

# TALISLADTA



# Talisanta



## The Northern Reaches

MORRIGAN PRESS INC.





# TALISLANTA

FANTASY ROLE PLAYING GAME

## THE NORTHERN REACHES

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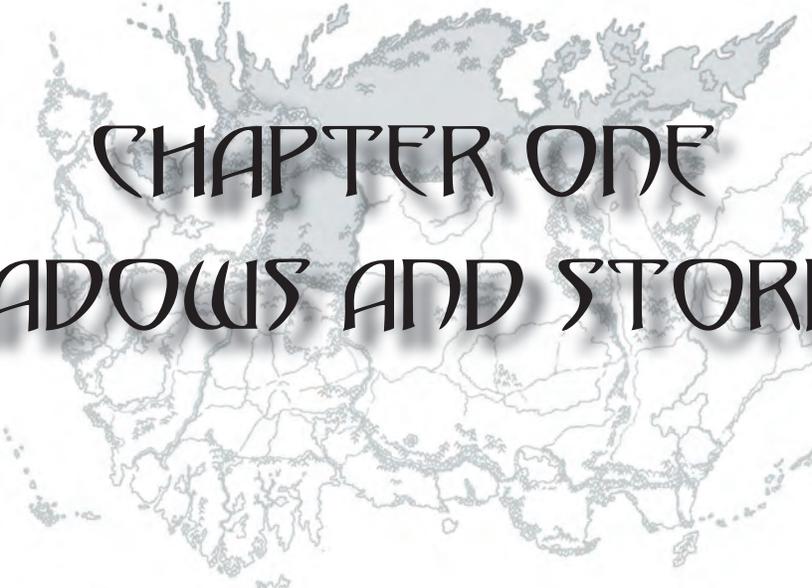
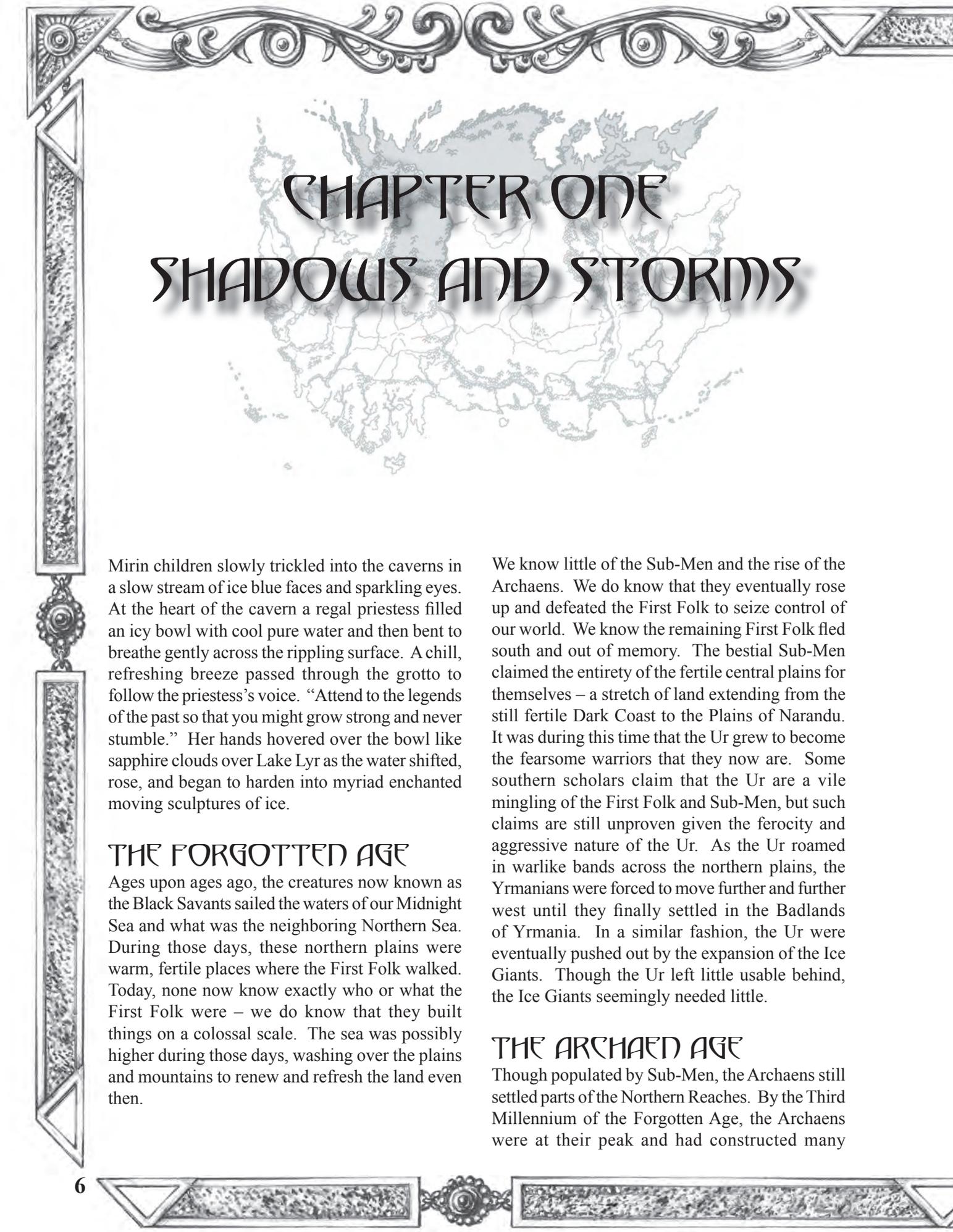
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# CHAPTER ONE

## SHADOWS AND STORMS

Mirin children slowly trickled into the caverns in a slow stream of ice blue faces and sparkling eyes. At the heart of the cavern a regal priestess filled an icy bowl with cool pure water and then bent to breathe gently across the rippling surface. A chill, refreshing breeze passed through the grotto to follow the priestess's voice. "Attend to the legends of the past so that you might grow strong and never stumble." Her hands hovered over the bowl like sapphire clouds over Lake Lyr as the water shifted, rose, and began to harden into myriad enchanted moving sculptures of ice.

### THE FORGOTTEN AGE

Ages upon ages ago, the creatures now known as the Black Savants sailed the waters of our Midnight Sea and what was the neighboring Northern Sea. During those days, these northern plains were warm, fertile places where the First Folk walked. Today, none now know exactly who or what the First Folk were – we do know that they built things on a colossal scale. The sea was possibly higher during those days, washing over the plains and mountains to renew and refresh the land even then.

We know little of the Sub-Men and the rise of the Archaens. We do know that they eventually rose up and defeated the First Folk to seize control of our world. We know the remaining First Folk fled south and out of memory. The bestial Sub-Men claimed the entirety of the fertile central plains for themselves – a stretch of land extending from the still fertile Dark Coast to the Plains of Narandu. It was during this time that the Ur grew to become the fearsome warriors that they now are. Some southern scholars claim that the Ur are a vile mingling of the First Folk and Sub-Men, but such claims are still unproven given the ferocity and aggressive nature of the Ur. As the Ur roamed in warlike bands across the northern plains, the Yrmanians were forced to move further and further west until they finally settled in the Badlands of Yrmania. In a similar fashion, the Ur were eventually pushed out by the expansion of the Ice Giants. Though the Ur left little usable behind, the Ice Giants seemingly needed little.

### THE ARCHAEN AGE

Though populated by Sub-Men, the Archaens still settled parts of the Northern Reaches. By the Third Millennium of the Forgotten Age, the Archaens were at their peak and had constructed many

## THE NORTHERN PORTS

*The mountains of the north are riddled with what appear to be small port settlements. In addition to the carved caves and construction surrounding the highest peaks of the mountains surrounding the Lost Sea, there are also numerous, extensive caverns overlooking the Midnight Sea. While many of these have been found and explored, every season brings some new tale of uncovered treasures and riches brought back by those daring enough to attempt the journey. Antiquarians readily devour such finds as the extreme temperatures frequently succeed in preserving the relics of the past. However, fortune-hunters should be cautioned – many such discoveries have later been found to simply be the failed settlements of more modern peoples such as the Rasmirin, renegade Ur, and other heretofore unidentified peoples.*

floating sky-cities. In the north were two notable examples – Farnir, the City of Alchemists, and Elande, the City of the One Hundred. There are scores of ruins sprinkled throughout the mountains of the north like so many scattered jewels attesting to the fact that these were not the only cities in the region, simply the most famous. Varying opinions from historians and scholars claim that these ruins prove that the north was settled by the diverse races mentioned above.

## THE GREAT DISASTER

The Fourth Millennium is commonly derided as the Age of Decline. Whether due to an increased ennui, decadence, arrogance, or pride, the Archaens began to wane. Scores of Neomorphs – magically created and bred sentient creatures – were set loose on the continent to battle both tribes of Sub-Men and other Archaens. Eventually, as you know, the Great Disaster struck. Afterwards, little recorded history remained. Called the Age of Confusion by some, the time after the Great Disaster saw great changes in the north: the Northern Sea vanished, the sky-city of Farnir crashed to the earth, the

city of Elande was flung into the heavens, and the Sinking Land formed as a result of some unknown activity resulting in the disappearance of a large band of Neomorphs who were last seen heading in that area seeking some sort of refuge from the chaos of the time. Additionally, it was during this time that the Mirin settled in what is now L'Haan after traversing much of Narandu.

## THE COMING OF THE ICE GIANTS

*There remains some debate as to the exact time the Ice Giants first entered the North. While it is known that Farnir was enshrouded in ice after it crashed, many scholars debate whether the City of Alchemists suffered its fate as a result of the Great Disaster or instead crashed because of the powers of the Ice Giants and their King. While the intricacies of the matter seem of little import to most Talislantans, those who seek to restrain or battle the fearsome Ice Giants often look to their origins in Talislanta for clues to aid in their struggle.*

## MODERN TIMES

The modern north is a wild, inhospitable, and largely uninviting region. From the fierce Jaka in the west, to the despoiled lands of Urag, across the harsh frozen climes of Narandu and L'Haan, to the bizarre inhabitants of the Shadow Realm and Sinking Land, the Northern Realms are only sparsely populated today despite the presence of so many ruins hidden throughout its mountains and buried beneath its icy plains. Each of its many and varied races are especially suited to the harsh life of the north. And yet, despite its meager population and unwelcoming lands, people from all across the rest of Talislanta frequently travel to and from the Northern Realms. Many of them are merchants and traders seeking such trade goods as furs, rare herbs and wood, blue diamonds, and blue adamant. Others are opportunists seeking lost lore, forgotten treasures, and salvageable secrets of the past that

lie securely hidden within various caves, ruins, and tombs sprinkled across the land.

Despite having descended into a series of lands with sparse populations, the North is nevertheless a vital part of the continent of Talislanta in many ways. Politically, the Mirin are willing associates of the Seven Kingdoms, Zandu, and Dracarta. While L'Haan is sympathetic to many of the political ideals in these nations, they often get much less support against their continued foes. Such strains in addition to the great distance mean that many in the South discount the Mirin out of hand when thinking of global politics. However, if it were not for the Mirin the neighboring areas, such as Narandu and the Kang Empire, would quickly seize a significant area of fertile plains, accessible ports, and connections to mountain passes through the northern extremes of the Volcanic Hills and into the Wilderlands of Zaran. Likewise, the Jaka form a fierce deterrent to the expansion of both the Ur and the Ice Giants as their nomadic packs roam out from Yrmania in seasonal courses. Conversely, the Ur are an almost constant threat to the northern borders of the Seven Kingdoms, while the Ice Giants of Narandu threaten Tamaranth and the northern Wilderlands. Though few are aware of their presence, knowledgeable scholars perennially ponder what the Malum of the Iron Citadel are actually up to and if they will one day venture forth from the Shadow Realm.

Economically, much of the above influences the prices of goods with far reaching effect. The Jaka, skilled forest guides and animal handlers, must roam very far from their homes to reach the "civilized" lands of Talislanta. Not only do they frequently charge for their skill, but also for the distance they must travel from their homes. The Mirin are the only known producers of Blue Adamant. A magical alloy of surpassing strength and durability, Blue Adamant is also quite resistant to temperature extremes – an effect not only useful in the extreme temperatures of the North, but also for such purposes as windship construction, alchemical containers, and magical barriers. The dangers posed by reaching either of these races include traversing the lands held by the other, less amicable ones. Merchants and traders frequently

seek ways to reach the North via less expensive or more rapid means. Until they derive such a method however, the prices paid for the services of the North will continue to remain at a premium.





# CHAPTER TWO:



## EMPIRES OF ICE

### L'HAAN

The nation of L'Haan stretches across vast snow fields, frozen lakes, and the glittering ice peaks of north-eastern Talislanta. Most of this land consists of vast areas of wilderness, populated only by herd of snowmane, tundra lopers, wooly ogriphant and the tundra beasts and frostweres that prey upon them. Bordered on the south by the Mystic Mountains and the west by Narandu and its fierce inhabitants, it is only across the northern Midnight Sea or the eastern Sea of Madness that L'Haan is readily accessible.

Although L'Haan's coastline does provide ample bays, coves, and inlets that would be suitable for landing a sailing craft handled by a skilled crew and captain, the nearly ever-present ice that roams the seas of the north tends to discourage such endeavors. Furthermore, the tides and coastline of the north change so frequently, that credible maps of its waters and shores are practically non-existent. This is largely because the water close to shore frequently freezes to varying degrees of thickness. The Sea of Ice, the body of water closest to civilized L'Haan, has a tide that not only varies during the days, but across the entire year as well. As the year turns colder and colder and the months turn towards Talisandre and Zar, the water nearest

the shore freezes, creating a small, if artificial, beach. Each day, as more water washes up over this shelf of ice, it too freezes. As a result, the highest tides in the winter are often much further from the true shore than the lowest tides during the height of the warm season's low tide. This same effect occurs less frequently along the coast of the Midnight Sea, and the Sea of Madness carries its own dangers as well. Ships from the west have a much longer journey to reach L'Haan. Typically, it may take from several months to a year to reach L'Haan from Zandu.

Once arriving, a sailing vessel also runs the risk of becoming stuck, literally frozen into the surface of the Sea of Ice, for a period of time before it can make the return journey. Resultantly, though the Mirin often receive visitors and merchants who make the journey up by ship from eastern Talislanta, the vast majority of its trade is handled by small, hardy souls daring enough to attempt the journey overland. Druas from the Maze-City of Altan often travel here, as do a particularly hardy and determined tribe of Djaffir merchants. Not to be outdone by the Djaffir, Orgovians will often use their knowledge of the northern part of the Wilderlands to lead teams of lopers over

## TRAVEL BY AIR

*Travel to and from L'Haan is a perilous undertaking at the best of times. Windships from the Seven Kingdoms do occasionally make the long journey north; however, many windship captains simply refuse to make such a hazardous journey, for many practical reasons. The first thing to consider is the distance. Even were it possible to travel from Cyrmil to Rhin in a straight line, the journey would still be over 1000 miles. Instead, a windship captain must navigate the west-east winds that blow across the continent, brave the aberrant weather that commonly sweeps the Wilderlands, and cross some the tallest mountains in the world. The wind patterns closer to L'Haan are affected by a mingling of heated air from the Volcanic Hills, discharges of magical energy from the Shadow Realm, and the winter chill of its own native weather; these forces often interact to produce terrifying and spectacular storms over the western border of L'Haan, the Shadow Realm, and the Sinking Land. Besides all of that, the freezing winds that make up the storms of the north often bear shards of ice. Called the Boryallis by sky sailors, these vicious tempests are sharp enough to slice sail and rigging to shreds and with enough time and exposure can even wear away the hull of most civilian windships. Given these dangers, it is no wonder that goods from the north fetch such high prices in the markets of the west.*

the mountains and down into L'Haan. There are several passes through the mountains that ring L'Haan's southern borders. Most frequently merchants must dare a crossing of either Noman's Land or the Shadow Realm. While both are quite perilous, they are admittedly safer than attempting to cross the Crystal Mountains to the west and traveling across Narandu. Such journeys from the civilized south are not impossible of course, whether by land, sea, or air, as trade does occur

between L'Haan and the West and East, but the dangers associated with such a journey go a long way to explaining the rarity of adamant in southern lands.

L'Haan's icy lakes are another important feature in the region. These five fresh-water lakes are permanently topped with a thick layer of ice, although remaining liquid, the water below is still numbingly cold beneath the surface. Mirin fishermen and divers cut holes in the surface of the ice in order to reach the waters beneath. In these dark, deep pools the Mirin find not only edible aquatic creatures of various sorts, but also such riches as Blue Pearls and Ice Dragon Eggs. Typically, the divers only hunt at the edges of the lakes. In fact, there are stories amongst the divers that some of the lakes are bottomless, the pressure increasing as the light decreases until only a thick, crushing darkness remains beneath the earth. As there are few others who will even dare venture into the frigid cold of water beneath the ice to disprove this, such claims must be believed.

## THE MIRIN

A people of noble physique, the tall and statuesque Mirin are the recognized masters of L'Haan and the north. The bright blue skin of the Mirin and their gossamer-like white hair only serve to make them look more like carvings of ice and snow. Typically the Mirin dress in robes, boots, and cloaks all trimmed in frostwren hide. These furred garments are not, as some would believe, a recognition of the frigid air of L'Haan, but rather worn purely for decorative purposes as the Mirin themselves are unaffected to the cold of their homeland.

## MIRIN HISTORY

During the Great Disaster ages ago, the works of the Archaens failed in spectacularly devastating ways. All of the Archaean sky-cities were destroyed in various fashions and crashed to the ground. Those who had managed to survive had to suddenly contend with the Wild Folks to whom the lands of Talislanta had been ceded in previous centuries. Having suffered greatly at

## LOSING THE BLUE

*Mirin who spend more than a month away from the winter climes of their home find the color of their skin fading from blue to a crystalline white. This effect, called fading by the Mirin, is reversible after spending time back in freezing temperatures similar to those of their home. Although typically equal to half of the time spent away, the time required to regain the blue coloration can be decreased by spending time in increasingly lower temperatures such as those afforded by the water beneath L'Haan's frozen lakes or in the wind atop her mountains. It is not that uncommon in such metropolitan locales as Cymril or Zandu where there is a demand for ice, be it for food or luxury, to find a Mirin reposing amongst the blocks simply enjoying a taste of home.*

the hands of the Archaens, the Wild Folk took the opportunity provided them by the Great Disaster to take vengeance on the bewildered and disoriented Archaens. These depredations pushed the Archaens to the extremities of the Talislantan continent. According to Mirin legends, they are descended from a group of Archaens who fled the depredations of the Wild Folk after the Great Disaster. Some stories cite that the group originated in one of the fabled sky-cities, but given that many Archaens lived in such places prior to the Great Disaster, this is not surprising.

According to the Mirin, and specifically the odes of the Mirin Mirars, after the crash of one of the sky-cities, their ancestors found themselves in a desolate, nearly barren land. The favorite and most renowned ode of the Mirin is "The Cold March after the Fall" which details the events of the Mirin's early history. After managing to tend to their wounded and settle their nerves, the Archaens tried to find food and shelter. Instead they found stagnant, foul smelling pools, deforested hills, and a band of ferocious Wild Folk. It is common for the Mirars long, alliterative poems to take some liberties with the facts; nevertheless,

these Wild Folk are described as being veritable giants, standing close to ten feet tall and having "bottomless bleak black eyes" and "fiendish foul fanged maws." Apparently, these Sub-Men also possessed considerable skill at hunting in the dark, for the Archaens soon suffered attack after attack after nightfall. Many times, they awoke to the sound of one of their comrades being dragged away into the night, never to be seen again. One of the deeds of an early Mirin hero known as Mithyar Myar was to finally fight back against these night terrors by laying a trap for one, wrestling with it once it was caught, and ultimately ripping the creature's arm from its body. After this bloody deed however, the Wild Folk who had previously been harassing the Archaens redoubled their efforts. So fierce were their nightly attacks that the Archaens were forced to flee in order to find safer shelter. Leaving behind all that they could not carry, the Archaens sought to cross a vast mountain range in order to put some sort of barrier between them and their attackers. As they climbed the heights the temperatures dropped lower and lower, and still they were pursued. Eventually, they crossed not only the mountains, but also a huge rolling plain of hills. Here the cold of winter had truly set in: the hills were blanketed in snow



## FALLEN FROM THE SKY

*Mirin legends do indeed claim that they came from one of the fallen Archaen sky-cities, but in their legends such a city remains unnamed. Given the nature and description of the Cold March, there are a number of possible locations that could be the Mirin's prior home.*

*The Vanished Kingdom of Shalihan is perhaps the least likely of the eligible candidates. The fact that the city lay somewhere across Narandu on the other side of the Crystal Mountains aligns with the story of having to cross the frigid wastelands and mountains. However, legend says that Shalihan simply vanished as if the entire city was itself an illusion. The people of Shalihan excelled at the arts of illusion and conjuration, but such skills did not help them when the Great Disaster struck. Since Mirin tales say that their city crashed, it is unlikely that Shalihan was their home. Some ancient Mirin texts that survived the Cold March do mention ancient Shalihan, but only it seems as a passing historical reference to the city and the people who served as actors and servants there. One professor of the Lyceum Arcanum however claims that all texts relating to Shalihan that were penned during its existence were altered by the very illusionary powers of the city itself; therefore, he claims, the Mirin Texts may conceal clues to lost Shalihan.*

*The Frozen City of Farnir is a possibility. The city did fall from the sky and its inhabitants were renowned alchemists. On the other hand, by the time of the Great Disaster the Farnirans's skill at alchemy had waned so much that they primarily made cosmetic enhancements similar to those employed in Cymril and Zandu today. Another Farniran tale is that the city was not, as some suggest, a victim of the Ice Giants, but instead a powerful and malevolent magician. This black magician somehow used the entire city and its citizens as a sacrifice to mysterious and terrible demonic powers in order to secure for himself power over his foes or perhaps even over death itself. The citizenry of Farnir who were in residence at the time were altered by the unspeakable magics unleashed and were transformed into the first Ice Giants, the black magician into the Ice King, and those descendents of Farnir who were not there were altered by the powers of sympathetic magic to become the Mirin. Evidence for either of these tales might be found in the ruins of Farnir beneath Narandu's ice.*

*Elande, City of the Four Winds, is another eligible location. The Elandar were skilled magicians dedicated to preserving knowledge. These are both talents that the Mirin prize and additionally, there is the connection to the winds. However, the Mirin actually worship Borean, god of the North Wind, while Elande earned its name because its inhabitants were skilled in the creation of both windships and levitationals. Additionally, Elande did not crash. While it is reported to have descended somewhat during the Great Disaster, there was time for the Elandar to escape via their fleet of windships. After their departure, Elande vanished into the heavens, hurled towards the clouds by the unpredictable forces of the Great Disaster. Furthermore, the Phantasians of Cabal Magicus specifically claim to be the descendents and inheritors of the Elandar.*

and ice and all the trees and plants were barren. A stranger, "painted like the hours of darkness," came to the early Mirin at some point during their journey across the plains. Although they feared this entity at first, it did not seem to bear them any ill will, and they allowed it close to their camp.

Taking pity on the weary refugees, this wandering stranger called "the Nameless One" in the "Cold March," instructed the famished migrants on what plants were still edible in this chill, northern land. After a few nights respite from the attacks of their pursuers, the Archaens continued on, determined



to find a place of safety. As they traveled, many of them died from the rigors of the march, lack of food, or exposure to the elements. Finally, the remaining refugees came to the shores of a huge body of water, almost completely covered in ice. In this place they settled for a short time until they were set upon by a huge dragon made of freezing wind and ice. Mithyar Myar allegedly slew the beast himself, but died of the wounds he sustained in the process. Weary, saddened, and desperate, the Archaens set out once more in an effort to escape any more predators that might have been attracted by the dragon's death. Eventually, they reached an enormous expanse of dark water that stretched seemingly to the horizon. Islands of ice floated by in the distance and the wind coming off of the sea was chill. Having reached the ends of the world, many of the Archaens collapsed, melting the snow beneath them with their tears. One of their number, a strong willed woman who had long urged them on even when the stoutest of them had wanted to surrender, did not weep. Instead, she raised her arms to the sky and called out in a voice raw with wind and cold. Beseeking the heavens, she presented the remnants of her people to whatever deity might finally save them and give them aid. Something answered.

## MIRIN RELIGION

So ends the "Cold March after the Fall." It was Borean, also called the God of the North Wind, and in exchange for the worship and obedience of this band of Archaens, he granted them immunity to the cold so that they might survive in the chill north. These people became the Mirin and the woman who led them became their first queen. On a hill overlooking the Midnight Sea, the Mirin built their first shrine to Borean. The Mirin believe that Borean cannot be worshiped indoors and thus no temples of the God of the North Wind exist in L'Haan. Instead, the Mirin build open air shrines or simply erect small alters on hillsides. Along with their immunity to the cold, the Mirin took on their notable blue skin and a predilection for frigid climes. Mirin can survive, with little discomfort, in more temperate regions of the world, but typically after a few weeks of exposure to such temperatures their distinctive blue coloration fades to become

a crystalline white similar in shade to their hair. Religious beliefs aside, the name Borean also has appeared amongst a listing compiled by the Archaens of various arch-elemental entities. While this would account for the control that the Mirin claim their deity has over the wind and the cold, it would not readily explain their blue coloration, their ability to Meld, or the power that Mirin believers wield in its name.

### SHRINES

*Many of the shrines and alters of Borean exist overlooking frozen bodies of water, on wind-swept hills, or indeed anywhere beneath the open sky. The Aurai, as both the priests and priestesses are known, claim that it is only beneath the open sky, surrounded by the wilds, that one can truly feel the presence of the God of the North Wind. This would seem to accord with Borean's elemental status as many natural magicians find their powers increased in such surroundings. The Aurai are quick to point out, however, that they do not consort with every minor spirit that blows by. The powers conferred by Borean are potent and only bestowed on those who properly pay him homage.*

In addition to the power granted them by Borean, the Aurai are adept aquamancers. Aurai consider their elemental spells as a part of their worship of Borean. In their eyes, they stand above common elementals in a hierarchy stretching from the minor elemental residing in the lowliest flake of snow all the way to Borean himself. As such, their power over the element of frozen water is not merely a right owed their station, but it is also an extension of Borean's power and will working through them to preserve and defend the natural world around them.

As a part of their command over elementals and the elements, the Mirin speak Elder Tongue. While some of them, most notably the merchant-poets known as Mirars who interact most frequently with outsiders, do speak one of the dialects of



Talislans, for the most part their society has been removed from Talislantan culture for so long that the majority of the Mirin no longer speak its common language. Elder tongue, whose origin stretches back long before the Archaen sky-cities fell, is a language commonly spoken by various lesser elementals. While this might seem to be the source of the Mirin's knowledge of Elder Tongue, it is equally possible that they learned it from the Ariane of Tamaranth who claim to have aided the band of Archaens that would become the Mirin.

Not only skilled magicians, the Aurai are also the spiritual advisors to their people. From the ceremonies of birth where Mirin children are left alone on a hillside for an entire night, to marriage ceremonies of ecstatic joy, to the ceremonies of death where Mirin dead are submerged beneath the lakes in ornately carved coffins of ice, the servants of the God of the North Wind are always with their people. These priests and priestesses are responsible for keeping the records and histories of their people in order to provide them with guidance in the future. They are responsible for teaching the children to read and write and the intricacies of Mirin culture and Borean philosophies. Furthermore, the ruler of L'Haan, the Snow Queen, is always a Priestess of Borean. The Snow Queen is a hereditary position; she is not only a ruler by right of blood but also by the blessings bestowed upon her by Borean. Having undergone such trials to finally achieve a home, the Mirin are fiercely protective of it. Coupled with their worship of Borean, all Mirin share a desire to protect their people, the land and its ecology. Mirin priests and priestesses do not accept money for their services, instead encouraging those under their care about proper attitudes towards the natural world and defense of the nation.

In addition, Mirin consider the practice of Alchemy to be closely related to their religion as well. Seen as being a "joining of the mind and spirit with the forces of nature," alchemy is viewed as another avenue for a devout Mirin who does not wish to enter the priesthood. The talents of these alchemists are indispensable to the defense of the nation as it is from their skills alone that blue diamonds are transformed into adamant, a

rare and magical alloy of tremendous durability. Additionally, while most metals, such as bronze, copper, and even black iron can become brittle in the extreme temperatures of L'Haan, adamant is capable of withstanding even the severe cold of icy sea-water.

#### BLUE DIAMONDS AND ADAMANT

*The creation of adamant is a closely guarded secret of the Mirin. Created from an alchemical synthesis of blue diamond, silver, and black iron, adamant is similar in color to a very dark sapphire – a shining, reflective, blue-black. Not only does adamant hold up well under extreme temperatures, its sturdy nature also causes weapons made from it to shear through most armors or armor to turn aside blows with ease. Furthermore, adamant has demonstrated the ability of damaging a large array of corporeal extra-dimensional entities even before it has been enchanted. While some magicians speculate that this is due to the nature of the alchemically altered silver, the Mirin claim that it is another blessing from Borean.*

*The Mirin use blue diamonds for other purposes as well however. Blue diamonds are carved into fantastic shapes or set as gemstones to decorate homes and belongings. Visitors to L'Haan have brought back stories of not only jewelry and tools made from blue diamonds, but such frivolous items as wind chimes, crystalline-sheer playing cards, writing tablets, and glare-proof lenses created from this valuable gem.*

#### MIRIN CULTURE

As Borean does not covet wealth, neither do the Mirin. The primary concern of the Mirin is the desire to survive and to protect their land. Although many Talislantans in the south may scoff at the idea of a Mirin being poor given the astounding amount of adamant and blue diamonds

that the average Mirin owns, the Mirin themselves do not see such things as riches but rather as necessities to the defense of their home. As the biggest threat they face is the Ice Giants, they may be quite correct in this assessment. The Mirin are also quite concerned about helping one another. While their society is not necessarily a communal one, due to the harshness of the climate and the hardships that they have historically endured, the need to help one another in order to survive went from being an indispensable part of life to a habitual one.

The Mirin are not simply one-sided winter warriors, however. Their people work in a variety of professions, all of which are considered equally important to the survival of Mirin culture. Farmers produce edible lichens and alchemical ingredients. Hunters bring in various wild and aquatic game as well as hide, bone, and horn.



## MIRIN HOLIDAYS

*Drome 49 – Equinox – A day that traditionally marks the movement from spring to median, in L’Haan it is a reminder that the days are warming, and with the warmer weather come the northern snows.*

*Laeolis 25 – Ritual of the Midnight Suns – The longest day of the year where the suns shine from dawn until midnight in the Northern Realms. In L’Haan this day is marked by a median celebration involving dancing, ice skiff racing, and other games. One such game involves betting on when a adamant sculpture will fall through the surface of one of the lakes.*

*Laeolis 49 – the Ghost Moon – The appearance of an eerie ‘ghost’ moon produced as pale Laeolis passes in front of Phandir is considered a night for silent watchfulness by the Mirin. On multiple occasions the Ice Giants have conducted large scale assaults on L’Haan’s borders on or around this day.*

*Phandir 49 – the Conjunction of the Suns – This day is celebrated in L’Haan as marking the return of fall and colder weather.*

*Zar 7 – the Septenarial Concordance – The alignment of the seven moons is a night of quiet contemplation in L’Haan as the people take time to reflect back on the events of the past year.*

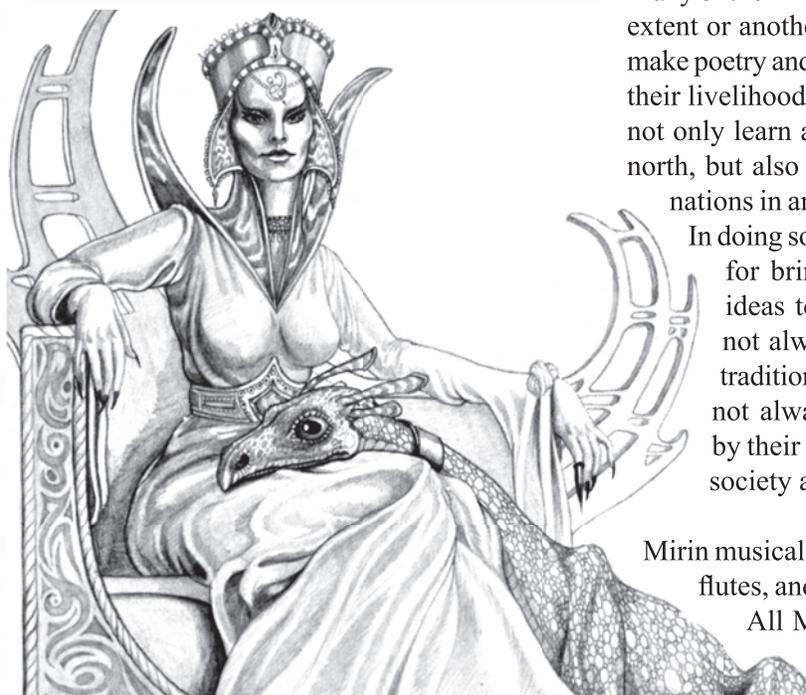
Priests and priestesses intercede with Borean and provide guidance. Warriors and scouts defend the cities. Alchemists forge adamant, produce various elixirs, and refine precious metals. Poets provide heartening entertainment and retell the histories of the Mirin. Artists and artisans produce not only luxury items such as sculpture and carvings, but also the elegant and graceful ice ships used in L’Haan.

Mirin artisans are also responsible for the ornate crystalline structures that are the dwellings of the Mirin. All structures in L’Haan are constructed

## MELDING AND THE MILITARY

*Their immunity to cold aside, the Mirin are also possessed of another unique ability: Melding. Through this little understood ritual Mirin “bond their spirits” to another chosen individual. As a result of Melding the two participants are joined with a form of empathic link; they cannot communicate directly via words or images, but typically can sense strong emotions from their partner.*

*The Mirin military’s border patrols typically number between ten and twenty individuals. While the Mirin do not like to force Melded individuals to be apart, there is little doubt that there is a certain painful logic to the practice of sending one half of a Melded pair to patrol the border while the other is stationed somewhere closer to home. In such a way, the Mirin are often warned of trouble on their borders much faster than even the wind can travel. Although the nature of the danger is unknown, the garrison of Myr can be armed and waiting for any invading force.*



from blocks of solid ice mined from the lakes, glaciers, and fields in L’Haan and carved into shapes that are both beautiful and functional. By sunlight these buildings glitter and shine making the cities seem to be constructed of enormous diamonds. At night, they are lit from within by Amberglow spheres produced by Mirin alchemists. Interior rooms are lit by reflected light from the suns or moons via cunningly crafted lenses of ice and shafts carved into the walls. With the almost sole exception of certain alchemical procedures and the outdoor shops of metal smiths, fires are not used, nor even permitted, within the bounds of the settlements. While the Mirin do not feel the cold, they can experience sensations of warmth; however, given that the Mirin themselves do not produce any noticeable body heat, nearly any temperatures warmer than that of freezing are uncomfortably warm. Additionally, such extreme temperatures as fire and flame could wreak devastation and destruction in a Mirin city given the nature of their icy construction.

Mirin life is not completely involved with worship and warfare. The Mirin practice a variety of pastimes just as people in other lands do. Among these pastimes are such hobbies as poetry, music, carving, sailing, and skating.

Many of the Mirin practice the arts of poetry to one extent or another. However, there are those who make poetry and the epic recitation of Mirin history their livelihood. Called Mirars, these individuals not only learn all they can of the histories of the north, but also occasionally venture out to other nations in an effort to expand their repertoires.

In doing so they are inadvertently responsible for bringing back information and new ideas to the Mirin. Such new ideas are not always met with appreciation by the traditional Mirin. However, while they are not always looked upon with admiration by their countrymen, their contributions to society are still valued.

Mirin musical instruments include bells, chimes, flutes, and even a rather unusual pipe organ.

All Mirin instruments are carved from solid ice. Additionally, some of

their instruments do not even need players, being capable of producing various notes as they are affected by icy breezes. Mirin orchestras perform at many official events. At unofficial gatherings it is not unusual for young Mirin to produce instruments from pouches, belts, and bags and strike up impromptu ensembles to provide music, or “the breath of Borean,” for all those present.

Mirin are also quite adept at carving, whether the medium is ice, horn, bone, or even metal. Such skills are utilized to construct their buildings. Besides these, magnificent ice sculptures are commonplace in Mirin cities, often lining major streets or intersections in commemoration of important events or achievements. Horn and bone taken from wild game and aquatic creatures are used for such things as jewelry, combs, footwear, inkwells, and flasks among other things. Mirin metal smiths, besides using their skills to create weapons, armor, and tools from adamant, create ornate designs from both adamant and mundane metals. While many of these are functional pieces, they also create artistic pieces just as artisans in other lands.

## MIRIN GOVERNMENT

L’Haan is ruled by a white witch known as the Snow Queen. This position is passed down from mother to daughter. A daughter-heir is required to not only learn the intricacies of statecraft, but also the precepts and philosophies of the God of the North Wind. Before ascending the throne, the woman who shall become Queen is expected to be very skilled in both of these arenas.

Prominent in the Snow Queen’s court are a collection of officials. Known as the Royal Ministers, each of these men and women are responsible for one aspect of the nation’s governance; such as defense, alchemy, shipbuilding, trade, public works, and justice. The Royal Ministers are typically chosen from amongst the ranks of the priests and priestesses of Borean, but it is not unheard of for a valiant tundra scout to ascend to become the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Shipbuilding, or the like. Beneath each of these Ministers in turn are collections of sub-ministers who oversee

## TAX

*Taxes in L’Haan are of low levels, the majority of which pays for the wages and equipment of the alchemists, army and navy. Higher taxes are unnecessary, as the community-minded Mirin often perform work for the community, even aiding in the upkeep of the local parks, and the tutelage of the young. They also keep their settlements clean, tidy and pristine. Due to these factors, the authorities have no real need to employ substantial numbers of civil servants. All Mirin pay a blanket tax of 25%, based on their weekly income, and they are honest enough that they even declare weeks when their earnings have been higher. The local clergy collect the taxes every month and take them to the Royal Ministry. They do so without armed escort.*

such concerns in a particular city of L’Haan. For example, the Minister of Justice is the head of L’Haan’s judicial system with each of his sub-ministers serving the role of chief justice in each city. Likewise, the Minister of Trade monitors the amount of goods produced, imported, and exported from the nation, while his sub-ministers in each city also keep track of how much adamant is sold to non-Mirin, limiting the amounts allowed to leave the country. In such a manner does the Snow Queen learn what her people most need and desire. The rest of the Snow Queen’s court is made up of various minor nobles. While every Mirin is of course descended from those original Archaen survivors of the north, some of them maintain that even then they were descended from nobility. Such ideas persist amongst the Mirin court; however, unlike some nobility in southern lands, Mirin nobles are highly concerned with taking care of those beneath them. Indeed, they often measure status amongst themselves by how much they have spent and how many of their subjects they have helped or protected. Given the shared desire to serve the public good, there is little of the bickering, backstabbing, and politicking of some notable courts elsewhere in Talislanta. This is not to say that such occurrences do not transpire, merely that they are more often set aside in the interest of the good of the people.

## EXCERPTED FROM THE HISTORIES OF HOTAN

*Suitably disguised and admonished not to speak, I crept forward with the rest of the robed and painted Rasmirin into the icy cave. When we were all assembled, a masked warlock stood upon an icy perch at the back of the cave and recited the following, presumably from memory as I did not see a book or scroll of any kind.*

*“And Aberon said to the assembly, ‘Force is what fits me now, force! By force shall I drive forth the weeping clouds, by force I shall whip and compel the sea, by force I send gnarled span-oaks crashing, I pack the boundless drifts of snow, and I hurl innumerable hailstones down upon the land. When I meet my brethren in the sky, the open and boundless sky, in my chosen field of battle, I brawl and wrestle with such force that the heavens themselves ring with the sound of our conflict and the blaze of flames leap forth, struck from the hollow clouds. When I have pierced the arched passageways of the world, when I twist in his deepest caves and heave my angry shoulders, I put even the dead to fright and with those tremors petrify the world.’ With words like these, Aberon waved his forceful wings and as they beat the wind, the whole world felt the gust and all the seas surged. Trailing his dusty cloak across the mountain peaks, he swept the land, and enshrouded in the gloom of the storm . . .”*

*At this point, I missed the rest of the Rasmirin’s no doubt moving oration as the chill of that place had finally seeped through what meager magics I had brought to bear against it. Seeing as how I was beginning to shiver while those around me stoically endured the cold, I thought it best to leave before my disguise was questioned.*

Ever since the founding of the first Mirin cities, the Mirin government has had to deal with a continuous state of warfare with the Ice Giants, and for the past two centuries sporadic outbreaks of fighting with the Rasmirin. Despite this they have managed to hold together their society while it blossomed into one of the more advanced cultures on the continent.

## THE RASMIRIN

Many Talislantans see the Rasmirin as anarchists, and while it is true that they seek to overthrow the government of L’Haan and have sought aid in doing so from such sources as the Farad, the now-deposed Quan, and even the Rajans, most Rasmirin simply desire a society where the individual is more important than the society itself. If those who are weaker decide to follow a strong leader, that is their right, but they must be allowed the choice, something unavailable not only in L’Haan, but in their beliefs, other nations as well. As a result of their beliefs, the Rasmirin have been exiled from L’Haan to the barren rocks of the Outcast Islands. However, the Rasmirin continue to be discovered by the Mirin back in L’Haan and exiled to the islands. At the same time, Rasmirin continue to sneak back into L’Haan to recruit, influence, and sabotage. The unwillingness of the people of L’Haan to submit these traitors to capital punishment may one day be their eventual downfall. The Rasmirin are in most respects exactly like their more benevolent cousins, the Mirin. However, such similarities end when it

### COMMON HEROES

*Mithyar Myar is one of the individuals whose deeds are described in similar fashion in both Mirin and Rasmirin histories. The Rasmirin, however, claim that Myar was one of their number, and while his deeds are praised by the Mirin, they are praised for the wrong reasons. Myar, the Rasmirin claim, accomplished his deeds by bending nature to his will, overcoming adversity, and working for his own glory.*

comes to culture and society. The Rasmirin are to large extent practitioners of black witchcraft. Through their beliefs and practices they seek the aid and guidance of an entity known as Aberon, a quasi-elemental creature that calls itself the "Ruler of All Demons." Unlike the Mirin, the Rasmirin believe in the individual's triumph over the adversities of nature. Indeed, they feel that to be successful one should force nature to be bent to the will of the individual. Many Mirin believe the Rasmirin to be a strange anomaly, a rejecting of the protecting kindness of Borean; however, the history of the Rasmirin goes back further than they think.

## RASMIRIN HISTORY

The Rasmirin themselves trace a history similar to the legends told in L'Haan, but with some subtle differences. The Rasmirin state that after the crash of the great sky-city, they were forced into bondage by their alleged betters and made to endure the long march across the north. Despite their subtle attempts to deride the journey and return to the warmer climes of their former home, their enslavers pressed them north, using the Rasmirin to do the work of carrying all of the refugees' supplies and wounded. When the march did stop for a rest, the nobles forced the Rasmirin out to hunt, but when they brought back wild game demonstrating their superiority over the wilds, their "betters" took the choicest spoils and claimed that it was their right.



The final indignity came on the shores of the Midnight Sea when one of the nobility thought to speak for all of the survivors, pledging their souls to whatever god would aid them. No one asked the opinions of those who had ensured the safety of the people. As a result, the Rasmirin have long worked against those they see as their betrayers. Rebellion through simple means was the only way that they could act against Borean and his puppets, the Mirin. The only way, that is, until they began to worship Aberon.

## RASMIRIN RELIGION

Since the Rasmirin rarely keep written records of history, how the early Rasmirin first began to worship Aberon is lost to the mists of time. What is more readily apparent are the tenets of his worship: the destructive power of nature unleashed. In their eyes, Borean is a tyrannical god that has enslaved the wills of the nobles who once sought to do the same to the Rasmirin. The Rasmirin do not doubt Borean, if given the opportunity, would extend his despotic rule over the rest of the continent, until all who lived were bowed to his will. According to the Rasmirin, Borean wishes to control the living because they are the only ones who have the ability to strip him and his brethren of authority. Indeed, prior to worship by the Mirin, the faith of Borean was fast disappearing from the continent and he was almost numbered as one of the Forgotten Gods. The Rasmirin do not see themselves as demon-worshippers, despite claims by the Mirin and others to the contrary. In their eyes, Aberon's otherworldly servants are merely the avatars of destructive elemental forces.

Some Talislantan scholars have put forth the suspicion that Borean and Aberon are one in the same. They postulate that like the coins in some realms, there are two faces to this entity: one that is beneficent and one that is malevolent. The Rasmirin faith, they claim, is simply a perversion and reaction to Mirin beliefs. While both of these deities do have control over the forces of nature, particularly ice and wind, most agree that any similarities end there. In fact, most scholars who press the issue too far are often found dead, frozen solid to their writing desks.

## ABERON'S GIFT

*Like their eastern cousins, the Rasmirin are immune to the cold. Many Rasmirin use this fact when attempting to sway the Mirin to their own beliefs, claiming that despite their rejection of Borean, they still are immune to his icy breath. What the Mirin fail to realize, however, is that the Rasmirin immunity to cold is a dark gift from Aberon. While Rasmirin converts have not revealed whether or not their immunity to the cold falters during the time of their conversion, the truly faithful claim that their immunity stems from the ultimate realization of their power over nature, not the gift of a tyrant god.*

Since the Rasmirin rely on oral histories and traditions, the faith of Aberon has changed over time, but has constantly remained a somewhat primitive adoration of the destructive power of nature. Harnessing the destructive powers of nature such as storms and the power of ice to rend stone in addition to forcing their will on the native spirits of the north, the Rasmirin magicians are a strange and powerful lot who are largely divided into three separate doctrinal groups. The Nihilists are perhaps the largest of the sects and what most Talislantans think of when discussing the Rasmirin. Dedicated to the overthrow of order, destruction, and harnessing the powers of black magic in addition to their worship of Aberon and knowledge of demonology, the Nihilists are understandably an often feared group. Another sizable majority of Rasmirin magicians are former priests or priestesses of Borean who have been converted to the worship of Aberon. Known amongst their kin as Savants for the coldness that has gripped their hearts, these Rasmirin are often sent back into L'Haan as covert agents attempting to sow seeds of dissent and heresy amongst the Mirin. Additionally, the Savants are known for attempting to bargain with demonic forces in their search for power and revenge over those whom they perceive have slighted them in the past. While such bids for power are not often successful, they are rather conspicuous while they last. Such



negotiations tend to be less intellectual and more physical affairs with the caster attempting to bully or bluff the demon into acquiescing to his wishes especially since the chaotic forces of entropy that empower demons renders them immune to magical Influence. The smallest group simply call themselves Warlocks and adds no further appellations. While they themselves are not avid worshippers of Aberon, they still focus their studies on the destructive powers of nature. The Warlocks typically believe that the world must be completely destroyed in order to be reborn. Warlocks are further distinguished from their brethren by their penchant for living solitary lives in the wilderness and leaving behind cryptic runic carvings in various places frequented by other Rasmirin.

Not all Rasmirin are magicians however. Although something of a stereotype, those Rasmirin who grow to be taller and heavier than their brethren are more frequently trained to work in a more physical capacity. Some of them become Raiders, striking at Mirin patrols or attacking the infrequent merchant caravans that pass through the area. Others may switch to such pursuits after a small indoctrination into the worship of Aberon. These Rasmirin are often used as spies and infiltrators in Mirin settlements or to protect their more magically-apt companions.

### RASMIRIN CITY-STATES

Scattered about the Outcast Isles, the cliffs of the Ice Peaks opposite the islands, and sporadically along the nearly impassable Ice Peaks are a number of Rasmirin domains. While the Rasmirin were first discovered and exiled by the Mirin during the early part of the 5th century, their heresy had existed long before the fateful battle of Traitor's Bay. The Rasmirin who were found, rooted out, or betrayed were all shipped off to the Outcast Isles where they quickly had to fend for themselves; however, others sympathetic to their cause back in L'Haan smuggled food, tools, and other supplies to them when possible. Thus were the Rasmirin able to not only survive, but also to prosper to a limited extent.

Eventually, differences of opinion, political

maneuvering, blame over wrongdoing real or imagined, and paranoia began to split the Rasmirin apart. Although most of the Rasmirin wish to return to L'Haan in control of its government, they differ on exactly how to accomplish those goals. As a result, the Rasmirin are largely split into a number of small independent city-states. Typically these are populated by no more than a few score people crowded into an ice-fortress barely big enough to hold half their number.

It is often difficult for Rasmirin to establish any new settlements. Despite their power, they are few in number and in order to construct a dwelling sizable enough to protect against attacks from northern predators while simultaneously defending the builders from those same dangers requires a greater force than those who wish to leave a city-state can muster. Furthermore, it is often difficult for the Rasmirin to journey too far from their homes. The routes of travel south are treacherous and many of those who rule over the fortresses are loath to commit the few and precious ice schooners that the Rasmirin have stolen or repaired. Despite their often grandiose plans and schemes, many of the Rasmirin remain disorganized and separated. Because of these facts, the Rasmirin have not yet achieved their aims or spread their dark faith to the south.

Given their penchant for destruction, it is little surprise that the Rasmirin have tried on more than one occasion to barter with the Ice Giants or locate the Ice King. By and far the vast majority of these attempts have ended in failure and the death of one or both of the parties involved.

### L'HAAN LEGENDS

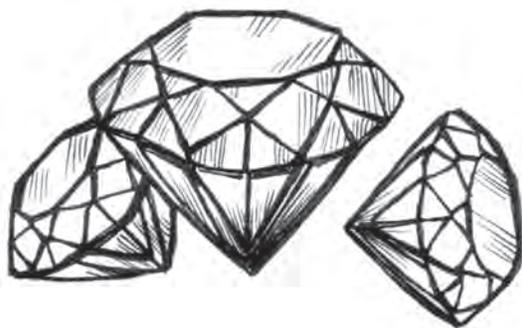
#### BLUE DIAMONDS

Blue diamonds can be found in many locales in the far north. Typically just as rare as black diamonds, and thus often worth just as much outside of L'Haan, blue diamond is utilized in a variety of ways. Many times it is found in caves deep within the earth and must be mined just as normal diamonds are. However, there are places, especially in Narandu, where blue diamonds can

## HATRED ENDURES BEYOND EVEN DEATH

*The Rasmirin do indeed know the secrets of crafting soulstones from blue diamonds. Although they are not necromancers, the magicians amongst the Rasmirin have learned that a blue diamond, prepared through certain rituals similar to normal enchantments, can be bound to one individual so that upon their death at least a part, if not the entirety, of the soul is imprisoned within the stone. The Rasmirin have yet to learn how to create a true soulstone, but the processes used for these blue soulstones is a large step along the way. Exactly where they acquired their magical knowledge is currently unknown, but speculation rests among the Malum of the Shadow Citadel, their dark deity Aberon, or some other entity from the lower planes.*

*Among the Rasmirin there are a rare few individuals whose hatred for the Mirin is so strong that they wish to exist long enough to see the Mirin utterly destroyed. Through the use of these strange soulstones these Rasmirin Anarchists are able to imprison their souls for the rest of eternity as well as pass along some small amount of their skill and power to their fellows. The Rasmirin who make use of blue soulstones claim that the inhabitants are not always as coherent as they were when they were truly alive, but that their resolve keeps them strong.*



quite literally be found lying on the ground; it is supposed that this phenomenon occurs because the Ice Giants who have no concept of wealth simply leave or drop them in their perennial migrations.

Aside from its estimable value as a gemstone and the invaluable role it plays in the creation of adamant, sages and scholars wonder what other properties it may bear as well. It is known that black diamonds are utilized by certain practitioners of black magic in the creation of soulstones, an enchanted gem that imprisons the soul of a being for untold necromantic purposes.

Sages and scholars have long wondered if it might be possible to create a soulstone through the use of a blue diamond; however, as there are few necromancers willing to share their secrets and fewer still reputable wizards who would dare to experiment with a being's soul, such knowledge might well go unknown forever. With the exception of the Rasmirin, no one knows to what arcane purposes a blue diamond might be placed.

## ADAMANT

Blue adamant, the more common form of the metal found in Talislanta, has long been a product of the Mirin. Although the early Mirin were able to use their magical power to keep the Ice Giants at bay, it was not until the creation of adamant that the Mirin were able to push the giants back and secure their borders. The origins of adamant are lost in time, despite the Mirin's claim that the secret of the creation of adamant was another of Borean's gifts, thus it is often called "Borean's iron" among the Mirin. That the early Mirin had kept the alchemical knowledge necessary for the creation of adamant gives some indication that they had to have had some great skill amongst them already, whether widespread or in the hands of a few.

Some indication of the origins of adamant may perhaps lie with its similar alloy, black adamant. The secrets of black adamant are solely in the province of the Black Savants of Nefaratus. The ancient ancestors of the Black Savants, the Thane, used to dwell in what are now the wastelands



of Khazad on the opposite coast of Talislanta from L'Haan. While it is possible that the Mirin stumbled upon the secrets of adamant in the ancient carvings of the caves they had to dwell in during their exodus across Narandu, why wouldn't they then have produced black adamant. While the Rasmirin do not dispute the Mirin's claims of adamant's otherworldly origins, they instead point out the caveat of adamant's power to affect only corporeal entities from other planes, not beings such as the intangible elemental force that is Borean. This is just one more proof, they claim, that Borean wishes to seize control of the world for himself alone.

## RASMIRIN JOURNEYS

The Rasmirin have managed to seize not only a few ice schooners, but also a small variety of sailing vessels as well. While these have been used on rare occasion to sail past L'Haan and to the rest of the continent, the Rasmirin claim to have sailed north as well. According to their tales, the crew of the solitary ship that survived the journey spoke with fevered eyes and hushed words of sailing past the edge of the world and into a dark and demonic realm. Most of the Rasmirin are at least sensible enough to not attempt a second voyage to verify their brethren's tales.

## L'HAAN LOCATIONS

### MYR

Myr is the largest and most populous of the Mirin cities, primarily because it is here that the majority of L'Haan's military might is based and due to the presence of the famed Shipyards of Myr. It is here that the graceful and rapid ice crossing craft of the Mirin are built, whether they are for military or private use. Myr also happens to be the primary

supplier of blue diamonds, not just to the rest of L'Haan, but to all of Talislanta as well.

Built to ward off attacks from the encroaching Ice Giants, Myr is situated atop a rise on the western shore of the Sea of Ice. Surrounded by thick, towering walls that are obviously built for military use, the city is encircled by a huge area of cleared land, packed hard for the use of ice boats. From some fifty feet or more above the earth atop the substantial towers that periodically intersperse the walls, it is possible to spot an uncountable number of small blue diamonds held beneath the frozen ground of this perimeter.

No gates or doorways, including the awe-inspiring main gate into Myr, are at ground level. Whether accessible by slick ramps or icy stairs, many of the cities crystalline towers of ice have doors on the second or third floor. Although this arrangement seems strange at first to visitors from warmer lands, one needs only spend a single summer here to discern the wisdom of its people. When the temperature rises high enough for snow during the months of Jhang and Laeolis, there are frequent ice storms and blizzards, causing snow and ice to fill the winding streets, often to a depth of ten feet or more. As the weather grows colder and everything freezes solid once more, the Mirin carve the ice out of the streets to use for new construction, sculpture, and the like. Because of these elevated entrances, Mirin homes remain easily accessible, whether at the height of winter or the sparseness of summer. Also, there is the additional benefit of defense. Myr's main gate is situated some twenty feet above the ground at the top of a long ramp. The frosty tunnel that surmounts the ramp is narrow enough to only allow a single laden cart or Ice Giant through, and that is after it has had to climb the lengthy incline.

From the high spires of central Myr, the shores of nearby Lake Myr are visible as a sparkling sheen. Largely similar to L'Haan's other bodies of water, it is frequented by frostweres and tundra beasts. At one time, this frozen lake was frequented by Ice Dragons, but frequent patrols from Myr have caused them to depart for other areas.

## RHIN

*"The sight of Rhin's glittering spires will take your breath away, assuming the frigid air doesn't do so first".*

- Djama al Shen, Djaffir Merchant

Rhin, a walled metropolis of elaborate and shining ice castles, lies situated between the shores of the Sea of Ice and Lake Rhin. Capitol of L'Haan, the city's skyline is dominated by the fabulous and fantastic spires of the Palace of the Snow Queen. It is here that the Court of the Snow Queen assembles on at least a monthly basis as well as most of L'Haan's southern guests and emissaries. Celebrated for its alchemists and their creations, most noted of which are an assortment of enchanted elixirs and blue adamant, Rhin is favored by the Mirin as something of a resort.

Lake Rhin is a large frozen body of water in central L'Haan whose shores are dotted with ice lodges of various sizes and designs. Frequented for recreational resources such as fishing, swimming, and skating, Lake Rhin is overseen by a contingent of tundra scouts known as the Snow Queen's

Storm. A Stormer is a prestigious position, not only for the prominence for serving in the capital and court, but is also highly coveted by young tundra scouts who wish to enjoy the whirling night-time revels along the lake shore.

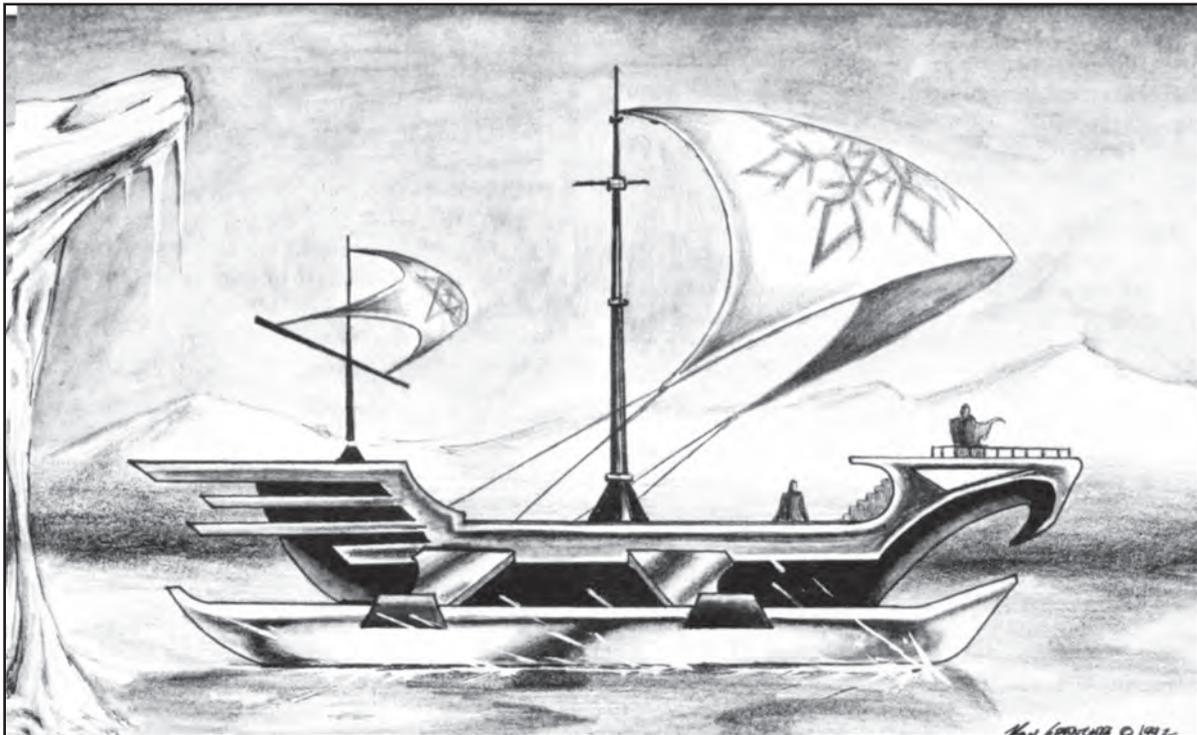
## A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO RHIN

### The Populace

The Mirin are not a numerous people, and even Rhin, capital of L'haan and home to a full 35% of their population, only houses 10,000 inhabitants. The inhospitable nature of their frigid climate means they receive few visitors, save for the al Shen Djaffir, and Oj Orgovian tribes with whom they trade, and the occasional Ariane Druas for whom they harbor great respect.

### History

According to Mirin legend, they were a people that had fallen to earth from Borean's embrace, to experience life. Led by the white witch Cerene, the Mirin began construction of Rhin and L'Lal in 21 N.A., following centuries of hardship as nomads in the frozen wastes. With Cerene's guidance, both cities were constructed in a matter of years, providing the Mirin with much needed protection,





and a place to call home. In 163 N.A. a Mirin expeditionary force into Narandu, stumbled across what seemed to be a great tower-like construct, leaning precariously, and half covered with ice and snow. Chipping their way inside, they came across many strange alchemical devices, and tomes of lore containing the secrets of adamant. Many dangers beset their return, but those few that survived bore extra knowledge of alchemy beyond what the Mirin already possessed, and the ability to forge blue adamant gave the Mirin a greater edge, although they never did find the ice-encased tower again.

In 176 N.A. a colossal force of Ice Giants attacked L'Haan, but armed with adamant and powerful alchemy, the Mirin were able to drive the invaders back. In 350 N.A. the Mirin came under attack once again, as they repelled an army of Harakin in a fierce battle that lasted three days and nights.

#### **FIRE AND HEAT**

*Fire and heat, including the use of pyromancy, is expressly forbidden in any Mirin settlement as it could damage the architecture. Visitors are provided with ample furs, but are not permitted to create fires to warm themselves.*

## **VISIONS OF RHIN**

### **A View from Afar**

A mighty 25-foot wall of ice encircles the city in the shape of an eight-pointed snowflake. The wall merges with the landscape like a natural growth and light sparkles from the icy surface of many tapering, elegant towers of ice. Like a field of impossibly large stalagmites shaded in blues and whites, surrounded by a wall of ice, the city stands on the bank of a vast mirror-like expanse of frozen water, elegant ships skimming the surface on glittering blades.

### **At the Gates**

A huge disk of lustrous blue metal rolls back into a slot within the wall, leaving a large circular gateway. Stalagmites, each 35-foot tall and carved with narrow windows stand at either side of the

gate, and at regular intervals around the wall. A fortress-like dock of ice lies on the banks of the vast frozen lake nearby.

### **The City Streets**

Crisp paths of snow lie between buildings of crystal-like ice; each sculpted like a stalagmite of various heights and widths, some standing alone, others in elaborate clusters connected by enclosed walkways of ice. Each is delicately carved to reflect light, shimmering like a diamond. A great palatial cluster of slender spires stands in the center of the city, towering a full half again the height of its tallest neighbor. Sculptures of heroic figures, magnificent beasts, and abstract design stand here and there as if by whim. The inhabitants walk with stately grace, bedecked in blue silks and white furs.

## **RHIN AT NIGHT**

Darkness never truly engulfs Rhin, for the northern night sky is cloudless, and afire with stars. The polished ice of the city itself glitters and sparkles, and the haunting sound of the Soul of Borean (see below) fills the air.

#### **ILLUMINATION**

*Each Mirin building is designed to reflect and channel light through precisely cut ice, providing interior lighting beyond that which the windows provide. This system is so efficient that even starlight and moonlight provide more than adequate illumination. Orbs filled with amberglow - a luminescent fiery-orange alchemical - are trapped in the tips of ceiling stalactites, glowing softly during the hours of darkness, and are also used as nightlights and torches on those few nights when the stars and moons are obscured.*

## **THE TYPICAL DWELLING**

### **An Exterior View**

An 80-foot high stalagmite, tapering gradually from a 35-foot base is carved with delicate trceries, and many windows of abstract shape. Willowy needles of ice extend and twist from the tower, seemingly for no other purpose than decoration. A carved oval

doorway stands open at the base.

### **The Tower Interior**

A staircase of polished ice ascends, while another descends, each featuring an elegant banister of ice.

#### **DOORWAYS**

*Rather than the doors common to other cities, the Mirin have but a single thick hide on their front entrance that is fastened down from the inside.*

### **The Apartment**

A cluster of grotto-like rooms forms the apartment, each room connected to the other by a doorway covered with an elaborately stitched hanging of leather and fur.

### **The Communal Room**

#### **COMFORT NOT HEAT**

*As Mirin do not feel the cold, they do not need blankets. They only wrap themselves in fur blankets for reasons of comfort. Ice is cursedly hard. The soft snow is replenished each day.*

This small room features a low table at its center, carved from the ice of the floor. Several thick fur rugs are scattered around it, providing comfortable seating low to the floor. A shelf is carved into the wall, following its curve, decorated with books, ivory statuettes and ice decanters. A cluster of stalactites hangs from the ceiling, orbs of amberglow frozen into their tips.

### **The Bedroom**

An abstract-shaped window of clear ice sheds light into this room. A circular plinth of ice some 7-foot in diameter and 1-foot in height serves as a bed, its center hollowed out and filled with a mattress of soft snow covered with stitched furs and several tooled fur and leather blankets. Pegs and shelves of delicately carved ice serve to hang and bear clothing, and personal possessions.

### **The Bathing Room**

A large oval bath is sunken into the floor, filled with frigid water. An entire wall is highly polished acting as a mirror in front of which are several elaborate ice-shelves bearing cleansing alchemicals, musk perfume, and toiletries. A beautifully carved box-like toilet stands in the corner, the wastes sliding down a frozen chute into the sewer.

### **Larder and Kitchen**

This small room features a large wardrobe-like feature of ice containing frozen joints of meat, freeze-dried lichen, and wafers of snow lily bread. Plates and cutlery are contained on a wall-rack, along with vials of imported spices, and local alchemicals that flash-cook and cool the food ready to serve.

## **PLACES OF AUTHORITY**

### **The Snow Queen's Palace**

Elegant clusters of spires tower up to 120-foot in the air, composed of thousands of needle-thin ice splinters. Delicate tracteries cover every surface, and each spire is fluted, carved and faceted like a diamond. Sculptures stand in recessed alcoves around the entire base of the palace. A broad stair sweeps up to a great circular portal of blue adamant under a balcony supported by carved tapering pillars.

#### **SEAT OF GOVERNMENT**

*The Snow Queen's Palace houses L'Haan's governing body of Royal Ministers, along with the Vault of Records, the Crystalline Courts of Law, and the mysterious Snow Queen herself. Each Royal Minister lives in a well-appointed quarter of the palace's lower levels. The Royal Ministers act through six sub-ministers each (two in each of L'haan's three cities). All the records of births, marriages and deaths recorded by community clergy, as well as trade, tax and military records are collected monthly and stored in the Vault of Records beneath the palace.*

## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

*Crime is literally unknown among the Mirin, with the result that the Keeps seldom hold more than one or two malcontents. Punishments vary according to the severity of a crime. If the crime is petty and non-violent, the criminal is forced to pay the aggrieved party recompense (usually double what they stole), suffers ostracism within the community for a short period, and must make pilgrimage to a shrine and pray for absolution. If the theft was substantial, or the criminal was violent in a brief, non-lethal manner, he is imprisoned in a Keep for a month before undergoing the same punishment as for a petty crime. Heinous crimes are grounds for immediate exile with nothing but a few supplies.*

### The Keeps of Solace

Housed under the base of each Vigil Tower are The Keeps of Solace: the city's prison cells. Each Keep is a single cell, large enough for one man, secured by bars of blue adamant. Each Vigil Tower has but one of these cells located beneath their stables. As a result, each city can only hold up to 25 criminals at any one time.

## MILITARY BASES

### The Vigil Towers

Each Vigil Tower houses two units of 10 tundra scouts who alternate shifts. It is typical for four scouts from each unit to patrol outside the city walls in pairs, while the other six remain on constant alert. As a result, the city has 32 pairs of tundra scouts out on patrol, 96 scouts on active alert, and 160 scouts off-duty at any one time. The first floor of each Vigil Tower is a well-equipped

## WARRIOR SOUL

*Many members of the Mirin military forces have a strong sense of friendship and devotion to each other, often Melding to intensify these bonds. All tundra scouts are trained in the barracks-complex at L'lal, and the vast majority have seen action against the frequent Ice Giant incursions.*

snow-mane stable, and also contains four war-sleds. In the ground beneath each Vigil Tower is a Keep of Solace.

## EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

### The Cold Forge

Eight large halls of opaque ice radiate from a central hub that contains a lecture hall in which Rhin's alchemists are trained. Each of the eight halls consists of two levels: one above ground, and one subterranean. The upper level of each hall contains eight alchemical laboratories, while the lower level of each contains four blue adamant forges.

## MUSEUM & LIBRARIES

### Vault of the Wind-Borne

This vaulted subterranean hall of ice contains life-size ice sculptures of L'haan's greatest heroes, and is entered via a sweeping staircase that lies at the base of the Soul of Borean above. The finest warriors, artisans, alchemists are artists are represented here in a long hall, back-lit with glowing alchemicals. They serve as an inspiration to those that visit them, as well as a record of L'haan's history and development.

## PLACES OF WORSHIP

### The Soul of Borean

This monument is a huge cluster of ice needles, ranging in size from a mere 3-foot to 50-foot in height, each delicately carved and pierced with holes. When the north wind blows through the monument the pipes whistle with a sound so haunting and beautiful it has moved many to tears. This reminds the Mirin that Borean is always near.

## MARKETS & BAZAARS

### The Frigid Heart

Occupying an expanse in front of the Snow Queen's Palace is the Frigid Heart: an open area of snow at the center of which is the Soul of Borean. Mirin gather at the Frigid Heart every day to trade for whatever goods and services they need. Located

deep within the ice beneath the Frigid Heart is the Vault of the Wind-Borne, the entrance to which is at the base of the Soul of Borean.

### COMMON GOODS

*Any item made of carved ice, including furnishings, musical instruments, etc. can be purchased for a mere 25% of the cost of a similar good elsewhere. Needless to say, such goods melt outside L'haan or Narandu. Minor and beneficial alchemicals are also cheap: 30%-50% of their standard value. Hazardous alchemicals are strictly prohibited without a Royal Ministry permit. Blue diamonds only cost 50% of their normal value. Blue adamant is heavily restricted, only used for mining, ship-building, and the crafting of tools and weapons. Merchants who wish to trade for it must approach the Royal Ministry, and should expect to pay high costs for the few dozen ingots they "might" be offered.*

## MERCHANTS, ARTISANS AND TRADERS

### The Merchant's Guild

Situated on the perimeter of the Frozen Heart, this structure resembles three residences melded together in a ring. Members of Rhin's small Merchant's Guild work here, and are responsible for all trade with outsiders, especially the restricted availability of adamant.

## PARKS

### The Boundary Promenade

This park of crisp white snow encircles the Snow Queen's Palace like an ivory band, covered by soaring archways of ice. Twinkling sculptures line the pathways, and delicate snow lilies grow on banks of snow. Tended ponds feature layers of glass-like ice under which fish swim lazily.

### SnowFall Park

A huge dome of ice some 50-foot high covers this park, cut to resemble the facets of a diamond. Polished mirror-like ponds reflect the sky, and

tables and benches are carved from the ground itself. Intricate frames, chutes and tunnels of ice provide hours of enjoyment for the city's young.

## RECREATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

### The Melding Halls

These large circular halls of ornately carved ice feature many friezes carved in bas-relief both inside and out. A single circular portal is covered with a thick layer of furs and leather, but is never secured, leaving the hall open at all times. Inside are countless low tables and fur rugs for seating. The Melding Hall is the heart of the surrounding community: the children spend 4 hours here each day attending classes run by local clergy and sages. Marriage and funerary services are also conducted in the local Melding Hall, as are the rare criminal trials and hearings.

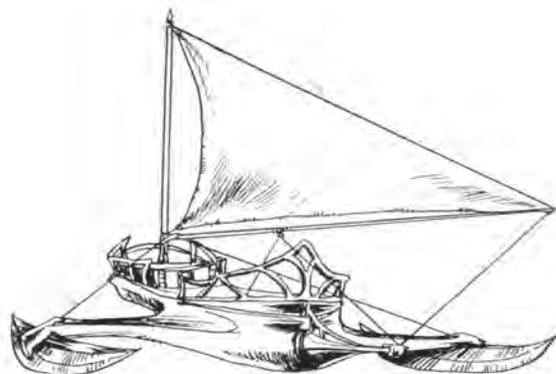
## TRANSPORTATION

### TRAVEL COSTS

*Two ice-schooners arrive and depart from Rhin's Ice Docks every day at noon; one bound for L'lal and one bound for Myr. Each one-way journey takes nearly two days (wind permitting), or at least five days for a return journey (unless you leave a city on a departing schooner as soon as you arrive). The cost is 2 g.l. each way, per person. Berth is not provided for mounts.*

### The Ice Docks

A small 50-foot fortress of ice stands on the bank of the Sea of ice, just to the southwest of Rhin. As well as serving as the docks for all of Rhin's ice vessel traffic, this fortress hosts a contingent





of four scout units, and also features two large shipbuilding halls. Docking facilities are provided for 10 ice-schooners and 20 ice-skiffs.

#### SKIFF-RACING

Ice-skiff racing is a popular sport among the Mirin, with races held on the second High day of each month. Teams eagerly strip down their skiffs for greater speed, competing to win trophies of sculpted ice and blue diamond.

#### LAHSA

Situated in north-western L'Haan along the shores of Lake Lahsa, this small village primarily draws its resources by mining the nearby mountains along Traitor's Bay for blue diamonds. Ice fishing is another favored pastime.

Lake Lahsa is also known for the presence of northern quaga and their shimmering blue pearls, the fist-sized crystals known as Ice Dragon eggs, and a variety of edible aquatic creatures whose iridescent hides are popular in the capitol. Unfortunately, Ice Dragons themselves have been known to descend upon the lake, presumably for those same edible creatures.

#### L'LAL

The easternmost Mirin settlement lies on the south-eastern coast of Lake L'lal. From the city it is a short journey to either the Sea or the Mountains of Madness. While this may explain why some Mirin are wary of the inhabitants of L'lal, a better explanation might lie with the L'lalaans habit of cultivating the fierce Ice Kra common to Lake L'lal.

Lake L'lal is deep body of midnight blue waters. Like the other lakes of L'Haan, the upper surface of the lake is covered in ice, but here the ice never completely reaches the center. Ice skiffs are still usable on the edges of the lake, and most Mirin find the waters here slightly warmer than other bodies of water in their lands.

#### LIR

Similar in most respects to other smaller settlements in L'Haan, Lir is situated along the northern shore of Lake Lir. In close proximity to Paramour Island, Lir is much smaller than it used to be. Many of its outlying structures have begun to crack and shatter without the constant attention that the city's coastal buildings share. Coupled with the alarming presence of Frost Demons, Lir is a destination little visited.

Lake Lir is much more solidly frozen than other lakes in L'Haan, although this is perhaps because of the presence of bands of Frost Demons than its extreme northern locale. Nevertheless, it is noted for its reliance upon ice fishing as there are some examples of aquatic life in the depths of Lake Lir that are to be found no where else in Talislanta.

#### SEA OF ICE

The Sea of Ice is a large bay off of the Midnight Sea. Perpetually covered with a glittering spread of shimmering ice, Mirin ice schooners traverse the bay constantly, both to transport goods as well as to patrol for dangers to L'Haan's people. Channels do open from time to time far out in the sea allowing ships from the south to bring their cargoes in. Typically such an occurrence is accompanied by an impromptu celebration and the construction of a small temporary village on the ice closest to the vessel. Besides the dangers posed by Ice Dragons, frostweres, and night demons, the sharp and jagged edges of sunken icebergs and glaciers create hazards for unwary ship captains.

#### PARAMOUR ISLAND

According to Mirin myths, this island was the site of the first city constructed by the Archaens who would become the Mirin people. On the shore opposite the island is a rather primitive shrine to the God of the North Wind that is visited with some frequency by Mirin lovers or companions considering Melding. Central to the legend of Paramour Island is the extravagant ice castle located on the island. Legend has it that this structure was created to house the many suitors of the very first Snow Queen. Reportedly the

close proximity of so many rivals quickly caused problems of an increasingly serious nature and the entire island was abandoned in favor of the newly created city of Lir. To this day the island remains deserted except for the presence of a sizable band of frost demons.

### WARLOCK'S KEEP

A large spire of crystalline ice and rock in the shape of a huge tower, Warlock's Keep is situated far to the north of Paramour Island. According to legend, the island is indeed a wizard's tower; it is the domain of a warlock commonly called Nobius. A master of witchcraft, tales disagree on the temperament of the owner of Warlock's Keep. In some stories, he is kindly and casts lights out across the waters to warn sailors from the rocky shore, while other tales claim that he is the last surviving and bitter suitor from Paramour Island. Tundra scouts who patrol this area of L'Haan maintain that both versions of the tale are correct;

that the inhabitant of the Keep is powerful but also unpredictably mad. While various bands of multicolored light often hover and mark the air above this spire, most Mirin give little thought to what this rocky overlook might hold.

### TRAITOR'S BAY

Another inlet from the Midnight Sea, Traitor's Bay is normally covered in ice much like the Sea of Ice. It was on this frozen body of water in the year 403 that the first known band of treacherous Rasmirin was confronted by the Mirin navy. After an assault on the shipyards at Myr, the Rasmirin fled in stolen ice schooners loaded down with looted military supplies. However, the rapid Mirin navy caught up with them and engaged them in an epic encounter on the surface of this bay. Purportedly the very waters beneath the ice were turned the red of blood as the surface cracked, splintered, and finally shattered. The Rasmirin who survived were taken back for justice and eventually sentenced to





exile on the Outcast Isles. The ships and bodies of those who did not survive still rest somewhere beneath the surface of the bay.

## THE OUTCAST ISLES

A collection of frigid, rocky islands that have been home to a band of Mirin exiled over two centuries ago for practicing black witchcraft, betrayal, and attempting to seize the authority of the Snow Queen, the Outcast Isles lie at the mouth of Traitor's Bay, nearer to Narandu than to L'Haan. Dwelling in crude ice fortresses, the Rasmirin, as they came to be known, managed to thrive somewhat in this locale and continue to plot against the government and religious creed of L'Haan.

## HOARFROST MOUNTAINS

Forming L'Haan's western border and ringing the peninsula that separates the Sea of Ice from Traitor's Bay is a mountainous line called the Hoarfrost Mountains. These mountains are much lower than the other rocky mounts in the north, but do serve to keep out some of the snow and icy weather from Narandu. Furthermore, they are riddled with deposits of blue diamonds that the Mirin mine for a variety of uses.

## MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

Strung along L'Haan's desolate eastern coast like a collection of black, grasping clawed hands are the Mountains of Madness. Like the Sea of Madness to the south, these mountains are subject to innumerable and inexplicable events ranging from strange aberrant weather unheard of in the rest of Talislanta to the appearance of strange and aberrant life forms. Among the hills and valleys of these mountains can be found the rare crystal lotus, a plant that properly prepared and ingested allows its user to see and contact various spirit-forms. Unfortunately, it also carries the detrimental side-effect of causing habitual users to go insane.

## MYSTIC MOUNTAINS

L'haan's southern border is formed by the unusual formation of the Mystic Mountains. So named

for its uncanny resemblance of a line of towering stone statues carved to bear a resemblance to robed mystics, or philosophers, the vast majority of the mountain range is largely thought to be impassable by any but the most expert climbers and mountaineers. Separating L'Haan from Xanadas and Harak, the Mystic Mountains are thought to be another as yet untapped source of blue diamonds; however, the sheer terrain, bitterly frozen winds, and native frostweres have heretofore kept explorers at bay.

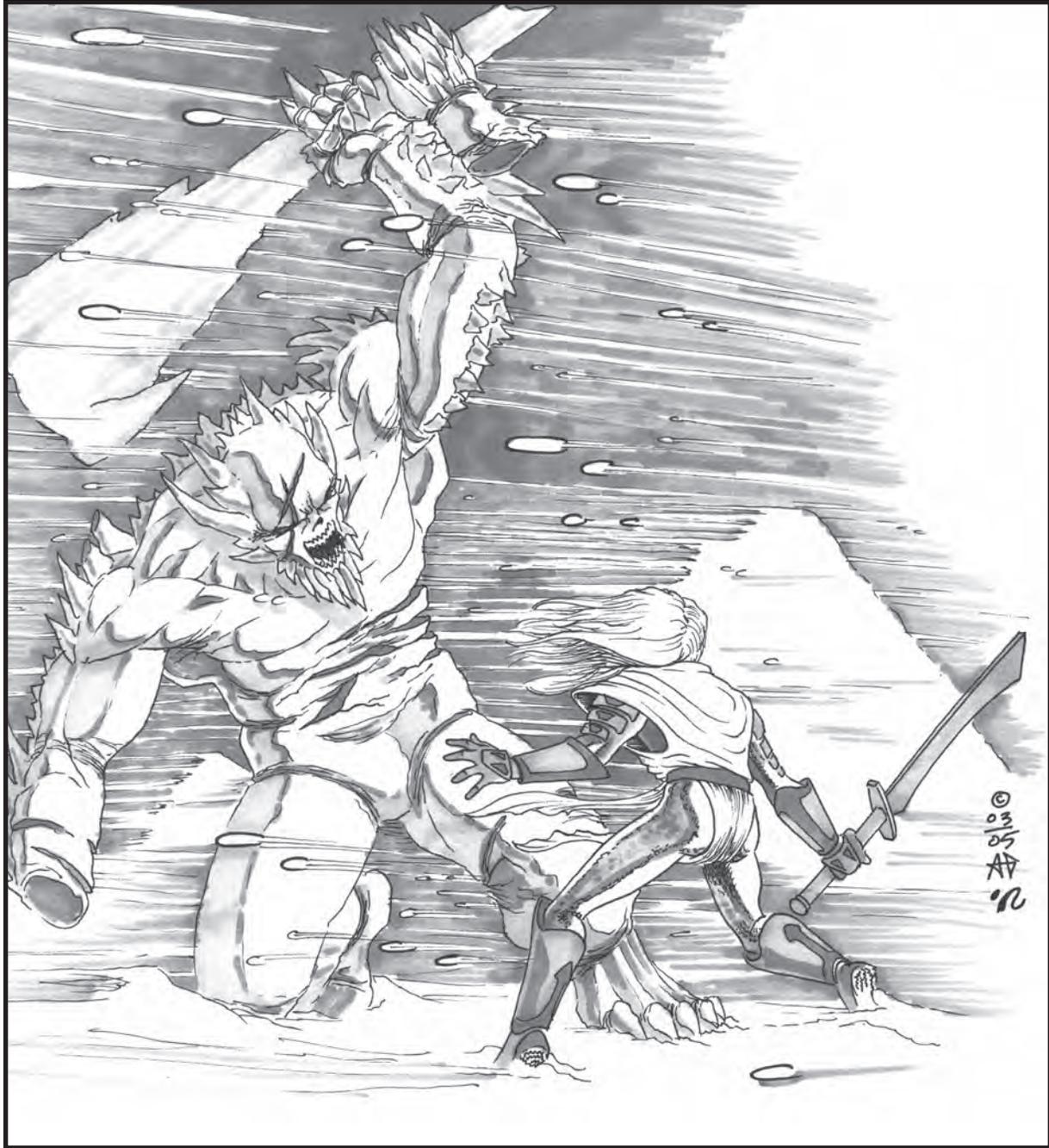
## SEA OF MADNESS

A turbulent body of water separating L'Haan's eastern coast from the rest of Talislanta, the Sea of Madness is subject to all manner of aberrant weather. The infrequent sailors who pass this way have reported "maelstroms and spiraling columns of water," in addition to the rather more widespread unusual weather effects such as storms of black lightning. Coupled with the sporadic sea dragon or bizarre aquatic aberration, it is little wonder why most Talislantan sailors shun this sea.

## NARANDU

The rolling plains of Narandu extend for much of the northern border of the continent of Talislanta and are ringed with sharp, jagged cliffs and mountains. Fertile at one time in the distant past, the plains are now covered in successive layers of ice and packed snow. Ruins of forgotten empires and cultures are spread like dust across the landscape along with clusters of rare gems, plants, and animal specimens. To the north of Narandu lies the Midnight Sea. This ill-omened body of water is typically shunned by Talislantan sailors due to the ubiquitous hazards it bears, the least of which include icebergs, phantom ships from the lifeless territory of Khazad, Night Demons, and ancient Sea Dragons.

Currently only the hardiest of beings can survive for long in these frigid, wind-battered hills. Even so, many of Talislanta's species have adapted to survive the current clime – or have been altered



to do so. Besides its most notable and formidable inhabitants, the Ice Giants, the bleak tundra of Narandu is also populated with such beasts as swift tundra lopers, wooly ogriphants, ferocious tundra beasts, man-eating frostweres, and such sought after fauna as the snow lily – a key ingredient in elixirs that confer some resistance to the ever-present cold that pervades this part of the north.

## THE ICE GIANTS OF NARANDU

In this expanse of brutal cold and vicious wind there dwells a strange and singular race known as the Ice Giants. Modern Talislantan scholars debate still today exactly where this strange race originated as well as what their motives might be concerning the rest of the continent. Towering beings allegedly made of solid ice; the Ice

## ARIANE POETRY

*A particular style of poetry by the Ariane of Tamaranth has long intrigued scholars because many of its pieces give the impression of being prophetic in nature. Given the Ariane's metaphysical view of time and reincarnation, such seeming may be true. While many of these short works do not translate well into Talislan from Elder Tongue, below are a few of those that seem to hint at the impending approach of the Ice Giants.*

*A great cloud will burn for seven days  
and from that cloud two (suns) rays.  
A fearsome (wind) shall moan and bay  
where the immeasurable king shall stay.*

*The Easterner shall leave his seat,  
and pass the sentinels of stone.  
He will change the sky, the waters and the sleet  
and everyone shall be stricken by his blow.*

*Similarly, a longer work penned by an Ariane known to outsiders as the Poet, seems to refer to the Ice King and his servants. However, only a piece of this work is recorded in written form, and the Ariane are reluctant to recite what Shell may have recorded in his tamar.*

*Oh! Many colored and oft recorded vale  
Over whose trees and crags and caverns sail  
Rapid storm shadows and ice. An awful sight  
Where Command in the image of Night  
From the ice-gulfs that surround his secret throne  
Comes bursting forth from the dark mountains of bone  
White like bright flame from the tempest's singing  
Your giant brood around you clinging  
Children of an ancient time through whose devotion  
The chainless winds still . . .*

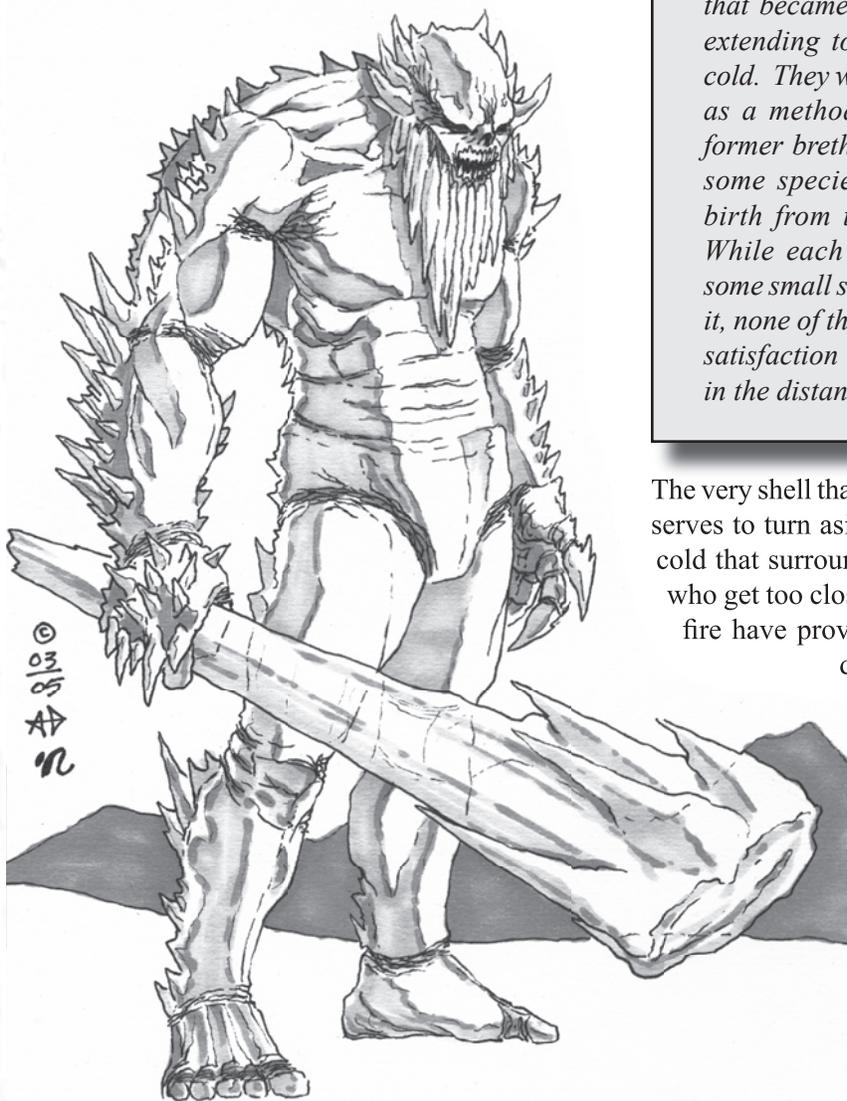
Giants are assuredly encased in it. Their frozen extremities terminate in bristling outcroppings of sharpened ice, horns, and claws. As if these deterrents to social refinement weren't enough, the Ice Giants constantly bear enormous clubs that they expertly brandish to enforce their strange and unknowable goals.

Naturalists do know some facts about Ice Giant physiology. Outwardly, all Ice Giants appear to be ominous monsters devoid of gender. In fact, no Ice Giant females or young have ever been reported, except by various scholars of ill-repute in even less reputable drinking establishments. Additionally, the very presence of an Ice Giant leeches the heat

from an area. This effect is strong enough that large bands of Ice Giants can cause the temperatures to drop precipitously in a wide area around them. Ice Giants prey upon warm-blooded creatures, often entombing victim's bodies in the tunnels and caverns of Narandu's glaciers. Ice Giants do not consume anything that is not first frozen solid; indeed, they may not be able to derive nourishment in any other fashion. Travelers are advised that while seeking shelter in the north, discovering the frozen carcasses of animals and Men is not uncommon but is also characteristically indicative of Ice Giants in the vicinity. The frequent presence of blue diamonds in these same caves is one attraction for the honest explorer; looted spoils

from less-fortunate adventurers are an attraction to those who are not so honest.

Stories persist of caves filled with frozen specimens of animals from bygone days, men and creatures from ancient empires, and even piles of unused treasure. Accounts of such creatures thawing and being revived are the common subject of nighttime horror stories told around campfires and hearths. Some such tales claim that such caves are also the wombs by which the Ice Giants are born. When those creatures frozen alive finally die, their icy shells become the frozen bodies of Ice Giants animated by the tormented spirit of the slain. Naturalists denounce such ridiculous claims, but the fact remains that no Ice Giant young have ever been seen.



### THE TEMPERATURE FALLS . . .

*The origins of the Ice Giants are largely a mystery, especially since the Ice Giants seem either incapable or unwilling to discuss the matter. That fact has not stopped the speculation of various naturalists, sages, and wandering peddlers over the centuries. The most widespread conjecture is that the Ice Giants are some sort of magical creation formed long ago that got free of its creator's control – the history of the Araq is similar to this in some respects. Other theories rapidly become less likely and more fantastic. The Ice Giants are the former inhabitants of Farnir. They are the frozen, roaming spirits of the people that became the Mirin prior to Borean extending to them protection from the cold. They were created by the Rasmirin as a method of revenge against their former brethren. Or even that they are some species of demonic entity given birth from the Black Pit of Narandu. While each of these speculations has some small shred of evidence to maintain it, none of them have been verified to the satisfaction of naturalists or historians in the distant south.*

The very shell that gives Ice Giants their name also serves to turn aside most mundane weapons; the cold that surrounds them can also weaken those who get too close. Enchantments, adamant, and fire have proven to be much more reliable in destroy them. Elemental spells that affect water have also been used to remove the sinister magics that animate the Ice Giants shattering them into inanimate icy rubble.

Ice Giants typically carry immense clubs made of solid ice and studded with sizable, uncut blue diamonds. While a good deal of the damage from these weapons comes from



their substantial weight, the jagged edges of raw blue diamond also serve to rip and tear through both flesh and metal.

Typically, Ice Giants travel in groups. Individually, a solitary giant often wanders aimlessly until it finds another band of its fellows; however, lest unwary travelers think this is the best time to attack a giant, a solitary giant will still defend itself, often lashing out viciously with wild abandon. Though Ice Giants do not speak, anecdotes do speak of them using simple hand gestures reminiscent of Sign to communicate with one another. In groups, the Ice Giants often seem to exhibit a variety of responses ranging from animalistic cunning to what could be described as efficient, if not necessarily intelligent, tactics. It is surmised that the Ice Giants are not natural life forms, but perhaps were created by a potent wizard. “The Ice King” is the name commonly given to the progenitor of the Ice Giants and it is thought that they serve him still. Indeed, the constant outward progression of the Ice Giants and seemingly coordinated assaults on L’Haan would give the impression that they are driven by some powerful entity. Just who, or what, the Ice King is however is unknown.

Every year seems to find the borders of the Ice Giants slightly further south than it was before. However, this expansion seems to come in cyclical waves, speeding up during the colder winter months of Talisandre and Zar and slowing down or even receding during the month of Jhang. Despite this apparent natural and seasonal pattern of movement, many of the folk who dwell in or near Narandu claim that the tundra cold extends a little further into their territories. Indeed, the Gryph of Tamaranth claim that the Ice Giants have edged closer and closer to the Crystal Mountains during the past five decades and will probably surmount them by the end of this century. While some scholars do acknowledge that the Ice Giants are progressing outwards, the extent of that movement can be measured in mere inches per year. Kasmir and Sindaran mathematicians counter that even an increase of the borders of Narandu by six inches every year would add an area at least the size of Durne to Narandu during the lifetime of an average Archaen.

The Ice Giants seem to exist in a state of perpetual warfare with the world around them. In ages past they have battled the Archaen city-state of Farnir with its powerful alchemical defenses, the Ur Warlords with their numerous warrior-slaves, the Ariane who have long kept their forest borders free from northern frost, and for centuries now the Mirin with their adamant blades. Even when they are not waging war against one of their neighbors, the Ice Giants seem to be at war with the very land itself. Whether it is a metaphysical sense with their freezing of everything around them, or simply physical as they engage in their destructive smashing and tunneling of the mountains of the north, the Ice Giants never cease their destructive behavior.

## LEGENDS OF NARANDU

### THE ICE KING

The legendary creator of the Ice Giants and supposed guiding hand behind their inexorable march across the continent, the Ice King is a being that is shrouded in mystery and myth. While the Mirin claim that the Ice King that lives today is the exact same being that has been guiding the Ice Giants for centuries, no one can definitively say exactly who or even what the Ice King is. Most Mirin believe that the Ice King is, or was, a mighty mage with an unhealthy penchant for conducting dark deals with greater demons. In these tales, the Ice King conducted such bargains with a constant

#### THE ICE KING IS REALLY . . .

*Other stories and legends are, of course, told about the fabled Ice King. One popular version of the tale of the Ice King is that it was something created and grown from the spilled alchemicals and wrought illusions of ancient Farnir. Some Rasmirin have in the past claimed that the Ice King is none of these things, but is instead a powerful demon fleeing something even worse.*

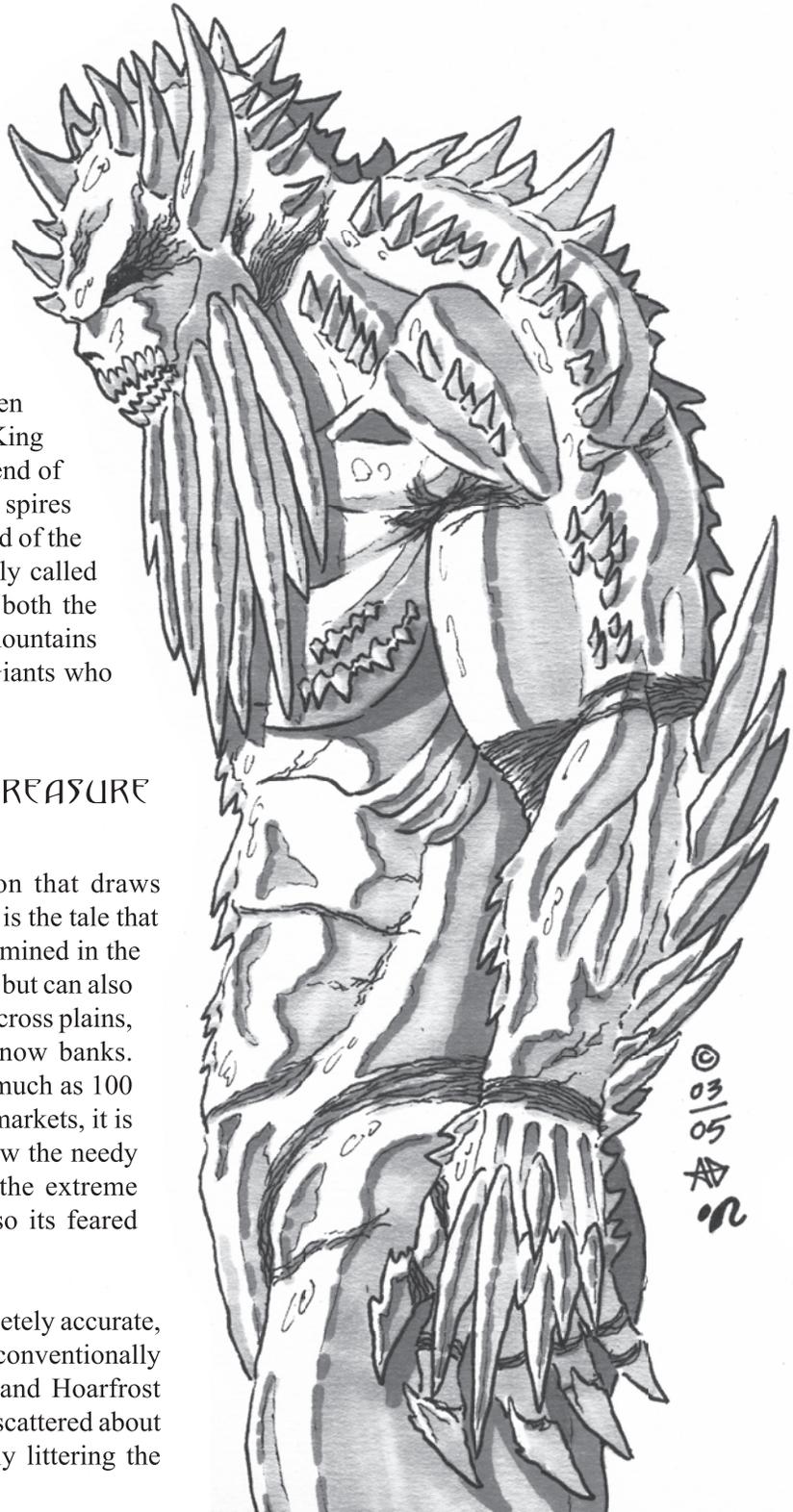
and unceasing vigil to garner himself more and more power, even at the cost of his countrymen, his friends, his family, and ultimately his own mortality. His heart long since turned to cold, hard ice, the rest of his corporeal form soon followed suit.

If it is true that the Ice King directs the Giants, then it must be an entity of high intelligence and cunning for while the movements of the Ice Giants seem somewhat random and chaotic at the best of times, Mirin historians have discerned that there are patterns that play out over the course of decades or even centuries. It is thought that the Ice King dwells somewhere in the western end of the Ice Peaks. The collection of spires thrust out into the north-western end of the Plain of Blue Frost are occasionally called the Ice King's Palace because of both the fanciful image these crystal-blue mountains present and the multitude of Ice Giants who roam the surrounding area.

## PERMANENT ICE – TREASURE BEYOND COMPARE

Perhaps the most common reason that draws travelers and explorers to Narandu is the tale that Blue Diamonds are not only to be mined in the regions many icy mountain ranges, but can also be found literally laying scattered across plains, in dry riverbeds, and buried in snow banks. Since blue diamonds can fetch as much as 100 gold lumens per carat in southern markets, it is understandable why such tales draw the needy and desperate to brave not only the extreme temperatures of the north, but also its feared natural inhabitants as well.

In many cases, such tales are completely accurate, for although blue diamond can be conventionally mined from the Crystal, Mystic, and Hoarfrost Mountains, they can also be found scattered about almost all of Narandu occasionally littering the





ground but most often buried by snow or incased in ice.

Why such riches are abundant across glacial Narandu is not known. Indeed, many who find such caches of blue diamonds rarely spend the time to ponder why or how they got there, instead focusing their attention on how to get their suddenly new found wealth back to civilized lands.

## THE RUINS OF FARNIR

Numerous legends and stories surround the ancient City of Farnir. While many of these are dubious in origin and still others confuse Farnir and the Vanished Kingdom of Shalihan some 500 miles distant, it is certain that there is an extravagant city entombed in the crystalline ice of Eastern Narandu. Adding more mystery to the stories than solving its puzzles are the presence of a number of tunnels through the ice that descend to the level of the Frozen City. While these tunnels bear a strong resemblance to those shaped by the Ice Giants, it is unknown what the Giants would want with these ancient ruins.

Sometimes called the “Frigid Heart of Narandu,” the Ruins of Farnir are forever encased in ice. During the Archaen Age, Farnir was one of the great sky-cities. Established, some tales say created, by a cabal of alchemists, the city was at one time a wonder of the Archaen world,

### AN Icy HEART

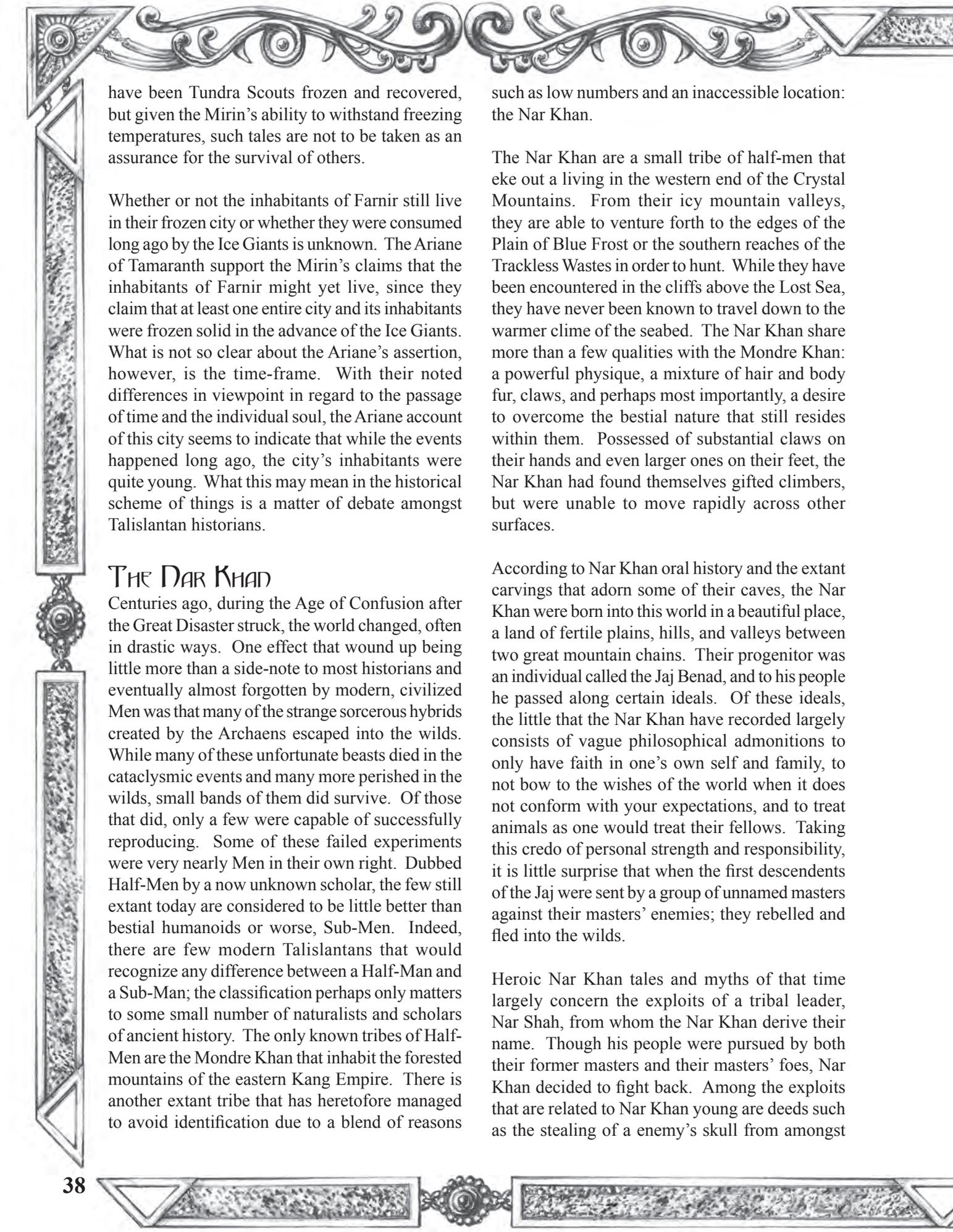
*Learned magicians claim that blue diamonds form the hearts of not only Ice Giants, but also a number of other denizens of the north such as Rime Hounds, Frost Demons, Frost Golems, and Ice Dragons. This claim goes a long way to supporting certain ideas that all of these creatures are in some way related. While they do share certain similar characteristics, modern naturalists point out that Archaens and Sub-Men also share similar characteristics, but they are not necessarily related.*

impressing even the famous archmage Korak. Reputedly said to be seeking a solution that would grant its imbiber nothing less than immortality, the Farnirans succeeded in creating elixirs to cure all manner of diseases and ailments and even extend life.

How such an enlightened civilization endowed with such skill in magic and alchemy ever fell into decline is still something of a mystery. Buried under layers and layers of crystalline ice, historians and magicians continue to debate its demise. One theory suggests that during the Great Disaster, Farnir was caught in a cloud of freezing vapor and thus plummeted to the ground. Another claim is that it was not the Great Disaster but the coming of hordes of Ice Giants that led to the ruin of the city. Yet other claims state that the experimentation of one of its chief alchemists created a series of explosions and chain reactions that resulted in the air of the city suddenly transforming into solid ice.

Lost Archaen magics and alchemicals aside, the area is also haunted by various spectral entities, though whether they are spirits of the dead, illusions, or something else entirely is unknown. Many expeditions have attempted to reach the city. While some few have come back from Narandu with admittedly ancient luxury items and trinkets; most have joined the lost and frozen inhabitants of Farnir, victims of either natural predators or the Ice Giants that frequent this area. Successful explorers to the region have reported Night Demons, necrophages, ghastrs, as well as creatures of indescribable origin.

Some Mirin allege that it is possible that some of the Farnirans still live, frozen in stasis by the encasing ice and perhaps the magics of the Ice Giants. Since it is recognized that the frigid cold created by large numbers of Ice Giants can freeze still living victims solid, it is possible that such creatures exist in a form of stasis and would only need to be properly decanted in order to survive their experience. However, since the Ice Giants are also notorious for devouring both flora and fauna frozen in this manner, the validity of such a theory is not entirely known. The Mirin tell that there



have been Tundra Scouts frozen and recovered, but given the Mirin's ability to withstand freezing temperatures, such tales are not to be taken as an assurance for the survival of others.

Whether or not the inhabitants of Farnir still live in their frozen city or whether they were consumed long ago by the Ice Giants is unknown. The Ariane of Tamaranth support the Mirin's claims that the inhabitants of Farnir might yet live, since they claim that at least one entire city and its inhabitants were frozen solid in the advance of the Ice Giants. What is not so clear about the Ariane's assertion, however, is the time-frame. With their noted differences in viewpoint in regard to the passage of time and the individual soul, the Ariane account of this city seems to indicate that while the events happened long ago, the city's inhabitants were quite young. What this may mean in the historical scheme of things is a matter of debate amongst Talislantan historians.

## THE NAR KHAN

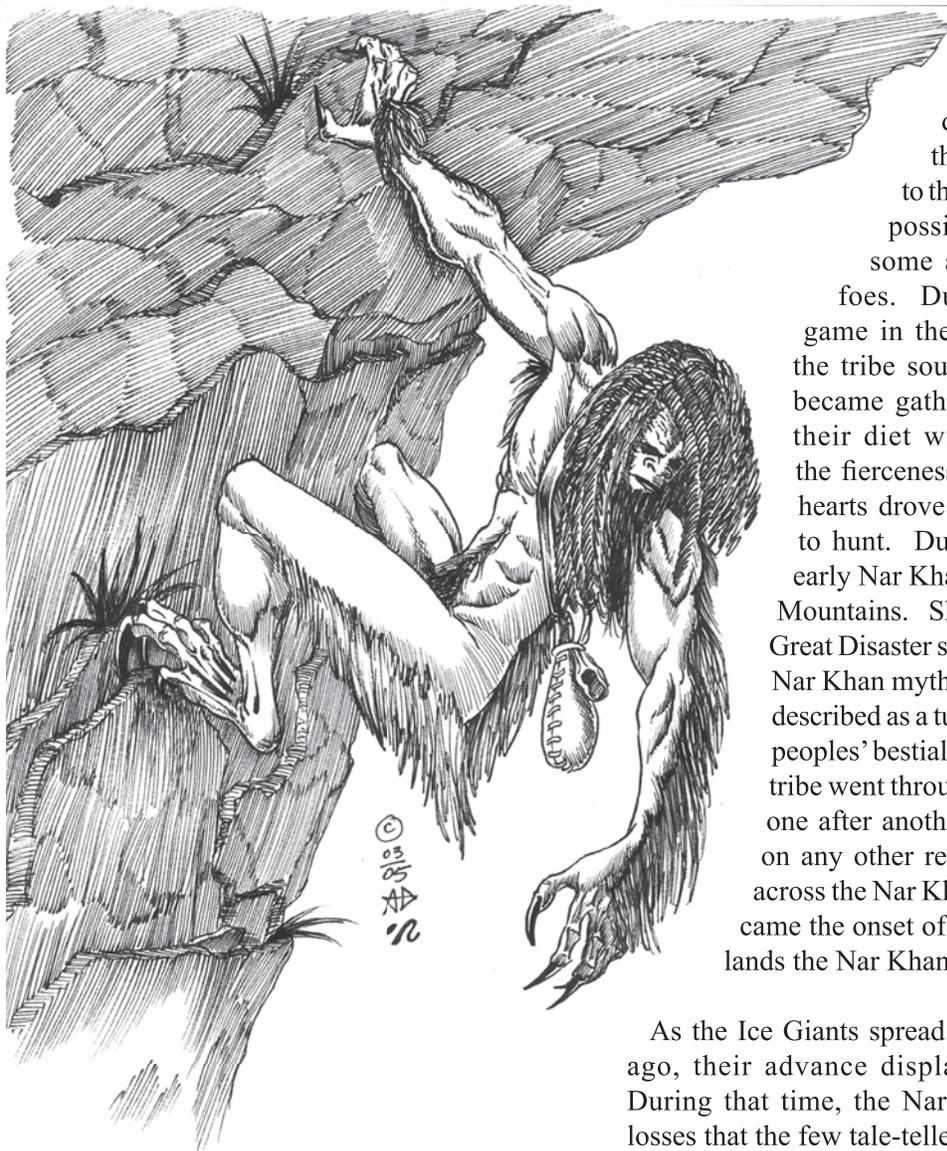
Centuries ago, during the Age of Confusion after the Great Disaster struck, the world changed, often in drastic ways. One effect that wound up being little more than a side-note to most historians and eventually almost forgotten by modern, civilized Men was that many of the strange sorcerous hybrids created by the Archaens escaped into the wilds. While many of these unfortunate beasts died in the cataclysmic events and many more perished in the wilds, small bands of them did survive. Of those that did, only a few were capable of successfully reproducing. Some of these failed experiments were very nearly Men in their own right. Dubbed Half-Men by a now unknown scholar, the few still extant today are considered to be little better than bestial humanoids or worse, Sub-Men. Indeed, there are few modern Talislantans that would recognize any difference between a Half-Man and a Sub-Man; the classification perhaps only matters to some small number of naturalists and scholars of ancient history. The only known tribes of Half-Men are the Mondre Khan that inhabit the forested mountains of the eastern Kang Empire. There is another extant tribe that has heretofore managed to avoid identification due to a blend of reasons

such as low numbers and an inaccessible location: the Nar Khan.

The Nar Khan are a small tribe of half-men that eke out a living in the western end of the Crystal Mountains. From their icy mountain valleys, they are able to venture forth to the edges of the Plain of Blue Frost or the southern reaches of the Trackless Wastes in order to hunt. While they have been encountered in the cliffs above the Lost Sea, they have never been known to travel down to the warmer clime of the seabed. The Nar Khan share more than a few qualities with the Mondre Khan: a powerful physique, a mixture of hair and body fur, claws, and perhaps most importantly, a desire to overcome the bestial nature that still resides within them. Possessed of substantial claws on their hands and even larger ones on their feet, the Nar Khan had found themselves gifted climbers, but were unable to move rapidly across other surfaces.

According to Nar Khan oral history and the extant carvings that adorn some of their caves, the Nar Khan were born into this world in a beautiful place, a land of fertile plains, hills, and valleys between two great mountain chains. Their progenitor was an individual called the Jaj Benad, and to his people he passed along certain ideals. Of these ideals, the little that the Nar Khan have recorded largely consists of vague philosophical admonitions to only have faith in one's own self and family, to not bow to the wishes of the world when it does not conform with your expectations, and to treat animals as one would treat their fellows. Taking this credo of personal strength and responsibility, it is little surprise that when the first descendents of the Jaj were sent by a group of unnamed masters against their masters' enemies; they rebelled and fled into the wilds.

Heroic Nar Khan tales and myths of that time largely concern the exploits of a tribal leader, Nar Shah, from whom the Nar Khan derive their name. Though his people were pursued by both their former masters and their masters' foes, Nar Khan decided to fight back. Among the exploits that are related to Nar Khan young are deeds such as the stealing of an enemy's skull from amongst



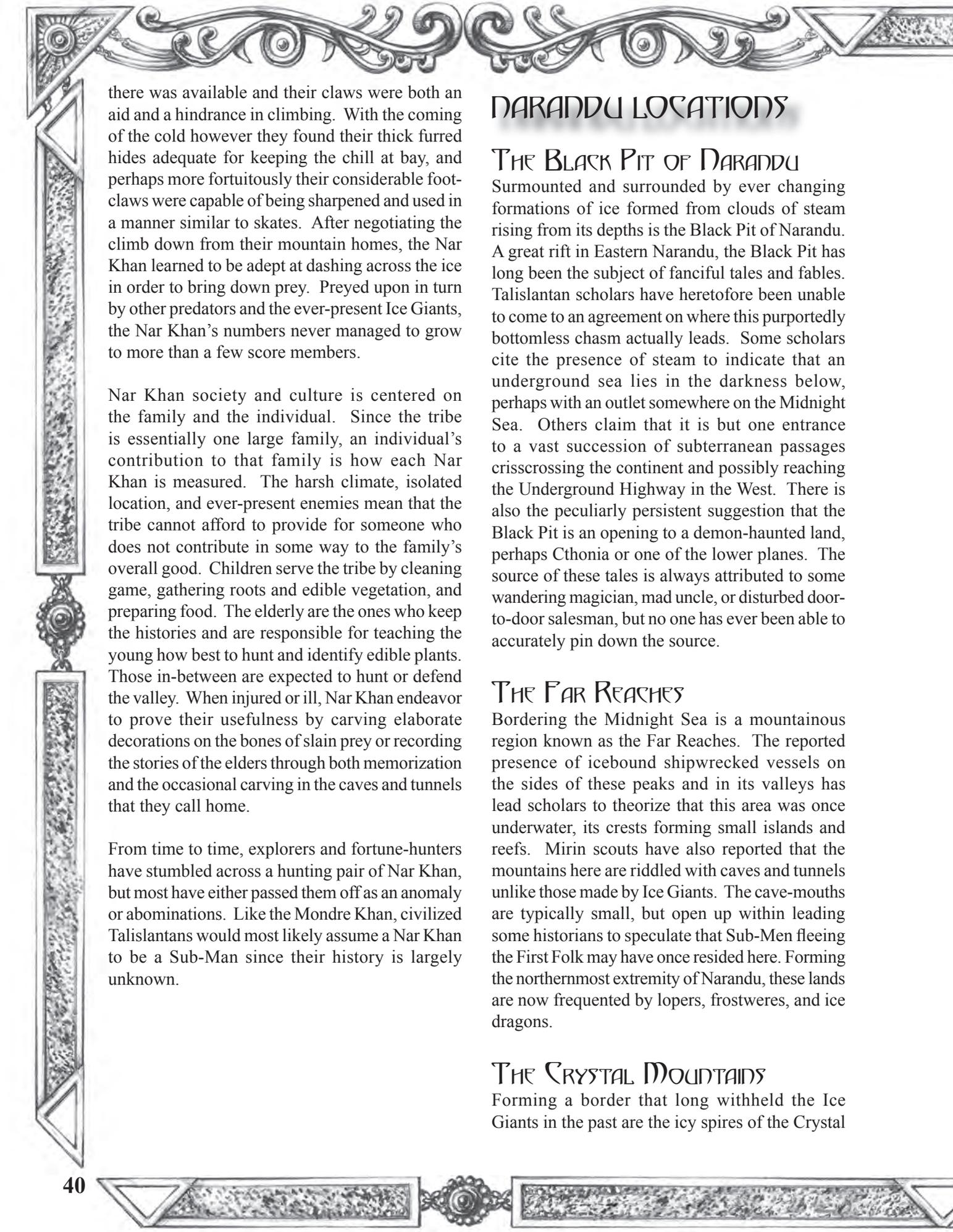
his family, slaying numerous giants, and scaling perilous cliffs unaided. Ultimately even these mighty deeds were apparently not enough for Nar Khan; he eventually led a band of his fiercest warriors against his former masters. Although he was apparently defeated during this conflict, Nar Khan legend claims that their unnamed former masters saw the strength and worthiness of their opponent and used their strange powers to preserve him in some fashion. Because of this, the Nar Khan believe that one day their ancestor will return to them.

After Nar Khan's defeat and disappearance, the remaining tribe members fled the region

and traveled great distances. Unable to move rapidly due to their physiology, the roaming band took to the mountains whenever possible in order to have some advantage over their foes. Due to the scarcity of game in the remote locales that the tribe sought out, they largely became gatherers, supplementing their diet with meat only when the fierceness and hunger of their hearts drove them to struggle out to hunt. During this exodus, the early Nar Khan crossed the Crystal Mountains. Shortly afterwards, the Great Disaster struck the continent. In Nar Khan myth, the Great Disaster is described as a turbulent time when the peoples' bestial nature prevailed. The tribe went through many chieftains as one after another led ferocious raids on any other refugees that happened across the Nar Khan's territories. Then came the onset of the Great Cold to the lands the Nar Khan called home.

As the Ice Giants spread across Narandu long ago, their advance displaced many peoples. During that time, the Nar Khan suffered such losses that the few tale-tellers who did remember them thought them extinct along with several other tribes of Wild Folk such as the Jrakno, the Sideways Wailers, and the Tonoro. Set upon in turn by the Yrmanians, the Ur, and the Ice Giants, it is indeed amazing that the Nar Khan did not die out. However, the animalistic features that had plagued the Nar Khan before became their greatest asset as the frigid boundaries of the Ice Giants spread across the insignificant vale they had claimed for themselves.

Because of their proficiency in climbing, the Nar Khan fled ever higher and higher into the mountains, and therefore secured for themselves a small valley in the peaks of the Crystal Mountains. However, they soon depleted what natural game



there was available and their claws were both an aid and a hindrance in climbing. With the coming of the cold however they found their thick furred hides adequate for keeping the chill at bay, and perhaps more fortuitously their considerable foot-claws were capable of being sharpened and used in a manner similar to skates. After negotiating the climb down from their mountain homes, the Nar Khan learned to be adept at dashing across the ice in order to bring down prey. Preyed upon in turn by other predators and the ever-present Ice Giants, the Nar Khan's numbers never managed to grow to more than a few score members.

Nar Khan society and culture is centered on the family and the individual. Since the tribe is essentially one large family, an individual's contribution to that family is how each Nar Khan is measured. The harsh climate, isolated location, and ever-present enemies mean that the tribe cannot afford to provide for someone who does not contribute in some way to the family's overall good. Children serve the tribe by cleaning game, gathering roots and edible vegetation, and preparing food. The elderly are the ones who keep the histories and are responsible for teaching the young how best to hunt and identify edible plants. Those in-between are expected to hunt or defend the valley. When injured or ill, Nar Khan endeavor to prove their usefulness by carving elaborate decorations on the bones of slain prey or recording the stories of the elders through both memorization and the occasional carving in the caves and tunnels that they call home.

From time to time, explorers and fortune-hunters have stumbled across a hunting pair of Nar Khan, but most have either passed them off as an anomaly or abominations. Like the Mondre Khan, civilized Talislantans would most likely assume a Nar Khan to be a Sub-Man since their history is largely unknown.

## NARANDU LOCATIONS

### THE BLACK PIT OF NARANDU

Surmounted and surrounded by ever changing formations of ice formed from clouds of steam rising from its depths is the Black Pit of Narandu. A great rift in Eastern Narandu, the Black Pit has long been the subject of fanciful tales and fables. Talislantan scholars have heretofore been unable to come to an agreement on where this purportedly bottomless chasm actually leads. Some scholars cite the presence of steam to indicate that an underground sea lies in the darkness below, perhaps with an outlet somewhere on the Midnight Sea. Others claim that it is but one entrance to a vast succession of subterranean passages crisscrossing the continent and possibly reaching the Underground Highway in the West. There is also the peculiarly persistent suggestion that the Black Pit is an opening to a demon-haunted land, perhaps Cthonia or one of the lower planes. The source of these tales is always attributed to some wandering magician, mad uncle, or disturbed door-to-door salesman, but no one has ever been able to accurately pin down the source.

### THE FAR REACHES

Bordering the Midnight Sea is a mountainous region known as the Far Reaches. The reported presence of icebound shipwrecked vessels on the sides of these peaks and in its valleys has lead scholars to theorize that this area was once underwater, its crests forming small islands and reefs. Mirin scouts have also reported that the mountains here are riddled with caves and tunnels unlike those made by Ice Giants. The cave-mouths are typically small, but open up within leading some historians to speculate that Sub-Men fleeing the First Folk may have once resided here. Forming the northernmost extremity of Narandu, these lands are now frequented by lopers, frostweres, and ice dragons.

### THE CRYSTAL MOUNTAINS

Forming a border that long withheld the Ice Giants in the past are the icy spires of the Crystal

Mountains. Stretching from the edges of the Lost Sea to the eastern borders of Tamaranth, these peaks are largely impassable except for a small number of trails. Traders often keep the knowledge of such trails secret, hoping to preserve for themselves access to the deposits of blue diamonds that give the Crystal Mountains their color. The trails are becoming increasingly fewer due to the encroaching glacial ice of the Ice Giants, avalanches, frostweres, and ice dragons, leaving many would-be prospectors to either move elsewhere or invest more heavily in their journeys.

### THE PLAIN OF BLUE FROST

Stretching out from the Crystal Mountains is a huge and open tundra known as the Plain of Blue Frost. It is so named because of the wind-blown pollen of the snow lily which grows abundantly here. The several hundred mile expanse of land is perhaps the most fertile area under the control of the Ice Giants. Sustained by the nutritious snow lily pollen vast herds of lopers, muskronts, and wooly ogriphants roam here. Those creatures in turn draw the various native predators such as frostweres, tundra beasts, and rime hounds. Since these lands were once home to bands of

Sub-Men, occasionally primitive ruins can still be found here.

### THE ICE PEAKS

Forming the northern border of Central Narandu are the Ice Peaks. More ice than rock, these jagged shards are considered to be impassable by even the Mirin. Innumerable bands of Ice Giants make frequent use of caves and tunnels at the base of these shunned mountains, Night Demons occasionally lair within their peaks and Wind Demons and Ice Dragons reportedly struggle above. To the best reports of modern Talisiantans no other creatures venture near this region. The especially steep outcropping that looms like a cliff-faced island south of the western end of the mountain chain is known as the Five Peaks, but is occasionally called the Ice King's Palace. It is so named because of its appearance during the night when it seems to hover above the ground as snow billows about its base and to glow with the last rays of the fading sunlight. Such stories have spurred several expeditions to investigate the Five Peaks; most vanished, but a few returned with stories of apparently endless caverns and tunnels throughout the gargantuan blocks of ice.



## THE WESTERN GLACIERS

The Western Glaciers form a peninsula that juts into the Midnight Sea north of Yrmania. Now a formidable stretch of bleak and icy terrain, historians claim that this land was once the dwelling place of a now vanished tribe of early humanoids who apparently kept the First Folk at bay. Whatever skills they might have possessed apparently could not withstand the advance of snow and glacial ice. Besides cave paintings and carvings in caves long buried, blue diamonds and snow lilies draw the occasional explorer to these frozen hills. Lopers, tundra beasts, rime hounds and frostweres inhabit the area in sparse numbers.

## THE TRACKLESS WASTES

North of the Lost Sea is an area of undulating hills known as the Trackless Wastes. There is little here to distinguish one mile of snow blown hill from another. Subject to frequent blizzards, ice storms, and aberrant weather, travelers continue to voyage to these forlorn valleys in search of crystal kaliya. There are naturalists, scholars, and curiosity-seekers from Cymril, Vardune, Sindar, Zandu, and the Kang Empire that have variously offered excessive rewards of wealth, prestige, and luxury to anyone able to capture and return with one of these creatures. There are also other wise folk who claim that the crystal kaliya is nothing but a myth and point to the fact that the Trackless Wastes seem completely uninhabited by any sort of life except the ubiquitous Ice Giants. However, there is one Mirin Schooner Captain, now retired from military service, who vows that such a creature exists. Determined to bring back the hide of "the great white beast" that once purportedly shattered his vessel and most of the crew aboard, Mirhab habitually hires mercenary crews willing or desperate enough to join him on his ill-fated hunts.

## THE SPECTRAL ISLES

The Spectral Isles are an archipelago off the northwestern coast of Narandu continuously shrouded in clouds of ghostly grey mist. The cause of this phenomenon is unknown. What little is

known of the Spectral Isles comes from ancient maps and the rare erratic report from sailors. As far as modern Talisnantans know, the islands have never been accurately mapped, or even explored. This could be attributed either to legends of ice dragons inhabiting the area or to sightings of Night Demons flying above the islands, or to the frequent sightings of mysterious ghostly ships that pass by in the fog and mist. These strange ebon-black vessels seem not to be crewed by anything living, but solely by mysterious black cloaked forms.

## THE MIDDNIGHT ISLES

The Midnight Isles are attributed to be the dwelling place of not only Night Demons, but other horrors of the night as well. Apocryphal tales heard in seaport taverns claim that the edge of the world lies a few scant miles north of these troubled islands. While these fantastic legends might account for the reticence of captains to sail past this point, the large number of shipwrecks and icebergs in the area are probably more to blame. Additional tales of sightings of a mysterious obsidian black fortress on the island's north shore also serve to dissuade sailors. No modern Talisnantan scholars know of any civilization whose borders extended so far north so what the fortress may contain is unknown.

## THE UNKNOWN ISLES

Appearing on maps and sea charts from the Forgotten Age, the Unknown Isles have never been explored or mapped. Therefore, little is known about them. The rare report from sailors who have survived a trek in that part of the world claim that the Unknown Isles are jagged and stony outcroppings haunted by a wizard's creation that cannot die. Sages scoff at such tavern talk – after all, if the islands have never been explored then there could not be anyone there.

The eastern end of the Northern Realms are lands that were once pristine forest, rolling hills, and majestic mountains, but in modern times they are the last refuge of a number of peoples who have reached the desperate last hours of their kind. Some of them pass with dignity, while others fume and rage at the world that is ever passing

## THE PHANTOM MILITIA

*Travelers during the months of Laeolis and Zar have reported seeing what appeared to be a vast arrangement of spectral armies standing at attention under the moonlight. The visions were apparently Men, perhaps Archaens or their servitors, and stood staring not towards the icy depths of Narandu to the east, but somewhere north of the Midnight Isles. The identity of these puzzling specters and the reason for their unending vigil is a mystery.*

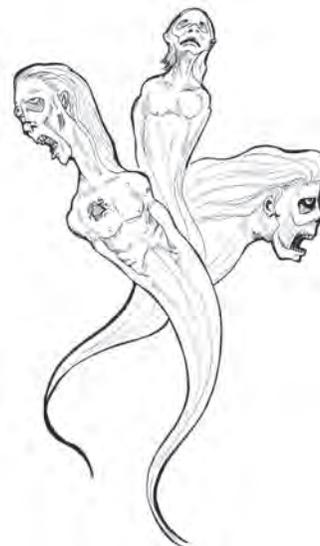
*Comparison to maps would indicate that the soldiers stand facing the Midnight Isles. Why such a force would once have been marshaled to protect against Night Demons is uncertain. However, it could account for both the stories of an obsidian black citadel spotted on the Midnight Isles and a large force of soldiers outfitted by the Kingdom of Shalihan and sent north to fight the Wild Folk during the Third Millennium. The Shalihan army vanished without a trace not long before the Great Disaster, taking with them a vast amount of arms and armor, not least of which were the spectacular Shimmering Blades of Ramal, the Armor of Iridescent Scales, and the ensorcelled Chariot of Flames. Such treasures have long been thought to be locked in ice somewhere in frozen Narandu. However, the stories of a ghostly army might support the claims that the force was betrayed by its commanding officer, a magician of great skill and power who had long struggled against rumors of ties to the Torquarans.*

*One account left in a journal by an adventurer long since imprisoned for lunacy claims that on the night of Laeolis 49 he witnessed the armies, but instead of standing at attention, the soldiers were milling about, talking, and behaving as if they were alive. Apparently, some of the soldiers spotted the watcher however and, after proclaiming him some sort of fiend or spirit, attempted to slay him. The adventurer survived, albeit with some portions of his mind lost forever.*

them by.

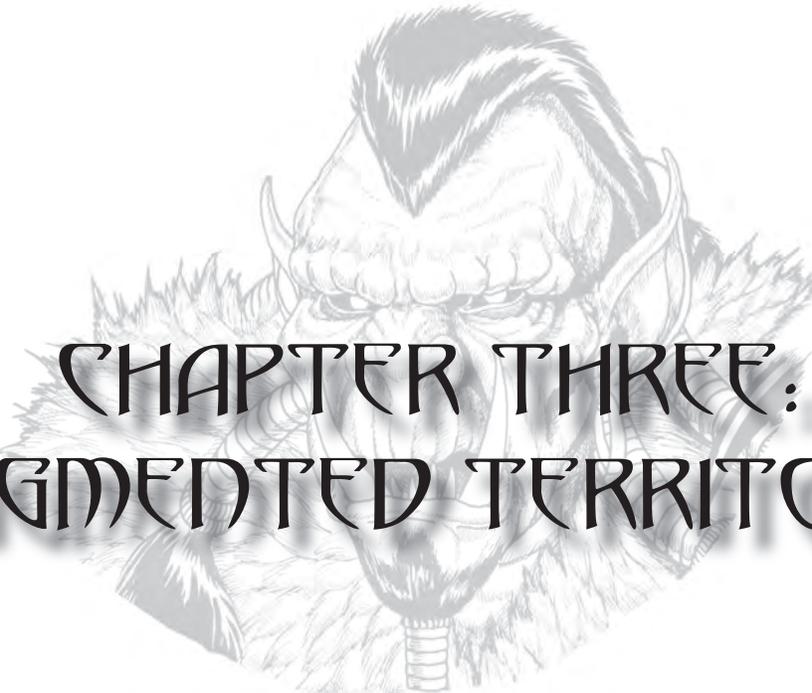
In the Time Before Time, these lands were largely overlooked and left to predators and prey of more natural sorts. The ancient Thane of Khazad once sailed from the Northern Sea down the mighty river to the Southern Seas while the First Folk roamed the plains. The primitive tribes of Men that roamed the edges of Talislanta may have traveled through these lands, but if they did they left little evidence to mark their passing. During the rise of the Archaens during the First and Second Millenniums until the end of the second war between the First Folk and the races of Men saw little change in this, except perhaps for the beginnings of the plunder of this land's resources for use in war. Eventually, the Archaens would build two cities on the opposite shore of the Great River, still not daring to settle in these wildernesses. During these days it is certain that at least the Darklings and the Jaka had come to settle in their respective territories. By the time of the Great Disaster and subsequent Age of Confusion, however, all of the current inhabitants

of the Fragmented Territories were dwelling within these lands. During the New Age, the ancient Phaedrans were reportedly held in check by the Ur living past the Onyx Mountains, the Gnomekin were being driven south by the Darklings, and the Jaka of the Northern Woods were being described by naturalists.





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# CHAPTER THREE: FRAGMENTED TERRITORIES

## URAG

In ages past the land now known as Urag was an area full of lush forests, rocky canyons, and mountainous spires. It was bordered on the east by the wide and rapid Ippimissi River which not only brought water and life to eastern forests and hills, but also formed a natural border, keeping out the most dangerous life forms of the central plains. Evidently, even the First Folk rarely visited this place. The Watchstone, some eighty miles away in Golarin, is thought to have once been used by the First Folk to keep watch on the forests of this land, despite Aamanian claims to the contrary. Bordered on all other sides by multiple mountain ranges, the lush and verdant valleys of this land were truly once a wonder to behold.

All of that is no more.

The land of Urag is now a harsh and barren landscape of dry, arid plains, scar-like canyons, and expansive mountain ranges. Its streams and watercourses are befouled by waste, its wildlife hunted to near extinction for its hide and bone, its woodlands are now nearly non-existent having vanished beneath the axes and saws of the Ur, its

hills and mountains riddled and blasted in the search for usable minerals. The Ur's crude practices at harvesting the natural wealth of the land have only hastened the ravages and destruction begun by their nearly constant skirmishes and battles between one another. What few animals now range Urag are ones that either roam its borders or have wandered in from a neighboring land. The rare life forms that are found here are typically altered and mutated forms of life that little resemble other members of their species in the rest of Talislanta.

## UR

The Ur are a brutish warlike race of giant Sub-Men. Typically rising over seven feet in height, and weighing more than five hundred pounds, the Ur are possessed of great strength and stamina, but tend to come up lacking in the areas of both physical and mental speed and acumen. Their thick, leathery, yellow-greenish hide, curved tusk-like fangs, and deep set eyes give them an unwelcoming appearance; given their penchant for destruction, mayhem, and murder, this appearance is not far from fact.

Living in large tribes under the control of an

### SOWING THE SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

*In their early days, the three Ur tribes were so mistrustful of one another that it is a wonder they survived at all. Skirmishes started for all manner of reasons: one tribe would see members of the other two bartering and assuming a plot was afoot attack them both; while bartering with one of the other tribes a war band from the third tribe would show up and thinking that they had been led into a trap the bargainers would attack them both; a band of warriors would find an enemy tribe fighting with a band of other Sub Men and believing it to be a clever ruse attack them both. Such activity not only kept the three tribes warring with one another, but also wound up alienating them from several tribes of Wild Folk. Historians also speculate that these conflicts are the reasons for the extinction of at least one Sub Man tribe, the Nineteen-Teeth People; the modern Ur habit of wearing the teeth and bones of slain foes is thought to have originated during this time.*

Ur King who is advised by a shaman, the Ur's predilection for warfare and violence soon becomes apparent in any area that they choose to settle in: uprooted trees, smashed stone, and a lack of game are all hallmarks of the presence of the Ur.

### UR HISTORY

While naturalists of the New Age believe that the Ur are related to the Giants of Kharakhan; despite their similarities in hair style and the fact that both are giant humanoids, the resemblance largely ends there. Most naturalists counter with the statement that many such degenerate species show widely different characteristics: the two species of Ardua, the Gryphs, Stryx, and Sawila are all believed to be distantly related, for example.

The Ur, of course, have different views on the matter, when they can be bothered to discuss such ancient history outside of the boastful deeds

of past ancestors. According to the Ur, they are the descendents of the ruling tribe to whom the Archaens originally ceded all the lands of Talislanta. Known at that time as the Cahldeans, this early band of Wild Men were known both for the use of strange, black iron chariots from which they took their name and the array of other Wild Men tribes that they had either angered or exterminated. At that time their ruler was a fierce warrior named Gishul, son of Nam-ur, and it was he who negotiated the bargain with the Archaens that would give his people the rights to the vast central plains of Talislanta. Perhaps due to differences in linguistics and the resulting misunderstandings, the Cahldeans claimed that the Archaens had given them and them alone the lands, while the few other Landborne who had contact with the Archaens insisted that all of the land belonged to the Wild Folk. The Archaens either cared little or knew nothing of the conflict as they regarded most of the Sub-men as little more than bestial, warring tribes anyway. Gishul's reign was not to last long however; one of his own tribesmen, a warrior called Shemgilgah slew him in his sleep and claimed the right to rule for himself. Shemgilgah, himself a son of Nam-ur, changed the name of the tribe to Ur, both in honor of his slain father and their new rulership of the world. Before he could solidify his power however, the Ur were attacked by rival tribes amongst the Wild Folk and driven west.

Shemgilgah's rivals amongst the newly named Ur saw this defeat as a sign of weakness, and despite his own vicious attempts to keep them in line, he was poisoned and left for dead after a mere year as king. Keeping the name Ur, the tribe divided amongst Shemgilgah's three sons, each of whom claimed that they had killed their sire. After each in turn named himself king, the tribe split into three and each went their separate ways. The three tribes never ventured too far from one another. Suspicious and distrustful, each of the kings thought that his brothers would unite and attempt to slay him. The results of this suspicion were several indiscriminate wars amongst the Ur tribes.

The Ur discovered, or stole, the knowledge of siege engines and chemical warfare from the

ruins of the Archaens after the Great Disaster. According to the boastful tales of the Ur, after the Great Disaster, each of the tribes witnessed one of the sky-cities descending to the earth and recalling the Bargain of Gishul, rode to the attack seeking vengeance on these Archaen trespassers. As fate would have it, the three tribes arrived at the ruined sky-city

at about the same time and began to fight over the spoils. During their skirmishes, a band of Archaen survivors managed to get past them using sly and devious magics. These Archaens attempted to kill all of the Ur by not only using their foul magics, but by also by throwing orbs of noxious substances that had a variety of effects: explosions, clouds of smoke, loud noises, and the like. Undeterred by these cowardly tactics, the Ur quickly adopted such tactics to their own use, not only against the Archaens but against each other as well. Ur shamans, some few of them capable of reading the languages of the Archaens found plans within the ruins for strange devices. These plans became the predecessors for modern Ur siege weaponry. The three tribes quickly set about felling large numbers of trees for the production of catapults from which they hurled not only boulders, but vats of bizarre liquids plundered from the wreck of the sky-city. Eventually, the band of Archaens was routed. The Ur tribe that had been closest to their settlement was determined not to let them escape Ur justice, and began to pursue them. A day or two later the two other tribes noticed that both their brethren and the Archaens were gone, and determined to prevent an unholy alliance between the two, set off in pursuit.

For many weeks one tribe or another harried the Archaen survivors, exacting justice for every crime the Archaens had perpetrated on the Landborne. Most often these impromptu trials resulted



after a raiding band would charge the Archaen encampment stealing supplies and taking at least one prisoner. These prisoners were then tortured by the shamans until they confessed to crimes both known and unknown to the Ur. Sometimes the prisoners died during these examinations; those that didn't were dragged along as slaves to slowly die of exhaustion and starvation.

The final indignity came when one of the young Ur raiders was crippled by the Archaens during one of the nighttime raids. This young warlord, Nergdel, had ties to all three tribes: he was the son of one of the Ur kings, his mother had been taken in a raid and then returned to her tribe, and he had served in the court of the last tribe as a door-guard. Exactly what went wrong during the raid he led on the Archaens is unknown. While most of his band returned, Nergdel did not. He had wanted the honor of capturing the prisoner that night, and when the morning sunlight broke the sky the three tribes found the Archaens gone and Nergdel's mutilated corpse left behind. Nergdel's brother, Grod, took up the severed arm of his brother and driving his long spear through its length, rallied a band of Ur from all three tribes to track down his brother's killers and exact revenge. As the weeks went by and Grod's band pursued the Archaens into the mountains of the north, Nergdel's hand contracted into a fist and the bone and sinews of his arm hardened and dried. Allegedly, Grod used this long and grisly club to kill a great number of the Archaens that he had pursued. However, after Grod

## NERGDEL'S HAND

*The legend concerning the amputation of Nergdel's arm and its subsequent use as either a standard or a club is often cited by the rare few New Age historians who study Ur culture as the starting point for the modern Ur traditional yaksha-paw club.*

*The Ur of several centuries ago used the war club as a symbol of their power; a demonstration that they had slain a yaksha single-handedly and taken a trophy to use as a weapon. Modern Ur still use these gruesome war clubs; however, they tend to get theirs through bribery, theft, trapping, or by sending several score Darklings to overwhelm an old and infirm yaksha. Despite all this, the Ur themselves do call war clubs "Nergdel's hand" in what passes as poetry among their kind.*

and his band returned to the rest of the three tribes, they were all summarily accused of treasonous behavior for consorting with the soldiers of the other tribes, tortured into confessing, castrated, and made to serve as slaves.

After their pursuit of the Archaens the Ur found themselves between the dried gorge of the Great River and the Crystal Mountains. For a time, the tribes settled in this area, venturing into the mountains with captured slaves to mine metals and gems. The opposite side of the Crystal Mountains, in what is now the southern end of the Plain of Blue Frost, was at that time still lush grassland. The three tribes rapidly crossed the mountains and claimed all the lands from the Crystal Mountains to the Ice Peaks as their own. For many years, the three tribes roamed these hills. In so doing, they had to constantly fight against other tribes of Landborne who had also tried to claim these lands; the primitive Yrmanians, the clumsy Shavians, the crafty Warzen, and the Sideways Wailers. The Ur with their knowledge of siege engines and dwindling supplies of alchemical creations looted from the Archaen sky-city quickly exterminated

these Wild Folk or drove them from their lands. With no one left to fight, the three tribes began their perennial attacks upon one another, and in a short time the western end of the grasslands were a ruinous stretch of burnt ground, polluted streams, and barren hills. Then, the Ice Giants came.

Ur legend says that the Ur left the despoiled lands to the Ice Giants since there was nothing left there of value, but many scholars believe that the Ice Giants advance simply pushed the Ur closer and closer to the mountains until they had no choice but to head south across what had become the Dead River Chasm.

When the Ur first entered the land that now bears their name, it was a green and growing place. A tribe of Sub-Men known as the Warzen lived in the forests and mountains at that time, but they were quickly overwhelmed by the combined might of the Ur and now exist only as a name in very obscure history texts. The Ur quickly moved over the flat plains adjacent to the river and made use of the existing abundance of timber to construct several crude forts and new siege weaponry. In a short time these verdant plains were made barren; however it was on the borders of this area that the three Ur tribes established the fortress-cities that exist today: Grod, Vodruk, and Krag. As the Ur explored this land, they found the land scattered with enormous stone idols. These hideous carvings seemed to have three eyes. At first the Ur disregarded the idols, occasionally toppling or defacing them. However, after a pattern of strange deaths occurred to those who disturbed the idols, the Ur shamans advised against disturbing them. A gathering of the shamans went alone into the wilderness one night to study one of the statues. After their return to their respective tribes, they all claimed that the idols were magical in nature and that by holding vigil at one of these idols for a night, insights and wisdom might be gained. Afterwards, Ur shamans began to wear crudely fashioned replicas of these effigies around their necks.

In need of iron for weapons the Ur moved south towards the Obsidian Mountains. In the canyons and valleys leading up into the dark, cloud-

shrouded heights they were continually beset by dozens of accidents a day: wagons losing a wheel, Ogriphants or burden-beasts being lamed due to sharp stones, small rockslides, water and rations disappearing. Soon thereafter the Ur discovered their first nest of Darklings. Blaming the small, wiry humanoids for their numerous misfortunes, the Ur began a widespread assault on any Darklings that they could find. As the Darklings began to fight back, the other two Ur tribes noticed the amount of activity in the mountains and joined in the general fray. In short order the Darklings, despite their numbers, were overwhelmed and retreated into their caves, tunnels, and burrows deep beneath the ground. Given the difference in size between the Darklings and the Ur, it is no surprise that the Ur could not follow the Darklings. The Ur took this as proof of the Darklings' treachery and ordered their shamans to create an alchemical solution to bring the Darklings out of their caves. The shamans, with to no knowledge of alchemy, started mixing together the remnants and drops of barrels and vials. In addition to pouring this foul concoction down the tunnels of the Darklings, they also lit numerous fires at the cave mouths and used big fans to waft the smoke down as well. The combination of smoke and fumes forced the Darklings out of their caves where they were first slaughtered then captured by the Ur. As the Ur herded captive Darklings down the hillsides they were surprised to find a large flock of dark and sinister avians awaiting them. Apparently drawn by the scent of so many dead, a flight of Stryx warriors approached the Ur and offered them their own unique services in exchange for a the usual mercenary's due: money to spend and food to eat.

## UR RELIGION

The Ur themselves practice little in the way of religion, seeing themselves as masters of all they can see. Ur shamans do prostrate themselves before the strange three-eyed idols that are scattered through the hillsides, but do not worship them. Given the occasionally dubious abilities of these shamans, it is unknown whether or not these idols have any effect upon their magical skill for good or ill. Many civilized magicians view the

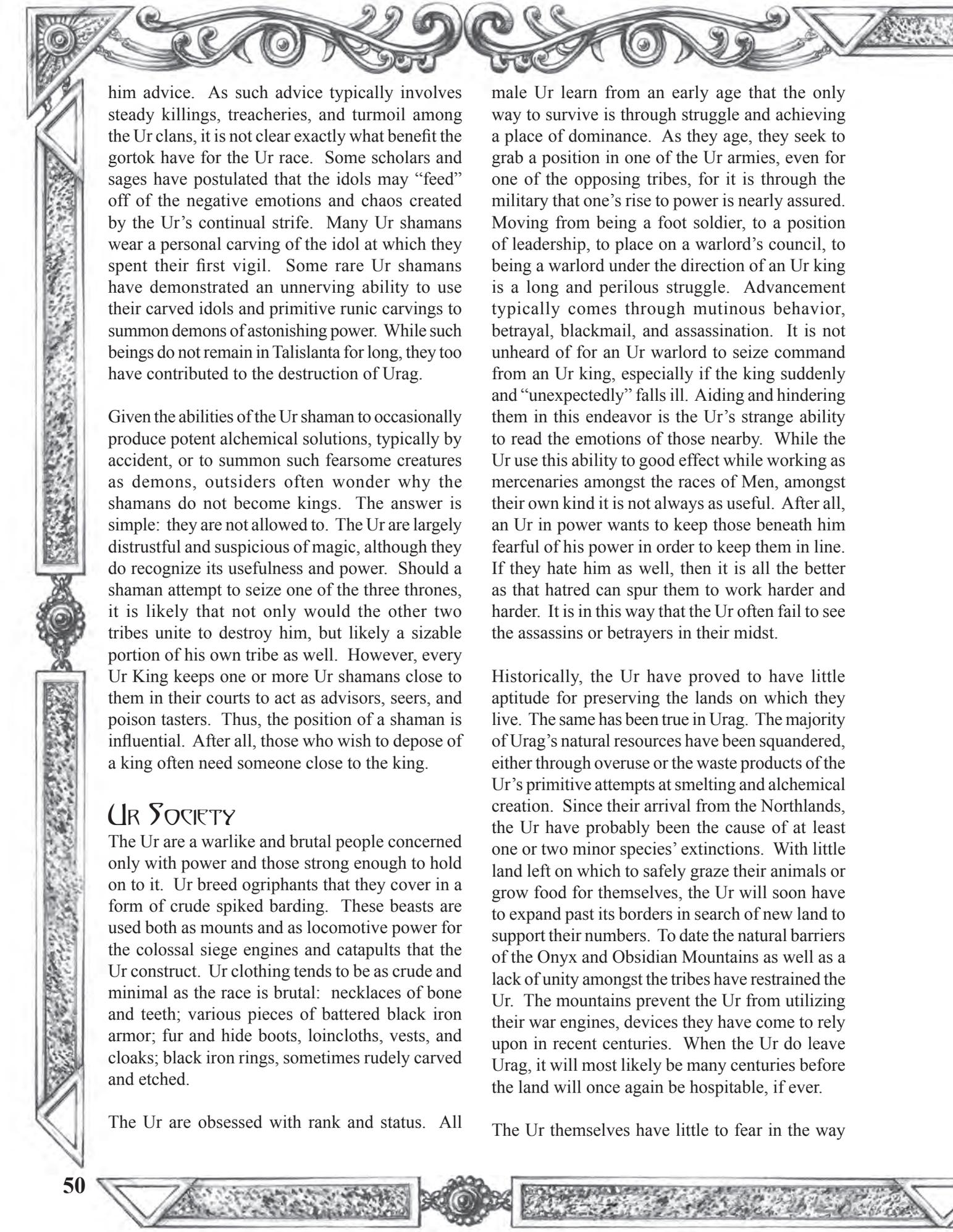
## UR AND EMOTIONS

*Although not often the most astute or perceptive individuals, the Ur are adept at discerning the emotional state of those near them. Given that most Ur inspire hatred, fear, and loathing in those around them, some sages have pondered whether the Ur can only sense negative emotions such as these. If so, perhaps they constantly act in ways to drive others towards negativity so that they can discern what someone truly feels. The Ur have a saying, "true loyalty is like a woman's beauty; neither lasts." Given that a loyal Ur most likely feels the same fear and loathing as one who is disloyal, there may be some credence to these claims.*

Ur shamans as primitive frauds at best, deluded madmen at worst. Most scholars of the New Age believe these strange carvings to be much older than the Ur themselves, but few agree as to their origins. The statues themselves yield few clues. Aside from three eyes, an ancient and weather-beaten appearances, and a marked tendency to be found facing south-east, there is little to distinguish one from another aside from size.

The shamans call these idols "gortok," literally head-talkers. Allegedly, spending long periods before a gortok, meditating, fasting, and beseeching them for aid can awaken the spirits of the gortok from their stony slumber, or so the shamans claim. Once awakened, the shaman can hear the voice of the gortok in his head, instructing him and giving





him advice. As such advice typically involves steady killings, treacheries, and turmoil among the Ur clans, it is not clear exactly what benefit the gortok have for the Ur race. Some scholars and sages have postulated that the idols may “feed” off of the negative emotions and chaos created by the Ur’s continual strife. Many Ur shamans wear a personal carving of the idol at which they spent their first vigil. Some rare Ur shamans have demonstrated an unnerving ability to use their carved idols and primitive runic carvings to summon demons of astonishing power. While such beings do not remain in Talislanta for long, they too have contributed to the destruction of Urag.

Given the abilities of the Ur shaman to occasionally produce potent alchemical solutions, typically by accident, or to summon such fearsome creatures as demons, outsiders often wonder why the shamans do not become kings. The answer is simple: they are not allowed to. The Ur are largely distrustful and suspicious of magic, although they do recognize its usefulness and power. Should a shaman attempt to seize one of the three thrones, it is likely that not only would the other two tribes unite to destroy him, but likely a sizable portion of his own tribe as well. However, every Ur King keeps one or more Ur shamans close to them in their courts to act as advisors, seers, and poison tasters. Thus, the position of a shaman is influential. After all, those who wish to depose of a king often need someone close to the king.

## UR SOCIETY

The Ur are a warlike and brutal people concerned only with power and those strong enough to hold on to it. Ur breed ogriphants that they cover in a form of crude spiked barding. These beasts are used both as mounts and as locomotive power for the colossal siege engines and catapults that the Ur construct. Ur clothing tends to be as crude and minimal as the race is brutal: necklaces of bone and teeth; various pieces of battered black iron armor; fur and hide boots, loincloths, vests, and cloaks; black iron rings, sometimes rudely carved and etched.

The Ur are obsessed with rank and status. All

male Ur learn from an early age that the only way to survive is through struggle and achieving a place of dominance. As they age, they seek to grab a position in one of the Ur armies, even for one of the opposing tribes, for it is through the military that one’s rise to power is nearly assured. Moving from being a foot soldier, to a position of leadership, to place on a warlord’s council, to being a warlord under the direction of an Ur king is a long and perilous struggle. Advancement typically comes through mutinous behavior, betrayal, blackmail, and assassination. It is not unheard of for an Ur warlord to seize command from an Ur king, especially if the king suddenly and “unexpectedly” falls ill. Aiding and hindering them in this endeavor is the Ur’s strange ability to read the emotions of those nearby. While the Ur use this ability to good effect while working as mercenaries amongst the races of Men, amongst their own kind it is not always as useful. After all, an Ur in power wants to keep those beneath him fearful of his power in order to keep them in line. If they hate him as well, then it is all the better as that hatred can spur them to work harder and harder. It is in this way that the Ur often fail to see the assassins or betrayers in their midst.

Historically, the Ur have proved to have little aptitude for preserving the lands on which they live. The same has been true in Urag. The majority of Urag’s natural resources have been squandered, either through overuse or the waste products of the Ur’s primitive attempts at smelting and alchemical creation. Since their arrival from the Northlands, the Ur have probably been the cause of at least one or two minor species’ extinctions. With little land left on which to safely graze their animals or grow food for themselves, the Ur will soon have to expand past its borders in search of new land to support their numbers. To date the natural barriers of the Onyx and Obsidian Mountains as well as a lack of unity amongst the tribes have restrained the Ur. The mountains prevent the Ur from utilizing their war engines, devices they have come to rely upon in recent centuries. When the Ur do leave Urag, it will most likely be many centuries before the land will once again be hospitable, if ever.

The Ur themselves have little to fear in the way

of natural enemies. Aside from their constant struggles with one another, they typically despise the races of Men as usurpers of the Ur's hereditary rights. Similarly, the Ur have a loathing for the Ice Giants of Narandu that pushed them southwards centuries ago. The enmity that the Ur tribes display towards the Ice Giants is quite fierce, and one of the few reasons that war bands from differing tribes will work together. Because of this hatred, the Ice Giant's advance on the western borders of Narandu has been stalled for the past century. However, should all three of the Ur tribes band together, it is believed that they could easily overwhelm a great number of Ice Giants and possibly reclaim some of their former territory in Narandu. Perhaps more likely however would be a push towards the south. Most civilized Talislandans are aware of the growing threat the Ur will become. The choices for Ur expansion are rather limited. They could return to the Plains of Golarin, reportedly their home a millennia or more ago. However, the Dead River Chasm presents one barrier to their easy expansion, while the lack of substantial resources such as wood and stone provides little drive to bring the Ur east. To the west lies the country of Arim, itself rich in mineral resources, if somewhat lacking in arable soil. The primary path from Urag to Arim is the Gorge at Akbar: a large passage through the mountains lined with sheer cliffs and terminating at the Arimite citadel of Akbar. Passage south to



the lands of the Seven Kingdoms has been barred both by the Obsidian Mountains and the diligent efforts of both the Gnomekin and the Borderlands Legions. Again, should the Ur tribes merge into one collective fighting force, it is possible that they could overwhelm the Northern defenses of the Seven Kingdoms and sweep southwards, perhaps all the way to Cymril itself.

Some historians claim that there was an Ur Overking at one point in the past. During the Age of Confusion, when the Tirshata united the Sub-Men tribes against the Archans, a single Ur King slaughtered the other two kings and brought the majority of the Ur together to fight under the Tirshata's banner. However, many Ur themselves believe widely varying tales about this Ur Overking depending on the tribe to which they belong. There is little else that will get a group of Ur mercenaries to brawling, not only amongst themselves but everyone else present as well, as asking them about the Overking.

Ur politics revolves around life at court. Perhaps in mockery of ancient kingdoms, perhaps out of a sense of history, the Ur kings host large courts that they keep complacent through gifts of stolen booty and lavish praise. In turn, the various advisors, shamans, ministers, and warlords present shifting alliances and constant betrayals in order to both acquire the power needed to usurp the throne while keeping others from doing the same. Given that many Ur often have a tendency to fly into violent rages and that the Ur idea of subtleness is "club them from behind so they can't see you coming," it is little wonder that court politics are rather vicious and rarely clandestine. Into this mix the Ur king often attempts to groom an heir to take over after his death. Most often this is one of his many children, or at least an Ur alleged to be his. However, as with the numerous courtiers, the king must make sure to keep his heir powerful enough to not be overthrown but weak enough not to usurp his own power. Typically upon an Ur king's death, whether by natural causes at the hands of a military coup or more frequently poisonings, the inner council of the court decides who will next become king. Most often, this new king is one of the members of the inner council of advisors,



but he is not always the strongest as some new kings attempt to purge their courts of loyalists to the old regime by ordering the mass sacrifice of “prisoners” to the shamans’ stone idols.

All of these positions are held by Ur males. Although Ur society seems strictly patriarchal and male dominated, the Ur women assert otherwise. “Behind every great Ur man is a woman with a knife pointed at his shoulder blades,” as the Ur women say. In their estimation, Ur society is ruled by the women and the Ur men are too crass, violent, and dumb to have realized it. An Ur male by tradition is not allowed to marry until they are in command of other Ur, typically at the head of a war band. As an Ur male increases in status, he is allowed to take more wives. Some of the Ur kings have had as many nine wives, though five seems to be the more common number. Ur women control the households and the attendant servants in them. It is the women who keep the stories and legends of the Ur people, passing them down orally from one generation to the next while they attend to the chore of raising Ur children, called “brats” until they come of age. As it is not uncommon for an Ur wife to seek other companionship outside of their marriage, whether for pleasure or for political gain, Ur men have little to no guarantee that any given child is theirs or not. As new wives come into the household, the struggle for power often increases. As Ur men are not allowed to take new wives until they achieve a higher status, it is common for newer, younger wives to be of a higher social status. However, since the older, or eldest, wife has had much longer to mold the household staff into some semblance of loyalty, the struggle for power can be quite intense.

Typically a household staff is made up of Darkling slaves, unmarried Ur women, and eunuch Ur males. Young Ur men leave the household as soon as they can fight for themselves, but any daughters are expected to stay and serve until they are married. While this does provide additional hands to do the necessary work, a father often attempts to marry off his daughters for political ties and wedding gifts as often as they do to get rid of another mouth to feed. Ur males who fail to successfully pull off a mutiny, coup, or rebellion are often “sent to the

servants’ quarters,” a euphemism for castration. Since Ur society is based off of the appearance of power and the ability to forge alliances, a shamed Ur eunuch typically has little to offer. Ur being “sent to the servants’ quarters” happens often enough that Ur shamans have rituals for the task of castration, normally involving various alchemical mixtures or experiments. Because of this, Ur who are sentenced to such a fate often choose to instead flee into temporary exile until they have earned enough wealth and power serving as a mercenary in a foreign land to attempt to return to Ur in some state of glory and power. Most Ur renegades wind up working for bandit groups or as bodyguards in far off Farad, Zandu, or the Kang Empire.

## STRYX

A race of carrion-eating avians resembling horned devils, the Stryx stand around six feet tall and are covered with dark grey and black feathers. With a typical wingspan greater than twenty feet, the Stryx are excellent gliders who often circle in the air for hours at a time at night watching for the dead and dying. Grouped together in clans called “nests” that number upwards of 150 members, the Stryx normally inhabit cliff-side caves. A sizable portion of Stryx hatchlings are born dead; seen as gifts from their dark god, the Stryx relish dining upon these sacrifices. Only those who are fit to hunt and bring in food are allowed to live by the Stryx; all others are slain outright and used to feed those who remain. Perhaps because of their eating-habits or perhaps due to their worship of a Carrion-God, the Stryx commonly exhibit a variety of ailments and illnesses that while uncomfortable, are not debilitating.

The majority of Stryx work for the Ur as scouts, spies, messengers, and advisors. While the Ur see the Stryx as being devious and deceiving subordinates, the Stryx can accomplish many things that Ur cannot. Additionally, most Stryx accompany Ur armies in order to scavenge battlefields for the dead. Most Stryx working for the Ur are warriors, wielding spears and pole arms to great effect, but typically rejecting other weapons. Typically these alliances are brief; at best they last long enough for



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the Stryx to stay until the next meal. If an Ur warlord does not feed his mercenaries, they seek employment elsewhere. Those who do serve with the Ur are typically underappreciated; they lack discipline, the desire for victory, and are not strong enough to complete the same tasks as an Ur warrior. Because of this, Stryx mercenaries who serve for a long time with the Ur often come to believe the belittle curses the Ur constantly shout at them; that they are lazy, stupid, and sluggish. While a fair number of Stryx have been integrated into Ur society, traveling with war bands and attaching themselves with typical Ur loyalty to a warlord, most Stryx are independent, serving where and when they will. Other Stryx leave Urag to become mercenaries in foreign lands, to hunt their age-old rivals the Gryph of Tamaranth, or to simply become wandering scavengers.

Most Stryx nests are led by a chieftain, typically the individual who can deliver on its promises of

providing carrion for all in his care.

As this is typically a male warrior in its prime, the position seems largely patriarchal. Should a chieftain ever cease to provide enough food for his flock or in the rare occurrence that he grows too old or infirm to do so, he is typically challenged by another warrior. A fight to the death normally occurs, the winner becoming the chieftain and the loser his victory feast. The chieftain is the forceful arbitrator of all disputes among his nest, although troublemakers are often left to fend for themselves: if they die because of their troublesome ways, they feed the flock; if they survive, they can be ordered out to hunt and scavenge. Most punishments meted out by Stryx chieftains are death sentences, celebrated by the rest of the nest before dining on the wrongdoer. For the smallest of offenses, a lenient chieftain may simply take an eye or a hand, but this in itself can become a death sentence as well

since the afflicted can no longer hunt as efficiently as the rest of his nest.

Stryx nests often trade with one another for various trinkets, weapons, and tools. They regard their alliance with the Ur as a matter of convenience and frequently switch loyalties between tribes depending on which can provide better for their nest. The Stryx view the Ur's constant warfare not as a contest for glory, but as a prelude to feasting; often they care little for who actually wins any particular battle. Each nest lays claim to a particular territory and will defend its borders against other nests, but otherwise strife between Stryx is rare. The only time territorial boundaries fall are in times of great bounty – typically Ur clan wars where the dead and dying are so many that not even one nest can eat them all.

## STRYX ORIGINS

The Stryx claim that they came to the caves of the Obsidian Mountains from a distant land. In this strange place, Taryx watched over them and provided plenty of food. He used his mighty wings to darken the sky so that the harsh light of the suns would not sting and burn their eyes. The Stryx were able to soar across the ash-grey plains and pluck as much as they wanted to eat whenever they hungered. Unfortunately, something horrible occurred and all of the dead were swept away. Trusting to Taryx, the Stryx migrated from the sunless lands of their origin across a great sea and eventually arrived in Talislanta.

Before coming to Urag, they found a cave complex. The caves were already inhabited by a race of smaller avians and for a long time, the Stryx fought and feasted, until Men drove them out with magics. Heading west, the Stryx attempted to settle in a huge, vast forest overlooked by crystal blue mountains. However, again they encountered another group of avians. These avians were closer in size to the Stryx, but were also just as fierce. Eventually, these avians drove the Stryx out of their temporary homes and towards the west.

Modern scholars have long assumed that the second group of avians mentioned in Stryx legends

are the Gryphs of Tamaranth. However, there are no known avians who live east of Tamaranth according to modern lore. In a similar fashion, the “sunless lands” mentioned in Stryx origin tales are either an unknown continent, another plane of existence, or perhaps just simply a comforting myth.

## STRYX RELIGION

Stryx culture centers on death. Being carrion eaters, the more dead things there are, the more there is to eat. Therefore, events that to the Stryx are seen as being blessings and good fortune are often calamities in other lands; famine, plagues, warfare. While this may account in part for the enmity that most civilized Talislantans hold towards the Stryx, the way that Stryx eye others creatures, as if imagining what they will taste like, probably is a greater influence.

The Stryx worship Taryx, the Scavenger of Souls. Many of the practices of their priests are so similar to Necromancy, that most Talislantan magicians assume that either Taryx was a necromancer of some kind itself, or that the worship of Taryx is so closely tied to death that necromantic practices and black magic go hand in hand with its worship. Stryx priests name themselves the “Servants of Taryx,” and officiate over meals. Carrion, they claim, is the gift of Taryx. These Servants often preside over sacrifices, and claim to be able to read omens in the entrails and screams of their victims.

Some Servants band together to form cults dedicated to their carrion god. These communities are known as warrens, and spend a majority of their time seeking out victims to sacrifice. In fact, the more sacrifices brought in, the more status given to an individual priest. Therefore, the older priests tend to be those with the highest status as they have more experience and have had more time to accumulate sacrifices. According to the leaders of these warrens, high priests known as eereah, for every sacrifice offered up to Taryx, the Stryx people will receive ten for themselves. “Death begets death,” is their central creed. The Servants preach that the Stryx are superior to all

other living beings; Taryx created all life in order to feed his chosen people. Therefore, all living beings are as cattle to the Stryx and are all grouped together with one term, mrra-akk, a word meaning “future food.”

In the rare instance of conflict between nests or even warrens, a necromancer-priest from another warren is called in to mediate and settle the dispute. These gatherings are solemn gatherings, jokingly called a murder. A group of assembled Stryx and the mediator assemble and let one disputant from each side tell their version of the events. Seemingly in unison, without any discussion, the assembled host will fall upon the speaker and devour them if they do find the tale worthy. The victor thus slain, the loser is sent away without being allowed to feast.

In the past two decades, the Stryx, particularly the necromancer-priests, have been changing; as they age their horns and wattles are becoming more elaborate and colorful. While these changes are notably noxious to outsiders, the Servants feel that this is an omen from Taryx that Talislanta will soon be “showered with corpses” and the suns will shine no more. Several Stryx necromancers have interpreted various this and other various omens an indication that Taryx has forged a pact with Aberon that will ensure the provision of a great deal of carrion for his chosen people.

## DARKLINGS

The Darklings of Urag are a small and miserable race. Small, wiry humanoids, the Darklings have soot-grey skin, large pointed ears, sharp fangs, and distorted features. Naturalists disagree on whether they look more diabolical or demonic. Darklings bear a strong odor, are physically weak, and rarely display anything resembling magical talent. In order to survive, the Darklings have developed the ability to hide almost anywhere, especially in darkness and have very sharp senses including the ability to see at night and identify scents from up to one-hundred feet away. Most historians believe that these talents developed after the Great Disaster, at which time the Darklings fled underground to escape the widespread havoc and confusion on the

### A HIDDEN CIVILIZATION

*Rumors persist about hidden Darkling tunnels caverns and citadels under the earth, but it is likely that such things are the wishful thinking of an abused people. Given the excesses of the Ur, it is likely that they did not stint on the quantities of alchemicals, toxins, and poisons that they poured down the holes of the Darklands many years ago. Also, in the intervening centuries, the place has continued to be used as a dumping ground by the Ur. Therefore it is most likely that any existing Darkling homes beneath the earth will never be livable again.*

*Despite this however the Darklings persist in discussing a Lost Home beneath the ground, where not only unslaved Darklings, but refugees and escapees have fled. If such existed, it would most likely be somewhere beneath the Darklands or the Obsidian Mountains. Not only would it have to be a secret from the Ur, but the Darklings would have to work to conceal it from others, such as Satada and Subterranoïds as well.*



surface. Having lived underground for so long, the Darklings naturally adjusted, and now find the light of day uncomfortable.

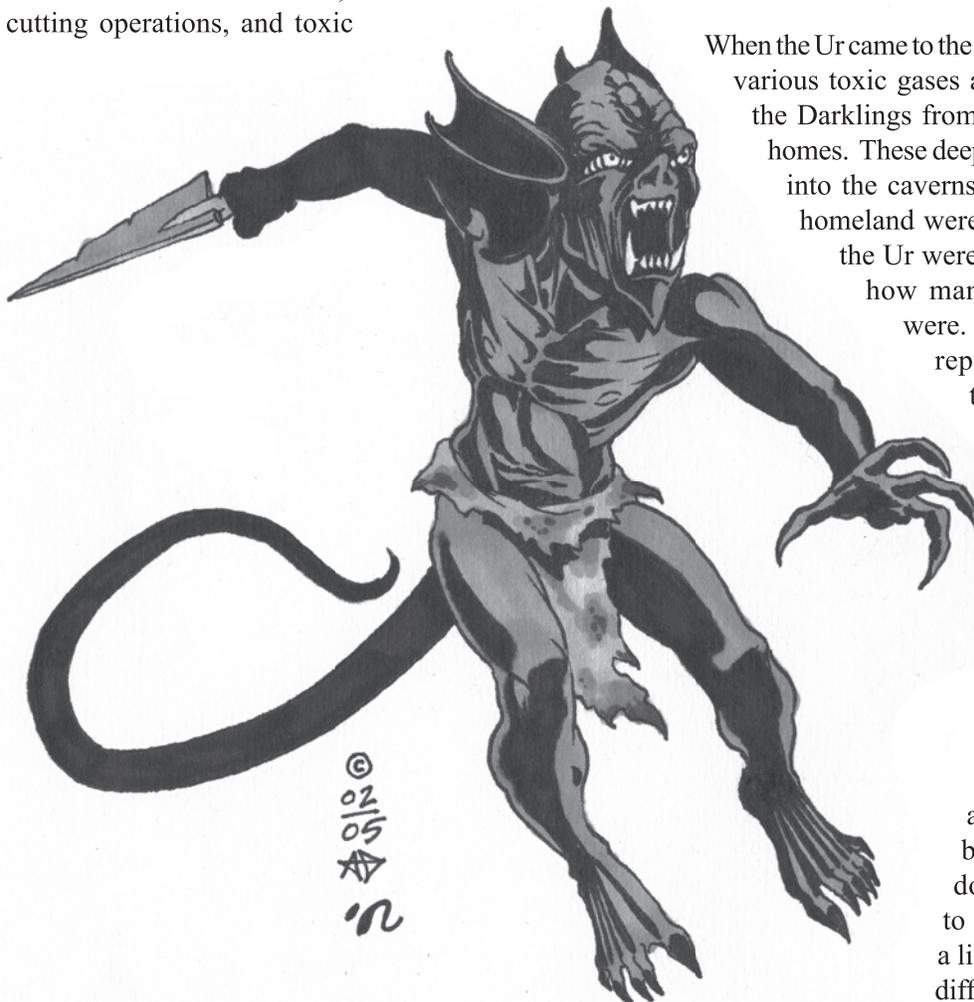
Most Darklings barely have enough to wear a simple rag loincloth, scraps of discarded metal as ornamentation, and if lucky perhaps a weapon or two. Darklings regard lying as an art form and continually practice the arts of deception such as theft, hoarding, knife-play, and the torturing and tormenting of smaller creatures. Nervous and twitchy, Darklings produce a near-constant stream of utterance, gibbering, cackling, or grumblings about one thing or another, typically the lack of food, cruelty of the Ur, scariness of the Stryx, ingratitude of the Gnomekin, and so on. The Ur, who keep the Darklings as slaves, typically use them as front-line fodder in their battles not caring how many of them die. They are also used as slave labor in various mines, timber-cutting operations, and toxic

waste handling throughout Urag. Despite their constant use in these fields, the Darklings remain only minimally helpful at such tasks. In fact, the Darklings are so incompetent at these tasks, and the Ur such brutal taskmasters, that one is forced to wonder if the Darklings tendencies to cunning and conniving are a survival mechanism or a cultural phenomenon. Darklings are, if anything else, extremely durable. They can endure deprivations like hunger and lack of sleep, insults and abuse, toil and hardship, but they never give up their struggle to survive.

## DARKLING HISTORY

These subterranean creatures have long been thought to be some mutated species of Ferran, or perhaps a mingling of Ferran and diabolic stock created by the Archaens for some unknown purpose.

When the Ur came to the Darklands they used various toxic gases and smoke to force the Darklings from their subterranean homes. These deep settlements carved into the caverns and rocks of their homeland were small enough that the Ur were never sure exactly how many Darklings there were. Based on Darkling reports of the size of these caverns, it is possible that there were once tens of thousands of them living beneath the Darklands. Darklings are still a prolific species, mating indiscriminately. Darklings females are known to give birth to perhaps a dozen litters of two to three young during a lifetime, typically by different fathers. These



## EXCERPT FROM THE HISTORIES OF HOTAD

*... I had managed to crawl and drag myself down through the tunnels until they finally opened up into a larger cavern where I was able to stand and stretch for the first time in what seemed an age. I was amazed by the sight which greeted my eyes when I cast a dim star-glow about my person. Here were the ancient homes of the Darklings. Tunnels and caverns and caves, sculpted and carved in all manner of fanciful design that, while not as intricate or sophisticated as work by others like the Gnomekin, was still a testament to what the Darkling people could have achieved had it not been for their enslavement under the Ur.*

*While I was gazing, an older Darkling crept out of the shadows to stand near me. When I finally noticed him, we exchanged greetings. It took some time to both explain and convince him that I was nothing more than a traveling scholar interested in the history of the Darklings. He told me much once we had established a common language amongst the two of us, I not being skilled at his Northron tongue, nor he in High Talislan or Phaedran. He told me much of the shamans of the Master of Lies and the history of the Darklings under the Ur. Then he told me another tale, a tale of the Darklings' Origins. According to his tale, the Darklings were originally creations of the Archaens and worked in a vast castle in the sky. Sham himself figured into this tale, though I was uncertain whether as the name of their Archaen creator, their god intervening, or as some early Darkling hero. The entire castle was created to cater to others whims and desires and made use of all manner of illusions and conjurations. Originally, he claimed, the Darklings were bred from various creatures from other worlds, perhaps even a mingling of demonic or diabolic stock. It was here the Darklings worked, hidden in the shadows and cloaked by many and various illusions and glamours. It was here that the Darklings learned to lie; not to be malicious, but to lie to please others, to make their illusions real and give those voices. They were consummate actors and actresses, delving into and becoming the very role assigned them to play.*

*With a flash, all of it was gone. The Great Disaster struck and the fabulous sky-city, their refuge from the time of their birth, was gone. Vanished like smoke on the wind, dissolved by the magics that sustained the illusions cloaking its streets and walls. The Darklings managed to survive; how he did not say. They fled from the various Sub-Men tribes until they came to the Darklands. For a time they were slaves of the Warzen, but then the Warzen were killed by the Ur. For a time they had peace again, until the Ur found them. Now they wait for the day when the Ur shall fall. One day, they shall ascend to the surface again, and eventually return to the heavens.*

*While all of this was a pretty enough tale, I am not sure how accurate it truly was. After all, the tale teller claimed that he was "but a lowly slave and not a shaman or leader or wiseman or anything." Given the Darklings' penchant for lying, I am not sure what the lie was and what was real.*

young are born sightless, their eyes taking a longer time to develop. By the time they are six years of age, their dormant optic nerves are developed enough for sight. Normally however their mothers cast them aside long before this, leaving them in the communal caverns to grope about for scraps of food and develop their other keener senses

in order to survive. Every year thousands upon thousands of Darklings die in battle, at the hands of their taskmasters and overseers, or while undertaking hazardous labor for the Ur. The death of a hundred Darklings means nothing to the Ur, each of whom may personally own a dozen to a score of Darkling slaves. Although occasionally

put to good use as spies and thieves, most Ur see them as simply another expendable resource to be used and tossed aside.

There are some Darklings who were never enslaved or captured. These small communities survive deep underground, led by their shamans. These subterranean villages often engage in stealing from one another, trading stolen and smuggled goods, and occasionally attempting to free their enslaved kin.

## DARKLING RELIGION

Darklings revere an obscure figure known as Sham, the Deceiver. Also known as the Master of Lies, many New Age Talislantan scholars believe that Sham may have been one of the Forgotten Gods. As part of the worship of Sham, all Darklings are member of a secret organization known as the Shadow Cult. Typical Darklings priests are really little more than thieves, charlatans, and assassins. In fact, most Priests of Sham, also known as Shamans, will rarely admit to being one. Outsiders often wonder if a priest of a god of lies is even allowed to tell the truth. Given such facts, it is rare indeed to actually find a Darkling Sham-an at all; most of those who will admit to being so know little more of the faith than those seeking to find a priest. Darklings also have a high disregard for art in nearly all its forms. Music, too, is seen as an assault upon the senses. This apathy towards art and tendency towards lying seem to be intertwined somehow in the worship of Sham, but exactly how has not been determined.

## URAG LOCATIONS

The three primary Ur settlements of Krag, Grod, and Vodruk are all constructed of felled trees, broken stone, and packed soil. Iron spikes often pierce outwards from the outer walls which are surrounded by a deep ditch or “moat” that is both a deterrent to attacks and a receptacle for all manner of waste from within the walls. A typical Ur pastime is to use captured prisoners or slaves for “trolling,” an amusement consisting of lowering the bound victim headfirst into the ditch to see what manner of creature can be caught from the

foul and murky waters. As all manner of vermin, including urthrax, scavenger slimes, and alatus can be normally be found eking out an existence in the fetid mires typically little is left of the victim by the end of the game but a few ragged bones that are cut loose and left to sink beneath the surface.

## KRAG

Situated at the bottom of an outcropping of mountains, Krag utilizes a great deal of stone in its construction. Additionally, rocks hollowed out and filled with mud dredged from the Poisoned Wastes are often used by Krag’s warlords as catapult shot, much to the dismay of their foes. The Ur Kings of Krag have sent war bands east for generations in attempts to plunder the Ruins of Osmar to mixed success. Resultantly, although the war lords here do typically wield better weapons than their counterparts, raids by Beastmen from the Plains of Golarin are quite common.

### MOBILE BORDER FORTIFICATIONS

*In addition to the three fortress-cities of the Ur, there are numerous small fortifications that dot the land. Typically consisting of whatever local materials are available, such as dying trees, animal carcasses, and wrecked siege engines, these encampments are used as staging areas by the roaming war bands of Ur. As territory changes hands so frequently and the damage inflicted by siege engines can be so unpredictable, the locations of these shelters is in constant flux. A war band must be careful not to approach one too rapidly as they can change hands overnight or while a war party is on patrol.*

## GROD

Perhaps named for a former Ur hero, or traitor to hear the tale in other citadels, Grod has the enviable position of being located near a portion of the Dead River Chasm where the walls are a mere ten to twenty feet in height. Because of this, war bands from Grod frequently raid merchant caravans up and down the Dead River as far south



as Nankar. This typically yields the Ur King of Grod a greater selection of goods with which to bribe and reward his followers, but the distances the war bands must travel often leaves the city woefully undermanned.

## VODRUK

Vodruk, the westernmost of the Ur fortresses, lies just south of the Toxic Hills. War bands from the city must constantly drive off abominations that wander down from the north, but the occasional strange substance brought back by Darkling slaves are used to great effect by Vodruk's war lords and shamans.

## ACID PLAINS

The stretch of pock-marked plains covered with the foul-smelling fumes from the various pools of bubbling lye, acid and smelted slag known as the Acid Plains have been a dumping ground for the Ur since its grasses and soil were spoiled centuries ago. The resulting noxious clouds above the plains often spread across all of Urag, staining the sky various shades of ochre and orange. Uninhabited by any but the hardiest of creatures, Darkling labor crews are frequently sent here to either dump or retrieve various caustic substances for use by the Ur.

## DARKLANDS

A mountainous region of southern Urag, the Darklands are now a hostile wilderland, stripped of resources, suffering from erosion by wind and rain, barren, and unable to support much more than lichens and briars. These lands were once the province of the Darklings long before the Ur and the Stryx came to Urag, but for how long, no one knows. Beneath the Darklands in numerous mine shafts, Darkling slaves are forced to perform unceasing labor to extract more and more black iron, though little now exists here. A miniscule number of Darklings who were not captured and enslaved by the Ur have long hidden deep within the caves and tunnels that spiral and gyre through the rock of this land, avoiding both the native Land Kra and the rare Ur overseer who ventures in to whip the miners to swifter labor.

## DARKLING BURROWS

*Beneath the Darklands are numerous caverns and caves once used by the Darklings as their homes. These days most of them have been filled with alchemical waste and other toxic products. However, there are a few small warrens and burrows used by some scattered bands of free Darklings who manage to blend into Ur society through the use of lies and the blessings of Sham. Since the Darklings all pretty much look alike to the Ur, such ruses are easy to get away with.*

## OBSIDIAN MOUNTAINS

The black spires and peaks of the Obsidian Mountains gleam and shine like the stone for which they are named. Stretching across Urag's southern border and preventing expansion to the south and the Seven Kingdoms, these mountains are the homes of such predators as yaksha and chasm vipers. Furthermore, caves riddle the mountains from top to bottom; the uppermost caves and cliffs are inhabited by Stryx, while those closer to the surface are used by the Darklings as homes. Frequently, Satada emerge from tunnels deep beneath the ground to seize captives for unknown purposes. Due to the breadth of Satada attacks it is thought that the tunnels beneath the Obsidian Mountains may connect to similar tunnels in both Durne and the Wilderlands.

## STRYX NESTING GROUNDS

*High above the Poisoned Wastes and across central Urag, the Stryx make their homes in the caves and caverns in the peaks of the Obsidian Mountains. Since their eyesight is usually very poor during the bright daylight hours, the Stryx normally come out to hunt and scavenge at night, having vision particularly suited for lightless environments. During the day, they nest far back in the caves of the mountains, cursing the sunlight and muttering prayers to Taryx.*

## POISONED WASTES

An area of winding ravines and canyons north of the Darklands, this area was once considered a place of enjoyment by the Darklings. After the coming of the Ur, however, the various noxious chemicals used to drive the Darklings from their homes eventually drained to these lands. Now, thick trails of acidic sludge line the bottom of the canyons and turn the very air into a danger for living creatures. Although some creatures do manage to eke out a living along the cliff walls or on the tops of the canyons, the entire area is now inimical to living creatures.

### QUINTOXIN

*Reportedly a strange and shimmering liquid the color of tarnished silver, the exact properties of quintoxin are unknown. The descriptions of the effects of its release however are similar in some respects to quintessence – however, while quintessence can transmute things in very specific ways, quintoxin seems to react in a very quixotic manner. Furthermore, instead of reacting with a limited amount of material, it seems that the original quintoxin spill continued to react, spreading with both the wind and the rivers of the Toxic Hills to the surrounding areas. Rivers full of fiery wind instead of water, storm clouds seemingly made of solid rock that rain icy pebbles of hail, and entire hills converted into a viscous thick sludge are non uncommon results of this vile substance. Living creatures coming into contact with leftover quintoxin often mutate into strange and otherworldly forms as evidenced by the presence of abominations in the area of quintoxin exposure.*

## SMOKE RIVER

Flowing down from tributaries in the Toxic Hills, the various pollutants and strange substances

generated by quintoxin and Ur warfare have so contaminated this body of water that it continually seems to burn and give off thick clouds of steam or smoke. These billowing, greenish-black vapors pass over much of Urag and react with the clouds of the Acid Plains to produce harsh aberrant rainstorms. The only thing found living in the Smoke River any longer are aquatic abominations.

## SKAG LAKE

The terminus of the Smoke River is a once pristine lagoon now corrupted into a giant, steaming cesspool of filth and alchemical wastes. Skag Lake, inhabited by urthrax and mutated Lake Kra, produces a rank stench that not only affects Urag, but occasionally blows over into neighboring Arim as well.

## TOXIC HILLS

A hilly region in the north of Urag that was used not only as a battleground, but also as a testing site for various alchemical concoctions of the Ur shamans. During the testing of a substance, which has since become known as quintoxin, an accidental spill led to a sudden and perhaps irrevocable contamination of nearly the entire area. The Ur quickly fled the area, leaving behind several huge cauldrons of the disastrous mixture that have never been recovered despite the efforts of teams of Darkling slaves sent in by the Ur. Although typically considered uninhabitable as well as inhospitable, strange abominations often emerge from the hills to the dismay of any nearby.

## YRMANIA

The land of Yrmania is a nearly pristine sampling of early Talislanta. Bordered on practically all of its sides by mountains and hills, the land has remained largely untouched throughout the ages. Across this rough country one can find a range of natural features: coniferous woodlands, rock-strewn hills, forlorn mountain peaks, dreary tundra plains, withering cliffs, narrow gorges, and hidden valleys. To the north and west of this wilderness

lies the Bay of Yrmania and the Midnight Sea, while to the east the flat wasteland of the Lost Sea bars easy access to outsiders. Just as the land here remains an example of bygone days, so too do the peoples that inhabit this land; the Yrmanian Wildmen and the Jaka.

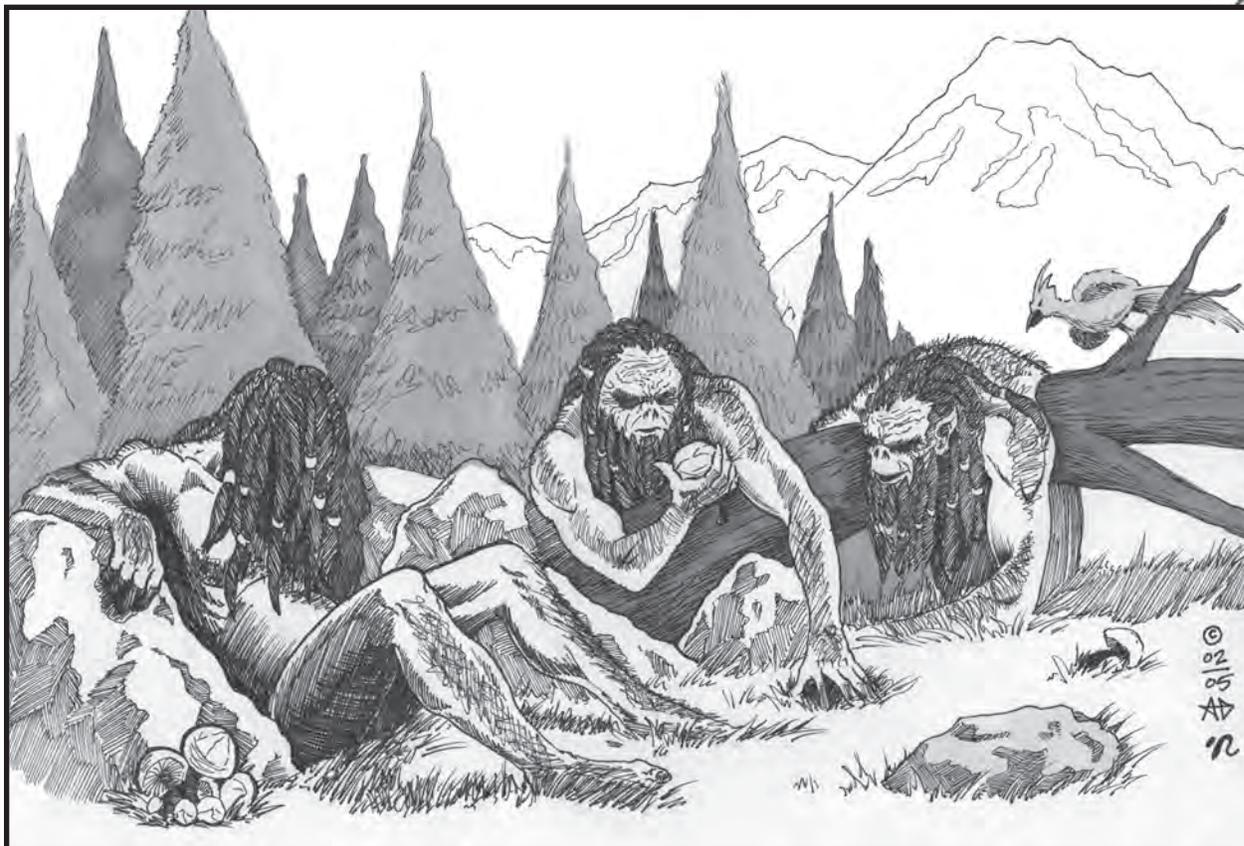
## YRMANIANS

The Yrmanian wildmen are a group of the Wild Folk who were gradually pushed farther and farther west until they came to the Badlands of Yrmania. In these rugged hills and valleys, these wildmen settled into small tribal bands where they continue to live today as they have for centuries.

The Yrmanians are a primitive people, surviving mostly off of edible plants that they can gather and the occasional piece of wild game that they are able to trap or pursue. They present a bestial appearance having sharp fangs, a shaggy mane typically braided and decorated, lightly furred bodies, and a strong odor though this last is possibly due to the noted lack of hygiene exhibited. No settlements

or constructions have ever been found that can be easily attributable to the wildmen, so it assumed that each tribal band merely wanders from place to place over the territory that they claim. Each tribe varies greatly; bands as small as a single family of six have been seen as well as huge gatherings of over a hundred, but twenty to thirty members is the typical average. Members move between tribes seemingly at random. What social cohesion exists in a tribe is largely due to the young children and infants present. While parentage does not seemingly play issue, a tribe always has two adults for every adolescent. These “parents” do little to visibly care for the young with the exception of leading them out to forage for edible plants or to set and check the various crude traps a tribe may have set near its current resting place. In fact, it is the older adolescents between nine and fifteen years of age that seem to be the guiding intellectual force amongst a group of tribes people.

Yrmanian tribesmen and women are notably productive when it comes to childbirth. Wildwomen often give birth to one or more children per year.



## SKULLCAP

*The toxic mushroom known as skullcap also plays some part in the migratory habits of the Yrmanian wildmen. Typically a tribe stays in an area where skullcap is abundant. Although the decisions may not be conscious, the size of the tribe alters in correspondence to the amount of skullcap. Less skullcap means that tribe members wander off to join new tribes, an abundance of skullcap indicates the rapid arrival of a large and growing tribe. In addition to skullcap and its pollen being liberally present amongst the edible plants the Yrmanians eat, traces of it can be found in the occasional animal that they find in their wanderings. On top of this, the Yrmanians ritually gather the notable fungus, dry it, grind it into powder, and then ingest or inhale it daily. Starting with small doses consumed in this fashion after reaching adulthood, the Yrmanians build up a resistance to the toxic effects of the plant. The hallucinogenic properties become stronger however, the effects lingering in the adult's system often for days or weeks at a time. After many years of habitual use, the Yrmanians probably do not even need the constant infusion of the drug any longer as the apparent madness brought on by the plant has taken a solid hold on them.*

*Skullcap itself displays a rather notable appearance. Its bone white cap and thick black stem are striking and eye-catching. The caps normally develop a unique coloration resembling a humanoid skull with faint black spots representing the eye-sockets when the mushroom is fully grown. Also by this point, the cap has grown too heavy for the stem to hold upright. The bending of the stem and the skull-like appearance of the cap results in a small replica of a black cloaked skeletal figure. The sight of an entire hillside full of ripe skullcap can be shocking for those who have never witnessed it.*

*Besides being found where all manner of other mushrooms might be located, skullcap also has the particularly disturbing habit of growing on or in living creatures who have inadvertently consumed it, drawing nutrients from them while slowly poisoning them. Upon the creature's death, numerous spores and stems burst forth from the corpse. Naturalists who spot a bundle of flesh covered in tiny robed skeletons know to keep well away. Why this phenomenon does not effect the Yrmanians is unknown.*

Children are carried or strapped to one of the parents for up to a year; once the child can walk on its own it is let free to roam with the rest of the tribe. Furthermore, the Yrmanians are apparently able to mate with nearly any other humanoid regardless of race or type. As a result, there are occasionally Yrmanian children to be found who have a slightly different coloration or build than their fellows. However, apparently the bestial nature of the wildmen is quite strong as all of their children still exhibit the bestial appearance of the Yrmanians.

Apart from being one of the tribes of Wild Folk that range across the Talislantan continent, the Yrmanians are called wildmen for another reason:

their behavior. Seemingly insane and erratic, the adult population of the Yrmanians often exhibit mindless behavior. During the median mating season, the males are not only in a near constant state of arousal, but coupled with being easily confused, often display rather rude behavior. While seeing a Wildman attempt to have his way with a muskrant or even a shrubbery can often be humorous for those observing from a distance, it is to be noted that observing from too close can often lead to intimate encounters with a Wildman that leave little to laugh about. In battle it is not uncommon for wildmen to turn on one another, attack nearby inanimate objects, perform incredible yet suicidal stunts, or simply continue to attack even after being savaged by dozens upon



dozens of wounds. If threatened, an entire tribe will take up arms in its defense. An entire tribe of opponents who act as the Yrmanians do is not only dangerous, but is also extremely frightening. Sometimes two tribes will encounter one another and a large scale battle will occur, or they will simply commingle and then separate into new tribal arrangements. Scholars and naturalists attribute some of this behavior to the abundance of a natural toxin present in the area that the Yrmanians call home. Skullcap, a bone-white parasitic mushroom, is indigenous to Yrmania and known to be both a hallucinogen as well as being very poisonous. The long accepted theory is that the abundance of skullcap manages to induce a hallucinogenic state in the adult wildmen who have built up an incredible amount of skullcap pollen in their system after having lived in the Badlands for so long. This theory does not readily explain why the Yrmanians are not all dead due to skullcap exposure, but otherwise holds strong merit.

Besides fighting one another, the wildmen have also been known to rampage into the territories of the Jaka who easily repel them. While the Yrmanians will not cross the Sardonyx Mountains that form the southern border of this land, the Ur have on multiple occasions sent war bands north. The ability of the Yrmanians to fend off the invaders from Urag seems dubious, but nevertheless no war band from Urag has ever managed to maintain more than a temporary foothold in these lands. Perhaps it is because of the lack of rational tactics or perhaps the fearful nature of the Yrmanian attacks, but the wildmen are capable of preserving their southern borders. To the north however, the wildmen face a foe of a different sort. The Ice Giants of Narandu do manage to wander down from the Trackless Wastes and the Western Glaciers. Against the frigid cold and land altering powers of the Giants the Yrmanians have little in the way of defense since they exhibit little to no magical aptitude.

Yrmanians make all of their own weapons and tools from materials that they can find and scavenge, typically wood, bone, vine, and stone. While the effectiveness of these tools and weapons is questionable, the Yrmanians know little better nor have access to much else. Yrmanians also

exhibit some skill at abstract art; numerous paintings and carvings are found in caves and on trees throughout the regions frequented by the wildmen. Additionally, they are known to dye their shaggy, braided hair or paint strange and disturbing designs on their bodies with natural dyes and pigments.

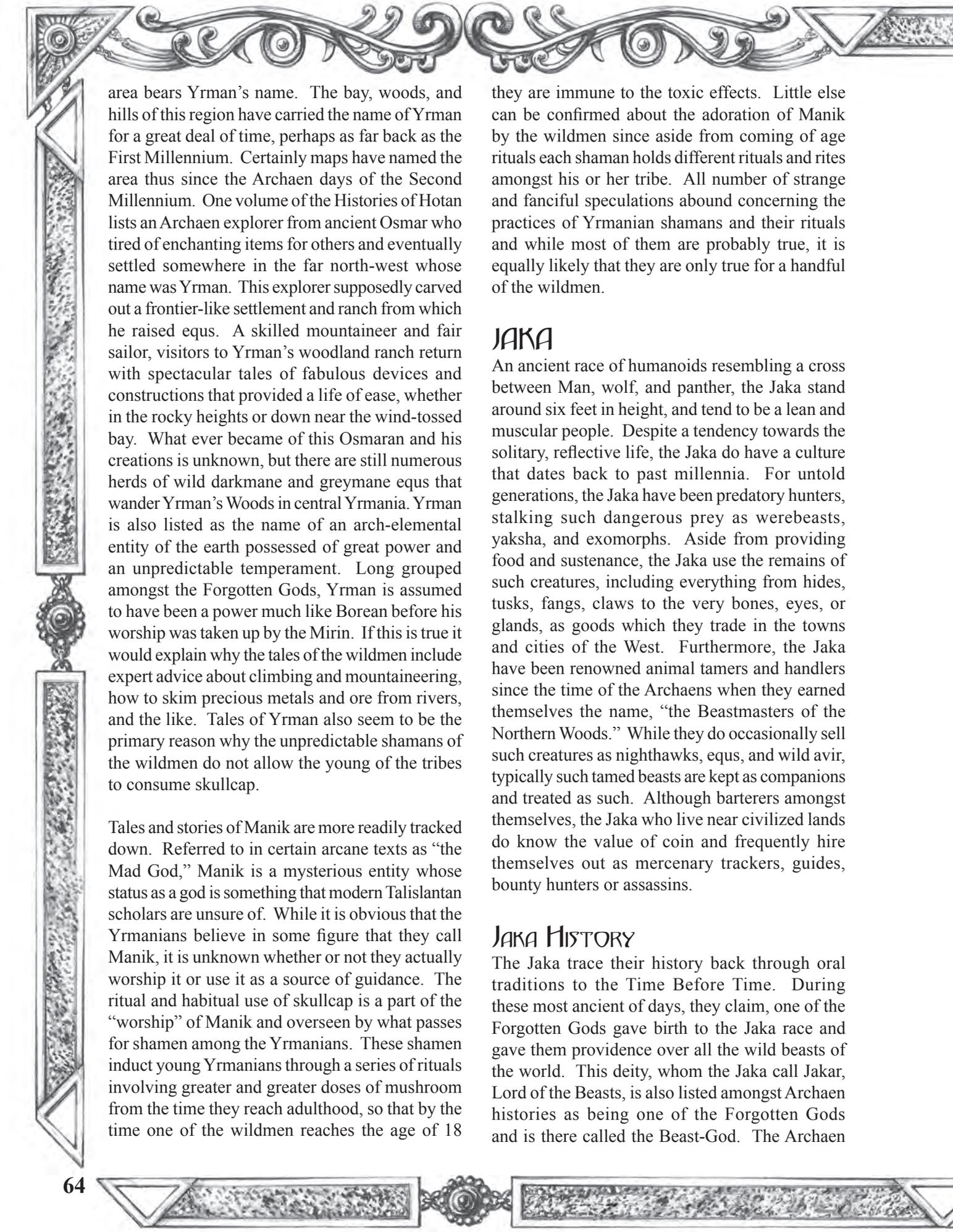
## THE HISTORY OF THE WILDMEN

The history of the Yrmanians is largely one of conjecture based on current observations of their culture and references from earlier sources. The wildmen share physical characteristics with other sub-men such as the Drukh of Arim and the Danelek of the Wilderlands. Given that the Yrmanians did not become as warlike as other tribes, such as the Drukh or the Za, it can be surmised that by and large they were able to remain unscathed by the Sub-Men Wars of the first three Millenniums. The Histories of Hotan, records preserved from vanished Shalihan, and books from Osmar all detail the migration of the wildmen from Golarin north-westward to the area of the Northern Sea, and then west after the Great Disaster. Since the only territory inhabited by the wildmen in which skullcap is prevalent has been Yrmania, it is likely that their addiction to hallucinogens did not start in earnest until the around the time of the Great Disaster. The only other evidence that is available to trace the history of the Yrmanians are their religious practices.

## ANCIENT GODS

There are two central deities common in the Yrmanian pantheon, Yrman and Manik; due to the effects of skullcap, individual wildmen may believe numerous gods or none but these two.

Tales about Yrman are rather vague given the disoriented nature of the tale-tellers, but most commonly they are of an admonishing tone with guidelines for the behavior of the wildmen. All of the tales of Yrman depict it as a being of huge aspect. Indeed, the Yrmanians believe the Sardonyx Mountains to be Yrman's teeth and do not on any circumstances venture into these stony peaks. No one is precisely sure why the wildmen have taken the name of Yrman or even why this



area bears Yrman's name. The bay, woods, and hills of this region have carried the name of Yrman for a great deal of time, perhaps as far back as the First Millennium. Certainly maps have named the area thus since the Archaen days of the Second Millennium. One volume of the Histories of Hotan lists an Archaen explorer from ancient Osmar who tired of enchanting items for others and eventually settled somewhere in the far north-west whose name was Yrman. This explorer supposedly carved out a frontier-like settlement and ranch from which he raised equus. A skilled mountaineer and fair sailor, visitors to Yrman's woodland ranch return with spectacular tales of fabulous devices and constructions that provided a life of ease, whether in the rocky heights or down near the wind-tossed bay. What ever became of this Osmaran and his creations is unknown, but there are still numerous herds of wild darkmane and greymane equus that wander Yrman's Woods in central Yrmania. Yrman is also listed as the name of an arch-elemental entity of the earth possessed of great power and an unpredictable temperament. Long grouped amongst the Forgotten Gods, Yrman is assumed to have been a power much like Borean before his worship was taken up by the Mirin. If this is true it would explain why the tales of the wildmen include expert advice about climbing and mountaineering, how to skim precious metals and ore from rivers, and the like. Tales of Yrman also seem to be the primary reason why the unpredictable shamans of the wildmen do not allow the young of the tribes to consume skullcap.

Tales and stories of Manik are more readily tracked down. Referred to in certain arcane texts as "the Mad God," Manik is a mysterious entity whose status as a god is something that modern Talislantan scholars are unsure of. While it is obvious that the Yrmanians believe in some figure that they call Manik, it is unknown whether or not they actually worship it or use it as a source of guidance. The ritual and habitual use of skullcap is a part of the "worship" of Manik and overseen by what passes for shamen among the Yrmanians. These shamen induct young Yrmanians through a series of rituals involving greater and greater doses of mushroom from the time they reach adulthood, so that by the time one of the wildmen reaches the age of 18

they are immune to the toxic effects. Little else can be confirmed about the adoration of Manik by the wildmen since aside from coming of age rituals each shaman holds different rituals and rites amongst his or her tribe. All number of strange and fanciful speculations abound concerning the practices of Yrmanian shamans and their rituals and while most of them are probably true, it is equally likely that they are only true for a handful of the wildmen.

## JAKA

An ancient race of humanoids resembling a cross between Man, wolf, and panther, the Jaka stand around six feet in height, and tend to be a lean and muscular people. Despite a tendency towards the solitary, reflective life, the Jaka do have a culture that dates back to past millennia. For untold generations, the Jaka have been predatory hunters, stalking such dangerous prey as werebeasts, yaksha, and exomorphs. Aside from providing food and sustenance, the Jaka use the remains of such creatures, including everything from hides, tusks, fangs, claws to the very bones, eyes, or glands, as goods which they trade in the towns and cities of the West. Furthermore, the Jaka have been renowned animal tamers and handlers since the time of the Archaens when they earned themselves the name, "the Beastmasters of the Northern Woods." While they do occasionally sell such creatures as nighthawks, equus, and wild avir, typically such tamed beasts are kept as companions and treated as such. Although barterers amongst themselves, the Jaka who live near civilized lands do know the value of coin and frequently hire themselves out as mercenary trackers, guides, bounty hunters or assassins.

## JAKA HISTORY

The Jaka trace their history back through oral traditions to the Time Before Time. During these most ancient of days, they claim, one of the Forgotten Gods gave birth to the Jaka race and gave them providence over all the wild beasts of the world. This deity, whom the Jaka call Jakar, Lord of the Beasts, is also listed amongst Archaen histories as being one of the Forgotten Gods and is there called the Beast-God. The Archaen

## SIXTH SENSE AND MAGIC

*The Jaka's reactions to the magic of the New Age are often theorized to be a hold over from the horrors unleashed during the Great Disaster. However, both the Jaka and certain obscure histories claim that their so called "sixth sense" predates the Great Disaster and its ruinous effects. In the Jaka's case, these senses have been with them since their birth eons ago, a gift of one of their creators. Archaen texts do not say where or how the ability manifested, merely that the Jaka had this ability and that it was put to great use during the various Sub-Men wars, although what side the Jaka were on differs from text to text.*

*Another one of these histories, however, makes the claim that the Jaka were the creation of a certain disreputable wizard who desired more interaction from his pets due to the remote location of his abode. As a result of the wizard's less successful attempts at sorcerous creation as well as certain amorous scandals the creations that survived and fled his home developed such senses as a protective adaptation.*

*Whatever its origin, the senses of the Jaka can detect the metaphysical energies that power magical effects in their vicinity. These senses are not always accurate predictors of danger, often the Jaka can be seen to tense and bristle at the simplest of incantations and conjurations regardless of the skill of the caster. In contrast, an existing magical effect, such as that of an enchanted item or a Cryptographic rune will often not disturb their insightful senses unless there is the possibility of immediate harm. Many of these facts are actually references to a work penned by a Torquaran biomancer who experimented heavily to determine the efficacious qualities of a number of beings and creatures of Talislanta. This unnamed black magician as well as the title of his work is lost to time, but it was so widely regarded as accurate during its day that his results were taken as fact by a great number of other Archaens before the fall of the Torquaran Necromancer-Kings.*

biomancer Thaumaste of Pompados recorded in his notes that the Jaka are the descendents of a race he names the Feroids whom he claims fathered the modern Jaka, Beastmen, and Mondre Khan. For their part, the Jaka consider themselves to be a free and civilized race and any comparison to the various Sub-Men tribes, such as those previously mentioned, is considered a grave insult to these noble creatures. Such insults are regrettably common however as the bestial appearance and nomadic life of the Jaka often leads civilized Talislantans to presume that they are barbaric by nature.

## JAKA RELIGION

Although the Jaka do not worship them in the sense that, for example, Aamanians worship Aa or the Gnomekin worship Terra, they do revere the Forgotten God Jakar and his mate Jalar, the progenitors of the Jaka race.

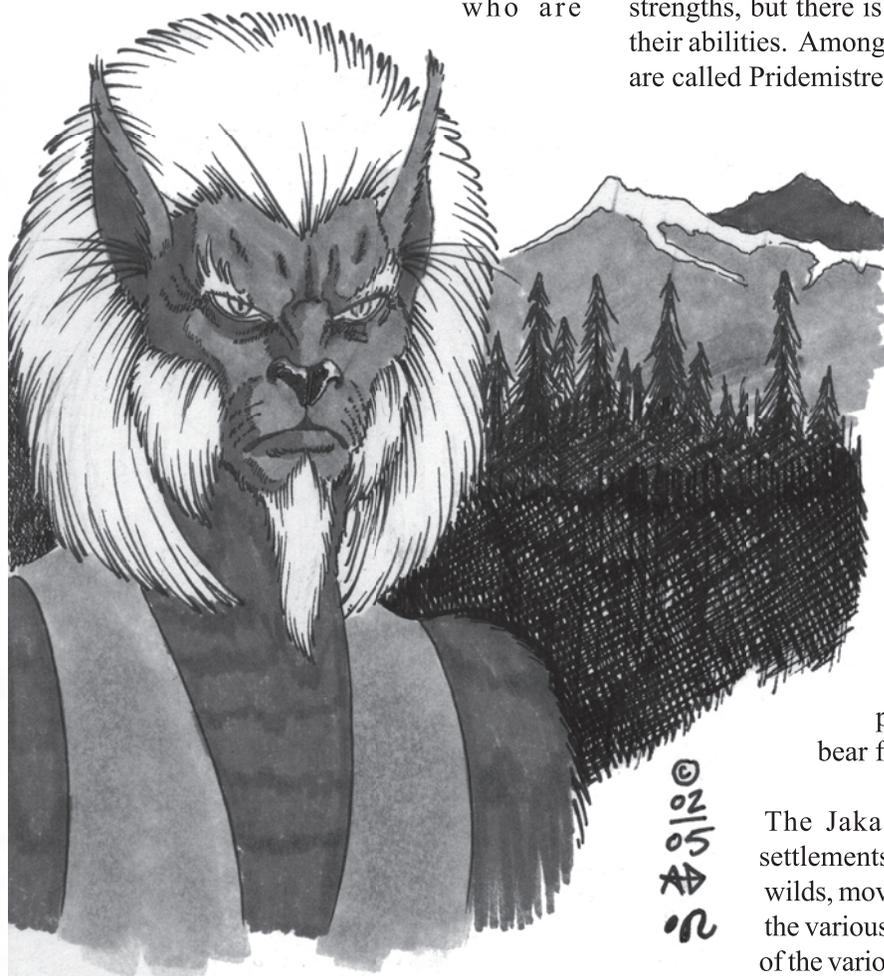
The Jaka credit Jakar with teaching their ancestors the secret lore and skills that Jaka Beastmasters still use in modern days. The Jaka also claim that there was once much more that their Forestlords and Pridemistresses knew, but that many of them were killed during the Great Disaster or slain in the chaos afterwards. With them went much of the lore and wisdom of the Jaka that many of these bestial nobles seek to reclaim. Such stories of loss would explain why historical texts make claims of the Beastmasters of the Northern Woods being able to call forth mythical beasts from ages past, wordlessly guiding entire herds of animals by thought alone, and even transforming their bodies into those of their charges no matter the difference in size. While some of these alleged powers can be mimicked with magic, the annals of history state that the Beastmasters' talents were innate and required no manipulation of outside forces. The modern Jaka do all they can to preserve the knowledge they have remaining in their lore and

the individuals who possess it.

From the goddess Jalar the Jaka claim that they received their uncanny intuitive senses. Although these finely tuned senses are capable of detecting even such mundane dangers as the nearby presence of an exomorph or an assassin sneaking up in the dark, they react most strongly when confronted with nearly any kind of magic. All Jaka wear simple pendants that not only serve to provide some protection for them from black magic, but also serve to dampen their incredibly sharp intuitive senses. Although such beliefs are scoffed at as being superstition by civilized magicians, there may be some basis for the Jaka's claims. Without these charms, the Jaka react violently in the presence of magic either flying into a vicious frenzy or a panicked flight.

Despite their revulsion towards magic, there are a small number of Jaka who are

practitioners of the magical arts. Although the primary purpose of their magical study and initiation seems to be the creation of the Jaka luck talismans and their services as midwives or healers, they have time to slowly study and master other abilities as well. For the most part their studies are done under the ever-watchful and cautious eye of an older witch or warlock. Although outsiders typically call them witches or warlocks, their study of magic seems to be a unique mingling of Invocation and Natural Magic. Among Jaka society these individuals are kept segregated. While they recognize that instruction must take place, and preferably with someone who has already mastered such skills as are needed, they are very uneasy about the idea of these individuals gathering together in groups larger than two or three. As a result, the position has become a largely hereditary one passed along family lines either on the male or female side. Each gender takes on certain roles and plays to specific strengths, but there is actually little difference in their abilities. Amongst their own kind these Jaka are called Pridemistresses and Forestlords.



## JAKA CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Although they tend to be loners, Jaka are also unfaltering and devoted companions whether to a chosen mate or a working partner. They expect the same treatment however and woe to those who would seek to cross a Jaka for the same lifelong devotion they share with those they respect is as passionate as the hatred they bear for those who betray them.

The Jaka do not erect permanent settlements, instead living free in the wilds, moving from place to place with the various migrations and wanderings of the various animals of the area. Most



Jaka dress in toughened leather clothing made from animal hides, with simple but functional arm and leg bracers when expecting a need for armor. Jaka do group together in bands numbering between seven and fifteen individuals. Each of these groups, called a Pride by the Jaka, exists primarily for child-rearing. A Pride may claim an area of territory that they will tenaciously hold and defend for a season or more. As most Jaka females only give birth to two litters of twins in a lifetime, most Prides are not permanent affairs. However, the position of Pridemistress is an honored one amongst Jaka females. Typically a hereditary position, Pridemistresses are responsible for keeping the lore and stories of the Jaka alive, not only through recitation to the young, but also through the enacting of various legendary events as well as setting up situations through which the young can learn these important lessons on their own. A similar position amongst Jaka males is that of the Forestlord except that the Forestlords keep the lore of the Beastmasters and provide training in certain physical arts and more dangerous games.

At other times, the Jaka will band together for the purposes of defense, whether it be for defending their homeland or for protection while carrying trade goods south to the cities of the Western Lands. Most often, such bands travel mounted on swift equus steeds and are armed with bows. Skilled in hit and run tactics, these bands will harry their attackers repeatedly firing arrows before dashing away.

In truth and despite their claims to the contrary, the Jaka are no longer the noble savages they were in ages past. They do acknowledge that the power over animals that their ancestors possessed seems to be waning, but little else. However, the Jaka are still bestial creatures: their speech is often punctuated with snarls, hisses, and growls; their lifestyle follows the migration patterns of their prey; even their very appearance is bestial. Some naturalists believe that the Jaka may be degenerating in a manner not too unlike that of the Ardua; however, in the Jaka's case the devolution is reverting them back to a more and more bestial state. As there are few Jaka born each year and their solitary lifestyles tend to the extreme, scholars

speculate that within a few centuries the Jaka may become as wild and undisciplined as the Beastmen they themselves despise.

## YRMANIA LOCATIONS

### THE BADLANDS

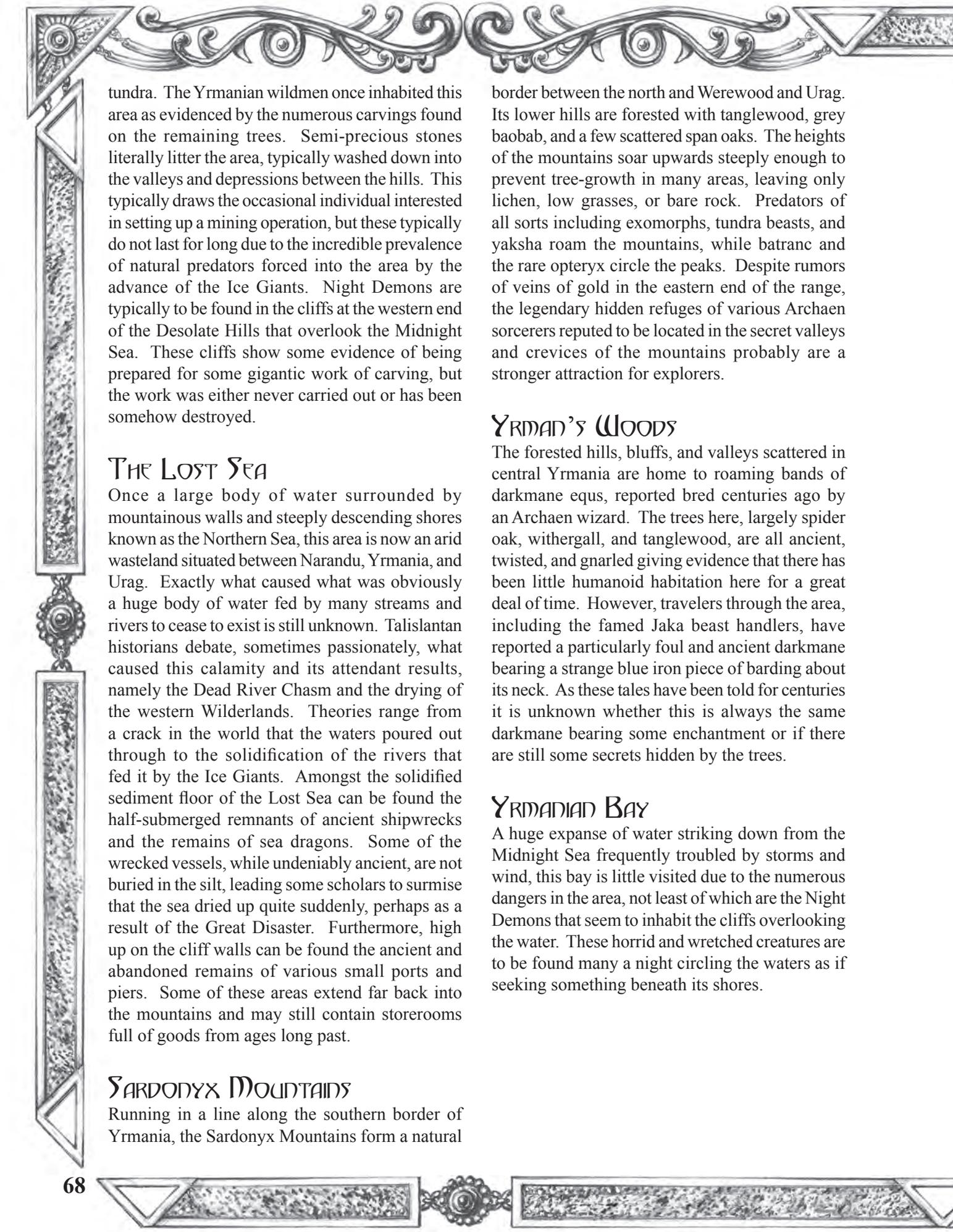
A hilly region of Yrmania sparsely covered in trees, the Yrmanian wildmen claim the Badlands as their home and may be found wandering across this area seemingly at random. Yaksha, tundra beasts, and muskront herds also roam the area feeding on the harsh native fauna such as tanglewood and skullcap or more often on one another and the wildmen. Another notable feature of the region is an untarnished path of black iron leading down from the Sardonyx Mountains that surround the Lost Sea and heading in a perfectly straight line to a bay on the coast. Apparently unaffected by the elements or time, no one yet knows where this road originates or leads. The eastern end heads up into the mountains near the Lost Sea, but quickly disappears into a tunnel complex that has yet to be mapped due to the prevalence of Satada, chasm vipers, and crag spiders. The western end of the road runs not only to the shore but down under the water. Where it may then lead is a mystery known only to the sea dragons and night demons that plague the area.

### THE BROWN HILLS

The home of the Jaka for untold centuries, the Brown Hills are so named for the sepia-toned forests that cover its terrain. Aside from the Jaka, this region is home to all manner of wild beasts, ranging from the benign silvermane equus to such ferocious predators as omnivrax and yaksha. Stories persist of the treasured creations of an Archaen enchanter who once lived near this area still existing somewhere in the secluded hills and valleys of the area, but the Jaka work to turn back the perennial treasure-seekers who venture this far north.

### THE DESOLATE HILLS

The northern end of Yrmania bordering Narandu, this area is slowly becoming a region of frozen



tundra. The Yrmanian wildmen once inhabited this area as evidenced by the numerous carvings found on the remaining trees. Semi-precious stones literally litter the area, typically washed down into the valleys and depressions between the hills. This typically draws the occasional individual interested in setting up a mining operation, but these typically do not last for long due to the incredible prevalence of natural predators forced into the area by the advance of the Ice Giants. Night Demons are typically to be found in the cliffs at the western end of the Desolate Hills that overlook the Midnight Sea. These cliffs show some evidence of being prepared for some gigantic work of carving, but the work was either never carried out or has been somehow destroyed.

### THE LOST SEA

Once a large body of water surrounded by mountainous walls and steeply descending shores known as the Northern Sea, this area is now an arid wasteland situated between Narandu, Yrmania, and Urag. Exactly what caused what was obviously a huge body of water fed by many streams and rivers to cease to exist is still unknown. Talislantan historians debate, sometimes passionately, what caused this calamity and its attendant results, namely the Dead River Chasm and the drying of the western Wilderlands. Theories range from a crack in the world that the waters poured out through to the solidification of the rivers that fed it by the Ice Giants. Amongst the solidified sediment floor of the Lost Sea can be found the half-submerged remnants of ancient shipwrecks and the remains of sea dragons. Some of the wrecked vessels, while undeniably ancient, are not buried in the silt, leading some scholars to surmise that the sea dried up quite suddenly, perhaps as a result of the Great Disaster. Furthermore, high up on the cliff walls can be found the ancient and abandoned remains of various small ports and piers. Some of these areas extend far back into the mountains and may still contain storerooms full of goods from ages long past.

### SARDONYX MOUNTAINS

Running in a line along the southern border of Yrmania, the Sardonyx Mountains form a natural

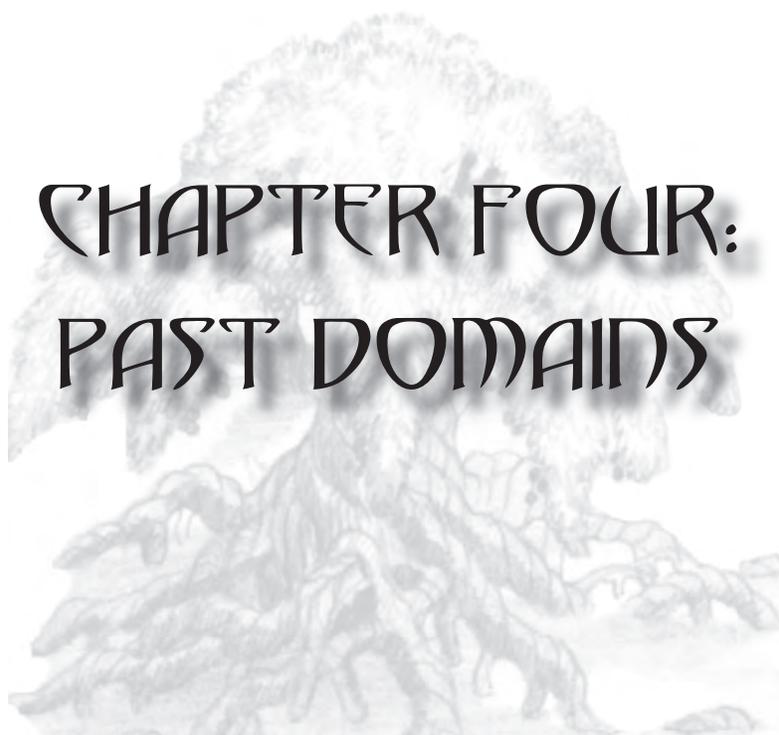
border between the north and Werewood and Urag. Its lower hills are forested with tanglewood, grey baobab, and a few scattered span oaks. The heights of the mountains soar upwards steeply enough to prevent tree-growth in many areas, leaving only lichen, low grasses, or bare rock. Predators of all sorts including exomorphs, tundra beasts, and yaksha roam the mountains, while batranc and the rare opteryx circle the peaks. Despite rumors of veins of gold in the eastern end of the range, the legendary hidden refuges of various Archaen sorcerers reputed to be located in the secret valleys and crevices of the mountains probably are a stronger attraction for explorers.

### YRMAN'S WOODS

The forested hills, bluffs, and valleys scattered in central Yrmania are home to roaming bands of darkmane equus, reported bred centuries ago by an Archaen wizard. The trees here, largely spider oak, withergall, and tanglewood, are all ancient, twisted, and gnarled giving evidence that there has been little humanoid habitation here for a great deal of time. However, travelers through the area, including the famed Jaka beast handlers, have reported a particularly foul and ancient darkmane bearing a strange blue iron piece of barding about its neck. As these tales have been told for centuries it is unknown whether this is always the same darkmane bearing some enchantment or if there are still some secrets hidden by the trees.

### YRMANIAN BAY

A huge expanse of water striking down from the Midnight Sea frequently troubled by storms and wind, this bay is little visited due to the numerous dangers in the area, not least of which are the Night Demons that seem to inhabit the cliffs overlooking the water. These horrid and wretched creatures are to be found many a night circling the waters as if seeking something beneath its shores.



# CHAPTER FOUR: PAST DOMAINS

Situated at the north-eastern end of the Wilderlands are two small realms ringed by mountains. Although they are vastly different in nature, the two regions share certain similarities of history that link them together. Known as the Sinking Land and the Shadow Realm, these lands were once ancient societies whose power and people were shattered by the Great Disaster. Even with the intervening centuries of the Time of Confusion and the New Age, these two lands have never recovered from the horrific events of the past. As such these lands are rich in history and lore, but their location and inhabitants are not always approachable.

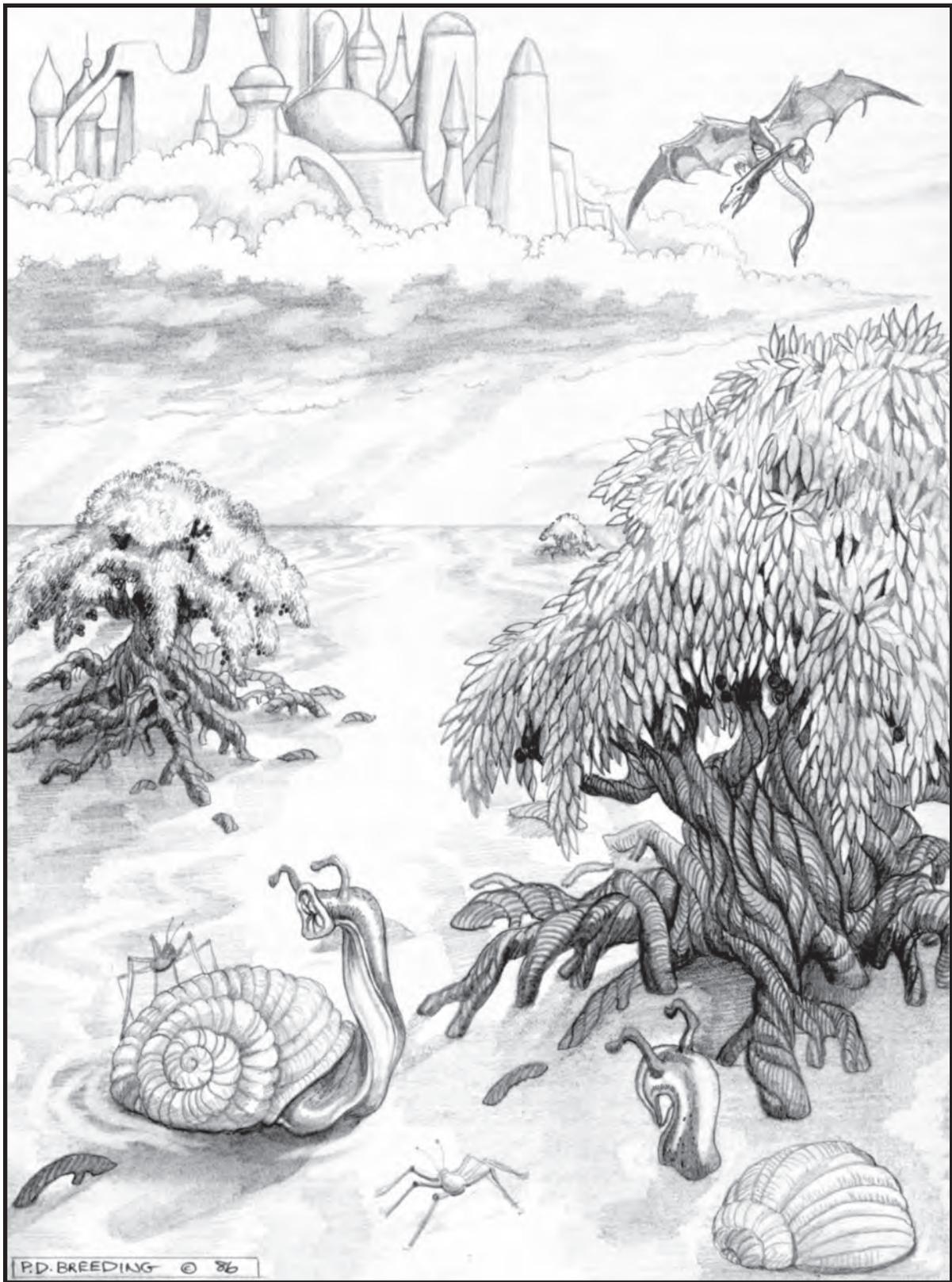
## THE SINKING LAND

Bordered on all sides by the Opal Mountains, the Volcanic Hills, the Mystic Mountains, and the Crystal Mountains, the Sinking Land is a vast bowl of seemingly unending mud, muck, and mire. The thick quagmire gives the Sinking Land its name because it will slowly suck under its surface anything that remains still for even a few moments time. Scholars still do not know how far down the morass goes; some theories claim that

it must run out through the bottom of the world, but that would not explain why the entire bowl of sludge does not drain away. Almost constantly shrouded by clouds, these lands rarely see the suns and so most of the remaining plants and animals have had to adapt to the unusual environment. By far the vast majority of these adaptations have been successfully achieved by a variety of plants, most notably the Barge tree and nigh-innumerable fungi and mosses. Amongst the strange fauna that have adapted are a few unusual insects and the extraordinary Snipes. In past centuries, the Sinking Land was the site of an Archaen kingdom known as Elande whose capital is still the object of treasure-seekers and historians.

## THE SNIPES

A peculiar species of giant mollusk, the Snipes are quite intelligent despite their odd appearance. With spiraling convoluted shells reaching diameters up to four feet, or more in rare cases, the Snipes have a large appendage that can extend an additional three feet from the shell's opening and serves as both an ocular and a dietary organ, and a solitary fin or foot by which they maneuver quite rapidly through



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the quagmire of the Sinking Land. Although they may be distantly related to the giant mollusks of the Dark Coast, their amazing intellect and conversational abilities place them as distinctly unique creatures. The calcified shell possessed by the Snipes is as firm and impervious as quality plate-mail and their ability to rapidly withdraw into it and down into the mud means that it is quite easy for them to escape harm.

While it is known that the Great Disaster had a powerful effect on the area now called the Sinking Land, little is known of the origins of Snipes. Some scholars, as well as some Snipes, postulate that the Snipes were always there and that the magical energies of the Great Disaster somehow heightened their capabilities.

#### THE MIRACULOUS SPRING

*Somewhere in the Sinking Lands there is a magical flow of water that many have lost their lives seeking. During the time of the Archaens, before the Sinking Land became the morass that it is now, the lands the Elandar claimed as their own included a minor sea whose aquatic life grew to astounding proportions. The Elandar divined that this was in part due to the source of the waters in the sea, but as there was no easy way to reach the spring or a guarantee of its properties, it was left alone.*

*In the Age of Confusion, this spring was allegedly found by a group of wandering survivors. Savoring its refreshing coolness after their days of hardship, they were soon pleasantly surprised by the discovery that all of their ailments and fatigue had passed from them. In fact, in the days that followed, they grew noticeably more fit and healthy. Unfortunately, these exiles were unable to hold onto this wondrous place of enchantment as catastrophes continued to plague the land. Now, only these fragmentary tales are known; the location of the spring is lost somewhere in the mire of the Sinking Land*

The Snipes are essentially vegetarians, subsisting on the various molds, lichens, and fungi of the Sinking Land. Astonishingly social creatures, the Snipes themselves have a very distinct culture with its own sophisticated rituals and traditions. Travelers to this area are typically watched by groups of three to a dozen Snipes, most often from a distance where various ideas and rumors are exchanged concerning the traveler, long before they are ever approached by the mollusks, if at all. It is believed that the Snipes actually dwell in underground caverns, caves, and tunnels beneath the Sinking Land in places where the mud does not reach. Some of the reasons that scholars assert such an idea are the notable lack of Snipe young as well as the Snipes' own mention of worship halls and meeting amphitheatres. Knowledge in all its forms is of paramount importance to the Snipes; their social and governmental structures are based around intelligence in a way not unlike the Sindarans of the Seven Kingdoms. In cases of an irresolvable disagreement between parties, the Great Sage, or leader of the Snipes, is consulted for his opinion in the matter. Beyond settling disputes and overseeing rumored gatherings of Snipes, it is uncertain what other duties the Great Sage might have, if any at all. A traveling group of Snipes is known as a school. While individuals do occasionally leave, it is rare for anyone to stay absent from a school for very long. The Snipes need social interaction the way other species need light and air.

The Snipes do not build or craft anything. However, they have rich a oral tradition through which they craft stories of epic lengths and elaborate construction. Such stories often weave back and forth from past to present, between symbolism and fact, around allegory and fable. Often characters and events are prefigured in others, foreshadowing and flashbacks abound, and the more ornate and elaborate a story can be made, the better. True masters of their craft strive to accomplish this with as few words as possible, selecting diction with multiple meanings and subtle differences in tone.

Incredibly curious, Snipe commerce is not based on coin but knowledge and the accumulation of it.

Snipes trade secrets, stories, rumors; all manner of wisdom and knowledge are passed along as barter. Knowledgeable travelers can make use of this by trading tales of distant lands inaccessible to the Snipes in exchange for the knowledge of how to traverse the Sinking Land. Since the Sinking Land has long been considered to be impassable, and indeed its numerous sinkholes, mires, and muddy terrain proving inhospitable to carts, wagons, pack animals and the like, the knowledge of how to cross even the smallest portion of the Sinking Land is of great worth to outsiders, but of little use to the mud-swimming Snipes. Furthermore, since Snipes so love stories and tales, a traveler who can regale a group of Snipes with fanciful tales can possibly learn at least a little; however, since Snipe stories are so complex and multi-layered it is considerably difficult to impress them in this manner. The races of Men are often found humorous as well as informative. To the Snipes, they seem naked since they do not have a shell. Snipes also can be reluctant to share too much information with others outside their school; outside of their own people they do not share their names with Men.

#### SECRETS BEST LEFT BURIED

*The entirety of the Sinking Land was once the dwelling place of an entire Archaen empire. Based on this fact, many scholars believe that the mud of the swamps might obscure ancient Archaen treasures. With such riches in mind, many expeditions have been sent to the Sinking Land to consult the Snipes about what might be hidden beneath their home.*

*On this subject, however, the Snipes are curiously quiet. The few treasure-hunters who have made the journey and returned claim that the Snipes they questioned either rapidly retreated and hid beneath the muck or instead stayed and told multiple long stories of the Archaens and their mistakes. Whether this means there is something hidden beneath the Sinking Land or not remains a mystery.*

#### LOST ELANDE

Somewhere in the clouds and mist above the Sinking Land is the lost Archaen sky-city of Elande. The center of its own kingdom, Elande was a modest sky-city built for the foremost scholars and magicians of the Third Millennium. It soared above green verdant fields, majestic mountains, and an exquisite crescent sea. Called the City of the Four Winds, Elande gathered information from all over Talislanta. These scholars, called the One Hundred, were in a sense historians. Besides improving their magical lore and power, the One Hundred sought to catalog and identify all manner of life be it flora or fauna. This and other knowledge was stored in various magical means: Archaen crystal orbs, magical tablets, alchemically-treated tomes and scrolls, and even actual specimens imprisoned in magic fields of stasis. The knowledge of these magicians was so great and vast, that legend records they never even touched the ground. Even their buildings and cities floated above the surface. While this may refer to the Elandar's fleet of windships or simply be tales told by the Wild Folk, it is known that the few surviving histories of the time all spoke very highly of the wonders of Elande.

Many scholars name the Fourth Millennium as the Age of Decline, and Elande itself was not immune. Being descended from the very elite and continuing work that was largely seen as a noble duty, the Elandar began to think of themselves as superior to all others, even their fellow Archaens. When the Great Disaster struck, the City of the Four Winds began a slow, but definite descent. The Elandar fled their noble city on a vast fleet of windships, determined to avoid the calamities that were striking all others. While it is not known how many, if any, survived, the Phantasians of Cabal Magicus claim to be the descendants of the refugees from the Elandar. The Phantasians claim that a great deal was lost in the flight after the Great Disaster which would suggest that not all of the Elandar fleet was successful. If this is true, there may be myriad treasures lurking beneath the sludge of the Sinking Land.

## ARCHIMANDIUS STATUE

*The Archaen sorcerer Archimandius was a citizen of Elande before its demise. In order to gain more knowledge, he left the sky-cities of his kin and returned to the surface of Talislanta. Apparently his knowledge of the native creatures enabled him to survive quite well and eventually he even made peace with some of the tribes of Wild Folk who then dwelt in the area. After the Great Disaster, Archimandius became a hero to both the Landborne and groups of Archaen Neomorphs whose masters and mistresses had abandoned them. According to legends he organized these Wild Folk and Neomorphs and led them to safety. Again, legends state that the safety he led them to was in the vicinity of the Sinking Land and as little but the Snipes dwell there now, it is unknown where the great Archimandius, not to mention his wards, went.*

*Nevertheless, as the Age of Confusion wore on, the tales spread, not only amongst the Archaen survivors but amongst the Sub-Men as well. In fact, many tales of Archimandius and his deeds are still told by the Sarista Gypsies of the Western Lands. Someone, it is not known who, constructed what may have been a tremendous statue commemorating Archimandius and his accomplishments. However, because of the changes to the Sinking Land since that time, the great statue is largely unrecognizable, being tumbled, half-sunk, and covered with lichens. The statue does make a useful landmark however as the remnants of its legs mark the boundaries of the sinking mud.*

Elande itself did not sink beneath the soil however. At some point after the Elandar's departure it must have resumed its normal position. Sightings of the flying city high above the Sinking Land are a constant draw for seekers of wisdom, knowledge,

and treasure. No less a personage than the last Sorcerer King of ancient Phaedra, Kabros claimed to have visited the City of the Four Winds, of which he said, "The City of the Four Winds must be believed in order to be seen, and seen in order to be believed." While this statement is quite ambiguous, it would seem to confirm that Elande still flies today.

The reasons why Elande remains a mystery are the numerous storms and powerful winds that abound in the area. The frigid winds of L'Haan and the furnace blasts from the Volcanic Hills make any sort of flight towards the flying city dangerous. The presence of numerous wind and storm demons add to the peril and serve to dissuade most windship captains from gambling their craft on such a journey.

## OTHER LOCATIONS

### THE DIM-LIT FEN

A particularly chill area of swampland bordering the Shadow Realm is under a perpetual low hanging cloud. Frequent rain and little light from the suns mean that fungi abound here. The Snipes occasionally come to this cold western end of their territories in order to dine upon some varieties of mushroom that are not to be found elsewhere in the Sinking Land. However, even they find the atmosphere of the region dispiriting.

### THE ROAMING ISLAND

This strange formation floats and wanders about the eastern side of the Sinking Land. Appearing as a sort of towering sculpted pillar or perhaps an ornate wizard's tower, those who have been fortunate enough to get close to it claim that it is something far stranger. They insist that it is a small collection of Barge Trees bound together by a Spider Oak whose trunk has been carved into leering faces and whose upper-most branches hold ample room for travelers to sleep and rest. Assuming these tales are true, the question remains who could have formed such a creation. Green Ardua Botanomancers would pay a fortune for

samples and accurate depictions of this strange arrangement of flora; indeed, there are many of them who have been duped by scoundrels and mountebanks over the years with hasty sketches and trimmings from other trees.

## THE STONE ROAD

Passing from a collection of ruins in the western swamps near the Dim-lit Fen and extending out towards the east for several thousand meters are a collection of marble blocks. These slabs of stone float six inches to a foot above the surface of the swamp and form what amounts to a path. The gaps between the stones prohibits the use of conveyances such as carts or wagons, but three to five men can walk beside one another easily. The difficulty arises because of the nature of the Sinking Land however. While walking on the stones will keep a traveler from sinking into the muck, the accumulation of centuries of mold, slime, and other less readily identifiable substances cause the rocks to be quite slippery. Should someone wish to use the road, they will find themselves led a few miles out into the middle of the swamps where the stones mysteriously end.

## THE SHADOW REALM

The desolate, ruin-filled wastelands of the Shadow Realm were home to various kingdoms, empires, and nations in the distant past. The remains of these powers lie throughout the region in the form of crumbling ruins, crushed statues, and strange obelisks whose engravings were worn away long ago. The landscape here has been torn and devastated, apparently by wars, the Great Disaster, and time.

Now few plants grow here aside from tanglewood, thornwood, deadwood and a few other unrecognizable species. Amongst the shattered ruins very few natural creatures move, most long since having fled the other, unnatural predators which now roam the hills and moors. Among such creatures are Bat Mantas, Fiends, Shadowmane eqs, Shadowights, Night Demons, and various

## THE BURIED LAKE

*In ages past the two lands now called the Shadow Realm and the Sinking Land were connected in more ways than politics and trade. Before the spires of the Hoarfrost Mountains sliced the two realms apart during the Great Disaster, a wide crystalline lake formed a natural border between the two kingdoms. Now far beneath the mountains' peaks the waters run still. Gigantic subterranean lakes, caverns, and canals now sit beneath the massive weight of the mountains above. In the Shadow Realm there is one small stream that trickles from a mountain cave to mark the existence of this remarkable underground realm. The few explorers to have found these wondrous caverns claim that there are the signs of past civilizations submerged beneath the clear waters. Reportedly, what appeared to the travelers to be a sailing craft of some kind lay shipwrecked on one of the underground shores, but as the beach rapidly dropped away into watery, inky blackness they did not dare to disturb its precarious balance.*

spiritforms of creatures who died while in these lands, Men and animals both.

Rising like a grim monolith from the ruins and hills, however, is a single edifice seemingly comprised solely of thick black iron. Since the majority of the ruins in the Shadow Realm are unidentifiable, it is unknown whether this structure pre-dates its current inhabitants or if they themselves constructed it with unknown magics.

## THE MALUM AND THE IRON CITADEL

The inhabitants of the Iron Citadel are a cabal of Shadow Wizards of great power. These creatures, spectral shades of dead magicians, have been able to leave the Underworld. While it is certain that they are still answerable to Death, they seem to dwell in Talislanta for reasons of their own. The

members of this cabal call themselves the Malum, but they are essentially the spiritforms of those long since dead. The origins of this cabal are unknown. Perhaps they are unknowable if the group was assembled while in the Underworld or at the command of one of the dread entities of that place. This has not stopped scholars and magicians from trading stories and speculations over glasses of aquavit. The two most popular stories have historically been that the Malum are those Elandar who did not make it out of their city and continue their work at cataloging the world, or that perhaps the Malum work under the command of one ancient sage who has his own reasons for watching the continent of Talislanta.

The Malum, like other creatures of the Underworld, resemble humanoid shadows with burning white eyes. They have a strong aversion to light of most kinds and are only comfortable in completely lightless or deeply shadowed environments. In fact, the great bulk of the Iron Citadel bears no windows in its scoured metallic façade. Unlike Shadowights which must prey upon living creatures in order to gain some semblance of substantiality, the Malum can become substantial or insubstantial at will. Typically cloaked in huge dark robes, the Malum can occasionally be found scouring the ruins of the Shadow Realm for relics of the past.



Obsessed with death, black magic, and the occult, the Malum are less than social creatures. They rarely speak anything but the barest words needed and once done end any interactions without exchange of pleasantries or small talk. Although the items created by the Malum are of an exceptional quality, many of the living find them uncomfortable to bear for very long. Not only do such items display a morbid esthetic design, but most of them seem to be similar to the grave-goods of older cultures. The Malum's curiosity and interest in the funerary relics and history of other cultures does provide an avenue for enterprising travelers to trade with these mysterious specters. In this way the strange cloth, armor, weapons, and enchanted items of the Malum occasionally make their way into the rest of Talislanta.

Speakers of Elder Tongue, the Malum often use bound devils, typically small imps, as translators when dealing with other Talislantans. Although the Malum claim to be neutral in continental politics, they are known to have dealings with such cultures as the Black Savants of Nefaratus, the Rasmirin of L'Haan, Rajani Necromancers, and other less easily identifiable beings. Aside from the inner circle of the cabal, there are Malum that are young by comparison. As there is little chance of their superiors vacating their positions, these "young" Malum often venture outside the Iron Citadel in search of knowledge and power so that they might

elevate themselves in the hierarchy of the cabal.

### GRAVE GOODS

*Many cultures habitually bury certain things with their dead to ensure the happiness of those who have passed from this life and world; coins, small statues or idols, treasured items or weapons, fine clothing, food and wine all being very common. All of these are items that the Malum will generally purchase from those rare brave travelers who reach the doors of their sanctuary. Aside from their studies and seeming appreciation for such things, it is unknown exactly what the Malum do with these things. However, it is to these strange black magicians that scholars fear many of the relics stolen and looted from tombs have gone. Additionally, the Malum have expressed interest in the various plant and animal ingredients typically used by magicians that are unobtainable in the Shadow Realm; chief among are items from banes, demon dust, black diamonds, moonstones, black opals, and onyx.*

*In exchange for such things, the Malum have their own goods for trade. Predominant among these are items made from a strange metal called shadowsteel and a cloth called shadowsilk. Materials made from such substances are apparently capable of being used both by corporeal and incorporeal creatures alike.*

There are still places in the Shadow Realm where the passages between the planes are shortened, where the Lower Planes, the Underworld, and even the Nightmare Dimension are but a few steps away. Perhaps because of this it is not surprising that the Iron Citadel often plays host to travelers from lands much further away than the mere physical nations of Talislanta.

### HISTORY MADE APPARENT

The history of the Shadow Realm is as obscured as its name suggests. Despite the numerous ruins

and relics scattered across the domain, very few of them are identifiable to one specific culture known to New Age scholars. Furthermore, it would seem that what culture there was here occasionally preyed upon its neighbors to the south as there are apparent artifacts and similarities in construction to the Torquarans, Xambrians, Sursia, and Kharakhan are evident here.

Some scholars speculate that at one time the Shadow Realm was as verdant and populous as neighboring Elande, but that it was held by no less than three warring city-states. These three nations could find no way to live in peace beyond a few short years. When the Great Disaster struck, each blamed the other for the strange magical destruction of their own lands and the resulting war between the three destroyed them all. It is definite the dead still walk in the Shadow Realm, many of them who seek to prey upon the living. While this does occasionally draw Necromancers to the area to harvest the knowledge or power of such wretched creatures, there are also other things that prey upon such lost souls as well.

Ancient magics, whether from warring city-states, the Great Disaster, or both, continue to wash across the land in the form of aberrant weather and strange, inexplicable events. Occasionally deadly traps, some of Archaen make and others constructed in the immense style of the First Folk, are uncovered by the effects of these malicious forces creating further hazards for those who would seek to travel across this land.

### THE FOREST OF REGRETS

A band of gnarled and foreboding trees stretching across the southern parts of the Shadow Realm, the Forest of Regrets is deep and shadowy. In ancient times it is said that bandits and outlaws would flee into this Forest in order to evade pursuit from the nations that ruled here. However in the stories it is rare that anyone ever left the Forest.

In recent history, no mortal man has ventured beyond the forest's outlying eaves. Under these mighty trees, the sunlight rarely reaches the ground and strange noises can be heard as if

echoing from a distance. What secrets the Forest may hold are kept close in its deep and shadowed heart.

## SHADOW RIDGE

A line of peaks separating the Shadow Realm from the Sinking Land, Shadow Ridge has long been considered an area haunted by tragedy and misfortune. The very mountains themselves seem to conspire against travelers with numerous rock slides, tremors, and fiercely swirling winds.

Should a climber make it to the top of these deadly heights, they can witness the creepy vision of three shadowy armies fighting on the plain below. The savage and brutal battle that these ghostly warriors continue to re-enact night after night is testament to the passion with which they defended their homes. Amongst these armies it is possible to discern strange metallic creations that bear the appearance of land dragons, but seem to be a type of mechanical siege engine. These wondrous creations always sink into the ground, thrashing and with the shrill creak of tearing metal. However, from the ground it is nearly impossible to tell where these creations may have gone, which explains why they have still not been found by explorers.

## DAGGER RIDGE

Separating the Kharakhan Wastes from the Shadow Realm is a stretch of jagged peaks. Called Dagger Ridge for their harsh, knife-like appearance and the brutal sharpness of its natural stone, these mountains are well thought to be impenetrable except for the most skilled mountaineers. Adding to the danger of the heights is the presence of such predators as Satada, Bat Mantas, and Crag Spiders.

Strangely situated on the Shadow Realm side of the Ridge is a ruined tower of huge proportions. Similar in most respects to the Kharakhan ruins south of this place, this tower seems to have perhaps been a lookout placement. While the tower is broken and toppled, it is still possible to shelter within its lofty walls. A magician-cartographer from Cymril once led an expedition here while

paying another to journey to the Watchstone in the western Golarin Plains. In order to prove a theory, the expedition he led camped in the tower while he used his magic to levitate himself to what he calculated to be the original height of the tower. On a prearranged date, his second expedition lit a huge bonfire on top of the Watchstone. As the magician had suspected it was possible to see the Watchstone fire from atop Dagger Ridge three hundred miles away. This magician has a theory based on his cartographic efforts that both the Ruins of Osmar and ancient Phaedra (now Zanth and Aamahd) are also along this same line of sight, perhaps marking the sites of other ruins of the extinct First Folk. Even supposing his theory is factual, other scholars are unsure of what it would mean. Despite this there are several groups of explorers, treasure-hunters, and salvagers who would like to discover if it is true.



# CHAPTER FIVE: LEGENDS MADE REAL

## NEW ARCHETYPES

### Darkling Warrior Slave

*"I fight for your honor my King. My life is yours."*

You were chosen from amongst your other blind siblings for some unknown, and perhaps unknowable, reason and placed with other Darkling young. From the time you all could see, squinting around you at the wretched cage in which you lived, you were trained to fight. But unlike the rest of your people, your cage does not fight out in the battlefields. No. The Ur make you fight in a deep pit with whatever it is they happen to have caught recently. Those who survive are rewarded with food. Those who don't survive don't have to suffer any more.

**Appearance:**  
4'-5', 90-130 lbs. Soot-grey or black skin; large pointed ears, sharp fangs, and distorted features; sinuous tail; wiry build.

0	+1	+2	-2
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+2	+1	-4	-3
CON	SPD	WIL	INT
+3	12	-1	
CR	HP	MR	

**Skills:**

Knife +4  
Spear +3  
Weapon of choice +1  
Shield +1  
Brawling +3  
Evade +5  
Stealth +4  
Laborer +2  
Torture +2

**Languages:**  
Northron, native



**Special Abilities:**

Sense living creatures by scent at range of 100', +2 to Stealth in darkness; Night Vision; Vision at PER -3 in daylight; Fangs are DR 1

**Equipment:**

Rag loincloth; stone knife, spear, and weapon of choice; small wooden shield.

## Darkling 'Sham'an

*"Of course the Darklings don't have priests. All Darklings serve the Ur, and are glad to do it lest we fall prey to the horrid creatures in the hills."*

You are one of the Chosen of Sham, the Deceiver, the Master of Lies. You have taken a vow to never let a complete truth pass your fanged lips. You do your best to aid your fellow Darklings and cause trouble for the Ur. But you must be careful. If the Ur suspect that the misfortunes that befall them are because of a Darkling, they will kill many of them, perhaps all in the citadel. So you wait. And watch. And listen. And when they ask you things, you answer. But you never tell the truth. You took a vow not to . . . didn't you?

### Appearance:

4'-5', 90-130 lbs. Soot-grey or black skin; large pointed ears, sharp fangs, and distorted features; sinuous tail; wiry build.

-3	+1	+2	-1
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+2	+1	-3	-1
CON	SPD	WIL	INT

+1	12	+1
CR	HP	MR

### Skills:

Invocation (Sham), three modes of choice +2

Knife +3

Sling +2

Laborer +2

Torture +4

Evade +5

Stealth +8

Deception +8

Legerdemain +6

Languages:

Northron, native

Low Talislan, basic



### Special Abilities:

Sense living creatures by scent at range of 100', +2 to Stealth in darkness; Night Vision; Vision at PER -3 in daylight; Fangs are DR 1

### Equipment:

Rag loincloth; stone knife, spear, and weapon of choice; small wooden shield.

## Jaka Pridemistress / Forest Lord

*"Hear the words of your ancestors, 'young kits. Listen to grow wise and strong."*

One of your parents was charged with the task of ensuring that not only you and your sibling, but all the kits of the pride were educated in the basics of the culture of your people. As you came of age, the responsibility fell upon you as well. Now you ensure that the little ones learn how to hunt, how to stalk, how to ride. When they are sick, you show them the proper things to eat. When all else fails and the natural talents given you by Jakar and Jalar are not enough, you call on their memory and the memories of all your ancestors to grant you the additional strength you need to ensure the survival of your people.

### Appearance:

5'10"-6'2", 120-180 lbs. Sleek black fur, silvery-grey mane, blazing green eyes, lithe muscularity; features a cross between wolf and panther.

+1	+3	+4	-2
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+1	+3	-0	-1
CON	SPD	WIL	INT

+4	24	+0
CR	HP	MR

### Skills:

Invocation (Jakar and Jalar), three modes of choice +3

Longsword +1

Shortbow +2

Dagger +2

Brawling +2

Mounted Combat +2

Tracking (by scent) +5

Stealth +4

Survival +8

Ride +3

Acting +2

Healer +2

Herb Lore +2

Languages:

Sign, native

Low Talislan, native



### Special Abilities:

Land on feet after falls of up to thirty feet; natural Stealth (+3); Night Vision; Sixth Sense +5; without their talismans Jaka react to magic with INT -4.

### Equipment:

Loincloth, vest, leg and arm bracers of leather; talisman worn on thong around neck; pouch for holding herbs and stones; short bow; dagger; long sword; rope; greymane steed, 25 gold lumens in skins, hides, etc.

## Malum Shadow Warrior

*"You seek to steal from the Death's chosen, then you accept Death's fate."*

You are fairly young as Malum go. Returned from the Underworld some centuries ago, you now serve the inner circle of the cabal as a guard, assassin, and enforcer. While a great deal of your time is spent simply guarding the Iron Citadel, occasionally you are sent to track down and retrieve some item looted from the ruins of the surrounding areas. Other shadowwarriors have told you stories about having to take Death's embrace to one of the Malum gone rogue, but if it has happened during your second life, you do not recall.

### Appearance:

6'6"-7'6", weightless or 110-160 lbs. Eyes like burning coals. Hair and loose clothing blown in an aethereal wind. Incorporeal: tall, thin shadow. Corporeal: black-skinned, thin limbed humanoid.

-0	+4	+4	-2
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+1	+2	+1	+2
CON	SPD	WIL	INT
+4	22	+1	
CR	HP	MR	

### Skills:

Long Sword +3  
Dagger +2  
Two weapons of choice +2  
Shadowstep +3  
Soul Trapping +2  
Assassinate +3  
Stealth +4  
Ride (Shadowmane) +3

### Languages:

Elder Tongue, Native  
High Talislan, Native



### Special Abilities:

See clearly even in magical darkness; detect invisible, aethereal, and astral; immune to unenchanted weapons; partially blinded by strong light; damaged by magical radiance; change from corporeal to incorporeal at will; emanates aura of death in 10' radius

### Equipment:

Shadowsilk robe and hood, shadowsteel chainmail, shadowsteel longsword, shadowsteel dagger, shadowmane steed, shadowsilk pouch, 50 lumens in assorted ancient currencies

## Malum Shadow Wizard

*"You have knowledge that I seek. I need it to survive. Deprive me of that knowledge, you deprive yourself of life."*

You are fairly young as Malum go. Returned from the Underworld some centuries ago, you now serve the inner circle of the cabal as a researcher and lackey. You are the one sent out on the dangerous task of retrieving some lost article or bit of arcane knowledge from the harsh light of the two suns of this wretched world. You are the one assigned the chore of binding and dealing with the various minor demons and devils that your masters no longer need. One day you will have the power to usurp a place for yourself amongst the Inner Circle. You know of others who have tried and have had to flee their wrath, so you are careful. The shadows can be your friends, but even they are not to be trusted.

### Appearance:

6'6"-7'6", weightless or 110-160 lbs. Eyes like burning coals. Hair and loose clothing blown in an aethereal wind. Incorporeal: tall, thin shadow. Corporeal: black-skinned, thin limbed humanoid.

-1	+0	+3	-2
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
-1	+0	+1	+3
CON	SPD	WIL	INT
+0	18	+4	
CR	HP	MR	

### Skills:

Necromancy, 4 Modes of Choice +4  
Soul Binding +3  
  
Weapon of choice +2  
Alchemy – Shadowsteel +2  
Arcane Lore +4  
Astromancy +2  
Ride – Bat Manta +3  
Stealth +2  
Cultures  
Lower Planes +3  
Talislantian +2

### Languages:

Elder Tongue, Native  
High Talislan, Basic



### Special Abilities:

See clearly even in magical darkness; detect invisible, aethereal, and astral; immune to unenchanted weapons; partially blinded by strong light; damaged by magical radiance; change from corporeal to incorporeal at will; emanates aura of death in 10' radius

### Equipment:

Shadowsilk robe and hood, shadowsteel weapon of choice, shadowsteel bound spellbook, two magical items of own creation (together no more powerful than level 15), bat manta steed, shadowsilk pouch, 100 lumens in assorted ancient currencies and black diamonds

## Mirin L'Halia

*"Yes, good traveler, you are well come to L'Haan. Tell me your tale, and let me regale you with our own!"*

Perhaps more than other Mirin, you know the place of your people in the world. The Priesthood of Borean rarely leave their blessed arctic hills, the studious alchemists that your people depend upon do not stray, and the brave tundra scouts have duties to attend to when journeying beyond the bounds of L'Haan. But you, you are able to traverse the cold plains of L'Haan, cross the distant mountains, and journey down into the burning lands beyond. By doing so, you not only bring back new ideas and innovations, but also exotic trade goods and new pleasures to share with your people. You know your peoples histories, you know the songs of other lands, and you know that you alone may hold the water that makes the bridge between the two.

### Appearance:

5'8"-6'6", 110-210 lbs. Bright blue skin, hair as fine and white as gossamer, statuesque figure.

-0	+2	+0	+2
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+1	+0	+1	+1
CON	SPD	WIL	INT

+1	18	+2
CR	HP	MR

### Skills:

<weapon of choice> +1  
 Etiquette +5  
 Acting +3  
 Song +3  
 Diplomacy +3  
 Haggle +5  
 Appraiser +3  
 Merchant +3  
 Animal Handling +2  
 Conveyance +2  
 Ride +1  
 Survival +5

### Languages:

Elder Tongue, Native  
 High Talislan, Fluent



### Special Abilities:

Immunity to Cold (after several weeks in temperate regions, Mirin lose this immunity and their skin fades to crystal white; both effects are reversible); Melding.

### Equipment:

Cloak, boots, and robes of frostwere hide; satchel; leather bound book of songs, poems, and epics; writing supplies; choice of weapon; choice of snowmane or tundra loper steed; 50 gold lumens in L'Haan adamants.

## Nar Khan Ice Hunter

*"Family needs meat. You have seen too much. You shall feed us for a week."*

Your family is everything to you, and your tribe is your extended family. All that you make and do is for their betterment because as long as they survive, so shall you. You struggle with the cold and having to walk on the curved talons of your malformed feet. Walking is difficult, climbing is easier, but your true joy is dashing across an icy plain, spear in hand, and your prey in front of you. The stories told around the fires deep in your cave-homes have told you that the hairless men from the air will enslave you or worse. Your own experience has shown you that the crystalline Giants are of no help to your tribe. Therefore, you do your best to remain out of sight while providing for your family. After all, they provide for you.

### Appearance:

5'8" – 6'6", 130-250 lbs. Leathery brown skin, thick coarse black hair, patches of thick fur across legs, arms, and back, bestial features, clawed hands, large taloned feet.

+2	+1	+1	-3
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+4	+1*	-1	-1
CON	SPD	WIL	INT

+3	24	-2
CR	HP	MR

### Skills:

Spear +3  
 Club +2  
 Brawling +3  
 Climbing +5  
 Survival (Narandu) +4  
 Stealth +2  
 Tracking +2  
 Artificer +1  
 Weaponer +1

### Languages:

Sign, Native  
 Low Talislan, Basic



### Special Abilities:

Can use talons to skate across ice at SPD +6, Claws can be used to climb at +4 to ability rating, Claws can be used to attack for DR 2 + STR.

### Equipment:

Hide loincloth; frostwere fur and hide clothing; small pouch; blue diamond spear; blue diamond club; 100 gold lumens in assorted carvings, precious stones, and blue diamonds

## Rasmirin Anarchist

*"Soon, all shall be put to paid. All to waste shall be laid."*

Your Mirin cousins who cast you out are fools, tricked by the lies of Borean mimicked on the wind. You and your confederates are proof enough of that. Had Borean given the Mirin the ability to withstand the chill of the north, surely he would have removed it from you for your blasphemies. Borean is a power who wants control over the Mirin for his own, wants to control everything he can, wants to force the entire world to worship him. Aberon has shown you freedom. Freedom from control, freedom from laws, freedom from fear. You are now free to take what you need and desire from the elements around you. Nature now bends to your will. You will show the fools back in Myr.

### Appearance:

5'8"-6'6", 110-210 lbs. Bright blue skin, hair as fine and white as gossamer, statuesque figure, features painted with cult markings.

+1	+1	+0	-1
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+2	+0	+0	+2
CON	SPD	WIL	INT
+3	22	+3	
CR	HP	MR	

### Skills:

Trade Skill <choice> +4  
Deception +6  
Stealth +5  
Staff +3  
<weapon of choice> +2

### Languages:

Elder Tongue, native  
Sign, native



### Special Abilities:

Immunity to Cold (after several weeks in temperate regions, Rasmirin lose this immunity and their skin fades to crystal white; both effects are reversible).

### Equipment:

Cloak, headdress, and boots of frostwre hide; adamant partial chain and hide armor; adamant mail gauntlets; adamant-shod staff; choice of adamant weapon; hide covered spell book; belt pouch; 250 lumens in blue diamonds, ivory, and hides.

## CHOOSE ONE PROFESSION:

### Nihilist

Invocation, (Aberon) four Modes of choice +2  
Witchcraft, four Modes of choice +2  
Doctrines (Demonology) +5  
Assassinate +3

### Savant

Invocation, (Aberon) four Modes of choice +3  
Elemental Magic <choice of Ice (water) or Storms (wind)>, four Modes of choice+2  
Doctrines (Demonology) +3  
(Borean) +2  
Alchemy +2

### Warlock

Witchcraft, four Modes of choice +2  
Elemental Magic <choice of Ice (water) or Storms (wind)>, four Modes of choice+2  
Naturalism +5  
Survival +3

## Rasmirin Raider

*"This battle you will lose. The tide has turned, the wind has died. There is no hope for you this side of death."*

Exiled for crimes against the people of L'haan. It happened either to you, your parent, or one of their parents. The harsh life of an outcast has hardened you into something cold and deadly. The teachings of the Anarchists have focused and sharpened you like an axe.

### Appearance:

5'8"-6'6", 110-210 lbs. Bright blue skin, hair as fine and white as gossamer, statuesque figure, features painted with cult markings.

+2	+1	+1	-1
STR	DEX	PER	CHA

+2	+0	+0	+1
CON	SPD	WIL	INT

+3	22	+2
CR	HP	MR

### Skills:

Trade Skill <choice> +4  
Deception +6  
Stealth +5  
Staff +3  
<weapon of choice> +2

### Languages:

Elder Tongue, native  
Sign, native



### Special Abilities:

Immunity to Cold (after several weeks in temperate regions, Rasmirin lose this immunity and their skin fades to crystal white; both effects are reversible).

### Equipment:

Cloak, headdress, and boots of frostwre hide; adamant partial chain and hide armor; adamant mail gauntlets; adamant-shod staff; choice of adamant weapon; hide covered spell book; belt pouch; 250 lumens in blue diamonds, ivory, and hides.

## CHOOSE ONE PROFESSION:

### Warrior

Decrease MR by 1, Increase STR and CR by 1

Ice Axe +4

Two weapons of Choice +3

Brawling +2

Shield +2

Pilot (choice of ice schooner or long boat)

Salvager +2

Wilderness Skill of Choice +2

### Infiltrator

Increase CHA and MR by 1, Decrease WIL and CR by 1

<choice of Witchcraft or Invocation (Aberon), 2 Modes of Choice +2)

Espionage +3

Sabotage +3

Ice Axe +3

Two Thieving Skills of choice +2

Two weapons of choice +2

## Snipe Gossipmonger

*"I have heard many rumors of late concerning the object of your search. If you might know some interesting tidbits about some scholarly matters, perhaps I can lead you there. And do not waste my time with trivialities."*

Like the rest of your people you value knowledge above all else. However, while they are seemingly content to travel in their schools from grazing spot to grazing spot, discussing all manner of trivia, you are bold. You struck out on your own long ago and with your knowledge you have become something of a wandering messenger between Schools of Snipes. Of especial interest to you is the ability that the naked outlanders call Magic. While the Snipes have long known about its effects, you are one of the patient few who have mastered it. You pick up tidbits of information about spell casting and spells from the naked outlanders. While it is difficult, it has proven to be of great help in acquiring new information.

### Appearance:

3'-4' in diameter, 100-200 lbs. Mollusk, spiral shell of glistening calcinate, 3'+ eye-mouth stalk, fin

-3	-1	+4	-3
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+4	+6*	+2	+4
CON	SPD	WIL	INT
-2	18	+2	
CR	HP	MR	

### Skills:

Wizardry, two Modes of Choice +2  
 Scholar Skill of Choice +2  
 Cultures +1  
 Oratory +3  
 Song +3  
 Stealth +2  
 Guide +4  
 Survival +3  
 Swim +8  
 Barter +3

### Languages:

Low Talislan, Native  
 High Talislan, Native  
 Archaen, Basic



### Special Abilities:

Travel in mud or water at SPD +2; Shell is PR 7 and +4 resistance to Magic; Withdraw into shell at SPD +6; +5 to Stealth when in mud; Sonar-like navigation; Can create cave-ins and pit-falls at Swim ability in swamp-like environments.

### Equipment:

None; no wealth as Snipes value information above all else

## Stryx Advisor

*"No, no, my lord. See, look at this coiling of the entrails here. Obviously the lifeblood of this messenger from King Raf clearly shows that he means to attack you soon. Why not take advantage of this information and attack him while he is still preparing?"*

You serve Taryx, but you also serve the Ur. You learned long ago that for the Ur to adequately provide for you and your people, they needed to be guided by Taryx's hand. While the Ur shamans are fierce, and probably do pay homage to Taryx in some obscure, degenerate way, the Ur King needs your advice to guide his troops to provide for your flock. Life at court is occasionally confusing and shifts like the high winds, but you will persevere until you die. Death begets death, after all.

### Appearance:

5'10"-6'2", 140-180 lbs. Covered with dark grey or black feathers, 20-foot wingspan, clawed talons, horns, misshapen vulture-like features, hunchbacked or stoop-shouldered physique.

+0	-2	+3	-3
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+1	+1*	+0	+2
CON	SPD	WIL	INT
+3	18	+0	
CR	HP	MR	

### Skills:

Necromancer, two modes of choice +2  
 Brawling +2  
 Dagger +3  
 Aerial Combat +3  
 Spear +2  
 Doctrines (Taryx) +4  
 Deception +2  
 Coerce +2  
 Interrogate +3  
 Torture +3

### Languages:

Northron, native



### Special Abilities:

Flight at SPD +5; Night Vision; Vision at PER -2 in daylight or bright light; Detect carrion by scent at a range of 5 miles; Talons are DR 2+ STR

### Equipment:

Animal hide loincloth; torso harness of leather; black iron bracers; necklace of semi-precious stones and polished teeth; spear; dagger; 50 gold lumens in assorted currencies, gemstones, and scavenged plunder

## Ur Renegade

*"I can feel your hate for me. That is good. Your death will remind me of my home."*

Your mother taught you to betray your elders. Among your kind, it is the only way to gain rank. You started out well, taking command of your squad while still a young warrior. But when you tried to kill your warlord, his shaman caught you. Rather than face the iron orb or a grisly death by trolling, you fled your clan. Now they are your enemies. If they find you, they will kill you. But not if you kill them first. Maybe you will hire-on with one of the other two clans. There is much you could tell them about your old clan. But they know you're a renegade, and you can feel them watch you through narrowed eyes. The outside world is better in many ways, or at least safer. The other races are smaller and weaker than you. They can't read emotions. They hate you and fear you, but they will pay gold for someone of your strength and brutality. You've fought as a mercenary in several small wars, wresting command when possible. You've guarded caravans until it was worth siding with the bandits. And you've been a criminal yourself, riding with the Za and sometimes operating alone. It's good that your employers never ask for references. Most of yours are dead. At times, you enjoy having companions to brag with, and it can be useful to have allies. But if there's to be a leader in your group, you'll make sure you're it. Someday, you'll return to Urag to begin your climb again, maybe become an Ur-King. In the meantime, there are many enemies to kill.

### Appearance:

7'-8', 500-600+ lbs. Yellow-green, leathery hide; deep set black eyes with white pupils; furrowed brow, pointed ears, and bestial features; curved fangs; hair worn in double or triple top-knots bound with black iron rings.

+6	-2	+0*	-2
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+6	-2	+0	-2
CON	SPD	WIL	INT
+5	34	-1	
CR	HP	MR	

### Skills:

Ur Club +4  
Brawling +3  
Coerce +2  
Ride +5  
Weaponer +1

### Languages:

Northron, native  
Low Talislan, basic



### Special Abilities:

Night Vision; read emotions at PER +6 at a range of twenty feet.

### Equipment:

Spiked black iron partial plate with bracers and arm bands; loincloth, cloak, and boots of yaksha hide; necklace of teeth and bone; Ur Club (made from a yaksha paw); choice of two weapons (made of stone); pouch; may have ogriphand steed and access to siege engine; 80 gold lumens in assorted currencies, gemstones, and plunder

## CHOOSE ONE PROFESSION:

### Scourge

Choice of two weapons +3  
Mounted Combat +2  
Command +4  
Engineer (siege weapons) +4  
Artillerist +4

*If you are a Scourge, you are essentially a bandit or perhaps the head of a group of bandits and mercenaries. You take what you can, and work for others when they pay well enough.*

### Raider

Choice of two weapons +2  
Mounted Combat +2  
Espionage +5  
Gambling +2  
Interrogate +4  
Torture +4  
Choice of one thieving skill +1

*If you are a Raider, you are always a mercenary, selling your skills at gathering information, and the information you receive, to the highest bidder. While some do not like your methods, none can argue with your results.*

## Yrmanian Shaman

*Wild gestures, arms flapping, and gnashing of teeth*

You were chosen from amongst your tribesmen to be the messenger to the spirits. You were chosen for this because of your skill at gathering the sacred plants of Manik. Sometimes the little plant men speak to you before the spirits do. Sometimes they do not. Sometimes you see the bright colors and hear the sounds of the spirits singing through you and your axe, but other times you just feel the empty ache as this world drains your spirit away

### Appearance:

5'6"-6'2", 130-230 lbs. Light brown skin, bestial features, deep set eyes, fangs, shaggy hair worn in braids and dreadlocks daubed with colored pigments.

+1	+2	-4	-4
STR	DEX	PER	CHA
+6	+0	+6	-6
CON	SPD	WIL	INT

+3	26	+1
CR	HP	MR

### Skills:

Shamanism, four Modes of choice +1  
R'ruh +4  
Brawling +3  
Tracking +3  
Survival +2  
Climbing +2  
Art +1  
Artificer +1

Languages:  
Sign, native



### Special Abilities:

None

### Equipment:

Loincloth, arm and leg wrappings of animal hide; r'ruh (stone singing axe); pouch for skullcap; necklace of shiny, polished stones; no wealth

## SKILLS

### APPRAISE (SOULS)

This skill permits the individual to estimate the rough power (Difficulty 5) and nature (Difficulty 10) of a spirit. Spirits bound in a natural or magical receptacle receive +3 to the roll.

**Training Period:** 30 weeks

**Attribute Modifier:** PER

### SHADOWSTEP

Shadowstepping is a skill mastered by Malum (Ebonite) shadowwarriors, through which they control their corporeality to a degree of precision and speed that allows them to perform several unique feats, such as becoming noncorporeal for just an instant to evade an incoming attack, or shadowstepping through an opponent to suddenly appear at his or her rear (receiving +5 to attack the following round).

**Training Period:** 50 weeks

**Attribute Modifier:** DEX

### SOUL BINDING

Soul binding is a magical skill through which a soul or spirit is imprisoned within a black or blue diamond. The end result of this practice is a magical crystal that can later be utilized to instill items or users with certain powers or properties dependent upon the spirit so imprisoned.

The diamond used, regardless of type, must be of sufficient quality; the carat weight of the gem must equal or exceed the level of the desired enchantment. Binding a soulstone requires a MR + Soul-binding roll with a difficulty equal to the enchantment desired. Enchanting through the binding of souls is measured in days; one day per level for limited enchantments, three days per level for continuous enchantments. Although the time required for this process is much shorter than normal Talislantan enchantments, it is an activity that most Talislantans would find repelling abhorrent. In all other respects, Soul Binding functions exactly as Enchantment in Talislanta 4th edition and soul stones count against a character's

seven-item limit. Unlike Soul-Binding practiced in the Midnight Realm or other lower planes, soulstones produced in Talislanta can only contain one power or ability.

**Training Period:** 100 weeks

**Attribute Modifier:** MR

## SOUL TRAPPING

The skill of detecting spiritforms and utilizing spirit-traps and soul cages to capture and contain these entities. The individual with this skill can detect the slight disturbances in the environment caused by the presence of spiritforms, even if the individual has no magical senses. Telltale cues such as cold spots, ethereal whispers, and other phenomena help the individual locate the spirit.

**Training Period:** 30 weeks

**Attribute Modifier:** PER (DEX when using the tools)

## MAGICAL ORDERS

### INVOCATION

Invocation is the practice of turning to outside forces to provide the power and impetus of spellcasting ability. A wide-range of Talislantan cultures practice Invocation. While someone not schooled in the subtleties of the nature of magic might see similarities in how Invocation, Shamanism, and Elementalism are conducted since they all involve the assistance of power outside of the caster, whether it be gods, spirits, or elementals, there are some very distinct differences involved, most notably dependent upon the superstitious or religious beliefs of the practitioners culture.

### BOREAN

Defend +2, Move +2, Illusion -2, Influence -2

Priests and priestesses of Borean revere the power of the God of the North Wind in his role as a deity of the winds and protector of the land. Most Borean invokers call upon him for gifts of magic, but would never think to command or force him in any way.

### ABERON

Attack +2, Summon +2, Heal -2, Influence -2

The witches and warlocks who revere Aberon seek the power of their patron in order to assume power over those around them. While many outsiders claim that Aberon is a powerful demonic entity, the Rasmirin see him as an elemental force similar in nature to Borean. However, as Aberon and its servants are aspects of the destructive side of nature and the elements, Aberon invokers are typically overly-suspicious and cautious, perhaps understandably so given the nature of the entities with which they consort.

### TARYX

Attack +2, Reveal +2, Heal -2, Defend -2

The Stryx Necromancer-Priests of Taryx are rarely interested in the subtleties of magic. Concerned almost solely with death and the ability to locate carrion, some outsiders wonder if the worship of Taryx is separate in any way from the Stryx's own culture. Given the abilities of its priests, Taryx apparently is strongly concerned with causing pain and harm but has little interest in protecting his chosen people.

### JAKAR

Reveal +2, Ward +2, Attack -2, Summon -2

In many respects, the reverence that the Jaka bear for Jakar and Jalar is similar to Natural Magic in many ways. Like Natural Magic, Jaka spellcasters find that their work is much easier in the wilderness than in any cultivated or "civilized" area. In all other respects, their magic is like Invocation. While the Jaka do not worship their progenitors in the same way that other cultures do, they do respect their memory and the gifts that they bestowed upon the Jaka. The ritual vestments of the faith of Jakar amount to various herbs, stones, and wood each corresponding to a specific desired result; it is probably because of this that outsiders named Jaka spellcasters witches and warlocks. Typically Jakar is seen as having providence over the power of Wards, but weak in Summoning while Jalar bestowed the power of Revelation, but relied more heavily upon her physical prowess rather than supernatural Attacks.

## SHAM

Conjuration +2, Illusion +2, Attack -2, Defend -2

The rare devotees of Sham, God of Lies, often do not reveal their belief or the power granted to them. In fact, some wonder if they even can reveal their true nature or if perhaps by the very nature of worshipping a God of Lies if they can ever be honest again.

## EQUIPMENT

### ICE AXE

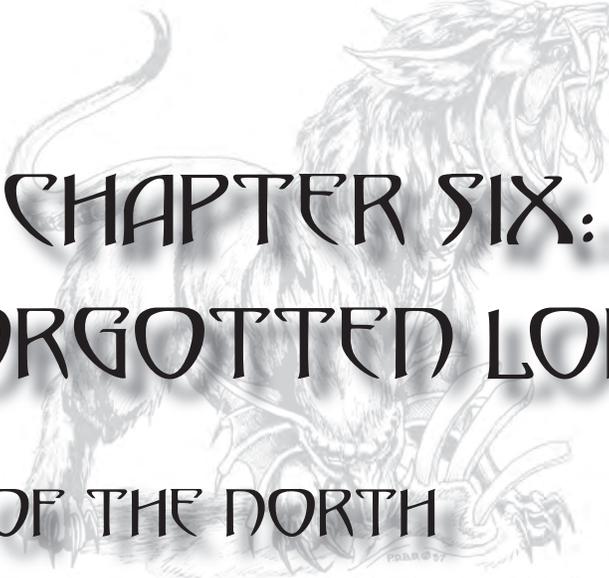
A blue adamant tool used by the Mirin to carve ice as well as scale mountains. While the head of this axe resembles that of a typical hand axe, opposite the blade is a long, slender spike used to grip ice or anchor into stone.

## SOULSTONES

Black diamonds enchanted to hold the essence of a spirit. The wielder of the soulstone can use one of the spirit's abilities or access its thoughts based upon the enchantments laid upon the stone during its creation.

## SNOW SHOES AND ICE SKATES

Footwear used by the Mirin in their native land. Snow shoes enable a humanoid to cross snow at their normal movement rate unhampered. Ice Skates enable a practiced user to maneuver across ice with a reduced chance of falling. A skilled user can increase their SPD by 1 for purposes of movement while on ice.



# CHAPTER SIX: FORGOTTEN LORE

## SECRETS OF THE NORTH

### ICE GIANTS

Ice Giants seem to be related in some manner to a number of other creatures in Narandu. Whether all of these strange life forms were created at the same time, or even by the same entity, is unknown. Typically the Ice King is credited, or blamed, for the origins of all of these beasts. The Ice Giants themselves are, despite appearances, capable of communicating via sign language not only amongst themselves but with others as well. However, what secrets they may hold in their frozen minds are

rarely discovered. Curiously, when Ice Giants are slain, their bodies immediately go through a magical transformation either shattering into thousands of icy shards or melting into a vast puddle of water. The magical energies released in this way are somehow also responsible for the creation of crystalline blue diamonds; these are often discovered amongst the icy shards or in the snow beneath the melted remains of Ice Giants. What this may signify in regards to the veins of blue diamond mined from the mountains of the North is a secret best left up to the imaginations



of the GM.

Astute Talislantan magicians who make the study of history and the north part of their magical regimen may eventually draw parallels between the “life cycle” of Demons, also known as anti-elementals, and certain pieces of the Narandu food-chain. While it may prove interesting to find that Rime Hounds, Frost Demons, Ice Giants, Frost Golems, and Ice Dragons are in part comparable to the Six Stages of Demonic Growth as outlined by Kabros in his Guide to the Lower Planes, it is also worth noting that no demonologists are known to have ever summoned an Ice Giant. This could be a case of Frost Demons mimicking the natural life of a region or may instead have dire repercussions if the opposite were true.

## EFFECTS OF EXTREME COLD

In a Heroic game, GMs might decide to forego any of the effects of cold weather and terrain and simply mention that the characters need to buy various furs and winter clothing. For a Grim game, GMs should consider that extreme cold can not only cause such effects, not the least of which is frostbite, but can also cause metal to become brittle.

Frostbite occurs on exposed skin at a rate depending on the severity of the temperature. The freezing temperatures of open wind across much of the Northern Realms can cause frostbite in about an hour. As temperatures drop to around -30 below freezing, whether from nightfall, icy weather, or the presence of Ice Giants, frostbite can occur on exposed skin in a matter of seconds. Characters suffering from frostbite go through a series of stages beginning with penalties to all of their roles; starting at -1 and increasing to -10. Beyond this, GMs can inflict additional penalties on any CON, STR, and DEX rolls. Severe frostbite is essentially the same as a severe burn, and if occurring over a large area of skin eventually can result in the necessity of amputation or even death. Hypothermia, another cold weather effect, is essentially similar to frostbite, but

whereas frostbite occurs on the outside of the body, hypothermia is occurring within the body and while much more painful may be harder for Talislantan healers to identify.

Metal exposed to extreme cold becomes brittle as the metal crystallizes. After a week in the frigid environments of the north lower the DR or PR of black iron arms and armor by 1 and continue decreasing it every two weeks thereafter. These penalties do not go away once the items are returned to warmer weather. Furthermore, on a failure it is possible that a weapon will shatter, an almost certain result of a critical failure. Armor is likewise likely to shatter on an opponents critical attack success.

For red iron, double the times required for metal to become brittle. For blue iron, quadruple the times. Shadowsteel and Adamant, both black and blue, are not susceptible to the effects of cold weather. Additionally, many Archaen items were crafted so well that they are also immune to temperature extremes.

## SNOW AND ICE

Snow is common in the North, even in the regions of Yrmania and the Shadow Realm. Large accumulations of snow cause difficulties for travelers, hampering movement and reducing speed. For Grim Fantasy campaigns, consider each foot of snow to reduce a humanoid’s SPD by 1 for purposes of movement; two feet of snow does the same for quadrupeds and steeds such as equs, erd, and striders.

Ice can cause the unwary traveler to loose their footing, typically at inopportune moments. For Grim Fantasy campaigns, consider any creature without clawed feet to have their SPD and DEX lowered by 1 while on ice. This penalty does not apply to Ice Giants.

## ADAMANT

There are two types of adamant in use in Talislanta, the blue adamant created by the Mirin and black adamant crafted by the mysterious Black Savants of Nefaratus. Black adamant has the same

properties as blue adamant. Indeed, there is so little difference between the two substances that most only think that the difference lies in their coloration. However, black adamant has been known to effect even non-corporeal entities, a property that blue adamant lacks. Presumably, black adamant is created via the same methods as blue adamant; however, to date it has been relatively rare for anyone to know the secrets of its creation.

## BLUE SOULSTONES

Blue Soulstones are enchanted items that contain the soul of a slain Rasmirin within them. Very rare devices, these creations typically carry enchantments that enable their users to inflict great damage or master the elements. The blue diamond used to create a soulstone sets the maximum limit of its power.

The Rasmirin spirits imprisoned in these Blue Soulstones seem to be almost mad with anger and hatred and display little in the way of rational thought, but this does not stop their souls from powering the enchantment of the stones. Some Rasmirin users of soulstones have begun to speculate on ways to entrap their foes as a form of punishment; the idea of using the power of a Mirin witch or warlock against their own is simply too exciting to pass up. However to date the Rasmirin do not know how to accomplish such a task as their current knowledge of soulstone creation involves the actual binding of the receptacle to its willing host.

## BEASTLORE

Just like Archaen secrets of magic, much of the ancient lore of the Jaka has been lost to time. The recovery of such secret lore can be an incentive for Jaka to journey out into the rest of the world. GMs can look to various animal related Magical effects from Natural Magic or Shamanism for ideas, but should keep in mind the Jaka's strong relation to and concern for the natural environment. Some lost secrets might be comparable to the reputed powers of the Archaens.

## THE MALUM

The Malum are very much like the Ebonites of the Midnight Realm. In fact, they are the same race. However, as "life" for the Malum in Talislanta is much less dangerous than that of their brethren on the Lower Planes, many of the Malum lack the skills and training that come with constant danger. However, the inner circles of the Malum cabal are still beings of vast power, much stronger than many of their kin in the Midnight Realms. Accordingly, the Malum Archetypes are presented for GMs and Players wishing to explore the boundaries between Talislanta and other Planes, but some thought should be given to the abilities and knowledge of the Malum.

## IMMORTALITY AND PLAYER CHARACTERS

The Malum are effectively immortal since they are in fact already dead. While their destruction can be caused by someone with a determined will, their shades will eventually reform in the Underworld and, should Death allow, return to Talislanta. Exactly how long this takes is up to the GM, but could take centuries as the dead measure time much differently than the living.

Also, a large number of the Malum have been conducting their research for longer than most Talislantans have been alive. This does not mean that all Malum have access to this knowledge. As the ranks of the Malum are never vacated by death, knowledge truly is power to these shadowy beings. Therefore, knowledge is highly prized and rarely shared. An entire political game of dark dealings, sinister plots, and malicious backstabbing could easily be held entirely within the confines of the Iron Citadel. Conversely, as the Archetypes suggest, their could be Malum that have only recently returned to the lands of the living who must claw and climb their way upward; and the easiest way to do that might lie outside both the Iron Citadel and the Shadow Realm despite the numerous dangers involved in such.

## INCORPOREALITY AND PLAYER CHARACTERS

The ability of the Malum to shift between corporeal and incorporeal is a powerful talent. Couple this with their other skills and a Malum can quickly outshine the rest of a party of adventurers. However, the strengths that Malum gain should be tempered by the fact that Malum can only wear and use shadowsilk, shadowsteel, and soulstones. Additionally, the light of Talislanta's two suns is often harsh enough to cause Malum to seek shelter during the day. However, if a GM feels that the powers of the Malum are too much for their game, they do not have to allow Players to take either of the Malum Archetypes as Characters.

## ALCHEMICALS AND TOXIC WASTE

Scattered about Urag are multitudinous amounts of various alchemicals. Many of these have reacted with one another, the local landscape, and the refuse of the Ur and resulted in a variety of toxic substances. In general, consider the toxins of Urag to have the double the effects of the poisons or narcotics listed in Talislanta 4th edition along with any additional effects desired by the GM.

## THE FORGOTTEN GODS

The various entities who make up the Forgotten Gods are numerous and strange. A simple explanation of the Forgotten Gods would be that they were various deities worshipped by the various tribes of the early First Millennium. Time worn effigies, monoliths, and cenotaphs to these beings can be found scattered across the continent but many of them have long past the point of recognition. Historians and magicians state that the peoples of this time primarily engaged in primitive forms of witchcraft and elemental magic. Therefore it is not surprising that many of the Forgotten Gods are associated with the various natural elements and events that would have most concerned the wandering tribes of that time: weather; protection and defense; and the spirits of animals, plants, and ancestors. As time went on and the various tribes evolved or devolved, the worship of these beings began to wane and finally to cease nearly altogether. Although their

names were recorded in later histories and legends, no one really paid reverence to them any longer. The re-emergence, or perhaps continued presence, of the Forgotten Gods in the Northlands is a notable phenomenon and there are several sages and sorcerers of the Lyceum Arcanum who are interested in these matters. For the most part they agree that a great number of the Forgotten Gods may have simply been very powerful elementals and that their comeback is testament only to the near eternal life-spans of such creatures. There are, of course, a few notable dissenters who insist that the Forgotten Gods are indeed Deities simply by dint of having worshippers. As the Forgotten Gods themselves are much disinclined to answer the summons of a simple mortal be they deity, demon, or elemental it is likely that the mysteries of their exact nature will remain secret for the foreseeable future.

## A NORTHERN BESTIARY

Reference the 4th edition Talislanta book for information and statistics on: Abominations, Aramatus, Avir, Bat Mantas, Batranc, Behemoths, Caravan Bugs, Chasm Vipers, Dractyl, Durge, Equs (Darkmane and Snowmane), Erd, Erx, Exomorphs, Fiends, Flits, Frostweres, Ghosts, Ikshada, Land Kra, Lopers (Normal and Tundra), Malathropes, Monitor Imps, Necrophages, Night Demons, Night Hawks, Ogriphants (Normal, Muskront, and Wooly), Ogronts, Omnivrax, Opteryx, Quaga (see Gaint Mollusk), Ravensers, Reincarnators, Sardonicus, Satada, Scavenger Slimes, Sea Dragons, Shadowights, Sniper Bug, Storm Demons, Urthrax, Yaksha, Barge Trees, Deadwood, Gray Boabab, Mandragore, Scarlet Sporozoids, Skullcap, Snow Lilies, Sorcerer Trees, Span Oak, Stranglevine

## CRYSTAL KALIYA

While there are numerous explorers who claim to have seen it distantly and at least one Mirin schooner captain obsessed with pursuing it, the

existence of the Crystal Kaliya is unproven. Despite the fact that a species of dragon known as Kaliya does, or did, dwell in the jungles of the Dark Coast, there is little evidence to prove that a species of multi-headed dragon dwells in Narandu. If such a beast did exist, it would most likely combine the ferocity and sharp intellect of its southern kin with the frigid affinities of Ice Dragons.

## CRYSTAL LOTUS

The Crystal Lotus is a hardy variety of flower that grows in the extreme temperatures of the north. Like southern varieties of lotus, it can be used as an ingredient in alchemical creations that allow their users to contact various spirit-forms. Among the side-effects of the use of crystal lotus however, is a tendency to go mad as well as displaying various outdated and archaic habits.

## FROST DEMONS

Frost Demons are misshapen creatures composed of solid ice bearing large wings and jagged spines of frost. From a distance, their appearance can resemble that of a frostwere. Attracted by the body heat of warm-blooded creatures that their keen senses can detect from miles away, Frost Demons use their hooked claws and huge fangs to rend apart their prey. Additionally, Frost Demons possess a fearsome ability to exhale a blast of sub-zero vapor that can freeze victims solid. Despite their attraction to warm-blooded creatures, Frost Demons display an aversion to heat and flame.

**Size:** 7'-8', 500 lbs.

**Attributes:**

INT +1	PER -2*
WIL +3	CHA -9
STR +6	DEX -2
CON +10	SPD -1*

**Ability Level:** 3-10

**Attacks/Damage:** Claws: DR 12; Bite: DR 8; Freezing Breath, DR 20

**Special Abilities:** Detect warm-blooded creatures (1-5 mile radius) with PER +4, flight at SPD +3, double damage from heat or flame, if the demon's icy breath is enough to reduce a creature to 0 Hit Points, the creature does not die, but is instead frozen solid.

**Armor:** Icy hide, PR 3

**Hit Points:** 30



## ICE DRAGONS

Huge crystalline monsters dwelling in the coldest reaches of Narandu, L'Haan, and Xanadas, Ice Dragons seem to be some disturbing cross-breeding of Talislantan dragon and the beings known as Ice Giants. The illustrious naturalist, Thystram, once claimed that Ice Dragons and Ice Giants were created at the same time as a result of "destructive magical elemental forces unleashed during the Great Disaster." During Thystram's day, his peers laughed at his suggestions and claimed him a madman. However, modern Talislantan scholars do not entirely dispute his claims. His other claim, that Ice Dragons begin their lives as crystalline eggs underneath the icy waters of the Midnight Sea or the frozen lakes of the north, has yet to gain many adherents.

Like other notable destructive denizens of the North, Ice Dragons seem to be composed almost wholly of animate ice with the exceptions of their hearts which take the form of massive uncut blue diamonds that can be glimpsed deep within their frozen bodies. These huge reptiles subsist on wild beasts and humanoids that they freeze solid with

their icy breath. Not only capable of flash freezing living prey into a state of suspended animation, their frigid breath can also cause materials to become brittle enough to shatter at a touch. It is not unknown for Ice Dragons to glide high above Narandu in its sporadic cloud cover, only to dive down on unsuspecting victims. Fortunately for living beings everywhere, Ice Dragons are apparently becoming quite rare.

**Size:** 50'-60' in length, 3-5 tons

**Attributes:**

INT -1            PER +4  
WIL +3            CHA -6  
STR +15          DEX -4  
CON +8           SPD -3

**Ability Level:** 15-50

**Attacks/Damage:** Bite, DR 20; Claws, DR 25; Icy Breath, DR 40

**Special Abilities:** Radiate cold in a 25' radius (causes -2 to opponent's combat rolls), fire inflicts double damage, capable of limited flight and gliding. If the Dragon's icy breath is enough to reduce a creature to 0 Hit Points, the creature does not die, but is instead frozen solid until such time as magical aid might be administered or it is consumed by the Dragon.

**Armor:** Icy plated scales, PR 8

**Hit Points:** 75



## THE EGGS OF ICE DRAGONS

*Found only in the depths beneath L'Haan's frozen lakes are the crystalline orbs known as Ice Dragon Eggs. Although naturalists in the south have never been able to hatch or even crack one of the diamond-hard shells of these orbs, the repeated stories of these gems found only in pools frequented by Ice Dragons is enough for them to keep their name. Mirin artisans are purportedly able to open one of these eggs through repeated freezing and chipping with an adamant blade or hammer. The thick luminescent fluid within is considered a delicacy by the Mirin, but practically unknown in other lands. In other lands, these globes are frequently polished and used by wizards for various purposes, including attractive, if often unreliable, orbs for scrying.*

*The few sailors who have traversed the Midnight Sea claim that Ice Dragons are born somewhere beneath its dark and ice-haunted surface. Whether this means that they are in some way related to Sea Dragons is a matter of much dispute in the warm, dry academies of the west.*

## KRA, LAKE

Smaller relatives of the Kra, these giant eels are commonly found in lakes and rivers across the continent. Although they typically do not grow to the size of their other relatives across the continent, the strength and ferocity of Lake Kra are not to be underestimated.

**Size:** 8'-12' long, 800-1500 lbs.

**Attributes:**

INT -9            PER +1  
WIL +3            CHA n/a  
STR +5            DEX -1  
CON +5            SPD +5

**Ability Level:** 3-15

**Attacks/Damage:** Bite: DR 10+Ability Level; Tail: DR 8

**Special Abilities:** Aquatic  
**Armor:** Scaly hide, PR 2  
**Hit Points:** 30



## KRA, ICE

Similar in many respects to the Lake Kra, Ice Kra are giant eels that dwell in the waters of the wintry North. Unlike many of their kin, Ice Kra are capable of surviving outside of water. Although they cannot burrow through rock and stone like Land Kra, they are capable of pushing their bulk through snow. Should food supplies grow short in the waters claimed by an Ice Kra, they will typically leave their homes and travel great distances looking for food. The sight of an Ice Kra bursting from a snow bank to snatch up a nearby strider or tundra beast is not an uncommon one according to Mirin tundra scouts.

**Size:** 10'-15' long, 1000-1500 lbs.

**Attributes:**

INT -7	PER +0
WIL +2	CHA n/a
STR +6	DEX -2

CON +8                      SPD +5

**Ability Level:** 5-15

**Attacks/Damage:** Bite: DR 10+ Ability Level;  
Tail: DR 8

**Special Abilities:** Aquatic; move across land/  
burrow through snow at SPD +3; Immune to  
natural cold

**Armor:** Thick Hide, PR 2

**Hit Points:** 40

## RIME HOUNDS

The near constant bane of travelers crossing Narandu, these fierce beasts scour the plains in numerous bands numbering in the dozens. Small and reptilian, Rime Hounds are covered in what appears to be stiff, frozen spines of fur. They are capable of running across the surface of even the most dangerous snow without ill-effect. Because of this, they are practically indistinguishable from a cloud of blown snow from a distance. Called hounds for their predilection to hound their quarry for long distances, they seemingly flock towards sources of heat. Thick, insulating furs that keep in heat and turn away cold are often sufficient to keep Rime Hounds away since they can apparently detect the warmth of the skin. Those creatures who are unfortunate enough to experience the exposure of their skin to Rime Hounds suffer from a rapid drop in bodily temperature and the swift onset of hypothermia. Flames both draw Rime Hounds but can also keep them at bay; unfortunately such things as campfires often attract the attention of other creatures in Narandu as well.

**Size:** 2'6"-3' at shoulder; 40-65 lbs.

**Attributes:**

INT -6	PER +2
WIL -4	CHA - 6
STR -3	DEX +3
CON +1	SPD +4

**Ability Level:** 1-2

**Attacks/Damage:** Claws: DR 2, Touch: DR 1  
per round within melee range due to loss of body  
heat

**Armor:** Icy skin, PR 1

**Hit Points:** 5

**Special Abilities:** fire inflicts double damage;  
detect warmth at a range of 100'

## SMOKK

An amusing-looking species of flightless avir native to Urag, the Smokk has a harsh, croaking call that can be heard up to a mile away and from which it derives its name. Although they cannot fly, Smokk are quite fast. Often sought after because of their unusual ability to locate precious metals



and gems, Smokk are unfortunately quite susceptible to various diseases and ailments. The malodorous fumes and vapors of Urag however seem to stave off the negative effects of these complaints, an adaptation that has allowed the Smokk to survive in the wilds.

## SPIDER OAK

A much smaller relative of the Span Oak, the Spider Oak has a large exposed root system that lifts its main trunk high off the ground much in the same way that a Crag Spider's dozen legs elevate its own body. Large groves of Spider Oak often have their root systems so intertwined with one another that many woodsmen go elsewhere in search of lumber for fear of cutting the wrong root and having part of the mass come crashing down. The undersides of Spider Oaks are often moist, damp places and home to the various fungi, mosses, and vermin found in such places. However, for a traveler seeking to get out of the rain, the darkened arches of a Spider Oak's roots offer some shelter.

## THORNWOOD

A giant species of vine, Thornwood can be found in regions across Talislanta. The tough spiny branches of the Thornwood are highly resistant to both fire and cutting implements normally used for clearing brush, furthermore, the prodigious rate of growth of this vine leads most farmers to describe it as a nuisance. Although it can be used as an

efficient hedge to surround a property, providing a measure of both privacy and security, the constant need to keep the plant from over-growing its bounds and taking over the rest of the landscape often discourages any but the wealthiest or most careless from using it for this purpose.

## TIMBER BEAST



A larger relative of the Tundra Beast, Timber Beasts only possess one head and have a darker coloration. Typically found in the mountains and forests of northern Talislanta, Timber Beasts are known for their distinctive cry – a long and eerie shriek that seems to carry on the wind. Packs of Timber Beasts often spread out over the territory they claim; using their shrill howl they are able to communicate with their pack in the event of finding suitable prey.

**Size:** 5'5"-6' at shoulder, 450-700 lbs.

**Attributes:**

INT -8      PER +7  
WIL +3      CHA n/a  
STR +6      DEX +2  
CON +5      SPD +4

**Ability Level:** 4-10

**Attacks/Damage:** Bite: DR 12

**Special Abilities:** Track by scent

**Armor:** Thick scales and fur, PR 3

**Hit Points:** 30

## TUNDRA BEAST

A feared, two-headed predator of the north, Tundra Beasts have scales and fur of gray and white that allow them to get close to their prey. Able to track prey by both sight and scent, these great beasts are capable of bringing down creatures much larger than they are. Although they are frequently sought by trappers for their thick, insulating hides, the Jaka of Yrmania favor Tundra Beasts for their large fangs. These prodigious teeth can grow to be six or eight inches long before the Tundra Beasts shed them for new ones in the spring. Normally Tundra Beasts hunt in packs of as many as a dozen individuals and are wisely avoided by most Talislantans.

**Size:** 4' at shoulder, 350-450 lbs.

**Attributes:**

INT -8      PER +5  
WIL +4      CHA n/a  
STR +4      DEX +4  
CON +5      SPD +4

**Ability Level:** 2-5

**Attacks/Damage:** Bite: DR 8 (two attacks per round)

**Special Abilities:** Immune to natural cold; track by scent; difficult to spot in snow

**Armor:** Thick scales and fur, PR 2

**Hit Points:** 25

## TUNDRA LOPER

Hardy and belligerent cousin of the common, plains loper, tundra lopers are indigenous to the frozen northern realms of Narandu and L'Haan. They are distinguishable from their plains-dwelling relatives by their shaggy white manes. Tundra lopers also have an additional spike on their clawed lower appendages, which enables them to

negotiate icy terrain.

Traveling in herds of up to thirty individuals, these rugged bipeds roam the frigid wastelands, feeding on creatures smaller and weaker than themselves. They have been known to attack frostweres, but usually only in self defense. When food is scarce, such as after a deep snowstorm, tundra lopers may hunt larger prey, including humanoids.

**Size:** 14' in length, 8' in height, 400-600 lbs.

**Attributes:**

INT -6      PER +2  
WIL +6  
STR +4      DEX +4  
CON +8      SPD +5

**Ability Level:** 7-9

**Attacks/Damage:** Bite: DR 6, Hind Claws: DR 10, Whip-like Tail: DR 8; one attack per round

**Special Abilities:** Sure-footed climbers (even on ice), leap across 20'-30' spans with running start

**Armor:** Shaggy fur, PR 2

**Hit Points:** 44





*Mirin children slowly trickled into the caverns in a slow stream of ice blue faces and sparkling eyes. At the heart of the cavern a regal priestess filled an icy bowl with cool, pure water and then bent to breathe gently across the rippling surface. A chill, refreshing breeze passed through the grotto to follow the priestess's voice.*

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