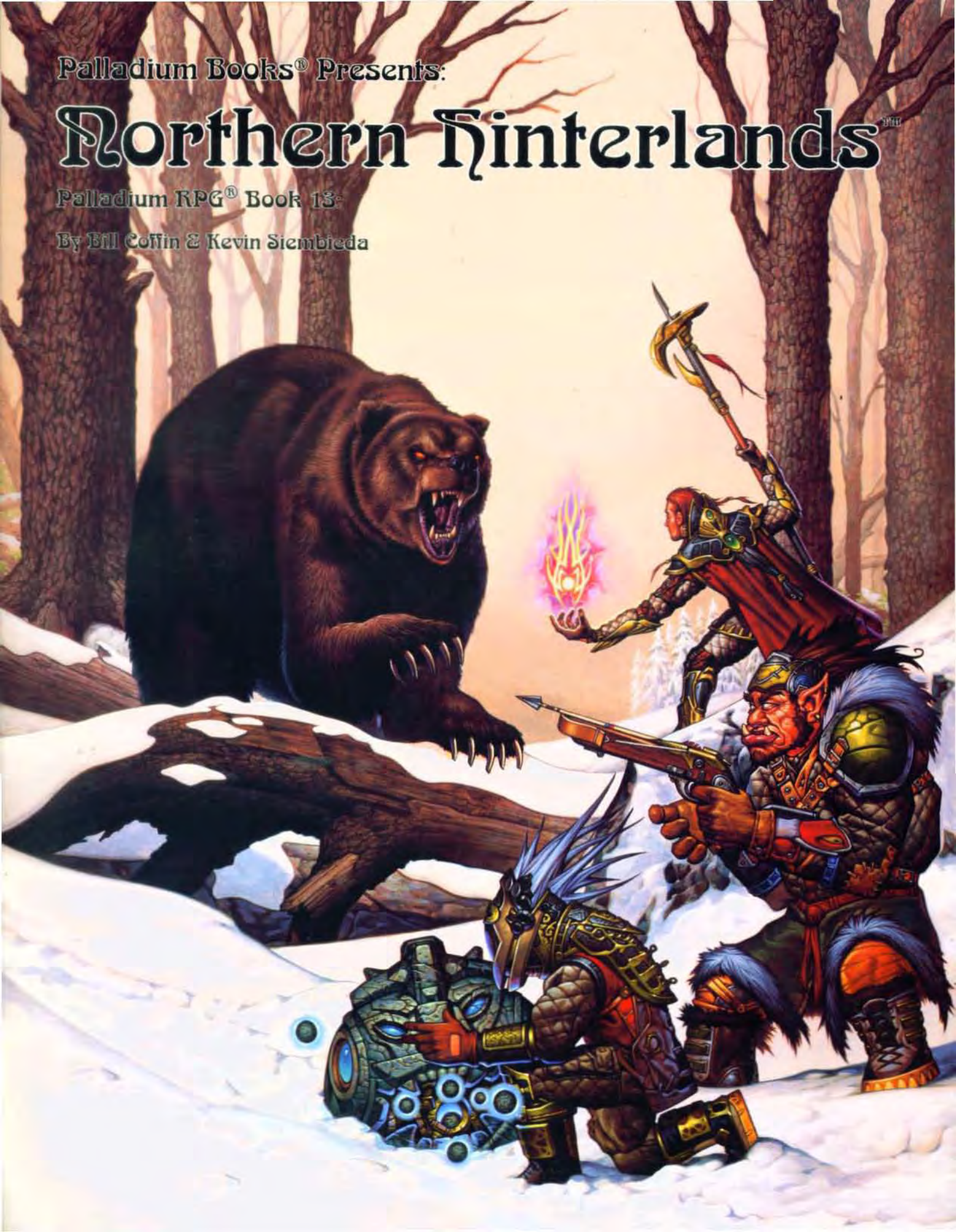


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# Northern Winterlands™

Palladium RPG® Book 13

By Bill Coffin & Kevin Siembieda





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## Dedication

As always, to Kevin and Maryann Siembieda, two heroes in a world full of dragons.

To my second family — Jim, Lynn and Shannon Higgins. Thanks so much for all of the support and encouragement you've given me. I love you guys.

And most of all, to Alli and Fiona, my twin princesses, who both bring so much light to my life. Here's to our never ending adventure together.

— Bill Coffin, 2001

To the multitude of fans who have waited so long to see the rest of the Palladium World revealed. Enjoy, and know there is more to come.

— Kevin Siembieda, 2001

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**Palladium Books® Presents:**

# **Northern Hinterlands™**

**A sourcebook for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®, 2nd Edition**

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**Special Thanks** to Bill Coffin for continuing to expand the Palladium World and to boldly go where few humans have set foot. And to my artists, Maryann, Steve, Alex, Wayne, Julius, Adam, Hank and the other heroes of the realm.

— *Kevin Siembieda, 2001*



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## A Stranger's Tale

"So ya be goin' to the Northern Hinterlands, are ya? Place of promise and danger. Figure to find treasure or make a reputation, eh?"

"Nah, ya don't haveta answer. Heard it all a million times. Hell, lads, done it myself.

"Oh, look at them smiles o' disbelief. I know whatcher thinkin' — Ol' Ben's just a crazy man lookin' fer some attention an' maybe a beer or two. Tell ya what, that beer sounds like a right good idea if y'all be kind enough, but I ain't crazy or lyin'. I've been there, alright. An' the experience almost kilt me. Thet's why I try ta give adventurers like yerselves a little advice. I ain't sayin' don't go. I'm sayin' be prepared. An' once ya think yer all prepared, realize ya ain't. 'Cuz unless ya grewed up in them parts, ya kin never be prepared fer the Hinterlands.

"Well, I don't see no beer comin' my way, but I see I got yer attention. Good. See this here, wooden stump of a leg?" The old buzzard clunks his peg-leg up on the table. Wood makes up everything from the knee down.

"Frostbite. Other foot's missin' three toes. An' I'm one o' the lucky ones. Now, ya probably heard tell of northern winters. How bad they kin be? Snow up ta yer waist in a single fall? Sudden blizzards an' all? Temperatures that kin freeze a man in his sleep? It's all true enough, but that ain't winter in the Hinterlands. That's winter in the Great Wilderness. Bad as it is in them parts, that ain't nuthin' compared to whatcha get in the Hinterlands.

"Best advice I kin give y'all is ta git out before the snow falls. Once the first flakes start ta hit the ground, ya best git to shelter and be prepared to hole up fer the next six months. No kiddin'. If yer more than a day or two away from a hearth an'

home, or some damn place ta spend the winter, yer probably dead men who don't know it yet.

"Ya see, winter there don't fall like nowhere else. It starts when the wind comes in off the ocean, an' sweeps across the land chillin' everythin' it touches. This keeps up fer what feels like forever. Every day a little greyer. A little colder.

"The leaf trees die and the sky goes gray and don't turn back until the spring thaw comes on the far side o' the next year. This is the dead time. The gray time. The frozen time. As bleak as that all sounds, it gets worse. Take me fer example. Me an' my mates knew a bad winter was brewin' when what few leaf trees there is in the Hinterlands went completely bare by the end o' September an' the nights would be freezin'. Skies turned by the first o' October, an' by the end of the month, the snow came.

"They say winter is a little longer an' a little stronger in the Great Northern Wilderness. True, but winter in the Hinterlands ain't like nothin' one 'spects ta find this side o' Hell. No lie. An' there ain't no outsider prepared fer it. Trust me on that one fellas.

"Me an' my mates, we was adventurers like y'all. Young and fulla spit an' vinegar. Thought we was invincible. Did some fightin' in the Disputed Lands and prospectin' in the Great Northern Wilderness. Spent a few winters there too, so we thought we knew what we was headin' for. We was wrong.

"Ya see, once the snow begins ta fall, it don't stop. It comes rollin' down from the mountains, smotherin' the landscape with so much whiteness that the eyes can hardly see through it. Thick, wet flakes come down like a relentless sheet. It started fer us in the mornin' an' by noon the world 'round was turned white. Hell, we was so stupid, at first we thought it was pretty.

Figured we pitch camp an' wait the storm out. Storms in the Great North kin be fierce, last days, but weren't nothin' new ta us. We was prepared, remember?

"Well, by nightfall two feet o' snow had covered the ground. Snow was still coming down so heavy that ya couldn't see more than 50 yards. Couldn't even see the mountains. It was as if the whole world turned white. We thought we'd hunker down ta wait it out. Only by the second day, when one of the tents caved in from the heavy snow an' two more feet covered the ground, we realized if we didn't move we was gonna git ourselves buried alive. That's when the winds kicked in. Violent, icy wind that feels like the fingers o' death clawin' at yer very soul. Wind that cuts through yer furs and clothin' like it were cheese cloth, an' freezes yer breath ta yer beard and mustache the instant ya breathe it out. Wind that almost seems alive, movin' an' shiftin' the snow ta create walls, mountains and canyons. God, it's .... it's .... ya just can't imagine it.

"I know, ya'll thinkin' I'm 'zaggeratin'. Wish I was. Ya gotta understand, once the snow starts fallin' in the Hinterlands, it just keeps comin' for days on end. By the end o' the week, over twelve feet o' snow covered the ground, an' the storm showed no sign o' stoppin'. Wouldn't stop fer months. Till the middle of January, but I'm gittin' ahead o' myself.

"In the Hinterlands, snow is measured by the yard, not inches. If yer lucky like we was, it'll slow down considerable after a week or two. It don't stop mind ya, but slows down ta deposit only an inch or three o' new snow every day. Problem is, by this point the world around ya has been transformed as if by magic. Everythin' ya thought ya knew is gone. The sky is slate gray, the snow keeps fallin' an' it's too cold fer much o' the snow ta melt. So it jus' keeps growin'.

"The icy wind smacks ya hard in the face every time ya look up or even try ta look ahead. After a while ya jus' feel like a whipped dog. Snow blankets the countryside an' weighs heavy on pine branches, pullin' 'em down low an' twistin' the shape o' the trees. That demonic wind helps ta transform the wilderness into something monstrous and unrecognizable. There is actually some windswept places where ya kin still see tufts o' grass poking through maybe only three ta six inches o' snow. They'll be gone 'fore long, eaten by what deer an' grazin' animals are fortunate enough ta find 'em.

"Then there's the endless fields o' snow. Ain't so bad after a while 'cuz it gits packed down in a few weeks an' one kin walk atop o' it pretty good. O' course, there's always new snow fallin' so no matter what, yer trudgin' through at least one ta three feet o' the white stuff all the time. Thing is, it ain't the deep snow that's so bad, it's that you don't know where ya is or where yer goin'. No sir, it's like ya been teleported ta some ice hell ya ain't never even dreamed about before.

"First, there ain't no sun, moon or stars ta steer by. Not even a hazy silhouette o' the sun tryin' ta poke through the clouds. It's gone. Swallowed by gray and white. Oh, it gits lighter durin' the day, but when I tell ya everything, sky included, is gray and white, I ain't kiddin'. The sun an' stars an' even the black sky o' night is smothered by a wall of gray clouds and snow that lasts all winter. Even when ya git into an open field, most o' the time ya can't see where the ground ends an' the sky begins. It jus' all runs together. That means one gray day looks pretty much like another. Without no heavenly bodies ta navigate by, believe me, yer lost.

"Second, there ain't no landmarks neither. The mountains, like the sky, is smothered by the gray an' white. If only ya'll could see 'em ya could follow 'em north or south, but ya can't. Half the time ya can't see no more than 50, 60 yards in front of yer own face. Git seperated from yer mates, an' yer on yer own.

"Third, the whole world is different. Not just covered in a blanket o' white, but the world ya knew is buried under six, ten, twenty feet o' snow. Creeks, boulders, trees, even houses and forts are buried under the white like they was never there. Rivers and lakes frozen solid an' covered over by snow don't look like water no more, but open fields. That means an open area could be anything, an' yer only foolin' yerself if ya believe it's a particular lake, river or place ya knew in the summer. Ya gotta realize thet the summer Hinterlands and winter Hinterlands is two completely different places. Don't try ta think o' one as the other, or compare the two, 'cuz thet only adds ta the confusion.

"Last, is the driftin'. Wind blowed snow thet builds snow mounds, walls, canyons, an' frozen arches three ta six times taller than a man. It's them drifts thet are real hell. Bad enough yer trudgin' through snow thet's knee ta hip deep, but ya gotta go up an' over or 'round these giant snow formations taller than a house. Besides, ya never know what's buried in one o' them drifts, an' its probably best that way too.

"Point is, the wind sculpts the snow into giant barriers. Personally, I believe ice demons come down from the mountains and deliberately build these things ta beguile an' torment us mortal men. Like I said, the land is completely transformed. Fergit about summer landmarks, 'cuz they is gone, boyo. Claimed by winter an' the ice demons. An' don't be lookin' ta identify any new ones fer this winter season, 'cuz the howlin' wind an' the snow thet jus' keeps fallin' and fallin' changes the landscape every few days. That's why the smart ones hunker down at a hearth 'n home or lodge ta sit out the next five or six months. O' course, the really smart ones hightail it outta the Hinterlands 'fore winter ever comes. The rest .... whether they be foolish, brave or outright stupid .... die or end up like me, survivin' by the grace of the gods, but end up crippled or squirrely. Yep, I got off lucky losing one leg, a few toes an' an ear. Half my mates died. Other half come out worse for the wear than me. At least I kept all but one of my fingers. I don't think there's anythin' worse than losin' yer fingers or hands.

"By early or mid-January, the snow finally stops. An' when the snow stops, it ends completely. Oh, the occasional light snow or February storm may sweep in from the mountains or sea, but fer the most part, the snow is over. The sun even comes out, turnin' the sky blue an' makin' the snow glisten like diamonds. Maybe ya could 'preciate it if ya weren't stuck god knows where in a frozen wilderness. Even without a wind, it's so cold the snow don't melt an' yer skin feels tight an' turns frozen in minutes if left uncovered. Ya kin feel yer beard and mustache as it gits ice encrusted from yer own breath, an' even the hairs in yer nose turn all stiff an' bristle with every snort of cold air. Bundled up like a Bearman, ya soon realize thet the sun ya missed fer so long ain't a welcomed sight after all, 'cuz the rays dancin' on the snow will turn ya blind sure as anything. The sun also brings out the predators and monsters who have been holed up since the snow began eight ta fourteen weeks earlier. They ain't in any better mood than y'all, an' are probably twice as hungry.



"Swallowed by the snow an' cold, ya be lost and trapped til spring thaw. Thet means ya git new enemies ta face 'sides the snow an' cold. Them enemies is boredom, cabin fever, madness and poor plannin'. The isolation o' bein' trapped indoors gits ta a body in ways ya might not imagine. It makes most people irritable, mean, an' depressed. Those who can't handle it so well, go a little squirrely in the head, but not too bad. Those who really can't handle it go completely crazy. I seen a man cut off his own foot an' eat it. Seen two others leave in the dead o' winter, preferrin' ta take their chances outside than stay with us in the lodge — never seen them boys ever agin. Mostly, people either stay to themselves or go lookin' fer trouble. I helped kill one man who went berserk, an' helped ta lock up two others 'cuz they turned into belligerent animals. Ya'd be surprised, but sometimes bein' with people is worse than bein' alone.

"Unprepared, though, is what kills most folks. Runnin' outta food an' starving. Runnin' outta wood for the fire an' freezin', not findin' a place ta hole up, not havin' the right cloths or shoes, an' stuff like that is what does most people in. Thet's also why so many hearth n' homes haveta turn strangers away. It ain't thet they is heartless or cruel, it's jus' thet they know if they take in more folks than they kin handle, they'll ALL die. It's sad, but true.

"Spring thaw ain't as welcomed as ya might think neither. As sudden an' hard as winter hits, it ends just as sharply. Sunlight and warm weather appears outta nowhere. One day it's colder than an ice demon's tail, the next, it's warm an' everything is wet an' drippin'. It's almost as if the gods or demons governin' the Hinterlands jus' say 'enough,' an' make it all end with a wave o' their hand.

"The sudden heat brings new problems. Fer one thing, it causes fog an' mist thicker than any snowstorm. Fog that makes travel or huntin' jus' as impossible as did the winter snows. Mist that conceals animals, monsters an' Coyles come down from the mountains or up from the southern grasslands.

"Ya gotta remember, nothin' in the Hinterlands is like anywhere else, an' spring ain't no different. There ain't no rain thet falls from the sky. No, the rain falls from the meltin' snow and ice coverin' the tree branches. Spring is also when frozen bodies is found stickin' outta the snows like spring flowers — food fer the animals an' bugs thet seem ta come crawlin' outta every nook an' cranny. Lots of bugs too. In fact, by the first day o' May, swarms o' mosquitos an' gnats explode onto the scene.

"April is the worst, 'cuz the quick meltdown turns the ground into a quagmire o' mist covered mud and swamp. A week or two into spring, the ice on the frozen rivers and lakes gits too thin fer a man ta walk on without fallin' through ta the icy water below. Not thet a body kin tell jus' by lookin'.

"Snow n' ice melts too fast fer the ground ta soak it all up, causin' rivers an' lakes ta spill over. Unless y'all is on high ground, there be a good chance ya might git washed away or encircled by flood waters. Then there's the rushin' waters from the mountains. Come down like rapids they do. I nearly got swept away in a flash flood myself.

"Since the ground can't soak up the water fast enough, there be floodin' everywhere till the middle o' June. Summer heat an' lack o' rain gives enough time fer the land to drink up the water eventually, an' fer the sun ta dry up the rest. By July, the ground

is dry an' the weather is pert 'nice. Don't usually git overbearin' hot an' everything is green an' beautiful.

"Yep, **summer** is right nice. 'Cept for the occassional thunder or lightnin' storm, there ain't much rain, so the weather is steady an' pleasant. When ya see her like this, the Northern Hinterlands is as beautiful a place as any. An' the game animals. Boys, there be deer n' moose, an' duck n' pheasant, goose an' quail, rabbit an' beaver, fox an' bear, an' a plentitude of animals to satisfy any hunter. I'm tellin' ya, one could kill a thousand deer in a day an' not make a dent. No kiddin'.

"Did I mention fishin'? Trout, pike, blue gill, an' a host o' others too numerous ta mention. Then there be critters like Unicorns, Pegasus, Peryton, an' other rare beasts who are more plentiful in the Hinterlands than anywhere else in the world this side o' the Land o' the Damned. O' course, there be plenty o' monsters too. Gods in heaven, you don't even wanna git me started talkin' bout all o' the animals n' monsters up there.

O' course the Hinterlands is dangerous any time. Fact is, each season brings its own brand o' trouble. In summer, the dense woodlands, hills, an' rocky ground creates a harsh terrain difficult ta traverse even on foot. The trees in the Hinterlands ain't as tall or densely packed as in the rest o' the Great Northern Wilderness to the east, but it's dense enough. Seen city folk git lost 30 yards from camp. The landscape may be green an' perty, but it's a tangle o' vines, fallen trees, rocks, scrub an' thick underbrush, makin' travel slow an' hazardous. Even horses an' pack animals must be taken at a slow, careful pace. Mules an' donkeys be the best. Takin' a horse is jus' askin' fer trouble. My guess is more than half pull up lame and haveta git put ta death, poor things.

"Even a man makin' his way through the Hinterland forests hasta be right careful, 'specially at night or if runnin' or chargin' ta battle. If he ain't, he be findin' hisself tangled in scrub, snared by thorns, or tripped by underbrush. All them dang vines, bushes, stunted trees, roots an' fallen trees makes it slow goin' fer sure. They be so thick in places, ya gotta chop yer way through 'em. Fortunately, the worst bramble is in the heart o' the Hinterlands in the Kididin, thinnin' out some as one moves west toward the mountains. Trees thin out there a bit too, but jus' a bit.

Even in the thinner forests, there be a thousand places ta hide or git ambushed. Fergit about tryin' ta prowl. It be hard ta move silent over a blanket o' leaves n' twigs, or steppin' over deadwood, or through a bramble o' brush. Most places in the woods ya can't clear see fer more than a hundred yards 'fore there is a cluster o' trees, boulders, or bush that could be concealin' anything — bear, boar, wolf, wild cat, or Bug Bear, Coyle, bandits or worse. An' there be plenty worse. Thus, the Hinterlands be a haven for bandits an' bushwhackers, not ta mention monsters an' outcasts.

"O' course there be a plentitude o' monsters up there. Most folk who don't know no better, an' I ain't suggestin' you fellas is amongst them, I'm jus' sayin' ta hear most folk south o' the Great Wilderness tell it, Wolfen, Coyles and human barbarians be the worst of the lot, but that ain't so. **Wolfen** ain't hardly in these parts. I seen jus' as many humans, Dwarves, Elves an' Gnomes up there as Wolfen. Hell, this is the place ta see Gnomes by the cart load. Unless somethin' is happenin' ta bring 'em over from the east, ya don't see Wolfen in great numbers.

Mostly mongrel hunters, trappers, an' small adventure groups o' a few ta maybe a dozen or two. Now maybe it's 'cause I make the distinction 'tween Wolfen an' Coyles an' the likes, that I have this view, but if ya gonna spend any time in them parts, ya need ta understand there's a huge difference 'tween all them walkin' mongrels.

"Like I said, Wolfen is the least o' your problems. Although they claim the Northern Hinterlands as part o' their wilderness empire, there ain't all that many of 'em. Sure there's the occasional village or town but most don't have more than two ta five hundred, with the biggest towns havin' maybe as many as 800 ta 1400. Life in the Hinterlands is hard fer all critters, even Wolfen. They be smart enough ta live in the northeast where the winter an' things ain't so bad. The other reason Wolfen ain't so dangerous in these parts is they ain't as aggressive or murderous as some o' the others livin' there. Hinterland Wolfen tend ta keep to themselves and don't go looking fer trouble like they do in the Disputed Lands. 'Sides, most Wolfen be civilized compared ta the other monster races. I found if ya leave 'em be an' show 'em a little respect, they kin be downright friendly .... um .... not that I'm .... uh, sayin' ta befriend them mongrel mutts. I'm jus' sayin' they're more like ya'll an' me than most civilized folk give 'em credit ta be. O' course that makes 'em a cunnin' enemy if ya'll git on their bad side.



"Now Coyles on the other hand, are worthless scum that should be kilt like mad dogs if ya ask me. They be the wild ones – the scourge o' the Disputed Lands. Savages who don't give care or consideration fer human life an' kill for plunder an' pleasure. Y'all stupid enough ta give yer trust or even fair consideration ta a Coyle, an' y'all be gittin' yer throats slit at the next opportunity. An' that's the truth, boyo, that's the truth!

"Now some people will tell ya there ain't no Coyles up in the Hinterlands, but that's 'cuz they're ignorant .... the people who say such a thin'. In fact, there's a lot people who'll tell ya a lot o' nothin' about the Hinterlands that ain't factual. O' course, I

kin understand this particular misconception. See, most Coyles live in the northeast. I mean there be millions o' them treacherous savages livin' in the east, so I guess by comparison there ain't hardly no Coyles in the Hinterlands. Maybe, eight or ten thousand at the most, with half o' them livin' down around Ophid's Grasslands an' the other half livin' along the valleys an' low ranges o' the Northern Mountains. Thing is, they be nomadic hunters, so bands o' ten ta forty Coyles make their way into the Hinterlands, 'specially in the spring an' summer when huntin' is best. Coyle outlaws find solace there too. Since even Wolfen be at a disadvantage in the Hinterlands, outlaws on the run from the Empire hole up in the Northern Hinterlands. Trouble is, them vermin seem ta find other lowlifes likes themselves an' take ta raidin' n' killin'. Ain't nothin' worse than runnin' inta bandits half o' which is Coyle an' the rest made up of Gigantes, Ogres, Orcs an' god knows what else. Like I said, avoid Coyles, don't trust 'em, an' if they give ya a lick o' trouble, cut 'em down 'fore they do ya any worse.

"I gotta say I like them ornery, little runts known as **Kankoran**. I know it ain't popular ta say nothin' good about dog folk, but there jus' ain't nothin' not ta like about these runts. Kankoran are sorta like walkin' foxes. They got red or reddish brown fur with a white, grey or tan underbelly. Kanks stand no more than five feet tall, but they be as strong an' tough as any Wolfen .... an' as fearless as any Bearman. Seen one o' the little fellers take down a Catoblepa all by his lonesome. Seen another kilt hisself a Dragonactyl, and a quartet o' the little fellows chase off a Gigantes an' four Orc raiders. Most Kankoran are rangers who know the Hinterlands better than any livin' creature in them parts, Bearmen an' Emerin bein' the only ones on par with 'em. Kanks ain't all thet fond o' Wolfen neither, an' show good sense by hatin' Coyles near as much as I do. Ya git yerself lost in the Hinterlands, the best thing ya kin do fer yerself is find a Kankoran an' convince him ta help ya. I found most ta be sympathetic an' kindly toward idjit outsiders, even humans. O' course there be some Kanks who see outsiders as invaders an' destroyers, an' they kin be trouble, but even the ornery one kin usually be convinced ta help by tradin' 'em small metal knives, hatchets, an' pickaxes, or maybe a magic item. Them runts loves magic o' any kind, even simple, cheap stuff.

"Kankoran have a hard life, if ya ask me. They want nothin' ta do with civilization or buildin' settlements. They live in small tribes o' maybe 40 or 50 people an' are constanly on the move. I ain't sure where they go ta hole up fer winter, an' they be one o' the few critters ya might find wanderin' 'round out in the middle o' dead time. They live offa the land as hunters an' see every scar on their powerful, little bodies as a badge o' honor an' a story ta tell. There ain't a critter alive more brave or tough than a Kankoran, not even pallodins nor them crazy Danzi in the East. An' them little buggers will fight ta the death, even 'gainst their Coyle or Wolfen kin, ta uphold somethin' they believe in or ta protect someone under their protection. Like I said, there ain't nothin' not ta like about them Kanks, 'cept they ain't human. An' I fer one, kin get past thet little detail.

"**Bearmen**, now them's a sight ta behold. Behemoths o' fur, claws an' fury. They stand ten feet tall, are as wide as two men, an' weigh more than half o' ton. They be as strong as any Ogre or Troll, an' kin wrestle down a real bear or dang Peryton with ease. The Hinterlands is home ta one o' the largest populations





o' these warrior huntsmen, with only the northeastern tip o' the Great Northern Wilderness havin' more.

"Now people will tell ya that Bearmen be savage monsters scarcely smarter than a mule, but it ain't so. Most Bearmen tend ta be simple folk, an' they ain't the sharpest axe in the woodshed, but they ain't nobody's fool an' don't tolerate bein' made the fool or the butt o' jokes nor cheatin'. Trick, shame or cheat a Bearman, an' ya have jus' made an enemy fer life – an' there ain't nothin' worse than earnin' the retribution o' a Bearman, boyos. Nothin'!

"Anyway, if y'all treat Bearmen cordial-like, they kin be friendly enough an' maybe trade some news, stories an' chow. Good company can be hard ta find out in the wilderness, so ya take what ya kin git. I found they be excellent travellin' companions, cuz they don't talk yer ear off, an' know the land better than anybody short o' the Kankoran. I've been tol' thet Emerin be just as knowledgeable, but I ain't never got comfortable with the Emerin. Jus' don't seem natural ta saddle up ta a dang mountain lion that's as smart as a man an' talks to ya in yer head. A musty ol' Bearman on the other hand, is somethin' I kin understand an' 'preciate. An' if ya be lucky enough ta earn one's trust an' befriend a Bearman, I heard tell they be yer friend ta the bitter end. O' course it kin be difficult ta warm up ta one these big fellas, an' it may be best ta avoid 'em if ya think yer gonna get 'em angry. Like I said, they don't 'preciate humor much, an' even Faerie Folk tend ta keep their distance from these big fellas.

"Bearmen are hunters an' woodsmen mostly. Dang good fighters, strong as a bull, but with enough sense not ta go lookin' fer trouble. Most avoid civilization except ta 'do some tradin'. The big fellas live offa the land like the Kanks but regularly trade furs, animal meat, and treasure they find in the forest with humans, Wolfen an' travelers they come upon. Half live an' hunt alone, the rest in pairs or small groups. Oddly enough, most don't 'ssociate with their own kind much, so ya often find a Bearman or two in the company of a mixed group o' humans or any combination o' woodland people – y'all would be surprised at the motley groups o' unlikely companaions ya find in the Hinterlands. Now these bands ain't usually too large, 'cuz Bearmen jus' don't feel comfortable 'round lots a folks. In fact, most big fellas I seen be the strong silent type, although they kin git as rowdy as the next fella when they git drunk or riled up. An' Bearmen kin put away the drink when they git a hankerin' ta do so.

"Now I could go on an' on 'bout Faerie Folk, people an' critters in the Hinterlands all night long, but I saw yer eyes light up when I mentioned treasure a minit ago. Sure, most folks like yerselves venture out into the Hinterlands in search o' only two things: adventure or treasure, if not both. I reckon from the looks o' y'all that it be adventure yer lookin' fer an' treasure most of all. If that be the case, then yer goin' ta the right place. Only it ain't as easy pickin's as ya might have been told.

"There be treasure in the Hinterlands alright. Treasure large an' small. Sometimes one kin stumble right on top o' it. Other times ya gotta search an' dig fer it, or fight fer it. I've heard tales o' men fallin' over a skeleton or findin' a fresh corpse pokin' outta the spring snow with a coin purse, backpack, weapons an' supplies still intact, an' waitin' ta be taken like holiday gifts under a tree. Sometimes such a find is minimal. Maybe a few dozen coins, a sword an' some food rations, but I'll tell ya, sometimes that's enough ta make the difference 'tween life an' death fer the lad who finds it. A dramatic example o' one man's loss bein' another man's gain, I'd say. O'course, it's the corpse with the magic ring or magic weapon or other valuables that's a real find.

"Oh, I recognize them looks on yer faces. These little wind-falls ain't exactly what ya was thinkin' about. Y'all dreamin' o' the jackpot. O' findin' forgotten ruins an' a king's buried treasure lost thousands o' years ago. Or is it the lost cities of gold or the secret o' the Crystal Cave ya have yer hopes set on? No.

Maybe it's the lair o' a dragon or sphinx or Syvan filled with gems an' magic waitin' fer a team o' warriors like yerselves, smart enough an' strong enough ta take it from the beast. No that ain't it either, is it? Although ya wouldn't complain none ta be so fortunate. Yer dreamin' o' legendary treasures like the Thunder Loop, Eye o' Eelmore, an' the Winter Glade. Ain't that so?

"Don't need ta answer, y'all sittin' there grinnin' like greedy little Bug Bears done tells me that I hit the mark. Well boyos, give it a try. A thousand or more travel ta the Hinterlands every spring with thet same dream. As ya already know, some find it. Some come back rich as kings or bearin' some ancient magic weapon or talisman that helps 'em become famous heroes or wealthy lords. That's fine an' dandy, lads. It's good ta have dreams an' take risks. Jus' remember, fer every adventurer who comes outta the Hinterlands rich as sin or turns into a hero, there be a hundred who comes out crippled like me, and five times as many who don't come out at all.

"I ain't meaning ta rain on yer parade, boyos. An' this ain't sour grapes, cuz despite the way I may look ta ya, I've been blessed with a long, good life. I want ya to think, jus' a little, 'fore ya run off head over heels into the Hinterlands. I ain't sayin' don't go. I know nothin' is gonna dissuade y'all from that. I'm sayin' don't get so caught up in the excitement an' challenge that ya lose sight of other options or the dangers thet await ya there. All I'm sayin' is think it all through from the git go.

"Let's say y'all git lucky. Kilt yerself a monster or three, find a king's ransom, an' a bucket o' magic items ta boot. Ya jus' accomplished somethin' thousands o' others have failed ta ever do. Congratulations. Now how ya gonna git it all home? Alive ta 'preciate it I mean. 'Cuz y'all gonna make a right good target carryin' yer sacks o' loot. Easy prey 'cuz not only will ya be laden down, but starry-eyed from yer o' accomplishment, probably

weakened, an' dreamin' about how yer gonna spend it all. Moreover, ya ain't gonna be quick ta surrender yer loot or sacrifice part o' it even if it might save yer scrawny necks. Ya worked too hard ta git it, an' ya won't be quick ta let it slip through yer fingers. Know what I mean?

"All I be sayin', is that gittin' yer treasure is only part o' the challenge. Gittin' it an' yerselves home alive is another story entirely. An' believe me, boyos, there'll be plenty o' people tryin' ta steal it away from ya. People an' monsters who won't hesitate ta slit yer throats in yer sleep or do whatever it takes ta git it fer themselves. An' thet monster may be one o' yer own buddies. Git what I'm sayin'?

"Personally, I think lots o' them treasures and arty-facts is found more regular than most folks believe. It's jus' along the way o' tryin' ta git it outta the Hinterlands, they meet with a cruel fate, an' the treasure or arty-fact is lost all over agin. I also suspect some o' those things is meant ta stay in the Hinterlands an' there be protectors, monsters, demons an' maybe even gods who make it their business ta make sure the item don't never make it out.

"One last thing ta think about 'fore I take my leave. Remember where ya be. The Northern Hinterlands is the cradle o' the fearsome Northern Mountains. A wall o' rock erected by the gods ta run from coast ta coast ta keep what monstrosities thet live on the other side away from folks like us. The mountains help ta keep the Land o' the Damned isolated from the rest o' the world fer a reason. I fer one don't want ta know what's on the other side o' them mountains. But even the best wall in the world can't keep everythin' out .... or in .... an' things git through. That's what makes 'em demon infested mountains, an' the beasts an' evil that gits out often comes down into the Hinterlands, contributin' ta make it a place o' danger an' monsters too.

"Now let me buy y'all a drink, an' wish ya well."



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# A Forgotten Land

By Bill Coffin & Kevin Siembieda

## An Overview of the Northern Hinterlands

The Northern Hinterlands region is peculiar to the Palladium World in that it is largely forgotten and ignored. It is rarely named or marked on any maps and is typically lumped together with the *Great Northern Wilderness*. The Hinterlands are not *recognized* as a sovereign nation, kingdom or even a territory. Even among the most learned scholars, it is disregarded as nothing more than the western third of the Great Northern Wilderness. Its harsh conditions and long winters make it unappealing for colonization and work to keep it a remote, uncivilized wilderness.

Indeed, to most of the civilized world, the Hinterlands do not exist. This is due, in large part, to the fact that most nations are located thousands of miles to the south. Being geographically removed from it, they simply don't know much about the land. To the casual observer, the Northern Hinterlands seems to flow seamlessly from the forests of the east and is nothing more than a largely uninhabited extension of the sprawling woodlands that are The Great Northern Wilderness. Because it is mistakenly seen as part of the great wilderness, it is erroneously believed to be filled with Wolfen (who are actually found in the greatest

numbers to the east of the Hinterlands) and a place devoid of civilization and teeming with wildlife. What stories that do trickle down to civilized lands are tales of wild animals, monsters, human barbarians, Wolfen, and savagery. Rumors abound about dark magic, ancient peoples and horrid monsters from bygone eras best left undisturbed and forgotten. All of this adds to the Northern Hinterlands' mystique as a dark and forbidding land of evil and savagery. A land where no one other than monsters, wilderness folk and society's castaways would consider living. The tales and trophies carried out of the Hinterlands by heroes and adventurers only serve to preserve the many misconceptions about the region, for most speak of their encounters, hard fought victories, foul beasts and monsters, and the treasure or reward won, rather than the land itself.

Even the people of the neighboring **Island Kingdom of Bizantium** have only a cursory knowledge of the region and have dared only to skirt the coastline of the Northern Hinterlands. They share many of the same misconceptions about the Hinterlands as the rest of the world, basing much of their "knowledge" on a litany of misconceptions, tall tales, legends and lies.

The Hinterlands also suffers from guilt by association, for the Northern Mountains run along its western border and beyond those mountains lies the fabled **Land of the Damned**, a land of

mystery and fear. The Land of the Damned is said to be the home to legions of monsters, demons and vile archaic races who survived the Age of Chaos. Wicked beings who practice forgotten black arts, command demon hordes and many of whom still worship (and serve?) the dreaded Old Ones. A shadow land said to be a little piece of Hell on earth, filled with evil and plagued by sorrow. A land commonly believed to have been damned and intentionally sealed off from the rest of the world by the gods of Light and Dark upon the defeat of the Old Ones. The Northern Hinterlands are at its backyard, and while the Northern Mountains contain most of the abominations that live in the Land of the Damned, there are those that escape and those who were never truly trapped within. Beings who make their home in the mountains and the Hinterlands.

## Doorstep to the Land of the Damned

For many adventurers and scholars, the reason for visiting the Northern Hinterlands is to find a way to the infamous **Land of the Damned**, for it is said that the only viable way *into* the region is through the *Northern Mountains*. One might not think there are many reasons to visit the so-called "End of the World" or "Hell's Threshold." The Land of the Damned is, after all, arguably the world's most dangerous place (with the Hinterlands and Yin-Sloth Jungles competing for a close second). However, a never-ending legion of adventurers, scholars and men of magic regularly come to the Northern Hinterlands and go to the Northern Mountains to find a way into the forbidden land. The reasons are many: To destroy evil, to plunder treasure from despicable monsters, to unearth lost knowledge, to learn secrets about the past, or to learn new or archaic forms of magic and for many, the simple thrill of facing one of the greatest of all challenges. (Many see the Northern Hinterlands in a similar vein and come for similar reasons.)

The Land of the Damned is inaccessible from the sea, as any ship that gets closer than a few miles disappears beneath the waves and is never seen again. On the northern shore, this phenomenon is attributed to a massive infestation of sea serpents in the Sea of Despair. On the southern shore, sailors from the Western Empire have been at a loss to explain the disappearance of ships venturing too close. Scholars believe a race of super-aggressive undersea humanoids have claimed the entire *Gedorma Strait* (the thin body of water connecting the Great Inland Sea to the outer ocean) as their domain, and will destroy any ship that does not pay them tribute. It is rumored that the nations in the Western Empire have figured out how to keep these sinister aquatic raiders at bay, but will not share their secrets with anyone else, which explains why the nations of Phi and Lopan have been unable to successfully navigate *any* ships through the Gedorma Strait in over 300 years. Of course, there are also powerful sorcerers, demons and elemental forces at work attacking vessels and sending them to a watery grave.

It might be possible for a few light vessels (mainly lifeboats and skiffs) to survive the carnage and successfully land on the shores of the Land of the Damned, but then the survivors are subject to the travails of the cursed land. Presumably, most befall some terrible fate at the hands of inhuman monsters. Cer-

tainly, few have made it out alive to tell their tales. In fact, it was piloting a ship too close to the foul waters of the Land of the Damned that swept the Defilers to its shores as survivors of a shipwreck. It is only their sterling reputation that has made scholars accept their subsequent adventures there as true. However, over the years, the stories of the Defilers' adventures in the Land of the Damned have been embellished, making some versions flights of fancy rather than an accurate portrayal of events.

The tales of destruction and death by sea routes to the Land of the Damned are so widespread throughout the world that even the boldest of sailors and pirates will NOT attempt it, not even for a king's ransom. That means trying to find a *land route* over the indomitable Northern Mountains – a wall of stone so high that it is said no air exists at the highest peaks. To approach the Northern Mountains, one must first travel through the Northern Hinterlands. There is just no other way. As a result, the Hinterlands are the "staging ground" for any expedition to the Land of the Damned. The *Shadow Coast of Bizantium* receives the majority of visitors intent on exploring the Land of the Damned as well as the Hinterlands or Northern Mountains. The Shadow Coast offers travelers and adventurers some modicum of civilization before entering the world's harshest realm, whether that be the mountains or the Hinterlands itself. It also has ties with the Island Kingdom of Bizantium, which is the only truly civilized nation in the north. (Most humans do not recognize the Wolfen Empire as a legitimate nation.) These heroes, explorers, fortune hunters and hardcases are inevitably drawn into the Northern Hinterlands' own mysteries and challenges. For most, the encounters and challenges they face in the Hinterlands are their baptism of fire before advancing to the Northern Mountains. Locals say that those who fall prey to the dangers of the Hinterlands en route to the Land of the Damned are blessed, for whatever fate they met in the woodlands pales before the soul-grinding oblivion awaiting them on the far side of the mountains.

Beyond the Great Northern Mountains is the mysterious and frightening Land of the Damned. It is a widely upheld belief that the Land of the Damned is largely inaccessible, and that any who manage to find their way in are likewise damned and forever trapped. However, there are a tiny handful who *claim* to have visited the Land of the Damned and returned to the known world to tell the tale. Many are dismissed out of hand as lies and tall tales, however, the legendary Defilers are among those who are said to have visited the hellish place and managed to return alive. The information that follows is an amalgamation of reports, claims and legends made by the Defilers and *others* who claim to have explored the Land of the Damned. Exactly how much is true and how much is fiction is known only to those who have honestly been there.

**The Northern Mountains** are generally regarded as part of the Land of the Damned. Greater than the mighty Himalayas of Earth, the Northern Mountains are the tallest and most forbidding mountain chain of the Palladium world. According to every major source of religious, historical, magical and scholastic lore, the mountains were crafted by the coalition of beings who defeated the Old Ones and put an end to the *Age of Chaos*. The victors of that titanic conflict (few that there were) erected the Northern Mountains to seal off the Old Ones' surviving minions and dark magic from the rest of the world. This served a dual



purpose. It protected the rest of creation from the horrors of the Old Ones' many different soldiers and worshipers (demons and monsters among them), and it also inflicted a terrible punishment on those blackguards who refused to forsake their evil masters. A punishment that forced these wicked minions to live amongst each other without the guidance of their gods or central leader, and without any friends or allies. Here, behind the mountains, these servants of evil live out their damned existence fighting each other in wars that can not ever be truly won.

The Mountains are meant to be unclimbable; otherwise, they would not be a very good containment measure. For the most part, the mountains do their job well. The Northern Mountains are sheer and jagged, providing the ultimate challenge to even the most skilled mountain climbers. So high are these peaks that any form of flight — natural or otherwise — proves insufficient. Fliers may only get to the two-thirds mark before they can gain no further altitude and must either turn back or try climbing the rest of the way.

For those on the mountain face, however, there is a whole other set of challenges aside from the nearly impossible task of hanging on for dear life. At higher altitudes, the air thins out and makes even the most routine tasks seem like great labor. Those not in prime physical condition often are too winded to go on. Those who realize this early on turn around and abort their climb. Those who realize this when they are already on the verge of exhaustion die on a lonely crag, too energy-starved to save themselves or easy prey for predators and monsters.

As if that were not enough, the weather of the Northern Mountains is murderous and unpredictable. Sudden storms, violent winds and extreme cold can maim or kill even the best prepared and hardiest adventurers, as the hundreds upon hundreds of frozen bodies stuck to the rocks attest. Rangers, Druids and other explorers can only predict the weather for a few hours at a time, and the winds and weather in the Northern Mountains change as frequently as a fickle woman's whims. Thus, a morning that starts out sunny and calm, can turn grey and rainy by noon, and by evening the cliffs could be ravaged by pounding rain or hammering winds. It is entirely the luck of the draw whether or not a climbing expedition gets hit by one or more killer storms, rock slides or flash floods at the worst possible time (as if there were ever a good time for such disasters). To survive the ordeal, only equal parts of skill and luck will suffice.

Despite the poor odds of success, there will be a select few with the right mix of cunning, courage, strength, skill and good fortune to find a way across the uncrossable. Most of those who have managed the feat claim to have found a hidden path through the mountains. One that threads its way around the base of the mountains and into the dozens of low-altitude valleys. It is in these valleys where small communities are said to thrive, sheltered from the rest of the world by mile-high stone walls on every side. Some of these places house collections of adventurers and their descendants who never made it to the other side and chose to build a life in seclusion. Others are the domain of monstrous tyrants, wild bands of mountain men, savage tribes or the lairs of those who want to be lost to the outside world. There are rumored to also be monasteries and cults of exclusive orders who likewise choose not to be part of the "civilized world." However, the stories that garner the greatest excitement are those that tell of secret valleys, home to the last great civilizations of Gnomes, Kobolds, Troglodytes, Changelings and the

last vestiges of ancient races and exotic beasts thought to have perished when the Age of Chaos ended. It has only recently been discovered that tribes of Minotaur (and other monster races) also inhabit these mountains.

Here, tucked away in the folds of the Northern Mountains, travelers may begin to learn the terrible secrets of forgotten magicks and people, as well as those of the Land of the Damned. The mountains — like the Northern Hinterlands and the Land of the Damned, also hold the promise of incredible treasure in the form of gold, gems, and magic items. Countless are the stories of lost treasures, dragon lairs, demonic hideaways, evil cults, sorcerers' towers, and ancient ruins and hidden tombs filled with treasure.

**Land of the Damned: The Great Rift.** Splitting the Land of the Damned in two is a canyon miles wide and deep. It is said to extend so far into the earth that in some places, the very fabric of the Megaverse tears open, forming interdimensional gates to realms nefarious and sinister, or exotic and wondrous. The largest and most stable of these gateways lead to the evil worlds of *Hades* and *Dyval*, but a collection of smaller gateways lead to lesser known infernal realms, ones which have not yet had the time or opportunity to establish strong footholds in the Palladium World. Thus, the creatures that issue forth from these places often find themselves either under attack from Demon or Deevil forces, or shanghaied into serving the more powerful and established demon hordes as their slaves and minions.

To the north of the Great Rift exist the outermost defenses of **The Citadel**, capital of the region known as **The Bleakness**, and arguably the strongest single power point in all of the Land of the Damned. So great are its armies of darkness that not even the endless hordes of demons and Deevils from the Great Rift can defeat them in battle. So, these fiends infest the plains to the south of the Great Rift instead, covering all of the land between the canyon, the bizarre forest region known as the **Darkest Heart**, and the region of undead known as the **Eternal Torment**. This strip of demon overrun land is called the **Blasted Lands**, because it has been so ravaged by marauding creatures and war that nothing lives here anymore. It looks as if a vast fire has scorched the landscape, stripping it of everything except for its thin, gritty soil and the rocks that jut from it.

**The Blasted Lands** form the battleground upon which the infernal forces of the Great Rift wage endless war on each other. They fight for no reason other than an unreasoning hatred of one another, retribution for past conflicts and an innate viciousness that compels them to inflict violence. No one side gains an upper hand for long, as temporary coalitions, alliances and strategic gains shift as easily as sand dunes in a windstorm. The casualties from this war are frightful, but there seems to be a never ending supply of reinforcements from the various gate points in the Great Rift, so until those gates are somehow closed, the hordes of infernal creatures blighting this land will never cease. That being the case, anything or anybody caught in the middle of their insane bloodletting will be torn to pieces as the combatants strive ever onward to their unattainable goal of total destruction of their enemies.

This is a land more or less divided into many little fiefdoms, each run by some kind of demonic Lord. Acting as generals and dark nobility, these sinister individuals control the war efforts in their own particular spheres, reveling in the power they command and using it to inflict punishment and torture upon their

enemies and anyone foolish enough to cross them. Some of these fiefdoms actually have something approaching a perverted form of law and order, while others are pure zones of anarchy where the strong survive and the meek are fodder and slaves.

Regardless of where one travels in the Great Rift and the Blasted Lands, one sees that this place exemplifies the bleak promise of the entire Land of the Damned – eternal hardship punctuated by dread, terror and the grinding toll of constant warfare. Outsiders are captured and enslaved, eaten or recruited (often through intimidation rather than any promise of reward) into one of the demonic armies.

**The Darkest Heart.** To the south of the Great Rift lies the *Darkest Heart*, an ancient forest teeming with life corrupted by the foul magicks of old. The forest is like a pocket dimension – far larger on the inside than on the outside. One can walk into it normally, but getting out requires some kind of magic trickery or dimensional traveling ability. Here, the woods are dominated by Faerie Folk who have also been corrupted by the dark magicks that warp all who live here. The Dark Faeries in particular are a vicious folk who delight only in the torment of others and playing endless tricks and tortures upon all who enter their domain. There are many kinds of Faeries unique to these woods, as well as “ordinary” wee folk whose hearts have been blackened, and whose physical forms have shriveled and turned to reflect that change in their souls.

The various humanoid animals that inhabit the *Darkest Heart* live much like animals, motivated primarily by three urges – eating, sleeping, and breeding. They all possess greater intelligence than regular animals, so they can make crude tools, and in some cases, have even established loose societies. Perhaps in time, these beings could develop into a higher race of their own accord, but for now, they resemble what the canine races must have been like eons ago – marginally sentient, and more savage than civil. Some scholars and cultists believe that the animal folk of the world – the Grimbor, Gromek, Cat-Men, Avians, Lizard Men – originate from this place, but given how the denizens of this land can never leave it, such talk seems more fancy than fact.

In addition to the corrupted beast men of the forest, there exist ancient Elven kingdoms, the last shreds of goodness in an environment otherwise teeming with pure evil. These last strongholds of ancient Elven culture are slowly dying, eroding under the relentless attacks by the forces of evil on all sides. To those adventurers looking for a bit of solace in the *Darkest Heart*, finding one of these Pocket Kingdoms is their only hope. However, in accepting the hospitality of any of these fading kingdoms, visitors are often expected to stay and help defend them. Indeed, many such kingdoms never let their guests leave once they have partaken of the gifts they have to offer.

**The Endless Torment.** When the Age of Chaos came crashing to an end, the coalition of gods, sorcerers and mortals that defeated the Old Ones were presented with the dilemma of what to do with their prisoners. Most of the Old Ones’ minions had been destroyed, but a large number gave up when it became clear that their masters would lose the war. Unwilling to slaughter these prisoners, the gods and creatures of power who stood victorious decided to punish them for their crimes and continuing worship of the wicked Old Ones. Thus, they were sealed

away, imprisoned, in what became known as the Land of the Damned, where they abuse and prey upon each other to this day.

The most vile of the Old Ones’ soldiers and worshipers committed suicide rather than surrender. So that they did not escape without paying for their crimes, the victorious coalition imbued these cowards with the dark energies that would transform them into undead, forever locked in bodies that are eternally hungry for the life force of other creatures. The region is avoided by all who know of it, so the undead starve in an agony that can never be alleviated. This has driven many of them mad, and now they patrol their section of the Land of the Damned in search of living creatures to punish. Most of these undead do not need a reason to kill any living thing they find, for they have spent so long being undead that it all comes very easily to them. They are, at best, depraved shadows of themselves that exist only to kill, maim and destroy.

To Necromancers and others who embrace darkness, the Endless Torment seems more like a paradise than a realm of torture and despair. Here, undead dragon lords vie for supremacy against each other. They command huge armies of the slain to smash each other to bits, only to reform afterwards and repeat the process. The great city of Necropolis provides a sick parody of civilization as thousands of undead try to live out what used to be their original lives under the rule of the *Court of the Damned* – a depraved parliament of greater skeletons, zombies, vampires, wraiths and other undead wretches. The Court is a terrifying spectacle few can witness without going mad. The Lords of the Court know this themselves, and spend eternity presiding over a series of insane and confused undead to whom the courtroom is just an extension of cruel retribution.

**The Broken Horn.** The westernmost region of the Land of the Damned is named after what it resembles – a long, curved horn that has been shattered at the tip. The peninsula and archipelago is the domain of the last great Minotaur tribes. Most of these villains have no remorse for the role they played as the Old Ones’ minions. To them, the Age of Chaos is merely a part of their history. Their only regret, the hardships brought upon them after the Old Ones were defeated. Indeed, there are even those who still openly worship the Old Ones and who are able to tap into the power of these sleeping but mighty beings of pure evil. The majority of Minotaurs are locked in a life and death struggle against the armies of the *Citadel*, the obsidian fortress of evil sitting in the heart of the Bleakness. Time and again, the *Citadel* sends its armies of zombie-like drones to capture and enslave any humanoids they can, destroying those who resist. The *Citadel* sends its agents everywhere in search of new prisoners, but it has been particularly tough on the Broken Horn area. Tribal elders within the Broken Horn tribes suspect that the *Citadel*’s prisoners are kept alive forever, serving the masters of the fortress. The truth is, not even the wisest Minotaur sage knows for certain what the *Citadel* is up to, only that it is slowly chipping away at the strength of the Minotaur nations. Unless the *Citadel* is stopped, the elders agree, the Minotaurs of the Broken Horn will one day perish. They have only one choice if they wish to survive: find a way to destroy the *Citadel* and to defeat its armies of darkness. An impossible task? Perhaps. But for these savage beast men, it is their only option. One which many of them look upon with great pride. Thus, outsiders are recruited as spies, assassins and agents against the forces of the *Citadel*.



In the Broken Horn itself, the Tribes of the Horn are a perpetually shifting quilt of alliances, with each tribe backstabbing the other for the slightest of perceived benefits, advantages or slights. Periodically, they all band together to repel an advance by the armies of the Citadel, but as soon as they feel safe again, they fall back into an internecine civil war.

In a weird way, certain adventurers might find the Tribes of the Horn a cause worth fighting for. True, the Minotaurs here are evil, but they are mostly honorable predators who are out for the survival of their kind more than anything else. All they really want (or so they say) is to beat back the Citadel and live in peace and isolation. One day, they hope to launch a counter-invasion against the Citadel, perhaps even to invade and destroy it. They consider this bleak tower a blasphemy that must be removed from the world at all costs. Considering the odds here, siding with the Minotaurs is definitely going with the lesser of two evils.

There are eight major Minotaur tribes (with over 100,000 members each) that together form a loose confederation of city-states. The Minotaur cities are ancient places that in historical value are absolutely priceless to any outsider historian. Here, Minotaur mages practice old ways of magic and perfect new ones as well, as they try to devise a means of defeating the Empire of the Citadel.

**The Bleakness.** At the heart of the Land of the Damned lies a dark, lifeless land, tainted by centuries of foul magicks and the blot of evil. Here, monsters and wicked creatures of every kind make their home, preying on each other and any hapless visitors who stray too close to them. At the heart of this evil land is *The Citadel*, a huge black tower of alien stone that spires up from the earth, almost as high as one of the Northern Mountains. Its base is larger than any of the great cities of the outside world. Dozens of smaller spires jut forth from it, like the entire structure was not built by mortal (or immortal) hands, but as if it were some freakish kind of growth. A bizarre obsidian fungus slowly growing across the landscape, with towers spiking upwards like the shoots of a young redwood tree.

The very presence of this place stains the land. Nothing grows here. No animals can be found, and the sky is always nighttime dark. The air keeps a wintry chill throughout the year, and the soil is rock-hard. These effects are so strong that they blur into the adjacent territories of the Land of the Damned, where the skies are in eternal twilight, or at the farthest reaches, are always overcast.

Legend states that the Citadel is the mightiest fortress in the Palladium World. It is home to the great *Chaos Lords* who have built it by using foul, arcane means that not even they fully understand. Only together can they even barely begin to grasp this world-shaking magic, the sort of forces the Old Ones themselves used to shape the universe around them. It is said that the Chaos Lords of the Citadel, in keeping this black art alive, have created a magical taint of the Land of the Damned that prevents any of its inhabitants from leaving. According to some, the Citadel puts forth a dark radiance that slowly infects all who stay in the Land of the Damned for too long. After a while, one's body grows dependent on this foul magic aura, and if they leave the Land of the Damned, they sicken and die. As a result, anybody entering the Land of the Damned (certainly those going into the Bleakness) soon learns that there is no way out, that the region

is a giant trap dooming its inhabitants to a lifetime of struggle, pain and hopelessness. None of this has been confirmed, of course, although the Defilers claimed they could feel the evil taint and did not doubt the story.



Inside the Citadel is a hive-like city of mind-boggling proportions. Its dimensions constantly shift and turn unexpectedly, so that one traveling inside can never tell what direction they face, or even which side is up. It is said that even the Chaos Lords who built this place do not fully comprehend its design, and that they too are, in effect, lost in a prison of their own making. Here, they summon legions of creatures from the outside world and from other worlds and dimensions to do their bidding. These minions harvest the lower catacombs for food (parts of the Citadel resemble pocket dimensions where alien forms of food and game grow and flourish, as if only to feed the denizens of this strange and awful place). The summoned folk also are enslaved to lend their magical potential to the Chaos Lords, who need every drop of power they can muster.

To this end, the inner streets and yards of this dark tower are a gumbo of races, species and cultures. Together, they live desperate, hopeless lives, wandering the halls of the Citadel, trying in vain to make sense of the truth behind their terrible and con-

fusing captivity. The Citadel itself reportedly saps the mystic energy (P.P.E.) of anybody living inside of it, making the place a huge P.P.E. sponge. If this is the case, one must wonder to what end all that siphoned energy is going or whether the bleak structure is itself alive!

The Chaos Lords exist as a kind of Council, working together to increase the Citadel, but also fighting amongst each other for power and control over the Citadel and the magic that governs it. Their union is one of convenience and necessity, so there is little love between them. The Chaos Lords have been at this since the Old Ones were put to sleep, and aside from building the Citadel, they have not expanded their knowledge of the Dark Arts by so much as a whit. They are treading water, and have become desperate to increase their power.

In a land of tyrannous villains, the Citadel represents a higher kind of evil. A blackness that even the vicious monsters of this Land uniformly revile.

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## The Northern Hinterlands

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As with many myths and legends, there are kernels of truth to many of the stories about the Hinterlands, its killer winters, relentless snow season, monsters, treasures and people. Those who live in the Northern Hinterlands know it to be a distinct environment with its share of unique properties, people, places and wildlife every bit as unique as the Yin-Sloth Jungles, Baalgor Wastelands or the neighboring Great Northern Wilderness. It has its own history, its own quilt of cultures, its own delicate balance of power, and its own indigenous horrors and secrets. In fact, it is many of the Northern Hinterlands' unique features that makes it such a dangerous place to live or even visit. Many a foolish adventurer and know-it-all scholar who do not recognize this, and understand the Hinterlands, pay for their folly and arrogance with their lives. For to come to the Northern Hinterlands filled with assumptions, overconfidence and ill preparations, is to embrace death and beg the specter to strike one down. Western colonists, scholars too proud to admit they are wrong, adventurers, amateurs and ill-prepared warriors from other lands litter the forests of the Hinterlands in mute testament to their underestimation of this harsh land.

Like any true "wilderness," the northwestern forests of the Great Northern Wilderness are treacherous. Visitors must be able to fend for themselves, navigate and live off the land, and contend with the elements, animals, monsters and killer winters. But there is more. Resting in the shadow of the Northern Mountains, the Hinterlands are even more wild and unforgiving than the rest of the Great Northern Wilderness. They are home to bands of nomadic barbarians and host to demons and monsters not found anywhere else. Creatures who have called the Hinterlands forests their home for thousands of years. The enigmatic Emerin and Drakin are but two examples. The murderous Peryton and Dragonductyls, Ice Demons, Bug Bears and Faerie Folk, Bearmen and countless other obscure and dangerous creatures are only too glad to prey upon adventurers. And that barely takes into consideration the roving bands of Coyle marauders, small clans of Minotaurs and Centaurs, barbarians, or reclusive Wizards and dragons, or the rogue gods, fearsome monsters and

demons that sometimes escape the **Land of the Damned** locked away on the other side of the mountains.

Like any region, the Hinterlands includes a few truly notable subsets, each with their own particular identity, that sets the region apart from others. It is the combination of these areas that give the Hinterlands its collective identity. They include the following and are presented in detail later in this sourcebook.

**The Shadow Coast of Bizantium** is a collection of colonies on the northern edge of the continent. They were founded by Bizantium nobles, first as work camps, growing into towns and city-states. Strife and greed have created long-standing hostilities between the colonists and their Bizantium lords and full-blown civil war threatens to shake these pleasant communities.

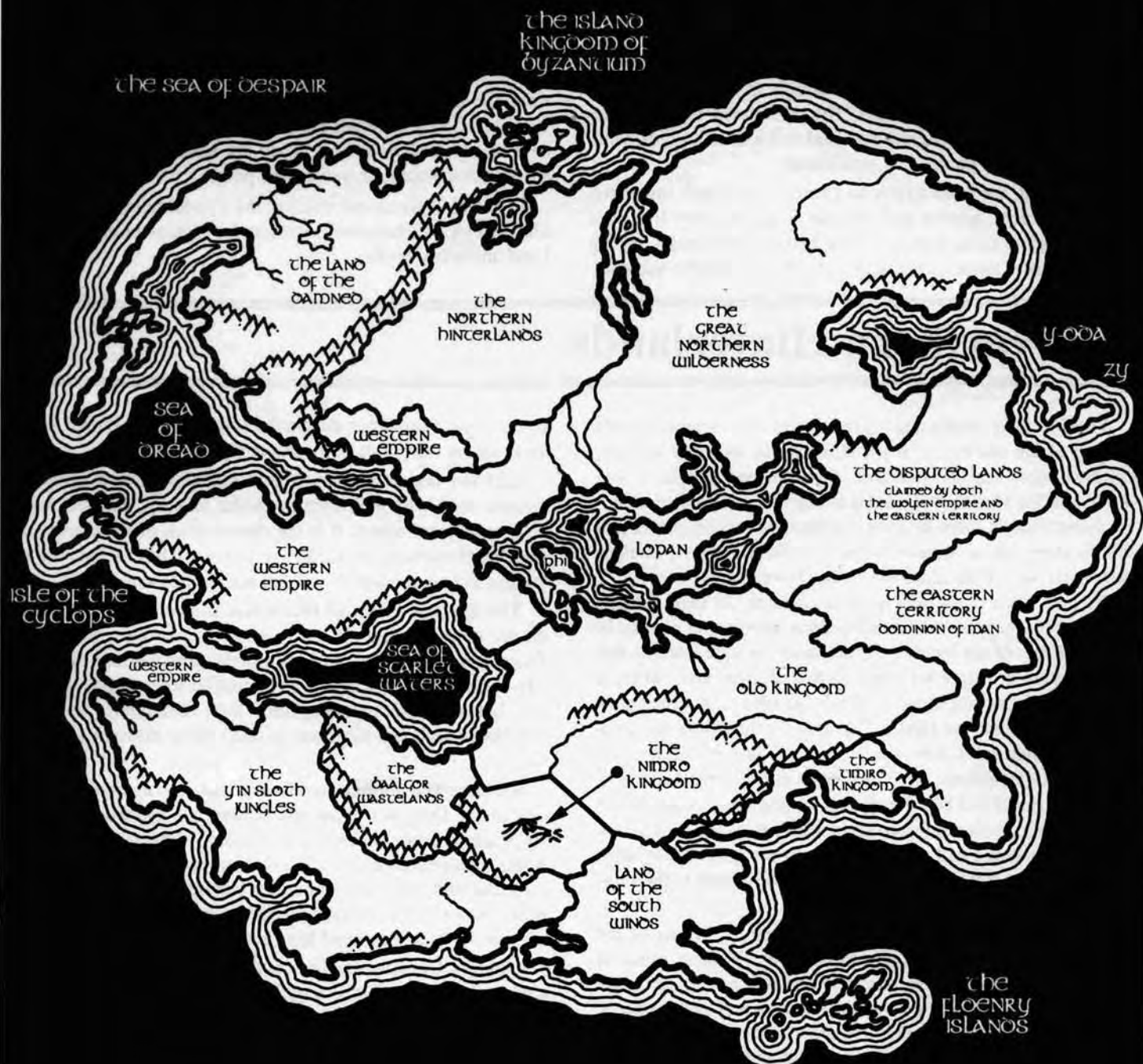
**Kiridin:** The northeastern forests that runs along the western side of the Dragon's Claw and borders the eastern colonies of the Shadow Coast, is known as Kiridin – "the sorrowful land." Although a remote and desolate wilderness, it is claimed by roving clans of human and nonhuman barbarians. A portion of that land, known as the Kadriel province is magically held in eternal autumn. Kiridin is detailed later in this book.

**Ophid's Grasslands:** The southern half of the Hinterlands is a great flat tundra that is largely uninhabited by intelligent life forms, except for scattered tribes of Goblins, Emerin, Bug Bears and the *occasional* band of humans, Orcs, Ogres, Faerie Folk, canine races and Deevils. In the northeast there exists the *Devil's Mark* which is believed to be a dimensional Rift to the dimension of the Deevils. The area is shunned by all people.

A tundra is an expansive plain of scrub, grass, mosses, lichens and algae, with scattered marshlands; there are no trees. During the summer, the flat land offers an abundance of food that attracts reindeer, oxen, other herd animals, rabbits, small rodents, a variety of song, game and water birds (often in large flocks), and the predators that prey upon them. The average summer temperature is 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit (10-16 C), while during the coldest months, temperatures plummet from freezing to 30 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit; -34C).



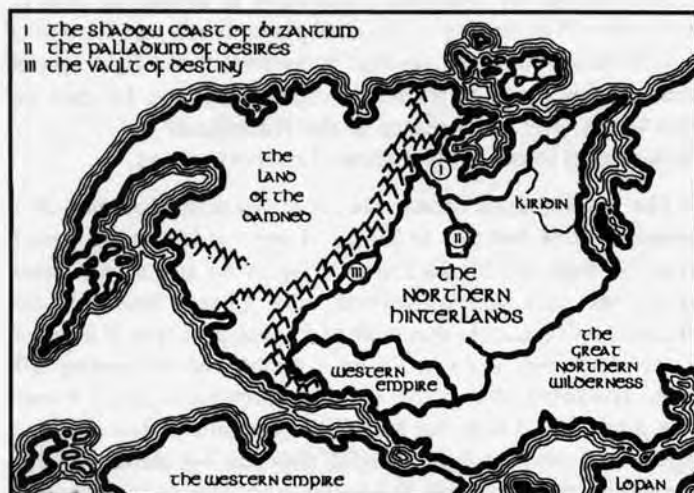
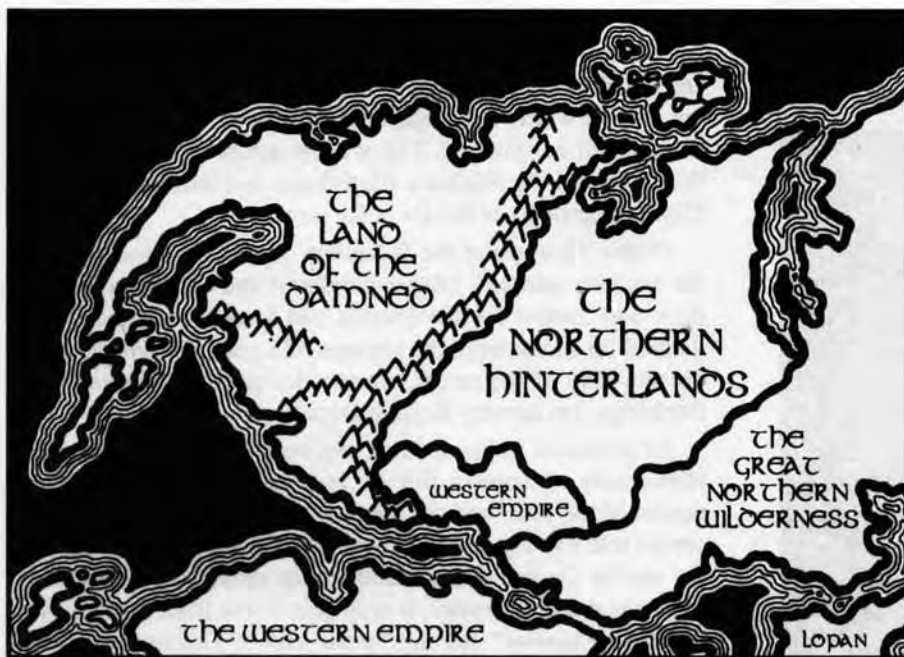
# map of the known world



SCALE IN MILES

0 200 400 600





### Northern Hinterlands

- Forest is indicated by the shaded area
- Light Forest is indicated with smaller broken dots along the Northern Mountains
- White area is the Ophid's Greaslands

**Horde Lands:** This is the northern third of Ophid's Grasslands where human barbarians, tribes of Coyles and other nomads congregate and wreak havoc.

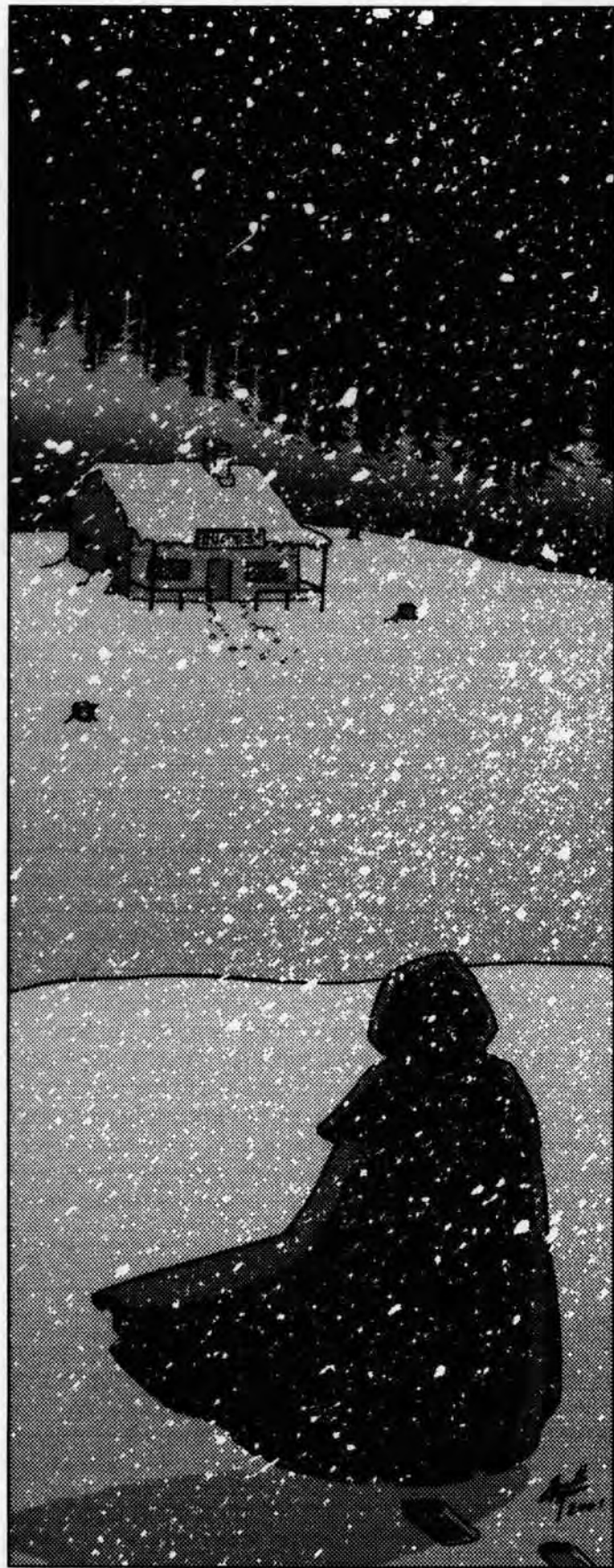
The infamous **Vault of Destiny**, a fortress built into the foothills of the Northern Mountains, is said to be found here. Legend says it houses a cabal of Summoners who secretly control the greatest of Coyle Hordes while conducting their ongoing search for the secrets to the legendary *Palladium of Desires*. Yes, the *Palladium of Desires* — a place where the *Nameless Lord*, the greatest Wizard in history, would grant any visitor their fondest desire, no matter what it was, and where the fabled heroes known as *The Defilers*, were born. For the dark lords of the Vault of Destiny, the *Palladium of Desires* is not just something they wish to visit. It is something they must *control*. And should they find and unlock its mysteries, all the world shall tremble before them.

**The Great Northern Wilderness** is a giant expanse of forest that covers hundreds of thousands of square miles. The northern third is mostly coniferous trees, while the lower, southern portion is a mixed forest of coniferous (pine and fir trees) and hardy deciduous trees like birch, larch, and willows. It has four seasons: Spring, summer, fall and a harsh, cold, snow-laden winter. During the winter, many of the animals hibernate. The climate and forests are similar to those of the Northern United States and Canada.

The Great Northern Wilderness has only recently become the target of human exploration, settlement and exploitation, primarily along the southern coast of Ophid's Grasslands, the east coast, southern forests and the *Disputed Lands* in the south. Only the Shadow Coast of the Northern Hinterlands can be said to be true colonies and inhabited by humans and other civilized folks. See *Adventures in the Northern Wilderness, Second Edition*, and the upcoming *Wolfen Wars* for details concerning the Great Northern Wilderness.



# The Long Winter



Winter is such an important and oppressive event in the Northern Hinterlands that it must be given great attention and detail. The Hinterlands is a dangerous place all year round, but it is the winter that claims the most lives, especially those of ill prepared adventurers. The winters are so bad that even the Wolfen avoid the Northern Hinterlands and only small clans of Coyles migrate to its forests in the summer.

(Note: Throughout the Palladium World, a 12 month calendar has been adopted. Different cultures and nations might have their own names for the months and seasons, but the overall method for measuring the passage of a year remains the same. For the sake of the reader, we use designations familiar to us, Earthlings, i.e. January through December.

As presented in the opening segment, *winter* in the Northern Hinterlands occupies a full *six months*, making it the longest season of the year, and the longest winter on the planet. A chill creeps into the day and cold begins to fill the nights in September and by the end of the month, temperatures dip below freezing by nightfall everyday. It only gets worse from then on, with the “*snow season*” starting by the end of October and sometimes starting as early as the second week of the month.

Snowfall in the Northern Hinterlands is something akin to *monsoon rain* in the tropics. At such places it will rain for weeks on end for two or three months. Sometimes it is a light rain or drizzle, other times, torrential downpours that last for days or even weeks. The snow season in the Hinterlands is very much like monsoon season, only it snows for weeks on end.

The *snow season* almost always starts with a blizzard that deposits 1D6+6 feet (2.1 to 3.7 m) of snow in less than a week! After 3-5 days, the blizzard usually tapers off into a light snow for the next 1D4 weeks. However, 1D4+1 heavy snowfalls and blizzards will return to dump an additional 2D4 feet (0.6 to 2.4 m) of snow over a 48 to 72 hour period before tapering off again. The bottom line is that once the snow starts falling it may slow down, but it does not stop until sometime in January. The regular and constant *light snowfall* deposits 2-4 inches per day or roughly one or two feet (0.3 to 0.6 m) of new snow per week. The cold prevents much melting, so the snow just piles up. As Old Ben said in the opening to this book, the Northern Hinterlands is a place where “snow is measured in yards, not inches.”

The snow will pack down after about a month, enabling characters to walk on top of it without sinking more than one to three feet (0.3 to 0.9 m). The snow of each new day only adds to the total accumulation and continues to bury and reshape the wilderness in white. Meanwhile, the wind is often fierce. It blows in from the ocean and down from the mountains, gets whipped up to create powerful gusts that shape the snow and cut through clothing like a knife. The wind creates drifts as tall as a house, and creates sloping canyons, sheer walls, curving pathways, valleys and hills of snow that transform the landscape into something new and alien every few days. Old Ben’s introductory discussion presents winter in the Northern Hinterlands very clearly, so there is no reason to rehash it here. Just realize that the old codger was NOT exaggerating one bit.

**The last half of the winter in the Hinterlands.** As Old Ben described, the snow finally stops falling in January. Though the sun comes out, the north wind kicks up worse than before and temperatures drop to well below freezing, sun or no. Temperatures range between 50 below zero Fahrenheit (-46 C) to a frigid

high of 10 above zero (-12 C). Everything is frozen. By February, much of the snow is packed down, but glazed over with a crust of ice that crunches with every footstep. The deep snow and ice conceal snow pits, boulders, hidden debris, rivers and lakes, bury landmarks, and make travel without magical means nearly impossible. Most animals remain in hibernation and smart humanoids stay locked behind closed doors where there is food and a warm fire. Some Woodsmen/Trappers, Rangers and Druids will dare to venture forth to go hunting for food and furs, or to explore snow-capped forests, or to gather wood. Still, even the best of them seldom wander more than a mile or two (1.6 to 3.2 m) from their cabin and take great care in watching how to get back home.

This is also when creatures suited for winter and cold venture out to hunt, play and mate. Bearmen, Kankoran, Emerin, Algor Giants, and select other humanoids enjoy the winter and may venture out even during the snow season. Monsters like the Peryton, Gryphon, Twin Serpent, some Worms of Taut and predators also roam the sun drenched winter wonderland. Wolves, mountain lions and other predators have ample deer, caribou and moose to hunt, but even these beasts have a tough time in the deep snow and will turn to easier prey whenever they can get it. That includes livestock, pet animals, dogs and humanoids.

The worst of the monsters are the notorious *Hinterland Ice Demons* who come down from the mountains with the onset of winter. These murderous creatures seem to hate all intelligent life forms, humans, Elves and Gnomes in particular, and slaughter innocent people without provocation. While most are lone hunters, some gather in small packs and will lay siege to homesteads and even Hearths and Homes. If they manage to break in, they will kill as many as they can before they are repelled, and are known to have slaughtered entire compounds of 20-60 people. The killing may be done over the course of a week or in a single blood-filled night, depending on the individual pack. When one hears ominous pounding or scratching at their barred door or shuttered windows, it is a safe bet that it is one of these inhuman fiends.

Ice demons and other demonic creatures may prowl and hunt during the snow season, but they seem even more aggressive and plentiful during the snowless, sunny part of the winter (late January through April). One may also encounter *Ice Dragons* and other arctic creatures frolicking in the snow. Dragons of all kinds come to the Northern Hinterlands and mountains because there are few humans or other humanoids to bother them, and they can find peace and solitude, especially in the winter.

**Spring.** Springtime bursts onto the scene in April, causing winter to melt away in a matter of days. It turns the ground into mud and sends rivers flowing over their banks and streams rushing down from the mountains where there were none before. That leaves one month for Spring (May; with April being spring thaw or "meltdown" as the natives call it), three months for Summer (June, July and August, with temperatures of 70-85 degrees Fahrenheit; 21-29 C), and roughly two months for autumn (September and October, with the latter month being quite cold with temperatures dropping below freezing at night and only 25-35 degrees Fahrenheit (-4-2 C) during the day. As noted, winter and snow season in the Hinterlands usually starts by the end of October, with temperatures dropping and holding at

10-20 degrees colder than October, and never rising above freezing until April thaw.

**Winter in the Shadow Coast** is only slightly less harsh, with a five month long winter (November through March) and about a third less snow, but it is still as difficult as any winter in the Great Northern Wilderness to the east. A month into winter, the colonies are effectively "snowed in." Work continues at most businesses but at half its normal production level. Travel to neighboring colonies is both difficult and hazardous, taking five times longer and leaving travelers vulnerable to the elements and foul play. In December and January they are completely "socked in," with work brought to a halt and travel nearly impossible. Only the most experienced, brave or desperate dare consider travel to even a neighbor a mile (1.6 km) down the road. By mid-January the snow stops and the colonies begin to dig out, but travel by land or sea remains too hazardous to consider until the end of March. This means that except for magical means and rare treks by bold individuals, each of the 13 colonies becomes separated and isolated, cut off from one another without any sort of regular communication or interaction. If there is a good side to this, it is that they are also cut off from Bizantium from December through mid-March.

## Wilderness Survival in The Northern Hinterlands

By Eric Thompson & Kevin Siembieda;  
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### Extreme Cold

Cold can literally freeze and shut down the human body, so when traversing the Northern Hinterlands during the winter months, one must dress properly and use extreme caution.

There are a series of factors that must be considered to prevent fatal exposure to the elements. *Frostbite* and *hypothermia* are the most common and notorious causes of injury and death, but what most people don't realize is that these are often brought on by *exhaustion* and *exposure*. Without adequate food or water one tires more quickly. The depletion of body sugar (energy), the decrease in body temperature (the onset of hypothermia), severe dehydration (poor circulation and stiffening muscles and joints), and psychological changes all contribute to the traveler's condition and can leave the victim weak and vulnerable to injury, disease, exposure and death.

Exhaustion is dangerous, because as one becomes tired he becomes less alert and self-aware, less aware of his surroundings, and much less concerned for his well-being. This can lead to all sorts of careless mistakes, like leaving extremities exposed to frostbite, failing to build a proper shelter in which to rest, not drinking sufficient water, incorrectly plotting one's direction or trail, failing to recognize hazards or changing weather conditions, and so on. All of these further contribute to the diminishing of the traveler's physical health and state of mind. Eventually, he collapses, exhausted, barely aware of his physical condition and too tired to do much of anything to protect himself. Exhaustion takes over and saps the body of its strength and steals one's force of will.





Without adequate food, water, clothing and rest, an individual will succumb to the cold and wind — losing the ability to react against external forces and becoming a victim waiting to keel over. Having a sufficient food and water supply, proper clothing, suitable mode of transportation (snowshoes or skis are encouraged while traveling on foot), awareness of the current and coming weather conditions, and a good knowledge of the terrain are essential to surviving in a snow-covered wilderness.

Preventing the onset of exhaustion greatly reduces the chances of the person falling prey to the effects of hypothermia and even being as badly afflicted by advanced stages of frostbite. The trick is knowing when and how to take the proper precautions and regular rests to stay fresh, strong and alert.

## Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when the temperature of the body core (brain, spinal cord, heart and lungs) of an individual has been reduced to 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius) or less by exposure to the environment. One of the greatest dangers of hypothermia is that it can occur in any season, with water greatly accelerating heat loss. Children and the elderly are particularly susceptible.

The following is a symptom table noting what is likely to occur as the body temperature of a hypothermia victim drops. These temperatures apply to most humanoids, such as *humans*, *Elves*, *Dwarves*, *Gnomes*, *Orcs*, *Ogres* and so on, including *Coyles* and *Wolfen* (their fur only helps to a point).

Races especially suited for the cold, such as *Kankoran*, *Bearmen of the North*, *Danzi*, *Gigantes*, *Emerin*, *dragons*, *demons*, *Deevils* and others, can endure far lower body temperatures before they begin to suffer for it. Their resistance to the cold is several times that of other humanoids, so the G.M. is advised to begin applying these negative modifiers when their body temperature gets down to **85.2 to 78.8 Fahrenheit (29.6-26 C)**. This would also apply to those who can magically or psionically make themselves "resistant" to cold. Of course, some creatures such as *Algor Giants*, *Ice Dragons*, certain *Faerie Folk*, many supernatural beings and others are *impervious to cold*, and do not suffer any penalties or threat of injury from it. However, unless stated otherwise, their movement is likely to be hampered by deep snow and ice the same as anyone else.

**97.6 to 95.0 degrees Fahrenheit (36.4 to 35 degrees C):** The individual feels chilled to the bone and shivers. The skin is cold to the touch and the lips have a purplish hue to them. This condition is not serious and can be quickly remedied by putting on a few layers of dry clothing and/or being wrapped in warm blankets. The body should be thoroughly dried before getting dressed to prevent frostbite when exposed to the cold. It typically takes 2D6+6 minutes before the person begins to feel completely warm and back to normal. **Penalties:** While suffering from this touch of hypothermia, the victim is -2 to initiative, -1 on all combat maneuvers and -5% on skill performance where a nimble and steady hand is required.

**95.0 to 91.4 Fahrenheit (35 to 33 C):** Intense to violent shivering, and the ability to perform complex tasks is clearly impaired. In addition, the individual feels fatigued, suffers from slowed flexes, and the extremities (fingers, hands, toes, ears, nose) will feel numb and frozen. Coordination becomes poor. Speaking may also be difficult and the thought processes sluggish. If left in this condition, the character may black out, suffer from amnesia, and start to lose awareness/contact with the environment around him. **Penalties:** -20% to all skills, reduce Speed attribute by half, -1 melee attack, has no initiative, -2 on all combat rolls, and may need to make a roll with punch/fall/impact vs a 10 for every 100 feet (30 m) walked, or else the character will fall down. It takes an act of will power to get back up (and a successful roll to save vs punch/roll/impact or maintain balance), and get back moving again. The character probably can not feel his hands or feet anymore. It typically takes 3D6x10 minutes of being wrapped in warm, dry blankets and exposure to heat (stove, fire, etc.) before the individual begins to feel completely warm and normal.

**91.4 to 87.8 Fahrenheit (33-31 C):** Shivering decreases, but in its place is muscle rigidity (hard to move limbs), erratic movement (brief spasms), the thinking process is dull and hazy, and the victim can not stand on his own two feet; must crawl on all fours. Hallucinations are common and the character loses contact with his surroundings and barely has any sense of his own body — has no sense of time, direction, self, or what's going on more than five feet (1.5 m) away from the front of his face. Extremities are completely numb and nearly frozen. **Penalties:** -50% on the performance of skills, reduce speed by 75% (can only crawl and lunge), no initiative, reduce all combat bonuses by half, reduce all attacks/actions per melee round by half, and can not maintain balance for more than 1D4 melee rounds and then only if standing still and ideally, braced against an object. It typically takes 4D4+4 hours of being wrapped in warm, dry

blankets and exposure to heat (stove, fire, etc.) before the person begins to feel warm and back to normal. **Note:** Hallucinations are suspected to be the origins for many of the myths and legends concerning certain treasure troves, places (like cities of gold), monsters and visitation by gods.

**87.8 to 85.2 Fahrenheit (31-29.6 C):** Skin feels like ice, skin is blue, eyes glazed and dilated, muscles hard and rigid and hands are frozen claws, but no shivering. The character's senses are almost completely gone, skill performance is virtually nil (-85%), the character is irrational and drowsy. It takes every ounce of will power to keep crawling along at a snail's pace. Pulse and respiration are slow. **Penalties:** -85% on the performance of skills, reduce speed by 90% (can barely crawl), no initiative, no combat bonuses, reduce melee actions/attacks per round to one. Cannot maintain balance for more than 1D4 seconds even when supported by a brace or others. Can not feel hands or extremities; it is impossible to even pick up or hold an object. It typically takes 4D6+18 hours of being wrapped in warm, dry blankets, exposure to heat (stove, fire, etc.), water and sleep before the person begins to feel warm and back to normal.

**85.2 to 78.8 Fahrenheit (29.6-26 C):** Nearly comatose! Cannot move and even reflexes do not function. Pulse is slow, erratic and difficult to find. The victim fades in and out of consciousness and does not respond to spoken words (may be delirious). The heart starts atrial fibrillation. **Penalties:** Skills and any physical action are impossible for at least 2D6+32 hours, at which point the character can move his fingers and toes, understand spoken words, speak in a hoarse whisper and has one melee action. It typically takes 6D6+72 hours of being wrapped in warm, dry blankets, exposure to heat (stove, fire, etc.), sleep, and being hand-fed food (ideally soup) and water before the character begins to feel strong and back to normal (half usual bonuses and melee actions). It can take a full week or two to get back to full health.

**Below 78.8 Fahrenheit (26 C):** Coma and death are imminent. Heart and respiratory failure, ventricular fibrillation, probable brain and lung hemorrhage, apparent death. Unconscious and will die if immediate medical attention is not administered. Roll vs coma/death. If the character can be resuscitated, it will take one week to get to the stage of having one melee action and being able to maintain consciousness for more than 10 minutes at a time. It will take 1D4+1 additional weeks to get back to full health.

## Cold Water Kills

It has been estimated that half of all drowning victims actually die from the fatal effects of cold water, or hypothermia, and not from water filled lungs. Loss of body heat is one of the greatest hazards to survival when one falls overboard, is capsized, or jumps into water. Cold water robs the body of heat 25-30 times faster than air. Sudden immersion in cold water cools the skin and outer tissues very quickly. Within 10 or 15 minutes, the core body temperature begins to drop rapidly and the arms and legs become numb and completely useless. The victim may lose consciousness and drown before their core temperature drops low enough to cause death.

**Game Note:** In the case of our heroic player characters, one can assume the length of time he or she can survive in freezing

water (or having been soaked and left wet in freezing temperatures) is 30 minutes +1 minute per P.E. point. Until this time elapses, the character basically suffers from phase two hypothermia (body temp reduced to 95.0 to 91.4 degrees). After that, they are in serious trouble.

**Body Hot Spots:** Areas of the body such as the head, neck, sides of the chest, armpits, and where there is little fat or muscle are major areas of heat loss from the warm chest cavity. The groin area is another "hot spot" and susceptible to the loss of heat because major blood vessels are near the surface of the skin.

If a character should suddenly find himself in the water, he should try not to panic; G.M.s may want to have the character make a save vs Insanity or Horror Factor; 13 or higher saves and any M.E. and save vs cold bonuses should be applied to determine whether or not the character panics. One should follow the procedure below to increase their survival time by minimizing body heat loss. This is the single most important thing the character can do.

**Do not remove clothing.** Instead, characters should tighten their clothing as much as possible, taking special care to cover their head. A layer of water trapped inside one's clothing will be slightly warmed by the body and help insulate it from the colder water, slowing the rate of body heat loss.

**Devote all efforts to getting out of the water.** Act quickly before the loss of full use of the hands and limbs. Climb onto a boat, raft, ice flow, or anything floating. Right a capsized boat and climb in. Most lifeboats will support a character even if they are full of water. If the character can not right a capsized boat, he should attempt to climb on top of the hull. The object is to get as much of one's body out of the water as possible.

**Do not attempt to swim.** Not unless it is to reach a nearby boat, another person, or a floating object that can be climbed upon. Unnecessary swimming pumps "out" warmed water between the body and the clothing, circulating new, cold water to take its place and contributes to rapid hypothermia and exhaustion. Likewise, unnecessary movement of the arms and legs pumps warm blood to your extremities, where it cools quickly, reducing survival time by as much as 50%!

## First Aid For Hypothermia

Any character pulled from cold water or a frozen condition should be treated for hypothermia. Symptoms include intense shivering, loss of coordination, mental confusion, cold & blue (cyanotic) skin, especially around lips or fingers, weak pulse, irregular heartbeat and enlarged pupils, etc., as described earlier in this section.

Once shivering stops, the core body temperature begins to drop critically. The goal in treating hypothermia is to prevent further body cooling. Severe cases call for rewarming by trained medical personnel. Whenever possible, arrange to have the victim transported to a medical facility immediately. In the Hinterlands or any wilderness, that's probably a Psi-Healer, the clergy or similar individual skilled in First Aid at the least and Holistic Medicine or magic at best. Of course, in most cases professional or magical medical treatment will not be available, forcing the character or his teammates to try their best at improvisation. The following isn't all medical knowledge and even characters without any type of medical skills (but common sense and general



knowledge) can attempt to help a victim of hypothermia. Any character with First Aid, or better yet, the Holistic Medicine skill will know how to treat hypothermia. Basic procedures include the following:

**Gently move the victim to warm shelter.** Treat gently to prevent fibrillation of the heart and shock to the system.

**Check breathing and heartbeat.** In cases of hypothermia one should check very closely for as long as two minutes at a time.

**Remove victim's wet clothing with a minimum of movement, cut them away if necessary.** Lay the victim in a level, face up position with a blanket or other insulation beneath them.

**Wrap victim in warm blankets, furs, sleeping bag or other warm covering.** If there will be a long delay before the victim arrives at a medical facility or none is available, use the following rewarming techniques.

**Apply hot water bottles,** wrapped in a towel to prevent burning the skin, to the head, neck, chest, and groin.

**Do not apply heat to arms and legs, and do NOT give the victim a hot bath.** This forces blood out through the cold extremities and back to the heart, lungs and brain, which will further drop the core body temperature. This can cause "after drop" (i.e. the continued and worsening affects of hypothermia), which can be fatal!

**Do not massage or rub the victim.** Rough handling may cause cardiac arrest.

**Apply warmth by direct body to body contact.** Have someone lay next to the victim, ideally skin to skin. Wrap both in dry blankets.

**If the person is alert enough, aid givers can give them hot drinks or soup.** If they are unconscious or stuporous do not give them anything to drink. NEVER give alcoholic beverages because it will act to dehydrate the victim.

**Save vs coma/death may be required.**

**Magic and psionic applications** of such treatments as Healing, Touch/Heal Wounds, Psychic Purification, Psychic Deaden Pain, Psychic Induced Sleep, Light Healing, Sustain, Sheltering Force, Cure Illness, Restore Limb, Restoration, Heal Self and others can help combat hypothermia, prevent frostbite, and heal and restore damaged extremities as well as dramatically increase the healing process (victim recovers in one quarter the normal time needed). Obviously, psychic powers like Impervious to Cold, Resist Fatigue, Summon Inner Strength, Bio-Regeneration, Psychic Body Field, and Pyrokinesis, or magic like Resist Cold, Impervious to Cold, Armor of Ithan, Invulnerability and others can help resist the cold and avoid injury in the first place.

## Frostbite

Frostbite is a condition where the tissue of the body freezes. The most common affected areas are the hands, fingers, feet, toes, nose and ears where frostbite can happen in a matter of minutes in very cold, dry weather (like late January through March in the Hinterlands), or when stuck in freezing water. Symptoms include firm, cold, white patches on the skin, and affected area(s) become numb to the touch and the victim will feel a constant freezing pain. When warmed, these areas may become blotchy red, swollen, and painful (similar to the freezing

pain but may actually feel as if the skin is on fire). Numbness imposes a -10% skill performance penalty and the character is -1 to parry and strike. The affected areas are painful and vulnerable to attack. If struck they may require the character to make a save vs pain (optional; 16 or higher to save; P.E. bonuses are applicable).

**Advanced cases of frostbite** occur when the pain subsides without the character doing anything to counter the cold. The appendage becomes completely numb and may actually feel warm. At this point things become serious as the skin begins to freeze and die! Skin and muscle tissue begins to die off, and as the affected area thaws, it will decompose and become infected, running the chance of poisoning the victim (killing them) unless appropriate medical attention is sought immediately.

**Frostbite Damage:** Since this is the actual freezing of tissue, the possibility of damage is very real. Minor cases are merely painful to the touch and may require the character to make a roll to save vs cold (14 or higher; P.E. bonuses and any bonuses to save vs cold are applicable). A failed roll means the affected area suffers 1D4 S.D.C. damage. Serious damage and a failed roll to save, means there is permanent cellular and nerve damage. In the most extreme cases the victim may actually lose extremities (typically amputated to prevent gangrenous infection): toes (reduce speed by 30%, -20 to all skills requiring balance), fingers (-10% to skill performance for every two fingers lost, and it takes 50% longer to perform properly), nose (reduce P.B. by 50%), or ears (reduce P.B. by 10%), sometimes even a hand, arm or leg may be lost (apply the appropriate penalties; use the Optional Damage Rules on page 20 of *The Palladium RPG*® as a guideline).

**A successful save** means the pain and a -15% skill penalty are only temporary (1D4+1 days), and no permanent cellular or nerve damage has occurred.

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## Treating Frostbite

In most cases, treating frostbite is as easy as placing the affected area in a warm area of the body like the armpits or in warm (never hot!) water that feels warm to an unaffected hand. Consult with a doctor or healer if the area does not recover after treatment. Putting the affected areas in hot water is very painful (2D6 S.D.C. damage and a save vs pain roll is required every time the character moves the appendage). Moreover, serious cases of frostbite may cause the skin to crack, causing bleeding, more pain and wounds vulnerable to infection and gangrene.

**Note:** Though alcohol may provide an initial warming sensation to a cold body, it can be very deceptive. Alcohol causes peripheral vessels, such as those in the skin, to dilate. Blood rushing through these vessels radiates heat away from the body, diverting warmth from vital organs and increasing the risk of hypothermia. Drinking can also interfere with good judgment needed to be cautious and survive in cold weather.

The previously mentioned magic and psychic treatments also apply to frostbite, and in most cases, a Healing Touch/Heal Wound will prevent permanent damage and infection.

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## Snow Blindness

Another potentially dangerous condition in the wild is snow blindness. This is a temporary visual disturbance brought on by injury to inner eyelids and the surface of the cornea by exposure to ultraviolet rays from the sun reflecting off snow or another highly reflective surface like water or ice (can be considered a sunburn on the cornea).

In most parts of the world, the time which people are most susceptible to this condition is after a new snowfall, even when the sun's rays are partially obscured by light fog or mist. Furthermore, there is no warning to the onset of the condition until the symptoms begin to appear two to 12 (2D6) hours after exposure. In the Hinterlands, snow blindness is a constant danger from the time the snow stops falling (late January) through March. Only areas that are heavily shaded by trees or fall under the shadow of the mountains for part of the day, are reasonably safe from snow blindness.

The victim will first experience an irritating, gritty feeling in the eyes. There may be severe pain in and over the eyes due to inner eyelid irritation. The eyes will feel hot and sticky, and tears will flow excessively. Sight will become blurred, objects appear to have a pinkish tinge, and the victim may develop extreme sensitivity to light.

While not completely blind, characters are -5 on initiative, -3 to parry and dodge (loses automatic dodge if they had it), and all other combat rolls are reduced by half. Characters who become sensitive to light (save vs cold, -1 for every four hours exposed to the damaging conditions; one roll with any P.E. and Cold bonuses added) are -3 to save vs attacks or conditions involving bright light and the character will need to save vs pain or be temporarily blinded for 2D6 melees (-2 melee actions/attacks, -10 on all combat rolls, and -60% on all skills that require sight). These hapless characters will need to wear the equivalent of sunglasses or a thin cloth that helps to shield the eyes from the light during the day to protect their eyes. Otherwise they will be afflicted with a pulsing headache for as long as they are outside, plus an additional 1D4 hours after.

Thankfully, the major complications are only temporary and, aided by medical attention, the impaired vision will subside in 1-6 days depending on the severity and length of exposure. Victims suffer from headache and are -1 on initiative and -1 to strike, parry and dodge for 1D4 days after vision is restored.

## Avalanches

Snowslides or avalanches occur when snow on the slopes of glaciers and mountains becomes unstable and slides down in great sheets of rolling ice and snow. The deadliest type of avalanche, *the slab*, is most often caused by adventurers wandering off of marked trails. It typically occurs after heavy snowstorms when a layer or "slab" of new snow is too heavy to stick to stable, packed snow underneath. In the Hinterlands the constant falling of new snow means avalanches are a constant threat from November through January.

The weight of a traveler can dislodge a small area or cause a slab to slide, causing a chain reaction that can send the side of a mountain sliding downward. The loose snow avalanche begins in a small area, not unlike rolling a snowball down a hill to make a boulder. These avalanches travel at speeds of up to 100



miles per hour (160 km)! Most victims die within a half hour from suffocation (6D6 minutes if not trained in survival). Since about half of buried avalanche victims die within a half hour, the odds of finding a person alive are poor (without magic). For one thing, it is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. The buried individual could be anywhere along the 2D6 mile (3.2-19.2 km) long avalanche trail and could be buried under as little as a foot (0.3 m) of snow to as much as 60 feet (18.3 m). Groups need to be equipped with shovels and probes, or magic to locate and rescue the victim of an avalanche. Or the victim himself needs special equipment or powers to signal for help or dig himself out. The Magic Pigeon spell works nicely to locate an ally lost to an avalanche, since the magic birds home in on their intended target. Locate, Calling and Telepathy are also useful.

**Avalanche Damage:** In the real world, large avalanches create a wall of air in front of them that inflicts terrific concussive force to everything in their path. Often, the sheer impact of this air blast is enough to kill people and strip trees of their branches in the case of large, fast-moving avalanches. Since it would not be very dramatic to have heroes killed off in this manner, the damage for player characters caught in an avalanche is scaled down considerably. The air blast of small avalanches inflicts 6D6 damage to everyone and everything caught in its path. The blast from medium avalanches inflicts 1D4x10 damage. The air blast from large avalanches inflicts 1D6x10 damage. Super-large avalanches inflict 2D6x10 damage.

The crushing damage avalanches do to fixed, standing structures from the sheer weight of the snow is far greater than the air blast. To houses, trees, and other such stationary structures, small avalanches inflict 2D6x10 damage. Medium avalanches, 1D4x100 damage. Large avalanches, 1D6x100. Super-large avalanches, 3D6x100. **Note:** In real life, the damage would be ten times greater.

**Heroes caught in avalanches** often are bounced around at the forefront of the rushing snow and are spared the brunt of the physical damage to be had. For player characters, the greatest danger is not outright physical harm but the suffocation that results from being buried alive in snow. Being covered over by an avalanche completely immobilizes its victims. They can not even move their mouths to utter spells or cry for help. The only chance for survival a burial victim has is to be dug out by friends or to use some psychic ability to effect an escape. Characters without the *Wilderness Survival* skill have 6D6 minutes before they suffocate to death. Those with *Wilderness Survival* get 30+1D6 minutes per level of experience. As a rule of thumb, rescuers can dig through packed, post-avalanche snow at a rate of one foot (0.3 m) per minute. If they have a shovel or other tool, they can dig out two feet (0.6 m) per minute. Magic can often dig out avalanche victims much faster. To randomly determine how deeply the victim has been buried, consult the following table:

- 01%-20%: Lucked out! Only 1D6 feet from the surface. This is still enough to kill, though. Plenty of avalanche victims die under just a few inches of snow.
- 21%-40%: Not too bad. Only 3D4 feet from the surface.
- 41%-60%: Buried. 3D6+10 feet from the surface.
- 61%-80%: Bad News. 5D6+15 feet from the surface.
- 81%-00%: Deep Sixed! 6D6+26 feet from the surface. Unless the character does not need to breathe, can go into a death

trance/suspended animation where the metabolic state slows to a crawl (triples the time he can be buried without suffocating or suffering from severe hypothermia) or teleport out on his own, chances are the character will meet his end under the snow.

## Snow Pits

A snow pit occurs when the top layer of snow becomes glazed or encrusted with ice, but shifting or melting snow under the glazed top forms a hole, depression, dip or valley hidden beneath the surface, or the snow underneath is not packed. What happens is the surface looks solid, but there is a depression or soft snow under a very thin ice or crystallized snow covering. When a traveler steps on it, his weight plunges him through the thin surface crust and sends him (and those next to or tied/connected to him, including a dog team and sled) falling into the opened space or pit below. Such drops are not usually too deep, 2D6+6 feet (2.4 to 5.5 m; half that deep on the tundra and flat lands) and are rarely fatal. The lone victim of such a fall suffers 4D6 S.D.C./H.P. damage. However, injury could be severe if a dog sled, other people or vehicle falls with him or on top of him! In that case, damage could range from 1D6x10 to 4D6x10 damage. Of course, bad luck can result in broken bones and the inability to climb out without help. Those traveling alone or wandering off from their group could be trapped in the pit without anybody knowing where they are. Should it snow, one could be buried alive and suffocate from falling and drifting snow. In fact, in the Northern Hinterlands, a third of the snow pits are more like quicksand, meaning most of the snow in the area is packed, but there are small areas or pits where the snow was shielded and did NOT get packed. Thus, the character drops into a pit of soft snow that immediately covers him. The consequences are basically the same as being buried in an avalanche, except one can use levitation, telekinesis, the power of flight and similar means to get out of the light snow. Of equal consequence, is the fact that a vehicle or animal(s) that falls into any snow pit is probably stuck and irretrievable.

**Climbing out of a snow pit** can be difficult to impossible depending on the consistency of the snow. If the walls are too soft, they will crumble, sending the trapped character back to the bottom and possibly collapsing, burying him alive! It is best to be pulled up by somebody top side and avoid placing stress on the walls of the pit. If too packed and hard (or ice covered) it may be impossible to get a firm grip to climb out without assistance. Levitation, Telekinesis, the power of flight and similar psychic or magical means can also be used to get a character quickly and safely out of any snow pit, provided such abilities are readily available to the victim or his comrades.

**Note:** In most parts of the world, snow pits occur mainly in mountains and glaciers, but can also happen if there has been a great deal of blowing and drifting. In the Northern Hinterlands, deep snow, blowing and drifting are commonplace, and so are snow pits.





## Deep Snow

Deep snow is actually quite rare in most parts of the world, as most of the snow compacts into firm, heavy snow or ice quite quickly. Likewise, well traveled snow like that in the Shadow Colonies also packs nicely, making travel easier. Towards the inland areas however, there are tens of thousands of miles of landscape that have not been trodden, meaning the surface is still quite soft. In the Hinterlands the problem is compounded by the fact that it never stops snowing from late October to late January! The weight of the snow itself will pack it down to some degree, but one is always trudging through 1-3 feet (0.3 to 0.9 m) of snow under the best of conditions.

I don't care who or what you may be, traveling through deep snow – halfway to the knee or deeper, up to one's hips – is difficult, tiring and ponderous. For readers not familiar with snow, it is like trying to run in water that is up above the knees. One can do it, but the effort is much greater, more energy is expended (one fatigues twice as fast), and speed is dramatically reduced. Without getting into all kinds of detail about the consistency of snow, cold, etc., in game and movement terms, it is really as simple as this.

### Speed Modifiers for Deep Snow

**Humanoids on Foot:** Reduce speed by half (-50%) for ordinary humanoids. Those wearing heavy armor will have their Speed reduced by 75%. Giant-sized humanoids will only have their Speed reduced by 25% unless they are wearing heavy armor, in which case their Speed goes down by 50%. Small, light humanoids, like *Gnomes*, *Goblins*, *Pixies* and *Faeries*, travel at only -10% their normal speed on soft, fresh snow (they are light enough to walk on top of it like a rabbit), but are -30% on

packed snow and ice. Again, speed drops to -50% if they wear heavy armor.

**Combat Penalties:** Reduce the number of melee attacks by one and -2 on all physical combat bonuses/moves as a result of the impairment of movement due to the deep snow, frigid temperatures, bulky clothing and other factors. This is in addition to reduced speed. Remember, in all cases (other than riding inside a vehicle or by magical means) the traveler fatigues twice as fast as normal.

**Snowshoes:** The use of snowshoes, which rather look like large tennis rackets worn on the feet, will enable a traveler to walk on top of the snow, is less likely to cause an avalanche, and lets the character move more quickly over the snow. Speed penalties for travelers with snowshoes are half those listed above. And characters in heavy armor see their speed reduced by only 50% instead of 75%. Combat penalties as noted above still apply unchanged. No, animals cannot wear snowshoes.

**Cross-Country Skiing:** No speed penalty for cross-country skiing; travel is roughly the same as walking. **Note:** Except for a few select mountainous places, downhill skiing is not possible, particularly in the expansive, flat tundra or forests of the Northern Hinterlands.

**Animals and Snow Natives:** -30% on speed for most animals native to such frozen and snowbound conditions (puma, wolf, bear, deer, moose, dogs, etc.), as well as races who thrive in arctic conditions such as the *Kankoran*, *Bearmen of the North*, *Emerin*, *Ice Dragons*, *Frost Pixies* and others. Remember, some monsters, like *Ice Elementals* and *Ice Demons*, can run across snow and ice without penalty or impairment. There are also certain magic spells and items that enable characters to move across snow or ice as if it were dry land.

**Dog Sled:** One of the oldest ways of travel in arctic conditions is by dog sled. This is typically a narrow, streamlined, one- or two-man sled designed to carry packages, food and gear in the bed of the sled, pulled by six to nine dogs and ridden by the driver in a standing position at the rear of the sled. It is amazingly mobile, can handle most terrains from tundra to glaciers, and comparatively inexpensive to operate and maintain. It is especially useful for people who don't have magic available as a means of transportation. The cost of the sled is about 100-200 gold, and seven to nine trained sled dogs will cost 200-500 gold each. **Average Speed:** 5-8 miles per hour (8-13 km) with spurts of speed up to 30 mph (48 km) for 15 minutes at a time. However, pushing the dogs too hard (more than four speed runs per 24 hours) can result in one or more of the animals pulling up lame, death by exhaustion, or the animals simply refusing to run. The latter is the most common result as most dogs know their limit and will only be pushed so far before self-preservation kicks in. When pushed hard, the animals will need to rest for at least two hours. **Reduced Speed:** Reduce speed by half when snow is falling or conditions are poor (mist, loose snow, ice covered ground, snow pits are known to be in the area, etc.). **Maximum Weight:** 600 lbs (270 kg), plus the driver and the weight of the sled itself. **Reference Note:** Go rent the movie *Iron Will* on video for some great dog sled scenes and racing.

**Deer Sleigh:** Another way to travel on snow is to use a deer drawn sleigh. Reindeer can be reasonably domesticated and used in a similar way the dog sled. Basically, everything is the



same as Dog Sled, except as noted here. Sleights are usually larger and can carry/pull greater weight. The average sleigh sits four or five human-sized riders comfortably, six or seven cramped. Cost: 200-300 gold for the sleigh and requires six to eight reindeer (5D6+10 H.P. 1D4x10 S.D.C.) to pull it. Each large, domesticated deer costs 300-600 gold. Average Speed: 3-5 miles per hour (4.8 to 8 km) with spurts of speed up to 20 mph (32 km) for 15 minutes at a time. However, pushing the animals too hard (more than four speed runs per 24 hours) can result in one or more of the animals pulling up lame, death by exhaustion, or the animals simply refusing to run. The latter is the most common result. When pushed hard, the animals will need to rest for at least two hours between runs. Reduced Speed: Reduce speed by half when snow is falling or conditions are poor (mist, loose snow, ice covered ground, snow pits are known to be in the area, etc.). Maximum Weight: 500 lbs (225 kg) per animal, in addition to the driver and the weight of the sleigh itself.

**Horse-Drawn Sleights and Horseback:** Horses do not fair well in frigid temperatures and are susceptible to colds, pneumonia and other diseases brought on by cold. Nor do they move well on snow and ice. A slip or fall can wrench an ankle, pull a muscle or break a leg and put them at considerable risk. Even the more surefooted mule and donkey are at risk in snow and freezing temperatures. Moreover, unless one is hauling food for the animal with them, there is nothing for the horse to eat. Thus, taking any type of horse into the Northern Hinterlands in the winter is a death sentence and the animal will *not* last more than 1D4 days!

Even during summer and autumn, horses do not do well in the forest because of the rocky, uneven ground, thick trees and debris littered floor. Except in Ophid's Grasslands and the occasional open stretch of forest land, the best a lone horse or pack animal can do in the Hinterland forest is one or two miles per hour (1.6 to 3.2 km). Going faster, say 3-6 mph (4.8 to 10 km) is dangerous and could cause the animal to trip and injure itself or knock the rider off by slamming into a tree branch. Running any faster is just plain impossible! (Note: Running speed on horseback is double in the Great Northern Wilderness with a maximum speed of up to about 20 mph/32 km possible.) Likewise, unless there is a road or well traveled trail wide enough to accommodate a wagon, using a coach or wagon is also impossible in the forest. Such paths are extremely rare in the forest, even along rivers and lakes, and roads are nonexistent.

Only the Shadow Coast has a network of roads and trails connecting the 13 colonies to one another. Other large settlements may also have one main road in the community and a handful of paths or trails between homesteads or a short way into the forest, or to the next trading post. At such places, a horse or horse-drawn sleigh can be used in snow up to three feet, which means by the middle or end of December, horses are out of commission till summer. And we say "summer" because the soaked ground of spring is too muddy for any sort of cart or carriage and the animals have more trouble slogging through mud than they do making their way through snow.

**Horses in Winter:** Must have a dry, warm place to be kept and can be taken out into the cold for no more than 3-6 hours at a time, with long periods of rest (at least 3 or 4 hours) in between. Can not navigate through snow higher than three feet

(0.9 m) which is the first few days' snow in the Hinterlands. Cost: 300-1500 gold for the sleigh depending on the quality, and requires four to eight animals to pull it. Each workhorse or mule costs 500-1000 gold depending on the quality of the animal. Average Speed in Snow: 2-3 miles per hour (3.2 to 4.8 km) with spurts of speed up to 10 mph (16 km) for 15 minutes at a time. Pushing the animals too hard (more than four speed runs per 24 hours) can result in one or more of the animals pulling up lame, death by exhaustion, or the animals simply refusing to run. The latter is the most common result. When pushed hard, the animals will need to rest for at least two hours between runs. Reduced Speed: Reduce speed by half when snow is falling or conditions are poor (mist, loose snow, ice covered ground, snow pits are known to be in the area, etc.). Maximum Weight: 1,000 lbs (450 kg) per animal, in addition to the driver and the weight of the sleigh itself. Note: Horses, mules and donkeys are not indigenous to the forests of the Northern Hinterlands. This means most horses found in the region were brought there by settlers and adventurers, and they are quite uncommon. The greatest number (perhaps two thousand) are found at the Shadow Colonies, and most are work animals. Note: Also see Travel by Horse and Wagon in the Summer, later in this section.

**Monsters & the Supernatural:** Those not used to snow and ice, or whose natural habitat is jungle, desert or hot climate, see their speed reduced by -30%. Remember, however, some monsters, like *Ice Elementals* and *Ice Demons*, can run across snow and ice without penalty or impairment. There are also certain magic spells and items that enable creatures to move across snow or ice as if it were dry land.

**No penalty** for Air, Snow and Ice Elementals and supernatural beings (gods, spirits, and demons) who are naturally adapted to or magically part of snow, ice and winter.

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## Alternative means of travel

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**Flying:** The problems with flying in the Hinterlands are so many that we give it its own section, a page or so down.

**Methods of Magic Travel:** Of course, in a world of magic there are always alternatives to conventional means of travel. A number of winter and Warlock magic spells (presented in the treasure section) as well as such spells as *Fly as the Eagle*, *Magic Portal*, *Teleport* and others, enable practitioners of magic to travel from one place to the other via spells, circles, scrolls or magic items. Likewise, those who know how, can travel using ley lines and even create environmental shelters. Magical modes of transportation are comparatively uncommon and not typically available to the average person. There are also psionic powers that can help one survive and overcome the icy winters and the frozen north.

**Travel by Horse and Wagon in the Summer:** Travel in the Hinterlands by horse, mule or oxen is only possible in the summer and autumn, and then is best suited for Ophid's Grasslands and the area of cleared land in and around the colonies of the Shadow Coast. In the spring the ground is too soft and muddy for horses and barely manageable by mules, donkeys or oxen (maximum speed is one mph/1.6 km).

Wagons and coaches are generally limited to smooth, flat terrain, such as grasslands, lowlands, trails and roads. Such envi-

ronments in the Hinterlands are found only in the colonies and Ophid's Grasslands (which is bumpier than most would like). Speed is limited by the weight and number of horses drawing the vehicle. As a rule of thumb, it is safe to assume that a single animal pulling a wagon at full speed will travel 50%-80% slower than when carrying a single rider on its back. A team of animals pulling the same wagon share the weight and can move faster, but will still be 10%-40% slower than when traveling by horseback. Furthermore, the other members of the team can only go as fast as the slowest horse in the team, as well as being restrained by the weight of their load. Pulling a wagon at full speed *may* also cause the wagon to tip over and break (01-42% chance), or cause a wheel or axle to break. Repairs will take 1D4+1 hours if it can be repaired at all. (Hope you have a spare.) Moreover, a *full speed run* can only be done for 15 minutes at a time. When pushed hard, the animals will need to rest for at least two or three hours between runs.

**Cost:** 200-1500 gold for the wagon or carriage depending on the quality and requires four to eight horses or mules or oxen to pull it. Each work animal costs 400-1000 gold depending on the quality of the animal. **Average speed on dry ground:** 2-4 miles per hour (3.2 to 6.4 km) with spurts of speed up to 20 mph (32 km) for 15 minutes at a time. Half that speed for oxen. Pushing the animals too hard (more than four speed runs per 24 hours) can result in one or more of the animals pulling up lame, death by exhaustion, or the animals simply refusing to run. The latter is the most common result. When pushed hard, the animals will need to rest for at least two hours between runs. **Reduced Speed:** Reduce speed by half when the ground is slippery or muddy. **Maximum Weight:** 1,200 lbs (540 kg) per animal (+20% for mules and +40% for oxen) in addition to the driver and the weight of the wagon itself. **Note:** Horses, mules and

donkeys are not indigenous to the forests of the Northern Hinterlands. This means most horses found in the region were brought there by settlers and adventurers, and they are quite uncommon. The greatest number (perhaps two thousand) are found at the Shadow Colonies, and most are work animals.

The kind of food fed to a horse or pack animal will make a difference in the rate of travel. Contrary to what many gamers may think, a horse is *not* a lawn mower with legs. A horse can eat grass, weeds and other vegetation, but it takes a much longer time for it to digest such foods and therefore, the horse can not function at full capacity. A horse on a varied diet of oats, grass and hay will move 10% slower. A horse on a steady diet of grass and/or hay will run a full 25% slower because such food just is not as nutritional or filling. It would be like you or I living just on bread and water; it would keep us alive, but with very little energy. On the other hand, a diet of oats, barley and other grains, though more expensive, will help keep the animal healthy and operating at top efficiency. Grooming and proper watering are also important for the horse or pony's well-being. (Note: The term "pony" refers to an Appaloosa-type pony, not a child's miniature riding animal).

**Summer Travel on Foot:** The remote forests of the Northern Hinterlands are fairly dense, uncivilized and untraveled. That means there are no roads and few man-sized trails or animal paths. Nor is there anything resembling civilization. As noted previously, the terrain is difficult and treacherous for horses and pack animals.

*Travel on foot* is the safest and most flexible mode of transportation. However, even on foot, the Hinterland forests are something of an obstacle course. Fallen trees, boulders, hard rocky earth, dense tree cover, scrub, brush and vines create a tangle of vegetation and obstacles that makes travel slow and ponderous. Running through the forest at top speed can send a character tumbling into a ravine or woodsman's trap, or tripping and falling flat on his face (takes 1D4 damage and loses initiative and one melee action). The character is also likely to lose sight of his companions and get lost. Unless he has one of the Navigation skills or magic abilities to locate his friends, camp or landmarks, the character could remain lost indefinitely.

The scrub and vegetation combined with pine cones, broken twigs, and dry leaves that carpet the forest floor, crunch, snap and crinkle with every footstep, making prowling difficult. Ambushes by wild barbarians and bushwhackers are painfully common.

The deeper one goes into the interior of the Hinterlands, the fewer the humans and civilized folk (Elves, Dwarves, Gnomes, etc.), and people in general. It is in the interior where one is most likely to encounter exotic, inhuman and monstrous beings like Trolls, Gigantes, Bearmen, Kankoran, Centaurs and others who call the Northern Hinterlands "home."

**Penalties and Modifiers for moving through the forests of the Hinterlands:**

- A reasonably unobstructed line of sight is usually only about 1D6x10+100 feet (33.5 to 49 m) in any ONE direction (half that distance in the others). Beyond that, there are so many trees, logs, bushes and boulders that it is impossible to get a





clear line of sight and there are numerous places where an opponent could be hiding.

- A good, careful walking pace in the cluttered forest is one or two miles per hour; double for true Giants or at a quick trot. However, trotting or jogging is noisier and the traveler is likely to miss details such as game animals, notable but subtle landmarks, concealment and possible enemies or predators within sight or earshot. Speed is roughly one mile per hour (1.6 km) when tracking. A half mile an hour (0.8 km) when searching for traps or concealment.
- Running speed in the forest is -25%. Running at maximum speed is not possible.
- Prowling in the woods of the Hinterlands is done with a penalty of -20%, and scrub, vines and bushes make travel not only slow, but noisy. Prowling on horseback or accompanied by a horse or other large animal is -50%!
- Detect Ambush is -10%.
- Detect Concealment and traps is -10%.
- Concealment/hiding, Ambush and Camouflage skills get a +10% bonus.
- Land Navigation is -10% in the summer and -40% in the winter. Astronomy & Navigation using heavenly bodies is impossible during the "snow season."

## Flying

**Flying (via magic, wings, or animal):** Riding on top of a flying animal, like a Pegasus or Gryphon, or flying by means of spell or magical enchantment (flying carpet, etc.), can be one of the best ways to travel across any harsh environment. It is fast, easy, and low-maintenance, but comes with its own set of problems and concerns. One is expense. Unless a character is a practitioner of magic himself, getting even a limited means of magical flight can be expensive. Spell casters must be careful not to expend so much P.P.E. on flying that they become ineffective or powerless in case of trouble.

A flying humanoid can be seen coming from a great distance; at least two miles (3.2 km) if not two or three times that distance, especially over the grasslands, flat land or sea. The alternatives are to use cloud cover, fly at treetop level, among the trees, or fly low to the ground to be less obvious. However, even then, movement on the flat horizon is still likely to be noticed. In forests, flying at tree level or among the tree branches has its own set of dangers. While it may conceal the fliers, the character must fly 30-50% slower than possible to avoid crashing into a tree or getting battered from tree branches. Reckless flying claims many lives, especially those who are enjoying the power of flight for the first time and either can not control their movement or can not control their urges to "hot rod." Mid-air collisions and crash-landings can be fatal, and in the least, loudly announce one's arrival and position. Since flying through the trees will mean dodging tree branches, the flyer is -1 on initiative and loses one melee attack too. In addition, unless flying very slowly (under 10 mph/16 km) and no more than 20 feet (6 m) above the ground, the flier is likely to miss things — like one's enemies and friends and landmarks. Flying at any speed or height makes tracking, finding items dropped on the ground or those in hiding, impossible.

**Flying Animals:** The forest of the Northern Hinterlands is too dense to use a flying animal such as a Gryphon, Pegasus, Peryton or Dragondactyl effectively. First, the creature must have an open area at least 12-15 feet (3.6 to 4.6 m) in diameter to take-off and land from. Once airborne, the creature can cover vast distances, but must find a clearing to land. This means the rider and animal will have to fly at treetop level, unable to see anything more than vague glimpses of what's happening on the ground below. Winged riding animals are large and can NOT fly through the trees like an eagle without making a tremendous amount of noise, getting injured and their wings getting battered and torn, perhaps even impaling themselves on a broken branch. Thus, unless the rider is willing to risk injuring or killing his flying mount, he has effectively taken himself out of the action on the ground and runs a very good risk of getting lost (unable to locate his teammates)!

Once on the ground, these creatures of the air and wide-open spaces are at a great disadvantage. They must try to navigate the unfamiliar terrain of dense trees and rugged, rocky ground. They fare about the same as the horse (see *Travel by horse and wagon* earlier in this section), but have to worry about snagging brush with their wings, making noise and their wings suffering minor damage. More importantly, most winged beasts hate traveling through the forest where they may have no quick or easy way up and out of the trees and into the sky, grounded in such an environment makes them easy targets for predators and humanoid attacks, as well as nervous wrecks who may flee their master if pressed to stay grounded in a Hinterland forest for more than an hour. Thus, flying animals, while cool to have, beautiful to look at, and effective in grasslands, along the coast and in the mountains, are worthless in the forests of the Hinterlands (and to a lesser degree, the Great Northern Wilderness). Forcing these wondrous animals into the Hinterland forest is a death sentence eight out of ten times.

**Attacks from airborne predator and enemies.** Fliers, especially those winging above the treetops or flying on winged animals, are extremely vulnerable from attacks by other fliers.

Attacks from airborne predators, such as Perytons, Dragondactyls, gryphons, dragons, and other winged beasts, are always a threat, and nowhere more so than in the Northern Hinterlands. One must never forget that the towering, demon- and monster-filled Northern Mountains run from coast to coast, placing the entire Hinterlands, from forest to grasslands, in its shadow. Not only do hungry predators monitor the land below for prey, but demons, dragons, foul gods and black-hearted men of magic watch from the peaks. Once again, the danger is that a flyer is easily observed, especially from the mountains and other flyers above. To make matters worse, most humans and other "ground dwellers" forget to look above or around them, making surprise attacks from higher altitudes an easy proposition. Besides, once spotted by an aerial predator or enemy, where does one go? The rider or flyer is out in the open. The character's only choices are outrunning his attacker(s), which may not be possible, losing them in the clouds (if there are any) or diving for the ground in hopes of losing pursuers under the cover of the forest, or in the hope that the predator or enemy will abandon the chase at treetop level.

One must also take into consideration attacks from hostile natives, bandits, dragons, sorcerers or other creatures using

magic or the elegant bow and arrow from the ground. In such cases, the airborne character can usually fly away to safety, but retaliation or attempts to communicate or even identify his attacker(s) will be difficult. For undoubtedly, his attackers will be using the cover of trees and are probably impossible to see unless he lands, or is able to fly through the trees at slow speed, low to the ground (probably not a good idea). Flyers low to the ground or among the trees are all the more vulnerable to ground attacks as well as getting jumped by assailants hiding up in the trees. The Hinterland barbarians, Fearie Folk, Loogaroo and others use this tactic regularly.



**Navigating from the air** is more difficult than most people imagine too. Ground-dwelling creatures like humans are accustomed to a ground level perspective not an aerial one. Thus, it is easy to lose one's bearings from up high or even flying among the trees where everything looks different and familiar landmarks are obscured by trees. One tends to lose his sense of time, speed of travel, direction and distance, especially when flying high, up in the clouds or in a storm or other condition that obscures one's vision and hides the ground. This is even worse for subterranean beings who often get "air sick" (i.e. feel a bit frightened, nauseous and dizzy, and may need to stop periodically to vomit) when flying. As a result, inexperienced flyers are easily disoriented when traveling by the air. When flying, the *Land Navigation* skill is reduced to -20% during the day and -30% at night (-30% and -50% respectively for subterranean folk). Reduce the penalty to only -10% if flying low to the ground; 50 feet (15 m) or lower in most environments, 20 feet (6 m) in the forests of the Hinterlands. Additional penalties will result from poor atmospheric conditions and obscured vision which can reduce *Land Navigation* to -50% to -90%. During white-out conditions the flyer will be completely blind and navigation at zero. **Note:** Remember, it is impossible to track, find a dropped item or locate a hidden place or individual while flying no matter how slow the character is going. It is also impossible to prowl when flying through dense trees or underbrush.

**Atmospheric conditions**, like smoke, fog, rain, snow, bright snow glistening in the sun (causing snow blindness), cloudy or stormy weather and other conditions can impede or even prevent flying – getting hit by lightning bolts from every direction during a thunderstorm, or getting pelted by hail or blasted by wind and snow during a blizzard will encourage one to land right

quick to find cover. Thick fog or a heavy snowstorm, let alone a blizzard or white-out conditions, will make it impossible for the flyer to see the ground or know exactly where he is going (can not use *Land Navigation* or *Astronomy* skills). Continuing to "fly blind" will take the character at least 2D4x10 miles (32 to 128 km) in the wrong direction per hour of flight; double that distance if the character is flying at maximum speed.

Depending on how bad visibility is, the flyer may not be able to tell where the trees, ground or mountains are, making a crash into something hard, likely (takes 2D6 damage for every 10 miles/16 km of speed). The flyer will be unable to avoid glaciers, mountain ridges or trees in his path unless he is flying slower than 20 mph (32 km).

Strong winds or flying against the wind will slow one's speed and make control, combat moves and accuracy difficult (-3 on initiative and reduce all combat rolls like strike, parry and dodge by half). Flying into or against *strong winds* (30-45 mph/48 to 72 km) will reduce one's speed by 40% while flying with the wind will increase it 20%. Flying in winds greater than 50 mph (80+ km) is like trying to navigate in a hurricane. Under these conditions, flying against the wind reduces flying speed to a mere 2D4 mph (3.2 to 13 km), requires tremendous energy (the flyer fatigues four time faster than normal) and *Land Navigation* has a (cumulative) penalty of -30%. So great is the turbulence that controlled flight and combat is impossible, with combat bonuses reduced to one, and the flyer's attacks/actions per melee round reduced by half even if flying with the wind. Mid-air collisions with other flyers (or flying debris) are much more likely and even landings will be clumsy. Trying to fly by magic or winged beast is impossible in wind speeds greater than 90 mph (144 km), which is the low range for hurricanes and the high range for tornados.

**Hinterland Note:** Virtually all of the preceding atmospheric conditions, plus cold and moisture, apply during the "snow season" in the Northern Hinterlands where the sun, stars, and sky are concealed behind a wall of thick gray clouds, the winds are strong and swirling, and it snows for three months non-stop. Storms, snow and ley line surges can all ground fliers with terminal intensity. Air over the Hinterlands gets really cold, especially during the long winter months. Flying higher than 500 feet (152 m) becomes unbearable, with temperatures well below the freezing point. That and natural wind makes high altitudes lethally cold. Flying at lower altitudes is an easy fix, but then one becomes vulnerable to sharp-eyed aerial predators. One also may come under arrow or javelin fire from marauders on the ground who will want to bring fliers down. Anybody who looks like they're flying by magical means is a juicy target indeed for bandits and marauders.

**The elements.** Cold and heat can also be a problem, especially for those flying by enchanted means or riding a flying animal. Getting soaked by rain or snow, or bombarded by cold winds, can cause hypothermia, frostbite, dehydration and fatigue the same as traveling in the snow. The cold of the Great Northern Wilderness in autumn and winter anywhere can be oppressive, but it is bone chilling and relentless in the Northern Hinterlands.

One of the most common problems for magically empowered flyers in wilderness settings, is they often assume they do not need to bring as many provisions with them. After all, they



are flying over the region, right? It's not like they are walking or riding, so why load oneself down with all that water, food and snow gear when you can fly back to town or camp and get some more whenever you need it, right? Wrong. Often dead wrong! Most do not realize they suffer the effects of the cold and wind (or heat) to the same degree as those on the land, often more so because they have no shade, wind break or protection from the elements. They don't realize they need water to keep cool and hydrated too. As for flying back to get critical food, clothing and supplies, many an adventurer following such shallow wisdom has perished when conditions did not permit him to fly back to where provisions could be had, or when exhaustion or hypothermia, or injury made it impossible to fly or, in some cases, even cast spells! The wisdom behind all this is, just because flying is faster and seemingly more efficient, it doesn't make traveling in the wilderness any less hazardous. One must always be prepared. **Note:** *Other Winter, Snow & Arctic Conditions* and their resulting penalties apply to flyers.

## Weather, Winter Conditions & Ground Penalties

All modifiers and penalties are cumulative and reflect reduced visibility, cold and foul weather conditions. They are added together along with the speed modifiers from deep snow, as is applicable.

**Light Snow, Mist or Fog:** -5% to speed and reduces visibility by 10%; maximum visual distance is about one mile (1.6 km). **Snow Accumulation:** 1D4 inches, even in the Hinterlands. Covers tracks in about 1D4x10+90 minutes. -5% to Land Navigation skill.

**Moderate/Medium Snowfall:** -10% to speed and reduces visibility by 25%; maximum visual distance is about three quarters of a mile (1.2 km). **Snow Accumulation:** 1D4+2 inches (8-15 cm; x5 in the Hinterlands). Covers tracks in about 60 minutes. -10% to Land Navigation skill.

**Heavy Snow or Fog:** -20% to speed and reduces visibility by 50%; maximum visual distance is about half a mile (0.8 km). **Snow Accumulation:** 1D6+6 inches (18-30 cm; x10 in the Hinterlands). Covers tracks in 4D6 minutes. -20% to Land Navigation skill.

**White-Out Conditions:** Typically accompanies heavy snow and high winds or blizzard. Cannot see tracks. -90% to Land Navigation skill. See Blizzard for details.

**Modifiers on Ice:** (i.e., the character is standing on a sheet of ice) +1 to dodge on ice, -1 to strike, parry, disarm or entangle, and combat or trick moves require a skill roll at -30%.

**Ski & Snow Modifiers:** No speed penalty when traveling on snow with skis, but combat bonuses are reduced to half because the skis make fast, agile movement difficult (if not completely impossible), and combat or trick moves require a skill roll at -30%.

(On a snowboard, instead of skis, the character can perform quick stops, hops, leaps, aerial somersaults, and ricochet off rocks, trees and snowbanks, but at -10% to his skill performance. However, it is unlikely that snowboards exist in the Paladium World.)

**Snow Lightly Covered in Ice:** -10% to speed.

**Solid Ice/Ice Flow:** -30% to speed.

**Jagged or Chunks of Ice & Rocks:** -20% to speed.

**Light Wind (5-10 mph/8-16 km):** Causes slight wind chill factor, blowing and drifting, but no significant penalties to note. Makes the air temperature feel colder by 10 degrees Fahrenheit/6 Celsius (wind chill factor). Snowdrifts 1 to 3 feet (0.3 to 0.9 m) tall.

**Medium Wind (11-20 mph/18-32 km):** -5% to speed factor. Causes significant blowing and drifting, covers tracks in half the time (same as Light Snow if it is not also snowing), and makes the air temperature feel colder by 15-20 degrees Fahrenheit. Snowdrifts 3 to 5 feet (.9 to 1.5 m) tall. -10% to Land Navigation skill.

**Heavy/Strong Wind (21-40 mph/34-64 km):** -10% to speed factor. Visibility is bad as the wind causes significant blowing and drifting, covers tracks in half the time (same as Heavy Snow if it is not also snowing), and Wind Chill: Makes the air temperature feel colder by 25-30 degrees Fahrenheit (14-17 C). Snowdrifts 6-11 feet (1.8 to 3.4 m) tall. -20% to Land Navigation skill.

**Blizzard:** -60% to speed and reduce visibility to near zero. One can barely see more than 8 feet (2.4 m) in front of his face, and even that is blurred and obscured! It's also impossible to hear shouting voices more than 8 feet (2.4 m) away. Winds are over 50 mph (80 km), which makes the air temperature feel colder by 40-60 degrees Fahrenheit (22-33 C). Tracks are covered in 1D4 minutes. Snowdrifts 12 to 25 feet (3.7 to 7.6 m) tall, on top of the current snow base. Snow Accumulation: 3D6+10 inches (33-71 cm).

**Additional Combat Penalties from Blizzard Conditions:** Reduce attacks/actions per melee round by two, all combat bonuses by half and shooting at targets more than eight feet (2.4 m) away is the same as shooting blind (no W.P. bonuses and -9 to strike, parry or dodge). -90% to Land Navigation skill.

Traveling faster than 10% of one's maximum speed in a blizzard or "white-out condition" has a 01-80% chance to crash into a tree, rock, giant snowdrift, hut/igloo or monster, or go off a cliff, into a pit, into the sea, etc. It is better to find some sort of at least partial shelter (a cave, boulder, side of a glacier, etc.) and wait out the blizzard than try to travel.

## Rainstorms

Although one might think of snow when they think of bad weather in the Hinterlands, intense rainfall can be a problem during the warmer parts of the year. Many of the furious thunderstorms that lash the area come in from the northern oceans as super-squalls or mini-hurricanes, that often skip over the Hinterland coast (or hit it with the less severe tail end of the storm) but pound the Great Northern Wilderness and Island Kingdom of Bizantium with punishing wind, rain and lightning. In the Hinterlands, the winter is the worst and wettest, with rain falling mainly in late summer and autumn, and a few are violent storms.

**Coastal Storms** brew over the Sea of Despair, like the intense maelstroms that affect the European North Atlantic, and in the winter, from snowstorms like the Nor'easters that pound the northeastern U.S. coastline. These storms gather strength over the water, then head straight inland, where the rocky coastline comes right up to the sea. Usually, these storms crash head-on

into the coastal areas, then roll either north or south until they blow themselves out, or until they return back to the sea. The hurricane-force winds (70-150 mph/112 to 240 km) of these storms wreak havoc on most of the coastal settlements here, none of which are really built to withstand that kind of punishment. Moreover, the storm surge (a 20 foot/6 m tidal wave) caused by these storms often dashes ships against stones, cliffs, and docks, which accounts for the unusually high number of shipwrecks in the north, particularly in and around the Sea of Despair where the worst coastal storms occur.

Such storms happen several times (2D4) a year (only 1D4 times in the Hinterlands), but every 10 or 15 years, an unusually strong storm season pops up, creating 2D6+3 coastal storms over a period of three months (the Hinterlands seeing only 1D4+1). During such times, one of those storms will hit the coast and roll away to the sea but not really lose any power. These storms will double in size and strength and hit the coast again as a super-storm. These fearsome maelstrom will destroy all but the hardiest communities and ships. Local legend has it that every 100 years, a super-super storm brews up to flood large sections of the Hinterlands' interior. So far, there are no records to confirm such tales, but given the low altitude of the Hinterlands' interior, if the whole region were deluged, there would be considerable flooding. **Note:** Though on the coast, the Shadow Colonies are at a higher elevation than much of the interior.

**Interior storms** do not often occur in the Northern Hinterlands, but are common in the spring and summer of the Great Northern Wilderness. These are like "normal" thunderstorms throughout the rest of the Palladium World, except they tend to rain a little harder, last a little longer, and have about double the amount of lightning. Anybody hit by lightning in one of these storms takes 8D6 damage! There is only a 03% chance of this happening, unless the character is wearing a full suit of metal armor, in which case the chance of a lightning strike while out in the open increases to 21%.

The real problem with interior storms is that they dump 2D6 inches of water within 30 minutes to an hour, which is more than the soil can absorb. As a result, the runoff quickly accumulates into a flash flood. If the rain had taken place over a longer, more gradual pace, *all* of the water would soak into the ground without incident.

**Thunderstorms.** Intense rainstorms can cause flash floods that wash out bridges and trails and cause the banks of rivers and lakes to swell and flood, as well as mud slides and damage from high winds, broken branches and toppled trees. Travel speed during such a storm is reduced by 30-60% depending on its severity, plus visibility is typically a half mile (0.8 km) or less (the worst will have zero visibility); -50% to the Land Navigation Skill. Plus, the traveler will get soaked, cold and may catch a cold or worse.

**Flash floods** are free-flowing rivulets of fast-moving water that race through the area, drowning and washing away most anybody caught in the wave. The rushing torrents of water race down at speeds of 30-60 mph (48-96 km) and are 3D6 feet (0.9 to 5.5 m) deep. Characters with the Swimming skill can try to stay afloat and navigate the rush of water, but their swim skill is -25% and they take 3D6 points of damage. Those who fail three consecutive Swimming rolls when caught in a flash flood will

drown. And those who do make their rolls can only stay in the rushing water for a number of minutes equal to their P.E. before they tire and drown, too.

The worst place to be during a flash flood is in a small valley, dried-up riverbed, or other such depression. Flood waters channel into such places, and only increase in their ferocity. One should take caution when traveling in these; a flash flood will occur with only one melee round of warning, unless travelers have some other means of advance notice. **Note:** Old river beds, flood plains, chasms, mountain trails, hillsides, and drainage channels are the most likely places where flash floods and mud slides will occur.

**Mud slides** are similar to flash floods, only they can be even more devastating and deadly. These mud slides travel at speeds of 60-100 miles per hour (96-160 km)! A small, isolated stream works the same as the *flash flood* except reduce the swim skill by half. Damage is also the same, except in addition to it, there is a very real probability of being buried alive and suffocating when the flow stops. Roll percentile dice.

**01-80%** Means victims suffer 4D6 points of damage and are buried under tons of mud and rock, and will suffocate within 2D4 minutes. Rescue without extraordinary means (i.e. magic) is impossible. The only exceptions are those protected by magic or a force field of some kind. But even they must be located and dug out by outside help.

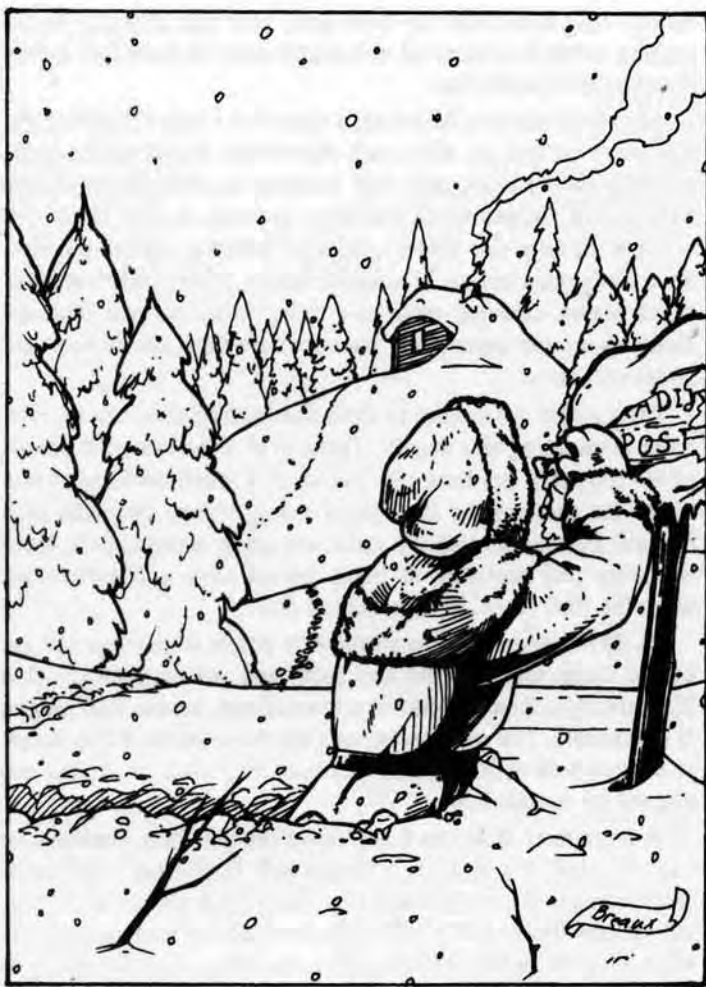
A large mud slide can bring down the side of a mountain or half of a hill. Victims die within a half hour from suffocation (6D6 minutes if not trained in survival). Since about half of buried victims die within a half hour, the odds of finding a person alive are poor (without magic). For one thing, it is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. The buried individual could be anywhere along the path of the slide, although probably somewhere at the bottom. They could be buried under as little as 1D6 feet (0.3 to 1.8 m) or as much as 60 feet (18.3 m) of rock and mud. In real life, a large mud slide is like a run-away freight train pulling down half the mountain or hill behind it. They uproot trees, carry away livestock and vehicles, and bury entire villages. The event is nothing short of catastrophic.

**81-00%** Means the character miraculously survived (he's covered in mud from head to toe and probably lost everything he was carrying, but he's alive!).

**Tornadoes:** Twisters or tornadoes can occur anywhere in the north and Disputed Lands, with perhaps one or two appearing every 10-20 years. Tornadoes are most common, with 2D6 appearing every spring and summer in the Old Kingdom, Timiro and lower half of the Eastern Territory. Phi and Lopan sometimes get one or two every few years.

Tornadoes are typically accompanied by rain or a thunderstorm, dark or strangely colored sky, and move through an area quickly; typically touch down for 1-4 minutes, but can rip along 1-6 miles (1.6-9.6 km) in that time. To make playing easy, consider the tornado to be the equivalent of a 6+1D4 level Tornado Elemental spell.





## The Hearth & Home

The sight of a Hearth and Home is always a welcomed one, especially in the winter. A Hearth is less than a town or village, more than a trading post and quite like a fort. They can vary in size from small (can accommodate as many as 120 people, but may be inhabited by as few as 30) to large (inhabited by 160-240, but can accommodate as many as 400). They are basically a palisade surrounding one large lodge house and a half a dozen smaller buildings. These palisade homesteads and trading posts dot the forests of the Northern Hinterlands and can save a traveler's life. This is how Old Ben described them:

*"What's that? Ya'll ain't never heard of a Hearth n' Home? Well, let me tell ya lads, it kin mean the difference 'tween life an' death, 'specially in the winter. Yes, sir. I guess ya might call a Hearth n' Home a palisade homestead, only it ain't much o' no fort an' there ain't no soldiers garrisoned there.*

*"The place is impossible to miss, sitting in a man-made clearing. The trees that made it cut from the forest that once stood all around it. That's on purpose too, 'cuz nobody wants the forest up to their doorstep to cloak invaders and barbarians. One wants a little open space and distance so they kin see what's comin' at 'em. Yep, there's no mistaking it. Facility like this take a lot of lumber an' man power. Too big fer jus' one or three fellas to put up in a summer. An' that's about all one has in summer. The wet spring an' the long winter makes buildin' near impossible 'cept for the summer. An' the fall is gone in a blink of an eye, ending with the first snow. So ya gotta corral yerself a bunch o' people an' work quick. That's probably why they all be so simple too.*

*"Basically, somebody, probably a handful o' trappers or rangers or homesteaders, finds themselves a nice piece o' land – maybe near a stream or a spot that has a well, or is not too far from a hunter's trail. Anyway, they build themselves a big ol' log cabin. An' I mean BIG! The size of a dance hall an' then some. They make it outta the trees they cleared. Then they make a barn or stable, a storage house, a smoke shed fer meats, a shed for furs, an outhouse an' maybe another storage shed. Most I seen has a animal pen too, fer summer months. After that's all done they put up the palisade 'round it.*

*"The outer walls, they be made of piked logs lashed together. Stand pretty near 12 to 18 feet (3.6 to 5.5 m) tall. Ta you green know-nothin's that probably makes the place pretty safe lookin' – an' it is, but them rough hewn walls ain't gonna keep anything out that don't wanna git in. Hell, I could scale them walls wit jus' my one good leg and missin' fingers. Wolfen kin hop them like ya'll might a fence. What them walls does is keep out animals like wolves, dogs, deer an' the likes from givin' people a fright, chasin' away livestock an' rumagin' through the garbage. An' keeping livestock, horses an' kids from gittin' themselves lost or eaten. Them walls is also a godsend when the wind kicks up, 'specially in the winter. That's when ya realize what a godsend windbreakers are, not that ya'll be goin' out much in the winter. Not unless yer crazy.*

*"There's usually a big, double hung gate, 10 feet (3 m) tall or more.*

*"The big lodge is the main place o' business an' livin', especially in the winter when one wants all the bodies ya kin git to help warm the place an' keep company. Lots o' these big ol' lodges be two story cabins, but most is only one. O' course they be made outta nice thick logs jus*

*like the walls. The lodge has a big ol' fireplace right in the center o' the west wall. Don't know exactly why the west wall, but I ain't never seen one without it there. There are big fireplaces on each o' them other walls too, though not as big as the main one.*

*"The big log cabin is the heart o' the outpost. It's the place where the people live, communal like. Most of the food, furs and supplies are stored an' traded here too, with a part of the insides sectioned off a bit to be used as the tradin' post. A fella kin git most basic supplies at the Hearth n' Home tradin' post – rope, needle an' thread, snares, knife, new moccasins, gloves, hat, water skin, blanket, flint, dried meats, sausage, and such – providin' he's got somethin' worth tradin' for. Animal hides, furs, meat, sack o' nuts, fruit, vegetables, mushrooms, spices, cheese, booze, tools, bolts o' cotton or wool fabric an' such is usually good trade, as is livestock, healing powers an' magic that helps the folks who live there. Silver an' gold or gems an' weapons is usually acceptable in the summer, but not all places will take it in the winter or they'll charge three times what it's worth. Reason is, in the winter, coin and shiny pebbles ain't gonna keep ya alive, ya'll need blankets, food, firewood an' a dry place to keep yer butt warm. For those who pay or have a service to offer, whether it be a strong back, a healin' touch or magic to help ease the burden o' daily life, they can stay an' share in the warmth and food o' the outpost. Payin' customers git whatever they want. Freeloaders git the boot and trouble-makers a knife in the ribs an' maybe git fed to the pigs.*

"Stayin' at the Hearth n' Home for a night or two is usually free in the summer an' autumn, with a hardy meal costin' as little as the equivalent o' two gold. Stay longer than that, an' ya gotta pay either in trade, coin or chores around the place. Sure ya could always pitch yer bedroll or tent outside o' the place, but after bein' out in the woods it's nice ta be around other folk. Beside, the Hearth n' Home is where to share stories o' adventure an' git caught up on the latest news an' rumors. Yep, this is where tradin' is done, deals are made, information shared, an' one kin rest a bit. An not jus' with the folks who live an' trade at the post, but with other trappers, woodsmen and folks stopped by to visit. The fires always burn high in the cabin at the Hearth n' Home, and for those who have something of value to trade to the community, the food and drink flow freely. Come autumn an' spring, the H&H is full to bursting night. Tends ta be quiet durin' summer when a body has to work his hardest while the weather is good. In fact, there ain't likely to be more than maybe 30 ta 50 people livin' there and not even a dozen visitors some nights durin' summer. But things change in the winter.

"The long winter makes life hard, an' a Hearth n' Home will be packed to the rafters; maybe two or three hundred people all crammed into the main lodge. A body can't be as charitable as one might want in the winter. Visitors kin come an' trade, but unless they be known to somebody at the Hearth n' Home, they can't stay. Not even for the night. Strangers kin spell trouble, an' one can't afford no trouble in the winter. Likewise, even if ya be known to the good folks, if the place is full, ya gotta go. A Hearth n' Home kin only feed an' support so many people. After that point, takin' on more than is reasonable ain't charity, it's killin' everybody. Anyone who has spent any time in the Hinterlands an' survived a winter understands an' don't make no fuss about it. Food is parceled out durin' the winter too, an' alcohol locked up 'cept for special occasions. Booze ain't good fer a body in the cold, an' drunks only stink up the place in more ways than one, if ya know what I mean.

"Early on in the winter, a deep furrow in the snow marks where travelers come an' go. O'course, after a while the path

gits covered by snow, but then ain't nobody going nowhere in the heart o' winter. An' that's when the Hearth n' Home is a lifesaver. That's when ya'll 'preciate the design too. One big ol' log cabin, with thick walls ta keep out the elements an' filled up with a hundred or more people ta help keep the place warm an' cozy. A body jus' finds a place on the floor fer his bedroll an' that's his spot for the winter. O'course the tradin' post part is separate, although it don't do much business in the winter. An' there be a place to cook, an' a place to eat with rows o' benches an' long tables to sit at, an' a space or two for gatherings. You know, to git together with folks ya like to tell stories an' sing or dance an' such.

"Everybody stayin' is expected ta help pitch snow over the wall, where it piles up so high travelers can practically walk up the icy slope and along the top of the palisade. No matter how high one builds a wall out there, the snow will always rise to meet it. Inside, the frozen mud o' the compound still gits covered by 5-10 feet (1.5 to 3 m) o' snow, cuz it ain't possible to remove all the snow thet falls without magic. O'course a path is made from the lodge to any other important buildings like the stables an' the out house, although a good number o' animals is allowed in the lodge ta share the warmth. One path will lead to a heapin' snow mound that goes up an' over the main gates an' another one or two as well, jus' in case.

"O' the majority of Hearth n' Homes I seen, most have themselves a Warlock, Wizard, or Druid or two. The best ones will have a Healer livin' there too. These fellas come in real handy to fight the elements, raiders n' monsters. O'course, with all the woodsmen and adventurin' folks that come, 'specially in the winter, there's likely to be all kinds o' men at arms, clergy, spell casters an' everything in between.

"Most everybody is welcome at a Hearth n' Home, Wolfen, Coyles, Orcs an' Ogres among them. Only time they ain't is when the good folks who built an' live at the place say otherwise. While folks in them parts is pretty tolerant, some folks have their reasons to hate other folks, an' there ain't no gittin' around that. No sir."





# People & Promise of the Hinterlands

By Kevin Siembieda & Bill Coffin

The Northern Hinterlands is unique in that it is truly a sprawling wilderness: forest in the north and a wind-swept grassland in the south. There are very few people of any kind and individuals, clans and tribes of Bearmen, Kankoran, Coyles, Wolfen, Centaurs, Minotaurs, Ogres, Orcs, Goblins, Giants, human barbarians and all the rest are few and far between. When one talks about a "clan" the group is usually under 20 people, and a tribe in these parts seldom exceeds 300; most range from 60-180. Adventurer groups, bandits and the likes can be small at 3-6 or large with 10-30 members, seldom more. Any group larger is considered an army. Many woodsmen and wilderness folk travel alone or in small bands and hunting parties of 3-10. Most are nomadic and have no permanent home site or anything even beginning to resemble a town. Except for the Bizantium colonies along the *Shadow Coast*, there is no civilization in the Hinterlands. Most wilderness folk, be they Faerie, Kankoran, Giant or human, live off the land, hunt and fish, and are constantly moving from place to place. There are no recognized borders or boundaries in the open and free wilderness. What small plots of land are claimed by man or beast are easy to avoid or usurp. These are typically homesteads, hunting lodges, trading posts, Hearth and Homes, or the home, tower, cave or lair of a monster or powerful individual or small group.

## The Great Races

### Canines

To those unfamiliar with the specifics of the Palladium World, the **Great Northern Wilderness** is synonymous with the *Wolfen Empire*. Of course, this is not the case. Though the Wolfen claim dominion over all of the Great Northern Wilderness, the reality is that they control well less than half of it. Their strongest base is in the region's northeast corner, where the capital of *Shadowfall* and the other tribal centers are found. To the south lies the **Disputed Lands**, the territory over which the Wolfen and Eastern humans are soon to go to war over. To the west, the Wolfen's control wanes rapidly, so by the time a traveler reaches the shores of the **Dragon's Claw**, the Empire seems to hardly exist. Out there, legionnaires are as rare as Unicorns, and the only peace to enforce is that which settlers, explorers, traders and mercenaries choose to enforce themselves. By the time one reaches the far side of the Dragon's Claw, the Wolfen Empire is no more. There is only the wilderness that locals call the **Northern Hinterlands**.

Though there is no formal government over the Hinterlands, it is still the canine races – Wolfen, Coyle and Kankoran, that effectively dominate it. Coyle hordes, though unorganized rabble, enforce their will through their massive strength in numbers. No Wolfen tribes exist out this far, but small Wolfen homesteads, outpost, trappers, explorers, adventurers, scouts and traveling groups roam the Hinterlands. A constant reminder that the Wolfen consider themselves lords of this land and intend one day to expand into it.



More than any other canine, the Northern Hinterlands belong to the **Kankoran**, though they would never actually lay claim to land or make borders. Kankoran are all woodsmen who live off the land and see the entire Hinterlands as "their home." Though they often travel alone, in pairs or small groups of 3-6, they do gather in strength not to enforce their own will, but to champion the cause of the wilderness itself and protect it when it has been infringed upon by outsiders. Such is the case in the **Shadow Coast**, where human settlers are steadily cutting their way into woodlands thousands of years old. Generally speaking, the Kankoran have ignored the settlers who hug the coast and leave 99% of the Hinterland woodlands alone. The Kankoran are not against sharing the land with others, and some of the tribes in the north have actually befriended the colonists whom they see as more noble and understanding than their Bizantium masters. From the Kankoran's point of view, it is the Island Kingdom of Bizantium that is the despoiler of the land. As they see it, the evil King and lords of Bizantium clear cut the forest and dig up the earth, not the colonists. They believe the "Coastlanders" (the name given to the colonists of the Shadow Coast) understand and respect the forest, and would not rape her if left to their own devices. For this reason, should the Coastlanders ever rise up to break the shackles that bind them to their Bizantium masters, many Kankoran, Bearmen and a handful of other woodland people would join in their crusade. Unfortunately, the Kankoran are naive and too trusting. They do not really understand "human" nature, and don't believe the colonies would be as indifferent and destructive to the wilderness as their "civilized masters." While this is true to some extent, the colonists do NOT share the Kankoran's love and appreciation for nature and would, indeed, continue to plunder the mineral rich earth and cut away the forest for lumber and farmland. However, it is years before any open rebellion is likely to erupt at the Shadow Colonies and generations before the colonists move beyond the lands they know. Until then, the Kankoran see most (not all) of the colonies as friendly neighbors. Currently, only the *Seven Sisters*, *Destiny Point* and, to a lesser degree, *Outer Cadath* are seen as corrupt centers of civilization (as the Kankoran understand it) and despoilers who may one day endanger the region. As a result, the Kankoran avoid these places and try to teach the colonists about conservation and respect for nature. Should the Shadow Colonies one day prove they are not worthy of the Kankoran's friendship and ignore their warning, they shall become an enemy. Against foes such as those, the Kankoran have become an army intent on halting their so-called progress and pushing the despoilers out of the wilderness.

There are plenty of other races who have staked their claim in the Northern Hinterlands, to be sure, but all of them do so with the understanding that no matter who lives there, no matter what settlements are nestled among the trees, no matter how far other empires may stretch their hands into this great, vast wilderness, it is the *canine people* who are the true children of the woods. And unless some genocide were to happen, or a divine intervention occurs, that is the way it shall always be. As a result, it is customary to give a little more respect to canines in the Hinterlands than one might in other parts of the world. All canines have friends here, and to antagonize any group of them is to invite the worst kind of trouble. Lasting trouble at that. This is the threat that hangs over the heads of any non-canine in the Hinterlands, which has done a lot to keep the various human settlers more humble than they might otherwise be.

The position canines hold in the Hinterlands has had a long-term cultural effect on other races living here. Humans, Elves and Dwarves who live in the Hinterlands for a long time (usually over 10 years) begin to shed their old ways and customs in favor of Wolfen and Kankoran tradition. The haughty imperials of the Western Empire and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium scoff at this effect, but it is a cultural reality that can not be denied. No other race can compete so well in the wilderness as the canines, so those who are humbled by the wilderness tend to take up similar views and approaches to life in the Hinterlands as the canines whether they realize it or not. Most people who "go native" are never fully accepted by canines, but they are certainly treated better than they would have been otherwise. The Kankoran are the most accepting of the canine races, since they are themselves a "fringe culture." The Wolfen, after all, have a society that expands and grows by absorbing other cultures and incorporating their ways into their own. The human client state of *Havea*, deep in the heart of the Wolfen Empire, is proof of this. This Wolfen tolerance, especially of peoples who accept their own culture, has served both the Wolfen and non-canine races well in the Great Northern Wilderness and Northern Hinterlands, where people live isolated lives and rarely get the chance to meet with others. When they do, it is far better for all parties involved that they see eye to eye and not go at each other's throat. That way, a chance meeting in the wilderness is likely to bring people together rather than push them apart.

## Humans

To say the Northern Hinterlands is sparsely populated (by any combination of people) is an understatement. One can travel for days, even weeks, without running across another intelligent being. And when one is encountered, there's a better than 50/50 chance it will not be a human. The Hinterlands is one of the few places where humanity is not the dominant civilization. Except for the colonies along the Shadow Coast, the northernmost edge of the Hinterlands, and the Western Empire's colonies in the Ophid's Grasslands along the southernmost edge, there is nothing that can be called "human civilization" or much of anything that most people would think of as a city. The closest one comes to a city are scattered hunting lodges, homesteads, trading posts, Hearth and Homes and village campsites for nomadic tribes. A few permanent towns and villages can be found in Kiridin Barbarian Territory, but they are the farthest thing from "civilized."

Visitors to the region must never lose sight of the fact that the Northern Hinterlands is first and foremost, a *wilderness*. Like all tracts of wilderness, it is very much alive and growing. As harsh an environment as it may be, it is teeming with flora and fauna. And there are even people, but they are spread out over tens of thousands of square miles, don't usually build permanent settlements, and wander the land. By "civilized" standards, the natives of the Hinterlands are savages and barbarians. It doesn't matter if whether they are human, Elf or canine, or something else entirely, they are wild men barely elevated above the beasts of the woods. To civilized people, even the human, Elven and Dwarven colonists along the two coasts are nothing more than backwater peasants trying to scratch a life out of the savage land. Even were all these forces to combine their strengths and numbers, they would barely equal the population of the tiny Island of Bizantium. And not even a third of those



people would be human. No, humanity's sun has not risen on the Hinterlands. It might one day, but until then, this part of the world rests in canine hands and other non-humans.

## Elves, Dwarves & the Origin of Wolfen?

Elves and Dwarves both hold an interesting position in the Northern Hinterlands, as their races once played a large role in the region. During the Elf-Dwarf War, both empires established numerous outposts throughout the Northern Wilderness, far from the battlefields in what is now the *Baalgor Wastelands* and the *Old Kingdom*. The war raged for thousands of years, punctuated by several peaceful interludes. During those lulls in the fighting, neither side really believed the conflict was over, so they both spent their peacetimes building bigger and better weapons with which to destroy each other. The Elves were the undisputed masters of spell casting, and the Dwarves had mastered the art of Rune magic, but something both dabbled in was obtaining entire new minion races to serve as disposable warriors when the fighting next broke out. After all, each of these great Empires had suffered millions of dead and wounded each time their war renewed itself. Their numbers dwindling, they needed to recruit (or enslave) outside forces. Besides, why not have armies of expendable creatures to do the majority of the dying instead of their own kind?

At first, the Great Powers did all they could to bring minion races from other worlds into this one. The *Quorians*, *Gromek* and *Gosai* of the Baalgor Wastelands are living proof of that effort. But soon it became clear that this was not enough. If the Elves and Dwarves wanted other races to do their fighting, they would have to "build" some themselves. That is what ultimately brought the twin Great Powers to the Northern Wilderness. Here, they could experiment and tinker as much as they wanted. If something went terribly wrong (as it often did), the fallout would be minimal. The north was an impossibly vast region, and any mutants or misfits that got away would probably die in the wilderness before they spread and caused any serious havoc.

Scholars suspect that it is this legacy of alchemical "engineering" that resulted in many of the freakish monsters and animals that currently populate the Northern Wilderness. According to *Commander Grandish*, a decorated military veteran and explorer for the Eastern Territory, all of the canine races of the north – the Coyle, Kankoran and Wolfen, as well as Bearman – were all created by Elven alchemists looking to breed a super warrior to pit against the Dwarves. Commander Grandish will not reveal his sources on this theory, except that he is one of the few humans to have explored the mysterious "golden city" within the Wolfen Empire, and his knowledge of the Wolfen's origins supposedly stem from that expedition. It is the Commander's assertion that the ancient Elves first crafted the Coyle, then the Kankoran, before finally creating the kind of warrior race they had been after all along – the proud and fierce *Wolfen*. The Elves had scarcely finished their preliminary "engineering" of the warrior canines when the war turned against them and they had to abandon their work when it was only half done. As a result, the Wolfen Project was abandoned and all their canine creations let loose into the wilderness where they were expected to perish. To state the obvious, they did not perish, but without guidance or direction they remained savages for

years, until they each found their own way in the world. That is why, states Commander Grandish, that the Wolfen have established their Empire only within the last century.

This is a controversial, questionable and frequently hotly contested theory. Commander Grandish hated the Wolfen and saw all canines as a threat to "civilized" people. Many scholars and learned people believe he concocted the story out of thin air to debase the canine race and make them seem more monstrous and inhuman than they already were. As a military man, the Commander knew full well that the less one can relate to or accept an enemy, the more easily a soldier can bring himself to destroying him. Certainly this is the case in the *Disputed Lands* and *Eastern Territory*, where the theory is widely held as truth and hatred for the canines is at the boiling point.

There are other reasons to question and reject this theory. For one thing, neither Elf nor Dwarf has any record of such magical experiments, and their modern descendants can not believe their ancestors could do such a thing. Then again, their ancestors atomized a garden paradise, enlisted demon minions and all but destroyed themselves. So it is fair to say the ancient Dwarves and Elves were capable of pretty much anything. On the other hand, the Wolfen have no record of this as a people or culture, and openly reject the theory as nothing more than a pack of lies. However, those who do believe it, and there are many, believe they have good reason. After all, it would explain (ignoring a dozen more plausible explanations) why the Wolfen worshiped the Elves for so long, and why they still hold that race in such high regard. Additionally, since Wolfen were barbarians for so many thousands of years, their true origin could be long forgotten, and being savage warriors, what hard evidence may have once existed, is likely to have been destroyed.

Among the elite circles of Wolfen society, this theory has intrigued many and obsessed more than a few. After all, the Wolfen are a people with a very poor sense of history. Their loose tribal society and lack of writing for so long has let the majority of their ancestry fade away bit by bit, piece by piece, over the years. To learn once and for all who they are and where they may have come from is something the Wolfen have become incredibly concerned with. (The concept of evolution is not known on the Palladium World.) To that end, Wolfen explorers and adventurers have begun combing their homeland and the Northern Hinterlands in search of any evidence to support or disprove Commander Grandish's theory. That this theory comes from a grubby human troubles some Wolfen, but the more pragmatic among them see the inherent truth of it.

Over the years, finding the truth behind the Wolfen has inspired hundreds of Wolfen, Elves, Dwarves, and humans, among others, to explore the Northern Hinterlands in search for ancient Elf or Dwarf ruins, books of magic or lost artifacts that might settle the debate once and for all. While most of these seekers of truth are scholars and historians, it also includes clergy, adventurers and even military squads. The former because they seek the truth in all things. The latter three, because the truth about the canine races might serve as a weapon against them. If Wolfen are the creation of Elven alchemy, *indisputable proof* might demoralize the nation and make them easier to contain or destroy. Or better yet, say the military minds, there might be a way to magically "undo" them! Ridding the world of the monsters in one felled swoop or with the wave of a hand. The motivation for adventurers is either the money or the glory that

such a discovery will earn the ones who make it – especially the money, for somebody, somewhere, will gladly pay big for the truth. So far, the searching has turned up nothing, but still they come.

**Dwarves & Demons.** Exploration in the Hinterlands has done a lot to shed some light on what the Dwarves were up to back in the days of high magic and low alchemy. Thanks to the efforts of the Wolfen Empire using native Kankoran, the creatures of the Northern Hinterlands have been extensively cataloged and examined. (At least by the Wolfen, if not the rest of the world. A prized copy of this animal catalog was stolen and sold to the *Library of Bletherad*, where it is under lock and key in the reference section. Two copies have recently been completed by Scholastic Monks. All editions are complete with simple drawings of most creatures.) While this is an impressive feat in and of itself, it is this information, combined with ancient writings and artifacts recovered by the Wolfen from Dwarven ruins dating back to the Elf-Dwarf War, that has made a startling impression on the world. Just ten years ago, the Wolfen published and distributed with pride, a short tome presenting a previously unknown portion of the world's history. It deals specifically with foul tactics using demonic creatures by the Dwarves in the latter centuries of the Elf-Dwarf War.

According to Wolfen historians, while the Dwarves mastered the *art of the rune*, they never quite got the hang of Diabolism and Summoning. Evidence in the possession of the Wolfen Empire shows that Dwarven Summoners came to the Northern Hinterlands, not to build monsters or minions from scratch, but to *summon them* from other worlds, and from beyond the Northern Mountains in the *Land of the Damned*.

Pulling supernatural beings from another dimension, especially en masse, is a much more difficult task than some would imagine. First, the very nature of Deevils, demons, and infernals from any alien hell is rebellious and evil, making them unwilling and treacherous slaves. However, the Dwarves reckoned if they could magically summon monsters and demons said to be locked away in the *Land of the Damned*, the creatures would be less alien and more importantly, appreciative for having been "saved" from their prison. This would, as the theory went, make them more inclined to work with the Dwarves and be more trustworthy and reliable. Thus, they set up shop in the Hinterlands to summon and build a legion of monsters. Creatures who would obey and serve Dwarvenkind and destroy their Elven enemies.

History has already shown the Dwarves to have been successful in the use of infernal beings. All rune weapons require the life essence of a living (usually supernatural) creature. Thus, the eternally trapped life essence of Elementals, demons, and other supernatural beings fill most of the rune items in the world today. Moreover, the Dwarves are known to have called forth and commanded demons and monsters throughout the Elf-Dwarf War. In the last days of the War, their own demon legions turned and rained death and destruction upon the Dwarven Empire.

While many of the major events and folly of the Elf-Dwarf War have been chronicled since the day they occurred, few then or now, ever realized how far reaching the Dwarves' use of the demonic had gotten. Nor about the many *failures* that unleashed all manner of evil into the forests and plains of the Northern Hinterlands.

Among the Dwarves' mistakes are such horrors as the *Winter Storm Ice Demon* (recovered lost records show they had high hopes for these creatures), *Muckers*, *Threkk*, and *Razorvine*. Although there is no solid proof yet found to support it, many also credit the Dwarven Summoners with unleashing into the world the *Loogaroo*, *Tusker*, *Harpy*, *Killgore*, *Angel-Demon Serpent* and *Terror Trees*, as well as many of the nightmarish demons that haunt the Northern Mountains. Beings that may have once been contained within the Land of the Damned until hate-filled Dwarves meddled with magic. So it is, the Northern Hinterlands is littered with the mistakes and half-finished endeavors of the Dwarves (and Elves). Something of which Dwarven scholars, once confronted with this knowledge, feel a little ashamed, and which most modern-day Dwarves know nothing about.

While there is no Dwarven Empire to hold accountable for all the demonic creatures, monsters and animals running riot through the Hinterlands, that it is coming to light at all is a point of immense national pride for the Wolfen. They never liked the Dwarves in the first place, and to point out something to embarrass the remains of their much diminished race resounds deeply within the Wolfen spirit. Detractors dismiss it as the Wolfen acting like good attack dogs for their Elven "creators," but it is a hollow taunt. These detractors know as well as the Wolfen that their discoveries in the Northern Hinterlands have earned them a special place in history. Additionally, other explorers and historians have uncovered things that support the Wolfen's discovery and assertions. No matter what happens, the Wolfen shall forever be enshrined as the first to figure out why so many strange creatures and supernatural beings inhabit the Hinterlands. As well as uncovering a part of the Dwarve's shameful past.

Angry Dwarves have bankrolled a number of expeditions to discredit the Wolfen findings, and even to steal evidence or kill the scholars advancing the Wolfen's position, but it is all too little, too late. The world's scholastic community knows of the controversy, and even if many question the entire work, the whole thing has become a legitimate issue, one logged in the *Library of Bletherad* and a point of discussion in the highest universities of the world. It shall live on, perhaps even longer than the Wolfen Empire itself (academic quandaries have a way of outlasting worldly realms), and in a way, that has bought all Wolfen a little immortality.

## Gnomes

The Gnomish civilization is one of the Palladium World's longest-running tragedies. There was a time when the Gnomes commanded a great Republic, a society that knew peace and prosperity like few others did before or since. For millennia, the Gnomes managed to be a major force in the world without getting embroiled in the various wars and hostilities. That all changed during the Elf-Dwarf War. The heart of the great Gnome Republic was hopelessly caught in the crossfire of the two warring nations. Thus, the Gnomes bore the brunt of the earliest carnage and saw millions of their people callously mowed down by Elf and Dwarf alike. Many of those who were not destroyed fled from the battlefields and headed far away to escape the insanity. Of those who refused to leave, most perished. Those who splintered off to make it on their own also struggled and ultimately met a grim fate or became assimilated into other cultures. The largest group made a mass exodus, resettled in the Northern Wilderness, and even though there were



Elven and Dwarven outposts in the area, there still was no fighting to fear.

For centuries, all seemed well with the Gnomes, who were happy in their new home. Indeed, the **Exodus Republic**, as they called themselves, had their own golden age of culture, art, music and magic. They lived in peace, refused to make any weapons or build an army, and immersed themselves in art, magic and scholastic pursuits. For a time, it seemed that even the genocide they suffered in the early rounds of the Elf-Dwarf War could be forgotten. Oh, how wrong the Gnomes would be.

By the final stages of the war, both the Elven and Dwarven Empires were spent. They scarcely had any soldiers or gold left to fight their war, and barbarians gathered at their gates. Their greatest minds had been lost in the carnage, and neither side seemed capable of producing the incredible new super-weapons that were so prevalent in the war's early days. Vast stores of gold and materials were expended, and the war seemed stalled by yet another stalemate. Desperate, the combatants became increasingly cruel and bloodthirsty in their drive to annihilate each other. History does not record exactly when the Elves and Dwarves again turned on the Gnomes, but they did. Knowledge of the Gnomes' accomplishments in the area of *new* magic had reached the two combatants. Knowledge each coveted in order to get the upper hand on their enemy. Magic that could, if the stories were true, vanquish their enemy and rebuild their crumbling kingdom.

The Gnomes refused to share their knowledge with either side, and sent emissaries away without even speaking to them. These peace-loving people would not willingly participate in helping to destroy either kingdom. Nor were they willing to help the very forces who had slaughtered millions of innocent people and once pushed the Gnomes to the brink of extinction.

The Elves and Dwarves were not asking. They were ready to take what they could by any means necessary. So it was that the Elves gathered an army to invade and plunder the Exodus Republic. When the Dwarves caught wind of the plan, they marshaled their own forces and both raced toward the Hinterlands. As fate would have it, both arrived at roughly the same time. The two armies, equipped with magic and demonic minions, launched into a free-for-all raid on the Gnomish Republic. The Gnomes' dedication to non-militarization proved their undoing, for it left them with few defenses. The magic they had at their disposal was insufficient to rebuke either army, let alone both.

The twin armies descended upon the Gnomes like hungry locusts. Not wanting the other to get the upper hand, the rival invasion forces set about to capturing Gnomes while destroying everything in sight. Great libraries, centers of learning, schools, temples, museums, businesses and homes were all set on fire or mowed down by magical energies. Where Dwarven and Elven forces met, they clashed, and Gnomes died by the thousands in the collateral damage. Dwarven demons unleashed against the Elves reveled in the carnage, destroying houses and indiscriminately slaughtering everyone who was *not* a Dwarf or known to them. In short order, the Exodus Republic was laid to waste. Their cities ransacked and burned, an entire society was crushed by armies in search of the secrets to power and triumph.

Neither Elf nor Dwarf paused to consider what they had done. When the Gnomish Kingdom laid in ruins and ablaze, the two armies turned to war on each other. Here, thousands of

Gnome captives were again caught in the crossfire and met their doom. When the main Elf army made a run for the Old Kingdom, the Dwarves followed and the two forces battled all the way home. Thousands of warriors died, and thousands of Gnomes died with them. Along the way, the Gnome captives of the Dwarves managed an escape (some say with the help of the Elves). Most of those few thousand managed to evade capture and scattered to the wind. The Dwarves did not pursue, for having lost their prize, they could not risk the Elves learning Gnome magic and pressed all the harder to capture the Gnomes in the Elves' possession. Or, failing that, destroy them all. Of the two thousand Gnome prisoners in the Elf camp, half are said to have died before the wee folk could use their magic and a surprise attack by the Dwarves to make good their escape. Less than one third of the soldiers in the two armies would ever reach the Old Kingdom. When they did, not a Gnome was among them.

What the Dwarves did not realize was that a battalion of 700 Elves and some 200 Gnome captives had slipped away, into the wilderness at the onset of the race home. After enduring excruciating torture, the Gnomes were forced to give at least some of their magic secrets. According to myth and legend, it was with this knowledge that the Elves created strange, twisted creatures like the *Arrowhead*, *Scrollworm* and possibly, the *Bearman* and *canine races*. The War finally ended before much could come from these secrets or their dark creations, and the Elves who once knew them are said to have met with a terrible fate – some say by Gnomes, others by Titans come to avenge the slaughter of the innocent. Supposedly the secrets of that magic were lost



forever – the Elves who had stolen it slain, and the Gnomes choosing to forsake the knowledge that led to their destruction.

What happened in the north is one of the great crimes of the Elf-Dwarf War, and it is something many Gnomes shall never forget. Being a remarkably forgiving and peaceful people, Gnomes, in general, do not fault the Elves or Dwarves for their conduct during the war. They feel both races had gone crazy during the war and were willing to commit any atrocity that promised them victory. However, at the same time, Gnomes are not fools. They have lost the great trust they had for both the Great Races, and see humans and Wolfen as dangerously walking in their shadow. After the terrible oppression in the north, the survivors of the Exodus Republic gathered, mourned their dead and divided into small groups. A third moved off to establish small villages (1D4x100 people) and Hearth and Homes (6D6 Gnomes), while others went to live among Kankoran, Centaurs or others where they could live in peace. In recent years, some have even made a home in the human colonies of the Shadow Coast. Meanwhile, legend says the largest group of Gnome survivors headed west into the *Northern Mountains* and possibly into the *Land of the Damned*, where their descendants are said to remain to this day.

Sadly, Gnomes feel divided as a people. Their last remaining strongholds are thousands of miles apart, one in the Northern Hinterlands and the other in the Old Kingdom Mountains, never to meet. Thousands of other Gnomes are scattered around the world, living among other races and cultures, vowing to never again gather in great numbers lest they become the target of war or genocide. As a result, Gnome adventurers are friendly enough, but rarely discuss their history, family, goals or whether any Gnomish settlements exist. Gnomes who practice the mystic arts are subtle about how they use or display their magic, and refuse to share their secrets with anyone but fellow Gnomes or their most trusted and long-time friends. Most insist tales about villages in the Hinterlands or Great Northern Wilderness are nothing but rumor and faerie tales, and the idea that a Gnome city is hidden in the Northern Mountains is preposterous. In truth, they say with a touch of sadness, Gnomes are a dying people with no homeland to call their own. So they wander the world as explorers and adventurers. When they do settle down, it is among humans and other people.

And yet, there are persistent stories even among the northern barbarians and adventurers from the Northern Hinterlands who speak of tiny Gnome villages nestled in the woods and meadows, and witnesses who claim to have seen both Gnome and Elf magicians who possess strange magic not known anywhere else. Myths and tall tales in the region tell of a secret sect of Elves who discovered a long forgotten magic and who still live in the Hinterlands. Stories also tell of Gnomish sorcerers and sages with the power to change lead into gold and a log into a leg of lamb. As for a city of Gnomes somewhere in the Northern Mountains, it is there, they say. A city of gold created by forgotten magic known only to the Gnomes of the *New Republic*. A place that can only be found by accident and from which no visitor can ever leave. Then again, there are thousands of stories in the Northern Wilderness. Few of them are true.

## Changelings

Hated and feared, these shape changers learned long ago that the world does not welcome them. If they are to survive, they must do so by masquerading as members of other races and trying to blend in. Masquerading among others, Changelings live under the constant threat of discovery and death. It was not always like this, however. In parts of the world, scholars, archeologists and explorers have unearthed evidence that there might have been ancient Changeling kingdoms throughout the world where these shape changers knew no persecution and could use their skills out in the open. The Northern Hinterlands appears to have been one such place. Nobody can be sure when Changelings once openly inhabited this remote part of the globe, but it seems they had established quite a kingdom for themselves. Though it has been all but obliterated by the march of time, artifacts and ancient records suggest that the Changeling Kingdom in this region was a substantial one indeed.

The only lasting testament to this mysterious Changeling Kingdom are a variety of large, carved stone heads that can be found throughout the Hinterlands. Many of these carvings are gigantic (easily the size of the giant stone heads of real-world Easter Island), but there are dozens to be found that are smaller, down to heads that are only life-sized and some that are stylized spheres with eyes, a mouth and other features. These stone heads represent a huge variety of races, including many that are not present elsewhere in the world. (These races are thought to have died out in the Chaos War, but they might still thrive in the *Land of the Damned*.) There are also stone heads featuring the natural face of Changelings, and it was these heads which first tipped off scholars that a Changeling Kingdom might have once covered the Hinterlands.

Nobody knows exactly when this Kingdom existed, or what its full extent may have been. Its signature stone heads can be found from the Northern Mountains into the Ophid's Grasslands, and as far east as the Dragon's Claw. The Kingdom's fate is likewise unknown. There is no record of a great war, plague or other catastrophe which would account for the nation's sudden destruction. Likewise, there is no account of the society's gradual decline, which seems to indicate that it never atrophied into nothingness, but came to a sudden end. It is as if the Kingdom was hale and hearty one year and simply disappeared the next. Then again, there are no records or even myths or legends suggesting this kingdom ever existed in the first place. A fact that has made some scholars wonder if the Changeling Kingdom might not have existed during the Age of Chaos and fell when the Old Ones fell. Or possibly came into being shortly thereafter, but met some terrible fate some 90,000 years ago.

Scholars believe that the answers to these mysteries can be found in modern-day Changelings themselves. More cynical sages insist that a vast conspiracy of silence binds all Changelings, and that they *must* have a secret archive somewhere in the world. Without the slightest evidence to support their conclusion, most believe that secret place is somewhere in the Northern Hinterlands. Find that archive and not only will the Hinterlands Kingdom have its secrets revealed, but any other Changeling realms will be exposed as well, or so they reason. The few Changelings who have been interrogated on this insist



that there is no "phantom archive," and that even to modern Changelings the notion of a shape changer kingdom is a flight of fancy, nothing more. There might have been large bands of Changelings in the past, but not today. To the Changeling mentality, gathering in strength is an invitation to discovery and genocide. Better to live alone or in small numbers among other cultures than risk annihilation.

But so-called Changeling "experts" insist that this mentality is typical of Changelings *outside* of the Northern Hinterlands. Up north, the few shape changers in the area still stick together in isolated villages, where they openly practice their natural abilities and wage war upon any other humanoids who discover them. What is worse, even stronger groups of Changelings are rumored to exist in the foothills of Ophid's Grasslands and in the valleys of the Northern Mountains. If the full story of the stone heads of the Hinterlands can be found, it is probably with these enigmatic groups of Changelings, if indeed they exist at all. Again these conclusions are built entirely on conjecture and paranoia. There is not one piece of hard evidence to suggest any historical archive, Changeling city or conspiracy can be found in the north. While it is true that some Hinterland Changelings have dared to gather in tiny villages, their populations rarely exceed 60 and most Changelings know very little about their ancient past. They are busy with the necessities of surviving NOW!

## Orcs, Ogres & Trolls

Often called the "Unholy Three" by the arguably more civilized races of humanity, Elves, Dwarves, and Gnomes, the Orcs, Ogres and Trolls make an unwelcome contribution to the racial makeup of the Northern Hinterlands. These monstrous folk are in relatively low numbers here, nowhere near their strength in the Baalgor Wastelands, Mount Nimro or the Old Kingdom. Their existence in the Hinterlands is almost entirely undocumented and unorganized. Though these people live in tribes of varying size and strength, the existence of other, more powerful nations has always kept the "Unholy Three" in check.

Nowadays, these natural born killers form the underclass of the Hinterlands and generally find work as laborers, animal skinners, trappers, woodsmen, thieves, bandits, pirates, raiders and mercenaries.

**The Shadow Colonies.** A surprising number of them have found work at colonies of the Shadow Coast, as increasing numbers have headed north and west to seek employment as soldiers and laborers. As one might expect, they tend to get the hardest and least appealing work (at least to humans) such as working in the quarries hauling stone, digging in the mines, cargo hauling, assisting in carpentry, and working in the slaughterhouses and cleaning fish. Actually, most Orcs, Ogres and Trolls don't mind working in slaughter houses or fish markets because they are allowed to eat and take home the parts not usually eaten by humans, such as fish heads, guts, hooves, etc. They don't mind the smell either. Those who have proven themselves over years of service may also find work in the various shops, assist carpenters and craftsmen, and even work in the areas of protection (guarding warehouses and work sites, and riding shotgun for merchant caravans), law enforcement and civil defense. About

sixty percent are volunteers in the militia and look forward to breaking up fights and breaking some skulls. Also not surprising is that the majority of these natural warriors are all for rebellion and war. Many are quick to volunteer for blockade running and glad to take assignments that involve bloodletting, sabotage and vandalism. This works out especially well, since the nobles of Bizantium expect such behavior from Orcs, Ogres and Trolls, and so, in their arrogance, do not suspect any sort of organized rebel effort. Most of the time, they don't even know their cap-



tives are members of the community, automatically assuming that these troublemakers are woodland bandits and monsters in search for easy plunder.

The Unholy Three are glad to be lawmen, tracking down raiders, recovering stolen goods and bring those responsible to justice. While some like to make that "justice" at the end of their sword and others will skim off some of the valuables they "recover" for themselves, an amazing majority (81%) obey the law and the rights of their employers. This is because most of the colonies who use the Unholy Three as enforcers or lawmen pay them to do something they enjoy, b) the job gives them a certain amount of "hero status" these monster races do not normally see, and most importantly, c) the people put their trust into them! A big part of this is the fact that all Coastlanders, including humans, work extremely hard. The only "fat cats" are the nobles and their foremen and henchmen who work *everyone* like dogs. This has created an overall air of equality for all Coastlanders. Consequently, the Unholy Three feel like they are a viable part of the community, not second-class citizens. While there is some prejudice among the common folk, most colonists see the Unholy Three as not quite equal to humans, Elves, Dwarves or Gnomes (after all, they are ugly and not as smart), but close to it. Certainly they are strong, hard workers who contribute to the community, and many are even worth calling "friend." That unusual sentiment (molded by circumstance, not choice) has created an acceptance and bond with the Unholy Three rarely seen anywhere else in the world. Even more impressive is that the Orcs, Ogres and Trolls at the Shadow Coast colonies honestly try to be "civilized" and obey the law, be loyal and contribute to "their" community. Many work hard to conduct themselves with some measure of civility and grace! Thus, most defend their community with all their heart, and consider the humans and other Coastlanders their comrades in arms.

**In the wilderness**, many of the raiders and bandits who target the coastal colonies are also the Unholy Three, thus pitting Orcs, Ogres, and Trolls against their own kind. This does not seem to have any significance to either the loyal monstrous colonists or their savage and cruel counterparts. Nor should it, for race is not a factor, and there are just as many marauding humans as well as Coyles, Giants and other beings who target the colonies, travelers and woodsmen for plunder. Orcs, Ogres and Trolls are notoriously aggressive warriors and barbarians – in effect, humanoid predators.

Most of those who live outside the Shadow Colonies are born into a life of robbing, raiding, violence and killing. Their culture is based on the strong (the Unholy Three) taking from the weak (humans, Elves, etc.), and the strongest among them are their leaders, warlords and masters. They respect and fear power, and will often kowtow and follow those who wield it. Thus, they are often the willing pawns of greater powers, be that power a mortal sorcerer, general or Giant, or an inhuman dragon, demon lord or god.

Notoriously unorganized and quarrelsome even among their own kind, members of the Unholy Three typically gather into small rival gangs, clans and tribes. Groups that raid and war among each other as much as they do others. (The same can be said of the human Kiridin Barbarians.) This is good in the sense that the Unholy Three seldom gather into armies, and even when they do, such large gatherings can not be sustained for long. Individuals and small bands of the Unholy Three will frequently

hire themselves out for legitimate work as mercenaries, wilderness guides, scouts, and guards and alternately turn to robbery, bushwhacking, kidnaping and other crimes as circumstance dictates. If no work can be had, then it's time to become a crook. Merchants, nobles, pirates, warlords and countless others take advantage of the Unholy Three's loose morals and taste for combat by hiring them as expendable soldiers, scouts and thugs.

As if imitating the monsters of storybook lore, the Trolls of the Hinterlands are especially fond of setting up camp at known watering holes, trails, and byways, where, in typical Troll fashion, these misanthropes charge a "passage fee" for anybody who wishes to pass, and battle those who refuse. Half the time, they just waylay travelers, taking their "toll money." Despite tales to the contrary, while Trolls may rob an individual blind, stripping those they take a strong dislike to down to their bare skin, but many only kill when the have to. There are several practical reasons for this. One, if they killed everybody, or robbed everyone of everything they had, people would avoid that part of the woods and the Trolls would have to move. Two, rampant murder and mayhem would, sooner or later, bring an angry mob or magic wielding heroes down on them, and why encourage that. And three, it's more fun frightening and bullying lesser beings into giving them coins, weapons, horses (to eat), booze, food and valuables than always fighting to get it. Trolls (and Ogres) are brutes and bullies. They like to prove themselves by dominating and intimidating others. It makes them feel strong, powerful and important. Sure they have to kill people to make a point and keep their position of power, but it is bad for business to kill and eat every passerby.

Apparently, the Trolls of the Hinterlands have been at this forever, and as Orcs and Ogres came into the area, some were recruited into serving the Trolls as henchmen, or sometimes, in the case of Ogres, partners. Some Ogres have even adopted the practice themselves and set up ambush sites along roadways, crossroads, forest trails, river banks and especially ancient bridges in the area built by old Elven, Dwarven and Gnome (Changeling too?) architects. Trolls tend to gather in groups of 2-4 and *may* command an additional 2-6 Orc, Goblin, Coyle or mixed group of henchmen. Any nonhuman can be part of a Troll gang, but they hate humans, Elves, Dwarves, Gnomes and other handsome people and most refuse to include them. Ogres tend to gather in bands of 4-12 and may have anywhere from 4-24 henchmen. Ogres will usually accept any race into their fold provided they bow to their will and call them master, but Orcs are a favorite minion. In the alternative, a band of Ogres (or a mixed group) may be led by a Giant or other powerful individual of any race. These ambushers are tough to dislodge, because they know the immediate area like the back of their hands, and usually have a number of places to hide or make good their escape. Other bands are mobile and constantly moving, changing their area of attack and taking advantage of opportunities as they come to them. Mugging travelers, stealing horses, snatching and running away with supplies, robbing or ransacking a campsite, jumping travelers from ambush, and extorting payments or "feel their wrath," are all common occurrences.

This pattern plays itself out more and more in the region's remote areas near trading posts, hunting trails and Hearth and Homes. These small and isolated oases provide a home away from home for the explorers and travelers far from the comforts of larger settlements. The Unholy Three and other intelligent



marauders know this and often seek such locations to start some trouble. What starts as a crew of monsters coming into the outpost to have a few drinks turns into a brawl or a robbery, and before the outpost keepers know it, a small horde of monsters has overrun their home and business. The unwelcome guests may or may not hit and run, or kill the rightful owners before looting the place and leaving it in ruins.

Every once in a while, heroes might come across such besieged outposts before it is too late. Whenever these heroes manage to evict the invaders, the deed becomes a matter of local legend. There is nothing settlers like more than when champions of justice deal a blow to the scum who deserve it. For the heroes who have carried off such work, their fame tends to precede them throughout the Hinterlands for the next few (1D4+1) years. During this time, the heroes can expect royal treatment at any remote outpost, including free food, drink, lodging and whatever meager services the outposts may provide. On the flip side, this reputation carries some burdens. If any other outpost in the area is suffering monster trouble, then the heroes will be *expected* to take care of it, just on general principle. If they do, their fame will only grow and continue on longer. If they do not, then their good name turns into a stigma and for a much longer time (2D4 years), the group will be known as fakes and cowards, unwelcome anywhere outside of the largest of settlements.

To make matters worse, word of "heroes" also will spread among Orcs, Ogres and Trolls. The Unholy Three (and their friends) do not take meddlers kindly, and will seek out those who have a reputation for busting up marauder crews. Likewise, Bearmen, Minotaurs, Giants and other individuals and gangs may want to make themselves a reputation out of being the ones to "eliminate" the heroes. In one such case, the heroic band known as the *Knives of Shadowfall* made a ten-year career patrolling the Hinterlands, destroying whatever groups of brigands they could find. During their tenure, the group suffered numerous attacks by other bandit groups looking to make a name for themselves. In the end, the *Knives of Shadowfall* were destroyed when a combined force of over 300 Orcs, Ogres and Trolls ambushed the party in a small valley and stoned them to death. Since then, no other band of heroes has matched the *Knives'* record for bravery or results. Some say no heroes ever will. Of course, there are always upcoming heroes ready to prove that theory wrong and become the greatest enforcers of law and order the Northern Hinterlands have ever known. Or die trying.

## Kobolds

Kobolds have never had a substantial presence in the Northern Hinterlands. Their greatest concentrations lay in the mountainous regions of the world – the *Old Kingdom* and *Northern Mountains* being two of the most notable. The relatively flat woodlands of the northern Hinterlands hold little promise for these nefarious metalworkers and tunnel-dwellers, and so they have never emigrated to the wilderness. In the last few decades, however, all that has changed.

As the Wolfen Empire has exposed the Dwarven Empires' ancient meddling, opportunistic Kobolds have ventured to the lowlands in the hopes of discovering some ancient Dwarven underground workshops and learn a secret or two of their metal-working techniques. More than that, Kobolds have long insisted



they could handle the art of rune magic, if only they had a chance to learn it. A few unusually driven and talented Kobolds have made the Northern Hinterlands their new home as they quest to find any shred of magical information the Dwarves might have left behind revealing the secrets of their mighty rune weapons or other secrets. Most believe the Kobolds' crusade is a fools errand. Not only do they lack the aptitude and discipline to master rune smithing, the chances that the Dwarves left their greatest secrets behind is just ludicrous. Some even go so far to admit that Kobolds *might* be able to make rune weapons if given the raw magical formulae for it, but their gross lack of skill will ensure the Kobolds will only make the accursed and flawed weapons that marked the Dwarven efforts near the end of the Elf-Dwarf War.

In the meantime, most Kobolds have embarked on a different sort of endeavor: providing top-quality weapons and armor to the nonhuman people of the Hinterlands. Like any marauders, the Coyles, Orcs, Kiridin barbarians and others are not exactly the best craftsmen and smiths, so they rely on obtaining weapons made elsewhere. This has proven troublesome since trade for such things, especially in such an unforgiving wilderness, is rare to come by, even for raiders and thieves. To these marauders and nomads, knowing they can travel to the foot hills of the mountains to get weapons from Kobold smiths has been a godsend. Moreover, a dozen or so groups of Kobolds have taken to traveling the countryside as freelance smiths bringing a small selection of weapons with them and able to repair armor and sharpen weapons on the spot. These freelance weapons experts are paid well and two have taken to traveling with one of the largest barbarian hordes, building new equipment whenever possible and repairing used hardware as it needs it. The Kobolds bound to the barbarians reportedly love their work, since they are making a mint off them and they are playing to an appreciative audience. And the Kobolds don't even have to do their best work (weapons with no bonuses) to keep these brutes happy and heaping them with piles of furs and ivory, as well as booty extracted from their victims (barbarians have minimal use for coins and gems, but Kobolds do).

**Note:** Most Kobolds dislike humans and Gnomes if for no other reason than they are tall and/or attractive. They hold Elves and especially Dwarves (their long-time rivals) in disdain. Consequently, Kobolds are only too happy to malign, cheat, rob, backstab, and hurt Dwarves. In fact, those looking for the Dwarf's ancient secrets to magical weapon making will be nearly as happy to find evidence of more Dwarven (and Elven) war crimes and atrocities, and turn it over to the Wolfen. Meanwhile, any Elves or Dwarves who meet with an unfortunate end due to Kobold skullduggery are one more small accomplishment to be proud of. Humans are just a nuisance to be taken advantage of, and those who cause too much trouble should be beaten, killed and made into a pot of stew. Kobolds think *Kankorans* are crazy and are a little afraid of them. They are leery of *Bearmen* only because of the giants' unpredictable tempers, and feel similarly about the demon hordes found in the mountains. They find *Bug Bears* to be murderous little fiends who cannot be trusted and who'd kill their own mothers given the right circumstance. Kobolds regularly deal with *human* bandits, pirates, barbarians and wandering adventurers, but *Centaurs*, *Coyles*, *Orcs*, *Ogres* and *Trolls* are their favorite clients. *Goblins* and *Hob-Goblins* are alright, but never have enough money and always try to

wrangle buying weapons on a payment plan they can never meet. Kobolds like *Wolfen*, but find them to be a bit too serious and demanding for their taste. Besides, there aren't too many in the Hinterlands.

Arms dealers to the world (or at least the underworld), Kobolds will generally sell weapons and armor to anybody, including Elves and Dwarves. If they don't like that particular individual or ethnic group, they'll simply price gouge them and make snide remarks while doing it. If a fight breaks out, the Kobolds will be glad to demonstrate just how tough and deadly little people can be.

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## Goblins and Hob-Goblins

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Goblins and Hob-Goblins are considered by many to be the vermin of the Palladium World, and to a large extent, that is true. These shiftless, black-hearted rogues exist to sponge off the hard work of others and to cause senseless fights and trouble. Throughout the Hinterlands, especially in Ophid's Grasslands, Goblin folk can be found in disconcertingly large numbers. Though Goblins and Hob-Goblins lack the will to band together for any central purpose, the sheer number of them can mean only trouble for those who run afoul of these despicable mugs. For the most part, these folk form small, undisciplined rabble that try to carry out acts of banditry but are often driven back by the fierce defense of their intended victims. Goblin crews lack the strength and pure intimidation power of the *Unholy Three*, something which undercuts their ability to make a living by intimidating or waylaying others. Sure, the unprepared outlanders who enter the region might be an easy mark for these villains, but any hardcore explorer, adventurer or military type will make short work of these runts, even when outnumbered by them. For this reason, Goblins and Hob-Goblins often band together with Coyles, Orcs, Ogres, Trolls, Giants and other powerful beings, to serve as their henchmen and lackeys. However, Goblin folk can be a hassle to deal with, so many warlords just give Goblins a rude brush-off when they come looking for work or to mooch a few handouts. (As the saying goes, "You know the world doesn't want you when even Coyles think you're a pain in the rump.") Rumor has it many Coyles engage in routine prayer to various dark gods for a plague that will wipe all Goblins from the face of the world. Many clans of human barbarians kill them for sport.

How ironic, then, that the biggest way in which Goblins and Hob-Goblins make their mark is through the various diseases they carry. Like the rats they are so often compared to, Goblin folk are infamous for carrying sicknesses that they themselves are immune to. Throughout the ages, towns and kingdoms have been crippled time and again by Goblin pathogens such as **magma spots** (a form of leprosy that begins with big, bright red welts that fester and pus over for 3D4 days; reduce P.B. by half, S.D.C. by 10%, and is often mistaken as leprosy with the usual panic and ostracization that comes with it), **the staggers** (a kind of brain fever that makes the victim behave as if drunk, only it takes 2D4+1 days to recover) and **Queedle's Revenge** (a bloodborne pathogen named after the notorious Goblin slave and assassin, Queedle Backbiter, and puts its victim in a coma for 2D4 days). The disease known as **Goblin Fever** is a respira-



tory infection currently nearing epidemic proportions in the Western Empire. It does not harm Goblins or Hob-Goblins in any way, but any other humanoid may fall prey to it. The disease quickly causes the victim's lungs to fill with mucus in much the same way as pneumonia. Heroes, who are naturally more resistant to sicknesses of all kinds, must roll a save vs disease when exposed to any individual carrying Goblin Fever. The heroes must beat an 11 when rolling to save (ordinary folk a 13). If they make it, then congratulations, they have dodged infection.

If they fail to save, the character has contracted the ailment. For 1D4 days, the victim is at -1 to P.E., tires twice as quickly as normal and has trouble focusing (-1 on initiative, and -10% on skill performance). For 2D4+4 days after that, the character's P.S., P.E., Spd., combat bonuses, skill performance, S.D.C. and Hit Points all drop by half! Apply the appropriate penalties, and the character still fatigues easily. At the end of this period, the victim rolls again to save versus the disease. If he makes the save, the fever breaks and the victim is back to full health in 1D4 days. If the victim fails, the fever continues on the same way it had for 1D4+4 days more. Magical and psionic "healing" has no effect unless it is something that actually cures disease or purges the body. After this second period, the G.M. should take mercy on the character and let him or her recover. While the disease itself is seldom lethal, characters who continue to adventure or engage in hard labor will fair poorly and collapse when exhausted. Trying to continue to function while in such a diminished capacity is what usually results in the character's demise, especially adventurers who need to be in top shape to explore the wilderness and win battles. While a character is sick with Goblin Fever, anybody staying with the character for more than two hours at a time runs the risk of infection and must roll against the sickness itself.

Some scholars believe that since the disease ridden Goblins have lived in Ophid's Grasslands for thousands of years, the sum effect of all their diseases might well explain the lack of humanoid life in the Grasslands. After all, few other wildernesses are so stark.

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## Brigands & Fugitives

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**The Shadow Colonies are easy pickings.** As any Hinterlands native will tell you, creating a permanent village or town is only inviting bandits, thieves, raiders, and barbarians to attack you and take or destroy everything you have worked for. That is why most natives gather in small, nomadic groups always on the move. That way brigands don't have a permanent, stationary target to victimize whenever they please. Although the Shadow Colonies are large (gigantic by Hinterlands standards), they are not large enough to keep bandits, raiders, pirates and other villains from targeting them on a regular basis. Matters are compounded by the fact that most of the Noble Houses only worry about protecting their moneymaking businesses and don't do much of anything to protect the residents. The locals and visiting adventurers keep things reasonably safe and peaceful, but banditry and crime at the hands of outsiders and wilderness savages is a fact of life.

Pirates from the sea, barbarians from the southeast, Harpies from the mountains, and monsters at large are a constant danger to the colonies of the Shadow Coast and any homesteader, visitor, traveler, woodsman or individual who ventures into the Northern Hinterlands. It is not called a "savage wilderness" for nothing.

Homesteads and farms on the outskirts of the colonies are the most vulnerable, but are also the least likely to end in homicide. They usually suffer from having some of their food stores plundered, livestock stolen, and home, barn, tool shed, cellar, etc., broken into and various tools, food, alcohol and items of value taken. If the people living there don't put up a fight, they may be pushed around and threatened, but they are not often seriously hurt or killed. If they put up a fight, many bandits, particularly Goblins and Hob-Goblins, will grab what they can and flee – especially if the defenders of the homestead are powerful, wield magic or there are many (as is often the case at Hearth and Homes).

**The least dangerous** scoundrels are usually small bands of thieves or mercenaries down on their luck, and looking for a quick score. They aren't looking for booty or fun, they usually need basic supplies and food, so they typically steal only what they need for the moment. Targeting livestock, food storage buildings, and businesses where they can get necessary supplies like food, blankets, rope, clothes, weapons and booze, these lowlifes usually flee at the first sign of trouble and fight only to make good their escape.

**Drunken bullies and punks** looking for trouble are more dangerous, because they have something to prove and are out deliberately looking for trouble, while they will fight until defeated (down to one quarter of their Hit Points or when one or two of their comrades have fallen), they do not usually fight to the death. More importantly, they are not usually looking to kill anybody, just win the battle to prove how powerful and dangerous they are. Thus, these bullies will generally accept surrender or settle for beating their opponents into the ground. Likewise, they are not prone to steal too much, maybe some obvious item of value or weapon or "cool" item as a trophy rather than any loot.

**Gangs of bandits** are organized groups of professional robbers and highway men who lay in wait or travel the countryside looking for travelers to ambush or attack. When the bandits' target least expects it, they strike, trying to use the element of surprise and weight of numbers to their advantage. Orcs, Ogres, Trolls, Minotaurs, Goblins, Hob-Goblins, Coyles, humans (barbarians, crooked locals and outsiders) and any combination of them are all likely candidates for such outfits. The most powerful and successful will have magic, psionic or supernatural fire-power to back them up (a Syvan, Scarecrow, Giant, Sphinx, Dragon, Demon, Wizard, Witch, Priest of Darkness, high level warrior, etc.; probably the leader or one of 2-3 lieutenants). Fortunately, most bandits are only after loot and do not kill without reason.

**Simple robbers** are gangs who rob and harass their victims, taking only obvious valuables (which may include weapons, armor, pack animals, furs and food), but far from everything. Nor do they kill unless they feel it is absolutely necessary or in self-defense. They will, however, intimidate, lie, threaten, beat, and fight their victims, but only to the point of getting what they

want. These crooks never fight to the death and prefer *easy targets*. If an opponent proves to be too tough, they will retreat, leave them be, and wait or go searching for easier prey. These bandits also prefer to strike fast, often using ambush, magic and surprise, grab what they can and get out fast. This means they are likely to leave a good amount of valuables behind and not linger to hurt anybody. Typical Alignments: Anarchist (60%), Miscreant (25%), and other evil (Aberrant and/or Diabolic 15%).



**Vicious thugs** are brutal bands of cutthroats who are easily provoked to violence. They may hurt anybody who threatens or angers them, or who just looks at them the wrong way. They also tend to shoot to kill when spooked. Likewise, those victims who offer resistance are severely hurt, physically incapacitated, or killed (better safe than sorry). If a prisoner is taken, the character can expect to be terrorized, beaten, perhaps tortured and, at some point, there is a 50/50 chance the prisoner will be slain. These brigands rarely fight to the death unless they seek revenge or a vendetta. If an opponent proves to be too tough, they will retreat, leave them be, and wait or go searching for easier prey. These bandits also prefer to strike fast and may use ambush and surprise, but tend to be more obvious and direct, using strength of numbers, brute strength and magic to win the day. Although they seldom fight to the death as a group, there are likely to be one or more individuals who are so crazy that they *will* fight to the death even if the rest of the group leaves them behind. These vicious marauders will leave a fair amount of valuables behind

but are more aggressive and thorough than simple robbers. If they feel safe and confident that they have the upper hand, they may linger to have some "fun," i.e. terrorize and hurt some of their victims before leaving. Typical Alignments: Anarchist (20%), Miscreant (40%), Diabolic (30%) and Aberrant (10%).

**Raiders** typically gather in a large band of 10-60, consisting mainly of thieves and warriors. They specialize in making hit and run attacks on established settlements, mining camps, Hearth and Homes, farms, villages, towns, cities, docks, and even ships moored at the dock. Normally, a specific number of targets are specified, especially when hitting a town or city. For example, one faction of the gang will loot a store or warehouse, another will make a grab for livestock and another will hang back and wait to engage defenders while the other two continue their looting. Cattle and horse rustling, and jumping merchant caravans are two of their favorite targets. A group of travelers or adventurers loaded for bear could fall victim to raiders as easily as any community, however, such attacks are crimes of opportunity where the raiders just happen upon some outsiders who look like they have loot to plunder. If the group looks impoverished or battered, raiders are likely to ignore them and move on to a more lucrative target.

Raiders are nomads, always on the move, although they are likely to have 1D4 secret hideouts as well as favorite "watering holes" and supply depots, probably Hearth and Homes. These brigands use hit and run guerilla tactics and never hang around after making a score, even if things are going their way. They usually work reasonably well as a team, with the most cunning or powerful in positions of leadership. A few men of magic, clergy and others with special abilities (including lesser demons and creatures like Muckers) are also likely to be valuable members of the party. Since riding animals don't do well in the forest, many raiders in that part of the country use magic items and spell magic to give them the power of enhanced speed, flight, teleportation, chameleon and other magic to help them in their mission both offensively and defensively.

The usual mixed gaggle of misanthropes can be members of a raiding party, or the group can be predominantly one particular people. For example, the Kiridin barbarians make their living as raiders and are mostly (50-60%) humans, with some clans entirely human. Likewise, clans of Coyles, Ogres, Orcs and Minotaurs also survive as raiders and pirates. Typical Alignments: Anarchist (30%), Miscreant (40%), Diabolic (20%) and Aberrant (10%).

**Con-artists, flimflam men, and tricksters.** Conniving thieves who talk a good game and pretend to be something or someone other than what they really are (i.e. pretend to be innocent travelers, farmers, refugees, mercs, etc. rather than thieving crooks). They use fast talk, diversion and misdirection to steal from their victims. Typically, one or more will draw attention to themselves or something else, while the other members of their band stealthily steal valuables. They are bold pretenders who often earn their victims' trust and/or sympathy before they do their dirty work. The moment their intended victim(s) turns his back, they rob him blind. Like the simple robbers, these lying thieves and con-artists try to avoid violence and murder, preferring treachery, cheating and guile to win the day. They will hurt others to save themselves or one of their thieving teammates, but usually kill only by accident, in self-defense or out of revenge.





There is some twisted honor among these thieves as they usually travel in tight-knit bands or family clans loyal to one another. Inevitably, some members of the group will be skilled in gambling, seduction, disguise and forgery; most are streetwise. One or two may also possess some level of magic or psychic abilities. *Waternix*, *Dragon Wolves*, *Changelings*, *Coyles*, *Kobolds*, *Goblins* (especially if a Cobbler is among them), *young dragons* (in disguise), *Pixies*, *Leprechauns* and *humans* rank among the most likely folk to be flimflam artists.

Typical Alignments: Anarchist (42%), Miscreant (38%), Aberrant (15%), Diabolic (3%) and even the occasional Unprincipled (2%).

**Bushwhackers:** These are murderous thieves or bloodthirsty monsters who find it easy and effective to kill, or at least render their victims incapacitated. All too often, standard procedure is to attack and fight until all or most of their opponents are unconscious or dead, chase the rest away or force a surrender, then strip them of their valuables, kill anybody who resists or threatens (which might be all of them), and leave. Bushwhackers seldom try to negotiate and they quickly grow tired of their own intimidation tactics if they don't yield fast results, so they usually just kill everybody and take what they want. That way they leave no eyewitnesses behind to seek revenge or to organize a posse to hunt them down. Survivors of bushwhackers are usually a mistake ("I thought he was dead," or, "I didn't see him"), or a rare moment of compassion. Although bushwhackers will usually accept someone's surrender, they will beat, rob and either kill him in cold-blood or sell him into slavery. The worst of these cutthroats will take a captive only "to have fun with" — meaning to torture and eventually kill.

Typical alignments for Bushwhackers are Miscreant and Diabolic; evil through and through. The only time such a group may include Aberrant and Anarchist characters is when the bushwhackers are brutal robbers who beat and rough up their victims but don't usually torture, rape or murder them. At least one or two members of the band will be practitioners of magic (may include one of the dark magicks, like Necromancy or Witchcraft), or a Shaman or other clergy (probably the leader or second in command). Muckers are among the most savage and murderous thugs, with Bug Bears, Threkk, Hairy Jacks, Dead Moon Hags, Satyrs, Coyles, and Trolls falling behind them, pretty much in that order. These brutes all like to hurt and kill.

**Mad Dog Killers.** Demons and predatory monsters aside, Muckers, Threkk, Killgore, Kelpie, and Bug Bears (mainly in the grasslands), as well as Melech and Harpies (mainly in the North), will all attack travelers for no reason other than to kill them! Some, like the Killgore and Melech, are not even likely to loot the bodies.

Some bands of Coyles, Wolfen, Ogres, Trolls, Minotaurs, Giants and other monster races may also be mad dog killers victimizing a particular enemy or race, like humans or Elves, or simply because they like to kill or eat other humanoids. Sadly, *humans* must be added to this list. There are bands of human mad dogs who do their share of wickedness, with those who target Coyles, Wolfen and other monster races for extermination, as well as Necromancers, demon worshipers, and death cultists who see anyone, even fellow humans, as potential victims.

**A place to hide.** Far from the reaches of "civilized" people, the Northern Hinterlands have served as a refuge and sanctuary for those who seek solitude or obscurity. This is especially true of practitioners of magic, fugitives on the run, dragons and other powerful beings. Thus, one can find a simple cabin, lodge or farm to elaborate stone towers, mansions or castle keep-like strongholds suddenly appearing in the middle of the wilderness. Group homes, camps and compounds are the least to be worried about, for frail mortal beings need to join forces with others to survive. It is the lone tower or home where only one to a half dozen beings live that an adventurer must fear, because one must be powerful, wield magic or be something more than human to survive alone or in such a tiny clan. Dragons often disguised in some humanoid form, Syvan, Sphinxes, Scarecrows, Spectres, Changelings, Giants and even greater demons, demon lords and godlings are all said to visit and make their homes in the Northern Hinterlands and neighboring mountains. (See the Wild Lords for one set of examples.)

## Outsiders

An outsider is anybody who was not born and raised in the Northern Hinterlands. Even Warlocks, Wizards, Rangers, Druids and heroic adventurers welcomed and loved by the locals are outsiders. Even if such heroes come to the Hinterlands at an earlier age and spend the rest of their lives in the Hinterlands, they are still considered outsiders. Knowledgeable and friendly outsiders, perhaps, but outsiders nonetheless. Likewise, one who was born and grew up in the Hinterlands but willingly moved to live somewhere else and then came back years later, is also an outsider. (This does not apply to heroes and explorers whose adventures might carry them away for years at a time, but only those who "forsake" their homeland in favor of another.)

Outsiders are *NEVER* to be completely trusted. For unless one has lived in the Hinterlands all his life, the reasoning goes, he can never completely understand them or their life, and; thus, can never be truly one of them. Even well intentioned outsiders are viewed with suspicion, for the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.



## Manifest Destiny

Some believe that a new Golden Age has dawned in the Paladium World. While much of the world remains unexplored and wild, there are now strong and vibrant nations whose spheres of influence grow larger with each passing day. True, there are national crises simmering all over – the Eastern Territory and Wolfen Empire inch ever closer to war, the resurgent Western Empire no doubt has plans to conquer the world, the Timiro Kingdom stands on the brink of a giant slave revolt and race war, and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium faces a growing threat of civil war at the Shadow Coasts and doesn't even realize it — but the dangers of such things only underscore a universal truth: The last few centuries have laid the groundwork of what might become *Humanity's Golden Age*. How these nascent human powers conduct themselves in the coming years will determine, in large part, humanity's collective destiny in a turbulent world.

Some grouse that humans only raised themselves from barbarism a mere heartbeat ago (relative to the total history of this world), while others protest, citing how no other race has taken to dominating the world as humans do, so quickly and decisively. Elves and Dwarves had their shot and squandered it. The monstrous races of Orcs, Ogres and Trolls had their opportunities too, especially in the wake of the Elf-Dwarf War, and remain in a state of barbarism. It has been humans who dragged themselves from the darkness of savagery to rebuild a largely shattered world. Although the nations of Man have much work

still ahead of them, their track record has shown a readiness, a willingness and an ability to mold the world in their image, whatever the cost.

Nipping at the heels of this progress is the resurgence of other so-called "monster nations," – the Wolfen Empire chief among them, the Nimro Kingdom, and to a lesser extent, the Orcish Empire of the Yin-Sloth Jungles, as well as numerous fiefdoms and petty realms scattered throughout the Old Kingdom. For most humans, the incursion of such lands on the rest of the world is a grim reminder that humanity has two choices: One, it can ceaselessly push forward and survive, or it can stagnate and be overtaken by other civilizations that would be all too happy to consume them.

For lands such as the Western Empire and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium, the answer is clear, domination or death.

As a result, both nations have pursued aggressive colonization policies, both to expand their sheer volume of living space, and to increase their holdings of valuable natural resources, such as minerals, lumber, and so on. Both nations have spread out toward the Northern Hinterlands, the Western Empire from the south and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium from the North. **The Western Empire colonies**, located on the edge of Ophid's Grasslands, continue to struggle, and have not yet dented what most consider the Northern Hinterlands, but the Empire that sponsors them continues to send people northward to claim the land. For most, this is a death sentence, and the colonies barely



cling on to life. Western scouts, soldiers and adventurers constantly enter the region to get a sense of what challenges they will face there when the Empire succeeds in taming the northern wild lands and continues its march to conquer it all.

Meanwhile, the Island Kingdom of Bizantium has already established its **Shadow Coast**, a ring of colonies on the Hinterlands' north shore. These scrappy settlements have sampled the hardships that the region has to offer, and for them, knowing what to expect is more than good planning, it is pure survival strategy. They have fared much better than the pitiful Western colonies in the south and may blossom into a kingdom in their own right.

**Independent operations.** The Northern Hinterlands are a land of opportunity for anybody willing to take the risk. For those who can locate precious mineral deposits, lay claim (and hold on) to land for lumber operation and other lucrative natural resources, the rewards are great indeed. Piles of coins, stakes in profitable harvesting operations that should yield riches for years, and living a life of hard-earned luxury. Others can find fame and profit as explorers, scouts, spies and warriors who pinpoint the movements of hostile natives, or who help eradicate dangerous monsters and animals.

Coveted military leadership, grants of nobility, and the opportunity to create such a name for oneself that it will remain a thing of legend and reverence long after one has passed from this world, are all part and parcel in the slow movement to colonize the north lands. It also explains why both the Western Empire's colonies in the south and the Shadow Coast of Bizantium teem with eager adventurers who want nothing more than to gear up and delve deep into the Northern Hinterlands. For these roughnecks and hard cases, the dangers of the region are exactly why they came. Courage is their currency, strength their native tongue, the Northern Hinterlands their latest home away from home, and the thing that may make or break them.

## Charting the Darkness

While it might seem like grunt work, mapping out the unexplored reaches of the Palladium World can mean big business for those with the insight, knowledge and skill to make it happen. The majority of the world is *terra incognita* – unknown earth. While every region has its locals who know their way around, this kind of information can be spotty and flat-out incorrect. Even though locals might know their own neck of the woods like the back of their hand, it might be so tinged with superstition and tradition that the truth of it has gotten mixed up with fiction and fantasy. For that reason, outside imperials such as Westerners, Bizantines and Wolfen prefer to chart their own course through unknown territories. As the greater powers set their sights on carving out a piece of the region for themselves, those willing to explore and map out the territory suddenly have more work than they know what to do with.

**Mapping** is not just drawing an accurate picture of the region. It includes detailed information on the flora and fauna, the strength and movement of hostile humanoids, the presence of the land's treasures, intimate knowledge of weather patterns, and so on. In other words, cartographers need to become complete experts on the area, able to comment knowledgeably on every possible aspect of the land. Those who can do this will quickly garner a reputation for reliability, and will find them-

selves the fast friends of powerful individuals and organizations who have big plans for the Northern Hinterlands. Those who can not will be cast by the wayside as amateurs, charlatans, and fools.

For obvious reasons, Rangers excel at this kind of work, but they need not be the only ones at it. In recent years, Mercenaries, ex-Soldiers, Merchants, Wizards, Warlocks, psychics and other adventurers have all entered the grand game of charting the Hinterlands. The region is so vast and treacherous that many (75%) of those who attempt to map the region never return from their initial outings. And of those who do, many return in failure or manage to survey only a tiny area, leaving enough business to go around for everybody. Still, professional explorers have reputations to build and uphold, and if they must compete with others, it makes their trying work all the more difficult. In the remote outposts of the Northern Hinterlands and the taverns of the Shadow Coasts, brawls and duels between competing exploration interests are commonplace. The formation of explorers' guilds has helped rein this in a little, but it is a wild and woolly region, and where bad blood runs deep, there is little that can stop the feuding.



**Merchants** are the biggest customers for accurate mapping information. There is lots of money to be made for those willing to transport goods and services from the Shadow Coast to the Western colonies, the Eastern Territory, or even the Wolfen Empire. Likewise, the Hinterlands has many small outposts in the boondocks whose locations are a closely guarded secret. If these places could be made major trade points known to all, not only would the outposts prosper, but anybody adventuring in the region would have plenty more places to go when they need rest, to replenish supplies, or to find a safe haven from the Hinterlands' many hardships.

**Military intelligence** is another application for freelance explorers, spies, mercenaries and Rangers. *The Eastern Territory* is in dire need of any reliable information on the Wolfen Empire and Coyle barbarians. An army of Wolfen (actually Coyles led by a great Wolfen General) is rumored to be gathering somewhere in the Great Northern Wilderness. An army rumored to be so great in number that they will wash through the Disputed Lands like a cleansing flood and could invade half the Eastern Territory before they were stopped. They need to know if this rumor is true, and if so, where the Wolfen strongholds are located and what enemies might exist in the north lands (the Northern Hinterlands included) that they might turn against their canine enemy. In addition, being neighbor to the Northern Wilderness, the Easterners have heard many of the rumors about ancient Dwarven and Elven magic lost in the Hinterlands, secrets that might save them and destroy their hated enemy if only they could find them. Secrets they will gladly pay a fortune to acquire.

Ironically, these same myths and legends fuel the Wolfen Empire, Bizantium nobles, Western Lords and even the occasional agent for Timiro and Land of the South Winds, as well as countless independent researchers and fortune hunters to come to the Northern Hinterlands all looking for the same ancient secrets and magic that will make them rich, powerful or famous. Most are as successful as the scholars and cartographers, with three quarters vanishing into the forest never to be seen again, most of the rest coming back broken men and empty handed.

There are more benign reasons to explore the Hinterlands, such as knowledge for the sake of knowledge, uncovering history's mysteries, and applications for medicine and helpful magic.

**Colonization.** Colonists tend to move at a slow pace, gradually encroaching on their surrounding wilderness like a moss, growing so slowly that before one knows it, ten years have gone by and another twenty leagues of Hinterlands have fallen to the steady march of human cities and farms. However, colonists are also a very suspicious and cautious lot. They did not get this far just by leaping before looking. Many colonization efforts have 20, 30 and 50+ year plans. They need to know not only everything about where they will be building into next year, but over the next several decades. This is one of the easiest exploration tasks one can take on because it does not stray too far from the comfort of civilization. But calling it "easy" is a relative misnomer. It is easier than, say, delving into the heart of the region where the nearest civilization is weeks or months of travel away. But testing the immediate wilderness outside of colonial areas still brings explorers in close contact with dangerous monsters, wild animals, indigenous people and natural hazards. The foolish and foolhardy will find that even a seemingly simple job like this can turn deadly if not approached with the proper professionalism.

The colonies of the Shadow Coast would like information on the location of mineral deposits, specific types of trees, hunting grounds, and other natural resources the land has to offer, so they can note them for possible future exploitation. They would also like to know about potential dangers and pitfalls to such operations, as well as a more intimate knowledge of the land, flora, fauna and dangers around them. The Western Empire wants information about the roving gangs and monsters that plague its

south coast colonies, as well as natural resources, rival colonies, indigenous people, ancient ruins, and dangers that might have an impact on its own plans for future exploitation of the north.

**Protection.** Wherever there are people, colonies and homesteads, there are people who need protection from experts and specialists such as Rangers, Mercenary Warriors, Knights, Wizards and other heroes (or swords for hire). Consequently, those with a hankering for the rough stuff can find plenty of opportunities to guard trade routes, protect colonies, mines and outposts, fight pirates, battle monsters and dispense justice at the end of a sword or the whisper of magic.

**Prospecting** is a big market for exploration. The Hinterlands are mostly wilderness, chock full of natural resources that could be exploited for generations without running dry. The region is known to possess great mineral wealth, for example, and in any colonial area or trading post, one can hardly throw a stone without hitting somebody with dreams of setting up a mine somewhere, tapping a rich vein of gold, silver, diamonds or some other exotic mineral, and living a life of wealth and luxury ever after.

The problem is finding these veins. They are out there, but the land is so vast and wild that nobody knows where! That is where explorers come in. They follow up leads and legends that might point to the location of a possible mineral deposit and then report the good news to their client. Of course, many explorers double-cross their benefactors and set up a mine themselves. Or, they will sell their knowledge to competing interests for a higher price than what their original employer promised them. Most commonly, though, explorers simply comb the wilderness for "strike spots," gather whatever loose ore can be found (in large strike spots, ore can be found lying on the ground before mining need be implemented), and then sell the location to other interested parties. After all, mining is the kind of thing that requires a ton of money, time and manpower to make profitable and relatively safe. Most adventurers lack both the capital and expertise to set up their own mine, and besides, why would they want to? While mines offer great profit, they also require one to stay tied down to a particular area for months, if not years, something wandering adventurers are loath to do. Better to make a quick hit off the location of the place and move on. Besides, finding a mineral strike in the middle of a hostile wilderness is one thing, keeping it without getting one's throat slit is quite another.

**Treasure hunting.** The Northern Wilderness is one of the last great unexplored treasure troves the world has to offer. According to legend and lore, there are scattered throughout the region a number of mysterious ancient ruins, fabulous magical items, ancient artifacts, rune weapons, lost treasures, and secrets, any one of which could make a man rich beyond his wildest dreams. It would seem that the Northern Hinterlands have been home to at least three different ancient civilizations, as well as secret operations, lairs and hideaways for both sides in the Elf-Dwarf War, bandits and pirates (whose treasures lay buried or hidden in caves long after they have passed away), dragons, Wizards and demons, all of whom have their own cache of gold, gems or magic, just waiting to be found or taken by bold warriors.

These are the Lost Treasures of the Northern Hinterlands. The mere mention of them is enough to get even the most skep-



tical treasure hunter drooling. So far, maybe one in 10,000 such explorations have met with any level of success, but that has hardly deterred others from trying themselves. The promise of such riches is great enough to make even the most level-headed adventurers scoff at the dangers and travails facing them.



## The Hidden Bounty

Mineral wealth exists in every corner of the Palladium World. The trick is finding and extracting it. In places such as the Old Kingdom, where Dwarves (and Kobolds) once built their grand empire, nearly every seam of precious ore had been located and exploited to some degree. In others like the Western Empire, some parts of the realm have been tapped out while others have years of exploitation left to go, and still others have yet to be discovered. Then there are the great wildernesses, where vast mineral wealth waits to be discovered, and where unimaginable fortunes are to be made for those with the luck and courage to find these hidden bounties.

The Northern Hinterlands, like any great untapped wilderness, poses its own particular challenges to anyone intent on capitalizing on the region's seams of mineral wealth. Chief among these is the long winter and the short time one can actually spend excavating, roughly June through August (maybe September if one plans on holing up at the mine all winter). Then are the bandits, raiders, roving bands of the Unholy Three, Coyles and other monsters that inhabit the region. Mining requires lots of time, lots of people, and an incredible amount of hard work at some remote location probably hundreds, if not

thousands of miles away from the nearest town. All of which make such endeavors particularly vulnerable to attack. Eventually, *some* hostile force will come upon the site and make trouble. Now, the mine can employ soldiers, adventurers and sorcerers to protect the project, but this is expensive, perhaps even more so than the ultimate profitability of the venture. The problem is that with any given seam, it can be difficult or impossible to determine exactly how much wealth remains to be extracted. Dwarven and Kobold engineers can predict this to some extent, but oftentimes they can only guess. This means the mine owner must take a pretty big gamble: Does he bring a veritable army into the wilderness and find out that he will have no reward left once he has paid them? Or does he go out with just a skeleton crew and risk almost certain slaughter? After all, operating a mine in the wild, especially in the Northern Hinterlands, is an invitation to trouble. It is always a matter of when, not if, trouble will come calling. And we haven't even addressed the difficulties of carting the precious ore OUT! Hauling anything in and out of the Northern Hinterlands can be a herculean effort, for as mentioned earlier, the ground is rocky, uneven, littered with ground cover and the scrub and trees are so dense that it

would take an entire summer (the only available work time) to clear a mile long path! Again the expense and manpower necessary borders on the insane.

Despite all that, scholars and explorers alike confirm that throughout the Hinterlands there must certainly be enormous mineral veins and deposits, the kinds of strikes that could finance an entire kingdom were the whole of those riches pulled from the earth. With this kind of enticement in the air, there is no shortage of entrepreneurs willing to organize mining interests, even though it might mean their deaths. And though big operations may be impractical, panning for gold and making small strikes can make an ordinary Joe and his buddies set for life.

The *Shadow Coast* teems with eager-eyed prospectors whose heads are filled with dreams of incredible riches. To a lesser extent, this is also the case in the *Island Kingdom of Bizantium*, the *Wolfen Empire*, *Disputed Lands*, *Phi*, *Lopan*, and even the *Western Empire's beleaguered colonies* along the southern coast of Ophid's Grasslands. All of these are places where mining expeditions might be launched into the Northern Hinterlands. And in each of these places exists a teeming marketplace for such expeditions – the buying and selling of mineral deposit maps, the brokering of rumor, myth and legends regarding a substantial strike, freelancers looking to join a wilderness expedition, and wealthy benefactors looking to organize one. The dramas involving the formation of a mining expedition sometimes offer more adventure than the expedition itself, something which a small subculture of opportunists have discovered. Those willing to prey on the hopes and greed of prospectors, explorers and fortune hunters find that for them, the bounty of the Northern Hinterlands lies not in the wilderness, but in the legions of dupes, victims and easy marks it brings to the region.

Aside from the dangers of being double-crossed by one's business partners, prospecting parties have an even bigger concern, aside from monsters, unpredictable weather and the work hazards of digging a shaft. They have each other to fear. Many times, news of a particular deposit breaks in several places at once, and numerous competing parties of treasure seekers converge on the same spot at the same time. This often results in the strongest party asserting its claim to the entire deposit and running all other interested groups away. Sometimes, opposing parties cross swords over the matter, and great bloodshed is the result. In some cases, there have been a few benefactors who bring a small army into the field not to protect their mine once it is dug so much as to destroy anybody else who would dare assert their claim to the area. That is how the *Battle of Brightseam* came about. A party of some one hundred workers and soldiers led by the nefarious explorer *Sir Bronde Skiller* butted heads with an equally large party headed by the endlessly greedy nobleman *Lord Dagorra Hensch*. The result was a grand melee lasting an entire day. By its end, both benefactors lay dead, and the few survivors on either side were soon slaughtered by Alpine Monitors attracted by the smell of blood and death. While the giant lizards and carrion feeders feasted on the two rivals, no human survived to benefit from their discovery. Their weapons and armor were scavenged by a band of lucky Orcish raiders who just happened to be passing through. A few weeks later even their bones were eaten, leaving no trace the battle had ever taken place. The deposit could have yielded vast wealth for every one of them, but greed doomed them all, and their strike

waits to be rediscovered by some other enterprising explorers or prospectors.

Situations like the Battle of Brightseam are frequent occurrences when the race to any treasure is on. But for every hundred catastrophes, there is a success story, a mining operation that goes off without a hitch and makes a host of people rich enough to live like kings for the rest of their days. For those with the skill, luck and cunning to successfully exploit the Hinterlands' mineral wealth, the following treasure awaits:

**Silver, copper and gold** deposits comprise the bulk of the mineral deposits in the Hinterlands. So much so, in fact, that these three metals have become known to some as the "wicked sisters," since they are what draw so many into the wilderness to dig them up, and more often than not, get those same opportunists killed. That said, there are dozens of sites throughout the Hinterlands where sizable quantities of silver, copper or gold exist. The true size and location of these strikes is never known until a mining crew actually digs into them, but the majority contain enough ore to make their owners at least a few hundred thousand in gold (currency, not raw metal). The largest sites may yield millions upon millions but are impossible to exploit to the fullest without the power of a nation behind it. Still, a careful prospector can sneak out enough to live high on the hog and leave the rest for someone else to benefit from.

The ore drawn from any silver or gold deposit is considered "raw ore," and will only be worth a fraction of its market value until it undergoes refining. The ore of any given deposit will run 60% to 90% pure. If a character wishes to bring unrefined ore to the market, then simply determine its purity and deduct the remainder from the ore's market value to see the worth of what the individual has to sell. When governments refine ore, they turn it into coins of the realm. When refiners in the boondocks (such as the Hinterlands) refine ore, they turn it into heavy "trading bars" of various sizes.

**Silver** is worth 500 gold pieces per pound (0.45 kg). A 10 pound (4.5 kg) silver trading bar, about the size of a small dinner roll, is worth 5,000 gold pieces. A 25 pound (11.25 kg) silver trading bar, about the size of a hot dog bun, is worth 12,500 gold pieces. A 50 pound (22.5 kg) silver trading bar, about the size of a brick, is worth 25,000 gold pieces. And a 100 pound (45 kg) silver trading bar, about the size of a loaf of bread, is worth 50,000 gold pieces.

**Gold** is worth 2,500 gold pieces per pound (.45 kg). A 10 pound (4.5 kg) gold trading bar is worth 25,000 gold pieces. A 25 pound (11.25 kg) gold trading bar is worth 62,500 gold pieces. A 50 pound (22.5 kg) gold trading bar is worth 125,000 gold pieces. And a 100 pound (45 kg) gold trading bar is worth 250,000 gold pieces.

**Copper** is worth only 100 gold pieces per pound (0.45 kg).

**Korobite** is a relatively rare and unknown metal that appears to be a natural alloy containing gold, silver and a few mystery components that give the metal an uncommon strength and luster. Korobite has a marbled, gold-silver appearance, as if those two metals were swirled together. The metal is harder than 10 karat gold, making it very durable, yet when exposed to fire, it becomes malleable enough for smiths to mold it into any shape they desire. Korobite is useful both as an ornamental ore as well as a good alloy for edging weapons so they can harm supernatural creatures. For reasons unknown, unrefined Korobite



is highly magnetic, through once refined, it loses all magnetic properties. Korobite is worth five times that of gold – a whopping 12,500 gold pieces per pound, but it is extremely rare and seldom discovered in quantities larger than 1D6 pounds (0.45 to 2.7 kg). Usually, Korobite deposits are nestled in the heart of super-large gold or silver seams, deep beneath the earth. That means that by the time they are discovered, that particular mine is close to drying up. As a result, despite the high value and easy portability of a Korobite strike, it is rarely a cause for celebration. Many see the metal as a strike's farewell gift to those who just tapped out a rich vein of silver or gold. **Note:** Because Korobite is found in such small quantities, it is rarely refined into trading bars. This ore comes from the ground already 99% pure, making any further refining an exercise in repetition. Most prospectors carry Korobite in one pound (.45 kg) nuggets, which is how it is usually found.

**Black Iron** is a super-hard variant of ordinary iron that has only recently come to light. It is used by the Kiridin Barbarians who trade it to Kobolds to make them sturdy weapons and armor. Any item crafted from steel created with black iron will not only have double its usual S.D.C., but it will also take half damage from ordinary fire. Armor made from black iron will likewise have double the ordinary S.D.C., as well as an A.R. one point higher than usual.

Perhaps what makes black iron most attractive to human metalsmiths is that any blade edge made with the stuff can be made incredibly sharp (+2 to damage) and it holds its edge ten times longer than ordinary steel.

So far, black iron has no real market value, because the civilized world knows nothing about it, and even the folks at the Shadow Colonies who have only just realized that the Kiridin raiders use it to regularly attack them, aren't sure whether Black Iron is a metal or created through some special, perhaps magical, process. The only people who know where any deposits of Black Iron can be found are the Kiridin Barbarians! And they aren't telling anybody, not even their Kobold weapons makers.

Black iron can be identified by its flat, non-reflective black surface. This look has led some to dub the metal *shadow steel*.

**White Iron** is the natural counterpart to black iron. It is found in similar locations and quantities as black iron. The few smiths who have examined the stuff believe it to be geologically related to black iron somehow, as if they are both created by the same subterranean processes, just containing different raw components.

White Iron is super-flexible, able to take a great deal of punishment without permanently bending out of shape. When turned into steel and forged into a permanent shape, White Iron has a "shape memory" that enables it to shrug off a portion of whatever damage it receives. Objects made of White Iron negate the first 20 points of damage done to it in any given attack. While this might make the stuff look good as an armor component, guess again. White Iron has a lot of give, and anybody wearing a breastplate of white iron will suffer *full* damage from a hit because the energy from the blow transmits right through the metal! White Iron does not conduct electricity at all, however, so a shirt made from it would provide its wearer with total resistance to ordinary electricity and half resistance to magical electricity.

This metal's flexibility suits it well for weapons production, however, as items made from it are unusually well balanced (+1 to strike).

White Iron has no real market value, either. The Kiridin Barbarians use it less than Black Iron, so the whereabouts of this substance are even less well known than its dark-colored counterpart. The two metals can not be fused together.

**Gantrium** is an unusual, super-rare metal that is present in trace quantities only, but has become so valuable that entire expeditions have been mounted just to find trifling amounts of it (for example, just enough to make a set of rings or a necklace). What makes this mystery metal so attractive is that it is magically conductive. Enchanted jewelry made of Gantrium allows its wearer to cast spells at only *half* of their usual P.P.E. cost! Moreover, keeping any quantity of Gantrium on one's person allows them to recover P.P.E. at twice the usual rate; triple when at a ley line or a ley line nexus. Finally, Gantrium, when forged in magical fire, turns indestructible. This means that Gantrium jewelry generally can not be made into anything else.

Were enough Gantrium somehow mined to make a suit of armor out of it, a spell caster could wear the armor and cast spells with *no* penalties whatsoever! The duration and effects of the spells would be unhindered, and the P.P.E. cost would be normal. The promise of Gantrium armor has given more than a few men of magic dreams of suiting up and becoming armor-clad warlords, enjoying the power of their spells and the invincibility of full body armor. Given the amounts of Gantrium already discovered in the Northern Hinterlands (each strike spot typically yields less than one pound/0.45 kg of the ore), it would probably take *all* of the Gantrium in the Northern Hinterlands just to make a single suit of chain mail, and that's assuming one could find all the Gantrium. This still has not dissuaded the more military-minded men of magic from prowling the Hinterlands looking for a fast avenue to fame and fortune. To that end, many of the mining expeditions headed up by men of magic are, despite their publicly stated intentions, efforts to locate and excavate a Gantrium strike. Those that are not are more than likely in search of Xanthine.

**Xanthine!** This is the only exotic gemstone found in the Hinterlands, and like Gantrium, it is both magically conductive and found in minuscule quantities, when found at all. The average Xanthine strike is a nugget weighing in from two to eight (2D4) karats. Xanthine is a natural storage medium for potential psychic energy, with each karat holding up to 20 P.P.E. Xanthine has no intrinsic value as an ornamental substance (it closely resembles quartz), but men of magic have been willing to pay up to 20,000 gold per karat. Xanthine/Gantrium rings are in extremely high demand in the Western Empire, where there is no shortage of powerful Wizards willing to pay through the nose for such items. To capitalize on this, explorers and gem smiths of the Shadow Coast have tried to start a high-paying cottage industry locating Xanthine and Gantrium, converting them into magic-enhancing jewelry and other items, and selling them to the cash-rich Western Empire. So far, nobody has been able to get such a business off the ground, because both materials are almost impossible to find. The Warlock Council of Elements has secretly managed to get two five carat rings made with Xanthine and Gantrium. Both are reserved for military use by the colonies' Warlocks in case of an emergency.

**A Final Note:** Unless located near one of the northern or southern colonies, no mining operation will be very feasible without millions of gold in capital and an army of workers and defenders. Even then the Wolfen Empire, the Kingdom of Bizantium, Western Empire or even some god, demon lord or other power will try to seize it all. The rate at which metal or gemstones may be drawn from these sites (and indeed, any mining area) varies depending on the local geology, topography, skill of the workers, and a host of other factors. In game terms, the productivity of any mine is left to the G.M.'s discretion. Generally speaking, exploiting a mine site should NOT be an excuse to grant player characters a quick few million gold pieces. Rather, mines work best as an ongoing story element and a source for NPC political intrigue, betrayal, corruption, invasion, war, etc., that will generate adventures for the player characters. Player characters should work for and earn everything they get, with the ultimate reward for true heroes being saving lives, not getting stinking rich.

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## The Vertical Harvest

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Logging is a more lucrative and stable enterprise than mining, in large part because over 60% of the Northern Hinterlands is dense, ancient forest. Most of these trees are ordinary enough, but there are three particular types that have special properties and are thus attractive for harvesting. Anybody living or building any kind of permanent settlement in the region knows of the special types of lumber that exist, and they would be a fool not to make the most out of it. As such, tree cutting crews routinely venture into the woodlands to fell the most valuable trees the forest has to offer. The sawmills of the Shadow Coast run day and night, processing the raw lumber brought in by intrepid woodcutters and the soldiers who escort them.

The great thing about logging is that vast stretches of harvestable trees can be found within a day's travel of most *any* settlement in the Northern Hinterlands. Except for Ophid's Grasslands, no matter where an expedition launches from, by sundown the crew will have located a harvest site and begun hauling fallen lumber back to civilization. Unlike mining, loggers do not have to travel to remote areas, sometimes searching for days or weeks before finding a promising strike spot, only to yield *nothing* of value after months or years of digging in the dirt. Loggers can easily identify trees that have an intrinsic value and guess by eyeballing it how much the tree will bring on the market. However, the big problem for loggers is hauling the lumber out and staying alive. Chopping down trees is not inconspicuous and the noise and activity attracts everything from wild animals to bandits and monsters. Magic can help in both areas, but most logging camps rely on muscle more than magic. As a result, loggers use river ways to move their bounty down to the Shadow Coast or physically *pull* the logs across the countryside. This is where big, powerful workers like Orcs, Ogres, Trolls and Giants come in especially handy. It also means large areas around the Shadow Coast are becoming deforested, because it is easier to harvest trees close to the colonies where there are roads, sawmills, shipping docks and the luxury of civilization, such as it is there. Besides, they have barely touched the vast forests of the Hinterlands, 99.7% of which remains as pristine as it has ever been, despite loggers' efforts to take as much as they

can from it. If at any time sections of the Northern Hinterlands should face serious deforestation, the indigenous *Kankoran* will take matters into their own hands to slow down harvesting to a more manageable level. Right now the Kankoran have an imaginary line in their minds as to where the borders of the Shadow Coast's territory ends. They are willing to let these intrepid and industrious humans claim some of the land for themselves and dominate it as humans are prone to do, but beyond that, there will be problems. Meanwhile, the Kankoran try to counsel the Coastlanders about conservation and replanting, something the Warlocks also tend to promote.

Difficulties and bushwhacking monsters aside, logging operations continue at a steady pace, with more and more lumberjacks hitting the Hinterlands each year. For most of them, their saws and axes are meant for one of three special kinds of lumber to be had: *fernwood*, *hardwood*, and *stonewood*. Each are a special treasure unto themselves, and those who make their living by the saw will know the difference.

**Fernwoods** are the most commonly lumbered specialty wood in the Hinterlands. They are not trees, actually, but a kind of fern that grows to enormous size and can live for hundreds, if not thousands of years. (G.M. Note: In real-world terms, fernwoods are modeled after the giant sequoias of Northern California, which are themselves a special kind of fern plant.) Fernwoods grow between 300 to 400 feet (91.4 to 121.9 m) high and 30 to 50 feet (9.14 m to 15.2 m) in diameter. They grow an average of one to three feet (.30 to .91 m) in both height and diameter a year, until they max out in diameter and just continue to grow skyward to their full height. Once they max out in size, fernwoods are considered to have reached their maturity. Nobody really knows the upper limit to a fernwood's life span, but scholars have good reason to believe these behemoths can live for thousands of years.

Their huge size means just one fernwood can provide enough lumber to build a small village worth of houses. The wood is both strong and pliant, and whatever is built out of it can be expected to *last*. For its reliability and ease of use, fernwood fetches a nice price on the open market – around 1,000 gold per cord (one cord equals 100 planks measuring two feet wide, six inches thick, and eight feet long/0.6 m wide, 0.15 m thick, and 2.4 m long). An average fernwood will yield several *dozen* cords of wood, making each tree the equivalent of a small gold mine strike.

With trees this tall and wide, cutting them down is a very hazardous undertaking, requiring sizable crews of skilled lumberjacks. Any crew with insufficient numbers or skill will not only damage the tree while felling it (poorly cut trees, especially fernwoods, snap in the middle as they fall, ruining a portion of the wood and reducing the value of the tree), but creates the risk of the tree falling in an unpredictable direction. When this happens, the chance for one or more lumberjacks getting caught under the falling fernwood is pretty good. Anybody hit by a falling fernwood will suffer 1D6x100 damage and will be pinned by the tree, suffering another 1D4x10 damage each minute thereafter until they are rescued. Most times, victims of a bad tree fall are goners.

Most crews take down fernwoods by scaling them to their upper heights and shearing off the top branches first. Then they work their way down, suspending themselves to the tree via an



intricate system of ropes and safety lines. This allows the lumberjacks to section off the tree from the top down, making the rest of the trunk, when they fell it, that much easier to control. Plus, the forests where fernwoods are found tend to be dense, so if a full fernwood is allowed to crash to the earth, it will probably fall against another tree, get hung up, and require both trees to be taken down — a very hazardous task indeed. Think it's hard enough to bring down one fernwood safely? Try bringing one down that is sitting at a 45 degree angle. As any lumberjack worth his salt will tell you, "hung trees" are not worth the danger they present, but they are almost always created by poor lumber working, so the crew has a moral obligation to bring the tree down. Otherwise, the tree will come down on its own, endangering anyone in the vicinity when it does. Having an appreciation of what a bad tree fall will do to one's body, most lumberjacks will go out of their way to make sure a hung tree is properly laid to the ground before leaving the area. As previously mentioned, however, skilled crews rarely hang trees, especially when they take the time and effort to section off the tree from the top down. To do this, the lumberjacks must have the *Rope Works* skill to properly suspend themselves off the ground and to secure themselves to the tree they are working on. When working a tree section, lumberjacks need only check their *Rope Works* skill once; if they miss the roll, they will fall from the tree once they begin sawing. Lumberjacks will suffer 1D6 damage per 10 feet (3 m) of distance fallen. Since most falling victims will be hundreds of feet off the ground when they plummet, the trip down is usually a fatal one. But before a lumberjack ever gets a chance to put his *Rope Works* skills to use, he must scale the tree to whatever height he is going to work at. For this, the *Climb/Scale Walls* skill must be used. If used in combination with a successful *Rope Works* roll, the lumberjack need not make successful *Climb/Scale* rolls every ten feet.

Veteran loggers like to section off fernwoods by cutting into the trunk from the top and sectioning it into four vertical quarters. Then they cut through the entire trunk every 50 feet (15.2 m), creating four sizable (but manageable) log-like pieces. Before any of these pieces are completely cut away from the tree, they are secured by ropes and lowered to the ground. Again, the *Rope Works* skill is needed for this. If the lumberjack securing the log misses his *Rope Works* skill on this, the piece of wood will fall free to the ground. Anybody hit by the falling lumber will take 2D6x10 damage. Anywhere from 10% to 40% (1D4x10%) of the wood will be ruined from the fall.

Sectioned wood is gathered and stacked on the ground, where it is lashed to wagons for transport to the nearest marketplace or sawmill. Sometimes work crews will further process the wood themselves, reducing it to cords on the spot, thereby increasing the wood's resale value. ("Raw" fernwood lumber usually fetches only half the price of an equal amount of ready-to-use wood.)

The danger of fernwood harvesting is more than offset by the profit to be made from them, which is why lumberjacks continue to work this hazardous trade. Most work crews consist of six to eight workers who will take down only one tree per year. They spend up to a month actually falling and sectioning the tree, and maybe another three months selling it off. The rest of the year, the crew lives off the fat profits it made. Really ambitious crews might try harvesting two or even three fernwoods a year, but what almost always happens is the crew overworks it-

self and gets sloppy. When that happens, mistakes are made and accidents begin to claim the lives of the crewmen. The conventional wisdom is that it is better to go easy and live well than to get greedy and die fast.



**Hardwoods** are the second major lumber market in the Hinterlands. These are trees that possess precious and semi-precious woods used to make jewelry, fine furniture and other luxury goods. There are over a dozen species of valuable hardwoods in the Northern Hinterlands, including *whitebark*, *jadewood*, *splendor*, *richesse*, *glory ring*, and *thronewood*. The average hardwood is 50 to 70 feet (15.2 m to 21.3 m) tall and 10 to 20 feet (3 m to 6.1 m) in diameter. This yields three to six cords of wood, each going for around 5,000 gold. Hardwoods are considerably easier and safer to harvest than the mighty fernwoods, but they have been entirely wiped out within reach of any civilization. So in order to find more, lumber crews must venture deep into the wilderness to do it. This means handling hostile monsters and humanoids as well as unpredictable weather and the other hazards of isolation. Hardwood harvesting is not the dangerous trip that opening a mine in the boondocks is, but it still possesses a greater threat (and payoff) than taking an easy score like a fernwood.

The biggest problem with hardwoods is that the real markets for them are in the more wealthy nations of the world — the Western Empire, the Island Kingdom of Bizantium, the Timiro Kingdom, and to a lesser extent, the Eastern Territory. Getting large shipments of wood from anywhere in the Hinterlands to these markets is problematic at best. Shipments can go by land to the Western Empire or Eastern Territory, but that entails a long and hazardous trip through areas known to be infested with hostile savages who delight in waylaying merchant trains. It can be done, of course, but it requires merchants to equip their trains with armed escorts, and to take their trains along secret routes that will skirt the patrol routes of marauders. Those who can do this make a habit out of running hardwoods to the Western Empire colonies to the south of the Hinterlands, to Wolfen Empire outposts on the western edge of the realm, or to trading centers within the Disputed Zone or the Eastern Territories proper.

The better way is to move the lumber through the Shadow Coast and send it by boat to waiting buyers in other lands. Unfortunately, the deteriorating political situation between the Shadow Coast and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium has led to a Bizantium blockade of the Shadow Coast. Anybody trying to ship wood out of the area will be stopped by warships who will either confiscate the cargo or sink the ship. Smaller blockade runner vessels make a habit of slipping through the gauntlet, but this is risky business that clients must pay through the nose for. It is said that even if one manages to move a shipment of hardwood to a foreign market by way of blockade runner, the extra costs of hiring such a pirate ship will basically consume any profit to be made from the run.

In addition to its application as a luxury material, hardwoods make for excellent weapons materials, especially for blunt instruments and thrusting weapons such as spears, javelins, and arrows. Any weapon made of hardwood inflicts ordinary damage but can be bought at half the ordinary list price because they contain no metal. Especially beautiful weapons (those with ornate carving and other workmanship) will go for the usual list price.

**Stonewoods** are the most valuable and least common of the Hinterlands' commercially harvestable trees. As their name suggests, these are trees with wood as hard as stone. They only grow in the Northern Hinterlands and are usually found in small groves of 2D6+4 trees. In a few cases, the wood is stone-hard as

it grows, as in the case of *mahogranite*, *marble pine*, and *oakstone*. Trees such as these are known as "petrified" wood and are exceedingly difficult to knock down. (They are, after all, like large stone columns. Ever try to saw one of those down?) In other cases, the wood seems ordinary enough and does not get all its super-hardness until it is baked in an oven for a few hours. This is the case with stonewoods such as *trollwood*, *neversplinter*, and *bulwark*.

Though they are scarce, stonewoods are a hot commodity to anybody who wishes to build fortified structures without actually using stone. These woods are used in the building of Bizantium's famous Stone Ships and other fortifications, as well as rock hard weapons and tools. The Shadow Coast wants to build a series of coastal defense strongholds out of the stuff and have cutting crews and Rangers scouring the deep Hinterlands for stonewood trees. Likewise, the Kankoran, Bearmen, Kiridin Barbarians, Trolls, Minotaurs and other "natives," use stonewoods to make weapons, tools, wagons and sleighs.

As their name implies, stonewoods are as hard as stone and almost as heavy. A ten foot (3 m) square section of stonewood has 600 S.D.C. The exact S.D.C. for smaller items should be determined by the G.M., but a good rule of thumb is that stonewood items will have twice as much S.D.C. as if they had been manufactured from ordinary wood.

On the open market, stonewood weapons cost the same as the price for ordinary metal or metal and wood items. Stonewood weapons and tools are reliable and strong as metal ones and some people (like Druids and Warlocks) prefer them. Plus stonewood weapons, particularly battle axes, swords and knives have become something of a desirable "tourist" item that appeals to warriors because the item is both unique and practical. It also serves as proof that one has visited the Northern Hinterlands and is a nice keepsake.

*Stonewood weapons* inflict an extra 1D6 damage because of their heavy weight and are coveted by Giants and beings, like Ogres and Trolls, with great strength (P.S. 22 or higher). On the downside, these weapons are also at -3 to strike and parry (regardless of P.S.), since their bulk and weight makes them poorly balanced. Missile weapons such as arrows or javelins may be made from stonewood, but their range will only be *half* normal, again, because of their extra weight. Even with that figured in, Kiridin barbarians, Kankoran and other Hinterlands archers love using stonewood arrows because they hit hard and inflict an extra 1D6 damage.





# Ancient Secrets & Lost Treasures

By Bill Coffin & Kevin Siembieda

As noted earlier, many are the rumors, legends and tales of magic and treasure. There are tales of dragons and their secret lairs, where hidden inside are tons of loot. There are stories of black-hearted demons and terrible monsters who wield an ancient rune weapon, magic item or some other coveted artifact that will become the possession of he who can slay the beast. There are rumors of secretive clans, cults, tribes and enclaves of demon worshipers, Necromancers, Changelings, Gnomes, Minotaurs, Wizards and forgotten races who hold the secret knowledge of the ancients and cast magic thought lost to the ages, or guard precious magic weapons or artifacts worth a king's ransom. There are legends of lost cities of gold or magic, buried treasure, ancient ruins and items of great power all said to be found somewhere in the Northern Hinterlands and the foothills of the Northern Mountains. All one needs is a bit of luck to find it, the resourcefulness to claim it, and the power to keep it (and get out alive).

## Heeding the call to adventure

Despite its many horrors and hardships, the Northern Hinterlands remain a land visited by intrepid explorers, scholars, adventurers and fortune hunters of every conceivable occupation, heritage and place in the world. Indeed, every year, particularly in the summer when the Hinterlands is at its least threatening, scores of outlanders enter the Hinterlands seeking fame and fortune. Over the decades, Wolfen Imperials have deployed thousands of their finest scouts and soldiers, as have the Western Empire and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium as well as lords in the Eastern Territory and elsewhere. Why seek the secrets of a place so harsh that few who enter ever return to tell of it? The answers are varied, but at their core, they all contain a fundamental truth – regardless of the danger, the Northern Hinterlands offer the *promise* of the unknown and dangles the promise of riches, power and glory beyond imagination.

The Hinterlands offer monsters and magic long forgotten, ancient artifacts and lost civilizations waiting to give up their secrets to those bold enough to take them, monsters and demons, near forgotten gods and abominations found nowhere else on earth except perhaps in the impossible to access Land of the Damned, or Yin-Sloth Jungles and other rare places untouched by the passage of time and hidden away from human civilization at large. It boasts creatures and magicks that stretch back to the *Time of a Thousand Magicks*, and some back to the *Age of Chaos* when the Dreaded Old Ones held sway over the world. It is the challenge and promise of what these creatures, places and things might hold that draws the bold and adventurous, the power-hungry, curious and foolish, alike. In a world full of opportunists, heroes, sorcerers, and adventurers, the Northern Hinterlands is one of those rare places that offers true mystery and forgotten truths.

## Lost Treasures of the Hinterlands

Recent and ancient history have both played their part in depositing an array of unusual and valuable treasures throughout the Hinterlands. Stories about rare magic items, lost treasures, ancient ruins, dragon lairs, demon strongholds filled with magic or gold or both, and monstrous beasts wielding powerful rune



weapons, and countless other tales of wonder abound. The *Shadow Coast*, the *Island Kingdom of Bizantium*, the *Wolfen Empire* and the *Disputed Lands of the Eastern Territory* are hotbeds for these tales, especially among sailors, pirates and adventurers who dream of someday finding such a treasure for themselves.

Perhaps needless to say, these tales inspire a veritable legion of treasure seekers to make a pilgrimage to the Northern Hinterlands in the hopes of laying claim to any one of them. Most arrive in the summer when the wilderness is least threatening. Many of those who survive the summer, leave for a port town, colony city or Bizantium, or go home to wait out the terrible winter and renew their quest with the onset of spring. Many give up entirely, glad to have survived the experience at all. Those trapped deep within the Hinterlands at the onset of winter must either dig in at a Hearth and Home or try to survive on their own the best they can. Once the snow begins to fall, escaping the Hinterlands is a challenge that even most natives avoid. Those caught ill-prepared are lucky to survive. The overconfident are never seen again, or found dead and frozen during the spring thaw — food for the predators and a warning to the throng of new adventurers.

Yes, the place has proven to be a deathtrap, but it is enticing nonetheless. The challenge of beating death often is. Part of its glamour and allure is the fact that the Hinterlands is a place that gobbles up the frail, stupid and cowardly. It is a place that challenges even the most experienced, cunning and powerful warriors, wizards and adventurers. It is a place that screams out to bold heroes and champions, and demands every ounce of their courage, strength and resourcefulness. It is a place where only the "best of the best" can win the day — and even they struggle to do so. It is a challenge where even coming away empty handed is a feat of triumph.

"I have been to the Northern Hinterlands," is a statement that will stop most people in their tracks, and make them bend an ear in hope of hearing tales of monsters, daring, adventure and treasure. For it is a claim that few can truthfully make. Thus, those who enter the Northern Hinterlands (or the Northern Mountains) must bury their fears and smother any doubt. They must forget about the thousands who have gone before them, never to be seen or heard from again, and focus on the few who have returned. Among them, those who speak of great challenges and greater treasure that slipped through their grasp and waits for some other hero to win. To spur on newcomers, there are those who have returned with powerful magic, the hides of great beasts, or a treasure trove that makes a Lord from the Western Empire drool with envy.

Many are the rumors, legends and supposedly firsthand accounts of treasures said to be waiting for adventurers bold enough to claim them. New rumors and tales come out of the Hinterlands and Northern Mountains on a regular basis. Some are true, some hold only a kernel of truth, and others are fanciful folk tales or outrageous flights of fantasy, but all offer promise and call out to dreamers willing to take the risk.

The following "lost treasures" are only *some* of the most notorious and elusive. Many an adventurer has risked everything in search of them. So far, all seekers have failed. Some may not exist at all.



## The Eye of Eelemore

Eelemore ("EEL-ee-more") was a Wolfen Psi-Mystic of uncommon skill and raw talent. Most Wolfen, thanks to their short life span (50 years or so), never attain the mastery of magic that longer-lived races, such as Elves, do. It is a failing that torments this proud canine race, since they so badly wish to establish themselves as a major magic-using people. So, when prodigies such as Eelemore come along, they win great prestige and power amongst their people. In Eelemore's case, he was granted unconditional access to whatever magical resources the Empire had on hand.

After spending six years alone in the Northern Hinterlands, Eelemore returned more powerful than ever and in possession of the secrets of rune magic! The Psi-Mystic set himself to the task of creating an entire arsenal of rune items for his beloved Wolfen Empire. The Imperials, for their part, never questioned Eelemore's unprecedented abilities, nor did they disrespect his wishes that they not ask him to teach his secrets to anybody else. They just counted their blessings to have a genuine rune smith on their side, and were willing to do whatever it took to get the most out of it. With somebody like Eelemore in the Wolfen Empire's service, the brewing war with the Eastern Territory would quickly become a one-sided ending affair. Oh, yes, those humans would pay, and the Disputed Zone would forever remain in Wolfen control. It would be a great new era for the Wolfen Empire, one in which the legions would drive forth with Eelemore's great runic devices at their command!

Oh, if only that dream could have been realized.

Shortly after Eelemore finished his first rune device, a lantern with the ability to grant its user incredible powers of perception, the Wolfen Psi-Mystic was assassinated by freelance killers employed by foreign nationals. At first, the Wolfen believed their beloved Eelemore was slain by Eastern spies, but in the years that followed, tiny shreds of evidence have surfaced that indicate maybe the Western Empire was behind the slaying. After all, the West wants very badly to see an even war between the Eastern Territory and the Wolfen Empire, because it would keep both powers from having the strength to oppose the Western Empire. With Eelemore on the verge of establishing a new Runic Age for the Wolfen, the balance of power would have been disrupted. Something had to be done, and fast. So, the theory goes, the Western Empire sent human assassins to the Wolfen capital of Shadowfall under the guise of a diplomatic party from Havea, a Wolfen client state comprised of humans who have



given their allegiance to the canines. The killers slipped through Wolfen security, slew the promising young rune lord, and slipped out with his sole creation, the runic lantern.

What happened next is something the Wolfen want very badly to figure out. Imperial Rangers have uncovered reports that a band of human adventurers carrying a magical lantern were involved in a tavern brawl on the western edge of the Wolfen Empire. Twelve of the Stonemoon Brigade, one of the Wolfen's most elite fighting units, were deployed to apprehend the killers and retrieve the magic lantern, posthumously named the *Eye of Eelemore*. The Stonemoons followed the fleeing humans deep into the Northern Hinterlands, where they found their bones, picked clean by some kind of predator. Their belongings were left intact, only the Eye of Eelemore was missing. Where it went or who took it was never determined, but the Wolfen Rangers believe that the runic lantern is still somewhere within the Hinterlands. All that remains is for them to find it and get it back home before war really does break out with the Eastern humans.

In the meantime, the Wolfen Empire officially holds the Western Empire responsible for the death of their one and only rune mage, but they are keeping quiet about it for the time being. The Western Empire prides itself on pulling off dirty little missions like this, and as far as they are concerned, even though they did not retrieve the Eye of Eelemore, its maker is dead and the rune item removed from the Wolfen's possession, so the mission must be considered a success. The Wolfen are content to let the Western Empire gloat at its secret enclave, that way, when the Wolfen decide when and how to extract their vengeance upon the Empire of Sin, those decadent Westerners will never know what hit them. Only when the Wolfen do strike, they intend to strike hard and in a way that will shake the Empire to its very core. Among the top levels of the Wolfen military, plots under consideration include the assassination of Emperor Itomas, or helping the rebellious Middle Kingdoms region of the Western Empire successfully carry out its bid to break away and form its own nation (which could prompt the collapse of the rest of the Empire).

### The Eye of Eelemore:

1. The Eye is a greater rune item with all common rune powers plus the following special abilities.

2. The lantern can be activated to shine light with but a simple command. There is no limit to how long the light will shine, it can be adjusted from dim to bright, and uses NO oil nor burns with fire. It shines a magical light as if inside were contained a perpetual Globe of Daylight. Thus, the lantern light will hold at bay the undead and any other creatures that shun the light of day to the edge of its light, which is normally a 20 foot (6 m) diameter. However, as often as 12 times a day, the Eye of Eelemore can cast magical daylight in all directions out to 500 feet (153 m) for a duration of 30 minutes, or as a directed beam 10 feet (3 m) wide out to 1,000 feet (305 m). Any undead hit by this beam will suffer as if they were caught in real sunlight. Vampires will suffer outright damage, while all other undead will be repelled and forced to flee unless they save vs magic at -6; must roll to save at the beginning of every new melee round (15 seconds).

3. While the user grasps the Eye and its light shines upon the item, thing, creature or area in question, he can not be affected by illusions of any kind. No saving throw is even necessary

against illusions, for the lantern holder automatically sees right through them. The user will also see people for who they really are while grasping the lantern. That means anybody in disguise or metamorphed (such as a Changeling or a dragon posing as a human) will be seen for their true selves, but only by the holder of the light and only if the light of the Eye is shined upon them.

4. The user can See the Invisible and has the powers of the spell *Eyes of Thoth*, at his own level of experience, on any item, writing or area on which the light is shown.

5. Once per 24 hours, the owner bound to the lantern can peer into it and use the lantern like a Crystal Ball. Gazing into the central crystal of the lantern is what provides the scrying imagery. The character can see (not hear) whomever it is he is looking for and spy upon said individual for up to six minutes. Unless there is some recognizable landmark known to the viewer, he will not know where said individual is actually located, although he may have an idea. 6. Three times a day, the user of the lantern can use the psionic power of Sixth Sense, without I.S.P. cost to him, cast at the user's current level of experience, to sense immediate danger.

The Eye of Eelemore has no curses on it. Its value is at least 15 million gold, probably two or three times that.

**Estimated Value:** 20-30 million gold. Perhaps more where one has a vampire problem.

**Final Note:** G.M.s, feel free to examine the strange case of Eelemore himself. How did a Wolfen know the secrets of rune magic? Did he find some secret ruin that contained some ancient writing or artifact with the instructions for rune magic? If so, does it still exist (probably not) or did Eelemore destroy or lose it? Could the Mystic have discovered some ancient Dwarf or people who still possess the knowledge of rune magic and they taught it to him? Could the Mystic have opened himself to commune with some ancient spirit and been possessed by an ancient Dwarven master? Or perhaps Eelemore was possessed by or linked with one of the Dreaded Old Ones, said to have invented rune magic? (In which case, it is best that Eelemore was slain.) Was Eelemore gifted with knowledge from the gods? Or could Eelemore have been a charlatan? One rumor (started by Western Empire rabble-rousers) is that Eelemore never knew the secrets of rune magic, but had discovered the magic lantern buried in an old Changeling ruin at the Northern Hinterlands and was only pretending to have created it on his own. Assassins may have killed a faker. The answer is up to you, but even following false leads could be the start of some grand adventure.

## Fire Ice

Fire Ice is a multi-faceted stone crystal about the size of softball or orange, but shaped like a teardrop or flame. It is clear with a faint red tint and a tiny spark of red energy in its center. Although very hard and difficult to damage (A.R. 17 and 800 S.D.C.), it can be smashed or cracked open, at which point the red spark vanishes, the crystal turns completely clear and all magic it once had is destroyed.

Although rare, most people come upon a single Fire Ice stone by accident. Most have been found laying on the ground in the middle of a forest or out in the grassland with no ruins or people anywhere nearby. Who made these items and why they seem to be sprinkled throughout the Northern Hinterlands and Northern

Mountains is unknown. One legend suggest there was a good natured alchemist who wandered the region, like a Johnny Appleseed type character, dropping a crystal here and there for some needy individual to find. Others say he lived a thousand years ago and handed out Fire Ice crystals to people he thought could benefit from them or whom he took a liking to. When they felt their end coming near, they were to pass the crystal on to some other deserving individual or drop someplace in the wilderness. Some legends say this mysterious benefactor is an immortal Elf or Titan, or god who still comes out from time to time to scatter Fire Ice in the wilderness. The gods *Algor*, *Belimar the Dwarf* and *Epim* are most often credited for this act of kindness, but in truth, nobody has any inkling how these strange magical crystals have come into being or why they are found only in the Northern Hinterlands and Northern Mountains. The only thing that is certain is that they are hand crafted and not a natural phenomenon.

Indeed, over the centuries several hundred Fire Ice have been found. And every year or two comes reports of another 1-4 being found by some erstwhile adventurer. Despite this, Fire Ice are considered rare and valuable magic items with perhaps fewer than two thousand recovered and in use throughout the known world. It is also an item that modern alchemist cannot seem to replicate.

### The powers of Fire Ice:

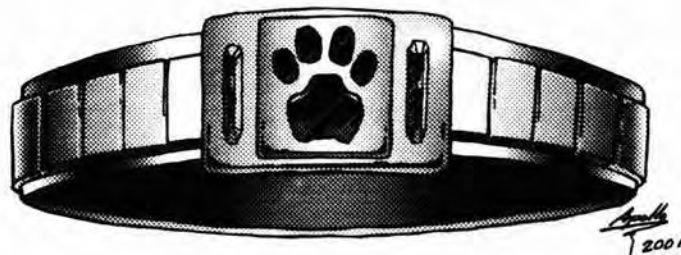
1. A Fire Ice feels warm to the touch and can be made to radiate heat equal to a sizable campfire twice a day by the person holding it wishing to be warm. This warmth lasts for up to three hours at a time and can be cancelled with a thought. Even when it radiates such heat, the crystal itself feels comfortably warm and can be handled or carried in a backpack. The only problem is that the character carrying it will feel uncomfortably hot and sweat profusely as if sitting too close to a roaring fire or hot stove.

2. Fire Ice can also melt ice (equal to a block the size of a basketball) and unthaw frozen food or dry articles of clothing in a matter of 2D4 minutes. More importantly, those warmed by its heat after being out in the cold or brought in with frostbite or hypothermia will be restored to full health without pain or injury from cold. **Note:** Although warm and able to melt ice, it can not be used to catch even flammable items on fire.

3. Unknown to most users of Fire Ice, it also wards off *Ice Demons* and other supernatural evil or mischievous creatures who are spirits of ice and cold. Such beings dislike the heat of Fire Ice and unless the creature is burning with anger, a lust for revenge or provoked, it will stay at least a hundred yards (91 m) away. This is an automatic and constant effect in place around the clock. However, greater demons and greater Elementals are not influenced in the least, and even lesser beings can fight the uncomfortable heat and distressing aura. However, such lesser beings will suffer the following penalties when they are within the hundred yard (300 feet/91 m) radius of one or more Fire Ice: -1 attack per melee round and -1 to strike, parry, dodge and disarm. Clergy who worship any Northern god are likely to know about this property.

**Estimated Value:** 150,000-300,000 gold. For those who believe Fire Ice comes from the gods or a good spirit, the crystal has great and religious significance, with those who *find* or are

given one as a gift (not purchased) being considered "blessed" and having earned the "favor" of a northern god.



## Gantrell's Familiar

*Gantrell the Great* started life as a bumbling Wizard 11,000 years ago in what is now known as the Old Kingdom. On the lighter side of things, Gantrell was infamous for an utter inability to keep a familiar. The hapless mage had, over the years, conjured forth dozens of them, but for some reason or another, they kept dying on him. This kept Gantrell in a constant state of ill health, since the shock of a familiar's death takes its toll on the spell caster. Eventually, out of frustration, Gantrell gave up on familiars and became one of those studious scholar-mages of lore who, in the long run, designed a number of unique spells and contributed a great deal to Wizardry in general.

In his later years, a few alchemist friends of Gantrell's got together and fashioned for him a runic ring for his birthday. In jest, they named the ring *Gantrell's Familiar* because they knew he couldn't kill *this* one, no matter how hard he tried. History does not tell us if Gantrell found his friends' jibe amusing, but he did keep the ring on him as one of his prized possessions.

On his deathbed, Gantrell gave his ring to his top student, who was charged with keeping the ring throughout his lifetime and then passing it along to his top student, and so on and so on. This chain of ownership had continued into modern times, but was recently broken in the Northern Hinterlands. There, the ring's current owner, a Wolfen Wizard named *Fargut Tenspell*s was ambushed by raiders in the heart of the region. Coyle and Ogre renegades one hundred strong attacked Fargut and his small retinue of followers. The mighty spell caster put up a great fight. By the time he was laid low, he had already sent over 50 of his attackers to their graves ahead of him. It is said a Coyle named *Nokoggin Nor* made off with Fargut's precious ring, but where he went is anybody's guess. Since then, the students of Fargut's Academy of Wizardry in *Shadowfall* have placed a 100,000 gold reward on Nokoggin's head, and an equal reward for the safe return of Gantrell's Familiar. At present, there are no fewer than two dozen of Fargut's students in the Hinterlands chasing down every possible lead for the magic ring.

### The powers of Gantrell's Familiar:

1. All common rune powers plus the following abilities.
2. The ring will only allow spell casters of *good* alignment to wear it. Anybody who does not meet those requirements will get a single warning and 15 seconds to remove the ring. After that, the ring will constrict like a coiling serpent, cutting off the transgressor's finger (1D6 points of damage and loss of that finger)! The ring will then resume its normal shape.



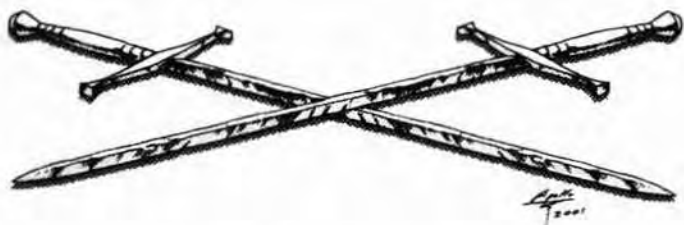
3. When a new wearer who is a *spell caster* puts the ring on for the first time, he will immediately gain a *Magic Cauldron's* worth of new spell knowledge. The wearer does not have to actually carry out that ceremony; he just receives additional spells as if he had. The spells gained should be determined randomly, but any duplicates should be re-rolled.

4. The wearer gains +3 to save vs magic, +2 to his own spell strength, +1 to strike and dodge, and +1 attack *by spell* per melee (that means three spells per round rather than the usual two).

5. The wearer of the ring is also able to Sense Evil at will. Likewise, evil creatures can automatically sense Gantrell's Familiar as a major force of good, and often will find themselves strangely compelled to destroy whoever is wearing it. Certainly they take an immediate and lasting dislike to the individual.

6. Once placed on the finger, it cannot be removed except to permanently give it away to another or when the current owner dies.

**Estimated Value:** 35-50 million gold for any Wizard or spell caster; priceless for those who see the ring as their legacy.



## The Green Reavers

This pair of enchanted longswords were commissioned by a Western Assassin who went only by the moniker of *Steel*, perhaps in reference to the tools by which he made his living. Having long worked as a professional killer in the streets of *Caer Itom* and other major Western cities, *Steel* reportedly built a large fortune for himself both in the fees he collected and in booty he plundered from his victims. On his rise to infamy, *Steel* made his share of enemies; namely, the many Assassins guilds he never bothered to join or pay tribute. Taking a dark view of unaffiliated freelancers, the guilds began an earnest attempt to find *Steel* and show him the error of his ways – permanently. The wily killer realized he had worn out his welcome in his homeland and made all haste to depart as soon as he could. But he also knew that unless he made a show of force for the guilds' men hunting him, he would forever be hounded by them. That is why he paid a visit to one of the best "underground alchemists" working in *Caer Itom*, a rogue named *Coradel Norchan* who specialized in making things for people who preferred that others never knew where they came from.

*Coradel* owed *Steel* his life after an escapade that occurred a few years before, and cleared his debt by crafting for him the finest weapons of his lengthy career, a pair of magic killing tools he would name the *Green Reavers*.

The same day *Steel* picked up his merchandise, the shop was laid siege to by a veritable army of guild Assassins representing every band of professional killers in the capital city. *Coradel* slipped out during the ensuing chaos, but his shop was destroyed, and the alchemist has not come out of hiding since.

*Steel*, on the other hand, did not go so quietly. Putting his new weapons to the test, he met his attackers head-on in the outside streets. The resulting sword fight lasted over an hour and left over twenty Assassins dead, as well as the dozen or so city guardsmen (in the secret employ of various Assassins' guilds, by the way) who responded to the disturbance. The battle became known to locals as the *Night of Green Steel*, and it made *Steel* himself something of a legend. Rumors abounded that *Steel* paid a visit to the guild lords who ordered the hit on him and sent them all to an early grave before leaving the Western Empire. It is said that he joined forces with a band of adventurers seeking fame and glory in other parts of the *Palladium World*.

According to accounts in the *Wolfen Empire*, *Steel* and his companions were last seen carrying out a mission on behalf of the *Wolfen*, though the particulars of the job have not been revealed to the public. Apparently, the group ran into trouble somewhere in the Northern Hinterlands and *Steel* himself was said to have been slain. He was resurrected by his friends three days later thanks to some timely magical intervention, but his famed swords were lost, looted by those who killed him but failed to complete the job. The whereabouts of the swords are unknown, but they are thought to be in the hands of *Ogres*, *Trolls* or *Kiridin Barbarians*. If *Steel* is still alive (and he probably is), he will certainly wish to retrieve his prize possessions. Whether he will conduct his search alone or bring along his adventuring cohorts remains to be seen. Whoever beats him to the swords will have a tough choice when he comes looking for them; either give them up and forsake powerful weapons for an equally powerful ally, or hold on to the weapons and prepare for the fight of a lifetime.

### The powers of the Green Reavers Long Swords:

The pair of blades were ordinary, Dwarven-quality long swords that were specially enchanted into weapons about as powerful as conventional alchemy can create.

1. The most truly unique feature is that both weapons appear to be ordinary weapons, and they do not even give off a magical aura under any circumstances (a quality that served *Steel* well on a number of occasions when his weapons were permitted in places where magic items were not. It is a rare and costly enchantment said to be known only to *Coradel* and perhaps one or two other Alchemists in the world).

When used as ordinary swords, the weapons are +2 to strike and parry, +2 to disarm, +1 to strike when thrown, and inflict 2D6+4 damage per strike.

2. Upon command, emerald flame will ignite along the swords' edging. When ablaze, each of the swords inflicts 6D6 damage per strike, but its bonuses to strike and parry remain unchanged.

3. The swords are also indestructible and can not be destroyed by any means. The weapons were designed to be used as a pair, but they can be used singly without penalty.

**Estimated Value:** The *Green Reavers* are *not* rune weapons, and as such, do not have their own personality, alignment preference, or any other standard runic powers. They are simply superbly crafted magical weapons with quite a bit of history attached to them. It is this history, however, that gives the weapons their true value. Whoever lays claim to them can easily par-

lay the weapons to instantly earn him or her credibility on the streets of the Western Empire, Phi, Lopan and even in the colonies in the Northern Hinterlands and parts of the Eastern Territory. Coyles in the southeast and grasslands (erroneously) believe that the swords contain the souls of their fallen comrades, and that if they gain the weapons, they might possibly bring their dead back to life. This is impossible, of course, and where this crazy rumor started, the gods only know, but the Coyles are convinced of it.

True value: 270,000-340,000 gold; but to those convinced it drinks souls and/or can raise the dead: 50+ million!

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## Ice Daggers of the Death Legion

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A legendary magic weapon believed to have been created by the Old Ones over 180,000 years ago, before the Age of Chaos came to an end. Whether such blades were created by the Old Ones or one of their minions is unknown. It is said that 100,000 of these blades were made and given to every warrior who served in the dreaded Old Ones' Death Legion, a massive death squad whose membership required pledging one's soul to the Old Ones and vowing to fight to the bitter end and die for their masters. The Death Legion contained some of the most powerful, gigantic and monstrous of the Old Ones' warriors, thus the size of these magic blades can range from short sword to a ten foot (3 m) long Claymore as they were intended for true Giants. Consequently, any Ice Blade smaller than five feet (1.5 m) long (the majority found in the world today) was originally a "dagger." In fact, even the largest may have been a dagger.

The weapons are inscribed with runes and magic symbols but are not true rune weapons and do NOT have the usual range of runic powers. Whether this was some other form of magic known to the Old Ones or one of their unholy minions is a mystery.

When the Old Ones were defeated, the Death Legion did, indeed, fight to the death. All the Ice Daggers were gathered up, counted and supposed to be destroyed. Most were. However, the final count came up 20,007 short. Presumably, these blades had been lost, destroyed by other means or stolen. According to legend, many of the missing Ice Daggers were lost on the field of combat (indeed, 30 years ago an Ice Blade was found buried in one of the Shadow Colonies' mines and was given to a noble lord of Bizantium), others are said to have been tossed into the sea (meaning the Sea of Despair), some were taken as tribute by some of the gods who had defeated the Old Ones, but a full half are believed to have been spirited away by Minotaurs still loyal to the Great Old Ones. These Ice Daggers are said to be hidden away in some underground labyrinth in the Northern Mountains or the Land of the Damned – somewhere even the gods can not find (if such a place can really be). The legends also suggest that this group of evil Minotaurs has survived to this day, and their leaders and greatest warriors are given an Ice Dagger, the size of a giant broadsword, to denote their elevated position and to defend their realm from the forces of good. The rest of the weapons in their possession are said to be locked away where none can find them. Kept in storage until the Old Ones reawaken, at

which point a new Death Legion of Minotaurs will stand ready to serve their masters.

### Powers of the Ice Daggers:

Also known as the Old One's Ice Dagger, the Old One's Tear, and Algor's Tooth. All *Ice Daggers* have a blade made of thin crystal that has the same clarity, color and consistency of ice, only they are indestructible. Some Alchemists believe the weapons are made from real ice magically enchanted to be indestructible, an enchantment no longer known to the world's Alchemists.

1. Damage: Small (3-5 feet/0.9 to 1.5 m): 4D6; rare, but the most common of the three size ranges.

Medium (6-8 feet/1.8 to 2.4 m): 6D6 damage; rare.

Large (9-12 feet/2.7 to 3.6 m): 1D4x10+12; very rare.

**Note:** All, regardless of size, inflict double damage to creatures of fire and heat, including Fire Elementals, Fire Warlocks, Fire Dragons and so on, and triple damage to the Seraph (fire) Spirits of Light as well as the good gods in the pantheon of the Gods of Light, like Ra, Isis, and Thoth.

2. Fires magical ice shards up to 60 feet (18.3 m) and inflicts 4D6 damage. Each shard blast counts as one melee round. Can only be fired four times per 24 hour period.

3. The wielder of the Ice Dagger is impervious to normal cold (even sub-zero temperatures) and attacks from magic cold do only half damage.

**Cursed:** Although anyone of any alignment can use an Ice Dagger, the majority are cursed! Roll percentile dice for a random determination.

01-50% Half are cursed to turns its owner into a cold, callous individual who has little room for mercy, compassion or warm emotions such as love, caring, kindness and mercy. Turns the character's alignment into Anarchist or Aberrant evil, whichever he is most naturally inclined toward, as well as someone who distrusts others and sees the worst in people as expected and common.

51-65% have the curse of Misunderstanding.

66-70% have the curse of Cravings.

71-75% have the curse of Cold (even though otherwise impervious to the cold).

76-80% have the curse of Heat.

81-85% have the curse of Glowing Eyes.

86-00% Congratulations, no curse!

None of these curses can be removed from the weapon, nor can they be removed from the cursed individual until he discards it. Despite the likelihood of a curse, these Ice Daggers are highly coveted.

**Estimated Value:** 60,000-75,000 for small, 90,000-125,000 for medium and 250,000 or more for large Ice Daggers. Less than 50 are believed to exist in the world, with 60% being small blades.

**Note:** The most notable known to exist include two small Ice Daggers in the hands of rival Western lords in the Empire of Sin (both have the first curse), one large blade is in the possession of a Wolfen General (who also has a Winter Fang), one small blade has become the favorite weapon of a 7th level Assassin based out of *Destiny Point* at the Shadow Colonies, one small sword belongs to a Bizantium noble, a medium one is in the hands of a powerful Kiridin Barbarian Warlord, a large one in



the hands of a glowing eyed Palladin who disappeared after entering the Northern Mountains on a quest to the Land of the Damned ten years ago, and one is in the hands of a Timiro Kingdom Knight who plans on launching a campaign into the Old Kingdom against the monster hordes.

## Heart of Ice

This magical artifact is believed to be a thing of pure legend and may never have existed. Still, scores of power mongers have searched for it for thousands of years. Its creation has been attributed to numerous different gods, supernatural beings and legendary alchemists have been attributed to its creation, including Thoth, Belimar, Mephisto the Deceiver (Dyval), Charun the Cruel (Hades), and the Old Ones, among others. The evidence to support claims it *may* have existed is that a religious treatise on the God of Light, Osiris, mentions that he "found the Heart of Ice to be not a thing meant for gods nor man, for it turns even the greatest of heroes and kings into craven tyrants and power-hungry madmen with a cold heart that can not be melted." The popular text goes on to say that Osiris destroyed the "foul work of magic."

However, a certain older text, outlawed by the Church of Light, says that try as he might, Osiris could not destroy the Heart of Ice. Moreover, wherever he went with it in tow, scores of people would beg him to give it to them so that they might use it for good. Osiris is said to have seen only glazed eyes and madness in all the petitioners, many of whom fought amongst each other to prove they were worthy, or did terrible things to win Osiris' boon. Turning to Thoth for help, even he could not destroy the cursed item, but advised Osiris to take it to "the land as cold and desolate as the Heart itself, and bury it there. For there, it will be impossible to tell from the rest of the frozen rock and ice, and no man nor god will find it."

Not that they don't look. Many have reasoned that the only land that fits the description is the *Northern Hinterlands*, although a few wonder if it could be the Land of the Damned, since nobody really knows what that region is truly like. Of course, if the Heart of Ice is buried in the Hinterlands, it is probably impossible to find (how deep would a god dig anyway?). Osiris never shared its location with any of the other gods either, not even Isis or Thoth. And no higher power can find it either, for as Thoth surmised, as long as the cursed Heart is buried among the frozen rock and ice, it is completely undetectable by any means.

**The raw, cold power of the Heart of Ice:** While much about the Heart of Ice is unknown, its powers, at least as presented in legend, are well documented and known.

The Heart of Ice is a carved piece of ice that is a hundred times colder than the ice known to man. It has been carved into the crystalline shape and size of a human heart. He who desires the Heart most must hold the magic item in one hand and cut or chop out his own beating heart with the other. The magic artifact will keep the individual alive while he does this, but he endures the agonizing pain. If he is helped by any other person, the enchantment is broken and he dies. After his own heart is removed, the Heart of Ice is put in its place, the wound closes up

and the individual is restored to full health. As a portent of things to come, the flesh and blood heart shrivels up and turns into powdered ice that blows away in the next breeze no matter how slight. From that moment forward the character has the following abilities.

1. Impervious to cold, including cold based magic spells and magic weapons of cold.

2. Can cure hypothermia and heal frostbite by touch. P.P.E. cost is 10 points.

3. Hit Points, S.D.C. and P.P.E. are doubled in human form.

4. The character can transform at will, and without limit, into a *creature of living ice*. The individual retains all his memories and abilities, but also gains those from his new ice manifestation. It is important to understand that the character is not coated in ice, but actually becomes solid ice. It is in this form that the individual is most powerful and why warriors, knights, kings and power-mongers seek the Heart of Ice in the first place.

### The Creature of Ice

All the following apply only when in ice form.

- Natural Armor Rating is 14.
- Horror Factor 12, but reduce beauty by 30%.
- Hit Points are x5 and S.D.C. x10. However, in the winter or any environment where the temperature is below freezing, the H.P. and S.D.C. are both increased x50! In either case, any damage sustained while in ice form will magically regenerate with the first light of the new day.
- Strength becomes supernatural.
- Cool under fire, bold and confident. +1 to initiative, +5 to save vs Horror Factor and +6 to save vs possession.
- Life span is doubled if one spends half his time as the Creature of Ice. Quadruples if one spends 75% or more of one's time as the Creature of Ice.
- Can see the invisible and see and speak to Water, Ice and Air Elementals.
- Has 50 P.P.E. per level of experience (plus any P.P.E. and spell casting abilities the character had to begin with) and can cast the following spells (but only when in ice form): Frostblade, Ice Shield, Ice, Skate Ice, Ride Ice Flow and Snow Walk (all described later in this book) plus the following Water Warlock spells (see **Palladium Fantasy RPG**, starting on page 238): Color Water, Dowsing, Float on Water, Foul Water, Freeze Water, Sheet of Ice, Hail, Shards of Ice, Wall of Ice, Snow Storm, Ten Foot Ball of Ice and Little Ice Monster.

**The dark side of being a Creature of Ice.** The character with the Heart of Ice begins to enjoy and crave the power that comes with every transformation into the Creature of Ice. After 2D4+4 months, he or she will begin to prefer being the Creature of Ice more than human (or whatever natural form). With time (after 1D4 years), the character will prefer the ice form and spend 90% of the time in that ice body. When this happens the following applies.

1. When not a creature of ice, the character will feel incredibly vulnerable, weak, jumpy and paranoid.

2. Conversely, feels like a god when transformed into a Creature of Ice, which makes the individual arrogant, haughty, con-

descending, cold and callous toward others. He sees most mortals as inferior, weak and beneath him.

3. The Heart of Ice is a cold, lifeless hunk of ice that makes its recipient dispassionate about love and life. Little excites or interests him. Whatever passion and joy might have once existed is lost, replaced by an obsession to find challenges, crush the opposition (good or evil) and prove himself superior to all mere mortals and worthy of being a demigod.

4. Loves to win. Hates to lose. Losing makes the character angry and vengeful. Thus, he will usually do anything and sacrifice anybody to win. Such extreme action is justified as necessary for the "greater good" of the people, but is seldom true. Since his heart is ice, the character will not understand why old friends and allies might turn against him or criticize his cold actions. The Creature of Ice that the character has become chalks it up to envy and betrayal, making him all the more paranoid and untrusting even of friends and family.

5. As a Creature of Ice, the individual is cold, ruthless and merciless. He rules with a rock hard fist of ice. His (or her) heart turned to cold, the Creature of Ice is callous and uncaring about those around him. His needs, his plans, and his power are all that matters. The Creature of Ice does not even see the fear, suffering and emotions of others, for his own emotions are a fading memory. Compassion is lost. Justice an excuse to wage battle. Kindness a quaint anachronism. Mercy, for the weak.

6. Lesser Ice Elementals and lesser Ice Demons, including the Winter Storm Ice Demon, will recognize the character as their superior and will not attack or challenge the individual with the Heart of Ice in human or ice form. In fact, some (1D6+1) will submit to his will and obey his every command.

7. Alignment slides down a slippery slope. Characters of a good alignment will slip to Unprincipled within a year, 1D4 years later it slips to Anarchist, and 1D4 years after that to Aberrant evil.

Those who started out Unprincipled will slip to Anarchist and 1D4 years later to Aberrant or Miscreant (whichever seems most appropriate).

Anarchist or evil aligned characters slide right into Diabolic after only one year.

#### **Vulnerabilities:**

1. Metal weapons forged by fire (that's all blades), inflict full damage, including most rune weapons.

2. Heat and fire based magic and magic weapons inflict double damage.

3. Psionic powers have full effect.

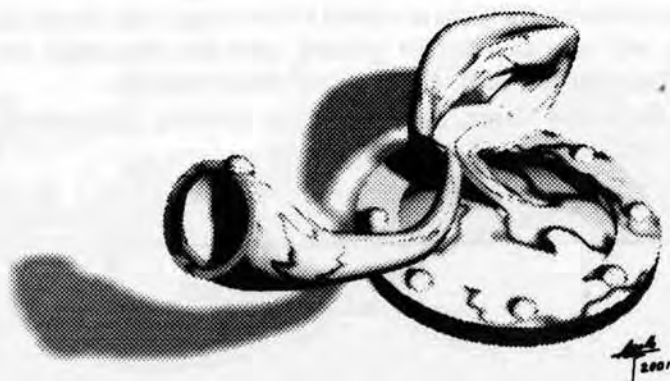
4. After the character has turned into a Creature of Ice, he can be destroyed if the Heart of Ice can be touched by the warmth of love or caring/compassion. If this occurs, the Heart of Ice will literally melt and the character will become his old self, but within 1D4 hours he will die. The Heart of Ice is not destroyed, however, and will magically reappear somewhere in the land where it was buried, but this time above ground, waiting for a new person to accept its gifts. **Note:** The character can also be destroyed by magic, psionic or physical means. A violent death will see the character melt into a pool of water in 1D4 minutes, leaving the Heart of Ice laying there in the open. It is so cold that touching the heart will cause 1D4 damage per minute unless tongs or some other item is used to hold or move it. Of course,

any character who plans to replace his own heart with the one of ice will have any damage inflicted upon him completely restored when the Heart of Ice is placed inside his chest.

**Estimated Value:** Some would say priceless, many would not hesitate to pay 60 million or more.







## The Immortalisman

Throughout history, this magic item has appeared in a number of different configurations; as a ring, an earring, a bracelet, a pendant, and so on. It is said that the shape of the item changes each time its owner dies, so there is no telling what shape it is in now. Regardless of its form, the Immortalisman always appears as something carved from ivory with streaks of black onyx running through it, similar to the streaking one would find in a piece of marble. The device has for centuries been thought the creation of *Cerula XIV*, a slightly mad alchemist-king of the Western Empire. However, recent accounts predating Cerula's reign by 350 years suggest the Immortalisman was really the product of a confederation of Timiro alchemists calling themselves the *Foundry Immortalus*. These alchemists designed a number of means to grant immortality, ranging from a variety of potions (some of which worked better than others), magic items (of which the Immortalisman is merely the most famous), and even magical procedures that would extend life indefinitely. (One involves carving a special rune into the subject's back, then cauterizing the wound with ground dragon bone and acid.)

The Foundry Immortalus' procedures and magic items bestowing immortality have been lost, the Immortalisman, among them. This talisman disappeared when the enraged citizens of Timiro overran the shop during one of the Kingdom's more turbulent periods in its history. The mob was not even angry at the alchemists, per se; they were in a state of rebellion and destroyed everything in their path. During the fracas, so much of the Foundry Immortalus' catalog of works was lost or destroyed that the couple of disheartened alchemists who survived never sought to rebuild their lost treasures. Little did they know that the Immortalisman survived and had fallen into the possession of a prominent thieves' guild, the *Dragons of Fukenja*, who used it to empower their reigning guild leaders.

The Dragons of Fukenja held on to the Immortalisman until their organization was shattered in a vicious guild war that tore the Credia underworld apart for several years. In the ensuing chaos, the item changed hands so often its ownership was never really ascertainable until the war died down, by which time somebody had taken the talisman and spirited it far away from Timiro, perhaps to the Land of the South Winds or Great Northern Wilderness. To this day, dozen of thieves and assassins from Timiro are actively looking for the device and will follow up any hard leads regarding its whereabouts.

The Immortalisman was last "reported" in the Northern Hinterlands, as the possession of an infamous freelance spy named

*Lady Jaia Solvux*. She was operating in the area on behalf of one of the Bizantium Noble Houses. According to rumors, Solvux never made it to her destination. She left the Western Empire's Ophid's Grasslands colonies and headed north, going straight through the grasslands. She was last sighted by a band of Centaurs near the *Devil's Mark*, a spot known for its terrible inter-dimensional disturbances from which all sorts of evil monsters spring. It is believed that something came from the Devil's Mark, slew Solvux, and took the Immortalisman. If true, the fabled magic item may no longer be in this world. A few optimists hope whatever killed the spy left her belongings at the murder site, except that probably means her body has been looted by thieves, raiders, barbarians or worse, and the Immortalisman could be anywhere. Given how many scavengers work this part of the Hinterlands, the chances of that happening probably puts it in the possession of a Goblin or Orc.

### The powers of the Immortalisman:

Whoever wears the Immortalisman will immediately gain a host of remarkable powers.

1. The individual stops aging for as long as he wears the device.
2. The wearer become immune to all drugs and poisons, and he will gain a +4 bonus to save vs magic.
3. No longer needs to rest, eat, drink, or sleep, and his P.E. score will increase to 24 if it is not equal to or higher than that already.
4. The wearer's Hit Points double and S.D.C. increase by 6D6+36 points.
5. The wearer will also automatically regenerate 3D6 Hit Points/S.D.C. once per minute (every four melee rounds).

**The curse:** First, all powers, increased Hit Points and regenerative powers are lost when the Immortalisman is not worn, but that's the least of his troubles.

The big one is this, the user of the Immortalisman must ingest a certain amount of *gold* per day or he will slip into a coma and die. In the beginning, the user must ingest one gold piece worth of gold each day. This can be flaked into a drink or powdered and served over food. But, this quantity goes up by 1D4 gold coins every two months for as long as the user retains control of the Immortalisman. The only way to break this curse is to be rid of the device. Within 2D4 years after getting rid of it, the need to ingest gold will go away entirely. Until then, the user must still keep ingesting gold even though he may no longer own the Immortalisman. Why, because unless he does, he will age 1D4x10 years and all physical attributes are reduced by 25% (adjust attribute bonuses accordingly). Needless to say, this device forces its owners to seek out enormous fortunes just to stay alive, which might explain why it often becomes the property of thieves, successful adventurers, and nobles.

**Estimated Value:** 20-40 million.

## Kosigil's Philter

Kosigil of Timiro was the southern world's greatest Diabolist, Summoner, and oddly enough, monster hunter. This legendary figure once ruled an entire district of *Credia*, the capital city of the Timiro Kingdom, through manipulation, threats, and the occasional use of force. Kosigil crafted an urban empire

for himself often using nothing more than his reputation as a powerful master of magic to get others to do his bidding. So many feared him that for years, many thought the mage to be untouchable. Kosigil spent his fortune securing special reagents and conducting all manner of magical experimentation, trying to create new power circles and other such magic. None of them proved successful, but his failure as a pioneer never distracted him from his real passion: destroying monsters. Kosigil reportedly destroyed several of the Demon Lords of Credia (and is the reason why only a few exist today) before meeting his own untimely demise a quarter century ago fighting a cadre of major demons who set up their own little empire of evil in the poorest sections of Credia.

After Kosigil's death, his magical vial, now known as *Kosigil's Philter*, became something of an heirloom to a monster-hunting society known as the **Lazurine Order**. The Lazurines had a long and proud history of seeking out the world's worst monsters and destroying them. Kosigil's Philter would prove to be a mighty asset in their quest. The device is a crystal vial that can hold eight fluid ounces. Whoever first built it filled it with eight ounces of his own blood before enchanting it. Now, the vial must *always* contain at least one ounce of blood in it at all times or its enchantment will be forever lost. To use the Philter, all one must do is open it up and drink a single dose (one ounce) of blood. This will instantly heal the drinker to *full* Hit Points (but not S.D.C.). If a drop is applied to an amputated stump, missing eye, or other such permanent injury, the wound will be healed entirely! Lost limbs will instantly regrow, sightless eyes will once again see, and so on. The vial can be refilled by anyone who *willingly* bleeds himself and places the blood in the vial. (This causes the loss of one Hit Point.) If somebody is forcibly bled for the vial, it will be tainted and its magic will vanish forever. Likewise, if the vial is filled with the blood of a dead individual, the enchantment will be ruined.

Three years ago, Lazurine agents (who had Kosigil's Philter on them) followed a major Witch named **Zilna Ur Ner'seka** into the Northern Hinterlands, where she supposedly was seeking to enter the infamous *Vault of Destiny* and become one of its innermost members. The Lazurines caught up to Zilna at a lonely outpost one cold winter evening and rushed the place. Inside was Zilna and her various demon minions. A battle royal ensued, ending when one of the Lazurines brought down a tornado on the outpost. The twister destroyed the building and killed the Witch, but somehow the Philter was caught in the windstorm, too. The Lazurines watched their precious treasure get sucked up into the vortex and shot out into the open sky. The

Philter is indestructible, so the Lazurines are sure it landed somewhere in the Northern Hinterlands. The problem is finding it. It contained a full eight ounces of blood at the time, so its magic is still potent ... if its top did not jar loose when the item landed.

**Estimated Value:** 50+ million gold.

## Magebane

The great sword *Magebane* is one of the few giant-sized magical weapons of note. It was commissioned by the Wolfen Empire just three years after its formation as part of an ambitious program to give the Wolfen people a series of national treasures and symbols that could help bring all of the Wolfen tribes together. Unfortunately, *Magebane* did not work out as planned.

As a magic item, the device functions perfectly. However, the Wolfen have a great respect for all kinds of men of magic, and the Wolfen Empire did not like that its first great national treasure was a magical sword designed specifically to *slay magic-users*. Thus, the sword was mothballed, its very existence kept secret from the Wolfen public. The military was apprised of its existence so it might be used in time of war, but other than that, the sword has spent most of its life packed away in a Wolfen storage facility.

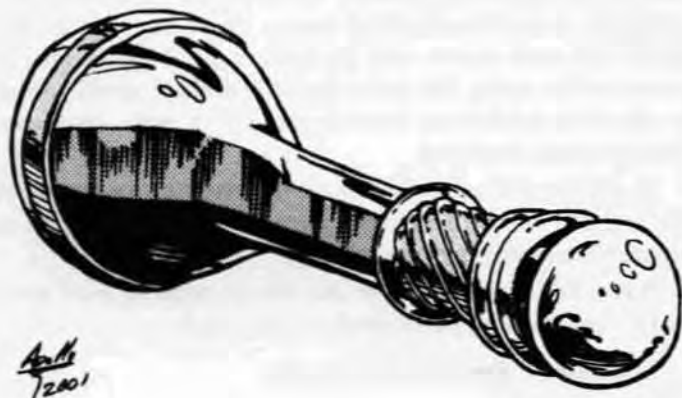
Seven years ago, the sword was stolen by a mixed team of rogue Wolfen, Coyles, and Haveans (humans who lived in the Wolfen client-state of *Havea*). They killed *Magebane's* guards and fled with the weapon. By the time Imperial Guards caught up to the thieves and killed them, the sword had already been delivered to pirates operating along the coast of the Dragon's Claw. Wolfen longboats were deployed at once to seal off the Dragon's Claw. Apparently the pirates learned of this and turned back from the blockade. Some speculate the pirates' destination was the Island Kingdom of Bizantium, but there is no way to prove this. The theory goes that the King himself commissioned the *Magebane* theft simply because he wanted the magnificent weapon for his own personal collection.

With a northern exit blocked off, the pirates landed on the western shore of the Dragon's Claw and off loaded the weapon there. It was sold (or so the stories go) to a caravan of Kiridin traders (human barbarians living in the heart of the Northern Hinterlands) who were never informed of the sword's magic powers. These barbarians supposedly took the weapon back home with them, where it has been used as a traditional duelling sword ever since. Whether or not this small band ever learned of *Magebane's* full potential or traded it away to someone else or lost it in battle, remains to be seen.

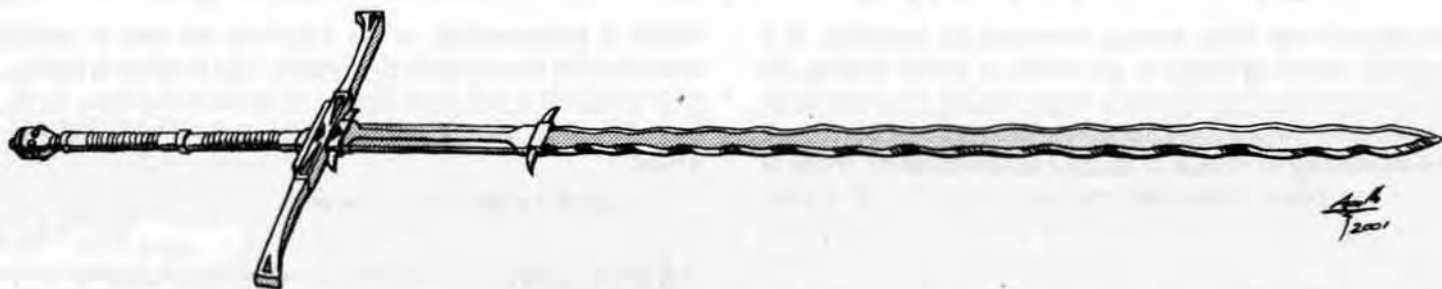
The Wolfen Empire has a 250,000 gold reward for the return of *Magebane*, but they are unwilling to venture into barbarian country to get the weapon back. For one thing, they have absolutely no idea who has it. None. Given how the sword was never officially used by the Wolfen, there are some in the Imperial Empire who suggest letting the thing go, since their military has obtained many other magic items since then.

### The powers of the *Magebane*:

Though *Magebane* is not a rune sword, it is a major magic weapon. It is an enchanted *zweihander* (a massive two-handed sword) with a wavy, kris-style blade.







**Damage:** The sword inflicts 5D6 damage. Any strikes against men of magic, creatures of magic, or supernatural creatures automatically inflict double damage!

**The Curse:** However, any men or creatures of magic or supernatural beings struck by the sword must save vs magic (14 or higher), or else the damage done to them by Magebane becomes *permanent*. Well, sort of permanent. A successful save vs magic means the damage is ordinary (5D6x2) and can be healed by normal or spectacular means (psionics, magic, potion, etc.). In this case, the Magebane can inflict further damage to the mage, but all subsequent attacks also require a save vs magic.

If the save against magic fails, the damage inflicted works as a *curse*. As such, the damage may NOT be healed by any means until a successful *Remove Curse spell* is cast on the victim! This means whatever damage the character sustained from the attack stays until the curse is removed, effectively reducing the character's S.D.C. and/or Hit Points by 5D6x2! While a victim of the Magebane curse suffers under its influence, the sword itself can no longer hurt him. Any further strikes with the Magebane will do no more than ONE point of damage (until the curse is lifted, then the character is vulnerable again). Of course, other weapons do their full damage, thus the curse of the Magebane is that the individual is physically impaired for days, weeks, months, perhaps even years, until the curse is lifted. Damage from the other attacks can be healed.

**For example:** If a Wizard with 42 Hit Points and 30 S.D.C. is struck by the Magebane and blood is drawn, the weapon inflicts 5D6x2 damage. Let's say only 34 points of damage was inflicted and the character fails to save vs magic. This means his S.D.C. is effectively eliminated and Hit Points are reduced to 38 points. The Magebane can not inflict any additional significant damage, but other weapons and attacks can. Any of the additional damage can be restored later with medical attention, rest or magic. However, the Wizard can only be restored up to 38 Hit Points. The rest has been effectively blocked, taken away, by the curse of Magebane. Until the curse is removed, the Wizard in this example only has 38 Hit Points and NO S.D.C.

Finally, any man of magic or supernatural creature that is hit by a critical strike from Magebane must also save vs insanity or suffer a random insanity.

**Estimated Value:** 25 million gold or more.

## Ring of Ice & Fury

The Ring of Ice and Fury is said to have been made in the latter days of the Elf-Dwarf War. The son of a Dwarven Rune Master was an officer in the Dwarven army charged to raid the Gnome city of the *Exodus Republic* in the Northern Hinterlands to acquire their secrets of magic. The Elder Dwarf made the ring as a gift to keep his first born son alive and safe in the hostile

wilderness. Sadly, his boy never returned home. One of the many casualties in the running duel between the Dwarf and rival Elf armies that battled at the Exodus Republic and fought all the way home. His son went missing during the battle for the city, and was presumed dead. Anybody might have taken the ring from his fallen body, or it might still lay at the side of his skeleton, buried someplace in the wilderness.

### The powers of the Ring of Ice & Fury:

1. All the common abilities of a greater rune weapon apply, telepathy, bonding, etc. Since this is a rune weapon, it bonds with (and telepathically speaks to) its owner, so even if physically removed from its owner or given up by its owner, the rune ring remains bonded to him/her and only that character can access and use its powers. The only ways to break the bond are to either kill the current owner or have the owner willingly (under no duress) remove it, and give it to someone of his choosing. However, in the case of murder, the ring remains dormant for 1D4+2 months and in the latter case, 1D4+2 weeks.

1..Q. is 15, alignment is Unprincipled. The ring can be used by any good or selfish alignment to its full potential. Evil characters can also use the rune ring, but can NOT access "The Fury" and the available P.P.E. for spells is only 31 points.

2. **The Ice:** The wearer is impervious to cold and can cast six elemental spells.

**Ice Magic:** The wearer can cast the following spells provided the rune ring has enough P.P.E. to weave them: Orb of Cold, Frostblade, Ice Shield, Ice, Shards of Ice and Skate Ice. The ring has 62 P.P.E. that recovers at a rate of 10 points per every three hours. The P.P.E. of the ring can NOT be drawn upon by the wearer or any outside force, only the ring can use it.

3. **The Fury.** Once a day (per 24 hours), the wearer can activate "the fury," once in defense and once in offense.

**In defense,** the character's speed is doubled and the wearer can parry or dodge every single attack leveled at him for one full melee round (15 seconds) without using up any of his own attacks that round. He can NOT be surprised or ambushed and can avoid sword thrusts, dodge energy blasts, bat away thrown spears and catch arrows with his hand or teeth! Any magic directed at him during this melee round is avoided, saved against or otherwise ineffective! The character's own melee attacks/actions are made as normal.

**In offense,** for one melee round (15 seconds) the wearer of the ring gets two extra attacks/actions, is +6 on initiative, +3 to strike, +3 to disarm and +6 to damage!

**Note:** The fury of defense and offense must be used separately, they can not be combined simultaneously.

**Estimated Value:** 25+ million gold.



## Soulstone of Arendrun

This magical gemstone is of unequaled beauty and workmanship. Whoever created it has never been known, but it was first discovered beneath the ancient ruins of the city of Arendrun, in what is now the Old Kingdom. According to scholars, the origin of the Soulstone was a mystery even back during the Time of a Thousand Magicks. Back then, the Stone was thought to be a leftover artifact from the era following the Age of Chaos, but in truth, it might even be more ancient than that. There is just no way to tell. Throughout the Megaverse, similar artifacts have been found and used, most notably on Rifts Earth and several of the so-called "Heroic Realms." According to a few (admittedly insane) scholars, there are even worlds where there exist thousands of similar artifacts, used to make entire populations effectively immortal.

### The power of the Soulstone:

Cut in the image of a large rosebud, the Soulstone is designed to store the soul or life essence of one individual. Whoever owns it can transfer their life essence into the stone with nothing more than a single melee round's worth of concentration. The Soulstone can only contain one soul at a time. The owner may withdraw his soul from it whenever he likes, again with a single melee round's worth of concentration. The Soulstone can only hold the soul of somebody who willingly wishes it. If its user is tricked or coerced into depositing their soul into the artifact, it will not work.

While one's life essence is stored within the Soulstone, his or her body can NOT be destroyed! Any damage done to it *will* eventually heal itself at a rate of 2D6 S.D.C. or Hit Points per hour. Missing body parts will grow back within 1D4 weeks, and even grievous bodily damage, like having one's head cut off or heart cut out, will restore itself in 1D4 months. The only way to kill an individual whose life essence is locked away in the Soulstone is to find the artifact and place one's own soul inside. This automatically causes the previous character's life essence to return to its natural flesh and blood body. If the injuries already sustained are too great to survive, the character dies. Otherwise, the life essence is returned and the character can be slain by normal means. In the alternative, the Soulstone can be destroyed. It has 1,000 S.D.C., an A.R. of 17, and it is impervious to fire, electricity and cold, both natural and magic. Any damage done to the stone, however, is permanent and can not be mended or restored by any means.

Although the stone provides its user with incredible power, it does come at the cost of a certain vulnerability. For if someone else should acquire the Soulstone, he will have power over the

individual whose life essence is inside the rose. Do as he says, or face having the life essence cast back out into the body. While this may not be the worst thing possible, it could be that the soulless individual's body is in a deadly condition. Moreover, unless the individual can get to the Soulstone, he can not retrieve his life essence even if he wanted to. As a rule, those who submit their essence to this magical construct either keep it on their person at all times or keep it in a place where they think it is safe and will never be found.

Over the eons, this item has been used for good and evil. The legendary Elven hero *Letholmiel Quickstring* stored his soul in this item, making him the immortal champion who defeated an entire Orcish army with his magical long bow, *Gildarian*. Conversely, several villains have also used this item. Chief among them was *Arkquellist the Grey*, a Dwarven Rune Master who, while protected by the Soulstone, created an arsenal of vile rune weapons and used them to arm the force that slaughtered the Elven city of *Shirens* ("shi-REN-say") during the First Elf-Dwarf War.

**Estimated Value:** At least 45 million gold; for many, it would be priceless.



## Sweet Green Evening

This unusual item is a beautiful painting of a forest glen at the height of summer. In the center of the frame is a sun-dappled clearing in which one might imagine a traveling party settling down for a pleasant rest after a long journey. The sky is clear and light, but a growing darkness in the west suggests the onset of twilight. Indeed, on the eastern edge of the sky is a rising moon and a few stars, while on the west, the sun is just beginning to set. The tall trees in the scene are thick with green leaves, and there is a slight breeze blowing. The painting is framed in a heavy metal casing that has an equally heavy cover to it – as if the painting were framed in a big metal book with a lock on the front cover and gear-like hinges along the spine. Once the front cover is shut, the frame automatically locks. The cover lock is a seven-part dial combination which makes it -30% against any Pick Locks skill roll. The combination of the lock has been lost, and it would take even a dedicated locksmith months or years to systematically try every possible combination to it. (G.M.s, roll seven percentile dice to determine the combination.)



The Sweet Green Evening is a total mystery. It showed up briefly in a Shadow Coast auction house as the property of one J. K. R. Thendle, whoever that may have been. The item was immediately the object of a fierce bidding war between two noblemen who both wore masks to hide their identity. One of the nobles obtained the Sweet Green Evening for a reputed bid of three million gold, but some say even that is an overly conservative recollection. Whatever the amount paid for it, the item and its new owner disappeared from the auction grounds right away, much to the chagrin of the other masked noble, who disappeared soon afterwards.

The only other account of the item comes several years later, when a lumber expedition reportedly came across a dead human body in the middle of the wilderness. He was lying against a tree, his body reduced to a skeleton, and he was still clutching the closed frame to his chest. It took three lumberjacks to pry the skeleton's arms away from the locked painting, so tight was the corpse's grasp. The lumberjacks submitted the object to a locksmith within the Shadow Coast for examination but they were killed by a falling tree soon afterwards (occupational hazard) and never returned to claim their bizarre property.

If this story is true, then a locksmith in the Shadow Coast has this odd metal-clad painting. Chances are, the individual has never made a serious attempt to unlock the painting or to even figure out what the whole thing really is.

### The power of the Sweet Green Evening:

The Sweet Green Evening is an artifact from the *Time of a Thousand Magicks*. Basically it is a talisman for casting an odd cross between a Dimensional Pocket and Sanctuary spell. All the owner must do is channel 100 P.P.E. into the painting and utter a power word, and the Sweet Green Evening will whisk the holder of the painting and up to five other people to a magical pocket dimension consisting of the lovely pastoral scene shown in the painting.

This pocket dimension extends for 1,000 feet (305 m) in all directions from the clearing in its center. There is an abundance of food growing from the trees and vines, and freshwater springs abound. Those who enter this pocket dimension are protected as if they had all been affected by a Sanctuary spell; thus it is impossible to inflict any acts of violence within this setting. Moreover, those staying there can do so for as long as they like. It is thought that many people who enter the Sweet Green Evening stay there for the rest of their lives. This is indeed possible, as the food and water supply of the pocket dimension will never diminish.

Inhabitants can leave at any time, but they should be prepared for a bit of a shock when they do. Anybody entering the Sweet Green Evening enters it entirely. If there is nobody left on the outside to hold on to the painting, it will just drop to the ground until somebody picks it up or until somebody comes out. As mentioned before, the painting can only hold six people at once; as soon as one person leaves, somebody on the outside can jump right in.

Adventurers can use this item as a temporary sanctum or as a place to store prisoners and/or supplies/treasure. **Warning:** It is said that if a Time Hole or Pocket Dimension spell were cast inside the Sweet Green Evening, it would cause that pocket dimension to collapse in on itself, killing any inhabitants.

Naturally, this has never been tested as the device is still thought to exist. A close inspection by a skilled alchemist could determine if that story is real or not.

**Estimated Value:** Three million gold, possibly 2-4 times more if sold to the right purchaser.



## Thunder Loop

This magical ring has been carved from a single piece of silver to look like a Thunder Lizard swallowing its own tail. Whoever puts it on will immediately gain many of a Thunder Lizard's natural gifts.

According to legend there was a whole set of these rings crafted during the Time of a Thousand Magicks. Each ring corresponded to a different dragon type. According to a few obscure texts from the Library of Bletherad, a Fire Dragon ring was sighted in the *Floenry Islands*, a Great Horned Dragon ring was sighted in the ruins of the *Old Kingdom*, and apparently some Wizard was transformed by an Ice Dragon ring in the *Western Empire*. Not much else is known of these other rings. The Thunder Loop, on the other hand, has quite a bit of history behind of it, most of it recorded by the Wolfen Empire.

The Thunder Loop was one of the many magic items lost during the Millennium of Purification. Thought to be destroyed in the *High Purge of Endlerune*, the Thunder Loop actually was spirited away by a lowly acolyte who saw great promise for the item, and saw that it would go someplace safe. He hid the ring inside a hollow staff belonging to a pilgrim who never knew what precious cargo he carried. The pilgrim eventually arrived in the *Island Kingdom of Bizantium*, where his magic ring was discovered and confiscated. Shortly thereafter, the ring changed hands several more times, briefly becoming the possession of more than half of the Noble Houses ruling the island. As a result, almost any given Bizantium noble feels he has a legitimate right to the ring.

Bringing the item to Bizantium is flat out unsafe, and noble-backed teams of mercenaries and thieves scour the Hinterlands in a constant search for the lost treasure. They believe it to be in the region because when it left the Island Kingdom, it was in the hands of a Havean (human) spy who meant to deliver the ring to the Wolfen Empire. The spy was slain shortly after he landed in the Hinterlands, but the Thunder Loop was never found. The tracks of Orcs and Ogres were sighted heading away from the scene, but those marauders were never located. By now, there is most likely somebody in the Hinterlands wearing the ring and fully transformed into a mighty Thunder Lizard. That is why those interested in finding the device have stopped looking for the ring itself and are merely "dragon-hunting." Where a Thunder Lizard might be found, there is a decent chance the ring might be found, too. Of course, actually slaying

a Thunder Lizard is no easy task, and the bones of many would-be dragon slayers litter the northern wilderness.

### The power of the Thunder Loop:

**Natural Abilities:** The wearer gets Nightvision 100 feet (30.5 m; can see in total darkness), see the invisible, turn invisible at will, bio-regenerate 1D4x10 Hit Points/S.D.C. per minute, resistant to fire and cold (does half damage, including magic fire), and metamorphosis at will (up to two hours per level of the user's experience). Teleport self and dimensional teleport are NOT bestowed upon the ring wearer.

**Green Fire Breath:** Range: 100 feet (30.5 m), three feet (0.9 m) wide. A blast of poisonous vapors that look like green flame and inflict 1D6 damage and paralysis (1D6 melees unless victim saves vs magic by rolling a 14 or higher) to ordinary beings, 3D6 to supernatural beings and dragons, and 6D6 to Elementals. The breath attack can be used up to two times per melee round. The width of the blast enables the ring wearer to strike several opponents (2 to 6) simultaneously if they are clustered closely together.

**Permanent Transformation:** In addition to the aforementioned abilities, anybody who owns the ring must save vs magic each month or they will transform permanently into a Thunder Lizard hatchling with its full powers and long life! However, the Natural Armor Rating of this magically created dragon is only A.R. 10 and the Hit Points and S.D.C. are 20% less than a true dragon.

While some might see this as a good thing, those who are attached to their mortal live do not. It is said that whoever is transformed by the ring soon forgets their previous life. Old friends and enemies are no longer important, just as old obligations and duties are cast aside. Sometimes, these transformed individuals will strike up a fast friendship with their current traveling companions, but more commonly, the *new dragon* retreats into solitude for a few decades to sort out the confusing metamorphosis they have just endured.

When transformed into a dragon, the ring buries itself into the flesh of the creature's ring finger; only when the transformed individual dies will the ring be exposed once more, ready to be worn by somebody else.

Those transformed by the ring become a first level Dragon Hatchling, with all the powers and abilities thereof. If the friends of the individual want to reverse this transformation, they will need a *Remove Curse* spell and a *Restoration* spell cast on their friend. This will return them to their former state, as well as expel the ring from their finger.

**Estimated Value:** Priceless; at least 90 million gold.

## Viperstrike

Viperstrike is a magic sword, forged by a band of gifted Kobold weapon smiths and enchanted by an evil alchemist known only as the *Grinning Sinister*. It is a darkly beautiful weapon, a long sword of pure, clean construction. Anyone with the Recognize Weapons Quality skill can tell just by looking at Viperstrike that it is a Kobold weapon. Those who make a successful skill roll will recognize it and know the story behind this weapon, long and complicated though it may be.

This sword was commissioned by the great Kobold, *Vaurus Foroke*, shortly before his brilliant performance at the *Battle of*

*Skola Dur*, the southern capital of the Dwarven Empire during the latter stages of the Elf-Dwarf War. Skola Dur soon fell into barbarian hands when the Dwarf Kingdom began to disintegrate. It has remained a "monster city" ever since. Sometimes it is a ghost city, sometimes it is the thriving capital of a nascent monster empire. When Vaurus Foroke took over, the city was little more than a seething cauldron of barbarian rabble. By the time he'd finished with them, they were a crack army ready to march around the world at their master's command. However, the Elf-Dwarf War at this time was not yet over, and the Dwarves were anxious to regain their vaunted southern capital before beginning the final assault on the Elves' Baalgor homeland. The Battle of Skola Dur is what resulted.

For over a month, the Dwarves laid siege to the city, which Vaurus and his legions of Kobold followers had built up and modified to their purposes. It became a great conflict that pitted the engineering savvy of both sides against each other. The Dwarves were the greatest builders (and siege experts) in the world, but Vaurus' Kobolds were nearly as good, and the fight became a long, bloody stalemate. The worst action was in the miles of labyrinths and corridors that crisscrossed beneath the city. There, sapper squads from both sides met in point-blank combat, taking heavy casualties and gaining no ground for their trouble. Each side tried to strategically collapse part of the catacombs, but such plans were always foiled by the enemy.

Topside, things had gotten quiet. The Dwarven army encircled the city and cut it off, but aside from the occasional bombardment, there was no action. All the fighting was underground. But not for much longer. Taking an elite force of Kobold cavalry, Vaurus Foroke, wielding his mighty sword Viperstrike, rode forth from the city gates and launched a surprise attack on the Dwarven surface units. Though outnumbered three to one, Vaurus' soldiers slaughtered the unsuspecting Dwarves, and broke the back of the surface siege. From there, Vaurus' troops flooded into the city's catacombs from the direction the Dwarves had entered, trapping their Dwarven enemies in the middle. The Dwarves fought bravely, but they never stood a chance. By the time the battle was finished, over 60,000 Dwarves lay dead on the surface and underneath the embattled city. Discouraged, the Dwarves headed on to Baalgor without recapturing their fallen city. Their poor morale, showed when they laid siege to the Golden City of Baalgor, a battle the Dwarves essentially lost and then etched into history with their apocalyptic spoilsport attack that not only obliterated the city, but turned the lush jungle paradise of Baalgor into a scorched desert wasteland.



Even today, Dwarves consider the Battle of Skola Dur to be a signature moment in their history, for it showed that they had, once and for all, lost the Elf-Dwarf War in all the ways that mattered. Unable to live with such shame, Dwarven patriots swore to destroy Vaurus Foroke, and they made good on their promise. Three years to the day after the Battle of Skola Dur ended,



Dwarven assassins penetrated the city and murdered Vaurus in his sleep. His head was cut off and stolen, along with the warlord's infamous sword, Viperstrike.

Where the sword went from there was anybody's guess. Conventional wisdom states that the weapon remained in the hands of a secret Dwarven sect dedicated to destroying the ancestors of any Elves who escaped the destruction of Baalgor, as well as the descendants of Vaurus Foroke and any other Kobold who participated in the Battle of Skola Dur. These Dwarves, who call themselves the **Sons of Ithgin** (in reference to the last of the great Dwarven generals), made sure Viperstrike never left their hands. So long as no Kobold gained control of the weapon, another great warlord such as Vaurus would never walk the world. And indeed, the Sons of Ithgin were correct. They kept the weapon safely ensconced for thousands of years until their headquarters were discovered and destroyed in the Eastern Territory 50 years ago. The society's vast treasure vaults were plundered, and Viperstrike went missing. A mere four months later, it turned up in the hands of a Kobold warlord named *Vaurus Skorob* in the Old Kingdom. Like his namesake, he had formed a great army of inhuman marauders, and threatened to capture a huge section of the Old Kingdom for himself. For many Dwarves, it was their worst fears realized.

Adventurers, assassins and mercenaries were hired by dozens of wealthy Dwarves who wished to see Viperstrike removed from Kobold hands once more. Ultimately, Vaurus Skorob's army was routed, and the warlord himself fled to the north with Dwarven retribution agents hot on his heels. The Kobold disappeared into the Northern Hinterlands, where it is said that he died a violent death, but hid his famous sword someplace where, "Dwarves would never find it." Dwarvenkind has taken that epithet as a challenge, and teams of treasure seekers make Viperstrike an item on their list whenever they comb through the region looking for valuable magical salvage. Likewise, the Kobolds of the region (and there are many in the Northern Mountains) are acutely interested in finding the lost blade, because of the black eye it would give their Dwarven enemies, but also because the sword is a mighty weapon.

### The power of Viperstrike:

Viperstrike is a one-handed long sword. It is made of dark, burnished steel, with a long, straight, double-sided edge with a deep blood groove running down the center. The handle has a slanted waffle pattern cut into the steel to prevent it from slipping from the user's hands. The pommel is a sculpture of a snake's head with fangs bared.

1. The sword inflicts 4D6 per strike (6D6 when in the hands of a Kobold), is nearly indestructible (immersion in a magical fire for 12 hours or more would destroy it), and it returns when thrown. It has amazing balance, feels light in one's hands and can be thrown up to 50 feet (15 m) with reasonable accuracy (no penalties).

2. Upon command, the sword can magically envenom its blade with any of the following contact poisons: Numbstrike, Gutwrench, Wart Callo, Witchbane, Basilisk's Eye, Dragon's Breath and Scorpion's Blood. The sword can only use each venom type once in a 24 hour period. Each envenoming lasts for only one strike.

3. The user of the blade is himself +5 to save vs poison, +2 to save vs other drugs and magical fumes, and even if he should

succumb to poison, its effects (damage and penalties) are halved.

4. Viperstrike is most powerful in the hands of a Kobold, doing 6D6 damage (instead of 4D6), and magically providing the Kobold with double his normal S.D.C., increased stamina (can fight three times as long before tiring), +2 attacks per melee round, +3 on initiative, +1 to strike and parry, +2 to disarm and does triple damage on a critical strike roll from a Natural 20.

**Estimated Value:** 5-8 million gold for most, double or triple for a Kobold King or Warlord.

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## Winter's Fang

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The Winter's Fang is said to have been created by mortals as a gift to the Northern Sea God Algor in an attempt to win his favor. It is a greater rune sword (meant to be a dagger for the god) that is ten feet (3m) long with a light blue blade designed to be an Ice Demon and Elemental slayer. According to legend, Algor was offended by the gift, because he knew they made it only to buy his favor and manipulate him into serving them. He took the dagger and hurled it from the tallest peak in the Northern Mountains, and then sent a storm to wipe the arrogant Dwarves from the face of the Earth. Supposedly, the sword rests somewhere in the Northern Hinterlands or Great Northern Wilderness, but it has never been found. Some wonder if the Winter's Fang might not be stuck halfway in a boulder or stuck high up in the trunk of a tree.

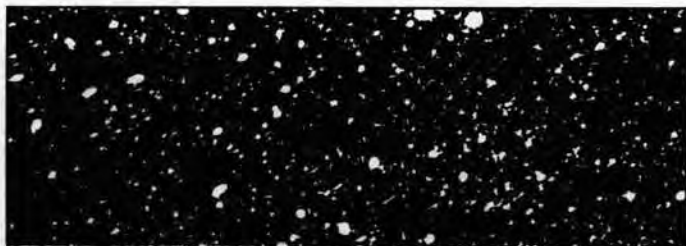
### The power of the Winter's Fang:

1. Has all the standard powers and features common to rune weapons; I.Q. 10, Anarchist alignment and can be used by selfish, good or evil beings, but not Elementals.

2. **Damage:** Does 3D6 damage to mortal foes but does 6D6 damage to Water and Ice Elementals, Winter Storm Ice Demons and any "creature of ice and cold." Moreover, the blade burns them and cuts through their natural A.R. as if it were not there! This means any roll to strike higher than a four, will hit and do damage unless the creature rolls a successful parry or dodge. Those creatures who don't use weapons (like Ice Demons) can not parry the attack and can only dodge.

3. **Spell Magic:** The Winter's Fang was designed to battle creatures of snow and ice, so it possesses the following six Fire Warlock spells (descriptions start on page 233 of the **Palladium Fantasy RPG**): Blinding Flash, Fiery Touch, Fire Ball, Fire Whip, Plasma Bolt and Circle of Flame. The sword has 90 P.P.E. and recovers 10 points every three hours.

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## The Winter Glade

The Winter Glade is a magic crystal the size of a billiard ball with runes and ancient magic symbols etched into its base. It is said to be so clear and transparent that it is completely invisible when placed in water or encased in ice. One of its magical attributes is that it turns invisible when dropped in the snow. (Note: When invisible, the magic gem can only be found by touch, so even if one knows its general location – i.e. roughly where the Winter Glade has fallen – finding it by blindly feeling around for it will take some time and may be an impossible task.)

A thing of legend, nobody knows exactly who crafted the enchanted stone or exactly what it can do. The rumors about this item are many and often contradictory. For example, some insist the item was made with good intentions, others for evil. One suggests it was created by an angry god, another says it was designed by a powerful Lizard Mage, another by a Syvan Wizard, yet another by a vengeful and rare Algor Giant alchemist, then again, there is a rumor attributing its creation to just about every race, monster and dark god imaginable. In truth, nobody knows by whom or why the Winter Glade was created.

One of the most popular legends in the region, is that there are actually six or nine (the exact number varies) Winter Glade stones said to have been created by a band of sorcerers intent on conquering and claiming the Northern Hinterlands for themselves. This happened eons ago, during the *Time of a Thousand Magicks*. Apparently they failed.

It believed only 1-3 Winter Glades still exist, the rest having been lost to the elements. Locals claim one resurfaced only 100 years ago and lays somewhere on the forest floor waiting to be found by some lucky adventurer. According to the story, the stone had been found by a cadre of adventurers holed-up for the winter in the Northern Mountains. Exactly where they found it is a mystery (of course). As the story goes, the mage in their group immediately recognized it for what it was and slew his comrades. Some versions of the story even suggest he survived the winter in a cave by summarily slaying his companions and feasting on their flesh when food ran out. That spring, the sorcerer came down from the mountain brandishing the Winter Glade. While using it to kill a tribe of Ogres and Trolls who barred his path, and reveling in its power, he was swept away in a flash flood and killed. The Winter Glade was carried away and deposited somewhere by the torrent of rushing water.

Even what it does is not known with any certainty. Supposedly, the enchanted item gives its owner some measure of power and influence over winter. Again, some tales suggest this is little more than a number of Warlock spells controlling the cold and ice. Others suggest the crystal gives its wielder the power to control the forces of nature as they apply to the winter, can summon blizzards and mold ice and snow. It is the latter possibili-

ties that intrigue most treasure hunters and warmongers. Although many of the legends surrounding this mythical gem attribute its creation to have been for nefarious purposes or good, most believe it has an equal capacity for good or evil. That it is the *wielder* who can choose to use it for good or evil.

### The powers of the Winter Glade:

1. Refrigeration. Can preserve food by means of magical “refrigeration” (same as the modern day appliance, keeping fruit, vegetable and other perishables fresh for 1D6+6 days) or “freezing.”

Can also “chill” water and drinks. Can NOT freeze people with this particular brand of magic.

2. Cool anger and bring about a “cool head.” Momentarily reduces anger to give characters a chance to think about what they are about to do and engage in meaningful discussion without being clouded by aggression, passion and other hot emotions.

3. Impervious to Winter. Impervious to all aspects of winter: the cold, wind, frostbite, hypothermia, etc. Thus, the wielder of the Winter Glade can see for a 1000 feet (305 m) in the worst blizzards, is not buffeted by the north winds, does not feel wet or cold from the snow, and can bathe in frigid, icy water without ill effect. Also see Walk on Snow & Ice. Can handle snow and ice as if it were a dry, warm material. Note: Ice and cold based magic does one third its normal damage.

4. Walk on Snow and Ice. The wielder of the Winter Glade can also walk on top of snow and ice as easily and freely as he or she would grass covered ground. There are no penalties for slipping and sliding and the individual can walk, run and climb across snow mounds or ice covered ground at his usual running speed. No matter how soft, deep or loose the snow may be or thin the frozen ice on water may be, he can walk over it without fear of falling through. Moreover, he leaves no footprints!

5. Snow missiles. The wielder of the Winter Glade can magically summon snowballs to appear in one or both hands. These can be thrown an unnatural distance (100 feet/305 m per level of the gem’s owner) and with great accuracy (+2 to strike).

Damage: Varies depending on the intent (just having fun or creating mischief, or deliberately wanting to inflict damage) as follows:

•Fun & Games Snowball: One point of damage if it hits someone in the head or bare skin; none if it strikes a coat, armor or hat.

•1D4 for a heavy snowball; again no damage if it hits padding or armor.

•1D6 for a slush ball; half damage if it’s a coat, cloak or padding. No damage against armor.

•1D6+2 for an ice ball. This damage is inflicted through articles of clothing and does half damage to armor when it does not penetrate the A.R.

6. Snow Staff. A rod or staff made of ice can be made to appear at will. Inflicts 2D6+3 damage.

7. Magic Spells. Can cast all cold and ice based magic equal to a 6th level Warlock regardless of the wielders actual level of experience.

8. Command the Winter. This is as dramatic and powerful as it sounds, especially in a place like the Hinterlands, Great Northern Wilderness, Disputed Lands and other lands where



there is a winter! It is also the power that makes the Winter Glade so desirable, for it can be used to transform a harsh, deadly winter like those in the Hinterlands into a gentle winter paradise (hence its name), or turn the mildest of winters into the equivalent of a killer Northern Hinterlands winter! This power can be used to defend against, immobilize, or bury, freeze and destroy entire armies. For the wielder of the Winter Glade has absolute power over his winter domain, and can transform one part into a raging storm while keeping another quiet and safe.

- The wielder can transform and mold the elements of winter, snow and ice around him, shaping and molding the snow into mounds, hills, pathways, canyons, walls, jagged pillars of ice (punji sticks or towers), and so forth.
- Can also turn snow into ice, ice into snow, and magnify a simple snow shower or flurry into a blizzard, or a snow blizzard into gentle flurries.
- Summon and command a snowstorm/blizzard, directing its fury toward a specific target or region.
- Summon and command 1D4 Lesser Snow or Ice Elementals or one Greater per level of his experience.

**Duration of the Control Over Winter:** The entire winter season! Plus, the wielder of the Winter Glade can extend winter by 1D4+1 weeks per level of his experience! Effectively eradicating Spring, extending winter, and with it, his own power.

**Limitations of Command Winter:** Can only affect a five mile (8 km) radius per level of the user's experience, and can only be performed when it is winter! This power is not accessible during spring, summer or fall.

Note that all other abilities, including snowballs, ice staff and spell magic can be cast in any season and in any environment, including deserts and jungles. Only the Command the Winter power is limited to the winter season. Obviously the fundamental abilities of Impervious to Winter and Walk on Snow and Ice are limited to the environment.

**Estimated Value:** Priceless, worth at least 50 million gold, perhaps 2-4 times that.

## Withering Stone

The Withering Stone is said to be a powerful magic item created by an angry god of pestilence or vengeance to bring pain and suffering upon mortals. It appears as a hexagonal shaped stone tile roughly the size of a man's hand. It is etched with magic symbols and pictograms meant to represent disease and death. Whatever foul god was responsible for its creation imbued it with the *Deific Curse: Pox* and tossed it out into the world. Whoever has the stone can infect the inhabitants of one entire community (city, town, village), whether it is inhabited by 40 people, 40,000 people or four million people, with a terrible pox. Some think a Withering Stone might have been given to elite minions in service to the Old Ones during the Age of Chaos. These minions could then use the stone to punish, torture and control entire cities of slaves.

Whatever the case, at least one Withering Stone is known to have existed in the Northern Hinterlands before it was thrown into the ocean a thousand years ago. Unfortunately, a demonic creature known as the **Baehag** appears to have found it, and is using the stone to torment and kill the people of **Tohatha**.

Tohatha is a beleaguered Bizantium colony on the Shadow Coast. At some point they offended the loathsome creature that lives in the sea off the coast of their colony, and the creature retaliated by placing a curse on the entire colony. For over 25 years now, the population bears large, weeping welts all over their bodies which cause great pain and constant discomfort. Since word has spread of the Baehag curse, nobody will settle there, and the other colonies avoid doing business with Tohatha, condemning it to isolation. The problem is, nobody even knows what they might have done to invoke the Baehag's wrath to make them suffer so. Truth be told, the vile Baehag really does not need a reason, and has probably made up the story about some offense to cause the people of Tohatha more torment, with neighbor blaming neighbor, and everyone questioning themselves. Many a hero has tried to locate and slay the wretched Baehag in her lair under the sea, but none have succeeded, and each attempt brings storms and murderous retribution by the hag.

Any serious student of religious mythology or ancient magic should recognize the sure signs of a Deific Pox Curse and surmise that the Baehag possesses a fabled Withering Stone. That means to end the pox, all that is necessary is to retrieve the stone from her possession and the new person holding the magical construct can cancel the curse with but a wish. In fact, just killing the Baehag will not release the tortured people of Tohatha from the curse. Someone must will it to end through the magical Withering Stone. Unfortunately, getting to the Baehag and getting the stone (she wears it like a pendant on a chain made from seaweed, around her neck) won't be easy. First, magic is needed to breathe and travel underwater. Second, the monster's lair must be found and breached. Third, any heroes or thieves diving underwater are now in the Baehag's element. Which gives her the edge, and who knows what sort of traps, demons or sea serpents she may have protecting her lair or under her command.

In the case of liberating the city of Tohatha, one need only to steal the Withering Stone and use it to end the curse and set the people free. While the people of this colony are poor and have little in the way of money to offer their saviors, they will be eternally grateful. That gratitude will earn the heroes a house (one for each member of the group if they'd like) and a nice parcel of land that is theirs and their heirs' forever. Likewise, the heroes will be treated like the true saviors they are, and given huge discounts (60%) on any goods in the colony, free food, little favors and acts of kindness, and a place of honor among them. All sorts of favors will be theirs for the asking, including hiding the heroes from villains, monsters, Bizantium soldiers or even the authorities. Free services in the way of healing, repairs, horseshoeing, tailoring, and so forth, are theirs too. It could make Tohatha a nice place to retire someday – quite literally a place in the sun; assuming rebellion against their Bizantium taskmasters doesn't bring ruin to the Shadow Coast colonies.

Leaving the Baehag alive will invite her continuing wrath, but without the Withering Stone, her powers are limited to storms, elemental magic and angry tirades. In an ironic twist of fate, one might be able to force her to leave by threatening her with the Deific Pox Curse. As the Baehag well knows, the enchanted item was crafted by a god and may very well have the power to hurt a creature such as herself. Wishing to escape the curse of an evil god, the Baehag might just agree to move on.

The next question is what to do with the Withering Stone. In the wrong hands, this terrible item can be used to control, punish and blackmail entire cities. The heroes, no matter how well intentioned or powerful, should fear they will one day lose it, or accidentally let it slip into the sinister hands of some villain they are battling. Consequently, they should want to stash it away someplace where it is not likely to be discovered. Of course, finding a secret and secure hiding place where the Withering Stone can lay dormant for centuries is a much more daunting task than one might think.

### The powers of the Withering Stone:

1. A deific creation equal to any rune weapon. It does not have an intelligence but it is indestructible and radiates with magic.

2. As described above, the holder of the Withering Stone can cast a terrible pox upon an entire community. One community per every three experience levels of the user can be affected. The curse lasts until it is either lifted by the Withering Stone or a powerful Earth Mother or All-Father type god.

The Deific Pox of the Withering Stone: Those affected will know sorrow and fear, thus, the first born shall die within their first month of life, and all others before or to come after, endure a plague of festering boils on their skin. Large, weeping welts and sores cover their bodies, causing constant pain and discomfort. It only affects those living and/or born in the community, although newcomers who make a home or start a business in the cursed community shall join them within 2D4 months after their arrival.

Penalties: In addition to the pain, all those suffering from the Pox have the following penalties: Reduce attacks per melee round and all combat bonuses by half, Spd by 10%, skill performance is done at -1D4x10% (varies with the degree of pain), and Physical Beauty is reduced by half.

The exceptions: There is a slim, two percent chance that an inhabitant is immune and does not ever contract the disease. This goes by entire families with the roll to determine immunity going to the mother, and if there is no mother, then to the father. Roll percentile. A 01 or 00 means the entire, immediate family (i.e. father, mother and their children) are immune. Brothers, grandparents, and cousins may all suffer from the pox. This is actually a diabolical trick to add to the suffering. Why were these people spared? Are they better, holy, stronger? Or are they in league with the dark forces responsible? Witches or demon worshipers perhaps? What if they are slain? Will the pox end? Ultimately, it just causes paranoia, fear, and prejudice (those spared the pox are often treated cruelty), and adds to the sorrow.

3. The owner or keeper of the Withering Stone is impervious to disease and +6 to save vs any magical sickness or curses. However, the stone must be carried on the character's person to enjoy these bonuses.

4. Spell Magic: The user of the Withering Stone can cast each of the following spells as often as once per day (24 hours): Sickness, Spoil, Agony, Life Drain, as well as Cure Minor Disorders, Cure Illness and Remove Curse; all equal in strength to an 8th level Wizard.

Estimated Value: Varies. Because it is reputedly the creation of a dark god, it could be considered priceless and worth millions. In fact, a Priest of Darkness, Necromancer, Witch,

wicked king or other evil being might pay 20 million or more, but most characters of a good alignment or any compassion in their soul will want to see this item destroyed or locked away where no one can find it to use for their own evil machinations.



### The Baehag

The Baehag is a rare, foul-spurred supernatural being that lives in the sea, usually in shallows and bays, hence the name. These demonic creatures appear as ugly, old hags with long black or dark green hair, gnarled teeth, black eyes like those of a fish, pale white scaly skin, long arms, wide hands with long fingers and legs with large webbed feet like those of a frog. Baehags are notoriously fickle and cantankerous spirits who can be spiteful and cruel in the extreme. Although they despise surface dwellers and all things beautiful, they often establish under-sea lairs near coastal settlements and regularly antagonize, harass and kill the people living there. When unhappy or angry, the Baehag will send animals away – and can control all animals of the sea, including fish, whales, seals, walrus, sea birds, and sea serpents.

Despite their foul and spiteful nature, a Baehag can sometimes be convinced to be helpful for a price. That price can be a favor, gold, gems or human sacrifice. Sometimes the Baehag will ask the petitioner or request that a hero, shaman, Druid or Water Warlock sacrifice himself as proof of his devotion to the sea or the people he or she is trying to help. After which the hag will keep the body in her collection of heroes and perform the



helpful service as she promised. If the volatile spirit is in a generous mood, she can calm seas, create good hunting or fishing (catch 1D4x10% more than usual, quickly and easily), or cause an approaching storm to change direction or pass overhead without causing damage or trouble.

However, when angry, or in a foul mood (which is usually, or the Baehag just finds the people nearby to be annoying, the creature will send animals/fish away, make the waters choppy and dangerous or summon a frightful or damaging storm to besiege them.

A Baehag can assume the human form of an old, frail woman, naked, clad in rags or covered in seaweed. However, this grandmother has large clawed hands and a speed, agility and power that belies her frail-looking appearance. The Baehag sometimes walks upon dry land in her natural giant hag form or the frail human form to extract bloody carnage personally, or frighten those annoying her, and sometimes to sun herself on a rock or ice flow. Those who show her respect and/or kindness on these occasions are left unharmed, and if the individual can muster the courage to offer a gift of food, fish, toy, jewelry or some act of kindness, the hag will be pleased, leave without incident and respond by giving the community the gift of a rainbow (appearing that evening or the next dawn) and/or good weather and hunting for the next week.

Those who dare to challenge her, or even look at her without succumbing to fear (roll for Horror Factor 13) or revulsion (roll on H.F. again, but this time only to see if the character curls a lip, gags, turns away, crinkles his or her nose or brow, or other sign of disgust or revulsion) will invite her wrath. An attack, act of cruelty or threat will cause the Baehag to either attack and strike said individual down where he stands or cause her to leave, but send a terrible storm, sea serpent or Aquatic demons to attack within the next 24 hours. Tragically, the attack is leveled at the community at large with those who had nothing to do with the insult or attack paying for that individual's insolence or folly.

**Race:** Considered a greater demon of the sea.

**Alignment:** Most are Miscreant or Diabolic, and occasionally Aberrant or Anarchist. The Tohatha Baehag is Diabolic and cruel in the extreme.

**Typical Attributes:** I.Q. 1D6+10, M.E. 1D4+4, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 1D4+30, P.P. 1D6+14, P.E. 1D6+14, P.B. 1D4, Spd 132 (approx. 90 mph/144 km) swimming, but only 1D6+14 on dry land. **Note:** All attributes are supernatural.

**Hit Points:** 1D4x100; **S.D.C.:** 4D4x10.

**Natural Armor Rating:** 8 on dry land, but A.R. 14 in or under water.

**Horror Factor:** 13

**Size:** 12 feet (3.6 m) in her true form, 5 feet (1.5 m) tall as a frail looking human female.

**Weight:** Five tons in true form, 120 pounds (54 kg) as a human.

**Average Life Span:** Immortal spirit of the Seas.

**P.P.E.:** 4,200

**Natural Abilities:** Excellent speed running and swimming, and can swim or fight without pause or exhaustion indefinitely. Swim 98%, does not breathe air, can survive water pressure at any depth, nightvision is one mile (1.6 km), see the invisible, dimensional teleport 40% (+20% at a ley line nexus), and bio-regenerate 4D6 H.P. or S.D.C. per melee round (half on dry land).

**Knows all Languages:** Magically understands and speaks all languages 90%, but cannot read.

**Water Link & Powers (special):**

- Recognize/identify any mineral on sight at 50%.
- Recognize/identify all aquatic life forms at 98%.
- Knows the time and direction by scanning the heavens and tides at 98%.
- Sense the direction and speed of winds, water currents and tides, changes in the currents and tides, and underwater disturbances at 98%.
- Sense the approach of tidal waves, rainstorms, hurricanes and atmospheric disturbances involving water at 98%.
- Sense impurities, chemicals, poisons, and particles in the water at 90%.
- Can see through fog and mist without any impairment of vision.
- Dowsing; same as the spell only triple the range.

**Limited Metamorphosis (special):** As described previously, the Baehag can take the form of an ugly, old, human woman.

**Limited Invulnerability (special):** The Baehag is impervious to ocean depths, drowning, tidal waves, lightning, cold, magical cold and ice, disease, hurricane and tornado winds, storms, and toxins. Ordinary S.D.C. attacks and weapons do full damage, as do psionics, spell magic and magic weapons. Weapons made of wood or stone inflict double damage. Fire also does double damage.

**Summon and Command Sea Monsters:** 1D4 Aquatic demons or twice as many sharks, and/or one sea serpent of any variety (may include a giant squid or octopus). **Note:** The Tohatha Baehag has a pair of Aquatics and a Snaggled Tooth Gobbler as her minions.

**R.C.C. Skills:** The equivalent of astronomy, navigation, land navigation, basic mathematics, boat building, pilot sail and row boats (including canoes), and lore: demons and monsters, all at 98%.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Five.

**Damage:** Headbutt, punch or kick does damage equal to the creature's supernatural P.S., or by weapon or magic.

**R.C.C. Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +3 to strike, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge (+6 underwater), +4 to pull punch, +2 to roll with impact or fall, +1 to save vs magic, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, and impervious to possession. All bonuses are in addition to any possible attribute bonuses.

**Magic:** All Water Warlock spells levels 1-7 and Air Warlock spells levels 1-3 plus Calm Storms, Dissipate Gases, Circle of Rain, Darken the Sky, Atmospheric Manipulation, Hurricane, Rainbow, Summon Fog, Summon Rain, and Summon Storm.

Spell potency is equal to an 8th level sorcerer. P.P.E. 6D6x10+P.E. attribute.

**Psionics:** None.

**Enemies:** Any being – mortal, supernatural or immortal – who bothers, crosses or challenges the hag. Generally dislikes most attractive, intelligent life forms.

**Allies:** Lesser demons and sea monsters subservient to her; sometimes Kappa. It is they who often serve as the instrument of the Baehag's wrath as well as protectors. May ally

herself to other dark forces, but is generally an independent loner. Rarely gets involved in the plots of other gods, spirits or demons.

**Value:** None.

**Habitat:** Bays, coves, reefs and shallow seas usually near or along inhabited coastal areas. Known to inhabit the coastal waters of the North as well as the Sea of Scarlet waters, but can be found anywhere in the world.

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## Wizard Stones

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Carved stone globes the size of a 30-60 gallon drum were created during the Time of a Thousand Magicks and invested with magic – and some say the life essence of their insane creators. Nobody knows exactly what the original purpose of these strange magical artifacts was, but they seem to have had something to do with exploration and communication. A typical Wizard Stone, as they are called, is a large, stone orb carved to resemble a head or face. All have a pair of eyes, and mouth. Some wear a sort of stone crown or headdress, while others do not have any such adornment. Where the ears might be is a circular depression inset with a crystal. The eyes are also made of a semi-opaque crystal. However, when the stone is activated, the crystals come alive, glowing with blue or red energy. To activate the Wizard Stone, one must have a minimum of 50 P.P.E. (identifying that individual as someone who probably wields magic), and place their hand inside a hole or opening in the mouth. Once the hand is inside, the teeth of the stone mouth will slide to clamp the hand, holding it tight and drawing a single drop of blood, and 10 points of P.P.E. A second later there is the hum of energy and the Wizard Stone comes to life, and the mouth opens to release the hand along with 2D4 small flying orbs the size of a baseball. These small orbs are also made of stone and glow with the same energy as the crystals in the eyes and ears.

Wizard Stones are sometimes built into or added to totem poles or shrines, or worshiped where they lay. In primitive tribal groups like Orcs, Ogres and Goblins, only the shaman, priest or resident magician will “commune” with the stone idol and wield its magic.

Most Wizard Stones weigh 800 to 2000 pounds (360 to 900 kg), making them very difficult if not impossible to transport alone with an adventuring group. However, the small, glowing orbs will fly and follow the mage who activated the larger stone and follow his commands and wishes. **Note:** One such Wizard Stone is depicted on the cover of this book.

### The power of Wizard Stone Orbs:

The color of the energy will indicate the different powers available to the mage commanding them. Note that in all cases, the flying magic orbs will last only 24 hours after activation of the Wizard Stone. Likewise, the stone can only be activated once per 24 hours.

Blue Glowing Wizard Stones mainly involve benign powers of seeing, understanding and movement. Once activated, 1D4+4 glowing spheres will rise out of the stone megalith's mouth to hover around the mage who brought them to life. The sorcerer knows everything the flying orbs can do from the moment he

activates the Wizard Stone, for his drop of blood temporarily links him to the strange artifact.

- While hanging about him, the Wizard (actually any man or creature of magic) can NOT be ambushed or surprised, because he or she will be instantly aware of any such attack. The stones also give the character the powers to *See the Invisible* and *Nightvision* (400 feet/122 m), both of which last as long as the flying orbs do.
- One of the orbs can be sent 200 feet (61 m) ahead of the mage where it functions like an observation ball, enabling the sorcerer to see anything within a 20 foot (6 m) diameter of the orb, including invisible creatures.
- In combat, the orbs dart around the sorcerer confusing and startling any attacker and effectively making the combat moves of any opponent done with a penalty of -2 (to initiative, strike, parry, dodge, etc.).
- The small orbs can be hurled at an opponent too, and explode on impact, but rather than inflict damage, it causes its victim to levitate into the air and bob around as if on a rolling current of air. Said individual has no sense of balance and sees his number of attacks per melee round reduced by half and all combat moves are made at -6 to strike, parry and dodge. The flying orb vanishes in the explosion, magically teleporting back to inside the large head-like Wizard Stone. Range: 200 feet (61 m) and +4 to strike.
- Lastly, each of the flying orbs can be used to create any one of the following spells at 8th level potency. However, as soon as the spell is activated, the orb seems to explode into a shower of sparkling dust over the mage, vanishing as it touches him, but giving him the spell effect desired. The P.P.E. necessary for the spell is contained in the orb. Available Spells: See Aura, Eyes of Thoth, Eyes of the Wolf, Sense Traps, Armor of Ithan, Fly as the Eagle, Magic Pigeon, and Tongues.

Red Glowing Wizard Stones mainly involve energy and power. Once activated, 1D4+4 glowing spheres will rise out of the stone megalith's mouth to hover around the mage who brought them to life. The sorcerer knows everything the flying orbs can do from the moment he activates the Wizard Stone, for his drop of blood temporarily links him to the strange artifact.

- While hanging about him, the Wizard (actually any man or creature of magic) is bathed in a network of light beams all around him. The stones heightens the character's senses, making him more alert and quick to take action: +2 on initiative, +1 to parry, +2 to dodge, as well as automatically *Sense Magic* without expending P.P.E. or casting a spell.
- One of the orbs can be sent 100 feet (30.5 m) ahead of the mage where it functions like an observation ball, enabling the sorcerer to sense/feel any unusual power surges, large fires, or large expenditures of magical energy (60 points or more) within a 20 foot (6 m) diameter of the orb.
- In combat, the orbs dart around the sorcerer, actually blocking attacks for the character as if they were extra pairs of arms; +3 to parry. Allowing the character to focus on magic or his own physical attacks.
- The small orbs can be hurled at an opponent, exploding on impact and doing 6D6 damage, but vanish in the explosion, magically teleporting back inside the large head-like Wizard Stone. Range: 300 feet (91.5 m) and +2 to strike.



- Lastly, each of the flying orbs can be used to create any *one* of the following spells at 8th level potency. However, as soon as the spell is activated the orb seems to explode into a shower of sparkling dust over the mage, vanishing as it touches him, but giving him the spell effect desired. The P.P.E. necessary for the spell is contained in the orb. **Available Spells:** Impervious to Fire, Energy Field, Extinguish Fire, Fire Ball, Fire Fist, Call Lightning Superhuman Strength, and Dispel Magic Barriers.

Green Glowing Wizard Stones are the rarest of the three and deal with dimensions. Once activated, 1D4+4 glowing spheres will rise out of the stone megalith's mouth to hover around the mage who brought them to life. The sorcerer knows everything the flying orbs can do from the moment he activates the Wizard Stone, for his drop of blood temporarily links him to the strange artifact.

- While hanging about him, the Wizard (actually any man or creature of magic) can see Astral beings and entities, Sense Magic and Sense Dimensional Anomalies automatically without expending P.P.E. or casting a spell.
- One of the orbs can be sent 100 feet (30.5 m) ahead of the mage, enabling the character to sense the presence of the supernatural or dimensional anomalies within a 20 foot (6 m) diameter of the orb.
- No combat applications.
- The small orbs can be hurled at an opponent that is an *entity* of any kind, exploding on impact and expelling it from this world. Has no effect on flesh and blood beings. Range: 200 feet (61 m) and +2 to strike.
- Lastly, each of the flying orbs can be used to create any *one* of the following spells at 8th level potency. However, the flying orb vanishes as soon as the spell is cast. The P.P.E. necessary for the spell is contained in the orb. **Available Spells:** Escape, Time Slip, Teleport Lesser, Teleport Self (on the Wizard and his possessions up to one mile/1.6 km away; flawless), Wink-Out, Reduce Self, Constrain Being and Exorcism.

**Note:** Wizard Stones are only found in the Northern Hinterlands, including Ophid's Grasslands, and once in a while, the Great Northern Wilderness. They have never been discovered in the Disputed Lands or farther south, nor in the Northern Mountains or Bizantium. Most people outside of the Hinterlands don't know anything about these strange artifacts. One of the Kiridin barbarian clans is said to worship a Red Wizard Stone, a Blue Wizard Stone is located near the Devil's Mark in Ophid's Grasslands, and at least one of each type is said to exist scattered in the Hinterland Forests. Meanwhile, the Vault of Destiny is said to contain one of each type. As many as a dozen total may exist in the Hinterlands. Most natives in the region leave the stones where they lay, figuring they are for anyone who needs them to use. A few are part of a temple, shrine or totem pole.

**Estimated Value:** 60+ million in gold.

## Magic of the North

The following are a number magic spells and items common to the north. Most deal with the unique conditions found in this part of the world, and places an emphasis on cold and winter. **Note:** The description will indicate if the magic is available to Warlocks and whether or not it can be made available as a magic potion or enchanted item.

### Alphabetical List of New Cold and Snow Spells

Avalanche (60 or 100)  
Blow Snow (6)  
Cure Frostbite (12)  
Dig Through Snow (8)  
Frostblade (15)  
Ice (15)  
Ice Shield (10)  
Orb of Cold (6)  
Ride Ice Flow (24)  
Shield from Light/Polarized Vision (4)  
Skate Ice (8)  
Snow Walking (8)  
Wave of Frost (18)  
White Out (6)  
Wind Run (10)

### Avalanche

**Range:** 200 feet (61 m) away per level of experience; line of sight.

**Duration:** Instant, with the snow slide lasting about 1D4 minutes.

**Saving Throw:** Not applicable.

**P.P.E.:** One hundred for medium-sized, sixty for small.

**Spell Level:** Seventh level *Water Warlock* spell.

This spell of destruction causes a medium-sized avalanche about 1D4x100 yards (91-366 m) wide, inflicting 1D4x10 damage to everything in its path from the air blast, and 5D6x10 damage from the snow itself. Everything and everyone is buried 3D6+6 feet (2.7 to 7.3 m) under the snow.

A small avalanche half the size and doing 4D6 from air blast and 2D6x10 damage from snow can be created at the cost of 60 P.P.E.

### Blow Snow

**Range:** 10 feet (3 m), line of sight.

**Duration:** Five minutes per experience level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** Not applicable.

**P.P.E.:** Six.

**Spell Level:** Second level for a *Wizard* or *Air Warlock* but only costs the Warlock 4 P.P.E.; fourth level *Water Warlock* spell and costs 6 P.P.E.

The character can magically blow up to one foot (0.3 m) of snow per level of experience, up and out of his way like an invisible, modern day snow blower. The snow disperses with the sweep of his hand or point of his finger! The snow can be blown

to clear a four foot (1.2 m) wide path and is sent flying up to 15 feet (4.6 m) high, but creates a mound or wall of snow on either side of the path.

This power can also be used to blow snow into the face of an enemy or to cover (and conceal) an object or structure. In the former case, the victim will be momentarily surprised and blinded for a few seconds; loses one melee action and initiative. In the latter case, the character is +15% to use snow for camouflage. If the camouflage skill is not known to the character, he has a base 50% chance to conceal an item this way.

Blow snow can also be used to cover one's tracks in the snow, however, those characters with a tracking skill and who take their time are likely to notice irregularities in the snow pattern to indicate that the trail has been covered over. Trackers can follow the covered over trail but with a -10% penalty to successfully track.

## Cure Frostbite

**Range:** Touch.

**Duration:** Instant.

**Saving Throw:** Not applicable.

**P.P.E.:** Twelve for Air Warlock.

**Spell Level:** A Fourth Level *Air Warlock* spell. Also available as a Sixth Level spell to *Water Warlocks* and *Shamans* (Costs 22 P.P.E. for both).

With a simple touch and a momentary sparkle of magic energy, like snowflakes, an individual who has just contracted frostbite is cured. Circulation is restored and the frostbitten appendages return to normal. This spell only works if the character is recently frostbitten, i.e. within the last 48 hours.

**Note:** In the north, the spell equivalent is available as a magic potion (900 gold per dose), and is sometimes available as a scroll (2,200 gold) or a Medallion of Protection from Frostbite (impervious to it, but costs 28,000 gold).

## Dig Through Snow

**Range:** Self or one other by touch.

**Duration:** Five minutes per experience level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** Not applicable.

**P.P.E.:** Eight.

**Spell Level:** Second level *Water Warlock* spell.

The character can magically dig through snow without tiring. Using a shovel, the enchanted character can dig at a rate of 1D6+2 feet (0.9 to 2.4 m) per melee round; a half of that with his bare hands. Additionally, any tunnel or hole magically dug will NOT cave in while the magic is in effect. This is great for burrowing under snow and digging out characters caught in an avalanche or snow pit.

**Note:** In the north, the spell equivalent is available as a magic potion (700 gold per dose); equal to a 5th level spell.

## Frostblade

**Range:** Close, hand to hand combat.

**Duration:** One minute per level of experience.

**Damage:** 3D6

**Saving Throw:** None

**P.P.E.:** Fifteen

**Spell Level:** Sixth level *Wizard* spell, but a fourth level *Water Warlock* spell (cost the Warlock 10 P.P.E.).

This spell creates a 3-4 foot (0.9 to 1.2 m) blade of ice that appears in the spell caster's hand to use as a sword. Or the spell caster can coat a piece/shaft of metal into an ice covered blade. This "Frostblade" glows with a pale white, misty energy. After creating it, the spell caster can give the sword to someone else or use it him or her self. The weapon can be used in much the same manner as any sword, but can parry energy blasts and balls of fire (no special bonuses). It inflicts damage through a combination of magical force and numbing cold, so fire creatures will take double damage (6D6 S.D.C.). The weapon will not be damaged by parrying attacks, but disappears or returns to normal metal when the spell duration elapses.

**Note:** Can be made into a "property" for magic weapons, the counterpart to flaming sword, doing 2D6 damage as knife (double damage to fire creatures), 3D6 damage as a sword or axe (double damage to fire creatures). Cost: 40,000 for knife, 55,000 gold for sword or axe.

## Ice

**Range:** 50 feet (15.2 m) per level of experience.

**Duration:** Five minutes per level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** Not applicable.

**P.P.E.:** Fifteen.

**Spell Level:** Sixth level *Wizard* spell, and fourth level *Water Warlock* spell (but only costs the Warlock 8 P.P.E.).

This spell allows the spell caster to transform magical energy into ice, creating one of the following three effects.

1. The spell caster may choose to create a thin wall of ice having 15 S.D.C. per level of the maker. The wall is 10 feet (3 m) tall and 10 feet (3 m) long per level of experience, but only one foot (0.3 m) thick. The wall can be created anywhere within range and can be made smaller or bigger as the spell caster desires (i.e. a 3rd level mage can seal a small, six foot (1.8 m) wide corridor from wall to wall, like a door or wall made of ice, or run the wall down the middle or along one wall of the corridor (perhaps blocking doors) for 30 feet (9 m) down the length of the corridor. Anybody in the area where the spell is cast is pushed out of the way by the wall. If the ice wall would crush or encase a living being (because the area is too small) the magic will not work! Likewise, as a "wall" the ice must be placed on the ground and cannot be made to appear in the air or inside a crate or to encase an item. There is no save against this ice wall.

2. Magically cover the floor, wall ceiling and objects in a thin coating of ice, an 8th of an inch thick, plus frost particles twinkle in the air. Can affect a six foot (1.8 m) radius per level of experience. People caught in the icy covering will be glazed over in the ice and suffer from cold and surprise, losing initiative that melee round and are -1 on all combat actions. Characters not protected by body armor or warm, thick clothing will suffer incidental frostbite damage (1D6 S.D.C.) unless they quickly knock the ice off (using up three melee attacks). The main advantage of this spell is that movement on the ice is extremely difficult - reduce the speed of those trying to walk across the ice by 75% and even then there is a 01-75% chance of falling if the character moves faster than a speed of 4! Since everything is covered in ice, there is no handhold to grab onto for support. Furthermore, the magical ice does *not* melt even in extreme heat, but disappears when the spell duration elapses.



This frosting over aspect of the spell can also be used to glaze over glass windows to make it impossible to see out of until the ice vanishes or is chipped away, whichever happens first. It takes one melee round to chip or scrape away a little peephole in the ice coat, that's assuming the ice is on the inside. If the ice coating is on the outside of the window, those inside can not get to it and the window is frozen shut (requires a combined P.S. of 30 to open).

3. **Freeze water.** The mage can use this spell to instantly freeze two gallons of water per level of experience into a solid block of ice. Freezing can be done to one container or several in a 6 foot (1.8 m) radius (puddles, canteens, water skins, drinking glasses, etc.), provided the total amount of water frozen does not exceed the mage's maximum limit in total gallons. Freezing water may cause full containers to rupture or shatter. The ice melts as it would under the circumstances (i.e. quickly in warmth, slowly if cold, not at all if temperatures are below freezing).

## Ice Shield

**Range:** Self, although may be given to another to use.

**Duration:** In the cold of a winter environment, one hour per level of experience. In a warm or summer environment, five minutes per level, and only two in a hot desert or jungle.

**Saving Throw:** Not applicable.

**P.P.E.:** Ten.

**Spell Level:** Fourth level *Wizard* spell or third level *Water Warlock* spell (at a cost of 6 P.P.E.).

The spell caster can magically create a shield made of ice. To him (or any character the spell caster gives it to), the Ice Shield has the weight and feel of a normal wood and metal shield (small, medium or large) and the item can be used as a normal shield by him with a +1 to parry (plus any W.P. Shield bonuses that may apply). The Ice Shield has an A.R. 14 and 80 S.D.C.

Anyone not specifically given the shield by the spell caster will find it heavy and distractingly cold (reduce shield bonuses by half) and it melts twice as quickly.

## Orb of Cold

**Range:** Throw: 200 feet (61 m).

**Duration:** One melee round; 1D4 minutes for numbness.

**Damage:** 3D6 plus numbness penalties.

**Saving Throw:** Dodge; standard.

**P.P.E.:** Six

**Spell Level:** Third level *Wizard* spell and *Air Warlock* spell.

The spell caster summons a magically charged ice ball the size of a softball into his hands, to hurl it at an enemy. The character must roll to strike, getting to use his usual P.P. bonus (if any) and a magical bonus of +1 to strike – the orb disappears in one melee round (15 seconds) if it is not thrown. If the orb hits, it shatters, inflicting impact and cold damage to one target. If it misses, it is gone, unless the G.M. thinks it may hit something or somebody else. Those struck take 4D6 damage and must make a save vs magic or suffer from a sudden, debilitating numbing cold. A numbed opponent loses one melee attack, is -2 on initiative, -1 to strike, parry, and dodge, and speed is reduced by 10%. These penalties are *not* cumulative, and last for 1D4 minutes.

## Ride Ice Flow

**Range:** Must be on board the floating ice.

**Duration:** 20 minutes per level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** Twenty-four

**Spell Level:** Seventh level *Wizard* Spell or fourth level *Water Warlock* spell (at half the cost).

The spell caster can use any piece of floating ice up to 20 feet (6 m) in diameter and magically propel it like a floating barge across unfrozen water. Maximum Speed is three miles per hour (4.8 km) per level of experience. This magic even makes riding an ice flow at *sea* possible, without the occupants being swept overboard by large waves, although they will get soaking wet and cold from water spraying and pooling over the ice.

## Shield from Light/Polarized Vision

**Range:** Self or up to two others by touch.

**Duration:** 15 minutes per level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** Four.

**Spell Level:** Second level *Wizard* spell or first level *Air Warlock* spell (at a cost of 3 P.P.E.).

Gives the eyes polarized vision and makes it as if the character were wearing quality sunglasses. Prevents snow blindness and reduces glare. Makes the eyes appear dark and gives them a bit of a purple tint.

**Note:** Also available as a magic potion for the cost of 400 gold.

## Skate Ice

**Range:** Self or up to two others by touching them simultaneously while casting the spell.

**Duration:** Ten minutes per level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** Eight.

**Spell Level:** Fourth level *Wizard* and *Air Warlock* spell, but a third level *Water Warlock* Spell (and only costs the *Water Warlock* 5 P.P.E.).

The character can skate over ice barefoot or in any type of shoe or footwear. Moreover, he or she can skate over wafer thin ice without fear of cracking through it and falling down into the icy water below. This applies only to ice that is NOT covered by more than an inch or two of snow.

Skating speed is 50% faster than running speed and the character tires at half the normal rate (can skate 50% longer than running before feeling tired).

**Notes:** In the north, this spell is popular as magic potions (600 gold) and magical boots (22,000-30,000 gold); all are usually equal to a 6th level spell once activated. Most can be activated four times a day.

## Snow Walking

**Range:** Self or up to two others by touching them simultaneously while casting the spell.

**Duration:** Ten minutes per level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** None.

**P.P.E.:** Eight.



**Spell Level:** Fourth level *Wizard* and *Air Warlock* spell, but a second level *Water Warlock* Spell (and only costs the *Water Warlock* 4 P.P.E.).

The enchanted character can walk on top of snow as if he were wearing snowshoes or skis! Travel leaves footprints, but the character can walk up and down snowdrifts without fear of falling into snow pits or causing an avalanche!

**Notes:** In the north, this spell is popular as scrolls (1,500 gold), and very popular as magic potions (600-800 gold) and magical rings and medallions (20,000 gold with three activations a day) and sometimes magical boots (28,000-40,000 gold; with four activations a day); all are usually equal to a 6th level spell once activated.

## Wave of Frost

**Range:** 200 feet (61 m) +20 feet (6 m) per level of experience.

**Damage:** Special.

**Duration:** One minute per level of experience.

**Saving Throw:** Special.

**P.P.E.:** Eighteen.

**Spell Level:** Sixth Level *Wizard* and *Water Warlock* spell, fourth level *Air Warlock* spell (and only costs the *Air Warlock* 12 P.P.E.).

This magical attack is designed to damage the delicate flowers and roots of plants. The Wave of Frost can be cast several hundred feet away and covers a 6 foot (1.8 m) radius per level

of experience. All flowering plants caught in the frost will suffer damage: 2D4x10% will die, meaning the yield of fruit, vegetables, etc., normally borne by that plant(s) will be reduced by that amount. In addition, 1D4x10% of the plants are irrefutably damaged (Shaman or Elemental magic is all that can restore them) and will die within 48 hours. This spell can also be used to obscure windows by covering them in frost (takes one melee round to scrape a peephole).

## White Out

**Range:** 12 foot (3.6 m) radius +5 feet (1.5 m) per level of the spell caster.

**Duration:** One melee round (15 seconds) per level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** Victims are -2 to save. A successful save means that individual must squint but can see reasonably well, suffering a penalty of -3 on all combat moves as noted below.

**P.P.E.:** Six.

**Spell Level:** Third level *Wizard* Spell or second level *Air Warlock* spell (at half the P.P.E.).

**Limitations:** Requires daylight and snow or ice. Can only be performed when the sun is out and not in twilight or at night. The *Globe of Daylight* spell is insufficient to fuel a *White Out* spell.

This magic magnifies the *sun's* light a hundred fold and causes blinding light reflection as if the snow has been turned



into a thousand mirrors. Victims are all momentarily blinded and -10 to strike, parry, and dodge, and lose initiative. All they can do is cover their eyes and either stagger away from the area of blinding snow or wait until the spell ends. Even characters with Light Shields to protect the eyes are -5 on all combat moves and are partially blinded, forced to squint and shield their eyes. Likewise, it is impossible to read or perform any skill that requires clear vision.

The spell caster is impervious to the effects provided he is outside the radius of effect and moving or looking way, not into the light. This means he can not attack the victims of this magic without being blinded himself. Those looking into the White Out area from the outside can see nothing inside its radiating diameter, and therefore cannot find a target to hit. This spell is also good for signaling others, for it can be seen up to 48 miles (76.8 km) way when used up in the mountains, in an open field, grasslands or out at sea.



## Wind Run

**Range:** Self or another (one) by touch.

**Duration:** Five minutes per level of the spell caster.

**Saving Throw:** None

**P.P.E.:** Ten

**Spell Level:** Fourth level *Wizard* spell, but a third level *Air Warlock* spell (and only 6 P.P.E.).

The spell caster can run on the wind instead of on the ground. This spell is not a substitute for flying, and only increases one's running speed by 30% and has a maximum altitude of only five

feet (1.5 m) off the ground (can rise and run 1-5 feet/0.3 to 1.5 m above the ground as the runner desires and can easily leap 10 feet/3 m into the air or across).

The character must jog or run in the air. Simply walking is too slow and will cancel the magic and cause the character to gently drop to the ground when not moving at least half his maximum speed attribute. Likewise, stopping for more than six seconds will cause the character to descend to the ground. When this happens, the Wind Runner can quickly start to run again, enabling him to continue running in the air. However, this "pause" and immediate resumption of movement can only be done three times, after which point the spell is broken and the character is deposited back onto solid ground. Note that the character really does not run "on" the wind at all. He runs in the air.

This spell has three big advantages.

1. Wind Run increases the character's speed by one third; so a character with a maximum speed of 10, for example, can now run at a speed of 13, while a character with a speed of say 20, can now run at a speed of 26, and so on (round down). It also increases the distance and height one can leap by 50%. Thus, the character can run or easily leap over boulders, creeks, bushes, fallen trees, and even animals in his path.

2. Runs quietly and does not leave any tracks. Since the character is running above the ground, he can move quietly (not completely silently) even through a forest that is covered in crunchy leaves, pine cones, twigs and underbrush like the Northern Hinterlands and Great Northern Wilderness; +5% to prowl when this spell is cast, but the character must keep moving.

Jogging or running in the air means the character can run above underbrush and debris that would otherwise crunch, snap, or snare articles of clothing to make noise. Of course, with forests as dense as those in the north, there are still plenty of tall brush, tree branches and such to impede one's movement and brush up against to make noise, but it is much less so than running on the twig and leaf cluttered ground. Wind Running is especially useful during the spring when the ground is turned into mud, as well as running over *packed snow* or new snow under four feet (1.2 m) deep without leaving tracks.

3. The character can run twice as far before feeling tired.

**Limitations:** This spell provides *no* protection or bonuses against natural strong winds, storms, cold, the Wind Rush spell or any other wind based magic – all have full effect. *Nor* does it enable the character to run up and down the sides of walls nor over water or over snow taller than four feet (1.2 m) unless it is tightly packed. If the snow has fallen in the last 72 hours, it is not packed and the character runs above the ground underneath the newly fallen snow. This means the Wind Runner leaves little toe marks and swirls in the tall snow, as well as plows through the tops of snowdrifts. In fact, if the snowdrift is taller than five feet (1.5 m), the character can not go over or through it, and if he stops, he'll sink down into the snow until he hits the ground. If the snow is packed, however, he runs five feet (1.5 m) above the packed snow.

**Note:** In the north, this spell is popular as scrolls (1,700-2,200 gold), and very popular as magic potions (800-1000 gold), as well as magical rings and medallions (25,000-35,000 gold with three activations a day) and some-

times magical boots (35,000-50,000 gold; four activations a day); all are usually equal to a 6th level spell once activated.

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# Creatures Great & Small

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By Bill Coffin & Kevin Siembieda

We didn't want to reprint a bunch of creatures found in the **Palladium Book of Monsters & Animals**, so only a few reappear in these pages with notes on other key figures. Wolfen and Coyles are found in both *M&A* and *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®*. Bug Bears, Bearmen, Centaurs and Kankoran are reprinted here for the benefit of those who don't have *M&A*. We urge our players to take a peek at **Monsters & Animals** because it is a valuable resource and fun sourcebook presenting over 120 monsters and 200+ animals found throughout the world. For quick, at a glance reference, most creatures are accompanied by a world map indicating exactly where they are most commonly found.

## The Misfit Menagerie

The Northern Hinterlands has a vast variety of life forms that are unique to it and the north in general. It has an ecology and a roster of unusual beings all its own. Some of these creatures are indigenous to the region, others seek the Hinterlands as a refuge – a place to hide from people and civilization. Still others are demons from some alien hell, or from the Land of the Damned, or beings that time has forgotten. Many are so strange that their very existence suggests their having been tampered with or created from scratch by ancient magic or dark gods. Some are said to have once served the Old Ones during the Age of Chaos. The Angel-Demon Serpent, Bug Bears, Killgores, Arrowheads, Muckers, and a host of others all hint of the meddling influence of some magical power long, long ago. The sum of all this tampering is a land populated by freaks, mutants and misfit creatures that seem to fit in nowhere else.

These are the creatures that help make the Hinterlands such a special and unique place. They are also what makes the region so bloody dangerous for the uninitiated. Experienced soldiers and explorers might have tangled with the worst other parts of the world have to offer, but when they reach the Hinterlands, they find themselves confronted with a range of monsters and animals with powers, abilities and motives never before encountered. Hardcore adventurers might think they know everything they need to survive the Hinterlands, but until they familiarize themselves with its most noteworthy flora and fauna, they don't know the half of it.

## Alphabetical List of New & Notable Monsters of the Hinterlands

*Alpine Monitor (New!)*  
*Angel-Demon Serpent (New!)*  
*Arrowhead (New!)*  
Bearman of the North  
Bug Bear  
Centaur  
*Chig (New!)*  
*Giant Scuttle Crab (New!)*  
Kankoran  
*Killgore (New!)*  
*Mucker (New!)*  
*Oboru (New!)*  
*Razorvine (New!)*  
*Scrollworm (New!)*  
*Terror Tree (New!)*  
*Threkk (New!)*  
*Weirdwing (New!)*  
*Winter Storm Ice Demon (New!)*



## Alpine Monitor

The only large lizard to inhabit the Hinterlands, the Alpine Monitor is a vicious predator that resembles the giant monitor lizards found in the southern jungles, especially in the Land of the South-Winds, the eastern Yin-Sloth Jungles, and certain spots in the Floenry Islands. (**G.M. Note:** In real-world terms, Alpine Monitors are very similar to the dreaded Komodo Dragon in both form and function. Watch any documentary on these dinosaur-like animals, and you will appreciate their sheer lethality. There is a reason why the villages on Komodo Island all rest on ten foot tall stilts.)

Alpine Monitors, also known as "Snow Lizards," have tough hides, are quick on their feet, and possess a killer instinct second to none. They routinely go after prey that is bigger than they are – which is saying a lot since these creatures range anywhere from 12 to 20 feet (3.6 to 6 m) long!

Like sharks, Alpine Monitors rely on their sense of smell to locate prey. Having poor eyesight, they must rely on their bloodhound-like ability to pursue quarry, else they would never catch enough to survive. This reliance on smell is what enables them to track prey for days if need be. It also is what draws these otherwise solo hunters into large and deadly packs. Normally, Alpine Monitors are solitary hunters who avoid their own kind except during mating season. However, when a blood scent is in the air, they often swarm, creating a pack of frenzied killers reminiscent of sharks. The standard pattern is numerous Alpine Monitors (2D4+2) in a given area all smell the same in-





jured prey and converge on it. The creatures will all attack the prey en masse, acting more out of a simultaneous hunting reflex and hunger than any sense of teamwork. If there is enough food to feed all the animals, then all the lizards will feed in unison. If there is not enough food for them all, the largest and most ferocious 2-4 will claim it and fight any Snow Lizard or other animal (humans included) who challenge them for it. This seldom results in the killing of other lizards, as most are smart enough to back off after they are struck a few times.

When Alpine Monitors are around a lot of blood, or taste blood, they enter a killing and feeding frenzy, attacking relentlessly until their prey is slain. This means the ravenous beasts will often fight to the death to bring down their prey as well as to protect their kill from challengers who might want to steal their prize for themselves. That having been said, prey that proves to be too elusive or difficult to kill (especially if magic is used as a defense or after several attacks the prey is not severely injured will make the giant lizard(s) give up and go in search of an easier target.

After a successful kill, the animals that have gorged themselves will disperse to digest the oversized meal they just had, and go into a sluggish, near hibernation sleep for 1D4 weeks. During this rest period, the Alpine Monitor has no interest in hunting or fighting and will ignore everything but the most obvious threats. Rangers and Woodsmen who move slowly and cautiously can walk within 10 feet (3 m) of the beasts without arousing more than a few hisses and grunts warning them to keep their distance. Most giant Lizards usually like to find a nice secluded boulder, stony river bank, or toppled tree out in the sun to lay upon or snuggle up next to while digesting their food. A week or so after gorging, the monsters return to their hunting grounds and begin the cycle once more, going from solo hunter to pack hunter, to frenzy fighter, to hibernating hermit.

Alpine Monitors hunt *large prey* with wild boar, deer, elk, moose and humanoids their primary targets. They will also attack wolves, Worms of Taut and other predators, and even consider attacking Arrowheads, Catoblepa, Dragondactyls and other large, fierce animals if that animal is old, weak or injured. Humanoids, including Kankoran, Coyles, Orcs, Goblins, Gnomes, Elves, Dwarves and humans, are targeted because they are comparatively slow and easy to catch. Pack animals, pets and livestock are also vulnerable to these giant lizards, especially if tethered to a tree or penned. These aggressive reptilian hunters are so bold that even a solitary lizard will dare to steal into a campsite to seize sleeping humanoids and drag them into the woods to be finished off and eaten. Travelers in the Hinterlands who do not post a night watchman to guard over his teammates are inviting trouble. In fact, many woodsmen and solitary travelers will find a stout tree to sleep in, for the Alpine Monitor is a poor climber. Most of the giant lizards, however, have learned to respect and fear magic and psionic powers, and will quickly give up on prey who wields them. Likewise, the lizards will abandon an attack on humanoids who prove too tough a foe or who gather in a tight group or circle – Alpine Monitors fear cohesive groups that stand and fight together. Even when tracking herd animals, an Alpine Monitor will attack only those who stray from the rest of the group. **Note:** These giant lizards are active both day and night, but tend to sleep a lot or sun themselves during the day and be much more active at night when they do most of their hunting.

Though generally relegated to the “interior” of the forested Hinterlands, one or more Alpine Monitors occasionally target the Shadow Colonies on the coast where they prey upon livestock and any colonist who happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. When this occurs, a hunting party will go out to find the beast and put it down. Forest predators, the giant lizards do not care for Ophid’s Grasslands, although one may be encountered there from time to time. Such an encounter is most likely to occur on the edge of the grasslands, allowing the liz-

ards to travel 1-20 miles (1.6 to 32 km) to hunt and return to the safety of the forest afterward. Despite their name, Alpine Monitors are never found in the mountains and rarely even in the foothills.

Some believe the Alpine Monitor is the product of magic or alchemical mutation because unlike most cold-blooded animals, the Alpine Monitor thrives in the cold. They do most of their hunting at night and stay active year round. In fact, they love the snow and thrive in the harsh Hinterland winters, earning them the common nickname of "Snow Lizard." The Snow Lizard is one of the few animals that venture out during the "snow season" to hunt, and can be seen laying on top of a snow mound or at the bottom of a wind swept canyon. With so few other creatures out during the winter, especially during the snow season, they become the lords of winter. Scholars who see the handiwork of magic or the divine also point to the fact that the animal's nearest warm climate cousin is on the other side of the world. This has led some to believe that the animal was brought to the Northern Hinterlands and magically mutated into the cold climate Snow Lizard. Whether that individual was a god or mortal, he modified the lizard to survive the harsh Hinterlands' cold and then either let them loose or they escaped. According to one myth, two mated pair of Snow Lizards belonged to the god Algor, who used them like hunting dogs. One day, the Mighty Algor was unexpectedly called away for a long time. While he was gone, his Snow Lizards became hungry, broke free from their pen and ran off into the woods to hunt. There they had numerous children, and by the time Algor returned to his mountain home, the countryside was filled with Snow Lizards.

Kankoran and Coyles have tried to domesticate these great lizards as attack and riding animals to no avail. Snow Lizards just don't have the temperament and are too alternately aggressive and languid to function as any kind of beast of burden or pet. Other humanoids hunt these creatures without remorse. Kankoran will often battle them to the death as a right of passage, and often kill them to protect others. In a pinch, Snow Lizards can be eaten, but their meat is not very tasty and is very fatty. Money-minded trappers hunt the Monitors to sell their tough hides (which make a great heavy-duty leather ideal for armor) and to collect their teeth. Alpine Monitors are common throughout the forests of the Northern Hinterlands and are lords of the winter.

**Alignment:** Considered Miscreant or Anarchist.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D6+2, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 2D6+18, P.P. 2D6+12, P.E. 2D6+12, P.B. 2D4, Spd. 3D6+18 (running) and 2D6+12 (swimming).

**Hit Points:** 6D6+20

**S.D.C.:** 1D4x10+10

**Natural A.R.:** 12 – **Note:** Even soft, padded leather armor made from the hide of this lizard has an A.R. of 12 and 30 S.D.C. Hard Leather armor A.R. 12 and 40 S.D.C., and Studded Leather Armor A.R. 13 and 45 S.D.C.

**Horror Factor:** 11; 15 as a hungry pack.

**Average P.P.E.:** 2D6

**Natural Abilities:** Alpine Monitors are excellent swimmers (85%), prowl (60%), are impervious to cold and snow blindness, Nightvision 800 feet (244 m), +3 to save vs poison and disease, can use their prehensile tail as a whip, and are aggressive hunters. They have good running speed and can double their speed in short bursts lasting 1D4 melee rounds

(15-60 seconds). Their sense of smell is as good or better than any bloodhound, enabling them to track by smell (80%, +10% to follow a blood scent), can identify specific scents up to a mile (1.6 km) away and follow a blood scent up to four miles (6.4 km) away.

**Lords of winter:** Their wide, padded feet, long prehensile tail and low profile enable them to slither and slide on top of deep snow and ice at their normal running speed, giving them a great advantage in the winter (+2 on initiative, +1 to strike on snow and ice, in addition to its normal bonuses). Snow Lizards can NOT leap, although they can lunge, and are terrible climbers. They are fine over rocky and rugged terrain, but cannot climb trees, walls or steep inclines (probably why they are not found in the hills or mountains).

**Attacks Per Melee:** Typically three, while the oldest and largest will have four.

**Damage:** Tail slash: 2D6+P.S. damage bonus. Claw: 2D6+P.S. damage bonus. Bite: 4D6 plus the monitor can lock its jaws and continue doing 2D6 damage (no P.S. bonus) automatically each subsequent attack until its victim is killed or the lizard is slain or forced to let go. Anyone locked in the jaws of the Snow Lizard is trapped unless a combined P.S. of 40 is used to pry the jaws open (not something the Alpine Monitor will take kindly so it will continue to fight with tail and claws) or the beast is slain. Those locked in the jaws are partially pinned and in pain, causing them to lose one melee attack and combat bonuses are reduced by -2. **Note:** Not all bite attacks are locking ones. The lock jaw attack is only used when the lizard is trying to grab and run off with its prey, thus a lock jaw attack is often the monster's first attack. After that, it bites to inflict damage and defend itself without locking its jaws. However, when its prey appears to be weakened, it will again try a lock jaw attack and hold on until its victim is dead. By holding on to its prey in this way, the lizard can keep it from other predators and is guaranteed the first several bites if not the whole thing.

**Bonuses:** +2 to initiative. +4 to strike and dodge. This is in addition to probable attribute bonuses.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** 20-28 years.

**Value:** A hide from which two or three suits of leather armor can be made will fetch 40-80 gold, 50% more if trade is taken instead of cash. Six gold is paid per dozen teeth.

**Habitat:** The forests of the Northern Hinterlands; rare in the Great Northern Wilderness and Eastern Territory.

**Languages:** None.

**Enemies:** The Alpine Monitor pretty much sees most life forms as food. Tends to ignore giant-sized creatures, including Ogres, Trolls, Bearmen and tall Wolfen.

**Allies:** Occasionally other Alpine Monitors, and may be commanded by Summoners (the Summon Serpents Circle is a powerful weapon in the Hinterlands forest).

**Physical Appearance:** These creatures look like Komodo Dragons except they have a distinctive "tree bark" camouflage pattern to their leathery hides. In the warm seasons they are a dull grayish brown color, and in the winter they turn a pale gray. One out of every 25 Alpine Monitors is an albino that is 25% larger than usual, and with an extra 4D6 points to both Hit Points and S.D.C. and +3 to damage.



**Size:** 8-12 feet (2.4 to 3.6 m) from nose to haunches, plus tail which is another six to ten feet (1.8 to 4.3 m) for a total length of 14-20 feet (5.5 to 6 m) for a mature adult.

**Weight:** Approximately 1,000 lbs (450 kg).

**Notes:** Eats the equivalent of one human or deer a week. Mates once a year in January, laying 2D6+6 eggs, but only 1D4 will survive to grow to adulthood. The eggs are the size of a grapefruit and are good eating.



## Angel-Demon Serpent

Frequently referred to as simply the Angel-Demon, this chaotic being is one of the strangest of them all. The Angel-Demon is a study in duality and contrast. It is both intelligent and savage, beautiful and frightening, helpful and wicked. Even the Angel-Demon's physical body is in conflict with itself and displays its dual nature for all to see. The head and upper torso is that of an attractive and powerfully built, elf-like male or female with bronze colored skin. The hair consists of flowing yellow locks like the rays of the sun. The lower body, however, is that of a worm or serpent, the top green with black or reddish brown markings, the underside the same bronze as the upper body. A pair of wings protrudes from the back; one with white feathers flecked with specks of gold, the other, black leather like those of bat, with green trim and highlights.

The duality does not end with its appearance, for this supernatural being wields the contrary elemental powers of *fire* and *water*, and its personality is equally divided. All Angel-Demons

have a fragmented alignment, and accompanying personalities. One is inevitably *Unprincipled* leaning toward good (its angel side) and the other *Miscreant evil* (its demon side).

**The good personality** tries to do what's right and exhibits some measure of self-control, compassion and mercy. This is the personality that will rescue a child from a burning building, come to the aid of adventurers, battle monsters, right injustices, make personal sacrifices and spare the life of a worthy adversary. This is the being who can be kind and loyal, and in turn, let itself trust others. It is the personality that lets itself care deeply about others (sometimes too deeply, unleashing the beast).

**The evil personality** succumbs to rage, prejudice, and revenge. It is cold, often calculating, and merciless. This is the personality that gives in to base desires (lust, greed, revenge, hate, etc.) and engages in betrayal, theft, torture, murder and revenge. This is the personality who will cheat at games, backstab a friend, murder an unarmed foe, torture a suspect, and engage

in wholesale slaughter and destruction. This is the beast. The manifestation of hate and cruelty. Once let loose, one must appeal to the Angel side to stop it, lest the demon run rampant and unchecked.

**Which side, good or evil, is dominant,** varies with the individual Angel-Demon Serpent and who it associates with. These enigmatic and unpredictable beings are social chameleons who tend to take on the morals, ethics and emotions of those around them. If that group is *good*, the Angel-Demon is giving, kind and compassionate, fighting to help and protect those in need and standing up for justice. If that group is *evil*, the Angel-Demon is wicked, giving in to cruelty, aggression, and violence, delighting in intimidation, humiliation, hurting, tormenting and killing others.

**An ever changing heart.** If its associates or anybody the creature has come to care about are slain, a *good* Angel-Demon is likely to respond in one of two ways (pick one or roll percentile for random determination).

01-70%: Turns into an *angel of vengeance* who hunts down those responsible to be punished. In most cases, that punishment will be torture and death, after which the good Angel-Demon will be horrified by what it has done, and flee into the wilderness. There it will contemplate its actions and may return to a life trying to be good or become a selfish lone-wolf who watches out for itself and tries not to care about others ever again.

71-00%: Gives up on being good (it doesn't pay and only leads to heartache and disappointment), and turns to being evil and self-serving, at least for now. However, an Angel-Demon with a dominant good side will always be attracted to kindness, justice and goodness, and will return to being good, as best it can. Moreover, even when it turns to "evil" it will be Aberrant evil and display acts of kindness, compassion and mercy.

Conversely, an *evil* Angel-Demon who sees his friends killed may have one of the following reactions (pick one or roll percentile dice for random determination):

01-25%: Unleashes its wrath upon those responsible by hunting them down, torturing and killing them (and anybody who gets in its way)!

26-50%: Hounds, haunts, terrorizes and undermines those responsible until they *wish* they were dead. At which point the creature leaves them be. They are not spared out of mercy, but because the creature tires of the fun and games, and by leaving them alive, his victims remain living in fear, never knowing if or when he may return to extract final retribution. Final retribution is not likely to ever come (not that they know this), unless their paths cross again in the future. Old enemies are the Angel-Demon's most hated, and evoke powerful emotions difficult to control.

51-75%: Decides there has been enough killing, spares their lives and flees to start a new life as a good being; at least for a while. This is not likely to last however, as the Angel-Demon will return to its vile ways.

76-00%: Decides there has been enough killing, brings them to justice by turning them over to the authorities (rather than being judge, jury and executioner itself), and flees to start a new life as a good being; again, at least for a short while.

**The never-ending battle.** Whenever an Angel-Demon is faced with a difficult decision or intense emotions, especially

anger, hate and revenge, the creature will *ALWAYS* be tempted to give in to wickedness and commit acts of cruelty, murder and bloodletting (often on a large scale).

During such periods, the character will look toward its associates and allies for direction. Unfortunately, this is usually done in an indirect and emotional way, like screaming a war cry and shouting or growling something like, "I say we make them pay. Make them pay with their blood!" (Or lives, or women or any number of brutal, cruel and deadly ways). While this is a proclamation of the creature's thoughts, emotions, and desires, it is also a *plea* to be calmed down and convinced otherwise. Accomplishing that feat may be difficult, for the Angel-Demon can always make a strong argument for retribution and murder. But even those with a dominant evil personality can usually be swayed, if nothing else, to bring the brigands to justice and leave their fate in the hands of the law rather than taking matters into their own hands.

Some are more aware of their diverse dual nature and hot emotions than others. These, whether predominately good or evil, are more likely to turn to outside influences in making important or life and death decisions, or before engaging in cruelty, violence or criminal acts. While some will turn to seek or ask what their comrades are doing, and act similarly, many others turn to bizarre *means of chance*. Since they are dual personalities, most prefer things that have a fifty-fifty chance such as flipping a coin; i.e., heads you win (and are spared), tails you lose (and are tortured and/or killed)! Common means for this determination include 1) The traditional coin toss, 2) cutting cards (numbers vs face cards), and 3) the roll of the dice (low numbers represent one side, high numbers the other; 50/50), but any similar method of *chance* will suffice. As a rule, the Angel-Demon will let his opponent/victim or those representing the opposing view "call" which spectrum of chance they want (i.e. "Heads" or "Tails"). The creature NEVER cheats in these matters and if an opponent is discovered to have cheated, it is his death warrant, no ifs, ands or roll of the die about it.

**Life in the Northern Hinterlands.** Nobody knows who or what Angel-Demons are or where they come from. They worship no deity and accept no being as their master. They seem to have an instinctive dislike and distrust of true demons and Deevils, and often oppose them. Angel-Demons appear to be natural born warriors empowered by magic and often live the lives of wandering warriors and errant knights. Those who are inherently good, regularly join up with adventuring groups and men at arms, sometimes staying with them for years before something breaks the group apart or the mortals leave. On the other hand, inherently selfish and evil Angel-Demons often ally themselves with other selfish or evil or magical beings. This may include any practitioner of magic or creatures of magic such as dragons, Lizard Mages, Scarecrows, Sphinxes, Syvan, Za, Dragon Wolves, Wolfen and others, to pirates, bandits and tyrant lords. Their dual nature surfaces again, for while they dislike the trappings of civilization and avoid towns and cities (the Coastlanders of the Shadow Colonies have never seen one in their domain), Angel-Demons crave the company of others, particularly warriors and sorcerers, whether they be human, Gnome, Wolfen, Minotaur or anything in between. They also have a fondness for beauty and enjoy watching such creatures as the unicorn and Pegasus as well as such things as a field of flowers, a beautiful person, a child at play, and the miracle of birth.



Angel-Demons can weather winters in the Hinterlands without difficulty, and are one of the few creatures who can be found outside in the dead of winter and in the worst of conditions, playing in the snow, flying about, hunting or battling Winter Storm Ice Demons or other monsters from the mountains.

Powerful, capable warriors with the ability to fly and empowered with elemental magic, one would think they could go anywhere in the world, but they are only found in the Northern Hinterlands and the neighboring mountains. Once in a great while, they will accompany adventurers or go exploring in the Great Northern Wilderness, but have never been seen farther south than the Disputed Lands, and seeing one anywhere outside the Hinterlands or beyond the Northern Mountains is a rarity. If captured and taken to another land, once the Angel-Demon escapes, the creature will not tarry for long before beginning its trek back home. While such a journey may take years and involve numerous adventures and side trips along the way, the Angel-Demon will return home.

One legend suggests Angel-Demon Serpents have no other choice, because they were created by the powers that defeated the dreaded Old Ones to guard the mountains and destroy any vile fiend that should escape their prison in the Land of the Damned. The story says that sometime before the Time of a Thousand Magicks, some malevolent power among the Damned launched an escape over the mountains. To overcome the Angel-Demons, a powerful magic was worked to turn them to evil. The will and fury of the Angel-Demons prevailed and the monsters were forced back, half their forces slaughtered and their leaders slain. When the battle was done, the Angel-Demons stood triumphant, but were forever changed. The evil magic meant to turn them into minions of darkness, had not failed in its entirety, and although their heroic side remains, it now battles daily with evil has caused them to forget their purpose and who created them. Thus, the Angel-Demons are drawn to the Hinterlands and Northern Mountains, though they know not why, and instinctively hate demonkind and recognize the faces of evil from the Age of Chaos and know to destroy them.

Many scholars (and the creatures themselves) scoff at such legends. However, there may be some truth in this tale. For Angel-Demons are immortal unless slain, and have dim memories of their past. Events that happened more than a thousand years ago are all but forgotten, and those more than 500 years ago dim and fading memories. In fact, some believe this fading memory prevents the creatures from mastering many human skills and ever gaining more experience than eighth or ninth level.

### Angel-Demon Serpent R.C.C.

**Note:** This character is best suited as a villain or Non-Player Character (NPC) used by the Game Master. However, if the G.M. allows it, and the player is experienced enough to not overshadow the other players in the group, the Angel-Demon may be allowed as a player character. This is entirely left to the G.M. and players should respect his wishes and not protest if he says no.

**Alignment:** Unique and conflicted; see description above. Those who lean toward good will be Unprincipled (with inclinations toward Aberrant evil) and those who lean toward evil will be Miscreant (with inclinations toward Unprincipled).

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D6+4, M.E. 1D6, M.A. 2D6+4, P.S. 2D6+18, P.P. 1D6+16, P.E. 2D6+12, P.B. 2D6+5 (would be higher if not

for its serpentine and monstrous aspects), Spd. 3D6+6 (running/slithering) and 4D6+44 (35 to 45 mph/56 to 72 km; flying).

**Gender:** 55% are male, 45% are female.

**Hit Points:** 6D6+30 +10 per (perceived) level of experience.

**S.D.C.:** 1D4x10+16

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 11 when first seen or when facing an irate character.

**P.P.E.:** P.E. attribute number x10, plus 10 points per level of experience.

**Average Level of Experience:** 2nd to 4th level for player characters, 4th to 9th level for NPC characters and villains. Note, every time this character reaches 7th level, roll on the following table which takes into account the fading memory and other factors that make up the abilities of these strange beings.

01-14%: Forgotten experiences. Reduce the character to second level and start over!

15-28%: Forgotten experiences. Reduce the character to third level and start over.

29-42%: Forgotten experiences. Reduce the character to fourth level and start over.

43-56%: Doing fine, continues to gain experience til next level; at that time, roll again.

57-70%: Doing fine, continues to gain experience up through level nine. Upon reaching tenth level the character drops down 2D4 levels and starts again!

71-86%: Doing fine, continues to gain experience up to level eight. Upon reaching eighth level the character drops down 1D4 levels and starts again!

87-00% Frozen at current level until that same amount is reached again (starts as zero), at which point the character can advance to 8th level and up toward 9th. Upon reaching ninth, drops down 1D6 levels.

**O.C.C.s:** Not available, basically a Soldier-Warlock dual class R.C.C.

**R.C.C. Skills & Skill Bonuses:** Lore: Demons & Monsters (+25%), Basic Math (+10%), Land Navigation (+20%), Astronomy & Navigation (+10%), Tracking Humanoids (+10%; +15% if tracking demons, Deevils or humanoid monsters), Track (not trap) Animals (+10%), Identify Plants & Fruits (+15%), Climb, Swim, W.P. Blunt, Hand to Hand: Martial Arts and two Military skills of choice (+10%) excluding Field Armorer.

**Natural Abilities:** Superior physical strength, agility and endurance, good sense of hearing and smell, flies at speeds of 35 to 45 mph (56 to 72 km), hawk-like vision, Nightvision 2000 feet (610 m), can see the invisible, impervious to cold, resistant to heat (half damage), impervious to poison and disease (and can eat raw meat and spoiled food), impervious to supernatural possession, and can use their prehensile tail to strike an opponent. The creature can also swim, survive depths of up to one mile (1.6 km), and breathes underwater like a fish.

Bio-regenerates at a rate of 2D6 per melee round and can regrow lost limbs and appendages like a snake, only the Angel-Demon does so within 48 hours! Does not fatigue unless it has not slept or meditated in over three days. Only needs 3 hours of sleep a day.

**Enemy of Supernatural Evil:** Punches and magic do double damage to creatures that are supernatural and evil, including witches, Necromancers, demons, Deevils and gods! Tends to rely on magic powers and raw strength when fighting, but may also use other weapons from time to time.

Also see bonuses, magic and psionics.

**Limitations:** Demon blades designed to slay angels and the forces of good do double damage, and most other weapons and magic have their normal affect. Silver weapons have no significance to this character.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Those gained from Hand to Hand: Martial Arts and level of experience, plus two additional attacks/actions per melee.

**Damage:** Punch: 2D4+P.S. damage bonus, tail slash: 2D6+P.S. damage, bite: 1D6 or by weapon.

**Bonuses:** +2 to initiative on the ground, +4 on initiative from the air, +3 to strike and parry, +3 to dodge on the ground, +5 to dodge when airborne, +6 to save vs Horror Factor, +6 to save vs possession (impervious to possession by supernatural beings). These are all in addition to probable attribute bonuses or Hand to Hand combat bonuses.

**Magic:** Knows all Water and Fire Warlock spells from levels 1-5, plus any other Warlock spells involving cold or ice, and Eternal Flame, Flame of Life and Fire Whip. P.P.E.: 200+

**Psionics:** Minor Psychic with the abilities of Meditation, Mind Block and Empathy. I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number +4D6 and an additional 1D6 per level of experience.

**Average Life Span:** Appear to be immortal, however, they only remember the last 500-1000 years of their lives. Can be slain by the use of magic, psionics and violence.

**Value:** None per se. Can make a welcomed if unpredictable and rash companion.



**Habitat:** The Northern Hinterlands (Ophid's Grasslands included, but more common in the forest) and the Northern Mountains. Relatively rare, their exact numbers are unknown, and it is not known if they can reproduce. Some Angel-Demons seem young, but that may be attributed to their forgetting things and having to relearn and rebuild their levels of experience. It is believed that approximately 10,000 are scattered across the tens of thousands of square miles that are the Northern Hinterlands, with an equal number in the Hinterlands side of the mountains.

**Languages:** Magically understands and speaks *all* languages, but can not read a single word.

**Enemies:** An instinctive dislike and distrust of true demons and Deevils, and other evil supernatural beings including gods, the undead, Witches, Necromancers and most of the dark beings, found in the Land of the Damned. Consequently, they are easily provoked into battling such creatures, and enjoy

killing demons and monsters. One creature that has become something of a natural enemy in the Hinterlands is the *Winter Storm Ice Demon*, described at the end of this section.

**Allies:** Potentially anybody, but prefer men at arms and men of magic.

**Physical Appearance:** A winged, golden skinned Elf with the lower body of a serpent. See the opening description for complete details.

**Size:** 14-18 feet (4.3 to 5.5 m) long from the top of the head to the tip of its tail. The Angel-Demon stand in such a way that its upper torso is in an upright position. Its natural level of height when on the ground is seven or eight feet (2.1 to 2.4 m), but the serpent-like character can raise or lower itself to be eye level with anyone 3-12 feet (0.9 to 3.6 m) tall, as desired.

**Weight:** Approximately 800-1,000 lbs (360 to 450 kg).

**Notes:** The character's diet is very similar to a human's, with a taste for meat, fish, vegetables, fruit and nuts, but a preference for none. It can also eat certain roots and is able to gorge itself like a snake, eating the equivalent of 3-6 mixed meals to go for as many days without food. Moreover, it can survive without penalty on one third the amount of food required by humans and can eat raw meat.

## Arrowhead

In the plains of Ophid's Grasslands and the southern forests of the Hinterlands lives a creature known as the Arrowhead, also known as the "Armored Buffalo." Arrowhead are large, lumbering herbivores with a body not unlike that of a buffalo or bull. Like a buffalo, these exotic animals have oversized heads that make them look clumsy and top heavy. In the case of the buffalo, that look is deceptive. Not so for the Arrowhead. Their huge head and shoulders are covered with a thick bony carapace that renders this part of the creature virtually invulnerable against physical attack. However, the great weight of this natural armor also makes the creatures slow and off-balance. They do alright when walking or trotting, and can even run in a straight path, but it would be too much to expect any really fast running, sharp turns or quick maneuvers. Attempting stunts such as these often causes the beasts to wipe out spectacularly, tumbling and bowling over anything in their path. A fall can sprain or break a leg, which makes the animal vulnerable to predators. Thus, Arrowheads almost never run unless they have no other option (like being confronted with an advancing forest fire or relentless hunter). Not even a cruel taskmaster whipping an Arrowhead's unarmored flank can make it move any faster than a brisk trot.

The Arrowheads' lack of evasive abilities is more than compensated by their armored upper body which is also covered in tiny spikes reminiscent of a blowfish or small arrowheads. Growing out of the thick bony carapace are thousands upon thousands of tiny, bony quills. Not only will a predator hurt itself trying to bite or claw at the rock hard head or neck, but the Arrowhead can shred attackers with head butts that rip at its opponent's flesh. As if that were not enough, the creature can, if truly fearful for its life (Arrowheads are notoriously calm under attack), fire a dozen of these arrowhead-like spines at will. Given that the Arrowhead can turn its head a full 130 degrees to





either side, the beast has a wide field of fire, making it almost impossible to get into its "blind spot" or haunches. What's more, Arrowheads tend to gather in small herds of 6-36 members and will cluster together, heads facing out, rear ends protected inside the circle. These armored grazing animals will usually stand their ground, snorting, bellowing, stomping their feet and head butting whatever it is that's threatening them. If that doesn't chase the attacker away, then a volley or two of arrow spikes should. After that, they will hold their ground and open fire until the attacker withdraws or dies. One to three of the bulls may also charge out a few yards (meters) to frighten or ram the attacker and quickly shuffle back into the circle, always trying to keep their opponent in front of them so the Arrowhead can bat the attacker away with its head or shoot him with its spines. Only if caught outside the circle defense will an Arrowhead consider firing all its barbs to defend itself.

Many predators, hunters and other monsters have learned the hard way, that attacking a group of Arrowheads on the ground is almost certain suicide. Far better to try attacking the dim-witted beasts from the air above their eye level and at a safe height using one's own arrows, spears or magic to kill the beast. Attacks from the air are confusing to the animal and their heavy, armor plated heads weigh too much for them to raise them very high. Thus, most will continue to stand their ground until one or two fall, at which point the frightened animals will make a run for it. (The sheer weight of their armored heads makes it impossible to look higher than straight ahead.)

Otherwise, to kill an Arrowhead, one must lure one or more of the animals out of the defensive circle (or catch one alone) and strike with several attackers. This is usually done by having one or two attackers in the front to attract the beast's attention, while two or more hunters circle around to its side or behind to attack before the creature knows they are there. The two in the front are in the greatest danger, but using this tag-team approach is the most effective way to hunt Arrowheads. Of course, one

can always try to outmaneuver the awkward animal to attack its vulnerable side or rear. A hunter can even leap on its back, behind the great armor plate above its shoulders. However, a "one on one" attack can be deadly. Falling under the feet of this one ton animal can lead to death by trampling, but hunting them alone is also the most fair and challenging, at least according to Kankoran, who rarely bushwhack or attack Arrowheads en masse. (Where's the challenge or sport in that?) Arrowhead meat is delicious, tasting like prime beef, and Kankoran, Wolfen and other northern people consider the animal's brain and heart to be delicacies.

Though dangerous to hunt, Arrowheads are not particularly aggressive. If left alone, the lumbering beasts will ignore travelers and pack animals coming within 150 feet (46 m), and even then the Arrowheads will only move and perhaps begin to gather and make a circle, just in case.

Unless attacked first, these calm, easy-going, animals are nothing to fear. After all, they are like gentle but armored and spiked cows.

Being so difficult to kill and deadly when cornered, most inhabitants in the Hinterlands do not find Arrowheads to be a viable food source. Not when there is such an abundance of easier and tasty prey from deer and wild boar to all manner of fowl. The Arrowhead's carapace has no value because once the ani-



mal is killed, it becomes brittle and splinters when worked on. Human barbarians (and sometimes Coyles) occasionally stampede herds into enemy camps to inflict damage or cause confusion, but even that is a dangerous and difficult proposition unless the camp is in a relatively straight line from the Arrowheads. And because these Armored Buffalos run in a straight line, they are easily dodged and avoided. Those who live in the Hinterlands also know that Arrowheads seldom spook to stampede, so any such run has to be a deliberate attack or ruse by bandits or raiders.

Arrowheads will, over time, develop a kind of trusting bond with those who live around them and they are sometimes domesticated by tribal clans and small villages. However, slaughtering the tough Arrowhead is a long and difficult process that will cause the animal to *fight back* with deadly force (and flying arrowheads) no matter how tame it is. Females can be milked but the milk is bitter and less appetizing than a cow's. They also make lousy beasts of burden, for they are slow, lazy and awkward. Push or whip one too hard, and the taskmaster is like to get head butted, kicked or shot full of Arrowhead spines! Thus, if they are kept at all, it is as a guard animal or pet, not that they can be made to attack or fire on command. Still, the animals will eventually come to accept their keepers as fellow members of the herd, so when the village is attacked, the Arrowheads feel that their entire herd is under fire, and are thus easy to move to form a protective ring around a small cluster of people, and fire upon any perceived attackers who rush them, just as they would in the wild. At this point, the Arrowheads' legendary dim-wittedness is temporarily replaced by a savant-like ability to discern friend from foe. Those who are friends can move behind and even climb on top of the encircled Arrowheads, using the armored creatures as cover. Those who are enemies had better not get within arrowhead quill-launching range or else they will get perforated in short order.

Unless in their hyper-defensive mode, Arrowheads are fairly dumb animals, unable to think their way out of the simplest problems. This makes them unsuitable as draft animals or steeds, which is why the Shadow Colonies gave up long ago on any efforts to raise these beasts on a large scale. Still, those who have the ability to communicate with animals report that Arrowheads are very easy to deal with, as long as a person doesn't try to make them do something contrary to their ponderous, laid-back nature.

**Alignment:** Considered Unprincipled or Anarchist.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D4+1 (animal), M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 4D6+12, P.P. 2D6, P.E. 1D6+16, P.B. 2D6, Spd.: 2D6+8

**Hit Points:** 2D4x10

**S.D.C.:** 3D6x10

**Natural A.R.:** 17 for the head and shoulders area, which the creature makes sure to keep pointed toward an attacker or predator. The rest of the body has only an A.R. 9.

**Horror Factor:** 8, because they are not aggressive.

**Average P.P.E.:** 2D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** None.

**Natural Abilities:** Track by smell (45%), nightvision 200 feet (61 m), reasonably good vision and hearing, great strength and good endurance. See damage for info on their quill attack.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Three.

**Damage:** Bite: 1D6. Stomp or Kick: 2D6+ P.S. damage bonus. Head Butt: 4D6+P.S. damage (takes into consideration getting raked by a dozen or more arrowhead spines). Ram: 1D4x10+P.S. damage (counts as two attacks and requires a full running start, which usually takes half to an entire melee round just to get up to speed).

**Arrowhead Quill Attack:** Can only be fired in small volleys of a dozen or two. The volley fans out to spray an area that is roughly 10 feet (3 m) wide. Those in front of the beast within 12 feet (3.6 m) will get struck by 1D6 arrowheads. Those within 13-20 feet (4-6 m) will get struck by 1D4 and those 21-60 feet (6.4 to 18.3 m) away will be hit by only a single arrowhead. Of course, those at point-blank range (closer than 8 feet/2.4 m) will get hit by the brunt of the volley, taking 1D6+4 arrowheads.

**Damage:** 1D6 per each arrowhead. However, unlike "arrows," these short, arrowheaded projectiles will embed themselves into the flesh and muscle under the skin, requiring them to be "dug" and/or "pulled" out like giant splinters, causing another 1D4 points of damage to remove them. Not removing the arrowhead causes an additional 1D4 points of damage an hour, and healing can NOT be performed until after the arrowhead has been removed. Having one stuck in the character's body causes debilitating pain (reduce speed by 30% if shot in the leg, 10% for anywhere else on the body and -1 to all combat moves such as strike, parry, etc.).

**Range:** Most effective at 20 feet (6 m) or closer, but maximum range is 60 feet (18.3 m).

**Payload:** The typical Arrowhead has enough quills for 2D6+6 attacks. Each blast counts as one melee attack.

**Note:** The arrowhead quills grow back in about 1D4+1 weeks.

**Bonuses:** +3 to strike, +1 to parry with head, +1 to dodge, +4 to strike with arrowhead quills, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, and +2 on all other saving throws. Does not include any attribute bonuses.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** 50 years.

**Value:** Arrowhead quills may be salvaged and used for the tips of real arrows and crossbow bolts (normal arrow damage), as well as spikes/spines for clubs (2D6 damage) or primitive knives (1D4 damage).

**Habitat:** Any grassy or thin forested areas will do, but native to the Northern Hinterlands, with 70% found in and around Ophid's Grasslands.

**Languages:** Not applicable.

**Enemies:** None, per se. Arrowheads are fairly easy-going creatures and do not innately dislike any other creatures. Predators will be recognized as such, but so long as they do not attack them, the Arrowheads will be content to live and let live without incident.

**Allies:** Occasionally the humanoids who domesticate them.

**Physical Appearance:** These ungainly creatures look like a big buffalo with a huge head and shoulders covered by a bony carapace. Embedded into this carapace are thousands of needle-like quills which the Arrowhead can bristle out and fire.

**Size:** Six feet (1.8 m) tall at the shoulder and eight feet (2.4 m) long.

**Weight:** 2,000 to 2,500 lbs (900 kg to 1,125 kg).



**Notes:** Eat grass, weeds, shrub bushes, and tree bark. Mature females can give birth to one or two calves about once every 22 months (8 month gestation period).



## Bearmen of the North

Bearmen of the North are something of a frightening oddity to the rest of the world. Although they can be found in the Old Kingdom Mountains, the islands of Phi and Lopan, the Disputed Lands and occasionally elsewhere in the Eastern Territory, they are most common in the north. The northeastern corner of the *Great Northern Wilderness* harbors the greatest concentration of these giants, about 42% of the world's population, but it is from the *Northern Hinterlands* that Bearmen originate. The Hinterlands are still home to about 21% of their total population (mostly in the forested half of the country) with another 10% in the *Northern Mountains* and 8-10% in the *Land of the Damned* (where, rumor has it, they are a foot/0.3 m taller, 200 lbs/90 kg heavier, 1D6 points stronger, and even more savage).

Their size, strength and monstrous appearance have made Bearmen hugely popular in the gladiatorial arenas of the *Western Empire*, and to a considerably lesser degree in *Timiro* and the *Land of the South Winds*. Seen as an ally and cousin to the hated Wolfen, Bearmen gladiator slaves are becoming increasingly popular in the arenas of the *Eastern Territory*, particularly in the *Disputed Lands*. Western slavers relentlessly hunt, capture and drag Bearmen to the Empire as warrior slaves con-

demned to a life of imprisonment in the arena. This ruthless practice has made many Bearmen hate and distrust humans and Elves.

Bearmen are notoriously solitary creatures intolerant of others regardless of race, and who prefer to be left alone. Their hatred and intolerance for other intelligent beings is legendary. Many seem to resent their very existence on the face of the planet and are hot tempered, outspoken and rude in the extreme. Bearmen are very blunt creatures and say what's on their minds with little regard for the other person's feelings, politics or allegiances. Consequently, they are usually rude, abrupt and insult-



ing. Most see the multitude of adventurers who come and die in the Northern Hinterlands as weak and stupid. They respect courage and fair play, but tend to see even the most heroic warrior or wizard as a foolish outsider who should go home. Generally speaking, Bearmen cannot understand why humans, Elves, and Dwarves stick their noses in other people's business and find politics and civilization to be insane and annoying.

Most Bearmen have no interest in politics, power, fame or treasure and are content living off the land as hunters and trappers. Two common vices include sweets and alcohol (especially mead and Dwarven beer). They have few needs and spend most of their booty on food, drink, animal traps and heavy weapons. Although rarely professional thieves or raiders, Bearmen will often "shake down" travelers, threatening and posturing to coerce weaker beings into giving them a few small odds and ends such as booze, sweets, food, trinkets and/or a weapon or two. Their dislike for others is only occasionally overcome by their desire to get drunk in some small town or with a band of adventurers. Everybody knows to give a cranky Bearman a wide berth and to never cheat or challenge one of these giants when they are intoxicated. A drunk Bearman does not know his own strength, and once a Bearman sobers up to learn he was cheated, the warrior will seek out those responsible with a vengeance, challenge them to combat and either make mincemeat of them or beat them to a pulp and strip them of everything they have of value. That will include food, water, and clothing, even though the Bearman is likely to rip and throw things he doesn't need or finds to be "stupid."

For all their antisocial behavior and threatening posture, Bearmen are not particularly aggressive. Most are loners who just want to be left alone to do as they please. They rarely attack anyone without a reason (although being pestered or insulted may be reason enough) and even more rarely join forces with kings, mercenaries, or bandits looking for conquest or trouble. The typical Bearman wanders the Hinterlands and Great Northern Wilderness living off the land as a hunter, trapper or ranger, although some become mercenaries or take up a life as an adventurer or other occupation.

Many scholars believe the Bearmen are the result of some magical experiment gone awry, and that they killed their masters long ago in a bid to be free. Others believe they are native to the Palladium World and evolved in the Great Northern Wilderness along with the Wolfen and other canine races.

**Alignment:** Any, but mostly Aberrant or Anarchist.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D6+1, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 5D6, P.P. 4D6, P.E. 6D6, P.B. 3D6, Spd. 3D6.

**Hit Points:** P.E. attribute number plus 1D6 per level of experience.

**S.D.C.:** 2D4x10 plus those gained from O.C.C.s and physical skills.

**Natural A.R.:** 11

**Horror Factor:** 14

**Average P.P.E.:** 3D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** Any men of arms, but most tend to be Rangers or Mercenaries. Bearmen have no interest in magic.

**Natural Abilities:** Nightvision 10 feet (3 m), poor day vision (about 120 feet/36.6 m), superior sense of smell and hearing, prowl (28%), track by smell (68%), swim (70%), climb (60%/50%) and recognize poison (90%). Their heavy fur and

blubber make them resistant to cold and they are virtually impervious to hypothermia and frostbite.

**Attacks Per Melee:** +1 attack per melee round, in addition to hand to hand combat training.

**Damage:** Claws: 2D6 plus P.S. bonus, power punch: 4D6 plus P.S. bonus (counts as two attacks), bite: 2D4, head butt: 1D6, or by weapon (of which large axes and swords are favored).

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, and +1 to save vs Horror Factor at levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Standard.

**Average Life Span:** 60 years.

**Habitat:** Lightly inhabited regions of the Great Northern Wilderness, Ophid's Grasslands, Land of the Damned, and the northern half of the Eastern Territory. They are occasionally found in Phi, Lopan, the Old Kingdom and throughout the Eastern Territory, usually in forest or forest-covered mountains.

**Languages:** Wolfen; 20% have knowledge of either Giantese or Faerie Speak.

**Enemies:** Everybody, but they especially hate Bug Bears.

**Allies:** Kankoran and Faeries are tolerated.

**Physical Appearance:** Huge, hulking, bear-like creatures. They have dark brown or black fur.

**Size:** 9-10 feet tall (2.7-3.0 m).

**Weight:** 1200-1400 pounds (540-630 kg).

**Notes:** Bearmen never use armor because it impairs their movement and they believe that armor is for cowards and humans. However, they will wear arm and leg bands, vambraces and gauntlets. Most are resourceful warriors who will use whatever weapon may be at hand, be it a sword or a club, or a table or door torn from the hinges. If a Bearman comes across a weapon he likes, he may keep it until it breaks. Large, two-handed swords, giant axes, and small trees (used as clubs) are favorite weapons. They tend to view magic weapons and items with suspicion, but may become attached to one if given the chance.

Fewer than 30,000 Bearmen are believed to exist in the Palladium World. Of those, 80% are found in the Northern Wilderness. Many scholars consider them to be a dying race. However, nobody knows their exact numbers, and most scholars do not know at least 6,000-9,000 Bearmen inhabit the Northern Mountains and an equal number dwell in the Land of the Damned.

The typical Bearman of the North finds Wolfen to be one of the more tolerable races, but even they are too power-hungry, civilized and human-like for their taste. They hate the mischievous and treacherous Coyles as much as any human, and dislike most other nonhumans. The only intelligent creatures a Bearman can be said to truly respect and (believe it or not) actually like are Kankoran and Drakin. They sometimes befriend some of the gentler Faerie Folk too.







## Bug Bears

Bug Bears are a strange race of mischievous, cruel humanoid beasts who resemble vicious Teddy Bears. They appear to be indigenous to Ophid's Grasslands which makes up the southern half of the Northern Hinterlands. Some sorcerers and scholars suspect they come from another dimension linked to the infamous Devil's Mark, while others have suggested that these magical beings may be related to Faerie Folk like Kelpie, Kinnie Ger, Puck, and other relatively large denizens of Faerie. Bug Bears are barbaric nomads who wander the grasslands gathering roots and wild berries, and hunting small humanoids and occasionally game animals. Bug Bears feed almost entirely on other humanoids. Goblins are their favorite prey, Gnomes a close second, but they will attack a lone human, Wolfen or even Bearman if they are feeling cocky or ambitious. Bug Bears will rarely attack groups unless the intended victims are outnumbered by at least three to one. Consequently, they hunt in packs of 2D4, clad in animal skins and using crude stone and wooden tools and weapons.

Bug Bears are natural *creatures of magic* able to turn invisible, metamorph into full-sized bears, and teleport. Like Faerie Folk, they are very inquisitive, mischievous and shy, avoiding contact with all other creatures except to hunt them. Surprisingly, Bug Bears never molest or attack even the most helpless Faerie Folk, except for Goblins. Likewise, Faeries and their kin seldom pester Bug Bears, perhaps further indication of some distant relation between them.

Bug Bears are exclusive to Ophid's Grasslands, traveling in scattered bands or tribes as small as 4-12 to as large as 24-64

members. Scholars believe that fewer than a thousand exist, although most will admit there could easily be two or three times that number in the wilderness. Entrepreneurs from the Western Empire have taken to capturing them for wrestling and gladiatorial spectacles because of their bestial appearance and savage fighting ability.

**Alignment:** Any, but tend toward selfish and evil.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D6, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 5D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 4D6, P.B. 2D6+2, Spd. 4D6.

**Hit Points:** P.E. number plus 1D6 per level of experience.

**S.D.C.:** 6D6+10

**Natural A.R.:** None. Rarely wear armor of any kind.

**Horror Factor:** 12

**Average P.P.E.:** 2D6x10

**O.C.C.s Available:** Any men of arms, but most are the rough equivalent of a Mercenary Warrior, Ranger or Vagabond. Bug Bears rarely exceed 6th level of experience.

**Natural Abilities:** Nightvision 60 feet (18.3 m) and see the invisible. Plus the following.

**Turn Invisible at Will:** There is no limitation as to how often or how long invisibility can be maintained, but Bug Bears tend to turn invisible only when stalking, fighting or when frightened.

**Metamorphosis Into a Full-Size Bear:** This huge form can be maintained for up to 20 minutes at a time. There is no limit as to how often the mystical creature can perform the metamorphosis.

**Teleport at Will:** Distance is limited to 40 feet (12 m) maximum. Teleportation can be performed as often as once every other melee round (every other 30 seconds).

**Attacks Per Melee:** Four attacks per melee or by O.C.C. and hand to hand skill, whichever is greater.

**Damage (Bug Bear form):** Bite: 1D6, restrained claw strike: 2D4, claw strike: 2D6, or by weapon.

**Damage (Full-Size Bear form):** Bite: 2D4, restrained claw strike: 2D6, full strength claw strike: 5D6; cannot use a weapon in this form.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +3 to strike, parry and dodge, +3 to save vs magic, +3 to save vs poison/drugs, and +2 to save vs Horror Factor. **Note:** +7 to strike, parry and dodge when invisible, but only if the creature's opponent cannot see the invisible.

**Magic:** None, other than natural abilities. Also radiates strong magic and has a magic aura similar to most Faerie Folk.

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** 80 years.

**Value:** Alive and caged, 2500-3500 gold. A pelt is worth 40-50 gold.



**Habitat:** Ophid's Grasslands.

**Languages:** Wolfen and Elven.

**Enemies:** Hate Goblins with a passion, and hunt and eat them.

Gnomes are targeted mainly because of their diminutive size.

**Allies:** None. Indifferent to all other races, although these vicious scoundrels will bully, rob and hurt anybody they feel they can get over on.

**Physical Appearance:** Squat, broad, fur-covered people of great strength. Light brown colored fur, canine teeth, and vaguely bear-like features.

**Size:** 5 feet tall (1.5 m).

**Weight:** 150-200 pounds (67.5-90 kg).

**Notes:** Their favorite weapons are stone axes, hammers, spears, or clubs. They are lousy craftsmen, not familiar with armor or iron weapons. They do not worship any gods, but respect the four elemental forces of nature.

## Centaurs of the North

There are ancient records on this race of half-man, half-horse that go back thousands of years. Their origin is lost to antiquity and they have been pushed out of lands inhabited by humans, Dwarves, Orcs and Ogres. If their numbers continue to dwindle, they may soon disappear from existence.

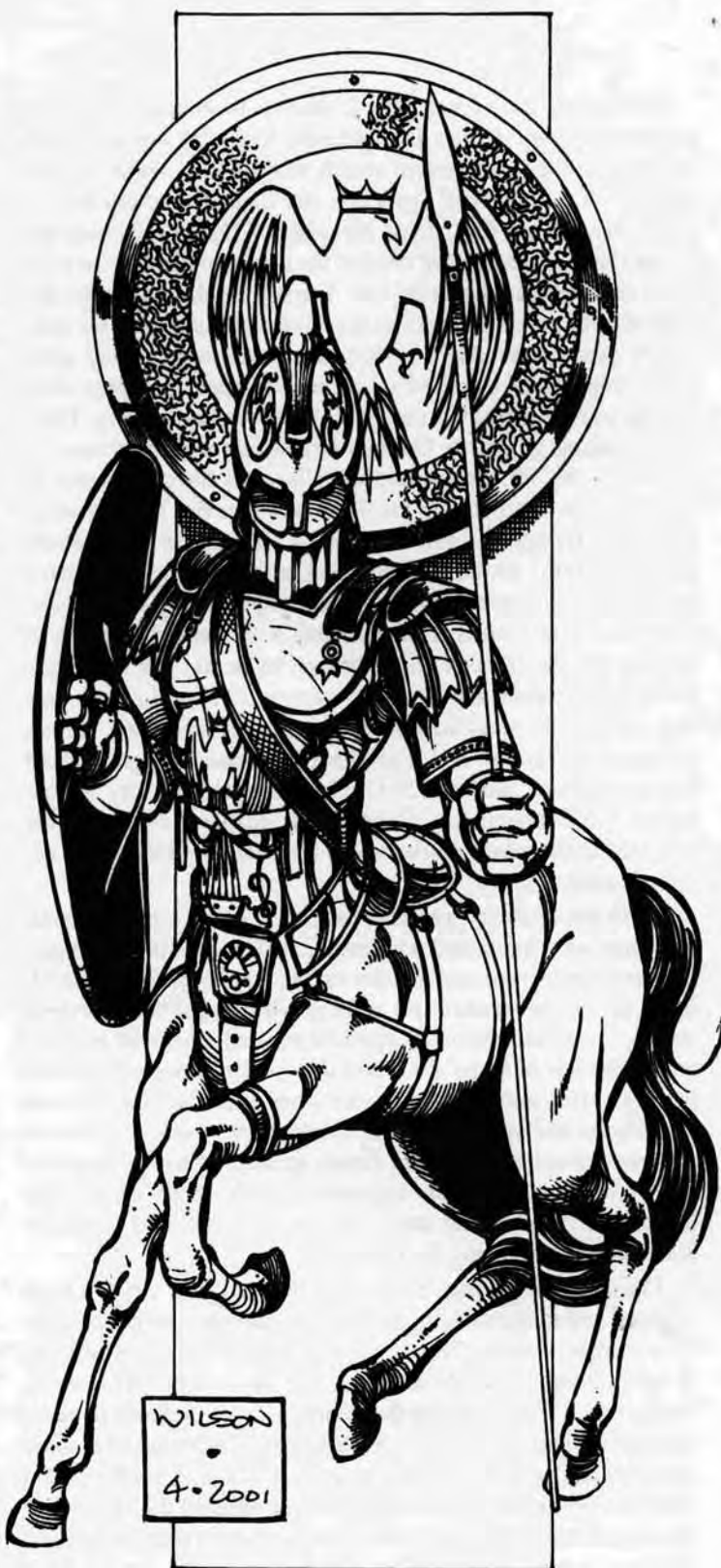
Generally speaking, Centaurs live on the open plains in tribes of 40 to 60. They are nomadic people who dislike staying in any one place longer than a season. Although they are good craftsmen, they rarely have access to a proper hearth or tools. Because of this, they will sometimes visit other, more settled peoples and trade some of their work for a chance to use a smithy. However, many have been captured, enslaved or slain at the hands of unscrupulous people. Centaurs can not live in captivity. Even a week in chains will begin to kill their spirit and weaken them (reduce Hit Points and S.D.C. by half). By the end of the second week, the Centaur will die. Nevertheless, many greedy merchants have attempted to enslave them for work or entertainment.

The Centaurs' abuse at the hands of two-legged people has made them wary of most other races. Only Elves, who have shown them friendship and kindness throughout the ages, are likely to strike an alliance with them. Once befriended, a Centaur will remain loyal for life. These creatures are magnificent hunters, archers and woodworkers.

Centaurs are primarily found in the southern parts of the Great Northern Wilderness and Northern Hinterlands. They can also be found in the Disputed Lands, although the increased number of Coyles and warfare between humans and canines have caused many of those native to that part of the world to move west.

**The Northern Hinterlands**, particularly in Ophid's Grasslands and the southern forests bordering the Grasslands, has the largest concentration of these noble and beautiful creatures. An estimated 12,000-16,000 roam Ophid's Grasslands in larger than usual tribes of 100-300. The more traditional tribes and bands of hunters can also be found in grasslands and the southern woods, with adventuresome bands of youths (2D4 individuals) exploring up into the northern forest, but staying far away from the human infested Shadow Coast and the demon haunted foothills of the Northern Mountains. A few tribes have taken to raiding the Western Empire colonies on the southern coast of the Grass-

lands. They see the Westerners as invaders ripe for plunder, and hope that their attacks will send them packing for home. Many of the colonists would love to oblige, but their masters in the Western Empire won't allow it. Meanwhile, the human colonies up north in the Shadow Coast are ignored. As long as they stay on the coast, the Centaurs (and Wolfen) could care less about them.







**Wildwind, the secret city.** Unknown to humans and most people in the world, there is a spacious, sprawling city of 16,000 Centaurs in the southwestern woods of the *Great Northern Wilderness*. It is only a half day's ride (for Centaurs; otherwise it is a 2-4 day trip on foot) from the edge of Ophid's Grasslands. These Centaurs had grown tired of the nomadic life and dared to build themselves a beautiful city literally nestled in the forest. This tribe of peaceful Centaurs have lived in this region for over twelve generations (that's 1,000 years for Centaurs). They grow some crops, have a sprawling orchard of apple and pear trees and do some fishing, but they mainly survive by hunting. Their main hunting ground is Ophid's Grasslands and the forests to the north. So far, the people of Wildwind have managed to avoid serious conflict with the Wolfen or humans. Nestled away from the civilizations and colonies of humans far to the south and the Wolfen to the far north and east, these Centaurs have managed to remain hidden while their city prospers and thrives. They have had a number of problems with marauding clans of Coyles, but the Centaurs have proven to be too fast and organized for the canine barbarians to overcome. They do some limited trade with other natives in the region, including certain Bearmen, Kankoran, and a neighboring brood of Ogres (about 100 strong with another 120 Orc hangers-on). The city is concealed in the surrounding woods and is unknown even to many who live in the north. Stories about it are assumed to be just another legend.

To fit the Centaurs' physical needs and outlook of the world, buildings were integrated with nature. This means trees and gardens are everywhere and line the streets. The majority of "buildings" are roofs standing on pillars, with large, bead covered entrances and exits (usually opposite of each other and in every wall). The use of walls are minimal, typically designed as wind breakers. This makes the city very open and spacious. The use of columns and open courtyards shielded by a back or side wall and roof, gives it an ancient Greek quality. Wood is the chief (90%) building material, augmented with some baked clay bricks and stone. Roads and paths are dirt. The river is nearby and a stream runs along the north side.

The most notable and important structure in the city is a huge foundry and metalworking facility that outsiders might mistake for a temple or arena. This is the only completely stone building in town, with two thirds of it dug into the ground like a great, roofed cellar. This is where the Centaurs make their metal weapons, armor and horseshoes. A variety of metals are processed here, including iron, bronze, copper, silver and gold. To aid them in this endeavor, the Centaurs have enlisted the aid of four Cyclops metalworkers and their families (21 Cyclops in all, half of whom are youngsters). These lightning giants are so trusted

that they are considered official and honored members of the tribe, a position the Cyclops cherish. Not only do the giants help work metal and mold armor, but they also supply the Centaurs' top warriors (the Lightning Riders, a legion of 800) with quivers of lightning javelins.

**The Lightning Riders** are the chief defenders of Wildwind, augmented by a volunteer militia. The Lightning Riders wear a Greek or Roman style suit of half plate armor (A.R. 14, 60 S.D.C.), a helmet with a face plate that covers most of the face and a red, blue, yellow or white veil covering the mouth and chin. Standard issue weapons are a medium to large wood and metal shield, a long spear or lance (2D6 damage), and a horseman's hammer (2D6 damage), a short sword (2D4) and a quiver of six light (4D6 damage each) and 4-6 medium Cyclops lightning javelins (7D6 damage each). All are the equivalent of *Knights*. Average level of experience is third to fifth level with squad leaders being 1D4 levels higher.

Militia and other Centaur warriors (roughly 1000 strong) typically wear studded leather (A.R. 13, 40 S.D.C.) or chain armor (A.R. 14, 50 S.D.C.) or a combination of the two (A.R. 14, 52 S.D.C.). They can use any weapons they choose. About 15% of the militia are Long Bowmen, 20% Rangers and the rest Mercenary Warriors. Average level of experience is second to fourth level with squad leaders being 1D4 levels higher.

**Note:** Although peaceful, the Centaurs as a people have suffered enough at the hands of bipedal peoples to know better than to trust strangers, especially humans. As a result, bands that happen upon the city are evaluated (sized-up) as to the level of threat they represent. Those deemed to represent little danger either because they can be trusted to keep their secret or are too incompetent to be believed, are allowed to leave or invited to stay as equals. However, those deemed to be a danger to the community are either enslaved or slain! Slavers and spies are always put to death, while bandits, raiders and other aggressive, untrustworthy evil characters are also usually put to the sword. This is a lot less people than one might think, about a fifty a year, for few ever find the city of Wildwind. While this may seem like an extreme measure to some, it does not to the Centaurs who have seen 80-90% of their race wiped out, leaving probably fewer than a hundred thousand in the known world, most of them in the north lands.

**Population Breakdown of Wildwind:** Approximately 16,000 Centaurs, 60 Elves, 40 humans (half are Druids), 35 Gnomes (a third are Druids), 21 Cyclops, 15 Ogres, 12 Kankoran, 6 Bearmen, 4 Dwarves, 2 Spriggans and a Brownie. Plus, 240 slaves, 20% humans, 40% Orcs, 15% Goblins, 10% Coyles, 5% Ogres and 10% others. The population does NOT include the many Kankoran, Bearmen and Emerin who know about the city and who have a friendly relationship with it. Nor does it include any of the other independent and nomadic Centaur tribes in the surrounding wilderness. The Centaurs are concerned about the struggling colonies of the Western Empire located on the southern shores of Ophid's Grasslands and hope they fail. They are also concerned with humanity's press from the southeast into the north, and agree with the Wolfen that the Disputed Lands are part of the Wolfen Empire.

**Alignment:** Any, but mostly Principled or other good alignments.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 3D6, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 4D6, P.P. 4D6, P.E. 5D6, P.B. 3D6, Spd. 4D6x2.

**Hit Points:** P.E.+1D6 per level.

**S.D.C.:** 25 plus those gained from O.C.C.s and physical skills.

**Horror Factor:** 10

**Average P.P.E.:** 4D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** Any, but they rarely study magic. Most are Mercenary Warriors, Soldiers, Rangers, Trapper/Woodsmen, or Long Bowmen, with a small percentage being Knights, Thieves, Druids, and other occupations.

**Natural Abilities:** In addition to great speed and prowess, the Centaur can prowl (60%), track (77%), and swim (60%). These are instinctive abilities that are in addition to O.C.C. skills. Centaurs can also leap five feet (1.5 m) high, and nine feet (2.7 m) across, +1 foot high and across at levels 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Three without combat training or as per hand to hand combat skill, whichever is greater.

**Damage:** Kick with front legs: 2D6, kick with hind legs: 4D6, or by weapon.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +2 to parry, +3 to dodge and +4 to damage.

**Magic:** By O.C.C.

**Psionics:** Standard.

**Average Life Span:** 90 years; some live as long as 140.

**Value:** 400 to 2400 gold to unscrupulous slavers; the Western Empire and Eastern Territory love to see them fight in the gladiatorial arena.



**Habitat:** Ophid's Grasslands, southern part of the Northern Wilderness, Lopan, and the Eastern Territory.

**Languages:** Elven and two of choice (+15%).

**Enemies:** None per se, but Centaurs distrust humanoids in general.

**Allies:** Elves and Faerie folk.

**Physical Appearance:** They look like horses with a human torso coming out of the neck. The head, hands and belly are all human. Centaurs have pointed ears like Elves and tend to wear their hair in long manes, either free-flowing, in tight braids or in a ponytail.

**Notes:** Centaurs prefer bow weapons to any other. They are skilled at making long bows, crossbows, compound bows, and all kinds of arrows and bolts. They also like spears, lances and pole arms for hand to hand combat. Leaders or wealthy individuals will wear full suits of chain mail (A.R.: 14, S.D.C.: 75) or plate armor (A.R.: 17, S.D.C.: 185) into combat. This combination of armor and barding cannot be worn by any other creature. Centaurs can also wear half suits of any kind of armor. Since they have no need and little desire for gold, gems or magic, a

typical tribe has very few valuables (rarely more than 6D6 gold per character).



## Chig

The Chig is a weird arthropod that looks like a cross between a flea and a wood tick, only its body is roughly the size of a large orange. Like fleas and ticks, they are parasites, but these creatures do not drain their hosts of blood. Instead, they drain them of P.P.E.

Chigs lie in hiding and use their incredible leaping abilities to launch onto a target. When they land, they dig in with their hooked feet, insert their proboscis into the host, and suck away 1D4 P.P.E. per day. Chigs feed only on magical energy, and can not be nourished by anything else. Moreover, Chigs can not just feed by sitting in a ley line. They must drain it from a living host, the bigger the better. After all, large hosts (such as Catoblepa, Oboru or Arrowheads) often can spare the P.P.E. and do not mind the presence of a Chig as much as a humanoid might.

However, when Chigs latch on to humanoids, something unique happens. Scholars can not explain it, but while a humanoid "wears" a Chig, he can magically understand and speak all languages at 98% proficiency! Once the Chig is removed, the language ability goes away that very instant. At first, the only drawback appears to be the daily sacrifice of a few P.P.E. To that end, some Rangers, explorers and other adventurers choose to wear Chigs intentionally. There are, however, long-term negative effects from wearing a Chig, only they are not very well documented. After wearing a Chig uninterrupted (not going more than three days without wearing one such parasite) for a



long period of time, the host will begin to suffer mental instability. The effects of this deterioration vary from individual to individual. A Chig host can wear one of these parasites for as many days as he has Mental Endurance points without suffering ill effect. Every day after that, the host becomes confused and suffers a cumulative penalty of -2%. Even worse, once a week the character must save versus insanity, or suffer one randomly determined insanity. If the host makes his save, then he is good until one week later, when he must roll to save versus insanity again, only this time at -1. If the host continues to save and continues to wear his Chig, he must keep making saving throws every week until he gets rid of the parasite or until he suffers from an insanity. Each extra week adds another -1 penalty to the host, so eventually, he *will* succumb.

Once the host has received his insanity, however, he can then wear a Chig for another month before getting a second. Meanwhile, he continues to lose his skill aptitude on a daily basis. If the host has the damn bug removed he can get his insanity cured either by magic or psionic means with a +20% bonus to the success rate. Or he can slowly return to normal after 1D4+1 months of confinement and convalescence. Removing it and trying to continue to work or adventure will cause the insanity and skill penalties to remain unchanged. Until the character gets a few months rest, sleep and relaxation, the side effect of the Chig will remain indefinitely.

So far, the few folks who know of the Chigs' unique abilities have tried unsuccessfully to raise them as something of a cash crop. It seems the critters do not respond well to mass farming, and can only be harvested from the wild. Not that it makes much difference – most folks find the entire idea of using these insects to be disgusting and a little frightening. Only scholars, druids, men of magic and Kankorans will consider the use of Chigs as a universal translator (Necromancers, Witches and Summoners don't hesitate).

**Alignment:** None. Considered an animal parasite.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D4 (insect), M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 1D6, P.P. 1D6, P.E. 1D6, P.B. 1D4, Spd. 2D6+1

**Hit Points:** 2D6+2

**S.D.C.:** 2D6+24 (many have remarked about how tough these buggers are to kill!)

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Horror Factor:** 12, likewise, anybody seen wearing a Chig will have a Horror Factor of 12 because they look gross.

**Average P.P.E.:** 2D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** Not applicable.

**Natural Abilities:** Aside from their ability to siphon 1D4 P.P.E. per day from their hosts, these parasitic insects can climb rough surfaces (trees, walls, clothes, leather and chain armor, etc.), prowl 60%, and can leap 6 feet (1.8 m) high and four feet (1.2 m) across.

**Attacks Per Melee:** One.

**Damage:** A Chig inflicts one point of damage when it bites its host and has a 01-33% chance of causing a rash that will itch for 2D4 days after the bug is removed (victim is -1 on initiative because of it). Otherwise it does no further harm aside from the P.P.E. it drains.

**Bonuses:** +2 to save vs magic.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** Three to four years.



**Habitat:** Wooded, grassy climes, preferably dry. Hot, humid, tropical climates do not agree with these creatures, they like it cool. In the winter a Chig will either find a host or hibernate.

**Languages:** None.

**Enemies:** None.

**Allies:** None.

**Physical Appearance:** Like a cross between a flea and a tick; black or dark gray in color.

**Size and Weight:** About the size and weight of an orange.



## Giant Scuttle Crab

These huge land crabs are an unusual mix of alchemical tampering, human domestication, and natural instincts run wild. The result is a bizarre creature that on one hand can be a tremendous asset to those who raise and keep them. On the other hand, they

can be far more trouble than they are worth, and even downright deadly.

The Giant Scuttle Crab is a kind of rock crab that was alchemically altered eons ago so that it could live on dry land. These creatures began as just another type of rock crab found on the northern coastline of the Hinterlands and Bizantium. The ordinary crabs are fished in large number by the Shadow Colonies and shipped to Bizantium, the Western Empire and eastern ports as a delicacy. An unknown alchemist (probably the someone whose handiwork is seen in other creatures of the region) modified these crabs into something he or she hoped could be used as a steed, pack animal, guard animal, and a food source. The result was the Giant Scuttle Crab, a creature that has become a hallmark of the Northern Hinterlands.

At best, these creatures are only a modest alchemical success. They are big and strong (their carapace and endurance enable Scuttle Crabs to absorb incredible amounts of damage). And, the meat inside their shell is as delicious as their comparatively small forefathers. The problem is, they are dumber than dirt and impossible to control or domesticate. In fact, their huge size (roughly the size of a mini-bus or elephant) has made the crabs more aggressive. Only characters who have the power to control animals can use Giant Scuttle Crabs as riding animals or livestock.

Giant Scuttle Crabs can no longer breathe underwater, but in a strange quirk of fate, once a year, usually before winter, the creatures get a suicidal urge to migrate back to the ocean. Like lemmings, a thousand or more will dive headlong over cliffs or the edge of land and into the ocean where they drown. This is good in that it keeps their population under a few thousand, and many fishermen and port towns will scoop up as many as they can and have an autumn feast. Unfortunately, when Giant Scuttle Crabs are compelled to visit the ocean, the creatures become all the more aggressive, and will destroy any living thing that gets in their way. What's more, migrating Scuttle Crabs have an uncanny ability to seek each other out and form huge massed migration columns, trampling crops, smashing fences and pens, damaging buildings, frightening away or slaughtering livestock and battling any individual in their path. Fighting off one enraged Scuttle Crab is hard enough. Fighting off a small army of them is a nightmare. Fortunately, they can be diverted with barriers (something Earth Warlocks excel at making) and the monsters have never run through the center of a coastal town or city; presumably because the clusters of buildings appear as barriers that the giant crabs circle around. Outlying farms and homesteads on the other hand, may suffer severe losses.

Giant Scuttle Crabs cannot be domesticated or trained in the least, but they can be kept as livestock. The animals are dumb enough to be corralled or more often than not, kept in a huge pit with steep walls, because the giant crabs can not climb. They are good eating and the meat from a single crab can usually feed over 1000 people. The animals are extremely hardy and eat just about anything, including fresh, spoiled and rotten fruit and vegetables, table scraps, as well as grass, hay, seaweed, bushes, and carrion. Part scavenger, part predator, the Giant Scuttle Crabs will also hunt and eat virtually any kind of animal and people. Since they are garbage cans on legs, some communities use the beasts as a means to dispose of certain types of waste, reducing their disposal problems by half. Others use them in a variety of ways.

For example, **Destiny Point** has 3D6x10 on hand at any given time as livestock and keeps another dozen at a place called the "Crab Pit," a makeshift arena where visitors can try to "ride" the giant crabs bareback, the same as they might a bucking bronco. The crab's pincers are tied closed, but the crab can still use them to club and swat riders. A prize of 10,000 gold goes to anyone who can stay on the bucking and swatting monster for more than three minutes (12 melee rounds) without the use of magic, psionics or other means of mind control. They also use them in local gladiatorial combat and export them to gladiatorial arenas around the world. Four of the largest ever found are kept at the Destiny Zoo. A full 12% of Destiny Point's income is from the Giant Scuttle Crab trade. **Seabright** also pens, raises, eats and exports the live animals and "canned" crab meat to other colonies, Bizantium and beyond. Meanwhile **Inner Cadath** keeps a few hundred as livestock to be butchered and eaten by the locals.

Young Giant Scuttle Crabs (under four years of age) have no compunction to leap into the sea and kill themselves, it is only those 5-10 years old that get suicidal. The young are also not as aggressive, attacking only when provoked or extremely hungry. The older animals, however, are aggressive predators, as well as scavengers, quick to attack, kill and eat any living creature they encounter. Obviously, they prey upon large animals, such as deer, moose, Arrowheads, bears, Oboru, pigs, and livestock, and people too. Fortunately, they only attack when they feel threatened or hungry, but need to eat the equivalent of two cows or moose, or six humans, or a half ton of garbage a day.

Given the thick armor of these creatures, it takes a dedicated effort to kill one. The best way is to flip it on its back and attack the comparatively soft (A.R. 10) underbelly. While on its backs the creature loses half its attacks and all combat bonuses to strike, parry and dodge. The safest way to flip a Giant Scuttle Crab on its back is with magic or an Elemental, but long spears, pikes or poles can be used instead.

**Alignment:** Considered an Anarchist or Miscreant predator.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D4+1 (low animal intelligence), M.E. 2D4, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 3D6+20, P.P. 2D6+6, P.E. 2D6+13, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 6D6+20 running; can not swim or breathe underwater.

**Hit Points:** P.E. +30

**S.D.C.:** 5D6+100

**Natural A.R.:** 14 for the top of the body, eye stalks, mouth, legs and pincers, only 10 for the underbelly. The young have an A.R. 11 and 8 respectively.

**Horror Factor:** 13

**Average P.P.E.:** 3D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** Not applicable.





**Natural Abilities:** Powerful walking tanks, with two giant pincer arms and claws, two prehensile eye stalks that can turn 360 degrees, good speed, nightvision 200 feet (61m), semi-invulnerable to cold (one quarter damage), impervious to most disease and spoiled food. **Note:** Can NOT climb, swim or breathe underwater.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Three for young, but six for an adult. Giant Scuttle Crabs use their claws as paired weapons, and simultaneous strikes with both count only as one attack. They can also elect to engage two different opponents at the same time, with one eye stalk and claw battling one and the other eye stalk and claw engaging another (one opponent per claw).

**Damage:** Bite: 3D6. Leg Kick or Stomp: 2D6+P.S. damage bonus. Claw Strike (blunt): 3D6+P.S. damage bonus from a chopping or swatting blow. Claw Grab: 2D6 for the initial crushing grab, then 2D6 damage automatically on each subsequent attack until the Scuttle Crab lets go or the victim dies, crushed or cut in half! Scissor Power Strike (with pincer claw): 6D6+10 damage from one quick scissor-like strike. Does not grab and counts as two melee attacks.

**Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +3 to strike, parry and dodge, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, and +3 to save vs poison. All are in addition to likely attribute bonuses.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** 8-10 years, but they might live to 100 if they did not have their suicidal urges.

**Value:** Varies. 200-600 gold per animal for food. 1000 gold as an animal to fight in the arena. The young animals are usually kept as livestock and butchered for their meat, because they eat half as much as an adult and are easier to handle and kill. Their armor is not suitable for use as body armor or making tools or weapons.

**Habitat:** The coastal areas of the Northern Hinterlands and around the Dragon's Claw. They are spreading southward in small numbers and have been encountered as far as Ophid's Grasslands, although that is unusual (there aren't more than a hundred in the Grasslands). Giant Scuttle Crabs get sluggish in the winter (lose one melee attack and reduce bonuses by half), eat half as much and sleep half the time, but can survive quite well. They are among the few animals that stay active in the Dead Time.

**Languages:** They communicate with each other through a series of whistles, whines and screeches.

**Enemies:** None.

**Allies:** None.

**Physical Appearance:** Look like great big rock crabs, essentially, except their claws are a bit oversized compared to the rest of their bodies.

**Size:** The main body is 6-8 feet (1.8 to 2.4 m) in diameter, the legs extend out for another four feet (1.2 m) and the pincers extend out another six feet (1.8 m). Stands 4-7 feet (1.2 to 2.1 m) tall.

**Weight:** 3-6 tons.

**Notes:** There are at least three cults within the Western Empire that consider the Giant Scuttle Crab a holy creature. These groups often send pilgrims to the Northern Hinterlands to find these creatures and bring a few home with them. The Western Empire has tried to discourage these cults, but to no avail.

Mature Females (3+ years old) lay 1D6 eggs once every spring, buried in the forest. Eggs hatch in 2D6+60 days.

## Kankoran

The Kankoran are a canine race related to both Coyles and Wolfen. They are the smallest of the canines and most benign to humans, living a simple life in harmony with nature. Most are skilled Rangers, Long Bowmen, Trapper/Woodsmen, or Scholars or sages, and a few are healers, clergy, Shamans or Druids. Some readers might equate them to the Zen warriors and philosophers of Earth's Japan. Although a gentle, loving and compassionate people, they are fiercely protective of their remote wilderness habitat and many of the woodland creatures they share it with. Those who defile their people or the land are hunted down and slain in combat. The Kankoran are fierce, noble warriors who live by their own hard code of the forest and the cycle of life.

Kankoran society is anything but easy. As their young enter adulthood, they are required to go through a *rite of passage*. This varies according to the tribe and location, but typically involves the young Kankoran living alone, off the land, for six months to a year. Some require the slaying of a monster such as a Giant Scuttle Crab, Arrowhead, Melech, Dragondactyl, Troll, and so on. The kill must be made by an individual or pair. The rite of the *Emirin Tribe* of Kankoran is one such group. Their rite of combat requires two young Kankoran to seek out a single young Emirin and battle it to the death. Since it's a very even battle, the Emirin actually approve of this ritual.

These rites of passage are crucial to Kankoran society where all have names that reflect the rite they have endured. For example: Left-Side-Wound, Mountain Shadow, and Knife Handle are typical Kankoran names. Kankoran call scars "stripes," and respect anyone with an impressive collection of them. Outsiders who subject themselves to a Kankoran rite of passage can be accepted into their society; in fact, Kankoran often adopt "stray children" of any race and raise them as their own.

Kankoran have a rather naive view of other creatures. Wolfen, humans and subhumans are considered to be "children" unless they can show that they know how to take care of themselves in the wilderness. They find most "civilized" people to be ignorant and foolish, but often come to their aid and stop to offer strangers directions and advice.

One of the great legends of the Kankoran is that they were created by the Elves in the distant past. For this reason they respect Elves and will go out of their way to help them. They also get along with most of the gentler Faerie Folk, woodland spirits and Drakin. Most Kankoran and Bearmen share a mutual respect for each other and may come to the other's aid in times of need. *Wolfen* regard the Kankoran as the "People of the Forest" and revere them as great woodland scouts, rangers and seers in matters of the forest. Some of the greatest *Wolfen* leaders have turned to ancient Kankoran for advice or aid. *Coyles* consider the Kankoran to be stodgy, primitive fools. The Kankoran tend to dismiss the *Coyles* as the undisciplined hooligans that they are. Despite this lenient attitude, Kankoran will not tolerate *Coyles* taking action against them, their regions, or people under their protection. Most *Coyles* know when to back off from an angry Kankoran, but there have been legendary battles between Kankoran tribes attacking and decimating *Coyle* bands that outnumbered them six to one, in order for the Kankoran to extract justice or put an end to evil-doings. Make no mistake, though



**Physical Description:** Although they are canines related to the Wolfen, they have more similarity to foxes than to wolves. The body is covered in reddish brown fur, the muzzle is short and narrow, the ears are small and pointed, and the eyes are brown or green.

**Natural Abilities:** Nightvision 40 feet (12.2 m), excellent day vision (equal to a human), keen smell and hearing, and a unique understanding of nature and people. Kankoran, unlike most other beings, suffer NO penalty to prowl through the northern forests.

**Track Blood Scent:** Can follow the scent of blood up to 1000 feet (305 m) away: 30%+4% per level of experience.

**Recognize Scent of Others:** Can recognize and follow a familiar scent up to 50 feet (15 m) away: 20%+4% per level of experience; +10% to recognize and follow the scent of a mate or offspring. Roll once for every 100 feet (30.5 m) when following a scent trail. A failed roll means the trail is lost.

**Keen Hearing:** The character's hearing is as keen as a dog's.

**Attacks Per Melee:** By hand to hand training.

**Damage:** Punch or claw: 2D4+P.S. bonus, bite: 1D4.

**Bonuses:** +3 on initiative, +2 to pull punch, +1 to save vs Horror Factor at levels 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15.

**Magic:** By O.C.C. (clergy) only.

**Psionics:** Standard.

**Average Life Span:** 40+ years. Some live up to 80.

**Size:** 4 feet, 5 inches to 5 feet tall (1.4 to 1.5 m).

**Weight:** 80-140 pounds (36 to 63 kg).

**Habitat:** The Northern Hinterlands (particularly the forested half) and the Great Northern Wilderness, with the greatest concentration in the north and most remote regions. They seldom travel farther south than the Eastern Territory or Lopan. Rumors suggest that a few tribes also exist in the Land of the Damned.

**Language:** Wolfen and Gobblely at 98%.

**Enemies:** No formal enemies; dislike Coyles, demons and other destroyers or despoilers of nature.

**Allies:** Their principal allies are the Wolfen. They also have a strange alliance with the Emirin, even though certain Kankoran tribes ritually hunt those creatures as a rite of passage. They are friendly toward Faerie Folk, Bearmen, Drakin, and other woodland creatures.

**Notes:** Kankoran worship nature and elemental forces. They seldom wear armor of any kind, since they view it as disharmonious with nature. ("If we were intended to have armor, we would have shells on our backs.") They are full-time hunters who are at home in the forest and live easily off the land.

the Kankoran are the smallest of the canine races, they are by no means any less dangerous when pressed to fight.

**Alignment:** Any, but tend toward good and unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 3D6, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 3D6, P.P. 4D6, P.E. 4D6, P.B. 3D6, Spd. 4D6

**Hit Points:** P.E.+1D6 per level of experience.

**S.D.C.:** 20 plus those gained from O.C.C.s and physical skills.

**Natural A.R.:** 6; armor can afford additional protection, but Kankoran rarely wear it.

**Horror Factor:** 12

**Average P.P.E.:** 6D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** Ranger, Knight, Long Bowman, Scholar, Mind Mage, Psi-Healer, Druid, Shaman or any clergy. O.C.C. bonus of +5% to all *Wilderness* skills. This is in addition to the usual O.C.C. bonuses.





Kankoran are highly disciplined wilderness scouts, rangers and huntsmen, and they are often approached by Wolfen to serve the Empire as freelancers in that regard. A friendly folk, Kankoran provide aid and protection to all who deserve it. They are usually on the move and transport their villages of skin huts to wherever the hunting is best. They will usually be armed with obsidian daggers and obsidian-tipped spears. A typical tribe rarely numbers more than 50 members, although the inclusion of other races might swell a tribe's ranks to over 80.

## Killgore

The giant Killgore is one of the most dangerous monsters of the Northern Hinterlands. Like so many others in this region, the creature appears to be the result of a failed alchemical experiment gone wrong, for certainly mother nature could not come up with something like this. With its broad, hulking armored hide, body covered in long, spiky thorns and thick body structure, the Killgore appears to be across between a grizzly bear and a porcupine. And it's sometimes mistaken for a freakish Gigante, owing to its large size and bizarre appearance. However, the Killgore is neither bear, nor true Giant. It is some kind of aggressive beast with a dim intelligence (by human standards). These brutes walk on their knuckles like a gorilla and run on all fours in a loping motion. They stand erect, like a bear, however, to attack, and can even take several steps in an upright position before reverting to all fours. Like a bear, they strike with claws the length of short swords, and use a deadly bear hug to crush their opponents. However, this is no bear. The Killgore is covered in long, thick spines that almost look like feathers. Its head is crowned in even thicker spikes, some almost horn-like in their size and shape. These spines serve both as a natural splint-style armor and to dissuade attackers. Any predator or humanoid opponent who leaps on, grabs at or punches it will be stabbed by the sharp barbs and do little if any damage to the monster itself! The creature is tan and white with bits of black. The base of the spines to about two-thirds up is tan with the tip being an ivory white. Black highlights are scattered across the hind legs, being darkest on the bottom of the feet, palms of the hands, underarms, and throat. The long, sword-sized claws are ivory white, as is the chest area. Despite vaguely humanoid appearance, the monsters lack any skills or culture.

These creatures seem to live wretched lives of constant pain, as if their basic design is so flawed that it actually causes these monsters pain to be alive. Driven mad with agony, Killgores lash out at anything moving nearby them – animals, humanoids, other Killgores, even swaying trees! Thanks to their wretched condition, Killgores endure a life of little more than eternal torment and tantrum. Thankfully, there are few of them and they are presumed to be a dying race, with perhaps only a few hundred scattered across the Hinterlands. Given how rarely these creatures breed and how fast hunters and adventurers are killing them off, scholars believe the Killgore will go extinct within the next ten to twenty years. Until then, these creatures will continue to terrorize the Hinterlands and carve paths of destruction wherever they go. Though their enemies are many, the Killgores will not vanish from this world without leaving a huge pile of bodies and destruction behind them to mark their passing. Those who seek to destroy them had better prepare themselves for heavy casualties indeed.

Killgores, for some reason, have a tendency to gravitate toward permanent settlements of every kind. Whether they are attracted to the scents and/or sounds of humanity, or whether they instinctively attack vulnerable communities is one of the many mysteries surrounding these nightmarish beasts. Villages, towns and outposts all dread the coming of one or more Killgores (even encountering two is uncommon), for few are ever prepared for the carnage the creature can deliver, and even the most skilled warriors and wizards have difficulty repelling them.



Oddly enough, no Killgore has yet found its way to the colonies of the Shadow Coast, probably because the monsters are mostly found in the deep woods and foothills of the Northern Mountains. Consequently, many residents of the Shadow Colonies believe the Killgore is just an imaginary creature. Another myth dreamed up by crackpot hermits or hallucinating adventurers wandering in the boondocks of the Hinterlands. To them the "Killgore" is just a bogeyman with which to scare children and visiting outsiders. Presumably, the Warlocks of the Shadow Coast could repel any attack by a Killgore, but if the monster should stay on the outskirts of town, slaughtering livestock and troubling the more remote farms and homesteads, nobody would be the wiser. Indeed, trappers and adventurers go missing regularly, and camps and wilderness posts are sometimes found smashed to rubble and the ground covered in blood; the occupants missing and presumed dead. Every few years, there are also incidents in which cattle have been slaughtered in the fields, as well as the gruesome discovery of a group of locals or adventurers torn to pieces. However, there are so many monsters and dangers in the wilderness that these incidents are usually blamed on Coyles or Wolfen (a lot gets blamed on the canine races), or roving gangs of Trolls, Ogres, Giants, and other monster races, to demons and a host of other beasts, including bears and wolves. For all anyone knows, one or more Killgores could very well be operating in the vicinity of the Shadow Coast. Should the dreaded Killgore bear down on the Shadow Colonies, it will be a fine test of their military mettle.

There exist rumors that a secret organization of healers has taken to the Northern Hinterlands, aided by Rangers and Mercenary Warriors, to find as many Killgores as possible and ease them of their pain. These mysterious crusaders believe that beneath the Killgores' raging exteriors beat the hearts of gentle giants. All they need is to be relieved of the agony their flawed alchemical design puts upon them to stop their wanton destruction. So far, this group, which has no formal name but has been titled by certain bards and storytellers as the **Mercy Brigade**, has reported that they have actually caught one Killgore and performed extensive psychic surgery on it, healing its inborn injuries. They further report that afterward, the Killgore appeared thankful and happy, and lumbered into the deep forest peacefully and quietly. According to the story, the creature paused before disappearing into the trees to nod its head in thanks and to smile at those who did so much to help it.

This story would not mean so much were it not for another story regarding the Mercy Brigade. On their way back to the Shadow Colonies to replenish their provisions, the group ran afoul of a large number of Coyle raiders intent on capturing or killing as many members of the brigade as possible, and inflicting a host of tortures and assaults upon them. Halfway during the battle, when it appeared that the Coyles would slaughter the Mercy Brigade's contingent of bodyguards and defenders, something huge crashed through the trees and tore into the Coyles with a vengeance. Eyewitnesses claim it was the Killgore they had healed, accompanied by several other Killgores who all acted in unison. Within moments, the Coyles were slaughtered and the Mercy Brigade saved. The grateful members repaid the creatures' valiance by performing the same healing measures on the other Killgores. When it was all over, the half-dozen or so Killgores once again left their benefactors, seemingly aware that they owed them a debt that could never re-

ally be repaid. However, the Warlock Council at the Shadow Colonies suspect the claims are false and that the so-called *Mercy Brigade* is nothing but a cover for nefarious activities in the woodlands. Moreover, the Warlocks have gathered some evidence that a secret group of Summoners and demon worshipers have come the northern woods of the Hinterlands on a mission to find, capture and breed the Killgore, so they may turn them into an army of monsters under their thrall. What they intend to do with that army is yet to be seen. The Warlocks suspect the *Mercy Brigade* may be that group. However, wild stories, unfounded rumors and ill-conceived plots are commonplace in the Northern Hinterlands, so neither story may be true, or they both might be true.

**Alignment:** Considered Miscreant (if the story about curing the beasts is true, then they might be any alignment, including good).

**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D4+3 (animal predator), M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 4D6+20, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 3D6+6, P.B. 2D4, Spd. 2D6 knuckle walking, like an ape, +12 running on all fours. **Note:** When running on all fours, Killgores must spend one attack/action stopping and assuming their bipedal stance in order to fight with slashing claws or bear hug.

**Hit Points:** P.E.x4

**S.D.C.:** 3D4x10+20

**Natural A.R.:** 15

**Horror Factor:** 14

**Average P.P.E.:** 4D6

**O.C.s Available:** None.

**Natural Abilities:** Nightvision 300 feet (91 m), track by smell (60%), swim (55%), climb (60/40%), impervious to poison and disease, impervious to cold, resistant to heat (half damage), and regenerates 4D6+6 points of damage every 12 hours.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Five; and will usually fight until it has rendered its victims dead or unconscious, or until it is slain. The former can work to a character's advantage because the monster will often leave those it believes are dead (i.e. playing possum), maimed or dying. In fact, when there are many foes, the Killgore likes to attack, incapacitate or kill one and quickly move on to the next one in rapid succession. Running away while the beast is preoccupied with something or someone else may save the life of he who flees, for the Killgore is likely to go looking for him after it is done with the others, but will give up after a short while and wander off in search of other prey. Regularly targets campsites, pack animals and groups. The Killgore eats only a fraction of those it kills, leaving most kills for scavengers to find and devour.

**Damage:** Bite: 2D4. Punch (with spikes): 2D6+P.S. damage bonus. Claw Strike: 4D6+P.S. damage bonus. Head Butt: 2D6





+P.S. bonus damage. Running Body Block/Ram: 1D4x10 damage and victim is knocked to the ground, losing initiative and one melee action/attack (counts as two attacks, must have a full running start).

**Bear Hug Attack (Special):** 2D6+P.S. damage bonus initially, plus the Killgore will then squeeze its opponent for its next one or two subsequent attacks, inflicting 1D6+P.S. damage bonus (**Note:** those in full plate armor take half damage). After that, the beast will let its prey go, dropping them to the ground (lose initiative). The victim is pinned and cannot attack while locked in a bear hug. Furthermore, each hug attack uses up time so the pinned character loses one of his own attacks for each crushing hug he receives.

**Bonuses:** +4 to strike and parry. Killgores *never* dodge! They just stand there and duke it out with their opponents until one of them drops. +8 to save vs Horror Factor, and +2 to all other saving throws.

**Magic:** None. Any attempt to read a Killgore's mind or the use of Empathy will give the psychic thoughts or feelings of anguish, agony, and aggression similar to a berserker rage.

**Psionics:** Considered a Minor Psionic with the powers of See Aura, Sense Evil, and Total Recall (they never forget a face or those who paid them a particular kindness or cruelty). I.S.P.: M.E. attribute +4D6.

**Average Life Span:** 40 to 60 years.

**Habitat:** Native to the Northern Hinterlands, but they would do fine anyplace where it is cold. Killgores hunt and kill year round, but primarily hunt during the daytime and evening.

**Languages:** None per se; grunts and growls.

**Enemies:** All living things, from animals to people.

**Allies:** None. Sometimes gather in groups of 2-4.

**Physical Appearance:** Like a big grizzly bear with spike-like horns growing out all over their bodies.

**Size:** Ten feet (3 m) long (or tall when standing on hind legs).

When on all fours, five feet (1.5 m) at the shoulder.

**Weight:** 2,000 to 3,000 lbs (900 kg to 1,350 kg).

## Mucker

These malicious little bastards serve no purpose in the Northern Hinterlands other than to further hone their fighting skills by waylaying any unsuspecting folks who happen by. They are clearly imp-like demons with a murderous streak, but whether they come from the Land of the Damned, or are some other infernal being who has adopted the Hinterlands as their home is unknown.

According to legend, the unnamed Alchemist or Summoner who brought Muckers into the world was a homicidal maniac who wished to commit mass murder against her enemies and any who opposed her. To that end, she sought to command a race of demonic warriors who delighted in smashing other people to bits and spreading mayhem wherever they went. Hiring an army of lackeys would not do, because lackeys require supervision, something one lone maniac could not provide. On the other hand, demons bound to do her bidding, the mage reasoned, would do nicely, especially if they were not too intelligent themselves and needed her as their general. So it was that she conjured forth the Muckers. The final solution to insane ambitions and retribution.

The history of the Hinterlands is full of legends and stories that tell how many of the bizarre creatures living there came to be. Some are true, some not, and some hold just a smidgen of truth. Where it all went wrong in this case, is anybody's guess. The sorceress (Was the mage really a woman? Was there a mage at all?) disappeared with nary a trace. For all anyone knows, the sinister Muckers might have done her in. After all, they are treacherous and uncontrollable, have unsatiable appetites for destruction, and resent anybody who exerts control over them. All that's really important is that the Muckers spread across the Hinterlands and some of the forested valleys of the Northern Mountains, continuing their lives of brazen robbery, vandalism and killing.

Over the eons, the number of Muckers in these parts seems to have dropped dramatically. It may be that many have perished at the hands of adventurers and other monsters (nobody likes or trusts them), or they have been summoned elsewhere or have simply gone off to other parts of the world. Muckers are nasty little cretins who love to rob, steal, torture, hurt and kill other beings, large and small. It's not that they hate beauty (they're glad to do away with an ugly bloke), or want to destroy all life, they are simply little bullies who delight in causing pain and death whenever possible. Their treacherous nature also makes them completely untrustworthy. Muckers love to backstab allies or betray and malign anybody whenever possible. Those who have already run into a Mucker know just how duplicitous, mean and deadly these brutes can be. Even when a Mucker freely offers his help or advice, one should run away because they *NEVER* do anything out of kindness or to help. As a result, numerous heroes and monster hunters have dedicated their careers to combing the Hinterlands for the Muckers and slaying them on the spot. It is not an easy job, though. Not only are



Muckers themselves formidable foes, but they have a nasty habit of going into hiding when it suits them. Given their small size, their lack of need for food or water, and the sheer size of the Northern Hinterlands, the widely dispersed Mucker population ensures that their hunters will be at it for a very, very long time. As it is, there are no hard estimates of how many Muckers are left. Most scholars agree there are less than 5,000, but even that figure is conjecture. The original lot created or summoned is believed to have been somewhere around 10,000 individuals. No record has been kept of how many have turned up dead since then, so for all anybody knows, the majority of the Mucker swarm may still exist, prowling the Hinterlands in their eternal search for somebody to hurt, something to smash, or some place to defile.

The one true weakness of these monsters is that like a Demon or Deevil, they are susceptible to anybody who knows their true name. Moreover, each Mucker has its true name engraved on the bottom of their stump-like feet, so if one can hold one of these beasts long enough to check for their true name (not an easy task, by the way), then a means of controlling them can be had. All one must do is utter the Mucker's true name in a command, and the Mucker will be compelled to oblige. This is either a control mechanism built into these creatures or a punishment imposed upon them by some powerful demon lord or god. More than a few Summoners have tried to take advantage of these vile creatures, using them as assassins, spies and immortal minions. Of course, one can only control a Mucker to a point. And while Muckers will obey when so commanded, they will look for any loophole in a command that might allow them to hurt their current master. And these fiends are masters at bending words, misrepresenting facts and leading their "masters" to their doom. Moreover, they will carry out most tasks with malice and do whatever they can to inflict damage and suffering upon those they encounter, if not their master directly. Indeed, keeping control of a Mucker is a bit like having the proverbial tiger by the tail – they are powerful henchmen, but the moment their masters slip up (and everybody always slips up sooner or later), they make them sorry they ever crossed a Mucker.

For ages, Muckers had no official name for their race. When encountered, they often were referred to as "dark demons," "flailers," "dwarf golems," and a half-dozen other such titles. It was not until the Shadow Colonies were formed, and colonists ran afoul of these creatures, that the name "Mucker" was coined. The name comes from the swampy, slushy tundra areas surrounding areas of development in the Shadow Colonies. These areas of gradually spreading tundra swamp, known as "muskeg," provided the Muckers with a perfect place in which to hide and ambush unsuspecting travelers. For this kind of behavior, the monsters became known as Muckers, and the name has stuck ever since, even though most of them do not live in swamps or around the Shadow Colonies anymore. Those who once haunted the muskeg patches have all been killed or driven away. The majority of Muckers now dwell in the heart of the Hinterlands and more and more into the Ophid's Grasslands area, where there are no settlements to speak of, but plenty of prey in the form of would-be heroes and adventurers. If not contained, the Muckers will someday make it down to the Western Empire where they will have all kinds of murderous fun manipulating nobles, generals, cultists and madmen to engage in war and commit all sorts of atrocities. Muckers will have a field day

causing trouble at any "civilized" kingdom, but the Empire of Sin will seem like paradise.

**Alignment:** The rare Anarchist at best, but the majority are Miscreant (40%) or Diabolic (55%).

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D6, M.E. 2D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 2D4+19 (supernatural), P.P. 2D6+14, P.E. 1D6+17, P.B. 1D4, Spd. 6D6+15  
**Hit Points:** P.E. x3

**S.D.C.:** P.E. number +50

**Natural A.R.:** 14

**Horror Factor:** 9 at a casual glance. Those who know about Muckers will treat them as if they had a Horror Factor of 13.

**Average P.P.E.:** 2D6x10

**O.C.s Available:** Natural killing machines who will use anything from a brick or shattered bottle to a knife or poison.

**Natural Abilities:** Nightvision 300 feet (91 m), don't need to eat or drink, never seem to fatigue (sleep two hours a night), bio-regenerate 2D6 Hit Points/S.D.C. per melee round, impervious to normal fire, cold and electricity (magical versions do half damage), immune to mind control or magical sleep or paralysis. Can leap up to 30 feet (9 m) in any direction from a standing start, and out to 45 feet (13.7 m) from a running start. Magically understand and speak all languages (95%).

Muckers have the following equivalent skill abilities: Climb (85/80%), Land Navigation (80%), Track Humanoids (56%), Concealment (90%), Palming (80%), Pick Locks (70%), Prowl (60%), Use & Recognize Poison (70%), Recognize Weapon Quality (65%), Escape Artist (60%), and Basic Math 90%.

Although they do not need to eat or drink water, most enjoy drinking blood and find it as intoxicating as humans find alcohol.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Six.

**Damage (Supernatural P.S. 21 to 25):** Restrained punch or kick: 2D4, full strength punch or kick: 3D6, power punch or kick: 6D6 (counts as two attacks), leap attack: 6D6x2 (automatic critical strike; counts as all attacks for the melee round and must be the first and only attack for that round by the Mucker). Bite: 2D6

**Damage (Supernatural P.S. 26 or 27):** Restrained punch or kick: 2D6, full strength punch or kick: 4D6, power punch or kick: 1D4x10 (counts as two attacks), leap attack: 2D4x10 (automatic critical strike; counts as all attacks for the melee round). Bite: 2D6+3.

**Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses):** +3 to initiative, +4 to strike and parry, +5 to dodge, +5 to pull punch, +4 to disarm, +3 to roll with punch, fall or impact, +5 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Vulnerabilities:** Ordinary weapons, but those made of or plated with silver do 50% more damage, and Holy Weapons do double damage.





**Magic:** None, though *any* spell cast upon a Mucker has a 01-03% chance of reflecting back and affecting the spell caster instead (roll percentile dice).

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** Effectively immortal, although they can be killed.

**Habitat:** For now, the Northern Hinterlands, but these terrors could spread across the world if they are not contained somehow. A handful have already made it to Bizantium and the Wolfen Empire, and one is said to be counsel to an influential noble or merchant in Lopan.

**Languages:** Between themselves, they speak a guttural tongue that only Muckers understand, but they understand and speak all languages at 95% proficiency. (Cannot read).

**Enemies:** Everyone is a potential target and victim. Anybody. Especially those who have crossed, insulted or annoyed the little fiend.

**Allies:** None per se, or for long, but may join forces with other evil and power-hungry beings if the alliance means causing destruction, torment or death, especially on a large scale. Often volunteer to be the interrogator and torturer, as well as assassin and/or executioner. Sometimes Summoned and controlled by Summoners (whom they despise), and view Diabolists, Monster Hunters and clergy who worship the gods of Light with disdain. On the flip side, they rather like Necromancers and Witches, and some Muckers let people worship them.

**Physical Appearance:** Imagine a Dwarf-sized humanoid that looked like it was shaped out of dark blue clay. Then place four beady orange eyes in a horizontal row in its head above a large, wide nose and a wide mouth full of sharp teeth. Top it off by making the humanoid entirely hairless. That pleasant picture is a Mucker.

**Size:** Three to four feet (0.9 to 1.2 m) tall.

**Weight:** Exceedingly dense for their height, roughly 200 to 300 lbs (90 to 135 kg).

## Oboru

This remarkable elk-like creature is one of the most coveted steeds in the Northern Hinterlands. It possesses great strength, endurance, intelligence and agility. It responds well to training, and exhibits die-hard loyalty to its master. It serves equally well as a pack animal, a draft animal, a steed, and even a war mount. The only downside to the Oboru is their relatively low numbers. The Oboru once dominated the landscape, but a mysterious disease has decimated their numbers in recent years. Were it not for this plague, the Oboru would still number in the millions, as they had for centuries. Instead, their numbers have dropped to less than 400,000 throughout the entire Northern Hinterlands, and their total population is dropping by another 2,000 to 5,000 each year. Scholars and Rangers believe that only about 10% of the species is resistant to the disease that is wiping them out. Whether or not the Oboru can continue to perpetuate itself with only 10% of its previous population remains to be seen. Those individuals experienced in breeding Oboru insist that there will be enough breeding stock to keep the species healthy after the plague has run its course. Then again, these breeders make their living selling the Oboru, so their predictions might just be self-serving optimism.

In the wild, Oboru roam the Hinterlands in herds of 4-24 (4D6). They are led by a Grand Matriarch, the oldest female in the group. All males serve the Matriarch and during the rutting season, fight for the right to mate with her. The losers all partner with other females of the herd. Oboru used to mate for life, but Woodsmen have noticed that since their numbers have fallen so precipitously, they now change mates every breeding season. Some see this as a good sign that the great elk are adapting, and point to it as further proof that the Oboru will not die out any time soon. Others insist that since the Oboru have stopped mating for life, their infant mortality has more than quadrupled,



which practically negates any boost in their numbers brought about by "free mating."

Wild Oboru are almost impossible to domesticate. Even with intensive training and conditioning, an adult wild Oboru has only a 5% chance of full domestication. A wild young Oboru (under two years old) has a 50% chance of being successfully domesticated, while a Oboru raised in captivity has a 95% rate of success. As a result, any prospective Oboru breeder has two options when going into business: Buy domesticated stock from another breeder, or go out in the wild and capture stock and domesticate the young himself. The second option is the only real one, since most established breeders will not sell breeding pairs under any conditions. They just don't like having any more competition. Plus, domesticated Oboru are pretty expensive. Even though capturing them from the wild is risky and work-intensive and might not even pay off, it is still the way to go.

Those who acquire a domesticated Oboru swear the beasts are worth the trouble. They have the speed and strength of a racehorse, the agility of an antelope, and the senses, intelligence and attack instincts of a fine warhorse. They also are resistant to the bitter cold of the Hinterlands winters, and have the digestive abilities of a billy goat, making them prime foragers. In the sometimes desolate Hinterlands, other animals might starve, but the Oboru can always find something to eat, be it carcasses, moss, tree bark, whipgrass, sour fruit, seemingly poisonous berries and the like.

Compared to other beasts of burden (such as horses), Oboru do not spook easily, which makes them all the more attractive as a war mount. That, combined with their natural fighting abilities and fearsome antlers, has convinced the humans of the Shadow Coast to adopt the Oboru as their official cavalry mount. Of course, they have only a small number of steeds ready for use. If war does break out with the Kingdom of Bizantium, the Shadow Colonies will need many more Oboru to field. To make up for the shortage, the Shadow Colonies are now offering twice the going rate for captured young Oboru. This has hunters and trappers combing the Northern Hinterlands in record numbers, and the end result is they are depopulating the wild Oboru population even further. To compound matters, slavers and sellers of exotic animals from the West and South seek out these beasts as work animals and fighters in the gladiatorial arena, as well. If this keeps up for much longer, wild Oboru might become as uncommon as the Unicorn, and that does not have to be so. If Oboru hunters practiced just a little restraint, they could harvest the wild population and keep the wild numbers up. Instead, they are over-trapping these fine creatures into oblivion. Some would argue that trapping will only increase the numbers of domesticated Oboru, thus preserving the species. Others argue that the mystery plague that is destroying the Oboru first showed up among domesticated specimens.

Nobody is more distressed over this (outside of the poor Oboru themselves) than the Kankoran, Emirin and Druids of the Northern Hinterlands. They feel the plight of these beasts is only the beginning of the Hinterlands' exploitation by outsiders who care nothing about the land, its wildlife or its people. Consequently, Kankoran and Druids frequently intervene to prevent the capture of the "great forest steed" (as they call them) as well as attack slavers and outsiders from other lands. They regularly

sneak into camps to let animals like the Oboru, Pegasus and Unicorn free, sabotage traps, steal and destroy supplies and equipment (forcing the invaders to retreat), and even attack, beat and sometimes kill the most invasive, cruel and destructive intruders. They hate slavers and deal with them the harshest of all, just looking for an excuse to slay them. Meanwhile, those friendly with the colonies on the Shadow Coast have warned the humans to take care in how they use the Oboru or they too will earn the wrath of the woodland people.

**Alignment:** The animals are generally considered to be Principled, Scrupulous or Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D4+4 (high animal intelligence), M.E. 2D6+3, M.A. 2D6+5, P.S. 3D6+25, P.P. 2D6+10, P.E. 2D6+11, P.B. 2D6+9, Spd. 1D6x10+24

**Hit Points:** P.E. +35

**S.D.C.:** 2D4x10

**Natural A.R.:** 5

**Awe Factor:** 8

**Average P.P.E.:** 4D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** Not applicable.

**Natural Abilities:** Strength, endurance, outstanding speed and balance, excellent hearing, can leap 8 feet (2.4 m) high and 15 feet (4.6 m) across, swim (70%), land navigation (80%), and prowl (35%).

**Attacks Per Melee:** Three for young and females, four by mature males.

**Damage:** Antler strike: 3D6+P.S. damage bonus. Running antler ram: 1D4x10+8 (must be running full tilt and counts as three melee attacks). Kick (forelegs): 2D6+half the P.S. damage bonus. Kick (hind legs together): 4D6+P.S. damage bonus. Head butt: 2D4.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +3 to strike, +1 to parry, +4 to dodge, +5 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Special intuition enabling Oboru to use the following psionic abilities at will and at no I.S.P. cost: See the Invisible, Sense Dimensional Anomaly, and Sense Evil.

**Average Life Span:** 28-35 years.

**Habitat:** Ophid's Grasslands, forests of the Northern Hinterlands, and to a much lesser degree, the Great Northern Wilderness and Disputed Lands, where they are very rare, but present.

**Languages:** Speak to each other (and their owners, oddly enough) through a system of whinnies and neighs like a horse or canines.

**Enemies:** Predators of course, and humanoids who hunt them for their fur (worth 50 gold a pelt) and antlers (worth 20-40 gold depending on the size). Also being domesticated by some. Young earmarked for domestication are worth 100-200 gold.





**Allies:** None per se, but Kankoran, Emirin and Druids often come to their aid and battle to keep them free.

**Physical Appearance:** A great, majestic elk with a full rack of antlers in its head.

**Size:** Six feet (1.8 m) at the shoulder, 7-8 feet (2.1 to 2.4 m) long.

**Weight:** 750 lbs to 1,000 lbs (337 to 450 kg).

**Notes:** Mature Oboru females give birth to one or two young every three years. Gestation period is seven months, but the young stay with the female until they reach three years of age.

## Razorvine

Of the two carnivorous plants found in the Northern Hinterlands, only the Razorvine is at all mobile. Lacking any kind of fixed root structure, the plant is little more than a central stem cluster housed in a writhing mess of grasping tendrils and longer, stronger whipping vines.

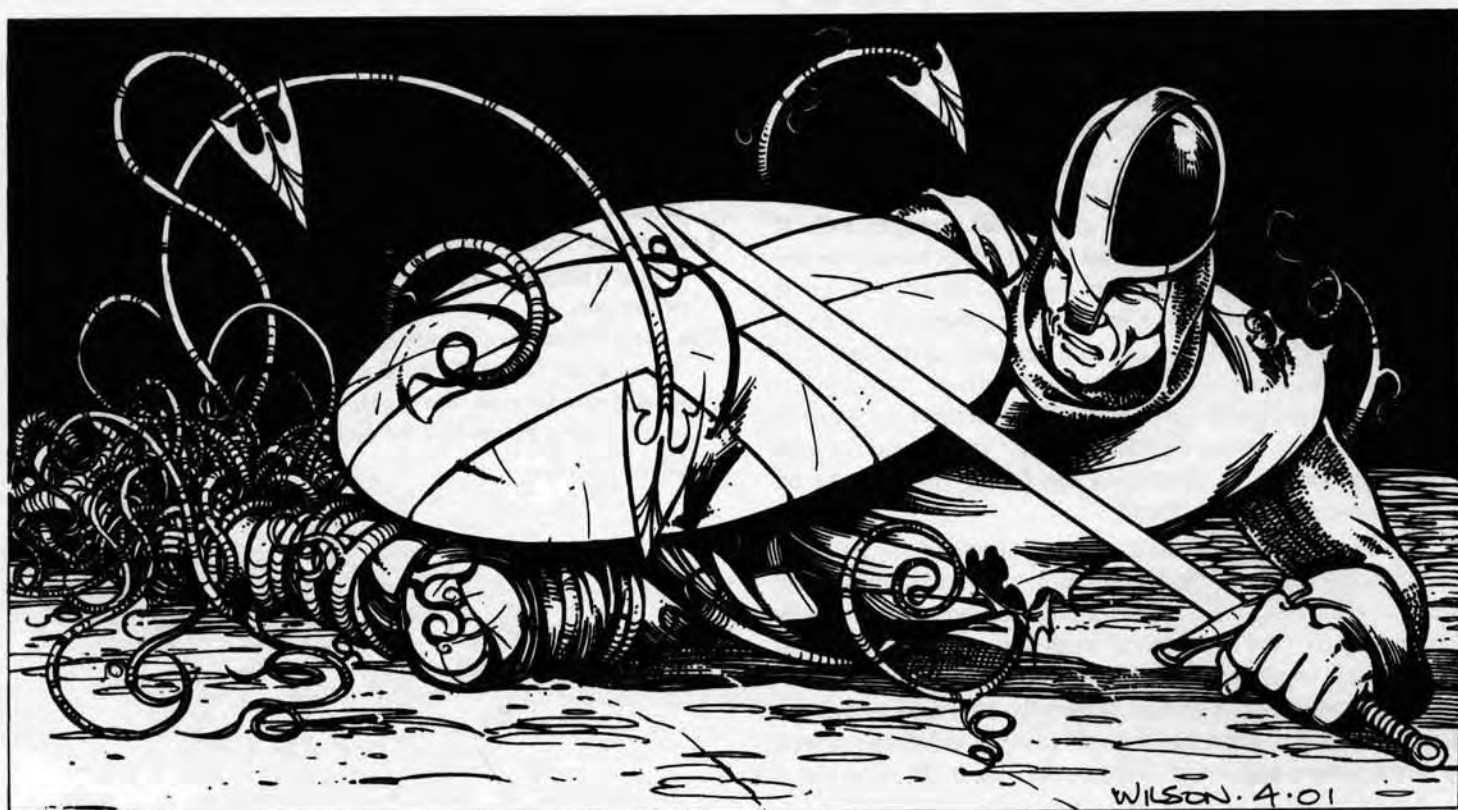
The plant moves by grabbing things with its tendrils and pulling itself along or by pushing off from the ground. The larger vines are for hunting and defense. They are the rough length and width of a rattlesnake and are tipped with hard, spade-like leaves that stab and cut like small daggers or the tip of a spear. These spades are razor sharp and used to slay small animals as well as defend itself from whatever might threaten it. Most animals and humanoids know to steer clear of Razorvines, since they are unintelligent and have no sense of fear or pain; they simply attack on instinct.

The deadly vine feeds by entangling its prey and killing it with its dagger like leaves. The vine fights to the death or until its prey withdraws, escapes or dies. Razorvines are easily dispatched with weapons and can be burned by fire. Although they are mobile, they are still rather sluggish and linear in their at-

tack, providing little sport to those looking for a thrill. The real danger from Razorvines comes from those who stumble upon them by accident. Like their carnivorous counterpart the Snapjaw (also known as the Terror Tree), Razorvines camouflage themselves and are difficult to spot until one lashes out. Much of the Northern Hinterlands' forested areas have thick ground cover of vines and roots, making travel difficult and slow. It is among this endless carpet of sinuous ground cover that Razorvines lie in wait for their prey.

Once a living creature comes within reach of the plant, it goes into action, lashing out like a python to entangle its prey with its thick main stem body and multitude of smaller, thinner vines that it uses like tentacles to tangle, trip and hold it. It then uses its blade-tipped vines to slash and stab at its victim. First, the horrible plant drinks in the nourishing blood it spills. If the prey cannot escape, it then slices the animal into small pieces, and uses its small tendrils to pick them up and deposit them in a digestion cavity within its central stem cluster. The plant only attacks when it is hungry or is attacked itself (reflex action). In the latter case it instinctively kills, but leaves its victim behind in a pile for scavengers to feed on. In fact, the small pile of bones and rotting carcasses often attract what will become the plant's next victim. The remains of a Razorvine victim are hard to mistake for anything else, and Rangers, Woodsmen and Druids can tell where and when a Razorvine has been active in a particular area.

Herbalists have long contended that the central stem of a Razorvine is a wonderful cure-all for a number of ailments, not to mention an antidote for several kinds of poison. The effects of this are debatable, as few explorers are willing to put forth the effort to find a Razorvine and bring parts of it back for examination. Certain folk living in remote parts of the Hinterlands have been known to use Razorvine spades as crude weapons, lashing them to a short stick to make an axe or a longer stick to make a



spear, however, the blade-leaves get brittle and crumble after about a week.

According to legends and rumors, there are places deep in the Hinterlands where Razorvines grow up to ten times their normal size and prey upon elk, moose, men and giants. Whether they really exist is not known.

**Alignment:** Considered Miscreant evil.

**Attributes:** I.Q. Not applicable, M.E. n/a, M.A. n/a, P.S. 2D6+12 for the main vine, 1D6+6 for the smaller, thin vines and razor-tipped ones, P.P. 1D6+8 (all), P.E. 2D6+6, P.B. 2D6, Spd. 2D4

**Hit Points:** P.E.x2 (main stem).

**S.D.C.:** 1D4x10; each spade vine has only 5 S.D.C. before it is amputated. Once chopped off it stops moving/attacking.

**Natural A.R.:** 5

**Horror Factor:** 12

**Average P.P.E.:** 1D4

**O.C.C.s Available:** None.

**Natural Abilities:** Chameleon roughly the same as the spell: 90% undetectable if unmoving (which it usually is when hunting), 70% undetectable if moving two feet (0.6 m) per melee or slower, 20% undetectable if moving six feet (1.8 m) per melee round; perfectly visible if moving any faster than that. When hungry it ensnares whatever animal (humanoids included) that comes within its grasp, otherwise lays dormant. Regrows any vines that are lost in combat in a matter of 2D4 days. Hibernates in the winter, active in the spring and summer.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Four to Six, depending on the size and age of the plant. It will have a single spade-shaped razor vine for each of its number of attacks and twice as many thin tentacle-like vines for snaring and entangling prey.

**Damage:** Spade vine: 3D4+4 per strike.

**Bonuses:** +3 to initiative, +1 to strike.

**Vulnerabilities:** Fire does double damage to the plant, and it will instinctively recoil from a fire or lit torch.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** Unknown; thought to be under 15 years, on average.

**Value:** None, although some woodland inhabitants and villains use the plants as an exterior defense system by letting it grow along their fence or among the bushes near their lair. Some use it to dispose of the bodies of their victims, leaving only bones.



**Habitat:** Indigenous to the forests of the Northern Hinterlands (much less common in Ophid's Grasslands), but could grow in any alpine region including the Great Northern Wilderness and forests of the Old Kingdom Mountains.

**Languages:** None.

**Enemies:** None.

**Allies:** None.

**Physical Appearance:** A long tangle of vine as thick as rope and with spade- or arrowhead-shaped leaves.

**Size:** The central stem cluster is 6-8 inches in diameter and 15-25 feet (4.6 to 6 m) long. The spade-shaped blade vines are thick as rope and have a reach of 6 to 8 feet (1.8 to 2.4 m). The tentacle-like tangle vines are half as thick and have a reach of 8-10 feet (2.4 to 3 m).

**Weight:** All told, a fully grown Razorvine weighs about 200 lbs (90 kg).



## Scrollworm

Of the various denizens of the Northern Hinterlands, none bear such obvious signs of having been crafted by the hands of alchemists or a mad god than the devious Scrollworm. Nor are any so eagerly pursued.

Residing wherever tall grass (or similar ground cover) can be found, the Scrollworm lives out a life of surprise predation. It lies in wait for its prey to come by – anything ranging in size from a rabbit to a Wolfen or Troll. When the prey gets within striking range, the Scrollworm springs from its hiding place and constricts the victim, suffocating it like the anaconda and python. Once the prey is dead, the Scrollworm swallows it whole and digests it slowly over a period of a few weeks, during which time the creature enters a state of torpor and is rather vulnerable to attack.

Although the Scrollworm hunts and kills like a large snake, it is not one. Rather, it resembles a huge segmented worm about 2-3 feet (0.6 to 0.9 m) wide and twelve to sixteen feet (3.6 to 5



m) in length, sometimes longer. The creature has tiny, beady eyes and a gaping maw lined with several rows of inwardly pointing, needle-like teeth. The mouth is wide and can unhinge to swallow all but the largest of animals and humanoids. The flexible body can swallow creatures twice as wide as the worm itself. The sharp teeth can gnaw of the limbs of giants to be eaten (leaving the trunk of the body for scavengers), and those swallowed whole and still alive will find it impossible to break free, as the mouth will open only long enough for the teeth to clamp down on anything trying to climb out. **Note:** Young Scrollworms, even after hatching, are more aggressive than the adult. Though only about 6-10 inches in diameter and five or six feet (1.5 to 1.8 m) long, they will attack any human or other creature who disturb them (as depicted in the illustration). This is an instinctive survival mechanism. They kill via strangulation and may bite (1D4 damage; two attacks per round).

The Scrollworm gets its name from two sources. The first and most obvious is that when it lies in wait, the Scrollworm coils itself into a tight spiral, resembling a scroll. When it attacks, it uncoils with furious energy, springing up to two times its body length to nail its prey and slay it. (It is said that some Western merchants have procured specimens of these creatures and place them inside locked trunks, crates or vaults as a booby trap against thieves and bandits who would loot their caravans. It is a worthy idea – anyone opening a trunk containing a starving Scrollworm will have a hard time fighting off the surprise attack!)

Even more peculiar is the second source of the Scrollworm's name – that they are, in fact, living scrolls containing magical spell knowledge! As incredible as this may be, the Scrollworm was created for this purpose. All Scrollworms have on their backs some kind of mystic script that is part of their natural markings, like stripes on a tiger. This script never changes or fades away and practitioners of magic can actually use them to learn a bona-fide spell! Since Scrollworm hides do not contain perfect flowing script, deciphering the characters can be difficult and requires the *cryptography skill* and a *working knowledge of spell magic* (i.e. the character must be a Wizard or Alchemist). **Penalty:** Therefore, any scroll conversions done off the back of a Scrollworm's hide must be rolled at -15%. Otherwise, deciphering the magic text from a Scrollworm works like any other scroll conversion. Oh, there is one catch. To see the final four inscriptions for the magical invocation, the Scrollworm must be slain! Upon its last breath the final symbols appear, however, they will disappear within the hour. Moreover, once slain the Scrollworm rots and putrefies quickly (smells terrible), and within 8 hours, turns into a liquified mass of foul smelling goop. **In the alternative**, rather than convert the living scroll into a spell, it can be used as a genuine scroll to cast the spell inscribed on the monster's back. The creature must still be slain first and the instant the spell is cast, the creature turns into foul smelling goop.

Each Scrollworm hide contains the equivalent of a single spell. If successfully converted, roll on the following table to see exactly what level of spell the Scrollworm has on its back. Once the level has been determined, the actual spell may be determined randomly or at the G.M.'s discretion.

|         |                  |
|---------|------------------|
| 01-10%: | First Level      |
| 11-20%: | Second Level     |
| 21-30%: | Third Level      |
| 31-40%: | Fourth Level     |
| 41-50%: | Fifth Level      |
| 51-60%: | Sixth Level      |
| 61-70%: | Seventh Level    |
| 71-80%: | Eighth Level     |
| 81-85%: | Ninth Level      |
| 86-90%: | Tenth Level      |
| 91-93%: | Eleventh Level   |
| 94-96%: | Twelfth Level    |
| 97-98%: | Thirteenth Level |
| 99-00%: | Fourteenth Level |

To date, the very existence of Scrollworms remains a guarded secret held by the most powerful Wizards' guilds in the Western Empire and independent beings in the know (such as a few dragons, sphinx and similar). Nobody at the Shadow Colonies or Bizantium has any idea they exist. The Western Empire knows only because a mage from an exploratory group into Ophid's Grasslands made the discovery. Now that they know, the uppermost echelon of the Western Empire's power brokers have agents combing the Hinterlands right now for these rare and elusive creatures. The aim is to capture enough of these things to set up breeding programs back home that could yield a possibly endless supply of magic. Thus, dozens of "capture teams" have gone into the grasslands to bring 'em back alive. Half never return, falling to the savages or monsters in the region, or to the very Scrollworms they seek. Those who have been successful have poor showings for their efforts, returning with 1D4. Currently, nobody thinks too much about these capture teams being in the Hinterlands, since the Empire is always capturing monsters for gladiatorial contests and study. However, individuals who ask too many question or accidentally learn about the worms' magical properties are slain.

**Note:** Most woodland people and inhabitants of the Northern Hinterlands have known about the existence of Scrollworms for thousands of years, but they call them "Ophid's Worms" and have no idea that they possess any magical properties whatsoever. Many an adventuring Wizard and Diabolist have encountered the beasts, and thought of them as nothing more than dangerous monsters. Barbarians and races who hate the Empire of Sin, or humans in general, are beginning to target the capture teams for retribution, making their job all the more difficult.



**Alignment:** Considered natural predators – Anarchist or Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D4 (animal/predator), M.E. 2D4, M.A. 2D4, P.S. 3D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 3D6, P.B. 2D4, Spd. 3D6

**Hit Points:** P.E. +1D6x10

**S.D.C.:** 1D4x10+15

**Natural A.R.:** 6

**Horror Factor:** 11

**Average P.P.E.:** 6D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** Not applicable.

**Natural Abilities:** Snake-like predators with a superior sense of smell and taste; poor vision. Track by scent (50%), Prowl (50%), Climb (50/30%), Swim (60%), and a prehensile body that can crawl, slither and constrict. Can flatten and roll up their bodies into a small coil or ball about three feet (0.9 m) in diameter. Burrows into the ground or under rocks and debris to hibernate in the winter.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Three for adults, two for young.

**Damage:** Constriction: 3D6 per attack. The first attack is to see if the victim was successfully snared. Subsequent attacks will inflict 2D6 per melee to the victim unless he dies or the beast lets go. Bite: 3D6; plus if the creature rolls a critical strike to hit, the victim is *swallowed whole!* The victim suffers an additional 2D6 damage per round until dead or cut out of the worm. Any attempt to wriggle out while in the worm causes another 2D6 damage courtesy of the creature's inward pointing teeth.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +2 to strike, +1 to dodge (all three are double for young), +6 to save vs mind control and possession, resistant to cold (half damage), impervious to poison and disease, +6 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Magic:** None other than the mystic writing on its back.

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** Unknown; at least 20 years, probably double that.

**Habitat:** Indigenous to Ophid's Grasslands. Occasionally found in meadows and fields in the forests near the grasslands. Not found anywhere else in the world, and as the Western Empire has discovered, do not do well in warm or hot environments. (74% of the Scrollworms they have transplanted to the west die within 2D6 weeks. None have mated and borne any offspring.)

**Languages:** None.

**Enemies:** Humanoids. As a predator, all animals, large and small, are seen as food.

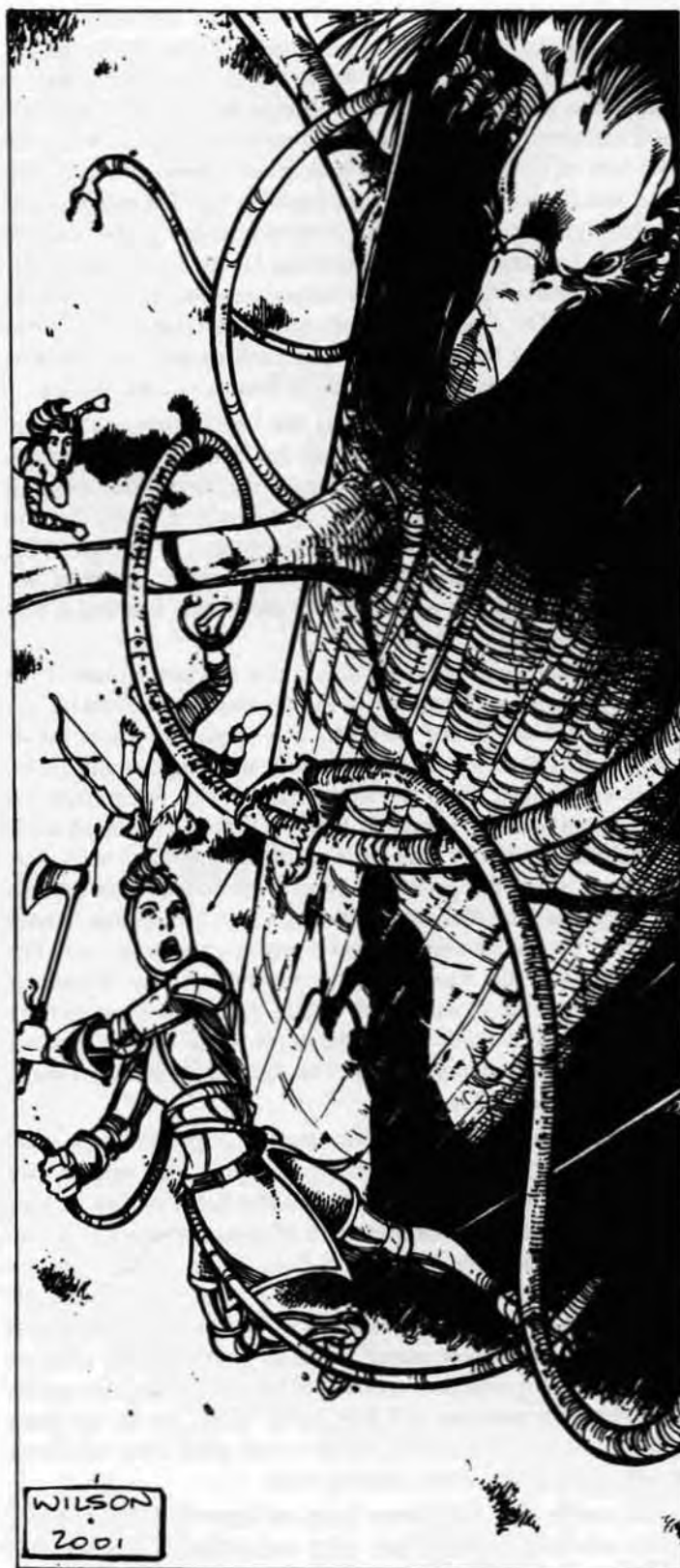
**Allies:** None.

**Physical Appearance:** Like a giant larva or caterpillar without legs, whose flesh has the consistency of a papyrus, and which has mystic writing marked into its hide.

**Size:** 2-3 feet (0.6 to 0.9 m) wide and 12-16 feet (3.6 to 5 m) long.

**Weight:** 300-700 pounds (135 to 315 kg).

**Note:** Mature adult females lay 1D4+1 eggs every summer. The worms reach full size and maturity within two years.



## Terror Tree

The Terror Tree is the second carnivorous plant native to the Northern Hinterlands. Like the Razorvine, Terror Trees blend in with their surroundings, namely the giant fernwood plants of the inner Hinterlands' forest. In that region of sub-arctic rain forests, there are few trees. Instead it is dominated by a special kind of tree-like fern that grows to colossal size. (These are like the giant sequoia trees of California, which also are not trees,



but a kind of fern that just happens to grow hundreds of feet high and wider than a two-lane highway.) These fernwoods are as ancient as any living thing in the world. Over time, some of these trees underwent a terrible change, turning from magnificent monuments into bloodthirsty towers of death. Scholars are at a loss as to how this effect took place. These creatures may look like fernwoods, but they are anything but. The origin of the Terror Trees is unknown, but certainly rooted in the darkest magicks imaginable. A few crusading heroes have tried to destroy the demonic trees, but for various reasons, all such efforts have failed. The Trees themselves are so large that they defy traditional logging methods. Plus, they have unique defenses that make any sustained effort to cut them down a suicidal gesture.

The first defensive measure is the tree's "Snapjaw" vines, Venus flytrap-like appendages at the end of long, flexible branches. Like the arms of an octopus, the Terror Tree can flail forth with these Snapjaws, up to eight at a time, using them to snap and slash at any opponents on the ground or up high in the treetop. Attackers can cut through the Snapjaw branches, depriving the tree of its weaponry, but the Terror Tree has a second, more versatile line of defense.

Terror Trees are far more than just a predatory plant. They are a symbiotic organism living in harmony with a freakish humanoid race called the **Threkk**. The origins of these beasts seem to be just as shrouded in mystery and magic as the Terror Trees themselves. Deep within the heart of the Terror Tree lies the beginnings of a vegetable brain, a highly developed nerve cluster that the Terror Tree does all of its "thinking" with. This cluster is also what gives the Trees their considerable psionic abilities. They use these abilities to maintain a telepathic rapport with the Threkk who serve as their minions and protectors. The Threkk live in the Tree's upper branches and help defend the tree and provide it with food. While the tree's Snapjaws are used for close defense and predation, it is the Threkk who are the tree's real weapons. (Note: The description for the Threkk follows the Terror Tree.)

Terror Trees can live for thousands of years, and over time, their intelligence grows only stronger, as does their rapport with their Threkk. It is said that ancient Terror Trees radiate an aura of evil strong enough for most men of magic or psychics to detect, which marks the Trees apart from the fernwoods they are supposed to blend in with. By then, the Trees become an obvious fortress of evil, home to dozens of Threkk and virtually impervious to any direct assault upon its physical body short of super-destructive magic like River of Lava or Earthquake spells. Soul-draining weapons will kill Terror Trees, but to say these malevolent creatures actually have a soul gives them too much credit. They are pure evil, nothing more.

As creatures of evil, Terror Trees are home to the vile Threkk (their minion of choice), but other malevolent beings are also welcome in their branches, including Laager, Weirdwings, and Bogies. The trees lash out at other beings in the forest, especially those of good alignment, and like to beguile, torment and kill other creatures; animals and intelligent humanoids alike. They also come to the defense of other evil creatures, demons and practitioners of dark magic. Thus, many a Witch, Necromancer, and villain will make his home at or near a Terror Tree.

**Alignment:** Diabolic only.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D4 (low human; evil), M.E. 3D6, M.A. One

point, P.S. 4D6+6, P.P. 2D6+6 (for purposes of striking only), P.E. immeasurable, P.B. 2D6+2, Spd. Not applicable.

**Hit Points:** 4D6x100

**S.D.C.:** 4D4x100; Snapjaw vines each have 1D4x10 S.D.C.

When that is depleted, the vine is cut from the tree (dead) or otherwise destroyed.

**Natural A.R.:** 14 for the trunk, 10 for all branches.

**Horror Factor:** 13

**Average P.P.E.:** 2D4x10

**O.C.C.s Available:** None.

**Natural Abilities:** Symbiosis with the Threkk. See the Threkk description for details.

**Attacks Per Melee:** One attack per melee per point of I.Q. Terror Trees with more advanced nerve clusters can control more Snapjaw vines at once.

**Damage:** Snapjaw attack: 2D6+6 per strike. Will also command Threkk to defend it or attack.

**Bonuses:** Snapjaw vines are +2 to strike and have no bonus to damage. Terror Trees have no parrying, dodging, or other active defense abilities. Nor can they pull their punches or roll with impact. When fighting directly, they are able to attack with the Snapjaws only. For more sophisticated fighting abilities, the Terror Trees rely on their Threkk minions.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Limited to Sense Good (same as Sense Evil in reverse), Sense Magic and the telepathic rapport the Terror Trees keep with their Threkk minions. All are in effect constantly. For whatever reason, the tree can only telepathically communicate with the Threkk, no other race. The distance of this telepathic link between tree and Threk is one mile (1.6 km).

**Average Life Span:** 2D6x100+800.



**Habitat:** Exclusive to the fernwood forests of the Northern Hinterlands. These beings have evolved to fit into this particular environment.

**Languages:** None. They communicate with the Threkk at an empathic, instinctive, gut level, where there is no need for words.

**Enemies:** Pretty much anything within its grasp, even other plant life.

**Allies:** None outside of the Threkk.

**Physical Appearance:** Like a giant fernwood tree, except it has Snapjaw vines nestled in its higher branches. When these whip out for combat, a Terror Tree can not pass for a fernwood.

**Size:** Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) in diameter and several hundred feet high.

**Weight:** Were a Terror Tree to be cut down, the lumber would weigh several tons.



## Threkk

The Threkk were once a proud and mighty race of vulture-like humanoids who, according to legend, commanded a vast empire throughout what is now the Great Northern Wilderness. The Threkk's golden age must have been well before the Elf-Dwarf War (some say it was during the Age of Chaos), since there are virtually no remains of their civilization aside from a few scattered references in a handful of rare scholastic texts. The Library of Bletherad is the greatest single source of information on the Threkk, but even there, precious little information is available on these bird-people, how they came to be, how their civilization rose to power, how it crumbled, and most importantly, how they devolved from sentient beings to proto-sentient minions living to serve the malevolent Terror Trees.

Some scholars believe the Threkk are what's left of one of the forgotten archaic races, and may have once served the Old Ones. If that is true, then most of their race would have perished in the battle twixt light and dark, and the coalition of gods who defeated the Old Ones may have "devolved" the Threkk into their current primitive state as punishment. Others believe they are more savage cousins to the **Loogaroo**, another semi-intelligent, vulture-like monster native to the *Baalgor Wastelands* and western half of the *Old Kingdom*. Those creatures are occasionally encountered in Lopan and the Northern Hinterlands, and also welcomed by the Terror Trees.

Threkk live in the top branches of the Terror Trees where they eat and breed. At the Tree's behest, Threkk hunting parties descend to the ground and waylay other humanoids and large animals. Those who fall to the Threkk attacks are ripped to pieces and carried back or chased to the Terror Tree, where the unfortunate victims are fed to the Tree's various Snapjaws. The Threkk eat whatever is left over and are allowed to keep whatever items they want for themselves. Threkk spend the rest of their time living like animals, harassing and attacking travelers,

killing small animals for pleasure, resting and occasionally fighting amongst themselves. They sometimes kidnap babies, small children and little people (Gnomes, Brownies, Pixies, etc.) for (tortured) pets until they tire of them and hurl them to the ground or eat them. Terror Trees often keep Threkk hunting parties out for up to a week at a time, so they can scout out the surrounding areas before making a kill and bringing nourishment back home. They provide their host Terror Trees with exactly the kind of mobile, remote fighting force the giant predator-plants require to extend their influence as far as possible.

Threkk have no technology, and as such, have no use for weapons, armor or tools of any kind. They may keep some daggers, trinkets, gems, silver and gold, because they like shiny things (kept in their nest high up in the trees). Threkk rely entirely on their natural abilities – their claws, acute senses, natural body armor and resilience to the elements.

Threkk tend to live and work in groups. The average adult Terror Tree will contain 2D4x10 individuals, while especially large or ancient Trees will contain twice that amount. However, half the group is usually off on some assignment or out causing mischief miles away. These creatures are asexual and reproduce every 15 years by laying a clutch of 1D6 eggs. After gestating for 1D4+3 months, the eggs hatch a young Threkk. Within only 6 months, the newborn reaches full size and is capable of carrying out hunting missions for its host Terror Tree. Only a quarter to half of the young survive to reach adulthood because the siblings instinctively fight and kill the weakest members of the nest and eat them.

When a Threkk is taken away from a Terror Tree (at least 100 miles/160 km), the creature suffers a long period of confusion and agitation, then becomes docile and even receptive to commands and training. This would seem to be evidence that the Threkk's natural aggressive and vile nature is empathically fueled by the Terror Tree. Sort of like a schoolyard bully being



egged on to be meaner and nastier because his buddies are watching. In fact, Threkk show increased aggression when put with others of their kind, but they are most cruel and murderous when under the influence of the evil trees. Away from the Terror Trees, the Threkk show a subtle intelligence and cunning. When in such a submissive and malleable state, the creatures can be used as scouts, spies, bodyguards or assassins. However, this is a ploy to lure its new "master" into a false sense of security, for the cunning Threkk is observing habits and patterns to exploit at a later time. Once the creature has a good understanding of its environment and what people expect from it, the Threkk will play along until it gets the opportunity to escape, kill, maim, or cause some other problem. Threkk are masters at playing the clever, but ultimately "dumb animal," when they really have a low human equivalent intelligence. Moreover, they are resourceful, tricky and cruel. They also love to confuse, torment and hurt others, often killing for pleasure. The Terror Trees may give them extra confidence and encouragement, but the Threkk is a vile, wicked monster all on its own.

Independent Threkk, out from under the influence of the Terror Trees, often serve some other malignant force as its henchmen. They don't mind working for others as long as they get to have some cruel and deadly fun. In fact, they appreciate others who are smarter than they are to hatch lovely schemes of murder and mayhem for them to participate in. They are shunned by most good folk, and they have no real identity of their own.

**Alignment:** Technically, a Threkk can be any alignment, but most are Diabolic (50%) or Miscreant (35%), with a few being Anarchist (12%). No "good" Threkk have ever been reported, and if one did exist, it most certainly would be an outcast among its own kind.



**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D4+4 (low human; very cunning), M.E. 1D6+8, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 3D6+4, P.P. 3D6+4, P.E. 3D6, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 2D6 on the ground and 4D6+24 flying.

**Hit Points:** P.E.x3

**S.D.C.:** 1D4x10+18

**Natural A.R.:** 10

**Horror Factor:** 13

**Average P.P.E.:** 3D6

**O.C.C.s Available:** Not applicable; see Natural Abilities.

**Natural Abilities:** Nightvision 500 feet (152 m), see the invisible, natural climbing ability (78%), swim (45%), leap 20 feet (6.1 m) in any direction from a standing start, resistant to cold (half damage), plus the following equivalent skills: Identify Plants & Fruits (85%), Recognize and Use Poison (75%), Prowl (65), Intelligence (70%), Surveillance (65%), Astronomy & Navigation (80%), and Basic Math (80%). They heal twice as fast as humans.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Five.

**Damage:** Beak slash: 2D6. Claw strike: 2D6+P.S. bonus. Free Threkk may use weapons.

**Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses):** +2 to strike and parry, +4 to dodge when flying, +4 to pull punch, +2 to disarm, +2 to roll with impact, +4 to save vs poison, disease and spoiled food, +5 to save vs Horror Factor.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Minor psychic with the power of Telepathy and one Sensitive ability of choice. Can telepathically communicate with Terror Trees up to one mile (1.6 km) away at no I.S.P. cost. **I.S.P.:** M.E. +4D6 points.

**Average Life Span:** 90-130 years.

**Value:** Some evil beings value them as scouts, spies, assassins and henchmen.

**Habitat:** Primarily the Northern Hinterlands (90%) but can also be found in the Northern Mountains and Great Northern Wilderness. Threkk are reasonably rare, with less than 6,000 believed to exist in the world today.

**Languages:** The Threkk speak a much bastardized version of Gobblely among themselves. This dialect is -20% to hear and to speak when using it with more "conventional" Gobblely speakers. Threkk do not need much language ability, since they communicate with their Terror Tree telepathically up to one mile (1.6 km) away.

**Enemies:** Everybody of a good alignment and then some; cruel and wicked to everybody including their own kind. They have an ongoing feud with Melech and like to taunt and pester Dragonductyls and Loogaroo.

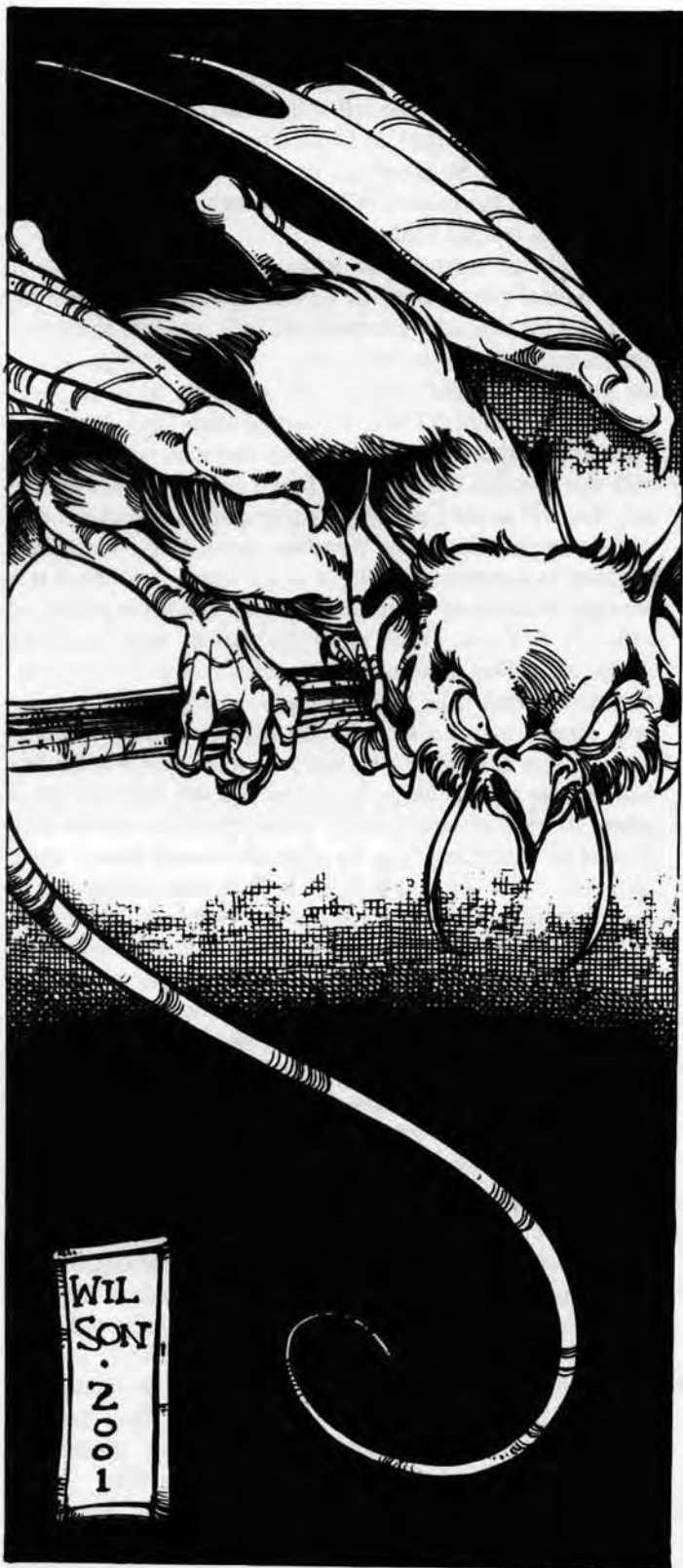
**Allies:** Generally speaking, Terror Trees or evil creatures of magic and other foul-hearted beings. Threkk have a fondness for Priests of Darkness, demon worshipers, evil Summoners, Witches, Necromancers and assassins.

**Physical Appearance:** Large, vulture-like humanoids with scrawny (but powerful), fleshy, human-like arms and clawed, three fingered hands. The hands and arms are attached to the wings like a bat, although the hands do bend at the wrist and can pick up and use small weapons and tools. The wings are huge and black, the feathers on the body black with a red chest and neck. Their eyes are black with a red center that makes them look like burning coals. The head is bald, except for a handful of red or white feathers on top. The skin is the same pale pink and grey color as the arms and hands. The misshapen beak is larger on the top and small on the bottom. It is a pale yellow with a brown tip. The large top portion of the beak can be used like a hooked knife to slash and stab. The legs are those of a bird with huge, oversized feet and black talons. The tail is long and black, tipped with white and a dab of red.

**Size:** Six feet (1.8 m) tall with a wing span of 15 feet (4.6 m).

**Weight:** 200 to 250 lbs (90 kg to 112.5 kg).

**Note:** Prefer to eat flesh and carrion, but can eat garbage if necessary. Love the taste of Bearmen, all canines, Pegasus and Unicorns. Humans and others are good too, but those listed are favorites. Loves to scare, trick, hurt and slay humans and other intelligent races. Threkk live to bring misery and death to others.



## Weirdwing

The Weirdwing gets its name because it is a truly weird combination of bat, bird, cat and intelligence. It has leather, bat-like wings, the beak and legs of a bird, oversized ears, yellow eyes, whiskers that droop down, and a long, rat- or possum-like prehensile tail with which it can hang upside down, swing from trees, grab objects and pick locks!

The Weirdwing first appeared in scholars' tomes as a creature of the Eastern Territory, but over the eons, the creature has migrated northward and westward, up through the Wolfen Empire and most recently, into the Northern Hinterlands. These enigmatic creatures abhor settled areas and will move to wherever large civilization isn't. That is why, when humanity arose in the East, they moved. When the Wolfen surged southward in their great expansion, the Weirdwings moved again. Now, they inhabit the great and unknown expanse of the Northern Hinterlands, secure for the moment that the steady march of civilization will not find them any time soon.

The Weirdwings distrust the great races (Elves, Dwarves, Gnomes, Titans, Ogres and humans) because of their long history of abusing the special gifts the Weirdwing has to offer. Able to foretell the future of anyone they know the true name of, Weirdwings have been hunted and hounded mercilessly by Wizards, Warlords, warriors, kings and criminals and everyone in between, so one may learn what the future holds for them. At first, these creatures were only too glad to share their gifts with others, but after many years of near enslavement, they decided to quit the company of humanoids and live by themselves in the wilderness. There, if they came across a truly worthy individual, they would share a glimpse of his future with him. Likewise, if the creature wanted to frighten a humanoid it didn't like or wanted to make suffer, it may volunteer some future danger or dark path that awaits him. Overall, most Weirdwings have become content merely to watch the world, to observe its patterns and history, and to archive its legends and lore, and in effect, become its great *mute* sages.

Many scholars believe the Weirdwings have vanished from the world, or they have become virtually nonexistent, like Unicorns and other such beasts of legend. In truth, there are still a fair number of Weirdwings flying over the treetops of the Northern Hinterlands; perhaps as many as 30,000, plus individuals and small clans of 3D4 can still be encountered in quiet woodlands in the Great Northern Wilderness, Disputed Lands and valleys of the Northern Mountains. Weirdwings just choose not to reveal their presence unless *they* feel like doing so. So every once in a while, for better or worse, a Weirdwing spies a special individual or group of people who are in extraordinary circumstances, or who have carried out incredible deeds in the name of truth, honor and justice, with whom to share a glimpse of the future. Young Weirdwings and those with a yearning for adventure, will sometimes join an adventurer group for a while. Every once in a while, a Weirdwing finds the kind of hero they feel they have been meant to help with their wisdom, insight and clairvoyance. To these special few, the Weirdwings are an unlikely ally and mentor. To all others, they are a myth, a figment, a whisper, a fading dream. Ghosts of the past lingering in the present.





**Alignment:** Any, but usually Unprincipled (30%), Anarchist (35%) or Aberrant (15%).

**Attributes:** I.Q. 2D6+5, M.E. 2D6+6, M.A. 2D6+7, P.S. 1D6+6, P.P. 3D6+4, P.E. 2D6+3, P.B. 2D6, Spd. 3D6+23 flying or 1D6+2 walking.

**Hit Points:** P.E.x4

**S.D.C.:** 30+3D6

**Natural A.R.:** 5

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 9

**Average P.P.E.:** 6D6

**Average I.S.P.:** 3D6x10 +10 per level of experience.

**Average Level of Experience:** 1D4+1 for young, 1D6+3 for mature and experienced ones, and 2D4+4 for elder Weirddwings.

**O.C.C.s Available:** None; see Natural Abilities and Psionics.

**Natural Abilities:** Weirddwings possess incredible psychic abilities, phenomenal memory and vast areas of knowledge. Skill equivalents include: Anthropology (+20%), Astronomy & Navigation (+20%), Basic Math (+20%), Art (+10%), History (+20%), Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%), Lore: Religion (+15%), Lore: Magic (+10%), Read Elven and 1D4 languages of choice (+15% to literacy), Escape Artist (+5%) and Pick Locks (+10%).

**Attacks Per Melee:** Three physical or psionic attacks per melee round.

**Damage:** Claw: 1D6, tail lash/whip: 1D4 damage, or by psionic attack.

**Bonuses:** +1 to strike, +3 to dodge, and +2 on all saving throws.

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** Master Psychic with the following abilities: All Sensitive psi-powers, Detect Psionics, Exorcism, Lust for Life, Psychic Diagnosis, Advanced Trance State, Death Trance, Float, Impervious to Cold, Impervious to Fire, Resist Fatigue, Mind Block Auto-Defense, and three Super Psionic powers of choice (Mind Bolt is a popular one); only Psi-Sword and Psi-Shield can NOT be selected. I.S.P.: 3D6x10 +10 per level of experience.

Special Super-Clairvoyance, an ability that costs no I.S.P. and comes when the Weirddwing focuses on an individual whose "true name" is made known to it. In a glimmer of an instant, the Weirddwing can see the character's aura and knows of any *past* traumatic experiences (loss of parent or beloved pet, frightening experience, etc.) as well as the most happy and memorable. The Weirddwing will also know what the character's present goals are, along with the individual's alignment and current state of mind, as well as all the usual things that come with See Aura. This insight enables the Weirddwing to see what the character is thinking and (reasonably) accurately determine his or her plans in the short run. Thus, the creature can offer advice based on these (and other) impressions; i.e., "You're angry and hurt. So you are thinking of betraying (or abandoning, or cheating, etc.) your teammates. This you can do, but you will never forgive yourself (the Weirddwing can assess this from the past and present it has seen for it knows the individual as well or better than he knows himself), and you will discover too late that this is not the source of your problem." Inevitably, such a statement will illicit the question, what is? To which the wise Weirddwing will offer advice. Perhaps its, "you are angry and do not see that you must keep a cooler head, be patient and

wait. Opportunity will come to you, and if your mind and heart are free of anger (or hate, self-loathing, or insecurity, love, etc.), you will recognize it and seize the moment." Likewise the creature can tell if the character is too trusting or being played the fool, or blinded by love, and similar. All these things can be presented in Fortune teller style to the character. But the powers of the Weirddwing go far beyond a keen insight into the character.

The psychic creature can, when drawing on the power of an individual's true name, see into the future. The Weirddwing can tell if the character's current path will lead him to misfortune, heartache, danger and death! It may also glimpse possible illness, injury and death (of the character or loved ones) years in the future (G.M.s, be careful with this). However, since life is constantly changing, the character who is armed with this glimpse of a possible future can make changes (or not) that will avoid a particular person, place or incident that will change the future and therefore, avert death. Sometimes this may be something as simple as not losing one's head in a bar fight, sucking up an insult and avoiding a battle or duel in which he is killed. Other times the choices may not be so simple and others may suffer if the character avoids his fate. And that's what it is, fate. And a hero, in order to save or help others, may accept his fate regardless of the consequences. For example: "You and your allies will win the day and save an entire village, but when you are alone, you find others in need of your help. It is then that you will be confronted by something (may be a specific so and so or a vague danger). If you stand and fight (or face whatever) you will rescue those in peril. However, your friends will not be able to reach you in time and you will fall (which may not necessarily mean death) before the power (or treachery or cunning) of your adversary." Thus, the hero may recognize events as they unfold in the future, and know if he turns and runs away, he will live, but a true hero will not be able or willing to sacrifice innocent lives (he knows he can save them, it's been foretold) to save his own. And so, his fate is sealed and the Weirddwing's prophecy becomes reality.

**Average Life Span:** 80-125 years.

**Value:** Highly coveted and often captured and placed in captivity. Western nobles will cheerfully pay 10,000 to 40,000 gold for a single Weirddwing, sometimes more. Lords in the East will match that, while those in Bizantium are only willing to pay 10,000 to 20,000 gold.

**Habitat:** The Northern Hinterlands, but they can be found anywhere in the world, usually in remote areas. They have no particular reason for staying in the Northern Hinterlands other than they like being removed from civilization.

**Languages:** Weirddwings naturally understand all languages, and are able to speak in a bizarre tongue that anyone can understand the first time they hear it.

**Enemies:** Mostly evildoers, and savage races such as the Coyles, Orcs, Goblins, and so on.

**Allies:** Despite their solitude and complaints about humans, Elves, Dwarves, Gnomes and Wolfen, many Weirddwings crave their company and find them endlessly interesting and appealing. Even elder Weirddwings will sometimes associate with noble knights, warriors, kings and clergy to try to "help" humanity. Indeed, Weirddwings frequently observe events from the rafters and are constantly tempted to meddle in the

affairs of men via their prophecies and advice. Irresistibly attracted to humans and Elves in particular.

**Physical Appearance:** A conglomeration of bat, cat, rat, bird and human mind.

**Size:** 3-4 foot (0.9 to 1.2 m) wingspan; the body is just 1-2 feet (0.3 to 0.6 m) long from the tip of the nose to the buttocks.

The prehensile tail is 3-4 feet (0.9 to 1.2 m) long all by itself.

**Weight:** Less than 20 pounds (9 kg).

## Winter Storm Ice Demon

Winters in the Northern Hinterlands are harsh and forbidding. This keeps humanoids indoors and even powerful predators tucked away in their lairs, especially during snowfall. However, there are beings who will brave the cold and harsh elements, bold and foolish humans, Gigantes, Bearmen, Kankoran, and Emirin among them. Then there those rare beasts who seem born for the environment. One such being is the notorious Winter Storm Ice Demon. So named because this monster appears after the first snow begins to fall in the Northern Hinterlands, and the first snow is usually a storm. Whether true demons, monstrous elemental beings or something else entirely, the Winter Storm Ice Demon is a fearsome monster that stalks humanoids and intelligent life forms for both food and pleasure.

Little is known about these creatures. They seem to disappear with the spring thaw and reappear shortly after the snow begins to fall. Reports of encounters with Ice Demons in the Northern Mountains during summertime suggest they may migrate and perhaps hibernate in a cave or curl up on a mountain peak during the warm months. When winter returns, signaled by the first snowfall, the demons migrate back to the lowlands to wreak havoc.

The Ice Demon's origin is anyone's guess. Some speculate that they were one of the Old Ones' archaic servant races. Perhaps monstrous warriors or shock troopers ideal for battling Fire Elementals and mortals. Others wonder if they may be one of the demons from the Land of the Damned fortunate enough to have found passage through the mountains into the Domain of Man. For all anyone knows, the so-called Winter Storm Ice Demons are the first indigenous inhabitants of the Northern Hinterlands, and all who have come since are invaders of their homeland (which might explain why they are so hostile toward other life forms). Supernatural demon or not, the Hinterlands Ice Demon is definitely a monster.

Cruel, savage killing machines, they seem to live for battle, kill for pleasure, and eat humanoid flesh. They go looking for trouble and attack even when unprovoked. Though normally a solitary hunter, Winter Storm Ice Demon may gather in groups of 3-12 to lay siege to an armed camp, Hearth and Home or even a fort or town. They seem to be fearless of humans and most other humanoids, and welcome a challenge from men of magic and physically powerful beings such as Bearmen, Gigantes and dragons. Some will fight to the death, especially if provoked, while others will fight to the brink of death before giving up and vanishing in the snow.

These demons seem to be made entirely of living ice. They have claws that are like short swords and teeth like daggers. Sharp spikes and spines cover their backs and heads, while ice shards help to protect the forearms and knees.

In the winter, all these Ice Demons do is wander the land looking for intelligent beings to slaughter. While humans and other humanoids are their primary targets, dragons, sphinxes, and other creatures of magic, creatures of beauty and beings of good alignment are sought out and destroyed.

**Also known as** Winter's Vengeance

**Alignment:** Always Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 1D6+7, M.E. 1D6+7, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 4D6+10, P.P. 1D6+12, P.E. 1D6+15, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 3D6+22

**Hit Points:** P.E.x2+90

**S.D.C.:** 2D6x10

**Natural A.R.:** 15

**Horror Factor:** 9

**P.P.E.:** 4D6x10 +ME. Attribute number.

**O.C.C.s Available:** None; see Natural Abilities and Magic.

**Natural Abilities:** Great strength, speed and cruelty. Impervious to cold (love it; the colder the better, and cold based magic has no effect), impervious to poison and disease. Nightvision 2000 feet (61.0 m), can see the invisible, can turn invisible when on ice or in water. Doesn't need to breathe air or drink water and can go without eating for seven days at a time without ill effect (feasts on human flesh, bones and blood and often gorges itself). Bio-regenerates 1D6 Hit Points or S.D.C. every melee round and magically understands all languages, but growls, snorts and howls like an animal. May say a word or two like, "No," "yes," "open door," "die human" and "now you die" in a cold, deep voice.

Leave tracks, but can run atop freshly fallen snow without sinking down into it. Ice Demons can run/slide across ice even if wafer thin at double their normal speed, as well as swim in below freezing water at double their normal speed. Can climb up frozen rock and sheer walls of snow and ice at full speed (equivalent of 90/80% climbing skill).

Skill equivalents include: Land Navigation (75%), Track Humanoids (70%), and Swim (90%).

**Vulnerabilities:** -5 to save vs fire based magic. Magical flame weapons and Holy weapons do double damage. Rune weapons do normal damage but against them the demon's A.R. is a mere 10! The Ice Demon is vulnerable to ordinary weapons, provided they can punch through its formidable Armor Rating of 15! Silver weapons have no special significance.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Six physical or two by magic.

**Damage:** Hand to hand or by magic.

Bite: 3D6 (P.S. bonus does not apply).

Claws: 4D6+P.S. damage (double damage to creatures made of fire or vulnerable to cold, including Fire Dragons).

Punch or Kick: 3D6+P.S. damage (usually around +12).

Head Butt: 4D6 damage (P.S. bonus does not apply).







Death Blow on a roll of a natural 20! Double damage direct to Hit Points.

**Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +3 to strike and parry, +2 to dodge, +2 to disarm, impervious to possession and Horror Factor, and +3 on all saving throws.

**Magic:** All Water Warlock spells levels 1-5 (including those in this book); cast as if by a 6th level Warlock. 4D6x10+PE. attribute number.

**Psionics:** None.

**Average Life Span:** Immortal, although they can be slain.

**Value:** None; hated and feared.

**Habitat:** The Northern Hinterlands and Northern Mountains (may also exist in the Land of the Damned). Occasionally, 1D4 are encountered in the Great Northern Wilderness and Disputed Lands, but only in the winter.

**Languages:** Magically understand all languages, but are monsters of few words.

**Enemies:** Compelled to hunt down intelligent life forms and destroy them. Tend to stay in the remote regions, but Winter's Vengeance has been visited upon the colonies of the Shadow Coast many times (every 1D4 years), and once, Outer Cadath was besieged by ten of them!

**Allies:** Warlocks can speak to these beings, but the demons have no respect for them and see them as their natural enemies. Sometimes ally themselves with evil Summoners, Wizards, gods, demon lords and other powerful, but evil beings, especially if war and destruction is promised. Tend to respect Witches, Terror Trees, Threkk and evil Faerie Folk, and leave them alone. **Physical Appearance:** A brutish creature of ice and spikes, with long, thin arms and legs, and a head and spine covered in a crown of icy thorns.

**Size:** 7-9 feet (2.1 to 2.7 m) tall; 800-1000 lbs (360 to 450 kg).

## Notes on other Monsters & Animals

There are many other creatures that make the Northern Hinterlands their home, but in far fewer numbers or strength than those listed above. That said, these "minor" creatures are just as dangerous as any Bearman or Tusker, and should be treated with caution. Some will be lone hunters or individuals, others will be found in groups or herds. **Note:** The page number following each monster below is where you can find additional information in the **Monsters and Animals, 2nd Edition** sourcebook. **Monsters and Animals** also offers a variety of ordinary animals (such as wolves, bears and mountain lions) that adventurers might run afoul of while traveling in the Northern Hinterlands.

**Catoblepa:** Fearsome plains beasts found primarily in Ophid's Grasslands and some of the thinner forests around it. However, a rogue male or 1D4 Catoblepa may wander into the deep woods. See M&A, page 34.

**Drakin:** Strange, leather-winged bird-like beings with human intelligence and noble spirits. Despite their animal appearance, they are intelligent, cunning creatures that exhibit a startling affection for humans, Elves and Wolfen. Many a ranger or trapper has returned from the north with tales of how a Drakin appeared out of nowhere to save him from the jaws of a bear or other antagonist. For this reason, the Drakin are also called "Luck Birds," for many believe just sighting one will bring good fortune. Sounds good, but not true, although they often come to the aid of travelers. Almost always of a good alignment. Found in the Great Northern Wilderness, Bizantium, the Shadow Coast and occasionally in the deep woods of the Hinterlands; rarely in the grasslands. See page 38 of M&A.

**Dragonactyls:** The Northern Hinterlands is one of the few places in the world where these demonic Pegasus are found in large numbers. Most live in the Northern Mountains and hunt in the forest, grasslands and coastal region. They are most abundant in the northwest corner of the Shadow Coast and constantly plague *Destiny Point*, *Seabright* and *Stone Coven*. Those bold enough to attempt it can tame these beasts (to some degree) and use them as riding animals (half the normal cost in this part of the world). See page 39 of M&A.

**Dragon Wolf:** The Dragon Wolf is not a true dragon, but a mystical wolf-like creature so named because of its scaly serpent's tail, great leathery wings, and supernatural abilities. It loves adventure and intrigue, but cannot be trusted. Found primarily in the Great Northern Wilderness, but a few also call the Hinterlands and Northern Mountains home. See page 42 of M&A.



**Emirin:** Oversized mountain lions as intelligent as humans, more compassionate, and wielding the powers of a Mind Mage! They are found in greatest numbers in the forests along the Shadow Coast, Northern Mountains and the Land of the Damned, but also inhabit the Northern Hinterlands and Great Northern Wilderness. Once in a while they can be found as far south as the Eastern Territory. See page 47 of M&A.

**Entities:** An entity is a supernatural energy being that is *invisible* to the naked eye. Consequently, many entities are regarded as ghosts, spirits, wraiths and similar non-physical apparitions. There are five major types of entities, each uniquely different from the others. All are P.P.E. vampires. They are: *poltergeists*, *syphons* or *trapped entities*, *haunting entities*, *tectonic entities*, and *possessing entities*. See page 48 of M&A.

**Eye Killer:** These ugly creatures have the body of a serpent, dog-like front legs, and an owl-like head with large black eyes that possess lethal powers. These creatures are animalistic predators that feed on other, smaller animals and (for reasons unknown) humanoids such as Goblins and Elves. They are found primarily in Ophid's Grasslands and southern forests of the Great Northern Wilderness, but a few migrate in the northern forests in the summer (they hate the harsh winters, so most migrate southeast in the autumn). See page 56 of M&A.

**Faerie Folk:** All manner of Faerie Folk can be found here and there in the forests of the Northern Hinterlands and Ophid's Grasslands. *Merrows* and *Mermaids* are found in many of the lakes and larger rivers, along with the wicked *Kelpie*. *Kelpies*, *Toad Stools*, *Pucks* and *Bogies* are often found in and near swamps. See page 64 of M&A.



**Kinnie Ger:** This race of subhuman felines has the head and tail of a mountain lion and the torso, arms and thighs of a powerfully built human. They are legendary for their hunting prowess and enormous appetite for human, Dwarven and Elven flesh. These sly, sneaky creatures love to toy with their food, inflicting long, slow torture on it before killing it. See page 69 of M&A.

**Kelpie:** The Kelpie is a murderous monster with the ugly head of a horse, clawed hands, a human trunk, horse legs, and a dark complexion. They lurk in or near deep rivers, streams and swamps where they jump out and grab unsuspecting prey. Although Elves and humans are their favorite targets, no humanoid is safe from a Kelpie's ravenous hunger. See page 68 of M&A.

**Frost Pixies:** Not surprisingly, Frost Pixies abound (relatively speaking) throughout the Northern Hinterlands and are most likely to be seen during the autumn and winter months, replaced in the spring by Faeries, Sprites and Brownies. See page 73 of M&A.

**Spriggans:** Are the maniacal stone builders of the Faerie clan. Their megalithic handiwork is most prevalent in Ophid's Grasslands and in and around the Northern Mountains. See page 75 of M&A.

**Feathered Death:** Wicked and cruel creatures, the Feathered Death is also known as the *falcon-man*. They are ugly bird-like creatures with bat-type clawed hands and ugly human-ish faces. Despite their small size, Feathered Death are incredibly strong and quick. They enjoy abducting and torturing small humanoids and children for their own perverse pleasures. See page 79 of M&A.

**Giants:** The north lands are home to many beings who do not fit in polite society. Giants are one such group.

**Algor Frost Giants:** These blue-skinned Giants are most common to the eastern half of the Great Northern Wilderness, but lone individuals and small clans (3D4) are found in the Hinterlands and occasionally the Northern Mountains as well. See page 84 of M&A.

**Cyclops:** Because the Island of the Cyclops, west of the Western Empire, is so famous, many people seem to forget that the fabled Lords of Lightning populate the Old Kingdom and are found in the Eastern Territory and Great Northern Wilderness. The farther northwest one goes, the fewer Cyclops one finds, but they are there in the Northern Hinterlands nonetheless. Most are found along the southern part of Ophid's Grasslands and the neighboring forest (see the Centaur City of Wildwind elsewhere in this section) where they clash with settlers from the Western Empire and adventurers who come from the west, Phi and Lopan. Small clans can be found in the eastern forests of the Hinterlands, but Cyclops adventurers, mercenaries, explorers and bandits can be found anywhere in the Hinterlands, usually as a member of a mixed group of rogues. They even join pirate crews. See page 86 of M&A for more details about these Giants.

**Gigantes of the North:** Gigantes are the powerful mutants and freaks of the Giant race. Their deformities and powers only seem to make them all the more the outcasts (even among their own kind), which in turn makes them all the more ruthless, cruel and vindictive. The Northern Mountains are infested with Gigantes, who come down to explore the forests and plains of the Northern Hinterlands and head east to the Great Northern Wilderness and Eastern Territories. While their numbers are low in these last two places, they are frighteningly high in the Hin-

terlands, thanks to the region's close proximity to the mountains. Gigantes often join forces with other Giants, Trolls, Witches, and malevolent forces. See page 89 of M&A.

**Gryphon:** Gryphons are highly intelligent animals that have the forequarters of a giant eagle and the hindquarters of a giant lion. They can be found on the cliffs of remote mountain ranges, particularly those along the western edge of the Northern Hinterlands. They can be domesticated as steeds and attack animals. See page 99 of M&A.

**Harpies:** Part hag, part vulture, all monster, these vile creatures love to cause trouble, torment, harass and hurt humans and other mortals. Harpies are a huge problem along the Shadow Coast, especially the northwestern end. The cities of *Destiny Point*, *Seabright*, *Stone Coven*, and *Skurjen* have it the worst. All have had so many raids and problems with Harpies, that they organize hunting parties and challenge visiting adventurers to track down flocks of the foul creatures and destroy them. *Destiny Point* has a half dozen in its zoo, and all four colonies have a running bounty on harpies – 60 gold per head. Something adventurers down on their luck often try to take advantage of.

The presence of the colony Warlocks, particularly Air and Fire Warlocks, does a great deal in keeping the communities safe and away Harpies, but problems persist. This is due in part to the close proximity to the Land of the Damned where Harpies are said to flourish (some say all Harpies originate from there). Another is the great number of the wretched creatures along the Northern Mountains and north shores of the Shadow Coast. Where most of the world finds Harpies in small clans of 2D4 monsters, pairs and solitary hunters, the northern coast sees them by the dozens and some Harpy flocks have as many as 1D4x100! The larger the group, the bolder the beasts. Thus, in spite of the presence of mercenaries, Wizards and scores of Warlocks, the Harpies keep coming. There is not a month that goes by that does not have at least one or two incidents involving one or more Harpies.

The outer homesteads, farms and trappers have it the worst, because they don't have the immediate protection of the Warlocks. Away from their neighbors, militia and men of magic, farmers, woodsmen and homesteaders regularly see their storehouses and granaries plundered, livestock terrorized and maimed, pets slaughtered (sometimes for food, other times out of meanness), sections of crops torn up and other types of vandalism. Farmers and travelers (or their livestock/pack animals) may be chased by Harpies or pelted with rocks, spoiled vegetables or feces. The horrid creatures may also abduct (for torture and unpleasant games) people working in the fields or walking down the road; women and children are among their favorite targets.

Thankfully, most Harpies are cowards and back off a few moments after the presence of magic is made known (especially spell casters) or more people show up. This means most Harpies are satisfied with making a few strafing runs, getting a few good licks in with their claws, damaging crops, stealing some food or valuables, wrecking fences, overturning wagons, and causing a commotion before they fly away content with themselves. Mischievous and vindictive, Harpies take great joy in tormenting trappers by springing their traps, taking or eating the animals caught in the traps (this happens all the time near the Shadow Coast), ripping up the trapped animal with their claws to destroy

the value of the fur, and frightening away game. Harpies also like to dive bomb campsites at night, making a ruckus screeching and screaming, grabbing blankets, clawing at people, and dropping excrement on the campers before flying away. The entire ordeal usually lasts less than a minute (4 melee rounds), just enough to wake up and terrorize everybody – but it is the Harpies' idea of a fun night out. They will do the same to adventurers, buzz travelers and make horrible noises (especially at night) to frighten people, horses and livestock and prevent them from getting a good night's sleep. Nor is it uncommon for one or more Harpies to sneak into a camp or onto a homestead to steal booze, eat food, plunder supplies and/or kill the pet cat or dog that is left unguarded or poorly hidden.

Harpies are creatures of the wind and fury, so they see humans and most landlocked beings as *stuck on the ground*. A fact that makes them easy to find and target again and again. To Harpies, homesteads, Hearths and Homes, trading posts, villages, cities and the people who live in them, are anchored to the ground, slow, and inferior. On the other hand, Harpies see logging operations (which they are constantly sabotaging and harassing), farms and development of the land as something of an invasion of "their" hunting grounds. Places they have inhabited for thousands of years. Thus, the humans from Bizantium are invaders and despoilers to be harassed, killed and eaten.

Harpies are truly dangerous when they outnumber their opposition by three to one or have allied themselves to other powerful beings, such as spell casters, dragons, demons, etc. (Harpies frequently elect to serve a more powerful being as his agents of destruction and evil). Their superior numbers or extra firepower make them brave, and inspire them to fight till half of their group falls in combat, before abandoning the attack. Furthermore, if they are winning, Harpies get drunk with power and will show no mercy, slaughtering most everyone. They may choose to leave one or two people alive to tell the tale of their victory, and may also take a few prisoners. Captives, however, will either be ransomed back to their family or community or tortured and eventually (days or weeks later) killed and eaten. Likewise, Harpies will cause as much property damage as possible. See page 100 of M&A for stats and more info on Harpies.

**Ki-lin:** The Ki-lin are dragon-like creatures that resemble a horse. They are extremely rare throughout the world. The remoteness of the Northern Hinterlands has attracted a couple dozen to make their homes there. See page 106 of M&A for more on the Ki-lin.

**Loogaroo** mainly inhabit the Baalgor Wastelands and Old Kingdom, but a few have made their way to the Northern Hinterlands. May associate with Threkk, Terror Trees and other evil beings. See page 113 of M&A.

**Melech:** Described by most as a monstrous demon horse, the Melech are known for their cruelty and vile natures. According to locals in the Northern Hinterlands, they originate from the Land of the Damned where they serve as steeds for demons. Typically found in the far south, adventurers are surprised to find them (in small numbers) in the Hinterlands. See page 119 of M&A.

**Pegasus:** These extremely rare winged horses inhabit the Northern Mountains and come down to feed, play and explore the forests and grasslands of the Hinterlands. In fact, the Hinterlands is one of the only places where Pegasus are found any-

where in the world! They tend to stick to very rough, mountainous terrain, making their nests near those of eagles and other hunting birds. They are rumored to be the creation of some ancient Elven magic, but were nearly wiped out during the Elf-Dwarf War. See page 123 of M&A.

**Peryton:** Another flying anomaly of nature (or product of magic) is the deceptively beautiful and elegant creature known as the Peryton. This mystical animal appears to be a winged





deer, but it is a murderous hunter that preys on animals and humanoids alike. Ultimately, nobody knows where the Peryton came from or exactly what they are. See page 124 of M&A.

**Rock Crawlers** are found in the southern portion of Ophid's Grasslands and plague the colonies founded by the Western Empire. See page 128 of M&A.

**Tuskers:** One of the most aggressive creatures on the planet, these huge, hairless boars or tapir-like beasts roam Ophid's Grasslands and the southern forests of the Hinterlands. They travel in small packs that are powerful enough to bring down the Great Wooly Dragon (a few dozen of which inhabit the same region). The Hinterland winter is hard on Tuskers which helps to keep their numbers low. See page 149 of M&A.

**Unicorn:** This beautiful animal runs wild and free in the Hinterlands and large ranges in the Great Northern Wilderness. See page 150 of M&A.

**Waternix:** A beguiling and mischievous creature of magic that inhabits the forests of the Northern Hinterlands and all of the Great Northern Wilderness. See page 153 of M&A.

**Worms of Taut:** Blow Worms, Nippers, Tomb Worms and the occasional Serpent Beast and Tri-Fang can all be found in the north lands. Start on page 156 of M&A.

**Yema:** This is a race of extinct flying reptiles that have been mysteriously transformed into undead zombies of destruction. Once animated, they become a fearsome and powerful supernatural creature, usually controlled by a supernatural monster or wizard. Most of these creatures are believed to be in the Land of the Damned, though burial sites for these reptiloids are found throughout the southern Ophid's Grasslands, just beyond the reach of the Northern Hinterlands. See page 162 of M&A.

**Note:** All manner of diabolic beings, outcasts, fugitives and evil sorcerers find the Northern Hinterlands to be an alluring retreat. Thus, the exotic, disenfranchised and the worst of the worst may be found here and there. This includes the occasional dragon, sphinx, demons of all kinds, and the rare Mummy Immortalus, Lizard Mage, Syvan, Scarecrow, Za and the like.

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# The Wild Lords

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By Bill Coffin with some additional text by Siembieda

The Chaos War. Without a doubt, the most cataclysmic conflict the Palladium World has ever known. On one side were the Old Ones – the lords of Chaos – and their vast armies of vile minions. On the other were the rebellious dragons who once served the Old Ones, and a legion of gods and goddesses who combined hoped to match the might of their sinister adversaries. The prize at stake? Nothing less than the Palladium World (the Old Ones' base of power) and half the universe held under the monster-gods' sway.

The Tristine Chronicles offer a spotty and sometimes conflicting account of the Chaos War, but their description of the carnage has never been questioned. Fully seven-eighths of *all* combatants in the Chaos War were killed or so terribly wounded that they retreated to some dark corner of the Megaverse, never to be seen again. On the side of light, entire pantheons, constituting dozens upon dozens of major and minor deities, and their legions of minions were destroyed in their near-suicidal assault upon the Old Ones. Such was nearly the case with the little-known pantheon of the *Wild Lords*. These supernatural beings were never known as a major deific force, but became famous for their uncommon valor against the Old Ones in the final days of the Chaos War.

It is said in the most secret religious texts of the *Church of Light and Dark* that near the last stages of the Chaos War, it appeared that if the forces of light did not make a breakthrough soon, their strength would wane and the Old Ones would triumph. The armies of light were decimated, demoralized, and sapped of their will to fight. The end seemed inevitable. How could they defeat a foe so evil, so corrupt, so invincible? The answer came from the Wild Lords, "... with heart, force of will and courage so strong that it inspired the gods themselves." They would prove it all by putting on an assault so bold that

hardly any of their comrades could believe their senses. The Wild Lords vowed to destroy a single Old One by themselves. Period. They never qualified it with a "or we will die in the attempt," or a "and who will come with us." They simply stated their mission and set off to accomplish it.

What followed was one of the most fiercely pitched battles of the entire war. The Wild Lords had proven able and valiant soldiers early on, but taking on an Old One? By *themselves*!?

Surely they had all gone mad and were looking for an elaborate suicide. That was what most of the forces of light thought to themselves. Then the Wild Lords launched their first attack. The Old Ones were unimpressed and deployed a huge force of minions against them, as if to imply that they could not be bothered with defending themselves against so paltry a force. The Wild Lords marshaled their strength and fought as one, driving into the heart of the enemy host and scattering it. For three days and nights the Wild Lords slaughtered their enemies, blanketing the ground with piles of the dead. They obliterated the center of the enemy force and continued on to their real target, the Old Ones themselves.

The Wild Lords took the Old Ones by surprise and converged upon a single one, cutting loose with all their strength in a single massed attack. History can not say which Old One the Wild Lords targeted, nor can it say exactly how successful their attack was. All any religious texts note is that the Wild Lords had grievously wounded their foe and might possibly have destroyed it were they not betrayed by one of their own, who somehow smote the entire pantheon in a devastating sneak attack. Suddenly, all of the Wild Lords' miraculous momentum disappeared in a moment. The Old Ones had used their greatest weapon of all: the ability to corrupt those who oppose them. The Wild Lords' brave gesture had, in the end, been for nothing.

Or had it?

The Wild Lords' singular defiance of the enemy and their willingness to carry the entire Chaos War on their shoulders had re-energized the remaining forces of light. The Wild Lords never knew it, but once it seemed that their attack on the Old Ones might actually work, the rest of the forces of light followed suit, shooting through the hole the Wild Lords had made and bringing the fight to the Old Ones' doorstep. No sooner had the last Wild Lord fallen than the brunt of a hundred pantheons came down on the Old Ones in what would be the final battle of the war. The slaughter of minions raged for a full year, it is said, before at long last, the exhausted forces of light finally won the conflict by forcing the Old Ones into an eternal slumber, deep beneath the crust of the world.

So weary from the effort, the victorious allies hardly had the strength or inclination to celebrate. The losses they'd suffered were too horrible. They had come too close to utter defeat, and the world they saved was a blighted wasteland that no longer seemed worth the effort. The alliance of light stayed just long enough to punish the few surviving minions of the Old Ones. Then they dispersed and have never come together since. Most of the allied pantheons and dragon lords left this world, wishing to put the memory of the war far behind them. Some gods stayed behind and formed what would become the new major religions of the Palladium World, but they would have a very long time to wait. The world had become a much quieter place, and eons would pass before the gods who remained here would have many worshipers to govern.

**The Age of Man.** Over the last few centuries, scattered religious scholars have reported the emergence of an obscure northern religion practiced by both human and canine races. The gods being worshiped fit no description of any deities presently worshiped anywhere in the world. It would appear that a new cadre of gods and goddesses had made their appearance. Intrigued, teams of explorers investigated these claims, only to learn that these were not new gods at all, but the *Wild Lords*! What was left of them, anyway. Only a few of the original 30 Wild Lords remained, and all are shadows of their former selves. But they are alive, and for them and their newfound followers, that is all that matters.

As far as pantheons go, the Wild Lords are currently among the weakest and least known gods of the Palladium World. Once the mightiest of the mighty, the damage they suffered during the Chaos War was so severe that they still require many eons more to convalesce. Furthermore, their great heroism in the Chaos War was not widely sung or celebrated in loud voice, for the other gods feared such celebration could elevate the Wild Lords to the highest status and make them the most powerful of all the pantheons. As grateful as they were, the gods of light sought to maintain their own power base, and let the Wild Lords fade from the pages of history and the minds of mortal creatures. And with that, the loss of power.

Indeed, were it not for the emergence of the canine races (and Wolfen in particular) who somehow learned about the Wild Lords and worshiped them from the start, the pantheon might never have come back from the darkness. Now that the canines rule the north, the Wild Lords gain more and more devotees with each passing generation, at least among Wolfen and Coyles. And as their following grows, so too does their strength

and power. One day, they might regain their former status as greater deities, but until they do, the Wild Lords will continue their new role as *demigods* (even the Wolfen see the traditional Northern Pantheon of Od to be superior gods) who walk the world and interact directly with those who pay them homage.

Like the fallen god Chantico, the Wild Lords' *mortality* makes them a special case among the deities of this world. Though they are powerful, they can actually be slain by adventurers or other worldly forces. Indeed, as word of the Wild Lords spreads, villains of considerable power (such as the rogue mage *Tezuan*, described in the next section of this book) have come to the Northern Hinterlands with dreams of the impossible: To destroy a god, or worse, to somehow usurp that being's power.

Any agents of the Old Ones also have a long-standing grudge to resolve against these deities, whom they blame, and rightly so, for the defeat of their own dark masters. Indeed, secret cults devoted to the Old Ones have proliferated in the Hinterlands and the Northern Mountains, with the sole purpose of locating the Wild Lords and destroying them. According to some rumors, one of these cults believes if it can capture a Wild Lord and slay him during a special blood ceremony, it will have the effect of raising at least one of the dreaded Old Ones. That same rumor suggests Netosa would be the one reborn. "... and with the re-birth of one, so shall they all rise," or so the story goes.

So far, none of these cultist groups have even come close to locating a Wild Lord much less destroying one, but some think it is only a matter of time before these fanatics give the pantheon some serious trouble. The cultists have an uphill battle ahead of them, for not only do they face the gradually strengthening Wild Lords themselves, but their growing numbers of genuine followers. Anyone who has pledged their spiritual devotion to these nearly forgotten and embattled gods will gladly cross swords with whoever tries to do them harm. In fact, coming together to protect their fragile deities is one of the few motivations that might bring together disparate individuals from the Northern Hinterlands. Under no other conditions might we find a Wolfen Imperial soldier, a Kiridin barbarian warrior, an Elf, a Bearman and a band of human adventurers all working together for a common cause other than to prevent one of their beloved Wild Lords from falling to the vile machinations of the agents of the Old Ones.

Unbeknownst to their followers, the Wild Lords' worst enemy is themselves. These gods have never really gotten over the fact that they were *betrayed* by one of their own. That betrayal not only laid them low, but also might have cost several worlds and pantheons their freedom. The turncoat within the pantheon was *never identified*, and each of the remaining Wild Lords fears that their betrayer is still among them, secretly devoted to the Old Ones, making plans to finish the act of deadly treachery that was started so very long ago. Until these suspicions can be cleared away (discerning exactly who the traitor was and determining if he is alive or dead), the Wild Lords can never trust each other completely, much less work together. Thus, even though they all grow stronger, so might the traitor among them. Alive or deceased, the traitor's handiwork still cripples these gods, for their lack of teamwork might very well get the entire pantheon killed. Those who believe in the Wild Lords consider it their holy mission to piece together what happened during the



pantheon's darkest hour and use that knowledge to bring their fractious gods together again.

**Note:** Religious scholars have not yet discovered if there has been or is any interaction between the Wild Lords and the Northern Gods. Almost certainly, the two pantheons see each other as rivals "competing" for the worshipers. Some religious experts believe that if the Wild Lords grow too powerful, the Northern Gods will strike them down or at least demand some kind of formal agreement between the two pantheons as to which parts of the Palladium World each would control. If such an agreement were struck (and that's a big "if"), the Northern Gods would probably keep the Wolfen Empire and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium while ceding the Northern Hinterlands to the upstart Wild Lords. Should these two pantheons come into conflict, however, it will make for a sticky situation among their many followers who otherwise have no reason to show hostility to each other. Some tribal elders within the Wolfen Empire fear something like this may happen, and could tear at the heart of the Wolfen Empire's fragile unity. Then again, the two pantheons might avoid a direct conflict between themselves and let the people choose whom they deem the most worthy gods to worship.

As mentioned before, there are only a few Wild Lords left. They are, in no particular order, *Gainim, Lord of Autumn*; *Haezor, Lord of Pain*; *Lashgan, Lord of Midnight*; *Isurron, Lord of Mercy*; *Eternus, Lord of Destiny*; *Kuldun, Lord of Illusion*; and *Semotra, Lord of the Wood*.

## Gainim, Lord of Autumn

If there is a leader to the Wild Lords, it is Gainim. He was never the prime deity of the Pantheon, but of the Wild Lords left alive, he is the oldest and one of the more powerful. It was he who actually led the fateful charge against the Old Ones, and it was he who was first struck down by the Great Traitor who turned on the pantheon.

Before the Chaos War, Gainim was the Lord of Spring. As the war dragged on, Gainim aged and became the Lord of Summer – still in his prime, but no longer with the boundless potential and blossom of life that he once commanded. When he returned to the world, sapped of most of his former strength, he had become the *Lord of Autumn*, a creature of sunset, in harvest, and in decline. Gainim knows that he can not reverse this process, and shall, one day, become the Lord of Winter, and after that ...who knows? He would like to think he would enjoy a rebirth and start over as the Lord of Spring, but he is fairly certain that his destiny is to ride out the winter of his life and then pass from existence, as cold and as traceless as a snowflake upon the wind.

The other Wild Lords regard Gainim as a sullen loner who has become overly absorbed with the pantheon's betrayal and downfall. Though most of his fellow deities do not suspect he could be the traitor among them, a few (most notably Haezor, Lord of Pain and Kuldun, Lord of Illusion) believe that Gainim's demeanor is just a clever front. They think he is indeed the backstabber and is willing to go to any length to conceal that fact from those he intends to use or destroy for his own purposes.

Gainim dwells exclusively in Kiridin, and is worshiped mostly by the human barbarians there, but is also worshiped by

many Wolfen, especially those who live and operate outside of the Empire. His presence in Kiridin has magically locked the region known as Kadriel in a perpetual state of autumn. It is always the height of the harvest season there. All trees have blazing red, yellow and orange leaves, and all crops are ready for the taking. He makes the land one of eternal sunset, and when his time draws near to a close, he will take Kadriel with him. It too will become a land of endless winter, and when Gainim finally dies, the land (*his land*) will become forever barren.

Gainim appears as a regal emperor in full battle dress, ermine cloak, and a crown of autumn leaves. His manner of dress, oddly enough, is almost identical to what is current Imperial fashion in the Western Empire, even though this god has never been there and makes no conscious effort to emulate any of the ways of that land. Gainim's entire color scheme is in brilliant yellow, orange and red. As he turns into the Lord of Winter, his skin will take on a bluish hue, his hair will turn white, his armor will be as of ivory, his cloak will still be ermine, and his crown will be a weave of dead branches. (As the Wild Lords' grow in power, however his decline toward winter is stopped, and if he can gain enough followers for years to come, he will remain the Lord of Autumn for centuries to come). A lordly rack of antlers grow from his head, the only obvious outward sign that he is something more than human.

**Alignment:** Scrupulous.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 25, M.E. 20, M.A. 23, P.S. 25 (supernatural), P.P. 20, P.E. 22, P.B. 20, Spd. 60 running, 120 flying.



**Hit Points:** 1,000; **S.D.C.:** 1,500.

**Natural A.R.:** 13

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 15

**Weight:** 240 lbs (108 kg). **Height:** Six feet, six inches (1.98 m).

**Age:** Unknown.

**P.P.E.:** 1,400; **I.S.P.:** 500.

**Experience Level:** 15<sup>th</sup> level Air/Water Warlock.

**Natural Abilities:** Astral travel, hawk-like vision up to two miles (3.2 km), see aura, nightvision 200 feet (61 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will (no time limit), knows all languages, teleport 92%, dimensional teleport 41%, resistant to heat, cold and fire (half damage, even if magical), never tires, bio-regenerates 6D6 S.D.C./Hit Points per melee round without P.P.E. cost, swim 98%, metamorphosis: animal, and metamorphosis: humanoid.

**Deific Powers:** Alter Primal Manifestation (500 P.P.E. plus "consumed" body investment), Banish (325 P.P.E., no body investment required), Bio-Regeneration: Deific (350 P.P.E., no body investment required), Control Weather: Local (400 P.P.E., no body investment required), Create Deific Portal (500 P.P.E. plus severe body investment).

**Magics:** Knows all Water and Air Warlock magic.

**Psionics:** Has all Sensitive and Physical psionics.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Eight physical or three spell attacks per melee.

**Combat Bonuses (includes attribute bonuses):** +3 on initiative, +9 to strike, +8 to parry and dodge, +7 to pull punch and roll with punch/fall/impact, impervious to possession, and +6 to all saving throws.

**Other Combat Info:** Restrained punch: 2D4 damage, full strength punch: 3D6, power punch: 6D6 (counts as two attacks).

**Weapons:** Gainim attacks with a long sword that magically inflicts 1D4x10+10 per strike, but does double damage to demons and Deevils, and damage x10 to Alien Intelligences like the Old Ones. Only Gainim and those he specifically appoints may wield the weapon, all others will take 1D4x10 damage upon grasping its handle.

**Armor:** Gainim wears a suit of regal looking armor (A.R. 17, S.D.C. 1,500).

**Magic Items:** None other than his sword.

**Other Equipment:** None.

## Haezor, Lord of Pain

The self-styled Lord of Pain is the most overtly villainous member of the Wild Lords. A living engine of destruction and malice, Haezor exists only to inflict suffering on others. He is foul temperament personified and is openly hostile to everyone and everything except for his own army of Tuskers made into his animal minions. To them, he shows an odd sense of kindness and respect. Haezor dwells in what he calls the Horde Lands (i.e. Ophid's Grasslands), where he controls huge sections of the grasslands and commands herds of Tuskers. Like the animals he commands, Haezor has no ambition to create any kind of empire; he just wanders the land looking for new victims and anybody who can offer him a good fight.

As might be expected, Haezor does not get along with any other Wild Lord, and he has carried out long vendettas against

most of them at one point or another. In fact, when the pantheon rallied to fight the Old Ones, it took the combined threats/requests of all the Wild Lords just to get Haezor to go along with the plan. Some believed (and rightly so) that if the foul monster had been left to his own devices, he would have gladly sat out of the Chaos War, especially if such action meant doom for his fellow Wild Lords.

Haezor remains a prime suspect among the other Lords as the mastermind behind the pantheon's betrayal, but as Isurron, Lord of Mercy points out, Haezor is too stupid to have carried out such a perfect sneak attack. Whoever tried to destroy the pantheon by surprise did so at the behest of the Old Ones. Given Haezor's absolute hatred of taking orders from anybody else, it makes it even less likely that he would have been the Old Ones' dupe. Could this stupid, wrathful monster have been manipulated into attacking his fellow Wild Lords? Of course. That is why the Lord of Pain remains under suspicion, but it seems unlikely, to some. Since Haezor has a history of lying when it suits him, his enraged declarations of innocence on this matter ring false to certain ears. Haezor has lied and schemed his way into advantageous positions over his fellow Lords before. Why could he not have done so with the Old Ones? Or why would he not do so even now? Even if Haezor did not engineer the great treachery during the Chaos War, his strident protestations of innocence are seen by some as an insincere ploy to get in the other Lords' good graces just so he can ambush them later. Haezor might not have played a role in the Great Treachery, but treachery is one of his fortes, and he can not be trusted.

In the grasslands where Haezor reigns, he has become a popular object of worship among the Orcs, Ogres and Trolls there. Coyles also find this dark god appealing and are pledging their faith to him in ever-increasing numbers. Other Coyles see Haezor as an abomination and fit to be worshiped only by savages. The schism over Haezor within Coyle society is one more stress factor that threatens to pull this fractious lot of canines apart.

Haezor appears as a giant-sized Tusker with a rust-colored pelt and tufts of dark, bristly hair running down the length of his spine. His eyes glow with sickly green energy ("the color of old pus," one scholar insists), and a cloud of steam always issues from his breath, regardless of what the surrounding temperature might be. He somehow manages to speak without moving his lips, and his voice is a loud, menacing rumble. Haezor magically understands all languages. Likewise, even though Haezor speaks in a bizarre language that only he and other Tuskers would ordinarily understand, anybody who this dread god addresses will understand what Haezor has to say perfectly.

Whenever Haezor is encountered, he will have his *Bloody Rabble* with him – a herd of 1D4x10+6 Tuskers (ordinary Tuskers, not dominant males), each with maximum statistics, Hit Points, and S.D.C.

**Alignment:** Diabolic.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 11, M.E. 11, M.A. 11, P.S. 30 (supernatural), P.P. 15, P.E. 30, P.B. 9, Spd. 60.

**Hit Points:** 1,500; **S.D.C.:** 2,000.

**Natural A.R.:** 15

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 16

**Weight:** 3,000 lbs (1,350 kg). **Height:** Seven feet (2.1 m) at the shoulder, 15 feet (4.6 m) long.





**Age:** Unknown; immortal.

**P.P.E.:** 2,500. **I.S.P.:** 400.

**Experience Level:** 13th level Assassin.

**Natural Abilities:** Astral travel, hawk-like vision up to two miles (3.2 km), see aura, nightvision 200 feet (61 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will (no time limit), knows all languages, teleport 92%, dimensional teleport 41%, resistant to heat, cold and fire (half damage, even if magical), never tires, impervious to poison, bio-regenerates 6D6 S.D.C./Hit Points per melee round without P.P.E. cost, swim 98%, metamorphosis: animal (but only takes on the appearance of "great" animals, namely predators and large, powerful beasts like Tuskers, Oboru, elephants, bears, etc.) and metamorphosis: humanoid.

**Deific Powers:** Bio-Regeneration: Deific (350 P.P.E.; no body investment required), Deific Curse: Pox (1,500 P.P.E.; plus token body investment), Deific Curse: Pestilence (400 P.P.E.; plus token body investment), Hellfire Blasts (1,000 P.P.E. plus token body investment), Mobile Sphere of Destruction (250 P.P.E.; plus token body investment for the first four melee rounds plus 25 P.P.E. for each additional melee round).

**Magic:** Haezor knows all Summoning circles (including circles of power) and can draw and empower them just by digging them in the soil with his hoof. However, he often lacks the patience to employ this ability fully.

**Psionics:** All Physical psionic abilities.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Nine by physical attack or three by spell.

**Combat Bonuses (includes attribute bonuses):** +2 on initiative, +10 to strike, parry and dodge. +5 to roll with impact and to pull punch, and +8 to all other saving throws.

**Other Combat Info:** Restrained hoof or head butt: 2D6, full strength hoof strike or head butt: 4D6, power strike or head butt: 1D4x10 (counts as two attacks), ram: 1D6x10 (counts as two attacks plus requires a running start), and a bite does 5D6 damage.

**Weapons:** None.

**Armor:** None.

**Magic Items:** None.

**Other Equipment:** None.

## Lashgan, Lord of Midnight

The story of Lashgan, Lord of Midnight, is one of the more tragic tales of the Wild Lords. Once a proud and noble Lord, this giant wolf provided the pantheon with a counter to the vile Haezor and his Bloody Rabble. Lashgan, embodiment of the night world and the cycle of life and death, also ran with an army of his own – a crew of super-wolves known as the *Wild Pack*. In addition to his Wild Pack, Lashgan had another ally, his beautiful and strong-willed mate, the she-wolf *Surgana*. Ultimately, Lashgan's love for her would prove to be his undoing, but it might also pave the way to this Lord's redemption as well.

The story of Lashgan's private torment begins with none other than Haezor himself, sworn enemy of Lashgan. Haezor wanted to make his enemy suffer, and the best way to do that, since Haezor had tried several times without success to destroy Lashgan on the battlefield, was to strike at those who Lashgan loved the most. Haezor had always lusted after *Surgana*, and so decided to abduct the she-wolf and force himself upon her. During the daytime, when the Wild Pack lay sleeping, Haezor and his lackeys swept into Lashgan's camp and kidnaped his mate. By the time the Wild Pack stirred and gave pursuit, their beloved mistress was gone.

Lashgan charged after Haezor to rescue his love, but he was too late. Her ravaged body lay deep in the forest, where animals had already begun to feed on it. Something snapped within Lashgan, and he swore eternal vengeance upon Haezor, even if it would cost him his life. For eons, he and his Wild Pack tried to trap the vile Tusker Lord, but nothing ever worked. In desperation, Lashgan turned to the services of Eternus, Lord of Destiny, and asked her to tell him if he would ever be allowed to punish Haezor for his crimes. Saddened, Eternus told Lashgan that it was his destiny to chase Haezor forever but never catch him. He would never have the opportunity to avenge the violation and murder of his mate. If he honored the loving memory of *Surgana*, Eternus advised, he would let her spirit rest and give up his obsession with punishing Haezor.

Lashgan could not accept this and instead grew angry and bitter. Surgana was his one true love. He had sworn he would do anything for her, even die. How could he just give up on this when her killer roamed free? The Lord of Midnight withdrew from the world, isolating himself from the other Wild Lords and life in general. In time, he and his Wild Pack became a wrathful and vicious lot, striking down anybody who dared to venture out under the night sky. When the Chaos War came, the Wild Pack agreed to fight, but it took intense diplomatic pressure from the other Wild Lords to make it so. To this day, Lashgan believes Haezor is the one who sold out the pantheon, and he will gladly take up the issue in single combat with anybody who says otherwise. Likewise, Haezor points to Lashgan as the traitor, claiming that the grief-stricken god would do anything to kill him, even if it meant sacrificing the other gods in the pantheon and losing the battle against the Old Ones.

The sad thing about Lashgan is that he would return to his old noble self if he could just heal his wounded heart. Over the ages, various Wild Lords, Isurron, Lord of Mercy in particular, have tried counseling their sullen friend, but to no end. The only likely remedy for this Lord's dark temper is if a third party were to destroy Haezor themselves and present the Lord of Pain's head to Lashgan. Once convinced that Surgana had been avenged, Lashgan might then begin the long journey to returning to the just and righteous god he once was. Until then, he is scarcely any different in behavior than Haezor – angry, violent and destructive. His Wild Pack roams at night, destroying any evildoers they come across. Under the full moon, however, the Wild Pack goes berserk and destroys any living being who dares challenge or insult them in the least.

The Wild Pack consists of 4D6+12 wolves with maximum statistics, Hit Points and S.D.C. They all have an extra attack per melee round as well. Lashgan himself resembles a giant-sized timber wolf with a jet-black pelt. His eyes and the interior of his mouth glow red (as do all of the Wild Pack), but should this god ever change in temperament, his glowing will turn to a much softer yellow. Lashgan and his pack are for some reason unable to enter Ophid's Grasslands, which helps to explain their inability to destroy Haezor; every time they get close, the Lord of

Pain just retreats to his safe haven and waits Lashgan out. Otherwise, the Wild Pack and its tormented lord roam over the whole of the Northern Hinterlands in search for other dark forces of evil to destroy. The Lord of Midnight's favorite targets are cretins who would victimize women and children, but any malignant force will do. Lashgan may come to the aid of heroes (often in disguise) by offering them information and advice, and sometimes fighting at their side. Anyone who destroys Haezor on his behalf will earn his undying gratitude.

**Alignment:** Aberrant. Lashgan's violent actions are his way of striking out at the world to vent his anger and pain. He will not attack women and children (even if evil incarnate) because they remind him of the mate he lost and the pups he never had. Lashgan also will show mercy to especially noble or worthy opponents. Should Haezor perish, Lashgan will slowly begin to recover, gradually moving from Aberrant to Anarchist to Unprincipled to Scrupulous. That process would probably take at least a century, if not more.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 20, M.E. 20, M.A. 20, P.S. 22 (supernatural), P.P. 20, P.E. 21, P.B. 22, Spd. 80.

**Hit Points:** 1,000; **S.D.C.:** 1,400.

**Natural A.R.:** 14

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 12

**Weight:** 300 lbs (135 kg). **Height:** Six feet (1.8 m) at the shoulder.

**Age:** Unknown; immortal.

**P.P.E.:** 1,000; **I.S.P.:** 1,000.

**Experience Level:** 14th level Knight.

**Natural Abilities:** Astral travel, hawk-like vision up to two miles (3.2 km), see aura, nightvision 200 feet (61 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will (no time limit), knows all languages, teleport 92%, dimensional teleport 50%, resistant to heat, cold and fire (half damage, even if magical), never tires, bio-regenerates 6D6 S.D.C./Hit Points per melee round without P.P.E. cost, horsemanship: knight 99%, swim 98%, can track by sight or scent 88%, prowl 60%, can leap 50 feet (15 m) high and 100 feet (30.5 m) across, metamorphosis: animal, and metamorphosis: humanoid.





**Limitation Note:** As the Lord of Midnight, Lashgan is at his full strength at night, and his P.P.E., Hit Points and S.D.C. increase by 20% when the moon is full. However, during the day, ALL of Lashgan's powers are reduced by half, including P.P.E., Hit Points, S.D.C., attacks per melee round, bonuses, skill proficiencies, natural abilities and equivalent experience level (i.e. fights and cast spells during the day as if he were 7th level instead of 14th).

**Deific Powers:** Banish (325 P.P.E., no body investment required), Create Deific Portal (500 P.P.E. plus severe body investment), Hellfire Blasts (1,000 P.P.E. plus token body investment), Manifestation (500 P.P.E., plus token body investment), and Transmutation (500 P.P.E. plus token body investment).

**Magic:** All Wizard spells, levels 1-8.

**Psionics:** All Physical and Sensitive psionics.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Eight physical or psionic attacks per melee round or two by spell magic.

**Combat Bonuses (includes attribute bonuses):** +4 on initiative, +8 to strike and parry, +10 to dodge. +6 to roll with impact, +10 to pull punch, +8 to save vs Horror Factor or possession, and +3 to all other saving throws.

**Other Combat Info:** Bite: 4D6. Claw: 3D6. Howl of Doom: Once per melee round, Lashgan can issue a howl of sonic boom intensity. The Howl can be directed at one target to inflict 1D6x10 damage and has a range of 500 feet (152.4 m), or it can affect everyone around him for 4D6 damage with a range of 100 feet (30.5 m). Lashgan prefers to use his Deific powers, spells and psionics in combat.

**Weapons:** None.

**Armor:** None.

**Magic Items:** None.

**Other Equipment:** None.

## Isurron, Lord of Mercy

Appearing as a giant Unicorn, Isurron is a living symbol of peace, healing and understanding. Although she is peaceful by nature, she participated in the attack upon the Old Ones with special vigor. To her, the Chaos Lords were not merely an evil enemy, they were a force that directly opposed life itself. They had to be stopped, whatever the means or cost. In that spirit, the mighty Wild Lord helped lead what would be her pantheon's last charge into battle. She distinguished herself as a mighty warrior, having destroyed an entire legion of Old One minions by herself in just an hour of intense fighting.

The stories of Isurron's martial prowess do little justice to her true nature as a peacemaker and builder. She is the kindest, most gentle Wild Lord of the bunch. She exists to spread knowledge and to protect life as best she can. As a result, she almost *never* takes part in combat unless circumstances truly call for it (like the Chaos War). Instead, she likes to visit the sites of great battles and pass among the soldiers, trying to convince the hale and hearty to lay down their arms and give up the fight. On more than a few occasions, Isurron's intervention prevented entire armies from going to war, saving tens of thousands of lives. Other times, she might appear after a battle has concluded, where she will pass among the dead and dying, weeping and giving them whatever comfort she can through her legendary healing powers.

The only Wild Lord who suspects Isurron could have been the Great Traitor is Haezor, but he is widely regarded as a jerk and an idiot, so his claims hold no water. After all, was it not Isurron who nearly killed herself by channeling almost all of her life force into her wounded comrades, enabling them to keep fighting the Old Ones once the pantheon's fate had been sealed? Was it not Isurron who, with Gainim, led the charge against the Old Ones? And is it not Isurron who even now works tirelessly to bring the remaining Wild Lords together into a single fellowship? No, for Isurron to have betrayed the pantheon it would somehow prove that there really *is* no goodness or loyalty in the world, for if this magnificent heroine is capable of treachery, then *everybody* is. To many within and without the pantheon, such thoughts are poison and discarded. Still, offers Haezor, this is exactly what Isurron wants, to get people to believe she was incapable of such treachery so she might strike again when the moment suits her.

Such ugly theories aside, Isurron has the single largest following of any of the Wild Lords, particularly among Gnomes throughout the North. They share her same sense of compassion, forgiveness and wholesome outlook toward life. Her simple message of tolerance, working together and peace resonates with those North landers who have known hard and violent lives, again, with Gnomes at the forefront. Her purity and nobility are such that she has maintained close friendships with some of the more even-headed Wild Lords such as Gainim (Lord of Autumn) and Eternus (Lord of Destiny). She pities her fellow



Lords who are dominated by anger and hatred, such as Haezor (Lord of Pain) and Lashgan (Lord of Midnight). Isurron is convinced Lashgan can be rehabilitated if only he lets go of the pain that Haezor's brutality has caused him. To that end, she routinely seeks out the Lord of Midnight and speaks to him in a vain effort to mend his soul and forsake his brutal ways. Lashgan never attacks her, indeed none of the Wild Lords can bring themselves to assault Isurron, not even the Lord of Pain. There is something about her that renders her off-limits to all other Wild Lords and impresses even the greater Gods of Light. In fact, both Ra and Isis (and Osiris when he was alive) have the greatest respect for her and sometimes stand at her side, and vice versa.

Mortal men and monsters can still hurt this magnificent goddess, but the chances of ever killing Isurron are slim. Besides, unless a black-hearted villain, most mortals are so awed by her beauty and touched by her compassion that they will not attack her. Many will become calm and reconsider their aggression, and show their opponent uncharacteristic mercy.

Isurron ranges all over the Northern Hinterlands, and has been spotted periodically in the Shadow Coast, on the Island Kingdom of Bizantium, in the Wolfen Empire, and as far away as the Eastern Territory and the islands of Phi and Lopan.

**Alignment:** Principled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 21, M.E. 22, M.A. 22, P.S. 24 (supernatural), P.P. 25, P.E. 25, P.B. 30, Spd. 88 (60 mph/96 km).

**Hit Points:** 1,600; **S.D.C.:** 2,500.

**Natural A.R.:** 15

**Awe Factor:** 18

**Weight:** 500 lbs (225 kg). **Height:** Seven feet (2.1 m) at the shoulders.

**Age:** Unknown; immortal.

**P.P.E.:** 2,300; **I.S.P.:** 950.

**Experience Level:** 15th level Psi-Healer.

**Natural Abilities:** Astral travel, hawk-like vision up to two miles (3.2 km), see aura, nightvision 200 feet (61 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will (no time limit), knows all languages, teleport 92%, dimensional teleport 56%, resistant to heat, cold and fire (half damage, even if magical), never tires, can leap 80 feet (24.4 m) high and 200 feet (61 m) across, prowl 70%, impervious to poison and possession, bio-regenerates 6D6 S.D.C./Hit Points per melee round without P.P.E. cost, swim 98%, metamorphosis: animal, and metamorphosis: humanoid.

**Deific Powers:** Bio-Regeneration: Deific (350 P.P.E., no body investment required), Bio-Regeneration: Primal Deific (1,200 P.P.E., no body investment required), Manifestation (500 P.P.E., plus token body investment), Resurrection: Deific (300 P.P.E. for a mortal, 600 P.P.E. for a supernatural being, 1,200 P.P.E. for a god; no body investment required), and Transmutation (500 P.P.E., plus token body investment).

**Magic:** Knows all protection circles, plus all Wizard spells, levels 1-3.

**Psionics:** All Sensitive, Healing and Super-Psionics.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Eight physical or psionic attacks per melee round or three by magic. Isurron is a peaceful creature by nature and will do all she can to avoid or defuse a hostile situation before lowering herself to battle.

**Combat Bonuses (includes attribute bonuses):** +5 to initiative, +8 to strike, parry and dodge, +9 to disarm, +5 to roll

with punch/fall/impact. +8 to pull punch, and +5 to all saving throws.

**Other Combat Info:** Kick (Foreleg): 4D6. Kick (Hind Legs): 6D6. Horn Gore: 1D4x10. Running Ram: 1D6x10 (counts as two attacks and requires full running speed).

**Weapons:** None.

**Armor:** None.

**Magic Items:** None.

**Other Equipment:** None.

## Eternus, Lord of Destiny

As the Wild Lord embodying destiny, Eternus is aloof and solitary, difficult to reach and even more difficult to communicate with. Eternus has the body of an enormous eagle and spends her time soaring high above the clouds, endlessly circling the Northern Hinterlands and watching what goes on below. Eternus sees everything that happens in this part of the world, yet she does nothing to act upon it. Eternus' role is to observe and record, and on occasion, to reveal the course of future events to those who need to know them.

It is said that of the remaining Wild Lords, Eternus knows without a doubt who betrayed the pantheon, yet chooses not to tell anyone. Why the great raptor withholds this information from her fellows is a mystery. Perhaps she believes that none of the other Wild Lords are ready for the news. Maybe she knows one of the remaining Lords is the traitor and does not want to tip him or her off yet. Or maybe Eternus has a hidden agenda of her own, that only she can understand. Whatever the reason, Eternus is keeping the pantheon's greatest secret to herself, ostensibly because to do otherwise would cause more harm than good. This has cost Eternus a bit of credibility among the other Wild Lords, however. If the Lord has done nothing wrong, why not say who the Great Traitor is? Eternus does not care about this. To her, all that matters is the inevitable march of time, and how everyone's life plays into it.

Of the Wild Lords, Eternus has the fewest followers. Indeed, few people even know that this God of Destiny even exists, much less feel the need to pay her spiritual tribute. Those who pay homage to this Wild Lord may gain her favor in the form of a *destiny reading*. Eternus gives these readings as a reward for devoted service, having done a favor, or simply for being a friend (as in the cases of Gainim and Lashgan). During a destiny reading, Eternus looks into the fabric of time and sees the life events of a single person (usually the person for whom the reading is given). From this, Eternus will tell one of three things about the character being read: the nature, moment or place of his death; the person's greatest moment ("You will become king of a great nation"); and the person's worst moment ("but you will lose your throne when your best friend betrays you."). Note that the worst moment in a person's life often is not the moment of one's death, oddly enough.

Eternus' readings are always correct, though they might be fairly cryptic, speak to events decades away and open to interpretation. Readings regarding the time of certain events are always couched in uncertain terms, largely because Eternus acknowledges that the future is not set and telling somebody how things will turn out often changes the future time-line. If a person *knows* that he will die in the Northern Wilderness, chances are he will never travel there, right?



**G.M. Note:** If you grant a destiny reading to a player character, keep it vague enough so you can work it into any adventure you like. Also, feel free to use that knowledge as a great plot device. For example, if a hero will not go into the Land of the South-Winds because Eternus said he will die there, then if you can come up with an adventure compelling enough to get the player to go there anyway, or that character is kidnaped or magically taken there, it will grant twice as much dramatic tension to the adventure.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 17, M.E. 18, M.A. 18, P.S. 20 (supernatural), P.P. 28, P.E. 30, P.B. 25, Spd. 20 (running), 160 (flying; 109 mph/174 km).

**Hit Points:** 1,000; **S.D.C.:** 1,200.

**Natural A.R.:** 14

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 14

**Weight:** 300 lbs (135 kg). **Height:** When standing, five feet (1.5 m) tall at the shoulder.

**Age:** Unknown; immortal. 20 foot (6.1 m) wingspan.

**P.P.E.:** 750; **I.S.P.:** 1,050.

**Experience Level:** 15th level Psi-Mystic.

**Natural Abilities:** Flight, Astral travel, hawk-like vision up to ten miles (16 km), see aura, nightvision two miles (3.2 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will (no time limit), knows all languages, teleport 92%, dimensional teleport 50%, resistant to heat, cold and fire (half damage, even if magical), never tires, bio-regenerates 6D6 S.D.C./Hit Points per melee round without P.P.E. cost, swim 98%, metamorphosis: animal, metamorphosis: humanoid. Also can use the psionic power of Clairvoyance at any time without P.P.E. cost.

**Deific Powers:** Consume P.P.E. (2,000 P.P.E., plus severe body investment), Dispel Deific Power (140 P.P.E., no body investment required), Display Deific Omen (25 P.P.E., no body investment required), Manifestation (500 P.P.E., plus token body investment), Transmutation (500 P.P.E., plus token body investment).

**Magic:** All Wizard spells, levels 1-9, plus Banishment, Dimensional Pocket, and Time Hole.

**Psionics:** All Physical and Sensitive powers.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Seven physical or psionic attacks per melee round or two by magic.

**Combat Bonuses (includes attribute bonuses):** +3 on initiative, +7 to strike and parry, +9 to dodge, +8 to pull punch, +7 to roll with impact, +8 to save vs illusions, and +5 to all other saves.

**Other Combat Info:** Bite: 3D6. Talon Claw: 4D6. Flying Ram/Body Block: 1D4x10 plus the victim is stunned for an attack. (Counts as two attacks and requires full flying speed and preferably the element of surprise.)

**Weapons:** None.

**Armor:** None.

**Magic Items:** None.

**Other Equipment:** None.

## Kuldun, Lord of Illusion

Many pantheons have a rogue or a trickster, and Kuldun is that for the Wild Lords. The unabashed Lord of Illusion, this miscreant loves to use his powers to trick and manipulate his fellow Wild Lords. On many different occasions, Wild Lords

have been driven to battle each other only to find they were both put up to it by the devious Kuldun (who, of course, had slunk away by the time the fight began). This tendency for villainy makes him a prime suspect as the pantheon's Great Traitor, a charge Kuldun has never been interested in addressing. He has



grown used to living a solitary life (the other Wild Lords don't want him around), and does not care what his fellow deities think of him.

More than any Wild Lord, Kuldun loves to mingle among the peoples of the Northern Hinterlands, working his illusion-making abilities and messing with folks' minds. He especially enjoys mucking with the goings-on of large settlements, the larger the better. He has long desired to get involved somehow in the civil war brewing between the Shadow Coast and the Island Kingdom of Bizantium; the sheer possibility for sowing discord and chaos is almost enough to make Kuldun giddy. He also is interested in undermining the Wolfen Empire and has provoked discord and conflict between the mighty Wolfen and mangy Coyles, as well as stirred the pot in the Disputed Lands and the conflict between humans and Wolfen. The Lord of Illusion also has a fond place for the savage barbarians of Kiridin and is worshiped by several tribes (some Coyles too).

Not everything is rosy for this troublemaker. In the short time he has been active again in the Northern Hinterlands, Kuldun

has managed to make enemies with every powerful entity in the region. The dragons *Kogell the Merciless*, *Oundelmore Neverdeath* and *Sevenscales* have all sworn to destroy this meddling Wild Lord in return for some grievance Kuldun visited upon them. The God Algor has beaten him into the ground twice for some incident between them and numerous warlords and bandit chieftains have also claimed vendettas against Kuldun for his many offenses against them. To Kuldun, this is all great fun, but the other Wild Lords are concerned. The more trouble Kuldun gets into, the more he tarnishes the reputation of the rest of the pantheon. As a result, Kuldun currently is in a state of exile by his fellow Wild Lords. Until he settles the many vendettas against him, no other Wild Lord will knowingly deal with him. They just don't trust him. Ironically, this is what usually encourages him to start manipulating his fellow Wild Lords and hatching grand schemes against them that always end in calamity.

Kuldun appears most often as an effete Elven nobleman dressed in high-quality finery. He is a master at shapechanging though, and rarely does he appear as the same thing twice to the same person (unless he is pulling some form of long-term deception on them). Not even the Wild Lords can tell when Kuldun has magically disguised himself, which makes their distrust of him even worse.

Kuldun is increasingly worshiped by Goblins, of all things, as these nasty little pests love the pure miscreant spirit Kuldun embodies. Though they lack the abilities or inclination to pull off any of Kuldun's schemes, Goblins just *love* to see their adopted Lord in action. It is like Kuldun has suddenly earned a huge cheering section made up exclusively of the least liked humanoids in the Hinterlands. In some ways, this is a perfect match: a race of people who nobody wants paired with the Wild Lord that none of his fellows wants. As noted earlier, a few bands of Coyles and barbarians also worship this foul demigod.

**Alignment:** Miscreant.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 22, M.E. 30, M.A. 30, P.S. 18 (supernatural), P.P. 15, P.E. 15, P.B. 20, Spd.20.

**Hit Points:** 500; **S.D.C.:** 750.

**Natural A.R.:** 12

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 12

**Weight:** 220 lbs (99 kg). **Height:** Six feet, three inches (1.9 m).

**Age:** Unknown; immortal.

**P.P.E.:** 250, **I.S.P.:** 1,500.

**Experience Level:** 15th level Illusionist (for details on this O.C.C., please refer to the **Old Ones** sourcebook).

**Natural Abilities:** Astral travel, hawk-like vision up to two miles (3.2 km), see aura, nightvision 200 feet (61 m), see the invisible, turn invisible at will (no time limit), knows all languages, teleport 92%, dimensional teleport 41%, resistant to heat, cold and fire (half damage, even if magical), never tires, bio-regenerates 6D6 S.D.C./Hit Points per melee round without P.P.E. cost, swim 98%, Climb 90%/85%, Prowl 70%, Palming 80%, Concealment 80%, Ventriloquism 80%, Imitate Voices and Impersonation 76%/62%, metamorphosis: animal, and metamorphosis: humanoid.

**Deific Powers:** Alter Primal Manifestation (500 P.P.E. plus "consumed" body investment), Bio-Regeneration: Deific (350 P.P.E., no body investment required), Consume P.P.E. (2,000 P.P.E. plus severe body investment), Manifestation (500 P.P.E.; plus token body investment), and Transmutation (500 P.P.E., plus token body investment).

**Magic:** None.

**Psionics:** All Physical and Sensitive plus the Super-Psionic powers of Advanced Trance State, Mind Block Auto-Defense, Hypnotic Suggestion, Insert Memory, Invisible Haze, Mental Illusion, Mind Bolt and Induce Nightmare. In addition, Kuldun has all psionic powers of illusion (again as described in the **Old Ones** sourcebook).

**Attacks Per Melee:** Six physical or psionic attacks per melee. Kuldun does not like fighting. Instead, he prefers to toy with his opponents using illusion, misdirection and deception. More often than not, he gets out of tough situations by making his opponents fight each other.

**Combat Bonuses:** +2 on initiative, +4 to strike, parry and dodge, +2 to pull punch, +9 to save vs possession or mind control, and +3 to all saving throws.

**Other Combat Info:** None.

**Weapons:** None. However, Kuldun will sometimes use magical weapons and items of magic, but must acquire them first, either by charging his minions to get them or through trickery of his own.

**Armor:** Kuldun wears a suit of magical studded leather (A.R. 14, S.D.C. 300; regenerates 10 S.D.C. per hour) at all times.

**Magic Items:** None currently, but he is working on getting as many as he can.

**Other Equipment:** None.

## Semotra, Lord of the Wood

The Great Tree King, Semotra is the most quiet, aloof and powerful Wild Lord. He is more like a force of nature than a deity. After the Great Betrayal, the Wild Lords all vanished from the world while they slowly healed from their grievous wounds. Semotra, however, is thought to have stayed in the Northern Wilderness all this time, growing more and more powerful. To this day, he remains a withdrawn individual, and he will not communicate with anyone unless the Lord of Mercy, Isurron, acts as an intermediary. Legend states that Isurron once healed Semotra of a terrible wound he received and as a result, the Lord of the Wood feels forever indebted to the magnificent healer. Of course, getting Isurron's attention is difficult enough, and she is loath to bother her friend Semotra unless it is for something really important.

Since the Wild Lords have returned, mortals have successfully communicated with Semotra only three times. The first two were from Druids who wished to pay the Tree King some kind of homage. The details of these interactions are unknown, but according to certain scholars, the Druids eventually turned into giant trees that tower over the Northern forests to this day. The third time, Wolfen Rangers begged the Lord of the Wood to intervene in the Hinterlands southern forests, where a newly formed Western "castoff colony" (a settlement of criminals and other exiles) had begun to deforest the local area. Semotra heeded the call and thundered to the site. According to eyewitness accounts, the Lord of the Wood smashed the colony within minutes, leaving no survivors. He then wept on the ground where the battle took place and hours later, large saplings were growing from the earth. Today, the site bears no trace of a Western colony having ever been there.

Semotra is a giant humanoid who looks as if he is carved from a single piece of wood, with scraps of tree bark here and





there, forming his scar tissue and his wrinkles. His hair, eyebrows and beard all flow with a lush bed of leaves and vines. He speaks as if the entire forest were to breathe out at once, sighing a message to the world. This deity is pure power, unstoppable as nature itself. And those who test his resolve will know what it means to face the wrath of the world itself. Semotra has no concern over who might have betrayed the Wild Lords back during the Chaos War. This deity takes the long term view towards everything, a living embodiment of the phrase "this too shall pass."

Semotra is worshiped by Kankoran, Bearmen, Rangers, Druids, and anybody else who has a healthy regard for nature and the forest. Even though this Wild Lord almost never intervenes on his followers' behalf, they often are fanatically devoted to him. To them, just knowing that there is a god of the forest looking after his realm is a validation of the first order. In recent years, more and more followers have tried to find Isurron so they could arrange a parley with Semotra. For the most part,

Isurron dodges such efforts because they come from insincere followers who are looking for some kind of boon or gift from Semotra, and that is something he does not do. He also does not wish to hear from those who have vengeance or other ugly emotions in their hearts. This weeds out another big chunk of his followers. The ironic thing is those most likely to gain an audience with Semotra are those least likely to seek him out. Those who do, however, might find themselves in the rare position of asking a favor from one of the more unique deities of the northern world.

Semotra has received increasing entreaties to do something about the Shadow Coast of Bizantium, which is seen, by some, to be a growing blight upon the earth. The settlers there are clear cutting forests, over-hunting entire areas, and show no respect for the ground they claim for themselves. For some weird reason, though, Semotra refuses to intervene against the Shadow Coast. He refuses to say why, which has prompted his many followers to try to figure it out for themselves. The prevailing opinion is that somehow Semotra knows that in the long, run, the Shadow Coast will not scar the Northern Hinterlands, and that his firm hand is not needed to sweep the settlements into the sea.

**Alignment:** Unprincipled.

**Attributes:** I.Q. 15, M.E. 20, M.A. 15, P.S. 50 (supernatural), P.P. 12, P.E. 30, P.B. 16, Spd. 15

**Hit Points:** 2,000; **S.D.C.:** 3,000.

**Natural A.R.:** 16

**Horror/Awe Factor:** 16

**Weight:** 20 tons. **Height:** 30 feet (9.1 m).

**Age:** Unknown; immortal.

**P.P.E.:** 2,000; **I.S.P.:** 1,000.

**Experience Level:** 15th level Druid.

**Natural Abilities:** Astral travel, hawk-like vision up to two miles (3.2 km), see aura, nightvision 2000 feet (610 m), see the invisible, chameleon (same as the spell without expending P.P.E. and no time limit), knows all languages, teleport 92%, dimensional teleport 44%, resistant to cold, heat and fire (half damage, even if magical), never tires, bio-regenerates 2D4x10 S.D.C./Hit Points or S.D.C. per melee round without P.P.E. cost, swim 98%, climb 98%, Land Navigation 98%, and metamorphosis: humanoid (rarely used).

**Deific Powers:** Bio-Regeneration: Deific (350 P.P.E., no body investment required), Bio-Regeneration: Primal Deific (1,200 P.P.E., no body investment required), Consume P.P.E. (2,000 P.P.E. plus severe body investment), Control Tectonics (1,200 P.P.E. plus severe body investment), Godblaze (2,000 P.P.E., plus annihilated body investment).

**Magic:** All Earth Warlock magic, plus all Wizard spells, levels 1-6.

**Psionics:** All Physical and Sensitive powers.

**Attacks Per Melee:** Seven physical or psionic attacks per melee round or three by spells.

**Combat Bonuses:** +5 to strike, parry and dodge. +4 to roll with impact and pull punch. +3 to initiative. +8 to all saving throws.

**Other Combat Info:** Restrained punch: 2D6 damage, full strength punch: 1D6x10, power punch: 2D6x10 (counts as two attacks).

**Weapons:** None.

**Magic Items:** None.

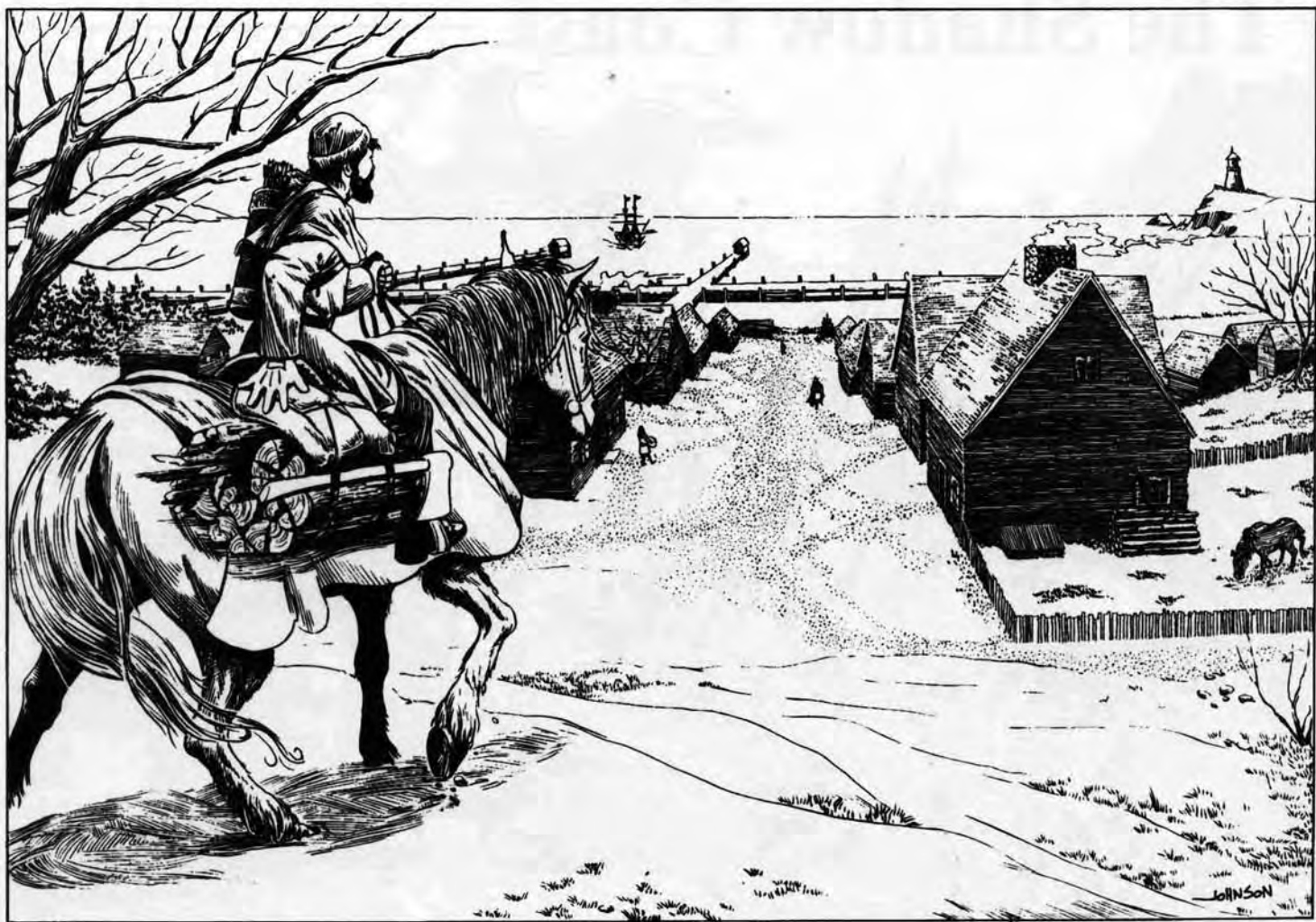
**Armor:** None.

**Other Equipment:** None.

# The Shadow Coast







# The Shadow Coast

By Kevin Siembieda & Bill Coffin

The Shadow Coast is a ring of colonies on the banks of *Homeland Bay*, so named because its outer shape resembles the shape of the island of Bizantium itself. The Shadow Coast is rich with natural resources (timber, ore, wildlife, fertile farmland, etc.), and over the last century, it has been the site of aggressive colonization by the Island Kingdom of Bizantium. This is not so much to increase the Kingdom's land holdings, but rather because the island's resources are beginning to dwindle and the effectively limitless resources of the nearby coastline are lands unclaimed by anybody and ripe for the plucking. As these Bizantium colonies covered almost the entire coastline of Homeland Bay, they took on the unofficial collective name of the **Shadow Coast of Bizantium**, or more simply, the "Shadow Coast."

Bizantium's Noble Houses founded these colonies roughly a century ago and continue to fund them to this day. A couple colonies are "free" commercial enterprises, but the Crown has plans to put that to an end. Many of the colonies are the *possession* of a single Noble House, with approximately 20% being the joint property of two or more smaller Noble Houses who lack the money or the political pull to get the King to grant them a colonization charter individually. Exactly who administrates

each colony differs from House to House. Some Noble Houses send their best and brightest to the Shadow Coast, for their colonies are lucrative and bring the House greater glory. Other colonies have been mismanaged since day one (or have simply had incurable runs of rotten luck) and are losing propositions. The Houses that control these failing or run-down colonies typically use them as a place to which undesirable family members, enemies of the House (who can not be killed or imprisoned for various reasons) and convicted criminals are sent for good riddance. (Note: Bizantium has seen how disastrous the Western Empire's "criminal colonies" have turned out, so as a result, each shipload of fresh colonists may consist of no more than 20% convicted criminals.)

There are currently 13 colonies, each of which operates under a direct "colonization charter" from the King of Bizantium — who reserves the right to annex, dissolve, reassign or merge any colonies as he sees fit. This keeps the various Noble Houses in line, for if they earn the King's wrath, he can undermine their colonization efforts and perhaps take away a major source of wealth, power and prestige.

Lately, however, the colonies have become a hotbed of potential trouble. For generations, the colonists have labored hard

under trying conditions. Winters on the Shadow Coast are only slightly less fierce and long than the rest of the Hinterlands. Dangerous monsters and animals abound, as do bandits and pirates. And despite the many natural resources and their hard work, the colonies still are not very self-sufficient. To make matters worse, their noble "sponsors" take the lion's share of the wealth and leave them with a pittance. A practice of economic rape the settlers are increasingly infuriated over. They are growing weary of working like mules while their noble masters grow fat and rich from their labor.

In recent years, talk of insurrection has come to the surface, fomented, in large part, by the secretive rabble-rousing of the *Council of Elements* (described later in this section). After all, if so much of the nobles' power comes from the money they make from the Shadow Coast, then why don't the colonists share in the profits? At first, these rumblings were brushed off as the mere bellyaching of workers, but now, violent sedition is a very real possibility. The Noble Houses fear that all it will take is one significant event to send many of these colonists over the edge. They have the King's ear on this and point to an 8-16% decrease in productivity at all but a few of the colonies. The *Coastlanders* (as the colonists are called) claim the decrease is the result of losses at the hands of raiders, pirates and monsters, but the Noble Houses insist the "ungrateful colonists" are diverting a portion of the lumber, crops, ores and other commodities to "foreign interests" and independent merchants to line their own pockets. A couple of the Noble Houses have even implicated the Western Empire with circumstantial evidence, claiming the Empire is cleverly encouraging sedition to get a better price on goods from the colonies and possibly even claim the Shadow Coast settlements for itself!

The King of Bizantium will not allow the Western Empire on his doorstep and has taken the nobles at their word. He has promised that if rebellion occurs at even one of the colonies, he will dispatch troops to stem the revolt. An action that is likely to galvanize the majority of the 13 colonies to join forces and fight back with everything they've got.

In the meanwhile, the King has ordered a full naval blockade of *Homeland Bay*, ostensibly to "protect the colonies" from the pirates and raiders they claim to be robbing cargo and goods earmarked for the Noble Houses. This action places all shipping under the control of the King, and in effect, the Noble Houses. A blockade has been established and all foreign vessels (i.e. any other than registered Bizantium ships) are turned away. The only ships that are allowed passage are those officially sanctioned by the Crown, including those dispatched by the Noble Houses to export goods from the colonies. Additionally, marines regularly patrol the docks, check shipments and guard warehouses in the colonies. This has had the immediate effect of cutting losses in half! It has also made the situation more volatile, as the colonists resent being "occupied" by the Bizantium Navy and feel that the Crown has joined the nobles in enforcing unfair poverty and hardship upon them. (Note: It is true that the majority of the colonies were funneling raw materials and goods to independent merchants and foreign powers (namely the Western Empire, Phi, Lopan and the Eastern Territories), but they did so out of desperation. The King does not realize (or care) exactly how unfair the colonies are being treated or how oppressive the poverty is along the Shadow Coast. Even a whipped dog will

fight back at some point. The colonists see the recent military action as being taken against them, not any pirates or raiders, and as one more slap in their face. It has raised the level of resentment and anger to new heights and puts them that much closer to open rebellion.)

Occasionally, Coastlanders send blockade runners to punch through or sneak past the cordon, and deliver smuggled goods to and from the colonies. However, this is hazardous and often deadly work. Those caught are declared "traitors" subject to imprisonment, being sold into a life of slavery or public execution. And even unarmed resistance is often met with deadly force. To avoid intervention by the Crown or private retribution by their noble lords, the Coastlanders are better off transporting goods over land to waiting merchants and traders located in Ophid's Grasslands or to outposts in the east along the *Dragon's Claw*. The problem is, land travel takes four times longer and is more vulnerable to attack and losses. Thus, the naval blockade and limited occupation of the colonies has placed an economic stranglehold on the Coastlanders. What little extra money, and trade goods they had been able to get in past months, have been cut to half or to nothing. They struggle to support their families and break their backs for the fat nobles of Bizantium without thanks or fair compensation. Unless the blockade is lifted, the resulting poverty and hardship may drive them to open rebellion. Since they can no longer circumvent their poverty by secretly trading with outsiders, even colonists who were against rebellion before are beginning to think otherwise.

Sadly, the Crown does not notice or care about the injustice foisted upon the settlers along the Shadow Coast. The government has let things slowly spiral out of control in the colonies through a steady stream of corruption, mismanagement and callousness. Thus, it comes as no surprise to the Coastlanders that the King could care less about them and intends to use military force to crush them under the heels of his nobles. They realize that he and the Noble Houses expect the blockade and the threat of martial law will make them submit. Instead, it has sparked the opposite reaction, making them more angry and emboldened to defy the authorities and throw off the yoke of oppression. With increasing frequency, there is seditious talk, open defiance, vandalism and secret meetings. Coastlanders gather to commiserate about their plight and discuss strategies and tactics for rebellion and guerilla war. Many Coastlanders have been preparing for war and they have a ton of tricks up their sleeves to use against their *enemy*, the lords of Bizantium! The Crown might have ships, muscle and magic, but the colonies have the moxie and experience in the Hinterlands to bring on a civil war that even the great Island Kingdom of Bizantium would be hard pressed to quell. And they are not without their own magical resources. If someone could make the King or the nobles see the light and get the Noble Houses to loosen their grip and let the Coastlanders enjoy the rewards of their hard labor, conflict could be avoided. However, at the present, a full-scale civil war seems inevitable. It is only a question of when and what will set it off.

## Shadow Coast Population

**Population:** Approximately 400,000 total; with each colony ranging from 20,000 to 50,000 people.

**Typical Racial Breakdown:** Humans: 66%, Elves: 6%, Dwarves: 7%, Gnomes: 6%, Orcs: 5%, Ogres 3%, Goblins: 3%,



Canines (various): 2%, and Others: 2% (including a small number of Centaurs, Bearmen, Trolls and giants, among others).

**Note:** There are few "slaves" because the Coastlanders are poor, hard working people who see slavery as inhuman and evil. However, a few of the less scrupulous colonies specialize in the capture and exportation of slaves and monsters; many for exploitation in gladiatorial arenas and heavy labor around the world. The monster races are the primary targets, including Wolfen, Coyles, Bearmen, Trolls, Ogres, Orcs, Goblins, Bug Bears, Centaurs, Minotaurs, Giants and the occasional Faerie Folk, Kankoran, Emerin, demon, Gnome and human (the latter two are usually bandits, rebels and troublemakers).

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## The People & Culture

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Though humans dominate the Shadow Coast, it is a racially diverse place. Regardless of race, the Coastlanders are a crusty, hard-nosed lot. They have developed a mentality and culture distinct from their Bizantium origins and now feel more beholden to their stake in the Northern Hinterlands than to their King and homeland. Much of this cultural break comes from the relatively easy lives Bizantines live compared to the average Coastlanders, for whom survival is a constant challenge. Every year, any given colony of the Shadow Coast could fold thanks to disease, crop failure, bad weather, monster invasion, piracy, runaway crime, or any number of disasters. Coastlanders have to fight the elements, survive brutal winters five months long and plumb the forest and land to scratch out a living. To get by, Coastlanders must be both independent and interdependent. As contrary as that may sound, they must know how to survive on their own against the elements and all the challenges the Northern Hinterlands throws at them. Yet at the same time, there is a tacit understanding of the necessity for teamwork and to help one's fellow man when he truly needs it. The combination of these principles has forged a society that is remarkably close-knit and distrustful of the distant authority from Bizantium, and which grates at the unfair exploitation of their communities by the sponsoring (and loosely governing) Nobles Houses. The Coastlanders' culture, more than any one policy from the Crown or any behind-the-scenes manipulation by the Council of Elements, is the *real* foundation of their society, mindset and undercurrent for rebellion. Their struggles have also given them a great respect for the land, nature, freedom, justice and equality. This helps to unite the Coastlanders, for they have come to terms with their environment, are equals amongst themselves, and all endure the hardships and injustice imposed upon them by their uncaring masters.

Initially, the colonies were populated solely by worker staffs who came out for a year on contract, then rotated back home with some extra money. Over time, workers began to accept long-term work contracts, and some stayed permanently. Eventually, there developed enough of a population that the labor force began to replenish itself as folks married and offspring born on the Shadow Coast grew up and took over the jobs their parents once held. This unexpected but welcomed development made the need for a short-term labor force from Bizantium increasingly unnecessary, and the Shadow Coast began evolving as a separate culture and society from its isle homeland.

Today, most Coastlanders tend to be down to earth, hard working, crusty, cautious and gruff, but at the same time, generous (if grudgingly so), compassionate and honorable. They are accustomed to short and violent lives, thanks to the harsh conditions in which they live and the dangerous jobs they must routinely undertake. They are also accustomed to getting a raw deal from the King and the Nobility back home, so they take nothing for granted and trust nobody beyond a simple handshake. Still, their hard living conditions and exploitation have not ground the life out of these people. Quite the opposite, they have made them mentally and physically tough and resilient, and willing and able to take on the most challenging of tasks with little more comment than a wry joke. The Coastlanders' sense of humor and gift for artfully vast understatement, for example, has become a signature characteristic of their culture, something that minstrels and jesters back home use both to make fun of the colonists and to incorporate into their own acts.

Though the Homeland profits greatly from the Shadow Coast, it does little to support it. Virtually no shares of the profit, food, finished goods, education or military aid (aside from ill-trained mercenaries who couldn't get jobs working for any of the Noble Houses back home) are given to the Coastlanders, so they have learned to use whatever they can to survive. That includes accepting help from other races, which is what makes the Shadow Coast such a multi-racial community. While Bizantium is not nearly as hostile to non-human races as the Western Empire or the Timiro Kingdom, it does have its own brand of human supremacy, something which the Shadow Coast colonists have distanced themselves from. They no longer view Wolfen and Bearmen as inferior creatures, merely different folk who know a lot more about the Northern Wilderness than they do. Kankoran in particular are respected for their intimate knowledge of the environment and hunting, just as Coyles are reviled for their destructive behavior and their tendency to start trouble whenever they show up. Along those lines, Coastlanders typically have no use for *troublesome* Orcs, Ogres, Goblins, Hob-Goblins, et al., but a member of *any* of those races who is willing to work hard and keep his nose clean is accepted as an equal (or as close as any human society comes to it). This does not mean, however, that Coastlanders are trusting fools. They are wary of all strangers and most honest communities can recognize a bandit, pirate, con artist or adventurer at a glance. They regularly deal with monstrous raiders and are used to repelling attacks from bandits, pirates, barbarians, Coyle marauders, and even small bands of Gigantes and demons from the mountains, all with precious little help from back home. This has made most Coastlanders pragmatic and resourceful fighters whose greatest strength is teamwork and unity. Their weapons and defenses may be crude and limited, but they make the best of what they have and neighbor looks out for neighbor, always ready to take a stand in his defense or lend a helping hand. Thus, rowdy adventurers, bullies, thieves, raiders and demonic predators do not face a single man, but an entire community willing to help their fellow man.

While very few Coastlanders are professional fighters of any kind, most know how to fight, are rugged and strong from their backbreaking labors, and are unafraid to fight for friend, family or community. Standing together as they do, most Shadow Coast communities present a formidable force to whoever is foolish enough to cross swords with them, and unlike most brig-





communities at large. Consequently, folks in each of the 13 colonies know a large number of people in all of the colonies. The residents of a particular colony know most everybody within it, and many folks know each other by first names. Various members of the community will also know several other folks from 2-8 other communities, and know the names of town leaders and important individuals (if not know them personally). This all makes Shadow Coast settlements very tight-knit and sometimes secretive among themselves.

The oppression of the Noble Houses and military action by the Crown only push them closer, and make Bizantium seem all the more like a foreign invader rather than the motherland. This sense of unity and camaraderie also works to create a close-knit communication network wiring the colonies together by word of mouth, empathy and magic. News of important events, conflicts, trouble, concerns and rumors spread among the settlements like wildfire. In a matter of a day or two (hours if the news is explosive), all the colonies will have heard about it. Consequently, by the end of the day, the arrival of a visitor(s) will be known to everyone in town. If that visitor is a member of the Bizantium government or Noble House, or some other powerful, suspicious or important figure, the neighboring townsfolk will know of his arrival (and rumors about the purpose of his/their visit) by the next morning, and most of the other colonies by the end of the week. This is not as true of adventurers, especially those who keep to themselves and don't cause trouble or make a spectacle of themselves. However, one can become "known" to the people of the Shadow Coast by their deeds in and away from town. Word of heroic feats, acts of kindness, as well as villainy, cowardice, acts of cruelty, and the discovery of magic or treasure deep in the wilderness, is likely to reach one of the colonies sooner or later, and from there spread to at least a few others. Again, only events that directly affect or endanger the colonies, or which are exciting or important, will sweep throughout them all. News of outsiders who do things to help or protect the colonies and their wilderness friends is likely to spread throughout the 13 towns of the Shadow Coast, as will word of dangerous or murderous villains and monsters.

Newcomers are viewed with a certain amount of suspicion and will find it difficult to fully integrate into the Coastlanders' society until they have proven their worth ten times over. Even then, they may never be completely accepted as "true" Coastlanders. To earn that privilege, one must be born here, and even then, unless one can trace his lineage back a generation or two, he still might be brushed off as a "newcomer." This has created a strict hierarchy within Coastlander society that has nothing to do with wealth, political pull, or legal status. In the back of everybody's mind, everyone is ranked by their personal history. The older and truer the Coastlander, the more he should be trusted, respected and believed, even if that person is a known cheat or incompetent. This tends to cause problems from time to time, but for the most part, the Coastlanders are able to sort things out without ruffling too many feathers. In the end, this might be an acidic and hard-skinned lot, but they also have a capacity for kindness and forgiveness that belies their tough, independent and untrusting demeanor.

**A final note:** Coastlanders live their entire lives in the "shadow" of the *Northern Mountains* and neighbor the *Sea of Despair*. Consequently, they lack the utter dread of these areas that most other folk in the world hold for them, simply because

this area is their home, and when one spends an entire life fishing amid sea serpents or staring at the mountains on the horizon, they simply cease to be as amazing or frightening as they are to those unaccustomed to them. It is even said that the Coastlanders have secret knowledge of safe passages through the Sea of Despair. A rumor that Coastlanders laugh at and deny, but which *seriously* rankles Bizantium Naval Command who wonder if the rumors are true (they aren't) and what to do about it if they are. (The Bizantium Navy would like to believe only *they* have the ability to cross those treacherous waters successfully.)

**Adventure Notes:** The Shadow Coast is a heavily maritime society. Half the people make their living fishing, hunting whales and sea serpents and sailing like the old maritime whalers of Earth. Sea trade to Bizantium includes the export of lumber, iron and other ores, furs, foods, exotic animals and some slave trade (usually for resale to other kingdoms). In the spring and summer, the ports along the Shadow Coast are visited by hundreds of visitors from around the world seeking lost treasure, knowledge or challenge. For most visitors to the *Northern Hinterlands* or en route to the *Northern Mountains* or *Land of the Damned*, the Shadow Coast is their first stop and the ideal launching point for both land, based and ocean-going adventures. Sea adventures might involve pirates, raiders, slavers, hunting sea serpents, traveling to *Bizantium* or ports along the coast of the *Great Northern Wilderness*, and any number of places accessible by sea.

To get everything one needs to run a nice ocean-going campaign, check out the **Adventures on the High Seas** sourcebook, perhaps the single most indispensable piece of source material for the **Palladium Fantasy** game thus far. High Seas has ships, naval combat, a dozen O.C.C.s (including the Pirate, Gladiator, Shaman and Necromancer), and a ton of world information, including an overview of the *Island Kingdom of Bizantium*, *Isle of the Cyclops*, and *The Floenry Isles* and some fun adventures. As for the *Northern Mountains* and *Land of the Damned*, summer and fall of 2001 will see the release of adventure sourcebooks on those parts of the world.

## Economics

Money is the chief reason why the Shadow Coast was colonized, and it is the catalyst for trouble today. The Crown established the first Shadow Colonies to exploit the vast resources of the Northern Hinterlands and to sell those raw goods to hungry markets all over the world. Even in ports as far away as the Timiro Kingdom and the Land of the South-Winds, Bizantium traders have serious pull and can sell their wares for a good price. The Bizantium trade lanes have long been a source of major income for the entire Kingdom. It was the hope of the Noble Houses who established these colonies that these wilderness outposts could be used to improve their personal wealth and position in the King's court by catapulting the Island Kingdom into a new age of prosperity.

Of course, nothing ever goes as planned, especially when it concerns get-rich-quick schemes. The Kingdom of Bizantium did, and continues to, make a great deal of money off its Shadow Coast operations. However, the slothful Noble Houses are in over their heads. Somehow they never imagined maintaining these lucrative operations would be so demanding and

fraught with trouble. For one, they did not anticipate entire towns and cities growing out of their "business" operations, but lumbermills, mining and other work require a lot of people. Workers began to forge relationships and build families, so the population grew. The next thing the nobles knew, there were entire city-states with 20,000-50,000 people. Communities they had not planned for. Places requiring infrastructure, organization and all kinds of maintenance and overhead that drains cash from their profits. Big operations cost money and manpower. The nobles thought they were clever when they originally opened their operations to the poor (who don't expect much), as well as sending bankrupted nobility and a certain number of criminals to work the land and join the coastal labor force. These were all desperate and needy folk who, the nobles reasoned, should be delighted to start a new life in the Hinterlands and appreciate what little they received as pay. For a while this worked, but as operations rapidly grew, the common folk became tired of breaking their backs and getting a pittance in return. This has led to the current atmosphere of resentment, anger and dissent. After three generations of hard labor, the Coastlanders want to share in the apparent prosperity their labor has brought the Noble Houses and Bizantium. Ironically, they'd be satisfied with a modest increase in their income, a few hours less work, marginally improved work conditions and a little respect.

There can be no doubt that the Noble Houses are greedy, cold-hearted and often brutal in their treatment of their workers and the colonists at large, but they are not the only villains here. The Noble Houses are themselves being squeezed by the King of Bizantium. Between what the Crown takes, cargo hauling expenses, and the overhead to keep the Shadow Coast operations running, the Noble Houses are only seeing 10-15% of the profits! That's a huge reason why they are so stingy with sharing the wealth and keeping their costs low by putting as little as possible back into the Shadow Coast. That having been said, even putting as little as one or two percent of what they get would make life in the Shadow Coasts significantly improved. It would more than satisfy the Coastlanders. However, the greedy and callous nobles don't see things that way. They don't see why they should share "their" hard earned profits even if it does come from the backs of their workers/colonists. After all, the Houses are spending money maintaining the bare essentials and losing potential profits by letting the colonies keep basic raw materials such as lumber, to build their homes (themselves) without actually having to pay the Noble House for the materials. The fact that a Coastlander must, for example, cut down the trees, process the wood or pay someone to do it for him, in order to build his home himself (hopefully with the help of friends and family) has no impact on the nobles. ("Hey, he got the land for free didn't he? And he didn't pay for those trees did he? Where's the injustice?")

To keep costs low, the Noble Houses take no hand in organizing or ruling the Shadow Coast colonies. As long as they come to work every day, do a reasonably good job, and don't steal or damage too much, the Noble Houses don't care how they live or what they do. Moreover, keeping things running smoothly and productivity at a consistent (if not increasingly high) level falls to the bosses, foremen and henchmen the Noble Houses hire to run the show. As a result, Coastlanders are treated more like mules than people. They have few rights, are treated harshly and without compassion, are made to work in

poor to deplorable conditions and receive poverty pay. The more the Coastlanders complain, the harder the bosses representing the Noble Houses come down on them. The harder things get, the angrier and more belligerent the exploited Coastlanders become. From this rises discord, open disobedience, reduced productivity and "skimming" in which the Coastlanders steal raw materials for their own use, welfare and resale just to get by and improve their lives a notch. This thievery only brings down sanctions, firings, retribution in the workplace, and recently, martial law. Rather than try to understand the people's plight, they are beaten and punished like dogs. It is a vicious circle that will, sooner or later, spiral into rebellion unless something is done about it.

Through constant regulation, excessive taxation, and zero political representation, the Bizantium King and nobility have managed to alienate almost all of their subjects on the Shadow Coast. No wonder they are so ready to revolt! Yet as bad as things are, the Coastlanders dare not stop working, since selling their wares back to the homeland is their only source of meager income at the time. Furthermore, a work stoppage or selling goods to "foreign" sources would require overthrowing their bosses and without a doubt, bring the Bizantium military down on their heads to restore the status quo. Like the nobility getting squeezed by the King, the colonists feel the need to take what they get to eke by. Many would consider rebellion and becoming fully self-sufficient and independent, but the thought of war, and the death and destruction that would come with it, holds them (for the moment) in check. Year by year, bit by bit, the number of these fed-up colonists grows, and eventually, there will come a breaking point when those who are willing to just grin and bear it will be greatly outnumbered by those who desire justice and independence.

Someday, if the colonies should ever manage to break away from the Crown, the Shadow Coast might carry out trade on equal terms with Bizantium and other nations. The diversity of resources, industry and sea lanes available to them makes them uniquely suited for such a challenge, and they could be a fledgling nation ready to be born.

As said before, Coastlanders are a hard-working lot, and most of them are a cut above the average commoner in other countries. They are a little tougher, stronger, wiser, and more willing to face adversity. And though they might not possess expert weapons training, wield great magical powers, or command an army or navy, their hearts pump hard and heroism runs strong through their veins. These are ordinary folk, yes, but they are all capable of doing extraordinary things.







## The Council of Elements

No organized religion has so strong a foothold in the colonies of the Shadow Coast as simple Elementalism. The worship of the Northern Gods, Algor, nature spirits, and druidism can be found among the colonists, but it is comparatively minimal. Perhaps because the Coastlanders are surrounded by a harsh, isolated wilderness, the raw power of nature is what stirs the spirit of the average Coastlander, not the intricate characters and dramas of most pantheons. As a result, Warlocks enjoy immense social power on the coast. Not only is their magic condoned and even applauded (stopping storms and driving off hostile monsters is a real boon to these colonies), but it also serves as the Coastlanders' basis of faith and justice. The average *Warlock* is considered a wise and holy person able to dispense advice and settle disputes. In fact, in most Shadow Colonies, the laws and regulations established by the Crown have slowly been eroded and are largely ignored by the people. Instead, they turn en masse to their Warlocks to inspire, lead and protect them. This sentiment has enabled the mysterious Warlock group known as the **Council of Elements** to gain power in the Shadow Coast. To this day, the Council of Elements is the single most powerful organization in the colonies. A force that challenges the King of Bizantium's authority and which agitates and pushes for rebellion and independence harder than any other group in the Shadow Coast.

Warlocks hold a place of prominence and power within the *Island Kingdom of Bizantium* too, which is where the Council traces its origin. As much as Bizantium reveres and relies upon its Warlocks, it fears them as well. The Crown and Noble Houses have always seen Elementalists as a possible threat to their own power, and sought to control them. They did this by establishing the state-run Warlock Council, a mix of a guild and regulatory body that lets the government keep tabs on all Warlock activity. In time, the Warlock Council grew entrenched and cliquish, with internal factions forever at each other's throats to

attain even a modicum of power within the organization. The Crown loves this, for while Warlocks are fighting among themselves, it keeps them divided and they can not plot against the government.

After too many years of this internecine infighting, a contingent of Warlocks left the Bizantium Warlock Council and tried creating their own guild. This was frowned upon by the Crown and the Warlock Council of Bizantium, neither of whom approved of this unsanctioned rival. Thus, both King and Warlock Council worked together to nip them in the bud. The culprits were not jailed, but they were forbidden from gathering in public or practicing their magic ever again. Those who refused were declared traitors and slain by members of the Warlock Council by request of the King. Those who submitted to the Crown's decree were left alone. However, they were seen as potentially dangerous and hostile dissidents. The question was, what to do with them without creating a public scandal?

Along came the Shadow Colonies, which needed Warlocks to help build them and survive. Somebody within the Royal Court thought it a good idea to send the rebel Warlocks to the colonies, where they could again use their magic in the service of King and country. They would not be missed on Bizantium and this magnanimous gesture would look good to the public while giving the fledgling colonies the firepower they would need to survive. Little did the powers that be realize they were only planting the seeds of sedition in the Shadow Coast. For the castoff Warlocks were no man's fools and did not appreciate being manipulated and used. Still, most accepted a place in the Shadow Colonies where they could again use their magic and enjoy some small measure of power and prestige. Angry at their treatment, they vowed to get even one day. Left to fend for themselves in the Shadow Coast, they saw their opening and seized it.

Life was hard for the early colonists, so the Warlocks did everything they could to offer their magical assistance. This made them welcome and ingratiated them to the population of workers. From there, the Coastlanders' respect for Warlocks only grew. The castoff Warlocks formed their own group known as the *Council of Elements*, which functions more like a secret cabal government or at least an underground political power that has great influence over the Shadow Coast, than a guild or other type of commercial organization.

The Council of Elements acts behind the scenes to avoid trouble with the government of Bizantium, but they are the undercurrent that keeps thoughts of rebellion circulating throughout the colonies. As tension escalates, the Warlocks have publicly stated that the Council of Elements is prepared to stand by the people – while in secret, they have made it known they are ready and willing to take charge of the Shadow Coast and lead it to victory against the Bizantium oppressors. More than any other group, the Council of Elements promotes absolute autonomy and freedom from Bizantium, rather than reaching any sort of compromise. At first the Coastlanders resisted the idea of going independent, but as the Noble Houses manipulate the King to crush the colonists' spirit and treat them like slaves, they are growing to like the idea of becoming a free, sovereign nation.

At nearly every level of Coastlander society, the Council of Elements has considerable influence, to the point that some

would consider them the *de facto* rulers of the colonies. The lords of the Bizantium Noble Houses are seen as absentee tyrants, nothing more, and their corrupt House bosses and foremen only as cruel and corrupt henchmen who only care about their own careers, production and profits. Without any meaningful input from the Noble Houses, these logging, mining and other business operations were left to fend for themselves. As a "business," the nobles never thought of establishing any sort of government or hierarchy. In truth, they never really thought of them as true colonies, and certainly never thought of them ever becoming autonomous communities. Words like "colonies" and promises of a new life were just gimmicks to get desperate Bizantium peasants to work in the mills, mines, lumberyards and ports along the wilderness of the Shadow Coast. The arrogant and self-absorbed nobles never really considered building real colonies. Thus, the colonists of the Shadow Coast were ignored and left to govern themselves. When the mills, ports and work camps grew into towns and then into city-states, nobody was more surprised than the Noble Houses who sponsored them.

The castoff Warlocks on the other hand, saw the potential and seized it with both hands. With no one else to turn to, the people looked to the Council of Elements for guidance. In the few cases where "official" Bizantium administrators and representatives have a firm grip on coastal operations, the Council of Elements tries to either buy them off or have them otherwise eliminated (i.e. discredited and leveraged out, sometimes killed or gone missing). The end result is that no administrator comes to the Shadow Coast expecting to have much influence on how the people live or govern themselves, only in when, where, what and how they *work*. So while these foremen and bosses keep an iron grip on business operations, productivity, and shipping, the government of the people has spiraled so far out of their control that all the Noble Houses and their lackeys can do is snarl and threaten retribution in the workplace, economic sanctions and military intervention. The bosses and lap dogs of the nobles know if rebellion erupts, they are greatly outnumbered and would have to flee, leaving the pacification of the rebels to the Crown and its military.

Meanwhile, despite the careful and calculated rabble-rousing by the Council of Elements, the people of the Shadow Coast remain hesitant to revolt. They fear that Bizantium would use its great naval capabilities to crush such a revolt in a fortnight, and they don't relish the loss of life that would result. Remember, these are a close-knit people who value life over all else, so they don't look forward to war and death. Moreover, they see themselves as simple people, not fighters, alone in a hostile wilderness. The colonists do not realize that they have an impressive number of (often powerful) friends and allies in the Hinterlands who would rush to their support. Thus, rebellion is a very big step most Shadow colonists are not ready to make. Still, the undercurrent of rebellion is strong and growing stronger by the day. For the Noble Houses, as long as the gravy train keeps coming, the colonies will be left to their own devices and their complaints and small acts of civil disobedience ignored. Or as one noble put it, "One must expect his hounds to snarl and bark, but as long as the dogs don't bite the hand that feeds them, it's just noise."

In many respects, the Council of Elements operates much the same way organized crime does in other nations. They influence

and control things through a system of *patronage*, the simple philosophy of doing favors for others so they will do the same when a favor is called in. This system of favors and helpfulness makes the people feel ingratiated to the Warlocks as well as casts them in the light of friends and comrades. This makes the Warlocks just another "one of the colonists," an (albeit magically powerful) equal who suffers the same hardships as everyone else. The fact that they stand with the people and use their magic to help the colonists and defy the powers at Bizantium, paints the Warlocks in a noble, selfless and heroic light. To most colonists, they are benevolent mages who can be trusted and considered a "brother and friend" rather than a rival power or political entity. It is not true, of course, but that is the prevailing perception.

Ironically, the oppression of the Coastlanders unites them as a people, gives them hope, and helps make them a strong society all on the same wavelength. The fact that the Warlocks are embraced as friends, protectors and advisors means *everything* that goes on in the communities, especially thoughts of rebellion, are immediately made known to the Council of Elements. And as friends and equals, the Warlocks are all too happy to *help* encourage, orchestrate, and participate in smuggling, piracy and other "acts of sedition" (i.e. crime and sabotage) against the "Bizantium tyrants." In fact, the Warlocks are almost always allowed to broker and coordinate "secret trade deals" with foreign powers and smuggle goods and resources in and out of the Shadow Coast. Here again, the people see them as heroes putting their own lives in jeopardy to make life better for them all. Little do the trusting and loyal Coastlanders know that the Council of Elements takes a "cut" of all operations for themselves. It is also the Warlocks who have created and control a sophisticated network of spies, smugglers, merchants, traders and agents. A network that makes them the real behind-the-scenes power in the Shadow Colonies. For without the "connections" of the Warlocks (primarily agents dedicated to them), the colonists would find themselves without any means to transport what little wares they can sneak past the Bizantium marines. A network and connections that will be used to make the Council of Elements the official trade organization for the Shadow Coast when the colonists finally throw off the shackles of Bizantium and become free. When that day comes, the Warlocks will have everything put into place for them to run and maintain all trade operations (on behalf of the people, of course) and get rich and powerful while doing it. Infinitely more rich and powerful than they already are, thanks to their "creative kindness" to the trusting Coastlanders.

Like any underworld or underground organization, the Council of Elements has a network of agents and a secret hierarchy. As one might guess, the Warlocks are at the top of that hierarchy and head all operations. All top positions and the majority of key positions are held by Warlocks. Specific tasks and areas of operations are divided between specific groups and families of Warlocks, with their henchmen being low level Warlocks and mundane agents who are devoid of magical powers but have expertise that makes them valuable. This includes enforcers (men at arms and sorcerers), smugglers, thieves, and runners. Remember that the colonists often unwittingly fill the roles of informant, spies, protectors and all other positions as they work together with their Warlock comrades against the yoke of oppression. It's a sweet situation for the cunning Warlocks.



The Warlocks' elevated position as learned advisors means they are often called upon to set laws and procedures, settle disputes (often on the spot) using their own subjective take on the situation, and give people guidance and advice in all areas of life. As the unofficial judiciary, if one colonist claims to have been wronged by the other, the Warlock will hold court right then and there, acting as judge, jury and executioner — well, the one who doles out the punishment; Warlocks rarely ever *kill* people. Even outsiders who are adventurers or traders are usually judged and treated fairly, but that's just the nature of the Coastlanders overall, and the Warlocks share many of the same values and outlooks. If the crime is especially heinous and a death sentence given, the Warlock may preside over the execution, but he or she does not do the actual killing.

This is an arbitrary and uneven system of justices at best. Sometimes it lets innocent folk take the fall for things the accused did not actually do, and sometimes lets guilty ones walk away. Accused who are in good standing with the community and/or on the Council of Elements, are frequently given much lighter sentences or benefit of the doubt, especially when the alleged crime is against outsiders or the henchmen of Bizantium and its Noble Houses. Conversely, crimes against the community and/or the Council of Elements are given greater weight and stiffer punishments. However, most Warlocks honestly try to be reasonably impartial and fair, as the people of the Shadow Coast demand. Since the Warlocks of the Council are active members of the colonies, they know everyone in their home communities and hundreds of others from the other twelve. This means they know a lot about the history and goings on in these communities as well as notable personalities in them. They draw on that knowledge in their arbitrations. This knowledge is especially handy when it comes to settling disputes between people the Warlock knows personally (or at least knows about). Often the Warlock will demand one side or the other to make apologies and restitution, and for both to stop their squabbling and make up. Since most folks regard the Warlock's word as law, once resolved, the matter is put behind them. For example, if the wrongdoing was committed by accident or resulted from recklessness or negligence, or if the matter is petty, or part of an ongoing rivalry, the Warlock will make the perpetrator apologize (sometimes publicly) and have him do something to make amends. "Malcolm Duuli, you have caused your neighbor consternation and loss. Shame on you. Before us all, apologize to him and make amends by sending your sons to work his fields every afternoon for the next three weeks." Or some similar compensation befitting the wrong, like giving him a goat and/or a chicken, or 10% of one's daily catch, or the next calf or foal born by the wrongdoer's livestock, or cash payment, and so on. In other cases, the matter may be judged a wash. "Jareth, you say Burgen stole three cows from you, yet you still owe Burgen from the time he saved your daughter's life (or helped build your house or whatever). I hereby rule your debt to him negated. He may keep the cows, but you owe him nothing. This matter is closed." Or, "Jareth you claim that Burgen owes you for breaking your fence when he was drunk. Yet I know you and he are good friends, and he has done you many favors in the past. You two are being childish, and I declare that you forgive this man his carelessness and this matter be forgotten." In the latter case, the Warlock could just as well tell the two to fix the fence together, or that Burgen should fix the fence he broke; all of which would be fair resolutions.

Ultimately, the Warlocks' way of running things matches with how the Coastlanders prefer their government — spare, simple, personal, and barely noticeable. There are those, however, who feel the Council of Elements oversteps its bounds. Usually, these are loyalists to Bizantium and foremen sent by the Noble Houses to supervise the nobles' holdings and manage their business. Or those who fear an uprising and are trying to prevent the Shadow Coast's inexorable drifting away from the Homeland. Many bosses, merchants and henchmen working for the Noble Houses are not loyal enough to their employers to stick their own necks out for King, Country or the Noble Houses and do nothing to challenge or undermine the Warlocks. They simply do their job without getting involved in politics.

However, there are Bizantium and Noble House *loyalists* who do care. Some even take it personally and will do whatever they can to keep the Coastlanders under the thumbs of their masters. Such individuals may form *secret, counter-revolutionary groups* to disrupt the actions of the Council of Elements and work to destroy it somehow. Many nobles and their lackeys have decided that if the Warlocks are eliminated, the threat of rebellion and dissension along the Shadow Coast will come to an end. They are wrong, but convinced of it nonetheless and driven to put the Warlocks out of business. They are willing to take extreme measures on behalf of the King and Noble House to cheat, trick, undermine, and spy on them and do whatever the Noble Houses insinuate be done, let alone happily follow direct orders. Their skullduggery includes attempts to frame and damage the reputation of individual Warlocks, to disrupting any and all aspects of their business and life, and with increasing frequency, acts of arson, vandalism, and murder. Efforts also go toward intimidating, taxing, firing, mistreating, brutalizing and even killing those who openly side with the Warlocks or speak against Bizantium, the King, or Noble Houses. The most vile of these loyalists include innocent folk who dare grumble about what they see as injustice. These Bizantium loyalists believe if they can discredit the Warlocks and make life more difficult for the colonists, that the people will fold to the will of their masters and throw the Council of Elements out on their ears. A turn of events the loyalists believe will restore peace and order to the land. In their blind, fanatical zeal, they do not realize the colonists see the Warlocks as fellow Coastlanders unfairly targeted for their "courage" to speak out. This only serves to make the Warlocks look more heroic and earn them the people's support. Similarly, the Coastlanders don't blame the intimidation tactics and workplace retribution they experience on the Warlocks. Seeing it, instead, as nothing more than a continuing campaign of tyranny and abuse of power by those placed in charge by the Noble Houses. In short, the loyalists' plan is backfiring on them.

### **The inner workings of the Warlocks' organization**

There are close to one thousand members in the Council of Elements, each a full-fledged Warlock. A few were once Bizantium nobles themselves, kicked out and exiled to the Shadow Coast because the King owed them too much debt and by removing them, the King removed the debt. A fact that only adds to some Council members' lust for revenge against the Crown.

Every four years, the Council of Elements holds internal elections to see which 100 Warlocks will man the **Council Par-**

liament, the decision-making body for the entire organization. The Parliament decides how to allocate funds, what courses of action the group will take politically, and so on. The Parliament can also mandate that specific members take on certain missions, handle particular underground operations and accept other responsibilities. Along similar lines, the Parliament also acts as a tribunal for punishing any Council members who have stepped out of line. A *Prime Minister* is also elected to head the organization and Council parliament. This person is the 101st member of the Parliament, and acts as the supreme member of the entire Council. Though any actions taken by the Prime Minister must be ratified by a 2/3 majority vote from the Parliament, the Prime Minister does carry serious credibility with the common Coastlanders. They recognize him as the leader of the Council of Elements and as such as the greatest and wisest of the Warlocks in their community. As such, his words carry great weight and many Coastlanders will follow his lead as if he were a high priest or even king.

To outsiders, the Prime Minister may appear to be little more than a figurehead and spokesperson for the Council of Elements. Aside from casting tie-breaking votes among the Parliament, the Prime Minister has no real power except to act as an advisor and elder statesman to the entire Council of Elements. As such he (sometimes she) is typically a Warlock of great experience, knowledge and impeccable credentials. An individual whose first loyalty is to the Council of Elements, secondly to the overthrow of the Bizantium lords, and third, to the people of the Shadow Coast who trust him implicitly. It is that implicit trust and his position among the Council that gives the Prime Minister true power, for as the top representative of the Warlock conclave, when he speaks he speaks on the Council's behalf, and the people listen. Nobody has more respect and influence among the citizens of the Shadow Coast than the Prime Minister of the Council of Elements. A position that is revered, honored, trusted and defended by the people. So great is this regard, that if the Council's Prime Minister was arrested or killed by the nobles of Bizantium there would be rioting in the streets and probably the start of civil war. Thus, the Prime Minister is effectively "untouchable" and says what he wants with impunity. More importantly, the Coastlanders listen to and weigh his every word.

In a very real sense, the Prime Minister and the Warlock Council Parliament are the *de facto* rulers (or at least leaders) of the entire Shadow Coast. It is the Warlock Prime Minister and the other Warlock Councilmen who serve as the Coast's judiciary, trade commission, political spokespersons and developers of law, order and social structure. Each colony may have a founding Bizantium Noble House who "officially" owns and supposedly rules the community in absentia (their foremen and bosses given a free hand to run their businesses as they see fit), as well as its own local city council chosen by the people, but it is the Council of Elements behind the scenes running the underground economy, uniting and organizing the colonies as a whole, and setting standards and practices (as well as the seeds of dissent) for them all.

The current Prime Minister is *Magul Sovendrisen*, one of the most popular "street level" Council Members to rise among the Coastlander populace in years. He is famous for his even-handed approach to things, especially matters of justice. In fact, Magul's role as an on-the-spot adjudicator is so well received that people from other colonies routinely seek him out to

settle matters of great debate or importance. Prime Minister Magul is a charismatic person who seems to know everybody on the Shadow Coast. Given the patronage system that the Warlocks use to hold the Shadow Coast together, Prime Minister Magul's extraordinary connections make him the perfect leader of and spokesperson for the Council of Elements. He was voted into the position by his fellows to succeed the previous Prime Minister, *Sentigo Whitesky*, who died three years ago of old age. Sentigo was 111, extremely old for a human.

There is no doubt Magul will be reelected and some believe this canny politician will reign as Council Prime Minister for years to come. Magul's family was one of the clans booted out of Bizantium to reduce the Crown's debt. An act of treachery he and his kin have never forgiven. Four other members of his family, a younger brother and three cousins, are low ranking members in the Council of Elements. His older sister, Maureen, served three terms as Prime Minister before Sentigo Whitesky took the position. She is currently a member of the Warlock Parliament (Age 60, 13th level Air Warlock, Scrupulous).

**Quick Stats for Magul Sovendrisen:** Alignment: Unprincipled. Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 17, M.A. 21, P.S. 11, P.P. 12, P.E. 13, P.B. 14, Spd 14. Age: 44. Experience: 10th level Air/Fire Warlock.

**Typical Warlock Council member:** Alignments: The most common are Unprincipled 15%, Anarchist 29%, Aberrant 28% and Miscreant 18%.

**Average level of Experience:** 20% are 3rd level or lower, 46% are 4-7th level, 23% are 8-10th level, and 11% are 11-14th. The most experienced and powerful tend to hold the highest reins of power, but there are some comparatively young, up-and-comers under 8th level who have acquired positions of influence.

**Type of Warlock Magic:** 24% Air, 22% Water, 20% Earth, 17% Fire and 17% mixed (worship and command two Elements such as Air and Water, Fire and Earth and so on).

**Note:** It is true the Warlocks of the Council of Elements are bent on extracting revenge on the Island Kingdom of Bizantium for injustices against their forefathers generations ago. Yet while they have their own agenda and quest for wealth and power, most do care about the colonists. Some actually see themselves as fellow Coastlanders, and/or protectors and heroes. Should the day ever come that the Shadow Coast successfully breaks away from Bizantium, the Council of Elements will not trample over the people to grab the seat of power. Nor will they become cruel despots who continue to use and abuse their subjects. In the end, the Warlocks are likely to be reasonably fair leaders who will help the Shadow Coast to grow and prosper. There can be no doubt that they are the lesser evil of two power-mongers when it comes to the Shadow Coast.







## The Shadow Rebellion

The Shadow Rebellion, as it's called, has been boiling for some 25 years, although it got its start long before then. Things only went from bad to worse when the current monarch of Bizantium, *King Raedaen IV*, came to power. Inexperienced and weak, the king was far more interested in holding court and living the luxurious noble life he had grown accustomed to as a young prince. He left the administration of his kingdom to a large and fairly self-serving body of advisors who, owing to their greed and personal ambitions, soon used their power to further their own goals and undercut their rivals within the court. As a result, many aspects of the Bizantium government have declined sharply in recent years, one of those being the Colonial Administration.

The Shadow Coast was formed through a joint compact between King Raedaen and the Noble Houses of Bizantium as a way to generate extra profits for the Kingdom. In Raedaen time, the colonies were efficiently run as a kind of long-term work program. Bizantium subjects went to the Shadow Coast for a year or two and then rotated home. When Raedaen came to power, he inherited a Kingdom that was just coming off a terrible financial crisis — a bank panic that devalued the currency and sent anybody who owed money into dire straits. With debtors' prisons overflowing, the King sent most of the destitute to the Shadow Colonies, where they would work off their debts in indentured servitude to their creditors and to the Crown. These

cast-off colonists never left the Shadow Coast, and settled in there. While some of this had been going on for years prior to the new King's reign, it escalated to unheard of proportions. The forced laborers had families, and though their debts were gone by the time their children were grown, the new "Coastlanders" had no intention of leaving. This place had become their home. Many of their children, born on the Coast, had never even set foot on Bizantium, though it was just a short voyage away.

The Coastlanders far preferred their wilderness home. It might not have been high civilization, but it was theirs. Raedaen II accepted this, and imposed a multilayered system of taxation on any goods going to and from the Shadow Coast. Since half the colonies were not self-sufficient, they had to receive plenty of supplies from the Homeland, for which they often paid with the raw materials and finished goods produced from within the colonies. Since the Crown taxed both transactions, the Coastlanders saw the majority of their profits go straight back into the Crown's pocket, which in turn, distributed most of the cash back into the King's Treasury and the Noble Houses. For the ruling elite of Bizantium, the Shadow Coast suddenly became a great deal. They pretty much ran themselves while the fat cats back home collected the piles of gold that came in.

It hardly took a financial wizard to realize that the Coastlanders were getting a raw deal, and plenty of the colonists openly groused about this for years. What kept them in line was that the colonies themselves were built by the Noble Houses directly, so as long as the Coastlanders lived and worked on the

*Nobles' property*, they had little recourse but to work their jobs, meet demanding quotas and pay their onerous taxes. Each Noble House was to keep its own Colonial Guard and maintain all work operations. However, many became slothful, turned the job over to incompetent managers, foremen and bosses (many of whom became tin-plated tyrants or shirked their duty) who ran the operations into the ground or focused only on the business side and left issues of protection, law, law enforcement (other than taxation) and government to the people.

Upon Raedaen III's ascendancy to the throne, the Coastlanders had already had quite enough. Slowly but surely, the people had become more self-sufficient and no longer needed so many supplies from the Homeland. Likewise, colonists opted to start trading, buying and selling harvested timber and ore as well as finished goods amongst themselves, thereby making money without having to pay double taxation to the Crown. In a time of a strong monarchy, this would never stand. The King would have either cracked down on the Coastlanders, or established a new form of taxation backed up by a strong military presence. But the Bizantium monarchy was not a strong one (and still isn't), and its trademark corruption and inefficiency has let the Shadow Coast problem spiral out of control.

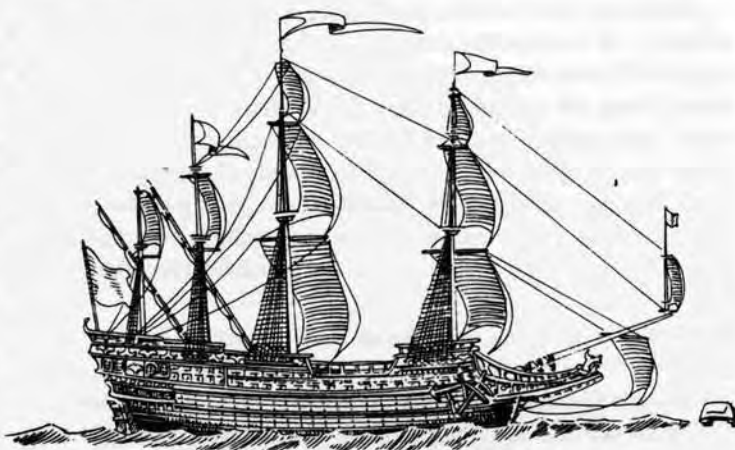
For the last 25 years, the Shadow Coast has operated on its own, a Bizantium dependency mostly in name only. The colonies can largely fend for themselves – they have had to, since the Homeland was seldom there to give them support that they didn't have to pay through the nose to get. Home-grown militias do the job of defending the colonies' outer borders, while the Warlocks of the Council of Elements provide a loose system of government and laws, and the means to enforce them. All this and constant instigation by the Warlocks has created a growing atmosphere of hostility and dissension at many of the colonies. They are tired of being treated like slaves, living in poverty and working like dogs without anything to show for it. They want their fair share or they want out. Out means freedom from the Island Kingdom of Bizantium. To become an autonomous new kingdom on the shore of the Northern Hinterlands. It is as simple as that.

For now, a thin majority of about 56% are unwilling to leave Bizantium. They still feel a certain amount of loyalty to the homeland and fear both how well they might fair when left truly on their own, and how brutal Bizantium's response will be when they break away. Even ardent proponents for breaking with Bizantium honestly admit that the Crown will declare civil war and dispatch troops and its powerful navy against them. Thousands of Coastlanders will die, and their beautiful cities and homes will be laid to ruin. Few are willing to face that challenge, yet. Until then, they hope for relief and try to negotiate with their Bizantium owners to lighten the taxation and work quotas and give back some of their earnings to the communities. So far, the Coastlanders' pleas fall on deaf ears, pushing them closer to civil war.

Unless things change (and the Bizantium King, Court and Noble Houses have no desire to do so), it is only a matter of time before the colonies of the Shadow Coast revolt. The lords of Bizantium tremendously underestimate the colonists' frustration and anger, as well as their strengths and resources. They have been under the Crown's thumb for so long that King and nobles think of them only as simpering rabble, rather than the strong, independent and capable people they have become.

When open rebellion explodes on the Shadow Coast, it will NOT be easy to contain, and the powers at Bizantium will be shocked to find themselves in a lengthy, planned war they might very easily lose. The Coastlanders also underestimate *themselves*. After all, they have been told they are weak and useless for their entire lives, thus, they will surprise themselves at how capable, strong and united they are. A realization that will make them all the stronger and more determined to win their freedom. A choice that will inspire some unlikely allies to stand at their side.

And once rebellion starts, it will be hard to turn back. A new nation may be about to be born.



## The Thirteen Colonies

Most of the colonies look very similar and have many of the same features and elements, such as those noted below. Space limitations do not allow us to map and describe each and every colony in detail, so we present a brief overview for each. First, however, we start with what most colonies have in common.

**The docks.** All are port towns with a fishing dock for small vessels and fishermen, as well as a ship and cargo dock where large merchant ships can be accommodated. Private docks and moorings for small, privately owned row- and sail-boats also dot the coast. Warehouses, blacksmiths, rope works, sail makers, carpenters shops and lumberyards, as well as barrel makers, cargo haulers and stables are located near the larger commercial docks.

**Smaller businesses** including saloons, pubs, boardinghouses, general stores, craftspeople, trading posts, furriers and other shops and services are located near the fishing docks and interior of the town. The fish market and other fishing and sailing related shops tend to be near the fish docks. Exotic businesses such as fortune tellers, alchemists and magic shops, and even drug dens, weapon armorers and bordellos, are a rarity. Only two or three of the 13 colonies have such establishments.

**Council of Elements Meeting Lodge.** Each colony has a Warlocks' Council of Elements Lodge. This is a sort of meeting hall and administration building for the local Warlocks who belong to the Council. It is usually one of the larger buildings in town, typically a large two or three story, stone and wood home. The colony's head Warlock usually resides here along with his family and 3-6 Warlock assistants (each usually has 1D4 levels of experience). Visiting Warlocks and men of magic can also



stop here to pay their respects and trade news and information. Unlike a Wizards' guild, however, the Council of Elements is a closed, secret society that does not welcome strangers. They may exchange pleasantries and bits of information, but the Warlocks of the Shadow Coast do not accept fellow Warlocks and practitioners of magic with open arms. They are wary of Bizantium spies, pirates and visiting marauders and keep what they know and think, close to the vest. That means no outsider ever spends the night at a Council Lodge, nor is given access to Council books, wares or secrets. Remember, the Council of Elements is a *secret* organization. **Note:** Most of the colonies have at least 60 Warlocks (all members of the Council) residing in their towns.

**Magic.** As noted earlier, the Shadow Colonies are composed primarily of uneducated laborers. The most common form of magic is Elementalism, with the Warlocks of the Council of Elements being the residing power. While there may be the occasional independent Warlock (fewer than ten per colony, and fewer still of other men of magic), the overwhelming majority of all Warlocks living on the Shadow Coast belong to the Council of Elements. This does not, of course, include Warlocks and mages from foreign lands come to the Northern Hinterlands to visit.

Generally speaking, most locals don't understand magic and avoid it. Although Wizardry and Druidism are accepted, few colonists are astute in the ways of magic. The mystic arts are left for Warlocks and the clergy. Thus, practitioners of magic are usually visiting outsiders.

Necromancy, Summoning and Witchcraft are all said to be practiced by the less reputable denizens of the Hinterlands and Northern Mountains, but most ordinary folk avoid dark magic of any kind. The Warlocks of the Council of Elements also make a point of keeping rival mages from establishing a foothold on their turf. Then again, unless one is a fugitive, or treasure hunter or has some other purpose for coming to the Hinterlands, there is no reason to stay and set up shop in the Shadow Coast. Trade is minimal, opportunities scarce, life hard and the rewards small. Unless the character is a humanitarian come to help others, study magic, or search for treasure and lost knowledge, or wants to live a life of solitude, the Shadow Coast has little to offer. The same holds true for psychics, even though Healers, Sensitives and Demon Slayers are always in demand.

**Lighthouses.** Most of the colonies have at least one lighthouse, using both conventional and magical means of lighting. Communities that have a great deal of sea traffic or have dangerous coastlines will have three or more lighthouses and special rescue teams led by Water and Air Warlocks.

**Churches.** Every colony has at least a dozen churches, with the god *Algor*, the gods of the *Northern Pantheon* and *Elementalism* (i.e. Elementals and elemental forces) being the most popular. These gods, the gods of Light and Dark, Rurga, spirits of nature and even select demons and the Old Ones are worshiped by people living in the interior of the Northern Hinterlands.

**Town Square.** All colonies have a town square which usually includes the Town Hall (local administration and meeting place), militia hall, jail, church (of the most popular religion in town) and a park or garden area for gatherings and festivals. About half the time, the Lodge of the Council of Elements is in or near the town square.

**Schooling.** A formal education (i.e. math and book learning) is not generally available to the citizens of the Shadow Coast. Most are peasant laborers, farmers, fishermen, sailors, woodsmen (Lumberjacks, Trappers and Rangers), or craftspeople who teach their youngsters the trade of their father and forefathers. Less than 15% can read or write. Most Warlocks and half the clergy can read, which means letters and decrees from Bizantium are taken to them for a reading. Notices that affect the entire community will be read at a town meeting with the heart of the message being conveyed to others via word of mouth. The Warlocks occasionally take youngsters who show an interest and aptitude in reading or math and teach them the fundamentals in exchange for them doing chores or favors.

**Language.** Virtually all inhabitants of the Shadow Colonies speak Northern, Eastern and Gobblely or Elven. About 25% speak Dwarven (which is also the Gnomish and Kobold tongue) and 20% can understand Wolfen or some other language.

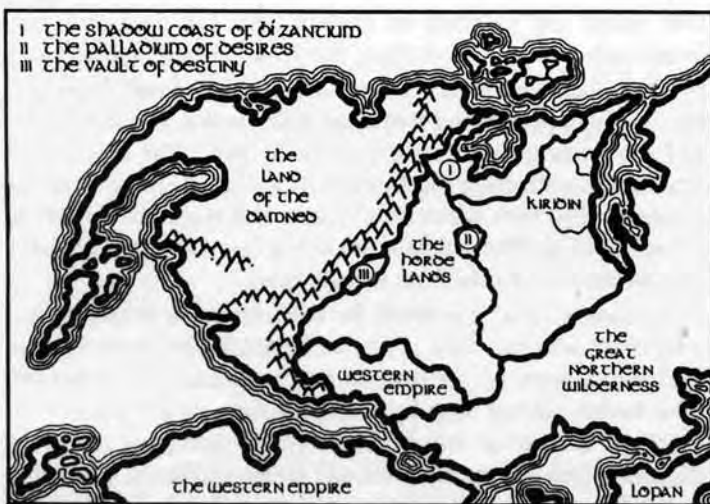
**Work.** The most common types of work/employment in the Shadow Coast typically involve one or more of the following: Fishing and fish export, whaling and sea monster hunting for meat and blubber (exported; generally exclusive to those closest to the Sea of Despair), lumber/logging/mills, mining, stone quarries, farming, fur trade/trapping, and the export of exotic animals and slaves (the latter two being the exception, not the rule). One of these areas will be the *main* source of work and income for the colony, with half or more of the residents involved in some aspect of that work/trade. However, virtually all of the colonies farm, fish and trap to some degree in order to augment their income and support themselves.

**Beyond the Colonies.** While a full half of the immediate coastal area of Homeland Bay is cleared and settled, the extent of civilization only extends a few miles/kilometers from the shore. Beyond that, it is pretty much all wilderness, some parts explored, some parts unexplored, all dangerous. Though the colonies of the Shadow Coast are themselves small or scattered, and ultimately not very powerful in any sense of the word, they offer the most highly developed settlements in the entire Northern Hinterlands.

These colonies are the equivalent of small- to medium-sized city-states and consist largely of farms, lumberyards, mills, fishing docks and homesteads scattered around a central port town. They are a far cry from the great cities of the Western Empire or Island Kingdom of Bizantium, or even some of the burgeoning kingdoms in the Eastern Territory. But compared to the settlements found elsewhere in the Northern Hinterlands, each Shadow Colony is a teeming metropolis featuring the very cream of civilization.

## 1. Destiny Point

Considered the optimal send-off point for adventurers to leave for the Northern Mountains and the famed Westward Passage, Destiny Point lies at the head of an elusive path through the lower Northern Mountains, right along the coast of the Sea of Despair. A path that supposedly offers the easiest entrance to the *Land of the Damned*. Nobody has ever actually proven if this supposed passage actually leads into the Land of the Damned, dead ends into the Sea of Despair or heads into the heart of the Northern Mountains. But as long as the legends persist and there are tons of adventurers ready to take the risk, out-



siders keep coming. The influx of explorers and glory hounds has always been a boon for Destiny Point, which rests on rocky land ill-suited for farming, logging or mining. Even fishing is difficult here, since the currents off shore require boats to fight like crazy to keep from getting dashed against the rocks. As a result, the people of this opportunistic community have made a cottage industry all their own: being the last stop for supplies, food, conversation, and rest for those looking to explore the mountains or enter the Land of the Damned. Though this might seem like dangerous overspecialization, it has earned the colony quite a handsome living over the years. There will always be adventurers, and as long as that remains true, heroes with cash to burn will always come to Destiny Point looking to spend it before the big push into "The End of the World." Destiny Point's many merchants and con men are only too happy to oblige.

This city-state of 50,000 has a main downtown area with dirt and gravel covered streets, dance halls, gambling clubs, brothels, taverns, pawnshops, fortune tellers (all charlatans), supply stores, and even professional healers and a small selection of magic. Horses and pack animals (mules, donkeys and oxen) are available for purchase (not rent), as are a small selection of exotic animals including the occasional half-tamed Pegasus and Dragondactyl. Wild animals earmarked for export to zoos and gladiatorial games include Arrow Head, Giant Scuttle Crabs, Scrollworms, Killgore, Threkk, Catoblepa, Dragondactyls, Gryphons, Melech, Peryton, Suckers and Worms of Taut, among others. Slaves are also bought, sold and exported from Destiny Point. The main slave stock consists of human barbarians, Orcs, Ogres and Trolls, but may also include Minotaurs, Gigantes, Harpies, Kobolds, Troglodytes and Bug Bears. Selling Bearmen, Centaurs, canines and other intelligent "natives" of the Northern Hinterlands is avoided for fear of retribution from local clans — most colonies of the Shadow Coast, Destiny Point included, have a fairly good relationship with the "natives," particularly Bearmen and Kankoran.

The "tourist trade" with adventurers has made Destiny Point one of the most wild, violent and lawless places on the Shadow Coast. This is where one can find thieves and smugglers, spies and mercenaries, pirates and sailors, dark sorcerers and menacing psychics. However, compared to lawless wilderness towns in the Eastern Territory, Old Kingdom and elsewhere, trouble at Destiny is about as dangerous as a church picnic. True, it has twenty times drunken brawls, duels, disorderly conduct, vice, larceny and incidents of skullduggery than the other Colonies,

but it is still relatively tame. There is no organized crime, and no thieves' guild, no assassins' guild. Nor are there slums. The town looks trashier and a bit run down ("well used," as fellow Coastlanders say), but all in all it is a tight-knit community of god-fearing people. The residents work together and generally stay away from downtown where the sailors and adventures stay, and the gambling halls and places of ill repute are found. The Warlocks own and operate the gambling and dance halls, and together with the volunteer militia, work at keeping the peace. Noisy, rambunctious fun and drunkenness is one thing, brutality and crime is quite another and not tolerated. Thus, most residents at Destiny can go about their business without fear, and most brawls, duels and crimes typically only involve visiting adventurers and other outsiders.

The regular presence of heroes, mercenaries, sorcerers and freebooters at Destiny Point is of concern to the Crown, who see such folk as potential rebel allies, foreign spies and general troublemakers. For years, Bizantium spies have patrolled the colony looking for signs of obvious insurrection, but to no avail. This is because the real revolutionaries know better and stay as far from Destiny Point as they can. Besides, this colony is perhaps the least interested in the brewing revolution, since they make a good living and enjoy a good living. The original Noble House who established Destiny Point had hopes of becoming a lumber baron, and still runs a small logging operation on the east side of town. However, the family's money comes from owning and operating several taverns, pawnshops, the local zoo, Hippodrome and the slave market. The Crown tolerates this unorthodox colony because the Noble House is an old loyal family, and because it actively gathers intelligence about foreign powers and pirate activity from the visitors and makes regular reports to the kingdom. Destiny Point also pays some hefty but acceptable taxes to the Crown to keep it happy.



#### Places of note at Destiny Point:

**Freebooters.** A combination tavern, inn, bordello and casino, Freebooters (owned by the Bizantium Noble House) is a top-notch den of iniquity. In fact, it is so attractively and discreetly well handled that similar businesses don't even try to set



up shop, because there is just no use competing with it. There are, of course, other taverns and gambling establishments.

**The Slag Pile.** This adventurers' supply shop consists of weapons, armor, equipment, and even the odd minor magic item, all presumably scavenged from the bodies of dead adventurers, brought in as booty by adventurers (as well as bandits and pirates), or traded away by unlucky adventurers to pay for ocean passage back home. The proprietors, a pair of eerie twins who both have lazy eyes, refuse to comment on where they get their inventory. They just smile, nod their heads, and repeat the price whenever asked any questions they'd rather not answer. Their famous line is, "No lookers. This ain't the zoo. Buy or get out." A pair of Anarchist Kobolds and a Miscreant Minotaur work in the back and will step forward to address any serious complaints or trouble.

**Hippodrome.** A real oddity for the Shadow Coast, this colony has a small race track where droves of drunken revelers like to bet obscene amounts of money during the "midnight madness" late-night racing marathons. The races are crooked as can be, but the betters rarely notice this. They are usually tying too hard to just stay conscious by this time of the evening. Those who complain too loudly or threaten violence are roughed up (something that usually elicits more betting on who will win) and tossed out on their ear. The Warlocks get a small but satisfactory "cut" of the take so they do nothing about the race fixing.

**Harlequin House.** This is a relatively high-class brothel that caters to discreet appointments, unlike the rowdy Freebooters across town. Any personal fancy can be satisfied here, but all clients must wear masks while inside the establishment. Somehow, this rule has something to do with an unsolved murder of one of the girls from a few years back.

**Herbs and Magic.** This is a fairly large shop that specializes in tobacco, snuff and herbs, but also sells a small selection of magic potions and magic items. There is no resident alchemist so half the goods are bought or traded for from visiting adventurers. The other half are "acquired" (legit and smuggled items) from the Island Kingdom or traders in the east and south. Powerful and rare magic items are seldom available. The most common and popular items are those involving healing and battling/surviving the cold and elements (including those in this book). The Shop is co-owned by a Scrupulous, 7th level Earth Warlock, an Anarchist, 6th level Wizard, and an Anarchist, 6th level Merchant.

**The Oboru Pen.** An establishment that breeds and sells domesticated Oboru, an elk-like creature ideal for pulling sleighs, wagons or as a pack animal. Also sells horses, mules, hunting dogs and the occasional Pegasus. Prices are average on the high side.

**Destiny Point Zoo.** This local attraction is most popular with the "tourists" who gladly pay the four gold admission fee to get a glimpse at what they may have to face in the wild. All the animals noted for export earlier, and then some, are found at the zoo. An aging, snaggletoothed Bearman who makes himself look quite ferocious is one of the zoo's attractions. The Bearman is a willing participant who pretends to be a snorting, giant wild man to scare and impress visitors. For his efforts, he gets free room and board, along with a modest salary for fun and booze. It is an arrangement that has suited this lazy, ailing brute for the last

four years, and he plans on spending his last days like this. Equal parts zoo and freak show, there are genuine monsters and oddities, including a half dozen Harpies patrons can throw rotten food at, a performing Bug Bear, a fire-eating juggler, a knife and axe throwing Kankoran, a Quilback and a 900 lb (405 kg) female Eandroth from the Baalgor Wastelands! There is also a museum filled with skeletons of giants and monsters, as well as a variety of stuffed animals, including sea serpents (captured and taxidermied by the folks at Seabright).

**Cemetery.** The graveyard for this colony is unusually full with those who met their maker while getting involved in some intrigue in town or perished in the mountains or wilderness, their bodies carried back by comrades for a proper burial. The cemetery has gotten full in recent years, prompting the grave diggers to just dig up old plots and throw additional boxes into them. The place is said to be haunted and a Banshee is known to stalk and wail at adventurers planning to take a trek into the mountains or Land of the Damned.



## 2. Seabright

The first and oldest of the thirteen colonies, Seabright has long been a seafaring community that supports itself almost entirely from its seafaring occupations. Its position near the mouth of Homeland Bay makes a great launching point for the colony's many fishing vessels, whalers and serpent ships. The stout mariners who command them make their living bringing in large net-fuls of prize fish, lobster, crabs, clams and other seafood. Approximately 50% are traditional fishermen, 5% are Whalers and Serpent Hunters, 20% are sailors, 5% are loggers and the rest are mostly laborers.

Seabright's fishermen also dare to venture out into the Sea of Despair on sea serpent hunts and whaling expeditions. They also catch and eat (locally) giant squid and octopus common to the cold waters and not generally counted as "true" sea serpents. A certain segment of the fishermen in this community have a strange fascination with sea serpents – something that is a cross

between an obsession and fear that drives them to destroy the monsters and respect bordering on adoration. The Serpent Hunters make up on only 5% of the colony's fishing trade, but their catches bring in big dollars for sea serpent teeth, claws, meat, blubber and oil. Sea serpent meat is surprisingly good and tastes like beef or venison (deer). The blubber and natural oils are boiled down like whale blubber and used for a variety of purposes, including lantern oil and perfume. Like most colonies, Seabright exports 90% of its catches to Bizantium who sells and exports it to other parts of the world. Bizantium has no interest in sea serpent blood or bones, but the locals do. They make Serpent Blood's sausage and a blood stew that Seabrighters love and most outsiders find disgusting and refuse to eat (their loss, as both are quite good). Serpent and whale bones are called "ivory" and used for whittling, scrimshaw and carving everything from earrings, pins, broaches and other jewelry to sewing needles, combs, weapon handles, walking sticks and intricate sculptures ranging in size from a couple inches to three feet (0.9 m); most sculptures are under one foot (0.3 m).

A small but growing pearl-diving industry is also part of the Seabright economy, in which divers leap off the sides of fishing boats and scour the bottom for pearl-producing oyster beds. In recent years, Seabright has discovered a bed of giant oysters that produce pearls the size of a man's fist. The sale of these beauties alone is more than enough to make this one of the more affluent Shadow Colonies.

Seabright is one of the few Shadow Colonies that is run reasonably well and equitably by the Noble House that established it. The community is still predominantly low income, but compared to most of the others, it is a paradise of affluence. The people of Seabright are known for working hard and playing even harder. The taverns and bawdy houses that line the dockyards are some of the unruliest places to spend an evening.

The community has approximately 49,000 residents.

#### Places of note at Seabright:

**The Old Bean Cannery.** One of the oldest businesses in the Shadow Coast, this establishment was created for the purpose of cleaning and packing fish into airtight tin cans so they would remain fresh for really, really long periods of time. Though the owners have perfected the process, it is still a little expensive, so the gimmick has not yet caught on anywhere, although it is gaining acceptance in the Shadow Coast and Bizantium. What the owners do not know is that a merchant from the Western Empire is convinced "canning" would be a great way to feed armies on the march, and he intends to steal the secret canning process and try setting up his own cannery back home. The Old Bean also cleans and prepares fish in other ways for shipping to Bizantium and along the coast. Fresh, smoked, salted and pickled fish all come out of this facility.

**Whale's Head Butcher Company.** A massive, dockside facility that butchers, prepares and packages meat, blubber and oil from whales, giant squid and sea serpents. When a new catch comes in, workers are busy around the clock for 2-3 days at a time.

**The Horned Ramrod Tavern.** This rough and tumble sailor's tavern is known for the large Horned Ramrod sea serpent skull hanging from the ceiling. The skull washed ashore some years ago and has become a local oddity ever since. Rumor has it one will enjoy great luck by touching the skull, but

since it is over 12 feet (3.65 m) off the ground, one must either stack tables and chairs to reach it, or stand on the shoulders of a tall friend. Those who have had too much to drink often attempt such a feat with disastrous results, crashing into other patrons and starting a brawl.

**The Temple of the Sea.** Here, every *sea god or goddess* known to the Palladium World receives the proper tribute. Priests and worshipers keep a constant vigil at the place, and are often rewarded for their vigilance with visions from their deities. It is said that some of the worshipers are busy praying to their gods for the means to sink the blockade vessels sitting at the mouth of Homeland Bay.

**Steeljack's Arms and Armor.** This wily human has a knack for obtaining top-quality Dwarven and Kobold weapons and armor, which he sells at only *two-thirds* their normal going rate. This means he must either get the stuff wholesale, or according to the ominous rumors spread by his competitors, Steeljack keeps a corps of Dwarven and Kobold slaves chained at a secret foundry on the edge of town. Weapon types are limited to swords, axes, picks, harpoons, and spears. Body armor is limited to soft and studded leather, chain mail, double mail, and plate and chain; sorry, no full plate. They can also make repairs.

**The Round Robin Tavern.** This upscale tavern is the sort of place merchants and wealthy landowners like to visit when in the mood for some cigars and brandy. It has become a hotbed of rebellion, though, and those who know the secret password can enter the basements, where outraged citizens plot a number of rebellious activities, including a daring plan to ram a ship filled with flammable oil into one of the main frigates of the blockade. The collision, the conspirators hope, will cause the ship to explode, sending the enemy frigate to the bottom of the sea.



### 3. Stone Coven

Devoted largely to extracting stone and ore from the local foothills, Stone Coven has been built almost entirely into the walls of the hard rock cliffs jutting out of the Homeland Bay, below. The entire colony sits atop a massive igneous rock outcropping of which the colony and its many stone quarries encompass just a small part. The land outside the colony outskirts is not well suited for farming or grazing, as peaks of stone poke through the scrubby grassland all over. The materials used to make the Bizantium navy's famous Stone Ships came from Stone Coven's quarries. The quarry masters and the merchants who handle this trade have made a killing selling to the Bizantium Navy, but the 23,000 people living and working at this colony are among the poorest on the coast.

The business end of the colony is a cash-cow and well organized, but the people are treated like dumb oxen. In recent years, the poverty and poor treatment has made Stone Coven a center



for rebellion, with protests, work stoppages, sabotage, brawls and open dissension. In a bold move, the Earth Warlocks of the Council of Elements have refused to work in the quarries until conditions are improved. Sadly, nothing the Warlocks or citizens do has made life better. If anything, things have gotten worse. The two Noble Houses that run the quarries have increased the work load and engage in harassment and workplace retribution. Two dozen Earth Warlocks from Bizantium have been brought in (at premium prices, which makes the nobles angrier still) to compensate for the local Warlock protest – 42 Earth Warlocks live, and once worked, in the quarries of Stone Coven – but it is not enough to keep things running smoothly. The Bizantium Warlocks are not used to the quarry operations, get paid big bucks, and demand to be treated reasonably. Meanwhile, the unskilled labor force continues to retaliate with a lingering work slowdown, harsh words and small acts of sloth and sabotage. Production at the quarries has dropped a whopping 45% and played a huge role in the King approving the blockade of the Shadow Coast and partial military occupation. However, none of this has improved matters at Stone Coven.

The lords in the two Noble Houses who “own” Stone Coven are furious with the colonists and are themselves buried in controversy and turmoil. The nobles have failed to meet their quotas for eight months running, continue to miss deadlines, and bankruptcy looms in their future. The King has already suggested that if they cannot quell the problems at Stone Coven, perhaps two other Noble Houses should take over the operations; a transaction that would ruin these two families. In fact, the courts of Bizantium are a hotbed of political wrangling as scores of Noble Houses position themselves to be the first in line to take over Stone Coven. All of this has only provoked the current “Quarry Houses” to be all the more cruel, forceful and unreasoning in the colony, when what they really need to do is back off, make amends with the Earth Warlocks, improve work conditions and pay out a little extra money to their workers. Ironically, half the money they are currently spending on the imported Warlocks would be more than enough to placate the residents of Stone Coven. However, this is a classic example of how the nobles of Bizantium see the colonists as “their” ingrate workers and servants (one step above slaves), and how they are unwilling to give an inch because they see it as a personal disgrace and (minuscule) loss of power.

Since the quarries of Stone Coven play a strategic role for the Island Kingdom of Bizantium and its Navy (i.e. supplying the materials for the Stone Ships), it will be a primary target in any full-out military campaign to rein in the colonies. Should the colonies of the Shadow Coast ever break free of Bizantium rule, Stone Coven would overnight, double in size and become one of the richest kingdoms in the region, making a fortune selling its stone and ores to Bizantium alone.

On a separate note, Stone Coven has an unusually high Changeling population. The Coastlanders themselves do not know this, of course, but the Changelings (posing as humans) have slowly infiltrated and grown in number over the years so they account for a full tenth of the total population. They have come because it is rumored that large Changeling communities exist in the Northern Mountains and the Land of the Damned where Changelings live free. A life these fearful individuals would like very much to find for themselves. Little do they realize the truth of these rumors.

**Places of note at Stone Coven:**

**Rock Solid.** This is a mercantile firm that transports shipments of stone, iron ore and tin to Bizantium. It is owned and operated by a third Noble House that is submissive to the larger two.

**The Underling.** An employment agency for all sorts of jobs, not just basic manual labor. Bodyguards, bounty hunters, wilderness scouts, mercenary warriors and even assassins can be hired here, though they are almost never used for jobs within Stone Coven or its immediate colonial neighbors. The locals consider that bad form.

**Joroby's.** A tavern and inn run by *Marcah Shamm*, a Changeling posing as a human. He and his Changeling family are convinced their secret has been discovered and that vigilantes are preparing to kill the lot of them. They are willing to pay 50,000 gold to be escorted out of the Shadow Coast with no questions asked.

**The Red Rock Quarry Co.** This business specializes in hiring out excavation crews to dig out quarries. The owner, a shrewd merchant named *Villager Green*, has never done a lick of heavy work in his life, but has launched over a dozen highly profitable businesses in his short life so far. He intends to cash out of the quarrying business before the Shadow Rebellion gets too dicey and retire to Bizantium a millionaire.

**Orefinger's.** This moneychanger and lender is one of the few businesses of the sort in the Shadow Coast. Mostly, it handles money invested by outlanders who do business in the Shadow Coast on a temporary basis. Coastlanders themselves do not trust a money handling business of any sort—they are far too frugal for that. Since the blockade, Orefinger's has been devoid of business for months and is on the verge of closing. When it does, the owner, a haggard human named *Gil Apeiron*, will kill the next three people he meets, then himself. He has purchased a series of poisoned daggers just for the job, too.

**The Stone House.** Built atop a man-made earth mound is the colony's Council of Elements Lodge, a three story castle-like edifice with twin five story towers. The structure is entirely made of stone, is much larger than the Warlocks need (can hold 300 people) and has a disturbing (for the nobles and their henchmen) "fort-like" look and feel to it. If rebellion erupts, there is no doubt that the Stone House would be used as a military stronghold by the rebels.

Stone Coven also has one of the largest Warlock populations in the colonies with approximately 55 Earth Warlocks, 23 Air, 10 Water, 16 Fire, 11 Earth/Air Warlocks and six Earth/Fire Warlocks. A half dozen of them live with their families at the Stone House.



## 4. Skurjen

This colony also makes its living in the stone trade, but it specializes in *finished* stone products including polished marble, slate and tile works, rather than exporting wholesale building







Despite Mayor Malemore's strong ties to the Crown, he engages in smuggling operations, skimming 2-5% of the profits off the top for himself and his immediate family, cheating both the King and his Noble House back on Bizantium. He also buys booty (at a superior price) from pirates, and smuggles drugs and contraband into the Shadow Coast for his own consumption and trade or sale to other pirates, bandits, adventurers and colonies, particularly the merchants at Destiny Point.

The Council of Elements has a small presence in Lothea, as Malemore makes a concerted effort to leverage them out at every opportunity. As part of this campaign, Warlocks can not find work at any of the Noble House's businesses and those who find work elsewhere in town are bothered and harassed. Currently only a dozen Warlocks live at Lothea. The overall population is approximately 43,000.

#### Places of Note at Lothea:

**The Ten Razors.** Supposedly a merchants' trade guild, this facility is the front for Jonn Malemore's smuggling and contraband operations. A master Thief (10th level, Aberrant) runs the organization which is divided into ten sub-sections. Two dozen (1D4+2 level) Thieves and a band of pirates are key agents of the Ten Razors. It also employs a 6th level Mind Mage, a couple of mid-level Wizards and a 7th level Mystic (Anarchist) named Salenger Smead.

**The Society for Peace.** Ostensibly this stone and wood Mansion is a meeting place for scholars and civil servants concerned about work conditions, productivity and talk about rebellion in the Shadow Colonies. In truth, it is really a meeting place for Bizantium nobles, company bosses, foremen, spies and visiting military personnel to discuss keeping the Coastlanders in check and undermining the Council of the Elements.

**The Gentlemen Rogues,** an up-and-coming guild of self-styled fortune hunters and adventurers. Most of the members are actual noblemen who grew tired of their lives of idle luxury and turned to adventure (or crime) for cheap thrills. It currently includes spies from virtually every faction with an interest in the Shadow Coast.

**The Arm of Utu** is a death cult that appeals to pirates, mercenaries and cutthroats with a dark side. These guys are really creepy, demanding total subservience to Utu, Lord of the Dead. They reportedly contract assassinations to whomever can afford them on the condition that their assassins get to keep the body. In fact, they currently own the body of the ex-Guild Master of the Steelheads. Rumor has it that this group of 10-18 may have

ties to demons or evildoers in the Northern Mountains or the Land of the Damned.

**The Steelheads** is a small guild of businessmen and learned individuals in Lothea who were lobbying on the side of the workers and residents for better pay and freedom. Now that their outspoken Warlock leader has disappeared and foul play seems certain (blood was found but no body), the Steelheads have grown quiet.



## 6. Inner Cadath

Located on a tiny island at the innermost part of the Shadow Coast, this colony is a trading hub within the colonies themselves. It also boasts a decently outfitted shipyard, and is the *de facto* capital of the Shadow Coast. The Colonial authority is particularly strong here, as are the Council of Elements and the Colonial Guards (a militia which maintains a virtual police state at Inner Cadath). Anybody coming on or off the island must undergo a customs inspection looking for contraband or any known fugitives or spies. Visitors who give the Guard a hard time are incarcerated or simply beaten and ejected from the island. Basically, Inner Cadath is the antithesis to Lothea and serves as the Shadow Colonies' stronghold. Here, the King, Noble Houses and spies of Bizantium have little influence. Although owned by the Gareth Noble House, this noble family gave up trying to control their holdings two generations ago. When called on the carpet by the King or bullied by the other Noble Houses, the Gareth family simply wring their hands and ask, "What can we do?"

Indeed, while the most disenfranchised, outspoken and militant Coastlanders reside at Inner Cadath, they make a point of living up to and often exceeding the demands placed on them. The lucrative shipping, lumber and fishing trade enables the Inner Cadath Coastlanders to pay all taxes, meet all quotas and make both the Gareth Noble House and the Crown a handsome profit. While the island colony is out of control by some people's standards, its complacent Noble House and the satisfied King simply don't see a problem. In fact, the King secretly wishes all the colonies were this profitable and prompt to pay moneys due. Success and profitability helps the King to ignore complaints and suspicion of conspiracy, illegal trade practices and civil disobedience. Since Inner Cadath meets its responsibilities to the Crown and as long as it is up to each of the Noble Houses to manage and maintain its colonial holdings, the grumblings of the other Houses are dismissed as jealousy. Nothing says success like a winner. And this island colony is a winner. As long as it remains lucrative for the King, and its residents do not take any irrefutable action against the Kingdom of Bizantium or any of its Noble Houses (i.e. rebellion), it can continue undisturbed this way for decades.

Part of Inner Cadath's success is due to the fact that it does, indeed, engage in illegal trade. It is Inner Cadath that hides, smuggles, and ships out skimmed and stolen raw materials and goods from the other colonies (on behalf of the other colonies) for sale and trade with clients in the east and south. It also has a lucrative business with pirates in the northern seas who raid Bizantium vessels coming from the Shadow Coast, seize their cargo and sell or trade it back to Cadath, or sell it to Cadath "clients" on their behalf and split the profits 60/40 (with 40% going to the colonists). The pirates are willing to be generous because it is the Inner Cadathians who tip them to shipments bound for Bizantium. The islanders tell the pirates how many ships are in the convoy, what their sea route is, which vessels have what onboard (so the pirates can go straight to the best loot), how heavily guarded they may be, and exactly what items/material the Coastlanders have buyers for already. Half the time, Warlocks of the Council of Elements go along to help with the raid, to make certain bloodshed is kept to a minimum, and to guard their investments. It has been a sweet deal for the pirates, so they happily go along without much backstabbing or cheating of the Coastlanders. The recent blockade just makes things more challenging.

The pivotal role Inner Cadath plays in the Warlocks' plans for undermining and overthrowing Bizantium's hold on the Shadow Coast means that they take an active, covert role in all operations on the island. In fact, they are the true power on Inner Cadath, which serves as the Council of Elements' central headquarters and base of operations along the coast. As a result, there are over 300 Warlocks in this colony, along with a hundred other practitioners of magic, psychics and other powerful or specialized agents, loyalists and freedom fighters. The Parliament of the Council of Elements preside here although the Prime Minister is often away.

#### Places of note at Inner Cadath:

**Warehouse District.** On the outside, an ordinary looking bulk container facility. On the inside, it is really a secret training facility for Shadow Coast rebels. Should rebellion come or the Bizantium Navy ever try to take the island, they "will" be ready. Secret underground bunkers inside several of the warehouses each contain a cache of weapons and chainmail armor for 600 men; over 6000 total. In addition, other weapon and money caches are scattered across the island in the cellars and backyards of businesses and houses alike.

The warehouse district is also used for shipping and receiving inconspicuous stolen booty and illegal goods from pirates and merchant marines friendly to the Shadow Colonies. A lot of smuggling goes on from this island. Inner Cadath is also a sanctuary to blockade runners. The local Warlocks use their magic to help conceal runners and contraband ships under the cloak of fog, mist, rain or other seemingly natural means.

**The Old Docks and Shipyard.** On the west side of the island are the old docks and shipyards. They were mostly closed down when the newer, bigger, better eastside docks and yard were opened. Today, the old docks are used by fishermen and in case of emergencies. The shipyard is still partially active too, but has seen better days. Locals claim the place is haunted by the ghosts of workers who died in accidents on the docks.

The Old Docks were always shrouded by fog at night and mist in the morning, which was one reason the new facilities

were built in the east. Its also why nobody is suspicious about it today, even when the mist seems a little thicker than the past and fog sometimes rolls in unexpectedly. In truth, the old docks are used to load and unload pirate ships and blockade runners with contraband. Meanwhile, the shipyard is used to make repairs on vessels that are damaged or need to be hidden for awhile. Bizantium ships captured by pirates can also be altered and given a new paint job so they can be turned into blockade runners, added to the pirate fleet or sold to foreign merchants. Moreover, the closed part of the shipyard holds enough weapons and supplies to equip an army 20,000 strong, and there is gold and gems worth two million gold hidden at the bottom of an old shaft (known only to the Warlock Parliament and guarded around the clock by Earth and Air Elementals). The workers at the old facility are all part of the secret operation.

**The Elemental Parliament House.** A majestic, sprawling, guarded estate that looks more like a large plantation than anything else. Forty Warlocks live here with their families, among them some very powerful and prominent figures in the Council of Elements. All workers, aides and assistants are loyal to the Council and the liberation of the Shadow Colonies. Everyone at the Parliament House must be known by those who hire them and their credentials must be vouched for by a long-time member of the Parliament. This is the heart of the Council of Elements and where not only much scheming occurs, but the plans to carry them out are devised and implemented.

**Saenn House.** A simple homestead with a terrible secret: Unknown to anyone in town, including those living there, the foundation of the main farmhouse is built with a mysterious and ancient stone that contains an evil force of some kind! This malevolent power corrupts those living on the farm, turning them evil or insane one by one. While the locals are aware of the strange string of "coincidence and tragedy" surrounding the place, none suspect that there is a dark force at work.





Past events include the following. Old man McCarty killing his cheating, young, second wife and her lover with an axe. His son becoming a drunk who claimed to hear voices in his head, and who finally killed himself by diving into the sea. Holister McCarty, the youngest son, was discovered to be a murderer (serial killer actually), with most of his crimes directed at the clergy and pious worshipers of the god Epim. He claimed to have been directed by the god Locknar to do the deeds. Then the Ranholm family, workers on the farm, were discovered to be demon worshipers said to be in contact, the Old One Netosa. The entire family was tried, found guilty and summarily hung until dead and their bodies cremated. A young neighbor child was found dead in the well (presumed to be an accident), and sweet Melissa became addled when she was kicked in the head by a mule. She never married and died an old maid who was said to enjoy killing chickens and drowning kittens. In addition, workers and passersby claim to have seen strange lights and heard frightening sounds at the farm and more than one individual has claimed to have seen Grave Ghouls in the fields. A Banshee is also known to visit this place as a harbinger of tragedy yet to unfold.

The farm is currently the property of Samuel and Lacreia Winstahl, second cousins to the McCarty family. Rumors have begun to circulate claiming that Lucretia is a witch with the power of the evil eye and a demon familiar disguised as a large rat. While Samuel is said to love her so desperately that he will do whatever she asks of him. Both are a little odd and don't seem bothered by the farm's history. The farm has fallen on bad times and few are willing to work it for any amount of pay. A large vegetable garden has been started and the two have started to raise hogs and a few sheep.

**The Guard Post.** A tavern popular with the Colonial Guardsmen. This is more of a social club where the Guard can relax than a place to get falling-down drunk.

**Second Hands.** An antique store run by an old coot named *Wardo Geidon*. Wardo's most distinguishing characteristic is that though he is an old human, he has the hands of an equally old *Ogre*! When asked about it, he pretends like there is nothing odd about his hands, but the reality is he was once a Necromancer, and these hands are a holdover from that part of his life. (Anarchist with Miscreant leanings; 9th level).

**The Fortress of Truth.** This is just a sea shanty on the north end of the island, but it is home to a dangerous, secret group of ultra-loyal Coastlanders who hunger for rebellion and freedom. They are fanatics ready to kill or do anything for the cause, even suicide missions. They regularly volunteer for blockade running, acts of sabotage and missions where they get to hurt or kill "the enemy" (i.e. Bizantium troops and the henchmen of the Noble Houses). Most are 4-7th level mercenaries, sailors, or pirates, but there are a few Warlocks and other men of magic among them.

**Note:** As a trading and shipping hub, this city-state of 30,000 has numerous accountants, moneychangers, cargo haulers, dock workers, sailors and laborers for hire. It has many shops, artisans, craftspeople and hotels that make it a favorite port for sophisticated and refined visitors and adventurers looking for a bustling city that "feels civilized."



## 7. Outer Cadath

Outer Cadath is a militant reflection of its island namesake. It is the biggest rebel hotbed in the Shadow Coast. That it sits on the coast not three miles (4.8 km) from the southern shores of *Inner Cadath* makes things particularly interesting. These two colonies represent the prime flash point for the entire Shadow Coast. If something happens to kick off a revolution, Outer Cadath is likely to be the place where it starts, and if not, it will be the first to join the rebellion.

Under the thumb of three heartless Noble Houses (one for each of the three major industries), the 50,000 colonists have had enough, and they bristle and shout about every injustice, new tax, new law or the slightest infringement on their civil liberties. The bosses and foremen in charge of the town's businesses are stern taskmasters quick to punish those who invoke their ire and deaf to the complaints of their workers. As a result, the colonists speak openly about their dismay, threaten and grouse. Work slowdowns, short-lived protests (typically 10-60 minutes long) and the occasional walkout and workplace riot are happening more frequently. Likewise, theft, sabotage, vandalism and losses are growing. The Blockade and increased military presence by Bizantium has done little to change things at Outer Cadath. If anything it has only made matters worse. Small rebel groups and individuals have begun to operate out in the open, and the entire colony is beginning to resemble a forward base for a guerrilla army rather than a place where ordinary people work and live. Rebels secretly shuttle to the island of Inner Cadath and vice versa, feeding new information into the rebel pipelines about what the Crown might be up to and how to respond.

Outer Cadath's primary industries are *mining* (15%), *lumber* (30%) and *ship building* (36%), although it engages in a little bit of most everything, including, the tourist/adventurer trade, fishing, hunting, trapping, raising cattle and farming. The fact that the colony maintains a large dockyard and shipbuilding industry for Bizantium, makes it a top military target for the rebels. Taking the shipyard and using it in concert with the considerably smaller facility on Inner Cadath, would achieve two things. One, it would take away an important naval contractor from the Kingdom of Bizantium, and two, it could be used to refit the Shadow Colonies' own vessels.

Though the Shadow Coast has no formal naval fleet, the dozens of privately owned vessels that cruise Homeland Bay could all be converted into privateering vessels with minimal work. While none of these ships would be as big as a *Bizantium Frigate* or *Stone Ship*, their speed, expert crews and sheer number (there are about four Coastlander vessels for each Bizantium Navy ship in the region) would make it something of a fair fight. Anybody looking to refit their ship for combat need only bring it

to the Outer Cadath shipwrights, where a vessel's S.D.C. and A.R. could be increased by 50% for a flat rate of 15% of the ship's original cost. That is, assuming the shipyards will even still exist. In the advent of war, Inner and Outer Cadath will be two of the first colonies Bizantium will strike in order to put down the rebellion and limit rebel resources. However, with all the magic and readiness of both Cadath colonies, this will be a much more difficult task than the overconfident Bizantium Navy anticipates.

#### Places of note at Outer Cadath:

**Hurricane Hassie's.** This raucous show house is home to the famous *Hurricane Hassie*, a legendary song and dance gal who has been entertaining folks for over a century. Hassie, of course, is a drop-dead gorgeous Elf who, for some odd reason, has taken a human name and has adopted a brash, flirtatious demeanor unbecoming of most of her kind. In fact, Elves are downright embarrassed when they see her in action. Rumor has it that it is all a front, and that Hassie herself is a rebel spy who uses her outrageous behavior to deflect attention from herself and flirtation to weasel information out of Bizantium nobles and sailors (not to mention ferret out spies).

**Harker House.** Home to *Elstin Harker*, an Eastern businessman who made millions trading with Bizantium and now sits at home dwelling on his old age. He has a 250,000 gold reward for anybody who can turn him into a vampire. The power-hungry 50 year old wants to live forever and seeks immortality (of sorts) while his body is still relatively strong and good looking.

**Abigo House.** Home to the leader of one of the most militant rebel groups in Outer Cadath. He has been placed at arms length after his outspoken antics earned him the ire and scrutiny of the Bizantium government. Now his every move is watched by agents (and assassins) of the Crown, who hope he will lead them to unknown rebels. Tired of sitting and doing nothing, he currently plots his own campaign to undermine operations at the lumber mills and mines. If he gets any more blatant than he already is, Bizantium assassins will end his life.

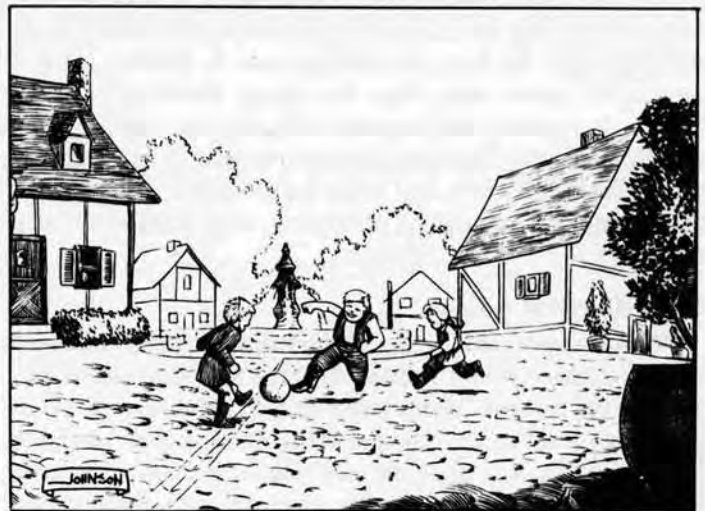
**The Heritage House.** A boarding house and meeting place for Warlocks and men of magic from the outside. In addition to fair prices and peace and quiet, the house has a small library with books about the colonies of the Shadow Coast, the history of Bizantium and its navy, and diaries and such about the Northern Hinterlands.

**Broadhead's.** A safari club that specializes in taking its clients out on bow hunting tours. Boar and "big game" hunting, which may include hunting monsters and even Giants and Trolls, is a favorite pastime of visiting nobles from around the world. The cost for such an expedition is 100 gold per day for "each" Ranger scout/expedition leader (typically 4-6th level) and 40 gold per day for retainers (1-3rd level peasant laborers) to carry gear and the carcasses of any "catches." All supplies, equipment, and pack or riding animals are the responsibility of the game hunter, although the proprietor can point them in the right direction.

The proprietor has a staff of fletchers on hand who specialize in making arrows with really large heads on them. These broad head arrows inflict nasty wounds (+3 to damage) and are the business' signature device. They even sell entire quivers of these arrows on special order for 40 gold per dozen. They also make conventional bows, crossbows, arrows and crossbow bolts.

**The Big Shop.** Outer Cadath is also a popular hot spot for adventurers going off on expeditions into the Hinterlands or Northern Mountains. As such, it has a number of shops and hotels that cater to adventurers. The Big Shop is a huge adventuring outfitter. Not only does it sell everything that an explorer or huntsman could imagine (well, minus magic items), it has a wing that specializes in giant-sized merchandise. The weird thing is, it's run by a family of Gnomes! Naturally, the Gnomes keep a handful of Ogres and an Algor Giant on the premises to help move their inventory and address the needs of "big folk." The Giants at the Big Shop are treated well by the Gnomes and all get along just fine. Apparently the elder Gnome is a Wizard (6th level, Scrupulous) and saved the Algor's life once. Now the big brute owes the little fellow his life and followed him into blissful, boring retirement.

**Note:** Outer Cadath lacks the vice and lawlessness of adventure towns like Destiny Point, but it is a favorite jumping off spot nonetheless and has a number of legitimate businesses that cater to adventurers (no magic shops, brothels or gambling halls). The coming and going of so many outsiders works great for the rebel forces of both Cadaths because it masks the activities of pirates, smugglers and outsiders in cahoots with the Coastlanders. Of course, it also helps to cover the operations of Bizantium (and other) spies.



## 8. Adira

An otherwise ordinary place except for the fact that it appears to have been built on the foundation of an older settlement, and therefore, is seriously haunted. Oddly enough, the 20,000 Coastlanders here have simply learned to live with the ghosts, and quite a few of them have become skilled "ghost hunters" and spiritualists themselves, driving out all unfriendly spirits in the colony and periodically traveling to other communities to identify, track down, and battle hostile entities, lesser demons, Witches and evil Summoners. As a result, there are an unprecedented number of Psi-Mystics (35), Psychic Sensitives (over 150), Psi-Healers (50), and even a dozen or so Mind Mages living or working out of Adira. Moreover, a full quarter of the residents claim to have Minor or Major psionic powers; mostly Physical and Sensitive. A half dozen *Undead Hunters* and a dozen *Witch Hunters* (both described in the *Yin-Sloth Jungles* sourcebook), as well as a number of Summoners and a few discreet Witches and Necromancers, have been attracted to Adira.



for obvious reasons, and use it as their home base for adventures throughout the colonies and into the Hinterlands and lower ranges of the Northern Mountains. All this talk of spooks and the presence of so many psychics (two thirds of the most powerful are outsiders unallied to the rebels, but their sympathies are usually with the people) makes the Crown nervous. The King has a disdain for psychics and figures these fighting heroes will be especially troublesome in any potential insurrections, despite their humble pretensions to the contrary.

Adira is well known for a large and thriving lumber industry (60%), supplemented by ghost hunting (20%), fishing (10%), and farming (10%). While the colony itself is on the small side, it claims a large area of woodlands and is an efficient lumber operation. Freelance lumberjacks head out from here into the local forests where they down mostly *fernwoods*, with hardwood or stonewood making up only 10% of their overall operation. Since Adira has numerous sawmills and woodworking shops, lumber brought back to town gets turned into wholesale building materials or fine finished products. Both end up turning into cold, hard cash, and lots of it, at least for the Noble House who owns the lumber industry. That having been said, this colony is better off than many and the lumberjacks here live well. Thus, a dynamic leisure industry has also popped up. This means bars, casinos, bawdy houses, and all sorts of other forms of roughneck entertainment. Sure, this has introduced a bit of lawlessness to the colony, but as long as everybody makes their money, folks don't get too bent out of shape over it. Besides, a lot of people are scared away from the colony thanks to the well known ghost stories and presence of demon and monster hunters. The Council of Elements has tried stepping in and changing things, but it is no use. And since the rowdiness is not hurting the colony's profitability or population, why make more of it than it is?

#### Places of note at Adira:

**Ghosthunters, Inc.** Home of a bumbling quartet of second level, freelance Undead Hunters and their first level Danzi warrior (see the *Eastern Territory* sourcebook), third level Diabolist and fourth level Ranger buddies. They claim to have designed some kind of power circle that can actually contain the essence of an Entity and deposit it safely into a specially made pocket dimension. The four Undead Hunters use magic staffs they found in the ruins of a half buried temple somewhere in the Hinterlands. Each fires beams of magical energy (3D6 damage, double damage to entities and energy beings), giving them an "edge" in fighting ghosts, just as long as they don't "cross the beams"—otherwise there is a burst of light and those with the staves are knocked on their butts (lose initiative and one melee attack).

**Woody's.** A woodcarving business that specializes in making fine objects out of exotic hardwoods. Criminals have the place staked out because the owner keeps nearly a half million gold's worth of hardwood inventory in the back room.

**The Orcish Connection.** A shop run by a human who clearly has such an obsession with Orcs that he dresses like one, acts like one, and even puts on an Orcish accent. He gives Elves a hard time, and shows a preference to any "monster races" that come into his establishment, which is an otherwise ordinary grocery store with some basic adventuring gear (salted and jerked meats, bandages, rope, flint, and similar). The neighbors think

this guy's a loon, but non-humans and visiting adventurers find him charming.

**The Fulminatory.** Every time there is a storm, lightning strikes the ground near this area, which is in the heart of a small cluster of houses. So, the locals built the Fulminatory, an iron gazebo with a huge, spear-like lightning rod off the top that absorbs lightning hits and channels them into the ground. Any Air Warlock standing in this structure during a lightning storm has his chances of summoning an Elemental boosted by +25%.

**Last Rites.** A mortuary run by a ghoulish proprietor, but that's only the half of it. It turns out this guy is really a *Mummy Immortalis*! A very well preserved and very intelligent Immortalis, but a mummy all the same. Why he is content to run a business remains unknown, as do the fellow's bizarre secrets. (Aberrant evil, I.Q. 11, and presumably has some secret agenda because this creature couldn't be content working as a mortician, could he? See page 121 of the *Monsters & Animals* sourcebook for complete details on this creature.)

**The Oakwood Cemetery.** This is an ordinary looking cemetery that is, of course, haunted. Poltergeists and Haunting Entities are the most common, but the occasional Syphon and Tectonic Entity also show up. It is avoided at night when Ghouls and Nasu come out to feed. Banshees and the occasional Lasae demons are also attracted to the place.



## 9. Deridan

Deridan is a mining (50%) and trapping/furrier (35%) center. Various ores can be found nearby, including iron, nickel, tin, and silver. The colony lacks any fine metalworkers, so 70% of the ore is only cleaned up and exported to Bizantium in its raw form for smelting on the Island Kingdom or one of the other Shadow colonies. A third, mainly silver and nickel, is melted down into trading bars and sent to Bizantium. The work is hard and the reward minimal, making Deridan a poor community of 36,000.

The trapping efforts coming out of Deridan are more exciting, since there exist numerous "hunting clubs" that routinely hunt and kill exotic wildlife. These hunting clubs often go on safaris that last for weeks at a time as they delve far away from home, into the heart of the dangerous Northern Hinterlands. Most of the time, these groups (which can range up to 30 hunters) come home with over two hundred skins and a lot of wild stories. But sometimes groups come back with truly valuable animals or treasure. Some also return missing half of their comrades, or not at all, the sign of a party that ran afoul of something bigger, badder and tougher to kill than they were.

The furrier business includes all sorts of leather workers, tailors and textile workers. Farming, sheepherding (and the wool trade) and fishing make up the rest of their economy.

### Places of note in Deridan:

**Alchemist Shop.** This colony has the only alchemist's shop in the Shadow Coast, a small and shifty place with a poor inventory and an unscrupulous owner (*Linidd Migoloth*) who must keep his shop hidden for fear that House Redriv, the minor nobles who initially bankrolled the colony, will simply annex the shop when it suits them. The shop is mostly a depot for secret information, vague and partial maps of the Land of the Damned (of poor accuracy and low quality), and pawning off magical items scavenged from adventurers down on their luck. The alchemist here also claims to know of a secret form of magic known as *Transmutation* (the transformation of things into other things, like lead to gold or people to frogs), but refuses to teach it to anybody or even practice it in front of other people. Most folks think Linidd is just telling stories when he speaks of having learned this mysterious craft from Gnomish arch-mages living in the Northern Mountains. But enough explorers know that there actually *are* Gnome enclaves up there, and that many of them practice spell crafts thought to be lost since the Time of a Thousand Magicks. That still does not verify if Linidd really knows Transmutation, but it certainly makes his claims more credible. Presumably, he is in dirty, impoverished Deridan because he is hiding from someone or something.

Prices are on the high end and only common magic items, potions and fumes are available, along with the occasional more powerful and rare items acquired from adventurers. He also offers a nice selection of herbs; no poison.

**Onei House.** Home and meeting place to many of the Earth and Air Warlocks who work in the mines.

**Madame Una Lau Bareba, Fortune Teller.** Madame Bareba is a genuine psychic who uses her Clairvoyance powers to see people's futures. About one in every ten readings, she gets a flash of future sight so intense that it practically renders her unconscious. When she comes to, she will have sighted an incredible moment coming up in the client's near future.

**Taxidermist.** Specializes in stuffing exotic creatures. The owner has a full-body stuffing of an Arrowhead guarding his front door; any burglars who enter in the front half of the building will trip off the Arrowhead, which is rigged to fire volleys of head darts in a steady stream for a full melee. The Head will be pulled side to side, so the arrow darts will spray the place like a machine gun.

**Wicela House.** This homestead is populated by a Coyle family who gave up the marauding life a long time ago, but still has never been fully accepted by other Coastlanders. If Coyle Hordes ever bother the colony, the poor Wicelas will be mercilessly persecuted for no reason at all other than their being the wrong race at the wrong time.

**Note:** There are numerous leather and clothing mills and shops.

## 10. Oceali

Devoted almost entirely to fishing, Oceali has a sizable fleet of boats it sends into Homeland Bay and beyond to bring home huge catches. Over the years, these mariners have become experts at handling the unpredictable weather in these parts, and can navigate the rough local waters with unsurpassed skill (making them a great asset for rebel naval commanders, if ever rebel-

lion occurs). Of all Coastlanders, it is said that the Oceali are the ones who figured out their own path through the Sea of Despair, something which Bizantium Naval Commanders consider a breach of royal security. If and when there is a rebellion, the Crown may decide to wipe this colony off the face of the map to make sure its secret naval routes through the Sea of Despair are kept safe, secret and exclusive. With all the foreign nationals within the Shadow Coast, it would not do to have any one of them (especially Westerners) learn the way through the Sea of Despair. That only Bizantium sailors can navigate that treacherous body of water has been a primary defense for the Island Kingdom since its inception. The Crown will do anything, including the slaughter of an entire colony of innocent men, women and children, to keep that defense viable.

Of course, destroying this colony might not be such an easy task. Oceali is a major haven for Air and Water Warlocks, nearly a hundred of each who live and work here. In fact, Oceali has the highest percentage of spell casters (Warlocks and others) of *any* of the Shadow Colonies, including a couple dozen Summoners and a half dozen Diabolists. A fact the Crown does not realize. If the Bizantium Navy thinks it can just sail up to this colony and grind it into dust, it had better think again. At the first sign of an invasion by warships, the colonists will prepare for battle, and they will give the invaders the fight of a lifetime.

The ironic thing is, Oceali has never been a hotbed of rebel activity. There are rebellious factions in the colony, and the Council of Elements has a strong presence here, but life is not overtly oppressive and there is still pro-Crown sympathy at this town. If the Crown should target it for destruction or leverage the ruling Noble House to become more tyrannical or launch a campaign to uncover those who know its secrets, it will only incite these fairly loyal and complacent Coastlanders (and powerful ones at that) to join the rebel cause and fight back. 26,000 total population.

### Places of note at Oceali:

**Clarnes and Barnes.** "Fish heads, fish heads, come and get yer roly-poly fish heads," is the call that comes from this shop. That's all these guys sell, but they have made a living doing it. Fish heads (and a variety of fish head stews and other recipes) are a local delicacy. Yum, yum.

**Razorscale.** A knife shop of no major consequence except that its owner is a 9th level Prestidigitator who is arguably the greatest knife-thrower in this part of the world. (He gets an additional +2 throwing attacks per round on top of his already high rate of fire, and he also gets an additional +3 to strike on top of his other bonuses.) Word is, the owner is also a freelance assassin. Guess what his methods are?

**The Ancient Wave.** This is a convalescent home for aging Warlocks and sea captains whose advanced years have made them frail or go daft. The residents spend most of their time sitting on a huge outside patio overlooking the sea, where any stray or accidentally cast spell will do minimal damage to the rest of the colony.

**The Golden Hedgehog.** A hunting club that only allows the richest and most noble of colonists to join. The inherent snootiness of the place has made rebels assume its members are entirely loyal to Bizantium. As a result, the place has been earmarked for destruction by the rebels of Outer Cadath when (and if) the Shadow Rebellion goes into full swing. Those who



overrun the place will find a veritable treasure trove in the club's basement: A wine cellar worth a half million in gold total, not including ten bottles of super-rare wines worth 1D4x10,000 gold *each* back in Timiro or the Western Empire.

**Blaspheme's.** This poorly named tavern gets almost no business, yet the owner can not figure out why. A broken statue of Od with the top of his head missing and his sword arm gone only lends to the misconception that the owner hates the Northern Gods and invites their wrath on all who patronize the place. Ironically, he and his family worship the Northern Pantheon of gods and he thinks of the statue as a tribute to them (he paid a whopping 50 gold for it from some Ogre adventurers). He serves a variety of ales, cheap wine and home brewed moonshine for 1-3 gold per glass. Sadly, his clientele (due to the misconception about the place) is mainly nonhumans and visitors who worship gods not of the Northern Pantheon.



## 11. Tohatha

Tohatha is an otherwise ordinary Shadow Coast colony dealing in the usual goods and services — ore, lumber, trapping, merchant services, a little rebel enterprise here and there, and some minor criminal activity thrown in for spice. However, a dark new influence has asserted itself here in the form of a curse fallen upon the entire settlement. Stories abound as to its nature and its origin, but nearly all of the tales deal with a mysterious villainess called **The Baehag**. She is a mysterious creature who lives in the waters just off the shore and has sworn eternal vengeance on the community for some wrong she suffered decades ago. The problem is, nobody even knows exactly who or what this Baehag is or what wrongs they did to her. Not knowing prevents them from making amends, which they would gladly do to appease her, and she refuses to say, killing most who try to talk to her!

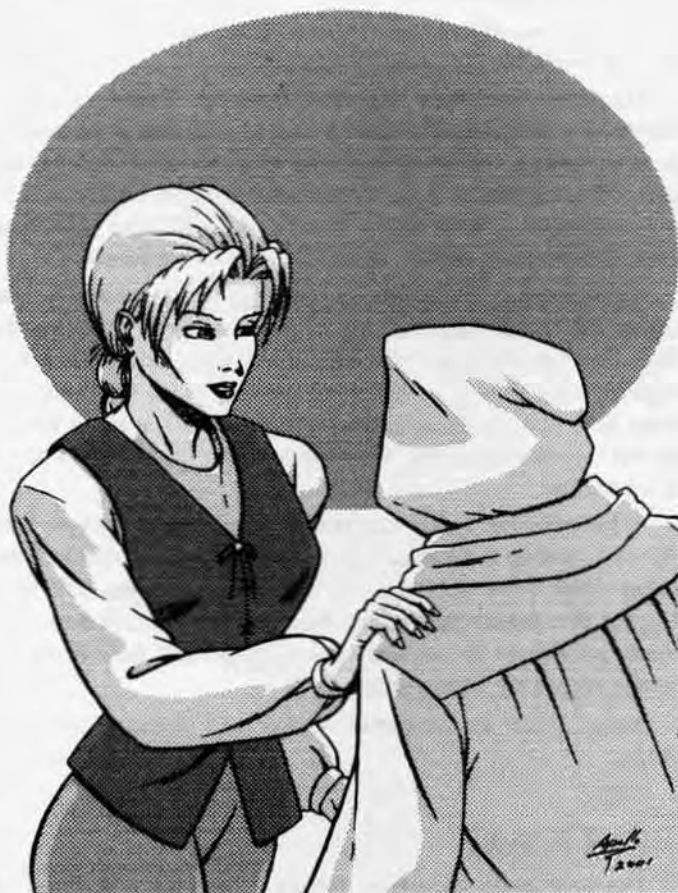
In recent years, scholars, hunters, and other warriors have come to Tohatha to learn exactly what The Baehag is and how it can be dealt with. So far, nobody has been even remotely successful. Those who go to face it are either frightened away (often by a sense of dread and/or evil) or are never seen again. Shortly after these confrontations, a terrible storm rocks the colony, as if The Baehag were punishing Tohatha for sending people to disturb her, or worse, try to destroy her. It has gotten to the point now, that when adventurers and demon slayers come into town intent on doing battle with The Baehag, the locals will do everything in their power to either dissuade them or drive them away, preferring to live under The Baehag's curse than face the storms and magic she sends out after each invasion of her privacy.

The nature of The Baehag's curse is that those who were born here shall know sorrow and fear, that the first born of any Tohathan family shall die within their first month of life, and

that all Tohathans shall endure a plague of boils on their skin. The entire population has large, weeping welts all over their bodies which causes the people great pain and constant discomfort. Since word has spread of The Baehag curse, nobody will settle there and the colonies avoid doing business with Tohatha, condemning it to isolation. The settlement is not very self-sufficient, and the curse of boils makes it difficult for the Tohathans to endure hard labor of any sort. The end result is this colony is slowly but surely dying and the Noble House that once owned it has decided to unofficially cut its losses and abandon it. Likewise, most adventurers avoid the place as soon as they learn about the curse. Only those who desire to help by negotiating with the mysterious monster (a banished Demon Lord, perhaps, from some alien dimension) or destroy it, keep coming.

The Tohathans eke through life as fishermen, farmers and shepherders, selling their wool to neighboring colonies willing to do a little trade with them. Fishing is dangerous however, for whenever The Baehag is disturbed or attacked, she inevitably goes forth to take her anger out on those at sea along her coast or summons storms that threaten those on both land and water. The population hovers around 19,500 but is slowly declining. There is a prevailing sadness and hopelessness that hangs over this poor colony that is obvious to all who visit.

The only hope for these people is for heroes to destroy The Baehag (whatever it is), despite the people's wishes to the contrary.



### Places of note at Tohatha:

**The Sentinel Tower.** This recently erected watchtower stands on the edge of town, where skittish townsfolk keep an eye out for any approaching visitors. Those who approach the

colony's main gate will be warned verbally to stay away. To keep well intentioned visitors and heroes away, they have made up stories that they are a leper colony and suffer under a variety of curses the visitors will want to avoid. For one, they insist that any who visit their city-state will suffer their fate and become covered in boils in a fortnight. Their stories are convincing and their misery palpable, so most visitors run for their lives.

**The Wailing Rock.** This big black stone in the center of town has become a ritual place for all mothers to weep upon when the Curse of The Baehag takes their children. It is said the tears of a thousand mothers have soaked into the stone, which will crack in two the day somebody manages to lift the curse.

**Fernfeather House.** The home of *Ardle Fernfeather*, a poor farmer whose family has not yet suffered the wrath of The Baehag curse. This makes others think that the Fernfeathers are somehow in cahoots with The Baehag, which they are not. Poor old Ardle has collected his life's savings — 412 gold and a few fat chickens — and will give it to any promising adventurers who he thinks can slay The Baehag and lift the terrible curse. Ardle wants the curse lifted for the sake of his fellow colonists, not because of the prejudice he and his family face.

**The Cemetery.** This sad place is the largest single piece of developed land in the colony. It is now home to all those who have died from The Baehag's curse over the last 20 years, some 4500. At night, ghosts routinely walk through the rows of headstones, confused and wondering where their families have gone. Banshees also flock to the colony and wail whenever a first born child is about to be born, a group of heroes arrive to face The Baehag, or when one of her storms is rolling in.

**Deacon Street.** This was once a row of temples, churches and other houses of the holy until the colony really began to depopulate. Now, many of these sacred buildings are abandoned or have been desecrated by various monsters, or so the locals say. Nobody has the courage to even look inside these creepy buildings, much less confront whatever horrors might have wrecked them or moved in.

## 12. Nendalheim

A joint venture colony funded by three smaller noble powers — *House Kerades*, *House Sherezen*, and *House Tekanna*. The colony itself is a very prolific producer of timber, wool, leather, furs and farm crops. Each Noble house involved here wants to see more profit, so they have all imposed their own taxes in addition to the stiff Crown taxes and quotas, making the workers very poor and very eager for independence. At present, virtually no Nendalheim colonists pay their taxes, and any revenue officials sent to collect them are tarred and feathered before being sent on their way. So angry are the people over the taxation issue that they have openly begun talking about rebellion and casting out the Bizantium powers-that-be. These people are stockpiling weapons and money and quietly smuggling their goods to pirates and foreign merchants willing to deal with them. The colony also maintains a fleet of thirty small ships they claim are fishing boats or necessary to scare away pirates, but all have been retrofitted for combat and privateering. In fact, half have light catapults or ballistas on board, and in the hands of their capable crews and Warlock complements, can hold their own against ships much larger than they.

The only thing dampening the fires of independence here is the sure knowledge that the Crown will send its navy to crush them. As paranoid as they are independent, those from Nendalheim fear they are being spied upon, so they try to keep all of their preparations low key, while they openly call for a united break from Bizantium. Whenever anything happens that throws a wrench in Nendalheim's rebel efforts, it automatically becomes the fault of Bizantium spies or the Seven Sisters, a colony steadfastly loyal to Bizantium. The animosity and mistrust between these two colonies dates back to the early days, generations ago, when both colonies competed for the same trapping and timber ranges. The bad blood from those days never faded and now that the colonies find themselves on opposite sides of the building Shadow Rebellion, they will probably go to war with each other just as soon as war breaks out into open fighting. For both Nendalheim and Seven Sisters, it would be the excuse they have always wanted to settle their differences once and for all. Population: 32,000.

### Places of note at Nendalheim:

**House Kerades Noble Manor.** The local headquarters for the Noble House's colonial operations. The place is a fairly well kept noble operation, thanks to the Kerades' ongoing leather and fur business. The Kerades own a large tannery across town and staff it with those who owe the nobles large sums of money. The workers are essentially wage slaves who toil under the cruelest of conditions.

**House Sherezen Noble Manor.** This place has sure seen better days! The structure is gutted from the inside out, and the





only official staff member anymore is an old, blind butler who never had the sense to leave the place when it was shut down. He now wanders through the abandoned halls asking if anybody would like a spot of refreshment. The funny thing is, this butler is rumored to be Lord Sherezen himself, left here because he went mad and was embarrassing the noble family too much.

**House Tekanna Noble Manor.** The Tekanna House looks like a small military compound with a mansion at the center. This fiercely pro-Crown noble power maintains a small private army that is well trained and well-equipped. All they need is the King's word, and they will begin waging bloody war upon all traitorous dissidents and spies. It is these Tekanna soldiers who are charged with keeping order at the colony and settling any rioting or work stoppages. Most of these 144 Soldiers are 2-5th level and hate the colonists and all rebels. An 8<sup>th</sup> level Knight leads them and the troops are supported by a 9th level Summoner, a 7th level Wizard and a 5th level Fire Warlock.

**Royal Bathhouse.** A rare comfort so far from home, nobles and important merchants love to come here to relax, even if the place does have a nasty reputation for being the site of a half dozen assassinations and twice as many attempts. The bathhouse is under the protection of the Tekanna soldiers.

**Sea Dragon Inc.** A failing business enterprise run by two young, third level Water/Air Warlocks of Anarchist alignment. They founded their venture based on the name they came up with, and nothing else. They figured all they needed was a cool name and everything else would fall into place as if by magic. Now the two are broke and will consider hiring themselves out for any kind of freelance work, no matter how crazy or degrading, to make their rent payments.

## 13. Seven Sisters

A relatively young colony, only 65 years old, it is located at the eastern tip of the Shadow Coast, and is the most loyal to the Bizantium Crown. It is also one of the few colonies where a good portion (nearly half) of the populace still rotates out annually on Crown-issued work contracts. This helps explain the lack of both rebelliousness as well as the typical Coastlander culture at the colony. The colony's primary industry is trapping and logging, but it also has numerous small mining, farming, and fishing interests. Thanks to its diversified economy, the colony does very well for itself. Moreover, its friendliness with the Crown enables ships from this colony to transport goods to and from the Homeland at a substantially reduced tax rate. It is fortunate for the colony that such a deal exists, since its loyalist sentiments have alienated it from the other 12 colonies, most of which no longer willingly trade with Seven Sisters at all.

This colony was named for the seven *Fayd Sisters*, a group of female Rangers who helped tame the surrounding land by driving out the bandits and monsters living here. Though the Fayd Sisters have all long since died, they had over fifty children (80% daughters!) among them, and countless grandchildren (again, predominantly daughters). Any woman who can trace her lineage directly to one of the original seven Fayd Sisters gains a step up on the social ladder. It is said that women of Fayd blood are *natural* archers, trackers and hunters. (Fayd women automatically get the W.P. Long Bow skill, are +1 on initiative, +1D4 to P.P., can select any Wilderness skill as part

of their available skills regardless of their chosen O.C.C. and enjoy a +5% bonus to any Tracking and Land Navigation skills regardless of O.C.C. Not applicable to the males of this family. Eighty-five percent of all female Fayd descendants become Rangers, Long Bowmen, or Trappers/Woodsmen/Hunters; 3% are Druids and 2% Beastmasters, the rest vary from warriors and farmers to housewives and scholars.) Population: 22,000.

### Places of note at the Seven Sisters:

**Seven Sisters Showhouse.** The most respectable place for entertainment in town. Pro-Crown plays and musical numbers are the going choice here. Anybody who openly voices pro-rebellion or pro-Nendalheim slogans might consider getting the hell out of there before the crowd turns ugly.

**Turtledove Rare Birds.** Well, sort of. They offer a variety of songbirds and finches indigenous to the Northern Hinterlands, as well as Ravens trained to speak a dozen or so words. They also sell homing pigeons for carrying messages to as many as three different locations and falcons trained to hunt (a favorite pet of the nobility and wealthy who like to hunt). The pigeons cost 100 gold each. Trained falcons and hawks go for 750 each, talking ravens for 50 gold, and songbirds for 5-15 gold each.

**Crossbones.** A rowdy adventurer's bar that pretends to be a haven for sailors, pirates and men at arms. In reality, this colony is so law-abiding that no real pirate hangouts could ever thrive here. Still, locals love the place because it gives them a fake sense of danger. If only they knew the owner was really *Captain "Massacre" Mulkevny*, murderer of over 600 people and wanted by courts in Bizantium, Timiro and the Eastern Territory. He has a bounty of 100,000 gold on his head at all three places, but is wanted alive. The captain is a 12th level Pirate of exceptional intelligence, cunning and cruelty; Miscreant. He has a number of magic items should he need them and has pirate connections from the Shadow Coast to Timiro.

**Pockwell House.** This simple homestead is a hotbed of local conspiracy theories and spying thanks to the rantings and ravings of the paranoid *Junker Pockwell*, the owner. Old Junker has been batty ever since he accidentally got hit on the head with a shovel by his wife. He now believes that everybody and anybody could be a rebel or a Changeling. And he will prove it, too. Mark his words, he says, and then usually heads off to the local alehouse.

**Symon House.** This is the home of *Praetor Symon*, an immensely popular Minstrel and Bard from Bizantium. He moved here years ago to get away from the political infighting back home only to find it has followed him.



# Occupations/O.C.C.s of the Northern Hinterlands

By Bill Coffin & Kevin Siembieda



The following are some new (and old) Occupational Character Classes (O.C.C.s) common to the people of the Shadow Coast in particular, and the Northern Hinterlands in general.

## Visitors

Visitors to the Northern Hinterlands, Shadow Coast and Northern Mountains can be virtually *ANY* O.C.C. from **The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®** or any of the sourcebooks.

As noted earlier in this tome, people from all walks of life and from around the world come to the Northern Hinterlands. The majority are adventurers, whether they wield sword or magic, who come in search of fame, glory, fortune or knowledge. Others include runaway slaves, fugitives, bandits and beings looking to lose themselves from the rest of the world. The latter may include Men of Magic, cultists, dragons, sphinxes, and creatures not easily accepted in the world of humans, and those who seek solitude or distance from humanity and civilization by making a home in the wilderness.

## The indigenous population

Those who have made their home in the Northern Hinterlands all their lives are most likely to include the following O.C.C.s:

**Men at Arms:** Any, but *Rangers*, *Long Bowmen*, *Mercenaries*, and *Thieves* are especially common to the Northern Hinterlands.

*Palladins*, *Knights* and their *Squires* are rare in these parts. There are no indigenous (local) knights, as there are no kingdoms or nobility in this part of the world. Even the colonies of the Shadow Coast are satellites claimed by the Island Kingdom of Bizantium. Consequently, any knights and nobility found in the Northern Hinterlands are from Bizantium or travelers, game hunters, adventurers, outcasts and fugitives from other parts of the world.

*Pirates*, *sailors* and other *seafarers* are most likely to be found at the colonies of the Shadow Coast and other port towns along the seaboard. At least a third are natives of the Hinterlands and Great Northern Wilderness, while other mariners come from Bizantium and all over the world. Most outsiders don't care to be in the north lands, and some natives become seafarers to escape the harshness of life in the wilderness. Likewise, *spies*, probably from Bizantium, the Western Empire, Eastern Territories, Lopan, Timiro and the Wolfen Empire, are most likely to be found at coastal cities and towns.

*Exotic warriors* such as *Holy Crusaders*, *Witch Hunters*, and the occasional *Palladin*, *Knight* and other fighters are not native to the land, but come to the Hinterlands on quests, pilgrimages and crusades to find and destroy demons, dragons, witches, monsters, evil cultists and dark practitioners of magic. Others are attracted to the haunted and demon filled Northern Mountains, and some seek passage to the legendary Land of the Damned.

**Men of Magic:** Any, but the most common among the indigenous people include the *Warlock*, *Wizard*, *Witch*, *Summoner* and *Necromancer* (see *Adventures on the High Seas* for the latter O.C.C.).

Many practitioners of magic visit and stay in the Hinterlands for awhile in hopes of discovering ancient mystic knowledge and/or magic items lost and forgotten by the rest of the world. Others come to study the region or the monsters or the ancient ruins in pursuit of knowledge or personal development. Some sorcerers come to find peace and solitude, establishing a home, secret lair or retreat away from civilization and prying eyes. Still others are wanted fugitives on the run, come to the Hinterlands to escape being brought to justice or persecuted. Lastly, some, like the *Witch* and *Necromancer*, see the Northern Hinterlands and neighboring mountains as places to practice their dark magicks without interference or persecution. In an environment where people vanish regularly, and people seldom question it, those who practice slavery, blood sacrifice, or have an appetite



for human flesh have ample victims (namely adventurers from the outside world) whose disappearance is seldom questioned and who are quickly forgotten. Free rein to do evil – at least until these monsters find justice at the end of a visiting hero's sword.

**Psychics:** Any can be found in the Hinterlands, with *Psi-Healers* and *Psychic Sensitives* being the most common.

**Clergy:** Any, but Priests of formal churches and religions are found primarily at permanent communities of reasonable size, such as those along the Shadow Coast.

Among wilderness folk, one is most likely to find Druids, Shamans (see *Adventures on the High Seas*), Witches and the occasional traveling Priest, Monk or Beast Master.

The most common deities worshiped in the Hinterlands are Algor of the Northern Seas, the Northern Gods, Nature/Druidism, Elementalism, and to a lesser degree, the Gods of Light and Rurga.

**Algor** has no pantheon and is worshiped as an individual with deific powers. He is especially popular among sailors, fishermen, Bearmen and Giants of the north.

The Northern Gods are worshiped both as an entire pantheon and as individual gods, with Od, Epim, Hoknar, and Wolvenar among the most popular and worshiped as individual gods throughout the north. These deities are popular among Wolfen, Coyles, Bearmen, humans and nonhumans alike, and the entire pantheon is worshiped by the northern barbarians.

The goddess **Rurga** and her pantheon of ancient gods have their greatest number of worshipers in the Northern Hinterlands, followed by the Great Northern Wilderness, with a flurry of renewed interest by worshipers in the Eastern Territory who are rediscovering the pantheon, although most worship Rurga alone. The most likely gods of this pantheon to be worshiped as an individual rather than a pantheon are Rurga, the Warrior Goddess and symbol of truth and justice, Cirga the Bowman and Lista the Warrior Sea Goddess.

The Gods of Light (and Dark) are most commonly worshiped by humans, Elves, Dwarves, and Gnomes.

**Optional O.C.C.s:** Any, but particularly *Vagabond Peasants*, *Farmers* and *Laborers* as well as *Trapper/Woodsmen*, the *Lumberjack*, *Fletcher* and *Artisan* presented in the pages that follow.

**Merchants** will be found namely at trading posts, Hearth and Homes, among the colonies of the Shadow Coast and other ports, towns and villages.

**Minstrels and entertainers** are uncommon in these parts. The few that there are will be found in towns, villages and many of the Hearth and Homes. In the case of small villages and Hearth and Homes, the Minstrel or entertainer is probably one of the locals with a gift for singing, playing an instrument, public speaking and telling stories. Theatrical, entertainers are usually quite welcomed, especially during the long winter months, and treated like visiting dignitaries or celebrities.

**Nobility.** Noble lords, knights and other men (and sometimes women) of privilege and power (along with their bodyguards, scouts and henchmen) come to the Northern Hinterlands because they have something to prove or because they have more time and money than the gods to engage in whatever dalliances they chose to follow. These may be hard and capable warriors,

decadent nobles looking for a place where they can enjoy dark pleasures and engage in cruelty without publicity or interference from the law, or flops and fools.

Many nobles and young knights come to the Hinterlands to hunt "big game." Animals such as Tuskers, Arrowheads, Oboru, bears, mountain lions and others, to a range of monsters, including demons and the monster races such as Wolfen, Bearmen, Trolls, Ogres and even Kankoran, Emirin, Drakin and others. Big Game hunting and fighting monsters are seen as both noble and brave pastimes worthy of bragging about at court, even though their bodyguards, henchmen, and local native guides do most of the work (a detail they omit). Such "adventures" are currently the rage in the courts of the Western Empire, Lopan and the courts of the Eastern Territory (where many of the new nobility of the East try to prove themselves civilized and noble by following whatever the West does). However, these territories are not alone, as nobles, rich merchants, and highly placed scholars, mages and warriors come for this purpose from around the world.

Many disenfranchised nobles, overthrown kings, army generals and power-brokers who have lost favor (and power) with their people or who have been overthrown by a political rival, will come to the Northern Hinterlands to lay low and hatch new plots. Some simply come to hide and lose themselves. Others come to get away, clear their heads and devise new strategies. Still others come to learn dark magic or attain fabled magic artifacts that will grant them the power they need to extract vengeance or to retake their position of power. Others still, come seeking to build an army of monsters or to forge new and dangerous liaisons with demon lords, evil sorcerers, ancient dragons and other dark powers.

## Quick Roll Table for creating Shadow Coast N.P.C.s

G.M.s, instead of just giving the average Coastlander a name and a few Hit Points, feel free to add an occupation by using any one of the optional O.C.C.s in this game. If you can't make up your mind as to which one or need something on the spot, try consulting the following Random O.C.C. table:

**01-10% Peasant Laborer (new).** This is the unskilled laborer who makes a living with his muscles and back. These are the men and women who load and unload cargo, work construction, operate mills, dig in the mines, carry and cut down lumber, assist carpenters and blacksmiths, and other hard but methodical work.

The Peasant Laborer is rolled up the same as the *Vagabond/Peasant Farmer O.C.C.* except the Laborer O.C.C. starts with the following O.C.C. Skills instead of the ones listed on page 99 of the Palladium RPG.

Cook (+5%) or Fishing (+5%)

General Repairs (+10%) or Carpentry (+10%)

Athletics (General)

Body Building & Weight Lifting (not by choice)

Swimming (+5%) or Masonry (+5%)

Streetwise (+2%) or Sew (+10%)

Native Language (probably Northern or Gobblely at 98%) and one of choice (+10%).

W.P.: Two of Choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic; can be changed to Expert for the cost of one O.C.C. Related Skill.

All other skills and details are the same as the Vagabond/Farmer.

**11-20%: Sailor (Adventures on the High Seas, page 28).** Sailors, like Rangers, are a heroic O.C.C. that sees a great deal of action along the Shadow Coast. Aside from the many land-based enterprises that Coastlanders partake in, this society remains an intensely maritime one. As such, sailors are a revered and honorable profession in this part of the world. Many simply work as waterborne fishermen or hunters of other sea creatures. After all, Homeland Bay is large enough to accommodate a virtual fleet of fishing vessels and still not suffer from overfishing. Thanks to its proximity to the Sea of Despair, the occasional Sea Serpent comes into the bay, in which case Coastlander Sailors form attack parties and hit the creature without mercy. Though such attacks are very dangerous, any Coastlander who slays a Sea Serpent becomes a hero for the rest of his life. Coastlanders and visiting sailors may also be other maritime O.C.C.s, such as the *Mariner* and the *Pirate*. **Note:** Although their main trade is being a seafarer, sailors can also engage in land based adventures and expeditions, especially if it involves finding or getting something (by force) that will make them famous or rich.

**21-25%: Merchant (see Palladium Fantasy RPG, page 96).** Before the blockade, there was a healthy and growing underground mercantile economy in the Shadow Coast. A quantity of raw and finished products produced by the colonies were being shipped, traded and sold to merchant ships and land merchants in the east. The blockade has choked off a lot (at least half) of that trade, which only makes smuggling and blockade running the new enterprise and outside merchants all the more inventive and daring.

There is also internal trading and sales with locals and visitors at businesses and trading posts throughout the Hinterlands. Of course, the greatest number and most professional businesses are found at the Shadow Coast and the occasional other village or town. Barter (trade) is most common at trading posts and Hearth and Homes. Additionally, wealthy merchants and nobles from Bizantium and other kingdoms, frequently bankroll expeditions into the Hinterlands in search of exotic, new animals, arts and crafts, magic items, and other marketable resources, from silver and gold to furs and lumber.

Many merchants are little more than fat middlemen who simply make a profit turning over inventory. More common, however, is a new breed of hard-bitten entrepreneur, a businessman as good with a sword as he is with an abacus. Somebody willing to escort his shipment, see he gets paid for it, and clobber anybody who gets in his way.

**26-28%: Noble (see Palladium Fantasy RPG, page 96).** The Shadow Coast is a dumping ground for the Bizantium nobility to get rid of troublesome or embarrassing members. Sometimes, it is the drunken rogues who are sent here where their escapades will cause their Noble House no further scandal. Other times, they are bright and worthy leaders who got caught in a battle for succession and were sent away lest they threaten an over-ambitious brother or sister's ascendancy to the family throne. Others are running from a criminal past or indiscretion

and sent to the Shadow Coast to lie low for awhile, or at least until the Family can smooth things over. Over the decades, these castoff nobles have had families of their own, and a mock Nobility exists in the Shadow Coast. Many of these individuals are bored playboys with nothing to do but get into trouble. More than a few, however, have become adventurers or merchants in their own right (either for glory, to alleviate boredom, or both). And some have even become revolutionaries, joining the Shadow Rebellion and covertly using their Family's own resources to seed their undoing. **Note:** As noted earlier, others are foreigners come to hunt, explore, hide or plot.

**29-31%: Scholar (see Palladium Fantasy RPG, page 97).** Though the Shadow Coast is far too pragmatic a place to have much room (or need) for Scholars, more and more men of learning have emigrated to this region so they might study the Hinterlands, the Northern Mountains or the Land of the Damned more closely. Even those born to the area who then become Scholars know little about the wilderness that surrounds them. Unfortunately, scholars, even locals, are rarely accepted by their peers because they have too much "book knowin's." Among the hard-nosed Coastlanders, knowing too much is a reason for mistrust. Still, Scholars find the Shadow Coast to provide a fine launching spot for various expeditions. It sits in a region rich with history and mysteries of magic waiting to be deciphered. Some Coastlander Scholars do not go out into the field. Rather, they hire adventurers to do their field work for them, paying them up front in cash and then giving them a share of any valuables found during the expedition. Most hire adventurers under similar terms to serve as guides and bodyguards to escort them into the wilderness so they may study the environment first hand. However, unless the scholar knows what he, she or they are getting into, the scholar can become a hindrance to the rest of the group; getting them into all kinds of trouble due to the scholar's curiosity, clumsiness and inexperience in the field. G.M.s, they are GREAT NPCs to get the player group into adventures and trouble.

**32-35%: Squire of the Shadow Coast (see the Knight O.C.C. in the Palladium Fantasy RPG, page 85).** In the Bizantium Kingdom, no Knight earns his title without first receiving some form of formal sponsorship from a Noble House. This keeps the military class under the thumb of the nobility, a tradition that has been in place for centuries and is going nowhere any time soon. When the Shadow Coast was formed, precious few Knights were deployed to it, as protecting the colonies from monsters was deemed an unworthy task of the Kingdom's glorious defenders. Those who were sent were generally *fallen knights* of some kind (alcoholics, cowards, indiscreet womanizers, those who'd fallen due to a temporary moral lapse, etc.), or Knights in training (squires). This first generation of Knights was of little use to the colonists. However, their children became warriors as well, but without the "official and formal" training of Bizantium Knights or recognition of the Bizantium Noble Houses. This means the best these individuals could become were mere Squires.

Despite how things may sound, the Squires of the Shadow Coast are nothing to laugh at. Just because they lack a formal title does not mean that they lack in skill, or that they do not follow the Code of Chivalry (they do). Indeed, the *Squires of the Shadow Coast* are effectively true Knight O.C.C.s (without rec-



ognition) and make up the elite ground forces of the Shadow Colonies. When and if the Bizantium Navy invades the region, they will find that the Coastlander "Squires" are more than a match for most Bizantium Knights. They fight harder, are more experienced (fighting Harpies and other monsters on a regular basis), have not grown used to a life of noble luxury, and they learned their martial skills on the battlefield (average level of experience is 3-6th), rather than on some overly regulated training ground. In recent years, Squires of the Shadow Coast have begun elevating themselves to the rank of Knight, and have continued on under that profession. As far as the people of the Shadow Coast are concerned, such individuals are legitimate Knights. To Bizantium eyes, though, these warriors are charlatans who need to be reminded of their low social station.

As noted earlier, other Knights are foreigners come to hunt monsters, champion a good cause, or to bring justice to the savage wilderness. The Squires who accompany them are the traditional helpers or young Knights in training (page 96 of the *Palladium Fantasy RPG*).

**36-50%: Vagabond/Peasant Farmer** (see *Palladium Fantasy RPG*, page 99). These hard-working souls are the backbone of the Shadow Coast's food production and menial labor. They are the quiet ones. Those who are used to a life of endless labor and hardship. But what makes these people different is that unlike the rest of the world, they are free. Farmers and laborers in the Shadow Coast generally are not owned by their Noble Lord, nor are they indentured servants of any kind. Thanks to the initial colonization charters, anybody who came to colonize the Shadow Coast would be held forever free of any such obligations, as would their offspring. As a result, the "worker bees" of the Shadow Coast enjoy life a lot more than their counterparts in other lands. These folk know what it feels like to actually earn a living rather than live off a stipend supplied by one's lord or owner. They also have an acute hatred for the repressive taxes they must pay (seen by many as a way to make up for the charter promises to free workers of their debts or ownerships). As a result, Coastlander farmers and workers were among the first to suggest rebelling against the Homeland. These poor folk have almost nothing to lose, but they will be damned if they let some distant king take away their right to earn a decent living for themselves by taxing them into oblivion. When the civil war comes (and it will), it will be simple, brave folks such as these who will form the Shadow Coast's front lines. And though they do not possess the heavy arms of a Squire or a Ranger, there are few opponents more deadly than a simple man fighting to protect his home. And *that* is what Bizantium will face when it comes ashore and tries to take back the Shadow Coast by force: a legion of die-hard defenders willing to fight until the bitter end. When the smoke clears, these folks will be the ones hailed as the true heroes of the Revolution.

**51-55% Trapper/Woodsman** (new; described elsewhere in this section). These are the hunters and trappers of animals who make a living in the fur trade. They are skilled in tracking, using snares, skinning their catches, and preparing hides and meat. They also know the wilderness almost as well as the Ranger, although they are, by trade, merchants who sell and trade their furs and other animal product to make a living. Coastlander Trapper/Woodsmen (and to a lesser degree, Lumberjacks) also double as a kind of unofficial scouting corps, since they work on

the edges of the colonial area and are likely to encounter weird monsters and animals on any given day.

**56-60% Lumberjack**. (See the *Old Ones* sourcebook, page 66. Reprinted in this section for the gamer's convenience.) These hardy souls make their living harvesting the vast forests of the Northern Hinterlands.

**61-65% Ranger** (see *Palladium Fantasy RPG*, page 90). This is one of the three "heroic O.C.C.s" that ordinary Coastlanders often become. (The others are the Sailor and Squire/Knight.) Rangers are an integral part of Coastlander society, as their hunting and trapping skills are big business in the wildlife-rich Northern Hinterlands. Increasingly, Coastlander Rangers are making good money in the hunting, trapping, and sometimes extermination of exotic wildlife in the region. Sometimes, these Rangers serve as guides to safaris that are run for the benefit of rich clients. Other times, the Rangers might be pelt hunting or looking to trap live specimens for resale. Rangers are almost always part of search and rescue missions when someone goes missing, as well as participants in seek and destroy expeditions in which they (and usually a bunch of other Rangers, warriors or adventurers) are set out (as a public service or for hire) to find a particular monster, group of monsters or animal that has become a man-eater or is causing trouble for people in the area. This is a popular practice for reducing the local populations of Harpies, Ice Demons, Snow Lizards, Tuskers, Trolls, Coyles, and other creatures that prey on humans and/or destroy property. Most Rangers who live in or near the Shadow Coast are members of the colonies' militia.

**66-70%: Warlock**. The Warlock is one of the most popular of the magical disciplines in the Northern Hinterlands and Great Northern Wilderness. Someone who can tame and command the elements is of tremendous value in a hostile environment as wild and unpredictable as the north lands. Average level of experience for NPCs is 1D4+2. Typical breakdown for the various Warlock types are: 01-24% Air, 25-46% Water, 47-66% Earth, 67-83% Fire and 84-00% mixed (two elements).

**71-75% Miner** (new). The vast mineral wealth of the Northern Hinterlands, more than its lumber, is what enticed Bizantium to set up its first colony on the coast. Indeed, the immediate region did have some major strikes, but many of them are played out or are in the process of running dry, so the miners of the region must find new mother lodes to tap.

**76-80% Blacksmith** (new; described later in this section). Every community that relies on metal technology needs one or more Blacksmiths – they are about as indispensable in this world as farmers.

**81-85% Druid**: See the *Palladium RPG*, page 73, for details. Druids are naturalists who actually worship and commune with nature. Not surprisingly, Druids (and Shamans) are found here and there throughout the Northern Hinterlands. They tend to avoid the Shadow Coast and cities, except for infrequent visits to trade goods, pick up supplies and get the latest news.

**86-90% Fletcher** (new): The fletcher is a specialty craftsman who builds and repairs bows and arrows. Like the Blacksmith, he is a treasured member of the community.

**91-95%: Artisan** (new): Artisans are craftsmen who build and make things. One may specialize in a particular good or service, such as building, carpentry, carving wood, cutting stone, making statuary, making jewelry, tailoring clothes, painting,

drawing, engraving, etc., or be a jack-of-all-trades and work in several areas. They are an important part of everyday life.

**96-98%: Wizard or other practitioner of magic.** Probably a visiting outsider, for other than working in the militia, offering healing or other special magical services (including protection, scouting, capturing animals and adventuring), there just isn't much paying work or challenge for them. Other than taking work with a visiting scholar, there aren't many folks who will pay for exploration and scholastic observations. The Warlocks of the Council of Elements dominate the market for magic, and make a point of keeping competition to a minimum.

**99-00%: Any Other O.C.C.** the G.M. desires, including Clergy, Druids, Bards, Jugglers, Gladiators, Slavers and others.

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## Optional O.C.C. Descriptions

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Players, just because these O.C.C.s are for "normal" people doesn't mean they can't provide a lot of fun to play, especially in the right circumstance. Speaking from personal experience, our favorite **Palladium Fantasy** characters have often come from the *Optional O.C.C.s* (especially for us G.M.s playing Non-Player Characters). Take a *Scholar* for example, give him a couple weapon skills, some good areas of knowledge (history, lore, cryptography, languages, literacy) and even with Hand to Hand: Basic (let alone some other physical skill or combat upgrade) and, whammo, you have a field capable explorer who could give Indiana Jones a run for his money – and probably has skills that can be invaluable. ("Quick! Who can read this magic scroll written in Elven?") Do the same with a *Merchant*, and throw in a few Rogue skills, and presto, instant smuggler, Han Solo style, or unscrupulous con artist or gambler (with or without a heart of gold).

Both modern and ancient fantasy literature give us many tales of mere peasant farmers who go on grand adventures, form lasting friendships with knights and kings, find magical artifacts or slay foul dragons, and save the day one way or another. It's the person inside (or in a game context, an imaginative player) that makes an interesting and heroic character. Aside from all that, optional O.C.C.s are fun because they are different and because they lack special abilities, often forcing the player to be a little trickier, and a bit more inventive with his play. If you feel up to the challenge, give any one of the preexisting Optionals or one of the new ones below a try. You might find they can be a lot more fun than you gave them credit for.

## Artisan Optional O.C.C.

Artisans are craftsmen, builders and creators of art and functional objects and tools, who specialize in producing a particular good or offering a particular service such as building, carpentry, carving wood, cutting stone, making statuary, making jewelry, tailoring clothes, painting, drawing, engraving, etc.

On the surface, they might just appear to be ordinary folk carrying out mundane jobs day after day, but what few readers may realize is that in the *Palladium World*, any kind of artisan

represents a unique trade important to everyday life and that can be parlayed into a business or even an industry. Carpenters and builders are needed to make pulleys, axe handles, tools, work tables, buildings and boats. The more artistic will be the ones to paint, carve, chisel or etch an attractive design, pattern, emblem or other feature into the wood, leather, rock or metal, or make some other type of adornment. They are the ones who make signs, weave blankets, make fancy clothes, etch armor, carve a totem pole, make a statue or painting of the gods for worship, craft a musical instrument, and so on.

As a rule, any kind of artisan industry is controlled by a Guild. In large cities, where there is lots of competition, or in places where law and order are already on the decline, Guilds provide some much-needed muscle and advisors to keep everything running smoothly (for a fee). They also maintain ties with the local magistrate, government, churches, and sometimes, even organized crime. Artisans tend to have a good understanding of social trends, the basics of running a business (supply and demand if nothing else), and know how the law works, and in some cases, how to get around it to make a sale. They are also used to dealing with people from both sides of the fence, and what the particular business/criminal dynamics of their local settlement may be. Moreover, because they deal with so many different types of people from every strata, rich and poor, they can make the perfect stool pigeon, lookout, rumor-monger, spy and revolutionary (as is the case in the *Shadow Coast*).

**Alignments:** Any.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 8 and P.P. 10 or higher. A high P.E. for working long hours is helpful, but not required.

**O.C.C. Skills:** All are professional quality.

**Appraise Goods (special!).** This skill allows the character to assess the true market value of "ordinary" commodities such as tools, clothing, furniture, jewelry, snares, etc. (not weapons or magic items, books, slaves or rarities). **Skill Ratio:** 30% +5% per level of experience for Merchants, +10% for Artisans.

Mathematics: Basic (+15%)

Language: Native tongue at 98% plus two of choice (+15%).

Literate in one language (+15%)

Art (+20%)

Sew (+10%)

General Repair (+5%)

Carpentry (+10%)

Sculpting and Whittling (+10%)

Hand to Hand: Basic (This can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of two "O.C.C. Related" skills or to Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) for the cost of three "O.C.C. Related" skills).

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select six at level one, two at level three, two at level eight and two at level twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any (+10%).

Espionage: Forgery only (+5%).

Horsemanship: General only.

Medical: Brewing and First Aid only.

Military: None.

Physical: Any, except Boxing, Acrobatics or Gymnastics.

Rogue: Locate Secret Compartments (+5%) and Card Shark (no bonus) only.



Science: None.

Scholar/Technical: Any (+5%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any except Blowguns, Paired Weapons and Siege Weapons.

Wilderness: Boat Building (+10%), Wilderness Survival and Identify Plants & Fruit only.

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select four secondary skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels 4, 8 and 12. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of any bonus listed in the parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also, skills are limited ("any," "only," "none") as previously indicated in the list.

**Starting Equipment:** One set of clothing, boots, gloves, a set of hand tools, chisel, mallet, small hammer, carving knives, pouch of 100 two inch nails, chalk, drawing lead, sketch book, small wooden cross, belt, bedroll, backpack, a large sack, a small sack, a water skin, and a tinder box.

**Armor:** Soft Leather (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 20).

**Weapons:** Starts with a dagger and one other weapon of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of fair to good quality. Magic weapons and other equipment must be acquired later.

**Money:** The character starts with 200 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or it can be saved for later. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty.

### Levels of Experience:

|    |                   |
|----|-------------------|
| 1  | 0,000 - 2,060     |
| 2  | 2,061 - 4,120     |
| 3  | 4,121 - 8,240     |
| 4  | 8,241 - 15,100    |
| 5  | 15,101 - 23,100   |
| 6  | 23,101 - 33,100   |
| 7  | 33,101 - 48,200   |
| 8  | 48,201 - 68,300   |
| 9  | 68,301 - 93,400   |
| 10 | 93,401 - 133,500  |
| 11 | 133,501 - 175,600 |
| 12 | 175,601 - 223,700 |
| 13 | 223,701 - 273,800 |
| 14 | 273,801 - 325,900 |
| 15 | 325,901 - 385,100 |

## Blacksmith Optional O.C.C.

Blacksmiths are masters of metalworking, making everything from nails and horseshoes to kettles and weapons. As such, they are the warrior and adventurer's best friend, because they produce, repair, and modify weapons and armor. This brings the profession in constant contact with a never ending array of interesting people, which makes the average Blacksmith a great source of rumors, legends, and other interesting talk. Like a bartender, just about anything worth hearing goes through the local Smith at one point or another, which makes him a worthy person for adventurers to stop by and see when they are looking for that vital clue or bit of info to put them on the right track. This is especially true when it comes to rumors about war, soldiers, mercenaries, pirates and the military and militia in the area, as well as trouble with bandits and buildup of local forces. Like-

wise, they are likely to know about bounties (and bounty hunters) and conflicts with bandits and monsters. This goes double in the *Shadow Coast*, because most (80%) of all travelers, warriors, rogues and adventurers use the colonies as a base camp and supply depot, if not a starting off place to go exploring, hunting or adventuring.

Coastlander Blacksmiths have been asked to refrain from any actual combat because they are considered too valuable to get themselves killed. For they are more important to the townspeople than any adventurer. It is the Blacksmith who shoes animals and makes tools, knives, axes, shovels, pots, pans, and other utensils, nails, door hinges, locks, bolts, and metal pieces and items of all kinds. Most comply with that request, but there is a special breed of Warrior Smith who has a special love of forging specialty weapons and armor and who likes a good brawl, battle or adventure from time to time. Even those who don't go adventuring are strong, powerfully built individuals who can usually account well for themselves in a fight.

**Alignments:** Any.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 6, P.E. 12, P.S. 14 or higher. A good P.P. is helpful, but not a necessity.

**O.C.C. Bonuses:** +1 to P.S., +1 to P.E., and +3D6 to S.D.C.



### O.C.C. Skills:

Language: Native tongue at 98% plus two of choice (+15%).  
Mathematics: Basic (+5%)  
Athletics (General)  
Body Building and Weight Lifting  
Recognize Weapon Quality (+20%)  
Field Armorer (+20%)  
Pick Locks (+5%)

**Metalworking (special!):** This skill enables the Blacksmith to build metal objects, particularly weapons, armor, tools and jewelry. Hand tools, jewelry and other small objects require 1D4 days of solid effort (8 hours a day with minimal interruption). Hand weapons and light armor require 1D4 weeks of solid effort. Heavy armor requires 3D4 weeks of solid effort. On any job, the Blacksmith may double the time required to make the object for a +20% bonus on the skill roll. Adding special bonuses to weapons (for Dwarven or Kobold/Kiridoi human characters) or increasing armor S.D.C. requires a separate skill roll; any failed roll ruins the item. When adding bonuses to weapons, a separate roll is required for each additional "plus" being instilled on the weapon. **Skill Ratio:** 40% +5% per level of experience. Dwarven Blacksmiths get a one-time +10% bonus; Kobolds get a +5% bonus.

W.P. Blunt

**Hand to Hand:** Basic. This can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of one "O.C.C. Related" skill or to Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) for the cost of three "O.C.C. Related" skills.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select four at level one, two at level three, and one at levels eight and twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Espionage: Detect Concealment and Traps only.

Horseman: General or Exotic only.

Medical: Brewing, First Aid or Holistic Medicine only.

Military: Heraldry and Military Etiquette only.

Physical: Any, except Prowl.

Rogue: Any.

Science: Mathematics: Advanced only.

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Chain, Knife, Sword, Shield, Spear, Staff, Paired Weapons, and Siege Weapons only.

Wilderness: Any.

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select four secondary skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels 3, 7 and 11. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Skills are limited ("any," "only," "none") as previously indicated in the list.

**Starting Equipment:** Two sets of work clothes, other clothing, boots, a pair of heavy gauntlets, a pair of heavy leather gloves, a set of forging hammers (3D4, 2D4 and 1D4 per strike), a set of tongs, belt, bedroll, backpack, a large sack, a small sack, a water skin, and a tinder box.

**Armor:** Starts with a suit of studded leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38) for adventuring and defending his shop or the town (most smiths are in the militia), as well as a suit of soft leather

(A.R. 10, S.D.C. 20; these are the leathers smiths wear for protection when working metals; it keeps away the heat and flying shards of metal and/or sparks).

**Weapons:** Starts with a pair of small but heavy hammers (2D6 damage each), a Mace (2D6 damage) or War Hammer (3D4 damage), a small knife (1D4; easy to hide in a belt or boot) and one weapon of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of fair to good quality. Magic weapons and other equipment must be acquired later.

**Money:** The character starts with 350 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or it can be saved for later. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty.

### Levels of Experience:

|    |                   |
|----|-------------------|
| 1  | 0,000 - 2,100     |
| 2  | 2,101 - 4,200     |
| 3  | 4,201 - 8,400     |
| 4  | 8,401 - 15,400    |
| 5  | 15,401 - 23,400   |
| 6  | 23,401 - 33,400   |
| 7  | 33,401 - 48,400   |
| 8  | 48,401 - 68,400   |
| 9  | 68,401 - 93,400   |
| 10 | 93,401 - 133,400  |
| 11 | 133,401 - 173,400 |
| 12 | 173,401 - 223,400 |
| 13 | 223,401 - 273,400 |
| 14 | 273,401 - 323,400 |
| 15 | 323,401 - 373,400 |

## Fletcher Optional O.C.C.

The fletcher is a specialty craftsman who builds and repairs bows and arrows. Like the Blacksmith, he is a treasured member of the community because he provides it with a major source of firepower. In most places, Fletchers are the friends of hunters, but in the Shadow Coast, any Fletcher is a potential source for any archers. Most Fletchers are themselves a good shot with a short bow or crossbow, and though they lack the specialty moves of a Long Bowman, they still can develop a good rate of fire with any bow weapon, except the *long bow*. Fletchers are also handy with making minor repairs and woodworking.

Given the relatively large number of Fletchers and danger from the wilderness, the Shadow Colonies have cultivated a respectable archery corps. Fletchers, like Blacksmiths, sometimes like to test their productions in live combat, and, as such, will sometimes seek out groups of adventurers or the militia to tag along with. The Fletcher will usually hang around just long enough to give their new bow (or arrow design) a workout before returning home. In the Hinterlands, fletching is such a lucrative business, most never leave it, but there are always a few who do, lured away from a life of steady work and comfort for the uncertainty of the adventuring life.

**Note:** Fletchers benefit from the ability to make arrows from scratch even in the wilderness, which means they rarely have an empty quiver, and are good to have along (can make four good arrows an hour). Ordinary folk with the whittling skill can attempt to make an arrow, but their ugly and awkward creation will be -6 to strike (arrows made by Artisans will only be -2 to



strike, but take twice as long to make; about two arrows an hour.) Most archers can NOT make arrows, Long Bowmen included, and must wait till they can get back to a shop to buy more.



**Alignments:** Any.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 8 and P.P. of 10 or higher.

**O.C.C. Skills:**

Language: Native tongue at 98% plus one of choice (+10%).

Carpentry (+10%)

Sculpting and Whittling (+20%)

Rope Works (+10%)

General Repair (+5%)

**Basic Metalworking (special!):** This is a very basic blacksmith ability, limited to the making of metal arrowheads only, which takes around one hour each to make. The Fletcher also knows how to use *stone* and *bone* to make arrowheads. **Skill Ratio:** 25% +5% per level of experience for Artisans and Blacksmiths; +20% for Fletchers.

Archery (but not the Long Bow!)

Hand to Hand: Basic. This can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of one "O.C.C. Related" skill or to Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) for the cost of two "O.C.C. Related" skills.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select four at level one, two at level three, two at level eight and one at level twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Espionage: Sniper only.

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: Brewing or First Aid only.

Military: Recognize Weapon Quality only, and only for missile weapons (+10%).

Physical: Any, excluding gymnastics.

Rogue: Palming and Card Shark only.

Science: Mathematics skills only (+10%).

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Blunt, Knife, Sword, Staff, Shield, Spear & Throwing weapons only.

Wilderness: Land Navigation, Wilderness Survival, Preserve Food, and Boat Building only.

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select four secondary skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels 3, 7 and 11. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Skills are limited ("any," "only," "none") as previously indicated in the list.

**Starting Equipment:** One set of clothing, boots, gloves, a set of whittling knives (1D4 each), belt, bedroll, backpack, a large sack, a small sack, a water skin, and a tinder box.

**Armor:** Studded Leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38).

**Weapons:** Starts with a short bow and a crossbow, a quiver of 24 arrows, and one other weapon of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of fair to good quality. Magic weapons and other equipment must be acquired later.

**Money:** The character starts with 270 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or it can be saved for later. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty.

### Levels of Experience:

1 0,000 - 2,060

2 2,061 - 4,120

3 4,121 - 8,240

4 8,241 - 15,100

5 15,101 - 23,100

6 23,101 - 33,100

7 33,101 - 48,200

8 48,201 - 68,300

9 68,301 - 93,400

10 93,401 - 133,500

11 133,501 - 175,600

12 175,601 - 223,700

13 223,701 - 273,800

14 273,801 - 325,900

15 325,901 - 385,100





## Lumberjack Optional O.C.C.

These hardy souls make their living harvesting the vast forests of the Northern Hinterlands. Most of them specialize in cutting down one kind of tree, be it giant fernwood, hardwood or stonewood. The majority of these roughnecks work hard and play hard. Theirs is a dangerous and uncertain profession, so when they make their money (and most do quite well once their lumber is processed) they tend to spend it quickly, for a lumberjack never knows if he will be alive at the end of the next work day.

Some lumber crews are in a state of undeclared war with Kankoran who feel the Coastlanders are cutting too deeply into the forests. Others find themselves playing the role of the heroic woodsman when their logging expeditions take them to a part of the forest where there are people in need of a champion to destroy the monsters or villains harassing them. A few Lumberjacks, once they have gotten a taste for such adventure, give up cutting for profit and take up their axe as a free adventurer. The Coastlanders are seeing an increasing number of such folk, many of whom are finding steady work as mercenaries, bodyguards, and enforcers of some kind. With civil war and a Bizantium invasion becoming ever more likely, these "free cutters" know that sooner than they like, they will be called to war.

**Alignments:** Any.

**Attribute Requirements:** P.S. 12, P.E. 12

**O.C.C. Skills:**

Language: Native tongue at 98% plus two of choice (+10%).  
Identify Plants/Fruits (+25%)

Climb Trees/Scale Walls (+20%)

W.P. Battle Axe

Hand to Hand: Basic. This can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of one "O.C.C. Related" skill or to Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) for the cost of two "O.C.C. Related" skills.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select five at level one, two at level three, two at level eight and two at level twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Sign Language only.

Domestic: Any.

Espionage: Track Humanoids only.

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: Brewing or First Aid only.

Military: None.

Physical: Any.

Rogue: Prowl and Card Shark only (+5%).

Science: Mathematics: Basic only.

Scholar/Technical: General Repair, Language, Literacy, or Sculpting/Whittling only.

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select 7 secondary skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels three, six and ten. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also, skills are limited ("any," "only," "none") as previously indicated in the list.

**Starting Equipment:** One set of clothing, boots, a pair of gloves, belt, bedroll, backpack, a large sack, a small sack, a water skin, and a tinder box.

**Armor:** Starts with a suit of soft leather (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 20).

**Weapons:** Starts with an axe and one other weapon of choice.

All are basic S.D.C. weapons of fair to good quality. Magic weapons and other equipment must be acquired later.

**Money:** The character starts with 100 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or it can be saved for later. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty.

### Levels of Experience:

|    |                   |
|----|-------------------|
| 1  | 0,000 - 2,060     |
| 2  | 2,061 - 4,120     |
| 3  | 4,121 - 8,240     |
| 4  | 8,241 - 15,100    |
| 5  | 15,101 - 23,100   |
| 6  | 23,101 - 33,100   |
| 7  | 33,101 - 48,200   |
| 8  | 48,201 - 68,300   |
| 9  | 68,301 - 93,400   |
| 10 | 93,401 - 133,500  |
| 11 | 133,501 - 175,600 |
| 12 | 175,601 - 223,700 |
| 13 | 223,701 - 273,800 |
| 14 | 273,801 - 325,900 |
| 15 | 325,901 - 385,100 |





## Miner Optional O.C.C.

Most people think of Dwarves or maybe even Kobolds when it comes to mining, but as it turns out, humans and other "tall folk" have quite the knack for it, too. Underneath sections of the Shadow Coast are vast tunnel networks dug out by local miners in an attempt to make sure all immediate mineral deposits are exhausted. With such experience digging and fortifying tunnels, Miners have suddenly become a *very* hot commodity in the pre-war Shadow Coast. Not only have these fellows built a large underground network that Coastlander rebels can use to launch surprise attacks against Bizantium invaders, but they will be instrumental in providing the colonists with escape routes, hiding places and secret storage caches should the rebellion take place.

Meanwhile, miners make their living finding and excavating mineral deposits or cut stone here, there and everywhere. Standard compensation for freelance miners is 1% of the stake's total production, 2% for squad foremen, 3% for site foremen, and 4% for mine supervisor. Considering that some big mines produce tens of millions of gold in their first year, even a 1% stake can be enough for some lucky sod to retire on. However, all these positions are currently held by bosses and noble kin shipped in from Bizantium, leaving the "real" miners to do all the hard work without any (or much) of the credit or profit. Most mine foremen know they need to pay these skilled workers more than the norm, so they pay them three times what a typical impoverished laborer in the mines gets paid. That pay is a joke, but right now the Coastlanders are not willing to challenge their Bizantium masters.

**Alignments:** Any.

**Attribute Requirements:** P.E. 12, P.S. 12

### O.C.C. Skills:

Language: Native tongue at 98% plus one of choice (+10%).

Body Building and Weight Lifting

Gemology (+10%)

Underground Tunneling (special!). This is identical to the Dwarven ability of the same name. Base Skill: 40% +5% per level of experience. Dwarven miners get a one-time bonus of +20%; Kobolds get a +10% bonus.

Underground Architecture (special!). This is identical to the Dwarven ability of the same name. Base Skill: 30% +5% per level of experience; detection and deactivation of traps is at half the normal skill ratio. Dwarven miners get a one-time bonus of +20%; Kobolds get a +10% bonus.

Underground Sense of Direction (special!). This is identical to the Dwarven ability of the same name. Base Skill: 40% +5% per level of experience; 30% +5% per level of experience to judge the approximate location to surface structures (natural and artificial). Dwarven miners get a one-time bonus of +20%; Kobolds get a +10% bonus.

W.P. Battle Axe/Pick

Hand to Hand: Basic. This can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of one "O.C.C. Related" skill or to Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) for the cost of two "O.C.C. Related" skills.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select six at level one, and one at levels 3, 7, and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any, but only Sign Language gets a +10% bonus.

Domestic: Any (+10%).

Espionage: None.

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: Brewing, First Aid and Holistic Medicine only.  
 Military: Camouflage (+5%) only.  
 Physical: Any.  
 Rogue: Card Shark only.  
 Science: Mathematics skills only.  
 Scholar/Technical: Any (+5%).  
 Weapon Proficiencies: Any.  
 Wilderness: Any.

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select four secondary skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels 2, 5 and 10. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also, skills are limited ("any," "only," "none") as previously indicated in the list.

**Starting Equipment:** Large pick/mattock (3D4 damage), a small hammer (1D6 damage), two sets of clothing, a pair of heavy work boots, belt, hat, blanket, backpack, one large sack, 1D4 small sacks, a water skin, dried meats and fruits equaling 1D4+1 weeks' worth of rations and a tinder box with a half dozen treated torches.

**Armor:** Soft leather (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 20) and a mining helmet (S.D.C. 25).

**Weapons:** Starts with an Oncin Pick (2D4 damage) and one weapon of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of fair to good quality. Magic weapons and other equipment must be acquired later. Many miners will use their pick axe/mattock as their prime weapon, however. It is what they are most comfortable with.

**Money:** The character starts with 190 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or it can be saved for later. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty.

### Levels of Experience:

- 1 0,000 - 2,100
- 2 2,101 - 4,200
- 3 4,201 - 8,400
- 4 8,401 - 15,400
- 5 15,401 - 23,400
- 6 23,401 - 33,400
- 7 33,401 - 48,400
- 8 48,401 - 68,400
- 9 68,401 - 93,400
- 10 93,401 - 133,400
- 11 133,401 - 173,400
- 12 173,401 - 223,400
- 13 223,401 - 273,400
- 14 273,401 - 323,400
- 15 323,401 - 373,400

## Trapper/Woodsman Optional O.C.C.

The Trapper/Woodsman is similar to a Ranger, but this character's focus is less on exploration and combat, and more on trapping and hunting animals for their fur. Most are well acquainted with wilderness survival and enjoy living off the land and being constantly on the go. While some have families or loved ones, they love hunting and the outdoors even more. Most consider the wilderness to be their true home.

Those in the Hinterlands are among the hardest and good natured. Game is plentiful, and even though the wilderness is dangerous and plagued by monsters, it is a true challenge. These locals have a keen understanding about the long winters and surviving in them. Many continue to hunt year round. Most will know and associate with Rangers, Long Bowmen, Druids, Kankoran and other Wilderness folk. They live hard and play hard.

**Alignments:** Any, but lean toward Unprincipled, Anarchist and Aberrant.

**Attribute Requirements:** I.Q. 8 and P.P. of 10 or higher.

### O.C.C. Skills:

- Language: Native tongue at 98% plus one of choice (+10%).
- Skin & Prepare Animal Hides (+20%)
- Track & Trap Animals (+25%)
- Preserve Food (+10%)
- Cook (+10%)





Land Navigation (+15%)  
 Wilderness Survival (+15%)  
 Camouflage (+10%)  
 Swim (+10%)  
 W.P. Knife  
 W.P. of choice (any).

Hand to Hand: Basic. This can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of two "O.C.C. Related" skills or to Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) for the cost of three "O.C.C. Related" skills.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select five at level one, and one at levels 4, 8 and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Espionage: Sniper only.

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: Brewing, First Aid or Holistic Medicine only.

Military: Any, except Heraldry, Field Armorer, and Military Etiquette.

Physical: Any, excluding Acrobatics and Gymnastics.

Rogue: Card Shark only.

Science: Astronomy and Navigation and Mathematics: Basic skills only (+5%). Scholar/Technical: Any.

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, except Siege Weapons and the Long Bow.

Wilderness: Any (+10%).

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select four secondary skills from the previous list at level one, and two additional skills at levels 3, 7 and 11. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus

listed in the parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Skills are limited ("any," "only," "none") as previously indicated in the list.

**Starting Equipment:** One set of clothing, boots, gloves, a dozen snares, a half dozen traps (medium and small), one bear trap, ten foot (3 m) spool of wire, 50 foot (15 m) ball of string, 30 feet (9 m) of rope, fishing line and hook, small mallet, six wooden stakes, four metal spikes, skinning knife (1D6 damage), belt, bedroll, backpack, two large sacks, a small sack, a water skin, small mirror, and a tinder box.

**Armor:** Studded Leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38).

**Weapons:** Starts with a short bow and a crossbow, a quiver of 24 arrows, and one other weapon of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of fair to good quality. Magic weapons and other equipment must be acquired later.

**Money:** The character starts with 150 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or it can be saved for later. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty.

### Levels of Experience:

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1 0,000 - 2,060   |                      |
| 2 2,061 - 4,120   |                      |
| 3 4,121 - 8,240   |                      |
| 4 8,241 - 15,100  | 10 93,401 - 133,500  |
| 5 15,101 - 23,100 | 11 133,501 - 175,600 |
| 6 23,101 - 33,100 | 12 175,601 - 223,700 |
| 7 33,101 - 48,200 | 13 223,701 - 273,800 |
| 8 48,201 - 68,300 | 14 273,801 - 325,900 |
| 9 68,301 - 93,400 | 15 325,901 - 385,100 |

# Kiridin, Land of Barbarians

## Barbarian O.C.C.

Sometimes known as *Marauders*, *Wildmen*, and *Nomad Raiders*, the **Barbarians** of the Palladium World can be found scattered around the globe, and are represented by nearly every race. They are the people who fall through the cracks of conventional "civilization" or belong to those small groups to whom civilization never quite reaches. They are the savages, the throwbacks, the primitives, the salt of the earth. They are rough and tumble warriors, wanderers, explorers, hunters, gatherers, raiders and more. They have been around since the dawn of time and even as civilizations rise and fall, the way of the Palladium barbarian has remained the same. It is one of the oldest and most unchanging walks of life in the Palladium World.

In the Palladium World, when one thinks "barbarian," *Orcs*, *Ogres*, *Goblins*, *Trolls* and *Coyle*s are probably the races that immediately come to mind. Some might also put Wolfen who have only (and arguably) recently risen from barbarism in that group, as well as the *Danzi* in the Eastern Territory and *Kankoran*, *Bearmen* and just about any primitive people who gather in tribes and live off the land. However, this is an unfair characterization as Goblins and the Unholy Three can learn to be quite civilized, humans and Elves can be barbarians, and just because a people are tribal and primitive by the standards of

so-called "civilized" people, they are not necessarily "barbaric." True Barbarians, in the context of this game, are primitive people who are hyper-aggressive, war and feud constantly and survive by raiding as much as any other means.

In the Northern Hinterlands, **Kiridin** is the land of *human barbarians*, although raiding bands, clans and tribes of these nomads, as well as barbarian *Orcs*, *Ogres*, *Goblins*, *Trolls* and *Coyle*s can be encountered anywhere, any time in the Hinterlands, especially in the northern part of the forest and Ophid's Grasslands.

**True Barbarians** possess little formal training, having learned how to fight and survive through the time-tested ways of their ancestors. These people are usually not interested in widening their scope of knowledge. Most of them live in their little corner of the world and develop just the skills they need to survive there. Once they have that figured out, they simply master what they need to know and live simple lives. Though their education is minimal, Barbarians know enough to be exceptional hunters, explorers and trackers. Likewise, while they have no formal fighting schools among them, the wild, eclectic styles of these warriors make them formidable opponents on par with most Men at Arms. One on one, most professional warriors will

have their hands full when up against a Barbarian, with their incredible strength, endurance and ability to take punishment. And when Barbarians gather in force, watch out! Given the right circumstances, a Barbarian army can destroy a "civilized" force five or six times its size.

So why then are Barbarians not a major power in the world? If they are so able, how come they don't step out of the shadows and take a bigger, better role for themselves on the world's stage? Simple question, complicated answer.

Barbarians generally do not gather in numbers. When they do, they usually gain the notice of whatever established civilizations are in the area, and within a few generations, the Barbarians get destroyed or absorbed by the larger culture. Against the huge civilizations of the Palladium World, even communities of thousands of Barbarians are no match for the relentless progress of cultural assimilation. Successful assimilation is almost never military and almost always gradual, over the course of generations.

Thus, the Barbarians that manage to keep their cultures intact are those that live in small groups, isolated and far from any dominant civilization. As a result, most "successful" Barbarian tribes have no desire to spread out or conquer their world. For them, it is enough to live and let live, getting by and fighting off one's enemies. Periodically, however, there will be those rare Barbarians who get the notion to invade a neighboring nation, gathering into large hordes to do so. (A good example of this are the marauding Coyle hordes that wreak havoc throughout the Northern Wilderness and especially the eastern Disputed Lands.) When hordes form, entire nations may tremble before their might, and indeed, Barbarian invasions have brought many an established culture to their knees. (The war-weakened Elven and Dwarven Empires at the end of the Elf-Dwarf War are two prime examples, falling to hordes of Orcs, Goblins and Ogres.) However, even the gathering hordes are not so much interested in conquering and holding on to an enemy's land as they are sacking it – stealing valuables, raping the females, looting communities and destroying property. For the most part, Barbarians do not foster dreams of large-scale expansion and conquest, and when they do, it is a cultural aberration. These people might be raiders, but they are not empire-builders, so even when they are at their most warlike and have entire kingdoms under their thumb, triumphant hordes are just as likely to pull back suddenly, leaving hardly a trace of their occupation in the lands of which they momentarily usurped control. Additionally, most Barbarian hordes are made of scores of smaller clans, tribes and hangers-on, that are united only in their gluttony of pillaging. Once the heaviest warring has ended, they splinter back into their usual lines of division and rivalry and head back for wherever they consider their homelands.

Barbarians who take up the adventuring life often wander the world as warriors, explorers, traders, thieves, bandits and whatever other walk of life they fall into. Most find a group of adventurers and travel with them, getting into scrapes and quests and generally having a great time of it, for most Barbarians love challenges. Eventually though, most return home, either as a great and powerful warrior, a rich traveler, or simply an older, wiser individual ready to live out the rest of his life at home with the people he knows best.

## Barbarian Stigmas

Barbarians are by nature simple folk. Even those who decide to become wandering adventurers have little knowledge of the larger world, and many who visit a great city for the first time find themselves in a state of deep culture shock. For these people, realizing just how vast, diverse, mysterious and ancient the world really is can be a mind-blowing experience, and some never quite recover from it. Most, under any circumstance, never fully trust or adopt the ways of the outer world, clinging ever tighter to the ways and beliefs they grew up with, no matter how alien or absurd they might seem to other people. One aspect of this that causes Barbarians lots of trouble are the *superstitions and fears* Barbarians carry with them. It is a popular myth that Barbarians fear magic and will not use it. This is untrue; many Barbarians find magic fascinating and desire to obtain magic items and weapons. A few even return to their tribes as new Wizards, eager to teach the arcane arts to their tribesmen, but Barbarians are fearful and superstitious to a degree that most outsiders find laughable. Most have respect for nature and all gods, and are loath to insult them. Although they hate, fear and destroy demons and other evil supernatural beings, they try to avoid them and would rather not invite their wrath. Likewise, they are firm believers in omens, signs of portent, luck and fate.

Each individual Barbarian has a *stigma*, a particular thing on which they place an intense and often irrational importance.

There are both *positive* and *negative* stigmas. A positive stigma means the Barbarian has an irrationally intense like, at-





traction or attachment to something, whereas a negative stigma means the Barbarian has an unusually strong revulsion to or fear of something; often such a negative stigma represents death, sorrow or ruination. Barbarians with positive stigmas will try to make sure they are in regular contact with the subject of their stigma, and finding it or a representation of it when not expected is seen as a sign of "good luck." Likewise, those with a negative stigma will try their hardest to make sure they are not confronted with the subject of their stigma at any time, and seeing it at any time is a sign of "bad luck" or impending trouble. (Game Masters should take full advantage of stigmas to add suspense and tension to their games.)

**Stigmatic Distraction:** When a Barbarian either loses contact with a positive stigma (this might include breaking, losing or misplacing a lucky charm), or comes into contact with a negative stigma, he automatically suffers from a *stigmatic distraction*.

**Penalties:** While distracted, the Barbarian's combat bonuses are all reduced by half, and all skills are performed at -15%. Until the Barbarian resolves the distraction (escapes it, kills it, can push it out of his mind; the latter taking 1D4 days!), he will be too preoccupied with his distraction to function at full capacity. **Note:** As debilitating as a stigmatic distraction can be, this is not as powerful as a true insanity. Positive stigmas are *not* obsessions and negative stigmas are not phobias.

Players and G.M.s are encouraged to come up with an original stigma for their characters. It can be bizarre, but it should not be so exotic that it never comes into play. G.M.s, try to look at a Barbarian character's stigma as a great springboard for adventures or throwing a little spice into an otherwise ordinary role-playing session. Players, try to view Barbarian stigmas as a great role-playing challenge and something to foster inventive play. If you have a Barbarian whose stigma is the color red, don't just have him smash every red thing he sees, try to develop clever ways for the character to get around his stigma and still try to go about his business as normally as possible. If nothing else, think of role-playing your Barbarian stigma as a great chance for some bonus experience points. For example, the Barbarian might never trust anybody who is wearing red when they first meet, because in that first meeting "red" served as an *omen*. On the other hand, characters the Barbarian has already known and met can wear red without it meaning anything negative, the Barbarian just finds the red item to be ugly, cheap or disconcerting, nothing serious. Likewise, when looking for a bad guy or information about evil goings on, the Barbarian with the red stigma may believe the place to find the answers is the "Red" Dragon saloon or "Redman" General Store, and so on. Likewise, if a Cardinal or other "red" bird was perched on or near the door to some establishment, it will serve as an *omen* to the Barbarian that trouble, betrayal, danger or death awaits inside or will soon make itself known - if anticipating trouble or looking for some villain, the Barbarian may assume that if he waits there, he will either be inside or he will arrive soon, or perhaps that a lead to his location can be had inside. Meanwhile, if a red colored poisonous snake crosses his path, the Barbarian may see it as a sign that he or the group should go no further or that death awaits inside or down that path. Likewise, if "red" is a good stigma, such things will be a good omen and the Barbarian will favor these places and expect good luck from them.

The funny thing about Barbarian stigmas is that they actually get *stronger* over time, not weaker. Old Barbarians treat their stigmas with the utmost seriousness, something not to be trifled with. In addition, Barbarian warriors and adventurers (that means your Player Characters) will pick up additional stigmas over the course of their exploits.

**Getting Stigmas.** All Barbarians start with *one* stigma at level one, and they gain an *additional* stigma at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. At the Game Master's or player's discretion, a truly traumatic or important/earth shattering event may trigger another positive or negative stigma (i.e. "I would have been killed if not for ..." fill in the blank, etc.). Each of these stigmas is a serious matter, and no matter how disparate they seem, to the Barbarian, they all tie in somehow. Even if a Barbarian has stigmas for the number thirteen, the color red, bones, and livestock, in his mind, there will be some crazy explanation for how they are all connected, and why they all mean something good or bad. While we noted before that stigmas are *not* phobias, when a Barbarian is negatively impacted with three or more stigmas at once, their cumulative effect is equivalent to that of a genuine phobia, and if the Barbarian can not avoid what is plaguing him, he might very well go into a hysterical frenzy, lashing out at everything around him until the multiple stigmas bother him no more.

For those who do not wish to create a stigma from scratch, feel free to roll percentile dice and consult the following random table:

### Barbarian Stigma Table

The Barbarian has a positive (01%-50%) or negative (51%-00%) stigma concerning a certain type of ...

- 01%: Dance.
- 02%: Wood; a specific type, like birch, cedar, maple, mahogany, etc.
- 03%: Stone; a specific type, like granite, marble, sandstone, etc. May be general such as "shiny" or a stone with a particular color or texture.
- 04%: Weapon (particular type, melee or missile; bladed, blunt, chain or thrusting)
- 05%: Armor (light or heavy; any specific type)
- 06%: Food (a specific type)
- 07%: Drink (a specific type)
- 08%: Music (a specific type)
- 09%: Hairstyle; a specific type for the head or facial hair.
- 10%: Language; pick a specific written or spoken tongue (not Gobblely).
- 11%: Monster; pick a specific one.
- 12%: Animal: Common; a particular bird, feline, canine, snake, etc.
- 13%: Race; any one common or rare/exotic people
- 14%: Profession. Pick a specific one, like priest, thief, knight, demon worshiper, farmer, lumberjack, and so on.
- 15%: Religion; pick a specific one.
- 16%: Branch of mystic study, pick one (Wizardry, Elementalism, Summoning, etc.).
- 17%: Magic Item; may be a specific type such as swords, knives, wands, armor, potions, scrolls, medallions, flying carpet, crystal ball, etc., or any and all magic items.
- 18%: Runes and anything with runes on it.
- 19%: Color: Red or Purple. May include blood.

- 20%: Number; either a type of number (odd, even, prime, etc.) or a specific number, three, ten, fifty, etc. (can roll percentile dice to determine a random number).
- 21%: Weather pattern; a specific type, like a rainbow, type of cloud or storm, etc.
- 22%: Style of clothing; a specific type or material.
- 23%: Animal: Exotic, like a Pegasus or unicorn.
- 24%: Money; either a certain type of money or a certain amount of it.
- 25%: Book; particular book or a kind of book (religious, magic, etc.).
- 26%: Undead; a specific type such as vampires, zombies, animated dead, or all.
- 27%: Psionics; a certain kind of psychic power or those who have psychic powers
- 28%: Skeleton or rotting corpse, in general or that of a specific creature, be it a humanoid, animal, dragon, or whatever.
- 29%: Skull and Death's Head motifs.
- 30%: Insanity; a specific kind of insanity or insanity in general.
- 31%: Name; a specific name.
- 32%: A particular person; alive or dead.
- 33%: A particular place or geographical region
- 34%: Personal ritual, such as sleeping or sitting in a particular position, rubbing the chin, winking, etc.
- 35%: A certain time of day (dawn, dusk, midnight, a particular hour, etc.)
- 36%: Games (either a particular game or games in general)
- 37%: Lucky Charm (rabbit's foot, tail, a tooth or claw, etc.)
- 38%: Number 7, or other traditionally lucky number of choice.
- 39%: Number 13, or other traditionally unlucky number of choice; may be good or bad.
- 40%: Holy symbol; select a specific one.
- 41%: Shape or Symbol. Pick a specific one such as a circle, square, triangle, lightning bolt, crossed swords, skull and crossbones, dragon, magical symbol, etc.; doubly good or bad if it is in a stigma color.
- 42%: Artifact, either a historical, religious or magical relic or some kind of rune device.
- 43%: Color White
- 44%: Water that is not clear; murky, brown or a strange color.
- 45%: Color Blue; excluding the sky.
- 46%: Disease; probably limited to a specific one.
- 47%: Slime/Goo
- 48%: Spider Web or Cob/Dust Webs.
- 49%: Strangers (may be specific to tall, short, human, young, old, etc.)
- 50%: Friends.
- 51%: Siblings/family members.
- 52%: Bones/Skeletons.
- 53%: Raven or Hawk.
- 54%: Musical instrument; a specific type.
- 55%: Riding animal; a specific type.
- 56%: Circles, especially magic circles.
- 57%: Vegetable, or herb or root; a specific type; mandrake, garlic, etc.
- 58%: Eye symbols or motif; i.e. symbols, carvings, etc., of just an eye or many eyes.
- 59%: A specific kind of meat (beef, pork, poultry, Tusker, and so on).
- 60%: Fallen Tree or a particular vine, plant or flower.
- 61%: Gold or silver; the metal and/or color.
- 62%: Brand new things; may be limited to weapons or specific type of item.
- 63%: Old things; may be limited to weapons or specific type of item.
- 64%: Broken weapon; can be a good sign (peace or victory), or bad (defeat and misfortune).
- 65%: Keepsake (lock of a loved one's hair, medal, charm or article given for good luck)
- 66%: Dead bodies
- 67%: Underground (i.e. underground ruins, tunnels, caves, etc.)
- 68%: Slaughtered or slain animal(s). For those who see this as a positive omen, a freshly slain animal means a coming bounty and success. However, if the animal appears to be a fresh kill but upon closer inspection it is diseased or maggot ridden, it means lean times and/or misfortune awaits. Those who see any animal slain but not eaten as a bad sign, knows it means misfortune and loss – danger lays away.
- 69%: Seeing one's own reflection before a particular event such as before going to battle, entering an establishment, etc. Typically a bad omen if seen in a cracked glass or muddy water, or red wine. A good sign if seen in a mirror, shiny metal (especially if a shield or body armor) or clear water. Seeing one's reflection in the blade of a weapon means a coming conflict or hard choice.
- 70%: Color; any of choice.
- 71%: Games of chance; dice, cards, etc.
- 72%: Alien world or dimension; may include things from it..
- 73%: Particular type of Livestock animal (cow, pig, goat, chicken, etc.)
- 74%: Writing utensils; even if the Barbarian can not read.
- 75%: Dogs or wolves howling
- 76%: Stone megaliths and strangely shaped stone/boulder, or natural formations, including stone bridges, stalagmites, stalactites, etc.
- 77%: Symbol of Royalty or Power (crown, scepter, etc.).
- 78%: A day of the week.
- 79%: People of a certain age; babies, adolescents, adults, elderly.
- 80%: Black Cat; may be a good or bad sign. Can be some other feline.
- 81%: Knots; rope, string, shoelaces, doors or gates tied shut, etc. An unwanted knot, such as a knot in a shoelace, is usually a bad omen, especially if before a battle.
- 82%: Trees. Typically, large, ancient trees are usually a good sign, as are blossoming trees, especially if late in the year, but a blighted, dead or deformed tree, or a fallen tree that blocks a path is a bad omen.
- 83%: Gemstone; a specific type (ruby, diamond, amethyst, emerald, etc.)
- 84%: Eclipse (includes symbols of such too).
- 85%: Demon or Deevil; a specific type.
- 86%: Dragon; a specific type.
- 87%: Giant; a specific type.
- 88%: God or Goddess; a specific one.
- 89%: Mountain or mountain range; a specific one.
- 90%: Borrowed things.
- 91%: Spilled glass/cup/container; may be a good or bad sign depending on where it spills, on whom or what it spills or what image the spilled contents form.



92%: Moon. A specific notable type or phase of the moon (full moon, half moon, moonless, harvest moon with a golden halo, blood moon when it has a reddish or brown tint to it, etc.)

93%: High altitude/heights.

94%: Maze, labyrinth or catacomb; includes symbols of such too.

95%: Insect; a specific type; scorpion, spider, butterfly, ladybug, etc.

96%: Door; an opened door is a good sign, a barred/locked or broken one is bad.

97%: Drakin, the Luck Bird; may mean good or bad to the Barbarian. Finding a dead luck bird is always a bad omen.

98%: Ghosts and Spirits. May be limited to a specific type or spirits in general.

99%: Items found on the dead; may be good or bad. Could be seen as a boon from helpful spirits or ancestors, or avoids anything found on the dead or at burial sites, even ancient ones because it invites bad luck and/or trouble from ghosts, spirits or demons. Burial places are generally to be respected and not disturbed. Ironically, one of the few places a Barbarian will not loot.

00%: Roll two times on this table, ignoring another roll of 00%.

### Special O.C.C. abilities of the Barbarian Warrior

The Barbarian character may select *three* of the following special abilities:

1) **Berserker Fury.** During combat, the Barbarian may enter a state of rage that turns him or her into a walking killing machine. When berserk, the Barbarian receives the following bonuses: +1 attack per melee round, +3 to strike, +8 to damage, +6 to save vs Horror Factor, +5 to save vs possession and mind control, and the character becomes immune to the effects of fatigue and pain.

While berserk, the Barbarian also is -3 to parry and absolutely refuses to dodge incoming attacks. Berserk Barbarians favor simultaneous attacks with their opponents, doling out blow for blow. The berserker fury lasts until no obvious threats remain in view. When berserk, Barbarians *can* distinguish between friend and foe. After this rage has subsided, the Barbarian is emotionally and physically drained and functions at half speed and combat ability for 20 minutes, during which time the character can not enter into another berserker fury. In fact, the fury is such that it can only be done three times in a single day (24 hour period).

2) **Physical Strength Attribute Bonus.** Add 1D6+2 to the Barbarian's P.S.

3) **Physical Attribute Bonus.** Add 1D4+1 to the Barbarian's P.P., or his P.E.

4) **Toughness.** Add 6D6+12 to S.D.C.

5) **Temperature Endurance.** The Barbarian is highly tolerant to extreme temperatures. As a result, he takes only half damage from ordinary heat or cold. Plus, he can last *twice* as long as other people can when exposed to prolonged, severe heat or cold.

6) **Equestrian Skill.** The Barbarian is a natural born horseman and has the skills of Horsemanship: Knight at +10%!

7) **Master of Paired Weapons:** This brute has W.P. Paired Weapons, and can wield weapons that normally require two

hands, one-handed (like a Claymore, Hercules Club, or giant weapon in each hand), plus he is +3 to disarm!

8) **Battle Cry.** In the first round of combat, the Barbarian can emit a blood-curdling war cry that inflicts a Horror Factor of 8+1 per level of experience upon all enemies within a radius of 50 feet (15.2 m) +10 feet (3 m) per level of experience. Any first or second level characters who hear the war cry and fail to save vs Horror Factor will run away as fast as their little feet will carry them. Higher level characters who fail to save are just momentarily frozen, losing one melee attack and initiative for that round.

### Barbarian Warrior O.C.C.

**Note:** The only alternative O.C.C.s are Shaman, Beastmaster, Woodsman, Blacksmith or any Psychic O.C.C.

**Race:** Any, but typically northern humans, Orcs, Ogres, Trolls, Gigantes, Coyles and Wolfen.

**Alignments:** Any, but tend toward Anarchist and Miscreant; typically very aggressive and violent.

**Attribute Requirements:** None. Most Barbarians have high P.S., P.P. and P.E. scores thanks to their intense physical training, but that is not a requirement.

**Gender:** Male. Less than 5% of all Barbarian Warriors are female. Women barbarians are tough but play the traditional role of mother, wife and child-care provider. Only females with great strength (P.S. 17 or better), and high P.P., and P.E.



(at least 14) will be allowed to be a warrior, and should be feared.

#### **O.C.C. Skills:**

Body Building & Weight Lifting

Climbing (+10%)

Running

Swimming (+10%)

Boxing

Wrestling

Land Navigation (+15%)

Wilderness Survival (+10%)

Two W.P.s of choice.

Hand to Hand: Expert (Assassin if evil and so inclined). May be changed to Hand to Hand: Martial Arts for the cost of one O.C.C. Related skill.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select six at level one, and one additional at levels 4, 8 and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Sign Language only (+5%).

Domestic: Any

Espionage: Any, except Forgery.

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only.

Medical: First Aid or Holistic Medicine only (+5%).

Military: Any (+5%), except Heraldry and Military Etiquette.

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics.

Rogue: Any

Science: Mathematics and Astronomy only.

Scholar/Technical: Breed Dogs, General Repair, any Lore, Rope Works, Language, and Sculpting/Whittling only (+5% to those listed and +10% to any language skills).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any

Wilderness: Any (+5%)

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select four secondary skills from the previous list at level one. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Available skills are limited as previously noted.

**Starting Equipment:** Two sets of clothing, a fur cape/cloak (with or without a hood) or poncho, boots, gauntlets or arm bands, bedroll, backpack, two large sacks, two small sacks, a water skin, 50 feet (15.2 m) of rope, two weeks worth of food rations, and a tinder box.

**Armor:** Starts with studded leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38) or chain mail (A.R. 14, S.D.C. 44).

**Weapons:** Character starts with two weapons of choice (usually matching the character's W.P.) and a knife and war club.

**Money:** The character starts with 2D4x10 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or it can be saved for later. Additional money will come from payment for jobs and/or booty. Barbarians tend to be spendthrifts, spending their money as fast as they receive it on food, wine, women and song.

## **Barbarian Keepers O.C.C.**

**Female Barbarians:** The only alternative O.C.C. is Artisan, Shaman, Druid or any Psychic character.

**Note:** Fundamentally the same as the male Warriors except as noted. Both use the same experience table. Females tend to be the storytellers and lawmakers, and decide on punishments.

## **Levels of Experience for Barbarians:**

1 0,000 - 2,200

2 2,201 - 4,400

3 4,401 - 8,800

4 8,801 - 16,500

5 16,501 - 25,000

6 25,001 - 35,000

7 35,001 - 50,000

8 50,001 - 71,000

9 71,001 - 96,500

10 96,501 - 135,500

11 135,501 - 180,500

12 180,501 - 230,500

13 230,501 - 280,500

14 280,501 - 335,500

15 335,501 - 400,500

**Alignment:** Any, but tend to lean toward Unprincipled, Miscreant and Aberrant; fiercely loyal and protective of their immediate family and clan. Nearly as aggressive as the males and assume outsiders are dangerous.

**Attribute Requirements:** None

#### **O.C.C. Skills:**

Body Building & Weight Lifting

Climbing (+10%)

Running

Swimming (+10%)

Sew (+10%)

Cook (+15%)

Preserve Food (+20%)

Identify Plants & Fruits (+10%)

Holistic Medicine (+15%)

Wilderness Survival (+10%)

W.P. Blunt

Hand to Hand: Basic. May be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for the cost of one O.C.C. Related skill.

**O.C.C. Related Skills:** Select four at level one, and one additional at levels 4, 8 and 12. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Sign Language and Mime only (+5%).

Domestic: Any (+10%)

Espionage: None

Horsemanship: General only.

Medical: Any (+5%).

Military: Camouflage only.

Physical: Any, except Boxing, Gymnastics and Acrobatics.

Rogue: Any

Science: Mathematics and Astronomy only.

Scholar/Technical: Art, Breed Dogs, General Repair, any Lore, History, Rope Works, Language, and Sculpting/Whittling only (+10%)

Weapon Proficiencies: Knife, Sword, Spear, Staff and Shield only.

Wilderness: Any

**Secondary Skills:** The character also gets to select three secondary skills from the previous list at level one. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Available skills are limited as previously noted.



**Starting Equipment:** Two sets of clothing, a cape/cloak (with or without a hood) or poncho, boots, gauntlets or arm bands, bedroll, two blankets, backpack, one large sack, two small sacks, a water skin, bandages, small bag of herbs, small pot, and a tinder box.

**Armor:** Starts with soft leather (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 20) or studded leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38).

**Weapons:** Character starts with a club (2D4 damage) or mace (2D6), a knife (1D6) and a frying pan (1D6 damage).

**Money:** The character starts with 1D6x10 in gold.



## Kiridin — The Sorrowful Land

The northeastern forests of the Northern Hinterlands are known as Kiridin. The barbaric *humans* who inhabit this woodland region are known as the "Kiridin Barbarians" or just, "Kiridin."

The word *Kiridin* is the barbarians' name for "sorrowful land," because of the harsh, long Hinterland winters, and the hardship and conflict one must face to survive living here. The Kiridin barbarians are the only *humans* to have permanently settled here in substantial numbers, and even they only number into the thousands. One of the chief reasons why so few people outside the Hinterlands have even heard of the Kiridin Barbarians is that the Kiridoi themselves have little interest in seeing the larger world. These people have a very strong attachment to their homeland and family clans, and just have no interest in seeing what lies beyond the great forests or northern mountains.

The Kiridin people (also known as the *Kiridoi*) are a proud race of human warriors and woodsmen whose lives are governed by their harsh environment, war, raiding and seemingly illogical vendettas. To civilized folk, the Kiridin are savage and barbaric, scarcely better than the Coyles in the southeast. They have no written language and don't even speak one of the human languages, but rather a strange dialect of Gobblely. Nobody knows from when or where these human barbarians originate. Most scholars believe they must have come from one of the established human kingdoms in the south, and reverted to barbarism. Their ancestors might have been the survivors of a shipwreck or perhaps Bizantium settlers who lost touch with civilization centuries ago. However, the Kiridin Barbarians claim to have lived in the forest "always," and know nothing of any other kingdoms, not even Bizantium. This has caused some

historians to wonder if they might not be one the most ancient races of humanity existing in this world. Unfortunately, because of the Kiridin's self-destructive culture and oral tradition of history, there is no evidence to substantiate this theory. Scholars who have tried to link the barbarians to some of the ancient ruins scattered across the Hinterlands have failed. For one thing, the Kiridin barbarians have no stories about ever having lost civilization, and most ruins are found in the west, not in Kiridin. According to the barbarians, they have always been "the people of the sorrowful land." Kankoran, Bearmen and other indigenous races agree that the barbarians have inhabited these woods as long as they have.

The "sorrowful land" is the wild and unsettled place that has been described in detail throughout this book. The barbarians inhabit the portion along the western banks of the Dragon Claw. The Kiridin Barbarians have always lived the way they do, hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering food from the vine and raiding other people to survive. In the past, raids were limited to rival barbarian clans, Wolfen and other nonhumans, but since the establishment of the Shadow Colonies, "outsiders" (i.e. the colonists, explorers, adventurers and others) have become their primary targets. Kiridin Barbarians are intensely aggressive and violent. Their war-like way of life and constant rivalry between other clans has made them a fractured and scattered people who, it would seem, will forever struggle just to survive, unable to progress or become something greater than what they already are.

The Northern Hinterlands, Ophid's Grasslands included, is home to wandering tribes of barbarians. It is generally believed that the ancestors of these savages started life as explorers, settlers and adventurers from Bizantium, the Western Empire and other "civilized" kingdoms. Somewhere along the line, they simply gave up on civilization and civility, and went feral. This is much more extreme than even the Trapper/Woodsmen, Kankoran or Bearmen. This is more like the Coyles - brutal, uneducated wilderness wild men who live off the land, beat and rob travelers, steal and rape women, raid farms and war with other barbarian clans and woodland people without discrimination. The barbarian clans of the Hinterlands are usually a mixture of races; half human and the rest typically 20% Orc or Goblin, 10% Coyles, 5% Ogre, 5% Bug Bears, 5% Centaurs and 5% others. These bandit-woodsmen are uneducated, rough, cruel and violent. They survive by looting as much as by hunting and living off the land, and are true savages.

**The clan is all.** The Barbarians of Kiridin do not, as a rule, make any distinction between the different races. Thus, they tend to treat everybody more or less the same, regardless of race. However, they do have a "them and us" mentality. Basically, all "outsiders" (i.e. anyone who is not a Kiridin) and most types of O.C.C.s are "them." All Kiridin people, including nonhuman barbarians who call the Sorrowful Land home, represent the "us." Powerful individuals who can fight and stand on their own (i.e. most Men at Arms O.C.C.s) may be accepted as an equal or worthy adversary, but remains an outsider who does not belong in Kiridin. Such an individual is considered an "equal" or "worthy brother," and will be accepted and tolerated by other Kiridin Barbarians if there is a Kiridin warrior to vouch for him. An outsider can become an official member of a barbarian clan by submitting to a *Rite of Brotherhood*, in which he

undergoes a painful ritual that ends in blood spilling to make him a "blood brother." Blood brothers must live as Kiridin Barbarians, follow clan law, obey its leaders, and always fight on behalf of the clan and clan brothers. To betray the clan (side with outsiders) is punishable by death. Clergy, Men of Magic, psychics and most other O.C.C.s can never be accepted as a "blood brother."

**Outsiders don't belong.** Ultimately, this means whether a Kiridin Barbarian clan is predominantly human, mixed 50/50 or mostly nonhumans, if they were born and live in Kiridin, then they are one of the accepted clans. While there is constant rivalry, feuding and raiding between the clans, they all belong in Kiridin. ALL others are outsiders, do not belong and are fair game to all the barbarian clans. Moreover, most clans feel that by simply setting foot on Kiridin lands, the outsider has declared war on the clans and is automatically an enemy to be driven away, robbed, molested, killed, or enslaved; basically the Kiridin feel they can do whatever they want to interlopers on "their" land. Conversely, the barbarians may "allow" intruders to cross their land without intervention, or choose to let them live, or hunt or trade in their domain. Not surprisingly then, it is understandable why all attempts by independent homesteaders and kingdoms alike have failed in this region. In fact, when an invading army or throngs of people invade, it is one of the few times that ALL the clans will unite for the common purpose of destroying or chasing away the invaders.

**Raiding outsiders.** This same sentiment holds true for when Kiridin Barbarians travel outside their domain to rob and raid others. In this case, they acknowledge that it is they who are the invaders, and whatever fate should befall them is fair and just. Thus, they expect to be chased, and even hunted down and killed by those they attack. To the Kiridin Barbarians, that's just the way of life. And raiding is their way of life. The forests of Kiridin might best be thought of as the barbarians' base of operations - the place they come from and the place to which they retreat, and call home. It is standard operating procedure for Kiridin Barbarians to venture out into the rest of the Northern Hinterlands, Great Northern Wilderness and even into the Disputed Lands in search for victims to raid. Since their inception, the colonies of the Shadow Coast have become a prime target, especially outlying farms, homesteads and lumber camps. They use hit and run tactics and frequently target livestock, food, clothing and supplies for theft. This is how they live, by robbing others, hunting, raising a little cattle and living off the land. As they see it, robbing others is living off the land.

Despite their strength, the Kiridin Barbarians live a hard life in a hard land. Many warriors are slain in combat, and the average life expectancy for a warrior male is only 32-38. The average females, that is to say the ones who survive frequent childbirth, live to be 45-50 years old.

**The telling.** The Kiridin have no written language, yet they maintain a long and rich sense of history. How? Simple, through the art and craft of storytelling. In Kiridoi society, females are considered the Keepers of the clan and its collective history. They are the ones who present the "official" versions of what has gone before, and as such, they hold a unique and important place in the barbarians' culture. They may not have the honor and prestige of a warrior, but they wield considerable power. For it is they who immortalize a warrior's exploits in story and





in song. Though all Kiridin Barbarians are bound to tell the truth to their clansmen, sometimes the odd little fib or exaggeration sneaks in, or they might choose to exclude certain details.

The Kiridoi storytelling tradition is also a social mechanism that helps to bring the clans together, and keep feuds with rivals going. At such gatherings, all sit around a vast campfire while the Keepers take their turns walking around the fire, telling their stories – the Kiridin log of history. It is a high time of fellowship and celebration during which outsiders may or may not be welcomed, depending on the storyteller and general atmosphere.

**Beyond the Mortal Coil.** In addition to their preoccupation with honor and combat, the Kiridin Barbarians are intensely mystical people. Not in the sense that they have innate magical powers, but that they are acutely interested in powers and mysteries beyond mere mortal comprehension.

**The Wild Lords.** Described earlier in this sourcebook, the Wild Lords are the primary focus of religious worship among the Kiridin people. The Wild Lords receive a lot of spiritual attention from the canines who roam the region too, but it is the Kiridoi who worship them with the most fervor. Every clan, tribe and village will worship one of these gods, and some even build permanent little shrines and medicine lodges dedicated to one or more Wild Lords. *Gainim, Lord of Autumn*, is the most favored of them all.

**Bad Mojo.** The Kiridin Barbarians place a great deal of power in superstitions and omens, to the point that it has made the entire people a little skittish and overly sensitive to the darker side of magic. They view all practitioners of magic, priests and creatures who possess magic as outsiders who can never be trusted. Most feel it is best to avoid them whenever possible, and if threatened by one, kill him. Magic curses are seen as the ultimate insult. Faerie Folk and dragons are regarded as dangerous spirits of nature best to be avoided, lest one succumbs their mischief. Deevils, Demons and similar dark creatures are seen as a plague upon the earth to be purged whenever possible.

## The Nine Nations

The Kiridin Barbarians are very similar to the olden day Indian Nations of real world North America. There are nine Kiridin tribes, all are nomadic, but at the same time claim a particular region within Kiridin as their tribal homeland. The entire village moves with them when they travel as a whole and in the winter they build lodges to wait it out. The Nation or tribe is usually divided into smaller clans of 1D4x100 people. Most of these people live, work and die within the same small village of their clan their entire lives. There is virtually no commerce to speak of, since the people are always on the move and steal what they need from outsiders or live off the land. Villages, clans and tribes all operate on a basic system of government based on clan loyalty and honor. Females are the lawmakers and givers, while the male warriors carry out any serious punishments (usually upon "outsiders," because the barbarian clan members rarely commit a crime against their own).

The only permanent structures are the occasional shrine to a Wild Lord, blacksmith house for making weapons, hunting lodge, or semi-permanent shelter for winter. The only exception is the Kadriel Nation. See the Kadriel description for more details.

**Note:** Every Kiridin village and clan belongs to a larger Barbarian nation which consists of roughly 1D6x1,000 +4,000 people. Basically, whoever runs the biggest and strongest clan or village becomes his Nation's leader.

### Joruth

This is northeastern-most of the Barbarian Provinces and the most often invaded by Byzantium settlers, explorers, and military. The Shadow Coast runs along its western border and the Byzantium loyalist colony, the Seven Sisters, is its western neighbor. If ever there will be a major clash between one of the Shadow Colonies and the Kiridin Barbarians, it will be with the Seven Sisters and Joruth. The Joruth people are the quintes-

sential Kiridin Barbarians. They fish, hunt, trap, rob, raid, rustle cattle, and do a little of everything to survive. The Shadow Colonies in general, and the Seven Sisters in particular, are their main targets for raids and looting. However, the Joruuth Barbarians are not murderous, killing only in self-defense and revenge, preferring to leave their target for plunder alive and healthy so they can raid it whenever they need to. They are also quick to attack any "outsiders," including smugglers, pirates and blockade runners who might set anchor along the coast of the peninsula that is Joruuth.

**Population Breakdown:** Approx. 8,000-10,000; Humans 55%, Ogres 15%, Orcs 12% Trolls 5%, Giants 3%, Goblins 3%, Kobolds 2%, Bearmen 2%, and others 3%.

**Typical Alignments:** Unprincipled, Anarchist and Aberrant.

## Kadriel

The most unique and magical of all the regions claimed by any barbarian nation is Kadriel, The Land of Eternal Autumn. This is the place the Wild Lord known as Gainim lives, thus the area is locked in eternal Autumn at peak harvest. As a result, food grows here year round, the vines and trees bear fruit several times in the year, and the temperature never drops below freezing, even at night. Average daytime temperature is 65-75 degrees Fahrenheit. Because Winter (nor spring or summer) never touches this land, it is the most temperate and hospitable environment anywhere in the north lands. This environment has also worked to make the Kadriel Barbarians the least aggressive and nomadic of the lot. Although they engage in some raiding and looting, as well as ongoing feuds with other clans (particularly the Murdigan and Throhan), the Kadriel have built permanent settlements along the Dragon Claw. Most are lodge houses and huts made of branches, woven grass and clay, with several small to large stone blacksmith facilities where one will find Kiridin and Kobold smiths working side by side. The Kadriel people also trade furs, food and other goods with any Kiridin tribal nation who is interested. Female artisans work in leather, weave fabric, and make baskets, jewelry, and woodcarvings. The Kadriel people also raise some livestock and have a substantial area of farmland. Totem poles and shrines dedicated to Gainim are scattered throughout the region. Not surprisingly, the Kadriel Barbarians are devoted worshippers of Gainim.

The Kadriel region has effectively become the "trade center" for the Kiridin Barbarians. This is where they meet to trade goods, exchange stories and find peace. To avoid other nations from trying to seize their mystical land from them, the Kadriel Barbarians allow all the other nations to send as many of its clans as they would like to come and spend winter with them. Roughly half the people from the other nations (sometimes entire tribes like the Honnorah) come to spend the winter at Kadriel. While squabbles and conflicts between the tribes do erupt, the region is big enough to accommodate them all, while maintaining a good distance between them. Nobody has tried to take the land away from the Kadriel, because they share its bounty and several, like Honnorah, Svardon, and Joruuth, among others, would stand at the side of the Kadriel. Moreover, most believe that since the Kadriel tribe worships the Wild Lord Gainim, that this powerful war god would come to their aid, and if his people were ousted, that he would turn the land into "Eternal Winter." At least that's what the Kadriel and most Kiridin Barbarians believe, and it helps to keep the peace.

**Population Breakdown:** Approx. 7,000-8,000 Kadriel; Humans 55%, Wolfen 5%, Coyles 5%, Ogres 10%, Orcs 10%, Goblins 5%, Kobolds 5%, Centaurs 3%, and others 2%.

**Typical Alignments:** Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist and Aberrant.



## Murdigan

Led by a mysterious Were-Shaman who calls himself the "Rat King," Murdigan has the unofficial status of a "pariah" nation among the other Kiridin Barbarians. The Rat King and his warriors regularly prey upon the other eight nations, with only 10% of their raids going against outsiders. The Murdigan tribe also worship *Kirgi the Rat God* and condemn and criticize the Wild Lords. When they battle "outsiders," the Murdigan tribe is merciless, rarely taking prisoners and usually slaughtering every one! They also worship the Wild Lord, Kuldun, Lord of Illusion.

**Population Breakdown:** Approx 7,200-9,000; Humans 60%, Ogres 15%, Orcs 10%, Trolls 6%, Changelings 5%, Werewolves 2% (120-200), and others 2%.

**Typical Alignments:** Anarchist, Miscreant and Aberrant.

**Quick Stats for The Rat King:** Experience Level: 9th level Were-Shaman (Werewolf), perhaps also a 5th level Priest of Darkness? Aberrant alignment. Attributes: I.Q. 19, M.E. 18, M.A. 18, P.S. 15, P.P. 17, P.E. 17, P.B. 9, Spd 15. Age: 44.



## Honnorah

The Honnorah nation is quintessential Kiridin nation. They fish, hunt, trap, rob, raid, and do a little of everything to survive. They are not outrageously aggressive or violent, but typical for their breed. Among their people are blacksmiths who work in Black and White Iron. Honnorah territory is one of the places where Black Iron is abundant. They are friendly toward the Kadriel and trade with them regularly, and virtually the entire nation spends the winters camping at Kadriel, moving back to their own land in late May.

Population Breakdown: Approx. 7,000-9,000; Humans 77%, Ogres 10%, Orcs 8%, Wolfen 3% and others 2%.

Typical Alignments: Unprincipled, Anarchist and Aberrant.



## Throhan

Throhan is deeply driven by ancient vendettas and feuds against the other eight nations, especially Murdigan. They are the most violent and warlike of the Kiridin Barbarians and thrive on raiding, cattle rustling and robbing. It is the Throhan who raid and bother the *Shadow Colonies* more than any other Barbarian clan, with the exception of Joruuth (one of Throhan's hated rivals) and are ruthless against "outsiders." They also keep 1D4x100 slaves, mostly outsiders captured in the woods or whisked away from the Shadow Coast.

Population Breakdown: Approx. 8,000-9,000; Humans 52%, Coyles 10%, Ogres 18%, Orcs 10%, Minotaurs 5%, Kobolds 2% and others 3%.

Typical Alignments: Anarchist and Miscreant.

## Logath

This nation is the most bellicose of them all, forever in some kind of squabble with any other Kiridin nation it can find. Moreover, several of the clans within the Logath tribe are constantly at each other's throats bickering, leveraging and fighting amongst themselves. The only thing keeping them from running roughshod over their fellow nations is that they are so divided and belligerent that half the clans are locked in war with somebody somewhere and the mortality rate among their warriors is high, and their numbers low.

Population Breakdown: Approx. 7,000-8,000; Humans 70%, Ogres 15%, Orcs 10%, Kobolds 3% and others 2%.

Typical Alignments: Anarchist, Miscreant and Diabolic.

## Svardon

Insanity runs deep in this particular group of warrior folk. Why this is nobody can rightly say, but it has given birth to a generation of fearless berserkers (75% of all Barbarian Warriors have this attribute) who attack outsiders and hate Coyles, Muckers, Threkk, Necromancers, Witches and demons and demon worshipers/Priests of Darkness with unprecedented ferocity and bravery. Their utter fearlessness has led them to pull some pretty reckless raids over the years, and now their daring has become a source of quirky inspiration to all Kiridin. Of course, these lunatic swordsmen might never live long enough to appreciate it if they keep antagonizing evil beings and their minions. Certain Coyle tribes, in fact, have taken it as a matter of personal pride and revenge to destroy the Svardon Berserkers. Likewise, Ice Demons, Bug Bears, Muckers and Threks do whatever they can to trick, hurt and kill Svardon Berserkers. As one might guess, there are several clusters of *Terror Trees* in the Svardon region.

Population Breakdown: Approx. 7,000-8,000; Humans 80%, Ogres 8%, Wolfen 4%, Elves 3% (very unusual), Bearmen 2%, Centaurs 1% and others 2%.

Typical Alignments: Unprincipled and Anarchist.

## Nurbellen

This relatively new Nation increased its size by almost 20% when it incorporated the remnants of another Kiridoi Nation, *Kolossa*, after its failed attempt to battle some Wolfen barbarians in the east. Today, Nurbellen is a powerful and vibrant Kiridin nation full of mighty Barbarian Warriors, ingenious leaders and cunning shamans.

Not all Wolfen are trying to become civilized and the Nurbellen tribe is a good example of this, with two thirds of its people being Wolfen!

Population Breakdown: Approx. 7,000-8,000; Wolfen 68%, Human 10%, Ogres 10%, Orcs 5%, Trolls 3%, Bearmen 2%, and others 2%.

Typical Alignments: Unprincipled, Anarchist, and Aberrant. These guys all hate Coyles and Bug Bears.

## Ogenheim

Ogenheim is not ruled by a single monarch, but instead by a trio of Shamans who call themselves the *Three Furies*. They refuse to adopt any kind of individual identities, and are always seen in each other's company. The *Three Furies* took Ogenheim by force a mere decade ago, in the culmination of a savage series of major feuds that had the entire nation tearing itself apart. When the Furies and their soldiers finally wrested control of the throne, all of the infighting finally came to an end. As the Furies ascended in power, they assumed the vendettas of any opponents they beat. When they deposed the old king and made his subjects swear loyalty to them, every ongoing vendetta was suddenly consolidated, and the Furies just let them go. It took a while for the Ogenheim nation to get used to no more civil war, but once they did, they became a strong, solid nation.

Still, there remain the seeds of rebellion within this tribe. For some Ogenheim Barbarian Warriors, the ancient ways of vendetta die hard, and they find the Furies' unity to be unsatisfying. To them, there is no honor in merely canceling out entire blood feuds because one commands power over those who fight them.

That is not the Kiridin way. That is why a small and secret society has arisen dedicated to destroying the Furies and placing a more conventional monarch on the throne. So far, however, finding people to join this cause has been difficult, since those who do not love the Furies fear them too much to oppose them.

**The Three Furies:** *Nightcloud*: 10th level Shaman, Aberrant, female. *Cool Breeze*: 8th level Shaman, Anarchist, male. *Quiet Sword*: 6th level Psi-Mystic, Miscreant, male. All are humans.

**Population Breakdown:** Approx. 9,000-10,000; Humans 54%, Wolfen 24%, Cyclops 13%, Gigantes 3%, Trolls 2%, Kobolds 2%, and others 2%.

**Typical Alignments:** Anarchist, Miscreant and Aberrant. These guys all hate the Western Empire more than anything, except maybe the Coyles and Bug Bears that inhabit Ophid's Grasslands. Regularly raid the Western Colonies in the south. Dislike the Wolfen Empire. **Note:** Both Stonewood and Black Iron are found in this region.

# Ophid's Grasslands

Ultimately, Ophid's Grasslands are a dry, barren place filled with tall arctic grasses, scrub, vines and wild flowers, and little else. One often will travel for days in this region and not encounter another living thing, and then when he *does* run into something, it is undoubtedly hostile. The soil is no good for planting crops (its acidity is way too high for standard crops, though the science of the Palladium World has no way to recognize that, so all scholars can tell is that the ground is barren except for various kinds of scrubby grass and plants). The weather is cold and windy all year long, with very little rain, and the Long Winter of the Hinterlands. Areas close to the mountains suffer from violent Spring storms that cause flash floods everywhere.

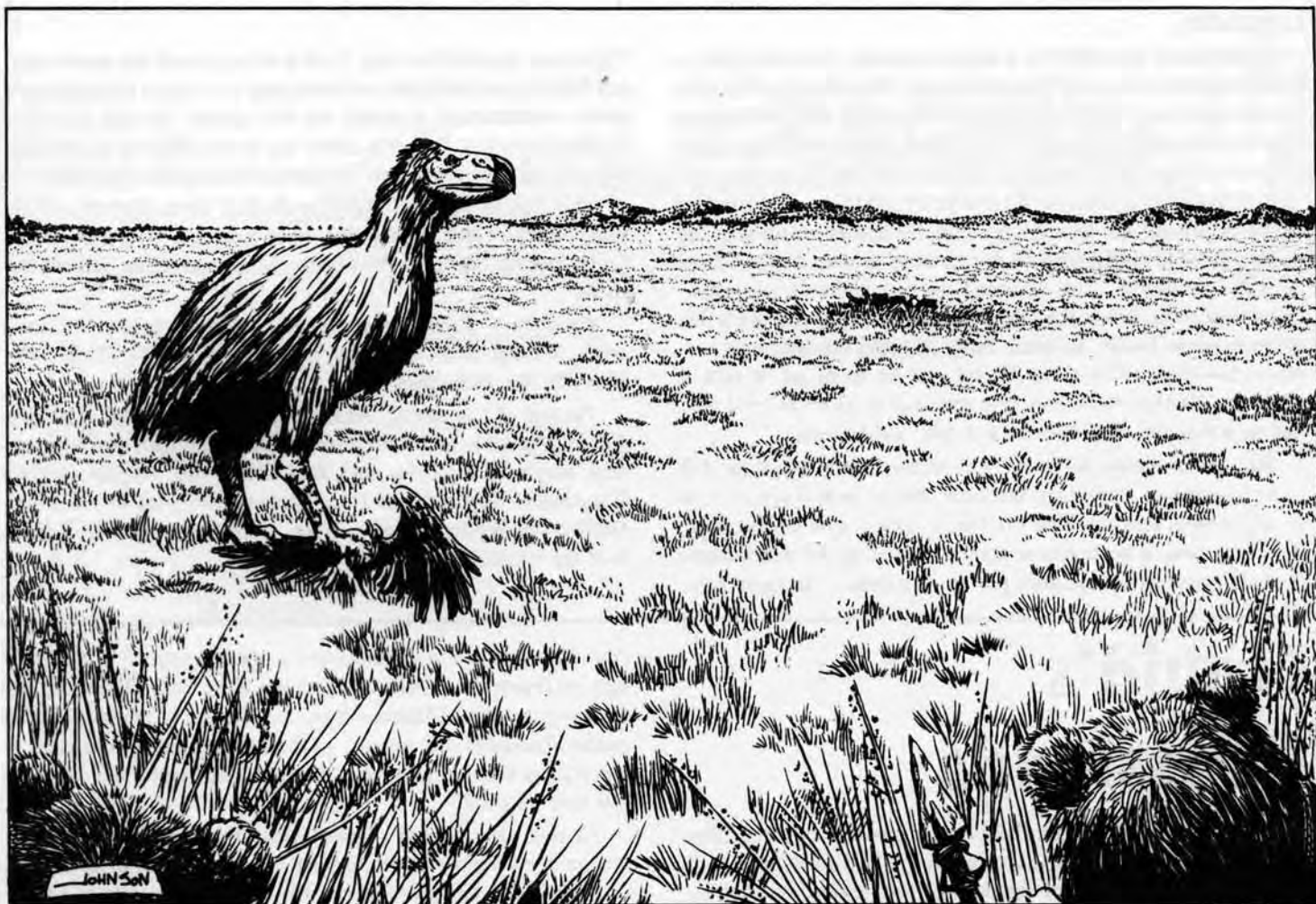
Though the Western Empire has established a colony on the southern coast of Ophid's Grasslands, it is little more than a series of half starving shanty towns and a naval base rather than a genuine attempt at civilization. With these colonies, the Empire of Sin can choke off the *Gedorma Strait*, also known as the *Strait of Thunder* (the thin body of water joining the Inland Sea to the outer oceans, so named because the waves crashing against the high rock walls on either shore make a sound like thunder). The colonies also serve as a base for exploration and other operations in the Hinterlands and Great Northern Wilderness (Western spies are everywhere). A few of these coastal towns are of reasonable size and starting to get better settled in, but without serious subsidization by the Empire, the colonies would wither and die. (G.M. Note: For more information on these Ophid's Grasslands colonies, please refer to the **Western Empire™** sourcebook.) But even the explorers and adventurers coming into the Horde Lands from the south still do not make it a particularly inhabitable place. To those who take a narrow view of the Grasslands, it appears as if little of *anything* lives

there! There is not much incentive to, really, since this is a fairly ugly environment. There are no great cities here. There are not even any great civilizations here. Just bands of nomads and an endless badlands that nobody in their right mind would want to control. In the words of one Western Explorer: "We came all this way for *this*?"

**An overview.** Ophid's Grasslands. What is there to say about this vast, sweeping tundra that isn't obvious even to the casual observer? The tall grass and scrub covers thousands of square miles, broken only by megalithic stone structures. Some of these *standing stones* are little more than pillars of stone, others are towers and lonely archways. Some are as small as eight or ten feet (2.4 to 3 m) tall, others tower twenty, thirty and even fifty feet (6 to 15.5 m) tall. The majority are built by the strange Faerie Folk known as *Spriggans*. Lunatic artists and architects who build stone constructs for nothing more than the sake of art (or obsession). Thus, many are considered works in progress (even if they haven't been touched in 500 years) and regularly visited and repaired by grumpy, boulder-tossing Spriggans. Other stone megaliths form circles in the middle of nowhere and presumably serve a more nefarious purpose. These often mark places of magic, where ley lines form Nexus Points, or serve as open-air gathering places for Summoners, Witches and cultists. Some include an altar or large, flat-topped stone to serve as a place for blood sacrifice. Some of these standing stones appear to date back thousands, perhaps tens of thousand, of years. A few radiate with magic. Some circles, like the *Devil's Mark*, carry the stench of evil and are said to be the pathway to hellish dimensions and demon realms.

Pegasus and Gryphons can be found frolicking in the tall grass, and a myriad of Faeries, Sprites and other denizens of Faerie can be seen dancing among the vast fields of wild flowers, playing with butterflies and riding on the backs of birds and large dragonflies. Its wide open range gives the world's last great Centaur tribes a place to live free and run with wild horses or deer without fear of being hunted by humans. A breeding ground for less savory men, beasts and monsters, Ophid's Grasslands are said to be the birthplace of the Bug Bear, the





nesting grounds for Goblins and Hob-Goblins, and the hunting range for Orcs, Ogres and migratory Coyle tribes. Trolls, Giants and other "large folk" tend to avoid Ohpid's heartlands for there is no cover for them to hide, however, they are found in the plains near the mountains or along the forest's edge, and large folk do make the occasional sojourn to places of magic, as well as to extract murderous revenge or raid nomads. It is also home to *Kobolds* and *Minotaurs* and the demons best left unnamed, although again, such beings are most often found in the foothills of the Northern Mountains.

The haunted peaks of the *Northern Mountains* (barrier to the Land of the Damned) run the entire length of Ophid's Grasslands. Because of them, the plains are visited by (some would say infested with) monsters like the *Dragondatcyl*, *Peryton*, *Diatryma* and *Melech*, all of whom hunt in the grasslands, preying on animals and humanoids alike. The grasslands are also visited by dragons, sphinxes, and both men and monsters of magic seeking solace in the remote wilderness or searching for ancient secrets. Ophid's Grasslands, like the rest of the Northern Hinterlands, is a place with a long, rich and often forgotten history that is said to date back to the Age of Chaos. Indeed, it is said that the *Devil's Mark* can teleport one to the heart of the Land of the Damned or to the Citadel.

Ophid's Grasslands is not all magic and monsters, although it has its share. It is also home to the rabbit, snake, fox, horse, Tusker, Arrowhead, and other creatures who feed on the tall arctic grasses or find refuge weaving their way through it. Ordinary humans, Goblins and Coyles, among others, make their home in

the flat lands, although most are tiny clans and homesteads that range from a dozen to three dozen individuals.

**Scum of the Earth.** *Goblins and Hob-Goblins* are the single largest group of people inhabiting the southern two-thirds of the Grasslands, yet they have made no attempt to colonize it or even to gather together in large numbers. The reason for this is simple: Goblins and their Hob-Goblin kin are just too lazy and slack to do much of anything with their lives, much less build an empire or even a suitable home in which to live. They rove the plains, scavenging and looking to steal from others (70% are Thieves, the rest are Assassins and Mercenary Warriors). They can be found in their greatest concentrations on the fringes of large nomad camps, where they hope to mooch whatever scraps and goods they can for themselves. Some groups, particularly Ogres, Coyles, and Trolls, actually like having Goblins around because they can bully them into performing menial labor for them, and they also serve well as subjects for the occasional act of random cruelty. Human and Centaur bands rarely have any use for Goblins at all, and will try to drive them away at first sight. With Goblins, being grimy, lazy, cheating and conniving lowlifes is part of their culture.

Goblins are known carriers of *Goblin Fever* and a number of other contagious diseases. While the Horde Lands do not appear to be affected by any kind of outbreak right now, there is no telling when the next one will occur. **Note:** In the Horde Lands, these scum bags are the flunkies and lackeys of larger folk like humans, Coyles, Ogres, and Trolls.

**Short, Dark and Ugly.** *Bug Bears* are one of the more understudied creatures of the Palladium World. They are tough, incredibly strong, and vicious little monsters who are found throughout the Grasslands. They love to rob, harass, hurt, and kill, and do so with impunity, preying on and harassing whoever they come across. Most of the time, they are merely behaving like common thugs, looking to roll over a victim for their food and valuables. Sometimes they are on a tear and need some fresh victims to murder or eat. Most commonly, they are on the lookout for people to bully and terrorize. This, more than anything else, is the Bug Bear's speciality, and they perform this task with a rapacious glee. Usually it is not enough for them to physically abuse their victims. No, they must mentally abuse them too. To that end, Bug Bears have designed a number of sick torture games they play with their victims.

The most common of these is *You Bet Your Head*, a twisted little quiz game in which victims are strapped down to a large rock or some other hard object. Then, a Bug Bear stands over the victim with a heavy, blunt object in its hand, preferably a large hammer. Another Bug Bear asks the victim questions to which he can not possibly know the answers. For each wrong answer, the victim gets a smashing blow to the cranium. This goes on until the victim dies. In the unlikely event that the victim gets a question right, the resulting confusion will throw the Bug Bears playing the game into such a disarray that the victim might actually escape.

Another popular game is *Sir Smashalot*, in which a victim is tied up and made to stand in the middle of a field. Then two Bug Bears, each riding on the shoulders of Bug Bears themselves, charge at each other like they are jousting. Typically, they carry some long instrument in their hands, but any blunt object will do. (For some reason, cast iron skillet and spiked wooden clubs are popular for this.) As the Bug Bears pass, they swing at each other. If they hit the other Bug Bear, they get a point. If they get hit themselves, they lose a point. And if the victim gets caught in the middle somehow (they often chase him down), both players get a point. The game continues until the victim is dead or the Bug Bears get bored.

*Tag, you're dead*, is another fun game in which one or more victims are targeted (they are allowed to keep their weapons and such) and one or more Bug Bears "teleport" in or turn invisible while they sneak up on their victims before turning visible again (creating the illusion of "popping in") and attacking for a melee round before turning invisible or teleporting away. This process is repeated as often as necessary. Sometimes "tag" is not to the death. Instead, each "tag" attack is designed to hurt, confuse and steal something or damage the victim (or his armor). This may be done until the victim is in tatters, robbed of everything and/or naked.

And finally, a fourth game Bug Bears enjoy playing is *Run for the Hills*, a simple game in which victims are given a specified head start in which to run away. After 1D6 minutes, the Bug Bears give chase. When the horrid little creatures catch up to the runner(s), they kill and eat the victim (or just play more games with them). If the victim gets away, he gets away. **Note:** See the full description on Bug Bears elsewhere in this book or in the *Monsters & Animals* sourcebook. Remember, these murderous Teddy Bears can be encountered as lone hunters, pairs or small packs of 2D4. The most vicious ones are in the Horde Lands.

**With Noble Stride.** If there is a self-appointed group of heroes in Ophid's Grasslands, then the *Centaurs* are it. These champions of justice and goodness live tough lives, outnumbered on all sides by genuine villains, monsters, or scrappy troublemakers looking to make their lives difficult. Whatever the case, the Centaurs of the Grasslands and the Northern Horde Lands are used to living life without any allies besides themselves. They especially distrust human explorers, since their initial contact with humans was with Western slavers looking to capture as many Centaurs as possible and sell them as gladiators back home. Any humans looking to make a friend of the Centaurs here will do so only by proving their trustworthiness ten times over before these noble horse-folk will begin to accept them as allies.

Though their numbers are small, no more than a few thousand, their impact is a strong one. Traveling in groups usually no larger than 4 to 24 (4D6), Centaurs use their speed, knowledge of the land and its inhabitants, and their skill with long bows to disrupt large formations of Coyles or Orcs. Since Centaurs are so swift, they can literally ride rings around their ground-based enemies, deftly dodging enemy missile fire and returning with deadly accurate arrows. It is said that any group of Centaurs can engage a group of Coyles or Orcs up to five times its size and defeat them without any casualties of their own. In the rare instances when large groups of Centaurs get together, Coyles or Orcs had better not be anywhere near the area, lest they wish to die a swift death.



**The Smallest Lords.** *Faerie Folk.* There is hardly an explorer or an adventurer who has not at least heard of these diminutive troublemakers. The Faerie Folk of Ophid's Grasslands tends to be of the good or selfish variety, while the more cruel and murderous ones are found in the Horde Lands and Hinterland for-



ests. **Spriggans** are found wandering and building their stone megaliths all over the place, sometimes working in pairs or small groups of 2-8. However, there are probably less than a thousand or two all told. Still, that is a huge number for any one region. **Faeries, Sprites, Brownies** and **Grogach** are especially common in the Grasslands, as are **Frost Pixies**. Likewise, if one is ever to encounter a **Leprechaun** or **Faerie Nymph**, this and parts of the Hinterlands forest is where they are most likely to do so.

Faeries live to have fun and play. This can only mean trouble for "Big Folk," like humans. They mostly want to have big playmates to sing and dance and do silly (often dangerous) stunts and dares with. Silly Folk, they like to launch all sorts of pranks, tricks, jokes, and silliness at Big Folk. Unfortunately, Faerie Folk fun and games can be embarrassing, troublesome, exhausting, dangerous and even painful or deadly for the (often unwilling) Big people. The many nomadic "Big" people in the Hinterlands present Faerie Folk with a great variety of targets from Bug Bears, Coyles and Goblins to Orcs, Centaurs and humans. Orcs and Goblins are too large and too stupid to be able to defend themselves against a constant onslaught of Faerie pranks so they hate Faerie Folk with a passion! They usually kill them whenever the opportunity avails itself (which is not often, since the Wee Folk can easily outsmart them).

A favorite trick is to leave bundles of Faerie Food lying about, and then to watch from a distance while the Big Folk eat the stuff and pay dearly for it. In fact, it is said that when the Golden Horde meets with Faerie Folk, the sound of hysterical giggling can never be far away. It is not uncommon for a contingent of Faeries or Sprites to tag along with groups of travelers (whether the people want them or not) so they can get in several days of randomly launched pranks and mischief. Pixies are just at bad, but tend to be encountered as lone individuals or pairs. Of course a group of pranksters may include a mixed group of Faerie Folk. Such bands of mirth and mischief can be thankfully small (1D6+2) to an entire flock of 1D6x10. A hundred or more may be encountered from time to time, but usually only when one happens to stumble upon a Faerie Mound or festival. Aggression against a Faerie Folk will always be met with swift retribution by several of its brethren. Fortunately, such revenge is seldom to the death, although it might be if a Grogach, Puck, Bogie or other evil Faerie Folk is part of the attack.

The Faeries of the region live in large Faerie Mounds to the west, at the foothills of the Northern Mountains. Here, Faerie Folk gather by the hundreds, living and playing without a care in the world. Any given Faerie Mound will have its own Faerie Court led by a self-appointed Faerie Kynge or Faerie Queene. These leaders expect to be addressed by outsiders with all the respect and honor that any other monarch would receive. If outsiders do this, then the monarchs might grant them an audience and even a favor; if not, then the outsiders had better prepare for some of the worst harassment they will ever receive from anybody. Nobody disrespects a high noble of the Faerie Court and gets away with it. Not heroes, not villains, not gods, not anyone. **Note:** See the **Monsters & Animals** sourcebook for complete details on the denizens of Faerie.

**The Golden Horde** is the name given to a tribe of *Coyles* that is found in the Grasslands and southern forests of the Northern Hinterlands. Although the tribe numbers into a few thou-

sand, they are usually found in small family clans with 2D4x10 members, the largest with 1D6x100. Like most Coyles, they are nomads who live off the land and engage in raiding, robbing, and looting. Most (95%) only come to the Northern Hinterlands in the Spring and Summer, heading southeast by Summer's end to avoid the "Long Winter" of the Hinterlands. The few who stay throughout the Winter are usually clans who didn't start to move south fast enough and got trapped by an early snowfall, or who are members of a mixed group of raiders or bandits.



## The Northern "Horde Lands"

The northern third of Ophid's Grasslands has been dubbed by locals and the Kingdom of Bizantium as the **Horde Lands**. For this region, nestled between the Northern Mountains and the Hinterland forests, is the most heavily populated by the so-called "monster races." Bands and tribes of Kobolds, Coyles, Goblins, Orcs, Ogres, Trolls, Minotaurs, Bearmen, Giants, barbarian raiders, bandits and other unsavory types abound. Bug Bears, Muckers, Threkk, Pucks and other vile creatures are also attracted to the violence and bloodletting, contributing to the danger of the region. Likewise, this is one of the areas where "Big Game Hunters" from other parts of the world come in search of monstrous humanoid "game," and Knights and Demon Slayers come to battle gatherings of "monsters." The two thirds to the south, with its Bug Bears, Goblins and Centaurs, is tame by comparison. Thus, the low, barren grasslands of the north-west is a hot spot for war, plots and banditry.

Although it may sound like a thickly settled place, the Horde Lands (and any part of the Grasslands) are anything but. The nomadic groups who roam its reaches are, compared to the vast

stretches of land under consideration, a mere smattering of people over an incredibly large wilderness. No, the inhabitants of the Horde Lands are not the reason why the region has become a recent hot commodity among scholars and explorers. It is because the Horde Lands are home to three major sites of interest in the Palladium World: the **Vault of Destiny** (the legendary fortress home to the largest cabal of Summoners in the world), the **Devil's Mark** (an inter-dimensional nexus from which all manner of foul creatures spring) and the **Palladium of Desire**, (a place of legend where it is said anyone's fondest wish can be made to come true).

## The Vault of Destiny

Nestled in the extreme western edge of the Horde Lands, in the foothills of the Northern Mountains, is the Vault of Destiny. An ancient fortress that now serves as the base of operations for a cabal of Summoners known as the *League of Masters*.

The Vault itself is a circular stronghold built right into the face of a *tor*, or small mountain. With the super-tall Northern Mountains in the background, the 1,000 foot (305 m) tall tors of the Horde Lands seem like speed bumps in comparison. Archeologists know almost nothing about the Vault, save that it was built at least a thousand years ago, probably by humans in an attempt to establish a line of fortresses in the area, the evidence of a botched colonization attempt.

The Great Library of Bletherad has only two books which mention the Vault of Destiny. The first, **Fortresses Through Time**, described the Vault as just one in a number of strongholds built by the brilliant but insane architectural genius *Dandle Kuldinhan*. Kuldinhan had a knack for building structures that were themselves magical antennae, conductors of spiritual energy. The Vault of Destiny is just such a place. Located right on top of a ley line nexus, and incorporating strands of the magically conductive metal *gantrium* throughout the stronghold's construction, any men of magic will see their magic enhanced, with the casting of any magical spell or ritual costing only *half* as much P.P.E. as usual. Plus, spent P.P.E. is recovered at a rate of 15 points per hour. This makes the Vault the perfect place for men of magic to gather in strength and work their crafts. Which brings us to the second book the Vault is mentioned in, the legendary **Tristine Chronicles**:

*In the Age of Man there stood at the foot of the End of the World a place of crafting such as the world had never seen before. Tho' it would be the home of spell crafters, it was the Circle Mages who were suited best to the place. Here would they pool their wicked arts and bring forth terrors unto the world the likes of which had gone unseen since the Great War twixt Elf and Dwarf. So did this stronghold become known as the Citadel of Circles, for it housed the greatest assortment of Summoners the world has seen. And so was it also known as the Fortress of the Farthest Reaches, for it lie on the outermost edge of the known world. And thus the Circle Mages did conspire and wait to work their magic to usurp mastery of the world and become masters of all they survey.*

Today, those warnings from the Tristine Chronicles seem to have come true. Not only have the evil *League of Masters* made the Vault of Destiny their home and the home of their hundreds of minions, but they also use its unique magical properties to further their own mysterious projects and gathering of power.

Rumor has it the League is summoning hideous monsters from other worlds and binding them to their service, presumably to gain mastery over the world. Rumor also has it that the League's minions, mortal and supernatural, are scouring the Horde Lands for any sign of the *Palladium of Desires* so that the Dark League might storm it and realize their mad dreams. The League of Masters is also rumored to be working on an entirely new summoning circle to summon a creature so powerful that no force in this world can oppose it.

## The Master of Masters

The League of Masters is a secretive group of 999 evil men of magic. Between them, the League has members who have mastered every known school of magic, including some thought to be lost forever. But one thing binds them all together: they are all master Summoners.

The League has existed for 998 years, and next year, on the 999th anniversary of its founding, the group intends to put into motion a plan so grand that only the nine topmost members of the League even know of it in totality, and of them, only one, the League's true master, knows the particulars of that plan. The Master of Masters is *Shurgen Rongsol*, a Wolfen Summoner, Diabolist, and Wizard of immense power. He is an evil mastermind who is bent on not just the domination of the world, but the conquest of the Wolfen Empire and utter destruction of the Eastern Territory. Shurgen's grand scheme is simple, ruthless and all consuming. He and his aides are finishing the design of a summoning circle that when written would be exactly one mile (1.6 km) in diameter, known as the *Wracking Wheel*. This circle would be "written" by burning it into the ground and then lacing the burned areas with the blood of 999 sacrifice victims. Unbeknownst to the rest of the League of Masters, Shurgen knows each and every one of their true names, and when the time comes, he shall bind them *all* to his service through the use of a *Mass Command Circle* he is also developing. Should his plan work, Shurgen will command his entire legion of Summoners to bleed themselves onto the Wracking Wheel and devote all of their P.P.E. to its activation. Should it work, the terrible circle will open a doorway to the dimension of giant demonic beings known as the *Shruupos*, who are as mindless as they are world-shakingly powerful, and should prove easy to command. If Shurgen can locate the *lost* Palladium of Desires, it only insures his conquest of the world (or so he believes). However, finding the Palladium of Desires is not critical to his plans and Shurgen will move forward whether he has it under his power or not. (Truth be told, Shurgen has no idea what he is up against should he find the golden Palladium tower.)

Naturally, there are a ton of things that could go wrong with this plan. Shurgen's Wracking Wheel might not work. His Circle of Mass Command might not work either, and the other Summoners might catch wind of his murderous scheme, causing them to rebel against him, or splinter into rival factions. Even if the plot works, for the most part, the Shruupos might not be as mindless or easy to control as he believes, and who knows what could unfold if he can not control them. All of these things Shurgen sees as mere details. He is so blinded by the *possibilities* of his scheme that the megalomaniac believes his brilliant plan will be an unquestionable success, and he will soon rule the planet. Of course, his many "equals" believe they shall rule the world together as a government of 999, so they are only a step



or two down from the insane ambition of Shurgen. All are too drunk on their own power to recognize the dangers or flaws in their scheme. And Shurgen is not the only one ready to backstab his compatriots. For one thing, many of the Summoners involved are not even human, with a hundred dragons (of varying age and cunning), and a handful of Sphinx, Syvan, Lizard Mages, Greater Demons and other foul creatures of magic, supernatural beings and mortals of flesh and blood (the majority) all party to this bold conspiracy.

In the meantime, Shurgen has his cadre of Summoners hard at work summoning new legions of minions to the Vault of Destiny, where they (he) might command them to find the Palladium and to carry out other missions. When not involved with the grand plan, Shurgen and the others spend a great deal of time conferring amongst themselves and engaging in sidelines to gain ancient artifacts and the upper hand on one another.



## Quick Stats for Shurgen Rongsol,

### Master of Masters

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 20, M.E. 23, M.A. 18, P.S. 19, P.P. 17, P.E. 22, P.B. 10, Spd 30

Experience Level: 9th level Diabolist, 9th level Summoner, 9th level Wizard.

Age: 52; old for a Wolfen. One of the things he seeks is the means to become immortal.

P.P.E.: 245

Skills of Note: Basically all the O.C.C. skills for each of the three O.C.C.s all around 80% to 95%, but only a total of eight O.C.C. Related Skills and six Secondary ones.

Magic Knowledge: All Diabolist, Summoner and Wizard O.C.C. powers, all known magic symbols, can read runes, and all Diabolist Wards. Circles are limited to ALL Sum-

moning Circles, Protection Simple and Greater, Protection from Spirits & Entities, Protection from Good, and the Power Circles of All Seeing, Animate & Control Dead, Command, Domination/Control, Power Leech, Power Matrix, and Teleport.

Wizards spells are limited to ALL level 1-3 spells, Ley Line Transmission, Eyes of Thoth, Size of the Behemoth, Fire Ball, Fire Fist, Animate & Control Dead, Dispel Magic Barriers, Negate Magic, Mystic Portal, and all summoning related spells.

Magic Items: Shurgen has a vast array of magical weapons including Gryphon Claws, Cape of Dimensions, a Crystal Ball, Gem of Reality, Gem of Direction, Leather of Iron (A.R. 15, 132 S.D.C.) and a handful of magic potions.

His most precious possession is a soul-devouring, greater rune sword called Maxillian (Diabolic, I.Q. 14, does 1D4x10 damage, double damage to angels and gods and priests of Light; and can cast one magic spell: Teleport Self which includes its wielder for the cost of 35 P.P.E.; has 70 P.P.E. available to it).

Notes: The common belief is that Shurgen was once an Imperial spell caster thrown out for practicing untried and dangerous magicks. In reality, the Wolfen Summoner descends directly from the *Algor Range Huntsmen* tribe of Wolfen, the tribe that was utterly destroyed in the great civil war that ultimately led to the creation of the Wolfen Empire. While the Wolfen collectively feel ashamed for the Algor Range Huntsmen's demise, Shurgen believes that the Empire secretly rejoices in it. For most of his life, he has obsessed about the tribe's destruction and on making the Wolfen Empire pay for it. As an adult, Shurgen moved to the Horde Lands where he took over the Vault of Destiny and began building the secret armies of the League of Masters. During that time, he has become a ruthless power to be feared.

## Typical Members of the 999

Race: 46% Human, 18% Elf, 11% Dragon (various), 5% Sphinx, 3% Demon, 2% Deevil, 2% Wolfen and 13% other (Dwarf, Gnome, Minotaur, Lizard Mage, Za, etc.).

Alignment: 50% Diabolic, 30% Miscreant, 10% Aberrant, and 10% Anarchist.

Attributes: Higher than average mental attributes; some possess superhuman physical attributes and special powers.

Experience Level: 7th to 14th level Summoners, with 9th level being average. About 10% are split class Summoner and one other magic O.C.C.; few know more than two areas of magic.

Age: Varies dramatically with age and lifespan, from mid-thirties to thousands of years.

P.P.E.: 245

Skills of Note: Standard for the Summoner O.C.C.

Magic Knowledge: Most specialize in Summoning or Protection Circles.

Note: Only about half of the Summoners are present at any given time, and fewer than 500 of the minions are present; mostly Orcs and such, a third being demons and monsters.

## A Fortress of Monsters

Though the League of Masters is nearly 1,000 members strong, these men of magic do not actually carry out the organization's field work. For that, the League has assembled a large army of minions. Most of these 1,500 or so lackeys are garden variety mercenaries, bandits and killers recruited from the Horde Lands and the Northern Mountains, thus most are one of the afore-mentioned monster races. However, a growing number (around 500) are extraordinary creatures such as demons, Deevils, and other monstrous intelligent beings like Gigantes. These creatures are known as *Shurgen's Fury*, and they compose the elite strike force of the League of Masters. For carrying out special missions or defending the Vault of Destiny against a frontal assault, it shall be *Shurgen's Fury* at the forefront of the action. (G.M. Note: Feel free to get crazy when determining what kinds of creatures might be present in *Shurgen's Fury*. Pretty much anything from this or the **Monsters and Animals** sourcebook is fair game). All are typically of Diabolic or Miscreant alignment.

The actual Vault of Destiny itself, is a large fortress divided into three sections, an *Outer Vault*, a *Middle Vault*, and the *Inner Vault*.

The *Outer Vault* is the largest, and was built to serve as a small city, capable of housing ten thousand people. It lies mostly deserted and in great disrepair, as the monsters who live here do nothing to fix the premises and their roughhousing often adds to the damage. This is where most of the Summoners' most vile, gigantic and monstrous minions live when they aren't out on some mission. Otherwise, it is largely deserted, except for perimeter guards.

The *Middle Vault* is where the League of Masters' minions live and work. This section of the fortress is similar to the Outer Vault in that it provides a city within a city, albeit a much smaller one that can only house 3,000 people, tops. The Middle Vault is much better maintained. Its walls are not crumbling, its buildings are in decent repair, and the inhabitants are forced by their masters to at least attempt cleaning up after themselves. The Middle Vault feels like a regular town or city, though one inhabited by monsters and villains of every kind. Since the Leagues' minions live here year round, there are plenty of permanent establishments throughout the Middle Vault such as shops, taverns, arenas, guild halls, and other amenities of "civilized" life. Things are still pretty spare here, of course, but they are nothing like the pure chaos and ruin of the Outer Vault, which more resembles an animals' den than a civilized settlement of any kind.

Finally, there is the *Inner Vault*. Again, this city within a city provides living and working space for the **League of Masters** (i.e. the 999 Summoners) and nothing else. The Inner Vault can only house 1,500 people and so is almost at capacity. Besides the League of Masters, a detachment of the greatest warriors from *Shurgen's Fury* live and work here as the Leagues' bodyguards and personal servants. Each of the minions here answers directly to the Master who summoned it, to *Shurgen Rongsol*, and to nobody else. The Inner Vault is in the best condition of any part of the Vault of Destiny, a prime fortress with high walls, multi-layered defenses, and pre-made Diabolist "ward" defenses and traps (few such defenses are found in the Middle Vault and virtually none in the Outer Vault). Anyone who in-

tends to infiltrate the innermost sanctum of some of the world's greatest Summoners had better have some serious magical tricks up their sleeve. Just walking in here with a sword and a willingness to fight will only buy a quick ticket to the afterlife – or worse. Few make it beyond the Outer or Middle Vault.

## The Devil's Mark

The Devil's Mark has existed as long as anybody can remember. A huge circle of short grass, seemingly charred brown and black to stand only a few inches tall.

It is believed to date back to the Time of Chaos or appeared shortly thereafter. No god nor demon lord, nor mortal hand takes credit for its creation, and nobody knows its purpose. Even the *Tristine Chronicles* fails to mention its existence or purpose. According to local legend, it is a portal to one or more (some say, "all"), infernal planes of hell. And as such, it can also serve as a portal to the demon-ridden Land of the Damned, provided one can figure out how to make it work. All agree it is a cursed piece of charred earth best avoided by all good people.

The Mark is 2000 feet (610 m) in diameter and radiates with magic and evil. Four ley lines intersect it, which may account for the emanation of magic, but not the evil. Snow does not dare to fall in the Devil's Mark, nor does rain. Moreover, there is always a chill in the air no matter what the conditions are around it and the dead grass will not burn beyond the circle. In fact, the Devil's Mark has been set ablaze many times (once by the Defilers), but after the blaze burns itself out as it would normally, the flattened grass remains, apparently untouched, or magically regenerated.

**A place of dark magic and wickedness.** Typically, 3D6 Poltergeists, 1D6 Haunting Entities, one or two Syphon Entities and one Possessing or Tectonic Entity are always somewhere within the circle and will come to plague any who enter the Devil's Mark. Likewise, a *Banshee* is always present and will wail around characters of a good alignment. Several clans of *Bug Bears* (4-9 in each) live near the Mark waiting for travelers to investigate so they may waylay or torment them. These clans are especially murderous even for their kind. Indeed, all manner of foul creatures seem to be attracted to this place of evil, including a *Mucker*, a pair of *Melech*, and a handful of the wicked Faerie Folk who live nearby.

Legend also warns that *digging* within the Devil's Mark will uncover 1D6 hungry Tomb Worms and that within a few minutes the evil beings who dwell within and around the Mark will be alerted to their presence and attack. Among the first attackers are the following Worms of Taut (roll percentile dice): 01-20% a Blow Worm, 21-40% 1D4+4 Nippers, 41-60% 1D4+2 Fire Worms, 61-80% 1D4 Tri-Fang, 81-00% 1D4 Serpent Beasts!

Drawing into the dirt to make a magic circle of summoning or power can be done, and the power of a ley line nexus is available throughout the circle that is the Mark. However, Circles of Protection do NOT work within the Devil's Mark.

Meanwhile, characters of an Anarchist or evil alignment will find themselves given to thoughts of cowardice, revenge, treachery, betrayal, and murder. Their tempers run hot and they are easily provoked to violence, theft, cheating or abandoning their associates. *Angel-Demon Serpents* will immediately feel their evil nature coming to the surface and unless they leave the



Devil's Mark within ten minutes will switch to their "dark personas." *Priests of Light* will feel the evil to be overwhelming, while *Priests of Darkness* will feel inspired and safe (they are not bothered by the Entities either).

Whatever its original purpose, the Devil's Mark is a place of dark magic and unknown (and impressive) power. Thus, it tends to attract Priests of Darkness, Witches, Necromancers, evil dragons and other foul-hearted characters. However, even they dare not reside within the circle, but only come to it from time to time to work nefarious magic.

## The Palladium of Desires

The last major site of the Horde Lands is perhaps the most famous and the most mysterious: the vaunted *Palladium of Desires*. This is a place of legend and wonderment. A place created hundreds of years ago to become the haunt of peasants and kings, thieves and wizards, dragons and heroes, gods and demons. All were welcome and none fought among the others as long as they were guests of The Nameless Lord.

According to legend, all were welcomed to join The Nameless Lord in an endless revelry. As the greatest Wizard to ever walk the planet – greater than the Slayer of Mountains, greater than any dragon, equal to the gods – this ordinary looking human reveled in the company of diverse people. It is said that every day, thousands flocked to the golden tower that was the Palladium of Desires. All were welcome to indulge themselves in all manner of pleasures and games of chance. One could stay as long as they desired, and many stayed for years at a time. Yet, no matter how many came, there was always room for one more inside the slender tower of gold.

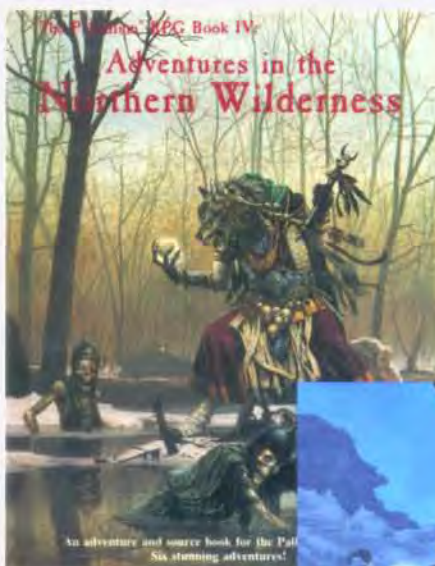
The legends are many about the Palladium of Desires, and there is much more to tell, but suffice it to say for now, that some terrible fate befell the Nameless Lord. When he disappeared, there was no one mighty enough to keep all the diverse and powerful forces in check. The Palladium of Desires turned into a place of chaos, bloodshed and depravity. Monsters and evil reigned, and the Palladium became a place of horror and death. Abandoned by most visitors, it became a place of dread,

inhabited by beings of wickedness and lunacy. For centuries it held a place only for adventurers bold enough to risk its many challenges. Thousands entered the gold tower of endless space and possibilities, but barely a tiny handful ever exited. The few who did were often driven mad, were physically mutilated or forever haunted by their experiences. They spoke of demons and monsters. Of mad gods, the undead, and lingering death. But they also spoke of incredible wonders and entire worlds behind locked doors. And of treasures and magic items waiting to be seized by the greatest heroes.

It was during the period of decay that a group of heroes known as The Defilers rose to prominence. Heroes forged by the conflict and horrors that inhabited the Palladium of Desires. Heroes who not only tamed the Palladium, but brought peace to the land and fought for all people in the world regardless of race or their station. In many ways the Defilers came to represent the philosophy of the lost Nameless Lord and stand to this day as the greatest of heroes.

Some years after the fabled Defilers scattered across the world and to worlds unknown to most men, the Palladium of Desires *vanished*. One day it was there. The next it was not. Nobody knows what happened to it or where it went. One rumor says the Nameless Lord finally returned and took the Palladium to someplace new and different. Someplace not on this world. Others say he returned to find it in such a state of disgrace that he wiped it from existence. Others say the Defilers (at least those who still live these many generations later) have learned of an insidious plot that would unleash something terrible contained within the golden tower upon an unsuspecting world or use the Palladium of Desires in some way most foul, so they have evoked some powerful magic to move or conceal it. Perhaps causing it to vanish within itself or straddle two or more dimensions. Then again, rumors run rampant in the Northern Hinterlands and nobody knows the truth. All that is known for certain is that the Palladium of Desires has joined the ranks of the legendary places and artifacts said to exist someplace in the Hinterlands. Another source for quests and adventure. Another mystery to be solved.





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