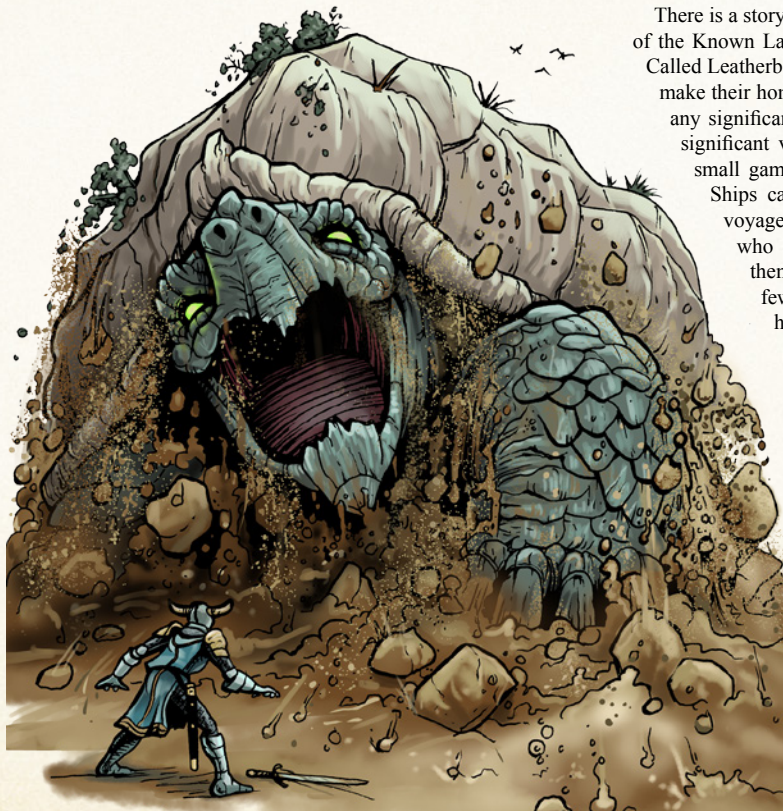


## ∞ Islands of the Known Lands ∞

# Leatherback Island



There is a story among the sailors who frequently travel the seas south of the Known Lands, about an idyllic island that appears on no maps. Called Leatherback Island because of the large number of tortoises that make their home upon its beaches, the island is supposedly free from any significant threats and home to abundant resources that are of significant value to sea-going vessels, such as a large supply of small game, a great deal of fresh fruit, and ample fresh water. Ships can often put into port there and restock during long voyages, as long as they cause no significant disruption. Those who do find that the island itself seemingly turns against them, which is something that no one fully understands. A few believe that there is a powerful druid who makes his home on the island and sees himself as its protector, and who drives away anyone who fails to respect it. They also ascribe the difficulty in locating the island to this druid's influence.

They are only partially correct.

Leatherback Island is not at all what it seems, and while it is an excellent source of resupply and recreation for the weary crews of seagoing vessels, it is incredibly dangerous on a scale far beyond anything that could easily be guessed. And the island is indeed home to a powerful arch-druid who seeks to protect nature from being despoiled, but chiefly as a means of protecting the Known Lands from a threat more ancient than any of the races currently inhabiting the world of Aden.

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Ignorant of the truth behind Leatherback Island, denizens of this area of the world regard it as an almost mythical place of wonder, with those who stumble across it considered to have good luck as a result of encountering it. Attempts to map its exact location have long since been abandoned, as numerous attempts have proven inaccurate, sometimes by a matter of hundreds of nautical miles. The Cartographer's Society has mapped its location no less than a half dozen times, each time later discovering that their maps were no longer accurate. The prevailing opinion among the society's membership is that the island is home to some strange, unknown phenomenon which either grossly distorts the perceptions of others, resulting in a repeated failure to map its location, or, more rarely, a magical force that actually moves the island itself periodically, which results in its constant movement.

## FEATURES OF THE ISLAND




✦ **THE COVERED BEACH** – The most readily accessible beach, or at least the one most accessible to crews of ships wishing to make landfall on Leatherback Island, is also the one that gives the island its name. For reasons unknown, the beach attracts vast numbers of sea turtles. Some lay their eggs in the sand as per normal, but many more seem to simply lounge upon the beach for a short while before returning to the ocean. There is no immediately apparent reason for this behavior, and even those finely attuned to the natural world, such as druids and rangers, have no explanation for it. Other terrapins are present in the area as well, including a surprising array of land-based species who constantly loiter around the treeline. Some visitors to the island have mistaken these denizens for an easy source of food, but this has proven a disastrous mistake, one that is quickly and ruthlessly punished by Aerys Summerfall and her chosen followers.

✦ **THE IRON TOWER** – An anomaly on an otherwise completely natural island, the Iron Tower is the sole structure of any industrialized nature on the entirety of Leatherback Island. Compact and enigmatic, the tower has a single room on each of its three stories, resembling nothing quite so much as a small inverted cone with a blunted tip that reaches slightly above the treeline. The tower remains locked and apparently vacant at all times, and a soft, somewhat rhythmic thrumming can be heard emanating from it. The vibrations, while soft, can still be felt in the ground for a dozen feet or so around the tower itself. Anyone who gains access to the tower would find it almost filled with strange mechemagical devices in a state of perpetual operation; they are the source of the vibrations that the tower is known for. However, any attempt to discern their purpose automatically fails, because they don't seem to do anything other than make the vibrations, which themselves serve no immediately apparent purpose. Anyone familiar with his work might recognize the handiwork of the well-known mechemage known as Mykal the Toymaker from the Known Lands, although how or why he would have established an outpost in such a remote location is a mystery, much less what possible purpose it could serve to have done so or why the island's druid protector would permit such a thing when all other efforts at colonization have been so brutally rebuffed. Anyone who observes the tower long enough will notice that, periodically, small mechanical servitors emerge from various small openings, traverse a portion of the tower, and enter another small opening. These servitors invariably resemble small woodland creatures or even insects. The vibrations that the tower emits are strangely soothing, and can lull a man to sleep if given the chance.

✦ **THE SHELLBACKS** – The center of Leatherback Island is home to a trio of low mountain peaks that are the only appreciable elevation anywhere on the islands. The mountains themselves are white in color, but don't appear to be composed any of the more commonly known white stones. The mountains are largely free of any impurities, with no known inconsistencies or presence of other minerals found within them, at least in the limited amount that such things can be studied with the few caves available for examination. For the few who have tried, the stone is noto-

riously difficult to harvest and, for unknown reasons, gradually loses its structural strength over time after being removed; within a few years of being taken from the mountains, the stone is powdery in brittle, so much so that it is of little value as building material. The material is also surprisingly porous.

## DENIZENS OF THE ISLAND



### The Natives



Although referred to as natives by those few who visit the island, the name is very much a misnomer, as the small handful of individuals who make Leatherback Island their permanent home are not native to the region but have instead been stranded there over time. Ostensibly under the leadership of the druid Aerys Summerfall, these individuals are the remnants of castoffs, shipwreck survivors, refugees, and other dregs who have ended up on the island through misfortune or chance. Generally, those who wash up on its shores are granted temporary asylum by Aerys as long as they respect her rules and accept that they will be granted passage off the island at the earliest possibility. Those who are so stranded often chafe under the strict rules, which ensure that they offer the least possible disruption to the natural order as possible, including minimal if any hunting and no shelter permitted to be erected. Those who defy her are cast into the sea to fend for themselves, which frequently means nigh-immediate death. Those who acquiesce are granted passage on the first available ship, which Aerys arranges via trade in the island's renewable resources, such as fruit, vegetables, lumber, and water.

Occasionally, there are those who find that life on the island is fulfilling in some way, whether because of their personal philosophies toward the natural world, a desire for solitude, or some other individual inclination. Those who find the island suitable in this manner are sometimes invited by Aerys to remain. At present, despite the island's large size, there are less than two dozen permanent residents, most of whom live in small groups or completely alone. All defer to Aerys and do as she bids in all things. Sometimes this is simply because it is her decision who remains on the island, and other times it is because they have come to hold her in high regard over time, respecting her as a natural leader and a wise woman whose leadership is valuable.

### The Shellson Tribe



In the coral reefs surrounding Leatherback Island, reefs that are with it no matter its location, there dwells a small tribe of slurgithians, although those familiar with the aquatic species from the Known Lands might have some difficulty recognizing them as such. For whatever reason, this particular tribe has come to more closely resemble sea turtles than the eels that their mainland brethren resemble; it may be that this is a distinct sub-species with members in other locations at sea, but if so they have not been encountered by any known groups.

The slurgithians consider themselves defenders of the island, although they have been gently persuaded against attacking non-violent visitors by Aerys, whom they do not like but whom they do respect as a powerful defender of their homeland. The Shellsons know many secrets about the island, knowledge otherwise known only to Aerys, but it is rare that they will deign to communicate with outsiders, much less share their knowledge. On occasion, they choose to pursue vengeance against visitors who prey upon the island's tortoises, a tendency that the island's few natives are content to let stand, and who take up arms only when the Shellsons decline to act.



# PERSONS OF NOTE

## Aerys Summerfall, the Archdruid

Female elf druid 12 \* CR 11

N medium humanoid (elf)

Init +3; Senses low-light vision; Perception +17

### Defense

AC 23, touch 14, flat-footed 20 (+7 armor, +1 deflection, +3 Dex, +2 shield)

hp 79 (12d8+22)

Fort +11, Ref +9, Will +14; +4 vs fey and plant-targeted effects

### Offense

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 sickle +12/+7 (1d6+3) or masterwork shortspear +12/+7 (1d6+2)

Ranged masterwork shortspear +13/+8 (1d6+2)

Special Attacks wild shape 5/day

### Druid Spells Prepared (CL 12th; concentration +16)

6th – control winds (DC 20), greater dispel magic, repel wood

5th – call lightning storm (DC 19), cure critical wounds, ice storm, tree stride

4th – cure serious wounds, dispel magic, flame strike (DC 18), freedom of movement, sleet storm

3rd – call lightning (DC 17), cure moderate wounds, greater magic fang (3), protection from energy (DC 17)

2nd – barkskin (2), bear's endurance, bull's strength, cat's grace, fog cloud

1st – endure elements, entangle (DC 15), faerie fire, obscuring mist, shillelagh, speak with animals

0 (at will) – detect magic, guidance, stabilize, virtue

### Statistics

Str 14, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 18, Cha 8

Base Atk +9, CMB +11; CMD 26

Feats Augment Summoning, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Power Attack, Spell Focus (conjuration)

Skills Climb +8, Fly +9, Handle Animal +5, Heal +11, Intimidate +1, Knowledge (nature) +13, Linguistics +3, Perception +17, Sense Motive +9, Survival +15, Swim +7

Languages Elven, Western Common

SQ elf blood, nature bond (Weather domain), nature sense, trackless step, wild empathy +11, woodland stride

Combat Gear potion of haste, wand of cure moderate wounds (8 charges)

Other Gear +1 ironwood breastplate, +1 darkwood heavy shield, +1 sickle, masterwork shortspears (4), bag of holding (type 1), cloak of resistance +2, headband of inspired wisdom +2, ring of protection +1, healer's kit, spell component pouch

Aerys Summerfall is one of a rare few who could accurately be described as an arch-druid. Her magic is incredibly powerful and her link to the living world is even more powerful, so much so that it has extended her life long past even what is expected of elves. She alone knows the full extent of the secrets of Leatherback Island, and she has never found anyone worthy of entrusting them to; perhaps if she had, she would have by now chosen a successor and relinquished her duties to another, finally having the rest she has earned so many times over. But the mortal world is a dark place, was so even before the Darkfall, and those whose souls have the purity and strength to carry such a burden are so rare that she has not seen one in centuries.

## Thorik Redfall, the Apothecary

Male dwarf alchemist 7 \* CR 6

NE medium humanoid (dwarf)

Init +6; Senses darkvision; Perception +9

### Defense

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 15 (+4 armor, +1 deflection, +2 Dex)

hp 56 (7d8+21)

Fort +9, Ref +10, Will +4; +4 vs poison

### Offense

Speed 30 ft.

Melee masterwork light mace +6 (1d8)

Ranged masterwork light crossbow +8 (1d8)

Special Attacks bomb 11/day (4d6+4 fire; DC 17)

### Alchemist Spells Prepared (CL 7th; concentration +11)

3rd – absorbing touch, heroism

2nd – alchemical allocation, barkskin, false life, invisibility

1st – bomber's eye, cure light wounds, disguise self, expeditious retreat, shield

### Statistics

Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 12

Base Atk +5, CMB +5; CMD 17

Feats Brew Potion, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Point-Blank Shot, Throw Anything, Toughness

Skills Appraise +10, Craft (alchemy) +14, Disable Device +12, Knowledge (engineering) +11, Knowledge (local) +11, Perception +11, Sleight of Hand +12, Spellcraft +14, Stealth +9, Survival +11

Languages Dwarven, Eastern Common, Fundamental, Giant, Jurakti, Western Common

SQ alchemy (alchemy crafting +7, identify potions), discoveries (acid bomb, enhance potion 4/day, latest dose, mutagen (+4/-2, +2 natural, 70 minutes), precise bombs, poison use, swift alchemy, swift poisoning)

Combat Gear 3 potions of cure moderate wounds, 3 alchemist's fire

Other Gear +1 studded leather armor, masterwork light crossbow with 20 bolts, masterwork light mace, alchemist's kit, cloak of resistance +1, ring of protection +1, 542 gold crests

Years ago, there was an unfortunate shipwreck on Leatherback Island, the only survivor of which was a dwarven alchemist named Thorik Redfall. A particularly hardy and inventive sort, Thorik recovered quickly and set out to explore the island, leaving the beach behind before Aerys even noticed that he had survived the wreck and come ashore. Knowing that the possibility of rescue was beyond his control, Thorik instead focused on discovering anything that might be of use in his craft on the island, figuring that if he was rescued he could make use of it later. The island's flora and fauna did not particularly interest Redfall, but the mineral content of the mountains interested him tremendously. Although he could not identify anything unique about the stone, he sensed something was different, and harvested as much as he was able and could carry. A short time later, as fate would have it, he was rescued by a ship stopping off to stock up on fresh water.

Over time, Redfall discovered that the natural decay of the stone into an enigmatic white powder provided an incredible boon to his craft, as the powder itself augmented the potency of his alchemical creations dramatically. He carefully conserved what he had taken from the island, using it only for those customers who could afford to pay truly exorbitant prices for his concoctions, turning several pounds of powder into a vast fortune one pinch at a time. Eventually, though, Thorik's supply ran out, and with it, his means of maintaining his outrageous income. As time went on, he knew that he would need more if he were to keep the lifestyle to which he had become accustomed. Accordingly, Redfall amassed a small fleet of merchant marine ships serving under his command, and has begun actively searching for Leatherback Island in order to ensure his supply.



Unfortunately for Redfall, there is little to no chance that Aerys Summerfall will miss a group of ships the size of his making landfall on what she regards as her island, and will respond accordingly.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

✧ A massive land tortoise, one of the largest ever seen, has ambled across Leatherback Island and discovered the Iron Tower. The lullaby-like vibrations appear to have affected it, and it has fallen asleep next to the tower. Unfortunately, during its sleep it has shifted slightly rests against it, muting the vibrations somewhat and making them slightly discordant (although only those intimately familiar with the tower would notice the variance). The beast's slumber is so deep that not even Aerys and her powerful nature magic can awaken it, but she seems insistent that it must be awakened, and without violence. She seeks outside aid from any adventurers who might be on the island at the time.

✧ The merchant fleet of the apothecary Thorik Redfall has finally found Leatherback Island, and descends upon it like a flock of hungry birds. The sheer number of personnel setting foot on the island dwarfs any previous incursions, and Redfall has knowledge of the island's defenses. Using alchemical explosives, his forces drive away the local slurghithians before even making landfall, and his forces are enough to potentially make it difficult for even Aerys to fend them off, at least for a short time. Redfall himself and his minions head for the Spines to harvest as much rock as can be carried in the ships, and their explosive endeavors shortly throw the entire island into absolute chaos. Aerys and the natives are desperate for aid to avoid using the most powerful magics against the interlopers, which the archdruid is apparently reluctant to do for reasons she will not divulge (see below for more information on why she might wish to avoid it).

### Expanded Adventures on Leatherback Island

To understand the true potential for expanded adventures on Leatherback Island, one must first understand the truth behind the island itself. Or rather, one must first understand the truth behind what others believe to be an island, for it is not an island at all.

Aerys Summerfall is the latest in a very long line of incredibly powerful druids who have made their home in the southern seas, all for the express purpose of safeguarding the world against a potential threat older than mankind. Aerys has rare knowledge: that the people of Aden once worshipped gods long ago. This is a common conjecture among prominent scholars in the Known Lands, who theorize that these ancient religions were lost during the centuries of the Great War long ago. However, what no one realizes is that, if these gods were not simply superstition and did actually exist, they were not the first divine creatures to walk upon the surface of the world. Creatures huger than anything ever conceived, and more powerful than can easily be imagined, these beings are perhaps the forces that gave birth to the world in the first place. These creatures eventually gave in to the slumber of ages, most of them buried deep beneath the surface of the world. Only one remains nearby, the lightest sleeper of them all, and it is upon this creature's back that Leatherback Island exists. Its name is no longer remembered by any living thing, or may never have been known in the first place, even Aerys is not certain, but she knows the creature as Tarratos, the Scion of the Seas, the Sire of Storms.

It would be easiest to describe Tarratos's physical form as a tortoise, although that would not exactly be correct, somewhat akin to

comparing an iguana to a dragon. Tarratos slumbers amid the ocean waters, a portion of its protective shell above the water. Over thousands of years, windborne soil and sand has accumulated on its shell to a sufficient degree that plants have taken root and given rise to an island-like environment indistinguishable from any other island in the region. Wildlife has arrived there over time as well, ensuring that the illusion is perfect. The Shellbacks, the mountains at the island's center, are not mountains at all, but the bony protrusions at the apex of the creature's massive shell. The reason that it is so difficult to extract materials from the mountains is that Tarratos's bone is far harder than any stone, and it gradually decays once separated from the rest of its body.

Tarratos, and presumably other creatures of the same sort, are not inherently good or evil, agents of neither order or chaos, but are beyond such labels. They are quite literally primordial forces of nature, capable of reshaping entire continents if the circumstances are right. Their ongoing slumber is essential to the continued survival of civilization, simply because the power they possess is too great to exist alongside mankind and his endeavors. It is for this reason that Aerys and her lineage have labored for so long to keep the existence of Tarratos a secret and to keep it safe from those who might attempt to exploit it or inadvertently awaken it. As primal beings of nature, these creatures are intrinsically linked to the natural world, and development of ordered structures is anathema to them. If Aerys allowed a large population or extensive development to take place on Leatherback Island, Tarratos would eventually awaken. The ramifications of such an awakening would change the face of the world.

Unfortunately, whatever sinister intelligence exists behind the forces of the Darkfall is aware of Tarratos's existence, and longs for little more than to awaken the great beast. The fear that such a thing would evoke would be a veritable feast for the Darkfall and certainly inspire the creation of an entirely new generation of nocturnals. The destruction of existing power structures would only increase the influence of corrupted throughout the Known Lands as well, and would begin the apocalypse that began when the Darkfall took place over a decade ago. Aerys Summerfall has sworn that such a thing must never happen, which is why she defends the island and its secrets with such relentless fervor. She even went as far as to recruit a mechamage from the Known Lands, a brilliant man she trusted above all others, to create the Iron Tower, whose vibrations serve as a sort of lullaby to ensure Tarratos continues to slumber even when other troubling circumstances arise.

Unrelated to the Darkfall's hunger for Tarratos's wakefulness, the creature has unknowingly contributed to the dangerous nature of sea travel in the southern seas between the Known Lands and the Misari Expanse. Centuries ago, Tarratos in his slumber roamed too close to the mainland and a weaker portion of his underside was cut on a reef. It was a tiny scrape, nothing the beast would even have noticed if awake when it happened, much less sufficient to wake him from his slumber. Given the scale of the beast, however, hundreds of gallons of his blood leaked into the sea over the course of weeks, and those creatures that ingested it slowly grew to enormous size. Those creatures begat offspring of similar size and so on, leading eventually to a region of the southern seas populated by enormous creatures easily able to attack and disable ships as they see fit, and often doing so having mistaken the ships for prey of worthy size. Something of Tarratos's essence passed to these creatures as well, for when they congregate in large enough numbers, the region they occupy is plagued with vicious, frequent storms that further discourage sea travel, which has kept the Misari Expanse reasonably separated from the Known Lands for much of the past few centuries. Although known by Aerys Summerside as the Sire of Storms, among other things, Tarratos rarely inspires elemental fury in his own vicinity, which may be a product of his slumber. His spiritual descendants, the behemoths and leviathans that loiter in the southern seas, suffer no such limitations or self-control.





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