



# Elminster's



# Ecologies

Appendix II

The High Moor  
The Serpent Hills

MAXO





# Advanced Dungeons & Dragons



## The High Moor

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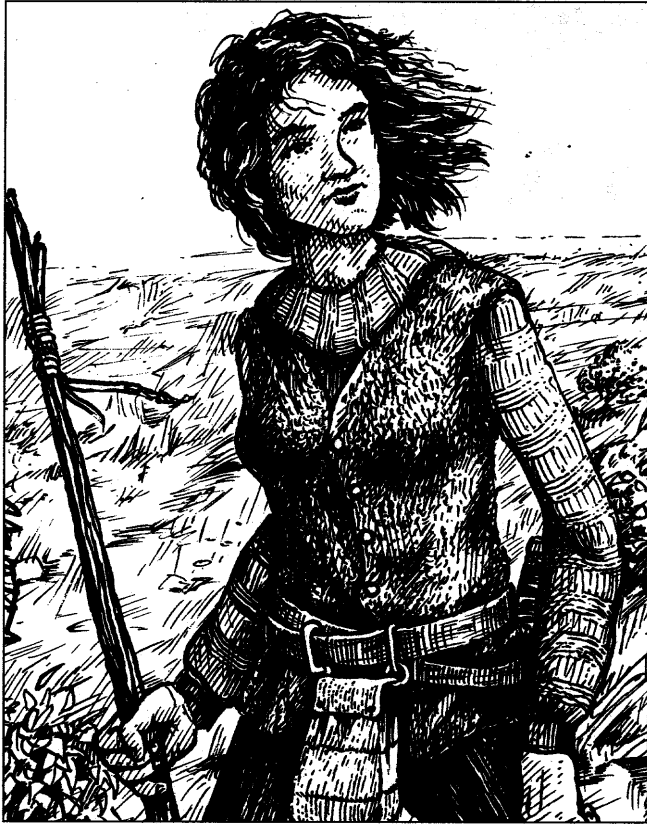
## I Think Not



I want to state something very important right now: I don't like people. Well, at least I don't like very many of them. There have been a few I have come to know and to respect in a limited fashion. For instance, I met an interesting rogue several months ago and spent some time with him. And there's a barbarian warrior whom I enjoy talking to—because he reminds me of me.

And then there's Elminster. He's a special case. I would have to say that I like the old rascal a little and I respect him a great deal. That, and nothing else, is the reason I agreed to write this treatise on the ecology of the High Moor. Elminster told me what he wanted, and I agreed to do it, but here's the deal: What you learn, you use the right way. Okay?

And what's the right way, you ask? Well, you're not as dumb as you look. No, I can't see you, but I know you must look



dumb, because to me all adventurers look pretty silly. And according to the Grand Old Mage, you're probably poring through this book because you want to go adventuring.

That's one of the reasons I don't like people. (Let's be clear here: I mean *all* people—humans, elves, dwarves, and so forth.) See, there are living things all around this world of ours. I live in a place that happens to have a lot of unusual life forms that some people call monsters because they don't understand them or don't see how they fit into the grand scheme of things. I'm not saying there aren't true monsters around—creatures that are evil and destructive. It's just that if you're going to go around killing things, you ought to know what impact it's going to have on everything else.

And don't worry, I didn't forget. I'll tell you the right way to use my information in a minute. You just read right now—don't be jumping ahead to "the important parts."

Here's a little note on what you're going to read. It's about ecology. That might be an unusual word for you, so I'm going to explain what it means. Ecology is the relationship between organisms and the environment. An organism is usually defined as any living thing—plants, animals, *and* those creatures usually called monsters. The environment is, to put it roughly, the place where those organisms live. The

environment includes such things as geography, weather, and natural and arcane forces. All these elements—each part of the environment and each organism—form a tapestry known as the ecology. And like a tapestry of cloth, this one can suffer severe damage if a single thread is removed, no matter how ugly the thread.

For example, suppose you come by the High Moors and kill a troll. Most people would say that's a good thing, and I'd be hard pressed to disagree. Trolls are vicious and destructive, and they're just smart enough to be really annoying. On the other hand, suppose you came in and killed *all* the trolls. Then there would be no control on the population of sheep, and their numbers would grow. They'd eat all the vegetation they could find—and there isn't that much vegetation in the High Moor to start with. When they eat the vegetation, it takes away food from the moor rabbits, and they die in droves. Then, the lesser carnivores that live on rabbits—like the swamp ferrets—die out because they haven't any food. Meanwhile, the wolf population increases because there are more sheep. Then the sheep population reaches its maximum; the wolves aren't able to keep up, so the sheep—being too dumb to know any better—overgraze and destroy their own food supply, and they die too. This leaves a surplus of wolves to venture out and start raiding livestock.

Don't miss my irony here: Sheep don't know any better than to destroy their food supply because they are dumb animals. I'm trying to educate you past this level so that you aren't so stupid as to destroy your own food supply.

I'm going to do this by telling you about the environment of the High Moor, the plants and animals that live there, and how they all fit together. That's what Elminster said to do, and that's what I'm doing. Get this straight, though: I'm doing this to show you the balance of nature, not to guide you to which animals need killing, where there are hidden treasures, or anything like that. I'm telling you this so that you can preserve the ecology, not wreck it.

Incidentally, part of Elminster's standard format includes a little bit about me. I'm Bara, I'm female, and I'm a druid. I'm human, but please don't hold that against me—and I'll try to do the same for you. I'm young for this profession since I've not yet seen 25 winters—but I *have* seen a lot of other things.

I'll be watching for you, so don't traipse around like you own the place and expect me to fall for the handsome warrior in your group. I'm thinking that's unlikely to happen.

So you want to learn about the High Moor so that you can come by and kill whatever you see there?

I think not.







# The Environment

**T**o reiterate, in case you weren't paying attention before, an environment is what surrounds us. This includes physical features of the land, the weather and other forces in the area, and anything external that affects the organisms living within it. Unfortunately, in the case of the High Moor it includes several settlements of people as well. This part of my treatise covers the most important facets of the environment of the High Moor. The area is simply too large to cover in great detail in the space here.

The size of the High Moor is important: It is as big as most nations of Faerûn, if not bigger. Fortunately, most of its terrain is of a similar type—a dreary moor—so it isn't difficult to describe. However, the size of the area does mean that the tapestry of life within it is large, too. What someone does in one small area probably won't have too much of an impact—but if something major occurs (like wiping out all the trolls in an area), the impact can be incredibly far-ranging. Be careful.

## Geography

**T**he High Moor is located not far from the Sword Coast in the region of Faerûn called the Western Heartlands by most humans. (Incidentally, don't confuse this region with the High Moors, an area south of Anauroch and near the Stoneland. That's a much smaller region.) From the city of Waterdump—excuse me, Waterdeep—to the High Moor is a journey of almost 600 miles east-southeast. Don't mistake this for an invitation to visit.

The most obvious geographical feature of the High Moor region is the moor itself. For those who haven't traveled very much, a moor is an expanse of open land broken up by peat bogs and patches of low shrubs and other herbage. Or, to put it another way, a moor is a desolate wasteland with some scrub vegetation and some swampy places. At least that's the way it appears on the surface. However, a moor, and especially the High Moor, is not as desolate as it may first appear. The High Moor is full of life, if one knows where—and how—to look.

Take note of something here: The High Moor wasn't always a desolate moor. Quite a lot of evidence suggests that the High Moor (and indeed, any other moor) was once covered with rich woodlands. However, early peoples cleared the forest to make fields for crops and to provide themselves with

building materials. These early peoples were mostly human tribes. Dwarves contributed a little to the clearing but weren't interested in building except in stone, goblinkin weren't much interested in either building or farming, and elves have never been ones to clear forests. In other words, the High Moor is an environment *created by humans*. It is not a very pleasant place, and it clearly demonstrates the negative impact that humans can have on an environment.

Anyway, the High Moor region is now mostly moor, but it also encompasses some other terrain features such as the fire marshes. The Misty Forest borders the High Moor on the northwest, and the Serpent Hills lie to the southeast. In the northern portion of the High Moor, Highstar Lake sits in a bowl upon the plateau.

## The Moors

The High Moor is the largest moor region on the continent of Faerûn and perhaps the largest such area in the world. The majority of the High Moor sits on a large plateau composed mainly of limestone. To the east, south, and west, the plateau's edges slope rather gently to the level of the surrounding area—though in the southeast, the land slopes down only a short dis-

### Sinkholes

**S**inkholes are almost perfectly round holes into which the surrounding earth (and other materials) has collapsed because the underlying rock beneath the surface material has been eroded away. They may be partially or completely filled with water.

Water erodes limestone, and an underground stream erodes limestone from the inside. A sinkhole forms when such a stream hollows out a great cave with no access to the surface except, perhaps, through the stream that created it. The cavern grows close to the surface, leaving only a thin shell of rock between the surface above and the cavern below. Over the years, this shell gets thinner and thinner. A heavy weight or simple erosion eventually breaks through this crust, causing it to collapse into the cavern beneath.

Sinkholes, incipient or fully formed, present a hazard to safe travel. Even a fully formed sinkhole can be difficult to see until one is right on top of it. It is also possible for a person or large animal to be trapped in the collapse of earth inherent in the formation of the sinkhole if the timing is right, but this is a rare occurrence at best.





tance before rising again into the Serpent Hills. On the north, the plateau is bordered by cliffs of pink granite. Granite also protrudes through the limestone in various places, especially in the northern part of the moor, so various crags dot the otherwise flat highland here and there.

I have an acquaintance, Vincin, the Gray Druid of the High Moor, who claims this arrangement is unnatural. Like most other gray druids, he lives in caverns. In his case the caverns spread out beneath the broad plateau of the High Moor. (I never really understood wanting to live in a cave instead of a forest, but I suppose fungus and lichen might occasionally need druidic protection, too.) Having lived in a cave for most of his life, he knows a little about rocks. According to him, limestone results from sediments collecting in oceans, while granite is produced by pressures within the earth. Vincin says the granite might have been formed beneath an ocean. After the granite formed, the limestone might have formed above it on the ocean floor, and then geological pressures could have caused both types of rock to rise. But according to Vincin, this would be unusual, and besides, a lot of odd things have formed from time to time beneath the High Moor—like rivers that flow upward. Vincin suspects one of the ancient magical civilizations in the area is responsible for the odd mixture of rock types. I don't really know. If you have a question about animals, I can answer it, but if you want to know rocks, ask Vincin.

So most of the plateau is limestone. Over the centuries, water has cut through the limestone, forming a lot of ravines

### In The Fire Marshes

**T**he fire marshes can be quite dangerous. In game terms, for each turn spent in a fire marsh, an individual has a 1-in-6 chance of tripping a flame jet. Check for each member of a party once per turn. If the die roll indicates a flame jet, the character is allowed a saving throw vs. paralyzation to avoid the jet because of the telltale sound that precedes it. If the saving throw is successful, the character takes no damage; if the saving throw fails, the character suffers 1d6 points of damage and some of that individual's flammable possessions might catch on fire at the DM's discretion. (Consult the item saving throws table in the *DUNGEON MASTER*<sup>®</sup> *Guide*.)

A *dispel magic* can affect an area of fire swamp, rendering that area incapable of producing flame jets for 1d4 rounds. The area affected is equal to the area of effect for the *dispel magic* (a 30-foot cube). For the purposes of resisting the *dispel magic*, the fire swamps are considered 12th-level magic.

and canyons. Springs bubble forth out of nowhere through the limestone, and streams disappear and reappear in the ravines. Occasional waterfalls flow into short streams that disappear into deep holes. A lot of sinkholes dot the countryside, too, offering many entrances to the Underdark.

On top of the great limestone shelf of the plateau lies a thin layer of soil. This topsoil is too thin for decent farming, but just thick enough to support the growth of various grasses and shrubs in patches. At one time, there was better topsoil on the moor, but the long-ago removal of the forests allowed the earth to erode and exposed the ground to the region's cool, damp, windy weather, which leaches nutrients from the soil. The moors are therefore mostly barren and rocky. In places where some soil has accumulated and enough water collects to support plant life, a marsh is the usual result. Few of the marshlands of the High Moor still support much life, however. Most marshes have degenerated into cold bogs clogged with peat. (Peat is formed from the remains of many generations of plants, mostly mosses.) These soft, waterlogged strips of land are another hazard for travelers in the region.

### The Fire Marshes

A long time ago, the fire marshes were just normal, natural marshlands. However, under certain conditions, plant matter turns into peat after it dies. Peat is a muddy, gritty substance that can burn. A while back, a person named Daeros Dragonspear decided he would wipe out all the trolls in the moors. (Remember the example of wrecking an ecology that I mentioned before?) One of the things he and his friends did was to use some sort of magic to create occasional flames in several of the peat bogs. Their logic, of course, was that the fire would kill the trolls or at least drive them out into the open where they would be easier to hunt. Well, this strategy worked, and Daeros and his friends killed a lot of trolls.

Unfortunately, the spells or items these people used had permanent effects. Ever since Daeros meddled with the peat in the fire marshes, flame has tended to shoot up whenever a living creature walks by certain areas in these peat bogs. There's usually a brief intake of air, then some of the peat catches on fire and a small jet of flame comes out. This flame lasts for only a second, after which the peat burns calmly for as long as a minute before dying out. (I've marked the locations of the fire marshes on the map at right.)

### The Red Cliffs

As I mentioned, the northern side of the High Moor plateau is composed mainly of granite cliffs. Though they are called red, their color is really more pink—but I suppose "Pink Cliffs" just doesn't have the same ring to it as "Red Cliffs"





and wouldn't be as attractive to the bold and stupid men who come to the High Moor for excitement.

The Cliffs are fairly sheer, though the southern tributary of the River Shining (the branch that drains Highstar Lake, sometimes called the Hark River) cuts through them at one point in a series of rapids and small waterfalls. Unless one can climb really well for a very long time, following this river is the easiest way onto the High Moor plateau from the north.

The Red Cliffs are being quarried by the people of Secomber, a small village perched on three hills located on the northwestern bank of the confluence of the Unicorn Run and the River Shining. Over the years, they have taken away enough of the cliff face that only a shelf perhaps a hundred yards across now remains at the base of the cliffs along the southern shore of the river. The stonemasons of Secomber still make occasional forays across the river to remove another slab of the pink granite.

This practice has been damaging the area and destroying the nesting grounds of various types of creatures such as giant eagles. Fortunately, the cliffs are extensive enough that nothing has yet been rendered extinct because of their actions. If anything had, I would have had words with the people of Secomber long ago. With any luck, they'll get

through the granite to an underground river that will wash away the perch they've made for themselves northwest of the rivers before they can do too much more damage.

## The Misty Forest

At its western edge, the great plateau of the High Moor slopes gently downward toward the sea (even though some maps indicate an abrupt drop-off). On the lower half of this slope grows a forest that continues onto the plain below. The upper part of the forest has a rock-strewn floor typical of the moor region, while some low grasses, shrubs, and other plants cover the ground under the trees in the lower portion. Obviously, better topsoil has remained in this area than within the moor proper.

The trees are mainly evergreens of various types. Elves and other people inhabit the forest. The ground in the forest is moist, just as are the marshy portions of the High Moor. Mists that rise from the forest floor or creep down from the High Moor give the forest its name.

Though fairy folk of various types reside within the Misty Forest, it has a well deserved reputation as a place of magic and death. Occasional raiders from the High Moor—both barbaric humans and evil humanoids—sometimes slip through the Misty Forest to attack nearby settlements. A





strong druidic presence protects the forest, though, so don't even consider messing with it.

### **The South Wood**

While not truly a part of the High Moor ecology, the South Wood is worth mentioning here. Despite its name, the South Wood sits near the northern edge of the High Moor, its furthest edges reaching to within a mile of the western Red Cliffs beneath Lake Highstar. In fact, the South Wood is a branch of the High Forest that has been separated over the years from that larger body of trees by years of logging along the River Shining and the continued deepening of the riverbed as the years rolled on. The barrier presented by the cliffs effectively separates the South Wood from the High Moor, at least as far as geography and life forms are concerned. Again, some maps are misleading on this score, but what can one expect from people with no real respect for the land or anything found in it?

### **Highstar Lake**

Known by dwarves as *Dauerimlakh* and by elves as *Evendim*, this lake is known to humans by many names as well. Highstar Lake is simply its most common name. Few maps of the region give the lake a name, but it is unmistakable, being the only siz-

able body of water (not counting marshes of various sorts) between Anauroch and the Sword Coast.

Maps often disagree on the location of the lake. Well, actually they disagree on the extent of the High Moor, which is often depicted as ending beside the lake when it clearly continues on the lake's other side. Not that I care—an inaccurate map is a thorn in the side of an adventurer, so errors are all the better in my opinion—but I suppose I should set the record straight. Despite what some maps might show, Highstar Lake sits atop the plateau of the High Moor. Once a simple sinkhole with a natural spring, the lake has expanded over the last couple of centuries to become the largest body of fresh water in the so-called Western Heartlands. Several springs now feed it, some from beneath it and one from a hill on its eastern shore.

The lake is clear and beautiful. Some pronounce it almost eerily beautiful, and dwarves (who once lived nearby in the Halls of the Hammer) ascribe magical properties to it. From the surface of the lake, one can look far into its depths, and given enough light, one can see seemingly to almost its bottom. Just at the edge of sight at the water's bottom lurk oddly shaped objects of various sizes. More than once, some poor sap has asked me about "the lost temple," "the sunken airship," or "the treasure of the dead," all supposedly located within the lake's depths. I haven't seen any of these things—and I *have* looked—nor has anyone reliable reported sure knowledge of them. Still, as explained in the section on abominations later in this treatise, dead things sometimes ooze out of the depths to annoy the locals.

Highstar Lake sits in a large bowl formed by granite on the north and west and by marble and limestone on the south and east. The granite of the northern side forms hills that overlook the lake, and several hills holding limestone and marble deposits are strung along the eastern shore. The lake drains through a gap in the western granite, forming a waterfall and a series of rapids that lead down through the pink granite cliffs to form a river along much of the base of the cliffs. The river, the southernmost tributary of the River Shining, is sometimes called the Hark River. It is so named (for whatever reason) after a wererat that used to live in a dungeon along it.

### **The Rivers**

As I mentioned, the southernmost tributary of the River Shining, the Hark River, runs from Highstar Lake through the High Moor and down the Red Cliffs. It then follows the base of the Red Cliffs until it joins with the River Shining near the northwest corner of the High Moor plateau. The River Shining (also called the *Delimbiyr*) flows several more miles along the base of the Red Cliffs until it is joined by the Unicorn Run from the north. The *Delimbiyr* enters the Sea





of Swords at the Lizard Marsh, a great bayou that is home to lizard men and related creatures, including a number of small dinosaurs trained by the lizard men. The lizard men are said to communicate regularly with the reptile folk of the Serpent Hills and the nearby Marsh of Chelimber.

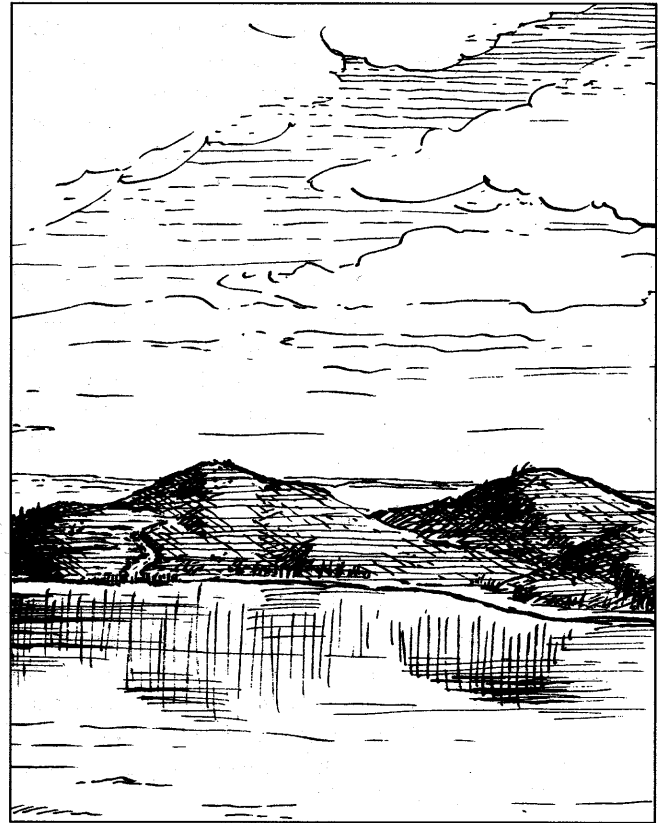
The Serpent Hills are the source of another major river of the area, the Serpent's Tail Stream. This small river joins with the Winding Water—which drains the aforementioned Marsh of Chelimber—near the Forest of Wyrms, just south of the High Moor. While this river system is outside the ecology of the High Moor, it forms a sort of boundary that helps define the extent of the High Moor's ecosystem. Some maps show the river running directly along the southern bounds of the High Moor. It doesn't.

Several underground rivers also flow within the vicinity of the High Moor. Most travel beneath the plateau itself, connecting various caverns of the Underdark. Most of these rivers start beneath the plateau as well, springing from sources well above sea level. There is, however, one strange underground river that starts south of the Misty Forest, travels beneath some of the forest, turns southeast to flow through the ruins of Dragonspear, then flows northwest. On its journey to the northwest, the river actually *gains* altitude until it bursts through the wall of a chasm on the High Moor plateau, emerging as a waterfall that feeds a small pool. Finally, the pool drains back into the depths of the Underdark. Needless to say, this is *not* a natural arrangement, though it seems to have existed long enough to become part of the normal environment of the local Underdark.

Several small streams that change course seasonally are found in the High Moor. They are considered part of the High Moor itself. Most spring from underground sources and travel along the moorlands for a short time before draining into sinkholes or forming small pools. Outside of Highstar Lake, little moisture stands to form any discrete bodies of water on the High Moor. Most of the water from streams and pools soaks into the surrounding land to form marshes.

### The Serpent Hills

This region borders the High Moor, but Elminster has engaged another sage expert to discuss it at length elsewhere. Therefore, it is not covered in my treatise in any more detail than is found in this paragraph. However, I would advise people who want to know about the High Moor region to check through the treatise on the Serpent Hills because a lot of beasties from that region travel to the High Moor for a short vacation and adventure of their own. Several of the inhabitants of the Serpent Hills are both intelligent and malevolent, so consider yourself warned.



### The Underdark

Most of the information in this section comes from my friend Vincin, the Gray Druid of the High Moor. As I mentioned previously, much of the plateau of the High Moor is limestone, though in some places the stone has been compressed into marble sheets. (Thankfully, the marble is rare and is so difficult to reach that it hasn't been worthwhile for people to come in and quarry it.) The great limestone shelf of the High Moor contains a series of caverns housing a plethora of wondrous formations.

Limestone, when acted upon by water for long periods of time, creates many spectacular rock formations. Some of these shapes include stalactites, which hang from the ceiling; stalagmites, which jut from the floor; draperies, which resemble ruffled curtains; and flowstone, which looks like a waterfall built of stone. These creations form through the action of slowly dripping water that evaporates and leaves behind small deposits of minerals. The colors of these deposits range widely over the bounty of hues known in nature depending on the minerals present. Red and pink shades predominate in the features of the local Underdark, while brilliant white formations decorate a few caves.

Most of the caverns of the local Underdark are living caves,







which means that water is still present to change them. Streams flow through most caverns, and water flows upward in several areas, defying the general effect of gravity due to localized arcane forces. A great deal of mud features into the floors and walls in the caverns, and plant and fungus life flourishes. In fact, Vincin says some areas of the Underdark caverns here would be called marshes if they were above ground.

Vincin sometimes calls the local Underdark the *Undermoor*. The many diverse life forms of the Undermoor spend most of their time beneath the ground, but they occasionally venture out onto the night-darkened surface of the High Moor. These creatures don't usually stay above ground long, and those that do often die when the sun rises again; they fall easily to predators or hunters because the sunlight disorients them.

## Weather

Few enjoy the weather in the High Moor. I know I don't. To put it concisely, the High Moor is a cold and windy place. Because of its placement on the globe of Toril just south of halfway between the equator and the northern pole, it has an overall temperate climate. Because of the High Moor's altitude and desolation, however, the normally temperate climate takes a shift toward the cold end of things.

On the plateau, winter lasts between three and four months of the year, and it snows a fair amount. During the first part of the winter, the snow melts relatively quickly, since the moisture in the ground retains some heat. The snows contribute to the overall moisture, and the High Moor becomes a massive, cold marsh, with even more bogs than normal.

However, it isn't long before the water freezes and the land hardens. Once this occurs, the snow remains on the ground. Drifts build, shifting like the dunes in a desert, and some grow to 10 feet or more in height. Few features in the area block the wind, so it whips across the High Moor with no little violence. The winds cut one to the bone with chill on the High Moor during winter, making the season exceptionally bitter. During the long winter, the region becomes even more hazardous than usual, since the snow hides sinkholes, still-oozing bogs, and other dangerous geographical features. Ice and snow make it easy to slip, and climbing to and from the plateau becomes very difficult. Fortunately, the winter drives most creatures into hibernation or to milder climates. Those creatures that remain on the High Moor are perpetually hungry during winter and can be even more vicious than usual.

In the spring, the snow and ice thaws, and the land again becomes a huge marsh. The streams and rivers swell, and the Undermoor floods in many regions. Plants begin to grow

again. Many creatures of the Undermoor journey to the surface in the spring, making lairs where it is somewhat more dry and hunting during the night. Other creatures come out of hibernation and begin moving around again. Spring is mating season for many species, and a lot of the normal monsters and animals are very aggressive during this time. To make matters worse, the moisture in the ground rises in thick, cold mists that drift across the plateau and flow down the slopes. Because of prevailing winds in the spring on the High Moor, most of the mists drift down into the Misty Forest, whose trees provide enough shade to allow the mists to remain for many hours. These spring mists on the moors provide ample cover for those creatures with enough intelligence to use it.

Toward the end of spring, the mists thin and warm somewhat, but they linger on, albeit for a shorter time each day. The marshes dry out in places, leaving vast areas of more solid, yet still barren, ground. Insects begin to fill the skies around the marshes, and by the beginning of summer, mosquitoes and worse pests fill the air. During the summer, animals mature and young offspring begin to leave their parents' lairs; the predators become more active in response to an increased chance of bringing down easy prey. Summer never really gets hot on the plateau, but the region does warm somewhat.

In the fall, it begins to cool again, and the creatures of the High Moor launch into a period of increased activity in preparation for winter, either to put on fat in preparation for hibernation or to build up a larder of stored food. For many creatures, this increase in activity includes more hunting, and many moor creatures consider people to be at least as viable prey as anything else. Fall also brings more rain, and the lands begin a general softening again.

So, you ask, if it weren't for the dangerous life forms of the High Moor, would it be a pleasant place to live? The answer to that would be a "no."

## Arcane Forces

Elminster has his rabbit rules, and I have my rules of nature. While some adventurers might consider such things as gravity to be arcane forces—trust me on this—they're not. Gravity, along with wind and rain, is usually a natural force. Arcane forces as I am dealing with them here include magic, gates to other planes, and the like. Don't forget two important rules, though:

### **Bara's First Rule of Nature**

*A natural force can be generated by unnatural means.*

Mages of all types, and even druids, have been known to use spells to create wind, rain, or even lightning. All



these are natural forces, yet they can be produced by unnatural means. In the High Moor, the fire swamps are one example of this. Fire is a natural phenomenon, yet the fires in these marshes are produced by lingering magic.

And look at the Undermoor, with rivers that flow upward. Despite some popular rumors to the contrary, under natural circumstances gravity always causes objects and materials to move down, not up. The upward-flowing Undermoor rivers are actually responding to a use of gravity, a natural force. Obviously, however, gravity has been altered here in some fashion by unnatural means. From the courses of the Undermoor rivers and from certain stone formations, we can deduce that gravity in the Undermoor has been altered for many centuries, perhaps millennia. While it isn't canceled except in a few isolated regions, gravity has been lessened or redirected in several pockets in the Undermoor.

### Bara's Second Rule of Nature

*An unnatural force can become part of the natural environment.*

Suppose some unthinking mage opens a gate to the Elemental Plane of Fire, creating a sea of fire. (*There are a lot of ye thoughtless types out there, so give a listen.* —Elminster) For a time this unnatural force causes a lot of problems in the local environment. Animals and plants die, others move to new homes, and the weather is affected by a permanent source of heat. (This would *irritate* me, by the way. Don't do it.)

After a while, though, the surrounding environment and the organisms living within it would adapt to this strange incursion. Creatures accustomed to heat and fire would move in, and everything would adjust to accommodate the sea of fire. At this point, which occurs only after years of pain, death, and adaptation, the sea of fire would become a "normal" part of the environment. Removing it would have the same effects as its original introduction: a lot of creatures and plants would die, the ecology would be upset, and a long period of adaptation to the new conditions would follow.

A similar situation has come to exist in the moorland itself. The moors were created by humans acting in an irresponsible manner over years, but they now support a wide variety of unique and unusual life forms. Though created unnaturally, the moorland is now a natural environment for the area's life forms. While the moor is desolate and unforgiving, I would be reluctant to see it radically altered.

So, if you feel inclined to remove an unnatural phenomenon, check with the local druids first to see if it has become a part of the normal environment of the area and what impact its removal might have. A sea of fire could be a sea of fire that *belongs*.

Besides the fire swamps and the rivers of the Undermoor, the most prominent arcane forces in the High Moor region are the *gates* of Dragonspear, magical items left over from ancient Netheril and other old nations and empires, and an unusual pocket of wild magic. While the ruins receive a separate treatment later in this chapter of my treatise, the *gates* of Dragonspear, the general nature of the ancient ruins, and the wild magic picket all present arcane forces worth mentioning.

Dragonspear, a ruined citadel southwest of the High Moor, hides within its ravaged walls *gates* to other planes. Most are now guarded by local adventurers. (I feel *so* secure.) Extraplanar fiends, primarily baatezu, periodically journey through the *gates* to interact with the local ecology—and upset it. In fact, an extraplanar incursion was defeated recently, but why nobody thought to simply close the *gates*, I do not know. (*It's not as simple as that.* —Elminster)

Many other ruins dot the region as well. In them lie moldering ancient spells and magical items of great and obnoxious power. More than once have I come upon some mess caused by adventurers only to have them tell me that they couldn't prevent an incident's occurrence because their mage was "under the control of an ancient and malevolent artifact of evil." If you *must* come to the High Moor and you *must* hunt treasure there, be *careful*. Check things for curses *before* you pick them up and play with them. Being mind-controlled doesn't give you free reign to come in and muck up the region I protect.

### The Mobile Wild Magic Zone

**T**hough no other mobile zones of wild magic are known, this field indeed seems to have all the properties of a normal, nonmoving wild magic zone (as described in *Running the Realms* in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting box). The differences between a usual wild magic zone and this one are that this zone moves and is visible.

The zone has a maximum movement rate of 24. It is attracted to spellcasters—especially mages—and moves toward them when they cast spells. The zone is usually spherical and has a diameter of 10 feet, but it has been observed to elongate on occasion to an ellipsoid some 20 feet long and 5 feet wide at the center in order to engulf two spellcasters at once. The zone hovers around spellcasters for 2d4 rounds before moving away, though it may return if those spellcasters begin casting again.

This zone serves as a DM's tool. It can be used to as a change of pace to amuse players or as a device to move a plot along that is stagnating or has gone astray. It should be used with restraint.







Even if you don't go delving into ruins where you don't belong, you might run into the most capricious arcane force known to the area. This *seems* to be a mobile wild magic zone. I've not experienced it myself, so it might not exist. It has been described to me as a small field of scintillating light that is perhaps 10 feet in diameter. It is said to rush toward people using a spell or magical item and surround them. Magical effects generated within the field are altered: Some increase, some decrease, and some simply change—or so it is said. Again, I have no personal experience with this mobile zone, so I cannot authenticate its existence.

Incidentally, as far as I or anyone else has been able to determine, no psionic forces are currently active in the High Moor except those directly associated with individual creatures or people in the region.

## Ruins

Part geographical feature, part arcane force, the ruins of the High Moor region are important enough to deserve their own heading. The most prominent of the arcane forces in the ruins, the *gates* of Dragonspear and the presence of ancient Netherese magic, have already been briefly covered. However, aside from those prominent examples, several other arcane forces are at work in the ruins, including lesser magical items and spells. These spells (or effects of items) include those that summon monsters, minor curses, and various confinements that restrict the movement of something that could cause great harm.

I'd rather not talk about ruins (or "dungeons" if you prefer), but I suppose most of Elminster's intended audience finds them interesting. In fact, the most prominent effect of the local ruins is to attract adventurers of various stripes, and as those people traverse the High Moor, they affect the local ecology. Well, the ruins are part of the environment. If you go decide to go to them, maybe their contents will keep you from coming by and wrecking the rest of the area's ecology. And, I have to admit, every once in a while, some sort of abomination comes crawling or oozing out of some dungeon to play havoc with the normal animals and plants—and unfortunately only the adventurers seem willing to do anything about it.

Well, as long as you adventuring sorts help when needed and don't otherwise interfere, I guess I won't have much of a problem with you. On the other hand, if you go into a dungeon and release some abomination, you had just better clean up after yourself. I don't need the aggravation.

For my purposes in this treatise, a "dungeon" is a dank and disgusting hold where adventurers ply their trade and where monsters go to die. Some people might include natural caverns or monster lairs as types of dungeons, but as the heading of this

section indicates, the ones I deal with here are all ruins. They date from an assortment of periods in Faerûn's history. If you want more information on them, seek another source like that Volo person I hear about every once in a while.

## Dragonspear Castle

Actually located slightly to the south and west of the High Moor itself, Dragonspear Castle is without a doubt the most infamous ruin in the region. At least it's the one people ask *me* about the most. (I guess I can't be sure of its reputation in Cormyr or Tethyr.) While it is not on the moor proper, it has had several effects on the High Moor in its long and bloody history.

The builder of the citadel was supposedly a human-dwarf crossbreed (sure, *right*) who befriended a copper dragon and then built a castle around the lair of the dragon. A few copper dragons have dwelt in the region, so this part of the story is pretty plausible. Anyway, the rumors say that this man-dwarf and his dragon scoured the moors to kill orcs, trolls, and other creatures who made their homes there. According to legend, he almost succeeded.

This part of the story has been corroborated, at least in part. I have seen evidence that, at about the right time in the past to correspond with the story, the trolls and orcs of the region *were* decimated. Some goblinkin folklore even indicates that the orcs were completely destroyed at that time. It was their absence that gave other humanoids the chance to move into the area, along with new tribes of orcs. Naturally, this wreaked havoc on the ecology of the region for quite some time, and the repercussions are still felt to some degree.

Anyway, the castle's builder died not long after he wrecked the ecology of the High Moor, and the castle was then ruined by a wizard. This wizard also set up the first *gate* within Dragonspear that allowed baatezu to come to this plane. As one might imagine (at least if one has been paying *any* attention to what I've been saying), this again radically changed the local ecology. Baatezu are avid hunters and are quite organized. Fortunately, their appetites lead them to people as prey, so the normal inhabitants of the High Moor were able to adapt fairly readily to the presence of the baatezu, at least as far as I can tell. (Remember that the High Moor was at the same time suffering from the loss of the trolls and orcs.)

Dragonspear for centuries has then served as a marshaling center for various groups including lizard men, ophidians, and a large variety of goblinkin. Baatezu, though rare, have become a part of the local ecology. Magical items from the ruin have also escaped on occasion to make things interesting.

Trolls, goblinkin, and human brigands still lurk in the castle. While the *gate* is supposedly neutralized, or at least guarded, baatezu still linger in the area.





## The Dungeon of The Hark

This ruin sits atop the cliffs at the northern edge of the High Moor plateau. It was once a fine village, and several of its buildings have been restored to house a band of wererat bandits that raid traffic along the south branch of the River Shining. After raids, the wererats retreat to the ruins. If attacked there, they can retreat into an extensive underground complex.

Beneath the ground are a few tunnels connected with the remains of the village. Beyond those corridors lie several entrances to the Undermoor, where such creatures as ropers, ogres, and even a rare illithid or two roam near the locale. The Dungeon of the Hark (named for the first leader of the wererat band) is an easy-to-access entrance to the Undermoor and is also an easy place for the creatures of the Undermoor to reach the surface.

## Halls of The Hammer

This long-abandoned dwarven hold is rumored to hold great treasures, but few have returned safely from it, and those that have did not penetrate far within its depths. To get to this dangerous place, go to the eastern side of Highstar Lake and look for a spring that gushes out of one of the hills along the shore. Climb to the barren top of this hill. Look to the southeast, and you

should see two other hills topped with barren stone. These three hills—the one you are on and the two others—form a line that points to a pit. Follow the line to the pit, which is half-filled with loose rubble. An opening cut into the rock walls of the pit leads into the Halls of the Hammer.

My friend Vincin says the Halls of the Hammer can be reached through the Undermoor as well. He reports that even the worst monsters and abominations of the Undermoor avoid the depths of the Halls of the Hammer. The ancient hold houses powerful undead horrors, violent illusions, and worse. If anyone has successfully ventured into the more hidden levels of the vast hold, they have not returned to tell about it.

So stop by and see it sometime.

## Hammer Hall

Years ago a group of adventurers built a small keep consisting of a log house and a stable surrounded by a wooden palisade so that they could more easily venture into the Halls of the Hammer. Travelers should notice that there are no longer any forests on the High Moor. However, at one time, a few small copses dotted the shores of Highstar Lake. For centuries these survived despite the general devastation of the area's woodlands. Now, thanks to those adventurers (the Men of the Hammer), the area right







around the lake is as dreary as the rest of the High Moor. Those copses never recovered from the devastation wrought by the Men of the Hammer in building their house and palisade. Thanks.

Anyway, the palisade makes a nice place for a visit and forms a warm retreat in a blizzard or blinding rainstorm. Of course, the local goblinkin know of the existence of Hammer Hall, and they keep an eye on it. Any smoke from fires lit there is likely to attract the attention of trolls and hobgoblins at the very least. I've left a nice stack of firewood by the main chimney of Hammer Hall, should you adventurers decide to take the chance and use it. This way, you won't have to cut down the last few trees in the region. If you do, I'll be VERY UPSET.

An assortment of rumors and half-baked tales say that the Men of the Hammer left buried treasure somewhere close to Hammer Hall. On more than one occasion adventurers have stopped by to look for it, and evidence of their digging can still be seen all around the palisade.

I'm going to tell you something from the horse's mouth here: The Men of the Hammer went north a few years ago and never returned. They *planned* to go, and they took their stuff with them. If *you* were going to relocate, would *you* leave treasure sitting around? I think not. Neither would they, so don't dig around Hammer Hall! There's nothing there! And if you really, truly feel the need to dig, at least clean up after yourselves later. The soil of the High Moor is in bad enough shape without you adventurers contributing to its further erosion.

### Ruins of Highstar Lake

As I mentioned in the entry on Highstar Lake, it is my belief that these ruins are simple myth. However, rumors say a sunken Netherese airship filled with gems and guarded by undead wizards rests in the depths of the lake. Feel free to look, but don't even *think* about trying to drain the lake. If you want to check out the legend, learn how to swim.

### Orogoth

Once ignored by most treasure-seekers, this ruined hold of great antiquity has been getting more and more attention in the last couple of years. Supposedly, years ago it was the grand home of a Netherese family that captured dragons, then transformed themselves *into* dragons.

As with several other rumors about the High Moor region, I have run across some natural evidence that supports part of this: Dragons have lived here, and several of them laired together. The truth is that they raided other dragons for treasure. Eventually an outright minor dragon war involving most of the dragons of the High Moor erupted as a result of their actions. The wyrms destroyed one another along with a lot of wildlife. (Most

dragons aren't much better than humans in their respect for the ecology.)

Anyway, a powerful dracolich now sits within the ruins of Orogoth, directing a small group of black dragons to do its bidding. These dragons are a powerful destructive force in the region. Adventurers and representatives from the Cult of the Dragon visit Orogoth regularly. They seldom live through the experience.

Again, please feel free to stop by. Orogoth is some 55 miles southwest of Hammer Hall.

### Ruins Beneath Secomber

The nearby village of Secomber sits atop an ancient settlement that may be an ancient city of the Fallen Kingdom. Every once in a while, new construction or a band of foolhardy folk opens some ancient crypt and releases magical or undead creatures. In fact, a fairly large population of gargoyles presently nests in the Red Cliffs thanks to explorations beneath Secomber.

### Ruins of The Undermoor

Many of the caverns of the local Underdark lead to ancient ruins. These ruins are the probable source for the arcane forces that pervade the area and cause such things as upward-flowing rivers. Most of these ruins are probably Netherese, like Orogoth, and filled with dangerous magic. Some of the ruins might have been outposts of Delzoun, ancient Illefarn, Eaerlann, or the Fallen Kingdom (the Kingdom of Man, not one of the other "fallen kingdoms").

On occasion, a goblinoid or even a troll has stumbled up from these ruins with some cursed item clutched in one claw and gone on to lead its fellow creatures in some kind of power play. These lucky humanoid seldom cause trouble on the High Moor itself, which is fine with me, but they often build up large bands of their kind around their leadership that go raiding nearby settlements—which is also fine with me. If you visit the ruins of the Undermoor and fall under a curse, follow the example of the local trolls and hobgoblins and take it somewhere else.

### Nearby Ruins

Lyran's Hold lies within the Forest of Wyrms. The Dungeon of Swords can be found in the Serpent Hills. Both of these ruins are, as I understand it, mentioned in the treatise on the ecology of the Serpent Hills that Elminster has commissioned.

Several other ruins are spread throughout the areas surrounding the High Moor, including two sets of ruins of Dekanter and the remains of Illefarn. Humans and other people have proliferated in the region in the last several millennia, and they have left their marks. If you look hard enough, you can find ruins almost anywhere.



The point that I wish to make is that none of these ruins are in the High Moor. Only the ones I have mentioned previously are. If you are looking for other ruins, you don't need to visit the High Moor—so don't.

## Nearby Settlements

Though no permanent settlements have been established on the High Moor itself, several towns and villages can be found nearby. Only four are really close enough to have an ongoing impact on the High Moor: Secomber at the plateau's north-west tip, Daggerford to the west, and Serpent's Cowl and Soubar to the southeast. Serpent's Cowl is covered in the separate treatise on the Serpent Hills, so I won't talk about it here. Brief discussions of the other three follow.

A handful of small towns and villages lie to the north of the High Moor, including Loudwater, Zelbross, Orlbar, and Llorkh. Loudwater is a nice place, for a town, because the people take some care with growing things. Orlbar and Zelbross are both inconsequential and inoffensive.

Llorkh has a dubious claim to fame, having been corrupted by evil forces, specifically the Zhentarim. As long as the Zhentarim don't turn to trying to run the High Moor, I'm not too concerned, but recent evidence of some recruitment drives by them on the High Moor has surfaced. The Zhentarim have been trying to convince goblins, orcs, and trolls to leave their natural homes and go serve in battles between humans. So far, these Zhentarim agents haven't done anything to really harm the High Moor, but you adventurers always run the risk of encountering a few of them.

### Secomber

Secomber is the closest settlement to the High Moor. It has already been mentioned a couple of times, once because its people have unleashed gargoyles on the area and another time because their quarrying of the Red Cliffs' granite stands to cause other environmental problems. Those are just the beginnings of the difficulties caused by this "quaint" little fishing village.

Now, to be honest, most of the humans and halflings of Secomber are pretty inoffensive. They spend their lives fishing or farming and live in relative harmony with nature. They've at least become an expected part of the ecology of the region, and without them the populations of various species would rise or fall, and the ecology would have to adapt. So their presence is not necessarily a bad thing.

However, the lord of Secomber, one Traskar, has turned this little town into a tourist stop for adventurers. He's made certain that the town welcomes adventurers and can offer them supplies for their treasure-hunting forays. He has positioned the town in

adventurers' minds as a convenient rest stop between such thrill-seeking endeavors. With Secomber so close to the High Moor and the ruins and monsters available in the Moor, it's no wonder that a lot of those adventuring expeditions head right up the slopes and into the High Moor.

Please, feel free to use the town as a base for adventures, but please take the adventures somewhere else—like to the north into the High Forest. I wouldn't mind seeing some grief come to a druid or two up there for a change. Seriously, though, if you must adventure, please be careful.

And let's talk for a minute about Amelior Amanitas. Though it might sound like the name of an exotic disease, it's really the name of an obnoxious mage native to Secomber. This fellow seems to have a penchant for experimenting that often leads to subsequent explosions or other accidents. He's also created far more than his fair share of magical hazards, including items and constructs that have encouraged mischief of various sorts. Not only that, but he occasionally hires adventurers to—you really should see this one coming—travel to the High Moor and gather materials for his stupid experiments. This usually involves the death of one of the natural denizens of the region, something which quite naturally UPSETS ME. Say it with me this time: Leave the High Moor alone.

### Daggerford

A quaint little tale about how Daggerford got its name says that some young adventurer slaughtered a few lizard men at a ford with a dagger to secure his claim to the land. The town models itself after that young adventurer in a typically human fashion: Its people fancy themselves as the rulers of all they survey, able to control nature and defeat all who challenge them. Fortunately, the town is heavily influenced by a temple of Chauntea, which keeps the people from wandering the countryside and damaging the environment too much. Also, the townsfolk are mainly traders who are concerned primarily with caravan traffic through their settlement. (Daggerford is, after all, located at the juncture of a river and a prominent road.) This is fine, because it keeps them from having too much interest in the High Moor except as a base for occasional caravan raids that interfere with trade.

### Soubar

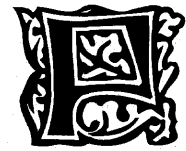
Soubar is a lawless settlement that shrinks to a mere outpost in the winter and grows to a thriving village in the summer. It's been raided numerous times by goblinkin from the High Moor. This is no less than the little town deserves, however. It is a home to bounty hunters of all the worst sorts. Soubar serves a thriving marketplace for butchers who are interested in ecology only so they can find out what parts of an animal they can sell.







# The Flora



For the less aware among Elminster's intended audience, flora refers to the plant life of a certain area; thus, this section describes the plants of the High Moor and the surrounding area. Since the ages-ago deforestation of the High Moor plateau, the region has become fairly desolate. Still, a surprising diversity of plant life exists. Only the more prominent or more interesting species are discussed here. If you want to know more, talk to a sage, herbalist, or druid who knows more about this region and area of expertise. To be perfectly honest, I've never been that interested in plants. I was attracted to my profession because of a love for animals—but I'll do my best.

## Common Flora

The first plants most visitors notice on the High Moor are the grasses and scrub trees. A more discerning observer also sees mosses and various shrubs and vines. Each type of plant grows in several varieties on the High Moor, and each variety fills a specific ecological niche. Also, if you plan on visiting the High Moor, you should take note that while I became a druid out of love for animals, many animals rely on plants for their well-being. So while I could generally care less what a particular plant looks like, my druidic training has given me enough knowledge to identify the different types of flora and I am generally protective of all plants.

### Trees and Shrubs

Mainly pines and other evergreens grow in the forests around the High Moor. Spruce flourish in great numbers in the Misty Forest, while redwoods are common in the Forest of Wyrms. Stunted evergreens of various types are occasionally found on the edges of the High Moor, struggling valiantly to gain a foothold. Unfortunately, the soil has become too poor to support much of an incursion by full-sized evergreens.

On the High Moor itself, especially in the interior, rowan and heath (or heather) are much more common. High Moor rowan can grow as tall as four feet in some places, but the vicious winds of the moors stunt these trees and prevent them from ever achieving their full potential height. The rowans produce white flowers at the tips of comblike branch formations as well as a red fruit in season. I'd recommend not eating rowan berries unless you enjoy vomiting.

Heath is a low-growing shrub with small, needlelike evergreen leaves. It produces several small, urn-shaped pink flowers to a branch. Moors are sometimes referred to as heaths because of the relative profusion of this shrub in moorlands. The species that predominates on the High Moor is also called heather. Heather grows well in the acidic peat bogs of the High Moor as well as the rest of its infertile soil. Several vast fields of the stuff stretch out across the plateau, some growing to a mile or more in diameter.

Among the less common, but more interesting, trees of the plateau are felsuls and silverbark. Felsuls have a deep brown hue and soft flesh. They grow gnarled and twisted by the harsh winds of the plateau. They are nevertheless tenacious plants, growing on cliffs and rocky crags. In the spring they flower brilliantly with blossoms of yellow and red. The petals of these flowers can be crushed to yield a spicy scent. Felsul wood cannot be used for building and does not burn well.

Silverbark trees are slender trees that are found in small copses on the High Moor that are always located near a bog. Not more than a dozen small copses of the trees grow on the plateau. In the High Moor, silverbark grows thin and straight as tall as 10 feet. The bark—which is not real silver, so it is not valuable in the slightest—flakes off easily, and silverbark wood dries quickly and is too brittle for most uses. The deep red leaves of the silverbark, however, are quite useful. They are waxy and large, sometimes reaching the size of a human hand. The leaves are used by people native to the area as a wrapping for fresh game or other materials to keep dirt out.

### Grasses and Mosses

Several kinds of grasses flourish on the High Moor plateau, some tall, some short. The most noticeable type is what some people call fluffgrass. This grass grows two or three feet tall in most places. In the summer, feathery flowers appear at the tops of the grass plants. The High Moor is home to purple fluffgrass and white fluffgrass. These two varieties of ground cover dominate large areas of the plateau.

The marshy areas of the High Moor, especially the peat bogs and the fire marshes, are home to a variety of mosses. The most common of these is sphagnum moss, which thrives in the acidic peat. When these mosses die, they fall into the bogs, where they eventually form more peat. From quite a few vantage points on the High Moor, it looks like the whole moorland is covered with moss; it is at least as prevalent a plant as heather.





## Berries and Miscellaneous

Two types of good berries grow on the plateau: a yellowish raspberry usually called *cloudberry* and a type of blueberry often called *bilberry* by the locals. Although these two berries are delicious, the plants that bear them are only similar in that they both grow thorns to protect their fruit. The cloudberry, like other raspberries, grows on a plant whose long, whiplike, wiry branches are called *canes*. Bilberries grow on a shrub with many short, brittle branches and small round leaves. Both bilberry bushes and cloudberry canes tend to form dense, interwoven thickets, which makes retrieving their fruits a challenge to either people or animals. Both berries are very palatable and serve as staples for many types of animals on the plateau, including humans and goblinkin.

Ferns of several varieties also thrive on the plateau, especially in the gorges and canyons, and a multitude of lovely flowering plants blossom in the more fertile areas of the High Moor. Besides the two types of berry just mentioned, relatively few edible plants grow well on the plateau—at least, plants that a person would *enjoy* eating. However, wild tubers of various sorts, including a local variety of sugar beet, can be unearthed with patience and the knowledge of what foliage to look for. In some places, vetches have taken hold. These serve as fodder for many

animals, and they prevent erosion and make the soil more fertile for other plants. I am currently trying to encourage some of the local human and goblin tribes to plant vetches in certain regions.

Numerous herbs grow on the High Moor as well, some poisonous, some with medicinal properties. Someone skilled in herbalism can find most of the needed ingredients for any common preparation. For information on a truly miraculous bit of medicinal flora, see the section on fungus later in this chapter.

## Uncommon Flora

In addition to the more mundane varieties of vegetation found on the High Moor, some varieties of plant that are decidedly monstrous thrive on the plateau. The most important are the thornslinger, the giant sundew, and vampire moss. On the plateau, thornslingers are most often seen in rocky gorges. They are pale, almost white, and have a sweet-smelling pink flower. These plants shoot thorns at animals that approach too close, and several dead animals can usually be found within a few feet of the plant. Animals that come too near can also become trapped by the sticky sap exuded by the thornslinger.







### High Moor Giant Sundew

**T**hese creatures are more intelligent than related species in other areas; they have Intelligence 5-7 (Low). They communicate with one another through a form of empathy. When one is harmed by a certain creature, all other giant sundews within a mile know about it instantly. Information is passed on until all tanglers of the High Moor are acquainted with the enemy. The tanglers of the High Moor recognize Bara (by her weight, shape, and scent) as a friend and do not harm her. In contrast, they recognize goblins in general and seek to harm them. Others creatures are judged on an individual basis by their actions.

Giant sundews, also known locally as tanglers, are found scattered in large fields of heath as well as in places where other plants give them a little bit of shade. They prefer moist ground and are often also found in marshes and bogs. The acidic nature of the peat bog does not bother them, nor does the flame of the fire marshes. A tangler is a pale green with pink splotches and stripes. It looks like a pile of sticky ropes and rags about three feet in height and diameter. Tanglers detect creatures by sensing vibration through the ground. They are quite sensitive and can tell when a creature the size of a mouse approaches.

While giant sundews are generally more intelligent than

### Bluecap Mushrooms

**I**f the caps of bluecap mushrooms are boiled in a preparation of clean water, they become able to absorb ingested poisons of many sorts. If prepared correctly, a bluecap stew can act as a *neutralize poison* spell against ingested poisons. Only an individual with the herbalism nonweapon proficiency can choose the proper herbs to make bluecap stew correctly. If the stew is made incorrectly, the presence of boiled bluecaps still gives those who eat the stew a new saving throw with a +2 bonus against already-ingested poison.

Bluecap stew must be ingested to be effective. Since it consists of large solid pieces, it cannot be ingested without conscious effort.

Against injected poisons, boiled bluecap provides the victim with a new saving throw vs. poison with a +1 bonus. The boiled bluecap need only be consumed to attain this benefit; no other special preparation is necessary.

The usage of bluecap mushrooms is only effective against a particular incidence of poisoning once. Repeated administrations of incorrectly made bluecap stew for ingested poison or boiled bluecaps for injected poison provide no further benefits beyond the initial new saving throw.

most normal animals, the local tanglers of the High Moor are even more intelligent. They can recognize certain individuals and members of different species. (I am one individual they recognize, and because they know I won't harm them, they leave me alone.) Local tanglers are not fond of goblins and attack them at any opportunity (perhaps they also like the way goblins taste). They don't seem to have yet made a decision about other kinds of life forms in general, but their predatory nature makes them dangerous to all animal life.

Vampire moss (from the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual, Volume One*) is an insidious vegetable creature that feeds on the life energy of passing creatures. It need not touch its victim, but need only be located within a few yards of a being to attack. Like other types of moss, vampire moss is a stringy green plant. It hangs, beardlike, from the branches of trees or shrubs. In the High Moor ecology, vampire moss is found in marshes, excluding the fire marshes and the peat bogs. Although it is typically a dull green in color, vampire moss becomes a brighter green as it feeds.

A victim of vampire moss seldom realizes the source of the attack and simply becomes weaker and weaker, finally falling dead. One vampire moss can kill a large animal (like a person) in a matter of minutes. Woe betide the victim who walks into an area draped with several of the mosses. The "lair" of the vampire moss usually carries the stench of death from previous victims, whose drained corpses can be easily seen until carrion eaters remove them—unless the carrion eaters themselves fall prey to the moss! Vampire moss almost surely has an arcane origin, yet the plant forms a normal part of the marsh ecology of the High Moor, culling the weaker specimens of several animal species.

## Let's Talk Fungus

**H**ere's a cheery topic. However, while fungus may be unexciting, it is pretty common on the High Moor. An abundance of fungi grow in the area, including two prominent types of mushroom and a rather common lichen. (Yes, I know lichen isn't precisely a fungus. Just bear with me.)

The two prominent mushroom types are the bluecap and the snapper. Bluecaps can grow to a height of almost six inches. They have slender white stems that curve slightly, and they take their name from their pale blue caps, which mold tightly to their stems. Eaten raw, a bluecap is mildly nutritious, and it serves as a dietary supplement for most omnivores of the plateau. In addition, the local human tribes have discovered that boiled bluecap mixed with a few local herbs absorbs ingested poisons.

The snapper is an interesting little fungus. This puffy ball-shaped mushroom can grow as large as a foot in diameter and is light orange in color with brownish splotches. Most snappers





have between two and twelve eyelike spots as well. These spots, combined with the fungus's other properties, lead some to speculate that snappers might be related to gas spores, the floating fungi that resemble beholders.

During its growth, a snapper retains its colors and its thin, soft shell. If the snapper is punctured during this time, the air leaks out of its great hollow center with a piercing, drawn-out shriek. The fungus gets its name from its last stages of growth when the shell dries out and becomes brittle and spores form on the inside of the shell. Once the ball-shaped shell becomes brittle enough, the snapper separates from its stalk. The winds of the High Moor blow the snapper shell around until it hits some hard surface or it is struck. At that point, the snapper breaks open with explosive force and a loud sound, spreading spores in every direction. The explosion is harmless, though the spores might obscure vision for a short time or even cause an allergic reaction in some people.

Snappers are uncommon on the High Moor, though a few can usually be found in any open area. At some times clusters of them can be found in ditches and shallow caves. Bluecaps are relatively rare, but the human and goblin tribes tend them and protect them where they are found. Neither type of mushroom is nearly as common as the lichen that festoons the rock outcroppings of the High Moor.

Lichen is an intermediary life form, part plant and part fungus. The lichen of the High Moor—usually just called lichen, as it doesn't seem to be worthy of a special name—can be found in many areas, especially on rocks and in bogs. This lichen is pale greenish-gray and spreads across surfaces with spidery tendrils. Lichen is extremely common on the High Moor and can be found in profusion in the Undermoor as well.

The Undermoor, it should go without saying, is a safe haven for fungus of all types under the protection of my friend Vincin. Many varieties of fungi thrive in the Undermoor, some of which are larger than people. Some are edible, some are poisonous, and some are predatory. Some brightly colored giant mushrooms grow with caps large enough to be used as boats on the rivers of the Undermoor. (They have a one-person capacity each at most.)

I do know that gas spores and several varieties of dangerous mold can be found in the Undermoor. In addition, Vincin tells me that a couple of tribes of mold men and one of myconids dwell in the Undermoor. The mold men are warmth-loving creatures and do not venture near the surface in colder weather; Vincin says they migrate according to the season, approaching the surface only during summer. But they always remain underground, and they tend to linger near the few hot springs in the mid-level of the Undermoor and by one or two lava flows deep under the plateau.

All the myconids of the Undermoor form one large tribe or, more correctly, colony. The colony is made of numerous *circles*,



which are social units of as many as two dozen myconids. Circles can be found in many areas of the Undermoor. Their organization and range are centered on moist caves filled with fungus farmed by the myconids.

The myconids consume lesser forms of fungus for food. They raise many varieties in their farms. Humans and similar creatures can safely consume many of these fungi, and some provide valuable nutrients—but most taste very, very bad.

Adventurers often mistake the farms of myconids for wild fungus jungles (fungles?). If you find an area that seems overgrown with fungus, be aware that it might belong to myconids. Check for some sense of arrangement in the growth of the fungi, such as different types in different areas or even rows of certain kinds of mushrooms. Myconids are very organized, and this quality is reflected in their farms. Myconids are usually very peaceful, but they defend themselves and their farms doggedly, and they are dangerous opponents.

I don't mean to imply that all areas overgrown with fungi are farms. Many are simply overgrown areas inhabited by a variety of dangerous fungi from yellow mold to violet fungus. Think twice—if that's possible for you—before playing in the fungi.







# The Common Animals



like animals. I would be greatly distressed if you killed too many in the High Moors. Hunting for food is acceptable; that's a normal part of nature. But don't kill more than you can eat, and don't kill for sport.

That said, I'll be happy to tell you about the common animals of the High Moor. Quite a few types of animals inhabit the area, although a not many members of each species live here. I've been told that I'm too long-winded about certain things, like talking about animals, so I will attempt to be brief. In an effort to do so, I have limited myself to the most common animals of the plateau and the surrounding area.

## Mammals

In general, mammals—especially large mammals—are rare on the High Moor. However, there are some exceptions. For example, hooved mammals flourish on the High Moor, living off the abundant heath and grasses. Wolves, which feed primarily on the hooved mammals, are also common. The presence of these more common mammals is also encouraged by the intelligent creatures of the region (humans and goblinkin), who herd some of them and take care to ensure their survival. I would be pleased if they took such an interest in preserving all species.

However, humans and other allegedly intelligent species seldom consider small animals to be worthwhile, except in a limited sense, so they take little care with them. That is truly sad, since many species of small mammals inhabit the High Moor. Most are herbivores (plant-eaters) or omnivores

### The High Moor Swamp Ferret

This animal is very similar to the ferret from the "Mammal, Small" listing in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome, with a few exceptions. Swamp ferrets grow to a length of 2 feet. They are a deep brown color with markings of gray and green, and they make nests in the small trees of the swamps. Several usually nest in the same area.

Swamp ferrets are skilled swimmers, with a swimming movement rate of 9, and they travel and attack in small groups. They are quite aggressive and have a morale rating of 15. A swamp ferret's bite inflicts 1d2 points of damage.

(eaters of plants and meat). The most common of the smaller animals are rabbits, badgers, hedgehogs, moor rats, swamp ferrets, and bats. Rabbits dwell on the open moor and among the heath, making burrows wherever the ground is soft. Their prodigious breeding rate allows them to maintain a proportionately high population compared to other animals of the Moor. Generally, the rabbits of the High Moor aren't the cute little bunnies that travelers seem to picture; they are scrawny and tough. They usually have light brown fur with tufts of white at the tips of their long ears.

The rabbits compete directly with the moor rats for food and living area. While rabbits are herbivorous, moor rats are omnivores. The rats commonly live near the marshes (except the fire marshes), where they can find their favored prey, which includes frogs, fish, and lizards.

Badgers are also omnivores and are very territorial. In the High Moor region, they tend to live in rocky places, digging their burrows—more correctly called *setts*—in the loose, sandy soil of ravines and hills. A few specimens of giant badgers also reside on the High Moor in such rocky areas. Badgers dwell in the same sort of terrain as hedgehogs, sometimes competing with them for territory. Generally, the more amenable hedgehogs move away, leaving the badgers to themselves. Badgers eat roots and fruits, but they also feed on worms, insects, and small mammals, including young rabbits and rats.

Like the badger, the swamp ferret also feeds on young rabbits and rats. However, the High Moor's swamp ferret is a vicious and cunning predator that is unafraid to attack larger mammals as well. While ferrets avoid the tenacious badger and the more dangerous predators like wolves and some of the monstrous life forms, they attack almost anything else, regardless of size. I have even heard of incidents in which a small group of swamp ferrets has brought down an adult goblin.

High Moor bats are also predatory, feeding mostly on insects, which they find in abundance, especially near the marshes. Bats are nocturnal. During the day, they can be found hanging in bunches from trees in the marshes or in shallow caves.

As for larger predators, a few besides wolves and monsters roam the Moor. An occasional fox or wildcat takes up residence in the area, but these creatures seldom last long against wolves and other more dangerous predators. They are usually forced to move to more promising hunting





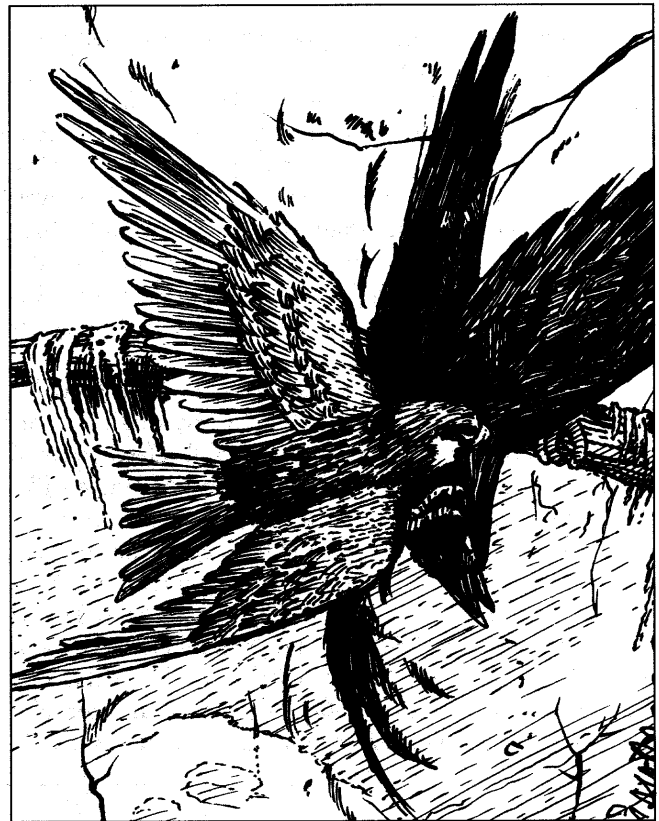
grounds. Normal wolves and the larger worgs can be found in packs all over the plateau, though they tend to avoid the wetter areas, preferring the open areas frequented by the hoofed mammals. Some wolves and worgs are also raised by goblins and orcs. On the High Moor, two tribes of goblins use worgs as mounts.

As I mentioned before, the preferred prey animals of the wolves are the hoofed mammals of the plateau: the ponies, sheep, goats, deer, and horses. The sure-footed rock ponies tend to live in the more barren areas of the plateau, feeding mostly on the tougher grasses. Ponies are sometimes captured and tamed by humans or hobgoblins, who use the ponies as beasts of burden. To the best of my knowledge, nobody has successfully trained a High Moor rock pony as a riding animal.

However, a few wild horses wander the plateau. Like the rock ponies, the horses are usually brown or roan with red or rust-colored manes and tails. Nonnative humans, usually groups from nearby settlements, sometimes come up to the High Moor in the warm months to round up a few horses. Native humans and hobgoblins also try, off and on, to catch a few of the horses for mounts, and both natives and goblinkin have been known to attack large groups of interlopers who come looking for horses. Few native hobgoblins and humans have been able to snare a horse to break it to ride. Generally, not more than a half-dozen per tribe have mounts. Most are satisfied to walk.

These local tribes, as well as the orcs of the High Moor, herd sheep or goats to maintain for food and to provide material for making clothing. High Moor sheep are shaggy, and their wool is difficult to shear, especially with the lack of proper shears that the native tribes have. Thus, most locals kill a sheep when they need to and use the entire skin for clothing and the meat for food simultaneously. Sheepskin and goatskin clothing is common among all the tribes of the High Moor. Fortunately, when the tribes aren't killing these herd animals, they're taking care of them so that they can produce other important commodities such as milk and cheese and offspring. The sheep and goats are in no danger of extinction.

The only other noteworthy hoofed animals of the region are the red deer. Most of these deer live in the Misty Forest, although a few herds wander up onto the plateau during summer. I wouldn't recommend hunting red deer in the Misty Forest. If you think I'm pushy, you wouldn't want to meet the elves of the Misty Forest or the local druid. The druid is so detached she's given up her name, and the elves are extremely protective of "their" forest and the life within. Of the red deer that occasionally make it up to the High



Moor, most quickly fall prey to wolves, one of the human or humanoid tribes, or other predators.

Boars and wild cattle, as well as a few bears, are also found in the Misty Forest. They, too, sometimes find their way onto the plateau, but are generally only rarely encountered.

## Birds

A wide variety of birds live in the different terrains of the High Moor. Grouse and flunderwings, both fine prey for the quick, abound. The region is also home to partridges, golden plovers, red-beaked moor hens, stonechats, and curlews. None of these birds migrate from the High Moor; instead, they remain on the plateau year-round, even during the worst weather. All are omnivorous, mainly eating seeds, grains, berries, and insects. The curlew's long beak and preference for marshy areas makes it an excellent fisher.

It is difficult to find an area anywhere across Faerûn without ravens, and these can be found in quantity on the High Moor, where they can easily obtain plenty of carrion to eat. Ravens are especially fond of dead sheep, so they get along well on the plateau. Ravens are reasonably intelligent and are often found near vampire moss. The birds wait until the







moss has gotten its fill, then swoop in for a free meal while the moss is still satiated.

Among the predatory birds of the High Moor are kestrels, peregrine falcons, short-eared owls, buzzards, and giant eagles. The kestrels and the owls feed primarily on rodents, ranging from common mice to the large moor rats. However, the two species seldom compete directly because both migrate south for the winter: the kestrels away from the High Moor, the owls onto the High Moor. The two species' ranges sometimes overlap, but only for a period of a week or two.

The peregrine falcons also migrate off the High Moor for winter. They and the buzzards, which stay resident year-round, hunt mainly other birds. Buzzards also feed on small mammals and reptiles as well as frogs and giant insects like the common giant dragonflies of the Moor's marshy areas. The peregrine falcon is a beautiful bird, and many are captured by the human tribes to be trained as hunting birds.

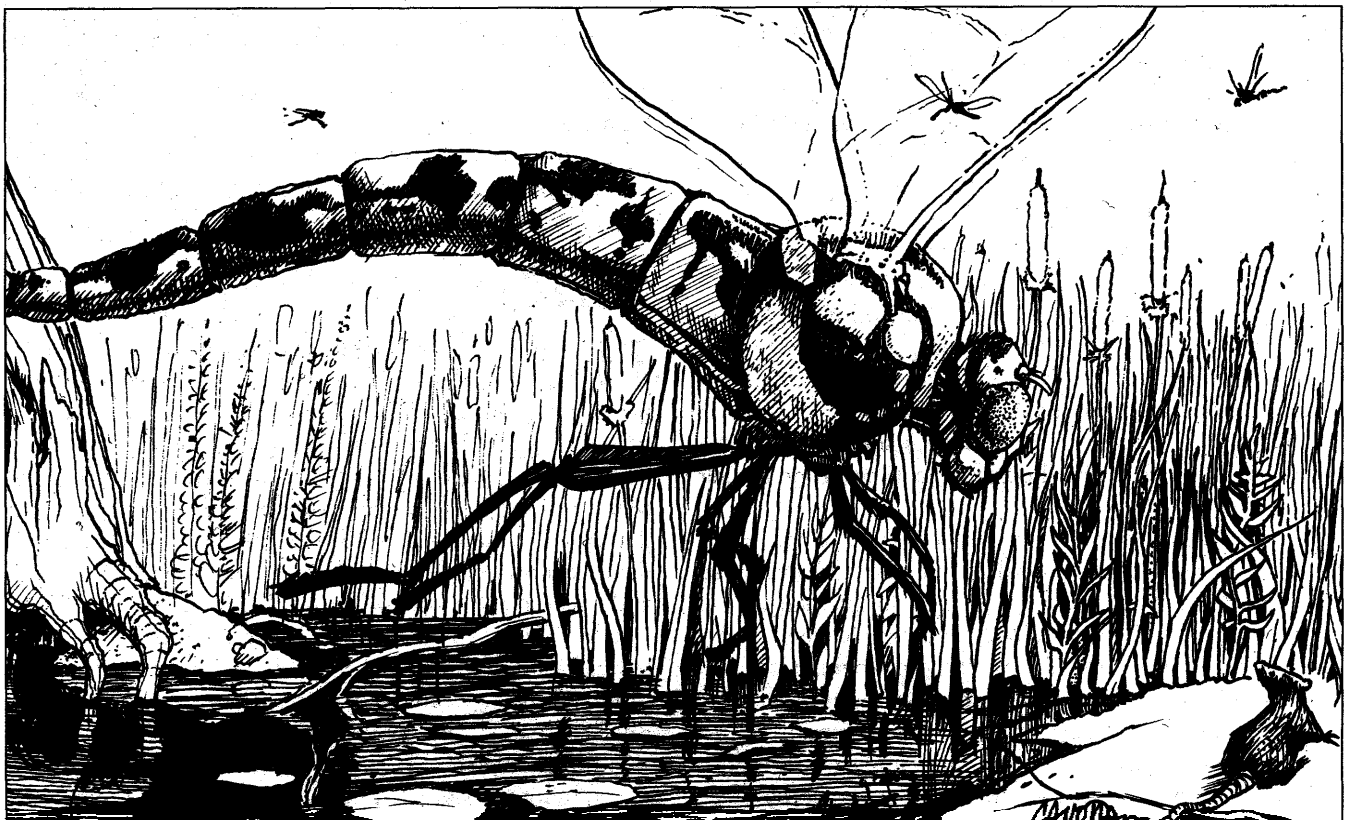
The giant eagles of the High Moor live on the Red Cliffs on the Moor's northern side. Their numbers have been decreasing due largely to the destruction of their habitat by local humans, who also hunt their eggs, which they consider a delicacy. These eagles, also known as red eagles, are truly

magnificent to look upon. They have red-tinted feathers and a deep red patch on their throats. Though normally peaceful, the giant eagles have lately been fighting back to protect their homes and young. They are fairly intelligent, and it took only a little reasoning to get them to understand the situation and the reasons for their decline. They are now forewarned, and they will make formidable opponents to any who try to harm them or their homes. Poachers will be struck by lightning if I catch up with them.

## Insects

The High Moor has a normal, broad range of insects, from green carrion-eating flies to common bumblebees to predatory dragonflies. The region is also home to the green hairstreak, large heath, marsh fritillary, mountain ringlet, and bog bush cricket. A plethora of beautiful butterfly and moth species also flit across the High Moor during summer.

Perhaps the most beautiful of the butterflies is Morgan's redwing, named for one of the previous druids of the High Moor, a man responsible for saving that butterfly from extinction. Redwings are gentle and beautiful, with brilliant scarlet





wings with markings of blood-red. They were once plentiful, but a tribe of goblins discovered that their wings could be boiled to produce a red dye, which they then began using for tribal decorations. Before too long, all the goblin tribes of the region were using the dye and the redwings were suddenly endangered. Several goblins were subsequently struck with a wasting disease, and Morgan let it be known (erroneously but deliberately) that redwing dye was poisonous. It wasn't long before the butterflies were left unmolested.

Dragonflies of all sizes hum and dart everywhere on the plateau. They favor marshes and actually thrive in peat bogs, and they are even found in the fire marshes. These insects are quick and dangerous predators. The small varieties, those considered normal in most circles, hunt primarily other insects. These smaller varieties come in all colors of the rainbow, though a metallic red is most common on the High Moor.

The largest of the dragonflies on the plateau is the golden-ringed dragonfly, named for the brilliant rings around its abdomen. This airborne hunter dwells only in and near peat bogs. These creatures are as big as humans, and some reach as much as 8 feet in length. They prefer larger animals—sometimes including humans or orcs—as prey. For the most part, however, they feed on other insects, as well as swamp ferrets and moor rats.

These great dragonflies mate at the end of summer and lay eggs in the water not long after. These eggs hatch in less than a month. The dragonfly larvae, known as nymphs, are ugly creatures and dangerous aquatic predators. They surprise their prey as often as not by expelling water suddenly to propel themselves forward from cover to attack.

Though dragonflies feed on other insects, they avoid two types: fyreflies and ankhegs. Fyreflies are not much bigger than normal flies, sometimes reaching an inch in length. In adult form, they are black, with red wings and eyes. Fyreflies are dangerous during their breeding season in late spring. They reproduce by flying into fires, making them well-adapted to life in the fire marshes. In a fire, a fyrefly regresses to its larval form, which is a mote of fire. If left alone in the fire for 10 minutes, it splits into two larvae. In another 10 minutes, each of these splits into two more larvae. This process can continue until as many as 64 fyrefly larvae have fissioned off from a single adult. When the fire dies or when the maximum number of fyreflies per fire is reached, the larvae leave the fire and begin flying toward anything that moves. They have a chance to set fire to anything they touch.

The larvae burn until killed or until forced into dormancy. A simple slap is sufficient to kill one, and larvae are rendered dormant by being doused with water or hit with

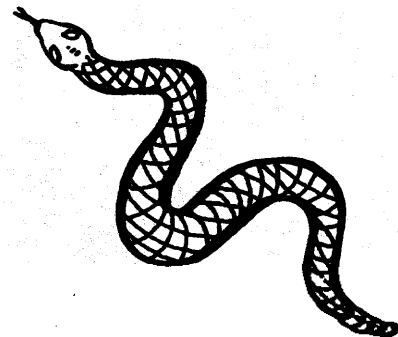
any cold-based spell. They also fall naturally dormant about 10 minutes after they emerge from a fire. A fyrefly stays in its dormant state for about a week, then attains its adult form.

## Miscellaneous

**T**oads, frogs, and newts are found in abundance on the High Moor plateau, especially in the marshy areas. In the water itself, many varieties of fish flourish—as well as snails, a type of freshwater oyster, and small green crabs. Before you get any ideas, the local oysters seldom produce pearls that are large and well-formed—though an occasional beautiful red pearl encourages the humans of Secomber to go hunting for oysters. If you feel you adventurers *must* hunt oysters for that elusive beauty, don't pick on anything less than a foot across. Only the extremely rare oysters of that size have ever produced such precious pearls. Besides, when they bite back, you feel it.

Worms and leeches thrive in great numbers in the marshes of the High Moor; be careful where you go for your water. More than one fool has lost his life to a throat leech from one of the local wetlands. Of course, throat leeches are only one species of these creatures. Other leeches are also found on the High Moor, from common leeches to giant specimens. Small leeches swarm in most of the marshes of the High Moor. Hunting *packs* of giant leeches can be found in the larger marshes of the plateau.

Snakes and other reptiles live in the nearby Forest of Wyrms and, of course, in the aptly named Serpent Hills. Most are pretty harmless. The adder is the only poisonous snake typically found on the plateau. Of course, many other varieties of poisonous snakes inhabit the Serpent Hills, if snakes are really what you're looking for. And on occasion, some of the critters of the Serpent Hills come slithering onto the plateau, so the southeastern portion of the Moor might hold any variety of snake as well as a few lizard men or snake folk to boot.





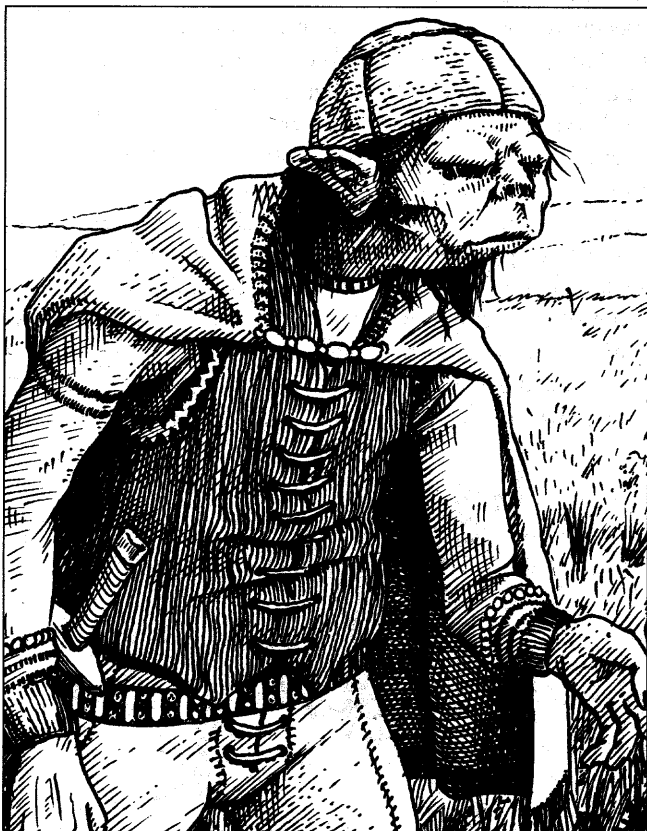


# The “Monsters”

**I**f you’ve been paying attention, you’ve probably noticed that I have already mentioned several creatures that are normally considered monsters by other people. Well, I suppose that means it is time for me to tell you what I consider a monster. A monster, to me, is something that meets one or more of the following conditions:

- \* It is destructive enough to upset the local ecology if not watched closely and controlled.
- \* It has been magically altered in some fashion or might be the result of magical experimentation.
- \* It’s hard to classify as a mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, insect, or other normal kind of animal.

In the following section I discuss the creatures that I consider the monsters of the High Moor. First I deal with the tribes of the High Moor (and briefly with the elves of the Misty Forest) and then with the miscellaneous monsters



that can be found through most of the region. Then come two sections dealing with special regions of the High Moor, the fire marshes and the Undermoor, both of which are part of the overall ecology but are quite special and reasonably separate from the rest of the plateau.

## Tribal Creatures

**A** lot of people would argue with my classification of tribes of people as monsters, at least when they realize that I’m including the human tribes along with the goblinkin tribes. Well, these beings all meet my first criteria for determining monstrosity: They are capable of upsetting the local ecology if not watched carefully and controlled.

Four races comprise the tribes that live on the plateau: humans, goblins, orcs, and hobgoblins. At one time, kobolds, bugbears, and ogres may also have lived on the High Moor, and evidence suggests that lizard men once dwelt there as well. The lizard men probably voluntarily migrated to nearby marshlands to escape the harsh winters of the High Moor plateau, but the other goblinkin tribes were probably destroyed by those that still exist. Now kobolds, bugbears, and ogres can be found scattered among the other tribes as honorary tribe members, charismatic leaders, or servants; they are also occasionally encountered in small raiding or hunting parties from other regions.

### Goblins

The High Moor goblins are yellow-skinned and tend toward flat faces. Several tribes of the thieving, murderous creatures nest on the plateau, each tribe led by the strongest member. The goblins do not produce any fabricated items except for a few weapons as well as the crudest forms of necklaces and bracelets. They do not engage in any form of agriculture or animal husbandry except to raise and train wolves to serve as guards or mounts. However, the goblins do hunt and gather with little regard for conservation of supply. In other words, they take without thought, but they never consciously return anything to the environment. Fortunately, goblins are small enough to serve as prey for a variety of creatures, so they can be of some benefit to the overall ecology as forms of food for other animals.

Goblins of the High Moor depend largely on stolen weapons, clothing, and armor, and they have been known to use bows with poisoned arrows. They prefer to raid and steal,





seldom engaging in a pitched battle with an obviously superiorly armed foe. They make strategic plans only rarely, but they are willing (and easily convinced) to follow the plans of powerful creatures such as hobgoblins, bugbears, or even occasional humans. There seems to be no way to predict what causes them to leave the High Moor to raid in the surrounding lands; they are capricious and vicious.

### **Hobgoblins**

The hobgoblins of the High Moor are not such bad folk, especially given the proclivities of most goblinkin. In fact, High Moor hobgoblins are similar in many ways to the local humans. They make things, they have semipermanent settlements, they engage in limited agriculture and trade, and they raise animals. Numerous hobgoblin tribes dot the plateau, most with under 50 members. These tribes are generally at peace with other hobgoblin tribes. The majority of the hobgoblin tribes herd sheep, though a few raise goats or even rock ponies for food. A number of the tribes keep wolves or worgs as guard animals.

Hobgoblins typically wear clothing made of sheepskin. They carry a variety of weapons, usually clubs and spears, though they sometimes send representatives to Soubar to

trade for swords of various types. They tend to prefer scimitars. (I can understand this preference because that's what I use.) They aren't always well received in Soubar, though, because they have raided the town on occasion.

The hobgoblins dislike the High Moor goblins. While uneasy around humans, they are relatively tolerant, and as demonstrated by their trade with Soubar, they are sometimes even willing to talk to humans. They make decent guides if approached with respect, and they manufacture some items worth trading for, including some incredible sheepskin clothing that is resplendent embroidery and beadwork.

### **Humans**

The humans of the High Moor are considered barbarians by most other humans. I suppose it's all a matter of point of view. To the humans of the towns and cities, the High Moor tribes (clans, really) must seem barbarous since they don't have permanent settlements and their ways are rough. On the other hand, I'm seminomadic myself, so I can't say I find the locals all that different as people—and to be honest, I've always thought the travelers from settled lands to have some pretty barbarous ideas.







Well, anyway, the local clans of humans do not make permanent settlements. During the warmer months, they wander the High Moor with their flocks of sheep or goats, seeking the best forage for themselves and their herds. They engage in hunting and trapping, and grouse, flunderwings, rabbits, and moor rats are staples in their diets. They also gather plants for food, including cloudberries, bilberries, sugar beets, and bluecaps. Occasionally, they venture into the Misty Forest to gather spruce branches and twigs to make a rather vile concoction known as spruce beer, which requires parts of a spruce tree, sugar from the sugar beets, and molasses. They use the intoxicant brewed from this mixture for celebrations and ceremonies.

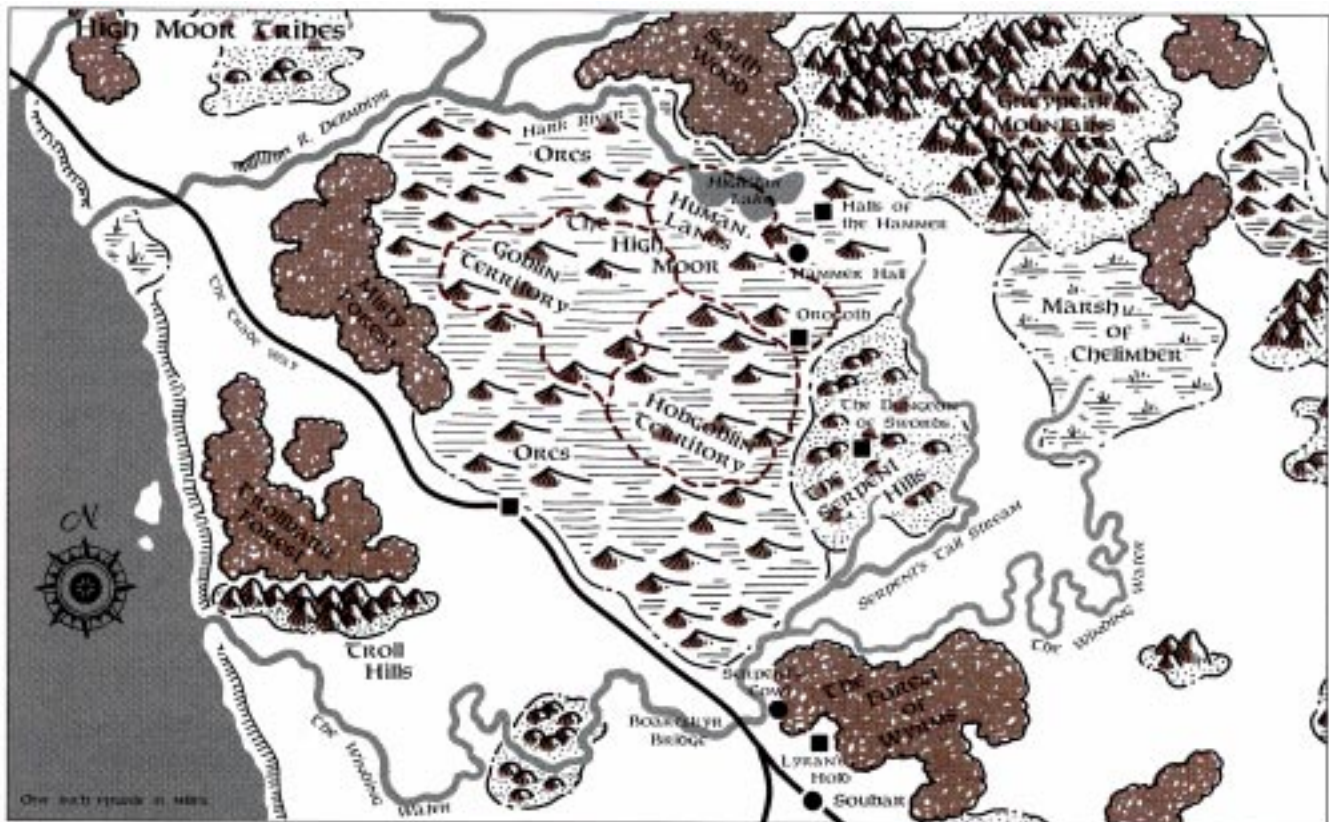
The clans spend most of their time gathering food so that they have sufficient stores when winter comes. In the winter, they usually move into caves, though a few brave clans winter in various ruins. Some even build winter shelters of their own; they use rocks to make walls in ravines to provide protection from the vicious winds of the mesa. During the winter, they live in close quarters, and only hunting parties venturing forth except on the rare mild day.

In the spring, the clans come out and begin traveling again. Several clans come together in spring in various parts of the

High Moor to celebrate the turn of the season, to exchange goods and information, and to acquire mates for the young women and men of the clan who have come of age.

At these gatherings, contests are held and stories of battle are recited. The clan leaders meet to discuss any problems they have had, such as with the goblins, hobgoblins, or the other clans, and brief alliances sometimes arise so that war can be made. At times, a couple of clans join together to form a raiding party that ventures off the plateau through the Misty Forest. However, such parties usually run afoul of the elves there before they can cause too much trouble.

The clans use spears and short bows for hunting and war. They also have craftsmen capable of forging fine two-handed swords. These swordcrafters are the most settled of the humans, usually forming small clans around specific sites and remaining there for years so they can make weapons. The iron for the swords they make must be imported. The swordsmiths usually acquire iron through trade in Soubar or from caravans that detour temporarily onto the High Moor specifically to trade with the human clans at certain meeting areas. The local humans trade their knowledge of the area, sheep, and ponies (which they are expert at catching) for the ore or ingots of pig iron. Some "civilized" folk are also interested in trading for the





sheepskin jerkins the locals make or in the beads and bangles with which the clothes are decorated.

The local human clans are proud and rough, and they tend to live in relative harmony with their environment. This is due in no little part to the efforts of myself and my predecessors. For more than a century, we have impressed upon the humans the importance of preserving the animals and plants of the region for the clans' own survival. Several of the clans follow druidic ways, and I have trained numerous initiates from these people, many of whom still reside on the plateau and help me watch over things.

## Orcs

Few orcs are left on the High Moor, most having been wiped out long ago by the person who built Dragonspear Castle. The orcs that currently live on the High Moor are orcs that moved in subsequent to Daeros Dragonspear's crusades against the region's humanoids. Only two orc tribes still inhabit the plateau, and I believe both sprang from a tribe that once lived in and around Dragonspear Castle before the tribe was driven away by more powerful inhabitants who saw no use for them.

I've heard it said that all orcs are ugly, and I'm inclined to agree. Note, however, that it's not a prejudice so much as a sense of aesthetics that makes me say so. I think I've made it clear that I don't like people of any kind, so orcs are no different than humans in most cases, as far as I'm concerned. However, the orcs of this region are *really* ugly. They have deep green skin, piglike snouts, and stringy hair and warts are the norm for facial "decorations." In fact, their appearance has given birth to a local saying in the settlements around the High Moor: Anything "as ugly as a Dragonspear orc" is very, very ugly.

Overall, though, the orcs are no worse in their behavior (that is, their detrimental ecological impact) than most of the people of the High Moor, and they are better than the goblins on several levels. At least the orcs produce some things, and they seem to be smart enough to conserve some of the wild animals around them as breeding stock, though a time of famine can easily drive them into a panic that quickly turns destructive. (I've had to intervene more than once to save a species from the orcs.)

One of the High Moor orc tribes raises sheep for food and wolves as guard animals. They haven't quite figured out that the two species are not the most compatible, and the reason their sheep keep disappearing is because of the wolves. The other tribe raises goats and even produces some decent cheese. Both of the tribes also support themselves through raiding.

The goatherds live above the Misty Forest and travel through the forest to attack human settlements or those who

travel the forest. These orcs have learned to use the mists for concealment, and they dress appropriately in grays and other light yet dreary colors to better utilize this strategy.

The shepherd orcs live at the south end of the plateau and generally travel down the long slope of land to go raiding around Dragonspear or into Soubar if they want to leave the plateau. They are often satisfied with preying on their neighbors on the plateau and considering raiding them to be easier than trading with them or others.

## Other Goblinkin

Ogres, kobolds, and bugbears also make their homes on the High Moor. Unlike the other goblinkin, however, these three races do not form distinct tribes in this region. Instead, they can be found in small family groups or with tribes of other creatures. Bugbears are the most common of these races, though their numbers have declined sharply from what they once were.

Bugbears can be found in small families all over the High Moor. Some families live with hobgoblin tribes, often serving as elite guards for the hobgoblin chief and thus holding the status of honorary tribe members. These guards are considered trusted servants, and they are often well rewarded by the hobgoblin chiefs. Curiously, the bugbears don't seem interested in dominating the hobgoblin tribes. Most seem satisfied with their subordinate roles, as if they held some deep, grudging respect for the organization and intelligence of the hobgoblins.

In contrast, other bugbears dominate tribes of goblins, leading them in daring raids. It is the goblin tribes led by bugbears that are the most dangerous. Normally, a goblin tribe is too fearful to attack openly or too impatient to set up clever ambushes. However, a bugbear leader can inspire goblins to incredible feats of bravery, and when such feats are backed by large numbers, little can stand in their way.

Still other bugbear families live alone, making lairs in caverns or constructing crude hovels. These bugbears hunt and scavenge to survive, living off the scraps discarded by the region's other tribes. For the most part, these families are solitary sorts, seldom having direct commerce with others.

Ogres live in a similar manner to bugbears on the High Moor, though they are as likely to be encountered alone as with others of their own kind. Ogres can be found among tribes of humans, hobgoblins, orcs, and goblins, serving as guards or performing heavy labor in payment for food. Ogres of the High Moor are wanderers, however, and even those that settle with other tribes eventually leave. They can be encountered anywhere on the High Moor.

Kobolds form small bands on the High Moor. No band is large enough to really be called a tribe, but there are numerous bands. Most operate on their own, though some make







temporary alliances with goblin tribes. A High Moor kobold band is basically a party of feral hunters, banded together for mutual protection.

The High Moor kobolds are degenerate in the extreme. They do not care for their eggs, instead allowing them to fall to predators or to survive on their own. Some kobolds leave clutches of eggs with goblin tribes, who raise the kobolds as menial servants. Kobold bands usually take in the young that hatch and survive long enough for a group of adult kobolds to notice their existence.

## Elves

Though there are no elves native to the High Moor itself, the elves of the Misty Forest deserve at least a brief mention. They almost never venture onto the plateau, since they are understandably happy in their lush home in the Misty Forest, but they have an indirect effect on the local ecology because they are very often the first creatures to interact with any group that leaves the High Moor to go raiding.

The elves of the Misty Forest are quiet and rather insular. They are even more private than many elves on the continent of Faerûn. They seem to be dwindling in number as the years go on; perhaps some have made the Retreat to Evermeet as ordered by the elven queen. They prefer to be left alone in their forest home; however, they have been known to band together with the civilized humans of the surrounding area, especially when threatened by creatures from the High Moor.

As the first line of defense against many incursions from the High Moor, the Misty Forest elves are often responsible for causing attrition to raiding forces, often through ambush, or for turning back an invasion entirely. The elves are aided in their endeavors by a strong druidic presence in the forest.

## Other Monsters

Only a few other types of monstrous life forms range throughout the High Moor. Two of these, leucrotta and trolls, are common enough to warrant their own entries. However, some other rare monsters can be encountered anywhere on the plateau.

Owlbears occasionally wander up from the Misty Forest and can be found on the western end of the High Moor. They seldom stay long before other predators drive them away.

Mudmen sometimes form in the shallows of High Moor ravines or in marshes where the water has been tainted by the magic still present in the Undermoor. The marshes are also home to several other beasts. Catoblepases can occa-

sionally be found in a marsh or a peat bog. They seldom leave these moist environments but do travel about in the spring to find mates. Brown puddings are also sometimes found in marshes or bogs. Those in the peat bogs tend to be more aggressive hunters.

Of course, no swampy area would be complete without a will o' wisp or two. On the plateau, will o' wisps typically have a reddish glow, like so many other life forms of the High Moor. They range over the entirety of the Moor and can be found anywhere at any time.

## Leucrotta

It's been said that one would be hard pressed to find a druid that would try to protect a member of this species. Well, here I am.

Don't get me wrong. Leucrotta are ugly, evil, nasty beasts, and they don't do much good. Except for one thing: Leucrotta hunt adventurers. In times of need, leucrotta turn to local life forms for nourishment, but they prefer the easier prey of travelers. A leucrotta imitates the call of a distressed child or domestic animal or even of an injured adult and uses that noise to lure unsuspecting people into an ambush.

Incidentally, don't miss the implication here: Travelers are easier prey because they don't expect the leucrotta. The people of the local tribes and clans know of leucrotta and seldom leave the warmth of their fires when a piteous cry is heard over the wind. While they sometimes lose loved ones in this way, tribal folk probably save far more of their own lives by not responding. Of course, this practice also means that if you get hurt near a tribal camp, calling for help probably won't get any result—at least not until daylight.

While leucrotta in many parts of the world favor treacherous ravines and old ruins, they can be found anywhere on the High Moor. Any cry for help could be a leucrotta.

## Trolls

Despite the best efforts of adventurers throughout the centuries, trolls are relatively common throughout the High Moor region—except in the fire marshes. They are difficult to eradicate, and they can replace casualties with frightening speed. The troll population increases each year during “adventuring season,” which occurs from late spring to early autumn when travelers and adventurers come through and provide the trolls with food in quantity—generally the travelers and adventurers themselves. At the end of adventuring season, in late autumn, the lack of travelers and adventurers usually drives the trolls to seek out other food sources. It is at this time that trolls begin raiding off the High Moor into surrounding areas—such as toward the Way Inn. Their raids



usually result in their own deaths, so the overall population of trolls on the High Moor never grows too large.

Because of the danger of the fire marshes and because trolls aren't usually smart enough to tell the difference between one marsh and another, most High Moor trolls avoid all marshy areas. They can be found in the rocky ravines and in the great expanses of open land on the Moor mesa. High Moor trolls make shallow burrows in the ground, often simply digging down enough to cover themselves with dirt. They remain in these shallow burrows during most of the daylight hours unless disturbed. More than one fool traveler has kicked at what looked like an overgrown gopher mound only to find his leg grabbed by the scaly hand of a troll.

High Moor trolls are predominantly gray, but a few green specimens roam the moorland as well. Like other trolls, they have rubbery skin and foul dispositions. In addition to the typical species of troll, several two-headed specimens roam the High Moor also. These are often found as the leaders of small packs of trolls.

Though trolls occasionally band together with other trolls, they seldom work with any other type of creature. However, I have seen a couple of incidents of strong leaders who gathered together various goblinkin tribes and persuaded a few trolls to join in as well. Trolls are notoriously unreliable allies, however.

## In The Fire Marshes

The fire marshes have become an ecology unto themselves that is in many ways insulated from the overall ecology of the High Moor. The creatures of the fire marshes seldom venture outside their base terrain while other creatures seldom venture within it. Every creature that lives in the fire marshes is highly resistant to flame, including the "normal" plants and animals found there.

The fire marshes are quite dangerous to creatures without a tolerance for fire. However, they provide a haven to those that enjoy flame. Among the creatures found in the fire marshes are fire toads, fire lizards, fireflies, and pyrohydrae, all the progeny of normal High Moor creatures that have adapted to the environment of the fire marshes over the years. All these except the pyrohydrae are common in the fire marshes. Pyrohydrae are quite rare but extremely dangerous; normal hydrae are extinct on the High Moor.

The fire marshes are also home to creatures from elsewhere, often other planes. Hell hounds and fire snakes are not uncommon, and an occasional fire mephit can be found there as well. Abominations of various types (covered in the

### Fire Marsh Inhabitants

Normal plants and animals from the fire marshes receive a +2 to any saving throw vs. fire or flame of any kind, including flaming breath weapons. For instance, a moor rat from a fire marsh would receive a +2 saving throw vs. the effects of a *fireball*, even when outside the fire marsh.

chapter on abominations that follows this chapter) can be found in the fire marshes as well.

## In The Undermoor

The monstrous creatures of the Undermoor are many and varied. Some of the more prominent species include cave fishers, hook horrors, piercers, spiders, garbugs, carrion crawlers, and various oozes and jellies. Because I have not ventured into the Undermoor myself, I cannot report on the danger presented by these creatures except to say that I have heard enough to keep me from ever venturing into the Undermoor.

Most of the prominent Undermoor species seem to be insectoid or nearly so. Hook horrors and cave fishers certainly fall into this category, and spiders, carrion crawlers, and garbugs are close enough to insects for most people. Most of the creatures just mentioned are either predators or carrion eaters; this raises the question of exactly what they eat. Well, several more benign insectoid races in the Undermoor, such as rust monsters and giant ants, are a prominent source of their diet.

The Undermoor is a wilderness area for the most part, but some societies have grown up below the plateau. Among these are mold men and myconids, mentioned in the earlier chapter on flora, and mind flayers, discussed in the chapter subsequent to this one. In addition, a colony of derro thrive beneath the plateau. These degenerate dwarves are evil in the extreme and destructive as well. Fortunately, they do not often venture onto the plateau, but they have been known to send expeditions to the surface to capture slaves. Derro questioned by adventurers claim to have constructed a vast city deep beneath the earth. It is said that in the deepest caverns of the Underdark, they war with illithids for control.

Fortunately for the Undermoor, the area seems to be clear of several of the major Underdark races such as drow, cloak-ers, and aboleths. I am not saying that those races do not have agents in the Undermoor, because they probably do. Their agents simply aren't numerous enough to pose as much of a threat as the derro and others mentioned above.







# The Abominations

**A**bominations, in my reckoning, are the things that fall so far outside the normal ecology that they cannot be considered a part of it. Things like the undead or like elementals are what I consider abominations. However, while they are not a normal part of the ecology, they can have a strong impact on it when they destroy living things or ruin habitats where animals live.

Further, abominations never really become a part of the ecology of an area like an arcane force might. If you want to kill any of these creatures, feel free.

## Baatezu

**B**aatezu of various types have come to inhabit the High Moor. Most have been summoned through Dragonspear Castle, and most have been killed—but a few rogues still roam the High Moor. These include a pit fiend that frequents the fire marshes and a small handful of red abishai that wander the desolate plains of the plateau. Other druids and some local tribesfolk have confirmed for me reports of amnizu, cornugons, and barbazu in the area. I have heard occasional other reports as well but have confirmed nothing else.

The pit fiend of the fire marshes is a horrid creature some 12 feet tall. It occasionally tries to organize other creatures into an army of some sort. It has tried with both goblins and hobgoblins. In both cases, after a few weeks of “training” its recruits, the pit fiend became irritated and slew all of its one-time followers. I wouldn’t be surprised to see it try such a thing again, and it might even provide some amount of leadership to the goblinkin of the plateau. I have heard the creature called “Deref,” but I am unsure if that is its real name or an alias.

## Dragons

**N**ot many dragons live on the High Moor, but any are too many. Even metallic dragons are powerful destructive forces, and like many “good” humans, these creatures seldom have a deep regard for their environment; they always believe (correctly) that they can move on if things get too bad.

A couple of copper dragons lair on the High Moor in the higher and drier lands among the hills that occasionally rise above the plateau. One, an older fellow called Aaronarra, is a crotchety and sarcastic old wyrm of more than 700 winters.

He’s got an attitude problem, and we enjoy arguing. Aaronarra lives on the western side of the High Moor, not terribly far from the Misty Forest, and as dragons go, he’s not too bad. He doesn’t care about ecology, but he tends to prey on those creatures that can stand to have their populations diminished, like goblins.

The other copper dragon is Carynnallerastis, a haughty yet beautiful female specimen who is soon to turn 100. (It happens within a year; she won’t say exactly when.) This creature is insufferable, a prankster and a teller of tall tales. Like many copper dragons, she enjoys eating poisonous creatures. She lives in the southeastern quadrant of the High Moor, not too far from the Serpent Hills. She stops most incursions of animals from that area, especially poisonous snakes, and she sometimes hunts in the Serpent Hills. Other than these hunting habits, this young dragon is very indiscriminate in her food-gathering and protective behavior. She attacks almost anything that gets too close to her lair, jealously protecting the lands she considers home. A number of rare and beautiful creatures have been lost to her. Fortunately, one only runs into her very rarely.

A beautiful young amethyst dragon resides in Highstar Lake. I have been able to talk to this lovely creature (Sh’derra D’zeer), and she seems very receptive to my way of thinking. Sh’derra considers the two copper dragons to be pretty foolish, and she tries to keep an eye on them to make sure they don’t bother things too much. So far, she’s only talked to them on occasion, but she has sometimes been able to distract them from doing something detrimental to the ecology. I doubt she would fight to preserve the local ecology, but perhaps I can talk her into helping more actively to defend the plateau.

The really threatening dragons of the High Moor are the black dragons. Black dragon lairs and hunting territories are scattered throughout the region, with a concentration near the ruins of Orogoth. The black dragons in the ruins are a family, and they are led by a dracolich—an undead dragon. I have not learned the name of the dracolich. The black dragons simply call it “the Old One.” (They aren’t very creative.) One young dragon from Orogoth was recently slain by a group of adventurers from Cormyr, and another moved to the Serpent Hills. At present, the family has five members (not counting the dracolich): a couple and their remaining three offspring. The parents are each more than 1,000 years old. They have separated several times but seem to have some lingering









the ruins of the Halls of the Hammer are said to contain numerous undead dwarves. In the ruins in the Undermoor, more than one dreary location supposedly holds a crypt thing and a handful of crypt servants. I have also heard reports of mummies uncovered in ancient crypts deep within the Undermoor or even hidden in the Red Cliffs.

## Adventurers: Too Stupid To Live

It should be painfully obvious that I consider adventurers among the worst of the abominations of the High Moor. You come in here with no regard for anyone but yourselves, destroying things right and left “for the common good.” More than once, I’ve had to clean up a mess made by your like. Adventurers release ancient curses and abominations and arcane forces, destroy normal and important life forms, and then leave.

Look, if you come to the High Moor for adventure, do as I’ve repeatedly suggested and show some respect for the area. Maybe I’ll downgrade the status of your ilk to “monster.”

## Miscellaneous

A few other examples of abominations inhabit the moorlands, such as the occasional salamander in the fire marshes. They are pretty rare, but they tend to issue orders to the other creatures of the fire marshes, giving a semblance of organization to their normally chaotic or self-centered behaviors. A foolish tribe of goblins that lives near a fire marsh in the southern part of the plateau has begun offering tribute to the local salamander, who is demanding a great deal of meat. This salamander has turned the goblins into an even worse problem than usual, encouraging them to attack anything and everything. Normally,



goblins are simply ignorant and thus destructive. These creatures are actively seeking to destroy portions of their environment, and I am having trouble stopping them. Because they are devoted to an abomination, these little monsters are close to becoming abominations themselves.

I have received a few reports of actual fire-elementals living in the fire marshes. Most, though, seem to find the marshy environment not to their liking and travel elsewhere. Vincin tells me that more than a few have gone into the Undermoor, where the occasional lava flow is more to their liking as a long-term habitation.

The Undermoor is also home to a few mind flayers. These organized and very dangerous creatures are masters of manipulation, and they are known to control the minds (and thus actions) of creatures near to or on the surface of the plateau. Fortunately, the flayers seldom venture onto the mesa themselves. But, they often order their servants to retrieve captives for them. The mind flayers are known to have agents among the trolls of the High Moor, and they may control the wererats of the Dungeon of the Hark.

Aside from the mind flayers, few malevolent intelligences reside in the Undermoor, though Vincin has received reports of a rogue neogi deep beneath the earth. This creature, known only as the Reaver (as I understand it, a *reaver* is any rogue neogi), is a cunning and quiet hunter of the Undermoor known to have taken dozens of victims from adventuring parties. The only reports about it come from well-armed parties who saw it from a distance. Their description of it—a giant, hairy spider with a serpentine body—seems to fit for a neogi. Still, Vincin worries that a drider may have entered the Undermoor, and he is currently trying to uncover more information regarding this mysterious creature.

Finally, a few crimson deaths lurk in the marshes and bogs of the High Moor. A crimson death is a creature of mist thought by some to be a ghostly variation of a vampire—but the creature does not behave like most other undead. Still, the crimson death does feed on blood and can be a horrible and horrifying opponent. Like other abominations of the High Moor, crimson deaths sometimes serve as a sort of tribal patron for the goblinkin and human tribes of the moorlands and require the deluded tribesfolk to bring them victims. One of the human clans in the east recently fell into such service, but the other clans of the region banded together and destroyed them. That particular crimson death is trying to reestablish a steady source of victims, but it hasn’t had much luck since then.

I pay attention to abominations because they annoy me, but don’t be surprised if I’ve missed a few. Things change all the time.



# Rumors and Legends

**R**any legends circulate about the High Moor. I have touched on most during my discussion of the ruins found in the region. However, since Elminster asked me to, I'll relate a few more as well as some rumors that have been going around. As I've stated before, *none* of what I've been telling you should be construed as an invitation to visit. These are just some of the more interesting things going on in the area.

★ **Rumor:** Giant eagles have been attacking quarry workers on the Red Cliffs.

**Facts:** These attacks are due mainly to my discussions with the giant eagles and the desire of those magnificent birds to protect their homes. Maybe you can get the people of Secomber to listen to reason and leave the eagles' nesting grounds alone. If you're lucky, you might even be able to get close enough to the giant eagles to negotiate with them.

★ **Rumor:** The druid of the High Moor, Bara, doesn't like people and does whatever she can to thwart adventurers.

**Facts:** This is pretty true. I don't like people, and I do like animals, even the ugly or dumb ones that most people don't believe belong. However, if you don't do anything to harm the local ecology, I won't stand in your way. But if you do things that I find irritating, you'll find me a powerful enemy.

★ **Rumor:** The goblinkin of the High Moor are uniting for a major invasion of the nearby lands.

**Facts:** This rumor has some elements of truth in it. The hobgoblins have always been pretty organized, and recently a great leader has emerged in one of the tribes. This leader has arranged an alliance with three other hobgoblin tribes. While the hobgoblins of the High Moor are not inclined to launch wars, this alliance could prove troublesome. In addition, the goblins of the High Moor have seemed more clever lately. The direction they are receiving from a few bugbear leaders seems exceptionally good.

★ **Rumor:** A huge, spiderlike creature is raiding the surface of the High Moor and taking captives into the Undermoor.

**Facts:** As discussed in the chapter on abominations, a spiderlike creature—perhaps a neogi, perhaps a drider—

roams the caverns and passages of the Undermoor. Vincin the Gray Druid has never seen the creature or its identity would be sure. Unfortunately, we must instead rely on the reports of adventurers—and we know how notoriously unreliable *they* are. To make matters worse, none of those who have seen the creature have been close to it—or, if you prefer, all those who got close to the creature died.

Regardless, tribe members on the Moor have reported the presence of a spiderlike creature. I have not met anyone who claims to have actually seen it. All reports are secondhand or worse. Several recent disappearances have been attributed to the creature—and the times of some of those disappearances have coincided with sightings of the Reaver in the upper levels of the Undermoor.

I don't know what the creature is, though I suspect it is a neogi. And as much as I would like to attribute stories of surface raids to overactive imaginations, I believe them to be true. I myself have seen tracks on the surface, and though I have no way of confirming their exact origin (I have never seen their like before), I suspect they belong to a lone neogi who has been to the surface.

★ **Legend:** Beneath the High Moor lie the ruins of an ancient civilization.

**Facts:** This legend is at least partially true. There are ruins beneath the High Moor. In addition, there are beautiful living caves, places where water flows upward, and roaming magical forces. A vast network of caverns and passages, many natural and some made by people, crosses beneath the High Moor.

Many people have gone into the Undermoor and returned with great treasure, from the magical to the mundane. Others have gone into the Undermoor and returned, well, changed. Some have been influenced by arcane forces so that their personalities changed, and others have suffered physical change. Many have died in the Undermoor.

The Undermoor is a vast and alien environment with vast lakes and marshes that have never seen the light of day—but which have often seen the glow of magic. Your guess is as good as mine.

★ **Legend:** An ancient Netherese airship rests in the depths of Highstar Lake.

**Theories:** Probably a lot of things sleep in the depths of Highstar Lake, some of which were there before it was a







lake, some of which arrived there later. As I've mentioned, I've never seen any proof of the sunken airship or the lost temple or of any other ruins in the lake's depths. However, the lake does possess some odd qualities such as its vivid clarity and the objects in its depths that seem to dance at the edge of vision. I do not believe there is an airship at the bottom of the lake. The lake seems to have been formed since after the time of Netheril, which means the airship would have had to have been resting there when the lake was formed. Also, no matter what the ship was made of, it has to have deteriorated over the course of many centuries. To expect a full airship to survive in the water's depths is silly.

I would not, however, discount the possibility of a lost temple—or more likely a school of wizardry—in the depths. The odd shapes seen deep within the water are undoubtedly the visible remains of everything that has sunk into the lake over the past several centuries, and certainly enough debris and plant matter has sunk over the centuries to cover and disguise most structures that might lie beneath this detritus.

Also, remember that the lake started as a sinkhole and that beneath the plateau lie several large ruins. It is not unreasonable to expect that a ruined structure could have been exposed by the sinkhole that became Highstar Lake. It is also possible that, given the odd operation of gravity in sections of the Undermoor, this structure can still be entered from somewhere in the Undermoor—and that Highstar Lake itself could be accessed from beneath.

Stranger things have happened.

✱ **Legend:** In the depths of the Halls of the Hammer are ancient treasures beyond imagining.

**Theories:** Long ago, even before Illefarn came to hold power in the North, dwarves in the area carved a strong hold in the rock beneath the plateau of the High Moor. This hold has come to be known as the Halls of the Hammer. Few have speculated on the exact origins of the ruins, but most who have say they were built as an outpost of Delzoun, a dwarven nation of the North and a contemporary of Netheril. A few sages even suggest the ruins may have been an outpost of Oghrann, the ancient dwarven nation located in and near the Storm Horns near Cormyr.

Whatever the origins of the ruins, the dwarves in the hold must have warred with humans—possibly the inhabitants of Netheril, possibly earlier, tribal humans. This conjecture is supported by an illusion located in a great central chamber in the Halls that depicts many humans hanging from a forest of chains. In addition, sev-

eral adventurers have reported traps that specifically target humans (or beings of similar size).

The Halls of the Hammer fell into ruin before Illefarn came to power, and dwarf survivors from this outpost may have been integrated into Illefarn; certain parts of the ruins around Undermountain have strong similarities to the Halls of the Hammer. In the thousands of years since the hold fell, little of it has been mapped. The most successful group to explore the ruins were the Men of the Hammer. They supposedly mapped several levels (though few of those maps have been found) but left dozens of others untouched. They never reached the vast hoard of treasure rumored to lie within the Halls.

The name of this ruin is misleading since it implies a simple hold such as a small outpost or perhaps the hold of a minor local ruler. Judging from the extent of the ruins, the hold was quite large and was really more of a small city. Reports tell of long passages and a multitude of rooms, along with the complex holding many levels and sublevels. Natural caverns separate many of the worked areas, and some sublevels are said to be cut off entirely from those that have been explored. These hidden levels might be accessible only by magic.

The Halls of the Hammer have many inhabitants, including constructs known as helmed horrors and watchghosts (which are also known to wander Undermountain). Numerous undead dwarves wander the halls as well, and the animated corpses of adventurers have been encountered, indicating that something within still animates the dead. Fortunately, few of the undead leave the ruins.

The ruins also hold living inhabitants, including various fungus life forms and miscellaneous wildlife. Derro have also been sighted there. Vincin the Gray Druid theorizes that the derro of the Undermoor are the descendants of the inhabitants of the Halls of the Hammer. Derro are becoming more common in the Undermoor, and they may be trying to reclaim their ancient heritage in the Halls—including the treasure within.

Several rich crypts have been found in the Halls of the Hammer that yielded gold and silver as well as some gems. One large hall guarded by helmed horrors holds a brilliantly glowing hammer, the item that gives the ruin its name. Some areas have been completely looted, but once a season or so adventurers claim a new room or two—usually at the cost of the lives of their companions.

No one has yet claimed the magical hammer, and no one has found enough treasure to retire on. These facts, plus greed, lure new adventurers every year.

# Advanced Dungeons & Dragons



## The Serpent Hills

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## That's Not a Stick



Nello. I am known as the Lark of Suzail. I am a wizard of some skill, and I have long conducted magical researches, especially in regard to ancient spells and magical items. Elminster of Shadowdale, who knows my research abilities, asked me to compile one portion of his *Ecologica*, a collection of treatises that describe many areas of the continent of Faerûn on our world of Toril. Though I

am certainly old enough to know better, I instead acted as if I were the age that I appear, and I agreed. I still crave adventure and quest for knowledge as if I were a youngster. Our conversation went as follows.

"Of course, Elminster," said I. "I would be happy to write a treatise. It would give me the opportunity to travel, to remind myself of what lies beyond my dreary walls. I have been studying magic and writing about spells for a long time now."







"I am glad to hear ye say that, m'dear," he replied.

"Shall I write about these settled lands that I know so well?"

"Eh, well, no, that's already been done."

"Even better!" I laughed. "I can venture into one of the more exciting areas. Maybe the Stonelands or the Goblin Marches?"

"No," said the elder mage with a sigh. "Those have been covered as well."

The expression he wore was one of reluctance, as if he worried about telling me what he had in mind. Trying to comfort him, to reassure him that he was not asking too much, I continued. "I would even travel to Cormanthor or the Great Gray Land of Thar for you, my dear friend."

"Those have been done as well."

"Even the Storm Horns would be fine," I continued, beginning to feel a small sense of dread.

"Aye, they would, but alas, those have been written about as well." He smiled briefly, almost shyly, then seemed to brighten. "But it is a hilly environ I had in mind for ye."

The sense of impending doom was almost palpable now. "The Thunder Peaks?" I breathed, hopefully.

He shook his head and fumbled with his pipe, then mumbled

something under his breath. A flame appeared at the end of his finger, and he tried to light his pipe as if desperate for the diversion.

"What?" I asked, trying to sort out the sounds I had barely heard. "Sir- something. Hills?" Then I recalled my geography lessons, and the ranges of hills to the west—and fear tightened my stomach into a knot. "Elminster," I said sharply, "Where do you want me to go?"

"To some hills to the west, a small chain." He started glibly, but then saw the color drain from my countenance. After a pause and a long sigh, he finally pronounced it audibly: "The Serpent Hills."

I echoed him quietly, stunned. He knew, he *knew*. I gathered my composure about me like a grand cloak, and I struggled to keep my voice even as I haughtily replied, "You must be mistaken, Elminster. I know nothing of—s-snakes. You must have had somebody else in mind for this particular job."

He sighed again. It was developing into a habit. "I did, Larkie, I really did, but now he can't do it, and I was hoping . . ." His voice trailed off and became another sigh.

Now my fear had solidified almost into anger. "Elminster, you *know* I do not like—those animals." This was an under-





statement. I have a deep and abiding fear, even a hatred—if I may be so bold as to express such strong emotion—of all things serpentine.

"I know, lass. But maybe this will help ye overcome your, er, dislike." His eyes gleamed as if he had found the key to an important treasure. "Aye, it will be good for ye— therapeutic."

I started to protest, but I knew it was hopeless. He offered me many kinds of magical protections, reminded me of our past and how much I owed him, explained how much he needed my help, declared that not everything in those hills was a snake, and finally, begged. I could not refuse. We had been friends and more for too long. In addition, it was a good way to get him to agree to perform all manner of favors for me. He still owes me a few.

Anyway, I undertook for him a journey to the Serpent Hills, a series of low peaks nestled against the High Moor in the Western Heartlands. I had just entered the hills with a local guide, Atad, and I happened to look down and see a brilliantly colored stick lying next to my foot. I made an appropriate exclamation, something about it being a lovely branch, and reached for it. Just as I noticed that it was beginning to move and froze in my place, my guide announced quietly, "That's not a stick." *These are important words to remember in the Serpent Hills*, for there dwell snakes that look more like sticks than actual branches do.

The Serpent Hills are named appropriately. They are home to more kinds of serpents and other reptiles than I could possibly count. These range from the small and allegedly harmless lizards and snakes to great creatures of malevolence and majesty. I spent several months in the Serpent Hills along with my guide, Atad, and I learned far more about reptiles and related creatures than I ever desired to know. Atad was very informative—and so were my personal experiences. I took copious notes during the jaunt, as Elminster knew that I would, and here I present my findings.

I have read many of the other treatises commissioned by Elminster, and I have followed their basic format. First, I have set out this, my introduction, stating who I am and what I have done. Then follows a discussion of the features of the Serpent Hills region, from the land to the weather to the plant life. This chapter includes a brief discussion of the Serpent's Tail Stream, which drains the hills and serves as a liquid highway for the many life forms of the region.

After that, I discuss the various forms of animal life that I discovered in the hills, beginning with the smaller and less common creatures, continuing with the lizard folk and the snake people, and concluding with the dragons. Each form of serpent has its own impact on the region. I still shudder to

think of the interviews I conducted with various representatives of the reptilian civilizations of the Serpent Hills.

Finally, I touch on several areas near the Serpent Hills (such as the Marsh of Chelimber and the Forest of Wyrms) and their relationship to those snake-infested heights. As a closure to the piece, I present notes on the current events and the ageless mysteries of the Serpent Hills.

During my drafting and subsequent editing of this treatise, I have tried to maintain an unbiased point of view. I failed in that task miserably in my first draft, but I do believe the manuscript has improved. However, I am still biased. I do not like reptiles of any kind.

Elminster said the trip would be therapeutic. I think he meant to imply that I would learn to overcome the fear and disgust I felt for these cold, scaly creatures. He was mistaken, but in some ways the excursion *was* therapeutic. I am now quite confident in my ability to kill reptiles of most sorts, and my skills at avoiding those I cannot kill have increased tremendously. In this treatise, I happily relay as many details about destroying serpents as possible, just in case you are inclined to help rid the world of these horrid animals.

As you can tell, I still have no liking for serpents, even though I have now studied a wide variety of them and learned intimate details about them. I have seen scale patterns that I would consider beautiful were they not composed of scales. Still, other than this cold and dispassionate beauty I saw little to admire among most of the reptiles of the Serpent Hills.

The majestic dragons were an exception because they have a proud magnificence that transcends their dubious lineage. Dragons also have warmth and emotion, both of which are lacking in the reptiles of the Serpent Hills. I think this points out to me the things I find most disturbing about reptiles in general: They are emotionally cold, as if reason and instinct are all that matter to them. I am an emotional person, and I enjoy talking to people. When I remember my conversations with the reptile folk of the Serpent Hills, I shudder at their lack of warmth, the coldness of their eyes, their completely alien nature.

How you use the knowledge I impart here is up to you. Just remember, though, if you go to the Serpent Hills: That's not a stick.



**Symbol of the Lark**







# The Area

**T**he terrain of the Serpent Hills is, not surprisingly, composed mostly of hills. These are ancient precipices worn with age until they now only reach a height of under a thousand feet; most average about 500 feet. At the eastern edge of the range, the ground rolls and gathers into foothills. A few rougher features, such as an occasional cliff, ravine, or rock formation, dot the rolling terrain, but for the most part, the land is composed of gentle slopes. As one moves farther west toward the center of the Serpent Hills, the land forms itself into rounded heights that are almost mountains. Past the high center, the general altitude drops, only to rise again into the great plateau of the High Moor.

The land, in fact, is quite beautiful if one forgets the types of animals that are found in it. It receives good moisture and is reasonably fertile; it is quite lush when compared to the utter desolation of the High Moor. Small copses dot the Serpent Hills, and grasses and shrubs fill most of the land between. Only the rockiest portions of the hills remain devoid of greenery, and even those areas are often decorated with lichen or vines or some hardy weed.

The formations of the land itself are also very beautiful. In some of the badlands areas, the wind and water of centuries have carved the stone into incredible shapes that seem to defy gravity. Even the more gentle slopes lead one to new vistas as they overlook the misty valleys between the hills.

Small springs create tiny freshwater ponds in numerous places, and quiet grottoes can be found in abundance. Many of these small waterholes empty into brooks that babble gently to larger bodies of water. Most of these eventually connect with the Serpent's Tail Stream, which drains most of the hill range. A handful of beautiful waterfalls also lie hidden among the Serpent Hills. The tallest falls almost 60 feet to the surface of the pool that receives its water.

Most of the hills are geologically very solid, with granite and other hard rocks being quite common. A few ores, notably iron ore, can be found in several places in the Serpent Hills as well. The color of the rock in the hills tends toward a red or sometimes a red-orange. The large deposits of granite are mostly gray, though one can find some startling deep red areas.

Several shallow caves lie beneath the hills. In addition, a few scarce entrances into extensive underground cave systems are secreted in this rolling land. While part of the High Moor plateau is a great limestone shelf, little of that mineral is found in the Serpent Hills—at least on the surface. Beneath the ground, several limestone formations are found in the cavern systems, but most of the caves are dead, with formations are no longer being made. At one time, the hills apparently held extensive deposits of marble, but most of that has been quarried and used to build various structures in and around the hills. The marble is usually of a grayish hue with occasional red streaks. Perhaps it is the atmosphere of the area, but the red streaks always remind me of serpents winding their ways through the rock.

The Serpent Hills also show many signs of habitation. People—more or less—have been carving structures into the rock for centuries. The landscape is dotted with ruins of various sorts. Most are long abandoned, and almost all have been thoroughly looted. In addition to being formed into structures for habitation or ceremony, the rock faces have been cleverly chiseled and shaped into numerous decorative carvings. At times, it is very difficult to tell the natural formations from those made by a conscious force, but a little diligent study usually pays off. Most of the rock carvings are of dragons, nagas, or other powerful serpentine beings.

## A Brief History

**L**ong, long ago, the mages of ancient Netheril held sway over this entire area. Though their main civilization was to the north, they maintained several outposts in this region. Some scholars suggest that many Netherese had country estates in the lands that would later become known as the Serpent Hills.

According to old legends, the Netherese who reached this area began experimenting with the local animals, especially the lizards and the snakes, causing them to evolve into the creatures that would eventually give rise to lizard men and ophidia. The Netherese disappeared over time after their great empire fell, and others came in their place. Old tales tell that outposts of Delzoun, Illefarn, the Kingdom of Man, or perhaps even of distant Anauria have arisen and disappeared in the Serpent Hills in ancient times.





Not long after Netheril fell, the ophidia moved south to the Forest of Wyrms led by their leader, a dark naga of great power, called Terpenzi. Terpenzi had come to them after they were abandoned by their human masters. In the Forest of Wyrms, the ophidia practiced magic under the leadership of the dark naga. It is said that they eventually learned how to summon other creatures to them and that this is how yuan-ti arrived in the region. The yuan-ti were summoned by the dark naga to serve as troops against the coming invaders.

The yuan-ti were brilliant and powerful. While Terpenzi plotted, the snake creatures organized the ophidia to build a grand temple. Eventually, the yuan-ti multiplied to the point that the temple became the heart of a great city, and the Kingdom of the Snakes was born. The yuan-ti became the rulers of those who had summoned them, and all served the dark naga.

In the hills to the north of the Forest of Wyrms, the lizard men struggled more slowly toward civilization, some seeking better lives elsewhere. The lizard men lived in clans, then began forming tribes, and eventually developed a tribal confederation that dominated the Serpent Hills. In the hills they were supreme, while the snake men ruled to the south in the forest.

Eventually, the successors to Netheril began to expand, and they discovered the Kingdom of the Snakes and the lands of the lizards. The lizard men were regarded as too primitive to pose a threat, but the snake men had recently uncovered the ruins of a Netherese outpost and storehouse, where some of the empire's treasures were taken for safekeeping. The yuan-ti were using their great intellects to learn the secrets of these magics, and they had begun to manipulate creatures to build monsters of their own design. In addition, the magical items of the lost outpost were used to arm the ophidia, making them a powerful military force. Aided by the hideous creations of the yuan-ti, they could become a threat to all nearby nations.

In response to this growing threat, several of the other kingdoms banded together and sent a force of powerful wizards to deal with the Kingdom of the Snakes. The battle raged for days, and the city of the snake men was utterly destroyed. But Terpenzi and many of its followers escaped. They returned to the Serpent Hills, where they began reclaiming space from the spreading lizard man confederacy. The two groups warred, and both lost many of the civilized advances they had gained over the last century or so.

After another long span of years, the Marsh of Chelimer was created, and many of the lizard men migrated to that area. This emigration left more territory in the hills to the serpent folk. The lizard man population declined, and



the serpents gained in power, spreading across the hills in hidden citadels and destroying the mammalian races who tried to enter the hills. Those humans and humanoids who survived gave the area its present name.

Now the hills are dominated by the serpent folk, while the lizardkin struggle for survival; mammals have almost no chance. The local presence of many dragons and other powerful creatures only increases the current general tension and danger in the region.

## Weather

Weather in the Serpent Hills is relatively mild and wet. The hills serve as a watershed, stopping the effect of many southern and eastern weather systems from crossing over into the High Moor and slowing the more energetic storm systems so that they drop precipitation on the Serpent Hills and the High Moor but peter out over the large plateau. Because of this, the Serpent Hills receive a goodly amount of rain. In addition, the drainage and soil in the hills are better than they are on the High Moor, so the moisture flows readily into rivers and ponds, rather than causing much of the area to turn marshy.







The rains come in the spring and summer and are relatively warm, which is good for the warmth-loving reptiles. In the autumn, cold winds blow and the rains slow. Autumn in the Serpent Hills becomes both dry and cold. Snow comes late to the area but covers most of the hills during the winter. During the coldest months, the reptiles remain in their citadels and dungeons, seeking the warmth of their hearths. When spring comes again, the snows melt into cold rivulets that feed the Serpent's Tail Stream, which floods somewhat and eventually empties into the Winding Water and then into the sea.

Storms are as frequent in the hills as in the surrounding areas, but they are seldom violent. Storms in the hills are neither as harsh as the storms of the High Moor nor the plains. The winds along the ground and lower portions of the hills are reasonable. Still, winds can whip very quickly through the valleys and ravines, and they have plucked many a climber from a rock face even when it was not storming. The air currents in the heights and above the hills can be extremely mercurial and rough. While the dragons of the area can handle this turbulence, few other flying creatures can, so there are few fliers besides dragons in the area. (One major exception is the urd, discussed in the following chapter.)

## Plant Life

**A**bountiful variety of plants grow in the Serpent Hills. As mentioned, copses of trees are found throughout the hills, and while none could qualify as actual forests, they can be rather large. Beech trees are common in the northern parts of the Serpent Hills, but evergreens dominate in the south. Smaller trees, such as the rowan common on the High Moor, can be found in some places as well. Protected from the vicious winds common to the moors, rowans can grow as tall as 10–20 feet in the Serpent Hills. They produce white flowers at the tips of comblike branches. Felsuls can be found in the hills as well, tenaciously clinging to cliffs and crags, their gnarled forms belying the softness of their deep brown flesh. Felsuls produce yellow flowers, the petals of which yield a spicy scent that many find enticing.

Various grasses also grow abundantly in the hills. Two main types dominate: white fluffgrass and common spidergrass. The fluffgrass grows in clumps in the more fertile areas, growing as tall as 4 feet in some places and producing feathery white flowers in the late spring. Spidergrass grows in tiny cracks on rock walls and spreads tendrils over several feet. Some of these tendrils dig into cracks and

begin satellite plants. It is not unusual for a connected patch of spidergrass to cover several hundred square yards of territory.

Heather and bilberry are also found in the Serpent Hills, the latter providing edible berries for the few omnivores and herbivores of the area. The heather grows in large patches, but these clumps are not nearly so large as the vast fields of the stuff on the High Moor.

## Unusual Forces

**I**n many areas of the Realms, magic or another force has an impact on the environment—so too for the Serpent Hills. Because much of this region was once dominated by empires with great control over magical forces, remnants of ancient magic remain. In addition, the fallen yuan-ti kingdom once birthed many powerful mentalists, and psionic echoes linger in the area. Also, occasional portals opened to other planes of existence have left their mark.

Few portals are still in existence. Most were closed long ago. At one time, horrible planes could be reached through these portals, and the reptile folk of the area could summon fiends—abishai and others—to their aid. These *gates* have thankfully been closed, and the only operating *gates* in the region open to elemental planes. One opens to the Plane of Earth and one to the Plane of Water. Both are under the control of the serpent folk.

Other fragments of ancient magic can be found throughout the Serpent Hills, left perhaps by the ancient Netherese, by the forces that brought down Netheril, or by the kingdoms that succeeded Netheril as powers in this region. For the most part, these fragments are actual items such as the swords of the Dungeon of Swords. In other cases, some areas simply react to a magical detection for unknown reasons and give occasional rise to arcane creatures such as mudmen, but they are otherwise innocuous. Several ancient magical constructs can be found in the area as well. Interestingly, no dead magic or wild magic regions have ever yet been encountered in the Serpent Hills.

Ancient psionic forces, on the other hand, linger on in the area. Long-ago yuan-ti masters used powerful mental abilities to forge unusual items that acted in many ways like magical items yet did not radiate an enchantment. Each of these items, usually called empowered items, is intelligent, has a personality, and can perform various psionic tricks. Fortunately, the yuan-ti no longer seem able to make such items.





# The Wildlife



As one might expect, the animal life in the Serpent Hills is mostly serpentine. However, serpents are by nature predatory, and every predator needs prey. Thus, other animals must also dwell in the region. Most of these prey animals are amphibians, which thrive in the moist areas of the hills. A few mammals and birds live in the area as well, and insects, of course, are present everywhere.

## Serpents

It should be noted that this section discusses the more mundane serpent life of the hills. The intelligent species are discussed in a later chapter devoted solely to them and their culture. In the following text, the reader should expect to find notes regarding normal snakes and unusual serpents that are not a part of the intelligent cultures of the Serpent Hills.

As I discovered on my jaunt to the Serpent Hills, snakes can be divided into two major types: vipers and constrictors. Vipers use poison against their prey and are found in many regions. A few varieties even inhabit the Serpent Hills. Constrictors, which are almost never poisonous, wrap themselves around their prey, suffocating it. Though constrictors are typically found in hot regions of our world, three varieties can be found in the Serpent Hills.

### Constricting Snakes

The three constrictors found in the Serpent Hills are the whip snake, the tree python, and the striped boalisk. A whipsnake is a slender constrictor that can grow to as much as 20 feet in length. These serpents are mainly brown in color with a mottling of deep green and black. Small whipsnakes lurk on trees, ready to drop or slither onto any creature that passes beneath them. Larger whipsnakes often wait stretched across a trail or path along the ground. When another creature approaches, the whipsnake coils quickly about the intruder's legs, trying to trip the victim so it can bring more coils to bear.

The tree python is a more active hunter. It is a form of *jaculi*, or tree snake, adapted specifically to arboreal hunting. Like other *jaculi*, the tree python possesses camouflage capabilities, making it difficult to detect in foliage. Normally a dull greenish-brown, the tree python can change its shading to match many types of local foliage. The tree python coils

itself into a knot, then uses powerful muscles to spring forth, traveling as far as 20 feet! If it lands on a victim, it quickly attempts to coil around its prey to constrict. Tree pythons can grow to a length of 10 feet.

The longest of the constrictors found in the hills is also the most deadly. The striped boalisk can reach a length of 25 feet. One ancient specimen said to inhabit the Serpent Hills is rumored to be more than 30 feet long! The stripes of the local boalisks run horizontally from tail to nose, and strips of red, black, brown, and yellow run the lengths of their bodies. A boalisk attacks by constricting and also has a strong bite. In addition, a boalisk can also inflict a disease upon victims with its gaze. Those who stare into the eyes of a boalisk are afflicted with an unusual disease that causes the flesh to rot from their bones. The boalisk usually tracks creatures so afflicted by the scent the disease causes, attacking them when they have become too weakened to put up much of a fight.

### Vipers

The most common viper of the Serpent Hills, the adder, is a creature that can grow to a length of 3 feet. Many people believe two different species of adder live in the Serpent Hills, but this is not so; the male and female adders simply have decidedly different markings. A male adder is usually a greenish-gray with angular black markings, while a female is generally reddish-brown with markings in a deeper shade of the same tone. The bite of an adder is poisonous but not fatal to humans or animals of similar size. A human who suffers the adder's poison can expect to become nauseous and suffer from vomiting. A bite can incapacitate a victim for as long as four days in extreme cases.

Besides this common adder, an adderlike species of *amphisbaena* also dwells in the Serpent Hills. These two-headed snakes, sometimes known as loopsnakes, have similar markings to adders; but their poison is much worse. A victim can die instantly from an *amphisbaena*'s poison. *Amphisbaenas* are typically found in cold places such as caves. They seem especially tolerant of all sorts of cold and are more active than almost all other local snakes in winter.

The Serpent Hills region is generally considered too cold as a whole for many kinds of snake. One species not normally found in temperate areas is the winged snake, of which there are some specimens in the Serpent Hills. While not as brilliantly colored as their tropical cousins, these winged snakes are every bit as swift and deadly. A tropical winged







snake usually has feathered wings; the local variety, which can also be found in the depths of Undermountain (where it is known as the *flying fang*), has batlike wings. These bronzed scaled creatures have a vicious bite and can spit an acidic venom as well. They travel in flocks and are typically active only during daylight hours.

Besides these dangerous varieties of snake, the Serpent Hills are also filled with numerous species of snakes considered harmless to humans. These lesser serpents feed on small animals, eggs of various sorts, and insects. They often become prey for other predators of the area. I have been reliably informed that no less than 20 varieties of “harmless” snakes flourish in the region. None grow over 5 feet in length. Some varieties sport scale patterns similar to the markings of the more dangerous snakes to scare potential predators; this strategy sometimes works on their potential prey as well.

## Other Reptiles

While snakes are by far the most common of the reptiles in the Serpent Hills, many other species live there, too. Some are relatively inoffensive, such as turtles,

while others, such as firedrakes, are definitely threatening. Most of the other reptiles of the hills have certain snakelike characteristics.

For example, the turtles of the Serpent Hills have exceptionally long necks. Called simply the *snake-necked turtle*, this creature can grow to have a shell about a foot long. Its neck is able to extend half again that distance. The snake-necked turtle cannot pull its head completely into its shell, like some species, but its head can recoil and shoot forward to seize prey. This turtle is a carnivore and subsists on small fish, frogs, crayfish, worms, and the like. It is a powerful swimmer and often makes a burrow with an underwater entrance at the side of a lake. The snake-necked turtle hibernates in its burrow during the coldest of the winter months. I have heard rumors of a poisonous variety of this turtle, but I saw no evidence of such. The turtles seemed to me to be relatively inoffensive and harmless.

Not so with the black caiman, a local variation on the crocodiles and alligators found in warmer environments. This predator grows to a length of 12 feet and has a powerful jaw. It is very similar to smaller crocodiles in many respects. However, the black caiman, which takes its name from its bumpy, glossy black hide, seems unaffected by colder weather. The creatures tend to move into local caves during the winter months, though, because their dark hide is very visible against snow. In the warmer months, black caimans can be seen along the small streams in the Serpent Hills. A few even make it to the Serpent’s Tail Stream.

Many smaller lizards live in the hills as well. Most are skinks of various sorts. Four varieties of skink reside in the Serpent Hills. All are characterized by long, slender, sinuous bodies and small legs. In fact, skinks in this area look almost exactly like snakes. The main difference (besides, obviously, the legs) is that a skink’s neck is the same thickness as the back of its head, while in most snakes, the head is distinct from the neck. All skinks eat insects, worms, crayfish, and other small boneless creatures.

The yellow-striped skink, the largest in the area, eats plants as well and is found on grassy hillsides. The yellow-striped skink grows to 2 feet in length and has two distinctive yellow stripes along the length of its body and tail.

The green skink is smaller, rarely growing to more than 1 foot in length. The creature is a forest dweller, and pads on its feet help it cling to trees. The green skink is unusual because it has green scales, a green tongue, and green blood—a characteristic almost never found in natural animals. It also lays green eggs.

One species, the scintillating skink, does not lay eggs at all but gives birth to a small clutch of live young. This crea-





ture also reaches a length of 1 foot and can be recognized by its many-colored, shining scales. It also has a bright blue tongue that it shows to frighten other creatures. Scintillating skinks enjoy wet environments and can be found near ponds and streams.

The smallest of the skinks, seldom longer than a human hand, is the burrowing skink. This small creature has legs that are almost useless. It tucks its legs against its body to move more quickly through loose ground, into which it burrows with its tough, blunt nose. The burrowing skink is found in the drier ground of the hills.

Overall, skinks are harmless to humans except for their sometimes-startling resemblance to snakes. However, more unusual reptiles inhabit in the regions, reptiles that can present a very real danger: dinosaurs. Often thought to be extinct, dinosaurs of several varieties can be found in many places across Faerûn and the face of Toril, though they are quite rare this far north (except for one species in the nearby Lizard Marsh, located west of the High Moor on the Sword Coast). Only two species are found in the Serpent Hills. Locals call them the *razortalon* and the *spiketail*. The first, a fast and vicious carnivore, is a variety of dramaosaur more correctly known as a *deinonychus*. This is a cunning creature that stands about as tall as a human. Razortalons hunt in packs and are thankfully rare in the wild. When attacking, a razortalon leaps on its prey to bring its powerful rear talons to bear.

The razortalon is one of the few predators that attacks the other type of dinosaur in the region, the spiketail. A smaller variety of the *stegosaurus*, the spiketail can reach a height of 6 feet and a length of 10. It has a bowed back on the top of which are parallel rows of large plates. The creature also sports the feature for which it was named, a tail with six or eight spikes, each about a foot long. I have heard that this dinosaur reaches a length of as much as 20 feet in other areas. Based on mass, those creatures should be as much as four times as powerful as the local variety. Still, the local spiketail is a formidable, if stupid, opponent. Its spiked tail is as dangerous as a long sword in the hands of an expert.

It would be wise to avoid using a sword if confronted by a fire Drake. Often mistaken for baby red dragons, these creatures belong to a fire-breathing species of dragonet. A fire Drake can grow to a length of 4 feet, making it one of the larger dragonets. It has a red skin mottled in various shades of mauve, maroon, and reddish-brown. The reason to avoid using a sword against one is simple: Its blood burns on contact with the air. Thus, an individual who pierces or slashes a fire Drake could suffer a slight burn. The fire Drakes of the

Serpent Hills are unusual because they have rattles on their tails much like the rattlesnakes found in some areas. The fire Drake rattles its tail when threatened, giving a small warning just seconds before loosing its fiery breath. Fire Drakes make nests on the tops of hills, but they take care to avoid the territories of true dragons.

The variety of rare and unusual reptiles in the Serpent Hills and the absence of those creatures in any nearby region (or even in similar environments elsewhere in the North) leads one to speculate that something is awry. Those who have studied the area (one of whom could surely have saved me from this onerous task) suggest two theories as to the reason for the current distribution of species. One school of thought hypothesizes that the local reptile folk, primarily the yuan-ti, have altered the local environment in some fashion to favor reptiles of all types. This idea has relatively little support since no one has been able to explain either how this might have been accomplished or exactly what might have been done to the environment.

The alternate, and more widely accepted theory, is that several of the local species were somehow altered with forced adaptations to make them better able to survive in a climate colder than they typically inhabit. This idea gains more support for two reasons. First, several spells exist that can permanently alter the nature of animals so that they can pass on new characteristics to their offspring. Second, the yuan-ti are known to have altered the natures of several creatures. They have even created a number of new beasts—some unique and some capable of reproducing. It is not too much of a stretch of the imagination to suppose that yuan-ti might have altered several creatures in small ways, perhaps to recreate portions of the yuan-ti culture's native environment (the place from whence they were summoned long ago by the local ophidia).

## Amphibians

Moisture-loving amphibians are common in the Serpent Hills, including several varieties of frogs and toads and the muckdweller. Small and giant frogs can be found in the hills, usually around marshy areas. One small frog, a bright blue in color, produces a paralyzing poison used by lizard men to coat arrowheads so that their prey can be captured more easily.

Small and giant species of toads are also found in the hills, usually in somewhat drier areas. The giant varieties never venture forth from the caverns in which they make their homes. These pale-skinned horrors cannot stand direct sunlight and seek to escape magical light sources.







Muckdwellers are large amphibians raised by lizard men. More information on them can be found in the later chapter called *The Lizard Folk*.

## Other Creatures

As indicated, several small, boneless animals—including worms, snails, crayfish, and insects—are common in the Serpent Hills and serve as prey for the wide variety of reptilian predators in the hills. In addition to these small creatures, a few larger nonreptiles have managed to survive. Besides a few common varieties of fish, birds, and small mammals (mostly rodents), some unusual species make a home in the area.

The main cultures of the Serpent Hills are the snake people and the lizard folk. (There are also several dragons, but they do not form a coherent culture.) The only other intelligent, social creatures found in the hills are urds, winged relatives of kobolds. These creatures, which like regular kobolds are intermediary between mammals and reptiles, are found in small, familial tribes, seldom with more than three dozen members. Perhaps a half-dozen tribes are found in the Serpent Hills, and they avoid the more powerful beings of the region. A couple of the tribes are known to raise winged snakes as pets. The urds live in caves near the tops of hills.

Pegasi and perytons have also been seen in the high hills on hilltops (especially those that are difficult to reach), though both are very rare. The only large mammal in the region, the *aurumvorax*, which is vicious enough to defend itself from almost any predator, makes its lair midway up larger hills. The presence of these creatures indicates the possible presence of gold ore or at least buried treasure. *Aurumvorae* are rare, though, and their lackluster coats indicate that only small amounts of gold can be found in the hills.

## Constructs and Animants

On occasion an ancient golem is encountered in the Serpent Hills. Most are iron, and some are snake-shaped. Undead of various sorts are also encountered in the hills, some having been produced by other undead, some animated by long-gone spellcasters.

Using ancient *arcana*, the *yuan-ti* have been constructing new and unusual creatures. Please refer to the chapter called *The Snake People*, later in this treatise, for further details about these oddities. For the most part, these constructs are extremely rare if not truly unique, and they dwell among their serpentine masters, often acting as guardians or as weapons of war.





# The Lizard Folk

**O**f the two main cultures of the Serpent Hills, the lizard folks culture is the lesser one in many ways. The lizard man population is smaller than that of the snake folk, and the lizard folk are less advanced magically and socially as well. Additionally, the lizard men are in many ways less ambitious than the snake folk. While they have developed trade relations with other groups and have made certain developmental plans for the growth of their society, they are concerned most with simple survival—with holding back the threat of the snake people and defending themselves from dragons and adventurers.

The characterization of the lizard folk as less ambitious is not intended to imply they are lazy. In fact, they are quite energetic and spend most of their time in various activities. Many people think that lizards are lethargic, happy to simply lie in the sun and eat whatever happens by. I know that is what I thought before I began an adventuring career. However, in the case of lizard men, especially those of the Serpent Hills, nothing could be further from the truth. This difference is based primarily on the physiology of the local lizard folk.

## Body and Mind

**U**nlike many reptiles, lizard folk are not truly cold-blooded. That term implies that a creature depends on the ambient temperature for heat. Lizard folk are actually warm-blooded, generating internal heat. Warm-bloodedness is one of many differences between lizard folk and other reptiles.

Lizard folk are, of course, built very much like humans (at least on a gross physical level) and stand upright. While many varieties of lizard men are green, the ones in the Serpent Hills are primarily brown with some striking green markings along their arms and upper chest. The lizard folk of the Serpent Hills have limbs and extremities that are strikingly humanlike in structure.

They also exhibit a cold intelligence and are usually quite shrewd. Lizard folk also show emotions, though they are often aloof and cold. Anger is an emotion often displayed among the lizard folk, but compassion is something I never saw them demonstrate. Admittedly, I seldom saw them interact with one another, but the coldness with which they traded for their own young appalled me. I suspect they are very practical—almost logic driven—in many ways and give

themselves little time for the enjoyment of such things as love and family.

## Local Culture

**T**he local society of lizard folk does not display much emotional warmth, sophistication, or higher aspirations—at least in public. Theirs is a culture of warriors that has little regard for artistic pursuits. This is not to say the lizard folk do not have art. They simply use it in a practical manner to represent prowess or to venerate their deities.

## Entertainments

Lizard folk do, however, have forms of entertainment. Again, these have a very practical basis. As in primitive human cultures, many of their games are simply ways to practice hunting or war, for those are the pursuits that entertain the adults. Their children play simply to learn the skills needed for survival.

Not surprisingly, many of the games played by young lizard folk involve the use of weapons. Young lizard folk hold archery contests, spearing competitions, and engage in mock combats with swords. The lizard folk also compete in running and swimming to see who is the fastest and strongest. They have an elaborate game worked out in which some take the part of prey and others the part of predators. The object is for the predators to find and touch the prey. Touched prey is dead prey. This game helps the youths practice stealth and patience.

As adults, the lizard folk use these skills for real hunts. They travel in small armed parties in the hills, and the chances of encountering such a party is good if one travels in the area. The lizard folk in these bands are typically looking for food, which can include almost any type of meat from snake and fish to human and yuan-ti, but they are always ready for trouble should they meet another armed party.

One of the more challenging hunts in which the lizard folk indulge is the hunt for razortalons. These cunning beasts are good matches for the lizard folk. It is fortunate that the lizard men regard them as sport and not as stock to be tamed, for if the two were to hunt together, little could evade them.

When hunting in the wetter areas of the Serpent Hills, the lizard folk use muckdwellers to help them. These small amphibians are roughly as intelligent as the lizard folk but







are very primitive and do not use tools or manufactured weapons. Muckdwellers are sometimes found in the encampments of the lizard folk, where they act as guards and servants. Sometimes the lizard folk encourage the muckdwellers to race as a form of entertainment. The status of the muckdwellers in lizard man society is almost that of slaves, but the lizard folk place little emphasis on ownership. They order the muckdwellers around and punish them when they do not obey, but they do not buy or sell them.

## Government

All the lizard folk of the Serpent Hills belong to one large tribe that is almost a nation in some respects. The overall leader of the great tribe is the lizard king, Amiskal, who rules from his keep in the southern hills, not terribly far from the Dungeon of Swords. A large concentration of lizard folk dwell in and around that keep or congregate there. Amiskal has several chieftains who pass his laws on to tribe members.

Branches of the great tribe are scattered throughout the hills. Each of these smaller tribes has between 50 and 100 members. Each is ruled by a chieftain and has a central camp that serves as home to all members of the tribe. Some of the camps are dungeon complexes, like the keep of the lizard

king, while others are caverns that have been finished to some extent or collections of huts of stone or mud.

Each chieftain has a small number of assistants who help with day-to-day management of the tribe and who offer advice. The king and all the chieftains also keep a handful of personal bodyguards. Most tribes have one or two shamans. Approximately a half dozen live more or less permanently in the lizard king's keep.

While shamans, chieftains, bodyguards, and the king are all above the common tribe member in status, all other tribe members are considered warriors and are essentially equal. Females have skills, abilities, and duties very similar to the males except when they are heavy with eggs. At such times, the females are allocated reduced duties to protect their eggs and ensure a good number of offspring.

Each member of the tribe who is an adult has a say in what the tribe does. (Lizard folk over seven winters old are considered adults.) Tribal meetings are common, and all adults can offer their opinions at such a conference. After each speaker has had a say, the chieftain confers with his (or her) advisors, including the shaman or shamans, and makes decisions. If these decisions might affect other tribes, the chieftain is obligated to send a messenger to the king, who





can overrule any decision the chieftain has made. The king overrules chieftains as seldom as possible to ensure their continued loyalty.

The lizard king can and does make proclamations determining the activities of the great tribe. These announcements are delivered by messenger to the chieftains involved. The king can also summon chieftains to his presence and has the power to call a chieftains' council to decide policy for the great tribe.

Few chieftains' councils are called because they involve travel time and take the leaders away from each of more than five dozen tribes. However, one such council was called not too long ago. There the chieftains heard information from a captured adventurer about the Dungeon of Swords and the magic it might contain. The lizard king and the chieftains decided to explore the Dungeon of Swords, hoping to claim a vast treasure of magical weaponry. With such weapons, they could claim power throughout the Serpent Hills. This exploration plan has met with limited success so far. Only a few magical swords have been found, but new patrols are sent into the ruin with regularity.

## Commerce

A chieftains' council at the beginning of Amiskal's reign, several years ago, decided to enter into commerce with the lizard folk of the Marsh of Chelimber. (This marsh is named for an ancient prince who fell to ruin after he encouraged a wizard's duel.) The lizard men of Chelimber are quite primitive in comparison to those of the Serpent Hills, probably because they have had less real competition for territory and resources. Led by a large specimen named Kront, the lizard folk of Chelimber patrol the marsh using whatever weapons they take from their victims.

Amiskal sent emissaries to meet with Kront after Amiskal took control of the great tribe. Kront was invited to meet with him at the Serpent's Tail Stream, and they met nearly a decade ago, each attended by dozens of their followers. The two discussed several options, but Kront wanted only one thing: weapons. Since some of the tribes under Amiskal made weapons or traded elsewhere for them, this was not a problem. When asked what he wanted in return, Amiskal expressed admiration for the muscular members of Kront's tribe. He asked for several to serve as his personal bodyguard.

Kront readily agreed, and since then the two tribes have carried on a similar trade: weapons from Amiskal for eggs from the tribe of Kront. Kront is slowly arming his tribe, and Amiskal has an elite force of bodyguards who are stronger than his normal tribe members but are raised by and completely loyal to him.

The great tribe also communicates a little with the lizard men of the Lizard Marsh, a great bayou where the River Shining (the Delimbiyr) enters the Sea of Swords. The lizard men of this marsh are quite advanced. They tame the small, local dinosaurs and use metal weapons. They are led by Redeye, an ancient lizard man reputed to have magical powers. In all likelihood, Redeye is a lizard king. In any case, the two tribes have a little contact with one another and occasionally trade—usually razortalon eggs for fine metal weapons. The lizard folk of the Lizard Marsh are attempting to train the razortalons, but they are having limited success.

The lizard folk of Amiskal's tribe also trade in a limited fashion with the humans and humanoids who come to Boareskyr Bridge or even to Soubar. Members of the great tribe rightly consider these trade missions to be hazardous duty. Wandering lizard folk are not fondly regarded by local humans, since they have occasionally launched raids on nearby settlements and they have a tendency to kill any human or humanoid that enters their territory. Still, some lizard folk travel to the trading towns every fall, offering their handicrafts, meat of various sorts, and the eggs of some of the more unusual animals of the Serpent Hills in trade. In return, the members of the great tribe usually ask for well-made weapons of steel.

## Enemies

Amiskal's tribespeople are interested in weapons primarily so they can defend themselves from enemies, though they hope to one day be able to take a more aggressive role in the local power structure. Though any adventurer is considered an enemy, dragons present dangers to the lizard folk, and the urds are difficult neighbors the lizard folk are worried primarily about one enemy: the snake people. The two main cultures of the Serpent Hills do not get along. This state of hostility is probably a good thing for the communities of the Western Heartlands and the North, since their ongoing undeclared war keeps either side from accomplishing its goals and becoming too powerful.

The lizard folk have been historically content with the territory they already have, but Amiskal has led them into a more militant phase. Admittedly, his actions come mostly in response to the raids and other depredations enacted on the lizard folk by the snake people, but he has perhaps overreacted. In addition to responding to attacks, he has launched several surprise—and unprovoked—attacks on settlements of snake people. This has led in return to a harsh response from the snake people, who were never that kind to the lizard folk to begin with. The attacks from both sides have escalated, and each side is desperately seeking something to







turn the tide in its favor. The lizard folk are entering the Dungeon of Swords, looking for its legendary hoard of magical swords, and the snake people, as explained in the succeeding chapter, are attempting to reclaim their ancient lands so that they can explore ancient arcane practices.

## In The Hall of The Lizard King

To learn about the lizard men of the Serpent Hills, I traveled among them, speaking to various individuals. I eventually sought an audience with their king. With some persistence and a good story, I was admitted into his keep. Two things allowed me to execute the deception necessary to gain an audience.

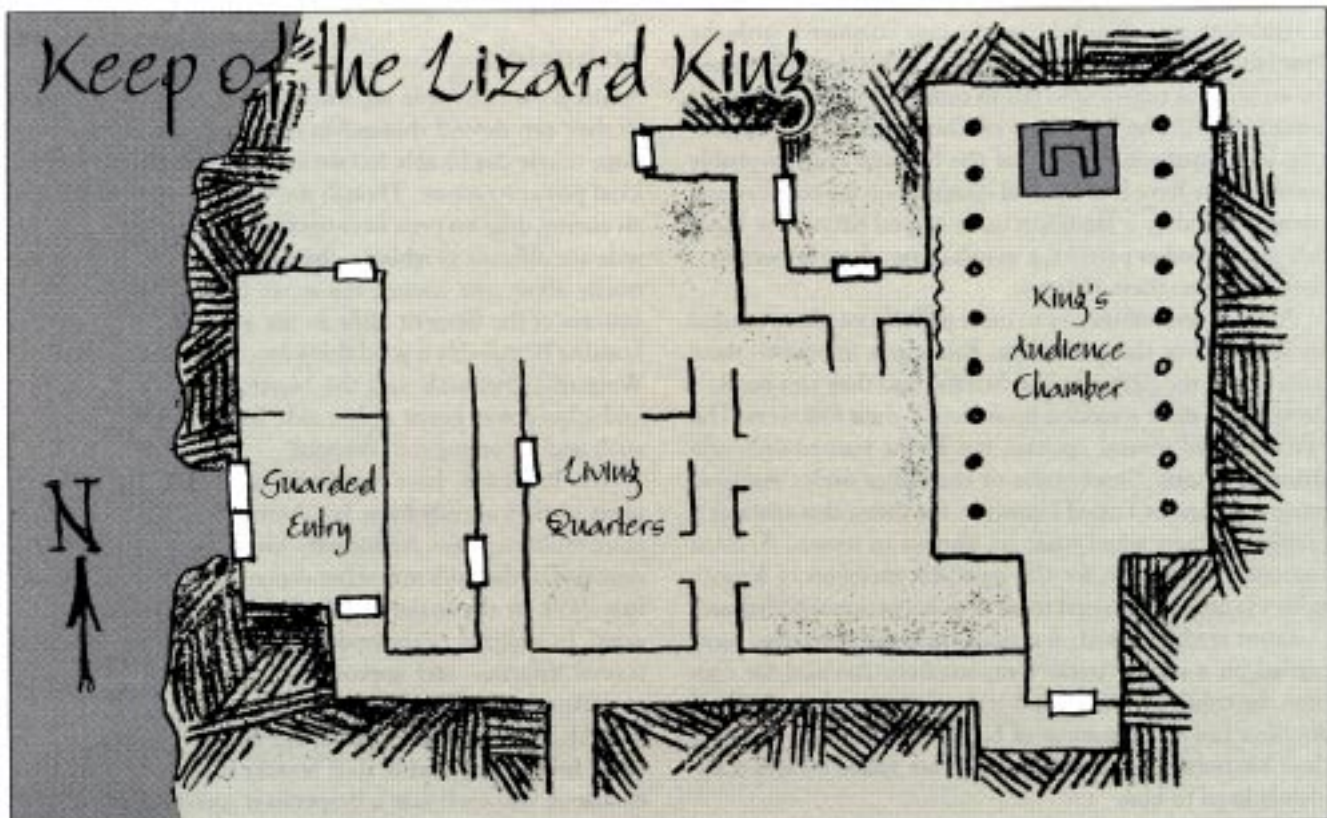
First, one of the items given to me by Elminster was a magical hat that allowed me to change my appearance. With it, I changed myself to look like one of the gray-skinned lizard folk of the Marsh of Chelimber, who carry on some commerce with the lizard men in the Serpent Hills. The hat has an enchantment stronger than many of its kind, and it affected all the viewers' senses so that I smelled and

sounded like a lizard as well. I should probably note that I did not look at myself in a mirror while transformed. I preferred not to see myself as a reptile. My companion, Atad, was kind enough to help me complete the costume and to avoid comment on my appearance.

Atad was the second factor that made this trip possible. He was born and raised in the hills and knows quite a lot about the cultures and wildlife of the area. (I will reveal more about Atad later.) He was able to instruct me in the finer points of reptilian etiquette, such as they are. He helped me with my disguise and then with proper behavior, then we entered the keep—me looking like a lizard and him invisibly.

A sketch of a map we made is included below. We were unable to see the whole of the keep, but those areas we did explore are noted. As can be seen on the map, we saw a number of corridors and doors, but we were unable to explore them.

I approached the keep in the open with my mouth closed and hands held carefully at my side to indicate nonaggressiveness. Two guards challenged me at the entrance, and bowing my head, I said (in the language of the lizard folk, which I have long studied) that I would like to see the king and that I brought greetings from the people of Chelimber Marsh.





The guards called to a superior, who sent a message within. In a short time, I was taken within to wait in the audience chamber to see if the king would deign to see me.

The entrance to the keep was hidden in a shallow opening in the side of a hill. Great wooden doors opened outward. I noted that a great wooden post could be placed to bar the doors from within. Inside and to the left of the entrance, an opening (without door) led into a good-sized room where perhaps a dozen other guards waited, obviously ready to back the door sentinels if anything happened. I silently hoped my disguise was good enough, and we exited through a door on the right side of the room.

As we passed through a long corridor, I saw many signs of activity. Lizard folk walked through the corridor on varied missions, most of which I could not fathom. However, just a few feet down the corridor I did see a pair of lizard folk come from a left-hand passage, bearing several live rats in a small cage. Atad later indicated that these were probably food for young lizard folk. Thus, I suspect the left corridor led to some food-producing area—perhaps a breeding pen for the rodents. The reptilian “chefs” exited to the right, and I suspect that some sort of nursery may lie in that direction.

Seconds later, we passed another left branch that one of the guards indicated as leading to living quarters. If I stayed and the king had no other plans for me, I would be guided back there and given the opportunity to make some new friends. I later declined this gracious invitation.

When we reached the end of the corridor, we came to a large stone door, carefully balanced to allow even a fairly weak individual to open it. Past the door was a huge and beautiful chamber with a floor of red-flecked marble and a ceiling supported by granite pillars in parallel rows. At the opposite end of the room was a huge throne.

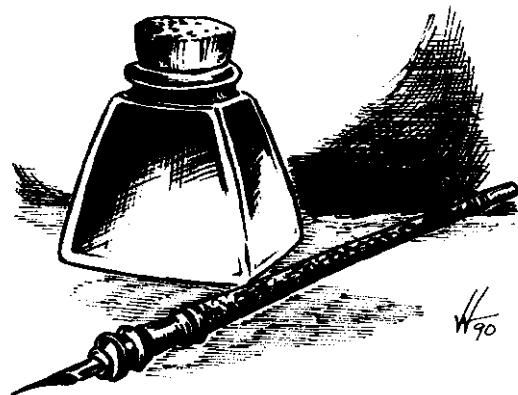
I learned later that, while I was waiting, Atad slipped off behind a tapestry on the left-hand wall into a short series of corridors. He was unable to see much but reported that the corridors likely led to a temple because he heard chanting from behind one of the doors. I thought at the time that Atad was nearby, and I took great comfort in his nearness. I was horrified later when he told me he had been absent. I do not relish the thought of being alone with reptiles.

My wait was mercifully short. The king came in from a door in the far right corner of the room. He was powerfully built and had spiky scales on his shoulders and arms. He carried a great trident and wore a long cape of black leather. He stood on the dais surrounding his throne and, in a hissing yet imperious voice, he demanded to know why I had not brought the eggs he was expecting.

Naturally, I was not prepared for this, for it was the first time Atad or I had heard about the trade between the lizard folk of Serpent Hills weapons for Chelimber eggs. It was at that moment that I realized some of the king’s personal bodyguards were bulky and gray and thus obviously Chelimber lizard folk rather than the local type. I decided to improvise, and I replied with an apology that there had been a slight delay. He seemed to grow angry, and I quickly continued. The eggs would still be delivered, and I had been sent ahead of the others to tell him about the delay. The delay would surely be no more than a day. As I said these things, I curled my illusory tail about my feet, and I bent my head to the side. (Among lizard folk these body postures are signs of submission.)

The lizard king slammed the butt of his trident into the floor and swished his tail angrily. He calmed quickly, though, and coldly thanked me for my message, then left the room slowly, ignoring me completely. I was taken back to the corridor but chose not to stay in the offered quarters, instead leaving the complex “to return to my companions” lest the king’s mood change again. Since the king had expressed displeasure toward me, the lizard folk took this wish as a natural response and allowed me to leave.

Atad and I compared notes when we got outside, and much of this report comes from the long discussion that we had. We also approached and questioned several tribe members, usually aided by a *charm* spell of some sort. The information we gained in this way has proved to be reliable in all cases, and we confirmed many of the theories we had about the great tribe. Naturally, though, we probably missed many things, and some information we obtained was very subjective. Thus, while I can—and have—provided several warnings within these pages, my information is perhaps lacking in several particulars and might even be incorrect to some degree. However, Atad has good reason to know the events of the Serpent Hills, and when I showed him an early draft of my manuscript, he offered no corrections. Still, be wary.







# The Snake People

**T**he snake people's civilization is the dominant culture of the Serpent Hills, and its predominance is one of the primary reasons for the area's name. The snake people are dangerous and sneaky—and I say this not simply as an extension of my fear of serpents. Very real evidence has been presented to me that these creatures want to take over significant portions of Faerûn. They have made significant progress toward that goal. If not stopped soon, they may be able to achieve it completely—at least in the Western Heartlands.

Now that I have declared that we, the mammal peoples of the continent, have an enemy, allow me to describe this enemy. An enemy recognized is an enemy half defeated.

## The Snake Folk

**T**hree types of creatures make up the intelligent population of the present-day Kingdom of the Snakes: nagas, yuan-ti, and ophidia. None are cold-blooded, though they do love heat. Physical descriptions of each type can be found in the following text. The three races form a sort of pyramid of power, with a few nagas at the top, a larger number of yuan-ti acting as a cold nobility, and many ophidia assuming the role of commoners—and soldiers. These races seldom work together elsewhere, but here they have formed a coherent and strong society.

### The Ophidia

These creatures are known simply as “snakemen” in many areas, but in the Serpent Hills such a name does not provide enough of an identification. The ophidia comprise the majority of the population of the Kingdom of the Snakes, filling the roles of laborers and warriors. A few hold positions of some power, but only over other ophidia. An ophidian never has power over a yuan-ti or a naga. This nation of serpents is not a democracy in any way. It has a very rigid caste system based on race, and the ophidia make up the lowest caste, a position with which they seem satisfied.

Ophidia are often characterized as selfish, independent, uncooperative, and difficult to control. The ophidia of the Serpent Hills fit this description fairly well, but over the last few centuries in this region they have learned to cooperate among themselves, and they have accepted the leadership and control of the more powerful yuan-ti and nagas. The

difference between these ophidia and others lies in their history.

Centuries ago, small tribes of ophidia lived in the region, hunting and fighting and living in a generally primitive and chaotic manner. Then one family was discovered by the dark naga, Terpenzi. This foul and evil creature had powers the like of which the ophidia had never seen. They began to worship Terpenzi and to make offerings to it. Terpenzi recognized the advantages of such a situation and encouraged their worship through demonstrations of power. When the ophidia were ready to lay eggs, Terpenzi ordered that the eggs be brought before it. When the eggs hatched, the young ophidia immediately became followers of the dark naga. Within a few generations—which the long-lived Terpenzi guided personally—the number of the creature's followers had surpassed 100.

Terpenzi led its followers from their original home to the Forest of Wyrms area, and it acquired humanoid advisors and instructed the ophidia in the ways of civilization: how to organize and how to build, how to raise food and how to fight with weapons—and how to worship dark gods. The ophidia, raised above their savagery, were apt pupils, and their worship skills grew to great heights. At Terpenzi's behest, the most powerful priestesses of the ophidia gathered and summoned the first of the yuan-ti from elsewhere. (Whether the yuan-ti came from another plane or some far corner of Toril is unclear.)

The yuan-ti were geniuses even then, and with their mastery over psionics and magic, they quickly assumed dominance over the ophidia. Directed by the yuan-ti, the ophidia built a great temple. Years later, the temple was razed by human wizards, but not before it had produced many varieties of horrid abominations. Following the temple's destruction, the snake people fell partway back to savagery—but not all the way.

The ophidia remained organized and subservient to the other snake people, and their few remaining priestesses retained their powers. The present-day ophidia of the Serpent Hills form an organized culture that obeys its yuan-ti overlords and venerates its dark naga ruler as a living god. Priestesses can still be found among the ophidia, and some rise to a level of power and skill equivalent to some of the greatest dwarf patriarchs.

The ophidia of the Serpent Hills are otherwise much like ophidia found elsewhere. They are mottled green and deep





yellow in color, though they can adjust their color to blend with their surroundings. (The hide of an ophidian is prized by humans in this region because leather made from it retains some of the color-changing capacity.) While some ophidia have legs or hoods like those of cobras, the ophidia of this region have simple, snakelike bodies with arms and hands like those of humans.

Ophidia also have a truly terrible ability. They are able to pass on a curse something like lycanthropy but far, far worse. A human, demihuman, or humanoid bitten by an ophidian may begin to change into one. The onset time of this affliction varies, but it is always at least a couple of days after the bite. This delay makes it difficult to recognize the symptoms in time to do anything about the curse. Eventually, the affected individual turns completely into an ophidian, losing all memories of a previous life.

Ophidia, those made as well as those hatched, serve the Kingdom of the Snakes in many capacities, mostly menial. They raise the food animals, hunt, dig and build, and fight. In addition, the ophidian priestesses lead the other ophidia in religious ceremonies. The yuan-ti and nagas believe in gods but seldom worship in the same fashion as ophidia. They routinely ignore the activities of ophidian priestesses,

allowing them to pacify the ophidia with religion to make them into a more cooperative population.

### The Yuan-ti

The yuan-ti are the active leaders of the Kingdom of the Snakes and form an odd sort of nobility in this dispassionately intellectual nation. All yuan-ti are as intelligent as most of the better wizards found in Faerûn. They are also purely evil and very selfish. Still, they function within the kingdom to direct the ophidia in a wide variety of projects.

Yuan-ti are administrators, directing building projects, food production, and many other tasks. They order the ophidia into action but never work themselves except by ordering others around. Any given group of ophidia usually has a yuan-ti supervisor. In a group of traders, the yuan-ti allows the ophidia to carry tradable goods but handles negotiations personally. In a military unit, the yuan-ti acts as the officer while some of the more powerful ophidia serve as rough equivalents to sergeants.

Yuan-ti maintain their positions in snake society because of their impressive (but cold) intellects and through the judicious use of their arcane powers, which include powers both mental and magical. All yuan-ti have mental abilities







that allow them certain levels of divination as well as the abilities to affect the minds of others and to alter their own bodies. Yuan-ti with human heads have the ability to cast a certain set of spells as well: spells to create fear or darkness, to charm snakes or change sticks into snakes, to influence the minds of others, and, most horrifyingly, the ability to force another being to change shape.

I mentioned yuan-ti *with* human heads. The concurrent implication that not all yuan-ti have human heads is a correct one. In fact, four varieties of yuan-ti are found in the Serpent Hills: *servitors*, *blends*, *imitators*, and *masters*. Each type serves a different function in the society of the Kingdom of the Snakes.

The lowest class of yuan-ti is the servitor, sometimes called *histachii*. These creatures are created by using a foul potion on human victims. This concoction causes the person who swallows it to transform into a hideous, spindly, reptilian biped. The ugly gray-and-bronze creatures that result are almost mindless and are completely submissive to the yuan-ti masters and blends. They carry out their orders without hesitation.

The blends are the next highest class of yuan-ti. These creatures combine the features of humans and snakes. Individuals vary greatly as to their physiognomy, but one might be human except for a snakelike head or could have a snake's tail or snakes in place of arms. These blends are the ones who direct most forces of ophidia, especially those involved with building or food production. For the most part, blends stay close to the underground complexes of the snake people.

Imitators are almost equivalent to blends in individual status but are generally regarded as slightly above blends in social rank because of the dangerous duties they perform for the kingdom. Imitators look almost entirely human. A typical yuan-ti imitator has only one small nonhuman feature such as small fangs, a forked tongue, or eyes with vertical slit pupils. Most humans fail to notice such minor aberrant features, especially since the yuan-ti take pains to conceal them. Many yuan-ti imitators can be found in the Western Heartlands if one knows how to recognize them. Imitators are known to reside in most human villages, towns, and cities in the entire region—from tiny Serpent's Cowl to great Waterdeep. They often remain in their cover identity for years, relaying any information that they are requested to obtain (or simply of interest) to their masters in the Kingdom of the Snakes. Just the thought of these hidden snake-men is enough to give one chills. It is possible that many of the readers of this treatise have met yuan-ti imitators but failed to realize it.

The most important of the yuan-ti are the masters, creatures that look exactly like very large snakes or that look like snakes with a single human feature such as a head or arms. (Those with human heads strongly resemble nagas.) The masters have bronze scales with some dark red patterning. No two yuan-ti have the same pattern. These creatures direct the ophidia in war strategies as well as in the building of temples and in very important trade missions. Masters also direct other yuan-ti, and they are the only yuan-ti that can become priests. Each population center of the Kingdom of the Snakes has a yuan-ti master as a leader. Larger centers have nagas as well.

The masters of the yuan-ti form an elite class that is second only to the nagas in power. These masters often serve as advisors to the nagas. In addition, the masters act on behalf of the nagas in many different ways. Currently, many of the elder masters—those rumored to have skills in magic and psionics greater than those possessed by normal yuan-ti—are working directly for the ruler of the kingdom. These masters of the macabre search for ancient arcane lore and conduct experiments in the creation of new or altered creatures. Many creatures have been created in this fashion. Several are mentioned and discussed in the Monstrous Creations section at the end of this chapter.

## The Nagas

The nagas are the rulers of the Kingdom of the Snakes. These creatures are very powerful and extremely evil. At one time, only one dark naga, Terpenzi, ruled the Kingdom of the Snakes. When the population of the nation grew, more nagas were produced to help direct the activities of the kingdom.

Terpenzi, while thoroughly evil, was said to have great wisdom and divination powers. It looked into the future and saw its imminent destruction. In the face of this, Terpenzi decided to produce children. A dark naga needs to mate to produce young. Terpenzi left the kingdom briefly to search out a mate and returned after only a brief sojourn to give birth to a squirming mass of infant nagas. Months before the final battle that destroyed the ancient temple of the snake people, the young dark nagas, the *nagara*, were sent to a secret hold in the Serpent Hills. (It is this hold that serves as home to the current ruler of the Kingdom of the Snakes.) Terpenzi led its followers into battle and lost—but its remains were recovered.

The young *nagara* were raised by yuan-ti and schooled in the ways of magic. Eventually, one showed more promise than the others, and this one, Jacinica, became the new ruler. The present ruler, Ebornaje, is a direct descendant of





Terpenzi. Its siblings and the few remaining siblings of its parent direct operations in the larger population centers of the kingdom. The word *nagara*, which originally meant simply *young nagas*, has now come to mean the leader nagas as a group. The nagara is fairly small, with about two dozen members, but it holds all the power in the kingdom and guides it toward a dark destiny.

The dark nagas are not the only nagas found in the kingdom. Long ago, one of the ruling dark nagas invited a small family of spirit nagas to join the kingdom. These startling creatures have bands of crimson and black circling their bodies. They can cast spells and can trap victims with a mere look. The spirit nagas in the kingdom (perhaps a dozen) made a pact with the ruler of the snake people long ago, and they hold to that pact with the descendants of that ruler. Simply put, the pact names the spirit nagas as protectors and servitors of the royal line. Each of these creatures answers directly to Ebaranje. Some serve as guardians, while others inspect other population centers to see how things are going. Some even act as inquisitors, checking for any traitors to the cause of the snake kingdom and punishing transgressions—because a traitor to the nation is a traitor to the ruler.

Besides the dark nagas and the spirit nagas, bone nagas, undead constructs created from the remains of actual nagas, dwell in the Kingdom of the Snakes. One great bone naga, known now simply as the Guardian, was made from the remains of Terpenzi. The Guardian is exactly that. It never leaves the presence of the current ruler of the nation and will give its unlife to save the life of its unholy master.

The dark nagas almost never venture out of the dungeon complexes they rule. The spirit nagas, who must sometimes visit other areas to dispense the naga's brand of justice, often travel between complexes. Bone nagas remain in one complex forever. If their master dies, they become free-willed rogues—and more than one such creature has been discovered in the ruins of the Serpent Hills.

## How The Serpents Live

While the organization of the snake people has been fairly well delineated, little has been said about their daily life. In many ways, the society of the snakes is like human society but colder, less emotional, and lacking in several basic values.







Like humans, the snake people play games. Whereas the games played by the local lizard folk are simple practices for the hunt and for battle, the games of the snake people include puzzles and many mind-expanding exercises. For example, the ophidia play a simple guessing game with one another. A pair gets together and one thinks of a word. Using only simple answers, it replies to queries from the other player. The object of the game is to force an opponent to expend more guesses than oneself.

Among the yuan-ti and nagas, entertainment focuses on games that simulate the strategies of war. One popular game seems to be very much like a game from Kara-Tur of which I have heard. Colored stones are used as markers on a board, and the object of the game is to surround groups of opponents' stones. Surrounded stones are removed from the board. When only one player is left with stones on the board, that player is the winner.

The fact that the snake people have time for recreation indicates that they have delegated tasks sufficiently among their population to provide free time. Their food production is adequate to fulfill the needs of their population, so rather than spending time finding food (like the lizard folk, for example), they can devote time to building, recreation, and artistic pursuits.

The art produced by the snake people is beautiful in a fashion, but it always seems devoid of some spark of life or personality. The snake people are logical and precise, and this leads them to prefer elaborate patterns in the decorative arts, such as repeating bands of stripes, swirls, interlocking geometric forms, or continuous lines in various colors. They do not often attempt representative art, and when they do their logical natures produce objects that are technically excellent but almost never tug at the emotions.

This sterile art is indicative of the overall view of the snake people. They are pragmatic in the extreme, accepting things that happen without much emotion. Even their base emotions—like greed—seem more cold and calculating than vibrant and grasping. They plan everything (which is probably why they enjoy strategy games), and they accept failure as an occasional matter of course. If someone dies (because of old age or from murder), it is treated as a simple parting with no grieving attached to the event, and the dead body becomes food for those who live.

This attitude makes the snake people—at least the yuan-ti and the nagas—skilled mages. They have the ability to analyze complex spells as well as the ways such spells might interact. They can also think of new and interesting ways to combine spells with their mental powers. The

magic of the snake people has ascended to prodigious heights.

Among other talents, the snake people have gained some ability to manipulate living creatures, forcing them to adapt to new environments or simply changing their abilities. They have also learned to maintain elemental portals, and they currently control one *gate* to the Elemental Plane of Earth and one to the Elemental Plane of Water. The *gate* to the Plane of Water is found in their main citadel, while the *gate* to the Plane of Earth is in a temple complex in the center of the Serpent Hills.

The snake people spend some time each day maintaining the arcane skills they have brought into play, whether they be magical or psionic in nature. They practice for war, they trade, they explore, and they accomplish a myriad of mundane and trivial tasks. Few of the snake people leave the complexes where they grow up, though some travel for commerce or for hunting. Of those that do leave the complexes, most are imitators that pass themselves off as humans to provide intelligence to their homeland.

### My Friend Atad

One such imitator is my friend Atad. It was much to my chagrin that I discovered Atad was an imitator. By the time I found out, I had developed a strong liking for him, and I was placed in a bit of a quandary. He is basically a snake, so it disturbs me to be near him—yet I find him to be caring (though not compassionate), hard-working, and practical.

I went to Atad at Elminster's request. (That is another one he owes me for—sending me to a snake for a guide!) When we met, I noticed his yellowish-brown eyes and his bronzed skin. I thought perhaps he was descended from some local barbarian stock with which I was unfamiliar. After all, the human mind rationalizes when faced with unfamiliar details.

He showed respect for me yet seemed aloof. He willingly shared most information with me, and he taught me a great deal about the Serpent Hills. And then when I questioned his plan to take us into the Snake Pit, the home of the ruling dark naga, he revealed his true nature to me.

Please note that even though I like Atad, he proved himself to be just what I dislike in reptiles: cold and emotionless, manipulative and secretive. His plan to get us into the Snake Pit, however, did succeed.

### Into The Snake Pit

As he did before we went into the keep of the lizard king, Atad described to me many of the finer points of local eti-





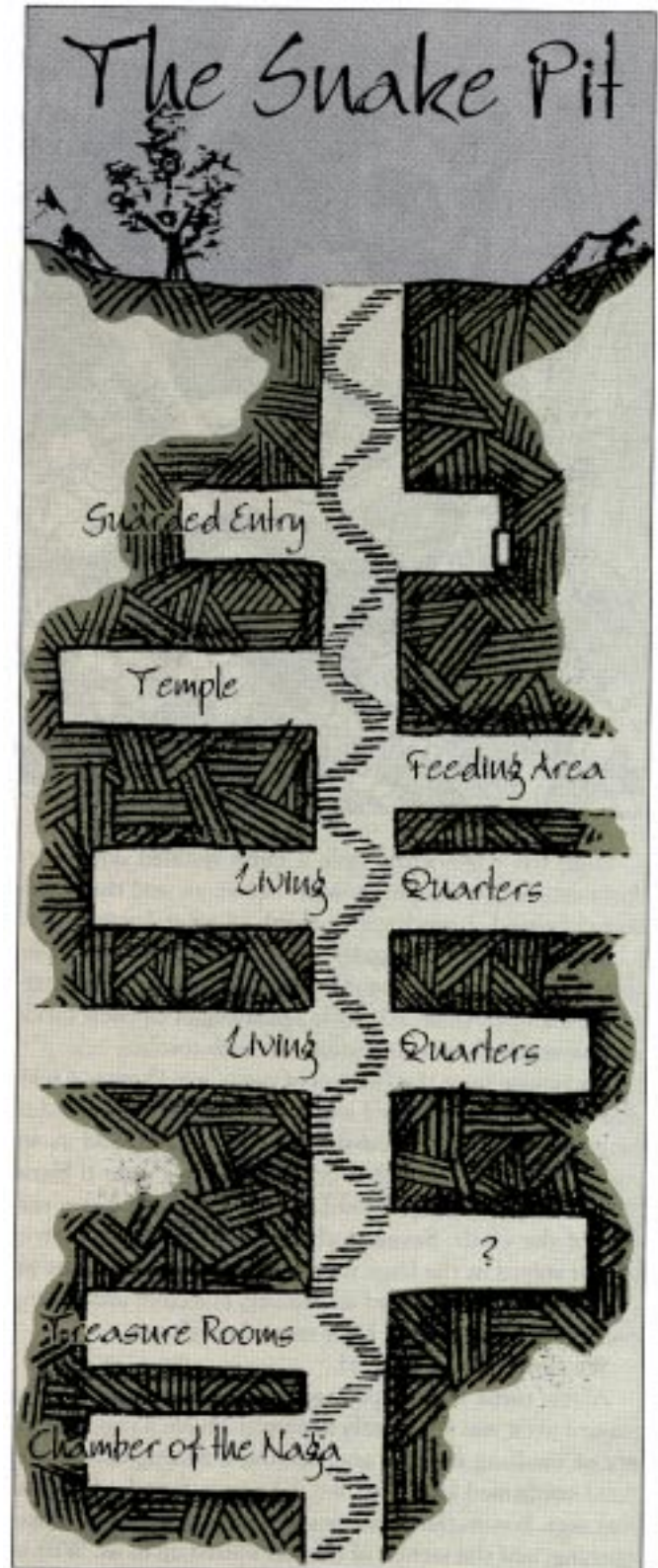
quette. When I questioned him about a disguise, he said that none was needed. When I began to protest, he explained about the imitators among the yuan-ti and stated that he was one. It seems that after spending a great deal of time among humans, he began to admire them and to question the ways of his own people. (He once lived in Serpent's Cowl and in Soubar. It is interesting that he gained an admiration for humans while living in some of the roughest, most lawless areas in the Western Heartlands). In effect, Atad now acts as a sort of double agent who provides his own people with useless information about the local humans while gathering valuable information about the activities of the snake people and providing that information to those who can do something with it, such as the Harpers—or even myself, by writing this treatise.

If Atad were ever caught, he would be saved for death at the hands of one of the inquisitorlike spirit nagas. It would not be pleasant for him. I consider him a very brave snake, but a snake nonetheless.

In any case, he coached me on local etiquette, then took me along when he was ready to deliver a report to his superiors in the Snake Pit. Using the magical hat that Elminster gifted me with, I gained a forked tongue and eyes that never blinked. Fortunately, I also had a ring that kept intruders from scanning my mind in any fashion, essentially shielding it.

When we arrived in the area of the Snake Pit, all I could discern at first was a large hole perhaps 20 or 30 feet in diameter in the ground, in a small valley formed by low hills. A few small trees grew in the valley with some clumps of grass. The hole appeared in no way to be anything of interest. As we approached it, I had a feeling of trepidation, as if I were being watched. Atad later confirmed that we were under surveillance as we approached by a yuan-ti using mental powers. When we got within a few feet of the hole, enough to see down into it a little, a party of perhaps a half-dozen ophidia swarmed out of the hole. (So I was informed later by Atad. At the time, it seemed more like 20 of them.) It was like something out of nightmare, and I had to make a very conscious effort to continue moving forward. My heart was racing so fast and seemed so loud that I was sure the ophidia would hear it and realize that I was not one of them.

Atad greeted the ophidia with a secret sign that I imitated. He explained that we had come to report in. He was quite rude to the ophidia, which seemed to be what they expected of a yuan-ti. I made an effort to sneer at them myself, and I believe I managed at least a grimace, which was enough to keep the signs of panic from reaching my face.







From the edge of the hole a ramp spiraled down into darkness. A pair of ophidia went before us, and the others stayed behind. I tried not to think of what I was sure to encounter within the citadel of the snakes. We went down into the earth an unknowable distance, entering full darkness for a short time. As panic again began to swell inside me, we reached a sort of landing lit with torches.

My respite from the twinges of panic was short as I realized the landing was filled with ophidia. Several seemed to be gathering for an excursion to the outside, and as we passed the landing, a dozen or more led by a yuan-ti blend slithered up the ramp toward the light and the warm surface of the earth. Several other ophidia and one yuan-ti master stayed in the large room just off the landing. As we passed, the master offered us a salute. His cold, unblinking eyes bored into me and, I was sure, through me.

We continued downward.

A few turns later, a passage left the ramp and headed toward what was apparently a temple. I have a vague memory of smelling incense and hearing a hissing chant, and Atad confirmed later that we did pass a temple. Just past that area, but on the opposite side of the shaft, was another opening, and the stench of carrion wafted up to us. Within

I saw a haunting scene of carnage in the dim torchlight as several animals—thankfully, mostly rats and such and no humanoids—were torn apart or sometimes eaten alive by ophidia. The gore of their remains fell to the floor. I turned away and quickly moved down the ramp, fighting the urge to run upward as fast as possible. The idea that I would get caught if I broke was enough to calm me a little.

Farther down, we passed by more levels, one with living quarters for ophidia, another with living quarters for yuan-ti of various sorts. I tried not to notice the abominations I saw, the woman with an impossibly long neck, a man with snakes where his eyes should have been, and others too horrid to even mention or recall.

I passed the next several loops of the ramp in a daze, as if I had lost my grip on reality. We passed at least one level, I know, but I have no memory of what might have been on it, and Atad refuses to tell me—leading me to believe it was something far too horrible for my already dazed and overworked mind to accept. Perhaps it was a breeding area for the yuan-ti experiments? I do not know, nor do I really wish to remember whatever it was I may have seen.

After that, I began to notice my surroundings again, as if I were waking from a dream or coming out of a deep, dark pool. On one side of the interminable shaft a pile of treasure and several yuan-ti guardians could be seen in the dim light. Corridors led away from the initial chamber, and I could glimpse signs of movement and the glint of riches beyond.

Finally, we stopped, though the shaft continued downward into what seemed a bottomless pit. We had arrived in the chamber of the naga, Ebarraje itself.

Several torches hung in sconces on the walls of a long corridor that led into a huge open room. Several ophidia were in the corridor, and as I felt something brush my foot, I realized that the floor was *moving*, that it must be covered in snakes. I resolved not to look down, and I shuffled along moving the snakes with my feet rather than risking stepping on them. We entered the great chamber.

At the far end was a large, flat rock surrounded by braziers and covered in soft cushions. Yuan-ti guardians and masters seemed to fill the room, and I saw a moving, skeletal form—apparently the bone naga, Terpenzi—behind the platform. From the midst of the cushions, as if in response to a flute, the head and body of the great naga Ebarraje rose swaying into the air.

“Report,” it hissed.

I stood rigid, dazed, while Atad introduced me as an imitator from the city of Waterdeep, sent there by Ebarraje’s parent many years ago. As I silently prayed Atad was





not overdoing it—I did not want to be invited to a feast, even as a guest—I realized I was swaying in time with the naga. This seemed to please it, however, and I remember it smiling and revealing vicious fangs. After Atad finished, I managed to give my short report. I told the sinuous beast that I was moving to a new area because of the lack of relevant activity in Waterdeep, false news that I had thankfully committed to memory.

As we turned to go, the naga chuckled, a deep, unpleasant sound, and hissed a farewell that sounded very threatening. As we went up the ramp, it was again difficult to fight the panic, but I persevered, watching the ramp until we reached the top.

It knew who I was. I am sure of it.

In any case, I saw many things that I would rather not have, and I learned things first-hand that Atad could have simply told me about.

I did *not* find it therapeutic.

## Monstrous Creations

The yuan-ti have been reviving ancient experiments to produce monstrous creatures of many varieties to serve as weapons or as guardians. Most of these creatures are kept with the snake folk and are thankfully quite rare, but some have on occasion escaped. In addition, adventuresome people who deal with the snake folk might encounter these freaks. Thus, a short discussion of several known types follows. The barest details are available, and it behooves the intrepid explorer to resist the urge to make too many comparisons. Just as a snake might sometimes resemble a stick, so might a monster of great and unusual power resemble a known creature. A creature that resembles a bulette might have completely different abilities, for example.

- \* Long-ago accounts tell of a pale thing that resembled a bulette. This creature, though, had huge eyes and was colored a pale gray. It was said to be active only at night, and it could supposedly change its size. Blunt weapons seemed to have no effect against its thick, leathery skin. It was never seen to leap or burrow, but it once burst forth from a river, suggesting that it was a good swimmer.
- \* More recent accounts from adventurers in the local Underdark echo ancient accounts of a serpentine beholder, a creature with a dangling, snakelike body and a head that sports 10 eyes. It exhibits several powers,

none of them associated with a regular beholder. Two of its eyestalks weep greenish tears that mist into a poisonous gas. Other eyestalks have eyes surrounded in small maws. As they attack, the eyes move within as if swallowed, and the fangs come together to bite a victim. When the creature opens its mouth, a great, tubular tongue shoots forth. The tongue is also tipped with a mouth that attaches itself to a victim and begins draining blood. When the eyes began pouring forth with colored beams, the witness fled.

- \* A pale, behirlike creature was sighted long ago, and recently a similar creature has been seen in the Forest of Wyrms. It seems to be a burrowing creature, and rather than shooting lightning from its mouth, it seems to shock creatures when it bites or touches them. Some reports claim it has a stinging tail.
- \* A giant winged snake—some 40 feet in length with huge wings—has been sighted in the hills recently. While some suggest it is a form of dinosaur, one witness claims it had the head of a viper complete with fangs the size of long swords.
- \* Two-headed adders have been seen in many places recently. Some have been killed, and their bodies have been retrieved as proof.







# The Dragons



At last, I have arrived at a portion of the manuscript that does not cause me to panic or to stand in stunned terror. Do not misunderstand. I have a very healthy fear of dragons. Anyone with any intelligence should. However, they are majestic and in many ways more human than the other creatures of the Serpent Hills. At the very least, they are not the slithering, writhing, scaly monstrosities that I saw so often in the Serpent Hills.

Several types of dragons live in the Serpent Hills. Red and brass dragons are the most common, while coppers and bronzes lair here as well. On occasion, other kinds of dragons move into the area, some staying only a short while, others intending a permanent residence. Until recently a single green dragon lived in the hills, and a deep dragon might still reside in the local Underdark.

Not too long ago a black dragon from the High Moor moved into the region and has been claiming territory. The black dragon stands a chance of upsetting the local balance of power

between the dragons. For the last 200 years or so there have been several skirmishes between dragons in the Serpent Hills, but there have been no wars. The established dragons respect the territories claimed by other dragons and seek to avoid trouble in most cases.

The dragons are the top predators of the region. They feed on whatever prey presents itself, including whipsnakes and black caimans, razortalons and spiketails, snake people and lizard folk. None of the region's inhabitants can mount much defense against the dragons, though some well-armed parties of yuan-ti and ophidia have had some survivors. Some tribes of lizard folk and some of the snake people have begun imitating the urds, who long ago perfected a defense against the dragons: They keep track of how many days pass between feedings. When another feeding is due, they tie some large animal not too far from their lair. They wait safely inside until the dragon stops by for an easy meal, then go about their normal business. This tactic fails on occasion, though, because some dragons prefer the thrill of the hunt and the challenge of intelligent prey.

On the whole, the dragons of the Serpent Hills are a capricious lot. They are selfish and arrogant and do whatever they want to—seldom with any more reason than to prove that they *can*. The bronze dragons are the only exceptions to this. Though they tend toward arrogance, they attempt to lead ordered lives, and they are adamant in their support for the cause of good. Unfortunately, these noble beasts receive little support from the other dragons.

## Black Dragons

Currently, only one black dragon resides in the Serpent Hills. However, this creature, Kasidikal, is part of a family of dragons that lives in and around the ruins of Orogoth on the High Moor. She has several siblings, any of whom might decide to join her in the Serpent Hills. Kasidikal is supposedly around 350 years old and thus a mature adult, but she is still young in comparison to some of the other wyrms of the Serpent Hills.

Kasidikal has recently claimed a small ruined keep on a hilltop at the northern tip of the Serpent Hill range, not too far from Orogoth and her family. She had to clear out a small group of urds but apparently had no problems doing so. Kasidikal is currently trying to gather treasure to build a hoard, and she is making many small raids throughout the hills. Recently, Amiskal the lizard king has been sending emissaries to talk to the dragon about an alliance. Though the dragon ate the first





four or five ambassadors, she listened to the most recent one (perhaps she was full) and seems ready to negotiate with Amiskal. His initial offer was treasure of many types in exchange for the black dragon's protection.

## Brass Dragons

A small family of brass dragons lives in the northern section of the hills. They share a large, old ruin that has been so scarred that its history is completely lost. The family consists of both parents, who are each somewhere around 500 winters old, and three young dragons approaching the century mark. Their lair is in a dry spot in the hills that has openings to the east so the sun can warm the rock. Generally lovers of warm weather, these dragons have been miserable the few times they have remained in the hills for winter. In the last decade, they have taken to traveling south for the coldest months and living somewhere in Calimshan. I had planned to ask them why they chose to live in this moist, hilly environment, but a short ways into my visit I decided not to encourage them to continue speaking.

Like many brass dragons, these creatures are very boorish, and they will happily tell visitors about their last vacation to the south. I did actually speak to them for a short time—or at least I had planned to speak to them for a short time. It took more than an hour to get through with mere greetings, and the total conversation—or lecture, really, from my point of view—took almost five hours of time I could have spent better elsewhere. Though it may be hard to believe, even the young dragons were boring, as if they had been telling the same boring story for more than a century.

In addition, all of them are hopeless braggarts. They always have to top the last story told, even if they have to utter an obvious fabrication to do so. The information they gave me on the Serpent Hills was good, but it was also very difficult to wade through the useless information to find the important facts.

On the good side, the brass dragons are very sociable—almost *too* sociable—and they do not mind having visitors to their lair unless those visitors try to steal something. All thieves of their treasure are eaten, no exceptions—or so they said, in the middle of a tirade about the speed of the wind on their last flight south.

The parent dragons in this family are Girac (the father) and Janic (the mother), while their children are Narbdy, Topher, and Sivart. Narbdy is a bouncy young lady dragon, while her brothers tend to be a little more serious and ostentatious. Narbdy even has the good grace to be a little embarrassed when the rest of the family tells stories. She is more likely to try to attract attention to herself by a show of some physical skill than by a boring story.

Most of Narbdy's brothers' stories are merely tedious descriptions of short contests between the two male dragons, such as

flying competitions or even footraces. As to the question of winners and losers, they generally manage to engage so much in bragging that I strongly believe they have completely forgotten the actual event that spurred the subsequent tale. Stories from the brothers usually dissolve into a "did too-did not" argument that is generally settled when Girac interrupts with a story about the wild days of his youth and his arguments with his brothers.

## Bronze Dragons

The bronze dragons are the most ordered of the dragons in the Serpent Hills as well as the only ones that are not so involved with themselves that nothing else is important. In fact, the bronze dragons in the area are very concerned about other creatures than themselves, and they actually ask questions of the intelligent creatures they encounter. It was surprisingly easy for me to gain an audience with a pair of the great bronze beasts. All I had to do was approach a lair and announce myself, and I was invited within.

I had chosen to approach the lair of a known mated pair of adult dragons just over a century old. The male of the pair, Borcher, was a magnificent beast with a regal bearing. His mate, Nusas, was also beautiful and carried a quiet nobility about her. When I called to them, Borcher called out in a booming voice and told me to approach and be received. When I got to the edge of the pond where I had been told to look for them, it was only a moment before the two of them slid from the water with barely a ripple and made their way onto the shore. I speculate that the entrance to their lair is entirely underwater, but air shafts allow them to communicate vocally with beings on the surface. (I had apparently been walking on top of their lair.)

Borcher and Nusas stretched and introduced themselves. Without deception, I told them who I was and that I had come to the Serpent Hills so that I might learn about the region and its inhabitants so that my writings could reach many interested people. They were very pleased to receive a personal interview, and it was from them that I learned many things about the area, from the politics between the local dragons to the general locations of several species.

The two great beasts also asked me several questions, including a number of enjoyable riddles. I was able to answer most of their riddles, and I introduced them to some new ones as well. They were remarkably adept at answering the riddles, and I was able to defeat their combined effort with only one riddle, for which they sincerely congratulated me. It seems it had been some time since they were so entertained by challenging riddles, and I was happy to indulge them.

The kind couple was apparently quite impressed with me. They gave me a gift before I left, but I will not tell what it was







because that could encourage greed and thievery, which I would not see inflicted upon these tremendously gracious and powerful beasts. In addition, they told me where I might find the other bronze dragons of the hills. Alas, I was unable to personally visit those other dragons, so I must simply offer the following summary information.

Two other bronze dragons live in the Serpent Hills. Neither lair is far from the mated pair. Both are older sisters of Nusas. These dragons are Naelere and Thyka, both proud creatures slightly over 450 winters of age. Nusas characterized them both as very intelligent, but cautioned that Naelere was a domineering type. She also explained that Thyka was looking for a mate and hoped that I would mention her to male bronze dragons if I should run into any.

## Copper Dragons

The bronze dragons also told me a little about the copper dragons. This discussion was fortunate because I was able to contact only one copper dragon. The other copper dragons of the region, Mejas and Miteach, apparently decided to play games with me. They left messages in their lairs to lead me on a hunt for them. I did follow the messages to three more places

before I decided I had better things to do and went to see the third of their number. The two I did not see, Mejas and Miteach, are both males, both young, and might be brothers. I could not determine that for certain.

The copper dragon with whom I talked was Chellewis, a beautiful female creature some three centuries in age. She shrewdly deflected my subtle inquiries as to her exact age, so have I made an estimate based on the history she recalled and on the powers she exhibited. Chellewis, like many copper dragons, likes to feed on venomous creatures. She complained that in this area she could quickly grow fat if she were not careful. It was good to know that in the northern part of the hills, where she and the two copper brothers range, there are fewer poisonous snakes than there are elsewhere in the Serpent Hills.

It was, in fact, Chellewis who told me the most about the vipers and other snakes of the hills. (She also informed me about the taste of their flesh, which I choose not to relate to the reader.) Chellewis told me that the copper dragon brothers also attack patrols of yuan-ti and ophidia and that one day they hope to capture a naga. I expressed some amount of concern—a full-grown naga would make a formidable opponent for a young copper dragon—but Chellewis informed me that the brothers often hunt together. As a team, they should be able to defeat almost any adversary.

Apparently the two brothers also speak simultaneously, often finishing sentences for one another—usually in some humorous fashion. For her part, all the time we were talking Chellewis played word games of various sorts, often making puns or finding plays on words. I found her pleasant and amusing, but I could see how her sense of humor might easily irritate others.

Chellewis and the other copper dragons make a habit out of irritating others with pranks and jokes and riddles, and they take special pleasure in annoying red dragons, who often live in the same sorts of environs as coppers. Indeed, the territory of the copper dragons is located between the ranges of the two red dragons known to prowl the hills. Chellewis said the two brothers carefully avoid the red dragons when alone, but when the three of copper wyrms frolic together—which is frequently—they often dare one another to approach the lairs of the red dragons.

Chellewis told me one story about such a jaunt when she was chosen to enter the lair. She had actually entered the lair of old Troberdene, something neither of the brothers has ever accomplished, when a cry from them alerted her to the return of the old wyrm. She left as quickly as possible and has never returned. She is sure the old creature would recognize her scent and punish her.

In return for her tale, I told Chellewis the story of my descent into the Snake Pit. She seemed to appreciate it for the drama, though she was unable to understand my fear and hatred of the vile snake creatures. She explained that she feared no creatures





but believed in healthy caution. In fact, she was a little wary of her new neighbor, a black dragon from the High Moor.

## Red Dragons

The worst enemies to the bronze dragons are the vicious red dragons. Greedy and vain, these creatures are the most dangerous individuals in the whole area. Fortunately, only two red dragons live in the region.

One, an old wyrm named Troberdene, has a lair in the eastern section of the Serpent Hills. He is more than 1,000 years old, making him one of the oldest dragons on the continent. He is rumored to have a truly huge hoard of gold and gems, but no adventurer has gotten close enough for confirmation in more than a century.

Troberdene looks his age, with white edges showing around the edges of his scales. He sometimes flies but more often walks. While he still looks graceful in flight, he tires easily when flying. When he walks, he seems to limp a little, and he takes gentle steps as if fearful of breaking a bone.

In combat, however, Troberdene shows no fear, hesitation, or weakness. He attacks ferociously, using his fiery breath wisely. He seldom leaves much behind for scavengers. Any adventurers who think an old dragon is an easy mark had better beware.

The other red dragon of the area is an old female of perhaps 750 winters. This dragon, Landillew, still looks like she is in her prime, with great, glossy crimson scales. Landillew seems to have suffered few scars during her life. I do not know if she avoids fights or if she has simply been too skilled for any of her opponents. She is a magnificent sight—except to those she attacks, to whom she is surely most terrifying. She makes regular raids throughout the Serpent Hills and even into some of the surrounding areas. Landillew is one of the dragons who refuses bait, preferring an active hunt. Her favorite prey seems to be well-armed groups of adventurers. She tries to attack them in the open before they have a chance to reach her lair so that she can use her flight capabilities to full advantage.

## Recent Dragon Residents

While the fate of the black dragon, Kasidikal, remains to be determined, other dragons in the Serpent Hills have not fared well. Over the centuries, several other dragons have lived in the area, some for a short time, others for several decades. Most of these were considered interlopers by the dragons who still live in the Serpent Hills and were killed or driven away by them. A few of the past dra-

conic residents were slain by well-armed and clever groups of adventurers.

Two of the recent denizens of the hills met with such a fate. One was a deep dragon, which some sources claim is actually still alive. It seems that a group of warriors and mages from Waterdeep (and its environs) entered the Serpent Hills looking for the Dungeon of Swords. They apparently found a different set of ruins from which they entered the local Underdark. They delved ever deeper looking for the fabled swords while unaware they were simply in the wrong place. In a series of limestone caverns, they found a huge store of treasure and its owner—a deep dragon perhaps 300 winters old, judging from its length.

Several bold adventurers quickly fell to the creature's corrosive breath, but others launched a successful counterattack that seemed to leave the creature dead. The adventurers gathered as much treasure as they could and left, dragging the bodies of their friends behind them. Since that time, a deep dragon has again been reported in the local Underdark, but whether it is the same one or perhaps the mate of the slain one is unknown.

A wyrm that definitely fell to adventurers was a green dragon, part of a mated pair. The pair, Makmahonn and his mate Emikaiwufeg, lived in the northeastern hills. They arrived there nearly a century ago and were left alone by the other dragons because they hunted primarily outside the hills; they ranged into the nearby plains and even into the Marsh of Chelimber and the Greypeak Mountains.

The pair produced a pair of eggs about a year ago, and they began increasing their raids to gather food for their soon-to-hatch children—that is, they started taking captives. The captives came from many species and were kept in the dragons' rather large lair. One of the more notable captives was Amberamonti, an elven adventuress from Evereska. Amber had many friends in distant Ravens Bluff, including the mage Darsson Spellmaker and Killian O'Kane, a rogue rumored to be the son of that city's mayor. When these two heard about their friend's capture, they gathered a party of adventurers, mostly from the Society of the Grand Gauche, a group of swashbucklers in Ravens Bluff. It seems these chivalrous rogues wanted an opportunity to rescue a lovely damsel in distress, and Killian informed them that Amber qualified.

Several of the adventurers reached the Serpent Hills and found the lair. Though a few lost their lives to various traps and to the dragons themselves, they were able to rescue most of the captives, mainly due to the spellcasting of Darsson and heroism of Killian. The group also killed Emikaiwufeg and stole her eggs and much of the dragons' hoard. Makmahonn survived, though barely, and left the Serpent Hills swearing revenge on the adventurers. Rumors say that Makmahonn now lives near Ravens Bluff and avidly, though carefully, hunts the adventurers of that city.







# Nearby Areas

**S**everal noteworthy areas are located near the Serpent Hills, including the neighboring High Moor, the nearby Marsh of Chelimber, and the Forest of Wyrms. For the most part, the cultures and wildlife of the Serpent Hills have been rather insular, but the reptilian societies of the Serpent Hills have begun expanding somewhat into these areas, and all manner of lesser reptiles are abundant in them as well. In addition, this section contains a short discussion of the Serpent's Tail Stream, the Dungeon of Swords, and the local Underdark beneath the greater Serpent Hills region. Because it is doubtful that Elminster will assign anyone to write about these areas, I have chosen to discuss some relevant points about them here.

## Marsh of Chelimber

**A**t one time in the early days of Waterdeep, this fertile area was ruled by Chelimber the Proud, a decadent fellow with a great deal of wealth in silver, gold, tapestries, and more. Though he valued his riches, he took most of his pleasure from hunting and drinking. In those days, the Winding Water sprang from a rocky crag not far from Chelimber's keep, and one spring a wizard used elementals to erect, in a matter of days, a tall tower on that crag. Chelimber tried to remove the Wizard of the Crag, but his forces took casualties from the wizard's spells. Chelimber hired another wizard, one Taskor the Terrible, to fight his enemy. In a climactic battle both disappeared, never to be seen in the Realms again. Their conflict wrought great destruction, and water elementals were freed from the wizard's keep. These elementals caused the whole region to flood, and all of Chelimber's holdings disappeared beneath the waters along with Chelimber himself.

Today, this region is a misty, overgrown bog broken by small hillocks and dotted by numerous ruins. Quicksand is rather common in the marsh, and several unpleasant denizens dwell within, including catoblepases, water spiders, water snakes, and gulguthra. In addition, a large tribe of lizard men led by a hefty specimen named Kront patrols the marsh in armed bands. These lizard men carry on trade with the lizard men of the Serpent Hills.

The lizard men are aggressive and have no love of humans or other humanoids, regarding them as prey. They are known to lie in wait near the ruins in the marsh to ambush adventurers trying to get rich.

## The Serpent's Tail Stream

**T**his waterway runs all along the eastern side of the Serpent Hills and in fact defines the perimeter of the hill country. Several small streams lead from the hills to the Serpent's Tail, and that waterway handles the majority of the drainage for the hills. In the spring, runoff causes some flooding along the Serpent's Tail as well as the river into which it feeds, the Winding Water.

Not surprisingly (considering the source of the water for this stream) the Serpent's Tail Stream is heavily laden with snakes of many types, from the deadly to the merely disgusting. The stream originates at a small spring in the northern tip of the Serpent Hills territory. The spring may in turn originate in the Underdark beneath the High Moor, as evidenced by occasional strange creatures that are found within its waters.

The Serpent's Tail is joined by a western tributary (which originates near the Dungeon of Swords) about 35 miles before the Serpent's Tail flows into the Winding Water north of Boareskyr Bridge. Most of the stream's snakes and other life forms stay upstream of this confluence.

## The Forest of Wyrms

**T**his thick wood of pines and redwoods lies due south of the Serpent Hills. Like the Hills, the forest is infested by a wide variety of snakes. It also serves as a home to a half-dozen young green dragons. Several small communities and ruins lie hard by it.

### Lyran's Hold

A prominent ruin, Lyran's Hold, is found in the Forest of Wyrms. Once the tower of a powerful archlich, the hold was claimed in 1357 DR by a pair of adventurers who claimed to have participated in the destruction of the lich. Always





interested in ancient magic, I took a brief side jaunt to explore the ruins with my faithful companion, Atad. I spent less than a day exploring and touched almost nothing because most items of interest appeared to have been removed. I saw no signs of the adventurers who had laid claim, but the tower was full of life, most of it reptilian. In addition, numerous specimens of undead—mostly skeletons and zombies—patrolled the lands around the keep. Curiously, I saw no undead creatures within the keep itself. If the adventurers still mean to claim the tower, perhaps they were merely gone for a short period.

### **Boareskyr Bridge**

Not far west of the Forest of Wyrms, Boareskyr Bridge crosses the Winding Water, the river that drains the Marsh of Chelimber and continues from there to enter the Sea of Swords just south of the Troll Hills. At Boareskyr Bridge, the Winding Water becomes poisonous as a result of a battle between Cyric and Bhaal during the Time of Troubles. At the bridge, the river's muddy waters become an inky black and release a foul, rotting stench. The waters remain poisonous until they reach Trollclaw Ford many miles downstream.

On the southern side of the wide bridge is a small trading center made mostly of tents and wagons. This center's only permanent structure—other than the bridge itself—is a rough stone fort with a poisonous moat known as the Bridgefort. The trading center is rough and lawless and allows all sorts of creatures to come in and barter or buy, including lizard men and even ophidia from the Serpent Hills. The small settlement suffers from occasional raids from goblins or bandits but has never been molested by the reptile folk of the Serpent Hills. Apparently, the opportunity to conduct commerce is too important to the intelligent lizards and snakes of the hills to pursue such outright hostilities.

Upstream a short distance from the bridge is Heartwing, the private estate of Aluena Halacanter, a mage who raises pegasi. She confided to me that her original pegasi eggs were a clutch she rescued from the heights of the Serpent Hills years ago. So, though wild pegasi are extremely rare in the hills (because predatory reptiles raid the creatures' nests), pegasi thrive at Heartwing.

### **Serpent's Cowl**

Farther upstream from Boareskyr Bridge is the small town of Serpent's Cowl, a village that is named for the great yuan-ti city and temple once maintained on this site. The village is small but pleasant and crowds around a small square. The

villagers tend several farm fields near the village, but these fields lack any buildings.

The farms lack buildings for the same reason the village is small: A ward protects the village's buildings and people from dragons, but the ward has a fairly small area of effect. Dragons destroy any structure outside the protected area and occasionally attack people inside and outside that area as well.

Beneath Serpent's Cowl (and much of the surrounding area) lie the ruins of a powerful yuan-ti city, and beneath and among those ruins rest ancient Netherese ruins. The yuan-ti seized awesome magical items from the ancient Netherese ruins and built their city, which dominated the surrounding area for more than a century. In the center of the city was a great temple in which hideous arcane experiments transformed monsters into horrid abominations. Legends tell of their creating giant winged flying snakes and beholders with snakelike, dangling rear bodies.

The yuan-ti were eventually brought down by a force of mages. They caused the collapse of the temple, burying the yuan-ti and their terrible creations beneath. Many of the yuan-ti escaped to the Serpent Hills (as detailed in the earlier chapter on The Snake People), where they plot and scheme to reclaim their ancient lands. Twisted passages still exist from the ancient yuan-ti city through the Underdark to the Serpent Hills and to sites within the Forest of Wyrms.

The people of the Serpent's Cowl area have a strong belief in the legends about the yuan-ti with good reason. By unspoken agreement, they never construct cellars or dig pits into the ground, and since they can get good water from the Winding Water, they do not drill wells. In this way, they do not risk accidental contact with any of the monsters presumed to still live beneath the site.

At some unspecified time in the past (local tellings of the legends simply state "long before any of us were alive"), a group of evil mages entered the area riding dragons that they directed to dig up the ancient ruins in search of Netherese magic. It was these incursions that led to the creation of the ward that now protects the village. The ward's presence and the fact that the dragon-riding mages seem to have found whatever it was they were looking for eventually led to the villagers being left alone by sorcerous guests.

I asked several inhabitants of Serpent's Cowl why they stayed where they were when they all knew of the dangers of the Forest of Wyrms and they all believed in the dangers lurking beneath the ground; most villagers are farmers, hunters, fishers, and woodcutters, and most must travel with armed parties to practice even those inoffensive professions in safety. Of those I asked, most explained that they stayed







because their ancestors had claimed the land and they were too stubborn to move.

One old man, however, stated his belief that he had a sacred duty to watch over the area in case the snakemen should come back. If they did, he would be ready to stem the tide while others went for help. When he said this, several other townspeople silently nodded in agreement.

While at first the people seemed foolish to me, I must admit that their chosen task—to serve as early warnings should the serpent people invade again—provided me with some comfort. It led me to reconsider my judgment of the villagers as foolish; I now believe them to be quietly noble and steadfast.

### *In The Forest*

The Forest of Wyrms itself is a target of the yuan-ti and their ophidian allies. Though they denied trying to retake their ancestral territory whenever I asked, their denials were a little too quick and their attempts to change the subject a little too forced. The populations of snakes in the forests have been increasing, and more and more frequently, worse creatures such as winged serpents and even an occasional behir are sighted. However, nobody has seen a yuan-ti or

ophidian in the forest yet—or if they have, they haven't lived to tell about it.

Besides these snakes, winged snakes, behirs, and the previously mentioned family of young green dragons, the Forest of Wyrms is home to several undead creatures from Lyran's Hold. This wood is one of the most dangerous forests I know of, and it is no wonder that local woodcutters work only around its edges and always travel with armed guards who watch constantly for attack.

## *The High Moor*

I understand that a treatise on this area was written by another at the same time as I was composing this lengthy essay, so I will not mention much about it, limiting myself to just two observations. First, the Serpent Hill region and the High Moor are rather distinct geographically, limiting contact between the two areas; however, animals and humanoids constantly travel between the two. Thus, the types of creatures found in the two areas overlap somewhat near their shared edges. Second, I cannot help but envy the author of the treatise on the High Moor and his or her opportunity to spend time in the cold and desolate wastelands of the High Moor rather than in the snake-infested surroundings of the Serpent Hills.

## *The Dungeon of Swords*

This mysterious dungeon, supposedly a remnant of ancient Netheril, is built around a crypt. The crypt supposedly houses a forgotten war hero, possibly one who participated in the wars pursued by Netheril itself—or one who may have lived and perished soon after the fall of Netheril. Some legends suggest that this hero created dozens of magical blades. Other tales declare that he simply collected the blades. Some stories suggest that he was actually from distant Anauria, a land known for its magic and sword-making. In any case, several magical blades are said to have already been discovered in this place—and the hero's actual burial place and his tomb's treasure chambers have not yet been uncovered!

The entrance to the dungeon is supposed to be a natural cavern with passages that lead to a deep chasm. On the far side of the chasm worked passages can be seen. Those adventuring parties who have managed to cross the chasm say that the corridors are nothing short of wondrous, with magical blades on display in several areas guarded by elabo-





rate magical wards and traps. In addition, undead warriors, both skeletal and ghostly, guard parts of the crypt complex. The Dungeon of Swords has many levels, and in addition to its undead guardians (most of whom seem limited to certain areas within the dungeon), it is said to house many other denizens, including many reptiles from the area it lies under and creatures of the Underdark. The adventurers who reported the Dungeon's initial layout to me chose not to search further after they discovered the undead hazards—at least not until they were better armed and more skilled.

## The Local Underdark

I have no personal experience with the Underdark, the network of caverns and passages that lies beneath the Serpent Hills. To be perfectly honest, I was asked to discuss the Serpent Hills, a task that I would not have performed for anyone but Elminster, and I did my job. Anything else I reveal is bonus information.

Nevertheless, here is what I know of the Underdark. My information comes from Atad, from interviews with adventurers, and from a short discussion with a Gray Druid, Vincin, who lives in the Underdark beneath the High Moor. Since the Underdark areas beneath the High Moor and the Serpent Hills interconnect in many places, most of Vincin's information was very helpful.

As noted earlier, the snake people have an extensive network of tunnels beneath the Serpent Hills that stretch to many nearby areas. These tunnels, while not truly a part of the Underdark, definitely connect to it. Thus, ophidia are rather common in the local Underdark, and yuan-ti travel about there as well. Nagas, some associated with the snake nation and some rogues, have been spotted on occasion in the Underdark as well.

The lizard folk seldom venture too deep into the Underdark, though they occasionally hunt the upper levels in winter. Though dragons usually have underground lairs in this area, few venture very far into subterranean passages. They prefer areas that allow them quick access to the surface, where they can fly and hunt. Similarly, urds are occasionally seen in the snake people's cavern system since they make their lairs in caverns in the tops of hills, but they almost never venture to downward a point where they cannot see the sky. They seem to be rather afraid of enclosed spaces.

Some lizards and snakes can also be found in the upper levels of the Underdark, especially winged snakes and

amphisbaena. Rodents of all sorts thrive in the darkness of the underground passages wherever there is food for them. Toads, both normal and giant, also inhabit the Underdark. The giant toads actually pose the worst consistent nuisance threat there is in the upper levels, where their numbers and natural aggressive tendencies make them formidable opponents. Also, in the winter, black caimans from the surface migrate downward into the underground cavern system so that their black hides are not as visible as they would be against the white snow on the surface. And, of course, several lesser local animals also make their ways into the snake fold's caverns and subsequently into the Underdark.

The local Underdark holds several ruins, some barely recognizable as construction, others almost intact. A few are very ancient, while others were built and abandoned within the last century. In these ruined areas, items and animated creations left behind by the previous inhabitants can be found. These "leftovers" include occasional constructs such as iron golems, undead such as wights and crypt things, and magical hybrids such as the pale bulette bred by the yuan-ti (discussed in the Monstrous Creations section in The Snake People chapter). All of these unusual inhabitants seldom leave the lairs they have in the ruins.

Farther down into the Underdark, few reminders of the surface terrain survive, including the types of animals found there. By the time the deeper Underdark areas are reached, snakes and lizards are seldom encountered any more. Fungi of all sorts dominate this darkened landscape, from harmless and even edible varieties to the more dangerous and mobile types to the intelligent myconids and mold men. Myconids are rare beneath the Serpent Hills since the region is very far away from the center of their culture. Mold men, however, can be found in some numbers because the Underdark area here has a generally warmer climate.

Few other intelligent life forms are found in the local Underdark, though a derro patrol might be encountered and mind flayers are known to haunt the entire subterranean area. Spiders of many sorts have been reported deep beneath the Serpent Hills—including driders. This indicates the possible presence of drow elves in the deeper levels of the Underdark, though no witness has ever lived to report actually sighting the dark elves. If drow are in the area, they would encounter tough opposition from the snake people near the surface. I suppose that is one *possible* advantage to having the reptile people in the area.

For more information on the local Underdark, one must undertake an excursion within it. Entrances can be found through many of the Serpent Hills' ruins and surface caverns.







# Mysteries & Current Events

**I** have been asked to collect pertinent rumors and legends about the greater Serpent Hills area into this section. I must warn people seeking adventure here, however, that this region is cleverly and thoroughly infested with snake people, some of whom are nearly indistinguishable from humans.

## The Dungeon of Swords

**T**his underground complex is the greatest mystery of this entire region. Some sages think the dungeon dates from the time of Netheril, and the hero buried within may have come from Anauria. Those are the theories. There are also some other associated mysteries.

Several ruins are located in the Serpent Hills, and the ruins are from many different time periods. However, a relationship may exist between several of the oldest ruins. Nobody has done a thorough study of the ruins, but I have collated enough information to give me an inkling of an idea.

I suspect that many of the older ruins of the region, including the Dungeon of Swords, were created as crypts. Not only that, but there may be a pattern to their distribution in the region. Reports about the ruins' general architecture and artifacts found in them indicate that the crypts were all constructed at roughly the same time. In addition, some of the ruins contain rooms that either teleport or disintegrate those who step within. (My ambiguity here comes from the fact that not all of those who disappeared have been recovered, and those who have been were miles away from their previous locations.)

Now, generally crypts are set up for two reasons: First, they protect the deceased and any possessions laid there to accompany the individual's essence into the next life. Second, they serve as memorials, as visible reminders of the importance of the person within. If the latter is true in this case, it is possible that an entire teleport network can be found within the scattered ruins and that at its end is the heart of the Dungeon of Swords, which is the main burial site. At that main site must be a large number of magical blades.

If this is true, then the threat of the lizard folk finding the mythical main burial site and its hoard of magic swords on purpose is minimal because I suspect that the heart of the Dungeon of Swords is simply inaccessible by normal means. However, since so many of the ruins are open, there is a chance that someone—human, snake, or lizard—could simply stumble onto the correct portal to the main burial site. However, getting in and getting out are two different matters entirely. It is possible that many people have

already reached the heart of the Dungeon of Swords and have slowly withered away to nothing or fought with other trapped individuals while searching for a way out. One warning: If this crypt complex is typical of certain other tombs of ancient Anauria, there may be an enchantment that prevents visitors from leaving with more items than those with which they entered. Thus, it may not be possible to *gain* any treasure at all from the primary crypt.

## The Yuan-ti Plot

**A**ccording to current rumors, the yuan-ti of the Serpent Hills are moving into the Forest of Wyrms and are ready to mount an attack on Serpent's Cowl and all other nearby settlements. They have finally decided to recover their temple and all the magic within.

**Evidence:** There *are* yuan-ti in the hills, and ophidia occasionally trade at Boareskyr Bridge. The traders are interested in all things magical as well as any artifacts from the ruins at Serpent's Cowl. In addition, it seems that the number of snakes and snake-like monsters is increasing in the Forest of Wyrms. Also, in my estimation, the snake people were a little too quick to deny any interest in returning to their homeland. The ongoing war with the lizard folk has also prompted some extreme reactions among the snake folk to lizard folk raids, and it is known that the snake people want to gain a firm upper hand in the conflict. Finally, reliable reports from adventurers say that Underdark passages still lead from the Serpent Hills to the area around Serpent's Cowl as well as to other regions.

**Counterevidence:** No yuan-ti have been seen in the Forest of Wyrms. If they are working in the forest, they are being discreet. Some say they already have underground lairs and they venture outside only when they know they are unobserved—or if they know they can kill the observer.

**Conclusions:** The yuan-ti and their ophidian servants are definitely plotting something that will gain them power. Their desire for domination is a well-known trait. It is almost sure that passages exist between the Serpent Hills and the Forest of Wyrms, and if they do not, they can be constructed without too much trouble. Also, the number of weird hybrid creatures has increased dramatically in the Serpent Hills, indicating that several arcane devices or lorebooks may have already been recovered. In other words, it looks very much like the snake folk want the area back and have been moving in slowly to establish control subtly.

Let this serve as a warning to all: The snakes are up to something in the Forest of Wyrms.





FORGOTTEN REALMS  
Accessory

Elminster's  
Ecologies  
Appendix II  
Encounter Tables  
Encounters on the High Moor

**The Central Moorlands**

**1d8+1d12 Result**

- 2 Leucrotta
- 3 Troll
- 4 Swamp ferret
- 5 Thornslingers
- 6 Giant sundew
- 7 Snapper fungus
- 8 Moor rat (near marshes) or rabbit (elsewhere)
- 9 wolf
- 10 Sheep
- 11 Raven
- 12 Goblin (more likely in the west), hobgoblin ( more likely in the south and east), or human (more likely in the north and east)
- 13 Goat
- 14 Pony or horse (roll 1d4: 1-3=pony, 4=horse)
- 15 Kobold or ogre (roll 1-4=kobold, 5-6=ogre)
- 16 Ankheg

**1d8+1d12 Result**

- 17 Will o' wisp
- 18 Abishai or other abomination (roll 1d6: 1-4=abishai with type chosen by the DM, 5-6=roll on Central Moorland Abomination Table)
- 19 Kestrel (in warm months) or owl (in cold months)
- 20 Falcon or buzzard (equal chances). A buzzard indicates nearby carrion.

**Central Moorland Abomination Table**

**2d4 Result**

- 2 Neogi
- 3 Baatezu (DM chooses type; no abishai)
- 4 Dragon (choose type by location)
- 5 Adventurers
- 6 Undead (roll 1d6: 1-3=wight, 4-6=DM's choice)
- 7 Other High Moor abomination (DM's choice)
- 8 DM's choice (not native to High Moor)



## The Marshes

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Goat
3	Fyrefly
4	Baatezu or other abomination (roll 1d6: 1-4=baatezu of DM's choice, 5-6=roll on Marsh Abomination Table)
5	Kestrel (in warm months) or owl (in cold months)
6	Bat (from late afternoon to early morning) or rabbit (other times)
7	Will o' wisp
8	Giant sundew
9	Vampire moss
10	Moor rat
11	Swamp ferret
12	Leech (DM's choice)
13	Frog
14	Raven
15	Giant dragonfly
16	Goblin (more likely in the west) or hobgoblin (more likely in the south and east)
17	Troll
18	Poisonous snake
19	Kobold
20	Leucrotta

## Marsh Abomination Table

2d4	Result
2	Crimson death
3	Neogi
4	Dragon (choose type by location)
5	Undead (roll 1d6: 1-2=wight, 3-6=DM's choice)
6	Adventurers
7	Other High Moor abomination (DM's choice)
8	DM's choice (not native to High Moor)

## The Fire Marshes

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Adventurers
3	Black dragon
4	Bat or fire mephit (DM's choice)
5	Baatezu (DM's choice)
6	Rabbit or moor rat
7	Giant sundew
8	Swamp ferret
9	Hell hound or tire snake (DM's choice)
10	Fyrefly
11	Leech (DM's choice)
12	Will o' wisp
13	Fire lizard
14	Fire toad
15	Undead (roll on Fire Marsh Undead Table)
16	Frog
17	Giant dragonfly
18	Kestrel (in warm months) or owl (in cold months)
19	Goblin
20	Pyrohydra or salamander (roll 1d6: 1-2=pyro- hydra, 3-6=salamander)

## Fire Marsh Undead Table

2d4	Result
2	Wight created within the past century
3	Ancient wight (remnant of Netheril or other lost kingdom)
4	Zombie
5	Skeleton (DM's choice)
6	Ghoul
7	Haunt or phantom (DM's choice)
8	DM's choice

Note that undead do not trigger the fiery reaction of the fire marshes and do not possess any special resistance to fire.

## The Peat Bogs

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Dragon (choose type by location)
3	Baatezu (DM's choice)
4	Adventurers
5	Poisonous snake
6	Toad
7	Fire toad
8	Swamp ferret
9	Moor rat
10	Giant sundew
11	Giant dragonfly
12	Leech (DM's choice)
13	Troll
14	Will o' wisp
15	Bat
16	Fyrefly
17	Kobold or bugbear (roll 1d6: 1-4=kobold, 5-6=bugbear)
18	Fire lizard
19	Undead (roll on Peat Bog Undead Table)
20	Kestrel (in warmer months) or owl (in colder months)

## Peat Bog Undead Table

2d4	Result
2	Mummy (wrapped for burial in the bog, not in a desert)
3	Skeleton
4	Wight
5	Ghoul
6	Zombie
7	Haunt or phantom (DM's choice)
8	DM's choice

## Rocky Ground

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Will o' wisp
3	Ankheg
4	Dragon (choose type by location) or other abomination (roll on Rocky Ground Abomination Table)
5	Rabbit
6	Snapper fungus
7	Wolf
8	Thornslinger
9	Moor rat
10	Sheep
11	Badger
12	Pony
13	Falcon or buzzard (equal chances). A buzzard indicates nearby carrion.
14	Raven
15	Bat
16	Hobgoblin (more likely in the south) or human (more likely in the north)
17	Goat
18	Toad
19	Leucrotta
20	Ogre or troll (roll 1d6: 1-4=troll, 5-6=ogre)

## Near The Misty Forest

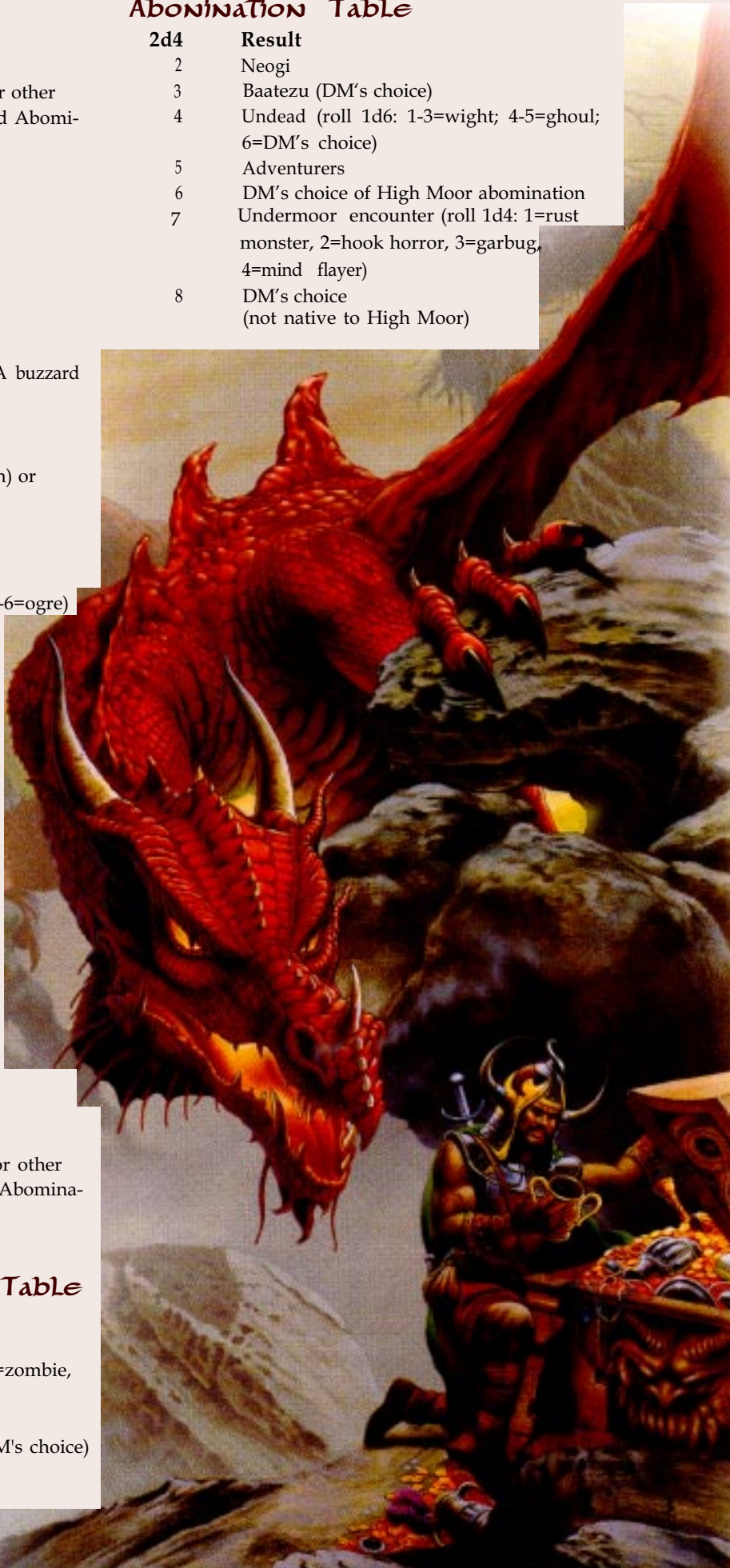
1d8+1d12	Result
2	Wildcat
3	Fox
4	Raven
5	Thornslinger
6	Giant sundew
7	Moor rat
8	Troll
9	Wolf
10	Sheep
11	Orc
12	Goblin
13	Kestrel (in warmer months) or owl (in colder months)
14	Bat
15	Ankheg
16	Elf
17	Red deer
18	Pony
19	Dragon (choose type or location) or other abomination (roll on Misty forest Abomination Table)
20	Will o' wisp

## Misty Forest Abomination Table

2d4	Result
2	Baatezu (DM's choice)
3	Undead (roll 1d6: 1-2=skeleton, 3=zombie, 4=ghoul, 5=wight, 6=DM's choice)
4	Bulette
5	Plant, dangerous or intelligent (DM's choice)
6	Adventurers
7	Forest creature (DM's choice)
8	Crimson death

## Rocky Ground Abomination Table

2d4	Result
2	Neogi
3	Baatezu (DM's choice)
4	Undead (roll 1d6: 1-3=wight; 4-5=ghoul; 6=DM's choice)
5	Adventurers
6	DM's choice of High Moor abomination
7	Undermoor encounter (roll 1d4: 1=rust monster, 2=hook horror, 3=garbug, 4=mind flayer)
8	DM's choice (not native to High Moor)





## In and Around Highstar Lake

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Horse
3	Leucrotta
4	Swamp ferret
5	Leech (DM's choice)
6	Undead or other abomination (1d6: 1-4=roll on Highstar Lake Undead Table, 5-6=roll on Highstar Lake Abomination Table)
7	Amethyst dragon
8	Pony
9	Moor rat
10	Human tribesmen
11	Adventurers
12	Frog
13	Giant catfish
14	Kestrel (in warmer months) or owl (in colder months)
15	Falcon or buzzard (equal chances). A buzzard indicates nearby carrion.
16	Ogre or bugbear (roll 1d6: 1-4=ogre, 5-6=bugbear)
17	Goblin or hobgoblin (equal chances). These are usually scouts or traders in human territory.
18	Toad
19	Will o' wisp
20	Giant dragonfly

## Highstar Lake Undead Table

2d4	Result
2	Ghoul
3	Spectral wizard
4	Lacedon
5	Wight
6	Skeleton (DM's choice of type)
7	Zombie
8	DM's choice

## Highstar Lake Abomination Table

1d6	Result
1	Dragon (DM's choice; not amethyst)
2-3	DM's choice of aquatic creatures (animal Intelligence or lower)
4-5	Baatezu (DM's choice)
6	DM's choice (not native to High Moor)

## Near The Serpent Hills

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Leucrotta
3	Copper dragon or other abomination (roll 1d6: 1-4=copper dragon, 5-6=roll on Serpent Hills Abomination Table)
4	Will o' wisp
5	Thornslinger
6	Giant sundew
7	Badger
8	Moor rat
9	Wolf
10	Sheep
11	Falcon or buzzard (equal chance). A buzzard indicates nearby carrion.
12	Poisonous snake
13	Hobgoblin
14	Constrictor snake
15	Kestrel (in the warmer months) or owl (in the colder months)
16	Troll or ogre (roll 1d6: 1-4=troll, 5-6=ogre)
17	Ankheg
18	Toad
19	Lizard man
20	Ophidian or yuan-ti (roll 1d6: 1-4=ophidian, 5=yuan-ti, 6=ophidian party with yuan-ti leader)

## Serpent Hills Abomination Table

2d4	Result
2	High Moor dragon (not copper)
3	Serpent Hills dragon (not black)
4	Undead (DM's choice)
5	Adventurers
6	DM's choice (not native to High Moor)
7	Baatezu (roll 1d4: 1-3=abishai, 4=DM's choice)
8	Yuan-ti experiment (see Yuan-ti Experiment Tables in the Encounters in the Serpent Hills section)



## Near The Red Cliffs

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Will o' wisp
3	Human
4	copper dragon or other abomination (roll 1d6: 1-4=copper dragon, 5-6=roll on Red Cliffs Abomination Table)
5	Rabbit
6	Moor rat
7	Thornslinger
8	Kestrel or owl Bat
10	Badger
11	Hedgehog
12	Kobold
13	Toad
14	Giant eagle
15	Falcon or buzzard
16	Troll
17	Bugbear or ogre
18	Leucrotta
19	Ankheg
20	Baatezu or other abomination (roll 1d6: 1-3=flying baatezu of DM's choice, 4-5=other baatezu of DM's choice, 6=roll on Red Cliffs Abomination Table)

1d8+1d12	Result
14	Toad
15	Badger
16	Rust monster
17	Ankheg
18	Garbug or cave fisher (roll 1d6: 1-3=violet garbug, 4=black garbug, 5-6=cave fisher)
19	Poisonous snake
20	Mind flayer or abomination (roll 1d6: 1-3=mind flayer, 4-5=roll on Upper Undermoor Abomination Table, 6=see Yuan-ti Experiment Tables in the Encounters in the Serpent Hills section)

## Upper Undermoor Abomination Table

2d4	Result
2	Drow elf or drider (DM's choice)
3	Neogi
4	Adventurers
5	Undead (roll 1d6: 1-2=crypt thing, 3-4=wight, 5=ghoul, 6=DM's choice)
6	Baatezu (DM's choice)
7	Ophidian or yuan-ti (roll 1d6: 1-4=ophidian, 5=yuan-ti, 6=ophidian party with yuan-ti leader)
8	Deep dragon from the Serpent Hills

## Red Cliffs Abomination Table

2d4	Result
2	Dragon (DM's choice; not copper from High Moor)
3	DM's choice from Upper Undermoor Table (breaking through the cliff face)
4	Undead (roll 1d6: 1-3=mummy, 4-5=wight, 6=DM's choice)
5	Adventurers
6	Gargoyle
7	DM's choice of aerial creature (not native to the High Moor)
8	DM's choice of nonflying creature (not native to High Moor)

## The Upper Undermoor

1d8+1d12	Result
2	goblin or orc (roll 1d4: 1-3=goblin, 4=orc)
3	Will o' wisp
4	Derro dwarf
5	Mold man
6	Myconid
7	Gas spore
8	Mold (DM's choice)
9	Moor rat
10	Troll
11	Bat
12	Spider
13	Hook horror or carrion crawler (roll 1d6: 1d4=hook horror, 5-6=carrion crawler; a carrion crawler indicates nearby carrion)





# Encounters in the Serpent Hills

## Northern Hills

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Black dragon
3	Red dragon
4	Copper dragon
5	Lizard man (roll 1d6: 1-3=well-armed raiding party, 4-5=raiding party willing to be friendly with adventurers, 6=lost hunting party)
6	Naga
7	Urd
8	Fire drake
9	Yuan-ti (roll 1d6: 1=servitor, 2-3=blend, 4=imitator, 5-6=master)
10	Ophidian (roll 1d6: 1-2=hunting party, 3-4=patrol, 5-6=patrol with yuan-ti leader)
11	Toad (in drier places) or frog (in wetter places)
12	Skink
13	Black caiman
14	Poisonous snake (roll 1d6: 1-3=adders, 4-5=amphisbaena, 6=winged snake)
15	Constrictor snake (roll 1d6: 1-3=whipsnake, 4-5=tree python, 6=striped boalisk)
16	Yuan-ti experiment (see Yuan-ti Experiment Tables)
17	Turtle
18	Dinosaur (roll 1d4: 1-2=razortalon, 3-4=spiketail)
19	Undead (roll 1d6: 1=bone naga, 2=skeleton, 3=zombie, 4=wight, 5=skeleton warrior, 6=DM's choice)
20	Behir

1d8+1d12	Result
14	Fire drake
15	Muckdweller
16	Adventurer
17	Turtle
18	Dinosaur (roll 1d4: 1=razortalon, 2-4=spiketail)
19	Brass dragon
20	Bronze dragon

## Southern Hills

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Naga
3	Pegasus
4	Yuan-ti experiment (see Yuan-ti Experiment Table)
5	Yuan-ti (roll 1d6: 1-3=blend, 4-5=imitator, 6=master)
6	Urd
7	Ophidian (roll 1d6: 1-2=ophidian hunters, 3-4=ophidian raiders, 5-6=ophidian raiders with yuan-ti leader)
8	Toad
9	Frog
10	Poisonous snake (roll 1d6: 1-2=adders, 3-4=amphisbaena, 5-6=winged snake)
11	Constrictor snake (roll 1d6: 1-2=whipsnake, 3-5=tree python, 6=striped boalisk)
12	Black caiman
13	Lizard man (roll 1d6: 1-3=hunting party, 4-5=well-armed patrol, 6=raiding party on the way to snake folk territory and willing to be friendly with adventurers)



## Western Hills

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Turtle
3	Yuan-ti experiment (see Yuan-ti Experiment Tables)
4	High Moor wildlife (roll 1d6: 1-2=troll, 3-4=small harmless mammal or other creature, 5-6=High Moor monster or abomination)
5	Fire drake
6	Razortalon
7	Spiketail
8	High Moor humanoid (roll 1d8: 1-3=hobgoblin, 4-5=human, 6=goblin, 7=bugbear, 8=ogre)
9	Frog
10	Poisonous snake (roll 1d6: 1-4=adders, 5=amphisbaena, 6=winged snake)
11	Constrictor snake (roll 1d6: 1-3=whipsnake, 4=tree python, 5-6=striped boalisk)
12	Toad
13	Skink
14	Ophidian (roll 1d6: 1=hunting party, 2-3=patrol, 4-5=raiding party, 6=partol or raiding party with yuan-ti leader)
15	Lizard man (roll 1d6: 1-2=well-armed raiding party, 3-4=well-armed patrol, 5=raiding party willing to be friendly with adventurers, 6=hunting party)
16	Black caiman
17	Yuan-ti (roll 1d6: 1=servitor, 2-3=blend, 4=imitator, 5-6=master)
18	Brass dragon
19	Copper dragon
20	Red dragon

## Eastern Hills

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Copper dragon
3	Bronze dragon
4	Naga
5	Dinosaur (roll 1d4: 1-3=razortalon, 4=spike-tail)
6	Yuan-ti (roll 1d6: 1=servitor, 2-4=blend, 5=imitator, 6=master)
7	Lizard man (roll 1d6: 1-3=well-armed raiding party, 4-5=raiding party willing to be friendly with adventurers, 6=lost hunting party)
8	Ophidian (roll 1d6: 1-2=hunting party, 3-4=patrol, 5=raiding party, 6=raiding party with yuan-ti leader)
9	Urd
10	Poisonous snake (roll 1d6: 1=adders, 2-3=amphisbaena, 4-6=winged snake)
11	Constrictor snake (roll 1d6: 1-2=whipsnake, 3-4=tree python, 5-6=striped boalisk)
12	Turtle
13	Black caiman
14	Frog
15	Fire drake
16	Toad
17	Muckdweller
18	Yuan-ti experiment (see Yuan-ti Experiment Tables)
19	Behir
20	Red dragon





## Forest of Wyrms

1d8+1d12	Result
2	Wyvern
3	Hydra
4	Yuan-ti (roll 1d6: 1=servitor, 2-5=blend, 6=master)
5	Yuan-ti imitator
6	Behir
7	Dragon (roll 1d6: 1-3=green, 4=Landillew the red dragon, 5=another Serpent Hills dragon, 6=DM's choice)
8	Skink
9	Constrictor snake (roll 1d6: 1-2=whipsnake, 3-5=tree python, 6=striped boalisk)
10	Harmless mammal
11	Harmless snake
12	Harmless bird
13	Poisonous snake (roll 1d6: 1-3=addler, 4=amphishaena, 5-6=winged snake)
14	Toad
15	Stirge
16	Dangerous or intelligent plant (DM's choice)
17	Adventurers
18	Ophidian (roll 1d6: 1-3=patrol, 4-5=partol with yuan-ti leader, 6=lost ophidian)
19	Lizard man (roll 1d6: 1-3=trading party, 4-5=hunting party, 6=raiding party)
20	Yuan-ti experiment (see Yuan-ti Experiment Tables)

## Yuan-Ti Experiment Tables

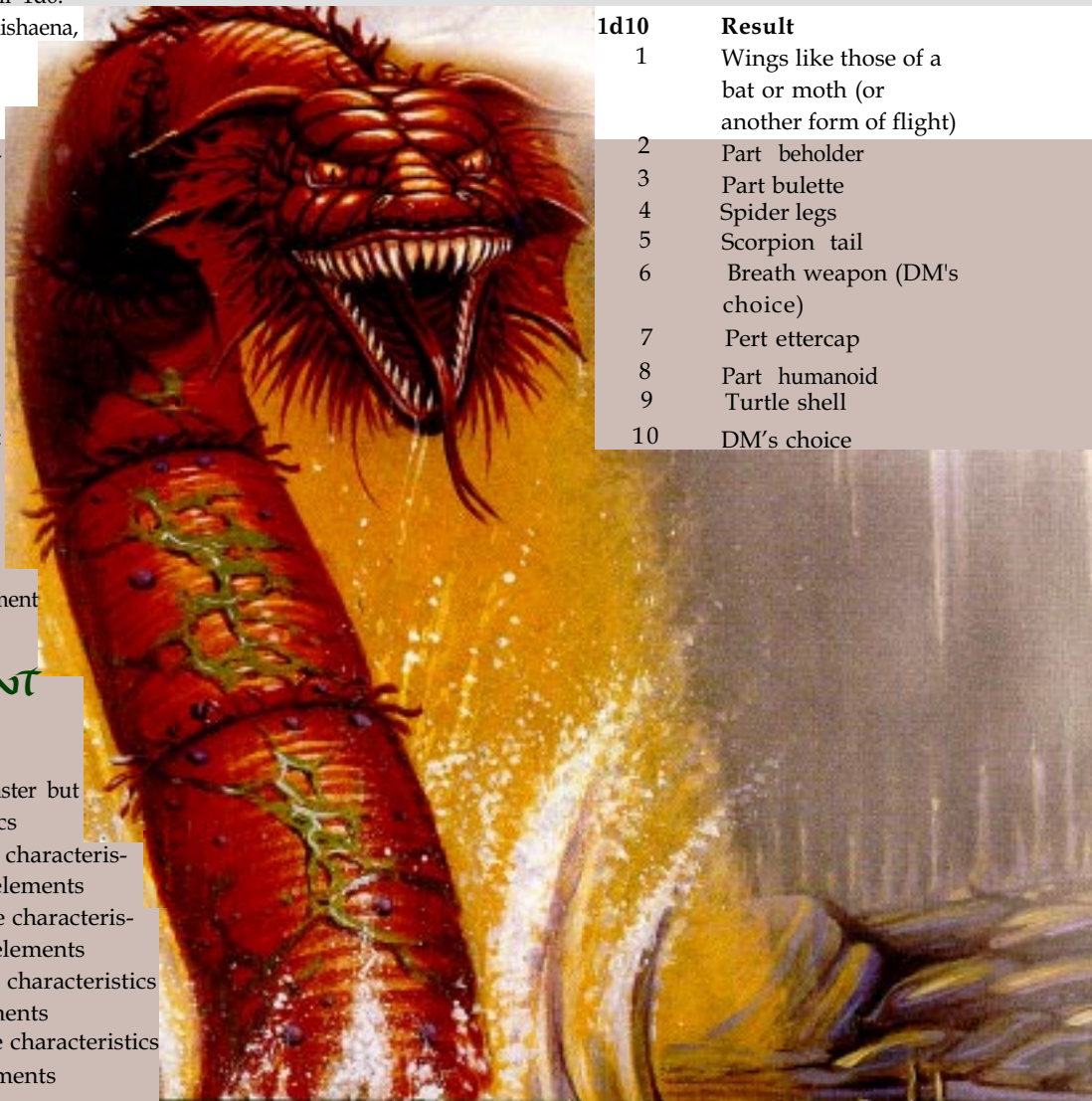
1d12	Result
1-2	Looks like a normal monster but has altered characteristics
3-6	Roll once for serpentine characteristics and once for other elements
7-9	Roll twice for serpentine characteristics and once for other elements
10-11	Roll once for serpentine characteristics and twice for other elements
12	Roll twice for serpentine characteristics and twice for other elements

## Serpentine Characteristics

1d10	Result
1	Long, sinuous body
2	Tongue is a snake (see the Monstrous Creations section of The Snake People chapter in the booklet on the Serpent Hills)
3	Poisonous fangs
4	Snake tail
5	Scales and snakelike markings (roll 1d6: 1-2=diamond pattern, 3-4=stripes, 5-6=splotches of dark color)
6	Forked tongue and slitted eyes
7	Snake head
8	Can retract limbs and slither like a snake
9	Writhing, snakelike hair
10	DM's choice

## Other Elements

1d10	Result
1	Wings like those of a bat or moth (or another form of flight)
2	Part beholder
3	Part bulette
4	Spider legs
5	Scorpion tail
6	Breath weapon (DM's choice)
7	Pert ettercap
8	Part humanoid
9	Turtle shell
10	DM's choice







# Elminster's Ecologies

Appendix II

## The High Moor The Serpent Hills

by Tim Beach

An excerpt from *A Treatise on the Life of the High Moor* by the druid Bara:

*The environment includes such things as terrain, flora, fauna, weather, and natural and arcane forces. All these elements—each aspect of the environment and each organism—form a tapestry known as the ecology. And like a tapestry of cloth, this one can suffer severe damage if a single thread is removed, no matter how ugly the thread.*

This appendix includes two booklets penned by friends of Elminster of Shadowdale. Collected here are:

- a 32-page booklet containing the words of the inimitable Bara, feisty druid of the High Moor, describing the ecology of that region;
- a 32-page booklet by the Lark of Suzail that gives her descriptions of the slithering inhabitants of the Serpent Hills; and
- a brief booklet of tables to aid the Dungeon Master in determining random encounters for adventurers whose travels take them through these areas.

Those planning to explore these regions would be well advised to read the works herein to prepare themselves for the reptilian dangers of the Serpent Hills and the hazards of the High Moor—from its beasts to its protective druid herself!

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