 to Swim rolls and the length of time you can hold your breath.

**Finesse Attack:** Use Dexterity for Melee skill.

**Mobile Attack:** Move and attack at the same time.

**Quick Draw:** +2 to Initiative rating.

**Slight:** -2 to feats of strength, such as heavy lifting, pushing or breaking items. This does not affect Melee or Brawl rolls.

**Susceptible:** -2 to resist disease.

**Greedy:** Greatly values wealth and material possessions.

Ascondean, Rover

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Rapier	2L	0	10L	(5)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	



# COMMUNITIES

via waterways and the three Beguilers who survived the Night of Fire. He then looked at what his customers wanted: They wanted things back the way they were. Ki-chan realized the Beguilers could provide that by letting survivors relive their fondest memories for a brief time, and he soon found that people would trade just about anything for the service. What they weren't willing to trade, Ki-chan's Beguilers could discover amid their memories and his treasure hunters could take.

Some talk quietly that most of the "treasures" being stolen aren't worth much now. The food, tools and materials the land-bound trade for memories are all the Rovers really need. They don't think it's worth the risk. What they don't know is that Ki-chan plans to sail away from Ascondea when the ship is well stocked and the seas hopefully calm. He hopes to find a new land and expects the stolen treasures to have value there. He only needs to ride the wave of his crew's thankfulness for their survival a little longer and keep the Beguilers happy.

Ki-chan is interested in trading for foods that will last a long time, baubles that would have fetched a high price in the Before and Beguilers who would be willing to join his crew.

## Lambent Springs

■ Population: 137 (126 humans, 6 dwarves, 2 elves, 2 island folk, 1 mongrel)

■ Survival: Stores and conquest.

■ Motivation: Spread the Argent Path, by force if necessary.

■ Personality: Zealous, aggressive and militaristic.

■ History: Survivors of a Nascent temple mound discovered natural springs that bubble with molten silver. A shrine, town and walls have been built to protect the holy place.

■ Attitude toward magic: Magic has no place in Lambent Springs. Those who draw power from other sources do not accept Sansehl as their true God and should be punished.

■ Government: Military theocracy. The town is guided by the High Beacon, Emery Phaust, an elderly priest of the Argent Path. All military decisions are made by General Iskar (pictured above), who is the real power within the city.



## Background

The Followers of the Martyred Guide was one of the most powerful and widespread Wayfarer orders in all of Scondera. It had more than a dozen temple mounds and hostels spread from the Saikin Wastes to the Oruskan Wilderness, and boasted a membership to rival even the largest Warbands. The Night of Fire claimed most of this, but miraculously the seat of the Order's powers, a temple mound located in southern Nascency, survived untouched.

In the months to follow, the Order did its best to gather and protect its fellow men, but found that others' faith had been shaken. Realizing they had been too tolerant of different faiths and lax in their holy duties, they redoubled their efforts to combat Llevelak and spread the light of Sansehl. Their mission was without mercy, spread through the force of arms and fueled with righteousness. If one was not willing the walk the Path, they would die in the shadow.

As the first snows began to fall, the Order discovered a solitary sheet of azurite jutting oddly from the ground. Standing almost 12 ft. tall, the rocky fist looked like an anvil ready to topple, refusing to acknowledge gravity's pull. On the underside they found a spring of pure molten silver trickling from a fissure and flowing down into a small natural basin. The spring bubbles without heat and seems to have an unending supply of molten silver, although this has not been put to the test.

The Order immediately knew it was a gift from the One Light. They used the remains of nearby villages to begin construction on a new town to house and protect the spring. They worked tirelessly during the first months of snow and came to name the new community Lambent Springs. The entire rock formation has been surrounded by a low fence and enclosed in a well appointed shrine. All within the village are permitted within the structure, but only priests may approach the spring.

During the Long Winter, the Order continued with its mission to root out evil and expand their control of the area. As they days grew short, they met their first real opponent in the After. Another group of soldier priests from other temple mounds and orders had heard of the Martyred Guide's deeds and shrine. They felt that the zealous Wayfarers had lost their way on the Path and needed to be stopped.

In literally the darkest day in Nascency history, during the depth of the Long Winter when the sun was not seen for days, the two forces fought. Holy brother fought against brother and the blood of both sides flowed freely. Although outnumbered, the men of Lambent Springs held fast behind their walls and threw back the unrelent-

ing assaults. For several days, a pitched battle waged — with neither side resting for fear the other would gain an advantage. When the sun finally rose again, Lambent Springs opened their gates and took the battle to their attackers in a surprising gambit. After a fierce melee that lasted less than an hour, the Followers of the Martyred Guide stood victorious, and knew their god looked down with approval.

They have yet to be challenged again, and continue their conquest of Nascency and Cushulain's remains. They have turned an eye toward Sanctahl, and have dreams of reuniting the Silver Steppes under their order and purging the entire world of those who do not follow their Path.

## Traditions

All who wish to join or are "brought into" the village must believe in the Argent Path. Those who do not show good faith or resist conversion face a grueling indoctrination process. This last for several weeks and includes rigorous teaching sessions, fasting, solitary introspection, and tests of faith. Those who do not accept Sansehl into their hearts are killed. Children are excluded from this treatment and are guided onto the Path with patience and love.

Prayer is held three times a day: sunrise, noon and

sunset. Sunrise is time to rejoice in the new light and ask for blessings or boons. Noon is a time to give simple thanks and seek forgiveness for transgressions. Sunset is a time to reflect on the day and ask for protection from the darkness to come. Although a priest leads a prayer at the shrine, people are allowed to pray silently by themselves.

All priests also have a brooch or medallion worked from the spring's silver and engraved with the Argent Path's symbol. In addition to this, those who show true bravery receive a dagger gilded with silver taken from the molten spring. The silver has proven remarkably easy to work with and has yet to tarnish. It has even shown to hold an superior edge to normal silver, but is not equal to iron or steel.

## Geography

Actually located in the northern area of what was once Cushulain, Lambent Springs is situated within a day's travel of the Nascency border. The area immediately around the springs seem untouched by the Night of Fire and is being farmed successfully. Further west lays more grassland that is littered with the remnants of the Primea Mountain. Several days east can be found what is left of the Merchant's Highway, the main thoroughfare from the farmlands below to Sanctahl. Where the road crosses the Nascency border, it passes beneath the misshapen, tarnished, yet still-standing remains of the Southern Arch. This mighty artistic structure, made entirely of silver, straddles the highway and once served as a place of worship for travelers. This road leads north to the remains of a well-known Wayfarer temple mound, although it ends soon after that at a forest of jagged stone spires.

To the south, the road remains intact for several leagues before it vanishes into a newly formed lake trapped in an unlifting fog. Also to the south are the remains of several small villages that Lambent Springs has conquered and plundered.

## Resources and Needs

Lambent Spring is very well off when compared to other settlements in the After. Not only does it have food, water and shelter, it also has the means to protect it. In addition to their well-protected village, they also have access to at least one temple mound and its contents. Their only real need is people with faith — or at least people willing to pretend they have faith. They are actively searching for those who can further their conquest efforts (warriors and metal workers) and the next generation of believers (children and fertile women).

## General Iskar of Lambent Springs

Holy Warrior (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 6
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 4
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 7	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 6	<b>Def:</b> 8

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/Religion	3	3	6	(3)
Brawl	4	2	6	(3)
Intimidation	2	4	6	(3)
Melee	4	6	10	(5)
Ride	3	2	5	(2+)
Warfare	3	3	6	(3)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Flurry:** Reduce multiple attack penalty.

**Righteous Warrior:** +2 in combat when fighting for beliefs.

**True Faith:** Style points after a roll to gain an automatic success.

**Vow:** Sworn to action or organization.

**Zealot:** Dedicated to spreading his religion, to a fault.

Ascondean, Cushu

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Sword, Two-Handed	4L	0	14L	(7)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chainmail	+2	2	—	



# COMMUNITIES

## Lorlathan

■ Population: 179 (75 humans, 12 mongrels, 5 orcs, 3 goblins, 84 elves).

■ Survival: Indirect farming — the elven settlement is some miles distant from the farmland, and the elves visit the farming villages regularly to pick up food.

■ Motivation: Punishment. Now the humans (and others) are the downtrodden masses.

■ Personality: Strongly anti-human.

■ History: A reclaimed ancient elven settlement at the edge of a burned forest. Nearby communities of humans were claimed by the more powerful elves and are now forced to work farmland in place of the elves, who cannot.

■ Attitude toward magic: Only Elemental magic is allowed. All other magic is rejected by the elven leaders.

■ Government: A council of seven elven elders, in the style of the ancient forest-dwelling elves. No representatives of other races are recognized.



### Background

Prior to the Night of Fire, many groups of elves wandered across Scondera. The Empire tolerated these itinerant bands as long as they did not cause trouble or remain in one place long enough to cause problems with crops or farmlands, a common side effect of Nature's rejection of that race. Other nations tended to be less forgiving, if they cared at all.

One particular band spent the Night of Fire near some ancient elven woodlands in the far north of the Empire. This elven region predated the formation of the Empire, though it had been long abandoned even before Nature rejected their race. The group only knew of the settlement because its leader, Loraneer (pictured above), had long been searching for Lorlathan and the secrets he knew it held.

The Night of Fire killed most of the elves in Loraneer's band, but 35 survived. The forest blazed and burned, killing off most of the plant and animal life, and leaving petrified trees behind. Within a few days, the smoke and heat had mostly dissipated and the band entered the ruins of the forest to find what was left of their ancient city.

The fires had left much of those ruins scorched but intact, and the elves began to rebuild within the forest that had turned to stone.

Their minds soon turned to the problem of food. Loraneer led some scouting missions to nearby human communities and attempted to trade. They were violently rejected each and every time, to the extent that three elves were killed. Loraneer grew angry and his long-held bitterness spilled over into a burning hatred of humanity. The next mission he led was not to find trade, but to conquer. He picked a smaller village on the edge of some surviving farmland and swept in with Elemental magicians and archers. The humans surrendered immediately. Loraneer, pleased with his first attempt at revenge, ordered the humans to provide food on a weekly basis, or face death. If the elves couldn't work the farmland themselves, they would force the humans to do it.

The elves raided two more villages and within a few weeks had nearly 150 humans willing to give up a portion of their crops in return for their lives. Loraneer forbade the humans to name their settlements, telling them that they were all part of Lorlathan now. To encourage "good faith" he took several children from each village back to the woods, promising to look after the children for as long as the villages looked after the elves.

As the Long Winter crept in, more elves found their way to the reborn settlement of Lorlathan. Some mongrels and Oruskans also joined the settlement, and Loraneer used them as muscle and sheriffs of the human settlements. It was safer for non-elves to remain behind near the farmland and food stores, and the mongrels and Oruskans had their own reasons to resent humans. The goblins that joined the settlement did so out of desperation and spend most of their time guarding the fields and farmland, out of the way of the elves.

The human villages did not attract other survivors for long. A few did arrive before the depths of Winter, but either fled in horror when they discovered the relationship with the elves or tried to fight back and were killed in short order.

The Long Winter was hard on those settlements. Nearly half the human population died of hunger, while the elves and their allies lost only a few of their number.

Since the Thaw, the villages have found themselves hard pressed to keep up with Loraneer's demands. Their only hope is that help will somehow come now that the world seems to be slowly returning to normal.

The humans of the farming communities have secretly named their villages "Hope," "Perseverance" and "Vengeance" in defiance of their masters. They are slowly building up secret caches of weapons and food for when they finally decide to resist.

# COMMUNITIES

## Traditions

The elves of Loralathan spend the majority of their time learning about their heritage. Ancient stone tablets and carvings discovered in the ruins outline some of the oldest traditions of their race. Some of the Elemental mages in the community are trying to learn advanced magical techniques related to the lost druidic magic their race once mastered.

## Geography

The petrified woodland of Loralathan is situated at the head of a long, fertile river valley. The flood plain of the river has created extremely good land for farming.

The village is far enough away from the farms so that the “pollution” of the elves cannot have an impact on the crops being grown.

### Loraneer of Loralathan

Vengeful Archer (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Elf	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 6
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 3
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 6	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 6	<b>Def:</b> 7

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Archery	3	5	8	(4)
Athletics	3	2	5	(2+)
Diplomacy	3	2	5	(2+)
Intimidation	3	4	7	(3+)
Melee	3	4	7	(3+)
Survival	3	3	6	(3)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Indefatigable:** Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Willpower-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

**Keen hearing:** +2 bonus to hearing Perception rolls.

**Musical:** +2 bonus to musical Perform rolls.

**Accuracy:** Reduced called-shot penalties.

**Long Shot:** Double Weapon Ranges.

**Rapid Shot:** Reduce multiple-shot penalty.

**Unnatural:** Animals and plants receive a +1 dice on attack rolls against elves. Elves receive -2 to all Skill rolls in woodlands. If elves stay in any place too long, crops fail and animals get sick.

**Intolerant:** Biased against non-elves.

**Vengeful:** Bent on revenge.

Ascondean, Elven

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Longbow	3L	0	11L	(5+)L
Falchion	3L	0	10L	(5)L
Whip	0N	0	7N	(3+)N
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

## Resources and Needs

The elves of Loralathan proper want to expand their settlement. They need to find more elves to join Loralathan. Humans with stonemasonry or construction skills are useful to help rebuild the ancient ruins, though the human settlements are starting to fall apart because anyone with useful skills are taken to Loralathan.

## Lost Lolín

■ Population: 111 (98 humans, 8 goblins, 3 rovers, 2 orcs).

■ Survival: Hunter gatherers willing to trade.

■ Motivation: Create a new way of life.

■ Personality: Backward, but willing to learn.

■ History: Lost Lolín is one of the few surviving civilizations in the swamps of the region known as Loslolin. The swamps had always been a natural barrier to the outside world, protecting Loslolinites from the threat of invasion. The Night of Fire destroyed much of the swampland and changed the culture of its survivors.

■ Attitude toward magic: Distrusting of magic that does not come from a bottle.

■ Government: Matriarchy led by Brew Witch Tilivia.

## Background

The swamp that had kept the world at bay for generations was no match for the Night of Fire. Tidal waves pounded in from the east, claiming much of the swamps and its people for the sea. The Geltin River rushed in from the west, overflowing its banks and drowning entire clans.

The family clan structure the swamp dwellers had clung to for centuries could not be sustained in the After. The Long Winter turned the swamps to ice and destroyed the Loslolinites’ famous resolve to stay independent. Members of families who had feuded for ages were forced to come together to survive the winter. The snows took their pride just as it took their way of life. The reed plants they had used to build their homes and boats were buried in snow; many of the freshwater fish, frogs and crabs were frozen beneath the ice. They no longer understood how to live off the swamp.

As a brew witch, Tilivia had always been above the family clan squabbles. Brew witches were revered for their potion-making powers. They left their clans at a young age, dropping their family surnames and allegiances. So it was with Tilivia, who had lived alone in the swamp for nearly five decades. But things were different now. Now she was surrounded by survivors who had sought shelter in the grove of swamp willows that surrounded her home.



# COMMUNITIES

The snows had melted and dozens of Loslolinites from different clans had survived the winter, but their struggles had just begun.

Tilivia has two rules for staying in the community she has coined Lost Lolin, as a reminder that their old way of life is gone: no fighting and no slacking. Everyone is required to pitch in by rounding up stray schlekks, building mud-brick walls and collecting ingredients for Tilivia's potions. She uses her abilities to concoct draughts that make the sick well, the hunters stronger, the gatherers more vigilant and the troublemakers bedridden. Most learn quickly to stay on the brew witch's good side in order to avoid poisoning. The poison that saps their strength and makes it nearly impossible to even stand is a warning to any who

## Common Potion Ingredients

Ingredient	Use
Alecost roots	Bug repellent
Angelica root	Fever reducer
Black swamp moss	Hair growth
Borage leaves	Courage builder
Chamomile	Stomach ailment cure
Cloves	Painkiller
Dart snake venom	Wart removal
Dirk wasp venom	Poison
Dove droppings	Love potion
Feet of crow	Change destiny
Fern spider venom	Wound cleaner
Fox urine	Intelligence booster
Giant tears	Paralysis cure
Ginger	Aphrodisiac
Ground agate	Perception booster
Hollyhock	Immunity booster
Iron tree sap	Wound healing
Mandrake	Healing
Marjoram	Diarrhea cure
Mint	Poison extraction
Mugwort	Luck
Rose hips	Strength booster
Rosemary	Plague removal
Rue leaves	Blindness cure
Saffron	Infection removal
Sage	Clarity of thought
Salamander entrails	Burn treatment
Schlekk mucous	Allergy treatment
Spiderwort	Laxative
Vetch weed	Appetite suppressant
Wormwood	Stimulant
Yarrow	Anti-inflammatory

break her rules, and Tilivia doesn't warn anyone twice.

While most residents of Lost Lolin are grateful to Tilivia, some resent her for turning her back on Loslolin's customs. Only their respect for her powers — and her pet wampus cat — prevent them from doing her harm.

## Traditions

The residents of Lost Lolin give thanks to the swamp and to Tilivia before each meal. They are very superstitious. Many believe "Mother Tilivia," as they call her, can somehow hear their conversations and will poison any who speak out against her. Women in Lost Lolin are treated with great respect, not only because they are capable of bringing new life, but because Tilivia sometimes shares her potion recipes with them. Only women ever create potions in Lost Lolin.

## Geography

Brew Witch Tilivia once lived close to the southern border of the Loslolin swamps on the highest ground she could find. Her grove is now surrounded on all sides by muck that, even with the melting snows, doesn't have deep enough water to traverse by canoe. She has ordered a canal

## Mother Tilivia of Lost Lolin

Brew Witch (NPC 4)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 4	<b>Health:</b> 9
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 2	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 5	<b>Wil:</b> 6
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 2	<b>Stun:</b> 6
<b>Per:</b> 11	<b>Init:</b> 7	<b>Def:</b> 8

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Brew magic potion	5	6	11	(5+)
Craft/Apothecary	5	5	10	(5)
Knowledge/Swamps	5	4	9	(4+)
Medicine	5	3	8	(4)
Herbalist	—	—	9	(4+)
Melee	6	3	9	(4+)
Survival	5	3	8	(4)
Swamplands	—	—	9	(4+)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Focused Attack:** Use Willpower for Melee skill.  
**Focused Defense:** Use Willpower for Defense rating.  
**Headstrong:** Use Willpower for Stun rating.  
**Life Saver:** Improved healing ability.  
**Deaf:** Cannot hear, automatically fails hearing checks.  
**Slow:** Reduce movement.  
Ascondean, Loslolin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Cane	1N	0	10N	(5)N

of sorts to be cleared by digging out the mud in a path due south in hopes of finding more high ground. The mud excavated from the canal is being used to create an ever-rising mud-brick wall that surrounds the grove and keeps out predators. To the east, a day's journey over a series of reed-rope bridges connected to branches and natural walkways created by roots and downed trees, is a vast tar pit. Explorers who have traveled north and west have not returned. Tilivia alone knows from her animal scouts that to the north the swamp waters grow deep, with strong undertows and monstrous creatures lurking in them. To the west is a nearly treeless no-man's land of quicksand-like muck littered with the bones of all the men and beasts foolish enough to try to cross it.

## Resources and Needs

After the Long Winter, the swamp is once again providing for the people of Lost Lolin. Catfish, crawfish and snakes are plentiful food sources. They are protected from the worst of the weather in their surprisingly strong mud-brick and tar huts that have thick thatch roofs. Tilivia's potions keep sickness at bay and give them the strength to survive the swamp's many perils. But Tilivia knows her grip is the only thing holding the community together. She is old, and fears for what will happen to her people when she dies. The brew witch hopes the southern canal will lead them to new civilizations where they can trade, and perhaps even live. What she doesn't know is that many communities are worse off than Lost Lolin. She would welcome anyone who could help clear the way for the canal, anyone who can bring her rare potion ingredients and anyone who can identify apothecary uses for some of the new flora her scouts have reported in the After.

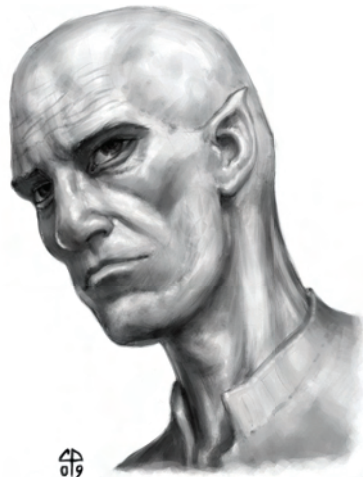
## Methyn's Keep

■ Population: 1,231 (396 humans, 303 mongrels, 158 elves, 149 orcs, 118 dwarves, 75 goblins, 32 gnomes).

■ Survival: Toll-keeping, trading and some farming.

■ Motivation: Maintain independence and prosper. Would like to become the next Cynosure.

■ Personality: Diplomatic, ambitious and resilient.



■ History: Destroyed during the Night of Fire, but rebuilt by an enterprising warband using magic and slaves. In addition to the citadel, an expansive labyrinth and a set of narrow roads have been built to choke and control trade toward the fallen mountains and eastward.

■ Attitude toward magic: It is looked upon as a valuable tool. Magic has been greatly leveraged in building their defenses and attacking their enemies.

■ Government: Warband. Led by an elf named Tersyllaen (pictured at left), who is a potent earth Elementalist. He prefers to be called Lord Methyn and rules his new citadel with an iron fist.

## Background

Tersyllaen was the right hand of Orlist Eight-Fingers, an orc Warband leader with a cunning, yet savage disposition. Together they ravaged the Warlands for more than a dozen years, gaining a reputation for picking the winning side of a fight (or at least knowing when to switch sides). They had been in possession of Methyn's Keep, their first citadel, for less than two months when the Apocalypse hit.

The only warning was some faint rumblings from the east, but no one was prepared when the mountains shattered upon themselves. Those hours were lost in a haze of dust and terror while the sounds of stones screamed through the night as they tumbled, splintered, twisted and crashed. It was as if a giant had stepped upon the Primea Range and flattened it with a single step, barely missing the great citadel of Methyn's Keep.

Although spared complete obliteration, the Keep still suffered greatly. Between the shifting mountainside, the fragments of stone falling from the sky and the earthquakes, the citadel was more a burial cairn than a city. Less than 1 in 20 survived. The citadel had fallen. Only one wall remained standing — and at only half its former height. When Tersyllaen looked around and surveyed the devastation, he saw only one thing: opportunity.

With Orlist dead and Methyn Keep in ruins, the survivors looked to Tersyllaen for leadership. At first, the elf was reluctant to take control. He knew any leader in the Warlands had a bulls-eye painted on his back, so he was always comfortable letting Orlist handle that burden. But with no other options, he found himself thrust into the role. To his own surprise, he discovered that not only did he excel at running the rescue and rebuilding efforts, he also enjoyed it.

His earth magicks proved to be extremely useful in the recovery efforts. The ability to move and reshape stone saved numerous lives and countless hours of manual labor. He did his best to overcome the fractured Weave and



# COMMUNITIES

endure the increasingly painful Burn. But the limitations on his casting were frustrating at best: he needed more Elementalists. Amid the rumors and anti-magic sentiment, he sent out word that all spell casters would be welcome in Methyn's Keep and given a place of honor.

Within months, he had managed to double the population of the destroyed citadel, rebuild the protective walls and explore the surrounding area. His warband was strong, and the city was beginning to take shape. When refugees arrived at the eastern gates, seemingly from the other side of the mountains, Tersyllaen realized what he had — a land-based trading route to the former Empire. Rather than just a simple fortress, Methyn's Keep had the potential to be so much more. With that in mind, he decided to take advantage of the lull created by the Long

Winter and increase his efforts to both fortify the city and gain control of the trade route.

He enlisted the help of a retired engineer from the Empire's own Legion, a brash drunkard known simply as Trap. With his knowledge of magical architecture and warfare, the citadel was reinforced and the landscape to the east was magically transformed into a natural labyrinth. Now under the Keep's domain, all who wished to travel safely through would need to either pay a toll or find themselves lost — or worse. The toll is a percentage of whatever cargo is being transported, which varies depending on the whim of Tersyllaen and the value of the items. Those without cargo or means to pay are put to work as manual laborers, helping to clear and repair the keep.

By the end of the Long Winter, Methyn's Keep had already repelled two attacks and begun operation of its "merchant's maze." A small team of warriors and earth Elementalists traveled eastward, trying to clear the way to what remained of the Empire and funnel travelers to the Keep. Similar teams have also traveled a week's ride to the north and south, closing any other possible trade routes. In addition to this, Tersyllaen has made sure that other warbands and mercenaries know that they can get decent prices for goods taken from those who attempt to circumvent Methyn's Keep.

When word of Camson Hurle's Crusade (see page 53) reached Tersyllaen's ears, he briefly pondered the possibilities of joining the siege on Cynosure. In the end, he decided to let the other warbands destroy one another and throw themselves at the fortified city. His scouts had also told him of Hurle's likely return. He was one of the few men within the Warlands that Tersyllaen feared, so remaining uninvolved seemed prudent. Once Hurle returned and dispatched Cynosure's attackers, Tersyllaen sent envoys southward to Cynosure seeking an alliance. Despite this overt act of diplomacy, efforts are quietly being made to close the route taken on the Crusade.

Still awaiting word from the jewel of the Warlands, Tersyllaen continues his efforts to turn the citadel into a full-fledged city. He realizes that there is only a small window of opportunity to establish Methyn's Keep as a force to be reckoned with. But his vision is clear, and his warband is fearsome. Soon others will come — and he will be ready.

## Traditions

In an effort to gain residents, the town has adopted many of the ideals that made the Empire successful. The most surprising is its openness and acceptance of other races, religions and magic. Hand in hand with this tolerance

## Tersyllaen of Methyn's Keep

Elementalist (NPC 4)

<b>Race:</b> Elf	<b>Style:</b> 4	<b>Health:</b> 6
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 3
<b>Cha:</b> 5	<b>Int:</b> 4	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 6	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 7	<b>Init:</b> 7	<b>Def:</b> 7

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Bureaucracy	4	3	7	(3+)
Diplomacy	5	3	8	(4)
Linguistics	4	2	6	(3)
Magic/Elemental	5	7	12	—
Merchant	5	2	7	(3+)
Melee	3	4	7	(3+)
Ride	3	2	5	(2+)
Warfare	4	2	6	(3)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Indefatigable:** Receive one extra die whenever you spend Style points on Willpower-based rolls, above and beyond the extras you would normally receive.

**Keen hearing:** +2 bonus to hearing Perception rolls.

**Musical:** +2 bonus to musical Perform rolls.

**Burn Reduction 2:** Takes 2 less points of Burn.

**Enhanced Potency:** Increase Potency of spells.

**Magical Aptitude, Elemental:** Cast spells from Elemental tradition (earth and fire).

**Unnatural:** Animals and plants receive a +1 dice on attack rolls against elves. Elves receive -2 to all Skill rolls in woodlands. If elves stay in any place too long, crops fail and animals get sick.

**Greedy:** Greatly values wealth and material possessions.

**Short Temper:** Loses his temper easily.

Ascondean, Oruskan, Saiken, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Morning Star	3L	0	10L	(5)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

is a strict and unforgiving attitude toward crime and dissension. Because of this, the people's justice tends to take care of a situation before it comes to the attention of Lord Methyn and his warband.

In preparation for the inevitable attack on the Keep, test drills are run on a regular basis. During these tests, the population is watched carefully to see whether anyone is shirking their duties or leaving the town vulnerable through incompetence or self-interest. Such individuals are given a single warning. A second infraction results in the forfeiture of their possessions and expulsion.

## Geography

Located in the remains of the original Methyn Keep, the new keep is on the western slopes of the flattened Primea Mountains. The cliffs that once protected its back has been reduced to a rolling plain of shattered stones and thick red plateaus that wind eastward in serpentine valleys. The Elementalists of Methyn's Keep have shaped these formations to their advantage, creating a maze of dead ends, bottlenecks and other trapped corridors.

When the mountains crumbled, earthquakes split the land and stones fell for days. Ranging in size from pebbles to small mountains themselves, these rocks now clutter the countryside, littering the scarred, scrub-filled plains with new landmarks and obstacles. One such boulder, larger than the keep itself, landed to the northwest only two days' journey away. It created a crater that has since filled with fresh water and become a popular watering spot that will soon be fought over.

## Resources and Needs

The keep is planning to expand. While stone is in abundance, they need people with a willingness to sacrifice and work hard in the short term to build a prosperous future. Nothing is ever certain in the Warlands, but Tersyllaen has a vision and is determined to see it come to fruition. In addition to workers, the town needs craftsmen, merchants, farmers and anyone else willing to help turn the keep into a city.

Warriors and spell casters (especially earth and water Elementalists) are also much sought after. Taking a page from the Empire, Lord Methyn is trying to leverage magic in the creation of the community's infrastructure, buildings and fighting forces. And of course, one can never have too many swords in the Warlands.

On a less tangible level, Methyn's Keep is looking for stable trading partners and the good graces of Cynosure. A political alliance would give the newly built city credibility and status in the constantly shifting political landscape.

## *Mother Ice*

■ Population: 149 (141 Kobolds, 5 goblins, 2 orcs, 1 troll)

■ Survival: Hunting. The kobolds are learning to love the taste of venison instead of fish.

■ Motivation: Stay cold, safe and out of the way of everyone else. Protect their glacier (that they call Mother Ice) from outsiders and the heat.

■ Personality: Fiercely protective of this sacred space, starting to entertain thoughts of trade with the outside world.

■ History: A colony of kobolds living on top of and within a glacier found themselves relocated hundreds of miles from where they'd been before. Now, sitting in the middle of grasslands at the edge of a ruined mountain, the kobolds are desperately trying to keep the glacier from melting while protecting themselves from the outside world.

■ Attitude toward magic: Tolerant of Primal magic. Indeed, one of the goblins and three of the kobolds are Shamans, including one kobold who has Ice as his totem. Extremely anti-Elemental magic, especially Fire.

■ Government: Tribal council, led by Kallu'ree (pictured above), a one-eyed kobold. The other Oruskans swear fealty to Kallu'ree also, though the goblins tend to look up to their own Shaman, who follows the totem of Rat.



## Background

For time out of mind, the kobold tribe of Ree made its home in an ancient, slow-moving glacier. They called the glacier Mother Ice, out of respect. They had carved out endless warrens and caverns within the shifting ice, safe from the outside world. They hunted and fished and had as little to do with other Oruskans as possible. They entertained a few goblin Sellers and Shamans from time to time and their orc bodyguards. Sometimes, as was the case just before the Night of Fire, they would capture a rampaging troll and use it as either a guard or to do heavy lifting.

Life was good. It was simple and peaceful. Any invaders had to first face the blistering cold and then try to chase kobolds through tunnels not much bigger than the residents. Mother Ice held the tribe safely within her and they sacrificed fish to her largess.



# COMMUNITIES

At the time of the Night of Fire, the tribe was led by Kallu'ree, an experienced hunter. A polar bear slashed him during a fight several years previously, and Kallu'ree wears his scar with pride. He is missing his right eye as part of this attack. It is sewn shut. His re-

## Kallu'ree of Mother Ice

Kobold Hunter (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Kobold	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 5
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 5	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> -1	<b>Move:</b> 7	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 10	<b>Def:</b> 10

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Acrobatics	5	3	8	(4)
Athletics	2	4	6	(3)
Melee	5	5	10	(5)
Stealth	5	5	11	(5+)
Survival	3	3	6	(3)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Dual Wield:** Reduced penalties when fighting with two weapons

**Quick Witted:** +2 Initiative.

**Acclimated:** -1 damage from exposure to cold environments.

**Finesse Attack:** Use Dexterity for Melee skill.

**Dual Wield 2:** Reduces penalty to dual attacks to -2 per attack.

**Vigorous Defense:** Reduce multiple attacker penalty.

**Coldborn:** -2 to all skill checks in environments over 90°F

**Flight Response:** If blood is drawn and you don't have overwhelming odds, you must succeed on a Willpower check vs. amount of damage taken during the fight, or flee.

**Small:** -1 to Size.

**One-Eye:** Missing an eye results in poor depth perception.

**Perfectionist:** Overly demanding of himself and others.

Ascondean, Oruskan

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Tusk Dagger	1L	+1	12L	(6)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Hide	+1	1	—	

maining eye glints with intelligence and cunning, and his white bearskin cloak is a visible testament to his bravery and prowess in battle.

His second-in-command was the Shaman Gulan'ree. The totem of the tribe was the Ice Worm, a rare and powerful incarnation of the domesticated creature with which kobolds had long shared their warrens. The warm fur and frozen breath of the ice worm were tools that the Shaman used both to protect the tribe and carve new tunnels and caverns out of Mother Ice.

However, when the sky started to burn and the ground shook and rolled beneath Mother Ice, the kobolds panicked. They were fearful for their Mother, though the visiting goblin shamans and their bodyguard were afraid for their own lives.

As the fire rained down, an old Shaman raised his arms and wrapped the entire glacier with the essence of the Ice Worm. At that very moment, the Weave lashed out, but instead of killing the Shaman with Burn, the entire glacier heaved and shifted, appearing leagues from its original location.

The first thing the kobolds felt was a great warmth. The air itself lacked the comforting chill of the far north. There was panic at first, until the goblin visitors explained they were high in the mountains, and it would not get any warmer than it was.

The Long Winter was welcomed with celebration and joy. When it kept going, the kobolds felt as if they had been blessed by the Mother and Father for their faith and solidarity. They basked in the cold, exploring their new homeland and discovering human neighbors in small, half-broken villages. The tribe watched and learned, hunted and prospered.

The Thaw spelled the start of another dark time of fear. Now the kobolds fight the heat to stop the glacier



from melting too quickly. For the most part, they have slowed the loss of their ice to almost nothing, though Mother Ice is steadily losing herself into a fast, cold-water stream. The tunnels inside the ice have also melted somewhat and are now alarmingly wide. Even the orcs can walk around almost freely these days. Invaders would have very little problem delving deep into Mother Ice — something that makes the kobolds very nervous.

The kobolds work to find ways to save their home, while the goblins encourage them to begin trading with the local humans. Mother Ice's children may find a place in this new world, if they can accept life outside of the ice warrens.

## Traditions

As the glacier is considered to be a living being of sorts, feeding on water (turned to ice) and excreting water (as the ice melts), many of the kobold's traditions involve placating and honoring Mother Ice. The shaman Gulan'ree works hard to freeze water and prevent the glacier from melting further, but it is a tough battle.

The melt water is used as drinking water (the milk of the Mother), though most of it is captured in a dam and brought to places where the glacier is suffering from the heat and refrozen. Rainfall is feared, though the pools that collect in the glacier's nooks and crannies can be easily refrozen by the Shaman. Gulan'ree risks a little Burn each time he turns water to ice, but he must do so dozens of times each day. It is a rare day that he isn't covered with bruises and lesions from accumulated magical backlash.

## Geography

Where the glacier was before, no one is sure. It was certainly in the far north of the Oruskan Wilderness,

beyond the edge of any map ever drawn up by the Empire. The glacier now resides in a high, but verdant valley, nestled in against some low mountains that were once part of the Primea Range. While the climate is cool and mostly dry, it is still too warm to support a glacier like Mother Ice. A melt water stream has sprung up alongside the existing streams in the small valley as the glacier slowly melts away.

Mother Ice herself was once three miles long and 100 yards deep, though the tribe only made use of a half-mile section near the front end of the glacier. Since it moved, the glacier has lost some of its length and height, but is still more than two miles in length.

Within a day's walk of the glacier are two communities of mostly human survivors. They have kept their distance from the unexpected glacier (and its Oruskan residents) but have begun tentative attempts at communication and trade.

## Resources and Needs

The most important resource the kobolds possess is clean, fresh water. However it is critically important to the creation of new ice and cannot be spared beyond the small amount of "Mother's Milk" that the kobolds drink each day. Trading the Milk away is unthinkable.

The kobolds are very talented trappers and furriers. Their collection of furs would be worth a small fortune in the Before, and even now would be in high demand if the goblin Seller with the tribe could persuade the kobolds to start trading them.

Basically, the glacier needs ice. This is obviously something in short supply — until winter at least. In the meantime, the Shaman of the Ice Worm and his goblin colleagues are desperately seeking magical ways to keep the glacier from melting.





# COMMUNITIES

## Nhirain

- Population: 129 (119 humans, 8 mongrels, 2 elves).
- Survival: Hunting, fishing and banditry.
- Motivation: Conquest and power. They wish to become the new rulers of Jherlind, reshaping it into a unified nation.
- Personality: Brutal, adaptable and cunning.
- History: Formed near the healing pools of Nhirain, surviving Jherlinders threw off many of their traditions in order to survive the Long Winter.
- Attitude toward magic: Accepting. They see it as a tool to aid their cause.
- Government: Nhirain is ruled by the Prophet and Protector, who act as joint rulers of their new nation. The Prophet once wore the brown veil of the Barren, but is now wed to the Protector, who was one of the Unshattered.

### Background

Cormik Blackgoat was surprised to be alive when he opened his eyes and found himself submerged in the grey, salty water. It wasn't the first time he had been in the healing pools of Nhirain, but it was the first time he had awakened in one after plunging off a cliff to escape a wave of black and green fire. He remembered the screams of his brothers behind him as he leapt, the chill of the air rushing past him, the rocks and shallow water rising to meet him, but not the impact or anything after.

When he broke the surface, he saw the woman who was gently cradling his head and looking at him like a mother who was seeing her newborn child for the first time. Gathered beyond her were a dozen more people, each with a look of amazement and awe. As one, they dropped to a knee and bowed their heads at Cormik and the woman standing in the pool beside him. She helped him to his feet and whispered into his ear, "And so Nhirain is born."

The woman's name was Tionna. She had lived many lives despite her lack of years. First as the bride of an old man, given as little more than a child to end a feud between households. Then as one of the Barren. Blamed for her impotent husband's inability to get her with child, she was forced to take the brown veil.

When the Night of Fire fell upon Jherlind, the cliffs and peaks shifted and warped as if they were made of clay instead of stone. Hidden deep within the valleys, not even the Pools of Nhirain and its tenders were spared from that terrible night. When dawn broke the next morning, the surviving women found their home reshaped. Many of the pools were drained, while others were swollen or moved. A new river

flowed down to them from unfamiliar cliffs, and old hidden paths were lost among the shifted crags and stones.

Tionna had stood within the oldest and most revered pools during the Apocalypse, praying for an end to the life she lived. She asked the mountains to tumble upon her, beseeched the rivers to sweep her away, and begged the ground to open and swallow her. But the land refused. As her world was shattering around her, she stood unharmed. She raised her fists angrily to the sky and screamed in frustration, asking why she should survive. Then the skies opened and she heard her destiny.

Others saw her get struck by a bolt of amber lightning that illuminated the entire valley. Thicker than an ancient tree, the lightning lingered upon Tionna for several seconds, as if it were alive and trying to make sure its full force was felt by its target. But when it faded, she and the pool stood unharmed while the ground around them was scorched and steaming. Her hopelessness and anger vanished as quickly as the lightning. In its place was a profound sense of purpose. And now she is the Prophet, a woman able to hear the cries and laments of the land, fated to take its wounds and pain and forge them into a new nation.

In the days and weeks to come, she guided and rallied her sisters, helping them to survive and understand the After. She shared her vision for a new nation and explained that their protector would soon join them, brought by the new river. Soon after, the corpse of Cormik Blackgoat washed up on their shores, cold and broken. After Tionna raised him from the dead, the others followed her without question.

### Tionna of Nhirain

Prophetic Healer (NPC 2)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 2	<b>Health:</b> 5
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 5	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 6	<b>Def:</b> 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/ Traditions	3	3	6	(3)
Diplomacy	2	2	4	(2)
Empathy	3	3	6	(3)
Medicine	3	5	8	(4)
Survival	3	2	5	(2+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Chosen One:** Able to tap into the power of the Pools of Nhirain.  
**Holy Ground:** +1 to all skill checks when around Pool of Nhirain.  
**Merciful:** Compassionate and forgiving.  
Ascondean, Jherlindish

Cormik fell in love with his savior and readily accepted her new ideas — especially those about him ruling all of Jherlind. The old ways no longer appealed to him. He wasn't sure if it was because the world itself was different, or if something had changed inside him while he was dead. Whatever it was, he now saw the world with new eyes. Eyes bent on conquest.

His army grew slowly. The old ways were hard for others to give up and Cormik was not skilled with words. He tried to avoid his fellow goats and sought out lesser warriors. Only one out of four joined. The others declined with steel and blood and screams of betrayal. When the snows began to fall in earnest, his name was whispered all along the highlands with fear.

During the Long Winter, the valley of Nhirain suffered through the cold and darkness with the help of the pools, which nourished them and provided heat. As they waited for spring, the Prophet and Protector shared their vision of Nhirain: A new nation where women would be treated like people instead of property; where neighbors helped one another instead of feuding; where the strength of one's character was more important than their family's name.

After the thaw, Cormik and his men began the bloody work of carving out the new nation of Nhirain from the surrounding stone and people. They terrorized the peaks and roads, ambushing travelers and raiding villages. Some chose to join the new nation freely, but most would not, or could not, give up the old ways.

The Unshattered are especially conflicted. Only a few have fully committed themselves to Nhirain. Instead, most of them have opted to wait and watch, hoping that the Pools of Nhirain do not overflow with blood and drown all of Jherlind.

## Traditions

Nhirain has turned its back of many of its clan traditions and social structures, but its people have not forgotten Jherlind itself. They have revived and embraced the beliefs that formed the backbone of their culture — the reverence and respect of Nature. They observe the same holidays as they did before, but now they appreciate their origins and the meaning of them.

Those who wish to join this new nation are required forsake their old life, giving up any ties or loyalties to other nations, families or households. They must swear an oath of allegiance to Nhirain while standing in one of its pools. To bind the oath, the person is immersed and then "reborn" — just as Cormik was.

## Geography

Isolated and difficult to find in the Before, the pools of Nhirain are lost in a maze of reshaped cliffs and valleys. Nhirainians have managed to discover a single pathway out of the valley, but it is steep and treacherous. They are in the process of carving a set of stairs to make the journey easier.

## **The Pools of Nhirain**

A paradox in the Jherlind culture, these sacred pools were long thought to hold special powers despite their long-held abhorrence of magic and those who cast spells. More than a few legends tell of Unshattered warriors who have bathed in the pools before an epic battle to protect themselves from magic, or have visited them after a grievous injury to be miraculously healed, or have dunked their newly forged weapons into its depths to increase their strength and potency against spell casters. But these have been relegated to stories and folklore. That is not to say that the pools have been forgotten. Ceremonies and rituals are still carried out prior to battle and on holidays. Their warm waters and the ministrations of its attendants are regularly used by injured warriors to speed their recovery. Although still revered, the pools have not shown mystical properties for generations... until now.

In the After, the pools have shown some of the power they once held in the past. At present, Tionna is the only one able to access these gifts. By focusing her will and calling upon the pools and nature itself, she is able to unlock its healing magicks. This healing can only occur on one who rests within the pools' waters. When a subject is first put into a pool, she can make a Medicine roll and use the results to restore lost Health, regardless of how old the damage is or if the target has been previously tended. Those who rest in the pool for 4 hours a day after receiving this initial healing can recover the rest of their Health at twice the normal rate. To cure blindness, sickness, deformities or other medical problem, she must make a successful Medicine check at the same difficulty as a Listener casting a spell to repair the same ailment (see the *Desolation* core book, page 137). This can only be attempted once per person.

Tionna does not suffer Burn when attempting this magical healing.

Tionna has not yet tapped into any of the pools' ability to repel or protect against magic — if such



# COMMUNITIES

The deep caves that once held the pools and housed the Barren have expanded and now connect with a previously undiscovered network of caverns. Some of the members of Nhirain have chosen to make these caverns their home, but most prefer the sky above their head. A modest village of thatched cottages has sprung up on the valley floor between the caverns and newly formed river. The river's source is a cliff face less than a day's walk from the pools. It streams from more than a dozen large cracks, creating numerous waterfalls that merge and flow lazily to the east. Once past the village, it flows into a small swirling lake, the water somehow draining as quickly as it arrives.

## Resources and Needs

The greatest resource of Nhirain are its pools, which do more than just inspire its people. The pools possess special powers that some of the Barren have learned to harness, giving them an edge in a dangerous world. They are a hearty people, used to surviving in a harsh environment. They are able to live off the land with relative ease, but if they hope to grow their nation, they are going to need weapons and warriors. They are also in search of allies — both from a military and political standpoint. Their fellow countrymen have all but declared war on all their neighbors, so Nhirain hopes to present an alternative.

## Philean's Menagerie

■ Population: 47 (35 humans, 6 rovers, 2 dwarves, 2 mongrels, 1 elf, 1 gnome).

■ Survival: Grift, theft and entertainment.

■ Motivation: Revenge. Kill those responsible for the Night of Fire.

■ Personality: Seemingly friendly and gregarious. In truth, they are cold and ruthless killers.

■ History: The leader of a circus was maimed as he watched his family consumed by the Night of Fire. He and other like-minded people travel the land in an effort to uncover and kill magicians while pretending to be simple performers.

■ Attitude toward magic: Those who use magic or abide its use must be destroyed. Even those with the potential to use magic and magical artifacts cannot be tolerated.

■ Government: Autocracy. The owner and organizer of



the menagerie, The Amazing Philean, runs the menagerie more like a cult than a troop of entertainers. He brooks no dissent and puts their mission above all else.

## Background

Danil Philean (pictured, left) watched in horror as his wife and children were consumed by fiery hail a thousand miles away. He desperately tried to break free from the grip of Avonish, the circus' spell caster, and go to his family that were on the other side of the magical door frame. He could feel the heat of the firestorm on his hand as he reached across the threshold. His family's screams mingled with the warnings of the sorcerer holding him. The next thing he knew, the world went white as the door frame exploded.

When he awoke, he found himself in a strange new world where everything was broken or gone. He had been unconscious for nearly a month. His lower arm and hand were missing. His family was dead. It was snowing when it shouldn't be. The circus was in shambles. He wasn't sure there was any reason to go on. Then he saw Avonish, and he found a purpose.

He found a hate burning inside that he had never felt before. The man who had prevented him from saving his wife and child had somehow survived. That was reason enough to kill him, but his hate was much deeper than that. He blamed the Night of Fire on Avonish and people like him. They tampered with forces beyond their control and brought destruction upon the world. It was so obvious to Philean: The only way to make things right, to avenge the deaths of all the innocents and maybe bring some semblance of order to the universe, was to kill those responsible.

He strangled Avonish the next night with his one good hand, savoring the feeling of the sorcerer's life ebbing away beneath his fingers. A trial was quickly called, but to his surprise he was found innocent. The majority of the makeshift community shared his views on magic. They declared his assault on the spell caster justified. Those who disagreed left, although some would say they were forced out.

Although a juggler in his former life, Philean was being looked upon as a leader. People wanted him to help create a new village and become the mayor. But he was uncomfortable in that role since all he had ever known was the road and performing. And besides, how could he hunt down and kill spell casters if he stayed in the same spot? During the Long Winter, he came up with the solution to both his problems.

Philean found it far easier to acquire strange or unusual animals in the new world than skilled performers, so he created a traveling menagerie instead of a circus. He has dreams of eventually turning the menagerie into a full circus, but his

pride will not allow that to happen until he has enough entertainers and tents to be worthy of the name. Currently, the show consists of a guided viewing of the exotic animals, each displayed with a flourish and exciting tale told about its capture and abilities. Small side shows with different performers break up the tours, mainly showcasing the survivors from the original circus. This includes a strongman, a rover contortionist, one half of an acrobatic duo and a knife thrower.

Over time, their collection of animals has grown. It wasn't difficult to find unusual and exotic animals roaming the broken landscape. Most of them had been flung from their natural habitats or changed by the Night of Fire. Two-headed goats, fire-breathing bears, cats that barked like a dog and more were captured and caged. Those whose dedication to the mission was in question were always sent to ensnare the most dangerous beasts.

The most prized animal in the menagerie is an albino quill ape named Mormuu. Unique enough just for its appearance, Mormuu is also very sensitive to people and things that are connected to the Weave. When in the presence of a spell caster or magic item, he goes into hysterics — leaping, howling, rattling his cage and generally acting like a child throwing a tantrum. All visitors to the Menagerie are walked past Mormuu to identify targets for execution.

Since the thaw, the Menagerie has visited more than a half dozen communities, and have identified at least one suspicious person at each stop. At the first village, they tried to out the spell caster and kill her front of the other villagers. Unfortunately, she was well-liked by the community and a fight broke out — resulting in several deaths within the Menagerie, the release of several creatures and the death of everyone at the village. Since then, Philean has been more circumspect with his agenda.

Now the Menagerie takes no actions while the performers are in town, instead using that time to identify targets, memorize layouts, gauge attitudes toward magic and find likely recruits. They go back to the village days later and carry out their mission in secret, hoping to avoid confrontation and ties to the actual killings. So far they have remained above suspicion and continue with their mission.

## Traditions

In the world of the After, people often see life on the road as a chance to leave whatever harsh life they have been dealt. If their hatred of magic matches Philean's, they are allowed to join after they have given all their worldly possessions to the Menagerie. They must walk naked into the group and ask to be clothed, fed, housed and accepted into the group. Even after this, they are not fully

accepted until they have actually "blooded" themselves and participated in the killing of a suspected spell caster.

## Geography

Philean's Menagerie is a traveling community, so it has no real geography. Thus far, it has kept its travels mostly within the confines of what was once the Empire. Consisting of about a dozen wagons, the menagerie tries to stay on roads or flat grasslands whenever possible. They have identified one small community filled with like-minded individuals where they plan on wintering.

## Resources and Needs

The menagerie has little to offer other than entertainment. They rely upon others for most of their food — either stealing from them or accepting food in payment for entertainment — though a few among them are able to hunt and forage. They are constantly on the lookout for others to join their family and expand the show. They are especially interested in skilled performers, animal handlers and hunters. They also need men who know how to fight. Although they have managed to stay alive and parlay with attackers in the past, it is only a matter of time until they meet someone who cannot be swayed with words and amusement.

## The Amazing Philean

Obsessed Performer (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 5
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 4	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 4	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 6	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 7	<b>Def:</b> 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Animal Handling	4	1	5	(2+)
Athletics	2	3	5	(2+)
Bureaucracy	3	2	5	(2+)
Con	4	4	8	(4)
Merchant	4	2	6	(3)
Investigation	3	3	6	(3)
Performance/Juggling	4	5	11	(5+)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Combat Skill, Performance:** +2 to Defense when using skill.  
**Skill Aptitude, Juggling:** +2 to skill.  
**Weave Hunter:** +1 when hunting and fighting Weave-touched, -stained, -borne, or -cursed.  
**Obsessed, Killing Mages:** Compulsion to hunt and kill spell casters.  
**One Hand:** Missing a hand and has trouble doing work.  
 Ascondean, Cushu

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Dagger (thrown)	1L	0	6L	(3)L



# COMMUNITIES

## *The Avinec Tribe*

- Population: 97 humans.
- Survival: Scavenging carrion.
- Motivation: Survival and worship.
- Personality: Feral practicality.
- History: Starving, leaderless tribe saved by Primal magic and cannibalism.
- Attitude toward magic: Accepting of Primal magic, distrustful of outsiders.
- Government: Primitive theocracy.

### Background

The Night of Fire was just beginning. Crone Delia could sense something was wrong even before the red light appeared on the eastern horizon. She could smell the coming death, even if her son, Krehl, chief of the Avinec tribe, couldn't. But no one would listen to the old woman. Krehl said it was a prairie fire, far in the distance, and that was enough until Nature began to punish the Avinec with fire and magic. The tribe ran to their tents, but they offered no protection from the raining fire and lightning. Krehl ordered Delia to fly into the burning sky to find shelter for their people. She held the carrion reaper's talon that hung around her neck, focusing her energy on her totem. The hunched old woman spread her arms as she chanted. Her arms began to melt into thinning wings as her already long nose began to form into a beak and her form began to shrink. And then a blue streak of light shot from the sky, and Delia's transformation stopped. The Avinec scattered in the chaos, but Crone Delia remained, frozen in place.

Many of the tribe died that night, including Chief Krehl. Without their leader or their wise woman, the Avinec looked on with horror as the snows began to fall and food became scarce. Many more died of cold and starvation.

One night, Dea, the only surviving child of Krehl, began to cry of hunger and wouldn't stop. Her mother had died after giving birth, shortly after the Night of Fire. There was little food for the yearling. What was left was reserved for the hunters. If they were not strong, all of the tribe would die. Dea's caregiver, a slave named Anya who once served Krehl's wife, left the whimpering child in their tent and trudged through the crisp snow toward Delia.

The statue of flesh stood as she had that night. Her skin had not rotted. It was leathery and gaunt, tight against the bones. Anya knelt at it, asking for forgiveness for what had to be done. She must kill Delia's granddaughter. It was not right to let the child die a slow, painful death. Dea's cries grew louder, but there was something else. A hum emanated from

the statue and then a pulse of light washed over the woman, only she was no longer a woman. She had been transformed into a carrion reaper, and she immediately knew how to save Dea. She instinctively made her way to the pit where the tribe had thrown its dead. Dea would eat well.

From that night on, the tribe knew it would survive. When Dea cried and could not be consoled, it was time. The finest hunters of the tribe would assemble around Delia and wait for the magic to transform them. The pulse of primal magic would flash out for 10 ft. in all directions, turning the hunters to scavengers. The carrion reapers would take flight awkwardly, their senses honed to find the dead, even if the carcasses were buried or a mile away. They followed their instincts out into the wilderness, bringing parts of corpses — human and animal — back to the tribe. Some hours later the magic would fade and the hunters would return to their human forms. They would then kiss Delia's taloned toes in thanks and the tribe would feast. At first some tribe members were opposed to cannibalism, but they either ate or died and were eaten.

### Traditions

Delia has become an icon of worship among the Avinec. They decorate her with traditional tooth necklaces and chieftain paint. She has become their goddess. They pray



## Anya of the Avinec Tribe

Caretaker (NPC 1)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 1	<b>Health:</b> 4
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 2	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 2	<b>Wil:</b> 2
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 4	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 4	<b>Init:</b> 4	<b>Def:</b> 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Craft/Wet Nursing	2	3	5	(2+)
Intimidation	2	3	5	(2+)
Scavenge	2	2	4	(2)
Stealth	2	2	4	(2)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Righteous Purpose:** Extra Style point when spent in name of belief.

**Dependent:** Reliant upon others.

Ascondean, Warland Pidgin

for her to continue to bless them with her magic. Even though the melting snows meant the return of more game, the Avinec continue to worship Delia and consider scavenging in carrion reaper form to be a high honor. Dea, now 18 months old, indicates which 30 tribe members will be given the honor. Her caregiver holds Dea out to each hunter. If the child reaches for them, they have been chosen for the next scavenge. A black line is painted down the bridges of their noses. Sometimes Dea chooses more hunters than can be transformed by Delia. In those cases, the first 30 to surround the statue when Dea cries are the ones who are transformed.

Dea is treated as a wise woman and as the next chieftain. She is doted over and kept well fed. Still, even with a full belly, she will break into screaming fits. It is the signal that Delia's magic is ready. Some think it might be young Dea's unmastered magic working through her grandmother's form that causes the transformation, but no one can explain why Delia was frozen in time.

As Dea's caregiver, Anya has assumed a position of respect in the tribe, despite her inability to hunt. She has many suitors and is lavished with jewelry and food. She takes good care of the baby, knowing that without Dea, she would be relegated back to slave status among the Avinec.

### Geography

The Avinec were in the southern Warlands before the Apocalypse, between Cynosure and Algiz. However, they're not entirely sure where they are now. The scrub brush to the south has now been replaced by a dense pine forest. The land to the east, which was once crisscrossed with trails and roads, has been washed clean. Two days'

journey to the east there is now a great salt plain, where the ocean may have once been or washed ashore and receded. The Avinec have begun making trips to the plains to gather salt to help cure meat. Four days to the north is a vast pit with the ruins of a small village at the bottom. The scavengers have picked it clean of carcasses, but there are many useful items still to be found in the ruins. To the west stretches the rugged terrain of scrub brush and prairie grass that the Avinec were accustomed to in the Before.

### Resources and Needs

The Avinec are slowly building up a stockpile of dried meats, but they have never farmed. Before the Night of Fire, they would follow game across the prairies and forage for wild berries and roots, but now they have settled around Delia. They need seed and more knowledge of agriculture to add to their growing supply of meat. The Avinec will happily trade the dried meats that can be seen hanging in many parts of their tent village, but they are careful not to tell outsiders that some of it may have come from humanoids. They are methodically learning the best methods of preserving the meat through trial and error, but would be accepting of outside help to cut down on the amount of food that goes bad.

The tribe includes craftsmen skilled at making arrowheads and speartips from stone, grass ropes and baskets, tooth jewelry and paints. They also are skilled at dressing game and tanning hides.

## The Brigands

■ Population: 45 (28 humans, 10 mongrels, 3 rovers, 2 dwarves, 2 Loranthians).

■ Survival: Theft

■ Motivation: Annoy and someday overthrow Anlaf Carr.

■ Personality: Insolent.

■ History: The Tenth Legion was comprised of the dregs of the former Empire's soldiers. Still, some truly tried to keep the peace in Verelanar before the Apocalypse. That didn't matter to Anlaf Carr, the despot who rose to power in Verelanar after the Night of Fire. He enslaved all of the Empire's peacekeepers — and anyone else who would not bow to him. Some of those slaves escaped.

■ Attitude toward magic: Distrustful.





# COMMUNITIES

■ **Government:** Band of rogues comprised mostly of former legionnaires who escaped from enslavement in New Beda. Loosely led by Dessa Santon (pictured on previous page).

## Background

In the Before, Dessa Santon was a legion captain who worked diligently to protect the people of Verelanar from the rebels who sowed the seeds of chaos. Despite being assigned the punishment detail of the Tenth Legion, she was sure she could work her way back in to the good graces of her superiors. But, more than that, she honestly thought the Tenth Legion could help the people of Verelanar. Sure, there were some bad apples in the Tenth, but overall she believed in the cause.

That changed after the Night of Fire. In the ensuing chaos, she saw fellow legionnaires killed by angry mobs. She and a few of her fellow legionnaires hid out for a few days, but eventually they were caught and tortured. Anlaf Carr, the newly anointed king of Verelanar, gave the orders personally. He made examples of the captured legionnaires to gain the hearts and minds of his people. Each dead or enslaved legionnaire was another nail in the coffin of the once-great Empire; another symbol of the Lanarian's true independence.

### Dessa Santon, Leader of the Brigands

Vengeful Bandit (NPC 3)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 3	<b>Health:</b> 6
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 4	<b>Str:</b> 3
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 7	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 7	<b>Def:</b> 8

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Archery	4	5	9	(4+)
Athletics	3	2	5	(2+)
Intimidation	2	3	5	(2+)
Melee	3	4	7	(3+)
Stealth	4	3	7	(3+)
Survival	3	3	6	(3)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Danger Sense:** Reduce surprise penalty.

**Evade:** +2 defense vs. ranged attacks.

**Inspire:** Provide skill bonus to allies.

**Vengeful:** Bent on revenge.

Ascondean, Lanarian

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Longbow	3L	0	12L	(6)L
Sword, Long	3L	0	10L	(5)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

The experience ruined Dessa's faith in mankind, the laws of the Empire and the teachings of the Divine Mother.

Dessa and her band of former slaves have the aftershocks from the Night of Fire to thank for their freedom. After the Thaw, while working the fields north of New Beda, the ground shook violently and shifted up beneath their feet. She and 20 other slaves suddenly found themselves 15 ft. above four of their five guards as a cliff rose from the field. Dessa regained her feet and used the ropes that tied her hands together to strangle the guard who stood in their way.

They ran north as the day turned to night, but they would never have made it to safety if it wasn't for the Beguiler, Andin Ko, who had also been enslaved. He used his magic to make people look the other way and convince Carr's loyalists to let them go.

After two days on the run, the little group found the perfect hiding place from Carr's mounted militia. A vast forest had been knocked down during the Night of Fire, toppled like stalks of wheat after a storm. Trees lay on their sides for as far as the eye could see. It was tough going, even on foot. Dessa found an easily defensible shelter near a natural spring and turned her attention to food. Though she never requested it and does not acknowledge it, the rest of the slaves turned to Dessa to lead them.

It was Dessa's idea to begin raiding the logging parties sent out from New Beda to harvest the fallen trees. They would take out the guards, one by one, free the slaves, and then help themselves to the guards' supplies. Andin used his magic to weed out the slaves who were not trustworthy. The others were permitted to join the Brigands, as long as they proved themselves useful. Andin is the only person Dessa trusts, mainly because she has no choice.

The band continues to grow slowly. It follows no laws. Anyone traveling near the downed forest with useful supplies is fair game for robbery. Dessa does not try to impose her will on the group of people who choose to help her. Her only motivation is to be a thorn in the side of Anlaf Carr.

It seems she is getting her wish. Carr's militia has increased patrols around the southern edge of the forest. Thus far, they haven't attempted to penetrate the fallen trees by more than a few hundred yards.

## Traditions

Before a freed slave or anyone else is permitted into the Brigands, he must be cleared by Andin Ko. Dessa asks a series of questions and Andin uses his magic to determine whether the recruit is lying. It's an arduous process because the Beguiler must rest many times during the questioning as the magic saps his strength. With the growth of the

group, Dessa is beginning to feel more responsible for their safety. If any members decide to leave the Brigands, she moves the group to another camp so that no one ever knows their exact location.

## Geography

A vast forest of downed trees two days north of New Beda provides the perfect hideout for the Brigands. Dessa's people have scouted four days to the north, northwest and northeast but have found no end to the fallen forest. A pond, partially covered by fallen trees, lies about a day's journey to the east. The Brigands have placed traps in and around the watering hole to catch fish and game they use to supplement their raids.

A half-day to the west is a long, deep crevice that is crisscrossed by fallen trees. If Carr's men ever do find them and give chase, Dessa plans to use the natural hazard to her advantage. It is trapped so that only she and her men know the safe way across. The Brigands have sites they use for camps secreted throughout the fallen forest.

## Resources and Needs

The Brigands have all the wood they can use to make arrows and bows, and enough game and supplies to get by. They are always on the lookout for metal, especially in the form of spearheads and arrowheads. Dessa does not like the thought of defending her new home with sharpened sticks and arrowheads made from chipped stone, especially since she has noticed that Carr's militia is relatively well armed and armored. The group could use more hunters and scouts, especially those who are skilled trapmakers. The Brigands use traps extensively, both for defense and to capture small game. However, anyone traveling openly through Verelanar is more likely to be raided by the Brigands than to be permitted to parlay. Anyone not a slave is immediately suspected of being loyal to Carr.

## *The Forlorn*

- Population: 27 mountain dwarves.
- Survival: Scavenging and rune crafting.
- Motivation: Survival and escape. They want to find a dwarven community or the surface.
- Personality: Bleak, tired and determined.



They continue on through sheer force of will, but their hope and faith are dwindling.

■ History: Once numbering in the hundreds, the refugees and survivors of several settlements have been wandering the tunnels for more than a year. They have faced starvation, monstrous attacks, disease and more.

■ Attitude toward magic: Reliant on rune crafting. They welcome anything that could save them.

■ Government: Democracy. All within the group have a voice, although the few remaining Rune Casters and priests are highly regarded. The most respected and powerful of these is named Aldwyn Cavinir (pictured below, left).

## Background

The Night of Fire destroyed cities and lives across the face of Scondera, but none suffered so much, perhaps, as the denizens of the land beneath Scondera.

The Mountain Dwarf nation of Cair Dhurn lay beneath the Primea Range, which collapsed during the Night of Fire. The hundreds (if not thousands) of miles of tunnels and chambers were crushed and destroyed, along with many of the caverns that linked the various dwarven outposts.

Most of the Mountain Dwarves stranded on the surface after the Night of Fire assumed that their kin were killed instantly by the destruction of the Primea Mountains — or hoped they were. The alternative was unthinkable. The worst possible nightmare any dwarf could imagine was to be buried alive, dying slowly in the darkness.

Unfortunately, several thousand dwarves did not perish when the mountains fell. They survived in a variety of ways; some were trapped beneath pillars and angled stone walls, and were rescued days later. Others found safety in deep tunnels, or caverns that were spared the worst of the destruction. Ongoing tremors killed a few of the survivors, but they slowly made their way through the shattered remains of the various underground settlements toward each other.

One particular group, numbering nearly 200, had gathered in a large, mostly intact hall. They discussed what should be done next, while the few surviving Rune Casters etched runes of light and heat upon what was left of the stonework. They took stock of what supplies they had, and attempted to map out possible routes to the surface. Then, they began what would turn into an endless trek to find a way out.

Every attempt to take an upward route was met with collapsed tunnels — or simply missing chambers. Where once there had been many ways to the surface, now there were none. Some tunnels would end in solid faces of rock, or worse, tilt alarmingly downward into empty spaces.



# COMMUNITIES

Deep ravines cut through once-busy thoroughfares. It felt as if the world itself had been turned upside down. Maps were no longer useful, and even the once-reliable dwarven instincts for direction were faulty, as if their inherent connection with the earth and rock had been shattered like the Primea Range itself.

As they traveled, they met with other small groups of survivors who had been trapped in smaller chambers and forgotten tunnels. These meetings were initially joyful, though it was clear that resources were low. The food and water that the roaming group found from time to time was running out, hardly enough to keep everyone alive.

Their numbers were soon to diminish anyway. The first run-in with Deep Horrors killed more than half of the survivors within a few short minutes. It was only the self-sacrificing actions of one of the three remaining Rune Casters that allowed anyone to escape alive. She etched a powerful rune

## Aldwyn Cavinir of The Forlorn

Respected Rune Caster (NPC 4)

<b>Race:</b> Dwarf	<b>Style:</b> 4	<b>Health:</b> 8
<b>Body:</b> 4	<b>Dex:</b> 3	<b>Str:</b> 3
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 4	<b>Wil:</b> 4
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 5	<b>Stun:</b> 4
<b>Per:</b> 8	<b>Init:</b> 7	<b>Def:</b> 9

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics: Religion	4	4	8	(4)
Diplomacy	3	3	6	(3)
Empathy	4	3	7	(3+)
Magic/Blood Rune	4	3	7	—
Magic/Rune	4	6	10	—
Melee	3	3	6	(3)
Survival	4	3	7	(3+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Darkvision:** Ignore Perception penalties caused by darkness.  
**Hardy:** 1 extra die when spending Style points on Body-based rolls.  
**Resistance:** +2 to resist poison, immune to Deep Horror poison and disease.  
**Braiding, Blood Rune Magic:** Cast spells from Blood Rune tradition.  
**Burn Reduction:** Take 1 less point of Burn.  
**Magical Aptitude, Rune Magic:** Cast spells from Rune Magic tradition.  
**Righteous Presence:** +2 Charisma bonus when dealing with like-minded believers.  
**Broken Compass:** -2 to Navigation rolls.  
**Dense:** -4 to Swim rolls.  
**Slow:** -1 to Move.  
**Flashback:** Relives past trauma.  
 Ascondean, Dwarven

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Pickaxe	3L	0	9L	(4+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chainmail	+2	2	—	

of destruction upon a supporting column, collapsing the entire chamber upon the Deep Horrors and dying dwarves. Slightly less than 100 dwarves survived that incident, six months ago. Since then, their numbers have been reduced even further by sickness, hunger and even a murder.

Now, only 27 of this group of dwarves remain. They have almost run out of food and water, relying upon Rune magic to convert inedible fungus (and bodily waste) into meager supplies of nutrition. Whispers of “unloading dead weight” have started — again — and there is even worrying talk of finishing off the particularly sick in order to use their remains as a source of food. They’re even desperate enough to accept Cavinir’s Blood Rune spells, which he tried to keep hidden as long as possible.

They have found hints that other dwarves have survived, and even picked up a few stragglers. However, they worry that meeting another large group of survivors might result in a fight over what’s left of their supplies.

## Traditions

Other than staying alive, the only other tradition the survivors maintain are regular services to the Five Pillars. However, they are certain that Aldwair has either forsaken them, or is punishing them for some unknown sin. They believe that the entire dwarven race has perished, so it is up to them to keep the faith alive. They will also stop at nothing to find other dwarven survivors also trapped beneath the mountains.

## Geography

The twisted broken remains of Cair Dhurn is not what it once was. Not only have the majority of open spaces been destroyed by the collapsing mountain range above, what remains does not resemble anything that existed before. Deeper paths, ancient even to the dwarves, have been uncovered and it is through these that The Forlorn find themselves wandering most often. Sometimes they will find a familiar settlement, mining outpost or guard station — but for the most part, it is a strange and alien environment.

## Resources and Needs

The surviving dwarves need everything. There is precious little food or water for all of them, even with their vastly depleted numbers. Wild mushrooms and the rare subterranean animal are luxuries, while the occasional spring gives them a chance to refill their barrels and wineskins. Deep Horrors are attracted to the same sources of water, giving the dwarves no respite and little time to catch their breath. Ultimately, the one thing the survivors need is a way out.

## The Grey Academy

■ Population: 85 (72 humans, 5 mongrels, 3 dwarves, 2 elves, 2 rovers, 1 island folk).

■ Survival: Hunting upon the mud flats and some fishing.

■ Motivation: Research the broken Weave. If it can't be fixed, then it should be exploited to find new magical traditions.

■ Personality: Isolated and arrogant. The Academy mages who survived the Night of Fire clearly deserved to, and now it's time to delve deeply into the new mysteries.

■ History: Originally a minor offshoot of the Empire's magical Academy on a small rocky island, now it has been isolated by the ocean pulling back for a dozen leagues in every direction and lies in the middle of endless mudflats.

■ Attitude toward magic: Very open. Magic of every tradition is openly used and studied here.

■ Government: Academic. The Grand Master of the Grey Academy maintains leadership, while his professors and adjuncts fill lesser ranks. A few non-mage servants are at the bottom of the heap.



### Background

For 300 years, the Imperial Academy of Magic dedicated itself to the study of sorcery and related magical traditions. It was rumored that they even worked with Necromancers, treating every magical tradition as fair game for research. However, much of the Academy's work did not take place in the city of Ascondean itself. There were dozens of smaller Academies across the Empire (and even in other nations, outposts of the great Imperial institution).

The Grey Academy was situated nearly 12 leagues out at sea, on a rocky island perhaps a mile long. The Empire visited the island monthly, bringing supplies and new students while taking visiting mages back to shore. The Grand Master of the Grey Academy, Ballard Ashe (pictured above), was as much an orator and salesman as he was a powerful sorcerer. Visitors to the Grey Academy would often not quite believe this man in his skull cap, etched with meaningless magical symbols. However, Ashe knew that appearances were very important — and he liked to maintain an air of mystery and power.

The truth was that the Grey Academy was located far away from the Empire for a reason: Only the Imperial Academy's most troublesome and eccentric members were sent there, for "rest" and "research." In reality, they were being swept under a rug so as not to cause problems for the more regal and refined mainland Academies.

Ballard had been one of the most problematic mages in the history of the Imperial Academy. He had been a magister of the Grand Armies for most of his life, until he had a nervous breakdown after a particularly unpleasant experience in Verelanar. To this day, he refuses to speak about what happened, but those few who were there talk about a magical accident that killed several innocent people. Fewer still know that Ashe's experimentation with Necromancy was to blame.

For the last decade, Ballard has been Grand Master of this outpost of exiles and fools. No one could have guessed that he would later be responsible for maintaining the last remaining outpost of the Imperial Academy.

Most of the mages in the Grey Academy perished during the Night of Fire as they tried to either escape or hold back the devastation. Only a fraction of their number remained the next morning, many of them injured or insane because of the breaking of the Weave and the horrendous

### Ballard Ashe of the Grey Academy

Magical Headmaster (NPC 4)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 4	<b>Health:</b> 8
<b>Body:</b> 3	<b>Dex:</b> 2	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 6	<b>Wil:</b> 5
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 4	<b>Stun:</b> 3
<b>Per:</b> 11	<b>Init:</b> 8	<b>Def:</b> 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/History	6	3	9	(4+)
Bureaucracy	6	3	9	(4+)
Investigation	6	4	10	(5)
Linguistics	6	3	9	(4+)
Magic/Necromancy	6	3	9	—
Magic/Sorcery	6	6	12	—
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Battle Mage:** +1 Spell Damage.

**Braiding, Necromancy:** Cast spells from Necromancy tradition.

**Burn Reduction:** Takes 1 less point of Burn.

**Magical Aptitude, Sorcery:** Cast spells from Sorcery tradition

**Mentally Unstable:** Mental illness causes him to act unpredictably.

**Weave-Stained:** Emits odors at random intervals. These can be pleasant or foul.

Ascondean, Cushu, Gnomish, High Ascondean, Kar'Danish

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Quarterstaff	2N	0	7N	(3+)N



# COMMUNITIES

Burn they suffered.

The island itself was left mostly intact, though, with little actual damage to the towers of the Academy. Most had feared a massive destructive wave of water after they saw the ocean pulling back, but instead all that happened was the hissing din of fire falling upon endless mud flats.

In the days that followed, the survivors were glad of that muddy plain. Fish and other sea creatures had been left stranded on the flats, and it was easy to gather food. Even the seaweed was taken and cooked. The mages (and their servants) quickly found some larger pools of briny water that had been left behind — small but welcome oases of life that could keep them all alive. No ships were coming soon, that much was certain, and the members of the Grey Academy knew that they were on their own. For all they knew, the entire world had perished.

Ashe cared little for the fate of the world. All he knew was that the Weave itself had heaved and shattered during the Night of Fire. Now it was up to him and his mages to discover why and, perhaps, fix it.

During the Long Winter, a few survivors made it across the miles of frozen mud to the island. Ashe was not surprised that these hardy travelers were also mages, somehow *called* to the Grey Academy. They were welcomed with open arms and open minds to become part of the Great Study. To Ashe's credit — and secret surprise — some discoveries have been made.

Indeed, the Grey Academy has Necromancers, Listeners, Beguilers, Rune Casters and Elemental and Primal mages all working together, sharing their knowledge and skills for the betterment of magic in general.

This environment of cooperation is why Ashe believes the Grey Academy holds the future of Scondera in its grasp — if they can stay alive and keep the dreaded Burn at bay.

## Traditions

The mages of the Grey Academy maintain as many of the Empire's traditions as possible, including worship of the Two Above, raising a cup to the Emperor and the Grand Army and holding life in high esteem. They are tolerant of other races, but a visitor will only be accepted as an equal if he is a mage of some power and talent. Arriving at the Academy via magical means is often enough to prove the worth of a visitor.

## Geography

The Grey Academy is an impressive collection of granite towers and buildings built around a rocky outcrop on a small island far off the Ascondean coast. Capable of housing nearly 400 mages and staff, most of the Academy

now lies empty. The island has several small springs and one river that now trickles its way across the muddy plains. Some of the support staff grow basic crops near the beaches, but for the most part, food is plentiful — if hard to get to — with large murky pools full of fish scattered around the mud flats near the island.

## Resources and Needs

Food (other than fish and seaweed), as the residents of the Grey Academy are mightily sick of fish. More mages are always welcome, though the true need is for skilled everymen who can maintain the buildings, gather food and let the mages get on with studying magic.

## Verashen

■ Population: 61 (43 humans, 6 mongrels, 4 gnomes, 3 rovers, 3 elves, 2 island folk).

■ Survival: Fishing, scavenging and trading.

■ Motivation: Knowledge and preservation. They want to gather, protect and record all they can from the Before. They also want to understand the new world around them.

■ Personality: Inquisitive, reclusive and wary. The residents want to be left alone, but the lure of more knowledge can overcome their caution.

■ History: The Brotherhood of Silent Voices moved into the remains of Verashen to preserve its library and other historical items.

■ Attitude toward magic: Cautious curiosity. They wish to know how it has changed, but treat it like they would a dangerous animal.

■ Government: Monastic order. The Brotherhood oversees Versashen as if it were one of their monasteries or farms.

## Background

For centuries, Verashen was a small, almost forgotten city. It contained little of note, except for a library that had been tended since before the formation of the Empire. This alone was enough to set it apart from cities 10 times its size, and the Brotherhood of Silent Voices had long considered Verashen as one of the most sacred places in



Scondera. Only the library at Merene was more important to the Brotherhood.

The Library of Verashen wasn't particularly large, but beneath the stone complex lay nearly two miles of winding passages, lined with bookshelves and scroll cases. One particularly scholarly Emperor decreed that one copy of every book, thesis or academic missive produced in the Empire should be stored there. It is within this maze of corridors that the Archive was kept. The rest of the complex, made up of a four-story tower surrounded by a high stone wall, was mostly reading rooms and study chambers, staffed by volunteers from the city and overseen by an Imperial Archiver dedicated to updating the library's records. As an official part of the Imperial Academic network, the library's walls and gate were enchanted with powerful magic-making them almost impossible to overcome.

The Brotherhood of Silent Voices recognized the importance of this store of knowledge and would send one of its order to the library each year, to live nearby and spend time wandering the Archive. They were particularly good at retrieving documents for visitors to the library, as only the Archiver knew the shelves as well as the Brotherhood. The Empire tolerated this unofficial help, and few others were ever allowed into the labyrinth below the tower.

When the Night of Fire roared across the Empire, Verashen burned — at least most of it did. The ancient library weathered the fire storm better than any other building in the city and was left mostly intact. Moreover, although parts of the Archive collapsed, only a fraction of the materials within were destroyed.

The visiting Brother, Abel Fidel, was one of the few survivors within the library. The Archiver had left to save his family (who lived in the city), as had the volunteers and visitors. Brother Abel was quickly faced with some difficult decisions, as the first survivors arrived at the gates. Some he recognized as being volunteers who had worked faithfully within the library, and those he allowed in. Others at the gate were strangers, angry and frightened, and those he refused entry.

Eventually, the survivors began to build shelters along the wall, ignoring the library and the Brother within. The library itself had a spring in the gardens and plenty of dry food stored for visitors. The few within the walls had what they needed to survive.

Brother Abel feared for the knowledge within, however. It was only a matter of time before the increasing number of survivors became desperate enough to break into the library and use the books and papers for kindling.

One of the volunteers agreed to take word to the Silent

Voices in Merene, but it was unnecessary — a dozen pilgrims arrived within days of the messenger leaving. More than 50 Brothers, along with an armed escort, had set out for Verashen the day after the Night of Fire, to ensure the survival of the Archive. Many had died along the way, but those who had survived brought weapons and supplies to replenish those already used. They fought their way through some of the more aggressive survivors surrounding the library, ensuring that the other inhabitants around Verashen would have little love for the Silent Voices.

Since then, the Silent Voices have held the library, resisting several attacks and failing to make friends or allies among the survivors outside the walls. Any attempts to leave the library meet with, at the very least, sullen resistance — if not outright violence. From time to time, some Brothers make it out and manage to return with supplies scavenged from the surrounding area, but several have been killed in bloody skirmishes over those same supplies. Though water is plentiful, food is running out. Eventually, the outsiders will find a way through the gates and the books will burn.

## Traditions

The Brotherhood of Silent Voices have little chance to allow the free and open sharing of knowledge, but an honest visitor to the library who truly just wanted to browse the Archives would be greeted with something akin to joy. They are carefully recording every event they observe, just

### Brother Abel Fidel of Verashen

Scholar (NPC 2)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 2	<b>Health:</b> 5
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 1	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 2	<b>Int:</b> 5	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 3	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 8	<b>Init:</b> 6	<b>Def:</b> 3

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/All	5	3	8	(4)
Craft/All	5	3	8	(4)
Linguistics	5	2	7	(3+)
Medicine	5	3	8	(4)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Scavenge	5	2	7	(3+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Skill Mastery, Academics:** Use disciplines with no penalty.

**Skill Mastery, Craft:** Use disciplines with no penalty.

**Honest:** Never lies.

**Vow:** Sworn to action or organization.

Ascondean, Gnomish, Dwarven, High Ascondean

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Club	2N	0	6N	(3)N



# COMMUNITIES

in case the walls and gate should fall. The Archive itself can be sealed behind a dwarven rune-etched stone door that the Brotherhood practices closing each day.

## Geography

Verashen was situated by a slow-flowing river and fertile farmland. Rolling hills surrounded the city, supporting many scattered farms. After the Night of Fire, the land is mostly barren, with inches of ash that have been cast into drifts and strange shapes by the wind. Some of the original farmland has been uncovered by the drifting ash, but a storm can bury that land again within hours. Inside the city, most of the buildings are intact, if badly damaged. Only the Library of Verashen remains strong and undamaged, though the grey walls were scorched black by the Night of Fire. The walls and gate are impossible to open or climb. Bright arcs of energy are emitted should anyone try to scale them. This effect has gotten worse since the Night of Fire — sometimes unleashing upon anyone even passing the library.

### Resources and Needs

The Brothers need help on many levels. They have water, but little food. They need able-bodied warriors to assist with defending the library, but would do better with a diplomatic soul with the ability to build a healthier relationship with the other inhabitants of Verashen. Too much damage may have been done, though there are some within the remains of the city who would forgive the Brothers. They are in the minority. This illustrates another potential resource they need: someone with diplomatic skills who can build a better relationship with the rest of Verashen's survivors.

# Windfall

- **Population:** 288 (180 humans, 42 mongrels, 32 mountain dwarves, 12 rovers, 10 goblins, 6 Loranthians, 4 elves, 2 desert dwarves).
- **Survival:** A settlement built up around a pile of debris that randomly falls from the sky nearly every two hours in the same spot.
- **Motivation:** Make the most of the strange phenomenon, while dealing with the unwelcome arrivals that sometimes come with the positive gifts.
- **Personality:** Practical and stalwart. The people of Windfall are always able to find a use for almost any item, person or skill. They are also strong-willed and always ready for trouble, given the occasional terrible things that tumble unbidden from the sky.
- **History:** Before the Night of Fire, there was no town



or village. Windfall wasn't founded until some survivors discovered a random pile of debris.

- **Attitude toward magic:** Typically cautious, though the town is especially interested in any traditions that can give insight into what's causing the windfall. They are not tired of it, as it's given the settlement a lot of success, but they would be concerned if was causing trouble elsewhere — or indeed, actually taking things from somewhere else now that the Night of Fire is over.
- **Government:** The Town Council rules fairly over Windfall. The original founders have seats on the council.

## Background

A group of survivors came across a pile of scattered debris a few weeks after the Night of Fire and started desperately scavenging through the pile looking for something useful. The leader of the group, a young woman called Pola, noticed most of the objects looked like they had been shattered, as if from a long fall, with the scraps scattered over an area. Also, the objects seemed to come from all over Scondera. It was quite a mystery, though they didn't waste time pondering because there was plenty to look through, and enough intact equipment to keep their attention for several hours.

As night began to fall, crashes came from all around the group, who had started to build a makeshift camp. At first they thought they were under attack, but they then real-

ized dozens of objects were falling from the sky above them. About 50 objects, ranging from weapons to furniture, landed all around them.

Bewildered, the group stayed for several more days and witnessed more falls of random items. They realized that this strange magical side effect of the Night of Fire could be useful in the After. And so a community was built up around the phenomenon. Windfall was born.

Of course, not all the items that fall are good, or safe. Sometimes, bad things come down: bodies, or limbs or a rain of blood. Once, there was a fall of severed heads.

From time to time, creatures tumble from the sky and are quickly entangled in nets after they hit the massive mats the residents learned to set up to protect falling items. Sometimes the creatures break out and people get hurt, but for the most part, the Fall Guard are good at what they do. The one exception was when a strange creature fell. A dwarf in the community identified it as a Deep Horror — specifically a Seethe Warrior from beneath the Primea Mountains. Despite the dwarf's warnings, half the town was killed. It was only the pragmatic advice of a surviving dwarf resident that prevented an outbreak of corpse fungi, which could have destroyed the settlement.

The town uses what items they can, repairs them if possible, or stores them safely until a use can be found or a passing survivor can be persuaded to repair it. The buildings, walls

and weapons are all taken from the falls, and food too, if it's edible. Otherwise, trade is healthy, and Windfall is building a reputation for fair and interesting merchandise.

Items that fall tend to be scorched, as if they had been pulled up into the sky during the Night of Fire, though they can look brand-new, ancient or anything in-between. Sometimes items look just like lost trinkets from a person's childhood, and people wonder in amazement that this personal treasure just happened to end up in Windfall.

Sorcerers sometimes feel very uncomfortable around certain items, usually nondescript things like plates or picture frames — or even random pieces of wood. They feel too hot to touch, as if still on fire. (*GM's Note:* Sorcerers handling such items may suffer a point of Burn while holding it. This Burn can be reduced as normal with Talents or Style points. A Magic: Sorcery skill roll, Difficulty 2, will determine that the items have been teleported by a powerful effect that can leave a powerful and long-lasting touch of the Weave upon certain objects.)

## Traditions

Twenty minutes after sunrise, First Fall takes place. Although items come from the sky every 112 minutes throughout the day, stopping just after sunset, First Fall is always a tense moment. The original founders are given first look at whatever items are scavenged from this Fall, though traditionally they give up everything they find to the settlement. However, every now and again, an item of personal importance to one of the original founders is uncovered in the First Fall — and only ever in this Fall of items. No one is quite sure why.

## Geography

Windfall is a ramshackle place in the middle of nowhere. It is made up of improvised buildings constructed from the random things that have Fallen from the sky. Nothing looks the same. It almost looks like a shanty town that has itself just fallen from the sky. The town is roughly circular, constructed in a protective curve around the large rope nets and hay-filled mats that make up the target area where the items arrive. This is a town with two walls: one to keep things out, and one to keep things in. There is a cleared "killing field" around the Falling Ground, just in case something nasty comes down from the sky.

## Resources and Needs

Windfall needs craftsmen to repair or fix items that have come down during the Windfalls. They desperately want to understand the magical phenomenon itself, just in case it's dangerous to them or other communities.

### **Pola of Windfall**

Ex-Farmer/Council Member (NPC 2)

<b>Race:</b> Human	<b>Style:</b> 2	<b>Health:</b> 5
<b>Body:</b> 2	<b>Dex:</b> 2	<b>Str:</b> 2
<b>Cha:</b> 3	<b>Int:</b> 3	<b>Wil:</b> 3
<b>Size:</b> 0	<b>Move:</b> 4	<b>Stun:</b> 2
<b>Per:</b> 6	<b>Init:</b> 5	<b>Def:</b> 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Animal Handling	3	2	5	(2+)
Diplomacy	3	2	5	(2+)
Empathy	3	2	5	(2+)
Farming	3	3	6	(3)
Linguistics	3	2	5	(2+)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)
Scavenge	3	3	6	(3)

### **Talents/Flaws/Languages**

**Guardian:** Defense bonus to allies.  
**Lucky:** +2 dice to one die roll per session.  
**Depressed:** Sad and pessimistic.  
 Ascondean, Cushu, Dwarven, Lanarian

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Quarterstaff	2N	0	5N	(2+)N



# A SURVIVOR'S STORY

**I**t was too easy. So easy, it made Kreel wonder if he had ridden into a trap. Dressed in the scout's armor and mask, Kreel was not questioned as he approached the warband. He had lightly tied Graham's hands, told him to act unconscious, and dropped him off — literally — with the other captives, who were surrounded by guards.

Kreel looked back at the captives. Graham made eye contact with him, and nodded once. Merriam's kitchen knife had made it from captive to captive, cutting their bonds. They outnumbered the warriors by almost three to one, but was that enough, Kreel wondered.

Kreel tapped the horse's flanks with his heels, flung off his mask, and drew the scout's sword as he shouted his people's battle cry. Garn went down like the dog he was, yelping as Kreel's sword split open his gut. An arrow caught Kreel in the back as he rode past. Another whizzed past his head as he wheeled his horse for another charge.

His attack had distracted the ring of guards around the captives, and they were captives no more. Thankfully, they had joined the fight.

"Garn is dead!" bellowed Kreel, his sword glinting in the light of a campfire. "I have returned to lead you."

Only a handful of the 50 or so warriors, still loyal to him, lowered their weapons and knelt. But he was still alive, so the other warbanders' minds weren't made up. Once again, his life was in Graham's hands.

"Easterners," he yelled in Ascondean. "Drop your weapons and kneel to live."

Some did as commanded immediately, but most hesitated. They looked to Graham, the man who had freed them.

Graham knelt, followed by the other captives, who were followed by the warlanders.

If there was one thing Warlanders respected, it was power, thought Kreel. As long as he showed no weakness, his people would follow him. He reached behind him, broke the arrow off that was in his back and threw it to the ground. Then he dismounted, steeling himself against the pain in his leg as he forced himself to walk without a limp to Graham.

"Where are my wife and daughter?"

Kreel wasn't expecting the question. Now was not the time for a conversation. One sign that he was not in control and the warband would cut them down.

"Sold," he said under his breath. "We will get them."

He turned and gave his first command. "Tie up the prisoners," he said in the language of the Warlands.

To Kreel's relief, his order was quickly followed.

"What are you doing?" Graham shouted when he saw what was happening.

Graham didn't understand what Kreel said, but it was obviously an order. Why would the westerners follow the orders of a former slave, he wondered. And then he remembered that the scout knew Kreel by name.

"No," Kreel heard Graham's voice behind him.

Kreel turned in time to see the tip of a sword slide under his leather breastplate. His blood spilled over Graham's hands. He was surprised, but then smiled, nodding in understanding as he died.

"I killed your son ..."

Graham drove the sword deeper by standing, knocking Kreel back. The warlord was dead before he hit the ground.

Graham screamed at the corpse. Kreel's death wasn't enough to make up for what he perceived as treachery. It wasn't enough to bring back his old life. He stabbed at the body — as if it was hardpan ground and the sword was a shovel — until another westerner came close enough to attack.

All around him people were dying as the captives rose up again. Graham was consumed by rage. He stabbed warrior after warrior, until he was covered in so much blood and gore that the sword slipped from his hands. But still he fought, like an animal with its back against the wall. He had nothing to lose. He clawed, strangled, bit and pummeled.

Then he stood, breathing hard, wildly looking for the next opponent. But there were none. He was surrounded by fallen warriors and kneeling easterners. They knelt to him.



# Chapter 7: Friends & Foes

*“Well met ... unless you need something from me.”*

In the following pages are an assortment of non-player character (NPC) templates that represent many common types of characters your group could encounter in their journey through *Desolation*. Although not exhaustive, you will find plenty of possible friends and foes to place in your scenarios. These templates can often be used “as is” for a quick, off-the-cuff encounter, they can be slightly modified to match your campaign, or they can be used as a starting off point to create a more fully formed NPC that will become a long-term nemesis or valued ally to your player characters.

NPC templates have been fully calculated and are ready to use straight from the book (if desired). All adjustments for race, skills, equipment, talents and flaws have been taken into account. The only changes necessary are those you wish to make.

## MPH and More

It is important to note that these NPCs are shapeless and nameless, with no motivation, history or personality (MPH). It is up to the GM to take these templates

and tie them to an MPH if he wishes to create an NPC that will be more than a set of numbers. In some cases, this step is unneeded, especially when using them for unexpected combat. But if an NPC is going to have a name, she should have an MPH.

You can often use the same template to create many different characters. This can be accomplished by modifying any part of their MPH. Personality is the easiest and most obvious way to put a unique stamp on a particular character stat block.

There are also a myriad of other details that can be altered to help differentiate one NPC from another. These details can include (but are not limited to): race, gender, heritage, appearance, profession, weapon choice, Skill Specialization or flaw.

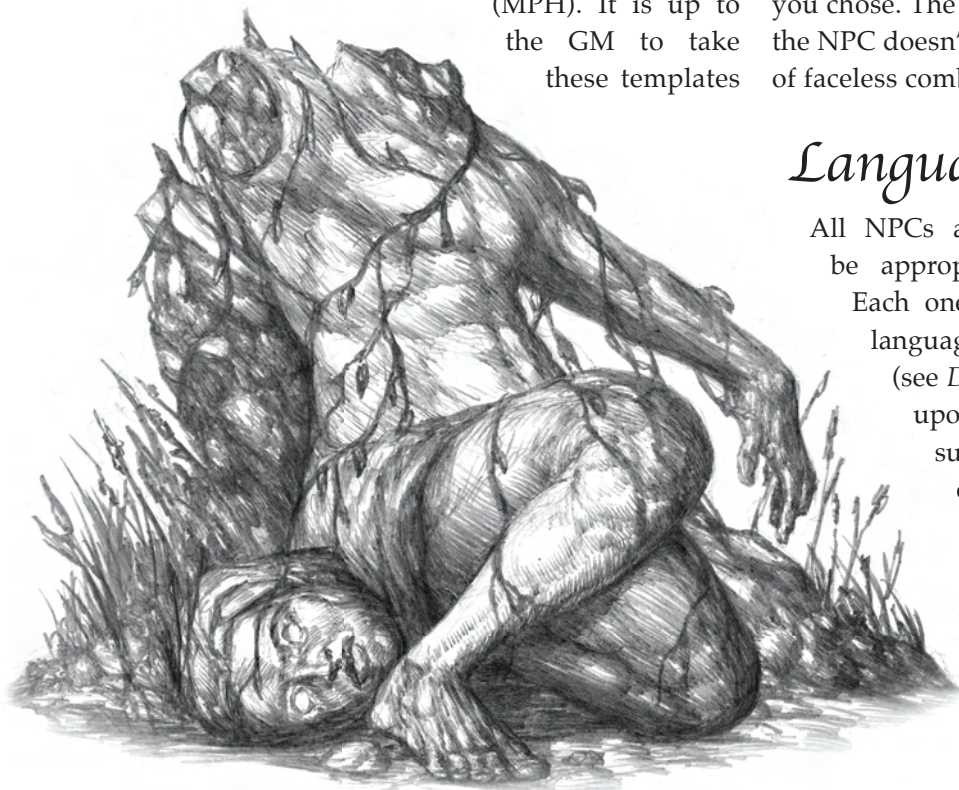
For example, a mace-wielding mercenary with a bushy mustache and a penchant for cursing will seem completely different from the toothless elf mercenary who favors a spear and puts on a noble air.

**Note:** Although a flaw is given for each template, this can easily be changed to correspond with the MPH you chose. The flaw is typically unimportant whenever the NPC doesn’t have a name or is part of a large group of faceless combatants.

## Languages

All NPCs are listed with languages that would be appropriate for their race and profession.

Each one is listed with the correct number of languages, based upon their Linguistics Skill (see *Desolation*, page 80). However, depending upon the background, race or circumstances surrounding a character, these languages can be easily changed. Just remember that no additional languages can be added — and be wary of removing Ascondean, as this common tongue ensures the NPC can communicate with the party.





# FRIENDS & FOES

## Arms, Armor & Equipment

The NPCs possess the armor and weapons that are listed on their template. Additional equipment can be given to the character if his situation or background warrants it. Remember that *Desolation* is not a plentiful place, and few people own more than a few possessions. Essentials, such as food and water, and basic gear (rope, bedroll, etc.) are not guaranteed.

As a rule, the armor and weapons should be in a worn condition (see *Desolation*, page 196). Generous GMs can give NPCs one piece in good condition. Regardless of the conditions, these items are used in various combat statistics (Defense, Attack rating, stat adjustment) and are fully calculated. If the GM decides to change the weapons or armor of an NPC to suit a particular encounter, character background or whim, make sure to recalculate the combat statistics.

## Race

The majority of NPC templates are human because they are the most abundant of the races. They are also a good baseline in case GMs wish to transform the characters into other races, as humans possess no additional traits, bonuses or penalties to their attributes. When changing the race of one of the templates, be sure to reference the table to the right before adjusting the character's attributes, skills, languages and physiological traits. Remember that all magical traditions — and some talents — are restricted by race.

## Upgrading an NPC

Many of characters listed are provided with templates showing them both as Average and Talented. In some instances, a Talented version or signature character is not available and the GM may need to upgrade the Average NPC on his own. Use the following guideline to quickly and easily upgrade an Average NPC. These suggestions represent a set of skills and experiences that a typical person would gain from surviving the apocalypse and living in the After.

### Attributes

- +1 to Body or Willpower
- +1 to Strength or Dexterity
- +1 to Charisma or Intelligence

Race	Modifications	Physiological Traits
Desert Dwarf	-1 to Move	Darkvision, Hardy, Resistance, Dense, Sensitive eyes, Slow
Mountain Dwarf	-1 to Move	Darkvision, Hardy, Resistance, Broken compass, Dense, Slow
Elf	None	Indefatigable, Keen hearing, Musical, Unnatural
Gnome	-2 Move, -1 to Size, -1 Health, +1 Defense, +1 Stealth, +1 to Hit	Mental acuity, Gnomish subconscious, Heaven sense, Reject magic, Slow, Small
Goblin	None	Natural, Innate Balance, Gangly, Scary visage, Distinct
Island Folk	-2 Move, -1 to Size, -1 Health, +1 Defense, +1 Stealth, +1 to Hit	Disease Resistance, Limber, Nimble, Slow, Small, Voracious
Kobold	-2 Move, -1 to Size, -1 Health, +1 Defense, +1 Stealth, +1 to Hit	Dual wield, Quick witted, Coldborn, Small, Coldborn, Flight response
Mongrel	If Small: -1 to Size, -1 Health, +1 Defense, +1 Stealth, +1 to Hit  If Large: +1 Size, +1 Health, -1 Defense, -1 Stealth, -1 to Hit  If Slow: -2 to Move	Variable, see <i>Desolation</i> page 69
Orc	None	Brute, Natural weapon, Darkvision, Killer instinct, Blind spot
Rover	None	Exotic, Farsight, Waterborne, Susceptible, Slight

## Skills

- +1 to combat skill (Melee, Brawl or Archery)
- +1 to Survival or Scavenge
- +1 to Diplomacy, Con or Intimidation
- +1 to Athletics or Stealth
- +1 to a skill that best represents profession

## Talents

- Alertness, Lucky, Robust, Skill Aptitude or Swift

Talented NPCs are the same strength as a starting player character, but can use the same guidelines if the GM wishes to upgrade the NPC to Influential. However, most Influential NPCs should be given a full MPH, and would almost certainly be better served by creating the character from scratch or upgrading them with a specific goal in mind.

## Common Archetypes

### Archers

Archers have been an integral part of armies, raiding parties and warbands for as long as bows have existed. The ability to kill foes at a distance may be considered cowardly by some, but few can argue with their effectiveness. The archer template can also be used to represent scouts, pathfinders and others who are skilled with the bow and rely on stealth.

A Talented example of an archer can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Osim Kerhab, the warland scout, can be found on page 112 of *Desolation*.



### Bandits

Bandits have become common in the lawless world as desperation and depravity have spread. They attack, terrorize and steal from others rather than build

#### Archer (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 3	Str: 2
Cha: 1	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 5	Stun: 2
Per: 4	Init: 5	Def: 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Archery	3	4	7	(3+)
Athletics	2	1	3	(1+)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)
Stealth	3	3	6	(3)
Survival	2	1	3	(1+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Accuracy:** Reduced called shot penalty

**Curious:** Fascinated by the unknown  
Ascondean, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Longbow	3L	0	10L	(5)L
Sword, Short	2L	0	5L	(2+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

#### Bandit/Pirate (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 3	Str: 2
Cha: 1	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 5	Stun: 2
Per: 4	Init: 7	Def: 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	2	1	3	(1+)
Brawl	2	2	4	(2)
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)
Ride/Sail	3	2	5	(2+)
Stealth	3	2	5	(2+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Quick Reflexes:** +2 to Initiative

**Criminal:** Believed to have committed a serious crime  
Ascondean, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Fist	0N	0	4N	(2)N
Sword, Long / Cutlass	3L	0	8N	(4)N
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

#### Bandit/Pirate (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 4	Str: 3
Cha: 2	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 7	Stun: 2
Per: 4	Init: 6	Def: 7

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	3	2	5	(2+)
Brawl	3	3	6	(3)
Melee	3	4	7	(3+)
Ride/Sailing	4	3	7	(3+)
Stealth	4	3	7	(3+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Mobile Attack:** Move and attack at the same time

**Quick Reflexes:** +2 to Initiative rating

**Criminal:** Believed to have committed a serious crime  
Ascondean, Lanarian

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Sword, Long/ Cutlass	3L	0	10L	(5)L
Fist	0N	0	6N	(3)N
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	



# FRIENDS & FOES

or fend for themselves. These hardened men and women roam the countryside and infest the forests, lying in wait to rob unsuspecting travelers.

The bandit template can be used to represent pirates, raiders and other men of arms who value agility as well as strength.

## Barbarians

The barbarian is considered by some to be little more than a primitive savage with a thirst for blood. Although partially true, these fierce warriors are skilled in combat and capable of surprising cunning in their native lands. Stronger, tougher and wilder than a normal opponent, the barbarian's unpredictable tactics and unrelenting ferocity make him an opponent that few care to encounter on the battlefield. Many barbarians are non-human races, but even the most spoiled Ascondean may become a barbarian in the After

### Barbarian (Talented)

Race: Orc	Style: 2	Health: 8
Body: 4	Dex: 2	Str: 4
Cha: 2	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 6	Stun: 4
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 7

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	4	2	6	(3)
Brawl	4	3	7	(3+)
Intimidation	2	2	4	(2)
Melee	4	5	9	(4+)
Survival	2	3	5	(2+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Brute:** 1 extra die when spending Style points on Strength rolls

**Darkvision:** Ignore Perception penalties caused by darkness

**Natural Weapon:** +1 lethal damage with claws or teeth

**Robust:** +2 to Health rating

**Strong:** +1 to Strength attribute

**Killer Instinct:** Must make a Willpower to leave a fight once wounded

**Poor Peripheral Vision:** -1 to Perception rolls vs. Stealth

**Short Temper:** Loses his temper easily

Ascondean, Oruskan

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Axe	3L	0	12L	(6)L
Claws/Teeth	1L	0	8L	(4)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Hides	+1	1	—	

## Beguilers

The Beguiler has been a source of mystery and distrust even since the rovers reached the shores of Scondera a few generations ago. The tattooed magicians with the ability to control thoughts and read minds are feared as much as other spell casters who can level cities. Their subtle and invasive magicks, combined with the general reputation of their people, make most Beguilers especially careful and secretive when using their gifts.

## Blacksmiths

A familiar face in all but the smallest of communities in the Before, the blacksmith is in high demand in the After. Their talents and services are desired by all, but are of particular interest to those engaged in war and conquest. The ability to create and repair weapons and armor makes the blacksmith one of the most coveted professions in the world.

The blacksmith can also serve as a template for other craftsmen. By changing the discipline associated with the Art and Craft skill, you could create a variety of others who can help rebuild the world. Anyone with the ability to help build and repair is valuable and needed.

### Beguiler (Talented)

Race: Rover	Style: 2	Health: 5
Body: 3	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 4	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 3
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Con	4	4	8	(4)
Empathy	2	4	6	(3)
Magic/Beguiling	4	5	9	—
Performance/Singing	4	2	6	(3)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Exotic:** 1 extra die when spending Style points on Charisma based rolls

**Farsight:** Ignore moderate sight Perception penalty (-2) to see things at a distance

**Waterborne:** +4 to swim and holding breath

**Enhance Potency:** +1 potency bonus to spells

**Magical Aptitude, Beguiling:** Cast spells from Beguiling tradition

**Slight:** -2 to perform feats of strength (does not affect attacks)

**Susceptible:** -2 to resist disease

**Paranoia:** Anxious and distrusts everyone around her  
Ascondean, Rover

## Brawlers

Burly men with heavy fists and short tempers have always existed. In the After, brawlers can easily find a reason to fight and a person to pummel. Whether they brawl for sport or for pay, these brutes can be counted on when someone needs to be beaten or worse.

The brawler template can also be used to represent thugs, gladiators and others who use their fists to make a living.

## Cultists

Religions and beliefs have splintered in the After, giving rise to new faiths, sects and cults. Some of these groups are more aggressive than others, actively recruiting



or preying on those who have survived. Violent and secretive, cultists follow their leaders without question — and often lead a double life.

The cultist template can also be used to represent monks, friars and others who are dedicated to serving their faith but are not full priests or warriors.

A Talented example of a cultist can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Keke Lekili,

### Brawler (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 4
Cha: 1	Int: 1	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 6	Stun: 2
Per: 3	Init: 3	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	4	2	6	(3)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Gambling	1	1	2	(1)
Intimidation	1	2	3	(1+)
Melee	4	1	5	(2+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Lethal Blow:** Do lethal damage with Brawl

**Short Temper:** Loses his temper easily

Ascondean, Dwarven

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Fist	0N/L	0	8N/L	(4)N/L
Cestus	1L	0	9L	(4+)L
Club	2N	0	7N	(3+)N

### Cultist (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 2	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 2
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/Religion	2	3	5	(2+)
Empathy	2	2	4	(2)
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)
Performance/ Oratory	2	2	4	(2)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**High Pain Tolerance:** Reduce wound penalty

**Zealot:** Dedicated to spreading his religion, to a fault

Ascondean, Lanarian

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Club	2N	0	7N	(3+)N

### Blacksmith (Average)

Race: Dwarf	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 3
Cha: 1	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 2
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Art/Engraving	2	2	4	(2)
Brawl	3	2	5	(2+)
Craft/Smithing	2	4	8	(4)
Melee	3	1	4	(2)
Merchant	1	1	2	(1)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Darkvision:** Ignore Perception penalties caused by darkness

**Hardy:** 1 extra die when spending Style points on Body-based rolls

**Resistance:** +2 to resist poison, immune to Deep Horror poison and disease

**Skill Aptitude, Craft/Smithing:** +2 to skill rating

**Broken Compass:** -2 to Navigation rolls

**Dense:** -4 to Swim rolls

**Slow:** -1 to Move

**Perfectionist:** Overly demanding of himself and others

Ascondean, Dwarven

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Fist	0N	0	5N	(2+)N
Hammer	2L	0	6L	(3)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather (apron)	+1	1	—	



# FRIENDS & FOES

the zealous Listener, can be found on page 114 of *Desolation*. The priest template could also be considered an upgrade of the cultist.

## Farmers

One of the most important professions left in the new world, farmers were often ignored or looked down upon in the Before. These simple, yet hardworking folk have fed nations thanks to their deep understanding of the fields and skies. In the After, their skills will be put to test in a world where the weather, animals and even the soil has become unpredictable and must be re-tamed.

A Talented example of a farmer can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Tarl Ishrak, the farmer with faith, can be found on page 126 of *Desolation*. However, he was built without the Farming skill and is a combination of a farmer and a priest.

## Healers

Their skills often mistaken as magical gifts, healers have suffered greatly during the After. Despite the great need for their knowledge and services in a dangerous and violent world, these compassionate and caring people are few and far between. Whether they are Empire-trained chirgeons or simple frontier wise women, healers are a dying breed. Still, there are those who remain with both the humanity and skill to cure sicknesses, mend broken bodies and tend wounds.

### Farmer (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 2	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 2
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Animal Handling	2	2	4	(2)
Archery	2	2	4	(2)
Farming	2	4	6	(3)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)
Survival	2	1	3	(1+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Subsist:** Survive without food and water longer

**Superstitious:** Goes out of his way to follow unusual beliefs  
Ascondean, Cushu

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Bow	2L	0	6L	(3)L
Pitchfork	2L	0	5L	(2+)L

## Holy Warriors

Sadly, the faithful and righteousness have always been targets of the wicked and ignorant. Holy warriors serve to guard their church and destroy its enemies through force of arms. Where compassion and speeches fail, the steel and resolve of these divinely inspired champions must take over. Both protectors and conquerors, the holy warrior is equally a man of god and battle.

The holy warrior template can also be used to repre-

### Healer (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 1
Cha: 2	Int: 3	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 3	Stun: 2
Per: 5	Init: 5	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/ Herbalism	3	3	6	(3)
Diplomacy	2	1	3	(1+)
Empathy	3	2	5	(2+)
Medicine	3	4	7	(3+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Guardian:** Defense bonus to allies

**Merciful:** Compassionate and forgiving  
Ascondean, Dwarven

### Healer (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 6
Body: 3	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 2	Int: 3	Wil: 3
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 3
Per: 6	Init: 5	Def: 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/ Herbalism	3	4	7	(3+)
Diplomacy	2	2	4	(2)
Empathy	3	3	6	(3)
Medicine	3	5	8	(4)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Guardian:** Defense bonus to allies

**Life Saver:** Improved healing ability

**Merciful:** Compassionate and forgiving  
Ascondean, Loranthian

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Quarterstaff	2N	0	5N	(2+)N

sent knights, militant priests, wayfarers and other fighters who are fueled by their faith and devotion.

## Hunters

Living on the edges of civilization, hunters are skilled woodsmen and trackers. These rugged men are accustomed to hardships and perils that abound in nature. These skills leave them better prepared than most in the After, although even their mettle and abilities will be put to the test.

The hunter template can also be used to represent outdoorsmen, pioneers and others who are skilled at living off the land and surviving its dangers.

A Talented example of a hunter can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Krek of Karhut, the outcast forester, can be found on page 124 of *Desolation*.



## Mage Hunters

Blaming the Apocalypse on spell casters, mage hunters have devoted their lives to tracking down and killing those they hold responsible. They also wage a war against the new world and its magical inhabitants, considering all things touched by the Weave to be unnatural and profane. The mage hunter is tireless in her quest, fueled by grief, outrage and horror at what magic and its wielders have wrought.

## Magic Apprentices

Although trained in the magical arts, apprentices have not yet had an opportunity to hone their craft. They face a cruel life where mentors, friends and acceptance will be difficult to find. Yet if magical knowledge is to survive, apprentices must find a way to endure and learn.

The apprentice could also be used as a Necromantic, Primal or Rune Magic apprentice, as these magic traditions are also based on Intelligence.

Talented examples of Intelligence-based spell casters can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Esther LaVore, the noble sorceress, can be found on page 106 of the core book. Hengen Barshuun, the desert Rune Writer, can be found on page 120 of *Desolation*.

### Holy Warrior/Knight/Wayfarer (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 5
Body: 3	Dex: 2	Str: 3
Cha: 3	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 5	Stun: 3
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 7/9*

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/Religion	2	3	5	(2+)
Intimidation	3	3	6	(3)
Melee	3	5	8	(4)
Ride	2	2	4	(2)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Righteous Fury:** +2 to attacks vs. enemies of the faith

**\*Parry:** +2 Defense vs. armed attackers

**Vow:** Sworn to action or organization

Ascondean, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Sword, Long	3L	0	11L	(5+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chain	+2	2	—	

### Hunter (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 5
Body: 3	Dex: 2	Str: 3
Cha: 1	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 5	Stun: 3
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Archery	2	3	5	(2+)
Athletics	3	1	4	(2)
Survival	2	3	5	(2+)
Tracking	—	—	6	(3)
Melee	3	2	5	(2+)
Spear	—	—	6	(3)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Strong:** +1 to Strength attribute

**Vengeful:** Bent on revenge

Ascondean, Oruskan

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Longbow	3L	0	8L	(4)L
Spear, Short	2L	0	8L	(4)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Fur/Leather	+1	1	—	



# FRIENDS & FOES

## Merchants

The lives of merchants are drastically different in the After, where the value of an item cannot be measured until they see how much the buyer wants it. While prosperity and wealth can no longer be measured by the amount of gold one can possess, the merchant still makes his living through trade and opportunity. His life depends on having the items others need or being able to provide it.

### Mage Hunter (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 6
Body: 3	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 2	Int: 3	Wil: 3
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 3
Per: 6	Init: 5	Def: 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Empathy	3	3	6	(3)
Investigation	3	4	7	(3+)
Melee	2	5	7	(3+)
Survival	3	3	6	(3)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Weave Hunter:** +1 bonus when hunting or fighting creatures of the Weave

**Weave Warped:** Cause casters more Burn

**Intolerant:** Biased against a certain thing  
Ascondean, Cushu

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Spear, Short	2L	0	9L	(4+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

### Sorcery Apprentice (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 1	Int: 3	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 2
Per: 5	Init: 5	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/History	3	2	5	(2+)
Investigation	3	2	5	(2+)
Linguistics	3	2	5	(2+)
Magic/Sorcery	3	4	7	—

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Magical Aptitude, Sorcery:** Cast spells from Sorcery tradition

**Curious:** Fascinated by the unknown

Ascondean, Gnomish, High Ascondean, Kar'Danish

## Necromancers

Hated and treated with contempt even before the Apocalypse, Necromancers have always suffered the stigma that all spell casters now face. Still, Necromancy is more reviled than any other tradition, and its wielders will have difficulty finding acceptance. With it borders shattered and population emboldened, not even Kar'Danan can remain as a safe haven for those who practice death magicks. Necromancers are now —

### Merchant (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 3
Body: 1	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 3	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 1
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 3

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Diplomacy	3	3	6	(3)
Empathy	2	2	4	(2)
Merchant	3	3	8	(4)
Scavenge	2	2	4	(2)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Skill Aptitude, Merchant:** +2 to skill rating

**Coward:** Afraid of conflict and may run from fight  
Ascondean, Warland Pidgin

### Necromancer (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 5
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 2	Int: 4	Wil: 3
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 2
Per: 7	Init: 6	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Intimidation	2	2	4	(2)
Threats	—	—	5	(2+)
Magic/Necromancy	4	5	9	—
Medicine	4	3	7	(3+)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Scavenge	4	2	6	(3)
Battlefield	—	—	7	(3+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Burn Transfer:** Share burn with willing people

**Magical Aptitude, Necromancy:** Cast spells from Necromancy tradition

**Callous:** Selfish, insensitive and uncaring of others  
Ascondean, Kar'Danish

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Dagger	1L	0	5L	(2+)L

homeless and must find a way to free themselves from the dark legacy of their tradition.

## Nobles

Nobles have lost their fortunes and lands to the Apocalypse, but they have kept their breeding and knowledge. A few have managed to retain their sense of obligation and duty, even if most no longer care about their station. They do their best to ensure the survival of those in their care, leading and protecting them through an uncertain and unforgiving world.

The noble template can also be used to represent diplomats, community leaders and others skilled in dealing with people and helping to guide them through the After.

Talented examples of nobles and diplomats can be found among the signature characters. Esther LaVore, the noble sorceress, can be found on page 106 of *Desolation*. Jarinar Pendilton, the gnome Finder can be found on page 122 of *Desolation*.



## Performers

Providing a seemingly frivolous service, performers are actually very important and desired members of many communities. To entertain is to give hope and help others forget the misfortune that surrounds them. In addition to just singing a pretty tune, performers also help spread news from town to town — and valuable lessons from generation to generation.

Although the performer example is listed with specific disciplines in the Melee and Performance skills, these can be changed to reflect whatever particular weapon or talent the character should possess in the GM's scenario.

A Talented example of a performer can be found among the signature characters. Sasha Veng, the roving performer can be found on page 118 of *Desolation*.

## Priests

Priests and other persons of god(s) have a difficult job in the After. They are expected to give answers to the unexplainable and give hope to the hopeless. Their flocks have become as splintered and divided as the land itself, turning to and from the gods with equal passion. Not only must they guide and comfort those who are already

### Noble/Diplomat/Leader (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 1	Str: 2
Cha: 3	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 3	Stun: 2
Per: 4	Init: 3	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Diplomacy	3	4	7	(3+)
Empathy	2	3	5	(2+)
Intimidation	3	1	4	(2)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)
Ride	1	1	2	(1)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Inspire:** Provide +2 skill bonus to allies  
**Vow:** Sworn to action or organization  
 Ascondean, High Ascondean

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Sword, Short	2L	0	5L	(2+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

### Noble/Leader/Diplomat (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 4	Int: 3	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 2
Per: 5	Init: 5	Def: 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Diplomacy	4	5	9	(4+)
Empathy	3	4	7	(3+)
Intimidation	4	2	6	(3)
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)
Ride	2	1	3	(1+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Danger Sense:** Reduce surprise penalty  
**Inspire:** Provide +2 skill bonus to allies  
**Vow:** Sworn to action or organization  
 Ascondean, High Ascondean

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Sword, Short	2L	0	7L	(3+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chain	+2	2	—	



# FRIENDS & FOES

faithful, they must also spread the word and reclaim the hearts of those who have lost their way. Some priests are more dogmatic than others and view non-believers as enemies to be destroyed rather than souls to be converted.

## Primalists

Focusing on totem animals that are as varied as the Oruskans, mongrels and humans who practice it, Primalism survives in many parts of Scondera. Once the advisors and protectors of their tribes and chieftains, many have found themselves alone in the After. Still connected with Nature, even in the broken and changed world, Primalists continue to try to bend it to their will and defend those close to them.

## Scavengers

The ruined buildings and communities from the Before outnumber those that remain. Scavengers scour these broken structures and sift through the rubble for items they can either use or trade. They can uncover lost treasures and forgotten knowledge, helping to rebuild the new world while preserving the old. Some look upon these folk as little more than looters and grave robbers, but most

### Performer (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 3
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 3	Int: 2	Wil: 1
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 2
Per: 3	Init: 4	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Acrobatics	2	2	4	(2)
Art/Music	2	2	4	(2)
Linguistics	2	1	3	(1+)
Melee	2	1	3	(1+)
Dagger	—	—	4	(2)
Performance	3	3	6	(3)
Singing	—	—	7	(3+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Skill Mastery, Performance:** Use all disciplines of Performance with no penalties

**Braggart:** Inflates abilities to epic proportions  
Ascondean, Rover, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Dagger	1L	0	5L	(2+)L

### Priest (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 6
Body: 3	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 3	Int: 2	Wil: 3
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 3
Per: 5	Init: 4	Def: 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/Religion	2	3	5	(2+)
Diplomacy	3	3	6	(3)
Empathy	2	4	6	(3)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Performance/ Oratory	3	3	6	(3)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Blessing:** Bless others with Style points

**True Faith:** Style points after a roll to gain an automatic success

**Zealot:** Dedicated to spreading his religion, to a fault  
Ascondean, Cushu

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Mace	2L	0	6L	(3)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

### Primalist (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 5
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 3
Cha: 2	Int: 3	Wil: 3
Size: 0	Move: 5	Stun: 2
Per: 6	Init: 5	Def: 5

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	3	2	5	(2+)
Brawl	3	4	7	(3+)
Magic/Primal Magic	3	5	8	—
Melee	3	2	5	(2+)
Survival	3	2	5	(2+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Burn Reduction:** Ignore 1 point of Burn

**Magical Aptitude, Primal Magic:** Cast spells from Primal Magic tradition

**Wildborne:** Unfamiliar and uncomfortable in civilization  
Ascondean, Oruskan

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Fist	0N	0	7N	(3+)N
Spear, Short	2L	0	7L	(3+)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Leather	+1	1	—	

value their resourcefulness and view them as hunters of a different sort.

A Talented example of a scavenger can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Denner Khent, the scavenging dwarf can be found on page 108 of *Desolation*.

## Scavenger (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 3
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 2
Cha: 2	Int: 3	Wil: 1
Size: 0	Move: 4	Stun: 2
Per: 6	Init: 5	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Larceny	2	2	4	(2)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Scavenge	3	4	7	(3+)
Rural Area	—	—	8	(4)
Stealth	2	1	3	(1+)
Hide	—	—	4	(2)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Alertness:** +2 to Perception rating

**Guttersnipe:** Prefers to be dirty and smelly  
Ascondean, Gnomish

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Club	2N	0	6N	(3)N

## Scavenger (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 3	Str: 3
Cha: 2	Int: 3	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 6	Stun: 2
Per: 7	Init: 6	Def: 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Craft/Smithing	3	2	5	(2+)
Larceny	3	3	6	(3)
Melee	3	3	6	(3)
Scavenge	3	5	8	(4)
Stealth	3	2	5	(2+)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Alertness:** +2 to Perception rating

**Tinker:** Ignore improvised penalty

**Shy:** Dislikes social situations and tries to avoid them  
Ascondean, Gnomish

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Club	2N	0	8N	(4)N

Armor	Def	Str	Dex
Leather	+1	1	—

## Scholars

Scholars were found mainly in institutes of higher learning, seldom bothering with the common rabble of humanity. But now their ivory towers have collapsed and they find themselves in a world where most consider esoteric knowledge and deep thinking to be less valuable than a strong back.

Although the scholar example below is listed with specific disciplines in the Academics skills, these fields of study can be changed to reflect whatever particular knowledge or focus the character should possess in the GM's scenario.

A Talented scholar can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Desmun of Westharbor, the inquisitive scholar, can be found on page 116 of *Desolation*.



## Scoundrels

Preying upon the vices and gullibility of those who survived, scoundrels use these weaknesses to their own advantage.

Living in the moral and legal shades of grey that more reputable people usually try to avoid, scoundrels

## Scholar (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 1
Cha: 2	Int: 4	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 3	Stun: 2
Per: 6	Init: 6	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Academics/History	4	3	7	(3+)
Academics/Philosophy	4	2	6	(3)
Bureaucracy	4	1	5	(2+)
Investigation	4	2	6	(3)
Linguistics	4	2	6	(3)

## Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Intelligent:** +1 to Intelligence rating

**Condescending:** Thinks he is better than everyone else  
Ascondean, Cushu, Dwarven, High Ascondean



# FRIENDS & FOES

make their way through the world using wits and cunning. They're not above using force if they can't outsmart an opponent, however.

The scoundrel template can be used to represent con men, fortune tellers, gamblers and anyone else of questionable ethics who uses deception to make a living.

A Talented example of a scoundrel can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Denner Khent, the scavenging dwarf, can be found on page 108 of *Desolation*.

## Scoundrel (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 3
Body: 1	Dex: 3	Str: 2
Cha: 3	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 5	Stun: 1
Per: 4	Init: 5	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Con	3	3	6	(3)
Gambling	2	3	5	(2+)
Larceny	3	2	5	(2+)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Charismatic:** +1 to Charisma attribute

**Overconfident:** Foolhardy and sometimes gets in over his head  
Ascondean, Rover

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Dagger	1L	0	5L	(2+)L

## Seducer (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 2	Str: 1
Cha: 3	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 3	Stun: 2
Per: 4	Init: 4	Def: 4

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Acrobatics	2	2	4	(2)
Contortion	—	—	5	(2+)
Con	3	4	7	(3+)
Seduction	—	—	8	(4)
Larceny	2	1	3	(1+)
Performance/Acting	3	2	5	(2+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Attractive:** +1 Charisma bonus with people

**Addiction:** Hooked on a specific substance or activity  
Ascondean, Elven

## Seducers

While many use brawn and steel to survive in the After, some must rely on their charms and sexuality. Alluring and intriguing, the seductress uses her feminine wiles and beauty to bend others to her will. In an ugly world where pleasures are few and far between, the seductress has plenty of targets.

The seductress template can also be used to represent prostitutes, courtesans and any others — both male and female — who uses sex and guile as a weapon.



## Soldiers

Although armies have fallen along with their nations, some of the soldiers who filled the ranks still remain. Skilled at the art of war and accustomed to violence, a soldier will find himself well suited for the ugly and turbulent times that lie

## Soldier (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 5
Body: 3	Dex: 2	Str: 3
Cha: 2	Int: 1	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 5	Stun: 3
Per: 3	Init: 3	Def: 8

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	3	2	5	(2+)
Brawl	3	2	5	(2+)
Melee	3	4	7	(3+)
Warfare	1	2	3	(1+)

### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Tough:** +1 to Body attribute

**Intolerant:** Biased against a certain thing  
Ascondean, Oruskan

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Fist	0N	0	5N	(2+)N
Spear, Short	2L	0	9L	(4+)L
Sword, Long	3L	0	10L	(5)L

Armor	Def	Str	Dex
Chainmail	+2	2	—
Shield, Wooden	+1	1	—

before him. His sword is both welcomed and feared by other survivors in the After — depending on which side he is on.

The soldier template can be used to represent guards, militia, mercenaries, warband members and other warriors who make a living through bloodshed and conquest.

A Talented example of a soldier can be found amongst the signature characters in the core book. Lem Ollender, the former legionnaire, can be found on page 104 of *Desolation*.

## Thieves

Regardless of how much has been lost or destroyed, thieves seem to always find something worth stealing. Called by many names (robbers, rogues, burglars, cutpurses, etc.), these criminals can be found in every community and in all walks of life. In the After, survivors hold on dearly to what they possess and do not suffer



### Soldier (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 5
Body: 3	Dex: 3	Str: 4
Cha: 2	Int: 2	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 7	Stun: 3
Per: 4	Init: 5	Def: 9

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	4	3	7	(3+)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Melee	4	5	9	(4+)
Warfare	2	3	5	(2+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Flurry:** Reduce multiple strike penalty

**Tough:** +1 to Body attribute

**Vengeful:** Bent on revenge  
Ascondean, Warland Pidgin

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Fist	0N	0	8N	(4)N
Spear, Short	2L	0	11L	(5+)L
Sword, Long	3L	0	12L	(6)L
Armor	Def	Str	Dex	
Chainmail	+2	2	—	
Shield, Wooden	+1	1	—	

thieves lightly. Shadowy and opportunistic, rogues are always on the lookout for an easy mark — and quick escape — if they value their lives.

A Talented example of a thief can be found among the signature characters in the core book. Menelaris Co-vanalar, the defiant elemental, can be found on page 110 of *Desolation*. He is a combination of a thief and a spell caster.

### Thief (Average)

Race: Human	Style: 1	Health: 3
Body: 2	Dex: 4	Str: 2
Cha: 2	Int: 2	Wil: 1
Size: 0	Move: 6	Stun: 2
Per: 3	Init: 6	Def: 6

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Larceny	4	4	8	(4)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
Scavenge	2	1	3	(1+)
Stealth	4	3	7	(3+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Agile:** +1 to Dexterity attribute

**Overconfident:** Foolhardy and sometimes gets in over her head  
Ascondean, Elven

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Dagger	1L	0	5L	(2+)L

### Thief (Talented)

Race: Human	Style: 2	Health: 4
Body: 2	Dex: 5	Str: 2
Cha: 2	Int: 3	Wil: 2
Size: 0	Move: 7	Stun: 2
Per: 5	Init: 8	Def: 7

Skill	Base	Level	Rating	(Avg)
Athletics	2	3	5	(2+)
Climb	—	—	6	(3)
Larceny	5	4	9	(4+)
Lockpicking	—	—	10	(5)
Melee	2	3	5	(2+)
Stealth	5	4	9	(4+)

#### Talents/Flaws/Languages

**Agile:** +1 to Dexterity attribute

**Subtle Strike:** Make sneak attack vs. Passive Defense

**Greedy:** Greatly values wealth and material possessions  
Ascondean, Elven

Weapon	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg)
Sword, Short	2L	0	7L	(3+)L
Sword, Short (subtle)	2L	0	11L	(5+)L



## A SURVIVOR'S STORY

The map before Grahm Sikes had been hastily drawn on a piece of leather by one of his scouts. His old neighbor, Harwin, stood over his shoulder, scrutinizing the map as if he had planned an attack before.

"This isn't going to work, Harwin," Grahm said. "If we do this wrong, they'll kill our families."

"You want to ask for their help," Harwin said, nodding his head at the prisoners. Across the camp, the 15 Warlanders who had survived the uprising were bound, hand and foot, and surrounded by guards.

"No, not ask," Grahm said. "I must command them."

Grahm said it as a joke, but Harwin didn't laugh. Everyone treated him differently now. In his wildest dreams, Grahm would never have imagined he would be planning to attack a town. Of course, he had never imagined that fire would rain from the skies, or that magic would go wild ... or that he would. That was the only way he could explain it — he had gone wild, like a farm-raised pig left to fend for itself in the woods. Though it happened just a week ago, he could barely remember it — the blood, the screams, the smell of insides pulled out. With any luck, he would block it out completely.

He was again struck by the mixed blessing of Merriam's blindness. She wouldn't see what they were about to do to the slavers. But Marie would see ... then it occurred to him why the westerners wore battle masks. They must be ashamed of what they do as well.

"We can't trust them," Harwin said, interrupting Grahm's thoughts.

"No, no we can't," Grahm said. "But we need them."

Grahm stood and walked over to the Warlanders, staring them down. He wasn't sure what he was looking for — he no longer trusted his ability to judge character after being duped by Kreel. Only one broke his gaze and looked at the ground.

"You," Grahm said and pointed. "Can you understand me? Do you speak Ascondean?"

The man looked up and nodded.

"Bring him," he ordered two of the guards.

The slightly built Warlander seemed uncomfortable in Grahm's presence. He would rarely look him in the eye and kept shuffling his feet. Grahm almost laughed when he realized why. The man was afraid of him.

"What is your name?" Grahm asked.

"My name is Tygh Hol, Warlord," the prisoner replied. He had been given food and drink, but he had not been untied.

"Why do you call me Warlord?"

"You killed Kreel. Your people follow you. You are a Warlord."

"Do your people follow anyone who does not make war?" Grahm asked.

Tygh looked at him then. It was a look of complete lack of understanding.

"Never mind," Grahm said. "What I need to know is, will your people follow me?"

"No," Tygh replied, after a moment of hesitation. "They will not follow an easterner."

"Can't say that I blame them," Grahm said to Harwin and sat down on a stump. The field where they camped was littered with trees and large rocks. He looked to the west at a grassy hill that rose into the approaching dusk. Just half a day's ride over that hill were Merriam and Marie.

"Tygh, I am no warlord," he said. "I was a farmer. I grew crops to feed my family and sold them to my friends and neighbors. I had a wife, a family, a home. That was my life. What's left of that is in a town over that hill. I want it back. You are familiar with this life. How would you suggest I do that?"

Tygh gave Grahm another incredulous look, but this time Grahm just stared back at him. Eventually Tygh spoke.

"You could trade my people for some of your people," he began.

"Become a slave trader?"

"Yes, Warlord," Tygh said. "Or you could attack."

"Sell people or kill people," Grahm said. "Those are the choices? Is that all you people know?"

"What else is there?" Tygh asked.

It was a good question. In this new world there seemed to be few choices: kill or be killed, enslave or be a slave.



# Chapter 8: Bestiary

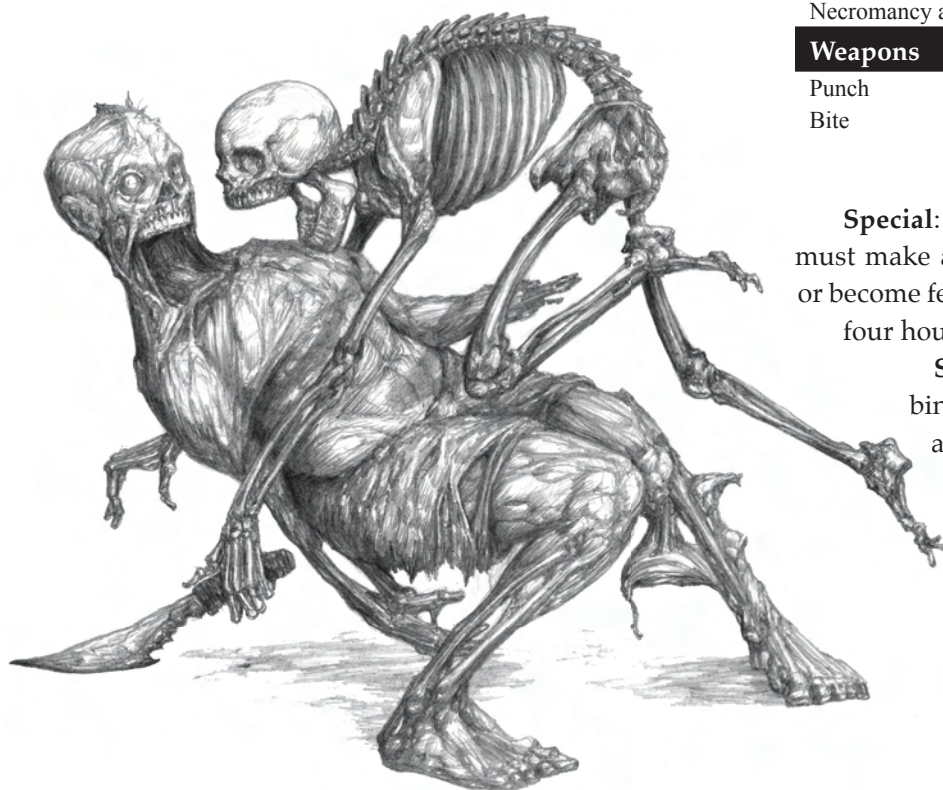
“Whatever it is, it’s not natural.”

The world of *Desolation* is a dangerous place to be, especially after the Night of Fire. The magical maelstrom that nearly destroyed the world also gave birth to new creatures and awoke others from ancient slumbers. In the following pages are creatures created by the broken Weave, legendary creatures not seen for countless generations and mundane animals that were strong enough to survive the Apocalypse.

Dozens of other creatures can be found in the Bestiary chapter of the *Desolation* core book, which begins on page 224. The core book also describes how gamemasters can create their own beasts and balance encounters.

## Combined Corpses

Forged by the Weave from the pieces of corpses littering Scondera after the Night of Fire, combined corpses are constantly searching for new body parts as pieces of them rot away. They have the ability to rebuild themselves if even a small portion of them is not destroyed by fire. They attempt to obtain the body parts they need by dismembering opponents.



### Combined Corpse

**Archetype:** Weave-touched Undead **Motivation:** Completion  
**Style:** 0 **Health:** 7  
**Nutritional Value:** 0 **Toughness:** 3

#### Primary Attributes

**Body:** 3 **Charisma:** 0  
**Dexterity:** 2 **Intelligence:** 0  
**Strength:** 6 **Willpower:** 4

#### Secondary Attributes

**Size:** 0 **Initiative:** 2  
**Move:** 8 **Defense:** 5  
**Perception:** 4 **Stun:** NA

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	6	6	12	(6)
Stealth	2	2	4	(2)
Survival	4	2	6	(3)

#### Talents

**Disease Carrier:** Infection Rating 1 or become ill  
**Dismember:** Rip apart victims if pinned for two rounds  
**Weave-touched:** Rebuild Body 3x per day, Base Difficulty: 4, duration: permanent  
**Fearsome:** Frighten opponents

#### Flaws

**Mentally unstable:** Acts unpredictably.  
**Susceptible to Necromancy and Sorcery:** -2 to defend against Necromancy and Sorcery attacks.

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Punch	1N	0	13N	(6+) N
Bite	1L	0	13L	(6+) L

**Special:** Characters bitten by a combined corpse must make a Body roll against an Infection Rating of 1 or become feverish and nauseated (-2 to all Skill rolls) for four hours.

**Special:** To dismember an opponent, a combined corpse must first succeed at a Grapple attack (see the *Desolation* core book, page 177). The grappled opponent can break free in his next turn by succeeding in an opposed Strength roll. If the opponent does not break free, the combined corpse will attempt to dismember him. If the combined corpse succeeds in an opposed Strength Roll and more than doubles the opponent’s



# BESTIARY

successes, the opponent has been dismembered, but is no longer grappled. Regardless of a successful dismemberment, the opponent takes Lethal Damage equal to the difference of the opposed Strength rolls. The combined corpse can continue making dismemberment attempts until the opponent breaks free or is dismembered.

## Giants

Tall tales say giants shaped the lakes, canyons and mountains of ancient Scondera as they battled one another. Aside from the occasional footprint-shaped pond or fist-shaped crater, no evidence for giants was ever discovered by Ascondea's scholars. After the Night of Fire, however, the evidence is obvious: Giants roam the lands once more.

The huge humanoids are at least 15 ft. tall. Giants are unkempt, with long, shaggy hair. They wear clothing made of many hides stitched together with vines. They also appear to have some form of their own language.

Giants wield good-sized trees as clubs and favor stomping smaller opponents (Size -1 and smaller) into the ground. They are also fond of throwing large rocks at adversaries.

### Giant

Archetype: Awoken		Motivation: Survival		
Style: 0		Health: 11		
Nutritional Value: 36		Toughness: 5		
Primary Attributes				
Body: 7		Charisma: 1		
Dexterity: 1		Intelligence: 1		
Strength: 8		Willpower: 2		
Secondary Attributes				
Size: 2		Initiative: 2		
Move: 9		Defense: 6		
Perception: 3		Stun: 7		
Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	8	2	10	(5)
Brawl	8	6	14	(7)
Melee	8	4	12	(6)
Survival	1	5	6	(3)
Talents				
*Stomp: +3 Skill specialization to Brawl/Stomp vs. Size -1 and smaller only.				
Flaws				
Clumsy: -2 penalty when grace and coordination are needed				
Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Punch	0N	-2	12N	(6) N
Tree	5L	-2	15L	(7+) L
Rock	4L	-2	12L	(6) L
*Stomp	1N	-2	16N	(8) N

## Hoarghasts

At first glance, hoarghasts appear to be incredibly old, wizened humans. They have gray hair, stooped backs, no teeth and their leathery skin is covered with wrinkles. However, their acrobatic prowess and speed belie their apparent age, as does the fact that they have no eyes in their sockets. They are actually just skin husks filled with Necromantic energy.

**Special:** Wither allows hoarghasts to inflict the negative effects of old age upon an opponent with a successful Touch Attack vs. the target's Active Defense plus Armor bonus. If touched, the character takes no damage, but can attempt to resist the magical effect. A negative Attribute modification can be resisted using the character's Willpower vs. the attack. If not resisted by the opponent, the character loses 1 point of Body. If touched again, the character loses 1 point of Body and 1 point of Dexterity. If touched a third time, the character loses 1 point of Body, 1 point of Dexterity and 1 point of Strength. Attribute losses can only be reversed with a Very Difficult Necromantic, Animism or Blood Rune spell. When the character's Body reaches zero, he dies. A character killed in this

### Hoarghast

<b>Archetype:</b> Weave-touched Undead		<b>Motivation:</b> Youth		
<b>Style:</b> 0		<b>Health:</b> 6		
<b>Nutritional Value:</b> 0		<b>Toughness:</b> 3		
<b>Primary Attributes</b>				
<b>Body:</b> 3		<b>Charisma:</b> 1		
<b>Dexterity:</b> 3		<b>Intelligence:</b> 2		
<b>Strength:</b> 3		<b>Willpower:</b> 3		
<b>Secondary Attributes</b>				
<b>Size:</b> 0		<b>Initiative:</b> 5		
<b>Move:</b> 8*		<b>Defense:</b> 6		
<b>Perception:</b> 5		<b>Stun:</b> NA		
<b>Skills</b>	<b>Base</b>	<b>Levels</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>(Avg.)</b>
Acrobatics	3	5	8	(4)
Athletics	3	1	4	(2)
Brawl	3	3	6	(3)
Stealth	3	1	4	(2)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)
<b>Talents</b>				
<b>Run:</b> Running speed is doubled				
<b>* Swift:</b> +2 to Move				
<b>Weave-touched:</b> Wither 3x per day, Base Difficulty: 3, range: touch, duration: permanent.				
<b>Flaws</b>				
<b>Susceptible to Necromancy:</b> -2 to resist Necromancy				
<b>Weapons</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Attack</b>	<b>(Avg.)</b>
Touch	0N	0	6N	(3) N

way is consumed by Necromantic energies, immediately rises as a hoarghast and flees its creator.

## Ice Worms

Ice worms are furry, warm-blooded burrowing mammals native to extremely cold regions of Scondera. Kobolds long ago domesticated large numbers of ice worms to the extent that wild Worms are now extremely rare. Kobolds mostly use ice worms as mounts, helping them move swiftly through the ice and snow. Ice Worms are much slower on non-icy surfaces, rendering them clumsy and ineffective.

The term “worm” isn’t entirely accurate. Ice worms are not invertebrates, but long-bodied mammals that resemble furry white snakes. They have vestigial limbs that help push them along and maintain traction as they travel and burrow. Ice worms can create extensive tunnels through glaciers, which are widened and used as living space by kobolds.

The attributes provided below are for a typical riding worm; some Ice worms get much larger. Ice worm queens can be the size of shlekk and are used by kobolds to burrow through the largest ice tunnels and caverns.

### Ice Worm

<b>Archetype:</b> Animal		<b>Motivation:</b> Survival		
<b>Style:</b> 0		<b>Health:</b> 5		
<b>Nutritional Value:</b> 4		<b>Toughness:</b> 1		
<b>Primary Attributes</b>				
<b>Body:</b> 3		<b>Charisma:</b> 0		
<b>Dexterity:</b> 4		<b>Intelligence:</b> 0		
<b>Strength:</b> 3		<b>Willpower:</b> 2		
<b>Secondary Attributes</b>				
<b>Size:</b> 0		<b>Initiative:</b> 4		
<b>Move:</b> 7/14/4*		<b>Defense:</b> 7		
<b>Perception:</b> 2		<b>Stun:</b> 3		
<b>Skills</b>	<b>Base</b>	<b>Levels</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>(Avg.)</b>
Brawl	3	3	6	(3)
Stealth	4	3	7	(3+)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)
<b>Talents</b>				
<b>Burrowing:</b> Can move beneath ground.				
<b>Ice glide:</b> Double Move on ice or snow. (Normal Move in water or on wet, cold surfaces).				
<b>Flaws</b>				
<b>Bestial:</b> Cannot communicate or use tools				
<b>Cold feet:</b> Half Move on loose dirt or dry surfaces.				
<b>Weapons</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Attack</b>	<b>(Avg.)</b>
Bite	2N	0	8N	(4) N
Claws	3L	0	9L	(4+) L
<i>* Move 14 on ice or snow, 4 when burrowing</i>				

\* Move 14 on ice or snow, 4 when burrowing

## Lost Souls

Some of the few remaining scholars argue that lost souls are no more than Weave-touched humans who were changed by some form of rogue Air Elemental magic. The affliction and their propensity to materialize, seemingly at random, have caused them to go insane. However, no Loranthian could be convinced of such a thing. The islanders believe that any corpse not properly burned can lose its way to the spirit world and become a lost soul. In fact, they blame the pain of Burn on attacks from lost souls. With all the death and destruction of the Night of Fire, it makes perfect sense to them that there are more and more lost souls trapped between worlds ... so many that they are now appearing in the material world.

One thing all can agree upon is that lost souls are a dangerous adversary. They can appear without warning, materializing from thin air. When in material form, they appear as pale, floating humanoids with wild eyes.

### Lost Soul

<b>Archetype:</b> Weave-touched Elemental		<b>Motivation:</b> Punish the Corporeal		
<b>Style:</b> 0		<b>Health:</b> 4		
<b>Nutritional Value:</b> 0		<b>Toughness:</b> 3		
<b>Primary Attributes</b>				
<b>Body:</b> 2		<b>Charisma:</b> 4		
<b>Dexterity:</b> 4		<b>Intelligence:</b> 2		
<b>Strength:</b> 3		<b>Willpower:</b> 2		
<b>Secondary Attributes</b>				
<b>Size:</b> 0		<b>Initiative:</b> 6		
<b>Move:</b> 7 (flies)		<b>Defense:</b> 6		
<b>Perception:</b> 4		<b>Stun:</b> 2		
<b>Skills</b>	<b>Base</b>	<b>Levels</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>(Avg.)</b>
Brawl	3	3	6	(3)
Intimidation	4	4	8	(4)
Performance	4	2	6	(3)
Soul Punch	2	2	4	(2)
<b>Talents</b>				
<b>Weave-touched:</b> Soul Punch 3x per day, Base Difficulty: 4, duration: one round.				
<b>Materialize:</b> Appear from thin air 1x per day, Base Difficulty: 5, duration: Entire combat.				
<b>Captivate:</b> Temporarily entrance targets.				
<b>Fearsome:</b> Frighten opponents.				
<b>Flaws</b>				
<b>Mentally unstable:</b> Acts unpredictably				
<b>Susceptible to Air Elemental magic:</b> -2 to resist Air Elemental magic				
<b>Weapons</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Attack</b>	<b>(Avg.)</b>
Punch	0N	0	6N	(3) N
Soul Punch	4L	0	10L	(5) L



# BESTIARY

Loranthians believe lost souls are trying to kill others in the hopes of following a newly dead soul toward salvation. They often sing a mournful, ethereal song to captivate their enemies before attacking. They may also attempt to frighten their opponents with a chilling wail. When defeated, lost souls disappear into thin air.

**Special:** When brawling, a lost soul can make its fists semi-incorporeal for one round. It can do this up to three times per day. This Soul Punch allows it to bypass an opponent's armor and cause Lethal damage.

## Minotaur

Undoubtedly the result of Primal magic gone awry during the Night of Fire, minotaurs are an amalgamation of humans and bulls. Fused by rogue magic, they rarely have the best features of man or beast. Their partially human heads are marred by bulls' muzzles, ears and horns. They often have only one human arm and hand, forcing them to move awkwardly on three hooves.

Like bulls, minotaurs often charge when attacking (see *Desolation* core book, page 177) and attempt to gore their opponents with their horns. They have human intelligence, but madness has made them incapable of reasoning.

### Minotaur

**Archetype:** Weave-touched animal **Motivation:** Survival  
**Style:** 0 **Health:** 6  
**Nutritional Value:** 4 **Toughness:** 2

#### Primary Attributes

**Body:** 4 **Charisma:** 1  
**Dexterity:** 1 **Intelligence:** 2  
**Strength:** 4 **Willpower:** 2

#### Secondary Attributes

**Size:** 0 **Initiative:** 3  
**Move:** 5 **Defense:** 5  
**Perception:** 4 **Stun:** 4

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Melee	4	4	8	(4)
Survival	2	2	4	(2)

#### Talents

**\*Gore:** +3 Skill specialization to Brawl/horns.

#### Flaws

**Mentally unstable:** Acts unpredictably.

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Dagger	1L	0	9L	(4+) L
*Horns	1L	0	12L	(6) L
Kick	1N	0	9N	(4+) N
Punch	0N	0	8N	(4) N

## Mud Men

Mud men were formed by the combination of Earth and Water Elementals during the Night of Fire. They are often found along sea coasts and inland shores, but can lurk wherever earth and water mix. They can take on many shapes — from a morass to a human form. They often lie in wait before attempting to engulf their opponents, but can also attack from a distance by flinging mud up to 15 ft. in an attempt to temporarily blind them. Mud men also have the ability to take on the visage of their past victims.

Summoning a mud man is possible for a talented Earth/Water Elementalist, but it is a Nigh Impossible spell.

**Special:** The mud in your eye attack will blind a victim until the end of the following round if it is not resisted. The attack (5N includes all penalties and bonuses) does no physical damage, but can only be resisted by Dexterity plus shield bonus.

**Special:** An engulfed character can only do a maximum of 1 point of damage when he attempts to attack. Also see drowning rules, page 188 of *Desolation* core book, because a mud-engulfed character is drowning in mud.



## Mud Man

**Archetype:** Elemental  
**Style:** 0  
**Nutritional Value:** 0  
**Motivation:** Bloodlust  
**Health:** 4  
**Toughness:** 2

### Primary Attributes

**Body:** 2  
**Dexterity:** 3  
**Strength:** 4  
**Charisma:** 0  
**Intelligence:** 1  
**Willpower:** 2

### Secondary Attributes

**Size:** 0  
**Move:** 7  
**Perception:** 3  
**Initiative:** 4  
**Defense:** 5  
**Stun:** 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	3	5	8	(4)
Brawl	4	4	8	(4)
Stealth	3	3	6	(3)
Survival	1	3	4	(2)

### Talents

\* **Advanced Accuracy:** Reduces called shot penalty by 4.  
**Engulf:** Drowning attack.

### Flaws

**Susceptible to Elemental magic:** -2 to resist all Elemental magic.

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Punch	2N	0	10N	(5) L
Engulf	1N	0	9N	(4+) N
* Mud in your eye	1N	0	5N	(2+) N

## Plant Elementals

Plant elementals are most common in the swamps of Loslolin, but they can be found anywhere there is ample plant matter. They can take on many forms — from mud-covered swamp-plant creatures to woodland monstrosities comprised of grasses, moss and tree debris. They often attack by hiding in plain sight as part of Nature, then attempt to entangle and engulf any prey that comes nearby. However, if no meal is forthcoming, they will actively hunt it out.

**Special:** An engulfed character can only do a maximum of 1 point of damage when he attempts to attack. Also see drowning rules, page 188 of *Desolation*, because a mud-engulfed character is suffocating in plant material.

**Special:** Plant elementals can make ranged touch attacks up to 15 ft. to entangle an opponent (see *Desolation* core book, page 182). If the attack succeeds, no immediate damage is done. Instead, compare the amount of damage that would have been done to the target's Strength rating. If the amount of damage is greater, the target is wrapped in vines. An entangled character must succeed in an opposed Strength roll against the vine's Strength of 4 to break free. Plant elementals often entangle a victim before dragging them near to make an Engulf attack the next round.

## Plant Elemental

**Archetype:** Elemental  
**Style:** 0  
**Nutritional Value:** 2  
**Motivation:** Bloodlust  
**Health:** 4  
**Toughness:** 2

### Primary Attributes

**Body:** 2  
**Dexterity:** 4  
**Strength:** 4  
**Charisma:** 0  
**Intelligence:** 0  
**Willpower:** 2

### Secondary Attributes

**Size:** 0  
**Move:** 8  
**Perception:** 2  
**Initiative:** 4  
**Defense:** 6  
**Stun:** 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	4	4	8	(4)
Brawl	4	2	6	(3)
Stealth	4	5	9	(4+)
Survival	0	3	3	(1+)

### Talents

**Subtle Strike:** Sneak attack.  
**Engulf:** Drowning attack.  
**Entangle:** 15-ft. ranged vine attack.

### Flaws

**Susceptible to Elemental and Primal magic:** -2 to resist all Elemental magic and Primal magic.

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Punch	2N	0	8N	(4) L
Engulf	1N	0	7N	(3+) L
Entangle	2N	0	10N	(5) N

## Rubble Rousers

While many of the ruins that dot the lands of Scondera in the After are filled with desperate men and women who would kill for a morsel of food to sustain their sad lives, rubble rousers are already dead. They kill because they know one thing: hate for the living. Rubble rousers were once flesh-and-bone people like anyone else, but during the Night of Fire the torn Weave unleashed an awful mix of Elemental and Necromantic magics that charred and petrified their skin, melded parts of it with shards of stone from the ruins, and then filled their dead corpses with the force of life.

Rubble rousers attack with fists that are embedded with sharp, jagged stone, which makes their blows lethal. They can also throw rubble with great accuracy. Their petrified skin is hard to pierce, giving them +2 to Defense.

**Special:** When rubble rousers are reduced to -1 or less Health, the Weave inside of them bursts out, causing them to explode and send stone shrapnel in every direction for 15 ft.



# BESTIARY

## Rubble Rouser

**Archetype:** Weave-touched Undead **Motivation:** Bloodlust  
**Style:** 0 **Health:** 7  
**Nutritional Value:** 0 **Toughness:** 3

### Primary Attributes

**Body:** 4 **Charisma:** 0  
**Dexterity:** 2 **Intelligence:** 0  
**Strength:** 4 **Willpower:** 3

### Secondary Attributes

**Size:** 0 **Initiative:** 2  
**Move:** 6 **Defense:** 8\*  
**Perception:** 3 **Stun:** NA

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Athletics	4	4	8	(4)
Brawl	4	2	6	(3)
Explode	3	3	6	(3)
Stealth	4	5	9	(4+)
Survival	0	3	3	(1+)

### Talents

**High Pain Tolerance:** Ignores nonlethal damage.

\* **Skin of Stone:** +2 to Defense.

**Weave-touched:** Explode, Base Difficulty: 3, duration: 1 round, range: 30 ft. radius.

### Flaws

**Susceptible to Earth Elemental magic and Necromancy:** -2 to resist all Earth Elemental magic and Necromancy magic.

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite/Punch	1L	0	7L	(3+)L
Rubble (thrown)	0N	0	8N	(4)N
Explode	3N	0	9N	(4+)N



## Stab Bats

Stab bats prevalent throughout Scondera, but are especially common in what is left of the Primea Mountain Range, the dense woods of the Oruskan Wilderness and the rocky outcroppings of the Saikin Wastes. They resemble other species of giant bats, except for the long fangs that protrude straight out of their snouts.

Stab bats are nocturnal and hematophagous, surviving solely on blood. At dusk, colonies of stab bats leave their hiding places in caves, deep forests and ravines in great clouds that consist of dozens of the bats. They fly through the night, searching for food using their ability to sense heat in the range of that given off by warm-blooded creatures.

Stab bats attack by diving through the air to plunge their arrowhead-like fangs into their targets. They have a thick skull, which protects them from harm during impact. Specialized mouthparts lap up the blood from the puncture wounds they create.

**Special:** Stab bat wounds heal at half the rate of normal wounds, because of an anti-coagulant in their saliva.

**Special:** Characters bitten by a stab bat must make a Body roll against an Infection rating of 1, or become feverish and nauseated (-2 to all Skill rolls) for four hours.

## Stab Bat

**Archetype:** Animal **Motivation:** Survival  
**Style:** 0 **Health:** 2  
**Nutritional Value:** 1 **Toughness:** 1

### Primary Attributes

**Body:** 2 **Charisma:** 0  
**Dexterity:** 3 **Intelligence:** 0  
**Strength:** 1 **Willpower:** 2

### Secondary Attributes

**Size:** -2 **Initiative:** 3  
**Move:** 4/2\* **Defense:** 7  
**Perception:** 2 **Stun:** 2

Skills	Base	Levels	Rating	(Avg.)
Brawl	1	5	6	(3)
Stealth	3	5	10	(5)
Survival	0	4	4	(2)

### Talents

**Disease Carrier:** Infection Rating 1 or become ill.

**Heat Vision:** Can sense heat given off by warm-blooded creatures.

**Sonar:** Can navigate in darkness.

### Flaws

\***Airborne:** Half movement rate on ground

Weapons	Rating	Size	Attack	(Avg.)
Bite	1L	+2	9L	(4+)L

## Mutated Myths

Mythological creatures have long been a critical component of good storytelling. Try to imagine Beowulf without Grendel, Odysseus without Polyphemus the Cyclops, or Hercules without Cerberus. Defeating dangerous monsters has been a key ingredient in the development of many literary heroes.

Players in *Desolation* can have the same opportunity to test their characters' mettle against some classic fantastic beasts.

The Night of Fire provides GMs with a built-in creature creator. The rogue blasts of magical energy from every tradition that blazed across Scondera that night could have created nearly any monster, with any set of powers — including any mythological creature from literature.

A mythological Roman satyr, for instance, could be a goat and man combined by a wild thread of Primal magic that lashed out as the Weave was unraveling? Adding the appropriate Attributes, Skills, Talents and Flaws can create a creature identical to the legends.

## Twisting the Tropes

But why create an exact copy of mythological creatures? Players familiar with fantasy stereotypes may think they know what to expect from a satyr, for example, but in the world of *Desolation*, a satyr can be different. The amalgamation of a man and goat could result in a handsome-faced, goat-legged man with small goat horns protruding from its head, as in the Roman version of the legends. However, it could also result in a hairy, goat-headed man with hooves for hands and a tail growing grotesquely from its abdomen. Unlike the Greek and Roman gods from mythology, the Weave

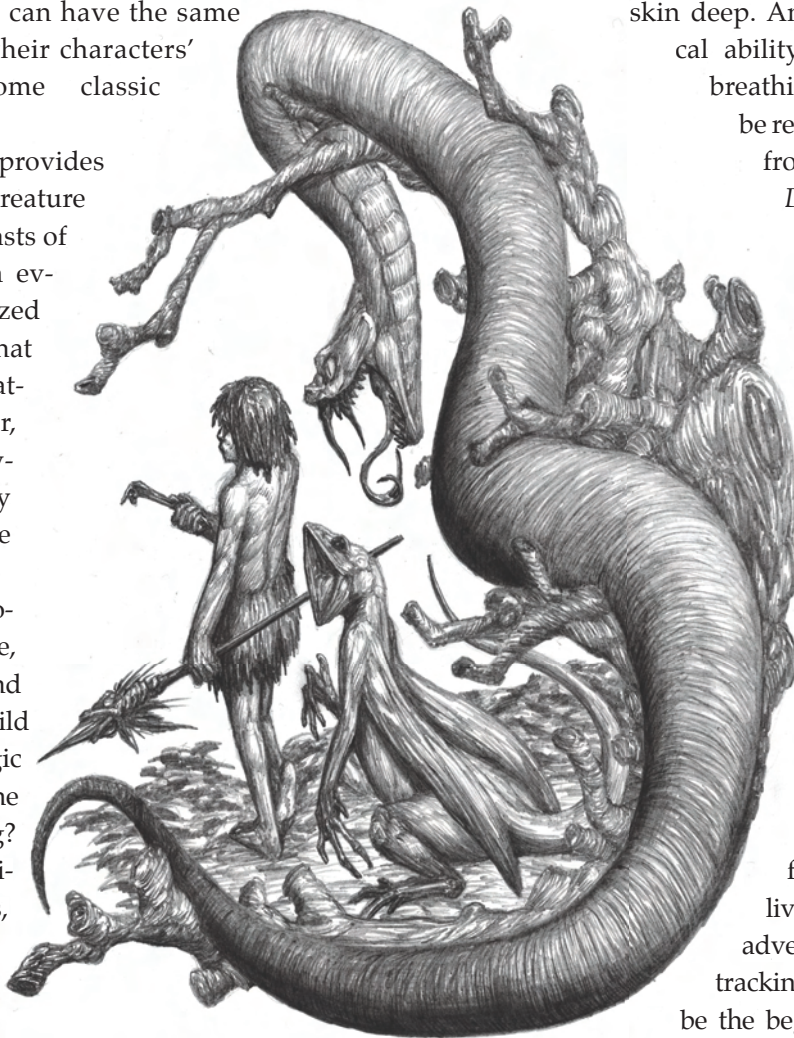
is a random, wild force of Nature. Any combination is possible, and the odds favor malformed, misshapen and ugly convergences. See the minotaur illustrated on page 122 for an example.

Twisting the tried-and-true fantasy archetypes keep players on their toes while allowing familiar myths to become part of the interactive story being created by GMs and players. The differences can be more than skin deep. Any traditional fantasy magical ability — invisibility, flight, fire breathing, regeneration, etc. — can be recreated with magical powers from the traditions outlined in *Desolation*. A GM could create a satyr capable of reading minds or leaping great distances, for example.

## Creating Your Own Myths

Rumors of mythological creatures can also be used as convenient plot hooks in the game. For example, villagers may tell tales of a wolf monster in the woods nearby that leaves human handprints beside its tracks. They think it is responsible for the disappearance of their livestock and children. An adventure involving the characters tracking down the wolf man could be the beginning of a werewolf myth for the campaign as the characters retell (and embellish) the tale of their encounter with the Weave-touched wolf.

Rules for creating Weave-touched creatures can be found on page 247 of the *Desolation* core book. To give GMs and players a sense of the mutated myths that are possible in *Desolation*, brief descriptions of 18 classic fantasy monsters can be found in the table on the next two pages. Note that the classic mythological names are used in the table for sake of clarity, but residents of Scondera may come up with their own names, such as calling a centaur a manhorse, a unicorn a horned steed or a hell hound a fire dog.





# BESTIARY

## Weave-Touched Creatures

Monster	Health	NV	Def	Stun	Init	Per	Move	Size	Body	Dex	Str	Int	Chr	Will	Attacks
<b>Centaur</b>	7	12	6	4	5	2	9/18*	1	4	3	4	2	0	2	Bite/Kick: 6L (3L) Bow: 7L (3+)L Dagger: 6L (3)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Athletics: 6 (3), Archery: 6 (3), Brawl: 6 (3), Melee: 6 (3), Survival: 6 (3). Accuracy: Reduced called shot penalty, Swift: +2 to Move rating. Disfigured, Mentally unstable														
Description	Men and women merged with horses in monstrous mutations. Centaurs with human arms and hands can use weapons. Others are forced to rely on hooves and horse teeth to attack. * Double move when running.														
<b>Chimera</b>	6	4	8	3	5	3	9/18*	0	3	5	4	0	0	3	Bite/Claw: 10L (5)L Ram horn: 9N (4+)N Breath: 9L (4+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 8 (4), Breath: 6 (3), Stealth 8 (4), Survival 4 (2). Weave-touched: Flame breath 3x per day, Base Difficulty: 3, range: 50 ft., Advanced Flurry: No penalty to attack 2x per round or -2 to all attacks to attack 3x per round, Dual Wield: Can attack two different targets in one round, Poisonous Bite: Toxin 3, Damage 3L														
Description	A mishmash of animals usually consisting of a great cat that also has the head of a snake and a ram. It can attack with each head in one round, and can also breathe fire once per round. Its snake head has a poisonous bite. * Double move when running.														
<b>Flying Snake</b>	-1	.5	7	1	2	2	3	-4	1	2	1	0	0	2	Bite: 6L (3)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 2 (1), Stealth 8 (4), Survival 4 (2) Weave-touched: Good Fortune 1x/day, duration: 1 day, Base Difficulty: 4; Invisibility 3x/day, duration: combat, Base Difficulty: 4, Poisonous Bite: Toxin: 3, Damage: 3L														
Description	A small, brightly colored, feathered snake with wings and a poisonous bite that can turn invisible. It is a sign of good luck, but only bestows its Good Fortune (+2 to all rolls for 24 hours) to anyone who catches and releases it unharmed. The good luck begins 24 hours after the snake is released.														
<b>Gargoyle</b>	5	—	7*	3	2	2	6	0	3	2	4	0	0	2	Bite/Claw: 9L (4+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 8 (4), Stealth 4 (2), Survival 2 (1), *Stone skin: +2 to Defense Weave-touched: Living stone, 1x per night, duration: until sunrise, Base Difficulty: 5														
Description	Stone statues of animals that come to life each night. They cannot be harmed with pointed or sharp weapons.														
<b>Harbinger</b>	1	1	6	1	3	2	4	-2	1	3	1	0	0	2	Talon: 5L (2+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 2 (1), Stealth 8 (4), Survival 2 (1) Weave-touched: Evil Eye Curse, 1x per day, duration: 1 day, Base Difficulty 5														
Description	A seemingly normal black raven, except for its green eyes. Harbingers can curse someone with bad luck (-2 to all rolls). The curse starts 24 hours after the Harbinger caws three times while looking at its target. Some victims may never know how they were cursed.														
<b>Harpy</b>	4	2	5	2	5	4	5	0	2	3	2	2	4	2	Bite/Claw: 6N (3)N Rock (thrown): 7N (3+)N Javelin: 6L (3)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Athletics 6 (3), Brawl 6 (2), Stealth 6 (3), Survival 4 (2). Disease Touch: Infection rating 3, Recovery 2. Disfigured, Mentally unstable.														
Description	Men and women who sprouted wings large enough to grant them flight. Harpies are covered in their own filth and the rotting entrails of their previous victims. Anyone hurt by a Harpy bite or claw attack must make a Body roll or fall ill with a wasting disease that causes 1 point of nonlethal damage per day until healed or resisted.														
<b>Hell Hound</b>	3	2	5	2	2	2	4/8*	-1	2	2	2	0	0	2	Bite: 6L (3)L Breath: 9L (4+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 4 (2), Breath: 5 (2+), Stealth 7 (3+), Survival 4 (2). Weave-touched: Flame breath 3x per day, Base Difficulty: 3, range: 50 ft.														
Description	A dog with a powerful bite and the innate magical ability to breathe flames. * Double move when running.														
<b>Lizardman</b>	3	2	5	2	3	3	4	-1	2	2	2	1	0	2	Bite/Claw: 6L (3) L Spear: 8L (4)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 4 (2), Melee 6 (3), Stealth 4 (2), Survival 2 (1). Weave-touched: Restoration, +4 Health 3x per day, Base Difficulty: 4. Disfigured.														
Description	A Lizardman is a mutated cross between a giant lizard and a person. Some are more lizard than man. They have the innate magical ability to immediately heal themselves up to 3x per day. Their healing ability can even regenerate lost limbs, but cannot cure poison or disease.														
<b>Manticore</b>	8	12	7	4	4	3	8/16*	1	4	4	4	0	0	3	Bite/Claw: 8L (4)L Stinger: 8L (4)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 7 (3+), Stealth 8 (4), Survival 4 (2) Advanced Flurry: No penalty to attack twice per round, Dual Wield: Can attack two different targets, Poisonous Stinger: Toxin 3, Damage 3L														
Description	Great cats with the tails of scorpions and the wings of a Wývern. Manticores often use their claws to hold down smaller targets as they sting them. They are capable of flying away with Size -1 creatures. * Double move when running.														

# BESTIARY

Monster	Health	NV	Def	Stun	Init	Per	Move	Size	Body	Dex	Str	Int	Chr	Will	Attacks
Medusa	4	4	5	2	6	5	6	0	2	3	3	3	2	2	Snake bite: 7L (3+)L Gaze: 11N (5+)N
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl: 6 (3), Gaze: 6 (3), Melee: 6 (3), Survival: 6 (3). Weave-touched: Stone gaze 3x per day, Base Difficulty 5, duration 1 day, range, 25 ft., Poisonous Bite: Toxin 2, Damage 2L. Disfigured, Mentally unstable														
Description	A woman with poisonous snakes for hair who can turn anyone who meets her gaze to stone.														
Pegasus	7	12	6	4	3	2	7/14*	1	4	3	4	0	0	2	Kick 6L (3)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 5 (2+), Stealth 6 (3), Survival 2 (1), Mobile attack: Can attack without stopping movement, Weave-touched: Gift of flight, duration: scene, Base Difficulty: 3														
Description	A flying horse capable of carrying an armored rider and making devastating flying attacks. Two feathers from a pegasus can be used to make a potion of flight that even inexperienced brewers can easily create (Brew Magic Potion Difficulty 2). A pegasus often attacks with a flying charge (+2 to Attack). * Double move when running.														
Phoenix	3	2	5	2	2	2	4	-1	2	2	2	0	0	2	Talon 7L (3+)L Flame strike: 15L (7+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 5 (2+), Flame Strike: 8 (4), Survival: 2 (1). Weave-touched: Become flame 3x per day, Base Difficulty: 6, duration: 1 round														
Description	Normal-looking large birds of prey that can turn to flame at will. They often swoop down on opponents and turn to flame just before they strike, enveloping their victims in fire.														
Roc	8	36	5	4	3	4/8*	9	2	4	3	6	0	0	2	Talon/Bite: 10L (5)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 10 (5), Stealth 3 (1+), Survival 4 (2). *Alertness: +2 to Perception rolls, Keen sense: +4 eyesight, Swift: +2 Move, Mobile attack: Can attack without stopping movement														
Description	A gigantic golden eagle capable of carrying away a horse and its rider. It often drops victims from great heights to tenderize them before eating them.														
Shadow Beast	4	—	6	2	4	2	6/12*	0	2	4	2	0	0	2	Bite: 7L (3+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 6 (3), Stealth 6 (3), Survival 2 (1) Weave-touched: Shadow, 3x per day, duration: 1 turn, Base Difficulty: 6														
Description	As a solid shadow that takes on various shapes, a Shadow Beast can teleport when its shadow is visible, traveling wherever its shadow touches. It often does this during battle to gain +4 to its Defense for the round immediately after it teleports. * Double Move when running.														
Siren	4	2	5	2	5	4	5	0	2	3	2	2	4	2	Bite/Claw: 4N (2)N Club: 5L (2+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Athletics: 4 (2), Brawl 4 (2), Con 8 (4), Melee 4 (2), Performance 6 (3), Stealth 6 (3), Survival 4 (2). Aquatic: Breathe underwater. Captivate: Temporarily entrance target. Disfigured. Mentally unstable.														
Description	Attractive women fused with fish who can live in either saltwater and freshwater. They lure their victims close with seductive songs to captivate them, and then attack with coral- or seashell spiked clubs.														
Unicorn	7	12	6	4	3	2	7/14*	1	4	3	4	0	1	2	Horn: 9N (4+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 8 (4), Stealth 7 (3+), Survival 4 (2) Weave-touched: Horn capable of resurrecting others 3x, Base Difficulty: 6; Run: double running speed														
Description	A horse with what appears to be some type of goat horn protruding from its head. The horn is infused with magical powers that makes it easy for even inexperienced potion makers to create up to three potions of resurrection (Brew Magic Potion Difficulty: 2 per potion). Unicorns often run and hide from fights, but will charge (+2 to attack) when cornered. * Double Move when running.														
Vampire	6	—	6	3	5	5	6	0	3	3	3	2	1	3	Siphon Bite: 10L (5)L Dagger: 7L (3+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Brawl 6 (3), Melee 6 (3), Stealth 6 (3), Scavenge 4 (2), Survival 4 (2) Subtle Strike, Weave-touched: Siphon Life, 3x/day, Base Difficulty: 4. Allergic to sunlight: 1L Damage per turn when exposed to sunlight. Mentally unstable.														
Description	Vampires are people who were transformed into hematophagists by the Weave. They must feed off blood. They often sneak up behind would-be victims and use their Subtle Strike Talent to bite them. Any damage done via the bite transfers an equal amount of Health to the Vampires. Vampires can live eternally, as long as they can feed.														
Werewolf	5	4	6	3	5	4	8	0	3	3	5	2	1	2	Bite/Claw: 11L (5+)L
Skills/ Talents/Flaws	Athletics: 8 (4), Brawl: 8 (4), Stealth: 8 (4), Survival: 5 (2+). Mobile attack: Can attack without stopping movement, Alertness: +2 to Perception rolls, Transform: Shift between human and lupan forms up to 3x per day at random.														
Description	Burly men and women who unexpectedly become half-wolf beasts. In beast form, they can travel on two legs like a person, or on all fours like a wolf. When not in beast form, they appear to be almost normal — though hairy — men and women.														



# A SURVIVOR'S STORY

The Warlord Graham Sikes sat uncomfortably in the saddle. Through his facemask, he read through each of the 68 names on the back of his wooden shield. Before they left camp, he had spoken with each of the men who followed him. He explained the plan to each of them personally, making sure they understood. He saw the fear in their eyes and asked about their families. As they told him stories of better times, he wrote the names of their wives, daughters and sisters on the back of the shield.

It was as he knew it would be — he might be able to trade the warlanders for 15 or 20 slaves, but not 68. He had no choice but to attack. There was no way to choose just 20.

He looked down at the village as dusk set in. He and the bulk of his men were hidden in a copse of trees on a small hill behind the village. The settlement was surrounded by a low wall of debris — bricks, wooden beams, pieces of wagons — it was the last barrier between him, and his wife and daughter.

He watched the sun sink. It was almost time. A beautiful sunset painted the western sky orange and red, but all Graham saw was fire and blood. What else was there?

Graham had ordered the westerners to be gagged and tied to the worst horses. A few of his men would drive them toward the slaver village's front gate. When the slavers sallied to respond to the threat, Graham and his men would attack from behind. It was a simple plan, but one Graham would have been proud of if he weren't sacrificing the westerners. But again, what choice did he have?

Torches sputtered to life in the village. Shouts could be heard. A bell was rung.

Warlord Graham drew his sword; his footmen rushed forward, running as quietly as they could toward the town. Graham didn't want to give away their position yet by allowing the villagers to hear the rumble of hooves. He remembered that sound well. It seemed so long ago, but less than a month had passed since his farmstead had been attacked by the Warlanders.

His men made it to the wall unchallenged, but were spotted as they began to scurry over. Graham dug his heels into his horse's flanks and shot down the hill, his riders just a few steps behind.

Graham was shocked by the horse's speed. He had ridden before, of course, but never on a horse like this. It was smaller than the horses he used on the farm, but incredibly powerful and seemingly drawn to the sounds of battle. An arrow whizzed by Graham's head and he remembered to raise his shield. And then he was at the wall. He pulled up on the reins to stop the horse and dismount, but the horse had been trained differently. It leapt the wall, taking Graham with it.

Somehow Graham managed to hold on. His men followed his lead, but at least half were thrown from their mounts. Some landed badly and didn't move.

Graham had no time to try to help them. A man with a spear was charging. The horse cantered to the left, which put Graham in position to parry. He knocked the speartip out of the way and then swung down. His sword bit deeply into the man's shoulder. One of his men on foot finished the slaver off, but then was downed by an arrow.

Graham turned toward the archers who were lined up along the wall. They had turned their attention inside the town, picking off Graham's men one by one. Graham held on tight and kicked his heels as he had seen Kreel do at the Warlanders' camp. The horse charged directly at them, knocking the first archer down with its chest. The others tried to jump out of the way. Graham split a man's skull with his sword and bashed another's face with his shield before wheeling around to charge them again. He was halfway through the remaining archers when he heard Marie scream.

He pulled up short and turned in the saddle to see a half dozen slavers trying to lead a group of women and children before them into the fray. He started to charge them when something hit him in the back, hard, with a sickening plunk. Pain seized his muscles, causing him to sit straight up in the saddle. His horse, perhaps responding to some unknown body language, stepped sideways. Graham wasn't ready for the maneuver and fell from the saddle, which sent his mask flying.

Some of his men saw him fall and rushed to his aid. But seeing Merriam and Marie helped Graham ignore the pain. He stood, pointed his sword at the slavers with the human shield and ordered his men to attack.



## A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Grahm rushed in with them, despite the pain of the arrow sticking out of his back. As they entered the slavers' torchlight, Marie recognized him.

"Daddy!" she yelled.

Merriam looked confused.

His men cut the ropes holding the line of slaves together, then shoved past the women and children to get to the slavers. Some of the women were cut down by the slavers before his men could engage them.

"Run, Marie!" Grahm yelled. "Hide and close your eyes."

The little girl ran and Grahm moved to get Merriam out of harm's way, but he was too late.

A slaver held a dagger at her throat.

"Let her go!" Grahm yelled.

"Grahm? Is that really you?" Merriam asked.

"Yes, dear," Grahm said. "Don't worry. Everything's going to be fine."

For the first time that night, Grahm looked one of his opponents in the eye. Grahm found killing was easier if the enemy was nameless and faceless. But this enemy held his wife's life in his hands. The man, an easterner, was gaunt. He looked scared and desperate. And why shouldn't he? His people were dying all around him. His village was burning. The surreal nature of the moment hit Grahm and he wondered aloud, "What were you in the Before?"

The question seemed to catch the man off guard.

"I, I was a merchant," the man answered. He had a Cushu accent. Grahm might have traded with him in the past.

"I'll make you a trade, then," Grahm said. "Give me my wife and I'll let you go."

The man moved the dagger away from Merriam's neck, just a bit. Merriam whirled out of his grasp and Grahm, almost automatically, ran him through.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I, I didn't mean to."

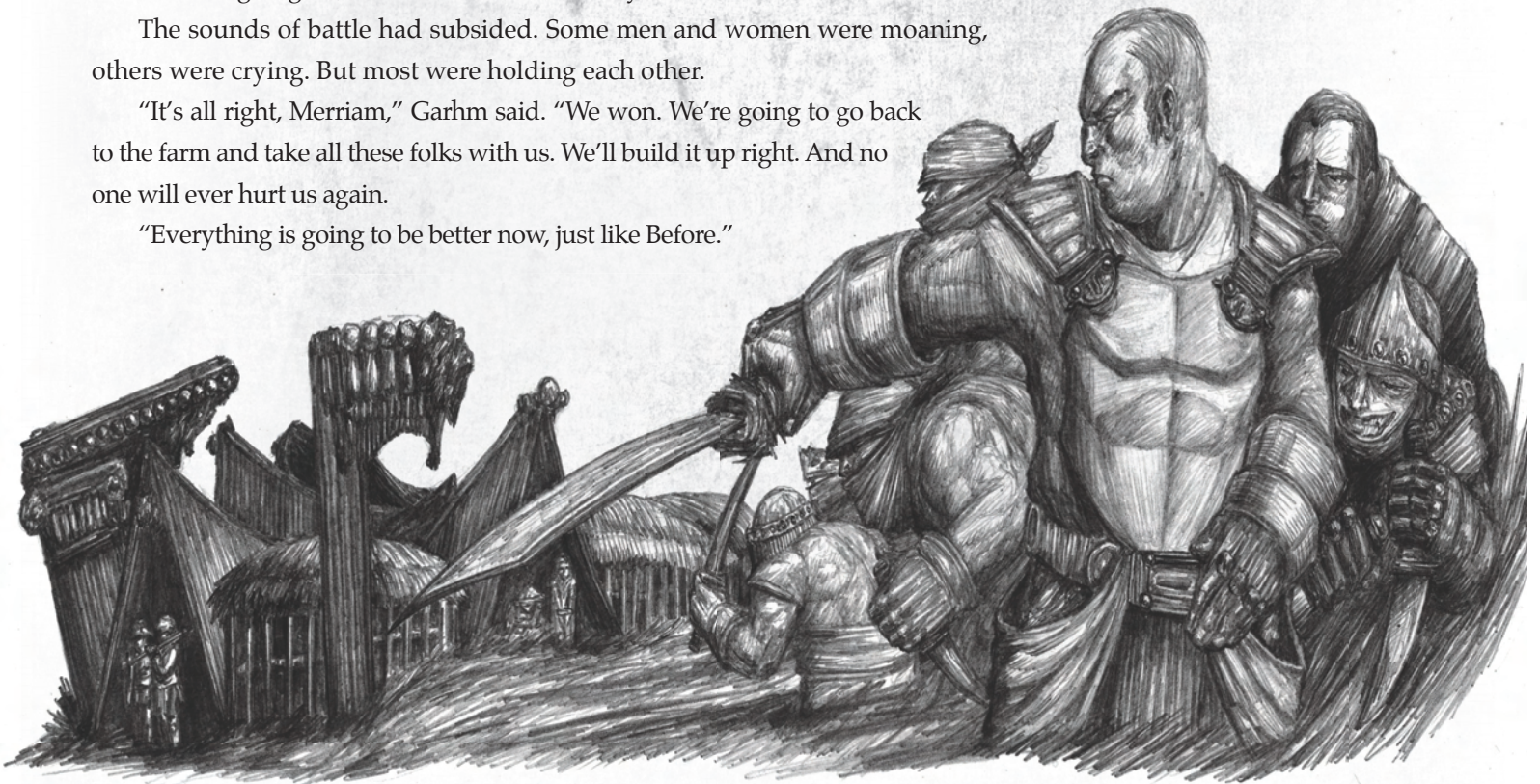
But the man was already dead. Merriam was there, calling for him. Grahm went to her and held her. Marie came out of nowhere to clutch his leg.

"What's going on, Grahm?" Merriam finally asked. "Where's Rom?"

The sounds of battle had subsided. Some men and women were moaning, others were crying. But most were holding each other.

"It's all right, Merriam," Grahm said. "We won. We're going to go back to the farm and take all these folks with us. We'll build it up right. And no one will ever hurt us again."

"Everything is going to be better now, just like Before."





# INDEX

## A

Academics/Knowledge . . . . .	19
Acclimated . . . . .	13
Affernell Winsolin of Blossom . . . . .	65
Alchemy . . . . .	23
Aldwyn Cavinir of The Forlorn . . . . .	98
Allergies . . . . .	25
Amazing Philean, The . . . . .	93
Annalise Zavancy of Carris . . . . .	67
Anya of the Avinec Tribe . . . . .	95
Apprentice . . . . .	112
Archer . . . . .	107
Archetypes, Common . . . . .	107
Armor . . . . .	48
Avinec Tribe, The . . . . .	94

## B

Ballard Ashe of the Grey Academy . . . . .	99
Bandit/Pirate . . . . .	107
Banith Harrik of Kesh'Har Baranthum . . . . .	77
Baranthum . . . . .	14
Barbarian . . . . .	108
Bartering . . . . .	46
Beguiler . . . . .	108
Berith Othell of Groundswell . . . . .	74
Bestiary . . . . .	119
Blacksmith . . . . .	109
Black Wing, Invasion . . . . .	7
Blind Spot . . . . .	17
Blood Rune Magic . . . . .	29
Blood Rune Magic Spell Examples . . . . .	30
Blossom . . . . .	64
Braiding . . . . .	23
Branded . . . . .	25
Brawler . . . . .	109
Brigands, The . . . . .	95
Brother Abel Fidel of Verashen . . . . .	101
Brotherhood of Silent Voices . . . . .	100
Brute . . . . .	17
Building a Community . . . . .	63
Bureaucracy . . . . .	19

## C

Camson Hurle . . . . .	50, 52
Captain Harucan Keye, Isle of T'sol . . . . .	75
Carris . . . . .	66
Centaur . . . . .	126
Charitable . . . . .	27
Cheerful . . . . .	27
Chieftain's Blood . . . . .	23
Chimera . . . . .	126
Cloth . . . . .	36
Coldborn . . . . .	13
Combined Corpses . . . . .	119
<b>Communities</b> . . . . .	63
Avinec Tribe, The . . . . .	94
Blossom . . . . .	64
Brigands, The . . . . .	95
Carris . . . . .	66
Emerald . . . . .	68
Fair Trade . . . . .	70
Falling Tower . . . . .	71

Forlorn, The . . . . .	97
Grey Academy, The . . . . .	99
Groundswell . . . . .	73
Isle of T'sol . . . . .	74
Kesh'Har Baranthum . . . . .	76
Ki-chan's Village Ship . . . . .	78
Lambent Springs . . . . .	80
Lorlathan . . . . .	82
Lost Lolin . . . . .	83
Methyn's Keep . . . . .	85
Mother Ice . . . . .	87
Nhirain . . . . .	90
Philean's Menagerie . . . . .	92
Verashen . . . . .	100
Windfall . . . . .	102
Condition of Equipment . . . . .	38
Consorts of Shadow . . . . .	60
Craft/Profession . . . . .	20
Creating Your Own Myths . . . . .	125
Crusade, The . . . . .	53
Cultist . . . . .	109
Cynasure . . . . .	50

## D

Dahar Mha . . . . .	75
Davin Bron of Emerald . . . . .	69
Debris Fields . . . . .	61
Dependent . . . . .	27
Dessa Santon, Leader of the Brigands . . . . .	96
Determining Scavenging Difficulty . . . . .	36
Distinct . . . . .	9
Drunken Chir . . . . .	61

## E

Emerald . . . . .	68
<b>Equipment</b> . . . . .	35
Condition . . . . .	38
Determining Difficulty . . . . .	36
Location Modifiers . . . . .	36
Material Modifiers . . . . .	36
Starting Equipment . . . . .	38

## F

Fair Trade . . . . .	70
Falling Tower . . . . .	71
Farmer . . . . .	110
Farming . . . . .	20
Father Sea . . . . .	10
Flashbacks . . . . .	27
<b>Flaw Descriptions</b> . . . . .	25
Allergies . . . . .	25
Branded . . . . .	25
Charitable . . . . .	27
Cheerful . . . . .	27
Dependent . . . . .	27
Flashbacks . . . . .	27
Greedy . . . . .	27
Haunted . . . . .	27
Short-tempered . . . . .	27
Weave-cursed . . . . .	27
Weave-stained . . . . .	27
Wildborne . . . . .	27
Flight Response . . . . .	13
Flying Snake . . . . .	126

Focused . . . . .	23
Followers of the Martyred Guide . . . . .	80
Forlorn, The . . . . .	97
Friends & Foes . . . . .	105
Future Glimpse . . . . .	24

## G

Gal'Rood . . . . .	50
Gangly . . . . .	9
Gargoyle . . . . .	126
Gate of Bone . . . . .	59
General Iskar of Lambent Springs . . . . .	81
Giant . . . . .	120
Goblins . . . . .	6
Greedy . . . . .	27
Green Bloods . . . . .	7
Grey Academy, The . . . . .	99
Griv'doral'kir . . . . .	16
Groundswell . . . . .	73
Gulan'ree . . . . .	88

## H

Harbinger . . . . .	126
Harpy . . . . .	126
Harriers . . . . .	7
Haunted . . . . .	27
Healer . . . . .	110
Hell Hound . . . . .	126
Heshune Chun of Fair Trade . . . . .	70
Hoarghast . . . . .	120
Holy Ground . . . . .	24
Holy Warrior/Knight/Wayfarer . . . . .	111
Hunter . . . . .	111
Hurle, Camson . . . . .	50, 52
Hurle's Mug . . . . .	61

## I-K

Ice Worm . . . . .	121
Innate Balance . . . . .	9
Isle of T'sol . . . . .	74
Jo, Shin . . . . .	57
Kal'ari . . . . .	9
Kallu'ree of Mother Ice . . . . .	88
Kentin Palanur of Falling Tower . . . . .	72
Kesh'Har Baranthum . . . . .	76
Khran'doral . . . . .	15
Ki-chan . . . . .	79
Ki-chan's Village Ship . . . . .	78
Killer Instinct . . . . .	17
Kobolds . . . . .	9

## L

Lambent Springs . . . . .	80
Leren River . . . . .	52
Library of Verashen . . . . .	101
Lizardman . . . . .	126
Location Modifiers when Scavenging . . . . .	36
Loraneer of Lorlathan . . . . .	83
Lorlathan . . . . .	82
Lost Lolin . . . . .	83
Lost Soul . . . . .	121

# INDEX

## M

Mage Hunter . . . . .	112
Magic . . . . .	21, 29
Magic, Starting a New Tradition. . .	33
Magical Aptitude . . . . .	24
Manticore . . . . .	126
Material Modifiers . . . . .	36
<b>Materials, Examples</b> . . . . .	36
Cloth . . . . .	36
Metals . . . . .	37
Scrolls and books . . . . .	38
Medusa . . . . .	127
Melee Weapons . . . . .	44
Merchant . . . . .	21, 112
Metals . . . . .	37
Methyn's Keep . . . . .	85
Minotaur . . . . .	122
Moon, Cylan . . . . .	58, 59
Mother Ice . . . . .	10, 87
Mother Tilivia of Lost Lolin . . . .	84
Mud Man. . . . .	123

## N

Natural . . . . .	9
Natural Path . . . . .	24
Natural Weapon . . . . .	17
Necromancer. . . . .	112
Nhirain . . . . .	90
Noble/Diplomat/Leader . . . . .	113

### **NPCs**

Affernell Winsolin of Blossom . .	65
Aldwyn Cavinir of The Forlorn . .	98
Amazing Philean, The . . . . .	93
Annalise Zavancy of Carris . . . .	67
Anya of the Avinec Tribe . . . . .	95
Ballard Ashe of the Grey Academy	99
Banith Harrik of	
Kesh'Har Baranthum . . . . .	77
Berith Othell of Groundswell . . .	74
Brother Abel Fidel of Verashen .	101
Captain Harucan Keye, Isle of T'sol	75
Davin Bron of Emerald . . . . .	69
Dessa Santon, Leader of	
the Brigands . . . . .	96
General Iskar of Lambent Springs	81
Kallu'ree of Mother Ice . . . . .	88
Kentin Palanur of Falling Tower. .	72
Ki-chan . . . . .	79
Loraneer of Lorthan . . . . .	83
Mother Tilivia of Lost Lolin. . . .	84
Pola of Windfall . . . . .	103
Tersyllaen of Methyn's Keep . . .	86
Tionna of Nhirain . . . . .	90

### **NPCs, Templates**

Apprentice . . . . .	112
Archer . . . . .	107
Bandit/Pirate . . . . .	107
Barbarian. . . . .	108
Beguiler . . . . .	108
Blacksmith. . . . .	109
Brawler. . . . .	109
Cultist . . . . .	109

Farmer . . . . .	110
Healer . . . . .	110
Holy Warrior/Knight/Wayfarer . .	111
Hunter . . . . .	111
Mage Hunter. . . . .	112
Merchant. . . . .	112
Necromancer. . . . .	112
Noble/Diplomat/Leader . . . . .	113
Performer . . . . .	114
Priest . . . . .	114
Primalist . . . . .	114
Scavenger . . . . .	115
Scholar . . . . .	115
Scoundrel . . . . .	116
Seducer . . . . .	116
Soldier . . . . .	116
Thief . . . . .	117

## O-P

Orcs . . . . .	13
Oruskans . . . . .	6
Orusk, Jeremiah . . . . .	6
Pack Hunter . . . . .	24
Pegasus. . . . .	127
Performer . . . . .	114
Philean's Menagerie . . . . .	92
Phoenix . . . . .	127
<b>Physiology Traits</b>	
Goblin . . . . .	9
Kobold . . . . .	13
Orc . . . . .	17
Pit, The. . . . .	60
Plant Elemental . . . . .	123
Pola of Windfall . . . . .	103
Pools of Nhirain . . . . .	91
Potion Ingredients . . . . .	84
Priest . . . . .	114
Primalist . . . . .	114

## R

Righteous Presence . . . . .	24
Righteous Purpose . . . . .	25
Righteous Warrior . . . . .	25
Roc 127	
Rubble Rouser . . . . .	124
Rune Magic and Burn . . . . .	30
Ruusk, Phelan . . . . .	58

## S

Scary Visage . . . . .	9
Scavenge Attempts. . . . .	35
Scavenged Items . . . . .	39
Scavenger . . . . .	115
Scholar . . . . .	115
Scoundrel . . . . .	116
Scrolls and books . . . . .	38
Seducer. . . . .	116
Sellers . . . . .	7
Seller's Diplomacy. . . . .	25
Shadow Beast . . . . .	127
Shadow Magic . . . . .	31
Shadow Magic Spell Examples . .	32
Short-tempered. . . . .	27
Siege, The . . . . .	53

Siren . . . . .	127
<b>Skill Descriptions</b> . . . . .	19
Academics/Knowledge . . . . .	19
Bureaucracy . . . . .	19
Craft/Profession . . . . .	20
Farming . . . . .	20
Magic . . . . .	21
Merchant. . . . .	21
Soldier . . . . .	116
Spirit of Battle . . . . .	25
Stab Bat . . . . .	124
Starting Equipment . . . . .	38

## T

### **Tables**

Armor . . . . .	48
Bartering . . . . .	46
Common Items. . . . .	40
Melee Weapons . . . . .	44
Potion Ingredients . . . . .	84
Racial Traits . . . . .	106
Ranged Weapon . . . . .	47
Skill List . . . . .	20
Talent List . . . . .	22
Weave-Touched Creatures . . . .	126

### **Talent Descriptions**

Alchemy . . . . .	23
Braiding . . . . .	23
Chieftain's Blood . . . . .	23
Focused . . . . .	23
Future Glimpse . . . . .	24
Holy Ground. . . . .	24
Magical Aptitude . . . . .	24
Natural Path . . . . .	24
Pack Hunter . . . . .	24
Righteous Presence . . . . .	24
Righteous Purpose. . . . .	25
Righteous Warrior . . . . .	25
Seller's Diplomacy. . . . .	25
Spirit of Battle . . . . .	25
Weave Hunter . . . . .	25
Tersyllaen of Methyn's Keep . . . .	86
Thief . . . . .	117
Tionna of Nhirain . . . . .	90
Tower of the Broken Sword . . . .	59

## U-W

Unicorn . . . . .	127
Upgrading an NPC. . . . .	106
Vampire . . . . .	127
Verashen . . . . .	100
Watchers, The . . . . .	57
Wayfarers . . . . .	80
Weapons, Ranged . . . . .	47
Weave-cursed . . . . .	27
Weave Hunter . . . . .	25
Weave-stained . . . . .	27
Weave-Touched Creatures . . . .	126
Werewolf. . . . .	127
Wildborne . . . . .	27
Windfall . . . . .	102



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