

Fritz Leiber's
Lankhmar



NEHWON

NEW YORK & MASSACHUSETTS
RuneQuest
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

The logo for Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar is a large, intricate, black and white illustration. It features the name 'Fritz Leiber's' in a smaller, stylized font at the top, and 'Lankhmar' in a much larger, highly decorative, gothic-style font below it. The letters are filled with complex, interlocking patterns and designs. The entire logo is set against a background of a dark, textured surface, possibly a stone wall or a piece of parchment, with some hanging objects like a skull and bones visible in the upper right corner.

NEHWON

Credits

Author Aaron Dembski-Bowden	Interior Illustrations Nathan Furman, Len O'Grady
Editor Nick Robinson	Publications Manager Ian Belcher
Cover Art Nathan Furman	Production Director Alexander Fennell
Lankhmar Logo Iordanis Lazaridis	Proofreading Scribendi
Runequest Logo Anne Stokes	Playtesters Mark Billanie, Jason Denton, Daniel Haslam, Mark Howe, Thomas Howe, Alan Moore, Michael J Young

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NEHWON

Lankhmar was the base of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser's many adventures. It was where they found adventure on their doorstep more often than not and tangled with the high and mighty and the dread and dark within the Imperishable City. The City of the Black Toga is where their legends were truly born and grew with the telling. It was, until their eventual retirement on near-mythical Rime Isle, very much their real home.

Yet while it was the location for many of their deeds and adventures, Lankhmar was only the foundation of others. In this respect, Lankhmar was their home and haven, their base of operations for all the journeys across Nehwon. Fritz Leiber told in the *Swords* tales not only the stories of Lankhmar, but of an entire world. It was this world that Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser explored with gusto. They may have always returned to Lankhmar but they were never afraid to leave it in search of something new, exciting, potentially dangerous and likely profitable.

Nehwon contains the expanded details on the world, adding to the information presented in the main book, which primarily dealt with the City of the Black Toga and the possible adventures therein. It is part appendix to that first tome and part expansion. Ilthmar, with all its filth and poverty; Quarmall, with all its dark and hidden sorceries; the northlands, where the temperature falls with each step north – these realms are revealed in greater detail between the covers of this book, combined with the first part in a multi-scenario adventure that takes characters from Lankhmar across Nehwon and back again.

Fans of the source material will be aware that much of Leiber's writing style focuses on the moment and the characters themselves, rather than extensive details about the places the characters visit. His flair for the visual and the immediate is part of what makes his writing so enjoyable, after all. However, it does mean that certain regions of Nehwon, such as 'fabled' Horborixen or 'exotic' Tisinilit remain shrouded in doubt and mystery.

Rather than generate entire cultures from scratch and stray from the source material, *Nehwon* instead focuses on the realms that did see a degree of discussion in the *Swords* stories and can be speculated upon without risking a break from the author's grand vision. Where the

text of this book speaks of the possible structure of the Ilthmarish underworld or the applications of Quarmallian necromancy, it does so based on what information was provided in Leiber's masterwork. Ultimately, the parts of the following pages that remain speculative do so with an eye for options: where one idea is possible, others are suggested for Games Masters that envision Nehwon in a slightly different way.

Ilthmar, Quarmall, the Land of the Eight Cities, the Cold Waste and Rime Isle. These are the regions that are detailed beyond what information was presented in the *Lankhmar*. Each section offers a selection of possibilities regarding the lay of the land and the societies within, as well as a number of story hooks and adventure ideas for Games Masters.

Finally, taking up the latter half of the book is the scenario *Swords Across Nehwon*. This scenario is designed for characters to leave the walls of Lankhmar behind them and travel the length and breadth of the wider world in their quest for adventure. It is also designed to link directly into the forthcoming scenarios such as *Swords Against Sorcery*, serving as the first steps on a much longer path. A number of story hooks and plot devices that occur in the adventure here tie into later scenarios, allowing Games Masters to connect the tales in one epic campaign.

Alternatively, *Swords Across Nehwon* will work equally well on its own with no further support beyond the Games Masters' own imagination. It introduces the characters to those conniving and oft-bickering archimages Ningauble of the Seven Eyes and Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. It also takes characters from Lankhmar to Ilthmar, to Quarmall and across the Inner Sea to the Forest Land and finally up through the Cold Waste to a climactic battle in the howling snowstorms of the north.

Enemies both natural and supernatural plague the characters for their journeys, from roguish bandits collecting 'tolls' around Ilthmar to vengeance-driven tree-spirits in the Forest Land and undead possessed by dark forces in Quarmall – the characters will contend with a wide variety of the nuisances and foulest evils that populate Nehwon.

ILTHMAR

Ilthmar is a city in which even a minimally prudent man dare not sleep soused, while the endless repetitions of its rat-god, more powerful even than its shark-god, in sculptures, murals, and smaller décor (and in large, live rats silent in the shadows or a-dance in the alleys) make for a certain nervousness in newcomers after a few hours.

— The Wrong Branch

Ilthmar is not Lankhmar. Whereas the Imperishable City is by turns decadent and populated by thieves, murderers, sell-swords and deceivers, the citizenry is balanced (or at least, filled out) by hard-working labourers, cultish priests of a hundred gods and the most powerful merchant league in the world. When Lankhmar is described as decadent and grand, it is because the great city has the blue-blooded social elite and the vast wealth necessary to make the description stick. Ilthmar is not decadent, nor is it grand in any but the most ironic use of the word. Ilthmar is Lankhmar's filthy, penniless twin and decadence would actually be a step up for the place. Lankhmar is unarguably corrupt. For Ilthmar to be corrupt, it would mean there would have to have been a shred of goodness to be corrupted in the first place, which is arguable. It is a city not rife with corruption, but *saturated* with it.

There is a Nehwonian saying that *'most adventures have a tendency to begin in Lankhmar'* and this certainly bore true for Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser. There is a Nehwonian saying about Ilthmar, as well: it is where *'most adventures have a habit of ending.'* It is a dangerous place at the best of times, and times are rarely that good in Ilthmar. 'Adventures ending' speaks of death and treachery, not pleasant retirement.

It is Ilthmar, not the City of the Black Toga, which stands as the hub-city of the world. Ilthmar is north of exotic Horborixen and the great Nile-like River Tilth which

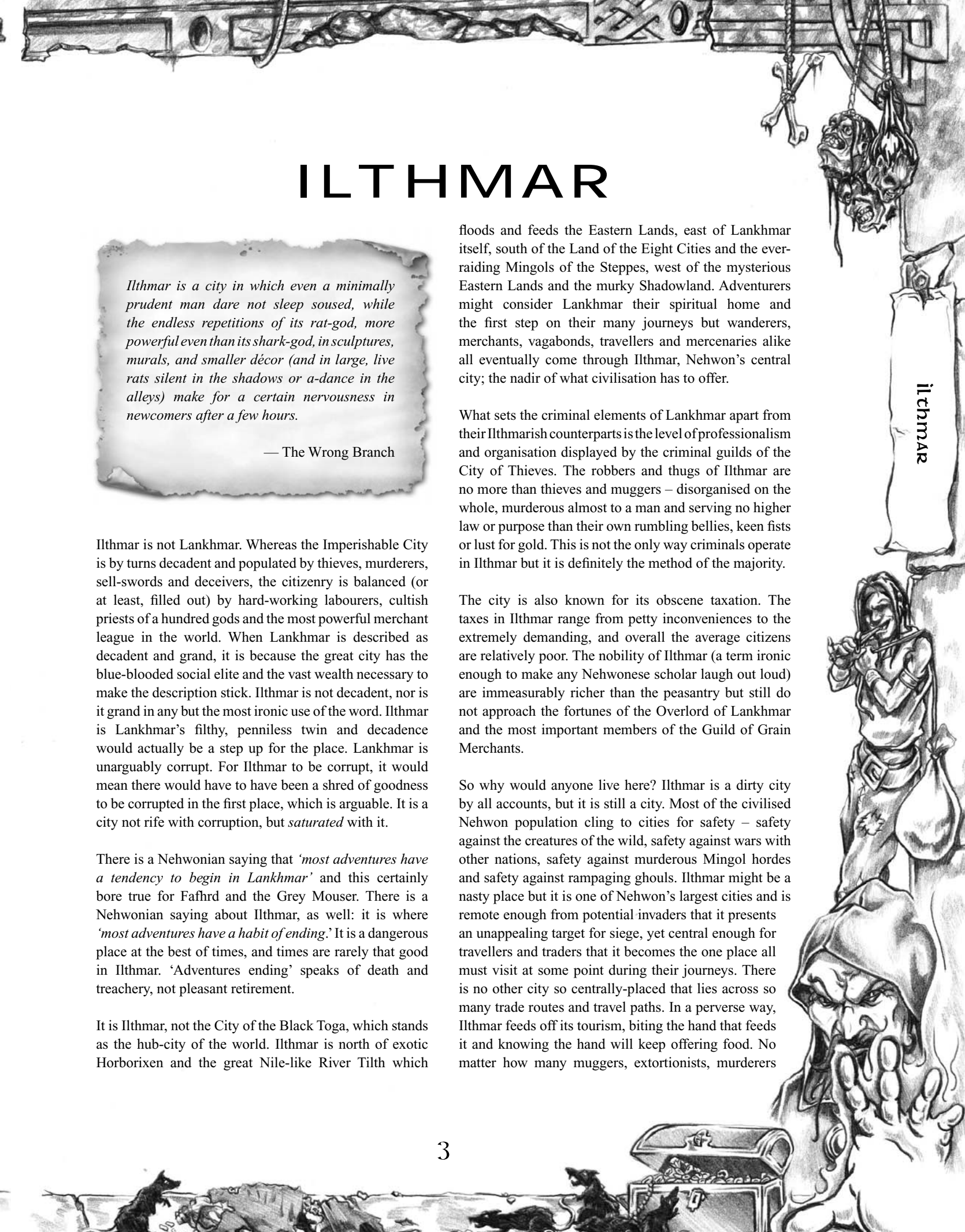
floods and feeds the Eastern Lands, east of Lankhmar itself, south of the Land of the Eight Cities and the ever-raiding Mingols of the Steppes, west of the mysterious Eastern Lands and the murky Shadowland. Adventurers might consider Lankhmar their spiritual home and the first step on their many journeys but wanderers, merchants, vagabonds, travellers and mercenaries alike all eventually come through Ilthmar, Nehwon's central city; the nadir of what civilisation has to offer.

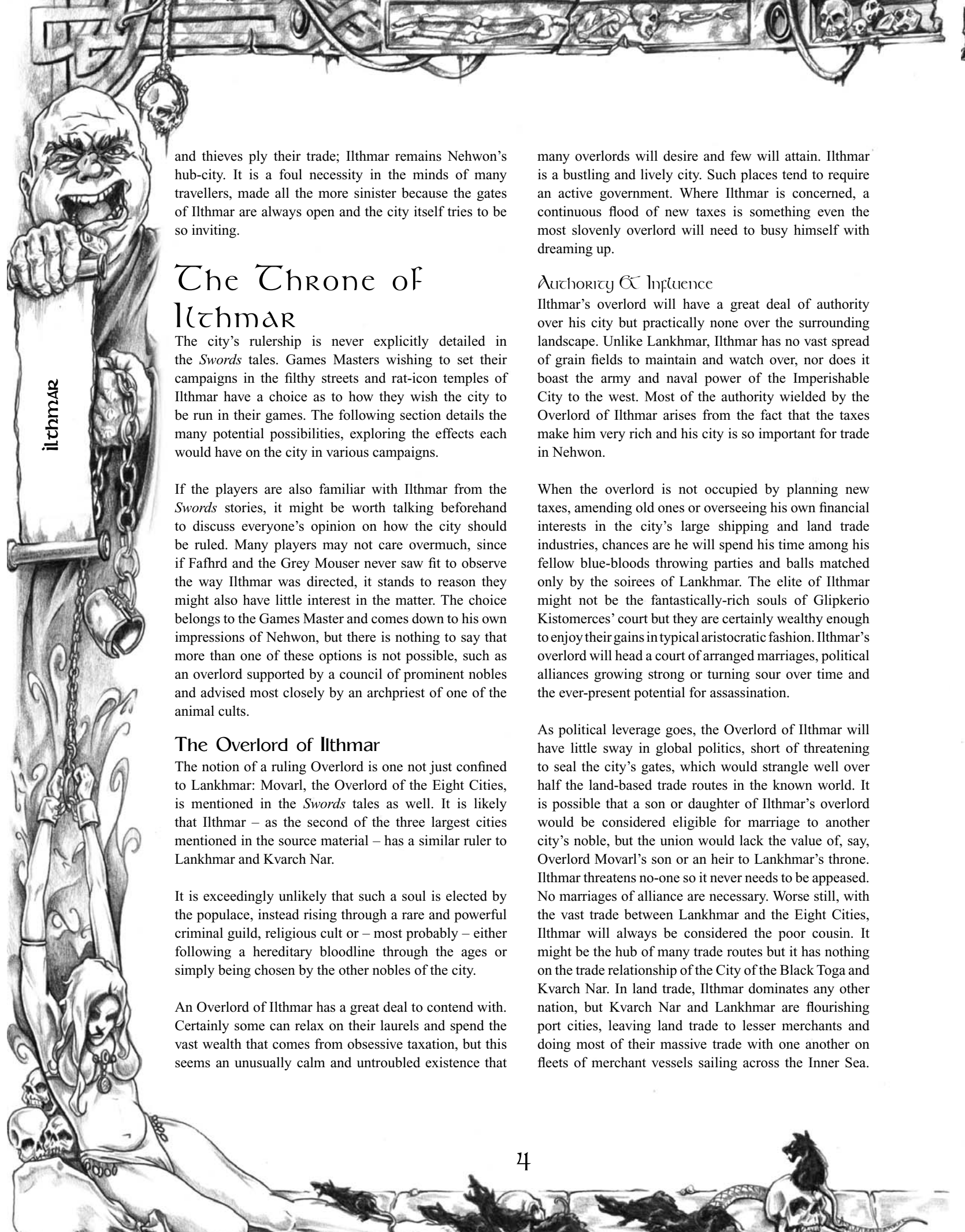
What sets the criminal elements of Lankhmar apart from their Ilthmarish counterparts is the level of professionalism and organisation displayed by the criminal guilds of the City of Thieves. The robbers and thugs of Ilthmar are no more than thieves and muggers – disorganised on the whole, murderous almost to a man and serving no higher law or purpose than their own rumbling bellies, keen fists or lust for gold. This is not the only way criminals operate in Ilthmar but it is definitely the method of the majority.

The city is also known for its obscene taxation. The taxes in Ilthmar range from petty inconveniences to the extremely demanding, and overall the average citizens are relatively poor. The nobility of Ilthmar (a term ironic enough to make any Nehwonese scholar laugh out loud) are immeasurably richer than the peasantry but still do not approach the fortunes of the Overlord of Lankhmar and the most important members of the Guild of Grain Merchants.

So why would anyone live here? Ilthmar is a dirty city by all accounts, but it is still a city. Most of the civilised Nehwon population cling to cities for safety – safety against the creatures of the wild, safety against wars with other nations, safety against murderous Mingol hordes and safety against rampaging ghouls. Ilthmar might be a nasty place but it is one of Nehwon's largest cities and is remote enough from potential invaders that it presents an unappealing target for siege, yet central enough for travellers and traders that it becomes the one place all must visit at some point during their journeys. There is no other city so centrally-placed that lies across so many trade routes and travel paths. In a perverse way, Ilthmar feeds off its tourism, biting the hand that feeds it and knowing the hand will keep offering food. No matter how many muggers, extortionists, murderers

ilthmar





and thieves ply their trade; Ilthmar remains Nehwon's hub-city. It is a foul necessity in the minds of many travellers, made all the more sinister because the gates of Ilthmar are always open and the city itself tries to be so inviting.

The Throne of Ilthmar

The city's rulership is never explicitly detailed in the *Swords* tales. Games Masters wishing to set their campaigns in the filthy streets and rat-icon temples of Ilthmar have a choice as to how they wish the city to be run in their games. The following section details the many potential possibilities, exploring the effects each would have on the city in various campaigns.

If the players are also familiar with Ilthmar from the *Swords* stories, it might be worth talking beforehand to discuss everyone's opinion on how the city should be ruled. Many players may not care overmuch, since if Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser never saw fit to observe the way Ilthmar was directed, it stands to reason they might also have little interest in the matter. The choice belongs to the Games Master and comes down to his own impressions of Nehwon, but there is nothing to say that more than one of these options is not possible, such as an overlord supported by a council of prominent nobles and advised most closely by an archpriest of one of the animal cults.

The Overlord of Ilthmar

The notion of a ruling Overlord is one not just confined to Lankhmar: Movarl, the Overlord of the Eight Cities, is mentioned in the *Swords* tales as well. It is likely that Ilthmar – as the second of the three largest cities mentioned in the source material – has a similar ruler to Lankhmar and Kvarch Nar.

It is exceedingly unlikely that such a soul is elected by the populace, instead rising through a rare and powerful criminal guild, religious cult or – most probably – either following a hereditary bloodline through the ages or simply being chosen by the other nobles of the city.

An Overlord of Ilthmar has a great deal to contend with. Certainly some can relax on their laurels and spend the vast wealth that comes from obsessive taxation, but this seems an unusually calm and untroubled existence that

many overlords will desire and few will attain. Ilthmar is a bustling and lively city. Such places tend to require an active government. Where Ilthmar is concerned, a continuous flood of new taxes is something even the most slovenly overlord will need to busy himself with dreaming up.

Authority & Influence

Ilthmar's overlord will have a great deal of authority over his city but practically none over the surrounding landscape. Unlike Lankhmar, Ilthmar has no vast spread of grain fields to maintain and watch over, nor does it boast the army and naval power of the Imperishable City to the west. Most of the authority wielded by the Overlord of Ilthmar arises from the fact that the taxes make him very rich and his city is so important for trade in Nehwon.

When the overlord is not occupied by planning new taxes, amending old ones or overseeing his own financial interests in the city's large shipping and land trade industries, chances are he will spend his time among his fellow blue-bloods throwing parties and balls matched only by the soirees of Lankhmar. The elite of Ilthmar might not be the fantastically-rich souls of Glipkerio Kistomerces' court but they are certainly wealthy enough to enjoy their gains in typical aristocratic fashion. Ilthmar's overlord will head a court of arranged marriages, political alliances growing strong or turning sour over time and the ever-present potential for assassination.

As political leverage goes, the Overlord of Ilthmar will have little sway in global politics, short of threatening to seal the city's gates, which would strangle well over half the land-based trade routes in the known world. It is possible that a son or daughter of Ilthmar's overlord would be considered eligible for marriage to another city's noble, but the union would lack the value of, say, Overlord Movarl's son or an heir to Lankhmar's throne. Ilthmar threatens no-one so it never needs to be appeased. No marriages of alliance are necessary. Worse still, with the vast trade between Lankhmar and the Eight Cities, Ilthmar will always be considered the poor cousin. It might be the hub of many trade routes but it has nothing on the trade relationship of the City of the Black Toga and Kvarch Nar. In land trade, Ilthmar dominates any other nation, but Kvarch Nar and Lankhmar are flourishing port cities, leaving land trade to lesser merchants and doing most of their massive trade with one another on fleets of merchant vessels sailing across the Inner Sea.

This reduces the eligibility of the marriageable members of Ilthmar's noble class by some degree, at least to outsiders.

Within Ilthmar's walls, the overlord's rule is absolute. While no ruler has yet cracked down on lawlessness, the taxations are enforced with rigid, ruthless intensity. It is likely that crime simply does not concern any but the most idealistic of Ilthmarish overlords. So as long as their own coffers remain full, the issue is not a problem for the upper classes. If the criminal elements of the city ever found a way to put a dent in the collected taxes, there would likely be blood on the streets. No overlord would take such a slight without seeking either justice or revenge and recompense.

The overlord does not possess the same large armies under his command as the Overlord of Lankhmar. Instead, Ilthmar's ruler calls upon a significantly smaller royal guard, reinforced by the local soldiery (several hundred-strong) stationed in barracks.

The Ruling Council of Ilthmar

A related possibility would be for Ilthmar to have a council that oversees political decisions rather than a single overlord for the city. Games Masters with a penchant for political games will find this possibility offers the most leeway for scheming and plotting, with shifting alliances, broken promises and usurped council seats serving as the bulk of the campaign's storylines. With any number of councillors, each sharing the responsibility and largesse that would otherwise be enjoyed by a lone overlord, ambitious members will always try to get an edge over their colleagues. That means assassins will see a lot of employment, hired sell-swords will dispatch nobles in waylaying ambushes under the orders of aristocratic rivals and it will be extremely busy to spend time in the courts of Ilthmar. There is only so much money to go around and the efforts of the high and mighty to claim what they can will be redoubled.

With a council made up of nobles or merchants, the governing body of Ilthmar is likely to be deadlocked or divided on many issues, even the introduction of new taxes. Each aristocrat or trader prince will have his own agenda and interests, many of which are likely to be financial. Overall, Ilthmar's nobles will probably butt heads over matters of prestige and social station as well as trade issues, while merchants focus principally on matters of coin. Rivalry for respect and money (as well as

the allocation of the city's mass-taxes) will be cause for a great deal of infighting between the ruling class. With the exception of hired outsiders such as mercenaries, assassins and thieves, these are battles that the populace will rarely know anything about.

Just as Lankhmar's Guild of Grain Merchants holds a large measure of power in the city, Ilthmar's Wine Merchant's Guild will likely hold the same type of influence in their city. Games Masters who prefer the Ruling Council system should bear in mind that any body of powerful merchants and aristocrats will probably number a majority of wine merchants, grown rich on the trade of Ilthmar's many fine wines to other cities.

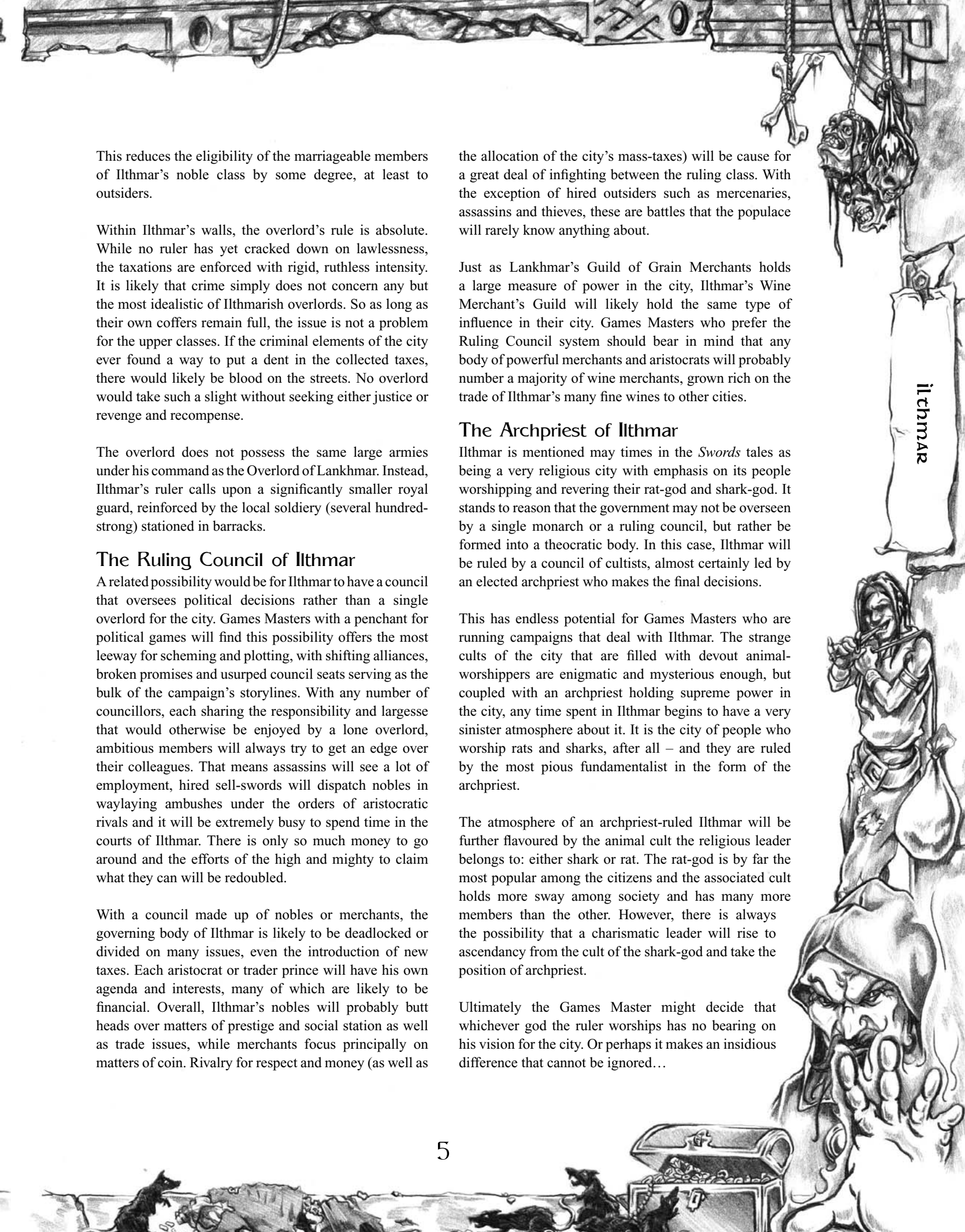
The Archpriest of Ilthmar

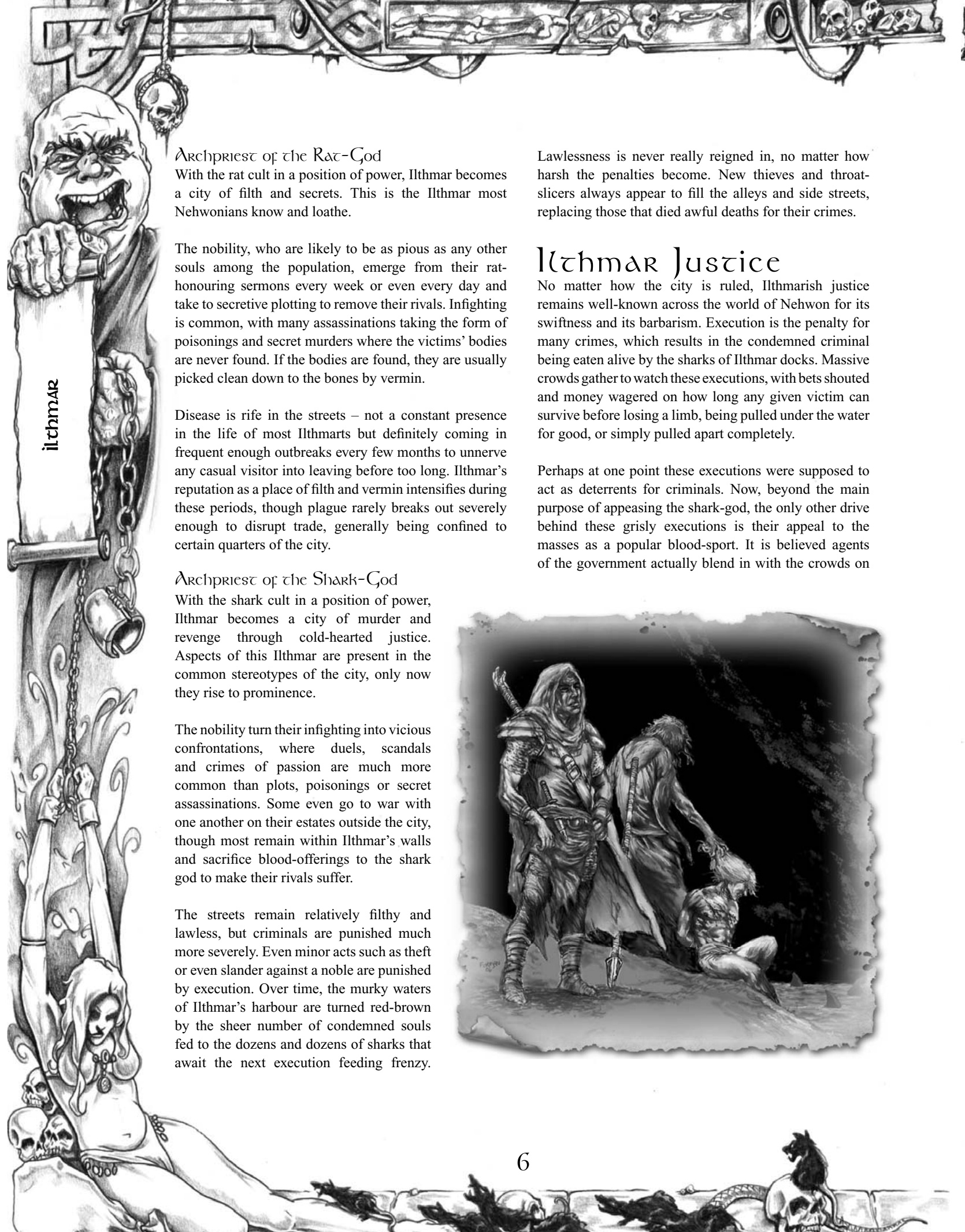
Ilthmar is mentioned many times in the *Swords* tales as being a very religious city with emphasis on its people worshipping and revering their rat-god and shark-god. It stands to reason that the government may not be overseen by a single monarch or a ruling council, but rather be formed into a theocratic body. In this case, Ilthmar will be ruled by a council of cultists, almost certainly led by an elected archpriest who makes the final decisions.

This has endless potential for Games Masters who are running campaigns that deal with Ilthmar. The strange cults of the city that are filled with devout animal-worshippers are enigmatic and mysterious enough, but coupled with an archpriest holding supreme power in the city, any time spent in Ilthmar begins to have a very sinister atmosphere about it. It is the city of people who worship rats and sharks, after all – and they are ruled by the most pious fundamentalist in the form of the archpriest.

The atmosphere of an archpriest-ruled Ilthmar will be further flavoured by the animal cult the religious leader belongs to: either shark or rat. The rat-god is by far the most popular among the citizens and the associated cult holds more sway among society and has many more members than the other. However, there is always the possibility that a charismatic leader will rise to ascendancy from the cult of the shark-god and take the position of archpriest.

Ultimately the Games Master might decide that whichever god the ruler worships has no bearing on his vision for the city. Or perhaps it makes an insidious difference that cannot be ignored...





ARCHPRIEST OF THE RAT-GOD

With the rat cult in a position of power, Ilthmar becomes a city of filth and secrets. This is the Ilthmar most Nehwonians know and loathe.

The nobility, who are likely to be as pious as any other souls among the population, emerge from their rat-honouring sermons every week or even every day and take to secretive plotting to remove their rivals. Infighting is common, with many assassinations taking the form of poisonings and secret murders where the victims' bodies are never found. If the bodies are found, they are usually picked clean down to the bones by vermin.

Disease is rife in the streets – not a constant presence in the life of most Ilthmars but definitely coming in frequent enough outbreaks every few months to unnerve any casual visitor into leaving before too long. Ilthmar's reputation as a place of filth and vermin intensifies during these periods, though plague rarely breaks out severely enough to disrupt trade, generally being confined to certain quarters of the city.

ARCHPRIEST OF THE SHARK-GOD

With the shark cult in a position of power, Ilthmar becomes a city of murder and revenge through cold-hearted justice. Aspects of this Ilthmar are present in the common stereotypes of the city, only now they rise to prominence.

The nobility turn their infighting into vicious confrontations, where duels, scandals and crimes of passion are much more common than plots, poisonings or secret assassinations. Some even go to war with one another on their estates outside the city, though most remain within Ilthmar's walls and sacrifice blood-offerings to the shark god to make their rivals suffer.

The streets remain relatively filthy and lawless, but criminals are punished much more severely. Even minor acts such as theft or even slander against a noble are punished by execution. Over time, the murky waters of Ilthmar's harbour are turned red-brown by the sheer number of condemned souls fed to the dozens and dozens of sharks that await the next execution feeding frenzy.

Lawlessness is never really reigned in, no matter how harsh the penalties become. New thieves and throat-slicers always appear to fill the alleys and side streets, replacing those that died awful deaths for their crimes.

Ilthmar Justice

No matter how the city is ruled, Ilthmarish justice remains well-known across the world of Nehwon for its swiftness and its barbarism. Execution is the penalty for many crimes, which results in the condemned criminal being eaten alive by the sharks of Ilthmar docks. Massive crowds gather to watch these executions, with bets shouted and money wagered on how long any given victim can survive before losing a limb, being pulled under the water for good, or simply pulled apart completely.

Perhaps at one point these executions were supposed to act as deterrents for criminals. Now, beyond the main purpose of appeasing the shark-god, the only other drive behind these grisly executions is their appeal to the masses as a popular blood-sport. It is believed agents of the government actually blend in with the crowds on



Ilthmarts are a somewhat heartless people and much given to gambling. Besides, they welcome sharks into their harbour, since it makes for an easy way of disposing of common criminals, robbed and drunken strangers and slaves grown senile or otherwise useless, and also assures that the shark-god's chosen victims will always be spectacularly received.

— The Wrong Branch

execution days, amassing money for the city leaders by betting with the masses and driving up the odds in order to make a profit.

A by-product of the shark host cutting through the cold waters of the harbour is the fact that any sailors or dockworkers that fall in by accident are likely to die. This also serves as a great amusement for the people lining the docks, who miss no opportunity to wager on the survival (or rather more commonly, the number of seconds before

death) of any unfortunate soul who falls into the water. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser experienced this nasty and vicious game themselves when arriving in Ilthmar on the collapsing *Black Treasurer*. They received no help at all, instead hearing the jeers and cheers of the people wagering on the dock while the two heroes fought for their lives against the harbour's ever-hungry predators.

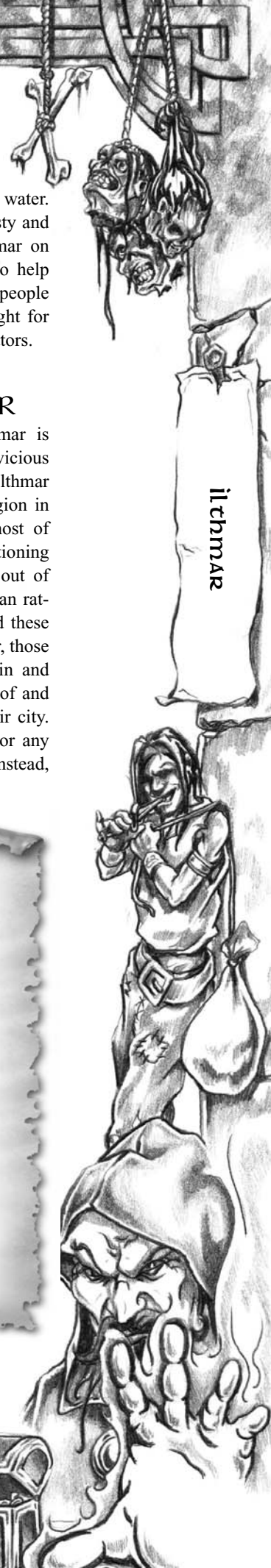
Religion in Ilthmar

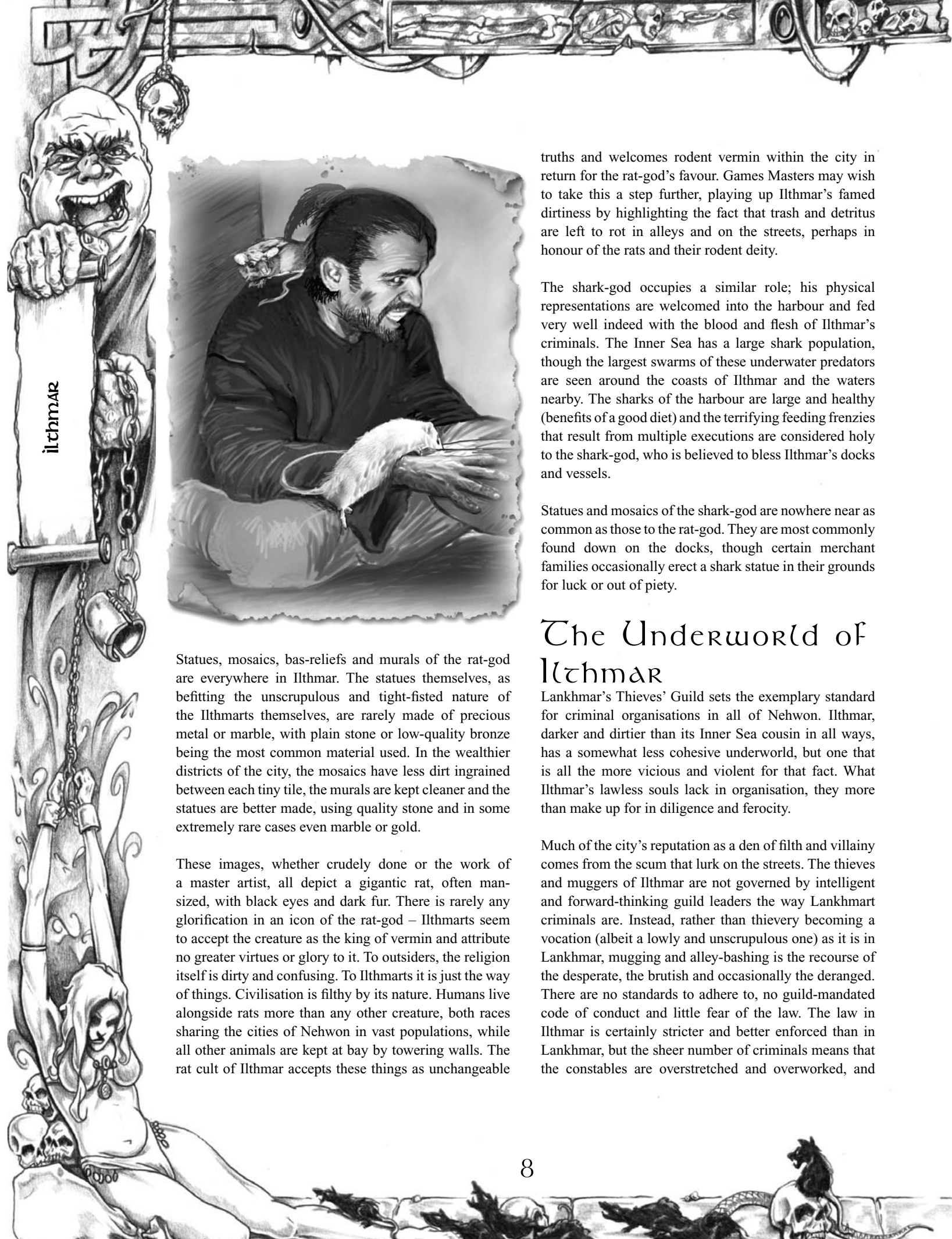
Religion is the third of the three things Ilthmar is renowned for, after the filth and the unnervingly vicious crime rate. As in many other respects, religion in Ilthmar comes across as a dirtier, darker version of religion in Lankmar. Where the Lankhmarts worship a host of saints and godlets on the Street of the Gods, auditioning and discovering new ones as older deities fall out of favour, Ilthmarts pay mass-worship to the inhuman rat- and shark-gods. The menace and eeriness behind these cults cannot be overstated. The Gods of Lankmar, those brown-boned mummies wrapped in leathery skin and scraps of ancient black togas, are rarely spoken of and worshipped even less often by the people of their city. Ilthmar seems to have no similar sense of fear or any shame regarding its faith in its own sinister gods. Instead, the city celebrates them.

Ilthmar's Atmosphere

Games Masters have a powerful tool for atmosphere when dealing with or describing the city's religions. Only in Ilthmar could several hundred people watch sharks turn the churning water red, feasting on live prisoners and each other when the frenzy reaches its height, and consider such a display holy. Displays of worship such as allowing rats to crawl around the floors of houses and feeding screaming criminals to sharks while hundreds of people cheer are effective ways to highlight just how different from Lankmar Ilthmar really is in matters of faith and social attitudes. The irony is that by most people's standards, Lankmar is bad enough. Ilthmar goes somewhat beyond the pale.

If Games Masters find in their campaigns that *players* find Ilthmar interesting but that their *characters* are edgy about remaining there for any length of time, it is likely that they are hitting the mood perfectly. Most travellers have to come through Ilthmar at some point but few do so with any joy at the prospect. The fervency of the inhuman religions can make it uncomfortable for almost anyone not raised in the region. Blood-sports exist elsewhere, but even the victims of the gladiatorial pits in Ool Hrusp get the chance to fight back against their fate, unlike those sacrificed to the sharks of Ilthmar. Even Lankmar's cobblestone slum-streets are swept clean by the owners of the stores and tenements who take care of the areas outside their doors. In Ilthmar, trash accumulates in the streets, often ground into the muddy roads by coastal rainfall. The only souls who feel no discomfort at spending time in Ilthmar are likely jaded to poverty, filth and suffering or inured because they were raised in similar conditions.





Ilthmar



Statues, mosaics, bas-reliefs and murals of the rat-god are everywhere in Ilthmar. The statues themselves, as befitting the unscrupulous and tight-fisted nature of the Ilthmarts themselves, are rarely made of precious metal or marble, with plain stone or low-quality bronze being the most common material used. In the wealthier districts of the city, the mosaics have less dirt ingrained between each tiny tile, the murals are kept cleaner and the statues are better made, using quality stone and in some extremely rare cases even marble or gold.

These images, whether crudely done or the work of a master artist, all depict a gigantic rat, often man-sized, with black eyes and dark fur. There is rarely any glorification in an icon of the rat-god – Ilthmarts seem to accept the creature as the king of vermin and attribute no greater virtues or glory to it. To outsiders, the religion itself is dirty and confusing. To Ilthmarts it is just the way of things. Civilisation is filthy by its nature. Humans live alongside rats more than any other creature, both races sharing the cities of Nehwon in vast populations, while all other animals are kept at bay by towering walls. The rat cult of Ilthmar accepts these things as unchangeable

truths and welcomes rodent vermin within the city in return for the rat-god's favour. Games Masters may wish to take this a step further, playing up Ilthmar's famed dirtiness by highlighting the fact that trash and detritus are left to rot in alleys and on the streets, perhaps in honour of the rats and their rodent deity.

The shark-god occupies a similar role; his physical representations are welcomed into the harbour and fed very well indeed with the blood and flesh of Ilthmar's criminals. The Inner Sea has a large shark population, though the largest swarms of these underwater predators are seen around the coasts of Ilthmar and the waters nearby. The sharks of the harbour are large and healthy (benefits of a good diet) and the terrifying feeding frenzies that result from multiple executions are considered holy to the shark-god, who is believed to bless Ilthmar's docks and vessels.

Statues and mosaics of the shark-god are nowhere near as common as those to the rat-god. They are most commonly found down on the docks, though certain merchant families occasionally erect a shark statue in their grounds for luck or out of piety.

The Underworld of Ilthmar

Lankhmar's Thieves' Guild sets the exemplary standard for criminal organisations in all of Nehwon. Ilthmar, darker and dirtier than its Inner Sea cousin in all ways, has a somewhat less cohesive underworld, but one that is all the more vicious and violent for that fact. What Ilthmar's lawless souls lack in organisation, they more than make up for in diligence and ferocity.

Much of the city's reputation as a den of filth and villainy comes from the scum that lurk on the streets. The thieves and muggers of Ilthmar are not governed by intelligent and forward-thinking guild leaders the way Lankhmar criminals are. Instead, rather than thievery becoming a vocation (albeit a lowly and unscrupulous one) as it is in Lankhmar, mugging and alley-bashing is the recourse of the desperate, the brutish and occasionally the deranged. There are no standards to adhere to, no guild-mandated code of conduct and little fear of the law. The law in Ilthmar is certainly stricter and better enforced than in Lankhmar, but the sheer number of criminals means that the constables are overstretched and overworked, and

the odds greatly favour the thieves. With no Thieves' Guild educating the unskilled or killing the unnecessarily brutish members of the trade, Ilthmar's streets are packed with people who clumsily slit throats for a living and earn their wage by taking coin-purses off corpses. Truly skilled thieves and murderers do exist, of course. It is just that the number of unskilled amateurs is something completely unseen in Lankhmar and other cities.

Games Masters can use this fact to scale their criminal antagonists according to the skills and competency of their Player Characters. The plain fact is that adventurers in Ilthmar *will* fall foul of criminals at some point, be they cutpurses or throat-cutters intent on stealing the characters' coin. The skill level of these antagonists is likely to vary wildly from one to the next, with one being a veteran of the streets who has made his living by pick-pocketing in taverns for over a decade, and another being an excitable amateur with a stolen sword and no guilt about ending lives with it.

Whether characters are dealing with experienced criminals or careless amateurs, the largest benefit to confronting Ilthmar thieves over Lankhmar thieves is that if the adventurers kill their assailants, there is no ever-watching Thieves' Guild ready to wreak revenge for the slaying. It also means that for characters who take to thievery themselves, there is no Master Thief needing to be paid off with kickbacks for the 'privilege' of working independently, nor is there a guild coffer to be filled with a percentage of each take.

Ilthmar offers a great deal of competition for thieves. It also offers unrivalled freedom.

The Thieves' Guild of Ilthmar

It does exist, of course. It just lacks anywhere near the power, political influence and social status of Lankhmar's Thieves' Guild. Games Masters have an open book where the Thieves' Guild is concerned, and are able to customise and shape it to meet the needs of their campaigns. The key factor in portraying the Ilthmar guild is to remember that its members do not get to act with the swagger or confidence of the thieves in the City of the Black Toga. The default assumption is that the guild of Ilthmar is almost swallowed in the press of freelance operators – thieves do not operate freely because the guild is weak; the guild is weak because there are so many thieves operating freely. For an organisation that depends upon most robbery taking place according to its designs, the

sheer number of thieves in Ilthmar makes it next to impossible to ever bring the guild into dominance. There are simply too many men, women and children within Ilthmar that turn to thievery to make a living. No one guild could ever mandate all their behaviour.

This leaves several possibilities for Games Masters to use as story hooks for their preferred interpretation of the Thieves' Guild.

The Rising Guild

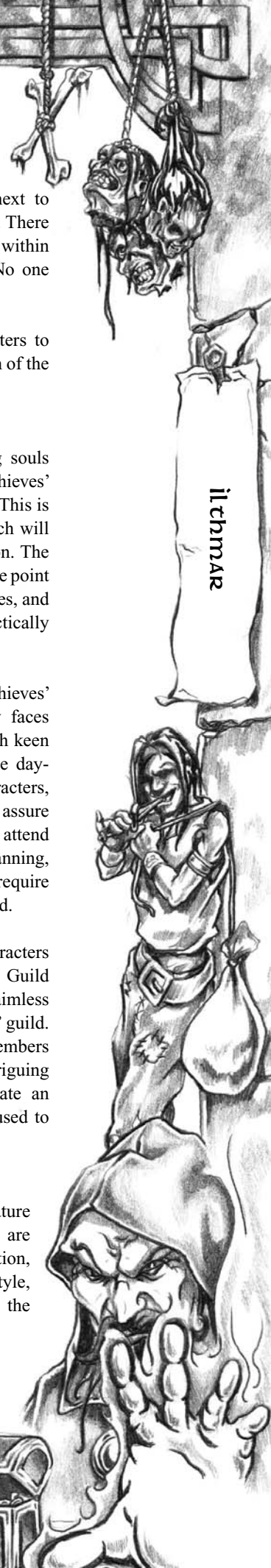
Players with criminal ambition and enterprising souls might take it upon themselves to form a new Thieves' Guild, which they would lead, direct and control. This is an epic undertaking to say the least and one which will take many sessions and story arcs to reach fruition. The advantages inherent in the idea are that getting to the point of fruition involves many adventures and challenges, and where Games Masters are concerned the plots practically write themselves.

Rival street gangs also seeking to become Thieves' Guilds, already-active guilds resenting the new faces on the scene, a harsh sheriff and a city watch with keen eyes for spotting lawbreakers – these will be the day-to-day and night-to-night antagonists of the characters, requiring bribes, threats or even killing in order to assure their silence. Added to these troubles is the need to attend to standard guild business; heists needing planning, robberies need undertaking and guild members require protection from other thieves and the Ilthmar guard.

An interesting option would be for experienced characters – longstanding members of Lankhmar's Thieves' Guild – to come to Ilthmar in the hopes of whipping the aimless curs and scum of the city into a more 'respectable' guild. The flow of information, profit and even guild members back and forth from Ilthmar can make for some intriguing adventures as the characters work hard to create an organisation that resembles the one they are so used to in Lankhmar.

Guild Wars

A reason for the scattered and disorganised nature of Ilthmar's underworld could be because there are actually two (or more) Thieves' Guilds in operation, each with their own customs and operating style, specialist agents, apprentices and claim to being the first guild in Ilthmar, the best, or both.





The street-war between the guilds can take unusual avenues that lead to new battlefields. Not everything will necessarily come down to which guild steals the most and manages to butcher the greatest number of opposing thieves. Contacts among mercenaries, the clergy, aristocrats, ship captains and rich merchants will all come into play, with cunning guild leaders exploiting their network of contacts in any way imaginable. Ship captains and merchants can be relied on to bring cheap slaves to use as expendable knife-wielders in back-alley fights where numbers count more than skill. Mercenaries and ship officers alike will be able to loan the use of trained fighters for confrontations with the opposing guild. Nobles, priests and ranking merchants might all be able to speak to judges in a character's defence, saving him from death in the jaws of sharks. Of course, any such assistance will depend on just what deals the characters cut with their contacts. If what they offer is dwarfed by what their rivals promise, all will be for naught.

The Weaker Cousin

The default assumption is that Ilthmar's Thieves' Guild exists and clings to some influence over the poorer parts of the city, but does not approach Lankhmar's organisation in terms of clout, membership or profit. In short, it is considered the 'weaker cousin.' It is likely that the guild was established close to the city's founding date, though it is not unreasonable to assume that an exiled Master Thief from Lankhmar set up this cousin guild in ancient times or an admirer of the organisation in the City of the Black Toga decided to try his hand at the same trade.

Joining the Thieves' Guild and working within its boundaries works exactly as it does in Lankhmar, though with the thematic loss of the Dead Master Thieves. Given the lack of mummified patron-gods in Ilthmar, this is a tradition the Ilthmarish guild will probably not share.

The customs of the Ilthmarish guild will obviously vary beyond the lack of the Dead Master Thieves. Perhaps the guild in Ilthmar has no prejudice against women and females are legitimate members alongside males. Perhaps the Thieves' Guild maintain close ties with the rat-god's priesthood, receiving the dubious blessing of Ilthmar's prime deity and occasionally working for the priests in stealing 'penance' property from impious nobles or merchants.

For details on the running and operation of the Lankhmar Thieves' Guild, see chapter two of the *Lankhmar*. Most of the core details will remain the same between the two, though it is unlikely that Ilthmarish thieves receive any bonuses to bribery given the harsh fate of criminals in the city.

The Curse

An intriguing possibility is that the Thieves' Guild of Ilthmar has never risen to the heights of its Lankhmarian counterpart because it is, in fact, cursed. A god's curse is unlikely to hinder the efforts of an entire organisation – and what would the rat-god care if humans steal the possessions of other humans anyway? No, if the guild is cursed then it is almost certainly the actions of a sorcerer, perhaps through spellwork inflicted on the guild centuries ago or even thousands of years ago at its founding.

The obvious reason *why* the guild would be cursed in this manner is because the thieves of times past targeted the wrong mark and made the foolish mistake of preying upon a sorcerer's belongings – perhaps some magical artefact that even now resides in the cellar of the guild headquarters. There may well be other reasons but this is by far the likeliest.

If the Games Master wishes to go with the notion of the guild labouring under a curse, some minor penalty for all members is in order, to represent the dark magic still holding sway after all these years. Having characters suffer a -20% penalty on all Stealth, Perception and Sleight tests would be a fair representation, or perhaps guild members may not use Hero Points for Second Chance rolls when on guild business. Either way, the penalty should not be life-threatening, merely inconvenient and generally troublesome. It needs to hinder the growth and success of the guild, not crush it completely.

There should also be the possibility, however slight, of the characters somehow lifting the curse, be it by returning the artefact to a crypt in Lankhmar, the burial site of a Mingol shaman in the Great Steppes, a family sepulchre in the City of the Ghouls or something equally adventurous and mystical. These would be the kind of deeds that cap off a campaign in royal style. If players lack the wherewithal to suss out the solution themselves, perhaps a consultation with Ningauble of the Seven Eyes will enlighten them further. He is sure to help them out, provided they agree to fall further into his debt.

The Monopoly

A final variant on the Thieves' Guild is that it is not weak, disorganised or minor in membership at all. In fact, it outdoes the Lankmar guild in every important way, controlling the streets and the underworld of Ilthmar with near-perfection. In this instance, the guild is not the largest player in the underworld as it is in the great city across the Sinking Land – in Ilthmar, the guild *is* the underworld.

Given the number of criminals that feed the harbour sharks, it can be a stretch to believe any guild could reach such prominence and not have its member regularly fall victim to the sheriff's men. It is likely that the Ilthmar guild has the expendable souls necessary to keep the shark-god's children happy and still maintain effective leadership – sacrificing the nobodies and remaining dry-eyed when the lowest apprentices yet again feed the sharks. Maybe they even arrange for the failing students to fall foul of the law, throwing their own weakest members into the jaws of the harbour beasts.

A prime target for the Thieves' Guild will be quality wine, which they can smuggle to other cities and sell at low rates to savagely undercut the legitimate Ilthmarish merchants. Such a scenario might weaken the sway of the Wine Merchant's Guild, depending on how ruthless and successful the Thieves' Guild is. The two factions may even engage in a clandestine war, where bashers and assassins seek out members of the opposing organisation in the hopes of ending the feud by killing prominent leaders and lieutenants. Characters with a talent for stealth and violence could make a fortune working for one group or the other, perhaps even playing them against each other to generate more employment.

The Hospitality of Taverns

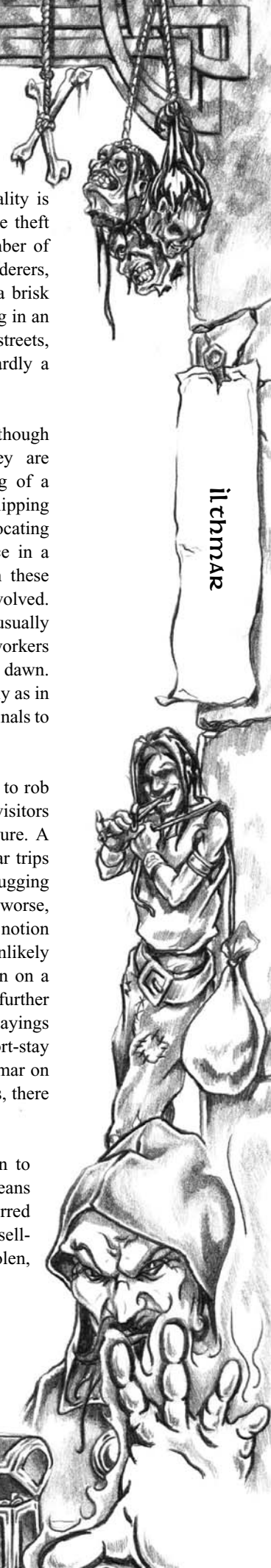
Ilthmarish wine is noted for its quality, coming in various tastes and textures from light to bubbly to fruitful and all fetching great profits when exported to taverns and the tables of noble families in other cities. In Ilthmar, the vigorous wine trade means that even gutter-taverns and dockside inns usually have excellent wine selections – and the drinking establishments in the richer areas of the city offer wine fit for the Overlord of Lankmar and the King of Kings in distant Horborixen.

It is a stark paradox then that wine of such quality is quaffed by the patrons of Ilthmar's taverns, since theft does not only occur on the streets. A large number of Ilthmar's many taverns and travel-inns cater to wanderers, adventurers and merchant caravans and also do a brisk trade in robbing the unwary of their coin. Sleeping in an inn is safer by far than spending a night on the streets, though depending on the establishment, it is hardly a guarantee of honest clientele and a restful night.

Night-murders are not common in Ilthmar inns, though they happen with enough frequency that they are gossiped about often enough and are something of a legend to many visitors. Tales told of landlords slipping poison or sleeping draughts into nightcaps or suffocating sleepers with a pillow do the rounds every once in a while. Sometimes the tales are bloodier and in these cases, the city watch have been known to get involved. In cases of innocence, murderous tavern staff are usually fine. In instances of guilt, the landlord and any workers in on the scheme are likely to feed the sharks at dawn. Bribery does not always work as easily or smoothly as in Lankmar – Ilthmar needs a steady supply of criminals to appease the shark-god, after all.

Most landlords that stoop to such tactics in order to rob their customers are careful to choose the kind of visitors that are unlikely to return to the city in the future. A merchant with a fat coin-purse who makes regular trips through Ilthmar might make a good target for mugging by street thugs but to rob him while he sleeps (or worse, kill him and take the money) is a less desirable notion for most tavern landlords. The rich victim is unlikely to return to a tavern where his money was stolen on a previous journey, and if he is slain there will be no further journeys at all. When choosing victims for night-slayings or room-robbings, landlords tend to focus on short-stay customers who are simply travelling through Ilthmar on the road to elsewhere. That way, if the victim dies, there is little loss of any potential future trade.

The majority of short-stay customers moving on to other things are, of course, adventurers. That means Player Characters fall right in the range of preferred targets for this kind of crime. If vagabonds and sell-swords turn up dead in their beds with their coin stolen, few Ilthmars will bat an eyelid.





The Black Shark



A faded sign, washed by years of wet coastal winds and rainstorms, swings in the breeze. The tavern is close enough to the docks for you to hear the sloshing of the filthy harbour water against the piers. Once you go inside, the raucous noise drowns out the outside world, immersing you in a dimly-lit atmosphere smelling of spilled wine. The tables are made from flat wooden boards resting on standing barrels and there are three dozen drinkers talking and shouting...and three dozen ill-concealed knives glinting in the torchlight.

The Black Shark (named after a legend of the shark-god's avatar swimming in Ilthmar harbour on midwinter night) is a perfect example of Ilthmar's dangerous dockside taverns. The decoration (what there is of it) takes the form of chunks of sunken ships taken from the harbour, old score sheets from betting on the executions and a portion of the wall much-nicked from knife-throwing contests.

On any given night, characters entering the Black Shark can expect to find a bustling crowd of sailors, thieves and pirates, many of whom will be betting on dice games or knife contests. Hustlers work the port area, known to the

locals but still finding work fleecing travellers out of their coin by pretending to be unskilled and suddenly raising their game when the big bets are laid down.

The bullies employed by the landlord are quick to use their fists and boots in a fight, but they only do so if the staff is threatened by any altercations that break out. Even murders are tolerated in the bar brawls that go on here, since a killing results in the body being dragged outside a short way and dumped into the harbour. Clever characters might even use the tavern (or a similar ale house) as a means of literally getting away with murder, since the authorities simply never find out about the deaths that go on here.

Where other establishments might fret about the destruction of furniture, since most of the tables and chairs are scavenged with driftwood from the docks and slapped together with a few nails, the landlord sheds no tears over any wreckage resulting from a fight. In fact, most customers with an eye for improvised weapons find The Black Shark a battlefield with plenty of possibilities.

The Rampant Buck

The tavern's large glassless windows stream yellow light into the street, coupled with the sounds of drinking, talking, and general good cheer. The sign above the door shows a rearing stag, proudly-antlered, and the name of the establishment written in the wood in burned-in letters. Outside, a burly man with an iron-shod club hanging off his belt nods to you as you walk in. 'Welcome to the Buck,' he says with a slight nod of his head.

The Rampant Buck is one of Ilthmar's finer establishments, which means it boasts fine wines and criminals that behave themselves while inside. Order is enforced by the fact that the clientele tend towards the wealthier and more 'civilised' end of society, as well as half a dozen armed bouncers who are all veteran ex-mercenaries.

The prices are high for Ilthmar, but the wine really is of the best quality – many of the labels seen behind the bar here are also seen on the table of Glipkerio Kistomerces, Overlord of Lankhmar, as well as in the dining rooms of the Imperishable City's richest moneylenders and grain merchants.

The Rampant Buck is (perhaps surprisingly) not known for its snobbery. While it has a reputation for cleanliness

and order right along with its high prices and quality wine, it is a venue where anyone with the necessary coin is welcomed and served by pretty, slender serving girls who also double as courtesans in the private rooms upstairs. Many notables in the Wine Merchants' Guild drink coffee or light wine here while they discuss business.

Astorian's Light

The sounds of fighting are evident as soon as you come near the place. A sign, fallen from its perch and propped up against the front wall of the tavern, shows a brightly-painted star ringed by the words 'Astorian's Light' in smooth-lettered script. Inside, the heavenly name seems even less appropriate, with bare-knuckle fighting taking place in a sand-floored corner and a raucous, noisy bar filled with what look like fighting men of every stripe – slender dirksmen, towering axemen, scarred men who are likely retired soldiers and younger men, still really boys, who carry new weapons in unmarked scabbards. The majority of the clientele are somewhere in-between, scarred with experience and still close to their prime, whether shy of it by a few years, enjoying it currently or inching past it day by day.

The loftily-named Astorian's Light (named after the brightest star in the Nehwonian night skies) is in Ilthmar's expansive slums, which take up most of the city. The tavern is a well-known haunt for mercenaries and adventurers, popular for the entertainments on offer and because the landlord and his serving wenches have never appeared to have intentions on the lives of their customers. Accordingly, the only designs on their customers' coin-purses are legal in nature, encouraging the spending of ale money, betting on the fights going on in the sanded corner, or buying the favour of the bar maids for an evening.

Astorian's Light is rough. Brawls are very common because the wine is so cheap and tempers flare among fighting men whether they are drunk or not. Adventurers looking for a quiet inn (or even one with the usual amount of violence) should look elsewhere. Whenever a brawl starts out, the regulars are quick to shove the combatants into the sand-floored corner where they can fight it out and bets can be made on the outcome. The most common fights there are bare-knuckle battles, pre-arranged between combatants of the semi-professional, largely underground Ilthmar fist-boxing scene. Customers (as long as they have purchased at least one drink) are welcome to join in and have bouts free of charge.

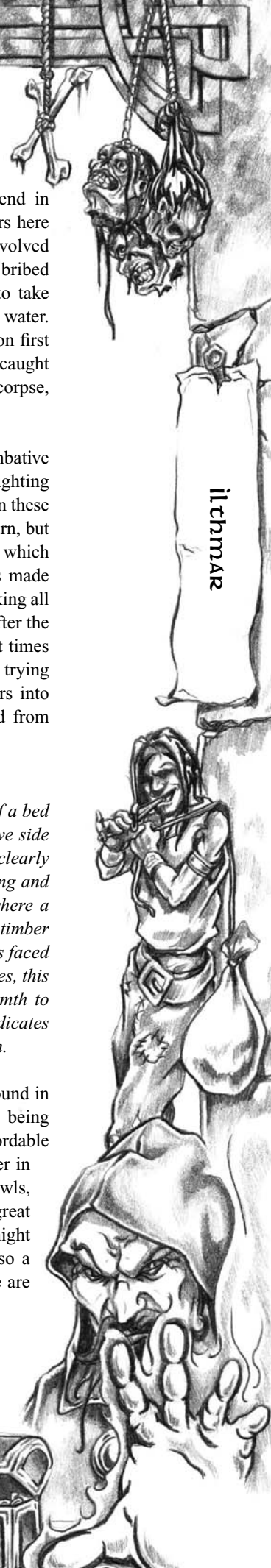
Very rarely, a fight will involve weapons and end in the death of a fighter. Since several of the regulars here are burly members of the city watch who are involved in the fist-fighting tournaments, they are easily bribed into silence by the landlord, who hires porters to take the bodies to the harbour and dump them in the water. The fees for this service are surprisingly high upon first consideration, though given the dangers of getting caught by the city guard in Ilthmar's streets carrying a corpse, the 'danger money' is a necessity.

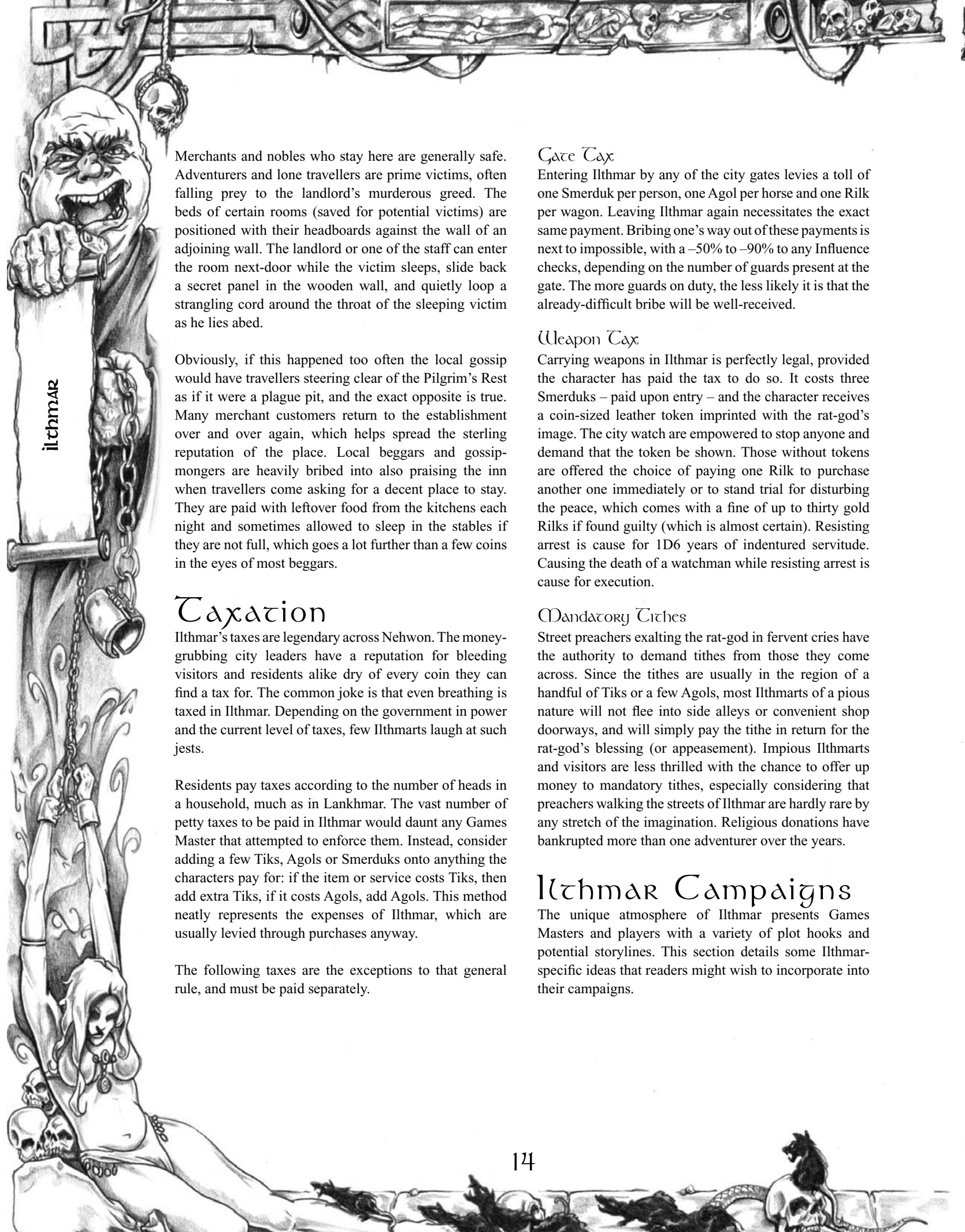
Games Masters may find that players of combative characters want to get involved with the fist-fighting tourneys that go on here. The rewards for success in these contests are far above what local labourers will earn, but the landlord takes a hefty 25% cut of the profits which he jokingly refers to as 'the fight tax.' Money is made betting on oneself to win, with the tavern owner taking all wagers and paying out honestly each time, right after the fight is finished. Fight fixing has been heard of at times in the past, though offenders that are discovered trying to arrange the results of matches or bribe fighters into taking falls are given severe beatings and barred from ever entering the tavern again.

The Pilgrim's Rest

The cracked sign shows a crude approximation of a bed with a white pillow and blue blanket. An expansive side alley reaches to a fenced-off yard around the back, clearly a place for storing coaches and wagons. Snickering and whinnying horses can be heard from the yard, where a large stable is kept. Double doors at the front of the timber and white-painted building are always open unless faced with the harshest gales. To all outward appearances, this five-storey inn seems to emanate welcoming warmth to any weary traveller, while the scent of good food indicates the handiwork of a skilled cook and a busy kitchen.

The Pilgrim's Rest represents the vicious irony found in many of Ilthmar's 'treacherous taverns.' Despite being a welcoming establishment with good ale, affordable wine of high quality and bullies that enforce order in all but the mildest and good-natured of bar brawls, the Pilgrim's Rest has a secret. It is not simply a great place for merchants to pull up their wagons for a night before selling stock the following day – it is also a murderous den where customers of a certain type are lucky to leave with their lives.





Merchants and nobles who stay here are generally safe. Adventurers and lone travellers are prime victims, often falling prey to the landlord's murderous greed. The beds of certain rooms (saved for potential victims) are positioned with their headboards against the wall of an adjoining wall. The landlord or one of the staff can enter the room next-door while the victim sleeps, slide back a secret panel in the wooden wall, and quietly loop a strangling cord around the throat of the sleeping victim as he lies abed.

Obviously, if this happened too often the local gossip would have travellers steering clear of the Pilgrim's Rest as if it were a plague pit, and the exact opposite is true. Many merchant customers return to the establishment over and over again, which helps spread the sterling reputation of the place. Local beggars and gossip-mongers are heavily bribed into also praising the inn when travellers come asking for a decent place to stay. They are paid with leftover food from the kitchens each night and sometimes allowed to sleep in the stables if they are not full, which goes a lot further than a few coins in the eyes of most beggars.

Taxation

Ilthmar's taxes are legendary across Nehwon. The money-grubbing city leaders have a reputation for bleeding visitors and residents alike dry of every coin they can find a tax for. The common joke is that even breathing is taxed in Ilthmar. Depending on the government in power and the current level of taxes, few Ilthmars laugh at such jests.

Residents pay taxes according to the number of heads in a household, much as in Lankmar. The vast number of petty taxes to be paid in Ilthmar would daunt any Games Master that attempted to enforce them. Instead, consider adding a few Tiks, Agols or Smerduks onto anything the characters pay for: if the item or service costs Tiks, then add extra Tiks, if it costs Agols, add Agols. This method neatly represents the expenses of Ilthmar, which are usually levied through purchases anyway.

The following taxes are the exceptions to that general rule, and must be paid separately.

Gate Tax

Entering Ilthmar by any of the city gates levies a toll of one Smerduk per person, one Agol per horse and one Rilk per wagon. Leaving Ilthmar again necessitates the exact same payment. Bribing one's way out of these payments is next to impossible, with a -50% to -90% to any Influence checks, depending on the number of guards present at the gate. The more guards on duty, the less likely it is that the already-difficult bribe will be well-received.

Weapon Tax

Carrying weapons in Ilthmar is perfectly legal, provided the character has paid the tax to do so. It costs three Smerduks - paid upon entry - and the character receives a coin-sized leather token imprinted with the rat-god's image. The city watch are empowered to stop anyone and demand that the token be shown. Those without tokens are offered the choice of paying one Rilk to purchase another one immediately or to stand trial for disturbing the peace, which comes with a fine of up to thirty gold Rilks if found guilty (which is almost certain). Resisting arrest is cause for 1D6 years of indentured servitude. Causing the death of a watchman while resisting arrest is cause for execution.

Mandatory Tithes

Street preachers exalting the rat-god in fervent cries have the authority to demand tithes from those they come across. Since the tithes are usually in the region of a handful of Tiks or a few Agols, most Ilthmars of a pious nature will not flee into side alleys or convenient shop doorways, and will simply pay the tithe in return for the rat-god's blessing (or appeasement). Impious Ilthmars and visitors are less thrilled with the chance to offer up money to mandatory tithes, especially considering that preachers walking the streets of Ilthmar are hardly rare by any stretch of the imagination. Religious donations have bankrupted more than one adventurer over the years.

Ilthmar Campaigns

The unique atmosphere of Ilthmar presents Games Masters and players with a variety of plot hooks and potential storylines. This section details some Ilthmar-specific ideas that readers might wish to incorporate into their campaigns.

The Septinocular One

Dwelling in caves near Ilthmar is the enigmatic sorcerer, the 'Gossiper of the Gods' himself: Ningauble of the Seven Eyes. If the characters have ties to Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble, it is much likelier that the paunchy warlock will be the one they deal with during their adventures in and around Ilthmar, purely because of his proximity to the filthy city. In the same way that Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser occasionally went to Sheelba because of his closeness to Lankhmar, Ningauble could serve as the first point of contact and sorcerous wisdom for Ilthmar-based players.

Son of the Overlord

One of the characters with the Aristocrat Cultural Background could be the child of the Overlord of Ilthmar and potentially an heir to the throne of the filthy city. Several characters might even share the same bloodline, each with a claim to the position of overlord. Ultimately the choice of heir will come down to the current monarch's preference or the electing council's decision. Either way, as rulerships go, there are more desirable thrones in Nehwon than Ilthmar's. Blue-blooded characters seeking to escape their responsibilities might find no more apt a place to flee from than the dirty city on the east shore of the Inner Sea.

Interesting events are likely to occur around the heir to the Ilthmarish throne. Firstly, the overlord might stop at nothing to have his son returned to face his duties like a responsible adult, leaving the 'adventuring' to the commoners of Nehwon. Hired agents dispatched to capture the wayward son might include professional soldiers and explorers, local thieves, bounty hunters or even a magician.

In Ilthmar, nobility is little protection against the dangers of the streets. Killing the overlord's son or daughter is something even the Thieves' Guild of Lankhmar cannot expect to get away with in the Imperishable City, but in Ilthmar life is notoriously cheaper and harder to keep hold of. A slit throat and a body dumped in the shark-infested

harbour leaves no evidence to tell any tales, and many of Ilthmar's resident scum would be all too happy to butcher the overlord's own children if it meant the corpses would be carrying a few more iron Tiks than the usual prey.

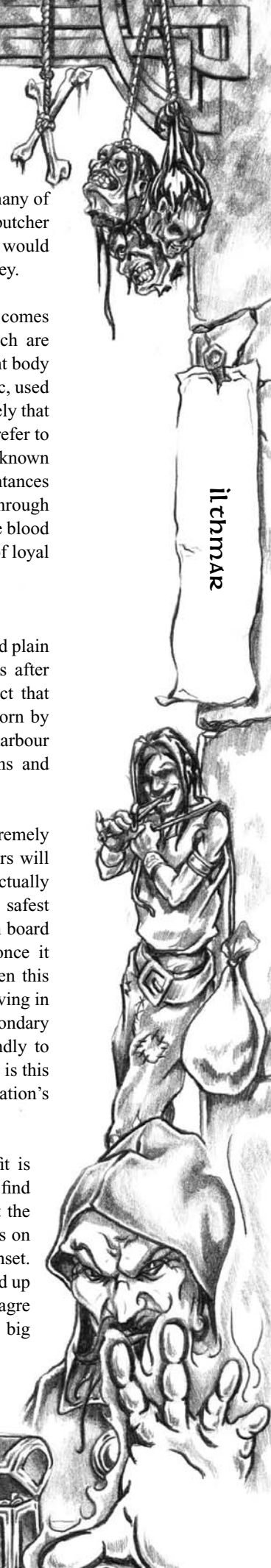
Escaping responsibility to the Ilthmar court comes with its own share of problems, not all of which are immediately obvious. Royal blood (or less pleasant body matter) also sometimes plays a part in Black Magic, used as one of many esoteric spell components. It is likely that any magician seeking such a commodity would prefer to hunt down the unprotected vagabond son who is known to frequent certain taverns and keep certain acquaintances in the city (who may be bribed), rather than go through all the effort of infiltrating a castle or palace to take blood from a king while he is surrounded by hundreds of loyal guards.

Belly Treasure

Given the number of ordinary sailors, travellers and plain clumsy, unlucky people that have lost their lives after falling into the dock water, coupled with the fact that sharks can and will eat anything carried by or worn by their human prey, it is almost certain many of the harbour beasts have undigested coins, jewellery, weapons and armour in their bellies.

Getting to this grim treasure is a risky but extremely rewarding prospect. Firstly, a group of adventurers will have to manage the physical challenges of actually capturing the sharks. Harpooning is probably the safest way to go about this, dragging the dying shark on board once it is impaled and slitting its belly open once it has been bled out or died gasping in the air. Even this relatively simple method, which certainly beats diving in and wrestling with the beasts, has an important secondary concern. Namely, the Ilthmarts will not take kindly to adventurers 'fishing' for sharks in their harbour. It is this kind of blasphemy that can really get a pious population's collective backs up.

As ever where lawlessness in the name of profit is concerned, inventive and cunning Nehwonians find away around such problems. Night-time down at the docks is significantly less busy, so if blasphemy is on the cards it is probably best to wait until after sunset. This is when the last of the fishing vessels have tied up and their owners are drinking away their meagre profits elsewhere in the city. This leaves only the big sailing ships like merchant vessels to deal with.





On one hand, most of the crew of these ships will be in port rather than on the vessel itself, and few lookouts and sentries will worry themselves about what is happening out in the harbour. Their eyes will be on the quayside, like as not. On the other hand, Ilthmar's port is a busy one at all times of day and night, even after nightfall when the fishing fleet is docked. It is all fine and good committing secret blasphemy against the shark-god and getting rich from the bellies of his dead beasts, but if a giant incoming merchant three-master smashes the characters' tiny sloop to pieces when it sails right through them into Ilthmar harbour, the scene will take an ironic turn for the worse. Any shark-hunting therefore necessitates a great deal of stealth and awareness. It is easy to see why so few adventurers would bother – the risks are pretty significant.

A final consideration that may well slip past all but the most spiritual of characters is that even if all incoming ships are avoided and the Ilthmars themselves are none the wiser about the shark-based religious desecration going on out on the night-time waters, blasphemy is still blasphemy. The shark-god himself (or rather *itself*) may take grave offence at such behaviour.

As detailed in the *Lankhmar*, the gods of Nehwon are not known for grand, bold curses against those who earn their displeasure. Something subtle yet undeniably cold-hearted and malicious is likely to be the shark-god's reaction to this kind of violation. Perhaps when one of the sharks is being cut open, it turns out not to be as dead as the characters believed, wrenching about and thrashing around just enough to bite off a nearby hand. Perhaps the rigging snaps under the feet of a character next time he climbs to adjust the sails and he falls into the harbour water. Perhaps he finds something he really did not want to find in one of those bloody, stinking bellies, like his lost wife's wedding ring or his father's dagger. Petty, spiteful (and frequently ironic) vengeance is the order of the day for Nehwonian deities and the shark-god is no exception.

Agents of the Throne

The characters may be in the position of working for the Ilthmar throne, whether this is a literal throne in the case of the Overlord or Archpriest, or a metaphor for any council system. Agents of the throne will likely be specialised in a certain area, most likely espionage, diplomacy or assassination. Spies are tasked with entering other cities and retrieving information that will be of value to

the Ilthmarish leadership. Diplomats are dispatched to other nations in order to strengthen relations and prevent hostilities. Assassins are used in areas where diplomacy has failed or greater advantage lies in treachery. Ilthmar has interests and needs in all these areas, so characters with the right skills may well be able to find employment and patronage.

A mercantile or aristocratic council will need spies to hit the streets as well as the courts of rival cities to gather local street-rumour as well as listen in on the talk of the well-born. The same council will need diplomats capable of bending the ears of powerful merchants and nobles in the name of furthering Ilthmarish profits on the Inner Sea, and assassins that have no difficulty entering noble estates, fighting their way or moving unseen through dozens of guards and striking the target down either in fury or in stealth, depending on the delicacy of the situation. Sometimes guile and perceived innocence matter. Other times, results are all that count.

A religious council or an archpriest likely wish for little more than the spread of the rat-god or shark-god's respective faiths, depending on the priests' allegiances. Characters of a more religious persuasion may find themselves sent to Lankhmar to improve the position of Ilthmar's rodent deity on the Street of the Gods. A tricky proposition because of the sheer unappealing nature of the god (when Lankhmar's godlings thrive by their charismatic preachers relating all godly deeds of interest) and the situation only becomes harder in the wake of the Rat Plague. Between fending off extortionists, fellow priests and preachers and dealing with suspicious Lankhmarites who are unreceptive to the very idea of a rat deity, a campaign revolving around getting Ilthmar's chief god anywhere westward on the Street of the Gods is an uphill siege.

Cultist Civil War

The two faiths generally ignore one another with cordial nonchalance. This need not always be so. Conflict between the shark- and rat-god's cultists would spread chaos and strife through Ilthmar. Neither side could generally be called humane or pleasant (at least not honestly or with a straight face) but depending on which side stoops lower, a clear 'lesser of two evils' may emerge. Sorcery and assassinations take place in the shadowy temples and murder is committed under the lifeless, staring eyes of shark and rat statues.



The rat cult, by far the more prominent and dominant of the two, might become the aggressor in this civil war if the shark faith takes a sudden rise, stealing worship from the rodent god. Likewise the shark cult could declare the secret war if the current leaders tire of the rat-god hoarding most of the respect and attention in Ilthmar. In truth, it is probably more likely if the conflict between the two faiths arises from conflicting personalities heading up both cults. Black Magic-wielding archpriests each holding personal grudges against each other can make for some thematic and frightening antagonists. Characters will have to decide which side to take, if they wish to get involved at all. It might not be possible to stay out of matters, especially if the spells and murders start to hit the night-time streets or the characters' lose a patron or contact in the secret war. The adventurers might even take the stance that *both* cults should be deprived of their malicious leaders, embarking on a quest of infiltration, investigation and ultimately assassination.

If the magical war reaches a dangerous degree of potency, it is likely that Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes will get involved, especially if the warlocks have previous associations with the characters.

The adventurers might even be loaned useful magic items like the Blindfold of True Seeing and the Cloak of Invisibility in order to get close to their targets.

As Sword & Sorcery stories go, hunting through an eerie temple, confronting a cult and killing the magic-wielding archpriest is about as thematic as Games Masters can get.

Seeds of Corruption

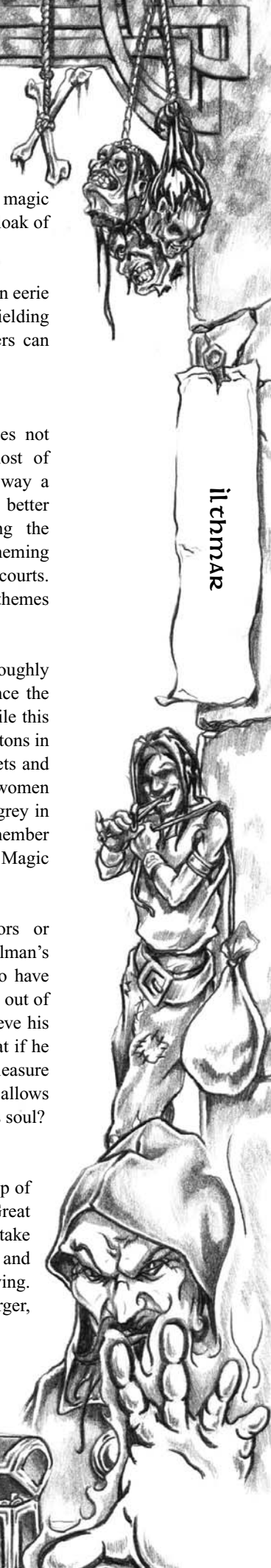
The idea of a Ruling or Merchant Council does not immediately present Games Masters with a host of thematic Sword & Sorcery possibilities in the way a tyrannical overlord might. Arguably, it would be better suited to campaigns geared towards exploring the political landscape, for players with a love of scheming and backstabbing their way through noble courts. However, there are always ways to return to the themes of the *Swords* tales.

The potential for immorality among the thoroughly corrupt upper classes is magnified in Ilthmar since the city itself has such a violent and black heart. While this means that most of the councillors will have skeletons in their closets (or wherever else they hide the secrets and the bodies) it also means that when these men and women fall into darker practises, they lose all shades of grey in their actions. A ruthless and ambitious council member might easily fall into learning the rituals of Black Magic in order to achieve advantages over his rivals.

Characters either working for rival councillors or merely stumbling onto the depths of the councilman's unwholesome ways are almost certainly going to have to put an end to such dark deeds before things get out of hand. If a man stoops to sorcery in order to achieve his own ends, there might be worse yet in store. What if he unleashes terrible magic on those that earn his displeasure in the future? What if his dabbling in the occult allows evil creatures or demons to gain influence over his soul?

The Old Faith Returns

Faiths change over time. In Lankhmar, the worship of ancient gods was banned centuries ago by the Great God, and newer faiths alter with each step they take west on the Street of the Gods, with new deeds and new ideals surfacing to maintain a popular following. Ilthmar might not be so different from its larger, grander Inner Sea cousin.





Worship of the rat-god has been the official faith of Ilthmar since time out of mind but what if the form the religion exists in now hardly resembles that which has come before? What if exponents of the 'old ways' came forward and decree that all Ilthmarts must return to the forgotten methods of worship?

There could be the possibility for the players to uncover that the so-called 'traditional' faith was actually a sham and its preachers were either sorcerers with some kind of evil agenda, harmless priests believing they had fallen upon an ancient truth, or con artists out to corrupt as many people as possible while growing rich and fat on the proceeds.

It might be much worse if the new preachers are actually telling the truth. Their claims to have uncovered a pure strain of the faith which demands that the city become filthier and pay blood-price to the rat-god in unholy, unhealthy rites is, to put it glibly, the very last thing Ilthmar needs. It is already a city where the inhabitants dump slop buckets in the streets and rats outnumber the people not in secret but in plain sight on the streets and the floors of many houses. Disease is never far from Ilthmar's doors and this conversion back to a darker time (which was probably best left untouched and was forgotten for a good reason) could be all that is needed to pitch the city into a full plague.

Characters might discover that the resurfaced cult bears a resemblance to the Temple of the Hates in Lankhmar – a secret order dedicated to bringing about lesser suffering in order to avert greater suffering. Perhaps the diseases that spring up in the wake of the unwholesome rites are actually designed to appease the rat-god and prevent future plagues that would devastate the city. Of course, any preacher who makes that claim is going to have a hard time convincing some people, but this *is* a city where the populace worship the god of rats – and the new belief is not a million miles away from what they might easily believe. Of course this will happen much to the amazement of outsiders who, it must at least be noted, have their own beliefs that seem odd to the Ilthmarts; take the Street of the Gods as an example of odd religious practices.

Ilthmar Below

Given the controversial aspects of Lankhmar Below with its civilisation of sentient rats and rat-sized people, many Games Masters may wish to axe all mention of a similar culture beneath the muddy streets of Ilthmar. It is an idea that polarises many fans of the *Swords* tales, with like and dislike running strong on both sides. Accordingly, Games Masters should be wary of including it within their campaigns set in Ilthmar because even though it seems likely that a companion 'under-city' would be found in the city of the rat-god, it is never explicitly mentioned in the source material.

The leaders of the rat city, the Supreme Thirteen (at least, those that survived the Rat Plague) generally dwell in Lankhmar Below but nothing says they cannot relocate to Ilthmar at least temporarily. Even one of the of rat-rulers might be enough to lord it over the rodent culture under Ilthmar, though the sheer number of his subjects would be staggering, putting the Rat Plague in Lankhmar to shame. This is the key to running a campaign where the rats come to the surface of Ilthmar as they did in Lankhmar: the size of the rat horde here would make the Rat Plague detailed in *The Swords of Lankhmar* look like a joyous, citywide celebration. A rodent uprising in Ilthmar would flood the streets and floors of buildings with endless carpets of dirty, filthy rats.

Any such invasion occurring in Ilthmar raises a worrying question: why? This is a city that devotes a great deal of time and worship to the veneration of the rat-god. What could displease the deity so much that his children swarm the streets? Some sinful acts of the clergy? Impious leaders reigning in power?

And how would the uprising be quelled? Ilthmar has no bell-towered Black Temple of the Gods of Lankhmar to turn to for supernatural aid, and canonically-speaking the whistle to summon the War-Cats is (or was) in the possession of Fafhrd. Games Masters might wish to challenge players to find their own ways of putting down the invasion, which could well make for an interesting campaign. However, some sorcerous aid should be forthcoming, most likely in the form of a black magician in the rat-god's cult or the ever-meddling Ningauble of the Seven Eyes.

QUARMALL

Outside the mount of Quarmall the sun was past meridian and shadows began to grow. The great white oxen threw their weight against the yoke. It was not the first time nor would it be the last, they knew. Each month as they approached this mucky stretch of road the master whipped and slashed them frantically, attempting to goad them into a speed which they, by nature, were unable to attain. Straining until the harness creaked, they obliged as best they could: for they knew that when this spot was passed the master would reward them with a bit of salt, a rough caress, and a brief respite from work. It was unfortunate that this particular piece of road stayed mucky long after the rains had ceased, almost from one season to the next. Unfortunate that it took a longer time to pass.

Their master had reason to lash them so. This spot was believed accursed among his people. From this curved eminence the towers of Quarmall could be spied on, and more important these towers looked down upon the road, even as one looking up could see them. It was not healthy to look on the towers of Quarmall, or to be looked upon by them. There was sufficient reason for this feeling. The master of the oxen spat surreptitiously, made an obvious gesture with his fingers and glanced fearfully over his shoulder at the sky-thrusting lacy-topped towers as the last mudhole was traversed. Even in this fleeting glance he caught the glimpse of a flash, a brilliant scintillation, from the tallest keep. Shuddering, he leaped into the welcome covert of the trees and thanked the gods he worshipped for his escape

— The Lords of Quarmall.

Quarmall is a subterranean kingdom to the south-west of the city of Lankhmar. It was once a great Empire though now it has fallen to a mere ghost of its former glory. Where once Quarmallian ships and caravans traded across the known world, now the kingdom is reduced to a single city – one of most unique construction and peopled by a unique culture. The bulk of the city of Quarmall is contained within a domed mountain, stretching out in underground passages and caverns to various other peak ‘towers’ in the mountain range.

Quarmall is a kingdom no longer truly deserving of the title, bound within a shield of rock to protect its last vestiges from the world that has risen since its ancient fall from grace. To most Nehwonians, it is a cursed place of dark sorcery and black magicians enslaving the masses; a place of people who live their entire lives without ever seeing the sun. The legends that tell of the place match the reality all too accurately.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Quarmall is what is implied in discussing the kingdom, not what is said. An ancient belief among the oldest and wisest of

Nehwon’s scholars is that some of the lowest caverns in the bowels of the under-city actually lead to or contain some remnants of the Elder Ones.

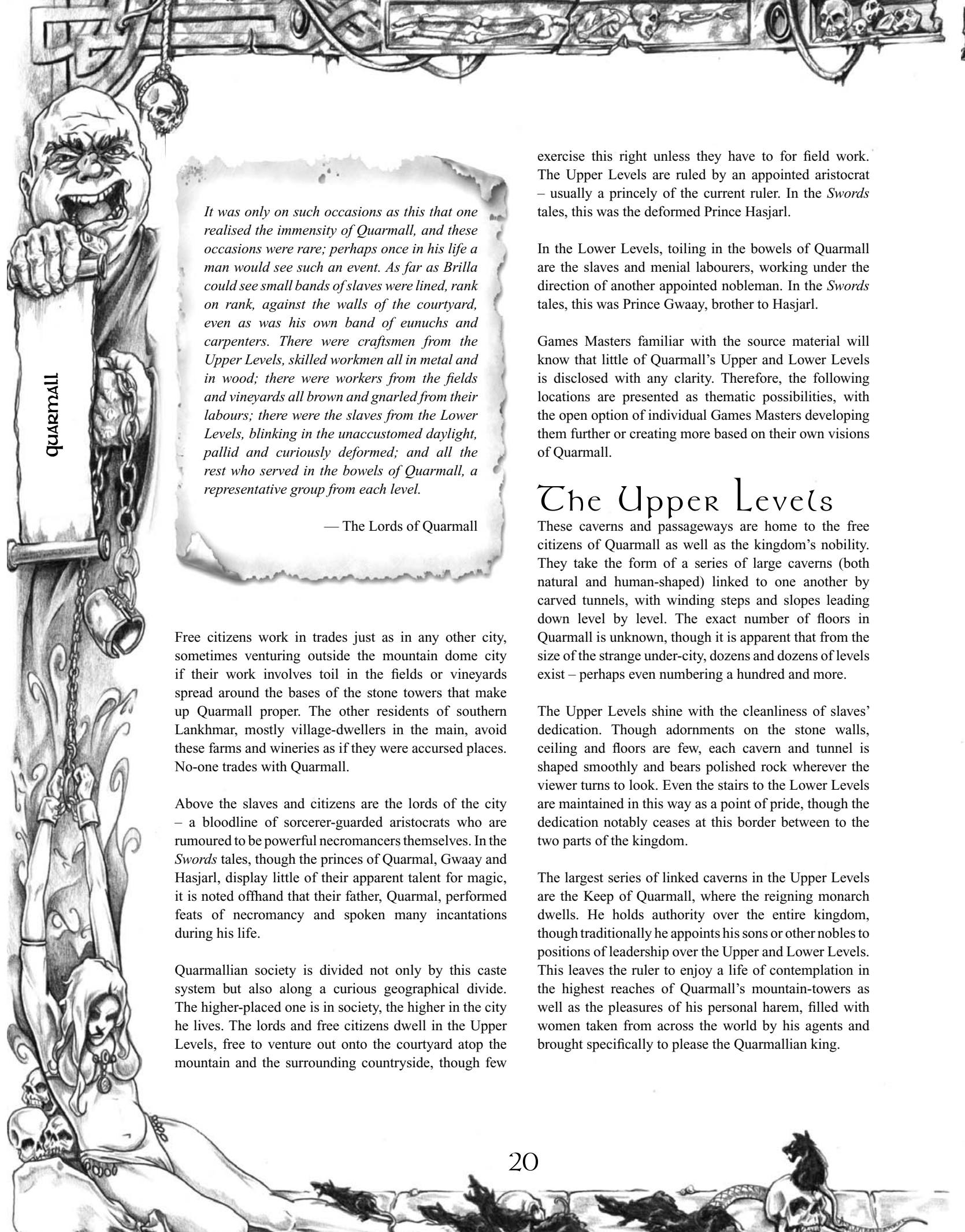
Exactly what the Elder Ones could be is something both detailed later in the chapter as well as something for Games Masters to chew over.

Life in Quarmall

The daily life of a Quarmallian citizen depends entirely on the station one is born into. Much of the population is made up of slaves or servants, as in any other city, though their lot is generally worse in Quarmall. Slaves are not the indentured criminals and war prisoners of Lankhmar; here they are true slaves, born into the role (or captured and subjected to it) with no hope of freedom until death. Slaves have a number of duties, from body servants to manual labourers, all working themselves to the grave for well-born masters.

quarmall





Quarmall

It was only on such occasions as this that one realised the immensity of Quarmall, and these occasions were rare; perhaps once in his life a man would see such an event. As far as Brilla could see small bands of slaves were lined, rank on rank, against the walls of the courtyard, even as was his own band of eunuchs and carpenters. There were craftsmen from the Upper Levels, skilled workmen all in metal and in wood; there were workers from the fields and vineyards all brown and gnarled from their labours; there were the slaves from the Lower Levels, blinking in the unaccustomed daylight, pallid and curiously deformed; and all the rest who served in the bowels of Quarmall, a representative group from each level.

— The Lords of Quarmall

Free citizens work in trades just as in any other city, sometimes venturing outside the mountain dome city if their work involves toil in the fields or vineyards spread around the bases of the stone towers that make up Quarmall proper. The other residents of southern Lankhmar, mostly village-dwellers in the main, avoid these farms and wineries as if they were accursed places. No-one trades with Quarmall.

Above the slaves and citizens are the lords of the city – a bloodline of sorcerer-guarded aristocrats who are rumoured to be powerful necromancers themselves. In the *Swords* tales, though the princes of Quarmal, Gwaay and Hasjarl, display little of their apparent talent for magic, it is noted offhand that their father, Quarmal, performed feats of necromancy and spoken many incantations during his life.

Quarmallian society is divided not only by this caste system but also along a curious geographical divide. The higher-placed one is in society, the higher in the city he lives. The lords and free citizens dwell in the Upper Levels, free to venture out onto the courtyard atop the mountain and the surrounding countryside, though few

exercise this right unless they have to for field work. The Upper Levels are ruled by an appointed aristocrat – usually a princely of the current ruler. In the *Swords* tales, this was the deformed Prince Hasjarl.

In the Lower Levels, toiling in the bowels of Quarmall are the slaves and menial labourers, working under the direction of another appointed nobleman. In the *Swords* tales, this was Prince Gwaay, brother to Hasjarl.

Games Masters familiar with the source material will know that little of Quarmall's Upper and Lower Levels is disclosed with any clarity. Therefore, the following locations are presented as thematic possibilities, with the open option of individual Games Masters developing them further or creating more based on their own visions of Quarmall.

The Upper Levels

These caverns and passageways are home to the free citizens of Quarmall as well as the kingdom's nobility. They take the form of a series of large caverns (both natural and human-shaped) linked to one another by carved tunnels, with winding steps and slopes leading down level by level. The exact number of floors in Quarmall is unknown, though it is apparent that from the size of the strange under-city, dozens and dozens of levels exist – perhaps even numbering a hundred and more.

The Upper Levels shine with the cleanliness of slaves' dedication. Though adornments on the stone walls, ceiling and floors are few, each cavern and tunnel is shaped smoothly and bears polished rock wherever the viewer turns to look. Even the stairs to the Lower Levels are maintained in this way as a point of pride, though the dedication notably ceases at this border between to the two parts of the kingdom.

The largest series of linked caverns in the Upper Levels are the Keep of Quarmall, where the reigning monarch dwells. He holds authority over the entire kingdom, though traditionally he appoints his sons or other nobles to positions of leadership over the Upper and Lower Levels. This leaves the ruler to enjoy a life of contemplation in the highest reaches of Quarmall's mountain-towers as well as the pleasures of his personal harem, filled with women taken from across the world by his agents and brought specifically to please the Quarmallian king.

The very top of the Keep reaches to the uppermost level of the city, where it meets the giant courtyard on the flattened surface of the mountain's stunted dome. Other exits exist from the Upper Levels to the surface world, though these are always guarded by sentries armed with spears, knives and slings. Expert slingers are appointed to be watchers on the roof of the mountain, ostensibly looking for incoming dangers but primarily present to kill any slaves that make a break for their freedom.

The Upper Levels are still close enough to the surface that air reaches these topmost passages and halls without need for additional ventilation. This changes as a traveller walks deeper within the city. The final landing before the Lower Levels features large chutes leading downward and slave-driven fans that waft air through the bowels of the city.

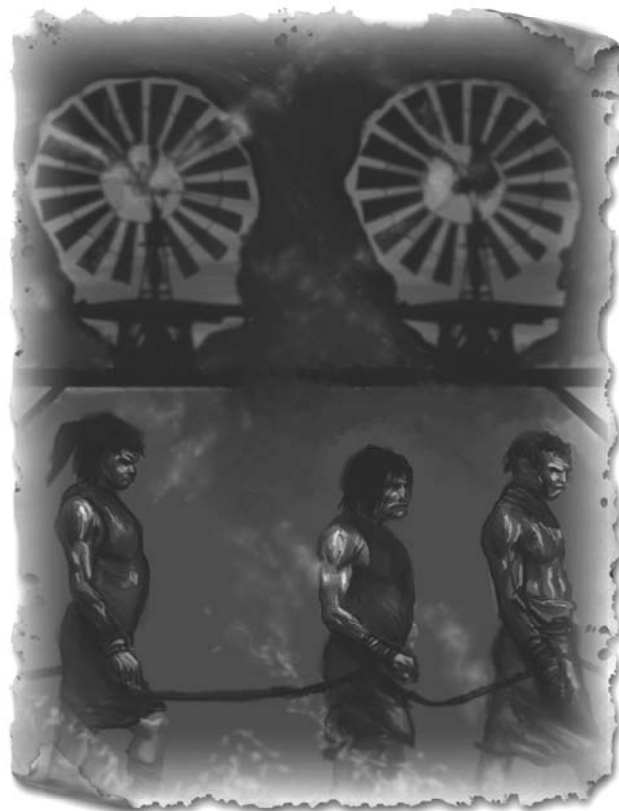
The Fans

Barefooted slaves walk endlessly on heavy leather tread-belts, driving huge wooden fans that force the air to flow downwards into the Lower Levels. These poor souls are forced into this duty for exhaustingly long shifts each day, and the fans are never allowed to stop moving, else all in the Lower Levels would die gasping and airless deaths in a short space of time.

Games Masters or players interested in stopping the fans for whatever nefarious purposes should go with the rule of thumb that after 2D4 fan-less minutes, anyone in the Lower Levels will begin to suffer the effects of asphyxiation as detailed on page 90 of *RuneQuest*.

These fans are mirrored by companion treadmills and great wooden blades of the same construction in the Lower Levels below. These catch the last of the fresh air as well as the downward-sent air from the fans above, pushing it through the lower tunnels.

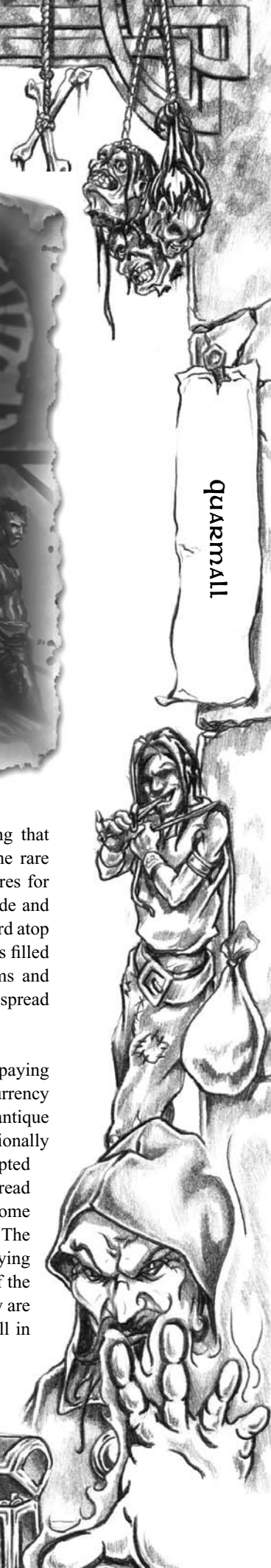
The slaves that once trod these tread-belts and drove the fans were normal humans. At some point in history, it is noted in the records of Ningauble of the Seven Eyes (from information gathered by an eons-old sentient cockroach sage called Scraa) that either the 'invention' or 'breeding' of new slaves created servitors better-suited to the monotonous task. These stunted, barrel-chested slaves with wide nostrils seem to have little more intelligence than mules, and no mental capacity to resist the orders they are given.

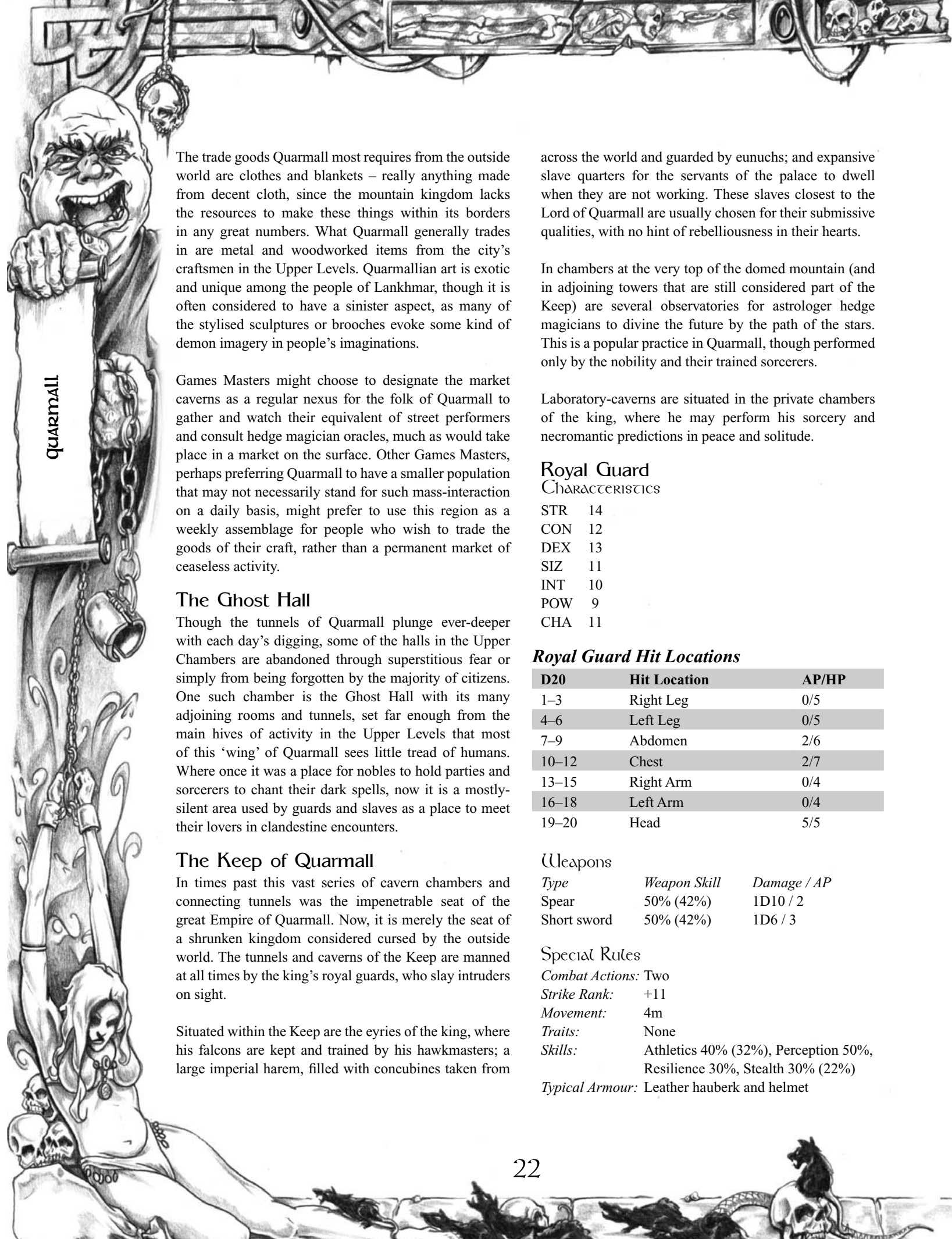


The Market Caverns

This huge cavern is a focal point for the trading that occurs within Quarmall and is the spot where the rare merchants from the outside world bring their wares for the people under the mountain to purchase. A wide and gentle-sloping tunnel leads down from the courtyard atop Quarmall, winding into the market cavern which is filled with a host of wooden tables bearing trade items and many sellers laying out their wares on blankets spread out across the bare stone floor.

Bartering for goods is much more common than paying with coin in Quarmall. Quarmall uses the same currency as the rest of the land of Lankhmar, though antique Quarmallian gold pieces still exist and see use occasionally within the mountain kingdom. They are accepted elsewhere by their weight, though superstitious dread runs deep among the people of Nehwon and some merchants refuse to take these coins as legal tender. The imprinted images of ancient rulers and accompanying Quarmallian mantras of superiority on the back of the coins is enough to trip most traders as to what they are dealing with when they hold coins from Quarmall in their hands.





The trade goods Quarmall most requires from the outside world are clothes and blankets – really anything made from decent cloth, since the mountain kingdom lacks the resources to make these things within its borders in any great numbers. What Quarmall generally trades in are metal and woodworked items from the city’s craftsmen in the Upper Levels. Quarmallian art is exotic and unique among the people of Lankhmar, though it is often considered to have a sinister aspect, as many of the stylised sculptures or brooches evoke some kind of demon imagery in people’s imaginations.

Games Masters might choose to designate the market caverns as a regular nexus for the folk of Quarmall to gather and watch their equivalent of street performers and consult hedge magician oracles, much as would take place in a market on the surface. Other Games Masters, perhaps preferring Quarmall to have a smaller population that may not necessarily stand for such mass-interaction on a daily basis, might prefer to use this region as a weekly assemblage for people who wish to trade the goods of their craft, rather than a permanent market of ceaseless activity.

The Ghost Hall

Though the tunnels of Quarmall plunge ever-deeper with each day’s digging, some of the halls in the Upper Chambers are abandoned through superstitious fear or simply from being forgotten by the majority of citizens. One such chamber is the Ghost Hall with its many adjoining rooms and tunnels, set far enough from the main hives of activity in the Upper Levels that most of this ‘wing’ of Quarmall sees little tread of humans. Where once it was a place for nobles to hold parties and sorcerers to chant their dark spells, now it is a mostly-silent area used by guards and slaves as a place to meet their lovers in clandestine encounters.

The Keep of Quarmall

In times past this vast series of cavern chambers and connecting tunnels was the impenetrable seat of the great Empire of Quarmall. Now, it is merely the seat of a shrunken kingdom considered cursed by the outside world. The tunnels and caverns of the Keep are manned at all times by the king’s royal guards, who slay intruders on sight.

Situated within the Keep are the eyries of the king, where his falcons are kept and trained by his hawkmasters; a large imperial harem, filled with concubines taken from

across the world and guarded by eunuchs; and expansive slave quarters for the servants of the palace to dwell when they are not working. These slaves closest to the Lord of Quarmall are usually chosen for their submissive qualities, with no hint of rebelliousness in their hearts.

In chambers at the very top of the domed mountain (and in adjoining towers that are still considered part of the Keep) are several observatories for astrologer hedge magicians to divine the future by the path of the stars. This is a popular practice in Quarmall, though performed only by the nobility and their trained sorcerers.

Laboratory-caverns are situated in the private chambers of the king, where he may perform his sorcery and necromantic predictions in peace and solitude.

Royal Guard CHARACTERISTICS

STR	14
CON	12
DEX	13
SIZ	11
INT	10
POW	9
CHA	11

Royal Guard Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–3	Right Leg	0/5
4–6	Left Leg	0/5
7–9	Abdomen	2/6
10–12	Chest	2/7
13–15	Right Arm	0/4
16–18	Left Arm	0/4
19–20	Head	5/5

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
Spear	50% (42%)	1D10 / 2
Short sword	50% (42%)	1D6 / 3

Special Rules

- Combat Actions:* Two
- Strike Rank:* +11
- Movement:* 4m
- Traits:* None
- Skills:* Athletics 40% (32%), Perception 50%, Resilience 30%, Stealth 30% (22%)
- Typical Armour:* Leather hauberk and helmet

Houses of the Sorcerer-Nobles

The nobles of Quarmall reside in a series of massive chambers, not far from the Keep of Quarmall at the very apex of the mountain. These caverns are decorated to individual tastes, with some bloodlines displaying treasured relics, hangings, war banners and weapons from the glory days of the Empire's dominance over Nehwon and others opting to retain the polished stone décor that characterises most of the city.

Since Quarmallian nobles are reared to be magicians and scholars rather than fighters, most noble houses have at least one room dedicated to the pursuit of sorcery – be it a library or laboratory. The bodies of dead servants are sometimes carried to these rooms for the Quarmallian families to use their necromancy, summoning the spirits of the dead for nefarious reasons.

The Lower Levels

The Lower Levels are illuminated by the dim light of discreet torches, and the sounds of the great fans blowing air through the tunnels or the *clack-clack-clack* of miners picks digging ever deeper into the earth can often be heard in the distance.



Here the slaves of Quarmall and the lesser citizens toil in the depths. With the Empire now a memory, Quarmall's only expansion is downward, pushing deeper into the flesh of Nehwon by lengthening tunnels and opening up new chambers. Many believe there is an ongoing gradual but distinct shift in the population, where each passing year sees another series of caverns abandoned in the Upper Levels and more tunnels in the Lower Levels becoming inhabited. It is as if the human remnants of the fallen Empire are not satisfied with sealing themselves within a mountain to escape the outside world – they seem to be forcing themselves further under Nehwon's surface.

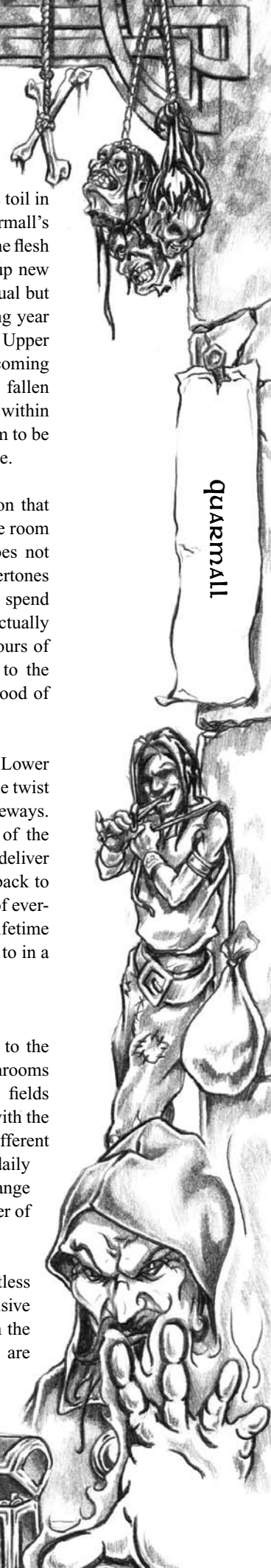
Counter to this belief is the more realistic opinion that the tunnels are extended downward purely to make room for an increasing population. Something that does not seem immediately obvious but has unsettling overtones is that the lords of Quarmall, who order slaves to spend their lives digging through rock and earth, are actually looking for something down there. With the rumours of the unknown 'Elder Ones' somehow connected to the caverns of Quarmall, this possibility chills the blood of any who are aware of it.

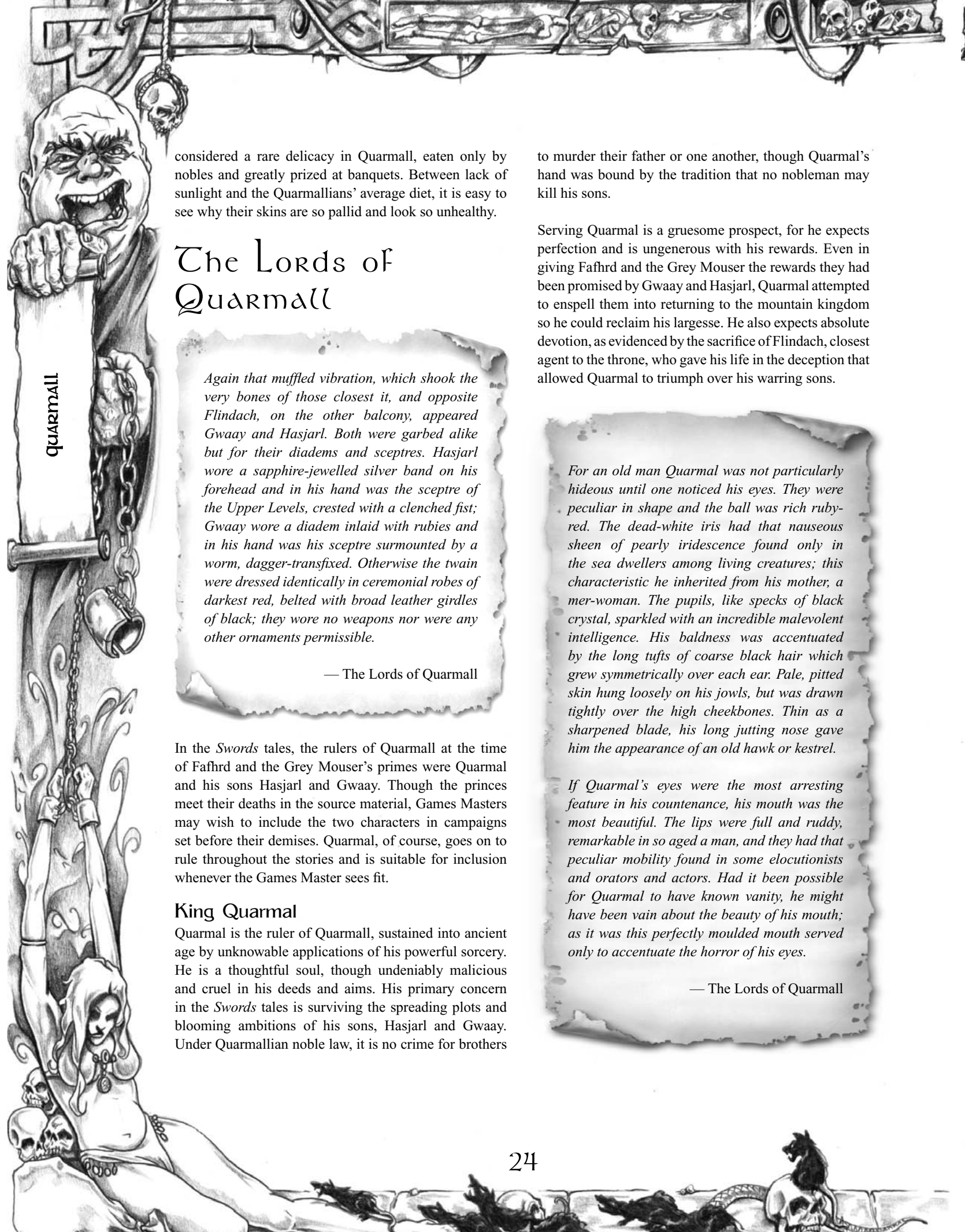
The endless tunnelling that takes place in the Lower Levels means that no living soul knows every single twist and turn in the labyrinthine subterranean passageways. Overseers use trained slaves to memorise parts of the network, so that they may navigate it alone to deliver messages to the work parties and find their way back to their Quarmallian masters, but the complete host of ever-lengthening, ever-twisting tunnels would take a lifetime or more to map even if they were not being added to in a hundred directions at once.

Mushroom Farming

A truly massive number of caves are given over to the mushroom fields, where slaves grow edible mushrooms on the floors and walls of the caverns. These fields produce the majority of Quarmall's food supply, with the people of the mountain kingdom eating many different varieties of mushroom as the lion's share of their daily diets. To the tongue of an outsider, these fungi range from the bland to the grotesque, sporting all manner of colours in their soft flesh.

The number of slaves that work in the near-lightless caverns growing and harvesting these repulsive mushrooms is staggering, though necessary given the number of mouths to feed in the kingdom. Rats are





considered a rare delicacy in Quarmall, eaten only by nobles and greatly prized at banquets. Between lack of sunlight and the Quarmallians' average diet, it is easy to see why their skins are so pallid and look so unhealthy.

The Lords of Quarmall

Again that muffled vibration, which shook the very bones of those closest it, and opposite Flindach, on the other balcony, appeared Gwaay and Hasjarl. Both were garbed alike but for their diadems and sceptres. Hasjarl wore a sapphire-jewelled silver band on his forehead and in his hand was the sceptre of the Upper Levels, crested with a clenched fist; Gwaay wore a diadem inlaid with rubies and in his hand was his sceptre surmounted by a worm, dagger-transfixed. Otherwise the twain were dressed identically in ceremonial robes of darkest red, belted with broad leather girdles of black; they wore no weapons nor were any other ornaments permissible.

— The Lords of Quarmall

In the *Swords* tales, the rulers of Quarmall at the time of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser's primes were Quarmal and his sons Hasjarl and Gwaay. Though the princes meet their deaths in the source material, Games Masters may wish to include the two characters in campaigns set before their demises. Quarmal, of course, goes on to rule throughout the stories and is suitable for inclusion whenever the Games Master sees fit.

King Quarmal

Quarmal is the ruler of Quarmall, sustained into ancient age by unknowable applications of his powerful sorcery. He is a thoughtful soul, though undeniably malicious and cruel in his deeds and aims. His primary concern in the *Swords* tales is surviving the spreading plots and blooming ambitions of his sons, Hasjarl and Gwaay. Under Quarmallian noble law, it is no crime for brothers

to murder their father or one another, though Quarmal's hand was bound by the tradition that no nobleman may kill his sons.

Serving Quarmal is a gruesome prospect, for he expects perfection and is ungenerous with his rewards. Even in giving Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser the rewards they had been promised by Gwaay and Hasjarl, Quarmal attempted to enspell them into returning to the mountain kingdom so he could reclaim his largesse. He also expects absolute devotion, as evidenced by the sacrifice of Flindach, closest agent to the throne, who gave his life in the deception that allowed Quarmal to triumph over his warring sons.

For an old man Quarmal was not particularly hideous until one noticed his eyes. They were peculiar in shape and the ball was rich ruby-red. The dead-white iris had that nauseous sheen of pearly iridescence found only in the sea dwellers among living creatures; this characteristic he inherited from his mother, a mer-woman. The pupils, like specks of black crystal, sparkled with an incredible malevolent intelligence. His baldness was accentuated by the long tufts of coarse black hair which grew symmetrically over each ear. Pale, pitted skin hung loosely on his jowls, but was drawn tightly over the high cheekbones. Thin as a sharpened blade, his long jutting nose gave him the appearance of an old hawk or kestrel.

If Quarmal's eyes were the most arresting feature in his countenance, his mouth was the most beautiful. The lips were full and ruddy, remarkable in so aged a man, and they had that peculiar mobility found in some elocutionists and orators and actors. Had it been possible for Quarmal to have known vanity, he might have been vain about the beauty of his mouth; as it was this perfectly moulded mouth served only to accentuate the horror of his eyes.

— The Lords of Quarmall

Prince Hasjarl

Hasjarl was the elder; older by only a few months which his appearance and demeanour lengthened to years. His long, misshapen torso was ill-borne on short bandy legs. His left arm was perceptibly longer than the right; and his fingers, peculiarly webbed to the first knuckle, were gnarled and stubby with brittle striated stains. It was as if Hasjarl were a poorly reconstructed puzzle put together in such a fashion that all the pieces were mismatched and awry.

This was particularly true of his features. He possessed his sire's nose, though thickened and coarse-pored; but this was contradicted by the thin-lipped, tightly compressed mouth continually pursed until it had assumed a perpetual sphincter-like appearance. Hair, lank and lustreless, grew low on his forehead, and low, flattened cheekbones added yet another contradiction.

— The Lords of Quarmall

There is perhaps no crueller and more malice-driven character in the entire *Swords* saga than Prince Hasjarl of Quarmall. While neither Quarmal nor Gwaay can be considered anything but the basest villains, Hasjarl's snide malevolence is arguably deeper than all others. He delights in torture for the sake of torture, spurns his brother's apparently sincere offer of peace and brotherhood and commands his subordinate magicians to incant an endless stream of magical diseases upon his rival prince – sorcery that will bring one of the most hideous deaths imaginable.

Hasjarl promises much in the name of acquiring decent mercenaries or champions, yet he is graceless to those in his employ, loathing the fact they might keep secrets from him and bitterly complaining about his straits to anyone

who will listen. Couple the ugliness of his personality with the ugliness of his body and one is presented with a truly repulsive creature indeed.

Hasjarl spends much of his time with his eyes closed, yet still appears able to see all that transpires around him. This is not actually a result of his sorcery – which he seems disinclined to use personally – but rather a degenerate and minor surgery performed on his eyes. A skilled slave pricked tiny holes in each of his eyelids, so that he can see even when his eyes are closed. This cunning trick works to unnerve all that enter his presence, which is just the reaction Hasjarl was hoping for when he coined the idea in the first place.

Prince Gwaay

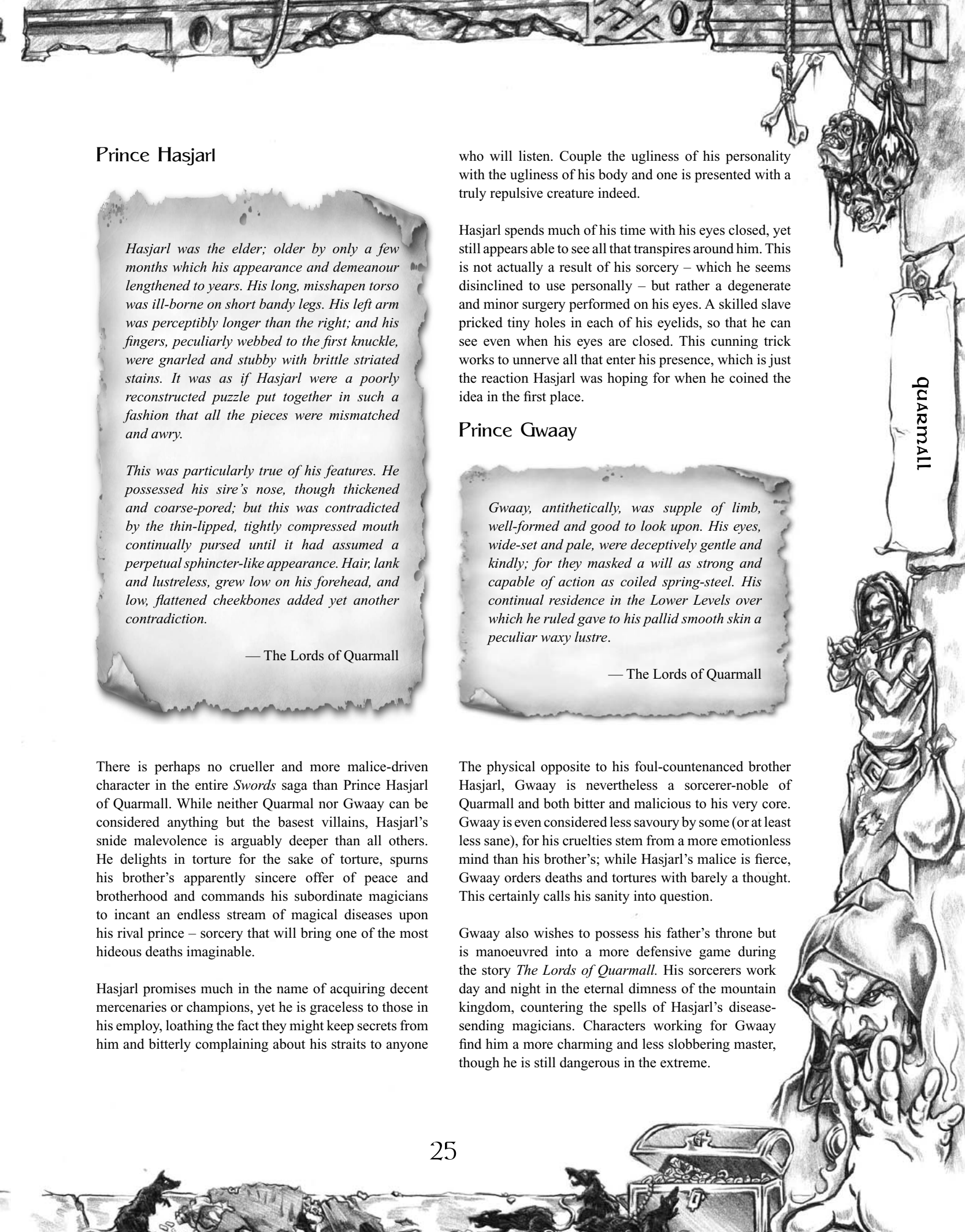
Gwaay, antithetically, was supple of limb, well-formed and good to look upon. His eyes, wide-set and pale, were deceptively gentle and kindly; for they masked a will as strong and capable of action as coiled spring-steel. His continual residence in the Lower Levels over which he ruled gave to his pallid smooth skin a peculiar waxy lustre.


— The Lords of Quarmall

The physical opposite to his foul-countenanced brother Hasjarl, Gwaay is nevertheless a sorcerer-noble of Quarmall and both bitter and malicious to his very core. Gwaay is even considered less savoury by some (or at least less sane), for his cruelties stem from a more emotionless mind than his brother's; while Hasjarl's malice is fierce, Gwaay orders deaths and tortures with barely a thought. This certainly calls his sanity into question.

Gwaay also wishes to possess his father's throne but is manoeuvred into a more defensive game during the story *The Lords of Quarmall*. His sorcerers work day and night in the eternal dimness of the mountain kingdom, countering the spells of Hasjarl's disease-sending magicians. Characters working for Gwaay find him a more charming and less slobbering master, though he is still dangerous in the extreme.

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Adventures in Quarmall

Quarmall's unusual nature and the many secrets it holds from the wider world make for a wealth of potential adventure hooks. Games Masters should have little difficulty dreaming up their own Quarmallian scenarios and the story ideas provided here should help get the creative juices flowing to that end.

The Secret Trader

'Ah, so you have found my little corner of Quarmall. And behold what wonders await you as reward for your discovery! Come, come, and feast your eyes on this rarest of treasures – the blade of Pezeen, sword-champion to the third Emperor of Quarmall back in the days of imperial glory. And over here we have...'

Tucked away in the Great Market caverns, easily-overlooked in his little cubby hole set in the rocky wall of a side tunnel, is a wizened old man selling what he claims are the ancient treasures of Imperial Quarmall. He asks the expected prices for such antiques, which reach thousands of Rilks in some cases and seem awfully strange when presented by a wrinkly old tradesman who lives in a little wet cave, who possesses fewer teeth than he has fingers and dresses in clothes that look like he stole them from a dead slave. Judging by the smell in the little cave, the slave had been dead for some time before this smiling old fellow relieved the corpse of its attire.

These antiques and artefacts are almost certainly magic or at the very least extremely valuable, be they weapons that offer combat bonuses, gemstones that graced the tiaras of long-dead princesses or more defined items that resemble the artefacts occasionally bestowed by Sheelba or Ningauble to their faithful servants.

If the characters wish to do business with this gentleman but lack the funds (which is likely), he will offer to barter the items in exchange for odd services rendered or esoteric objects that the characters will have to hunt for. These quests could range from collecting ice from the foothills of Stardock in the Cold Waste and bringing it back to Quarmall somehow un-melted, or retrieving a vial full of the invisible blood of a Ghoul warrior. If the characters do as the old man asks, he will be true to his word and hand over that which he promised.

Games Masters can essentially play this scenario in one of several ways:

'These are obviously fake.'

The most obvious scenario here is that the old man is, for want of a better word, *crazy*. He is no more than an old beggar selling pieces of scrap and detritus ('These are the seventeen mushrooms of immortality, I tell you true!') in the hopes of conning someone as unhinged or disturbed as himself.

Either that or he is somehow in the business of crafting incredibly beautiful and accurate fakes. Given the lack of a tourist trade in Quarmall – this sort of thing would work much better in Ilthmar – there is probably an interesting reason behind why he is doing this, let alone how he acquired the skills to do so. Either way, the scenario might not stretch into a full story but will certainly make for an interesting scene.

'I think he is telling the truth...'

Somehow, as unbelievable as it might seem, this old coot is actually telling the truth about his wares. The sword really is the blade of a historical imperial champion. That sapphire over there really did once rest in the tiara of Princess Naavi, an ancient Emperor's daughter. This bronze ring-mail shirt really does glow softly in the dark, illuminating the surrounding area and negating the need for torches. It is just a shame that they all cost so much, really.

This scenario presents two points of interest. Firstly, just how did the old man come by all this stuff? Is it stolen from the storage rooms of Upper Level nobles? If so, how did he manage such a series of daring thefts? Secondly, what exactly can these items do to benefit adventurers?

Games Masters will likely wish to reserve any powerful magical items for experienced characters, rather than handing over potentially game-unbalancing artefacts to new characters that will use them to easily overcome their future trials.

If the Games Master decides the items are real, further difficulties will arise from the players owning them. Firstly and most obviously, anyone with knowledge of ancient Quarmallian history (and the Lankhmar Thieves' Guild has information on the *oddest* things, sometimes) will know that a wandering vagabond is now carrying the

highly-valuable Sword of Pezeen, which legend states slays foes in a frighteningly short space of time. This is inviting trouble on a monumental scale. Characters will have to be diligent in holding on to their new property, while expecting the number of apparently random thug attacks and professional assassinations attempted against them to increase tenfold.

Allowing characters unlimited access to powerful magic items is not particularly thematic with the *Sword & Sorcery* genre, or the source material itself. It might then be better to bestow such an item on the characters, but ensure that keeping hold of it is an adventure in and of itself, with several forces intently seeking the artefact.

Ultimately, one force will probably succeed in getting it, though not before the character has had some fun with the thing. Take note of how Sheelba and Ningauble stole back their artefacts from Fafhrd in the *Swords* tales, also described in the appendix of the *Lankhmar*. Games Masters should probably be frugal with these items of unusual power, given that Nehwon is such a low-magic setting following the *Sword & Sorcery* themes.

Also, note that while it can be galling for a Player to know that his character's magic jewel now sits in the dusty vaults of the Thieves' Guild in Lankhmar, the attempts to get it back can be just as fun as owning it in the first place. Try not to tease or frustrate players, though.

‘These are worthless, but that one...’

An intriguing possibility that is perhaps more likely than the idea of the old man telling the whole truth is that somewhere between the elder's ravings and his collection of garbage for sale, one of the items is actually what he says it is: a relic of ancient imperial Quarmall. In this instance, the story can proceed as detailed above, only with a single reward at the end of the adventure.

‘The Devourers menace Quarmall!’

As revealed in the *Swords* tales and the *Lankhmar*, the Devourers are strange planar-travelling merchants who establish the Bazaar of the Bizarre in Lankhmar. Here, with the old man hawking what appear to be incredible wares (and at suspiciously low prices in this version of the scene), it could just be that the Devourers make a second attempt to enter Nehwon. The old man may in actuality be the Iron Statue encountered by Fafhrd, or

he may be some other sorcerous being intent on selling trash to the people of Quarmall and expanding his trade to wider Nehwon afterwards.

Characters facing the Devourers here will likely need the assistance of Sheelba and Ningauble to see the truth, just as Fafhrd did in Lankhmar during the *Swords* stories. For more details, see *The Adventures of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser in the Lankhmar*.

The Elder Ones

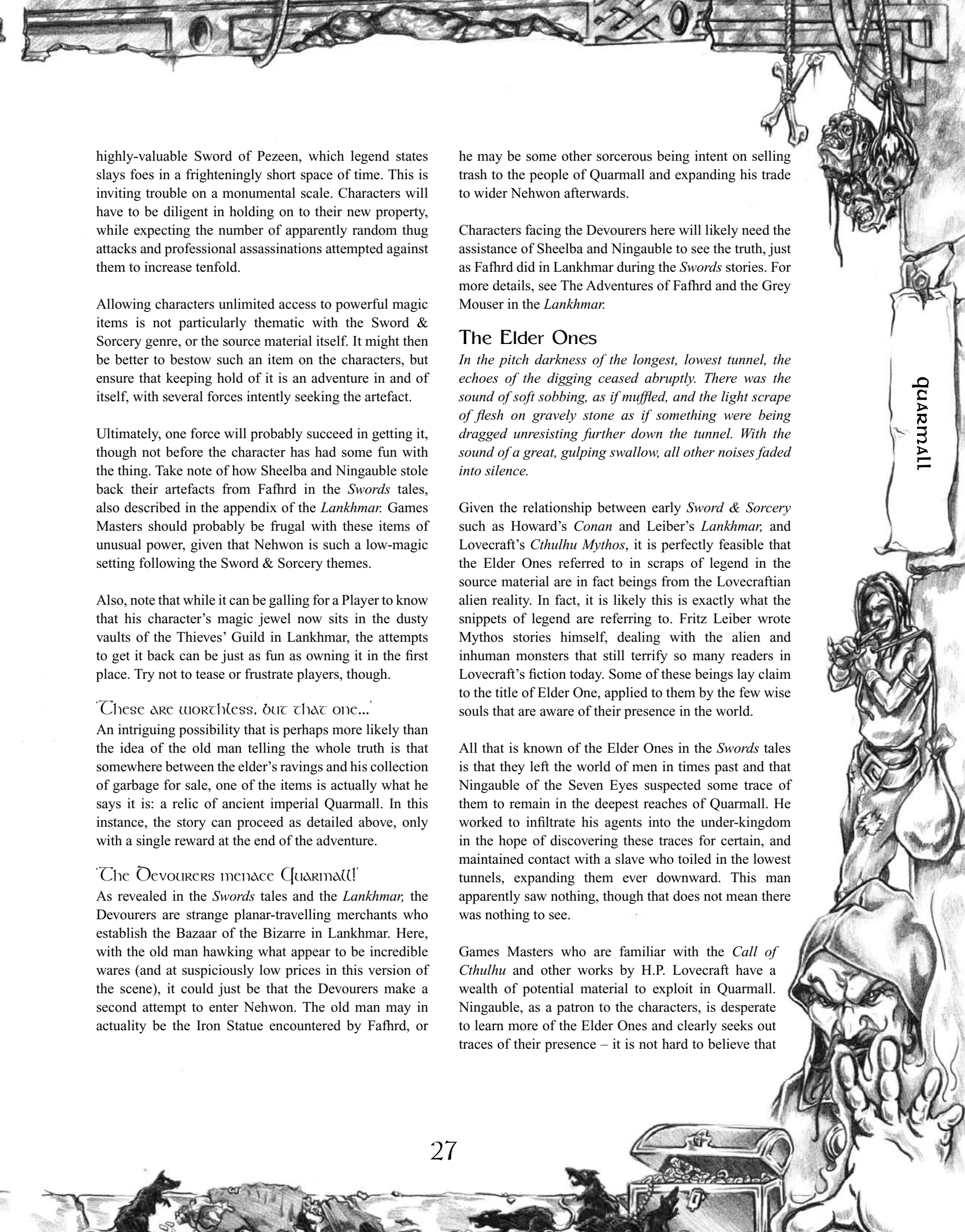
In the pitch darkness of the longest, lowest tunnel, the echoes of the digging ceased abruptly. There was the sound of soft sobbing, as if muffled, and the light scrape of flesh on gravely stone as if something were being dragged unresisting further down the tunnel. With the sound of a great, gulping swallow, all other noises faded into silence.

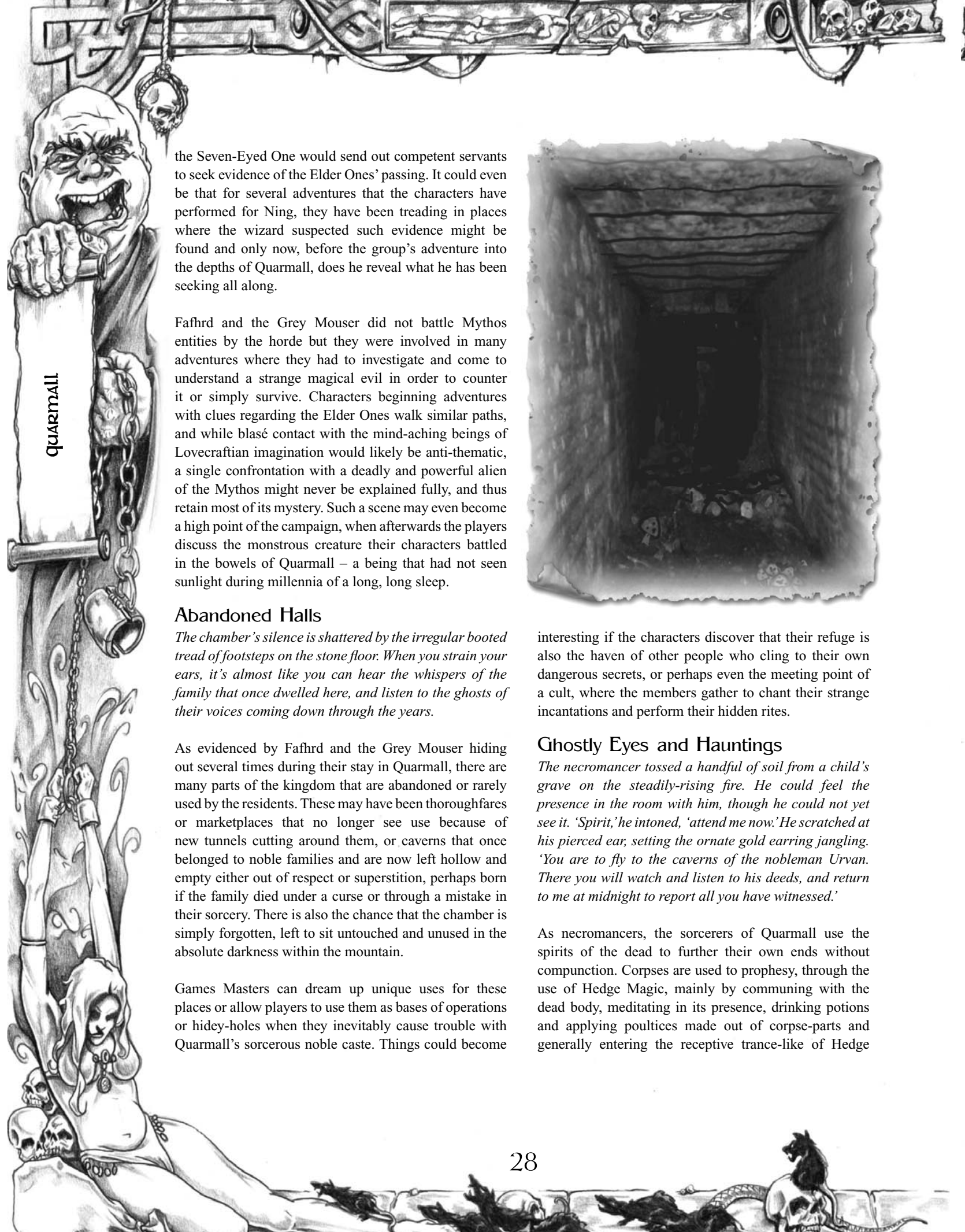
Given the relationship between early *Sword & Sorcery* such as Howard's *Conan* and Leiber's *Lankhmar*, and Lovecraft's *Cthulhu Mythos*, it is perfectly feasible that the Elder Ones referred to in scraps of legend in the source material are in fact beings from the Lovecraftian alien reality. In fact, it is likely this is exactly what the snippets of legend are referring to. Fritz Leiber wrote *Mythos* stories himself, dealing with the alien and inhuman monsters that still terrify so many readers in Lovecraft's fiction today. Some of these beings lay claim to the title of Elder One, applied to them by the few wise souls that are aware of their presence in the world.

All that is known of the Elder Ones in the *Swords* tales is that they left the world of men in times past and that Ningauble of the Seven Eyes suspected some trace of them to remain in the deepest reaches of Quarmall. He worked to infiltrate his agents into the under-kingdom in the hope of discovering these traces for certain, and maintained contact with a slave who toiled in the lowest tunnels, expanding them ever downward. This man apparently saw nothing, though that does not mean there was nothing to see.

Games Masters who are familiar with the *Call of Cthulhu* and other works by H.P. Lovecraft have a wealth of potential material to exploit in Quarmall. Ningauble, as a patron to the characters, is desperate to learn more of the Elder Ones and clearly seeks out traces of their presence – it is not hard to believe that

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the Seven-Eyed One would send out competent servants to seek evidence of the Elder Ones' passing. It could even be that for several adventures that the characters have performed for Ning, they have been treading in places where the wizard suspected such evidence might be found and only now, before the group's adventure into the depths of Quarmall, does he reveal what he has been seeking all along.

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser did not battle Mythos entities by the horde but they were involved in many adventures where they had to investigate and come to understand a strange magical evil in order to counter it or simply survive. Characters beginning adventures with clues regarding the Elder Ones walk similar paths, and while blasé contact with the mind-aching beings of Lovecraftian imagination would likely be anti-thematic, a single confrontation with a deadly and powerful alien of the Mythos might never be explained fully, and thus retain most of its mystery. Such a scene may even become a high point of the campaign, when afterwards the players discuss the monstrous creature their characters battled in the bowels of Quarmall – a being that had not seen sunlight during millennia of a long, long sleep.

Abandoned Halls

The chamber's silence is shattered by the irregular booted tread of footsteps on the stone floor. When you strain your ears, it's almost like you can hear the whispers of the family that once dwelled here, and listen to the ghosts of their voices coming down through the years.

As evidenced by Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser hiding out several times during their stay in Quarmall, there are many parts of the kingdom that are abandoned or rarely used by the residents. These may have been thoroughfares or marketplaces that no longer see use because of new tunnels cutting around them, or caverns that once belonged to noble families and are now left hollow and empty either out of respect or superstition, perhaps born if the family died under a curse or through a mistake in their sorcery. There is also the chance that the chamber is simply forgotten, left to sit untouched and unused in the absolute darkness within the mountain.

Games Masters can dream up unique uses for these places or allow players to use them as bases of operations or hidey-holes when they inevitably cause trouble with Quarmall's sorcerous noble caste. Things could become



interesting if the characters discover that their refuge is also the haven of other people who cling to their own dangerous secrets, or perhaps even the meeting point of a cult, where the members gather to chant their strange incantations and perform their hidden rites.

Ghostly Eyes and Hauntings

The necromancer tossed a handful of soil from a child's grave on the steadily-rising fire. He could feel the presence in the room with him, though he could not yet see it. 'Spirit,' he intoned, 'attend me now.' He scratched at his pierced ear, setting the ornate gold earring jangling. 'You are to fly to the caverns of the nobleman Urvan. There you will watch and listen to his deeds, and return to me at midnight to report all you have witnessed.'

As necromancers, the sorcerers of Quarmall use the spirits of the dead to further their own ends without compunction. Corpses are used to prophesy, through the use of Hedge Magic, mainly by communing with the dead body, meditating in its presence, drinking potions and applying poultices made out of corpse-parts and generally entering the receptive trance-like of Hedge



Magic in order to see the future. In this instance, the future comes as hallucinations or visions as normal, and are received by staring into the corpse's eyes or discerning patterns in its entrails.

'True' necromancy, dubbed Quarmallian Necromancy in this sourcebook, is simply a part of Black Magic. A very limited number of spells allow sorcerers to manipulate the spirits of the dead into service, binding them to a task that they are compelled to perform. Fiendish sorcerers use this magic to spy on their rivals at times, though the practise is rare within Quarmall considering the fact that other sorcerers can easily detect intruding spirits and destroy them.

An intriguing possibility is for a Quarmallian sorcerer-noble to use his power to manipulate ghosts outside of Quarmall, creating trouble for the characters and other people far removed from the mountain kingdom. Enemies that the characters have slain might be enchanted so that their souls return from the grave to bedevil their slayers. Ghostly spies can watch the business of the living, witnessing all their magician master desires and reporting back to him.

Dealing with the undead in any form was never easy for Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, so it is likely that any characters plagued by ghosts will need to seek out some kind of knowledgeable mentor for aid, such as Sheelba of the Eyeless Face or Ningauble of the Seven Eyes.

Solving the problem might be as simple as the characters undertaking a time-consuming trek to Quarmall and slaying the apparently aggrieved sorcerer who is inflicting these poltergeists upon them, or as complicated as somehow finding out what will allow the ghosts to rest in peace – provided the sorcerer's hold over them allows such succour.

A New God in Lankhmar

'Worship no more your weak godlets and godlings who provide you no true reward for your loyalty! Instead bring your faith and coin to me, and I shall show you a true god worthy of your belief. What other priests on this Street of so-called Gods allow you to speak with the souls of your lost loved ones? I alone! I alone... Now come, come closer and we shall begin tonight's work to cheat Death himself. Has everyone brought with him an item belonging to his lost love?'

New cults springing up on the Street of the Gods is no rare thing – it happens nightly, with new faiths singing the praises of new gods starting at the Marsh Gate and preaching their way westward over time. Also, Hedge Magic allows genuine corpse-talkers and talented charlatans to commune with the dead (or fake it) in various ways that are occasionally believed by the populace but unreliable enough that they are considered shams more often than not. Considering the numbers of charlatans aping the tricks of the genuine (and unreliable) seers, Hedge Magic is a service used only by the gullible and the desperate.

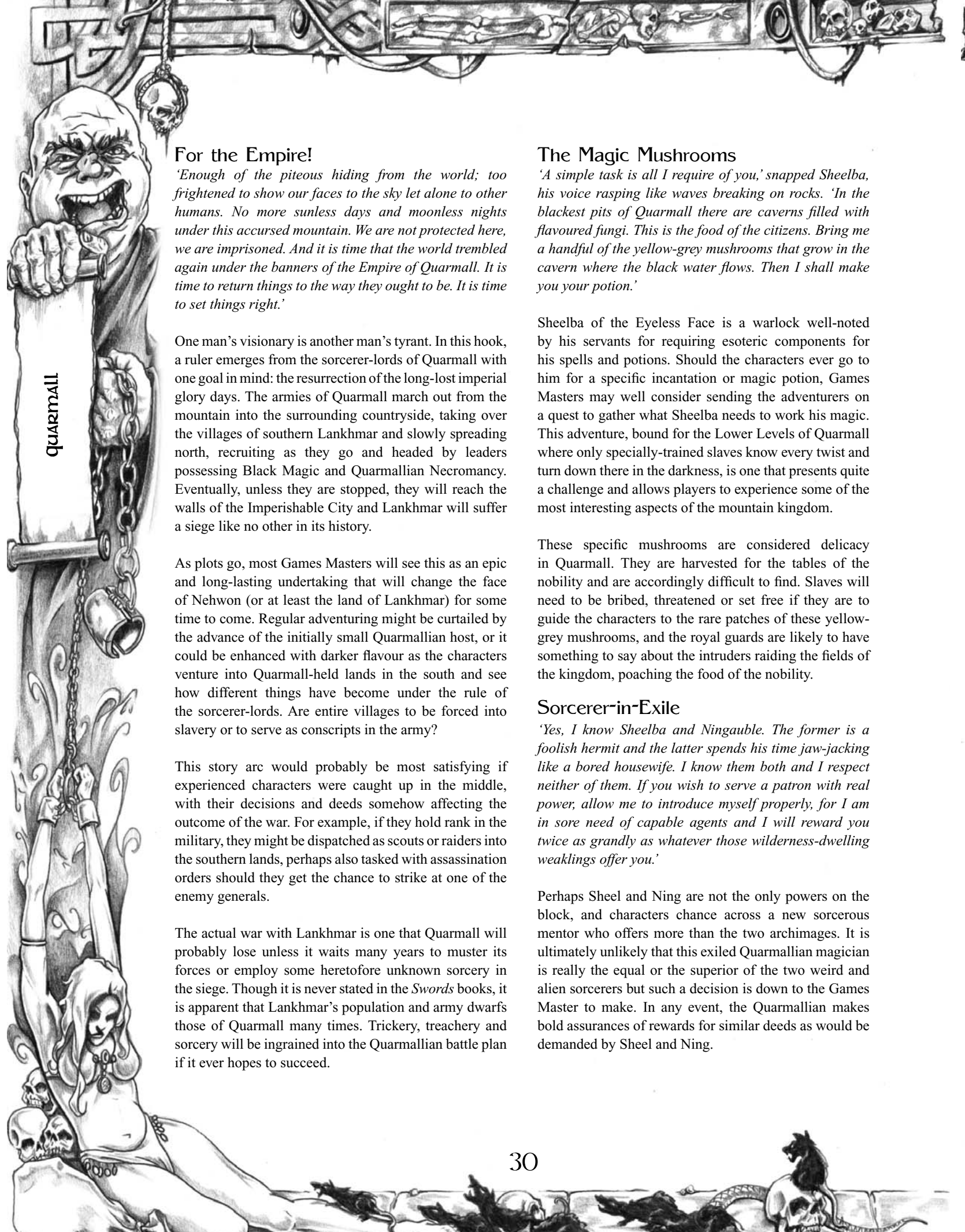
Here on the Street of the Gods is a man who hides his Quarmallian origins and simply speaks of a new god that has granted him the power to contact the loved ones of Lankhmarts who join the cult. This is not remarkable because of the claim itself; it is remarkable because it is actually true. He can indeed do as he promises. Maybe the god he calls upon is actually Death, which is a bold claim as well as a false one, but one that is sure to send intrigued chills down Lankhmar's collective spine.

As soon as gossip starts to spread about this talent of his, chances are that the cult will need to go underground else superstitious citizens, honourable adventurers or the constables of the City Watch put the priest out of business and clap him in irons. As religious practices go, this is clearly an unwholesome one and it fair reeks of Black Magic despite the priest's lies and claims of divine gifts.

The trick is that it will appeal to a great many people. Once the word is out that the priest is telling the truth without flimflamming anybody, people will flock to his cult, doing so in secret so that the authorities will not be alerted. Nobles and gutter-peasants alike will seek out the priest, offering faith and whatever payment he deems necessary to have the 'divine gifts' performed. Especially trusted cultists might even be trained as sorcerers to help manage the growing cult.

This is nasty magic. Even though the priest is professing to use his divine gifts for noble reasons, he is essentially using a form of Black Magic to get rich and is manipulating the souls of the dead in doing so. Characters with even a shred of honour will want to put this man out of business and probably slit his throat in the bargain so he cannot try this anywhere else.





For the Empire!

'Enough of the piteous hiding from the world; too frightened to show our faces to the sky let alone to other humans. No more sunless days and moonless nights under this accursed mountain. We are not protected here, we are imprisoned. And it is time that the world trembled again under the banners of the Empire of Quarmall. It is time to return things to the way they ought to be. It is time to set things right.'

One man's visionary is another man's tyrant. In this hook, a ruler emerges from the sorcerer-lords of Quarmall with one goal in mind: the resurrection of the long-lost imperial glory days. The armies of Quarmall march out from the mountain into the surrounding countryside, taking over the villages of southern Lankhmar and slowly spreading north, recruiting as they go and headed by leaders possessing Black Magic and Quarmallian Necromancy. Eventually, unless they are stopped, they will reach the walls of the Imperishable City and Lankhmar will suffer a siege like no other in its history.

As plots go, most Games Masters will see this as an epic and long-lasting undertaking that will change the face of Nehwon (or at least the land of Lankhmar) for some time to come. Regular adventuring might be curtailed by the advance of the initially small Quarmallian host, or it could be enhanced with darker flavour as the characters venture into Quarmall-held lands in the south and see how different things have become under the rule of the sorcerer-lords. Are entire villages to be forced into slavery or to serve as conscripts in the army?

This story arc would probably be most satisfying if experienced characters were caught up in the middle, with their decisions and deeds somehow affecting the outcome of the war. For example, if they hold rank in the military, they might be dispatched as scouts or raiders into the southern lands, perhaps also tasked with assassination orders should they get the chance to strike at one of the enemy generals.

The actual war with Lankhmar is one that Quarmall will probably lose unless it waits many years to muster its forces or employ some heretofore unknown sorcery in the siege. Though it is never stated in the *Swords* books, it is apparent that Lankhmar's population and army dwarfs those of Quarmall many times. Trickery, treachery and sorcery will be ingrained into the Quarmallian battle plan if it ever hopes to succeed.

The Magic Mushrooms

'A simple task is all I require of you,' snapped Sheelba, his voice rasping like waves breaking on rocks. 'In the blackest pits of Quarmall there are caverns filled with flavoured fungi. This is the food of the citizens. Bring me a handful of the yellow-grey mushrooms that grow in the cavern where the black water flows. Then I shall make you your potion.'

Sheelba of the Eyeless Face is a warlock well-noted by his servants for requiring esoteric components for his spells and potions. Should the characters ever go to him for a specific incantation or magic potion, Games Masters may well consider sending the adventurers on a quest to gather what Sheelba needs to work his magic. This adventure, bound for the Lower Levels of Quarmall where only specially-trained slaves know every twist and turn down there in the darkness, is one that presents quite a challenge and allows players to experience some of the most interesting aspects of the mountain kingdom.

These specific mushrooms are considered delicacy in Quarmall. They are harvested for the tables of the nobility and are accordingly difficult to find. Slaves will need to be bribed, threatened or set free if they are to guide the characters to the rare patches of these yellow-grey mushrooms, and the royal guards are likely to have something to say about the intruders raiding the fields of the kingdom, poaching the food of the nobility.

Sorcerer-in-Exile

'Yes, I know Sheelba and Ningauble. The former is a foolish hermit and the latter spends his time jaw-jacking like a bored housewife. I know them both and I respect neither of them. If you wish to serve a patron with real power, allow me to introduce myself properly, for I am in sore need of capable agents and I will reward you twice as grandly as whatever those wilderness-dwelling weaklings offer you.'

Perhaps Sheel and Ning are not the only powers on the block, and characters chance across a new sorcerous mentor who offers more than the two archimages. It is ultimately unlikely that this exiled Quarmallian magician is really the equal or the superior of the two weird and alien sorcerers but such a decision is down to the Games Master to make. In any event, the Quarmallian makes bold assurances of rewards for similar deeds as would be demanded by Sheel and Ning.

Behind his outwardly kind (or at least unthreatening) demeanour, this magician is up to something. His relations with Sheelba and Ningauble go beyond mere acquaintance into something deeper – a rivalry born years ago, perhaps when he was spurned as an apprentice, tired of Ningauble’s probing into Quarmall or had lost a wizardly duel with one of them in times past. Eventually, he aims to use the characters as weapons in the resurging war, employing the adventurers to work against either or both of the outlandish sorcerers. For now he is content merely to deprive them both of their most useful servants: the Player Characters.

Sheelba and Ningauble are unlikely to take this without at least a waspish comment from the former or a longwinded tirade by the latter. The Games Master may wish to present the two sorcerers as bitter over the whole thing while playing up the fact that their new patron is so much more generous with artefacts and less irritating when it comes to straight answers. Make it seem like the characters really are getting a good deal – then spring the truth on them, that their new ally wants Sheel and Ning dead and desires the characters’ help. *‘And why shouldn’t you consider it? After all the help I’ve given you these past months...’* When Sheelba and Ningauble attempt to dissuade the characters from their new allegiance, perhaps the story they insist is the truth is simply too outrageous to believe.

An interesting way to foreshadow the reality of the situation would be to sprinkle little clues here and there regarding the Quarmallian’s magical practices. Perhaps he requires a series of components that become grimmer and gorier the further down the list the characters go. When they are retrieving hairs from the heads of thirty virgins it does not seem overly sinister. When they are asked as their seventh quest to bring the fingers of a still-living king, things can start to seem uneasy. Even if they choose a hated and corrupt monarch, their consciences should at least be stirred by what they are doing. It will only get worse from there, with Sheelba and Ning repeatedly attempting to wean the adventurers away from their new master and back into their service. Of course, they will likely do so in their annoying and hostile ways, which will hardly endear the players to the archimages, but they were at least given warning, if not *fair* warning, before becoming too involved with the Quarmallian mage.

If done with enough subtlety, the Big Reveal could come as a delicious surprise, with the characters finally coming to realise they have been working for a hateful

necromancer all this time. They will have to redeem themselves by turning on him and ending his malice once and for all.

Slave Uprising

With pickaxes and kitchen knives, the horde moved upward, taking tunnels at random but always seeking out passages that led to the sunlight above.

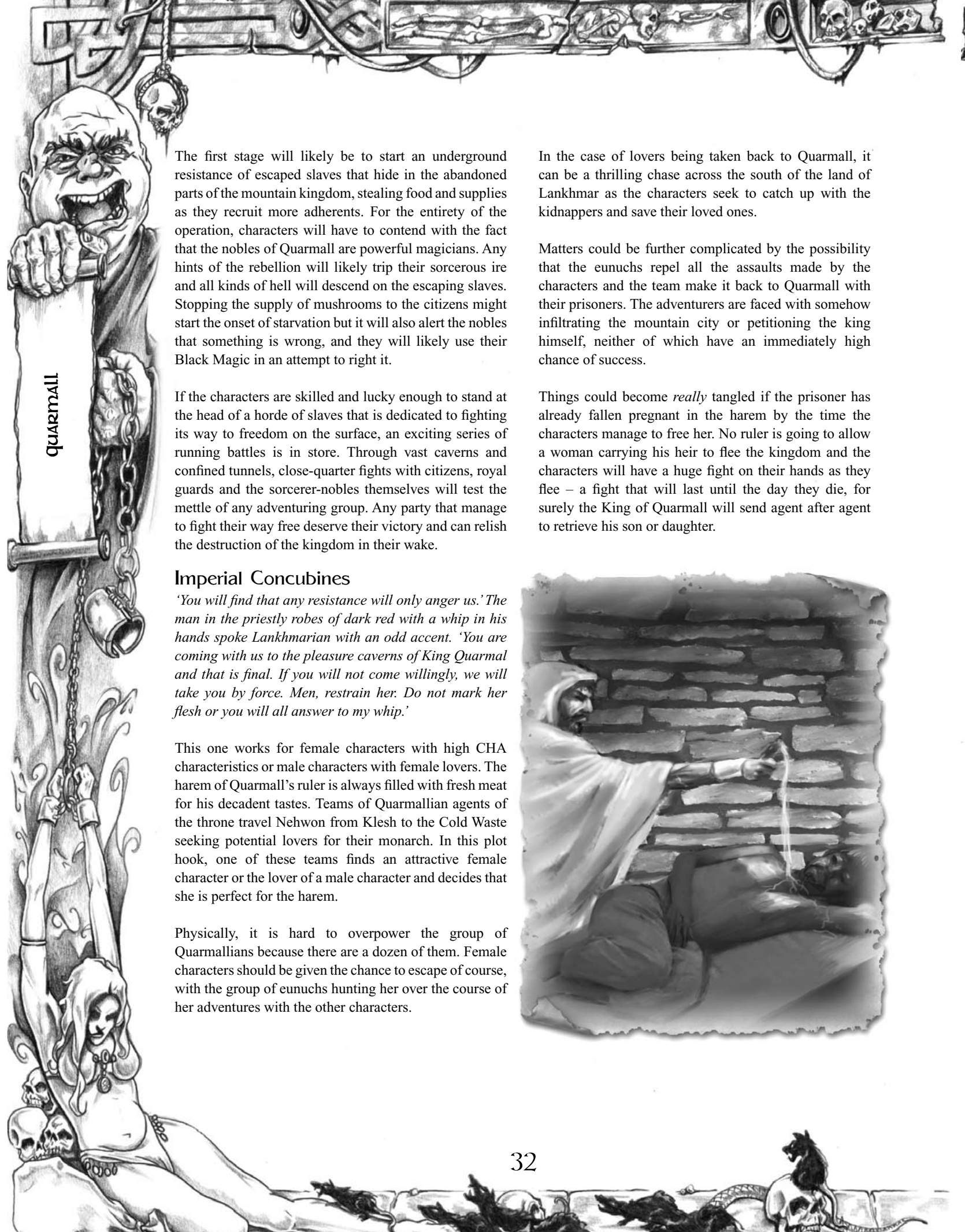
Though slavery is commonplace in Nehwon, the stripe of servitude that goes on in Quarmall is several degrees harsher than in any other nation, with the exception of perhaps the Mingols. Here, however, it is often sorcery-tainted. The people of the villages in the surrounding countryside around Quarmall know all too well that at times their fellows will walk, apparently soulless and devoid of reason, right from their homes at night to the gates of the mountain kingdom. Quarmall captures slaves by mundane means as well but the sorcerous summonings chill the blood more.

Players might decide that this severe oppression offends their characters and they want to do something about it. This is commendable, if extremely difficult.

Stealing individuals or small groups of slaves out of Quarmall and making a break for it is hard enough. The lords of the city are notoriously reluctant to surrender their slave workers. Instigating or leading an uprising comprised of the majority of the kingdom’s slaves is an epic undertaking that will make for a very long campaign as well as, if successful, change the face of Nehwon forever. The kingdom of Quarmall could arguably be considered to be in its death-throes now; the sudden loss of its slave caste would shatter the remnants of the fallen Empire and leave a handful of citizens to starve and struggle to survive in their near-empty mountain. That could be considered by many groups to be a satisfying result in itself.

Beginning the uprising is likely to be the hardest part. Spreading treachery and sedition through the ranks of the generally browbeaten and obese slave ranks is no easy feat. Many will harbour great fears of the outside world which they have never even seen (and who knows what propaganda the lords of Quarmall spread?), while even more will live in fear of their sorcerous masters ever discovering treachery. From the *Swords* tales it is clear that few Quarmallian rulers think ill of torture used to get their own ends or for simple amusement purposes.





Quarmall

The first stage will likely be to start an underground resistance of escaped slaves that hide in the abandoned parts of the mountain kingdom, stealing food and supplies as they recruit more adherents. For the entirety of the operation, characters will have to contend with the fact that the nobles of Quarmall are powerful magicians. Any hints of the rebellion will likely trip their sorcerous ire and all kinds of hell will descend on the escaping slaves. Stopping the supply of mushrooms to the citizens might start the onset of starvation but it will also alert the nobles that something is wrong, and they will likely use their Black Magic in an attempt to right it.

If the characters are skilled and lucky enough to stand at the head of a horde of slaves that is dedicated to fighting its way to freedom on the surface, an exciting series of running battles is in store. Through vast caverns and confined tunnels, close-quarter fights with citizens, royal guards and the sorcerer-nobles themselves will test the mettle of any adventuring group. Any party that manage to fight their way free deserve their victory and can relish the destruction of the kingdom in their wake.

Imperial Concubines

'You will find that any resistance will only anger us.' The man in the priestly robes of dark red with a whip in his hands spoke Lankhmarian with an odd accent. 'You are coming with us to the pleasure caverns of King Quarmal and that is final. If you will not come willingly, we will take you by force. Men, restrain her. Do not mark her flesh or you will all answer to my whip.'

This one works for female characters with high CHA characteristics or male characters with female lovers. The harem of Quarmall's ruler is always filled with fresh meat for his decadent tastes. Teams of Quarmallian agents of the throne travel Nehwon from Klesh to the Cold Waste seeking potential lovers for their monarch. In this plot hook, one of these teams finds an attractive female character or the lover of a male character and decides that she is perfect for the harem.

Physically, it is hard to overpower the group of Quarmallians because there are a dozen of them. Female characters should be given the chance to escape of course, with the group of eunuchs hunting her over the course of her adventures with the other characters.

In the case of lovers being taken back to Quarmall, it can be a thrilling chase across the south of the land of Lankhmar as the characters seek to catch up with the kidnapers and save their loved ones.

Matters could be further complicated by the possibility that the eunuchs repel all the assaults made by the characters and the team make it back to Quarmall with their prisoners. The adventurers are faced with somehow infiltrating the mountain city or petitioning the king himself, neither of which have an immediately high chance of success.

Things could become *really* tangled if the prisoner has already fallen pregnant in the harem by the time the characters manage to free her. No ruler is going to allow a woman carrying his heir to flee the kingdom and the characters will have a huge fight on their hands as they flee – a fight that will last until the day they die, for surely the King of Quarmall will send agent after agent to retrieve his son or daughter.



Quarmallian Necromancy

This section details new sorcery spells that follow all the rules of Black Magic as detailed in the *Lankmar*. Quarmallian Necromancers tend to gain mental instabilities rather than physical corruptions, however.

Summon Ghost

Casting Time 20, Duration: Special

After the ritual is completed, the room grows ice cold and breath from each person present steams into the air in misty white coils of vapour. A faint weeping is heard almost like a tickle in the back of the magician's mind, and a wraithly figure manifests before all observers, still bearing the injuries that slew him.

This spell summons a ghost into the character's vicinity and binds it to him, forcing the spirit to obey the sorcerer's will until it is released at the completion of a single task. Ghosts are generally weak creatures, being the mere echo of the person that once lived, and are good for little more than terrifying unsuspecting enemies or – much more commonly in Quarmall – spying without being seen.

To cast the spell, a necromancer requires a possession belonging to the deceased, which, among the sick sorcerers of the mountain kingdom, is usually a body part. The ritual involves chanting for the entire Casting Time, demanding that the spirit of the deceased return from the Shadowland and answer the call of the sorcerer. When the ghost finally appears, the Duration of the spell is decided at that moment. The spellcaster must decide what task the spirit must complete in order for it to return to the grave. The ghost cannot free itself until it has completed this task. The ghost can speak with the caster for the Duration of the spell, and *only* the caster can hear.

The only tried and tested way to banish a ghost with magic is via the spell Banish Ghost, which is effectively the same as Summon Ghost, only with the intent and demands reversed. The caster must still possess an item that belongs to the spirit if he hopes to have any success – the ritual will work no other way. Any sorcerer that knows Summon Ghost is considered to know Banish Ghost at the same level of skill and increasing a rating in one also increases the other.

Erode Willpower

Casting Time 5, Duration: Special, Resist (Persistence)

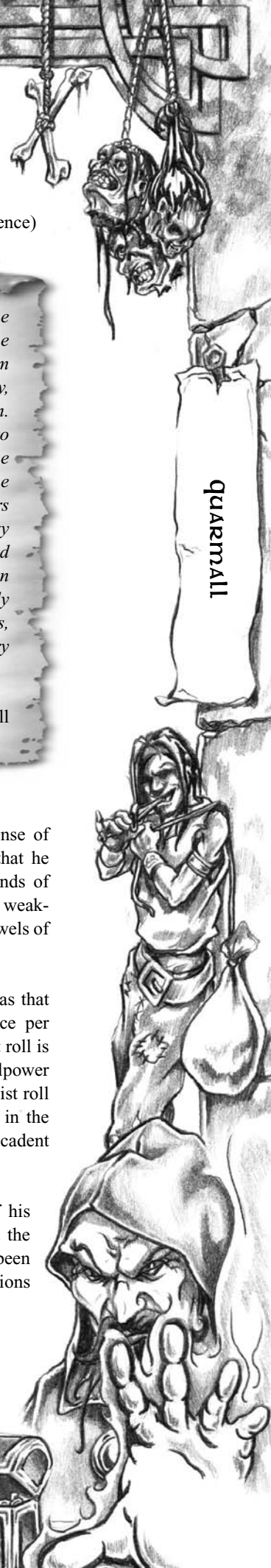
As the mucky road curved up a little, the towers of Quarmall came into view above the treetops. The Mouser's gaze drifted to them and he studied the lazy pinnacles thoughtfully, wondering whether he'd see them again. Suddenly the whim seized him to return to Quarmall straightaway – yes, to slip off the back of the load and run there. What did the outer world hold half so fine as the wonders of that subterranean kingdom? – its mazy mural-pictured tunnelings a man might spend his life tracing...its buried delights...even its evils beautiful...its delicious infinitely varied blacks...its hidden fan-driven air...Yes, suppose he dropped down soundlessly this very moment...

— The Lords of Quarmall

This spell allows a caster to erode a target's sense of free will, desires and ambitions so completely that he becomes a slave to whatever the sorcerer demands of him. It is used by the lords of Quarmall to lure weak-willed country folk into becoming slaves in the bowels of the mountain kingdom.

A Resist (Persistence) roll at the same difficulty as that of when the spell was first cast is allowed once per week of enslavement under the spell. If the Resist roll is successful, the character's full personality and willpower returns, and he is free to act as normal. If the Resist roll fails, he spends another week as a slave, toiling in the black caverns under the earth at the whim of a decadent Quarmallian nobleman.

At all times the target of the spell is aware of his actions, although unable to change them against the caster's wishes. Once a successful Resist roll has been made the character will remember all of his actions whilst magically enslaved.





THE NORTHLANDS

The themes of the Forest Land, the Cold Waste and Rime Isle are different from the heavy urbanisation of Lankhmar and Ilthmar. This section is designed to give Games Masters some ideas when their characters venture into the Land of the Eight Cities and the frozen north beyond. Civilisation peters out, settlements become rarer and rarer, the beasts of the wild become bolder, stronger and more monstrous and finally a traveller reaches Rime Isle – a place many Nehwonians believe to be no more than a myth.

Land of the Eight Cities

The common-room was another wonder of polished wood – Movarl's kingdom was so young that its forests were still its chief wealth. Most of the windows showed green leaves close beyond. From walls and ceiling jutted fantastic demons and winged warrior maidens all wood-carved. Here and there against the wall leaned beautifully polished bows and spears. A wide doorway led out to a narrow courtyard where a bay stallion moved restlessly under an irregular green roof. The city of Kvarch Nar had twenty times as many mighty trees as homes.

— The Swords of Lankhmar

In the vast woodlands north of the Inner Sea and south of the Cold Waste, a nation of scattered city-states exists, thriving on trade with Lankhmar and a lively lumber industry. The Forest Land, Land of the Eight Cities, sprawls across the north of known Nehwon.

The region is one of deep forests offering endless wilderness adventures, surrounded by danger. The hostile tundra of the Cold Waste lies to the north, accessible through treacherous mountain passes. The pirate-laden waters of the Inner Sea are to the south, thick with merchant ships, freebooters and even sea serpents. To the east are the ever-present twin threats of the Mingol hordes and the armies of the ghouls, both of whom regularly prey on the easternmost of the Eight Cities.

The nation that calls itself the Forest Land is actually a union of city-states covering a huge spread of land. It is ruled by a single monarch – the Overlord of the Eight Cities. During the *Swords* tales, this monarch is Movarl, who is revealed to have a friendly relationship with Overlord Glipkerio Kistomerces of Lankhmar, even if the two nations are not exactly allied. Trade flows between the two nations across the Inner Sea, with Kvarch Nar and Lankhmar doing more trade with one another than any other cities in the world.

The settlements that make up the Eight Cities are: Illik-Ving, Gnaph Nar, Klelg Nar, Kvarch Nar, Mlurg Nar, Ool Hrusp, Ool Krut and Ool Plerns. 'City' is a grand word for the reality of some of these locations, which are closer in size to towns and in some cases, villages. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser note several times in their journeys across Nehwon that it is only Lankhmar that deserves the title of 'city.'

Life in the Eight Cities

Directly opposite Lankhmar is Kvarch Nar, which sits at the mouth of the bay where the Mangrishik River flows into the northern waters of the Inner Sea. This is the capital of the Land of the Eight Cities, where the overlord's palace is located. It is also the second busiest port in all of Nehwon, what with the massive amount of trade occurring between it and Lankhmar.

Kvarch Nar is typical of Eight Cities' life. It is a beautiful city – it would surely be a wonder of the world if explorers could ever agree on just what constitutes a Nehwonian wonder. It is a settlement that almost seems to blend in the with the Great Forest in places, with the city limits merging into the surrounding woodland rather than being marked by solid walls of stone as in other

cities. Craftsmen – sculptors and architects specialising in wood, mainly – are prized and respected members of the community here, as they are across the Forest Land.

As the capital of a nation that lives and dies by the success of its lumber trade, the major export across the Inner Sea from Kvarch Nar is quality timber to Lankhmar and Ilthmar. The docks are busy day and night, busier and more crowded than Ilthmar's harbour yet lacking the feverish cluster of the port in the Imperishable City. Movarl's navy also docks many of its ships here, with the others stationed in various other Eight Cities ports – always on the hunt for pirates. Characters pulling into Kvarch Nar harbour can expect to find between two and 12 of the overlord's vessels at any one time. The overlord is known across Nehwon as an insightful and skilled sea-commander and his troops are purported to be almost the equivalent of the Lankhmarines in terms of training and competency.

Little piracy trade comes through Kvarch Nar. Freebooter captains usually divert their ill-gotten gains to Gnamph Nar where the laws and military presence are both lax. Kvarch Nar has its share of criminals among the leafy beauty of the wooden city but pirates are rarely among them. Movarl takes great pride in keeping his port free of privateers, which is the primary duty of the navy when not engaged in war.

Kvarch Nar is technically vulnerable to attack because of its lack of traditional city walls. However, since no invading armies have penetrated the Great Forest as yet in a bid to claim the Eight Cities capital, the people are hardly fearful of conquerors. Even the Mingols and ghouls that regularly siege the Eastern settlements of the Forest Land impress little worry into the hearts of Kvarch Nar citizens. These threats are distant and easily ignored by the folk who dwell in the beauty of the capital, far from the fires of invasion and the swords of enemies.

The Wooden Palace

The overlord's home is a palace of surpassing craftsmanship and beauty, made entirely from Eight Cities lumber. Here the ruler of the Forest Land enjoys the luxurious lifestyle of all Nehwonian nobles, though it is connoted in the *Swords* tales that Movarl is a more competent (at least militarily) and less decadent monarch than, say, Glipkerio Kistomerces of Lankhmar. The palace itself is shapely and artistically made, though like the city surrounding it, it is without defensive walls.



the northlands

When the Dukes of the Eight Cities gather to discuss their realm, the rulers of each of the Eight Cities are accompanied by their guards and advisors to the overlord's palace in Kvarch Nar. This is an infrequent occurrence, since the cities tend to rule themselves by and large.

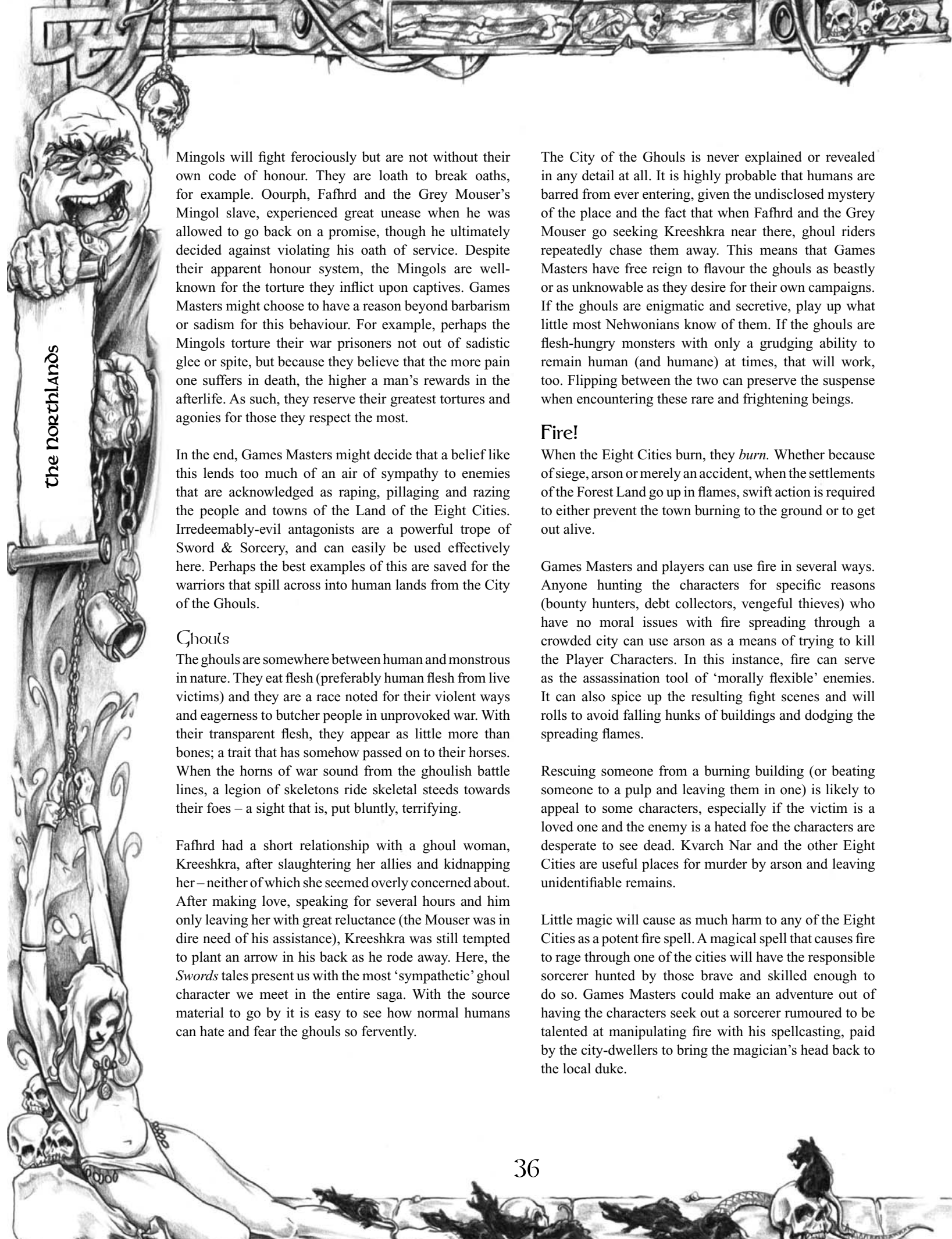
A Nation at War

The Land of the Eight Cities is no stranger to warfare. Both the ghouls and the Mingols lay siege to the easternmost cities of the Forest Land with painful regularity, though it is often Sarheenmar, an independent city-state to the south, which takes the brunt of invaders' aggressions. Games Masters dealing with the gritty, violent throes of war in their campaigns have a lot of room to manoeuvre here.

Mingols

The Mingol hordes are akin to the Mongols of our world, and are seen through western eyes as little more than barbarous warrior-nomads. This is a stereotype but an effective one, and can make for some fear-inspiring enemies on the walls of a city or in the bitter house-to-house fighting that floods the streets of a besieged town.





the northlands

Mingols will fight ferociously but are not without their own code of honour. They are loath to break oaths, for example. Oourph, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser's Mingol slave, experienced great unease when he was allowed to go back on a promise, though he ultimately decided against violating his oath of service. Despite their apparent honour system, the Mingols are well-known for the torture they inflict upon captives. Games Masters might choose to have a reason beyond barbarism or sadism for this behaviour. For example, perhaps the Mingols torture their war prisoners not out of sadistic glee or spite, but because they believe that the more pain one suffers in death, the higher a man's rewards in the afterlife. As such, they reserve their greatest tortures and agonies for those they respect the most.

In the end, Games Masters might decide that a belief like this lends too much of an air of sympathy to enemies that are acknowledged as raping, pillaging and razing the people and towns of the Land of the Eight Cities. Irredeemably-evil antagonists are a powerful trope of *Sword & Sorcery*, and can easily be used effectively here. Perhaps the best examples of this are saved for the warriors that spill across into human lands from the City of the Ghouls.

Ghouls

The ghouls are somewhere between human and monstrous in nature. They eat flesh (preferably human flesh from live victims) and they are a race noted for their violent ways and eagerness to butcher people in unprovoked war. With their transparent flesh, they appear as little more than bones; a trait that has somehow passed on to their horses. When the horns of war sound from the ghoulish battle lines, a legion of skeletons ride skeletal steeds towards their foes – a sight that is, put bluntly, terrifying.

Fafhrd had a short relationship with a ghoulish woman, Kreeshkra, after slaughtering her allies and kidnapping her – neither of which she seemed overly concerned about. After making love, speaking for several hours and him only leaving her with great reluctance (the Mouser was in dire need of his assistance), Kreeshkra was still tempted to plant an arrow in his back as he rode away. Here, the *Swords* tales present us with the most 'sympathetic' ghoulish character we meet in the entire saga. With the source material to go by it is easy to see how normal humans can hate and fear the ghouls so fervently.

The City of the Ghouls is never explained or revealed in any detail at all. It is highly probable that humans are barred from ever entering, given the undisclosed mystery of the place and the fact that when Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser go seeking Kreeshkra near there, ghoulish riders repeatedly chase them away. This means that Games Masters have free reign to flavour the ghouls as beastly or as unknowable as they desire for their own campaigns. If the ghouls are enigmatic and secretive, play up what little most Nehwonians know of them. If the ghouls are flesh-hungry monsters with only a grudging ability to remain human (and humane) at times, that will work, too. Flipping between the two can preserve the suspense when encountering these rare and frightening beings.

Fire!

When the Eight Cities burn, they *burn*. Whether because of siege, arson or merely an accident, when the settlements of the Forest Land go up in flames, swift action is required to either prevent the town burning to the ground or to get out alive.

Games Masters and players can use fire in several ways. Anyone hunting the characters for specific reasons (bounty hunters, debt collectors, vengeful thieves) who have no moral issues with fire spreading through a crowded city can use arson as a means of trying to kill the Player Characters. In this instance, fire can serve as the assassination tool of 'morally flexible' enemies. It can also spice up the resulting fight scenes and will rolls to avoid falling hunks of buildings and dodging the spreading flames.

Rescuing someone from a burning building (or beating someone to a pulp and leaving them in one) is likely to appeal to some characters, especially if the victim is a loved one and the enemy is a hated foe the characters are desperate to see dead. Kvarch Nar and the other Eight Cities are useful places for murder by arson and leaving unidentifiable remains.

Little magic will cause as much harm to any of the Eight Cities as a potent fire spell. A magical spell that causes fire to rage through one of the cities will have the responsible sorcerer hunted by those brave and skilled enough to do so. Games Masters could make an adventure out of having the characters seek out a sorcerer rumoured to be talented at manipulating fire with his spellcasting, paid by the city-dwellers to bring the magician's head back to the local duke.

Fire ravages the eastern cities when the Mingols or the ghouls manage to breach the defences and sack the settlements. Sarheenmar, north of Ilthmar and not actually one of the Eight Cities, also suffers the same fiery fate when the invisible-skinned flesh eaters or the nomads of the Steppes go to war. Characters or Non-Player Characters from these eastern cities may have a significant grudge against either the ghouls or the Mingols (or both) and this will likely flavour interactions with either culture.

The Mad Duke of Ool Hrusp

The most infamous of the Eight Cities' dukes is Duke Lithquil, also known as the Mad Duke of Ool Hrusp. He is a man with definite sadistic passions, relishing in bloodshed and the pain of others. He commonly hires adventurers in order to help him experience these passions and not all of his hirelings survive.

In Ool Hrusp is Lithquil's arena, constructed so that he and his citizens can watch the bloodsport-born pleasure of men butchering one another. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser served Lithquil for a time, creating bold battles and mock-deaths to satisfy the duke's appetite and bloodlust. His interest in these false fights waned, of course. He desires the real thing.

Games Masters can run with a classic fantasy trope here, by pitting combative characters against each other within an arena. Voluntary entrants will always be welcome but the duke is not above having potential fighters beaten into submission and dragged to cells under the arena, forcing them to fight for their freedom, earning it through victory in a certain number of matches. Characters can either be in the thick of the arena battles (which raises a dark question should two of them ever face one another) or seek to rescue a friend from the pits under the battle area, saving him from a death purely to please a madman.

The Cold Waste

The geographical aspects of the Cold Waste are detailed extensively in the *Lankhmar*. What this section offers Games Masters are additional details regarding the unique society of the northern barbarians and how to incorporate these elements into their games along with the more obvious aspects of the landscape.

Life among the Northern Barbarians

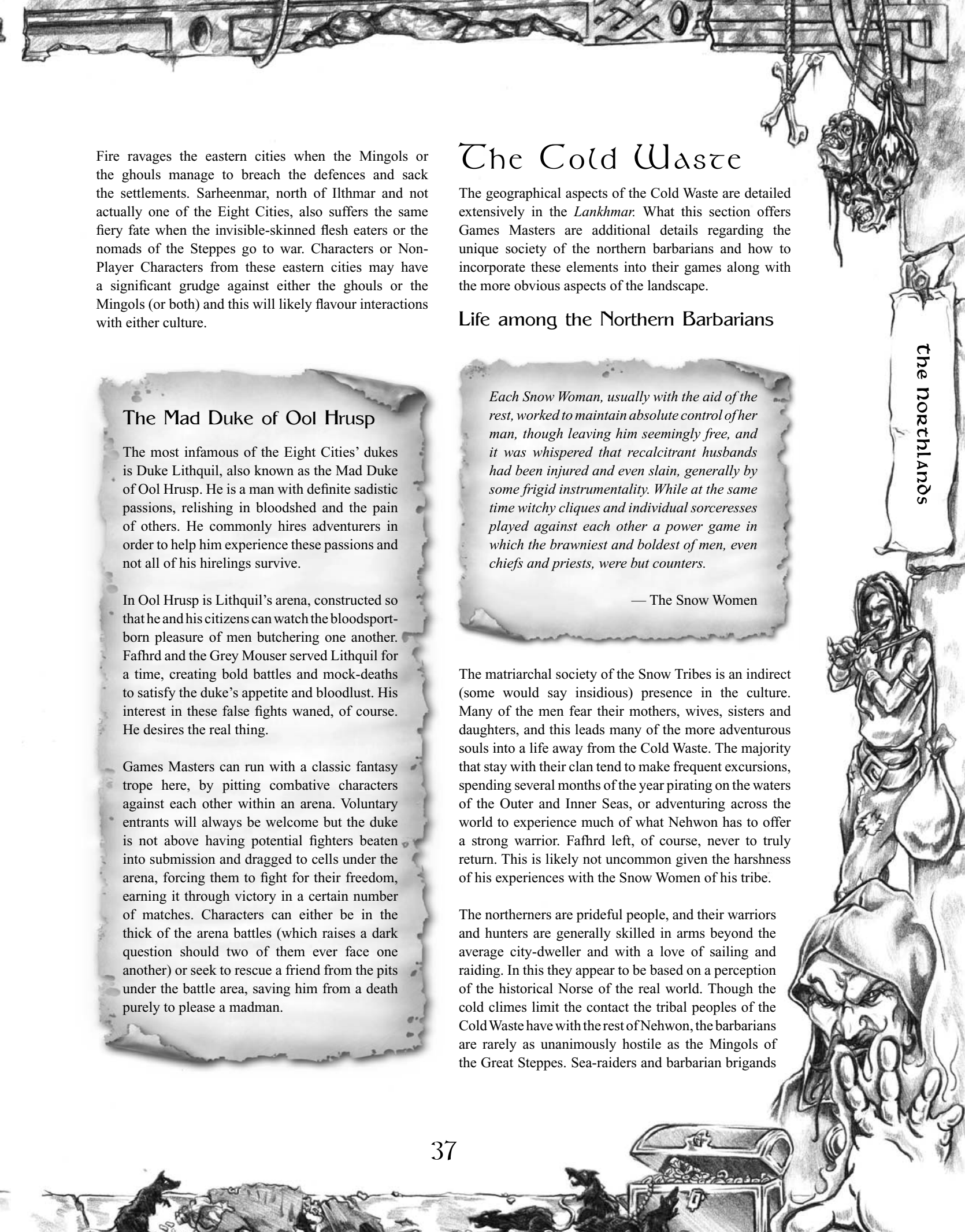
Each Snow Woman, usually with the aid of the rest, worked to maintain absolute control of her man, though leaving him seemingly free, and it was whispered that recalcitrant husbands had been injured and even slain, generally by some frigid instrumentality. While at the same time witchy cliques and individual sorceresses played against each other a power game in which the brawniest and boldest of men, even chiefs and priests, were but counters.

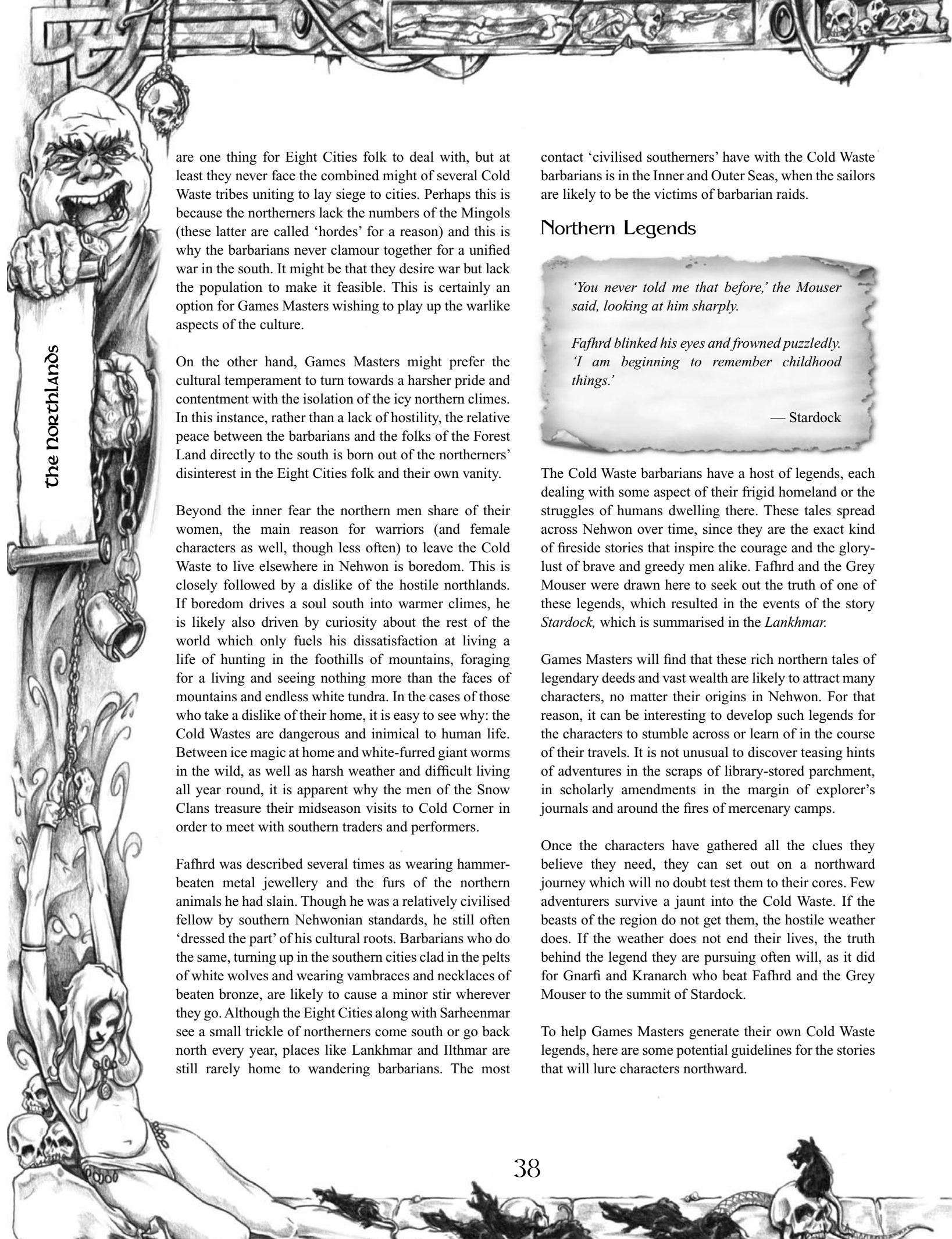
— The Snow Women

The matriarchal society of the Snow Tribes is an indirect (some would say insidious) presence in the culture. Many of the men fear their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, and this leads many of the more adventurous souls into a life away from the Cold Waste. The majority that stay with their clan tend to make frequent excursions, spending several months of the year pirating on the waters of the Outer and Inner Seas, or adventuring across the world to experience much of what Nehwon has to offer a strong warrior. Fafhrd left, of course, never to truly return. This is likely not uncommon given the harshness of his experiences with the Snow Women of his tribe.

The northerners are prideful people, and their warriors and hunters are generally skilled in arms beyond the average city-dweller and with a love of sailing and raiding. In this they appear to be based on a perception of the historical Norse of the real world. Though the cold climes limit the contact the tribal peoples of the Cold Waste have with the rest of Nehwon, the barbarians are rarely as unanimously hostile as the Mingols of the Great Steppes. Sea-raiders and barbarian brigands

the northlands





the northlands

are one thing for Eight Cities folk to deal with, but at least they never face the combined might of several Cold Waste tribes uniting to lay siege to cities. Perhaps this is because the northerners lack the numbers of the Mingols (these latter are called 'hordes' for a reason) and this is why the barbarians never clamour together for a unified war in the south. It might be that they desire war but lack the population to make it feasible. This is certainly an option for Games Masters wishing to play up the warlike aspects of the culture.

On the other hand, Games Masters might prefer the cultural temperament to turn towards a harsher pride and contentment with the isolation of the icy northern climes. In this instance, rather than a lack of hostility, the relative peace between the barbarians and the folks of the Forest Land directly to the south is born out of the northerners' disinterest in the Eight Cities folk and their own vanity.

Beyond the inner fear the northern men share of their women, the main reason for warriors (and female characters as well, though less often) to leave the Cold Waste to live elsewhere in Nehwon is boredom. This is closely followed by a dislike of the hostile northlands. If boredom drives a soul south into warmer climes, he is likely also driven by curiosity about the rest of the world which only fuels his dissatisfaction at living a life of hunting in the foothills of mountains, foraging for a living and seeing nothing more than the faces of mountains and endless white tundra. In the cases of those who take a dislike of their home, it is easy to see why: the Cold Wastes are dangerous and inimical to human life. Between ice magic at home and white-furred giant worms in the wild, as well as harsh weather and difficult living all year round, it is apparent why the men of the Snow Clans treasure their midseason visits to Cold Corner in order to meet with southern traders and performers.

Fafhrd was described several times as wearing hammer-beaten metal jewellery and the furs of the northern animals he had slain. Though he was a relatively civilised fellow by southern Nehwonian standards, he still often 'dressed the part' of his cultural roots. Barbarians who do the same, turning up in the southern cities clad in the pelts of white wolves and wearing vambraces and necklaces of beaten bronze, are likely to cause a minor stir wherever they go. Although the Eight Cities along with Sarheenmar see a small trickle of northerners come south or go back north every year, places like Lankhmar and Ilthmar are still rarely home to wandering barbarians. The most

contact 'civilised southerners' have with the Cold Waste barbarians is in the Inner and Outer Seas, when the sailors are likely to be the victims of barbarian raids.

Northern Legends

'You never told me that before,' the Mouser said, looking at him sharply.

Fafhrd blinked his eyes and frowned puzzledly. 'I am beginning to remember childhood things.'

— Stardock

The Cold Waste barbarians have a host of legends, each dealing with some aspect of their frigid homeland or the struggles of humans dwelling there. These tales spread across Nehwon over time, since they are the exact kind of fireside stories that inspire the courage and the glory-lust of brave and greedy men alike. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser were drawn here to seek out the truth of one of these legends, which resulted in the events of the story *Stardock*, which is summarised in the *Lankhmar*.

Games Masters will find that these rich northern tales of legendary deeds and vast wealth are likely to attract many characters, no matter their origins in Nehwon. For that reason, it can be interesting to develop such legends for the characters to stumble across or learn of in the course of their travels. It is not unusual to discover teasing hints of adventures in the scraps of library-stored parchment, in scholarly amendments in the margin of explorer's journals and around the fires of mercenary camps.

Once the characters have gathered all the clues they believe they need, they can set out on a northward journey which will no doubt test them to their cores. Few adventurers survive a jaunt into the Cold Waste. If the beasts of the region do not get them, the hostile weather does. If the weather does not end their lives, the truth behind the legend they are pursuing often will, as it did for Gnarnfi and Kranarch who beat Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser to the summit of Stardock.

To help Games Masters generate their own Cold Waste legends, here are some potential guidelines for the stories that will lure characters northward.

Stories based on the achievements of Cold Waste barbarians in the past are popular in the region. Fafhrd's father Nalgron was called the Legend Breaker for his mountain climbing skills; he scaled peaks that no living soul had managed to climb before. These are the kinds of stories that stick in the prideful hearts of the northerners and are likely to spread around the world with the boastful telling when barbarians speak of the culture to southerners.

Stories of chieftains who killed powerful beasts, raiders who sacked well-known settlements or sank famous ships or warriors who took the heads of mighty enemies in battle are also likely to feature in these boasts, though the only way they will draw treasure-seekers is if they feature some kind of long-lost valuable reward that modern adventurers can find, such as buried gemstone plunder in the foothills of the Mountains of the Giants, perhaps left by a raider captain as an offering to Kos or for his clan should they ever fall on hard times. Likewise the tale of a great war-leader with a magic weapon or centuries-lost item will attract brave, curious and greedy souls who desire the object for their own adventures, or to sell on at an incredible profit to some decadent southern noble.



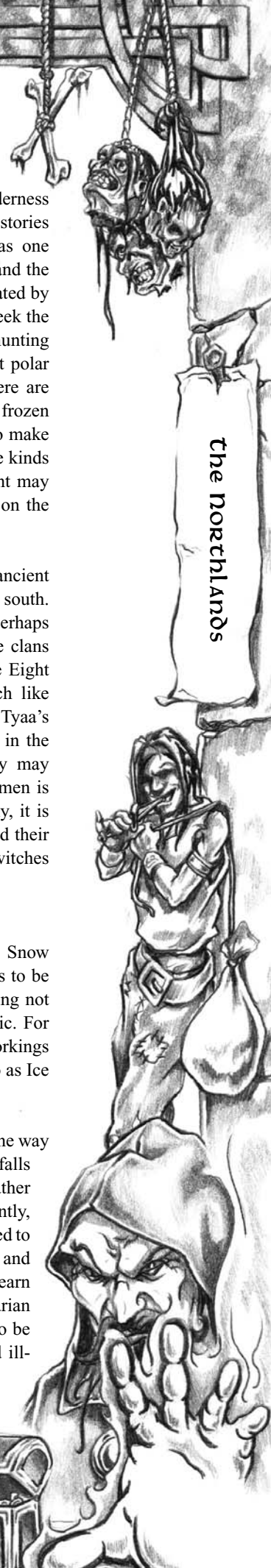
The legends of monsters or great beasts in the wilderness will always have a place of prominence in the stories of the Cold Waste. The inhabitable landscape as one ventures further north is suitable only for beasts and the region even where the clans dwell is surely populated by more wild animals than people. Characters who seek the respect that comes from claiming an unrivalled hunting trophy could do worse than taking on the biggest polar tigers or bears in the Cold Waste – provided there are not some unknown and deadlier creatures in the frozen wilds. It need not be the characters who decide to make the adventure, of course; nobles who hear of these kinds of stories who also possess a passion for the hunt may recruit the characters as companions or servants on the journey north.

An intriguing possibility is for tales telling of an ancient cult of Snow Clan witch-women to spread slowly south. Perhaps these witches still exist in some form, or perhaps they rise again in the north and seek to unite the clans into a force capable of attacking the Land of the Eight Cities and sweeping further into Nehwon. Much like Fafhrd and the Mouser during the resurrection of Tyaas' faith, characters can become accidentally caught in the resurgent religion and destroy it purely so they may survive. Though the ice sorcery of the Snow Women is subtle and insidious rather than violent and flashy, it is still dangerous for all that. A coven that has honed their powers beyond the normal abilities of the tribal witches would be a force to be reckoned with.

Ice Magic

In the *Swords* stories, little in the way of the Snow Women's sorcery is displayed. Their magic seems to be a limited, ritualistic form of elemental spellworking not quite related to the arcane powers of Black Magic. For the purposes of game mechanics, the mystical workings of the northern witches are collectively referred to as Ice Magic.

Ice Magic is not a complete magical discipline in the way that Black Magic is. It is a slower, subtler art that falls close to coming under Games Master prerogative rather than set of skills and a list of spells. It is, put bluntly, unnerving but generally not very powerful compared to the dark sorceries of other Nehwonian magicians, and it is recommended that Player Characters do not learn its secrets. The exceptions to this are female barbarian characters, but even these might find Ice Magic to be absolutely useless outside of the Cold Waste and ill-



suited to most adventures. From a thematic perspective, Ice Magic's power lies in the fact that it is frightening, not in the Hit Point damage it can inflict.

The main precept of Ice Magic is that it can be used in a host of minor ice-, wind- and snow-related methods, but is essentially little more than a way of lowering the temperature (often dramatically). For example, Ice Magic can be used to create cold winds or lower body temperature so that the person quickly freezes to death.

To actually use Ice Magic, a character must possess the Advanced skill: Ice Magic. The Snow Woman must also know the victim she is casting the spell on. She must know the person's face and name, having them both clearly in her mind at all times while incanting. The distance for any Ice Magic effect is the caster's POW in miles.

The Ice Magic Skill

Particularly when working together, the Snow Women were reputed to wield mighty magics, particularly through the element of cold and its consequences: slipperiness, the sudden freezing of flesh, the gluing of skin to metal, the fragility of objects, the menacing mass of snow-laden trees and branches and the vastly greater mass of avalanches. And there was no man wholly unafraid of the hypnotic power in their ice-blue eyes.

— The Snow Women

This skill is learned as any other Advanced skill, and increased through practice or research. It operates on the character's base POW characteristic. It is only available to female barbarian characters of the Cold Waste.

To use Ice Magic, a character decides what she wishes to do and rolls her skill test, comparing the results to the following descriptors. Minor Task effects take ten minutes. Difficult Task effects take 1D4 hours. Legendary Task effects take 2D4 hours.

For each other Snow Woman (who possesses Ice Magic) helping with the incantations, chants and the secret rituals, the time for Task effects are reduced by one

hour. An effect can never be created in faster than one minute. Additional Snow Women helping do not make the task any easier – only faster. The magic is driven by the bitterness of the ritual leader.

† **Minor Task:** Causing someone's boot to slip on a rock (imposing a –60% check on the next DEX-based check).

† **Difficult Task:** –20% to the check. Freezing objects over time, such as making a tree freeze overnight so that it falls come the dawn; creating a sheet of ice crystals that thicken on a tent's cloth and eventually crush the occupants for six Hit Points of damage to each Hit Location.

† **Legendary Task:** –40% to the check. Calling up a freezing wind that forces multiple characters to suffer the effects of exposure as noted on page 87 of *RuneQuest*; lowering a person's body temperature so that he suffers one Hit Point of ice damage a turn to each Hit Location; causing an avalanche that streams down the face of one of the Mountains of the Giants.

A Note on Ice Magic

Games Masters might prefer to expand on the Ice Magic seen in the source material and described here in the rules. For some campaigns, the players might prefer Ice Magic to take the form of a full discipline like Black Magic or the styles described in *RuneQuest* and *The RuneQuest Companion*.

Given how limited Ice Magic is in the *Swords* tales, this is a bold step to take, but it might be satisfying for groups that spend a great deal of time in the Cold Waste or play in northern-focused games. Some Games Masters may even want to take it further, allowing for a host of spells from ice and cold runes to feature in the game sessions. These are matters of personal choice, however. The standard 'stripped-down' rules for the Snow Women's cold sorcery accurately represent what this unnerving magic is capable of if one goes by the source material.

Rime Isle

'Yet,' Fafhrd said, recalling something, 'my grey friend judged Rime Isle to be a sort of rim-spot, where one might meet all manner of strange ships and men and gods from very far places.'

'That's true also,' she said hurriedly. 'And perhaps it's favoured the same hard-headedness: how, where there are so many ghosts about, to take account of only what the hand can firmly grasp and can be weighed in scales. Money and fish. It's one way to go.'

— Rime Isle

In ages past, Rime Isle was a place of superstition and faith much like any other nation in Nehwon. Now the northernmost vestiges of civilisation in the known world are populated by hard-headed, stubborn atheists who are set in their ways and possess a down-to-earth outlook on life. Ironically, these abject realists inhabit a land believed to be a myth by most Lankhmarts and other people of the south, and it is a place where the reality of Nehwon merges with the realities of other worlds.

On the rarest of occasions, Rime Isle – which seems to act as an occasional lodestone for strange beings from other worlds – has been the site of new gods arriving on Nehwon. The most recent example in the *Swords* tales (though it is mentioned that it happens at other times) is the arrival of two near-dead gods who lack any believers in their own realities and manifest on Rime Isle. These are Odin and Loki, the deities of Norse legend. They use their powers to incite the populace – led by Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser – into a massive war with the sorcery-dominated Sea Mingols. Fortunately for all concerned, the two heroes regain their wits from the two otherworldly gods and banish them from Nehwon completely. Rime Isle may not play host to such irregularities often but when it does, the results can be spectacular.

This is not an aspect of Rime Isle that has any game mechanics attached to it; indeed, such mechanics are impossible given the vague nature of the island's mysteries.

Instead it is simply a fact of the island – strange ships and foreigners from no known and in Nehwon arrive in Salthaven and Cold Harbour, Rime Isle's only ports, to be explained or expanded upon by Games Masters with a flair for introducing the people of other realities into their campaigns. This is certainly not a flavour that will appeal to all groups or fit in with all styles of campaign.

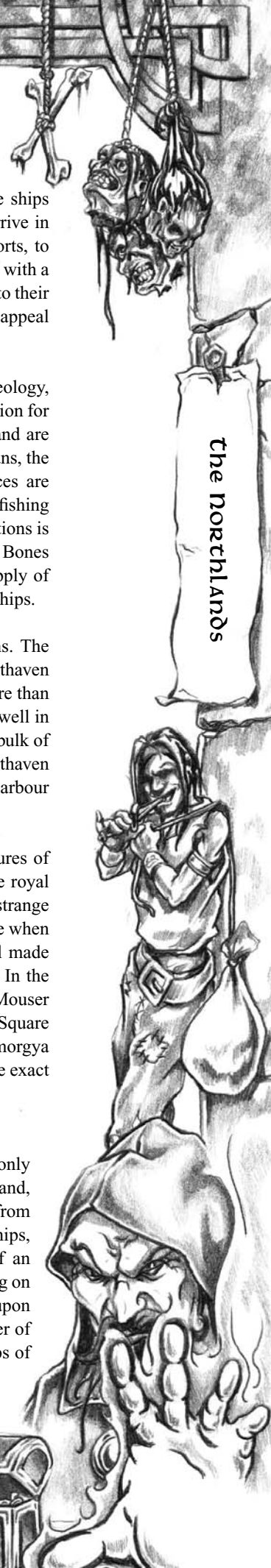
The atheistic souls of Rime Isle have no time for theology, and their down-to-earth natures leave little inclination for philosophy. Instead, though the people of the island are no more or less educated than any other Nehwonians, the acquisition and conservation of precious resources are the primary concerns of most Rimelanders. The fishing in the Outer Sea which rings Rime Isle in all directions is plentiful and rewarding, and the Beach of Bleached Bones provides the Islers with an irregular and grim supply of wood for their buildings, all taken from wrecked ships.

Rime Isle is not densely populated by any means. The only two settlements on the entire island are Salthaven and Cold Harbour, and the latter of these is no more than a small harbour and a dozen or so huts. Hermits dwell in the tundra that makes up the island's skin, but the bulk of the nation's several thousand citizens dwell in Salthaven on the south coast of the island, adjacent to Cold Harbour on the north.

The leaders of Rime Isle guard the ancient treasures of Simorgya, which apparently once belonged to the royal family of that sunken land. It is believed that the strange underwater-dwelling beings of Simorgya can sense when one of their ancient lost treasures – which are all made of solid gold – touch the water of the Outer Sea. In the *Swords* tales, this is demonstrated when the Grey Mouser quells the Great Maelstrom with the Gold Cube of Square Dealing, and the sea-dwelling princesses of Simorgya plot the return of their artefacts once they know the exact location of them.

Salthaven

Salthaven is a small town that serves as Rime Isle's only major port. Due to the scarcity of trees on the island, the majority of the buildings here are constructed from wood gathered from wrecked or dismantled ships, which makes the settlement either something of an eyesore or possessed of a strange beauty, depending on one's perspective. What is immediately noticeable upon arriving is that there is usually a surprising number of ships in port – and not just the many fishing sloops of



the townspeople. Rime Isle sees no shortage of trade with the outside world, even though many southerners see the place as little more than a myth.

The town has its fair share of taverns and a few inns, making it somewhat resemble the settlements of the south, though Rime Isle sees little in the way of crime since most everyone knows each other and the community is tightly-knit. Visitors can choose to stay in one of the taverns or inns and pay business prices on top of their docking costs, or to remain in the port area, bunking their men in the shore quarters run by harbour master Groniger, which is free with the docking cost of a gold piece a day per head.

What few courtesans work here dress in red to identify themselves to potential clients, though there is no organised guild as in Lankhmar. It is likely that most whores make their coin from the townsfolk and the visiting foreigners who may or may not be from other lands but still share the same desires as all men. Private rooms can be rented in many taverns, such as the Flame Den in the Salt Herring. These kind of night-time parties are a popular pastime in the town, though they tend to be private and quiet affairs rather than a city-wide decadence reminiscent of the sprawling southern cities.

The Council of Rime Isle

The room inside was larger and somewhat more lofty than the one at the Salt Herring, but was grey-timbered like it, built of wrecks. And it had no fireplace, but was inadequately warmed by two smoking braziers and lit by torches that burned blue and sad (perhaps there were bronze nails in them), not merrily golden-yellow like Rill's. The main article of furniture was a long heavy table at one end on which Cif and Alfreyt sat, looking their haughtiest. Drawn away from them toward the other end were seated ten large sober Isle-men of middle years, Groniger in their midst, with such doleful, gloomily indignant, outraged looks on their faces that the Mouser burst out laughing. Other Islers crowded the walls, some women among them. All turned on the newcomers faces of mingled puzzlement and disapproval.

— Rime Isle

Salthaven and by extension all of Rime Isle is ruled by the citizen council, which is comprised of inheriting nobles and townspeople in positions of authority, such as the harbour master. Their meetings are to discuss and decide important issues like matters of lumber-trade and the potential for war, as well as any oddities in the current visiting ships or in matters of treasury, such as merchant ventures to the south or the continued safeguarding of the gold icons of Simorgya.

The councilmen as portrayed in the *Swords* stories are hidebound and grouchy, barring Alfreyt and Cif, who are two shrewd and superstitious noblewomen that become the lovers of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser respectively when the ageing heroes retire. Any characters dealing with the Salthaven council can expect to face a board of traditionalists and stern judges, who will believe no words dealing with the supernatural. Observers are welcome to watch the council in session and ask questions of their own for their leaders to answer.

The Salt Herring

Moonlight striking almost horizontally left the narrow street in shadow but revealed the cross-set beams above the Salt Herring's door. Where did they get so much wood in an island so far north? That question was at least answered for him when he pressed on inside. The tavern was built of the grey beams and planks of wrecked or dismantled ships – one wall still had a whaleback curve and in another he noted the borings and embedded shells of sea creatures.

— Rime Isle

The Salt Herring (before it burns in the events detailed in the later *Swords* tales) is a classic example of the taverns in Salthaven. Here residents come to drink and make merry, or to simply talk of the day's fish-hauls. The games played here are more often backgammon or chess with chunky stone pieces, rather than knife games or dice bets as one would find in the south. That is not to say such pastimes do not exist – they do. They are just less common here.

A private room, the Flame Den, is available for nightly rental by those wishing to hold their own parties with the comfort of an indoor open fire, which is a relatively rare occurrence in Salthaven taverns given the scarcity of wood on the island. It was in this fire that the god Loki resided while he convalesced in Nehwon, before his banishment at the hands of the Grey Mouser. The stocky but ancient herbalist-cum-witch woman, Mother Grum, is often the door-woman here. She is a hunched but lumpish and intimidating figure, which combined with her warty face gives her the appearance of the mother of all ogres.

Cold Harbour

Those farmhouses and byres had been of turf or sod mainly, with grass and flowers growing on their narrow roofs and smokeholes instead of chimneys. Mara, dry-eyed, pointed out the one she'd dwelt in. Cold Harbour was simply a dozen such dwellings atop a rather steep hill or large mound backed against the glacier and turf-walled – a sort of retreat for the country-dwellers in times of peril.

— Rime Isle

The other settlement on Rime Isle is the hamlet of Cold Harbour in the north. Cold Harbour is accessible by sail or by a trek across the Deathlands, neither of which is overly appealing since the former involves sailing around the Great Maelstrom and the latter means a hike across harsh tundra.

Cold Harbour suffered in the siege by the Sea Mingols, though rebuilding such a tiny settlement is hardly any effort at all. Since northward of Rime Isle is the vast polar ice cap and little else, few vessels ever sail into Cold Harbour, and a portion of those that try end up wrecked on the Beach of Bleached Bones off Rime Isle's eastern shore as they attempt to navigate around the island's edge. In fact, it is likely that this northernmost reach of Rime Isle sees more otherworldly traffic than Nehwonian vessels coming into its modest port.

The Deathlands

The majority of Rime Isle's landscape is taken up by the tundra known as the Deathlands, which is equally rocky shale, bare earth almost too icy to farm and glacial runoff that freezes the earth solid for months on end in some regions.

Traversing the Deathlands counts as Slight Adversity due to the rocky ground but the real hindrance is that no opportunities exist for hunting or foraging in the wild once a traveller leaves the comfort of Salthaven. No game runs across Rime Isle's tundra and nothing in the way of edible flora exists to offer succour to the weary traveller, either. Although the Cold Waste is the most ice-blasted realm of Nehwon, Rime Isle is the most truly inhospitable because it is so utterly barren. More than once in the *Swords* stories, a Rimelander comments on his island being hostile to human life, yet the residents struggle on with the life they are accustomed to, perhaps under the belief that the decadent south has little to offer them, with all the superstitions and 'false' faiths.

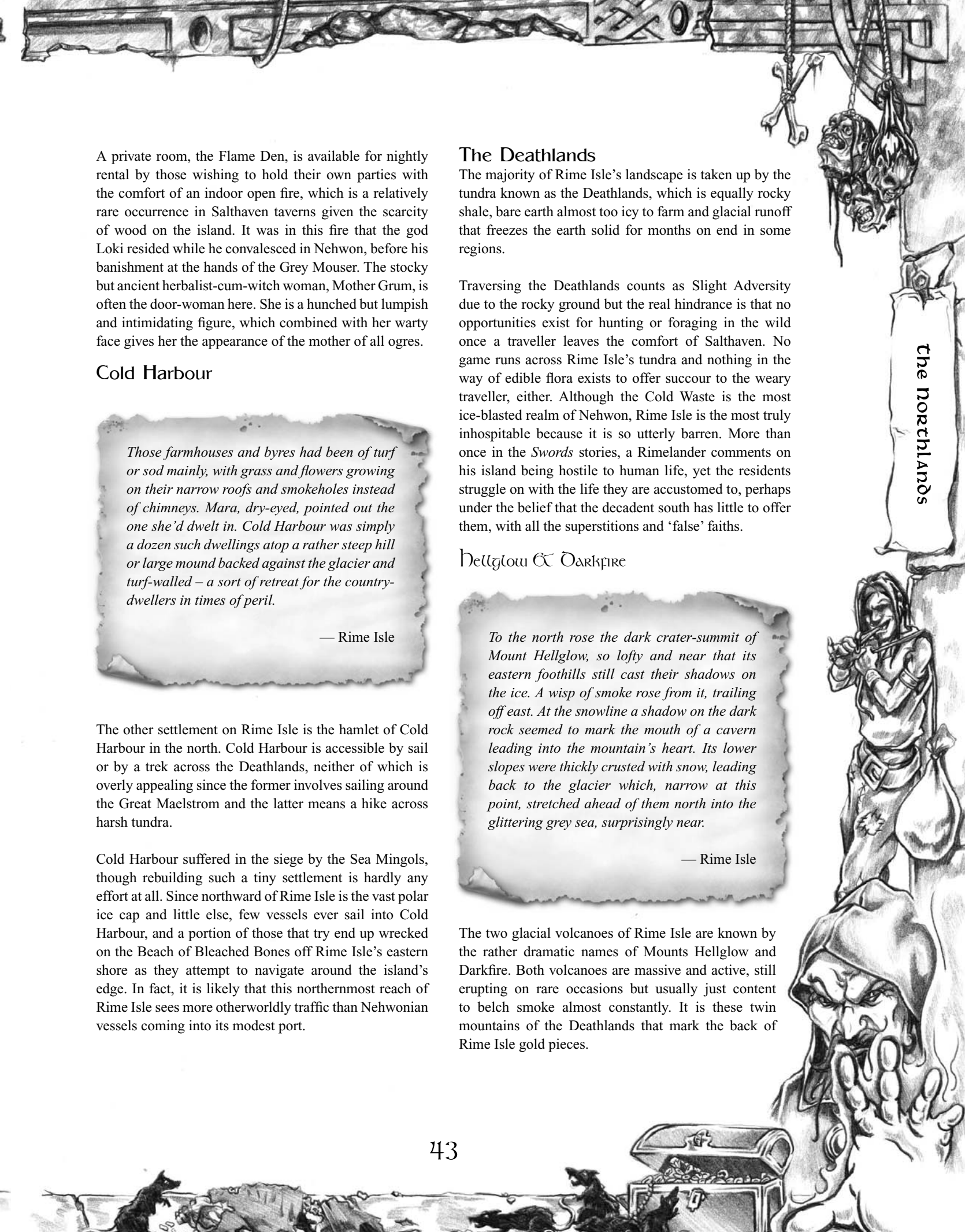
Hellglow & Darkfire

To the north rose the dark crater-summit of Mount Hellglow, so lofty and near that its eastern foothills still cast their shadows on the ice. A wisp of smoke rose from it, trailing off east. At the snowline a shadow on the dark rock seemed to mark the mouth of a cavern leading into the mountain's heart. Its lower slopes were thickly crusted with snow, leading back to the glacier which, narrow at this point, stretched ahead of them north into the glittering grey sea, surprisingly near.

— Rime Isle

The two glacial volcanoes of Rime Isle are known by the rather dramatic names of Mounts Hellglow and Darkfire. Both volcanoes are massive and active, still erupting on rare occasions but usually just content to belch smoke almost constantly. It is these twin mountains of the Deathlands that mark the back of Rime Isle gold pieces.

the northlands





Rime Isle is riddled with strange, secret underground passages, many of which terminate (or begin?) in the bowels and craters of these volcanoes. Given the connection Rime Isle has with other worlds and realities, there is a chance these caverns could be a cousin of Ningauble's own strange caverns, with passages leading to other realms or spheres of existence. Mapping such a possibility, perhaps even at Ningauble's request, would be an epic undertaking for any group of adventurers.

Gallows Hill

This aptly-named hill is where the Rime Isle gallows were set up in order to execute Salthaven's rare criminals. It was a site sacred to the invader god Odin, who established a minor cult among the people of Rime Isle which he termed the Order of the Noose. Before the events in the *Swords* story *Rime Isle*, Gallows Hill is little more than what the name describes. Afterwards, it becomes a grim memory of a time when the peace of the island was almost irrevocably shattered.

The Great Maelstrom

Oh, yes – the Great Maelstrom off the isle's rock-fanged east coast with its treacherous swift currents and tricky tides, the Great Maelstrom from whence the island gets what wood it owns, after it's cast up on the Beach of Bleached Bones. It forms regularly each day. Our sailors know it well and avoid it like no other peril.

This strange phenomenon seems equal parts natural and mystical in its appearance. According to the Rimelanders, due to the natural currents in the Outer Sea past Rime Isle's eastern coast, a colossal whirlpool forms every day in the late afternoon, lasting for several hours, snaring some of the many ships that come to Rime Isle and dragging them under the roiling, churning waves.

After the vessel and its crew have been pulled under, the ship is dashed against the rocks underneath the water and the stone 'fangs' on the eastern shore, to be scuttled by relentless battering. These vessels do achieve their goal of reaching Rime Isle, though not quite the way they intended. Instead they wash up, wrecked and ruined, on the Beach of Bleached Bones.

The Grey Mouser effectively sealed the Great Maelstrom by hurling one of the Simorgyan icons, the Gold Cube of Square Dealing, into its heart. Whatever other properties this icon may have possessed (which the Rimelanders themselves seemed not to have known) are lost after the later stories in the *Swords* tales.

Beach of Bleached Bones

The Beach of Bleached Bones is the main source of wood for fire and construction on Rime Isle, which says something about the number of vessels that must crash here. Even a small community like Salthaven requires a great deal of wood, after all.

The beach is a grisly scene of detritus. Pieces of wrecked ships obviously make up the most of the scenery, but personal possessions of killed sailors are common as well, as are the corpses of the sailors themselves which wash up with each sunken vessel.

Games Masters have a unique opportunity where the Beach of Bleached Bones is concerned, in that one can find the most unexpected treasures here. It could make an interesting and eerie climax to a world-spanning adventure, where the characters travel the length of Nehwon in search of something lost and forgotten amid the beach's saltwater-washed debris, or the beginning of another if the characters discover something magical and cursed among the wreckage of a ship.

Khahkht of the Black Ice

'Khahkht is Khahkht. It is no tribal sorcerer, 'tis sure. It dwells in farthest north within a dome – some say a floating globe – of blackest ice, from whence It watches the least deeds of men, devising evil every chance It gets, as when the stars are right – better say wrong – and all the Gods asleep. Mingols dread Khahkht and yet...whene'er they reach a grand climacteric they turn to It, beseech It ride ahead before their greatest, bloodiest centauring. Ice is Its favoured quarter; ice Its tool and ice breath Its surest sign save blink.'

In the later *Swords* tales, when Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser effectively retire from a life of adventuring, they fall prey to the schemes of a sorcerer known as Khahkht of the Black Ice, who was once a Mingol but is now spoken of by the people of the Great Steppes as something else entirely. He is an 'It' not a 'he,' as confirmed by the words of old Ourph, the two heroes' loyal sailing slave:

Khahkht may once have been mortal but It somehow attained a power and an immortality almost equal to that of Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes, who both mention Khahkht in tones that, if not fearful, are at least weighted with tones of caution when they recall that the northern ice wizard is not their ally.

Khahkht threatens Rime Isle and the two heroes that land there purely because of Its desire to spread malice and suffering wherever It is able. Its sorceries, which primarily deal with ice and manipulation of the hearts of men, are definitely Black Magic – not the Ice Magic of the Snow Women – or something yet more powerful such as that possibly practised by Sheelba and Ningauble.

The Frost Monstreme

Out of the torn and darkening fog bank, driving with preternatural rapidity into the teeth of the gale on a course to smash them, both, there had silently come a craft monstrous in size and aspect. It might well have remained unseen until collision, save that the weird rays of the rising black sun striking its load side engendered there a horrid, pale reflection, not a natural white light at all, but a loathy, colourless luminescence – a white to make the flesh crawl, a cave-toad, fish-belly white. And if the substance making the reflection had any texture at all, it was that of ridged and crinkled grey horn – dead men's fingernails.

— The Frost Monstreme

One of Its first plots was the creation of a black mist or storm clouds that blocked the sun and allowed a giant ship of ice to sail on the Outer Sea in pursuit of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser under the un-light of a new and unholy 'black' sun. This vessel, which was oared and apparently crewed, though by unknown hands, attempted to ram the vessels of the two heroes, and hurled great chunks of ice at their ships as if by catapults.

Ultimately, after what the heroes called the Night of Terror – pursued through the blackness by the vast ice ship – Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser captained their ships out of the black cloud and into the sunlight again, where the 'frost monstreme' dissolved under the sun's rays.

However, even though this plan failed against the heroes from Lankhmar in the *Swords* stories, there is nothing to say that the Games Master could not have Khahkht try

the same trick twice. In cases where the trick is as darkly threatening, interesting and as just plain cool as this one, Games Masters with an eye for the source material can repeat the events staged in the stories without too much fear of the characters getting bored by familiarity with the books.

After all, Khahkht is essentially unbeatable. It has transcended game mechanics much in the way character statistics would be inappropriate for Sheelba and Ning. That can make for a very fun and dangerous antagonist, as long as there is sufficient reward and satisfaction in defeating Its plans despite ultimate victory over the monster itself being next to impossible.

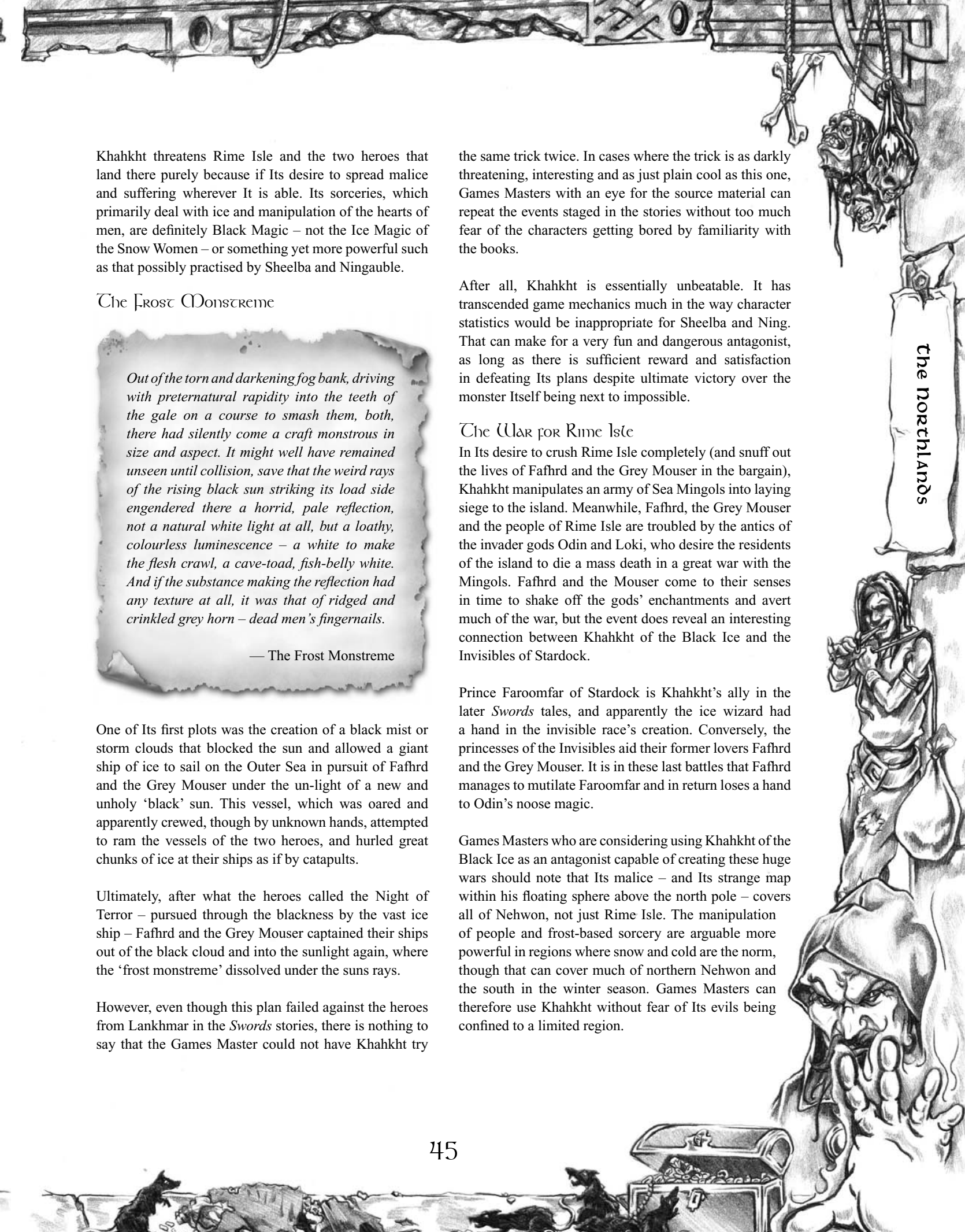
The War for Rime Isle

In Its desire to crush Rime Isle completely (and snuff out the lives of Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser in the bargain), Khahkht manipulates an army of Sea Mingols into laying siege to the island. Meanwhile, Fafhrd, the Grey Mouser and the people of Rime Isle are troubled by the antics of the invader gods Odin and Loki, who desire the residents of the island to die a mass death in a great war with the Mingols. Fafhrd and the Mouser come to their senses in time to shake off the gods' enchantments and avert much of the war, but the event does reveal an interesting connection between Khahkht of the Black Ice and the Invisibles of Stardock.

Prince Faroomfar of Stardock is Khahkht's ally in the later *Swords* tales, and apparently the ice wizard had a hand in the invisible race's creation. Conversely, the princesses of the Invisibles aid their former lovers Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser. It is in these last battles that Fafhrd manages to mutilate Faroomfar and in return loses a hand to Odin's noose magic.

Games Masters who are considering using Khahkht of the Black Ice as an antagonist capable of creating these huge wars should note that Its malice – and Its strange map within his floating sphere above the north pole – covers all of Nehwon, not just Rime Isle. The manipulation of people and frost-based sorcery are arguable more powerful in regions where snow and cold are the norm, though that can cover much of northern Nehwon and the south in the winter season. Games Masters can therefore use Khahkht without fear of Its evils being confined to a limited region.

the northlands





Adventuring in the Northlands

This section presents a series of story hooks and campaign possibilities for Games Masters who situate their stories in the northlands. They can be used wholesale as scenario ideas or cut and pasted in a bid to combine elements of them into a larger campaign, however the Games Master sees fit.

When Animals Attack

In this scenario, a sorcerer emerges from his hermitage to wreak havoc on the woodland cities of the Eight Cities. He uses his magic to control the minds of fierce local animals like bears, tigers and wolves, using these feral servants to attack the folk of the settlements in the Forest Land. At first the attacks are focused on the small woodland villages that see little contact with the rest of the world, but soon the beasts are stalking the night-time forests at the edge of Kvarch Nar and the other Eight Cities. Perhaps the sorcerer even manages to call some of the white wolves, ice cats and polar tigers of the Cold Waste into his beastly army, in preparation for moving on into the coldest climes of the north once he has finished with the Forest Land.



The sorcerer's reasons for doing this are an integral part of making the scenario believable and interesting. It could be a possibility that much like Tyaa and her forgotten religion in Lankhmar, the magician wishes to bring to the Forest Land or the Cold Waste a faith unseen in the region for many centuries – a religion based on appeasing a chosen few or risking the wrath of Nature.

Another possibility is that the sorcerer is a Mingol sorcerer, mastering the beasts as part of a greater war effort. If this is the case, it might also stand to reason that the man requires some very dark sacrifices to make that amount of magical control sweep across such a large swath of land.

Related to this idea is that the Mingol is an Eight Cities version of the monstrous Khakhkt of the Black Ice; a living legend for the people of the Steppes, spoken of in tones of hatred and fearful awe all at once. Just as Khakhkt uses Its magic to plague the people of Rime Isle, this sorcerer could use his power to bedevil the residents of the Land of the Eight Cities. To the Mingols, depending on their current cultural inclination, this legendary figure could be a hero or a demon, though either choice comes with a hefty amount of wariness about the man.

Games Masters may decide that this powerful hermit could become a potential mentor or patron for the characters, perhaps in direct competition with Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes for the Player Characters' service. If this is the case, it is likely that their new Mingol patron has a whole host of reasons the characters should never trust Sheel and Ning, while the bickering archimages likewise tell tales of the Mingol's dark past. The characters are trapped in the middle of an unfolding sorcerous civil war, trying to tell fact from fiction and decide which side to ally with.

Pirates of the Inner Sea

If the Games Master envisions a campaign of piracy on the high seas, boarding actions where freebooter cutlasses clash with straight soldier blades and plundering fat-bellied merchant ships in the name of stealing, then the Eight Cities are likely to feature in the story quite significantly. Lankhmar and Ithmar have their share of pirates, but the majority of privateers operate out of Gnamph Nar on the north coast of the Inner Sea.

An Inner Sea pirate captain has endless choices when it comes to ships to prey on. The main trade across the waters of the sea is timber going south to Lankhmar and Ilthmar, but there is also grain going north to the Eight Cities from the City of the Black Toga.

These simply comprise the majority of what is on offer for the discerning captain and a keen crew, not the entire vista of opportunity. In addition to these essential yet rather mundane items, pirates have a wealth of Ilthmarish wine to plunder, as well as Kleshite silk from the caterpillars of the southern jungle caves that comes north to the Inner Sea through Lankhmar and a host of luxuries like Eight Cities art, shipments of gold from one merchant to another and Lankhmar-forged weapons bound for another port. Literally any trade item is bound to find a buyer somewhere, if it is not something like grain or weapons which the pirates can keep to themselves and use without selling.

Whether plundering luxuries, selling on essentials at prices to undercut the true merchants or weapon-smuggling for thrills and profit, life as a pirate offers great rewards. Maintaining contacts in various ports is essential, as is keeping palms crossed with silver and negotiating on the black market for the best prices for loot. These characters answer to no law but that which they make themselves, and any number of supernatural adventures at sea can result from their careers.

There is a downside. Life as a privateer is never as easy as it sounds, primarily due to the serious enemies one makes while plundering the ships of the high seas. The Lankhmar navy make regular patrols in the Inner Sea, the navy of Overlord Movarl take an even greater dedication to eradicating the pirate presence and merchants hire mercenaries to voyage with precious cargo – these are all skilled fighters who must be overcome, but perhaps most dangerous of all are other pirates who scent a successful plunder and hunt down a captain's ship while it is slowed by stolen cargo.

The Navies

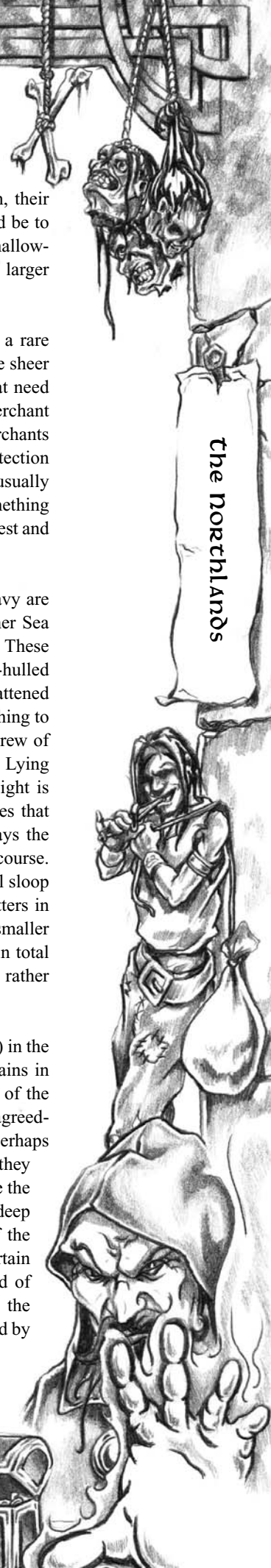
Generally speaking, the navies of the Inner Sea will be the most deadly of the threats pirate characters face, purely because the ships will be flush with well-trained fighters. An average three-master will be manned by up to 70 sailors working in two shifts, as well as up to 30 marines trained specifically for fighting in boarding actions and at sea. If the characters are operating a modest pirate outfit from the deck of a six-man sloop, such as Fafhrd and the

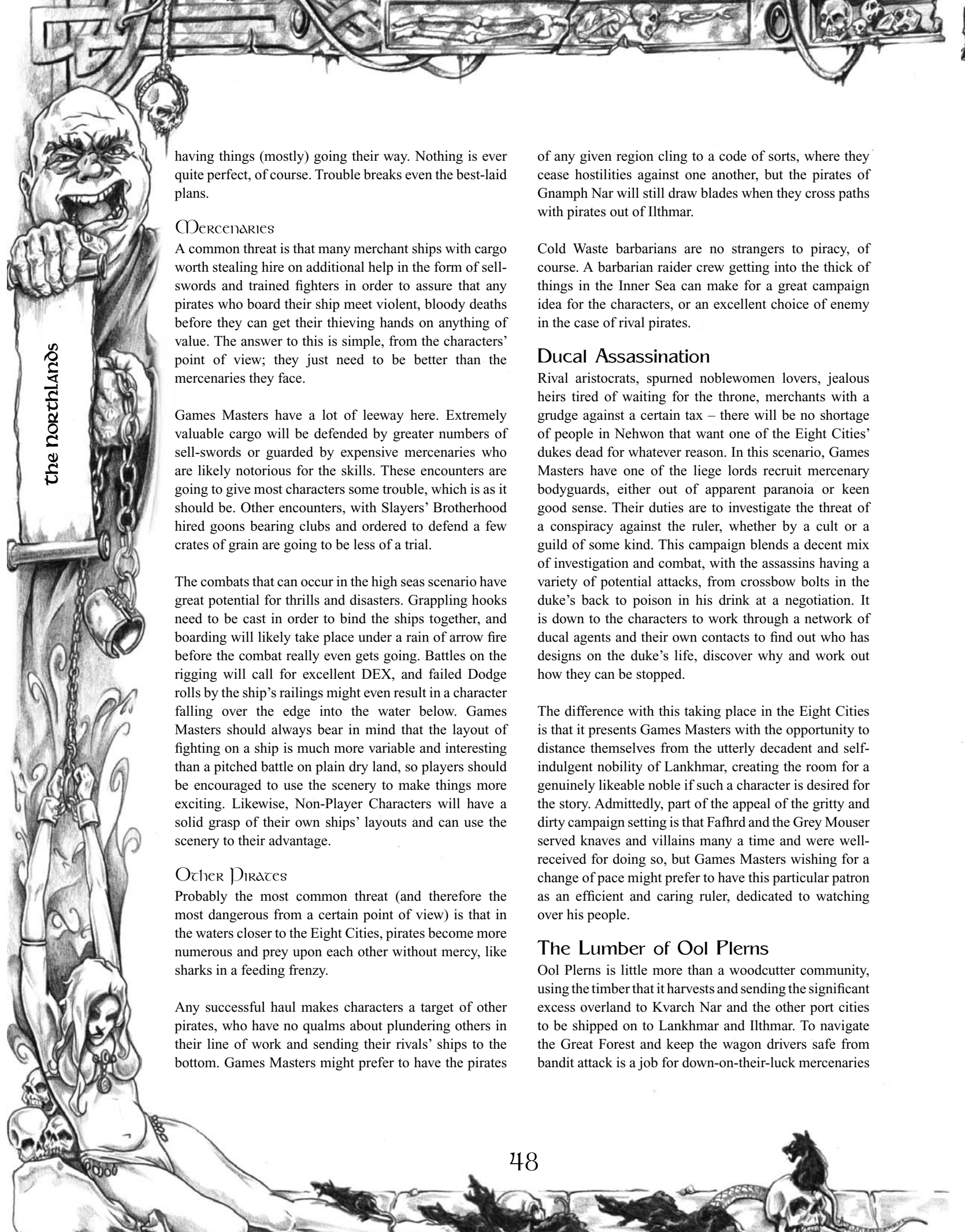
Grey Mouser had been known to do on occasion, their only chance at surviving such an encounter would be to flee, preferably over coral formations that their shallow-hulled craft can glide over but that would hole a larger vessel.

The navies are a dangerous threat, true, but also a rare one given the amount of sea there is to sail and the sheer number of vessels. Few overlords will feel a great need to pour money into their navies to baby-sit merchant vessels across the Inner Sea, when so many merchants are prepared to pay for mercenaries to serve as protection instead. If the characters encounter the navy, it is usually by chance or because the characters have done something very illegal indeed that evidently warrants their arrest and probably their execution.

The most common traps set by the Lankhmar navy are the positioning of 'bait ships' in the southern Inner Sea which are considered Lankhmar's own waters. These appear to all intents and purposes to be heavy-hulled merchant ships riding low in the water, apparently fattened by cargo if their depth and speed in the sea is anything to go by. In truth, these are manned by a skeleton crew of naval sailors and weighed down purely by ballast. Lying in wait only a few minutes' distant and out of sight is another navy vessel, ready to run down the pirates that take the bait ship. Inner Sea pirates are not always the three-mast vessels of Hollywood movies, of course. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser pirated with a faithful sloop and encountered triremes and small merchant cutters in their illegal Inner Sea activities. Likewise, the smaller and faster naval vessels carry only a dozen men in total – these are the ships that tend to catch the pirates rather than the big troop-laden vessels.

Characters with contacts (or even rank themselves) in the military can of course bribe the admirals or captains in charge of the vessels currently slicing the waters of the Inner Sea, so that the pirates need only run up an agreed-upon flag to escape pursuit by the authorities. Perhaps the characters are owed a favour by a merchant they once performed a service for who can in turn bribe the admiral, or perhaps they encounter a local captain deep in his cups in the tavern and offer him a cut of the profits if he will keep his crew away from a certain patch of water for the next few weeks. This kind of devious bribery shows some clever thinking on the part of the players and should probably be rewarded by





having things (mostly) going their way. Nothing is ever quite perfect, of course. Trouble breaks even the best-laid plans.

MERCENARIES

A common threat is that many merchant ships with cargo worth stealing hire on additional help in the form of sell-swords and trained fighters in order to assure that any pirates who board their ship meet violent, bloody deaths before they can get their thieving hands on anything of value. The answer to this is simple, from the characters' point of view; they just need to be better than the mercenaries they face.

Games Masters have a lot of leeway here. Extremely valuable cargo will be defended by greater numbers of sell-swords or guarded by expensive mercenaries who are likely notorious for the skills. These encounters are going to give most characters some trouble, which is as it should be. Other encounters, with Slayers' Brotherhood hired goons bearing clubs and ordered to defend a few crates of grain are going to be less of a trial.

The combats that can occur in the high seas scenario have great potential for thrills and disasters. Grappling hooks need to be cast in order to bind the ships together, and boarding will likely take place under a rain of arrow fire before the combat really even gets going. Battles on the rigging will call for excellent DEX, and failed Dodge rolls by the ship's railings might even result in a character falling over the edge into the water below. Games Masters should always bear in mind that the layout of fighting on a ship is much more variable and interesting than a pitched battle on plain dry land, so players should be encouraged to use the scenery to make things more exciting. Likewise, Non-Player Characters will have a solid grasp of their own ships' layouts and can use the scenery to their advantage.

OTHER PIRATES

Probably the most common threat (and therefore the most dangerous from a certain point of view) is that in the waters closer to the Eight Cities, pirates become more numerous and prey upon each other without mercy, like sharks in a feeding frenzy.

Any successful haul makes characters a target of other pirates, who have no qualms about plundering others in their line of work and sending their rivals' ships to the bottom. Games Masters might prefer to have the pirates

of any given region cling to a code of sorts, where they cease hostilities against one another, but the pirates of Gnamph Nar will still draw blades when they cross paths with pirates out of Ilthmar.

Cold Waste barbarians are no strangers to piracy, of course. A barbarian raider crew getting into the thick of things in the Inner Sea can make for a great campaign idea for the characters, or an excellent choice of enemy in the case of rival pirates.

Ducal Assassination

Rival aristocrats, spurned noblewomen lovers, jealous heirs tired of waiting for the throne, merchants with a grudge against a certain tax – there will be no shortage of people in Nehwon that want one of the Eight Cities' dukes dead for whatever reason. In this scenario, Games Masters have one of the liege lords recruit mercenary bodyguards, either out of apparent paranoia or keen good sense. Their duties are to investigate the threat of a conspiracy against the ruler, whether by a cult or a guild of some kind. This campaign blends a decent mix of investigation and combat, with the assassins having a variety of potential attacks, from crossbow bolts in the duke's back to poison in his drink at a negotiation. It is down to the characters to work through a network of ducal agents and their own contacts to find out who has designs on the duke's life, discover why and work out how they can be stopped.

The difference with this taking place in the Eight Cities is that it presents Games Masters with the opportunity to distance themselves from the utterly decadent and self-indulgent nobility of Lankhmar, creating the room for a genuinely likeable noble if such a character is desired for the story. Admittedly, part of the appeal of the gritty and dirty campaign setting is that Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser served knaves and villains many a time and were well-received for doing so, but Games Masters wishing for a change of pace might prefer to have this particular patron as an efficient and caring ruler, dedicated to watching over his people.

The Lumber of Ool Plerns

Ool Plerns is little more than a woodcutter community, using the timber that it harvests and sending the significant excess overland to Kvarch Nar and the other port cities to be shipped on to Lankhmar and Ilthmar. To navigate the Great Forest and keep the wagon drivers safe from bandit attack is a job for down-on-their-luck mercenaries

and characters that find themselves running out of money in the wilderness, with little else to do on their way to a sizable city. In this respect, Games Masters can use these lumber caravan scenarios for desperate characters as a way of giving them something to do on the way to civilisation. Bandits are unlikely to strike for the wood itself, but the wagons and the coins in the driver's money belts make such raids profitable enough to be worthwhile.

In the *Swords* stories, Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser establish a minor trading route from Ool Plerns to the mostly-treeless Rime Isle in order to provide timber for their new island home. Characters can emulate this if they wish, for there is certainly profit in bringing wood to the wealthy Rime Islanders. If this vein of profit is discovered by any other merchants willing to risk the long voyage north, the characters can expect some tense competition, with both sides likely stooping to sabotage and assassination in order to bring the money into their pockets.

The Grand Master

This scenario has the potential for horrendous violence and brutal politics, all coated in a concept of humour. The characters are hired by a Rimelander to accompany him across Nehwon as he seeks to play chess with those he meets. This occurs sometimes in taverns, other times by booked appointment with the nobles of other cities.

Embarrassed opponents who cannot take defeat with grace might arrange for the Rimelander's assassination, while others – hearing of his great skill at the game before they even play a match with him – hire sell-swords to kill the man before he can arrive and spread further embarrassment. People in taverns that bet a lot of money on the locals might pull blades when it becomes evident the Rimelander wins over and over again; perhaps they suspect a hustle or a cheat.

For his part, the chess-player is a kind-hearted and simple man, wishing no more than to test his skills with other players in the world. In the underground caverns of Quarmall, the back-alley taverns of Ilthmar or the treacherous courts of Lankhmar, the characters will have to keep sharp eyes open to keep the Rimelander alive.

Crackdown in Gnamph Nar

The thief crouched in the darkness of the alley mouth, listening to his racing heartbeat and the sounds of the Watch's spear-butts clacking on the cobblestone street.



When he had regained his breath, a quick bolt through the back alleys led him to the docks, where the port authority officer, escorted by yet another half-dozen watchmen, stood right by the gangplank onto the thief's ship. 'Lately' the thief thought to himself, 'Gnamph Nar is getting to be more trouble than it is worth.'

The Duke of Gnamph Nar somehow resists the minefield of bribes and payoffs that keep his port thriving on illegal activities and finally decides to restore order to the city. In areas where the city watch are not enough, he hires mercenaries to patrol the streets, clamping down on criminals and pirates. His own ships take to the waters in pursuit of infamous pirate captains, crewed by hired sell-swords as well as his own Eight Cities men. Put bluntly, this is the biggest crackdown on piracy the Inner Sea has ever seen, with the so-called 'pirate port' no longer a safe haven for freebooters.

Characters can be part of the hired groups who set out to catch named pirate captains, perhaps even hunting for the heads of legendary buccaneers who have passed into Nehwonian legendry because of their deeds. Alternatively, pirate characters will be run ragged trying to evade capture and secure both a new port as well as black market contacts in cities other than Gnamph Nar.





SWORDS ACROSS NEHWON

This scenario is designed to take players out of the City of the Black Toga and into the wider world of Nehwon, to experience the possibilities of adventure beyond the walls of Lankmar. The events take place in a variety of locations presented in this book. Beginning in Lankmar and moving quickly to Ilthmar, the characters head south to Quarmall, then take ship or ride overland to the Land of the Eight Cities, reaching a final climax in the bitter blizzards of a Cold Waste winter.

Swords Across Nehwon can serve as a stand alone adventure or as the first instalment in the forthcoming *Swords* scenario series. The next sourcebook in the game line, *Swords Against Sorcery*, can likewise be used independently of this adventure or as a direct follow-on from the events related here.

The layout of this adventure is broken up into set Scenes, which the Games Master and the players will run through in order, divided by a host of optional Encounters listed at the end of the scenario in a mini-appendix. Games Masters who wish to cut right to the plot at all times or are pressed for time in a game session might wish to skip the Encounters entirely, while Games Masters preferring to cram in as much detail as possible within an adventure might prefer to use all of them.

Swords Across Nehwon is designed for two to five beginning characters. Only minor adjustments to the Encounters will be necessary to alter that to suit a lone Player or a larger group.

Getting the Characters Together

The Games Master's first duty is to gather the Player Characters into a cohesive group with a valid reason to remain together. *Swords Across Nehwon* begins with the characters arranging to meet a mutual acquaintance, the Thieves' Guild member Savra, who sent each character a note to meet him in the Silver Eel on the Day of the Cat, in the Month of the Lion, past dusk.

The reasons for knowing Savra can be as varied as the players like, though they must all either owe him a favour or think of him well enough that they would come to aid him in a time of need. A character that roughed him up after a failed thieving is hardly going to think kindly of him, unless the character put it behind him afterwards and the two became friends. Here are some ties that might exist between Player Characters and Savra.

- † The character is aiming to enter the Thieves' Guild one day and knows Savra as a contact and a potential way into the Guild.
- † The character has worked with Savra before on a secret but lucrative heist and they split the profits without the Thieves' Guild knowing.
- † The character has been hired by Savra to turn up at the arranged time, promised payment for doing so. This could work well for independent thugs or members of the Slayers' Brotherhood.
- † The character met Savra in the past when the thief saved his life from an alley-bashing (and then demanded payment, of course).
- † Savra has hired the character in the past for protection on a heist.
- † Savra has loaned the character money before.
- † The character is one of Savra's relatives, or is in love with Savra's sister, Ellanni.
- † Characters with the Streetwise skill know Savra does a rich sideline in gossip-mongering around the slums, and the character has an established relationship of purchasing information from the Guild thief.
- † The character is a regular gambler at Savra's table in the Silver Eel and they became friends there.

For prop-minded players, photocopy the following note or rewrite it as preferred.

if you have even the slightest regard for me at all — or your gold-lust heightens your curiosity — meet me after dusk in the silver eel on dim lane. there's money involved, i'll say that much.

day of the cat, month of the lion.

come armed.

savra.

Scene One: Ill Met in the Silver Eel

Overview: The characters meet Savra, who explains his troubles and begs for their help in couriering something of great value.

The Silver Eel is busy tonight. Serving girls weave between tables, avoiding chair legs and groping hands. In the dimly-lit corner where the knife games are usually played, a circular table is occupied by serious-looking men watching a slender slave girl dancing. Most of the other tables are taken by farmers and fighters in various clusters, mixing only where wine loosens tongues and lowers prejudices. As you shed the cold of a winter's night from your skin, soaking up the atmosphere, you see Savra sitting at a table alone, back against the wall, carving something onto the surface of the table with a little fruit knife.

Among the rest of the graffiti, Savra's new-cut image appears to be a crudely-etched hand with seven fingers and circles at the end of each fingertip. He looks like he has not eaten a full meal in a few days, nor washed in the same time, but other than that he seems pleased to see you and in the same rosy-cheeked health as always. He still looks several dozen pounds over the average weight of a decent guild thief, but he is a skilled lock-picker first and foremost, and one hardly needs physical grace and firm muscles for that. His fingers, slim and smooth, brush out the flakes of wood from the etching on the tabletop.

Here the characters arrive in the Silver Eel and meet Savra. The chances are they will arrive within an hour or so of each other but Savra will wait until they are all gathered until he begins to explain things. A successful Perception test will reveal that while he waits and makes small talk, he is repeatedly looking at the door every time it opens, flicking glances to the windows and occasionally reaching into his battered brown cloak as if to adjust something by his chest.

He is content to play a dice game or pay for drinks while he waits for the group to assemble, but it is clear the usually jovial thief is distracted and uncomfortable. He apologises for the mystery of the note but feels he could not commit any more to paper in case the wrong eyes saw.

When the characters are assembled, Savra will explain his troubles fully. Games Masters can use these sections verbatim or edit them as they see fit.

'Look, hey, I'm sorry for calling you together like this. We've got a nasty winter outside that door and I know it wasn't a treat to come here with such little to go by. So here's the deal, laid out straight and true. I'm a dead man walking. If I don't get some help, I won't even be walking any more, I'll just be a dead man. Knowing my luck, they'll drag my body to Illthmar just so they can feed me to the harbour sharks. I probably won't even get a proper burial, like the Great God decreed all men must.'

Another successful Perception check reveals that Savra is flicking glances toward the quiet men at the corner table, though they are not paying him any attention at all.

'I got careless and dived in so deep the water went way over my head. And I'm not talking about the Thieves' Guild, here. No, I mean my sideline stuff. In the Guild, we've got stories of dead men coming back for revenge and old wives' whispers about superstitions you outsiders would never believe, but that's nothing compared to the troubles I've got now. I got involved with a sorcerer. A powerful one; calls himself Ning. I didn't have much choice in the matter, though. He talked and talked and turned my head around with long words, promising me a lot if I'd just steal this one thing for him. And I did it, true as an arrow flies. But it has attracted nine kinds of nasty attention.'

SWORDS ACROSS NEHWON

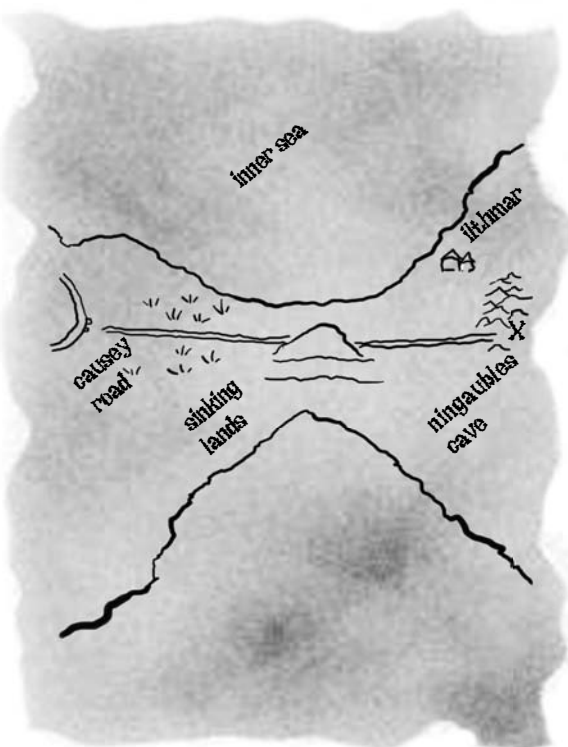


Savra reaches into a cloak and produces a rough cloth ball about the size of an apple – evidently something spherical wrapped in dirty, oily rags. He places it on the tabletop but keeps his hands over most of it, concealing it from the view of others elsewhere in the room.

'Here's what he wanted me to get for him. I've got to get this to the mouth of his cave, not far south-east of Ilthmar. For the love of Aarth, Issek and any other gods you care to name, don't unwrap it and never, ever look at it. I'm serious.'

He passes the cloth-covered sphere to the characters. It feels heavy, like lead or stone, and the rags smell of oil used to clean sword blades, as well as Savra's own sweat.

'If you can get this to Ning for me – here's a map to his cave, just past the Sinking Land – then maybe I'll be able to sleep at night without fear of being dead by the dawn. I'll pay, obviously. How does 200 Rilks apiece sound? I know it's a lot of coin but my skin is worth a lot to me and I'd like to keep it. I don't know how much longer I can keep running – I'm not the young'un I used to be. Just get this to Ning and you'll spare my bones from burial.'



'Head east through the Marsh Gate, along Causey Road and through the Great Salt Marsh until you reach the Sinking Land. Head on over when it's up and surfaced, then go south-east past Ilthmar to a cave network in some hills not far from the road. You can see the opening from that very road, clear as day.'

'Look, this part's important. Even if you lose it, please tell Ning that I did what he asked. Tell him that I stole it and tried to get it to him. No doubt I'll be just as dead if he's angry with me. He's got to be told that I did my best, no matter what else happens.'

The players are likely to have questions during this scene. Here are some possible queries and answers for Games Masters to use or to help familiarise themselves with the kinds of answers Savra will provide.

'What is that symbol you scratched onto the table?'
'This? Oh, nothing much. Something I saw in a dream. Can't seem to get the image out of my head.'

'What were these Thieves' Guild superstitions you mentioned?'
'Ugh, you don't need that on your mind, trust me. Those are real tales of dead men walking. Not a good night's talk on any evening, and I'll leave it there if you please. Guild secrets and all.'

'What happens when you look at it?'
'I can't speak plainer, can I? Don't look at it, ever. It's not worth it. It does something...to your mind. Your memory. Your thoughts.' Savra looks dizzy for a moment, then grips the table edge to steady himself. *'Don't look at it. Bells of the Black Temple, try not to even think about it.'*

'Come on – tell us!'
'Do. Not. Look. At. It. I'm only warning you because I like you.'

'Have you seen it?'
'Yes, when I first took it. I had to, obviously. Never once since then, though. Say what you want about me, I'm not that foolish. I've warned you fair.'

'Who is hunting you?'
'Who isn't? Some of them seem to be in the Guild. Others are just strangers bearing swords. Feels like they're everywhere, though. Stalking me, watching me, like they're waiting to be sure I've got the damn thing. I'm harrowed hollow with dread, and that's the truth. Two nights ago I was in one of my hide-ohles and I made the mistake of leaving my prize by the



window. Soon as I drew a third breath after putting it down, I was up to my throat in killers coming through the door. Ugh. Lucky escape. Someone wants this and they want me dead for carrying it as long as I have.'

'Who is Ning?' 'I don't know much about him. During last season's recruitment months at the Guild I did some bandit work outside the city. It was something to wile away the days until all the new thieves were trained, y'see. I hate tripping over kids in Thieves' House. If I wanted brats around I'd have 'em myself. Anyway, I met this Ning at the mouth of a cave where I was making my bedroll for the night. Gave me a double handful of Rilks and said 'Hereafter, you serve me and only me.' And now I've finally found what he sent me to find.'

'Where did you find it?' 'In a temple. I won't say any more, so don't ask. I...can't talk it about too much. It makes my mind ache.'

'TELL US!' It is important that Games Masters relate that Savra is not trying to be awkward; he genuinely cannot speak of this. If at any point the characters press Savra over and over again regarding the origin of the item, his nose starts to bleed and he becomes dizzy. 'Please...ask me about the damn thing no more. Just get it to Ning. He said it was dangerous to keep hold of it for longer than seven days and seven nights, but I've had it near three weeks now. I've not been able to get out of the

'I look at the orb.'

Swords Across Nehwon is not designed for the characters to keep the orb in their possession for very long but there is always the possibility of players acting fast and letting their curiosity get the better of them in the first half hour of the session. In this case, curiosity might lead one or more of them to decide 'to hell with this, I have to know,' and unwrap the sphere. This is fine. In fact, it is almost to be expected.

The sphere appears as a perfectly smooth, perfectly round orb of glass approximately the size of an eyeball, filled with a red liquid so dark it is almost black. A single bubble is evident inside, which is the only indication there is a liquid in there at all. Dropping the surprisingly heavy glass orb makes a dull *clunng!* sound like resonant metal but it appears quite invulnerable. Strangely, it also floats on water.

Any characters looking at the orb feel no ill-effects whatsoever. At least not yet – these 'kick in' later, as it were, always when the characters are in the presence of great evil power. Take note of any characters that look at the orb, even for a few seconds. These characters will be affected in later scenes, as noted in the scene text. Characters who refrain from looking at the orb do not suffer these later effects, of course.

city. There's always someone there at the gates, ready for me. I've even gone in disguise and tried it, but they saw me and gave chase.'

Eventually, Savra winds the conversation down. He warns them further about keeping it out of sight; to expose it to moonlight, even when wrapped, draws the eyes of those that seek it. He pays for all the drinks and food during the evening, as well as any dances the characters enjoy from the tavern's slaves. If asked how he has so much money, he confesses that since the death of Guildmaster Krovas, he earns more in his current position as Thief First Class.





Anyone wishing to make a Perception check to see if he is telling the truth finds out that he is being entirely honest.

The characters can leave immediately or wait until the following day as they see fit. They may decide to leave via any of the other gates (perhaps in a bid to throw off pursuit or observers) but ultimately they must rejoin Causey Road to get through the Great Salt Marsh and across the Sinking Land.

Games Masters wishing to add a little spice to the adventure before the characters leave the City of the Black Toga should consider running Encounter A: Keen Eyes in Lankhmar.

Scene Two: Warlock of the Great Salt Marsh

The sky is overcast, darkening the land below and promising heavy rain before many more hours pass. The stench of the Great Salt Marsh with its foul black bog-water reaches you as soon as you make a little distance from the smoke-choked air of Lankhmar. Causey Road, a wide cobblestone avenue of some disrepair with wobbling stones aplenty underfoot, stretches ahead into the tree-thick marshland. The road ahead of you all looks only a touch less inviting than a night spent sleeping among the dead in the cursed temple of the Gods of Lankhmar.

The details of a walk through the Great Salt Marsh are explained fully in the *Lankhmar*, in case any Games Masters are faced with characters deciding to leave Causey Road for any reason.

For the first few hours, the adventurers encounter nothing en route to the Sinking Land, beyond a couple of merchant caravans in a depressed convoy that are headed from Ilthmar. The drivers are too poor to afford passage across the Inner Sea. Their wares are a collection of kettles, pots, kitchen items and poor quality daggers. Clearly, these two merchants are bound for the slums with their trade.

After five or six hours, with the characters now reaching the halfway point in the swamp, rain begins to fall. It pelts down on their cloaks and hoods, slashes into the stinking

water that laps at the sides of the road and heralds the arrival of a thunderstorm. Sheet lightning starts to flash at irregular intervals.

Successful Perception tests will allow characters to notice a bright blue flash ahead and slightly withdrawn into the trees from the roadside – a flicker that is clearly not lightning. If the characters have any animals with them, such as pack mules, the beasts seem skittish and nervous. The flashing is coming from around a bend in the road up ahead and is visible through the trees. Some players might decide to leave the road and push through the trees to investigate. They are free to do so, but will get wetter and smellier because of the knee-deep marsh water. Games Masters may wish to run Encounter B: Serpentine Surprise at this point. Otherwise, players see exactly what they would have seen from the road, only they are ‘hidden’ by the cover of trees.

Around a bend in the road, the characters come face to face with a dome-shaped hut on a wooden platform. The hut is supported three metres above the ground by five stilts. This is, of course, the home of Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. Whether the characters pass by on the road or stalk through the marshy undergrowth, the enigmatic warlock is standing before his doorway, waiting motionlessly for them. He knew they were coming (of course he did) and has moved his hut to await their arrival. For the exact description of the hut, check Appendix B of the *Lankhmar*.

A figure stands in the doorway of this strange hut, robed all in black and with a deep cowl that reveals nothing of its face. A flash of lightning paints the area as bright as day for a heartbeat’s span, yet no detail at all stands out from the inky nothingness within the figure’s hood. In a voice somewhere between a rockslide’s harshness and a bear’s growl, the figure speaks as it gestures with a long sleeve.

‘Hist, agents of the Septinocular One. Stop and speak with me. I am called Sheelba of the Eyeless Face by those few that are aware of my existence. I would share a word with the servants of paunchy Ningauble and ask why you carry such a dangerous prize from its rightful place.’

Sheelba wants one thing and one thing only out of this conversation: to know who Ning’s new ‘agents’ are. He is not interested in enlightening the characters about what they carry. He cares nothing for explaining who Ningauble

is or delving into the origins of the cloth-wrapped orb. All he wants is to know who the characters are. This is not to say that Sheelba will say nothing expositional or enlightening, but the scene is primarily for the characters to meet the marsh-dwelling warlock and for Games Masters to have their players speak of their characters.

Here is a list of likely conversation pieces for Sheelba to use and for Games Masters to expand upon if they deem it necessary. Bear in mind that Sheelba answers any questions he dislikes with absolute silence, most notably queries that resemble: 'Are you human?' and 'What are you?' for example.

'Who are you?' *'The crippling flaws within Ning's agents now run to deafness, I see. I am Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, and naught but a humble warlock. The only question that matters is, however, who are each of you?'*

'Why do you live out here?' *'There is often no living soul around for many miles. I like the company.'*

'Who is/How do you know Ningauble?' *'He, like me, is a sorcerer. We are sometimes rivals, sometimes allies of convenience. How do you know the Fat Wizardly One?'*

'What is this thing we are carrying?' Sheelba leans down from his platform and reaches a sleeved hand for the item, apparently half-kneeling in some way. A Perception check at +20% reveals that the folds of his robe show how such a posture would be supremely uncomfortable for a human being to hold, yet Sheelba does so without any motion at all. If the characters hand over the item, Sheelba chuckles waspishly but does not unwrap it. *'Oh, my. This is just as dangerous as the scrolls say. Ningauble is welcome to it. I wouldn't look at it if you value the way your bodies work as they are.'*

In the characters refuse to hand it over, Sheelba chuckles the same way but says only *'Very well. Caution in your position is wise, if misplaced at this exact moment.'*

'Can we stay here and shelter from the storm?' *'My home is not a hostel for drowned rats and shivering children frightened by the touch of rain.'*

'I've been poisoned by a marsh cobra, can you help me?' *'Yes, I can. Here is some advice at no cost at all. Avoid swamp snakes in the future. They're dangerous, you know.'*

If the characters do not submit to Sheelba's questions or are overly reluctant to interact with the harsh-voiced magician, then he waves a large sleeve and invites them to be on their way. Whether they stay or go, Sheelba retreats inside his hut and the five legs walk ungainly through the sloshing black swamp water, weaving between the trees and vanishing from sight. Pursuit is possible – catching up is not. Making the attempt is a great way for characters to get lost in the Great Salt Marsh and experience its many evils.

If the characters submit to Sheelba's questions, telling the warlock who they are and from whence they came, the magician nods his hood to each piece of information, as if agreeing or storing it away for later. Afterwards, he reaches into his hut and pulls forth a single glass vial filled with a cloudy violet liquid. He hands it down from his platform, and drops it into a character's hands without revealing anything of his own limbs.

'Here is a potion that, once drunk, will flush all traces of poison from the body. It is a purging agent with some... added magical properties. Good luck on your travels. Do give my greetings to the Seven-Eyed One.'

He leaves here just as described above. Games Masters wishing to bridge the journey between here and Ilthmar with an event may wish to consider Encounter C: The Sinking Land.

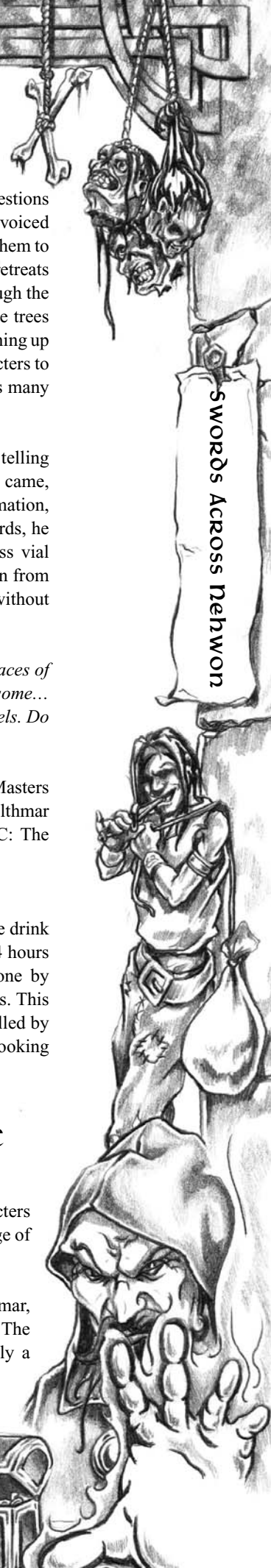
The Violet Potion

The potion he gifts the characters with is a one-use drink that stops all damage from poison attacks for 1D4 hours after ingested, including healing any damage done by poison or venom in the previous 10 combat rounds. This potion cannot restore life to a character already killed by poison and will definitely not heal the effects of looking at the red orb.

Scene Three: The Toll Collectors

With Ilthmar on the horizon to the north, the characters follow Causey Road eastward towards a small range of hills where Ningauble's cave is located.

Across the countryside from the direction of Ilthmar, a band of riders thunder towards the characters. The adventurers are on the road in what is essentially a





featureless expanse of wild fields, providing no cover beyond the occasional boulder or tree away from the cobblestone avenue. Accordingly, any Stealth checks are at -60% penalties. Players can try to conceal themselves, but it is a difficult proposition at best.

There are eleven riders, all dressed in various piecemeal armour of baked leather and chain, wearing black cloaks which are waterlogged from the storm. They all have swords on their hips and short bows, which they draw and nock arrows as they rein in around the characters.

It should be clear that the characters are outnumbered and probably outclassed here. A successful Lore (Ilthmar) or Lore (The East) check will reveal that this is likely one of the many bands of brigands out of the City of the Rat who prey on travellers, often pursuing them for miles and miles purely to steal the contents of their coin-purses.

The apparent leader of the group trots his horse forward, drawing a bead on the character with the highest CHA. He is a handsome man with light blue eyes and a week's worth of blonde stubble on his cheeks and chin. He has a friendly demeanour, contrasting with the aim of his black-feathered arrow.

'Hail, wanderers. Might we stop you a moment and pray chance relieve you of one particular item of value you are carrying? Namely one Bloody Eye of the Marble Rat God. Hand it over and your freedom is assured. Keep it hidden and we will loot it from your bodies.'

Any successful Lore (Ilthmar) checks will reveal a rumour from the City of the Rat of a cult only open to the richest and most pious citizens, where they have a secret temple and a marble rat statue rumoured to have magical properties. It is considered something of a legend or a conspiracy theory – akin to the Illuminati of the real world. The characters might have something to say before either handing the orb over or initiating a rather pointless attack. In that case, here are some potential Questions and Answers for Games Master convenience.

'Who are you?' *'My name is Jahol.'* (Pronounced Juh-HOLL) He performs a half-bow in his saddle, still aiming with his bow. *'I and my ruthless band of irascible outlaws are in service to the leaders of fair and filthy Ilthmar. That is all you need to know, which is lucky indeed, for it is all I am telling you.'*

'Why do you want this/Who wants this orb?' *'Ha! You'll get no breathy exposition out of me, my rain-soaked little road rats. My employers want it. I aim to give it to them. Simple, really.'*

'What is it?' *'The Bloody Eye of the Marble Rat God. Tut-tut. This level of ignorance truly highlights a lack of cultural understanding. Now hand it over.'*

Jahol is not going to give up. He cannot be bribed out of this task, though he will look kindly on anyone who makes the attempt, seeing the character as a dishonest man or woman after his own heart. He is also impressed by anyone who surrenders the orb immediately or engages him in any conversation about Ilthmar and the rat religion, though he is admittedly pressed for time and his patience has a limit. Ultimately, he just wants the orb.

Note: Games Masters who are running *Swords Across Nehwon* as the preceding adventure to *Swords Against Sorcery* should make note in this scene of which characters Jahol takes a shine to. He will feature again in the following adventure scenario.

The players have two choices here. They can either surrender the orb to the brigands or they can fight them. With beginning characters it is next to impossible that they will survive the fight, and unless they are Cold Waste berserkers with no desire to keep breathing, picking a fight here is probably unrealistic as well as indicative of a death-wish.

If the characters hand over the orb to Jahol, he will thank them, bid them farewell and take his horsemen back to Ilthmar. He will not look at it.

If the characters really wish to make a stand here, there is no need to kill them. While the scenario will flow smoother if the characters lose the orb here, Jahol has no wish to kill anyone for their valuables if he can take them without causing any deaths. The horsemen will all raise their bows in threat before the battle. Once combat is underway, Jahol will ride away from the characters to rein in his horse behind his men. The 10 remaining bandits will fire warning shots into the ground in one joint motion. If that fails to intimidate the characters into surrendering, they will draw their swords. The key to remember is that Jahol will shout an order to his men not to kill the characters, just disarm them. Use the rules on page 49 of *RuneQuest* for the disarming manoeuvre.

'No! To Ilthmar!'

There is the possibility that players will decide to go to Ilthmar to recover the orb. This is doomed to failure but try not to be too obvious in hindering their investigations. People they ask about the orb will have no idea what they are talking about and 'professional' gossip-mongers will look nervous and refuse to speak of the rumoured 'cult' with the marble statue. No-one in the taverns will have heard of Jahol and his band, though most will freely admit there are so many bandit riders around the city that even their employers in the government probably do not know them all.

Finally, when the investigations start to seem utterly fruitless, a small black bat arrives, lands on a character's cloak and hangs upside down with its little claws digging into the fabric. Around its ankle is a tiny roll of parchment. When unrolled, the parchment shows the tiny words written in dark red ink (or blood?) that state: '*You have lost something that belongs to me. Come and we shall discuss this matter.*' It is signed only with the same symbol that Savra was etching into the table with his dagger-tip – a seven-fingered hand with circles at the fingertips. On this tiny parchment, the circles resemble eyes.

This should be all the prodding the characters require in order to go visit Ningauble.

Once the characters are disarmed and hopefully subdued (if not, the bandits will grapple the characters to the ground) Jahol will dismount and ask again for the Bloody Eye of the Marble Rat God. If the players refuse, they will be grappled and Jahol will search through their pockets and pouches until he finds it. He steals nothing else from them, only the orb.

Once he has the orb in his possession, he mounts up and rides away with his men towards Ilthmar. The characters are under orders from Savra to inform Ningauble that the portly thief did his best and was successful in the

initial heist, even if the characters somehow lose the orb. Conversely, if the characters manage, by heroic efforts and great dice rolls, to keep hold of the orb, they are free to continue on to Ningauble's caves.

Here are the statistics for the bandits. Jahol should not enter combat during the scene but if it becomes necessary for any reason, use the same stats as for his men, though with the CHA characteristic upped to 16.

Bandits (10)

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 14
CON 12
DEX 10
SIZ 11
INT 12
POW 10
CHA 11

Bandit Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	2/5
4-6	Left Leg	2/5
7-9	Abdomen	2/6
10-12	Chest	2/7
13-15	Right Arm	2/4
16-18	Left Arm	2/4
19-20	Head	0/5

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
Short bow	60% (52%)	1D8 / 3
Short sword	45% (37%)	1D6 / 3

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +11

Movement: 4m

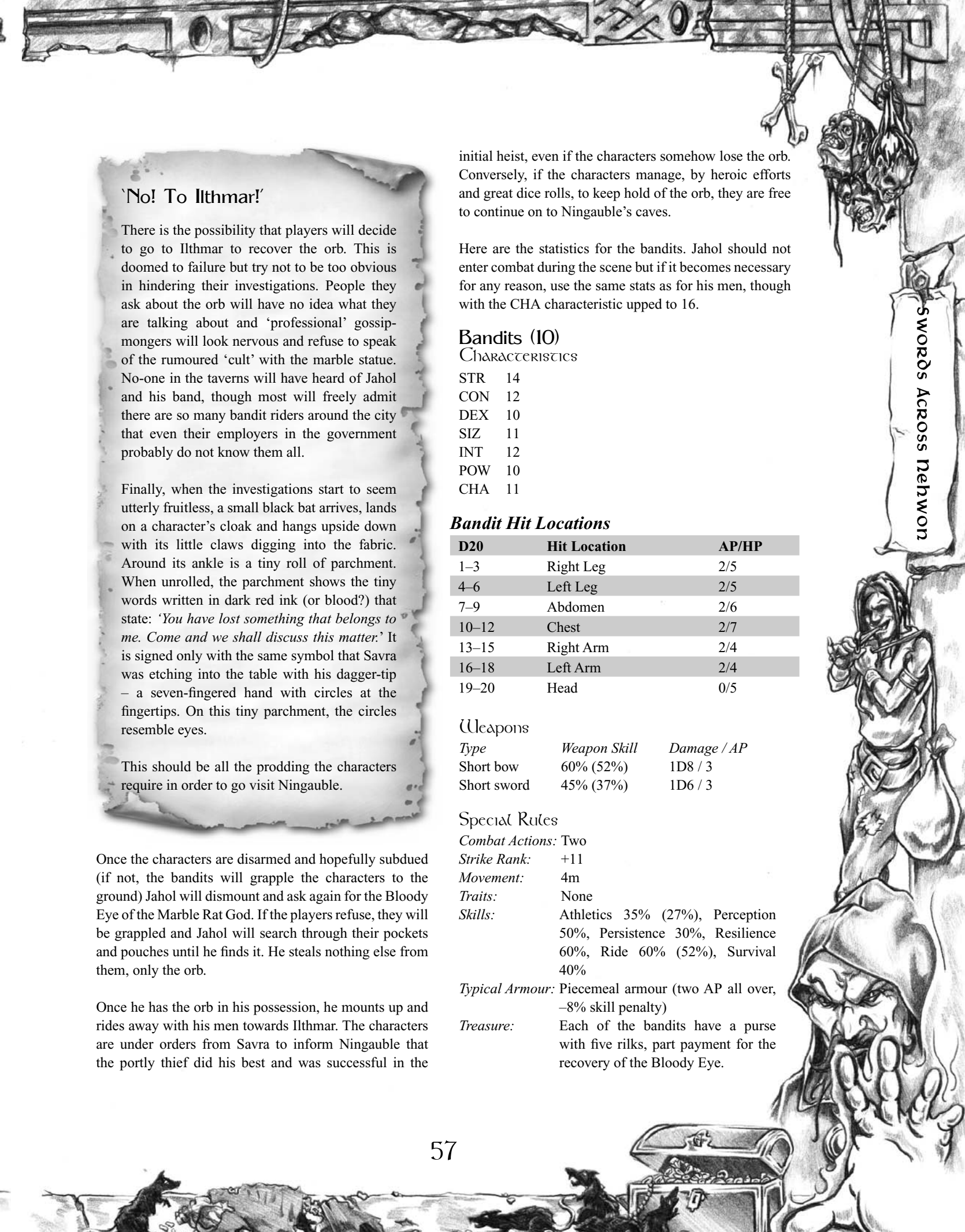
Traits: None

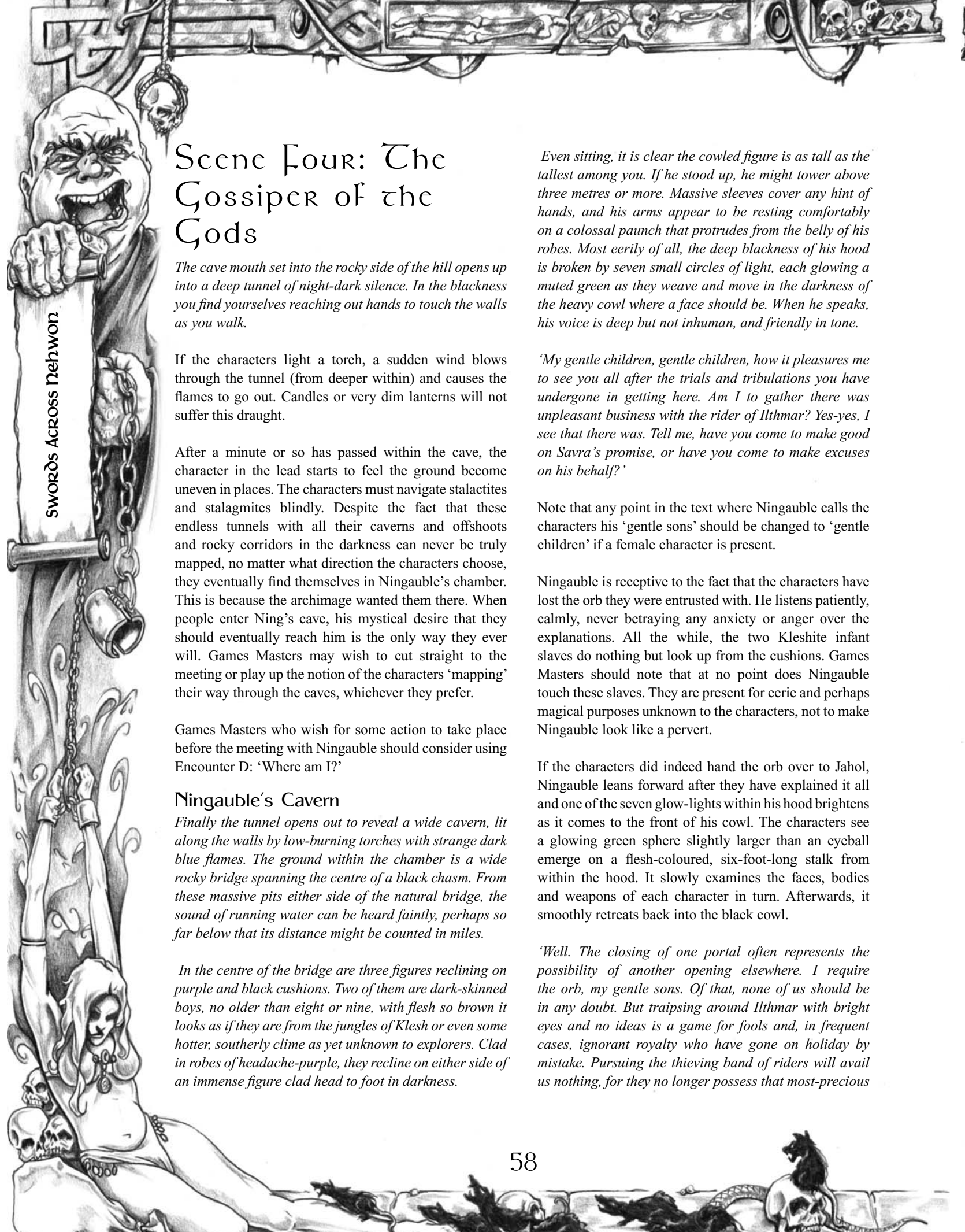
Skills: Athletics 35% (27%), Perception 50%, Persistence 30%, Resilience 60%, Ride 60% (52%), Survival 40%

Typical Armour: Piecemeal armour (two AP all over, -8% skill penalty)

Treasure: Each of the bandits have a purse with five rilks, part payment for the recovery of the Bloody Eye.

SWORDS ACROSS NEHWON





Scene Four: The Gossiper of the Gods

The cave mouth set into the rocky side of the hill opens up into a deep tunnel of night-dark silence. In the blackness you find yourselves reaching out hands to touch the walls as you walk.

If the characters light a torch, a sudden wind blows through the tunnel (from deeper within) and causes the flames to go out. Candles or very dim lanterns will not suffer this draught.

After a minute or so has passed within the cave, the character in the lead starts to feel the ground become uneven in places. The characters must navigate stalactites and stalagmites blindly. Despite the fact that these endless tunnels with all their caverns and offshoots and rocky corridors in the darkness can never be truly mapped, no matter what direction the characters choose, they eventually find themselves in Ningauble's chamber. This is because the archimage wanted them there. When people enter Ning's cave, his mystical desire that they should eventually reach him is the only way they ever will. Games Masters may wish to cut straight to the meeting or play up the notion of the characters 'mapping' their way through the caves, whichever they prefer.

Games Masters who wish for some action to take place before the meeting with Ningauble should consider using Encounter D: 'Where am I?'

Ningauble's Cavern

Finally the tunnel opens out to reveal a wide cavern, lit along the walls by low-burning torches with strange dark blue flames. The ground within the chamber is a wide rocky bridge spanning the centre of a black chasm. From these massive pits either side of the natural bridge, the sound of running water can be heard faintly, perhaps so far below that its distance might be counted in miles.

In the centre of the bridge are three figures reclining on purple and black cushions. Two of them are dark-skinned boys, no older than eight or nine, with flesh so brown it looks as if they are from the jungles of Klesh or even some hotter, southerly clime as yet unknown to explorers. Clad in robes of headache-purple, they recline on either side of an immense figure clad head to foot in darkness.

Even sitting, it is clear the cowed figure is as tall as the tallest among you. If he stood up, he might tower above three metres or more. Massive sleeves cover any hint of hands, and his arms appear to be resting comfortably on a colossal paunch that protrudes from the belly of his robes. Most eerily of all, the deep blackness of his hood is broken by seven small circles of light, each glowing a muted green as they weave and move in the darkness of the heavy cowl where a face should be. When he speaks, his voice is deep but not inhuman, and friendly in tone.

'My gentle children, gentle children, how it pleases me to see you all after the trials and tribulations you have undergone in getting here. Am I to gather there was unpleasant business with the rider of Ilthmar? Yes-yes, I see that there was. Tell me, have you come to make good on Savra's promise, or have you come to make excuses on his behalf?'

Note that any point in the text where Ningauble calls the characters his 'gentle sons' should be changed to 'gentle children' if a female character is present.

Ningauble is receptive to the fact that the characters have lost the orb they were entrusted with. He listens patiently, calmly, never betraying any anxiety or anger over the explanations. All the while, the two Kleshite infant slaves do nothing but look up from the cushions. Games Masters should note that at no point does Ningauble touch these slaves. They are present for eerie and perhaps magical purposes unknown to the characters, not to make Ningauble look like a pervert.

If the characters did indeed hand the orb over to Jahol, Ningauble leans forward after they have explained it all and one of the seven glow-lights within his hood brightens as it comes to the front of his cowl. The characters see a glowing green sphere slightly larger than an eyeball emerge on a flesh-coloured, six-foot-long stalk from within the hood. It slowly examines the faces, bodies and weapons of each character in turn. Afterwards, it smoothly retreats back into the black cowl.

'Well. The closing of one portal often represents the possibility of another opening elsewhere. I require the orb, my gentle sons. Of that, none of us should be in any doubt. But traipsing around Ilthmar with bright eyes and no ideas is a game for fools and, in frequent cases, ignorant royalty who have gone on holiday by mistake. Pursuing the thieving band of riders will avail us nothing, for they no longer possess that most-precious

artefact. It was palmed (stolen, to speak true) by a man with great skill at picking pockets and no luck at keeping his balance.'

Here Ningauble waits in silence. When a Player Character finally breaks the silence, interrupt them with this:

'Oh, silence, interrupter of heavenly rhetoric. To whit, as I spoke, the orb which I require is now in the possession of a man who is infinitely deader than he was only an hour before. He fell into the harbour while being chased, you see. I fear that our mutual prize now sits in the stinking innards of a white-fleshed shark with a black-tipped fin. It must be extricated from this intestinal burial immediately and forthwith, naturally. And that, my gentle sons, is where you – and your sharp weapons – enter stage left into our darling performance.'

Ningauble pauses again, waiting for a character to speak. Once someone does:

'Hush, oh violator of serene wordsmithing, hush your lips and let me finish. Ilthmar is your destination now and the delights of shark-fishing under cover of nightfall your next task. Find and bring to me the blood-filled sphere of the Ilthmarts' nasty little vermin god. Do as I ask in this and your endeavour shall be rewarded with a pouch of emeralds so green it will appear as if the gods of heaven sneezed into a bag and the debris became crystallised. These jewels are yours, no tricks and no lies, no deceptions and no half-truths, if your next visit marks the simultaneous arrival of the orb I seek. I only warn you in full fairness: look not upon the red sphere unless you have to, and even then, for no longer than a few seconds. Keep it covered at all times. Now...have we reached an accord?'

The loquacious warlock is done talking for the time being. The characters can now get a word in edgeways. Here are some of their potential questions and their likely reactions. Overall Ningauble is often no more helpful than Sheelba, though he is often more pleasant when saying 'no' to things. He also wishes to impress the characters and in the future talk them into serving him, as Fafhrd does in the Swords tales.

'Savra told us to tell you that he did his best.' *'This I already know. My wrath, such as it is, will not fall upon or even around him. I am but poor, penurious Ningauble. Misunderstood and feared for invented reasons. I hold no grudges against my faithful servants.'*

'How do you know where the orb is now?' *'It is an item of power and such things call to me. I feel them with a sense I cannot explain to you through any of the five senses you possess. If I showed you, it would render your eyes blind. If I told you, it would burst your eardrums. If I allowed you to touch, taste or smell it...well, you see where I am going with this.'*

'What the hell was that eye-stalk thing?' *'Oh, my gentle son, such mysteries are not for the untrained mind to dwell upon. Concern yourself with the ins and outs, the mores and morays of your own life, dear boy. Fret not over things you've no hope of comprehending. Why is the sky blue? Why does man have two legs? Why do we die? You see? You see where answerless questions lead? Let that be a lesson to you.'*

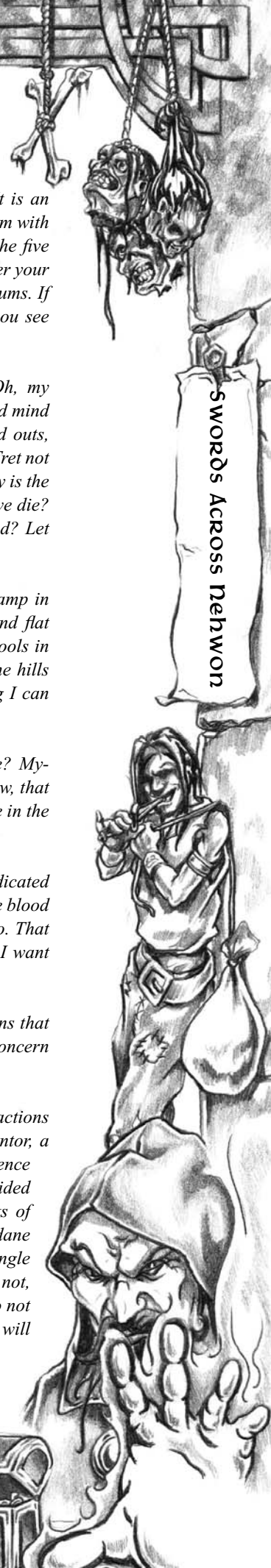
'We're injured. Can you help us?' *'You may camp in the first cave, by the entrance. There you will find flat ground and rainwater collected in several little pools in the rocks of the floor. Game is easily caught in the hills around us. A day's secure rest is the best healing I can offer you and you would do well to take it.'*

'Sheelba sends his regards.' *'Does he, does he? My-my. We have been on the outs for some months now, that witchy Sheel and I. If you pass by his marsh-house in the future, convey my regards back to him.'*

'What is the orb, really?' *'The eye of a statue dedicated to a silly – yet powerful – god. It was filled with the blood of a priest who died over three hundred years ago. That blood is still fresh, preserved by the magic. And I want it.'*

'Why do you need the orb?' *'I need it for reasons that you will never understand nor ever need to concern yourself about.'*

'Can you teach me to be a wizard?' *'If our interactions proceed smoothly, I will be a kindly father, a mentor, a pillar of support and sympathy, a patron of influence and no small power. I will scratch your back, provided you scratch mine in return. I will even ask tasks of you that will have rewards unmatched in mundane society. On rare occasions, I will even grant you single spells that can be used once and once only. I will not, however, teach you the ways of the mystic arts. Do not ask why because I have given the only answer I will give.'*



'We found someone in your caves...' *'Yes and thank you for disposing of him with brevity, gusto and no shortage of vim. I do so hate it when they find their way in here without my invitation. But enough of that talk for now.'*

'Who are these boys?' *'Assistants, of a sort. They came with questions and are staying until the full answers are revealed. Once they have these answers, they will return to their own world.'*

When the characters decide to leave the talkative archmage and his weird silent slaves, Ningauble has one last thing to say.

'Before you go, I offer you this.' He reaches one of his sleeves into the other and apparently extracts something from within. Reaching out with no hint of limb showing in his hanging sleeve, he places a palm-sized piece of parchment in the character's hand. *'This is one spell, a single-use, single-worded enchantment that will aid your efforts. Cast it when you are floating on the harbour waters and the shark you seek will make itself known to you. Instructions for the use of the spell are, by necessity and through the influence of my ever-cautious spirit, written concisely on the back of the parchment. Good luck, little would-be heroes.'*

After leaving, the characters can choose to stay the night at the cave mouth or press on. If the Games Master has not yet run Encounter D: 'Where am I?' now is as good a time as any. Otherwise, keep the pace going and brush over the couple hours' walk to Ilthmar.

Scene Five: Ilthmar

The city rises before you with no small degree of filthy majesty. It looks much like what it is: Lankhmar's dirty little cousin, smaller and less grand but essentially constructed the same way and for the same purposes, on the edge of the same sea. For those of you born here, the pelting rain makes it a cold homecoming but at least it drives away some of the smell. For those of you visiting the city for the first time, you cannot shake the notion that Ilthmar is what Lankhmar would look like if the Imperishable City were half the size it is today and had been left to rot for a few decades.

Encounters E, F and G are designed with the Ilthmar portion of the adventure in mind and Games Masters should feel free to inject them into proceedings at any

Ningauble's Parchment

On the Front: 'Axitholav'

On the Back: 'For the rupturing of the organs within certain predatory fish creatures, forcing them to thrash in obvious pain close to the surface of the water.'

1. 'Cast only at nightfall while out on the water.'
2. 'Speak the spell's word with a mouthful of Ilthmarish harbour water. Accurate pronunciation is vital.'
3. 'Try not to swallow when doing this. The water will undoubtedly be bad for you.'

'How the hell do you say this?' *'You can read, can't you? My-my, what an amusing question ask. You'll be fine!'*

point, particularly if the pace of the session has slowed and the Games Master feels something immediate needs to happen to grab the players' interest.

The City Gates

At the gates of Ilthmar, a band of four guards wearing dirty tunics with rat-icon tabards and bearing well-made military spears demand the gate toll and weapon tax from each character. Have each character roll a D10 and add their CHA to the modifier. If the result of the roll is 20 or above for more than half the group, use the first of the text blocks below. If the result is 19 or less for half or more of the group, use the second text block. Ties (such as in the case of two characters getting above 20 and two characters getting below 19) mean the second text block is used.

20+: *'Ho there, you lot. Gate toll is a Smerduk a head. Don't care what's printed on the coin, 'long as it's silver. It'll be 'nother three silvers each for the right to bear arms in Ilthmar, too.'*

19-: *'All right, you ugly lot. It's three Smerduks per head to get inside. That's the gate toll. Another seven per head for all those weapons, too. A total of 10 silvers or one gold, choice is yours, lads. No arguments now.'*

The guards are in a foul mood, having to stand on duty in the scything rain, hence their attempt at some minor extortion from the more ragged-looking and downtrodden-seeming adventurers. They refuse to be bribed, citing that the captain of the watch is doing his rounds in the storm and it is not worth their heads to risk a backhander. A Perception check will reveal that for the lie it is, though the soldiers stick to it adamantly. Despite their antagonistic stance, a successful Influence check at -20% will talk them from the '19-' reaction to the '20+' one.

If the characters genuinely cannot muster the necessary money to get into the city, the guards will take whatever they offer and let the characters in with a parting 'We never saw you, right?' warning.

The City Proper

The characters may find that they have some hours to kill until nightfall when the spell may be cast. If this is the case, consider letting them look around the city's markets and taverns, perhaps running Encounters E, F and G to eat up time and keep things interesting. Games Masters might also choose to use one of the taverns described in Chapter 1 of this book if the players decide to spend time in a tavern until sunset. Whatever happens, do make this scene drag if the players clearly wish to get on with their duty.

If the Games Master is using *Swords Across Nehwon* as the beginning adventure in a long campaign, he may wish to foreshadow other plots and storylines that will arise in future sessions after the events of this scenario are completed. Any side-plots or tangential story arcs that the Games Master wishes to introduce here have the potential for realistic insertion, since almost any Nehwonian traveller comes to Ilthmar at some point.

If the players wish to scout out the docks ahead of time, run Encounter H: 'Cast Him In.'

The Harbour

Once night has fallen, the characters can make their way to the harbour to perform the necessary deed.

The docks are still busy at night, though nothing compared to the bustle of daytime. The activity is mostly just sailors pulling sentry duty on the decks of their ships and the sounds of taverns on the waterfront. Tied up to the docks are seven huge ships – merchants or navy by

the size of them – and over fifty smaller sloops and fishing boats. The waters of the harbour are calm now that the incessant rainfall has stopped and the storm is hours into the past.

To get out onto the water, the chances are the characters will have to steal a boat. This is child's play given the fact that all of the fishermen are at home or in the taverns. A Stealth test at +40% allows the characters to untie a sloop or a boat and cast off into the harbour. A failed check means that they are spotted by one of the drunks walking home from a tavern or one of the sailors on a larger vessel. Neither of these characters will raise the alarm, though the characters should be aware that someone in the city now has their faces marked and they will be remembered as boat thieves by at least one man if the city watch comes questioning.

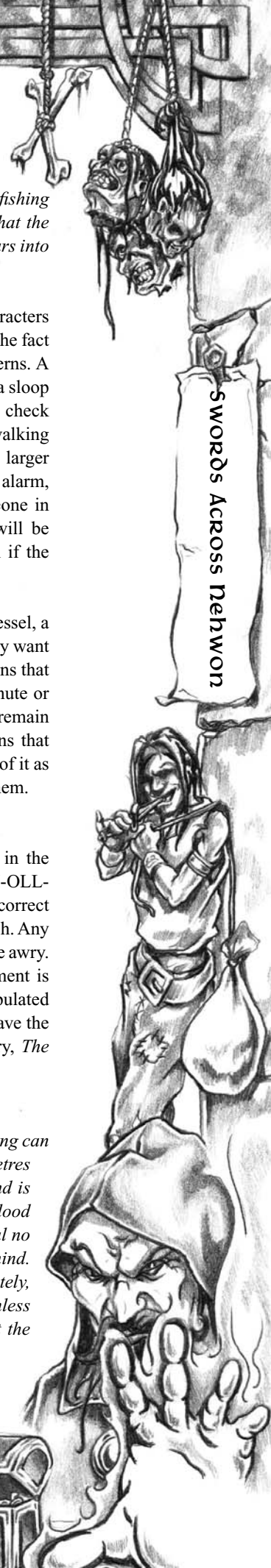
Once they are out onto the water in their chosen vessel, a Boating roll is necessary to get the sloop where they want it to go without incident. A failure on this roll means that the cruise is wobbly and unstable for the first minute or so, and characters must make Stealth checks to remain silent while they work. Further failure here means that they are noticed as before, though no harm comes of it as yet. Being noticed should be enough to unnerve them.

Casting the Spell

To cast the spell, a character must be in a boat in the harbour and speak the word exactly: AX-ITH-OLL-AV with a mouth full of dock water. The correct pronunciation means the spell works without a hitch. Any other pronunciation means that the casting has gone awry. No Corruption roll is necessary since the parchment is technically a focus and the magic cannot be manipulated in any way at all. It is akin to the 'rune' Sheelba gave the Grey Mouser to read and cast in the *Swords* story, *The Lords of Quarmall*.

Success!

On the still waters of the harbour, a sudden thrashing can be heard off the boat's port bow. Three dozen metres away in the water, a white shark has surfaced and is twisting and writhing in the water. Red-black blood streams from its gills, yet its night-dark eyes reveal no hint of the predatory panic seizing the animal's mind. After a few seconds, the thrashing ceases completely, yet the animal does not sink. Instead it floats motionless in the harbour water, its white belly facing up at the stars.





The shark has surfaced and a Boating roll (or Shiphandling, depending on the size of the stolen craft) is required to manoeuvre the vessel over to the dying/dead beast.

To lift the shark out of the water, an Athletics test at -25% must be passed. Obviously, characters can use the Assistance rules as noted on page 22 of *RuneQuest*.

Failure!

On the still waters of the harbour, a sudden thrashing can be heard off the boat's port bow. Three dozen metres away in the water, a white shark has surfaced and is twisting and writhing in the water. Red-black blood streams from its gills, yet its night-dark eyes reveal no hint of the predatory panic seizing the animal's mind.

An ache in your sinuses gradually builds up to agonising intensity as you watch the shark. Hot blood starts to trickle from your noses and your ears as each of you feels painful pressure in your skulls. After several racing heartbeats, the pain passes like blessed relief from the worst hangover you have ever felt.

For a failed spellcasting, the spell still works as intended but each character loses one Hit Point from their Head hit location.

'That's too easy!'

The Games Master might prefer to have the shark surface because of the magic, clearly injured but with some fight left in it. In that case, the characters will need to kill the beast with thrown and ranged weapons, or (gulp) dive in and stab the shark to death with swords and daggers. Use the following stats for the injured shark.

Games Masters who enjoy punishing the players or setting extremely difficult challenges might decide that other harbour sharks are attracted to the smell of blood in the water and the thrashing close to the surface. This is not recommended unless there are several uninjured characters and they are mostly phenomenal fighters, however. Such a fight, with the -50% penalties of stabbing while treading water, are going to wear any characters out in a short time. Even so, this shark is 'weakened' for characters who feel the desperate need to dive in.

CHARACTERISTICS

- STR 31
- CON 15
- DEX 10
- SIZ 25
- INT 5
- POW 9
- CHA 3

Injured Shark Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Tail	1/7
3-7	Body (Rear)	1/9
8-15	Body (Front)	1/9
16-20	Head	1/7

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	50%	1D10+1D4

Special Rules

- Combat Actions:** Two
- Strike Rank:** +7
- Movement:** 6m (in water)
- Traits:** Excellent Swimmer
- Skills:** Athletics 40%, Dodge 25%, Resilience 60%, Perception 40%, Persistence 50%, Stealth 90%, Survival 60%, Tracking 150%

Typical Armour: Thick hide (AP 1, no Skill Penalty)

The Gory Deed

Once the shark is on board it needs to be gutted and the stomach opened. This is brutally simple but absolutely disgusting. Once the belly is split open, guts, blood, fat and juices spill out onto the deck, with Persistence rolls at +20% required not to vomit. A vomiting character takes no mechanical penalty unless the players failed the spellcasting, in which case anyone throwing up here suffers another torrent of brain-aches and nose- and ear-bleeds, causing a further one Hit Point of damage as well as emptying his stomach over the side.

Inside the shark's stomach is the part-digested torso, left arm and head of a man none of the characters recognise. He has a silver ring worth two Rilks on his right forefinger, sunk into the clammy dead flesh. In a hidden pocket of his tunic, sticky with the fluids of shark innards, is the wrapped orb Ningauble desires so badly, as well as a common dagger. It is up to the players how much respect they have for the dead here.

Upon returning to the dock, the characters might be in trouble if they were observed earlier by a drunkard or a sentry. If the boat is awash in blood and seawater, neither witness will think twice or report it. If the characters come back into port with a dead shark on board as well as half a corpse, then either the sentry or the drunkard (depending on who the Games Mater used as a witness) will raise the alarm and start yelling for the city watch. After all, sharks are considered holy animals in Ilthmar and the players have just performed quite a blasphemy. Coming back into dock with evidence of heresy on board is an act of monumental stupidity.

If the alarm is raised, move to Encounter I: Blasphemy by Night. Otherwise, the characters are free to return to Ningauble with their reclaimed prize. Games Masters who have not run Encounters F or G as yet may choose to do so now if they desire.

Scene Six: Return to Ningauble's Caves

The return journey to Ningauble's caverns is uneventful and before long you stand at the mouth of the first cave. Ningauble is sitting in the middle of this entrance cave, a little way back from the open air and motionless but for

the swirling of his eye-gloves within his hood. Wordlessly, he holds out a sleeved arm, gesturing for you to sit on the ground in front of him.

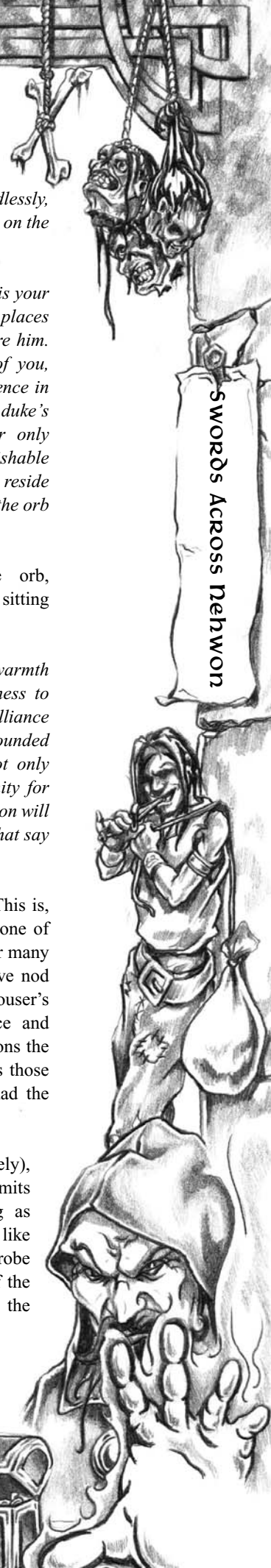
'I sense you were successful. As I promised, here is your reward.' He reaches into a fold of his robe and places a brown leather pouch on the stone ground before him. 'Emeralds from Kleshite mines, one for each of you, worth a prince's ransom if pawned to the right fence in Lankhmar. They are still surely worth at least a duke's ransom elsewhere, of course. I say Lankhmar only because the density of such criminals in the Imperishable City means the cream of the crop are most likely to reside there among the professional masses. Now, place the orb on the ground, if you please.'

Once the characters have given over the orb, Ningauble takes it into his sleeve and returns to sitting motionlessly.

'Ah, my gentle sons, you bring gladness and warmth to my soul with your efficiency and your keenness to please. What say we arrange a more permanent alliance between ourselves? What say you to a friendship founded in mutual benefaction and which offers you not only my exceptional patronage but also the opportunity for thrilling heroics the likes of which all known Nehwon will peak of in hushed and awed tones of jealousy? What say you to this, eh?'

The characters do not have to agree, of course. This is, however, a rare opportunity to be sponsored by one of the most powerful beings in Nehwon, a source for many more adventures and, last but not least, a massive nod to the source material. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser's relationships with Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes were the main reasons the heroes got into so much trouble – in fact, it was those relationships that were the main reasons they had the opportunity to become heroes at all.

If the characters agree (which is highly likely), Ningauble shuffles in his seating position and emits a deep and kindly chuckle. When roleplaying as Ningauble at times when he is genuinely pleased like now, think 'a talkative Santa Clause in a black robe with tentacles for eyes' and you won't be far off the mark. He acts like a fatherly figure throughout the Swords tales, even when angered.



'Hell no.'

If the characters really have taken a dislike to Ningauble, do not fret. The adventure as published need not come crashing to a halt just because Ning is removed from the equation at this stage. In short, do not panic. Let the characters leave without pressuring them or railroading the players into a decision. Luckily this is unlikely but with Player Characters, you never know what can happen.

Ningauble could ask them to perform a simple task since they are returning to Lankhmar anyway. To wit, might they take a certain scroll to Sheelba of the Eyeless Face in his hut in the Great Salt Marsh? Once there, it could be a grateful Sheelba who asks the characters to make the trip to Quarmall that Ningauble would have offered had they stayed and listened to the Seven-Eyed One. Or maybe Sheel desires a different artefact be retrieved or task performed.

If this fails to arouse their interests, the characters may receive a message from either Ningauble or Sheelba – whichever warlock they seemed to prefer– asking them to make haste to their havens in the wild for an urgent discussion. It could be at this meeting that the archimage, perhaps even *both* of them, asks the characters to act as agents in Quarmall and find a vital component for a spell.

Failing even that, then it is no trouble in using the information of each region in this adventure to flavour events in Games Master-planned campaigns that involve a wander across Nehwon. There is always something salvageable in collapsing story arcs.

'Good! Wonderful news, my dear children. You will find me a most generous, if occasionally demanding patron. I've a need for you now, should you have the fearless intent and swordish desire to embark across Nehwon on another bout of heroic endeavour so recently off the back of your last success. You have all heard of Quarmall, I presume? The fallen empire? The sorcerous stony citadel of the south?'

Players may make a Lore (World) or Lore (Quarmall) check here to stop Ningauble before another informative lecture. If they know about Quarmall, Ningauble nods his hood. If they confess to ignorance of the place (or even ask a single question for more detail) Ningauble goes off on one.

In fact, if the Games Master feels like Ning would say this anyway, feel free to use it.

'Ah, but it us a fine story. Though we are all comfortable here, and though I usually see no need to trim the edges or round out the details of a decent yarn, we are unfortunately pressed for time. Otherwise I could take

days informing you of all I know of dark Quarmall and the darker deeds of its nobles. Instead, I will say only this. It is a city as all cities, though it is concealed within a mountain in the south, where tunnels and caverns stretch down into the earth for many leagues. It is said they once looked for the remnants of the Elder Ones; those beings that trod the world many thousands of years before the first human ever drew his first breath.

The people there are either slaves, citizens or nobles, with the first of these far outnumbering the second, the second exceeding the third and the third the most dangerous despite being the fewest in number. It is said that the noble-blooded aristocrats of the under-kingdom possess sorcery of subtlety and great power. This is true in part. Sorcerers they are. Subtle they are not.'

After the exposition by the talkative magician, he relays his final instructions on the matter:

'I will supply you with directions to reach Quarmall overland and furnish you with this piece of espionage: my agent will show you the way inside once you arrive.

Ah-ah! Ask nothing now. Wait until you arrive in sight of Quarmall's rocky towers and then follow my agent within the mountain's stony bowels. You will know him when you see him, for he will make himself known to you.

As to what I require from Quarmall, that much is the simplest part of all. In the near-lightless caverns close to the surface peak of the domed mountain, the peasants and plebs of the stunted empire gather to exchange their wares under the sunless sky. A marketplace, you see.

In a side tunnel joining this marketplace to some forgotten part of the city is a trader who is – and is not – human. I can explain it no better than this, for I lack all the relevant details. But this man, this inhuman human (or human inhuman? What delightful poetry the very concept conjures!), this man possesses something of great value that I require. A coin of a metal unknown on Nehwon – though you will know it as soon as you see it purely by virtue of never having seen such a thing before.

He lurks in a tunnel marked by the etching of a blackbird. This is all I can say. I need that coin, my gentle sons. If you are successful in retrieving it for me, I will...oh, I don't know...enspell your blades so that they cut truer for three months and three days. How does that sound, my dearest and newest allies?'

Unlike many other scenes involving a lot of dialogue, Ningauble has said pretty much all he has to say on the matter. He will clarify that the Quarmallian nobles are powerful sorcerers but will give no details beyond that they possess necromancy: 'a filthy power at the very best of times.' He will also confirm that they will be entering Quarmall by deception and stealth, not by legal methods, so they should be careful. He will only mention this if the players ask directly, however. Other than that, he believes they are capable of completing the charge without additional magical assistance and with no further information. He explains only that his brevity on the matter is because he himself knows so little about Quarmall's interior. What he has said already is the limit of his lore on the matter.

If the characters agree, Ningauble bids them good luck and farewell. He remains where he is as they leave. The first time a character looks back, even if only a few seconds after leaving the cave mouth, Ningauble is gone.

Scene Seven: Quarmall

Games Masters wishing to spice up the two week journey south should consider using Encounter J: A Kleshite Wanderer to flavour the overland trek or spring a bandit ambush upon the characters. Otherwise, cut right to the point where the players first sight Quarmall.

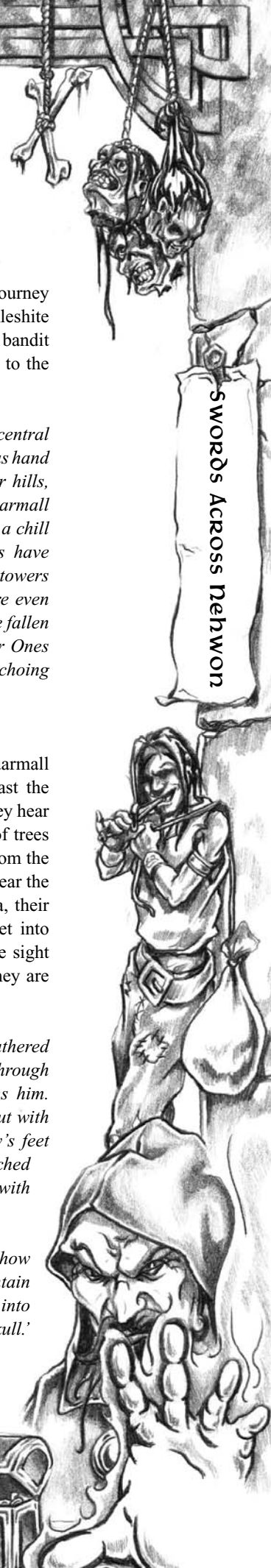
A lone mountain with several jagged peaks and a central dome seems to reach up to the sky like a blasphemous hand of ancient rock. It is surrounded by much smaller hills, none of which approach the eerie majesty of Quarmall proper. As you see the mountain for the first time, a chill runs through your blood. Perhaps the sorcerers have spotted you already – their views from the peak-towers would certainly be good enough. Perhaps you are even now walking above the subterranean tunnels of the fallen kingdom, and monsters descended from the Elder Ones are looking up as they listen to your footsteps echoing down through the soil.

The Contact

A forest reaches right up to the foothills of Quarmall and a main road that cuts through open land past the mountain. As the Player Characters walk closer they hear a sharp 'psssst!' coming from the closest group of trees or from behind a rock if they are some distance from the woodland. If they are already in the woods, they hear the 'psssst!' from up ahead. Either way, this is Rintha, their guide sent by Ningauble. He advises them to get into the cover of trees, since they are not far from the sight and range of the slingers atop the mountain. If they are already in cover, he merely greets them.

The first thing you notice about the man is his weathered visage and narrowed eyes, as if he has lived through many years of hard work and the sunlight pains him. He looks aged before his time, ostensibly 30ish but with whitened hair and silver stubble, and deep crow's feet by his squinted eyes matching the frown lines etched into the corner of his lips. He wears a thick cloak with many travel stains and patchwork repairs.

'I'm Rintha. You must be Ning's boys. I'm here to show you the best way to get inside that accursed mountain without the slaving nobles magicking your brain into powder or the slingers on the top cracking your skull.'



Rintha is a recently-escaped slave and a terse man at the best of times. When he is nervous, such as right now, his abrupt manner becomes almost rude. He is not interested in talking much. He wants to get the characters inside and get away from the mountain as fast as possible. If the characters ask him questions, he holds a finger to his lips to silence them. He will only speak if the characters pass an Influence check at -10%. They can each make the attempt to win Rintha over but with each failed test the penalty rises by a further -10%, so the second attempt to make him open up is at -20%, the third at -30% and so on until all the characters have made the roll.

If he does speak after a successful Influence check, he is still terse. Here are some example Questions and Answers for portraying Rintha.

'How do you know Ning?' *'I owe him a favour. That's all you need to know.'*

'You look like death / what's wrong with your eyes?' *'I was a slave in there for most of my life. I've only been out here for the past few weeks. I'm still not used to the sunlight and it makes my eyes ache.'*

'How did you escape?' *'Luck.'*

'What can you tell us about Quarmall?' *'Nothing. I said I'd get you in, not teach you the world's history. All you need to know will become clear once you're inside.'*

Rintha leads them through the forest to the base of Quarmall's main mountain. On the way there, he hands them striking flint and a tinderbox, and five torches made from bunched sticks that will last an hour each.

Games Masters wishing to introduce an event before the climb may decide to use Encounter K: Forest Guardian. Otherwise, proceed directly to the climb.

The Climb

The characters need to climb the side of Quarmall to reach an opening in the rock partway up the mountain. This requires a climb of 50 minutes. Since the ascent is relatively gentle (more like climbing a sloping hill rather than mountaineering) the going is not as hard as one might expect.

The Fatigue rules on page 86 might be necessary to deal with characters getting tired on the way up. The entire climb counts as Moderate Activity.

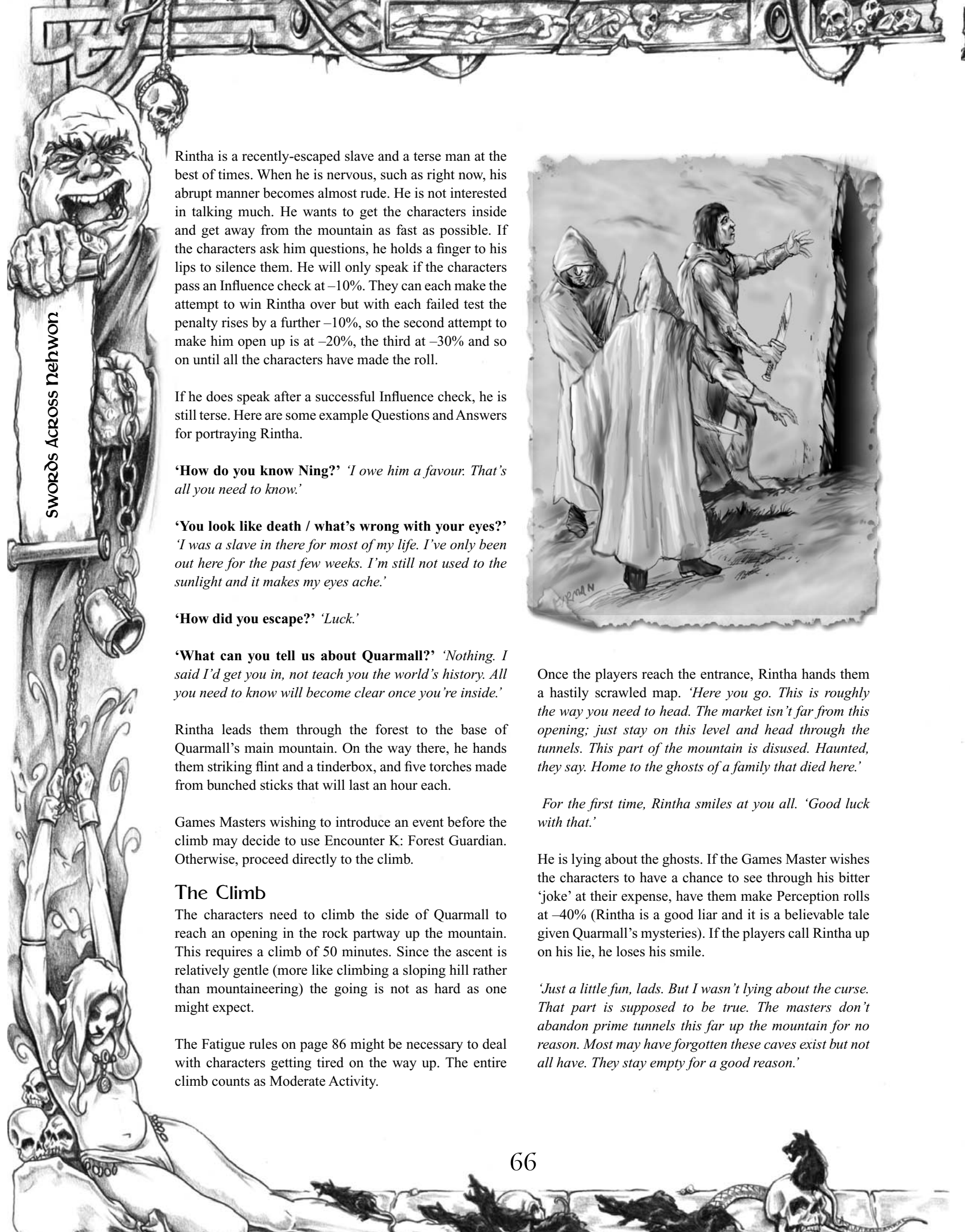


Once the players reach the entrance, Rintha hands them a hastily scrawled map. *'Here you go. This is roughly the way you need to head. The market isn't far from this opening; just stay on this level and head through the tunnels. This part of the mountain is disused. Haunted, they say. Home to the ghosts of a family that died here.'*

For the first time, Rintha smiles at you all. 'Good luck with that.'

He is lying about the ghosts. If the Games Master wishes the characters to have a chance to see through his bitter 'joke' at their expense, have them make Perception rolls at -40% (Rintha is a good liar and it is a believable tale given Quarmall's mysteries). If the players call Rintha up on his lie, he loses his smile.

'Just a little fun, lads. But I wasn't lying about the curse. That part is supposed to be true. The masters don't abandon prime tunnels this far up the mountain for no reason. Most may have forgotten these caves exist but not all have. They stay empty for a good reason.'



Inside Quarmall

The narrow entrance into the mountain is little more than a slit in the rock and fitting inside is a tight squeeze. Once inside, the dark tunnel leads away from the daylight into pitch blackness ahead. You will need some illumination if you are to proceed.

Tunnel 1: Once players have a torch burning, they are free to walk along the dark tunnel further into the mountain. The ground slopes gradually upward for the first five minutes, then the walls and ceiling widen out into a large chamber.

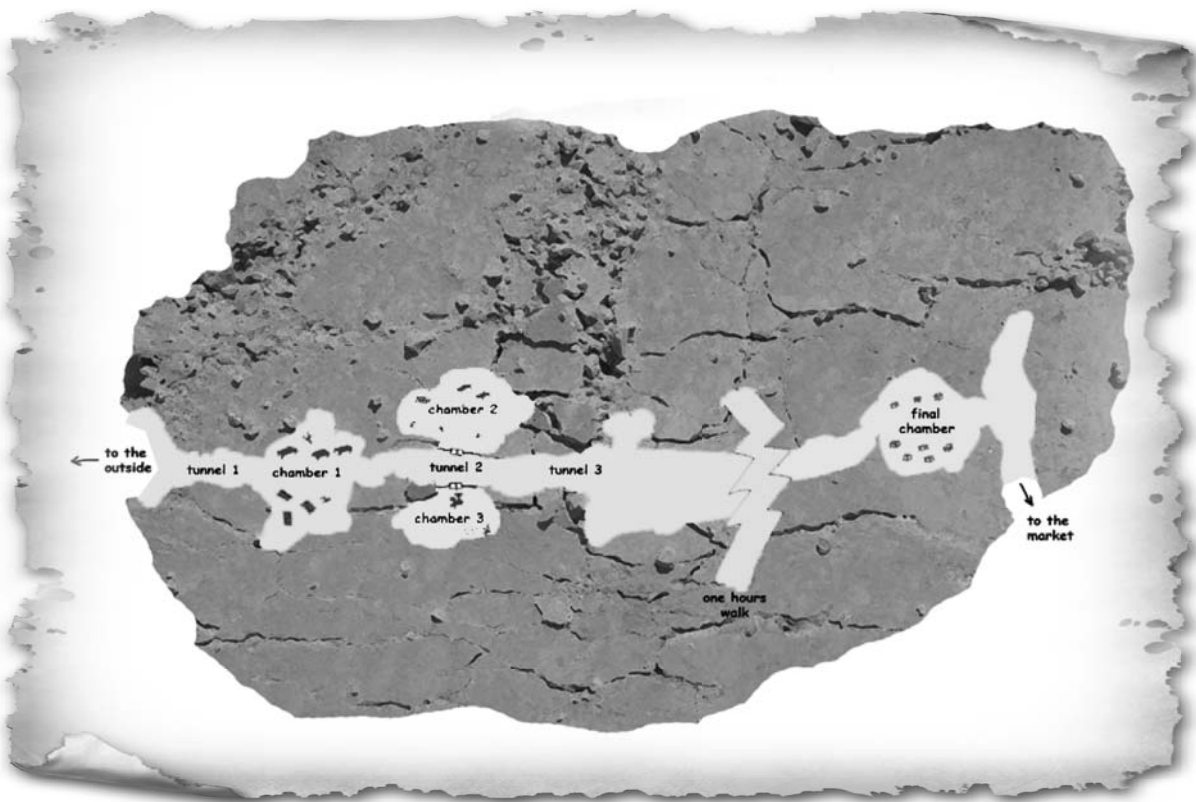
Chamber 1: Your footsteps echo around a large cavern, resonating strangely off the uneven walls. The ground levels out now, and you feel your boots scuffing over the remnants of what were once rich red carpets. Now they appear as little more than brownish dust-caked rags. Furniture, a broken table, three beds with rotted mattresses and several collapsed wooden chairs are dotted around the room. It looks as if a small group of people, perhaps a family, lived here many years ago. Around the collapsed table are the fragments of grey Quarmallian ceramic

plates that fell off and smashed when the table leg rotted through. The only other exit from this cavern is in the wall opposite to the archway you entered from. Though a door once barred entry, only planks of rotted wood remain scattered around the floor.

A Perception check will reveal that one of the plates miraculously survived its fall and is only slightly chipped. An Evaluate or Lore (Quarmall) check allows a character to estimate that to collectors and antiquarians, this item might be worth up to a hundred Rilks.

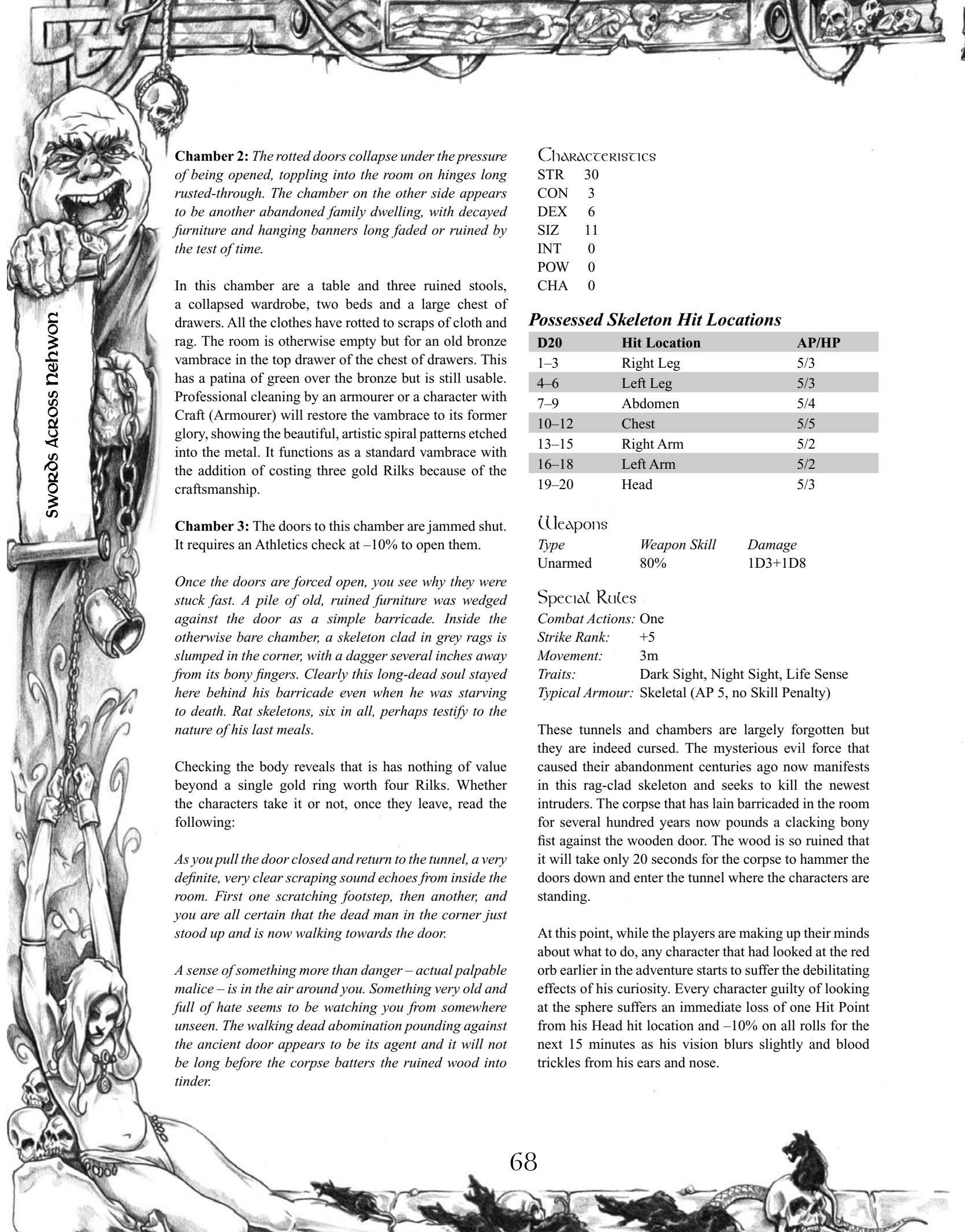
By the broken door, a Perception check at -20% reveals a faded bloody handprint on the wall, as if someone leaned by the door while injured, many years ago.

Tunnel 2: Past the broken door is another long corridor. This one leads gently upward like a ramp for almost 10 minutes before reaching a crossroad of sorts. Set in the left and right walls are twin double doors taller than the tallest among you. Ahead, the corridor continues into the darkness.



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Chamber 2: *The rotted doors collapse under the pressure of being opened, toppling into the room on hinges long rusted-through. The chamber on the other side appears to be another abandoned family dwelling, with decayed furniture and hanging banners long faded or ruined by the test of time.*

In this chamber are a table and three ruined stools, a collapsed wardrobe, two beds and a large chest of drawers. All the clothes have rotted to scraps of cloth and rag. The room is otherwise empty but for an old bronze vambrace in the top drawer of the chest of drawers. This has a patina of green over the bronze but is still usable. Professional cleaning by an armorer or a character with Craft (Armourer) will restore the vambrace to its former glory, showing the beautiful, artistic spiral patterns etched into the metal. It functions as a standard vambrace with the addition of costing three gold Rilks because of the craftsmanship.

Chamber 3: The doors to this chamber are jammed shut. It requires an Athletics check at -10% to open them.

Once the doors are forced open, you see why they were stuck fast. A pile of old, ruined furniture was wedged against the door as a simple barricade. Inside the otherwise bare chamber, a skeleton clad in grey rags is slumped in the corner, with a dagger several inches away from its bony fingers. Clearly this long-dead soul stayed here behind his barricade even when he was starving to death. Rat skeletons, six in all, perhaps testify to the nature of his last meals.

Checking the body reveals that it has nothing of value beyond a single gold ring worth four Rilks. Whether the characters take it or not, once they leave, read the following:

As you pull the door closed and return to the tunnel, a very definite, very clear scraping sound echoes from inside the room. First one scratching footstep, then another, and you are all certain that the dead man in the corner just stood up and is now walking towards the door.

A sense of something more than danger – actual palpable malice – is in the air around you. Something very old and full of hate seems to be watching you from somewhere unseen. The walking dead abomination pounding against the ancient door appears to be its agent and it will not be long before the corpse batters the ruined wood into tinder.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 30
CON 3
DEX 6
SIZ 11
INT 0
POW 0
CHA 0

Possessed Skeleton Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1–3	Right Leg	5/3
4–6	Left Leg	5/3
7–9	Abdomen	5/4
10–12	Chest	5/5
13–15	Right Arm	5/2
16–18	Left Arm	5/2
19–20	Head	5/3

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Unarmed	80%	1D3+1D8

Special Rules

Combat Actions: One

Strike Rank: +5

Movement: 3m

Traits: Dark Sight, Night Sight, Life Sense

Typical Armour: Skeletal (AP 5, no Skill Penalty)

These tunnels and chambers are largely forgotten but they are indeed cursed. The mysterious evil force that caused their abandonment centuries ago now manifests in this rag-clad skeleton and seeks to kill the newest intruders. The corpse that has lain barricaded in the room for several hundred years now pounds a clacking bony fist against the wooden door. The wood is so ruined that it will take only 20 seconds for the corpse to hammer the doors down and enter the tunnel where the characters are standing.

At this point, while the players are making up their minds about what to do, any character that had looked at the red orb earlier in the adventure starts to suffer the debilitating effects of his curiosity. Every character guilty of looking at the sphere suffers an immediate loss of one Hit Point from his Head hit location and -10% on all rolls for the next 15 minutes as his vision blurs slightly and blood trickles from his ears and nose.

Let the players know that this effect can be overcome by spending a Hero Point, though the Hit Point loss is unavoidable.

The creature can be destroyed as normal or quickly put down by attacking the head. Once the creature's Head hit location is destroyed, it remains motionless on the floor and the palpable sense of malice in the air fades away to nothingness.

Tunnel 3: The tunnel progresses forward in the same upward slope but turns several times in winding left turns so that the characters are slowly ascending the mountain from within in an elongated spiral. After an hour of walking (remember to have them relight torches when necessary) and finding dozens and dozens of empty rooms at irregular intervals, they finally reach the end of their journey.

Final Chamber: This last chamber leads into Quarmall proper. It is a rarely-used chamber, now frequented mainly by slaves seeking privacy with their lovers. At one end of the chamber is a passageway leading to the communal marketplace.

This chamber is piled high with crates and disturbed only by the sound of rats scuttling and chittering among the boxes. At the far end is a large archway with a beaten-bronze sign reading 'Market' – clearly the way to the trading chamber. The faint echoes of voices drift through the dry air to your ears, sounding like the faint bustle of distant commerce.

Heading through this arch leads the characters along a hundred-metre passageway that terminates into a busy corridor. This is the main thoroughfare leading into the marketplace, and dozens of Quarmallians, slaves and peasants alike, gabble and push and crowd around, just like any other market on Nehwon.

Scene Eight: The Marketplace

Hundreds of people mill around a colossal chamber, only dimly illuminated by the offerings of dozens of torches that burn low in little carved niches along the rock walls. The market stalls range from permanent wooden structures decorated by cloth hangings to rows of tables bearing wares, with humbler traders laying

out their wares on blankets stretched across the stony floor. The Quarmallians pay no undue attention to you; many are dressed in simple peasant tunics or the dark finery of a wealthy underground merchant, but armed bravos are not entirely absent from sight. A few nobles and richer citizens are escorted by armed and armoured men who likely came from the outside world to work as bodyguards, if the healthiness of their skin is anything to go by in comparison to the overwhelming number of wan and pale visages on display.

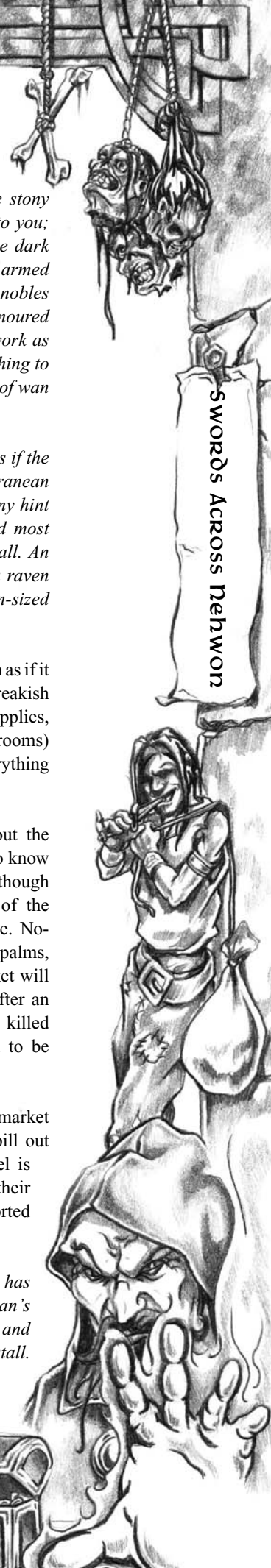
Nine passages lead out from this main chamber, as if the marketplace were the hub of some great subterranean wheel. None of the eight large archways reveal any hint of where they lead. Only one – the smallest and most unassuming archway – is marked in any way at all. An ancient wall-painting done in primitive style of a raven or a crow is well-faded into the rock above this man-sized passage mouth.

The characters can shop here for anything they wish as if it were any other marketplace in a regular and less freakish city. The stalls sell weapons, armour, blankets, supplies, food (largely in the form of Quarmallian mushrooms) and a host of other standard items. Practically everything is up for haggling.

The characters might decide to ask a local about the cursed tunnels they entered from. No-one seems to know anything of what the characters are talking about, though successful Perception checks reveal that some of the older men are lying when they profess ignorance. No-one will speak of the matter unless coins cross palms, in which case one of the elderly men in the market will admit to knowing that the tunnels were sealed after an evil force possessed a family patriarch and he killed his wife, daughters and servants. This was said to be centuries ago.

All of the side corridors leading out from the market chamber feature several stalls and traders that spill out of the main cavern. The blackbird-marked tunnel is no exception. Here several traders spread out their blankets and sell knickknacks, baubles and assorted curios but nothing of real value.

One man's area is immediately noteworthy. He has a small table about the size of a large infantryman's shield and on it are eleven dead ravens, rooks and crows piled up like the display in an obscene fruit stall.





Two still-living little ravens stand on the floor, cawing intermittently, with cheap and dirty string tying their ankles to the table legs. People look at his wares as they pass but none speak to him. The man himself is old to the point of being ancient, with wispy side-patches of hair framing a bald pate and crinkly, cataract-whitened eyes set in waxy-pale skin. With surprising dexterity, he flicks a bright white coin that looks almost ceramic, between his fingers like a trained sleight of hand performer.

This is Mennahaj. He sells these birds as a rare delicacy in Quarmall and has done for decades. The old cave painting in the main market chamber gave him the idea, and every few days he takes his sling and a bagful of tiny stones down the gentlest slope of the mountain to hunt blackbirds in the forest.

'Have y'come to buy one of my birds? I gots two still living and cawing down here. If you want one for y'pot then you can have one of these ones on the table here, all of 'em only a day dead. Ten Rilks a bird, twenty if you want one of the ones that can still flap and do little raven laughs.'

A successful Perception check reveals that the old man appears to be unerringly looking at the characters, looking from face to face directly despite his apparent cataracts. All the while as he talks, he flips his coin into the air and catches it over and over, without looking.

If the characters wish to speak in private, Mennahaj is fine with that. If they mention Ningauble, the coin or anything unusual like their suspicions about a blind old man hunting all these birds with a sling, then Mennahaj requests privacy.

'I think talk like this is better held in the comfort of privacy, no? Follow me.' The old man holds out a rough-made and smelly sack at the edge of the table and scoops the dead birds into it one by one. He bends down, with much creaking of the knees, and ties the two strings connected to the bird's ankles to his right thumb. The little blackbirds squawk some as they flap up onto his shoulders. With a noticeable limp, the old man leads the way down the tunnel back the way you came.

Mennahaj wishes to discuss matters in the storage chamber that the characters entered from, away from any prying eyes. If the characters wish to try and steal the coin from his belt pouch or kill him now and make a break for it, they have a good chance to escape since there are no guards in the chamber. It should be noted that murdering an old man in full public view – even a suspicious old man – is about the least heroic thing imaginable. If the characters act on this rather sinister and murderous urge, refer to 'Killing Mennahaj' below for details.

The Old Man's Coin

Once in the quieter chamber, Mennahaj eases himself down on a low crate and begins to feed his two living birds scraps of mushroom from one of his tunic pockets. He acts amiably and seems genuinely interested in what the characters are doing here. He introduces himself by name and asks the characters' theirs.

He does not know what the characters want with him until they admit it. At all times he denies (with some amusement) any suggestions that he is anything but a harmless old man. He insists that it takes him a good long time to gather his birds, since his eyesight is not what it used to be and his arm is slower than when he hunted rats with his sling in his youth. If asked about his age, he says he is surely somewhere around 60 or 70 but cannot be certain. He looks over 100 but would likely be the only man in Nehwon to reach that age if it were true.

If questioned about his coin, Mennahaj is willing to give it up in exchange for a single hair from each character's head, which he faithfully promises not to use in any dark spellwork that will harm them in any way. A Perception check will reveal that the old man seems to be telling the truth here. If the Games Master is running *Swords Against Sorcery* after this adventure, the truth of the matter will come to light in the subsequent scenario. If not, then consider the old man's offer of exchange for what it is – a strange, potentially dangerous trade that the characters probably have to make in order to achieve their ends. It certainly leaves an open-ended story hook for creative Games Masters to grasp hold of.

The truth that the players should never find out is that Mennahaj is *something* from another plane of existence, taking human form to blend in. If the Games Master wishes to add details of where this creature came from, he should feel free. The default assumption is that he is a trans-dimensional entity, much like the Devourers of the *Swords* story *Bazaar of the Bizarre* though his only apparent desire is to fit in and hide among humanity. The truth behind this is that if he has the body matter of any living being, he can create an illusory body of that person. This is why he wants their hair and is something that will come to haunt the characters as a side plot in *Swords Against Sorcery*.

-paying Mennahaj

At first Mennahaj will accept nothing less than what he asks for: a single hair from each character's head. If the players are desperately resistant to this, allow them to make Influence checks at -50% in order to win the old man over. If the players are lucky enough to make this difficult roll, Mennahaj says he will settle for a single hair from one character's head. He will debate no further over this. It is his final offer.

Once paid, Mennahaj loops each hair around his right index finger and ties them in place. Then he flips the white metal coin to the closest character and gathers his sack, readying to leave. He has no last words for the characters; he just seems to want to go immediately. If asked why he is in such a rush, he explains that he must reclaim his spot in the corridor before it is taken by another trader.

Killing Mennahaj

The characters have the option of killing Mennahaj if they so choose. The old man will not even try to defend himself if attacked. The first Hit Point of damage he

sustains to any hit location kills him instantly. Though his clothes remain as they are, his flesh darkens and crumbles into powdery grey dust almost instantly. All that remains of the old man is a dust heap, his clothes and the now-free two ravens. The white coin is nestled in the grey powder, hidden under the surface layer. A Perception check in the moments after his death allows the characters to hear a soft, breathy laugh that fades into the silent air.

For Games Masters running *Swords Against Sorcery* as a subsequent module, Mennahaj is not actually dead. His body has been destroyed however, effectively killing him for the purposes of *Swords Across Nehwon*.

The Coin of White Metal

The coin is surprisingly heavy for something so small, and is clearly made of some dense metal unknown on Nehwon. On one side is a coat of arms featuring a round shield flanked by two rearing horses. On the reverse is the skyline of a city made primarily of tall towers with walkways between the parapets. Holding the coin for more than a few seconds at a time makes your fingers prickle uncomfortably.

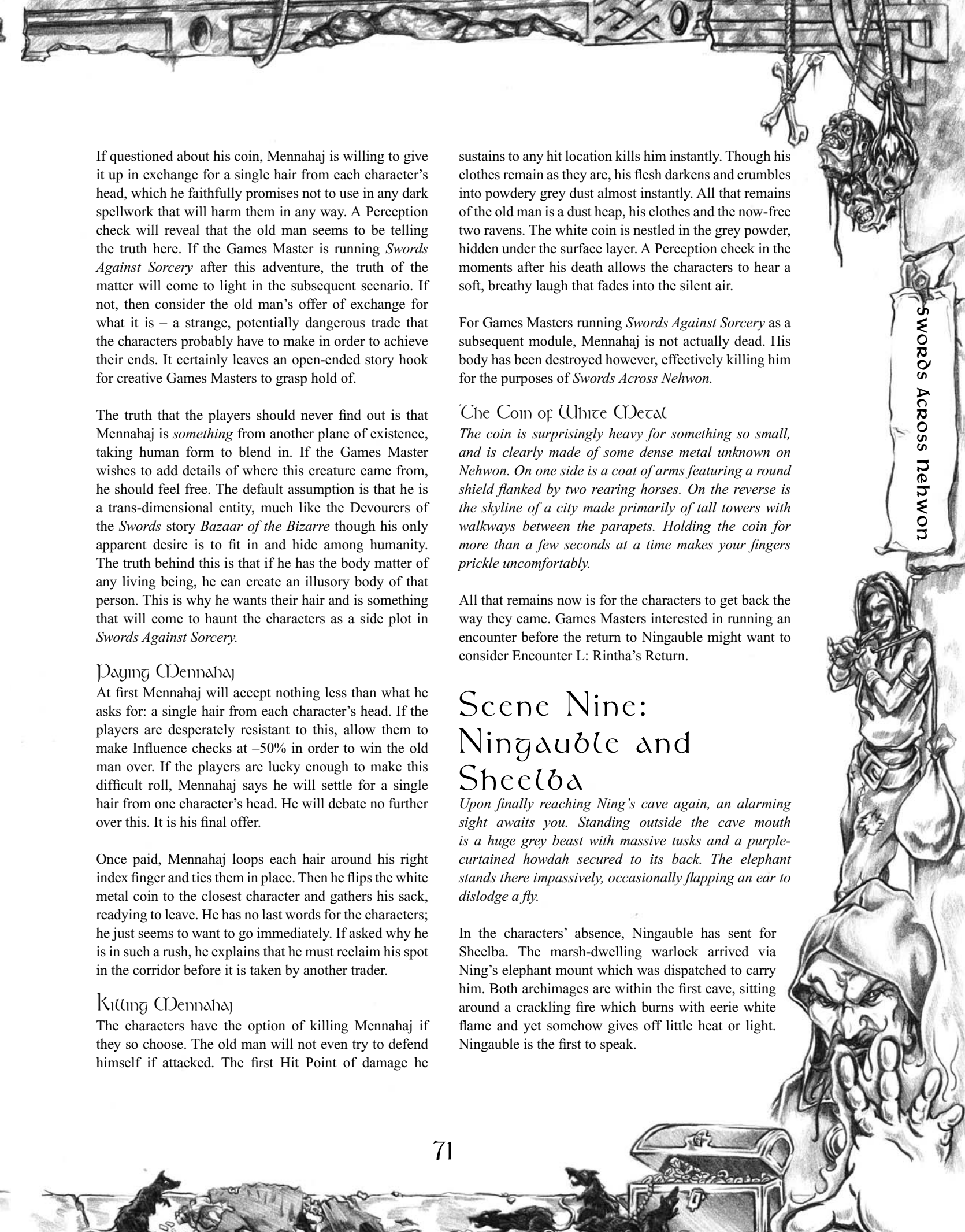
All that remains now is for the characters to get back the way they came. Games Masters interested in running an encounter before the return to Ningauble might want to consider Encounter L: Rintha's Return.

Scene Nine: Ningauble and Sheelba

Upon finally reaching Ning's cave again, an alarming sight awaits you. Standing outside the cave mouth is a huge grey beast with massive tusks and a purple-curtained howdah secured to its back. The elephant stands there impassively, occasionally flapping an ear to dislodge a fly.

In the characters' absence, Ningauble has sent for Sheelba. The marsh-dwelling warlock arrived via Ning's elephant mount which was dispatched to carry him. Both archimages are within the first cave, sitting around a crackling fire which burns with eerie white flame and yet somehow gives off little heat or light. Ningauble is the first to speak.

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'Ah, my gentle children, how it pleases your benefactor, nay, your uncle, to see you once more. My joy at your safe return is doubled by the scent of success in the air. What say you, good Sheelba? No? Nothing? Well, come and sit, oh my adventurous servitors. Tell me of your trials and conquerings.'

This scene plays out with Sheelba sitting in absolute silence and Ningauble listening raptly (with many a comment of approval) to the characters. If they ask any questions during the explanation, Ningauble shakes his hood and says *'In good time; first finish your tale.'*

When the characters are finally finished relaying the details of their journey and all questions are answered, Ningauble asks them to toss the white metal coin into the fire. Once they do this, the two archimages seem to stare intently at the flames even though neither of their faces are visible in the strange un-light given off from the heatless flame.

After several seconds of waiting in rapt silence, the stillness is broken by a deep cackling chuckle. Sheelba turns his cowl toward Ningauble and waves a sleeved arm in the paunchy magician's direction. 'I told you nothing would happen, you fat fool. You have succeeded in sending your servants halfway across the known world for a failed theory. The metal of Mennahaj's world is not suitable for -' Ningauble raises his own sleeved arm to silence Sheelba, who lapses into private chuckles again.

The two wizards have clearly failed to do whatever it was they were trying to do. Their veiled talk will go over the heads of the characters, which is not only understandable but is perfectly in character for the two magicians. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser had to put up with this all the time – performing duties without ever knowing why their patrons needed such odd components or strange tasks performed.

'I fear my snappish hermit of a companion is correct in his criticisms, though said criticisms are overly harsh and graceless in the extreme. Still a promise is a promise and poor, lonely Ningauble would hate for his prized servants to desert him over feelings of ill-treatment. I promised you ensorcelled blades for three months and three days, and ensorcelled blades you shall have.'

Ningauble nods his cowl to a flat rock by the wall further in the cave. A single glass vial of dark red liquid rests on its side.

'Take this and drip a single drop onto the blades of your favoured weapons. Do not let any fall upon your skin, for it is the blood of a demon and ill-suited to touching mortal flesh.'

At this pronouncement Sheelba chuckles again. 'Blood of a demon, indeed.'

Any close combat weapon treated with a drop of this liquid deals an additional Hit Point of damage each strike for the next three months and three days, as Ningauble promised. If more than one drop is placed on the characters' weapons, nothing untoward happens and no further benefits are received. If they get any on their skin they develop an instant and itchy rash that takes 1D4 days to heal if unscratched. After finishing their ministrations, Ningauble asks for the vial back, telling the characters to leave it on the stone where they found it.

Both Ningauble and Sheelba wish to employ the characters' talents again, this time sending them on a trek to the Cold Waste.

'Your services are proving invaluable and desirable, without a shade of doubt. It seems apologies are in order for my sending you to lightless, soulless Quarmall on a fool's errand.'

Sheelba nods at this. 'We require something else. The metal was...unsuitable...for the sorceries we seek to control. If I had been consulted from the beginning, these mistakes would never have been made. The blood of an exiled king – that is what we need for the conjuring.'

'No.' Ningauble's eye-gloves move faster, seemingly in annoyance. 'If the white metal failed, it must be sword of a disgraced king that is used, not his blood. My gentle sons, might you wait outside while the good Sheelba and I discuss this predicament?'

While outside, the characters hear the two wizards bickering like old ladies for several minutes but cannot make out any words. The elephant regards them with a bored eye. Finally they are summoned back in.

'My dearest wards, the solution is unclear. We do however propose a further task for your expert skills and reliable demeanours. We need the blade and the blood of a disgraced king. I would, were you willing, charge you all with the reclamation, retrieval and forthwith return of

these two vital ingredients in our sorcerous stew. Fear not, lest your heroic sensibilities lead you down the mistaken path of believing we demand a fine man's death. Not so!

Sheelba hisses an interruption. 'A chieftain of the Frost Companions is cast out from his tribe. He makes a lonely lair in the Cold Waste near the foot of Stardock. It is his blood we require.'

Ningauble speaks again. 'And his blade, good Sheelba. My gentle sons, it is this man, this beast of a berserker-king who we believe will fulfil our magical needs. He was exiled from his people for the murder of several kin, so do not fear that I, kindly Ning, would ever send you to slaughter a man beloved by the good-hearted folk around him. In fact, if I might conjecture further about this man's evils —'

Now Sheelba hisses again. 'Just kill the barbarian and bring his blood and his sword back to us. You will be rewarded with a rune that when spoken, renders you invisible to the eyes of black-souled beings for up to an hour. A spell of such power is fitting reward for this simple task, I'm sure you'll agree.'

If the characters do not look like they are taking the bait, Ningauble will gently suggest that the exiled chieftain fled into hermitage with much of his tribe's gold, which the characters can claim for themselves. Since Ningauble has no face to speak of and his voice betrays nothing untoward, no Perception check is allowed to see if he is lying here. Incidentally, he is. The characters can find that out later, though.

Here are a few potential questions and their possible answers for the scene, along with which of the magicians is likeliest to answer.

'How do we get to the Cold Waste?' (Sheelba) 'Head north past Sarheenmar, avoid dying under the hands of the Mingols or the Ghouls, go through the Great Forest of the Eight Cities, gather final supplies in Illik-Ving, go across the Trollstep Mountains and trek north through the tundra until you reach the base of Stardock. That is the longer route and considering I see no horses to bear you there, it will take many weeks and means you are unlikely to outrun any attackers on horseback.'

Alternately, take ship from Ilthmar or Lankhmar across the Inner Sea, dock in Kvarch Nar and head north to Cold Corner and speak with the Frost Companion tribe there. Depends if you care for sea travel, really. Travel by sea and you worry about pirates. Travel by land and you double your journey time and risk death by Steppes nomads and transparent-fleshed killers. But it is the Frost Companions you must speak with, and they are fastest reached by ship across the Inner Sea.'

'Who are the Frost Companions?' (Sheelba) 'Cold Waste Barbarians. Their black-hearted chief in exile is your prey.'

'How do we bring blood back all the way from the Cold Waste?' (Sheelba) 'Simply chop the man's head off and do not clean your sword — or even use it again — until you return here. If blood is what we need, it need only be a tiny amount, not a body-full. A knife blade, wiped through the corpse's slit throat will suffice.'

'I got this necklace from a Kleshite hunter.' (Sheelba) 'Hm. It is possessed of some small magic. A trifling matter but perhaps useful.'

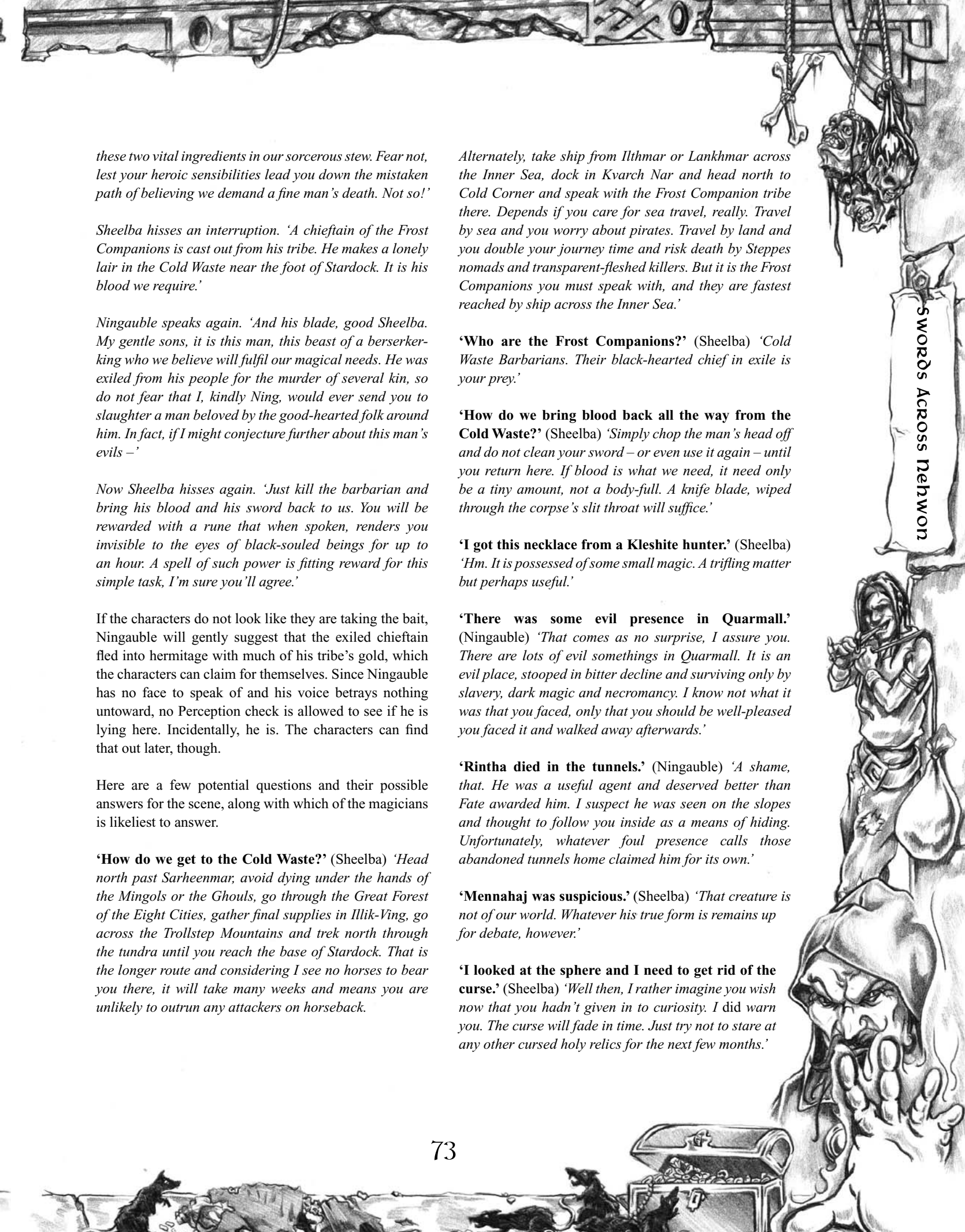
'There was some evil presence in Quarmall.' (Ningauble) 'That comes as no surprise, I assure you. There are lots of evil somethings in Quarmall. It is an evil place, stooped in bitter decline and surviving only by slavery, dark magic and necromancy. I know not what it was that you faced, only that you should be well-pleased you faced it and walked away afterwards.'

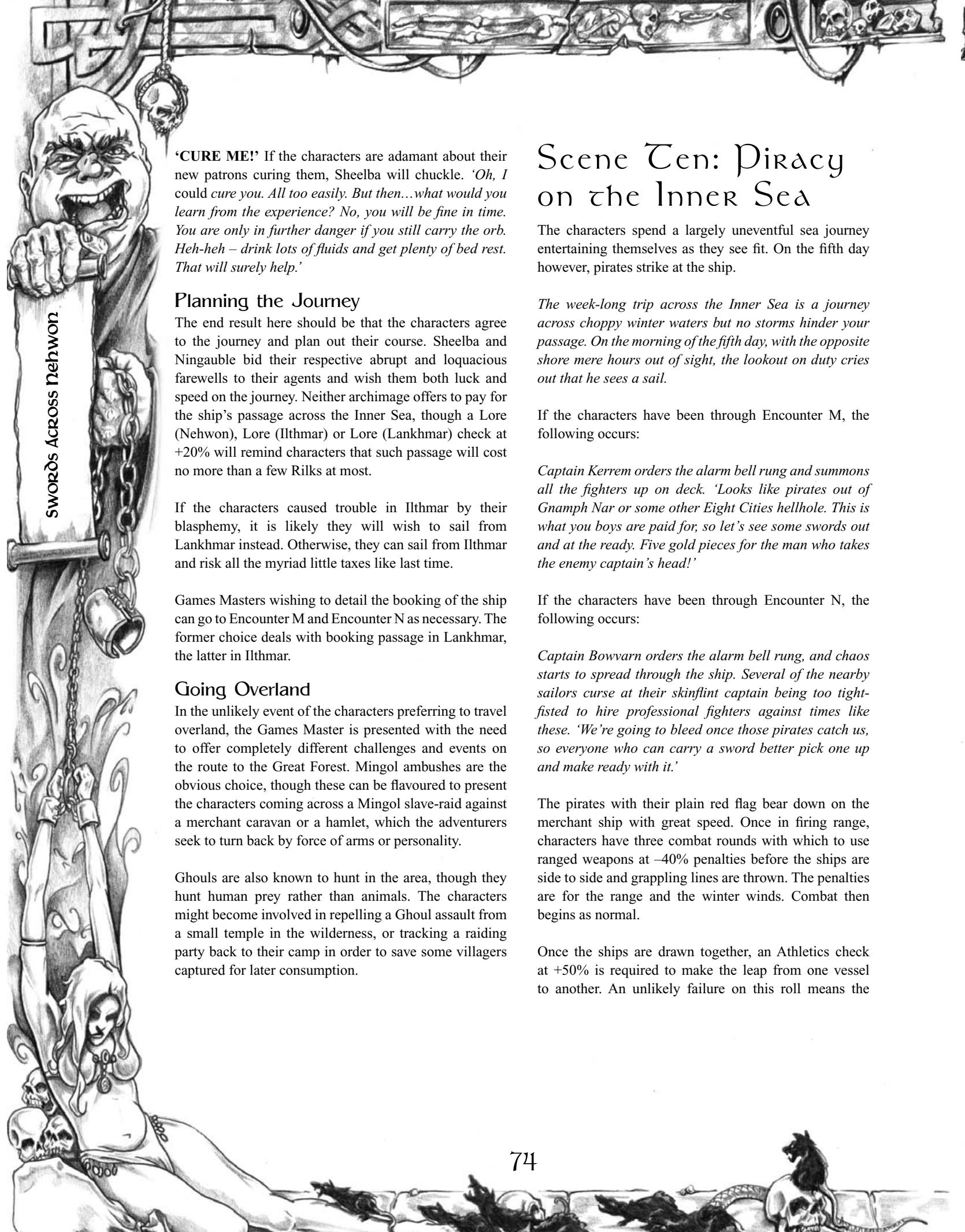
'Rintha died in the tunnels.' (Ningauble) 'A shame, that. He was a useful agent and deserved better than Fate awarded him. I suspect he was seen on the slopes and thought to follow you inside as a means of hiding. Unfortunately, whatever foul presence calls those abandoned tunnels home claimed him for its own.'

'Mennahaj was suspicious.' (Sheelba) 'That creature is not of our world. Whatever his true form is remains up for debate, however.'

'I looked at the sphere and I need to get rid of the curse.' (Sheelba) 'Well then, I rather imagine you wish now that you hadn't given in to curiosity. I did warn you. The curse will fade in time. Just try not to stare at any other cursed holy relics for the next few months.'

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'CURE ME!' If the characters are adamant about their new patrons curing them, Sheelba will chuckle. *'Oh, I could cure you. All too easily. But then...what would you learn from the experience? No, you will be fine in time. You are only in further danger if you still carry the orb. Heh-heh – drink lots of fluids and get plenty of bed rest. That will surely help.'*

Planning the Journey

The end result here should be that the characters agree to the journey and plan out their course. Sheelba and Ningauble bid their respective abrupt and loquacious farewells to their agents and wish them both luck and speed on the journey. Neither archimage offers to pay for the ship's passage across the Inner Sea, though a Lore (Nehwon), Lore (Ilthmar) or Lore (Lankhmar) check at +20% will remind characters that such passage will cost no more than a few Rilks at most.

If the characters caused trouble in Ilthmar by their blasphemy, it is likely they will wish to sail from Lankhmar instead. Otherwise, they can sail from Ilthmar and risk all the myriad little taxes like last time.

Games Masters wishing to detail the booking of the ship can go to Encounter M and Encounter N as necessary. The former choice deals with booking passage in Lankhmar, the latter in Ilthmar.

Going Overland

In the unlikely event of the characters preferring to travel overland, the Games Master is presented with the need to offer completely different challenges and events on the route to the Great Forest. Mingol ambushes are the obvious choice, though these can be flavoured to present the characters coming across a Mingol slave-raid against a merchant caravan or a hamlet, which the adventurers seek to turn back by force of arms or personality.

Ghouls are also known to hunt in the area, though they hunt human prey rather than animals. The characters might become involved in repelling a Ghoul assault from a small temple in the wilderness, or tracking a raiding party back to their camp in order to save some villagers captured for later consumption.

Scene Ten: Piracy on the Inner Sea

The characters spend a largely uneventful sea journey entertaining themselves as they see fit. On the fifth day however, pirates strike at the ship.

The week-long trip across the Inner Sea is a journey across choppy winter waters but no storms hinder your passage. On the morning of the fifth day, with the opposite shore mere hours out of sight, the lookout on duty cries out that he sees a sail.

If the characters have been through Encounter M, the following occurs:

Captain Kerrem orders the alarm bell rung and summons all the fighters up on deck. 'Looks like pirates out of Gnamph Nar or some other Eight Cities hellhole. This is what you boys are paid for, so let's see some swords out and at the ready. Five gold pieces for the man who takes the enemy captain's head!'

If the characters have been through Encounter N, the following occurs:

Captain Bowvarn orders the alarm bell rung, and chaos starts to spread through the ship. Several of the nearby sailors curse at their skinflint captain being too tight-fisted to hire professional fighters against times like these. 'We're going to bleed once those pirates catch us, so everyone who can carry a sword better pick one up and make ready with it.'

The pirates with their plain red flag bear down on the merchant ship with great speed. Once in firing range, characters have three combat rounds with which to use ranged weapons at -40% penalties before the ships are side to side and grappling lines are thrown. The penalties are for the range and the winter winds. Combat then begins as normal.

Once the ships are drawn together, an Athletics check at +50% is required to make the leap from one vessel to another. An unlikely failure on this roll means the



character plunges into the sea and must tread water until he can be saved after the battle or thrown a rope by a comrade.

There are 20 crew members versus 15 pirates in this battle; the leader of the latter is the cutlass-armed Captain Dalwin himself. He only recently became a captain – in fact this is his first jaunt out as head of an operation. The captain comes aboard in the centre of the ship rail, leading his men. Use the same stats for Dalwin as for his crew members, since he is no more skilled than they.

'Surrender your vessel and no-one need be hurt. Keep up a resistance and we'll scuttle your ship out of spite!'

Characters can contribute to this engagement in several ways – by shooting down at foes from the rigging, by rallying the untrained sailors into repelling boarders or by meeting the pirates head on in battle. Particularly brave, foolish or bloodthirsty characters might risk a leap onto the enemy deck to butcher the remaining four crew members on board the pirate vessel.

The crew of the merchant ship do not fight well. The characters are the only trained fighters among their number, except for Captain Kerrem (if the characters

went through Encounter M) who kills 1D4 pirates with throwing knives once battle is joined from his position in the rigging. It is a battle that essentially comes down to the characters.

Although the sailors outnumber the pirates they are too unskilled to do any worthwhile damage (especially armed as they are with belying pins and food knives). Their presence does, however, ensure each of the Plater Characters only have to face a single opponent at any given time.

Pirates (15)

CHARACTERISTICS

- STR 14
- CON 12
- DEX 12
- SIZ 10
- INT 10
- POW 10
- CHA 9

Pirate Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	0/5
4-6	Left Leg	0/5
7-9	Abdomen	0/6
10-12	Chest	0/7
13-15	Right Arm	0/4
16-18	Left Arm	0/4
19-20	Head	0/5

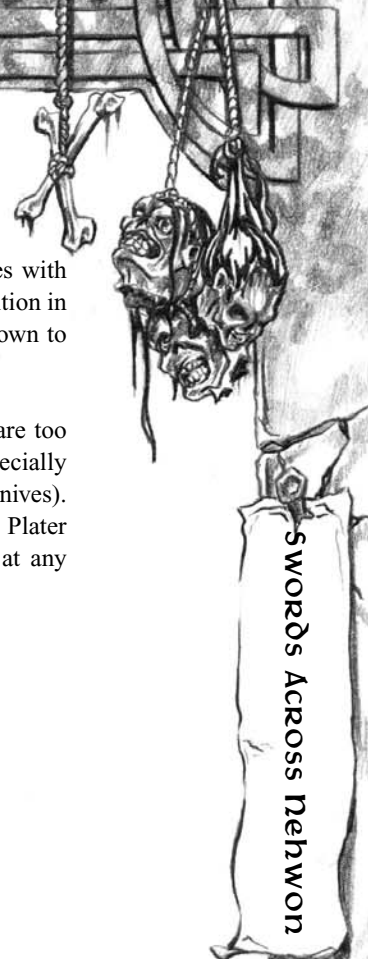
Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
Short sword (Cutlass)	45%	1D6 / 3

Special Rules

- Combat Actions:** Two
- Strike Rank:** +11
- Movement:** 4m
- Traits:** None
- Skills:** Athletics 50%, Boating 60%, Perception 40%, Persistence 30%, Resilience 50%, Shiphandling 60%

- Typical Armour:** None
- Treasure:** Each pirate has 8 rilks worth of personal coins and minor jewellery (rings, charms and so on)





Once the pirates have taken eight casualties or their captain is slain, they will retreat, running back to their ship and chopping the grappling lines to cast off. They are not interested in a protracted fight and lack the crew numbers to bleed too badly in any one engagement.

If the battle lasts under three combat rounds, only 1D2 of the merchant crew were slain. If the duration was between four and eight combat rounds, the number of crew killed is 1D6. If either of these is the case, characters who went through Encounter M are rewarded by Captain Kerrem for their incredible battle skills, paid to the tune of 10 gold Rilks each out of his personal finances. If more than six crewmen die, there is no additional reward.

The rest of the journey is uneventful unless Games Masters want to run Encounter O: Vengeance on the High Seas. That is only recommended for extremely battle-skilled characters given the potential for character death already in this scene.

Scene Eleven: The Forest Land

As the northern shore comes into sight, you are momentarily struck by the sheer beauty and overwhelming vastness of the Great Forest reaching across the horizon. Kvarch Nar is a city (or at least a large town by Lankhmarese opinion) that blends in with the forest itself, with trees surrounding so many of the wooden buildings that you are unsure where the woodland ends and the settlement begins. Perhaps you glance upon this sight and wonder at the beauty of the place; maybe you perceive the financial wealth of these vast forests; perhaps you see only fodder for the blades and fires of the Mingols. No matter your opinions and perspectives, Kvarch Nar is an awe-inspiring sight comparable to anything else you have seen elsewhere in your travels.

Kvarch Nar

Once the characters reach Kvarch Nar, they are free to disembark and do as they see fit. Kvarch Nar is much like Lankhmar and Ilthmar, though it lacks the sprawling size of the former and the filthiness of the latter. It replaces both of these with beauty, with roads lined with trees and buildings made entirely of wood. Wooden sculptures, decorations and motifs are found across the city-within-the-forest and many walls show delicate etchings.

Yet for all this beauty, corruption can be found if one looks hard enough. Kvarch Nar's underworld is neither as large as Lankhmar's nor as violent and treacherous as Ilthmar's, but this Inner Sea cousin to the two southern cities has plenty of opportunities for characters of a certain mindset to break into noble's homes or be mugged in turn by the local bashers.

It is assumed that the characters will be stopping here only to get supplies for the northern trek. However, if the Games Master wishes to tie in other character business, there is assuredly time to do so. Games Masters with their own ideas for interactions between characters from the civilised south and northern barbarians, and maybe even the occasional Mingol traveller, can find few better places than this neutrally-placed settlement.

For specific encounters, refer to Encounters P, Q and R in the Appendix. Otherwise, the characters can push on through the city, taking on supplies and heading to the next leg of the journey to Cold Corner at the north of the Great Forest and at the base of the Trollsteps. Characters who later declare that they wish to go over the Trollsteps by a different route are free to try. The Games Master should play the journey accurately, throwing all manner of lethal rockslides, crumbling footholds, hidden precipices and bone-aching climbs at such adventurers, which should convince them to take the less treacherous route before too long. There is a simple reason merchants and travellers risk the bandit ambushes of the known paths through the mountains – all over routes are suicide.

The Great Forest

The paths through the forest are many and in some cases rather overgrown. A main road runs directly north to Illik-Ving and a reliable path to the Trollstep Mountains beyond, though it is up to the characters whether they travel along the road or through the wilderness. Games Masters perhaps wishing to include bandit or highwayman ambushes should note that such are only really appropriate for adventurers taking the road north. Characters will obviously be camping off to the side of the road, however.

The Dead Travellers

On the evening of the first day's journey, the characters come across a modest-sized tent under the direct shelter of a large and healthy tree that has kept all its leaves despite the fact it is midwinter. The grass around the base of the tree is smeared with blood that has had at least several hours to dry.

While examining this scene, a Lore (World) check at -20% or a Lore (Land of the Eight Cities) check will remind characters of a Forest Land fairy tale to do with the Tree Witch, *'...who slays men asleep in the woods and uses their blood to water the roots of her favourite trees.'* There is also a nursery rhyme which will be known to practically any Eight Cities character:

*'Don't stop to sit or lay down your head,
Or the Tree Witch will come and leave you dead,
So carry an axe to guard your sleep,
Or she'll feed your heart to her favourite tree,
And you'll sing and shout as she pulls you down,
With your blood as water and your bones in the ground'*

Inside the tent is a mess of clutter: bedrolls, pots and pans, blankets and spare clothes either thrown around or knocked around in a struggle. A Perception check allows characters to notice streaks of blood across the foot-end of a blanket and a strange, dry yellowish crust on the blade's edge of a discarded hatchet. A Lore (Forests) or similar roll will reveal to any character with experience in the wild that this looks like some kind of dried tree sap.

No amount of scrutiny reveals the tree to be doing much of anything, though the Games Master might wish to have some timely branch-waving in the wind or (if he wishes to reveal a hint of the supernatural) the characters could hear a quiet laugh sounding like a young woman, with no distinct source or direction.

The truth behind this apparent murder scene is that a hamadryad, a tree-spirit of sorts, dwells in the area. She is kin to this tree, as well as several others along the roadside and further into the woods. This spirit manifests at night, most often when campers or travellers are slumbering, and drags them from their tents before lashing and beating them to death with her branch-limbs. Once the victim is dead, his body is magically taken within the tree to nourish the roots. Digging at the base of any tree bonded to a hamadryad – including this tree, naturally – results in unearthing the bloodless bones of all the past victims.

The Tree Witch Comes

When the characters make camp for the night, whether by the road or in the deep wilds, the 'Tree Witch' comes for them. A dose of care is required here to prevent the scene from ringing too close to *The Blair Witch Project*, comparisons to which can ruin an otherwise tense and unnerving encounter.

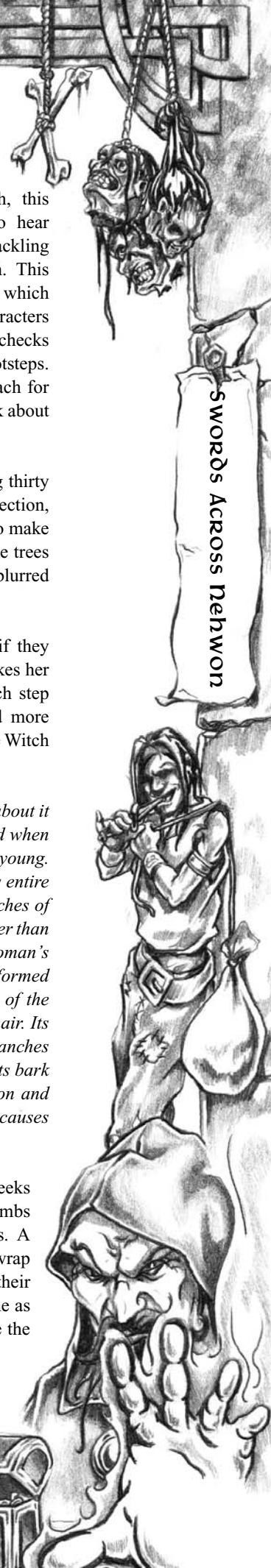
If the characters have someone keeping watch, this character gets a Perception check at +20% to hear footsteps, like bare feet on twigs and dry, crackling leaves, coming from an indeterminate direction. This should give the sentry time to awaken the others, which he has thirty seconds of game time to do. If the characters are all asleep, they can make reflexive Perception checks at -20% in order to wake up at the sound of the footsteps. Again, they have thirty seconds to get up and reach for weapons – more than enough time if they are quick about it.

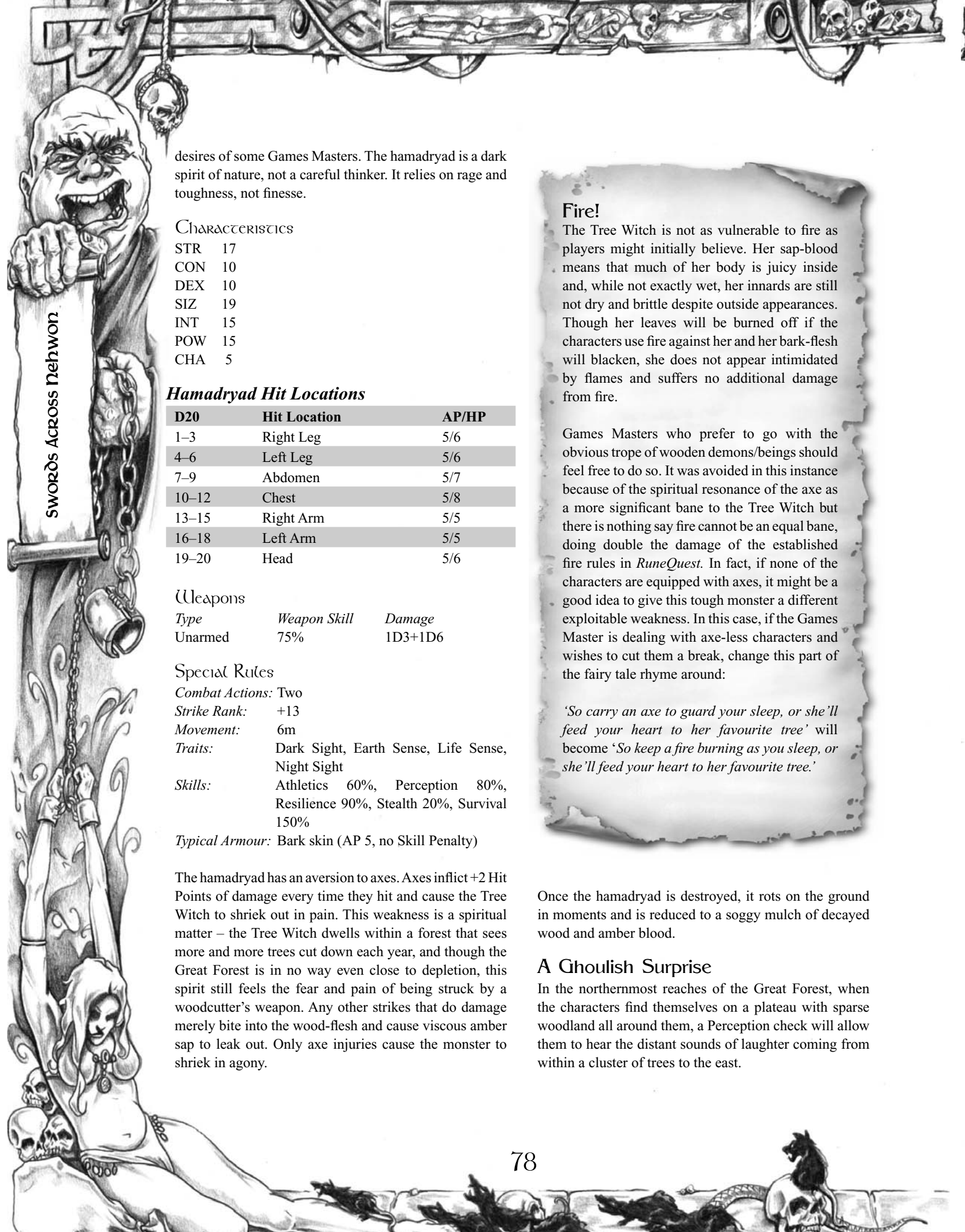
After the first Perception checks and the resulting thirty seconds of footsteps coming from an unknown direction, a second Perception check allows the characters to make out a vaguely humanoid shape coming through the trees to the north. It is man-sized, but eerily skinny and blurred at the edges as if not quite real.

Characters can open fire with ranged weapons if they wish, or wait for the creature to come closer. It takes her three combat rounds to reach the characters, each step of which the figure becomes better defined and more 'real' to the senses. In the turn she attacks, the Tree Witch impacts on more than just the visual sense.

The being before you has a powerful sense of age about it – it was born when this forest was born, it was old when the first men and women in the world were still young. Approaching three metres in height, the creature's entire body is cracked and gnarled wood covered in patches of foul-smelling black moss. It is thin all over, no thicker than a man's thigh at any part of its body. A young woman's face, almost beautiful despite its strangeness, is formed out of twisting knots in the bark close to the top of the trunk. Black vines stream out as if they were her hair. Its arms and legs are spiked with hundreds of lesser branches and rustling leaves. The reek that emanates from its bark skin is a noxiously strong mix of rotting vegetation and dead bodies. Each movement of the branch limbs causes a dozen separate creaks and twig-snaps.

The hamadryad's attacks are simple enough. It seeks to batter the characters to death with its branch-limbs and hopes to drag the corpses away afterwards. A deadlier attack might be to use its vine-hair to wrap around characters' limbs and inflict penalties on their dice rolls but the beast is hard enough to overcome as it is and this level of combat skill might be above the





desires of some Games Masters. The hamadryad is a dark spirit of nature, not a careful thinker. It relies on rage and toughness, not finesse.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 17
CON 10
DEX 10
SIZ 19
INT 15
POW 15
CHA 5

Hamadryad Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	5/6
4-6	Left Leg	5/6
7-9	Abdomen	5/7
10-12	Chest	5/8
13-15	Right Arm	5/5
16-18	Left Arm	5/5
19-20	Head	5/6

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Unarmed	75%	1D3+1D6

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +13

Movement: 6m

Traits: Dark Sight, Earth Sense, Life Sense, Night Sight

Skills: Athletics 60%, Perception 80%, Resilience 90%, Stealth 20%, Survival 150%

Typical Armour: Bark skin (AP 5, no Skill Penalty)

The hamadryad has an aversion to axes. Axes inflict +2 Hit Points of damage every time they hit and cause the Tree Witch to shriek out in pain. This weakness is a spiritual matter – the Tree Witch dwells within a forest that sees more and more trees cut down each year, and though the Great Forest is in no way even close to depletion, this spirit still feels the fear and pain of being struck by a woodcutter's weapon. Any other strikes that do damage merely bite into the wood-flesh and cause viscous amber sap to leak out. Only axe injuries cause the monster to shriek in agony.

Fire!

The Tree Witch is not as vulnerable to fire as players might initially believe. Her sap-blood means that much of her body is juicy inside and, while not exactly wet, her innards are still not dry and brittle despite outside appearances. Though her leaves will be burned off if the characters use fire against her and her bark-flesh will blacken, she does not appear intimidated by flames and suffers no additional damage from fire.

Games Masters who prefer to go with the obvious trope of wooden demons/beings should feel free to do so. It was avoided in this instance because of the spiritual resonance of the axe as a more significant bane to the Tree Witch but there is nothing say fire cannot be an equal bane, doing double the damage of the established fire rules in *RuneQuest*. In fact, if none of the characters are equipped with axes, it might be a good idea to give this tough monster a different exploitable weakness. In this case, if the Games Master is dealing with axe-less characters and wishes to cut them a break, change this part of the fairy tale rhyme around:

'So carry an axe to guard your sleep, or she'll feed your heart to her favourite tree' will become 'So keep a fire burning as you sleep, or she'll feed your heart to her favourite tree.'

Once the hamadryad is destroyed, it rots on the ground in moments and is reduced to a soggy mulch of decayed wood and amber blood.

A Ghoulish Surprise

In the northernmost reaches of the Great Forest, when the characters find themselves on a plateau with sparse woodland all around them, a Perception check will allow them to hear the distant sounds of laughter coming from within a cluster of trees to the east.

Within these trees is a small clearing, where an Eight Cities merchant called Mylo has made a humble camp. His small wagon is laden with dark wood barrels of white snow potato brandy which he traded for at Cold Corner, and which is bound for taverns in Kvarch Nar. The merchant, holding a quarterstaff with no apparent skill at all, is fending off three figures who are laughing as they menace the poor fat fellow.

If the characters intervene, the cloaked figures wheel to face their new attackers and the characters notice something rather alien about their foes.

The three people before you are clad in patched-up, thick brown cloaks to shield themselves from the cold, but underneath this simple garment they are naked. Most unnervingly, they appear as skeletons, with dark, empty eye-sockets, invisible organs and transparent skin, yet they move with the grace of trained and living fighters.

The three Ghouls will not be deterred from their petty banditry, and will go down fighting. They have remained in the Trollsteps since the last great Ghoulish incursion into the Forest Land and make a good living out here preying upon travellers. Here are the mechanics for these three warriors.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 16
CON 13
DEX 13
SIZ 11
INT 13
POW 11
CHA 8

Ghoul Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	2/5
4-6	Left Leg	2/5
7-9	Abdomen	2/6
10-12	Chest	2/7
13-15	Right Arm	2/4
16-18	Left Arm	2/4
19-20	Head	0/5

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
War sword	65% (57%)	1D8+1D2 / 4

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three
Strike Rank: +13
Movement: 4m
Traits: None
Skills: Athletics 55% (47%), Dodge 60% (52%), Perception 30%, Persistence 250%, Resilience 80%, Survival 90%
Typical Armour: Thick cloaks (2 AP all over, -8% skill penalty)

After the battle, Mylo thanks the characters profusely and says that if they are ever in Kvarch Nar and need a place to stay, he can offer them each a room at his home in the east quarter. All they need to do is ask a local gossipmonger or tavern owner where Mylo the brandy dealer lives and they will be pointed in the right direction. With many a handshake, Mylo sets off south again.

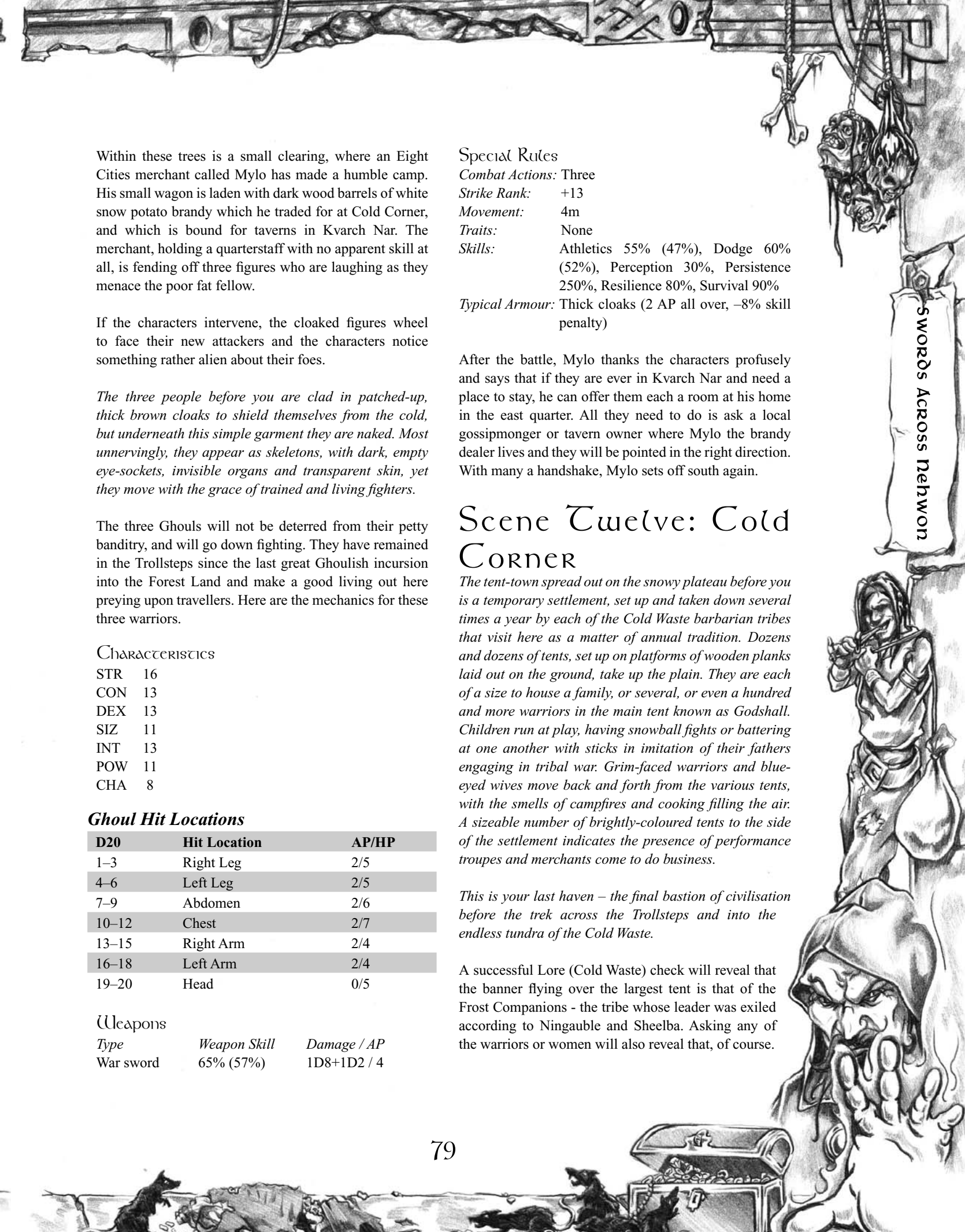
Scene Twelve: Cold Corner

The tent-town spread out on the snowy plateau before you is a temporary settlement, set up and taken down several times a year by each of the Cold Waste barbarian tribes that visit here as a matter of annual tradition. Dozens and dozens of tents, set up on platforms of wooden planks laid out on the ground, take up the plain. They are each of a size to house a family, or several, or even a hundred and more warriors in the main tent known as Godshall. Children run at play, having snowball fights or battering at one another with sticks in imitation of their fathers engaging in tribal war. Grim-faced warriors and blue-eyed wives move back and forth from the various tents, with the smells of campfires and cooking filling the air. A sizeable number of brightly-coloured tents to the side of the settlement indicates the presence of performance troupes and merchants come to do business.

This is your last haven – the final bastion of civilisation before the trek across the Trollsteps and into the endless tundra of the Cold Waste.

A successful Lore (Cold Waste) check will reveal that the banner flying over the largest tent is that of the Frost Companions - the tribe whose leader was exiled according to Ningauble and Sheelba. Asking any of the warriors or women will also reveal that, of course.

SWORDS ACROSS NEHWON



The characters can act here much as they would in any town, purchasing supplies and going through gossip as they see fit. Mentioning the exiled chief reveals that it is a source of shame for the tribe and several of the warriors spit at the question, giving no answer other than that.

If they ask a woman or child about the exiled chief, they will be directed to a large tent almost the same size as Godshall, which is guarded by two seven-foot tall warriors clad in white wolf fur. The doorflap of the tent is made from the striped fur of a polar tiger. The warriors keep their hands on the hand axes hanging from their belts and ask the characters' business. If they admit to wishing to discuss the exiled chief, they will be admitted. No other business will allow them through.

Inside the tent is a middle-aged barbarian woman with a slight hunch to her posture which makes her seem bent by the weight of her furs. She is Tagrilla, the chieftain. Her husband, Nifhlarg (pronounced NIFFA-larg), is the exiled 'king' the characters are hunting, considered royal because of his marriage to the clan matriarch. She reclines on several piled rugs of animal skin, peering into a glass bowl filled with frozen water and tracing her fingertip on the surface of the ice. She looks up as the characters enter and asks in a low, calm voice who they are and why they wish to discuss her honourless and demon-possessed husband.

Tagrilla is a cold-hearted woman, much like Fafhrd's mother Morr in the *Swords* tales. She listens in stoic silence to the characters' explanations, nodding occasionally and pursing her thin lips. Her sky-blue eyes track them slowly, staring at each character who speaks and rarely blinking as she subjects them to her scrutiny. If the characters announce their intent to kill the exile, she will spit into her ice bowl and chuckle, wishing them the luck of the gods on their task. She makes it clear, no matter what the characters say, that she considers her husband dead and honourless. Several times in the conversation she will refer to him as demon-touched or possessed.

If asked to explain such statements, she will do so.

I speak plain truth. A fiery shadow within his heart resisted all of her ice magic. We could not restore his humanity. He spoke in tongues and danced to music only he could hear. After a battle, his own warriors found him smearing his face with the entrails of a slain foe and eating the

corpse's intestines. The final insult to our honour came when he slit the throat of a young woman of the tribe and mated with her body after her soul had departed. So we cast him out, after our cold magic could not cool his humours. Let him die among the beasts and the blizzards of the Mountains of the Giants. If he cannot live like a Cold Waste warrior, let him at least die like one. If you wish to kill him yourselves, I give you my blessing for you would do honour to yourselves at conquering such a foe, and honour to the Frost Companions at slaying the stain on their good name.

But be warned. He is guarded by a tiger as demon-touched as himself. This beast has slain the few warriors brave enough to seek Nifhlarg's death.'

Tagrilla will not aid the characters in any way or hinder them either. She makes it clear that she thinks little of their chances but wishes them well all the same. She does offer to feed them and celebrate in their honour if they pass this way again with Nifhlarg's head as evidence of their heroism.

In the camp again, once word gets out that the characters intend to capture the hated exile, children invite the characters to get into snowball fights, and women and warriors alike nod respectfully. If the characters saved Mylo's life in the previous scene and inform any of the warriors of this, they will be congratulated and bought drinks as thanks, for Mylo is a welcome face at the campfires of the Frost Companions.

If the characters wish to stay long enough to enjoy a performance in Godshall that evening, they are treated to a show of Eastern belly-dances, music from all across the world, fire-jugglers, tumblers and erotic displays by dancing girls in the early hours of morning when the 'art' sections of the shows are finished. Although female barbarians are barred from these performances, females from the south (if any such characters are present) are welcomed with embarrassed grins and hearty laughs by the barbarian warriors.

If at any point during their stay in Cold Corner the characters ask where Stardock is, they are met with either an amused chuckle or a raised eyebrow as the barbarian answers by pointing north at a distant range of mountains, one of which towers above the others like the spearhead of a fallen god still trying to impale the sky.

Scene Thirteen: The Cold Waste

Crossing the Trollsteps takes two gruelling but uneventful days. The winds grow even colder, the snow underfoot becomes thicker and cleaner – untouched by the bootprints of men and women until now. The going becomes increasingly difficult with each hour. You know why people die in the Cold Waste now. The wracking weather is no longer just a story but a very real danger to you. This hostile region rebels against your presence, as if the land itself hates you for daring to tread here.

Games Masters will need to refer to the Adventuring in the Cold Waste section of the *Lankhmar* if they wish to include the exact details of the terrain. For brevity's sake, treat the ice-packed tundra as terrain with Slight Adversity conditions, as noted on page 85 of *RuneQuest*.

Ice Gnomes

This particular section of the scene takes place during heavy snowfall (though not a blizzard, by any means) and joined with the dense snow on the ground is therefore considered to be Moderate Adversity, also detailed on page 85 of *RuneQuest*.

As the characters pass through a bracken wood of grey, skinny and leafless trees that somehow manage to survive in the pathetic soil of the Cold Waste, successful Perception checks will reveal the sounds of boots scrunching on the packed snow nearby, coming from the cluster of trees ahead.

If the characters succeed on the roll, they are considered to have won the initiative for the first turn and have the chance to take cover or draw weapons once they see five Ice Gnomes dart out of their hiding places and start running at them. If the characters do not hear anything, they are considered to have lost the initiative automatically for the first turn of combat.

The stunted little creatures are no taller than a metre in height. They are wearing little more than rags and bearing no weapons that you can see. They make hungry, insistent animal noises as they run towards you, and the look in their piggish eyes and skullish faces is almost feral.

These Ice Gnomes are the last vestiges of a small tribe that were enslaved by the Invisibles of Stardock years before. They are now down to their last few members, and are starving, homeless and half-mad. The little creatures are overwhelmed by their hunger now and seek to feast on the only flesh that has come their way in days: the characters.

Their tactics are nonexistent. They launch themselves at the characters and bite and bite and bite. It should make for an easy but horrific fight.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 14
CON 19
DEX 7
SIZ 9
INT 13
POW 10
CHA 4

Starving Ice Gnome Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	0/6
4-6	Left Leg	0/6
7-9	Abdomen	0/7
10-12	Chest	0/8
13-15	Right Arm	0/5
16-18	Left Arm	0/5
19-20	Head	0/6

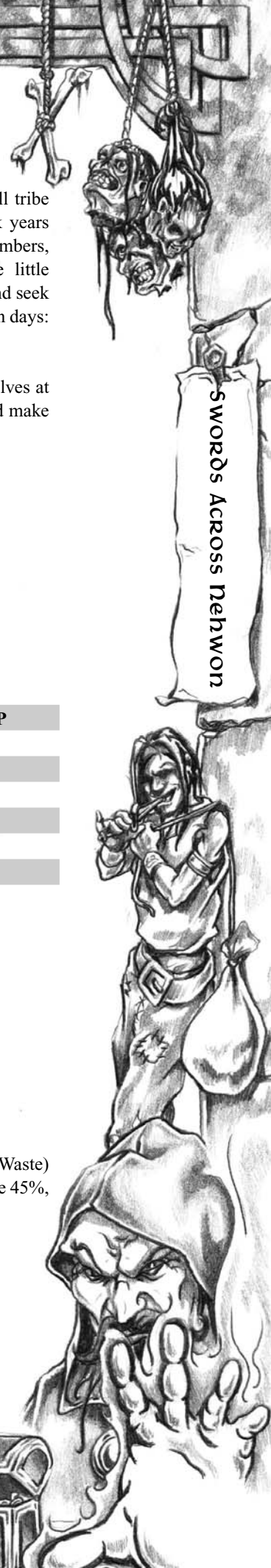
Weapons

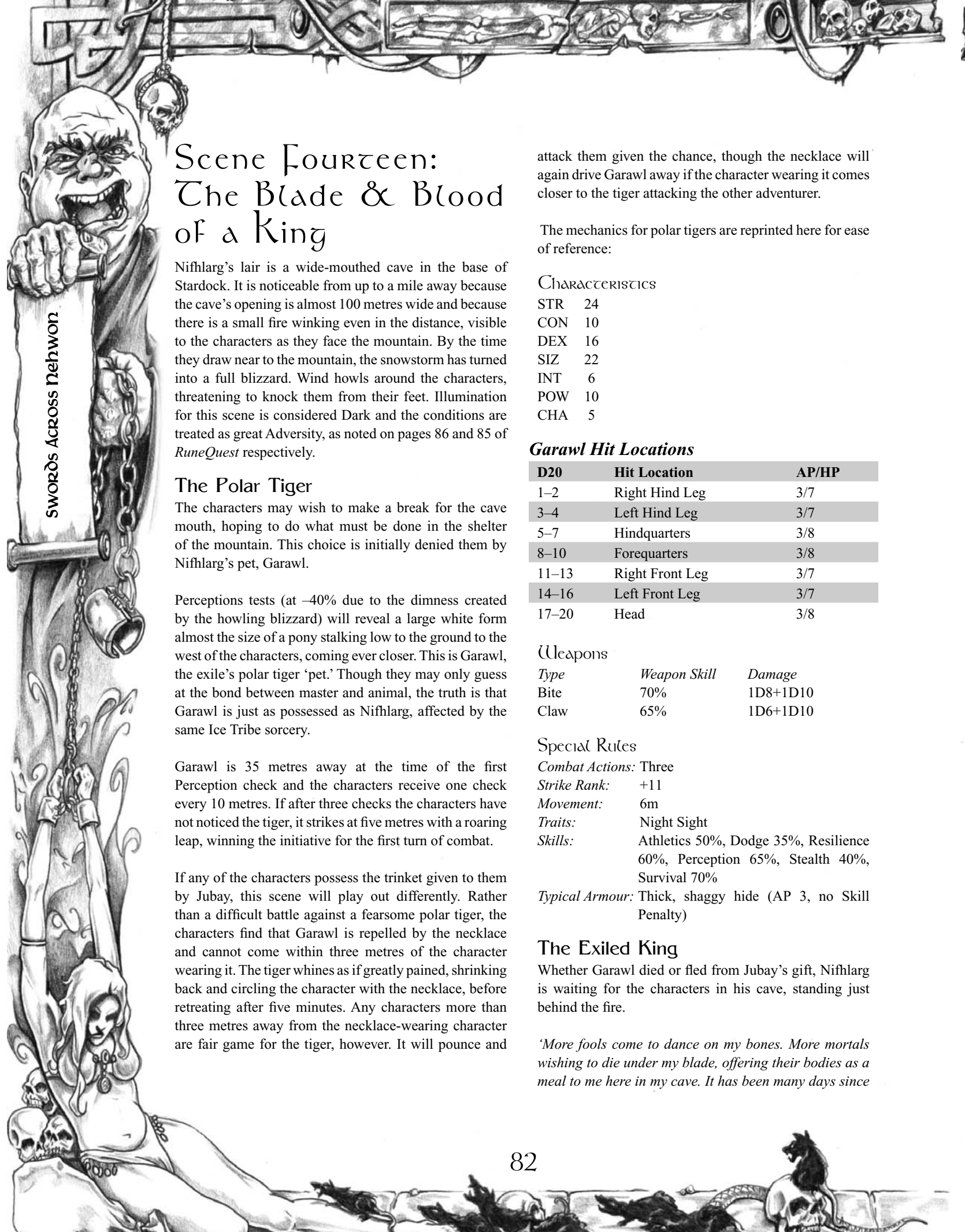
Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Unarmed	30%	1D3

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two
Strike Rank: +10
Movement: 3m
Traits: Earth Sense, Dark Sight
Skills: Athletics 30%, Lore (Cold Waste) 80%, Persistence 80%, Resilience 45%, Survival 50%

Typical Armour: None





Scene Fourteen: The Blade & Blood of a King

Nifflarg's lair is a wide-mouthed cave in the base of Stardock. It is noticeable from up to a mile away because the cave's opening is almost 100 metres wide and because there is a small fire winking even in the distance, visible to the characters as they face the mountain. By the time they draw near to the mountain, the snowstorm has turned into a full blizzard. Wind howls around the characters, threatening to knock them from their feet. Illumination for this scene is considered Dark and the conditions are treated as great Adversity, as noted on pages 86 and 85 of *RuneQuest* respectively.

The Polar Tiger

The characters may wish to make a break for the cave mouth, hoping to do what must be done in the shelter of the mountain. This choice is initially denied them by Nifflarg's pet, Garawl.

Perceptions tests (at -40% due to the dimness created by the howling blizzard) will reveal a large white form almost the size of a pony stalking low to the ground to the west of the characters, coming ever closer. This is Garawl, the exile's polar tiger 'pet.' Though they may only guess at the bond between master and animal, the truth is that Garawl is just as possessed as Nifflarg, affected by the same Ice Tribe sorcery.

Garawl is 35 metres away at the time of the first Perception check and the characters receive one check every 10 metres. If after three checks the characters have not noticed the tiger, it strikes at five metres with a roaring leap, winning the initiative for the first turn of combat.

If any of the characters possess the trinket given to them by Jubay, this scene will play out differently. Rather than a difficult battle against a fearsome polar tiger, the characters find that Garawl is repelled by the necklace and cannot come within three metres of the character wearing it. The tiger whines as if greatly pained, shrinking back and circling the character with the necklace, before retreating after five minutes. Any characters more than three metres away from the necklace-wearing character are fair game for the tiger, however. It will pounce and

attack them given the chance, though the necklace will again drive Garawl away if the character wearing it comes closer to the tiger attacking the other adventurer.

The mechanics for polar tigers are reprinted here for ease of reference:

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	24
CON	10
DEX	16
SIZ	22
INT	6
POW	10
CHA	5

Garawl Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Right Hind Leg	3/7
3-4	Left Hind Leg	3/7
5-7	Hindquarters	3/8
8-10	Forequarters	3/8
11-13	Right Front Leg	3/7
14-16	Left Front Leg	3/7
17-20	Head	3/8

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	70%	1D8+1D10
Claw	65%	1D6+1D10

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +11

Movement: 6m

Traits: Night Sight

Skills: Athletics 50%, Dodge 35%, Resilience 60%, Perception 65%, Stealth 40%, Survival 70%

Typical Armour: Thick, shaggy hide (AP 3, no Skill Penalty)

The Exiled King

Whether Garawl died or fled from Jubay's gift, Nifflarg is waiting for the characters in his cave, standing just behind the fire.

'More fools come to dance on my bones. More mortals wishing to die under my blade, offering their bodies as a meal to me here in my cave. It has been many days since

I last ate. The guts of some blue-skinned Ice Gnome, so insane with hunger himself he was almost glad to have me scooping bits out of his stomach and swallowing them while he watched. Come then. Come and be quick about it, so I may eat again.'

The man who emerges from behind the fire is stick-thin, wasted away almost to nothingness, though he still carries a bone-handled sword with ease. A single skin of white wolf fur wraps around his hips, but he is bare-chested and bare-legged, and his veins show through the marble-white skin, bulging from the flesh and coloured with an unholy red hue. His eyes are likewise reddened, with tears of blood running down his emaciated cheekbones as he drools pink saliva and mumbles gibberish to himself.

Nifhlarg is not only insane, he is possessed by some malicious sorcery concocted by a rival shaman of the Ice Tribe barbarians, whom the Frost Companions have beaten soundly in several battles over the past decade. There is no cure for this madness beyond the exile's death, for the hooks of the magic are too deeply ingrained within



his mind and soul. This story will be revealed in the cave writings seen after his death, or in the madman's final words as he dies. However, after speaking his opening threat, Nifhlarg wants only to attack, attack, attack.

Note: The Red Orb

Characters who looked at the orb in earlier scenes once again suffer the negative effects of their curiosity. As they come into close proximity to the evil sorcery tainting Nifhlarg, they find themselves succumbing again to the curse the orb has placed upon them. Use the aforementioned details to determine the exact effects on the affected characters.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 10
CON 10
DEX 16
SIZ 10
INT 15
POW 13
CHA 9

Nifhlarg Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	0/4
4-6	Left Leg	0/4
7-9	Abdomen	2/5
10-12	Chest	2/6
13-15	Right Arm	2/3
16-18	Left Arm	2/3
19-20	Head	0/4

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
War sword	90%	1D8-1D2 / 4

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

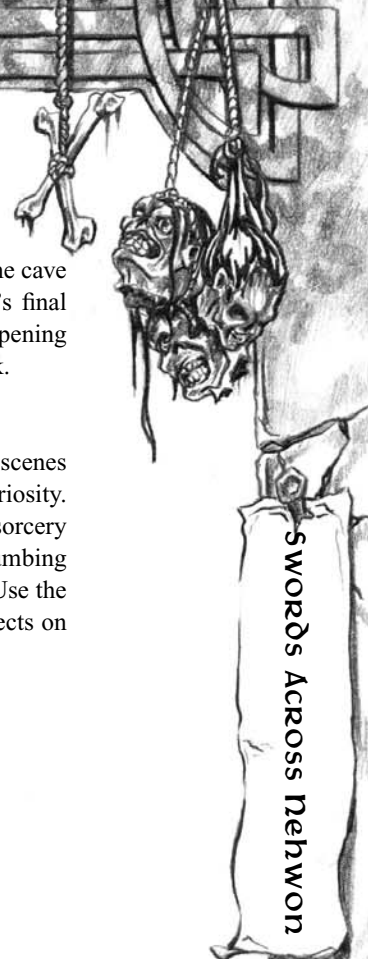
Strike Rank: +15

Movement: 4m

Traits: None

Skills: Athletics 30% (16%), Dodge 50% (36%), Perception 30%, Persistence 80%, Stealth 70% (56%), Survival 55%, Tracking 30%

Typical Armour: Thick furs (AP 2; Skill Penalty -14%)





SWORDS ACROSS NEHWON

Death of the Exile

Depending on just how Nifhlarg dies, the following scene will play out in one of two ways. If he is killed without a decisive 'killing blow' like a decapitation or having his skull completely crushed, he will have a precious minute to speak his last words as he lays dying on the stone floor of his cave.

The man's eyes clear of the redness, which leaks out down his face like bloody tears. Piercing green eyes look up at you as Nifhlarg's chest rises and falls in his last breaths. 'I never meant for this. The Ice Tribe. They did this to me. One of their sorcerers. It was revenge...for the times we...beat them in war...'

He tries to speak more; his lips move but only the gurgling of blood in his throat comes out. With a final choke and a heave for air that won't come, the exile goes limp and dies on the ground. His sword falls from nerveless fingers with a soft clang of bronze on stone.

With Nifhlarg dead, the characters are free to take what they need from the body; likely blood, blade and the head for Tagrilla. If they explore the cave (or if Nifhlarg was decapitated by a powerful stroke and had no last words) the characters now notice the scrawled runic writing all along the walls. Though the punctuation is horrendous and the language the scrawl of a madman, it is written in Low Lankhmarese: the trading language of Nehwon and the tongue used by the Frost Companions.

Much of it speaks of pain and agony from the 'demon within my head.' It laments that 'only death can be my release,' and describes the ache of 'bones that no longer feel like my own.' However, one passage is of particular note: 'I know who did this to me the Ice people they are jealous and bitter from the battles they have lost their sorcerers cursed me with demon magic if they come here I will eat their hearts and...' from there the passage goes into gruesome promises to suck at entrails like sausages and worse yet.

Scene Fifteen: With the Deed Done...

This scene is a mixture of events formed into a kind of epilogue of sorts. Obviously the two main areas where the characters have unfinished business are at Cold Corner and in the caves of Ningauble of the Seven Eyes. The

following two sections should serve as comprehensive guidelines as to what characters will encounter in each of these two major scenes.

At Cold Corner

If the characters return to Cold Corner to speak with Tagrilla again, they are welcomed into her presence as before. If the characters merely show her Nifhlarg's head and say nothing of either his last words or the scrawls in the caves, the matriarch of the tribe nods slowly and thanks them for their service.

'We will honour your battle skills tonight, for you have done us a great justice. By bringing this man's lifeless head back to us as proof of his death, we now know you are worthy of our sincerest thanks. Tonight we will celebrate in your honour, with the finest foods and drink we have at Cold Corner. For this deed, you are ever welcome among the Frost Companions.'

If the characters explain further that there seems to be the influence of the Ice Tribe and their sorceries, Tagrilla is confused, though she listens fully before speaking again.

'This does not make sense. The Ice Tribe are bitter over ten years and more of losing battles against our warriors, but to stoop into black magic as revenge? Thank you for this information. My gratitude is doubled, both as a tribal leader and a wife, for I know now my husband was wrapped in dark magic born of vengeance, not simply too weak to fight off the possession of a demon in his heart.'

The celebrations in the characters' honour runs long into the evening, with dancing, performance troupes, good food and drink aplenty. Underneath the revelry, however, there is talk of the Frost Companions now going to war – full-on war – with the Ice Tribe.

In the Caves of Ningauble

At the final steps of the adventure, the characters finally come back to Ningauble and Sheelba, who look to all intents and purposes as if they have not moved an inch – even a single muscle – since the characters left. It is Ningauble that greets them, and his eye-glow moves excitedly.

'Ah! Behold, good Sheel, our wayward wanderers come back to us after their thrilling heroics in the northern reaches of the known world. Do I sense success? I believe I do. I believe that I indeed do.'

The two archimages take very little notice of the evidence of success, wrapping Nifflarg's sword and the bloodstained knife (or whatever other blade bears the dead exile's dried blood) in black cloth and setting them aside for obvious use later in unknowable wizardly dealings.

My gentle sons, tell me all. Tell me all and I will unburden you of the questions that even now crease your brows.'

Ningauble and Sheelba listen intently to everything the characters have to say, with the following Questions and Answers helping to aid Games Masters in portraying the knowledgeable wizards at a time when the characters are sure to have questions.

'Can you explain the magic used by the Ice Tribe to ensorcel Nifflarg?' (Ningauble) *'Something heinous and dark, dear boy. Something malicious and unfriendly in the extreme, to turn the weak ice spells of the frost witches to the black magic of possession and madness. Tell me, do you ask because you wish to boldly hike north again, slay this new evil and bringing relative peace to the northlands?'*

If the answer is yes, Sheelba chuckles: *'How very foolish. Yet admirably bold, indeed.'*

'Was there really no cure for Nifflarg?' (Sheelba) *'No. If the magic is what I expect it to be, his soul and spirit were saturated by the sorcery and the evils he had been forced to commit. Death was his only release and I am sure, at the very end, he would have thanked you had he the breath to do so.'*

'We saw some kind of tree monster.' (Sheelba) *'A hamadryad, from the sounds of it. Nasty things. Spirits of nature that go rotten with hate when humans come to hack down their forests. You killed one but there are many, yet you should still be proud of surviving the battle.'*

'How about that reward then?' (Sheelba) *The warlock holds out a sleeved arm, letting a single scrap of parchment fall into your palm. On the palm-sized shred of papyrus is a three-sentence incantation of what look like gibberish words. 'This is the rune that I promised. When spoken correctly, this spell will cause you to be unseen from the eyes of anyone with a truly black heart, be they*

murderer or sorcerer. Anyone touching the speaker of the spell at the moment of completion will likewise be rendered invisible to the dark-souled, for an hour – no more, no less.'

'Do you have any more work for us?' (Ningauble) *'My-my, you are keen. I tell you honestly that no, for now you have done all we asked of you and more besides. We may find that our paths cross in the future, and know that you may always find Sheelba and me where we reside should you need our assistance. Know also that any assistance we render unto you, even out of the kindness of our own hearts (a considerably-sized heart in my case, smaller in the case of dear Sheel here) that our favours come with a price and we will require tasks performed in return.'*

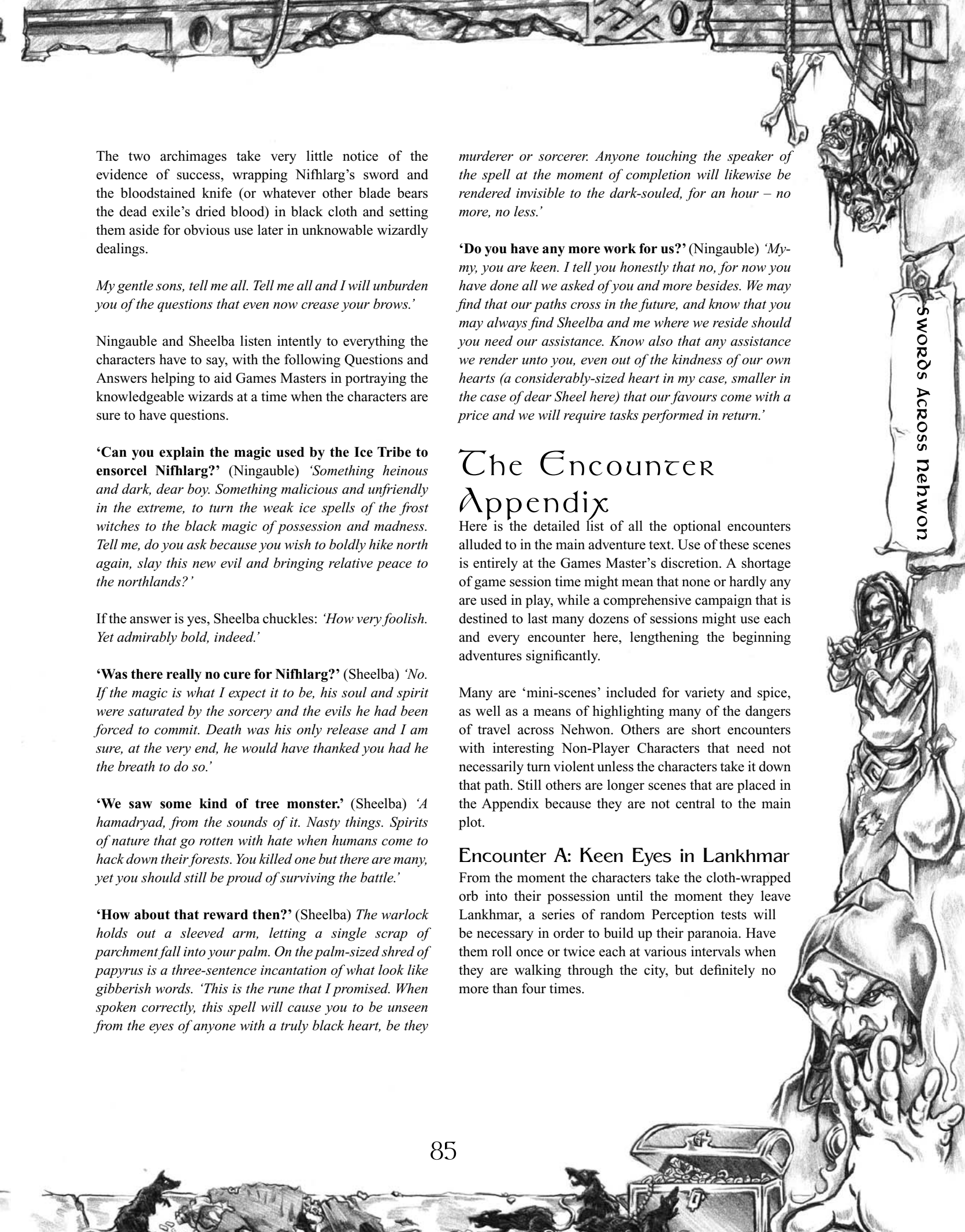
The Encounter Appendix

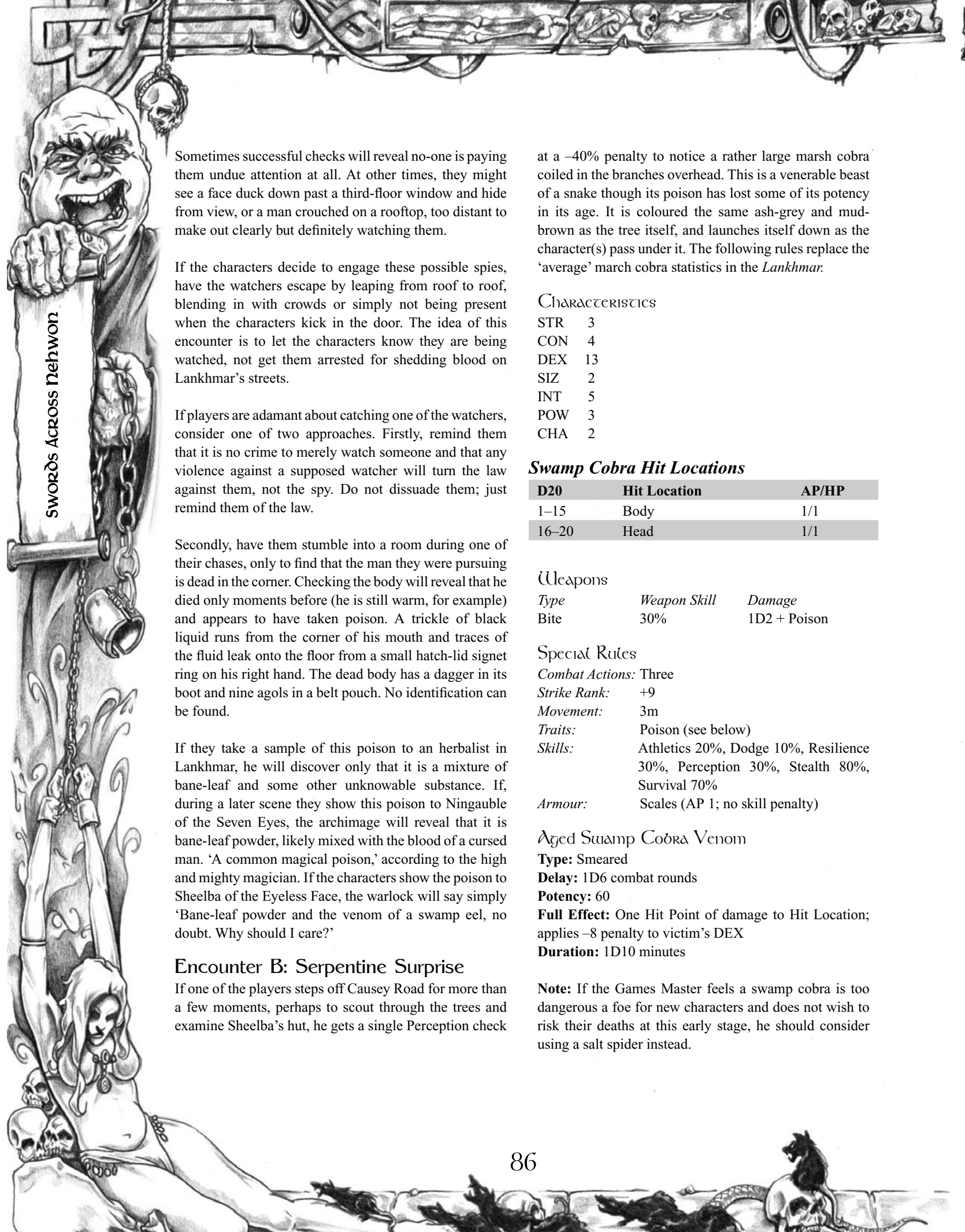
Here is the detailed list of all the optional encounters alluded to in the main adventure text. Use of these scenes is entirely at the Games Master's discretion. A shortage of game session time might mean that none or hardly any are used in play, while a comprehensive campaign that is destined to last many dozens of sessions might use each and every encounter here, lengthening the beginning adventures significantly.

Many are 'mini-scenes' included for variety and spice, as well as a means of highlighting many of the dangers of travel across Nehwon. Others are short encounters with interesting Non-Player Characters that need not necessarily turn violent unless the characters take it down that path. Still others are longer scenes that are placed in the Appendix because they are not central to the main plot.

Encounter A: Keen Eyes in Lankhmar

From the moment the characters take the cloth-wrapped orb into their possession until the moment they leave Lankhmar, a series of random Perception tests will be necessary in order to build up their paranoia. Have them roll once or twice each at various intervals when they are walking through the city, but definitely no more than four times.





Sometimes successful checks will reveal no-one is paying them undue attention at all. At other times, they might see a face duck down past a third-floor window and hide from view, or a man crouched on a rooftop, too distant to make out clearly but definitely watching them.

If the characters decide to engage these possible spies, have the watchers escape by leaping from roof to roof, blending in with crowds or simply not being present when the characters kick in the door. The idea of this encounter is to let the characters know they are being watched, not get them arrested for shedding blood on Lankhmar's streets.

If players are adamant about catching one of the watchers, consider one of two approaches. Firstly, remind them that it is no crime to merely watch someone and that any violence against a supposed watcher will turn the law against them, not the spy. Do not dissuade them; just remind them of the law.

Secondly, have them stumble into a room during one of their chases, only to find that the man they were pursuing is dead in the corner. Checking the body will reveal that he died only moments before (he is still warm, for example) and appears to have taken poison. A trickle of black liquid runs from the corner of his mouth and traces of the fluid leak onto the floor from a small hatch-lid signet ring on his right hand. The dead body has a dagger in its boot and nine agols in a belt pouch. No identification can be found.

If they take a sample of this poison to an herbalist in Lankhmar, he will discover only that it is a mixture of bane-leaf and some other unknowable substance. If, during a later scene they show this poison to Ningauble of the Seven Eyes, the archimage will reveal that it is bane-leaf powder, likely mixed with the blood of a cursed man. 'A common magical poison,' according to the high and mighty magician. If the characters show the poison to Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, the warlock will say simply 'Bane-leaf powder and the venom of a swamp eel, no doubt. Why should I care?'

Encounter B: Serpentine Surprise

If one of the players steps off Causey Road for more than a few moments, perhaps to scout through the trees and examine Sheelba's hut, he gets a single Perception check

at a -40% penalty to notice a rather large marsh cobra coiled in the branches overhead. This is a venerable beast of a snake though its poison has lost some of its potency in its age. It is coloured the same ash-grey and mud-brown as the tree itself, and launches itself down as the character(s) pass under it. The following rules replace the 'average' march cobra statistics in the *Lankhmar*.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 3
CON 4
DEX 13
SIZ 2
INT 5
POW 3
CHA 2

Swamp Cobra Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-15	Body	1/1
16-20	Head	1/1

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	30%	1D2 + Poison

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three
Strike Rank: +9
Movement: 3m
Traits: Poison (see below)
Skills: Athletics 20%, Dodge 10%, Resilience 30%, Perception 30%, Stealth 80%, Survival 70%
Armour: Scales (AP 1; no skill penalty)

Aged Swamp Cobra Venom

Type: Smear
Delay: 1D6 combat rounds
Potency: 60
Full Effect: One Hit Point of damage to Hit Location; applies -8 penalty to victim's DEX
Duration: 1D10 minutes

Note: If the Games Master feels a swamp cobra is too dangerous a foe for new characters and does not wish to risk their deaths at this early stage, he should consider using a salt spider instead.

Encounter C: Strangers at the Sinking Land

When you reach the edge of the land of Lankmar where Causey Road meets the water between here and the Eastern shore some 30 miles distant, the Sinking Land is submerged. You are not the only ones waiting at the end of the road; a dour-faced and grim looking pair of armed men stand by the water looking out over to the opposite shore. Both carry weapons and of cheap armour that look as if they were looted from battlefields.

These two travellers are Ilvarik and Nonfi. They are brutish, violent men and are trying to reach Ilthmar in the hopes of joining up with some caravans headed north. Both Il and Non have heard stories about the Eight Cities looking for mercenaries to defend against Mingol and Ghoul raids, and they are the kind of men who think nothing of earning money by splitting skulls.

It is D4 hours before the Sinking Land rises again. For the entire time, the characters are plagued by Ilvarik's incessant complaints about the weather, about Lankmar's constables pushing him around, about the fact he could not afford to book passage north on a ship and about anything else that could possibly be complained about.

All the while, Nonfi tries to play the characters at dice, in a simple game where whoever rolls the highest wins all the money bet each turn. Nonfi looks dumbfounded at the suggestions of any more complicated games.

There is the possibility of this encounter turning violent if the characters are not tactful and graceful in listening to Ilvarik's whining. He is a man who needs little excuse to use his sword and at the first hint of disrespect, he will pull steel and go for the character he perceives as being feisty with him. This spurs Nonfi into action to help his friend.

Ilvarik can be talked down from combat by a successful Influence check at -20%. However, if the scene turns bloody, here are the stats for the two fighters.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 14
CON 12
DEX 14
SIZ 13
INT 12 (8 for Nonfi)
POW 8
CHA 13

Ilvarik & Nonfi Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	2/5
4-6	Left Leg	2/5
7-9	Abdomen	2/6
10-12	Chest	2/7
13-15	Right Arm	2/4
16-18	Left Arm	2/4
19-20	Head	5/5

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
War sword	50% (38%)	1D8+1D2 / 4

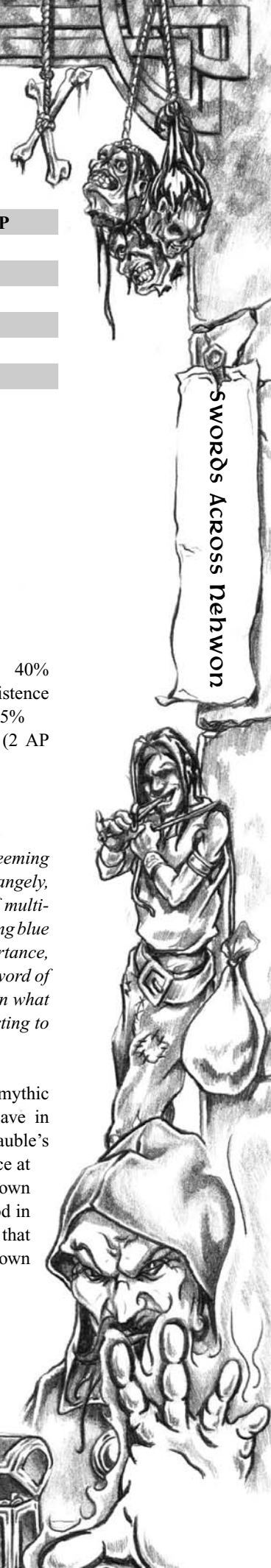
Special Rules

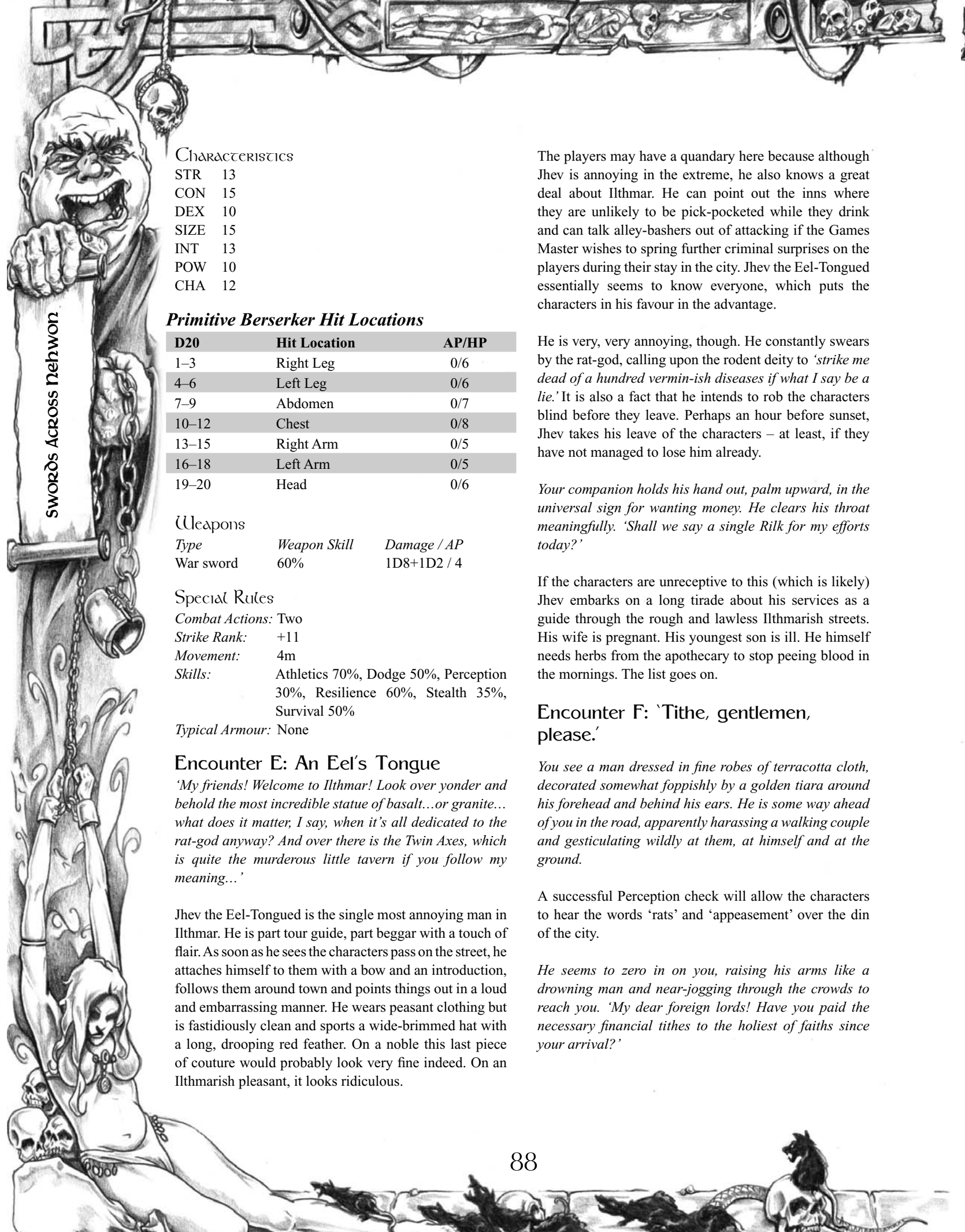
Combat Actions: Three
Strike Rank: +13 (+11 for Nonfi)
Movement: 4m
Traits: None
Skills: Athletics 35% (23%), Dodge 40% (28%), Perception 30%, Persistence 50%, Resilience 30%, Survival 25%
Typical Armour: Piecemeal armour and helmets (2 AP all over, -12% skill penalty)

Encounter D: 'Where am I?'

A man appears out of the darkness ahead of you, seeming to come out of nowhere. He is dressed most strangely, naked from the waist up and wearing trousers of multi-coloured weave. Across his chest and face is spiralling blue paint arranged in patterns of un-guessable importance, and in his meaty hands is a flat-topped chopping sword of hammered-flat bronze. He says something to you in what sounds like gibberish, clenching his teeth and starting to drool from the corner of his lips.

This strange fellow (somewhat reminiscent of a mythic Celtic or Pictish berserker warrior) entered a cave in his own world and ended up emerging in Ningaule's caverns in Nehwon. Possessed of a dim intelligence at best, his first reaction when dealing with the unknown is to suspect evil sorcery and attempt to shed blood in order to eliminate all nearby potential threats. To that end, he issues a blood-curdling cry that echoes down the tunnels and charges at the characters.





CHARACTERISTICS

STR 13
 CON 15
 DEX 10
 SIZE 15
 INT 13
 POW 10
 CHA 12

Primitive Berserker Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	0/6
4-6	Left Leg	0/6
7-9	Abdomen	0/7
10-12	Chest	0/8
13-15	Right Arm	0/5
16-18	Left Arm	0/5
19-20	Head	0/6

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
War sword	60%	1D8+1D2 / 4

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +11

Movement: 4m

Skills: Athletics 70%, Dodge 50%, Perception 30%, Resilience 60%, Stealth 35%, Survival 50%

Typical Armour: None

Encounter E: An Eel's Tongue

'My friends! Welcome to Ilthmar! Look over yonder and behold the most incredible statue of basalt...or granite... what does it matter, I say, when it's all dedicated to the rat-god anyway? And over there is the Twin Axes, which is quite the murderous little tavern if you follow my meaning...'

Jhev the Eel-Tongued is the single most annoying man in Ilthmar. He is part tour guide, part beggar with a touch of flair. As soon as he sees the characters pass on the street, he attaches himself to them with a bow and an introduction, follows them around town and points things out in a loud and embarrassing manner. He wears peasant clothing but is fastidiously clean and sports a wide-brimmed hat with a long, drooping red feather. On a noble this last piece of couture would probably look very fine indeed. On an Ilthmarish peasant, it looks ridiculous.

The players may have a quandary here because although Jhev is annoying in the extreme, he also knows a great deal about Ilthmar. He can point out the inns where they are unlikely to be pick-pocketed while they drink and can talk alley-bashers out of attacking if the Games Master wishes to spring further criminal surprises on the players during their stay in the city. Jhev the Eel-Tongued essentially seems to know everyone, which puts the characters in his favour in the advantage.

He is very, very annoying, though. He constantly swears by the rat-god, calling upon the rodent deity to *'strike me dead of a hundred vermin-ish diseases if what I say be a lie.'* It is also a fact that he intends to rob the characters blind before they leave. Perhaps an hour before sunset, Jhev takes his leave of the characters – at least, if they have not managed to lose him already.

Your companion holds his hand out, palm upward, in the universal sign for wanting money. He clears his throat meaningfully. 'Shall we say a single Rilk for my efforts today?'

If the characters are unreceptive to this (which is likely) Jhev embarks on a long tirade about his services as a guide through the rough and lawless Ilthmarish streets. His wife is pregnant. His youngest son is ill. He himself needs herbs from the apothecary to stop peeing blood in the mornings. The list goes on.

Encounter F: 'Tithe, gentlemen, please.'

You see a man dressed in fine robes of terracotta cloth, decorated somewhat foppishly by a golden tiara around his forehead and behind his ears. He is some way ahead of you in the road, apparently harassing a walking couple and gesticulating wildly at them, at himself and at the ground.

A successful Perception check will allow the characters to hear the words 'rats' and 'appeasement' over the din of the city.

He seems to zero in on you, raising his arms like a drowning man and near-jogging through the crowds to reach you. 'My dear foreign lords! Have you paid the necessary financial tithes to the holiest of faiths since your arrival?'

This is a religious shakedown, which is perfectly legal in Ilthmar. The priest can demand money from them and they risk arrest if they do not pay it. A Lore (Ilthmar) or Lore (Nehwon) check, both at +20% will reveal these facts. If the characters answer no, they will be pressured to pay up immediately. If they answer yes, have them make an Influence roll at -50% to convince the priest. The heavy penalty represents the fact that the priest is used to people lying to him and can see through such deceptions with ease.

The priest's name is Kiel, noted only in case the characters decide to make a contact out of him or the Games Master wishes to use him again as a recurring Non-Player Character. Kiel's reaction depends on what the characters pay.

† **Nothing:** *'For shame! You invite the displeasure, nay the holy wrath, of our most powerful deity!' The priest walks away, lost in the crowds and harassing other travellers as he goes. This will come back to haunt the characters in a later scene, so make a note of it.*

† **Under one Smerduk:** *'Hmph. Your ungenerous worship lacks piety but you have matched the letter of the law. Good day.' With that said, the priest moves away to harass other people in the street.*

† **Between one Smerduk and one Rilk:** *'Your generosity pleases me and the rat-god alike. Thank you, pious donators. Fare thee well.' And with that, the priest moves into the crowd, harassing another group of armed men.*

† **Over one Rilk:** *'Most pious of you, sirs! You have pleased the rat-god in your generous appeasement. I wish you well in your endeavours.' After a short blessing in the rat-god's name, the holy man cuts into the crowd and harangues yet another citizen. This will benefit the characters in a later scene, so make a note of their generosity.*

Encounter G: Alms for the Poor

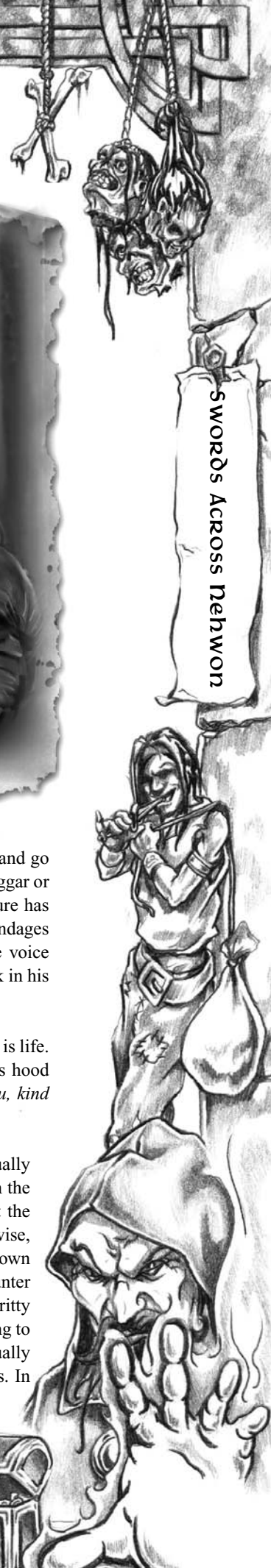
A figure sits huddled at the side of the road, leaning back against the edge of a building with its knees drawn up and a small tin mug held out in trembling, bandaged hands. The dark green travel cloak wrapped tightly around the figure hides any real chance of ascertaining gender, as do the bandages around the figure's head and face under the green hood.



If the characters ignore the figure, let them do so and go on their way. If they make a point of paying the beggar or moving in for a closer look, they see that the figure has kindly brown eyes showing through the dirty bandages and says *'alms for the poor...'* in a gentle, male voice while his trembling hand makes the single iron Tik in his cup rattle alone.

If the characters do not pay and simply leave, such is life. If they pay anything at all, the beggar nods in his hood and his brown eyes crinkle in a smile. *'Thank you, kind sirs.'*

If they ask for information, the beggar is not actually connected to any significant underworld figures in the city, though he can provide any local gossip that the Games Master thinks might be interesting. Otherwise, this man is a simple beggar with some unknown disease that causes sores on his skin. This Encounter is a thematic way of highlighting the grim and gritty aspects of Sword & Sorcery cities, as well as adding to the local flavour. In Lankhmar, the beggars are usually fakers and organised almost as well as the thieves. In





Ilthmar, they are often just desperate and near-death, which can be a hard truth to see firsthand when one is used to the mockeries of the Lhankmarese Beggars' Guild.

Encounter H (Cutscene): 'Cast him in.'

Down at the docks, the usual chaos of docking, departing, loading and unloading ships is heightened by a crowd of several hundred people lining the main pier. Sailors watch from the rigging and the decks of their anchored vessels. Beggar children push through the crowd of cheering and jeering Ilthmarters, ducking past knees and legs in order to reach front and get a good view.

A man in a black robe, flanked by two spear-wielding city soldiers, stands at the edge of the pier and reads aloud from a scroll. Standing in front of him is another man, short and skinny and wearing ragged clothes. He is blindfolded and bound at the wrists. The robed man's raised voice carries across the crowd.

'Here we offer the flesh of our city to appease the shark-god. Here we punish injustice with the penalty of death. Here we offer pious salvation for the tainted soul of this wretched sinner. May he find mercy in the eyes of the shark-god in the afterlife, as he finds redemption in a shark's jaws at the moment of his demise.'

The crowd cheers as the priest nods to the two guards. 'Cast him in.'

The blindfolded man shrieks as he is kicked off the pier to land with a splash in the muddy water below. Hands tied so he is unable to swim with any grace, the man yells as he bobs on the surface and goes under several times. In a few heartbeats it is over. Fins cut the water; huge sharks – several of them – race towards him. With no more drama and a simple, sudden silence, the man surfaces no more and a liquid red cloud blooms in the already brownish water.

Encounter I: Blasphemy by Night

If the alarm is raised when the characters dock, things are going to get real ugly, real fast. The characters will likely have to flee Ilthmar to escape the mob that is out for their blood and aims to feed them to the very sharks they were just preying on.

The characters have 1D6+1 minutes before everything does to hell. It takes that amount of time for other beggars and sailors along the dock to take up the cry and for the word of 'blasphemy in the harbour!' to reach the inebriated and violent souls crammed inside the waterfront taverns. Once the alarm is raised, beggar children race for the inns and drinking house in the hopes of earning a coin from drunk sailors for being spreading the word.

It is easy to lose oneself in the back alleys of Ilthmar, with many houses and buildings also featuring balconies and window-ledges that make it little effort to reach the roof. Additionally, the peasants and sailors that are incensed or drunk enough to bother with pursuit once it is apparent the heretics are escaping, will actually split up randomly, so a unified mob will hardly be a threat to the characters. Small bands of enraged or inebriated peasants are the main worry.

In short, the characters have plenty of options. If the Games Master is not interested in a long and drawn out scene here, the default method of fleeing the Ilthmar lynch mob is as follows:

The characters must succeed at three separate Stealth rolls to get out of Ilthmar unseen by negotiating the back alleys and twisting, dark roads. If they seek to escape via the rooftops, jumping from roof to roof and ending with a last leap and a drop from the city wall, then they must succeed at three separate Athletics tests. Failure on a Stealth test means they have been spotted ducking from one alleyway to another. Failure on an Athletics test means they have missed one of the relatively easy rooftop leaps (Ilthmar is crowded and the buildings are close together) and were seen hauling themselves back up onto the roof.

If either first roll is failed, the characters are pursued by 1D8 peasants who see them. If either second roll is failed, the characters are pursued by 1D12 peasants who see them. If either last roll is failed, the number of witnesses to their carelessness rises to 1D20.

If the characters fail the last roll or actually kill any peasants during their flight, they will be reported to the Ilthmar city watch and potentially recognised if they come into the city again, such as during the events of the forthcoming *Swords Against Sorcery*.

The stats for the peasants are as follows:

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 10
CON 13
DEX 12
SIZ 9
INT 10
POW 9
CHA 10

Ilthmart Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	0/5
4-6	Left Leg	0/5
7-9	Abdomen	0/6
10-12	Chest	0/7
13-15	Right Arm	0/4
16-18	Left Arm	0/4
19-20	Head	0/5

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
Club	30%	1D6-1D2 / 2

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two
Strike Rank: +11
Movement: 4m
Traits: None
Skills: Various (average rating of 30%)

Encounter J: A Wandering Kleshite

Walking overland some way off to the east is a dark-skinned man who must surely be a Kleshite by the looks of him. He carries a long spear and a shield of wood and stretched animal hide, and wears a heavy cloak, no doubt because he is unaccustomed to the colder weather of the northerly parts of the land of Lankmar. Upon seeing you, he hails you with a wave of his hand and starts to jog across the field towards you.

This man is Jubay, a hunter among his people in the jungle and struck with a wanderlust that makes him desire to see what the rest of Nehwon has to offer. He is powerfully-built without being bulky, and has a head of thick dreadlocks bound back with thin gold wire.

'Greetings to you. I am Jubay of Klesh. I come to your land to learn and to see. I have learned Lankmarese from a trader who visits my people but I am sorry if my words are not right.'

Jubay is a friendly sort, though he will obviously defend himself if attacked. He merely wishes to talk and share word of the travel north so that he knows what to expect. In return he tells of many superstitious villages to the south that live in fear of the sorcerers of Quarmall. He spits as he says the name of the mountain city, speaking passionately of his hatred for the kind of magic that steals a man's heart and enslaves him in a hunt-less life away from the sun.

If any of the characters admit to the hunter that they were formerly slaves and have escaped, Jubay nods his head to them and says they should feel most honoured at having the strength to escape servitude to another.

If the characters announce that they are bound for Quarmall, Jubay spits again, sucking air through his teeth in a pained hiss.

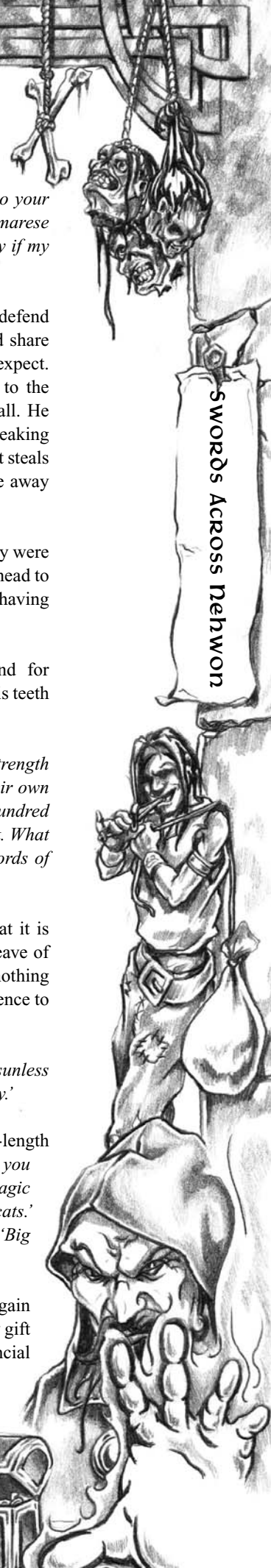
'That place is foul and dark. The people have no strength from the sun and no strength from hunting for their own meat. Their kingdom will be no more in a few hundred years and the world will be better for that, I think. What is your business there? Do you go to serve the lords of Quarmall?'

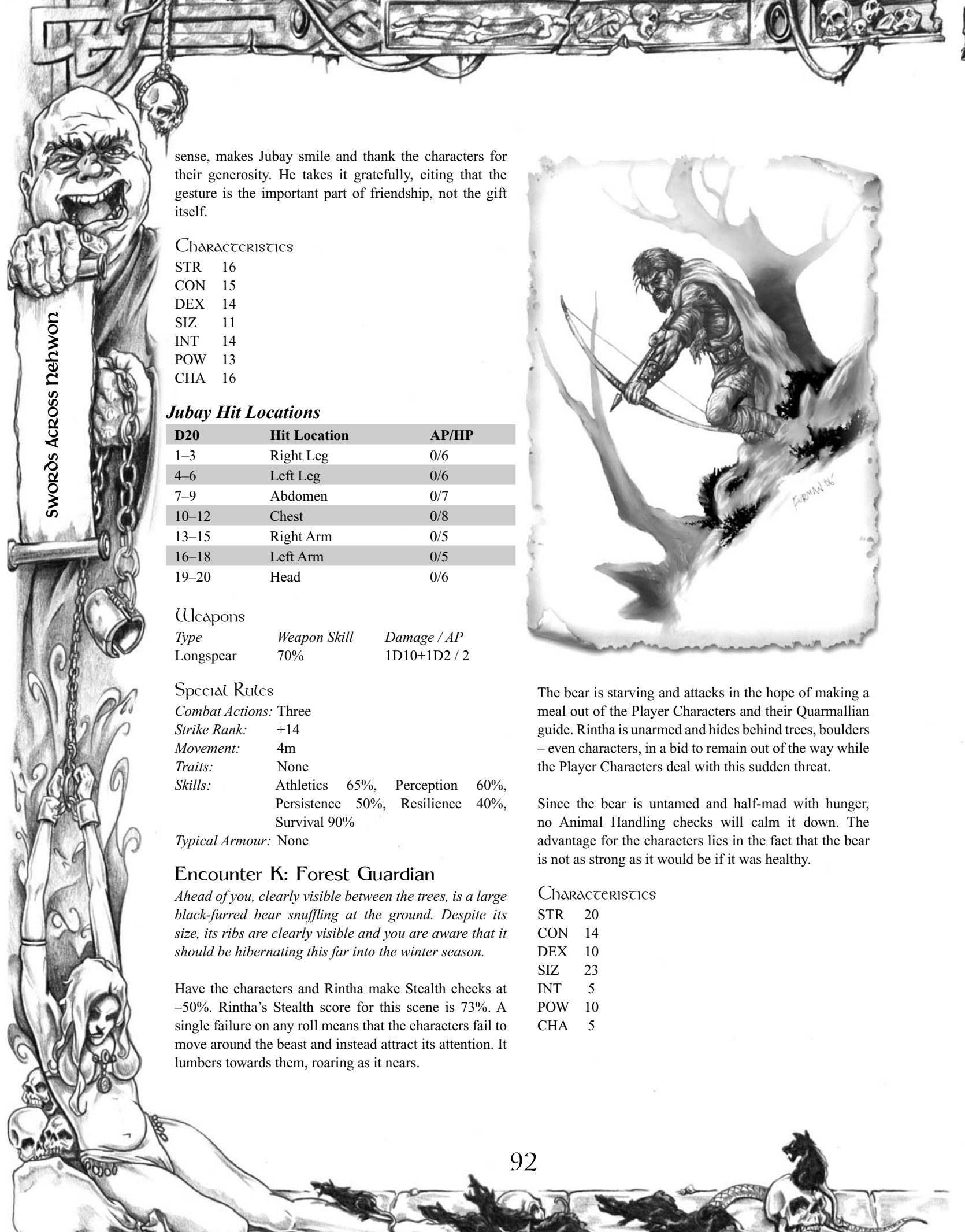
If the characters say yes or inform the hunter that it is none of his business, Jubay bows and takes his leave of them. If they admit the truth of their mission has nothing to do with Quarmall's people or they make a reference to hating the place themselves, Jubay seems pleased.

'I wish you well in whatever quest takes you to the sunless kingdom. Here, take this with the blessing of Jubay.'

Jubay hands over a necklace made of five finger-length teeth tied securely to a leather thong. *'It will bring you luck. It will scare hunting animals away. It is a magic of my people. We use it to protect our homes from cats.'* The hunter holds his hands out wide and smiles. *'Big cats.'*

With that, Jubay takes his leave, wishes them luck again and says he hopes to see them again some day. Any gift given in return, even if it is worthless in a financial





sense, makes Jubay smile and thank the characters for their generosity. He takes it gratefully, citing that the gesture is the important part of friendship, not the gift itself.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 16
CON 15
DEX 14
SIZ 11
INT 14
POW 13
CHA 16

Jubay Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	0/6
4-6	Left Leg	0/6
7-9	Abdomen	0/7
10-12	Chest	0/8
13-15	Right Arm	0/5
16-18	Left Arm	0/5
19-20	Head	0/6

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage / AP
Longspear	70%	1D10+1D2 / 2

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Three

Strike Rank: +14

Movement: 4m

Traits: None

Skills: Athletics 65%, Perception 60%, Persistence 50%, Resilience 40%, Survival 90%

Typical Armour: None

Encounter K: Forest Guardian

Ahead of you, clearly visible between the trees, is a large black-furred bear snuffling at the ground. Despite its size, its ribs are clearly visible and you are aware that it should be hibernating this far into the winter season.

Have the characters and Rintha make Stealth checks at -50%. Rintha's Stealth score for this scene is 73%. A single failure on any roll means that the characters fail to move around the beast and instead attract its attention. It lumbers towards them, roaring as it nears.



The bear is starving and attacks in the hope of making a meal out of the Player Characters and their Quarmallian guide. Rintha is unarmed and hides behind trees, boulders – even characters, in a bid to remain out of the way while the Player Characters deal with this sudden threat.

Since the bear is untamed and half-mad with hunger, no Animal Handling checks will calm it down. The advantage for the characters lies in the fact that the bear is not as strong as it would be if it was healthy.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR 20
CON 14
DEX 10
SIZ 23
INT 5
POW 10
CHA 5

Starving Black Bear Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-2	Right Rear Leg	2/8
3-4	Left Rear Leg	2/8
5-7	Abdomen	2/9
8-10	Chest	2/10
11-13	Right Front Leg	2/8
14-16	Left Front Leg	2/8
17-20	Head	2/8

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Bite	60%	1D8+1D8
Claw	50%	1D6+1D8

Special Rules

Combat Actions: Two

Strike Rank: +7

Movement: 4m

Skills: Athletics 50%, Perception 60%, Resilience 40%, Stealth 10%, Survival 40%, Tracking 35%

Typical Armour: Tough Hide (AP 2, no Skill Penalty)

Encounter L: Rintha's Return

As the characters flee Quarmall through their secret passage, allow a Perception check when they approach the twin doors where they encountered the rag-clad skeleton. If successful, from around the next corner they will hear booted feet walking slowly, without any rhythm, down the corridor towards them. Stealth checks at -20% allow them to hide behind various outcroppings of rock and in the shadows of niches in the wall, though the character bearing the torch may not do this for obvious reasons unless he also extinguishes his torch (which has the worrying side effect of plunging the scene into total blackness). The characters may hide, wait or confront the walker as they desire.

It is Rintha. He shambles down the corridor looking drunk or exhausted. A Perception roll in the dim torchlight allows the characters to see that Rintha's eyes are rolled back in his head, showing only the whites. They might guess from their eerie surroundings and the evidence of their former guide's posture that he is dead, which is exactly right. If they remain hidden, the walking corpse ambles past them without incident. If they still have a torch lit or they confront Rintha, the dead body of their guide attacks them in slack-mouthed silence. Rintha is

unarmed – the evil force that permeates these abandoned caves was unable to track down a weapon for its newest servant. To attack, the walking corpse seeks to grapple its enemies and strangle them.

As with the skeleton servitor earlier, all characters guilty of looking at the sphere suffers an immediate loss of one Hit Point from their Head hit location and -10% on all rolls for the next 15 minutes as their vision blurs slightly and blood trickles from their ears and noses.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	22
CON	3
DEX	7
SIZ	10
INT	2
POW	2
CHA	1

Possessed Rintha Hit Locations

D20	Hit Location	AP/HP
1-3	Right Leg	1/3
4-6	Left Leg	1/3
7-9	Abdomen	0/4
10-12	Chest	0/5
13-15	Right Arm	0/2
16-18	Left Arm	0/2
19-20	Head	0/3

Weapons

Type	Weapon Skill	Damage
Unarmed	60%	1D3+1D4

Special Rules

Combat Actions: One

Strike Rank: +4

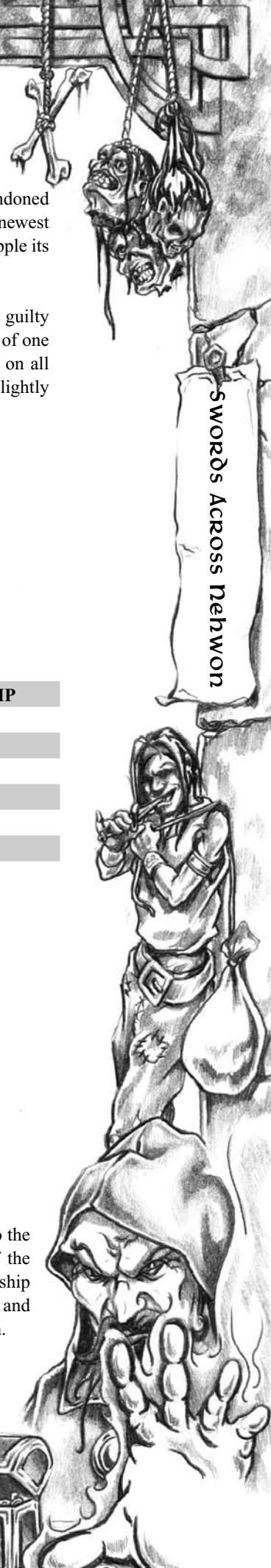
Movement: 2m

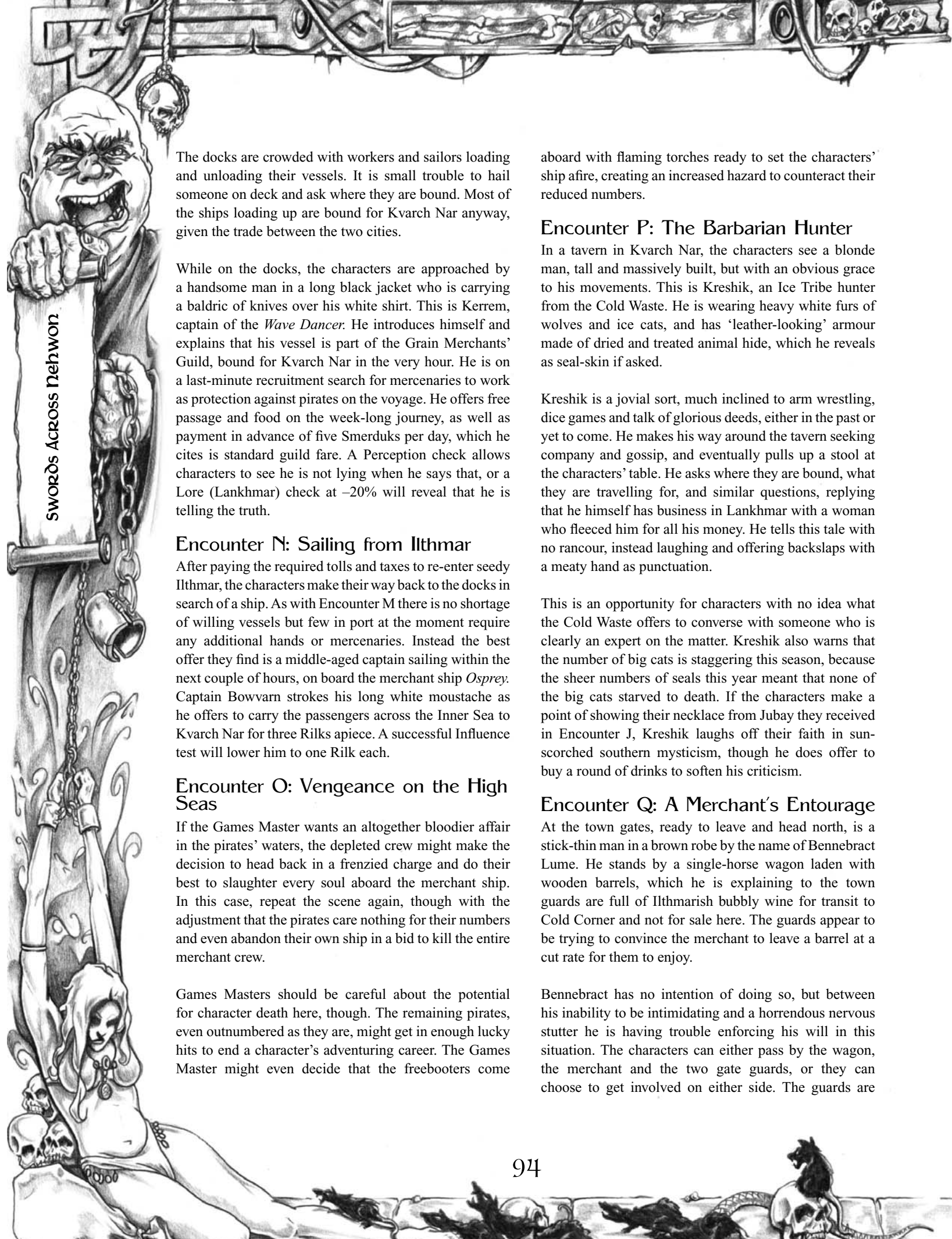
Traits: Life Sense

Typical Armour: Leather treads (no Skill Penalty)

Encounter M: Sailing from Lankhmar

After paying the requisite gate tolls and getting to the docks (most likely through the scenic Street of the Gods) the characters need to book passage on a ship bound for Kvarch Nar, chief of the Eight Cities and capital of Overlords Movarl of that northern realm.





SWORDS ACROSS NEHWON

The docks are crowded with workers and sailors loading and unloading their vessels. It is small trouble to hail someone on deck and ask where they are bound. Most of the ships loading up are bound for Kvarch Nar anyway, given the trade between the two cities.

While on the docks, the characters are approached by a handsome man in a long black jacket who is carrying a baldric of knives over his white shirt. This is Kerrem, captain of the *Wave Dancer*. He introduces himself and explains that his vessel is part of the Grain Merchants' Guild, bound for Kvarch Nar in the very hour. He is on a last-minute recruitment search for mercenaries to work as protection against pirates on the voyage. He offers free passage and food on the week-long journey, as well as payment in advance of five Smerduks per day, which he cites is standard guild fare. A Perception check allows characters to see he is not lying when he says that, or a Lore (Lankhmar) check at -20% will reveal that he is telling the truth.

Encounter N: Sailing from Ilthmar

After paying the required tolls and taxes to re-enter seedy Ilthmar, the characters make their way back to the docks in search of a ship. As with Encounter M there is no shortage of willing vessels but few in port at the moment require any additional hands or mercenaries. Instead the best offer they find is a middle-aged captain sailing within the next couple of hours, on board the merchant ship *Osprey*. Captain Bowvarn strokes his long white moustache as he offers to carry the passengers across the Inner Sea to Kvarch Nar for three Rilks apiece. A successful Influence test will lower him to one Rilk each.

Encounter O: Vengeance on the High Seas

If the Games Master wants an altogether bloodier affair in the pirates' waters, the depleted crew might make the decision to head back in a frenzied charge and do their best to slaughter every soul aboard the merchant ship. In this case, repeat the scene again, though with the adjustment that the pirates care nothing for their numbers and even abandon their own ship in a bid to kill the entire merchant crew.

Games Masters should be careful about the potential for character death here, though. The remaining pirates, even outnumbered as they are, might get in enough lucky hits to end a character's adventuring career. The Games Master might even decide that the freebooters come

aboard with flaming torches ready to set the characters' ship afire, creating an increased hazard to counteract their reduced numbers.

Encounter P: The Barbarian Hunter

In a tavern in Kvarch Nar, the characters see a blonde man, tall and massively built, but with an obvious grace to his movements. This is Kreshik, an Ice Tribe hunter from the Cold Waste. He is wearing heavy white furs of wolves and ice cats, and has 'leather-looking' armour made of dried and treated animal hide, which he reveals as seal-skin if asked.

Kreshik is a jovial sort, much inclined to arm wrestling, dice games and talk of glorious deeds, either in the past or yet to come. He makes his way around the tavern seeking company and gossip, and eventually pulls up a stool at the characters' table. He asks where they are bound, what they are travelling for, and similar questions, replying that he himself has business in Lankhmar with a woman who fleeced him for all his money. He tells this tale with no rancour, instead laughing and offering backslaps with a meaty hand as punctuation.

This is an opportunity for characters with no idea what the Cold Waste offers to converse with someone who is clearly an expert on the matter. Kreshik also warns that the number of big cats is staggering this season, because the sheer numbers of seals this year meant that none of the big cats starved to death. If the characters make a point of showing their necklace from Jubay they received in Encounter J, Kreshik laughs off their faith in sun-scorched southern mysticism, though he does offer to buy a round of drinks to soften his criticism.

Encounter Q: A Merchant's Entourage

At the town gates, ready to leave and head north, is a stick-thin man in a brown robe by the name of Bennebract Lume. He stands by a single-horse wagon laden with wooden barrels, which he is explaining to the town guards are full of Ilthmarish bubbly wine for transit to Cold Corner and not for sale here. The guards appear to be trying to convince the merchant to leave a barrel at a cut rate for them to enjoy.

Bennebract has no intention of doing so, but between his inability to be intimidating and a horrendous nervous stutter he is having trouble enforcing his will in this situation. The characters can either pass by the wagon, the merchant and the two gate guards, or they can choose to get involved on either side. The guards are

really not spoiling for a fight, especially not with well-armed travellers who have the stones necessary to hike up to the Cold Waste on foot for whatever reason.

The guards are being good-natured about it but look like they are running out of patience with a man they consider a worthless idiot. Bennebract lacks the charisma to even ask the characters for help, since they intimidate him as well.

If the characters disarm the situation by either offering two Rilks for the small barrel – thereby buying it for the guards just so they leave the merchant alone – Bennebract will grudgingly agree to it and be on his way. He will not be particularly well-disposed to the characters, for even though he got a good price, he had a certain number of barrels promised to the chief of the Frost Companions in Cold Corner.

If the characters force the guards into backing off with Influence checks at +10% for each member of the party present, Bennebract is thrilled (though stuttering all the while) and asks if the group would consider escorting him through the Great Forest to Cold Corner, in case bandits strike. He offers a Smerduk a day for each head, as well as cooking all the food himself. This is relatively fair, especially given the fact that each of the days spent travelling allows Bennebract to show just what a fantastic cook he is with what few ingredients he has. Stews, seasoned with southern spices and filled with vegetables and meaty chunks of beef, are likely a lot more palatable than the trail rations of dried meat the characters would be eating otherwise.

Encounter R: Daughter of the Duke

In Kvarch Nar, a tussle in the street between a handsome young man and an attractive woman draws a small crowd of onlookers. The man is insisting that the woman stay with him, while the woman threatens to slap him if he does not let go of her arm. This little scene should strike a chord in any of the more civilised, diplomatic or protective characters in the group, or any sexist characters who believe the woman likely can not stand up for herself. Whatever the reasons for intervention, a successful Influence check is enough to make the man back off and disappear into the crowds on the street without so much as an apology.

The woman is in her early-20s, raven-haired, green-eyed and possessed of a stunning beauty. Characters from the Land of the Eight Cities will find her somehow familiar.



Though she will not reveal her identity to the characters, she is Helena, the daughter of Overlord Movarl. After introducing herself as Nalla, she thanks the characters for their timely intervention, citing that she would not have wanted to stab the brute in the street and create a scene, though she was admittedly running out of patience. She also admits that it was a lovers' spat, though a Perception check at -20% reveals she is lying and it was likely something more serious.

As gratitude, she offers the characters a gold piece each and will not take no for an answer if they attempt to refuse gracefully. On the rear of the coin is the skyline of Kvarch Nar. On the front is a beautiful woman's profile – Helena's own. The characters either notice this now if they examine the coin, or the next time they spend a gold piece anywhere.

This brush with northern nobility sets up the characters to have dealings with Helena or Movarl in the future if the Games Master wishes to take the campaign in that direction. Specifically, this connection with the Overlord's daughter will have an impact in the forthcoming *Swords Against Sorcery* scenario sourcebook, so Games Masters who plan on continuing the published adventures might wish to include this Encounter even if they avoid the others.





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Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar

NEHWON

Away from the city of Lankhmar, an entire world of adventure awaits characters with courage and flair with a blade. From the twisted and stinking streets of rat-worshipping Ilthmar to the stifling caverns of underground Quarmall; from the mysterious northern land of Rime Isle – where the secret treasures of Simorgya now reside – to the Land of the Eight Cities which is constantly the victim of raids by the Mingol nomads.

Nehwon reveals the regions beyond Lankhmar City and delves into the lore of these nations and cities. Characters will find information on surviving in these exotic places, such as life in the cutthroat back alleys of Ilthmar and how to avoid a messy execution being fed to the sharks that glide through the muddy harbour waters. Perhaps the characters wish to taste the trials of working as a sell-sword for lumber shipping companies out of the Eight Cities when one has pirates and sea monsters to contend with on each voyage.

Filthy Ilthmar, dreaded Quarmall and the frigid Northlands are all covered within this book and all three are featured in *Swords Across Nehwon*, an introductory adventure contained within, designed for beginning characters. Become embroiled in the machinations of the mightiest sorcerers in the world! Battle great beasts and sorcery-maddened barbarians, suffer terrible curses and explore abandoned catacombs, outwit greedy thieves and even more pernicious priests as you attempt to fulfil your quest.



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To use this supplement, a Games Master will require *RuneQuest*,
RuneQuest Companion and *Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar*.