

WARLOCK

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THE DRAGON EMPIRE

WARLOCK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| “10 Magnificent Sultans of the Mharoti Empire” by Wolfgang Baur | 2 |
| “Into the Dragon Empire: Marea and the Islands” by Chris Harris | 7 |
| “Terrors of the Dragon Empire” by James J. Haeck..... | 12 |
| “Phosus, Dread Wyrms of the Falls” by Jon Sawatsky | 17 |
| “Yek Demons ” by Jeremy Hochhalter | 22 |
| “Dragon Turtles of Midgard: An Interview with a Sahuagin Scholar” by Brian Suskind | 24 |

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10 MAGNIFICENT SULTANS OF THE MHAROTI EMPIRE

by Wolfgang Baur

For all of its almost 350 years, the Mharoti Empire has been home to tremendously rapacious lords. All its sultans and morza have pursued a policy of war, plunder, and expansion—but not all have been equally effective. Leading the war and marshalling the empire’s resources is the work of the sultan or sultana, the human leader who unites, governs, and leads the empire’s many factions—work that the dragons don’t trust other dragons to do.

Indeed, one of the sultan’s most disagreeable tasks is that of ruling on disputes between the scaly lords, a task almost certain to make an enemy. Should we pity the sultan? No, indeed, but learn now the tales of ten of the most famous of these rulers and some of their strange magic and ever-glorious deeds.

HETMAN XANDROS (0–41 MDA)

The first sultan was not called a sultan at all but was styled as the chamberlain and hetman to Mharot himself, a sort of glorified servant and factotum. This role explains much of the later development of the title and duties of the sultan. For Hetman Xandros, over the years his word grew increasingly strict and his duties grew more and more martial as Mharot spent time counting treasures, accepting fealty, and raising thousands and tens of thousands of kobaldi and dragonborn troops to fight

for the nascent empire’s raids out of the hills and into the rich human lands of Parthia, the islands of Marea, the Free City of Pharos, and other neighboring territories. As he grew too old and feeble to lead soldiers on long marches out of the Khalpostan hills, Xandros took on new duties as a leader of the Mharoti faith, founding the first large temple of Baal and granting permission for eastern missionaries of Azuran to speak to the scaly folk.

At the end of his life, Xandros was posthumously given the title of “First Sultan of the Mharoti,” and his burial site in Khalpostan is still a site of pilgrimage and veneration. Called the Tomb of the First Servant, it is a place that Mharot himself visits about once a decade. Its priests make much of their role and history.

SULTAN TREBEZID, THE SHADOW OF THE DRAGON (58–79 MDA)

Said to be dragon-blooded and extremely well versed in prophetic arts and arcane divinations, Sultan Trebezid served as Mharot’s first recipient of dreams and indeed the system of “dream commands” originates with Sultan Trebezid. A very private man, he left no heirs, and much of his work was carried out in secret, bribing lesser lords to pledge fealty to Mharot and its legions (perhaps under magical compulsion—the records are unclear).

Certainly the first records of the service of ogres and giants in the armies of the empire date from his time. He also codified much dragon magic, including many of its unique elemental and battle spells (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook* or *Deep Magic: Dragon Magic*) and established the first college of war to train officers, wands, and siege engineers.

In addition to these contributions to the empire's traditions, Sultan Trebezd is fondly remembered for personally leading the assault on the Free City of Pharos, the empire's great naval rival on the Ruby Sea. The songs and tales of his courage are many, though some always take a more skeptical view; the assault did provide a victory and an enormous number of human slaves, but the ensuring city-wide fire left the conquest rather ashen. Plunder was slim, and what little taken funded an attempt to rebuild the harbor. Pharos never recovered and remains a minor village to this day.

SULTAN OMAyed THE MUNIFICENT 69–113 MDA)

Generous to a fault, Sultan Omayed kept his generals and nobles close to him, even as rebellion spread in distant provinces and assassins made attempts against his life closer to home. The morza loved him because he excelled at extracting taxes from the poor and the artisans, but the jambuka hated him, for he preached always of a “golden blood” form of the Mharoti polity, speaking frequently of exterminating the hairy folk that “hold the empire back.”

In practice, rebellions were brutally suppressed by his loyal heavy troops, and the kobaldi enjoyed lording it over terrified ghettos of humans, gnolls, and dwarves. In the end, Omayed died at the ripe age of 75 on the golden silk sheets of his sultan's bed and surrounded by generals who had all sworn to defend him—and grown rich doing it.

SULTANA PETEK RAYHANA THE GOLDEN (114–127 MDA)

After Omayed's heavy taxation and constant purges, it seems that the Blessing of Mharot took a different direction. Petek Rayhana was a woman raised in Perunalia who came to Harkesh as an adult and quickly became a wealthy, powerful leader of artisans and scholars and with many friends in the priesthood. Her salons and her tireless work on behalf of the poor and the starving restored peace and harmony between scaly folk and hairy folk—until she was appointed sultana at Omayed's death.

The title seems to have swiftly given her a sense of authority and control, and she moved quickly to advance Mharoti interests against the minotaurs, Nurians, Mareans, and Ishadians. Indeed, she led what is still called the Dragonfire Crusade against the Nurians, a bold stroke that conquered and held the Nurian city of Avaris for a season; her famous star dagger is said to have been looted from a Nurian god-queen's tomb. Her conquest of Achillon and the Marea was more lasting than the occupation of Avaris, and that province remembers her to this day. Sultana Petek died rather young in childbirth with her fifth child, though some believe she was assassinated by zealous cultists of Azuran offended by her refusal to allow gambling among the palace troops.

The Star Dagger

Rare weapon

Of Nurian make and star-forged steel and adamant, the star dagger is a beautiful +3 *dagger* that glows with a cold, actinic light. All invisible creatures within 60 feet of the unsheathed blade lose their invisibility at once and are covered in *faerie fire*. More than one assassin has been foiled by the *Star Dagger's* clear light.



SULTANA GÜLNUR PETEKA, THE SILENT ROSE (182–201 MDA)

The Sultana Gülnur spent time consolidating the conquests of her predecessors, building roads and fortifications, planning new thrusts against Ishadia and restoring the fleet to chase down Marean pirates. She is best remembered, however, not for aqueducts, castles, and roads, but for her ruling in the matter of the great undead morza Ibbalan and the general of the 4th Legion, Regladoross the Night Flyer. In that dispute, Ibbalan claimed a larger share of the treasure from the conquest of the harbor city of Prezhan (taken from the Nurians) than was strictly owing, simply as the morza nearest to the new land and its presumptive new liege lord. Regladoross had lost a brother in battle and fought extremely bloody actions against Red Portal mages, theurges of Thoth-Hermes, and a group of sun priests who slew Mharoti edjet and timarli with silent rains of radiant light, burning armor and puncturing helms and leaving roughly half the 4th Legion dead in the streets of Prezhan.

By Mharoti law, Ibbalan could claim a quarter of the spoils, but he took nearer a third. Kobaldi and other smallfolk were shocked when he dared to this corruption of law. However, quoting the Law of Baal and the dream-words of Mharot (“Fair plunder makes a stronger empire”), the sultana sided with the general and restored the plunder from Ibbalan to the legion’s survivors. The armies and the other morza all sided with the sultana’s ruling, and for the first time, Mharoti law was seen to apply to even the strongest and most powerful dragons. The sultana commissioned an enormous monument to the dead from her own funds.

Let it be thought that all the wrath of dragons was turned aside, let it be noted that young, charismatic Regladoross died of a mysterious scale rot some years later; no connection to Ibbalan was ever proven.

Gülnur immortalized him on the Prezhan monument as “Conqueror of the Harbor, Lord of Legions, Paragon of Just Plunder.”

SULTAN OMAYED THE YOUNGER (279–288 MDA)

A great and deeply devout follower of Khespotan, Sultan Omayed, it was said, would not leave bed without consulting his fortune. The priests of the earth god had great influence in his reign, and the dragon Rüzgar was the first and only one of its kind to be granted a province of its own during Sultan Omayed’s rule. It was a time of great prophecies, and the writing of several famous volumes of prophecy, poetry, and law all date to this period. Four great monastic schools and six large colleges teaching mining, arcana, and theology were all established in this short period.

In the end, however, Sultan Omayed failed to provide sufficient new wealth to feed the temples of Baal and to expand the treasuries of Mharot, Ibbalan, and Rüzgar (among others), and Omayed was denounced as having lost the “mandate of Mharot” by dozens of prophets of Khespotan, all on the same day throughout the empire. The Sultan died in his sleep four days later, leading to a tumultuous Years without a Sultan (288–303) when the morza all attempted to rule independently. This almost led to civil war and certainly did lead to the empire’s contraction until the morza agreed to restore a (very weak) sultan to make decisions for the empire as a whole.

SULTAN ZELIM THE WASTREL (304–308 MDA)

At first, Zelim was an odd choice for a sultan. His prior life had been as a court jeweler, providing gemstones for the dragonkin, taking commissions for necklaces and signet rings, and generally understanding the finances of plunder and conquest. However, his rule began very auspiciously because at the very least

it ended the public feuding of the Years without a Sultan. Caravans within the empire were no longer plundered, garrisons were sent to the borders, and legions marched against external foes.

And for a time, it seemed that Sultan Zelim had found a way to expand the power of the empire without all the expense of armies. He brought the blood mages of Kaa'nesh to his court, and they explained things of a few of the dark arts and the joys of Malena, the Red Goddess, and his armies found it easy to conquer towns and villages struck down by plagues and mysterious fevers. He commissioned a Clawed Scepter to show his excellent ability to generate streams of gold and jewels for the lords of the empire.

This worked well for a decade as Zelim grew ever more withdrawn, fat, and arrogant, thinking himself the lord of the Mharoti, rather than the lord executor and defender of the faith. In an incautious moment, he spoke of the "strength of human will" and the "power of the sultan over his enemies" and "the scepter that denotes my perfect rule of the land," phrases that his dragonborn and kobaldi advisors quickly reported to other scaled nobles as indicative of great pride and a confusion over whose will truly ruled the dragon lands. His doom was sealed.

Unrest among both the fire priesthood and the orders of Azuran, and doom-ridden prophecies from Khespotan's caverns, made it clear that Zelim's reign could not last. The priests denounced him daily from the temples as his losses grew, and one fine morning, Harkesh woke up to find that a rather junior general, Makbule Khezmir, had been given the Blessing of Mharot and the Clawed Scepter of government. Since then, few have spoken of Zelim the Wastrel, except to spit and curse his foolishness. The Clawed Scepter that Zelim commissioned is one of the few remaining signs of his reign.

Clawed Scepter

Unique wondrous item

Shaped like a set of talons holding a sun sphere, the Clawed Scepter is made of gold and set with pearls and rubies in a rather garish, bold style. The holder of the scepter is immune to magical fear, cold, and fire, and gains the ability to make all Charisma (Persuade) ability checks with advantage.

SULTAN MAKBULE KHEZMIR THE WISE (309–324 MDA)

With military experience and a deep sense of how corruption and arrogance can lead a ruler astray, Sultan Makbule Khezmir is certainly among the most humble and honest to hold the title. His rule is fondly remembered as the time of conquests against Khandiria, a great victory in Ishadia, even explorations down the Corsair Coast and steady progress in subduing Marea & the Islands, which is to say, finally rooting out several major pirate nests that had held on for a hundred years. He built roads, regulated weights and measures (one common weight is still called the Khezmir pint in his honor), and strove to improve the lot of all the Mharoti people. For this reason, he is rarely disparaged, and his is often referred to as the "Good Old Sultan."

SULTANA CASMARA AZRABAHIR (325–342 MDA)

The Sultan Khezmir's granddaughter and a woman of strong will and endless plans, the sultana ruled for many years in prosperity. Then the combined misfortunes of the naval defeat of Seggotan's Tears and the defeat by the Khandirians at the battle of Wheeling Angels led to the destruction of enough dragonkin that rumors, riots, and anger against the sultana became a problem. Her spies were able to warn her of the coming coup, and she escaped in time, but her fall

led to the rise of a much crueler and more rapacious ruler, the Dread Sultan Ozmir.

DREAD SULTAN OZMIR AL STRAGUL (342–347 MDA)

The first dragonborn to ascend to the position of sultan, Ozmir is a former general and acts like it. Every problem is to be solved by the application of just a little more force, and rampant bribery and corruption flourish among his court, for he believes in spoils and plunder as the right of all dragonfolk. While the merchants complain at the taxes he levies to fund the army (needed after the shameful neglects of the sultana, claims the new lord), the kobaldi delight in the new farmlands of Rumela and the new opportunities to enslave humans and gnolls and other hairy folk.

The empire has seen no great victories under the new sultan, but it has suffered no losses, and the mustering of troops and construction of fleets continues at a furious pace. Sultan Ozmir intends to leave a mark on the world, clawed loose with fire and cunning. The only question for his neighbors is which direction he will cast his steely eye.

Summary

The sultans have ruled sometimes wisely and sometimes foolishly, have been corrupted and have applied the rod of justice to the followers of dark paths and wicked dealings. Like any government, the Mharoti Empire is prone to fits and



starts, errors and injustices, just as often as it brings true justice, rich plunder, and full bellies to its people. Its sultans and sultanas, though, are much loved among the hairy folk and scaled folk alike, and it may be that their ability to weave and compromise among the dragon lords is the mortar that has held the whole enormous nation together for so many centuries. Long live the sultan!

INTO THE DRAGON EMPIRE: MAREA AND THE ISLANDS

by Chris Harris

The Mharoti Empire's Province of Marea and the Islands, also known as the "Province of Fallen Temples," became part of the empire over a century ago. With the conquest of neighboring Illyria, many thought the old worries concerning Marea's embarrassing "difficulties" with its largely non-scaled population and their supplanted faiths would have faded away, bringing greater stability to the region. On the island of Eraklion, at least, the prediction proved to be an erroneous one.

Eraklion

Eraklion, once a sleepy fishing village atop the western seaside cliffs of a small island, teeters on the knife's edge of imperial disfavor. The priesthood of Nethus on the island and the surrounding region all but disappeared over the last century, first due to conquest by the Mharoti Empire which expelled the Nethusites from their temples and rededicated the holy places to their own sea god, Segottan. Then decades later, their status suffered further degradation in the years of the Nethus's captivity by Kammae Straboli. With the freeing of their god, Nethus's remaining priests and priestesses experienced a renewed vigor and directed their zeal at those who drove them from their temples. They now play a deadly cat-and-mouse game with the Dragon Empire, striking at draconic rule and then

disappearing with the aid of sea creatures who share their devotion.

Eraklion now finds itself the nexus of the Nethusite priesthood's covert efforts by virtue of its seaside location and the old priest who leads the rebellion from hiding in a cave system among the coastal cliffs nearby. The ancient temple of Nethus, reluctantly restored by the Mharoti, keeps itself insulated from these activities and publicly denounces the "heretical" deeds of their hidden brethren. However, this disavowal is largely a charade to protect both the temple and its adherents from reprisal.

The relative light touch of the morza who rules the region, the silver dragon Yiraz Azah, played into their hands at the outset of the insurgency, but recent days have seen the morza's servants patrolling the area, and her wounded pride at the loss of an imperial legion to Triolan naval power acts as a goad to her efforts.

Rewards have been posted for the insurgent priesthood, but thus far, none have come forward to claim any, and the Nethusites themselves keep all but a few residents in the dark about their activities. Several radical devotees of Nethus have been burned alive near the steps of the temple, but the practice is unlikely to be repeated since it only served to intensify the conflict and galvanize some of the populace in their devotion. Nevertheless, some locals resent the Nethusites over the increased



imperial scrutiny, particularly among the seafaring smugglers who use the village as a home port.

ADVENTURE HOOKS IN ERAKLION

Find adventure in distant Eraklion:

- Hunt a renegade priest of Nethus hiding either in the cliffside caverns along the coast or beneath the waves below.
- Free a captured Nethusite accused of sedition and sacrilege.
- Pose as part of a smuggler's crew in order to take command of the ship and sail its valuable cargo to Kyprion.
- Hunt a ferocious sea serpent who preys on local fishing boats.

While some areas in the province grow restive, others carry on as they have done for a century, all the while remaining shrouded in secrecy. One such place, the mountaintop city called Mistras-Marea holds secrets even from the dragons it continues to serve faithfully.

Mistras-Marea

The steep mountain road which winds upward to the walled city of Mistras-Marea begins its climb at a fork in the road near a village of mostly human farmers governed by a small fort garrisoned by dragonkin officers and kobold troops. Almost all of the traffic up the mountain consists of kobolds driving cattle to spare their dragonkin superiors the indignity. No non-scaled creatures ever ascend unless bound as captives and escorted by soldiers from the garrison. What comes down the mountain does so with less regularity due to restrictions on trade. No silk goods leave the Mistras-Marea except in the hands of scaled imperial citizens of akinji rank or higher or those bearing a writ from a creature of equal prestige. Provided those qualifications are met, dragonkin or other

scaled citizens may purchase the finest silk in quantities of nearly any size; spools as large as a horse sometimes make their way in wagons down the mountain road.

Mistras-Marea's sole trade commodity is silk of the finest quality. Great spools of silk thread and rope, silk clothing, and other items, such as barding of any size, can be purchased at the barbican from the human thralls there or constructed to order while the client waits in the small inn just down the road a short distance.

The weavers of the city also produce a steady supply of quilted silk for use in padding for armor, which provides additional protection against arrows (possessing resistance to piercing damage from nonmagical weapons). Expensive even for Mharoti of some standing, such pieces are most often given as rewards by the ruling classes of the empire to faithful servants, primarily as an inner layer to a hauberk or suit of scale mail.

The steady trade notwithstanding, few visitors who come to trade go any further than the barbican, supposedly in the interest of protecting well-kept trade secrets. The interior of the city remains a mystery to all but the morza who governs the province and a few others.

The city's size is deceptive. Much of the surface area within the walls skirts around the edges of massive caverns that descend deep into the mountain. Indeed, these caverns and their occupants give the city its reason for existence. Thick, rope-like webs crisscross much of the caves' interiors for at least 100 feet below the surface, and their inner walls bear large, pockmarked holes. Within the holes, the web's spinners, all specimens of a fecund breed of angler worm (see *Tome of Beasts*) wait for cattle to be dropped into their lines.

Known to only a few of the ruling morza of the Empire, Mistras-Marea operates entirely under the guidance of a cartel of

Denizens of Leng (see *Tome of Beasts*).

Some of the humanoid prisoners brought to the city spend the rest of their lives as weavers of silk, leading hard, frightening lives of forced labor at the hands of monsters. Those captives not chosen for the work of weavers vanish down the enormous caverns. The weak and infirm become food for the angler worms, but the majority march in chains through a portal leading to the Plateau of Leng and an unknown fate.

The vast wealth that has made its way up the mountain for many years is thought to sit buried in chambers deep in caves, far below the webs of the worms. What dangers might await beneath the webs, none can say, but for all the worms' size, on occasion they are found half-eaten, slowly spinning in their own webbing. Whatever creatures feed on them do so infrequently, however, and have yet to come all the way to the surface.

Here are a few of the goods available to those with the privilege or luck to attain them.

TREASURES FROM MISTRAS-MAREA

Marean Silk Cloak

These full, hooded cloaks exist in a wide variety of vivid colors, though most serve as rewards for faithful service, reflecting the scales of the giver. Marean silk cloaks grants the wearer resistance to piercing damage from nonmagical weapons.

Cost: 120 gp; **Weight:** 3 lb.

Marean Silk Rope

Marean silk rope comes in a 50-foot coil, has 4 hit points, and can be burst or detached with a DC 20 Strength check.

Cost: 75 gp; **Weight:** 4 lb.

Marean Net

A Marean silk net functions as a mundane net but weighs less, has greater range, and the following differences:

- A Marean net requires a DC 14 Strength check to free oneself or another from it.
- Inflicting 12 slashing damage to the net (AC 12) destroys the net and frees a creature trapped within, but an attack made to free a creature which misses by 5 or more results in the weapon becoming snared in the net's sticky strands, requiring a DC 12 Strength check to free it.

Marean Whip

The silk of angler worms is braided together with leather to lend these whips an edge when used against unruly thralls. An attack with a Marean whip that succeeds against a Medium or smaller creature by 5 or more restrains the target.

Silk-Backed Coin Mail

Made of silver coins from conquered Illyria, backed by a layer of quilted red silk spun by the monstrous angler worms of Mistras-Marea, only a few dozen of these hauberks were made and awarded to dragonkin who acquitted themselves with conspicuous valor in the campaign that conquered that land. The armor grants the wearer resistance to piercing damage from

WEAPONS

| NAME | COST | DAMAGE | WEIGHT | PROPERTIES |
|-----------------|-------|--------------|--------|-------------------------------|
| Marean Silk Net | 60 gp | — | 2 lb. | Special, Thrown (range 10/20) |
| Marean Whip | 50 gp | 1d4 slashing | 3 lb. | Special, Finesse, Reach |



WEAPONS

| MEDIUM ARMOR | COST | ARMOR CLASS (AC) | STRENGTH | STEALTH | WEIGHT |
|-----------------------|------|---------------------------|----------|--------------|--------|
| Silk-Backed Coin Mail | — | 15 + Dex modifier (max 1) | — | Disadvantage | 50 lb. |

nonmagical weapons. Silk-backed coin mail grants the wearer +2 status when dealing with any citizen of the Mharoti Empire, and –2 status when dealing with exiled Illyrians or Triolans.

The key to the silk harvesting comes from the experimentation the denizens of Leng inflicted on some of their human captives. The end result is an ideal instrument for the purpose, though hideous to behold.

Marean Weaver

This gruesome many-legged creature has the body of an enormous centipede, topped by a humanoid torso covered in a chitinous exoskeleton. The mouth of its armored head consists of multiple sets of small mandibles, and its multifaceted eyes bulge out of human-like sockets. Two long, segmented arms droop from its shoulders, and a third grown from between its shoulders hangs over its head like a scorpion's tail.

Once Were Human. These hideous creatures were once human, but through arcane means, the denizens of Leng have transformed them beyond recognition. The metamorphosis did not leave their minds intact, and they appear quite dull when not performing one of the tasks for which they were made. Marean weavers may retain some shred of memory of their former lives, but their every waking moment is now filled with one task or another, all requiring what little concentration they can muster.

Designed for Several Purposes. Weavers exist for two purposes: harvesting the silk webs of angler worms by holding off the

worms without killing them to allow others to do the harvesting and weaving the silk into various items. Their altered minds make them immune to the worms' ability to lure prey, and their chitinous skin grants them some defense against the acid of the worms' bites. Everything about them that does not aid those tasks has been removed if at all possible by the denizens of Leng.

Formidable in Numbers. The weaver's three arms were designed primarily to hold off an angler worm's attack by stopping its charge and holding its gaping maw open with the aid of another weaver while others harvest nearby silk web lines. Accordingly, they are rarely seen in numbers less than three.

MAREAN WEAVER

Large monstrosity, neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (7d10 + 14)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 12 (+1) | 14 (+2) | 14 (+2) | 7 (–2) | 12 (+1) | 5 (–3) |

Skills Acrobatics +4, Athletics +3, Perception +3

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +4

Damage Resistances acid

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; passive Perception 13

Languages understands Trade Tongue but cannot speak

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spider Climb. The weaver can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.





Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the weaver knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. The weaver ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The marean weaver makes three claw attacks.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage. If two or more claw attacks hit the same target, the target is grappled (escape DC 13) if it is a Large or smaller creature and the weaver doesn't have another creature grappled. Two weavers working in tandem can grapple a Huge creature.

TERRORS OF THE DRAGON EMPIRE

by James J. Haeck

The Mharoti Dragon Empire is the scourge of Midgard and the Southlands alike. The vast armies of the Dragon Empire march relentlessly across the known world in their endless wars of conquest, spreading fear and chaos wherever they go. The creatures that make up the Mharoti forces are powerful and frightful, ranging from deadly kobold ambushers mounted atop camouflaged drakes to elite companies of the finest dragonborn warriors Midgard has ever seen. Feared by the Mharoti and their enemies alike, these are the terrors of the Dragon Empire.

Baal's 1st Legion

The fires must be fed. So says the creed of Baal, lord of fire, master of sacrifice, and king of dragons. Few feed the flames of war as expertly as the triumphant soldiers of Baal's 1st Legion. Where most Mharoti imperial legions number close to ten thousand troops strong, Baal's 1st is a unit of one thousand of the empire's best soldiers, reserved only for strategic deployment against crucial military objectives.

Many of the soldiers in Baal's 1st were once members of adventuring parties or high-profile mercenary companies

and are used to working in small units. The 1st Legion comprises one hundred "fellowships," each composed of ten soldiers. The commanders of these fellowships report to Korsiq Vraal, High Commander of the Legion. This way, the 1st Legion can act as a complete unit under Vraal's orders to overwhelm an enemy force or easily divide to attack with greater precision.

COMPOSITION

Baal's 1st Legion is one thousand soldiers strong—its ranks filled with kobolds, dragonborn, and a few assorted jambuka ("unscaled folk") who have gained favor in battle. The legion is composed of the following:

- 250 kobold light infantry (veterans with kobold racial traits).
- 200 kobold archers (veterans with kobold racial traits).
- 150 dragonborn cavalry (knights with red dragonborn racial traits riding warhorses).
- 100 dragonborn elementalists (mages with blue dragonborn racial traits).
- 100 dragonborn sky cavalry (**wyvern knights** with dragonborn racial traits riding war wyverns).

- 75 **desert giant** heavy infantry (see *Tome of Beasts*).
- 75 **kobold alchemists** (see *Tome of Beasts*).
- 25 **naina** spies (see *Tome of Beasts*).
- 25 half-red dragon veterans.
- Command Company (ten elite members of the 1st Legion, see below).

COMMAND COMPANY

Baal's 1st Legion is led by High Commander Korsiq Vraal, but Vraal is also the head of a fellowship of his own. The members of this elite force are heroes of the Dragon Empire, and their appearance on the battlefield can snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, not least of all because Vraal commands the incredible might of a fully grown flame dragon. Its members include the following:

- General Korsiq Vraal, LN male silver winged dragonborn (see below), fellowship commander. Keeps a **crimson drake** perched on his shoulder (see *Tome of Beasts*).
- Teryth, LN female adult **flame dragon** (see *Tome of Beasts*), artillery. Owes Vraal a mysterious life-debt.
- Blind-Eye, N male **ravenfolk doom croaker** (see *Tome of Beasts*), tactician. Claims to see the future.
- "The Blackscale Triplets," Kree, Lail, and Blim, CN female **kobold alchemists** (see *Tome of Beasts*), demolitionists.
- Haddad of the Forge, LN male **efreeti**, armorer and priest of Baal. Cremates fallen foes.
- Nimyu, CE female **naina** (see *Tome of Beasts*), spy/counterspy. Prefers to remain in her guise as an elderly human woman.

- Lord Wasim al-Gizmiri, LG male red dragonborn **wyvern knight**, scout. Vain but dutiful; scion of Ateshah, great wyrm of flame.
- Amirah of the Blade, CN female human *assassin* with 120 hit points, peerless swordswoman. Mysterious desert wanderer, became famous as an undefeatable prize fighter. Wields an enchanted scimitar of speed.

KORSIQ VRAAL

Medium humanoid (silver dragonborn), lawful neutral

Armor Class 21 (+1 mithral plate, spellguard shield)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 20 (+5) | 12 (+1) | 18 (+4) | 10 (+0) | 17 (+3) | 18 (+4) |

Saving Throws Wis +8, Cha +9

Skills Perception +8

Damage Resistances cold

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Aura of Devotion. Korsiq Vraal and friendly creatures within 10 feet of him cannot be charmed while he is conscious.

Blazing Smite. When Korsiq Vraal hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, he may expend one of his spell slots to deal additional fire damage. The extra damage is 3d8 for a 1st-level spell slot, plus 1d8 for each spell level higher than 1st, to a maximum of 6d8. The damage increases by 1d8 if the target is an undead or a fiend.

Dragonbreath Torque. Korsiq Vraal wears a silver torque that doubles the damage of his breath weapon (already included). It requires attunement by a dragonborn.

Spellguard Shield. While holding this shield, Korsiq Vraal has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and spell attacks have disadvantage against him.

Spellcasting. Korsiq Vraal is a 16th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *bless, cure wounds, heroism, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *branding smite, lesser restoration, locate object*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, remove curse, revivify*

4th level (2 slots): *banishment, death ward*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Korsiq Vraal makes 3 melee attacks.

Flame Tongue Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage, or 10 (1d10 + 5) slashing damage if wielded with both hands, plus 11 (2d6 + 1d8) fire damage.

Cleansing Touch. Korsiq Vraal ends one spell on himself or a willing creature that he touches. He can use this action 4 times, regaining expended uses when he finishes a long rest.

Cold Breath (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Korsiq Vraal exhales an icy blast in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) cold damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Protection. When a creature Korsiq Vraal can see attacks a target that is within 5 feet of it, he can use a reaction to impose disadvantage on the attack roll. He must be holding a shield.

Mharoti Kobolds

Kobolds are the largest single racial group in the Mharoti army, and just as wild kobolds unquestioningly serve mighty dragons, so too do these civilized kobolds serve the mighty Dragon Empire. Most kobolds legionnaires are mere infantry, using **kobold** stats—with kobolds in especially well-supplied corps wearing scale armor (AC 16) and wielding spears: +4 to hit, *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

More specialized kobold regiments employ **kobold scouts** and **kobold ambushers**, both of which are trained to operate with a **camouflage drake**. Kobold scouts are trained in the art of moving unseen on drakeback over large stretches of land. When stealth fails, these scouts are adept at fighting on the run. Unlike typical kobold warriors, these scouts are trained to operate individually or in very small groups. As such, they aren't used to fighting in packs like other kobolds. Even without their drake mounts, most kobold scouts are blessed with the gift of flight, and can use their wings to travel great distances.

Kobold ambushers also employ stealth to deadly effect, preferring to lay in wait for hours or days at a time. Ambushers also typically operate in units of ten or more, using their numbers and their pack tactics to devastate their targets even after the initial ambush. While these advantages make them formidable combatants even without the element of surprise, these kobolds rarely try to salvage a failed ambush, preferring to scatter in all directions and meet up at a predetermined rendezvous point.

Camouflage drakes are squat, sand-colored quadrupeds with tiny, vestigial wings incapable of lifting their muscular forms. Despite lacking the ability to fly, these drakes can change color to blend in with their environment and can run as fast as a horse at its top speed. These bestial creatures

lack the shrewd cunning of true dragons but are still intelligent enough to work in perfect tandem with their kobold rider.

KOBOLD SCOUT

Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 22 (4d6 + 8)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 9 (-1) | 18 (+4) | 14 (+2) | 9 (-1) | 16 (+3) | 8 (-1) |

Saving Throws Dex +6

Skills Perception +8, Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the kobold scout can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Skirmishing. The kobold scout deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage whenever it hits a target with a weapon attack on its turn, and has moved at least 30 feet that turn. This includes movement made while mounted.

Stealthy Traveler. The kobold scout can move stealthily at a normal pace while traveling overland.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/360 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

KOBOLD AMBUSER

Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 7 (3d6 - 3)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| 7 (-2) | 16 (+3) | 9 (-1) | 8 (-1) | 10 (+0) | 8 (-1) |

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Assassinate. During its first turn, the kobold ambusher has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit the ambusher scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Camouflage. The kobold ambusher has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to avoid being seen on a turn in which it has not moved. If it does not move for at least 1 minute, it cannot be seen unless directly interacted with. This effect ends if the ambusher moves.

Pack Tactics. The kobold ambusher has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the ambusher's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Sneak Attack. The kobold ambusher deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the spy that isn't incapacitated and the ambusher doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

CAMOUFLAGE DRAKE

Medium dragon, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 38 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 50 ft., burrow 20 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 12 (+1) | 14 (+2) | 16 (+3) | 5 (-3) | 12 (+1) | 5 (-3) |

Skills Stealth +6

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning

Senses tremorsense 20 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Camouflage. The camouflage drake has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks

made to avoid being seen on a turn in which it has not moved. If it does not move for at least 1 minute, it cannot be seen unless directly interacted with. This effect ends if the drake moves.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The camouflage drake makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (2d4 + 1) slashing damage.



PHOSUS, DREAD WYRM OF THE FALLS

by Jon Sawatsky

In the belly of the Dragoncoil Mountains lies an ancient and spectacular set of magma falls. The falls have many names but are most commonly known as the Firefalls of Ghoss. The story tells of a young dragonfolk sorcerer who, fleeing through the mountains from an angered nest of wyverns, discovered a wide tunnel leading to the falls. After descending into the mountain, he spied a ledge that looked out over the great flow of magma and, walking upon it, discovered a thinning of the veil between Midgard and the Eleven Hells. The sorcerer began to plot immediately.

Near the ledge in the heated stone walls around the magma flows, Ghoss built himself a fortress—hiring all manner of mercenaries, builders, and madmen to assist in its construction. The fortress housed Ghoss's greatest hope—a magical focus built to harness the raw elemental energy that emanated from the falls and the infernal magic cast by the gateway on the ledge. But unbeknownst to the sorcerer, a great malevolence slumbered in the deep places below where the firefalls flowed into darkness. On the eve of the celebration of the fortress's completion, a great wyrm

imbued with magma and flame awoke to the sound of carousing and victory. Phosus, the dread wyrm of the falls arose and incinerated most of the celebrants in a single breath. "IT IS MINE," the beast roared and with that took up residence in Ghoss's fortress. The dragon found the focus and wrapped its fiery length around the stone and crystals, feeding on the stored magic.

As for the sorcerer, his life was spared, and he made a bargain with the wyrm. In exchange for five great magical treasures stolen from the temples of the gods, Ghoss could have access to the smoldering focus that Phosus now coveted. The dragon smiled and agreed, but upon the delivery of the final treasure, Phosus turned the sorcerer to ash.

The tunnel that leads to the Firefalls of Ghoss lies hidden somewhere in the Dragoncoil Mountains. Fiery creatures stalk its length, and the flames of Phosus itself await those who descend toward the fortress and that strange thinning between worlds that shimmers on the ledge.

PHOSUS, DREAD WYRM OF THE FALLS

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 306 (17d12 + 102)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 19 (+4) | 14 (+2) | 23 (+6) | 17 (+3) | 14 (+2) | 29 (+5) |

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +11, Wis +7, Cha +10

Skills Deception +10, Insight +7, Perception +12, Persuasion +10, Stealth +7

Damage Immunities fire

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, slashing damage from nonmagical sources

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Common, Draconic, Giant, Ignan, Infernal, Orc

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Fire Incarnate. All fire damage dealt by the dragon ignores fire resistance but not fire immunity.

Keeper of the Gateway (Recharge Special, see Legendary Actions). When Phosus reduces a creature to 0 hit points, it may summon one devil or demon of CR 6 or less to assist it in combat. The summoned creature spawns atop the body of the fallen creature and obeys Phosus until it is destroyed or combat ends.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature repeats the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area takes 63 (18d6) fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 19 Dexterity saving throw. Each creature in that area must also succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or go on a rampage for 1 minute. A rampaging creature must attack the nearest living creature or smash some object smaller than itself if no creature can be reached with a single move. A rampaging creature repeats the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Shifting Flames. The dragon magically polymorphs into a creature that has immunity to fire damage and a size and challenge rating no higher than its own, or back into its true form. It reverts to its true form if it dies. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (the dragon's choice). In a new form, the dragon retains its alignment, hit points, Hit Dice, ability to speak, proficiencies, Legendary Resistance, lair actions, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, as well as this action. Its statistics and capabilities are otherwise replaced by those of the new form, except any class features or legendary actions of that form.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Devour Infernal. Phosus devours any creature it summoned using its Keeper of the Gateway trait. It's Keeper of the Gateway trait recharges. The devoured creature must have at least 1 hit point remaining or this action fails.



Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 15 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

LAIR ACTIONS

The lair of Phosus is fully described in the *Firefalls of Ghoss*.

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the dragon takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects, but the dragon can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

Ignite the Focus. Phosus draws upon the magical focus at the heart of its lair, unleashing a billowing cloud of sulfuring smoke which fills the lair and chokes living creatures within it. Any creature within 200 feet of Phosus must make a DC 15 Constitution save or be blinded and unable to speak until the end of their next turn. The smoke heals Phosus for 20 (3d10 + 3) hit points.

Magma Rain. Phosus causes the firefalls to spew magma, which rains down around him in a 30-ft. radius. Creatures caught in the rain must succeed a DC 15 Dexterity check, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

Rock the Rock. Phosus smashes his great tail upon the stones of his fortress, sending a shockwave in a 60-foot cone in any direction he chooses. Creatures caught in the shockwave must succeed a DC 15 Strength check or fall prone.

Ghoss's Offerings

Phosus prizes the following treasures above all others in its horde. Each was brought to the dragon by Ghoss, who acquired them through treachery, gall, and murder. The elders and high priests from whom the items were stolen are eager to have them returned. Fortunes await adventurers willing to risk the magma, smoke, and teeth of Phosus's lair.

IS AND SUW, THE KNIVES OF BOREAS

Weapons (Is [rapier], Suw [shortsword]), very rare (require attunement)

These twin swords are made from iced steel in the cold forges of the Northlands. Their blades are pale blue and translucent and when unsheathed shed dim white light in a 20-foot radius around their wielder. Their pommels are freezing to the touch to any save those who are attuned to them. The blades become shrouded in strange runes when exposed to temperatures below freezing; the runes float away from the swords and fade from sight after a few feet.

Each of the blades is a +2 *weapon*. The wielder may freely choose to have the swords do cold damage instead of their normal damage type. Once each day, as a bonus action, the wielder may invoke the following:

Frozen Wrath of Boreas. For 1 minute, creatures who take damage from both blades in the same round must make a DC 14 Constitution save or be restrained until the end of their next turn.

VISIOS, THE BLINDFOLD OF CHARUN

Helm, very rare (requires attunement)

This length of shimmering black silk is adorned with small skulls embroidered in silver thread and tiny pearls. Unless wrapped around the eyes of an attuned creature, Visios whispers incoherently to creatures within 60 feet of it. The whispers are both menacing and soothing. The first time a creature hears the whispers, it must make a DC 10 Wisdom save or be frightened for 1d4 hours, after which it is immune to this effect.

A creature who is attuned to Visios and wraps the blindfold around its eyes gains Devil's Sight (as per the warlock's Eldritch Invocation). Once each day, as a reaction

to the death of a creature within 60 feet, the bearer of *Visios* may open their spirit to the following:

Truth in Death. Learn one secret about the dying creature from its spirit as it dies. The GM determines the nature of the secret learned.

ALES, THE MIGHTY STEIN OF NINKASH

Wondrous item (beer stein), very rare (requires attunement)

Made from lacquered sandstone and cherry wood, this festive-looking drinking stein fills the space its bearer occupies with pungent alcoholic mist. Anyone adjacent to the bearer can smell the aroma. The handle of *Ales* is carved wood and portrays a dwarven fertility symbol with lustrous yellow hair. The cap is made from sandstone and gold and does not flip open for any save *Ales's* bearer. The stein is ever-filled with high-quality beer, and provided they drink from the stein each midday, the bearer gains +1 to Strength. The bearer of *Ales* may drain the stein once each day as a bonus action to gain the following:

Might of Nakash. For 1 minute, the bearer gains advantage on all Strength and Charisma ability checks. Additionally, creatures who take damage from a weapon attack of the bearer must succeed a DC 14 Strength save or be pushed 10 feet away from the bearer or knocked prone—bearer's choice.

MERCI, THE CHARMS OF LADA

Wondrous item (belt), very rare (requires attunement)

Twelve platinum charms hung upon a golden chain represent the sacred number of Lada, goddess of dawn love and mercy. Each charm is a repetition of the sacred eye of Lada, varying in size and color. The charms jingle softly as they move, though

they can be silenced with a thought by their bearer. Worn at the waist, *Merci* glows brilliantly when exposed to the light of dawn and casts bright light in a 40-foot radius around its bearer for an hour after such an exposure. The bearer may cancel this effect at any time. Creatures touched by the light (including the bearer) recover one HD up to their maximum. Once each day as a bonus action, the bearer of *Merci* may use the following:

Rise Against Shadow. Magical darkness within 120 feet of the bearer is dispelled. All creatures of the bearer's choosing within 120 feet must succeed a DC 14 Dexterity save or be affected by *faerie fire* for 1 minute. This effect does not require concentration or the ability to cast spells.

EBOS, SHADOW GLOVES OF CHERNOBOG

Wondrous item (gloves), very rare (requires attunement)

Unworn, *Ebos* are an oily pair of leather work gloves that smell faintly of wood smoke and sulfur. They are stiff and cracked and entirely unattractive to the casual looker. When the bearer slides the gloves on for the first time during attunement, they are paralyzed for 1d4 hours as they experience visions of a twisted, shadowy landscape through which horrible creatures walk. Upon recovering, the bearer's maximum HD are reduced by 1. Becoming unattuned to the gloves restores the lost HD. While worn, the gloves appear as miasmic shadow in the vaguest hand-like shapes. While wearing the gloves, the bearer gains advantage to stealth checks. Once each day, as a bonus action, the bearer may cast *vampiric touch* upon themselves (3d6) using their proficiency and Charisma bonuses for the spell attack.

YEK DEMONS

by Jeremy Hochhalter

With flattened, lupine faces and skin pulled taught over skeletal frames, the bulging bellies of yek seem to churn as though their prey still lives inside them. Wearing entrails and bones of previous victims over their dark red fur, black spikes jutting from their spines, yek are terrible to behold.

Yek are loathsome fiends, hated by other demons because of their cannibalistic tendencies. They are creatures that do not care what flesh they feed upon but prefer it to be raw and wriggling. Though vicious fighters alone, they are rarely encountered without their pack. Even the most powerful of fiends can be brought down by a pack of yek.

In a controversial move, the armies of the Dragon Empire have begun using yek as shock troops, summoning the fiends behind enemy lines and letting them do their dirty work.

DEMON, YEK

Small fiend, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 99 (18d6 + 36)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 16 (+3) | 16 (+3) | 15 (+2) | 19 (+4) | 13 (+1) | 10 (+0) |

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +7, Con +6, Int +8

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical damage

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge Rating 9 (5,000 XP)

Devouring Swarm. If a creature has three or more yek attached to it from a bite attack at the end of its turn, the creature must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or suffer from 1d4 Constitution damage as the demons feast upon the creature's flesh.

Magic Resistance. The yek has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Pack Tactics. The yek has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the yek's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The yek makes one bite attack and two claw attacks. It may make a bone shard attack in place of a claw attack if it chooses and has a bone shard available.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (5d6 + 3) piercing damage. On a successful hit, the demon latches on and begins to gnaw on the target (escape DC 17). The yek cannot make a bite attack if already attached but automatically deals bite damage at the end of its turn if it is latched on to a target.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d4 + 3) slashing damage.

Bone Shard. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage. On a successful hit, the bone breaks into splinters in the target's wound.

The target takes 5 (2d4) piercing damage at the end of its turn as long as the bone remains lodged in its wound. A successful DC 15 Medicine (Wisdom) check or magical healing halts the ongoing damage.

A yek typically carries 3 (1d6+1) of these weapons, which are destroyed on a successful attack. It may use its action to tear a bone from a nearby corpse.



DRAGON TURTLES OF MIDGARD

AN INTERVIEW WITH A SAHUAGIN SCHOLAR

by Brian Suskind

"I tell you, mate. Our blades and ballista just bounced off the beast's shell! It's maw opened like the abyss itself, and with a single chomp, our rudder was bit clean away!"

—overheard at the Drunken Sail Tavern

Greetings Good Readers!

It is I, Jacopo de Zagora, professor, investigator and student of all that is. In this missive, I shall relate a fascinating discussion on dragon turtles, which I undertook in a port tavern along the windy docks of Triolo with K'abuleck, a sahuagin scholar of my acquaintance.

THE BEGINNING

Ship's bane. Sailor's horror. You surfacers have many names for them. My people have different ones. Shelltooth, we call them. Or greatmaws. Call them what you will, dragon turtles are respected, feared and revered by all those who make their lives under or upon the water. And why wouldn't they be? With their nearly impervious shell, breath weapon, claws, and tail, the dragon turtle is surely one of the greatest aquatic foes.

A DESCRIPTION

Have you never seen one? Then count yourself lucky not to relive the nightmare when you close your eyes at night. I have seen them both above and below the water

and managed to survive the experience. The first thing you notice is their shell. And a massive thing is it. Rough and studded with three rows of spiked plates, the shell is nearly the same greenish color as deep water making it very hard to see while below. Dragon turtles have taloned flippers for feet that propel them through the water at a speed that belies their great size. Their heads are more like dragons than turtles, a mouth of razor sharp teeth in an armored head complete with a crest of spines. And they have a long powerful tail for swimming and smashing.

ON THEIR NATURE AND HABITS

In general, dragon turtles are fiercely territorial and solitary creatures. They abide the company of their own race or other dragons begrudgingly and the presence of other races hardly at all. Now this does not include their own kin. A dragon turtle matron sometimes has one or two younger members of her clutch to boss around, but she will drive them away by the time they reach adulthood. Really the only time a dragon turtle allows another dragon turtle to enter their domain is during mating season. Lucky we are that this only happens once a decade or so, else we'd be in some greatmaw's belly!

A single dragon turtle claims vast tracks of open ocean as their domain, and pity any

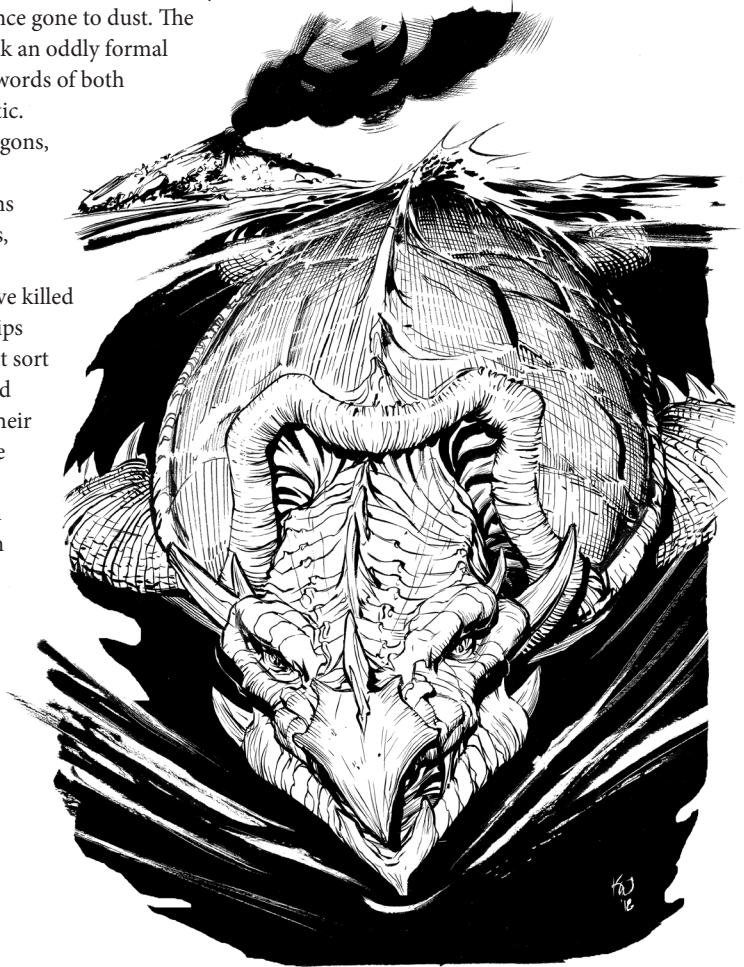
creature who dares intrude. Sometimes this can be over 50 square miles and includes above and below the waves, which is why your sailing ships occasionally run afoul of one of the shelltooths. Luckily for you surfacers, most of the dragon turtles in this part of the world reside in the Western Ocean.

Their lifespan is longer than any in the ocean, longer even than their draconic cousins. Some greatmaws are eons old. This gives them a strange perspective on life. They may hold a grudge against a country for some slight centuries in the past or defend a coastline due to an ancient treaty with a king long since gone to dust. The dragon turtles speak an oddly formal language melding words of both draconic and aquatic.

Much like the dragons, shelltooths collect valuables and tokens from their domains, usually items from interlopers they have killed or the wrecks of ships they have sunk, that sort of thing. They hoard these treasures in their lairs deep below the surface. What . . . ? No. No, the dragon turtles breathe both air and water, so typically their lairs are sea caves near the bottom of the

sea. Now I've been inside a lair a time or two. The greatmaws can be reasoned with if you approach them right. The lairs that I have seen are decorated with their captured wealth and the shattered hulls of ships. Quite tasteful if you appreciate that sort of thing.

As I said, the dragon turtles will aggressively attack any interloper who dares enter their domain. But they can be convinced to allow you passage with a bit of bribe or tribute. Anyhow, folk like you and me are not the main part of their diet. While they eat anything that strikes their fancy,



usually this is the biggest of the fish, like tuna, shark, sturgeon, and whales, but they also eat seaweed or other plants.

ON THEIR LIFE CYCLE

Much like other dragons, dragon turtles vary in size and strength, growing ever more powerful as they slowly age. Their hatchlings start off small, about the size of a dog, and are actually sort of cute. Born in clutches every decade or so, the newborns are left to their own devices, their mother having laid her eggs and moved on long ago. Most of the hatchlings do not survive to reach adulthood.

This is lucky, for at the other end of the current, the oldest, most ancient greatmaws are gargantuan or larger. Their jaws snap wood or bone as easily as kindling, and the scalding steam of their breath boils blood and sloughs skin. It can take centuries for a dragon turtle to reach adulthood and longer to become ancient. And all that time they are getting bigger, stronger and gaining new abilities, even picking up divine or arcane skills. I've even heard tell of one old shell who has taken to pretending to be a small island. Apparently, he enjoys the flavor of sea birds.

NOTABLE INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

Storros the Sea Sage: The ancient one himself. Armada's Bane. Deep Oracle. Shelled Father. He has many names. Storros (N male dragon turtle wizard 12) is a massive, moss-green turtle with eldritch glyphs engraved into his shell. Though not normally known to attack ships, Storros has been known to intercept vessels to set matters along certain foretold paths. This may include imparting cryptic prophesies or demanding specific passengers be handed over to him. The domain of Storros the Sea Sage extends along the Eastern coast of Harkesh.

Jubaila, Priestess of the Waves: Though young for a dragon turtle, Jubaila (NG adult female dragon turtle cleric [Nethus] 7) earned great honor and respect for her dedication to her faith. During the sea god's recent imprisonment, Jubaila prayed and fasted, ritually disfiguring her noble face with coral and stones until her features became twisted and scarred. At first, she believed her sacrifice was rewarded when Nethus was freed, but this initial impression has soured. Jubaila now believes that her beloved god has fallen under the sway of Hecate. She has vowed to find a "cure" for what ails the sea god.

Commander Agaha and the Deep Legion:

This cadre of perhaps a dozen young and adult dragon turtles serves at the pleasure of the Imperial throne. Their mandate extends to vessel interception, coastal raids, and scouting and sentry duties. The current leader of the Deep Legion is Commander Agaha (N adult dragon turtle cleric [Seggotan] 6).

AN ENDING

So that is what I know about the greatmaws, my friend. If you wish to know more, you can enter the embrace of the sea and ask them yourself but I . . . I shall remain here and enjoy some more of this swill you surfacers call ale!

So was my conversation with K'abuleck, a sahuagin scholar in the Drunken Sail Tavern and what I have related to you is the truth! Or my name is not Jacopo de Zagora!

SOME HIDDEN LORE ABOUT THE DRAGON TURTLES OF MIDGARD

Around 2,000 years ago, the Haizhu clan of dragon turtles exiled themselves from the Realm of the Jade Throne in Far Cathay. Where the other dragons of the Celestial Court saw wisdom in the new policy of cohabitation and cooperation with humans, the Haizhu saw only capitulation to lesser

beings. Led by Storros the Wise, as he was then called, the clan passed through a massive undersea portal and arrived in the Middle Sea.

For 1,700 years, the dragon turtles of the Middle Sea slowly grew in number, expanding out into the endless reaches of the Western Ocean. From one clan, the Haizhu eventually became a dozen or so competing clans of dragon turtles. Most live far out at sea and have little to no contact with the land-based civilizations of Midgard. The extended family of the original Haizhu still hold vast dominions in the Middle Sea and continue to be led by Storros. Honored for his divinations and wisdom, it was the Sea Sage who advised the great wyrm, Mharot the Founder, foretelling how the dragons might create their own kingdom.

Important Locations

The Eastward Arch: Far below the surface of the Middle Sea, a stone and crystal span rises up from the ocean floor forming a perfect arch. Of ancient age and unknown origin, the Eastward Arch is a portal connecting to an identical archway along the shore of Far Cathay. The activation of the arch is a closely guarded secret known only to only a handful (many of whom are dragons or dragon turtles). Those who even know of the arch suspect that the triggering component (or key) to activate the relic changes every 50 years. Even possessing the correct key is by far the easiest aspect of making use of the Eastward Arch. For the arch lies within sight of the lair of Storros the Sea Sage himself, and the area is strewn with guardians, traps, and fell magic. Even if someone were to learn the correct key, bypass all the obstacles, evade Storros, and activate the portal, it is more than likely that they would be met with guards from the Celestial Dragons of Cathay on the other side.

Shard Cay: Located far off in the Western Ocean, this circular stretch of sandy beach provides a vital link in the lifecycle of the dragon turtles. The cay has few trees and no surface water and presents a barren and utterly uninteresting picture. The only item of note is the exceptionally wide beaches. Yet once a decade or so, a female dragon turtle emerges from the waves to lay and bury her eggs. A closer inspection of the beach reveals thousands of broken egg shells, creating a hazardous terrain for non-dragon turtles.

Story Hooks

Find adventure on the waves:

- Word has reached the PCs of a dragon turtle's body washed ashore on a beach a few days from their location. Further, the shell of this great beast is studded with gemstones, some glowing with magical radiance. Unfortunately, the PCs are not the only ones to get this news, and a race is on to plunder the corpse.
- While sailing or walking along the coast, the PCs are confronted with Storros the Sea Sage. He has foreseen their involvement with a delicate situation and offers to pay them handsomely for interfering with the forbidden courtship between a sahuagin princess and a sea elf.
- The PCs ship is waylaid by a distraught dragon turtle who blames them for intruding on Shard Cay and stealing her eggs. The PCs have only a limited time to track down the true thieves (a band of piratical rakshasas) and return the eggs before they start hatching.

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