

SWORD & SORCERY

VIGILWATCH

WARRENS OF THE RATMEN™



A SOURCEBOOK FOR 3RD EDITION FANTASY ROLEPLAYING

SCARRED LANDS



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Developer's Preface

The Vigils of Vesh face a seemingly impossible task: holding back the chaos and darkness that seek to destroy the Scarred Lands, and battling those who would bring about the return of humanity's greatest enemies — the titans. Nowhere is their job more difficult than in the depths of the Mourning Marshes, where the evil ratmen — also known as the slitheren — lurk in shadows, plotting vengeance for the titans' downfall.

Vigil Watch: Warrens of the Ratmen is a guidebook to the slitheren, their culture, biology, and secrets. Game masters will find a wealth of information here, from the Veshian Vigils' own documents. Players are not neglected, either, for here also are complete rules for roleplaying slitheren characters. Two major nests in the Mourning Marshes are detailed, presenting deadly challenges for you and your players.

Putting a face to the enemy is one of the most challenging things that a game master can do, and with this volume, the slitheren become more than anonymous foes — more than simply orcs in rat suits. The cultural and roleplaying notes provided will help you

present the ratmen as believable creatures, with history and societies behind them. A vividly portrayed enemy is a far more potent and frightening enemy, especially in the chaotic world of the Scarred Lands.

I'd also encourage any roleplayers looking for challenges to try playing a slitheren PC. Not all ratmen are evil, nor do all wish to overthrow the divine races and bring their creators back to life. A ratman in an adventuring party will attract all kinds of attention, most of it unwanted, but the possibilities of interacting with more traditional characters — rangers, fighters, clerics, and the like — makes portraying ratmen a fascinating task.

So enter the depths of the Mourning Marshes. Deadly enemies lurk there — enemies who hate everything the divine races stand for, and will stop at nothing to inflict pain and terror upon their opponents. And all of you daring roleplayers who want to be different and original, take up the gauntlet and play a slitheren — prove to the world that not all ratmen are bad. Or be bad. The choice is yours.

—Anthony Pryor

The *Creature Collection* and *Creature Collection II* introduced the slitheren races and contains some of their basic statistics, but you don't have to own that book to make use of this one. The *Scarred Lands Ghelspad Gazetteer*, which offers further background on the lands, titans, and gods described here, could prove helpful as you read this book. In addition, some spells and magic items mentioned here appear in *Relics & Rituals*.

Introduction

My Brothers and Sisters:

No one knows for certain why the common rat was so susceptible to the corrupting influence of the titans. But the truth remains that every defeated titan spawned a different brood of malign, intelligent, and horribly twisted ratmen, all of whom plague us to this day. Popular legend asserts that these rats were transformed by eating of the flesh of the slain titans, and for some broods this is true. Others, however, were infused with the essence of their titanic "patrons" in far different, far more baffling ways. Nowhere are these ratmen more powerful and dangerous than in the depths of the Mourning Marshes, along our nation's southern border.

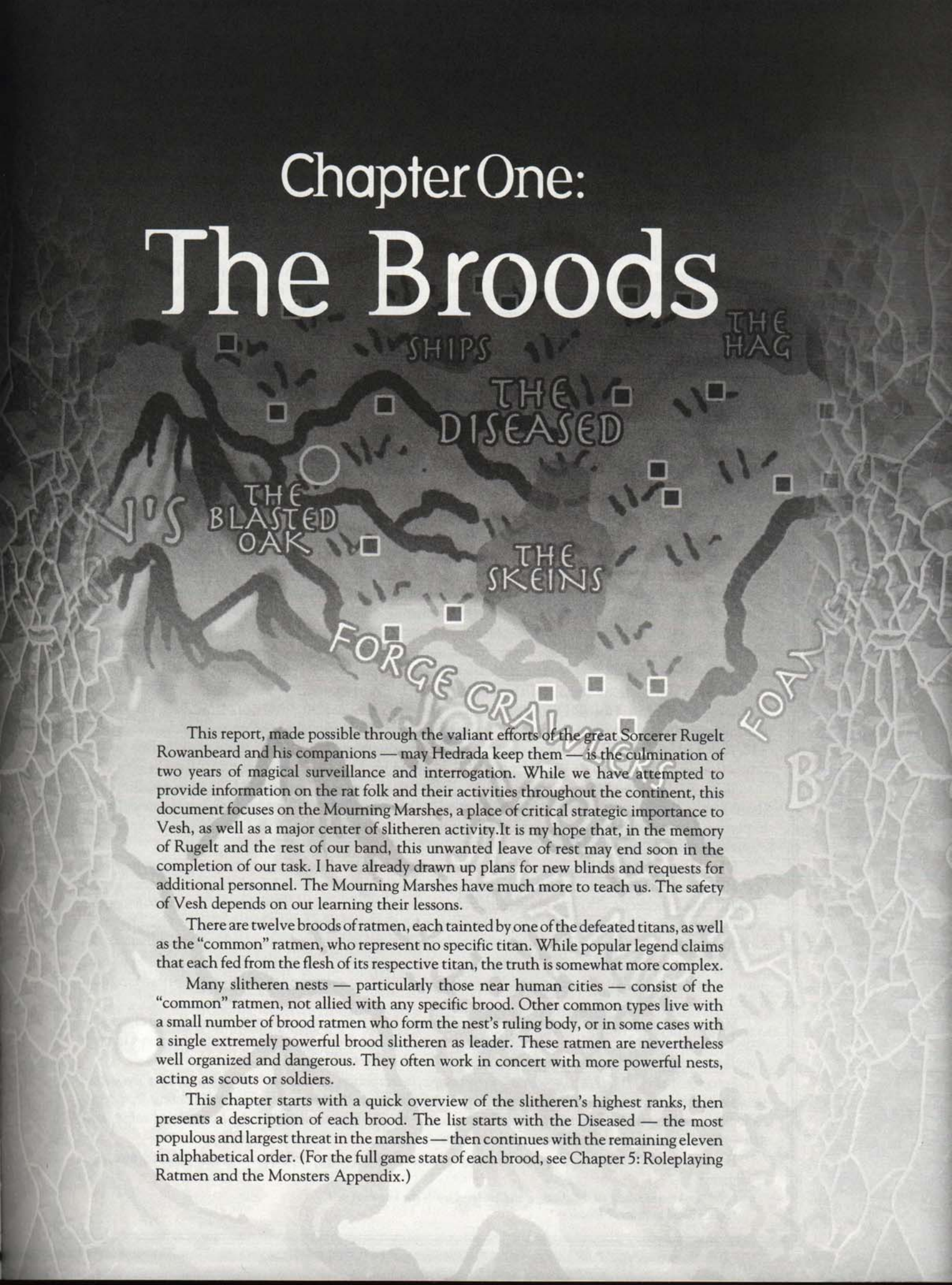
It is our intent in the pages of this volume to provide our brothers and sisters of the Vigils with the information necessary to understand, identify, combat, and ultimately defeat these foul and unnatural beasts. Here you will find an unprecedented amount of information about the slitheren, including details on their secret dwelling places — obtained at great personal risk by the Vigils' most daring operatives and allies.

In our eternal quest to ensure the final defeat of the titans and to foil the schemes of those who would bring about their return, the ratmen number among our most pernicious and persistent foes. Their taint is everywhere, even in the depths of our most secure fortresses and beneath the streets of our most populous cities. Our duty is inherent in the name that our order bears — we must always be vigilant and aware of our enemies and their intentions. We remain ever ready to stand in the breach and defend the innocent against the depredations of the ratmen and their ilk.

I salute you!

—Home-Commander Kelewis Durin

Chapter One: The Broods



This report, made possible through the valiant efforts of the great Sorcerer Rugelt Rowanbeard and his companions — may Hedrada keep them — is the culmination of two years of magical surveillance and interrogation. While we have attempted to provide information on the rat folk and their activities throughout the continent, this document focuses on the Mourning Marshes, a place of critical strategic importance to Vesh, as well as a major center of slitheren activity. It is my hope that, in the memory of Rugelt and the rest of our band, this unwanted leave of rest may end soon in the completion of our task. I have already drawn up plans for new blinds and requests for additional personnel. The Mourning Marshes have much more to teach us. The safety of Vesh depends on our learning their lessons.

There are twelve broods of ratmen, each tainted by one of the defeated titans, as well as the “common” ratmen, who represent no specific titan. While popular legend claims that each fed from the flesh of its respective titan, the truth is somewhat more complex.

Many slitheren nests — particularly those near human cities — consist of the “common” ratmen, not allied with any specific brood. Other common types live with a small number of brood ratmen who form the nest’s ruling body, or in some cases with a single extremely powerful brood slitheren as leader. These ratmen are nevertheless well organized and dangerous. They often work in concert with more powerful nests, acting as scouts or soldiers.

This chapter starts with a quick overview of the slitheren’s highest ranks, then presents a description of each brood. The list starts with the Diseased — the most populous and largest threat in the marshes — then continues with the remaining eleven in alphabetical order. (For the full game stats of each brood, see Chapter 5: Roleplaying Ratmen and the Monsters Appendix.)

Slitheren Ranks

Despite the many differences among the various broods, three key ranks of prestige emerge as standard across all of slitherenkind: the brood rulers, or priest-kings; the oracles or seers of the brood; and the strategos — high-ranking military commanders.

The Priest-Kings

Each slitheren brood is led by a powerful individual known as a priest-king. In most broods, these slitheren are always albinos, a condition ratmen consider particularly holy and indicative of close contact with the spirits of the titans. They are far more than powerful spellcasters. Their authority stems in part from their innate link to the titans as well as from the religious devotion of their brood. This brood foundation fuels the priest-king's power beyond that attainable through arcane study alone.

One facet of these rulers that non-slitheren rarely see is their formidable personality and mien. Their ability to inspire fear and fealty is a cornerstone to the priest-kings' continued supremacy within the slitheren hierarchy. Even elders of great power find themselves cowed before the focused gaze of their rulers, and those of weak will can suffer extreme effects under such scrutiny. Though tales of priest-kings turning their victims to stone with a look are (mostly) apocryphal, the ability to halt a battle-raged combatant in his tracts or make an iron-willed foe break into tears is not.

Above all else, priest-kings are beings of immense power and should be treated with due respect and caution. One of these deadly leaders makes his home in the Mourning Marshes — Yakkel of the Diseased. The other leaders, thankfully, are scattered across the continent.

Priest-King

Priest-kings are, by definition, fiercely unique and driven individuals who fit poorly into any mold. They employ idiosyncratic strategies in combat, ranging from the subtle to the superlative. Whatever their tactics, all priest-kings appear remarkably adaptable, able to gauge their opponents quickly and counter whatever strategies they meet. Fleeing in the face of overwhelming power is not beyond priest-kings — they retreat when defeat seems imminent, so as to prepare to fight another day. And fight they will: priest-kings always remember those who defeated them in combat, and they hold a grudge for the rest of their long lives.

Note that the following statistics represent an "average" priest-king. In addition, the game master may add special attacks and qualities appropriate to a priest-king's brood. One prominent priest-king — Yakkel of the Diseased — is detailed later in this chapter.

Priest-King, male or female slitheren, Ftr9/Sor9: SZ M monstrous humanoid; HD 9d10+27 plus 9d4+27; hp 117; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16/24 (+2 ring, +2 Dex, +2 natural/with +4 *mage armor*, +4 *haste*); Atk +20/15/10 melee (2d4+5/crit x3, +3 *ranseur of wounding*) melee +15/10/5 (1d4+2/crit 19–20, silver dagger); SA Gaze of power, spells; SQ Aura of rulership, aura of protection; AL LE; SV Fort +14, Ref +13, Will +13; Str 15, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 17.

Skills: Alchemy +12, Concentration +15, Jump +9, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Listen +6, Profession (herbalist) +10, Ride +11, Scry +15, Spellcraft +10, Swim +9. **Feats:** Alertness, Combat Casting, Dodge, Expertise, Great Fortitude, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Sunder, Spell Penetration.

SA — Gaze of Power (Sp): By focusing on any target(s) within line-of-sight, the priest-king may inflict upon them any effect which she could normally perform with a skill whose key ability is Charisma; assume the skill check succeeds. Alternately, she may target that individual with *charm person*, *daze*, *fear*, *hypnotism*, *rend the sovereign soul*, or *salamar's quiet contemplation*, as the spell cast by a 10th-level sorcerer. The priest-king may use this ability at will and simultaneously against a number of targets equal to her Charisma score.

SQ — Aura of Rulership (Su): A priest-king who uses any skill for which Charisma is the key ability automatically succeeds if the target is within 60 feet. Against targets beyond that range, the priest-king gains a +10 circumstance bonus.

SQ — Aura of Protection (Su): Opponents of a priest-king suffer -2 morale penalty to all skill checks and attack rolls while within 60 feet of her. Spellcasters in the same area who wish to target the priest-king with a spell must succeed at a Concentration check (DC 20 + the spell's level).

Sorcerer Spells (†/†/7/7/4): 0—*clean**, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *enumerate**, *ghost sound*, *light*, *mage hand*, *steal sleep*; 1st—*burning hands*, *mage armor*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shocking grasp*, *Tenser's floating disk*; 2nd—*Dolomar's force wave**, *Ganest's farstrike**, *phantom's howl**, *see invisibility*; 3rd—*haste*, *mind raid**, *slow*; 4th—*minor globe of invulnerability*, *remove resistance*.

Possessions: Robes, silver dagger, +3 *ranseur of wounding*, +2 ring of deflection, amulet of ghost armor, cloak of whispers.

†A priest-king may cast all the cantrips and 1st-level spells she knows at will.

*Spells listed in *Relics & Rituals*.

The Oracles

Two generations after the birth of the first priest-kings, a second line of “chosen” slitheren began appearing. These rare broodlings grew up innately adept at divination magic, even in those broods for which magic came with difficulty. Over time they began manifesting potent perceptual powers, the ability to see past lies, to visualize faraway places, and even discern events that had not yet occurred. Because of their abilities, they became known as the

oracles and were granted a place of prestige exceeded by few except the priest-kings.

A brood may have more than one oracle at a time, and most warrens have at least one. By custom and law, oracles may not hold power, either material or political, except over a handful of acolytes. Besides the few items necessary for their craft, they are also barred from ownership. Even slaves are beyond the reach of the seers. This injunction ensures that the oracles remain forever loyal to the priest-kings, never to challenge the rulers' supreme leadership.

Oracle

Oracles disdain combat and avoid it whenever possible (which, given their power, they can easily do). They prefer to bargain their way out of difficult situations, offering their services in return for being left alone. Only on the rare occasion when something stirs these normally dispassionate beings to anger do they unleash the full might of their powers. This action usually takes the form of a curse, an ill portent that the oracle proclaims like a judgment from on high. Brood Oracles have powers appropriate to their respective bloodline — Brown Gorger, Black Pelt, etc.

Oracle, male or female slitheren, Sor7: SZ M monstrous humanoid; HD 7d4+7; hp 22; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14/22 (+1 ring, +2 Dex, +1 natural/with +4 *mage armor*, +4 *blazing shield*); Atk +4 melee (1d6+1, +1 rod) melee +3 (1d4/crit 19–20, dagger); SA Ill omen, spells; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 16.

Skills: Alchemy +5, Concentration +5, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Listen +3, Profession (herbalist) +5, Scry +5, Spellcraft +3. *Feats:* Alertness, Leadership, Skill Focus (Scry).

SA — Ill Omen (Sp): Once a day per two character levels, an oracle may pronounce a dire fate upon any creature she can see. The creature may shrug off the ill omen on a successful Will save (DC 16 + oracle's Wisdom modifier). Failure means the oracle's curse becomes a reality. The nature of the curse can be whatever the oracle imagines, but its scope can never exceed that of a spell at the maximum level the oracle can cast. The effects of ill omen usually take some time to manifest and, though often used against enemies, this is *not* a combat power.

Spells (6/7/7/5): 0—*clean**, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *dowsing*, *enumerate**, *light*, *mage hand*; 1st—*comprehend languages*, *identify*, *mage armor*, *Salamar's quiet contemplation**, *shade's sight**; 2nd—*blazing shield**, *locate object*, *see invisibility*; 3rd—*clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *mind raid**.

Possessions: Robes, dagger, +1 ring of deflection, +1 rod†.

*Spells listed in *Relics & Rituals*.

†An oracle's rod allows her to cast a spell as if it were maximized or enlarged (as the metamagic feats) twice a day. These spells are not considered to be of a higher level.

The Strategos

The slitheren have evolved to the point where organized warfare and the ethos of armed conflict have become concepts that they can understand — and they excel in them. From this was born a new breed of slitheren warrior that would bolster the broods' might and send shockwaves across the Scarred Lands. At the forefront of this bold evolutionary step were the strategos, supreme military commanders answerable to the priest-kings alone.

With time, the strategos became more than the best fighters among the ratmen; they came to symbolize all things military. They were conduits of the titans' aggressions, semi-profane incarnations in their own right. Aged veterans would hand-pick successors, and these in turn would carry on the tradition and spirit of war for another generation. The current generation of strategos is fiercer and more cunning than ever, having absorbed countless lifetimes of experience. They are the edge of the slitheren sword; whether the Divine Races can meet their challenge remains to be seen.

Strategos

Strategos have no strict physical requirements, though most possess some characteristic that sets them apart even during the chaos of battle. Their troops feel their presence even when they cannot see them, and slitheren rally to their side instinctively. Strategos are fearless warriors whose strategy and skill few can match. To assault one head-on more often than not spells an invitation for death, but indirect strategies often prove just as fruitless. Only the greatest of heroes can hope to match these champions, and even they had best prepare for a hard and costly battle.

Note that the following statistics describe a typical strategos. Others may have special qualities and attacks appropriate to their brood. One prominent strategos — Lyrd Cathlis of the White Wraiths — is detailed later in this chapter.

Strategos, male or female slitheren, Ftr10: SZ M monstrous humanoid; HD 10d10+7; hp 57; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 22 (+3 Dex, +2 natural, +7 *breastplate of invulnerability* +2); Atk +14/+9 melee (2d6+4/crit 19–20, +1 *greatsword of speed*); melee +14/+9 (1d4+4, +1 *dagger*); ranged +14/+9 (1d8+1/crit x3, +1 *longbow*); SQ Call of battle, strategic command, visage of authority, voice of command; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +8, Will +7; Str 17, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 16.

Skills: Climb +7, Craft (weaponsmith) +4, Jump +4, Listen +2, Ride +8, Spot +2, Swim +4, Wilderness Lore +2. **Feats:** Dodge, Expertise, Great Fortitude, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Sunder.

SQ — Call of Battle (Sp): Once a day per three character levels, a strategos can rally those who can hear her, boosting their spirits and protecting them from harm. A strategos can maintain a number of calls equal to her Constitution modifier simultaneously. While doing so she can fight but may not cast spells or activate magic items by spell completion or magic word. Each call can be maintained for one round per three character levels; the effects end immediately after the call terminates (or the target stops hearing it). The strategos can choose from among the following types of calls:

- **Protect Morale:** Targets become immune to the effects of morale penalties. Spells that inflict these modifiers fail, and the circumstances that cause them are ignored. Should a continuous effect result in the loss of morale, the penalty is applied in full if the effect remains active at the time the call ends.
- **Inspire Courage:** Targets become immune to the effects of fear. Even against a hopelessly superior enemy, they will fight to the last. This immunity is breached if the source of fear comes from a character (or creature) of level (or challenge rating) greater than the strategos.
- **Inspire Perseverance:** Targets are not disabled when they drop to 0 hit points. Instead they may continue acting normally until they reach –6 hit points. At that point, they are considered only disabled when they would normally be dying (up to –9 hit points; see *Core Rulebook I*, page 129, for the disabled rules). Slitheren can continue hearing the call while disabled. The target of the call dies immediately upon reaching –10 hit points. Note that targets continue to lose hit points as normal for creatures in this range.
- **Bestow Clarity:** Targets gain a +2 circumstance bonus against all charm effects and illusions. They also receive the benefits of the Blind Fighting feat.
- **Bestow Fortitude:** Targets gain the benefit of the Endurance feat and receive a +1 circumstance bonus to Fortitude saving throws.

SQ — Strategic Command (Sp): Once a day per three character levels, a strategos can lead those around her in such a way as to improve one aspect of their fighting skill. A strategos can only give one strategic command at a time but can maintain it indefinitely. The effects last so long as the command is maintained, and they end immediately if the target loses sight of the strategos. While giving or maintaining a strategic command, a strategos can take only partial actions. The character can choose from among the following types of commands:

- **Defensive Stance:** Targets receive a +2 strategic bonus to AC.
- **Mass Charge:** Targets may increase their base speed by 10 feet/round. They can move only forward and suffer a –1 strategic penalty to AC, but they receive a +3 strategic bonus to attack as well. The threat range of their weapons increases by 1, but if they provoke an attack of opportunity, the defenders receives two free attacks rather than one.
- **Offensive Stance:** Targets receive a +2 strategic bonus to attack.
- **Orderly Retreat:** Targets receive a +5 strategic bonus to AC but can move only away from the opponent. They never provoke attacks of opportunity.
- **Staggered Assault:** Targets can attack only every other round. During their attack round they receive a +1 strategic bonus to attack and benefit from one-quarter cover. During their defense round they receive a +3 strategic bonus to AC.

SQ—Visage of Authority (Ex): A strategos can be seen clearly, as if she were standing next to the observer, even if she really is much farther away. This ability affects all observers within 150 feet/ +10 feet per character level.

SQ—Voice of Command (Ex): A strategos' voice carries true even in the thickest and most chaotic of battles. She may speak to anyone within range as if the target were standing next to her. This ability affects everyone within 150 feet/ +10 feet per character level.

Possessions: +2 *breastplate of invulnerability*, *champion's helm*, +1 *greatsword of speed*, +1 *dagger*, +1 *longbow*, *star gazer*.

The Diseased

From his burial place beneath the Mourning Marshes, the malign influence of Chern, the Lord of Plagues, helped create the brood known as the Diseased. They continue to spread sickness throughout the Scarred Lands. Greatly feared, the Diseased seem less interested in restoring their plague-ridden master than in subjugating and conquering others of their kind. So far as our Vigils are concerned, this may be a good thing.

The children of Chern are the most common type of slitheren in the Mourning Marshes. More civilized than their fellow ratmen, the Diseased go clad in loose, hooded clothing, and regularly use tools and equipment of civilized origins. In the marshes, the Diseased have established towns and cities. Most of the larger communities are close to the fringes of the swamp, though far enough within the bounds to hide from casual contact with outsiders.

Warrens

The Diseased locate their warrens on high ground, drier than the surroundings. Because of this practice, the larger Diseased communities are most common along the western edge of the marshes.

Much of a typical town lies underground. Aboveground huts contain threshing tools, clothing, and catchbasins for rainwater. In these rooms, slitheren clean, cut up, and bundle their prey before bringing it below. Also, they store heavier cloaks, shoes, and other less valuable equipment here.

Open spaces between huts serve as staging areas for raids and hunting parties. These clearings also host rituals that demand an open sky: rituals based on lunar cycles or greeting the night and day.

Underground, tunnels link the huts, weaving around a large subterranean meeting space. If the surface is far enough above the water table, the central space lies below the cluster of tunnels. Otherwise the tunnels surround the central space; a corresponding empty clearing usually occupies the ground above.

Side warrens extend from the tunnels. Where space allows, the warrens descend even deeper. These underground spaces are well constructed, roomy, and

ventilated. Many allow two humanoids, walking upright, to pass with minimal trouble.

Where groundwater or rock lie close to the surface, Diseased communities sprawl in a more shallow construction. Slitheren prefer depth and, if circumstances permit, place religious warrens deep. Military wings of the nest vary the most in depth, depending on the purpose of each specific space.

For a sample Diseased warren description and map, see Chapter 4.

Divisions of Warrens

Side warrens are roughly divided into three types — public, military, and religious.

Public areas are closest to the tunnels and easily accessed. Generally, one public room connects directly to the next. Tunnels open into many of these public rooms. The slitheren do not create internal corridors or tunnels.

Public galleries contain food, common equipment, and sleeping spaces. The cleanest and driest spaces are reserved for the most “valued” of the brood. Scuffles and duels over importance, though common, usually prove harmless.

The more isolated military warrens often remain under guard. Several galleries extend from public spaces into the military wing. These sections are designed to confuse, often featuring false walls that let warriors move about quickly in emergencies.

Some rooms contain armor and weapons, kept on racks under dry conditions. Other spaces Diseased warriors use for military training or sleeping. The most valuable and comfortable spaces, allocated to high-level members of the military caste, often connect

to the sleeping quarters of the priesthood.

Religious galleries usually lie within a singular, isolated warren. The guarded corridors in this series of interconnected galleries lead to the public and military warrens. The egress tunnels here are accessible only by the priesthood. Religious galleries are tasked to storage, sleep space, and rituals.

Among the most important of the religious chambers are the so-called “infirmaries.” This term is somewhat ironic. While the individuals in these chambers are indeed ill, they likely will never recover — they serve merely as living reservoirs for the sicknesses that the slitheren spread. Each order of priests is responsible for maintaining a different dis-





ease, and each warren specializes in its own ailments as well.

Storage spaces are isolated, usually as a series of rooms off a corridor patrolled by warriors or protected magically. Some hold unholy books and magical items.

Egress

Egress tunnels lead from various warrens to secluded spots above, allowing stealthy access to the settlement, or escape in times of emergency. Constantly manned guardrooms bracket these tunnels. Egress tunnels usually feature some means to cut them off from intruders or prevent escape, such as a boulder or collapsible pillars. Often, in at least one point, the tunnel constricts, forcing someone of humanoid size to crawl through. This tactic renders incomers vulnerable to guards inside.

Warrens Elsewhere

Outside the Mourning Marshes, the pattern remains generally the same. Instead of aboveground huts, Diseased communities elsewhere rely exclusively on egress tunnels. Slitheren towns isolated from other races even contain a few large, central tunnels, allowing a large group to leave at once. Diseased nests below the settlements of Divine Races rely more on small egress tunnels; the slitheren gather in specific alleys or abandoned buildings in preparation for raids. Otherwise, the layout of their communities is the same.

Castes

The Diseased divide themselves into three castes: workers, military, and priests.

The Workers

Workers each have one of three tasks. The first is caring for tunnels, repairing cracks or partial collapses caused by water seepage or earth movement. Tunnel workers also dig new passageways and prepare materials to strengthen them. This caste is further divided by age and prestige. Younger workers haul materials, such as mud or reeds. Older workers weave the reeds into wattles, lashing them into complex constructions, then mixing mud to daub onto the structures. With smoke and other materials, the workers carefully build up the surface. The oldest workers act as foremen.

The Diseased sometimes use stone or brick to create more lasting structures, but this hasn't been observed in the Mourning Marshes. Sometimes, particularly when constructing religious warrens, they magically strengthen the materials.

Among the brood's slaves, dwarves are highly valued for their abilities to help with tunnel work, and are carefully protected.

The second worker's task is hunting for food. Some workers dedicate themselves solely to hunting, a position granting prestige. The best of these hunters are privileged with the care of a giant rat or (more rarely) a wolfrat.

Other workers are tasked to care for children. These are usually the youngest females, or males of small stature.

Workers are both male and female. Females of this caste grow bigger than the males, and generally have more prestige by virtue of their size and ability to breed.

The Military

The military is tasked with raids and guard duty. The Diseased respect both duties as vital, though friction between the two groups does tend to surface.

Raiders often go out on hunts with workers to practice laying traps, setting snares, and training in missile attacks — all vital for raids. Because of their specialized training, raiders stand exterior guard duty when necessary. Raiders enjoy a greater autonomy than other military slitheren, a difference reflected in their personal habits. For instance, a few raiders are literate and read texts they acquire on their outings. Many wear exotic ornamentation and braiding in patterns that show off symbols of their greatest exploits.

Guards are trained in melee combat — very useful within the warren. Individual warrens have varying “uniforms”: standards of ornaments or daubings of color that distinguish guards from other members of the military caste. Nest guards and home guards often help officiate during religious rituals, as well.

Most nests have one military slitheren per fifty workers. When needed, workers act as militia or find themselves pressed into guard duty, depending on circumstances. The military directs all affairs of the nest, under the direction of the priesthood.

Albino females rank highest within the military caste. Albinos who wear primarily military gear are leaders of a warband or highly placed members of the slitheren community. They often care for giant rats and lead the Dead Eaters into battle (see below). Occasionally, albino females have a talent for sorcery. These rare Diseased blend military skill with sorcerous power, to deadly effect.

The Dead Eaters

The Dead Eaters are the shock troops of the Diseased. They receive minimal training and equipment — inspiring terror and dread is their main purpose. Through long generations of magical experimentation, humans were twisted into these jagged-toothed monsters. They share the brood's resistance to disease and have gained darkvision. These unfortunate humans may result from cross-breeding or exposure to Chern's flesh. The facts are unclear.

One can tell the cannibalistic Dead Eaters from normal humans by their excess of body hair, poor hygiene, and mouths full of sharp teeth. When feeding, Dead Eaters rip off chunks of meat, gulping the

pieces down quickly. They then wander off with swollen bellies to digest their meal.

They are also sent into cities with infectious material, to spread plague. With appropriate clothing and care, they can pass as human — at least to casual observers.

Despite their importance to the warren, Dead Eaters remain second-class citizens, ranked above slaves but below the youngest slitheren. The priests teach the Dead Eaters that they are holy: members of the Divine Races chosen to bear kinship with the perfection of the slitheren.

The Priests

The exclusively male priesthood is considered the living embodiment of Chern. Though all Diseased are of Chern's flesh, the priesthood is thought to be made of better stuff. The priesthood receives first cut of any brain matter or heart flesh and also feeds first when titan flesh is discovered. It is forbidden for the other castes to eat either first, upon pain of death.

The Diseased priesthood comprises a number of orders, one for each disease that the slitheren spread. The priestly caste maintains the diseases themselves, incubating them within disease carriers. These Holy Slaves, kept alive and infected with sickness, are replaced as they succumb. Such priestly groups include the Orders of the Scarlet Shaking Pox, Lung Rot, Grey Wasting, Cackle Fever, and Slimy Doom. Each maintains a group of up to one hundred victims, ready to be sent back to their people to spread death and sickness.

The priests also are responsible for keeping the ways of Chern. This duty consists of many daily and annual rituals, as well as judging the transgressions of members of the community. The priests also care for holy pets like the giant rats or wolfrats, oversee the Dead Eaters, and watch over food stores — delegating who eats first, and how much. Most importantly, the priests determine who may breed.

The other castes must perform the wishes of the priesthood. Some warriors may find themselves tasked to obey specific priests, though senior members of the military may ignore the orders of low-ranking priests.

Some military caste members report that the priesthood enacts a Ritual of Passage that grants immortality. In this rite, priests gather to consume one of their dead, taking his power much as they fed from Chern. One chosen priest consumes the brain of the old priest, and thus receives his thoughts and memories.

No concrete evidence exists to prove the truth of this story, but the slitheren believe it. They also believe in the immortality of their priest-king. Either the priest-king maintains a serial immortality via the rumored Ritual of Passage, or he consumed a particularly vital portion of Chern a century and a half ago. Most likely, this tale is simply untrue. Due to the

priest-king's seclusion, it is even possible that he is not a slitheren at all, but some other vile being.

Lifestyle

In addition to clothing, the Diseased share a number of other habits with the Divine Races. They may wear earrings or weave small jewelry into the fur around their jaws and hands. They sometimes grind colored earth into their gray fur, forming simple patterns that seem to relate to rank, though we have not managed to catalog them extensively. Part of prestige is determined by age, so the youngest have no jewelry and only a spot or two of color. The military often boast elaborate patterns, particularly when appearing at ritual events. In battle, members of the military generally cover themselves in obscuring colors for simple camouflage. The priests adorn themselves with elaborate treasures but keep their fur absent of color; they take fastidious care to make their fur appear as white as possible.

Prestige Among the Diseased

The young Diseased always seek to prove themselves to their elders. Workers try to ply their craft well or, if particularly strong, to prove themselves on hunts. The many young wishing to join the military caste must meet harsh requirements. Those who attempt and fail are usually killed. In this way, the strongest and most violent slitheren form the bulk of the military caste. Sometimes, particularly after a defeat or in a new nest, these rules are relaxed.

With few other opportunities to prove themselves, guards often duel during off hours. A guard demonstrates his quality by following orders, winning duels, following ritual demands, and doing his duty. As this generally involves the whim of priests, the guards' lot remains somewhat capricious.

Raiders have clear opportunities for advancement. Bountiful hunts and traps that yield frequent game show skill. Displaying a particularly vicious nature during a raid, as well as clever plans and execution, distinguishes a raider as well.

Young priests must learn ritual and discipline. From a young age until the age of majority they are frequently beaten for a host of possible infractions. They spend much of their training wrapped in the schemes of various mentors, trying to fulfill impossible demands. This upbringing encourages competition, caution, and the vicious temperament desired among those who embody Chern.

In the nests, increased prestige translates to more food and opportunities to breed.

Worship

The Diseased are of two minds about the titans. Their worship exalts Chern, but at the same time they feel a holy terror toward the Lord of Plagues. Some stories suggest that ratmen can be swayed by even greater fear, from an appropriately diabolical or

powerful agency. Some are said to have turned to the gods—evidently more powerful and terrible than the titans, whom they destroyed. If such ratmen do exist, other slitheren would have dark designs on them, if for no other reason than to keep the titans from punishing them all for the sacrilege of a few. Many Diseased remain slavish zealots, however, ever loyal to their creator.

The Diseased view Chern's principle, that of corruption and disease, as linked to the nature of life. The world can be purified by disease, which sanctifies those who become infected. The brood's own immunity to disease marks them as the anointed of Chern, his followers tasked with the sacred duty of spreading illness to purify the land.

Rituals

The important rituals of these slitheren involve sunrise, sunset, birth, death, the Nameless Orb, and shifts of seasons.

All the Diseased gather to greet the rising sun. Even roving warbands pause as the sky lightens. About two-thirds of an hour before sunrise, they face east and thank the giver of the desert mosquitoes and the vermin that scurry in the heat of the day, of the feverish torture of the burning sun and the bubbling heat of the swamps. Prayers are raised to the priest-king, asking for the blessings of the titan and proclaiming their loyalty to the source of vermin.

During such rituals, the Diseased leave themselves particularly vulnerable. They plan no other activities at these times, making sure to return to their lairs. Some guards rotate onto "dayturn" duty, just in case of attack from without.

This is not to say that the Diseased never attack at daybreak — records show otherwise. The priesthood undoubtedly has special rituals allowing dispensation for such activities. Surprise remains more likely to succeed at this time.

A similar ritual occurs at dusk. The vermin of the night, of darkness, the diseases that bring cold and blindness — these the Diseased worship with the setting of the sun.

The day's main hunt for food usually begins after the dusk ritual. Some hunting — mainly trapping — goes on during the day as well. (The Diseased hold the brain and the bladder to be the most delectable parts of a victim. They particularly value the bladders of elves.) The brood feasts just before the dawn ritual and sleeps after it.

When a slitheren litter is born, priests perform a small ritual, thanking Chern for more of his essence. They intone a prayer, calling upon pestilence and power to flow through the newborns of their brood. The Diseased consider it unlucky to view the furless slitheren, so the priests perform fasting rites to cleanse themselves after the birth ritual. The mother may look upon the children as she feeds and cares for them, but others must wear a blindfold; no one else

may view the children until they have fur (about six weeks).

Once a child has fur, it joins other children in a communal lair. Female albinos join priestly training lairs. Male albinos are raised in the communal lair. If a male albino does not show strength and a warrior/leadership role early on, he is killed and placed in food stores.

The Diseased employ rituals to consume their dead, and are particularly keen on recovering fallen comrades. They believe Chern's essence is best concentrated within their race, not dissipated. Every member of the nest is a piece of Chern, spreading out to sow disease and suffering. They will not go to outrageous lengths to bring back the dead, however. Any bodies not recovered become the subject of another ritual, back in the nest: The priests pray to Chern that the lost corpses continue to spread corruption and disease.

The Nameless Orb is called "Relief from Sorrows" among the Diseased. Of course, in their case, "sorrows" include the victory of the gods and the rule of the Divine Races. When the Orb is full, they conduct a variety of secret rituals in the priest warrens. All other castes are forbidden to speak frivolously during this time. Uncontrolled children are gagged or, if they will not keep quiet, slain.

During the Week of Sorrows, the Diseased behave with particular violence, conducting their raids with religious fervor. They are also exclusively nocturnal during this week, avoiding the sun with what can only be described as a superstitious fear. They raid isolated towns during this week and, when victorious, feast on their victims — alive if possible — out under the unholy moon.

Rituals accompany the shifts of seasons as well. Hunters find particularly delectable prey (see below) to share in a large feast. The highest ritual is that of summer, which the Diseased greet joyously as a time of pestilence. Ideally, hunters find carcasses of animals dead from disease for the nest to feed on. Priests also try to gather up members of the Divine Races to infect beforehand, to have a good larder.

The Diseased and Others

The Diseased see themselves as superior to the other slitheren. As all have gray fur, they consider even their lowliest worker to be almost as valuable as the priests of others. They are tactful in this belief when dealing with other subraces, however.

The Diseased invite other broods to gather, for trade of goods and information. The different priests of the slitheren meet more secretly for complex rituals and high-level discussion. Elaborate agreements have formed between the nests. These agreements establish territories, hunting rights, mutual aid, and the formation of large forces for raids on difficult targets. Arguably, it is this, more than their diseases and magic, that makes this group dangerous.

Slaves remain a valuable commodity among the Diseased. They provide emergency rations, basic laborers, occasional sources of skilled labor, and hosts for disease. Unfortunately, the high death rate among slaves creates a constant demand for more; to meet this need, the Diseased conduct their own slave raids and support the raids of other broods.

Dead Eaters are more highly valued due to their resistance to disease, as well as their usefulness for stealth. Various Diseased nests trade Dead Eaters, working on improving the breed. Selling Dead Eaters to other slitheren broods is rare, however.

The Diseased have forged detestable arrangements with humans and other Divine Races. There are rumors of humans trading elf slaves to the Diseased — humans residing in Vesh. We recommend that determining the truth of these rumors be given high priority, not only because this slave trade is an affront to any standard of decency, but also to prevent such agents from being used to strike at Vesh itself.

The Diseased keep giant rats and wolfrats as companions and war animals. Their frequent contact with disease often limits the lifespan of these pets; however. For this reason, they do not keep horserats, as it is quite difficult for Diseased to maintain good breeding lines. They are more likely to use Dead Eaters or slaves as pack animals.

Yakkel (True Death), Priest-King of the Diseased and Co-Founder of the Bonemakers

Yakkel earned his title after being crowned priest-king in the days following the Autumn Overrun. His name holds religious significance to most broods and is a profane curse among his own people: True death greatly unsettles the Diseased, as it means an end to all life, even that of disease. Even those not moved by his name's significance find Yakkel a figure to respect, for the youngest of the priest-kings lives up to his title. Those touched by Yakkel's anger are rarely the same afterward — they seem hollow and listless, void of all energy and will. Those he kills have never returned, not even by the mightiest of resurrection magics.

Despite his power, many critics and dissenters throughout the broods murmur against Yakkel. However, the priest-king has made it widely known that he invites opposition, so long as his naysayers think through their arguments and keep in mind that he has the final word. This sense of openness and justice has made Yakkel very popular among most of his people (if not the elders). Fear, he believes, is the sole preserve of the titans. His duty is to nurture that terror within his people for Chern's greater glory. To make them fear *him* as well would be tantamount to stealing from his lords and the very worst of blasphemies.

Yakkel remains close to his childhood friend and oath-sister, Lyrd of the White Wraiths. The two are the architects of the Bonemakers (see chapter three), a group Yakkel hopes to use to create new sicknesses and to raise undead in defense of the marshes.

Special Qualities: In addition to the special qualities listed in the entry for priest-kings on page 6, Yakkel has the following personal powers:

Immunities (Ex): Yakkel's incredible vitality has enhanced his normal brood traits, making him immune to all manner of death magic; necromancy and destruction are his playthings, and no longer threaten him in any way. Like all other members of the Diseased brood, he is immune to all diseases.

Poisoned Weapons: Yakkel favors particularly deadly poisons on his blade, often selecting from among those listed in *Core Rulebook II* (page 80). Even his "normal" poison is more potent than those of other Diseased — those hit must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or suffer an additional 2d6 damage with each blow.

Sorcerer Spells (†/†/7/7/4): 0—*clean**, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *enumerate**, *ghost sound*, *light*, *mage hand*, *steal sleep*; 1st—*chameleon skin**, *mage armor*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shocking grasp*, *Tenser's floating disk*; 2nd—*assassin's senses**, *dark flames**, *Dolomar's force wave**, *phantom's howl**, *summon swarm*; 3rd—*Dar'tan's shadow bolt**, *haste*, *stinking cloud*; 4th—*minor globe of invulnerability*, *verminplague**.

†A priest-king may cast all cantrips and known 1st-level spells at will.

*Spells listed in *Relics & Rituals*.



Black Pelts

The rats who absorbed large portions of Mesos' essence when the gods ripped apart the Sire of Sorcery became the oldest of the slitheren broods. Potent magic users, the Black Pelts rival the Red Witches for supremacy in the field of spellcasting and number among the most intelligent and cunning of the ratmen. Probably the best organized of the broods, they are great champions of slitheren unity, often calling upon their fellows to unite against the Divine Races. Fortunately, most other broods dislike the Black Pelts and consider them self-important and arrogant. The current coalition in the Mourning Marshes appears to have come about without aid from the Black Pelts, though it is known that representatives of the brood have tried to make contact with the priest-king Yakkel, offering aid.

Warrens

Black Pelts often live aboveground in a variety of building types, depending on local materials. These complex, rambling dwellings reflect their buildings' original purposes in appearance and ornamentation. Black Pelts carve intricate designs and scrolling onto every wood and stone surface, creating arrangements of pools, mirrors, and plants between their buildings, and favoring luxuriously detailed furnishings.

This brood remains most common in south and central Ghelspad. They are unknown in the Mourning Marshes, save for a small delegation from the Black Pelt priest-king.

Castes

This brood follows a great black sorcerer, Sanok Attresiss, who has experienced visions of slitheren unity and power. If he had his way, this priest-king would forge all the ratmen into a single, overwhelming force capable of wreaking terrible destruction on the Divine Races. Luckily, a combination of circumstance and politics has prevented this union from coming to pass.

Lifestyle

The Black Pelts divide themselves into various work groups that train together and support one another. Slaves and juveniles raise the children, who eventually become apprenticed to mages or those of lesser rank. The young do much of the work of the nest.

Jewelry is popular and denotes power in the nest. However, the Black Pelts don't value gems as much as the delicacy of design. A skillfully crafted silver rose denotes more importance than an egg-sized ruby.

Prestige Among the Black Pelts

Unsurprisingly, Black Pelt slitheren gain prestige by expertise in sorcerous spellcasting. Capable sorcerers rise quickly in the nest hierarchy and the best are chosen to serve nest leaders. Sanok Attresiss himself is served by a circle of nine powerful Black Pelt Sorcerers, and it is expected that he will choose his successor from among their number.

Worship

The activities of the Black Pelts are planned on meticulous schedules, with prayers and prohibitions arranged on a complex daily timetable. These schedules vary from nest to nest, and also change from season to season.

Black Pelts regard their patron as the foundation of all logic and thought. As they see themselves as the most intelligent and aware of the slitheren, they remain the obvious choice to rule the entire world.

Part of this perception involves the belief that all things in the world can be understood and calculated, amenable to logical description. As many sages would point out, this is a classic flaw of the intellectual and might be an exploitable weakness.

Black Pelts and Others

Infused with the magical energies of Mesos and a burning desire for vengeance, the Black Pelts think of themselves as the leaders of their kind. However, their relationship with other slitheren is rather poor. Despite their potent magic and effective organization, the Black Pelts often try to control and proselytize. The Red Witches, in particular, find their entire approach fundamentally flawed. Some reports suggest past episodes of conflict between the Pelts and other groups have led to long-term distrust. The priest-king's delegation to the Mourning Marshes has so far met with little success in its attempts to join Yakkel's alliance.

Slaves form a vital role in the society of this brood. Those with craft skills or other useful abilities are treated well, as far as slavery goes. They remain fed, clean, and are beaten rarely. Otherwise, slaves are worked to death, as it is cheaper for the Black Pelts to gain more slaves than to devote enough care to keeping them alive. Additionally, dead or dying slaves can provide useful resources for magical efforts or fodder for animals.

The Black Pelts keep giant rats, wolfrats, and horserats, though they expend no great effort to maintain them. Their prize is constructs, which receive the majority of their attentions.



Brown Gorgers

The rats who fed from the blood and flesh of Gaurak when his great teeth were ripped from their sockets became a breed of obese, always-hungry slitheren. Raiders and pillagers, the Brown Gorgers have spread all across the Scarred Lands, often banding together to attack caravans or travelers.

The ever-ravenous Brown Gorgers are fairly common in the Mourning Marshes, but they have also built many warrens in the Perforated Plains, near the Spires of Gaurak.

Warrens

Gorger warrens appear rather simple, consisting of packed-earth tunnels and lairs. These tunnels are prone to collapse, creating a very confusing assortment of branching corridors, many leading to dead ends. These communities equal those of the Diseased in population but cover a larger, sprawling area. Small clusters of relatives form within them. Priests inhabit the center warrens. Their voices calling out orders reverberate throughout the nest, causing potential confusion for invaders.

Castes

Besides priests, Gorgers do not have fixed castes. When a raid is planned, some will gather to discuss it, then call out through the tunnels. The raiders gather either below or above, then set out in an impromptu manner. Sometimes they do not take care to leave the warrens protected, given the distraction of their constant hunger. Despite this somewhat chaotic organization, the Gorgers nevertheless are lawful creatures who heed the commands of their priests and senior warriors without question. When in battle, the Gorgers' hunger often gets the better of them, however, and they set to devouring their foes with a madness that overwhelms any thoughts of order or discipline.

Lifestyle

Gorgers form gangs, small groups composed of members of equal prestige. Breeding is exclusive to members of a gang, and there are few behavioral differences between sexes. When situations become dire, gangs prey on the young of other, lower-prestige gangs. Such actions always lead to a fight, however, and the attackers might find the tables turned on them, changing the ranking of groups within the

nest. Priests don't concern themselves with these details, beyond mildly discouraging the practice.

Gorgers sometimes shave patterns in their fur during priestly rituals to denote rank or achievement. Battle scars, in particular, are worked into the designs. Some Gorgers have magical tattoos, which maintain their potency even when hidden by fur. A few of the Gorger priests learn the skill of creating such tattoos, but it is fairly rare.

Prestige Among the Gorgers

Prestige is a matter of which group gathers the most food for the priests. This reality creates an elaborate accounting between gangs during raids. In most circumstances raiders feed first, then divide the spoils/bodies, and carry them back. Though arguments remain common, they are rarely deadly and often are settled by priests.

Worship

Most holy rituals conducted within a nest do not require the immediate presence of other Gorgers. Priests call out their chants and prayers for intercession, words that echo through the tunnels.

On holy feast days, which fall on the second or third day of every week, priests demand large amounts of food. Once they have fed, the other Gorgers return to their lairs to feed as well, accompanied by the sung blessings of the priests.

During rituals is actually a poor time to attack Gorgers. The priests are generally sated, and their attendants can bring them to the surface, if needed, to invoke unholy magics. A better moment for attack is while many of the Gorgers are carrying food to the hungry — and thus more vulnerable — priests. This timing would require good reconnaissance, however.

Gorgers are different than other slitheren in that they focus much more on hunger than on their creator. Though they worship Gaurak and pay homage to him, the Gorgers remain more fearful of hunger itself. As such, their worship is less fervent than that of other broods. Simply put, eating is their way of worshipping Gaurak, and their rituals are hunting, raiding, and consuming others.

Gorgers are very nervous around skeletons, which they find terrifying — particularly those of slitheren. Once they finish tearing into a carcass, they carefully deposit the bones a distance from their lair, or in pits



in the farthest corners of their warrens. Needless to say, they fear the undead and avoid the White Wraiths as much as possible.

The Gorgers' priest-king is said to be a voracious, skeletally-thin creature, and therefore the object of great fear on the part of his subjects. He bids them carry out his will, and that of Gaurak, lest they become like him — emaciated and eternally hungry, but never sated. He is said to dwell in the Spires of Gaurak.

Gorgers sometimes bear pendants or jewelry featuring simple stone settings. These stones have no particular power; they simply remind the slitheren of Gaurak's teeth.

Brown Gorgers and Others

Gorgers are particularly dangerous because of their hunger. They *are* hunger. There is no reasoning with them, no ideology behind their attacks or possible mercy — just hunger. The one positive aspect of this fact is that they do not form alliances easily with any other group, or with each other. They avoid other broods and, as noted, fear the White Wraiths and necromancy. Their attacks, though initially well disciplined and planned, often degenerate into orgies of consumption. Gorgers eat everything they can, so they keep neither slaves nor pets.

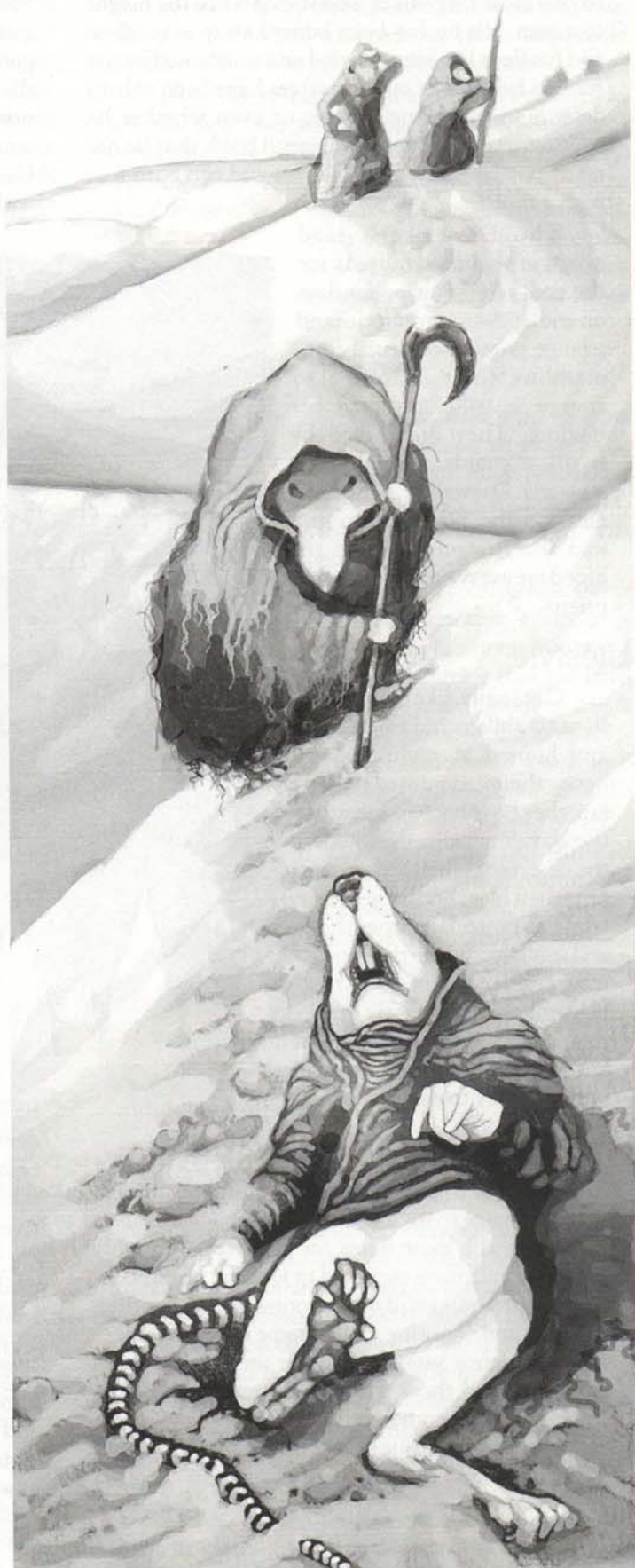
Daywalkers

The strange kin of Thulkas, the Daywalkers were created when the glowing fragments of the Iron God's body were scattered by Corean. Gathering around the glowing embers, the rats became scorched, pale-furred creatures who today wander the deserts and arid lands of Scarn. Their mad priests claim personal knowledge of Thulkas' imminent return, and entire tribes pay tribute to the titan by building great bonfires from anything they capture.

The brood of Thulkas appears rare in the Mourning Marshes, but a contingent is known to dwell there, giving aid to the Diseased and gathering magical items and goods for transport to their comrades in the Ukrudan Desert far to the west.

Warrens

These perverse and wretched slitheren seek out the hottest and most inhospitable of lands to settle. They purposely go about by day beneath the burning sun where they know their master, the Iron God, still dwells and plots his return. They have few, if any, permanent abodes, preferring to camp at night and



resume their senseless wandering in the full light of day.

Castes

The brood's priest-king, Kithlas Danrhol, is said to be a great Daywalker who stands twice the height of a man. His fur has been burned away in patches, and his flesh has been gnarled and toughened by the sun. So far none of our operatives have been able to determine this being's name, or even whether he truly exists at all, but brood legend holds that he has many powers of the lord Thulkas and can burn foes with a touch.

The Daywalker's mad priests are believed to speak for the god, often ranting for days on end, spewing prophecies and strange pronouncements, commanding their followers to engage in wild, irrational behaviors. They are served by fanatical guards, who instantly slay any Daywalker who dares question them. Few do, for it is said that the members of this brood are every bit as mad as their priests.

Lifestyle

Originally, like most ratmen, the Daywalkers hid from the sun and hunted at night. Now, to honor their vanquished patron titan, they have become creatures of the day, nomadically wandering the deserts of Ghelspad and wrapping their bleached bodies in gauzy fabric as protection from the heat and sunlight. While they are led by mad priests, the truth is that all Daywalkers are slightly mad, for their devotion to the Father of Fire has mad them act in a manner totally contrary to their natures.

Prestige Among the Daywalkers

Daywalkers gain power and influence through acts of homage to their patron titan. Brood members who bring the most items for the fires are highly respected and often expected to join the priesthood. As the Daywalkers dance around these bonfires, capering and chanting madly, some fall into trances and experience visions — these are often seen as prophetic, and those who see them sometimes become a nest's temporary leader, commanding its members as they pursue bizarre the bizarre quests that the visions demand. Distinguished warriors are often

asked to become mad priests' guards; their authority is second only to the priests themselves.

Worship

Like their brethren in the desert, the Mourning Marshes' Daywalkers pay homage to their master by gathering wood and other combustible materials into great bonfires that burn all night, symbolic of both the Iron God's burning body and of the sun where he now dwells in exile. In the dank environs of the marshes, maintaining such fires is no easy task, and Daywalker sorcerers often supplement the flames with their own spells. Letting a bonfire go out is considered a terrible omen, and Daywalkers have been known to throw their own bodies onto the flames to prevent this from happening. Captives are also consigned to the bonfires as well — the Daywalkers do not keep slaves.

Daywalkers and Others

Due to their diurnal habits, the Daywalkers do not interact with the other slitheren often. Representatives of other broods sometimes approach them, however, treating with their leaders in the flickering light and heat of the bonfires. The Daywalkers cooperate with other slitheren, as long as their joint ventures result in plunder and captives for sacrifice.

The Daywalkers have proved themselves to be important allies of the Diseased, providing scouting and information on their enemies' daytime activities, when most other ratmen hide in their lairs. Outsiders who traverse the marshes often do so during daylight, hoping to avoid the region's most infamous denizens. Such travelers are frequently shocked when beset by maddened Daywalkers, who attack swiftly, taking prisoners and plunder, and consigning captives to their nightly bonfires.

Captured magic items are gathered and either used by the marsh-dwelling Daywalkers or sent overland by small parties across the continent to the Ukruan Desert, where larger bands of Daywalkers can use them in raids. These items may also be part of some larger plan, for agents of the city-states of Lokil and Hollowfaust have reported that the Daywalkers maintain large caches of magic weapons, guarded by powerful spellcasters and conjured outsiders.



Foamers

The brood of Kadum specializes in aquatic operations and resides on or near the sea. Scholars believe the Foamers were created from rats dwelling on the shores of the Blood Sea when Kadum's lifeblood stained its waters. Today, bands of these deadly creatures plague the Blood Sea and its environs, sometimes traveling on floating hulks made up of dozens of wrecked ships. Some dwell on the eastern coast of the Mourning Marshes, lurking near rivers, ponds, and other aquatic areas. Other broods come to the Foamer camps to trade for their ill-gotten gains. Though these huge and savage slitheren are never found deep in the marshes, their influence remains significant.

Warrens

Foamers are the brood most likely to be encountered at sea, as many of them dwell on drifting masses of wreckage or on hulks stranded on shallows and reefs. Naval actions against them prove difficult, given the constant flow of Foamers to and from these communities.

The giant Foamer priest-king, Garanock Tosin, dwells in a twisted mass of wrecked ships, flotsam, and rock somewhere in the islands east of the Bloodrain Woods. He has the power to determine all decisions between nests. In practice, however, he reserves this power for rare occasions and for invoking a Summons.

A Summons is an announcement ordering all Foamers to target a certain region or group. Sometimes the Summons requires the nests to gather at staging areas so the priest-king can deploy an overwhelming force. Summons go out through the use of magic and messengers, who pass on the priest-king's commands throughout the Blood Sea regions. A Summons can draw together even a great armada of Foamer hulks; priests can magically propel such a fleet across the Blood Sea to descend upon coastal communities or raid merchant shipping.

The priest-king's control of the Foamers he Summons is not absolute. Garanock Tosin must work constantly to keep at bay clan leaders seeking his kingship and must intercede in the frequent disagreements between nests and other groups. On the whole, though, the priest-king — aided, no doubt, by his imposing 10-foot physique — can rouse a massive force.

Castes

Each Foamer nest comprises various warbands. Warbands are ruled by a single family, though "strays"

may join a band from time to time. Nests are grouped loosely into clans, though each nest also includes a few members of other clans as well.

The two levels of politics — clan and warband — can tangle in intricate ways that lead to feuds and disputes solved only through complicated wrangling. The ties of clan and warband can create impossible conflicts of interest for individual Foamers.

These two levels of organization have resulted in lengthy oral laws and arrangements, dealing especially with the division of plunder and territory. Territorial divisions, for instance, can vary due to weather, season, or the strength of a particular clan.

Even other broods find the particulars of Foamer territory agreements and plunder tithes inscrutable.

Lifestyle

Females, who tend to grow larger than males, typically focus on clan politics. Males, including the priest-king, concern themselves with raids and relations between nests.

Foamers of both genders wear treasures and other symbols of their accomplishments. Rings and bracelets — items that are hard to remove and unlikely to catch on equipment — are preferred. They tie some small jewels into tufts of their black fur as additional ornamentation.

Foamers practice limited scarification. The forearms and face bear small scars, causing the fur to lie in patterns that denote rank and accomplishment, as well as clan ties. These slitheren even work battle scars into the patterns. It is easy to mistake these artificial scars for natural ones,

without careful examination.

Prestige Among the Foamers

The structure of Foamer society is a simple pecking order, with age and experience granting power. Though the albinos often hold the highest positions, they are also frequently slain in battles for domination. Young Foamers fight each other for the attention and admiration of their elders, who treat them with a relaxed and surprisingly gentle hand. The young stay close to their families, as other adults have little compunction against killing them. These savage slitheren rarely keep slaves, and even then only as a handy food source.

The power of a Foamer group — be it warband, nest, or clan — reflects the status of its leader. A



strong leader dominates rivals and inspires loyalty. A particularly powerful individual with imposing generals under him can command an entire nest.

Worship

The worship of Kadum is the exultation in one's bestial nature. Foamers express their devotion through savagery and mayhem. Still, within each furry breast of this brood beats a heart filled with fear. Kadum is the great beast, and his savagery knows no friends.

The Foamers seek to channel the titan's essence by ritual. They adopt his identity, crippling and torturing sacrifices in his name so that screams ring out, sweet prayers to the bloody sea. Rending enemies and feeding the waters with their blood repays the Divine Races for the suffering Kadum endured at their hands. Particularly frenzied worshippers sometimes fling themselves into the Blood Sea as well, there to be consumed by ferocious marine creatures. Foamers who manage to survive this ordeal are considered touched by the hand of Kadum, and often find themselves invited to join the priesthood or treated as prophets.

Dawn and dusk, when the skies suffuse as if with blood, remain holy for the Foamers. Blood must be spilled in the water at these times, though not always in great amounts. If the slitheren have no sacrifices, a small offering of blood from a slave suffices. In the absence of slaves, the Foamers must offer their own blood.

Foamers and Others

Despite their lust for slaughter and war, the Foamers do not nurse a passionate hatred of the Divine Races. These peoples, after all, supply the brood with essential resources. Were it in their power to eliminate all the Divine Races from the world, the

Foamers would feel reluctant to do it. But, as the Divine Races remain the official enemy, Foamers quite enthusiastically torture and pillage them.

The brood's barbaric and violent culture allows little room for nurturing other creatures, but Foamers occasionally keep giant rats as food and guard animals. As noted, slaves are sometimes seized from among the Divine Races, but the rarely survive long.

These ratmen form solid ties with the other slitheren, though they keep other broods at a distance. Foamers prefer to launch their raids and fight their wars by themselves, though they happily accept equipment and supplies from other slitheren. Other broods respect the Foamers for their bestial natures and devotion to the titans, but remain terrified of their berserk rages and unpredictability.

The Red Witches and Diseased are the Foamers' biggest trading partners, with the Forge Crawlers running a close third. Trading takes place on the coast, where the Foamers maintain small encampments, even though they prefer life on their floating Blood Sea hulks.

Other broods offer valuable resources to the Foamers. Red Witches have subtle connections in human communities, providing potent magic, horserats, and slaves as commodities. The Diseased are also an important source of slaves and sometimes trade Dead Eaters. The Foamers offer treasure in large amounts to both groups. The Red Witches find treasure useful for bribing the Divine Races, and the Diseased enjoy the occasional magic item. Finally, the Forge Crawlers trade valuable equipment for plundered books. If the Foamers can capture a knowledgeable slave, they can get a great price from this brood.



Forge Crawlers

Divided into two factions, the pothecaries and mechanics, the Forge Crawlers are believed to descend from rats who crept into Golthagga's workshop and felt its heat or, worse, fell into the molten metal of the forge itself. The pothecaries master the art of poison, while the mechanics, in twisted imitation of the Shaper, seek to create dangerous constructs and mechanical devices, often with devastating results.

A small but potent force in the Mourning Marshes, the Forge Crawlers appear most common in the Haggard Hills and nearby wilderness areas. Though enjoying some security from the actions of the Divine Races due to their remote habitat, they are well positioned to raid, as well keep in contact with the other broods.

Warrens

Large nests of pothecaries occupy the south of the Mourning Marshes, where they can access the Sorporatra Swamp. The mechanics prefer to dwell in the north, where they can raid — or trade — for materials from Vesh. Mechanics divide themselves into diverse workshops rather than the centralized nests common to pothecaries and other slitheren.

Castes

As Forge Crawlers become more powerful and skilled, they must choose one of two paths. Some focus on practical matters, becoming warriors and leaders of their workshop or nest. Others devote themselves to the mystery of Golthagga, and the essential nature of their brood. These slitheren become priests and rulers, though only larger groups have the resources to support them.

The current priest-king, Tessa'kidi, is a mechanic. The leadership of the brood seems to switch back and forth regularly between its two factions.

Lifestyle

Gender roles do not seem strongly distinct among the followers of Golthagga. Children are generally ignored once they can fend for themselves, and they eventually migrate to the activities of the adults. Children perform menial labor and work hard to join a particular workshop or work group within a nest. In time, the young receive training in the ways of the Forge Crawlers.

Prestige Among the Forge Crawlers

The relationships within a workshop or nest can be quite complex. Forge Crawlers are not prone to overt or ritualized social order. Friendships, popularity, skills, and power exist on an informal, unspoken level. Generally speaking, a pothecary increases in status by contributing the most — and the most useful — poisons, potions, and alchemical mixtures to the nest. Mechanics, likewise, gain higher station based on the success of the "trial runs" of their latest inventions.

In nests, work groups of like-minded individuals or families create contrasting political divisions. Arguments over raids, trade, allocation of resources, and other slitheren cause tensions, sometimes leading to the dissolution of a nest or workshop.

Worship

Forge Crawlers worship Golthagga in surprisingly casual ways. They celebrate ceremonies of adulthood — when slitheren are formally embraced into workshops or groups — with huge informal parties. For half a day families congregate, share food and drink, and trade tall tales. The attendant priest

The Forge Crawler Schism

In the old times, many moons and frosts ago, the scions of the Forger lived within a single foundry and were to all purposes one people. They took in equal measure the scattered offerings of Golthagga and made of them creations worthy of his praise. With each generation did both the number and greatness of the Forger's children grow, until one night, under the watch of a gray-faced moon, they set about remaking their home to match their brood's new grandeur.

It took but a few nights for the gifted of the Shaper to remake the land to their whimsy. The new warren was a grand affair, mighty as a mountain, whose roots sank deep into the black soil and whose summit reached high into the black sky. Those who settled below took the offerings of buried treasures born of the ground and destined to stay within its bowels. Those that settled Above took the offerings of those goods born of the same ground, but destined to reach toward the sky. In such a way were born the first Erudites of Metal and Blade, and the first Erudites of Poison and Thorn. Today we know them as mechanics and pothecaries.

— From *The Nature of the Slitheren*, a single copy of which exists in the Library at Lokil

makes a few remarkably relaxed speeches and prayers to the great Forge-Titan.

Whispered prayers accompany births; death is mourned with a song of sorrow, bowed heads, and a wish for the spirit of the departed to fly back to the furnace of Golthagga to be hammered into a new form.

Despite appearances, their creator remains constantly on the Forge Crawlers' minds. Golthagga is an icon to these slitheren, the ideal to which they all strive. They believe he created the bones of the world, built the arch of the heavens, and laid in natural laws so everything else could form. He did not act out of love or compassion, but because such things were elegant, created to display perfection of form.

To this end, the pothecaries and mechanics hold the concept of perfect creation as their highest ideal. A clever poison, a finely-built machine — implicit in all the Forge Crawlers' creations are worship of the rules and perfection that Golthagga brought into being. This isn't necessarily a conscious consideration, but the value of crafting and work ethic remains intimately tied to the Forge Crawlers' worship of their patron titan, their view of the world, and their understanding of themselves.

Forge Crawlers and Others

The two factions of this brood treat each other with only a touch more amicability than they would other slitheren. Each group sees flaws in the way the other follows Golthagga.

Pothecaries see alchemy and combinations of substance as a more essential, more subtle, and truer examination of the perfection of Golthagga. Males are the pothecary leaders, with females more involved in military action.

Mechanicians consider alchemy to be sloppy mucking about. Golthagga is symbolized by metal, the material he used to forge so many of his creations. Obviously, metal and constructs ideally reflect his work. Females, symbols of creation and the enduring strength of metal, lead the mechanics.

The Forge Crawlers have extensive trade ties with other broods. They seem less inclined to mount raids, relying on the acquisitions of more aggressive slitheren.

Forge Crawlers produce many potions and items highly prized by other broods. Therefore, other slitheren go to great lengths to procure the slaves and goods that Forge Crawlers want. Relations are best with the Red Witches and the Foamers.

This brood prizes magical tomes quite highly. This interest has led to some rather unlikely raids on libraries and transports of magerworks. The Foamers, for example, once targeted a ship containing rare books, as well as cattle, gems, and other items. Human spectators were puzzled to discover only the books and a few cattle missing from the wreckage.

Forge Crawlers seem curious about the affairs of the Divine Races, mainly in areas that concern their work. Beyond tomes, they also like stories and pay highly for slaves with valuable experience. A learned



slave among the Forge Crawlers might actually enjoy a comfortable, if limited, existence — compared, at least, to the treatment of slaves elsewhere.

Members of this brood own giant rats and wolfrats, and they prize horserats — mainly for their use in transporting personnel and goods.



Red Witches

Powerful spellcasters created by feeding from the flesh of Mormo when she was dismembered, the Red Witches are among the most skilled and insidious of the broods. Ruled by the mysterious Witch-Queen, they dedicate themselves to the return of Mormo and the downfall of the Divine Races.

Red Witches are thankfully rare in the Mourning Marshes — their strength lies in the Hornsaw Forest, where they were first transformed by the flesh of Mormo. Here, the Witch-Queen Tyrasi Kalat is said to reside in a vast cave complex filled with hallucinatory vapors. Most recorded encounters near Vesh take place along the southern edge of the marshes, bordering the Sorporatra Swamp.

The Warrens

The warrens of Red Witches are tangled mazes of tunnels and pits. Supposedly, the turnings and weaving of the tunnels correspond to arcane secrets and sigils. The most accessible lairs contain equipment and food.

Simple communal living spaces contain slaves, who care for the young, prepare food, and — with minimal supervision — hunt for provisions. Undead often assist or direct them.

For a sample Red Witch warren description and maps, see “Coven of the Celestial Urn” in Chapter 4.

Castes

A coven, led by an archmagi, consists of up to two dozen lesser male mages and attendant slaves and undead. In addition, lesser females of other broods may round out the coven to help build up the nest's population of workers.

Red Witches use slaves to varying degrees. Some nests rely instead on undead, particularly zombies and skeletons (the brood prefers not to employ ethereal undead). Other covens prefer using ensorcelled humans or elves to do their bidding.

Only the archmagi and their maturing daughters may create undead among the Red Witches.

Lifestyle

Males of this brood sleep in communal quarters and are responsible for training male young once they can speak. The females are raised separately, under the care of specially prepared slaves and undead. They remain under the direct tutelage of their mothers. Only the strongest and most powerful of the females survive to maturity.

Prestige Among the Red Witches

Mature daughters assist their mother until they are suitably experienced, a time of dangerous tension in the lairs. At this point, the mother sends her daughter out with a selection of males, slaves, and undead to establish a new lair.

Males particularly gifted with the ability to build traps and tunnels receive privileges, and are potentially more likely to get the opportunity to mate with the arch-magi. Such competition often causes tensions within the coven.

Likely the best time to attack a coven is when the arch-magi is near to giving birth, with no daughters to aid her. Given that they seem to give birth at least once a year and have numerous daughters looking to establish their worth, it is unclear how often this opportunity arises.

Worship

The intricate rituals of the Red Witches do not fit a simple calendar. Rather, inspirations and visions indicate what events they must worship. Without direct information from a coven, there is little chance of timing an attack to occur during a ritual. Particularly powerful divination, on the other hand, could render them vulnerable.

Of special note, they frequently have ecstatic orgies under the full light of the Nameless Orb. These might serve as good times to attack; though attackers must contend with the undead surrounding such festivities.

The appearance of the Red Witches depends on family lines. Several covens, particularly those close to the Blood Sea, ornament themselves by extensive tattooing. Others utilize shaved patterns, or fetishes tied into their fur. The covens of the Hornsaw Forest, especially those closest to the Witch-Queen, utilize ritualistic scarification.

In general, the Red Witches ornament themselves as a reflection of their worship, a style that shifts over the year in accordance with their faith. During the fall, jagged shaved patterns and fetishes of brass, bronze, or topaz are common. Rituals focus on burning, smoke, and incense, as well as sacrifice. During the winter, they may bleach tips of fur, or ornament themselves with silver and quartz. Rituals often involve bleached skulls.

The spring features "rain" patterns shaved into the fur, with emerald and brass jewelry. Rituals involve mating, feasting, and relatively quiet contemplations. Most extensive raids take place in spring. The summer brings geometric shaved patterns and jewelry made of silver and set with rubies. Rituals feature blood and incense.

Red Witches will not harm snakes or snake-like beings, considering it sacrilege. They consider gold

an unlucky metal and fear traveling on open roads under the full Belsameth moon. Red Witches seem inordinately interested in mating with members of the Divine Races, possibly to spread their nature through half-slitheren.

The faith of the Red Witches is concerned with the revealed mysteries of Mormo. They see life as a struggle for domination and power. Mormo, even in her current dismembered state, remains the ultimate queen of their kind, and even the awesomely powerful Witch-Queen is only a pale reflection of the Serpent Mother.

Red Witches and Others

Red Witches willingly coordinate with the Diseased; such alliances have been responsible for terrible attacks on Vesh communities. Red Witches also mount subtle raids on trade routes and villages, gaining goods and slaves valuable to other broods. In addition, they produce valuable commodities, such as undead and maulers (see monster appendix).

Red Witches look down on other slitheren. The Diseased have extremely poor hygiene, by Red Witch standards, and the others are not much better. They do admire the organization of the Diseased, though see it as potentially limiting.

The Brown Gorgers they admire for their purity. They embrace their titanic roots to a degree few others match, in a way that the Red Witches find deserving of respect.

The Black Pelts are a source of great conflict. The Red Witches prefer deception and a dispersed "cell" structure, while the Black Pelts want to unify all the broods æ under their leadership. Though the two subraces cooperate on occasion, tensions often cause long feuds.

The other groups, such as the Foamers and Forge Crawlers, are seen as useful resources at best.

Being culturally diverse, some Red Witch covens deviate far from the others. For example, some covens act as merchants, using a network of lower-ranked members to move goods, exchange services, and act as loose spy chains. The Tarspring Wash covens, which have a general fondness for raising animals, raise the best horserats in the Mourning Marshes. High-quality horserats are traded to the Forge Crawlers or the Black Pelts.



Stalkers

Solitary hunters known as the Stalkers descend from rats who fed on the blood and flesh of Hrinruuk's body as it rampaged over the land in search of its severed head. Humans encounter these slitheren more often than other broods, due to the Stalkers' fondness for cities. The wicked and amoral sometimes employ them as assassins, spies, and thieves.

Warrens

A solitary and independent brood, Stalkers are known to dwell in the marshes, carrying out missions on behalf of the Bonemakers and the Diseased. They appear to have no real organization here, but operate independently. They also form no permanent warrens — they don't stay in one place long enough to build them, nor do they prefer the communal life of the nest.

Castes

Although it is assumed that the Stalkers have a priest-king like the other broods, no evidence of such an individual has been discovered. They lack the organization and interest to form traditional slitheren castes.

Lifestyle

The Stalkers clothe their dark gray furred bodies in hooded cloaks. They take pride in the honing of their preferred weapons — throwing knives,

daggers, and missile weapons — an in caring for their pack animals.

Prestige Among the Stalkers

Stalkers are known to advance in status by hunting down and slaying one who has killed a Stalker. Proving oneself against such a worthy foe appears to be a hotly desired opportunity for members this brood.

Worship

Not terribly devout, the Stalkers have distanced themselves from their creator more than any other brood. Many feel they are alone in the world, since Hrinruuk is dead (or at least irrevocably dismembered), so they worship no god at all. Others venerate the memory of Hrinruuk and yearn for his return, but stoically believe he never will. A few have turned to the worship of Belsameth — some of these may be found in the employ of the Cult of Ancients.

Stalkers and Others

In the Mourning Marshes, the Stalkers operate much as they do in cities — as hired killers, agents, and spies for their fellow slitheren (and even some fell humans). They don't feel a great deal of loyalty to other ratmen, viewing the broods as just another source of income and prestige. A Stalker assassin or thief is a potent weapon, however, and their participation in an enterprise on behalf of the Diseased or the White Wraiths makes a mission far more likely to succeed.



Storm Chasers

Lethene, the Dame of Storms, like her sister titan Gulaben, was never slain or dismembered. Instead, she was banished to a distant, chaotic dimension, where presumably she could thrive in a realm that suited her nature. After her exile, however, Lethene's fell influence manifested itself in the bodies of rats whom her storms had injured. They became things of pure chaotic energy, wild-haired and wild-eyed, committed to duplicating their mistress' acts of angry, naturalistic destruction.

A bizarre brood crackling with pure elemental energy, the Storm Chasers are most common in mountainous regions. One may encounter them in the Mourning Marshes, as well.

Warrens

Storm Chasers dwell in rocky escarpments or tall constructions of wood and mud, carefully fireproofed. Congregating on isolated summits in shimmering hordes, even the other slitheren seem a touch nervous about them.

Castes

The priests lead Storm Chaser communities, though smaller bands follow the command of loyal warriors. The priest-king, Mansadi Vakel, sets a perfect example of chaotic wrath for her people, wielding her elemental might in perpetual prayer and combat.

Lifestyle

Socially, the Storm Chasers are organized along religious and martial lines. Mating takes place in strict accordance with the leaders' calculations, using astrological observations and other factors to bring new elements of Lethene into being. The young and infirm raise children, who are taught the precepts of their faith at communal gatherings.

When the Storm Chasers gather, the cumulative discharge of their auras can create a good deal of heat. The air fills with the sharp tang of storms, and wind blows toward them. This phenomenon can serve as a warning of imminent attack.

Prestige Among the Storm Chasers

Advancement and influence among the Storm Chasers derives from martial excellence, spellcasting and through the destruction of divine races. Though priests usually lead nests, they often seek out the advice of accomplished warriors. Ordinary brood members are expected to obey the commands of the priests and war chiefs without question.

Worship

Every day and hour is holy to these slitheren. Meals are accompanied by prayers and songs to the winds that call to Lethene, wherever she may be.



Combat gives them a chance to worship more fully, becoming her terrifying, caustic wind, and terrorizing those who desecrated her. Seeing themselves as part of her chaos, the Storm Chasers do not fear death. Some openly welcome it, if it helps bring about the destruction of many enemies.

The Storm Chasers hate the Divine Races with a purity few other broods match. Though their religion and prayers speak of emulating Lethene and exploring the world's airy reaches, in practice they seek only to bring death.

Storm Chasers and Others

The vehemence of their faith keeps the Storm Chasers isolated. Other broods have limited trade with them, for only when the Storm Chasers have a particular need for an item do they initiate any contact.

Cooperative ventures remain similarly limited. The Storm Chasers have little patience for those unwilling to follow their inspired direction. Still, when they announce to other broods their specific plans to attack the Divine Races, the others often coordinate secondary attacks, taking advantage of the ensuing chaos and destruction.

The Storm Chasers have no dealings with the Foamers, due mostly to the Chasers' dislike of water and the Foamers' maritime habits. The Storm Chasers seem generally dismissive of those keeping slaves, considering the practice just one more weakness of the other broods.

Storm Chasers do not keep animals, though stories among the slitheren tell of some bands traveling with storm kin: elemental nature spirits capable of vast destruction. Luckily, this is a myth.



Stricken

When Gormoth the Writhing Lord was chopped asunder by Chardun and Vangal, his blood soaked the land and twisted its rats into horrific parodies of their creator. These creatures are probably the most frightening of the broods — warped monstrosities whose bodies sprout extra limbs, tails, and even heads. These horrible creatures can also detach parts of themselves and send them into combat. Fortunately, the Stricken all seem mad — quite incapable of much collective action.

These beings are horrid, even by slitheren standards. Every action they take reflects suffering, furthers pain, and seeks to divide.

Warrens

The warrens of the Stricken reflect their chaotic nature: underground tunnels carved haphazardly into native stone and earth. This brood has grown particularly common in the southeast corner of the Mourning Marshes — some suggest they settled there with the help of Foamers. Though rare outside the swamp, Stricken sightings have been reported as far away as Darakeene on the continent's western shore.

Castes

The organization of the Stricken proves somewhat confusing to the outside observer. The brood follows few overt rules, traditions, or observable social stratification. Children and adults, males and females, all dwell in no particular arrangement. Children are raised by whoever is near, and these slitheren have no concept of individual property. The Stricken's priest-king, Baidaros, is known as much for his mastery of the clawer's art (see Clawer prestige class, chapter five) as for his rulership and rank within his brood.

Groups of Stricken gather and head out on raids with no fixed schedule, and all activities are fairly informal. One sees a great deal of rough interpersonal behavior among this brood; clawings, duels, and other acts of aggression erupt with little warning. Then, just as capriciously, the violence stops.

Mating also seems haphazard. Sometimes a group of males will rape a female, or a group may simply start mating in the midst of other activities. Unlike some broods, female Stricken are actually smaller than males, making unwanted advances hard to put off.

The unusual part of all this chaotic activity is the Stricken's ability to organize spontaneously. When tunnels threaten to collapse, food stores grow low, or a nest falls under attack, the Stricken suddenly begin working together in a coherent and productive fashion.

This organization makes the Stricken deadly in combat. If a group of Stricken is ambushed, they quickly take stock of the situation and drop into formation. While not immune to surprise, they behave with great control and skill, despite no observable training or discipline. This order can vanish just as quickly as it appears, with the Stricken returning to their original aimless activities.

Lifestyle

The Stricken do not communicate verbally under most circumstances. Subtle body language seems sufficient for the adults in a universal state of rapture (see "Worship"). This is not to suggest that they never talk, but they reserve speech reserved for occasions when they must communicate complex information quickly. Even then, they use the fewest words.

For example, a Stricken that spies three humans over the next ridge may communicate this fact by extending three fingers, speaking the word "men," and pointing to the ridge. For simplest communication, they use body language alone.

Children elicit the most communication, having stories and litanies whispered to them from birth. Where children gather, one can hear an unusual, pervasive murmur of adults praying in behalf of their young.

Children are regularly beaten and punished. Unorthodox behavior, which is a diverse and poorly defined matter, is punished by shunning, leaving the child somewhere to be alone and ignored. If the child does not wait to be retrieved and wanders off or back to the group, the child is trussed up and left for a much longer period.

Prestige Among the Stricken

Experienced warriors receive considerable respect and influence in the form of food shares and mating frequency. Others generally just go along with actions initiated by the warrior leaders. Their example remains haphazard, however. Even when coherent, leaders simply act with greater care, rather than overtly calling the shots.



Priests, likewise, do not have a highly visible leadership role. Unlike many other broods, albinos do not receive any observable preferential treatment among the Stricken. With age and experience, they follow a more mystical path, performing divine magic from the lessons of pain.

All Stricken are rapt worshippers of suffering. The path of the warrior and path of the priest differ only in the expression of that worship.

Worship

The Stricken have a poorly articulated, tainted understanding of development. They see life as inherent pain and suffering. Understanding and embracing these qualities improves their chances of gaining power, they believe. Beings survive and succeed by gaining more power than those around them, and carrying on that power over generations. As they took in Gormoth's flesh and blood to become highly developed beings, they consume the flesh and blood of others to add to their perfection.

The Stricken believe that cycles of life include division and union. When, long ago, the titan Mormo poisoned her brother, Gormoth, she gave his descendants a gift: a revelation of the central nature of all existence. To embrace this gift requires pain, caused by ripping away illusion and deception and embracing ugly reality.

Unlike other slitheren, these ratmen don't seek to bring their patron back. To them, Gormoth's division and monumental pain — and the fact that the gods perceive this a victory — is a great joke on the gods. Rather than being defeated, Gormoth, divided and writhing, has realized a heavenly and perfect state.

The goal of the Stricken is to achieve great power, transcend their pain and the suffering of others, and develop into greater beings. When they accomplish this aim, they will find Gormoth and join with him, uniting in a state of perfect pain. The Stricken believe that once united, Gormoth will expand infinitely, bringing suffering and absorbing the entire world into his corrosive embrace.

If they were prone to discourse, they would describe other races as weak, hiding from the reality of the pain-filled world and futilely wishing things were otherwise. Other races succeed despite their

flawed perceptions, but the Stricken's insight makes them far superior.

Every action of the Stricken is a prayer to their creator, and they spend their days in a euphoric state of rapture. True to their uncommunicative nature, adults speak no prayers or songs, but function in a haze of pain and joy. The violence that breaks out, as well as their expressions of hunger or lust, takes place on a basic instinctual level, little affected by contemplation.

When circumstances demand, their rapture focuses into organized action. Their contemplations help suppress individuality and forge a common spirit, which allows them to organize when needed.

The Stricken have no rituals, as others understand them. They are constantly in prayer, and they share their contemplations for specific events. Birth, death, the first killing and absorption, and achieving elder status all are occasions to gather and share a silent consideration.

Stricken and Others

The insular culture of the Stricken resists contact with the other slitheren broods. There are occasional group raids, choreographed carefully by Red Witches. Limited trade occurs, but the main interactions between Stricken and other broods involve territorial disputes. Unless other broods have significant advantage, they generally back down.

This brood sees all others, including Divine Races and other slitheren, as outsiders to their worship, and as potential material toward their rise to dolorous perfection.

The Stricken keep giant rats, wolfrats, and horserats as pets and occasional food sources (because of this, the Red Witches sell horserats to the Stricken only at high prices). The Stricken also experiment with their pets, a practice that has led to improvements of these lines that the other broods cannot match. Thus the Stricken often have animals with unusual qualities — and unpleasant drawbacks. Almost all are sterile. The Stricken may use these animals, but just as frequently release them into the wild to spread holy suffering throughout the marshes. Finding a concentration of such animals can be a rough indication of a Stricken nest nearby.

Unseeing

Members of Golthain's brood are perhaps the most enigmatic and mysterious of the slitheren. Our observations are limited, for they are secretive in the extreme and apparently play no part in Yakkel's alliance of the Mourning Marshes' ratmen.

Unlike other slitheren, the Unseeing were not created by feeding upon titan flesh or through exposure to the energies of the defeated titans. Golthain, commonly called the weakling of the titans, is best known for being mutilated and blinded by his fellows for daring to oppose the destruction of mortals. After his punishment, the blind titan sought out creatures of the wild to act as his eyes and ears. Among these were common woodland rats. Infused by Golthain's will, they grew more intelligent and cunning than their fellows, gaining wisdom and insight even as they lost other senses. With the defeat of the titans, they developed true sentience and were transformed into the creatures we know today.

As their name implies, the Unseeing are blind, perceiving the world through their other heightened senses. They can sense the presence of living things and read their nature empathically. Their kinship with the Faceless One created an aura of peace and repose, and the Unseeing can actually prevent foes from taking violent action against them.

Warrens

Unseeing dwell in small conclaves in isolated places — mountains, forests, deserts. They spend much of their time in contemplation and study, practicing the sorcerous and druidic arts. Many maintain contact with the outside world through links with creatures in surrounding lands, and a conclave always responds quickly when hostile forces approach. Their nonviolence is not absolute, however — an Unseeing warband is as dangerous as those of other slitheren.

Castes

Information about the brood's nature and goals is hard to come by. Like the other broods, the Unseeing follow a priest-king. Our information suggests that this individual, Annakis Li'shongki, is a philosopher-king schooled in the arts of healing rather than the creation of disease and mayhem. How this being perceives the outside world and the Divine Races

remains uncertain, for the Unseeing believe the gods betrayed Golthain as surely as did the titans.

Lifestyle

The Unseeing are quite different from other broods. They rarely if ever take offensive action against other races, preferring instead to lurk in their conclaves and study the ways of nature. If attacked, the Unseeing will defend themselves vigorously, but prefer to avoid conflict if at all possible. Their monks are highly influential, but our best information suggests that they lead primarily by example and rarely issue outright commands.

Prestige Among the Unseeing

As with all other things regarding the Unseeing, little is known of their social structure. Monks and druidic spellcasters with a great knowledge of nature or who have had visions of the brood's patron gain considerable respect within a conclave, as do skilled fighters who have defended their home. Warriors who can incapacitate foes without killing them are given special status, for they demonstrate the principals of Golthain best of all.

Worship

The Unseeing continue to revere the memory of Golthain, but they acknowledge that, unlike the other titans, he is truly slain and cannot return. This fuels a certain stoicism in their outlook. They believe that one life is all a ratman receives; at death he descends into unseeing, unknowing darkness to join Golthain in oblivion.

Some Unseeing are believed to worship Denev, the sole remaining titan, who slumbers beneath the land of Scarn. These individuals, with their benevolent — or at least non-hostile — natures, act as druids, defending wilderness areas and sacred groves. Some incarnates claim to have had dealings with these Denev-worshipping slitheren, but our own informants have never met one.

The Unseeing and Others

The lot of the Unseeing is probably the worst of any race of ratmen. Hated by their fellow slitheren and by the world at large, they find themselves forced to live in hiding, seeking out the uncritical forces of nature and the gentle souls of beasts for companionship and enlightenment. No Unseeing are known to

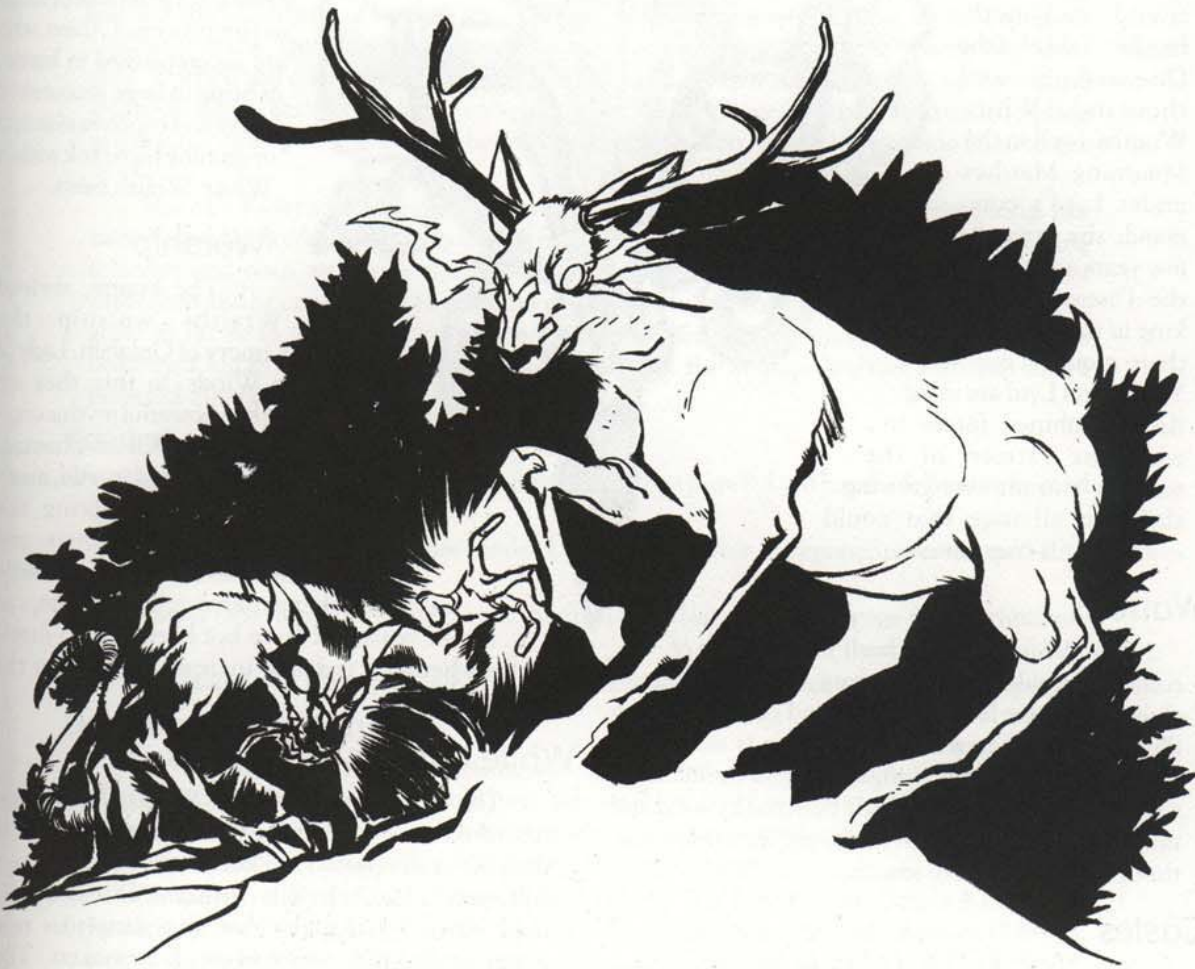


dwell in the Mourning Marshes — small enclaves are said to exist in the Ganjus, the Hornsaw Forest, the Kelder Mountains, and possibly in the unsettled regions of Darakeene, but these secretive creatures have managed to elude nearly all attempts at study and observation.

On occasion, the more forward-thinking broods such as the Black Pelts have approached the Unseeing, hoping to draw them closer to slitheren society. These efforts have universally met with failure, as have attempts by more violent broods such as the

Foamers and the Diseased, to carry out wholesale genocide against the Unseeing. The members of this brood are widely considered “traitors” and “aberrations” — an odd moniker, considering the aberrance of the entire slitheren species.

Although the Unseeing act with hostility to other broods, this does not mean they feel any kinship toward the Divine Races, whom they blame for their master’s destruction.



White Wraiths

The strangest of the broods, the White Wraiths resemble animate slitheren skeletons covered in transparent flesh. The touch of Gulaben, Lady of the Winds, is said to have torn the flesh from the bones of rats, her angry breath replacing it with invisible skin, muscle, and organs, crafted of the air itself. Worshipers of both the titaness and a mysterious "Great Shaman," the Wraiths seek to defeat and destroy the Divine Races. They also work to find their creator's prison, so they can free her to once more unleash her rage upon the land.

Their priest-king, Lanarkais Stakken, dwells somewhere in the wilderness near Adurn's Tear. No one knows much about this creature, save that he granted permission for his most skilled strategos, Lyrd Cathlis, to forge a new slitheren necromantic organization called the Bonemakers (see chapter three) with her friend and oath-brother, Yakkel of the Diseased. Several thousand White Wraiths dwell in the Mourning Marshes under Lyrd's command; she arrived a few years ago to assist the Diseased's priest-king in the founding of their group. Together, Yakkel and Lyrd are using their combined forces to weld the ratmen of the marshes into an ever-growing slitheren alliance that could evolve into a true nation.

Warrens

The White Wraiths dwell in a number of communities deep in the swamp, magically raised above the water level, fortified, and concealed with illusion. The strategos' own dwelling is said to resemble a crag of granite rising from out of the marshes, wreathed in fog and constantly buffeted by wind and rain. None of our operatives has yet seen this place, though we continue to search.

Castes

Several settlements are devoted exclusively to the worship of Gulaben and the Great Shaman (see below); here dwell the brood's oracles, as well as the priestly class of shamans, known as the Wind-Speakers.

These temple complexes, disguised as hills or even dismal swamplands, contain libraries with numerous volumes written in the crabbed slitheren script developed by the Wraiths themselves. They also hold armories stocked with potent magical weapons and circular open-air temples, where the Wind-Speakers sacrifice captives and conjure storms.

Lifestyle

Savage and violent, the Wraiths nonetheless remain the most philosophical and sophisticated of the slitheren, spending much time in arcane studies, and even producing volumes of history and science — a phenomenon all but unknown among other ratmen.

Prestige Among the White Wraiths

Priests who display especially detailed knowledge of Gulaben and her history are sought out for advice by their fellows, gaining considerable prestige in the process. Others who are accomplished in battle, or bring in large amounts of booty and captives also end up gaining high rank within White Wraith nests.

Worship

The bizarre, skeletal Wraiths worship the memory of Gulaben, Lady of the Winds. In this, they are aided by a powerful mythic creature called the Great Shaman. The two are revered in wild, magical ceremonies involving the conjuration of winds, storms, and lightning. We have detected a change in the weather patterns over the swamps in recent years, but have not been able to determine whether it is due to increased activity by the Wraiths.

White Wraiths and Others

The other broods hold the Wraiths in superstitious dread — especially the Brown Gorgers, who fear their skeletal appearance. Recently, the Wraiths have cultivated close relations with the Diseased, and their alliance has given rise to a dangerous new organization, the necromantic Bonemakers. The Wraiths maintain a certain rivalry with the Storm Chasers, as both share a similar patron and consider themselves masters of the elements.



The Divine Races fear the Wraiths more than most broods, both for their ghastly appearance and their magical powers. This is fine with the Wraiths, who use this fear against their enemies, striking quickly with terrifying magic, capturing plunder and prisoners, then vanishing — again with the aid of spells.

White Wraiths keep slaves, but usually not for long, subjecting them to magical alteration and experimentation with a cold, scholarly cruelty. Those who survive the Wraiths' attentions should not be considered lucky — most then find themselves handed over to the Diseased for infection or to the Foamers to serve as food.

Lyrd Cathlis, Frostwind Sky Killer and Co-Founder of the Bonemakers

This skilled war leader of the White Wraith brood, Lyrd Cathlis, is a cavalier with few equals even among our ranks. She and her skeletal mount, Da'tankar, travel the battlefield like a reaper harvesting our warriors' souls. The touch of her silver-blue blade severs metal as easily as sinew and bone, and her horse hovers 5 feet from the ground, giving her a great vantage in combat. Only two champions have fought her and lived. The first was Champion Barconius of Mithril, who repelled her forces on the Kelder Steppes, and the second was Commander Leigh of the Hornswythe Vigil, who lost an arm before the duel was done. If you see her, escape if you can. As she rarely strays far from a sizable raiding party, knowledge of her location is a far more useful thing than a report of your death.

Left an orphan following the disastrous Blood Monsoon storms of 112 AV, Lyrd became the adopted child and protégé of the great White Wraith sage Errestikon. From him she learned the rudiments of sorcery and gained a profound sense of purpose by following his teachings of the "quest for perfection." For her that perfection lay in the honing of martial skill. Warfare and combat represented the merging of thought and action, the unity of mind and body, which became her key to enlightenment. When Errestikon died, Lyrd took his place as a teacher among her brood, and her peerless abilities soon helped her become its strategos as well.

The Sky Killer's loyalties are many. Not only does she answer to her priest-king, her raiders, and her students, but also her oath-brother Yakkel. The White Wraiths' priest-king tolerates and even welcomes this relationship, for his own mentor was a close friend of Errestikon and he considers Lyrd and Yakkel to be "oath-cousins," after a fashion. He has even gone so far as to dispatch Lyrd to the Mourning Marshes, where she and Yakkel have combined forces to create the Bonemakers and forge the swamp-dwelling slitheren into a powerful alliance.

Combat

In addition to the normal strategos powers listed on page 8, Lyrd has the following Special Qualities:

Aura of Fear (Sp): Three times per day Lyrd can instill *fear* in opponents per the spell (DC 17).

Vanish (Sp): Lyrd can *disappear* per the spell (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 67) six times per day.

Possessions: +3 splint mail, +4 large steel shield, cloak of resistance +1, +3 vorpal scythe

Da'tankar the Skull Crusher

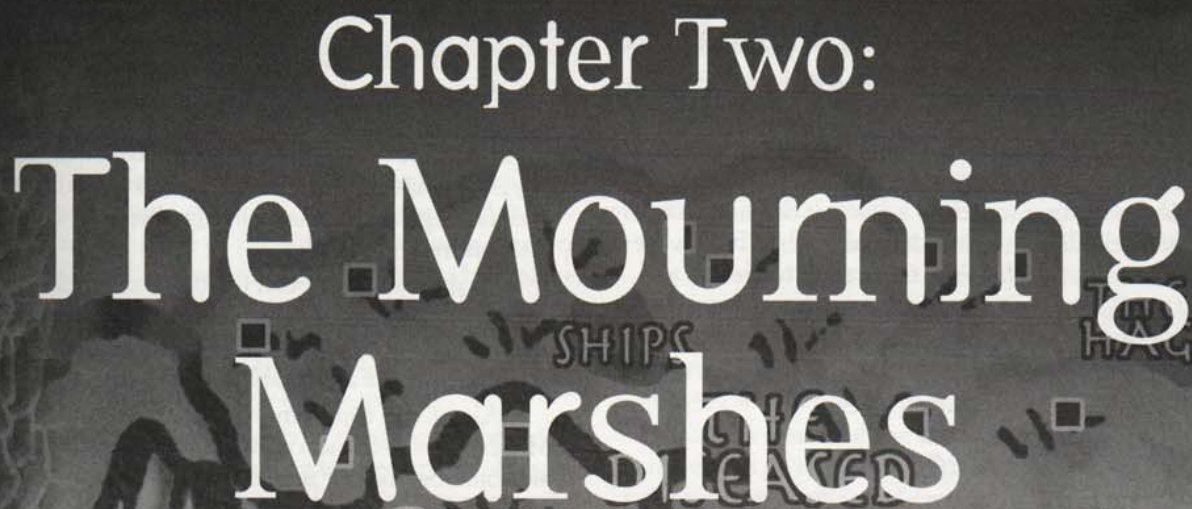
Da'tankar, Lyrd's skeletal mount, was a gift from Yakkel on the occasion of her lifenaming. Given her own necromantic talents, Lyrd has taken immediately to her new companion, and the two have been laying waste to Veshian patrols ever since. This creature resembles a skeletal horse with a frightening, demonic visage.

Da'tankar: CR 4; SZ L Undead; HD 8d12; hp 52; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 60 ft; AC 16 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +6 natural); Atk 2 hooves +4 melee (1d8+4), bite +2 melee (1d6+4); SQ Undead, immunities; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 18, Dex 12, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 11.

Feats: Improved Initiative.



Chapter Two: The Mourning Marshes



As the Mourning Marshes are a hotbed of slitheren activity, and hard by our borders in addition, it is critical that we obtain an accurate picture of the area's geography and natural history. To this end, we dispatched our special agent, Palah Niuk, to lead a party of vigilants, scholars, and spellcasters into the region, there to obtain all the intelligence possible. This mission they accomplished, though at considerable cost, and it is with our order's gratitude that I present the respected Palah's report.

To Home-Commander Kelemis Durn, ruler of the great and noble nation of Vesh, does Palah Niuk, overseer of informants and vigilants, send humble greetings.

My Lord,

As you have commanded, my vigilants have gathered extensive information on the Mourning Marshes, the vile ratmen, and other twisted species that dwell within its vile borders.

I must sadly report that several of our finest vigilants died in the acquisition of the information contained herein. But any one of us would gladly give our lives in service of the cause. If their loss leads to a better understanding of Vesh's foes — of the great evil that sits on her very borders — then their sacrifice shall not have been in vain.

Also key to acquiring this information were a number of sources outside my own network of soldiers, informants, and vigilants. Especially informative was a well-traveled mercenary by the name of Vukold. By his estimate, he has successfully traversed the marshes no less than three times and survived to tell the tale.

The information in this missive is, of course, not fully expanded, but I wished to get it to you as soon as possible so you could begin acting upon it as you see fit. My full report will follow when I can present it to you in person.

As always, your servant,

Palah Niuk, Overseer of Informants and Vigilants

Regional Overview: The Lay of the Land

The marshes are comprised of a roughly triangular region of nearly 25,000 square miles. This boggy realm of fens and mire is lodged between mountain, land, and water. However, rarely is the muddy water of the region more than a few feet deep, so in many areas the land remains dry and livable. It is in these areas that the slitheren make their homes.

To the west the marshes are less bemired, with stands of trees blanketing the area. Numerous small waterways crisscross the region, meeting up to form the lake known as Adurn's Tear.

Surrounding Areas

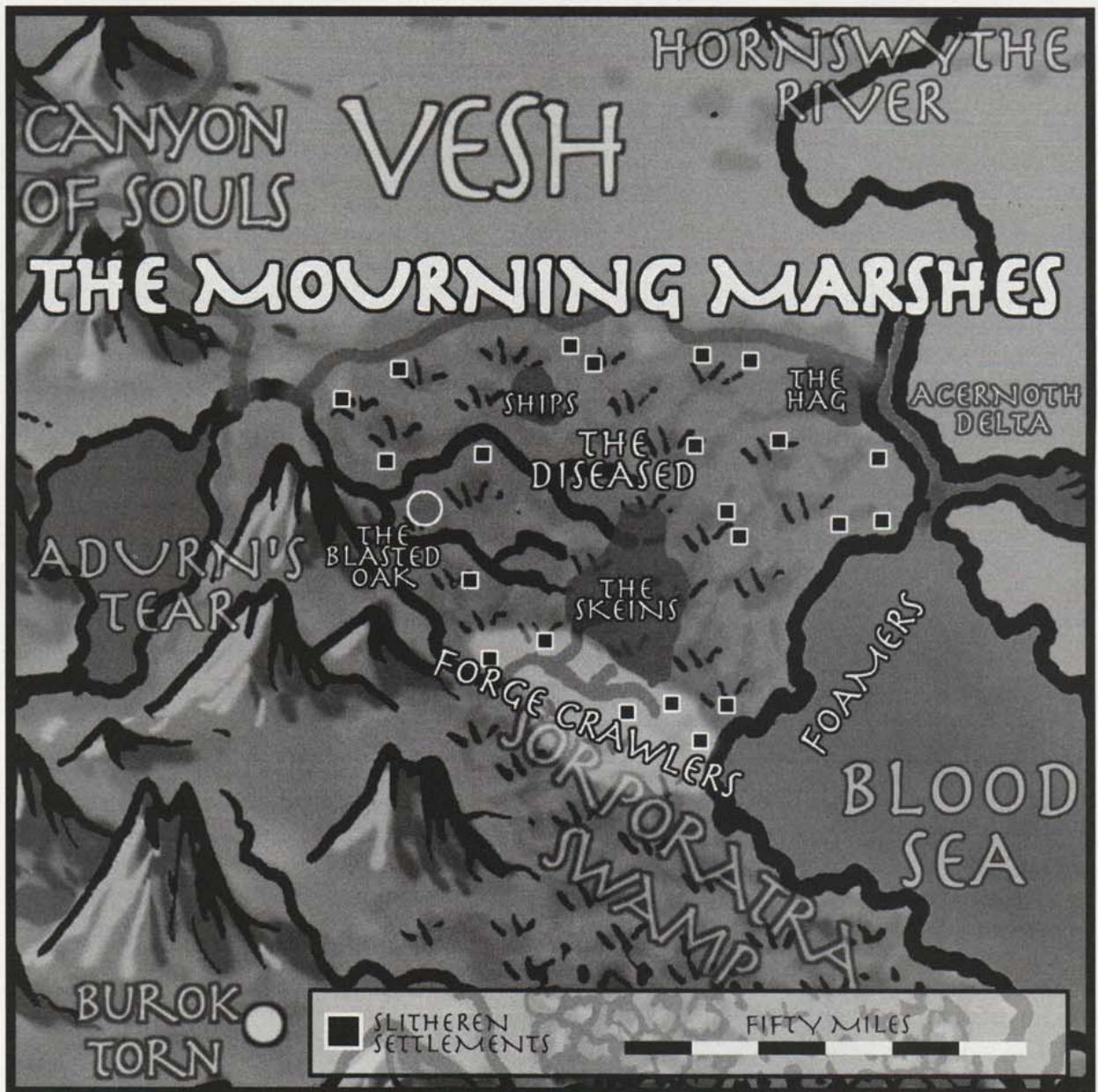
The regions that border the marshes are already well known, of course. To the north lies our great nation of Vesh, to the east is the Blood Sea, and to the

west rise the Kelder Mountains. However, to the south the marshes merge into the deadly Sorporatra Swamp.

Of all the regions bordering the Mourning Marshes, this final one is of interest to us in our investigation of the filthy slitheren race. Even among the ratmen, few dare to venture into the swamps for any great length of time. But some do brave its hazards with fair regularity to harvest ingredients for villainous poisons and the like.

To date we have been unable to determine the source of the noxious miasma that permeates the swamp, but through effort and sacrifice we have been able to formulate a workable hypothesis.

Along the southern borders of the Mourning Marshes can be found a number of seawrack dragons, awesome beasts that any and all fear to encounter. Their numbers increase as one moves farther south, and our operatives have spotted them along all borders of the Sorporatra. It is my assertion, great lord,



that the Sorporatra Swamp houses the greatest congregation of seawrack dragons to be found anywhere in Ghelspad. It is, we believe, their venomous breath that creates the poisonous vapors that permeate the swamp.

Areas of Brood Domination

The marshes fall primarily under the sway of the Diseased brood of ratmen, as this mire is held as the last resting place of the titan Chern, who spawned their brood. They consider the marshes a holy place, and woe to one who treads unwanted its boggy expanses. These ratmen are creating an alliance to increase slitheren control of the marshes and have recruited several broods into this effort.

The southern borders of the marshes fall under the control of the Forge Crawlers, spawn of Golthagga. These brave and foolhardy slitheren frequently enter the Sorporatra to the south, protected by complex and intricate devices of their own creation, collecting the noxious vapors filling that unholy place. From this effluvium they create a particularly potent and foul toxin known as puniceus mortis. They trade it freely with anyone willing to pay their exorbitant fees, and slitheren of all broods envenom their blades with this potent distillate. It is said that even the assassins of the Cult of Ancients trade with the Forge Crawlers for their dire venom.

The Forge Crawlers are masters of all manner of alchemical distillation and filtration systems. They clothe themselves head to heel in garments of sturdy, oiled sackcloth and leather, their heads hidden behind ornate breathing contraptions of bronze and

finest silk, which somehow allow them to imbibe the poisonous vapors for up to a day without fear. They collect the thick, ill mist of the swamp in great glass vessels, which they transport back to their lairs. There they distill the foul stuff into the fearsome puniceus mortis (for more on its effects, see Chapter 6).

Most other broods have at least a token presence in the marshes, from the Foamers, who occasionally inhabit coastal regions, to the Storm Chasers, who live in isolation, the White Wraiths, whose strategos has actually relocated to the region, and even the Black Pelts, who have dispatched a small delegation to treat with the Diseased and attempt to join their growing alliance.

In the center of the marshes lies a large region into which no ratman willingly ventures. It is ruled by the hideous skeins, and even the bravest and most foolhardy slitheren fear to pierce the web-draped veil of these accursed women (see below).

The hag, Addeirus, claims the northeastern corner of the marshes. She stalks her tiny realm restlessly, capturing any living thing she encounters to use for her own abominable purposes. Finally, the cross-brood Twilight Wardens menace the marshes' eastern and northern boundaries.

Ruins and Wreckage

It has been theorized that prior to the Titanswar the Mourning Marshes formed part of the forest we now call the Bloodrain Woods, a place sacred to the elves. While the elves remain — as ever — taciturn about their ways and holy places, I can at least



confirm part of this tale. The western reaches of the marshes are rife with the broken and twisted remains of a once mighty wood. Among that blighted forest I spied a massive tree — easily a hundred yards thick and three times again as high — shorn off at the top. Much slitheren activity surrounded it but, owing to an untimely attack by a ratmen hunting party, we could approach no closer. I suggest that this Blasted Oak might warrant further investigation.

Rumors abound of treasures great and small to be found in ruins scattered among the marshes. Again, I can confirm this hearsay in part. Though we found no treasure, many of our vigilants — myself included — discovered the ruins of structures and settlements among the fens and bogs. Most often, only the tallest parts of these structures protruded from the mire, so one can only guess what secrets remain to be discovered beneath. I can also report that almost half the ruins we encountered were being used as slitheren lairs; they seem particularly well favored by the Forger Crawlers. We also heard a tale that the famed assassin Nhoj once concealed himself in these marshes for nearly three months while avoiding the tenacious manhunt that followed his assassination of the high priest of Corean in Mithril. After witnessing the sturdy and solid ruins in this part of the marshes, I find myself believing the tale. I think a man could safely hide himself away among them for quite some time. I might also hazard to suggest — were investigators to clear away the muck and mire — that they would find most of the buildings standing and intact.

Possibly the strangest of all our discoveries was a fleet of ruined ships almost a hundred miles inland! Though the fleet was indeed wrecked, the damage seemed so severe to suggest they actually had been tossed by some tempest all the way from the Blood Sea. Some of the ships were quite old, their wood soft and rotten, but some appeared virtually new. A number of these hulks harbor nests of Foamer brood ratmen, who live on these landlocked ships as their Blood Sea brethren live on the water.

One might at first surmise that these vessels washed up there as a result of flooding, but they lie too far inland, too close together, and are too diverse in age to have resulted from any ordinary flood. One of my vigilants — a man named Keough — grew up in the nearby area above Sheer Falls. He assures me that a few of the vessels we encountered are short-range coasters unique to that region and could not possibly have sailed below the falls to the Blood Sea.

I must apologize, Lord Durn, for it seems that in my quest to provide you with answers I have — in this case — simply provided a new and perplexing question.

Indigenous Creatures

The following section details some of the creatures one likely may encounter in the marshes. Some

are simple beasts and unlikely to present a serious danger, but others are a grave threat indeed.

The Ratmen and Their Allies

Of course the most dangerous race inhabiting the Mourning Marshes is the vile slitheren.

Slitheren

Little explanation of these creatures should be required here as they are well known to you, my lord, and are detailed more fully elsewhere in the collected efforts of your vigilants. Suffice it to say that they are the most numerous of the sentient races to inhabit the marshes and present a significant threat both to Vesh and perhaps even the world at large.

Maulers

Though they belong to the ratman race, I list maulers separately due to their unique place in slitheren society. Where the other broods of ratmen were created by feeding upon the flesh of fallen titans, maulers were born of the slitheren themselves and so have no clan structure of their own. Easily the most fearsome and physically powerful of all the ratmen, maulers appear hideously deformed by their transformation from ordinary warrior into grotesque monster. These beasts are among the deadliest in the Mourning Marshes. All vigilants are advised to show utmost caution when combating them (see the Monsters Appendix).

Rats

The common rat is everywhere in marshes, often under the control of the ratmen. Though they appear identical to rats anywhere in Ghelspad, with the ratmen as masters they should not be underestimated (see *Core Rulebook III*, page 201).

Giant Rats

Akin to the common rat but more powerful and aggressive, giant rats also live throughout the marshes, again often under the control of the ratmen. Anyone who enters combat against the slitheren should expect to face these creatures as well.

Dire Rats

More fearsome still than the common and giant rats are the mighty dire rats. Thankfully they remain rare, but they seem more common in the marshes than elsewhere. One can only attribute this fact to the proximity of the slitheren (see *Core Rulebook III*, page 56).

Wolfrats

It is thought that the wolfrat is a chaotic offshoot of the dire rat, crafted by the efforts of the slitheren race through the use of foul magic and selective breeding. Wherever ratmen are found, there live wolfrats. These foul beasts — combining the size and power of the wolf with the cunning ferocity of the rat — serve the slitheren as guards, hunting beasts, and

loyal companions (see *Creature Collection II*, page 213).

Horserats

The ratmen breed, train, and trade these animals for both riding and cargo transport. They are native to the Mourning Marshes and, though the ratmen have long since captured and tamed most wild horserats, a few feral packs continue to roam the marshes. Whether trained for war or completely undomesticated, all horserats remain ferocious foes. Consider them extremely dangerous, accompanied or alone (see the Monsters Appendix).

Spirit of the Plague

The Diseased brood of ratmen considers any creature that rises as a spirit of the plague to be truly blessed and infused with the spirit of Chern. The Diseased venerate these undead monstrosities, revering them as holy apparitions, and aiding them in their task of spreading disease across the land. Though these creatures dwell throughout the marshes, I list them here because they usually appear in the company of the Diseased brood (see *Creature Collection*, page 188).

Vermin Host, Rat

Cursed by Vangal for their heresy, the vermin hosts remain unwelcome everywhere in civilized lands and prefer to seek refuge far from the hatred and fear

of other people. Though not overly common in the marshes, some do find their way there; the slitheren they encounter view them as a good omen. Most of the rat vermin host who reside within the marshes live and fight alongside the ratmen. The Diseased brood in particular sees the vermin hosts' affliction as a blessing. They revere these cursed souls highly, treating them as honored guests (see *Creature Collection II*, page 207).

The Skein and their Allies

I feel I must devote special attention to these infamous and tempestuous creatures called the skeins, and the beasts with which they associate. I will not go into the details of their origins, as that tale is well known, but shall instead relate only what my vigilants and the mercenary Vukold have witnessed directly.

The Skeins

Firstly of course I can relate that these wretched souls do indeed exist. I have heard it theorized that the tale of the skeins was a metaphorical one — crafted by the priests of Hedrad as a cautionary tale — but I can verify once and for all that these creatures are real and thrive in their exile. Anahs, one of my investigators, theorizes that the skeins we witnessed were not the original four cursed by Hedrad, but that each skein somehow passes her curse on to a successor when she dies. While I find this hypothesis intriguing, we have little evidence to support or refute it.



The skeins reside deep within the marshes. We saw no evidence of dwellings but witnessed several of the skeins both entering and exiting tunnels. From this we deduced that the skeins must live in caves or burrows cut into the dry mounds that rise from the surrounding miasma. The trees that surround and overhang the area of skein habitation are thick with webs horribly bedecked with the remains of creatures of all sorts.

The skeins themselves are a grotesque union of spider and human female. These emaciated creatures retain roughly their human forms, though they stand stooped and hunchbacked. The eight legs of a mighty spider protrude from their backs, wrapping about the body and meeting at the front. These limbs seem mostly to aid them in climbing and grappling foes as they continue to move about on their human legs. Though they attempt to cloak their twisted bodies beneath tattered and stained robes, they can do little to hide their ugliness (see *Creature Collection II*, page 154).

Vermin Host, Spider

As with other vermin hosts, at least a few of those afflicted as spider hosts find their way into the marshes. Preternaturally drawn to the kingdom of the skeins, one rarely sees them elsewhere in the marshes. Unfortunately for them, the skeins despise spiders and hunt these vermin host for sport (see *Creature Collection II*, page 208).

Wolf Spiders

Perhaps the skeins hate spiders because they see in their alien forms a hideous reminder of their own sorry fate. The lone exception to their animosity is the giant wolf spider. We witnessed many of the creatures in and around the lairs of the accursed ones. The skeins seem to enjoy the company of the beasts and treat them as spoiled pets, feeding them tidbits and stroking them affectionately. We also watched as one of the wolf spiders bore a captured ratman to the skeins. They proceeded to defile the poor creature in a most unholy and perverse manner before devouring it (see *Creature Collection*, page 215).

Other Creatures of the Marshes

Here are listed the creatures most commonly encountered in the marshes. Some are more dangerous than others, but consider none a trivial foe. The Mourning Marshes are a dire and deadly place, and one should exercise the utmost caution when forced to enter this region.

Angler Ooze

When actively hunting these creatures seem surprisingly easy to avoid, if one knows what to be wary of. Their glowing spherical protrusion, which they use to attract insects, signals an ooze on the hunt. All vigilants should use care when they spy such a glow in the marshes. When at rest, however,

the ooze lies on the ground, sheltering in shallow pools — an unwary traveler can easily step on it. Now at its most dangerous, the ooze attacks persistently with flailing tentacles sheathed in a paralytic slime. Exercise caution (see *Creature Collection*, page 10).

Mire Dwellers

These reptilian humanoids dwell in small numbers throughout the marshes, normally in fair proximity to slitheren burrows. Small bands of mire dwellers lie in wait for lone ratmen, whom they attack and spirit off to their lairs. Needless to say, the ratmen seem none too fond of such occurrences and seek to destroy mire dwellers wherever they find them. I witnessed a great melee in which dozens of both species fought in the ruins of some long-lost humanoid settlement. Both sides suffered tremendous loss of life with no clear victor; the few surviving on either side withdrew to nurse their injuries. However, the ratmen seem ahead in the larger war, for the population of mire dwellers continues to fall steadily. I estimate they could be eliminated from the marshes in as little as twenty years (see *Creature Collection*, page 134).

Mire Wyrms

It seems we have made an unexpected discovery in the marshes: a previously unknown species! How a deadly strain of carnivorous worm some 10 yards in length could go undiscovered for so long truly surprises me, but it seems to indeed be the case (see the Monsters Appendix).

Mire wyrms, powerful and deadly predators, lurk in the fens and bogs of the Mourning Marshes. Completely sightless, they track prey by some means we could not decipher. Their long, lithesome bodies, a dull greenish-gray in color, blend perfectly with the stagnant pools and fens in which they live.

These creatures possess an arsenal of particularly fearsome attacks. First among them, they can project viscous and caustic saliva. One of my vigilants was blinded when some of the rancid stuff struck her in the face. Moving with a speed that belies its great bulk, the beast set upon vigilant Bronwen and, with one strike of its knife-edged fangs, decapitated her.

Night Singers

One rarely sees these potent insects in the marshes — they prefer warmer climes such as the Swamps of Kan Thet far to the southwest — but during the hot summer months I observed a few of the creatures (see *Creature Collection*, page 142).

Seawrack Dragons

The mighty seawrack dragons, thankfully, appear rare in the marshes. They dwell in their greatest numbers along the southern border, where the marshes merge into the Sorporatra Swamp. For my speculations relating to these beasts see my notes on the Sorporatra Swamp earlier in this missive (see *Creature Collection*, page 55).

Skullworms

I have a dire tale to tell relating to these loathsome grubs. While searching through an abandoned slitheren burrow we stumbled across a midden crawling with bloated, sickly maggots nearly half a foot in length. With little warning one of the creatures attacked Onial — one of my men — burrowing beneath his flesh. He writhed in agony for a few moments as we stood by helpless, and then he stilled, seemingly in control of his faculties once again and suffering no ill effects. He refused all offers of aid both mundane and magical, and we proceeded on with our mission. Over the course of many days he seemed to grow more sullen and aggressive until one night — without warning — he took up his blade and attacked us: his friends and companions! Sadly, we were forced to kill him. As Onial lay dying, the bloated maggot wriggled out of his ear, slick with the man's blood. I spitted it with my own blade and burned its body. I fear to think what might have transpired had we returned directly to Vesh with Onial still under the sway of that hideous thing (see *Creature Collection II*, page 161).

Slime Reavers

Amphibious, froglike creatures, the slime reavers pose a significant threat and should not be treated lightly. Though they are known to battle the ratmen, they also trade with them and ally with them against common foes. Perhaps more alarming is that these slimy beasts often leave the marshes, raiding settlements in southern Vesh! I would recommend enhanced security forces along the borders of the mourning marsh immediately with orders to kill these creatures on sight (see *Creature Collection II*, page 168).

Spider-Eye Goblins

Isolated tribes of violent and primitive spider-eye goblins dwell in the marshes. They avoid contact with the slitheren, for the ratmen's organization and skill at warfare makes them deadly opponents. From time to time, tribes of spider-eyes cooperate with the slitheren on raids into surrounding realms or aid the ratmen in fending off invaders, but for the most part the two races avoid each other (see *Creature Collection II*, page 186).

Spined Lizards

The powerful reptiles called spined lizards appear fairly sluggish and normally not very aggressive. They are difficult to spot; in the tall grasses and reeds where they often rest it is easy to stumble across them,

causing the creatures to panic and charge. The best option under such circumstances is to get well out of the lizard's way as quickly as possible. In this case discretion is the better part of survival (see *Creature Collection II*, page 171).

Swamp Gobbler

Though they look like a cross between a monkey and a beaver, swamp gobblers are — or so legend tells — a cursed breed of halfling (see *Creature Collection II*, page 195). Swamp gobblers are a constant hazard to travelers, for their voracious nature compels them to attack anything that is even vaguely edible. Individually, gobblers are not terribly dangerous, but in bands of a dozen or more, they can represent a serious danger.

Swamp Hag

Thankfully, only one abhorrent swamp hag makes her home in the marshes. We were unable to observe the wretch directly, but we spoke with several individuals who claim to have seen her. Again, the warrior Vukold proved invaluable in this endeavor. This hag, Addeirus, claims a small plot of land in the northeast corner of the marshes, near where the Hornswythe River empties into the Blood Sea. She has apparently also been witnessed roving the southern reaches of Vesh, bearing a lantern formed from the skull of a ratman. Over her shoulder she carries a bag into which she stuffs all manner of living things — from livestock to children — which she carries back to her fen for some depraved purpose of her own.

I advise all vigilants to attempt to put her foul life to an end once and for all (see *Creature Collection II*, page 100).

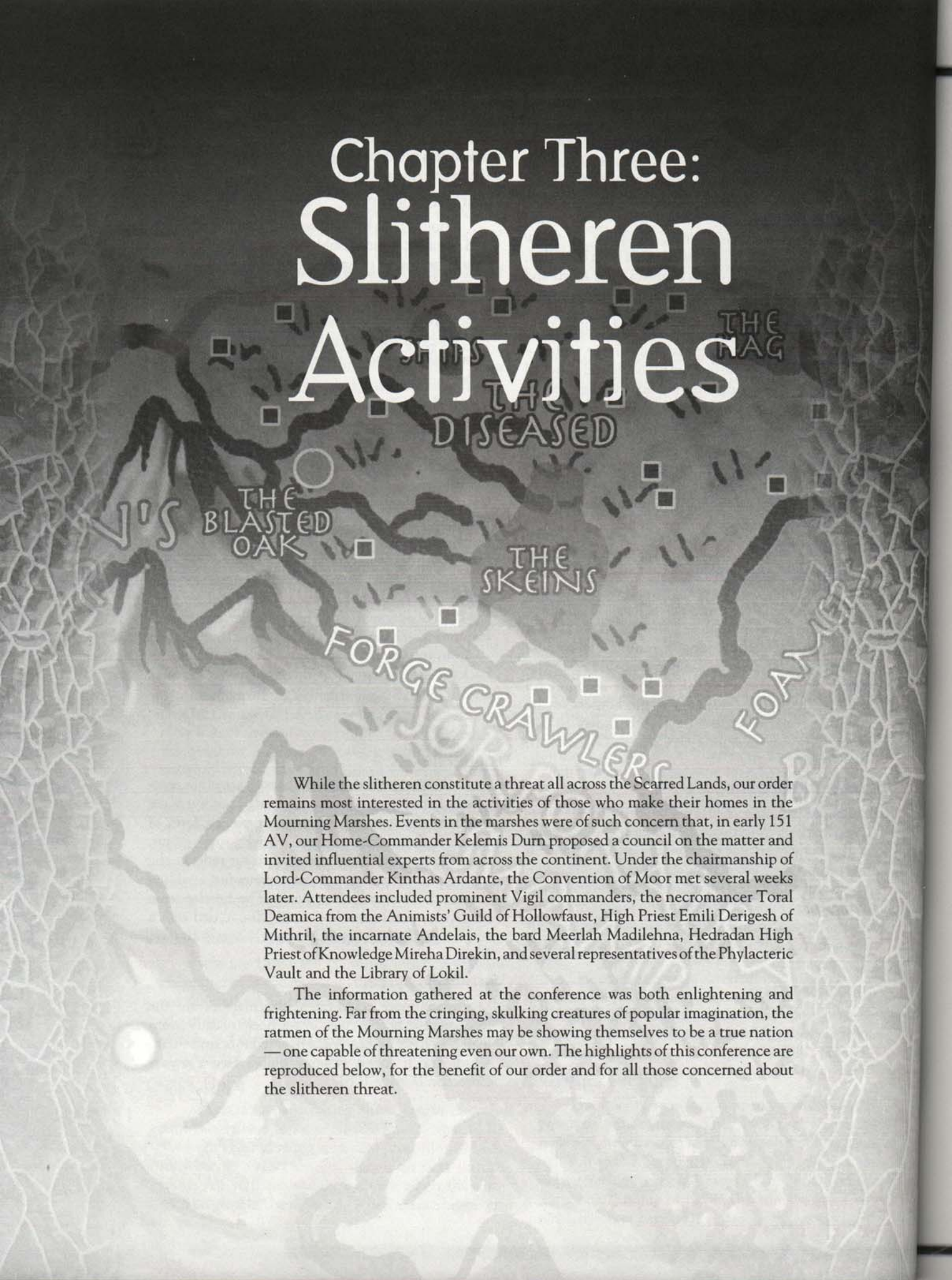
Tar Beetle

Like the night singer, tar beetles are more commonly found in the Swamps of Kan Thet but some dwell in the marshes. Their most potent form of attack is the ability to expel a sticky spray of tar, which gives them their name. This tar reduces the victim's speed and impairs his movements, enabling the beetle to attack more easily. The beetles seem relatively weak however — easily dispatched with a single sword thrust (see *Creature Collection II*, page 186).

Vermin Host, Leech

Much more common in the marshes are the leech vermin host. Driven by the needs of the vermin infesting their bodies, these ill-fated folk find themselves drawn to all swampy places (see *Creature Collection II*, page 106).

Chapter Three: Slitheren Activities



While the slitheren constitute a threat all across the Scarred Lands, our order remains most interested in the activities of those who make their homes in the Mourning Marshes. Events in the marshes were of such concern that, in early 151 AV, our Home-Commander Kelemis Durn proposed a council on the matter and invited influential experts from across the continent. Under the chairmanship of Lord-Commander Kinthas Ardante, the Convention of Moor met several weeks later. Attendees included prominent Vigil commanders, the necromancer Toral Deamica from the Animists' Guild of Hollowfaust, High Priest Emili Derigesh of Mithril, the incarnate Andelais, the bard Meerlah Madilehna, Hedradan High Priest of Knowledge Mireha Direkin, and several representatives of the Phylacteric Vault and the Library of Lokil.

The information gathered at the conference was both enlightening and frightening. Far from the cringing, skulking creatures of popular imagination, the ratmen of the Mourning Marshes may be showing themselves to be a true nation — one capable of threatening even our own. The highlights of this conference are reproduced below, for the benefit of our order and for all those concerned about the slitheren threat.

To my friends and colleagues, I bid you welcome; no doubt you are tired from your long treks. Lord Canrae, I'm sure, has many tales about the "unsavory barbarians" between here and Darakeene.... Ahh, but perhaps I digress — have I already put my dwarven comrade to sleep? Worry not, Rathos, you have missed nothing.

I have asked you here because of a growing menace to our mutual nations. I speak of the slitheren, those titan-spawned ratmen whose activities have gone virtually unchecked since their appearance over a century ago. The broods continue to grow, and with each encounter they learn more of our secrets. Decades after the Divine War they were half-sentient carrion eaters; now they have become an army with few equals. We can no longer afford complacency. We can no longer afford ignorance. We must join here and strike down our foe decisively, or be eaten alive when they finally come to our door.

— Opening address by Lord-Commander Kintias Ardante the Silverblade,
Arcernoth Delta Vigil, Convention of Moor 151 AV.

Current Events

High Priest Emili Derigesh: I have heard discussions among the clerics of the Temple City that link our recent altercation with the gorgons of the Hornswythe valley to slitheren activity in the south. Some believe the broods are expanding again, and that this expansion has forced other titan races in the region to mobilize as well. Have the Vigils detected anything to support or discount this theory?

Lord-Commander Ardante: Your Grace, my Vigil has indeed discovered increased activity from within the Arcernoth Delta, including an exodus of certain titan races. Perhaps it is best to go into detail now as to what we know of the slitheren's plots.

The Blood Sea

Slitheren have little in the way of craftwork and carpentry. While our own naval forces have advanced considerably thanks to innovations by such

geniuses as Themlesius of Darakeene, Kathos of Mithril, and Amran of Hetanu, modern slitheren pirates rely on the same poorly-built vessels as their forefathers. Our commanders can feel confident in their faster and sturdier ships, kept well equipped for navigation and extended journeys. Here, however, our advantages end.

The Foamers

The members of the Foamer brood are accomplished combatants on the open sea. Their amphibious nature grants them an advantage we can never truly overcome. Their warriors can lurk just below the water's surface, often quite literally under our noses. There they wait, circling our ships until the sun goes down, when they scale up the hull and attack under cover of darkness. Their natural ability to see at night makes this strategy especially deadly. Even with ample torches we cannot fully compensate, and you needn't be a sailor to understand the difficulty of maintaining open fires when surrounded by water.



In addition, the Foamers are experts at causing fear. They mount categorically vicious raids, but just as methodically they leave a few survivors to spread tales of the horrors enacted. We wonder if perhaps the slitheren somehow alter the memories of these witnesses, for the stories they spin contain wild claims that the seasoned veteran knows better than to believe. But, alas, most of our sailors are *not* veteran vigilants with years of experience under their belts. And it is hard to fight an enemy when your crew leaps at every shadow, imagining that some 20-foot-tall slitheren abomination is ready to jump out and snatch their souls from their bodies.

The Forge Crawlers

This diminutive brood of tinkers and crafters has only recently made their presence known on the high seas. Cowards at heart, they have little wish to journey far from the stability of ground; nor do they seek to antagonize the larger (and considerably more formidable) Foamers. Still, the Forge Crawlers' trademark is adaptation, and they have taken to the water like toads, if not fish.

The Crawler motivation is one of simple self-interest. The alluvial deposits of the Arcernoth Delta are ripe with all manner of exotic materials, which the members of this brood jealously hoard. As a result, they rarely attack ships (and in fact flee from any show of force), since their interests lie at the bottom of the ocean and not on its surface. Perhaps

because of this fact, the Foamers have done little to stem their cousins' foray into their traditional domain.

A Two-Front Expansion

The Arcernoth Delta

About a year ago, the broods began to raid more heavily into our southeastern quarter and neighboring regions of the Celestial Shelf. Sheer Falls has become a veritable zoo filled with slitheren warriors and their menagerie of cohorts. Only in the past month, however, have the raids amounted to anything other than the tired routine we've come to expect over the past few decades. Before then they were fiercer, more frequent, and more numerous, but as I said, nothing we hadn't seen before.

One month ago, there was a sudden shift. Raids virtually ignored our villages. The raids themselves also changed, now seeming more intent on keeping our people away from the region rather than capturing resources and slaves. The Arcernoth Delta has become completely hidden to us. Even magical scrying has met with impervious counters, no doubt erected by the sorcerers among the broods.

Reports from Hedrad sound no different. Since the evacuation of the settlements to our west, no word, whether by loyal scout or occasional mercenary, has reached our walls. Even the underground, normally rife with rumors and new fragments, has

ASlitheren Chronology

The following timeline include highlights of our interactions with the slitheren.

c. 0 AV: Almost immediately following the fall of the titans, feasting rats find their remains and begin the transformation into slitheren

57 AV: The first slitheren are reported by Cpt. Theodran Dannant of the Hornswythe Vigil. Vigilants report further encounters in the following months.

68 AV: The town of Merlford is attacked by “ratlike men.” Vigilants responding to attack later track and discover a slitheren warren. Later that year, the sage Panos documents the first slitheren brood, which he names “Foamers”.

68–97 AV: Slitheren raids continue to escalate along the southern border of Vesh. Reports indicate the presence of distinct broods, which now include the Red Witches, Brown Gorgers, Diseased, and Stricken.

93 AV: The Battle of Yentaro, the first true skirmish between Vesh and the slitheren, takes place.

95 AV: Caravan guards in the Ukrudan Desert report the appearance of “slitheren walking by day.” They are later dubbed the Daywalkers.

96 AV: Scouts from the Arcernoth Delta Vigil report the appearance of Storm Chasers in the Mourning Marshes. The Forge Crawlers are also found to be quite powerful in the southern regions of the swamp. During the summer of the same year, a series of lightning raids devastates the southern reaches of Vesh. Home-Commander Lain Arrison convenes the Council of Vigils, and the group conceives a plan to strike at the heart of the warrens in the marshes. Unfortunately, events of the First Calastian Advance — the forefront of Calastia’s aggression into Veshian territory — prevent the Vigils from bringing their full force to bear. With only a moderate-sized fighting force, Vesh and her allies enter the Mourning Marshes.

97 AV: Following a three-month campaign, the forces of Vesh, Hedrad, and Mithril encounter a small slitheren encampment at the confluence of the Placid and Hornswythe rivers. Fighting quickly escalates, resulting in the worst military disaster in Veshian history: a battle the allies will later recall as the Slaughter at Two Rivers.

98–112 AV: With Vesh’s northern armies crippled and her southern forces engaged against Calastia, the slitheren expand unchecked. Raids reach farther into the Veshian heartland, and trade routes as far south as Durrover report slitheren attacks. By the winter of 112 AV, slitheren are observed as far away as the Swamps of Kan Thet and the Perforated Plains.

112–126 AV: The Blood Monsoon, a months-long storm that floods the east with red rain, lays waste to vast portions of the Mourning Marshes. Slitheren raids cease for nearly a year, and only begin reaching their previous levels by the end of 125 AV. Despite the devastation, organization among the ratmen appears to increase. The Arcernoth Delta Vigil uncovers the basics of the slitheren hierarchy and the existence of the priest-kings.

136 AV: Late in autumn, a slitheren force arrives at the outskirts of Moor. The newly revitalized Vigils respond in force and crush the titanspawn army. Despite Vesh’s victory, the slitheren display incredible mastery of tactics, and their tenacity inflicts significant damage. Home-Commander Horodan Dace initiates a program of reconnaissance to better understand the nature of the slitheren threat.

137 AV: The Dace Initiative uncovers the existence of White Wraiths and even a small number of Daywalkers within the Mourning Marshes. Nearly all broods are now confirmed to exist within its boundaries.

139 AV: A Veshian patrol encounters a slitheren raiding party at Raven’s Grove, just outside of the hamlet of Treestand. Both sides call for reinforcements, and a battle ensues. Neither is able to claim victory and, after inflicting heavy loses on each other, both forces retreat. Following the engagement, Dace drastically scales back the Initiative’s activities, fearing its actions would provoke further slitheren attacks. It is finally absorbed by the Arcernoth Delta Vigil.

140 AV to Present: Relative calm follows the Battle of Treestand, though raids continue and the Arcernoth Delta Vigil’s surreptitious reconnaissance proceeds apace. Recently Vesh has called a meeting with her allies and interested parties from across the continent, hoping that, by pooling resources, they can achieve some breakthrough regarding the “slitheren menace.”

seemed uncharacteristically tacit of late. Whatever is happening in the Delta region, not even the native rogues seem to know.

Mining settlements have also been affected. Our outposts along the southern Hornswythe have gone silent for over week now. A few of the miners who came north just before this change told us the quarries were haunted. Workers, many of them experienced men who've been on the job for most of their lives, would go into a shaft one day and not return. Parties sent to find them always came back empty-handed, unable to find even a body or parts of one.

At first we suspected the slitheren, but Mullis Town has never had reason for quarrel with them. Even if this were some new offensive, one would expect at the very least some evidence of their passing. Raiders or no, the ratmen would have left some bits of fur or broken claws behind. Instead it was as if some otherworldly being manifested itself just long enough to swallow the men whole, then vanish once more. Now it is not merely men, but entire towns that may be lost. If I were you, I worry far more about your settlements than about what the slitheren may or may not be doing with their troops in the south.

The Sorporatra

At the same time that raids eased off in the north, slitheren forces along the Sorporatra border went into a frenzied state. Burok Torn now logs as many sightings of the broods as our command station in Moor. Even our outpost at Adurn's Tear has begun tracking slitheren movements in abundance. Are they planning to expand into the Kelders? We cannot be certain, and to be honest, it is highly unlikely; the ratmen's bodies seem ill-equipped to handle to dry, cold climes of that hostile mountain region. There is also the issue of the spider-eye goblins that infest the entire area — they and the slitheren usually attempt to avoid each other.

Still, given the extreme implications of a southern expansion, we cannot entirely discount the possibility of such an attack. Though I have no proof, I would wager that Calastia to the south has something to do with this new slitheren activity. Calastia's Queen Geleeda is known to have confederates among the Red Witches, and very likely other broods as well.

Internal Workings

Toral Deamica, Necromancer of Hollowfaust: *We know that titanspawn rarely work together, even those of the same patron. How is it that the slitheren broods appear to be cooperating?*

High Priest of Knowledge Mireha Direkin: *Perhaps I can be of assistance. The high priests of Hedrad have looked into that very question at some length. It should not surprise you that, given that our patron embodies order and law, we would take particular interest in the evolution of these ideals within our titanspawn neighbors. The slitheren have undergone a change in their*

social order no less significant than the transformation of their vermin bodies. To fully understand this, we must revisit our understanding of their origins.

Legacy of the Titans

As all of you know, each of the broods is the progeny of a titan, and each has powers reflecting those of its patron. The Red Witches and Black Pelts excel at magic, while the Unseeing are born blind. What few have realized, and what we have only begun to uncover, is that the slitheren also inherited their patrons' more intangible qualities.

Before the Divine War, the titans had amongst themselves an order of command. Though it would be folly to simplify their relations as simply "master" and "supplicant," each titan held his fellows in some kind of regard. Mormo, for instance, is credited with the poisoning of Gormoth, and the Writhing Lord thus gained all the provocation he needed to unleash devastation on our world. The slitheren, it would seem, have adopted — consciously or otherwise — these very same webs of relations.

Most of you are probably thinking that we can use this to our advantage. After all, our own creators defeated the titans because those ancient masters were fractious, arrogant, and too self-absorbed to work well together. However, at the risk of sounding heretical, that would be an oversimplification.

Remember this, if it is the only thing you take from me from this place: The titans were not merely immortals with great power — they were primal forces whose psyches we cannot readily understand. If they thought as we did, there would never have been reason for the War in the first place.

The slitheren are no different, except that they began as mortals. Now they have been given the perspective from both sides of the looking glass. They are as unfathomable as their patrons, and thereby remain beyond our ability to analyze definitively. Yet they understand ethics, unity, treachery, and guile — the ken of mortal beings. This duality makes them dangerous beyond anything we have encountered in many years, and reason enough for them to merit our careful consideration.

Sight of Mortal Frailty

Some of you seem skeptical, and others of you, simply confused. I will continue with a simpler problem. Why are the slitheren working together now?

We have already established that they are capable of unity, and that they, having inherited some unfathomable network of relationship from their patrons, have had a significant foundation upon which to build alliances. Now to make that understanding more complete, we should examine the exact nature of the forces and circumstance that allowed these elements to come together.

Scarcity of Resources: Practicality

The Scarred Lands are not the fertile realm they once were. Decades of conflicts, of which the Divine War was only the largest, left much of the land denuded. Farming is a greater challenge today than it was for our ancestors, and this despite the fact that our agricultural know-how has improved with time. Look at any other aspect of a nation's daily life, and you will see a similar picture. Mines strike smaller deposits, and the ore becomes shoddy and difficult to refine. Lumberers encounter entire stands of trees with wood too weakened by disease to be of use. Fishermen must labor at length where once the ocean teemed with life, and those who live along the Blood Sea can't even take bounty from its waters without fearing for their lives. Now imagine these problems amplified tenfold, and you begin to understand the situation of those who dwell in the Mourning Marshes.

An ancient alluvial flat, the marshes *should* be a fertile wilderness. However, they are covered almost completely by the waters of the Blood Sea. This makes the land yield a subsistence crop at best, forcing the slitheren to resort to raids to make up for the shortfall. The marshes have vegetation, but few trees worthy of a carpenter's note. Add to that, the moldy and waterlogged soil with few ores of value, and you have a serious shortage of building materials.

Scarcity of resources, therefore, explains why the broods have had to set aside some of their differences. True, they could just raid each other, but the proximity of Vesh and the Celestial Shelf presents them with far more alluring prey — prey that possesses resources that they want but couldn't get by destroying each other.

A Common Enemy: Ideology

The slitheren *hate* the Divine Races. This attitude in some ways seems even more extreme than those of titanspawn who fought us during the War. The older races at least remember just how badly they could lose in open conflict with the gods; the slitheren have no such reason for pause. They base their feud solely on the ideology of hate, a dogma their leaders perpetuate until it becomes so pervasive as to define the very structure of slitheren society. Against this ideology, there is no reasoning, no compromise. Zealots have a logic all their own, one that remains forever inaccessible to us. This fervor, though, is what binds them together. Regardless of the differences between the titans and their spawn, their hatred of us surpasses their mistrust of each other. The enemy of my enemy is my friend, and though they're not friends, a common enemy — us — has made them allies.

Bloodlust and the Predator Instinct: Nature

Slitheren are born of rats. They are animals to the core, regardless of how much the titans' blood has

changed them. They may wear clothing, build weapons, found societies, and even produce culture, but in the end they remain scavengers and hunters, who live for the kill. The Stalkers embody this point best, but even the other ratmen would gut a man if given half the chance.

Rats are also communal creatures. They feed and hunt in packs. Vesh, even weakened, stands far more powerful than any one brood alone, so they band together to take down larger prey. This strategy, which comes instinctively to them, helps them overcome the usual titanspawn propensity for isolationism and xenophobia.

The Good of the Species: Evolution

The final component to slitheren solidarity is the simple fact of evolution. By this I do not mean the Yugmanian concept of natural selection. Rather, I speak of the inevitable progress of order within any society that leads its citizens to go from community to nation.

A Unified Threat

Bard Meerlah Madilehna: Surely you don't suggest the slitheren are creating... a country for themselves in the marshes?

High Priest Mireha: No, not in the marshes, but everywhere. We have seen all the signs. And, as with all nations, the slitheren will have their own agendas. They will organize on a scale we've never seen before. I've explained what forces have led to their current stage of development. All they need now is one final push — whether it be an event or a person — and our lives will become infinitely more complicated than they are now.

Organizations

As a consequence of the increased cooperation among the slitheren of the Mourning Marshes, several new organizations have sprung up, or perhaps old organizations have spread among different broods. In any event, these groups represent another power base for the ratmen — and another reason why we must maintain vigilance, in the marshes and beyond.

Bonemakers

Necromancy has always been strong among certain of the slitheren broods. The Red Witches use it in abundance, and the White Wraiths are living mockeries of that art. All other broods except for the Stricken — who seemingly fear and loathe death magic — use it in one manner or another. The slitheren ideology meshes well with the fruits of necromantic manipulation. The broods almost universally employ slavery, and the power to create undead provides them with slaves in abundance.

There is within their ranks a band for whom necromancy has reached an entirely new level of importance. I speak of the Bonemakers, a nascent group founded a few years ago, near the end of the

Blood Monsoon. Since then they have amassed significant power within the slitheren hierarchy.

When Ducen Raith, then commander of the Arcernoth Delta Vigil, told our ruling Council about the existence of master necromancers within the marshes, we thought him either mad or gravely mistaken. By then it was already well known that the slitheren practiced necromancy, but to attribute mastery to those foul beings seemed impossible to us. Still, given that the commander had provided valued services to our city in the past, the Council agreed to send a group of mages including myself to investigate.

What we found both astonished and terrified us. I for one will never forget the towering piles of bone waiting to be turned to the slitheren's purposes. Some were over three stories high, and many contained skeletons not of man. Myriad races, both Divine and titan-spawned, native and extraplanar, had contributed to that profane treasury.

We later discovered that three of the broods formed the core for this enterprise. Several young mages from the Diseased, along with acolytes from the Red Witches and White Wraiths, had banded together in an unprecedented alliance that crossed brood lines to create these "Bonemakers." At first, this group intrigued us. As students of necromancy ourselves, we couldn't help feeling a certain empathy for our ratmen counterparts. This all changed after we witnessed some of them in action.

Many of you still hold prejudice against my city's chosen art. This I can understand, as my kind deals with the boundary of life, and few of us like being reminded that our time here is finite. For my brothers and me, necromancy has always been an arcane fascination to stimulate thought, a means to understand the mortality others would ignore, and a method to protect our families from the evils beyond our walls. But the arts of the Bonemakers held no beauty. They were instead the worst perversion of magic I have ever seen.

In one ritual, the slitheren summoned a being from a plane of great evil, binding it within a receptacle of bones. The creature's vitality then molded the skeleton into a great monstrosity unlike anything I had seen before or since. Then the ratmen finished their incantations, and the newborn undead vanished in a flash. I wish I could tell you what happened next, but we were discovered and attacked. Only by the grace of the vigilants did any of us survive at all.

Since that day I have asked myself many questions and found no answers. Why were these Bonemakers formed, and what are their goals? What was that thing I saw them create? From what plane did they summon the bound creature, and what is its nature? Where did the creature disappear to at the end of their ritual?

A heretical sect of my peers believes that all planes possess an elemental balance of life and death. Only through necromancy and other magics that

breach the barrier of mortality can one alter this balance. Some among them claim that, beginning twenty years ago, that balance began to shift in Scarn — as if some great creature were drinking away the life of our land. I remind you, these sorcerers were considered heretics for a reason; as liberal as I am considered, I put little stock in their ranting. Still, I wonder at times in the cold of the night, what my colleagues among the slitheren are up to within their dens of bone.

Making the Bonemakers

The Bonemakers were founded by the White Wraith strategos Lyrd Cathlis and Yakkel, priest-king of the Diseased. Though they later recruited several novices from the Red Witches, these two remain the undisputed helms of the order.

Lyrd and Yakkel originally envisioned the Bonemakers as their "child". The two met in the aftermath of the last great Blood Monsoon, after their respective warrens had been destroyed. Both were younglings still, their eyes not yet open. The elder Errestikon adopted Yakkel into his family when none of the Diseased came to claim him. None of them knew that Yakkel's deceptively dark fur would later turn ghost white and mark him as the next successor to the kingship of his brood.

In the interim, Lyrd and Yakkel become close friends. Lyrd was the chosen protégé of the great Errestikon, and Yakkel became the talented younger son. While Lyrd learned the way of steel and claw, Yakkel delved into sorcery. Following the death of the Diseased's previous priest-king, Yakkel's pelt turned miraculously white, and his eyes switched from brown to red. As there were no other albino successors among the Diseased, the brood unilaterally accepted Yakkel's transformation as a sign from Chern himself and crowned the new albino their priest-king.

Yakkel saw this as a mixed blessing. Every part of his being told him his ascendance was preordained. Yet his position left little time for personal indulgences — he could see his oath-sister only rarely. When Errestikon died nine months later, the young priest-king met with Lyrd to hatch a plan that would bring them together once more. The Bonemakers were born.

Since that time, the faction has grown and expanded its scope. Now it serves as a living embodiment of the two oath-siblings' dream of "power through perfection" and has served as the center of a growing alliance of the broods in the marshes. That it acts as an additional piece of leverage, should either of the two require it, is but a fortunate by-product.

Twilight Wardens

Lt. Langold Skywarder of the Arcernoth Delta Vigil: I would be next. The group I'd like to discuss is the cadre of elite warriors known as the twilight wardens. We've never captured one, so we've never interrogated one, either. Our information comes filtered through second- and third-hand reports, so most of it's likely trash, but what can you expect from the slitheren?

Anyhow, wardens are a bad lot, a really mean group, if you get me. My company came across a nest of them over by the Hornswythe, and they near toasted us before we knew what was happening. We were lucky though — they weren't feeling aggressive, and we gave them a good pasting. But that was one of the toughest fights I've been in.

The wardens consider themselves the "protectors" of the marshes. They have all sorts in that crew — Foamers, Gorgers, even those mystical little ones with the black fur. What's annoying is they work together, and they work together well. It seems once you're a warden, nothing else matters.

Like raiders, twilight wardens operate in parties ranging from a handful to a small contingent. They seem to each bear responsibility for specific stretches of land, and each squad guards its assigned area like nobody's business. They specialize in ambushes, but they'll abandon stealth if they feel confident. They're strictly a defensive bunch though, and that makes them less a problem — at least, from a strictly nonaggressive point of view. The problem is their defense seems nigh unbreakable, which means if you don't catch your wardens before they get back into the marsh, you'll have to wait for their next raid. It also means we can never hit them back, so whatever they raid, they keep.

The wardens are getting better at their handiwork, if you can believe that. They're already good at what they do, but they're working to expand their horizons, cover more territory. It used to be only the eastern border gave us problems; now almost the entire north is like a wall to us. And while we sit here unable to wage an offensive war, the slitheren — thanks to the wardens — rest easy until they're ready to attack once more. If you ask me, there's an egg we need to break, because I don't want to see what'll hatch. (See also the twilight wardens prestige class in Chapter 5.)

Tactics

Capt. Nytharia Hawk of the Arcernoth Delta Vigil: Commander, we have heard much on the motivations of the enemy. What do we know of his tactics?

Lord-Commander Ardante: Beginning with the Dace Initiative and later through the work of the Arcernoth Delta Vigil, we have uncovered much regarding the ratmen's strategies. If there is one thing I can tell you certainly it is this: The slitheren will make lies of what I say. Never has our reconnaissance been complete; always have our contingencies been insufficient. Still, I will give you the best answer I can. Do with it as you will.

The Tenets of Treonis

Apprentices should be familiar with the following precepts, first codified by the Veshian commander Treonis. The commander fought in the final years of the Divine War and established the foundations of our nation's defenses in the aftermath. Written in 12 AV, the tenets describe certain axioms regarding the military practices of titan races. Though modern warfare has made some of Treonis' observations less applicable now than at the time of their penning, the tenets can nonetheless serve as a valuable starting point that will put one in good stead on the field of battle.

—*Wages of War: A Primer on Warfare*, 82 AV

The Rule of Numbers: Titanspawn fight when it is to their advantage, and force by quantity is their most valued gauge. An army of poor quality but with many fighters will attack even though it will meet defeat. An army of strong veterans but with few fighters will retreat even though it could have won.

The Rule of Leadership: Pluck the eye and the head is blind. Sever the head and the body will die. Titanspawn fight well so long as someone or something leads them. Target their commanders, for with their defeat will you defeat them all.

The Rule of Violence: Hate calls for violence, and violence calls for blood. Blood in turn is spilt in plenty during war. This is why the titanspawn fight, for their hate is great, greater by far than their wits. Offer them a prize, and they will pursue, like rabid dogs diving into an orgy of mindless bloodshed. Thus can you lead them to folly.

The Rule of Conviction: Though furious, the heart of the titanspawn is hollow. It is filled in equal measure with tenacity and cowardice. In a prolonged contest, their will shall crumble and they shall rage and attack with a reckless abandon worthy of the worst of fanatics, blinded by the twisted devotion which only the titans can engender. Bring them to this point and you have won.

The Rule of Ignorance: Reconnaissance is beyond the ken of our enemy, and so your secrets need little protection. Some are blind through honor (though twisted), fighting with false righteousness that forbids subtlety and spying. Others are blind through dim wits, and these are the least dangerous. Still others are blind through odd wits. These last are most dangerous, for they remain as incomprehensible to you as you are to them.

The Rule of Quality: We are the victors of the Divine War. Our nations flourish while the titans' own fall to decay. Without the industry born of the state, the titanspawn's resources are fewer than ours by many degrees. Press this advantage well and equip yourself with the finest, and you shall match metal against wood, sword against stake.

The Rule of Allies: The titanspawn trust no one, not even themselves. Though this makes them impervious to approach by hidden agents, it makes them equally resistant to would-be compatriots. Give one group no reason for quarrel, and they will stand by as you eliminate another.

Massed Warfare

Of the Tenets of Treonis, only her observation on numerical might holds when speaking of the slitheren.

On Superior Numbers

In nearly every encounter to date, the ratmen have withdrawn when faced with superior numbers. Only the Stalkers and Storm Chasers are known to break this rule, and even they fight when outnumbered only as a last resort.

Maintaining their numerical advantage is the duty of the priest-king. As the number of available fighters stems from the size of the population, and that derives from the nest's overall health and welfare, the theocracy's competence in this matter cannot falter. We have seen that a warren will depose its leader if he or she fails to meet expectations; this becomes especially true for the Stricken and the Diseased. Our problem, then, is that the priest-kings do their duty all too well.

The slitheren population is on the rise. Not only is each nest expanding in number, but the number of nests has been increasing as well. Nowadays, almost every land hosts a nest or two of ratmen eking out a living. We estimate that since the Dace Initiative first began its census, the slitheren population has swelled from under one million to well over six times that total. Through underground expansion, draining of marshland, and the construction of fortified settlements, the ratmen have managed to establish a virtual nation right under our noses. If you have not begun doing so, I urge you to keep tabs on the warrens near your own territories.

On Worthy Tactics

Because they have troops in abundance, some might conclude that the ratmen hurl their forces against us with little thought or planning. It was exactly this conceit which led to the Slaughter at Two Rivers. We have never observed them to "rage and attack with a reckless abandon worthy of the worst of fanatics, blinded by the twisted devotion which only the titans can engender." Though Treonis' observation may remain true for many titanspawn, it applies not at all to the slitheren.

Both at Two Rivers and at Treestand, our mutual forces met in considerable numbers. But even when their army outnumbered our own, their commanders never lost their calculating control, and their troops, though tenacious, broke with sanity for not one moment. We saw no "orgy of mindless bloodshed" but a carefully executed attack, as efficient as it was brutal.

True, most raids appear the result of serendipity, and their success results more from the raiders' personal skill and ability to improvise than from a plot devised by some higher agency. Yet raids bear little likeness to the work of armies, and their haphazard nature serves only to mislead us into thinking the slitheren wage their wars in kind.

Of Steel and Claw

Beyond the realms of command and organization, one must consider the worth of the fighters themselves. Here too, the outlook seems poor. Our soldiers are better than theirs on average, but the broods' elite can match our finest, and they have far more line troops than do we.

Most slitheren use equipment of poor quality, but with the war in Calastia, we can afford to do little better. Also, the Forge Crawler brood has master craftsmen, which means that slitheren champions can match our heroes steel for steel.

Then there is this simple fact: Take away my sword, and I am unarmed. Do the same to a slitheren, and his claws can still rip out your throat. The ratmen were literally born to fight, and they know this. They engage at close quarters and press their natural advantage whenever they can. Add to that their fiendish speed, and you'll see that most of our infantry doesn't stand a chance against them.

Raids

Necromancer Toral Deamica of Hollowfaust's Animists' Guild: *Once again, I am reminded of Hollowfaust's distance from the Mourning Marshes. While I agree with everything you have said, the people I must safeguard will face no slitheren armies. My interest lies in how these vermin conduct their raids. I'm sure Lord Canrae would agree, seeing as Darakeene is not unlike us in this regard.*

Lord-Commander Ardante: *It would appear that your mastery of divination is not as exalted as your necromantic arts. I was just about to address that point.*

Death by Little Bites

The slitheren are raiders, first and foremost. Though they can conduct massed warfare, hit-and-run tactics remain their favored means of striking at us, by far. Don't be fooled though — small bands can still deal great damage. My colleagues from Mithril can sympathize with my pain at the sight of Vesh's southern territories. Raids there have left my people with only grief.

The vigilants have attempted to return the favor with daytime raids of their own. Regrettably, the Mourning Marshes are far more unforgiving of outsiders than the southern prairies of Vesh. Without a detailed knowledge of the terrain, our efforts prove haphazard at best. Unfortunately, our scouting expertise is needed elsewhere: the war with Calastia has kept most of our rangers and druids in the Kelders reinforcing Burok Torn and Durrover. Thus we have few means to locate warrens and gauge the lay of the land around them. We have sought aid from the incarnates, but other duties occupy them at present.

Under Cover of Night

Creatures of darkness, the slitheren raid mostly by night. Though this tactic seems obvious, under-

stand that our enemy adopts it out of more than simple habit. We are vulnerable in the dark for many reasons, of which poor vision is but one.

Fear becomes most potent when the sun has gone. Even seasoned woodsmen pray for protection at night. If this fear grows into terror, it renders the victim helpless — easy prey for the broods. To create terror, the slitheren use illusory magic and lesser summoned allies. Defenders hide, mortified, within their homes and keeps, while the slitheren have their way with everything outside.

Fatigue is another of our nighttime enemies. Despite taking shifts, most guards find it difficult to remain alert throughout the long hours. At this time we become most vulnerable to drugs, poisons, and the spells of our enemies. Once again, do not expect to face dancing blades by torchlight. Rather, be prepared for the envenomed needle that sends you to your final slumber.

For these reasons, the slitheren rarely engage in open combat during their raids. They have no need to. Defenders can do little if they expect a pitched fight. With most broods, prepare instead for trickery and subtle assaults. A well-versed mage and a level head will serve you far better than any armor or sword.

Cat, Mouse, and the Mercenary Question

Like the rodents they are, the slitheren use coordinated raids to throw off defenders. Raids at one village draw out garrisons, who arrive only to learn that the broods have struck the town they just left. To counter this, we have instituted backups for our patrols, so when they respond to one distress call,

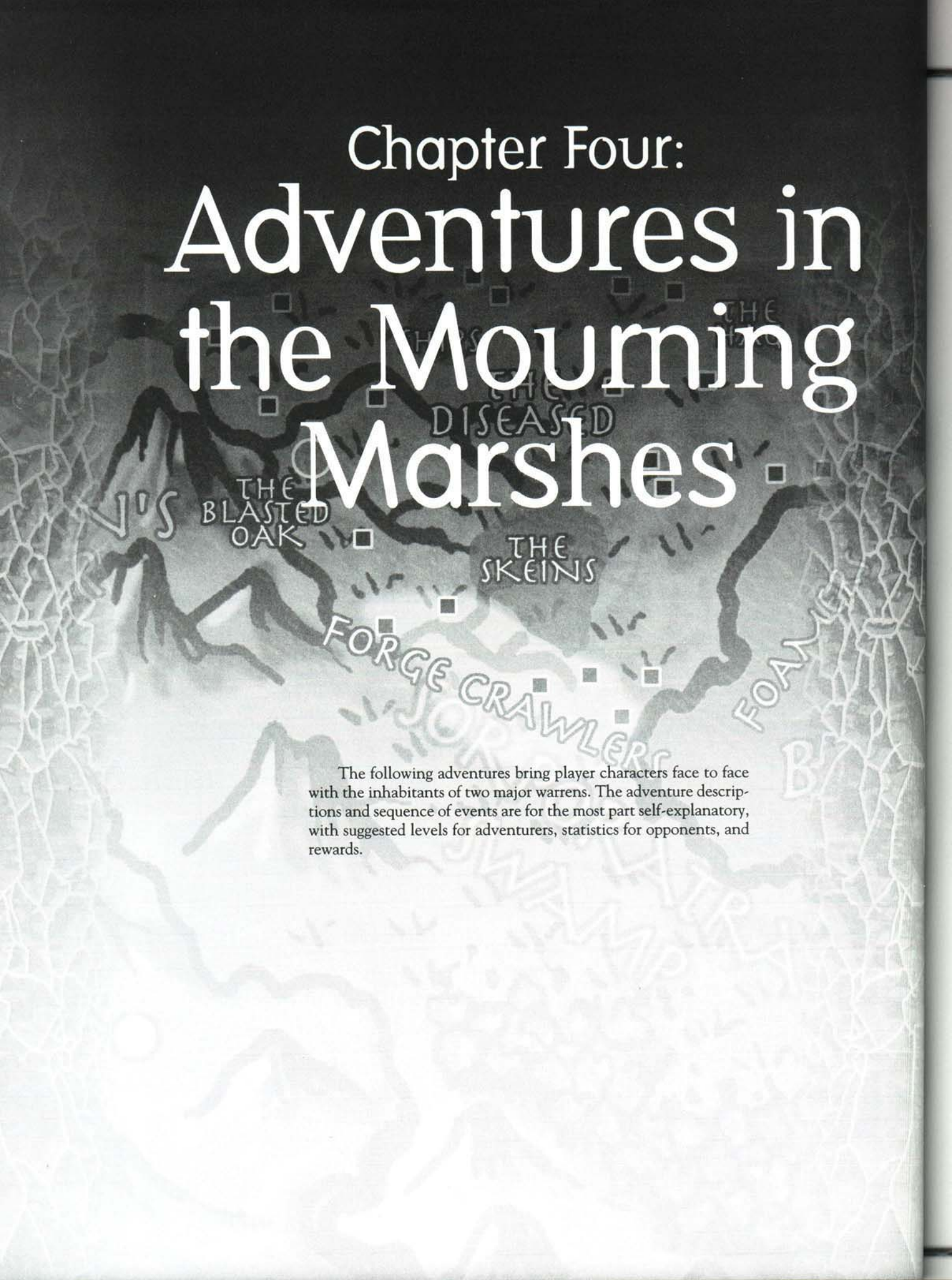
their former charges aren't left defenseless. Sadly, we remain underpowered to carry out this plan fully.

To address this problem, we have begun to hire mercenaries. Some of the wealthier settlements even bolster those few troops with additional hirelings of their own. Although this recruitment has reduced — at least in the short term — our vulnerability to the slitheren, other issues have arisen.

Vesh has fuller and more secure coffers than perhaps any other nation in the region. Our vast trade routes and open-minded approach to commerce have made for a speedy recovery since the end of the Divine War. But for all that progress, funding a war effort has stretched us to the limit. Mercenary troops now make up nearly twenty percent of our total forces in the southern provinces. Maintaining them has been a tricky endeavor at best. The House of Asuras has made subtle offers to "aid" us in this matter, though we have learned from experience that their help likely brings with it more trouble than it's worth.

Our only other option has been to encourage our citizenry to take a more martial attitude, but this practice runs counter to our ideals. We may be in a state of war with Calastia, with the slitheren, and others, but most of us in Lave find it distasteful to promote a militaristic peasantry. In the meantime, we continue to look for hardy adventurers and errant soldiers to fill in the gaps of our defenses. Some propose we organize these fighters into irregular contingents within the existing Veshian command structure. Whether anything will arise from these ideas remains to be seen.





Chapter Four: Adventures in the Mourning Marshes

The following adventures bring player characters face to face with the inhabitants of two major warrens. The adventure descriptions and sequence of events are for the most part self-explanatory, with suggested levels for adventurers, statistics for opponents, and rewards.

Diseased Nest of Chernpot Mossheld

In this scenario, checking out a reported warren of ratmen raiders plaguing border towns leads the PCs to the preparations for a slitheren raid and a plot to taint crucial Veshian water supplies with disease-ridden materials.

This adventure suits characters of levels 6 through 10, depending upon the party's approach. A group of four adventurers averaging level 6 or 7 must be careful not to fully engage or disrupt the nest. A "success" involves capturing members of the nest or merely surveying it. Each entry below is rated by encounter level (EL), suggesting the level of characters who will find the encounter challenging. A party of 8th to 10th level can act more aggressively but should still take care. Trying to take out the whole nest by subterfuge must be brilliantly conceived, and rigging its destruction would take a great deal of advance planning. A vigilant would be appropriate in the party, as would rogues and characters with darkvision.

Adventure Background

The Diseased warren of Chernpot Mossheld is located in a hill about a half day's travel from the edge of Vesh. Its raiders occasionally forage out of the marshes for slaves, and trade among the slitheren there remains brisk.

The nearest towns in Vesh don't know anything specific about where the slitheren raiders come from, other than "somewhere in the marshes." A PC with Knowledge (slitheren) or Knowledge (titanspawn) notes — after a successful skill check (DC 12) — that most descriptions of the raids suggest the Diseased, due to the outbreaks of illness that usually follow. A few raids are clearly the province of the Red Witches, carried out with illusions and undead.

PCs less familiar with slitheren may pick up some general information about the different types of broods by speaking with locals (see Chapter 1).

Adventure Summary

The best way to begin this adventure is to have the party respond to raids on Veshian villages along the edge of the Mourning Marshes. Gathering information, they could use magical reconnaissance to get a clue as to where the slitheren hole up. Depending on the nature of the party, this could be a heroic mission to vanquish evil or a more venal pursuit of treasure and information. A vigilant's involvement makes this adventure rather easy to launch.

At some point the party may capture a Diseased hunter or raider. These slitheren could provide helpful information. Other slitheren may reveal only the warren's location and basic answers about the Diseased.

Information, whether gained by interrogation or long-distance examination, indicates the warren's hill slopes gently northward, sharply southward, and seems monitored the least along its southern edge. Within the hill, the military wing lies southwest of the main warrens, with the priest wing southeast of the main warrens. See the map on page 57.

Hunters or raiders can give characters a basic sense of the A rooms and the aboveground huts (described below), but cannot provide a coherent map. Within the nest, the slitheren retain only a general idea of where things are, rather than mapping things out mentally.

Raiders know about rooms C1 through C4 and the existence of tunnels leading to other military rooms.

Either type of captive also can give general information about the Diseased, though only as a result of direct questions. This is not a matter of reluctance, presuming the PCs use a *charm monster* or similar spell; slitheren simply are not prone to reflecting on their condition and everyday surroundings.

You can find statistics for all involved creatures at the end of this adventure.

Hooks for Characters

The player characters can involve themselves in this adventure in a couple different ways.

PCs Traveling in Southern Vesh

From a nearby baker's shop, an old woman wails, "Audri! Audri! The monsters! How? How by Madriel's mercy could...?" before trailing off into weeping. Nearby stand a grim-faced pair of youths. One of them glances toward the shop and comments, "Cursed ratmen again!"

If the PCs ask just about anyone in town, they learn the latest news of a slitheren raid on Drumlin Farm, a hamlet close to the Mourning Marshes. The old woman is a baker named Gilly Adrule. Her daughter, visiting friends in Drumlin Farm, has either died or been taken as a slave. The hamlet had a population of 83; the few survivors have fled to other hamlets and villages. The characters can hear numerous stories of other raids over the past few years as well.

If the party requires a bit more inducement to take on the adventure, the PCs overhear scholars and mages wondering openly what treasures and arcane materials the slitheren raiders may have amassed over the years. Some of it is no doubt tainted by the titans, but perhaps someone ought to "liberate" the materials in question, and find out for certain.

One or More Vigilant PCs

You receive a sealed letter. In it are listed towns and villages throughout southern Vesh, and numbers. Reading on, it seems the numbers indicate people killed or enslaved during slitheren raids. A rough circle drawn on a map of the Mourning Marshes indicates an area thirty miles in diameter. The letter's details lead the Vigil to

believe the Diseased have established a large nest somewhere in this area. You have been tasked with locating the nest and, if possible, neutralizing the threat before reporting back to your commanding officer.

A number of points go unsaid in these orders, including who to bring, what the Diseased are, and other background. The group must track down any information they need. Although the letter suggests that locating the nest would complete the mission, higher-ranked vigilants will not be pleased with lackluster efforts. Still, an area thirty miles in diameter is a rather large region to search.

Development

Characters can scope out the nest in a few different ways. The simplest is from a distance, or using ranged spell effects. If the nest is on alert, however, the party may find things more difficult than they expected. Should their major exits fall under fire, the ratmen leave through other egress tunnels. If things grow particularly dangerous for them, they tunnel up to the surface to form new exits.

The ratmen are skilled at ranged tactical combat, though the PCs may have superior firepower. If the PCs find themselves forced to retreat from a confrontation, the slitheren can hunt them quite effectively. The ratmen remain cautious, however, and break off pursuit if success seems unlikely.

The Diseased kill captured PCs if they feel they can't control them adequately. A character may pretend to be subjugated in order to become a slave, but still may die due to disease or slitheren caprice.

PCs spending time in the nest must take care not to catch Filth Fever (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 75). Players make Fortitude checks at DC 10 when their characters enter the nest and once per day thereafter. If the PC bears wounds while in the nest, the DC is 15. Otherwise the disease progresses as listed in the *Core Rulebook II*.

Adventurers instead may attempt to infiltrate a nest, depending on their resources. Foreign slitheren or other potential allies will be accompanied in the warrens by at least one albino guard and a priest — more if the group looks particularly threatening. Generally the Diseased attempt to parlay outside the nest, most likely in Hut 3 or in the clearing above A1. These locations are both close to several access points, including the egress from the military wing (D1), allowing some security.

The party may be able to convince the slitheren to let visitors below. Whether they go in or not, the nest will be mobilized (see Nest Information at the end of this adventure) before the priests begin any dealings with visitors.

The Diseased initially refuse any requests to meet the high priest. Particularly persuasive arguments or characters (Diplomacy or Bluff checks at DC 20) may induce the high priest to meet them, most likely in the clearing or in A1. A home guard

unit will be on hand, as will several nest guard units (for details on these units see the end of this adventure). Assume that guards posted at watch are at their maximum capacity.

Within the nest, the PCs can find clues that the Diseased are prepared to wage major strikes against Veshian cities. They have put in a request to Red Witches for aid, which most likely will come in the form of 40 horserats and 5 Witches. Assuming the nest remains essentially undamaged by the group's actions, it will strike north in 2d6 days. The war parties in this operation seek to gather slaves from outlying hamlets and towns. The ultimate goal is to taint crucial water supplies with disease-ridden materials — water supplies used for targets too big for the nest to attack normally.

If the PCs have not crippled this nest by that time, thousands will die.

Outside

Far From the Warren

Marshland, thick with the stench of hay, excrement, and dirt, extends in every direction. Here and there, a mottled mess of brown and green reeds, grasses, and ferns breaks up the monotony. The air feels usually hot and still, though occasional breezes bring fresh odor to your nostrils. Mounds and hills dot the landscape, obscured in a sweaty haze.

During any encounter, the group may wade through rather thick mud. Roll a d20 for each party member and apply the penalty obtained from the chart below to the character's Dexterity for the duration of the encounter; adjust Dexterity modifiers accordingly.

Roll	Dex Penalty
1–5	None
6–10	–1
11–13	–2
14–16	–3
17–19	–4
20	–5

Note that any humanoids, including slitheren, suffer these Dexterity penalties. The above penalties apply only to actions requiring full motion, not to ranged missile attacks.

Each day in the marshes, roll a d20. On a roll of 1 to 5, the adventurers encounter a hunting group of Diseased, the equivalent of a nest response unit (see Nest Information at the end of this adventure).

The party should find it relatively easy to track through marsh (Wilderness Lore check* DC 10), particularly if tracking humanoids. Moving feet create furrows in the soil, leaving watery traces. Plants are thick and become lanes of broken stems and leaves. This applies both to the party tracking slitheren and the reverse.

*Character making the check must have the Track feat; otherwise, the character must succeed at a Search check (DC 15) to locate the tracks.



As the PCs close in within a mile of the nest, they have a good chance of spotting a line of smoke from the slitheren's cook fires and lanterns (Spot check DC 15 once per day or Search check DC 15 once per hour of active searching).

South of the Warren (EL 4)

The hill slopes up sharply just north of here, rocky earth rising from the mud and slime. Thick clumps of marsh plants form along the shallows. In every other direction, the plants form a patchy tangle as far as you can see. The only features are other mounds and rises, hazy in the organic miasma. Swarms of insects dance in the thick air. The slope looks a bit steep, though in two spots the land rises more gently.

There is a slight chance that slitheren may be nearby when a group approaches. A roll of 3 or less on a d20 indicates that a hunting party (1 to 10 on d20) or collection party (11 to 20 on d20) is either leaving or approaching and may notice the adventurers. This chance gets a +3 bonus about a half hour after dusk, and a -1 penalty during the day.

If the PCs do not carefully inspect the two ramps from the mud to the hill, the party will stumble onto 3 spined lizards (see *Creature Collection II*, page 171). A Search check (DC 10) allows them to notice the creatures, as long as the searching character actually looks for something unusual. Someone familiar with

marshes and spined lizards may instead make a Spot check (DC 20).

Climbing onto the initial rise of the hill away from the ramps requires a Climb check (DC 20). The slimy mud and slippery undergrowth makes it harder than it appears, but other PCs can assist the climber (offering a +2 bonus apiece to the climber's result if they succeed at checks). This climb becomes a problem if the PCs are rushed.

Creatures. There are two easy ramps out from the calf-deep muck and onto the hill. Nestled in the easterly route, covered with a thin layer of mud and obscured by tall reeds, is a spined lizard. Two others doze below the other ramp.

Tactics. If someone bothers or accidentally pokes any of the spined lizards, one bellows loudly, and then all of them attempt to escape farther into the marsh. If the PCs manage to stay out of the way, the lizards take no offensive action.

Spined lizards (3). CR 2; Large Beast (20 ft. long); HD 4d10 + 12; hp 42, 39, 35; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (+1 Dex, -1 size, +7 natural); Atk +6 melee (1d6+6, tail swipe); SA Defensive spines, tail lash; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 19, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 6.

Skills. Move Silently +5, Spot +3

SA — *Defensive Spines (Ex)*: If the spine lizard charges, anyone in its path must make a Reflex save (DC 13) or be hit by 1d8 spikes, each inflicting 1d4 points of damage. In addition, anyone who hits a spined lizard with an unarmed attack or with a weapon with a reach of 5 feet or less must make a Reflex save (DC 13) or be stabbed by 1d4 spines.

SA — *Tail Lash (Ex)*: If surrounded by opponents, the spined lizard lashes out with broad sweeps of its muscular tail, hoping to bowl over the attackers so it can escape. Opponents hit with the tail lash must make a Reflex save (DC 16) or be knocked prone.

Development. If the PCs panic the spined lizards, there is a good chance the creatures' noise alerts the warren. Simply startling the lizards results in a warning bellow that raises the slitheren on a d20 roll of 10 or less. A pitched battle with the lizards, on the other hand, alerts the ratmen on a roll of 14 or less. Particularly loud or impressive magic automatically raises a full alert.

A normal alert attracts 2 to 3 raiders, who cautiously peer over the hill. The PCs get a Spot check (DC 18) to notice them.

This side constitutes the best approach to the warren. The Diseased's huts are just over the hill, and, provided the PCs avoid disturbing the spined lizards, they might successfully sneak into the warren this way.

North of the Warren (EL 4 [day] or 6 [night])

The mud is deep and hard to move through. It gets shallower to the south, as a hill gently rises from thick reeds and ferns, hazy in the distance. Insects swarm, rising up in verminous waves from the slime when the wind dies, then scattering and falling as the breeze struggles to move turgid air.

The three huts of the warren stand 600 feet away, barely visible. A Spot check (DC 20) allows characters to notice them (DC 15 if they already know they're looking for a hut). If the party approaches during the day without suitable cover or distraction, the 2 to 3 raiders secreted around the huts spot them once they approach the huts within 400 feet. During the night there are 5 to 7 raiders. A party creating a lot of noise or otherwise creating a commotion is noticed immediately.

While the characters remain 400 feet or more from the huts, all Dexterity-related activities suffer a -2 penalty due to the sucking mud. The above penalty applies only to actions requiring full motion, not to ranged missile attacks. However, by the time the ratmen likely notice the group, the ground becomes solid enough to avoid penalty.

Development. Raiders, spying obvious members of the Divine Races, send one of their number below to alert the priests and military officials. Within 4 to 6 rounds, the entire warren will be mobilized (see Nest Information at the end of this adventure).

PCs disguised as members of the warren will find themselves scrutinized, but they do not raise the alert as long as they succeed in Disguise checks opposed by the ratmen's Intelligence. (Disguises include hooded cloaks gained from defeated Diseased, but donning these clothes requires a character to succeed at a Fortitude save; see "Diseases" in Chapter 6.) Should they disguise themselves as other slitheren or possible allies, the raiders hail them in Slitheren or the Common tongue; one guard calls out, demanding they hold until they may be received properly. Another guard goes below to alert appropriate priests. The warren soon will be mobilized (see Nest Information at the end of this adventure).

East of the Warren

The marsh feels solid underfoot, with only a few inches of soft, wet mud. By now you've become a connoisseur of mud, able to distinguish varying grades of slime, sediment, flow, and plant matter. If the gods are kind, you will spend the rest of your life somewhere dry.

A hill to the west rises from a dense growth of ferns and reeds. As you get closer, a horrendous stench assails your nostrils, achieving new standards in odor within the constant stench of decay. A bodily smell of rotting flesh and open sewers assaults your senses.

The waste material of the nest gets dumped to the east, where it falls easily down a slick slope into the marsh. The slitheren aren't too picky about where they put it, as long as it's convenient. Layers of foul matter block the egress point of the priest's escape tunnel (D3). It forms a slight depression just to the south on the hill, unnoticeable without magic or long examination (Search check 25).

A Fortitude save (DC 18) is necessary to avoid a -1 penalty to all attack and skill rolls while within range of the stench (a radius of 100 feet around the dump). Other factors may mitigate this penalty, such as a PC that lacks any sense of smell.

Though the odor does not unduly bother the Diseased, they do not normally travel down the eastern side of the hill. Other details of this area resemble to the northern approach, explained above. There is no Dexterity penalty due to footing here.

West of the Warren

The marsh, covered with low ferns and grasses, feels firm underfoot. A hill slopes up gently to the east, an easy walk from your location. It's somewhat lost in a haze of cloying air and dancing insects.

Hunting and collection parties (see Nest Information) normally travel east out of the warren, then south into the deeper marsh. The characters encounter one of these parties on a d20 roll of 1 to 4 if traveling during the day, or on a roll of 1 to 6 during the night.

A Spot check (DC 10) makes clear the signs of heavy activity and long-term, regular use of this area. This is the normal path of the warren's hunters and other workers.

Seeing the huts of the warren requires a Spot check (DC 10), assuming the adventurers succeeded at the first check and remain alert to the possibility of a nearby lair (DC 20 otherwise). Raiders posted as guards at secure locations keep careful vigil on this approach and spot the PCs at a distance of 600 feet. During the day, 2 to 3 raiders are available, 5 to 7 at night.

Aboveground

Each of the three huts upon the hill is built on a slight rise, placed to keep water from running down into the nest. South of the half-circle they form lies a small clearing.

Exterior of Each Hut

The large, rounded hut is made of dried mud. Old reeds and straw shows through in some spots where the mud has dissolved. Across a human-sized opening hangs a leather curtain.

On sunny days, pallets of drying brick are laid out just south of Hut 2.

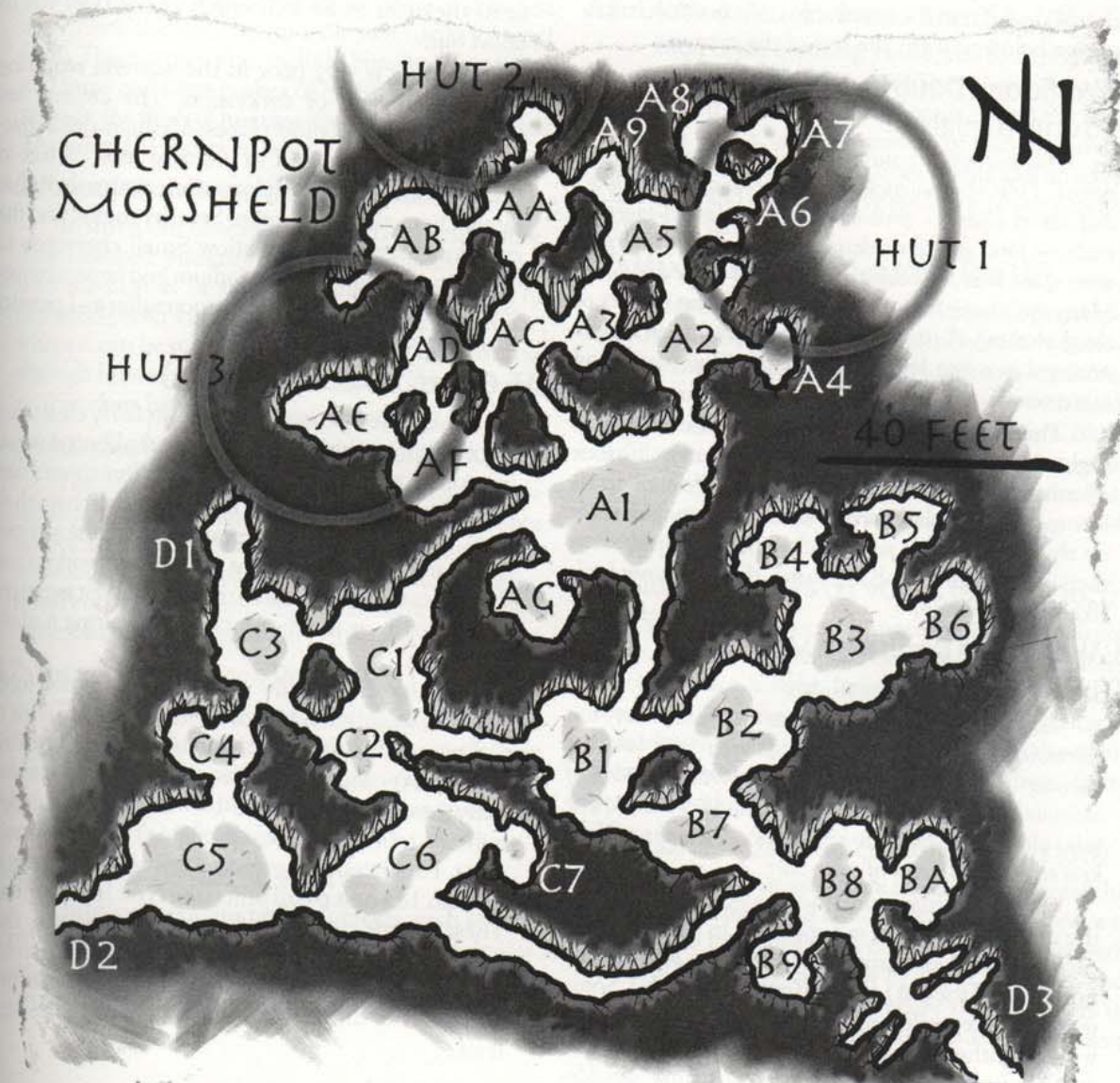
Clearing

An area of packed earth just south of the three large mud huts looks flat and dry.

If the party has made it to the clearing, the raiders on guard nearby have almost certainly spotted them. This location is otherwise unremarkable, though if the party can dig 10 feet down into the soil (or magically remove as much earth), they might break into Area A1.

1: Wattle and Daub Hut (Food) (EL 3 day, 5 night)

The hut seems larger than it looks from outside, a good 30 feet across. It is also very musty — its closed, animal smell and acrid smoke assault the senses. The little light here comes from small, cuplike lanterns hissing and spitting as they shed a noxious smoke. Smoke also billows up from one opening in the dirt floor. Throughout this hut stand support beams, resembling a small grove of decaying trees. Shadowy shapes swing listlessly above, cloaked with the haze.



Busy in this hut during the day are 6 workers, 12 at night (for stats, see Nest Information). They prepare a variety of game animals or, more rarely, slaves. The bodies hang on lariats from hooks in the ceiling, secured to the wattle structure of the hut. After draining them of blood, the workers skin the carcasses and strip off the flesh for food. They tan the skin for clothing, use the sinew as securing material, and craft from the bones various weapons, tools, and decoration. The blood they often store in ceremonial containers for the priests.

In the floor, two openings lead down at a steep angle to tunnels below. The tunnel to A2 — the more southerly of the two openings — also doubles as a chimney for cook fires. The second opening leads down to A5 below. Both tunnels measure a good 5 feet across, wide enough for someone to crouch and shuffle down carefully. Ratmen generally slide down on their backs or bellies. Straw and soft earth litters the floors of these tunnels, which the workers frequently turn up to keep them from getting too hard and slick.

Workers pick up and use impromptu blades or sharp bones if non-Diseased arrive. At least two try to escape below to warn the rest of the warren.

2: Wattle and Daub Hut (Materials) (EL 5 day, 10 night)

This hut appears surprisingly large, a good 30 feet across. Tufts of straw stick through the mud of the ceiling, and raised lines — probably wood or lashed-together reeds — form geometric designs above. At the intersections of the lines, wooden struts descend to the dirt floor. Many tools hang from racks on the wall next to piles of rough clothing. A variety of containers and small sledges arranged in a line hold reeds, wood, straw, mud, and excrement.

There are 10 workers here during the day, 30 at night. Near the southeast wall of the hut, a 10-foot opening in the floor acts as a convenient ramp to transport materials down to AA or back up. The tools on the racks include scoops, chisels, picks, and hammers. The hardier tools are stone, the finer ones look like wood or bone.

3: Wattle and Daub Hut (Materials) (EL 5 day, 10 night)

About 30 feet across, the interior of this musty hut resembles a forest at night. Light flickers from lanterns burning questionable fuel, and the pervasive odor of animals hangs in the air. Rough clothing lies piled to one side, along with threshing equipment. Several reed baskets store metal items of some sort.

The adventurers can find 10 workers here during the day, 30 at night. Two openings in the dirt floor, each about 6 feet across, lead below to AB (on the north side of the hut) and AF (on the east side). Some materials are collected here, as in Hut 2. Usually workers gather materials and form them into bundles and bricks here. Bricks they leave to dry outside,

while the bundles they bring below to be woven into baskets and furnishings. The iron implements are manacles to secure incoming slaves or those being prepared for outdoor rituals.

Belowground: Common Areas

Below, the rooms of the warren are rounded, with a tacky layer of filth over everything. The place is thick with an animal feter. The walls consist of layers of dried excrement and mud mixed with straw pressed into reed-and-wood lattices. The walls have a tendency to flake or scale, with mushrooms and slimes slowly spreading over them, but the passageways seem fairly sturdy. The passages to the surface appear somewhat drier, with dusty walls.

Should the ceiling sustain more than 10 points of damage at any one spot, it will start to collapse. A small collapse (covering an area 10 feet square) is relatively minor, though three or more collapses near one another can cause a significant cave-in.

Collapses require a Reflex save (DC 15) from those below to avoid the 1d6 points of crushing damage. Those who fail also find themselves pinned until they can make a Strength check (DC 10) to crawl out.

Lighting is very poor in the warrens, requiring torches, lanterns, or darkvision. The ceilings are reasonably high in most places; Medium-sized characters can stand upright in rooms at least 20 feet in diameter, and in the corridors connected to them, but larger characters must stoop. Smaller rooms, and the corridors between them, allow Small characters to stand upright but require Medium and larger characters to stoop. Characters who stoop suffer a -1 penalty to all Dexterity-related rolls.

A1: Common Room (EL varies)

This large common room seems fairly clean. It is the nest's major gathering place and a central meeting point for the three castes. Four or five times a day, a significant portion of the nest gathers to share their meal. The priests intone a prayer or two, the military struts, and the eating begins. Afterward, workers and slaves clean up. About one-third of the nest is present in this room or in adjacent tunnels during a given feeding.

During meals, one can see troughs for food, hanks of meat bound in twine or on sticks, skins of bad wine and water, and slaves serving (or being served). At other times, the common room remains fairly busy, with at least 100 workers and a few military ratmen passing through at any given moment. For encounter purposes, consider the room to contain 1d3 nest guard units (see Nest Information). These guards question characters in disguise that loiter. Visiting guests are served food and possibly even receive invitations to the next feast. Visiting enemies will also, of course, be invited to the next feast.

A2: Lower Kitchen (EL varies from 5 to 13)

The kitchen reeks of blood and spoiled food. Here, meat is brought down from the hut above and stored for immediate consumption on wooden racks worked into the walls, or shuffled to side pantries.

Workers use a variety of simple knives and sharp rocks in the rather simple food preparation. Cooking fires dry out or lightly cook meat and roots; the smoke billows up through the tunnel to Hut 1.

Adventurers find 1d3 x 10 workers here, or 60 in the event of a feast.

A3: Tool Area (EL up to 5)

A number of tools are stacked in baskets. These include small knives, sharp rocks, random pieces of wood and twine, reed bundles, and so forth. These baskets provide implements for the nearby kitchen and for other uses. This room also serves as a common thoroughway. There are 1d10 workers here.

A4: Pantry (EL up to 5)

Racks along the small pantry's ceiling and east wall contain hunks of glossy brown-and-black chunks of what must be meat, tied up in twine and lashed away from the dirt. Many look like hanks of aged ham. These stores also include bundles of radishes and yams and large bushes of herbs. The "hams" are actually the flesh of humans and other unfortunates. There are 1d10 workers here.

A5: Preparation Room (EL varies from 5 to 10)

In this room slaves are prepared for their demise. The Diseased pummel the more recalcitrant ones into submission or bludgeon them to death. The slitheren prefer not to spill blood except in Hut 1, where it can be stored for later use. Workers also pass through here to various other regions. There are 1d3 x 10 workers here.

A6: Main Slave Equipment Room (EL up to 5)

The ratmen store manacles, bindings, nettle lashes, and other equipment here. One can also spot bottles and other items stripped from new slaves that are not deemed immediately useful. Minor coinage, jewelry of mainly sentimental value, and clothing lies in various baskets. There are 1d10 workers here.

A7: Secondary Storage Room (EL 1)

This room is rarely used, serving to store overflow from A6 or A8. A nest of 6 giant rats quietly lives here, burrowing in rotting leather and cloth and making forays into other tunnels. (For giant rat statistics, see Nest Information.)

A8: Secondary Storage Room

This room contains broken objects, such as pottery shards, glass pieces, shattered swords, and similar items. There is nothing of value, though rummaging through may turn up clues concerning past slaves.

A9: Mudroom Storage (EL up to 2)

Pottery bowls reeking of filth are stacked in this store room. When full bowls are transported from AC, slaves take replacements from here. Occasionally, workers store excess excrement here for short periods. The 1d3 workers here are joined by 1d6 slaves.

AA: Materials Receiving Room (EL varies from 5 to 10)

Sledges of bricks and bundles of wood are frequently brought down from Hut 2 into this receiving room. From here, workers or slaves can pile up the materials for temporary storage and distribution throughout the nest.

The room contains several smooth-bottomed wooden platforms with tow ropes. These sledges are stacked, empty, for when they are needed. Brick, made of dried mud and excrement, is stacked in low piles, next to baskets full of prepared reeds, wood, and twine.

There are 1d6 + 10 workers here, and 1d8 slaves.

AB: Cloth Room (EL varies from 5 to 10)

Most of the clothing, twine, and tools of the nest are made in the cloth room. This big work room is littered with short lengths of reeds, straw, flat rocks, wooden bowls, and containers of various noxious fluids. A rough path leads from the tunnel up to Hut 3, to AA, and to AD. There are 1d3 x 10 workers here with 2d4 slaves.

AC: Mudroom (EL varies from 5 to 10)

This room smells even more noxious than most. While the Diseased occasionally defecate wherever they want, they are encouraged to come to mudrooms and excrete into pottery bowls. Big bowls, with stands around them for seating, line this small room. Slaves regularly transport the bowls up to Hut 3 above as raw materials and remove excess waste to be dumped east of the nest. There are 1d3 x 10 workers here, and 2d6 slaves.

AD: Slave Quarters (EL varies from 1/2 to 3)

The Diseased set aside space for slaves' meals and sleep. Young ratmen also sometimes quarter here. Though space is tight, lanes remain open for movement through the room. Manacles, a scattering of threadworn cloth, and scraps of food litter the many sleeping figures. The humid air feels stifling. There are 1d6 workers here, and 1d3 x 10 slaves.

AE: Children's Quarters (EL varies from 1 to 3)

Reed mats hanging from the ceiling conceal the western quarter of the children's room. This space is devoted to the still-furless children of the Diseased, about 10 currently cared for by slaves, mothers, and blindfolded workers. In the other three-quarters of the space, the 40 or so children sleep and spend most of their day.

Besides the children and a scattering of adults, the room has a few cloth blankets and rough bone or wooden toys. A substantial layer of excrement and rotting food covers the floor.

There are 2d3 workers here, with 40 children, 10 babies, and 2d10 slaves.

AF: Adult Quarters (EL varies from 10 to 16)

Sleeping ratmen occupy this simple room. A ramp leads up to Hut 3, and sleepers who shift into lanes of traffic are simply kicked back to the sides of the room. Any commotion above quickly awakens everyone here.

There are 1d4 x 50 workers sleeping here, as well as 2d6 workers and 2d4 slaves passing through.

AG: Preparation Room

This room, which connects to A1, contains mats and simple eating utensils. During large feasts, this room handles overflow capacity. Frequently the priests feed in this room while the workers eat in the main area. As it is also used as a place of honor for visiting allies, the workers keep it much cleaner than the rest of the nest.

This room normally remains empty, except during meals. At these times, various priests may occupy it. For combat purposes, consider this preparation room part of A1; characters in AG or A1 can use the passage's walls for cover.

Belowground: Priest Wing

The warren's southeast wing is home to the members of the priest caste.

B1: Priest Receiving Room (EL varies)

When the priests want to meet workers or converse with military ratmen, they do so in this receiving room. It contains four bowls of brass on stands, containing mud, excrement, and blood in varying amounts. With these materials, the priests anoint themselves and prepare sacrifices for the trip up to the surface.

Rarely does anyone venture in here, except at appointed times. During priestly preparation times one can find here 4 priests, 3 guards, 10 workers, and 2d4 slaves. At other times, there is a 1 in 20 chance of finding a priest in this room.

B2: Priest Quarters (EL 14 with all priests)

Priests sleep in their own quarters on mats of reeds and straw. The mats line the northern wall. A rough bookshelf made of woven reeds on the opposite wall holds a variety of religious tomes. Parchment the priests store away from the walls and other surfaces in wooden racks, though they still bear the mark of slow rot.

Rough abstract designs representing suffering figures, rats chewing their way through tunnels of flesh, and religious phrases cover the walls, though

they are hard to make out due to the rough conditions of the walls.

Unless there is a feast or other event, all nine priests remain here, studying, praying, or sleeping. The shelves hold 20 books, worth 1d20 x 10 gp each.

B3: High Priest's Quarters (EL 10)

This richly appointed room contains tapestries, chests, books, and a pile of elven skulls. All are in a state of decay, however, covered with a slow rot. The tapestries are worthless, except possibly as a clue to the towns the ratmen stole them from. The unlocked chests hold a total of 10,532 gold pieces. The room's 50 books, all in grubby but still decent condition, cover a wide variety of topics; they're worth 1d20 x 10 gp each from the right buyer.

Unless the nest has been mobilized (see Nest Information), the high priest will be found here, dining or relaxing. He always keeps at least one guard (preferably an albino guard) posted at the passage between B2 and B3. If there are insufficient guards, a raider or 4 hunters may substitute.

B4: Store Room (Books)

Bookshelves line this room. The space seems remarkably clean and dry. A *detect magic* spell reveals the presence of magic, though it is used only to preserve the books. The 210 volumes are worth 1d20 x 10 gp each. GMs may substitute useful tomes for these general books, taking into account their rough value. The *Black Book of Belsameth* (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 203) might be placed here, reducing the number of books by 100.

The room is closed with a wooden door and a simple lock. The lock can sustain only 2 points of damage; a character can break the door with a simple Strength check (DC 10).

B5: Store Room (Flesh)

This storage chamber holds the high priest's prized possessions. Waxy, life-sized figures of humans and elves in torment fill the room, covered with sores, cuts, and small insects. These corpses, preserved through magic, show the final stages of a number of diseases. They are used to instruct the priests, and the high priest is always looking to expand his collection.

B6: Treasure Store Room

Rough chests and baskets contain treasure of fabulous description. Gold bars, jewelry, and coinage are stacked in tottering piles, some half buried in the floor and walls. One can find a total of 23,950 gold pieces here, plus 125 gems worth 1d4x100 gp each as part of the pieces of jewelry. Many of the coins and gold bars bear the mark of Vesh, though some originated as far away as Calastia. These come from wreckage traded by the Foamers and from captured treasure transported too close to the Mourning Marshes.

B7: Ritual Room

The floor of the ritual room contains several shallow pits with eight stone blocks set with iron loops. These form anchors to hold down sacrifices for some of the rites performed here. The room is otherwise empty.

B8: Holy Slaves Room (EL 6)

This hive the priests dedicate to the slimy doom disease (see the *Core Rulebook II*, page 75). These quarters confine 20 slaves in various stages of the illness within rough cages made of reeds. Characters who come in contact with infected slaves run the risk of contracting the disease as described in the *Core Rulebook II*, page 74. Stone bowls, bone grails, and small sets of tools are arranged in a work area. The ceilings and walls are set in instructional designs.

The military wing has a special entrance to this room, so that guards may watch over the slaves. Unless they are posted elsewhere, one albino guard and two guards stand duty here. Occasionally one may wander into adjacent rooms, keeping security.

B9: Sample Room

Within nets hung from the ceiling are hundreds of stoppered bottles. They contain infectious material harvested from the Holy Slaves. Wrapped in reeds, they can be transported to water sources for large human settlements. There are also some scrap-

ing tools, used to gather the material, and a basket full of empty jars and bottles. The bottles of many shapes and kinds include even some wine jugs dating from before the Titanswar. The Diseased have carefully gathered them for their holy purpose. A rough door guards the room, though it is easy to break through.

A table here contains documents and annotated maps. The PCs can gather, based on these materials and a successful Intelligence check (DC 18), that the slitheren are planning to infect the water supplies of several Veshian cities during an operation scheduled to begin in 2d6 days. On a success of DC 25 or better, characters can deduce that concurrent raids of Veshian settlements to the north are planned as a distraction from the strike at the water supplies.

BA: Bone Room

When the Holy Slaves' organs finally fail, dissolving into bloody slime, the ratmen scrape all the loose material from the bodies, then deposit the remains in this bone room. In the center of the chamber plunges a deep pit filled with slimy, rotting flesh. Priests occasionally scrape the clearly infectious material from the merely rotten, near the edges of the pit. Deeper, the bodies decompose, releasing a charnel gas that seeps down into the bones and muck.

Occasionally, slaves are sent to remove excess bones. The close contact with the beslimed materials demands that these individuals join the Holy Slaves.



Belowground: Military Wing

The warren's southwest wing contains quarters for the members of the military caste.

C1: Staging Area

This main staging area for the formation of hunting and other parties contains room to discuss, organize, and train. The walls bear scars from numerous patches, due to poorly aimed blows.

C2: Base Armory

Reed baskets contain dozens of wooden practice weapons, scimitars, leather armor, and small shields. Some of the baskets hang from pegs in the walls, while some are simply piled on the floor.

C3: Raider Sleeping Quarters (EL varies)

Any raiders not otherwise occupied probably lie sleeping here. Despite their irregular hours, three of them likely are sleeping here at any one time. They sleep with weapons and armor nearby, ready to use. The ten sleep mats are highly individual, with knick-knacks and trophies from past campaigns. There are dolls from Vesh children, bundles of elven fingerbones, strips of silk and lace, locket, knots of hair, and many other sentimental items.

C4: Ranked Armory

Kept clean and very dry, wooden racks extend from the walls of this armory to hold shortbows, arrows, quivers, and slings. The favorable conditions help keep these weapons in good shape. The armory holds 14 shortbows, 50 slings, 200 arrows, and a dozen quivers.

C5: Main Guard Quarters (EL 17)

Whichever guards are sleeping here may use the mats laying about. Three guards generally doze here at any one time, barring mobilization or other events. The room is spacious, with space to train and wrestle. This is also the quarters of all 200 Dead Eaters. Though occasionally brought out for raids and training missions, they usually stay here. At any one time, 100 of them will be asleep.

C6: Holy Guard Quarters (EL 6 for both albinos)

Special quarters are devoted to the warren's two albino guards — Threading Fist and Bloodlight — considered the most holy of any non-priest. Stylized designs of inlaid reeds cover the walls, depicting various stories concerning the Diseased, the slitheren, and the titans. This room also serves as storage for the albino guards' equipment and personal effects. Here PCs can find correspondence from the Red Witches promising the nest aid in the form of 40 horserats and 5 Witches. These reinforcements are due to arrive in 2d6 days, in time for the nest's northern foray.

C7: Albino Guard Mudroom (EL 6 for both albinos)

As one of the perks of being a holy guard, these two females get their own bathroom. Of sorts. Rough wooden constructions allow them to sit while doing their business into pottery bowls. They also have fresh water for washing and drinking, courtesy of the slaves.

If the albino guards are in, each has with her 1d4 slaves. Otherwise the ratmen avoid this room, lest they anger Threading Fist and Bloodlight.

Warren Exits

The denizens of the nest use three main points of egress, described below.

D1: Military Central Egress

The top of the nest's western tunnel lies concealed beneath a thick plug of earth, anchored to the reeds. Digging a few inches down reveals several thick sticks which, if properly shoved, cause the plug to collapse. From below, one can pull the struts, causing the earth to collapse and opening the top.

This egress allows military personnel to reach the surface quickly during emergencies.

D2: Military Side Egress

The warren's southwestern tunnel narrows at several points. In the case of invasion through this egress, the variable width gives characters in C5 the advantage of targeting one opponent at a time. Military slitheren use this tunnel in times of emergency or as a quiet entrance to the nest.

D3: Priest Egress

This back tunnel at the southeast corner of the warren allows priests to move quietly in or out of the nest. It hasn't been used in several years, however. Layers of waste from dumping along the east side of the hill fill the mouth completely.

A series of side shafts are set up, piled with stones and earth. Pulling specific structural components obstructs the tunnel, allowing those fleeing to seal it behind them. Characters can notice this opportunity with a Spot check (DC 25) or Search check (DC 20).

Nest Information

Workers and hunters have effectively the same stats, but adventurers do not normally encounter workers with weapons or armor. During a full mobilization, consider workers equivalent to hunters.

Mobilization Units

During a mobilization alert, the Diseased divide up into various groups. Inside the nest, one nest guard unit (see below) confronts the PCs every 1d3 rounds as space allows in the crowded warrens. Assume that

most rooms can hold their maximum normal population x 1.5 during full mobilizations. Near the Priest Wing, there is a chance (a roll of 1 to 5 on a d20) that the home guard unit will appear. When things go very badly for the slitheren, however, they abandon the nest and flee.

Outside, when an alert sounds, nest response units mobilize and carefully exit the warrens. Each round, 1d3 units exit until all raiders present have been sent out. Nest guard units and the home guard unit may leave to confront trouble. If things get bad, some units harass and stall the enemy until the home guard unit can get away safely.

During a special event, some hunting or collection parties may be away from the nest. In the daytime, one of each party goes out. At night, two of each go out.

The listings below offer approximate rosters for each unit and party; the GM may need to vary them depending on the circumstances. The unit quantities assume that all hunting parties are in and no casualties have occurred. For primarily external threats, two nest response units become one external threat unit. Priests may join the external unit as well.

Nest response unit (8 or 10): 10 hunters, 1 raider, 1 giant rat; 1 unit = EL 5

Nest guard unit (3): 50 hunters, 3 giant rats, 2 guards, 1 wolfrat, 1 priest; 1 unit = EL 11

Home guard unit (1): 70 hunters, 2 albino guards, 2 guards, 3 wolfrats, 1 priest, 1 high priest; 1 unit = EL 13

External threat unit (1): 60 hunters, 2 raiders, 2 giant rats; 1 unit = EL 10

Hunting party: 30 hunters, 3 giant rats, 1 raider; 1 party = EL 8

Collection party: 30 workers, 10 hunters, 1 raider; 1 party = EL 9

Raiding party: 60 hunters, 2 giant rats, 2 raiders, 1 priest; 1 party = EL 11

Rarely, raiding parties go out with more priests or guards. Unless they expect only light resistance, the Diseased send out two to three raiding parties on a particular mission.

Overall Population and Stats

The nest contains the following populace:

- 600 workers (200 of them hunters)
- 20 giant rats (generally delegated to hunters)
- 200 Dead Eaters
- 10 raiders
- 8 guards
- 2 albino guards with one wolfrat companion each
- 8 other wolfrats (shared by guards or raiders)
- 9 priests
- 1 high priest.

- 100 slaves (60 humans, 35 dwarves, and 5 halflings)

GMs should keep track of population numbers on a tally sheet. Workers and hunters are conveniently tracked in groups of 30.

Hunter: CR 1/2; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 1d8+3; hp 7; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 15 (+1 Dex, +1 natural, +2 leather armor, +1 small shield); Atk +1 melee (1d3, bite), -4 melee (1d4, 2 claws), +1 melee (scimitar), +2 ranged (1d6, shortbow), +2 ranged (1d4, sling); SA Poisoned weapons; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., immunities; AL LE; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills: Diplomacy +1, Escape Artist +3, Hide +2.
Feats: Dodge

SA — *Poisoned Weapons:* Weapons are poisoned by various toxins; victims must make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or suffer an additional 1d6 damage per blow.

SQ — *Immunities (Ex):* The Diseased are immune to all diseases.

Dead Eater: CR 1; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 2d8+2; hp 11; +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative) Spd 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.; AC 15 (+2 Dex, +3 natural); Atk +1 melee (1d6+1 bite), +0 melee (1d4, 2 claws); SA Disease, burrowing attack; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity, immunity; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 12, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills: Hide +7*, Listen +1, Move Silently +7*, Search +1, Spot +7*. **Feats:** Improved initiative.

SA — *Disease (Ex):* Corpse blisters — bite, Fortitude save (DC 13), incubation period 1d4 days; damage 1d4 temporary Constitution and 1d4 temporary Strength (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 74).

SA — *Burrowing Attack (Ex):* Dead eaters often conceal themselves beneath a few inches of dirt. A dead eater concealed in this fashion is difficult to see (DC 25), and if a foe moves within 5 ft. of the concealed dead eater, it may make a grapple attack (see *Core Rulebook I*, page 137) with a +3 circumstance bonus as a full action. If the grapple succeeds, the foe is held and on subsequent rounds the dead eater may automatically inflict bite damage (and a risk of causing disease) upon its victim, until the grapple is broken.

SQ — *Light Sensitivity (Ex):* Dead eaters suffer a -1 penalty to attack rolls in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

SQ — *Immunity (Ex):* Dead eaters are immune to all forms of disease.

Worker: AC 12 (+1 natural); Atk +1 melee (1d3, bite), -4 melee (1d4, 2 claws); SA None. Other statistics are the same as a normal hunter (see above).

Raider: CR 2; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 4d8+12; hp 30; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 14 (+1 Dex, +1 natural, +2 leather armor); Atk +4 melee (1d3, bite), -1 melee (1d4, 2 claws), +4

melee (1d6, scimitar), +5 ranged (1d6, shortbow), +5 ranged (1d4, sling); SA Poisoned weapons; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., immunities; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills: Appraise +1, Diplomacy +1, Escape Artist +3, Hide +3, Spot +2, Wilderness Lore +2. **Feats:** Dodge.

Possessions: 200 gp in large, cheap gems, woven into designs in the fur.

Guard: CR 3; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 6d8+24; hp 51; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 15 (+1 Dex, +1 natural, +2 leather armor, +1 small shield); Atk +6 melee (1d3+1, bite), +1 melee (1d4+1, 2 claws), +6 melee (1d6+1, scimitar); SA Poisoned weapons; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., immunities; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +6; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 18, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 13.

Skills: Diplomacy +1, Escape Artist +3, Hide +4, Listen +3, Sense Motive +3, Spot +2. **Feats:** Dodge, Quick Draw.

Possessions: *Circlet of warning* (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 182) grants potent abilities to these ratmen, making it difficult to surprise them; 200 gp in gold wire woven around quartz chips, tied to tufts of fur around the jaw.

Successful interrogation of either of the albino guards or any of the priests can uncover aspects of the nest's plot against Vesh, including the imminent arrival of 40 horserats and 5 Red Witches to assist in a strike against communities to the north and the group's ultimate goal: to taint Veshian cities' water supplies with infectious materials.

Albino guard (Threading Fist and Bloodlight): CR 4; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 7d8+14; hp 45; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 17 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +2 leather armor, +1 small shield); Atk +8 melee (1d3, bite), +3 melee (1d4, 2 claws), +11 melee (1d6+4, scimitar), +9 ranged (1d6, shortbow), +9 ranged (1d4, sling); SA Poisoned weapons; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., immunities; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +6; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 14.

Skills: Diplomacy +1, Escape Artist +3, Hide +4, Listen +5, Spot +5. **Feats:** Dodge, Weapon Focus (scimitar).

Possessions: *Circlet of warning* (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 182) grants potent abilities to these ratmen, making it difficult to surprise them; +2 scimitar, 1,000 gp in sapphires and gold, tied to tufts of fur around the jaw.

Priest, Drd8: CR 8; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 8d8+24; hp 60; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 12 (+1 Dex, +1 natural); Atk +7/+2 melee (1d3, bite), +2/-3 melee (1d4, 2 claws), +7/+2 melee (scimitar), +8/+3 ranged (1d4, sling); SA Poisoned weapons, smite; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., divination bonus, immunities; AL LE; SV Fort +11, Ref

+3, Will +7; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Skills: Animal Empathy +3, Appraise +5, Bluff +5, Concentration +8, Diplomacy +6, Escape Artist +3, Hide +7, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (religion) +3, Sense Motive +5. **Feats:** Combat Casting, Dodge, Spell Penetration.

Prepared Spells (6/5/4/3/2): 0 — *Create water, cure minor wounds x2, detect magic, flare, shockwave**; 1st — *Calm animals, cause fear, endure elements, faerie fire, magic fang*; 2nd — *Animal infusion**, *barkskin, charm person or animal, contagion*; 3rd — *Ganest's farstrike**, *thorn throw**, *wall of horns**; 4th — *dispel magic, scrying*.

*Indicates a spell from *Relics & Rituals*.

SA — *Nature Sense:* Can identify plants or animals perfectly and identify the safety of water.

SA — *Animal Companion:* Each priest has a wolfrat companion, in addition to those kept by the nest in general.

SA — *Woodland Stride:* Priests may travel through land overgrown with thorns or similar mundane obstacles with no difficulty.

SA — *Trackless Step:* This character leaves no tracks when traveling.

SA — *Resist Nature's Lure:* +4 saving throw against the spell-like abilities of feys.

SA — *Wild Shape (3/day, Large):* Priests may turn into horserats, per the *polymorph self* spell, up to three times per day. (See the *Monsters Appendix* for horserat statistics.)

Possessions: Each priest has a *Kadum's Pearl* (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 189) and *Shackles of Apathy* (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 195); 5,000 gp worth of jewelry worked into the cloaks and other personal effects.

Kadum's Pearls have the power of agony. The victim must make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or suffer 1d6 points of subdual damage per round. Saves are made each round thereafter until one succeeds. While in agony, the target incurs a -2 penalty to attacks, AC, and saves, including further Fortitude saves. Note that the pearls require the name of the target to be known, so they cannot be used until the priest overhears or otherwise learns the name of a target. If the priests are aware of enemies, they may use *divination* toward this purpose.

The *Shackles of Apathy* are applied to particularly useful but unruly slaves. Those wearing the shackles become subdued and listless, defending themselves if attacked (after a successful DC 20 Will save) but making no aggressive actions of their own. Shackled individuals who fail at a Will save (DC 20) must obey one-word commands from their captors. Priests transporting slaves can use the shackles on one or two individuals. Otherwise, the priests carry them, ready to employ them when necessary.

Head priest (Chernson Weaver), Drd10: CR 10; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 10d8+30; hp 75; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 12 (+1 natural); Atk +8/+3 melee (1d3, bite), +3/-2 melee (1d4, 2 claws), +8/+3 melee (scimitar), +9/+4 ranged (1d4, sling); SA Poisoned weapons, smite; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., divination bonus, immunities; AL LE; SV Fort +12, Ref +4, Will +10; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills: Animal Empathy +3, Appraise +5, Bluff +5, Concentration +10, Diplomacy +8, Escape Artist +3, Hide +5, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Knowledge (religion) +4, Sense Motive +7. **Feats:** Combat Casting, Dodge, Iron Will, Spell Penetration.

Prepared Spells (6/5/4/3/3/2):

0 — create water, cure minor wounds, detect magic, flare, shockwave*; 1st — calm animals, endure elements, faerie fire, magic fang; animal infusion*, 2nd — barkskin, charm person or animal, commanding presence, hunter's stalk; 3rd — Ganest's farstrike*, plant growth, thorn throw*; 4th — dispel magic, scrying, spike stones; 5th — awaken, insect plague.

SA — All the special abilities of priests (above) but *Wild Shape* is usable 4/day.

SA — *Venom Immunity*: Immunity to all organic poisons.

Possessions: 4 *Kadum's Pearls* (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 189) with the power of *Strife* — victims must make a Will save (DC 17) or see their allies as deadly enemies; 10,000 gp worth of jewelry worked into the clothing and facial fur.

*Indicates a spell from *Relics & Rituals*.

Giant rat: CR 1/6; Small Animal; HD 1/4 1d8; hp 4; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 15 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 12 (+1 size, +1 Dex); Atk +2 melee (1d4-2, bite); SQ Scent; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 6, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills: Balance +10, Climb +12, Hide +18, Move Silently +10. **Feats:** Weapon Finesse (bite).

SQ — *Scent (Ex)*: Giant rats can scent opponents within 30 feet normally, 60 feet if opponent is upwind, 15 if opponent is downwind. They can

detect strong scents at twice the normal range and overpowering scents, such as skunk musk, at thrice the normal range.

Wolfrat: CR 1; Medium Animal; HD 2d10+2; hp 13; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 30 ft., swim 20 ft.; AC 14 (+2 natural, +2 Dex); Atk +3 melee (1d6, bite), -2 melee (1d3, 2 claws); SA Infectious bite; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 11, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 5, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills: Climb +2, Hide +2, Jump +2, Listen +1, Spot +1, Swim +2, Wilderness Lore +2. **Feats:** Track, Weapon Finesse (bite).

SA — *Infectious Bite (Ex)*: Victim bitten must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) or become infected. Victim suffers the temporary loss of 1 Strength and Constitution point each hour until stabilized by a successful Heal check (DC 15) or until *cure disease* is cast. One Heal check is allowed per hour.

Slave

Slave stats depend on the individual's race. The nest presently holds approximately 100 slaves: 60 humans, 35 dwarves, and 5 halflings. To determine the race of an encountered slave, the roll percentile dice.

For simplicity, consider all slaves to have AC 11, with 2 hit points and no combat-related skills. Some valued slaves, particularly dwarves, may have Craft or Profession skills that the slitheren find useful.

Enslaved humans and halflings suffer the most, since the warrens have no light. They must feel their way, stumbling through the darkness and punished severely whenever their "clumsiness" causes accidents.

The GM may generate special slave NPCs, possibly as the goal of a rescue mission (such as Audri Adrule from the "Hooks for Characters" section).

Rewards

At their discretion, GMs may award bonus experience points for outstanding performance, such as destruction of the entire nest or prevention of the attacks on Veshian water supplies.

Coven of the Celestial Urn

This adventure is suitable for a party of four characters of 3rd to 5th level. With some modifications, such as removing the high level leader, you can make it work even for 1st- or 2nd-level parties. The coven is fairly well protected from approach, however.

Rogues and mages, particularly those with the Disguise skill, may prove quite useful in the party.

Adventure Background

The coven of the Celestial Urn is a group of Red Witches that takes little direct action against Vesh. However, it remains a crucial trade post and logistics center for local activities — patrols of Diseased and Gorgers use it as a base of operations.

Some less reputable communities along the Mourning Marshes maintain covert dealings with the slitheren of this coven. The ratmen receive slaves and supplies, particularly of finished goods, in exchange for gold and other treasures (of Foamer origin). Though the coven operates some patches of farmland, the Witches do not produce enough to feed themselves; to raise funds they rely on trading with outlying settlements and selling horserats to other slitheren.

Adventure Summary

The Coven of the Celestial Urn supports units of the Diseased and Gorgers along the border of the Mourning Marshes in their trading with unscrupulous humans. Their aid allows for the continued capture and trade of slaves, as well as raids on Veshian communities. Key residents include the Red Witch Archmagi Anosmia and her two daughters.

Though this coven plays a vital part in the web of slitheren support in the Mourning Marshes, destroying it hampers the ratmen's affairs only in the short term — until they can form a new warren to take its place. However, a successful party can emerge with more information on slitheren activities in the area and perhaps even reconnaissance on the strange magical force that gives the coven its name. And, they will have prevented the two daughters from establishing covens of their own, which otherwise will happen in another season.

Statistics for all creatures in this scenario appear at the end of this chapter.

Hooks for Characters

You can involve a party in this adventure using various hooks. Vigils connections are the most straightforward — for instance, a group of vigilant characters could receive reconnaissance reports of the coven, explaining details about it and giving its exact location.

However, any group interested in striking a critical blow at the slitheren can be drawn in as well. One such introduction could involve PCs tracking down illicit activities (i.e., slave trade with ratmen) near the border of the marshes, and uncovering the coven's activities. Leaning on appropriate local merchants could reveal a nearby slitheren trade partner. Alternatively, a party making forays into the Mourning Marshes could capture a Diseased or Gorgers and uncover similar information.

In each of these cases, the group may learn the following basic information: the location of the Celestial Urn Coven (about five hours' travel by horserat into the northeastern Mourning Marshes) and the fact it houses about 30 slitheren, 60 slaves, and a dozen or so horserats. The characters can also uncover a few facts about the general layout: a U-shaped series of hills on a slightly raised patch of land whose mouth faces north (see The Coven Grounds map on page 69). They cannot discover details about traps, the residents' specific abilities, or similar information without visiting the coven.

Development

Traveling to the coven, a party is subject to various random encounters with the inhabitants of the Mourning Marshes, including warbands of Diseased and Gorgers. Each hour in the marshes, roll a d20. On a roll of 1 to 5, the adventurers encounter a warband of 4 Diseased, 4 Brown Gorgers, 1 Diseased guard, and 1 wolfrat (EL 5). The coven itself lies in a naturally defensible region, entrenched by a rather intelligent slitheren. Serpent root (see *Creature Collection*, page 169) infests the southern ridgeline, monitors in the form of *Tevikk's creeping eyes* (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 119) ring the coven, and undead are stationed at critical locations. The details appear in the area descriptions below and under the archmagi's statistics (see *Creatures and Characters* at the end of this adventure).

The best physical approach involves flying or using a portal item or spell — possibly in conjunction with invisibility. However, stealth, disguise, or other deception may give the party the greatest advantage in gaining entry to the coven, if the PCs have appropriate skills.

If the coven comes under attack, the archmagi wishes to protect or save her daughters above all things. If the situation becomes dire, she attempts to block or forestall any invading force, sending the Witches she can spare to help her daughters flee.

An unscrupulous or chaotic party can force the archmagi to surrender if the PCs capture her daughters and threaten to execute them at a moment's notice. Note that the party members must plausibly argue that they will not kill the daughters if the archmagi surrenders — otherwise she considers a full assault the only chance of saving them. Either way, such tactics force her to confront the party, rather than flee.

Elytron, a male Witch, is responsible for diplomacy and meeting with visitors. He serves as the point of contact if a party approaches in the guise of slitheren or black market merchants from Vesh. If the situation warrants, he invites the guests into the meeting house (A2) to relax and discuss business. Under most circumstances, the daughters and archmagi remain secreted away.

Ceron — the coven's most valued slave, thanks to his carpentry skills — and many of the other slaves appear relatively loyal to their masters. Most have known no better life and have absorbed the slitheren's indoctrination for many years, including tales of oppression of commoners in other lands. Here, or so they are told, slaves have an opportunity to prove themselves. The Witches use the slave children to shackle the wills of their mothers, and the female Witches use illusions and sex to manipulate the men.

If the coven falls under attack, the slaves help defend it with whatever simple tools they have on hand. Should the party rescue them, the group faces a challenging trip through the slitheren-infested marshes to bring them back to Vesh. The PCs then need to reintroduce the former slaves into communities that can effectively restore their free will. A party that manages to pull this off deserves some extra XP (see Rewards at the end of this adventure).

Overall Layout and Composition

The coven comprises the Archmagi Anosmia, her two daughters, and 20 male Witches. The group owns 10 horserats and 60 adult slaves. Of this number, 12 slaves work only with the horserats; the rest farm, mend materials, and gather reeds or other resources under the Witches' eyes.

Approaches

An unnamed road forms along a ridge rising from the bottom of the marshes. It leads in a south-southwesterly direction to the "mouth" of the U-shape of hills surrounding the coven and continues straight through the center of the settlement, terminating at its southern end. The eastern and western ridges (EL 4, either side), which slope steeply into the marshes, prove a difficult and slow climb. In some ways, however, these are the safest directions to sneak into the coven,



though leave the party vulnerable to being spotted by one of the eyes. (Anosmia scans the area through the eyes once every two hours). A character coming within 5 feet of one of the hidden eyes can locate it on a successful Search check (DC 20).

Hidden along either side of the road, the archmagi has posted 18 skeletons: two at each of the Xs on the map of The Coven Grounds (see page 69). They stand ready to flank any attack on the coven. The sounds of combat bring out all the hidden skeletons on that side of the road.

The southern ridgeline (EL 7) is infested with carefully tended serpent root. The lack of other vegetation may serve as a sign to the cautious that something strange is afoot (Wilderness Lore check, DC 15). The three plants here grow spread out across 200 yards, spanning the southern ridgeline. A druid can identify the threat immediately using Nature Sense; others may attempt to do so with another Wilderness Lore check (DC 12).

Coven Features

A large well stands in the center of the complex, with two water screws on either side (installed by mechanics years ago). These can quickly draw water up and into sluices that inundate the fields immediately to the west.

Slaves tend the Red Witches' two fields. The main crop, durrish, is a type of tuber that grows wild in drier parts of the marshes. The slaves fertilize the fields, inundate them, then plant portions of the tuber throughout the worked land. Rainfall usually suffices for a decent yield, but the well can help during dry spells. Within a few months, the slaves can gather up a new crop, and the process repeats. With luck, the slitheren can enjoy up to four harvests in a single year.

The ground between the coven's five buildings is set with flagstones (see The Coven Grounds map).

The Coven Grounds

Refer to the Coven Grounds map while reviewing this section. All locations designated "A" are aboveground.

A1: Stables and Training Area (EL varies)

In the stables, slaves care for the coven's horserats. Slatted windscreens let in air and light, and shutters keep out the rain in poor weather. The horserats are carefully penned, as they can easily slip out of most confinement, crawling up and through narrow openings. The slaves take the beasts in and out through a number of large doors.

Under most circumstances, all 10 horserats (7 female, 3 male) remain here. Three females and one male are breeding stock, while the Witches use the other six for regular work. The stables also hold six babies and five juveniles. As soon as the juveniles reach adulthood, the Witches will sell them or use them to replenish their breeding stock.

A total of 12 slaves are specially appointed to care for the horserats; they stay either at the stables or with the beasts at all times, sleeping here at night. One or two (1d3-1) male Witches are also here.

During the day, on a d20 roll of 1 to 5 the party finds the horserats roaming out in the open area north of the coven, accompanied by 8 slaves and 2d4 Witches. This daily activity serves as exercise and training for the horserats and the slaves that care for them. The Witches are there partially for security but also to stretch their legs.

The six non-breeding horserats are trained in basic combat with practice dummies made of reeds. (The Witches store the dummies in the stables when not in use.) During training periods, four slaves dressed in padded armor and armed with light batons of bundled reeds work with the more experienced of these horserats. The four breeding animals undergo no training. During quarterly harvests or weekly forays into the surrounding area for reeds, the Witches send out all the horserats to carry materials.

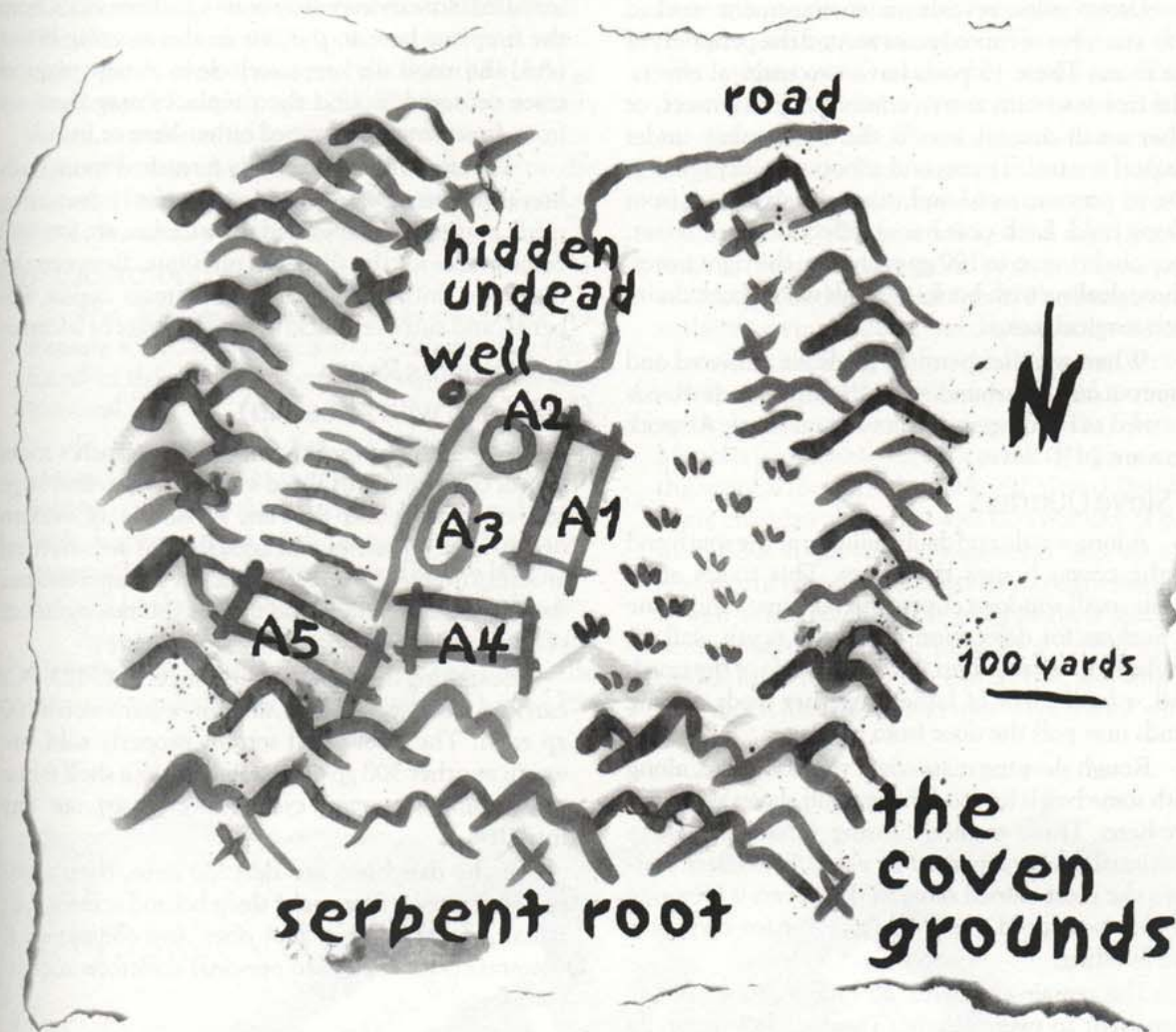
A2: Meeting House

From the outside, the building west of the stables looks noticeably different from the others: It resembles the houses of Vesh, with a wooden frame, delicate woodwork, and shuttered windows. It even sports a brick chimney on one side. Though a bit worse for wear and needing some mending, this structure stands out.

Inside of this meeting house, the main room features a fireplace, with windows on either side and a nice mantel. It contains pleasant furnishings from a variety of locations, tastefully laid out. A woven rug covers the floor, and there are several wooden seats, as well as a desk and several lanterns. Though all the features seem a bit old and worn, the room has a pleasant air, particularly when the lanterns are lit. When winter's chill covers the marshes, the fireplace offers welcome relief, fed by bundles of marsh reeds collected in fall.

This is where Elytron usually meets with human guests or other Red Witches. Carefully furnished with items traded from humans, it is meant to provide a relaxing and welcome atmosphere. A secret side room, accessible only through a hidden door across from the fireplace or from below, allows someone to watch what goes on through knotholes in the wooden wall. The room's design specifically helps sound travel well into the second room. It takes a Search check (DC 15) to find the knotholes while specifically examining the wall. Someone listening at the wall can, with a Listen check (DC 10), notice reverberation suggesting a space behind the wall. From the main room, the secret door leading to the side room requires a Search check (DC 15).

Archmagi Anosmia uses this side room to spy on all visitors without leaving herself directly vulnerable to them. If things go badly, she flees the side room to



her own chamber (B2) to form a plan. She also may leave the room to discuss coven matters with Elytron; on a Listen check (DC 20) party members may hear a momentary echo coming from the side wall as she departs. She might instead use a set of stairs to descend to the women's room (B2); a Listen check (DC 35) picks up her exit down the stairway.

The fireplace is linked through a series of ingenious vents to others in the Witches common room and women's room (B1 and B2). Mechanics installed these two fireplaces twenty-two years ago as part of a lucrative deal landed by Anosmia's mother, Pellagra. Should someone cast *detect magic* in the main room, the fireplace displays a magical aura: evidence of the enchantment that keeps the flues clean.

A3: Witch Quarters (EL varies)

South of the meeting house lies the residence of the male Red Witches. Each of the 20 males have specific sleeping mats here. Rough woven screens provide minimal privacy, and the 8 eldest have small chests for private belongings (very simple DC 20 lock). Each chest contains 500 sp and 1d4–1 rings worth 50 gp.

Another chest stands beside the desk at the head of the room. Those who best the simple (DC 25) lock find four books and nine scrolls inside. They cover such subjects as the lore of the titans, worship of Mormo, horserat breeding, accounts of trade (though frustratingly cryptic about the identities of trade partners), slave tallies, and basic magical training lore. Customers interested in the slitheren may pay up to 800 gp for the texts. Other scholars won't pay much more than 100 gp for the lot.

Near the desk, stairs lead down to a corridor that connects to the common room (B1).

From dawn until dusk, the male Witches will all be here, asleep. At other times, 1d4 of them will be here, studying or practicing combat maneuvers.

A4: Stores

A sturdy structure with a pitched roof, the storage building south of the Witch Quarters was designed to keep its contents dry and secure. Wooden racks hold bundles of tubers, reeds, grass, and other materials. Though mainly used to store produce, it also holds a variety of weapons, carts, scrap wood, rough fabrics, and other materials.

Detect magic reveals an enchantment worked into a number of carved posts around the periphery of the room. These 15 posts have two magical effects. The first is to turn away vermin. Any rat, insect, or other small animal avoids the area unless under magical control. The second effect is a mild preservative to prevent mold and other decay factors from taking hold. Each post has an effect range of 8 feet; they can bring up to 100 gp each from the right buyer. Those dealing with books or foods would both desire such magical items.

When weather permits, reeds are gathered and dried outside, then bundled and brought inside. Reeds are used as bedding and structural material. At work here are 2d10 slaves.

A5: Slave Quarters

A long wattle and daub building at the south end of the coven houses the slaves. This rough affair boasts small windows covered in reed mats and a line of buckets for defecation along the north wall. A single doorway stands in the eastern side of the north wall, a basic affair of lashed-together reeds. Strong winds may pull the door from its place.

Rough sleeping mats cover the floor here, along with some bowls for food. Forty adult slaves sleep and eat here. Three women nursing infants stay here continually, accompanied by about 8 toddlers. Perhaps the most valued slave in the coven is Ceron, a forty-two-year-old man with a talent for carpentry and building.

The remaining slaves, all human, range in age from eight to twenty-eight. The Witches generally trade away the older slaves: Those who perform well go to other slitheren communities, while problematic individuals go to the Gorgers. These Red Witches prefer to find a use for slaves rather than simply kill them — within reason.

During the day the slaves are out on a variety of assignments. Some work the fields, weeding and carefully tending the plants. Roughly half toil at a variety of menial chores, including refuse removal. Ten are tasked with gathering, under the care of a Witch; they head out through the marsh, gathering reeds and grass and occasionally are allowed to hunt with slings. Slaves who bring back meat find themselves rewarded with relatively small perks, such as getting to eat leftover meat.

The Underlevel

Refer to the Underlevel map on page 71 while reviewing this section. All locations designated “B” lie below the Coven Grounds.

B1: Common Room

All the Witches gather here to eat and discuss matters affecting the coven. On cold nights, they may light a fire. An ingenious system the mechanics

installed more than twenty years ago shunts soot from the fireplace here to the one in the meeting house (A3) and magically keeps itself clean. A faint magical trace centered around the fireplaces may show up from *detect magic* performed either here or in A3.

Tapestries give this nicely furnished room both literal and visual warmth. Chairs crafted from strong reeds, courtesy of the valued slave Ceron, are low and comfortable for the slitheren physique. Between the tapestries, intricately woven reed mats depict serpents, and slitheren suckling at the teats of Mormo.

B2: Women’s Room (EL 2.5 or 5 with Anosmia)

A well-appointed chamber, the women’s room comes complete with three soft sleep mats and large sets of shelves and drawers, obviously of human origin. Fine tapestries and bookshelves are arranged around a fireplace. Here, Archmagi Anosmia and her daughters sleep, study, and discuss the management of the coven.

Searching through the containers (DC 12), PCs can find 1,000 sp, two keys, and three gems worth 100 gp each. The books and scrolls, properly sold, are worth another 300 gp total. High up on a shelf is one of Anosmia’s *creeping eyes*, ready to spy out any intruders.

If the daughters are sleeping here, their eight personal slaves (four each) sleep behind screens, but remain ready to jump and obey any command. If Anosmia is here, her two personal skeletons accompany her.

Passageways

Twisting and turning passageways to B3 and B4 feature no special traps or spells. Skeletons occupy various spots along the hall. Suspended from harnesses, they’re designed to swing out at the slightest motion. A party encountering one should roll initiative for combat, as if the skeleton were animated. A Spot check (DC 25) allows observers to realize before attacking that the skeletons are not undead. After the first encounter, these Spot checks become easier (DC 10). GMs should stage “skeleton encounters” about every 100 feet of new tunnel.

B3: Treasure Room (EL 4)

A thick, iron-barred door leads into the treasure room. The lock is good (DC 30), but someone who thoroughly searches the women’s room (B2) can find the key to the door.

The huge room actually contains rather little treasure. Rusted spots indicate where manacles once were attached to the broad stone floor. Evidently, this room had some use previous to the coven’s arrival — a use that not even Anosmia is sure of.

A chest stands in one corner of the room; the archmagi has trapped its lock with an *enervation* spell

(DC 29 to find or disable, Reflex save DC 21 avoids). The chest contains 9,000 sp, six rubies (each worth 400 gp), and what appears to be a *Book of Knowledge* (see *Relics & Rituals*, page 179). The book is actually cursed, and the mind sprites within respond to questions with answers calculated to bring trouble on the user. A *remove curse* restores the book to its proper state, though five pages have been used.

B4: Laboratory

The Witches' laboratory looks much like the treasure room. Its door requires a different key (also found in the women's room), though the keys look identical.

In this room, candles are arranged around a central stone chamber that resembles a well. At the bottom of the well, about 50 feet below, a small crack leads deeper into the earth. Astute observers (Intelligence check, DC 20) may note that the bottom of the well lies below the water table, yet remains dry.

Appropriate spells detect a magical force seeping from the well. A slight sharp smell like ozone also becomes apparent near stone chamber. The crack in

the earth exudes a magical force slowly permeating the surrounding environment. This is the Celestial Urn — the coven's namesake — and the Witches direct its magical force into crafting magic items.

Learning to take advantage of this force requires magical research. Each month, an arcane spellcaster studying the phenomenon may attempt a Spellcraft check (DC 12). Success reduces the cost of crafting magical items in this room by 1%, thanks to the advantages of the magical force. The maximum cumulative savings is 20%, and the reduction continues to apply indefinitely within the laboratory. Unfortunately, learning to use this force would require the spellcaster to take up residence in the Mourning Marshes (the characters cannot bottle up a sample of the magical force to take back with them). Beside the stone chamber along one wall lie a number of bodies in various states of decomposition and an exotic assortment of tools and containers. Alchemical gear, as well as less recognizable equipment, is laid out on several tables. The gear includes a variety of stone pieces, instruments of wood and brass, and what look very much like wands and rods. Five wands and two



rods give off magical auras, but an *identify* reveals that they do nothing. These objects are the products of the coven's experiments to craft new magical artifacts to control and create undead. So far, none of the experiments have garnered results.

Collecting all the containers, items, and substances may yield the party 40 gp, but the collection weighs 85 lbs.

Should the crack in this room ever widen substantially, enough of the force might escape its well and permeate a larger section of the surrounding marshes, creating havoc with the local flora and fauna. This, however, is a topic for a future adventure.

Characters and Creatures

Below are statistics for the coven's slitheren and other denizens.

Red Witch male: CR 1/2; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 1d8+3; hp 7; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 13 (+1 natural, +2 Dex); Atk +1 melee (1d3, bite), -4 melee (1d4, 2 claws); SA Spells; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Wizard spells prepared (2/1):

0 — *Daze, detect magic, ray of frost*; 1st — *magic missile* x2

Skills: Concentration +2, Escape Artist +3, Hide +2, Jump +1, Scry +2, Spellcraft +5. *Feats:* Spell Focus (Illusion), Spell Focus (Necromancy).

SQ — Spells: The Red Witches cast as wizards of their Hit Dice in levels. These male Witches specialize in Illusion, with Evocation excluded.

Red Witch male (Elytron): Same as above, except hp 9 and *Skills:* Bluff +3, Concentration +2, Diplomacy +3, Sense Motive +3, Spellcraft +4.

Red Witch daughters (Syzy and Nidar): CR 3; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 3d8+6; hp 19; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 13 (+1 natural, +2 Dex); Atk +3 melee (1d3, bite), -2 melee (1d4, 2 claws); SA Spells; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +6; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Wizard spells prepared (4/3/2):

0 — *dancing lights, flare, mage hand, ray of frost*; 1st — *change self, magic missile, sleep*; 2nd — *Invisibility, Melf's acid arrow*

*Indicates a spell from *Relics & Rituals*.

Skills: Concentration +4, Escape Artist +3, Hide +2, Jump +1, Scry +2, Spellcraft +7. *Feats:* Spell Focus (Illusion), Spell Focus (Necromancy).

SQ — Spells: The Red Witches cast as wizards of their Hit Dice in levels. These female Witches specialize in Necromancy, with Evocation excluded.

Possessions: Antitoxin (4 doses), 3 thunderstones, *ring of force shield* (Syzy), *ring of mind shielding* (Nidar), *ring of sustenance* (both).

Note: Four human slaves willing to lay down their lives for their mistress accompany each daughter at all times.

Red Witch archmagi (Anosmia): CR 9; Medium Monstrous Humanoid; HD 9d8+18; hp 58; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 13 (+1 natural, +2 Dex); Atk +9 melee (1d3, bite), +4 melee (1d4, 2 claws); SA Spells; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +8, Will +9; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Wizard spells prepared (4/5/5/4/2/1):

0 — *dancing Lights, daze, detect magic, resistance*; 1st — *change self, identify, shield, sleep, spider climb*; 2nd — *blur, invisibility, Melf's acid arrow, mirror image, web*; 3rd — *fly, keen edge, slow*; 4th — *Evard's black tentacles, improved invisibility*; 5th — *wall of stone*.

*Indicates a spell from *Relics & Rituals*.

Skills: Concentration +7, Diplomacy +6, Spot +3, Hide +2, Jump +1, Scry +2, Spellcraft +10. *Feats:* Quicken Spell, Spell Focus (Illusion), Spell Focus (Necromancy), Spell Penetration.

SQ — Spells: The Red Witches cast as wizards of their Hit Dice in levels. The Archmagi Anosmia specializes in Necromancy, with Evocation excluded.

Possessions: *Ring of sustenance, ring of mind shielding.* *Note:* Anosmia lost her sense of smell during childhood magical experiments, thus she was given a name meaning "impaired sense of smell." Though immune to odor-based attacks, she cannot notice any unusual scents.

Anosmia has seven eyes, created via *Tevikk's creeping eye*, distributed around the area. Two are on hills on either side of the northern approach. Two more are on hills on the southern edge of the coven, designed to guard against likely approach. Two are set high up on either side of the coven, so they can look out over the central area. The other one is noted in Room B2, where it is located.

Once every two waking hours, Anosmia scans quickly through the various eyes, checking for intruders. Due to her *ring of sustenance*, she sleeps only from 10 a.m. to noon. If she feels particularly nervous about intruders, she may check more frequently.

Anosmia casts *detect scrying* when she wakes up, as her first spell of the day.

She has also performed *animate dead* and commands 18 skeletons. Two hide at each of the Xs on The Coven Grounds map; they stand ready to flank any attack on the coven. Another two act as her personal servants and constantly attend her.

Skeleton: CR 1/3; Medium Undead; HD 1d12; hp 6; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+2 natural, +1 Dex); Atk +0 melee (1d4, 2 claws); SQ Undead, immunities; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 12, Con æ, Int æ, Wis 10, Cha 11.

Feats: Improved Initiative.

SQ — Undead: Immune to mental effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Unaffected by critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

SQ — Immunities (Ex): Cold immunity, suffer only half damage from piercing or slashing weapons.

Horserat: CR 2; Large Beast; HD 4d10+4; hp 26; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 60 ft., climb 30 ft., swim 20 ft.; AC 15 (+3 natural, +3 Dex, -1 size); Atk +7 melee (2d4+4, bite), +2 melee (1d6+4, 2 claws); SA Pin; SQ Scent, Leap; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 19, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Skills: Climb +8, Hide +4, Jump +6, Spot +3, Swim +8.

SA — Pin (Ex): Standard attacks may be replaced by this attack. The horserat leaps upon the foe, pinning them to the ground. The pin is treated as a successful grapple, with the regular rules for such. The horserat may still make normal bite attacks against the pinned target.

SQ — Scent (Ex): Per *Core Rulebook III*, page 10.

SQ — Leap (Ex): All standard jumping distances are double.

Serpent root: CR 4; Large Plant (1d4x2 tendrils); HD 4d8+20 plant (1d8+5 tendril); hp 38 plant (9 tendril); Init -2 (Dex); Spd 0 ft.; AC 11 (-1 size, -2 Dex, +4 natural); Atk +4 melee (1d8+1, tendril

lash) or +4 melee (2d4+1, tendril constrict) or +3 melee (2d8+1, plant constrict); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA Vitality drain; SQ Plant, DR 5/+1; AL N; SV Fort +9 plant (+7 tendril), Ref -1 plant (-2 tendril), Will +0; Str 12, Dex 6, Con 20, Int æ, Wis æ, Cha æ.

Skills: Climb +10, Move Silently (tendril) +8.

Feats: Great Fortitude.

SA — Vitality Drain (Ex): Vine drains 1 hp/day from targets within 10 yards/HD of the plant.

SQ — Plant: Impervious to critical hits, subdual damage, and death from massive damage, not affected by mind-altering spells.

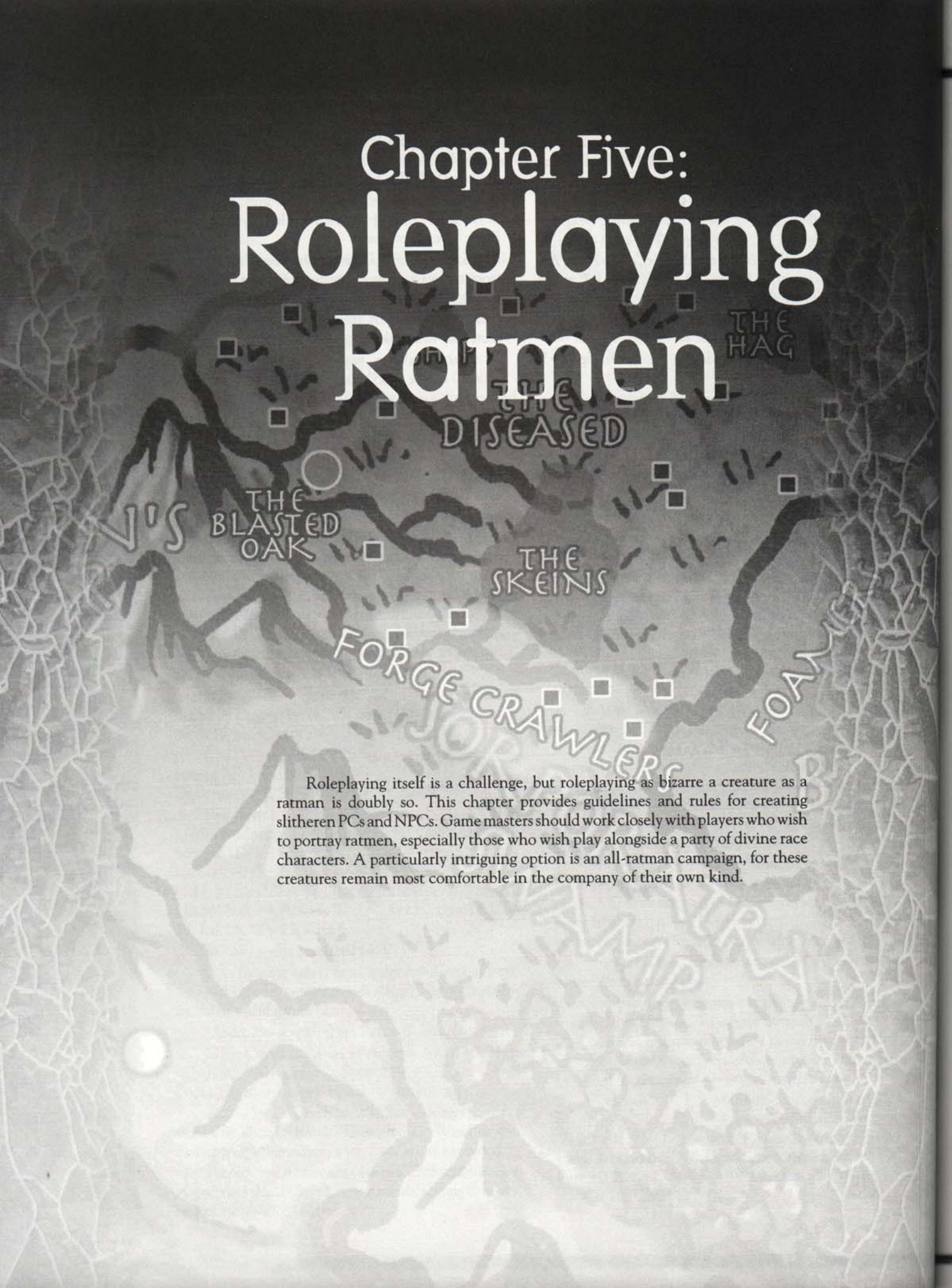
Human slaves, male and female: hp 2, AC 11, Atk +0 melee (1d3, unarmed strike).

Human slave, male (Ceron): Exp3, hp 2, AC 11, Atk +0 melee (1d3, unarmed strike), Craft (carpentry) +4.

Rewards

The GM may decide to award additional XP for uncommon successes. For instance, should the party rescue the slaves, bring them safely through the dangerous marshes to Vesh, and help them reintegrate into society, the PCs might receive a 100-XP bonus for each recovered slave. Those who retrieve the scrolls describing the scope of Red Witches' trade network and deliver it to the Vigils or other authorities might also be granted bonus experience awards.

Chapter Five: Roleplaying Ratmen



Roleplaying itself is a challenge, but roleplaying as bizarre a creature as a ratman is doubly so. This chapter provides guidelines and rules for creating slitheren PCs and NPCs. Game masters should work closely with players who wish to portray ratmen, especially those who wish play alongside a party of divine race characters. A particularly intriguing option is an all-ratman campaign, for these creatures remain most comfortable in the company of their own kind.

About the Slitheren

Slitheren — colloquially known as ratmen — are a dire manifestation of the power of the titans. In the wake of the Titanswar, common rats fed upon the blood and flesh of fallen titans, or were otherwise affected by the titans' presence. As the titans' remains interacted with the bodies of the rats that fed upon them, the slitheren race was born. The rats that fed most gluttonously upon the titans were most completely transformed. They formed several separate and distinct subspecies or "broods" of slitheren. From the magic-rich offspring of Mesos to the sightless progeny of Golthain, they remain the living, breathing embodiment of the titans who spawned them. However, not every rat gorged itself enough on titanflesh to become powerful and distinct beings like the Red Witches or Foamers — indeed, most representatives of the slitheren race are the "common" ratmen. For every single Red Witch or Foamer, a hundred common slitheren cram themselves into subterranean burrows.

The cunning, aggressive and adaptable slitheren can turn their talents to a variety of tasks. Quick to anger and quicker to fight — even among themselves — they hold grudges a long time. A slight against a slitheren goes remembered, the grudge often passing from parent to offspring for generations. No ratman forgives an insult until he has exacted vengeance against the offender — or sometimes his entire race.

A young species, slitheren have no respect for history. As they prefer to look only to the future, they see other races' tendency to venerate the past as a serious weakness. The slitheren view themselves as the true progeny of the titans, the rightful inheritors of their awesome power, and the prophesied and destined masters of the Scarred Lands. They work covertly and overtly — using means both mundane and magical — toward their ultimate goal of destruction and conquest.

Physical Description

A slitheren is every inch a humanoid rat, complete with a short-furred pelt, razorlike incisors, and a long, hairless tail. They typically stand between 5 and 6 feet in height — with the powerful Foamers reaching almost 7 feet — though they tend to slouch when walking, giving them a hunched appearance that makes them seem smaller. They have long torsos with arms and legs of equal length. Their long fingers grant them a natural dexterity that is the envy of many other species. The fur of the common slitheren ranges from dark brown to piebald, while the distinct slitheren broods have specific and unvarying hide colors, such as the oily black of the Foamers and the dull gray of the Diseased. Albinos can appear within any brood as well. Most wear clothing and armor scavenged or stolen from fallen foes, so it is normally in poor repair.

Many ratmen decorate their fur with shaved and dyed patterns and adorn their bodies with tattoos, scarification, and piercings of all sorts. Among younger slitheren it has become popular of late to pierce the tail with dozens of rings, which grow progressively smaller from base to tip. Elders find this practice mystifying and discourage it. Fighters often shave away patches of fur to better display particularly hard-won or impressive battle scars.

Ratmen as Player Characters

As a general rule, slitheren have little to do with other species, though they sometimes work with orcs, goblins, trolls, and other such disliked species when they share similar goals. This does not necessarily hold true of PC slitheren who are, of course, free to associate with whomever the player wishes.

Slitheren are almost universally hated and feared — particularly by humans, dwarves and elves — and often find themselves persecuted or even killed on sight. This sentiment seems, for the most part, mutual. However, King Virduk is currently considering a formal relationship with the slitheren. He already enjoys an informal one, employing ratman agents — especially Stalkers — for a variety of tasks. Thus slitheren can move about relatively freely and openly in a few of the less reputable regions under Virduk's control.

Most slitheren are lawful evil, with some variation among the different broods. These alignments primarily result from cultural influence, however, so a slitheren of any brood *could* be of any alignment. Thus, they are not barred from any class owing to alignment restrictions (though there have been no known examples of slitheren bards or paladins).

Slitheren characters who travel in the world outside their homelands and deal with other species likely will find themselves judged and condemned not by their own actions but by those of their race. The life of an adventuring ratman becomes one of repentance and a never-ending battle for acceptance.

Playing a Slitheren PC

Slitheren player characters face a surfeit of challenges. Playing a ratman PC isn't like playing a human in a rat suit. PC ratmen tend to encounter mistrust, hostility, and even hatred wherever they go.

On one hand, the major character races in the outside world display fear and anger toward them. The lot of a slitheren adventurer means fighting for simple acceptance while his comrades and colleagues are lauded and loved for the same accomplishments. Calling the idea of a "slitheren hero" in the lands of Ghelspad an unlikely concept is quite an understatement. Still, at one time the same was said of half-orcs, a race that has gained a certain amount of grudging acceptance and respect. After all, though people find

the idea of a slitheren hero difficult to imagine, it is not impossible.

The other difficulties a slitheren adventurer faces involve his dealings with his own race. The ratmen view those few of their number who leave the warrens to seek adventure as touched in the head. In extreme cases, other ratmen think of them as heretics who turned their backs on their people and their titan.

The real challenge, though, comes from game masters. It is their job to bear these issues in mind when handling your encounters with the rest of the world. Don't be too worried though; it's also their job to make sure you have fun. This is a game, after all.

As you can see, the lot of the slitheren PC is not an easy one. Feared on one side and loathed on the other, they put themselves in a difficult situation — but one that can provide tremendous roleplaying challenges and a truly unforgettable gaming experience.

GMing a Slitheren PC

As detailed in this volume, the slitheren are generally an evil race, dedicated to destruction and conquest. However, this fact need not hold true of all ratmen. While most slitheren tend toward evil alignments, they are not *required* to be evil. GMs are free to bar slitheren characters of evil alignment from their games, just as they would any other type of character. However, keep in mind that most slitheren are lawful and thus quite capable of following orders, forming plans, keeping their word, and working in groups. GMs might at least consider allowing ratmen characters to maintain their standard alignment tendencies.

The primary difficulty in running a game that includes a slitheren PC is the suspicion and persecution that the character encounters much of the time. Outside their own homelands and some of the seedier areas controlled by Virduk, slitheren are not well received. A ratman attempting to enter the city of Mithril, for example, receives a cold reception indeed (cold steel, if he's not careful). This does not automatically bar a player from running a slitheren PC, but it does make even a simple act like entering a city quite challenging. When running NPC encounters with slitheren characters, the GM must always bear in mind the ratmen's reviled reputation among other races of Scarn. Yet what is life if not change? The reputation of slitheren PCs should be able to transcend that of their race through their own deeds and actions.

Another thing to consider is the reception a ratman player characters find among their own race, particularly their own brood. As a religious breed dedicated to their titan progenitors, slitheren do not take kindly to ratmen who turn their backs on their sacred duties to go gallivanting about with lesser races in search of adventure.

To the GM falls the task of making the life of a PC slitheren as difficult as possible. Whether it takes the form of persecution from other species or resentment from his own kin, the lot of an adventuring ratman is not an easy one. But if the GM manages these drawbacks well and balances them with rewards, playing a PC slitheren can be a very rewarding experience.

Slitheren Player Character Traits

The following section details all the basic information required to create a slitheren PC of any brood. All slitheren have higher level equivalencies (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23) and thus not available as player characters at 1st level.

Some of the special powers and abilities of the more robust slitheren broods may unbalance the game, so the GM should examine the specifics of these broods in detail before allowing them as player characters. The broods' high level equivalencies serves to mitigate this issue somewhat.

While common ratmen may be best suited to become player characters, remember that slitheren are not relegated to any particular alignment or mode of behavior; a ratman of any class remains a perfectly viable player character with GM approval.

The following table lists slitheren broods that are appropriate for use as player characters. The Black Pelt, Forge Crawler, Storm Chaser, Stricken and Unseeing broods are extremely powerful and likely to unbalance a campaign, and so are not listed. Game masters are free to develop these broods as PCs, of course, but they are not recommended as player characters save in very unusual circumstances.

Common slitheren names include Aichi, Critch, Deek, Frik, Grist, Ix, Kith, Nix, Pratch, Reep, Ssith, Thex, Xiv, and Zexex. Most slitheren names apply to males and females alike.

Due to the infusion of titan essence into their very being, slitheren cannot become clerics.

Slitheren Brood Reference Chart

Brood	Titan	Class*	Level**
Common	Any	Rogue	+1
Brown Gorgor	Gaurak	Fighter	+2
Daywalker	Thulkas	Fighter	+3
Diseased	Chern	Rogue	+3
Foamer	Kadum	Barbarian	+3
Red Witch	Mormo	Wizard	+2
Stalker	Hrinruuk	Ranger	+3
White Wraith	Gulaben	Fighter	+3

*The Class entry indicates the brood's preferred class.

**The Level entry indicates the level equivalency of the brood.

The information listed below regarding Hit Dice, Armor Class, saving throws, and natural weapon damage represents only the basic racial values. After generating the slitheren PC's ability scores, GMs and players should adjust them based on the appropriate ability modifiers.

Language

All ratmen automatically know slitheren — a language of sibilant hisses and chittering similar to rodent vocalizations — and can communicate with all giant and normal rats. The language is difficult for non-slitheren races to learn (DC 20). The written form of the Slitheren language has its own character set.

Darkvision

All slitheren have darkvision to a range of 60 feet. Darkvision is monochrome only, but otherwise resembles normal sight.

'Common' Ratman Traits

Size: Medium

Hit Dice: By class

Racial Ability Score Modifiers: +4 Dex, +6 Con, -2 Cha

Typical Profile: Str 10, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8

Armor Class Bonus: +1 (natural)

Speed: 30 feet, climb 15 feet

Attack Bonus: By class

Saving Throws: By class. Additionally, as slitheren are exposed to all manner of filth and toxins at an early age, they receive a +2 racial bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poison and disease.

Skills: Escape Artist +3, Hide +2 and Jump +2

Feats: Dodge

Natural Weapons: Bite 1d3, claw 1d4

Favored Class: Rogue (see *Core Rulebook I*, page 56).

Level Equivalency: Common slitheren are a +1 level equivalent class (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23).

Brood Traits

The above traits apply to "common" ratmen. Player character ratmen can be from various broods as well, although some subraces seem more suitable than others. Trait listings and game master advice appear below, by brood. Full statistics as well as details on the special attacks and qualities for each brood appear in greater detail in the Monsters Appendix of this book, or in *Creature Collection* or *Creature Collection II*.

Brown Gorgier Brood Traits

Size: Medium

Hit Dice: 1d8

Racial Ability Score Modifiers: +4 Dex, +6 Con, -2 Cha

Typical Profile: Str 10, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8

Armor Class Bonus: +1 (natural)

Speed: 30 feet, climb 15 feet

Attack Bonus: +1

Saving Throws: Fortitude +5, Reflex +2, Will +0. Additionally, as slitheren are exposed to all manner of filth and toxins at an early age, they receive a +2 racial bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poison and disease.

Skills: Escape Artist +3, Hide +2, Jump +1 and Search +2

Feats: Dodge

Natural Weapons: Bite 1d3, claw 1d4

Favored Class: Fighter

Level Equivalency: Brown Gorgiers are a +2 level equivalent class (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23).

See *Creature Collection*, page 151 for full details.

Daywalker Brood Traits

Size: Medium

Hit Dice: 2d8

Racial Ability Score Modifiers: +6 Dex, +6 Con, +2 Int, +2 Cha

Typical Profile: Str 10, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 12

Armor Class Bonus: +2 (natural)

Speed: 30 feet, climb 15 feet, burrow 10 feet

Attack Bonus: +2

Saving Throws: Fortitude +3, Reflex +6, Will +3. Additionally, as slitheren are exposed to all manner of filth and toxins at an early age, they receive a +2 racial bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poison and disease.

Skills: Climb +2, Hide +3, Jump +10 (includes +8 racial bonus), Move Silently +3, Search +2, Spot +3, Wilderness Lore (desert) +3

Feats: Spirited Charge, Track

Natural Weapons: Bite 1d3, claw 1d4

Special Qualities:

Resistance to Energy: Daywalkers resist the first 10 points of fire damage inflicted upon them each round.

Favored Class: Fighter

Level Equivalency: Daywalkers are a +3 level equivalent class (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23).

See *Creature Collection II*, page 131 for full details.

Diseased Brood Traits

Size: Medium

Hit Dice: 1d8

Racial Ability Score Modifiers: +2 Dex, +6 Con, +2 Int, +2 Wis, +2 Cha

Typical Profile: Str 10, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 12

Armor Class Bonus: +1 (natural)

Speed: 30 feet, climb 15 feet

Attack Bonus: +1

Saving Throws: Fortitude +5, Reflex +1, Will +1. Additionally, due to their brood's natural immu-

nity, Diseased automatically succeed at all Fortitude saving throws against disease. However, they receive the slitheren's normal +2 bonus to Fortitude saves against poison.

Skills: Diplomacy +1, Escape Artist +3, Hide +2

Feats: Dodge

Natural Weapons: Bite 1d3, claw 1d4

Favored Class: Rogue

Level Equivalency: The diseased are a +3 level equivalent class (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23).

See *Creature Collection*, page 152 for full details.

Foamer Brood Traits

Size: Medium

Hit Dice: 2d8

Racial Ability Score Modifiers: +2 Str, +4 Dex, +6 Con, -1 Int, -2 Wis, -2 Cha

Typical Profile: Str 14, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 8

Armor Class Bonus: +1 (natural)

Speed: 30 feet, climb 15 feet, swim 40 feet

Attack Bonus: +2

Saving Throws: Fortitude +6, Reflex +5, Will -1. Additionally, as slitheren are exposed to all manner of filth and toxins at an early age, they receive a +2 racial bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poison and disease.

Skills: Jump +1, Escape Artist +3, Swim +5

Feats: Power Attack

Natural Weapons: Bite 1d3, claw 1d4

Favored Class: Barbarian

Level Equivalency: Foamers are a +3 level equivalent class (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23).

See *Creature Collection*, page 153 for full details.

Red Witch Brood Traits

Size: Medium

Hit Dice: 1d8

Racial Ability Score Modifiers: +4 Dex, +6 Con, +4 Int, +2 Wis, -2 Cha

Typical Profile: Str 10, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 8

Armor Class Bonus: +1 (natural)

Speed: 30 feet, climb 15 feet

Attack Bonus: +1

Saving Throws: Fortitude +3, Reflex +2, Will +3. Additionally, as slitheren are exposed to all manner of filth and toxins at an early age, they receive a +2 racial bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poison and disease.

Skills: Concentration +2, Escape Artist +3, Hide +2, Jump +1, Scry +2, Spellcraft +5

Feats: Spell Focus (Illusion), Spell Focus (Necromancy)

Natural Weapons: Bite 1d3, claw 1d4

Favored Class: Illusionist or Necromancer (must choose one at character creation)

Level Equivalency: Red Witches are a +2 level equivalent class (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23).

See *Creature Collection*, page 154 for full details.

Stalker Brood Traits

Size: Medium

Hit Dice: 2d8

Racial Ability Score Modifiers: +6 Dex, +6 Con, +2 Int, +2 Cha

Typical Profile: Str 10, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 12

Armor Class Bonus: +1 (natural)

Speed: 30 feet, climb 15 feet

Attack Bonus: +2

Saving Throws: Fortitude +3, Reflex +6, Will +3. Additionally, as slitheren are exposed to all manner of filth and toxins at an early age, they receive a +2 racial bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poison and disease.

Skills: Animal Empathy +8 (includes +6 racial bonus), Bluff +3, Climb +5, Escape Artist +2, Handle Animal +8 (includes +6 racial bonus), Hide +4, Jump +2, Move Silently +3, Search +4, Spot +3, Wilderness Lore +4

Feats: Track and either Ambidexterity or Exotic Weapon Proficiency

Natural Weapons: Bite 1d3, claw 1d4

Favored Class: Ranger

Level Equivalency: Stalkers are a +3 level equivalent class (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23).

See *Creature Collection II*, page 132 for full details.

White Wraith Brood Traits

Size: Medium

Hit Dice: 2d8

Racial Ability Score Modifiers: +4 Str, +4 Dex, +6 Con, -2 Int, -2 Cha

Typical Profile: Str 14, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 8

Armor Class Bonus: +4 (natural)

Speed: 30 feet, climb 15 feet

Attack Bonus: +2

Saving Throws: Fort +3, Reflex +5, Will +3. Additionally, as slitheren are exposed to all manner of filth and toxins at an early age, they receive a +2 racial bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poison and disease.

Skills: Balance +2, Climb +5, Hide +3 (+10 when among the undead), Intimidate +1, Move Silently +3, Jump +3, Spot +2, Wilderness Lore +2

Feats: Dodge, Run

Natural Weapons: Bite 1d3, claw 1d4

Favored Class: Fighter

Level Equivalency: White Wraiths are a +3 level equivalent class (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 23).

See *Creature Collection II*, page 133 for full details.

Slitheren Prestige Classes

The following prestige classes are available to ratmen player characters and NPCs. Some are limited to specific broods as listed.

Grenadier (Chucker)

The grenadier specializes in the crafting and use of the slitheren's impressive arsenal of grenadelike weapons. Though also trained in the rudimentary arts of hand-to-hand combat, no self-respecting member of this class enters battle without first winnowing down the opponent with a barrage of alchemists' fire, firesand orbs (see Chapter 6), and a multitude of other flasks filled with all manner of vileness. This form of fighting is most often used by the Diseased, but the Red Witches also have a good number of chuckers in their ranks, and other broods have begun to adopt the style.

Hit Die: d6

Requirements

Would-be mentors first test their pupils by hurling a goodly number of potions at them. Candidates who do not meet the following criteria face no chance for survival.

Base Attack Bonus: +4

Alchemy: 6 ranks

Profession (Herbalist): 4 ranks

Feats: Skill Focus (Alchemy), Weapon Focus (grenadelike weapons)

Special: Most mentors require prospective students to offer a gift in the form of a unique grenadelike weapon. Certain gifted pupils (such as pothecaries) can provide it on their own, but many quest for a long-lost relic of unusual power. This gesture does not prove entirely one-sided, though. The master takes the gift and learns to produce it efficiently. From that time onward, tradition binds the mentor to teach the student to make the weapon in abundance. Both master and student can then trade their grenade with "worthy" clients. In such a way, the grenadiers have fostered the development of one of the most potent arsenals anywhere in Ghelspad.

Class Skills

The grenadier's class skills (and the relevant ability for each) are Alchemy (Int), Craft (Int), Hide (Dex), and Jump (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the grenadier prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The grenadier is proficient in all simple and martial thrown weapons and all light armor.

Bonus Feats: The grenadier learns to be especially effective with grenadelike weapons. At each

level, the slitheren may select one bonus feat from the following list: Point Blank Shot, Far Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, and Shot on the Run. These feats apply only when the character uses grenadelike weapons, though their normal prerequisites are waived.

Grenade Use: The first lesson of any grenadier is how not to blow oneself up. Members of this class never risk accidental discharge of their weapons while carrying them on their persons.

Line of Fire: Skilled grenadiers learn to extend the potency of their arsenals — literally. First developed by Kathla, Scion of Firesand, this technique causes grenadelike weapons to produce a trail along its thrown path. Those inside and passing through this path suffer a portion of the weapon's full effect. Treat this as a breath weapon line attack (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 73) that deals half the grenadelike weapon's direct hit damage to those caught in the area of effect. For grenadelike weapons that do not deal damage, targets caught inside still suffer the direct hit result, though the DC to avoid ill effects (if one exists) decreases by 2.

Seeker Grenade: At 5th level, the grenadier can throw a grenade once per day at a known target within range, and the grenade travels to the target, even around corners. Only an unavoidable obstacle or the end of the grenade's range prevents its flight. This ability negates cover and concealment modifiers, but otherwise the attack is rolled normally as described on page 138 of *Core Rulebook I*. This is a spell-like ability. Throwing the grenade is part of the action.

Barrage: Master grenadiers waste no time picking opponents to death with small snipes. Instead, they have learned the art of making one devastating hail of multiple grenades: They may opt to pool all their attacks for one round into one single barrage. Roll for each attack in the barrage, though the grenadier suffers a -2 penalty to each attack roll. Then pool all damage (both direct hit and splash) from each successful attack and consider it the result of a single attack for purposes of overcoming resistances and damage reduction. Furthermore, each grenade beyond the first that successfully hits gives the barrage a +1 enhancement bonus for purposes of overcoming damage reduction (it doesn't add to damage).

Phase Grenade: At 9th level, the grenadier can throw a grenade once per day at a known target within range, and the grenade travels to the target in a straight path, passing through any nonmagical barrier or wall in its way. (*A wall of force, wall of fire, or the like stops the grenade.*) This ability negates cover, concealment, and even armor modifiers, but otherwise the attack is rolled normally as described on page 138 of *Core Rulebook I*. This is a spell-like ability. Throwing the grenade is part of the action.

The Grenadier

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Grenadelike Attack Bonus
1st	+0	0	+2	0	Bonus feat, Grenade use	+1
2nd	+1	0	+3	0	Bonus feat	+2
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+1	Line of fire	+3
4th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Bonus feat	+4
5th	+3	+1	+4	+1	Seeking grenade	+5
6th	+4	+2	+5	+2	Bonus feat	+6
7th	+5	+2	+5	+2	Barrage	+7
8th	+6	+2	+6	+2	Bonus feat	+8
9th	+6	+3	+6	+3	Phase grenade	+9
10th	+7	+3	+7	+3	Bonus feat	+10

Tail Fighter

The art of tail fighting is primarily practiced by Foamers and Brown Gorgers, though other broods have adapted the style for their own purposes. As the name implies, this technique centers on the use of the slitheren's prehensile tail. Initially, the ratman learns to employ the appendage fully, as it might use its arms. Later, this mastery extends to all facets of fighting, from offense to defense and including special maneuvers to throw off opponents.

Hit Die: d8

Requirements

No master of this art will accept a student who does not meet the following criteria:

Base Attack Bonus: +7

Feats: Ambidexterity (which becomes Multidexterity), Two-Weapon Fighting (which becomes Multiweapon Fighting), Expertise

Special: Has a tail

Class Skills

Tail fighters gain no class skills, though they retain all class skills from their existing class(es).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the tail fighter prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The tail fighter is proficient in all weapons designed specifically to be used by the tail. The character gains no additional armor or shield proficiencies.

Tail Use: Students may use their tails for any function that normally requires the use of forward limbs. This includes everything from wielding a weapon to performing somatic spell components. Tail attacks may target only opponents behind the slitheren, and — unless the tail holds a weapon — deal 1d3 points of subdual damage. Tail fighters can attack with the tail and forward limbs simultaneously, suffering the normal penalties for two-weapon fighting; the tail is considered an off-hand (see *Core Rulebook I*, page 125).

Tail Strike: At this level of competence, the slitheren's tail becomes a true weapon. Characters are considered to have the Improved Unarmed Strike feat (applicable only to the tail). At 2nd level a tail fighter's tail deals 1d4 points of normal damage. This increases to 1d6 at 5th level and 1d8 at 8th. Tail fighters attacking exclusively with their tails free up their arms for non-attack actions (such as spellcasting, grappling, or loading a crossbow). In this case, a slitheren must succeed at a Concentration check (DC 17 – her class level) or lose the arms' action (but not the tail attacks).

Tail Shield: The tail develops a "sixth-sense" and moves to parry attacks against the slitheren. The character's Armor Class increases by +1 against attacks made from behind.

Tail Trip: The slitheren may opt to make a trip attempt with the tail in place of a standard attack.

Tail Fend: The tail fighter's tail swings about threateningly, preventing those behind the character from effectively launching attacks. Opponents behind the slitheren suffer a –2 circumstance penalty to all attack rolls and must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 13 + slitheren's Dexterity modifier), or suffer 1d6 points of normal damage as the tail slams into them. This technique becomes so ingrained into the slitheren's fighting style, it does not preclude her from using her tail attacks at the same time.

Improved Tail Shield: The tail fighter can use its tail to parry attacks from all directions, granting a +1 to AC against all attacks.

Scorpion Stance: Like those vermin which plague the Mourning Marshes, a master of tail fighting learns to fight with tail forward, overcoming the normal restriction to targets behind the slitheren. Furthermore, the character may elect, as a free action, to use the tail fend ability against threats to either its front or rear (but not both).

Improved Tail Trip: The tail fighter is considered to have the Improved Trip feat, but only when using the tail to trip an opponent.

Tail Fighter

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	0	0	Tail use
2nd	+2	+3	0	0	Tail strike 1d4
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Tail shield
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Tail trip
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Tail strike 1d6
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Tail fend
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Improved tail shield
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Tail strike 1d8
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Scorpion stance
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Improved tail trip

Twilight Warden

The borders of the Mourning Marshes stand nearly impervious, thanks in no small part to the slitheren's elite twilight wardens. They call all swamps their dominion, and all trespassers their prey. All broods, save the Unseeing, contribute to this august order.

The wardens base their skills on a link with the land. This bond, however, is far from the tranquil harmony at the heart of druidism. It is instead a constant contest between parasite and host, as the slitheren appeals to the earth's darker nature for power and control. This struggle taints both the warden and his charge, straining his will and leaving him open to attacks through this connection.

For more than a century the way of the wardens has remained unchanged, and their power has grown unchecked. Now, with a new leader, they have begun to encroach upon the daytime world as well.

Hit Die: d8

Requirements

The wardens represent the greatest examples of slitherenkind, all of whom must first meet the following criteria:

Alignment: Any evil

Base Attack Bonus: +9

Skills: Three of the following at 10 ranks: Alchemy, Animal Empathy, Hide, Intimidate, Intuit Direction, Move Silently, Spot, and Wilderness Lore.

Feats: Any three, though these feats must increase or allow for the increase of the slitheren's attack bonus, damage, Armor Class, and/or number of attacks. Note that feats which reduce penalties to the above values (such as Two-Weapon Fighting, or Martial Weapon Proficiency) can count toward this total.

Special: All twilight wardens swear an oath to repel trespassers and carry out the dictates of the priest-kings. This oath is enforced by the wardens

themselves and the otherworldly allies of the priest-kings.

Class Skills

The warden's class skills (and the relevant ability for each) are Alchemy (Int), Animal Empathy (Cha, exclusive skill), Climb (Str), Jump (Str), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Intuit Direction (Wis), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), and Wilderness Lore (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier

Class Features

All the following are class features of the twilight warden prestige class:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The twilight warden is proficient in all weapons (simple and martial), all armor (light, medium, and heavy), and all shields. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Climb, Hide, Jump, and Move Silently.

Bonus Languages: Twilight wardens receive dark slitheren, a secret language spoken only by other wardens, as a bonus language.

Soul Taint: Wardens suffer increasing penalties to their Will saves with progressive levels. Regardless of their form, twilight wardens are creatures of unmitigated evil — no device or spell can conceal their alignment in any way.

Favored Ally: Wardens learn to bend the will of the wild to their own, calling upon the creatures of their domain to do their bidding. At will, the warden may *speak to*, *summon*, or *hold* a preselected type of ally and may *heal* or *harm* it each twice a day, per the spells cast by a ranger of a level equal to the warden's level. The first ally may be chosen from any vermin species whose Challenge Rating is 3 or less. The second ally can be any animal, beast, or vermin whose Challenge Rating of 5 or less. The third ally can be any animal, beast, magical beast, or vermin whose Challenge

Rating is 7 or less. The fourth can be any such creature with a CR of 9 or less. A warden who attempts to use these abilities outside of swamp-like terrain has a 60% chance of failure.

Swamp Affinity: While in swamps, the warden gains a +1 affinity bonus to Hide, Listen, Move Silently, and Spot checks and a +4 affinity bonus to Wilderness Lore checks.

Swamp Step: Once per day, a warden may *teleport without error* from anywhere within a swamp to anywhere else within the same swamp.

Affect Terrain: While in a swamp, the warden may cast at will *chill/warmth* and *mending* (which must target some aspect of the terrain) as a ranger of a level equal to the warden's level.

Affect Wildlife: Against most creatures of the swamp, the warden automatically succeeds on Animal Empathy attempts. Furthermore, these actions take one-tenth the normal time required and can target any creature type (so long as it is native denizen of the marshes) without fail. Especially powerful beings (namely, those whose Challenge Rating exceeds the warden's level) remain immune to this ability.

Master Terrain: As the affect terrain ability, but the warden may now also cast *obscuring mist*, *pass without trace*, *stone shape*, and *wood shape* at will. The last two must target some aspect of the terrain; they could not, for instance, be used against wooden or stone equipment.

Master Wildlife: Any creature native to the swamp that wishes to attack the warden must first succeed at a Will save (DC 17 + the warden's Cha-

risma modifier) or approach no closer than 15 feet and become unable to take offensive actions against the character. The warden may also issue a one-word *command* to any such creature (which it magically understands), as the spell cast by a ranger of a level equal to the warden's level except that the effect lasts round per level. Any one creature is vulnerable to this ability only once a day.

Spells: Twilight wardens can cast a limited number of druid spells selected from the list below. The number of spells they can cast appears in the Twilight Wardens table. Spell slots cannot be combined with those that the warden may already possess. The character gains bonus spells for having a high Wisdom, and the DC to resist spells remains 10 + the spell's level + the warden's Wisdom modifier. A warden prepares and casts spells as a ranger with a caster level equal to one-half the slitheren's character level.

Twilight Warden Spell List

Wardens prepare their spells from the following list.

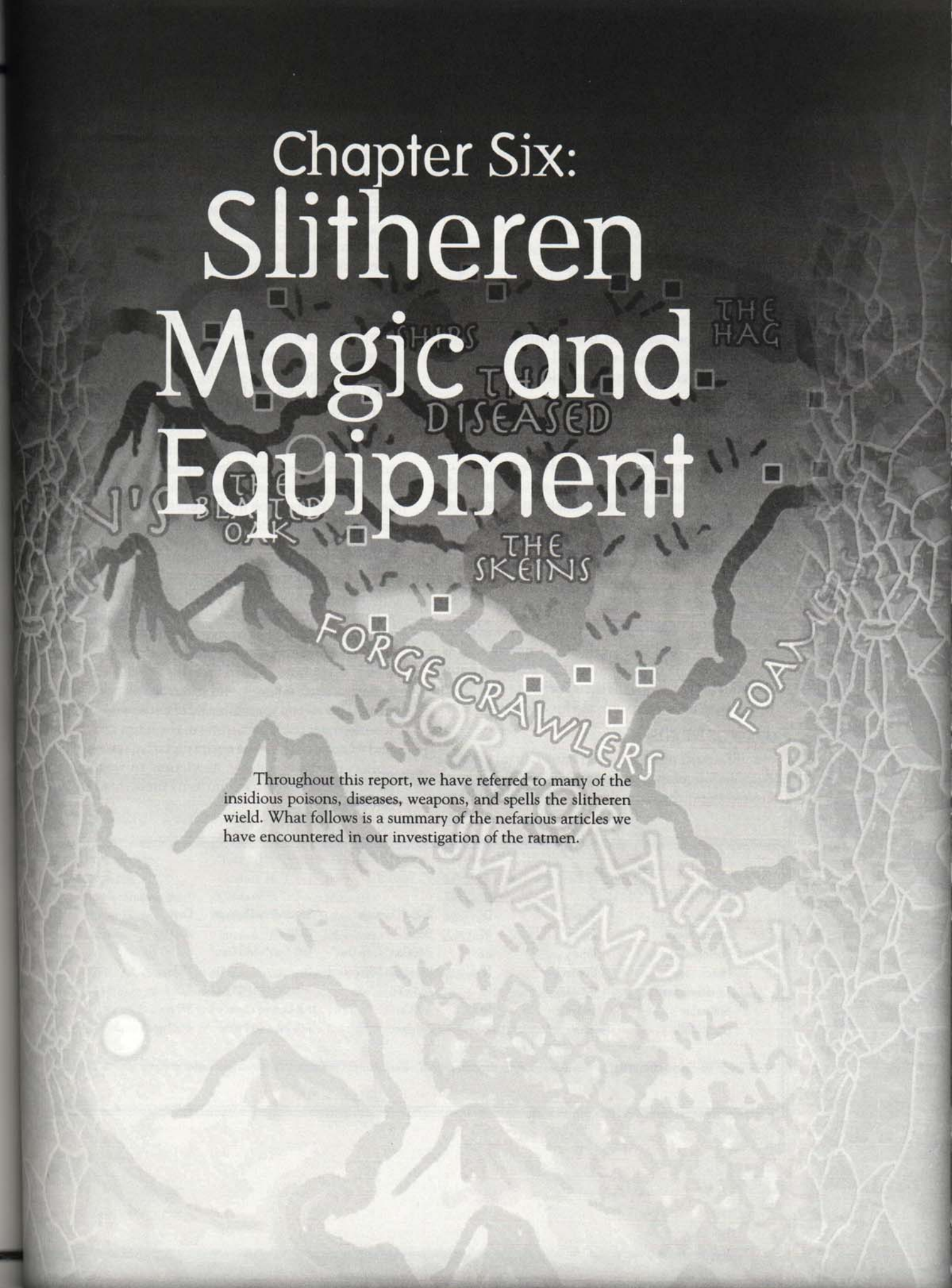
1st level — *Cause light wounds*, *chameleon skin**, *endure elements*, *entangle*, *magic fang*, *rabbit feet**, *shockwave strike**

2nd level — *Animal infusion**, *barkskin*, *flame/frost weapon**, *hunter's stalk**, *speak with animals*, *summon swarm*, *wolf's cry**

3rd level — *Contagion*, *cause moderate wounds*, *dominate animal*, *meld into stone*, *neutralize poison*, *poison*, *wall of hornets**

*Indicates a spell from *Relics & Rituals*

Twilight Warden								
Class Level	Base	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	Spells per Day		
	Attack Bonus	Save	Save	Save		1st	2nd	3rd
1st	+1	+2	0	0	1st favored ally	0	—	—
2nd	+2	+3	0	0	Swamp affinity	1	—	—
3rd	+3	+3	+1	-1	Swamp step	1	0	—
4th	+4	+4	+1	-1	2nd favored ally	1	1	—
5th	+5	+4	+1	-1	Affect terrain	1	1	0
6th	+6	+5	+2	-2	Affect wildlife	1	1	1
7th	+7	+5	+2	-2	3rd favored ally	2	1	1
8th	+8	+6	+2	-2	Master terrain	2	1	1
9th	+9	+6	+3	-3	Master wildlife	2	2	1
10th	+10	+7	+3	-3	4th favored ally	2	2	2



Chapter Six: Slitheren Magic and Equipment

Throughout this report, we have referred to many of the insidious poisons, diseases, weapons, and spells the slitheren wield. What follows is a summary of the nefarious articles we have encountered in our investigation of the ratmen.

Poisons

The pothecaries among the Forge Crawlers remain the undisputed slitheren masters of the art of poison. However, one should keep in mind these toxins that envenom the blades of the other broods as well. (For a full description of the use of poisons, see *Core Rulebook II*, pages 79 to 80.)

Amber Fugue

In some coastal areas, slitheren maintain large pens in which they keep captive ebon eels (see *Creature Collection*, page 67). The ratmen milk the blinding amber secretion that constitutes the eel's main form of defense and distill it to enhance its potency and enable it to better cling to weapons.

Blackwind

Derived from the black bracket fungus — a common growth in the marshes — blackwind is usually delivered by grenade or through means of a bellows. When inhaled, it causes a stuporous giddiness to overwhelm a victim, impairing judgment and reason. The ratmen themselves often partake of blackwind in small doses as a euphoric drug and as a flavoring agent in a number of their liquors and brews.

Notch Seep

Derived from the secretions of the angler ooze (see *Creature Collection*, page 10,) notch seep is a more potent, distilled form of this creature's natural defense (anyone who fails their Fortitude save against notch seep becomes paralyzed for 3d6 rounds).

Punicieus Mortis

The most terrible poison known in all Ghelspad is indeed punicieus mortis. One of few slitheren-crafted items they actually trade to outsiders, it may

be found in the possession of assassins in all corners of the land. The foul Cult of Ancients particularly favors this toxic brew. Distilled by Forge Crawlers from noxious vapors they harvest in the Sorporatra Swamp, punicieus mortis causes huge purple welts and bruises to appear all over the body as blood vessels burst and muscle fibers rupture. It is almost invariably fatal, and death comes rapidly. Even those that survive often find that they never fully recover from the effects of this most potent distillation.

Stillwater

The slitheren seek out pools of particularly stagnant and brackish water in the marshes. They tend these pools as a gardener tends a prized flower, encouraging the growth of all manner of filth. When they deem a pool ready, they harvest its water and distill it down, forming a thick, greenish toxin called stillwater. Stillwater must be ingested, but despite its brackish origins it has no smell or flavor when added to other food or drink. Consequently it is a favored method of assassination among the slitheren, who seem to take great joy in slipping it into each other's meals.

Sweltering Mist

Like blackwind, one sees sweltering mist most commonly delivered by grenade or through means of a bellows. This luminous white powder is actually quite beautiful to look at, but its effects are anything but. Where it touches the flesh, it causes fearsome burns, as if a hot iron had branded the tissue. These burns rarely heal well and often leave permanent scars. The victim invariably inhales the mist as well, which causes terrible burning in the lungs and throat and sometimes even the entire digestive system. This poison normally reduces its victims to writhing in pain, unable to function until its immediate effects have passed.

Slitheren Poisons

Poison	Type	DC	Initial Damage	Secondary Damage	Cost
Amber fugue	Injury	14	Blind	1d4Dex	250 gp
Punicieus mortis	Injury	22	2d6Con*+1d6 Dex*	1d6 Con*+1d6 Dex*	3,750 gp
Notch seep	Contact	18	Paralysis 3d6 rounds	0	130 gp
Sweltering mist	Contact	18	1d4 Con	1d6 Con + 1d4 Cha*	1,800 gp
Stillwater	Ingest	16	1d4Con	1d6Con	90 gp
Blackwind	Inhale	20	1d6 Int	1d6 Int + 1d4 Wis	400 gp

*If the victim suffers 4 or more points of damage to the indicated ability, 1 point of it becomes permanent.

Diseases

Illness is the specialty of the Diseased brood, and they wield it with wicked glee. While they use their Holy Slaves to carry these and other diseases to the Divine Races, even the other broods can spread illness among the unwary. (See *Core Rulebook II*, pages 74 and 75, for full disease mechanics.)

Black Pox

Blood begins to pool up and rot within the black pox victim, forming large pustules that ooze thick, black, septic blood. Very virulent and often fatal in a few short days, this is probably the most fearsome contagion spread by the Diseased slitheren. Thankfully, once you've had the pox you become immune to it — one way or another.

Gray Wasting

Victims' flesh becomes very dry, even to the point of flaking off in large pieces, and their hair tends to fall out. They cannot eat — anything victims consume they immediately disgorge — and rapidly lose weight over the course of a week or two. Even after fighting off the gray wasting, its deleterious effects remain until victims have had a period of bed rest equal to the number of days of their illness. Any day during the recovery period in which a victim does not have complete bed rest adds a day to the recovery time.

Flower Fever

The flower fever, rarely fatal, seems more like a very bad cold or flu, debilitating the host for a week

or two with weakness, congestion, headache, and vomiting. In addition, the victim begins to exude a strange and pleasant floral aroma that encourages others to inhale deeply, serving to spread this airborne contagion.

Lung Rot

This infection actually attacks the liver, not the lungs. Bile begins flooding the victim's system, causing extreme jaundice. The victim also begins to cough and vomit up massive amounts of this bright green bile — thus the erroneous association with the lungs. A successful *remove disease* spell cast during the incubation period (before symptoms occur) cures the disease. Unfortunately, it takes months for lung rot symptoms to manifest, and by then it is long past the time for a preventative cure.

Scarlet Shaking Pox

The victim of scarlet shaking pox develops huge red blemishes and becomes stricken with uncontrollable muscle spasms. This condition worsens as the disease progresses. It often takes several months to kill a victim. Though symptoms persist for the entire duration of the disease, the victim suffers damage slowly (once per week). No natural healing is possible (the player may make no further natural saving throws to avoid damage), though the disease can be treated magically, with herbs, and medicinally (use only the healer's roll for the saving throw). Without treatment, the disease always ends in death.

Slitheren Diseases

Disease	Infection	DC	Incubation Damage
Gray wasting	Injury 19	1d3 days	1d3 Con
Black pox	Contact 21	1 day	1d3 Str + 1 Dex + 1d3 Con**
Scarlet shaking pox*	Contact 23	1d2 weeks	1d6 Dex**
Flower fever	Inhaled 14	1 day	1d2 Con
Lung rot	Inhaled 17	1d6 months	2d4 Str†

*The body cannot fight off this disease without medical or magical treatment.

**For each ability damaged, the character must make another save. Each failed save means that 1 point of temporary damage delivered to that ability becomes permanent.

†Any time the victim suffers more than 4 points of damage, apply an additional 1 point of permanent damage as well.

Weapons

Just as some of the slitheren have their individual fighting styles distinct from those of the Divine Races, they also have developed a number of their own weapons.

Firesand Orb

In many ways, firesand orbs — clay spheres filled with firesand (see “Other Equipment”) — work very much like the alchemist’s fire grenades that other races use. The difference is that anyone struck in the “splash radius” of the orb suffers full damage from the burning sand. Also, owing to the sand’s fierce heat, all items struck make item saving throws with a –5 circumstance penalty. The sand is slightly sticky and clings to targets, where it continues to burn for three rounds.

Firesand Caster

A firesand caster, like a huge bellows, draws firesand from a sealed container. With a single pump of the bellows the slitheren can spray a gout of burning firesand at foes. A standard jar holds enough sand for six shots. The weapon has only a single range increment of 20 feet and becomes completely ineffective beyond that range. Anyone in a 20-foot line from the caster suffers 1d6 points of damage. Items receive a –5 circumstance penalty to their saving throws. The sand continues to burn for three rounds beyond the initial attack.

Since the sand begins to burn while passing through the bellows itself, these items wear out rather quickly. The GM should monitor the total number of shots fired through a caster. With every use of the weapon, make an item save with a DC equal to the number of shots that caster has fired. Failure means the item detonates, immolating the user for damage equal to 1d6 x the number of shots remaining in the caster’s sealed tank (including the shot being fired).

Flickknife

These tiny, teardrop-shaped blades don’t do very much damage, but a skilled user can fire a tremendous number of them at a target. They are about an inch and a half long, and a slitheren can hold several in the hand at one time. The user bends his arm back near his ear, his wrist twisted backward, and snaps his fingers, sending a blade spinning at its target with surprising speed. The flickknives deal only minimal damage, but the tiny blades are often merely delivery devices for slitheren poisons. One trained to use these blades can flick three of them for each attack, provided the character already has them in hand. Neither strength bonuses nor penalties apply to attacks made with flickknives. Flickknives can be fired from both

hands during a single round. Use the standard rules for attacking with two weapons (see *Core Rulebook I*, p. 124).

Hookstaff

To say that the hookstaff has a humble origin is an understatement. It developed from an early implement for the gathering of horserat dung. The hookstaff is a double-weapon with a semi-circular scythe-like blade at each end; one blade is edged on the inside of the curvature, the other on the outside. One can fight with it as if fighting with two weapons, but those who do incur normal attack penalties, as if fighting with a one-handed weapon and a light weapon (see *Core Rulebook I*, page 124).

The hookstaff’s curved blades make it useful for trip attempts. If the wielder is herself tripped while making a trip attempt, she can drop the staff to keep her balance.

Nail Sheaths

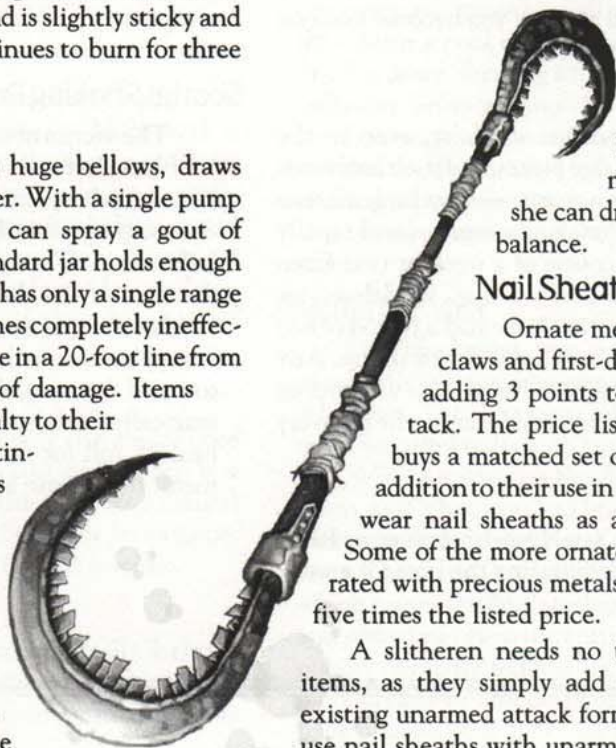
Ornate metal sheaths fit over the claws and first-digit of a slitheren hand, adding 3 points to the ratman’s claw attack. The price listed in the table below buys a matched set of fairly basic design. In addition to their use in combat, young slitheren wear nail sheaths as a decorative accessory. Some of the more ornate sets, intricately decorated with precious metals and gems, go for up to five times the listed price.

A slitheren needs no training to wear these items, as they simply add damage to an already existing unarmed attack form. Other races can also use nail sheaths with unarmed attacks (including a monk’s unarmed attacks), although they will require the appropriate exotic weapon proficiency to employ the nail sheaths effectively.

Sleeve Shield

The strange sleeve shields are crafted of steel and somewhat resemble vambraces from a suit of plate armor. The front plates, both on the forearm and the upper arm, are exceptionally wide — somewhere in size between a buckler and a small shield — and can deflect enemy blows. From the gauntlet extends a blade very much like that of a short sword. Intricate linkages and hinging allows the arm to bend, but sleeve shields do still hamper the wearer. In addition, the built-in blades preclude the use of any other weapons or shields — including bucklers — in the hand.

Sleeve shields are used both for defense — adding +3 to the wearer’s armor class — and for attack, in which capacity they are identical to a short sword.



As beneficial as this seems, the main benefit of sleeve shields is that any melee attack that fails to hit the wearer by 3 points or less is assumed to have been deflected specifically by the sleeves. This allows the wearer to make an immediate attack of opportunity against the attacker.

The listed abilities are for a matched pair of sleeves. If a character wears only one sleeve, the AC bonus falls to +1 and the wearer gets an attack of opportunity only if the attacker misses by 1 point. Wearing only one sleeve allows the character to wield a one-handed weapon or shield in the other hand. Max Dex, Armor Check, and Spell Failures modifiers remain unchanged.

Tail Knife/Tail Mace

Tail knives and tail maces are shaped to fit to the end of a slitheren tail. Metal bands extend from the weapon and wrap several times around the tail to hold it in place. Each tail weapon must be custom fitted to the individual user.

Wearing a tail weapon lets a slitheren make an extra attack with it each round to the sides or rear. Use the standard rules for attacking with two weapons (see *Core Rulebook I*, p. 124), treating the tail weapon attack as an off hand attack. Slitheren already wielding two weapons could essentially receive two extra off “hand” attacks: one with their off hand weapon and one with their tail weapon. Tail weapons cannot be used to attack targets in front of the character.

Whipsword

A whipsword looks just like a normal short sword — and indeed functions as one — but with a snap of the wrist it can expand, separating into several segments connected by intricate linkages. The tip of the blade is thicker and heavier than the base, adding

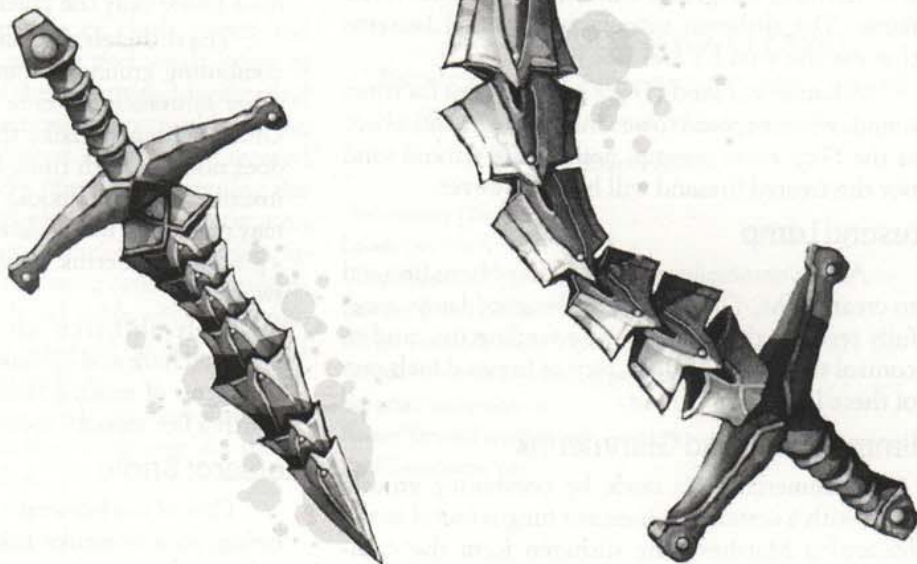
tremendous momentum when used in its expanded form. A whipsword has no set number of segments, though most have between seven and ten. It is considered the mark of a master smith to craft an effective whipsword with more than twelve segments. The greatest slitheren smith of all time — the legendary Frix the Maker — invented the whipsword and is credited with creating the most intricate one ever made, with close to twenty segments!

This sword — named Adderfang — is currently in the possession of the Red Witch archmagi Asthix. She is a master of the weapon and has issued a standing offer to grant Adderfang to anyone who can best her in melee combat. To date, no one has managed the task.

An untrained wielder who rolls a natural 1 when attacking with a whipsword in expanded mode strikes himself with the wildly swinging blade.

When used in expanded mode, a whipsword can wrap around a shield, thus ignoring the portion of the target's AC that is derived from the shield.

A slitheren trained with a whipsword has a +2 racial bonus to melee attack rolls when using it in expanded mode.



Slitheren Exotic Weapons — Melee

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range	Weight	Type
Hookstaff‡	27 gp	1d8	x4	—	12 lb.	Piercing & Slashing
Nail sheaths	50 gp	+3*	x2	—	1 lb.	Slashing
Sleeve shield	300 gp	1d6	18-20/x2	—	8lb	Slashing
Tail knife	65 gp	1d6	x2	—	3 lb.	Slashing
Tail mace	45 gp	1d6	x2	—	3 lb.	Bludgeoning
Whipsword	200 gp	2d4	x3	—	3 lb.	Slashing

Slitheren Exotic Weapons — Missile

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range	Weight	Type
Firesand caster	200 gp	1d6**	—	20 ft. †	30 lb.	Burning
Flickknife	3gp	1	x2	5 ft.	.1 lb.	Slashing

Slitheren Grenadelike Weapons

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range	Weight	Type
Firesand orb	20 gp 1	d6††	—	10 ft.	2 lb.	Grenade

Slitheren armor

Armor	Cost	AC	Max Dex	Armor Check	Spell Failure
Sleeve Shields	300 gp	+2	+3	-5	50%

‡Double weapon

*Adds +3 points of damage to normal claw damage

**Continues to burn and cause damage for 2 additional rounds

†This weapon has only one range increment. It cannot be used beyond this distance.

††Anyone caught in the splash zone suffers full damage from this weapon.

Other Equipment

The slitheren also manufacture many mundane items and tools foreign to members of the Divine Races.

Firesand

Throughout the Sorporatra Swamp lie deposits of a particularly thick, tar-soaked black sand. If treated with certain alchemical solutions, this sand becomes highly combustible. When the sand comes in contact with fresh air, it begins to burn with a fierce, lavender flame. The slitheren manufacture special lanterns that use the sand for fuel (see below).

A handful of sand (1/4 of a pint) burns for three rounds when exposed to air. In the toxic atmosphere of the Sorporatra Swamp, neither the natural sand nor the treated firesand will burn, however.

Firesand Lamp

As the name suggests, these lamps burn firesand to create light. The intricately designed lamps carefully regulate the amount of air feeding the sand to control the rate of burn. A pint of firesand fuels one of these lamps for an hour.

Glimmerchalk and Glimmerink

Glimmerchalk is made by combining ground bone with a certain luminescent fungus found in the Mourning Marshes. The slitheren form the com-

pound into sticks about as large as a finger, then dip them in wax to seal them. While sealed in wax the stick remains inert with no unusual properties. But once the wax seal is broken, the stick of chalk begins to glow an eerie green light about as powerful as a candle. Any marks made with the chalk also glow this same emerald color. The glow persists for several weeks before fading away. The slitheren use glimmerchalk for scribing marks and messages in their subterranean burrows. It is rumored that different clans produce chalk of varying colors, but outsiders have found only the green variety.

The slitheren also make a form of glowing ink by combining ground glimmerchalk with a variety of other substances — mire wurm blood among them. Unlike glimmerchalk, the glow from glimmerink does not fade with time. Most slitheren spellcasters inscribe their spellbooks with glimmerink so they may read them in the darkness of their burrows. Half a pint of glimmerink is easily worth as much as a fine sword.

Only slitheren know how to manufacture glimmerchalk and glimmerink. To the right person, the secret of making these valuable items would be worth a fair amount indeed.

Horserat Bridle

One of the horserat's primary means of attack is biting, so a horselike bridle — with a bit that fits

inside the mouth — is out of the question. Instead, a horserat is fitted with a metal or leather plate that comes over the top of its head, very much like a helmet. Carefully fitted straps hold it in place, and the reins are affixed to rings set on either side of the plate. While this arrangement does not give a rider quite as much control as an ordinary bit and bridle, it does preserve the animal's ability to fight effectively.

Horserat Saddle

Horserat saddles are broad and soft, lacking both pommel and stirrups common to horse saddles. Instead, two sets of wooden pegs extend from the sides. Riders do not sit astride these animals with their legs dangling as they might a horse. Instead, a horserat rider hooks his knees over the first set of pegs — those near the front of the saddle — and bends his legs backward to hook his ankles over the second set of pegs, set high and far back, close to the rider's bottom. The practical result is that it takes a full-round action to mount or dismount the beast, but it proves virtually impossible (DC 27) to unseat the rider. This position allows the rider to remain mounted even when the animal is climbing vertically up or down or making its astonishing leaps and pin attacks (see the Monsters Appendix).

Raskit

The raskit is a long-necked, nine-stringed musical instrument with a number of varying-sized bells set into its face. Slitheren play it not by plucking the strings but instead by stroking them vertically. This sets up sympathetic reverberations, which cause a harmonic vibration in the tiny bells set in the face of the instrument. All but the most dexterous musicians find this surprisingly subtle and beautiful instrument very difficult to play properly (–4 penalty to Perform checks). This slitheren creation remains virtually unknown in Ghelspad, though performers who have discovered and mastered the raskit demand very high prices for their skills.

Shell Pouch

Most races wear leather or cloth purses and pouches to carry their wealth and small items of value, but the slitheren of the Mourning Marshes find that these materials deteriorate too quickly in the swampy environment. Instead, they fashion secured receptacles from the shells of turtles. They line the shells with metal — copper being the most common choice — and close one end. The other end they cap with a hinged metal lid. The more ornate and expensive shell pouches are lined with silver or gold, secured with a complex lock set in the lid, and exquisitely carved and engraved.

Ratmen hang smaller shell pouches from the belt, while the larger ones they sling over the shoulder on straps or fine chains.

Slitheren Bog Wine

The slitheren distill their puissant alcohol from the same black bracket fungus as the blackwind poison. They pulp the fungus and mix it with a number of ingredients — some say horserat urine among them — and place it in large clay urns, which they bury in peat bogs. A year or more later they unearth the jars and enjoy the potent, black liquor. Each nest has its own recipes and wage fierce rivalries with each other over whose wine is best. For each glass imbibed, the drinker must make a Fortitude save (DC 4 per cup, cumulative). A failure indicates the character suffers a 1d2-point reduction to each ability score as she becomes increasingly inebriated. A drinker who rolls a natural 1 on a save roll passes out.

Wym Leather

From the powerful mire wyrms, slitheren produce an incredibly fine and supple greenish leather, which they fashion into clothing, armor, and other items. Leather and studded leather armor crafted from wym leather is identical to normal leather armor save that its Maximum Dex Bonus is 1 point better than normal. Characters will find the cost of mire wym leather items triple that of normal leather, but among the slitheren, the status of wearing wym leather is worth the price.

Wym Teeth

Mire wyrms are so dangerous, respected, and difficult to kill that ratmen often use their teeth as a form of currency. They are rare enough that the value of a tooth equates approximately to that of a standard gold piece among slitheren.

New Spells and Magic Item

The power of slitheren magic users inspires fear throughout the regions of Vesh adjacent to the Mourning Marshes. These spells and magic item number among the arsenals of the Red Witches and other broods.

Escape the Bonds of Flesh

Twists victim's bones and ruptures flesh, inflicting 2d8 points of damage + 1 per caster level.

Necromancy [Death, Evil]

Level: Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet/2 levels)

Target: One creature, size Large or smaller

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude half

Spell Resistance: Yes

Description

The exact origin of this spell is not known, but we have recorded instances of it predating the Titanswar. Since that time however, it seems to have vanished from use save among the ratmen. Horrible tales from southern Vesh tell of slitheren raiding parties attacking villages. Survivors report watching the very bones tear free from the bodies of friends and family, only to turn upon their loved ones at the bidding of the attackers.

Spell Effect

The victim's skeleton begins to writhe and twist within his body, tearing muscles and rupturing flesh. The victim suffers 2d8 points of damage +1 point per level of the caster. If the target falls below zero hit points thanks to this spell, his skeleton tears forth from its body and becomes an animated skeleton (see *Core Rulebook III*, page 165) under the caster's control, as if it had been created by the *animate dead* spell.

Material Components: A fragment of bone with flesh attached to it and a piece of iron.

Fracture

Inflicts 1d6 subdual damage, 1d4 actual, breaks random bone.

Transmutation

Level: Clr 2, Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet/2 levels)

Target: One creature, size Large or smaller

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

Description

It is thought that worshippers of Chardun created *fracture* to cause maximum pain and suffering to a victim with minimal actual damage.

Spell Effect

The caster selects a single creature, size Large or smaller, and utters the word "suffer" while snapping a small bone. If the target fails a Fortitude saving throw, one of her bones snaps, often piercing the skin.

The target sustains 1d6 subdual damage, 1d4 points of actual damage, and suffers a broken bone. Randomly determine which bone is broken by rolling a d10: left arm (1), right arm (2), left leg (3 to 5), right leg (6 to 8) or torso (9 to 10). Torso indicates a single bone such as rib, collarbone, pelvis, etc.

A victim drops anything held with a broken arm. Any actions that use the arm, such as climbing or swimming, suffer a -4 penalty. A broken arm cannot hold a shield, and the victim cannot use a weapon with that arm.

A victim of a broken leg immediately falls prone. A broken leg reduces the victim's movement rate by half and the victim cannot run or charge. The injury also applies a -4 penalty to any skills that use the legs, such as Tumble and Jump.

A broken torso bone reduces the victim's movement rate by one-quarter and exacts a -2 penalty to all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution based skill checks.

Due to the pain of the bone break, spell casters suffering from any form of fracture must make a Concentration skill check to successfully cast a spell (DC of 15 + level of spell being cast). The target must have bones. This spell proves ineffective against constructs, incorporeal or ethereal creatures, most vermin and amorphous creatures such as the gelatinous cube. *Fracture* can be used against undead creatures. They do not suffer the subdual damage, nor do they incur penalties to any skills. When *fracture* targets a skeleton, the affected bone breaks cleanly in half. A skeleton with a broken leg cannot walk.

Arcane Material Components: A small piece of bone that is snapped at the moment of casting.

Rupture

Inflicts 2d4 points subdual, 3d4 points actual damage, breaks random bone.

Transmutation

Level: Clr 4, Sor/Wiz 6

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 feet/2 levels)

Target: One creature, size Large or smaller

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

Description

Rupture is essentially a more powerful version of the spell *fracture*. It causes maximum pain and suffering to the victim with minimal actual damage.

Spell Effect

The major difference between *fracture* and *rupture* is that the latter allows the caster to choose which of the victim's bones to break. The target sustains 2d4 points of subdual damage, 3d4 points of actual damage, and suffers a broken bone as described under *fracture*. *Rupture* may be used to target the skull of a creature. Victims of a fractured skull are *stunned* and incapable of any actions except to defend themselves. Foes receive a +2 bonus to attack rolls against stunned victims. The victim gets an additional Fortitude save and the beginning of each subsequent round to recover from the *stunned* condition. A fractured skull imposes a -2 penalty to all attack rolls, skill checks and saving throws (including the Fortitude saves to recover from being *stunned*).

Medium Wondrous Item

One of the most horrific items ever recorded in the annals of the Vigils is the *slave bore*, which high-ranking slitheren have used to upon unfortunate captives to force them to do their bidding.

Slave Bore

Description: The *slave bore* resembles a small corkscrew, crafted of silver and iron and dipped in the blood of its victim's potential master. The target of this device's foul magic is trussed up with a scarlet cord and made to wear a black velvet hood with a small forehead opening. A gag prevents the victim from biting his tongue during the painful ritual to come. The wielder then screws the bore into the victim's head.

Powers: When the bore is put in place, the victim immediately loses 2d4 Intelligence and Wisdom points, and will lose 1d6 points of Constitution if he fails a Fortitude check (DC 12). While the bore is in place, the victim must make a Will save each day. The first day, the DC is 15, and it increases by 1 every day thereafter. Each day the victim resists successfully, his Constitution score drops by 1. If this score reaches 0, the victim has died (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 83). Should the victim fail his Will save while still alive, he becomes the slave of the character whose blood is on the bore; the victim must obey his

master's every command without question. These verbal commands may be delivered only by the slave's master, and must be comprehensible by the victim. The unfortunate slave has no chance to resist, remaining a slave until rescued or slain. So complete is the master's control, the slave will not even eat or drink unless commanded to. The Intelligence, Wisdom, and Constitution losses are permanent as long as the bore remains in place.

Another character can remove the bore with a *heal*, *wish*, or similar high-level spell, or someone can physically remove it from the victim's head. This latter procedure is extremely hazardous and requires a successful Heal skill check (DC 25). If the Heal check fails, the victim loses 1d6 points of Constitution, and the healer may try again. If the bore is removed without killing the victim, his abilities slowly return to normal per the normal rules for ability damage (see *Core Rulebook II*, p. 72). If the victim dies, the bore may be removed and the victim brought back to life with a *resurrection* or similar spell.

Caster Level: 12th

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *dominate person*

Market Price: 3,500 gp

Cost to Create: 1,750 gp + 140 XP

Weight: —

Dead Eater

	Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid
Hit Dice:	2d8+2 (11 hp)
Initiative:	+6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)
Speed:	30 ft., burrow 5 ft.
AC:	15 (+2 Dex, +3 natural)
Attacks:	Bite +1 melee, 2 claws +0 melee
Damage:	Bite 1d6+1; 2 claws 1d4
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Disease, burrowing attack
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity, immunity
Saves:	Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +4
Abilities:	Str 12, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 6
Skills:	Hide +7*, Listen +1, Move Silently +7*, Search +1, Spot +7*
Feats:	Improved Initiative
Climate/Terrain:	Any land or underground
Organization:	Gang (2-5), or pack (8-12)
Challenge Rating:	1
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Always chaotic evil
Advancement Range:	3 HD (Medium-size)

Description

Filthy, repellent cannibalistic creatures, no one is certain where the dead eaters came from. Most believe that they are the result of sadistic experiments by the Diseased brood of the slitheren — ordinary humans infected with horrible diseases and transformed into monsters. Others theorize that they are a result of interbreeding between humans and slitheren (a notion that is too revolting for many to even contemplate), or that they were normal men and women exposed to the flesh of the diseased titan, Chern.

Dead eaters resemble ghouls in both appearance and habits, but they are very much alive and unaffected by clerical turning and other anti-undead measures. They are emaciated, foul-smelling creatures covered with matted hair, their mouths bristling with jagged teeth, their fingernails elongated into dirt-caked claws. Their sunken eyes gleam with the spark of madness, and most agree that they must be mad, for who else would voluntarily seek the company of the slitheren?

These foul creatures are common in the warrens of the Diseased, where they shamle about aimlessly, lurk in shadows, or sleep on piles of disgusting offal. The Diseased themselves largely ignore the dead

eaters, who never themselves attack slitheren. Whether this is an inherent behavior deliberately bred into the creatures by the slitheren, or simply because ratmen don't taste very good is not known.

Dead eaters like to burrow, using their clawed hands to dig elaborate networks of trenches and tunnels in and around their warren. They can often be found hiding or sleeping in these trenches, and use them for concealment when the nest is attacked and they wish to ambush invaders.

Combat

Individual dead eaters are cowardly creatures who flee from noises and bright lights. In packs, however, they grow bolder, and often combine forces to waylay travelers, who are sometimes dragged back to the nest to serve as the main course at a feast.

Though possessed of only minimal intelligence, the dead eaters sometimes display a sort of low cunning. Two or three dead eaters will attack a party, then flee after only a round or two of combat, leading pursuers into an ambush as the remainder of their pack emerges from their buried hiding places and assaults their foes with burrowing attacks.

Disease (Ex): Corpse blisters — bite, Fortitude save (DC 13), incubation period 1d4 days; damage 1d4 temporary Constitution and 1d4 temporary Strength (see *Core Rulebook II*, page 74). Dead eaters also sometimes carry the favored disease of their chosen nest, such as slimy doom or scarlet shaking pox.

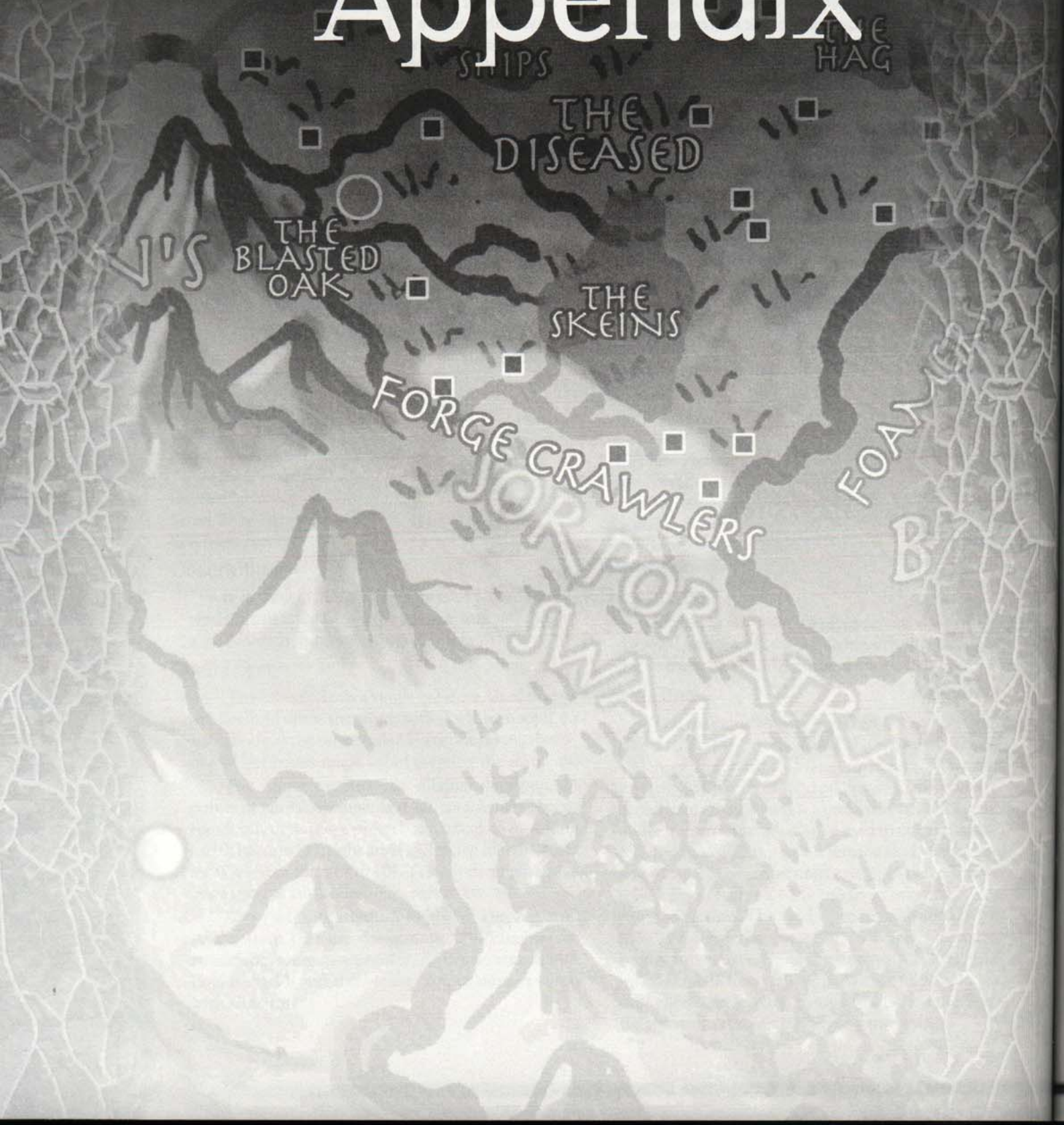
Burrowing Attack (Ex): Dead eaters often conceal themselves beneath a few inches of dirt. A dead eater concealed in this fashion is difficult to see (DC 25), and if a foe moves within 5 ft. of the concealed dead eater, it may make a grapple attack (see *Core Rulebook I*, page 137) with a +3 circumstance bonus. If the grapple succeeds, the foe is held and on subsequent rounds the dead eater may automatically inflict bite damage (and a risk of causing disease) upon its victim, until the grapple is broken.

Light Sensitivity (Ex): Dead eaters suffer a -1 penalty to attack rolls in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

Immunity (Ex): Dead eaters are immune to all forms of disease.

Skills: *Dead eaters receive a +4 racial bonus to Hide, Move Silently and Spot checks.

Monsters Appendix



Golem, Rat

	Huge Construct
Hit Dice:	12d10 (66 hp)
Initiative:	-1 (Dex)
Speed:	40 ft., climb 40 ft., swim 40 ft.
AC:	14 (-2 size, +6 natural)
Attacks:	2 slams +16 melee; swarm +16
Damage:	Slam 2d6+9
Face/Reach:	10 ft. by 10 ft./ 15 ft.
Special Attacks:	Swarm
Special Qualities:	Morphosis
Saves:	Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +4
Abilities:	Str 28, Dex 8, Con —, Int 1, Wis 10, Cha 2
Skills:	None
Feats:	None
Climate/Terrain:	Any land or underground
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	6
Treasure:	None
Alignment:	Always neutral
Advancement Range:	13-16 HD (Huge)

Description

Rat golems are formed from a living, ever-moving swarm of rats. Though it holds a roughly humanoid shape, it possesses no physical features—the golem's body ripples and throbs with the unceasing movement of the thousands of rats that comprise it.

As a construct composed of living creatures, a rat golem gains a benefit normally denied constructs in that it actually has a very rudimentary intellect. This does not enable the golem to learn skills, train in a class, or employ language, but it does allow it to understand and obey somewhat more complex commands and function as part of a combat unit.

Combat

Rat golems are unexpectedly fast, swarming over obstacles and through water as rapidly as they traverse open terrain. The golem's main attacks consist of two separate slams with fistlike appendages. Dozens of the rats that make up the golem's body impact a target and deliver vicious bites and scratches.

While the rat golem does not enjoy the magical immunities of other constructs, it cannot be affected by spells that specifically target animals (such as *calm animals*) as the rats that make up the golem are no longer individual creatures, but part of the overall rat golem construct.

Swarm (Ex): In place of its normal melee attacks, a rat golem may instead swarm a target, passing its body around it like a wave

crashing over and around a rock. This attack surrounds the victim with thousands of ravenous, chittering rats all biting and clawing, hungry for blood. A swarm deals a tremendous 5d6+9 points of damage. Anyone reduced to -10 hit points or less by this attack is stripped completely of flesh, leaving behind only a bloody skeleton. A successful Reflex save (DC16) reduces the swarm damage by half.

Following a swarm, the rat golem must reconstitute itself, and so cannot swarm again for 1d3 rounds.

Morphosis (Ex): A huge, humanoid rat golem is composed of thousands of tiny living creatures. As such, it can morph its body at will to fit into small opening or spaces. It can fit through any opening large enough to admit the passage of a rat, and it also can fill any space able to accommodate thousands of rats, such as the space beneath a floor or inside a slitheren warren.

Construction

A rat golem's body is formed from a single pack of living rats numbering around 100 per Hit Die. These rats must live together as a cohesive group for several weeks, consuming a potent food mixture enchanted and imbued with magical herbs and minerals.

A rat golem costs 50,000 gp to create, 5,000 gp of which pays for the special food, while the rest goes toward the enchanted cages and runs that house the rats. The rats consume the food during the creation process, but the equipment may be used again. A successful Handle Animal check (DC 15) is required each week to tend the rats during the course of the ritual. A failure means that too many have died, and the process must begin again with new rats.

The ritual must be performed by an arcane spellcaster of at least 16th level. Completing the ritual drains 1,600 XP from the creator and requires the casting of *geas/quest*, *limited wish*, *summon swarm*, and *haste*.



Horserat

Large Beast

Hit Dice:	4d10+4 (26 hp)
Initiative:	+3 (Dex)
Speed:	60 ft., climb 30 ft., swim 20 ft.
AC:	15 (+3 Dex, -1 size, +3 natural)
Attacks:	Bite +6 melee, 2 claws +1 melee; slam +6 melee
Damage:	Bite 2d4+4, claws 1d6+2, slam 1d6+6
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./ 10 ft.
Special Attacks:	Pin
Special Qualities:	Scent, leap
Saves:	Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +2
Abilities:	Str 19, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 8
Skills:	Climb +8, Hide +4, Jump +6, Spot +3, Swim +8
Climate/Terrain:	Temperate and warm marsh
Organization:	Solitary, pack (4-12)
Challenge Rating:	2
Treasure:	None
Alignment:	Always neutral
Advancement Range:	5-8 HD (Large)

Description

Observers jokingly named this animal “horserat” because of its role among the slitheren. The ratmen breed, train, and trade the creatures for riding and cargo transportation in exactly the same manner that humans breed horses. Though native to the Mourning Marshes — the best-quality animals still hail from there — horserats are bred and used wherever slitheren live, as only ratmen have yet attempted to train or harness them. The roughly bipedal creatures have massive, powerful rear limbs and small, undersized, but highly dexterous forelimbs. When running, they hold their

bodies parallel to the ground, extending their long tails straight backward as a counterbalance.

Combat

The horserat’s favored means of attack is biting, which they follow with two claw attacks. They deliver these attacks with the large rear legs, not the relatively undersized forelimbs. The animal balances itself on its tail (much like a kangaroo) to deliver a vicious double-rake with these clawed rear limbs. When facing a single opponent, hunting prey, or instructed to do so by a rider, the animal instead engages in a pin attack, leaping great distances to land on the target and proceed to bite its neck and head in a killing blow.

Pin (Ex): In place of its standard attacks, a horserat may leap upon a foe and pin it to the ground. If the horserat succeeds in its slam attack, it may immediately attempt to start a grapple as a free action identical to the Improved Grab power (see *Core Rulebook III*, page 9). If successful, the horserat has pinned its prey beneath it and immobilized it as long as the grapple is maintained and the horserat does not move. The horserat may conduct the grapple normally and make bite attacks against the pinned victim, or it can simply hold the victim down and attack other adjacent opponents. In the latter case, the horserat has a -20 penalty to grapple checks to keep its victim pinned, but the horserat is not considered grappled.

Scent (Ex): As *Core Rulebook III*, page 10

Leap (Ex): The horserat’s powerful legs — and their tremendous size in relation to the its body size and weight — allow it to leap incredible distances; double all standard jumping distances for this creature.



Mire Wurm

	Huge Beast
Hit Dice:	10d10+50 (105 hp)
Initiative:	+1 (Dex)
Speed:	30 ft., swim 15 ft.
AC:	15 (-2 size, +1 Dex, +6 natural)
Attacks:	Bite +13 melee, slam +8 melee; spit +6 ranged
Damage:	Bite 2d6+8; slam 1d6+4
Face/Reach:	10 ft. by 20 ft. / 10 ft.
Special Attacks:	Amputate, death throes, caustic spit
Special Qualities:	Blindsight, tremorsense
Saves:	Fort +12, Ref +8, Will +4
Abilities:	Str 26, Dex 12, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 4
Skills:	Hide +5, Move Silently +3, Swim +10, Wilderness Lore +4
Feats:	None
Climate/Terrain:	Temperate and warm marsh
Organization:	Solitary, breeding clutch (3-12)
Challenge Rating:	9
Treasure:	Standard (only metal, stone, and gems)
Alignment:	Always neutral
Advancement Range:	11-16 HD (Huge); 17-20 HD (Gargantuan)

Description

The powerful and deadly mire wyrms stalk the fens and bogs of the Mourning Marshes. These sightless predators track their prey using a variety of other means such as scent, heat, and sound. The adults grow to sizes of 15 to 20 feet.

As slitheren consider the flesh of the mire wurm a favored delicacy, ratmen hunt the beasts throughout the marshes. They also use mire wurm hides to make fine leather worn exclusively by the priestly caste, and they carve the creatures' teeth into intricate and valuable jewelry and ornaments.

Particularly desirable for their exquisite flavor and supple flesh are young wyrms. The hermaphroditic mire wurm gestates inside the body of its parent until mature enough to fend for itself. It then emerges and immediately burrows into the muck, where it subsists by hunting small animals such as lizards, fish, and insects. Only when they begin to reach full size do mire wyrms emerge from the filth to hunt as adults. Thus, pregnant wyrms — identifiable only by the indistinct gray/purple stripes that appear on their bodies while carrying young — are most sought after for their succulent bounty.

Mire wyrms keep no treasure, but often ingest it when consuming prey that does. Cutting open a mire wurm can reveal a surprising reward.

Combat

The mire wurm normally begins combat by spitting its caustic saliva at a target and closing to attack

in melee once the prey is blinded or wracked with pain. It becomes no less dangerous in melee combat, delivering savage bites with its razor-edged, chisel-like teeth. It also writhes and twists wildly while attacking, delivering powerful slam attacks against its foes. It can slam only targets to its sides and rear; it cannot ordinarily bring to bear a slam against a foe that it is biting.

Perhaps the wurm's most fearsome aspect is its ability to bite the limbs, or even the head, off a target in combat. But even devouring limbs does not sate the beast — it continues to attack even after consuming a number of such gruesome snacks.

Needless to say, it is extremely foolish to fight a mire wurm in melee combat. Anyone experienced with the beasts fights them from a distance or not at all. The single exception to this rule comes from the slitheren brood of Foamers. They consider it a test of battle prowess and maturity to seek out mire wyrms and defeat them in melee combat; yet even then these powerful ratmen never attempt to do so in groups of less than half a dozen.

Blindsight (Ex): Mire wyrms are sightless, lacking any visual organs whatsoever. They sense their environment through a combination of thermal signatures, vibrations, and sound. They can use this ability to detect creatures within 240 feet.

Tremorsense (Ex): Like the blindsight ability, a mire wurm can use its acute tremorsense to detect any creature within 120 feet that remains in contact with the ground.

Caustic Spit (Ex): In place of its melee attacks, a mire wurm can instead spew forth a viscous gob of caustic saliva at any target within 120 feet. Any victim struck by this ranged touch attack takes 2d6 points of acid damage and a further 2d6 points per round for five additional rounds unless the caustic spittle is somehow neutralized first. Anyone within 5 feet of the victim of the acid spittle attack must make a Reflex saving throw (DC 16) or suffer 1d6 points of acid splash damage and 1d6 points of additional acid damage for the same five additional rounds.

The wurm may make this attack a number of times per day equal to half its Hit Dice, but no more frequently than once every three rounds.

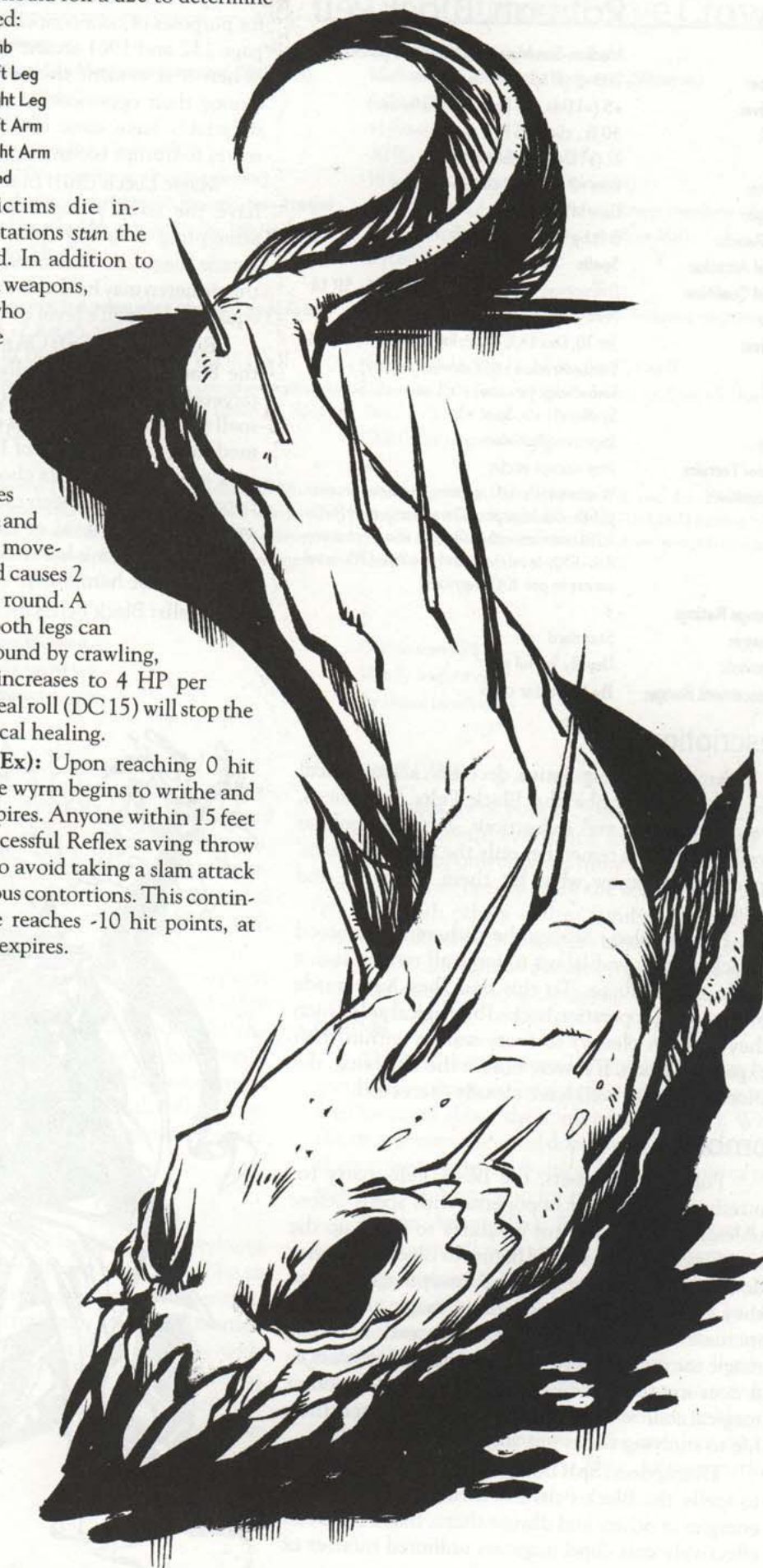
Amputate (Ex): On a successful critical hit, against any opponent that is both subject to critical hits and who is at least one size smaller than the mire wurm, the wurm may sever one of its victim's limb. A successful Reflex save (DC 20) allows victims to avoid the amputation, but they still suffer damage

normally. The GM should roll a d20 to determine which limb is affected:

Roll	Limb
1-5	Left Leg
6-10	Right Leg
11-14	Left Arm
15-18	Right Arm
19-20	Head

Decapitated victims die instantly. Other amputations *stun* the victim for one round. In addition to being unable to wield weapons, shields, etc., victims who have lost an arm lose 1 HP due to blood loss each round. Blood loss increases to 2 HP per round if both arms are lost. A lost leg causes the victim to go prone and reduces the victim's movement by one-half, and causes 2 HP of blood loss each round. A victim who has lost both legs can move only 5 ft. per round by crawling, and his blood loss increases to 4 HP per round. A successful Heal roll (DC 15) will stop the bleeding, as will magical healing.

Death Throes (Ex): Upon reaching 0 hit points or below, a mire wyrm begins to writhe and twist viciously as it expires. Anyone within 15 feet of it must make a successful Reflex saving throw (DC 20) each round to avoid taking a slam attack from the wyrm's tortuous contortions. This continues until the creature reaches -10 hit points, at which point it finally expires.



Ratman, Black Pelt

	Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid (Slitheren)
Hit Dice:	2d8+2 (11 hp)
Initiative:	+5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)
Speed:	30 ft., climb 15 ft.
AC:	12 (+1 Dex, +1 natural)
Attacks:	Bite +2 melee, 2 claws -3 melee
Damage:	Bite 1d3; claw 1d4
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Spells
Special Qualities:	Disruption, magic leech, redirection, SR 14
Saves:	Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +4
Abilities:	Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 14
Skills:	Concentration +6, Knowledge (any) +4, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Listen +3, Scry +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +3
Feats:	Improved Initiative
Climate/Terrain:	Any except arctic
Organization:	Warband (15-120 ratmen, plus one sorcerer of 5th-8th level per 30 warriors), nest (120-1,200 ratmen with leaders as above, plus one 8th-10th-level cleric and one 9th-12th-level sorcerer per 100 warriors)
Challenge Rating:	3
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Usually lawful evil
Advancement Range:	By character class

Description

Arrogant, manipulative, deceitful, and maniacal — all these describe the Black Pelts. Ingenuous, visionary, loyal, and industrious — these apply as well. Those who remember only the faults of Mesos' spawn rarely know what hit them when the end comes.

Perhaps alone among the slitheren, this brood preaches unity and labors to forge all ratmen into a single titanic force. To this end they have made overtures of cooperation backed by magical aid (which they have in plenty) to every warren within their expansive reach. If it were not for the Unseeing, the Black Pelts may well have already succeeded.

Combat

Potent magic users, the Black Pelts harry (or utterly destroy) their opponents with spells before unleashing their servitor creatures to clean up the rest. Since magic is second nature to Black Pelts, they do not behave as the typical, solitary mage. Instead they fight in teams, using ritual magic to further increase the potential of their invocations. Also, magic use rarely signifies a lack of martial prowess, as it does in other broods; Black Pelts develop potent magical abilities, even those who devote most of their life to studying the sword and shield.

Disruption (Sp): Beyond their innate resistance to spells, the Black Pelts can focus upon the arcane energies of others and disrupt them. Black Pelts can effectively cast *dispel magic* an unlimited number of

times per day, but may only use this spell-like ability for purposes of counterspelling (see *Core Rulebook I*, page 152 and 196) arcane spells (not divine ones). When it is evident they are facing arcane casters among their opponents, a pack of Black Pelts will invariably have some of its members ready themselves to disrupt (counterspell) their opponents.

Magic Leech (Su): Black Pelts are considered to have the monk's improved evasion ability when attempting a saving throw against the effects of arcane magic. Furthermore, upon a successful save, the slitheren may heal an amount of hit point damage equal to the spell's level or the item's caster level.

Redirection (Sp): On a successful saving throw, the Black Pelt may actually "store" an arcane spell targeted against it. The slitheren may hold such a spell for a number of rounds equal to its Constitution modifier (to a minimum of 1 round) before "casting" it at a new target of its choosing. This new spell is considered to have been cast by a spellcaster of the original caster's level or the slitheren's level (Hit Dice), whichever is lower. Stored spells not recast in time, disperse harmlessly.

Spells: Black Pelts cast spells as 3rd level sorcerers.



Ratman, Forge Crawler

	Pothecary	Mechanician
	Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid (Slitheren)	Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid (Slitheren)
Hit Dice:	2d8+4 (13 hp)	2d8+4 (13 hp)
Initiative:	+2 (Dex)	+1 (Dex)
Speed:	30 ft., climb 15 ft., burrow 10 ft.	30 ft., climb 15 ft., burrow 10 ft.
AC:	15 (+2 Dex, +1 natural, +2 leather armor)	16 (+1 Dex, +1 natural, +4 chain shirt)
Attacks:	Bite +2 melee, 2 claws (-3 melee); alchemist's fire +4 ranged	Bite +3 melee, 2 claws (-2 melee); heavy crossbow +3 ranged
Damage:	Bite 1d3; claw 1d4; alchemist's fire 1d8 (splash 2)	Bite 1d3+1; claw 1d4+1; heavy crossbow 1d10
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.	5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.
Special Attacks:	None	None
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 feet, poison adept, adaptation, signature brew	Darkvision 60 feet, craft adept, discern weakness, magnum opus
Saves:	Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +3	Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +3
Abilities:	Str 10, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 11	Str 12, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 11
Skills:	Alchemy +6, Craft (any 2) +4, Decipher Script +5, Hide +4, Knowledge (nature) +5, Listen +3, Spot +3	Appraise +5, Craft (any 3) +6, Listen +3, Spot +3, Use Magic Device +5
Feats:	Skill Focus (Alchemy)	Skill Focus (specific Craft)
Climate/Terrain:	All	All
Organization:	Workshop (10-30 pothecaries with one 4th-7th-level construct and two 3rd-5th-level warriors for every 15 pothecaries), nest (70-1,000 ratmen with guards as above plus one 8th-10th-level priest for every 100 ratmen)	Workshop (10-30 mechanicians with two 4th-7th-level constructs for every 15 ratmen), nest (70-1,000 ratmen with guards as above plus one 8th-10th-level priest for every 100 ratmen)
Challenge Rating:	2	2
Treasure:	Double standard	Double standard
Alignment:	Usually lawful evil	Usually lawful evil
Advancement Range:	By character class	By character class

Description

Since early in their short but tumultuous existence, the fractious line of Golphagga has threatened to blow itself (and everyone near them) to oblivion. In their mad desire to indulge their "creator's passion," they have undertaken increasingly complex and dangerous projects of construction, rarely with any regard for their short- (or long-) term safety.

To make matters worse, the Crawlers are equally skilled at the creation and use of poisons and other dangerous chemicals (though unlike some of the other broods it's more of a science rather than a religion). With the copious and exotic resources of the Mourning Marshes at their disposal, calling their work "messy and dangerous" is an understatement of titanic proportions.

Combat

Forge Crawlers are as eclectic in their styles of combat as they are in everything else. Some like to wade into the fray (usually "safely" ensconced within their mechanized monstrosities), while others snipe from a distance. Some swarm their enemies with hordes of constructs, while others design minions that act as lone suicide bombers or trump-card juggernauts. If it's possible, they'll try it, make it, and use it.

Pothecaries

The makers of poisons, potions, and poultices, pothecaries create everything from alchemical fire bombs to weapon venom. Unlike most of their kind, these slitheren openly share the secrets of their discoveries with others of the "family." An unspoken running tally of each member's contribution remains in memory and acts as the ultimate measure of prestige and station among the group.

Combat

These slitheren often lay ambushes from high ground, in a thick canopy, or any other safe vantage well elevated above their intended target(s). When the time comes, they hurl dozens of their vile concoctions at foes, patiently waiting for their brews to take effect before running in for the kill.

Poison Adept (Ex): Pothecaries receive a +2 racial bonus to all skill checks relating to poisons.

Adaptation (Su): If a pothecary has three full rounds to study a sample of poison (she must be able to see and smell the substance), she may alter her own metabolism to become immune to its effects. Furthermore, the ratman's saliva can now act as an antidote to negate the poison in others (though unlike the pothecary, the beneficiaries of the antidote do not gain permanent immunity). This ability functions

exactly as the spell *neutralize poison* (see *Core Rulebook I*, page 232), though when used on the slitheren herself, it also reverses all instantaneous effects of the poison that she has suffered so far.

Signature Brew (Ex): Potheccaries treat poisons as a matter of pride, holding them up as proof of their

genius and considering them the pinnacle of self expression. Each potheccary develops his unique poison, known as his signature brew. When a potheccary is encountered, roll 1d20 on each column of the chart below to determine the signature brew's characteristics.

Signature Brew Characteristics

Die Roll	Primary Damage (DC)	Secondary Damage (DC)	Form	Applications	Special
1-5	1 (11)	1d2	Liquid	1	—
6-9	1d2 (12)	1d4	Liquid	1	—
10-12	1d4 (13)	1d6	Liquid	2	Subtle
13-15	1d6 (14)	1d8	Liquid	2	Time Delay
16-17	1d8 (16)	1d10	Solid	3	Burning
18-19	1d10 (18)	2d6	Solid	3	Contagious
20	2d6 (20)	3d6	Gas	4	Virulent

Primary Ability Damage (DC): This represents temporary damage to one of the target's ability scores (the GM may select or randomly determine the affected ability). The DC represents the Fortitude save required to negate the brew's effects.

Secondary Ability Damage: As with primary ability damage, though secondary ability damage need not target the same ability and always takes effect the round following the onset of the primary damage.

Forms: The brew is normally a liquid, and must be used within 24 hours of its creation, or is rendered harmless. The brew can also be a solid or gas, with the following special characteristics:

Solid: When in the form of a solid, the brew retains its potency but decays more slowly. Each prepared dose is usable for a number of days equal to its listed applications (see below), rather than one day as with a liquid.

Gas: When in the form of a gas, the brew has a far greater area of effect. If the slitheren desires, doses of the poison can be stored in glass spheres, or other grenade-like weapons, and thrown. When the vessel breaks, it affects an area with a radius equal to 5 feet + its listed applications (see below). The gas also affects this area for a number of rounds equal to its listed applications.

Applications: If in the form of a liquid or solid, this is the number of attacks for which a dose of the brew remains active following its application to a weapon. Solid and liquid poisons can only be applied to a slashing or piercing weapon — bludgeoning weapons can't deliver poison. If in a gaseous form, this number equals the bonus to its area of effect, and the number of rounds that it remains effective (see above). Unsuccessful attacks count against the total number of applications. When applied to arrows or bolts, this value represents the number of missiles that may be tipped per dose.

Special: These characteristics increase the potency of the poison.

Subtle: The poison is insidious, making it difficult to detect and treat. Increase the DC of all Healing checks made on victims of this poison by +5.

Time Delay: The effect if the poison are delayed by a number of days equal to its applications (see above), though the target still attempts a save upon delivery of the dose.

Burning: This optional modification can apply to any dose the potheccary prepares. The brew deals its secondary damage as normal damage rather than as ability damage. Following the onset of primary ability damage, this secondary damage continues to be dealt for a number of rounds equal to the poison's applications (see above) or until the victim successfully saves against the secondary damage DC.

Contagious: The brew acts like a disease, its effects spreading from person to person. Anyone who touches or comes within 5 feet of a victim of this poison must make a Fortitude save vs. the poison's primary damage DC. These secondary victims receive a +8 circumstance bonus to their Fortitude saves to avoid the brew's effects, but failure means they suffer the full force of the brew and become contagious themselves. Note that a victim remains contagious only while the brew is active. A brew with time-delayed effects does not become contagious until the onset of its effects.

Virulent: The master potheccary learns to create a brew that bypasses the natural immunities of its targets. The master alone remains completely impervious to the brew's effects. Target creatures that are normally immune to poisons must succeed at a Fortitude saving throw or suffer the brew's effects. However, such beings receive a saving throw bonus equal to their character levels (or Hit Dice).

Mechanicians

Though many rarely venture from their workshops, these crafters of artifacts and devices never let the outside world pass them by. Most have small cohorts of lackeys who keep them in touch with prospective suppliers and buyers. A few even make it a point to go traveling to conduct a bit of industrial espionage. Not quite as open with their innovations as the pothecaries, the mechanics nonetheless cooperate with each other a fair amount to undertake projects too grand for any one of them to complete alone.

Possessed of great intelligence and cunning, mechanics build or modify golems, a feat that is normally possible only by especially advanced craftsmen. The sight of a mechanic, mounted on the back of his favored construct — known as his “magnum opus” — chittering madly and urging the monstrosity onward, is a fearsome one indeed.

Combat

In general, mechanics disdain combat, seeing it as a monumental waste of carefully crafted items. They do however have a great fondness for “trial runs” where they can test their latest creation against a “realistic and cunning obstacle.” This often translates to laying traps and ambushes for unwary foes, but running away when attacked.

Craft Adept (Ex): Each mechanic receive a +2 racial bonus to all checks relating to one area of craftsmanship, either repair, design, construction or modification.

Discern Weakness (Su): If a mechanic has three full rounds to study a mechanical device (including all constructs), he may receive an attack roll bonus against it equal to three times his Intelligence modifier. He may confer this advantage to others who can communicate with him, though its benefit is reduced — it may not exceed either the ratmen’s or the second party’s Intelligence modifier, whichever is lower. Similarly, the slitheren may reduce a weapon’s hardness or reduce the DC for breaking an item by his Intelligence modifier (see *Core Rulebook I*, page 136). These reductions apply only to the mechanic’s attempts to damage or break the item.



Magnum Opus (Ex): A mechanic takes great pride in creating deadly constructs, and if encountered, may be accompanied by a unique golem known as a magnum opus. Forge Crawler golems are instantly recognizable for, despite their high-quality function, they leave everything to be desired in the

realm of aesthetics. Tarnished materials interlock with polished components, with no pretense at symmetry or geometric harmony. Slitheren golems tend to be monstrous aberrations, further from the humanoid ideal than even their own twisted masters.

Magnum Opus Characteristics

At the GM's discretion, a mechanic slitheren may be accompanied by his magnum opus. If this is the case, roll 1d20 on the following chart to determine what type of golem it is.

Die Roll	Golem Type
1-4	Flesh
5-7	Clay
8-10	Stone
11	Iron
12-13	Bone*
14-15	Copper*
16-17	Lead*
18-19	Silver*
20	Tar**

*See *Creature Collection*

**See *Creature Collection II*

Once the golem type has been determined, roll 1d20 on each column of the following chart to determine its enhancements and special abilities. If you roll a 20, roll twice on the table, ignoring any more rolls of 20. These enhancements may increase the golem's CR (see below).

Die roll	Bonus HD	Natural Armor	Strength Adj.	Special Quality
1-3	—	—	—	—
4-6	1	4	1	—
7-9	2	6	1	—
10-11	2	6	2	—
12-13	3	8	2	Remote command
14-15	3	8	3	Damage reduction
16-17	4	10	4	Spell turning
18-19	5	12	5	Self repair
20	Roll twice	Roll twice	Roll twice	Roll twice

Bonus HD: These are additional ten-sided (d10) Hit Dice for the opus. Hit Dice also improve the opus' base attack (as cleric) and base save bonuses.

Natural Armor: Appearances notwithstanding, the opus' construction becomes increasingly sturdy as the mechanic incorporates better materials (often magical) into its body and perfects its design, resulting in an increasing natural armor bonus.

Strength Adj.: Add this number to the opus' Strength score to improve its Strength modifier.

Special Qualities: These abilities further enhance the golem's abilities. A magnum opus can never have more than two. If the golem has two special qualities, increase its CR by 1 (see below).

Remote Command: Normally, the mechanic commands his magnum opus by voice commands. If the golem cannot hear its creator, then it cannot take instructions. With this enhancement, the mechanic can mentally command his creation as a free action but must make a Concentration check (DC 13) if he performs anything more than a partial action that round. This supernatural ability has a range of 60 feet + 5 feet/Hit Die.

Damage Reduction: The opus ignores the first 5 points of damage received from nonmagical sources. Magical weapons and spells ignore this. This stacks with any existing DR.

Spell Turning: Spells cast against the golem have a 25% chance of being reflected back on the caster as if the golem has had *spell turning* cast on it.

Self-Repair: By resting, the construct can knit itself back to perfect working order. The opus can heal 1 point of damage each round that it remains motionless and takes no actions. It will repair itself even if attacked during this time.

Verbal Command: Ordinarily, the opus obeys the verbal commands of its creator without question, but if it cannot hear its master, it cannot receive instruction. If given general commands ("Attack anyone who approaches within 20 feet of you"), it will continue carrying them out until ordered otherwise. The remote command special quality replaces this, allowing the mechanic to communicate non-verbally.

Challenge Rating: These enhancements can increase the golem's CR. For every 4 additional HD, or 4 points of natural armor or Strength, increase the golem's CR by 1. These points are cumulative, so a golem that receives 2 additional HD, 2 additional points of Strength and 4 points of natural armor (for a total of 8 additions) would have its CR increased by 2. Every two special qualities also increase the golem's CR by 1.

Ratman, Mauler

	Large Monstrous Humanoid (Slitheren)
Hit Dice:	6d8+36 (63 hp)
Initiative:	+0
Speed:	30 ft.
AC:	16 (-1 size, +7 natural)
Attacks:	2 claws +12 melee, bite +10 melee
Damage:	2 claws 2d6+10; bite 1d6+5
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./ 15 ft.
Special Attacks:	Disease
Special Qualities:	Damage reduction 5/+1, immunity, regeneration 1
Saves:	Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +4
Abilities:	Str 24, Dex 10, Con 23, Int 6, Wis 8, Cha 7
Skills:	Listen +7, Spot +9
Feats:	Power attack, multiattack
Climate/Terrain:	Any except arctic
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	3
Treasure:	No coins; twice goods (all in jewelry); no items
Alignment:	Always chaotic evil
Advancement Range:	7-10 HD (Large)

Description

Maulers are unique among the slitheren. Where the other broods of ratmen were created by the influence of the titans, Maulers are a creation of the slitheren themselves. A Red Witch may select a ratman who has particularly shone in battle to receive this dark gift. The individual is fed a potion brewed from the blood of many creatures (including dragons', trolls' and a mix of titans' blood, according to rumor). The potion causes the ratman many days of agonizing pain, as attendants scourge and cut his flesh to allow for the expanding muscles and bones beneath. Many do not survive this procedure; those that do become the most fearsome and physically powerful of all the ratmen.

Maulers stand close to 10 feet tall and weight nearly 750 lbs. Their gray-black hides often have patches bereft of fur, and they are covered head to toe in scars. They wear no clothing but usually rivet bits of armor and metal plates to their bodies, mainly on the skull and torso — a process which seems to cause them no particular discomfort. A Mauler's arms and hands are grotesquely oversized for its body, each arm easily as long as the creature is tall, and each hand almost the size of the Mauler's own torso. This twisted abnormality prevents Maulers from using normal weapons but greatly enhances their reach.

Maulers bond, as dog to master, with the first individual they see after the transformation upon opening their eyes. They follow their masters' orders without fail. Having no clan structure of their own, Maulers serve only their masters and follow the customs of their masters' broods.

All of a Mauler's treasure is in the form of jewelry, mostly chains, collars, and cuffs, as it is something of a status symbol among masters to drape their Maulers in ostentatious wealth.

Combat

In combat Maulers are vicious and implacable foes. They fight with tooth and claw to an opponent's

destruction. Even after the foe's death, a Mauler must make a Will save (DC 15) to break off from continuing to maul its victim; hence its name. The Mauler receives a +5 bonus to this roll if its master orders it to cease combat.

A Mauler opens combat with a double claw-strike, which is handled as a two-handed attack and must be made against a single target. Next comes a bite attack, which may target a new foe, especially if the claw attack felled the first. However, a Mauler usually concentrates all its force on one adversary at a time.

Disease (Ex): Maulers are often crawling with disease. Both the claws and the bite of a Mauler can infect a target with a number of ailments including Flower Fever, Lung Rot, and Black Pox (see Chapter 6).

Immunity (Ex): Even though they are carriers, Maulers remain immune to all forms of disease.

Regeneration (Ex): A Mauler regenerates 1 hp per round. Fire and acid damage cannot be regenerated, and severed limbs may not be reattached.



Ratman, Storm Chaser

	Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid (Slitheren)
Hit Dice:	2d8 (7 hp)
Initiative:	+3 (Dex)
Speed:	30 ft., climb 15 ft.,
AC:	17 (+3 Dex, +1 natural, +2 leather armor, +1 buckler)
Attacks:	Bite +3 melee, 2 claws -2 melee; short sword +2 melee; shortbow +5 ranged
Damage:	Bite 1d3+1; claw 1d4+1; short sword 1d6+1; shortbow 1d6
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.
Special Attacks:	None
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 feet, storm anima, storm form, assured morale, immunities, resistance
Saves:	Fort +0, Ref +6, Will +3
Abilities:	Str 12, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 11, Cha 12
Skills:	Hide +3, Intimidate +3, Jump +2, Spot +4, Tumble +6
Feats:	Dodge
Climate/Terrain:	Any except arctic
Organization:	Warband (15-120 ratmen, plus one leader of 4th-7th level per 30 warriors), nest (120-1,200 ratmen with leaders as above, plus one 8th-10-level priest per 100 warriors, and 10-24 elementals)
Challenge Rating:	3
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Usually lawful evil
Advancement Range:	By character class

Description

Some storms take while others give — such, tells Denev, is the balance of nature's way. The Storm Chasers, though, know nothing of giving, and where they pass only devastation remains.

By their own mythos these wild-haired slitheren are no mere instruments of the titans' vengeance. That, they believe, is the role of their "lesser" brethren. Instead, when the gods willed the Dame of Storms into nothingness and forced upon the cosmos an unnatural calm, the spirit of chaos flowed from the titan and into their kind. As such, the Storm Chasers believe themselves the incarnation of a basic force of existence: unfathomable, undeniable, and immortal. They believe that when one of them dies, the spirit of chaos simply changes hosts, granting all Chasers eternal longevity through an endless cycle of incarnations.

Combat

So assured are the Storm Chasers in their own supposed immortality that they fling themselves into battle without a care. They never surrender and never break, a fact which makes their commanders bold (even reckless). Unlike many other slitheren, Storm Chasers attack even when outnumbered.

Furthermore, their warriors appear perfectly willing to engage in suicide missions (they'll be reincarnated, after all).

Storm Anima (Su): The spawn of Lethene carry their birthright literally upon their backs, cloaking themselves in a veil of turbulent winds and crackling energies. This not only confers some manner of protection upon them (+1 titanic (profane) bonus to AC) but it enhances their unarmed attacks (+1d6 points of electrical damage or a stunning attack as performed by a 2nd level monk, slitheren's choice made at declaration of each attack).

Storm Form (Su): Storm Chasers can manifest temporarily as a living entity of wind-driven rain and lightning. In this form, they gain damage reduction 20/+2 and can fly (average) 30 feet each round. The transformation lasts for two minutes and may be performed twice each day. While in their storm form, Storm Chasers may not physically attack but can still cause 1d6 electrical damage on touch attacks (from their Storm Anima).

Assured Morale (Su): Storm Chasers are immune to any negative morale modifiers. Whenever they receive a positive morale modifier, the morale modifier is increased by a further +1 due to the Storm Chasers' fanatical faith.

Immunities (Ex): Storm Chasers are immune to electrical attacks.

Resistance (Ex): Storm Chasers have cold resistance 10.



Ratman, Stricken

Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid (Slitheren)

Hit Dice:	2d8+6 (15 hp)
Initiative:	+0
Speed:	40 ft., climb 20 ft., burrow 10 ft., swim 50 ft.
AC:	15 (+3 natural, +2 leather armor)
Attacks:	2 claws +4 melee, bite -1 melee
Damage:	Claw 1d8+2; bite 1d6+1
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.
Special Attacks:	None
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 feet, homunculus, reflect pain, additional body parts
Saves:	Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +4
Abilities:	Str 15, Dex 11, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10
Skills:	Balance +2, Hide +4, Jump +2, Listen +6, Move Silently +4, Spot +5
Feats:	Power Attack
Climate/Terrain:	Any
Organization:	Warband (5-50 ratmen, plus one leader of 4th-7th level per 15 warriors), nest (100-500 ratmen with leaders as above, plus one 8th-10th-level priest per 100 warriors)
Challenge Rating:	2
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Usually lawful evil
Advancement Range:	By character class

Description

To the brood of Gormoth, pain is the world. It is their greatest fear, their greatest ally, their heritage, and their destiny. Sadists and masochists all at once, they rarely let survivors escape them without driving them at least in some measure to madness.

In the years since their creation, the Stricken have mutated nearly beyond recognition, their bodies sprouting strange extra limbs and even appendages that appear to be from other species. In the crucible of their warrens, evolution has gone berserk, making these slitheren the most horrific examples of their kind. Like their patron, the Stricken can use pain as a weapon, reflecting their suffering upon foes, and can also send portions of their own bodies into battle.

Combat

Stricken have no use for subterfuge or stealth. They revel in combat, tearing through terrain and fortifications in a relentless drive to engage their opponent in close combat. Once there, they use their superior physical brawn to overcome their prey. These slitheren fight one on one against opponents of equal strength, resorting to mob tactics only against superior foes.

Homunculus (Ex): In a twisted reflection of the Writhing Lord's own sorry state, the Stricken can detach portions of their body, which then act as independent "minions". Detaching a homunculus is a partial action. A homunculus has however many hit points that the Stricken chooses to invest in it; the Stricken loses the same amount, but regains any hit points that remain to the homunculus when it rejoins.

A homunculus is a tiny-size creature, has the same AC as its creator, +2 due to size (normally a total AC of 17), and the same number and type of attacks, albeit at a -1 attack penalty. Damage is likewise the



same as that of the Stricken, but at -1 per die. A Stricken may have as many as five homunculi active at one time; if one is killed, it may create another if it has sufficient hit points to do so. The homunculi are part of the Stricken, and act completely under its control. They will never venture farther than 20 feet from the creating Stricken. Those forced to do so can take no actions until their creator once more comes within 20 feet. Rejoining with a homonculus is a partial action.

Reflect Pain (Sp): The Stricken can channel pain against their adversaries; the slitheren converts every 10 points of damage it or its homunculi suffer into a -1 circumstance penalty to attack rolls and skill checks, targeted against any creature within 20 feet. A Fortitude save (DC 13) negates. The effect lasts for 2d4 rounds, even if the ratman perishes before this duration ends.

Additional Body Parts (Ex): Stricken are often born with multiple body parts, or develop them as they grow, with new limbs, tails or even heads — often from entirely different species — erupting from their flesh like foul diseases. A Stricken slitheren receives 1d4 extra body parts. Roll 1d20 on the following chart to determine what extra parts it receives. The Stricken may receive multiple instances of the same body part (three heads, for example).

Die Roll	Additional Body Part
1-10	Arm
6-15	Leg
16-19	Tail
20	Head

Additional body parts grant the following abilities:

Arm: One additional claw attack at +0, inflicting normal damage.

Leg: Increase Speed by 5 ft., +1 to Balance and Jump rolls.

Tail: +1 to Dex, +1 to Balance and Jump rolls.

Head: One additional bite attack at -2, inflicting normal damage.



Ratman, Unseeing

Hit Dice:	Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid (Slitheren) 2d8+4 (13 hp)
Initiative:	+5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)
Speed:	30 ft., climb 15 ft.
AC:	12 (+1 Dex, +1 natural)
Attacks:	2 punches +4 melee, 2 kicks -1 melee, tail slam -1 melee
Damage:	Punch 1d6+2; kick 1d8+1; tail slam 1d6+1
Face/Reach:	5 ft. by 5 ft./ 5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Monk abilities
Special Qualities:	Blind, empathy, empathic awareness, saintly aegis
Saves:	Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +5
Abilities:	Str 14, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 13
Skills:	Listen +6, Move Silently +5, Sense Motive +6, Swim +4, Tumble +4, Wilderness Lore +3
Feats:	Improved Initiative, Deflect Arrow*
Climate/Terrain:	Any
Organization:	Warband (5-50 ratmen, plus one leader of 4th-7th level per 15 warriors), nest (100-500 ratmen with leaders as above, plus one 8th-10th-level priest per 100 warriors, and numerous wild creatures acting as servitors and spies).
Challenge Rating:	2
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Usually lawful neutral
Advancement Range:	By character class

Description

Like their patron before them, the brood of Golthain finds itself ridiculed by its brethren and anathema in their eyes. Mistreated, distrusted, and hunted, the Unseeing have been transformed by the winnowing of evolution's cruel edge into something that might be called transcendent.

Though Golthain had no conscious hand in these progeny's making, they have nonetheless taken within themselves the best of that titan. Compassion is their center, and empathy without parallel compensates for their sightless eyes. Now they wage a secret war, against their estranged cousins, their would-be persecutors among the Divine Races, and their own darker natures.

Combat

No one quite knows how the Unseeing fight, since they love to blind their opponents before engaging hand to hand. Lacking the benefit of sight from birth, these slitheren quickly gain the upper hand in such contests.

Monk Abilities: These ratmen possess all the special abilities of a 2nd level monk, including stunning attack, evasion, flurry of blows and the Deflect Arrow feat.

Blind (Ex): True to their name, Unseeing are blind. In fact, their minds cannot even comprehend the visual world (so even if they were granted sight via magical means, they could not perceive the im-

ages). Any time a Spot check is required, the slitheren may attempt a Sense Motive check in its place, but only if they can bring to bear their empathic awareness (see below). Tasks that absolutely require visual senses (such as reading a printed page) fail automatically.

Empathy (Ex): Upon a successful Sense Motive check, members of this brood may divine the emotions of a target being within 10 feet of them. The check result determines the degree of information gathered. Obtaining a vague impression has a DC of 10, while divining well-hidden feelings incurs a DC of 25 or greater.

Empathic Awareness (Su): Similar to blindsight but far more comprehensive, empathic awareness is based on the slitheren's ability to perceive the ebb and flow of emotions permeating the land. Empathic awareness allows the brooding to "see" perfectly everything within 60 feet, including ethereal creatures. They can even perceive creatures without emotion in this fashion (they show up as "vacuums" in the emotional tapestry of the area). Targets charged with strong emotions light up like a beacon, making them easier for the Unseeing to hit (+1 insight bonus to attack rolls). Beyond the 60-foot range, an Unseeing can still "see," but cannot automatically perceive targets with the same perfection.

Saintly Aegis (Su): The brood of Golthain may take solace in their calm hearts; when taking no aggressive actions, they force creatures in their vicinity into a state of equal repose. Opponents who would seek to target the Unseeing must make Will saves (DC 12)) or take no action against the slitheren. Furthermore, all attack actions, regardless of target, suffer a -3 morale penalty when performed within 15 feet of the ratman.