Mysterious Lands! New Monsters!! Melodramatic Cover Text!!!

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A Community-Written E-Zine for OGL Gaming



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EDITORIAL: SPRING BREAK By Elven Doritos

Spring break: a time of refreshment, relaxation, and renewal. Eight hundred miles and thirteen hours of traffic lie between me and my well-earned respite.

My thoughts turn back to the work over the last few months, both at school and at the Guild. The Campaign Builders' Guide in particular comes to mind; a project that's been periodically caught in editorial limbo, the Guide is obviously one of the greatest achievements of the Guild. It's also one of my most glaring embarrassments when it comes to scheduling. I love the Guide and the finished product when it is completed, but I know that there is so much more that could have been done.

I pack my clothes first. It's always so strange picking the clothing to take when I leave, and I always overestimate my ability to pack. Most often, I manage to forget an article or two, much to my embarrassment and to the ridicule of my traveling companions.

While I double-check the amount of socks I have (it won't do me any good), I begin humming to myself. It is the first time in nearly nine months that I have felt relaxed, and I feel a little ashamed of that fact; I know that there's still a few responsibilities I have left, a few loose ends to tie up. And at one time, I enjoyed those responsibilities, but as they wore on, I found myself more overwhelmed by them. So I made a resolution: for the betterment of my work and that of others, I would do my best to reduce my workload.

So what exactly does this entail for all of you?

Effective March 12th, 2007, I hereby resign from my duties as Editor-in-Chief of the Campaign Builders' Guide, naming Natural 20 as my successor to the office.

Natural 20 and the staff have big ideas for the Guide, and it has never been a better time to be a Guilder (or Guide reader, for that matter). I have full confidence in their ability to produce the best possible Guide.

I would like to thank our contributors, readers, editors, and promoters for all their hard work. Keep it upbut don't forget to relax now and then!

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Catch you after Spring Break! -Elven Doritos

STAFF CREDITS

Publisher: The Campaign Builder's Guild

Editor-in-Chief: Natural 20 Associate Editor: Raelifin Content Editor: Raelifin Art Coordinator: Raelifin Graphic Designer: E.W. Morton **Contributing Authors:** Michael Ennis, Poseidon, Raelifin, Realm Weaver, Stargate525, Thread Evoker

Contributing Artists: Chris Malidore, razordu30

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GHELON: THE LAND OF SEEMING PEACE By Realm Weaver (Winner: Contest 1, The Island)



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The voyage has been long, and the crew is feeling the worst of it. Engineer Sanmai was placed in the brig just last week; his frayed nerves are no good in the cramped quarters of the engine room.

I have hope, however. The island is only a day away, if the gods bless us with a good wind. I can smell the gold on the wind.

-Log of Captain Amiko Nori of the Sea Fox IV, Day 11 of Xath, Year 998 of the Golden Reign

Across the ever-rough Strait of Blades, lies a land spoken of by few in civilized lands. Few truths are known by most people, but rumors abound about the island, and just who inhabits it. Some say it is populated by demons from the netherworld, while others say it is a land of heretics and sinners. Still more believe it to be a virtual paradise.

Here, for the first time, the truth about the island of Ghelon will be revealed. Excerpts from the log of the late Captain Amiko Nori will be provided, to show what one of the first explorers from across the Strait encountered. There have since been many following in his footsteps, but he was the first captain to successfully navigate through the hazardous waters, and make landfall on the fabled island.

Today, we have sighted land. Even though we are still some ways out, I can see the lush trees and sandy beaches from here. The gods have indeed favored us.

I plan to drop anchor once we get near a beach, and set up camp in the first clearing. We'll need to stock up on supplies, like wood and rations - the crew has not had good meat for most of this voyage - but there is yet more traveling to do; a river was sighted today, along with some smoke in the distance. I pray to the gods that the smoke is of civilized origin and not just a wildfire.

-Log of Captain Amiko Nori of the Sea Fox IV, Day 12 of Xath, Year 998 of the Golden Reign

The Strait of Blades

The Strait of Blades is a particularly dangerous body of water, passing between the mainland and Ghelon. It is several hundred miles wide, though it's exact width was not known until Captain Nori and other explorers managed to cross it. During the warmer seasons, fierce storms wrack the eastern half of the Strait, including the western coast of the island. These can vary in intensity, but are often at a level resembling that of typhoons.

A wide variety of creatures inhabit the waters of the Strait. There are the common fish varieties that are caught and eaten on the mainland coast, as well as a wide array of shark species. Some of these sharks have been recorded at over 400 lbs., though it is not known what causes them to grow to this size.

There are legends and tales about much fiercer creatures plying the rough waters of the Strait. Many of them tell of gigantic turtles, covered in scales nearly the same color as the water. These tales also tell of fishing boats being capsized by the beasts, or of the crew being subjected to a painful blast of steam from the beast's mouth. While these creatures are not worshiped as gods, they are known quite well in coastal fishing communities as something to avoid.

At the northern end of the Strait, there is a long archipelago, made up of thousands of small islands, each only a few dozen meters across. Navigating through these islands has not yet been successful, though many have perished in the attempt. Surviving records of explorers in this area describe a family of colossal winged beasts that roost among the spire-like islands. Like the mythic turtles to the south, these creatures can expel fire out of their mouths.

This land is not what I envisioned it to be.

I had been given to think of this land as a volcano-ridden wasteland, not worth my time. Yet, now that I am here, it seems to be as a paradise.

The air is cleaner, the trees are taller, and the creeks do not seep with effluent. I believe that, were the frightful monsters of the Strait to be destroyed, Ghelon would be a fine place to settle.

-Log of Captain Amiko Nori of the Sea Fox IV, Day 14 of Xath, Year 998 of the Golden Reign

The Island of Ghelon

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Ghelon is a quite large island, measuring almost 250 miles in width, and 400 miles north-south. The northern portion of the island is covered by high, slender hills, and a few taller peaks. This area is

much rockier and less fertile than other areas.

The south contains a large forest to the eastern side, and several impressive swamps to the western half. Four distinct river networks flow out of the mountains through to the southern coast, into the Sea of Lords.

Running through the center of the island is a large savanna. Lions, gazelle, and other animals common to the mainland run free here, as the first few explorers were surprised to discover.

The swamps to the west are quite dangerous, and hold many unexpected hazards for the unprepared adventurer. Logs by travelers, including Captain Nori, tell of horrifying monsters making their home in the fetid swamps. One of the most famous of incidents is that of the Cavalier Uneko Disuri, who was cut apart with 'crude blades of tusks' and eaten alive in front of his crew-mates by a 'trio of frighteningly ugly female corpses'.

The people here are quite different than I expected. They are indeed human, and not the nightmarish elves or brutish halflings our school mentors would mention as inhabiting the far corners of the world. In fact, they seem positively peaceful. I was met by their leader, and personally given a wreath of Gemtree leaves. But what intrigues me the most is that they speak a similar language to us, with only a few exceptions.

Lookout Kuma suggested that they once were of the Empires, but I am not yet convinced...they have none of the discipline and taste a proper Citizen should have. I am to dine with their leader, the Donohunga Iaskapru, tomorrow evening. I expect to learn much more then.

-Log of Captain Amiko Nori of the Sea Fox IV, Day 22 of Xath, Year 998 of the Golden Reign

The People of Ghelon

Several centuries ago, the wealthy Kaku clan held power in the government of the mainland. The Emperor Udao Kaku, an old, vain, and traditionalist family patriarch, managed to deepen the gulf in basic welfare between the poor and the well-off. He supported fellow traditionalists, lowered tithes for nobles, and spun false claims of treason and unregulated religious worship.

The Emperor Udao is also remembered for his

fascistic banning of many forms of entertainment. Dancing was barred everywhere but in homes. The practice of divinations was criminalized, along with most forms of religion. Many people began to resent Udao's laws, and many protests were launched, with a few ultimately turning violent. Udao, however, only used them as a cause to further tighten his control over public gatherings.

A group of coastal villagers, to whom drinking and dancing was the main source of relief after fishing or farming, decided to flee the mainland, after their liquor facilities were destroyed, and their communal eating hall burnt to the ground. They disassembled their homes, and used the wood to build several large ships, with enough armor to protect against any hazards encountered in the Strait.

After a few days, the people of the village of Ghel landed on the island, near where the city of Pekaeri lies today. Keeping their resourcefulness, the ships were disassembled, and used to build the first few buildings and homes, some of which still stand today.

It is recorded that of the 521 villagers that got boarded the ships, only 390 survived the hazards encountered in the Strait, which included giant squids, feral sea turtles, and the tail-end of a typhoon. However, when the villagers finally landed, they found a land of pristine nature, where many different environments exist, and many of the resources each environment brings. The Ghelonese population has grown, in the past four centuries, to 25,000, with nearly half living in the capitol of Pekaeri.

At the banquet, hosted by the Donohunga Iaskapru, we were treated to the viewing of a match between two masters of different schools. One was apparently quite skilled with fire magic of the sort to impress even the Array back home. Her lithe body seemed to glow with every acrobatic maneuver; I still remember the scorch marks left wherever her flesh contacted the ground.

Opposite the master of fire - she is the chief mentor of the Slithering Fire school, Iaskapru mentioned - was a short, bald man, who seemed to radiate calm. His skin had, before the battle began, turned a chilling shade reminiscent of ice; indeed,

a layer of ice was starting to build on his exposed skin. This man was able to weather all of his enemy's attacks with the patience rivaled only by the temple golems of Kanmei, back in the Empires. Predictably, his enemy wore down; when she finally stopped attacking, he chanted a few words of an ancient language, and slapped the ground. In a matter of seconds, everything inside the battle pit was covered in a layer of ice, including his opponent. He must have been a patriarch of the 'Strong Glacier' school that the crew had talked about.

It was a thrilling conclusion to an excellent dinner; during it, Iaskapru taught me much about the history of the island - too much to fit in one entry.

-Log of Captain Amiko Nori of the Sea Fox IV, Day 23 of Xath, Year 998 of the Golden Reign

In the absence of the strict control of the Emperor, the Ghelonese people established fair laws, including freedom of religion, freedom of entertainment, and freedom of magical use. Their culture has made use of many of the things they were denied under the rule of Udao.

The Ghelonese people are mostly farmers, orchard tenders, and similar agricultural laborers. Of course, there are examples of the professions as can be found on the mainland, such as record-keeper, village guard, and boat-builder. However, most of the Ghelonese population has, at one time or another, worked on a farm or orchard, and the profession is respected as a necessary and honorable one.

There are several established cities and villages, with Pekaeri being the biggest. Each village and city is lead by a *Donohunga*, who acts similar to the mayors on the mainland. Government bureaucracy has been kept to a minimum; many things are overseen directly by the Donohunga, and by members of the *Advisory Council* whom he appoints.

Few restrictions are placed on the establishment and teaching of philosophy, religion, martial arts, or magic. Most any religion and viewpoint are tolerated by the Ghelonese. However, one style of martial training has become much more popular than any other – that of the Worldways schools.

Each Worldways school – there are 21 different schools, currently – is based on a particular element of nature and the world at large. The school



trains students in martial arts, research, and magical techniques in accordance to the school's philosophy, many of which were formulated more than 150 years ago, based around the school's chosen element. Students, in almost all of the schools, are also meanwhile taught to use the talents they gain to serve the community, and how to use them to fend off monsters, or to keep civil peace. In fact, some schools send off students on training missions in the city militia, or to the hunters and professional rangers out in the forests and mountains, many of which are former students of these same schools.

Each school trains students in magical spells and martial techniques based the philosophy of their element. The Slithering Fire School, for example, instructs students in the use of fire-based spells, as well as quick, serpent-like stances and attacks. The Overwhelming Darkness School, on the other hand, will train initiates in the art of deception, creating shadows through magic and attacking from all angles.

Some schools, such as the aforementioned Overwhelming Darkness, are not as peaceful as others. Due to the relatively important position of the school's Grand Masters, corruption, bribery, and the potential for conflict with the Ghelonese government is always possible. However, except for a few notorious cases - such as the public decapitation of Iyes Taneko, a Bending Tree grand master, by younger students of it's former rival, Clawed Talon - the different schools have been able to

maintain a shaky peace among themselves and with the rest of society.

Some schools have indeed constructed entire religions based on their element, with gods and temples and similar religious items. However, many schools abstain from this; some experiments with doing such have proved to them to cause only further conflict between the schools.

The masters and students of these schools can be represented in many ways. One possible way is to have them take odd levels as an elemental caster – Shugenja, Wu Jen, or something similar – and even levels as a more combat-oriented class, such as Ninja, Fighter, Paladin, or Rogue. They could also be represented as multiclass Sorcerer/Fighters, with a selection of spells closer to their element.

Monsters of Ghelon

I have traveled with a small group of my crew and a few local guides to visit the ruins of a town called 'Reki', which Iaskapru has told me has been entirely abandoned after an attack by what he calls 'snake-demons'.

I do not fear, for I have been assured by the locals that the creatures prefer to stay beyond the mountains, and rarely pass south of them anymore. I will soon be surveying the town, and helping the locals to map the ruins; their superstition has until recently prevented them from doing so themselves.

-Log of Captain Amiko Nori of the Sea Fox IV, Day 13 of Yali, Year 998 of the Golden Reign

THE WORLDWAYS SCHOOLS OF GHELON					
School	Symbol	Typical Spells	Combat Style	Number of Active Halls	
Overwhelming Darkness	Black hexagon, with a white circle in the center	Darkness, Darkvision, Displacement, Haste, Mind Fog, Shadow Walk	Constant & unseen, but low strength	9	
Slithering Fire	A golden salamander	Burning Hands, Scorching Ray, Cat's Grace, Fireball, Shield of Fire	Quick, agile, and reckless; attacks can be strong, but those of students easily re- versible	7	
Strong Glacier	A glacier-filled valley	Bear's Endurance, Sleet Storm, Wall of Ice, Freezing Sphere, Polar Ray	Slow; will wait until opponent tires, then freezes opponent and uses fists or hammer to attack	8	
Bending Tree	A gemtree leaf (green with gold and silver streaks); or simply a crown of leaves	Entangle, Shillelagh, Barkskin, Soften Earth/Mud, Tree Shape, Spike Growth, Liveoak, Changestaff	Patient & Wise; will shrug off attacks on toughened skin, and change shape into an animal, or call natural allies, when attacking	12	
Leaping Monkey	A monkey's tail	Feather Fall, Jump, Blur, Spider Climb, Cat's Grace, Locate Creature	Dexterous & Deceiving; prefers to climb or jump to a higher position to gain an advantage	4	

THE WORLDWAYS SCHOOLS OF GHELON

The northern coasts and the mountain range that makes their access difficult have been avoided so far by the Ghelonese people. Tales of strange sounds and terrifying monsters encountered while exploring the mountain passes and tunnels have enforced the mountains' status as a place to avoid, if at all possible.

However, a few villages have sprung up around the many streams flowing down from the upper reaches of the mountains, including the now-abandoned Reki. Reki was once second only to Pekaeri in population, with a flourishing economy and development of the arts. But several decades ago, the town was attacked by snake demons in a savage nighttime attack (Captain Nori would note later, upon discovering a fresh corpse of a snake-demon, that they resemble the serpentlings, a mythical race commonly believed by the religious Elves of the north to be the 'very essence of selfishness, personified').

The snake-demons are seen by most Worldways schools as a corporeal manifestation of violence and chaos, rather than evil or selfishness, similar to many lower-intelligence creatures.

The mountains of the north are not the only region of Ghelon to contain such hazards. There are many reports of a small group of tall, almost skeletal hags living amongst the fens of the west. As



mentioned before, many explorers have already fallen victim to their powerful magics and sickening scents.

Besides the hags, a number of other monsters – usually based on natural forms – can be found there, including voracious and cunning vines, a race of small, muck-swimming lizards, and even the occasional animated crocodile skeleton. No one is really sure of how the crocodile skeletons are animated so, as no reported Worldways School has delved so deep into the necromantic lore. Many believe it is the work of the hags.

Armod's Tomb

Material Plane



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Explore the secrets of **Armod's Tomb**.

A full adventure appearing in **Open Game Bazaar #3**

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THE ANURAD By Poseidon (Winner #1: Contest 2, What is That?)



When the first Anurad were first encountered deep within forests or jungles, they were thought to be descendants of ancient treants. The Anurad are actually a mix of plant and animals.

Long ago a village of humans preparing to attack a nearby village, for reasons now lost in time, unknowingly chopped down a few trees from an enchanted area to make armor and shields. When the villagers donned the newly created armor many of them started to change. The wood began to cover their skin. A third of the population had succumbed to the armor. The wood had blended with their skin changing leaving nothing that would identify them as humans. Large root like spikes grew protruding from their fingers as well as other places along their skin. The Anurad's feet became large and round like two stumps.

The families and friends of those transformed, thinking they were demons, turned against them. The Anurad fled to the safety of the forest, finding a small area to live. The people of the Anurad's original village were destroyed less than a decade later. This combined with legends of the forest being haunted left the Anurad alone for decades. It wasn't until small groups wanted to find new lands that they were introduced to the rest of the world.

Anurad, 1st-Level Warrior

Medium Humanoid (Augmented) Hit Dice: 1d8 (4 hp) Initiative: -1

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)

Armor Class: 16 (-1 Dex, +3 Hide Armor, +2 Heavy Wooden Shield +2 Natural Armor), touch 09, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+2

Attack: +2 Handaxe 1d6+1, or -1 Javelin 1d6 +1 Full Attack: +2 Handaxe 1d6+1, or -1 Javelin 1d6 +1

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: Bark Skin, Rooted base, Low-light vision, Drink from the earth

Saves: Fort +2, Ref -1, Will +0

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 08, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: Intimidate 3, Spot 2, Listen 2 Feats: Alertness

Environment: Temperate Forest, or Jungles **Organization:** Patrols (2-3), Family (5-9), Tribe (30 -350 half to three quarters noncombatants) **Challenge Rating:** 1

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually true neutral

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +1

The Anurad stand about 6 feet tall and weigh about 450 pounds. Their wooden skin is usually brown, sometimes with small patches of moss. Most wear simple shrouds in shades of brown or green.

Combat:

The Anurad usually attack in groups, coordinating attacks to take down stronger foes. The Anurad are

rarely found alone. After being ostracized by their former family members the Anurad society grew close and began to fear being alone.

Bark Skin: The Anurad's bark skin provides them with +2 Natural armor and Light Fortification (25% chance that critical or sneak attack is negated).

Rooted Base: The Anurad large round feet give them a +4 to opposed rolls against being bull rushed or tripped.

Drink from the earth: If an Anurad is standing on soil or near a water source little roots extend from its feet and dig into the ground. These roots allow the Anurad to feed off water and nutrients from the earth and can sustain her as though she has eaten a day's worth of rations when no food sources are available.

Anurad as characters:

The Anurad usually live in close knit families and tribes. Rarely do they leave their surroundings, but there are some that have a want to explore the world. Those that meet groups to travel with will take these members as their families.

Anurad have the following racial stats:

- +2 Str, -2 Dex
- Medium Size
- Base speed 30 ft
- Special Qualities (see above): Bark Skin, Rooted Base, Drink from the earth.

- Languages: Common, Anurie. Bonus Languages: Terran, Elven, Gnome, Halfling

- Favored Class: Fighter
- Level Adjustment: +1

Fitting Anurad into your setting:

The Anurad fit well in any heavily forested or jungle areas. They are peaceful and mild tempered, but will defend their families ferociously. Banishment is one of the highest forms of punishment for the Anurad. Lone Anurad have usually done something horrible to warrant banishment, such as murder, or betrayal. Any one that knows this will usually look upon the Anurad with disgusts or fear, even the rare ones that choose to leave home.

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Armod's Tomb

Etherel Plane



Explore the secrets of **Armod's Tomb**.

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THE BOGHERIN

By Thread Evoker (Winner #2: Contest 2, What is That?)



Open Game Content

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This large biped stands half again as tall as a man, and has tough gray hide. It has a smooth head that swoops back to a point. Its feet are like tree trunks with blunt claw-like toes and there are sharper ones coming out at the knees, the elbows and several finger-like ones at the end of each muscular arm. It's intimidating appearance is amplified by two long horns running through its skin, down the sides of its head and another three massive tusks emerging from its shoulders. These look to be made of different colored bone then the others – almost as if they were from another creature. Usually N Large Monstrous Humanoid Init +3; Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Scent; Listen +13, Spot +13

Languages

AC 22, touch 12, flat-footed 19 (+3 Dex, +10 natural, -1 size) hp 95 (9 HD) Fast Healing 8 Immune disease, poison Fort +9, Ref +11, Will +12

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares); Climb 20 ft. Melee 2 claws +15 (1d8+6) Space 5 ft.; Reach 10 ft. Base Atk +9; Grp +19 Atk Options power attack, rend Special Actions consume, ground slam

Abilities Str 23, Dex 16, Con 22, Int 8, Wis 15, Cha 13

SA rend (1d8+9), ground slam

Feats Alertness, Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (claw) **Skills** Climb +11, Jump +11, Listen +13, Spot +13

CR: 8

Advancement by character class Favored Class barbarian

Rend (Ex): If a bogherin hits a single target with both claw attacks, he may immediately rend. This deals extra damage equal to a claw attack plus $1 \frac{1}{2}$ times it's strength bonus.

Ground Slam (Ex): As a full round action, a bogherin that jumps down from a height of at least 10 ft. (or reaches the necessary height with a vertical jump) can cause a shockwave in the earth nearby. All creatures within 10 of the bogherin must make a Reflex save DC 20, or fall prone. This save is constitution based.

Consume (Ex): A bogherin who has fed in the last 12 hours has a +4 racial bonus to whichever physical stat of it's prey was highest. For example, if he ate bear flesh, he would have +4 strength for the

next 12 hours. A bogherin can never have more than one of these bonuses at any one time, and the bogherin must have at least aided in the catching of whatever beast it is feeding off of. The prey must be an animal, humanoid, magical beast, monstrous humanoid or giant. A bogherin make feed and gain bonuses from other types of creatures, but only gains a +2 bonus and must make a Fortitude save with a DC of 10+the prey's racial HD or be nauseated until the meat has passed from it's system (12 hours).

Bogherin Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (nature) can research bogherin to learn more about them. When a character succeeds on a skill check, the following lore is revealed, including the information from lower DCs.

DC Result

18 Bogherin are perfect hunters, drawing strength from their prey and their rapid metabolism allows them to heal wounds almost immediately.

23 Bogherin are known to hunt by leaping out of trees or off cliffs, and are very cunning trap makers and ambushers.

28 Bogherin hunting grounds are characterized by star-shaped craters and small conical holes in trees and cliffs. Their rapid metabolism allows them to consciously evolve on a daily basis to gain the best qualities of their prey.

Strategies and Tactics

A favorite tactic of bogherin is to drop from above and use their slam ability to knock their opponents down. They are deceptively good climbers despite their bulk and unwieldy feet. They use the toehorns to dig into rock faces or trees and pull themselves up as far as they can. If their foes are lesser in number, they will frequently simply charge and attempt to tear their prey apart as quickly as possible. They are quite cunning though and tribes will set out traps and lay ambushes.

Environment

Bogherin tend to live in temperate mountain forests, but due to their adaptive abilities, they can essentially live anywhere and will take on some of the characteristics of the other native creatures.

Typical Physical Characteristics

A bogherin stands 9 feet tall and weighs about 460 lbs. They have tough gray hide and make horns of varying sizes emerging from their joints. Their rapid healing allows them to augment these by piercing their skin with bones from particularly impressive prey. Some will even have whole tusks emerging from their backs like banner poles. Along with elaborate tattoos and large shawls/cloaks, these piercings help to show an individual's place in the tribe, and tell of their exploits. Bogherin wear some clothing – mostly loincloths as well as belts and harnesses. Most Bogherin have a cloak, blanket or other large piece of cloth that is draped over the shoulders like a shawl. These shawls are often their most prized possessions although, they always seek to gain a better one whenever they have the opportunity to acquire or trade for one.

Society

Bogherin are the ultimate evolutionaries. The druid leaders of the tribes advise the others on what they should eat so that they can only absorb the strength of creatures that will improve themselves. If they eat a proper diet of a particular creature, then over time, they gain the absorbed characteristics of the creatures permanently. This form of very rapid conscious evolution allows bogherin to rapidly climb to the top of the local food chain – becoming closer to the native creatures the more they eat them. Bogherin will never eat other members of their tribe, but should two tribes meet in battle, the victors will eat the fallen and thus carry their strength on.

Alignment

Most bogherin are true neutral. They are frequently seen as vicious, but survival of the fittest is simply the core tenet of their philosophy and they see others as prey.

Bogherin with Class Levels

Most bogherin advance as barbarians or rangers, although the leaders of tribes tend to be druids. Not many bogherin use arcane magic though. Add one to their challenge rating for each class level added. **Level Adjustment:** +5.



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Medium Vermin Hit Dice: 2d8+8 (17 hp) Initiative: +4 (Dex) Speed: 40 ft., Climb 30 ft. AC: 18 (+4 Dex, +4 natural) Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+3 Attacks: Bite +4 melee (1d6+2 plus disease) Face/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft. Special Attacks: Stench, Disease, Improved Grab Special Qualities: Tremorsense, Swarm Tactics, vermin Saves: Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +0 Abilities: Str 15, Dex 18, Con 18, Int --, Wis 10, Cha 2 Skills: Hide +9, Move Silently +9 Feats: Weapon Focus (Bite)

Climate/Terrain: Temperate and warm land and underground Organization: Cluster (3-5) or swarm (6-30) Challenge Rating: 2 Treasure: None Alignment: Always neutral Advancement: 3-4 HD (Medium), 5-8 HD (Large) Level Adjustment: -

In the gloom you can hear a faint chattering—probably a rat. Suddenly a wave of odor rolls over the area, choking you and sending bile up your throat. The source of the stench becomes clear in seconds as out of the dark crawls a horde of huge black bugs, bloated and overgrown. The beetles reflect what little light there is and scamper in a wave toward you, dragging their fat bodies over one another. In seconds they are on you, crawling on you.

Creeping along sewer routes or hiding in tropical undergrowth, dire cockroaches are hideous monsters, dangerous alone and deadly in swarms. Dire

cockroaches are attracted to bodies of water and rotting organic material and dark, enclosed spaces. Large cities often have problems with these hideous bugs as, unlike their smaller brethren, they are amazingly aggressive and will often attack children, halflings or those that intrude into their lairs.

Physically, dire cockroaches resemble hissing cockroaches that have been blown up to the size of large dogs. They scuttle on clawed legs, dragging bloated, armored abdomens behind them. Their heads are small and blackened, sprouting large, serrated mandibles. Though they have become too heavy to fly, these slimy beetles have smooth transparent wings that run across their back. DMs may optionally make these wings operational. Granting the bugs a fly speed of 60 ft. and average maneuverability.

COMBAT

In combat, dire cockroaches show no fear at opponents smaller than ogres. They will charge en masse, attempting to overwhelm their foes and drown them in the wave. Dire cockroaches are adept at working with their kin, almost always attacking as a group.

Stench (Ex): Dire cockroaches secrete noxious slime from their bodies that reeks and burns the eyes. All creatures (except cockroaches) within 30 feet of the vermin must succeed at a Fortitude save, DC 13, or become nauseated (cannot act, ex-

cept for movement). This effect lasts for one minute, or until the affected creature leaves the zone. Once a creature successfully saves against the stench, they are immune for one day. Dire cockroaches encountered in their lairs increase the DC of their stink to 17.

Disease (Ex): Filth fever—bite, Fortitude DC 14, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a dire cockroach must hit with its bite attack. Dire cockroaches may attempt to grab medium sized prey, in addition to smaller targets.

Tremorsense (Ex): Dire cockroaches can automatically sense the location of anything within 60 feet that is in contact with the ground.

Swarm Tactics (Ex): Dire cockroaches fight in swarms. Two dire cockroaches may occupy one 5 ft. square at no penalty. While grappling, dire cockroaches count as small creatures for purposes of maximum number of creatures in a grapple.

Vermin: Immune to mind-influencing effects.

Want more cockroaches?

The locust swarm in the Monster Manual can be turned into a cockroach swarm instantly, just by changing the name. For hissing cockroaches, you could get rid of the fly speed and give it a land speed of 30ft.

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SPEECHCRAFT

By Michael Ennis

In this series of short articles, I explore various issues surrounding language in campaigns. Up this month – the Common Tongue

A Common Problem:

Since the early days of D&D, one of the (many) conceits of the game has been that, despite coming from a wide variety of ethnic and racial back-grounds, all of the PCs are miraculously able to understand each others' speech, and indeed the speech of everyone that they encounter. The vehicle for this universal communication is the Common Tongue, a language that for one reason or another everyone in the game-world has learned.

In light-hearted, "Fight the monsters, get the treasure" games, or on worlds with vastly different linguistic structures than Earth, this "Common Tongue" is certainly an allowable conceit. To a certain extent, the effect it achieves is necessary -aDM wants all of the PCs to be able to communicate amongst each other, or else he's simply asking for a headache. However, for those worlds that attempt to emulate a somewhat 'natural' feel, the Common Tongue raises almost as many problems as it solves. Why did this tongue come into existence? Who spoke it originally and how did it Is it taught as a second language or spread? learned alongside a person's 'native' tongue? (Or is it, indeed, most peoples' native tongue?)

In place of the ubiquitous and bland 'Common Tongue', I propose the following alternatives as food for thought:

Keep the Common Tongue

One option is to keep the Common Tongue 'as is', but to give it a bit more history and background – that is, answer the questions I posed in the second paragraph of this article. The grand-daddy of all world-builders in this regard is Tolkien, from whom the D&D notion of the Common Tongue most directly derives, so let's take a look at his example.

Tolkien knew that his narrative required characters to be able to communicate with each other. Problematically, four of his central characters were rural bumpkins from an obscure, isolated and overlooked region, and yet these characters needed to be able to communicate with innkeepers and great kings alike. To this end, he concocted Westron, the Common Tongue.

Tolkien gave a detailed account of why everyone spoke the Common Tongue (they had a common ethnic background and it evolved from the language of the Numenoreans, who were the great lords of the old kingdoms of Men.) He also detailed how some peoples, like the Rohirrim, spoke a language that was a highly archaic form of Common, and how Hobbits spoke a version with a few peculiar features of its own. ('Normal' Westron had a formal form for speaking to superiors and an informal form for speaking to your equals - Hobbit-Common had lost the formal form, causing people to have shocked reactions when the Hobbits addressed kings and stewards informally.) Importantly, Tolkien also distinguished that certain peoples did NOT share knowledge of Common.

Doing this turned Westron from a bland tongue into one that had life, an interesting language instead of a simple tool to allow all the characters to speak to one another. If you insist on keeping the Common Tongue in your own worlds, I recommend you follow this example. Make up a few details about local variations in speech, so that even if the party can speak to foreigners comfortably, they nevertheless remain foreign. This can be as simple as giving people from foreign lands strange accents, or as severe as giving them a healthy dose of strange vocabulary and a few structural peculiarities as well. Exclude certain groups, the most foreign of all, from having a share in the Common Tongue. (Don't fall into the trap of having only the Bad Guys unable to speak Common though the lack of Common should be about foreign customs, not wicked ways.) It will make your world's linguistic features infinitely more interesting.

Noble Common – The Lingua Franca

When Alexander the Great conquered much of Egypt, the Middle East and western Asia in the 4th century BC, he brought with him many elements

of Greek culture. The local nobles and educated persons, in an effort to maintain their status and interact with a truly 'international' society of elites, learned the Greek language. This use of Greek as a 'Common' language among the elites continued through the era of the Roman Empire. After the break-up of the Empire in the 5th century AD, Latin was used in the courts of various Western kings both claim Rome's cultural legacy and to facilitate communication between rapidly diverging peoples. In the early modern period, French was used in a similar capacity. Nowadays, in the Western world at least, English is rapidly becoming the Common language of the educated and the economically privileged.

A Noble Common is perhaps the easiest Common to implement in your games. Look at the nations that populate your world. Find one of them, Nation X, that is powerful, literate, and famous (or that was in the past) and declare that nation's language to be the Noble Common. The basic principle is this – at first, nobles and other educated persons started learning this language because they wanted to maintain good economic and diplomatic ties with Nation X (or, in the case of a fallen power, they wanted to lay claim to that nation's prestigious legacy). As more nobles began to adopt this language, however, the reasons became more pragmatic, as it facilitates international communication and also helps elevate their status.

Noble Commons of this type are usually learned languages rather than native ones – the speaker acquires it through rote memorization and practice in adolescence rather than learning it by exposure from birth. Thus, except within the borders of Nation X, only people who have the luxury of some education have the chance of acquiring the language. Outside of Nation X, therefore, knowledge of the Noble Common confers an appearance of status and importance.

In a game that uses Noble Common, adventurers who possess this language will be able to interact with high society, but they will not necessarily be able to deal with peasants, petty merchants or other lower-class people without having a common language to draw on. Adventurers may also be able to pass themselves off as members of a higher social class by using this language – in appropriate circumstances, you might want to award them a +2 circumstance bonus to relevant diplomacy and bluff checks.

Trade Common – Pidgins

Aside from nobles seeking diplomacy, the second likely group to develop a common language are merchants seeking profit. Successful merchants travel widely and must interact with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. In order to make this communication easier, over the years merchants create pidgins or Trade Common languages, pooling together the trade vocabularies of several natural languages with a simple grammatical structure to make a language that is easy to learn and efficient to use in deals.

Unlike a Noble Common, which is almost always a fully-fledged language in its own right, Trade Commons are usually very simple languages – after all, they aren't intended for literature or philosophy, only for the exchange of valuables. You can insert this type of language simply by creating a tongue called Trade Common, or for a little more variety, create numerous trade languages based on major markets – the Europeans trading for furs with the Native Americans used a different language from Europeans trading with the Chinese for luxury goods, for instance.

Like Noble Common, Trade Common languages are learned rather than native. Because they are of a lower level of complexity than natural languages, however, they are also easier to learn – any character may acquire a Trade Common tongue for a single skill point, regardless of whether Speak Language is a class skill for them or not. (There is also a greater possibility of uneducated persons like peasants having picked up this language by exposure over the years as well, making it useful for communicating to the underclass.)

The downside of Trade Common languages, as mentioned earlier, is that they are not designed for much outside of the mercantile sphere. While they have a rich vocabulary dealing with various products of trade, they break down in other areas. The result is that using a Trade Common language while attempting to use Diplomacy or other skills that require articulate verbal communication imposes a -5 penalty on all checks.

Pointing and Babbling

Perhaps yours is the type of world where (for whatever reason) it doesn't make sense to have any of the above Common languages. (Or perhaps you do, but you want additional rules to cover situations where the Common language might not be available.) In that case, I offer to you an optional rule that I've tested in my own games. It's called "Pointing and Babbling."

The basic principle, drawn out of so many comic scenes in movies, is that by pointing and using words emphatically, some basic communication can be accomplished even between people who do not share any languages in common. The underlying mechanic is an Intelligence check with a variable DC. The lower-Intelligence partner in the exchange makes the check.

Nearest Languages are:	DC
Close Family	12
Distant Family	16
Not Discernibly Related	20
Completely Alien	25

Nearest Languages:

I have studied Latin and French extensively. Although I have never learned Spanish or studied it in any serious way, I find that because I know languages that are related, I can frequently understand some parts of a Spanish conversation. This is because closely related languages frequently share vocabulary.

When determining the DC of the intelligence check, consider the languages available to both parties. Find the pair of languages that are the closest in relationship, and consult the chart above.

If you haven't detailed your world's languages to the extent that you know the relationships between them, use this alternative rule of thumb: Communications between members of the same race count as Distant Family, between members of different race but the same type (Humanoid, Outsider, etc) are Not Discernibly Related, and communications between members of different Types are Completely Alien.

Close Family: While the two languages are not strictly mutually intelligible, there is enough common vocabulary to make communication (relat-

ively) easy. This can arise either because both languages have a close common origin, or because one language has borrowed heavily from the other. A real-life example of the former is the connection between English and German; of the latter, English and French.

Distant Family: Two languages that have a common origin, though that origin is very distant and the commonality is hard to find except in occasional key vocabulary. In the real world, English and Russian are distant family.

Not Discernibly Related: Two languages that have no noteworthy relationships to each other. A real world example would be English and Swahili, say. In most fantasy worlds, Elvish and Dwarvish will not be discernibly related.

Completely Alien: Not only do the two languages have no common ground whatsoever, but the thought processes of the two groups are so inherently different that pointing and association is going to be very difficult. An example (no real world ones exist) might be trying to communicate with a creature from another plane of existence.

If the check succeeds, then the two characters (or parties) may exchange information on a single topic (the GM may determine what constitutes a 'topic' - I find that it most usually is used in bartering-type situations, where I use it to apply to one item.) However, they may not use this exchange to attempt any form of skill check (Diplomacy, most kinds of Bluff) that requires verbal communication. If the check fails, the two characters/parties may not attempt again on that topic for a day, but may attempt a different topic.

Parting Thoughts:

These are only a couple of the most typical examples of interesting Common Languages – you may develop others. As you do so, always keep in mind that Common languages always have a reason for becoming 'common', whether that reason be economic, political, religious, or even magical. Give your Common tongues their own purpose, flavor and peculiarities, and you will not only give your PCs a method to communicate with one another and the outside world, but a method to have some fun while doing it.

BORDER PATROL: VARIATIONS

By Stargate525

For most common fantasy countries, border patrols are just that, people patrolling a border. Its two-dimensional, often located along a well marked road, and often well guarded. Yet what happens when those borders are no longer two-dimensional? In a fantasy world, the citizens of kingdoms underground, in the air, and underwater all have borders to protect as well; therefore, there are many variations on the common border patrol.

Underground borders, whether tunnel passes through a mountain range or gateways to a colony of dwarves, are far easier to defend than traditional borders. A border like this must only seriously protect the narrow roads and passages in the earth, condensing what could normally be a miles-long patrol into the defense of, maybe, a half dozen openings.

Because of the unique conditions, a post guarding an underground border shares several traits with castle gatehouses. Since the easiest way to stop invaders or other undesirables is to simply seal off the passage, an underground border station would employ one or more portcullises and/or gates to slow down and bottle up the enemy. With the enemy barricaded in the close quarters of a tunnel, the garrison would be best served to employ area effecting attacks, such as burst or line magics, or other mundane spread weapons (flasks of acid, alchemists fire, or searing oil comes to mind). Attacks such as these are more effective than traditional bows or other ranged weapons, as the bows primary advantage, range, is limited by the confines of the earth. A border station could have several fallback positions to retry a defense due to its ability to keep enemies moving along a single predetermined route, and collapsing the tunnel could be an option of last resort. The ideal construction of these posts would have at least one level completely above the tunnel equipped with murderholes and other openings through which arrows, magic, superheated sand, or the classic pot of boiling oil can be dumped. In addition, the post should be defenseless from behind, allowing quick and easy recapture should the post fall.

Aerial societies have a separate set of chal-

lenges, with differences between completely airbased defenses (the flying city) or the land based one (the city sitting on the pinnacle of a mountain peak). Their primary and strongest defense is the fact that few enemies can actually reach them. The focus, therefore, should be less on a garrisoned defense and more on observation and scouting. A few patrols or lookouts should be sufficient enough for most airborne kingdoms. It would be wise, however, to heavily defend any land-based access, should one exist.

Aerial empires have one major Achilles heel: magic. Magic is one of the few ways normally landbound foes can attack them, and, with the extremely long range of some spells, magical bombardment is a risk. And even if a magical attack fails to fully kill an aerial target, the fall to earth surely will. Anyone defending the skies should devise some way of countering magic, whether its an able counter-speller, wands of dispel magic, antimagic fields, or some other device.

The final type of exotic civilization is aquatic. They share many traits with their flying counterparts above; the water presents a formidable natural barrier, they are almost free from threat from land-based enemies, and they hold a significant advantage in any combat that would occur against them.

Our aquatic friends do have one thing against them: the ocean is teeming with creatures that would be more than happy to devour them. Therefore, the most urgent need of a border patrol for the aquatic civilization is to watch for or repel aquatic predators. Some would do well to also look to the surface and prevent ships from crossing over their lands, if at all possible. Whether intended or not, a sinking ship will do damage to the seabed, or anything living on it.

Beyond these two considerations, aquatics countries have little need for borders unless they share the oceans with other races. In this case, the border would be similar to a land border, keeping in mind the third dimension that swimming provides.

The next article will elaborate on how to incorporate magic into a borders defenses.

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