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VILLAGE BACKDROP:  
RONAK



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# VILLAGE BACKDROP: RONAK

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*Nobody knows Ronak exists. Or, more precisely, nobody remembers. Ronak was the last hope of a dying trade company, a desperate attempt to settle and explore a distant swamp. When the colony found nothing but lizardfolk (exterminated in short order), the trade company did not have enough gold to retrieve their employees. Ronak never heard from civilization again.*

*Centuries later, the dwarves of Ronak believe civilization to be but a myth. Over the generations, they have become more savage, reverting bit by bit to a primitive state. They are haunted and guided by the ghosts of the exterminated lizardfolk who seek the continuation of their culture. The dwarves speak a hybrid of Dwarven and Draconic, build thatch huts amid the colony's ruins and worship a mixture of half-forgotten dwarven deities and heathen serpent gods. Most disturbingly, some dwarven children now bear scales and jagged teeth. Perhaps one day soon the lizardfolk will be born again, this time from dwarven mothers.*

*Designed for use with the 5th edition of the world's most popular roleplaying game.*

## CREDITS

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## RONAK AT A GLANCE

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**Government** Council

**Population** 68 (68 scaled dwarves)

**Alignments** N

**Languages** Ronakee (Hybrid Draconic and Dwarven, understood partially by speakers of either language, or perfectly by speakers of either language with a DC 10 Intelligence check).

Nobody knows Ronak exists. Or, more precisely, nobody remembers. Ronak was the last hope of a dying trade company, a desperate attempt to settle and explore a distant swamp. When the colony found nothing but lizardfolk, the company did not have enough gold to retrieve their employees. Ronak never heard from civilization again.

The native lizardfolk, despite their peaceful culture, were seen as nothing but savage natives by the dwarves. As the dwarves struggled to survive, the scaled tribesmen taught them how to hunt and fish in these dangerous lands. But cultural misunderstandings and rising tensions quickly led to violence. In a night of blind fear, the dwarves massacred the lizardfolk.

Centuries later and the dwarves have reverted to a more savage state, transforming bit by bit from organized colonists to hunter-gatherers. They are haunted and guided by the ghosts of the exterminated lizardfolk who seek the continuation of their culture. The dwarves speak a hybrid of Dwarven and Draconic, build thatch huts amid the colony's ruins and worship a mixture of altered dwarven deities and heathen serpent gods.

Most disturbingly, the Ronakee now bear scales and jagged teeth, and grow to proportions unnatural for a dwarf. Perhaps one day soon the lizardfolk will be born again, this time from dwarven mothers.

The dwarves of Ronak believe civilization to be but a myth, but they cannot stay hidden forever. While some Ronakee may cautiously seek to learn more from trespassing outsiders, others view interlopers as evil spirits who must be destroyed.

### VILLAGERS

**Appearance:** The Ronakee resemble a mixture between dwarves and lizardfolk, but vary greatly in their degree of transformation. Some grow shaggy beards over pink flesh, while others have rows of pointed teeth and scratch at malformed scales.

**Dress:** The Ronakee dress in furs and hides, as well as clothing woven from swamp plants. Children paint their faces with mud and adults sport intimidating tattoos.

**Nomenclature:** *male* Balgrik, Barik, Durnak, Garuk, Rorgek, Throrvak; *female* Frimaz, Gimdatz, Talez, Uslatz, Yadaz; *family* Bronzewall, Blackspine, Stonespear, Thundertooth.

### MARKETPLACE

**Resources & Industry** Fish, peat

When the PCs arrive, the following items are for sale:

- **Potions** *potion of animal friendship* (250 gp), *potion of poison* (300 gp), *potion of water breathing* (400 gp)

### VILLAGE LORE

A PC may know something about Ronak, its history and surrounds. A PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check knows one or more pieces of information from the list below. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser check.

**DC 15:** The Ronakee are dwarves who have forgotten all ties with civilization.

**DC 20:** The Ronakee are decedents of a dwarven colony that disappeared almost 500 years ago.

**DC 25:** The dwarves of Ronak massacred the lizardfolk who used to live in these lands.

### WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Ronak, a PC may hear one or more rumours. A PC making a DC 10 Charisma check learns one rumour from the table below. A PC exceeding this check learns an additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10.

D6	RUMOUR
1	The gravepits to the north are filled with bones of the ancestors.
2	Urraz Scaleborn thinks those without scales should be expelled from the council.
3*	The Ronakee are descended from lizardfolk.
4	Smoking sawleaf allows communication with the spirits of the ancestors.
5	In funeral rites, the Ronakee consume the corpse raw, then add the bones to the gravepits.
6*	Long ago, a group of dwarves invaded the bog and tried to murder the Ronakee. They failed.

\*False rumour





## NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

**Dunaz the Fisherman** (location 1; NG male scaled dwarf **scout**) Dunaz is far progressed in her transformation. Her large eyes pierce muddy water and she swims like a lightning snake with the help of a malformed tail.

**Elder Karhok** (location 3; CN female scaled dwarf cleric 8) Blind Elder Karhaz is the oldest of the Ronakee. After instruction from his god, he split his tongue in twain with an axe. Now he spits prophecies of rebirth, while raising his claws in reverence to Sskalaz. He reviles outsiders as evil spirits.

**Hildaz Scaleborn** (location 4; CN female scaled dwarf **berserker**) Feared and respected, Hildaz is the tribe's best. Past rows of jagged teeth, she dribbles froth at any who displease her. Hildaz often fights with her brethren, but she is a valuable tribeswoman. She hates outsiders.

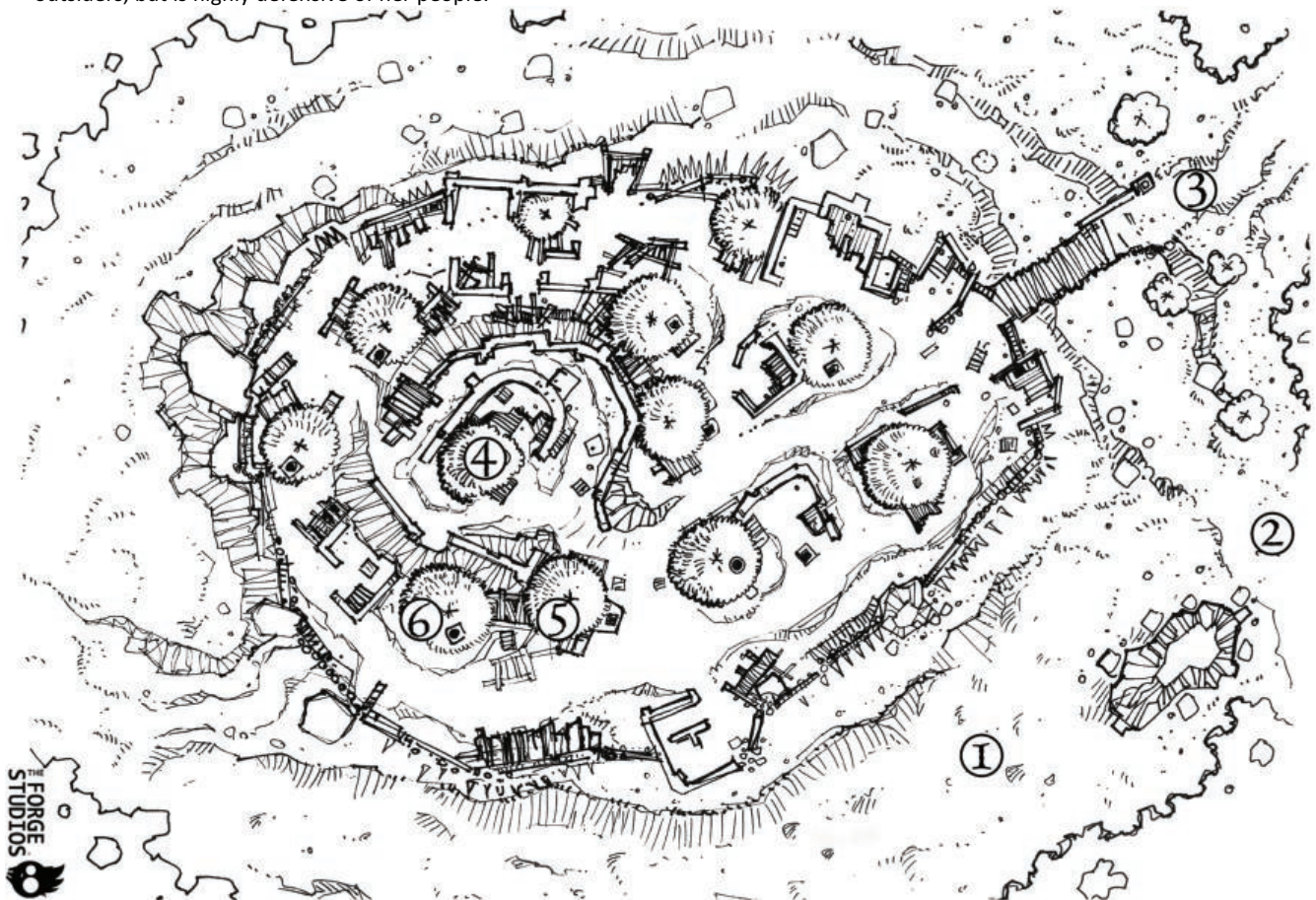
**Hinrok Throatsinger** (location 5; CN male scaled dwarf **spy**) Hinrok Throatsinger comes from a line of skalds. While his forbears played the lute, Hinrok intones modified dwarven epics in rough chants. He is fascinated by outsiders.

**Tordaz Mudrunner** (location 5; LN female scaled dwarf **veteran**) Though decisions are made in collective by all parents, Tordaz holds the most sway. She is respected among her peers for her patient and fair judgement. Tordaz is open to outsiders, but is highly defensive of her people.

## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises crude huts. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Bitter Bog:** Bitter Bog surrounds Ronak for 50 miles in all directions, isolating it from the rest of the world.
2. **Fangwaters:** The Fangwaters, a saltwater spring where alligators do not tread, is an excellent fishing ground.
3. **Gravepits:** When the dwarves of Ronak massacred the lizardfolk, they threw the charred corpses into mass graves. Centuries later, the Ronakee view the Gravepits as sacred, a place for meditation and reflection where the ancestors' whispers can be heard.
4. **Scaleborn House:** The Scaleborn family are closest to lizardfolk, and they wear their mutations with unusual pride.
5. **Spirithouse:** Hallucinogenic sawleaf smoke fills the spirithouse at all times. Hunters pray here, and the villagers seek counsel among the vapours.
6. **Temple of Sskalaz:** The Temple of Sskalaz was once a temple to the dwarven god of protection. However, the elements have reshaped the statue into the shape of a stone serpent, and religious customs have followed suit.



## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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### 1: BITTER BOG

The Bitter Bog surrounds Ronak for 50 miles in every direction. It is a cold, damp place of frequent rain and unending mist. Foul gasses pour from the muck, mixing with the fog and burning the eyes.

To visitors, the Bitter Bog is a terrible, noisome mire of fever and disease. To natives, however, it's filled with life. Pale fish swim murky pools, and alligators paddle through edible grasses. Thousands of birds visit the swamp, and honey can be found in hundreds of beehives. The flat stalks of a dozen plants make for excellent weaving material, and peat burns hot and long. There is much to hunt and plenty of natural resources. While Roank's original dwarves struggled to survive, the Ronakee, much like their lizardfolk spirit guides, flourish in these rich, but challenging, conditions.

Here, the Ronakee harvest the sawleaf that enables them to communicate with their ancestors' spirits.

### SAWLEAF

*The leaves of this spikey fern produce mild hallucinogenic effects and assist in communing with spirits.*

The smoke from this mildly addictive drug helps the scale dwarves seek their ancestors' wisdom.

**Effects:** 1 hour; ask local spirits a question as the *augury* spell, the spirits determine the answer as per their own motives; -4 penalty on saves against curses, as well as abilities and effects delivered by incorporeal creatures and haunts; **Damage:** 1 poison damage; **Price:** 20 gp.

### 2: FANGWATERS

The Ronakee mostly eat fish, caught in the bog's murky waters. While most ponds throughout the swamp are stagnant and stinking, in one place the water runs clearer. These are the Fangwaters, a collection of saline springs which gurgle warm water up from the depths of the earth. Among the salt pillars, which bear an uncanny resemblance to sharpened teeth, fish, frogs and birds eat a myriad of juicy insects. The Fangwaters are a sacred place, and an excellent fishing ground. Briny water keeps most of the more dangerous animals at bay, so dwarven children can safely swim the waters and consume their quarry raw. As a result, thousands of fish bones, rough from decades of mineral deposits, cover the bottom of this brackish pond.

### 3: GRAVEPITS

The dwarves came in the night. Terrified and on the brink of starvation, they massacred the lizardfolk and set the village ablaze. But the lizardfolks' tough flesh does not burn easily, so the dwarves dug deep pits and buried the stinking corpses.

These are the Gravepits, six mounds of damp earth with nearly 50 lizardfolk interred in each. Even though lizardfolk bones and tools are sometimes revealed by heavy rain, the Ronakee remember a different story. To the scaled dwarves, these Gravepits contain the remains of the Ronakees' ancestors. Here is a place of prayer and reflection, and here the ancestors' spirits are strongest. Many Ronakee visit at night, when the trees whisper with forked tongues, to seek guidance from their supposed forebears.

And the Gravepits are growing. When a villager dies, its flesh is ritually consumed but the bones are buried with their fellows. Dwarf and lizardfolk skeletons lie side by side, and with each passing decade the differences recede.

### 4: SCALEBORN HOUSE

The Scaleborn family is always first to acquire new lizardfolk traits. While most Ronakee think little of their evolution, the Scaleborn believe this advantage is a gift from the spirits. The Scaleborn are covered in translucent scales, which they shed in droves under the rough itching of hardened fingernails. Few dangling hairs adorn their jaws, and within their mouths gnash rows of tiny triangular teeth. Unlike all other villagers, Scaleborn pupils are vertical slits instead of circles.

The first Scaleborn in Ronak was Durnon Aleborn, leader of the colony and instigator of the lizardfolk massacre. Every day thereafter he visited the Gravepits, and was most affected by the spirits lingering within. When his child was born with grey scales around her eyes, Durnon felt his guilt made manifest. The colony mockingly called the child "Scaleborn," until Durnon killed himself from grief.



Ignorant of their tarnished past, the Scaleborn wear their mutations with a uniquely dwarven pride which aggravates the rest of the Ronakee. Urraz, the Scaleborn matriarch, even believes that those without scales should not have a vote on the council. Thus far, this view has not been popular.

The Scaleborn house is uniformly repulsed by outsiders.

## 5: SPIRITHOUSE

In a pit at the centre of the Spirithouse, a smouldering conflagration of embers, peat and sawleaf spits acrid smoke into the thick air. The Ronakee come here for guidance and meditation. Through the stinging vapour, humanoid shapes dance and intone ancient stories. Flickering shadows recount tales of the forgotten past, and whispered memories bear prophecies of events to come.

These are the spirits of the murdered lizardfolk. They are generally too weak to manifest directly, but through the assistance of sawleaf and ritual they can provide guidance and council to the dwarves.

The lizardfolk spirits want the dwarves to succeed, and so their council is just and wise. They understand that one day soon the Ronakee will transform entirely into lizardfolk, and on that day the tribe will be born again.

The spirits see outsiders as threats, and try to convince the

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### NEW SUBRACE: SCALED DWARF

Scaled dwarves hail from the forgotten colony of Ronak, deep in the Bitter Bog. Isolated from civilization, the Ronakee path has been guided by the spirits of the lizardfolk they massacred centuries ago. With every generation, the scaled dwarves drift further from their kin and closer to the lizardfolk whom they now revere as ancestor spirits. Scaled dwarves resemble large dwarves with thin hair and patches of translucent scales. Scaled dwarves possess other lizardfolk traits as well (see "Mutation" for more information).

As a scaled dwarf, you hail from an isolationist and increasingly savage and tribal people in the process of evolution or devolution, depending on whom you ask.

**Ability Score Increase.** Your Strength score increases by 1.

**Speed.** Your base walking speed is 20 feet. Your speed is not reduced by wearing armour or by walking through swampy terrain as long as you can still stand.

**Lizard Mutation.** You choose one of the mutations to the right to represent your reptilian side.

**Brusque Savagery.** You have disadvantage on Charisma (Persuasion) and Charisma (Deception) checks. If you gain proficiency in one of these skills, you may choose to forego gaining the usual benefits of proficiency and lose

Ronakee to drive them out. Any Ronakee who visit the Spirithouse quickly agree.

## 6: TEMPLE OF SSKALAZ

The Ronakee worship a pantheon of natural spirits, but the most important is Sskalaz. This serpent god embodies and corrupts many aspects of the dwarven god of protection who once presided over this colony. The original settlers raised a temple to this forgotten god. They carved his statue from a solid block of dolomite, clad in armour and raising a hammer to the heavens.

The Bitter Bog, however, has not been kind to the dwarven creation. Acidic lichen tore off the arms, which now languish in the mud. Centuries of rain wore enamelled breastplate into blurry scales. A lightning strike melted the god's helmet, splitting it into a shattered maw of teeth. The swamp took this dwarven god, proud and grimacing, and turned him into a snake.

And not just any snake. The lizardfolk here once viewed Sskalaz as their protector spirit, and communed with her spirit for assistance. Now, with the guidance of lizardfolk ghosts, Sskalaz is worshiped once again.

Sskalaz represents family, cunning and community, as well as a painful death from poison or animal attack. Not all seek her favour, but those who do view outsiders as a threat.

disadvantage on the skill instead. If you do, you are not treated as proficient in the skill unless you gain proficiency in it a second time.

**Languages.** You can only speak, read and write your own racial language, Ronakee, a dialect of Draconic understood by speakers of both Dwarven and Draconic. You can communicate with speakers of these two languages, but misunderstandings can happen. Ronakee is full of hard consonants, guttural sounds and sibilant hisses and sounds rather threatening.

### MUTATION

Every scaled dwarf exhibits the influence of his lizardfolk protectors in a different way. A scaled dwarf gains two of the following mutations.

**Hold Breath.** You can hold your breath for 15 minutes.

**Swamp Camouflage.** You have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in swampy terrain.

**Natural Armour.** When unarmoured, you have a base Armour Class of 11 + your Dexterity modifier.

**Bite.** You may use your action to make a melee attack with your bite. Your bite deals 1d6 piercing damage plus your Strength modifier. You have proficiency with your bite. Your bite's damage increases to 2d6 at 11th level.

**Strong Swimmer.** You have advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks made to swim or stay afloat.



## LIFE IN RONAK

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Ronak is completely isolated from the rest of the world, and must fend entirely for itself. Without a written language, oral customs and rituals guide daily life. Ceremonies mark birth, growth and death, and dozens of seasonal holidays mark time's passing.

Women traditionally hold more power than men, but oracles and sages are typically male. Major decisions are made by democratic vote within a ruling counsel of all Ronakee parents. Strength is respected, but wisdom carries more weight.

The Ronakee eat primarily fish and alligator collected by designated hunters. Other villagers are builders, weavers and storytellers. Without currency, goods are distributed evenly.

### TRADE & INDUSTRY

Beyond subsistence hunting and gathering, Ronak has no industry of note. Visitors reaching Ronak, however, may purchase (or steal) sawleaf from the Ronakee.

Additionally, if the PCs spend much time poking about the colony's festering ruins, they may discover odds and ends that have yet survived the ever-present muck. What the PCs find—and what the Ronakee want for it—is up to the GM.

### LAW & ORDER

Life in the Bitter Bog is tough; here the strong live and the weak waste away and die. Among themselves, the Ronak are generally peaceful; disagreements are normally settled quickly and with impromptu fights or brawls.

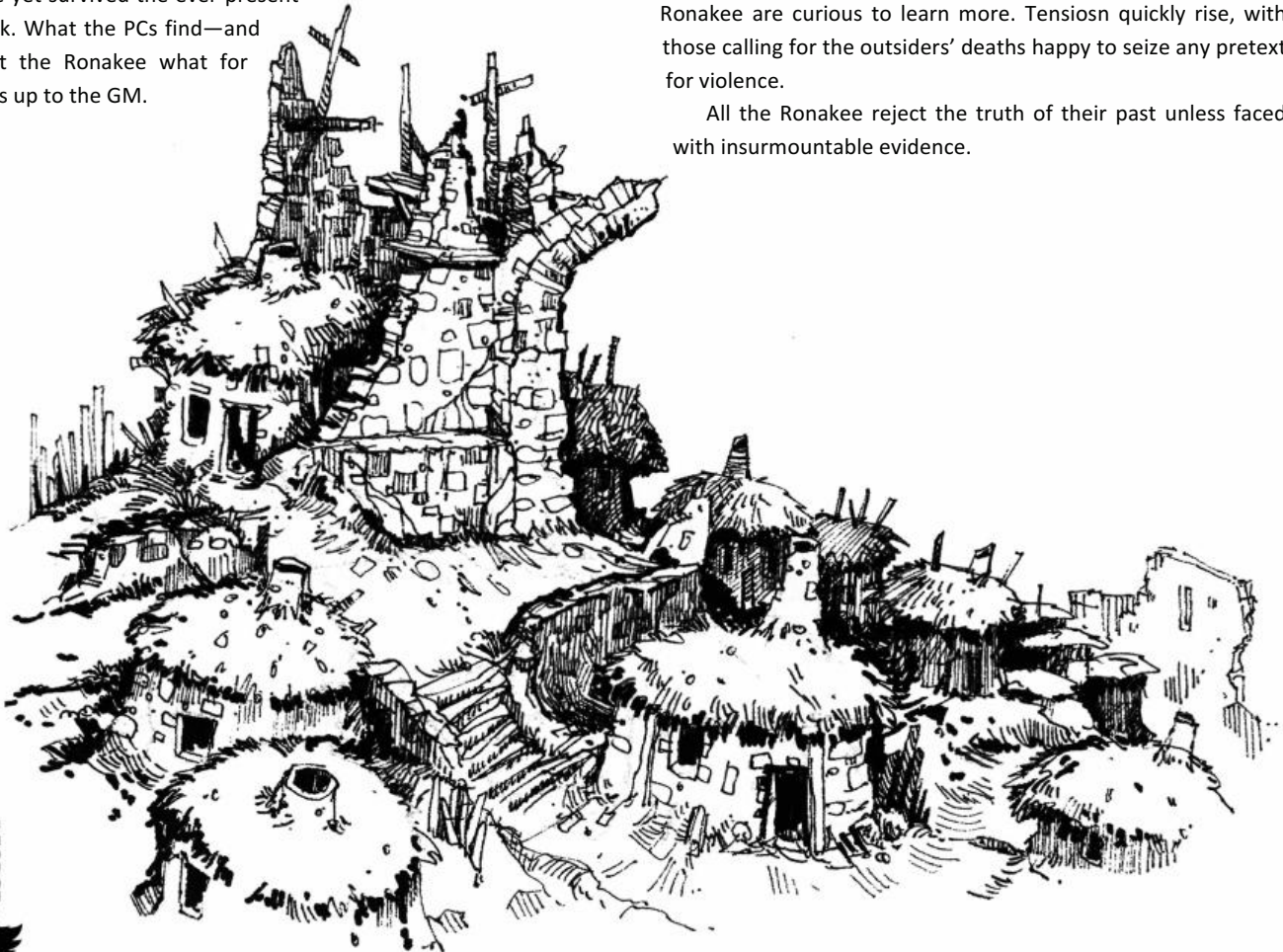
### THE ARRIVAL OF OUTSIDERS

The arrival of outsiders (such as the PCs) is a cataclysmic event for the Ronakee, equivalent to a demon appearing in a backwater village. Outsider dwarves and lizardfolk are viewed with particular confusion. None of the Ronakee have seen a human, halfling, elf or gnome before.

The villagers are split on what to do, and the PCs' actions determine whether they are accepted or attacked. Visitors accepted among the Ronakee may be taken in by a curious family while others may be forced to camp in the muck.

However, the whispering spirits of the lizardfolk scream for the outsiders' death, fearful of yet another massacre, and those more in tune with these spirits quickly agree. The level-headed Ronakee are curious to learn more. Tensions quickly rise, with those calling for the outsiders' deaths happy to seize any pretext for violence.

All the Ronakee reject the truth of their past unless faced with insurmountable evidence.





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