

FOLK
LÖRIC
GEMS

The Mikill Gata

the great road



d20
system



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The Mikill Gata

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A HELM OF DARKNESS

*He who steps forward
to mettle in the business of the gods
will surely sink to the
cold depths of despair.*

*Beyond this post waits
cold flesh more strong than chains
and a bridge to death.*

*Trespass of the bridge
will cause the deepdweller
to commit its purpose,
as sure as men must build their towers,
as dwarves must gather their treasure,
as wolves must hunt their dinner,
as the gold beneath the sea must glimmer,
as fire doth flame and earth is green,—
as babe calleth mother, and mother suckles
child,
as folks kindle fire, ships sail the sea,
and dead gods are born anew.*



The Mikill Gata (Great Road) runs like an invisible artery through the mountains of Niflheim. Beginning close to the northeastern shore, where the sea is cold and teeming with life, the Mikill Gata runs past Loftur the Necromancer's lair, past The Mountain King's home, and past the watchpost of the great hawk Gnauroq. It then runs west until it reaches Soltinn-bru, The Hungry Bridge, the cursed portal through which Hel can cross, if she pays a price.

The Mikill Gata was built ages ago by a race of frost giants, the *rimthursar*. The rimthursar were clever builders and architects of roadways and portals, and found it to their liking to connect different planes as they saw fit. Niflheim was once their favorite demiplane; they visited it often, remaining within the quiet halls of their mountain homes. When Hel was thrust into Niflheim and the Green Plane became poisoned, the rimthursar fled, leaving behind the Mikill Gata unattended.

The staves, aware of most living things in Niflheim, realized the rimthursar's error. Hel had chosen to build her palace perilously close to the western end of the Great Road. If the goddess of undeath were to discover the Mikill Gata, she would have a means of escape from Niflheim, as well as a portal to countless other planes.

The staves knew the secret of the Great Road, but had not the means to enter it. If the most cunning dwarf delved for one hundred years into the flesh of the mountains, he would never find the road of the rimthursar, for the Mikill Gata was not merely a road, but a plane itself - tucked beneath the mountains, forged by the planewalking giants who had left it behind.



Ivar, then leader of the staves, sent a message to Forseti - the god of travel. Ivar got his answer in short time, for the staves were not men of any god and Forseti knew Ivar's plight must be remarkable to ask for his help.

The son of Baldr stood before the leader of the staves, dressed plainly, resting upon his walking stick, a smoky visage of the crossroads behind him.

"You call to me and I risk much to appear to you, here in the graveyard of Loki's Daughter," said Forseti.

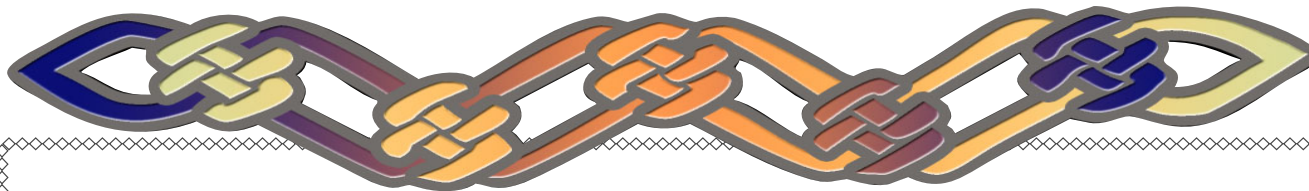
"I know, Wanderer. I do not ask you to take such a risk for little purpose. A way has been made for The Fickle One to escape her prison. A race of giants once delved deeply in these mountains, and they left

behind countless gateways for she whose name we will not speak to travel, if she were wise to them. Her spies are many."

"What is it you think I can do, wolfskin?"

"Find the rimthursar for us and bring them back here, that they may teach us the way to guard the Great Road. As it is part of Niflheim, so must it fall under our care."





The son of Baldr was silent for a great while; shadows dwelled beneath his eyes. At last he spoke.

"I shall round up the giants for you, and I will have audience with them in their mountain hall. They shall be made to understand the gravity of what they have wrought."

"Thank you, Wanderer—"

"You will pay dearly, impetuous wolfskin! You must swear an oath to me, an oath all of your people will be bound to, for as long as Niflheim remains beneath the curse of Loki's Daughter!"

"I will swear it."

"You must gather a number of your men and they will indeed learn the ways of the rimthursar. They must dwell amid the darkness and watch the way so that no one will pass. They must bid farewell to their wives, their sons, and their daughters, until the end. They must never waver in their task, or your people shall feel my vengeance."

Forseti added: "I will send a host of creatures loyal to me, and they will walk with your men and protect them."

"My blood is my oath," said Ivar, and as his knife bit into the flesh of his arm, nine crimson drops fell into the snow. "When, Wanderer - when will the end come?"

"I cannot say. I only know that you are not the only one who waits for it."

The chieftains of the rimthursar were brought back to

Niflheim and remained in council for two summers. At last they decided how best to block the Road from Hel. They emerged from their chamber and as they walked the long way to the Road's end even more rimthursar followed silently behind them, tools gleaming in the lamplight, solemn faces uttering no words. The giants worked day and night, carving the volcanic rock of the demiplane, plumbing its infinite depths to fashion a lake, The Lake of the Deepdweller. This lake would be a prison to a terrible creature, one powerful enough to devour Hel in the form the giants intended for her.

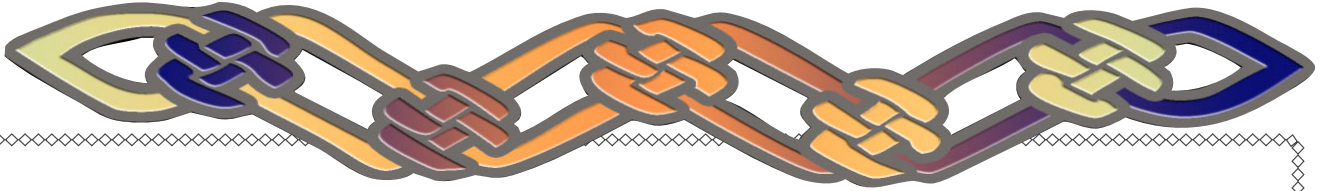
Across the lake the giants built a bridge. They called it The Hungry Bridge, *soltinn-bru*, for it rested less than a man's height above the water's surface. On the other side of the bridge two sentries, carved of stone, stood watch, their mouths wrought in eternal menace. Heavy magics were laid upon the sentries, and they held a powerful curse for the Daughter of Loki: should Hel ever pass the two statues, she would find she could not step further unless she accepted her own mortality. Once in mortal form, she would be allowed access to the bridge, under which the deepdweller - awoken by the screams of the sentries - would rise to devour her.

The remainder of the Road was now the responsibility of the *merkstaves*, the shadow-men - the guardians of the Mikill Gata.

THE MIKILL GATA

The Great Road is a demiplane of definite size. Its length is approximately 950 miles (1,529 km). It has a ceiling that fluctuates from a minimum height of 18 feet (4.6 m) to a maximum height of 100 feet (30.5 m).





Properties : The Great Road has normal time, magic, and gravity.

The Great Road is considered both a coterminous plane and a layered plane; as it connects to Niflheim at its easternmost and westernmost points it is coterminous, and as it connects to myriad other planes through The Hall of the Rimthursar it is layered.

THE HALL OF THE RIMTHURSAR

There are various underground pools and rivers that thread through the Mikill Gata, they contain no life but are a readily available source of fresh water. The Hall of the Rimthursar, with its seventeen doorways that connect to other planes, is both a source of great danger and a source of the merkstave's next meal.

Over the years since the Hall of the Rimthursar was built, many creatures have entered the Mikill Gata.

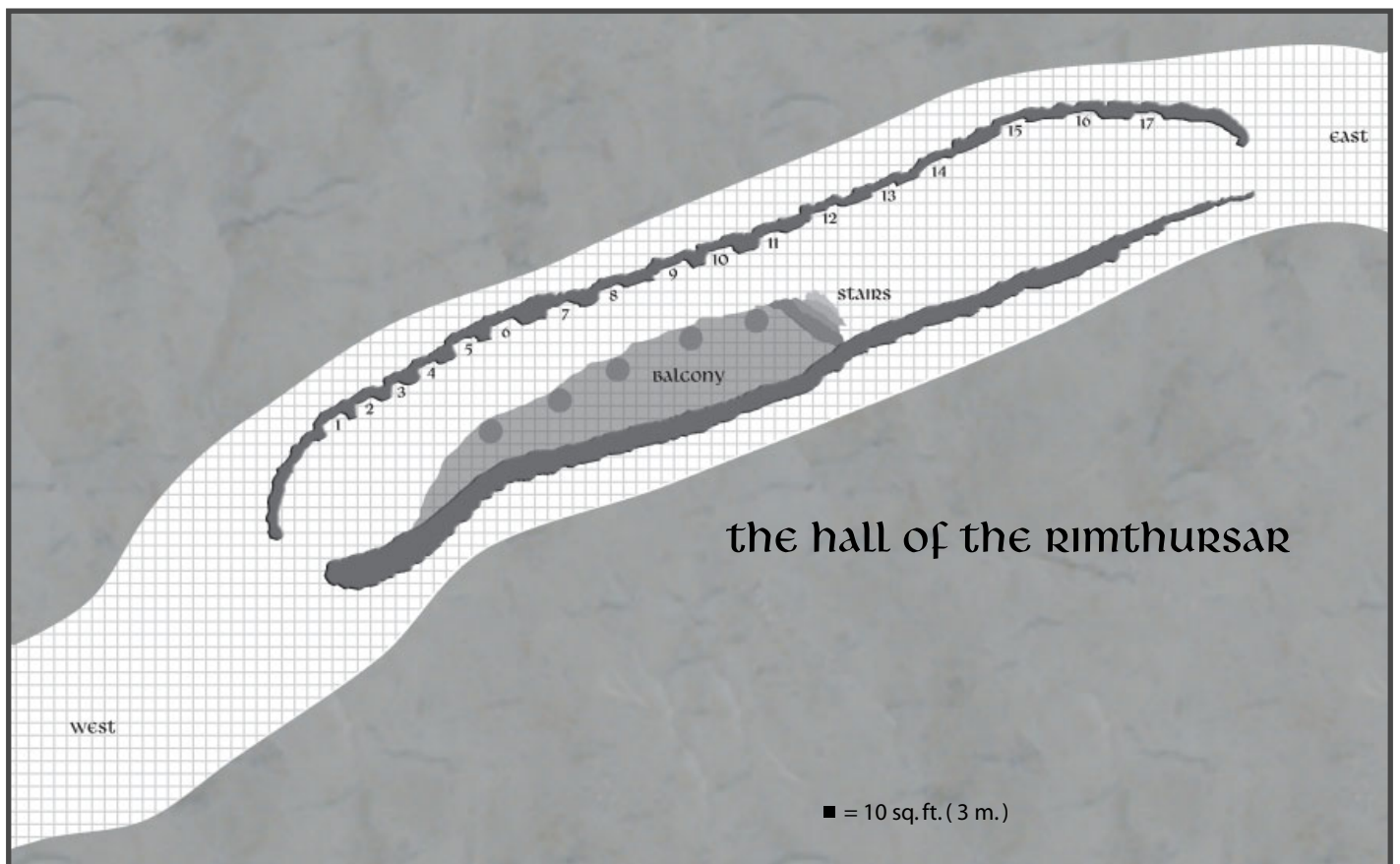
Some animals, suited to life underground, have remained and flourished - rats, fungus, and insects. Other creatures were lucky enough to find their way out again through the portals, still others were hunted by first the rimthursar, then the merkstaves, and still others were threatened the merkstaves for a while - until they died of starvation or exposure.

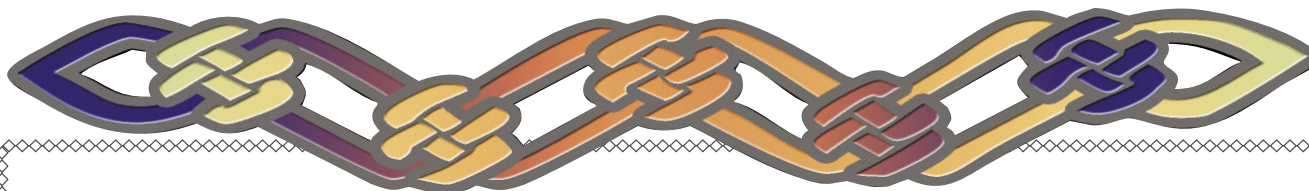
The seventeen otherplanar portals are in constant flux. Only the two doors that lead to the Road remain constant.

THE SEVENTEEN DOORS

The Hall has seventeen doors that lead to an innumerable amount of planes at any given time. The doors' otherplanar connections are constantly changing. The following is a sample of possible planes the doors can be connected to:

1. The Material Plane
2. The Ethereal Plane





3. The Plane of Shadow
4. The Positive Energy Plane
5. Elemental Planes: Earth, Air, Fire, Water
6. Qanaq - ice-bound demiplane
7. Pamiut - forested demiplane
8. Sinhamyan - volcanic demiplane
9. Neihn - demiplane of tall mountains and cloud-cities
10. Kol - jungle demiplane
11. Ahranega - plane of grasslands
12. Shooham - plane of ghosts
13. Brattahlid - oceanic demiplane
14. Pitilim - marsh-covered demiplane

Creatures In the Mikill Gata

It is entirely up to the GM's discretion as to which monster turns up in the subterranean twists and turns of the Great Road. Below is a sample encounter table:

d%	
1-5	dire wolverine (1-3)
6-10	cockatrice (1-5)
11-15	blink dog (1-4)
16-25	troglyte (1-3)
26-30	dire rat (3-18)
31-35	treant
36-40	devil, barbed
41-45	rust monster (1-2)
46-50	fiendish monstrous centipede, gargantuan
51-55	dire tiger
56-60	manticore
61-65	griffon
66-70	giant fire beetle (1-3)
71-75	yeth hound (1-2)
76-80	chaos beast (1-2)
81-85	frost worm
86-90	silver dragon, young adult
91-95	vampire
96-100	satyr (1-2)

The hall is naturally formed of volcanic rock, and its walls are uneven and marked with unusual formations: round,

rippled and pocked. Each "door" of the plane looks like a hollow in the northern wall of the room. Long, thin worm-like stalagmites hang from the 100 ft. (30.5 m) high ceiling, and thick, rippled stalagmites rise from the corners of the room.

Broad, uneven steps lead to a balcony about 45 ft. (13.7m) above the floor. The balcony has no wall or railing; it is merely a slab of volcanic rock balanced on thick, roughly-hewn columns.

There are two entries to the hall, one at the northeast end, the other at the southwest end. Neither have actual doors attached to them, however broken pieces of stone and metal indicate there may have been doors at one time.

The origins of the Hall are a mystery to even the merkstaves. It could have served as an observatory for the frost giants who built it, or perhaps a hunting area. Others speculate the giants used it merely as a device to travel to and from various planes, but neglected to close its seventeen portals when the left the Mikill Gata in the care of the merkstaves; still others say this was done purposefully to give the merkstaves a source of food.

THE HUNGRY BRIDGE

At the westernmost point of the Mikill Gata lies the Lake of the Deepdweller, a body of water unimaginably deep and so cold a man has mere moments before he slips into a state of shock, prey to what lies below.

What lies below is the deepdweller, a monstrous creature placed in the lake by the rimthursar.



The Soltinn-bru, known as the Hungry Bridge, spans the length of the lake, approximately 96 ft. (29 m.). Made of hewn stone, the bridge is supported by huge columns of granite which are covered in black glass and decorated with gruesome images of a tentacled beast.

Five buttresses support the bridge on each side, and give the area



an eerie semblance to the skeleton of some colossal behemoth spanning the still, black water.

The bridge sits less than 7 ft. (2 m.) above the water. Anyone walking over the bridge must make a Move Silently check DC 30 to avoid alerting the monster below.

The Deepdweller

Brought to the Mikill Gata by the rimthursar from a watery, subterranean realm, the deepdweller has been trapped in the lake for aeons. It waits in the cold, uncharted depths for any unwary creature that might scuttle across its bridge. It also waits for Hel.

At the western end of the bridge, guarding the westernmost part of the Road, sit two statues made of pale gray stone ribbed with gold. The statues have the form of winged, lion-tailed reptiles, their cold, chimerical eyes staring purposefully at the darkness ahead of them.

Should Hel ever breach the wall that connects the Road to Helgardth, she would need to pass the sentries before she stepped foot on the Hungry Bridge.

The sentries have two purposes: the first, to give Hel a choice - assume mortal form, or go no further than the statues; the second, to emit a piercing scream that would instantly alert the deepdweller of his purpose.

Deepdweller

Size/Type: Colossal Magical Beast (Aquatic)

Hit Dice: 36d10+396 (594 hp)

Initiative: +4 Speed: Swim 30 ft. (6 squares)

Armor Class: 32 (-8 size, +30 natural), touch 2, flat-footed 32

Base Attack/Grapple: +36/+68

Attack: Tentacle +52 melee (3d8+16/19-20)

Full Attack: 2 tentacles +52 melee (3d8+16/19-20) and 6 arms +50 melee (1d8+8) and bite +50 melee (6d6+8)

Space/Reach: 40 ft./20 ft. (120 ft. with tentacle, 90 ft. with arm)

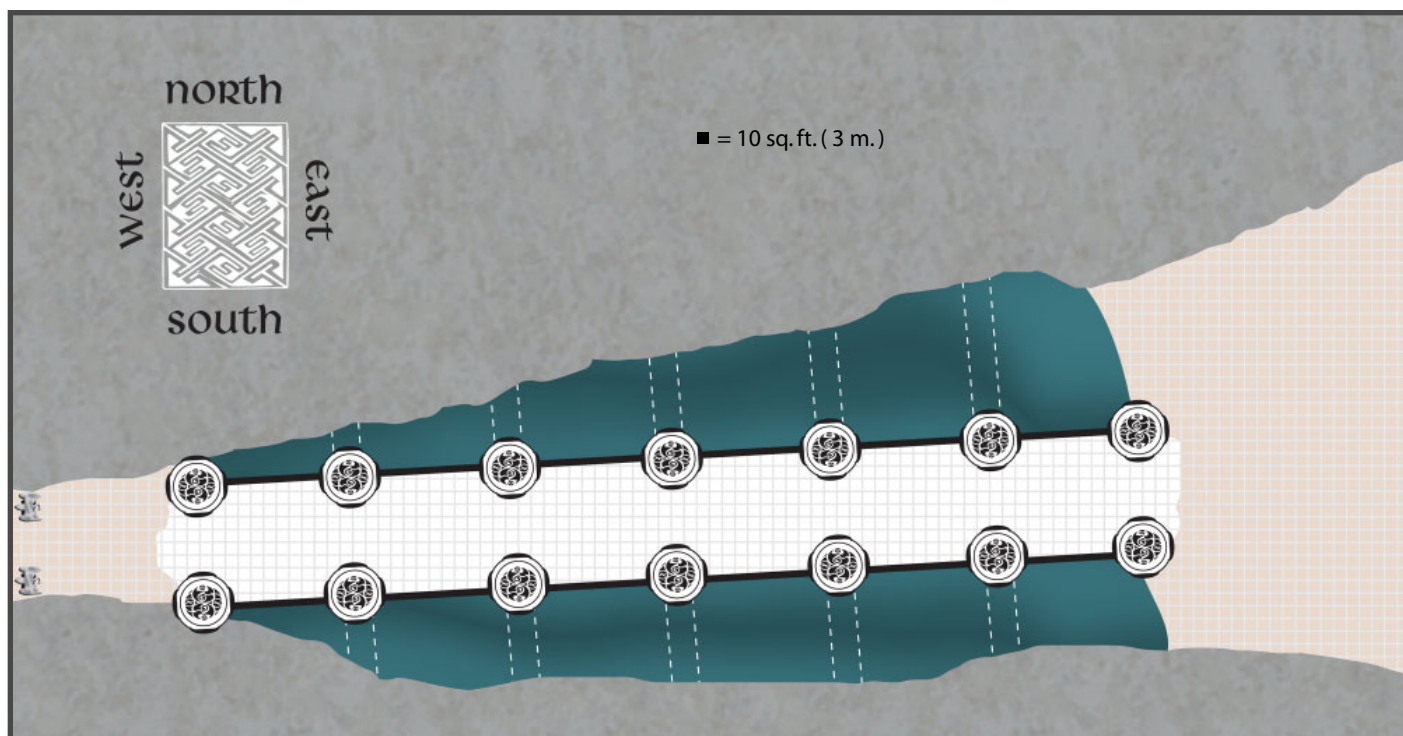
Special Attacks: Improved grab, constrict 3d8+16 or 1d8+8

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., ink cloud, jet, low-light vision, spell-like abilities

Saves: Fort +31, Ref +20, Will +17

Abilities: Str 42, Dex 10, Con 33, Int 21, Wis 20, Cha 20

Skills: Concentration +21, Diplomacy +7, Hide +0, Intimidate +35, Knowledge (geography) +17, Knowledge (local) +27, Knowledge (nature) +16, Listen +30, Search +28, Sense Motive +36, Spot +30, Survival



+15 (+17 following tracks), Swim +39, Use Magic Device +35

Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Expertise, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Armor (x4), Improved Trip, Iron Will, Multi-Attack, Snatch.

Environment: The Lake of the Deep Dweller, demi-plane of Niflheim

Organization: Unique

Challenge Rating: 25 Treasure: None

Alignment: Neutral

Advancement: -

Level Adjustment: -

Six of this immense creature's tentacles are shorter arms about 90 feet long; the remaining two are nearly 120 feet long and covered with barbs. Its beaklike mouth is located where the tentacles meet the lower portion of its body.

The deepdweller can speak Giant and Aquan, although it rarely feels the need to do so; it would rather ingest any potential conversationalists than speak.

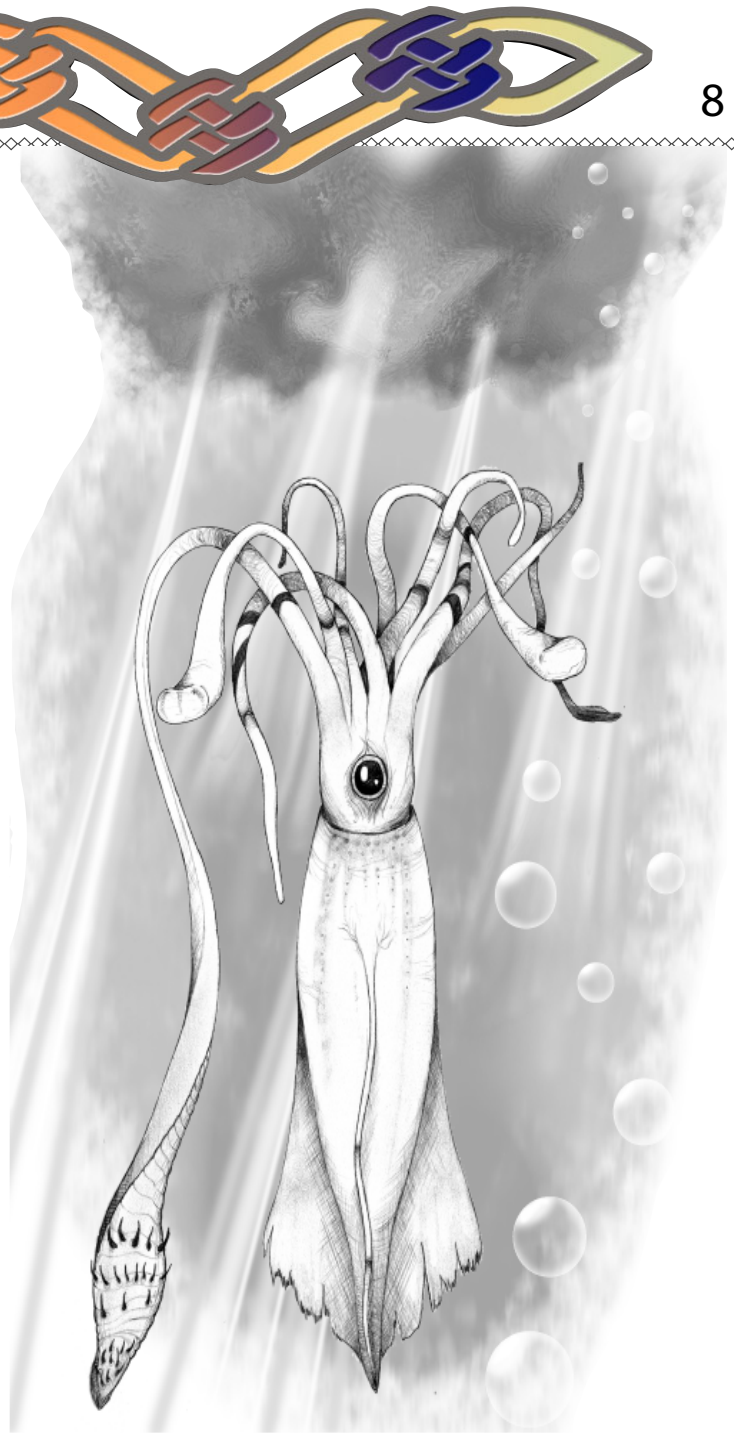
COMBAT

The deepdweller will lash out at opponents with its barbed tentacles, then grab and crush with his arms or simply drag victims into its huge gaping maw. An opponent can make sunder attempts against the deepdweller's tentacles or arms as if they were weapons.

A tentacle has 40 hit points, and the arms have 20 hit points. If the dweller is currently grappling a target with one tentacle or arm, it usually uses another limb to make its attack of opportunity against the sunder attempt.

The deepdweller can attack multiple targets simultaneously, and one of its favorite tactics is to grab prey using its snatch feat and then hurl them into walls or into the icy depths of the lake for snacking on later.

Severing a tentacle or arm deals damage to the dweller equal to half the limb's full normal hit points. The beast usually withdraws from combat if it loses both tentacles or three of its arms, although if Hel herself should step foot into the bridge chamber there is no known power

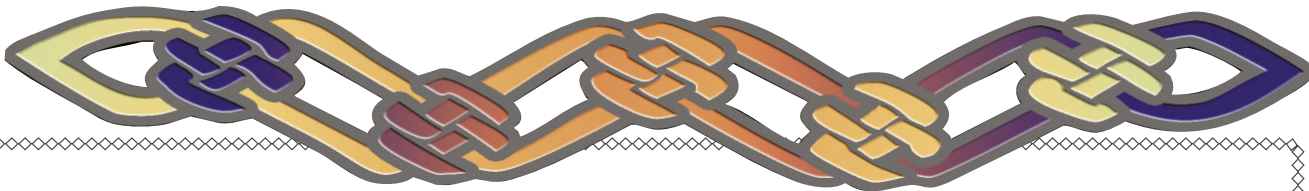


that can stop the deepdweller from attacking her while she is there.

The deepdweller can regrow severed limbs in 1d6+10 days.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the deepdweller must hit with an arm or tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Constrict (Ex): The deepdweller deals automatic arm or tentacle damage with a successful grapple check.



Jet (Ex): The deepdweller can jet backward once per round as a full-round action, at a speed of 280 feet. It must move in a straight line, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity while jetting. Considering the dimensions of its lake, such movement is usually straight down into the lake's depths.

Ink Cloud (Ex): The deepdweller can emit a cloud of jet-black ink in an 160-foot spread once per minute as a free action. The cloud provides total concealment, which the deepdweller normally uses to escape a fight that is going badly. Creatures within the cloud are considered to be in darkness.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day—acid fog, antipathy, dominate monster (DC 24), resist energy. Caster level 12th. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Skills: The deepdweller has a +10 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

THE MERKSTAVES

The word *merk* means "of the darkness," and the men and women who guard the Mikill Gata spend a good deal of their time in darkness. A light is both an illumination and a beacon to predators, so the merkstave must be thrifty with his lantern.

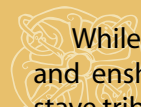
Each merkstave is accompanied by a *fyldja* (FAI-dyah). There are four different forms of *fyldja*: hare, wolf, bear and horse. The *fyldja* were given to the merkstaves by Forseti, the son of the fallen god Baldr.

FYLDJA FEATS

To become a merkstave, an aspirant must take the oath to Forseti that this path demands. By taking the oath, sworn so long ago by a former leader of the staves, a merkstave is granted a miniscule portion of Forseti's power, which manifests as a guardian or companion creature. These animals are called the *fyldja*, and they

are gifts of Forseti meant to help the merkstaves in their appointed task.

The oaths and the accompanying reward are represented by the *Fyldja Feats*. If the character is starting off at first level as a merkstave, he must fill his first feat slot with a *Fyldja* feat, for it is the *fyldja* that marks the merkstave for who and what he is.



While the merkstaves are a clandestine and enshrouded group within the larger stave tribes, they are not necessarily meant purely as NPCs. A stave PC joining the ranks of the merkstaves can lead the campaign into the different chapter dealing with the Road, and perhaps even an attempt by Hel to escape. Characters who start the campaign as merkstaves can lead interesting lives, bouncing between worlds and undertaking missions and creating tension and plot hooks to generate adventures for a long time.

Oath of Forseti [Fyldja]

You have taken the Oath of Forseti and have been given your *Fyldja* companion.

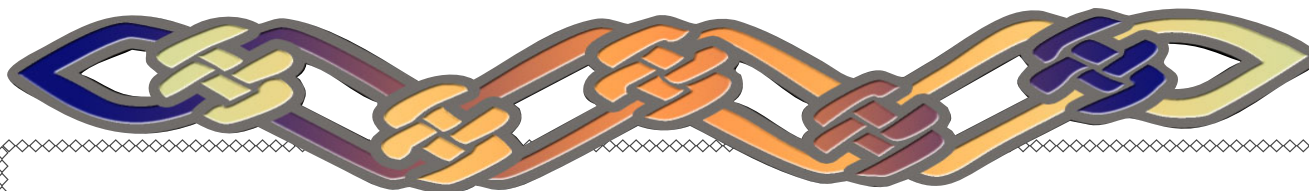
Prerequisites: Runefocus as a class ability.

Benefit: You gain a *fyldja* companion, a manifestation of Forseti's power given the same form as the totem animal of the path of the Stave you have chosen.

Path	Fyldja	Special abilities
Wolf	Wolf	+2 HD, Etherealness, Intelligence
Horse	Light Warhorse	+2 HD, Etherealness, Intelligence
Bear	Grizzly Bear	+2 HD, Etherealness, Intelligence
Hare	Dire Hare	+2 HD, Etherealness, Intelligence

+2 HD: *Fyldja* are more robust than the mundane members of their species, and as such they have +2 bonus hit dice.

Etherealness: *Fyldja* are able to become ethereal a



number of times per day equal to their merkstave companion's class level / 4 (minimum of 1). They may remain ethereal for up to 10 minutes during each manifestation, although they can combine multiple uses for longer durations. The effect can be dismissed at will, although if the duration is less than the full 10 minutes the daily use is still expended.

Intelligence: Fyldja are intelligent, self-aware creatures, unlike normal animals. All fyldja have an INT score of 8.

Improved Fyldja [Fyldja]

You have gained the attention of Forseti and through your deeds and/or dedication you have gained a bit more of his power for your fyldja companion.

Prerequisite: Oath of Forseti, 3rd Runefocus as a class ability

Benefit: Your fyldja gains new abilities and gains a measure of power beyond his more normal brothers.

Path	Fyldja	Special abilities
Wolf	Dire Wolf	Cause Fear, Telepathy
Horse	Heavy Warhorse	Fast Healing 3, Powerful Charge
Bear	Dire Bear	Spell Resistance 13, Rend
Hare	Large Dire Hare	Evasion, Invisibility

Note on the new form of the fyldja: When the fyldja increases in power, it is transformed into a more powerful version of the same animal type. All alterations to the previous animal (extra HD, any lasting damage or injury) will remain in place; i.e. these animals have +2 HD, and any scars, diseases or wounds it had gained are still apparent.

Cause Fear: Wolf fyldja can have the ability to *cause fear* as the spell of the same name. The Will save DC is 12, and is Wisdom-based. They may use this ability a number of times per day equal to their merkstave companion's class level/5.

Evasion: Hare fyldja have the remarkable ability to avoid damage. If called upon to make a Reflex save to avoid half of the damage from an attack, it instead takes no damage on a successful save.

Fast Healing: Horse fyldja have the ability to quickly recover from injury. They gain Fast Healing 3.

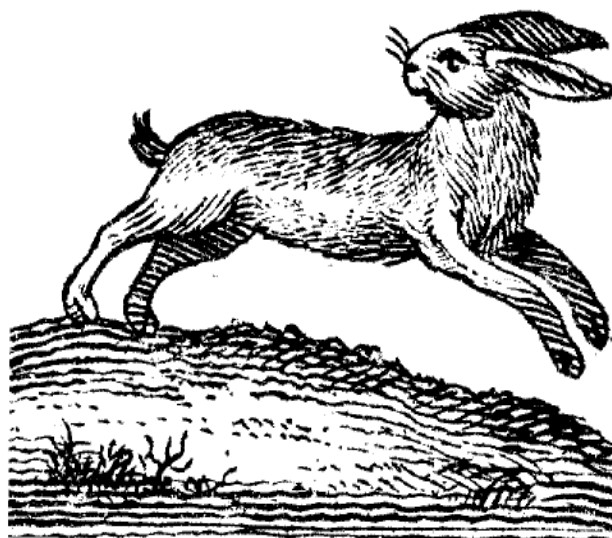
Invisibility: Hare fyldja have the ability to become invisible at will. They may do this up to three times a day for a number of rounds equal to ½ its merkstave companion's level each time. Aside from the duration, this ability is otherwise identical to the spell of the same name.

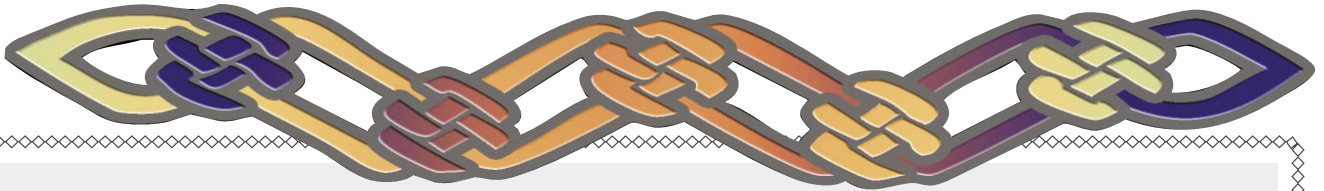
Powerful Charge: When a horse fyldja makes a charge, it deals an additional 2d6 damage.

Rend: Bear fyldja can cause terrible damage in battle. If they should hit a single opponent with both claw attacks in a single round, they may attempt to tear him apart. Such an attempt causes 3d8+15 points of damage.

Spell Resistance: Bear fyldja gain SR 13 as a special ability.

Telepathy: Wolves are the only fyldja that can become capable of actual communication with their companions. When this feat is taken, they can mentally communicate with their merkstave. The voice is always clear, calm and quiet despite any ambient interference. The range limit is 10 miles, although after 7 miles the voice of the fyldja begins to become more and more distant.





Excerpt from The Fishers of the Dead: Stave Class Options

Staves regard the quarterstaff as a symbol of Yggdrasil, the World Tree. Staves train their bodies to be both a tool and a weapon, like the quarterstaffs they revere, and from which the class draws its name. In Niflheim staves live simply, focusing themselves on meditation and the study of runic lore. They are reviled by their neighbors as uncanny, barbaric shapeshifters. These slurs have some basis in fact: staves are indeed uncanny and many know the secrets of adopting the forms of animals. Yet they regard themselves as peaceful folk who use their powers only to protect themselves and others from the various threats of Niflheim.

Plain-spoken: Many staves prefer to contemplate their runes rather than work to dispel the negative stereotypes that surround them. Their speech is direct, but often cryptic. Such characters gain a +2 to Concentration checks and, when conversing with non-staves, a -2 to Diplomacy and Bluff checks.

Stave classes: All staves share certain traits in common: they are adept in the use of quarterstaffs, and they practice rune magic, which gives them the ability to shapeshift. However their abilities otherwise depend on which rune they have chosen to represent the pathway for their own personal development. Some of these paths have fallen into disuse, but three are still practiced; the path of the Wolf, associated with the rune Ash; the path of the Bear, associated with the rune Is; and the path of the Horse, associated with the rune Sol. The discipline required to follow their rune paths demand an unwavering devotion to Law; all staves are lawfully aligned.

In game terms, stave characters choose one of the following paths. Each class is a variant of a core class, where some class abilities have been swapped for stave abilities. Use the table below to add class abilities to the variant core class of the path.

1st	1st Rune focus, Ur, knack (class skill)
3rd	Runegift (ability), knack (skill tied to runegift)
5th	Animal form, Kreft (disease), runic item
7th	2nd Rune focus, knack (any skill)

9th	Runegift
11th	Fast recovery, Kreft (poison)
12th	Greater animal form
13th	3rd Rune focus, Laug (spells)
15th	Runegift, unconscious focus
17th	Youth, Kreft (death magic)
19th	4th Rune focus
20th	Laug (mind ward), perfect knack.

The Path of the Wolf

Known as **Wolfskins** in popular parlance, these staves are associated with the rune **Ash**. Treat them as rangers, with the following changes:

Lose/Disadvantages: Animal companion, favored enemy, spellcasting.

Gain: Fast movement (+10 ft.), rune magic, and Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff) at 1st level, Animal form (wolf) at 5th level. Optional: Plain-spoken.

The Path of the Bear

Known as **Bearskins**, these staves are associated with the rune **Is**. Treat them as barbarians with the following changes:

Lose/Disadvantages: Rage, greater rage, illiteracy, indomitable will, tireless rage, mighty rage, trap sense.

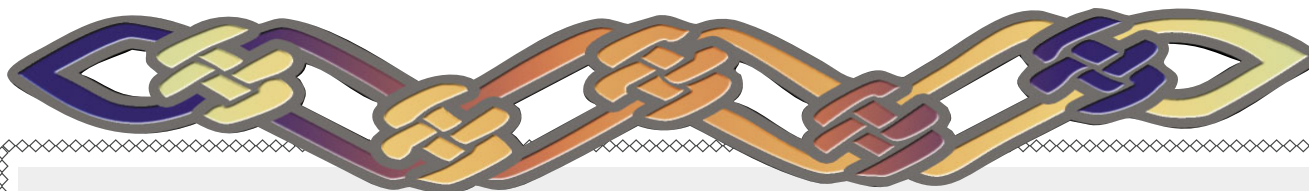
Gain: Rune magic and Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff) at 1st level, Animal form (bear) at 5th level. Optional: Plain-spoken.

The Path of the Horse

Known as **Horseskins**, these staves are associated with the rune **Sol**. Treat them as monks with the following changes:

Lose/Disadvantages: AC bonuses, purity of body, diamond body, diamond soul, multiclass limitations, timeless body.

Gain: Rune magic and Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff) at 1st level, Animal form (horse) at 5th level. Optional: Plain-spoken.



The Path of the Hare

Known as **Hareskins**, these staves are associated with the rune **Bjork**. Treat them as sorcerers with the following changes:

Loss/Disadvantages: Summon Familiar, 1 spell slot per day from each available spell level

Gain: Rune magic and Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff) at 1st level, Animal form (hare) at 5th level. Optional: Plain-spoken.

Multiclassing and Ex-staves: Except for shapeshifting, stave levels stack for the purposes of determining rune magic. A level 9/9 wolfskin/bearskin has the Youth special ability, and can shapeshift into either a Medium bear or wolf, but not into the form of a Large animal. For the purpose of determining multiclass xp penalties, all three stave classes are considered the same class; staves characters can multiclass freely with stave classes without penalties.

A character who ceases to be lawful can no longer advance in a stave class, but does not lose any class abilities. Such characters frequently take levels of fighter or wilderness rogue (*refer to the SRD Variant Class Rules*).

Rune Magic

The benefits of rune magic are supernatural unless otherwise specified. When rune magic duplicates the effect of a spell, the caster level is equal to your stave level.

Runefocus: You can meditate on a particular rune to attempt to become focused on an aspect of that rune, thereby unlocking its power. Most runes require focus to be used; see the individual rune descriptions for details. Focusing on a rune requires a DC 20 Concentration check. Focusing is a full-round action that provokes attacks of opportunity. Once you focus on a rune, you remain focused until you expend your focus, become unconscious, or go to sleep. Casting a spell requires as much concentration as maintaining runefocus. You must make a DC 20 Concentration check when you cast a spell; if you fail the check you expend your runefocus. Activating a spell-like or supernatural ability also requires a DC 30 Concentration check to

avoid expending your runefocus. You may expend your runefocus voluntarily to help make a Concentration check. If you do this, determine the result of the Concentration check as if the die roll were a 15.

A 1st level stave can only focus on one rune at a time, but this number increases with experience; two runes at 7th level, three at 13th level, and four runes at 19th level. If you focus on one fewer rune than is allowed you may cast spells (or use similar abilities) without having to make a Concentration check.

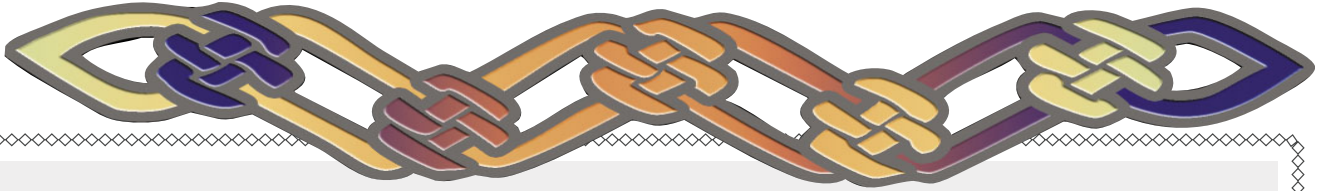
Ur: The first rune mastered is Ur, whose primal power provides protection to the stave who focuses on it. This protection manifests itself in the form of a shield bonus to armor class equal to your Wisdom bonus (or +2, whichever is higher). The bonus increases by +1 every five levels; +3 at level 5, +4 at level 10, +5 at level 15, and +6 at level 20. This invisible protection is force based, and so it applies even against ethereal or incorporeal opponents. There are no armor check penalties associated with the rune, and it does not interfere with any of your class abilities.

Knack: A knack applies the power of a rune to a single skill, chosen when the knack is acquired. The first knack you acquire applies to a class skill. The second knack applies to a skill governed by the ability to which you have a runegift. The third knack can apply to any skill, even one in which you don't have any ranks. When you focus on a knack, determine the result of any skill check with that skill as if the die roll were a 15.

Runegift: A runegift grants a +4 insight bonus to a particular ability score or type of saving throw. The exact benefit is chosen when the runegift is acquired, except that the first runegift can only apply to an ability score. The second and third runegifts can apply either to one's Will, Reflex or Fortitude saving throws, or to one of the six ability scores. You need to focus

RUNEGIFT RUNES

Ash: Wisdom
Ur: Strength
Sol: Charisma
Ar: Fortitude saves
Is: Intelligence
Nod: Will saves
Hagl: Dexterity
Yr: Constitution
Laug: Reflex saves



on the rune to enjoy the benefit of a runegift.

Animal form: At 5th level you may assume the form of your totem animal; a wolf, a young polar bear, a yearling colt, or a hare. Each type of animal is size Medium, except the hare which is size Tiny. While in animal form you gain a +10 bonus on Disguise checks when trying to pass as a normal animal of the indicated type. Up to 50 lbs. of equipment may be included in the transformation. All gear and magical items merge with your form but continue to function normally. Your natural armor increases by +2, which stacks with any natural armor you currently possess. Hares gain a size modifier to their AC. You lose the ability to speak intelligibly or to manipulate objects with your hands; they are effectively paws (or hooves).

You may change back and forth to your animal form as often as you like; each change requires a standard action and provokes an attack of opportunity. It does not require focus to assume animal form, but if you focus on the form you gain the use of the Endurance and Run feats.

Most game statistics are unchanged in animal form, but you cannot use normal weapons or unarmed attacks – only natural attacks, as follows.

BEAR: 2 claws at $d4 + \text{Str}$ (primary), 1 bite at $d6 + \frac{1}{2} \text{Str}$ (secondary: -5 to attack rolls).

WOLF: 1 bite at $1d6 + 1.5 \times \text{Str}$ (primary)

HORSE: 2 hooves at $1d3 + \text{Str}$ (primary)

HARE: None, although while in hare form the stave gains +20 ft. to movement

Special: As a stave does not gain the physical attributes of the animal form, in animal form you may use Power Attack to trade BAB for extra Strength. Increase your Strength by twice the amount you subtract from your BAB. This applies both inside and outside of combat. Although most game statistics are unchanged in animal form, the flavor of the statistics are appropriate to your new form. If you make a Climb check in the form of a bear, interpret the result as if a bear had made that check (bears climb better than humans, even though they don't have any ranks in that skill). Food appropriate to your animal form will nourish you when you are in that form.

Runic Item: If you have five or more levels of stave you may make runic items as if you were a spellcaster of your stave level. This allows you to ignore all prerequisite item crafting feats and prerequisite spells listed for the item. If you possess this feat you may focus on a stave or bow in order to do an additional +1d6 damage to any chaotic opponent struck.

Kreft (disease): You automatically make the Fortitude save against any disease whose DC is 20 or less. If you focus on the disease aspect of Kreft you cannot be infected by a new disease, and are unaffected by any disease you already have. This ability cannot cure a disease you already have, but it will halt its progression.

Kreft (poison): You automatically make the Fortitude save against any poison whose DC is 20 or less. If you focus on the poison aspect of Kreft you cannot become poisoned and are unaffected by any poison already in your system. This ability does not neutralize a poison already in your system, but prevents any further damage.

Fast recovery: At 11th level you learn how to recover runic focus quickly and unobtrusively. You may perform a brief meditation as a move equivalent action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. The Concentration DC for a fast recovery of runic focus is 30.

Greater animal form (12th level): As animal form, but the size assumed is Large instead of Medium (except for the hare, which assume Medium size, instead of Tiny), and more fierce. You gain a +2 size bonus to Strength, a -2 size penalty to Dexterity (to a minimum of 1), and a -1 penalty on attack rolls and AC due to your increased size. You occupy a space of 10 feet and a natural reach of 10 feet (except for the hare). You also gain an additional +2 to natural armor. Your natural attacks default to the following:

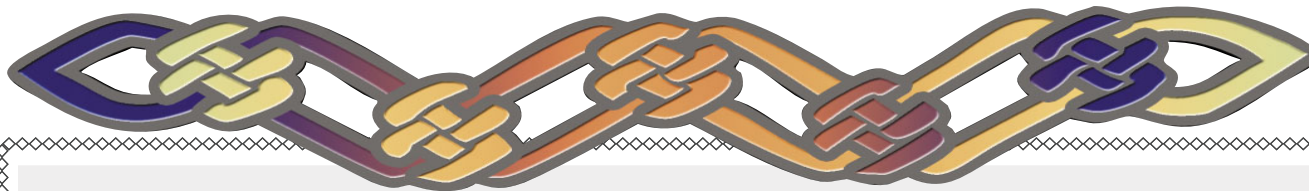
LARGE BEAR: 2 claws at $1d8 + \text{Str}$ (primary), 1 bite at $2d6 + \frac{1}{2} \text{Str}$ (secondary)

LARGE WOLF: 1 bite at $2d6 + 1.5 \times \text{Str}$ (primary)

LARGE HORSE: 2 hooves at $1d6 + \text{Str}$ (primary)

MEDIUM HARE: 1 bite at $1d6 + \text{Str}$ (primary)

Laug (spells): Meditation on the rune Laug grants you



Spell Resistance 20. If you focus on Laug you gain SR equal to your class level +10.

Unconscious Focus: Once you focus on a rune, you retain focus even if asleep or unconscious.

Youth: Your study of rune magic grants you health and extraordinarily long life. Treat your age as 1/2 of its actual value (to a minimum of young adult) for the purpose of ability penalties and maximum age. This is an extraordinary ability.

Kreft (death magic): You automatically make the Fortitude save against any death effect whose DC is 20 or less. If you focus on the death aspect of Kreft you are immune to death magic, energy drain and negative energy effects, as if by protected by a death ward.

Laug (mind ward): You automatically make your saving throw against any divination or mind affecting effect whose DC is 20 or lower. If you focus on the mental aspect of Laug you gain immunity to divination and mind affecting effects as if protected by a mind blank.

Perfect knack: When focused on a knack, determine the result of the skill check as if the die roll were a 20.

Sample Stave

Male human stave (bear) 5th level; CR 5; Medium humanoid; HD 5d12+10+3; hp 63; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14, touch 11, flat-footed 13; BAB +5; Grp +10; Atk +11 melee (1d6+6, quarterstaff); Full Atk: +11 melee (1d6+6, quarterstaff) or +7/+3 melee (1d6+6/1d6+6, quarterstaff); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA none; SQ Improved Uncanny Dodge, Runefocus, Animal Form; AL LN; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 20, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate ^K +12, Jump ^K +11, Listen +9, Survival +9; Skill Focus (Intimidate), Toughness, Combat Reflexes, [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Possessions: Studded leather armor, +1/+1 quarterstaff, backpack, bedroll, knife, 2 daggers

^K – skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

BEAR FORM

Male human stave (bear) 5th level; CR 5; Medium humanoid [augmented]; HD 5d12+10+3; hp 63; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15; BAB +5; Grp +10; Atk +10 melee (1d4+5, claw); Full Atk: +10 melee (1d4+5, 2 claws) and +5 melee (1d6+2, bite); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA none; SQ Improved Uncanny Dodge, Runefocus, Animal Form; AL LN; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 20, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate ^K +12, Jump ^K +11, Listen +9, Survival +9; Skill Focus (Intimidate), Toughness, Combat Reflexes, [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Feats

Devoted Focus

A rune is engraved on your very being.

Prerequisite: Access to a knack, or the appropriate form of Kreft or Laug.

Benefit: Prolonged study of a rune allows you to gain the full benefit even if it is not the object of focus.

Special: The rune must be prominently tattooed on your face or hands. This rune is visible even in your animal form as a patch of contrasting fur. This feat may be taken multiple times, applying to a different rune each time. Its effects stack.

Extra Knack

You have a broad range of reliable skills.

Prerequisite: Possession of a knack.

Benefit: Choose any skill according to the rules by which you chose a knack you already possess. You gain a knack for that skill.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times. Its effects stack.

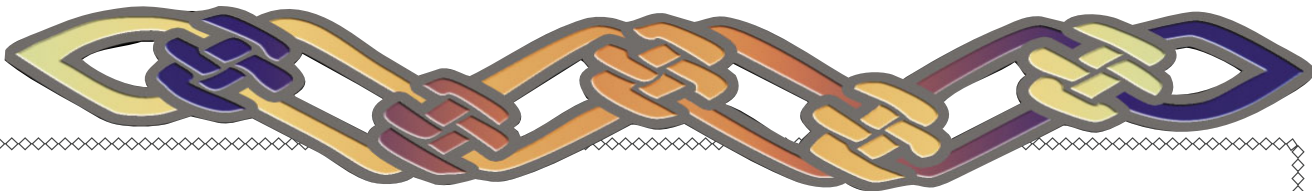
Greater Runegift

Your runegift has greater than normal effect.

Benefit: Choose a single runegift you possess.

The insight bonus for that runegift increases by +2.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times. Each time it is taken it applies to a different runegift. Its effects stack.



Life in Darkness

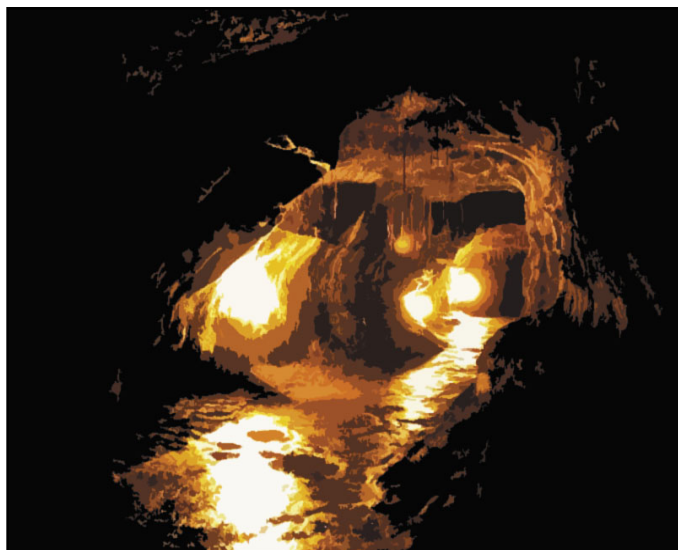
The merkstaves spend their days and nights in darkness, constantly moving along the miles of the Mikill Gata on patrol. Most merkstave troops are located near the Hall of the Rimthursar and the Hungry Bridge, but for every fifty miles of road there is usually one troop of five to seven individuals.

Merkstaves' personalities run the gamut from obsessively devoted and melancholy, to darkly humorous and sharp-tongued. There are those who've felt the effect of the constant darkness too deeply, and suffer for it - but the majority of merkstaves are cheerful and accepting of their fate.

COMMUNICATION ALONG THE ROAD

When one troop needs to send a message to the next nearest troops, one of two means of communication is utilized. Often, a merkstave will send his fyldja along to carry a message, either written on a scrap of cloth or with a small rock carved with runes.

The second method is more practical. Crops of stalagtites and stalagmites "grow" prodigiously along the road. Many of these vibrate when struck and produce a loud, musical tone. These notes can carry for miles. The merkstaves use a code to convey simple messages to each other.



TAPPING YMIR

The staves have an old legend that the mountains of Niflheim were formed from the body of an ancient giant, Ymir. The merkstaves refer to their musical code as *tapping ymir*.

Non-merkstaves would have little trouble hearing the music of the stalagmites/stalagtites, but they would have difficulty understanding the meaning behind them. Characters that know the spell *tongues* will be able to understand the messages being conveyed by the merkstaves, and may also be able to *tap ymir* themselves if they can find the right type of stalagtite/stalagmite nearby.

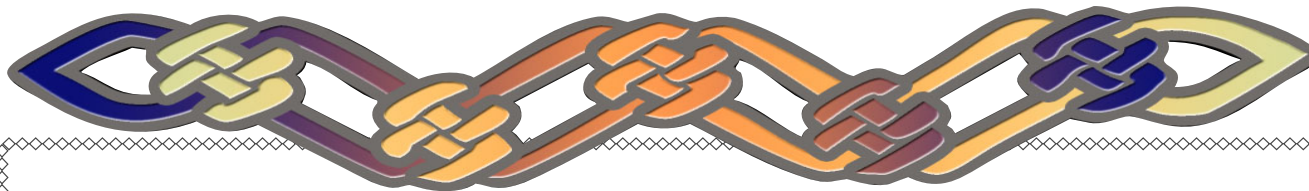
Below is a glossary of the most common messages used:

Three taps	Be aware; beginning of message.
Six taps	We require assistance.
Nine taps	Danger.
One tap; pause; one tap	All is well.
Long/short tap, long/short tap	We seek you; wait.
Four taps	Come join our meal.
Two taps	Repeat the message.

Sample Merkstave Troop

GORMR

- *Gormr is a natural hunter and thoroughly enjoys coming across the various extraplanar wildlife that wanders into the Mikill Gata.*
- *Gormr is fiercely loyal to HamI, and will never question his orders.*
- *Gormr is a little naive when it comes to strangers; he can be too welcoming of his own kind. He has a social side that can be his downfall if he ever meets other humanoids in the Mikill Gata.*
- *Gormr is claustrophobic, but only in extremely narrow places.*

**Gormr**

Male human Stave (bearskin) (barbarian) 6th level CR 6; Medium humanoid

HD d12; 56 hp

Init +1

Spd 30 ft.

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14

BAB +6/+1; Grp +11

Atk +12 melee (1d6+6, quarterstaff)

Full Atk: +12 melee (1d6+6, quarterstaff) or +12/+7

(1d6+6/1d6+6, quarterstaff) or +10/+5/+6 melee

(1d6+6/1d6+6/1d6+6, quarterstaff)

Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.

SA none

SQ Improved Uncanny Dodge, Runefocus, Animal Form

AL LN

SV Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +2

Str 21, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Climb +12^K, Intimidate +8, Listen +9, Survival +9^K; Cleave, Oath of Forseti, Power Attack, Two Weapon Fighting, [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)] Possessions: +1 Studded leather armor, +1/+1 quarterstaff, backpack, bedroll, knife

^K – Skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

Bear Form

Male human stave (bearskin) CR 6; Medium humanoid [augmented] HD d12; 56 hp Init +1 Spd 30 ft. AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16 BAB +6/+1; Grp +11 Atk +10 melee (1d6+6, quarterstaff) Full Atk: +10 melee (1d4+6, 2 claws) and +5 melee (1d6+6) Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft. SA none SQ Improved Uncanny Dodge, Runefocus, Animal Form AL LN SV Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +2 Str 21, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 9.

HAML

• *The leader of this small troop, Haml prefers to err on the side of careful. He will rarely take a risk that puts his fellow merkstaves in jeopardy.*

• *Haml prefers quiet. Loud outbursts irritate him.*

• *Haml's favorite place within the Road is the Temple of Freya; he perks up considerably when his troop is*

stationed at the easternmost section of the Mikill Gata. Looking out through the great ice windows and being able to see the waters of Niflheim brings him great joy.

Haml

Male human Stave (wolfskin) (ranger) 10th level CR 10; Medium humanoid

HD 10d8+30; 75 hp

Init +9

Spd 40 ft.

AC 19, touch 15, flat-footed 14

BAB +10/+5; Grp +11

Atk +12 melee (1d6+1, quarterstaff)

Full Atk: +12/+7 melee (1d6+1, quarterstaff) or

+10/+8/+10/+5 melee (1d6+1/1d6+1/1d6+1/1d6+1, quarterstaff)

Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.

SA Twin Weapon Style

SQ Improved Uncanny Dodge, Runefocus, Animal Form

AL LN

SV Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +3

Str 13, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 15.

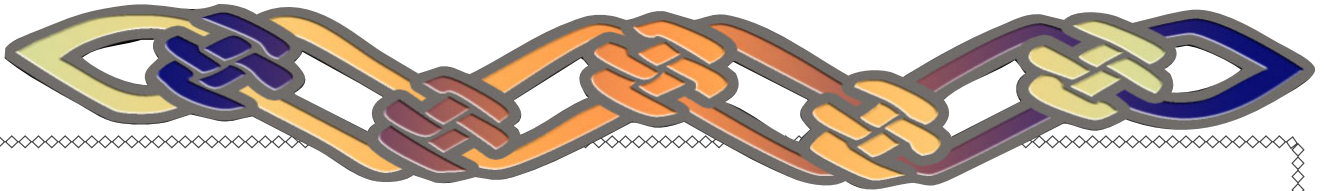
Skills and Feats: Climb +11, Concentration +8, Craft (boatswain) +8, Hide^K +12, Knowledge (geography) +8, Listen +12, Move Silently K +12, Search +10, Spot +12, Survival +8, Swim +10, Use Rope +10; Alertness, Athletic, [Endurance], Improved Initiative, [Improved Two Weapon Fighting], Oath of Forseti, Power Attack, [Two Weapon Fighting], [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Possessions: +1 hide armor, +1/+1 undead bane quarterstaff, backpack, bedroll, knife

^K – Skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

Wolf Form

Male human stave (wolfskin) 10th level CR 10; Medium humanoid [augmented] HD 10d8+30; 75 hp Init +9 Spd 40 ft. AC 19, touch 15, flat-footed 14 BAB +10/+5; Grp +11 Atk +10 melee (1d6+2, bite) Full Atk: +10 melee (1d6+2, bite) Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft. SA Twin Weapon Style SQ Improved Uncanny Dodge, Runefocus, Animal Form AL LN SV Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +3 Str 13, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 15.



ANI

• *Ani is quite at home in the dark, silent environment of the Mikill Gata. He finds a peace here that he didn't enjoy on Niflheim, and he would be quite happy to remain in the Road for the remainder of his days.*

• *Ani keeps a journal of his experiences in the Mikill Gata, written on scraps of cloth and leather that he's found during his travels along the Road. This is his prized possession.*

Ani

Male human Stave (horseskin) (monk) 8th level
CR 8; Medium humanoid
HD 8d8; 36 hp
Init +8
Spd 50 ft.
AC 18, touch 15, flat-footed 14
BAB +6/+1; Grp +8
Atk +10 melee (1d6+3, quarterstaff)
Full Atk: +10/+5 melee (1d6+3, quarterstaff) or
+8/+3/+8/+3 melee (1d6+3 quarterstaff)
or +7/+7/+2/+7/+2 melee (1d6+3 quarterstaff) or
+8/+3 melee (1d10+2 unarmed strike)
or +7/+7/+2 (1d10+2 unarmed strike)
Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.
SA Flurry of Blows, Ki strike (magic),
SQ Animal Form, Evasion, Rune focus, Slow Fall 40ft,
Still Mind, Wholeness of Body,
AL LN
SV Fort +6, Ref +10, Will +9
Str 14, Dex 19, Con 11, Int 9, Wis 16, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Climb +8, Hide +9 K, Listen +8, Move Silently +9 K, Search +4, Spot +8 K, Tumble +9; [Combat Reflexes], [Improved Grapple], Improved Initiative, [Improved Trip], Improved Two Weapon Fighting, Oath of Forseti, Two Weapon Fighting, [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Possessions: +1 hide armor, +1/+1 quarterstaff

K – Skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

Horse Form

Male human Stave (horse) (monk) 8th level
CR 8; Medium humanoid [augmented HD 8d8; 36 hp
Init +8 Spd 50 ft. AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 16 BAB
+6/+1; Grp +8 Atk +8 melee (1d3+2 hoof) Full Atk: +8
melee (1d3+2, 2 hooves) Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft. SA Ki
strike (magic), SQ Animal Form, Evasion, Rune focus,
Slow Fall 40ft, Still Mind, Wholeness of Body, AL LN
SV Fort +6, Ref +10, Will +9 Str 14, Dex 19, Con 11, Int 9,
Wis 16, Cha 12.

Bjartmarr

• *Bjartmarr has great affection for Inge, but he tries to keep this a secret.*

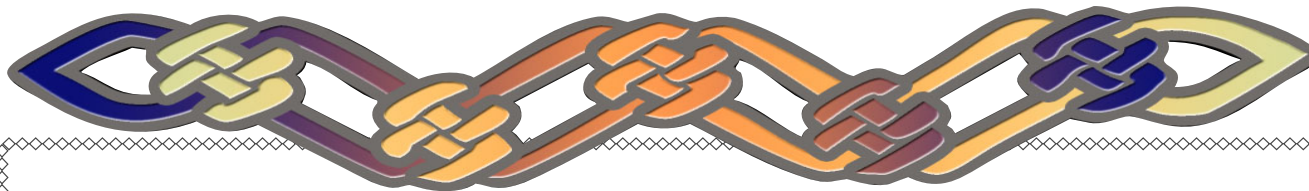
• *Bjartmarr is devoted to Forseti. His religious leanings made him some what of an outcast among the staves, but his new position as merkstave has granted him more respect than he ever dreamed he'd receive.*

• *Bjartmarr has a quick wit and loves to tell jokes or riddles to pass the time.*

Bjartmarr

Male human Stave (hareskin) (sorcerer) 5th level
CR 5 Medium humanoid
HD 5d4; 13 hp
Init +5
Spd 30 ft.
AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 10
BAB +2; Grp +4 Atk +4 melee (1d6+3, quarterstaff)
Full Atk: +4 melee (1d6+3, quarterstaff) or -2/-7 melee
(1d6+3, quarterstaff)
Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.
SA Spells
SQ Rune focus, Animal Form
AL LN
SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +4
Str 14, Dex 20, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 20.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +5 K, Knowledge (arcana) +8 K, Spellcraft +8, Hide +11, Move Silently +11, Spot +6, Listen +6; Eschew Materials, Natural Spell, Oath of Forseti, [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]
Spells per day: 5/5/3
Spells known: 0 - level: *detect magic, disrupt undead,*



mending, prestidigitation, ray of frost; 1st level: detect secret doors, detect undead, mage armor, magic missile, reduce person; 2nd level: acid arrow, fireball, hideous laughter

Possessions: +1/+0 quarterstaff, backpack, bedroll, knife, 2 daggers

κ – Skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

Hare Form

Male human Stave (hare) (sorcerer) 5th level CR 5 Tiny humanoid [augmented] HD 5d4; 13 hp Init +5 Spd 50 ft. AC 19, touch 17, flat-footed 14 BAB +2; Grp +4 Atk None Full Atk None Space/Reach 2.5 ft./2.5 ft. SA Spells SQ Runefocus, Animal Form AL LN SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +4 Str 14, Dex 20, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 20.

INGE

• *On Niflheim, Inge lost her only child to illness, and her husband, maddened by grief, left the tribe to roam in the wilderness. Becoming a merkstave has given Inge new purpose and she relishes the importance of her station.*

• *Inge enjoys a good fight.*

• *Inge has been having troubling dreams about the Hungry Bridge and the deepdweller.*

Inge

Female human Stave (wolf) (ranger) 8th level CR 8; Medium humanoid HD 8d8; 36 hp Init +4 Spd 40 ft. AC 17, touch, 14 flat-footed 13 BAB +8/+3; Grp +9 Atk +11 melee (1d6+1, quarterstaff) Full Atk: +11/+6 melee (1d6+1, quarterstaff) or +9/+4/+9/+4 melee (1d6+1, quarterstaff) Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft. SA none SQ, Runefocus, Animal Form, Woodland Stride, Swift Tracker AL LN

SV Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +6

Str 13, Dex 18, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 16

Skills and Feats: Heal +13, Hide +13, Knowledge (geography) +10^κ, Listen +11, Move Silently +13^κ, Search +9, Spot +11, Survival +13^κ; [Endurance], Great Fortitude, [Improved Two Weapon Fighting], Iron Will, Oath of Forseti, Self-Sufficient, [Track], [Two Weapon Fighting], [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Possessions: Studded leather armor, +1/+1 quarterstaff, dagger, 23 gp in various coinage

κ – Skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

Wolf Form

1 bite at 1d6 + 1.5 x Str (primary)

Female human Stave (wolf) (ranger) 8th level CR 8; Medium humanoid [augmented] HD 8d8; 36 hp Init +4 Spd 40 ft. AC 19, touch, 14 flat-footed 15 BAB +8; Grp +9 Atk +9 melee (1d6+2, bite) Full Atk: +9 melee (1d6+2, bite) Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft. SA none SQ, Runefocus, Animal Form, Woodland Stride, Swift Tracker AL LN SV Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +6 Str 13, Dex 18, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 16

Oire Hare

Medium Animal

Hit Dice: 3d8+9; 23 hp

Initiative: +3

Speed: 40 ft. (8 squares), burrow 10 ft.

Armor Class: 15 (+3 Dex, +2 natural), 13 touch, 12 flatfooted

Base Attack / Grapple: +2 / +4

Attack: Claw +4 melee (1d4+2)

Full Attack: 2 claws +4 melee (1d4+2) and bite -1 melee (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft. / 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Rake

Special Qualities: Low Light Vision, Tremorsense (60 ft), Scent

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +4

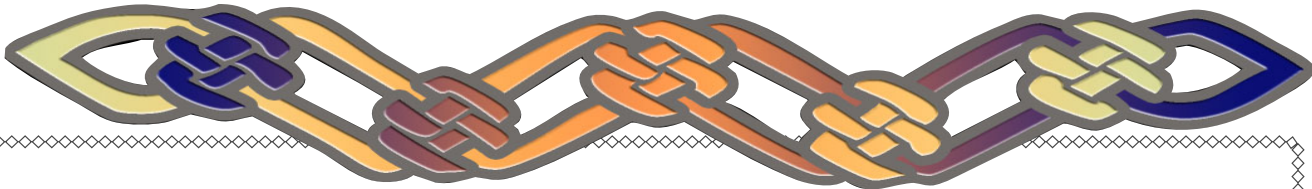
Abilities: Str 14, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills: Listen +6, Spot +6

Feats: Alertness, Toughness, Run B

Environment: Temperate forests and plains

Organization: Solitary, mated pair (2 parents +2d4)



young), warren (3-24)
 Challenge Rating: 2
 Treasure: None
 Alignment: Always neutral
 Advancement: 4-9 HD (Large)
 Level Adjustment: -

Despite the reputation of their more timid cousins, dire hares can be very dangerous, either singly or in groups. Warrens of dire hares on the move have been known to sweep through fertile farmland devouring everything edible from crops to livestock, including the occasional hapless individual. During nighttime hours, dire hares retreat either to previously prepared underground warrens or to temporary dens dug as the sun sets. They cannot burrow through solid stone, but they can tunnel through nearly anything less solid. The tunnels that they excavate are at least 5 ft. tall, and there are usually several larger chambers as well.

Dire hares grow from 5 to 7 feet in length, with large ears that usually stand erect atop their wide heads.

Their coloration varies by location and season; during the warmer months their colors are usually brown or dark green (assuming they live in forested areas) or even a dun brown (if they live in the plains), while in the winter months it changes to stark white.

COMBAT

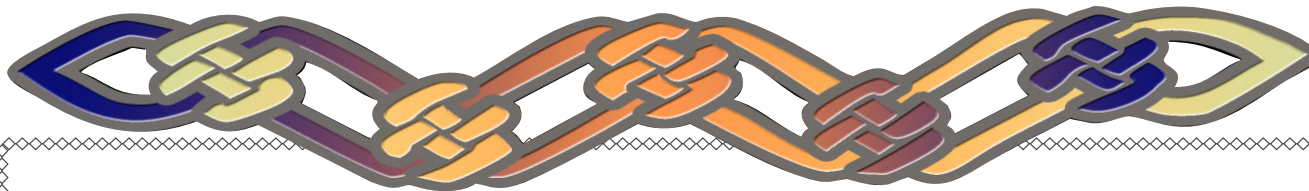
Rake: If a dire hare manages to hit with both claw attacks, it will rake with its rear claws dealing 2d4 additional points of damage.

THE WARRENS

The giants who built the Mikill Gata favored simple structures. Their purpose was not to build a great city or stronghold in Niflheim; in fact, it seems as if the rimthursar were fond of building meditative places - sanctuaries where they could go and ponder the mysteries of the universe. As such, the Mikill Gata has few quirks and peculiarities of original design.

Otherplanar visitors, however, have managed to carve





out dwelling places in the volcanic rock. The merkstaves call these minor dwellings "warrens", and indeed many of them are too small and burrow-like for most humanoid creatures to find comfortable. Some warrens are quite roomy, however, and serve the merkstaves well as base camps and sleeping quarters. The naturally-formed grooves and alcoves of the volcanic rock create small rooms and passageways lined with smooth shelves, and bunks for sleeping.

Another advantage of the warrens is the fact that the tunnels leading to them are often quite narrow, often at a width of five feet (1.524 m) or less just before the entrance to the living quarters. The twisting, narrowing tunnels can provide a convenient means of escape for a merkstave being chased by a larger predator.

Warrens appear along the entire length of the road, and the GM may create a section of warrens according to his or her needs. On page 23 is a sample of warrens that occur close to one of the waterfalls of Niflheim - where the great hawk Gnauroq guards a portal into the demiplane. Places where shelves are formed or carved into the walls are marked with an "A" for alcove. This particular section of warrens has many places too narrow for an average human to squeeze into, however, there are several places within these warrens that are roomy enough to provide shelter for the merkstaves.

Nine Men's Morris - a pastime of the merkstaves

When they're not fighting off interlopers from other planes, the merkstaves are fond of playing games. One of their favorites is called *Nine Men's Morris*.

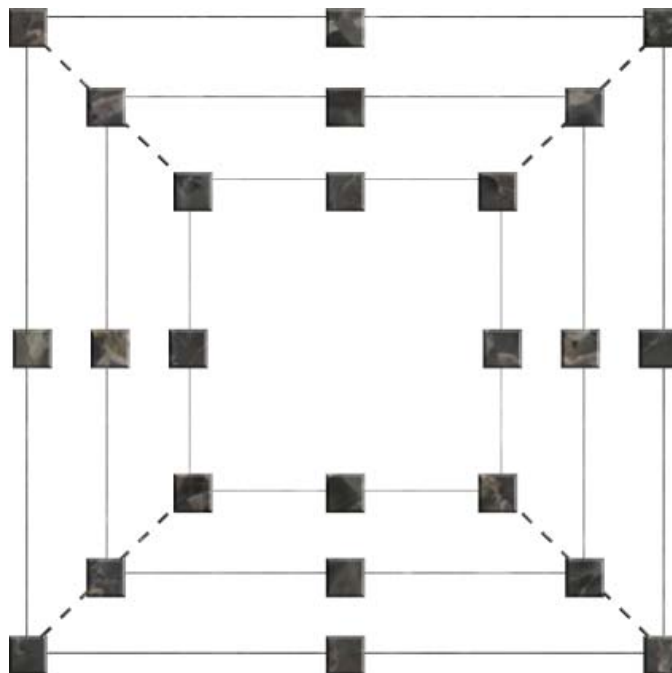
In the first stage of the game, each of the two players is permitted to place one of his nine pieces at any junction of line segments (corners or center-lines) in succession. An opponent's piece may be taken when a player manages to get three pieces on a single line segment (called a "mill").

When all pieces have been placed on the board, stage two begins (assuming one of the players hasn't wiped out his opponent; unusual but possible). Each player in succession may move one piece along any

line segment to the next junction on that segment. Jumping is not permitted. The object in this stage is also to form lines of three (mills).

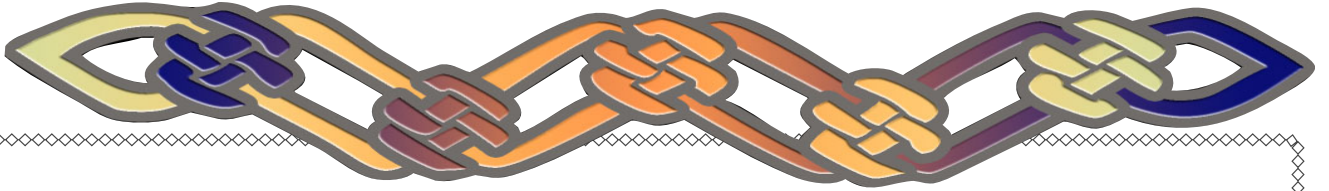
The game ends in one of three ways:

- 1) A tie, by agreement of the players that neither will be able to form further mills.
- 2) A win, where one player has been reduced to two pieces and is thus unable to make further mills.
- 3) A stalemate, where one of the players is physically unable to move any of his pieces due to the blocking positions of his opponent's pieces. The interpretation is to view this as a loss for the player who can't move.



THE TEMPLE OF FREYA

At the easternmost part of the Road lies a magnificent chamber. Enormous by human standards, the chamber is remarkable for several reasons. First is the series of large steps in the center of the chamber: each step is approximately eight feet in height and formed of solid ice. While the surface of each step is slightly slick when



climbed or stood upon, the steps never melt. Each step is a slightly different shade of ice and the steps appear to begin a dark, oceanic blue then graduate into paler shades of turquoise as they near the top.

At the top of this pyramid of steps stands a column of solid white ice carved with three likenesses of Freya. If one were to look into the column at just the right place, one would see a sword embedded in the ice. Too small for a giant's hands, the sword seems better-suited for a man; its arrival in the ice column was accidental and it's likely that the rimthursar workers did not notice its presence until after the temple was built.

THE STAIRS TO NIFLHEIM

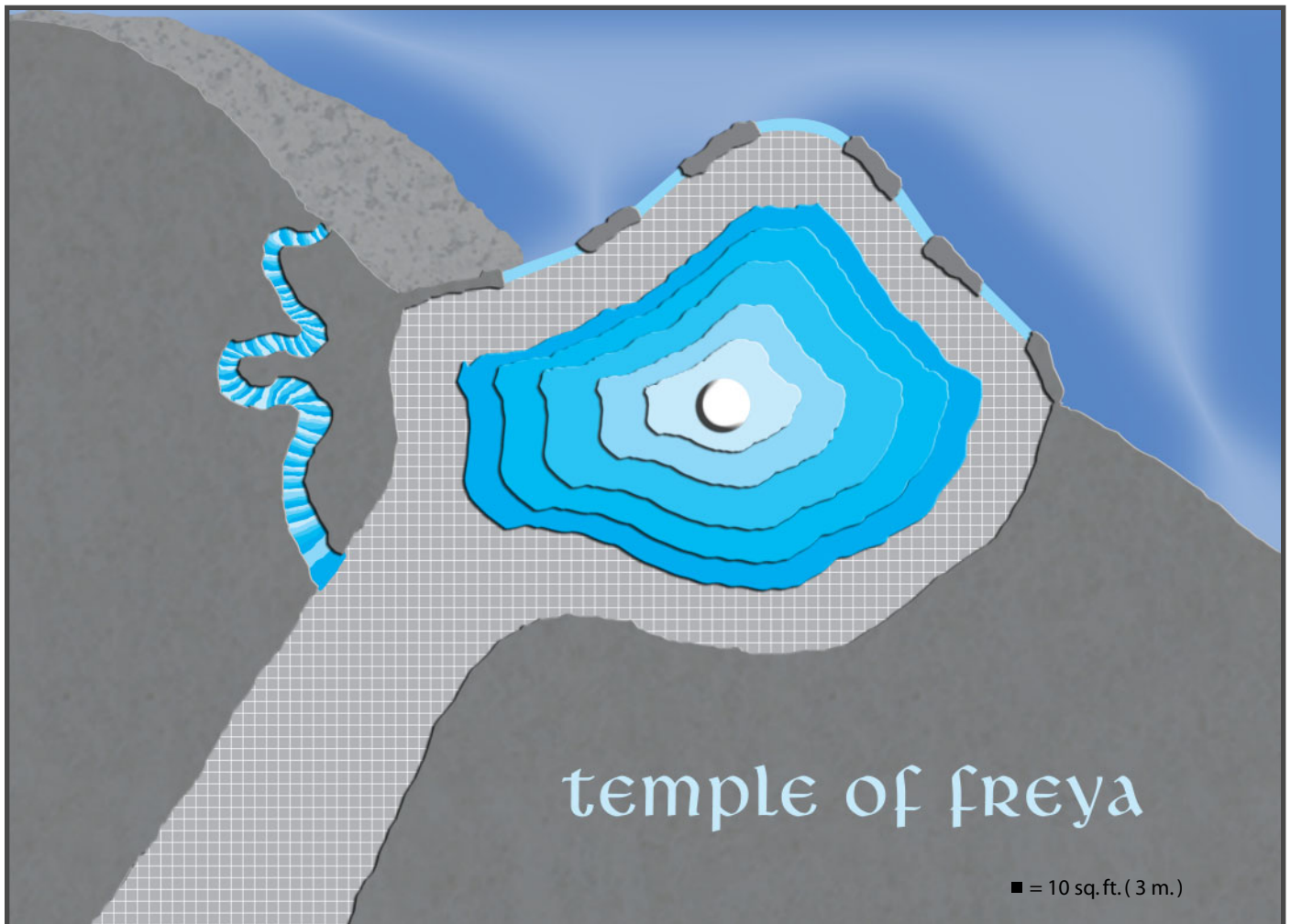
Leading down from a small doorway on the northeastern side of the road, just before the road opens up into the Temple of Freya, are stairs made

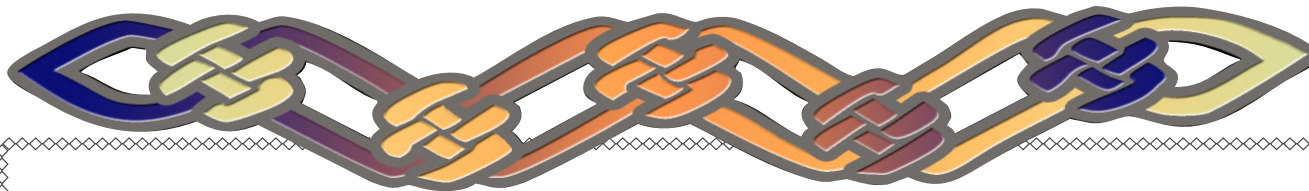
of the same varying shades of blue ice as the larger steps that lead up to the column of Freya. While the Temple's steps are smooth and level, clearly hewn by master builders, the steps leading down from the Road are quite irregular and ill-formed, making them treacherous to walk upon.

The steps go down for almost two miles (3.2 km). At the bottom of the steps is a solid wall of volcanic stone. Only those with abilities to travel between planes may pass through the stone; on the other side is a rocky beach of Niflheim. Lapping at the beach are the cold, dark waves of the North Sea, which is clean and free of the undead that plague the Sea of Death to the south.

THE WINDOWS OF THE NORTH

All along the outer wall of the Temple of Freya are huge windows made of thick, clear ice. Through these, the





North Sea of Niflheim can be seen.

Inscribed in runic language at the top of each of the fifteen ft. (4.57m) tall windows is the name of a rimthursar elder:

(clockwise from left)

1. Hymr
2. Saxa
3. Mistblindi
4. Helja
5. Baugi

Mistblindi's Mace

Mistblindi was one of the rimthursar architects and a powerful geomancer. He also enjoyed forging unique tools that would aid him in his work. While other rimthursar were content to look on while their workers did the actual digging, Mistblindi preferred to get his hands dirty and use his own muscle to see his designs to fruition.

Mistblindi's mace has the ability to cleave great chunks of rock in a style described by its bearer. For instance, calling out "high arch" in the language of the rimthursar while striking a wall of solid stone will actually create a large doorway topped by an expertly-curved arch, while tapping on the sides of a natural column of stone while chanting "ionic" slowly and quietly will result in a beautiful carved column. This ability can affect up to 100 cubic feet of stone every day.

The mace will only "awaken" and activate its powers if its maker's name is spoken, three times in succession. The name is engraved in very small runes along the beveled edges of the faceted pommel. In addition, it will shrink or enlarge to fit the grip of the one who wields it.

Should the mace remain dormant, it will remain a simple +3 heavy mace.

Strong Transmutation and Evocation; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, *disintegrate*, *earthquake*, *limited wish*, *mending*, *stoneshape*; Price 366,000 gp; Weight 9 lbs.

Hel's Blight

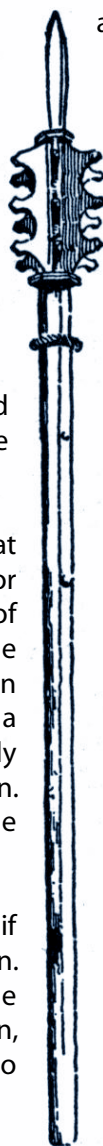
Those merkstaves who patrol the westernmost regions of the Road too long may find themselves falling ill to a terrible affliction. Called "Hel's Blight", the disease eats away at the heart of the victim and turns the person towards the nature of evil with each passing week.

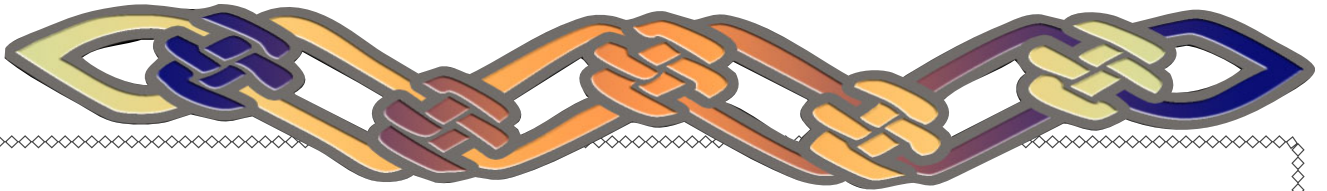
It is spread through contact (infection DC is Contact 18) and has an incubation period of 1d6 days. The damage is 1d4 Cha. During the infection, the afflicted suffers from severe tremors that inflict a -2 to all to hit rolls, saves, and skill checks. If Charisma is reduced to 0, the victim falls into a coma, but awakens three days later. As he continues to improve and heal from his illness, he begins to see the world through darker eyes. Every week after full recovery, his alignment shifts one step closer towards Chaotic Evil (i.e. Lawful will slip to Neutral and then to Chaotic, good falls to neutral and then evil). Only an atonement spell followed by a limited wish, wish, or miracle can restore the original alignment.

Nothung, the Sword of Need

According to legend, Nothung was forged by Odin himself and left for his son Sigmund. The Allfather was forced to take the weapon back for reasons that have never been clear, even in legends. Sigmund was killed when his father withdrew his power from the sword, and it was taken from the battlefield as booty by a frost giant of little import. Over the millennia since that battle, the various giants who have possessed the sword have added to the powers and gifts given the sword by its original creator.

This +4 keen longsword adjusts in size to suit the wielder. The weapon's original powers are varied: it can heal its wielder as with a cure moderate wounds for 2d8+3 hit points three times a day; it grants a +10 enhancement bonus to the wielder's Intimidate checks; and it can detect undead at will. The frost giants who took the sword added several other powers: it can bestow the benefits of a bless spell on the wielder and his companions (duration of 10 minutes); and it can quench fires within a 100 ft. cube centered on the sword as per the spell. Once per day, if





the point of the blade is driven into the ground and the name "Asabothilde" (meaning "god's compensation in battle," the name of the giant who granted this power) is called out, a blast of force is sent out from the sword in a 40 ft radius. This force blast will push any and all opponents, including those incorporeal and ethereal, in its path directly away from the sword to the edge of the blast. Should an individual strike an obstruction before reaching the edge, they will take 1d6 points of damage per 5 ft. of distance traveled.

The greatest ability given to the sword by the giants is for use against the Deepdweller. Should it be wielded against that monstrous guardian it gains a +6 enhancement bonus. In addition, it will strike the deepdweller dead if it manages a critical hit.

If the Nothung were freed from the column of ice in Freya's Temple, its owner would discover that the sword is quite intelligent, although it most often keeps to itself. Its personality is somewhat dour, though it does have a twisted and ironic sense of humor. It can communicate either through telepathy or speech, can glow a bright golden yellow that illuminates clearly in a 60 ft. radius and dimly to 120 ft., and it can perceive the world with sight, and darkvision. Its hearing is acute and it has 15 ranks in Listen. Its purpose now is to destroy the Dweepdweller, and it waits in its icy prison until the right hero can free it and allow it to commit to its destiny.

Strong all schools; CL 20th; Weight 15 lb.

AL CG; Int 18, Wis 10, Cha 18; Ego 30



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Helgardth

Soltinn-bru
(The Hungry Bridge)

The Lake of the
Deepdweller

Hall of the
Rimthursar

Gnauroq

The Mountain
King

Helka
Volcano



east

stairs

balcony

west

