

# HELLFROST LAND OF FIRE

• REALM GUIDE #15 •

## THE SALT MARSH

### Introduction

The verdant landscape of the Salt Marsh has lured many a curious traveler to his death. For sure it is rich in ruins untouched by human hands, but it is also home to fierce gator-men whose ancient civilization is threatened by civil war, as well as more dangerous foes. This supplement expands on material found in *Hellfrost: Land of Fire*.

### THE GATORMEN'S SITUATION

The passage of time has not been kind to the gatormen of the Salt Marsh. Cut off from their ancient heartlands by geography and the rise of the lizardmen, they have passed the ages in solitude. While they retained faith in their gods long after the northern empire fell, they too have succumbed to sole worship of Sarkeb, for he alone answers their prayers. Despite this, they have, for now, avoided falling into abject barbarity. Their rituals are certainly more bloody than in days of old, and much of their ancient knowledge is long forgotten, but they remain a largely civilized race, albeit one on a precipice.

For millennia they watched as other races rose to prominence, unwilling to commit their remaining forces to struggles that were not theirs, regardless of the rewards promised them. But times are changing, and isolation is no longer a viable option.

Since the end of jinn rule, vast tracts of the marsh have been swallowed by the sand. Though they dominate the central regions, the low-lying lands are their primary hunting grounds, and now they must compete with hungry nomads. Of no strategic value, the sphinxes have nonetheless set their sights on the Salt Marsh, or at least its sentient inhabitants. Captured gatormen are highly prized in the arena, and the price they fetch lures bounty hunters and trappers here in ever-growing numbers. Dwindling numbers among the tribes from captures, escalating tribal feuds, and a lack of newborns, is actually making it harder for Tyrannus Sornak to control the remaining population, for dissension now rules where once his word did.

The greatest threat is, of course, the lizardman army that seeks to pass through Sutmark into Al-Shirkuh. In truth the lizardmen know nothing of the gatormen's existence. Were they to break through, they would likely ignore the Salt Marsh, for their goal lies far to the south. Unfortunately, the gatormen do not know this. Whether they should aid the northern humans, prepare to meet the lizardmen on the Grazelands, or simply flee and head south is not only heatedly debated, it is splintering their society into rival camps.

Tyrannus Sornak is elderly even by gatorman standards. His longevity is down purely to his will to see his people not only safe, but prosperous. Exactly how he intends to

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## RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Salt Marsh.

\* **Biting Insects:** Each day every hero must draw a card from the action deck. A numbered Spade indicates biting gnats and midges plague him. He must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue from itchy bites. On a Spade face card, his Vigor roll is made at -2. Fatigue from the bites is removed after 24 hours or with the application of a single dose of antihistamine rubbed into the skin.

Because these swarms don't have stat blocks, use of insect repellent (see page 5) works somewhat differently. A character using repellent suffers an attack only if the card value is 2-4 or an Ace of Spades. Otherwise, the insects are just a buzzing annoyance.

\* **Difficult Terrain:** if the ground isn't waterlogged, it is covered in thick patches of grass or dense mangrove swamp. Movement is as per difficult ground. For each two hours of travel on foot, explorers must make a Vigor roll to avoid a level of Fatigue. Recovery requires nothing more than a 15 minute rest.

\* **Food and Water:** While the northern waters are salty, fresh water can be found in the southern swamp. Flora and fauna are plentiful. Survival rolls to find food and water are made at +2 here. In the northern reaches, rolls to find fresh water are made at -2 (food rolls still receives a +2 bonus).

deal with the many problems is as much a mystery to him as it is the powerful priests who wait to replace him. For now he juggles solutions, desperately hoping and praying that some miracles will bring the salvation he desperately craves. Should he die before this occurs, or fail to permanently appease the various factions, he knows the tribes will descend into a civil war from which they may never emerge.

## Exploration

For those used to wandering the harsh desert or more arduous lands like the Mirrorsands or Salt Basin, the Salt Marsh is a refreshing change. This is not to say travel is not fraught with difficulties or dangers, though.

Traveling through the Salt Marsh on foot is a physically tiring experience. In the south and along the fringes, the land is marked by water channels that have cut through the low-lying land to leave a maze of raised earth. Although rarely over knee-height, wading through the water and cloying mud hour after hour is exhausting. Moving along the raised land is little better, for it is a tangle of thick reeds and grasses. Occasionally one finds a salt flat where movement is brisker but these are far from extensive. Visibility is generally good due thanks to the flat terrain, though the grasses are ideal hiding places

for basking crocodiles and snakes. Poking ahead with a long stick is recommended.

Sensible explorers construct a raft. While paddling is certainly less rigorous, it brings with it other problems. The many river channels often mean either very lengthy voyages in the hope of finding a channel connecting to the one that leads to the intended destination or having to haul the raft over land for miles.

In the center and north, the grasses give way to dense clumps of mangrove trees as the water turns more saline. Dry land is harder to find, forcing explorers to wade along the channels. Visibility is greatly reduced, and it is easy to become disoriented, even when following a waterway. In places, the trees are so tall and their foliage so thick it gives the impression of traversing a corridor. In places where the treetops meet, a tunnel is formed. Along narrow waterways, these natural tunnels can invoke feelings of claustrophobia.

While disease is not a major concern except in rare stagnant pools cut off from the flow of the tides and rivers, biting insects are a constant plague. Day and night, the air positively hums with swarms of buzzing insects, most of which seem to have a taste for exposed flesh. Aside from the dangers mentioned above, giant frogs haunt the outer marsh. Deeper in, adventurers must be more alert, for here the threat is from vicious gatormen, ferocious marsh dragons, and many-headed marsh hydras. Deep in the mangrove swamp, harpies make their nests in the tree tops.

Unlike much of Al-Shirkuh's wild lands, the southern areas are home to abundant edible flora and fauna. The mangrove swamps are a veritable garden compared to the sands, but the many dangers keep hungry Bedu from venturing too deep.

## Gatormen Society

Tyrannus Sornak is king of the gatormen, yet his rule is not absolute. The high lords of the other cities, all of whom are priests of Sarkeb, wield immense political and military power, the latter through the paladins they command. In days of yore as now, kings rule through appeasing the rival factions, playing them off against each other in order to prevent them consolidating their power and threatening the throne.

Whereas before the lizardmen revolt the lords were of different faiths, making it far easier to manipulate them into arguing with rivals, the rise of the sole cult of Sarkeb has stymied that. Fortunately, each current high lord has different temporal goals. So long as they remain divided, Sornak has breathing space.

Each high lord's position is far from secure. The cult of Sarkeb promotes advancement through murder of one's superiors. Aside from machinations against the king, each must quell those who seek to usurp his power. Whereas the king prefers diplomacy, intimidation and fear are the primary weapons of the high lords.

## Military

Although the gatormen of the northern Great Swamp (see *Hellfrost Gazetteer*) are a faded shadow of their former might, barbaric raiders engaged in bloodthirsty rituals and thoroughly tribal, those of the Salt Marsh still maintain an orderly society.

Each priest commands a company of paladins of Sarkeb. The number of paladins at his beck and call depends on his influence within society. The high lords have the largest companies, their strength often superior to all the lesser priests they rule over combined. These companies of fierce holy warriors boast names such as Vengeful Teeth of Sarkeb, the Tearing Jaws, and the Flesh Renders. Despite serving the same deity, the companies stationed within the same city are not necessarily allies. Even if a city is attacked, the priests rarely cooperate, for each temple compete for glory and kills.

The king naturally has the largest number of paladins under his authority. This single company is known as the Chosen Host of Sarkeb. Fierce and fanatical, they would not be enough to quell a rebellion if the high lords ever put aside their differences. Still, they would make any attempt to seize the throne a costly exercise.

The second tier warriors are hunters. Only the city's ruler has the authority to call them to arms, and technically the king can overrule this decision. When summoned, they form makeshift companies averaging 50 to 100 strong.

## Trade & Tribute

Although the gatormen do not trade with outsiders, the local nomad tribes live near the fringes regularly plunder the Salt Marsh's natural resources. Bundles of reed and herbs, live birds and big cats, the skins and horns of gazelles, the skins and teeth of crocodiles, bits and pieces of gatormen pottery found in the water, and, on rare occasions, scales from marsh dragons are gathered for trade. Game meat, preserved in salt, is the major export of the region.

Trade not destined for the markets of the Grazelands is carried to the Oasis of Dreams. Here the items are traded with local merchants for goods the tribes need. The trade is very much a small scale enterprise, but it brings sufficient wealth to the tribesmen. Rarely do the goods reach the great coastal cities, for such things are commonplace across Al-Shirkuh. Most are purchased by passing merchants as trinkets or gifts for friends.

## Major Locales

Al-Shirkuh may be awash with ruins inhabited by all manner of monsters, but most hold little treasure to tempt adventurers. Not so in the Salt Marsh, for here the temples of the gatorman are untouched by human hands.

Unfortunately, they are also occupied by sentient beings, and the locals are not tolerant of those who would seek to rob them of their riches.

## CITIES (GENERAL NOTES)

When the gatormen ruled a vast empire, they erected cities of stone to honor their once many gods. At the heart of each city stood a pyramid-temple, a monumental stepped structure dedicated to the city's patron deity. Surrounding the pyramid was a sacred plaza, where only priests could walk except on holy days. A grand plaza, lined with smaller temples devoted to the other deities, led from the main gate to the plaza.

What gods the gatormen once worshipped in these impressive structures has been wiped away. Those the gatormen still inhabit are devoted entirely to Sarkeb. Even in the lost cities, and several exist in the surrounding desert, the names of the old gods, carved in stone to immortalize them, cannot be deciphered, even with magic. When they abandoned the gatormen and withdrew from the universe, their names went with them.

Smaller avenues radiated from the plaza, each laid down in accordance with a celestial alignment no longer visible in the heavens, for such is the great antiquity of these sites. Homes, barracks, slave pens, warehouses, shops, and workshops lined the avenues, creating bustling, vibrant cities whose grandeur belied the cruelty of the gatorman race and their bloodthirsty gods.

## CITY OF ABOMINATIONS

The gatormen of old were fascinated with the forms of other races and creatures, though they saw only ugliness in them. Seeking to "improve" them, to transform them into a form more pleasing to their eye, and to create a more pliable slave race than the lizardmen, the priests of the forgotten gods conducted many fell magical experiments. In the hallowed halls of their temples they labored to merge crocodiles with other species. One such species was the crocosphinxes (p. 12), but many other abominations were created.

Over the centuries, what began as idle curiosity became an all-encompassing obsession. Grotesque creatures were created for no reason other than to see the result, and when the results were known, discarded to wander the marsh. The madness reached its abhorrent conclusion in the creation of undead creatures with crocodile heads.

The city's downfall came about not through the actions of the lizardmen, but through its priests. Not content with giving other creatures crocodile heads, the priests turned on their people, removing their heads and replacing them with those of other beasts and races. The king, sickened by reports of the priest's evil ways, ordered the inhabitants destroyed to the last. While the attack cleansed the city, many of the undead beasts still stalked the marsh. They have gravitated back to the city, drawn here perhaps in a desperate search for a solution



## DISEASES

Most sentient citizens of Al-Shirkuh pride themselves on their cleanliness, but even their rigorous bathing habits cannot save them from disease. As well as diseases common to Rassilon (see *Hellfrost Bestiary* and *Rassilon Expansion*), Al-Shirkuh has diseases of its own.

Diseases are listed by their common name. The information in parentheses is the method of contracting the disease and Vigor roll modifiers.

**Apsu's Curse (Induction, 0):** Commonly contracted from ingesting tainted food and water, Apsu's Curse (also known as Brown Water) induces watery diarrhoea. As well as leaving the victim Fatigued (and needing frequent washes and changes of clothes), he must drink an additional one quart of water each day. A Vigor roll is made to recover each two days after the first.

**Camel Curse (Airborne, -1):** Causes water retention in the legs. Pace and running dice are halved due to the pain, and Agility and Agility-linked skill rolls suffer a -1 penalty. A Vigor roll may be made each week to rid oneself of the infection.

**Hekata's Revenge (Induction, varies):** The land of Hekata is awash with necromantic energy. The greatest source is the River Ankh, but all water and wildlife carries the taint. Consuming the flora or fauna of Hekata requires a Vigor roll at -1, -4 if water from the Ankh is ingested. Failure causes the victim to literally rot away from the inside. Each day, he must make a Vigor roll (with the same penalty as above) or lose a die of Vigor. When Vigor drops below a d4, the victim dies, only to rise again as a zombie 1d4 rounds later. A Vigor roll to rid oneself of the disease is only possible with antibiotics. Without these, death is guaranteed. Lost Vigor dice are recovered at the rate of one per week with total rest, and one per two weeks if active.

**Ifrit Breath (Induction, 0):** A minor disease that causes foul breath. Victims have -2 Charisma due to the awful stench. A roll Vigor to cure the infection may be made each week. Prolonged infection (typically a month), can cause tooth loss.

**Smoker's Cough (Airborne, -2):** Respiratory tract infection. Victims are Fatigued while infected. Any roll of 1 (regardless of Wild Die) on a physical Trait roll made under strenuous circumstances causes the victim to be Shaken by a hacking coughing fit. A Vigor to remove the disease may be made every two weeks.

**Tomb Rot (Airborne, -1):** Mostly commonly contracted from exploring musty, sealed tombs, tomb rot is a fungal infection. It causes the skin to dry and flake, leaving behind unsightly, painful sores. Victims are constantly Fatigued. A successful Vigor roll at -1, made each week after infection, cures the victim.

to their cursed existence, or perhaps by the memory that this was their birthplace.

Inside one of the crumbling edifices is a series of murals depicting sphinxes undergoing the transformation ritual. While the context is unclear, the images give the distinct impression the sphinxes, now mighty rulers, were once employed by the gatormen as slaves. Should the sphinxes discover their existence, they would undoubtedly seek to destroy them.

## CITY OF DECAY

Standing in the northern mangrove marsh, the City of Decay was constructed on a large island that rose just above the waterline. Dominating it, and accounting for over half the available living space, was an enormous temple complex to the gatormen's many gods. Over time, the gatormen sought to expand the city. Unable to move outward into the dank marsh, they elected to dig into the bedrock. Beneath the watery surface they excavated miles of tunnels and chambers.

The city was abandoned to the rebellious lizardmen during the uprising, and it was several generations before the armies were at sufficient strength to mount a counterattack. During that intervening period, the victorious slaves had failed to properly maintain the tunnels, causing them to become flooded. The uprising also had a secondary result. Slaves had attempted to breach the colossal ziggurat temples. In doing so, they had inadvertently activated traps which sealed the entrance passages with enormous stones. Weakened, the gatormen decided to abandon the city.

Millennia of neglect have taken their toll. Vegetation has consumed much of the city, and the roots of the mangrove trees have breached the surface, weakening the overgrown plazas. Water, which fills the tunnels of the upper level to a depth of four feet and has completely submerged the lower levels, has corroded and cracked many of the support beams holding up the ceiling. A careless step can lead to the surface paving suddenly breaking, and plunging an unfortunate explorer into the cold, wet, dark labyrinth below.

For those who wish to explore the great temple, travel through the tunnels is essential. Behind cunningly worked secret doors, whose existence the gatormen had forgotten in the decades between first abandoning and then recapturing the city, lay staircases that lead into the bowels of the monumental structure.

Contained within is not only the material wealth of the abandoned city, but the lost knowledge of the gatormen. Though many of the scrolls have rotted away over the millennia, enough remain to give scholars many lifetimes of translation work.

Even if one can find an entrance, looting the temple is no easy task. The mechanism that sealed the entrances also activated dozens of deadly traps. Those based on purely mechanical means are largely useless, the stone and wooden gears and activation mechanisms having seized and the ropes long rotted away, but those employ-

ing magic are just as deadly as the day they were cast. There is also the problem of undead, for many priests were laid to rest inside the great structure, and the necromantic wave of -302 awakened more than just the citizens of Hekata.

## CITY OF FLAGS

**Population:** 1,800 (100% gatormen)

Rising above the tops of the coastal mangrove trees, the temples of the City of Flags are clearly visible from the sea. Marines have long considered the edifices to be cursed, and seeing them is cause for hurried prayers.

Fluttering from atop the temples are great banners, and it is these the mariner's fear. Each is formed from the flayed skin of unfortunate sailors shipwrecked on the shore of the Salt Marsh, captured after making land to gather supplies, or kidnapped from ships that made the mistake of lowering their anchor off the shore to avoid a storm or bank of fog.

Quite at home in the marshes and swamps, gatormen never developed shipwright skills beyond constructing simple rafts, and even these were not necessary to navigate the waterways. Inscriptions found in ruins clearly show warriors seated on the backs of giant crocodiles, providing not only a means of transport but added firepower to a raiding party. The gatormen of the City of flags have a navy, though.

Made up of a handful of captured ships, they employ them to carry raiding parties far out to sea in search of sacrifices, or to raid coastal villages on the northwest shore of the Kingdoms of the Sphinxes. Reports of gatorman raids on the shores of Sutmark are unsubstantiated.

Though their activities are no threat to the mighty sphinxes or their trade with Rassilon, the arrogant lords cannot afford to show any sign of weakness. Rather than engage in a costly war, though, the sphinxes of Muglad and Talawdi are seeking adventurers to deal with the gatormen (in the arrogant belief that using minimal force to defeat an opponent displays greater power than unleashing a vast army).

## CITY OF FLIES

**Population:** 600 (100% gatormen)

Were the skins of gatormen are thin as humans, they would have abandoned this city long ago. Located in the southwest, the area is home to more swarms of biting insects than anywhere else in the marsh. During summer, the swarms grow so dense they block out the sun.

Formerly a city of several thousand, the population has gradually diminished down the ages. The current high lord is an elderly being, and his grip on the gatormen is gradually slipping through his scaly hands. Lesser priests are more inclined to disobey his orders, and even those who bow in submission are plotting his downfall, though their lust for power prevents them from cooperating with their peers.

When he dies, something likely to occur very soon,

## HERBAL REMEDIES

These remedies first appeared in the *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*, and are repeated here for those who do not possess that supplement.

**Antibiotic (0):** Antibiotics are used to treat diseases. All diseases allow a Vigor roll, typically once per day or per week. One dose of antibiotics must be taken every day for the appropriate period for the medicine to have any effect. Assuming this is done, the victim makes his next Vigor roll to shake off the disease at +2. Multiple doses otherwise have no additional effect.

**Example:** *Victims of camel curse make a Vigor roll each week with no modifier. To gain the benefit of antibiotics, the patient must consume one dose of antibiotics every day for eight days. If he misses so much as a single dose, he gains no benefit—he cannot miss a day and take two the next to make up the difference.*

**Insect Repellent (+1):** Insects, whether swarms or giant insects, must first make a Spirit roll as a free action if they wish to attack the user. The roll must be made before each attack. A single dose rubbed into the skin lasts for eight hours.

there is a strong chance the city will devolve into a bloody civil war as the priests seek dominance.

## CITY OF FROGS

**Population:** 1,450 (100% bufomi)

**Note:** GMs who wish to make use of bufomi will find details on their society, a write-up for K'kroakaa (their deity), and useful stats for a variety of bufomi in *Creature Guide: Bufomi*. Among the citizens of Al-Shirkuh, bufomi are believed to have been created by Apsu, god of water.

Located in the southeast corner of the Salt Marsh, the City of Frogs was partially destroyed by an earthquake in 126 CJ. Seeing the disaster as a sign of Sarkeb's anger, the superstitious survivors plundered the treasures, put the city to the torch, and abandoned it forever. These days it is home to a number bufomi tribes.

Unlike with their northern counterparts, the bufomi of northern Al-Shirkuh are more civilized. This is not saying much, for their rituals are still barbaric and they have never developed beyond rudimentary tool construction, but it means they have a more ordered, stable society. Whereas slime lords are rare among the tribes of Rassilon, here there has been an unbroken line.

Few scholars down the ages have seen fit to use their time studying the toadmen. Perhaps slime lords are simply more common in Al-Shirkuh. Maybe the presence of the many magical stelae (the city was a major communications hub at the height of the empire) has altered them. Or could it be that, long before even the gator-



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men rose, the bufomi of the desert realm were a more advanced race that fell to ruin?

Ruling over the city is a council of slime lords. Each lord lives atop one of the ziggurat temples of old, the tribe he controls making their homes in the surrounding ruins. The former great temple, its sides cracked by the earthquake, is now the temple of K'kroakaa, the bufomi's ancient deity. While each lord is the sole authority over his tribe, any actions that affect the city as a whole must be debated by the full council.

Attending council is about the only time the lords vacate their temple-top homes, for they are both immensely lazy and demand others attend their presence. When they have need to travel, warriors carry their corpulent bodies to the great temple on palanquins, for it is in the presence of K'kroakaa the council convenes.

The approaches to the city are protected not only by warriors and crude traps, but by several species of giant toads, and swarms of smaller flesh-eating toads. Some of these have venomous bites.

Although the gatormen have no further use for the city, the thought of another race occupying their temples is a great insult. Tyrannus Sornak sees little point in wasting precious lives cleansing a ruin his people will immediately abandon again, but there are priests who see his reluctance to commit to war as a loss of faith in Sarkeb.

## CITY OF SLAVES

The armies of Hekata never warred against the gatormen, though the pharaohs and priests knew of their existence. Raised on the banks of the mighty River Ankh, the Hekatics had long feared crocodiles. When scouts reported spying bipedal crocodile-men, the Hekatics feared their crocodile god, Sebek, had sent them as divine punishment. Acting quickly, the pharaoh ordered a city solely dedicated to the worship of Sebek, Taaud, to be built at the edge of the Salt Marsh.

In the centuries before the Hekatics abandoned the gods, the cult of Sebek grew so powerful that several pharaohs took the name Sebekhotep ("Sebek is pleased") as their throne name. Then darkness fell over the land. Refusing to give up their god, the citizens fought all attempts to crush their cult. Their struggle, brave though it was, ultimately proved futile, and the city, known as Taaud, was torn down by the victorious legions.

When it was built, the city was within spitting distance of the great marsh. Today, its crumbling, sand-choked ruins stand approximately 100 miles inland, roughly halfway between the Salt Marsh and the Snakelands of Old. Technically this places it in the Great Northern Desert, but giving the remaining iconography and inscriptions, it is still listed on maps as being in the Salt Marsh.

The city's modern name is a misnomer, given on the false belief that it was constructed by gatormen and that the human inhabitants were their slaves. In truth, few gatormen ever stepped foot inside its walls.

Hekata's legion looted and destroyed the main

temple and many of the primary government buildings, and defaced many of the statues, but enough remains to show how prevalent the cult of Sebek was. Tall columns, many lying shattered and prone, depict crocodile-headed humans. Headless statues stand as silent guardians over their cracked and defaced heads, each of which was carved to resemble a crocodile. Faded murals and inscriptions show humans kneeling before gigantic crocodile-men.

What the army did not destroy were the tombs of the nobles, for even in those days Hekata honored its dead. Within a necropolis lie the nobles of old, bedecked in wrappings of crocodile skin and adorned with golden crocodile masks. Each slumbers in a sarcophagus shaped like a tailless crocodile, for in Taaud it was believed he protected the dead from thieves and scavengers.

Taaud may be dead, but its nobles are not so lifeless. Awakened in -302, a small few still haunt the ruins. Uncaring of the outside world, they and their few undead servants continue to worship their ancient god, offering up the flesh of hapless explorers and passers-by to undead crocodiles, unliving servants of Sebek.

## CITY OF STARS

**Population:** 1,100 (100% gatormen)

Formerly a center of astronomical and astrological study, the city is today completely dominated by the cult of Sarkeb. While the scrolls that recorded the gatormen's many achievements in mapping and studying the stars are long burnt, fragments of carvings detailing their knowledge still remain in forgotten corners of the city.

Standing in the grand plaza is an enormous ring of stone covered in beaten gold. Attached to the disc is a second ring, this one of pure silver. This ring is designed to be rotated. Attached to it are 24 gold plates, each inscribed with a glyph depicting one of the major cities of old. Or rather there are spaces for 24 plates—three are missing. Placed at the top of the gold ring is a gigantic, stylized crocodile head. This can be made to "bite down" on the silver ring, preventing it from rotating.

Viewed from either side, the inside of the ring shows absolutely nothing but light-absorbing darkness. Strangely, the darkness is solid, unyielding to the touch, but somehow spongy and icy cold.

Although erected by the now extinct order of priest-mages, the gatormen have allowed the device to stand. Somehow, they came to believe the ring is a gateway to Sarkeb's divine realm. Should the missing plates ever be recovered, the priests would not only be able to open the gateway, but have the power to summon Sarkeb into the mortal realm (and presumably destroy the lizardmen, if not every other race).

In truth, the ring is a very powerful *teleport* relic. The disc is rotated to the glyph indicating the city the user wishes to visit, the crocodile jaw is locked in place, and the darkness is replaced with an image of the destination. To travel there, all the user needs do is step through the ring. Movement between the cities, regardless of

distance, is instantaneous. So long as the glyph remains locked in place, the traveler can return by stepping through the shimmering rend in space (which shows the City of Stars) at his destination.

Unfortunately, it is utterly useless without all the glyph plates. Even if all the plates were found, most of the most distant cities now lie in ruins, and those in the Great Swamp of Rassilon that are still inhabited are mainly in the hands of aggressive lizardmen.

## CITY OF WAR

**Population:** 800 (100% gatormen)

While all the gatormen's cities are in a state of near-terminal decline, the City of War has already descended in barbarity. Following the death of the incumbent high priest some 50 years ago (a rare case of death by natural causes), his would-be successors immediately embarked on a brutal civil war for supremacy.

Far from the capital, the war went unnoticed for several months. By the time scouts were sent to investigate the silence and lack of tribute, the damage had been done. Scouts reported the streets were awash with blood and the corpses of gatormen, that several temples had been ransacked (though not the main temple), and that the city had seemingly been abandoned. Unsure of what fate had befallen the inhabitants, the king declared the city cursed, passing a decree that it be avoided, lest restless spirits of the slain rise up to confront the living.

Several factions actually survived the battle, but only by fleeing into the marsh. Decades have passed, but still the factions fight for supremacy of the city. No sooner does one faction come out of hiding and claim control, then they are attacked and driven out. Lacking strong leaders and with their paladins greatly reduced in number, the war has entered a spiral of unending bloodshed. The only winner is Sarkeb, for war and death are his entertainment.

## HARPY ISLANDS

The mangroves of the northeast marsh are shunned by the gatormen. They have no fear of the shrieking, winged inhabitants—they just can't abide the vile stench. Explorers can use the islands in navigation, even unsighted, for the smell of feces and decay rides the offshore winds, assailing the nostrils and bringing tears to one's eyes. As one enters the harpies' nesting and hunting grounds, the solid ground changes from reeds and grass to a layer of dead vegetation and fungus covered in inches of slimy, rancid goo. The slow-moving waterways are heavily polluted, and drinking the water even after boiling, is a surefire way to contract a one of many diseases.

The harpies who reside are fiercely territorial, and always hungry for the flesh of sentient beings to supplement their diet. Rumors abound of a vine-covered building of great antiquity within their territory, though who raised it is a mystery—the gatormen have never settled the region, and harpies are incapable of masonry.

## STARFALL LAKE

Though much of the marsh comprises winding waterways, there are several open bodies of water. The largest of these is known as Starfall Lake. Approximately half a mile across and several hundred feet deep near its center, it takes its name from a huge, flat, black rock that protrudes from the water. According to the local Bedu tribes, the lake is artificial. One dark night, in days so ancient they are known only in myths, a fiery star fell from the heavens, landing in the Salt Marsh. The top of that star, cooled by the water, is visible as the black rock.

Storytellers, seeking to amuse audiences rather than recount any facts (none are known) have created all manner of tales. Some say Suleiman called it down to crush a band of rogue marid jinn living in the marsh, others say Suleiman's early battles were not the great victories of historical records, and that he was forced to shelter here to escape jinn vengeance. On finding him, a mighty ifrit tore a star from the heavens and launched it at the mage. Other tales involve Geb-Agni dropping a hammer, Iblis defecating on the mortal world, and a nail falling out of Upuaut's sandals.

The gatormen have a different story, not that anyone has ever bothered to question them. Inscriptions on a stela raised near the lake shore (now underwater thanks to subsidence) clearly details a spike or needle descending from the heavens and burying itself into the earth. The inscription also warns the site is cursed, and to be avoided, though no reasons are given beyond a name for the site—The Lake of Tentacles. A strange name given there are no octopuses or other tentacled creatures anywhere in the Salt Marsh, though it is possible the name refers to water snakes, of which the wetlands have an abundance.

Curious explorers have been known to vanish in the region, though the natural dangers of the marsh may account for their loss.

## STELAE

Long before the other gods abandoned the gatormen, the priests were wise in the study of celestial movements. Lesser priests, known as mage-priests, masters of astrology magic (see *Realm Guide #10*), founded a great network of stelae. Placed to mark specific astronomical alignments, they allowed the priests to communicate across the empire, transport armies to the most distant outpost in the blink of an eye, and transfer magical energy to other cities in times of crisis. The stelae also served as magical batteries, allowing a priest-mage to work his magic without needing astrological charts.

It was through the power of these stelae the ancient lords exerted their will over the distant cities of the Salt Marsh, and by this means the gatormen who dwelt here knew the heartland had fallen. While large parts of the network still remain standing in the Great Swamp far to the north, the pillars that once relayed the magic over the Sandwall Mountains are long gone.

## FLORA

Described below are some of the more common plants found in the Salt Marsh. Entries marked “\*” can be used in herbal remedies.

**Bang Seeds:** Once dried, these small seeds explode with a gentle pop when thrown onto a fire. Thrown as a handful, though, the noise is loud enough to cause a distraction.

**Bath Leaves\*:** Wide, waxy leaves that exude a faintly perfumed liquid. Nomads use them to wipe their skin as part of their daily cleansing rituals. So long as a cut leaf is kept submerged in water, it remains usable for two months. Can also be used in antibacterial herbal remedies.

**Black Root:** Although inedible, the root of this hardy plant is prized by explorers and nomads. Properly prepared, the thick juice becomes a water-resistant dye. Nomads use it to mark their goats and camels, and explorers mark corridors to help them navigate. A single dose is good for 50 animals or marks on a wall.

**Camel Fruit\*:** A heavy gourd (0.5 lbs) whose flesh is rich in sweet, refreshing liquid. Eating a single fruit provides only a quarter pound of food, but the equivalent of a quart of water. Excessive consumption leads to diarrhea (see hydrating remedies in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*, which these fruits can be used to brew). Kept out of the sun, camel fruits remain fresh for a month after harvesting.

**Fire Grass:** A tough, fibrous grass that burns very slowly and with a dim glow. The smoke acts as an insect repellent. Made into a torch, it provides light and smoke in a 1” radius for six hours.

**Iron Root\*:** The juice of these thick, red roots is a key component in local anti-anemia remedies.

**Marqod's Rose\*:** A delicate flower used to make healing remedies. The brews can only aid natural Healing, and thus must be applied for four days.

**Rope Weed:** Slippery when wet, rope weed dried slowly in the sun has remarkable strength. A Survival roll and an hour's work (after drying the weed for a day) produces a 10 yard length of rope capable of supporting 400 pounds yet weighing just 15 pounds. Greater lengths made simultaneously require a Group Survival roll.

**Salt Stalk:** The milky fluid in the stalks is extremely salty. Nomads soak meat in the juice to preserve it, and add the fluid to meals when true salt is not available.

**Snake Bane\*:** Fragrant plant said to ward off snakes. This is untrue, though its leaves are useful in making antitoxin herbal remedies.

**Tooth Leaf\*:** Chewed to alleviate toothache. Can be used to make numbing herbal remedies.

**Wound Thorn:** A thick, stiff thorn used as sewing needles and to hold wounds together.

Worse, the ancient order of priest-mages is no more, exterminated by the cult of Sarkeb. These days, very few gatormen actually know what the stelae represent, and those who do lack the understanding of magic to tap into their stores. Not that it matters much. Over the millennia the celestial patterns have changed, rendering the stelae network useless for its original purpose (the gatormen would move them periodically to match the changing heavens).

Any mage who speaks Lesarde, studies a stela (any one will do) for 2d6 weeks, and makes a Knowledge (Arcana) roll at -4 or Astrology roll at -2 earns how to tap into the stored energy. Failure means the mage learns nothing, but he can try again after a month of contemplation on where he went wrong. While within 50 yards of any stela, a mage who understands their basic working ignores the effects of the Siphoning. Because each stela was placed on specific alignments, moving it drains the energy, leaving it a mundane pillar of stone.

## TEMPLE OF TAWERET

**Population:** 200 (90% human, 5% mixed other)

**Ruler:** Tooth of Apsu Samilah bint-Ashad

On the western flank of the Salt Marsh, some 30 miles from the dry land of the Grazelands, stands a lone fortified temple, an isolated outpost of permanent human settlement in the gatormen's hinterlands. It is the sole temple to Taweret, the minor god of crocodile slaying.

The temple dominates the wide, flat island on which it stands. Wooden walls, ten feet high and covered in crocodile skins, encircle the entire island, while the surrounding water is heavily laced with nets and bundles of sharp sticks to deter gatormen from attacking. Tall sticks, each adorned with the skull of a crocodile or gatorman, stand inside the palisade. A lone jetty sticks out into the water. Tethered here are a number of small boats.

Within the compound are three barrack blocks, a storeroom, a smithy, a large hall housing a small number of sacred hippos, and the main hall of worship.

The permanent population numbers just 50 clerics—35 paladins and 15 priests. The remaining population comprises itinerant clerics, here on self-appointed crusade to wage war on Sarkeb's evil followers. Typically, they serve for a year or two before moving on.

The high priest is Samilah bint-Ashad, a paladin with 20 years experience of hunting crocodiles and gatormen. The left side of her face is heavily scarred from the bite of a gatorman, while her right leg is missing below the knee, having been torn off by a crocodile that got her in a “death roll.” She used the skin of both creatures to fashion her leather armor. Despite, or perhaps because of, the constant risk of death performing her duties entails, she is a woman of good humor.

While this part of the Salt Marsh has fresh water and plentiful food, life here is hard. The insect swarms are especially vicious, and the clerics' calling means a short expectancy for those who do not respect the landscape.

Over the years, the island fortress has developed into



a miniature trading post. Nomads trade fresh game and goods from the outside world for crocodile teeth and skin. Trade is brisk enough that the temple is considering constructing a permanent compound on a nearby island, where the nomads can rest in safety (conditions inside the temple precinct are crowded at the best of times).

## THE SHARK COAST

The waters along the western Salt Marsh stretching north along the Grazelands' coast are known to mariners as the Shark Coast. Maneaters of all types lazily glide through the warm waters in search of prey. Stories abound of their ferocity and ravenous appetites, and most are based firmly in fact. Among the merchants and mariners who serve the sphinxes, the Tale of the Six Hundred still causes shudders and mumbled prayer of protection. According to the story, a mighty trading fleet floundered in a storm. Six hundred men went into the water. By the time a passing ship found them the next day, just three men were found clinging to wreckage in the blood-red water—sharks had taken the rest.

The presence of so many sharks is not entirely down to the rich shoals of fish that share the sea. Some 20 miles off the coast of the marsh, deep beneath the waves, is a colony of kreana, the much-feared shark-men. They have no cause to raid the gatormen's coastal colonies, but they do pose a serious threat to shipping.

## THE SPHINX'S PAW

**Population:** 400

**Ruler:** Imy-Er Djedefmer, Scion of Talawdi

The islands off the north coast are known as the Sphinx's Paw. Those who look merely at the pattern of islands see a vague resemblance. The name actually stems from the fact it is a distant outpost of the Kingdoms.

The pharaohs of Talawdi, City of Sails, have long craved wealth. In order to ensure the prosperous trade route to the ports of Rassilon remained unaffected by corsairs and ships had a safe place to ride out storms or make repairs, Pharaoh Weret-Imtes' father ordered the construction of a fortified harbor on the largest island.

The pharaoh's house may own the island, but it does not rule directly. Every ten years, the noble houses of Talawdi bid to become governors of the island. The money, which can run to many thousands of dinars, goes straight into the pharaoh's coffers. The current governor is a scion of a noble house whose star is ascending. Governors are within their rights to charge docking fees, for repairs, and for providing armed escorts. With trade brisk, the island brings in a not inconsiderable income.

The rest of the population are "limited citizens." Of these, 90 serve as crew for the three warships berthed here, a further 120 serve as marines, and 100 are soldiers to protect the port from raiders. The rest are bureaucrats, craftsmen—mostly carpenters, but other trades essential to ensuring ships are quickly repaired are found here—and the governor's household staff.

Non-sphinx owned ships are permitted to take refuge here or seek repairs, but the costs are double those paid by sphinx vessels. As the only safe port for hundreds of miles, few captains complain openly. Non-sphinx visitors are not permitted to leave a walled compound on the docks except by the express permission of the governor. Within the walls are basic living accommodation and shrines to Qedeset and Upaut.

## PERSONS OF Note

Outside the cult of Taweret and the nomadic hunters who skirt the fringes, there are no civilized beings (by the standards of the player character races) who call the Salt Marsh home.

### AWS BIN-DHAKWAN

While working with a party of herbalists gathering rare plants for the cult of Marqod, Aws was attacked by a giant crocodile. He escaped with his life, but not without suffering permanent injuries. His right leg below the knee is a wooden peg, a jagged blade protrudes from the bandaged stump of his left wrist, and puncture wounds to his chest have left him severely weakened and frail.

After recovering, he swore a holy vow to avenge his injuries. He gave up his old life as a trainee cleric of Marqod (he had not yet taken his holy vows), and convinced the cult of Taweret to train him as a paladin. Though the clerics doubted his usefulness in battle against the vicious beasts they hunted, his will and desire for revenge saw him through his training. While his tutors heaped him with praise, many who already served the cult saw him as a loose ballista, too focused on his goal to maintain a balanced head, essential when fighting crocodiles and gatormen, and uncaring of others' needs.

Although he has spent the last ten years hunting crocodiles and gatormen in the Salt Marsh, his infirmities proving no obstacle, he has yet to find the beast that maimed him. Aws will know it when he sees it, for not only is it missing its right eye (which Aws gouged out with his bare hands), but the creature's scales are as white as snow.

Although still technically a cleric, he has no access to spells. Just over a year ago, he allowed hunters in his party to be mauled by a crocodile while he went running off after what he thought was his hated enemy. While he has made no attempts at penance, his continued slaying of crocodiles and gatormen has, for now, held Taweret's hand from unleashing her furies.

The paladin is not quite insane, but as the years go by his sanity is wearing extremely thin. He constantly murmurs to himself, he rants and rages at the injustice of the universe, and he is prepared to take ever greater risks to find his quarry. Those who accompany him into the marsh find him an excellent guide and tracker, but they should not expect his help if attacked unless it is by a giant white crocodile.

## Why Come Here?

The Salt Marsh itself may not be particular deadly, but it is populated by voracious gatomen in search of sacrifices, ferocious marsh dragons and hydras, shrieking harpies, snapping crocodiles, gluttonous giant toads, and vicious swarms of biting insects. So, why would the adventurers risk life and limb coming here?

\* **Orders.** Outside of the cult of Taweret (p. 11), and to a lesser extent Apsu, few organizations are likely to send heroes beholden to them to the Salt Marsh. The cult of Marqod might sponsor an expedition to gather healing herbs, and adventurers in the employ of a sphinx might be called upon to capture gatomen for the arena, but these are probably onerous tasks the heroes will need to complete but once in their lives.

\* **Knowledge.** That the gatomen once ruled an advanced yet simultaneously barbaric culture is unknown to sages and scholars. What is known is that the great ruins are a mystery from olden times, possibly the remnants of a lost human empire, and mysteries attract certain types of people. Even if the heroes have no desire to explore the ancient ruins of their own volition, a sage or cleric of Qedeshet may hire them as escorts.

\* **Treasure.** The gatomen knew the arts of gold and silversmithing (despite never working iron), and richly decorated their temples. Unfortunately, most of the cities with rich sources of material wealth are occupied. Talk of fabulous treasure hidden in secret chambers within towering, crumbling pyramids and protected by devious traps are commonplace. In many cases the stories are true, but treasure is not always coin and gems. Relics, and scientific and historical knowledge are all valuable items in Rassilon, if one knows where to sell them.

\* **Glory.** Heroes who want fame through slaughter will find no end of foes lining up to test them. Bufomi, and giant toads, leeches, and mosquitoes may challenge low Rank parties. Those of proven ability can battle marsh dragons and hydras, or pit their strength against the ferocious tribes of gatomen.

## Adventure Seeds

In addition to the adventure seeds buried in the text above, here are a few extra ones.

\* A sphinx merchant recently learned that one of his trade ships never made it to distant Rassilon. He believes it has been shipwrecked on the shores of the Salt Marsh (reports indicate a terrible storm swept through that area), and the contents may now be in the hands of the gatomen. He is offering a reward for the return of his cargo (rescuing the crew is optional—most have probably been sacrificed, and even if they have survived they are easily replaced).

\* Lurking within the marsh are many tribes of degenerate gatomen, those consumed by Sarkeb's desire for

destruction. One has begun attacking Bedu encampments along the edge of the marsh. The sheikh of the largest tribe offers his daughter's hand in marriage if the raids are stopped.

\* Much to the disgust of the local high priest, the cult of Taweret is organizing a crusade. Rewards of 200 dinars for each gatomen head, 100 dinars for a giant crocodile, and 25 dinars for every ordinary crocodile are being offered. In addition, every adventurer who answers the call may keep whatever treasures he discovers. The Salt Marsh is soon filled with amateur hunters who know nothing of the dangers lurking there.

## Gods & Monsters

This section details one inhuman deity, one minor deity, and two new creatures.

### SARKEB

**Titles:** Tearer of Flesh, He Who Remains, Defender of the People, He Who Hungers Eternally.

**Aspects:** Crocodilians, gatomen, war, protection, ferocity, strength, dominance, vengeance.

**Symbol:** The lumpy pattern on a crocodile's back.

**Priesthood:** Claw of Sarkeb (priests); Jaw of Sarkeb (paladins).

**Herald:** See Avatar of Sarkeb in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

**Holy Days:** First new moon of each month.

**Signature Power:** *Armor*.

**Powers:** *Beast friend* (crocodiles only), bolt, boost/lower trait (Strength, Vigor, and Swimming only), *champion of the faith*, *environmental protection* (water only), *quickness*, *sacrifice*, *shape change* (crocodiles only), *smite* (affects bite only), *summon beast* (crocodiles only), *summon herald*, *water walk*.

**Trappings:** Like many inhuman gods, trappings are focused on the deity's natural form—in this case, crocodiles.

**Disciple Edge:** Disciples are granted knowledge of the death bite. When a disciple scores a raise on a Fighting roll using its bite, its jaws inflict an additional +2d4 damage instead of +1d6.

Although worshipped by gatomen in both the northern continent and Al-Shirkuh, the cult of Sarkeb is not a unified faith. The northern variant of the cult is described in *Region Guide #17: The Great Swamp*.

In the myths of the Salt Marsh gatomen, the other gods survived far longer than their northern counterparts. Despite the fervent prayers of the faithful, they slowly abandoned the gatomen, allowing them to slide toward barbarity. Sarkeb, a minor war god whose cult rose to prominence during the lizardman rebellion, was the only deity who remained faithful to the people.

As their powers weakened, the priests of the other gods found themselves at first verbally attacked and later



physically devoured by the clerics of Sarkeb. With only Sarkeb's clergy displaying miraculous powers, it was not surprising the people flocked to their temples.

Unlike in the north, the gatormen of the Salt Marsh do carve statues of Sarkeb. These are usually bipedal effigies, showing Sarkeb as a muscular gatorman armed with a sword studded with crocodile teeth and a shield made out of the hide of his many victims. His hide is actually that of gatormen priests who failed in their attempts to depose a superior. The ground beneath these statues is stained black with the blood of countless sacrifices. Shrines may take the form of crocodile skulls or mummified sacred crocodiles.

While alive, these beasts are housed in pools either outside or within the many temples that stand in the cities. Considered lesser heralds of Sarkeb, their snapping jaws and thrashing tails are used to divine the future.

Every gatorman temple has been converted to the worship of Sarkeb. The largest, regardless of its original cult, serves as the home of the city's high lord and the city's main temple of Sarkeb. As in the north, no new temples have been constructed in millennia. Indeed, many have been abandoned, the outlying cities now long since consumed by sand.

Sarkeb's clergy are expected to climb the ranks by displaying ruthlessness rather than political savvy. Priests who wish to climb the social ladder are expected to do so by killing their superior, eating his brain and heart, and wearing his flayed skin. Such treachery, while prized, is not easy to accomplish. As in the north, paladins hold allegiance to a priest, not the cult or a specific temple. The higher a priest rises through the ranks, the greater number of paladins that flock to his banner.

So long as their priest lives and rewards them for their service, paladins are fanatical guardians. Once the priest dies, their oaths are considered null and void, allowing them to switch allegiance to a new priest.

Sarkeb is a voracious deity, and he demands constant sacrifices. In the olden days the priests sacrificed lizardmen slaves, but these are no longer available. Isolated in their dwindling marsh, the priests are now forced to offer their own kind to satisfy Sarkeb (and the occasional captured intruder). Such is his hunger for flesh that the sacrifices are a major contributor to the gatormen's shrinking numbers.

The traditional method of sacrifice is to flay the victim alive, his screams whetting Sarkeb's appetite. The skinless sacrifice is then thrown into the pool of crocodiles. As they digest his flesh, so Sarkeb is sated.

As well as requiring flesh, the god needs the souls of warriors to join his celestial army, for he has many enemies. Amid great spectacle, each priest nominates one of his paladins to fight in a gladiatorial bloodbath. Beginning at dawn, the warriors fight until just one remains standing. At dusk, the victor is sacrificed to his god at the great temple in Sarkeb-gar-Nattra—a great honor.

Unlike common sacrifices, the paladin is not flayed or fed to crocodiles. Instead, his beating heart is torn out (to remove his fear) and burned. His flesh is then

carefully scraped away (rendering him immune to harm in the spirit world), and his bones wrapped in crocodile skin and placed within the temple vaults.

As in the north, his sponsor is awarded great honor. The king and every high lord (assuming none of them supply the victorious warrior) allow him to pick one paladin from their personal retinues to serve under his banner. From that moment forth, their loyalty is to their new master.

## TAWERET

**Titles:** Defender of the Waterways, Enemy of Sarkeb.

**Aspects:** Killing crocodiles.

**Affiliations:** Apsu.

**Symbol:** A crocodile's head impaled by a spear.

**Priesthood:** Hide of Apsu (priests); Teeth of Apsu (paladins).

**Herald:** None.

**Holy Days:** Once per season, a cleric must nominate one Yaus al-Ittrou as a day on which he will kill a crocodile or gatorman. This counts as a personal high holy day. Failure to kill on the appointed day is a major sin. Snapping Jaw Day (see *Realm Guide #7: The Salt Basin*) is a cult high holy day.

**Duties:** To kill crocodiles and gatormen.

**Sins:** (Minor) conversing with a gatorman (except to Intimidate or Taunt), showing mercy to a crocodile or gatorman; (Major) fleeing from a crocodile or gatorman, refusing to attack a crocodile or gatorman; (Mortal) allowing a crocodile or gatorman to kill a hippo or good creature through your incompetency or inaction.

**Signature Power:** *Smite*.\*

**Powers:** *Armor*\*, *bolt*\*, *boost/lower*\* (Spirit, Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Shooting, Throwing, Swimming), *deflection*\*, *fear*\*, *sluggish reflexes*\*, *stun*\*, *water walk*.

**Trappings:** All trappings must relate to water or hippos. For instance, *armor* may transform the target's skin into that of a hippo or encase him in a sheathe of water. *Bolt* might produce a biting hippo's head or a spear of solid water.

**Special:** Spells marked "\*" only function against gatormen and crocodiles. They provide no benefit when used against other creatures, though the spell is still Maintained.

Taweret is the daughter of Apsu. A meek and mild child, she spent her days tending her father's hippos in the days before they became aggressive, ensuring they were well fed and rubbing cooling mud into their thick to protect them from the harmful sun.

Although Apsu defeated Sarkeb, he knew the crocodile deity would eventually return. In order to ensure the hippos remained safe, he charged his daughter with their protection, deferring her mundane duties to one of his other children. Taweret fought with Sarkeb and his children many times, but she could never defeat the gluttonous god. After Sarkeb created the gatormen, Taweret became more militant, dividing her duties between protecting her charges and actively hunting her enemies.

Although her cult was originally tasked with both duties, it has followed her militant attitude.

Taweret takes the form of a hippo-headed goddesses clad in scale armor and carrying a long spear. Images of Apsu frequently show him wearing a necklace of crocodile teeth or a crocodile-skin cloak, both of which represent the presence of Taweret.

Whereas her father is worshipped in most settlements, Taweret's shrines are found only along river banks and beside oases haunted by crocodiles. A typical shrine comprises a crocodile skin, on which are painted images of Taweret defeating Sarkeb. Because the skin is prone to aging, it must be replaced every few years. Crocodile teeth are frequently attached to the skin, and the area around it is littered with skulls and claws. Although a minor goddess, Taweret has a single temple, located in the Salt Marsh, the last great bastion of the gatormen in the whole of Al-Shirkuh.

Clerics are divided not so much by militancy, but by their desire to travel. Priests protect a single community, small stretch of river, or a small oasis from the privations of crocodiles. When clerics of Anti are present, those of Taweret are deemed superior when it comes to battling crocodiles. Paladins actively hunt crocodiles, ranging far and wide in search of the creatures. The great majority eventually find their way to Salt Marsh, where they test their mettle against gatormen.

Ceremonies involve reenacting Taweret's battles against Sarkeb. Whenever possible real crocodiles are used, with the creatures' deaths also serving as sacrifices. When not available, worshippers dressed in crocodile skin cloaks fill in for the goddess' enemies. Blunt weapons are used in the latter case, though this does not prevent injuries from occurring.

**Character Guidelines:** Regardless of their calling, clerics are primarily combatants. Spirit, Strength, and Vigor are the main attributes, for both crocodiles and gatormen are vicious, powerful opponents. Combat skills are essential, though the cult places no demands on its clergy to adopt a specific focus. Notice and Tracking are important skills for detecting and locating the cult's enemies, as well as avoiding ambushes. Paladins need at least a few dice in Survival if they are to survive the journey between settlements. Boating and Swimming are not essential, but can be very beneficial.

## CROCOSPINUX

Whereas the rulers of the Kingdoms of Sphinxes are arrogant, haughty, overbearing, and egotistical intelligent beings, crocosphinxes are mindless animals.

Their creation is far from natural. Long ago, gatormen used unholy miracles to merge sphinxes and crocodiles to create an abomination. Quite why they did this is lost to time, though it is widely believed they served in a role similar to guard dogs. That they are now found only in the wild is likely a result of the lizardman's revolt, though it might be they proved too temperamental to domesticate. Thankfully, the ancient ritual is now forgotten, though

this has not stopped the remaining crocosphinxes from siring new generations.

These resemble ordinary sphinxes save for their head and hide, which are those of a giant crocodile. They favor the Salt Marsh and river banks for their lairs, being equally at home in fresh and salt water. The mighty sphinxes consider them abominations, whose presence insults the gods. The gatormen fear them as predators.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Swimming d6

**Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 13 (3)

**Treasure:** Worthwhile, in lair

**Special Abilities:**

- \* **Aquatic:** Pace 8.
- \* **Armor +3:** Thick hide.
- \* **Bite:** Str+d8.
- \* **Flight:** Pace 12.
- \* **Large:** Attackers are +2 to attack rolls against a crocosphinx due to its size.
- \* **Rollover:** Crocosphinxes can only employ this ability in water. If one of these large beasts hits with a raise, it causes an extra 2d6 damage to its prey in addition to its regular bite damage.
- \* **Size +4:** Crocosphinxes are the same size as elephants.

## HARPY, MARSH, SHRIEKER

Marsh harpy culture is extremely primitive. The foul creatures gather only in small numbers (known as nests), and compete with rival nests for the best hunting grounds. Superiority within each nest is based on strength, and in that regard the shrieker harpy has a distinct advantage. Save for an enlarged larynx, it is identical in appearance to a standard marsh harpy.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6

**Pace:** 2; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

**Treasure:** Meager, in lair.

**Special Abilities:**

- \* **Claws:** Str+d4.
- \* **Flight:** Pace 8.
- \* **Infection (-2):** Harpies live in unsanitary habitats, and their claws are caked in filth. Any victim Shaken or wounded by a claw attack must make a Vigor roll to avoid the wound becoming infected. Magical healing has no effect on these wounds and natural Healing suffers a -1 penalty. This lasts until *all* the victim's wounds (not just those caused by the harpy) are healed, at which time the infection is cleansed.
- \* **Piercing Shriek:** As an action, a shrieker can emit a piercing cry. This fills a Cone Template. Any creature under the template must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken. Heroes with Hard of Hearing (or ear plugs) have a +2 bonus, while deaf heroes are completely immune.