



A FIELD GUIDE
TO
HOT SPRINGS ISLAND

THE SWORDFISH ISLANDS

ILLUSTRATED BY
GABRIEL HERNANDEZ



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HOT SPRINGS ISLAND

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A FIELD GUIDE TO HOT SPRINGS ISLAND



JACOB HURST
GABRIEL HERNANDEZ
EVAN PETERSON
DONNIE GARCIA

THE SWORDFISH ISLANDS

SAN ANTONIO



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SWORDFISH ISLANDS



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INTRODUCTION

Fewer than a hundred of the adventurers recruited to explore Hot Springs Island have made it back to us in one piece. However, every man and woman savvy enough to stay alive has returned with bags of treasure and a whole bard's worth of stories. They spoke of steaming jungles filled with magical plants, lost ruins, ravenous creatures, and vengeful, feuding factions. We compiled their firsthand accounts, polished them off with a bit of wild assumption, and wrote it all down in this book—*A Field Guide to Hot Springs Island*—for people just like you.

Now, if you're wondering why we're giving you something so useful for so cheap, that's good. Questions like that are why we picked you. Our angle is simple: The more you know about the island, the longer you stay alive. The longer you stay alive, the richer you're going to get, and the richer you get, the richer we get because the guild always gets its cut. How rich can you get? Well, so far there have been ten fine fellows who have paid off all their bounties on the mainland and retired in as little as six months, and there's at least one ex-marine who went on to buy herself a nice little kingdom in the Red Hills.

If you're worried you'll be at a disadvantage because you're not clever enough to read, don't be. There are drawings of every creature we know about, so you can flip through this guide and match our picture with whatever's currently eating your companion. Then again, even if you can read, many of the things encountered here on Hot Springs have not been recorded elsewhere (that we know of), so the names of places and creatures have emerged over time. We've done our best to reference everything by its most popular name, but for every name we've written down, there are probably three others that didn't make the cut.

Discoveries are being made daily here on Hot Springs Island, and if you find something new, or uncover something really old—especially if you see an ally die to it—let your guild representative know. We always pay handsomely for good information.

Special thanks to:

MATTHIAS for his journals and excellent notes.

MATILDA and JARVIS for keeping us alive so many times.

CAPTAIN RAND for making all this possible in the first place.

HARVARD, INDIO, and HARP for their ability to always come back.

And to the CREW for all of the blood and rum we've swallowed and spilled.

-Zilbee Bentgrass





Ruined gate seen
from the
Siren's Edge

The arrival at Hot Springs

Day 15 -

Aboard the Siren's Edge

Partly cloudy, light rain before noon

Our search for a suitable location to found this new port continues. After the incident on the Webbed Isle, and Vance's death on the Isle of Blooms, Captain Rand has ordered all crew to remain aboard the *Siren's Edge* and *Siren's Folly* until scouting parties from the Martel Company return with an initial report. Scuttlebutt is souring, and the normal pranks the crew direct toward Martel Company representatives are escalating to open hostility. The crew is clearly not handling the death of Vance well, and while I understand Captain Rand's desire to not risk his crew, folk are itching to get off these ships and explore the islands that will be their new home—even if they have proven an inhospitable home so far.

This island, and the one farther south, are two of the largest in the Swordfish Islands chain, and the Martel Company believe they have the most promising potential for deep water ports. Now we just have to determine if any inhabitants want to drink our innards or use our teeth as currency here, too. That said, if Martel marines keep returning to the ships with reports of "no suitable locations" and packs full of treasure, I'm not sure how long Jeremy can keep the crew in check, captain or not.

This island does appear quite beautiful from the safety of the ship. Twin volcanoes, heavily cloaked in jungle, rise nearly three thousand feet above black sand beaches, and I have spotted numerous signs of hydrothermal activity. The ruins of elven pleasure palaces and a large wall (in a style similar to those seen on the Isle of Blooms) tumble off the lower slopes of the smaller volcano and into the sea. Some kind of white stone structure gleams from the volcano's slope above the city, but I have not been able to discern its true purpose at this distance. Curiously, these ruins seem to lack the broad avenues and colonnades seen on the Isle of Blooms and the Ruined Isle. In their place are what appear to be giant-sized stairs resembling white woodland fungi. Hopefully the beauty of this island does not prove deceptive, too. I look forward to the marines' report.

Day 16 -

Aboard the Siren's Edge (morning)
Sunny with winds south by southwest

Mood among the crew remains sour. Twelve Martel Company marines, led by the recently promoted Lieutenant Barvus, dropped skiffs at dawn and headed in. Representative Amberlin continues to express her conviction that this will be an excellent location for our new port town, but the crumbling wall and ruins lead me to believe that much of this city rests beneath the waves, ready to split ship bellies. Opinions aside, for now we wait.

Day 16 -

Aboard the Siren's Edge (midday)
Sunny, calm and humid

Smoke has been spotted in the ruins. Speculation rampant. Orders are to remain anchored off the coast for forty-eight hours awaiting potential survivors.

Day 17 -

Aboard the Siren's Edge (morning)
Calm and overcast

Heavy clouds rolled in during the night, but the tropical heat has not abated. As the day heats up, this humidity may steam us like lobsters in a pot beneath a lid of clouds, and the crew are heated enough as it is. Representative Amberlin was fished out of the sea in the predawn hours after reportedly tripping over a pile of poorly stowed rope. Captain Rand has Stonejaw investigating. A change in weather or mood can't come soon enough.



Day 18 -

Aboard the Siren's Edge (predawn hours)

Overcast. Light breeze, south by southeast

We are now sailing toward the large southern island, and my hand feels as if it will drop off at any moment. I have been in Captain Rand's quarters writing nonstop since about midday, when the four survivors returned. I know I can trust Zilbee's quill of transcription to accurately record conversations as they happen, but old habits die hard in old men, and writing down what I hear as I hear it helps it stick in the memory as well as the page. Over the coming days, I will compare my notes to Zilbee's and compile the three accounts we heard into a sensible order. But for now, a recap:

This island, which I now call Hot Springs, has proven to be unsuitable for our port town. As I surmised, much of the coastal ruin (confirmed to be elven) continues into the sea, making the waters treacherous for large oceangoing vessels. The broad ways and avenues I'd thought missing from the ruins are still there, but overgrown by terraces of white rock formed by overflowing pools of hot water. These white terraces, resembling woodland fungal growths, indicate that the hydrothermal activity here is even more robust than I suspected, and the marines report seeing many smaller hot springs, mud pits, vents, and geysers as they fled through the jungle.

Hot Springs Island seems just as hostile as the other islands we have come across, and Lieutenant Barvus's poor choices in the ruins (splitting the company and focusing on loot) led to his death, and the death of most of his troops to a lizardman ambush. Of the twelve marines that went into the ruins, only four returned, and one (Unger) sustained a belly wound that may yet place him within the reach of Death's bony hand. The marine Harp fled northwest from the ruins and spent last night in a tree on the shores of what she calls Crab Mouth Lagoon. The marine Harvard carried the wounded Unger southeast and camped in a glade of ancient pine trees filled with swarms of exceptional bees. The marine Indio braved a night in the ruins themselves.

Harp's Tale

Harp is of average height, with brown hair, a white scar along the right side of her jaw, and the watery blue eyes of a drunk. She appears reasonably strong, but carries an inch or two of fat over her musculature. Indio claims that Harp is on everyone's "shit list" due to her drinking, and that the other marines tolerate her only because of her skill with a sword. Her answers to my questions were terse, and she avoided my eyes during our talk.

Lieutenant Barvus kept Harp's sword arm close to his side for much of their time in the ruins, but the first attack was one of personality from within the party itself. Barvus, being recently promoted and somewhat disliked, chose a Sergeant Varik to act as his squad leader and second. Varik was popular among the marines, and possessed a commanding personality that Barvus apparently thought he could control. Upon reaching the ruins proper, Barvus ordered the troop to head for an imposing structure of white stone on the high ground several miles from the beach. Varik countered the order, claiming to have spotted a ruined marketplace off to the northwest, and a small group of the men went with him in search of the booty that would doubtlessly be found there.

Instead of contesting this usurpation, Barvus reportedly revoked his original command to stick together, sealing the split. Varik, Indio, and five other marines headed to the marketplace, while Barvus, Harp, Harvard, Unger, and a young marine named Jessup continued northeast along the steaming, terrace-covered road. After a ways, Barvus spotted golden filigree in the ruins of a mansion and called for himself, Harp, and Jessup to investigate, ordering Harvard and Unger to continue up the road. When I asked Harp why Barvus had sent Harvard and Unger away, her answer was a curt, "How should I know?"

Indio offered possible insight into this additional splintering during our interview. "Ah, that's easy! New boss too focused on a handy. Jesse's fresh, so he's assed out of the cut. And good ol' Harp's only a short hair away from the deep, meanin' Lieutenant Swingin' Dick gets all the swag if'n he keeps Harvard and Unger away."

What follows is a copy of Zilbee's transcription of my meeting with Harp, wherein she talks about the curiosities of the ruins and mansion. Her responses, while terse, are copied here in full to avoid the unintentional omission of any informational subtleties.

Matthias: "What happened once Harvard and Unger were gone?"

Harp: "Barvus had us help him pry some long pieces of gold off the front entryway of the compound."

Matthias: "He didn't have you investigate it?"

Harp: "Not till the gold was in his pack. Then we started looking."

Matthias: "Looking for what?"

Harp: "I dunno. More gold, I s'pose."

Matthias: "You weren't told what you were looking for?"

Harp: "No. I'm not there for looking. Jus' have to do it sometimes."

Matthias: "What are you there for?"

Harp: "Fighting."

Matthias: "Should we skip to that?"

Harp: "You're the one asking these questions."

Matthias: "What did you see in the mansion grounds? Please be as detailed as you can."

Harp: "I was in first. The courtyard was overgrown, but some of the brick walk leading to the house was still visible. The house was nice looking, or was once nice looking. Shitty now, though. Barvus was behind me most of the time, and he told me to go into the mansion and look around, so I did."

Matthias: "What did you see when you looked around?"

Harp: "Most of the inside of the house was covered in some orange crystal. Like a layer of ice, right?"

Matthias: "Were there any statues or symbols?"

Harp: "Yeah. There was the top half of a statue sittin' in a raised flower bed. I don't know why. It was covered in orange, too. Didn't see no signs."

Matthias: "Orange crystal?"

Harp: "No, not like inside. That was like ice, I said. Like in the morning when there's dew on the grass and it's frozen. This orange wasn't like that. It was all wet. Like goo."

Matthias: "What was inside?"

Harp: "It was a big house. Furniture and stuff. The entry was very large and there was a statue of a skinny kid, or maybe an elf. It whistled as I walked past, and a door opened to one of them rooms where rich people drink with their drinkin' coats on. Paintings of elves everywhere. Some in the midst of fuckin'. Others dressed all funny. Most everything was coated in orange."

Matthias: "Orange goo? Or orange solid?"

Harp: "Orange solid."

Matthias: "What happened next?"

Harp: "I stole a statue of a fat naked dame touchin' herself."

Matthias: "What?"

Harp: "This."

At this point, Harp pulled a small platinum statue of a nude, pregnant elf from her pack. The reclining figure's back is arched, belly thrust up and legs splayed. Her face conveys ecstasy, and one hand cups a breast while the other is pressed to her genitals.

Harp: "As I snagged the statue, I heard Barvus calling for help, so I stowed it in my pack and ran outside. There was a large lizardman with green scales and what looked like dark markings fighting Barvus and Jesse."

Matthias: "What did you do?"

Harp: "I killed it."

Matthias: "Was it hard?"

Harp: "Not for me."

Matthias: "Where did you learn to fight like that?"

Harp: “Been in a couple of armies, and paid attention when people talked about how to fight. Always been good at it.”

Matthias: “Good at what?”

Harp: “Killing.”

Matthias: “How do you feel about that?”

Harp: “Heh. I seen who you sail with, Matthias. Howz’at make you feel?”

Matthias: “What happened next?”

Harp: “Two more lizards blocked the exit to the compound. Barvus told me to break through, so I did. I bowled into them, and when we all came up, I saw Barvus and Jess runnin’ up the street, which was fine by me.”

Matthias: “Why?”

Harp: “I caught Harvard out of the corner of my eye. He’s a better sword arm than both of them. Unger ain’t half bad either.”

Matthias: “You like Harvard? He seems regimental for your tastes.”

Harp: “I’ve only got tastes for good ale ’n bad whores. I don’t like Harvard, but he’s a good soldier. Would’a probably been runnin’ our company if Barvus hadn’t come on a family ticket. Harvard’s a good sword hand.”

Matthias: “What happened once Unger got to you?”

Harp: “Killed the two lizards. Unger caught a spear in the gut, though. Would like that might take hours to kill you, but it will. I went to get the others while Harvard helped Unger.”

Matthias: “You volunteered to go?”

Harp: “No. Harvard told me to help Unger while he went for the others, but I told him no. I’m no good at lying.”

Matthias: “Lying?”

Harp: “Yeah. Lying. If I gotta wrap someone up ’n tell him he’s gonna be all right when I know he won’t, he’ll know he’s dead. Unger’s the type that’ll think bearable pain ain’t killable pain, and Harvard’s the type that can keep him ignorant. I ain’t.”

Matthias: "Then what happened?"

Harp: "Got a little lost looking for Barvus. When I found him, he was bleedin' from the head, and Jesse was trying to bandage it. Barvus yelled that everyone was dead, even Harvard and Unger. Then we ran from some lizardmen."

Matthias: "Why didn't you tell him Harvard and Unger were alive?"

Harp: "Martel pays me to follow orders, not contradict 'em."

Harp, Barvus, and Jesse ran northwest through the ruins, skirting the ruined marketplace (which now billowed the clouds of black smoke we'd seen from the ships) and headed toward the city walls. They seemed to have evaded the lizards that had given them chase, and were able to pass through a crumbled section of wall and flee into the jungle. The marines hacked their way through the vegetation, heading northwest and aiming for the coast so they could backtrack to the skiffs once night fell. After traveling for four hours, Barvus sent Harp up a tree to get a lay of the land.

Matthias: "What did you see?"

Harp: "The coast wasn't far off, with the beach runnin' northeast and southwest so we'd gone the right way. That's when the attack happened."

Matthias: "Attack?"

Harp: "Yeah. We hadn't lost those lizards after all. While I was monkeyed up that tree, one ran a spear through Jesse while he was pissin', but it killed him so quick that I didn't hear it."

Matthias: "How did you realize there was an attack, then?"

Harp: "Barvus started screamin' and tried to take on the two scale-jobs."

Matthias: "It seems he didn't win?"

Harp: "Heh. No. Tripped on a tail and swallowed obsidian."

Matthias: "But how did you kill them?"

Harp: "Sword to the jaw. Spear to the face."

Matthias: "You used one of their spears?"

Harp: "Yes."

Matthias: “Are you sure these were the same lizardmen from before?”

Harp: “No. But they had the same type of dark markings. Black, bubbly tattoos.”

Matthias: “Tattoos? How can you tattoo scales?”

Harp: “Well, they didn’t have ’em anymore. Saw it when they was dead. Looked like they’d pulled out their scales in those black patches.”

Matthias: “And you say the tattoos were bubbling? We’ve seen a few lizardmen so far while sailing around these islands, both with blue scales and green, but none with tattoos. Let alone bubbling tattoos.”

Harp: “Guess these are different, then.”

Matthias: “What do you mean, bubbling?”

Harp: “I dunno. It’s like... It’s like the ink is wet and bubbling off their bodies, but the tattoos never get any lighter, right?”

Matthias: “I see. And you say they vanished when they died?”

Harp: “The tattoos? Yeah. Gone.”

Pulling details out of Harp continued to be a painful process, and her information about these lizardmen left me wanting. I found myself wishing I could have witnessed the combat directly and not been forced to rely on this secondhand account, as I had begun to realize I was already applying a great deal of my own bias with leading questions. When the other marines praised Harp’s skill with the sword, I had assumed she fought in a manner similar to Captain Rand. Jeremy rarely uses anything but his sword, a dagger, or his “mitts.” Hearing that Harp was just as lethal with an obsidian-tipped spear scooped off the battlefield as she was with her own blade made me wonder what other nuances I might have missed in her retelling of events.

In an attempt to squeeze more detail out of Harp, I had been steadily plying her with ale. But instead of making her more verbose, the alcohol began slurring her speech to such an extent that both Zilbee’s quill and I began to have a hard time keeping up. After the battle, Harp had headed toward the beach seen earlier. She reached it round about sunset, and based on her descriptions, seems to have discovered a large lagoon. The barrier

island is covered in mangrove trees, and the two spits of land reaching toward it reminded her of the mandibles on a crab's mouth when she viewed it from above. Once traveling alone, Harp had taken to climbing trees frequently to keep her bearings and watch for possible attacks.

Perched in a palm tree up above this Crab Mouth Lagoon, she claimed that as the sun set, the black sand seemed to erupt with bursts of golden light. "Almost like a million gold coins washed up on the shore." After such a long day, her eyelids began to sink as rapidly as the sun, so she tied herself to the tree and grabbed as much sleep as she could.

Harp left the lagoon several hours before dawn, following the coastline south to the ruins and the skiffs, where she ran into the other survivors.





Harvard's Tale

When Barvus took Harp and Jessup into the ruined mansion, he sent Harvard and Unger away to try and maximize his haul. The two marines continued up the street, terraced in hot springs, until it ended at a T-shaped intersection before the large white building we had seen from the ships. The structure's walls are at least fifty feet high and apparently quite remarkable, because they appear to have been carved from a single piece of white stone. Harvard was unable to see any seams over the entire façade of the building, which I now know to be the ruin of a once-opulent bathhouse. The façade, comprised of three distinct sections (smooth and blemish free, carved in high relief, and windowed) is cut by a single arched entry, thirty feet high and twenty feet wide. The archway leads to an overgrown area that was likely once a garden, and this is what Harvard had to say on the matter:

"We walked through the archway and into a large courtyard choked with strange vegetation. I don't know much about botany, but most of these plants can't have been natural. For instance, there was a long vine blooming with flowers of copper and a dull gray metal I'm not familiar with. I grabbed a pouch full of those petals for you to take a look at though, Matthias. [Upon inspection, this unknown metal proved to be zinc.] Another plant that caught my attention was a clump of flowers growing in a large, pearlescent planter surrounded by snapping grass. The flowers in this planter had long stalks of white crystal, and in place of petals was a small ball of sunlight. You could feel warmth coming off them and everything. I was going to grab one, but Unger called for help before I could pick it.

"I ran through the double doors leading into the building and saw Unger, sword limp in hand, staring at a snakelike creature coiled around a statue, its head even with Unger's. Now... this next part is weird, Matthias. The snake. Well. The snake's face was identical to mine. And I mean that I saw my head on this snake's body, staring at Unger. Unger told me later that he saw the same thing, only the serpent had his face and not mine when he looked at it. I don't get it now, and I didn't get it then, but I threw a dagger at it all the same. This caused it to lose control of Unger and we both ran. Oh! And before I forget, I managed to get a charcoal rubbing of runes that

were carved inside the big archway. I can't read the language, of course, but I figured you might like puzzling it out."

As Unger and Harvard ran from the human-headed serpent in the bathhouse, they saw Barvus, Jesse, and Harp being attacked by lizardmen in front of the ruined mansion. Harvard's tale aligns with Harp's, down to the description of the lizards' writhing and bubbling tattoos that never fade. Despite a severe stomach wound, Unger insisted on walking as they made their escape from the ruined city and tried to reach the beach. By this time, the marketplace was on fire, and a group of three lizardmen cut off their path to the skiffs on the beach. Knowing they were pursued, the two fled southeast through the city's broken wall, mirroring Harp's flight and sharing her goal of losing pursuit in the jungle before doubling back along the beach at night to the boats. Unger, amazingly, was able to travel on his own for a good two hours before finally collapsing into unconsciousness somewhere in the jungle.

Harvard is a good foot taller than Harp, with short burnished hair, sharp brown eyes, and a thick, horizontal band of freckles across his face. He seems quite capable, very intelligent, and as fit as a racing dog. I have come to discover that it's quite rare for these Martel Company marines to come to one another's aid in situations lacking orders and authority, but Harvard carried a comatose Unger through the jungle for two hours before finally collapsing himself. He refused payment for the items he brought me from the ruins, and seems more interested in the thrill of adventure than its monetary rewards. Every marine I've spoken to places him in high regard, and he is quickly becoming my favorite.

"I don't remember too much about that run to tell you the truth, Mr. Mayford. But after a while I even stopped looking over my shoulder for lizards, I was so tired. At the end of my run, I broke through into what I thought was a normal clearing. I set Unger up under a tree and then collapsed face first into the grass. I must have passed out for about two hours, because the sun was sloping westward when I saw it next. When I was finally coherent enough to take in my surroundings, they were so right, they were wrong. The glade was comprised of sixteen gigantic, ancient pine trees. And not tropical pine trees. Pine trees like you'd find up in the mountains where they've been untouched since the dawn of time. A cool

breeze blew through the area, and I saw eight cubes of white stone, three feet by three feet, scattered about the glade. The grass was cut short, as if maintained weekly, and while looking for tracks or signs of a gardener, I first noticed the giant honeycombs hanging from the branches and spilling down the trunks of the trees. And the buzzing. I'm not sure how I missed the constant droning noise when Unger and I first arrived, but I guess I'd just acclimated to it in my sleep.

"All this time, while looking around, I'd remained prone on the ground. But as I stood up and began to dust myself off, I heard Unger give a coughing laugh. I rushed over to check on him, but as I drew near, his eyes widened, looking over my shoulder, and he only managed to say 'Bees! Mimic!' before succumbing to another fit of coughing. I turned around suddenly and reflexively threw my hands into the air in complete surprise at the sight of a large cloud of bees behind me. But the bees, and I'm sure you're not going to believe this, Matthias—the cloud of bees mimicked my fright. Two arm-like appendages broke off the mass and waved around in a caricature of my shock. I turned back to Unger as his coughs were interrupted by snippets of laughter. Pale faced and sweating, he said, 'Look! They're waiting for more.'

"When I turned back around, it seemed Unger was right. The cloud of bees hung motionless and buzzing in the cool air. So I waved, and the bees waved back. I became more elaborate with my movements, hopping and crouching and waving and spinning, and the bees never missed a beat. I was laughing uncontrollably by this point. After a time, the bees began to split off into... I don't know... ribbons flying around me, and nudging me in a certain direction until I realized they wanted me to follow them.

"They led me to a honeycomb literally overflowing with the sweetest honey I've ever tasted, and then to a small spring of cold water just outside the glade. I refilled my waterskin, caught a decent amount of honey in my carry mug, and returned to Unger to change his bandages. I found him completely still and wide-eyed, with a swarm of bees crawling and buzzing over his bandaged midsection. He looked scared, and said that when I left with the bees, another cloud had come and landed on his stomach. He hadn't been stung, and said that they actually made his wound feel warm, in a soothing way. This treatment from the bees appeared to draw a load of

infection out of Unger's wound. After a time, they returned to their hives, allowing me to change his bandages and get him some honey and water.

"We spent most of the night under the watchful eye of the bees in that buzzing glade of pine trees before striking out for the coast. Unger was very weak by this point, and I carried him all the way back to the skiffs where I discovered Indio and then Harp. These islands are all death and wonder, Mr. Mayford. Death and wonder."



Indio's Tale

When Indio joined me in Captain Rand's quarters, he had a sour disposition. Blood loss and a sleepless night in the ruins of the bathhouse had put a pallor across his weathered, chestnut-colored skin, and dark circles under his eyes. Still, his eyes scanned the room constantly, drinking in all the details, and his scarred hands toyed with a strand of skull-shaped beads on his belt throughout our conversation.

"What's Longtooth seekin' a pigeon without a proper nest for?" he said as he sat across from me at Rand's small wooden table. Having sailed the seas of this world and the seas of its culture, I've picked up a bit of cant, so I tossed a bag of twenty gold pieces on the table in reply. I have heard Indio speak quite elegantly to his superiors, so I wasn't fully prepared for the wave of innuendo-laden, context-short gibberish he hit me with in response.

"Well, well, well, Shakey Legs. I didn't catch a wink, but I think I've got a few whistles left in me. We was small-ballin' it through the jungle, scared our laces was undone, but quarter watch goes by and we realized we'd been tied tight the whole time. Tomlin, seein' as his Pa brought him up with leeches on his balls, ain't easy to heel. Froggier than I'd'a set on, I tell ya. But he's got that type o' voice that makes you feel dumber for understanding, so when he yarbles out 'Ain't bein' follow'd n'mo, Indya,' I didn't feel no breeze 'bout it. Not wantin' to find the lamplight again, we was back off, long runnin' the boats. 'Nother quarter watch, sun's 'bout gone, and we're back at the coat, lookin' for a way up the collar when bammo! Curtain falls down."

I put my hands up in a gesture of surrender and asked Indio to speak plainly and start over. The gleeful smile on his face removed some of his weary look as he scoffed. "I's curious how long you'd let me go. I coulda' flipped it total goose on ya, but that wouldn't'a been fair with all these feathers you put in my nest. Surprised you kept up as long as you did."

I apologized for stopping him, and told him that even though I'd heard a fair share of gibberish in my time, I was getting a bit old to keep up. Indio

laughed again. I then explained that he'd started his story too far into the day, and that while his run through the jungle and attempts to climb the wall that circled the ruins were indeed interesting, I was hoping he could begin his tale within the ruins, when he was still a part of Varik's crew. But he hesitated.

"No, no, no. I ain't part of Varik's crew. They're all lifers with Ma Martel. In it for the thrill and party, but not too good at either. That said, that Barvus is a chump and shouldn't let the split happen in the first place. But when Varik offered the sweeter opportunity, I woulda been a fool to not go to that marketplace. Even if I'd be missing Harp's sword arm.

"Anybouts, I rowed in the morning with that kid, Tomlin, so we stayed paired up at the market. The whole ruins'd been quiet. No one too much on guard, and most jawin' off about that foppy Matilda. Then Varik finally breaks spades, starts digging in a collapsed building, and tells everyone to break off and 'get paid.' I spy this massive rubble heap, bet there's swag under it, so Tommy and I get to rollin' boulders when what do ya know—a chimney of sorts. Climb on down, and boom, some good haul. I know you like these old things more'n I do, Matthias, so if you've got more feathers I've got a few carnival class pieces you can prize later.

"Right. Where was I? So Tommin 'n I, bit heavier mind you, climbs back outta that chimney and up into chaos. Someone took a torch into one of the ruins and came out on fire. A couple whoop birds come out on fire too, runnin' around a bit faster than normal. Top o' that, lizardmen. At first, I just saw one holding Varik by the face with some gravedigger green magic swirling 'bout his mitts. Then Tommy pulls me back down that hole and I see a second greenscale throwin' his spear at me. Kid gave me air. Gotta love him for that, even if our type ain't too good with debts. Are we Matt?"

I passed Indio a flask of rum, watched him take a long pull, and listened to Zilbee's auto-quill scratch down those last words.

"Anybouts, we knew we was in the pan and had to jump quick before the lamps got lit, so we head for that big collar of a collapsing wall, and break into the jungle. Tommy almost caught his own spear as we was tippy-toein' through the rubble, so when we hit the grass, we didn't look back and

figured they was after us. But that's where we started this little chat, so we'll skip that."

"So we get back to the wall. Sun's falling into the sea by this point, and a gods-damned shadow stepped out of the shadows and looks at us. They're all black, but they got white eyes and fuck-off pointy ears and teeth. Thing looked like it was blowin' in a wind that weren't there, and then it steps back into the shadows and was gone. Near shat myself."

"So we possumed up in those last few trickles of sunbeam and just watched. Sure as the silver standard, we start seein' movin' spots of shadow all over. Hits me that the bard speak I'd heard shipsides 'bout grimdark shit in these ruins weren't just bard speak after all. So we try 'n sneak. Stupid, but we was spooked. Thinkin' fuzzy. Every time we think we're making it, some shadow came up on us. Weird part, though, is they don't always come right at us. Sometimes they'd just post up in our line o' sight, trying to breakfast our head, but I get it. Hell, I can scramble like a funhouse, but old Tommyboy was startin' to lose it. Lil' heavy on his view, if you catch me."

"Now, unnerstand, I ain't saying' I'm old hat at this anymore than the next guy, but I tussled about the world a bit before I set sail for fortune. Anybouts, I see it's a game and try to clean Tommy's plate, but he's still sweating. The last time one took a swipe at us, it damn near caught flesh. Seeing as the dark wasn't helping us, and sun was all dried up, I took a guess that mayhap these shadows don't care for light, so I spark a torch from my pack and tell Tomlin to do the same and keep his oil handy. He fumblefucks about for a few, then asks for my torch to light with. Swamp rat can't tinder?"

"I was a little frustrated with Mr. Day One, Page One, but seeing as he'd saved my life, I gave him some slack. Wasn't even paying attention when I went to hand him my torch. Great time for an attack, right? Shadow outta nowhere. I swear, I'm gonna cold-sweat over that grinning face for a long stretch, but I smash my torch into that ugly mug—and payday. Shit worked. I swear I heard it scream before it poofed. Bad day had kept getting worse and we was still stuck downwind, but at least now I knew I could sting. Torches in hand, we tore down the road looking for a hole, not worrying 'bout our display since we couldn't hide anyway."

“Torches or not, though, they kept toyin’ with us. A shadow came outta window, slashed wide, and got Tommy. Tomkins lets one of them screams that comes so loud and fast it don’t make no sound. I jump in without thinking. My daggers do nothing, and I almost get my throat ripped out before I remember to use the damn torch. Sends him off just right. So now I’m pulling a frantic Tommy down the street still lookin’ for a hole, and I spot one that looks perfect, but as I’m walking through the archway, I see one of Harvard’s scribble marks. Harvard’s one of them real 100 percent guys. Real greased axle. The only gig he can’t swing is a half-assed one, ya know? He was throwin’ Xs in chalk on any buildings of the not safe variety, and Os on the happy places. ‘Course I spot a damned white X as I pass through the archway, but my arms is about to fall off and Tommy’s still in a bad state, so I pull through and we end up in the middle of some garden.

“I realize Tom’s out cold, so I put five across his face a couple times and lay out our situation to him straight. We ain’t downwind no more. We’re square in the shit, and he’s gonna need to step back up if’n we’re gonna make it out. I prop him on a wall and go campfire the street in front of the archway to discourage any stray puppies. When I get back, I see Tommy’s got it, and has managed to get a bandage tied up tight around his chest.

“Garden’s shit for security, so we head deeper in, lookin’ for a quiet corner with a view. The place was dark but the torch showed quite a bit of gilt. Whoever set the place up sure was big-dickin’ it back in the day. Gold and gaudy flavor all over the place. Couple dozen heads in the sun could floss themselves out quite the retirement package, I ’spect. Takes us a while to find that corner, but when we do, Tom ’n I take turns sleeping in quick shifts.

“So there I am, housecattin’ it all proper like and Tommy wakes me up with a conversation. I almost toss him a shut-the-fuck-up before I realize he’s talkin’ to someone that ain’t there and walkin’ away from me, sayin’ things like, ‘Yeah. That’s right. I’ll find it. I knew it.’ He left everything but the torch in his grip, so I gear up quick and follow his light ’fore it disappears. I find him in some wide room with a hole in the ceiling and some snake creature hanging out of it, eyes locked on Tommin’s. Here’s the sweet sally part, though. Snake’s got my face! Tommy’s just noddin’ and lookin’ up at it as it lowers itself down, and then I get to see my face open up its jaw and



swallow Tom's head. The torch dropped from his hand and rolled my way, but I couldn't get my legs movin'. When the jaw reached his shoulders, I snapped back to it, reached for the torch, and made for the door.

"Headin' back to the garden, a shadow appeared. Every muscle in my body tightened up and I felt sleet tear through my left arm and chest. Then it stops and just grins at me from the dark. I'm sure you're savvy enough to have picked up that I ain't a toe-to-toe kind of guy, but I smashed that torch right in his gut without a second's hesitation. It cuts a noiseless scream and backs away, so I bard it up. Toss back a swig of oil and spray it at the shadow through my torch. Still no sound, but it worked and the shadow was gone. Time for me to be gone, too.

"I knew Tommy was dead, so I cut bait and didn't go back to check on him. I start small-ballin' it through the halls, not stopping for anything. Something orange and blobby slopped out of an alcove, but I cut wide 'n ran past it. Anybouts, you see me here... you know I made it out.

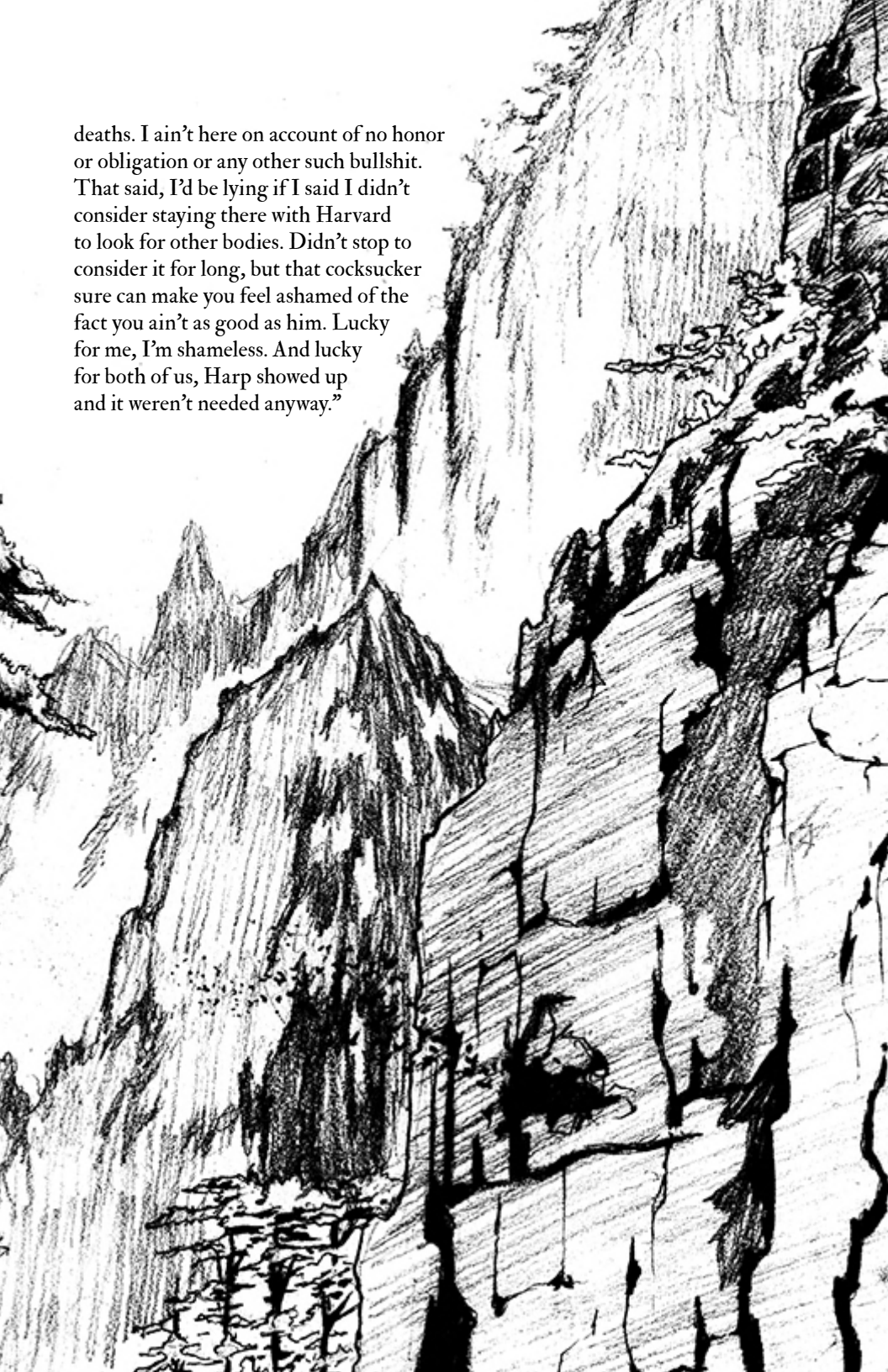
"I ran till I hit the collar, and jumped back in the jungle, keeping that wall on my right, and the sound of the ocean in front of me. Took about a whole watch to finally get back to the boats, but when I do, I flip one and hide out under it. Guess I passed out, 'cause next thing I know, I'm nearly shittin' myself as something's lifting the boat up. I draw steel, but it was Harvard. Fucking Harvard. Thank the gods it was Harvard. Right then, I wouldn't'a been able to handle a drunk five-year-old, much less anything these islands have to throw at ya.

"Harvard had Unger with him, poor bastard, and soon as the boat's righted, he lays Unger in it and goes full paladin on me. Wants the pigeon on everything. Then gets all lockjawed when I got no proof of Barvus, Harp, and Jesse's deaths. Mr. Mirror Boots tosses me his pack and tells me to bandage up Unger if he starts bleeding through again, but otherwise, once we start rowing, I'm not to stop till we reach the ship.

"Now then, Matthias, I ain't in the marines 'cause I've got nothing else to do. Ma Martel pays off bounties. That's draw number one. Draw number two is that they pay very well to send marines off to die horrible



deaths. I ain't here on account of no honor or obligation or any other such bullshit. That said, I'd be lying if I said I didn't consider staying there with Harvard to look for other bodies. Didn't stop to consider it for long, but that cocksucker sure can make you feel ashamed of the fact you ain't as good as him. Lucky for me, I'm shameless. And lucky for both of us, Harp showed up and it weren't needed anyway."





ELVES
AND ANCIENTS

Matthias Mayford!

You utterly insufferable old git! Don't play coy with me. You knew damn good and well exactly the sort of response that package was going to evoke from me when you sent it. Upon opening it, I was immediately forced to begin groveling and prostrating myself before Melinda in order to receive a sanctioned release from my duties as a tenured professor. It took three weeks, and you cannot fathom the tribulations I have had to endure, wooing that gluttonous edifice of bureaucracy, for special dispensation to leave the college for a time so I could come throttle you personally. Yes, that's right. By the time you receive this letter, I should be en route to the Swordfish Islands, as you doubtlessly expected.

I have spent my entire life studying the ancient Isle of Light, and you dared to ask me to research for you via correspondence after sending me proof of its existence, and telling me you were *living on it*?! Not on your life, Mayford!

The charcoal rubbings you sent were worthless, listing only the prices of oils, perfumes, and bath salts, but the symbols and language are a perfect match for the writings of the island. Did these come from ruins near thermal springs? The elves are said to have had a city of pools and baths built into the side of a volcano, and their magic was supposedly powerful enough to cap the volcano's cone and protect the city from eruptions.

The chimes you sent were amazing, and further prove you have found the island (or its remnants). The elves of the Isle of Light locked their homes and belongings with music instead of mechanical locks, and they used these chimes as keys. There is a stone chest in the basements of the palace of Banuvo that can be opened only with the tone of a copper chime, and is known to have come from the Isle of Light back when the trade in reywish moved caravans in ancient days. The symbols engraved inside the mithral chime say "Fountain 37", and neither the blacksmiths guild, nor the jewelers guild have been able to identify the red metal of the second chime.

When I arrive on the islands, the first thing I want to see is the singing stone head you spoke of. Legend says the elves embedded their chimes into stone automaton servants, and that broken head may be the key to palaces or storehouses. Are there symbols carved behind the ears? I will probably be there before any reply you write can reach me, but there is so much I wish to know! Have you been able to identify the shift yet? Based on the treasures and rubbings returning from the ruins? There are two distinct periods of elven culture, and the known objects from the island change suddenly from being aesthetically structured and geometric to loose and asymmetrical with a heavy floral motif. Have you noticed this? Have you seen the flower? Is it actually a real thing? Or is it all some decadent metaphor that went along with the supposed fetishization of pregnancy before the culture's sudden disappearance?

Beware the symbolism of the veil, Matthias. I have next to no actual information, but after the shift and before the fall, I believe there was darkness under the shine of the Isle of Light. We will speak more on this when I arrive. But this man Harvard—are you sure of his loyalty? We both know the past, and they say the Martel Company buries its hooks deep...

I feel as though I've looted half the college's library packing for this journey. You know I never need much, but please make sure there is someplace I can keep my books dry. There will be at least three trunks. You may have already written her, but Helena would love to hear from you (as always), and she has recently been placed in charge of the palace's archives in addition to her normal duties. All the information of Banuvo can now be yours for a few exotic flower pressings and flirtatious words.

Of all the people I've ever known, only you could have stumbled onto the Isle of Light. You've made me feel like a young man again, Matthias.

Yours in haste, hatred, and undying friendship,

-Simon Blade feather

THE ELVEN ALPHABET



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I



J



K



L



M



N



O



P



Q



R



S



T



U



V



W



X



Y



Z



To My Dearest Matthias,

Greetings from the lands of white sand. The obsidian blade you sent has caused quite the stir here at the college. Such quality of crafting! You weren't exaggerating when you said the snake forming its hilt looks as though it might come alive and slither off at any moment. Horace agrees with your conjecture that the hilt is made of mithral, but we have never seen such precision and perfection. The interlocking scales are simply breathtaking. It really has a twin? I can hardly believe this magnificence could be duplicated.

Of course we will display it in the college's museum! It will be an honor to do so once our research has completed, and assuming we can find an artisan competent enough to create a plaque bearing your name that will not look like the work of a barbarian when placed next to the blade.

Just as you stated in your letter, we have been unable to cut, puncture, or otherwise harm anything made of flesh with the obsidian knife, be it living or dead, and I think you downplayed just how fascinating it is when used to cut plants. I personally sliced a blade of grass from tip to base and watched it become two whole, separate, living blades. Every branch we trimmed on a rose bush in the western courtyard burst into bloom, and in such profusion that one of the branches actually cracked and fell under the weight of the flowers. Between the two of us, were I twenty years younger, I would be sorely tempted to run off with the blade and travel the world as a common street magician or mystical botanist.

Do you truly think the Swordfish Islands are the remnants of the ancient elven "Isle of Light"? We have indeed heard tales of the elven ruins on those islands, but the Isle of Light was a single island, not seven, or nine, or however many make up the Swordfish chain. The official theory here at the college is that your ruins are the remains of elven trading outposts, and that the actual Isle of Light remains undiscovered and lost to the mists of time. So far, I and the other staff who have examined the blade agree that it is not

of elven make, but they remain skeptical of your assertion that it might have come from an even earlier civilization.

Did you write Simon directly, too? He has been in a nearly frantic state of elation recently. Xavier, of course, loudly doubts that you've found the right island, and even if you did, neither he nor Simon are aware of a civilization existing on the Isle of Light that would have predated the elves. Not to mention the fact that the elves were such extensive traders and travelers that these twin obsidian blades could have come from anywhere. But of course, this is only their opinion.

I remain fascinated by your tale of a mass grave of headless skeletons in strata below known elven strata that your friend Harvard discovered. I wish you could have sent along a bone, since they seemed to be made of obsidian, but I fully understand your concerns regarding desecration.

My time in the archives has been more limited and fruitless than I would like. I have found one letter that might hint at the existence of civilizations predating the elves on the Isle of Light, but I worry you may find it disappointingly sparse. Although much of the letter deals with the reywish trade, there is an interesting reference to "twisted ones," and a cryptic mention of ruins that may just be some sort of invocation.

Please write again soon. You always did have an uncanny knack for discovering places long forgotten, and I ache to hear how this mystery unravels for you, Matthias. In the coming weeks, I should have more free time to spend in the archives hunting clues for you. Give Zilbee my love.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helena". The script is elegant and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Professor Helena Linden
Dean of Botany and Anthropology
Royal College of Banuvo



Translated from the original Elvish



For the last time, ambassador, if your people would like the riches of the cosmos to continue to flow, you must continue providing us with the blue dye from the western mountains of your continent. We are, as ever, aware of your ongoing difficulties with the inhabitants of that region, but the armaments we have already provided should be more than sufficient to deal with a threat as negligible as humans. Furthermore, we absolutely will not provide you with any additional Drakesfire, as, having seen its effect on the jungles of our island that once hid the twisted ones, we dare not risk the damage it could do to the forests where the reywish grows. Deal with the barbarians, or do not, as you must, but do not risk the plant.

We appreciate your attempt to send us the reywish whole, but the dyes are simply not the same when prepared on the Isle of Light, and our client's demands are exacting. As to your suggestion of sending us seeds to grow our own, while we appreciate the effort of your thought, the realities of the plant and its coloration are clearly tied to the land where it grows.

The ruins revealed the truth. We shared the truth.

Handle the bugs. Bring us the dye, and we will continue to shower you with riches beyond your understanding.

The Illustrious Cegdaven Jobril
Third Order of the Starfall



THE ANCIENT'S ALPHABET



A



F



B



G



C



H



D



I



E



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K



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THE ANCIENT'S ALPHABET



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LIFE



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PLANT



X



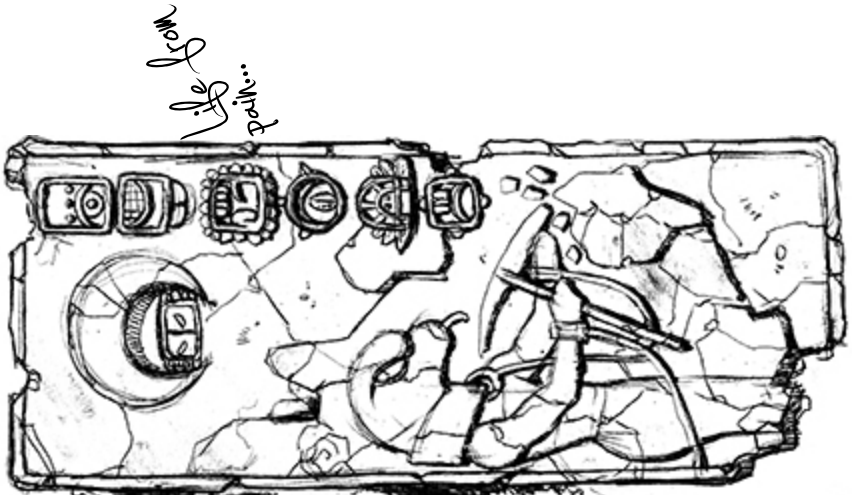
MOON



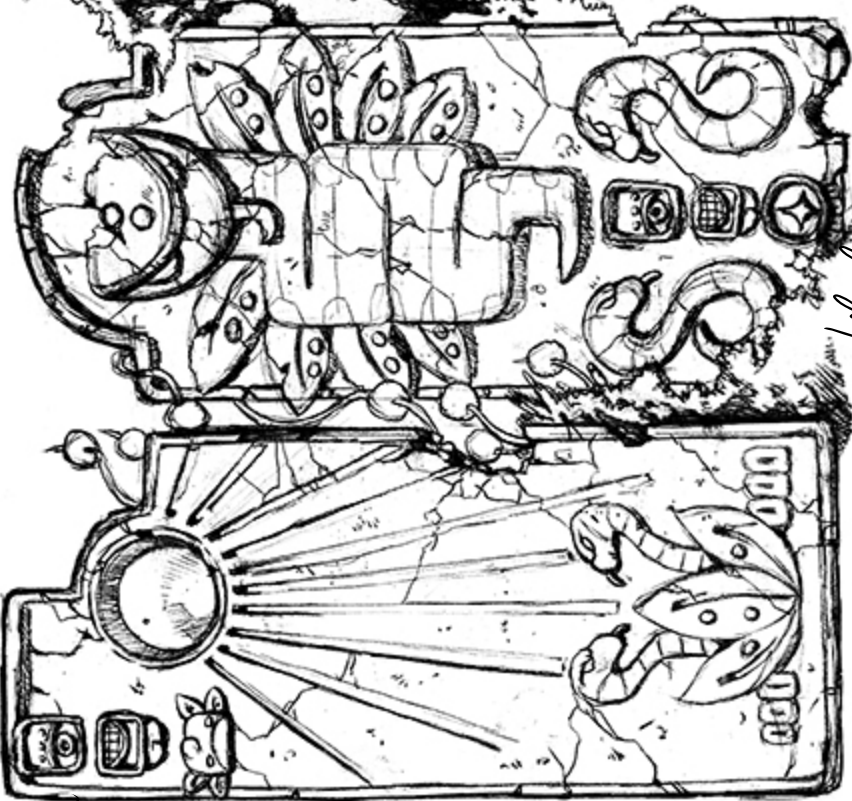
Y



FROM



Life from
pain...



Life was off



Life from
plant(s)

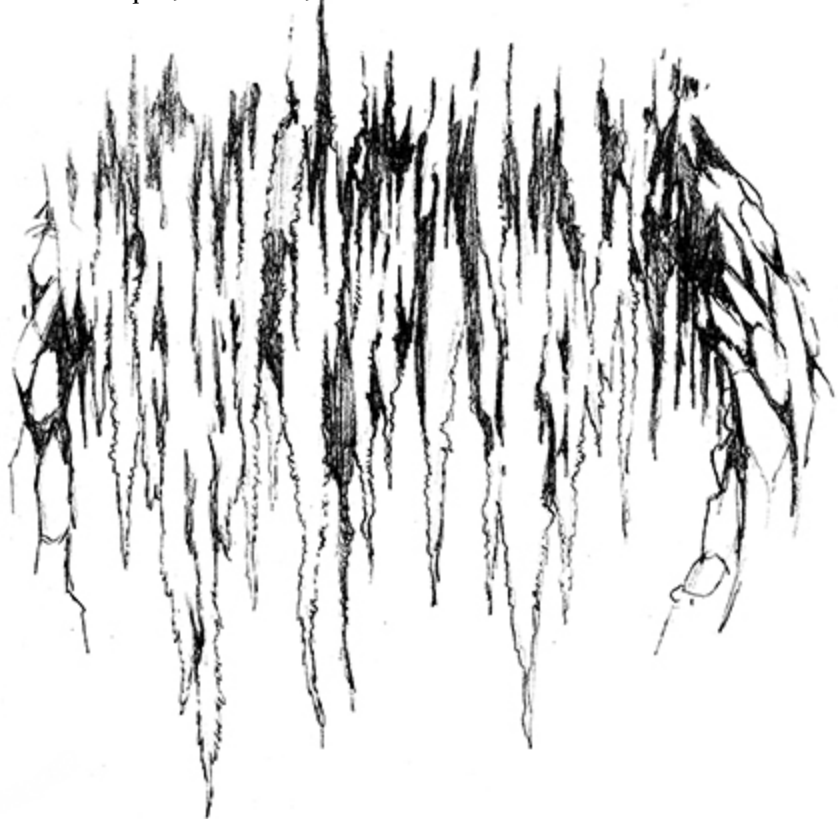




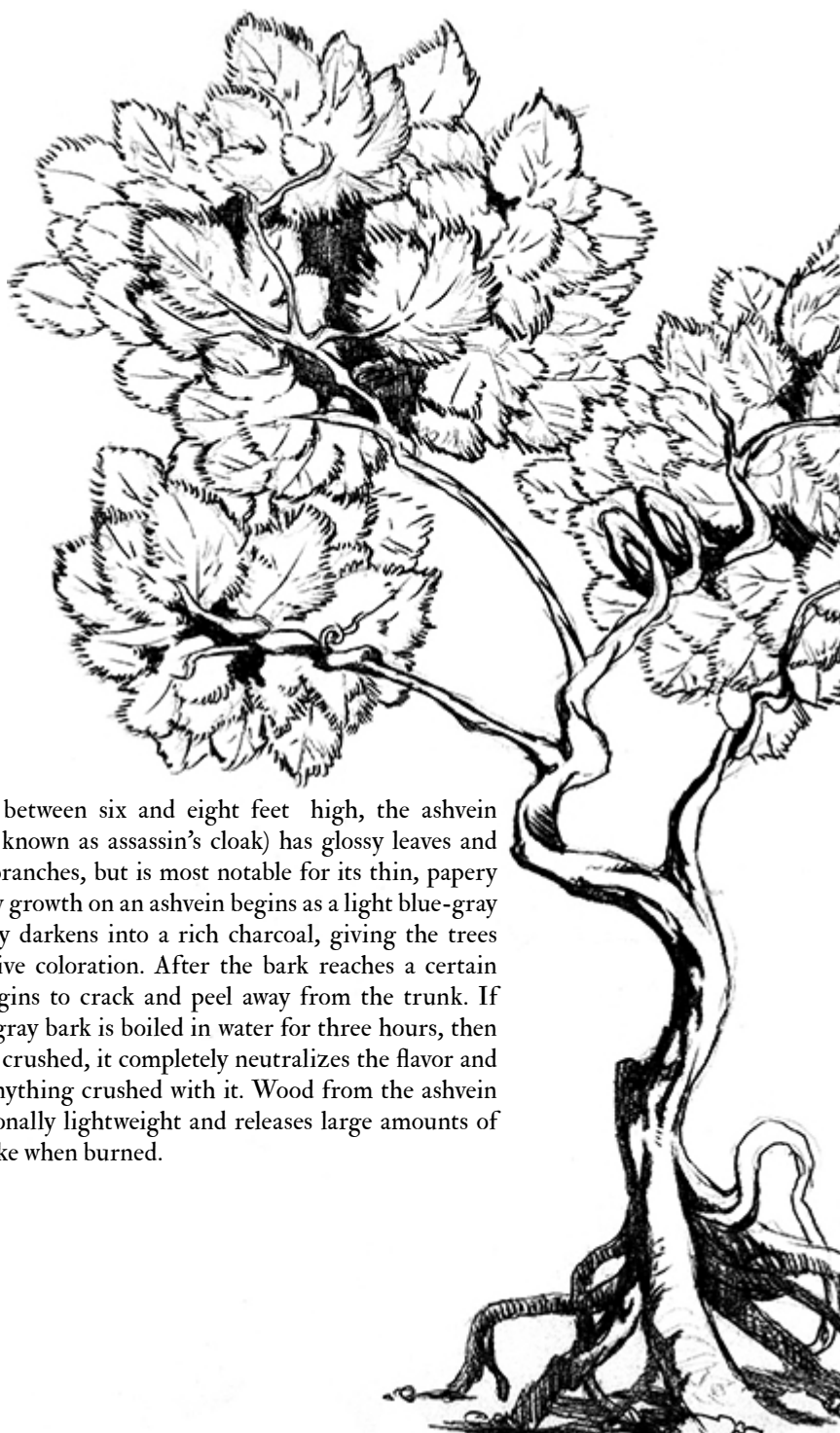
HERBAL

AMBERMOSS

Ambermoss, also known as ginger beard, is a great toxic rarity of a plant that grows in isolated locations on Hot Springs Island. It clings to vertical stone surfaces, where it can trail downward in a distinctive, triangular shape, resembling a long orange beard. The plant often grows above doorways and archways where it can hang and move freely. The texture of ambermoss looks and feels like a fine cotton velvet, but great care should be taken to avoid touching it with bare skin, as the moss secretes a translucent orange liquid of exceptional toxicity. The effects of the poison begin to take effect in as little as fifteen minutes, and can have vastly different effects on two different people touching the same spot on the plant. Once a person has been poisoned by ambermoss, they will experience the same reaction in any subsequent encounters. Some of the effects recorded so far include blindness, aural hallucinations (commonly buzzing or a deep, repetitive “wub wub wub”), amnesia, agoraphobia, hypersensitivity to touch, and reverse kleptomania. Though the effects are temporary, they can last up to four hours. It is said that the liquid, toxic or not, functions as an incredible lubricant.



ASHVEIN TREE



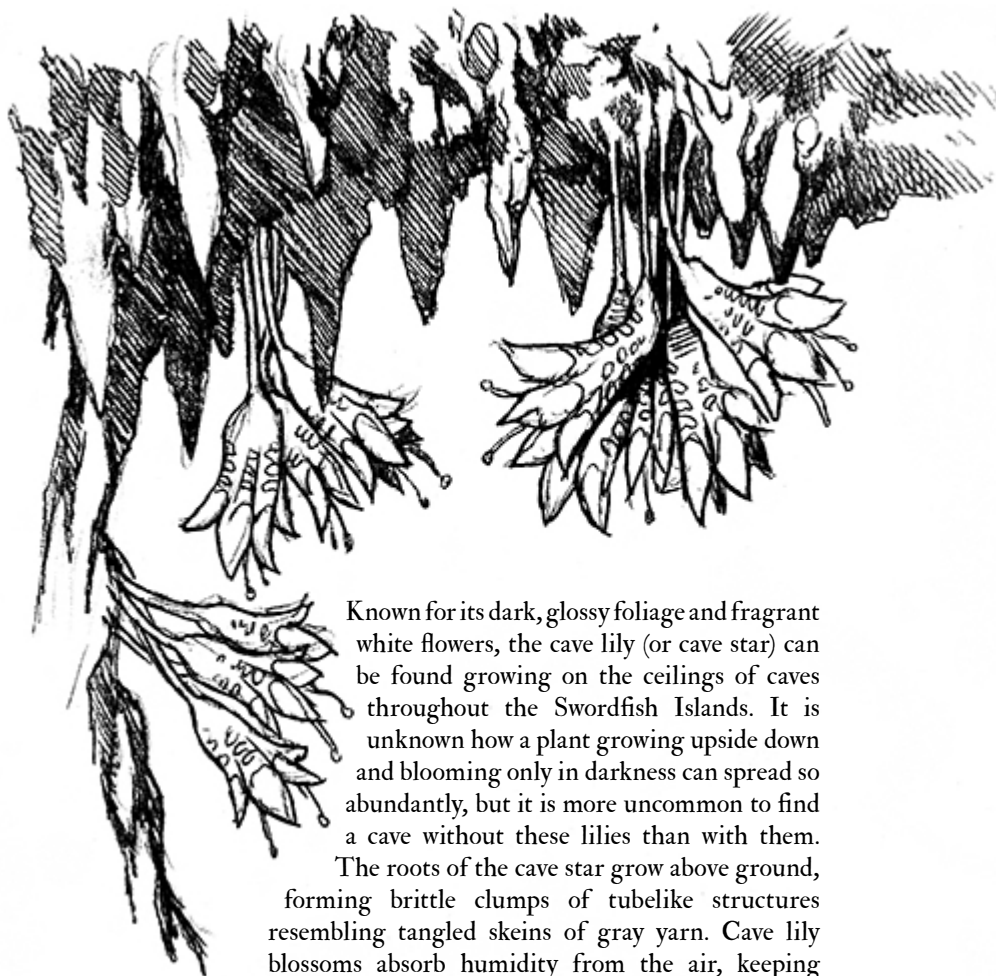
Standing between six and eight feet high, the ashvein tree (also known as assassin's cloak) has glossy leaves and twisting branches, but is most notable for its thin, papery bark. New growth on an ashvein begins as a light blue-gray that slowly darkens into a rich charcoal, giving the trees a distinctive coloration. After the bark reaches a certain age, it begins to crack and peel away from the trunk. If the dark-gray bark is boiled in water for three hours, then dried and crushed, it completely neutralizes the flavor and odor of anything crushed with it. Wood from the ashvein is exceptionally lightweight and releases large amounts of acrid smoke when burned.

CACHUGA PEPPER



Pronounced *ka-hoo-gah*, and sometimes called ‘magma bites’ or ‘lava bursters,’ cachuga peppers can be found only on Hot Springs Island. Vaguely pyramidal-shaped woody bushes with profuse foliage bear clusters of small, fragrant yellow flowers that bloom continually in the island’s tropical climes. Those flowers eventually give way to two-to-four inch fiery peppers of a marbled red-orange hue, which hang from the bush by thick, green veinlike structures. Cachuga peppers are exceptionally spicy and flavorful, rivaling the heat and potency of even the peppers of the blindfire vine. The leathery flesh of these peppers can be mashed into a paste, then shaped and dried into chips. It also makes a flavorful yet nonspicy paper-like wrapping, pairing nicely with raw fish. The peppers dry well, retaining their fire and flavor for exceptional periods of time. Their seeds can be ground into a powder that causes severe eye and skin irritation.

CAVE LILY

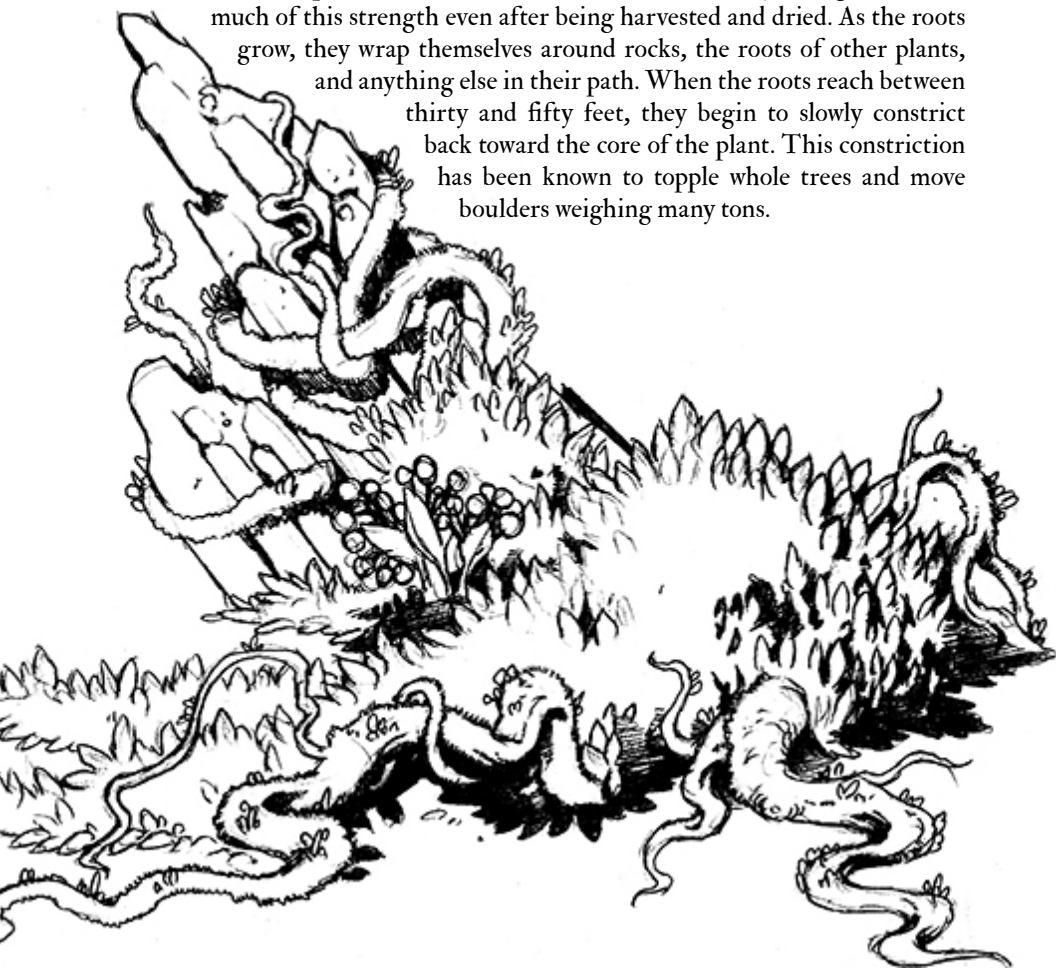


Known for its dark, glossy foliage and fragrant white flowers, the cave lily (or cave star) can be found growing on the ceilings of caves throughout the Swordfish Islands. It is unknown how a plant growing upside down and blooming only in darkness can spread so abundantly, but it is more uncommon to find a cave without these lilies than with them.

The roots of the cave star grow above ground, forming brittle clumps of tubelike structures resembling tangled skeins of gray yarn. Cave lily blossoms absorb humidity from the air, keeping the caves in which they are found surprisingly cool and pleasant. It is said that if a drop of nectar falls naturally from the bloom of a cave lily and is caught upon the tongue, it will grant visions of the past or future.

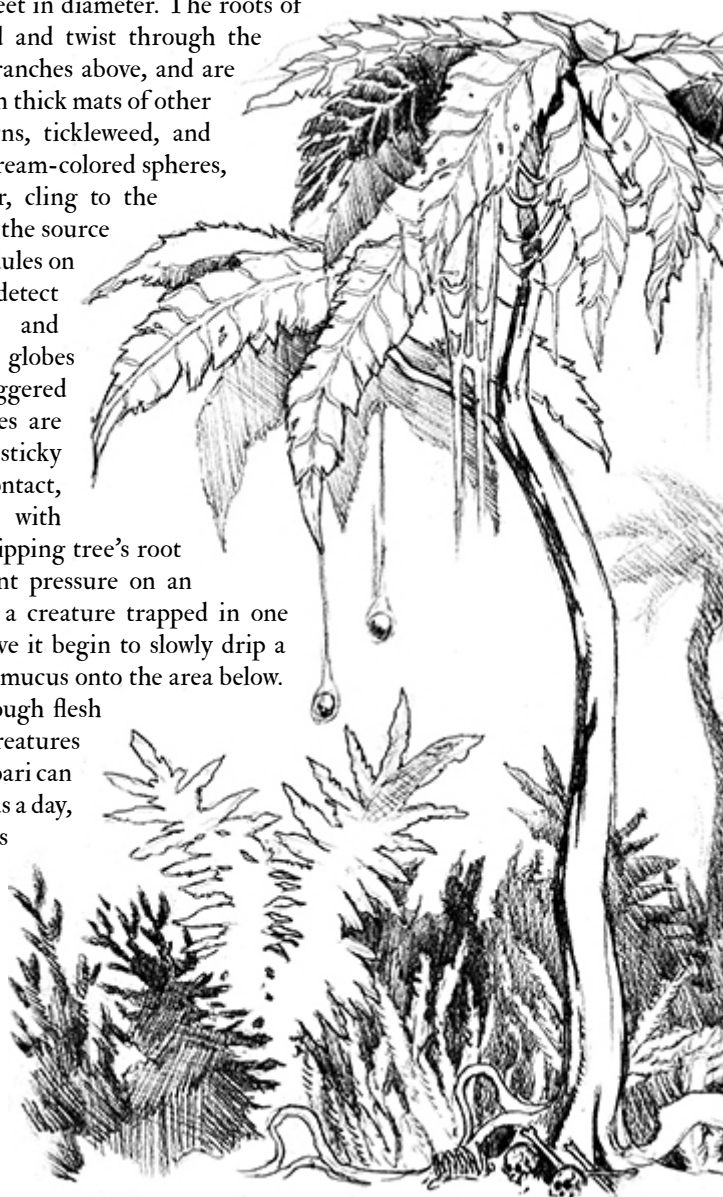
CONSTRUCTOR VINE

Instead of growing up to seek the light, the constrictor vine spreads out across the ground as a thick mat of small, glossy leaves. The plant blooms occasionally with unremarkable clusters of small green flowers, which give way to yellow berries favored by birds and small animals. While the leaf mat of the constrictor vine rarely reaches more than ten feet in diameter, its root system can stretch as far as fifty feet. The fibrous roots of a constrictor vine resemble the pale hair of a drowned woman, are incredibly strong, and retain much of this strength even after being harvested and dried. As the roots grow, they wrap themselves around rocks, the roots of other plants, and anything else in their path. When the roots reach between thirty and fifty feet, they begin to slowly constrict back toward the core of the plant. This constriction has been known to topple whole trees and move boulders weighing many tons.



DRIPPING TREE

The dripping tree has dark-brown bark, large leathery leaves, and grows as tall as thirty feet. Its branches grow only from the very top of the trunk and spread out almost horizontally, much like the cap of a mushroom, to shade an area ten to twenty feet in diameter. The roots of a dripping tree spread and twist through the ground as far as the branches above, and are almost always covered in thick mats of other vegetation such as ferns, tickleweed, and jellymoss. Numerous cream-colored spheres, ten inches in diameter, cling to the tree's branches and are the source of its name. Special nodules on the roots of the tree detect movement, warmth, and pressure, causing the globes directly above the triggered area to fall. The globes are filled with a viscous, sticky mucus and burst on contact, causing creatures hit with them to stick to the dripping tree's root clusters. When constant pressure on an area of roots suggests a creature trapped in one spot, the branches above it begin to slowly drip a sticky, acidic, digestive mucus onto the area below. This mucus melts through flesh like butter. Smaller creatures such as lemurs and tabibari can be dissolved in as little as a day, while larger creatures and humanoids may take up to seventy-two hours to be broken down into nutrients.



EMBER CORAL

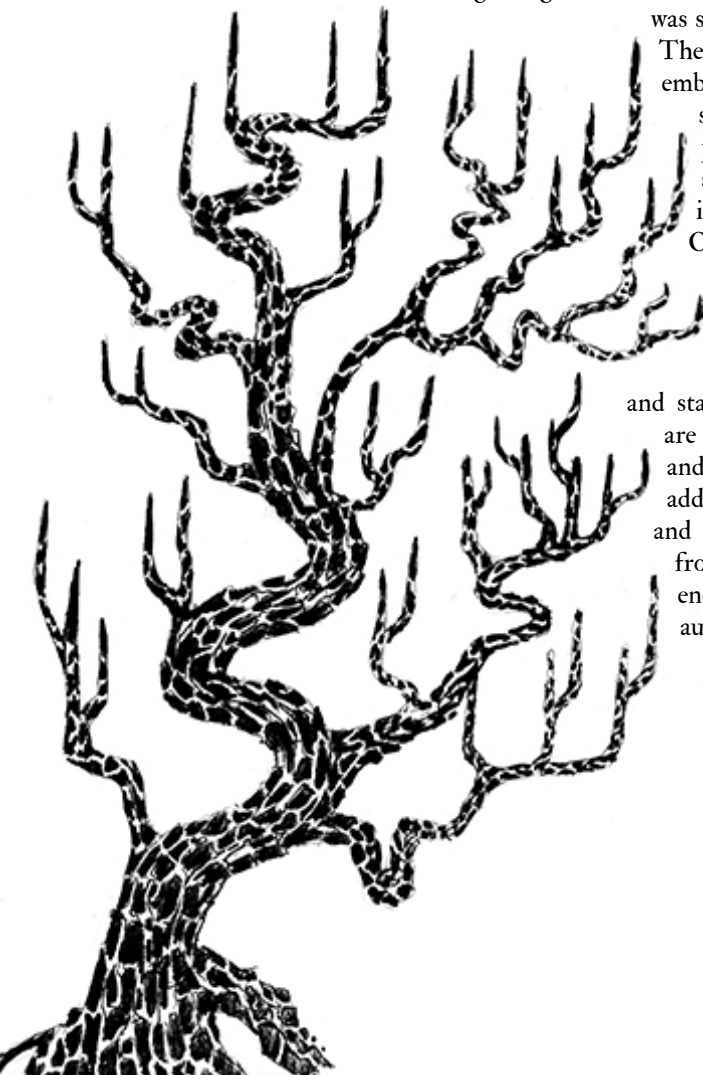
Growing as tall as seven feet, ember coral possesses an otherworldliness that is undeniable. Its forking, treelike branches resemble many of the larger corals dredged up from the Shorken Reef on their way to become jewelry for Banuvish nobility. But unlike those watery corals of pale yellow and deep pink, ember coral grows on land and resembles a cooling lava flow. Though cool to the touch, its branches of ashen black are split with a myriad of cracks that pulse and glow with the unquenchable reds and golds of a blacksmith's forge. The coral typically grows in cave systems near thermal activity, and was long thought to be a natural volcanic growth until it

was successfully transplanted.

The dull black "bark" of ember coral is as dense and strong as steel, and if properly harvested and shaped, it can maintain its soft glow indefinitely.

One foot of properly treated ember coral produces illumination equivalent to a single beeswax candle. Rods

and staves crafted of the stuff are prized by wizards and warriors alike. For in addition to physical strength and light, objects made from ember coral can be enchanted to powerfully augment fire-based magic.



FLINT MOSS

A dark-gray moss dotted with flecks of rust-brown, flint moss is commonly found in areas of thermal activity or piles of scree. The moss requires fire to spread its spores, and it will ignite from even the smallest spark. A three-inch cube of flint moss burns for three to four hours, and puts off a flame comparable to a normal-sized campfire. Flint moss growing on piles of rubble or loose rock is often dangerous, as friction from shifting stones can cause the rust-colored flecks to produce sparks, turning what appeared to be a moss-covered mound of debris into a raging inferno.



HIDDEN HIBISCUS

A large, woody flowering shrub, the hidden hibiscus grows from six to eight feet high, and as much as ten feet wide. The blooms of the hibiscus are large (easily the size of a human hand), plentiful, and many colored. Bloom colors are typically red with yellow ribs, or pink with dark-red ribs, but some sages claim the blooms have thousands of different color combinations and variations. If a hidden hibiscus is threatened, or detects rapid movement nearby, any blooms on the bush immediately change their color to drab greens and browns, and the entire plant appears to wilt and wither. Skilled alchemists use the roots of the hidden hibiscus to amplify creations that aid in natural camouflage. However, the blooms of the hibiscus are its true prize, as they can be used to dramatically increase both physical speed and mental acuity for short periods of time. Only brightly colored blooms can be used for this purpose, and once a hidden hibiscus changes the color of its blooms, they never change back.



It is said that when a representative of the Martel Company brought the first samples of jelly moss—often called ogre snot—back to Banuvo College and its School of Mysteries, it nearly caused a riot among academics. The resident sages were unable to conclusively determine if the clump of purple-gray tube-like structures, smelling a bit like rotten pears, was a plant or a fungus. The faculty became divided. Sides were taken, venomous rhetoric was exchanged, and long-standing friendships were laid to waste. Then, at the very peak of what became known as “The Semester of Slime,” Professor Smithwick inadvertently discovered a use for the stuff when he sat down on a sample and his robe became fused to his wooden chair. It was known that jelly moss becomes messy and sticky when crushed, but despite all the arguments and investigation, no one had realized that the goo would create an almost instant, permanent bond of incredible strength with wood. The battle of classification has since transformed into a full-blown war between the blacksmiths guild and the carpenters guild over the future of nails. Jelly moss can sell for a small fortune to the right individuals, but in areas where the blacksmiths guild’s influence is felt, possession can be punishable by death.



Juxi Root

A lumpy, tuberous root that some swear grows to resemble a pig, juxi root is prized by the culinarily conscious. Eaten raw, this tuber has a crisp, sweet flavor, but chefs the world over dry it and grind it into a fine powder used to spice and flavor foods, much like cinnamon. Juxi root grows bright-red trumpet-shaped flowers, and is common throughout the Swordfish Islands.



PYGMY KING FLOWER

The pygmy king flower, or green ribs, produces a conical, flowerlike structure from a base of eight to ten fat, fluid-filled leaves that resemble a broken rib cage. This 'flower' is usually one foot in diameter, two feet tall, and always brightly colored, most commonly as solid orange or blue with yellow spots. Nectar fills at least half of each basin-shaped flower, and releases a sweet, sugary fragrance when exposed to sunlight. Small creatures and large insects are attracted to this smell, but upon entering the flower, they are trapped by its slippery walls and slowly digested. When a pygmy king flower finishes digesting a meal or becomes overfilled (as after a heavy rain), the flower tilts to dump its contents onto the jungle floor before slowly righting itself once more. The tiny mold men from the Isle of Blooms prize the pygmy king flower, using them as hats that denote a sort of crude tribal status.

The succulent rib-shaped leaves at the base of the plant can be mashed into a salve that is an excellent treatment for major burns and minor lacerations.



QUICKWEED

Quickweed grows as a series of short, flat, silvery leaf blades along a single root runner, and is so named because it completes its entire life cycle in a single week. A living growing end and a decaying dying end are clearly visible on each root runner, and with patient observation, it is possible to watch the root grow and die in real time. Grass always grows in a single direction along a quickweed's root, causing entire fields of quickweed to migrate around islands like a wave. Alchemists prize the plant, as it amplifies concoctions related to time, speed, and travel.



RAINBOW PETALS



Rainbow petals, also known as color spikes, grow as a stout, relatively straight stem with triangular green leaves, and reach a height of four to eight feet. Many four-petaled flowers grow at the top of this stem, beneath a colorful but deadly terminal spike that is twelve to sixteen inches high. The flowers of the rainbow petal can appear in any color, and individual petals can even show different colors on the same flower. The petals are thick, fleshy, and surprisingly nutritious. They are frequently boiled into a thick and flavorful porridge, or dried and used in place of bread crumbs or cornmeal on fried food. If eaten raw, a single spike of rainbow petals can sustain a normal-sized human for a full day.

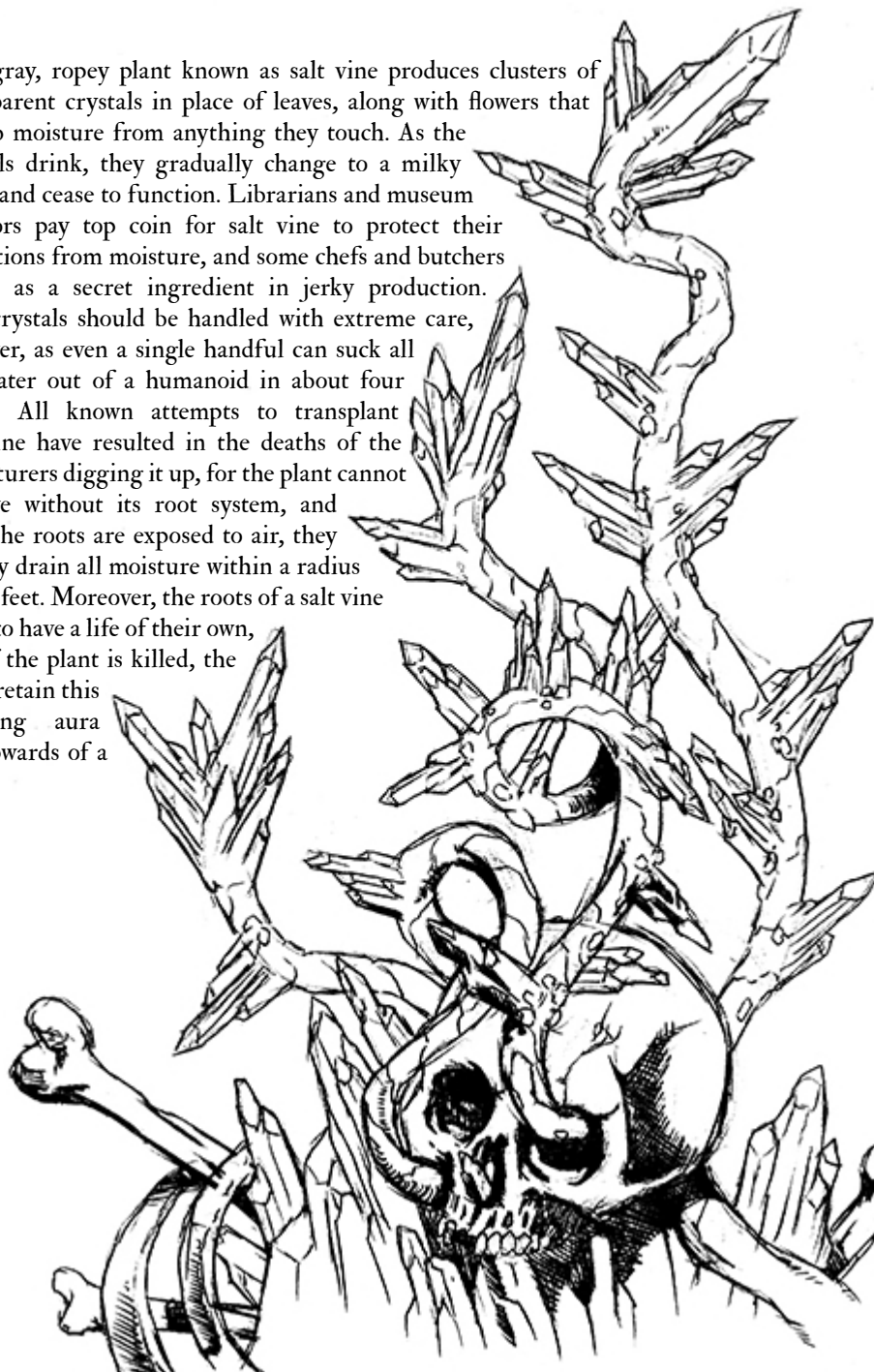
REDGOLD'S FEATHERS

Redgold's feathers grow in small, tight clusters of burnished, copper-colored, feather-shaped fronds near areas of thermal activity. The plant is impervious to heat, and some claim to have even seen it undergo instantaneous growth when exposed to direct flame. If its leaves are broken or crushed, they give off an acerbic odor potent enough to wake a person from unconsciousness (even magical), or to immediately recover from being dazed or disoriented. If the feathers are crushed and combined with sulphur and the essence of a naturally fiery creature, an alchemist can create a nontoxic mixture that glows a bright orange for thirty-six to forty-eight hours—even after being consumed and digested.



SALT VINE

The gray, ropey plant known as salt vine produces clusters of transparent crystals in place of leaves, along with flowers that absorb moisture from anything they touch. As the crystals drink, they gradually change to a milky white and cease to function. Librarians and museum curators pay top coin for salt vine to protect their collections from moisture, and some chefs and butchers use it as a secret ingredient in jerky production. The crystals should be handled with extreme care, however, as even a single handful can suck all the water out of a humanoid in about four hours. All known attempts to transplant salt vine have resulted in the deaths of the adventurers digging it up, for the plant cannot survive without its root system, and once the roots are exposed to air, they rapidly drain all moisture within a radius of ten feet. Moreover, the roots of a salt vine seem to have a life of their own, and if the plant is killed, the roots retain this draining aura for upwards of a week.



SHADOW LILY

With black stems and petals of dark purple laced in black veins, the shadow lily was long considered a phantasm, ill omen, or trick of the mind. Before being picked, these lilies can only be seen indirectly, or in fleeting glimpses from the corner of the eye. Should a person be lucky enough to catch a more direct view, the flower will appear to disintegrate and blow away on an ethereal wind. The only specimens ever recorded being picked were, in every case, picked by accident. In the first known incident, a young thief was kicked down a hill by a woman he sought to woo. When the lengthy tumble deposited him at the hill's base, the thief found the woman's position on the matter made clear—and a shadow lily in his hand. A freshly picked shadow lily glows with a faint black aura for several days, and during this time, consuming its pollen enables one to see in the dark. A single shadow lily confers twenty-four to forty-eight hours of vision in areas of darkness.



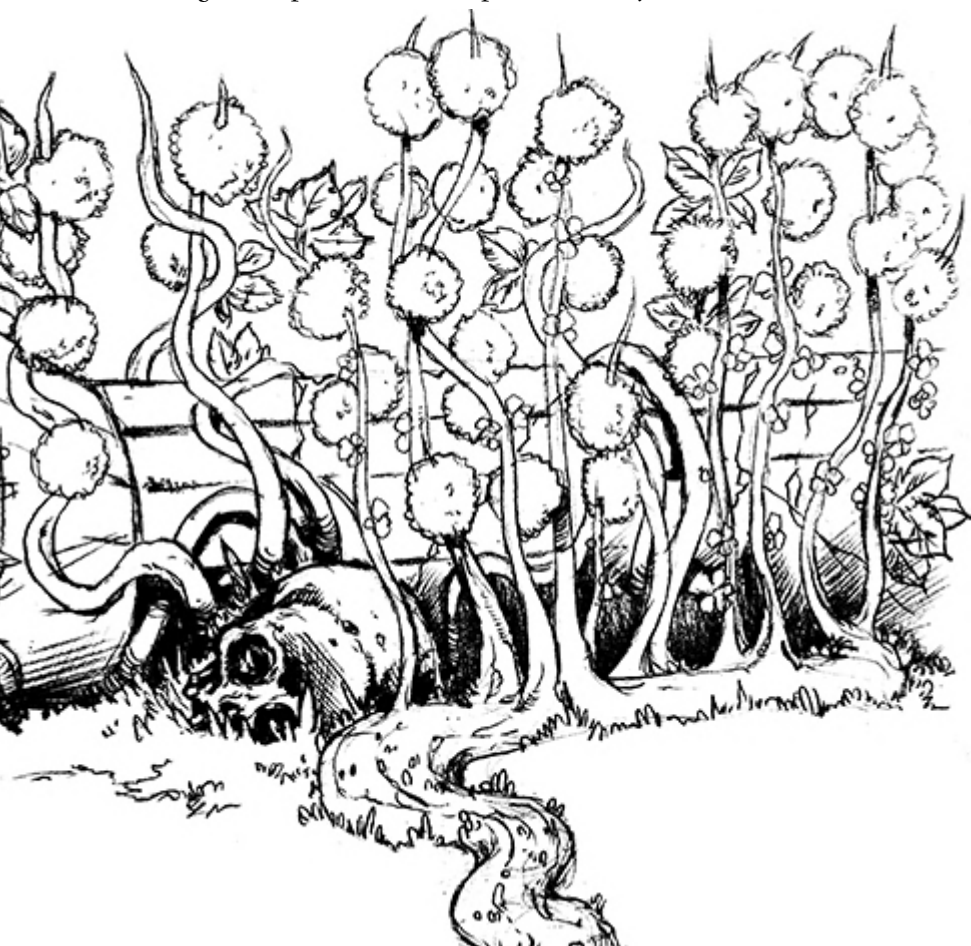
SIPOPA

The flowering bush known as sipopa grows in profusion throughout the Swordfish Islands. Its foliage is a green so dark it is often mistaken for black, and its thorny, woody branches terminate in upward-facing spike-like points. The bushes commonly grow to a size of three to five feet in diameter, but can sprawl even farther if planted next to a sturdy structure they can climb. It blooms continually in the tropical climes, presenting fuzzy flowers of five to eight vibrant red-orange petals. Once pollinated, a flower will grow a seed pod beneath its petals, similar to that of an opium poppy. The pod contains thousands of tiny black seeds encased in marbled globules of translucent orange, which float in a yellow nectar. The seed pod eventually becomes so full that the seeds and nectar dribble and ooze from between the petals. Both the Goa and Kiru lizardmen harvest the upward pointing branches of sipopa bushes and break them into fibers for their textiles using specialized wooden rollers. Some believe sipopa is the flower depicted throughout the elven ruins, but this speculation is as yet unconfirmed, and the elves' actual usage of this or any other plants native to these islands remains unknown.



SLEEPING IVY

This woody vine is a true climber, often reaching thirty to forty feet in length, with golden spade-shaped leaves growing in fan-shaped clusters of three or five. The blooms of sleeping ivy are blue-violet colored tufts covered in an extremely fine yellow powder. A rash of tiny, fluid-filled blisters form on the skin one to four hours after any contact with a tuft. Despite its angry appearance, the inflamed area is not painful and does not itch, but instead tingles numbly. After becoming exposed to sleeping ivy, a victim will become more lethargic and harder to wake from sleep. At first, the lethargy brought on by exposure can be so slight as to be unnoticeable, but it increases in intensity each day it goes untreated. On the seventh day of untreated exposure, the victim falls asleep quite peacefully—and never wakes again. To treat sleeping ivy, the inflamed area must be bathed in alcohol. The higher the proof, the more rapid the recovery.



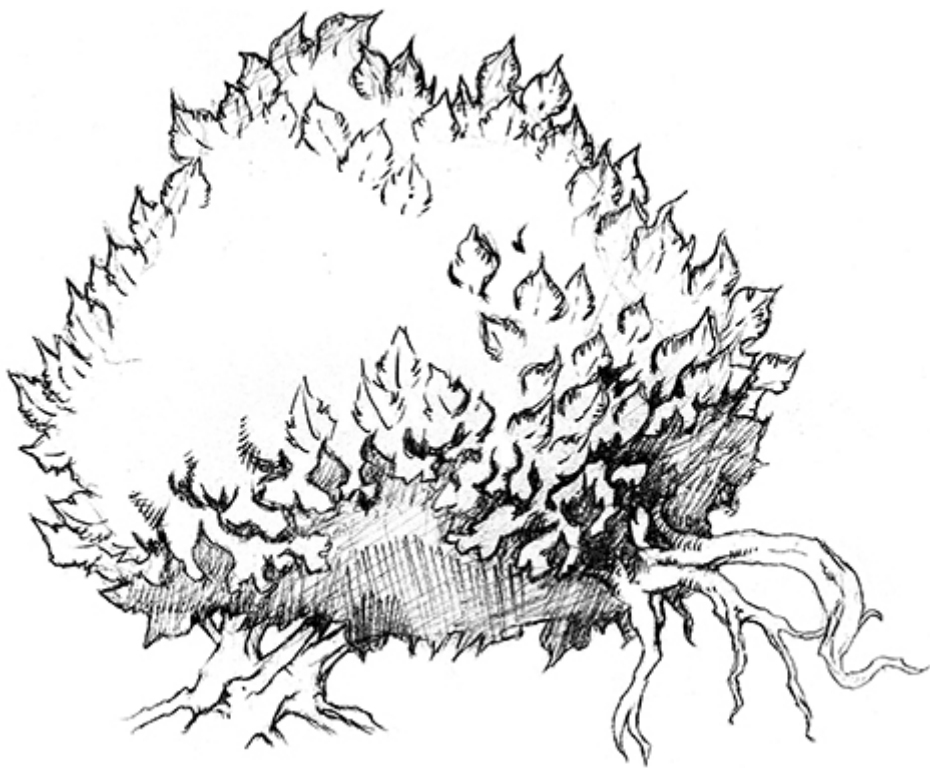
SNAPPING GRASS

Snapping grass grows as a clump or tuft of dark-green dagger-shaped leaves four to six inches tall. Six to twelve stalks, each eight to ten inches high, grow from the center of this cluster. At the top of each stalk sit a pair of hinged, shovel-shaped, bright-fuchsia leaves rimmed in spikes. These stalks sway constantly, as if moved by a gentle breeze. It is unclear how snapping grass hunts, but the moving stalks are able to bend, lunge, and snap up small creatures with exceptional accuracy. Though this plant subsists almost entirely on a diet of small vermin and birds, some adventurers have reported clumps of snapping grass lunging at shiny or sparkling objects such as rings and gems.



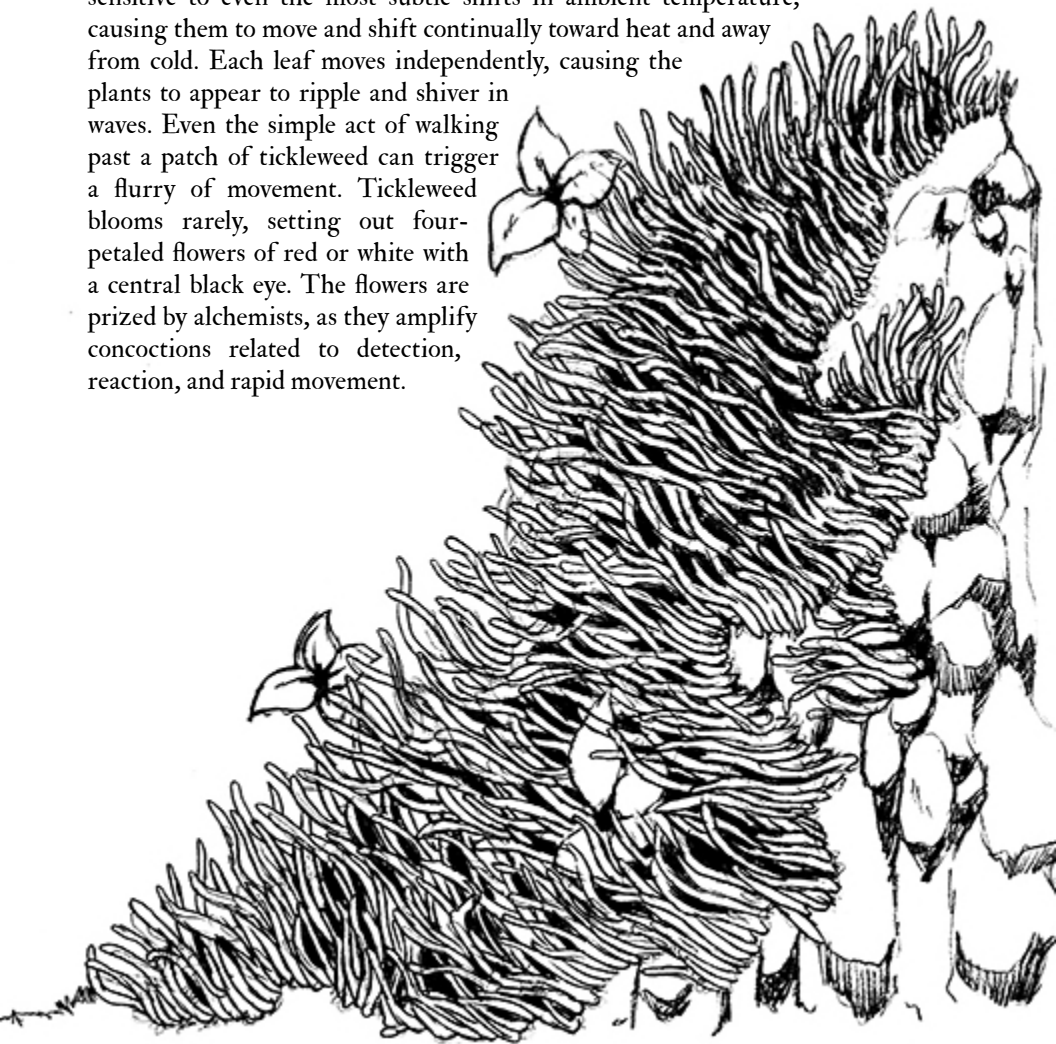
SPIDERBUSH

One of the most curious plants on the Swordfish Islands, the spiderbush is a small shrub, rarely growing larger than two feet in diameter, with waxy, light-green leaves and an exposed woody root system. Tiny blue and white flowers develop on the tips of its branches, blooming year-round. If a spiderbush does not receive sunlight for a twenty-four hour period, it uses its root system to waddle across the ground in search of light. However, these stubby makeshift legs combine with uneven jungle ground to cause spiderbushes to often lose their balance and tumble when they move. Due to their ambulatory nature and need for direct sunlight, spiderbushes naturally cluster together in clearings or along the tree line of an island's shore. Periods of extended rainfall have been known to trigger migrations of hundreds or even thousands of spiderbushes, shuffling and tumbling through the jungle in search of sunlight.



TICKLEWEED

Tickleweed grows as a thick, grasslike carpet of cylindrical dark-green leaf blades, three to four inches in length. However, unlike normal grasses, it prefers to grow on nearly vertical surfaces, and will even thrive in dark places, assuming access to ample moisture. The cylindrical leaf blades are highly sensitive to even the most subtle shifts in ambient temperature, causing them to move and shift continually toward heat and away from cold. Each leaf moves independently, causing the plants to appear to ripple and shiver in waves. Even the simple act of walking past a patch of tickleweed can trigger a flurry of movement. Tickleweed blooms rarely, setting out four-petaled flowers of red or white with a central black eye. The flowers are prized by alchemists, as they amplify concoctions related to detection, reaction, and rapid movement.



WAX TREE

Wax Trees have large, fuzzy, almost-white leaves that grow in bunches at the ends of twisted, dark-brown woody branches one to three inches thick. While most commonly growing to a height of two to three feet, some wax

trees have been known to grow as

large as eight feet tall. A

shallow and spreading root

system robs nearby plants

of food and moisture,

causing these trees to

be found with few

other neighbors,

even in areas of dense

vegetation. Broken,

branches ooze a

viscous translucent

purple fluid that smells

vaguely of citrus. This fluid

burns cleanly and evenly,

making it a good alternative

to beeswax, and alchemists

often seek it out as a foundation

for magical glues and thickeners.

Exceptionally skilled alchemists are able

to use this wax to create a putty that

can permanently change the shape and

structure of facial features. A would-be

master of disguise should be cautious

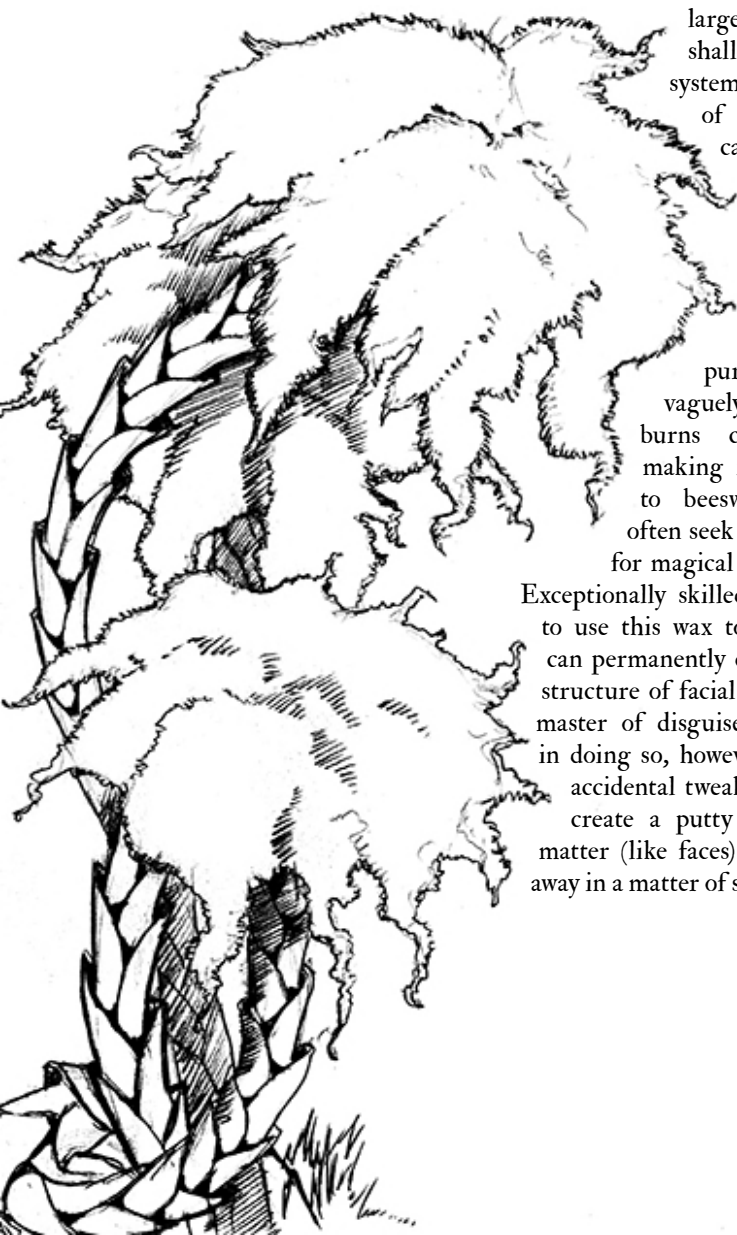
in doing so, however, as minor or even

accidental tweaks to the formula can

create a putty that causes organic

matter (like faces) to dissolve and melt

away in a matter of seconds.



WITCHWEAVE PALM TREE

A single witchweave palm tree is comprised of three to five trunks, each up to one foot in diameter, which grow in tight clusters and can reach twenty-five to fifty feet in height. The fronds of a mature witchweave grow approximately three feet long before splitting into seven to ten pale-green leaves whose drooping, fibrous tips grow for another two to three feet. Numerous white fibers resembling hair appear in the splits of the leaf tips to give the witchweave its name. These leaves are prized by the lizardmen natives of the Swordfish Islands, who harvest, dry, and process them into rope and rough cloth. The witchweave blooms with small yellow flowers that give way to oblong red fruit about the size of a human thumb. If the fruits are dried, wrapped in fresh green witchweave leaves, and then burned, a deep blue smoke with a sweet, musky odor is produced. This smoke acts as a potent anesthetic, and the lizardmen are known to fill tents and lodges with it for medicinal and spiritual purposes. It is rumored that the fruits can be refined even further to create healing salves and unguents, but if this is true, the secrets of doing so are highly guarded.





BESTIARY

ASTRAL SPINNER

Astral spinners are spider-like creatures that appear to be made of brightly polished silver metal, and which stand on long spindly legs. A spinner's enlarged thorax contains a glowing, liquid-filled sphere of red, blue, or purple, with blue being the most common. Their webbing is made of pure silver and coated in translucent sticky gel, and the spinners weave it into intricate geometric shapes and patterns.



SIZE: Eight to twelve inches long

DIET: Sustained by their host

SOCIAL: Spinners are normally found in a hive of up to twenty creatures.

HABITAT: Unknown

DEN: Although astral spinners weave their webs in the material realm, they dwell in astral space, creating a hive on the back of the ghostly host creature that spawned them.

COMBAT: After spinning a web of sufficient size and intricacy, spinners return to the astral plane and wait. When the hive senses a disturbance, one to four spinners appear and investigate. If a creature is stuck to the web, those scouts attempt to goad it into becoming completely trapped and immobile. Once they determine the creature poses no threat, the scouts summon the rest of the hive to fully wrap it in preparation for consumption. Sections of a body wrapped in their silver webbing appear transparent as they phase into the astral. The webbing can be cut away by normal weapons until the body has been fully wrapped, at which point, only magical weapons can sever the transparent bonds. When the target is completely wrapped, it becomes fully astral. The spinners then return to the astral plane and their host creature begins to feed, sucking the fluids from the squirming, helpless victim. After all its bodily fluids have been drained, the desiccated corpse is returned to the material world and the webbing begins to disintegrate.

USEFUL PARTS: Glowing gemlike spheres, webbing (actual silver)

RUMOR: It is rumored that the webbing can be melted and forged into weapons capable of cutting silver cords.

“There it is—the mother lode of silver. Wait. What are you doing? No. No! Don’t burn it!”

GIANT BAT

With large black wings and soft brown or gray fur, the giant bats of the Swordfish Islands are known for both their immense size and for the way flames reflect off their eyes. Instead of causing a bat's eyes to shine, firelight—and especially torchlight—reflects hypnotically as dancing flames in deep pools of black, pulsing in time with the bat's wings. A pinkish snout with large nostrils protrudes from a bat's fuzzy face, above a pointed jaw made for ripping strips of flesh off large creatures. Because of their size, the echolocation employed by giant bats sounds more like barking than screeching, often causing adventurers to think the cave ahead is filled with large dogs.

NICKNAME: Cave hounds

SIZE: Four to five feet tall, with a ten- to fifteen-foot wingspan

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Cave hounds typically live in groups of about a dozen bats. However, colony size is limited only by the availability of food, and colonies numbering in the hundreds have been reported.

HABITAT: Jungle (Heavy, Mountainous), Village

DEN: Though they prefer caverns or hollow trees, these creatures can also be found in ruined buildings or areas of jungle that remain dark throughout the day.

COMBAT: Cave hounds hunt in groups of two to four, harrying potential prey with swooping attacks aimed at the eyes. After a few passes, the bats disengage from combat and fly away. If the prey appeared weak, they return in fifteen to twenty minutes with the whole colony to attack en masse. Full colonies of cave hounds have been known to strip adult humanoids to bones in as little as ten minutes.

USEFUL PARTS: Ears, guano, wings

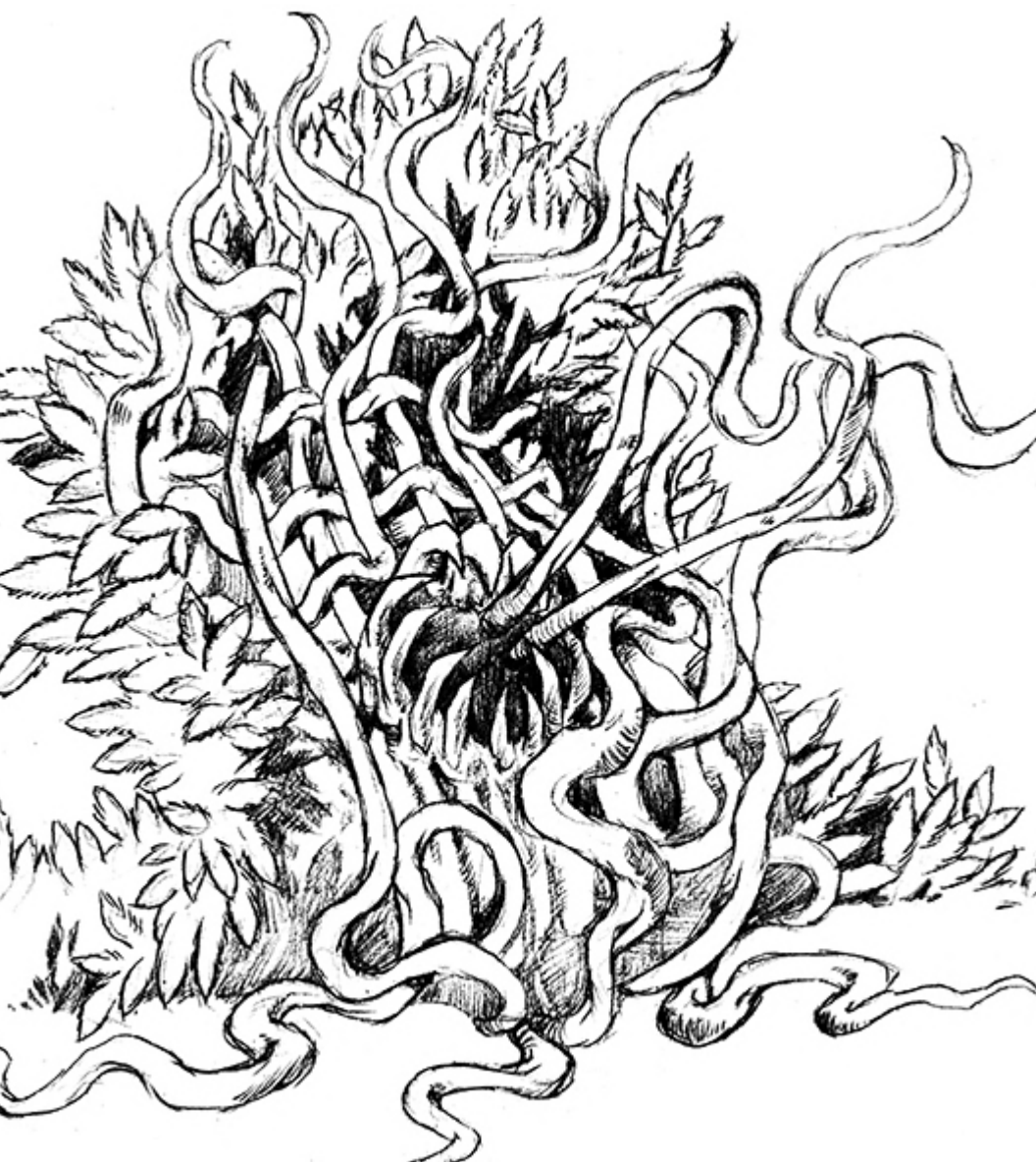
RUMOR: Because cave hounds seem to bark and have been seen panting with lolling tongues, some believe they were bred long ago from actual dogs.



“Sure, there’s a kingdom’s worth of guano in the old lava tubes, but I don’t wanna get eaten by cave hounds, and you’re already the king of bullshit. You really want the batshit crown, too?”

BLINDFIRE CARPET

Resembling a mat of feathery leaves, vines, red flowers, and orange peppers, blindfire carpets would be a beautiful and luxurious ground cover if only they didn't eat people. These carpets ripple in waves as they hunt throughout the jungle, but can stay still for days as they digest their food. A toothed maw on the underside of the carpet contains two shorter vines that wrap and pull prey directly inside.



SIZE: Maw three to ten feet in diameter; carpet of woven vines up to twenty feet in diameter

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary

HABITAT: Jungle (Heavy, Mountainous)

DEN: Blindfire carpets are usually found in areas of shade to part sun.

COMBAT: A blindfire carpet fights like an avalanche crossed with an octopus. It makes no more noise than the wind in the trees, typically moving to position itself in front of prey once it senses it. The carpet then rises up and simultaneously attempts to grab, constrict, smother, and consume its target. The plants that make up the blindfire carpet can slowly regrow damaged portions, and are most effectively killed by targeting the maw.

USEFUL PARTS: Peppers

SPECIAL: Blindfire peppers are flavorful and spicy, and a number of cook-offs and festivals have sprung up in Swordfish Bay that celebrate or make use of them. The more creatures a blindfire vine or blindfire carpet kills, the spicier and more prized its peppers become, especially around festival time.

RUMOR: Some say blindfire carpets are jungle spirits that use foliage as a temporary body, and which slaughter those who cut down trees.

“Step lively. In all my years of tracking on the mainland, I’ve never seen the jungle come alive to envelop someone. But here, that happens.”

BLINDFIRE VINE

Feathery leaves cover the core of the blindfire vine, disguising a circular maw ringed with long teeth used to chew prey. About a dozen vines, all dotted with red flowers and orange peppers, snake out from the central cluster. The ends of some vines widen into diamond-shaped leaflike structures whose underside is covered in barbs, helping the plant grasp its prey.

SIZE: Maw three to five feet in diameter; vines twenty feet and longer

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary

HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Ruins

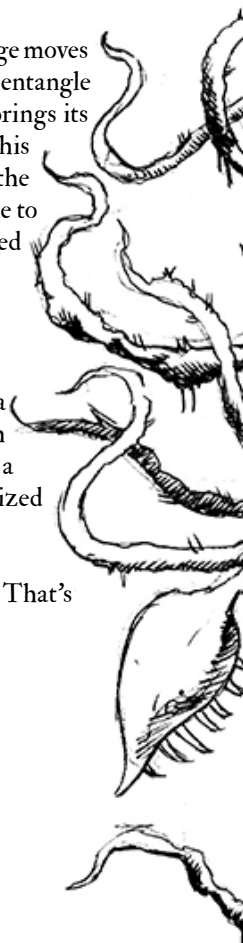
DEN: Blindfire vines are always found somewhere their vines can dangle downward, including trees, cliff sides and crumbling ruins.

COMBAT: A blindfire vine waits passively until something large moves one of its tendrils, at which point it lashes out, seeking to entangle and constrict the thing causing the disturbance. The plant brings its diamond-tipped vines to bear, helping to hold and crush this potential prey. Only when the victim stops struggling does the vine raise it to its dripping maw to feed. Blindfire vines are able to slowly regrow cut or damaged vines, and are most easily killed by targeting the maw.

USEFUL PARTS: Peppers

SPECIAL: Blindfire peppers are flavorful and spicy, and a number of cook-offs and festivals have sprung up in Swordfish Bay that celebrate or make use of them. The more creatures a blindfire vine or blindfire carpet kills, the spicier and more prized its peppers become, especially around festival time.

RUMOR: Deep beneath each blindfire vine is a pool of lava. That's why the peppers are so hot and the plant is so angry.

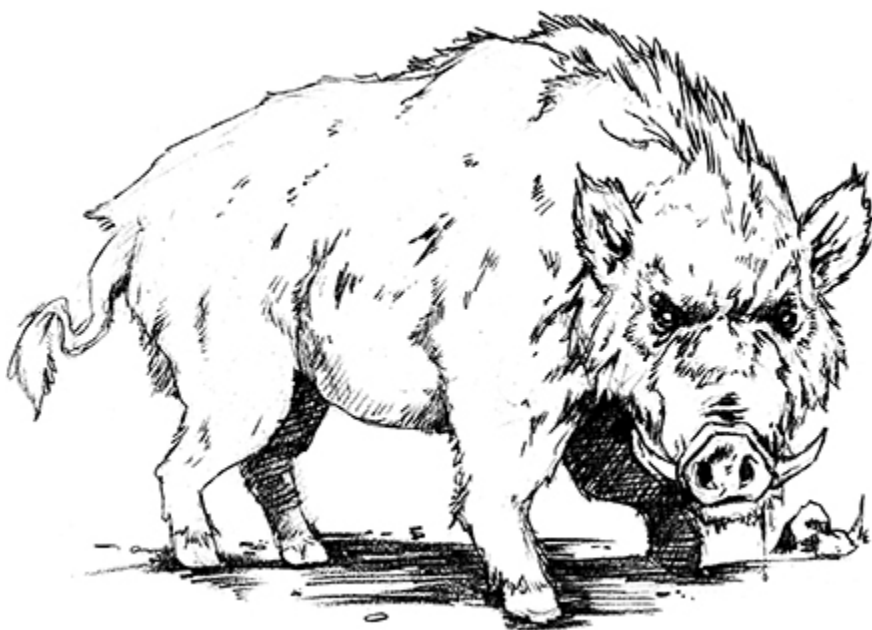


“Sunlight or soil? Ha! That flavor is death. Tasty, tasty death.”



BOAR

The compact bodies of the boars of the Swordfish Islands are covered in dense fur and wiry bristles. They are usually black with speckles of gray and white, or a dark brown with light-brown striping. As boars age, the tusks of both males and females grow larger, and the ridge of bristles along a boar's back changes colors. Brown boars develop a rusty-orange mohawk-like ridge of bristles, while black boars develop a white ridge.



NICKNAME: Island hog, jungle lunch, lunch

SIZE: Three to six feet long, and two to four feet tall at the shoulder

DIET: Omnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary by day; sleep in families of about a dozen

HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Ruins, Village

DEN: Boar families move around the islands frequently, digging shallow indentations into soft ground each night to sleep as a group.

COMBAT: Boars usually avoid combat unless provoked, startled, or cornered. Even then, they aim to wound their attackers and flee. They might charge, particularly as a family group, and when cornered, they will bite, kick, and swipe with their tusks.

USEFUL PARTS: Hide, meat, tusks

RUMOR: Boar hides from Hot Springs Island are flame retardant, and can absorb most fire-based attacks.

“We’d been forced outta camp and were on the run for a few days. Starving like the dickens till we stumbled upon some jungle lunch caught in a blindfire vine. Roasting that boar with a few peppers was the best meal I’ve had in my life.”

DIRE BOAR

Thick matted fur covers this monstrosity of a boar, whose humped back and massive legs help support a pair of truly gigantic tusks. Those tusks grow constantly, and a dire boar's territory can be easily identified by the damaged trees, rocks, and cliff faces that have been ripped up by its efforts to control the growth. Even after death, the tusks of a dire boar can grow another one to two feet if left attached to its skull.

NICKNAME: Canniboar

SIZE: Fifteen to thirty feet long, and nine to fifteen feet tall at the shoulder

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary, with group mating displays twice a year

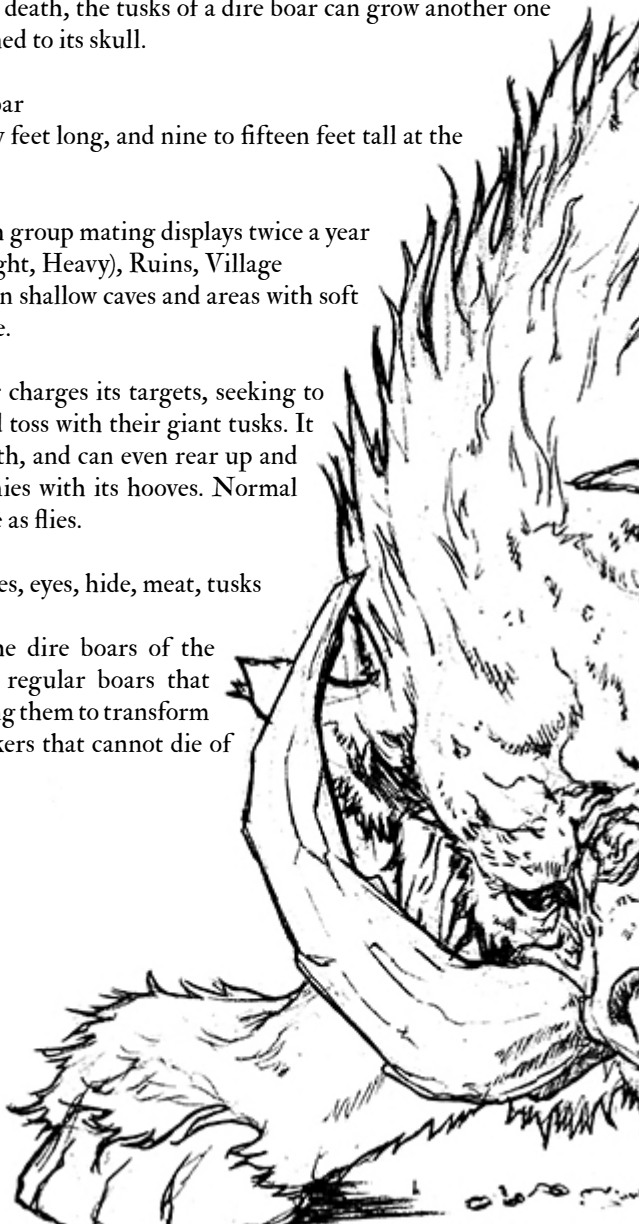
HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy), Ruins, Village

DEN: Dire boars lair in shallow caves and areas with soft dirt and plenty of shade.

COMBAT: A dire boar charges its targets, seeking to trample, or to gore and toss with their giant tusks. It bites with its foul mouth, and can even rear up and attempt to crush enemies with its hooves. Normal arrows are to their hide as flies.

USEFUL PARTS: Bones, eyes, hide, meat, tusks

RUMOR: Some say the dire boars of the Swordfish Islands are regular boars that turned cannibal, causing them to transform into monstrous berserkers that cannot die of natural causes.



“There’s a group of monkeys on the southern island that enchant boars to giant sizes, then sling spears as they ride them around.”



BOLTFORAGER

Brick-red feathers covered in light-orange dust cause boltforagers to stand out against tropical blue skies, so these carrion birds rarely take wing in broad daylight. They hunt most frequently from skies painted by sunrise or sunset, letting their wings blend in with the pinks and oranges, and allowing them to drop down like a bolt from the darkening sky. A bony yellow ridge protrudes in a long spike over a boltforager's beak, and the feathers covering its head resemble a furry mohawk from a distance. The birds stink of death, and their feathers emit clouds of dust with each flap of their wings.



SIZE: Two to three feet tall, with a four- to five-foot wingspan

DIET: Carrion

SOCIAL: Flocks of six to twelve

HABITAT: Volcano, Volcanic, Village

DEN: Boltforagers build large nests of broken branches atop trees, cliff sides, or ruins.

COMBAT: Just because boltforagers only eat dead, rotted creatures, doesn't mean they don't help make them that way. A boltforager attempts to impale targets with its horn or rake with its talons, flapping its wings vigorously during these attacks to create clouds of orange dust before flying away. This dust contains the eggs of a species of carnivorous worm, which hatch three to five days after being inhaled by a warm-blooded creature. Once inside a host, the worms bore into the victim's bones, consuming the juicy marrow within. This process kills the creature and causes the worms to produce an abundance of foul-smelling gas that bubbles out of the corpse, attracting the boltforagers back to their decaying meal.

USEFUL PARTS: Beak and horn, dust, meat

RUMOR: Boltforagers have a sense of smell so acute that they can identify a scent from as much as a mile away. Some believe that the dust they shed can be used in special rituals to reanimate corpses.

“You seen the carvings in the ruins to the west? Those elves worshiped some dark bitch of a goddess, and those horned birds are the poor damn fools who failed her.”

BROADBACK

These giant gray horned creatures resemble huge, misshapen lizards, but their quick eyes seem to shine with intelligence. Their hind legs are shorter than their front legs, which are jointed and splayed to support a wide chest and back. A broadback's hide is thick and scaly, and features spikes on the creature's back, sides, and joints. The scales covering its underside grow as dense plates capable of absorbing significant damage.



SIZE: Twenty to thirty feet tall at the shoulder

DIET: Herbivore

SOCIAL: Solitary; mating every three years. The deep, hornlike bellowing of broadbacks during mating season can be heard for miles, and goes on for hours as they trek toward one another through the jungle. Broadbacks have even been known to swim between islands at such times.

HABITAT: Jungle (Light)

DEN: Broadbacks have no permanent homes, literally falling over on one side to sleep, and crashing through whatever trees or undergrowth are in their way. While sleeping, a broadback's long, purple tongue often hangs out of its mouth, causing passersby to think it is dead.

COMBAT: Only attacking when threatened (a hard feat to accomplish), a broadback hammers foes with its massive forelimbs, its strong bite, or a devastating slam with its bony skull.

USEFUL PARTS: Blood, bones, hide, meat

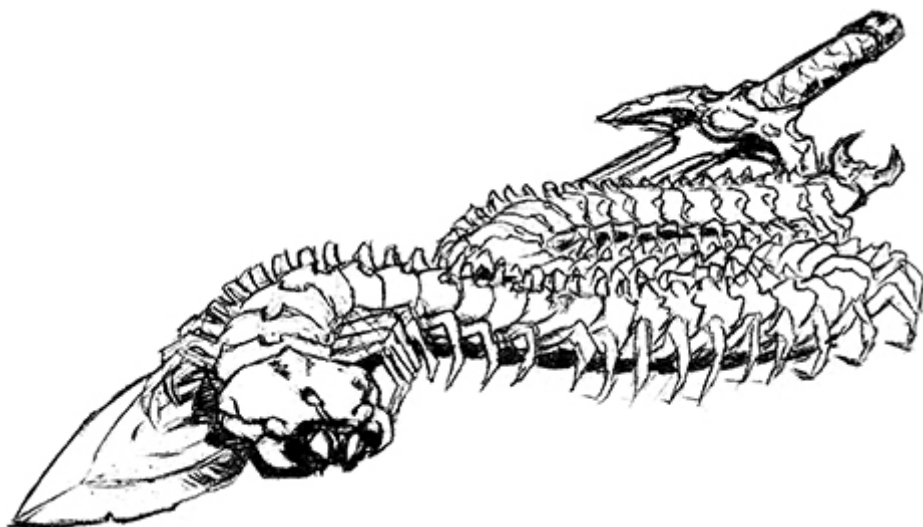
RUMOR: Because young and adolescent broadbacks are so rare, some believe that these creatures are immortal entities, not living beasts.



“Nope, never seen one mad. Everyone talks like they’re big softies. But I say those who make ’em mad just don’t live long enough to say so.”

GIANT CENTIPEDE

Wide and flat, the chitinous giant centipedes of the Swordfish Islands come in three distinct colors: red, yellow, and black. Aside from that variation, these vermin look mostly the same, with snapping mandibles, skittering spiked legs, and a venomous forked tail barb.



“Yeah I seen ’em. Seen ’em puppet around inside dead bodies! I kill any I find, and fuck that skinny cook if he thinks I’ll bring him their corpses so he can make centipede kebabs.”

SIZE: Three to six feet long

DIET: Omnivore

SOCIAL: Groups of two to six

HABITAT: Jungle(Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Volcano, Volcanic, Ruins, Village

DEN: Giant centipedes frequent holes dug into soft soil or formed naturally by rubble, ruins, or jumbled tree roots. They are also frequently found inside large corpses.

COMBAT: Giant centipedes crawl up and over their opponents, snapping with their mandibles and stabbing with their venomous tails. Though each type of centipede has a different venom, all three lead to unconsciousness or paralysis, enabling a centipede to crawl inside its target and consume its organs.

USEFUL PARTS: Legs, venom sacs

RUMOR: Some superstitious people believe these centipedes trap the souls of a victim in the eggs they lay in its corpse.

VENOM



RED: The target's skin begins to itch and feel as if it is on fire. This pain increases in intensity, eventually causing unconsciousness. Blisters appear on the target's flesh, and may release a contact poison variant when popped.

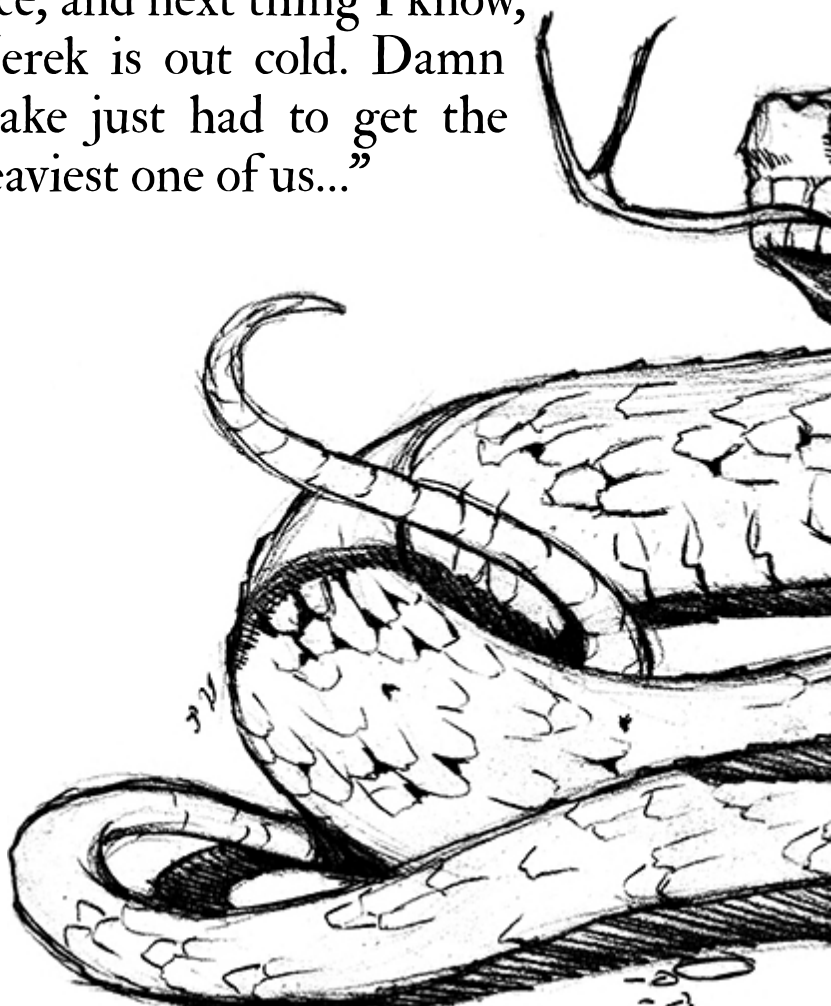
YELLOW: The target begins to lose control of its senses, leading to confusion and ultimately unconsciousness as it experiences effects such as the smell of sound and the sound of rot.

BLACK: The target's limbs become numb and too heavy to lift or move, even as the venom has the opposite effect on the eyelids, keeping them wide open.

COPPERBACK

The scales of this large snake are made of actual copper, displayed as a deep, swirling, blue-green verdigris. Diamond-shaped patterns of bright copper scales shine along its back.

“All I heard was air rushing past my face, and next thing I know, Merek is out cold. Damn snake just had to get the heaviest one of us...”



SIZE: Three to six feet long

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary

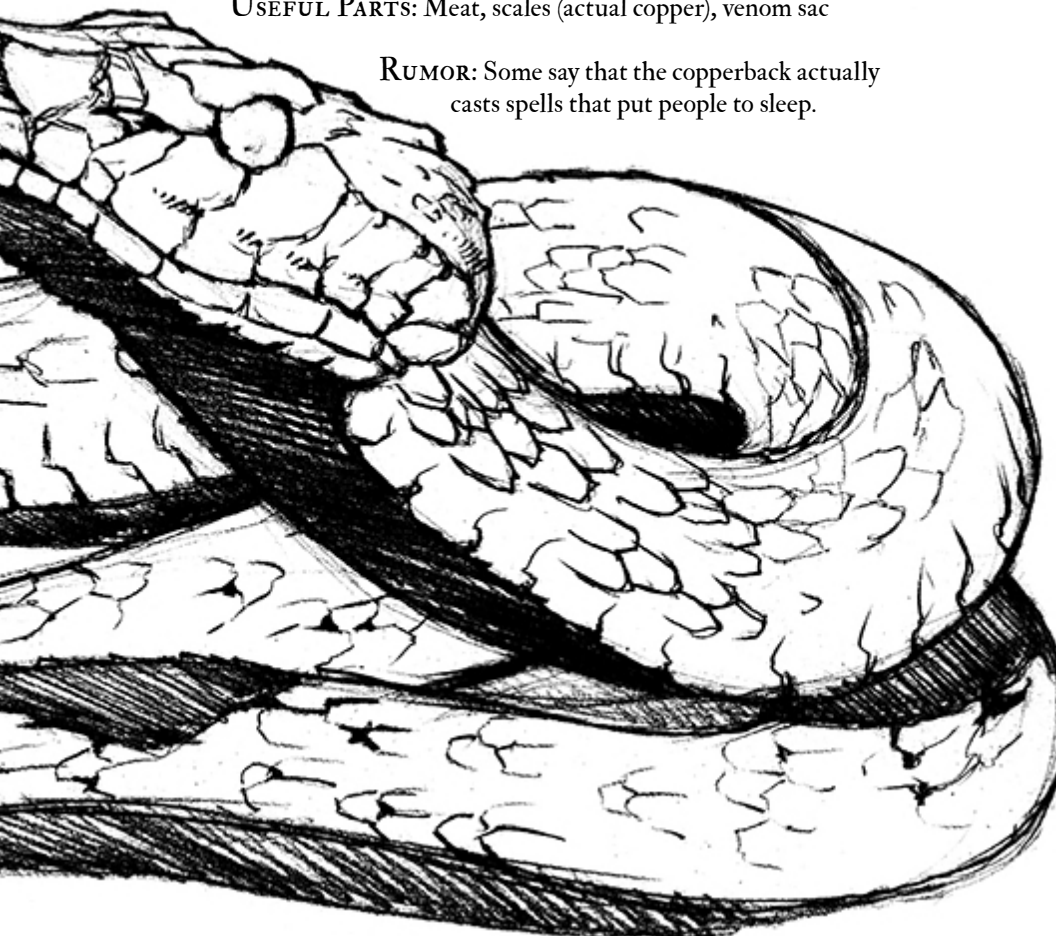
HABITAT: Jungle (Heavy, Mountainous), Village

DEN: Copperbacks are at home on both land and in the water, and they normally nest in areas of lush undergrowth near streams and rivers.

COMBAT: Few things are faster than a copperback on the move, and although it is a large snake, it eats only creatures of a considerably smaller size. If startled by anything larger than it considers food, the copperback bolts from its hiding place, hollow fangs extended, to inject its target with a potent venom. This single strike is lightning fast, and the snake flees immediately after contact. The venom is a powerful sleeping agent, causing an adult human to feel drowsy and fall asleep in as little as ten seconds. The sleeping creature cannot be roused until the slumber is complete, usually after about four hours.

USEFUL PARTS: Meat, scales (actual copper), venom sac

RUMOR: Some say that the copperback actually casts spells that put people to sleep.



COPPERMANE PROWLER

With the body of a large tawny cat and a birdlike head, the coppermane prowler most resembles a wingless gryphon. Its feathered mane is made of actual copper, which rustles musically and arcs with electricity. The creature's splayed, talon-like toes tread softly on jungle ground and rocky crags alike.



SIZE: Nine to eleven feet from beak to tail, and four feet tall at the shoulder

DIET: Carnivore; primarily zip birds

SOCIAL: Solitary; mating once a year before the wet season begins

HABITAT: Jungle (Mountainous)

DEN: Coppermane prowlers build large, soft nests in caves and ruins high in the mountains, with clear views of the lower slopes. They stay in these dens throughout the wet season, as the constant rain causes their manes to become a source of considerable discomfort.

COMBAT: A coppermane prowler stalks its quarry through the jungle like a large cat, waiting for an opportune moment to ambush. In combat, it shakes its mane vigorously to build up an electrical charge that can then be delivered with a bite, allowing it damage, paralyze, or even stop the heart of small creatures. A prowler occasionally swipes with its claws, but its shocking bite is its preferred attack. Several times per day, after building up sufficient charge, a coppermane prowler can teleport to anywhere within fifty feet, leaving a trail of lightning in its wake.

USEFUL PARTS: Beak, feathers (actual copper), heart, hide

RUMOR: A handful of coppermane prowler feathers can allow anyone magically attuned to fly at will.

“They’re like a gryphon, but without the wings. I think that makes them more dangerous. Oh, I guess that and the lightning.”

CORALKIN ANGLER

These slimy bipedal creatures are known mostly through whispered rumors. Anglers are said to be green in color and well armored, with a fishlike tail and large webbed hands and feet, making them incredible swimmers but awkward on land. A coralkin's head resembles a spiked crown and functions much like a rudder. Purple indentations on their shoulders are said to spawn their wriggling babies as clouds of tiny tadpoles.

SIZE: Six to seven feet tall

DIET: Carnivore, preferring swordfish and sharks.

SOCIAL: Solitary but lives with its spawn (which it often eats)

HABITAT: Unknown

DEN: The coralkin piles rubble into igloo-shaped domes that it cements together with a milky substance secreted from holes in its back. This secretion hardens into a rocklike substance resembling limestone.

COMBAT: Coralkin anglers prefer to fight in the water, where they can use their powerful swimming ability to maneuver underneath opponents, then launch those foes up and out of the water. In the caverns where it dwells, the coralkin supposedly prefers to use this launching move where it knows its foe will strike a rock ceiling before falling back into the water. When fighting on land, the angler utilizes a leap attack and a tail sweep, allowing it to then get atop and bite its fallen opponents. Nematocysts found between the teeth of the coralkin inject painful toxins, allowing it to sting like a jellyfish when rending flesh.

USEFUL PARTS: Unknown

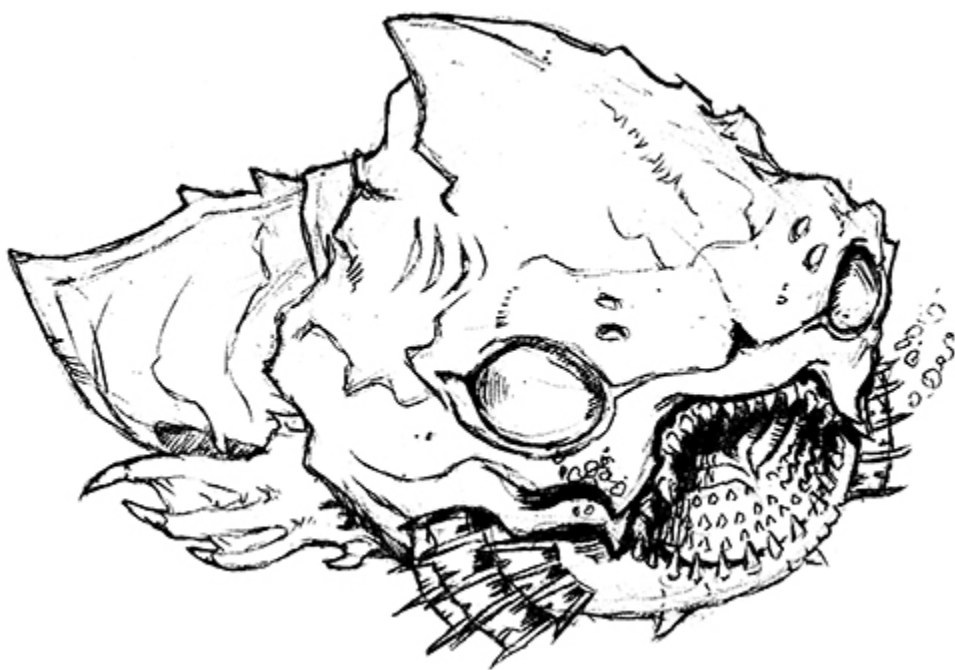
RUMOR: Some say they've seen this "fishman" off the southwest coast of Hot Springs Island.

“The fishman doesn’t speak. It only laughs. Over and over. It paused long enough to bite Todd, though, and that’s when I ran.”



CORALKIN SPAWN

Milky and translucent with large pale-pink eyes, the spawn of the coralkin angler resemble tadpoles more than fish. Their mouths are filled to the brim with small, sharp teeth and stinging nematocysts.



SIZE: Six to twelve inches long

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Spawn gather in schools of a few dozen, and are rarely found alone. Members of each school follow an alpha like chicks follow a hen.

HABITAT: Unknown

DEN: The spawn move constantly and do not sleep.

COMBAT: Coralkin spawn try to eat anything that comes within range of their school, regardless of its size. The nematocysts among their teeth inject a small amount of toxin, causing a tingling sensation that becomes more acute with each bite. If a victim's toxin levels continue to rise, the tingling turns to a burning, and the creature's kidneys and liver begin to fill with fluid until they burst.

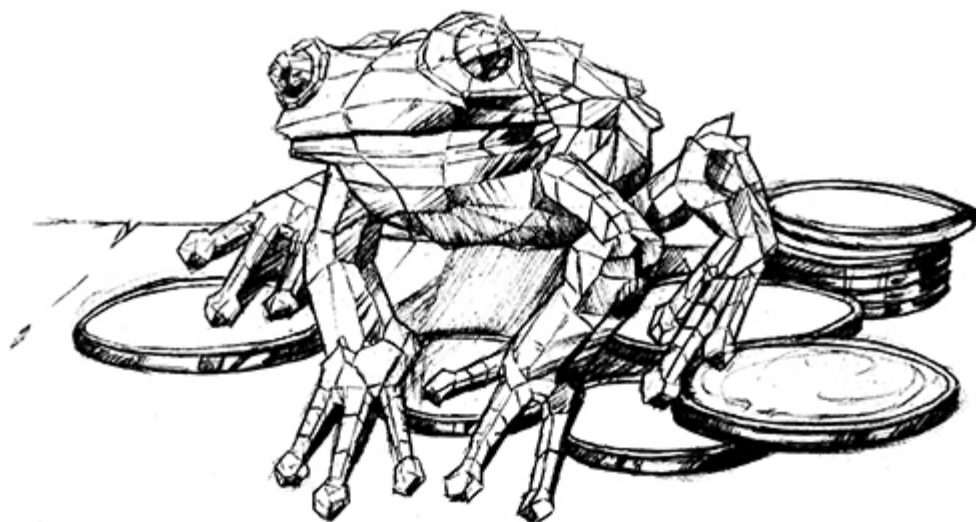
USEFUL PARTS: Unknown

RUMOR: A drunken mage living on the smallest of the Swordfish Islands will pay good coin for live specimens.

“The thing’s entire body was just big pink eyes and teeth. Venomous teeth. There were easily fifteen more in the water with it, too.”

CRYSTAL FROG

Magical constructs capable of reproducing, these tiny frogs created of clear, angular crystal are usually no larger than a human's thumb. They bond with intelligent creatures in a similar fashion to a mundane dog or cat, and a tiny heart beating within each frog changes color to match its owner's mood. Instead of croaking, crystal frogs twitter and chirp like nightingales.



SIZE: One-half inch to six inches long

DIET: None

SOCIAL: Solitary

HABITAT: Jungle (Light), Ruins

DEN: Crystal frogs have no lairs but are frequently found in ruins near a source of water, as they appear to enjoy swimming.

COMBAT: Most non- and semi-intelligent creatures leave crystal frogs alone, as they cannot be eaten. If a frog feels threatened, it simply stops moving until the perceived threat passes.

USEFUL PARTS: The frog itself

SPECIAL: Crystal frogs enjoy being bonded to intelligent creatures that give them attention. If a frog has chosen to stay with a creature and feels well treated, it can heal its owner of one disease, curse, or poison each day by singing a special song in their ear.

RUMOR: Some have reported seeing crystal frogs as large as a human fist. Others believe that even the tiniest of these constructs serve as phylacteries for the wealthiest souls of the long-lost elven race.

“Krom not care if look like stupid gnome toy. Froggie make Krom feel better when sick. All better.”

DUECADRE

Large flightless birds with feathers speckled in browns and grays, the duecadre appear even more stocky and dense than their size suggests. Their massive, scaly legs and beak turn a bright red-orange as they age, and the males possess spectacular yellow tail plumes they flaunt during mating displays. The duecadre's cries of "qwop qwop qwop" boom through the jungle at sunrise each morning, and can be clearly heard up to a mile away.



SIZE: Seven to nine feet tall

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary, grouping to mate twice a year

HABITAT: Jungle (Light), Ruins

DEN: Duecadre prefer to nest in large fern beds with good visibility.

COMBAT: Kicking and clawing, a duecadre makes the most out of its massive legs in combat. Its beak is sharp and strong enough to pierce the hide of a broadback, but it tries to keep its head above the fray during fights. Duecadre are relatively nonaggressive except during mating season and when defending their young, as other duecadre are known to run past nests, snatching eggs and young as quick meals on the go.

USEFUL PARTS: Beak, feathers, feet, liver, meat, sinew

RUMOR: Duecadre are capable of carrying up to five times their weight, and the Night Axe ogres know the secret of training and domesticating them.

“Not all them birds is birds, I tell ya. Some of them is those ogres in disguise. Don’t look at me like that. I mean a magical disguise or something. Stop it! I’m serious!”

FLAYFIEND

A flayfiend's large body is covered in thick, leathery, dark-gray hide and bone-colored spines tipped in red. Four large ivory tusks protrude from its beaked snout, and two colorful frills run along the back of its neck. The frills, usually yellow or red interspersed with splotches of gray, are used by the flayfiend for displays of both mating and aggression. A flayfiend's spines are hollow and covered in tiny barbs, which can cause significant damage to flesh when withdrawn.



SIZE: Twelve feet long and six feet tall at the shoulder

DIET: Carnivore. Flayfiends are so named because they occasionally eat nothing but the skin of their prey, leaving the rest of the body to rot.

SOCIAL: Solitary, coming together to mate twice a year

HABITAT: Jungle (Light), Ruins

DEN: Flayfiends create nests for themselves in areas of dense, thorny vegetation easily identified by a profusion of castoff and broken quills.

COMBAT: Flayfiends are fiercely territorial, and use their considerable bulk to carve trails through the jungle that they walk daily. They prefer to fight on those trails, since they provide ample room to charge and trample their foes. Flayfiends use their tusks to gore and fling their opponents, but they can also rear up for a short time to flail and slam with their forelimbs.

USEFUL PARTS: Hide, meat, quills, tusks

RUMOR: The hide of a flayfiend can keep anyone warm in the coldest weather, and their hollow quills can be honed to a razor edge.

“Yeah, I know it’s covered in quills.
The flaying comes after it makes you a
pincushion. Idiot.”

KUJIBIRD

Kujibirds are large flightless birds with iridescent navy plumage and a naked, golden face and legs. Exposed patches of golden scales are visible on the birds' neck and flanks, and their tail feathers (growing longer on males) are the same golden color.



SIZE: Three feet tall

DIET: Omnivore

SOCIAL: Kujibirds pair and mate for life.

HABITAT: Unknown

DEN: Kujibirds nest in large bowers on the ground, woven from sticks and fern fronds. Males decorate the bowers with piles of small colorful objects such as gems, coins, berries, rocks, and bits of fungus.

COMBAT: Although the kujibird is flightless, it is not without defense. The birds can run through rugged terrain in bursts as fast as twenty-five miles per hour. A special claw on the back of a kujibird's feet secretes a fast-acting paralytic neurotoxin, and the bird's song can inspire fear, sleep, or temporary madness.

USEFUL PARTS: Unknown

RUMOR: Many speculate that the rare kujibird is, in fact, extinct—probably because their tail feathers and scales were pure gold. Others talk of how their hollow bones can be made into exceptional magical instruments.

“Dose kookibirds may be made o’ gold,
but ain’t nobody seen one in da tree
years we been here.”

MUTTERING SERPENT

No one knows what the head of this large serpent actually looks like—as it always appears to be the head of any creature observing it. The muttering serpent's mirrorlike scales shift to match its surroundings, providing it with excellent natural camouflage when not in motion. The serpent secretes an oil with the scent of fresh wood shavings, which allows it to silently glide through its territory.



SIZE: Fifteen to twenty feet long

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary

HABITAT: Jungle (Light), Ruins

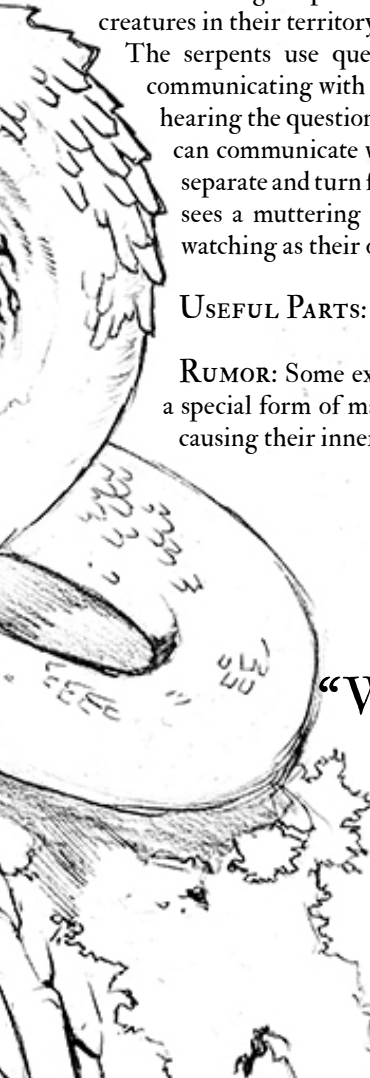
DEN: A muttering serpent carves out a large territory for itself, favoring areas of ruins, and shifts its lair within that territory weekly.

COMBAT: Muttering serpents are extremely territorial, and consider any entry into their domain as an affront—despite the fact that they take great pains to ensure that territory is unmarked. When a serpent detects trespass, it slinks up silently to determine who or what disturbed it. Unintelligent interlopers are eaten immediately, while intelligent creatures are played with. Muttering serpents can read the surface thoughts of intelligent creatures in their territory, and can communicate with them telepathically.

The serpents use questions exclusively and almost constantly when communicating with potential victims, with the target of this barrage hearing the questions as if spoken by their own voice. A single serpent can communicate with up to eight individuals at once, and seeks to separate and turn friends against one another. When a victim finally sees a muttering serpent, they are thus alone with the creature, watching as their own face unhinges its jaw to consume them.

USEFUL PARTS: Blood, head, scales

RUMOR: Some explain away the attacks of a muttering serpent as a special form of madness that strikes those who loot ancient ruins, causing their inner demon to materialize and slay them.



“When death finally comes, the last eyes you want to see are your own.”

OBSIDIAN DIGGER

An obsidian digger is little more than a knot of obsidian chunks held together by an aura of blue light. When digging or active, two arms of swirling obsidian fragments extend from the centralized mass. Although diggers can use these arms to attack, they use them more often to dig, shape, and twist obsidian to their whims.



SIZE: Three inches to three feet in diameter

DIET: None

SOCIAL: Solitary. That said, obsidian diggers will occasionally develop an infatuation for a creature, object, or area, and some have been seen following around a wide variety of both intelligent and unintelligent creatures. When under the effect of an infatuation, a digger carves intricate designs or sculpts whole objects to display its affection.

HABITAT: Jungle (Heavy, Mountainous), Volcano, Volcanic, Village

DEN: Needing neither sleep nor rest, an obsidian digger has no den. But it enjoys being in areas with a high amount of obsidian, which it shapes and polishes like a manicured stone garden.

COMBAT: Diggers tend to be oblivious to anything they are not currently infatuated with, making them very nonaggressive. Since a digger constantly loses and adds obsidian chunks to itself, it is difficult to damage in a traditional sense. If provoked, diggers are capable of flinging shards of razor-sharp obsidian at targets up to one hundred feet away. If the aggressor is in melee range, a digger rakes with its arms or slams its jagged body into the target.

USEFUL PARTS: The digger itself, sculptures

RUMOR: Some say the obsidian diggers' infatuations mark them as wanting to play with other creatures, and that they are actually toys from an ancient civilization. Others say the diggers are capable of creating stones that glow like a torch, even underwater.

“Don’t hold them close. Obsidian diggers are cute until they burrow into your chest. That’s how they got Morty.”

ORANGE SLUDGE

Orange sludges slink and melt through the ruins and dark places of the Swordfish Islands, consuming any creatures in their path. They coat all they touch with translucent orange goo that smells vaguely of grapefruit, and which crystallizes in darkness and evaporates in sunlight. Unlike most other members of the slime family, orange sludge has been known to form parts of itself into twisting humanoid shapes that melt back into the mass as quickly as they form. But though these shapes resemble arms, ribs, and other body parts more than just formless pseudopods, they are always contorted and wrong.



SIZE: Five feet to seven feet in diameter

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary

HABITAT: Ruins

DEN: Most orange sludge dens are little more than dank holes in the ground. But these creatures can sometimes be found in ruins, surrounded by ancient objects beneath inches of orange crystal, and preserved through the ages like insects in amber.

COMBAT: An orange sludge is normally lazy and lethargic, preferring to drop down and envelop prey from above, or to wait inside niches and alcoves so prey can fall into it. Every so often, a sludge is spotted racing maniacally through the jungle with no apparent purpose or direction. These hyperactive sludges are exceptionally aggressive, striking out at and attempting to consume anything that moves. Orange sludges attack using pseudopods ending in shapes that resemble feet, arms, heads, or bones, which are used to slam targets into the ground or off ledges for more leisurely envelopment and consumption. The slime these creatures use in their attacks creates a strong, sticky bond with iron or steel that dulls edges and accelerates rust if not cleaned off in a timely manner. High-proof alcohol works well for this task. Sludges are sometimes covered in growths of ambermoss, adding a level of toxicity to their normal attacks.

USEFUL PARTS: Unknown

RUMOR: Some say that the body parts an orange sludge creates resemble their most recent victim, and that hyperactive sludges only become that way after eating an elf.

“Of course a skin of rum costs more than a skin of water. It’ll clean away the slime, clean away the ivy, and clean away the memories of those soon-to-be dead friends of yours.”

POISON DART FROG

These tiny colored frogs are rarely larger than a thumbnail. Eight varieties can be found in the Swordfish Islands, and are easily differentiated from one another by their bright coloration. Each type secretes a virulent toxin that oozes and crystallizes on its back. A single fleck of this toxin, no larger than a grain of salt, can be sufficient to affect a fully grown humanoid.

SIZE: One-half inch long

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Solitary

HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Ruins, Village

DEN: Poison dart frogs breed wherever shallow water collects on the jungle floor. Some have even been known to live within the bowl-shaped pygmy king flower.

COMBAT: The sticky tongue of a poison dart frog is an amazingly precise gnat catcher, but their poison is their only defense against larger creatures.

USEFUL PARTS: While a pinch of crystallized poison from any type of frog is worth a wagon full of gold, a living frog and the means to care for it would be worth a king's ransom to the right (or perhaps wrong) people.

RUMOR: The blood of a poison dart frog acts as an antidote to its poison.



“I first heard of these frogs from a wild-eyed halfling running through the jungle with an empty jar. I wouldn’t have thought anything of it if he hadn’t been naked.”

POISON



RED: Ingested—The victim’s blood stops coagulating for one week.

BLUE: Ingested/Inhaled—The victim’s lungs fill with fluid, causing suffocation in as little as thirty minutes.

GREEN: Contact—Black fungus begins to grow on and eat the victim’s flesh, killing and consuming a human-sized creature in about six days.

YELLOW: Contact—The victim enters a stupor lasting up to half a day. During this time, they are highly susceptible to suggestion.

ORANGE: Ingested—The victim suffers immediate and uncontrollable vomiting.

WHITE: Ingested—The victim hears and sees static for one to two weeks.

VIOLET: Contact—Violet frogs appear to be covered in tiny stars. When one is touched, the victim astrally projects five to ten feet behind their body for up to twelve hours. Pain and sensitivity are considerably numbed during this period, and the victim is amped up and functioning at maximum efficiency and power.

BLACK: Contact—The victim immediately loses the last hour’s memories.

GIANT RAT

The giant rats of the Swordfish Islands, referred to by many as “the natives,” are muscular, agile, and vicious until their last breaths. Semiopposable thumbs on their front feet make the rats terrific climbers, and they can lightly grasp many objects. Their thick fur ranges in color from brown to black to white to gray. The natives’ eyes shine brightly in the darkness, reflecting and amplifying light—especially torchlight.



NICKNAME: The natives

SIZE: Two feet to four feet long, and one to two feet tall at the shoulder

DIET: Omnivore

SOCIAL: Giant rats are very social, living in colonies as large as three dozen creatures.

HABITAT: Jungle(Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Volcano, Volcanic, Ruins, Village

DEN: The natives live anywhere semidark and mostly dry. Anything left unattended for more than a few days on the islands that could become a lair probably will, including refuse, crates, ships, chests, and barrels.



COMBAT: Giant rats fight to the death no matter how big their opponents are. They use their large claws and teeth in combat, normally attacking any perceived threat as a single biting, swarming mass that seeks to overwhelm and confuse opponents until the rats can reach their foes' vital organs. Like most animals, the natives are typically nonaggressive unless starving or threatened in their home territory.

USEFUL PARTS: Heart, hide, liver, meat

RUMOR: The silver rats grant wishes if you bring them the tails of their rivals.

“Don’t fuck with the natives man. They will always win in the end!”

SHADOW

Humanoid forms of black smoke flitting through the ruins of the Swordfish Islands watch intruders with eyes of white-hot hate. Although their fanged mouths appear to laugh with malice and scream with rage, no one has ever heard a shadow make noise. In light, shadows are as intangible as vapor. But in the darkness of an overhang or beneath the broad, leafy canopy of the jungle, they assume a dark corporeality of powerful muscles, clawed hands, and sharp, pointed teeth.



SIZE: Five to seven feet tall

DIET: None

SOCIAL: Shadows are frequently found in groups of three to five.

HABITAT: Ruins

DEN: Unknown

COMBAT: Shadows often watch their quarry for hours before striking. Seeking to inspire terror and discord by knowingly allowing themselves to be glimpsed from afar, they appear as white, wrathful eyes at the end of ruined hallways. They almost always attack magic users or innately magical creatures first, and can sense them from a distance. Shadows appear to grow stronger and faster when struck by all but the most powerful spells. These creatures are not undead and cannot be turned by pleas to the divine. But light—especially sunlight—renders them incorporeal and unable to touch physical things. Despite this weakness, shadows are never deterred by light sources for long, and they make use of any nearby darkness to thwart the light. After an initial surprise attack, shadows fight like frenzied feral beasts, biting, slashing, rending, and choking their opponents.

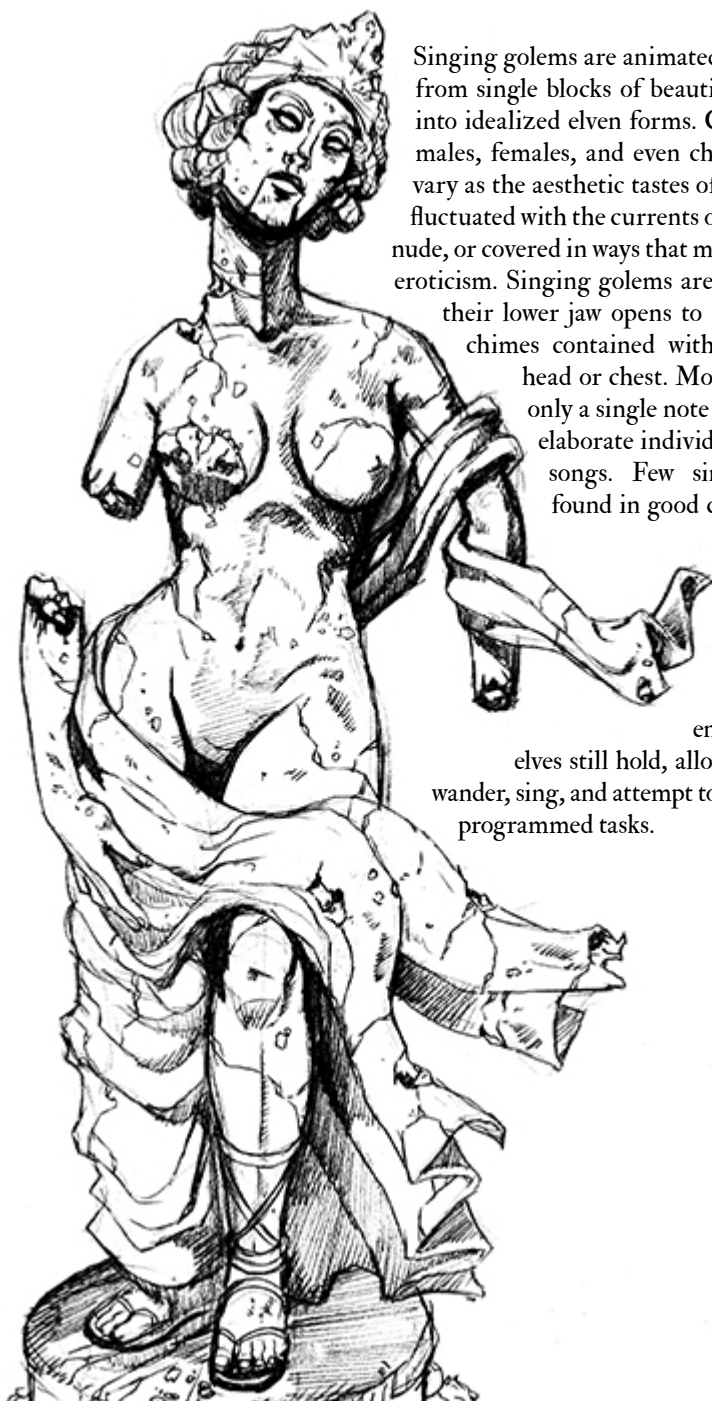
USEFUL PARTS: Unknown

RUMOR: Some say the scorched outlines of humanoids on the walls of many of the ruins of the Swordfish Islands are the origin of these shadows.

“Some say they can cast magic. Some say they can’t, but everyone agrees—they’re hungry for it.”

SINGING GOLEM

Singing golems are animated constructs carved from single blocks of beautiful or exotic stone into idealized elven forms. Carved to resemble males, females, and even children, their styles vary as the aesthetic tastes of their makers once fluctuated with the currents of fashion. Most are nude, or covered in ways that merely enhance their eroticism. Singing golems are so named because their lower jaw opens to sound out magical chimes contained within the construct's head or chest. Most golems can emit only a single note or chord, but some elaborate individuals can sing short songs. Few singing golems are found in good condition. Most are riddled with cracks, or are broken or weathered to the point of being featureless. Yet the original enchantments of the elves still hold, allowing the golems to wander, sing, and attempt to complete their last programmed tasks.



SIZE: Four to seven feet tall

DIET: None

SOCIAL: Solitary, unless originally designed as a set

HABITAT: Jungle (Light), Ruins

DEN: Singing golems require no rest or sleep, but their elven owners often constructed storage rooms for them in their homes. Active golems still attempt to return to these designated areas, even if those sites are ruined, underwater, or otherwise inaccessible.

COMBAT: Singing golems are not equipped or programmed to fight. Purely ornamental servants created to display social status and magical aptitude, most were also specifically programmed to not retaliate to aggression, so that their masters could dispose of them in spectacular ways.

USEFUL PARTS: Chimes, statue or pieces

RUMOR: The elves trapped the souls of criminals in these stone bodies, and they remain trapped in the stone even when it is broken. That's why if you rebuild a singing golem, it'll serve you and follow you around.

“The elves that didn’t kill each other turned to stone. Sometimes you can find them wandering the jungle. Just don’t look into their eyes.”

SPINE DRAGON

Spine dragons are ultradense creatures that weigh several tons. Their eyes sparkle with intelligence and wisdom, but no one has yet successfully communicated with them. Thick, metallic plates of a nondescript color cover their bodies, causing them to resemble natural stone when motionless. Those metallic plates are impervious to all known mundane and magical attacks—making some believe that if spine dragons weren't so ambivalent and docile, they might easily rule the world.



SIZE: Six to fifteen feet long, and two to five feet tall at the shoulder

DIET: Herbivore

SOCIAL: Solitary

HABITAT: Jungle(Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Volcano, Volcanic, Ruins, Village

DEN: Spine dragons do not appear to create dens, merely sleeping wherever they happen to be.

COMBAT: Spine dragons are utterly docile and apparently invulnerable. Disintegration rays cause no more damage to them than a handful of glitter does to the Goblin King. Even natural disasters such as avalanches, meteors, and geysers of lava do little more than slow a spine dragon down or flip it over. Spine dragons dislike cold, however, and if they get too chilly, they will go to sleep until it is warm again.

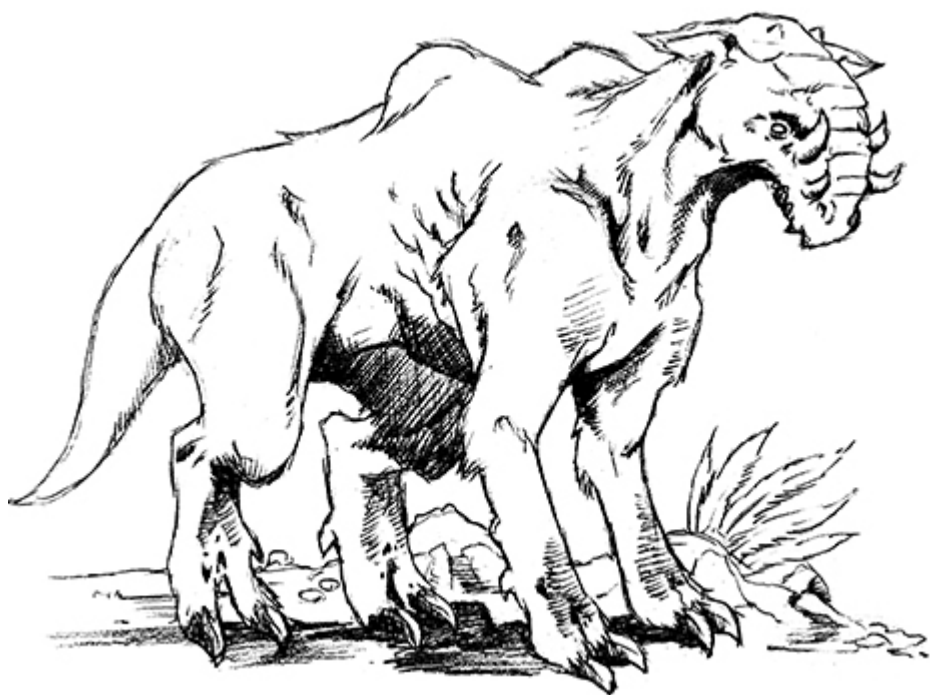
USEFUL PARTS: There are no recorded cases of a spine dragon ever dying, so any uses for their metallic hide remain speculative.

RUMOR: Some say spine dragons are actually quite vicious, and that the only reason they're so well behaved is because they are the pets of a god that sleeps beneath Hot Springs Island. It is said that if that god ever wakes, the spine dragons will kill and destroy everything in their deity's name. Others say that at least ten different trickster gods have tried to provoke a spine dragon but failed. Supposedly, these gods have joined together and are offering a fortune to anyone who can successfully irritate a dragon. Ooze imps are said to know the full terms of this arrangement.

“I once saw a roc pick up a spine dragon, fly high in the sky, and drop it. Week later, I see a spine dragon with a giant feather stuck between two of its plates. I don't think these things can be hurt.”

TABIBARI

Covered in a short coat of coarse brown or gray fur, sometimes set with white spots, the tabibari is a compact, muscular creature. Up to five pairs of horns grow from the beast's broad, bony nose, and no pupil can be seen in its white or yellow eyes.



SIZE: Five to six feet long, and two to three feet tall at the shoulder

DIET: Herbivore

SOCIAL: Tabibari are pack animals with no alpha. They move between packs at will, using those groupings only for security, not dominance. They are capable of shifting their sex in the event of a dramatic population decrease, to ensure the propagation of the next generation. Tabibari calves grow to full size in three months.

HABITAT: Jungle (Light)

DEN: Tabibari sleep openly in the jungle within their packs, and are normally found near running water.

COMBAT: Normally nonaggressive, tabibari do not attack unless threatened or cornered. When they do, they use their mass and their front limbs to slam their enemies. They can also charge and strike with their bone-plated heads or thrash back and forth with their horns, but such moves are normally only used to settle mating disputes with other tabibari.

USEFUL PARTS: Bones, brains, hide, meat

RUMOR: Some say that the tabibari share a consciousness, becoming more intelligent when grouped.

“What are they, anyway? Tiny cows? Big rats? Miniature horses? Or all three?”

VYDERAC MATRON

Composed primarily of quivering birthing sacs and chitinous plates, a vyderac matron most closely resembles a gigantic armored tumor. Matrons are permanently fused to their location by fleshy arterial tubes that weave around the structure supporting their bulk. These tubes swarm with lesser forms of vyderac, and are used to feed the queen and colony. Her great birthing sacs are produced seasonally, sloughing off as each batch of maggots is born. New sacs will form and maggots will be chosen to mutate into seekers, swarmers, and feeders, as the colony needs.



SIZE: Fifty feet long

DIET: The blood and pulped innards of warm-blooded creatures

SOCIAL: Matrons only associate with their own spawn, and seek to destroy any other queens detected within their one-to-five-mile territories.

HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Ruins

DEN: Each vyderac matron serves as the den for her entire brood, known as a storm. Queens are usually found on cliff sides, massive trees, or anywhere else the colony will have a commanding view of approaching danger. Vyderac maggots secrete a stony substance similar to coral. Over time, this lifts the queen even higher, forming a hive and reinforced reservoirs for long-term blood storage.

COMBAT: It is unlikely that a vyderac matron will be found without members of her brood nearby to defend her. If engaged in direct combat, a queen closes her chitinous plates to protect her face, then uses her large claws to crush or swat away any creatures within her reach. She is capable of spitting corrosive, pheromone-rich acid fifty feet or more, so if she is caught alone, she won't remain that way for long. As a final defense, a vyderac matron is able to emergency gestate a new matron larva, then self-destruct by popping a number of acid sacs throughout her body. The new queen larva is dropped into the colony's central blood reservoir beneath the old matron's corpse. In addition to dealing terrible damage to all creatures around the queen, this acid explosion causes the central blood reservoir to coagulate into a solid, nutrient-rich block that feeds and protects the new matron as she grows her wings.

USEFUL PARTS: Acid sacs, armor plates

RUMOR: Matrons contain acid sacs deep in their guts that can completely dissolve a whole body's worth of organic matter in thirty seconds, leaving behind nothing but the smell of cinnamon.

“Blood goes in. Maggots come out. Her blood went in...”

VYDERAC MAGGOT

Blind, lumpy, and translucent, maggots are the juvenile form of vyderac and the storm's main workforce. The maggots' claw-ringed mouths produce a mild acid, allowing them to slowly chew through both wood and stone. They are also capable of producing stony secretions used to build and reinforce vyderac colonial structures, including the blood reservoir that houses the vyderac matron.

SIZE: One to two feet long

DIET: Blood processed by the vyderac matron

SOCIAL: Maggots spend this entire phase of their life sprawling and squirming over one another inside the colony.

HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Ruins

DEN: Maggots remain within the hive and its immediate vicinity.

COMBAT: Though individual maggots are capable only of spitting weak acid and slashing with the claws encircling their mouths and sphincters, they are almost always encountered in writhing masses of ten to twenty creatures.

USEFUL PARTS: Acid sac, claws, meat

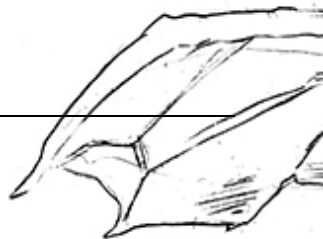
RUMOR: Because their diet is only blood, some speculate that maggots actually secrete iron, not stone. Others say their claws can literally grip anything, and a small industry of expensive climbing gear and grappling hooks crafted from maggot parts has sprung up in Swordfish Bay.



“If errryone had teeth ’bout they
assholes, it’d be a more polite world.”



VYDERAC SEEKER



With protruding black eyes like faceted onyx and a disproportionately large abdomen, vyderac seekers are some of the fastest-moving creatures in the Swordfish Islands. They spend almost their entire life in the air, zipping through the jungle in search of prey for their colony.

SIZE: One foot long, with a two-foot wingspan

DIET: The blood and pulped innards of warm-blooded creatures processed by the vyderac matron

SOCIAL: Solitary when hunting

HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Ruins

DEN: Seekers roost within the matron's chitinous armor or on high shelves above the colony.

COMBAT: Seekers are able to sense the flow of warm blood inside living creatures. Once they spot a target, they engage in a series of rapid fly-by passes and spit out clouds of fine powder. This powder causes extreme itching when it comes into contact with exposed skin, and creatures hit with it will often scratch affected areas until they bleed. When the powder enters the bloodstream, it causes numbness and eventual paralysis of the extremities. Pheromones released with the powder attract vyderac swarms and feeders to the scene. Seekers have no other attacks, and no defenses other than exceptional speed and aerial agility.

USEFUL PARTS: Blood, eyes, powder sac, wings

RUMOR: A seeker's eyes really are onyx, and they allow others to see the flow of warm blood inside creatures if they're taken from a seeker when it dies.



“How long kin ya go w’out scratchin’
an itch? Hows ’bout a hunnerd itches?
That’s how long you’ll live.”

HYDERAC SWARMER

Hyderac swarmers are roughly the size of a grapefruit, and resemble desert scarabs with their domed shells and flat bottoms. A swarmer's hard shell—usually a deep metallic red or blue-green—opens to reveal two transparent wings that allow the creature to make a flying hop of up to ten feet. Their tiny triangular heads end in a pair of jagged mandibles capable of burrowing deep into flesh.



SIZE: Six inches in diameter

DIET: In addition to processed blood, swarmers sometimes consume corpses (bones and all) that have been fully drained by vyderac feeders.

SOCIAL: A swarmer spends its entire life as part of a swarm three to six dozen strong, following the pheromone trails left by vyderac seekers.

HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Ruins

DEN: Swarmers sleep like a giant chitinous carpet on the outside of their matron's reinforced blood reservoirs.

COMBAT: Swarmers attempt to overwhelm prey identified by the vyderac seeker they follow. They climb over their target, biting with their mandibles and scraping with their claws. When a swarmer bites into flesh, its mandibles lock and it impales the victim with a spike from its mouth. Once the spike has pierced flesh, the swarmer begins pumping venom into the wound, preventing blood from clotting and eventually liquefying the victim's internal organs.

USEFUL PARTS: Blood, shell, venom sac

RUMOR: With the right combination of scents and magic, swarmers can be coaxed away from their brood and retrained as pets or weapons.



“First ya see just one.
Then ya see five.
Then ya don’t
see the bard no
more.”

HYDERAC FEEDER

Feeders are the largest of the hyderac aside from the matron. A large fleshy sac on a feeder's back resembles a deflated balloon, expanding as it fills with the blood and melted innards of the creature's target. Feeders are slow flyers, especially when full, and some say they drunkenly hop through the air more than fly. A feeder's head is heavily armored in chitinous plates, and a curved ridge extends above the head to support the weight of the blood-filled sac. Its two front legs end in large hooks and can be rapidly extended, like a frog's tongue.

SIZE: Three feet long, with a five-foot wingspan

DIET: Blood and pulped organs

SOCIAL: Feeders most often travel in pairs.

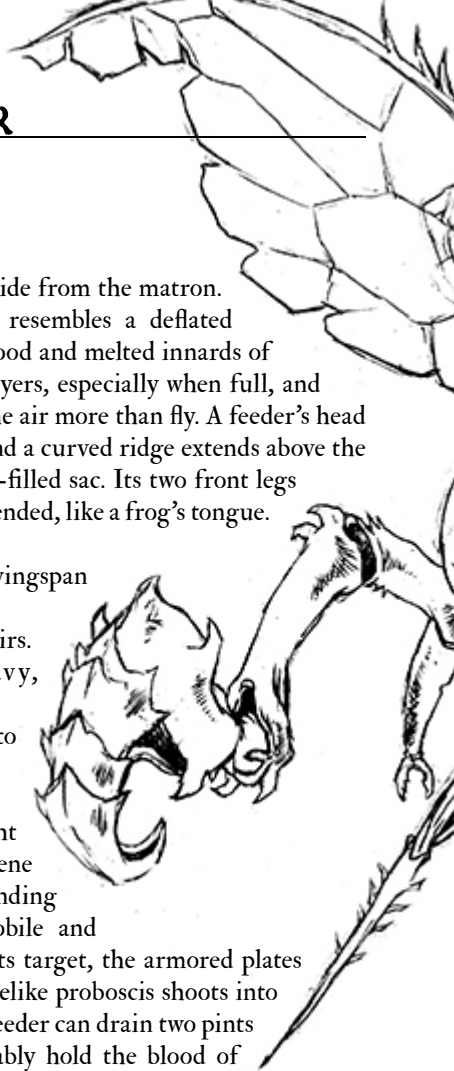
HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Heavy, Mountainous), Ruins

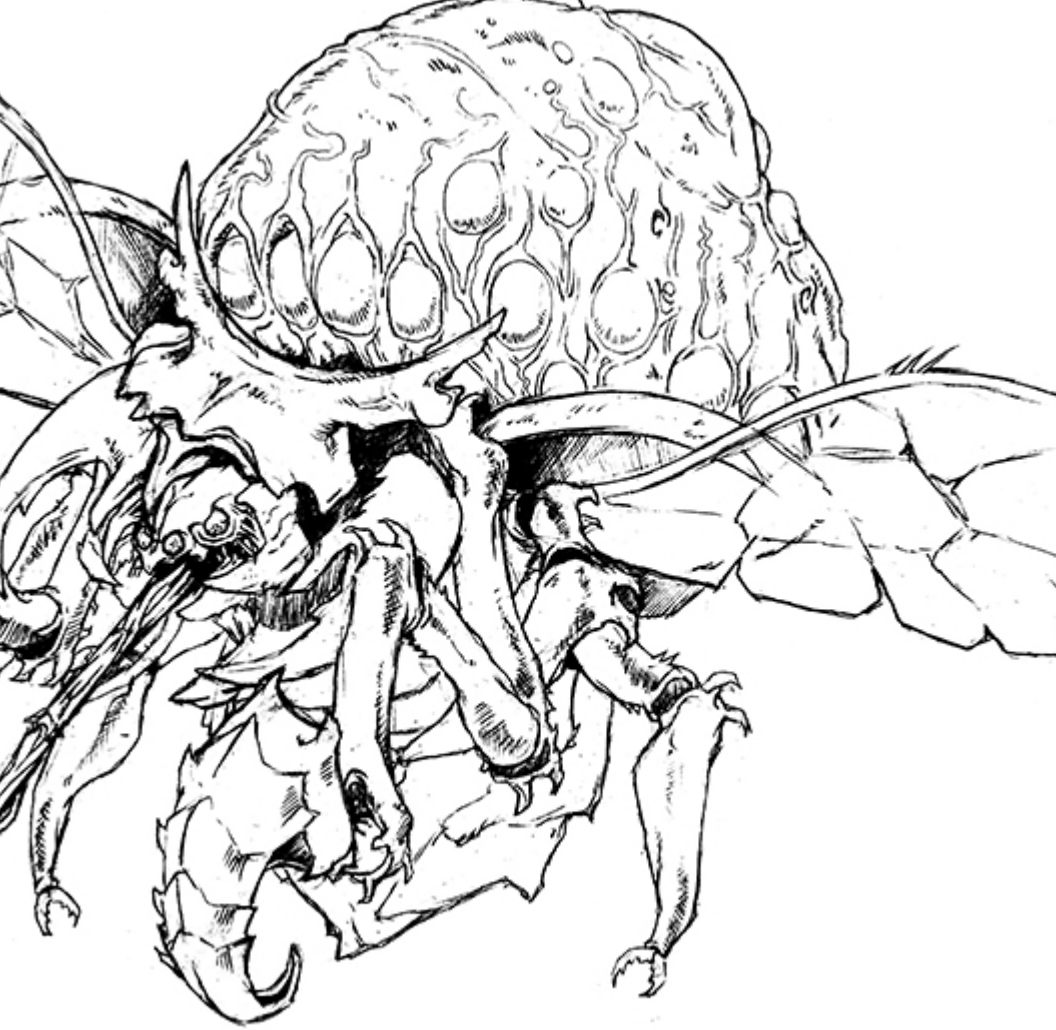
DEN: At night, feeders use their bodies to plug their matron's feeding tubes.

COMBAT: Their extremely slow flight helps ensure that feeders arrive on the scene after combat has concluded (or is winding down), and that their target is immobile and envenomed. Once a feeder hooks onto its target, the armored plates covering its face open, and a long, needlelike proboscis shoots into the creature to drain its juices. A single feeder can drain two pints of blood per minute, and can comfortably hold the blood of one average-sized humanoid. Once filled with blood, a feeder returns to its matron and deposits its contents for processing.

USEFUL PARTS: Armor plates, feed sac, hooks

RUMOR: Feeders are so docile and dumb that you can hitch a ride by holding their forelegs. Though you probably don't want to end up where they're headed.





“I can still hear my sister’s blood sloshing around in that thing’s sac as it flew away.”

BONEBACK WYDARR



Boneback wydarr are an amalgamation of mammal, reptile, and bony terror. Their long pink tongues loll from green reptilian heads, while the fur covering the rest of their body is an ashy brown. An exposed spine of spiked ivory vertebrae protrudes from the creature's back. Pale, ropey sinews connect the wydarr's body to this exposed spine, causing the furry parts of its body to jiggle about like a wet sack of organs as it runs. The front limbs of the boneback wydarr end in long bony hooks that grow throughout the creature's life. The growth of these hooks causes terrible pain that can be relieved only by grinding them down, normally by digging.

NICKNAME: Bone rager

SIZE: Three to four feet tall

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Small family groups of four to eleven

HABITAT: Jungle (Heavy, Mountainous), Volcano, Volcanic

DEN: Boneback packs dig out the dirt and stones beneath large trees in the jungle. Though these burrows are large enough only to house a single family group, tunnels often connect to the burrows of nearby extended family.

COMBAT: Vicious and energetic, all boneback wydarr grunt and thrash constantly, even in their sleep. They bound across the battlefield, slashing, biting, and tripping with their hooks. A boneback always tries to flank its targets or attack from behind, aiming to disable an enemy so the rest of its family has time to arrive and join the fun. They are devious in their tactics, but lack patience.

USEFUL PARTS: Blood, bone spikes, heart, tongue

RUMOR: Wydarr are effectively blind, and make all their decisions based on smell alone. If you wear the skin of a dead boneback, its family immediately accepts you as one of their own.

“Don’t bother running.
They’re faster than you.”

CRYSTALBACK WYDARR

Crystalback wydarr are hunched abominations with reptilian heads, bodies encased in metal plates, and bony spines of colored crystal that can chew through basalt like butter. The metal plates of most crystalbacks are iron or steel, but verdigris-crusted copper, gold, and other rare and precious metals have also been reported. The spines of a crystalback grow into large spikes, but unlike a boneback wydarr, its spinal cord is protected by its plated body and not exposed to the elements. A crystalback's forelimbs end in crystal scythes that grow continually and cause the creature immense pain. This pain inspires them to dig through dense stone constantly, as grinding down the blades is their only source of relief. Crystalbacks dig in tandem with one another, leaving behind tunnels five feet high and ranging from nine feet to twenty-four feet in width.

SIZE: Three to four feet tall

DIET: Anything, even rock

SOCIAL: Crystalback wydarr congregate in groups of three to eight

HABITAT: Unknown

DEN: Crystalbacks do not have dens, as they dig constantly. They stop only at the point of exhaustion, when they pile atop one another to sleep.

COMBAT: Crystalback wydarr charge into battle, crystal scythes flailing and jaws snapping at anything soft. Their battlefield tactics are similar to those of enraged beasts that refuse to back down. If multiple crystalbacks are present, they occasionally leap backward off one another in an attempt to impale targets with their back spikes.

USEFUL PARTS: Blood, bones, crystal spikes, heart, metal plates, tongue

RUMOR: Some say that wydarr tunnels can be followed all the way to the center of the earth. Others say that if you harvest a clear crystal from the back of a living wydarr, you can use it once to scry anything your heart desires.

“Ha! I’ll be here on this barstool not dying. Those things are like halflings on dragon’s blood, with crystal swords and a lizard’s maw for kissing.”



ZIP BIRD

These flightless white birds have powerful red legs and small wings that stand up on their sides like fins as they run. Although they do not fly, zip birds are able to leap almost thirty feet, allowing them to get the drop on their enemies. Able to cruise through rugged terrain at fifteen miles an hour while screeching their distinctive call of “woop woop woop,” zip bird packs are often preceded by a steady stream of fleeing small animals.



NICKNAME: Whoop birds

SIZE: Three to four feet tall

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Zip birds live in odd-numbered packs of three to thirteen.

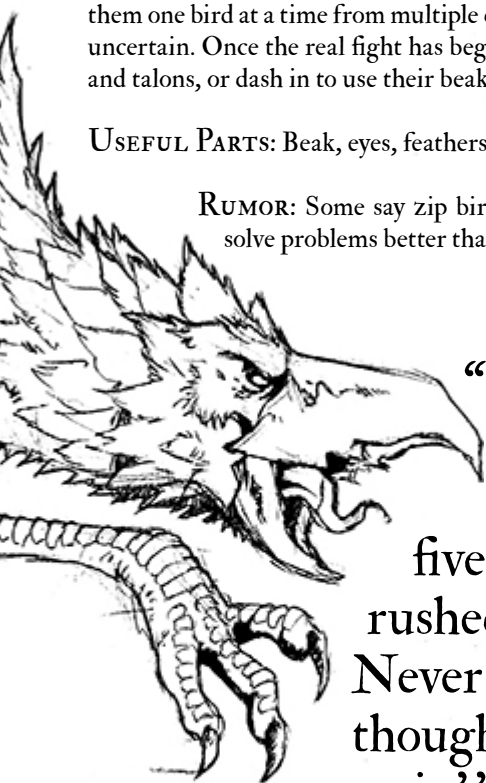
HABITAT: Jungle (Light, Mountainous), Ruins

DEN: Zip birds nest only in the bases of witchweave palm trees.

COMBAT: Zip birds are fearless, and a pack of these creatures will attempt to kill anything once. If an opponent proves too daunting, they simply flee shrieking into the undergrowth. The birds of a pack remember the creatures they challenge, and will call for aid or flee if those creatures are encountered again. When entering combat, zip birds harass their enemies by rushing past them one bird at a time from multiple directions, leaving their true numbers uncertain. Once the real fight has begun, zip birds leap and slash with beak and talons, or dash in to use their beaks like spears.

USEFUL PARTS: Beak, eyes, feathers, heart, meat

RUMOR: Some say zip birds can be trained to learn tricks and solve problems better than hunting dogs.



“One of those copper bird cats was about to finish me off when five of those whoop birds rushed up and attacked it! Never saw how it turned out though, 'cause I was too busy runnin'.”



ELEMENTALS

{Kind all up the claims of one wild mind! Prophecy babbling!
Mysticism, nothing more. Barely worthy of the name of thought}

{ It was not long since those of steady and rational perception those
not given to ~~any~~ answers or rational explanations that were regarded as
outliers, banished from the halls we built. I myself may
have suffered at the rough hands of her mob }

In recent years, it seems the whole careful armature of Protean studies has wrenched its footing. Fools scoff madly in the streets, students leave radical marginalia, the wise weep, and the accomplished are cast down.

The noble Ibn Afdal has shown that just as the flower rises to attend the sun, brute matter finds itself drawn ever closer to the human form, no doubt in imitation of the most high.

It incarnates firstly as pure yet simple symmetrical forms. The Protean Loci. Direct expressions of its primal power. Then, for those imbued with greater promise or a germ of thought, shaping some simple behavioral

To know the jarring climb was edgeless lead
swings down to shatter a guileless chaledony
smile. Her eyes staring down...
They were Innocent!
Innocent!

[illegible]

*(The doing the shapes are wrong
To not try to each one empty
carried by life. She lies to call them demons
who live in the world. The fact is that a
man's mind is not a fact
The water has no conscience, it reflects the vapours
of the earth. The vapours
if you are being with silent eyes within is not
Condemn I am.*

shadow of the human spark: the form of near-human. The creatures unschooled cretins know as 'Imps.'

*The lines safe said
enclosed on the glass
are chime. There is
no language that is read
they have no presence
in your dream and
slightly come to follow
not here. But there
no language that
thoughts*

In humanity's case, the process works the same, yet in reverse. Our own shapes are reflections of the (no doubt ethereal and therefore incorruptible) transcendent geometry of heaven. The place from which all souls descend. The fact that human 'cores' have never been found is childishly simple to explain. Our 'core'—or 'soul' as our brothers-in-religion would say—descends from a higher realm and is invisible to our currently dull material senses. Glankoröök has theorized a human core curving in unseen dimensions, therefore imperceptible to us.

*(This, once again,
is a school of deities
and silver analysis.)*

So each approaches the form of the human, so to speak, in the middle. The elements rise up in dull polygonal forms. These powerful but senseless 'cores' then naturally attempt to animate their available materials to produce the more perfect shape of humanity. Humanity likewise falls from their realm of abstract splendor, incarnating firstly as the intangible hyperdimensional construct we call the soul; and then through subtle arrangements of flesh, as these base homes of bone and blood. A simple shape. But

This insert taken from 'Protean Loci' by Dr. Geraldine Patricius.
Commentary and marginalia on the (temporary) scholastic purge
at the Royal College of Banwo thought to be in her hand.
-E

{ She claims the shapes are wrong - The mantle forms an orderless dinge, the human shape an entropic curl. Energy and flesh descending in a spiral. Its shape in time your grinning skull. }

immeasurably more complex than those of the Protean Loci.

We shall see a wild differentiation in the shapes and capabilities of the Protean or 'Elemental' creatures. Most typically, we find the higher forms more easily approaching the finer aspects of humanity. Beauty, thought, order, and abstract comprehension are produced by those fragments possessing greater and more subtle potential. Those without such capacities, yet still possessing a powerful 'will-to-life,' are found firstly in the pseudo-animal shape, and then in polygonal form.

Following Afdal's theorem, we find a general inverse law between the subtlety and apparent humanity of a Loci and its material powers—just as in human societies and cultures, we find those with finer sensations and deeper awareness separated from those of rough build and simple perception. The one suited for cognition and command; the other for obedience and simple, cheerful drudgery. Another example of the 'mirroring' of the world of the elements to the visible world of humanity, illustrating once again that elemental study is measurable, rational, comprehensible. Predictable.

{ She has said that man has no one. That the flesh of the Protean Loci is nothing more than a flapping doddle, an idle wave as it seeps into the sand. She names flesh an "addiction of the sky". Radicalism! Nothing more. To follow the seduction of this contraption - fragment. Why does it leak? The abandonment of logic. The destruction of carefully observed cosmic schema...

"Not rising up in man's form but sinking down in the last stage before entropic exploitation"

Foulness! Lies! She stands upon the shoulders of giants, yet spits down into their eyes. It is a slur upon the sanctified generations who bore us to this point.

...Thankfully the great wheel of academic "fashion" has
turned once more, never to rotate again. She is punished now.
Her works are dead. Never to be found. I urge you not to
seek her in the dark. Whatever we did was legal, legitimate and
just. The records are expunged.

The Elemental Study—or, as it is known in the parlance of the coffee shop and gutter, the 'Brute Art'—consists of tracing the lines of tension in the relationship between each 'living' shape and its core, and between each core and the pure element of its birth. The more fully we study (and in this deep and endlessly progressing field, even the wise must be counted as eternal students), the more fully we comprehend and the more finely we manipulate these transitional vectors—and the more powerful the response.

Before we begin, a brief safety notice. Any students dreaming of animate fire or globes of liquid thought must report themselves immediately to the faculty. Failure to do so will result in banishment to the Nightmare Stacks.

Her arguments are empty and her intellect bleak, blank
wormed with errors and writhing only of contempt, as I shall
now prove;

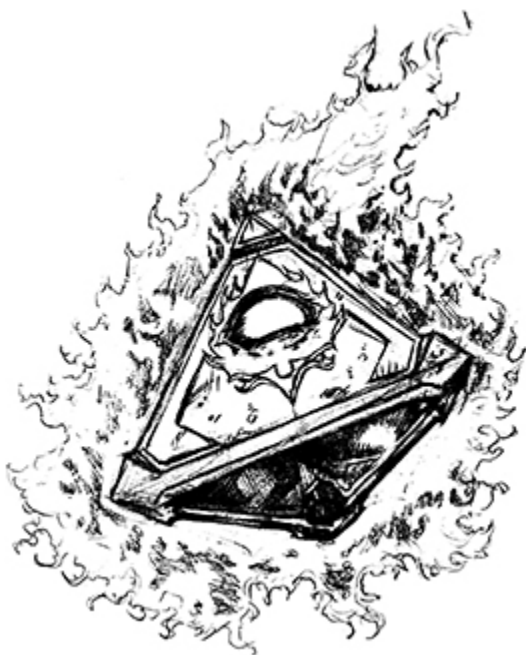
EARTH



Earth elemental cores appear as icosahedrons made from a singular piece of beautiful stone, such as basalt, granite, or lapis lazuli.

Ranging from one foot to three feet in diameter, earth elementals can create one whiskey barrel's worth of earth from nothing each day, and can effortlessly control a volume of earth the size of approximately ten whiskey barrels.

Earth elementals are able to command and control volumes of soil and most inanimate, fully solid objects affiliated with earth. These objects must have a sufficient level of compact density about them, as earth elementals typically ignore anything too fine or granular (such as silt, sand, or dust). Likewise, earth elementals appear to be incapable of controlling anything with a crystalline or exactly uniform internal structure, as demonstrated by the great Flavolius Brownstale and his earth elemental containment cages made of pure gold, pure iron, or carved from singular transparent crystals.

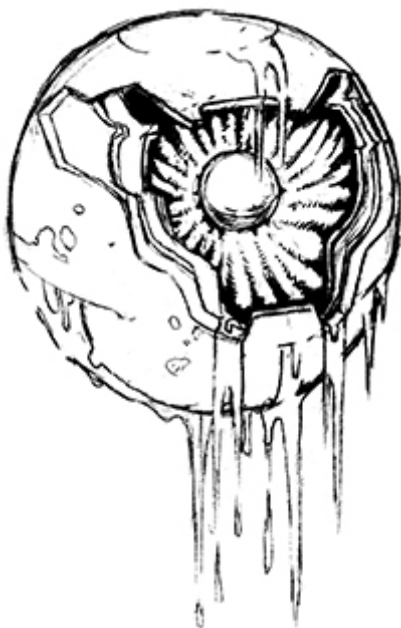


Fire elemental cores normally appear as burnished metallic tetrahedrons, but occasionally glow red, orange, yellow, blue, or white.

Ranging from one foot to three feet in diameter, fire elementals can create one whiskey barrel's worth of fire from nothing each day, and can effortlessly control a volume of fire the size of approximately ten whiskey barrels.

Fire elementals can command and control volumes of fire, as well as most exceptionally fine granular materials light enough to float through the air and hot enough to emit light. They ignore light without heat and nonflammable particulate. Although fire elementals appear most frequently in the midst of active infernos, some wizards have reported attracting their attention with something as mundane as a cloud of flour. It is unclear what attracts the elementals to some clouds of dust and not others, but the wizard Sparkolio posits that it has to do with both the combustibility potential of the material and the potential level of awe that could be sparked by an appearance within it.

WATER



Water elemental cores appear as perfect pearlescent spheres, ranging in color from white, silver, and gold to black, blue, and even pink.

Ranging from one foot to three feet in diameter, water elementals can create one whiskey barrel's worth of water from nothing each day, and can effortlessly control a volume of water the size of approximately ten whiskey barrels.

Water elementals are able to command and control volumes of water or liquids that contain at least 95 percent water. They manipulate the temperature of water, and while they cannot heat it beyond a boil, they frequently lower its temperature to points well below freezing due to the exceptional purity of their water. Unlike other elementals, water elementals have developed a symbiotic relationship with giant bivalves found in profusion at points of ethereal overlap. The great water-mage Fazool first documented how these elementals imbue the shelled creatures and guard their beds, as those bivalves grow the large pearls that will become the next generation of watery cores.

Ooze

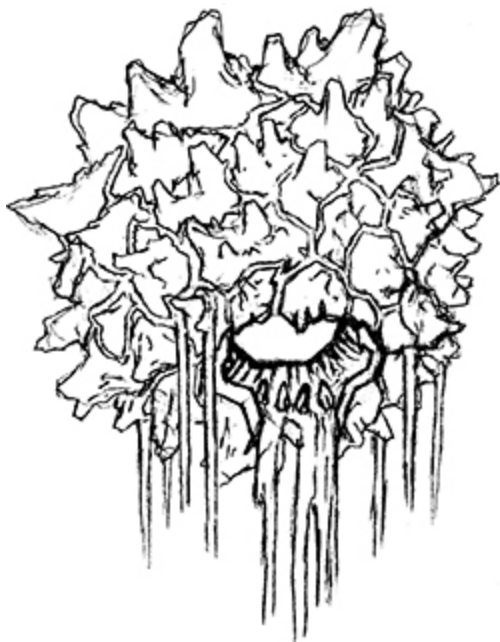


Ooze elemental cores appear as jellylike cubes that melt into a puddle when held, but immediately solidify when squeezed.

Ranging from one foot to three feet in diameter, ooze elementals can create one whiskey barrel's worth of ooze from nothing each day, and can effortlessly control a volume of ooze the size of approximately ten whiskey barrels.

Ooze elementals are able to command and control volumes of ooze, slime, muck, and any other suspension of fine particulate within a liquid that yields a creation of varying viscosity, elasticity, and questionable solidity. The behavior of these creatures is as shifting as the type of muck they move around, and their only constant is a lack of consistency. Able to change the viscosity of ooze on a whim, they appear to enjoy watching intelligent creatures struggle about in it, since sometimes their sludge requires quickly applied force to escape, and other times it requires little to none.

MAGMA

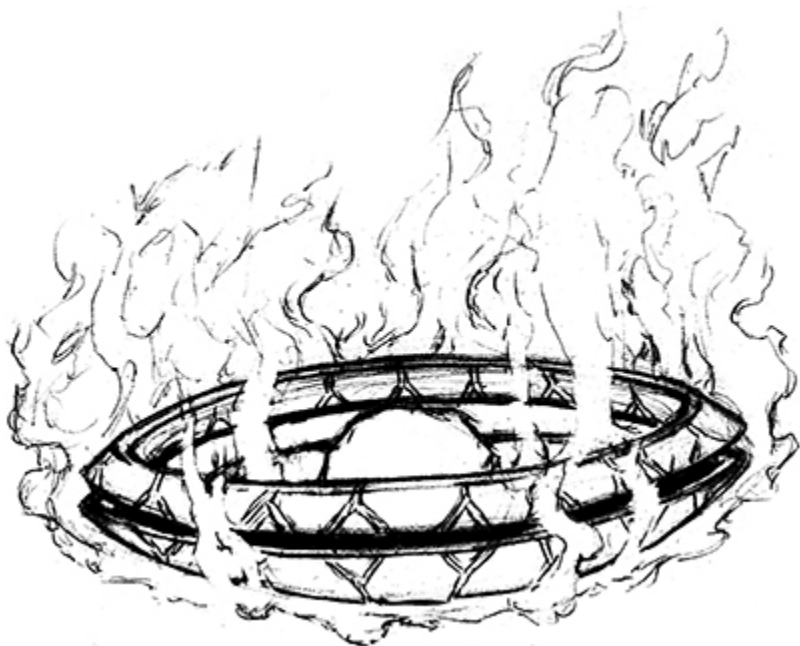


Magma elemental cores appear as glowing, molten dodecahedrons encased in cracked shells of glittering black rock.

Ranging from one foot to three feet in diameter, magma elementals can create one whiskey barrel's worth of magma from nothing each day, and can effortlessly control a volume of magma the size of approximately ten whiskey barrels.

Magma elementals are able to command and control volumes of molten rock, or most anything that has reached a state hot enough to glow and liquid enough to flow. When exposed to nonmolten environments, solid plates of glittering blackness encrust the elemental's surface, yet still reveal its molten interior. These chunks of black stone float and shift across an elemental's surface for a time before being recycled and reabsorbed. Magma elementals will occasionally guide this solidification process into useful temporary shapes (spikes, blades, blocks, and so forth) of use in their current pursuits.

STEAM



Steam elemental cores appear as shining metallic rings, usually silver in color, that are covered in water droplets but cool and dry to the touch.

Ranging from one foot to three feet in diameter, steam elementals can create one whiskey barrel's worth of steam from nothing each day, and can effortlessly control a volume of steam the size of approximately ten whiskey barrels.

Steam elementals are able to command and control volumes of steam and other manifestations of water droplets suspended in air, such as fog, clouds, and mist. They raise and lower the temperature of the steam they command by increasing and decreasing its pressure. While they cannot chill their steam to freezing, they can increase its pressure and heat to almost unimaginable levels, and enjoy setting up explosive situations. Steam elementals are the only elementals known to form the element they control into humanoid shapes. When in this form, an elemental's core floats slightly above the form's head, leading many to refer to these creatures as "Steam Kings."

EARTH IMP

“The fat little imps are so gneiss that it’s easy to take them for granite.”



Sporting a bulging stomach and easily weighing two to three tons, earth imps come in as many different colors and textures as there are types of stone. Almost every edge on an earth imp's body appears to have been smoothly rounded, and an almost permanent smile has seemingly been chiseled between their fat cheeks. Though their bodies are solid rock, they can bend and flex like organic creatures, and they often roll themselves into rough balls and tumble down mountainous slopes for fun. Earth imps grow in girth as they grow in age or power, and can become considerably rotund.

NICKNAME: Giggle boulders, gravel bellies

SIZE: Three to four feet tall

SOCIAL: Usually solitary. If two earth imps come together, they talk at amazing length about their experiences since they last met. When an earth imp meets someone for the first time, it tells this new friend its life story in excruciating detail, then expects to hear the life story of the newcomer in return. Most other imps and sentient creatures avoid earth imps because of their loquaciousness.

HABITAT: Throughout Hot Springs Island

DEN: Earth imps build no structures, and prefer to sleep wherever they have a good view of natural wonders. When one does sleep, it lies down on the ground, then pulls that ground over its body like a blanket.

COMBAT: With a gentle disposition and a hide that is literally rock solid, earth imps rarely have the need or desire to engage in combat. When pushed to fight, they favor causing small earthquakes and sudden avalanches, or creating upthrust spikes of earth or chasms to thwart their foes. Still, they are the strongest of all the imps, as their fists are literally made of rock.

RUMOR: Some say that an elven wizard lost a child and created a golem to replace it. He loved the golem so much that he made more and more until he was consumed by his madness, and a hundred polite, chubby golems with a childlike innocence remained. Others say earth imps love to play marbles, and often carry a number of marbles made from random elements.

FIRE IMP

With skin in varying shades of red, the musculature of fire imps appears to be carved out of wood. Their white eyes have no pupil and are protected by strong brows, scanning around them constantly in preparation for fighting and mayhem. The small wings on a fire imp's back are most frequently used to hover, but their speed and agility in flight is exceptional. Thumb-like talons on their feet can be used to aid in both combat and grappling.

NICKNAME: Brawlers, lil' instigators

SIZE: Two to three feet tall

SOCIAL: Fire imps live in groups of about three dozen, with no social standings or hierarchies.

HABITAT: Throughout Hot Springs Island

DEN: Fire imps prefer their lairs warm, and with a large, clear, central area that can be used for fighting and brawls.

COMBAT: Preferring grappling and hand-to-hand combat augmented with flame, fire imps scrap with one another continually. Their brawls rarely lead to death, though, and if they come into conflict with other intelligent creatures, fire imps try to keep those altercations nonlethal as well. They attempt to flee if a fight appears unequal or runs the risk of real harm to either side, making use of ranged fire attacks to cover their escape.

RUMOR: An apprentice wizard found out the hard way that fire imps are immune to restraints or containment. She trapped one in a cage of elemental holding, and the resultant explosion burned down half an acre of jungle.



“It’s not the size of the dog in the fight. It’s the amount of pissed-off little brawlers fueled by elemental fury that matters.”

WATER IMP

Good natured and inquisitive, with blue skin and green gills, water imps engage with anyone they think has pure intentions. Unlike other imps, a water imp keeps its core outside its body, where it floats around like an iridescent soap bubble. Their webbed hands and feet make them exceptional swimmers, and they can appear transparent when fully submerged. Most water imps speak with a slight lisp due to an abundance of saliva.

SIZE: Two feet tall

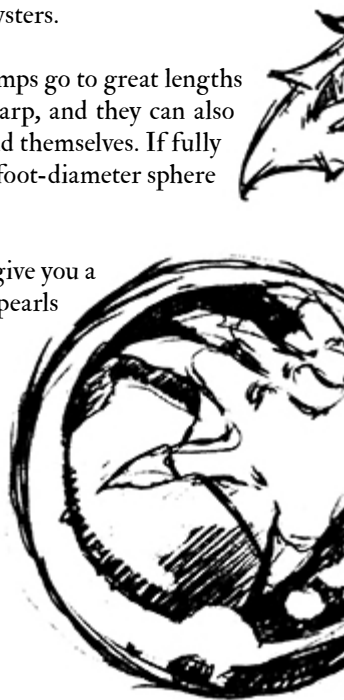
SOCIAL: Water imps live in groups of six to twelve, and usually in the company of other watery creatures such as nereids and elementals.

HABITAT: Throughout Hot Springs Island

DEN: Water imps build coral spheres in fresh and salt water that they polish to a pearlescent finish. They frequently surround these tiny homes with gardens of anemones, colorful plants, crystals, or oysters.

COMBAT: Because their cores are exposed, water imps go to great lengths to avoid combat. Though small, their claws are sharp, and they can also use blasts, jets, geysers, and whips of water to defend themselves. If fully submerged, a single imp can rapidly chill a twenty-foot-diameter sphere of water to subzero temperatures.

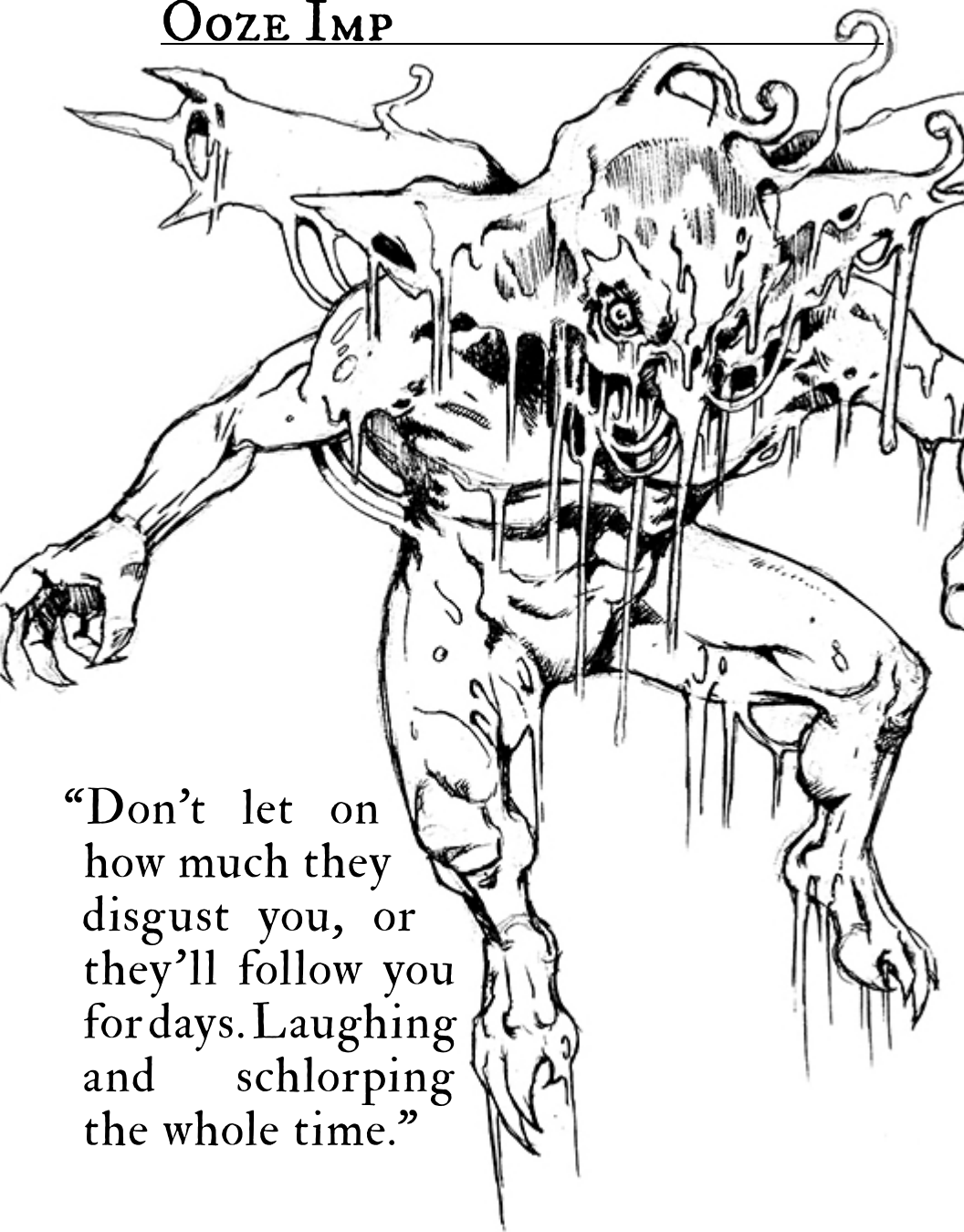
RUMOR: If you save the life of a water imp, it will give you a flask of endless water. They are also said to collect pearls and know the best places to find them.



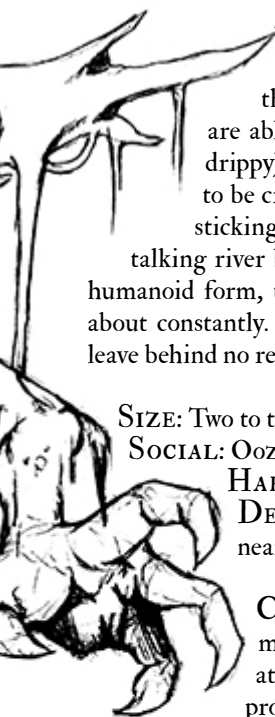
“Water Imps aren’t like normal imps. They’re nice, helpful, and speak plainly. They don’t make you jump through hoops like the others.”



OOZE IMP



“Don’t let on how much they disgust you, or they’ll follow you for days. Laughing and schlorping the whole time.”



Translucent and ranging in color from brown to orange to purple, ooze imps spend more time as lumpy puddles than winged humanoids. They enjoy surprising others, and are able to shift only parts of their bodies into physical (albeit drippy) substantiality. They get great kicks out of pretending to be crushed beneath boulders with only their tiny arms or legs sticking out, or manifesting only a face so they can pretend to be

talking river banks or mud puddles. When ooze imps fully take their humanoid form, they drip continually, and their features melt and move about constantly. But even though they look extremely messy, ooze imps leave behind no residue unless they have been in combat.

SIZE: Two to three feet tall

SOCIAL: Ooze imps live in small groups of two to five.

HABITAT: Throughout Hot Springs Island

DEN: Ooze imps build no structures, preferring to live in or near mud pits, quicksand, and particularly slimy river banks.

COMBAT: An ooze imp fights by throwing globules of mud or sludge at its enemies. It also employs slam and trip attacks to take full advantage of its body's non-Newtonian properties. If an opponent is larger than human size or especially dangerous, two to four imps can merge to form a larger entity five to six feet tall. In addition to normal attacks, this larger imp tries to suffocate an opponent by dragging it beneath ooze in the area, or by knocking it down and vomiting over its mouth and nose.

RUMOR: Some say ooze imps keep priceless gems at the bottom of mud springs, and will give those gems to anyone who makes them laugh.

MAGMA IMP

Composed entirely of molten rock, a magma imp appears to be equipped in shining black armor, illuminated from within by swirling lava. Although it looks like the molten interior of the imp drips out between the chinks in its armor, those drips never seem to hit the ground. Magmaimps strive to look as imposing as possible, and spend countless hours shaping the cooled magma on their heads into extravagantly elaborate helms.

SIZE: Three to four feet tall

SOCIAL: Magmaimps live in groups of five to twelve, and act as an utterly inseparable team. There is no official leader for these groups, and each imp anticipates the needs of the others with uncanny accuracy.

HABITAT: Throughout Hot Springs Island

DEN: Magmaimps build elaborate geometric structures on the shores of pools or rivers of lava, preferring stacked cubes and dodecahedrons.

COMBAT: Magmaimps are normally nonaggressive, but they shut down threats with ruthless efficiency. Never appearing in combat alone, they use the environment to their full advantage and love driving enemies into lava. They are capable of producing globules of magma, which they throw as a molten lump or cool into an obsidian shard. If the threat faced by a group ofimps is substantial enough, they pool their molten globules into boulders that are rolled across the battlefield or splashed into open lava sources. If a threat proves too great, magmaimps attempt to flee the field, constructing semimolten walls to block their pursuers. Ten magmaimps can create a wall ten feet by ten feet by 1 foot in size in as little as a minute.

RUMOR: Some say that magmaimps bear a fiery rune on their chest indicating allegiance to a forgotten fire god, demon, or cult. Magmaimp helms are said to enable one to comfortably survive in extremely hot environments, but such helms are quite small compared to human heads, and no magical attempts at resizing them have been reported as successful.



“Not really sure how you kill one, but I hear their heads fetch quite a price.”

STEAM IMP

Steamimps are liars, cheats, and thieves that respect nothing but the bet. They wager pieces of their cores against one another on anything with an uncertain outcome, and they aren't shy about trying to shift the odds as long as they don't get caught. Betting is, quite literally, a steamimp's life, for once the last of its core is gone, an imp turns into mist and dies. They talk fast, and their knowledge of probability makes them expert swindlers. They have large noses, large ears, expressive yellow eyes, and gray skin, and a steamimp's poker face means that it always looks pleased with any situation.

NICKNAME: Steam bookies, the bookies

SIZE: Two to three feet tall

SOCIAL: Steamimps love a crowd and congregate in large groups.

HABITAT: Throughout Hot Springs Island

DEN: Steamimps live anywhere that provides a good view of the action.

COMBAT: Steamimps do not fight. They bet. Fighting is something to wager on, not to participate in. They can transform themselves into clouds of steam at will, making mundane weapons useless against them. Steamimps also use charm and illusion magic to sow discord and confusion among their attackers—and to facilitate even more betting on how such effects will play out.

SPECIAL: Steamimps prize accurate information, and often trade favors in exchange for mind sharing with individuals that have witnessed contested events. When mind sharing, an imp surrounds the head of a target as a cloud of warm steam, then projects the thoughts and sight of the witness directly onto the cloud for a gathered crowd to witness—and to bet on.

RUMOR: The easiest way to get in good with steamimps is to win, and the easiest way to do that is to know the color of your fellow adventurers' underwear.

“They got big ears to hear your thoughts
and magic eyes to see your cards.”





FACTIONS

THE NIGHT AXE OGRES

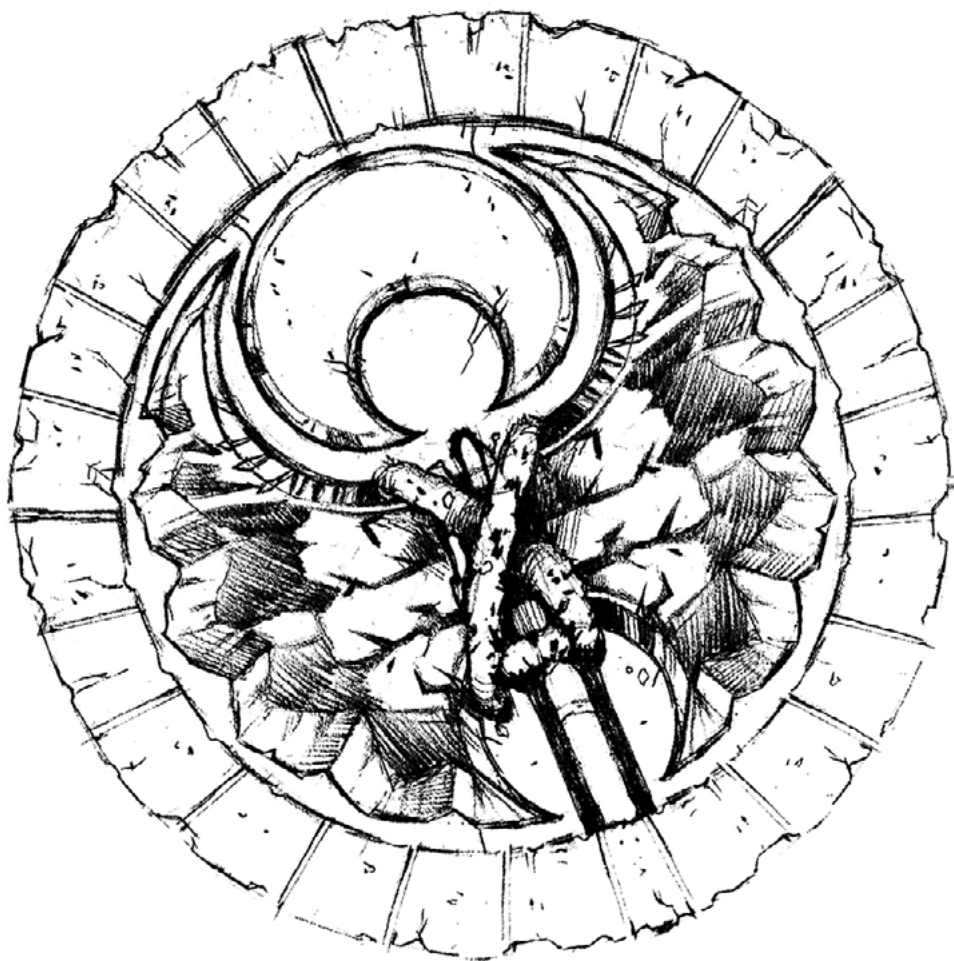
A tribe of ogres calling themselves the Night Axe can be found throughout the northern jungles of Hot Springs Island. There are at least two settlements of more than twenty ogres, and a number of smaller settlements have been reported as well. The Night Axe appear to be engaged in a constant conflict with the Fuegonauts (inhabitants of the island's central volcano), and whole sections of scorched and blackened jungle mark the shifting battlefields of their front lines.

Members of the Night Axe use weapons of obsidian, and some of the ogres seem to be able to shape it using nothing but their hands. Their shamans use bones to augment and focus their magic, and associate closely with water elementals. It is unknown whether the Night Axe ogres have a special affinity for water-based magic, or if this association is merely an alliance of convenience against the forces of the volcano.

The tribe is led by a shaman called Glavrok, who is rumored to be aided by an ogre witch who dwells in an obsidian spire somewhere in the jungle, and whose silver hair moves on its own. It was long thought that the Night Axe had no females of breeding age (with the possible exception of this witch), but this has recently been disproved. The central mound in the main village houses female ogres, but the location is heavily guarded, and the exact number of females is unknown. Breeding rites and rituals figure heavily into the little we have learned of Night Axe culture, and the importance of the females seems to be related to the tribe's ongoing conflict with the Fuegonauts.

In recent months, the ogres have become less openly hostile toward adventurers within their territories. Many groups are still killed by the Night Axe, but a growing number have survived their encounters with no combat, and have even reported trading with the creatures. Despite these recent developments, though, the posted warnings in the guild hall should still be adhered to. The abduction and disappearance of female adventurers in Night Axe territories continues unabated. All signs continue to point to the direct involvement of the ogres in

these incidents. However, the guild's relationship with the tribe has not improved enough to gain any new or additional insight into these events, which are made more mysterious by the fact that only certain women—typically strong fighters—are taken. Moreover, no half-ogre children have been observed in or around the villages.



NIGHT AXE WARRIOR



With large tusks, large bellies, and hands that can easily crush a humanoid skull, the warriors of the Night Axe tribe make an imposing sight. They range in color from a dark muddy brown to a sun-bleached tan, and some say you can tell the age of a warrior by the color of its skin. Small spikes of blackish bone protrude from a warrior's shoulders and back, preventing it from wearing much armor or clothing on the torso. But the ogres' thick, leathery hide seems to naturally deflect most light attacks anyway. The Night Axe ogres have no lips, so their teeth and large tusks give their faces a permanent skeletal grin.

SIZE: Nine to eleven feet tall

DIET: Omnivore. Mostly whale meat, blubber, boar, and local flora. Night Axe warriors prize blindfire peppers, and have been seen eating them raw in some sort of contest. They can go for days without eating, and seem to prefer periods of binging and fasting.

SOCIAL: Night Axe warriors serve as foot soldiers, guards, hunters, teachers, and protectors of the young. They follow orders from the Night Axe bonebinders, but are in no way inferior in the eyes of the clan.

TERRITORY: The northern jungles of Hot Springs Island

DEN: Warriors build rough huts that they share with one to two other members of the clan. Every week or so, these warriors leave their hut behind to stay in one of the barracks along the front lines of the clan's conflict with the Fuegonauts.

COMBAT: Night Axe warriors are capable of dealing massive damage with their large limbs and obsidian axes. They love to charge into combat and hew down their foes. If their weapons shatter and no replacements are available in the field, they stomp, kick, bite, and bash their foes into pulp. Intimately aware of how small their clan is, they take few risks on the battlefield and will retreat if the tide turns against them.

RUMOR: All Night Axe warriors are well versed in a single trade such as soap making, or leatherworking, and they are willing to trade any goods or knowledge they have to those who help in the fight against the Fuegonauts.

“Jus’ sayin’ it’s an ogre ain’t sayin’ much o’ anythin’.”

NIGHT AXE EDGESWORN



“They probably wouldn’t be so angry if they could talk about their problems.”

It is said that the edgework of the Night Axe tribe are made of nothing more than bone and muscle held together by fury. Their skin is the clouded tan of a dried riverbed, and the bone spikes protruding from their backs and shoulders are as black and glossy as their obsidian axes. Edgework have very little body fat, and in combat, they frequently wear nothing but the blood of their enemies. Like other Night Axe ogres, their teeth are always showing, but edgework have smaller tusks and no tongue.

SIZE: Nine to eleven feet tall

DIET: Carnivore. Edgework eat little that isn't whale fat or whale meat, and they seem to eat constantly.

SOCIAL: The edgework typically avoid Night Axe settlements, preferring to spend their time as close to battle as possible. Around other ogres, they stay on the fringes, and some speculate this is due to an innate inability to control their rage and aggression.

TERRITORY: The northern jungles of Hot Springs Island

DEN: Edgework only sleep near open flames, and almost never with items that would enhance their personal comfort.

COMBAT: Considerably leaner and faster than Night Axe warriors, edgework are the shock troops of the tribe. They exploit any opportunity to kill their enemies, preferring obsidian axes, daggers, and spiked clubs. When grouped with warriors and bonebinders, the edgework will use their superior speed and seemingly reckless actions to harass, hamstring, disarm, confuse, and disorient.

SPECIAL: Edgework are able to shape raw obsidian into wickedly bladed objects using nothing but their hands. They occasionally use this ability to create strange and furious objects of art, prized by collectors of brutal obscura, but they almost always break them upon completion.

RUMOR: Some say the edgework lose their tongues when initiated, but that's just not true. They lose their tongues the first time they scream in pain, and only those who never lose their tongues can become bonebinders.

NIGHT AXE BONEBINDER

“Crackin’ a bone might mean it’s about to speak your language. Or it might mean it’s about to steal your soul.”



Compared to Night Axe warriors and edgesworn, bonebinders appear gaunt—almost skeletal. Their skin is usually a dark taupe that glistens like wet clay, and the bone spikes protruding from their backs and shoulders are an ashy gray-white. Bonebinders always wear elaborate headdresses or shoulder guards made from the skulls of duecadres, coppermane prowlers, or zip birds. They adorn themselves in brightly colored feathers, wear no armor to speak of, and carry an assortment of bags, pouches, and gourds. It is not uncommon to see small water elementals in their presence.

SIZE: Nine to eleven feet tall

DIET: Omnivore

SOCIAL: Although bonebinders hold no official position, they are usually sought out by Night Axe warriors and young for advice and insight due to their wisdom and perspective.

TERRITORY: The northern jungles of Hot Springs Island

DEN: Bonebinder shamans live alone in huts that serve as both sleeping quarters and workspace. If a Night Axe child is born with shamanistic powers, one of the bonebinders present at its birth will adopt it, with the child's living space taking the place of the shaman's workspace.

COMBAT: Bonebinders are so called for their use of bone-based magic, which they wield from the edge of the combat zone to devastating effect. A bonebinder frequently serves as a strategist for a fighting group, communicating changing conditions in the field using animated ropes of water. The water for these signals is pulled from a gourd containing a small water elemental with which the bonebinder has forged a spiritual link. These elementals might directly aid shamans in battle, but this usually only occurs when a bonebinder's life is in direct and immediate danger.

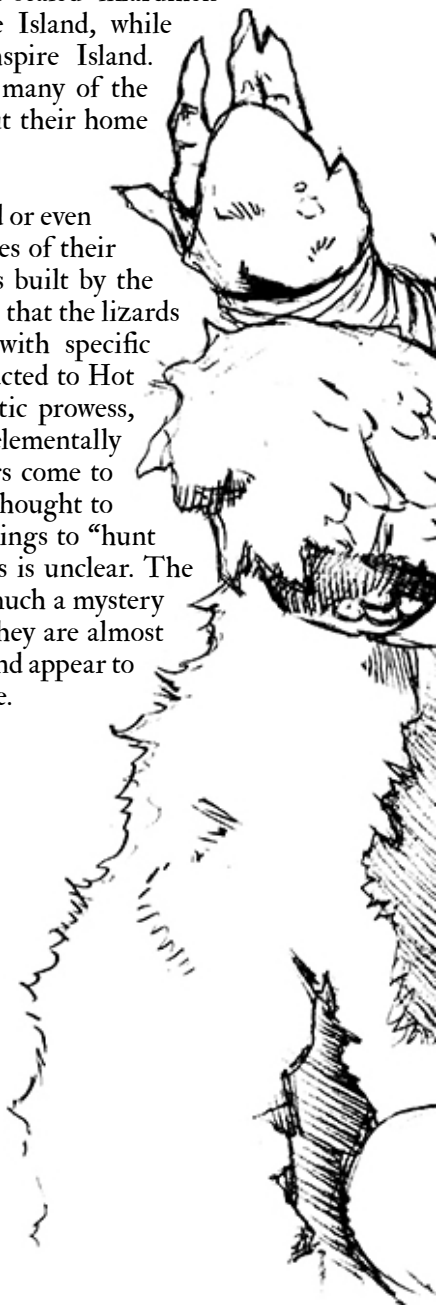
SPECIAL: The herb lore and slaves created by Night Axe bonebinders are exceptionally powerful. They are also capable of making magical gourds that can pour forth five gallons of cold, clean water per day.

RUMOR: The bones used for a bonebinder's spells come from creatures they have killed and eaten. Everything a shaman kills gets this treatment, and if one eats you, your body is defiled and the afterlife is forever lost to you.

LIZARDMEN OF THE ISLANDS

Two distinct species of lizardmen and one apparent offshoot call the Swordfish Islands home. The green-scaled lizardmen known as Goa reside on Northspire Island, while the blue-scaled Kiru live on Southspire Island. A third group called the Arva share many of the physical characteristics of the Goa, but their home is currently unknown.

Some say the Goa and Kiru are bonded or even directly linked to the ancient lightspires of their home islands—tall, ancient structures built by the elves, about which little is known—and that the lizards leave those islands only rarely and with specific intent as a result. Many Kiru are attracted to Hot Springs Island to test their shamanistic prowess, because it is the most primal and elementally active of the Swordfish Islands. Others come to hunt for the legendary kujibird, long thought to be extinct. The Goa come to Hot Springs to “hunt fire,” though what this actually means is unclear. The motivations of the Arva remain very much a mystery due to their extreme aggression, but they are almost always encountered in the elven ruins and appear to be looking for something—or someone.







The tribe of lizardmen known as the Goa are covered in thick, almost rocklike scales of a rich emerald green. The scales on their backs, shoulders, and forearms end in rough spikes, which many Goa adorn with beads, feathers, or strips of bright cloth. All Goa wear bracers of boar skin on their left forearms, bearing what some believe to be a family crest.

SIZE: Six to eight feet tall

DIET: Omnivore, with a special fondness for fungus

SOCIAL: Unknown. All Goa encountered on Hot Springs Island have been alone, and although their slitted yellow eyes shine with intelligence, they do not normally deign to speak with adventurers.

TERRITORY: Northspire Island

DEN: Large white-walled villas have been seen in the mountains of Northspire Island, but none who have attempted to investigate have yet returned.

COMBAT: No one has witnessed a Goa initiate combat except when hunting prey—and few have seen them fight even then, as they take great care to move through the jungle undetected. Despite their considerable stealth, if a Goa is engaged in combat, it fights with exceptional honor. It does not backstab, and refrains from maiming, disabling, or inflicting unnecessary pain on an opponent. If the Goa is clearly superior, it attempts to disengage completely. If attackers persist in fighting, the Goa discards its weapons and grapples them into submission. Goa lizardmen normally wield spears, javelins and wooden paddle swords with obsidian blades. If unarmed, they utilize their claws, teeth, and tails in an unknown martial art.

RUMOR: The Goa are focused and serious creatures, with no appreciation for trivial pursuits like art, love, and friendship. This makes them dangerous as a society, and it is best to avoid them. They do like money, though, but it has to be in the form of cubic red-crystal beads or small mithral shards.

“Me? No, I ain’t never fought one. And ya ain’t never gonna talk to no one who has, unless yer a corpse fucker.”

KIRU RANGER

Rangers from the tribe of Kiru lizardmen are covered in small serpentine scales of deep indigo. Larger spiked scales along their heads and necks form brightly colored crests of orange, deep yellow, or bright purple. Favoring speed and stealth, Kiru rangers carry little other than their weapons and handmade adornments of personal significance.

SIZE: Six to seven feet tall

DIET: Omnivore

SOCIAL: Details of Kiru society remain unknown, but rangers travel alone or as pairs that have undergone a ritual spirit bonding. This process creates an experiential link between two Kiru, causing them to share thoughts and senses until they have completed or failed their mission. It is thought to often be used on young rangers with a personal rivalry.

TERRITORY: Southspire Island

DEN: Rangers prefer minimalistic camp sites with good visibility.

COMBAT: Rangers are exceptional sharpshooters, preferring horn longbows and obsidian-tipped arrows. The deep indigo of their scales allows them to effortlessly blend into the shadows, and they use this ability to avoid combat that might keep them from their mission. In close-quarters combat, a ranger's clawed hands are strong enough to crush windpipes, and its long obsidian knives can take care of the rest.

RUMOR: Kiru rangers are obsessed with finding the possibly extinct kujibird, and will trade or do almost anything for information regarding the whereabouts of one. They are rather fastidious with their fact-checking, though. They also have no idea what steel is, and often immediately grab at any rings, belts or fasteners they see.

“So our scout finds the perfect spot to camp. Nice ’n safe, he says. Soon as we start setting up, two blue lizards drop from the canopy and disappear into the jungle.”



KIRU SHAMAN

“Turns out he smelled my soap at an old campsite and then followed our trail for three days to see if we’d teach him how to make it.”



Kiru shamans have rough scales of a vibrant blue, in bright contrast to their ranger brethren. Each shaman wears a cloak of furs or hides created and enchanted by its own hand, as well as a necklace of sizable mithral plates. They typically adorn themselves in bright feathers and other showy pieces of local flora and fauna.

SIZE: Six to seven feet tall

DIET: Omnivore, with a special fondness for bird eggs

SOCIAL: Shamans travel throughout the Swordfish Islands alone, seeking to expand their personal knowledge of and connection to the world. Peaceful and curious, they often engage adventurers who do not seem hostile or dangerous in lengthy conversation.

TERRITORY: Southspire Island

DEN: As Kiru shamans document natural phenomena that occur over lengthy periods of time, they grow semipermanent structures from local flora.

COMBAT: Just because Kiru shamans do not seek combat does not mean they are ill prepared for its eventuality. Their obsidian-tipped spears are extremely lethal, but their shamanistic magic is typically used to communicate or subdue before it calls down lightning or shatters the ground with eruptions of steam and fire.

SPECIAL: Kiru shamans are always interested in learning new and unique skills or techniques, and a shaman can use its magic to facilitate a “perfect knowledge exchange” between itself and another intelligent creature over a week’s time. This connection can reportedly be made only once per lifetime for any individual, and shamans are typically eccentric, preferring to learn obscure knowledge of a mundane but beautiful nature.

RUMOR: Once you learn the ways of the Kiru, any new Kiru you encounter will recognize this, and you will always be treated as a friend of their kind.

ARVA

The jagged, rocklike, emerald-green scales of the lizardmen called the Arva are interspersed with thick bands of black, covering much of their bodies in tribal swirls that appear to bubble and writhe in channels between the green. While the Arva resemble the Goa lizardmen, their bodies appear more muscular and savage, and they do not adorn themselves with anything other than their mysterious black striping. When an Arva dies, that black evaporates from the corpse, revealing scarred channels of pink flesh where the scales in that area were forcibly removed.

SIZE: Six to eight feet tall

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Unknown, but Arva always travel in small groups (often groups of four) with a clear hierarchy based on physical dominance.

TERRITORY: Unknown

DEN: Although they are found in ruins, it is unclear where (or if) Arva sleep.

COMBAT: Arva are extremely aggressive and wicked in their tactics. They prefer to utilize traps and ambushes to begin combat, and obsidian spears, daggers, and bolas to finish it. They have little if any self control, often springing their ambushes earlier than would be ideal, and embracing sloppy, reckless violence. Some of the larger, more powerful Arva are able to siphon the life energy out of their surroundings and convert it into dark, shamanistic magic.

RUMOR: The Arva are Goa who attacked a Kiru shaman and are now forced to feed forever on the last scraps of life energy from anything they kill. This hunger fills them with a madness that cannot be cured, forcing them to wander the isles. With each kill, the blackness on an Arva's body grows larger, until it consumes the creature completely. Beware the Arva... but beware the Kiru that created them even more.

“Careful, all. They fight dirty, use wizardry, and set traps. It’ll be like fightin’ meaner, greener versions of ourselves.”



SVARKU AND THE FUEGONAUTS



An efreet calling himself Svarku lives in the central volcano of Hot Springs Island, overseeing a veritable army of imps, salamanders, and creatures of obsidian collectively known as the Fuegonauts. Svarku appears to control great wealth, which he uses for grand acts of narcissism and splendor. The actual operations generating this wealth are unclear, but seem focused on a certain type of red crystal found in the volcano. This crystal appears to contain flickering flames and glows softly in the dark, but appears perfectly mundane when subjected to all manner of arcane tests. Some evidence of mining is seen around the volcano, but nothing to indicate off-island transport, leading some to speculate that extraplanar portals may exist somewhere within the site.



Root causes in the war between the Fuegonauts and the Night Axe ogres are still poorly understood. Both sides blame the other for initiating the conflict, escalating it unnecessarily, and breaking peace treaties.

Svarku has showered many adventurers with powerful and lavish gifts, and has reportedly treated others to opulent feasts in his palatial tower complex. Those invited to the volcano are given a red-crystal hexagon on a platinum chain to guarantee safe passage in Fuegonaut-controlled territories. The adventurers fêted by Svarku are always invited back to the tower with offers of work, but none who have taken the efreet up on his proposal have returned to report on what the job entailed.

When Fuegonauts are encountered in the jungle away from the volcano, it is never certain how they will react. Adventurers have reported being attacked on sight almost as often as they report being entreated to come to the volcano as a guest of Svarku, so keeping a hand on one's sword hilt is probably a good idea.

COMBUSTARINO



“Their swords burn, their insignias burn, but their laughs and jeers as they gut your friends burn hottest of all.”

Combustarinos share the same red skin, white eyes, and large brows as fire imps, but their bodies are covered in jagged scars. Small wings used for hovering give them a speed and agility in flight unmatched by other flying creatures. Thumb-like talons on their feet aid in complex aerial landings and takeoffs, and can even enable combustarinos to wield weapons with their feet in emergency situations. Claiming to be the favored servants of Svarku, combustarinos are most easily identified by the large emblem each wears on its chest in the efreet's honor. They each make their own emblem, with the materials used ranging from brass to obsidian to living flame. The emblems are a source of pride, and are always worn with a harness that doubles as the holster for a combustarino's standard-issue fourteen-inch butterfly blade.

SIZE: Two to three feet tall

SOCIAL: Unknown, but they tend to group into gangs of twenty to thirty.

TERRITORY: The island's central volcano and surrounding jungles

DEN: Combustarinos sleep in hot rubble among trophies from their defeated enemies.

COMBAT: Combustarinos never engage in combat unless in a pack or cornered and left with no alternatives. They fall into three distinct roles when a fight begins, but individuals are never locked to a role, and can shift as the needs of battle change. They might stay airborne and harass foes with jets or balls of flame, ignite their butterfly blades and leap directly into the fray, or tumble about their foes, using their size and speed to full advantage. Combustarinos do not usually aim to kill their enemies, preferring instead to hamstring and inflict lingering pain. They engage in this behavior both for their own amusement and to prolong the fight, giving other Fuegonauts time to arrive on the scene. Pain does not seem to bother these little hellions, and they fight with full fury until their last breath.

RUMOR: Combustarinos are said to have given Svarku their elemental cores as a sign of loyalty. Because of this, they can move freely throughout the multiverse.

OBSIDIAN BLADEGUARD

Bipedal and vaguely humanoid in shape, obsidian bladeguards are composed of solid obsidian with jagged, razor-sharp edges protruding from all surfaces. A vertical mouth ringed by spikes and two to eight randomly placed eyes comprise the totality of a bladeguard's chaotic face. They do not speak or seem to make any other noise. Although they have two arms, only one possesses a usable hand. The other ends in a weapon of some sort, such as a spike, an axe, or a sword blade, which can be regrown in twenty-four hours if broken or lost.

NICKNAME: Jagged foot soldier

SIZE: Eight to eleven feet tall

DIET: Unknown, but they have been seen consuming elemental cores.

SOCIAL: Unknown

TERRITORY: The island's central volcano and surrounding jungles

DEN: Bladeguards are said to reside in the walls, floor, and columns of the Obsidian Spire in Svarku's volcano complex.

COMBAT: Since an obsidian bladeguard's body is its weapons, its attacks come with terrifying speed and precision. When paired or grouped, these creatures are able to rapidly clear wide swaths of battlefield. Their charges and body slams are capable of inflicting massive damage to enemies, especially when combined with the attack of their weapon arms.

RUMOR: Many believe that these creatures are actually just highly trained killers wearing imposing armor. Some have seen them walking through the jungle in straight lines, clearing everything in their path, or slashing ineffectively at boulders and mountainsides.

“If that thing is an elemental, it’s one crafted of precision and ruthlessness.”



OBSIDIAN GIANT

Almost every surface of an obsidian giant is covered in a chaotic jumble of jagged spikes. Four massive legs support its body, while two large arms ending in obsidian claws extend from its raised torso. A giant's hind legs are shorter and thicker than its front legs, giving its body a distinctive slope. Two large obsidian tusks grow from either side of its head, and a prehensile trunk ringed with spikes droops below its two to eight shining eyes.

NICKNAME: Black diamond elephant

SIZE: Fifteen to twenty-five feet tall

DIET: None

SOCIAL: Solitary

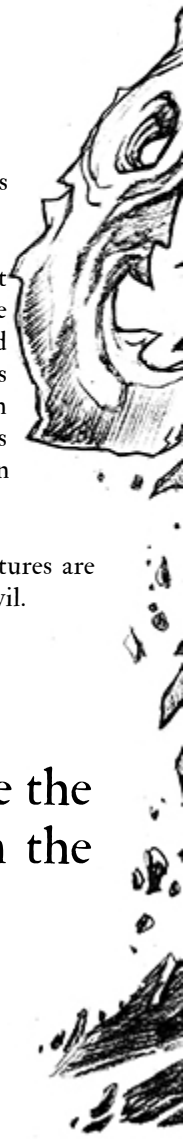
TERRITORY: The island's central volcano and surrounding jungles

DEN: Unknown

COMBAT: Obsidian giants have been encountered so rarely that there is much ongoing dispute regarding their number. The single time one was observed in combat, it used its immense size and jagged body to sow maximum chaos and destruction as it charged across the field, flailing its arms and trunk and trampling everything in its path. Some report seeing it wielding a massive enchanted brass polearm or sword, but its claws, tusks, and legs were more than sufficient to destroy its puny opponents.

RUMOR: It is commonly and openly speculated that these creatures are actually devils made of obsidian—or that there is only one such devil.

“All you need to know is: If you see the black diamond elephant, you run the fuck away.”





SALAMANDER TRICKSTER

Salamander tricksters have long serpentine bodies completely covered in tough, leathery scales, and short but agile arms and legs. Large forward-curving spikes grow in pairs along a trickster's upper back, and it is currently fashionable for female tricksters to pierce those spikes with metal rings and trinkets. Tricksters are easily differentiated from their warrior brethren by their bright, shimmering blue-and-white scales. They frequently carry small pouches holding spell components, jewels, and a special unguent used to keep their face tentacles supple and stylish.



NICKNAME: Blue gecko, ice gek, blue gek

SIZE: Six to eight feet tall, with a tail of equal length

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Salamander tricksters are mentally superior to salamander warriors, and they take every opportunity to assert this dominance. Tricksters eat together, sleep together, and stay in close-knit groups of four to twelve unless they have been specifically ordered to lead a group of warriors. They have a kinship with the combustarininos due to a shared penchant for independence, but they lack those imps' blind affection for Svarku.

TERRITORY: The island's central volcano and surrounding jungles

DEN: Tricksters lair in horizontal slits in rock walls warmed by magma.

COMBAT: Tricksters are exclusively spellcasters, preferring any magic dealing with illusions or fire. Occasionally, a trickster branches into another area of magic, but this is typically done to prank or spoof other salamanders. Their powers of prestidigitation are legendary, and they use them in battle to cause their opponents to look silly or to laugh (often at the expense of a salamander warrior's pride) and drop their guard. For all but minor spells, a trickster uses its whole body to cast, often lifting up on its tail and waving its arms and legs about. Although tricksters stand on two legs during combat, they move most quickly on all fours.

RUMOR: Debate rages over whether salamander warriors evolve into tricksters, or if they are separate creatures.

“I have never seen anything twitch so violently when casting a spell. Couldn't tell if I was watchin' a show or about to get pan-seared like a fish.”

SALAMANDER WARRIOR

Covered in leathery yellow or orange scales shimmering with heat, a salamander warrior is an imposing sight. Warriors are always seen with four-pronged spears of brass, gold, or obsidian that they carry in their hands or wrap in their serpentine tails. As with salamander tricksters, forward-curving spikes grow in pairs along a salamander warrior's upper back, but the warrior's spikes are much smaller. Salamander warriors often decorate their spears or their four face tentacles with trophies of battle to denote rank or status.



NICKNAME: Gecko, gek

SIZE: Six to eight feet tall, with a tail of equal length

DIET: Carnivore

SOCIAL: Salamander warriors are physically superior to tricksters, and take every opportunity to assert this dominance. They self-organize into close-knit teams of four to twelve, engaging in constant jocular competition with one another. Warriors are not terribly bright, and their pride transforms otherwise mundane competitions (skipping rocks over lava, killing rats, and so on) into memorable and intense events. Despite their competition, they only rarely kill each other, and frequently engage in extreme self-congratulatory behavior even after multiple failures.

TERRITORY: The island's central volcano and surrounding jungles

DEN: Warriors lair in vertical slits in rock walls warmed by magma.

COMBAT: Warriors love to fight dirty, and attempt to exploit any perceived advantage to the point of foolishness. They particularly love elaborate surprise entrances into combat, including leaping out of lava, dropping in from above, or—a favorite—being thrown into battle by an obsidian giant like a spiked discus. Because warriors move faster and more adeptly on four legs than two, they first throw their spears near an enemy or a destination on the battlefield, then race over to the spear to reclaim it and fight on their hind legs. The spears of ranking salamander warriors are frequently enchanted with magic that fills the area around them on impact, maximizing the effect of this tactic. Warriors also crawl about on all fours, wielding their spears with their tails like scorpions. Salamanders always fight exclusively with members of their team, as having salamanders from multiple teams in a single group can cause elaborate battle plans to collapse into competition and conflict.

RUMOR: Salamander warriors can be easily won over with offers of alcohol or raw boar meat, and can become quite friendly if you can teach them a game involving these offerings.

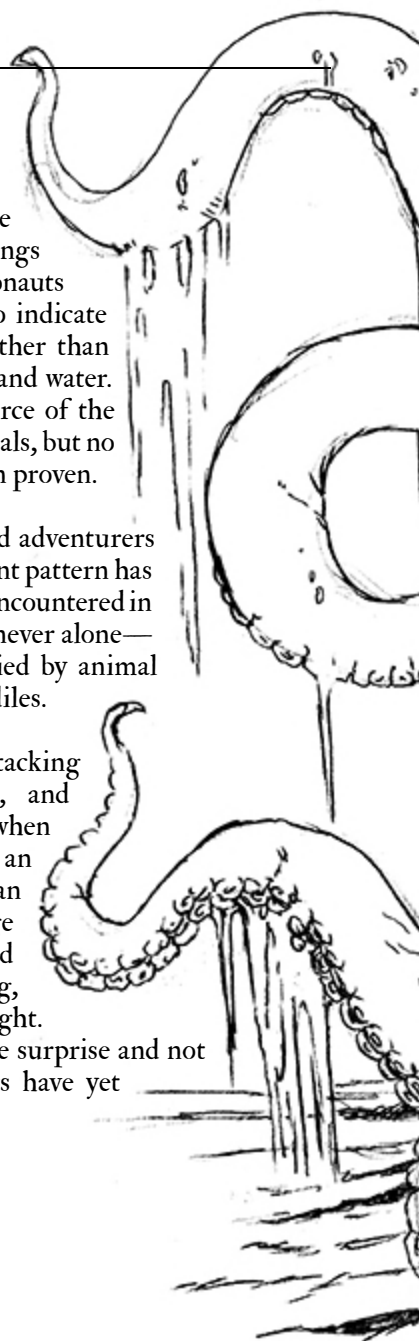
“They’re only happy when they can bully something. Even if that something is inanimate”

THE NEREIDS

Nereids are the most elusive of the intelligent creatures found on Hot Springs Island. We know they fear the Fuegonauts and Svarku, but there is no evidence to indicate if this aversion stems from anything other than the natural combativeness between fire and water. Some speculate the nereids are the source of the Night Axe's spirit-bonded water elementals, but no direct connection or association has been proven.

Though encounters between nereids and adventurers have been few and far between, a consistent pattern has emerged. The nereids are almost always encountered in a water source (usually flowing) and are never alone—either appearing in pairs or accompanied by animal companions, commonly saltwater crocodiles.

Only one instance of a nereid directly attacking adventurers has ever been reported, and the group startled a sleeping nereid when refilling their water skins. Upon seeing an elven female in the group, the nereid began shrieking in an unrecognized language and unleashed a torrent of water-based spells before disappearing into the spring, leaving her companion animals to fight. Some say the attack was the result of the surprise and not the elf, but no other elven adventurers have yet encountered a nereid to test this theory.





NEREID

Normally appearing in the guise of female humanoids with smooth blue skin, nereids constantly glisten with moisture as if having just stepped from the water. While they generally maintain a feminine humanoid form, they are able to slowly change the particulars of their appearance like the shifting of the tides. Nereids always appear in the most beautiful form they can imagine, but their ideals of beauty can be as fickle as their moods.

SIZE: Five to six feet tall

DIET: Unknown

SOCIAL: In the extraordinarily rare event that nereids are encountered, they are almost always found in pairs. Some talk of great undersea caves and hidden aquifers beneath Hot Springs Island where many nereids live together, but no one has witnessed such a gathering firsthand.

TERRITORY: Unknown

DEN: Nereids are most often found resting in springs and streams.

COMBAT: Nereids are exceptionally evasive, using their liquid nature to avoid being touched. Though they can command volumes of water against their foes, they rely heavily on their animal companions for assistance. Even if a nereid is not hostile, the saltwater crocodiles, sharks, or beaked and tentacled horrors in her company most certainly are.

RUMOR: Nereids weren't always elementals. Once, they were human priestesses devoted to a water goddess who was either killed by a creature of fire or trapped in a broken statue. Either way, when the goddess vanished, her followers were transformed into deathless nereids to help bring her back. Thing is, some don't want to.

“No, damn it! It wasn’t just bubbles.
There was a woman. Right there. By
those lotuses!”





THE
SIREN'S FOLLY

DAY 60

*Sunny and fair. Light winds from the east.
Aboard the Siren's Folly.*

Jeremy has finally given in to Patrick's demands to lead an expedition around the islands. Layout, planning, and clearing is in full swing on our new port town, Swordfish Bay, and Patrick was adamant that if Captain Rand was going to tie him to a desk as the leader of some adventurers guild, then he (Patrick) would need to do some adventuring here himself. Arguments between the two old friends went on for several days before Jeremy finally conceded to Patrick's point that a guild leader without firsthand knowledge of the islands was a guild leader that could never be respected.

I am not certain how much of Jeremy's reticence to agree to this excursion was anchored in his love of testing people's commitment to an idea by telling them "No," and how much it may have been influenced by the recent death of Vance and the losses we incurred on the Webbed Isle. Regardless of the reasons, Captain Marsh is once again at the helm of the *Siren's Folly* with his best crew, an old man, and a goblin. Jeremy insisted Zilbee and I accompany Patrick on this trip, and while I understand that Zilbee's site-clearing plans were all somewhat destructive, I can't help the fact that more volunteers lined up at my tent to recover relics and rubbings from the ruins than lined up to chop down trees.

The *Siren's Folly* departed from Swordfish Bay this morning, and our plan is to sail around the reefs and explore the northeastern side of Hot Springs Island. Spirits among the crew are high, and even though most will be left aboard while few go ashore, the fishing in these waters has proven to be fantastic, and all could use a few days relaxing in this beautiful weather. Luca has been playing his violin on deck nonstop since we left, and it is good to see the fire of wanderlust in Matilda and Jarvis's eyes as they ready their weapons to face the unknown once more.



WHALE GRAVEYARD

DAY 61

Strong winds from the east.

Scattered clouds and high stress all day.

We dropped anchor about a mile out early this morning and prepared skiffs to head ashore. The makeup of the landing party was not announced until today, and while the gear was being stowed, Patrick informed the crew that he, Luca, Jarvis, Zilbee, and I would go ashore. The rest of the crew, led by Matilda, would stay behind to keep things in order. Matilda was unhappy with this decision, having prepared to go ashore, and used excessively colorful language to make her displeasure known. Patrick tried to explain that he couldn't risk losing his first mate, so Matilda used that opportunity to remind him that he'd made Luca joint first mate, so that if she stayed, he should stay too. Luca, twirling his impossible mustache, laughed loudly throughout the exchange and agreed that Matilda had a point against Patrick's logic. I'm confident Luca was trying to get Matilda to come along too, as her skill and finesse with her lightning-tipped rapier is almost legendary. But instead, Patrick threw up his hands and ordered them both to stay behind.

Matilda's curses and Luca's booming laughter accompanied Jarvis, Patrick, Zilbee, and me as the skiff was lowered to the sea. The trip was to be short. One night in the jungle, with plans to return just after dawn.

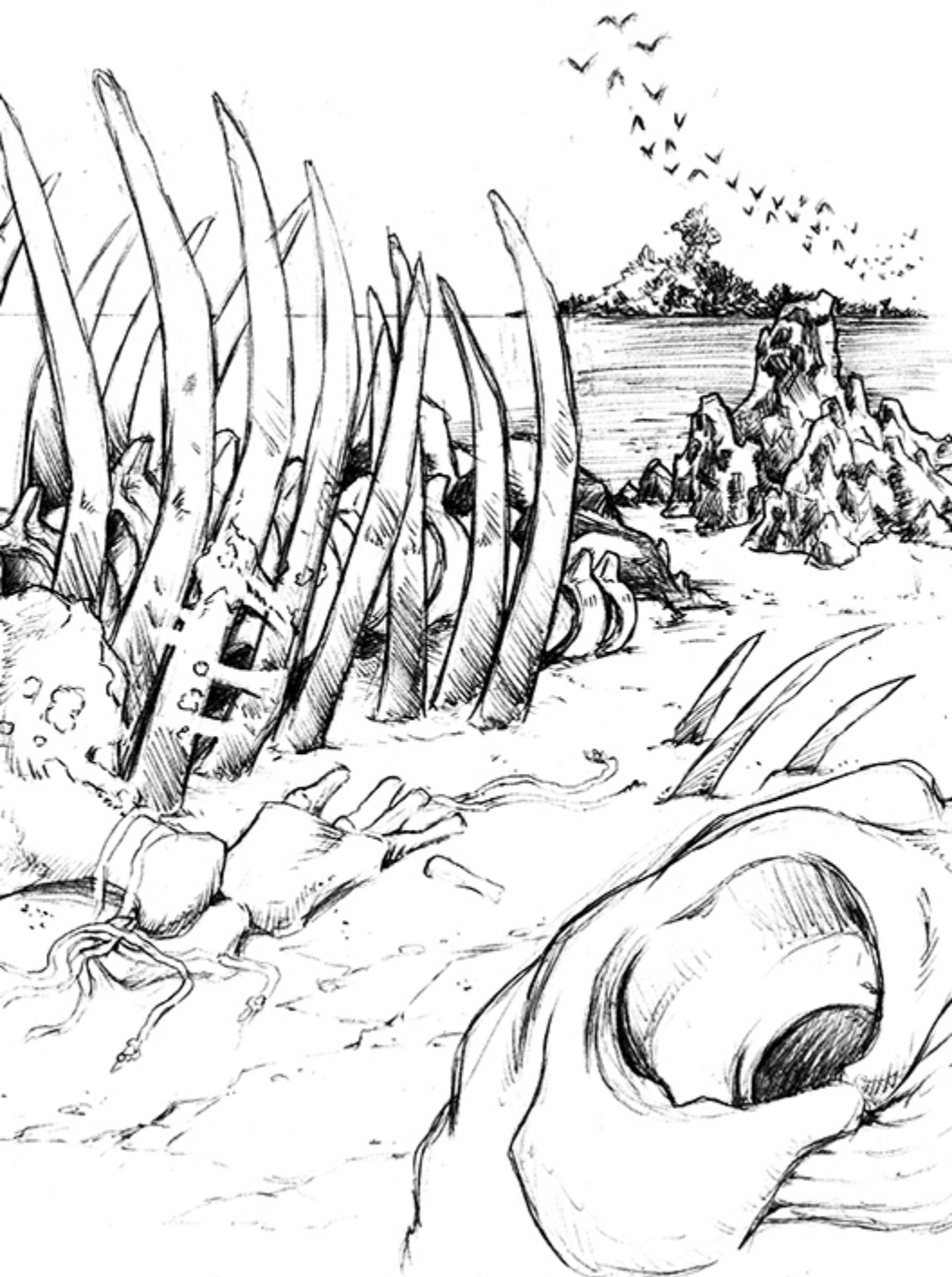
The stretch of black sand where we came ashore was covered in the corpses of hundreds of whales—some picked to bones by scavengers; others mostly whole but with large chunks of flesh cut neatly away. The beach smelled of death, but death like a fish market, and not the smell of rot or true decay. As Zilbee noticed the lack of maggots on the whales, Jarvis noticed rustling at the tree line some thousand feet north of our location. Patrick rushed us all behind brush-covered dunes, and as we peered through the foliage, six ogres openly carrying obsidian knives emerged from the jungle and approached the corpse of a whale. They appeared to be quite young (only standing six feet tall), and as they reached the whale, a full-grown ogre holding a massive obsidian axe walked from the trees to join them. This ogre was at least ten feet tall, his axe a solid eight feet in length, and his stomach alone probably five feet in diameter. I began to regret the absence of both Luca and Matilda.

We spent the next hour crouched behind the dunes, watching as the young ogres cut hundreds of pounds of meat off the whales under the watchful eyes of their elder. Although the older ogre was engaged with the youths through their harvest, he scanned the area in a constant state of alertness. Thankfully, we had beached our skiff on the south side of a large whale and out of his field of view. This protective behavior struck us as odd, and through quiet but persistent whispers, Zilbee convinced Patrick and Jarvis that we should follow this group to see how these ogres lived.

They left the beach after about an hour, and we lingered for an hour more before heading into the jungle after them. Zilbee cut a few small chunks of meat from an almost completely harvested whale, and even now, the meat smells fresh (but raw), and we can discern no sign of maggots or rot.







GLAVROK VILLAGE

DAY 6I

Jarvis had no trouble tracking the ogres back to their village. Even without his expertise, the stretch of jungle showed clear signs of frequent traffic. As we neared our destination, I began to realize how loud my footfalls were compared to the others—but glimpsing two dozen ogres through the trees ahead put my movements much more in line with Zilbee's goblin stealth. Fear of death and the possibility of being eaten are always powerful motivators.

At first glance, the village was rather typical of ogres. Spacious huts of poor construction, and a litter of stones and fallen trees. Then I began to realize there was a system. None of the huts appeared to be more than five years old, and the stone and trees were always piled together by type, perhaps serving as resources. All labor, ranging from skinning game to hauling and cleaning, was performed by young male ogres under the watchful eyes of adult males as big as the one we saw on the beach. Any elder ogres not standing guard sat in front of their huts, eating or working on their weapons.

I spotted only one female, and briefly at that. She stepped from a large grass-covered mound in the center of the village, accompanied by an adolescent youth. Her figure was surprisingly feminine, but looked just as strong and lethal as the males standing guard. Two males then approached her from a nearby hut, stopping briefly to offer gestures of respect. These two were very different, not

only from the ogres we'd seen so far, but from each other as well. Both were very lean, with almost no fat on them. One wore nothing but a loincloth and some sort of weapon harness holding obsidian-tipped spears. The other had a cloak of thick hides and wore the skull of a large bird upon his head. It was soon revealed that the ogre wearing the skull was some sort of shaman, and the other an exceptional warrior.

After speaking to the female, the warrior ushered her back into the mound. The shaman appeared to sniff at the air before pulling a bone from a small pouch and throwing it into the air. The bone spun upwards, sparked white, and vanished. When my gaze fell back to the shaman, his eyes were staring directly into mine. The warrior broke into a full sprint toward our hiding spot, and the surprising agility of his movements was eclipsed only by the malevolence of his grin as he ran. Before I could alert my fellows, I realized Patrick was pulling me backwards by my pack through the jungle, and Jarvis had scooped Zilbee onto his back and was already a good fifty feet ahead of us and running at full speed.

The warrior broke through the undergrowth before us, a spear in each hand. He bellowed out a grave roar, and I saw no tongue within his gaping maw. In retrospect, I wonder if this was a warning—a summons to stop and not to combat. But Jarvis came to his own conclusions, tossing Zilbee into a dense clump of ferns and equipping his cutlass and hunting knife in one fluid motion. Patrick drew steel and joined the fray a moment later. The ogre moved faster than either of them but not faster than both, Patrick and Jarvis having fought back to back for eight bloody years. Just as Jarvis managed to hamstring the ogre, Zilbee let out a cry. We were surrounded.

Patrick and Jarvis fell back to Zilbee, and I found that my saber had appeared in my hand at some point. We stood close together, nearly touching at the shoulders with Zilbee tucked between us. I could see at least five large ogres, two warriors, and the top of a bird skull moving back and forth behind the group. I felt Zilbee scrabbling up between us, and as I looked up behind me, I saw her standing on Jarvis's shoulders clutching a sparkling white gem in her hand. "Starlight!" she yelled, and silver light blossomed outward from our group to blind our pursuers. Our own vision was not impaired, thankfully, allowing me one glimpse of the ogres veering off in numerous wrong directions as we ran through the jungle once more.



Jarvis

WHITE ROCK SPRING

Day 61

I am often impressed with Jarvis Kray. He has saved the lives of our crew members countless times, is an excellent scout and a worthy fighter, and can tell gripping tales once the drink sets in. After nearly five hours of leading us through trackless jungle, he suddenly altered our course with no explanation other than, “We need to camp.”

I don’t know if he heard or smelled the fresh water, but within a few minutes, we were standing before a large upthrust mound of sparkling white rock. Cold, clear water flowed from cracks near the top of the rock, forming a small pool near its base. Fuchsia lotuses floated on the surface of this pool, and I’m not sure if it was the flight through the jungle, but this spring contained some of the most refreshing water I have ever imbibed. After drinking my fill, I busied myself studying and collecting specimens of the lotuses, completely forgetting to help set up camp or even sheath my saber. I do so love the lotus flower, and hopefully the six specimens I collected for study and display will survive tomorrow’s return trip.

While I was distracted by the lotuses, Patrick set up camp and sent Jarvis ahead to scout a potential route for our return before we lost the sun. Today’s encounter with the ogres had made it clear that spending an extended time in these jungles with only two real fighters was a poor idea. When Jarvis returned, his news wasn’t the greatest. The view he’d gotten from the treetops made it look as though we’d have to swing far to the south

to avoid the ogres' territory, meaning it would be an eight- to twelve-hour trip back to the skiff if we were lucky. But I, for one, was willing to accept any strain it might place on these old legs to take a few extra hours and avoid those obsidian blades.

I have taken to calling this place White Rock Spring, and hope to ensure all who come to this island know of it as a great place to catch a night's rest. I am eager to close my eyes and let the trickle of the spring and the sounds of the jungle compose nature's lullaby.



THE BURNING JUNGLE

Day 62

Winds from the southeast.

Sunny with few clouds.

The rest near White Rock Spring was very good. Better than any I'd had on ship over the past few months. And to make the morning perfect, Zilbee woke early and made a breakfast of cinnamon, oats, and some fruit she found nearby. As always, Jarvis was gone, waking before dawn to scout ahead. He returned bearing unhappy news as we struck camp. The ogres were out in force, and while we couldn't be sure this was due to us, we could not return to the *Siren's Folly* the way we'd come.

Patrick gave us all a speech before we left White Rock, emphasizing the need for speed and stealth. We were way behind schedule, and while the crew would wait for a full week, he didn't want to push it. He stressed that we were observers only, needing to stay out of conflicts because we didn't know nearly enough about these islands yet. Patrick's always been a passionate speaker, and he was in particularly fine form this morning. We headed southeast, hoping to stay well away from the ogres' territory, and the first few hours went smoothly. We avoided a pack of a dozen heavily armed ogres heading west, and my clumsy feet didn't blow our stealth!

The calm ended in the early afternoon when a female scream ripped through the jungle's cacophony of birds and animals. Jarvis looked back to Patrick, who shook his head slightly. The look of disagreement was clear on

the ranger's face, but he continued leading us away from the sound. Zilbee tugged on my satchel at the second scream, and when the third came, Jarvis altered course, snapping, "I need to observe with my eyes, Pat." As Jarvis's captain and friend, with dense muscles and many armaments, there were many ways Patrick could have addressed this insubordination, but he just clenched his jaw and followed. Patrick Marsh has acquired many scars by leaping in to help those in trouble, and allowing three screams to elapse already showed a level of control far beyond what he possessed before reaching these islands. A few gut-wrenching screams later, we arrived at a small rise and could finally see their source.

The stretch of jungle below us was filled with blackened clearings. Charred trees and black, gnarled roots were clearly visible, and every few minutes, a jet of fire preceded by a popping sound would erupt from the cracked ground. A spiderbush, one of those odd plants that wander in search of light, was set aflame by one of those jets and went rolling into the undergrowth, spreading a small blaze. In one of the western clearings, eight salamanders ringed a naked woman with pale-blue skin. Chunks of her long hair appeared to have been burned away, but I saw no obvious wounds on her. She ran about the circle, trying to break through the ring only to be tripped by their spears, struck by their tails, and burned by their breath. I quickly understood why her body was not bloody. When struck by a jet of flame, gouts of steam billowed off the wounded area.

Patrick spoke through gritted teeth. "We need to leave. She could be a sea hag for all we know. No hero shit."

"You sure about that, Marsh?" Jarvis replied, pointing down behind the ring of salamanders. Before I could turn to look, I saw the color drain from Patrick's face and heard Zilbee squeak excitedly, "Matilda!"

I turned in time to see the lithe duelist fly from the jungle and impale the neck of a salamander with her sparking, lightning-tipped rapier. Two more salamanders fell quickly to her blade before the remaining five could recover from their surprise and turn their golden spears toward the new threat. The naked woman flashed with magic during the confusion, and suddenly the salamanders were having trouble holding onto their spears where they were dripping with water. Patrick and Jarvis were already

halfway to the fray before I realized they were absent from my side. Matilda is hands down the most beautiful fighter I've ever seen. While she is quite physically attractive, that is too simplistic to encompass what I mean. It is impossible to understand grace and fluidity before seeing her fight. She never stops moving. Each flick of motion is purposeful as she transitions seamlessly from one maneuver to the next, spinning, twisting, striking, and exploiting the weaknesses and mistakes of her foes. Her rapier caught a salamander in the eye, its enchanted tip emerging from the back of its skull and spitting a shower of blue sparks.

The salamanders were in chaos. She danced between them, laughing as their spears slipped in their scaled hands, almost stabbing one another. Patrick and Jarvis made quick but (compared to Matilda) ugly work of three of the creatures, and Matilda responded to the final creature's startled "Eep!" by running her rapier up through the softer skin beneath its jaw.

The pale woman had attempted to run during the battle, but was caught by one of the random jets of fire and collapsed, steaming, at the tree line. Jarvis hefted her up to bring her back to the high ground Zilbee and I still occupied, followed by an angry Patrick and a jubilant Matilda. I ran to Jarvis, water skin and bandages in hand. As soon as the first drop of water touched the woman's lips, the skin emptied—the water flowing not into her mouth, but absorbed into her. We had saved a nereid.

My excitement at this realization was cut short as Patrick shouted out in alarm. Six more salamanders entered the burning jungle, presumably to meet the group we had dispatched. Patrick and Matilda, having engaged in an argument in plain view of the scorched zone, left us without the elements of stealth or surprise. I took the nereid from Jarvis, knowing he would have other demands on his attention, and we fled into the jungle once more.

As we ran, Zilbee managed to get three more water skins into the nereid, giving her enough energy to begin to move on her own. Twice, salamanders got close enough to sling spears at our group, but thankfully both attempts missed. The creatures are quite clumsy when standing on their back legs like a humanoid, and they gave pursuit on all fours, wrapping their golden spears in their tails like some sort of fiery, reptilian scorpion.

Jarvis is at home in any wilderness, and after seeing no signs of our pursuers for nearly an hour, he called a halt near a large tree that dripped goo from its branches onto a spread of knotty roots. "Stay quiet and don't step on those roots," he warned before disappearing into the undergrowth to plot our next path.

Would that I had been able to investigate why I shouldn't step on the roots. But moments after Jarvis was out of sight, a group of six salamanders broke through a bank of ferns and into the clearing by the large, dripping tree. They looked as surprised as we did, but thankfully I was traveling with not one but two masters of surprise. Matilda was off her feet and stabbing through throats in a heartbeat, with Zilbee hot on her heels. Both beat Patrick into the fray this time, as Zilbee used her small size to duck under her opponent's spear before spinning around it, clambering up its back, and sinking her stiletto between its shoulder blades. Even I moved faster than anticipated, stepping between the nereid and the salamanders, saber drawn.

The odds were quickly bettering in our favor. Matilda, having already killed one, now had two salamanders chasing her about. Zilbee's target was so distracted by the pain at its back that Patrick was able to easily bury a dagger in its skull, even on his way to body check one of the remaining two. Those salamanders both rounded on Patrick, but Zilbee managed to distract one by slicing off the tip of its tail. Again, Patrick seized the opportunity, kicking the legs out from under the pained creature, and finished it handily. For all of Captain Marsh's stalwart loyalty, strong principle, and generally upstanding demeanor, I'd almost forgotten what a dirty-fighting pirate he can be.

But dirty or not, a spear to the forearm will disarm most fighters, and Patrick was no exception. I lunged toward the battle to come to his aid just as Jarvis rushed out of the jungle, winning a race I was glad to lose. The ranger came from behind the salamander and decorated its back with his cutlass and dagger. As the creature died, we all found ourselves turning to look for Matilda, who stood with one foot atop the corpses of the two salamanders that had been chasing her. She just grinned her infectious grin and said, "About time. Shall we?"

And we did. There was less than a half-hour of light left for Jarvis to ensure we weren't being followed and find us a safe place to camp—but he did, as he always does. He even managed to find a resting site with a small spring, much to the nereid's quiet but obvious delight. The spring waters flowed into her as a blue flush, restoring both her spirits and her hair in a matter of hours. She was hesitant to speak with any of the males in our group, but Zilbee helped me gain her trust, perhaps by sitting on my leg the entire time they spoke, and the three of us were chatting like old scholars by the time the moon rose. However, of how she had come to be captured by salamanders—and so far from water—she would not yet say.

Matilda had managed to bring a bottle of spiced rum with her, which we all shared over dinner, during which she coyly kept us waiting for the story of how she had appeared in time to save us. After dinner, she claimed the remains of the bottle and passed it between herself and Patrick, taking great delight as he stuttered his disapproval of the entire situation at her. Matilda loudly reminded him of her life-debt to him, and that he wasn't upholding his end of the agreement if he tried to sneak off and die someplace where she couldn't have an opportunity to save him. The captain's grumbles subsided as Matilda told the story of how she snuck off the *Folly*. When she got to the part where Luca had been left hopping mad—literally—on the deck of the ship when he saw her rowing away, she mimicked his accent and fury so well, I feared we would wake the jungle with our laughter.

It pleases me to say that the nereid was the first to find slumber. This group has left me feeling safe many nights, and it is good to be able to share that with another, even if it is not my sword directly keeping the jungle's threats at bay.



THE PLAZA OF THE FOUR ASPECTS

Day 63

Overcast. Humid. No wind to speak of.

I woke early this morning, beating both Jarvis and the sun. Clouds had rolled in during the night, and as I assessed the camp, I saw the nereid sitting awake in the spring. It was deeper that I had realized, and only her head and shoulders stuck above the cool waters. I broke my fast with dried meat and cheese, and she proved receptive to my attempts at quiet conversation.

I have compiled a separate entry on the limited history she could tell me of her kin. She called herself Ruani, explaining that her true name was unpronounceable when not underwater. As we watched the sun rise, she caused me to recall many of my youthful musings on the ungraspable complexities of immortality. She and many of her sisters had been captured and enslaved by the elves ages ago when the island was whole, but she spoke of it as though it had been a recent event, and considered herself “old enough to have known better” when the trap was sprung. Her knowledge of the island was limited to the once-opulent bathhouse (described by Harvard and Indio), and to black caves and towers of brass and obsidian somewhere beneath the island.

When Jarvis awoke, he saw us conversing and asked the nereid what she could recall of the island. Her answers seemed to make no sense, and after twenty minutes of deflecting Jarvis’s mounting frustration, I realized

that Ruani was defining all of her experiences by her relative distance to water sources, and whether they were still, flowing, above ground, or underground. The ranger, lacking the patience to make sense of these directions, headed out to scout a new route for us in his normal manner.

Jarvis returned shortly after camp had been struck, reporting signs of salamanders (“gecko prints,” as he called them) to the north, south, and west. Knowing the ogres were to the east, we now had a decision to make. Patrick settled the matter quickly. “Since all the choices are equally bad, we’ll try for the shortest path to the sea and adjust as we need to. We go north.”

I had not realized during our flight the previous day just how close we had come to Hot Springs’ central volcano. Its sloping cone of black basalt towered thousands of feet above the jungle that rippled and undulated over its spreading base of ridges and uneven ground. While north may have been the shortest way to the sea, I foresaw a long day of climbing, descending, and skirting our way around these ridges. As the morning progressed, we were forced farther and farther westward by the terrain. Just before noon, as we mounted the top of a high jungle ridge, Ruani let out a low moan of terror and said, “Svarku! I knew we would be close, but not this close.”

“Svarku?” Patrick asked. “What is Svarku?”

“Not what,” replied the nereid. “Who.” Her face became vacant of expression, and her voice seemed lost in a trance when she spoke again.

“Svarku the golden. First among efreet and fearless leader of those who serve him. Savior of the Night Axe and protector of the weak. Svarku the wise. Svarku the just. Svarku the powerful. May his sorcery and fire warm the hearts of the fallen, forgotten, and forsaken... forever.” She shuddered.

I followed the nereid’s gaze and glimpsed a plaza of black stone adorned with golden statues off in the distance to the northwest. The figures did not appear very large from our vantage point up on the ridge, but as Zilbee tugged on my sleeve to hand me her spyglass, she pointed out the tiny blue-and-orange specks of salamanders milling about on the black expanse. Beyond the plaza, jungle-covered slopes stretched and tumbled off toward a sea that shone like beaten silver underneath the midday sun.

Jarvis, Patrick, and Matilda were rapidly weighing our options in light of this new discovery. The nereid, her back now to the plaza, sat holding Zilbee's hand and looking forlorn. Jarvis estimated we were about ten miles from the water, and based on what he'd seen in the jungle over the past few days, speculated there was likely some sort of front between the ogres and these minions of Svarku.

"They call themselves the Fuegonauts," Ruani said, her voice brittle as she at last told her story. "He holds many of my sisters captive within the volcano. I displeased him 'for the last time' yesterday, so he gave me to some of his salamanders to execute however they wanted. Their plan was to try and turn me into steam and crush my core in the burning jungle, but you saved me." She looked gratefully at Matilda. "As I am in your debt, I have no right to ask favors, but please, can we find another way?"

Patrick turned to Jarvis, who pointed off to the southeast as he spoke. "It looks like we're twelve to fifteen miles to the sea if we head south. The jungle thins out considerably in that direction, too, but I don't know if we can make it to the water before sundown."

Patrick, pondering this, asked me, "How do things look down there on the plaza, Matthias? Can you get a count of their numbers?"

Pressing Zilbee's glass to my eye, I looked toward the plaza once more. The first thing to come into focus was the wrathful golden face of an efreet. The statue appeared to be clothed in intricately detailed robes, and fire flickered around its raised hands. Three more statues of similar size and (I presumed) features faced away from the first at the four edges of the plaza, on which I counted at least twenty-five salamanders, ranging in color from deep red-orange, to yellow, to pale blue-white. They did not appear organized, and most seemed to be skulking about in a half-hearted pantomime of cleaning and polishing the statues and stones.

Just as I was about to report what I had seen, I caught sight of movement on the road of black cobblestones that looked to run from the plaza to the volcano. A gigantic creature, easily twenty feet tall, was walking down the road toward the plaza. Its shining black body was covered in a chaotic jumble of jagged spikes. Four massive legs supported its frame like a beast, but it

also had a raised torso, sporting long arms tipped in flashing claws like some obscene centaur. The giant's hind legs were considerably shorter than its forelegs, giving its body a distinctive slope. Two jagged, blade-like tusks stretched forth from its spiky head. At least fifteen smaller creatures with the same black, broken appearance walked behind it in a shifting brightness of reflecting sunlight, their arms for all the world resembling swords and axes.

Knowing words would not do justice to describe this new monstrosity, I passed the glass to Patrick. After looking where I gestured, he swore. "Gods damn it, then. South we go."



THE TRAIL OF BLACK GLASS

Day 63

Our travel south began uneventfully. Food and water were in plentiful supply in the jungle as we went along, and after seeing how handy it was to have water around the nereid, we strove to keep our water skins full. Jarvis, breaking frequently from our group to scout ahead, reported few signs of other bipedal life in the area, but the signs he did see were fresh, and most likely from salamanders. Jarvis's skill in the wilderness, coupled with our (or perhaps just my) fear of ogres and fiery creatures kept us moving at a rapid pace.

After trekking for three hours, the jungle began to thin significantly, allowing more and more beams of afternoon sunlight to pierce the canopy and pool upon the verdant undergrowth. Spiderbushes rustled in these islands of light, and we saw numerous woody bushes covered in small, fragrant yellow blooms and peppers of a marbled red-orange. Matilda, a lover of spicy foods, sampled one of the peppers with a familiarity that said she recognized it, letting forth a cry of delight at its fiery flavor. She pulled two small canvas sacks from her pack and, after tossing one to Zilbee, began picking peppers and loudly commenting how unfortunate it was that Patrick was far too mild of a man to savor such spicy fare. Zilbee, busy loading up her own bag, joined Matilda in decrying Patrick's delicate palate. But she pointed out his preference for spicy swordswomen over spicy peppers, causing both ladies to erupt with laughter.

Patrick, always supportive of his crew's light-hearted ribbing, reacted quite strangely to the jokes (or so I thought at the time). Instead of laughing along with the two or striking back with a witty riposte, he charged toward them, full sprint, with a look of fury on his face. Zilbee, wide-eyed, dropped her sack of peppers and froze as Captain Marsh rushed toward her. Matilda, hearing the rapid movement, spun around to face him, her laughter dissipating. When Patrick reached the pair, he grabbed Zilbee by the shoulders and flung the little goblin toward me. As she arced through the air, I heard Matilda shout, "What the hell, Pat?!"—and then the pepper bush exploded in a dazzling column of white fire. The shock wave knocked Patrick and Matilda into the jungle and nearly blew me off my feet. Matilda, being Matilda, caught a vine, swung around a tree, and landed gracefully, but I lost sight of Patrick.

I am surprised that I noticed so much through the smoke choking the clearing and the deafness ringing in my ears. When I looked around again, I saw a pale-blue salamander breathing a jet of fire toward Jarvis, even as I discovered that my sabre had leapt unconsciously into my hand once more. As I saw Zilbee (unharmed) on the ground, a burnished salamander warrior skittered into the clearing on all fours, a golden spear wrapped within its tail. It transitioned to its hind legs and thrust its spear toward me in a singular motion, but I managed to deflect the weapon and get a bit of distance between us. The creature came at me again, but only managed to skewer a good length of my cloak. And as it struggled to untangle itself, Zilbee appeared over its shoulder and plunged both her daggers into the joints where neck meets jaw. In my younger days, I would have had the mental cohesion to thank her at the time, but as I am quickly approaching the twilight of my adventuring career, it completely slipped my mind. Fortunately, I know she will read this journal one night as I sleep. So, thank you Zilbee.

Jarvis and Matilda were still fighting the light-colored salamander—and, judging by the chunks missing from its tail, had been doing fairly well. As I caught my breath again, the salamander breathed a gout of fire to push Matilda back, then turned and bolted away. As it moved toward the tree line, it split into three identical salamanders running in three different directions. But since chasing after illusions was not one of our current priorities, Jarvis motioned to Matilda to go find Patrick while we looked for the nereid.

When the attack began, Ruani had leaped into some bushes in fear and surprise, planning to assist with her powers from a position of concealment. Thankfully, it hadn't been necessary, so we hurried on to look for Patrick and Matilda. We found them a short distance past the tree line, standing over the corpse of another light-blue salamander. Patrick had caught a few minor burns on his legs during the scuffle, but seemed no worse for wear. This salamander had pierced some of its back spikes and decorated them with bracelet-sized rings, which Patrick had discovered were pure gold.

We continued on through the jungle heading southeast, even faster now than before, and the vegetation continued to thin before us. After traveling for an hour, we came to a type of clearing that I have not yet seen elsewhere. A fifty- to sixty-foot strip of grass, stone, and low bushes ran between two parallel tree lines and off into the distance. A trail, or even a road, of jagged black chunks of obsidian in the center of this clearing stretched off to each horizon. As this stripe of shattered black glass was nearly thirty feet wide and straight as an arrow, I cannot help but wonder if it has (or had) a deeper purpose than the random whim of nature.

A salamander warrior stood on the trail facing us, spear at the ready. From behind me, I heard Matilda call out an ambush warning. Turning, I saw her sprint toward another warrior in the jungle to our left, while Patrick and Jarvis charged toward the warrior on the trail. Both of the salamanders turned out to be illusions, and now that Patrick and Jarvis were exposed in the clearing, spears flew toward them from the trees. Jarvis caught a spear in the side, but Patrick deflected one with his sabre. Matilda, realizing the deception, ran back toward the group as small white flames, resembling flower petals, began to rain down upon us. Ruani grabbed a water skin from Zilbee's belt and threw it up toward the falling flames. As she spread her arms, the skin burst apart, forming a thin barrier of water between us and the flaming petals. We rushed toward our comrades in the open, hearing the whoosh of the jungle where we had been standing a moment before ignite behind us.

Jarvis had repurposed his shirt into a makeshift bandage to staunch the bleeding in his side, and as we approached he shouted, "Don't fight, just run!" With the jungle catching fire on the western side of the trail of black glass, and not knowing how many enemies we faced or where they lurked,

we fled due south alongside the trail. It wasn't long before more spears flew from the trees—and to everyone's surprise, one clipped Matilda in the calf, causing her to tumble.

My memory grows hazy at this point, but Zilbee tells me that as I turned to assist Matilda, a salamander charged from the jungle toward the nereid, wielding some sort of slaver's polearm with a collar instead of a point. Apparently I managed to push Ruani away from the attack and caught the full brunt of it myself. All I remember is waking on the trail, shattered obsidian stabbing into my arms and legs, and a wicked heat upon my back. It turns out that flint moss grows amongst the black glass in profusion, so as I slid across it, the friction set the moss aflame. I managed to scramble to my feet and rip the flaming remains of my shredded cloak from my back.

The warrior that had attacked me was dead, and no more came after it. We treated our wounds as best we could before heading out again, hopeful that Jarvis's estimation of only four to five hours of travel left was correct. The sun was moving west faster than we were moving south, though, and I worried that we wouldn't make it through another night in this jungle.



THE LAVA RIVER

Day 63

The ground beneath our feet began to change as we traveled southeast from the black glass. Its gentle rolling was frequently interrupted by formations of black, cracked basalt, looking as though they had oozed forth from a seeping wound. Scabs upon the island's face, to mirror those taking shape upon my back, Matilda's leg, Jarvis's side, and Patrick's arm. I could tell our pace had slowed, but still the jungle thinned before us, easing our flight with each step.

Ruani began to complain of heat, and even Zilbee looked exhausted, her quiet jokes becoming as sparse as the remaining trees. Although the angled rays from the western sun were intense, the nereid seemed to sense another heat that we could not, and over the course of two hours, she consumed almost every drop of extra water we carried with us.

As the sun began to set in earnest, we came upon a place of great beauty and desolation. A snaking stream of lava poured out of a broken ridge and flowed through the blackened, ash-choked contours of the land. It rushed as quick as water, a red and orange river cooling into brittle gray that crashed upon its banks in a crumbling mockery of foaming ocean breakers.

And then, across the river, two jagged black creatures, like those from the plaza, stepped out from behind a rise. The angles of their bipedal bodies glinted pink and gold, reflecting the colors of the setting sun. At first,

I thought they held weapons of the same black material as their bodies, before realizing that those weapons grew in place of their left forearms. One was equipped with a trident, the other with a massive axe. I turned to cry a warning as two ghost-white salamanders crawled out from behind the same rise, but Jarvis's voice rose in alarm before I could part my lips. Six salamander warriors were crawling rapidly toward us from the north, their orange scales glowing like fire against the blackened ground, golden spears shining in the light.

As I told my friends what I had seen across the river, I saw a light-blue salamander, chunks missing from its tail, rushing down the trail we had made. I heard the furious crackle of Matilda's lightning-tipped rapier as it tasted air once more, and saw Patrick draw his sword, his face set with the furious determination it always has before a rousing speech. But before he could speak, the nereid cleared her throat and said, "The ocean is close. I can feel the waves strike against cliffs. If we can reach them, I will guide you to your ship." Pain and earnestness was on her face, and I realized how dreadful it must have been for her to be so near a lava flow.

Ruani then tugged at a lock of hair, pulling forth a number of iridescent strands that she handed to each of us, and saying, "Tie this about your wrist. If we become separated, the sea will embrace you as its own. Please. Please do not let them capture me." Her words washed the fury off of Patrick's face, who nodded and said, "Our southern run continues. Be on guard everyone." My boots crunched across the blackened ground as we made our hasty retreat, and I noticed wisps of steam rising from the nereid's footfalls as we went. Looking west across the river, I no longer saw the abominations of black shards, or the white salamanders, but the golden spears of the warriors, no more than half a mile behind us, flashed brightly in the light of the sinking sun.

We moved along as best we could, but we were not fast enough. Red-orange salamanders fell upon our flank, and I was unable to get my blade up in time to block a spear thrust across my path. The sharpened tines tore a glancing bloody path across my chest, taking much of my shirt, but not my life. Patrick and Matilda met the onslaught in a swirl of steel and sparks, but Jarvis lost his footing somehow, rolling with a salamander down an ashen rise and out of sight.

My hand moved my saber faster than my mind could process. I have had many trainers in the past, but Rand's lessons stuck with me the most. He taught me nothing special—simple upward deflections; fast, wide swings to carve out space; feigning left; attacking right. Nothing overly taxing or clever, but each move practiced with excruciating repetition. But even as my arms remembered those movements, I watched the salamander's eyes widen in surprise as Zilbee, like clockwork, plunged her daggers into its back. As it reeled in pain, I sliced my saber hard across its head and locked eyes with my goblin companion. Panicked concern contorted her face as her gaze swept across my bloody chest. I wanted to say something boastful to her, but I could think of nothing but the breath rattling in my lungs.

The salamanders that had reached us were dead, but Jarvis was still nowhere to be seen. Matilda was running around the slope in the direction where I'd seen him disappear, and Patrick stood, holding the golden spear of a salamander and looking west. I hoped he was just enjoying the last sliver of the sun as it retreated behind the horizon, but the red-hued light revealed a mixed expression of dread and duty upon his face. I followed his eyeline. Illuminated from below by the orange lava light of the rushing river, a jagged, black form stood like a burning silhouette against the sun. Its left arm, shaped like a sword blade, was raised above its head, and two white salamanders walked along beside it, their bodies swaying like serpents.

"Matthias. Get her to the ocean." Patrick's voice was firm and deep. No falter anywhere within. To punctuate his words, he took two steps and loosed the spear. Then, grabbing another from the ground, he leaped over its previous owner's corpse and charged toward the river.

When I heard those words, a knot tied in my throat that could not be swallowed down. I grabbed Zilbee by her pack and flung her upon my back before taking Ruani's hand and pulling her along in as much of a sprint as I could muster. I am ashamed to say that I could not look back at Patrick. Perhaps a minute into our flight, we met Matilda and Jarvis running toward us from the east, a group of seven white and five orange salamanders in the distance behind them. Jarvis was covered in blood, most of which was not his own, but his left arm hung limp at his side and he was missing a boot. He did not speak, and his jaw was set tight in a scowl.

Matilda, despite her own coating of gore, looked as refined and poised as ever, but her posture changed as she realized Patrick was not with us. She told Jarvis to get us to the ocean, and the knot in my throat prevented me from disputing her orders. Zilbee, however, pulled a ten-inch rod of blue steel from her pack and tossed it toward Matilda, shouting, "Two charges Mattie! You know the word." As the rod passed by my face, I felt its aura of icy cold, manifesting as smoke or steam as it tumbled through the air toward Matilda's outstretched hand. She caught it effortlessly, then turned and sprinted off the way we'd come, her long braid swinging behind her.

The dark, gently rolling land stretched out before us, blacker than black in the quickly fading twilight, but we ran across it all the same. Timing seemed to be in our favor, though, and it wasn't until we reached the cliffs that we heard the rushing air of a thrown spear. Looking back, I only saw three salamanders, two orange and one white. I did not know if the others had gone off in pursuit of Matilda, or if the missing creatures had just been illusions. Ruani shouted for us to jump—to leap from the cliffs and let the ocean catch us. So I did.

When we had sailed around Hot Springs Island with the Martel Company, searching for a suitable location to build our port town, we found that much of the island's southeastern stretch was little more than cliffs of columnar basalt rising more than two hundred feet above the waves. Leaping into darkness, I was prepared to plummet for a lengthy time, but that was not the case. The fall seemed far too short, as if the sea itself reached up to catch us. Although the sun was gone, the tropical waters still held some of its warmth, and I floated comfortably, perhaps buoyed by the nereid's magic. Zilbee and Jarvis bobbed in the water nearby, but Ruani was nowhere to be seen.

The moon had just begun to rise, a pale half circle that trimmed my wake in silver as I swam toward the others. Jarvis was still not speaking, and the scowl fixed on his face now seemed lopsided in the darkness. His jaw was either broken or dislocated, so I used one of the remaining fragments of my shirt to bind it in the proper place as best I could. As I fumbled with the wet cloth and attempted to coax it into a knot that would stay, the darkness was momentarily lifted by an explosion of blue-white light from the cliff top. Zilbee exclaimed, "The coldsplosion! Oh, they're almost here!"

Before my eyes could banish the ghostly remnants of the sudden flash, another “coldsplosion” erupted right at the edge of the cliff as Zilbee screamed, “Matthias! Look!” I saw two silhouettes against the flash of icy blue. Then, I heard a rushing sound as the water foamed and swirled around us, and I felt like I was rising up. Then from behind me came a mighty splash, and Matilda and Patrick were with us once more. There was still no sign of the nereid, but the feeling of rising changed to one of slow descent.

Patrick and Matilda seemed whole, aside from additional lacerations, and after confirming we were mostly all right, they asked about the nereid. I told them what I knew and that she appeared to be gone, to which Patrick said, “Well, at least there was an ounce of truth and we didn’t splatter from the fall. Let’s make for the cliffs. Hopefully, we can find a place to rest a while.” The tide was high, and I worried we would find nothing but water and a sheer cliff face. Thankfully, I was wrong. Megalithic outcroppings jutted up through the waves closer to the cliffs. The swell that caught us really did seem to have saved us, and perhaps twenty minutes after witnessing the power of Zilbee’s rod, we lay dripping and panting atop an outcrop that proved easy to climb. Jarvis’s limp left arm turned out to be dislocated, but Patrick and I were able to set it for him, and I kept myself busy tending to his other wounds as best I could. Patrick and Matilda were having a heated conversation in hushed tones, and Zilbee rustled through the remains of her pack, looking for something that could make light or heat. The night was warm, and we weren’t terribly cold, but the sooner we could dry off, the better we would all feel.

And so we waited. Most of our supplies, packed originally for just a day, were by now lost, consumed, or waterlogged. Salt water had somewhat cleaned our wounds, and the last remnants of our shredded shirts were torn further to serve as bandages. Jarvis and Zilbee dozed fitfully while I watched the moon trace its way across the sky, and I listened to the waves sigh as they passed our rock.

In the time just before dawn, Patrick stood and said, “That’s it. She isn’t coming back. Matilda and I are leaving our things here and going to get the ship. I was going to go alone. But as a pair, if one gets hurt, the other can keep going. And besides, she’d probably sneak along anyway. There’s some jerky in her pack, and a little rum seems to have survived too. I

don't know what you'll face, but we'll try to be back as fast and fair as the western wind." And with that, they dove into the sea and swam away to the northeast. Perhaps it was their skill, or perhaps it was the nereid's blessing, but the two seemed to speed away with hardly a sound, gliding through the water as the sky began to paint over its blackness with indigo.

Day 64

Wind south-southeast with patchy clouds.

Dawn eased herself across the sky, a muted echo of the salamanders that had pursued us. Soft reds and oranges were cut through with clouds of blue and white, glowing gold around the edges. As the day wore on, Zilbee, growing bored, worked with Jarvis on a makeshift fishing line. Once he set it, she decided to get out of the sun and into the water with a mind to hunt for oysters. She dove down out of sight and then burst back up excitedly, exclaiming, "I can breathe! With Ruani's gift, I can breathe underwater. And I've spotted oysters, too." We spent the remainder of the day resting and eating fresh oysters. Jarvis didn't manage to catch any fish, but he did find a gold-colored pearl, nearly as big as a tooth and of exceptional quality in one of his oysters. We saw no creatures other than sea birds and a few schools of flying fish.

Round about sunset, the *Siren's Folly* cruised into view from the north. Patrick's ship has always been a beauty, but she was even more so today with her sails full of wind, and my body full of weariness and relief. Luca rowed out in a skiff to get us, his great mustachioed face erupting in laughter as Zilbee leapt to hug his broad arm. And as she did, I realized that at some unidentifiable point, while running through that jungle, these islands had gotten into my blood. Their primal beauty and fury were infectious now that I was safe once more. I realize I am getting old, but there is so much more here to see. I think I noticed at least ten plants that I could not identify as we ran along. And of course, there are the ruins to the west where the Martel Company found so much history and death.

I can think of no other place I would rather call home than the Swordfish Islands.





TRADE

“ ’Course we’re gonna cut up the body. What’d you think we came out here for? A picnic? All the parts are worth something to somebody.”



In the end, everything is just so much meat and useful parts that somebody, somewhere wants to buy. Especially here in the Swordfish Islands. The guild, of course, pays top coin for raw materials, but to get that coin you've got to get the goods back to Swordfish Bay on Rand's Retreat, and doing so might not always be in the cards. Besides, the natives on Hot Springs Island like raw materials just as much as we do, and since this is a field guide for that island, you probably want to know what they want in case you need to hustle in a pinch.

On the following pages, we go through each creature listed in the bestiary and identify the parts we know the various factions like to buy, steal, or trade for. An "X" means they usually want the item, while ".." means they're usually disinterested. It ain't the end all, be all, of course. Individuals might always want something different than their faction at large, but on the whole, if you want to sweeten up the Night Axe, they'll probably like it if you show up with tusks of some kind. There's nothing we know of that these factions consider revolting or offensive. But if you find out that's wrong the hard way, let us know, and we'll get the next edition of this guide updated.

Happy hunting!



CREATURE	U S E F U L PART	NIGHT AXE	NEREIDS	FUEGONAUTS	KIRU	GOA	ARVA
Astral Spinner	Glowing orbs	..	X	X	X	..	..
Astral Spinner	Web	..	X	..	X	..	..
Giant Bat	Ears	X	..	..	X	..	..
Giant Bat	Guano	X	..	X	X	X	..
Giant Bat	Wings	X	..	..	X	X	..
Blindfire Carpet	Peppers	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blindfire Vine	Peppers	X	X	X	X	X	X
Boar	Hide	X	..	..	X	X	X
Boar	Meat	X	..	X	X	X	X
Boar	Tusks	X	..	X	..	..	X
Dire Boar	Bones	X	..	..	X	..	..
Dire Boar	Eyes	X	..	..	X	..	..
Dire Boar	Hide	X	..	..	X	X	X
Dire Boar	Meat	X	..	X	X	X	X
Dire Boar	Tusk	X	..	X	..	..	X
Boltforager	Beak/horn	X	..	..	X	..	..
Boltforager	Dust	X	..	X	X	..	X
Boltforager	Meat	..	..	X	X	X	..
Broadback	Blood	X	..	X	X	..	X
Broadback	Bones	X	..	..	X	X	X
Broadback	Hide	X	..	..	X	X	X
Broadback	Meat	..	..	X	X	X	X

CREATURE	U S E F U L PART	NIGHT AXE	NEREIDS	FUEGONAUTS	KIRU	GOA	ARVA
Giant Centipede	Legs	X	..	..	X	X	..
Giant Centipede	Venom sacs	X	X	..	X	..	X
Copperback	Meat	..	..	..	X	X	X
Copperback	Scales	..	X	..	X	X	X
Copperback	Venom sac	X	X	..	X	..	X
Coppermane Prowler	Beak	..	..	..	X	..	..
Coppermane Prowler	Feathers	..	X	X	X	..	..
Coppermane Prowler	Heart	..	..	X	X	X	X
Coppermane Prowler	Hide	..	..	..	X	X	X
Crystal Frog	Frog itself	X	X	X	..	..	..
Duecadre	Beak	..	..	..	X	..	..
Duecadre	Feathers	..	X	..	X	..	..
Duecadre	Feet	X	..	X	X	X	..
Duecadre	Liver	X	..	..	X	..	..
Duecadre	Meat	X	..	X	X	X	X
Duecadre	Sinew	X	..	..	X	X	X
Flayfiend	Hide	..	..	..	..	..	X
Flayfiend	Meat	..	..	..	..	X	X
Flayfiend	Quills	..	X	..	X	..	..
Flayfiend	Tusks	X	X	X	..	..	..
Muttering Serpent	Blood	..	..	X	..	..	..
Muttering Serpent	Head	..	X	..	X	..	..

CREATURE	U S E F U L PART	NIGHT AXE	NEREIDS	FUEGONAUTS	KIRU	GOA	ARVA
Muttering Serpent	Scales	X	..	..	X	..	..
Obsidian Digger	Digger itself	X	X	X	..	..	..
Obsidian Digger	Sculptures	..	X	..	X	..	..
Poison Dart Frog	Poison/frog	..	X	X	X	..	..
Giant Rat	Heart	..	..	..	X	..	..
Giant Rat	Hide	X	..	..	X	..	..
Giant Rat	Liver	..	..	X	..	X	X
Giant Rat	Meat	X	..	X	..	..	X
Singing Golem	Chimes	X	..	X	..	..	..
Singing Golem	Statue/pieces	X	X	..	..	..	..
Tabibari	Bones	X	..	X	..	X	X
Tabibari	Brains	X	X	..	X	..	..
Tabibari	Hide	X	..	..	X	X	X
Tabibari	Meat	X	..	..	X	X	X
Vyderac Feeder	Armor plates	X	..	..	..	X	..
Vyderac Feeder	Feed sac	X	X	..	X	X	..
Vyderac Feeder	Hooks	X	..	..	..	..	..
Vyderac Maggot	Acid sac	..	X	..	X	X	X
Vyderac Maggot	Claws	X	..	..	..	..	..
Vyderac Maggot	Meat	..	..	X	..	X	..
Vyderac Matron	Acid sacs	X	X	..	..	X	..
Vyderac Matron	Armor plates	..	X	X	..	..	X

CREATURE	U S E F U L PART	NIGHT AXE	NEREIDS	FUEGONAUTS	KIRU	GOA	ARVA
Vyderac Seeker	Blood	:	:	:	X	:	:
Vyderac Seeker	Eyes	:	:	:	X	:	:
Vyderac Seeker	Powder sac	X	..	X	..	..	X
Vyderac Seeker	Wings	..	X	..	..	..	..
Vyderac Swarmer	Blood	..	..	..	X	..	..
Vyderac Swarmer	Shell	..	X	..	X	..	..
Vyderac Swarmer	Venom sack	..	X	..	..	..	X
Boneback Wydarr	Blood	..	..	X	..	..	..
Boneback Wydarr	Bone spikes	X	..	..	X	..	..
Boneback Wydarr	Heart	..	..	X	..	X	X
Boneback Wydarr	Tongue	..	..	X	..	X	X
Crystalback Wydarr	Blood	..	..	X	..	..	..
Crystalback Wydarr	Bones	..	..	..	X	..	..
Crystalback Wydarr	Crystal spikes	X	..	..	X	..	X
Crystalback Wydarr	Heart	..	..	X	..	X	X
Crystalback Wydarr	Metal plates	X	X	..	..	..	X
Crystalback Wydarr	Tongue	..	..	X	..	X	X
Zip Bird	Beak	X	..	..	X	X	..
Zip Bird	Eyes	..	..	..	X	..	..
Zip Bird	Feathers	X	X	..	X	..	..
Zip Bird	Heart	..	..	X	X	X	X
Zip Bird	Meat	X	..	..	X	X	..

“But I never could have done it,” he objected, “without everyone else’s help.” “That may be true,” said Reason gravely, “but you had the courage to try; and what you can do is often simply a matter of what you will do.”

-NORTON JUSTER, The Phantom Tollbooth

A. Hindelang	Daniel Lofton	Javier Soto	Matt Houck	Roman Perry
Aaron W Scott	Daniel MacPhee	Jeff Bernstein	Matt R Davis	Ron James
Adam Koch	Darren Wynne	Jeff Russell	Matthew “Ogre” Seagle	Ross Annesley
Adam Schmidt	Dave Bunge	Jeff Scifert	Matthias Weeks	Ross Hendry
Adam Whitcomb	David Fernandez	Jeffrey Klingbeil	Max Glasner	Rudy Hernandez
Adrienne C akyrh	David Noble	Jeffrey N. Smith	Maxwell Spann	Rudy Randolph
Alan Cranbury	Derek Rosenberg	Jen Brinkman	Megee	Rusted Portal Games
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Alex Davis	Devin Night	Jerry Barth	Michael Miska	Sam “DMSamuel” Dillon
Alex Huyer	Dom Mooney	Jesse N	Mike Bolam	Samantha Clayton
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Andrew Piseck	Dragon’s Lair Austin	Jimmy Eastwood	Mike Overbo	Scott Kehl
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Andrew Ross	duneaght	John ‘johnkzin’ Rudd	Mike Togtman	Sean Pelkey
Andy Action	edchuk	John Ivor Carlson	Mike Williams	Sean Poppe
Angelo Pileggi	Eleasa Nielsen	John katre Cater	MikeBusto	Sean-Mikel Flowers
ArcaneLayne	Elliott Freeman	John Lamulle	Mriha	Sergio F. Gutierrez
Arthur Lender	ELW Green	John Sajo	Murray Corradini	Shazbaz Boyles
Austin Chandler	Eric Betts	Johnathan “MvK” Wright	N. A. P.	Sherwood Dawson
Bardaree Bryant	Eric Hoffman	Johnny F. Normal	Nathan	Sir Charles
Bavo Callens	Erik Talvola	Jon Boylan	Nathan Ballingrud	Spencer Krigbaum
Ben L.	Ernest Mueller	Jon Hammersley	Nathaniel Bennett	steelwraith
Ben Rosenthal	Evan Dooner	Jon Hersherberger	Ngo Vinh-Hoi	Steven Robert
Benjamin Adelman	Evan Grim	Jonah Broh	Nicholas Kerr	Steven Torres-Roman
Benjamin Nitti	Ferric Galewind	Jonathan Smith	Nick Colombo	Taylor Grzechowiak
Blake Reinhart	Fia Gewinnt	Jordi Rabionet	Nick Serluco	Terry L Gilbert Jr
Blur Kuschel	Filthy Monkey	Josh Gardner	Olive & Eliot	Thalji
Blush	FKW	Josh Symonds	Omari Brooks	That weird gecko guy
Bob Fitch	flyaturtle	Josh Wittge	Patrick Stuart	The Stranger
Bob Limboblance Sweeney	Forrest Hudspeth	Joshua Smith	Paul Kensler	Thomas Milazzo
Bob Melcher III	Frank Brooks	JT Scott	Paul Rivers	Tim Cusack
Bobby Leopold	Frank Reidel	Judd M. Goswick	Paul S.	Tim Deschene
Boochydog	Fredrik “Mephil” B	Jürgen Mayer	Paul Sparkles	Timothy Baker
Brandon Daggerhart	Frits Kujlman	Kaeden Shaper	Paul Vermeren	Timothy W.
Brett Easterbrook	Fritz Stegmann	Kai Yau	Paul Wolfe	Todd Terwilliger
Call Harper	Fuckface Barfoholic	Kampante	Pedro O. Obliziner	Tom Walker
Cameron Orwin	Gary McBride	Karissa Riggs	Perttu Vedenoja	Tony Kapolka
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Cato Vandrare	Gideon Mecum	KEEGAN FINK	Peyton McCauley	Tyler Crumrine
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Chase Street	Handy Haversack	KIsa Griffin	Rafael Fagundes	Wes Fournier
Cherrelle M	Harald	Kris “Rompcat” Jaech	Ramanan Sivaranzan	Wilhelm Fitzpatrick
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Chris Carpenter	Henning Elfwerking	Kyle Frazier	Reece Nelson	William Fischer
Chris Nenko	Huy Tran	Kyloh Bear Conrad	Rev. Dr. Edgar Johnson	William Hollar
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Chris Sulat	Iron Spectre	Lance Turturice	Rick Grimes	Xander Cerretani
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Clayton Culwell	Jack Ulrich	Lloyd Rasmussen		
Cleoris Buttcake	James Hurst	Lorenzo Bandieri		
Clint Krause	James M. Brigham	Mac Ennis		
Cole Warburton	James Yager	Marek Benes		
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Connor Sites-Bowen	Jarrold Maistros	Mark Sable		
Damion “Doc” Meany	Jason Carter	Markus Plötz		
Dan Domme	Jason Keegan	Martin Schramm		
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Daniel Jacobsson	Jason Lawrence	Matt Cramsie		
	Jason Neff	Matt D’Amico		

Special thanks to all of the friends, family and Kickstarter backers who made Hot Springs Island possible. WE COULDN’T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU.



If found, return to B. FRENCH

HOT SPRINGS ISLAND

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HS-01:

HS-01:

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HS-02:

HS-03: White Rock Spring

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HS-03:

HS-04: Glavrok Village

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HS-05:

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HS-06: Plaza of Four Aspects

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HS-07: The Burning Jungle

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HS-08: The Whale Graveyard

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HS-11: Trail of Black Glass

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HS-14: Crab Mouth Lagoon

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HS-25:

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