

The Weekly Delver

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B·R·E·N·D·I·E· H·A·S·E·T·H· K·E·N·A·B·U· K·H·A·R·K·O·N· I·J·A·M·V·H·U·L· Q·U·E·T·A·P·A·N· X·I·A·N·G·U·R·
AND SELECTED POINTS THROUGHOUT THE NINE EMPIRES
The Truth behind the Tolk

Yet another Threat to Brend! Breaking News!

By Senifere Jienis, Junior Investigator, House Cleothe.

Sailors and merchants traveling the waters near Gir report that the seas over the sunken city of Tarpanesia have begun to boil, though thankfully without heat. An unnatural, but fresh breeze emanates in all direction from the area where the bubbles surface.

Tarpanesia was an ancient city where all Brendirian coins were once minted and which fell in 1486, shortly after the Canticle appeared, and earthquakes wracked the area, causing the great shelf of land that the city rested upon to break off completely, and sink beneath the brine.

Magical wards in place were enough to ensure that there was little structural damage, but still, most citizens there were drowned. It has been a hot spot for deep sea treasure seekers for years. Now, it appears that air is rising from the ancient ruins.

Essentially, this event is seen as a great mass of bubbles which roil to the surface, day and night. This effect has been growing for weeks, and is now so strong that no ship that sails the sea could withstand the churning, and merchants are avoiding the area. Seemingly related are groups of tritons who have begun to come ashore and enter secretive meetings with the various prefects and officials in Gir.

Facing obstacles to our questions, we sought another avenue to hopefully bring you answers. After much internal debate at the Delver, we have decided to give you access to the strongest possible explanation we've come across, and one that recurs among the dozens of Canticle scholars we've spoken with. Unfortunately, it involves the Canticle. Time and time again, we were shown the following consecutive verses:

*The coin is cast into the pool,
And still we have no bread,
Water brings but wormy gruel,
We'll try the Air instead.*

*What was cast low is raised on high,
The Maskers bring the breeze,
Five million thieves shall strive and die,
The "Endless" takes its knees.*

"The Coin", combined with the imagery of the pool and the Air, seem to point to the situation as it is over Tarpanesia. In fact, this is the only place in the current version of the Canticle that we were able to find these three symbols in the same place.

"The Maskers" seems to refer to the race known as the Lreans, agents of Hrum Vaat who are called Mask-Weavers among the dwarves.

The final interpretation as was given to us by our sources is that the City of Tarpanesia will be rising from its grave very soon, and by some artifice, will take to the air, bringing an army of Hrum Vaat's worst.

We also have reason to think that Brend may be the first target. "5 million" is Brend's estimated population, and as everyone knows, it is called the "Endless City" for its great size.

Tarpanesia lies nearly due west of Brend, so it is strategically a good place to launch an air based attack.

So far this is only speculation, but it might be that Hrum Vaat has somehow secured a shard of the original Prism, namely the Shard that controls air magics, and is using it to make the entire city and the slab of stone it rests on into a great airship. We shall certainly keep you abreast of this one. We have yet to get an official statement, but the Senate has been in closed doors session for the past week, and rumor has it, it is considering calling for the nearest troops—those in Tobran.

Daily Life in Tobran (Part 2 of 2)

By Tylun Moave, senior Brendirian investigator, House Cleothe

Consul Fultival Gambresius is mad. He'll tell you himself. He's the one who volunteered to lead the forces in Tobran, and to stay $\frac{3}{4}$ of the year for 10 years in that Hellish land. He has no body guards, and travels between Castras (camps) with the mere company of his Nightmare, Kelestia— who wears the same type of Helm that the other evil creatures within the ranks of the soldiers must wear. Truly, the beast is quite docile, and talkative.

We caught up with the Consul on the roof of his tower-terrace; the only building that projects through the cage that protects Sessir. He was taking his breakfast while idly downing flying demons with his mighty longbow. The only way I could gain an audience with the exceedingly busy man was to bring him his second course, and as I walked out onto the roof of his terrace, the doors behind me were slammed shut and bolted. Truth be told, this reporter almost bolted, himself, except that there was nowhere to go. The shrill songs of the agonized demons in the red sky of the place were almost hypnotic, but I kept low; and ran to the giant human's side, to his apparent amusement.

We proceeded to have an oddly civil discourse. He was cordial, but for obvious reasons, was unable to sit face to face with me. Instead, he fired off answers and arrows while serving as sole sentinel for his wards in the city below. He is a passionate man, selfless as any legionnaire...

It is impossible to say that he doesn't believe his own words when he says things such as this: "What is discomfort to a man of action? To fear for one's self is to be one step behind the enemy; to react to his advances; always a moment later than necessary; and eventually, a moment too late. No, it is better to swing the sword for the sake of preventing the

pain of others; at the moment when the enemy gives those you love the wrong look."

It is easy to be awed by the stately words and presence of the man, but for the sake of honesty, I asked him two questions that I heard time and time again in preparation for this journey; "Why have the legions not made more progress?" and "How long will this war last?" I was amazed at his candor, but it certainly raised questions.

"We have not made more progress because we are not fighting to win, despite what the Senate tells you. By tying the demons up here, we prevent their spread to the rest of the Empire. We know what they want—the portal—and we are preventing them from taking it. The war won't end until I say it does." After this response, I was almost afraid to ask whether he knew the location of the tomb of the crazed Ijamvian that was

believed to be a portal to the Hells. But I asked.

“Of course, and they do as well, but they cannot open it without the key, which I have.” He then produced a twisted, gnarled object from a chain around his neck. Forgive me, dear readers for telling you this, but the handle of this key resembled a tiny, petrified fetus, and the teeth on its business end were sharp as fangs. Sensing my discomfort he put it away. I asked him if he was being reckless to keep such a valuable and dangerous object on his person, at which he laughed. I knew it was time to head home, and I have made preparations to speed my journey. Though this was promised to be a two part story, I fear I must complete it upon my final and safe arrival home.

Abandon Tobran and We Play into the Canticle’s ‘Hands’

By The Seeker

There’s not much I can say about this. The recent developments, involving the admittedly shaky reasoning behind the potential threat to the Empire as represented by a few bubbles off the coast of Gir should not be taken as an excuse to forfeit our stake in Tobran. Two things will happen if we bring the troops from that very real war zone to fight our possibly imagined war in Brend. First, the Demons will likely follow, fulfilling the prophesized fall of Brend; and secondly, they will spread. They will take what little we’ve gained over these long years, and have no reason to stay contained to Tobran once the carrot we’ve been holding in front of them (the key to the portal that would allow their kind to swarm us) is no longer apparently within reach. Even if the threat from Tarpanesia is real, even Brend can not bear two invasions at once.

So, in case fear of flying gedge is actually anything more than the fantasy of a few lonely old men, it seems to be, I propose the following: We ask Kharkon for aid. They can march south with their mighty mogrekh, while we gather our

(Editor’s Note: Senior Brendirian Investigator Tylun Moave sent this report via a magical Warp Courier spell, along with a note to the editors stating that he was to seek teleportation home rather than travel the wilds of Tobran again. He has not been heard from since, and while we fear the worst, we hope for the best.)

own; and bring in our dragons, griffons, and various Triskatar Wonders as fast as possible. True, all we have available are the City Cohort (excellent as they are) and a few raw recruits (soldiers by any other Empire’s standards, if not our own) from the nearby academies, but that is more than a match for the likes of Hrum Vaat. We need to be prudent, and strategic, rather than giving into the fears of the moment, at the cost of our future.

Game Mechanics for this Issue

New Monsters

Lrean, With Carapace	Lrean, Unarmored
Medium-Size Aberration	Small Aberration
Hit Dice: 10d8 (45 hp)	Hit Dice: 1d8-3 (1 hp)
Initiative: +4 (Dex)	Initiative: -3 (Dex)
Speed: 30 ft	Speed: 5 ft
AC: 14 (+0 Size, +2 Dex, +12 Natural)	AC: 3 (+1 Size, -3 Dex, -5 Natural)
Base Attack/Grapple: +13/+19	Base Attack/Grapple: -/-
Attack: 2 tentacles +13 melee (1d6) or 'Bite' (1d10)	Attack: -
Full Attack: 8 tentacles +13 melee (1d6), Natural Attack Forms +7, Weapon +2 (by type), 1 Special Attack Form from all available or 4 Special Attack Forms	Full Attack: -
Space/Reach: 5 ft/10 ft	Space/Reach: 5 ft/0
Special Attacks: Special	Special Attacks: -
Special Qualities: Fast Healing, Devour Essence, Magical Form	Special Qualities: Organ Redundancy, Devour Essence
Saves: Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +10	Saves: Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +10
Abilities: Str 22, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 26, Wis 17, Cha 18	Abilities: Str 2, Dex 3, Con 3, Int 26, Wis 17, Cha 18
Skills: Appraise +10, Balance +7, Bluff +6, Climb +7, Craft +10, Decipher Script +9, Diplomacy +8, Disable Device +8, Disguise +5, Escape Artist +11, Gather Information +6, Handle Animal +6, Hide +14, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (Arcana) +10, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +2, Knowledge (geography) +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +10, Listen +5, Move Silently +10, Ride +5, Search +10, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +10, Spot +5, Survival +5, Swim +10, Tumble +5, Use Magic Device +6	Skills: Appraise +10, Balance +1, Bluff +6, Climb -2, Craft +10, Decipher Script +9, Diplomacy +8, Disable Device +8, Disguise +5, Escape Artist +6, Gather Information +6, Handle Animal +6, Hide +4, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (Arcana) +10, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +2, Knowledge (geography) +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +10, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Ride -1, Search +10, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +10, Spot +5, Survival +5, Swim +0, Tumble -1, Use Magic Device +6
Feats: Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Negotiator, Power Attack, Skill Focus: Escape Artist, Skill focus: Hide, Stealthy	Feats: Cleave*, Combat Reflexes*, Great Cleave*, Negotiator, Power Attack*, Skill Focus: Escape Artist, Skill focus: Hide, Stealthy
Environment: Any	Environment: Underground or Aquatic
Organization: Solitary, Covey (2-5), Cloister (6-10)	Organization: Solitary
Challenge Rating: 8 (Special-see below)	Challenge Rating: 1/4
Treasure: Triple Standard	Treasure: Rings Only (Up to four)
Alignment: Always Lawful Evil	Alignment: Always Lawful Evil
Advancement: Large (11d8-15d8), Huge (16d8-20d8)	Advancement: None

*This ability cannot be used in this form.

Lreans are gifted artificers, who create bio-magical armor to protect their frail, wormlike bodies. The Lreans are the masterminds behind Hrum Vaat, powerful beings that disguise themselves as humans or other creatures to deceive their prey. Lreans are inefficient excuses for doppelgangers, but they nonetheless are known for such endeavors, usually over the short term.

Within their mind-animated carapaces, they are crippled, boneless things that resemble long worms, with thousands of membranous nerve filaments branching off of the core, no eyes, and bulbous exposed brains, with three divisions instead of two, as is found in a human. They can only take in

predigested or liquefied foods, a service provided by their carapace, under most circumstances. Despite their inherent weakness, or perhaps because of it, they enjoy causing pain in others, glorying in power and strength that they do not truly possess.

COMBAT

Craft Carapace (Ex): Lreans can extrude a fibrous mucous that they can shape any way they like by mental command before it hardens, and which becomes a living chitinous material of great strength that can be any color. Shortly thereafter, the living chitin gives rise to the independent muscles, tentacles, and sinews that will later animate the carapace under the mental command of the Lrean. This exoskeleton is a separate living entity, devoid of intellect, but able to survive without its parasite (The Lrean) so long as it is force-fed nutrients. Alone it is immobile, but might twitch on it's own on occasion, or spasm if injured.

Any Lrean can control a carapace, even if it did not create it. Creating a new two-layered carapace takes one day, and such carapaces begin with no special abilities beyond the standard 8 tentacles and snapping fangs where their ribs should be.

Inside the carapace, lreans reside in a gooey mantel surrounded by two shells, an inner and an outer. Their outer shell allows them to pass at first glance for human or even as some animal they have devoured. Their face masks are always exceedingly beautiful, and never possess jaws, giving their faces the appearance of being paralyzed, and in the cases of their human forms, a deceptively gentle smile. These face masks fetch a high price (upwards of 5000 gp) among the elite socialites of Brendir.

Specially cultivated fungi give the appearance and superficial texture of skin, hair, or fur to complete the illusion. Underneath this covering is a chitinous and precisely segmented armor. If close contact is necessary to their goals, many spellcasting Lreans can improve their disguise with a handy figment or three.

A Lrean's inner shell is where it hides its weaponry. When combat begins, the outer shell flies apart on 'hinges' as a free action on the part of the Lrean. Their face masks fly up, over, and behind their heads, their torsos split down the center, and arms may fold back or split themselves, revealing the inner shell. This inner shell is contains an arsenal of teeth, tentacles and other nasty surprises (See the Devour Essence ability below).

A Lrean may have several of these armored vessels hidden away in their lairs, since when they are defeated within a suit of armor, it falls to dust, leaving them vulnerable. They will do whatever is necessary to hedge their bet when they are unarmored, using up to four rings, which they wear on their pulpy bodies. A Lrean leaves his extra shells in a pool of salty brine and nutrients when they are not being used. Vacating one shell and inhabiting another are each full round actions. A carapace counts as a vessel suitable for animation by an artificer's numinus, no skills, but all physical traits of the Lrean with a carapace

Every Lrean has the following basic abilities when inside a carapace:

Fast Healing (Ex): A lrean's shell, but not the lrean himself has fast healing 1.

Lash (Ex): A lrean may lash out up to 15 ft away with their eight tentacles for 1d6 damage per hit. They may attack up to 8 separate targets within a 90 degree arc of the square they are facing.

Envelop (Ex): If two or more of their tentacles hit the same target in a given round, they may set themselves in position with hidden spikes under their feet, and attempt to grapple with the target, pulling him into the waiting fangs on the next round.

Devour Essence (Su): Upon disabling a creature, a lrean may devour the body of that being incorporating this power into their current shell, by taking on the physical features that exhibit the power.

After devouring a creature while within its carapace, it may take on the following qualities from its prey:

- ¼ of its HD, converted to d8s
- any *one* of its supernatural abilities or special qualities
- any *one* of its extraordinary abilities,
- any *one* natural attack form
- Natural AC- does not stack, but best of all devoured creatures is taken.

In addition, the Lrean may take *one* Subtype, if desired, and *one* additional mode of movement from any of its devoured creatures, such as flight, or swimming.

The Lrean may draw from a number of creatures equaling its intelligence bonus (usually 8) into its inner shell's abilities. At any point, or when its carapace contains its maximum number of powers, the lrean may begin work on another, if it so wishes. The stat block above assumes a lrean with no powers. This ability may not be used to gain the abilities of constructs, undead, fey, or outsiders. All abilities work exactly as they did on the creature they came from.

Magical Form (Su): The lrean may infuse his shell with spell like abilities as if enchanting an item; requiring the Craft Wondrous Item ability. This is rarely done to a great degree, because a lrean's shells are usually considered nigh disposable. While the example above assumes no such abilities, a particularly wealthy or powerful Lrean may design a battle-suit with such powers.

Natural Attack Forms (Ex): A Lrean can recreate the natural attacks of up to 4 creatures it has devoured. These may not be supernatural or spell-like abilities, but things like a

Special Attack Forms (Su):

When encountered, a random lrean will have 1d6 special attacks that they have gained through their devour essence ability. These special abilities manifest in an identical manner to the way they did on the creature that was devoured with all of the same benefits, power levels and drawbacks. In other words, if the special ability was a gaze attack, the lrean would grow appropriate eyes and would have to "meet the gaze" of its target to use this ability. CR should be modified as appropriate for the abilities the lrean has acquired.

Lrean Society:

Lreans are slavers, murderers, and torturers with a subtle appreciation for beauty. They are the organizing principle behind Hrum Vaat's success, and it is they who do all the major planning for the empire. They live in immense subterranean societies every bit as complex as the Nine Empires, lording over other aberrations and lesser beings. In Hrum Vaat society, they are grudgingly acknowledged as superior to all other aberrations, able to possess the psionics, eye rays, or other powers of their lesser brethren. Still, a schism may be in the works as those who are born with such abilities grow weary of seeing their kind killed stolen.

Lrean Characters:

Lreans can freely become artificers, and many also become wizards, sorcerers, or psions.

Determining CR for Lreans

Add up the CRs for all creatures a Lrean devours. For every 5 pts of CR, add +1 to the Lrean's CR while wearing that carapace. Thus if a CR 2 and a CR 3 creature were infused into a lrean's carapace, its CR would be 9 while wearing that carapace.

Spell-like abilities, if present, will modify the CR of the encounter as well, but these effect must necessarily be calculated on a case by case basis.

Mogrekh
Huge Animal
Hit Dice: 16d8 (79 hp)
Initiative: +0
Speed: 35 ft.
AC: 15 (-2 size ,+7 natural)
Base Attack/Grapple: +12/+24
Attack: +12 Stomp
Full Attack: Bite +12 melee (1d10), Bite +7, Ram +2
Space/Reach: 15 ft. /10 ft

Special Attacks: Trample, Toss
Special Qualities: low-light vision, sure-footed
Saves: Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +3
Abilities: Str 34, Dex 10, Con 25, Int 2, Wis 8, Cha 14
Skills: Balance +4, Climb +13, Intimidate +6, Spot +2
Feats: Improved Bull Rush
Environment: Cold Mountains
Organization: Ride (5-20)
Challenge Rating: 10
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: Huge (17d8-24d8), Gargantuan (25d8-32d8)

Mogrekhs are massive ruminant beasts, with a taste for blood. They resemble immense, shaggy white rams, of the same relative proportions to their herbivorous cousins, as a dwarf has to a human., and possess oversized hooves and heads.

The Rams of the species are favored as war mounts by the Dwarves of Kharkon, and are capable of carrying small troops into battle. Dwarves will often outfit them with howdahs, armor, and weaponry. Like mountain sheep, they have the preternatural ability to balance on the most precarious surfaces. Their cloven hooves are terrible weapons that can shatter a man's spine with the most casual step. They are the size of mammoths, with curving horns and a thick skull.

COMBAT

Mogrekhs possess sharp interlocking teeth which they use to great effect and mighty hooves which are formidable weapons. They will most often try to trample smaller foes, and generally stomp around the battlefield.

Sure-Footed (Su): Mogrekh cannot be knocked down, or even pushed back. They need never make a balance check unless the ground gives way below them, or the space they are trying to occupy is less than 5 ft. square. They can move as freely on a 60 degree surface as on a horizontal one. They must somehow be lifted off the ground in order to fall.

Trample (Ex): As a standard action, mogrekhs can trample foes within a 10 ft radius for 4d10 damage. Victims can attempt a reflex save for ½ at DC 22. Trampled foes can attempt attacks of opportunity at -4 during the attack.

Toss (Ex): Mogrekh can sometimes throw an enemy that is medium size or smaller high in the air, or even to another mogrekh. On a successful ram attack, the mogrekh may attempt to grapple with its horns. If successful, he grabs the target and throws him 1d6 x10 feet in any direction. The target may try to hold on with a strength check (DC 18) each round, but otherwise is thrown and takes damage as if it had fallen the same distance.

A 16 HD mogrekh can carry 2000 lbs, and drag 10,000 lbs. Each HD over 16 increases the maximum carry load by 200 lbs, and the drag load by 1,000 lbs.

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