

# The Chromatic Chord

*A Bestiary of Caeldon*

*The Writers' Guide to the Decachord*

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joetjen.github.io/The-Decachord

# Contents


Preface 1
What This Book Is For 3
How to Read This Book 5
The Living World 7
**I: Animals 15**
- Air-Finches 16
- Badgers 18
- Bark Beetles 20
- Bats 22
- Bearded Vultures 24
- Black-Water Eels 26
- Blackfins 28
- Bough-Cats 30
- Brown Bears 32
- Cats 34
- Cattle 36
- Cistern Newts 38
- Congers 40
- Crag Eagles 42
- Crag Goats 44
- Crows and Ravens 46
- Deathwatch Beetles 48
- Deep-Witnesses 50
- Deer 52
- Devourers 54
- Dew Beetles 56
- Dogs and Hounds 58
- Doves 60
- Dragons 62
- Draught Moths 64
- Drowning Garden Fauna 66
- Dun Dogs 68
- Dust Runners 70
- Eels 72
- Egg-Takers 74
- Elk 76
- Farwings 78
- Fish 80
- Fog Serpents 83
- Fogbells 85
- Foxes 87

Frogs and Toads 89
Glove Spiders 91
Glow-Flies 93
Gluttons 95
Great Catfish 97
Grey Seals 99
Grey Wolves 101
Gut Worms 103
Hares 105
Hawks and Falcons 107
Heath Adders 109
Hedgehogs 111
Herd Animals 113
Herons and Cranes 115
Horned Vipers 117
Hornets 119
Horses 121
Insects and Bees 123
Kelpshade Rays 126
Kiln Newts 128
Kingfishers 130
Lampless Spiders 132
Lampreys 134
Leeches 136
Lice and Fleas 138
Liver Flukes 140
Locusts 142
Magpies 144
Moles 146
Mud Turtles 148
Mules 150
Octopus 152
Orchard Dormice 154
Ossuary Beetles 156
Otters 158
Owls 160
Oxen 162
Pack Animals 164
Pale Cave Creatures 167
Pan Hyenas 169
Pan Shrimp 171
Pass Bears 173
Pigs 175

Porpoises 177
Poultry 179
Rats and Vermin 181
Ravine Cats 183
River Crayfish 185
Rock Conies 187
Root-Borers 189
Rose Waders 191
Ruin Hogs 193
Run-Followers 195
Salt Foxes 197
Scar Vultures 199
Scorpions 201
Seabirds 203
Sheep 205
Shelf Antelope 207
Shellfish 209
Shipworms 211
Slow Returners 213
Sparrows 215
Squirrels 217
Stair Kine 219
Stone Cats 221
Storks 223
Storm Toads 225
Sturgeon 227
Sun Spiders 229
Terrace Snails 231
Thirstbacks 233
Thorn Ants 235
Threshold Crickets 237
Ticks 239
Trout 241
Wall Lizards 243
Water Snakes 245
Weasels and Martens 247
Well Grouse 249
Whistlers 251
Wild Asses 253
Wild Boar 255
Wild Geese 257
Wild Kine 259
Wind Cats 261

Woodpeckers 263
Wound Flies 265
**II: Plants and Fungi** **267**
Ageless Spring Flora 268
Alders 270
Ash-Thistle 272
Barley 274
Beans 276
Beyonder Spores 278
Bitterberry 281
Black Mould 283
Bloodgrass 285
Bog Myrtle 287
Bracken 289
Canopy Lilies 291
Carnivorous Plants 293
Cellar Rot 295
Chamber-Grey 297
Dreamcress 299
Driftmats 301
Drowning Garden Flora 303
Ember Moss 305
Fen Pitchers 307
Flax and Hemp 309
Fodder 311
Fold Saffron 313
Foxfire 315
Fractal Trees 317
Fungus Beds 319
Gallows Root 321
Garden Crops 323
Glare-Lilies 326
Glasscup 328
Glowing Fungi 330
Gorge Gentian 332
Grain 334
Grain Spur 337
Grass and Heath 339
Great Trees and Groves 342
Grey Poppy 345
Groveknot 347
Hall Canker 349
Heart-Leaf 351

Hemlock 353
Herbs 355
Hoodwort 358
Kelp 360
Living Root (Gloam) 362
Lodewort 364
Marker Lichen 366
Moss and Lichen 368
Nettles 370
Nightshade 372
Nuts 374
Oaks 376
Oats 378
Omenfern 380
Orchards and Fruit 382
Pale Caps 385
Quietbell 387
Reed 389
Ridge Pines 392
Rime Lichen 394
Ringcaps 396
Root Crops 398
Rot-Shelf 400
Rubble Elder 402
Salt Pines 404
Saltbush 406
Samphire 408
Seagrass 410
Skeletal Trees 412
Sky Isles Flora 414
Sourcrust 416
Spore-Clouds 418
Stagger-Vetch 420
Stanchweed 422
Storm Truffles 424
Sundews 426
Swollen Plants (the Blood River) 428
Thirstroot 430
Thorn and Thornwood 432
Thornapple 435
Timber Trees 437
Trimmed Trees 440
Twisted Trees 442

Veilmint 444
Verdant Expanse Flora 446
Vines 449
Wall Figs 452
Weeping Caps 454
Well Palms 456
Wildflowers 458
Willow 460
Wind-Bent Trees 462
Woad 464
Xylos Mycelium 466
Yews 468
**III: Natives of the Planes** **471**
Apex Predators (the Scourge) 472
Apex-Born 474
Arbiters 476
Archivists (the Eternal Record) 478
Ash-Turned 480
Ash-Walkers 482
Bleed-Beetles 484
Blood-Hounds 486
Bloomspawn 488
Bone-Walkers 490
Burners 492
Cage-Larks 494
Carrion-Kites 496
Censors 498
Chance Hares 500
Chorus 502
Cold-Stalkers 504
Contract-Binders 506
Cornerstones 508
Current-Bound 510
Dice-Lords 512
Dream-Forms 514
Drifters 516
Drowse-Wings 518
Dust-Eaters 520
Dust-Striders 522
Dust-Wyrms 524
Echo-Statues 526
Echo-Walkers 528
Ember-Grubs 530

Enforcers 532
Entropy-Seekers 534
Erasure Mites 536
False Wells 538
Fare Leeches 540
Fear-Monsters 542
Fire-Stalkers 544
Flawless 546
Flower-Stalkers 548
Fog-Stalkers 550
Forgers 552
Fortune-Weavers 554
Foundations 556
Frost-Born 558
Frost-Wolves 560
Gale Jellies 562
Gamblers 564
Gilded 566
Glacier-Drakes 568
Grave-Keepers 570
Gust-Callers 572
Harmony-Beasts 574
Hoar Owls 576
Hollows 578
Ice-Beasts 580
Ice-Stalkers 582
Illuminated 584
Indexers 586
Iron-Claws 588
Keepers of Dust 590
Kinspinners 592
Last-Light Moths 594
Last-Word Finches 596
Life-Bearers 598
Linked 600
Load-Bearers 602
Lucids 604
Memory-Keepers 606
Memory-Thieves 608
Menders 610
Midflight Birds 612
Mossbacks 614
Muffle-Wings 616

Murk-Fangs 618
Muse-Spirits 620
Nightmares 622
Oath-Breakers 624
Ore-Worms 626
The Overgrown 628
Phantasms 630
Preservers 632
Sand-Stalkers 634
Scavenger Beasts 636
Scourge Tuskers 638
Scourge-Born 640
Scribes 642
Scythe Mantises 644
Seedwasps 646
Singers 648
Sky-Weavers 650
Slag Eels 652
The Stilled 654
Stillhares 656
Stonewrights 658
Storm-Bringers 660
Storm-Callers 662
Strata Crabs 664
Telltale Flies 666
Thirst-Flies 668
Tidesingers 670
Tree-Men 672
Truth-Seekers 674
Unblemished Hinds 676
Undertow Rays 678
Unspoken 680
Vaultstones 682
Verdant 684
Voice-Mimics 686
Void-Stalkers 688
Vow-Wrens 690
Wave-Weavers 692
Wayfinders 694
Wayward Lights 696
Wind-Walkers 698
The Wordless 700
Deepswells 702

Quenchers 704
Offnotes 706
**IV: Natives of the Zones** **709**
Air Eels 710
Air-Goats 712
Anvil Snails 714
Architects 716
Blood-Eels 718
Blood-Spinners 720
Chain-Binders 722
Changers 724
Chime-Bats 726
Cinder-Moths 728
Clearwater Shrimp 730
Clockrats 732
Cold-Salamanders 734
Coolers 736
Crystal Singers 738
Door-Keepers 740
Echo-Divers 742
Echo-Readers 744
Flesh-Eating Arachnids 746
Floaters 748
Foregone Hounds 750
Frost-Burned 752
Frost-Wyrms 754
The Gaoler 756
Gill-Folk 758
Gloom-Leeches 760
Gorge-Gnats 762
Gust-Stalkers 764
Hemophages 766
Judges 768
Lattice Guardians 770
Lead Crabs 772
Liar Toads 774
Librarians 776
Lightning Larks 778
Lightning-Beasts 780
The Lingerers 782
Loop-Weavers 784
Manifestations 786
Margin-Worms 788

Maze Mice 790
Melody-Beasts 792
Mirror Swans 794
Muses 796
Muster Rooks 798
Mute-Walkers 800
The Nameless 802
Nightmare-Slayers 804
Odds-Takers 806
Path-Weavers 808
Plot-Weavers 810
Pressure-Wraiths 812
Probability-Beasts 814
Reflections 816
Rimecoal Beetles 818
River-Beasts 820
Seers 822
Shape-Shifters 824
Silence-Bringers 826
Silencers 828
Sky-Walkers 830
Sleep-Drinkers 832
Smiths of the Deep 834
Spring Carp 836
Stone-Walkers 838
Storm-Hawks 840
Storm-Walkers 842
Thieves of Tongue 844
Thought-Steered Birds 846
Thunder-Wyrms 848
Twinned Crows 850
Vault Spiders 852
Voice-Catchers 854
Water-Robed 856
Waymoths 858
Weight-Bearers 860
Wind-Ghosts 862
Wind-Listeners 864
Wind-Weavers 866
Year-Fish 868
**V: Hosts of the Dark Entities** **871**
Adoring Statues 872
Ash-Wights 874

Blank Hosts 876
Bone Statues 878
Bone-Choirs 880
Burden-Stays 882
Chorus-Hosts 884
Courtiers (the Puppet Court) 886
Facet Lice 888
Flesh-Hosts 890
The Grafted 892
Hiss-Flies 894
Hollow Flocks 896
Kindless Broods 898
Mist-Merged 900
Noise-Hosts 902
The Over-Mended 904
Root-Hosts 906
Rust Mites 908
Rust-Hosts 910
Seed-Hosts 912
Shadow-Hosts 914
Shard-Hosts 916
The Slumbered 918
Smoulder-Kept 920
Stitch-Lings 922
Stitch-Wraiths 924
The Strayed 926
The Sundered 928
The Unweeping 930
Watchers 932
Wayturned 934
**VI: Constructs** **937**
Bronze Sentries 938
The Clockwork 940
Clockwork Guards 942
Conjured Constructs 944
Crow-Scarers 946
Crystal-Golems 948
Curators 950
Familiars 952
Field Bulwarks 954
The Guardian Host 956
Guardians (the Ageless Spring) 958
Hunger Engines 960

Ice-Shards 962
Ill-Called 964
Night-Markers 966
Predecessor-Frames 968
Rebinders 970
The Record-Engine 972
Sketch-Soldiers 974
Slag-Tenders 976
Grey Clerks 978
Turnkeys 980
Ward-Hounds 982
**VII: The Risen Dead 985**
The Anchored 986
Bridge-Dead 988
Burst-Dead 990
Cairn-Wakers 992
The Choked 994
The Clock-Keeper 996
Crossroad Hanged 998
The Drowned Court 1000
The Forgotten (the Eternal Record) 1002
Fused Dead 1004
Grey Crews 1006
Hostile Remnants 1008
Marrow Sentinels 1010
The Old Hunt 1012
Path-Echoes 1014
Pit-Wakers 1016
Possessing Ancestors 1018
Raised Corpses 1020
Rattlecut Dead 1022
The River-Given 1024
Salt-Kept 1026
Seal-Knockers 1028
Self-Raised 1030
Surface-Walkers 1032
The Taken 1034
The Unfinished 1036
The Unreturned 1038
Unsworn Dead 1040
The Warmed 1042
Word-Generals 1044
**VIII: Other Beings 1047**

The Changed Living 1048
**IX: Touched Beasts** **1051**
Brace-Gnawers 1052
Coldcoat Wolves 1054
Glassback Lizards 1056
Greenharts 1058
Ill-Hatched 1060
Ley Moles 1062
Skin-Lost 1064
Slip-Foxes 1066
Springwater Herds 1068
Spurred Hounds 1070
Weather Goats 1072
A. A Short Chronology 1075
B. Glossary 1077
Index 1101
C. Licence 1109

# Preface

The other books of this series are about peoples: what they are as kinds, and what they make of an era. This one is about everything else that lives, grows, walks, or lingers in Caeldon and the planes behind it. It began as a set of working pages, one to each being, written to keep the world's herds, crops, and monsters as consistent as its rivers and its roads, and it became a book when it was clear that a writer wants them as much as a scholar does: a crop for a field, a beast for a road, something in the fog that should not be followed.

The book is compiled from those pages. Its first chapter, The Living World, and the short openings of its shelves were written for it; its entries were not. Each entry is its canon page, gathered into the book as it stands, so that the book and the pages can never drift apart. When a page is corrected, the next edition of the book carries the correction.

It stands beside the rest of the series rather than after it. *Foundations* explains the planes, zones, powers, and magic that so many of these beings belong to; the era books describe the peoples who herd, hunt, fear, and pray about them. The entries describe each being as it lives in the Medieval Era, the one era the series has told so far. The website's Reference at joetjen.github.io/The-Decachord/ has every entry too, with the rest of the setting around it.

A bestiary is an old kind of book, and the old ones were full of what people believed. This one keeps belief as well, but it keeps it apart: what a being is and does stands in its entry plainly, and what the peoples say of it stands beside that, under its own heading, for the reader to weigh.

*Jan Oetjen*

# What This Book Is For

*A Bestiary of Caeldon* is for writers who need a being that is not a person: the ox in the furrow and the mule on the pass, the wolf at the fold gate and the bear at the waystation, the fungus on the cavern wall, the voice in the Veil that calls in a loved one's voice, the statue that is still a person inside. What the series as a whole sets out to give is told in *Foundations* (see What This Book Is For, FND 3). This book gives it for the living world.

## What It Gives

For every being the book tells what it looks like, where it lives, how it behaves, what it can do, how it lives and dies, what it does for and to the peoples, and what they believe about it. That is enough to put it in a story without contradicting the world: to know that a basin farmer without a share in a plough-team is poor, that a Dark Elf house holds its fungus caverns by chamber-right like water, that iron would not ward off the Rust-Hosts, or what a Veil-Walker takes as its fare.

It also gives what the peoples make of their beasts and plants and monsters: the omens, the charms, the festivals, the proverbs, and the mistakes. So are the hunts: the bounty on a wolf pelt, the pass bear the whole road turns out for, the herb fetched from a plane that kills. Those are often where a story starts.

## What It Leaves Open

Where the setting names only a kind, the book holds the kind: sheep, barley, lichen, the hawks a lord flies. Breeds, varieties, and the names of particular animals are left to whoever needs them. Where the setting does not know something, the book does not pretend to: whether the deep-witnesses of the open sea are a people, a beast, or something the sea alone could make is not settled, and the entry says so.

The book carries no game rules. A being's abilities are facts of the world, what it can do and what that costs, never numbers, and anyone who builds a game on Caeldon makes those for themselves.

# How to Read This Book

Nobody reads a bestiary from end to end, and this one is not built for it. It is built to be opened at the being a story needs.

## The Shelves

After the first chapter, The Living World, which surveys the whole book in one sweep, come nine parts, called shelves, each with a short opening of its own: **Animals**; **Plants and Fungi**; **Natives of the Planes**, the peoples, beasts, and guardians of the Anchors, the Harmonics, and the Veil; **Natives of the Zones**, the beings that live in the Resonant Zones or that the zones have made; **Hosts of the Dark Entities**; **Constructs**; **The Risen Dead**; **Other Beings**, those of no other kind; and **Touched Beasts**, beasts of the world that a zone, a thin place, a ley line, or magic has changed. Within each shelf the entries stand in alphabetical order, one entry to each being. A few titles add a place in parentheses where the plain word would not say whose the beings are, as in Guardians (the Ageless Spring). The sapient peoples of Caeldon are not here: their bodies and lives are told in *Foundations*.

## An Entry

Each entry opens with a paragraph that says what the being is and why it matters to the peoples. Beside it stands a box headed **At a Glance**, which gives, where they are known, its **kind** (fauna, flora, fungus, crop, plane native, zone native, Dark Entity host, construct, risen dead, other, or touched beast), its **habitat** and **range**, the peoples it is **known to**, and its **danger**: a plain word, harmless, wary, dangerous, or deadly, often with a phrase saying to whom and why. The danger is a description, not a measure for any game.

The sections that follow are always in the same order: **Appearance**; **Habitat and Range**; **Behaviour and Temperament**; **Abilities**; **Life Cycle**; **Uses and Dangers**; and **Lore and Belief**. Not every being has every section. **Abilities** are facts of the world, what a being can do and what follows from it, and never game rules. **Lore and Belief** records what the peoples believe about a being, and belief may be wrong. Knowledge of the planes, the zones, and the Dark Entities is uneven and often mistaken, and an entry says plainly where belief and fact part company, and where nobody knows.

The words the entries use for the planes and powers, Anchor, Harmonic, Resonant Zone, and the rest, are reference terms, not the names the peoples use, which vary by people, faith, and era.

## The Rest of the Series

The entries describe each being as it lives in the Medieval Era, around 1,350 CR. Where an entry names a plane, a power, a school of magic, or a people, the place to read more is *Foundations*: its chapters on the planes, the zones, the powers, and magic explain what so many of these beings belong to. The regions where the animals graze and the crops grow are described in *The Medieval Era*. A link from one entry to another leads within this book; the website's Reference at joetjen.github.io/The-Decachord/ has every entry as well, with the rest of the setting around it.

At the back of the book, **A Short Chronology** gives the nine ages of Caeldon with their spans, for placing what an entry says of a being's past, and the full chronology is in *Foundations*. A **glossary** explains the names and terms the entries use, and an **index** shows where each is told.

## References to Other Books

A reference into another book of the series names the chapter or section it points to and adds, in brackets, that book's short form and the page there: (FND 112). The short forms are:

| | |
|---|---|
| **FND** | *Foundations* |
| **MED** | *The Medieval Era* |
| **BST** | *A Bestiary of Caeldon* |

# The Living World



*Gather in measure: a stand stripped bare*
*will not come back in the spring.*
*Cut the bark in strips the tree can heal.*
*Ask whose body before you ask what ails it;*
*the brew that mends a Human*
*may do little for a Dwarf, or harm.*

— a healer's rule, *The Book of Small Mendings*

Every people of Caeldon shares its world with beings that are not peoples, and lives by them, beside them, and in fear of some of them. A basin village counts its wealth in cows and its year in grain; a Dark Elf house eats the fungus that grows on dead root and lives beneath the living root that carries its ceilings; an Orc kindred pays for its wrongs in herds; a Thaluren run reads the open sea through two great beings it has barely seen. Beyond them lie stranger things: the peoples and beasts of the other planes, the creatures the Resonant Zones breed or make, the hosts that the Dark Entities send out ahead of themselves, made things that walk, and the dead that do not lie still. This book gathers all of them, one entry to each being: five hundred and eleven in all, on nine shelves. The peoples themselves, from the Elves and Dwarves to the Wrought, are told in The Peoples of Caeldon (FND 195). This chapter does not retell the entries; it follows what runs across them, and names the entries and shelves where each being is told.

## What the Peoples Live By

Ask any people of Caeldon what it lives on, and the answer is something alive, and seldom more than two or three things. The Human villages of the cradle-web give it as herd and field: Cattle on the common meadows, Oxen under the yoke, Sheep on the summer slopes, and above all Grain, whose surplus on the deep basin soil is what the corridor towns eat and what a lord's levy is counted in. Under the Elderweald the answer is Fungus Beds: a Dark Elf house holds a cavern where the fungus grows thick by the same chamber-right as its water, and loses its food with the chamber if the chamber falls. Across the Glassbelt the Orc kindreds of the Windscar Pacts answer in heads of stock (Stair Kine); the harbours below them answer in the catch (Fish, Shellfish); the Thaluren, who tend the shoals around their reefs, answer as keepers do.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **What it covers** | Every being of the world that is not a people: animals, plants and fungi, the natives of the planes and of the zones, the hosts of the Dark Entities, constructs, the risen dead, the few beings of no other kind, and the beasts a zone, a thin place, or magic has touched. |
| **Not covered** | The sapient peoples of Caeldon, from the Elves and Dwarves to the Wrought. |
| **Where they live** | The Material Plane, the Anchors, the Harmonics, the Veil, and the Resonant Zones. |
| **Danger** | From the fox at the hen-house to things no blade answers; beast-hunters, bounty-takers, and herb-hunters make their living in between. |
| **What is known** | Plain beasts and crops, well; the beings of the planes and zones, unevenly, and often wrongly. |
| **The year** | As the beings live and are believed in during the Medieval Era, c. 1,350 CR. |

Whatever a people lives on, it measures itself by. A household is rich or poor in cows before it is rich or poor in coin, and the line between a farmer who will eat in spring and one who may not runs through the plough-team: who owns a share in one, and who must hire. Among the kindreds a herd is not only food and hides but the price a wrong is paid in, so that a feud has a count and a reckoning has an end; and the oldest game on the shelves is the cattle-raid, in which a young Orc wins a first name by driving off a rival kindred's beasts by night. The Dwarven holds measure by what they must buy, and the basin wool that comes up the Headwater roads, which the holds cannot grow for themselves, is part of every hold's year. Even praise is taken from the field: the hardier grain of the foothills (Barley, grown beside Oats) gives the holds their word for a worker who never fails, and a pot of Beans means something precise to an Ogre band, which eats before it lifts.

What feeds a people can also fail it, and every people knows the shape of its own failure. The basins fear the tired field more than the bad summer: a ground pressed for a second harvest every year gives less each time, and the rest-year kept by the farmers of Anvelle the Harvest-Mother is custom set against that loss, for as long as the lord's riders let them keep it. Every store has its thief, the granary its Rats and Vermin; every orchard (Orchards and Fruit) its debt to the Insects and Bees that set it. A village notices the things it lives by most when they fall silent. The hundred and twenty-four entries of the first shelf, Animals, run from Air-Finches to Wound Flies; the ninety-five of the second, Plants and Fungi, hold sixty-six plants, seventeen fungi, and thirteen crops.

## Roads, Trade, and Rivalry

The roads of Caeldon run on animals, and each kind of animal belongs to a kind of road. Speed and rank travel by Horses, which carry the courier and the lord and are beyond most farmers, and which the commonest outlaws of the road steal and hang for; the mountain stages belong to Mules, trusted on a bad road above any guide; behind them come the strings of Pack Animals that the toll-houses count by the head and the inns stable by the night. Dogs and Hounds keep the yard and the flock, and in the lawless edges of the medieval present they also keep the bounty-taker's road: a fugitive's first fear in the Broken Marches is not the lamp but the dog beside it.

The roads have their own beasts, and every carter knows them. In autumn the Pass Bears come down to the mountain waystations for the stores, and a bear that has learned to break in is hunted by the whole road; whoever brings in its pelt drinks free at every waystation from the

basin edge to the Ironspine gates for a winter. In a hard winter the Grey Wolves come to the fold gates, the Bridge Hall at Greyford pays a bounty on every pelt brought to the toll-gate, and the fold villages name the wolf-winters after their heroes. In the ruins the Ruin Hogs have killed more salvagers in some seasons than falling stone, and nobody in the Marches puts a bare hand into a dark gap for fear of the Glove Spiders. On the ravine crossings of the Briarreach a Ravine Cat that has taken a lone walker is hunted by every crossing family on the ravine, and across the salt pans of the Glassbelt the Pan Hyenas follow a sick caravan for days, taking one straggler a night.

Living goods tie peoples together who have little else to say to one another. Wool climbs from the basins to the holds; dried fish climbs the cliff stairs from the Tidelace Coasts to the Windscar; grain goes down the Serath on the barges, past landings where the Great Catfish has taken a dog or a child at dusk. A trade like this makes neighbours, and neighbours find something to look down on. At the Greyford Reach the two banks of one river are divided by what they eat, the Goblin households of Lowbank by their Eels and the inns of Highbank by their Trout, and each bank's name for the other is a fish. Under the forest the Roothollow houses eat from their reservoirs what the dark has left them (Pale Cave Creatures), and nobody above has thought them worth naming.

## Who May Take and Who May Cut

Much of what people fight over in the living world is not the beast or the tree but who may take it, and the answer is usually whoever is strong enough to say so. Wild game is a privilege before it is a meal. Deer are hunted by the Elven groves, each of which hears about it from the next if it takes too many, and by Human lords in their own woods, where a poacher who takes one hangs if he is caught and the outlaws of the forest edge live on venison and the songs about it. A bird on the wrist (Hawks and Falcons) says who may hunt at all; falcon-thieves hang in most lordships, and the theft of a great lord's white falcon has started more than one feud between houses. The boar-hunt (Wild Boar) is the lords' most dangerous sport, and in some basin houses it has killed more young lords than war. What nobody claims, nobody protects, and Foxes are cursed in every hen-yard for living off that gap, and taken by outlaw bands as their sign.

Trees carry the oldest of these quarrels. To the Wood Elves the never-cut forest of the Elderweald (Great Trees and Groves) is kin and not timber, and cutting a living tree is a wrong against kin; groves have driven out those who did it, and hunted the Human woodcutters who tried. To the High Elves of the Crownboughs the same trees are a living material, bent over generations into hall and gate; to a basin farmer looking at the forest edge, they are fields not yet cleared. Below them the Roothollows live under a ceiling of Living Root (Gloam) that holds up their halls, breathes for them, and gives their only native light, so that what the groves above decide about a tree is, for a Dark Elf house, a decision about its roof.

The plants that hold an edge are the ones whose cutting starts trouble. Thorn and Thornwood takes the ground nobody holds and becomes, in the Briarreach, a wall that chooses its visitors; a war-band that tried to cut its way through a Thornbound hedge was met at the gap by watchers who had heard every stroke, and the songs say none of it came out. Reed and Willow mark where the river has been and where it will be, and to the Reedfolk a reed bed is the record of the water, read before anyone builds; it is also where outlaws and smugglers hide from the lord's riders. On the far side, Kelp is where the young who come down from the rivers are counted, and a thin count at the Kelpshade is grief and evidence at once.

## Care, Omen, and Offering

The living world is the first medicine and the first prayer. The Herbs of every healer work, because they carry a little of the lifeforce that runs through all living things, and they work differently in different bodies, which is why the healers' rule at the head of this chapter asks whose body before it asks what ails it. The rarest are fetched from places that kill: herb-hunters who go into the Verdant Expanse or the Drowning Garden are a known and short-lived trade, and a healer's shelf with a jar from the Expanse on it is a shelf someone died to fill. Poisoners keep the same shelves, and a Gallows Root found in a house after a sudden death has hanged more than one widow, guilty or not. Wildflowers, which feed nobody, are given to nearly every power of nearly every people: thrown on the water at the spring rise, or sent downstream with a sorrow.

Animals are read as well as kept. Birds above all are taken for messengers: Crows and Ravens for death, so that soldiers call a gathering of crows over a camp "the tally" and some sellsword captains will not march on a day the crows go ahead of them; Owls for ill luck by most people and for good mousing by farmers; Seabirds for the wind by the coast folk who hear the gulls before dawn. A silence where insects ought to sound is read too, and of all the omens of the living world it is the one most often right.

At the edge of what anyone can read stand the beings of the open sea. The Thaluren tell of the Deep-Witnesses and the Devourers as peoples of the ocean, the one honoured and the other feared, and know them from a few glimpses passed down the run-line; the runs that pressed past the known roads to look came back late, scattered, or not at all. Nearer the shore every Tidelace alehouse has a man who saw a fog serpent take a boat whole, though the Gnome sounders have measured the ribbonfish it really is. Further still lies the Dragons entry, which records a being nobody has seen for longer than any record reaches. Most people hold that dragons never were, and point to the Kobold telling, a memory of the furnace-masters of an elder world worn by very long telling into scale and coil. But the old bone sold as dragonbone has never been explained, every ruin-delver has heard that some elder hold still keeps a dragon's hoard, and the dragon may still live somewhere, and may one day come back.

## Beyond the World

Behind the world, life is the law of its plane made flesh. Where cold is a force that holds all things still, in the Frost-Bound, its natives are stillness turned to purpose: the solitary Frost-Born, the Frost-Wolves that hunt without a sound and freeze what they bite, the Glacier-Drakes that pass through ice, and the Ice-Beasts they all live on. The Parched, the plane of want, makes counters and swimmers of sand, the Dust-Eaters and Dust-Wyrms; the Scourge, where nothing is ever safe, makes the Scourge-Born and the Apex Predators that hunt them. Its plants obey the same law: the Fractal Trees of the Apex repeat themselves branch by branch, the Trimmed Trees of the Gilded Cage keep to measure, the Skeletal Trees of the Whispering Trace stand bare in its mist, and in the Verdant Expanse (Verdant Expanse Flora) a seed can become a forest in an hour, and the plants are the plane.

A traveller learns quickly that the planes of want are the honest ones. The planes of plenty are dangerous in the way a gift can be. The Apex-Born are beautiful past bearing, and the Echo-Statues that smile among them were visitors who stayed until they were improved. The Gilded are courteous and bound, and the Enforcers who keep their rules do not punish so much as restore. The Verdant may love a guest past leaving, and the Linked of the Weave may take a guest's self into their one mind as a kindness. The Harmonics keep the same rule: in the Radiance the Illuminated hide nothing

and the Truth-Seekers hunt whatever a visitor does; in the Silence the Hollows fade into their stone, and what they lose spreads.

Some of these beings come to the world, or the world goes to them. At the thin places of the Veil, the old shrines and boundary roads, the Veil-Walkers keep their tolls and take payment in things other than coin (they are a people, not a beast, and told in The Veil and the Outside (FND 51)), and the Voice-Mimics, which call from the fog in the voices of the people a traveller loves, are the reason the crossing-words forbid following a beloved voice. From the Dreaming Veil a dream shared by enough sleepers can become a thing that stays (Dream-Forms), and a Nightmare now and then crosses with teeth.

The Resonant Zones are where the planes press into the world, and their life is the pressure made visible. A Blood River overfeeds whatever drinks from it, so that its banks run riot (Swollen Plants), its beasts outgrow their kinds, and the Hemophages call the river a god and themselves its priests, and hunt travellers to feed it. The Cinder Fields keep the Cold-Salamanders and the Frost-Burned alive on a fire that warms nobody else; the Drowning Garden hurries every life within it, the Gill-Folk's with the rest. A zone native is often a creature of its zone in a stricter sense than a fish is of water: the Shape-Shifters of the Probability Fog can be anything inside it and are held to one shape outside. And some natives were born somewhere else. The Lingerers of an Ageless Spring (The Lingerers) drank, and did not leave.

The visitors a plane or a zone has caught and changed, the Lost, the Frozen, the Drowned, and the rest, are told with the place that changed them: those of the planes in The Planes (FND 11); those of the zones in The Resonant Zones (FND 33). The shelf Natives of the Planes holds a hundred and fifteen entries, Natives of the Zones eighty.

## What Comes from Outside

The powers outside the cosmos reach into it through living things. A Dark Entity takes, empties, fills, or makes, and what it sends out is its own nature on legs, so that a reader who knows the entity can guess the host, and the other way round. Krystallis, which is perfect order, sends flawless copies with nothing left to choose (Shard-Hosts), and they still stand in the Hanging Vale where the lattice stopped them; Qzoth sends change that never settles (Flesh-Hosts); Mnemosyne Null sends the emptied (Blank Hosts), and now and then a faceless thing walks out of the Paling. Those three are the only Beyonders whose hosts have walked on Caeldon, and only at the scars their Incursions left. The hosts of the other seven are examples of what an Incursion would bring: Xylos, which is a network, would send bodies that have become part of one (Root-Hosts), the Rust Flower exhaustion looking for strength to wear down (Rust-Hosts), and the most feared would be the gentlest, the Chorus-Hosts of Omm: happy, singing with one voice, with nobody in particular left inside, and very easy to love.

The fallen Stewards make their spawn out of what they could not bear. The Weeping Idol turns worship into stone and gold (Adoring Statues), the Hollow King turns service into an empty suit (Courtiers) and sends it out to crown the living, the Ashen Child turns grief into ash that wears a lost face (Ash-Wights), and the Rootless Tree, of the Unformed, turns whatever it grafts into a branch that will never find a root (The Grafted). Some faiths answer the first of them with shrines.

Not every host has a body. The spores and growths of the entities travel like weather (Beyonder Spores, Black Mould), and most of the people who meet them call them sicknesses, the Changing Fever above all, without knowing there is anyone behind them. They know the hosts as the Faceless or the wrong-born, as saints or ghosts, and ward them off with charms that sometimes help and sometimes bring them nearer. The shelf Hosts of

the Dark Entities has thirty-two entries, among them the victims of the Unformed's fields, from the edgeless Mist-Merged to The Strayed who walk until they fall; the entities themselves are told in What Waits Outside (FND 97).

## Made Things and Unquiet Dead

Most of the made beings of Caeldon have one thing in common: they want nothing at all. The everyday kind is the servant a conjurer calls up out of the matter to hand and sends off to work (Conjured Constructs), and the people who use them thank them anyway. A caster's Familiars are bonded companions, called back rather than invented. The radiant soldiers of Sanctified Magic (The Guardian Host) are, by their own school's teaching, a rite held in shape; the people who have fought beside them mostly refuse to believe it.

Some made things have outlasted the reasons for them. The Predecessor-Frames of the old deep holds were built to do work that kills, and in the Awakening of the Wrought, c. 1,500 BR-c. 200 CR, some of them became someone; those are a people, told in The Bridge Peoples (FND 257), and the frames that did not cross are still things, and some still stand at their posts in the lost holds below the lowest kept routes. The Sepulchre-Kin's Record-Engine was made to keep the dead in memory until they could rest; a landslide woke it c. 1,200 CR, and the survivors' Wake-Seal closed the Hushvale over it under fog. The planes and zones have their own machines and wardens, among them The Clockwork of the Frozen Moment, the Bronze Sentries of the Time Lock, and the Curators of the Memory Palace.

The dead are the most argued-over shelf. What necromancy raises (Raised Corpses, Marrow Sentinels) is a body put to work, with nobody in it; whether that is a mercy, a service, or a sacrilege depends entirely on the people watching, and a careless raising has left more than one burial ground walking. What a person leaves behind is an Echo, and most Echoes settle if they are grieved and given their rites. The ones that do not settle are the risen dead proper: Hostile Remnants where the rites failed, The Unfinished of the Whispering Trace with a debt still open, The Anchored and The Choked held by a zone, the Possessing Ancestors set over their heirs by the Rotting Crown, and the Taken, whom their own engine of memory kept until it killed them. Constructs holds twenty-three entries and The Risen Dead thirty. The changed living of the Hushvale are not dead at all, and stand alone on the shelf Other Beings. The last shelf, Touched Beasts, holds eleven beasts of the world that a zone's outflow, a thin place, a ley line, or a working has changed, from the Greenharts of the oldest groves to the Spurred Hounds of the lords' kennels: neither natives of a plane nor anyone's host, and several of them breed true. Two were people once and are no longer: the Skin-Lost, who forgot the way back from a beast's form, and the Ill-Hatched of a failed chrysalis.

## What People Believe

What the peoples know of a being falls away with its distance from ordinary life. Nobody knows an ox better than the farmer who yokes it, or a wolf better than the shepherd who has sat up with a brand against one. A zone's neighbours know its dangers to the step and the cost, and quarrel only over the reason, which each of them gives in the terms of its own faith, craft, or school. The planes are known from the stories of the few who came back, and the stories disagree. The Dark Entities and their hosts are known as fear is known: by rumour, by taboo, by the rites people keep without asking why. Each entry therefore gives what a being is and does in its own sections, and what the peoples say of it under **Lore and Belief**, with a word on how far the saying holds.

Belief about familiar things is mostly custom, and custom is often partly right. The crow does not foresee a death but is drawn to where death is gathering, so an augur who reads it is reading

something real, and goes wrong where death has already settled in. A rat aboard is good news to a sailor and bad news to a granary-keeper, and both are thinking about the same animal.

About the stranger beings, belief can kill in either direction. The faithful who kneel among the Adoring Statues are asking for exactly what may happen to them; the households that set a lamp for a Stitch-Wraith they take for a lost love are lighting its way in; the kin who beg for one of the standing ones of the Hanging Vale to be broken out may be asking for a death. But custom also knows more than it can explain. The Wrongwood's custom against digging does keep the protean spores asleep in its burned ground. A name said aloud every night at the Paling's edge does hold against what is left of the pallor, because a plain name is a clear memory. And the mourners in the Trace who pay a dead man's debts and finish his sentence for him are doing more for his Echo than they know.

For a writer, the space between belief and fact is where the stories are: the village with the wrong charm, the pilgrimage to the statues, the beast-hunter paid to kill the thing in the wood who finds it was never a beast, the family sitting up with a changed son while the neighbours wait with a torch. The book keeps one rule throughout. What a being can do is a fact of the world, and its entry gives it plainly; what people believe of it belongs to the people, and the people may be wrong.

## Tensions

- **The rest-year.** The Headwater roads and the Serathic towns both need more basin grain than the basins can safely give. Farmers who keep Anvelle's rest-year resist the levies that force a second harvest, and the lord's riders come for it with spears.
- **Draining the fen.** A march-town wants to embank a reach of the Reedmere for new fields. Its Reedfolk flood-keepers warn that the spring rise will go to the next village downstream instead. The warning is heard, and the town embanks anyway.
- **Whose stair.** A rockfall has broken a flight of the Gullstair, and the kindreds' herds can no longer come down it to the coast. The station keepers say the repair is the kindreds' to arrange under escort custom; the kindreds say the station has every reason to let a broken stair slow arrivals.
- **A sensing that counts for nothing.** A current road where a devourer has been sensed is distrusted until a later run has come through it whole, though by Thaluren custom the account of the sensing counts for nothing. Some say a devourer can be outwaited, others that it returns to a road it has broken, and each run bound for that road must decide which to believe.
- **Who answers for a construct.** Conjured constructs have no will, and the deepest worry about them is who answers when one does harm. Critics of the Hall of Borrowed Forms say the line between a servant and a weapon is only an order.
- **Mercy or desecration.** Some peoples revere the Bone Singer's statues as honoured dead and decorate them on feast days; others smash them as an act of mercy, believing that breaking the bone frees the one held inside. The statues are still persons inside, and no one can say which side is kinder.
- **Nursed or burned.** In the fog of the Hushvale the changed living hunt, and out of it they are men and women of the Held again. Some of the Held would watch, bind, and nurse a changed one till morning; others say the person died in the fog and something wears the body home, and that it should be burned.

PART I

# Animals

*The animals on this shelf are the ones the peoples live with: the cattle of the basin meadows, the horses and mules that carry the roads, and the driven herds of the Windscar kindreds, for whom a herd is food, shelter, trade, and the currency in which wrongs are answered. Around them live the deer a lord keeps and a poacher hangs for, the fox at the hen-house, and the crows and owls that every people watches for what they mean. Further out are the beasts people hunt and are hunted by: the wolf at the fold gate in a hard winter, the bear at the mountain waystation, the boar that has killed more young lords than war in some basin houses, and the hog in the ruin cellar that in some seasons kills more salvagers than falling stone.*

*At the edges stand the beings the peoples know least, like the eyeless creatures of the reservoirs beneath the Elderweald, and the dragon, which no one has seen for a very long time and most believe never existed.*





# Air-Finches

**Air-finches** are small yellow songbirds bred in the Dwarven holds and carried in cages on the vent rounds and into the workings. Their use is simple: they sicken from bad air before people do, so a finch that stops singing, or falls from its perch, means the air is going bad. The Kobold crews who walk the vent runs say their own sound codes are older and better, and that a finch only warns when it is already too late.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Kept caged on the vent rounds |
| **Range** | The Stonewake Deeps and the holds of the Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Dwarves and Kobolds |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An air-finch is the size of a sparrow, slim, with a short conical bill. Hold-bred birds are bright yellow all over, some with a little green or brown on the wings; the wild stock they came from, long ago, was streaked green and brown. The cock sings a long, rolling, trilling song almost without pause; the hen chirps.

It hops restlessly about its cage. In bad air it fluffs out its feathers, goes quiet, sways on the perch, and drops. Rounds carry it in a small wooden cage with a little brass door, often hung from the end of a staff.

## Habitat and Range

Air-finches live only where Dwarves keep them: in the holds of the Ironspine and above all in the Stonewake Deeps, where air comes first. Each

hold breeds its own in a lamplit finch-room near the outer halls and keeps the breeding lines in its tallies.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Air-finches are bred tame. They eat seed, greens, and the crumbs of a round's food, and they sing in the dark if a lamp is near. They do not live long in the deepest levels without being brought up for light and air between rounds.

## Life Cycle

Hens lay four or five eggs in a small basket in the finch-room in spring and summer. A finch may live ten years in care, though most carried on the rounds die sooner.

## Uses and Dangers

They give warning, which in the Deeps is life. A round carries a finch alongside its lamps and listens to it as it listens to the draught. They do no harm. The danger is relying on them: a finch warns of gas, foul air, and heat that has built up, but not of a brace about to fail.

## Lore and Belief

Dwarves count a finch that died on a round as having saved the round, and some holds mark the finch's cage-hook in the vent run with a small notch. Kobold crews say the finch is a Dwarven habit, honest but slow: by the time the finch falls, a Kobold has already read the draught's sound, the change in the stone, and the marks the last crew left, and has turned back. Dwarves have learned to read those marks without being able to make them, and still carry the finch.

Hold songs remember the finch that fell at the head of a rescue round during a fire-damp burst, and the warden who carried its cage on through the bad air and brought eleven miners out alive.



# Badgers

**Badgers** are the great diggers of the basin country. They live in setts, warrens of tunnels and chambers dug over generations into banks and wood edges, and where they dig into a flood bank they weaken it. Basin dyke reeves pay for their heads; Reedfolk, who read ground for a living, take an old sett as proof that the ground it is in has not flooded within a lifetime.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Hedgebanks, wood edges, and flood banks |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Lower Serath, and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans and Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Wary, to banks and levees |

## Appearance

A badger is the size of a stout dog but low to the ground, broad and heavy, with short powerful legs and long digging claws on the forefeet. Its body is grizzled grey, its legs and belly black, and its long head is white with a broad black stripe running back through each eye to the ear. It has a small tail and a flat, shuffling walk.

Badgers are seldom seen, since they come out after dark, but they are often heard: snuffling and grunting along the hedge, a shrill scream in a fight. A sett has a heavy, musky smell and great spoil heaps of earth and old bedding at its mouths.

## Habitat and Range

Badgers live in the hedgebanks, wood edges, and dry rises of the Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath, and in the foothill banks of the Headwater

Marches. They need soil that drains and digs well, and they like the made banks of dykes and embankments for the same reason.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A badger eats worms above all, and grubs, roots, fruit, eggs, and young rabbits. It forages at night along the same paths for years. Badgers live in clans in one sett, which the clan digs and extends over many lifetimes; some setts are older than the villages near them. They are shy and peaceable, but a cornered badger bites hard and does not let go.

## Life Cycle

Cubs are born in late winter deep in the sett, two or three to a litter, and come out in spring. A badger may live ten years or more; the sett lives much longer.

## Uses and Dangers

Badger hair makes the best brushes, and the fat is rendered for salves. The danger is to the banks. A sett dug into a flood bank leaves tunnels the spring rise finds, and a dyke that fails in the rise often fails where a badger dug. Dyke reeves in the Basins pay a coin for every badger head brought in, and dig out setts in the levees each autumn.

## Lore and Belief

Reedfolk pilots and flood-keepers say a badger never digs where the water comes, so a sett with spoil heaps grown over with old trees marks ground that has stayed dry a long time; an old sett suddenly abandoned is a warning. Basin farmers say a badger’s foot carried in the pocket stops cramp. Basin children are told the badger keeps the old earth’s memory, which is closer to Reedfolk thinking than the farmers know.

Dyke reeves pay a bounty on badger heads, and in a flood year the sett-diggers and the boys who hunt them are the most hated and the best paid on the bank.



# Bark Beetles

**Bark beetles** are the small borers that live between the bark and the wood of a living tree, and in numbers kill it. In the Elderweald they are the slowest of the forest's dangers and the hardest to answer, because the Wood Elves will not fell a living tree to stop them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Old living timber, under the bark |
| **Range** | The Elderweald and the foothill woods of the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Elves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary, to trees |

## Appearance

A bark beetle is no bigger than a grain of rice: a hard, cylindrical body, dark brown to black, blunt at both ends, with a rough, pitted back that ends in a short slope ringed with tiny teeth. Few people ever see one. What they see is the sign: a scatter of round holes like shot in the bark, little heaps of red-brown dust in the crevices and at the foot of the trunk, and beads of sap that weep from the holes and harden pale. Peel a strip of dead bark and the wood beneath is carved into galleries, a straight channel with fine side-channels running out from it like the veins of a leaf, or like writing.

A tree under heavy attack smells sour and resinous, and on a still summer evening its trunk ticks faintly.

## Habitat and Range

They live in old timber wherever it stands: the never-cut stands of the deep weald, its lighter margins, and the foothill pine of the Headwater Marches. In an ordinary year they keep to fallen and dying wood. After a drought or a storm, when many trees stand weakened, they rise in numbers and go into the living.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pair bores in through the bark, cuts a mother gallery, and lays eggs along it; the grubs eat outward, each in its own channel, until the bands of living wood under the bark are cut through and the tree can no longer carry its sap. Beetles find a weakened tree by its smell and call others to it, so a single failing tree can become a stand of them in two summers. They take no notice of people.

## Life Cycle

Eggs laid in spring become grubs that feed through the summer, rest in small chambers at the ends of their galleries, and emerge as grown beetles to fly to the next tree. A warm year may see two broods. A great tree they have girdled can stand dead for years, its bark sloughing off in plates to show the carved wood underneath.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing but deadwood. Their cost is the trees: a stand of foothill pine lost in two years, a grove's great tree dying from the crown down. Headwater woodcutters fell and burn an infested tree before the beetles fly, and fell its neighbours with it. In the Elderweald that answer is closed. A grove must decide together how far to let a tree die, whether to strip loose bark by hand, and whether to let the next tree be taken, and the argument can run longer than the beetles do. Wardens of Nature Magic can read where a stand is failing; they cannot make a girdled tree carry sap again.

## Lore and Belief

Wood Elves say the galleries are the tree's own last writing, and some groves read them before the tree is let fall. Edge villagers call the beetles **the engravers** and believe a tree they choose has been wronged by someone, which the Elves do not say aloud but do not deny. Headwater woodcutters hold that a beetle year follows a dry one, which is true.



# Bats

**Bats** are the small dark flyers that come out at dusk over every village pond and ruined tower. They eat the night's insects by the thousand, roost by day in caves, adits, barns, and broken walls, and are noticed by most people only when one gets into the house. The Kobold crews who work the vents and margins of the deep holds notice them more: a flight of bats boiling out of a working is a warning that the air behind it has gone bad.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Caves, mine adits, ruins, barns, and towers |
| **Range** | Widespread; thickest in the Broken Marches, the Ironspine's outer workings, and the edges of the Roothollows |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless; a sick bat may carry biting madness, and old dung-caves have foul air |

## Appearance

A common bat would sit in a child's cupped hands with room to spare, its body no bigger than a mouse, its wings a thin brown-black skin stretched between long fingers. Folded, it is a small furred knot of dull brown with a pug face, large ears, and black bead eyes. Its flight is fast and fluttering, full of sudden turns, and most people hear it before they see it: a dry flicker of wings past the ear, and from a roost a high, thin chittering at the edge of hearing. A large roost smells sharply of ammonia, and the dung lies in drifts beneath it.

## Habitat and Range

Bats live wherever there is a dry, dark place to hang by day and open air to hunt by night. They roost in natural caves, in the outer adits and abandoned workings of the Ironspine, in the towers, culverts, and storework vaults of the Broken

Marches, and in barns and shrine roofs in every farmed country. Roosts reach some way into the openings at the edges of the Roothollows, but no deeper than a bat can fly out in an evening, since all of them feed under the open sky.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A bat sleeps hanging head down through the day and wakes at dusk. The whole roost leaves together in a stream, hunts moths, gnats, and beetles over water and field edges through the night, and comes back before dawn. Bats are timid and avoid people, but a roost disturbed by day will burst out in a shrieking cloud. They are quick to leave air they cannot bear: smoke, damp heat, and the trapped gases of a deep working drive them out before a lamp flame shows any change.

## Life Cycle

Bats sleep the winter away in the deepest, coldest part of a roost, clustered and still. Females gather in warm nursery roosts in early summer and each bears a single pup, which clings to her and then hangs beside her until it flies in late summer. A bat may live ten years or more, and the same roost is used for generations.

## Uses and Dangers

Bats keep down the gnats over fens and the moths in the granaries, though few people thank them. Old roosts hold deep beds of dung, dug out in some places to feed fields and gardens; the diggers wrap their faces, because the air of a long-used dung-cave is foul and has felled careless men (see Bad Air). A bat found on the ground in daylight should not be picked up: sick bats carry biting madness.

For Kobold vent crews a roost near a working is a living warning. When bats pour out of a shaft at the wrong hour, the crew withdraws first and asks why afterwards, and a vent that the bats have abandoned is checked before anyone sleeps near it.

## Lore and Belief

A bat that flies into a hall is held in many Human villages to mean that the house will soon stand empty, by death or by leaving, and it is driven out with a broom and the doors left open till dawn. Goblin salvagers say a ruin with no bats in it is a ruin that is about to fall. Children are told that bats tangle themselves in hair; they do not.

Old delvers say the bats of an elder ruin know its treasure rooms, since they roost where the air comes in from below, and that a cloud of them pouring out at noon means something woke down there.



# Bearded Vultures

**Bearded vultures** are the bone-eaters of the heights. They live on the marrow of bones left by other hunters, and to get at it they carry bones high and drop them onto broad stones to crack them. On the Stormcrown the broadest stones are the fitted slabs of the Long Tread, and stretches of the colossal road lie strewn with splintered bone. The Edgeway Kindreds walk them and do not like it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | High crags and the colossal roads |
| **Range** | The Stormcrown and the upper Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples, Dwarves, and Giants |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A bearded vulture is a huge bird, its wings spreading wider than a tall Human is high, long and narrow and pointed like a falcon's, with a long wedge-shaped tail. Its body is rust-orange to cream below, the colour coming from the iron-red dust and pools it bathes in, and dark slate-grey above. Its head is pale, with a black mask through a red-ringed eye and a tuft of black bristles hanging under the beak like a beard.

It glides low along the ridges with hardly a wingbeat, and is silent but for a thin whistle at the nest. A dropped bone striking stone from a height cracks like a breaking branch.

## Habitat and Range

Bearded vultures live on the crags of the Stormcrown and the highest ridges of the Ironspine, and drop their bones on the Long Tread and the bare rock shelves near it. They are very few, a pair to a long stretch of ridge.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A bearded vulture eats bone above all, swallowing pieces whole and digesting them, and marrow, with a little meat and skin. It finds the remains of goats, whistlers, and anything else that died on the heights, after the eagles, cats, and gluttons have finished. It takes a bone too large to swallow up high and drops it on a chosen stone, again and again, until it breaks. It never kills anything large and avoids people.

## Life Cycle

A pair nests in a cave or under an overhang on a cliff in midwinter and raises one young, which takes many years to gain its adult colours. A bearded vulture may live forty years.

## Uses and Dangers

They do no harm and give nothing but their feathers, which Kindreds sometimes carry. Their ossuary-stones on the Long Tread are only a nuisance, scattered bone and broken shards underfoot.

## Lore and Belief

Edgeway Kindreds read a bone-strewn stretch of the Long Tread as unlucky ground, where beasts have died and travellers may follow, and they walk it quickly and without speaking. Dwarven wardens of the high stretches call the birds the road's sweepers. Kindred tellers say the Giants of the hidden basins keep bearded vultures as other peoples keep dogs, which no one has seen.



# Black-Water Eels

**Black-water eels** are the long blind eels of the still black water that fills chambers nobody drinks from in the Roothollows. They are the creatures of the black water that the Dark Elf houses leave alone. Nobody fishes for them or eats them, which is part of why they grow so large, and their bite festers. Parents keep children away from the black water, and these eels are one reason.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Still black water |
| **Range** | The Roothollows |
| **Known to** | Elves (Dark Elves) |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to a child or anyone wading |

## Appearance

A black-water eel is far longer than the eels of the surface rivers, as long as a grown Dark Elf is tall and as thick as a forearm, with a smooth, scaleless, slimy skin that is not black at all but a dead, bloodless white, faintly grey along the back. It has no eyes, only two pale smudges under the skin, and a wide mouth lined with small backward-curving teeth. A ribbon of fin runs the length of its back and belly.

It moves slowly in the black water and almost never breaks the surface; what people see is a pale shape turning under the dark. Lamplight on the water does not seem to disturb it. The black water smells of stale stone and rot.

## Habitat and Range

Black-water eels live only in the still black water of the Roothollows: flooded chambers, dead-end hollows, and the pools of chambers whose root

has died. They are few in any one pool. Whether they also live in the water behind the bars of the sealed Upper Roothollows nobody knows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A black-water eel lies still in the deepest part of its pool for days and feeds on whatever comes into the water: pale fish washed in, cave creatures, and anything that falls or wades in. It finds prey by the stir of the water and bites, holding on and twisting. It is not aggressive, but it does not distinguish a wading foot from a fish.

## Life Cycle

Nobody knows how they breed: no house has seen their eggs or young, and they appear in a pool that had none, as if the water had made them. They live very long.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, because nobody takes them. Their danger is the bite: a child or anyone wading in the black water may be bitten, and the wound festers badly, as everything touched by that water seems to. Houses keep their children away from the black water and do not drink from it.

## Lore and Belief

Dark Elves leave the eels alone as they leave the black water alone, and say that what lives in water no one drinks from is not food. Some houses hold that the eels are the underforest's old creatures, gone pale in the dark, like the pale cave creatures of the reservoirs; others say only that they are the reason for the rule. A child who has seen one turning under a lamp does not need the rule explained.



# Blackfins

**Blackfins** are the black-and-white hunting whales of the outer water of the Tidebound Reaches and the outer isles of the Tidelace. They hunt in family pods, take seals, porpoises, and sharks, and fear nothing in the coastal sea. A Thaluren run that meets a pod gives it water, turning aside until it has passed, and a Gnome pilot gives it sea-room.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Outer coastal water and the current roads |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches and the outer isles of the Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Thaluren, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to a lone swimmer |

## Appearance

A blackfin is longer than most fishing boats, a thick, smooth, powerful body that is glossy black above and white below, with a white patch behind each eye, a grey saddle behind the back fin, and white sweeping up onto the flanks. The fin on its back stands straight up from the water, in an old male as tall as a man, and it is this fin, rising and cutting through the water in a line of others, that names them. Its flippers are broad and rounded, its teeth large and interlocking. A pod surfaces together with explosive breaths that carry a long way, and calls underwater in whistles, clicks, and screams that the Thaluren can hear from far off.

## Habitat and Range

They range along the outer coastal water, the current roads, and the open sea beyond, following their prey. They come close inshore along the outer isles when seals are pupping, and to the estuary mouths when the runs and the young are moving and the sharks gather.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Blackfins live their whole lives in the same family pods, led by old females. They hunt together with great cunning: herding fish into balls, washing seals off rocks with a wave made by swimming together, and wearing down larger prey in turns. They are curious about boats and swimmers, and have been known to follow a boat for hours. They do not hunt people as a rule, but a lone swimmer in their water has been taken.

## Life Cycle

A female bears a single calf after a long carrying, every few years, and the calf stays with her pod for life. Blackfins may live as long as a Human, and the oldest females outlive their breeding years by decades.

## Uses and Dangers

They are not hunted; no coastal people has the means or the wish. They take seals and sharks, which the fishers do not mourn. They are dangerous to anyone alone in the outer water and to small boats that blunder among a hunting pod.

## Lore and Belief

The Thaluren honour the blackfin pods for keeping their own lines, the old mothers leading the same families along the same water for generations, and say that a pod is a run-line that never comes home because it never left. They give them water as they would give it to an assembly passing. Gnome pilots say a pod in a sound means bad weather coming off the Unrun Sea, and they move their craft inshore.

Coastal Humans tell of the lone swimmer taken off the outer isles and of the pod that circled a wreck for three days; wreckers on those coasts will not work a ship the blackfins have claimed.



# Bough-Cats

**Bough-cats** are the small wild cats of the high canopy of the Crownboughs. They were never tamed, but the High Elf houses have let them live in their galleries and garden-walks for so long that they keep the halls clear of mice and dormice and sleep on the sunny terraces as if they owned them. A house watches its bough-cats, because they know before anyone else when a bough has begun to fail.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Canopy galleries and garden-walks |
| **Range** | The Crownboughs |
| **Known to** | Elves (High Elves) |
| **Danger** | Harmless to people; a thief of fledglings and fruit |

## Appearance

A bough-cat is smaller than a house cat, with a long, thick, ringed tail that it uses for balance and wraps round itself to sleep. Its fur is soft and grey-brown, flecked with gold, paler on the belly, with tufts of longer hair on the ear-tips and dark stripes running back from the eyes. Its feet are broad, with hooked claws, and it can climb head-first down a trunk.

It moves along a bough like water along a gutter, quick and sure, and leaps between limbs a Human would need a ladder for. It mews, chirps at birds, and growls when cornered. It smells faintly of resin.

## Habitat and Range

Bough-cats live in the trained canopy and the old trees around it, throughout the Crownboughs, in the galleries, boughways, and suspended garden-walks the houses keep. They do not come down to the cleared understorey if they can help it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A bough-cat hunts mice, dormice, roosting birds, and fledglings, and eats fruit from the canopy gardens. It is solitary, curious, and unafraid of the houses, and will sit on a terrace rail and watch a gathering, but it does not like to be touched. It keeps to ground that carries it well: a limb that has begun to give, a walk that flexes wrongly, it leaves.

## Life Cycle

A female bears two or three kittens in a hollow in a trained bough in spring. They follow her through the canopy within weeks. Bough-cats live about ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

They keep the halls clear of vermin, which the houses value, and take the gardens' fruit and the songbirds' fledglings, which garden-tenders resent. They are harmless to people. Their use the houses value most is the warning: a bough-cat that will not cross a walk it used to cross is reason to look at the walk.

## Lore and Belief

A house whose bough-cats leave a hall reads it as a sign that a boughway is beginning to sag, long before it shows to the eye, and sends tenders up at once; it is usually right. Courtiers, who care little for the beasts, still count it an ill omen if the cats leave a hall during a presentation. Children of the houses are told that a bough-cat remembers every hand that was ever unkind to it.

Fruit-thieves in the canopy are called bough-cats too, and the houses say both kinds are hunted the same way: patiently, from above.



# Brown Bears

**Brown bears** are the largest beasts of the old forest. They sleep out the winter in the root-fed hollows that open under the Elderweald's leaf-litter, and when the wet season fills those hollows they come out early, hungry, and in a temper. Wood Elves share their ground with them and will not dig one out; Humans at the forest edge fear them more than wolves.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Old forest and its root-fed hollows |
| **Range** | The Elderweald and the understorey of the Crownboughs |
| **Known to** | Elves and Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, when roused in spring or with cubs |

## Appearance

A grown bear on all fours stands as high as a Human's chest, and reared up on its hind legs it is taller than any Human. It is massive through the shoulders, with a hump of muscle above them, a broad dished face, small round ears, and small dark eyes. The coat is shaggy and brown, from honey-gold to nearly black, often frosted paler at the tips. The front claws are as long as fingers and pale as horn.

It walks with a rolling, flat-footed gait and can run faster than a horse over a short distance. It huffs, clacks its teeth, and grunts; a roused bear roars. Its scent is heavy, rank, and musky, and a den smells of it for years.

## Habitat and Range

Bears live in the deep, uncut forest of the Elderweald, where the hollows under the root-mat give them dens, and in smaller numbers in the planted understorey of the Crownboughs, which High Elf

houses keep clear of them as best they can. Each bear holds a wide range alone, and they are never many.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A bear eats nearly anything: roots, fungus, nuts and berries, grubs from rotten wood, honey, fish from the forest streams, carrion, and the odd deer calf. It spends the autumn eating and the winter asleep in a hollow, waking now and then. It avoids people and gives way if it hears them first. The danger is surprise: a bear met suddenly at close range, a sow with cubs, or a bear flooded out of its hollow in spring before the forest has food for it, which will stand its ground and charge.

## Life Cycle

Bears mate in early summer, and the sow gives birth in the winter den to one to three tiny cubs, which come out with her in spring and stay with her for two or three years. A bear may live twenty or thirty years.

## Uses and Dangers

Bears give little that the forest peoples take: the Wood Elves do not hunt them as game, and a bearskin at the forest edge is a Human lord's boast. Their cost is the occasional death of a gatherer who walked into one, the raided store-hollow, and the hives torn open in autumn.

## Lore and Belief

Groves say a bear in its hollow is sleeping in the ground's keeping, and to dig one out of grove ground is to break into someone's house; a grove whose hollows flood will move its own people before it moves the bear. Some Wood Elves say the bears remember the forest before any grove was grown. Edge villages hold that a bear that comes out before the thaw is a sign of a hard spring.

Edge villages remember the bear-years by name, and the song of the woodward who held a hollow-mouth with a boar-spear while a gathering party ran is sung at every winter fire on the Elder-weald's edge. A lord's bear-hunt into the forest is something the groves do not forgive.



# Cats

**Cats** are the granary's guard. Every threshing floor in the Basins has its cats, every ship's hold and store-room wants one, and a household without a cat counts its grain twice. They live with people without quite belonging to them, and the feral cats of the ruins, the culverts, and the empty farms are the same animal gone back to keeping itself.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Houses, granaries, and ruins |
| **Range** | Widespread |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A cat is about the length of a forearm and hand, with a tail nearly as long, lithe and light, with a round head, pricked ears, long whiskers, and eyes that narrow to slits in daylight and shine green or gold in lamplight. Coats come in tabby stripes of grey or brown, ginger, black, white, and patches of all of these; the granary cats of the Basins are mostly striped grey-brown.

A cat walks silently on its toes, sits with its tail wrapped round its feet, and pounces from stillness. It mews to its people, purrs when content, and yowls and screams at night in the mating season. A tom marks his ground with a sharp stink.

## Habitat and Range

Cats live wherever people store food: granaries, threshing barns, mills, cellars, ships, inns, and houses, from the villages of the Confluence Basins to the quays of the Lower Serath and the fold

houses of the far side. Feral cats live in ruins, such as those of the Broken Marches, and around any settlement's edges.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A cat hunts mice, rats, small birds, and anything else small that moves, mostly at dusk and by night, and brings its catch home as often as it eats it. It is solitary, self-willed, and clean, attached to a place more than to a person, and affectionate on its own terms. It cannot be trained as a dog can and does not try to be.

## Life Cycle

A queen bears two litters a year, three to six kittens each, in a hidden corner of a barn or loft. Kittens hunt by three months. A house cat may live fifteen years; a feral one far fewer.

## Uses and Dangers

Cats keep down rats and mice in stores, which is why every granary keeper feeds them a little, never enough to stop them hunting; barn owls do the work as well, and the two are rivals. They are harmless, though they kill songbirds and a cat in the dovecote is a disaster.

## Lore and Belief

A cat that will not enter a house is held to have seen something there. Sailors on the far-side coasts take a cat aboard for luck. Basin tales give cats to witches as companions, and scholars note that a familiar in cat's shape is a spirit-construct and no cat at all, which basin villagers do not find reassuring.

Granary-keepers say a good cat is worth a guard, and thieves say the same of a bad one.



# Cattle

**Cattle** are the milk and beef beasts of the Human farmlands of the Cradle web. Basin villages graze them on the common wet meadows, and Headwater households drive them up to the summer slopes beside their sheep. They are wealth that walks: a household counts its worth partly in cows, and the livestock the Basins sell outward is mostly cattle. The castrated and yoked beasts that pull the plough are reckoned apart as oxen.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Pasture and farmland |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans, and the Dwarves who buy their meat |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though a bull or a cow with a new calf is given room |

## Appearance

A basin cow stands about as high at the shoulder as a grown Human's chest, deep-bodied and short in the leg, with a broad wet muzzle and short horns curving forward. Most are red-brown or dun, often splashed with white on the face and belly; black beasts are prized in some valleys and thought unlucky in others. The Headwater cattle are smaller, rougher-coated, and longer in the horn, built for climbing terraced slopes rather than standing in meadow grass.

Cattle move slowly and in a loose file, heads down. They low to one another across a pasture, bellow when a calf is taken from them, and grind their cud with a steady sideways chew. A byre smells of dung, warm hide, and sour milk, and the smell clings to the herders who sleep beside it in winter.

## Habitat and Range

Cattle are kept wherever Humans farm good grass. In the Confluence Basins they graze the flood-fed meadows held in common by each village, and are brought up onto the rises when the spring water comes. In the Headwater Marches a valley household keeps a few head, grazes them on the summer slopes, and brings them down to the byre before the snow shuts the roads. There are no wild herds in the Cradle web.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Cattle are placid, herd-minded, and slow to alarm. A herd follows the oldest cow it trusts and will stand in a ring with horns outward if something circles it. A bull is another matter: kept apart from the herd most of the year, he is watched, ringed through the nose, and never turned out on a common meadow without a herder near. A cow with a new calf will charge a dog or a stranger.

## Life Cycle

A cow calves once a year in spring and gives milk through the summer. Calves are weaned in autumn, and the beasts that will not be wintered are slaughtered then, so autumn is the season of salting. A cow lives perhaps fifteen years if she is kept that long; most are not.

## Uses and Dangers

Cattle give milk, butter, and cheese, beef fresh in autumn and salted through the year, hide for leather, horn for cups and lanterns, tallow for candles, and dung for the fields. Salt meat goes up the Headwater roads to the Dwarven holds of the Ironspine, who grow too little of their own. As with all beasts, husbandry and beast-derived medicine draw on the animal's own living pattern and work for real (see Biological Affinity).

The cost is in grass and in loss. A wet year rots the hooves, a bad winter takes the weakest, and a cattle sickness can empty a village's meadow in a season.

## Lore and Belief

Basin farmers say a cow that lows at night has seen a death on the road. Many villages bless the herds at the turning of the year and walk them past the shrine before they go out to the meadow, and a household that loses its milk cow is held to have lost more than a beast.

Cattle are what raiders come for: a border feud is reckoned in herds driven off and driven back, and the songs of the march country are full of night raids, burned byres, and the herdsman who followed his stolen cows across three valleys and came back with them and a raider's sword.



# Cistern Newts

**Cistern newts** live in the cisterns and spring heads of the Leeward Folds, and every fold's cistern hall keeps some. They are a living gauge of the water: as long as the newts are in the cistern, the water is good, and when they climb out or die, it has gone wrong. No fold draws for its terraces or its households from a cistern its newts have left until the water has been looked at.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Cisterns and spring heads |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Halflings |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A cistern newt is a little longer than a finger, slim and soft-skinned, with a flat head, small dark eyes, four short legs, and a long flattened tail for swimming. It is glossy black, splashed and spotted with bright yellow-gold across the back and head, and its belly is orange. In spring the males grow a low wavy crest along the back and tail. In the water it swims with slow sweeps of the tail and hangs still among stones; on land it walks slowly and stiffly. It is silent. Handled, its skin gives off a bitter, milky film.

## Habitat and Range

They live in cool, clean still water: the rock-cut and clay-walled cisterns at the fold heads, spring pools, and the stone channels that carry runoff into them. They hide by day under stones and in the cracks of a cistern's lining and come out to feed at dusk. They are found throughout the inner folds and are fewest in the Dry Folds, whose cisterns stand cracked and empty.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Newts feed on water insects, worms, snails, and the eggs and larvae of gnats and flies. They are slow, unhurried, and harmless, and they do not flee from people. When the water fouls, grows too warm, or goes short of air, they climb out onto the stones of the lining or the court and try to walk away, and if they cannot leave, they die.

## Life Cycle

In spring the newts court in the water and the females lay their eggs one by one, folding each into a leaf or a strand of weed. The larvae have feathery gills and live in the water all summer before losing them and climbing out. Newts live a long time, fifteen years or more, and a fold may know some of its cistern's newts for most of a Halfling's life.

## Uses and Dangers

They eat the larvae of the gnats and flies that would breed in the cistern, and they tell the fold its water is good. A cistern circle that finds newts on the court stones in the morning stops the release to the terraces, empties the cistern if it must, and looks for the dead thing, the fouled channel, or the crack. Their skin is mildly poisonous and bitter: it will sicken a dog that eats one and burn a child's mouth, which is why no beast eats them and they can live in the open water of a court.

## Lore and Belief

Each cistern hall keeps a count of its newts as it keeps the count of its water, and the count is read out at the autumn reckoning with the rest. A fold that loses its newts is said to have lost its watchers. When a new cistern is cut, newts are carried to it from the oldest cistern in the fold, and Halflings say the water does not belong to the fold until they breed there. The Dryfold Halflings, the old tale goes, stopped counting their newts first.



# Congers

**Congers** are the great sea eels of the far-side coast. They live in the gaps of breakwaters, in the drowned harbour works of earlier Gnome lines, and in wrecks, and they come out at night to hunt. A conger is far bigger and stronger than the river eels of the cradle, and every breakwater crew on the Tidelace has a conger story, most of them about hands.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Breakwaters, rocky ground, and wrecks |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts and the Soundchain Roads |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary: the bite takes fingers |

## Appearance

A grown conger is as long as a man and as thick as his thigh, and the oldest are longer: a heavy, scaleless, round body tapering to a flattened tail, with a continuous fin along the back and belly. It is grey to near-black above and pale grey below, and its skin is smooth and slimy. The head is broad and blunt, the jaws large and lined with close-set teeth, the eyes big, round, and dark. It moves with a slow, powerful wave of the whole body. Taken out of the water it thrashes, barks, and bites, and keeps biting long after a fisher thinks it dead.

## Habitat and Range

They live along rocky coasts wherever there are holes to hide in: the gaps between breakwater blocks, the old drowned breakwaters and towers off the inlets, the rock ground off the headlands, and wrecks of every age along the Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads. A large conger keeps the same hole for years, and divers and breakwater crews come to know where each big one lives.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A conger hides by day with only its head showing and feeds at night on fish, crabs, squid, and octopus. It does not hunt people, but it bites anything put into its hole, and a hand reaching into a breakwater gap for a dropped tool, a lobster, or a fouled line may come back short of fingers. Once it has a grip it twists, like any eel.

## Life Cycle

Congers grow for many years in their holes and then, when they are old, leave the coast for the open sea in autumn and do not come back. No one on the coast has seen them spawn, and the small congers that appear in the rock pools come from somewhere out past the beacons.

## Uses and Dangers

Congers are food: firm, white, and rich, caught on long baited lines set off the breakwaters overnight, and eaten fresh in steaks, in stews, or salted and dried. A big one feeds a household for days. Their danger is the bite. Breakwater crews setting blocks by hand, gatherers working the stones at low tide, and anyone diving for a lost anchor learn to look before they reach.

## Lore and Belief

Breakwater crews say that every breakwater has its conger, that it grows as old as the wall, and that a wall whose conger leaves will fall in the next storm. A crew that catches a very large one sometimes lets it go for that reason. Human hamlets say congers eat the drowned, and a hamlet that has lost a boat will not eat conger that season.

Wreck-divers fear them more than the dark: every breakwater has its one-handed diver who reached into a wreck's strongroom for a chest of silver.



# Crag Eagles

**Crag eagles** are the great eagles of high country on both sides of Caeldon: the cliffs of the Ironspine and the Stormcrown, and on the far side the open shelves of the High Scars. They take whistlers, hares, and young goats, and on the high pastures lambs and kids. Orc escorts and Dwarven wardens, who will never meet, both count a feather from one as the mark of a high road walked.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Cliffs and open shelves |
| **Range** | The Ironspine, the Stormcrown, the Headwater Marches, and the High Scars |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Humans, and Orcs |
| **Danger** | Wary, to lambs, kids, and small children |

## Appearance

A crag eagle is the largest bird most people ever see: as long as a Human's arm from beak to tail, with wings that spread wider than a tall Human is high. It is dark brown, with a golden-buff nape and crown that shine in sunlight, feathered legs, yellow feet with black talons as long as fingers, and a heavy hooked beak. Young birds show white patches on the wings and tail.

It soars for hours on flat, slightly raised wings, circling on the updraughts of a cliff, and drops on prey in a long, steep, half-closed stoop. It is mostly silent; at the nest it yelps.

## Habitat and Range

Crag eagles nest on cliff ledges and hunt over open slopes and shelves: in the Ironspine, the Stormcrown, and the heights of the Headwater Marches. On the far side they hunt across the High Scars. A pair holds a range of many days' walk.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A crag eagle hunts whistlers, rock-dwelling creatures, hares, grouse, and the young of goats and deer, and eats carrion in winter. It sometimes takes a lamb or a kid from a high pasture, and herders say it has taken small children, which has happened, though seldom. Pairs mate for life and keep to their range. They avoid people.

## Life Cycle

A pair builds a huge nest of sticks on a ledge, added to each year, and raises one or two young; often only one survives. Young eagles wander for years before settling. A crag eagle may live thirty years.

## Uses and Dangers

Their feathers fletch arrows and dress the caps of those who have earned them. Their cost is the odd lamb or kid. Herders on the high pastures keep the youngest children close when an eagle is circling.

## Lore and Belief

Among the Orc kindreds of the High Scars, a feather from a crag eagle is worn by escorts who have walked the highest passes, and finding one on the trail is a good sign for the crossing. Ironspine Dwarves give one to a warden who has walked a hold's whole stretch of high road. Neither knows the other does it. Headwater Humans say an eagle circling over a house marks a child for greatness or for loss.

Shepherds remember the eagle-years when lambs went every week, and every village claims as its own the child carried off a Headwater ledge and found alive in the nest.



# Crag Goats

**Crag goats** are the wild goats of the mountain belt. They live on cliffs and scree where nothing else can stand, and come down to the high pastures to graze. Gatehold Dwarves hunt them for meat and horn. They are harmless in themselves, but a herd crossing a slope above a road cut sets stones moving, and a goat-start is the commonest rockfall in the mountains that nobody saw begin.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Cliffs, scree, and high pasture |
| **Range** | The Ironspine, the Stormcrown, and the gorges of the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Humans, and Giants |
| **Danger** | Harmless; the stones they start are not |

## Appearance

A crag goat is the size of a large farm goat, stocky and short-legged, with a deep chest and hooves that are hard at the rim and soft and grippy in the middle. Males carry great ridged horns that sweep back in a curve as long as a Human's arm; females have short, slender ones. The coat is grey-brown in summer, thick and darker in winter, with a dark stripe down the back and dark legs. Old males grow a beard.

They move up a cliff face in bounds from ledge to ledge that look impossible. A herd's alarm is a sharp whistling snort. In the autumn rut the males crash their horns together with a crack that echoes from cliff to cliff, and a herd's ground smells strongly of goat.

## Habitat and Range

Crag goats live on the cliffs, scree, and high pastures of the Ironspine and the Stormcrown, and in the steep gorges of the Headwater Marches. They come lower in winter and climb higher in summer as the snow goes.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They graze grass, herbs, and lichen and browse shrubs. Females and young live in herds; males go in small bachelor groups and join the herds for the rut. They are wary, keen-sighted, and quick to climb out of reach. They do not attack people.

## Life Cycle

Kids are born in late spring, one or two, and can climb within hours. Crag goats live about fifteen years. Stone cats, eagles, and gluttons take the young and the old.

## Uses and Dangers

They give meat, hides, horn for cups, bows, and handles, and fine winter underwool. Gatehold hunters stalk them on the cliffs above the gates. The danger is the stones: a herd on a slope sets rock moving, and on a road cut below in the Headwater Marches or on the gate roads that means a rockfall on whoever is passing. Carters look up when they hear goats.

## Lore and Belief

Dwarves say the crag goats know which ledges will hold, and a hunter who follows a goat’s path will not fall; hunters who have tried it say only the goat will not. Headwater carters call a rockfall nobody saw begin "a goat’s toll". Giants are said, in Kindred tales, to herd crag goats on the storm shelves, which no one has seen.



# Crows and Ravens

**Crows and ravens** are the black scavengers of the open world: they follow ploughs, rob gardens, and come down wherever something has died. Because they gather where death gathers, and sometimes before it, they are the birds of omen. Augurs, necromancers, and commanders read them, and ordinary people watch them with a wariness that is not quite superstition.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open country, field edges, battlefields, and mountain passes |
| **Range** | Across the Cradle web and the borderlands, wherever there is carrion |
| **Known to** | All the peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless to the living, though ill-omened to soldiers and travellers |

## Appearance

A crow is the length of a forearm, glossy black from beak to claw, with a heavy straight bill and a square tail; in sunlight its feathers show a sheen of blue and purple. A raven is the bigger bird, nearly twice the crow's weight, with a shaggy throat, a deeper, arched bill, and a wedge-shaped tail that shows in flight. Crows rise in loose, quarrelling flocks; ravens come in pairs or small companies and soar on stiff wings over ridges like hawks.

Crows caw, harsh and repeated. A raven's voice is a deep, hollow croak, and it has many others: clicks, knocks, and a bell-like call heard in the passes. A carrion roost smells of what it eats.

## Habitat and Range

Crows live in farmland, along roads, at the edges of woods, and in towns, nesting in tall trees and on towers. Ravens keep to higher and emptier ground: crags, mountain passes, and border coun-

try, where a pair holds a wide range for years. Both gather in numbers over battlefields, plague country, and any landscape heavy with carrion.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Both birds are clever, bold, and patient. They eat almost anything, grain and grubs as readily as the dead, and wait on the edge of a fight or a slaughter for it to finish. Crows mob owls and hawks and remember a face that has wronged them. Ravens play, cache food, and follow hunters and armies on the march for what they leave.

Their most remarked habit is to gather early. A flock settles on a field or a pass before the blood is spilled there, as if called, and turns all at once when death strikes nearby.

## Abilities

Scavengers are drawn not only by smell and sight but by trace-attraction, the pull that death and its residue in the Whispering Trace put on the living, so their gathering and flight answer to pressure an ordinary eye cannot see. That is what Crow Reckoning reads to learn which pass will see blood by sunset, and what Carrion Warning binds into a web, so that a camp knows its pickets are struck when the crows turn at once. Crow Reckoning overreads plague country and old battlefields, where the birds gather for every reason at once.

## Life Cycle

Crows and ravens pair for life and come back to the same nest each spring, a bowl of sticks lined with wool and hair. Three to six young fledge in early summer and stay near their parents for a season. A raven may live twenty years; a crow rather less.

## Uses and Dangers

The birds give little to eat and are eaten only in hunger. Farmers net and stone them off the seed, hang dead crows on poles to warn the rest, and pay boys to scare them. Their worth is in what they tell: soldiers on the border watch them, and a ranger who knows Beast Speech can ask crows who crossed the ridge, though they answer only in simple meaning.

## Lore and Belief

Most peoples hold that crows know death before it comes, and a flock settling on a roof is bad news for the house. Ravens are thought wiser and older, birds that remember. Soldiers call a gathering of crows over a camp "the tally". In Omen Thread a caster may bind ravens gathering at dawn to a chosen warning, so that for one commander they mean the eastern road has failed; the meaning is the caster’s binding, not the birds'.

The belief is half right. The birds do not foresee; they are pulled towards where death is gathering, which is why the augurs can read them and why they are wrong wherever death has gathered too long already.

Sellsword companies say the ravens follow the war, not the other way round, and some captains will not march on a day the crows go ahead of them.



# Deathwatch Beetles

**Deathwatch beetles** live in old, damp hardwood and eat it from inside for years before anyone sees the damage. They are known by sound. In spring the grown beetles knock their heads against the wood of their tunnels to call a mate, and in a quiet house at night the ticking sounds like a slow clock. Basin folk take it for a death coming. On the Greyspan at Greyford it means the braces.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Old timber: roof beams, bridge braces, quay timbers |
| **Range** | The Greyford Reach (the Greyspan), the quays of the Lower Serath, and the old towns of the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Wary, to timber |

## Appearance

The beetle is the size of a little fingernail, dull chocolate-brown and mottled with patches of short yellowish hair, so that it looks dusty even when clean. Its head is tucked under a hooded shield, and when touched it pulls in its legs and plays dead. The grub is a fat, curled, cream-white thing with a brown mouth. Their sign is round exit holes the width of a pea in the face of a beam, and fine pale dust, like coarse flour, that sifts out of them and gathers in little cones below.

## Habitat and Range

They want old oak and other hard timber that has stayed damp and begun to soften with rot: roof beams over a leaking gutter, the underside of quays, church and hall timbers, and the bridge braces and planking of the Greyspan, which stand

over water and are never dry. They are common in the old towns of the Confluence Basins and along the quays of the Lower Serath. New, dry timber is safe from them for a long while.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The grubs bore slowly, for years, in the soft heart of a timber, leaving the outer skin whole, so a beam can look sound and be hollow. The grown beetles hardly fly. They emerge in spring, tick for their mates, and lay eggs in cracks and old holes of the same timber, so a building's infestation is its own and passes down the generations of the beetle as the house does of its people.

## Life Cycle

A grub lives in the wood for several years, longer in dry timber than in wet, then makes a chamber near the surface, turns to a beetle, and waits through the winter before cutting its way out in spring. A grown beetle lives a few weeks.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their harm is hollowed timber: a roof that comes down in a snow year, a quay that gives under a cart, a bridge brace that looks whole and is not. Greyford's Tollwardens tap the Greyspan braces with a mallet and listen, and a brace that rings dull is marked. Carpenters cut out the worst wood and burn it, and keep new timber dry. Goblins of Lowbank, who know the span's underside better than its Highbank keepers, count the exit holes in spring and say aloud which braces are going, which is one more thing the two banks quarrel about.

## Lore and Belief

In the Basins, ticking in the beams of a sickroom is a death-omen, and the family sits up with the sick. Some say the sound counts the days left. On the Greyspan the saying runs the other way: when the bridge ticks, it is the bridge that is dying. Neither belief harms anyone; the second is true.



# Deep-Witnesses

The **deep-witnesses** are the great whale-like beings of Thaluren ocean memory, said to live in the open water past the farthest runs. The Thaluren speak of them as an ocean people rather than as beasts, hold them sacred, and honour them without praying to them. Almost all that is known of them is memory: an Outer-Route run that glimpses one at a distance tells of it for generations, and no other people has a tale of them at all.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open ocean beyond the outermost current roads |
| **Range** | The Unrun Sea, seaward of the Tidebound Reaches |
| **Known to** | Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Wary: no one is known to have met one closely |

## Appearance

The memory gives a shape seen from far off and never close. A deep-witness is long beyond any craft or settlement the Thaluren know, a dark, slow back rising out of grey water and sinking again for what seems the length of a tide. Tellers speak of a blunt, heavy head, a pale and much-scarred underside, and a flank marked like old stone with the growth of years. It moves without hurry and without wake, as if the sea carried it rather than the reverse.

Its voice is the part most remembered. Runs speak of a low sound felt through the water before it is heard, so deep that it seems to come from the sea floor, and of a long silence after it in which the whole run holds still.

## Habitat and Range

Thaluren memory places the deep-witnesses in the Unrun Sea, beyond the **Far Set** and the outer routes of the Tidebound Reaches. They are not seen in the shoal worlds or the Kelpshade, and

never in the estuaries. How many there are, how deep they go, and whether they keep to one water nobody can say: the glimpses are few, years apart, and each was seen by too few to be sworn to.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Every glimpse in memory is the same in one respect: the deep-witness takes no notice. It does not come towards a run, does not flee it, and does not follow. The Thaluren read this as a kind of attention too large to turn aside, the patience of something that has watched the sea longer than any run-line has been counted. Whether it has a mind, a speech, or a purpose of its own is the heart of the question the Thaluren leave open.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known. Thaluren memory holds that a deep-witness never stops growing, so that the largest are the oldest, and no tale tells of a young one or of one dead. Some Outer-Route tellers say that when one dies it sinks so far that nothing of it ever rises.

## Uses and Dangers

The deep-witnesses give the peoples nothing that can be taken, and no Thaluren would try. No harm by one is remembered. The danger lies in looking for them: the runs that pressed past the known roads came back late, scattered, or not at all, and the Thaluren count the deep-witnesses among the reasons few of them go to look.

## Lore and Belief

Devotion in The Way of Return centres on the return-waters and on rightful spawning, and also on the deep-witnesses. They are honoured as witnesses of the deep in a faith that refuses to pray to anything, and the honour asks nothing of them. Thaluren read the larger sea through a pairing: the witnesses on one side, the devourers that break routes on the other.

A glimpse is told, not recorded. The telling passes down the run-line that saw it and is repeated at gatherings as part of the line's pride, though by Thaluren custom a tale no second run can swear to counts for nothing. Some Outer-Route lines hold that a run the deep-witnesses have seen was never truly alone; the Concord's elders will not hear it.

Whether the deep-witnesses are a people, a beast, or something the sea alone could make is not settled, and the Thaluren do not press it. What they actually are, and whether anyone has met one closely and lived, is among the things left open about the Unrun Sea.



# Deer

**Deer** are the great game of the Cradle web's woods. Elves hunt them in the old forests under the answerability of their groves, Human lords keep the right to hunt them in their own woods, and poachers take them anyway. A stag is the beast a hunter boasts of and a decoy-maker imitates.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Woods, woodland edges, and brush |
| **Range** | The Elderweald, the Briarreach, the Headwater foothill woods, and the brush of the march country |
| **Known to** | Elves and Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless, except a stag in the rut |

## Appearance

A stag stands as tall at the shoulder as a grown Human's chest and carries branching antlers as wide again, shed in late winter and grown anew by autumn in velvet that he rubs off on the saplings. A hind is smaller and bare-headed. Both are red-brown in summer, greyer and thicker-coated in winter, with a pale rump patch that flashes when they run. Calves are dappled with white spots for their first months.

Deer move in stillness and bursts: long minutes of grazing with ears turning, then a bound and gone. Hinds bark a short alarm. In the autumn rut the stags roar, a deep groaning bellow that carries a long way through the woods at dusk, and the woods smell of their musk.

## Habitat and Range

Deer live in woods with open glades, on woodland edges, and in brush. They are most at home in the Elderweald and in the broken woodland of the

Briarreach, and are common in the foothill woods of the Headwater Marches and the brush between the farmlands. Where farming is dense they come out only at night, to raid fields at the wood’s edge.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Hinds and their young keep together in small herds led by an old hind; stags live apart in bachelor groups and join the herds only for the rut. Deer graze grass and browse leaf, bark, acorns, and young crops. They are wary, keen of nose and ear, and flee first. A stag in the rut is the exception: he will fight other stags to the point of locked antlers and death, and he will turn on a hunter who comes too close.

## Life Cycle

Calves are born in early summer, one to a hind, and hidden in the bracken while she grazes nearby. They follow the herd by autumn. A stag grows his largest antlers in his prime, perhaps eight to twelve years old, and few live much past fifteen.

## Uses and Dangers

Deer give venison, hide for soft leather, antler for knife handles, combs, and tools, and sinew for bowstrings. In the Elderweald hunting is real but answerable, and a grove that over-hunts its ground hears about it from the next; in the Briarreach hunting is one of the circles' ordinary works. In Human country the deer of a lord’s woods are his, and taking them is poaching, which is why poachers learn Hunter’s Decoy to send a phantom stag crashing through the brush while they slip away the other side. Skilled trackers notice the missing scent and weight.

The cost falls on farmers whose fields border the woods, and who may not kill the deer that eat them.

## Lore and Belief

A white stag is held by many Humans to be an omen, of a lord’s death or of a road that should not be taken, depending on who tells it. Elves of the old groves say a deer killed without need leaves a debt in the ground it fell on.

Deer are the lords' beasts in the Human lands: poachers who take one hang if they are caught, and outlaws of the forest edge live on venison and on the songs about them.



# Devourers

The **devourers** are the squid-like beings of Thaluren ocean memory that break the routes. The same memory that keeps the sacred deep-witnesses places them in the open water past the farthest runs and speaks of them, too, as an ocean people. Where the deep-witnesses are honoured, the devourers are feared, and the fear is practical: a current road where a devourer has been sensed is not trusted until a later run has come through it whole.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open ocean beyond the outermost current roads |
| **Range** | The Unrun Sea, seaward of the Tidebound Reaches |
| **Known to** | Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, by Thaluren memory, to runs and to the current roads they travel |

## Appearance

Few in memory claim to have seen one, and those who did saw parts. The tellings agree on arms: many and long, pale as drowned rope in some accounts and dark as deep water in others, moving apart and together in the grey with no body ever quite in view. Some speak of a great eye, flat and unblinking, turned on a run from below. None gives the whole shape, and the Thaluren take that as part of what a devourer is.

Mostly a devourer is known by what it does to the water. The tellings speak of a road that goes cold from beneath, a current that slackens or turns where it has always run true, shoals that scatter from water they never leave, and a silence in which nothing calls.

## Habitat and Range

Thaluren memory places the devourers in the Unrun Sea, past the outer routes of the Tidebound Reaches. The outermost current roads are where

they are sensed, and the Outer-Route runs, which come in last and least predictably from the far edge of the known sea, carry most of the tales. No devourer is remembered in the shoal worlds, the Kelpshade, or the estuaries.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A devourer, as memory tells it, does not hunt a run so much as unmake its way. It breaks a current road, and the run on that road is scattered across open water, arrives late at the mouth, or does not arrive. Whether it means to, whether it feeds on what it scatters, or whether the breaking is only what its passage does to the sea, the tellings do not agree. Its temper is nowhere described as rage; the fear is of something patient and indifferent below the road.

## Uses and Dangers

The devourers give nothing. Their cost is the road. A run that does not come home is not a run, and a road that cannot be trusted is closed in practice until a later run has come through whole, whatever anyone swears. A lost Outer-Route run is often laid to a devourer in memory, though storms off the same water also break current roads and scatter runs, and the Thaluren seldom say which it was.

## Lore and Belief

The Thaluren read the larger sea through the pairing of witness and devourer: what watches the deep and leaves the roads alone, and what breaks them. The pairing shapes how they think of the water beyond the last run, and why few of them go to look.

A sensing is told along the run-line that met it and passed to other lines before the next season, so that runs bound for the same road hear of it in time. By Thaluren custom such an account counts for nothing, yet no line will ignore it: the road is distrusted all the same. Some say a devourer can be outwaited, others that it returns to a road it has broken, and both are told as if they were known.

Whether the devourers are a people, a beast, or a name for what the open sea does to those who press into it is not settled. What they actually are, and whether anyone has met one closely and lived, is among the things left open about the Unrun Sea.



# Dew Beetles

**Dew beetles** live in the cracks of the glassed ground and the stony flats of the Glassbelt Interior. In the cold hour before sunrise, when a thin mist forms over the pans and the fused stone, they climb out, stand on their heads into the air, and drink the dew that gathers on their backs. They are the salt foxes' main food and a crosser's sign of where dew forms.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Cracks of glassed ground and stony desert |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A dew beetle is the size of a thumbnail, round and domed, with long thin legs. Its back is black with a sheen like oil on water, green, violet, and gold in the low sun, and ridged with rows of tiny bumps. In the dawn they stand in rows on the crests of stones and glassy ridges, back legs raised high and heads low, and a field of them catches the first light like scattered beads. They make no sound and smell faintly of vinegar when handled.

## Habitat and Range

They live only in the true desert, in the cracks of glassed ground, the edges of furnace scars, and the stony flats and old shorelines of the pans, where the night is cold enough for dew. They are commonest where the mist forms most often: low ground near the old sea floor and the fused surfaces that cool fastest at night.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They spend the day deep in cracks and under stones, out of the heat, and eat what the wind brings: seeds, dead insects, scraps of plant. They come out only at night and at dawn. They are harmless and indifferent to people, and do not bite.

## Abilities

A dew beetle drinks from the air. The bumps on its back catch the mist, the droplets swell and run together, and the water runs down the grooves of its back to its mouth. A beetle can drink its fill on a morning when a person would find no water anywhere.

## Life Cycle

Females lay their eggs in the sand at the base of cracks, and the larvae live underground for most of a year before emerging as beetles. A beetle lives a year or two.

## Uses and Dangers

Crossers read them. Where dew beetles gather at dawn, dew forms, and a cloth spread on the stones there before sunrise can be wrung out for a few mouthfuls, which on the glassed ground can be the difference between living and not. Beetles crushed in the mouth give a little bitter moisture, and the desperate have eaten them. They do no harm.

## Lore and Belief

Salvagers call them **beads of the dead sea**, and say each one drinks a drop of the inland sea that was lost when the salt-people's worship killed it. On the old sea floor some crossers will not crush them, holding that to do so offends the Salt-Witch. The Kindreds treat a field of dew beetles on glassed ground as a sign that the fire in it has gone out; on the deepest furnace scars, where the ground is said to hold its heat, there are none.



# Dogs and Hounds

**Dogs** live wherever people do: they guard yards, turn flocks, clean up scraps, and sleep by the hearth. **Hounds** are the dogs bred and kennelled to follow a scent or run down game, and in the medieval present they hunt people as often as beasts. A fugitive's first fear in the Broken Marches is not the bounty-taker's lamp but the dog beside it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Settlements, farms, kennels, and hunting grounds |
| **Range** | Wherever the peoples keep house, most of all in the Human lands and the Broken Marches |
| **Known to** | All the peoples |
| **Danger** | Wary, above all to fugitives and anyone a hound has been set on |

## Appearance

Most village dogs are mongrels of middle size, knee-high to a Human, short-coated in brown, black, or brindle, with pricked or half-dropped ears and a curled tail. Herd dogs are leaner and quicker, often rough-coated black and white. A scent hound is long-eared and loose-skinned, heavy in the head, with a deep chest and a nose held low; the bloodhound, the heaviest of them, has folds of skin hanging about its face, red-brown or black and tan, and a slow, dogged walk that does not stop. Running hounds are taller and lighter, built like a drawn bow.

Dogs bark, growl, and whine; a hound on a hot line gives tongue, a deep belling bay that tells the hunters behind where it runs. A kennel yard smells of straw, meat, and wet dog.

## Habitat and Range

Dogs are kept by every people that keeps a house or a herd. Hounds belong to lords, wardens, and hunters, in kennel yards beside a hall or a watch-post, and to the bounty-takers who work the Marches for hire. Strays and half-wild packs live on the edges of towns and ruins.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A dog is a pack animal that takes its people for its pack. It is loyal, territorial, quick to learn, and quicker to remember a kick. Herd dogs work to a whistle at long range; guard dogs bark first and bite second. A trained hound, once laid on a scent, will follow it through crowds, water, and night until it loses it or is called off. Strays and pack dogs are bolder and more dangerous than any house dog, and will pull down a lamb or a child.

## Abilities

A good hound’s nose follows a trail days old and picks one person’s scent out of many. That is why concealment magic works on smell as much as sight. Scent Unmake scatters a fugitive’s trace so the hounds find no clean line, though fresh blood and heavy musk still leave some; False Trail Burn spoils the obvious ways behind a runner, but expert bloodhounds may still recover the true line. A scout pressed hard may drop a pursuing hound with Splinter Shard.

## Life Cycle

A bitch whelps a litter of four to ten in spring. Pups are weaned in two months, and hounds begin training in their first year, coupled to an old hound to learn the line. Most dogs live ten to fifteen years; working hounds are spent sooner.

## Uses and Dangers

Dogs guard, herd, hunt, haul small carts in some towns, and turn spits in inn kitchens. Hounds track game and people. In the Broken Marches bounty-takers follow debts and grudges into the tunnels with lamps, fire, and dogs, and the Goblins driven out of revoked ruins have reason to hate the sound of a bay. A dog bite festers, and a sick dog that turns on its people is put down at once.

## Lore and Belief

People say a dog sees what its people cannot, and a dog that will not cross a threshold, or growls at an empty corner, is listened to. Fugitives in the Marches pray to Varn the Shadow-Stalker, who hides the hunted, to lose the hounds behind them. A master of Many-Shaping may run as a hound among hounds, and tales of the dog that came home not quite itself are told in many villages.

These hounds are not the Blood-Hounds of the Scourge, the pack hunters of a Deficit plane, though travellers' tales mix the two.

Bounty-takers in the Broken Marches hunt with hounds, and the hound that tracked an outlaw band through three days of rain to its camp is the hero of more than one alehouse song.



# Doves

**Doves** are kept in dovecotes across the farmed river country of the cradle-web for their young, their eggs, and their dung. Keeping them is a privilege. In most of the Confluence Basins and the towns of the Lower Serath and the Headwater Marches, only a lord, a town, or a house that holds the right may build a dovecote, because the birds feed on everyone's fields, and a commoner who builds one has started a quarrel.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Dovecotes, towers, cliffs, and field edges |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Lower Serath, and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A dove is plump and soft-feathered, about the size of a small hen's head and neck together, with a small head, a short bill, and pink legs. The common dovecote bird is blue-grey, with two dark bars across each wing, a white rump that flashes in flight, and a sheen of green and purple at the neck. Some lines are white, pied, or brown. Doves clatter their wings on take-off and fly fast and straight; at rest they murmur and coo, a soft, rolling sound that fills a dovecote like water in a pipe. A dovecote smells of dust and dung.

## Habitat and Range

Wild doves nest on cliffs and in old towers; kept doves live in dovecotes: round or square stone towers lined inside with hundreds of nesting holes, standing near a manor, a town wall, or a mill. They fly out each day to feed on the fields and stubble within reach and come home at dusk.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Doves feed in flocks on the ground, on spilt and sown grain, weed seed, and green shoots, and a flock on a newly sown field can strip it. They are gentle with people, quick to startle, and faithful to their cote: a dove carried far away will fly home, which some courier houses use.

## Life Cycle

A pair lays two white eggs at a time and may raise five or six broods in a year. Both parents feed the young on a milk of their own crop. The young are taken for the table at about four weeks, just before they fly. A dove may live ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

The young, called squabs, are a summer delicacy on a lord’s table and a gift between houses. The dung, scraped from the cote floor each year, is the richest manure the basins know, worth more by the cartload than any other, and goes on gardens and the best fields. Against that, the cote’s birds feed on the tenants' grain, and complaints against a lord’s doves are among the commonest grumbles in the basins, and among the least often won.

## Lore and Belief

A dovecote is a boast of rank as plain as a wall, and a family the lord lets build one builds it where the road can see it. Doves are birds of peace and of marriage in Human villages, released at weddings and at the swearing of a settlement. Farmers say a dove that will not go home has smelt a death in its cote.



# Dragons

**Dragons** are remembered only as legends. No one has seen one for a very long time, longer than any record reaches, and the common belief is that they never existed: a fireside beast, a word for fierce fire and hard hide. Yet dragons may still exist somewhere, beyond where the peoples go, and may one day come back. Why they are gone, if they ever were here, is not known. The best-kept of the legends are the draconic-shadow stories of the Kobolds, and the dragon also survives as a word in the speech of the schools of magic.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Unknown; legend puts them in hot, deep, and high places |
| **Range** | Unknown; no dragon has been seen for a very long time |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Deadly, if the legends are true; no one living has met one |

## Appearance

The dragon of the stories is large, low, and heavy, scaled in black and the dull red of banked coals, with a hide like slag that cracks along old seams and glows faintly in them. It lies curled in a nest of mineral, crystals and ore heaped round it like a hoard, among vents that breathe heat. Its breath smells of hot stone and sulphur, its voice is the roar of a furnace drawing, and when it moves the ground shifts like settling slag. Tellers give it eyes like the glow seen through a furnace's spy-hole and claws black with soot. Other peoples' tellings vary the colours and the lair, but keep the scale, the heat, and the size.

## Habitat and Range

Where dragons live, if they live, nobody knows. The stories put them always deeper or higher than the teller has been: in the hot places under the cold ones, in the Kobold telling, or past the last ridge and the last run of the sea in others.

The only dragons anyone has seen are in the Muse's Studio, where a thought held with enough focus and feeling takes physical form. A visitor who thinks of a dragon there makes one, and it is a rough draft: a dragon of smoke, flawed and unstable, dissolving as soon as its maker's focus slips. Such a thing is a reflection of the maker's mind, not a dragon that lives, and it proves nothing either way.

## Behaviour and Temperament

In the Kobold stories the dragon is a patron before it is a danger. It keeps its nest and the heat-ways round it, favours those who serve it well, and is terrible to those who fire a furnace against its warning or take from the nest without leave. Some Kobold groups tell it as a guardian; others as a master whose protection could not be refused. Elsewhere the legends make it a hoarder, a burner of fields, or a sleeper best not woken.

## Abilities

The dragon of legend breathes fire, cannot be burned, and knows the moods of heat in rock better than any living keeper. In the schools the word names a measure, not a creature: **dragonfire** is fire past ordinary bearing, as when a champion under Dragonhide takes it on his scaled arms and lives, and the working takes its name from the hide of the stories.

## Uses and Dangers

A legend gives a great deal. The Kobold tellings keep the memory of the vent-houses alive in a form children repeat, and carry the warning the Kobolds have not forgotten about what **protection** can come to mean. Old bone or fused stone found in ash-furnace ruins and lower works is sometimes sold or kept as **dragonbone**, and scholars hold such fragments unchanged under Museum Sleep until they can be studied safely. What any such fragment truly is, no record says.

## Lore and Belief

Most people think dragons a story and nothing more. Those who hold so point to the Kobold tellings, which grew from a real memory: the soot-hardened furnace-masters of the elder Ash-Furnace Civilization, who gave the Kobold vent-houses their place and were half-remembered across a very long span as **scaled patrons** in mineral nests. The tellers who know their own history say the same, and say the stories are myths, not the origin of the Kobolds.

Others are less sure. The dragonbone fragments have never been explained, the legends of peoples who never knew the furnace world have their dragons too, and a few hold that dragons went away rather than never were, and that what went away can come back. Nobody can say where they would have gone, or why, or what would bring them.

In the songs the dragon is always the last and greatest of monsters: the hoard under the mountain, the burned march, the hero who goes alone into the dark with a sword and a borrowed name. Every ruin-delver has heard that some elder hold still keeps a dragon's treasure, and none has found it.



# Draught Moths

**Draught moths** are small pale moths that live in the vent runs of the Deeps and the lower Ironspine, riding the moving air up and down the shafts. While the air moves they fly with it. Where they settle thick on the walls of a run, the draught there has stopped, and the Kobold crews who walk the vents read that as plainly as the Dwarves read a finch.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Vent runs |
| **Range** | The Stonewake Deeps and the roots of the Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Kobolds and Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A draught moth is the size of a fingernail, its wings white to pale grey-buff, dusted with fine powder that comes off on the fingers, its body furred white, its feelers feathery. Its eyes catch lamplight red. In a moving draught a cloud of them drifts along like dust in sunlight; settled, they rest flat against the stone with their wings spread, so that a wall where they have gathered looks frosted.

They make no sound. A run where thousands have gathered and died smells of dry dust.

## Habitat and Range

Draught moths live in the vent runs, air shafts, and service galleries of the Stonewake Deeps and the root workings of the Ironspine, wherever air moves through stone and lamps burn. They do not live in still chambers for long.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed as caterpillars on the mould and fungus that grow in damp vents, and as moths hardly at all. They fly towards lamps and with the draught,

and they settle where the air stops moving. They are harmless and do nothing that people would call behaviour except follow the air.

## Life Cycle

Eggs are laid on the damp walls of the vents, and the pale caterpillars graze the mould there before spinning cocoons in cracks. Moths live a few weeks, and there are always more.

## Uses and Dangers

They give warning. A crew walking a run notes where the moths are flying and where they have settled, and a run frosted with settled moths is a run where the vent has stopped drawing: a silted fall, a stuck trap-door, a pressure gate closed. The crew clears it or marks it. The moths do no harm, though a cloud of them in the face makes a lamp gutter.

## Lore and Belief

Kobold crews say the moths are the vents' breath made visible, and count them among the signs their sound codes and warning marks record. Dwarves of the Deeps call a dead run "a moth wall". Some Kobold underhouses say the moths carry away the last breath of those who die in the vents, and do not kill them.



# Drowning Garden Fauna

The animals of the Drowning Garden live inside a pocket of the Material Plane where the flow of the Surging Deep has been turned on breathing itself: the water sustains, and air-breathers breathe it as easily as air. Fish swim between the kelp branches like birds, shrimp click on the moss, whales sing somewhere below, and anemones crowd the sand. They have stopped fighting the inversion, and under the Garden's quickening they grow, heal, breed, and age far faster than their kin outside.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Warm, clear water of a submerged kelp and coral forest |
| **Range** | The Drowning Garden, wherever it opens in deep lakes, flooded forests, and coastal caves |
| **Known to** | Gill-Folk; herbalists and other visitors to the zone |
| **Danger** | Harmless in itself; the water they live in ages a visitor fast |

## Appearance

### *Fish*

The Garden's fish move through the forest as birds move through trees, perching in the lee of a kelp stem, flocking between the coral branches, darting up through the falling beams of light. Most are small and bright: emerald, turquoise, sandy gold, the Garden's own colours worn as scales. In the deeper water they glow a soft blue-green from within, and a shoal turning in the dark is a cloud of faint lights.

### *Shrimp*

Small, near-clear shrimp swarm over the moss and sand, so many that the clicking of their claws fills the water like crickets in a summer field. Visitors hear them long before they see them.

### *Whales*

The singing of whales carries through the Garden muffled and distant, as if heard through a shell. The whales themselves keep to the deep water and are seldom seen close: long, slow, pale shapes passing beneath the forest. They breathe the water like everything else here and never rise to the surface.

### *Anemones and Sea Flowers*

The floor is dotted with anemones in every colour the water holds, soft as velvet and yielding under a hand, opening and closing with the current. Among them the line between animal and flower is hard to draw, and the Garden does not draw it.

## Habitat and Range

They live only in the Garden, in its warm, clear, nutrient-rich water among towering kelp, coral trees, and flowering water plants. The Garden opens in deep lakes, flooded forests, and coastal caves reached through Depth-Gates, so its creatures are found wherever it is, and nowhere outside it. The deeper the water, the stronger the quickening and the stranger the life.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Nothing in the Garden hurries away. Fish drift close to a visitor and turn aside only at the last moment, and the shrimp go on clicking under a hand laid among them. The current carries everything gently and constantly, and the creatures move with it rather than against it, so that a whole shoal will lean together in the flow like grass in wind.

## Abilities

The Garden's quickening is in every body. Its creatures grow fast, heal fast, and breed fast, and a wound that would kill a fish outside closes in a day. Under the reduced weight of the place everything floats, and even the heaviest creatures move with an ease they could not have elsewhere. Many in the deep water make their own light.

## Life Cycle

Lives here are short and full. A fish hatched in the morning may be grown by the end of a visitor's stay, and old before the visitor is home. Generations turn over so quickly that the Garden's animals change as visitors watch: shoal patterns, colours, and sizes shift from one visit to the next. The deeper they live, the shorter their span.

## Uses and Dangers

The fish are food: the Gill-Folk, the Garden's own people, live on its plants and fish, and harvest both as gardeners rather than hunters. Visitors come mostly for the plants and the healing water, not for the animals. The creatures themselves are harmless. The cost of watching them is the cost of the Garden: every hour spent among them ages the watcher with them, faster the deeper one follows.

## Lore and Belief

The Gill-Folk see the Garden's creatures as part of the gift of the Surging Deep, and tend the shoals as they tend the kelp. Outside, herbalists and travellers bring back tales of fish that fly and whales that never breathe air, and of shoals that are old by evening. People who live near a Depth-Gate know the Garden as a place with known dangers and disputed causes: some call its creatures blessed and some cursed, and the schools argue over why life there runs fast at all.



# Dun Dogs

**Dun dogs** are the wild dogs of the Windscar. They hunt in packs of about a dozen across the shelves of the High Scars and the rims of the Rimward Basins, and they follow the kindreds' herds and escorted parties at a distance for days, waiting for a beast or a person to fall behind. When an escort says a pack is **on the line**, the herd watch is doubled and nobody walks alone.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open shelves, dry ravines, and basin rims |
| **Range** | The High Scars and the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to herds and stragglers |

## Appearance

A dun dog is the height of a herding dog but leaner and longer in the leg, with a deep chest, a narrow waist, and big round ears that turn like cups towards every sound. Its short coat is blotched in patches of dun, tawny, smoke-grey, and dirty white, so that no two dogs are marked alike and a pack lying in scrub disappears into it. The tail is bushy and white-tipped and is carried high when the pack runs. They trot for hours with their heads low, run down prey in a long loping chase, and call to one another with soft hoots and twittering yips that carry a long way across the shelves. Their dens stink of carrion.

## Habitat and Range

Dun dogs range over great stretches of open shelf, thin grass, and dry ravine, following the wild grazers and the driven herds alike. A pack's country is wider than any kindred's grazing round, and the same pack may be met at the Whetgap in spring and on the basin rims in the dry months. They

avoid the strongholds and the busiest camp rings, and do not go far into the deep desert of the Glassbelt, where water fails them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pack hunts together under one breeding pair, mostly at dawn and dusk. It runs down antelope and other prey by endurance rather than speed, coursing it in turns until it tires, and a herd beast that strays or lags is easier still. The dogs are cautious with people and seldom attack a grown, upright adult, but a child, an injured walker, or a straggler on a long shelf is another matter. They test a camp at night, circling and calling, and learn quickly which herd watch is lax.

The pack is close and affectionate within itself. Dun dogs feed their young and their injured by bringing meat back in their bellies, and an old or lamed dog is kept fed by the others.

## Life Cycle

Only the leading pair breeds, and the female bears a large litter, often ten pups or more, in a den in a ravine bank or an old burrow, in the calm months after the windy season. The whole pack feeds and guards them. Young dogs leave in small groups of brothers or sisters to find a new pack. They live six to ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

Dun dogs take kids, lambs, calves, and weak herd beasts, and in a bad year a pack can cost a camp ring more stock than raiders do. The kindreds answer with herd watch, fire, and noise, by keeping their beasts bunched at night, and with the hunt: a pack that has begun taking stock is followed to its den. Escorts count the dogs as one of the reasons a straggler is a party's responsibility, and a captain who leaves a lame walker behind on a line where dogs are running owes the walker's kin a blood-price if the dogs take them.

## Lore and Belief

The kindreds say that dun dogs follow the dying and can smell a failing beast or a sick traveller before anyone in the camp knows. A pack that will not leave a party's line is taken as a sign that someone in it will not reach the next shelter. Their spotted coats are said to be the shadows of the rocks they lie among, and a hunter who wears dun-dog hide is held to walk unseen, which hunters do not try on the shelves twice.

Kindred herders pay well for a pack-leader's pelt, and the tale of the girl who held a fallen herd beast's carcass against a dun-dog pack through a night on the shelves is one the escorts tell new hands.



# Dust Runners

**Dust runners** are the great flightless birds of the open floors of the Rimward Basins and the edge of the Glassbelt. They are taller than any person, faster than a horse over a short run, and dangerous when cornered. Their emptied eggs, as big as a child's head and nearly as hard as pottery, are the water flasks of the far crossings, and every crosser on the Glassbelt carries some.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Basin floors and pans |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins and the Windscar edge of the Glassbelt |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Wary: the kick breaks bone |

## Appearance

A grown dust runner stands taller than a tall man, most of that height a long bare neck and long, thick, bare legs. Its body is a heavy oval of loose, soft feathers: the cocks black with white wing-plumes and tail, the hens and young a dusty grey-brown that disappears against a basin floor. The small flat head has a broad bill and huge, dark, long-lashed eyes. Each foot has two toes, one of them armed with a thick claw like a blunt horn. It runs with long, bounding strides, wings half spread for balance, raising the dust trail that gives it its name. Cocks boom at night in the breeding season, a deep sound like a far-off roar; at other times the birds hiss.

## Habitat and Range

Dust runners live on the flattest, most open ground: basin floors, dust flats, the edges of salt pans, and the stony desert at the Glassbelt's rim, where nothing can come at them unseen. They wander in small flocks between grazing and the

rare waters, and gather in larger numbers on the Long Pan's green fringe after a good flood. They go a long way without drinking.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They eat grass, seed, shoots, insects, and small creatures, swallowing stones to grind them. They are watchful and nervous, run from anything they see coming, and keep company with the wild grazers, which benefit from their height and sharp eyes. A dust runner that cannot run, or a cock guarding a nest, kicks forward and down, and that kick can break a man's leg or open his belly.

## Life Cycle

A cock scrapes a shallow nest in the open ground, and several hens lay in it, sometimes twenty eggs or more, cream-white and glossy. The cock sits by night, the leading hen by day. The chicks run within days and grow to full height in a year. A dust runner lives thirty or forty years.

## Uses and Dangers

The eggs are the great prize. One egg feeds a whole family, and its shell, emptied through a small hole and stoppered with wood and wax, carries water well and does not taint it; strung in a net and wrapped in hide, eggshell flasks are carried by Edgeway Kindred caravans and Orc escorts on the Glassbelt's edge, and some are buried full along the routes as water caches. Feathers are traded as ornament, and the skin of the legs makes a tough leather. Taking eggs from a guarded nest is how most dust-runner injuries happen.

## Lore and Belief

Crossers mark their eggshell flasks with their own signs and pass them down; an old flask scratched with the marks of many owners is a treasure, and to drink from a stranger's without leave is a wrong. Some salvagers hold that water carried in a dust-runner egg cannot go bad. It can, more slowly than in a skin. The kindreds say the dust runner was once a bird that flew, and gave up its wings to the wind in exchange for its legs.

Basin raiders ride down nesting grounds for the eggs, and the crossers who rely on them treat an egg-thief as they would a well-poisoner.



# Eels

**Eels** live in the slow water of the cradle-web's lowland rivers, in the fens and channels of the Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath and the side channels of the braided river at the Greyford Reach. Reedfolk households eat them with fish and waterfowl, and they are an everyday food on the Lowbank side of the Greyford crossing. Goblin households living on timber platforms above the flood line take them, with small fish, from wicker traps set among the piles and bars. On Highbank, where the inns serve trout, eel is poor people's fare and known as Lowbank food.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Slow side channels, fens, gravel bars, and flooded culverts of lowland rivers |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Lower Serath, the Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Goblins, Humans, Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A grown eel is about as long as a forearm and fingertips together, and some old ones as long as a child is tall: a single round muscle tapering to a flattened tail, with a small pointed head, small eyes, and a fringe of fin running the length of its back and belly. Its skin is dark olive above and dirty yellow below, so slick with slime that it slides through a bare hand. Out of water it twists and knots itself and makes no sound. It smells of river mud, and the smell stays on the hands that clean it.

## Habitat and Range

Eels keep to the slower water. In the basins and the Serath that means fen pools, slow channels, and the quiet reaches behind levees; at the Greyford, the side channels between the gravel bars and willow islands, the scour holes below the old

causeway stubs, and the flooded culverts and storework cellars under Lowbank. They lie hidden by day under stone and in the mud and silt, and they are most numerous where the water is quiet and the bottom soft. The main channel under the Greyspan runs too fast for them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An eel feeds at night, nosing along the bottom for worms, small fish, and whatever the river carries down. It shies from light and moves off at a shadow. It will push into any opening that smells of food, which is why the wicker trap works: a narrowing mouth it can find its way into and not out of. A trapped eel fights the wicker for a while and then lies still.

## Life Cycle

Eels grow slowly and live long, an old eel outlasting many floods in the same hole. They do not breed in the channels where they are caught, and none of the trapping families has seen an eel's egg or young: the small eels simply arrive in the side channels each spring with the rising water. Where they come from, and where the big eels go when some autumns they vanish downstream, the families do not know.

## Uses and Dangers

Eel is cheap, fat, and filling, and keeps well when smoked over a platform hearth. A Lowbank household sets its traps at dusk, lifts them at first light on the way to the fords, and eats eel and small fish with porridge from Highbank grain and greens from the island patches. Traps are set where each household always sets them, and moving another family's trap is a quarrel. Eel gives no harm beyond a bite to a careless hand, but the culverts where the best eels lie are the same culverts that flood and trap air, and a trap-setter can drown there.

## Lore and Belief

Lowbank children are told that an eel in the trap at dawn means the night's water was kind. Highbank calls the Fordbank "the eel side," not fondly, and Lowbank answers that an eel never paid a toll. The eel's disappearance downstream in some autumns is taken by some trappers as a sign of a hard winter to come.



# Egg-Takers

**Egg-takers** are the long, ambushing hunter fish of the rivers of the Tidebound Reaches. They live in the pools and weed beds of the lower and middle courses, and in spawning season they gather on the spawning grounds and the nursery gravels to eat eggs and young. The Thaluren name them for what they do, and the Thaluren Sanctuary Custodians and the Kavari nursery custodians take turns driving them off the waters both peoples guard.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Spawning reaches and river pools |
| **Range** | The rivers of the Tidebound Reaches, upriver, including the closed First Nesting Confluence |
| **Known to** | Thaluren, Kavari |
| **Danger** | Wary, to clutches |

## Appearance

An egg-taker is as long as a child is tall, the biggest longer, a long, narrow, muscular fish with its back fin set far back near the tail, so that it looks like an arrow. Its head is long and flat, its jaws broad like a duck's bill and lined with hundreds of backward-pointing teeth. It is olive-green on the back, with rows of pale gold bars and spots along its flanks that break up its outline among the reeds, and a white belly. It hangs motionless in weed or shade, then strikes in a sudden lunge too fast to follow. It smells strongly of river mud.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the slow pools, weedy margins, and deep side channels of the Reaches' rivers, from the brackish upper estuaries up to the middle courses,

where the gravel runs and spring-fed side channels begin. They are rarer in the cold upper tributaries.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An egg-taker hunts by waiting: fish, frogs, crayfish, ducklings, anything that passes within reach. In spawning season it changes its habits, moving onto the spawning reaches and nursery gravels and staying there as long as eggs and young are to be found, nosing into the gravel and lying in wait at the edges. It is bold, greedy, and unafraid of anything its own size. It does not attack grown people, but it will strike at a hand in the gravel.

## Life Cycle

Egg-takers spawn in early spring in flooded weedy shallows, before the runs come up. The young grow fast, eating each other, and a big one may live twenty years.

## Uses and Dangers

They take Thaluren eggs and the newly hatched young from the spawning grounds, and Kavari young from the nursery gravels, and a few of them on a spawning reach can do great harm to a clutch. In the season of the return, Sanctuary Custodians and Kavari custodians share the guarding of the reaches where their waters meet, by agreement between the two peoples: they patrol the gravels, drive the fish off with spears and nets, and kill them. The Kavari eat them, smoked; the Thaluren will not.

## Lore and Belief

Where the two peoples share the work, the egg-taker is one of the few things they agree about. The Thaluren say an egg-taker on a spawning reach was let in by a careless watch, and a custodian who loses a clutch to one feels the debt. The Kavari say the egg-takers know which reach will be used before the custodians do, and watch them for it. Neither people believes the egg-takers can be driven out for good.



# Elk

**Elk** are the largest deer of the Cradle web: solitary giants of the wet woods and bog edges. They are too big for most poachers to carry off and too rare for most lords to count on, and a bull standing in a forest road, refusing to move, is one of the commonest tales a traveller brings home.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Wet woods, bogs, and foothill forest |
| **Range** | The margins of the Elderweald and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Elves and Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary, in the rut |

## Appearance

A bull elk stands taller at the shoulder than a horse, with long legs, a heavy humped shoulder, a long overhanging muzzle, and a flap of skin hanging from the throat. His antlers are broad and flat, like two open hands with many fingers, wider than a cart, shed in winter and regrown each summer. Cows are smaller and bare-headed. The coat is dark brown, nearly black on the body, with pale grey-brown legs. Calves are plain red-brown.

Elk walk with a long, high-stepping stride that carries them through bog and deadfall where a horse would founder, and they swim well. Bulls in the rut grunt and moan; cows call their calves with a low lowing. They smell strongly in the rut, of musk and wallow.

## Habitat and Range

Elk live where wet woods meet bog: on the margins of the Elderweald, where the ground holds water like a sponge, and in the wetter foothill

woods and high valleys of the Headwater Marches. They are few, and each keeps a wide range.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Elk browse willow, birch, young shoots, and water plants, and stand belly-deep in pools in summer to feed and escape the flies. They live alone or in small groups. They are calm and slow to flee, which makes them seem tame; they are not. A cow with a calf charges anything that comes near, and a bull in the autumn rut will run down a walker or a horse.

## Life Cycle

Cows calve in early summer, one calf or twins, and keep them close for a year. Elk live about fifteen years.

## Uses and Dangers

An elk gives a great deal of meat, a thick hide, and antler for tools. Wood Elf groves hunt them seldom, since one elk feeds a grove for a long time and the forest has few to give. Human lords count an elk a rare trophy. The danger is the rut and the calving season, and a bull on a narrow road.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater carters say an elk in the road is asking a toll and will move when it has decided you have paid. Wood Elves say the elk walk the old wet ways of the forest that no grove remembers. Its antler, ground, is sold in the Basins as a cure for fits, without effect.

Lords' huntsmen count a bull elk the hardest kill in the march woods, and more than one hunter has been opened by the antlers of a beast he thought dead.



# Farwings

**Farwings** are the great gliding birds of the open ocean north of the far side. They nest only on the outermost isles of the Tidelace Coasts, around the beacon of Lastlight, and spend the rest of their lives over open water, flying out past the last beacon into the Unrun Sea and back. Gnome pilots say they know a shore nobody has charted.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open ocean and the outermost isles |
| **Range** | The edge of the Unrun Sea and the Tidelace Coasts (Lastlight) |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A farwing has the longest wings of any bird on the coast, narrow and stiff, spanning more than two tall men from tip to tip, on a body no bigger than a goose's. It is white on the head, neck, and underparts, with dark grey-brown upper wings and back, a short tail, and a long, heavy, hooked bill, pale pink with tube-like nostrils along its sides. It glides low over the waves for hours on stiff, unmoving wings, tilting to rise and fall with the wind over the swell. On land it is awkward, running and flapping to take off from a cliff edge. At the nest pairs greet each other with bill-clapping, bowing, and loud braying calls; at sea it is silent.

## Habitat and Range

Farwings live over the open sea and come to land only to breed, on a few steep, windswept outer isles of the Tidelace where they can launch into the wind. Out at sea they range beyond the last beacon, the Far Set, and anywhere pilots or runs have gone, and they are seen by Outer-Route Thaluren runs far out along the current roads.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed on squid, fish, and offal taken from the surface, mostly at night, and follow boats and runs for scraps. They are fearless with people at the nest, which they have no reason to fear, and indifferent at sea.

## Life Cycle

Farwings mate for life. A pair returns to the same nest, a mound of mud and grass on a cliff top, every second year and raises one chick, which takes most of a year to fledge. A young farwing leaves the isle and does not return for years. They live as long as a Human.

## Uses and Dangers

They harm no one, and they are not taken: the isles where they nest are hard to reach and the Lastlight families leave them be. Pilots read them as weather: farwings coming in to the isles out of season mean a storm off the open sea.

## Lore and Belief

Gnome pilots say the farwings know a shore beyond the Unrun Sea and fly to it between nestings, and that one day a pilot who follows them will find it; none has, and the sounding houses do not enter the tale in their ledgers. Lastlight's families say each farwing that leaves the isle carries the name of someone lost at sea and calls it over the water. The Thaluren Outer-Route lines say only that farwings are seen where no run has been.

Lastlight still tells of the pilot who followed the farwings west past the last isle in a summer of calms and was never seen again, and of the farwing that came back to Lastlight the next spring with a ring of strange red metal on its leg.



# Fish

**Fish** feed more of Caeldon than any beast but the herds. On the far side the coast lives on them: Gnome harbours and the coastal Human hamlets of the Tidelace Coasts fish, dry, and salt their catch. The dried fish goes up the cliff stairs of the Soundchain Roads to the Windscar. The Thaluren fish and tend the shoals around their reef settlements. In the cradle, Reedfolk households fish the fens and braided channels, and river fish go down the Serath with the reed and the boats.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Coastal seas, reefs and kelp, rivers, and fens |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts, the Soundchain Roads, the Tidebound Reaches, the Lower Serath, the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans, Orcs, Reedfolk, Thaluren, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

### *Inshore Sea Fish*

The Tidelace catch is mostly shoaling fish taken close inshore from small open boats: slim, blue-green-backed, silver-bellied fish about a hand and a half long that run in great shoals along the coves in their season and turn the water dark and then bright as they wheel. With them come heavier grey bottom fish, broad-headed and thick-lipped, from the rocky ground off the headlands, and flat-fish brown as sand from the shingle shallows. All smell strongly of the sea when fresh and more strongly still on the drying racks.

### *Reef and Kelp Fish*

In the shoal worlds of the Tidebound Reaches, where reefs break the swell and kelp grows tall enough to shadow the water, the fish are smaller, brighter, and many-coloured: banded, spotted, and striped fish that hang in the kelp shade, and

dense silver shoals that move along the reef edge as one body. The Thaluren know each shoal's water and season as farmers know fields.

### *River and Fen Fish*

The brown, slow water of the Lower Serath and the fens of the Confluence Basins hold muddy-flavoured fish of the backwaters and oxbows: deep-bodied, bronze-scaled fish that lie in the reed beds, long-snouted pike-like hunters that wait among the stems, and small silver fry in their thousands at the margins. Colder, quicker water upstream holds trout, and the side channels hold eels. The pale fish of the underground reservoirs belong with the pale cave creatures.

## Habitat and Range

Fish are wherever water is: the inshore coves and headland grounds of the Tidelace and the sounds of the Soundchain Roads; the reefs, kelp forests, and island margins of the Tidebound Reaches; the main channels, backwaters, and fens of the cradle's rivers. They are fewest where the water has gone wrong. Near some Tidelace river mouths the water is turning black and sour, and the hamlets that fish closest inshore are the first to haul up empty nets.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Shoaling fish run by season and by water, coming close inshore when the water warms and leaving with the cold, and a cove can be full one week and empty the next. Bottom fish keep to their ground. River fish follow the flood: they spread over drowned meadows with the spring rise and crowd back into the channels as the water falls. None of them is dangerous to anyone; the danger of fishing is the water.

## Life Cycle

Most fish spawn in great numbers in their season, the shoaling sea fish in open water and the river fish in the warm shallows and reed beds of the flood. Few young survive, and a season's catch depends on how many did. The Thaluren, whose own continuity rests on rightful spawning, keep a careful eye on the shoals they tend and do not fish them in their spawning water.

## Uses and Dangers

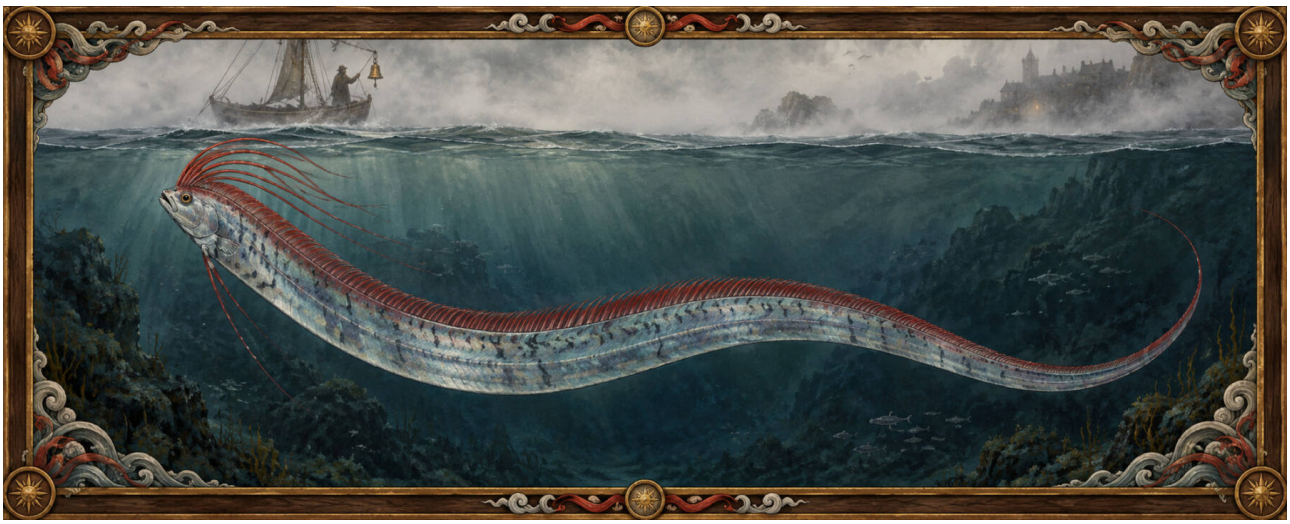
Fish is food first: fresh, dried, salted, and smoked. Gnome meals come mostly from the sea and the terrace gardens, with fish first among them, and Orc escort parties in the corridor eat fish with shellfish, seabird eggs, and stored grain. Dried and salted fish is one of the coast's chief trade goods, carried up the Windscar stairs in exchange for hides, felt, and wool, and the Human hamlets sell their catch at the nearest harbour quay for cordage, tools, and grain. On the rivers, fish goes down to the Basins with reed and boats.

Fishing grounds are fought over. Gnome tide halls settle quarrels over them in the harbour families' favour and may close a cove for resurvey, and a hamlet that says the fish are running can wait hungry until the harbour says otherwise. On the Serath the towns hold the fishing as they hold the water, and the weirs their mill-owners build change where fish can run.

## Lore and Belief

The coast remembers the Decade of Storms, when gales sank boats and the fish vanished, and the plea of Gnome towns and Human hamlets that raised Maris of the Tides. Fishers who come home with a good catch thank her at the shrine at the water's edge. The Thaluren remember instead Ulaun the Stilled Hour, the god they prayed to for stillness, around whom fish stopped mid-turn with their fins rigid, and they hold that water that

holds its fish still is water gone wrong. A shelf of dried fish beside a sealed jar of salt is the sign of the Salt-Witch.



# Fog Serpents

**Fog serpents** belong to the tales of the coastal Human hamlets of the Tidelace: long silver serpents with blood-red crests that swim in the **Long Grey**, the great fog belt of the outer coast, and drag down boats that lose their way. Nobody has seen one in the fog and come back to say so clearly. What the sea does give up, every few years, is a long, silver, ribbon-like fish from the deep, dead or dying on the shingle, and that is the truth behind the tale.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Legend: the Long Grey; in truth, the deep open sea |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless: a misreading |

## Appearance

The fog serpent of the tales is as long as a boat or a harbour quay, silver as a blade, with a red crest along its head and back that stands up like a flame, and eyes like lamps; it rises out of the fog beside a boat without a sound.

The fish that washes up is real and nearly as strange. A **ribbonfish** is far longer than a boat, but flat and thin as a belt, no thicker than a hand, and soft and fragile. It is shining silver, marked with faint dark streaks and spots, and a red fin runs the whole length of its back, rising on its head into a crest of long red rays. It has a small toothless mouth and large eyes. Stranded, it soon dulls and tears, and a few days on the shingle reduce it to a long, reeking silver rope.

## Habitat and Range

The ribbonfish lives far out and deep in the open sea, where no Gnome pilot or coastal fisher goes. It comes to the surface only when sick or dying,

and the wind and currents that bring the Long Grey onto the Tidelace sometimes bring it ashore too.

## Behaviour and Temperament

In the deep, a ribbonfish hangs upright in the water, rippling its long back fin to move, and eats the tiny shrimp and drifting creatures of the dark water. It harms nothing larger than a shrimp. The fog serpent of the tales hunts boats and fishers lost in the fog.

## Uses and Dangers

The ribbonfish does no harm and is not eaten; its flesh is soft and jelly-like. The tale does its own work: children are kept off the water in fog, and a boat caught out in the Long Grey stays where it is and rings its bell.

## Lore and Belief

Coastal Humans say the fog serpent rises when someone on the shore has broken faith with the sea, and that a serpent washed up dead means the sea has taken its due and will be calm for a season. Some hamlets hang the red crest rays of a stranded ribbonfish over the door of the shrine to Maris of the Tides. Gnome sounders, who have measured the stranded fish and logged them, say the serpent is a ribbonfish seen in fog by tired eyes, and that the fog does the rest. Like the dragons of the cradle's tales, the serpent is more widely believed in than seen; unlike the dragons, its plain truth lies on the shingle every few years for anyone to look at.

That has never stopped the tellers: every Tidelace alehouse has a man who saw the serpent take a boat whole, and a beast-hunter who once sailed out after one with a harpoon and a crew of drunk cousins is still sung of on the Soundchain Roads.



# Fogbells

**Fogbells** are the bell jellyfish of the open water off the far side's north coast. In most seasons a few drift by. When the **Long Grey**, the great fog belt of the outer coast, rolls in off the Unrun Sea, the same winds and currents often bring them in by the thousand, and a cove on the Tidelace may be thick with them when the fog lifts. Their sting welts the skin, and enough of it can stop a swimmer's heart.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open water, drifting inshore with the fog |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts, the Soundchain Roads, and the edge of the Unrun Sea |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans, Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, in a bloom |

## Appearance

A fogbell is a clear, soft bell the size of a bowl to a cartwheel, pale milky violet, with a darker rim and four pale rings inside it like the marks of a thumb. From the rim hang dozens of fine stinging threads, as long as a boat or longer, nearly invisible in the water, and from the centre four frilled arms. It moves by slow pulses of the bell, opening and closing like a breath, and drifts more than it swims. A bloom seen from a boat is a field of pale shapes as far as the eye can follow. Stranded on the shingle a fogbell is a shapeless clear jelly that still stings, and a stranded bloom smells sour and fishy as it rots.

## Habitat and Range

Fogbells live in the open sea beyond the coast and come inshore when wind and current drive them: into the sounds of the Soundchain Roads, the coves and outer inlets of the Tidelace, and around

the outer isles. A bloom can lie in a sound for days, and the breakwaters of the better harbours keep the worst of it out.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A fogbell drifts with its threads trailing, catching small fish, shrimp, and drifting animals that blunder into them; the threads sting, and the arms carry the catch to the mouth. It has no mind and no intent, and does not seek people. It simply stings whatever touches it.

## Life Cycle

Fogbells spawn in the open sea. Their young grow as tiny stalked things fixed to rock or drifting weed, which bud off small bells in spring; the bells grow through the summer and die in autumn, and a bloom of them washes up dead after the last fogs.

## Uses and Dangers

A bloom closes a coast to swimmers, waders, and divers, fouls nets so heavily that they tear or must be burned clean, and stings the hands of every fisher who hauls them. The sting brings burning pain and raised red welts along the line of the threads; a swimmer caught in many may cramp, choke, and drown, or the heart may stop. Children are kept off the shingle after a fog. Vinegar or seawater eases the sting, and fresh water makes it worse.

## Lore and Belief

Gnome pilots enter blooms in their logs with the date and the fog, and some sounding houses claim to be able to tell from their logs when a bloom will follow a Long Grey; others say that is precise and not true. Coastal Humans call the fogbells **the Grey's lanterns** and say the fog carries them as a boat carries lamps, to find the shore in the dark. The Thaluren keep their young out of a bloom and wait for it to pass.

Wreckers on the outer coast are said to wait for a bloom, knowing that a crew which has blundered into the stinging water will run for any light ashore.



# Foxes

**Foxes** are the small hunters that live just outside every village: in the hedge, the wood's edge, the ruined wall. Farmers curse them for their hens, children watch for their cubs in spring, and morphic scouts borrow their shape when they need to go low and unseen.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Field edges, woods, brush, and ruins |
| **Range** | Across the Cradle web, from the farmlands to the ruin country of the Broken Marches |
| **Known to** | All the peoples of the Cradle web |
| **Danger** | Harmless to people; a thief of poultry and lambs |

## Appearance

A fox is the size of a small dog, long-bodied and light, with a narrow pointed muzzle, tall triangular ears, and a thick brush of a tail nearly as long as its body. Its coat is rust-red above, white at the throat and the tail's tip, with black lower legs as if it had walked through soot. Its eyes catch lamplight green-gold.

It trots with its head low and its tail straight out behind, and pounces on mice in long grass with a high stiff-legged leap. On winter nights vixens scream, a shrill cry like someone hurt that frightens those who have not heard it before; dog foxes bark in short yaps. A fox's earth, and anywhere it has marked, has a sharp musky reek that lingers for days.

## Habitat and Range

Foxes live wherever there is cover near food: hedgerows, woodland edges, brush, the banks of ditches, and ruins. They den in old burrows, under roots, and in the gaps of collapsed works, and the ruin country of the Broken Marches is thick with them. Some live in towns, at the edges, on what people throw away.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A fox hunts alone, mostly at dusk and dawn, for mice, voles, rabbits, birds, beetles, and windfall fruit. It caches what it cannot eat. It is curious, cautious, and quick to vanish, and it learns a farm’s habits: which coop is badly shut, which dog sleeps. Once inside a henhouse it may kill every bird it can reach and carry off only one.

## Life Cycle

Foxes pair in midwinter, and the vixen bears four to six cubs in spring in an earth. The cubs play at the den mouth through early summer and leave in autumn to find ground of their own. Few foxes live beyond three or four years in the wild.

## Uses and Dangers

Foxes take poultry and the odd newborn lamb, and are trapped, snared, and hunted with dogs for it. Their winter pelts are made into collars, hoods, and trim. They keep down the mice in the granaries' fields, which farmers rarely credit.

A scout who knows Beast-Skin may become a fox to slip beneath siege debris, keeping her mind but losing much of her hands' skill while she wears it.

## Lore and Belief

Foxes are the clever thieves of village tales, the beast that talks its way out of every trap. A fox crossing the road ahead is held to mean a trick is coming. Some Human villages say that a fox which does not run from people is a mage wearing one, and drive it off with stones to be sure.

Outlaws of the march country take the fox as their sign, and more than one outlaw band has called itself after it; the songs about them are as clever and as false as the fox tales.



# Frogs and Toads

**Frogs** and **toads** live wherever there is fresh water to breed in. Their spring chorus from the ditches and fens is the sound that tells a basin village the floodwater has fallen back and the fields can be worked. Frogs are food for herons, storks, snakes, and the poor; toads carry a mild poison in their skin and an uneasy place in tales.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Ponds, ditches, fens, and cisterns |
| **Range** | Widespread |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless; the toad's skin a mild poison |

## Appearance

A **frog** is about the size of a palm, smooth-skinned and moist, olive-green to brown with dark blotches and a dark patch behind each eye. It has long, strong hind legs, webbed feet, and golden eyes. It leaps.

A **toad** is squatter and heavier, with dry, warty, earth-brown skin, a large swelling behind each eye, short legs, and copper-coloured eyes with horizontal pupils. It walks or makes short hops.

On spring nights frogs croak in a purring, grunting chorus that fills a fen, and toads call with a high, quiet trill. A toad handled roughly sweats a white milky fluid from its skin that burns the eyes and mouth.

## Habitat and Range

Frogs and toads live throughout the wetter country of both sides of Caeldon: the ditches, ponds, and fens of the Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath. They live as well in the side channels of the Greyford Reach, the cisterns and garden ponds

of the Leeward Folds, and every village pond. Toads range further from water than frogs and come back to the same ponds every spring.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Frogs and toads eat insects, slugs, worms, and spiders, catching them with a quick flick of a sticky tongue. Frogs keep near water; toads wander gardens and cellars at night. Both sleep through the winter in mud, under stones, or in the bottom of ponds, and come out together in a few warm nights of spring.

## Life Cycle

Frogs lay clumps of spawn, toads long strings, in shallow water in spring. Tadpoles hatch, grow legs, lose their tails, and leave the water as tiny froglets in early summer, in such numbers that the paths are covered. Most are eaten. A toad may live ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

Frogs' legs are eaten in the Basins and the corridor towns, and frogs feed the poor in the low months. Toads eat garden pests. The toad's skin poison is mild; it sickens a dog that mouths one and is used by some healers, in small amounts, against fevers.

## Lore and Belief

The first frog chorus of spring is the sign basin villages wait for: when the frogs sing in the ditches, the rise has fallen back. A frog in the well is good luck; a toad in the house is ill. Basin tales give toads to witches as their creatures and say a toad carries a jewel in its head, which it does not; a witch's toad of the tales, if it is anything, is a familiar, and no toad.



# Glove Spiders

**Glove spiders** are the black spiders of old cellars and dry ruins. Their bite rots the flesh around it and, in a small or weak body, can kill. Goblin salvagers named them for the habit they force: nobody in the Broken Marches puts a bare hand into a dark gap, and a salvager's first tool is a pair of thick leather gloves.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Root cellars, storeworks, culverts, and woodpiles |
| **Range** | The Broken Marches, the Greyford Reach (Lowbank), and the old towns of the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Goblins, Humans, Kobolds |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: the bite festers, and sometimes kills the old and the small |

## Appearance

A grown female is the size of a thumbnail in the body, with legs that span a child's palm: glossy black or very dark brown, round-bellied, with a pale violin-shaped or hourglass mark on the underside that few see until it is too late. Males are smaller and duller. The web is not an orb but an untidy, strong tangle of grey silk in a corner or behind a stone, with a funnel or a silk tube at the back where the spider waits. It makes no sound. A cellar long held by them smells faintly of dust and dead flies.

## Habitat and Range

They want dry, dark, undisturbed places close to food: the root cellars and ruined storeworks of the Broken Marches, the culverts and storework chambers under Lowbank at the Greyford Reach, woodpiles, outhouses, and the backs of store-

rooms in the older basin towns. Kobold underhouses keep them out by sweeping; abandoned works fill with them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A glove spider is shy and bites only when pressed against skin: a hand reaching into its gap, a foot into a boot it has moved into, a body rolling onto it in bedding left on a cellar floor. It eats flies, beetles, woodlice, and other spiders, and it can live months without feeding, which is why a ruin sealed for a generation still has them when it is opened.

## Abilities

The bite is a pinprick at first, often unnoticed. Within hours it burns; within a day a blister rises with a dark centre, and over a week the flesh around it dies and sloughs, leaving an open, slow sore. A child, an old person, a Goblin or Kobold bitten more than once, or anyone bitten near the face, may take fever, cramps, and worse, and some die (see Stings and Bites).

## Life Cycle

The female hangs several silk egg sacs in her tangle each summer, each holding dozens of young, and guards them. Spiderlings scatter on threads through the cellar. A female lives two or three years.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, except that a cellar full of them is a cellar nobody has disturbed. Their cost is the bite and the sore that follows, which often festers into wound rot. Salvage gangs smoke a storework before they go in, shake out boots and bedding, and carry a lamp into every gap before a hand. Healers of Vital Magic can draw the venom into a poultice if they reach the bitten in the first hours, and seldom do.

## Lore and Belief

Marches folk say a glove spider bites only the hand that takes without asking, and salvagers mutter a word to the ruin before they reach in. Basin households hold that a black spider in the house means a thief nearby. Goblins say the gloves are the spider's gift: a people that learned to keep its hands covered learned to keep them out of other people's business too.

Salvagers tell of a cellar in the Marches so thick with them that a salvage crew went in for a lord's buried silver and came out with three hands swollen black; one of them died, and the silver is said to be there still.



# Glow-Flies

**Glow-flies** are the small beetles whose lights fill the forest meadows of the Elderweald and the field edges of the cradle-web on summer nights. For a few weeks around midsummer the groves are full of them, and Wood Elf children name the year by how they shone: a year of many lights, of few, of late lights, of lights over the water.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Summer woods, meadows, and field edges |
| **Range** | The Elderweald, the Crownboughs, and the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Elves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A glow-fly is a soft, narrow beetle about as long as a fingernail, dull brown with a pale shield over its head, and the last segments of its body a pale sulphur-yellow. That tail gives a cold green-gold light that the beetle flashes in a pattern: a slow pulse, a quick double blink, a long glow. By day it is nothing to look at. At night a meadow full of them drifts and winks like sparks rising from a fire that is not there. The flightless females glow steadily from the grass. They are silent.

## Habitat and Range

They live in damp, grassy places near woods: forest meadows and glades, grove edges, streamsides, hedgerows, and the margins of fields in the Elderweald, the Crownboughs, and the Confluence Basins. They are surface creatures and need the dark of an open night; none lives in the lightless country below.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The grown beetles live only a few weeks in summer and hardly eat. Their lights are courtship: males fly low over the grass flashing their pattern, and females answer from below. The larvae, which also glow faintly, live in leaf litter and damp grass and hunt snails and slugs. They pay no attention to people.

## Life Cycle

Eggs laid in damp ground hatch into larvae that live a year or two in the litter, feeding and growing, before turning into the winged beetles of a single summer.

## Uses and Dangers

They do no harm and are of little use, except that their larvae eat slugs and snails in the gardens. Children catch them in jars and let them go at dawn.

## Lore and Belief

Wood Elf groves keep the year-names the children give, and an old Elf can recount a long run of summers by their lights. Basin Humans say the glowflies are the souls of the year's dead, come back for one night to see the harvest, and on midsummer night some villages leave the shutters open for them. A summer with no lights is held in both peoples to foretell a hard winter, and the Elves say a grove where they stop shining has been wronged.



# Gluttons

**Gluttons** are squat, fearless hunters and scavengers of the high forest and snow. They follow trap-lines and eat what is caught in them, dig up buried caches, and break into stores, and they will not give up a carcass to anything smaller than a bear. Every trapper in the mountains curses them by name.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Mountain forest and snowfields |
| **Range** | The Ironspine, the edges of the Stormcrown, and the Headwater heights |
| **Known to** | Dwarves and Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary, to traps, caches, and stores |

## Appearance

A glutton looks like a small bear with a long bushy tail: the size of a stout dog, low and broad, with short powerful legs, huge paws, and long curved claws. Its fur is long, coarse, and dark brown, with a broad pale band running along each side from shoulder to rump and a pale mask across the brow. Its teeth and jaws are strong enough to crack frozen bone.

It moves at a humping, rocking lope that it can keep up all day across snow. It growls and snarls. It sprays a foul musk over food it means to come back to, and a cache or store it has visited stinks of it.

## Habitat and Range

Gluttons live in the high forest and on the snowfields of the Ironspine, the lower edges of the Stormcrown, and the heights of the Headwater Marches. Each roams a vast range, and they are few.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A glutton eats almost anything: carrion above all, hares, whistlers, birds, eggs, roots, berries, and the young and weak of crag goats and deer. It follows wolves and stone cats to their kills and takes them over. It is solitary, tireless, and afraid of almost nothing, and it is clever with traps: it springs them, eats the bait and the catch, and leaves.

## Life Cycle

A female bears two or three young in a snow den in late winter. They stay with her until autumn. Gluttons live about ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

Glutton fur does not frost when breathed on, and it trims the hoods of hold wardens and Headwater hunters. Their cost is to trappers, whose lines a single glutton can strip, and to caches and stores left in the mountains: a hunter's meat cache buried under stones, a waystation's outer store, a stranded caravan's supplies. They are rarely a danger to people, though a glutton defending a carcass will face down a man with a spear.

## Lore and Belief

Trappers say a glutton is the mountain's tax on greed: set too many traps and it will come. Dwarven hold wardens say that a glutton once in a store-room will never leave it, and seal the store until it is gone or dead. Headwater children are told that a glutton eats until it bursts, which it does not, though it comes close.

A glutton that has learned to rob a trap-line is hunted like a thief, and the trapper who finally kills one boasts of it for years; in every mountain hut someone has seen, or knows a man who saw, a glutton drag a full-grown hunter's pack up a tree and eat his winter while he watched.



# Great Catfish

The **great catfish** is the giant of the Serath: a whiskered, scaleless fish of the deep slow water that grows longer than a barge pole. Most are smaller and harmless; the largest take ducks, dogs, and, bargemen say, once a child off a landing. A landed one feeds a whole quay for a day.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Deep slow channels and oxbows |
| **Range** | The Lower Serath and the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans and Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Wary; the largest are Dangerous, to swimmers and dogs |

## Appearance

A great catfish has a broad, flattened head, a wide mouth that could take in a Human's head, and six long whiskers, two long ones above the mouth and four short ones below. Its body is long and tapering, flattened towards the tail, with a long fin running under it. Its skin has no scales and is slimy, mottled dark olive and grey-black above, pale and blotched below. Its eyes are tiny. The biggest are as long as two Humans laid end to end, though most landed are half that.

It moves slowly, with a sideways sweep of its long tail, and rolls at the surface at dusk with a heavy swirl that bargemen know. It smells of the bottom mud it lives in, and so does its flesh unless it is kept in clean water first.

## Habitat and Range

Great catfish live in the deep, slow reaches of the Lower Serath: the scour holes below quays and weirs, the deep bends, the oxbow lakes and backwaters of the flood-ground, and the stretches

above the Lying Shoals. Smaller ones live in the lower rivers of the Confluence Basins. They are few, and the largest are counted by the reach.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A great catfish lies on the bottom by day under a sunken tree or in a deep hole and hunts at night, feeling for prey with its whiskers: fish, frogs, crayfish, water birds, rats, and carrion. The biggest take ducks and geese from the surface, and a swimming dog. It lives alone in one hole for years.

## Life Cycle

Catfish spawn in early summer in the shallows among roots, and the male guards the eggs. They grow slowly and live very long; bargemen say a great catfish in a famous hole is the same one their grandfathers knew, and they may be right.

## Uses and Dangers

They give a great deal of oily white flesh, smoked or eaten fresh, and their skin makes a tough leather. Corridor fishers take them on lines baited with a whole bird. The danger is small but real: the largest have drowned dogs and swimmers, and children are kept off the landings at dusk.

## Lore and Belief

Bargemen tell of the catfish that took a child off a landing and of one so large it overturned a ferry, and every reach claims its own famous fish with a name. Reedfolk say the great catfish keep the deep holes, and a hole whose fish has gone is a hole the river is about to fill. Some corridor folk call them the river god’s dogs, which Serovan the River-King’s priests do not.



# Grey Seals

**Grey seals** haul out in grey crowds on the skerries and island shores of the Tidelace Coasts and the sounds of the Soundchain Roads, and swim the shoals of the Tidebound Reaches. They eat the same fish the inshore boats are after and take them out of the nets when they can, and the fishers curse them. Gnome sounding houses note them in their ledgers for another reason: where the seals gather, the fish are running.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Rocky islands, skerries, and sounds |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts, the Soundchain Roads, and the Tidebound Reaches |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans, Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Harmless; a bull is Wary |

## Appearance

A grown grey seal is as long as a tall man lying down and much heavier, a sleek, tapering body with a rounded head, large dark wet eyes, long whiskers, and no visible ears. Its front flippers are short with claws, its hind flippers held together like a fish's tail. The coat is grey, from silver to slate, blotched and spotted darker, and dries paler on the rocks. Bulls are bigger, darker, and long-nosed. Ashore a seal humps along clumsily on its belly; in the water it is swift and graceful. Hauled-out seals moan, snort, and wail, a long eerie sound that carries through fog, and a haul-out smells of fish and old oil.

## Habitat and Range

They breed and rest on skerries, offshore islands, and the remoter rocky shores, and feed in the sounds, straits, and shoals around them. They are commonest along the outer isles and the Soundchain sounds, and come into the harbours rarely, to rob the quays.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Seals feed alone in the water on fish, eels, squid, and crabs, diving long and deep, and gather in crowds to rest on the rocks between tides. They are curious and will follow a boat or watch a person on the shore with only the head showing. They are timid ashore and slide into the water when approached, but a bull guarding cows in the breeding season will charge a person on the rocks and bite hard.

## Life Cycle

Cows give birth to a single white-furred pup on the rocks in autumn, nurse it for a few weeks on rich milk, and leave it. The pup sheds its white coat and goes to sea alone. Seals live twenty or thirty years.

## Uses and Dangers

To the inshore fishers seals are rivals and thieves, tearing fish from nets and lines and breaking the nets. Coastal Human hamlets take pups and young seals in autumn for their skins, which make boots and coats that shed water, and for the oil of their fat, burned in lamps. Gnome harbours mostly let them be. Pilots and sounders read them: a sound full of seals is a sound full of fish, and a ledger that notes the seals' numbers over many years notes the fish’s too.

## Lore and Belief

Human hamlets on the Tidelace tell of seals that come ashore as people on midsummer nights, and of fishers' children found on the shingle in the morning with a seal’s dark eyes. Fishers say killing a seal at sea brings a storm. The Thaluren know seals as quick, harmless neighbours of the shoals, and a seal among the kelp is a sign that the blackfins are not near.



# Grey Wolves

**Grey wolves** are the great hunters of the Cradle web's woods. They live on deer and wild boar in the old forest and come out to the edges when the game is thin. To a Wood Elf grove a wolf is another hunter on the same ground, answerable as the grove is; to a Headwater or basin shepherd it is the thief of the winter fold, and the lord who keeps the hunting right and will not use it is the one to blame.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Woods, forest edges, and winter pasture |
| **Range** | The Elderweald, the Briarreach, the Headwater foothill woods, and the forest edges of the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Elves and Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to herds and to lone walkers in hard winters |

## Appearance

A grown wolf stands as high as a Human's hip, long-legged and deep-chested, heavier than the biggest yard dog and narrower through the body. Its coat is grizzled grey, darker along the back, paler at the throat and belly, with a buff wash on the legs and a black-tipped tail carried low. The eyes are yellow. Winter coats are thick enough to hide the ribs of a starving animal.

Wolves move at a long, tireless trot that can be kept up all night. They howl at dusk and before dawn, a rising, falling chorus that one wolf starts and the pack takes up, and the sound carries for miles across a frozen valley. A kill smells of blood and churned snow; a den of earth and old bone.

## Habitat and Range

Wolves live wherever the woods are large enough to hold deer: thickest in the deep, uncut forest of the Elderweald, in the broken thickets of the Briarreach, and in the foothill woods of the Headwater Marches. In the farmed lowlands of the Confluence Basins they are few and keep to the forest edge. A pack holds a range of many days' walk and moves through it in a round.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pack is a family: a breeding pair, their young of the last few years, and sometimes an old relative, rarely more than a dozen. They hunt together, testing a herd for the slow, the sick, or the young, then running it down in relays. They avoid people and their dogs in ordinary years. In a hard winter, when the deer have gone thin or the snow lies crusted, a pack follows the game down to the edges and takes sheep from the folds, and a lone walker on a forest road at dusk may be followed.

## Life Cycle

Wolves pair for life and breed once a year, in late winter. Four to six cubs are born in spring in an earth or under a fallen tree, and the whole pack feeds them. Young wolves leave in their second or third year to find a mate and a range. Few wolves live past ten.

## Uses and Dangers

Wolves give pelts for cloaks and collars, and they keep the deer from eating a forest bare, which groves know and farmers seldom credit. Their cost falls on the herds: a fold broken into on a winter night, lambs taken from the summer slopes. Human lords keep the right to hunt wolves with the right to hunt deer, and hold wolf-hunts with hounds when shepherds complain loudly enough.

## Lore and Belief

Elves of the old groves count a wolf-kill against the ground as they count their own: a pack that takes a deer has taken it from the same answerable share, and a grove that hunts out its wolves has broken faith with the forest. Basin and Headwater Humans tell children that a wolf can smell a lie, and shepherds hang a wolf’s skull on a fold gate to warn the next pack, which wolves ignore.

In hard winters wolves come down to the fold gates, and the fold-villages name the wolf-winters and their heroes: the shepherd girl who kept a pack off her flock with a burning brand until dawn, the lord who paid a bounty for every head and had to pay it on a thousand. Some Headwater villages still keep wolf-spears behind the door.



# Gut Worms

**Gut worms** are the worms that live inside the bodies of people and their animals, in the bowel and sometimes beyond it. Every people of flesh carries them, every household purges for them, and few think of them as animals at all. The sickness they make, its course and its treatment, is set out under Worms.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | The guts of people and beasts |
| **Range** | Widespread |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

Three kinds are known to every healer, by what passes in the stool:

- **Threadworms**: tiny, white, and thread-fine, no longer than a fingernail is broad, that come out at night to lay at the bottom and set a child scratching in its sleep.
- **Roundworms**: pale pink-white, smooth, and pointed at both ends, as long as a finger or a hand and as thick as a cord; a heavy knot of them can be passed or, in a bad case, coughed up.
- **Flat worms**: ribbons made of many small flat segments, pale and soft, that can grow longer than their host is tall. Segments break off and pass, each like a grain of rice that moves.

None makes a sound or has a smell of its own beyond the dung it lives in.

## Habitat and Range

They live wherever dung and food or water meet: in village guts, in herds, in dogs and pigs, and in the fish of the rivers and seas. Flat worms come into people through the undercooked flesh of

beasts and fish; the others through dirty hands, fouled water, and unwashed greens. The Wrought, who do not eat, carry none.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A gut worm is a quiet lodger. It lies in the bowel and feeds on what its host eats, or clings to the wall and feeds on the host. It does not want to kill, since its life is its host's. Roundworm young wander through the body before they settle, passing through the lungs, which is why a wormy child may cough.

## Life Cycle

Eggs pass out with dung by the thousand and lie in soil or water, some for months, until they are swallowed. Flat worms pass first through a beast or fish, waiting in its flesh as small pale bladders until that flesh is eaten. A worm can live in its host for years, and a host can carry dozens.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. They take food from the hungry, stunt children, and add weakness to every other sickness. Herb purges drive them out (see Herbs), and a healer makes the body hostile to them with Parasite Expel, though egg-laying worms need the work repeated. Cooking flesh through, keeping the midden from the well, and washing hands keep them off, and few who do so know why.

## Lore and Belief

Many believe worms are born in the belly from sweets or raw fruit, or stir with the full moon. Some old healers keep a passed flat worm in a jar of spirit as proof to doubtful mothers. Fisher peoples hold that every fish has a soul and a worm, and that cooking frees the one and kills the other.



# Hares

**Hares** are the long-legged runners of the open fields. They are the game of coursing dogs and hawks, food for poor households who snare them, and in basin tales the shape a witch takes to cross the fields at night. When the hares box on the stubble, spring has come.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Fields, heath, and terraces |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Witnessfields, and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A hare is larger than a rabbit and rangier, as long as a forearm and hand with long, black-tipped ears longer than its head, and very long hind legs. Its coat is tawny brown flecked with black, white on the belly and under the tail, and its large amber eyes are set high on the sides of the head so that it sees nearly all round. In the Headwater heights some hares turn white in winter.

It sits crouched and still in a shallow scrape in the open, its ears flat, and when flushed it is gone in great zigzag bounds faster than any dog but a running hound. It is mostly silent; a caught hare screams like a child.

## Habitat and Range

Hares live in open country: the fields and stubbles of the Confluence Basins, the heath and grassed terraces of the Witnessfields, where nobody hunts them, and the terraces and summer slopes of the Headwater Marches.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A hare feeds on grass, herbs, and young crops at dusk and by night and lies up in its scrape by day, trusting to stillness and then to speed. It does not burrow. In early spring the hares gather on open fields and the females box off the males, standing up and striking with their forepaws, which is the sight that gives the season its sign.

## Life Cycle

A female bears several litters a year, two to four young each, born furred and open-eyed in a scrape and left alone most of the day. Hares are food for foxes, hawks, eagles, and wolves, and few live more than a few years.

## Uses and Dangers

Hares give meat and soft fur for linings and mittens. Coursing hares with running hounds is a lord's sport in the Basins; snaring them is a poor family's meat, and on a lord's land it is poaching. They eat young crops and bark in hard winters, but not enough to matter much.

## Lore and Belief

Basin Humans tell of witches who cross the fields at night in a hare's shape, and of a hare shot by a farmer that limped home to become a neighbour with a wounded leg. Meeting a hare on the road at the start of a journey is ill luck; seeing them box is good. Flockturn herders say the hares of the Witnessfields are the fattest anywhere, because no one inside the markers has ever been allowed to eat them.

Poachers who take the Witnessfields hares tell it as a dare: to slip past the markers by moonlight with a net and come back fat.



# Hawks and Falcons

**Hawks** and **falcons** are the daytime hunters of the sky. Wild, they take mice, hares, and birds, and now and then a farmyard hen. Trained, they hunt for people: a lord's falcon is a mark of rank, and a hunter's hawk brings meat to the pot. They are watched for omens, and their shape is borrowed by mages who need to see from above.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open country, woodland edges, crags, and towers |
| **Range** | Across the Cradle web, from the basin farmlands to the Headwater crags |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves, and the hunters of most peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless to people; deadly to small game and poultry |

## Appearance

A hawk of the woods is the size of a crow but longer in the tail, with short rounded wings for twisting between trees, a grey or brown back, a pale breast barred across with dark lines, and fierce yellow or orange eyes. A falcon is built for open sky: long pointed wings, a compact body, a dark slate back, and a dark "moustache" mark under each eye. The female of each is larger than the male, by as much as a third.

A hawk flies low and fast, with flaps and glides, and ambushes from a perch. A falcon climbs high and stoops on its prey from above in a near-vertical dive, folded wings hissing, and strikes it dead in the air. Both scream a thin, high keening near the nest. A trained bird on the fist smells faintly of the raw meat it is fed, and its bells and jesses chime and creak at every move.

## Habitat and Range

Hawks keep to woods and woodland edges, falcons to open farmland, heath, crags, and the towers of towns, where they nest on ledges as if on a cliff. Both are found through the Cradle web, falcons most where there is height to nest and open ground to hunt below it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Hawks and falcons are solitary hunters outside the breeding season, patient on a perch and explosive in the strike. They tolerate people only when raised to it. A trained bird is never tame: it works for food and returns to the fist because the fist feeds it, and a bird flown hungry too often, or not hungry enough, does not come back.

## Abilities

Their eyes are the sharpest of any beast, seeing a mouse in the grass from high above. Latent Spur can draw out what is already latent in that sight, so a hunting hawk gains keener night sight for one pursuit; it cannot turn the bird into something it is not.

## Life Cycle

A pair nests in spring, in a tree or on a ledge, and raises two to four young. Fledglings taken from the nest, or young birds trapped in their first autumn, are the ones trained. A wild hawk may live ten years; a well-kept trained one longer.

## Uses and Dangers

Falconers fly hawks and falcons at game birds, hares, and rabbits, and lords keep mews of trained birds as they keep kennels and stables. Feathers fletch arrows, and a falcon given as a gift is a lordly gift. The birds take chickens and pigeons, so farmers net their yards.

## Lore and Belief

A falcon stooping is held a good sign before a hunt or a journey, and a hawk on a roof-ridge a warning that something is watching the house. The legendary infiltrator of Many-Shaping, who flows from falcon to hound to noble in one pursuit, has made every unknown falcon over a lord’s hall a little suspect.

These are not the Storm-Hawks, whose wings are lightning; those belong to the Storm Heart, a Resonant Zone.

Falcon-thieves are hanged in most lordships, and the theft of a great lord’s white falcon has started more than one feud between houses.



# Heath Adders

**Heath adders** are the vipers of the Cradle web's dry, warm ground. They bask on heath and old terraces and in the thorn, and their bite, painful and sickening to a grown person, can kill a child or a dog. Scholars camped at Stillgate's gate in the Witnessfields and herders at the Grey Line carry the same poultice against it, and the same caution.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Heath, dry terraces, and thorn |
| **Range** | The Witnessfields, the Briarreach, the heath of the Confluence Basins, and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans and Elves |
| **Danger** | Dangerous; the bite can kill a child |

## Appearance

A heath adder is short and thick, about as long as a Human's forearm and hand, with a broad, flat head distinct from the neck. Its eyes are red-brown with a vertical slit pupil. Down its back runs a dark zigzag stripe on a ground that is grey in the males and brown or coppery in the females, with a dark V or X on the top of the head. Some are all black.

It moves slowly and lies still in the sun, coiled flat to catch the warmth. Disturbed, it hisses loudly and strikes fast, then retreats.

## Habitat and Range

Heath adders live in open, warm, dry ground with cover: the heath and grassed terraces of the Witnessfields and the sunny clearings and thorn of the Briarreach. They are found as well on the heathy uplands of the Confluence Basins and the dry terraces of the Headwater Marches.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An adder hunts voles, mice, lizards, and fledglings, striking and letting go, then following the poisoned prey until it dies. It is shy and slips away from footsteps, and most bites happen when it is trodden on or picked up. Adders gather in numbers to sleep through the winter in a dry bank, and come out together on the first warm days.

## Life Cycle

Females bear live young in late summer, half a dozen to a dozen, each as long as a finger and already venomous. Adders may live fifteen years.

## Uses and Dangers

The bite swells, bruises black, and sickens: vomiting, faintness, and in a child or a small person sometimes death. Herders and travellers carry a poultice of herbs pressed to the bite and bound, and healers who know Vital Magic draw the venom out with Toxin Draw into a blackening poultice. Dogs, sheep, and cattle are bitten more often than people.

## Lore and Belief

Basin Humans say an adder will not die until sunset, however it is killed. Thornbound children learn adder sign with the other warnings of the forest. Some Flockturn herders say the adders of the Witnessfields guard the markers; scholars at Stillgate say only that the old terraces are warm and full of voles, and wear boots.

Treasure-seekers who dig the old terraces for buried hoards say the adders lie thickest where the gold is, which is why so few have found it.



# Hedgehogs

**Hedgehogs** are the small spined wanderers of hedge and garden. They eat the slugs, snails, and beetles that eat the vegetables, and every gardener is glad of them. In the Leeward Folds Halflings leave a dish at the store-room door for them, and in the Confluence Basins a child who finds one rolled up in the leaves carries it home in a hat.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Hedges, gardens, and orchards |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Humans and Halflings |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A hedgehog is about the size of two cupped hands, round-backed and short-legged, with a pointed, whiskered snout, small dark eyes, and short round ears. Its back and sides are covered in thousands of short, sharp spines, banded brown and cream; its face and belly are covered in coarse brown fur. Threatened, it rolls itself into a tight ball of spines with nothing showing.

It trots along with a rolling, purposeful shuffle, faster than it looks, and snuffles, snorts, and grunts loudly as it feeds, so that a hedgehog in a garden at night sounds much larger than it is. It smells earthy.

## Habitat and Range

Hedgehogs live in hedges, garden edges, orchards, and wood margins wherever there are worms and beetles: throughout the farmed country of the Basins and on the terraces and orchard walls of the Folds.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A hedgehog wanders far each night, eating slugs, snails, worms, beetles, caterpillars, fallen fruit, and the odd egg. It is solitary, unafraid, and slow to learn danger. In autumn it fattens, and through winter it sleeps rolled in a nest of leaves under a hedge, a woodpile, or a terrace step.

## Life Cycle

Young are born in summer, four or five to a litter, with soft white spines under the skin that harden within hours. They follow their mother in a line on her rounds. A hedgehog may live four or five years if it survives its first winter.

## Uses and Dangers

They give the garden its best pest-keeper and nothing else. Some poor households in the Basins bake them in clay for food. They are harmless, though their spines carry fleas.

## Lore and Belief

Halflings leave a dish of water or milk at the storeroom door so that the hedgehogs will keep the garden; a fold commons whose hedgehogs are thriving is thought to be keeping its proportions well. Basin Humans say hedgehogs steal milk from sleeping cows and carry fruit off on their spines, neither of which they do.



# Herd Animals

**Herd animals** here are the beasts that live by moving: driven from grazing to grazing, counted in heads rather than housed in byres. The largest herds belong to the Orc kindreds of the Windscar Pacts, for whom a herd is food, shelter, trade, and the currency in which wrongs are answered; their beasts, the stair kine, have a page of their own. Dwarven farmsteads of the Ironspine drive smaller herds to summer pasture, and Ogre camps on the frontier pastures keep beasts of their own. The cattle and sheep of the Cradle web farmlands have pages of their own (Cattle, Sheep), as do the beasts that carry loads (Pack Animals).

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Thin escarpment grass, basin floors after flood, and mountain summer pasture |
| **Range** | The High Scars and the Rimward Basins of the Windscar Expanse, the Ironspine, and Ogre threshold country |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Dwarves, Ogres, and the Halflings and Gnomes who buy from the Windscar |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

### *The Shelf Herds of the Windscar*

The kindreds' herds are stair kine: shaggy, double-coated beasts between a large goat and a small cow in size, the colours of the ridges, that climb the cliff stairs sideways.

### *The Hold Herds of the Ironspine*

The herds of the Dwarven terrace farms are small, black or dark red, short in the leg and broad in the chest, with thick hides and short, blunt horns. They are heavy for their size and slow, built to climb terrace steps to the high pasture and to stand out mountain weather. They low deeply and seldom.

### *The Beasts of the Threshold Camps*

Ogre camps on rough uplands and frontier pastures keep whatever hardy beasts the ground will carry, most often rangy, long-legged stock of no settled breed, bought or traded from the peoples they work among.

## Habitat and Range

The stair kine graze the shelves of the High Scars and the rims and floors of the Rimward Basins, and are driven down to the Soundchain stations and the Leeward Folds (see Stair Kine).

On the terraces of the Ironspine the hold herds go up to summer pasture and come back down before the passes close. Ogre threshold camps keep their beasts wherever the camp is working that season.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Driven herds of every kind follow their oldest beast rather than the drover, and graze ground bare if they are left on it. The hold herds are slow and patient on the terrace steps and bunch in the lee of the walls when the weather turns; threshold-camp beasts are as mixed in temper as in breed.

## Life Cycle

Hold herds breed in spring and are culled in autumn when they come down from pasture. A beast that survives its first winters may give milk and young for ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

The Windscar herds are the kindreds' living store and the price their wrongs are paid in (see Stair Kine). The cost of every driven herd is water and grass, and an overgrazed pasture or a soured well can ruin a camp or a farmstead.

Dwarven herds give milk, meat, and hides, and everything a farmstead such as Barleystep raises goes up to its hold. Ogre bands carry other people's wounded animals as part of their burden work, and a beast too heavy to walk off a shelf may come down on an Ogre's back.

## Lore and Belief

The kindreds' tale of the Still Well, in which the herds sickened at a soured well until the Storm-Caller drove the camp on, belongs to the stair kine (see Stair Kine). Dwarven farmsteads say a hold herd that will not go up to the high pasture in spring knows of a late snow.



# Herons and Cranes

**Herons** and **cranes** are the great wading birds of the wet country. Herons stand alone at the water's edge all year and fish; cranes come in flocks and dance on the flood meadows in spring. Reedfolk pilots read both with the reed beds, as part of the long watching that tells them where the water stands and where it will go.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Fens, reed beds, and flood meadows |
| **Range** | The Reedmere of the Confluence Basins, the Lower Serath, and the Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Reedfolk and Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A **heron** stands as tall as a Human's waist on long yellow legs: a slender grey bird with a white neck streaked black, a black plume behind the eye, and a long dagger of a yellow bill. It flies slowly on broad, bowed grey wings with its neck folded back and its legs trailing, and croaks a harsh, single **fraank**. A heronry, high in the willows, stinks of fish.

A **crane** is taller still, nearly as tall as a Human, grey all over with a black and white head, a red patch on the crown, and a bustle of drooping feathers over the tail. It flies with its neck stretched straight out, and a flock calls in loud, rolling, trumpeting cries that carry for miles.

## Habitat and Range

Herons live along every slow water: the fens and reed beds of the Reedmere in the Confluence Basins, the backwaters and oxbows of the Lower Serath, and the side channels of the Greyford Reach. Cranes winter and pass through the wet meadows of the Basins and the Serath, and some pairs nest in the remotest fens.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A heron stands motionless in the shallows and strikes at fish, frogs, eels, and young water birds, or stalks slowly through the meadow for voles. It nests in colonies in tall trees. Cranes walk the meadows in flocks eating roots, seed, grain, and small creatures, and in spring the pairs dance: bowing, leaping, flinging up grass, and calling together. Both are wary and take flight at a long distance.

## Life Cycle

Herons nest early, in late winter, and raise three or four young in a great untidy platform of sticks. Cranes pair for life and raise one or two young a year. Both may live twenty years.

## Uses and Dangers

Herons are a lord’s quarry for falcons, and their plumes trim caps. Cranes are hunted for the table where lords allow it. Herons take fish from the weirs and ponds, which fishers resent. Neither does harm to people.

## Lore and Belief

Reedfolk pilots watch where herons stand: a heron fishes where the water is shallow and steady, so a heron standing where the channel was last year shows the channel has moved. When the cranes dance on a flood meadow, Reedfolk say the rise is near, and households move what they must above the line. Basin Humans hold that a heron flying over a house means a death, and that cranes carry the souls of the drowned downriver.



# Horned Vipers

**Horned vipers** lie buried in the sand at the edge of shade across the Glassbelt and the dry rims of the Rimward Basins, with only their eyes and the horns over them showing. Most bites come from a hand put down beside a rock or a foot set in the shadow of a wall. A grown person usually lives through one, sick and swollen for days; a child, an old crosser, or someone already weak may not.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Stony desert, sand, and rim shelves |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins and the Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: the bite can kill a child |

## Appearance

A horned viper is short and thick, about as long as a forearm, with a broad, flat, heart-shaped head on a narrow neck and a short tail. Over each eye stands a single pointed scale like a little horn, which some vipers lack. Its scales are rough and keeled, sandy buff or pale grey with darker blotches down the back, matching the ground it lies on so closely that it cannot be seen until it moves. On loose sand it moves sideways in looping coils, leaving a track of parallel hooked bars. When threatened it coils and rubs its scales together, a dry sizzling rasp like fat in a pan.

## Habitat and Range

They live in stony desert, sandy flats, wash beds, and the rocky shelves of the rims across the Rimward Basins and the Glassbelt Interior, and around the walls of wells, shelters, and ruins,

where lizards and rodents gather. They are commonest where there is sand to bury in and shade to lie beside.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A horned viper hunts by waiting. It shuffles itself into the sand until only its eyes and horns show, at the edge of a rock's shade or beside a track, and strikes the lizards, rodents, and small birds that come within reach. It hunts at night in summer and by day in the cool months. It does not chase and does not attack anything too large to eat unless it is stepped on or touched, but it will not move out of the way either.

## Life Cycle

Horned vipers lay a clutch of eggs in warm sand in early summer, and the young hatch in late summer as small copies of their parents, able to bite from the start. They live ten years or more.

## Uses and Dangers

The bite brings burning pain, swelling that spreads up the limb, blackened skin, and fever; a strong adult recovers in a week or two, sometimes losing a finger, while a small child can die within a day. Crossers shake out bedding and boots, carry a stick to turn stones, sleep off the ground where they can, and keep children out of the shade of the walls. Salvagers cut a bitten limb and bind it, which does little good. The skins are worn as bands.

## Lore and Belief

The horns are held by Glassbelt salvagers to be the viper's ears, and they say it hears the footsteps of a crossing a day away. Rimward children are told that a viper lies at the edge of every shade, so that nobody rests in shade without looking first, and the lesson is a good one. Orc kindreds say a viper found in a cistern channel means the channel has gone too long uncleared.

Basin raiders are said to toss vipers into an enemy's cistern before a raid; the kindreds count it among the worst of deeds and blood-feud follows it.



# Hornets

**Hornets** are the largest of the stinging wasps, and in late summer the worst trouble of an orchard. A nest in the hollow of an old fruit tree or under the eaves of a store-house can hold hundreds, and a picker who sets a ladder against the wrong tree is off it again in a breath. In the Leeward Folds the orchard leagues that share pickers and presses share the hornet work too, and burn the nests at night.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Hollow trees, eaves, wall gaps, and orchards |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds, the Confluence Basins, and the edges of the Elderweald |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, at the nest |

## Appearance

A hornet is as long as the top joint of a thumb: a heavy, red-brown head and chest, a belly banded in dark brown and deep yellow, and amber wings that fold flat along the back. In flight it is slower and louder than a wasp, with a low drone that a picker learns to hear over the wind. The nest is a papery ball the size of a head or larger, made of chewed wood, layered in shell-like bands of buff and brown, with one opening at the bottom. A disturbed nest gives off a sour, sharp smell that brings the rest out.

## Habitat and Range

They nest in hollow trees, in the eaves and wall gaps of barns and drying sheds, and in the stone of old terrace walls, wherever there is shelter and fruit or insects to hunt. They are commonest in the orchards and terraces of the Folds, in the villages

and hedgerows of the Confluence Basins, and at the warmer edges of the Elderweald. They fly by night as well as by day, and come to lamps.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Hornets hunt flies, bees, and other insects to feed their grubs, and in late summer turn to ripe and fallen fruit, hollowing a pear from the inside. A single hornet at the fruit ignores a picker who moves slowly. A nest does not: anyone who knocks it, shakes its branch, or stands at its mouth is stung again and again, and the hornets follow for a long way. They are worst when the nest is largest, just as the fruit comes in.

## Abilities

A hornet stings repeatedly without losing its sting. One sting is a deep, throbbing pain and a swelling for a day; a dozen sicken a grown Human, and fewer a small body (see Stings and Bites).

## Life Cycle

A single queen wakes in spring from the rotten wood where she wintered and builds a small nest the size of a walnut. Her first workers enlarge it all summer. In autumn the nest raises new queens and drones; with the first frosts the workers and the old queen die, the new queens go to ground, and the nest is never used again.

## Uses and Dangers

They kill many orchard pests, and a few fold keepers leave a distant nest alone for that reason. Their cost is fruit and stings, and now and then a picker's fall from a ladder. Fold orchard leagues find the nests by day, mark them, and go out after dark with smoke-pots and long poles wrapped in burning rag, when every hornet is home and slow with cold; the burnt nest is knocked into a sack and the sack into water. A Halfling child is not let onto a picking ladder until it can tell a hornet's drone from a bee's.

## Lore and Belief

Halflings say a hornet nest under the eaves means too much is being kept that should have been shared. Basin folk hold that seven hornet stings kill a horse and three a man, which overstates it. Some believe the queen that survives the winter is the same one every year, and there is a children's rhyme for her.

Halfling tales tell of the fold that drove off a band of thieves by throwing a hornet nest over the wall into their camp, and children in the Folds still play at it with pine cones.



# Horses

**Horses** are the riding beasts of the Cradle web. A horse is speed and rank: couriers ride them on urgent dispatch, lords and their sworn riders go to war on them, and a clerk who can borrow one for a day's journey counts himself lucky. Few ordinary farmers own one; the plough is the ox's work, and the mountain road is the mule's.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Roads, stables, and the pastures of farms and lordships |
| **Range** | The Human lands of the Cradle web, from the Confluence Basins to the Greyford Reach and the Headwater roads |
| **Known to** | Humans above all, and every people that deals with them on the roads |
| **Danger** | Harmless when handled; a kick or a bolting horse kills a few every year |

## Appearance

A riding horse stands about as tall at the withers as a Human's shoulder, long-legged and deep-chested, with a long head, a flowing mane and tail, and a coat of bay, chestnut, brown, grey, or black, often with a white blaze or white socks. War horses are heavier in the neck and haunch and bred for nerve rather than speed. The hill ponies of the Headwater valleys are a hand or two lower, thick-maned, and shaggy in winter.

A horse walks with a nodding head, trots in a two-beat jog, and runs at a gallop that shakes the ground. It whinnies across a field, snorts at what it does not trust, and blows softly into the hand of someone it knows. A stable smells of hay, sweat, leather, and dung.

## Habitat and Range

Horses are kept in stables and paddocks wherever there are roads and lords: in the towns and lordships of the Confluence Basins, along the Serath, at

the carters' inns of the Greyford Reach, whose big yards have stabling, and in the foothill towns of the Headwater roads. The outer halls of the Ironspine holds keep stables for visitors' beasts. There are no wild horses in the Cradle web.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A horse is a herd animal and a prey animal. It is alert, quick to startle, and calmer in company than alone. Trained well, it is willing and steady and learns its rider's voice and weight; trained badly, it bites, kicks, and bolts. It will not willingly walk onto a surface it does not trust, which is why riders lead their horses over bad bridges. A frightened horse forgets all training.

## Abilities

A horse can be bonded to its rider closely enough for magic to use the bond. Beast Tether, a whistled bond call, brings a trained mount by the safest route, so a rider trapped in a ravine can summon her horse after a skirmish scatters the column; it cannot override terror, injury, or a severed bond. Slipstream lightens the drag on a moving mount so dispatch riders cover ground with less fatigue, and Thunderwake trails rolling shock behind a cavalry charge to break pursuit.

## Life Cycle

A mare carries her foal for eleven months and drops it in spring. Foals stand within the hour and are weaned at half a year. A horse is broken to saddle at three or four, is in its prime from five to fifteen, and may live to twenty-five or more if it is not worked to death first.

## Uses and Dangers

Horses carry riders, messages, and small loads, pull light carts and coaches, and win battles. Their hides, hair, and hooves are used when they die; their meat is eaten only in hard times in most places. A horse is costly: it eats grain as well as grass, needs shoeing, and falls sick easily.

Cavalry is feared enough that several schools keep answers to it. Backbone Magic can turn a cavalry lane into a field of stone fangs, and Crucible Magic's Glassflash fuses sand into blinding flashes, a desert fighter's answer to riders. At Greyford the toll is taken by the head, so a rider pays for herself and her mount alike, and pays again if the men at the ford think she can.

## Lore and Belief

Humans name their horses, and a good horse's name is remembered after its rider's. A horse that shies at nothing on an empty road is believed to have seen what the rider cannot, and riders turn back rather than force it on.

Horse-thieves are the commonest outlaws of the roads and are hanged where they are caught, and the great raids of the march country are remembered by the horses taken. A good horse is sung too: the grey mare that carried her dying rider home through a raider ambush and would let no one else near him.



# Insects and Bees

**Insects** are everywhere people farm, store, bury, or write, and they matter to every people in small ways that add up to harvests and losses. The bees that set an orchard's fruit, the hum that fills a ripening field, the flies at a corpse, the larvae of the marsh fevers, and the small eaters of paper and grain are all part of ordinary life. Magic follows them closely: whole workings exist to call insects in, drive them off, or slow them down.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Fields, orchards, gardens, marshes, dwellings, and archives |
| **Range** | Throughout the Material Plane; thickest in the farmed basins and warm wetlands |
| **Known to** | Every people |
| **Danger** | Harmless, except marsh-fever carriers and swarms |

## Appearance

### *Bees*

Hive bees are small, furred, and banded in dull gold and brown, about the size of a fingertip, with smoky wings that blur as they work. A hive in full summer roars softly from a stride away and smells of warm wax and honey. Wild bees are larger and darker, single-living, and nest in banks and dead wood.

### *Field and Garden Insects*

A field at harvest hums with them: green and brown hoppers springing from the stalks, beetles with backs like polished horn, small white moths in clouds over the grain at dusk, and butterflies over the field margins in every colour of the hedges. Their caterpillars, green, striped, or furred, strip leaves in a bad year.

### *Carrion Flies*

Fat, blue-black, green-sheened flies find a corpse within the hour in warm weather, and their buzzing is the first sign of a death no one has reported. Their maggots follow.

### *Marsh Insects*

Over warm, still water in summer rise clouds of biting gnats and thin, whining flies, thickest at dusk. Some carry the marsh fevers, whose larvae can lodge in the body and work their way towards the spine.

### *Paper and Store Pests*

Silverfish, small boring beetles, and pale moths live in archives, chests, and granaries, eating paper, binding, cloth, and stored grain unseen until the damage shows.

## Habitat and Range

Insects live wherever there is warmth and food: thickest in the farmed country of the Confluence Basins and the orchards of the far-side folds, and in the warm wetlands of the river margins; fewest in high, cold, and dry country. They vanish in winter and return with the warmth, and their year is the farmer's year.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Bees work flowers from first warmth to dusk and defend the hive with their stings, dying of it. Most other insects go about their business without regard to people, which is why a swarm or cloud is so unsettling when it turns towards a body: it is not anger, only hunger, and hunger does not tire.

## Life Cycle

Most insects pass through egg, larva, and a resting shell before emerging in their grown form, and the turn from caterpillar to moth or butterfly is the most familiar change in the world. A summer's insects mostly die with the first frosts; bees winter in the hive, clustered on their stores.

## Uses and Dangers

Bees give honey and wax. Wax seals letters, chests, and jars, makes the best candles, and gives archives and scriptoria their smell of old paper and beeswax. Above all, bees set fruit: an orchard with too few bees bears little, and orchard keepers call them in with Pollinator's Friend to rescue a poor bloom season, by floral lure or by a hive-linked rite.

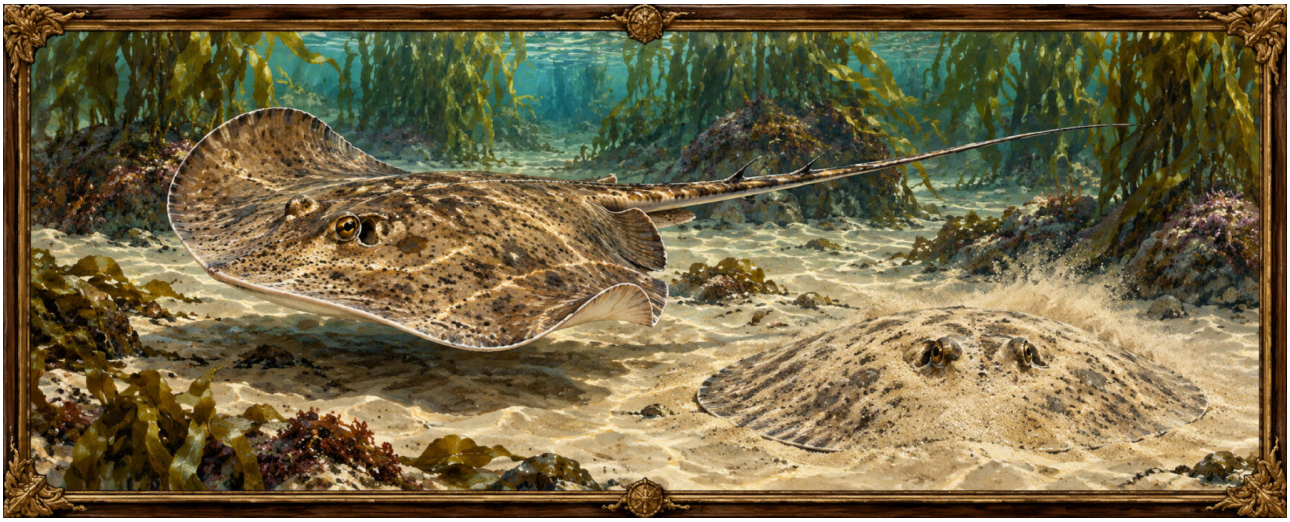
The costs are many and small. Caterpillars and hoppers strip fields; store pests eat grain and paper, and couriers guard treaties against them with Page Seal. Marsh fevers kill, and healers drive their larvae out with Parasite Expel before they reach the spine. Flies speed the rot of the dead, and a caravan carrying its dead to consecrated ground slows rot and insects alike under Pall of Stillness. A swarm can be broken and driven apart with Scatter Cloud, though done badly it only moves the cloud onto someone else.

## Lore and Belief

Insects are read. Necromancers weave nearby death-scent, insects, and scavengers into Carrion Warning, so that the flies and the crows warn of fresh death. In the Basins the air around the Harvest-Mother hums with insects, and a loud field is a blessed one. The chrysalis splitting to free a butterfly is the sign of Imago Prime, whose saying that the shell must break for the insect to emerge is told to the young at every hard change. Where no insect sounds at all, as by the still pool of the Ageless Spring, people feel that something is wrong.

The insects of the other planes and zones are other beings: the moisture-drinking Bleed-Beetles of the Parched, the heat-drawn Cinder-Moths of

the Cinder Fields, and the blood-spinning Blood-Spinners of the Blood River share a shape with ordinary insects and little else.



# Kelpshade Rays

**Kelpshade rays** lie buried in the sand under the great kelp forest of the Tidebound Reaches, the **Kelpshade**, where the returning runs rest before they turn for the estuaries. Each carries a barbed spine in its tail. A swimmer who settles onto one, or a gatherer who treads on one, learns of it at once.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Sand under the kelp forests |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches and the Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Thaluren, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Wary: the tail spine |

## Appearance

A kelpshade ray is a flat, round disc as broad as a shield, with a long whip-like tail and, partway down the tail, one or two barbed spines as long as a finger. Its upper side is sand-brown, freckled and mottled to match the sand, its underside white. Its eyes sit on top, with a pair of breathing holes behind them, and its mouth is underneath. It rests buried to the eyes in the sand, a faint outline the swimmer cannot see, and when disturbed it lifts off in a sudden cloud of sand and glides away, its edges rippling. It is silent.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the sandy bottom under the Kelpshade and the other kelp forests of the shoal worlds, in the sandy shallows of island margins, and along the sandy shores of the Tidelace Coasts. They come into warm shallows in summer in numbers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A ray spends the day buried and feeds at dusk and night, digging in the sand for clams, worms, and crabs and crushing them with flat grinding teeth.

It is shy and gentle and flees what it can. Only when it is stepped on, pinned, or grabbed does it whip its tail up and drive the spine in.

## Life Cycle

Rays bear live young, a few at a time, in sheltered shallows in summer. The young are small copies of their parents. They live a long time, fifteen years or more.

## Uses and Dangers

The spine drives deep, tears as it comes out, and carries a venom that brings agonising pain, swelling, and sickness; a strike to the body or the throat can kill, and a strike to the foot can lame for weeks or fester. Thaluren runs settling on the Kelpshade's sand and gatherers on the island shallows shuffle their feet over the bottom rather than stepping, so that the rays lift and flee ahead of them. Hot water eases the pain. The Thaluren eat the ray's wings, and the spine is used for needles and points.

## Lore and Belief

The Thaluren teach the young who first come down to the Kelpshade to shuffle on the sand before they teach them anything else, and say **the sand has eyes**. Some run-lines hold that a ray's sting is a sign that the one struck came to the resting water without the right to be there. Gnome sounders say the rays bury themselves deeper before a storm.

Pearl-divers who work the kelp edges tell of the ray beds where the sand moves under a diver's feet and of a diver who stepped on a great old ray and never surfaced; the pearls of that bed are still there.



# Kiln Newts

**Kiln newts** live in the hot seep pools of the lowest levels of the Stonewake Deeps, where natural heat warms the water to bath-heat or more. They are small and slow, but their skin carries a slime that numbs whatever it touches, and their bite festers. Dwarven healers of the Deeps scrape that slime for a numbing salve.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Hot seep pools of the lowest levels |
| **Range** | The Stonewake Deeps |
| **Known to** | Dwarves and Kobolds |
| **Danger** | Wary; the skin numbs and the bite festers |

## Appearance

A kiln newt is as long as a hand, slender, with a flattened tail, four short legs, and a broad flat head. Its skin is smooth and wet-looking, a deep dull orange above, brighter orange-red below, speckled with black, and it glows dully in lamplight like a coal. It has small black eyes, and frilled gills behind the head that it keeps all its life.

It crawls slowly along the warm stone of the pool edge and swims with a lazy wave of its tail. It makes no sound. Its slime smells faintly sharp, like hot metal.

## Habitat and Range

Kiln newts live only in the hot, mineral-heavy seep pools and runnels of the Deeps' lowest levels, near the natural heat the forge levels use, and in a few warm pools below the maintained routes that no hold keeps. Cold water kills them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A kiln newt eats the pale worms, shrimp, and insect larvae of the warm pools, and the eggs of other newts. It moves little and does not flee from people; it relies on its slime. A hand that grabs one goes numb, and a newt held tightly bites.

## Life Cycle

Females lay single eggs on the warm stone under the water's edge, and the young hatch as small versions of the adults. They grow slowly and live many years.

## Uses and Dangers

Dwarven healers of the Deeps catch kiln newts with leather gloves and scrape the slime from their backs into a salve with fat and ash, which numbs a wound or a burn before it is cleaned and stitched, and dulls an aching tooth. The newts are put back in their pools afterwards; a healer who kills them for the slime is thought careless. The danger is small: a numbed hand that slips on hot stone, and a bite that festers if not cleaned.

## Lore and Belief

Deep Dwarves say a pool with kiln newts in it is still warm enough to work beside, and a pool whose newts have gone is cooling; they are usually right. Kobold crews say the newts are born of the stone's heat and that a crew which kills one will be burned. Some Dwarven healers say the newt's numbing is a gift of the deep heat to those who keep the deep.



# Kingfishers

**Kingfishers** are the small, brilliant fishing birds of clear water. They dig their nests into earth banks, and the Goblin households of Lowbank, who live among flood-cut banks and are always reading them, say a pair nesting in a bank means a sound bank, and that kingfishers leave a bank the year before it goes.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Clear side channels and willow banks |
| **Range** | The Greyford Reach and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Goblins and Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A kingfisher is the size of a sparrow but stouter, with a large head, a long dagger bill, and short red legs. Its back flashes electric blue and green, its breast and cheeks are bright orange-chestnut, and its throat is white. In flight it is a streak of blue low over the water.

It perches very still on a branch above the water, bobs its head, and dives straight in with a small splash, coming back with a fish crosswise in its bill, which it beats against the branch before swallowing head first. Its call is a shrill, piping whistle as it flies. A nest burrow stinks of fish bones.

## Habitat and Range

Kingfishers live on clear, slow-to-moderate water with perches and earth banks: the side channels and willow islands of the Greyford Reach and the streams and millponds of the Headwater Marches. Muddy water and hard frost drive them away.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A kingfisher eats small fish, water insects, and tadpoles. Each pair holds a stretch of water and drives other kingfishers out of it. It nests at the end of a tunnel as long as an arm, dug into a sheer earth bank above the water, and it chooses the bank carefully: firm earth, not too sandy, high enough to stay dry.

## Life Cycle

A pair raises two or three broods a summer, six or seven young at a time, in the dark at the end of the tunnel. Many die in their first hard winter. A kingfisher seldom lives more than two or three years.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing but their colour; a few of their feathers end up in Highbank milliners' work. They do no harm, beyond a few fish from the ponds.

## Lore and Belief

Lowbank Goblins say a pair nesting in a bank means a sound bank, and they watch which banks the birds use in spring; when a long-used bank goes empty, households near it begin to think about moving. Whether the birds feel a bank weakening, or the Goblins notice it at the same time and credit the birds, nobody can say. Headwater Humans say a kingfisher’s dried body hung in the house turns its beak to the wind.



# Lampless Spiders

**Lampless spiders** live in the dark below ground, where nothing walks often enough to break their webs. In the Roothollows their webs are a sign the route keepers trust: a way strung across with them has gone unused, whatever its marks say. Dark Elf keepers read the webs before they read the marks.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Unused ways, deep chambers, and old underworks |
| **Range** | The Roothollows, the Stonewake Deeps, and the underlayers of the Broken Marches |
| **Known to** | Elves (Dark Elves), Kobolds, Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Wary: a numbing bite |

## Appearance

A lampless spider is pale as a peeled root, white to faint yellowish, with a small round body the size of a fingernail and very long, fine legs that span a hand. It has no eyes, or only faint pale spots where eyes would be. It moves slowly, feeling ahead with its front legs, and hangs still for hours. Its web is a wide sheet of fine, dust-grey silk strung across a passage from wall to wall, low or at head height, with loose threads trailing below it. In lamplight a web looks like a curtain of breath; it has no smell, and the spider makes no sound.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the unlit, still, damp passages of the deep: the Roothollows below the living root, the old ways of the Stonewake Deeps, and the culverts and service tunnels under the Broken Marches. They need the air to stay still and the way to stay quiet. A passage walked every day has none; one left a season has a few; one left a year is curtained.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They catch the small pale life of the deep: cave crickets, flies that breed on dead root and fungus, and the young of other spiders. They do not hunt people and seldom bite, but a hand pressed onto one, or a face walked into a web, may take a bite before it is shaken off.

## Abilities

The bite numbs. The skin around it goes cold and dead for an hour or two, the numbness spreads up a hand or across a cheek, and then it passes, leaving a small red mark. It does not kill, though a Kobold child bitten on the throat may struggle to swallow for a while.

## Life Cycle

A female lays a few eggs in a pale silk ball and carries it in her jaws until the young hatch. Spiderlings ride on her back for some days before scattering on threads along the passage. They grow slowly in the cold, and an old lampless spider may be older than the child who finds it.

## Uses and Dangers

Their use is the reading. A route keeper of the deep knows that marks can lie, through error, through malice, or because the way changed after they were cut, but a web across a passage means nobody has come through it since the web was spun. A web freshly torn on a way thought unused means someone has been there. Kobold crews in the Deeps read them the same way, and Kobold underhouses in the Marches leave an outer web whole as a tripwire. The danger is small: a numb hand, a fright.

## Lore and Belief

Dark Elves call a curtained way **a closed mouth** and do not break a web on a way struck from the reckoning, since breaking it would be walking it. Children are told that the spiders spin over every way that someone failed to come home by. Dwarves say a lampless spider in a working is a sign the air there is good, since they die in bad air; that is not certain.

Ruin-delvers in the Marches' underlayers take a thick curtain of web across a passage as a warning that no one has walked it for a lifetime, which means there is still something worth taking beyond, and something that kept the last delvers from coming back.



# Lampreys

**Lampreys** are eel-shaped fish with no jaws, only a round sucking mouth ringed with teeth. They live in the estuaries and lower rivers of the Tidebound Reaches and the estuaries of the Tidelace, and feed by latching onto big fish and rasping into them. Now and then one fastens onto a swimmer in the mouths. The Kavari eat them; the Thaluren loathe them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Estuaries and rivers |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches and the estuaries of the Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Kavari, Thaluren, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Wary, to fish and to swimmers in the mouths |

## Appearance

A lamprey is as long as an arm, round and smooth, scaleless and slimy, with two low fins near the tail and a row of seven round gill holes behind each small eye. It is mottled olive-brown to grey above and pale below. Its mouth is the thing people remember: a round sucker as wide as a coin, lined with circles of yellow, horny teeth around a rasping tongue. It swims like an eel and holds onto stones with its mouth to rest against the current. It is silent.

## Habitat and Range

Grown lampreys live in the estuaries and the coastal water just off them, feeding on fish; they climb the rivers to spawn on the gravel runs, and the young live for years buried in the silt of the slow river margins. They are commonest in the Reaches' estuaries and less common in the Tidelace mouths.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A feeding lamprey fastens its sucker onto a fish, rasps a hole through the skin with its tongue, and drinks blood and flesh for days, until it drops off or the fish dies. It will try any large, slow body in the water, which in the mouths includes a swimmer resting in the current. It is not aggressive in any other way and is easily pulled off, though it leaves a round, bleeding wound.

## Life Cycle

In spring grown lampreys stop feeding and climb the rivers to the gravel runs, where they move stones with their mouths to build nests, spawn, and die. The blind, toothless young drift down to the silt and live buried in it for several years, filtering food from the water, before changing into the sucking form and going down to the estuary.

## Uses and Dangers

Lampreys scar and weaken the big fish of the estuaries, and fishers find them clinging to their catch. A swimmer bitten in the mouths has a wound that bleeds freely and may fester. The Kavari catch them in baskets on the spawning runs and eat them stewed or smoked, rich and strong, a seasonal dish. Gnome pilots in the Tidelace estuaries think them ugly and harmless.

## Lore and Belief

The Thaluren hold the lamprey in horror. A creature that lives on another's body, taking its strength without killing it, is to them the shape of a broken return: a passage taken without right. A Thaluren who finds one on their body pulls it off at once and goes to clean water. The Kavari laugh at this, and say a lamprey is a fish like any other and better than most. Both peoples agree it should be kept off the spawning gravels, where its nest-building can disturb a clutch.

Kavari tales tell of a lamprey as long as a boat in the deepest pool of an estuary, that fastened to a Thaluren run-leader and was carried with him for a whole season; the Thaluren do not tell this tale.



# Leeches

**Leeches** are the blood-drinking worms of slow fresh water. Wade a basin fen in summer and they will find the legs; healers in the towns keep them in jars and set them on bruises and swellings. To a fen-wader they are a horror that has to be put up with; to a basin healer they are a tool.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Fens, ditches, and slow channels |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Humans and Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

A leech is a flat, soft, segmented worm, from the length of a finger to that of a hand when full, with a sucker at each end. The healers' kind is olive-green with rust-orange stripes along its back and a speckled yellow belly; other kinds are brown or black. Hungry, it is thin and narrow; fed, it swells to several times its size, dark and soft as a ripe plum.

It swims with a graceful up-and-down wave of its whole body, or loops along the bottom by its suckers. Its bite is barely felt, a small Y-shaped cut, and it lets go only when it is full.

## Habitat and Range

Leeches live in warm, still, weedy water: the fens and ditches of the Confluence Basins, the Reed-mere above all, and the backwaters and slow channels of the Lower Serath. They are thickest in summer.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A leech finds its host by the stir in the water, warmth, and smell, swims to it, and fastens on: cattle at the drinking place, frogs and fish, waders' legs. It feeds for an hour or more, then drops off and can go months without another meal. Some kinds eat worms and snails rather than blood.

## Life Cycle

Leeches lay their eggs in small spongy cocoons in the damp mud of banks. They grow slowly and may live several years.

## Uses and Dangers

Healers in the march-towns and corridor towns keep leeches in jars of clean water and set them on bruises, swollen joints, black eyes, and the heads of fevered patients, and leech-gatherers wade the fens bare-legged to collect them, which is miserable work. The bite does no harm in itself, though it bleeds for hours after and can fester. A leech that gets into the nose or mouth of someone drinking from a ditch is a real danger, and cattle drinking from a fen often come out bleeding.

## Lore and Belief

Basin healers hold that leeches draw out bad blood and with it the fever, which is believed more than it is shown. Reedfolk wade with their legs bound or greased and say a leech is the fen's toll, payable in summer. Some Basin Humans say a leech will not bite a liar, which leech-gatherers find a useful thing to say.



# Lice and Fleas

**Lice** and **fleas** are the commonest animals in any house, and the least wanted. Lice live on the body and in clothes; fleas live in bedding, floors, and the coats of animals and come to the body to feed. They are a nuisance in a good year and a killer in a crowded one, because lice carry camp fever and the fleas of dying rats carry the swelling plague.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Bodies, clothing, bedding, and dwellings |
| **Range** | Widespread |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Wary: they carry sickness |

## Appearance

A **louse** is a flat, pale, six-legged speck the size of a sesame seed, grey-white until it has fed and then rust-red with blood. Its legs end in hooks that grip a hair or a seam. Its eggs, **nits**, are glued singly to hairs near the root, pale and pearly. There are head lice, which keep to the scalp, and body lice, which live in the seams of clothes and come to the skin only to feed.

A **flea** is smaller still, dark red-brown, hard, and narrow from side to side, so that it slips between hairs; it has no wings, and jumps a hand's height or more when disturbed. It is far harder to catch than a louse, and cracks between the nails when it is.

## Habitat and Range

Lice go wherever people crowd and do not wash or change: camps, ships, gaols, pilgrim hostels, the poor quarters of towns, and children's shared beds (see The Itch). Fleas breed in floor-rushes, straw, dust, and bedding, and on dogs, cats, hedge-

hogs, and above all rats. Both are thinner in cold, dry high country and among peoples who live in water. The Wrought carry neither.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Lice spend their whole lives on one host or in its clothes, feeding several times a day, and leave only for another warm body close by, or when a body cools. Fleas feed and drop off, and they leave a dying animal for the nearest living one, which is how the swelling plague passes from rats to people.

## Life Cycle

A louse lays a few eggs a day for a month; nits hatch in a week and are grown in another two. Flea eggs drop into bedding and dust, where the larvae live on crumbs of dried blood and dirt before spinning cocoons, and a flea can wait in its cocoon for months until footsteps or warmth wake it.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their bites itch, are scratched raw, and fester, and the sicknesses they carry kill by the thousand. Every household keeps a fine-toothed delousing comb of bone or horn and searches the children's heads each week; clothes are boiled or baked in the oven after bread; floor-rushes are changed and strewn with bitter and sweet herbs; and smoke is used to drive fleas out of bedding. Healers can make a body hostile to them with Parasite Expel, but a cleared body back in a lousy bunk is lousy again within days.

## Lore and Belief

Most peoples believe lice breed from sweat and dirt, and take a lousy stranger for a wanderer or worse. Soldiers say lice desert a man about to die, and are glad of their own. Basin folk hold that fleas leave a house where someone has died, and lay a fleece on the bed to catch them. Hardly anyone connects fleas with the plague, though nearly everyone knows that rats bring it.

Sellsword companies are lousy to a man after a long campaign, and towns that see one coming shut their gates as much against the lice as against the sellswords.



# Liver Flukes

**Liver flukes** are the flat worms behind the "sheep rot" of the wet common meadows. They spend part of their lives in small water snails and part in the livers of sheep and cattle, and a wet summer that suits the snails costs the flocks of Human herders dearly by the next spring. The sickness itself, its signs and its cost, is told under Sheep Rot and Fly-Strike.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Wet meadows, seeps, and the snails that live in them; the livers of grazing beasts |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary, to sheep and cattle |

## Appearance

A grown fluke is a soft, flat, leaf-shaped worm about the length and breadth of a thumbnail, grey-brown or tawny, thicker at the front, where a small cone holds its mouth. A shepherd who butchers a rotten sheep finds dozens in the bile channels of a liver gone hard, pale, and gritty. The young stages are too small to see: a speck swimming in a puddle, a dot of cyst stuck to a grass blade. The snails they pass through are small, dark, pointed water snails no bigger than a pea, found on the mud of seeps, ditches, and hoof-pocked wet ground.

## Habitat and Range

They live where wet grazing, snails, and herds meet: the wet meadows grazed in common below the villages of the Confluence Basins, the seeps and stream-sides of the terraced valleys of the Headwater Marches, and any field that floods and stands. Dry hill pasture is free of them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A fluke does nothing a watcher could see. Its eggs pass in a sheep's dung; in water they hatch into swimming specks that seek out the snail and burrow in. Inside the snail each one multiplies into many, which swim out again, cling to the grass, and wait in a hard skin to be eaten. In the sheep they bore through the gut into the liver and feed there for years.

## Life Cycle

The whole round takes a few months in a warm, wet year and stops in a dry one, when the snails die back. That is why the rot comes after a wet summer and why one dry year cleans a meadow for a while. A fluke in a liver can live as long as the sheep does.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. In a wet year they can take a third of a flock and more, and cattle on the same meadows grow thin and give less milk. Rotten livers are eaten without harm to people. Herders move flocks to high, dry ground in wet years, drain or fence the worst seeps, and keep the wet meadows for cattle and hay, and nothing known cures a sheep already struck.

## Lore and Belief

Shepherds know the rot follows wet ground and blame the wet itself, "rotten dew", or grazing before the dew has lifted. Few have seen the snail as part of it. Some valleys say a rotten meadow lies over a grave. A Headwater saying holds that "a wet year fattens the flock and the fluke", and an old shepherd who sees sheep thriving on soaked grass in summer sells before autumn.



# Locusts

**Locusts** are grasshoppers of the far side's dry grassland. In most years they are scattered and harmless. In a swarm year they gather in clouds that darken the sky and eat everything green in their path: the thin grass of the Windscar shelves, the green fringe of the Long Pan, and, when the wind carries them over the Lee Wall, the terraces of the Leeward Folds. A swarm year is one of the years the Folds' long-cycle reserve exists for.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Dry grassland, shelves, and terrace edges |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins, the High Scars, the edges of the Leeward Folds, and the Glassbelt's Windscar edge |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Halflings |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to crops and pasture in a swarm year |

## Appearance

A locust is as long as a finger, with a blunt head, large eyes, short horns, a saddle-shaped plate over the shoulders, long folded wings, and great hind legs for jumping. A lone locust in an ordinary year is green or sandy brown, hard to see in the grass. A swarming locust is a different-looking thing: yellow and black, its wings longer, and it moves with others. A swarm on the wing is a roaring, glittering cloud, and the noise of one feeding is like rain falling on a roof. A field after a swarm smells of crushed grass and dung.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the dry grassland and scrub of the Rimward Basins and the High Scars, along the Windscar edge of the Glassbelt, and on the dry

spurs and saddles round the Folds. Swarms go wherever the wind takes them, mostly from the dry country towards the greener.

## Behaviour and Temperament

In ordinary years each locust lives alone, eating grass and leaves. When a run of dry years ends in good rains, the young hatch in vast numbers onto a small area of new green, and crowding changes them: they turn colour, seek one another out, and move together, first as marching bands of wingless young, then as flying swarms. A swarm eats grass, grain, leaves, fruit, bark, and thatch, and moves on when the ground is bare.

## Life Cycle

Females lay pods of eggs in damp sand and soil. The young hatch with the rains, wingless, and grow wings after a few moults; a swarming generation breeds again wherever it lands, so a swarm year can last two or three seasons before the dry and the birds bring it down.

## Uses and Dangers

A swarm can strip a shelf of grass in a day, leave the herds with nothing to eat, and take a fold's green crops and orchard leaves before harvest. On the Windscar a swarm year starves herds and sends camps to the strongholds early; in the Folds it is a hole in the year that only the reserve can fill. Halfling households drive marching bands into trenches and burn them, beat pans and light smoky fires against a swarm, and cover what they can. The locusts themselves are food: roasted, salted, or dried and ground, and in a swarm year many households eat a great deal of them.

## Lore and Belief

Rimward kindreds say a swarm follows the end of a dry cycle as surely as night follows day, and in a sense they are right. Halflings say a swarm comes to a fold that has let its reserve run low, and an unlucky fold with a full reserve is suspected of having miscounted. Some Orc kindreds hold that Rakhal the Storm-Caller sends the swarms on the wind to move camps that have stayed too long.

A swarm year is a raiding year: kindreds whose pasture has been stripped ride against those whose pasture was spared, and the songs of the Rimward Basins date their oldest feuds by the swarms.



# Magpies

**Magpies** are the loud black-and-white birds of hedge, ruin, and town edge, notorious for carrying off anything that shines. In the ruin country they pick bright scraps from the rubble and line their nests with them, and the Goblin salvagers of the Marches call a magpie's nest the first salvage market: the bird got there before anyone.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Ruins, field edges, hedgerows, and towns |
| **Range** | The Broken Marches, the Greyford Reach, and the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Goblins, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A magpie is the size of a pigeon in the body, with a long, stiff, wedge-shaped tail as long again. It looks black and white at a distance: black head, breast, and back, a white belly, and broad white patches on the shoulders and wings that flash as it flies. Close to, the black shines green, blue, and purple in the sun, and the tail has a bronze sheen. It hops and struts on the ground with its tail cocked, flies with quick flaps and long glides, and is never quiet for long: its call is a harsh, rapid chatter, like a stick drawn along a fence.

## Habitat and Range

Magpies live where open ground meets cover: hedgerows, field edges, orchards, overgrown ruins, and the outskirts of towns. They are common across the farmed lowlands of the Confluence Basins and thick in the ruin country of the Broken Marches and around the yards and platforms of Lowbank on the Greyford Reach. A pair holds its ground year-round; in winter they gather in noisy roosts of dozens.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Magpies eat whatever they find: insects, grubs, seed, carrion, scraps, and the eggs and chicks of smaller birds. They are bold, curious, and quarrelsome, mob hawks, owls, and cats together, and learn a household's habits as quickly as a fox does. Shiny things draw them: a dropped ring, a brass fitting, a bead, a polished nail, picked up, flown off with, and tucked into the nest or a crack in the wall. Most of it is never used again.

## Life Cycle

A pair builds a large domed nest of thorny sticks in a tall bush, a tree, or a high crack in a ruin wall, and lays five to seven speckled eggs in spring. The young fledge in early summer and stay with their parents until autumn. Pairs mate for life, and an old nest may be added to for years.

## Uses and Dangers

Magpies take seed from newly sown fields, eggs from henhouses, and fledglings from the hedges, and farmers sling or net them when they can. Goblin children climb to their nests in the ruins for what they hold, and now and then a lost fitting, a coin, or a broken lock comes down that is worth more than a day's salvage. They also give warning: a magpie's chatter in a quiet ruin means something is moving there.

## Lore and Belief

Goblin salvagers count magpies in a rhyme whose verses run from one for a broken fitting to seven for a cellar nobody has opened, and every warren sings it a little differently. Human villagers greet a lone magpie aloud to turn its bad luck away, and say that a pair on the roof means a wedding. Basin farmers hold that a magpie which steals from the threshing floor has been sent by someone who wishes the household ill.

Treasure-seekers swear a magpie led them to a treasure as often as they swear it led them into a cave-in; the bird is blamed and thanked in equal measure.



# Moles

**Moles** are the small tunnellers under the meadows. They are almost never seen, but their hills are everywhere, and they are a nuisance out of all proportion to their size: molehills foul the scythe in a hay meadow, and in terraced country a mole's run under a drain lets water into a retaining wall. Mole-catchers walk the fold commons of the Leeward Folds each spring and the meadows of the Basins each autumn.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Meadows, fields, and terraces |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Leeward Folds, and the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans and Halflings |
| **Danger** | Wary, to terraces and drains |

## Appearance

A mole is about the length of a hand, a velvet cylinder with no neck, a naked pink snout, and tiny eyes hidden in its fur. Its forefeet are enormous for its size, broad pink spades turned outward with heavy claws. Its fur is short, dense, and black-grey, and lies either way, so it can go backwards in its tunnel as easily as forwards.

Above ground it is clumsy and slow. Below ground it swims through soil. Molehills, cone-shaped heaps of fine crumbled earth, show where it has been; a raised ridge across a field shows where it is going.

## Habitat and Range

Moles live in soft, worm-rich soil: the meadows and fields of the Confluence Basins above the flood line, the terraces and gardens of the Lee-

ward Folds, and the terraced fields of the Headwater Marches. They avoid the wettest ground and rocky soil.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A mole digs a network of tunnels and patrols it, eating the worms and grubs that fall in. It stores worms in a larder, bitten so they live but cannot crawl away. It lives alone and fights any other mole it meets. Floods drive moles out of low ground, and they are sometimes seen swimming.

## Life Cycle

Young are born in spring in a grass-lined nest under a larger hill. They leave the nest at about a month and travel above ground to find their own soil, which is when owls and herons take them. Moles live two or three years.

## Uses and Dangers

Mole fur, soft and short, makes waistcoats and purses for those who can get enough skins. The cost is the hay meadow fouled, the scythe blunted on hidden earth, and, worse, the terrace drain undermined: water finds a mole run, follows it, and softens the fill behind a wall until the wall slumps. That is why terrace commons hire mole-catchers with traps and spades.

## Lore and Belief

Fold Halflings count a mole-catcher’s work as part of keeping walls, and the mole-catcher reports his tally at the commons beside the wall-menders. Basin Humans say a mole’s paw carried in the pocket cures toothache, and that molehills thrown up in a line towards a house foretell a death in it.



# Mud Turtles

**Mud turtles** are the snapping turtles of the fens. They lie buried in the mud of slow water and take ducklings, fish, and anything else that comes within reach, including the hand of a fisher who reaches carelessly into an eel-trap. Reedfolk know them as old residents of the pools, and say that when a mud turtle leaves its pool, the water is about to move.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Slow fen water |
| **Range** | The Reedmere of the Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Reedfolk and Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary; the bite takes fingers |

## Appearance

A grown mud turtle has a shell as wide as a large platter, ridged along the top in three rows of low keels, dark brown and often green with weed and mud. Its head is large, with a hooked, beaked jaw and small eyes; its neck is long and can shoot out to half the shell's length. Its legs are thick and clawed, its tail long and saw-edged. The shell is too small to hide in, so it fights.

It moves slowly on land, lunging and snapping with a hiss if approached. In the water it rests on the bottom, looking like a stone covered in weed, and smells of mud and rot.

## Habitat and Range

Mud turtles live in slow, muddy, weedy water: the fens and pools of the Reedmere in the Confluence Basins and the backwaters and oxbows of the Lower Serath. Each keeps to one pool or reach for many years.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A mud turtle lies in the mud with only its eyes and nostrils showing, waiting for fish, frogs, ducklings, snakes, and carrion to come close, then strikes with its jaws. It also eats water plants. It is slow and solitary, and on land it is aggressive, because it cannot hide. The bite can take a finger off.

## Life Cycle

Females leave the water in early summer to dig nests in sandy banks and lay twenty or more round eggs, which hatch in autumn. Many nests are dug up by foxes and badgers. A turtle that survives grows slowly and may live longer than a person.

## Uses and Dangers

Mud turtles are eaten, in soup above all, and their shells are used as bowls and scoops in fen households. Their danger is the bite: fishers reaching into eel-traps and children wading in the fens learn to look first. They take ducklings and fish from the traps.

## Lore and Belief

Reedfolk say a mud turtle that leaves its pool knows the water will move, and a household that sees one walking across a bank in a wet spring moves its boats and stores. A turtle that has lived in one pool for generations is spoken of by name. Basin Humans say a snapping turtle will not let go until it thunders, which is untrue but makes children careful.

Fen children dare one another to wade the pool of a named turtle, and the old snapper of one Reedmere pool is said to wear a thief’s finger-ring grown into its shell.



# Mules

**Mules** are the road beasts of the mountains. A basin caravan climbing the exchange roads of the Headwater Marches goes on mules where it can: they are ridden on the easy stretches, loaded on the steep ones, and walked on the worst, and the caravan-master who loses one counts it before the cargo. Mules are bred, not born of their own kind, so every one of them is a horse-breeder's work.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Mountain and foothill roads |
| **Range** | The Headwater exchange roads, from the basin edge to the Ironspine gates |
| **Known to** | Humans, Hobgoblins, and the Dwarves of the gate yards |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though a mule's kick is remembered |

## Appearance

A mule has its sire's long ears and its dam's height and body: about as tall as a riding horse, but narrower, with a shorter, upright mane, a thin tufted tail, small hard hooves, and a long, patient head. Most are brown, bay, or mouse-dun, sometimes with a dark stripe down the back. It walks with a short, careful, deliberate step, placing each hoof where it chooses. Its call is a mixture of whinny and bray, a creaking honk that carries down a valley. A mule string smells of sweat, dust, and harness.

## Habitat and Range

Mules work the roads where carts cannot go and horses fail: the Headwater exchange roads up through the foothill towns and walled waystations to the oath-yards of the Ironspine holds. Waystations keep fresh animals for the caravans, many of

them mules. They are less common in the flat country of the Basins, where carts and oxen do the work.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A mule is careful, stubborn, and clever. It will not step where it judges the ground unsound, and no beating changes its mind; mountain carters say a mule's refusal has saved more lives than any guide. It is hardy, eats rough fodder, works long, and keeps its head on a narrow ledge where a horse panics. It also remembers ill use for years and will kick the one who gave it.

## Life Cycle

A mule is bred by putting a jack to a mare, and it cannot breed in its turn. It is broken to the pack at three and works for twenty years or more if it is treated well, longer than most horses.

## Uses and Dangers

Mules carry riders, packs, and panniers on the exchange roads: grain, salt meat, cloth, and lamp oil up; metal, tools, and dressed stone down. Heavy haulage they leave to the Ogre bands. On the worst passages, such as the Rattlecut gorge, where the river takes part of the road in a wet spring, travellers are told to walk their mules and not ride. In winter they are the first loss of a caravan caught late in the snow (see Pack Animals).

## Lore and Belief

Mountain carters trust a mule's judgement over their own. "Ask the mule" is the Headwater answer to any doubt about a stretch of road, and a mule that stops dead at a bridge is turned round, whatever the toll-keeper says. Lowland people take the same stubbornness for spite and say a mule waits all its life to kick you once.



# Octopus

The **octopus** of the Tidelace Coasts lives in rock pools, the gaps of breakwaters, and the rocky shallows, and it is the cleverest thief on the shore. It robs crab pots, slips through the gaps of fish traps, and can open a stoppered jar from inside or out. Gnome children are set to watch one in a pool at low tide, to learn patience.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Rock pools, breakwaters, and rocky shallows |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An octopus has a soft, bag-like body the size of a fist to that of a head, two large eyes with slotted pupils, and eight long arms lined underneath with rows of pale suckers; the biggest span as wide as a man's outstretched arms. Its colour changes in a moment with its mood and its ground: mottled brown and grey against rock, sand-pale on sand, flushing dark red when alarmed, ghost-white when afraid. Its skin can raise bumps and spikes to match weed or stone. It walks on its arms over the bottom, squeezes through any gap larger than its beak, and swims backwards in a rush by squirting water. It is silent, and smells only of the sea.

## Habitat and Range

It lives in dens in rocky ground: holes under boulders, gaps in breakwaters and quay walls, old pots and jars on the bottom, and rock pools that keep their water at low tide. It is commonest in the sheltered inner sounds and the breakwater-closed inlets of the Tidelace, and keeps the same den for weeks.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The octopus hunts at dusk and night for crabs, shellfish, and fish, prying shells open or drilling them, and leaves a heap of empty shells at its den mouth. It is shy but intensely curious: it will reach an arm out to touch a hand held still in a pool, examine a dropped tool, and take it home. It learns quickly, remembers which pots hold crabs, and opens what it has learned to open.

## Abilities

An octopus can change its colour and the texture of its skin to vanish against rock, weed, or sand, squeeze its body through a hole the size of a coin, and squirt a cloud of dark ink to cover its escape. It can undo a lashing, lift a lid, and twist out a stopper.

## Life Cycle

An octopus lives only a year or two. A female lays strings of eggs in her den, guards and cleans them for weeks without eating, and dies when they hatch. The young drift as specks in the water before settling on the bottom.

## Uses and Dangers

Octopus is food, beaten tender on the rocks and boiled, grilled, or dried. Fishers catch it in clay pots lowered on lines, which it enters as a den. It costs the crab-potters many a catch, and a stoppered jar of salted fish left on a quay overnight is not safe. Its bite, rarely given, is painful but no worse.

## Lore and Belief

Gnome households say the octopus is the only creature on the coast that reads a mark better than a pilot, and a child who loses patience watching one is told **the octopus is still waiting**. Coastal Humans say an octopus that comes up onto the shingle foretells a storm, and some hamlets will not eat one taken from a drowned harbour, saying it has been at the dead's stores.

Wreck-divers say the great octopus of a drowned harbour guards the sunken strongrooms, and that a diver who comes up with a coin in one hand comes up with an arm round the other.



# Orchard Dormice

**Orchard dormice** live in the orchards and terrace walls of the Leeward Folds and in the store-rooms of the fold towns when they can get in. They eat fruit on the tree in summer and dried fruit off the shelf in autumn, and a household that finds their droppings among its stores knows its count is already wrong. They are also fattened for the autumn table, and the Halflings see nothing odd in either.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Orchards, store-rooms, and dry-stone walls |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Halflings |
| **Danger** | Harmless, except to stores |

## Appearance

An orchard dormouse is about the size of a rat in the body, with a bushy, squirrel-like tail as long again. Its fur is soft and thick, silver-grey above and white below, with a dark ring round each large black eye. Its ears are small and round, its paws pink and nimble, and it climbs with great skill, running up bark and stone and hanging by its hind feet to reach fruit. It is mostly silent, but squeaks and churrs when quarrelling, and it rattles and scrabbles in a store-room roof at night loudly enough to wake a household.

## Habitat and Range

They live through the warm orchard slopes of the Folds, nesting in hollow trees, the gaps of the dry-stone retaining walls, and the roofs and walls of store-rooms and drying sheds. They are fewest in the windward folds and the Dry Folds, where there is little fruit.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Dormice come out at dusk and feed through the night on fruit, nuts, seeds, buds, and insects. In late summer and autumn they eat until they are nearly round, and then, when the nights grow cold, they curl up in a nest deep in a wall or a hollow tree and sleep the winter through, cold and still, waking only in late spring. They are timid with people and quick to run, but they are bold and persistent with a store-room: they will gnaw through a shutter, squeeze through a crack, and come back to a store they found once.

## Life Cycle

Dormice breed in high summer, when fruit is plentiful, and raise one litter of four to six. In a poor fruit year they may not breed at all. They live five or six years, a long life for so small a beast, most of it asleep.

## Uses and Dangers

In autumn, as the fold counts its stores, dormice are its worst enemy: a family in a store-room can spoil a shelf of dried fruit and nuts in a few nights, fouling far more than they eat, and the loss shows in the reserve count. Households stop up their store-rooms with stone and clay, keep cats, and set traps along the beams.

The same dormice are a delicacy. Caught in autumn at their fattest, they are kept in clay jars with air holes and fed on nuts and fruit for a few weeks, then roasted with honey or stuffed. A dish of dormice is a feast-table dish, and a fold that serves too many is talked about.

## Lore and Belief

Halflings call a dormouse a **count-thief**, and children are told that a dormouse in the store-room is counting the household's shelves in its sleep and will tell the next fold how much is there. A household that finds dormice in the common reserve at the cistern hall is said to owe the hall a dish of them. The long winter sleep is taken as a sign of a well-kept life: a Halfling who rests deeply after a full harvest is said to sleep like a dormouse, which is praise.



# Ossuary Beetles

**Ossuary beetles** eat dry flesh and leave bone. Wild, they finish what the flies and crows began on a carcass or an old battlefield. Tamed, they are the quiet labour of the ossuary orders, which keep them in closed **beetle-rooms** to clean the dead down to clean bone for the shelves of an ossuary and for the constructs of the Bonewright Guilds, among them Marrow Sentinels.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Dry carcasses and bones; the beetle-rooms of ossuaries |
| **Range** | Widespread, where the dead are kept; wild on old battlefields and in dry ruins |
| **Known to** | Humans, Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

The grown beetle is small, the size of a grain of barley, oval and blunt, black or dark brown with a faint band of grey or rusty scales across the back. It folds its legs and drops when disturbed. Its larvae do the work: hairy, tapering brown grubs no longer than a fingernail, banded and bristled, that crawl in their hundreds over a body and shed their skins in drifts. A working beetle-room is warm and dry and smells of dust, dried meat, and something sweetish, and in the quiet a keeper can hear a faint dry rustling like sand poured slowly.

## Habitat and Range

Wild, they live wherever dry flesh lies: in the hides and carcasses of a dry summer, in the corners of old battlefields, in the nests of birds, in ruins and tombs, and in store-rooms where they get at dried meat and furs. The orders keep them in stone rooms beside their ossuaries in catacomb towns and monasteries, wherever the dead are kept on shelves rather than given to earth, water, or root.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They want flesh that has dried a little; wet rot they leave to the flies. A colony set on a body works from the softest parts inward and leaves cartilage and tendon until last, then the bone stands bare, clean, and whole, the small bones of hands and feet still in their places. They do not bite living people.

## Life Cycle

A female lays her eggs on dry flesh; the grubs feed for a few weeks, wander off to burrow into something soft, often the wood of the room's racks, and turn into beetles that mate and begin again. In a warm room the colony never stops. Keepers feed it between bodies with scraps from the kitchens and pick out the dead beetles with brushes.

## Uses and Dangers

The orders value them because they do what boiling and burying do worse: they leave bone whole and unmarked. An ossuary keeper sets a body in the beetle-room on a rack, closes the door, and opens it on bone in days or weeks according to its size. Bone that is to be built into a sentinel or an ossuary construct comes from these rooms. Loose, the beetles are a pest of furs, wool, dried meat, and the bindings of old books. A colony that escapes into a monastery's library is talked about for a generation.

## Lore and Belief

Where the dead are kept in ossuaries the beetle-room is a holy, unspoken place, and a keeper of the beetles is a respected and avoided office. Elsewhere it is a horror: many peoples who return the dead to earth, root, or water hear of the beetle-rooms as a desecration, and Wood Elves will not speak of them. A common belief holds that the beetles eat only what the soul has left; the keepers say nothing to correct it.

Grave-robbers fear the beetle-rooms more than the keepers: the story of the thief who hid among the bones from the keepers' torches and was found in the morning picked clean is told to every apprentice keeper as a joke and to every thief as a warning.



# Otters

**Otters** are the river's own hunters, at home in the water on both sides of Caeldon. They fish the side channels and the weirs, rob traps, and play on the banks. Lowbank's Goblins skin them for their fur; Kavari pool-keepers argue with them about the fish as with neighbours; and Gnome fishers on the far-side coasts find them in the kelp.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Rivers, side channels, and rocky shores |
| **Range** | The Greyford Reach, the Confluence Basins, the Kavari rivers of the Tidebound Reaches, and the Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Kavari, Goblins, Humans, and Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An otter is as long as a Human's arm, with a thick tapering tail as long again, a flat broad head, small ears, and a whiskered muzzle. Its body is long and supple, its legs short, its feet webbed. The fur is dense, rich dark brown, paler and silvery at the throat, and so close that water runs off it. Wet, an otter looks sleek and black.

It swims low, with only its head showing, and dives with a roll that leaves hardly a ripple. On land it lopes with an arched back. It whistles shrilly to its kin, chitters, and hisses. Its spraints, the dung it leaves on stones, smell oddly sweet, of fish and new-mown hay.

## Habitat and Range

Otters live along clean rivers with fish and cover: the side channels and willow islands of the Greyford Reach and the rivers of the Confluence Basins. On the far side they live in the gravel

rivers of the Kavari in the Tidebound Reaches and the rocky shores and kelp of the Tidelace Coasts. Each holds a long stretch of water.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An otter hunts fish, eels, crayfish, frogs, and on the coast crabs, mostly at dusk and by night. It robs eel traps and fish weirs and learns which traps are easy. Otters are playful, sliding down mud banks and wrestling in the water, and curious about people when they think themselves unseen. A mother with cubs is fierce.

## Life Cycle

A female bears two or three cubs in a holt, a den among tree roots or rocks at the water's edge, and teaches them to swim and fish over a year. Otters live perhaps ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

Otter fur is the warmest and most waterproof the river gives, made into caps, collars, and mittens. Lowbank Goblins trap and skin them, as much to protect their eel traps as for the pelts. The cost is fish and eels taken from the traps. They are harmless to people.

## Lore and Belief

Kavari pool-keepers treat otters as neighbours who keep no agreements: they speak to them, scold them, and set aside a share of the catch to keep them from the nursery pools, and they do not kill them. Goblins say an otter can always find the way out of a trap, so a trap that holds one is a trap that needs mending. Gnomes say an otter floating on its back among the kelp at dawn means fair weather.



# Owls

**Owls** are the hunters of the night sky. They live in barn lofts, hollow trees, ruins, and towers, kill mice and rats by the thousand, and are heard far more often than seen. Most people think them ill-omened; farmers who know better leave a hole in the barn gable for them. Some casters who work at night keep a familiar in owl form, which is a spirit-construct, not an owl.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Woods, barns, ruins, and towers |
| **Range** | Across the Cradle web, wherever there are mice and somewhere dark to roost |
| **Known to** | All the peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though a nesting owl will strike at a climber's face |

## Appearance

The barn owl, the one most often seen, is about the size of a crow, with a heart-shaped white face like a pale mask, dark eyes, long legs, and a back of honey-gold mottled with grey; from below, in flight, it looks almost white. The tawny wood owl is rounder and browner, streaked like bark, with a round face and large black eyes. The great horned owl of the crags and old forest is as big as a goose, with ear tufts like horns and burning orange eyes.

Owls fly without a sound: their soft-edged feathers make no whistle, and a mouse hears nothing until the talons close. On the ground or a perch they turn their heads almost all the way round. The barn owl shrieks, a long rasping scream; the wood owl hoots and answers its mate in a quavering call; the horned owl booms low. Beneath an owl's roost lie its pellets, grey wads of fur and tiny bones.

## Habitat and Range

Owls live wherever there is cover by day and open ground to hunt at night: woods and woodland edges, farmland with old trees, barns and shrine lofts, ruined works, and the upper floors of towers. The ruins of the old works across the Cradle web suit them well, and so do the quiet towers of towns.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An owl hunts alone, at dusk and through the night, by hearing as much as sight, quartering a field low or watching from a post. It swallows small prey whole. By day it sleeps hidden, and if it is found, crows and small birds mob it until it moves. Owls are shy of people and keep still rather than flee; a nesting owl, though, will defend its young by striking at a climber's face.

## Life Cycle

Owls nest early, in late winter or spring, in hollows, lofts, and ledges, laying three to six white eggs. The young hatch days apart and the smallest often die in a lean year. Fledged owls leave in autumn. A barn owl seldom lives more than a few years in the wild; the great owls live much longer.

## Uses and Dangers

Owls give their work: a pair of barn owls keeps a granary freer of mice than any cat. Their feathers are prized for fletching silent arrows. They cost nothing but the odd chick or pigeon, and the fear they cause.

A night courier may keep a familiar in owl form, a spirit-construct rather than a bird, and bring it from hiding with one whisper through Familiar Call before she climbs the tower; the bond must already exist, since the call is recall, not creation.

## Lore and Belief

Most peoples take an owl calling by daylight, or perched on a roof, as a sign that someone in the house will die. Others call the owl wise and keep its image over a door against theft, since an owl sees in the dark what thieves would hide. Scholars' houses and record-houses are often said to keep owls in their rafters to guard the parchment against mice, which is mostly true.

Ruin-delvers count an owl roosting in a ruin's high window as a sign the place has no worse tenant, and turn back from one where the owls have left.



# Oxen

**Oxen** are cattle gelded and trained to the yoke, the plough-beasts of the Human farmlands. Every spring the basin fields are turned behind them, and at harvest they draw the grain carts along the Sheaf Road to the granaries. A village's oxen are often held in common or lent between households, and a farmer without a share in a plough-team is a poor one. They are reckoned apart from milk and beef cattle, though they come from the same herds.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Farms, ploughland, and farm roads |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the farmed valleys of the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though a yoked pair does not stop for whoever is in front of it |

## Appearance

An ox is a big steer grown to full size: taller and heavier than any cow, broad across the shoulder and the brow, with a thick neck worn bare where the yoke sits and long horns, sometimes tipped or tied to keep them from goring a yokemate. Most basin oxen are red-brown or dun, a few pied; a matched pair is prized. They walk at a plodding, even pace that never quickens, heads low, breath steaming in the cold. They low and grunt rather than bellow, and the creak of the yoke and the drover's call carry further than any sound of theirs. A plough-team smells of turned earth, sweat, and dung.

## Habitat and Range

Oxen work wherever the ground is ploughed: the open fields of the Confluence Basins above all, the terraced fields of the Headwater valleys in smaller teams, and the farm roads and grain roads that

link them. They are stalled in winter beside the cattle and grazed on the common meadows in summer.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An ox is calm, slow, and stubborn. Trained young, it learns a handful of calls and the touch of the goad, and works steadily for hours without complaint; driven too hard or too long, it lies down in the furrow and will not rise. A pair yoked together for years will pull badly with any other partner. Oxen do not startle as horses do, which is why they are trusted with heavy loads on soft ground.

## Life Cycle

Oxen are chosen as calves from the herd, gelded in their first year, and broken to the yoke at three or four. They work for eight to twelve years, and when they are too old to pull they are fattened and slaughtered for beef and hide.

## Uses and Dangers

Oxen plough, harrow, and draw heavy carts, stone, and timber. They are slower than horses but cheaper to keep, eat rough grass and straw, and give meat and leather at the end. At harvest the basin grain goes out behind them, and the road from granary to march-town is a line of ox-carts; heavier loads still go to Ogre bands. Their cost is time: a team ploughs only so much in a day, and a sick ox in spring can lose a household its sowing.

## Lore and Belief

Basin farmers bless the plough-teams at the first ploughing, and the Festival of the First Sheaf, given to Anvelle the Harvest-Mother, ends with the oxen garlanded and fed first. "Patient as an ox" is praise in the Basins and an insult in the towns.

Battle tales tell of a transmuter who turned a siege ogre into a plodding ox with Other-Form long enough to break an assault. The working is real, risky to body and mind, and much less often done than told.



# Pack Animals

**Pack animals** and **draught teams** are the beasts that carry trade where boats cannot and Ogres are not hired: loaded on their backs, hitched to carts, or harnessed to barges on the towpath. They are counted, tolled by the head, stabled at inns and waystations, and lost first when a road turns against a caravan. The best known of them have pages of their own, the mules of the mountain roads, the oxen of the grain carts, and riding horses; the rest are the road beasts below, whose breeds the drovers know and few others ask about.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Roads, waystations, towpaths, fords, and escort routes |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches, the Greyford Reach, the Lower Serath, and the Windscar escort routes to the Leeward Folds and the Soundchain Roads |
| **Known to** | Humans, Orcs, Goblins, Halflings, and every people that trades by road |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

### *The Caravan Beasts of the Headwater Roads*

Beside the mules, the exchange-road caravans use short, thick-set pack beasts with broad backs, heavy manes, and feathered fetlocks, most of them dun or grey, a hand lower than a riding horse and far stronger for their size. Loaded, they carry panniers or a pack-frame lashed on a padded saddle and walk in a nose-to-tail string tied by the halter. They are quiet and plodding, and the bells on the lead beast are the sound of a caravan coming.

### *The Towpath Teams of the Serath*

The draught teams of the Serath towpaths are the heaviest beasts on the roads: great broad-hoofed, slow, deep-chested animals, brown or black, harnessed in pairs or fours to a towline and leaning into it at a walk, hour after hour, against the current. Their harness creaks and their hooves sink into the towpath clay.

### *The Escort Beasts of the Far Side*

Windscar escorts and the parties they guide load thirstbacks: rangy, long-legged, dust-coloured beasts with a hump of fat over the shoulders, which go long between waters, are led on a rope, and groan at every load.

## Habitat and Range

On the exchange roads of the Headwater Marches, walled waystations keep stores, fresh animals, and the escort, spaced so that a laden caravan reaches the next before dark; the last of them before the hold's wardens take over is Snowshut. At the Greyford Reach the carters' inns have big yards and stabling. On the Lower Serath the haulers' hamlet of Towrest keeps stabling for the draught teams that drag barges upstream.

On the far side, escort beasts walk the ramps, rim tracks, and passes of the Windscar, the Lee Road to the Leeward Folds, where loads go on backs and pack animals rather than wheels, and the cliff stairs down to the Soundchain stations; the few companies that cross the Glassbelt take thirstbacks with them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Pack beasts are herd animals made patient by work. They learn a road and their place in the string, follow the lead beast, and resist anything new: a strange bridge, a narrow stair, deep water. An overloaded beast stops and will not be moved; a frightened one in a string drags the next with it. The far-side thirstbacks are the most stubborn and the most enduring of all.

## Life Cycle

Most pack and draught beasts are bred on farms and in the herds and sold to the roads at three or four years old. They work ten or fifteen years and end as hide, meat, and glue.

## Uses and Dangers

Pack beasts carry the goods of the roads: grain, salt meat, lamp oil, and cloth up the Headwater roads, metal and tools down; grain and salt across the Greyford fords; barges upstream on the Serath; hides, felt, salt, and stores along the Windscar routes. At the Greyspan and its side fords, whoever holds the crossing that season takes what they can from every beast that passes.

The roads take them first. In the Headwater winter a caravan caught late loses its animals first and then its people. In the Rimward Basins the salt crust of the pan floors lies over mud that takes a laden animal to the belly. Heavy loads that no beast can carry, beams, stone blocks, and broken carts, go to Ogre bands, who also carry wounded animals off the road.

## Lore and Belief

Carters say a beast that will not leave the stable in the morning knows the road better than its master, and on the Headwater roads no caravan-master forces one out. A string's lead beast is named and its bell blessed; selling it is bad luck. Towpath families of the Serath say their teams know every stretch where the towpath has fallen in, and they do.

A loaded string is what road-bandits wait for, and carters on the lonely stretches travel in company and sleep with a spear by the packs. Every

Headwater road has a waystation that once saw a mule string walk home alone, packs full and no carters.



# Pale Cave Creatures

The **pale cave creatures** are the small life of the waters beneath the Elderweald: pale fish and small cave creatures that the Dark Elf houses of the Roothollows take from their reservoirs and hollows. Fungus is the staple below, and these are the food that comes after it, eaten fresh when caught and counted on in lean years. They are what remains of an old underforest ecology that once filled the root-caverns, and nobody has given them names beyond what they look like.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Reservoirs, seeps, and root-bound hollows of a root-cavern world |
| **Range** | The Roothollows |
| **Known to** | Dark Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

### *Pale Fish*

The reservoir fish are small, none longer than a hand, and white or faintly pink, so thin-skinned that the dark line of the gut shows through in lamplight. Most have no eyes, only a smooth place where eyes would be; a few have small, clouded ones. They swim slowly near the bottom, steering by long, fine feelers at the mouth and by a row of small pits along each side that seem to feel the water move. They smell of nothing but cold water.

### *Small Cave Creatures*

With them live other small, pale things: blind, translucent shrimp that pick over the silt; slender, pale newts with feathery red gills, as long as a finger, that cling to the root strands at the water's edge; and soft white crayfish with long thin claws

that back into crevices when touched. All are pale, slow, and quiet, and all go still when a lamp comes near, as if the light were a weight.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the water-bearing caverns, seeps, and reservoirs of the Roothollows, and in the root-bound hollows where water stands among the roots. They are most plentiful near the top, where living root comes down through the ceilings and dead leaf-mould washes in, and thin out where the root gives way to bare stone. Some reservoirs are shared with the Stonewake Deeps, and the creatures in them do not know whose share they are in. Whether any still live behind the bars of the sealed Upper Roothollows nobody knows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed on what drifts down: leaf-mould, fungus fallen from the beds, root sap, and one another. They move little, live slowly, and wait a long time between meals. None of them flees far; a fish touched by a hand drifts a body's length away and settles again, which is why children can catch them.

## Life Cycle

They grow slowly and live long for their size, and they breed seldom, a few eggs at a time under stones or among the roots. A reservoir fished too hard takes years to fill again, which the houses know and count in the reckoning of water and what is owed.

## Uses and Dangers

They are food: second after fungus, eaten fresh, dried beside the fungus cakes, or boiled into broth with them. Each house takes them from its own reservoirs and hollows by chamber-right, so a house that loses a chamber can lose its catch with it. They are harmless, but the water they live in is not. Running water is drunk, and still black water is not; the creatures of the black water are left alone.

## Lore and Belief

Parents warn children that if they stray near the black water Ithaere the Drowned Mother will take them as her tithe, and her hair, in the laments, is a tangle of drowned roots, drift, and the small bones of cave creatures. Some Dark Elves hold that the pale things are what the Drowning Bloom left of the underforest's living creatures, washed down and blinded, and that taking them is taking what the flood spared; others say only that they are food. Both are said at the same table.



# Pan Hyenas

**Pan hyenas** are the striped scavengers of the Glassbelt. They follow every crossing at a distance, eat whatever the crossing leaves, and dig at shallow graves, which is why those who cross bury their dead under stone however tired they are. On their own ground at night they will take the weak, the sick, or a sleeper who has strayed from the fire.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Salt pans, ruin fields, and crossing routes |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior and the floors of the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples, Ogres, Trolls, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to the weak, the sick, and the newly buried |

## Appearance

A pan hyena is the size of a large dog but built lower behind than in front, with a heavy head, massive jaws, and a sloping back. Its coat is long, coarse, and pale grey-buff with dark stripes across the flanks and legs, and a long, bristling mane runs from the back of the head down the spine; when it is angry or afraid the mane stands up and the animal looks twice its size. Its ears are big and pointed, its eyes dark. It walks with a limping, shambling gait that hides how far it can travel in a night. Pan hyenas are mostly silent, but they growl, chatter, and give a cackling yelp over a carcass. A den smells of rotten bone.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the Glassbelt Interior, wherever there is anything to scavenge: along the crossing routes, around caravan wells and shade sanctuaries, in the ruin fields, and on the old sea floor, and they come up onto the floors of the Rimward

Basins near the Lastwater Wells. They den in ruins, old cisterns, and burrows in the shoreline steps.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They forage alone or in pairs at night, ranging very far, and live on carrion, bones, the rubbish of camps, lizards, insects, eggs, and whatever they can catch that cannot fight back. Their jaws crack bones no other beast can open. They are cautious, patient, and clever: a hyena will follow a crossing for days, keeping a long way back, and come in only when the party is asleep, sick, or scattered. A guarded fire keeps them off; an untended grave does not.

## Life Cycle

A female bears two to four cubs in a den in a ruin or a burrow and nurses them a long time, carrying bones back for them. They breed slowly and live twelve to fifteen years.

## Uses and Dangers

Pan hyenas take the dying beasts of a crossing, the stores of a careless camp, and the dead. Crossers bury under heaped stone, and the cairns along the routes are partly their doing. A lone sleeper, a child, or a sick traveller left behind is in real danger. Salvagers trap them near wells and shade sanctuaries, and their manes and hides are worn by some as a boast.

## Lore and Belief

Desert lore says the pan hyena remembers every crossing that ever went wrong and waits along its line for the next. Goblin salvagers say they can smell old fire and will not den in furnace ruins; Troll crossing houses say a hyena that comes close in daylight has been sent by the dead whose grave was left unstoned. Ogre burden orders carry the stones for a grave cairn before they carry anything else.

Crossing escorts tell of a pack that followed a sick caravan for nine days across the pans and took one straggler a night, and of the escort who turned back alone with a spear and a torch to stand over the ninth.



# Pan Shrimp

**Pan shrimp** are the tiny red shrimp that appear in the brackish flood water of the salt and clay pans of the Rimward Basins within days of a storm, from eggs that have lain dry in the crust for years. In a good year on the Long Pan they come in such numbers that they turn the water pink, and the pink water brings the waders.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Brackish flood water on salt and clay pans |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A pan shrimp is no longer than a fingernail, a soft, many-legged, translucent body tinged red to orange, with two dark eyes on short stalks and a forked tail. It swims upside down, rowing with its many leaf-like legs in a steady flicker. Alone it is barely visible; in its millions it colours the water, from faint rose to deep salmon, and the edges of a drying pool are left crusted with their bodies and smelling of salt and fish.

## Habitat and Range

They live only in the short-lived brine of flooded basin floors, and only where the water is too salty for fish. They are found in every Rimward pan that holds water after a storm, and in their greatest numbers on the Long Pan.

## Abilities

Their eggs, smaller than grains of sand, can lie dry in the salt crust and the dust of the pan for many years, blown about by the wind, and hatch within

a day or two of being wetted. A pan that has been dry for a generation will still bloom pink when it floods.

## Life Cycle

A pan shrimp hatches, feeds on the green scum of the warm flood water, grows, mates, and lays in a few weeks. Its eggs sink into the mud or are left on the drying edge, and the shrimp dies with the water.

## Uses and Dangers

Pan shrimp are food for the rose waders and the storm toads and, in a good year, for people: Rimward camps on the Long Pan's edge scoop them in cloth, press them into cakes, and dry them in the sun, a salty paste eaten with meat and grain. They harm no one.

## Lore and Belief

Rimward kindreds call the pink water **the blush of the pan** and say the pan is glad to have been remembered by the storm. Salt cutters of Saltcut say that crust from a pan that has blushed is the best salt of all, and charge more for it.



# Pass Bears

**Pass bears** are the black bears of the Headwater mountain forest. They are smaller than the brown bears of the Elderweald and much bolder, and they have learned the roads. Each autumn they come to the walled waystations between the foothill towns, where stores, fodder, and the escort's food are kept, and break in if they can. Ogre bands working the winter roads drive them off.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Mountain forest and pass roads |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches and the verges of the Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Humans, Dwarves, and Ogres |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to waystation stores and their guards |

## Appearance

A pass bear on all fours stands as high as a Human's waist and is about as heavy as two large men. It is glossy black, sometimes cinnamon-brown, with a paler brown muzzle and often a pale blaze on the chest. Its face is straighter than a brown bear's, its ears larger, and it has no shoulder hump. Its claws are short and curved, made for climbing.

It climbs trees easily and fast, walks flat-footed with a shuffling roll, and runs faster than a Human. It huffs, moans, and clacks its jaws when uneasy. A raided store smells of bear for a season.

## Habitat and Range

Pass bears live in the mountain forest of the Headwater Marches and on the verges of the Ironspine, wherever there are woods with nuts, berries, and roads to rob.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pass bear eats berries, nuts, roots, grubs, honey, carrion, and anything people leave. It is clever and learns where food is kept: which waystation has a weak door, which caravan camps late, which town throws its rubbish outside the wall. In autumn, fattening for winter, it is at its boldest. It usually runs from people who stand their ground and shout, but a bear that has learned people mean food grows dangerous, and a sow with cubs is always dangerous.

## Life Cycle

Cubs are born in the winter den, two or three, and stay with their mother through the next year. Pass bears may live twenty years.

## Uses and Dangers

They give fur, fat, and meat. Their cost is the waystation broken into, the stores eaten or spoiled, a pack animal killed, and now and then a guard mauled defending the stores. Waystations are walled in part against them, and their keepers bar the doors at night in autumn.

## Lore and Belief

Ogre crews that keep the winter roads open say a pass bear is a thief that respects size, and they drive bears off with noise, fire, and their own bulk; an Ogre who has turned a bear from a waystation tells of it for years. Headwater keepers say a bear that comes back to the same waystation three autumns running has made itself a member of the road and should be killed before it brings its cubs. Some carters leave a little food out at the roadside to keep the bears from the wagons, which teaches them the opposite.

A bear that has learned to break into waystations is hunted by the whole road, and a hunter who brings in its pelt drinks free at every waystation from the basin edge to the Ironspine gates for a winter.



# Pigs

**Pigs** are the household's living larder. A village family in the Confluence Basins keeps one or two in a sty behind the house, feeds them on scraps and whey, turns them into the oak woods in autumn to fatten on the mast, and kills them at the turn of winter. Halflings of the Leeward Folds keep them in terrace pens, and Goblin households keep a pig wherever they can.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Villages, yards, and oak woods in autumn |
| **Range** | The Cradle web and the Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Humans, Halflings, and Goblins |
| **Danger** | Harmless; a sow with farrow is Wary |

## Appearance

A household pig is as long as a Human is tall and stands knee-high, heavy-bodied and short-legged, with a long snout ending in a flat, mobile disc, small eyes, and large ears that hang forward over the face. Most are pink or sandy under a sparse coat of coarse pale bristle, often spotted black or ginger; woodland breeds are darker and hairier, nearer the wild boar. Neither sex keeps tusks of any size.

Pigs grunt continually as they root, squeal when handled, and scream when killed, a sound every village child knows. A sty smells strongly and a pig does not, if kept clean.

## Habitat and Range

Pigs are kept wherever there are households with scraps to spare: across the villages and towns of the Cradle web and in the fold houses of the Folds. They are fewest in the high hold country and on the move with herders.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pig eats almost anything: scraps, whey, roots, acorns, beechmast, grubs, carrion. It roots with its snout and will turn over a garden in an afternoon. It is clever, curious, and sociable, learns its keeper's voice, and can open a badly latched gate. A sow with piglets bites anyone who comes between them.

## Life Cycle

A sow farrows twice a year, eight to twelve piglets each time. Most pigs are killed in their first or second winter; a breeding sow may be kept for many years.

## Uses and Dangers

A pig gives more meat for its keep than any other beast: pork fresh at the killing, bacon and ham smoked and salted for the winter, lard, sausage, and black pudding, bristle for brushes, and hide. In autumn villagers drive their pigs into the lord's woods for pannage, paid for in coin or pigs, and quarrels over pannage are a staple of the lord's hall, where the lord's own reeve is usually right. Pigs left to wander dig up graves and crops, and an untended pig has eaten a child left alone in a yard.

## Lore and Belief

The pig-killing at the turn of winter is a household feast, and the first cut is offered at the household shrine. Basin Humans say a pig can see the wind. Pigs that go wild do not stay pigs for long; the feral swine of the ruins, the Ruin Hogs, are their descendants, and Goblin salvagers fear them more than any yard pig.



# Porpoises

**Porpoises** travel the coastal water of the far side in small groups, along the sounds of the Soundchain Roads, the straits of the Tidelace, and the current roads of the Tidebound Reaches. They ride the bow waves of pilot craft and swim alongside travelling runs, and every people that meets them is glad of it. Gnome pilots welcome them aboard their wake, and the Thaluren call them **run-guests**.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Coastal water, sounds, and the current roads |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches, the Tidelace Coasts, and the Soundchain Roads |
| **Known to** | Thaluren, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A porpoise is a little shorter than a grown man, stout and smoothly rounded, with a blunt head without a beak, a small triangular back fin, and small dark flippers. It is dark grey above and pale grey to white below, the colours blending along the flanks. It swims in quick, smooth rolls, showing its back and fin for a moment as it breathes with a short, sharp puff, like a sneeze, that is the first sign of a group nearby. Underwater it clicks to find its way and its food.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the coastal water, sounds, straits, and estuary mouths of the whole north coast, and out along the current roads. They keep to water where fish run, and are commonest in summer.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Porpoises feed on shoaling fish, chasing them in quick turns, and live in small, loose groups of a few to a dozen. They are shy of being touched but drawn to moving craft and to swimming crowds,

and will play in a pilot craft's bow wave for an hour or keep company with a run for days. They are hunted by blackfins and run-followers, and when those are near the porpoises go quiet and leave.

## Life Cycle

A female bears a single calf in early summer, nurses it for most of a year, and bears again soon after. Porpoises live about twelve years.

## Uses and Dangers

They harm no one, and they are not hunted on the Tidelace or in the Reaches; a porpoise drowned in a net is a sorrow, and coastal Humans who take one by accident eat it quietly. Pilots value them as company and as a sign: porpoises playing in a sound mean fish and fair water, and porpoises gone quiet mean something hunting.

## Lore and Belief

Gnome pilots say a bow-riding porpoise keeps a craft off hidden ground, and while that is not true, no pilot steers away from one. The Thaluren count porpoises that swim with a run as guests of the return, owed the courtesy of water and fish, and a run that loses its porpoises on the current roads takes care, because something has frightened them.



# Poultry

**Poultry** are the birds of the yard: hens above all, and ducks and geese where there is water. Nearly every household that has a yard keeps some. They give eggs every day and meat on feast days, pay small rents to a lord in the Basins, and are the first offering a poor house can make. They are also the fox's prize, and every keeper's night is spent half-listening for the hen-house.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Yards, villages, and fold houses |
| **Range** | Widespread |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A hen is a plump bird the size of a small cat, with a red comb and wattles, and feathers in every farmyard colour: brown, speckled, black, white, or barred. The cock is larger and gaudier, with arching tail feathers and spurs on his legs, and crows at dawn and at any other time he pleases. Hens cluck, scratch, and announce each egg loudly.

Ducks are flat-billed, waddling, white or mottled brown, and quack. Geese are larger, grey or white, long-necked and heavy, and hiss with outstretched necks at strangers; a gaggle at a gate honks loudly enough to wake a house.

## Habitat and Range

Poultry live wherever there are households: in the villages of the Confluence Basins and the foothill towns of the Headwater Marches, on the platforms of Lowbank, on the terraces of the Leeward Folds, and in the yards of most peoples on both

sides of Caeldon. Ducks and geese are thickest in the wet basin country and along the Serath. They are fewest in the deep holds and the herding camps.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Hens scratch for seed, grubs, and kitchen scraps by day and go into a coop at dusk, where they must be shut in against foxes, weasels, and rats. Ducks dabble in ditches and ponds. Geese graze grass like small cattle and guard their ground. All are flock birds with a strict pecking order.

## Life Cycle

A hen lays most days through spring and summer and sits on a clutch of a dozen eggs when left to it; chicks hatch in three weeks and follow her within a day. Geese pair for life and live for many years. Most poultry go to the pot long before they grow old.

## Uses and Dangers

Poultry give eggs, meat, feathers for pillows and fletching, goose grease, and quills for every scribe of the Basins and the Serath. Eggs and a hen or two at the turn of the year are a common small rent. Geese are kept as watch-birds as well as for the table. The cost is the feed, and the losses to foxes, weasels, hawks, and owls.

## Lore and Belief

A hen that crows like a cock is thought to bring ill luck, and is killed. The first egg of a pullet is given to a child for luck. A poor household’s first offering at a shrine is often an egg or a bird, and many basin shrines keep a few hens of their own from what is given.



# Rats and Vermin

**Vermin** follow stored food. Wherever a people keeps a granary, a cellar, a ship's hold, or a larder, rats and mice come to it, and with them the smaller pests of grain and cloth. They are the oldest quarrel between a household and its stores, and the reason magic of the threshold and the boundary does some of its most ordinary work. In the Confluence Basins, where every village keeps a granary against the bad year, a winter's rats can decide whether that store lasts.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Granaries, dwellings, ships' holds, cellars, drains, and culverts |
| **Range** | Wherever grain and food are stored; thickest in the granary country of the Confluence Basins and in towns |
| **Known to** | Every settled people |
| **Danger** | Wary, to stores, and as a carrier of filth and sickness |

## Appearance

### *Rats*

A grown rat is about the length of a hand from nose to rump, with a naked, scaly tail as long again. It is brown-grey above and paler below, coarse-furred, with a blunt muzzle, quivering whiskers, small dark eyes, and thin, pink-grey ears and feet. It runs in quick, low dashes along the foot of a wall, and its claws on boards, its squeal, and its gnawing in the dark are known to every child. A rat-run smells sharp and sour, of musty droppings and urine.

### *Mice*

Mice are smaller, a thumb's length of grey-brown with big ears and a long thin tail, and get in where a rat cannot: through the gap under a door, into the sacks themselves. They are seen less than they are heard, a dry scratch behind the panelling.

### *Store Pests*

With the rats come the lesser pests that spoil a store from inside: grain weevils, meal moths, and the beetles of the larder (see Insects and Bees).

## Habitat and Range

Rats and mice live with people, not apart from them: in granaries and threshing barns, in cellars and larders, in ships' holds on humid voyages, and in the drains, culverts, and lower works of towns, where Kobold households know their runs as well as their own. They are fewest where stores are fewest, on the high herding country and on the move with travellers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Rats are bold in numbers, wary alone, and quick to learn which doors are kept and which are not. They feed at night and go where the food is, and a store left unguarded one winter is found by the next. Cornered, a rat bites. Mice are timid and endless.

## Life Cycle

Both breed fast and often, a litter in a few weeks and many litters in a year, so that a pair in autumn is a plague by spring. Few live more than a year or two.

## Uses and Dangers

Vermin give nothing but work for dogs and traps. They eat and foul grain, gnaw sacks, ropes, and bindings, and spoil whatever they touch; a granary count on the threshing floor that comes up short is often laid at their door before anyone is accused.

Against them the schools keep plain, useful workings. Pest Bar, laid along sill and seam, makes a boundary feel hostile to vermin and keeps grain stores free of rats through winter. Salt Ward, a blessed circle of salt, keeps rot and vermin from food stores, bodies, and medicines, as ships' surgeons guard their supplies on humid voyages. A hearth-and-threshold blessing, Household Grace, keeps vermin away among a dwelling's quiet everyday protections. None of these is sure against larger beasts or against magical vermin, which shrug off a boundary meant for ordinary ones.

## Lore and Belief

Rats are counted bad luck in a granary and good sense on a ship: sailors say rats leave a hull that will not come home. A house where Household Grace has held for generations is said to have no mice, and an old healer's cottage whose stores stay whole without a trap set is taken for a sign of a blessing laid long ago.

Rat-catchers are among the least loved and best paid of town trades, and several towns swear it was their own rat-catcher who, cheated of his fee, led the rats into the granary.



# Ravine Cats

**Ravine cats** are the ambush hunters of the Briarreach. They lie up in the thickets above the wet ravine floors and take deer when they come down to drink. The Thornbound teach their sign to children with the other warnings of the forest, and the Troll families who keep the crossings mark a cat's kill-place beside the collapses they remember.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Wet ravine floors and thickets |
| **Range** | The Briarreach |
| **Known to** | Elves (Thorn Elves) and Trolls |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone alone on a crossing |

## Appearance

A ravine cat is the length of a tall Human from nose to rump, with a thick tail as long again, and stands knee-high to a Human at the shoulder: long and low, heavy in the forelegs, with large paws and a short, broad face. Its coat is tawny to grey-brown, broken all over by dark rosettes and streaks, so that in the dappled light of a ravine it is very hard to see. The ears are tufted black, the eyes pale green.

It moves slowly and flat to the ground, then rushes in a few great bounds. It is mostly silent; in the mating season it gives a harsh, coughing call that echoes up the ravines at night. Its kills are dragged into the thicket and covered with leaves.

## Habitat and Range

Ravine cats live only in the Briarreach, along the wet ravines that fall southwards through the belt, thickest along the Sallow's deep cut. Each holds a stretch of ravine a few days' walk long and keeps to it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A ravine cat hunts alone, at dusk, dawn, and on dark wet days, waiting above a drinking place or a crossing where the ground forces prey into a narrow way. It takes deer, wild boar piglets, and anything else that comes to the water. It shies from groups and from fire. A lone walker crossing a ravine floor, slowed by mud and looking at the footing, is the shape of prey it knows, and now and then one is taken.

## Life Cycle

A female bears two or three spotted kittens in a hollow under a deadfall in late spring and raises them alone for nearly two years. Ravine cats live perhaps twelve years.

## Uses and Dangers

The Thornbound do not hunt them for skins and kill one only when it has taken a person. Their danger is to the lone traveller and the late walker on the through-route, and to the crossing-keepers' goats. A crossing where a cat has killed is a crossing nobody uses alone afterwards.

## Lore and Belief

Troll crossing families keep a cat's kill-place in their memory of the crossing as they keep its collapses, and mark both with the same notched post: to them a crossing has two ways of taking someone, the ground and the cat, and both are part of what the toll pays for. Thornbound children are taught the cat's scrape-marks, its covered kills, and the silence of birds above a thicket, and are told the cat watches the paths as closely as their elders do.

A cat that has taken people is hunted by every crossing family on the ravine, and the hunter who brings back its skin is given a place at every hearth on the crossing; the crossing families still tell of one who went down a ravine alone with a short spear and came up with the cat on her back and a scar from ear to hip.



# River Crayfish

**River crayfish** are the small armoured scavengers of the gravel streams. They are a poor household's meat in the low months, caught by hand and basket in the shallows, and a sign the water is good: where the crayfish die, something upstream has fouled the river. The Goblins of the Greyford Reach eat them; so do the Kavari of the far-side rivers, among the foods of their bank gardens and pools.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Gravel streams |
| **Range** | The Greyford Reach, the Headwater Marches, and the upper rivers of the Tidebound Reaches |
| **Known to** | Goblins, Kavari, and Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A crayfish is like a small lobster, as long as a finger to a hand, with a hard jointed shell, two large pincers, long feelers, and a fan-shaped tail. River crayfish are olive-brown to dark red-brown, and turn bright red when cooked.

It walks forward slowly on its legs along the bottom and flees backward with a flick of its tail, very fast. It lifts its pincers when cornered, and can pinch hard enough to draw blood from a careless finger.

## Habitat and Range

Crayfish live in clean streams and rivers with gravel and stones to hide under: the side channels of the Greyford Reach, the streams of the Headwa-

ter Marches, and on the far side the upriver gravel waters of the Kavari in the Tidebound Reaches. They need clean, well-aired water.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A crayfish hides under a stone or in a burrow in the bank by day and comes out at night to eat whatever it finds: water plants, snails, insect larvae, dead fish. It is solitary and defends its stone from others. Otters, herons, eels, and trout eat them.

## Life Cycle

Females carry their eggs under the tail through winter, and the young cling to her for a while after hatching. Crayfish shed their shells as they grow and hide while the new one hardens. They live a few years.

## Uses and Dangers

They are food: boiled in a pot of river water with a handful of greens, a cheap meal in the low months when the side fords open and the shallows can be worked by hand. They do no harm. Their use as a sign is valued: a bank of dead crayfish in a stream means bad water upstream, a dead animal, a mine's runoff, or rot, and the water is not drunk until someone has walked up to see.

## Lore and Belief

Goblin children hunt crayfish under the stones at Lowbank, and say that a crayfish's claw kept in a pocket finds lost things. Kavari say the crayfish are the river's cleaners and should be taken only from water that has plenty. Headwater Humans say crayfish walk backward because they are going back to the mountain, which is a joke and is told as one.



# Rock Conies

**Rock conies** are the small, round, short-legged animals that sit in rows on the sunny rock of the Windscar, warming themselves at dawn. Every hunter on the shelves eats them, from eagles to dogs, and every Orc child of the kindreds sets a first snare for one. The kindreds call them the eagles' bread.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Rock shelves, scree, and rim walls |
| **Range** | The High Scars and the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A rock cony is the size of a large rabbit but rounder and heavier, with no tail to speak of, small round ears, and short legs ending in soft, rubbery pads that grip bare rock. Its coat is thick and coarse, grey-brown flecked with darker hairs, matching the stone it sits on, with a pale patch down the middle of the back. It moves in short scurries and sudden bounds between cracks. A colony keeps up a soft twittering while it feeds, and its alarm is a shrill whistle that sends every cony on the face into the rock at once. Their latrine ledges, used for generations, are stained white and smell sharply.

## Habitat and Range

They live in colonies of a few dozen on rocky outcrops, scree, escarpment ledges, and the stone walls of the rims, across the High Scars and the spurs of the Rimward Basins. Old stronghold walls and abandoned cairn chains suit them well, and a long-quiet rim terrace may hold a colony in its stones.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Conies feed on grass, leaves, and thorn shoots in short forays from their cracks, mostly in the cool of morning and evening, and spend the middle of the day and the cold nights packed together inside the rock. One always sits watch on a high stone. They are nervous and quick, and they will not stray far from a crack.

## Life Cycle

Females bear two to four young after the windy season, born furred and open-eyed, able to climb within a day. They breed at a year old and live a few years more, if the eagles and the dun dogs let them.

## Uses and Dangers

Conies are meat and fur for the kindreds, small but plentiful, and the skins are sewn into children's caps and the linings of winter hides. A colony in a rim wall loosens stones with its burrowing and can start a slump, and stronghold keepers clear them from the cistern walls.

## Lore and Belief

A High-Scar child's first cony is cooked and shared with the whole camp ring, however small. The kindreds say that conies sunning in a line mean a calm day and conies gone into the rock at noon mean a storm before dark, and on the shelves, where weather is the first fact of life, nobody laughs at that. The white latrine ledges are read as old route marks by travellers who do not know better.



# Root-Borers

**Root-borers** are grubs that live inside the living root that carries the ceilings and walls of the Roothollows. Where they feed, the root dies: it stops glowing, goes grey, and stops holding, and its chamber loses its bracing and its air together. A Dark Elf house fears them more than flood, because flood comes and goes and a borer stays. Houses pay **finders** to hunt them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Living root |
| **Range** | The Roothollows |
| **Known to** | Elves (Dark Elves) |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to houses |

## Appearance

A root-borer is a fat, soft, legless grub as long as a finger and as thick as a quill, ringed and creamy-white, with a hard brown head and black jaws. It lies curled in a tunnel the width of its body, packed behind it with pale chewed fibre. The grown insect, seldom seen, is a long-horned beetle the length of a thumb, dull grey-brown and velvety, with feelers longer than its body. Its sign in the root is small: a hole ringed with damp frass, a patch where the gloam has faded, and sap that weeps and darkens. A finder with an ear to the root can hear a big grub chewing, a faint wet crunch.

## Habitat and Range

They live only in living root, and only in the Roothollows' upper chambers where the root still carries sap. Dead root, bare stone, and the Deeps below are free of them. They are thickest where root is old and stressed: chambers near failed

seeps, root bruised by a collapse, and the edges of the Sealing bars, where no one has tended the root for ages.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A grub bores along the root's sapwood, eating as it goes, for years. One grub does little. A brood in the same root cuts the sap from everything beyond it, and that length of root dies. The beetles fly to old wounds in the root to lay, so a root that has once been bored is bored again.

## Life Cycle

The grub lives three to five root-years, by Dark Elf count, in its tunnel, then cuts a chamber near the surface and turns to a beetle, which chews its way out in the rising sap of the forest's spring, mates, lays in a scar of living root, and dies within the season.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their cost is root, and root is a house's chambers, its air, its fungus beds, and its dead, who lie in the root-chamber against the living root. A wall going grey can take years to fail. **Finders**, who are paid by the grub, walk a house's chambers with lamps hooded low, listen at the root, and dig the grubs out with hooked irons, then seal the wound with fungus paste. A good finder is welcome in any threshold chamber and is admitted further than most guests. Grubs are fried and eaten in lean years.

## Lore and Belief

Dark Elf children are told that borers come to a house that has forgotten its dead, and the dead in the root-chamber are spoken to whenever a grub is found near them. Some houses say a finder who takes too many grubs from one root has been feeding them elsewhere to keep the work. Most believe the gloam fades before the borer comes, as a warning; in truth it fades because the borer is already there.

A root that the borers have hollowed can fall in a night and take a sleeping house with it, and the old tale of the house that woke to the root's groan and got out with nothing but its children is told whenever a grub is found.



# Rose Waders

**Rose waders** are the pink birds that arrive in thousands on a flooded pan of the Rimward Basins, seemingly from nowhere, within days of the water. They come for the pan shrimp, and their coming is the surest sign the kindreds know of a good year.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Shallow brine of flooded pans |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins; the Glassbelt pans rarely |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A rose wader stands taller than a child, nearly all of it thin pink legs and a long, curving neck, with a small head and a heavy bill bent sharply downward in the middle, pink with a black tip. Its plumage is soft pink, deepest on the wings, which show a band of crimson and black flight feathers when spread. Young birds are grey and grow pinker with every year of feeding. They stand on one leg to rest, walk with a stiff, high step, and fly with neck and legs stretched out straight, in long lines and skeins. A flock keeps up a ceaseless goose-like honking and gabbling that can be heard from the rims.

## Habitat and Range

They live where the brine is shallow and full of shrimp, and nowhere else, so they are seen in the Basins only after a storm, and in great numbers only on the Long Pan in a good year. A few appear in rare wet years on the pans of the Glassbelt. Where they go between floods nobody on the far side knows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A rose wader feeds with its head upside down in the water, sweeping its bill from side to side and straining the shrimp and the green scum through fine combs inside it. Flocks feed, rest, and move together, and do everything in unison: thousands of birds turning their heads one way, or rising together in a pink cloud. They are shy and will not let people approach on foot, but they ignore herds.

## Life Cycle

In a long-lasting flood they breed on the pan itself, building mounds of mud a hand high with a hollow on top for a single egg, crowded together in a colony. The grey chick leaves the mound within days to join a creche of young. If the water dries too soon the colony is abandoned. Rose waders live thirty years or more.

## Uses and Dangers

The kindreds take their eggs from the mound colonies and sometimes the birds themselves, and their pink feathers are worn and traded. They do no harm.

## Lore and Belief

When the waders come, the word goes round the camps that the year is good, and kindreds who have not met for years pitch beside one another on the Long Pan's edge. The kindreds say the birds are pink because the pan blushes, and the pan blushes because the storm remembered it. Some say the waders spend the dry years on a sea nobody has seen, and that they will lead a kindred there one day. Nobody has followed them.



# Ruin Hogs

**Ruin hogs** are pigs gone back to the wild. When a settlement of the Broken Marches failed and its people left, their swine stayed, and over many generations their descendants became a rangy, bristled, tusked wild kind that lives in the old works. Salvagers say a herd in a ruin is worse than bad air, because bad air does not come looking for you.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Ruins, overgrown fields, culverts, and cellars |
| **Range** | The Broken Marches and the Lowbank side of the Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Goblins, Humans, Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to salvagers in the underlayers and to anyone between a sow and her young |

## Appearance

A grown boar stands as high as a man's hip and is far heavier than he looks, all shoulder and head, tapering to narrow hindquarters and a thin tail. Its coat is coarse grey-black bristle, often patched with old pink or brown from the farm pigs it came from, and thick along the spine into a ridge that rises when it is angry. Its tusks curve up from the lower jaw, yellow and sharp, as long as a finger in an old boar. Sows are smaller and lack the long tusks. Ruin hogs trot with a stiff, quick gait, grunt and huff constantly as they feed, and squeal like tearing metal when frightened. Their wallows and sleeping hollows smell of mud, dung, and rank musk.

## Habitat and Range

Ruin hogs live where cover, water, and something to dig lie close together: overgrown fields, ruined storeworks and root cellars, culverts and service tunnels, and the edges of old burial grounds. They are commonest in the Broken Marches and come down to the abandoned storeworks and culvert

mouths of Lowbank on the Greyford Reach. A herd keeps to a run of ground it knows and beds in the same dry vaults for years.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They eat almost anything: roots, bulbs, acorns, grubs, carrion, the stores in an abandoned cellar, and whatever they can dig out of shallow ground, which in the Marches includes old graves. Sows and their young move in herds of a dozen or more; old boars go alone. They are wary of people in the open and bolt, but in a tunnel, a cellar, or a culvert, where they cannot run, they charge, and a sow with young charges anywhere. They learn quickly where food is left and come back to it.

## Life Cycle

A sow farrows twice a year in good seasons, six to ten striped piglets each time, in a nest of torn bedding in a dry vault. The striping fades in the first summer. Most die young to dogs, foxes, wolves, and hunters; those that survive live eight or ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

Ruin hogs are meat for salvage households and Goblin warrens, trapped in pits and snares at the run mouths or hunted with dogs in the open, and their bristles go to brush-makers. In the underlayers they are one of the hazards a crew reads for, beside collapse and trapped water: fresh rooting, droppings, and the smell of a wallow mean a crew goes in with light, noise, and spears, or not at all. A boar in a culvert has opened a man’s thigh to the bone.

They also undo work. A herd will root up a sheltered ruin-court plot in a night and dig into a cellar store, and the dead of a forgotten burial ground are sometimes found scattered by them in the morning.

## Lore and Belief

Lowbank Goblins say a ruin hog remembers the house its swine came from and goes back to dig there, which is why they so often turn up in the cellars of empty homesteads. Human settlers on the Marches' edge call them the **last tenants** and will not eat one taken from a burial ground. Kindred danger-marks have a sign for a hog run, and it is chalked beside the marks for unsound stone.

Hog-hunting in the ruins is a delver’s sideline and a deadly one: a boar cornered in a cellar has killed more salvagers than collapsing stone in some seasons, and the tusks of a big one hang in many Lowbank houses as a boast.



# Run-Followers

**Run-followers** are the sharks of the Tidebound Reaches. They live along the current roads and the outer water, and at two times of year they come in close: when the returning runs cross into brackish water, and when the young come down from the rivers to the sea. The Thaluren name them, as they name everything, by what they do. The young are what they follow.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Current roads, estuary mouths, and the Kelpshade's edge |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches and the edge of the Unrun Sea |
| **Known to** | Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to the young coming down from the rivers |

## Appearance

A run-follower is a grey shark about as long as two tall men, heavy-bodied and powerful, with a blunt snout, small black eyes, a tall curved fin on its back, and a long upper lobe to its tail. It is slate-grey above, fading abruptly to white below, and many carry the pale scars of old wounds. Its mouth is a wide crescent of rows of serrated, triangular teeth. It swims with a slow sideways sweep of the tail, and can turn and strike with a burst of speed that leaves a swirl in the water. It makes no sound.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the open coastal water of the Tidebound Reaches and out along the current roads towards the Far Set and the edge of the Unrun Sea. In the seasons of the runs and of the young's descent they gather off the estuary mouths and along the seaward edge of the Kelpshade in dozens. They rarely go up into brackish water and never into the rivers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Run-followers hunt fish, seals, porpoises, and anything weak or alone in the water. They learn where food comes at the same time each year and wait there. When the Thaluren young come down, small, unpractised, and many, the sharks cruise the mouths and the channel edges and take stragglers. They are wary of large groups and of anything that fights back, and a guarded run seldom loses an adult to them.

## Life Cycle

The females bear live young, a few pups at a time, in shallow sheltered water away from the mouths. The pups grow slowly and live twenty or thirty years.

## Uses and Dangers

To the Thaluren the run-followers are the sea's first test of the young. In the season of the descent, escorts from the sea settlements gather at the mouths and along the Kelpshade's edge, keep the young in close bands, and drive the sharks off with spears and noise; every settlement remembers the years they failed. A lone adult swimmer in the outer water at dusk is in danger too. The Thaluren do not hunt the sharks for food, but kill those that press in.

## Lore and Belief

By Thaluren custom the young who come down are counted at Turningshoal, and the count notes the run-followers' toll with the rest. The Thaluren say the sharks keep their own run, because they come back to the same water at the same time each year, and they hold that this is a run that honours no one: the sharks come back, but for themselves alone. A young Thaluren who has outswum a run-follower carries the story into adulthood, and is listened to.



# Salt Foxes

**Salt foxes** are the small pale foxes of the true desert. They live out on the salt pans, the old sea floor, and the stony flats of the Glassbelt Interior, where almost nothing else that size can, and they come to the edges of crossing camps at night for scraps. Kindred lore says: follow a salt fox at dawn and it will drink before you do.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Salt pans and stony desert |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior and the floors of the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples, Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A salt fox is smaller than a cat, slight and quick, with enormous pointed ears nearly as long as its head and a narrow face with large, dark eyes. Its fur is thick and soft, cream to pale sand, nearly white on the belly, with a black-tipped tail and furred soles that pad silently over hot sand and salt. It trots in short bursts and freezes, ears turning, before it pounces. It yaps and chitters, and at night a pair calls to each other with a high, wavering whine.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the Glassbelt wherever there is ground to dig and something to eat: the salt pans, the dry shorelines and steps of the old inland sea, ruin fields, and the stony desert. They come onto the floors of the Rimward Basins near the Lastwater Wells. Each pair keeps a den of many tunnels in a bank or among ruin stones and stays in it through the heat of the day.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Salt foxes hunt at night and at dawn, listening with their great ears for dew beetles, lizards, rodents, and small birds, and eating seeds and the fruit of desert scrub. They are curious and not very shy, and a camp that sits quietly will see them at the edge of the firelight. They seldom drink, getting their water from what they eat and from the dew they lick off stone and beetles' backs in the cold hour before sunrise.

## Life Cycle

A pair mates for life and raises two to five cubs in the den in spring, before the hot months. The cubs leave by autumn. Salt foxes live about ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

Salt foxes are harmless and of little use: their fur is too small to be worth much, and they are too clever to trap easily. Crossers value them as signs. A fox's tracks lead from its den to where the dew forms and the beetles gather, and where the beetles gather, dew will form again tomorrow.

## Lore and Belief

The Kindred saying is half true. A salt fox at dawn does drink before you do, but what it drinks is dew off stone, and a crosser who follows one in hope of a well usually finds the fox's breakfast instead. The old crossers know it and tell the saying anyway, as a lesson in reading the desert. Salvagers say a salt fox will not den near poisoned ground, and the Kindreds mark a fox's den as safe to camp beside.



# Scar Vultures

**Scar vultures** are the great carrion birds of the Windscar escarpments. They nest on the faces of the Shearline and the high shelves, ride the warm air above open country, and come down on any death within sight. In the High Scars, where exposure kills more people than anything else, a circle of vultures over a pass is news: someone did not get through, and escorts read it before any runner arrives.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Escarpment faces and the thermals above open country |
| **Range** | The High Scars, the Rimward Basins, and the Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A scar vulture stands as high as a child, with wings that span more than two tall men laid end to end, broad and fingered at the tips. Its body is dark brown, its ruff of feathers at the base of the neck pale buff, and its head and long neck bare, wrinkled, and a dull pinkish grey, dark with blood after feeding. The bill is heavy and hooked. On the ground it hops and shoulders its way about clumsily; in the air it hardly moves its wings, circling for hours on a thermal. A feeding crowd hisses, grunts, and squabbles, and smells of the carcass.

## Habitat and Range

They nest in colonies on high escarpment ledges and cliff faces and range over enormous distances: the shelves and passes of the High Scars, the floors and rims of the Rimward Basins, and

out over the Glassbelt Interior along the crossing routes. A few birds are almost always in the sky above any stretch of open Windscar country.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Scar vultures find food by watching: each other, the wild dogs, the wind cats, and the camps. When one drops, those nearest see it and follow, and within the hour a carcass is ringed by dozens. They strip it to bone in an afternoon. They do not kill, and they are wary of living people, rising heavily if anyone approaches, but they will wait a long time on a rock beside a beast or a person that is dying.

## Life Cycle

A pair lays a single egg on a bare ledge or a rough platform of sticks late in the windy season, and both parents feed the chick for many months. They use the same ledge for generations and may live forty years.

## Uses and Dangers

They clean the shelves. Without them the carcasses of the dry country would lie for months, foul the few waters, and feed the flies. Escorts use them as a far-seeing eye: a circle forming over a pass, a camping ground, or a stretch of the crossing is reported along the warning ridges as fast as a fire, and a party is sent to see. Their feathers fletch arrows.

## Lore and Belief

The kindreds hold that the vultures carry what is left of the dead to Ushkar the Ancestor-Warden so that he can count them, and killing one is a grave wrong. Escorts say that a vulture that follows a party from the start has already chosen someone in it, and a captain who hears this said at a treaty-ground does not laugh. Salvagers on the Glassbelt say the vultures will not land on furnace ground; the truth is that nothing dies there that they can reach.

Raiders on the shelves are said to read the vultures to find where a crossing has gone wrong, and to come in after the birds to strip what the weather left.



# Scorpions

**Scorpions** live under stones and in wall cracks wherever the far side is dry: across the Windscar, out over the Glassbelt, and on the bare saddles between the terraced folds. Most kinds give a sting that hurts for a day. The pale scorpion of the glassed ground of the Glassbelt kills. Every child on the far side learns to shake out its boots before putting them on.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Stony desert, walls, and bare saddles |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior, the Rimward Basins, the High Scars, and the bare saddles of the Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Halflings, Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Dangerous; the pale Glassbelt kind Deadly |

## Appearance

A scorpion is a flat, armoured, eight-legged hunter with a pair of grasping claws held out in front and a long segmented tail curved up over its back, ending in a bulb and a curved sting. The common kinds of the Windscar and the Folds are dark: brown, black, or dull olive, as long as a finger, with thick heavy claws. The **pale scorpion** of the glassed ground is slender, straw-yellow to nearly translucent, with thin small claws and a thick tail, as long as a hand. Scorpions move in short darts, stand with claws raised and tail cocked when disturbed, and make no sound.

## Habitat and Range

The dark kinds live under stones, in the cracks of dry-stone walls and stronghold walls, and in burrows across the Rimward Basins and the High Scars, and on the bare, unterraced saddles and spurs of the Leeward Folds, seldom in the terraces themselves. The pale kind is found only in the

Glassbelt, thickest on and around glassed ground and furnace scars, in the cracks of the fused surface.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Scorpions hunt at night, waiting at a burrow mouth or under a stone for insects, spiders, and small lizards, which they seize with their claws and sting if they struggle. By day they hide in cool dark places, which includes boots, bedding, folded hides, and the gaps of walls a hand reaches into. They sting people only when touched or pressed, but they do not give way.

## Life Cycle

A female gives birth to live young, which ride on her back for their first weeks. They grow through several moults and may live several years.

## Uses and Dangers

The sting of a dark scorpion brings burning pain, numbness, and swelling for a day or two, worse in a child. The sting of the pale scorpion brings pain, then sweating, twitching, a racing heart, and failing breath, and it kills children often and grown adults sometimes. Crossers shake out boots and bedding, sleep off the ground, and turn stones with a stick; Halfling wall-menders work the saddle walls in gloves.

## Lore and Belief

Glassbelt crossers carry a remedy against the pale scorpion of chewed root and prayer: a bitter root chewed and packed on the sting, and the name of the dead spoken to call them to help. The root eases the pain; whether the prayer does anything, the crossers do not argue. Salvagers say the pale scorpion was white-hot once and has not yet cooled, and that it takes its poison from the fire in the glassed ground, which is why it lives nowhere else. Halflings say a scorpion in a terrace wall means the wall has dried out and must be watched.

Glassbelt tales tell of the poisoner who milked the pale scorpions for a lord’s enemies and was killed by his own jar; the salvagers say the scorpions still nest in the ruin where he worked.



# Seabirds

**Seabirds** crowd the cliffs and isles of the far-side coast. On the Tidelace Coasts and along the Soundchain Roads their eggs are part of ordinary food, beside fish, shellfish, kelp, and terrace crops, for Gnome households and the Orc escort parties that camp above the beach yards. Their names are on the coast itself: the Gullstair, the corridor's busiest cliff descent, and Gullhead, the camping ground at its top.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Sea cliffs, offshore isles, and the sounds between them |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts and the Soundchain Roads |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Orcs, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though a nesting colony will strike at an egg-gatherer |

## Appearance

### *Gulls*

The gulls are big, loud, and everywhere: white-bodied birds with grey backs and black wingtips, a heavy yellow bill with a red spot near its tip, pale fierce eyes, and pink legs. A grown gull spans more than a Gnome's height from wingtip to wingtip. They wheel over quays and drying racks, stand in rows on breakwaters, and call in long, laughing cries that carry through fog.

### *Cliff Birds*

Below them on the ledges nest the smaller cliff birds, upright and dark-backed with white breasts, the size of a large hen, standing shoulder to shoulder on rock so narrow their eggs are pointed at one end so they roll in a circle and not off the edge. They fly low and fast over the water on whirring wings and dive for fish. A colony's noise is a steady growling, and its smell, of guano and old fish, reaches a boat long before the cliff comes out of the fog.

## Habitat and Range

Seabirds nest on the sea-cliffs and sea-cut terraces of the Tidelace and on the offshore isles, in colonies of thousands, and feed in the sounds and straits and on the shoals. Gulls follow people and live off quays, boats, and racks as well as the sea. The Long Grey, the great fog belt of the outer coast, does not drive them off; they call through it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Gulls are bold thieves, quick to take fish from a rack or a hand, and quarrelsome among themselves. Cliff birds are shy of people except at the nest, where a colony will rise in a shrieking cloud around anyone on the ledges and strike at the head. All of them follow the fish, and a sound full of diving birds is a sound full of fish.

## Life Cycle

The birds return to the same ledges each spring and lay a single egg or a small clutch. The young grow fat on the ledge and leave it in late summer, and by the storm season most of the cliff birds have gone out to sea, leaving the gulls behind.

## Uses and Dangers

Their eggs are a spring food, gathered from the ledges by climbers on rope and hand-hold. Gnomes, sure on stairs, quays, and wet rock, take them from the nearer cliffs; gatherers keep to known ledges and take only part of each colony's laying, so that it returns. Eggs are eaten fresh in season and are not a trade good. The danger is the cliff, not the bird: a slip on guano-wet rock, a rope frayed on an edge, or a colony rising at a climber's face.

## Lore and Belief

Gnome pilots read birds as they read water, and a sound where the birds sit thick is noted in a pilot's mind if not in the ledger. Coastal Humans say the gulls' cry before dawn means wind, and they leave a fish on the shingle for them at the shrine of Maris of the Tides after a hard passage. Orc escorts coming down the Gullstair know they are near the sea by the birds before they see it.

Egg-gatherers go down the cliffs on ropes every spring, and every colony has its tale of the gatherer whose rope was cut by a rival and of the feud that followed for three generations.



# Sheep

**Sheep** are the wool beasts of the Human uplands. Headwater households send them up to the summer slopes, and the herders of the basin edge graze them on the thin country towards the Witnessfields. Their wool clothes the Cradle web and goes up the Headwater roads to the Dwarven holds, which cannot grow their own, and their mutton is the broth of every carters' inn. The fleece that comes down the Windscar stairs to the far-side coast is not from these flocks but from the kindreds' herd animals.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Upland pasture, summer slopes, and the dry edges of farmland |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches and the inland edge of the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans, and the Dwarves who buy their wool |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Headwater sheep is small and hardy, knee-high to a Human at the shoulder, with a dense, crimped fleece of off-white, grey, or brown that grows thick by spring and hangs in ragged locks if it is not shorn. Its face and legs are bare, pale or speckled, and most rams and some ewes carry curled horns. Basin-edge sheep are larger and heavier in the fleece, and polled. A flock moves in a tight, flowing mass behind its lead ewe, bleating continually, the lambs high and thin and the ewes answering low. Sheep smell of lanolin and wet wool, and a fold smells of it all year.

## Habitat and Range

In the Headwater Marches a valley household grazes sheep with its cattle on the summer slopes, and high villages such as Notchfield send their flocks up as soon as the snow clears and bring them down before it returns. In the Confluence

Basins sheep belong to the drier uplands at the inland edge, where the fields thin towards the Witnessfields and hamlets such as Flockturn keep sheepfolds and graze their flocks up to the boundary markers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Sheep are timid, gregarious, and easily led. They follow one another, which a herder and a dog can use, and panic as one, which a fox, a stray dog, or a sudden storm can use against them. A ewe knows her lamb's voice among hundreds. A ram in the autumn will butt anything that crosses him. Left to themselves on rough pasture they keep to familiar paths and graze the slope in lines.

## Life Cycle

Ewes lamb in early spring, one or two at a time, and the lambing season keeps herders out in the folds at night. Lambs go up to the summer slopes with their mothers. Sheep are shorn in early summer; surplus lambs and old ewes are sold or slaughtered in autumn. A ewe gives lambs for six or seven years.

## Uses and Dangers

Sheep give wool above all, then mutton, milk and cheese, skins for parchment and fleeces, tallow, and dung for the terrace fields. Wool and cloth go up the Headwater roads to the holds of the Ironspine, who sell ore and tools and buy back the wool they cannot grow. Flockturn's herders sell wool and mutton at the march-towns, and mutton broth is eaten in the carters' inns at Greyford.

Sheep cost little but care. They fall to rot and fly in wet years, to foxes and dogs at lambing, and to snow when a flock is caught high late in the year.

## Lore and Belief

The herders of Flockturn graze up to the Grey Line of the Witnessfields and turn their flocks back there, saying the land inside is already spoken for; they do not cross the markers, and they say their sheep stop at the last stone before they do, without being whistled back. Whatever lies inside the markers, no flock has been seen to graze it. Elsewhere, a black lamb born first in the season is thought lucky, and herders swear oaths with a hand on a fleece.

Sheep-raiding is the oldest quarrel in the Headwater Marches, and every valley keeps the tale of its night raids, the flocks driven over the passes in snow, and the shepherds who followed with slings.



# Shelf Antelope

**Shelf antelope** are the wild grazers of the Windscar: small, quick, fawn-coloured antelope that move across the shelves of the High Scars and the outer slopes of the Rimward Basins following the grass, as the kindreds do. They are the main prey of the wind cats and dun dogs, and a welcome hunt for any camp.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Thin grass of shelves and rims |
| **Range** | The High Scars and the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A shelf antelope stands about as high as a goat but is slighter and much longer in the leg, with a short tail it flicks constantly. Its back and flanks are sandy fawn, its belly and rump white, with a dark band along each flank where the two meet and a dark stripe down each cheek. Both sexes carry horns, the bucks' longer, ringed, and curving back and up like a lyre. When alarmed a herd bounds away in high stiff-legged leaps, all four feet off the ground at once, flashing the white rump. They are mostly silent; a buck snorts and whistles at a threat.

## Habitat and Range

They live in herds of a few dozen on the thin grass of the shelves and rims, moving with the season: up to the high shelves in the calm months, down towards the basin rims and the green fringe of the Long Pan after the storms. A good flood on the

Long Pan draws them in hundreds. They can go long without drinking, taking water from dew and the plants they eat.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They graze and browse at dawn and dusk and rest in the heat of the day. One or two always stand watch. They are wary but not foolish: they will graze within sight of a camp ring that is not hunting them and run from one that is. Bucks fight for ground in the breeding season, clashing horns with a dry clack that carries across a shelf.

## Life Cycle

A doe bears one fawn at the end of the windy season, hides it in the grass for its first weeks, and returns only to feed it. Fawns join the herd by summer. A shelf antelope lives about ten years, if it lives long enough to grow.

## Uses and Dangers

They are game for the kindreds: meat, a fine light hide for bags and footwear, and horn for spoons, toggles, and handles. A hunted herd is driven towards hidden archers or into ravines, and the kindreds' customs share the meat among the camp ring that hunted. Their only harm is grass: in a dry year a large herd on a kindred's grazing ground is competition, and herders drive them off.

## Lore and Belief

The kindreds read the herds. Antelope moving early down the shelves mean an early windy season, and a herd that will not leave a grazing ground means the grass beyond it is worse. A kindred that moves on before the grass is spent is said to **go like the antelope**, which is praise; one that stays too long is said to stand like a stronghold.

Young hunters of the kindreds prove themselves by running down a buck on foot across the shelves, and the kindreds hold up the runner who chased one for two days and brought it home on her shoulders.



# Shellfish

**Shellfish** are the easiest food the sea gives. On the far side of Caeldon the coastal Humans of the Tidelace gather them with weed at low tide, Gnome households eat them with fish, kelp, and seabird eggs, Orc escort parties camped along the Soundchain corridor live partly on them, and the Thaluren gather them on the reefs around their sea settlements. They are also a coastal trade good, carried with dried fish, cordage, and lamp oil.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Rocky shores, shingle shallows, sheltered inlets, and reefs |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts, the Soundchain Roads, the Tidebound Reaches |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans, Orcs, Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Harmless, except taken from fouled water |

## Appearance

### *Mussels*

Mussels grow in dense blue-black beds on rocks, breakwater stones, quay piles, and mooring chains, each shell about the length of a thumb, smooth and dark outside and pearly blue within, holding to the stone by tough brown threads. A bed at low tide crackles and hisses softly as the shells close against the air, and smells of salt and weed.

### *Oysters*

Oysters lie in the still water of sheltered inlets, grey, rough, and flaky-shelled, cupped one side and flat the other, as broad as a palm. Inside, the shell has the shimmering pearl sheen that coastal tellers give to the skin of Maris of the Tides.

### *Limpets, Whelks, and Shore Crabs*

On open rock the low, ridged cones of limpets cling so hard a knife is needed to take them. Whelks, spiral-shelled and creamy brown, crawl

in the shallows, and small green-brown shore crabs scuttle sideways under the weed and stones, nipping at fingers.

### *Reef Shellfish*

On the reefs of the Tidebound Reaches grow larger and brighter kinds below the low-water line: thick-shelled clams set into the reef, spiny urchins, and fan-shaped shells hinged like a book, gathered by Thaluren swimming rather than wading.

## Habitat and Range

Shellfish live along every rocky shore, shingle cove, and sheltered inlet of the Tidelace Coasts and the Soundchain Roads, thickest on the breakwaters and in the inner sounds, and on the reefs and island margins of the Tidebound Reaches. Near the Tidelace river mouths where the water is turning black and sour, the hamlets say the beds are dying.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Most shellfish barely move. Mussels, oysters, and limpets fix themselves to one place for life and feed by drawing in the water; whelks and crabs wander a little and scavenge. They meet people only by being picked.

## Life Cycle

Shellfish spawn into the water in warm months, and the young drift before settling on rock, shell, or a quay pile to grow. A bed stripped bare recovers slowly, in a few years, so gatherers leave the small ones and work beds in turn.

## Uses and Dangers

They are food, eaten fresh, boiled in a pot of seawater, or smoked and dried for keeping and for trade at the harbour quays. Shells are burnt for lime, and the pearly linings are cut into buttons and inlay. Gathering is work for those who cannot go out in boats, the old and the young of the Human hamlets above all, and on the Tidelace the harbour families take their share of it like any other use of the shore.

Shellfish from fouled water sicken those who eat them, and the hamlets nearest the black water no longer gather near the mouths. A tide that turns while gatherers are out on the far rocks is the other danger.

## Lore and Belief

Gatherers say a shellfish bed knows who takes too much and moves away. The Thaluren, whose custom turns on the protection of vulnerable life and spawning water, leave reef beds unpicked in their spawning season. On the Tidelace a broken oyster shell set at the foot of Maris's shrine asks for a calm tide.

Pearl-beds are another matter: a good bed is fought over by the hamlets around it, and more than one Tidelace feud began with a diver found drowned with a stranger's knife-mark on her rope.



# Shipworms

**Shipworms** are not worms but molluscs, kin to the clams, that live inside wood in the sea. They bore through the hulls of craft, the piles of quays, the timber of breakwater works, and any drift-wood, and they do it from the inside, so that a pile can look sound and be hollow. On the Tidelace Coasts and along the Soundchain Roads they are the breakwater crews' other enemy, after the storms.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Wooden hulls, piles, quays, and sea-soaked timber |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts, the Soundchain Roads, and the Tidebound estuaries |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary, to hulls and quays |

## Appearance

A shipworm is a soft, pale grey-white tube of a body, as long as a finger or a forearm and no thicker than a reed stem, with a pair of tiny, ridged, white shells at the head end like the bit of an auger, and at the tail end two short siphons and two small hard plates that close the tunnel. It is never seen alive outside its wood. What people see is the timber: a piece of sea-soaked plank or pile that, split open, is riddled with tunnels as thick as a finger, lined with chalky white shell, running along the grain. The tunnels' mouths on the surface are pinholes. Rotten shipworm timber smells of the sea and old cheese.

## Habitat and Range

They live in any wood that stays in salt water: the hulls of craft, quay piles and mooring posts, the timber of old breakwaters, wrecks, and drift. They need full salt water and grow fastest in warm summer seas, and they are fewer in the brackish estuaries of the Tidebound Reaches. They are found the length of the coast.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A young shipworm settles on wood as a speck, drills in through a pinhole, and spends the rest of its life boring along the grain, eating the wood dust and filtering the water drawn in through its siphons. It never comes out. Many in one timber honeycomb it, never breaking into each other's tunnels, until the wood fails.

## Life Cycle

Shipworms spawn in summer; the young drift for some weeks and settle on whatever wood they find. They grow fast and live a year or two, by which time a summer's settlement can have hollowed a new pile.

## Uses and Dangers

They cost the harbour towns dearly. A quay pile can fail without warning under a loaded cart, and a hull that looks sound can open in a swell. Craft are hauled out every year, scraped, burned, and tarred, and the best hulls are sheathed in thin plank laid over tarred hair; quay piles are inspected and replaced on fixed rounds by the breakwater crews, and the sounding houses keep a ledger of every pile's age. Gnome harbours build their breakwaters in stone for this reason as much as for the storms. Coastal Human hamlets draw their boats up on the shingle and dry them, which the shipworms cannot survive. Some fishers eat them, raw, from split drift timber.

## Lore and Belief

Breakwater crews say a shipworm is a careless mark in wood: it looks true until the weight comes on it. A harbour family's honesty is measured in its readings, and a crew that lets a pile go unchecked has done a dishonest thing in the crews' eyes even if no one is hurt. Human fishers say a hull a shipworm will not touch has been blessed by Maris.

Wreckers are said to know which hulls the worm has eaten and to lure those ships first, since a riddled ship breaks up fast on the rocks and spills its cargo onto the shingle.



# Slow Returners

**Slow returners** are the great sea turtles of the far side. They spend years at sea, wandering the current roads and the open water, and the females come back, again and again, to lay their eggs on the beach where they themselves hatched. The Thaluren, whose whole faith turns on rightful return, name them for it, and hold that they keep the same rule. Taking one is a wrong.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open sea and sandy nesting beaches |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches and the outer isles of the Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Thaluren, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A grown slow returner is as long as a tall man lying down, its shell a broad, smooth, heart-shaped dome of olive-brown plates, each plate rayed with darker streaks, often grown over with weed and barnacles. Its head is blunt, scaled, and beaked, with large dark eyes, and its front flippers are long and wing-like; underwater it seems to fly, beating them slowly. Ashore it is heavy and slow, dragging itself up the sand with both front flippers at once and leaving a broad, ridged track. A nesting female breathes in long, groaning sighs, and her eyes stream with clear tears that wash away the sand and salt.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the open sea and along the outer water of the Tidebound Reaches, grazing the kelp and sea-grass of the shoal worlds and the reefs, and they travel very far. They nest on a few sandy beaches of the outer isles of the Tidelace and the island margins of the Reaches.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They graze on sea-grass and weed and eat jellyfish, including fogbells, and crabs and shellfish. They are solitary, slow, and calm, indifferent to swimmers, and allow the Thaluren to swim beside them.

## Life Cycle

Every few years a female swims back to her natal beach, from whatever water she has been in, and in summer nights comes ashore several times to dig a deep pit above the tide line and lay a hundred soft white eggs in it. She covers them and returns to the sea. Weeks later the hatchlings dig out together at night and run for the water, and birds, crabs, and fish take most of them on the way. Those that reach the sea are not seen again until they are grown. Slow returners live as long as a Human, perhaps longer, and take decades to come of age.

## Uses and Dangers

They harm no one. Gnome harbours on the outer isles mark their nesting beaches and keep people and dogs off them in summer, out of old courtesy to their Thaluren neighbours, and to keep the peace with them. Some coastal Humans take their eggs, which the Thaluren regard as a wrong done to a clutch.

## Lore and Belief

In Thaluren belief the slow returners are lesser kin in the rule of return: they hatch in a known place, go out, and come home to it to lay, and so their clutches are owed the protection owed to any clutch laid in its own water. A Thaluren who kills one, or who takes its eggs, is held to have harmed a return and is shunned by the runs. Outside Thaluren water it is only belief, and other peoples keep it or not; a Human egg-taker on a far beach answers to no one. The Thaluren say a returner swimming alongside a run is a good omen, and that a beach the returners stop coming to has gone wrong, as the First Nesting Confluence went wrong.



# Sparrows

**Sparrows** live wherever people grow and store grain, and nowhere else in such numbers. They nest in eaves and thatch, steal from the threshing floor, and squabble on every farmyard wall. In the Confluence Basins, where the granary is the centre of village life, keeping sparrows off the floor at threshing time is children's work.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Threshing floors, granaries, farmyards, and eaves |
| **Range** | Widespread wherever grain is grown and stored |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless, except to grain |

## Appearance

A sparrow is a small, round, stout-billed bird that sits easily in a palm. The cock is chestnut and grey with a black bib under his chin and a grey cap; the hen is plainer, streaked buff and brown. Both have short tails, quick legs, and an unending, cheerful racket of chirps that rises to a roar when a flock settles in a hedge. They hop rather than walk, fly in short whirring dashes, and take dust baths in dry corners of the yard.

## Habitat and Range

They live in villages, towns, farmsteads, and around mills and granaries, in every farmed country of the cradle-web and the far side. Wherever a village is abandoned, the sparrows leave soon after the people do.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Sparrows eat seed above all, the spilt grain of the threshing floor, the yard, and the field at harvest, and feed their young on insects. They are bold, sociable, and noisy, live in flocks outside the

breeding season, and will come within arm's length of a quiet person. A flock settles on a threshing floor in moments and lifts off together at a clap.

## Life Cycle

A pair builds an untidy nest of straw and feathers in a hole under the eaves, in thatch, or in a wall, and raises two or three broods a summer of four or five eggs each. Most live only a year or two.

## Uses and Dangers

In a big flock sparrows take a share of every harvest, from the ripening heads in the field to the grain on the floor and the open sacks in the granary. Children are set to scare them with wooden clappers and shouts through the threshing days. Poor households net them in winter and roast them a dozen at a time, and a sparrow caught with a hair snare is often a child's first catch.

## Lore and Belief

A sparrow is a common small offering at field shrines, given whole at the threshing in thanks for the grain the flock did not take. Basin villages that keep Anvelle the Harvest-Mother say the sparrows are her poor, and that a household which never leaves them a scatter of grain will find its own store short. A sparrow nesting in a new house is taken as a sign that people will live in it long.



# Squirrels

**Squirrels** are the small red nut-thieves of the forest. They take their share of the mast before the gatherers come and bury what they cannot eat, which is how a forest plants itself. The High Elf gardeners of the Crownboughs net them out of the trained nut trees; the Wood Elves of the Elderweald leave them their share as they leave the deer theirs.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Nut woods and canopy gardens |
| **Range** | The Elderweald and the Crownboughs |
| **Known to** | Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A squirrel is about the length of a forearm, half of it tail: a plume of fur as long as its body, carried curled over its back. Its coat is russet-red above, cream-white below, greyer in winter, with long tufts on the ear-tips in the cold months. Its eyes are large and dark, its hind feet long, and its claws grip bark like hooks.

It moves in bursts: a dash up a trunk in a spiral, a leap from twig to twig, a freeze, a flick of the tail. It chatters and scolds at intruders with a harsh, churring call and stamps its feet on a branch. It smells of nothing much but leaf and nut.

## Habitat and Range

Squirrels live wherever there are nut trees: throughout the old forest of the Elderweald, thickest where the great nut trees stand, and in the trained canopy and garden-walks of the Crownboughs. They follow the hazel out to the forest's edge.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A squirrel eats nuts above all, and also seeds, buds, fungus, and the odd egg. In autumn it buries hundreds of nuts in scattered caches and in winter finds most of them by smell; those it forgets grow. It builds a round nest of twigs and moss high in a fork. It is wary, quick, and bold by turns, and a squirrel used to a garden will take nuts from a terrace table.

## Life Cycle

Squirrels breed in late winter and again in summer in a good mast year, with three or four young in the nest. Most live only a few years; martens, hawks, and owls take many.

## Uses and Dangers

Squirrels give nothing much but the forest's planting, and in a poor year they cost the gatherers dearly. They strip bark from young trained trees, which harms a shaping begun generations ago, and that is why the Crownbough gardeners net them. They are harmless to people.

## Lore and Belief

To the Wood Elves, what the forest lets fall is offered to every eater, and a household that takes the whole mast and leaves none for the squirrels is thought greedy. They say a squirrel that forgets its nuts is the forest's best gardener. High Elf gardeners have a saying that a squirrel can undo in a season what a house trained in a century, and use it about rival houses.



# Stair Kine

**Stair kine** are the herd beasts of the Orc kindreds of the Windscar Pacts, named for the cliff stairs they climb sideways, step by step, when a camp moves. A kindred counts its wealth in them: they are its food, its shelter, its trade, and the currency in which wrongs are answered. The other herds the peoples drive between pastures stand under Herd Animals.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Thin escarpment grass, cliff stairs, and basin floors after flood |
| **Range** | The High Scars and the Rimward Basins, driven down to the Soundchain Roads and the Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Halflings, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A stair kine is between a large goat and a small cow in size, deep-bodied on short, strong legs, with split hooves hard enough for scree and stone steps. It carries a double coat: long, coarse outer hair that hangs almost to the knee, and beneath it a dense, soft underwool that loosens in spring and is combed out for felt. The colours are those of the ridges, dun, smoke-grey, and dusty brown, and most beasts carry short horns that sweep back from the brow. They graze head down and steady, and on the stairs they go sideways while the drovers call them on in long falling notes. A herd grunts and bleats in a low, continuous murmur; penned between the tents it smells of dust, dung smoke, and greasy hair.

## Habitat and Range

In the High Scars the kindreds move between seasonal camps on the sheltered sides of ridges, and their herds graze the thin grass of the shelves until it gives out; in the calmer months the herds go

highest. Below the Shearline, in the Rimward Basins, they draw in to the rims in the dry months and spread across the outer slopes and basin floors after the storms; in a good year every herd within reach is driven down to graze the Long Pan's short green fringe before it browns. Herds come down the Gullstair to the stations of the Soundchain Roads and along the Lee Road to the Leeward Folds. No stair kine lives wild.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Stair kine are hardy, thrifty, and stubborn. They crop grass to the root, which is why a kindred moves on before the ground is spent, and they follow the oldest beast of the herd, not the drover. They bunch tightly at a scent of storm or dust and walk into the wind's lee by themselves. Penned in the camp rings they are quiet; driven too far between waters, they lie down and will not rise.

## Life Cycle

They drop their young at the end of the windy season, so the calves have the calmer months to grow on the high grass. Cows are milked through the summer, and beasts are slaughtered in the lean months or driven down to be sold. A beast that survives its first winter may give milk and young for ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

The herds are the Windscar's living store. Orcs eat their milk and meat fresh, dried, and salted, live in shelters of their hides, and pitch felt tents of their combed underwool; hides, felt, wool, and driven stock are the main goods the kindreds send down the stairs and along the Lee Road. Under the Pacts' retaliation custom a raided herd is answered with animals, and most answers an ordinary Orc ever sees are paid in stair kine. Escorts drive stock down to the Soundchain stations, where its meat and milk feed the corridor in season, and to the yard of the Measure Cistern, where herders sell beasts to the Halflings of the Folds.

The cost is water and grass. A herd needs both in country that has little of either, and an overgrazed shelf or a soured well can ruin a camp. Driven herds are the heaviest traffic on the cliff stairs, and a broken flight of the Gullstair stops them dead. Dun dogs, wind cats, and stagger-vetch take their share.

## Lore and Belief

The kindreds tell the tale of the Still Well against the strongholds: a camp stayed so long at one well that the water soured and the herds sickened, and still no one would move, until Rakhal the Storm-Caller tore the shelters down and drove the camp on to sweet water. To an Orc, a herd that grows restless at a well is the wind telling the camp it has stayed too long. Halfling buyers at the Measure Cistern say a stair kine can count the steps of any stair it has climbed once, and will stop on a step that has moved.

Cattle-raiding is the oldest game and the oldest war on the shelves: young Orcs win their first name by driving off a rival kindred's beasts by night, and the great raids are sung at every gathering, with the count of beasts taken and the names of those who did not come back.



# Stone Cats

**Stone cats** are the great cats of the heights. They live on the crags and storm shelves of the Stormcrown and the upper Ironspine, hunting crag goats and whistlers, and they are so seldom seen that most people of the holds never see one at all. When one is seen low down, on a gate stair or a high road, the holds say the passes will close within days.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | High crags and storm shelves |
| **Range** | The Stormcrown and the upper Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Humans, and Giants |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to herds and lone climbers |

## Appearance

A stone cat is as long as a Human is tall from nose to rump, with a tail nearly as long again, thick as an arm and furred to the tip, which it wraps round its face when it sleeps. It is lean and long-legged behind, with huge furred paws that carry it on snow. The coat is thick and smoke-grey to pale cream, dappled with dark grey rosettes, so that on a scree slope or a snowfield it is nearly invisible. Its eyes are pale grey-green.

It moves along a ledge without a sound, and can leap across a gap many times its own length. It does not roar; it hisses, growls, and in the mating season gives a long, eerie wail that Headwater folk take for the mountains' ghosts.

## Habitat and Range

Stone cats live high, above the holds, on the crags, storm shelves, and high basins of the Stormcrown and the highest ridges of the Ironspine. Each

keeps a huge range, and they are very few. They come lower when hard weather drives their prey down.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A stone cat hunts alone, stalking crag goats, whistlers, and hares and leaping on them from above. In hard winters it takes sheep and goats from the summer pastures and the high terrace farms. It shuns people and is rarely a danger to them, but a lone climber on a high ledge or a child on a high pasture has been taken.

## Life Cycle

A female bears two or three kittens in a rock den in spring and keeps them with her for nearly two years. Stone cats may live fifteen years.

## Uses and Dangers

Their pelts are rare and costly; a hold warden who wears one wears a story with it. Their cost is to the herds on the high pastures in hard winters.

## Lore and Belief

The holds say a stone cat seen on a gate stair or a high road means the passes close within days, and a caravan master who hears of one hurries; the cats do come down ahead of hard weather, following the goats, so the saying is often right. Headwater folk call the cat's wail the mountain's voice. Some Kindred caravans on the Long Tread say the stone cats walk with the Giants, which is told and not known.

A stone cat that has learned to take climbers is hunted by the hold's wardens with spears and hounds, and its pelt hangs in the gate-hall; every hold child knows of the warden who fought one bare-handed on a ledge above a thousand-foot drop and came down with its pelt and without an ear.



# Storks

**Storks** are the tall white birds that nest on the towers, mill roofs, and chimney stacks of the march-towns and corridor towns. They come back to the same nest each spring, and a town watches for them: a stork that does not return means a bad year. Children are told that storks fetch the newborn.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Rooftops and wet meadows |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A stork stands as tall as a Human's waist on long red legs: a white bird with black flight feathers, a long straight red bill, and a long neck it can fold back on its shoulders. In flight it holds its neck straight out and soars on broad black-and-white wings, circling up on warm air over the fields.

It has almost no voice. Instead a pair greets each other at the nest by throwing back their heads and clattering their bills like wooden rattles, a sound that carries across a town square. A nest is a great platform of sticks, as wide as a cart wheel, built up year after year.

## Habitat and Range

Storks nest in the towns and villages of the Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath, and feed on the wet meadows, ditches, and new-ploughed fields around them. They leave in late summer and come back in spring, from somewhere south nobody has followed them to.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A stork walks the meadows and furrows with a slow, deliberate stride, taking frogs, fish, worms, grasshoppers, mice, and small snakes. Storks follow the plough for what it turns up. They are tolerant of people in towns and wary of them in the fields.

## Life Cycle

A pair returns to its nest each spring and raises three or four young on the rooftop through summer; the young are fed from the parents' throats and fly by midsummer. A stork may live twenty years or more, and some nests have been used for longer than the oldest townsfolk remember.

## Uses and Dangers

Storks give nothing but their work in the meadows, eating frogs and mice, and the pleasure of their return. They do no harm, beyond the nest’s weight on a roof and its droppings on whatever lies below.

## Lore and Belief

A house with a stork’s nest on its roof is held lucky and safe from fire, and a town that loses its storks is thought to have done something wrong. A stork that does not come back in spring means a bad year: flood, failed harvest, or fever. Children are told storks bring the newborn from the river, and a family hoping for a child leaves sweets on the window ledge for the stork. Some corridor towns say storks winter where the Serath reaches the sea, which nobody knows to be so.



# Storm Toads

**Storm toads** spend most of their lives asleep in the clay of the basin floors of the Rimward Basins, sealed in against the dry, sometimes for years at a time. When a storm floods a pan they wake all at once, by the thousand, and the noise of their calling carries to the rims. On the Long Pan that chorus is how the camps first know the pan has flooded and the herds can be driven down.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Clay pans and flood pools |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins, above all the Long Pan |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A storm toad is round and squat, as big as a child's fist, with a wide mouth, short legs, and bulging golden eyes set high on the head. Its skin is smooth for a toad, olive or sand-coloured mottled with darker green, and its belly pale. On each hind foot is a hard black spur like a little spade. Out of the clay it is plump and wet; dug up in the dry, it is a shrunken thing wrapped in a thin, papery skin like a bag. A calling male swells his throat into a pale bubble and gives a loud, bleating cry, and a flooded pan full of them sounds like a herd of goats being slaughtered all at once.

## Habitat and Range

They live under the floors of the clay pans and the edges of the salt-crust basins, thickest beneath the Long Pan. They spend dry years buried an arm's length down, and emerge only into the shallow, short-lived water that a good storm leaves.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Awake, the toads do everything at once: they call, mate, lay, and eat whatever insects, worms, and shrimp the flood brings, often in the first night. Within a few weeks, as the water shrinks, they dig down again. They are harmless and indifferent to people.

## Abilities

A storm toad can lie buried for years without food or water. As the clay dries it digs down backwards with its spades, sheds layers of skin that harden into a sealed cocoon around it, and slows almost to death. The rumble and soak of a storm wakes it; it eats its cocoon and digs up.

## Life Cycle

Females lay strings of eggs in the warm flood water, and the tadpoles grow faster than any others, some becoming toadlets in under two weeks, racing the drying pan. Many fail and dry in the mud. A storm toad may live twenty years, most of it underground.

## Uses and Dangers

The chorus is a signal: when it is heard from the Long Pan, word goes along the rims and the herds come down to the green fringe of Shortgreen. Rimward children dig sleeping toads out of the dry clay to squeeze water from their cocoons in a bad year, a trick that gives a mouthful and kills the toad. The tadpoles feed the rose waders. The toads harm no one.

## Lore and Belief

The kindreds say the toads hear the storm before it is born and call it out of the sky, and in a dry cycle some camps dig a few from the pan floor and set them in a cistern bowl to call. It does not work. Herders say a toad dug up living in the dry is a promise that the pan will flood again in the finder’s lifetime.



# Sturgeon

**Sturgeon** are the armoured fish of the big river. Each spring, after the rise, they come up the Serath from downstream, from water nobody in the corridor has followed to its end, to spawn on the gravel beds above. Its roe is the costliest food the river gives.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Deep reaches of the big river |
| **Range** | The Lower Serath and the lowest Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans and Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A sturgeon is long and shark-shaped, from the length of a Human to two or three times that, with a long pointed snout, four whiskers under it, and a small toothless mouth that pushes out like a tube to suck food from the bottom. Instead of scales it carries five rows of bony plates along its back and sides, each with a hooked point, so a young sturgeon is as rough as a rasp. It is dark grey-brown above and pale below. The tail is lopsided, the upper lobe longer.

It cruises slowly near the bottom and now and then leaps clear of the water, falling back with a slap heard across the river.

## Habitat and Range

Sturgeon live in the deep reaches of the main channel of the Lower Serath, and in spring run up into the lowest rivers of the Confluence Basins to spawn on clean gravel. Where they spend the rest of the year is downstream, beyond any reach the corridor knows, and whether that is a sea, a lake, or the river's own deep water nobody can say.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A sturgeon feeds on the bottom, sucking up worms, shellfish, crayfish, and small fish. It is placid and slow to flee. Spring runs come in a few weeks after the rise has fallen, and the fish travel in loose groups.

## Life Cycle

Sturgeon grow very slowly and live a very long time: the largest are older than any person in the corridor. A female does not spawn until she is many years old, and then not every year, laying great masses of dark roe on the gravel. The young go downstream.

## Uses and Dangers

A sturgeon gives firm meat, eaten fresh or smoked, roe salted in kegs and sold dear to the market-houses and the lords, and from its swim bladder a fine glue that bookbinders and joiners prize. It does no harm. The danger is to the fish: corridor fishers know a reach fished too hard does not fill again in their lifetime.

## Lore and Belief

Corridor towns claim the first sturgeon of the season as a toll fish, carried up the quay to the toll-house and weighed before the crowd, and the size of it is read as a sign of the year’s trade. Reedfolk say the sturgeon remember the river’s old channels and follow them even where the river has moved. Basin Humans say the sturgeon come from the edge of the world, and nobody in the corridor can say they do not.

Roe-thieves who raid the spawning beds by night are hanged from the quay cranes when the towns catch them, and the river songs make heroes of the few who were never caught.



# Sun Spiders

**Sun spiders** are the fastest-running small hunters of the Glassbelt and the Rimward floors, and the most feared beyond their harm. They are not quite spiders, though everyone calls them so. They chase shade, which means they run straight at a walking person's shadow and will crawl into a sleeper's, and the tales told of them at crossing fires are far worse than anything they do.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Desert, ruin fields, and camp grounds |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior and the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples, Orcs, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Wary: a frightening runner, a painful bite |

## Appearance

A sun spider is as long as a hand from jaws to tail, and its legs spread wider. Its body is pale tan to reddish brown and covered in long, fine, golden hairs. It seems to have ten legs, because the long feelers at the front are held out and used like legs. Its head bears two enormous jaws, like a pair of pincers set side by side, nearly a third of its length. It runs with startling speed in bursts, stopping dead and starting again, and makes a faint rasping hiss by rubbing its jaws when cornered.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the Glassbelt Interior and the floors and rims of the Rimward Basins, in stony and sandy desert, ruin fields, and the stones around wells and shelters. By day they shelter under stones or in burrows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A sun spider hunts at night and in the early morning, running down beetles, scorpions, lizards, and small rodents and tearing them apart with its jaws. It has no venom. In the heat it dashes from

one patch of shade to the next, and any moving shadow is shade, so it races after travellers, and after their animals, and stops where they stop. It does not hunt people. At night, drawn by warmth and insects, it comes into camps and under bedding.

## Life Cycle

A female digs a burrow, lays up to a hundred eggs, and guards them, sometimes feeding the young. They grow through several moults and live about a year.

## Uses and Dangers

A sun spider's bite is painful, can tear the skin, and may fester if not cleaned, but it is not poisonous and does not kill. The real harm it does is fright: a spider racing after a walker's heels has made crossers run in the heat, and a pack beast shying from one can throw its load. It eats scorpions, which is a mercy.

## Lore and Belief

The tales at crossing fires say that sun spiders chase people to eat them alive, that they numb a sleeper's skin with their bite and feed all night unnoticed, and that a pack beast's belly can be found hollowed out by them in the morning. None of it is true. Goblin salvagers tell such tales to newcomers on purpose, and laugh when they run. Old crossers say a sun spider following your shadow is a sign you have walked into the noon heat when you should be resting, which is the one true thing in the stories.



# Terrace Snails

**Terrace snails** are the big brown snails of the terraced gardens and walls of the Leeward Folds. They eat the young greens of the garden plots and are the gardeners' commonest pest, and they are also food. After rain the snails come out by the hundred, and gathering them is children's work in every fold.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Terraces, gardens, and walls |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Halflings |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A terrace snail's shell is as big as a walnut, round and coiled, glossy pale brown banded with darker brown and cream in spirals, with a white lip round the mouth. The snail itself is grey-brown and wrinkled, with two long feelers carrying its eyes and two short ones below. It glides on a broad foot, leaving a shining silver trail on stone and leaf. It is silent, though a basket of them clicks and rustles, and it smells of wet earth.

## Habitat and Range

They live through the Folds wherever there is lime in the stone, moisture, and green growth: on the terraces, in garden plots, along the bases of the retaining walls, in orchard grass, and in the hollows of the cistern halls. They are fewest on the dry saddles and in the Dry Folds.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Snails feed at night and after rain on young leaves, seedlings, fallen fruit, and the green film on stone, and hide by day in the gaps of walls and under

leaves. In the dry months of summer and through the cold of winter they seal the mouth of the shell with a chalky door and wait, sometimes for months, until rain wakes them.

## Life Cycle

Every snail is both male and female, and two snails court and mate after rain in spring. Each lays dozens of pearly eggs in a hole in soft soil, and the tiny snails hatch with thin, clear shells. They grow for two or three years and live several more.

## Uses and Dangers

In a wet spring snails can strip a bed of young greens in a few nights, and households hunt them out at dusk. The same snails are eaten. Children gather them in baskets after rain; they are kept in a jar or a pen on herbs and grain for a week or so to clean them, then boiled and eaten with garlic and oil or baked in their shells. The best, from the oldest walled gardens, are a market good in the autumn. The empty shells are crushed for the hens.

## Lore and Belief

Halflings say a snail carries its house with it and keeps its own reserve, and they hold it up to children as a model: it sealed its door in the dry and came out when the rain came. Snail-gathering after the first rain of autumn is half a game, and the child with the biggest basket wins the first share. A snail trail across a doorstep at dawn is said to bring a guest that day.



# Thirstbacks

**Thirstbacks** are the escort beasts of the far side: the animals Windscar escorts load for the parties they guide, and the few the crossing companies take with them into the Glassbelt. The name is the Edgeway Kindreds': a thirstback carries its thirst on its back, in the hump, and goes on long after a lowland beast would have lain down. The other beasts of burden of the roads stand under Pack Animals.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Escort routes, rim tracks, desert, and salt pans |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins, the High Scars, the Lee Road to the Leeward Folds, and the Glassbelt crossing |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Salvage Peoples, Halflings |
| **Danger** | Harmless; a bull in season is Wary |

## Appearance

A thirstback is rangy and long-legged, taller at the shoulder than a riding horse and narrower, with a long neck carried low, a heavy-lipped muzzle, and tough split hooves spread wide for sand and crust. Over the shoulders rises a hump of fat that stands full and firm after good water and hangs slack and leaning after a long dry stage. Its coat is short and dust-coloured, paler underneath, and wears thin where the load rides. It walks with a rolling, pacing gait, both legs of one side together, and is led rather than driven, on a rope. It groans aloud when loaded and again when unloaded, grumbles through the night, and smells of dust, old dung, and the sour cud it chews.

## Habitat and Range

Thirstbacks walk the ramps, rim tracks, and passes of the Rimward Basins and the High Scars, and the Lee Road to the Leeward Folds, where

loads go on backs rather than wheels. They are bred in the kindreds' herds alongside the stair kine and sold to escorts and crossers. Few go farther than the edge of the Glassbelt; the companies that cross take only as many as the wells can water, and on the white pans they wrap the beasts' eyes and lead them by touch.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Thirstbacks are the most enduring and the most stubborn beasts of any road. They walk on through heat and dust for days between waters, browse thorn, saltbush, and dry grass that nothing else will eat, and drink a great deal at once when they reach a well. Then, for no reason anyone can see, one will kneel in the track and refuse a step. They follow the lead beast of the string, bite and kick when ill-handled, and remember a cruel handler for years.

## Life Cycle

A cow bears one calf after a long carrying, in the calm months, and the calf walks within the day. Thirstbacks are broken to the rope at three or four years, work fifteen years or more, and end as hide, meat, and hair for rope.

## Uses and Dangers

They carry hides, felt, salt, and stores along the Windscar routes, and water, salvage, and the crossers' goods on the Glassbelt track. Their milk is drunk on the road, their dung burned where there is no wood, and their hair spun into rope and tent-cloth. Escort captains on the far side declare how many beasts their party brings as carefully as how many people, because a thirstback drinks what a family would.

The danger is the beast’s own temper and the road’s. A bull in season bites, and a string that panics on a narrow ramp can take its handlers over the edge. The salt crust of the pan floors lies over mud that takes a laden thirstback to the belly.

## Lore and Belief

Windscar escorts hold that a thirstback which will not drink at a well has smelt something wrong in the water, and no party of theirs drinks there after it. Edgeway crossers say a thirstback kneeling in the track has seen the well ahead gone dry, and wait out the day rather than drive it on. Both say a thirstback’s groan as it is loaded counts the days to the next water, and listen.

Thirstbacks are what raiders on the escort routes want most, and a string lost to a raid can kill its party as surely as a dry well; the escorts' songs tell of the night attack at a well-head and of the escort captain who held the beasts' tether-line with one hand and fought with the other.



# Thorn Ants

**Thorn ants** live inside the spines of one kind of thorn, which the Thorn Elves call **ant-thorn**, and pour out to sting anything that shakes it. The Thornbound Circles weave ant-thorn into the cultivated hedges around their clearings in the Briarreach, so that a hedge does more than block: it answers. Those who know the gaps pass. Those who push through are stung.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | The hollow thorns of ant-thorn, in cultivated hedges and wild thicket |
| **Range** | The Briarreach |
| **Known to** | Elves (Thorn Elves), Trolls |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, in a swarm |

## Appearance

A thorn ant is small, about the length of a grain of wheat, slender and rust-red with a darker, glossy belly and a sting at its tip. It runs fast and in lines. Its home, the ant-thorn, is a shrub of the thickets with paired spines at every leaf, each pair swollen at the base into a hollow, pale, horn-like bulb the size of a thumb-joint; the ants cut a small hole in each bulb and live inside. A shaken ant-thorn hums faintly as the ants come out, and gives off a sharp, vinegary smell that tells every ant on the bush to come.

## Habitat and Range

They live only on ant-thorn, and ant-thorn grows only in the Briarreach and its ravine edges, in the broken thicket among the commoner thorn. Wild stands are scattered. Cultivated stands are not: a Thornbound hedge may hold a run of ant-thorn wherever its keepers want no one to try it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Ants and thorn keep each other. The ant-thorn feeds its ants with sweet nectar from small cups at the leaf stalks and with tiny food beads at the leaf

tips; the ants clear the bush of beetles, caterpillars, and climbing vines, and sting any browsing beast or brushing body. A colony owns its bush and its near neighbours and fights other colonies at the edges. They do not chase far; a person who steps back from the hedge is left alone.

## Abilities

One sting is a sharp burn and a welt. A swarm is another thing: hundreds of stings in a breath on hands, neck, and face, with swelling, fever, and in a child or a small body worse (see Stings and Bites). A deer or a pig driven into a stand of ant-thorn learns, and does not come back.

## Life Cycle

A queen settles in a young ant-thorn's first hollow spine and raises her workers there, and the colony grows as the bush does, taking each new thorn as it swells. A large colony on an old bush may hold a single queen for many years, and winged queens leave it each summer after rain to find young bushes of their own.

## Uses and Dangers

To the Thornbound, ant-thorn is a hedge-keeper's best plant and the ants its keepers. Hedge-wardens plant it at the false gaps a stranger would try, train it into the weave, and leave the true ways free of it. Wardens learn to move through it slowly, in hard leather and hoods, and to smoke a run of hedge before they lay it. Ravine Trolls who keep the crossings know the ants too, and leave ant-thorn standing on approaches they want watched.

The danger is to strangers: woodcutters from the basin side who find a hedge they did not know was there and try to cut it.

## Lore and Belief

Thorn Elves say the hedge chooses its visitors, and they mean it as more than a figure; children are told the ants know whose hands planted the thorn. Basin folk of the frontier say that the Elves taught the ants to hate Humans. A Troll saying holds that a crossing with no ants on it has no one watching it.

Frontier tales tell of a war-band of Human raiders that tried a false gap in the hedge at night and was found in the morning still in the thorn, stung past knowing; the Thornbound did not need to draw a blade.



# Threshold Crickets

**Threshold crickets** are small pale crickets that the Dark Elf houses of the Roothollows keep in their threshold chambers, where the way enters and strangers are received. They chirp steadily through the watch, and fall silent when someone they do not know comes in. A house calls them its oldest door-warden.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Chambers and store-hollows |
| **Range** | The Roothollows and the edge of the Stonewake Deeps |
| **Known to** | Elves (Dark Elves) |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A threshold cricket is the length of a fingernail to a thumb-joint: a humped, wingless cricket with very long, fine feelers, longer than its body, and long, strong hind legs. It is pale, ivory to light amber, nearly translucent, with small dark eyes it hardly needs.

The males chirp by rubbing a ridge on the hind leg against the body, a soft, dry, steady sound like a slow clock, and a threshold chamber with a good colony of them is never quite silent. They move in long, sudden leaps, and stand still with feelers waving.

## Habitat and Range

Threshold crickets live in the dry chambers and store-hollows of the Roothollows, among the root strands and in cracks, and at the edge of the Stonewake Deeps where root gives way to stone. The houses keep their own colonies in the threshold chamber, in niches cut in the living root for them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They eat fungus, crumbs, dead root, and the dead of their own kind. They live in colonies and chirp together. They feel the ground and the air through their feet and feelers: a footfall of a weight they do not know, a breath of air from an opened way, a change in warmth, stops their chirping. They grow used to the people they live with and keep on chirping through the house's ordinary comings and goings.

## Life Cycle

Females lay their eggs in the soft fungus-litter of the niches. The young look like small adults and moult several times as they grow. A cricket lives about a year, and a colony for as long as the house keeps it; some houses say their colony is as old as the house.

## Uses and Dangers

They give warning. A route keeper on the threshold watch listens to the crickets as well as the way, and a silence among them sends the keeper to the door. They are harmless, and they eat a little of the fungus stores.

## Lore and Belief

A house's crickets are part of its threshold, and a house that moves takes its colony with it; a newcomer admitted to an outer chamber is said to have been accepted when the threshold crickets no longer fall silent for them. Some houses say the crickets know a liar's step. A house whose crickets die out without cause gathers to ask what has gone wrong with its door.



# Ticks

**Ticks** wait in the grass for something warm to brush past, climb on, and drink. Every herder, hunter, and escort carries a few home, and in every pasture country the evening ends with a search of the body and the dogs. Most ticks do no more than itch. A few leave a fever behind them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Long grass, heath, bracken, and scrub |
| **Range** | Widespread; thickest on the shelves of the High Scars and the hill pastures of the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Wary: some carry fever |

## Appearance

An unfed tick is a flat, oval, eight-legged speck the size of a lentil or smaller, dark red-brown with a hard shield behind its head and a small headpiece with a barbed mouth. Fed, it swells past recognition into a smooth, tight, bluish-grey bead the size of a pea or a bean, its legs tiny at the front. It holds on with its head buried in the skin and does not let go when pulled. It makes no sound and has no smell, and its bite is not felt.

## Habitat and Range

Ticks live in long grass, heath, bracken, and scrub wherever beasts graze or pass: the hill pastures and terraces of the Headwater Marches, the thin grass of the shelves of the High Scars, the heaths and wood edges of the cradle-web, and the deer-trails of the forests. They are fewest in ploughed land, bare desert, cities, and the deep, and they sleep through winter.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A tick climbs a grass stem and waits with its front legs held out, sometimes for months, until a breath, warmth, or a footfall comes near. Then it catches hold, climbs to soft skin, the armpit, the groin, behind the ears, or the hairline, and bites. It feeds for days, slowly swelling, then drops off to digest and moult.

## Abilities

The tick numbs its bite and cements its mouth into the skin, which is why pulling one leaves its head behind and the wound festers. Some ticks pass a fever: a week after the bite a red ring spreads around it, or a headache, aches, and fever come, and in a few people the joints, the face, or the heart suffer for months after. Herders call it **tick fever** and know which slopes give it.

## Life Cycle

A tick feeds three times in its life, once as a tiny six-legged larva, once as a young, and once grown, each time on a larger beast: a mouse, then a hare or a bird, then a sheep, a deer, a dog, or a person. A fed female drops and lays thousands of eggs in the litter, and dies. The whole round takes two or three years.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Heavy ticks weaken lambs and calves, a tick near a dog's spine can lame it for days, and tick fever lays herders up in summer. Herders and escorts search themselves each evening, burn ticks off with a hot twig or a lit coal held near, or ease them out with a thread and a twist, and rub the bites with spirit or vinegar. Grease on the legs and smoke over the fire are thought to keep them off.

## Lore and Belief

Orc escorts say a tick that drops off by itself means good water ahead, since the tick has drunk enough; it means nothing. Headwater shepherds hold that ticks rise with the sun and wait for the dew to dry before taking a flock up. Many believe a tick backs out if spoken to kindly, or if oiled, which only makes it cling.



# Trout

**Trout** live in the side channels of the braided river at the Greyford Reach, where the Headwater water runs cold and clear over gravel. They are the fish of the Highbank inns: in the common rooms of the carters' inns along the road, people waiting their turn at the toll gate eat barley bread, mutton broth, and trout from the side channels. A boy going down the night queue with trout in a wet basket is part of a market day at Greyford.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Cold, clear, gravel-bottomed side channels of a Headwater river |
| **Range** | The Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Humans, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A trout taken for the inn table is about the length of a hand and forearm, a firm, thick-backed fish with a square tail and a small, hard mouth. Its back is olive brown, its sides silver-gold, and it is speckled all over with black, with a scatter of red spots ringed in pale along the flank. Fresh from the water it shines; within an hour it dulls. It smells clean, of cold water and wet stone, and a fresh trout is judged by that smell.

## Habitat and Range

Trout want moving, cold, well-aired water over clean gravel, and the Reach gives them that in its side channels and along the heads of its bars. They hold in the current behind stones and in the lee of the old causeway blocks, facing upstream. They grow scarce in the low months, when the side channels shrink and warm, and gather again in the deeper runs; in the spring floods, when the river runs high and brown with snowmelt, they are hard to take at all.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A trout feeds on what the current brings it: insects falling onto the water, larvae from under the stones, small fish. It rises at dusk and at first light, when the surface rings with them. It is wary of shadow and footfall on the bank, and a careless step sends a whole run of them darting for cover.

## Life Cycle

Trout spawn in autumn and early winter, cutting shallow beds in the gravel of the side channels, where the eggs lie through the cold months and hatch with the spring. A flood that shifts the bars can bury or scour away a whole year's beds, and the Reach has lean years for trout after a bad flood.

## Uses and Dangers

Trout is the better fish of the crossing. Highbank households and inns buy it from the people who take it in the side channels, with lines, small nets, and traps, and the carters' inns sell it to drivers and walkers waiting for the gate. It must be eaten fresh or smoked the same day. Taking it is no more dangerous than any work in the Reach's water: a ford that was knee-deep last autumn can be a scour hole this year, and a summer storm upstream can raise the channel while a fisher stands in it.

## Lore and Belief

Carters say that a trout supper at Greyford is the last good meal before the Marches, or the first good meal after them, depending on which way a driver is going. Fishers take the first trout of the spring back to the water at some crossings of the Headwater country, so that the river remembers who fed it.

Bounty-takers waiting at the Highbank inns for an outlaw to come back over the river eat a great deal of trout, and the inn-wives say they can tell how long a hunter has waited by how sick he is of it.



# Wall Lizards

**Wall lizards** live in every dry-stone retaining wall of the Leeward Folds and the sea-cut terraces of the Tidelace Coasts, sunning on the stones by day and hunting insects among them. Halfling wall-menders read them as a gauge: a wall with lizards is dry and breathing, and a wall with no lizards has gone damp inside and is about to slump.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Dry-stone retaining walls, rocks, and sunny banks |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds and the terraces of the Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Halflings, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A wall lizard is as long as a hand, half of it a thin whip of a tail, with a narrow pointed head, bright black eyes, and slender legs with long clinging toes. Its colours vary from wall to wall: brown, grey, or olive, netted and spotted with black, and in spring the males' throats and flanks turn green and blue, with a row of blue spots along the belly edge. It moves in sudden flickers, darting into a crack the instant a shadow falls on it, and holds perfectly still between. It makes no sound but a faint scratching of claws on stone.

## Habitat and Range

They live wherever there is sunny stone with gaps behind it: terrace walls, the stone houses of the fold towns, cistern halls, rock outcrops on the saddles, and the walled gardens of the Tidelace harbour towns. A sound wall may hold a lizard every stride along its face.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They warm themselves on the stone in the morning, then hunt flies, beetles, spiders, ants, and grubs through the day, darting out to snatch them.

In the hottest hours and through the winter they retreat deep into the wall. Males defend their stretch of wall with nods, push-ups, and chases. They are shy of people but grow used to those who work the walls every day, and will sun beside a resting mender.

## Abilities

A seized wall lizard sheds its tail, which goes on twitching while the lizard escapes. It grows a new one, shorter and plainer.

## Life Cycle

Females lay a few soft eggs in a warm, dry crack in early summer, and the young hatch in late summer, tiny copies of their parents. They live five or six years.

## Uses and Dangers

They eat the insects of the terraces and gardens, and are welcome for it. Their real worth is as a gauge. A dry-stone wall needs to drain: when water gets trapped behind it and the fill turns to mud, the lizards leave, and the wall is close to failing. Menders walk the walls after heavy rain counting lizards as well as stones, and a stretch they have left is taken down and rebuilt before it can bring a terrace onto the one below.

## Lore and Belief

Halflings say a new wall is not finished until the lizards move into it, and a household that has rebuilt a wall watches for the first one. Children are forbidden to catch them, and told that a wall lizard holds the memory of every rain that wall has stood. Gnome families on the Tidelace terraces read them as well, though they say the lizards are listening for the tide.



# Water Snakes

**Water snakes** are the large, harmless snakes of the basin's wet ground. They swim the ditches and fens hunting frogs and fish, and they have no venom. Basin farmers kill them on sight because they take them for adders; Reedfolk spare them, and teach their children, and anyone else who will listen, the difference.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Ditches, fens, and reed islands |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Reedfolk and Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A water snake is longer than an adder by half, as long as a Human's arm to their height, and slimmer for its length. It is olive-green or grey-brown with small dark bars along its sides and a yellow-and-black collar behind the head. Its eyes are round, with round pupils. The heath adder, by contrast, is short and thick, zigzag-backed, with a slit-pupilled eye.

It swims well, head held just above the surface, and suns itself on banks and reed mats. Caught, it hisses and writhes and lets out a foul-smelling musk, and sometimes plays dead with its mouth open, which convinces nobody who has seen it.

## Habitat and Range

Water snakes live in ditches, ponds, fens, and reed islands throughout the low wet country of the Confluence Basins, the Reedmere above all, and along the backwaters of the Lower Serath.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A water snake hunts frogs, toads, newts, and small fish in the water and the reed edges, swallowing them whole. It is shy and flees from people. It does not bite unless handled, and the bite does nothing worse than a scratch.

## Life Cycle

In early summer a female lays a clutch of eggs in a warm heap of rotting vegetation, a dung heap, or a reed pile, and the young hatch in autumn. Water snakes sleep through winter in banks and under roots. They may live fifteen years.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing to people but fewer frogs. They are harmless; the danger is the mistake, and a farmer who learns to spare water snakes may one day spare an adder.

## Lore and Belief

Reedfolk spare water snakes as part of the fen they belong to, and tell children the difference between the snake of the water and the adder of the heath as one of their first lessons: the round eye and the slit eye, the long slim body and the short thick one, the collar and the zigzag. Basin farmers say any snake in the barn means a death, and kill it. Some Reedfolk households keep a water snake’s shed skin above the door against fever.



# Weasels and Martens

**Weasels and martens** are one family of small, long-bodied hunters that the peoples mostly name as one: the weasel, the stoat, the polecat, and the marten. They hunt mice and rats in the hedges and walls, which is a service, and kill hens and raid stores, which is not. A stoat's white winter pelt trims a lord's collar; a marten in the store-hollow is the oldest nuisance a grove has.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Woods, hedges, walls, and store sheds |
| **Range** | The Cradle web and the Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves, and Halflings |
| **Danger** | Harmless to people; a thief of hens and stores |

## Appearance

All of them are long, low, and supple, with short legs, small round ears, and a bounding run that arches the back.

The **weasel** is the smallest, no longer than a hand, red-brown above and white below. The **stoat** is half again its size, the same colours, with a black tip to its tail, and in the cold country it turns white in winter but for that black tip. The **polecat** is the size of a small cat, dark brown with a pale masked face, and stinks. The **marten** is the largest and the climber: cat-sized, rich chocolate-brown with a cream bib at the throat, a bushy tail, and the habit of running along branches.

They chatter and hiss when disturbed. The polecat's musk, which it sprays when frightened, clings to a hen-house for days.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the farmed and wooded country of the Cradle web, from the hedges of the Confluence Basins to the deep woods of the Elder-

weald, where the marten lives in the canopy; and on the far side in the walls and terraces of the Leeward Folds. Stoats go highest, into the mountain pastures.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt alone, mostly at dusk and by night, and are fearless for their size: a weasel follows a mouse down its own burrow, and a stoat takes a hare many times its weight. They kill more than they eat when they find a hen-house open. Martens take squirrels, birds, eggs, honey, and fruit, and break into stores to get at them. All are curious and will stand up on their hind legs to look at a passer-by.

## Life Cycle

Most bear one litter a year in spring, in a hole in a wall, a bank, or a hollow tree. The young hunt with their mother by summer. Few live past three or four years.

## Uses and Dangers

Winter stoat pelts, white with black tail-tips, are sewn into the collars and hems of lords' robes in the Basins and the Headwater towns, and marten fur is the finest of the forest. Farmers credit them, grudgingly, with keeping down rats. Their cost is hens killed in a night, eggs sucked, and stores broken into.

## Lore and Belief

A grove's tellers say the marten has been robbing the store-hollow since the first store-hollow was grown, and that a grove without a marten has nothing worth stealing. Halflings say a weasel in the wall means the wall is sound and dry. Basin Humans hold it bad luck to meet a weasel on the road at the start of a journey.

Marten fur is worth its weight in silver in the Human towns, and trappers who poach it from grove ground are hunted out of the forest by the Wood Elves in turn.



# Well Grouse

**Well grouse** are the sand-coloured birds of the desert edges that fly to water every morning at first light, in calling flocks, along the same lines every day. For the crossers of the Glassbelt they are the oldest guide there is to a well no one has marked: watch which way the grouse fly at dawn, and walk that way.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Desert and pan edges |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior and the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples, Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A well grouse is the size of a pigeon, plump and short-legged, with a small head, a short bill, long pointed wings, and a long pointed tail. Its plumage is the colour of the desert, sandy buff, finely barred and spotted with brown, black, and white, with a chestnut or black band across the breast and, on the cock, a yellow throat. On the ground it shuffles on its short feathered legs and vanishes against the stones; in the air it is fast and direct. Flocks call as they fly, a liquid, bubbling **gattar-gattar** that crossers learn to hear before they see the birds.

## Habitat and Range

They live on stony desert, the edges of the pans, and the dry rims, in the Glassbelt Interior and across the floors and outer slopes of the Rimward Basins, and feed far from water on seed. They drink once a day and will fly a long way for it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Well grouse spend the day on the ground eating small hard seeds, and the night huddled on open ground. Every morning, soon after first light, they gather and fly to water in flocks of dozens to thousands, drink quickly at the edge, and leave. They are wary of people and quick to fly.

## Abilities

The cock's belly feathers are made to hold water like a sponge. In the breeding season he wades into a pool at dawn, soaks them, and flies back to the nest, sometimes a long morning away, where the chicks drink from his breast.

## Life Cycle

The hen lays two or three cryptic eggs in a bare scrape on open ground in spring. Both parents sit, and the chicks run soon after hatching and are fed with water by their father until they can fly. They live a few years.

## Uses and Dangers

The grouse are food, netted at wells in large numbers by those who know where their flight lines go. Their real use is the line: a crosser who watches the dawn flight can find a seep, a hidden cistern, or a forgotten well that no marker shows, and many of the crossing's named waters were first found this way. The birds do no harm.

## Lore and Belief

The Kindreds keep the grouse lines in their route memory beside the marks, and an old crosser can say which way the birds fly from any camping ground on the crossing. A water found by following the grouse is not claimed by anyone; the crossers say it belongs to the birds. Orc custodians at the Lastwater Wells say a morning with no grouse at the well means the water is going bad, and they test it before anyone drinks.



# Whistlers

**Whistlers** are the fat marmots of the high meadows. They live in colonies among the scree and the alpine grass and whistle shrilly at anything that might be an eagle, a cat, or a stranger. Every traveller on the high roads knows the sound. The Edgeway Kindreds' caravans on the Long Tread listen for it, and say a colony that stays silent marks a bad stretch.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Alpine meadows and scree |
| **Range** | The Stormcrown, the Ironspine, and the Headwater heights |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Humans, and Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A whistler is the size of a large cat but round and heavy, with a short bushy tail, short legs, small round ears, and a blunt face with large orange-yellow front teeth. Its fur is thick, grizzled grey-brown on the back, warmer brown underneath, darker on the head. By autumn it is so fat it waddles.

It sits up on its haunches beside its burrow to watch, and at a threat gives a single shrill, piercing whistle and dives below. A colony warning goes from burrow to burrow across a whole meadow. It smells faintly of earth and dry grass.

## Habitat and Range

Whistlers live in colonies on the alpine meadows, scree slopes, and high pastures of the Stormcrown, the Ironspine, and the heights above the Headwater Marches, along the colossal roads and terraces as much as anywhere.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Whistlers graze grass, herbs, flowers, and roots through the short summer, sunning themselves on rocks between meals. They dig deep burrows with many entrances. A colony is families living close together, and adults take turns on watch. They are timid, but used to travellers on a busy road, and will sit and watch a caravan pass.

## Life Cycle

Whistlers sleep through the winter, a whole family packed together in a burrow sealed with earth and grass, from the first snows to late spring: more than half the year. Young are born soon after they wake, three or four to a litter. They may live fifteen years.

## Uses and Dangers

Their fat is rendered for an ointment sold in the Headwater towns against aching joints, and their fur and meat are taken by high herders and hunters. They do no harm, though their burrows break a pack animal's leg now and then.

## Lore and Belief

Kindred caravans on the Long Tread say a colony that stays silent as a caravan passes marks a bad stretch: something has been through recently that frightened them, or the ground is wrong. Caravan masters slow down there. Headwater folk say the whistlers wake in spring when the mountain lets them, and that a whistler seen above ground in winter means a death in the valley.



# Wild Asses

**Wild asses** live where the herds cannot: out on the dry floors and washes of the Rimward Basins and along the Windscar edge of the Glassbelt. They come down to the Long Pan in a good year, and in a bad one they dig for water in dry wash beds with their hooves. A hole dug by a wild ass is the first water many crossers find.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Basin floors, dry washes, and desert edges |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins and the Windscar edge of the Glassbelt |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless; a stallion kicks |

## Appearance

A wild ass stands a little lower than a pack pony, lean and narrow, with a big head, long upright ears, and a short, stiff, dark mane. Its coat is grey to sandy grey, paler on the belly, legs, and muzzle, with a dark stripe down the spine crossed by another over the shoulders, and often faint dark bars on the legs. Its hooves are small, narrow, and hard as horn. It trots with a quick, short stride and can keep it up for hours; when it runs it runs very fast. Its bray is a harsh, sawing roar that carries across a basin floor, and a stallion's carries farthest.

## Habitat and Range

They live in small bands on the open floors, dry washes, and low dividing ridges between the basins, and out onto the stony desert at the Glassbelt's edge. They keep away from the strongholds and the herd grounds, and they move to water rather than living near it, walking a day or more between drinks.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Wild asses graze the coarsest grass and browse thorn and dry scrub the herds will not touch. Females and young move in loose bands; stallions hold a stretch of ground near water and drive other males off it with bites and kicks. When the washes are dry they paw down through the sand of the bed where water lies beneath, sometimes deeper than a forearm, and drink from the seep. They are wary, keep their distance from people, and are hard to approach on open ground.

## Life Cycle

A jenny bears one foal after the storms, when there is grass. It can run within hours and stays with her a year or two. They live twenty years or more.

## Uses and Dangers

The kindreds hunt them now and then for meat and hide, and some escorts have caught and broken foals to the pack, though the beasts never take well to it. Their real use is their digging: a fresh ass hole in a dry wash means water is close to the surface, and herders and crossers widen it and drink. A cornered stallion kicks hard enough to break a leg, and herders keep their own stock away from one’s water.

## Lore and Belief

The kindreds say that the wild ass remembers every water it has ever drunk from and never forgets the way, and they follow ass tracks across a basin floor in a dry cycle. Salvagers on the Glassbelt edge say an ass that will not drink at a hole has smelt the old fire in the ground beneath it. Children are told that a wild ass’s bray at night is the sound of a well being dug somewhere nobody knows.



# Wild Boar

**Wild boar** are the rooting swine of the woods. A sounder of them can turn a field margin over in a night, and a cornered boar has killed more lords than any war of the march country. They are game for Human lords, meat for the Thornbound circles of the Briarreach, and a danger to anyone gleaning at a wood's edge in autumn.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Oak woods, thicket, and field margins |
| **Range** | The Elderweald's edges, the Briarreach, the woods of the Confluence Basins, and the Broken Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves, and Goblins |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to hunters and gleaners |

## Appearance

A boar is the size of a large dog but far heavier, a wedge of a beast: huge in the forequarters, narrow at the rump, with a long snout ending in a flat disc of a nose. Its coat is coarse bristle, dark grey-brown to black, with a ridge of longer bristles along the spine that rises when it is angry. A grown boar carries tusks curving up out of the lower jaw, as long as a finger and sharpened against the upper ones. Sows are smaller and tuskless. Piglets are striped lengthwise in buff and brown.

Boar trot with a stiff, short gait and charge low and fast. They grunt and squeal as they feed; a charging boar is often silent. They smell rank and earthy, and their wallows stink of mud and musk.

## Habitat and Range

Boar live in oak and beech woods with thick undergrowth and water: on the edges of the Elderweald, throughout the broken thickets of the Briarreach, and in the woods between the farms of the Confluence Basins. They are common too in the overgrown country of the Broken Marches. They move with the mast and come out to the fields at night.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Sows and their young go in sounders of a dozen or more; grown boars go alone. They root for acorns, nuts, roots, grubs, and fungus, and eat crops, eggs, and carrion. They are shy and nocturnal where hunted. A boar that is wounded or cornered turns and charges, and keeps charging: it will run up a spear shaft to reach the hunter.

## Life Cycle

Sows farrow in spring, four to eight piglets in a nest of grass and branches, and the striped young follow the sounder until autumn. Boar may live ten years. They are food for grey wolves and bears, and a striped piglet is a fox’s or an eagle’s prize.

## Uses and Dangers

Boar give pork, bristle for brushes, hide, and tusk for ornament. The boar hunt is a lord’s hunt, ridden with hounds and finished on foot with a cross-barred spear, and it is the one most likely to end in a funeral. Thornbound hunters take boar as part of the circles' ordinary work, with snares and pits on the paths they keep. The cost is the field margin turned over, the gleaner gored at the wood’s edge, and the hound opened by a tusk.

## Lore and Belief

Basin Humans say a boar’s tusk hung over the door keeps rot out of the stores. A lord killed by a boar is thought to have hunted on a day he should not have. Goblins of the Marches say the boar in the ruins are the ghosts of the settlements' pigs, which is not so: they are wild stock, and the feral pigs of the ruins, the Ruin Hogs, are another matter.

The boar-hunt is the lords' most dangerous sport, and more young lords have died on a boar’s tusks than in war in some Basin houses; Basin hunters still drink to the death of the great boar of the Briarreach edge that killed three hunters and a lord’s heir before a swineherd’s daughter brought it down with a pitchfork.



# Wild Geese

**Wild geese** come to the basin country in autumn and leave in spring, in long skeins that cross the sky calling. Their coming tells the Basins the year has turned. They winter on the wet meadows, the stubble, and the fens, and they are the lord's fowling right, the poacher's net, and the cheapest feast a Reedfolk household knows.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Flood meadows, stubble, and fens |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Humans and Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A wild goose is a little smaller than a yard goose and far sleeker: grey-brown, finely barred, with a paler breast, a white rump, and pink or orange legs and bill. The grey kind is commonest; a smaller dark kind with a black neck and white cheeks comes in hard winters.

They fly in long lines and wavering V shapes, high over the valleys, and call continually in loud, cackling honks that can be heard long before the skein is seen. On the ground a flock grazes heads down, with a few birds always standing upright on watch.

## Habitat and Range

Wild geese winter in the open wet country of the Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath: the flood meadows grazed in common, the harvested fields, the fens and reed edges of the Reedmere. They roost on open water and sandbars at night and fly

out to feed at dawn. Where they go in summer nobody in the Basins knows; they come from the north, over the forest.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Geese graze grass, winter shoots, spilled grain, and roots. They live in flocks of families and stay together on the wing. They are wary, quick to take alarm at a walker or a dog, and hard to approach in the open.

## Life Cycle

Geese pair for life. They raise their young in the summer country nobody has followed them to and bring them south in the family when they come. A wild goose may live twenty years.

## Uses and Dangers

They give meat, fat, and down. Fowling for wild geese with nets, decoys, and hawks is a lord’s right on his own meadows in the Basins; poachers net them at dawn anyway, and fowlers on the Serath’s sandbars take them under the towns' leave. Reedfolk take them from the reed edges in hard winters, when they are easy to approach. Their cost is grazed winter wheat, which farmers grumble about and lords ignore.

## Lore and Belief

Basin farmers reckon the seasons by them: the first skein over in autumn means the harvest must be in, and their leaving in spring means the fields can be sown once the rise falls back. A skein flying low and calling at night foretells a hard winter. Children are told the geese fly to the edge of the world for the summer, which may be as close to the truth as anyone has come.



# Wild Kine

The **wild kine** are the great wild cattle of the Witnessfields. They graze the old terraces, long gone to grass and heath, beyond the Grey Line where the herders of Flockturn turn their flocks back. No herder follows them and no lord hunts them. Flockturn leaves them alone for the same reason it leaves the land alone.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Grassed terraces and heath |
| **Range** | The Witnessfields and the upland margins of the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone on foot near a bull |

## Appearance

A wild bull is far bigger than any farm ox: taller at the shoulder than a Human, deep-chested and long-legged, with great forward-curving horns pale at the base and black at the tips, as wide across as a Human's outstretched arms. Bulls are dark brown to nearly black with a pale stripe down the spine and a pale muzzle; cows are smaller, lighter-horned, and dun or reddish. Calves are a bright chestnut.

They move slowly in a loose herd, grazing, and turn together to face anything that comes near. A bull bellows deep and long in the autumn, and paws the ground and lowers his horns before he charges.

## Habitat and Range

Wild kine live on the grassed terraces and heath of the Witnessfields, among the marker roads and the roofless witness halls, and on the rough upland margins of the Confluence Basins just out-

side the Grey Line. How far into the Witnessfields they range nobody outside knows. They are few, a few herds seen from the edge.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Herds of cows and young keep together under an old cow; bulls go alone or in small groups and join the herds in autumn. They graze grass, heath, and the young shoots of thorn, and drink at the culverts and the pools that collect on the old terraces. They are wary of people and avoid them, but a bull with a herd will run down anyone who comes near on foot, and a cow defends her calf.

## Life Cycle

Calves are born in late spring, one to a cow. Wild kine live perhaps twenty years.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing to anyone, because nobody hunts them. Their danger is to the scholars, salvagers, and treasure-seekers who cross the Grey Line on foot and meet a bull among the terraces, and now and then to a Flockturn herder whose flock has strayed too near. A wild bull has been known to come out past the markers and fight a herder's bull.

## Lore and Belief

Flockturn herders call them "the registers' cattle". Land inside the markers is already spoken for, they say, and so are the beasts on it, and a herder who took one would be taking from the dead who sealed it. They will not hunt them, and look sideways at outsiders who try. Some basin Humans say the wild kine are the descendants of the archive world's own herds, gone wild when the cities shut, which nobody can prove. Scholars camping at Stillgate's gate keep a fire burning all night when the herds are near.

Treasure-seekers who go past the markers for the archive world's buried strongrooms tell of being run down by a bull among the terraces, and of companions gored and left where they fell, and the tales have not stopped any of them going.



# Wind Cats

**Wind cats** are the slender spotted hunting cats of the open plateaus of the High Scars, and the fastest thing on the shelves. They hunt antelope and hares by day, take a kid or a lamb from the edge of a herd when they can, and leave people alone. The Orc kindreds admire them more than they fear them: a warning runner who brings news faster than anyone expected is praised for **wind-cat legs**.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Open plateaus and shelf grassland |
| **Range** | The High Scars |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Wary: they take kids and lambs, not people |

## Appearance

A wind cat stands about as high as a large dog at the shoulder, but it is built like nothing else on the shelves: a small round head, a deep narrow chest, a waist a hand could almost span, and very long, thin legs. Its coat is short and coarse, pale tawny scattered with small round black spots, and a black streak runs from the inner corner of each eye down the side of the muzzle like a dried tear. The long tail is spotted at the base and ringed black and white towards the tip, and it swings like a rudder when the cat turns at speed. A wind cat chirps like a bird to its cubs and purrs loudly; it cannot roar. At a walk it is all bones and angles. Running, it stretches flat and seems to fly.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the high, open plateaus and thin grass between the escarpment faces, where there is room to run and a clear view. They keep away

from the passes and ravines, where dun dogs and broken ground take their advantage away, and few come down the Shearline into the basins.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A wind cat stalks to within a short distance of its prey, then sprints, faster than a galloping horse but only for a few hundred strides, trips the animal with a forepaw, and holds it by the throat. Then it must rest, panting, before it can eat, and dun dogs and vultures often drive it off its kill in that time. It is shy, nervous, and never fights for a kill against a pack. Females live alone with their cubs; males often keep company in pairs or threes of brothers.

## Life Cycle

A female bears three to five cubs in long grass or a scrub thicket and moves them often. The cubs carry a long silver-grey mane along the back that fades as they grow, and they stay with her more than a year, learning to hunt. Few cubs survive the dogs. A wind cat lives eight to ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

They take young stock from the herds in the calm months when the herds go highest, and kindreds keep watch for them on the open shelves. A wind cat can be driven off a kid by a shouting child; it has never been known to attack a person. Its spotted skin is prized as a cloak edge and as a gift between kindreds, and is hard to come by, because the cat is almost impossible to catch.

## Lore and Belief

The kindreds say the wind cat is the wind of Rakhal the Storm-Caller given legs, and that the black tear lines on its face were left by the dust of his first storm. Runners touch a wind-cat claw before a long warning run. Herders say a wind cat seen watching a camp means the camp has grown slow.

A wind cat that takes from a camp’s herd is hunted by its young men, and its claw is the first trophy many Orc hunters win.



# Woodpeckers

**Woodpeckers** are the birds that chisel the old timber for the grubs inside. They go where wood is softening, and so their work shows a tender where a living tree is rotting long before it falls. In a forest where a great fall can crush a dwelling and flood a string of hollows in a night, the forest peoples listen to them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Old timber |
| **Range** | The Elderweald, the Crownboughs, and the Headwater foothill woods |
| **Known to** | Elves and Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

The commonest kind is the size of a thrush: black and white in bold bars and patches, with a crimson cap or nape and a red patch under the tail. A larger green kind, the size of a pigeon, has a yellow rump and a red crown and feeds on the ground among the roots. A rare great black woodpecker, as big as a crow, lives in the deepest stands.

They hitch up a trunk in short jerks, propped on stiff tail feathers, and fly in deep, bounding dips. In spring they drum: a fast, hard rattle on a dead or hollow limb that carries far through the forest. The green kind laughs, a loud ringing call.

## Habitat and Range

Woodpeckers live wherever there is old timber: throughout the Elderweald, in the trained trees and old stands of the Crownboughs, and in the foothill woods of the Headwater Marches.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A woodpecker feeds on beetle grubs, ants, and the larvae inside softening wood, finding them by tapping and listening, then chiselling in and drawing them out with a long, barbed tongue. Each pair holds a stretch of woodland and drums to claim it. They are shy of people but busy enough not to notice a quiet watcher.

## Life Cycle

A pair cuts a fresh nest hole in a softening trunk each spring and raises four to six young in it. Old holes become the homes of owls, bats, and martens. Woodpeckers live five to ten years.

## Uses and Dangers

They do no harm, unless one takes to drumming on a hall's eaves. Their use is warning. A tender walking a stand listens for where the birds drum and where they feed: a bird that chisels into living timber has found rot there, and a tree with many fresh holes is a tree to watch. Foothill woodcutters use the same knowledge to find the hollow trees not worth felling.

## Lore and Belief

Wood Elves say the woodpecker is the forest's physician, which knocks before it enters. In the Crownboughs a woodpecker working a hall's bough is news no house ignores, and a house that ignores it is gossiped about by every other. Headwater folk hold that a woodpecker's drumming in late winter means rain.



# Wound Flies

**Wound flies** look for an open wound on a living body and lay their eggs in it. Their maggots do not eat the dead flesh, as carrion maggots do, but the living, and widen the wound as they go. On the routes of the High Scars an escort with a wounded traveller rides hard for the next password shelter, where the wound can be cleaned and covered. On a battlefield in summer they come with the crows.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fauna |
| **Habitat** | Herds, open camps, and battlefields in warm weather |
| **Range** | The High Scars, the Rimward Basins, the Glassbelt Interior, and battlefields everywhere |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Humans, Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A wound fly is a little larger than a house fly, stout and bristly, with a metallic blue-green or bronze body, an orange-red face with large red eyes, and clear wings. It flies fast and lands without a sound on blood. Its maggots are white, pointed at the head and blunt at the tail, ringed with tiny dark spines like the thread of a screw; a wound full of them seethes, weeps a thin bloody fluid, and gives off a sweet, rotten smell that draws more flies.

## Habitat and Range

They live in warm, dry, open country where herds are many: the shelves of the High Scars, the rims and floors of the Rimward Basins, and the edges of the Glassbelt. They follow herds, camps, and fighting, and in the warm months turn up on battlefields on both sides of Caeldon. Cold drives them under; they are a summer plague.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A female finds a wound by smell: a branding cut, a navel of a newborn calf, a tick bite scratched open, a fighter's gash under a dirty bandage, a sleeping traveller's sore. She lays a raft of eggs at its edge. Within a day the maggots hatch, bury their heads in the living flesh, and feed outward in a pack, opening the wound into a pocket that draws other females to lay again. Untreated, a struck beast can be eaten to the bone.

## Life Cycle

The maggots feed for about a week, drop out of the wound, burrow into the ground, and come out as flies a week or so later. In hot weather a generation passes in a few weeks, so a dry summer with many herds and much fighting builds them into a plague by its end.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. They kill lambs, calves, and foals at birth, take herd beasts after branding or a fight, and turn small wounds in people into deep, festering ones (see Wound Rot). Orc herders brand and cut in the cool months, tar every wound on a beast, and check the herd each evening. Escorts carry clean cloth and pine tar for wounds, and every password shelter keeps a pot of salt and spirit for picking out maggots and washing the hollow they leave. Healers clean the wound first; Cleanse Wound washes it clear.

## Lore and Belief

Orcs say the fly is sent to a wound that was got dishonestly, and an escort whose traveller takes flies is made to answer for it at the route moot, where the kindred with more spears behind it is usually believed. Salvagers of the Glassbelt edge hold that a wound fly never strikes a body that has drunk its fill of water that day, so they drink before they work. Human soldiers believe the maggots eat only the bad flesh and leave a wound cleaner, which is true of carrion maggots and false of these, and the mistake has killed men.

After a battle the flies come in a cloud, and the songs of the Windscar wars tell of more warriors lost to the flies in the days after a fight than to the swords in it.

PART II

# Plants and Fungi

*On this shelf stand the trees, plants, fungi, and crops of Caeldon and of the planes and zones. The crops come first in the peoples' lives: the bread wheat of the basins, the flax and hemp that clothe and rope the river country. Beneath the Elderweald the Dark Elf houses live under the living root of the forest, whose faint glow, the gloam, is the only light their country makes of itself.*

*Thorn grows into the hedges that judge who may approach the Briarreach; in the Verdant Expanse a seed can become a forest in an hour, and the herb-hunters who go there for the rare kinds are a short-lived trade. Under the lord's gallows grows the root that poisoners prize and the clergy burn. The spores of the Dark Entities stand here too: they are not fungi of this world, but they behave enough like fungi that people name them so.*





# Ageless Spring Flora

The plants that ring an Ageless Spring are ordinary moss, wildflowers, and trees of their valley, caught in the moment the stillness reached them. They do not grow, fade, or change. To a visitor they are the first sign of the place: a glade where nothing has moved for longer than anyone can say.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The still glade of an Ageless Spring |
| **Range** | The Ageless Spring, in deep valleys and ancient ruins wherever one is found |
| **Known to** | The Lingerers, and the few who visit a spring |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A short, close moss covers the ground to the edge of the pool, green with a faint silver sheen, never taller than a fingernail. Flowers stand in it, each open at its best, with no bud and no faded head anywhere among them. The trees are whatever grew there, oak or ash or valley pine, every leaf whole and green, none yellowing and none on the ground beneath. In the unchanging golden twilight the leaves cast shadows that never move.

Nothing stirs. There is no wind in the leaves, no insect in the flowers, and the plants give off no scent at all. Touched, a leaf is cool and hard, and a stem does not bend: it is like touching glass.

## Habitat and Range

The flora grows only within the bounds of a spring, from the pool's edge to where the stillness ends, often a few dozen paces. The boundary shows plainly where dead leaves begin.

## Behaviour and Temperament

These plants do nothing. They take nothing from the soil, set no seed, and draw no bees, since no insect lives in the glade. A spring's moss is the moss it had on the day the stillness came.

## Abilities

Inside the zone a plant cannot be changed, only broken. A stem snaps cleanly like a glass rod, and both pieces stay exactly as they were, the cut end neither healing nor drying. Carried out of the zone, a picked flower meets the time it missed all at once and withers within the hour; a branch from an old spring may crumble to dust in the hand.

## Life Cycle

None, while the spring lasts. If the spring is destroyed or covered, time rushes back into the glade, and its plants live out their missing years in moments: leaves yellow and drop, flowers brown, and old trees can slump and rot where they stand.

## Uses and Dangers

The flora is harmless and nearly useless, since nothing taken from it lasts outside. To the Lingerers, a broken stem in the glade means someone has been there.

## Lore and Belief

Valley folk say a flower from the spring keeps its bloom for ever and give the tale to lovers. It does not: the flower withers on the way home, and the tale survives because nobody likes to say so.

Thieves still go for the flowers, and the spring-villages that live by the Spring's water deal with them as they deal with any raider; the song of the lover who went in for a bloom and came out to find his betrothed forty years married is sung at weddings in the valley as a warning.



# Alders

**Alders** are the trees that stand with their feet in the water. They line the banks and gravel islands of the rivers and the edges of the fens, and their wood has one virtue every river people knows: kept wet, it does not rot. Quay piles, ford stakes, weir posts, and the footings of the ruined causeway at Greyford are alder.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Wet ground, river banks, gravel islands, and fen edges |
| **Range** | The Greyford Reach, the Lower Serath, and the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans, Reedfolk, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An alder is a middling tree, two or three storeys high, with a narrow, cone-shaped crown when young that rounds with age, and often several trunks from one root. Its bark is dark grey-brown, almost black when wet, cracking into small square plates. The leaves are round and blunt, even notched at the tip, dark glossy green and sticky when young, and they fall still green in autumn. In late winter, before the leaves, it hangs out long purplish-brown catkins that shed yellow pollen; its seed is held in small, hard, dark cones like tiny pine cones that stay on the twigs all winter. Cut, the pale wood turns a startling orange-red within minutes, as if it bled.

## Habitat and Range

Alders want wet roots: river banks, flood-ground, spring lines, and the margins of reed and fen. They grow thick along the side channels and willow islands of the Greyford Reach, in the flood-ground of the Lower Serath, and along every

stream of the Confluence Basins. Their roots hold banks together; where they are cleared, banks slump.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Alder is quick and stubborn. It takes new gravel bars and fresh mud within a few years, often beside willow, and it comes back from the stump when cut, so a bank can be coppiced for poles for generations.

## Life Cycle

Seed falls in winter and floats; it sprouts on bare wet ground in spring. An alder grows fast for its first decades and seldom lives past a century or two. Coppiced, a stool lives longer.

## Uses and Dangers

Its wood is soft and rots fast in air, but driven into wet ground or sunk in water it hardens and lasts for centuries. The corridor towns build their quays and water-gates on alder piles, Reedfolk stake their channels and stilt houses with it, and Lowbank's Goblins set their platform piles and ford stakes in it. The old causeway's footings at Greyford still stand on alder timbers older than any record of the causeway. Its bark and cones make a black dye and ink, and its charcoal is the best for powder-fine work and for smiths' fires that must burn quick and even.

It does no harm, except that a bank cleared of it to make a landing loses its hold, and the next flood takes the landing.

## Lore and Belief

Because the cut wood reddens, many river folk say alder bleeds, and woodcutters ask its pardon before they fell one. Reedfolk say an alder on a bank means the bank will hold and an alder in the water means the river has moved. Greyford's Goblins hold that the old causeway was built by people who knew the river would outlast them and built for that, and they set their own stakes the same way, in alder.

Old river tales say the drowned are buried in alder roots, and fishers who pull a skull out of a root-tangle on a gravel island leave the island alone for a year.



# Ash-Thistle

The **Ash-Thistle** is the one flowering plant that still grows on the grey plains of the Ashen Wastes. On a plane where heat dies within moments it lives by taking heat from whatever burns near it, and when it goes to seed its down settles on a fire and puts it out. To a traveller who has carried fuel across the ash, that is the worst thing a plant can do.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Ash plains and the lee of eroded ridges |
| **Range** | The Ashen Wastes |
| **Danger** | Wary: its down puts out fires |

## Appearance

A thistle about knee-high, stiff and branching, the colour of old ash: grey stem, grey leaves deeply cut and spined at every point, and the whole plant dusted so that it seems to have been burnt and left standing. The flower heads are small, tight, and a dull rust colour, the only colour on the plain for a day's walk. In seed each head opens into a ball of grey down that hangs in the heavy air and drifts very slowly. Crushed, the stem is dry inside and smells faintly of cold smoke. It makes no sound; even its seed-heads break without a crackle.

## Habitat and Range

It grows scattered across the ash plains, one plant to a wide stretch of ground, thickest in the lee of the eroded ridges where the ash storms drop less. It is never found far from where something once burned: an old hearth-ring, a lightning-scar, the bones of a camp.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Ash-Thistle grows towards heat. A plant near a warm stone leans to it over a season, and its roots run under any hearth-ring left in the ash. The down does the same on the air: a fire's

draught draws it in, and wherever it settles the flame shrinks, goes dull red, and dies, while the seed it carried lies in the warm ash and waits.

## Abilities

Its tissues take in warmth and keep it, which no other thing on the plane can do for long. The seed-down carries that hunger: a drift of it on a fire takes the fire's heat into itself as a sponge takes water, and a camp can lose its fire in a few breaths when the thistles are seeding upwind.

## Life Cycle

The seed sprouts only in ash that has been warm. A plant grows slowly over many seasons, flowers once, seeds, and stands dead and grey for years afterwards, crumbling at a touch. Where a fire has been put out by its down, a ring of young thistles comes up later around the dead hearth.

## Uses and Dangers

The Ash-Walkers cut the green heads before seeding and burn them, for they give back some of the heat they have hoarded, and a dried stem smoulders longer than any other fuel on the plane. The danger is the down. Travellers who camp downwind of a seeding stand wake beside a dead fire in a cold that kills.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers call it the fire-thief and say it is the plane's way of taking back what visitors bring. The Ash-Walkers count it among the few things on the plane that do not waste, and will not tread one down. Travellers who come back from the Wastes say that a thistle head pushed into a pot of embers keeps the embers alive longer; the Ash-Walkers say it keeps only the thistle alive.

Delvers into the Wastes tell of the camp that bedded down in a thistle stand and woke in the dark with its fire smothered by drifting down; only those who had kept a coal sealed in a pot lived to walk home.



# Barley

**Barley** is the grain of hard ground. Where the basin valleys narrow into foothills and mountain terraces, the deep-field wheat of the lowlands gives way to a shorter, quicker crop that ripens in a high summer and stands up to a thin soil, and barley is the one the uplands live on. Human households of the Headwater Marches grow it beside oats, Dwarven farmsteads below the holds of the Ironspine grow it beside roots, and the bread and pottage made from it feed the roads between them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Terraced valley fields and hill farmland |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches, the Ironspine, the Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Humans, Dwarves, Ogres |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

Hill barley stands knee to hip high on a stiff, hollow straw. Its leaves are broad at the base and blue-green in spring, wrapping the stem in a pale collar. Each stalk ends in a single ear, the grains set in close rows and each one tipped with a long, stiff bristle, the awn, so that a ripening field looks bearded and catches the light like fur. Green in early summer, the ears turn to straw-gold and then to a bleached, almost silver pale, and as they fill they bow on their stalks until a field ready for the sickle nods all one way in the wind.

A barley field rasps rather than rustles. The awns are rough enough to scratch bare arms at harvest and to work their way into sleeves and collars, and the threshing floor smells of dust and dry straw. Each grain is clad in a tight husk that must be beaten or parched off before it is eaten.

## Habitat and Range

Barley is grown on narrow terraced fields in the sheltered valleys of the Headwater Marches, where it is sown as soon as the snow leaves the terraces and cut before the passes close. High villages such as Notchfield plough it on colossal terraces whose retaining walls no living people could raise. In the Ironspine it grows on the valley terraces below the holds, at farmsteads such as Barleystep. It comes down to the Greyford Reach as trade grain rather than as a crop of the river flats.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Barley forgives what wheat does not: poor stony soil, a late spring, a short dry summer, cold nights. It cannot forgive hail or an early snow, and a whole terrace can be flattened in the space of a storm. It ripens fast, which is the whole of its virtue in the mountains, and it shatters easily once ripe, so a harvest held back a week loses grain to the ground.

## Life Cycle

Hill barley is sown in spring and reaped in late summer, a season of some three to four months. A share of the best ears is kept back each year as seed, and households in the high valleys keep their own seed lines for generations, trusting them over grain bought from below.

## Uses and Dangers

Barley is eaten more than it is sold. Ground coarse, it makes the dense, dark barley bread of the hill country and the carters' inns. Whole or cracked, it goes into pottage, and the big pots of barley and beans an employer must set before an Ogre band before any job, under the food-right custom of the Hearth-Weight Compacts, are the best-known meal on the Headwater roads. Some of it is malted and brewed. The straw beds animals, thatches sheds, and packs goods for the climb.

Dwarven holds buy what the valleys can spare and send their own terrace crop straight up to the gate, so that every barley harvest below a hold is also part of the hold’s stores. A poor barley year at Barleystep is felt a long way down, and a poor year across the Headwater valleys means that more basin grain must come up the Sheaf Road.

The danger lies in storage. Barley put away damp heats and spoils, and a granary full of it draws rats.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater folk say the colossal terraces hold the sun’s warmth in their old stones longer than any wall a living people builds, and that barley sown against them ripens a week earlier. Nobody has measured it. Dwarves, who rarely praise anything that grows, say of a steady worker that he is "barley, not wheat": he will stand in poor ground.



# Beans

**Beans** are the field bean of the Human river country: a coarse, filling pulse grown in strips beside the grain, dried hard, and kept through the winter. Few people praise them and nearly everyone eats them. Their fame on the roads comes from one meal. Before any job, an employer of an Ogre band sets out big pots of barley and beans, salt meat, and bread, and a caravan master who skimps on it is never hauled twice.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Field strips and village plots |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Headwater Marches, the Greyford Reach, the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Humans, Ogres |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

The field bean grows as a stiff, square-stemmed plant about waist high, with grey-green paired leaves and no tendrils. In early summer it flowers white, each flower marked with a black blotch like a thumbprint, and a bean field in bloom smells sweet and heavy enough to be noticed from the road and loud with bees. The pods that follow are thick and green, as long as a finger, and blacken as they dry on the plant. Inside lie three or four flat, brownish beans the size of a thumbnail, hard as gravel once dried.

## Habitat and Range

Beans are grown across the Confluence Basins and in the valleys of the Headwater Marches, on strips that rest the ground between grain years, and in village plots on the rises above the flood. They travel as sacks along the Sheaf Road and down the

barges, and the camps, inns, and work yards of the Greyford Reach and the Lower Serath eat more of them than they grow.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Beans are sown in early spring, sooner than most crops dare, and stand cold well. They feed the soil rather than tire it, and a field that has grown beans gives a better grain crop the year after, which is why careful basin farmers set them between grain years. Blackfly and a wet harvest are their troubles.

## Life Cycle

Beans are sown in early spring, flower at the start of summer, and dry on the plant by late summer, when the whole plant is pulled and stooked until the pods rattle. The best plants are left for seed, and a household's seed beans are the last thing it eats in a hungry spring.

## Uses and Dangers

Dried beans are winter food for people and beasts alike. Soaked overnight and boiled long with barley, salt meat, or whatever is to hand, they make the thick pottage of labourers, carters, haulers, and soldiers on the march. They keep for a year in a dry store and travel well, which makes them a staple of any party that cannot count on the next market.

The Ogre meal is not charity. Under the food-right custom of the Hearth-Weight Compacts, the band is fed before it lifts anything, the weakest first: the youngest, the injured, the old. At the Ogre camp on Onefire Terrace above Lowbank the pots of barley and beans are on the fire before sunrise on every working day, and the band carries no beam until they are empty.

Beans eaten raw or undercooked sicken the eater, and a few people sicken from them however they are cooked.

## Lore and Belief

To Ogres the bean pot is a contract made visible: a band that has eaten has accepted the work, and an employer who has fed it has accepted the band. Human carters on the Headwater roads call a hard, fair bargain a "bean-pot bargain". Basin farmers say a bean field in flower is the last sweet thing before the hard work of summer.

An Ogre band that has eaten from the pot and then breaks its bargain is hunted down by the next band that hears of it, and the songs of the burden roads tell of such hunts with relish.



# Beyonder Spores

Two of the Beyonders spread themselves by spore. Qzoth, the Becoming, sheds **protean spores** that set anything living changing and never let it stop. The Rust Flower sheds **rust spores** that wear out whatever they touch. Neither is a fungus of this world, though both behave enough like one that people name them so; each is a piece of its Beyonder, carried out ahead of its Incursion.

On Caeldon only the protean spores are real. They sleep in the burned ground of the Wrongwood, left by the Qzoth Incursion (c. 4,000-c. 3,500 BR), and wake when it is dug or ploughed. No Incursion of the Rust Flower has ever reached Caeldon; its rust spores are what one would shed.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | The Wrongwood's burned ground (protean spores); the rust spores are an example, never on Caeldon |
| **Range** | The Wrongwood and the valleys its fever outbreaks reach |
| **Danger** | Deadly to every living body, and the rust spores to metal, wood, and stone as well |

## Appearance

### *Protean Spores*

Too fine to see one at a time, they show as a faint, warm-coloured haze over the Bloom or over broken Wrongwood ground, pinkish or the yellow of old fat, that thickens where flesh is changing fastest. On skin they leave a raised rash that itches and then moves. The air near them smells of blood and milk.

### *Rust Spores*

These would be visible: a reddish-brown dust like rust filings, drifting off every crumbling surface of a Rustfall and settling in a thin bloom of orange spots. Each spot would spread in rings as the surface beneath it gave way, shedding new dust as it went, and a cloud of them would rasp faintly as it moved and taste of iron.

## Habitat and Range

Both are thickest in their Incursion and thin out from it, but neither stays there. Protean spores now sleep in the Wrongwood's burned ground, which holds them still; once it is broken they travel on wind and water and in the bodies of the infected, so a village down the valley may wake to a fever that does not stop. Rust spores would ride on the dust of a Rustfall and on the Rust-Hosts that walked out of it, and a host passing through a town could leave hinges and rafters spotted after it had gone.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They have no will of their own. They settle, take, and spread, and each infection sends out more of them. The protean spore takes only what lives, flesh and plant alike. The rust spore takes everything, steel, wood, stone, and skin.

## Abilities

A **protean spore** infects on contact. It begins with a rash, a fever, or an extra joint; within hours the infected is unrecognizable, and within days may no longer be one organism. No ordinary filter stops it.

A **rust spore** corrodes what it lands on. A spot on a blade rusts it through, a spot on a beam rots it, a spot on a hand cracks the skin and thins the bone, and every spot sheds more spores as it crumbles.

## Life Cycle

Neither grows from seed. The spores are shed by the Beyonder itself, by its hosts, and by everything they have taken. A Flesh-Host buds new spores with every change; the dust a Rust-Host fell into at its end would still be full of them. Fire clears both, and the protean spores also fail where form is held perfectly still.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is that they move faster than the Incursion that sheds them and turn each victim into a new source. People near an outbreak cover every bit of skin, wrap their mouths, and burn whatever begins to change. Against rust spores, tools and sound goods would have to be oiled, waxed, and sealed. What a healer can do against the protean spores is told with the Changing Fever.

## Lore and Belief

Most people who meet the protean spores have never heard the name of the power behind them, and know them as a plague, the Changing Fever; the rust spores would bring the Red Dust. Dark Entities are known through fear, taboo, and rumour (see Knowledge of the Cosmos), and many take the fever for a god's punishment. Some say a written name worn against the skin keeps the

fever off; holding one's form in mind does help against Qzoth, but a scrap of parchment does not do it alone.



# Bitterberry

**Bitterberry** is a shrub of the wet ravines of the Briarreach, and the plant Thorn Elf children are taught first. Its berries are handsome, sweet at first touch, and bitter as gall after, and a handful kills a child. The Thornbound use it as they use most things in their forest, carefully: as bait for vermin and as the deep, near-black dye of their hedge cloth.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Ravine sides and thicket |
| **Range** | The Briarreach |
| **Known to** | Elves (Thorn Elves), Trolls |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

Bitterberry grows to about a person's height, a loose, arching shrub with smooth, purplish-grey stems and narrow, pointed, willow-like leaves that are dull green above and pale below. In early summer it bears small greenish-white flowers in clusters along the stems, smelling faintly of honey and cut grass. By late summer they have become bunches of round berries the size of a pea, green, then red, then a glossy purple-black that stains fingers dark red. Bruised, leaves and bark give off a bitter, almond smell.

## Habitat and Range

It wants the shade and damp of ravine sides and the edges of slip-slopes, where the forest breaks and light comes through. It grows nowhere outside the Briarreach and its ravine edges, and it is commonest in the deep cut of the Sallow.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A bitterberry shrub roots where its arching stems touch the ground, and a ravine side can hold a thicket of them. Birds eat the berries without harm and spread the seed; beasts that browse the shrub sicken and learn to leave it.

## Life Cycle

It flowers and fruits each year from its third or fourth, and the berries hang into the first frosts. A shrub lives a few decades and renews itself from its rooting stems.

## Uses and Dangers

The berries and leaves kill. A child who eats a handful vomits, cramps, and grows drowsy and cold within the hour, and may not wake; a grown body sickens hard and usually lives (see Poison Herbs). The Thornbound crush the berries into bait for rats and martens at their stores. Boiled with iron-rich mud and bark, the berries give the dark dye of Thornbound hedge cloth, which goes out through the Waitfield with the other dyes. Dyers wear gloves and wash in running water.

Ravine Trolls leave bitterberry standing along crossing approaches, since nothing grazes it and its roots hold soft soil.

## Lore and Belief

Thorn Elves say bitterberry is the forest's first lesson: "the sweetest thing in the ravine is the one that wants you there." It is planted at the edge of some circles as a warning to their own children. Basin traders who buy the dark cloth at the Waitfield believe the dye is poisonous to wear, which it is not once washed. Trolls say a crossing family that lets its bitterberry be cut has forgotten where its children play.

Frontier tales tell of a Human war-band that ate the berries on a forced march through the ravines and was found by the Thornbound three days later, half of it dead in the thicket; poisoners in the basin towns pay well for the berries for the same reason.



# Black Mould

The **black mould** is the growth of the Rotting Crown, the Cast-Out who was once the Keeper of the Line. It furs the bone of the Crown's face, trails from its crown down its neck, and falls behind it as the **Mould Trail**, a path of soft ground where nothing living keeps its shape. It is not a fungus that grows on its own; it is the Crown's rot made visible.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | The body of the Rotting Crown, and the ground behind it |
| **Range** | Wherever the Rotting Crown walks, most of all the seats of the old houses it rules |
| **Danger** | Deadly to growing things, and to the houses that let the Crown in |

## Appearance

On the Crown it is a short, dense black fur, like soot on a damp wall, close over the bare bone of the face and thicker in the hollows of the eyes. Where the living growth of the crown pulses its sickly green, the mould runs from it in wet black threads down the neck and into the mouldering velvet. It glistens and drips.

On the ground it shows as black streaks and spreading patches in the soft earth, fine as cobweb at the edges. The Trail smells of wet earth, decay, and old blood, and it drips: from leaves, from eaves, from the hems of those who have walked through it.

## Habitat and Range

The mould lives on the Crown and follows it. The Trail runs wherever it has walked, and lies thickest around the houses it rules, where the soil goes soft with their rot. It also comes with the Crown out of the crypts of the Ashen Wastes, whose decay it draws on.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It has no mind. It spreads where the Crown passes and stays where the Crown stays. In a house the Crown keeps, it creeps in season after season: into the cellar, the family crypt, the seams of the heirlooms, and the field margins, until the house and its land are one soft, black ruin.

## Abilities

Where the Trail falls, flowers wilt at once and trees slump to black sludge. The ground goes soft and spongy underfoot and will not hold a post. Around the Crown's Rot Field the mould runs ahead of the decay, so that food blackens before it rots and a field is lost before its crop is grown.

## Life Cycle

It is born from the Crown and does not seed itself. When the Crown leaves a place, the Trail stops spreading, and it can be dug out and burned. When a line it has bound at last slumps into black sludge, the mould is all that grows on what is left.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing, and it takes land and the living it touches. Its worst danger is that it marks a house that has already let the Crown in, and by then the house rarely wants to be told.

## Lore and Belief

Old houses call black mould in the family crypt a sign that the ancestors are restless, and some read it as a blessing on the line. The Crown's victims are told that the rot is the price of continuity, and they believe it. Farmers say the cure is to plant something new where the Trail has run, and this is closer to the truth than most lore: what weakens the Crown is a seed in fresh soil, an inheritance set down, a house founded instead of inherited.

Grave-robbers who break into a mould-blackened crypt for its grave-goods are said to carry the rot home with them, and in the old houses' country a thief's family is known by the black on its doorposts.



# Bloodgrass

**Bloodgrass** covers the plains of the Scourge: a tall red grass whose blades are edged like knives. On a plane where everything is sharp it is the ground itself that wounds, and every beast that lives on the plains is born to it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Plains and valley floors |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: it cuts whatever walks through it |

## Appearance

The grass stands waist- to chest-high on a grown man, in dense tussocks that run together into a single crimson sea. Each blade is narrow, stiff, and ribbed, dark red along its spine and paler at its edges, which are finely toothed and as hard as horn. Old blades fade to rust and stand on among the new. The seed-heads are dark, nodding spikes. When the wind moves through it the whole plain hisses, a dry, metallic sound like blades drawn slowly from many sheaths, and it smells of cut stems and, after anything has passed through, of iron.

## Habitat and Range

It holds the open plains and valley floors wherever soil lies deep enough, giving way only to the thorn thickets at their edges, the bare rock of the knife-ridges, and the trampled ground of battlefields.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Bloodgrass grows fastest where blood is spilled, and a stretch that has seen a fight stands thicker and redder the next season. A blade bent by a

passing body springs back with force, so that walking through it is to be cut again and again, at shin and thigh, and a running beast is cut worst.

## Abilities

Its edges open skin and cloth at a brush and leather after a few steps. Its colour hides the red and rust hunters of the plains, among them the Scythe Mantises, which can stand in it unseen.

## Life Cycle

It seeds in the dry end of each season and grows back from the root after fire or trampling within weeks. Dead blades keep their edges for years, and a burnt stretch is nearly as dangerous as a living one.

## Uses and Dangers

The plains grazers live on it. The Scourge Tuskers crop it with mouths its edges cannot cut, and a herd's passing leaves a trampled path that is the safest ground on the plain. The Scourge-Born wrap their legs in hide against it and use the dried blades as fire-starters and as crude saws. To a traveller it is a slow wound that never stops: few cuts are deep, but they are many, and the smell of blood draws the plane's hunters.

## Lore and Belief

The Scourge-Born say the grass drinks for the plane and that a warrior who falls in it is taken in, not lost. Travellers believe the grass itself turns its edges towards the living, which is not so; it only springs back. They are right that a fight on blood-grass ground breeds a thicker stand, and the oldest battle plains of the Scourge are the reddest.

Sellswords who came back from the Scourge tell of companies cut to ribbons crossing a blood-grass plain at a run with an enemy behind them, and of the trick of the old hands: walk slowly, wrap the legs, and never fall.



# Bog Myrtle

**Bog myrtle** is a small shrub of the wet margins whose leaves smell sweet and resinous when brushed, and keep the biting gnats away. The Reedfolk of the Reedmere strew it in their sleeping places and hang it in doorways, and basin brewers put it in their ale.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Fens, bog edges, and reed margins |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins (the Reedmere) and the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Reedfolk, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

It stands knee- to waist-high, a dense, upright shrub of reddish-brown twigs. Its leaves are narrow, greyish-green, toothed near the tip, and dotted underneath with tiny golden glands that hold the scent. Before the leaves in spring it carries short, stiff catkins, reddish on some plants and yellowish on others. Brushing through a stand on a warm day releases a smell like pine and sweet hay together, strong enough to follow a walker for a few strides.

## Habitat and Range

It grows where the ground is always wet and poor: the fen edges and reed margins of the Confluence Basins, above all the Reedmere, and the backwaters of the Lower Serath. It forms low, grey-green belts between reed and firmer ground.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It spreads by its roots into thickets and does well where little else will. Its roots fix the poorest wet ground and leave it better.

## Life Cycle

It is long-lived, coming back from its roots after cutting or burning, and flowers each spring before leafing.

## Uses and Dangers

Its chief use is against the biting gnats and whining flies of the warm wet months (see Marsh Insects). Reedfolk lay it under sleeping mats and in rafters, rub it on the skin, and burn a handful in the evening fire. Basin brewers who brew without hops use it to flavour and keep their ale, and a strong myrtle ale is said to give headaches. Its leaves keep fleas and moths out of bedding and clothes chests.

It harms no one in measure. Too much in ale is bitter and heady, and women with child are told to keep off it, which may be right.

## Lore and Belief

Reedfolk say a house that smells of myrtle has been kept, and they leave a sprig on the threshold of a new stilt house. Some believe it keeps off more than gnats, the fevers of the low ground among them; it does keep off some of the insects that carry them, though nobody knows that is why. Basin folk say a myrtle ale makes a man brave and a fool in the same cup.



# Bracken

**Bracken** is the great fern of open ground, and wherever grazing slackens it moves in and stays. It gives a Human household bedding, thatch, and the litter for its byre, and it poisons a beast that grazes it hungry. Across the old terraces of the Witnessfields it stands mixed with the grass and heath that took them when the archive world ended.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Heath, hill pasture, wood clearings, and abandoned terraces |
| **Range** | Widespread; the Witnessfields and the Headwater Marches above all |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary, to grazing beasts |

## Appearance

In spring bracken comes up as single stems from underground, each tipped with a tight, brown-furred coil like a shepherd's crook. By midsummer each has unrolled into one great frond, waist- or shoulder-high, its stem stiff and grooved and its blade cut into many pairs of narrow, finely divided leaflets, a hard, bright green. A slope of it in summer is a sea of green that hides a lying beast or a walker. In autumn it turns red-brown and dries in place, rustling, and stands through winter as dead russet bracken. Crushed, it smells green and bitter.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on dry, acid, light ground: heaths, hill pastures, wood clearings and edges, abandoned fields and terraces, from the basin uplands to the foothills of the Headwater Marches. It dislikes wet ground, deep shade, and the plough. It is part of the heath of the uplands (see Grass and Heath).

## Behaviour and Temperament

Bracken spreads by thick black roots that run a hand's depth underground, sending up fronds as they go. A stand advances a pace or two a year into grass that is not grazed hard, shades out what lies beneath it, and is almost impossible to dig out. Burning clears the fronds but not the roots.

## Life Cycle

The roots live for generations, and a stand may be older than any settlement near it. Each frond lives one season. Bracken seldom sets spore that grows; it holds ground by root.

## Uses and Dangers

Cut dry in autumn, bracken is bedding for people and beasts, litter for the byre, packing for stores, and thatch that lasts a few years. It is burned for a quick fire, and its ash goes into soap and glass-making. The young coils are eaten in some poor households in spring, though they are not wholesome.

Grazed, it poisons. Cattle and horses that eat it in a dry year, when the grass fails, sicken over weeks, bleed from the nose and in the dung, stagger, and die; sheep go blind. Herders keep hungry stock off bracken slopes. On abandoned ground it is a sign of how long the land has been left, and how hard it will be to win back.

## Lore and Belief

Many believe bracken seed, gathered at midsummer night, makes the gatherer unseen, and nobody has ever found the seed. In the Witness-fields, Flockturn's herders say bracken grows best where the old oaths were broken, and that the terraces that still hold grass are the ones whose oaths were kept. Basin folk say to cut bracken before the solstice is to call rain.

Thieves and outlaws who have bought "bracken seed" from a hedge-witch and walked into a lord's hall thinking themselves unseen are a stock joke of the Basin alehouses, and of the gallows.



# Canopy Lilies

**Canopy lilies** grow without soil, rooted in the moss and leaf-litter that gathers in the crotches of great boughs. In the Crownboughs the High Elves grow them along their garden-walks and in the trained galleries of their halls, and on summer nights their scent fills a hall. Every house keeps its own strains, bred over centuries, and a house's lilies are its signature at court.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Bough crotches, trained galleries, and canopy garden-walks |
| **Range** | The Crownboughs |
| **Known to** | Elves (High Elves) |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A canopy lily is a clump of long, strap-like, leathery leaves, glossy dark green, arching from a fat, pale bulb wedged into the bark, with grey roots that cling and wander over the wood like veins. In summer it sends out a drooping stem bearing from three to a dozen trumpet flowers, each as long as a hand, waxy and thick-petalled. Wild lilies are white with a green throat. House strains run from ivory to cream, blush, pale gold, and a rare greenish-white, some speckled, some with dark stamens dusting the petals rust. By day they smell faintly green; after dusk the scent opens, heavy, sweet, and spiced, and carries along a boughway.

## Habitat and Range

Wild lilies grow high in the old trees of the forest world wherever leaf-mould collects in a fork and light reaches it. In the Crownboughs nearly all are grown: set in bark pockets, in moss beds laid along trained limbs, and in hanging baskets of

woven withy over the garden-walks. They need moisture and shelter from the hard wind, and an outer walk stripped by storm loses them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are slow and patient plants. A bulb takes years to flower from seed, and a clump grows only as fast as the litter under it builds. A lily that is moved too often sulks and does not flower.

## Life Cycle

A bulb flowers each summer once mature, and a clump can outlive the gardener who set it, splitting into offsets that are given away or kept. Seed is seldom used outside the houses, since a seedling does not breed true and the houses guard their strains.

## Uses and Dangers

Their use is beauty and pride. A house fills its hall with its lilies at the court season, wears a flower at presentation, and sends a cut stem with a message. A visitor is expected to know whose lilies are whose. An offset from a house's strain is a gift between houses, less than a grafted sapling from the family grove and more than courtesy. The scent is said to make sleep deep, and some households keep lilies out of sleeping chambers.

They harm no one.

## Lore and Belief

At court, a house whose lilies fail to flower in a season is thought to be failing, and rivals make sure it is noticed; a house will force a reluctant clump into flower rather than be seen without. Tenders say a lily cannot be hurried any more than a child can, which is the region's oldest argument in another form. Some believe the strains carry the memory of the houses that bred them, and a house that has died out is mourned at court by a cut stem of its last lilies.

Lily-thieves who climb to a rival house's galleries by night to take an offset are the stuff of court gossip and, now and then, of duels; one feud between two old houses is said to have begun with a single stolen stem.



# Carnivorous Plants

Carnivorous plants catch living prey and feed on it. A few grow wild on Caeldon, from the tiny sundews of the bogs to the fen pitchers of the Reedmere, which drown frogs and small birds, and larger ones may grow in fens and deep woods nobody has walked. The ones people speak of are mostly made: nature mages can turn ordinary marsh growth into hunting plants for a while with the Nature Magic working called Predator Bloom. In the Verdant Expanse they need no mage. Many of its plants eat meat, and count a traveller as fertilizer.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Marshes and wet ground under a nature mage's working; the jungle of the Verdant Expanse |
| **Range** | Wherever Predator Bloom is cast; the Verdant Expanse |
| **Known to** | Nature mages, marsh folk, and travellers to the Expanse |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anything that stands still within reach, the caster's allies included |

## Appearance

### *Bloomed Marsh Growth*

A patch under Predator Bloom looks at first like the marsh around it, reed, sedge, and trailing vine, but thicker and darker green, glossy as if wet. Then it moves. Vines lift from the water and lengthen into tendrils as thick as a thumb, with a sticky sheen along their undersides; leaf-bases swell into cups; the whole cluster leans towards warmth like a dog towards a fire. It smells of crushed stems and, once fed, of meat.

### *Plants of the Expanse*

The Expanse's meat-eaters come in every form its riot allows: pitchers big enough to drown a goat, lips of bright pink and purple that close on a hand, sticky-haired fronds that fold over a sleeping body,

vines that coil, tighten, and pull. Their colours are the plane's own, saturated and pulsing, and their nectar is sweet enough to turn the stomach.

## Habitat and Range

The bloomed growth lasts only where it was cast, a small patch or cluster, and only for a while; it needs living plant mass, moisture, and fertile ground, so it is a working of marshes, river margins, and wet woods. In the Expanse such plants are everywhere, and grow back faster than they can be cut.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Bloomed growth hunts what is near and alive. It cannot tell friend from foe, and once fed it grows harder to control, so a mage who sets it round an intruders' camp keeps their own people well back. It goes for the still before the moving: a sleeper, a sentry, a hobbled horse.

The Expanse's plants hunt by lure and patience, with scent, colour, and nectar, and many work in step with the whole jungle through the root-network that links its life.

## Abilities

They grip, hold, and digest. A tendril can drag a grown man off his feet; a cup or pitcher dissolves flesh in its pool. In the Expanse, where growth is fast beyond measure, a trap closes and a body is taken down to soil within hours.

## Life Cycle

Bloomed growth returns to being ordinary marsh plants when the working ends, often withered and spent, since the working feeds on the plants themselves and on the ground. The Expanse's carnivores sprout, feed, seed, and die in a span of days, and each is replaced before it has finished dying.

## Uses and Dangers

Predator Bloom guards a camp, a ford, or a marsh path, and turns a hiding place into a trap. It is dangerous to allies and hard to stop once fed, and forcing it on poor ground costs the land and the caster dearly. In the Expanse such plants are one of the plane's chief dangers, beside the growth that buries a traveller in minutes; travellers are told to touch nothing and to cut any root they feel closing on them.

## Lore and Belief

Marsh folk tell of drowning-vines in every bog, waiting for children, and most of the tales are older than any mage who could have bloomed one; the fen pitchers, which drown what falls into them, may be where the tales began. Many believe a bloomed patch can be talked down by its maker; it can only be let wither. Travellers' tales of the Expanse make every flower a mouth. That is not quite so, but near enough to keep a traveller's hands in their sleeves. The plants that mimic blossoms there, the Flower-Stalkers, are counted by those who know the plane as hunters in their own right rather than as plants.

Battle tales tell of a nature mage who bloomed the marsh behind a retreating warband and let its pursuers ride into it; the drowning-vines took horse and rider, and the marsh is still called after the lord who led them in.



# Cellar Rot

**Cellar Rot** is a fungus that eats old timber from the inside: the props, lintels, and floor beams of the storeworks and cellars of the Broken Marches and the culverts under Lowbank in the Greyford Reach. A beam it has finished looks whole and holds nothing. It is one reason that in the Marches structures look sound and are not.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Timber of old cellars, storeworks, and culverts |
| **Range** | The Broken Marches; the Greyford Reach (Lowbank) |
| **Known to** | Goblins, Kobolds, Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to works and those under them |

## Appearance

On the surface there is little to see: a beam a shade darker than its neighbours, faintly cracked across the grain into small cubes, as if it had been charred without fire. Where the rot is open it shows as a flat, wrinkled skin the colour of rust or old leather, edged with white, spreading over wood and on across the stone beside it, and in still air it throws a fine brown dust of spores that settles on everything below. Grey strands as thick as a bootlace run from it through mortar and over brick to find the next timber. It smells of mushrooms and damp earth, strongest when a cellar door is first opened.

## Habitat and Range

It wants timber, still air, and a damp that is never wet: cellars under ruined storeworks, sealed rooms, the backs of old culverts, and the wooden bracing of collapsed works. It is commonest in the oldest and least aired underlayers of the Marches and in the storework cellars under Lowbank.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The rot spreads slowly and out of sight, through the heart of a beam before it shows at the skin, and it crosses stone and brick by its strands to reach dry wood far from where it began. Opening a cellar to the air checks it; closing one again lets it run.

## Abilities

It takes the strength out of wood while leaving its shape: a rotted beam keeps its look and its colour until a load or a knock crumbles it to brown powder. It reaches timber across masonry no other rot can cross.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing but warning work. Salvage crews test every old beam with an awl before they trust it, and the Kindred danger-marks on the stones grade a rotted cellar with the unbraced. A rotted prop can bring a cellar roof down on whoever stands under it, and rot carried in on salvaged timber spreads into the new beams of the building that bought it. The spore dust gives some cellar workers a cough.

## Lore and Belief

In the Marches "sound-looking" is a warning word, said of timber and of promises alike. Goblin households say the rot follows a building that nobody remembers, and that a cellar used and talked about keeps it off; the airing that comes with use does the work. Kobold crews, who brace by sound, say a rotted beam rings wrong under a tap, and they are right.

Salvage crews tell of the cellar under a fallen manor that held a lord’s buried strongbox and a rotten beam over it; the crew that dug it out is under the beam still, and the strongbox with them.



# Chamber-Grey

**Chamber-Grey** is a mould that settles on the living root of the Roothollows when the root has begun to fail. Dead root goes grey of itself, but the mould comes first, a bloom on root that still looks alive. A house that finds it knows that the chamber behind it may lose its bracing and its air within years.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Root walls of chambers whose root is failing |
| **Range** | The Roothollows; the root edge of the Stonewake Deeps |
| **Known to** | Elves (Dark Elves), Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Wary: the sign of a failing chamber |

## Appearance

It is a soft, close bloom like frost on a window, pale grey to the colour of ash, spreading in patches the size of a palm and then in broad sheets along a root wall. Up close it is a fur of fine threads, and it smears to a grey dust under a finger. In the gloam it shows as a dull place where the root's glow should be. It smells of cold stone and stale bread, and a chamber thick with it smells of nothing else.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on root walls in still air, where living root is weakening, most often at the outer edges of a house's chambers and along the eastern hollows where the root thins towards bare stone. Dwarves of the Stonewake Deeps meet it on the root edge of their country, where the caverns meet the hollows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It does not kill root by itself. It follows weakness, taking hold where the root's sap has slowed, and moves across a wall as the dying spreads. Where the root recovers, the bloom thins and goes; where it does not, the mould gives way in turn to the dead grey of the root itself and to the bed fungus that lives on dead root.

## Uses and Dangers

Its use is its warning. Every Dark Elf child is taught to look for it, and route keepers and root-watchers walk the chamber walls on the threshold watch and note every new patch. Its danger is what it foretells: a chamber that loses its root loses its air and its bracing together, and with them the fungus beds and the dead that count in its chamber-right. Its dust in a closed chamber brings a dry cough.

## Lore and Belief

"A wall going grey" is a house's slow emergency, spoken of in low voices: a house watches its wall go grey for years before it gives, as the small house of Sapfall is watching now. Some houses scrape the bloom away and burn fungus oil before the patch in the hope of warming the root back, which seldom helps. Others hold that the root goes grey first in the wall of whoever in the house has done the most wrong, and a patch found in a sleeping chamber can start a quarrel that outlasts the chamber.



# Dreamcress

**Dreamcress** is a small water herb of cold, clear brooks whose leaves, eaten or steeped before sleep, make sleep deep and dreams vivid. Workers of Dream Magic use it to sink further towards the Dreaming Veil; ordinary households use a little of it against restless nights, and learn what too much of it does.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Cold spring-fed brooks and spring heads |
| **Range** | The Elderweald; the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves |
| **Danger** | Wary: heavy dreams, and nightmares in excess |

## Appearance

It looks much like the watercress that grows beside it: a sprawling, hollow-stemmed herb that floats and roots in running water, with round, dark green leaflets in pinnate sprays. The difference is in the leaves' undersides, which are flushed a faint violet, and in the flowers, tiny four-petalled clusters of pale lilac where watercress flowers white, open from late spring into summer. It tastes peppery at first and then oddly sweet, and a crushed handful smells of wet stone and something like clove.

## Habitat and Range

It grows only where spring water runs cold and clear the year round, in the spring heads and shaded brooks of the Elderweald and the forest-edge valleys of the Confluence Basins, and dies out where a brook warms or muddies.

## Abilities

Taken before sleep, it slows waking and lengthens the deepest sleep, and dreams come clearer, more coloured, and easier to remember. A dream-worker who has eaten it reaches the dreaming

more easily and stays longer. More than a little brings dreams that will not let the sleeper go: heavy, looping, and frightening, and a waking that leaves the head thick for a day.

## Life Cycle

It grows through the year where the water never freezes, thickest in spring, and spreads by broken stems that root wherever they lodge. A bed can be lost in one summer if the brook above it is fouled.

## Uses and Dangers

Dream-workers keep it dried or fresh as a regular part of their craft, and buy it from herb-gatherers who know the spring heads. Healers give a sprig to the sleepless and the grieving. Used night after night it builds a craving for its dreams, and those who eat it to escape waking life slide towards Dream-Sickness. Gatherers mistake it for watercress and serve it at supper, and the household sleeps late and badly.

## Lore and Belief

Basin folk say a sprig under the pillow lets the sleeper dream of the dead, and widows sometimes gather it on purpose. Wood Elves say the cress dreams the brook it grows in, and will not take it from a grove's spring. The dream-workers hold that it opens no door by itself and only lets the sleeper walk further, which is why they fear it in untrained hands.

Hedge-witches sell it to the grieving and to the greedy, who hope the dead will tell where they hid their silver; many villages have buried a son who dreamed his father's hoard, dug it up, and was found dead beside it of the nightmares that followed.



# Driftmats

**Driftmats** are rafts of floating weed that come in off the Unrun Sea after storms, from water no run has laid and no sounding house has read. They tangle oars and foul rudders, and they bring with them small things nobody on the coast can name. Gnome pilots log every mat they meet, its place and size and drift, and then strike the entry out, because a mat is never where it was logged.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Floating on open water beyond the last beacon |
| **Range** | The edge of the Unrun Sea, drifting onto the outer Tidelace and the Far Set |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Wary, to oars and rudders |

## Appearance

A mat is a floating island of tangled weed, from a few strides across to the size of a harbour basin, a hand to a forearm thick. The weed is olive-gold to brown, made of branching, leafy stems studded with small round air bladders the size of peppercorns that keep it afloat; it has no root and no holdfast. From a distance a mat lies on the water like a field of wet straw, and the sea goes flat and greasy inside it. Up close it smells of iodine, salt, and something sweetish and rotten underneath. Its undersides are crowded with life: small crabs and shrimp the colour of the weed, tiny fish, worm tubes, and the eggs of creatures that are not seen on the coast.

## Habitat and Range

The weed lives out in the open water beyond the last beacons, where nobody goes to see it whole. Storms break it into mats and drive them south and west onto the outer isles of the Tidelace Coasts

and across the Far Set of the Tidebound Reaches. It comes with the storm season and is gone within weeks, rotting on the shingle or drifting away.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It grows as it floats, branching and breaking. A mat moves with wind and current, so it can lie across a strait one morning and be gone by the next tide. Inside the Lacework it dies quickly in the shallower, warmer water.

## Life Cycle

No one knows how it begins, since it has never been seen attached to anything. Broken pieces grow into new mats. Stranded, it rots in a few days into a brown sludge that the shore Humans spread on their gardens.

## Uses and Dangers

Its danger is fouling: oars caught and wrenched, a rudder jammed, a small craft held in it while the wind gets up. A pilot crossing a strait with a mat on it goes round, never through. Lastlight's island households gather stranded mats for manure and burn the dried weed. What lives in the weed is the stranger part. Now and then a mat carries in a fish, a crab, or a seed nobody has seen before, and the sounding houses keep a few of them in jars; most die within days.

## Lore and Belief

Gnome pilots say a mat is the Unrun Sea writing a letter that cannot be read, and the logging and striking out is a pilot's joke about the false mark. Some families of Lastlight believe the mats come from a shore across the Unrun Sea, as the Far-wings are said to fly to one, and keep the strange seeds in case one grows. Thaluren of the Outer-Route runs avoid them as water no run has come home through, and will not let their young swim under one.



# Drowning Garden Flora

The flora of the Drowning Garden is a whole forest under water: kelp, coral trees, and flowering plants, with a floor of moss and sand. Its breathing runs backwards. The plants breathe the water as air-breathers do there, and the open air above would suffocate them. They grow faster than anything on land, and they yield plants with alchemical virtues found nowhere else, which is why herbalists risk the Garden at all.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The warm, breathable water of a Drowning Garden |
| **Range** | The Drowning Garden, in deep lakes, flooded forests, and coastal caves wherever one forms |
| **Known to** | The Gill-Folk; herbalists and alchemists who go in |
| **Danger** | Wary: it entangles and crushes whoever stays still too long |

## Appearance

The tallest growth is kelp, rising in olive-gold columns towards the light and moving in the current like a wood in wind. Between it stand **coral trees**, branching shapes of rose, white, and orange, hard at the trunk and soft at the tips, in whose limbs the fish move like birds. Below them grow flowering water plants: broad-leafed stems with blossoms of turquoise, crimson, and yellow that open towards the beams of light, and **sea flowers** scattered over the moss among the anemones. In the deeper water many plants glow, a soft blue-green that is the only light at the bottom.

Everything is soft. A leaf feels like velvet, a stem gives under the hand, and the whole forest rustles in the current with a muffled sound. The water around it tastes of salt and minerals and something green.

## Habitat and Range

The forest fills the Garden from its sunlit shallows to its floor. The kelp stands thickest towards the surface, the coral trees in the middle depths, and the glowing plants deepest, where time runs fastest. The flora grows only in the Garden's own water.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It grows. Under the Garden's law, plants put on inches in an hour, and a cleared path closes behind a swimmer. The Gill-Folk prune the kelp and keep the forest in balance as gardeners, and without them it would choke itself. Fronds and runners settle on whatever stays still, and grow round it.

## Abilities

The plants breathe as nothing on land does. They draw their life from the water itself and cannot bear air: a plant lifted out of the Garden suffocates and dies, which is why its herbs travel in sealed jars of Garden water. Their speed is their danger. A traveller who rests too long in one place may wake held by fronds, and a slow swimmer in a thick stand can be trapped or crushed.

## Life Cycle

Everything in the Garden lives fast, and its plants sprout, bloom, fruit, and die in days rather than seasons. The deeper they grow, the faster they turn over. Dead fronds and fallen blossoms drift down to feed the moss and sand. Visitors who stay too long are claimed in the same way, sprouting plants and coral until they become part of the forest.

## Uses and Dangers

The Gill-Folk live by the forest, harvesting its fruit as well as its fish. Herbalists and alchemists come for its rare plants, whose potency is prized and whose names are guarded by those who gather them. The cost is the Garden's: every hour among the plants ages the gatherer, and the most potent grow deepest, where an hour may cost a lifetime.

## Lore and Belief

Herbalists hold that a Garden herb is stronger for every year it cost its gatherer, and price it so. The Gill-Folk see the forest as a gift of the deep water and tend it accordingly. Shore folk believe the coral trees are drowned travellers, and in a few cases they are right: the Overgrown are visitors the Garden has grown into its forest.

Herb-hunters who dive for the deepest Garden herbs are paid in gold, and the divers still toast the young one who went down to the bottom for a cure for a plague-struck town and came up grey-haired with the cure in her hand.



# Ember Moss

**Ember Moss** grows on the furnace scars of the Glassbelt Interior, where the glassed ground of the dead furnace zones is said to hold the fire's heat still. It lives on that warmth and a little dew, and it burns as no other plant does: lit, it smoulders for days. Workers of Crucible Magic prize it as tinder, and the salvagers who gather it keep strict rules about where it may go.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Warm glassed ground of the dead furnace zones |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Wary: it catches at a touch of flame |

## Appearance

A low, dense moss that crusts the cracks and pits of the glass in cushions the size of a hand, dark red to rust-brown, with a shine on its tips when the light is low. Dry, it is brittle and crumbles to a reddish dust; after a dewy night it softens and darkens nearly to black. Laid on the back of a hand it feels faintly warm. It smells of hot stone and, when crushed, of something sharp like a struck flint.

## Habitat and Range

It grows only on warm glassed ground, so it marks the deep furnace scars where the heat still lingers and is absent from the cooled glass and the pans. Crossers read a red crust on the glass as a warning that the ground underfoot is the kind they go over only when they must.

## Abilities

It holds heat in its dense cushions and gives it back slowly. A spark or a fingertip of flame sets it smouldering, and a cushion burns low and red for

days without flame, giving a steady warmth and very little smoke, nearly impossible to put out short of burying it.

## Life Cycle

It spreads by spores across warm glass and by pieces carried in the wind, and grows very slowly, a crust taking many years to cover a crack. On glass that cools, it dies back and is gone in a season.

## Uses and Dangers

The Salvage Peoples gather a little to carry fire across the desert: a pinch in a closed tin keeps an ember alive from one camp to the next, and a Crucible worker can draw on its stored heat. Its danger is that it catches too easily. A spark on a crust sets the scar smouldering for days, and a pack with loose moss in it can burn through on the march.

## Lore and Belief

The salvagers who work the furnace scars count it with the ash and slag: it is not carried out of the deep scars, and moss gathered there is burnt before the crossing ends, under the same old warning that keeps ash and slag in the desert (see Furnace-Ash Sickness). Crossers say the moss is the old fire still alive and hungry, and that it grows where the furnaces were worked hardest. Nobody says the fire's name near it.

Salvagers tell of the crew that brought a sack of moss out of the scars to sell as tinder and burned with their camp the first night outside.



# Fen Pitchers

**Fen pitchers** are the largest of the few plants of the Material Plane that hunt without a mage to make them. They grow in clumps on the deep fen and floating reed-mat of the Reedmere in the Confluence Basins, and their cups, as tall as a child's knee, drown frogs, mice, shrews, and small birds. They cannot take a grown person, but they are the truth that the marsh tales of drowning-vines grew from (see Carnivorous Plants).

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Deep, acid fen and floating reed-mat |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins (the Reedmere) |
| **Known to** | Reedfolk, Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary: a child's arm or a dog's paw can be caught, and the fluid burns |

## Appearance

A clump of fen pitchers is a cluster of upright, hollow, horn-shaped leaves, each a pitcher as long as a forearm and as wide as a cup at its mouth, rising out of a low rosette on the moss. They are pale green below and flushed deep red and purple towards the mouth, veined like a hand held to the light, and a hooded lid leans over each mouth to keep the worst of the rain out. The rim is ribbed and slippery and wet with nectar. Each pitcher holds a pool of thin, faintly cloudy fluid. In early summer the clump raises nodding, blood-red flowers on tall stalks. Close to, it smells sweet with a sour edge, like fruit left too long.

## Habitat and Range

They grow only on the open, deep, sour fen of the Reedmere, where the reed thins and the ground is half water, and on the floating mats of reed and moss that drift on its meres. They need sun and poor wet ground and are shaded out where the

reed stands tall. A clump may cover a patch the size of a table and live on the same patch for longer than a Reedfolk house remembers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pitcher lures with colour and nectar. Insects come first, then the frogs and shrews that hunt them, then birds that hunt both. The rim is slick, the inside of the pitcher waxy and lined with downward hairs, and whatever slips in cannot climb out; it drowns in the pool and is slowly digested. A big pitcher may hold the bones of several frogs at once.

## Abilities

Their fluid digests flesh slowly and burns broken skin. They do not move, grip, or reach; everything they catch catches itself.

## Life Cycle

A clump grows from dust-fine seed on wet moss and takes years to raise its first full-sized pitchers. Old pitchers brown and fall over in autumn, and new ones rise from the rosette each spring. A clump may live a century.

## Uses and Dangers

Reedfolk pilots read a fen pitcher clump as a sign of deep, soft ground that will not bear a foot. Herb-wives use the fluid, diluted, on warts and old sores. The danger is small and mostly to the curious: a child who reaches into a pitcher for a trapped bird, or a dog that puts its nose in, comes away stung and blistered, and the ground under a clump is often a sinkhole.

## Lore and Belief

Basin folk say fen pitchers drink the drowned, and that a clump on a mere marks where someone went under; Reedfolk know them for frog-drinkers that grow wherever the fen is deepest, which is where people drown. Children of the Reedmere are told the pitchers keep the songs of the birds they drown, and are warned off them with it.

Smugglers on the Reedmere are said to sink their goods in the deepest pitcher pools, knowing no one wades there willingly.



# Flax and Hemp

**Flax and hemp** are the crops people wear and haul with. Flax gives linen, the cloth of shirts, shifts, sheets, and shrouds; hemp gives rope, sacking, sailcloth, and the coarse cloth of working people. Both are grown on the damp ground of the Confluence Basins and along the Lower Serath, and both need the river twice: to grow, and to rot the stems soft enough to work. They are named together because they are worked together, in the same pools and on the same breaking-floors, and because the gods of the basin are pictured dressed in them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Damp lowland fields and riverside plots |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Humans, Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

**Flax** is slender and upright, waist high, with narrow blue-green leaves set close up a single wiry stem. For a few weeks in early summer a flax field flowers a clear, pale sky-blue, each small five-petalled flower opening in the morning and dropping by afternoon, so that the colour seems to move across the field from day to day. Round seed bolls follow, and the plant dries to a light straw-brown. Its seed is pressed for oil.

**Hemp** is a taller, ranker plant, often head high and more, with a ridged, fibrous stalk and dark green leaves split into long toothed fingers like an open hand. It smells strong and resinous, a smell that clings to hands and clothes, and a hemp field in late summer is dense enough to hide a standing man.

## Habitat and Range

Flax wants deep, moist, weed-free soil and grows best on the basin bottomlands. Hemp is less particular and thrives on the rich ground near villages and on the riverside plots above the flood. Most basin villages grow a strip of each for their own cloth and cord, and the river towns buy more.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Flax is delicate in youth, easily smothered by weeds, and exhausts the ground it grows on, so it does not follow itself on the same field for several years. Hemp is the opposite: it grows so fast and dense that it chokes the weeds out, and farmers sow it on dirty ground to clean it.

## Life Cycle

Both are sown in spring and pulled or cut in late summer. Flax is pulled by the root so that the fibre runs the whole length of the stem; hemp is cut. Then both are **retted**: laid in shallow pools, ditches, or the still margins of a river until the soft parts rot away from the fibre, then dried, beaten on a breaking-floor, and combed. The best fibre goes to the spinner, the coarse tow to sacking and caulking.

## Uses and Dangers

Linen is the cloth of the household and the court: it is worn next to the skin, laid on beds and altars, and a good linen shirt is handed down. Hemp feeds the ropewalks: the long sheds and yards of the river towns, where rope is twisted out along their whole length for towing lines, mooring, rigging, and the haulers' harnesses, and the boatyards that smell of tar and hemp. Gnome harbours of the far side make and export cordage of their own.

Retting stinks. A retting pool fouls the water downstream and kills fish, and towns and villages quarrel over where it may be done. Reedfolk of the Floodkeeper Houses count a fouled channel as a wrong done to the river, and the basin lords mostly agree when the fouled water runs past their own mills. Breaking and combing fill the air with fine dust that settles in the chest.

## Lore and Belief

How a god is dressed tells the basin how to think of them. Anvelle the Harvest-Mother is pictured in robes of woven hemp and linen dyed in earth tones, the clothes of a farmer’s wife on a feast day. Serovan the River-King wears rough-spun linen and leather like a bargeman. Linen dresses fainter gods too: the faded Ithaere the Drowned Mother is remembered in sodden white linen that never dried. Basin weavers say that linen remembers the river it was retted in, and a bride’s linen is retted in her own village’s water.



# Fodder

**Fodder** in the Rimward Basins is whatever green feed the cistern terraces can be made to bear for the herds: a deep-rooted leafy forage cut again and again through the growing months, and coarse terrace grass dried into hay. It grows on the small walled terraces below the larger cisterns, beside hardy grain, on water shares that everyone in the stronghold knows. It is not grown for plenty. It is grown so that a kindred's herds outlast the dry months without stripping the shared pastures to the root.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Small walled terraces below cisterns |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

The leafy forage grows in low, dense clumps a hand or two high, its small rounded leaves set in threes on wiry stems, deep green against the pale stone of the terrace walls. In flower it carries small tight heads of purple or yellow that draw what bees the rim has. Its roots go down far further than the plant stands up, into the cracks of the rock beneath the terrace soil. The terrace grass beside it is taller and tougher, grey-green, cut before it seeds.

Cut fodder is laid to dry on the warm stones and smells sweet within a day; stored hay is stacked in the dry store-chambers dug back into the rim, or roofed with stones against the wind.

## Habitat and Range

Fodder grows only where water can be led to it: the terraced spurs and rock shelves below the strongholds, fed by stone-lined channels from the cisterns. A terrace may be no bigger than a camp ring. Out on the shelves of the High Scars nothing is grown; the herds there live on the thin grass until it gives out (see Grass and Heath).

## Behaviour and Temperament

The forage is patient. Cut, it grows back from the crown within weeks if it is watered; left dry, it sits brown and dormant through a bad season and greens again after the next storm. It holds terrace soil against the wind better than grain does, and a terrace kept under it a few years grows better grain afterwards.

## Life Cycle

The leafy forage lives for several years from one sowing and is cut three or four times in a good season. When it thins, the terrace is turned over to grain for a few years and then sown back to forage. Terrace grass is cut before it seeds and regrows from the root.

## Uses and Dangers

Fodder carries the herds through the dry months, when households and animals draw in to the rims and crowd around the strongholds. It feeds the animals kept close: milk beasts, young stock, the animals a kindred will need for the next escort. Hay is part of the stores a stronghold holds against a run of dry years, and is counted with them at the reserve moots.

Its danger is the water it drinks. Every share of cistern water released to a fodder terrace is a share not kept for people or for an arriving party, and in a dry cycle the question of whether to water the fodder at all is argued in the open, before the people whose water it is. Fresh green forage gorged by a hungry animal can swell its belly fatally, so herders let it wilt before feeding it.

## Lore and Belief

Rimward Orcs reckon a stronghold’s strength in water first and fodder second, and say that a kindred with hay in its chambers "can afford to be patient". A terrace that has been watered out of turn is remembered, like a lie about water, against the line that did it.

Hay is what raiders burn first in a feud between strongholds, and the songs of the Rimward Basins remember the winters after a hay-burning as the cruellest.



# Fold Saffron

**Fold Saffron** is a small purple crocus grown on the warmest terraces of the Leeward Folds for the three red threads in each flower. Dried, the threads colour and scent food and cloth, and a little of it is worth a great deal. It is the Folds' richest small export by counted exchange, and every grain of it is picked by a Halfling hand.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Warm, dry terrace beds |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Halflings |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

The plant is a tuft of narrow grass-like leaves a hand high, rising from a corm the size of a chestnut. In autumn, after the first rain, each corm sends up one to three cups of pale violet petals veined in darker purple, and from the centre hang three long, bright red-orange threads beside the yellow pollen-tips. A bed in flower is a low purple haze along the terrace for a week or two. The fresh flowers smell faintly of honey and hay; the dried threads have a strong, bitter-sweet scent that fills a store-room.

## Habitat and Range

It wants sun, shelter, and dry, well-drained ground, and it is grown on the warm south-facing terraces of the inner folds in small beds, each kept by one household. It is not grown elsewhere on the far side that the Folds know of.

## Life Cycle

It does not set seed. A corm flowers in autumn, grows its leaves through the winter, and in spring makes small daughter corms beside itself and withers. Every few years the beds are lifted in

summer, the corms split and counted, and the best replanted; a bed left too long thins and stops flowering.

## Uses and Dangers

The flowers are picked at dawn on the day they open, and the threads drawn out by hand and dried over a low fire the same day. It takes a whole terrace bed to fill a small pot. Fold households use a pinch for feast bread and preserves and for the yellow of festival cloth, and the rest goes to market at the autumn count, when only what lies beyond the reserve is sold. Gnome traders carry it to the coast. Its only danger is to a household’s name: a family that sells more than its share, or cuts its saffron with dyed thread, hears about it at the next commons.

## Lore and Belief

Picking is shared work, and children are taught to draw the threads before they are trusted with a knife. Halflings say saffron is a crop that cannot be hurried, and use it as a byword for patience and for counting small: "a saffron count" is an exact one. A household’s saffron beds pass down with its terraces, and the corms are counted among the stores in the cistern hall’s reckoning like grain.

Saffron is worth more than silver by weight on the coast, and the Folds' saffron terraces are the first place a thief or a raiding band goes; folds that grow it keep dogs on the terraces at picking time.



# Foxfire

**Foxfire** is the glow of rotting wood: a fungus that runs through fallen timber on the floor of the Elderweald and the Briarreach and, on the darkest nights, makes the wood shine a faint green. It is too dim to read or walk by, which is why scholars do not count it among the glowing fungi that give working light, but every forest child knows it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Rotting deadfall and stumps on the forest floor |
| **Range** | The Elderweald; the Briarreach |
| **Known to** | Elves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

There is almost nothing to see by day: a log gone soft and pale, its wood threaded with fine white strands, sometimes a few small honey-coloured caps on its bark in autumn. At night, away from any fire and with no moon, the rotted wood shows a cold green-white glow, as faint as the afterimage of a candle, in streaks along the grain and in the soft heart of a broken stump. Broken open, a piece glows in the hand for a while and then fades. It smells of damp wood and mushrooms.

## Habitat and Range

It needs fallen wood, shade, and a long wet season, and it is found on the floor of the old forests, thickest in the deep weald where deadfall is never cleared, and in the damp ravines of the Briarreach. It grows above ground only; below, in the Roothollows, the gloam of the living root is the only light.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It glows brightest in the warm, wet end of summer and in autumn, and fades as the wood dries or freezes. A log can shine for several years as the fungus works through it, and then go dark as the wood falls to mould.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives no useful light, and its uses are small: forest folk lay a glowing chip on a path to mark a turn at night, and children carry pieces home. It harms nothing. Its danger is to the lost, who take a glow between the trees for a lamp or a door and walk towards it off the path.

## Lore and Belief

Basin and forest-edge folk call it foxfire and say foxes light it to lead hunters astray. Wood Elves say it is the light of a fallen tree going back to the ground, and do not take it home from a grove; wood that is cleared away, they say, takes its light with it, and the cut-over basin woods have none. Some at the forest edge confuse it with the pale lights said to draw travellers into drift at thin places, the Wayward Lights, which move; foxfire never does.

Poachers and outlaws of the forest edge say foxfire has led more lords' foresters into the bog than any lantern of theirs.



# Fractal Trees

The trees of the Apex, the plane of perfection, are identical fractals. Every tree repeats the same pattern, and every branch repeats the tree. They are the plane's law made into wood: complete, and unable to become anything else.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The geometric landscapes of the Apex |
| **Range** | The Apex |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A trunk rises straight from the smooth ground and divides into equal limbs, each limb into the same number of smaller ones, at the same angle, down to twigs too fine to see, so that the crown is a perfect rounded lattice. Bark and leaf are gold, white, or silver, so saturated they seem to vibrate. Under the plane's even light the trees cast no shadow. They are cool and smooth to the touch, like polished stone, and have no scent. They make no sound in any breeze, and stand in rows and groves spaced as evenly as the trees themselves.

## Habitat and Range

They grow wherever the Apex has land, on its domed hills and beside its mathematically curving rivers. Every grove looks like every other.

## Abilities

Nothing about them can be changed. A blade set to the bark does not cut it; a broken twig is mended before the hand has closed on it, as the plane corrects every change back to its perfect state. They do not grow, shed, flower, or age.

## Uses and Dangers

They offer no wood and no fruit, and harm no one. Their danger, if any, is the plane's: travellers who sit too long admiring a grove are among those who never leave.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' accounts of the Apex are rare, and the trees appear in them as proof of its perfection or of its deadness, depending on who is telling. Mystics who carve fractal branching into shrines say they copy the trees of a higher heaven, and those who have been there say the copies are better, because they have a flaw.



# Fungus Beds

**Fungus** is the staple food of the Roothollows. The Dark Elf houses of the Gloamroot Covenant grow it in **fungus beds** on dead root and washed-down leaf-mould, and where it grows thick of itself, in the caverns called the **fungal darks**, they hold it by chamber-right like water. Dwarven holds grow the same kind of crop in the lower levels and the fungal basins of the deep. It gives no light and needs none.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Underground: dead root, leaf-mould, and damp stone chambers |
| **Range** | The Roothollows, the fungal basins of the Stonewake Deeps, the lower levels of the Ironspine; wild kin on the Elderweald floor |
| **Known to** | Dark Elves; Dwarves; Wood Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A bed is a low, crowded mat across a chamber floor or a slope of dead root, knee-high at its thickest. The fungus grows in clusters of close-packed caps, each from a thumbnail to a spread hand across, on short thick stems that join at the foot. Young caps are the colour of tallow; they darken as they ripen to buff and then to a dull grey-brown, and the undersides are close-ribbed and paler. Old beds put up broad, leathery shelves along the dead root itself.

The flesh is firm and cool and bruises brown where it is handled. A bed smells of wet earth and something like bread, sharpening to sourness when it is overdue for cutting. In the dark it makes no sound; in a still chamber at the right season a fine pale dust of spores settles on everything near it.

## Habitat and Range

The fungus lives where dead root and leaf-mould meet damp and still air: in the lower Roothollows, where the living root above has thinned to dead strands, and above all in the fungal darks. Below the forest, little else grows. In the Stonewake Deeps it is nearly the only crop, grown in fungal basins, and in the Ironspine the holds keep fungal beds in the lower levels beside the barley and roots of the valley terraces. On the floor of the Elderweald wild kinds fruit on fallen wood and the root-mat, and Wood Elf households gather them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A bed feeds on what it stands on, eating dead root and leaf-mould down to a fine black crumb. It wants dark, damp, and still air, and it sulks in a draught. Tending is steady work: keeping water off the bed but the air wet, laying fresh leaf-mould brought down along the root, cutting the ripe caps before they shed, and pulling out any growth of another colour. A bed left alone runs to shelf and spore, and its caps turn tough.

## Life Cycle

A new bed is started with crumbled spawn from an old one, worked into fresh mould on dead root. It fruits within a season and goes on fruiting, flush after flush, as long as there is dead matter under it, slowing as the root is eaten through. A spent bed is turned and fed or given up. Because the fungus lives on dead root, a house whose living root is dying gains bed-ground for a time even as it loses air and bracing (see Living Root).

## Uses and Dangers

The caps are eaten fresh, dried, or pressed into **keeping cakes**, dense dark rounds that last through lean times. Rendered down, the fungus gives the oil that small lamps burn in every Roothollow chamber, with the gloam doing the rest. In the Elderweald the gathered fungus is one of the few things the forest lets go outward, beside nuts, fruit, resin, and medicinal herbs. A practised worker of Spore Cloud can loose a bed's spores in a burst.

The fungus is harmless; the danger is losing it. Beds count in chamber-right like the chambers they lie in, so a house that loses a chamber loses its food with it, and fungal basins in the deep are among the resource pockets fought over and worked under coercion (see Deep World Labour and Coercion).

## Lore and Belief

Dark Elves say a bed knows its house: spawn carried to a stranger's chamber is said to fruit poorly for a year, and a house that gives spawn to a lesser house is understood to be offering more than food. Travellers who eat the dried caps of the forest say they taste of smoke.



# Gallows Root

**Gallows Root** is a low plant whose thick root forks into a shape like a small human body. It grows on trampled, rich ground, and the places it is best known from are the crossroads and gallows sites of Human country, which has given it its name and its reputation. Necromancers buy it, Sanctified clergy burn it, and most people will not touch it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Trampled, enriched ground at crossroads and gallows sites |
| **Range** | The cradle-web: the Confluence Basins, the Headwater Marches, the Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary: the root is a strong poison, and owning it brings suspicion |

## Appearance

Above ground it is a flat rosette of broad, dark, crinkled leaves pressed to the earth, with pale bell-shaped flowers in spring that sit close in the leaves' centre, and in late summer round berries that ripen yellow and smell of overripe apples. The root is the thing: brown-skinned, as long as a forearm, pale and fleshy inside, and forked into two or three legs, often with side-roots like arms, so that a lifted root looks like a mannikin. It smells rank and earthy, and the leaves smell worse when bruised.

## Habitat and Range

It grows where ground has been trodden hard and fed: at crossroads where carts stop and beasts stand, at old gallows, and around hanging-places, middens, and the edges of burial pits. It is scattered across the farmed and travelled country of the cradle-web and is nowhere common.

## Abilities

Every part of it is a poison. A little of the root brings sleep and dulls pain; more brings visions, a racing heart, and raving; more again kills.

## Life Cycle

It is slow and long-lived, growing for many years from one root that thickens and forks further as it ages. It dies back each autumn to the root and rises again each spring.

## Uses and Dangers

Healers who know it give a sliver against pain at the setting of a bone; poisoners know it too. Its greater trade is to the practitioners of Necromancy, who buy whole roots for rites that work on the persistence of body and trace, and pay well for one dug at a gallows. Its danger, beyond the poison, is suspicion: a root found in a house can bring a charge of dealing with the dead, and workers of Sanctified Magic burn any they find, with the ground it came from.

## Lore and Belief

Folk say it springs from the last breath of a hanged man, that it screams when pulled, and that whoever pulls it will die within the year, so a root is dug with a rope tied to a dog. None of this is so; it grows wherever ground is trodden and fed, and gallows ground is merely famous. Necromancers say a gallows root holds something of the death above it and is worth the price; their critics say they only want a root nobody else will sell. A root kept in a box and fed with milk is said to bring luck to a household, which it does not, and to bring the clergy, which it may.

Poisoners prize it above any herb, and a gallows root found in a house after a sudden death has hanged more than one widow, guilty or not.



# Garden Crops

**Garden crops** are what people grow by hand, close to the door: greens, onions and leeks, peas, salad leaves, and the small herbs of the pot. No field is ploughed for them. They grow in plots on the floor of a Halfling fold, in walled terraces between the stone houses of a Gnome harbour, on mud patches of the islands below Lowbank, and in sheltered courts among ruins. They rarely travel and are never counted as wealth, but they are what makes a meal of fish, grain, or stores worth eating, and in a lean season they are often what keeps a household going.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | House plots, walled terrace gardens, island patches, and ruin-courts |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds, the Tidelace Coasts, the Soundchain Roads, the Greyford Reach, the Broken Marches, the Crownboughs, the Briarreach |
| **Known to** | Halflings, Gnomes, Goblins, Elves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

### *Greens*

Leafy greens are the commonest garden crop everywhere: broad, crinkled, dark green or purple-tinged leaves on a thick stem, standing shin to knee high and cut leaf by leaf from autumn through the winter. They grow sweeter after frost. Beside them stand short beds of tender salad leaves for summer and the bitter wild-looking greens that seed themselves along every path.

### *Onions and leeks*

Onions sit half out of the soil in rows, their hollow blue-green leaves flopping as the bulb swells, and are lifted and plaited into strings to hang from rafters. Leeks stand straighter and taller, white at the foot where earth is heaped against them, and

stay in the ground through the winter until wanted. Both leave their smell on the hands of whoever weeds them.

### *Peas and small pulses*

Peas scramble up twigs and string, grey-green, with curling tendrils, white or purple flowers, and short fat pods eaten green in summer or left to dry for the winter pot. The coarser field beans belong to the fields, not the gardens.

### *Pot herbs*

Every garden keeps a corner of pot herbs for flavour and simple remedies. Their uses are described with the herbs.

## Habitat and Range

### *The Halfling folds*

In the Leeward Folds the orchards take the warmer slopes and grain and garden plots the valley floors. Fold gardens are watered in turn from the cisterns like every terrace, and kept close and tidy. Garden food stands beside fruit, grain, and stored goods at every Halfling table.

### *The Gnome terraces*

On the Tidelace Coasts the stone houses of the harbour families climb the cliffs with walled terrace gardens between them, built against the salt wind and filled with soil carried up the stairs. They grow small crops: greens, onions, and peas that ripen in the sea air. The Gnome harbours of the Soundchain Roads keep the same terrace-garden crops where the cliffs allow.

### *The islands below Lowbank*

In the Greyford Reach, the Goblin households of Lowbank grow greens on patches of silt on the river islands, below their platforms. A flood can take a patch and lay down a better one; the households replant without complaint.

### *Ruin-courts and grove-gardens*

In the Broken Marches food comes partly from small plots in sheltered ruin-courts, where old walls keep off the wind and the soil is rubble and ash. Thorn Elves of the Briarreach keep small grove-gardens inside their hedges, and the High Elves of the Crownboughs raise their gardens into the canopy and plant the understorey beneath it. Human villages of the basins keep a plot behind every house.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Garden crops need constant hands: weeding, watering, staking, picking. In return they bear much from little ground, and several of them bear more than once. They are easy prey for slugs, birds, and goats, and much of the stone walling around a garden is meant to keep animals out as well as the wind.

## Life Cycle

Most garden crops live a single season, sown in spring and cleared by autumn. Leeks and winter greens stand through the cold and are cut as needed. A few of each kind are left to flower and set seed, and seed is kept in each household from year to year, swapped between neighbours, and given to a new household as a gift.

## Uses and Dangers

Garden crops are eaten fresh in season and kept where they can be: onions hung, peas dried, greens left standing in the cold. Goblin households

on Lowbank eat island greens with eel and small fish from the side channels and porridge from Highbank grain. Gnome tables set terrace crops beside fish, shellfish, kelp, and seabird eggs. A good Halfling table, generous without being lavish, always has garden food on it.

Their dangers are small. A garden in a ruin-court can grow in soil that is not safe, and salvage households of the Broken Marches learn which courts to plant and which to leave.

## Lore and Belief

Halflings count gardens as household work, not common work. A fold's commons asks what the orchards and the grain terraces will bear, never what a household's garden does, and the garden is the one patch of a fold that no one tallies aloud. Gnomes say a terrace garden that grows well has been sited honestly, out of the wind. Goblins of Lowbank say that the river owes them a patch for every one it takes.

In a siege or a raiding year the gardens are the last food, and many villages remember a winter when the raiders took the stores and the household gardens carried them to spring.



# Glare-Lilies

**Glare-Lilies** grow in broad meadows on the crystalline plains of the Radiance. Each flower gathers the shadowless light of the plane and throws it out again, sharpened, onto whatever stands before it, so that a thing lit by a Glare-Lily is shown in every detail at once. A traveller who looks too long at what the lilies show, or into the lilies themselves, is blinded.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Light-meadows on the crystalline plains |
| **Range** | The Radiance |
| **Danger** | Wary: they blind the long-looking |

## Appearance

A Glare-Lily stands knee- to waist-high on a single pale stem, translucent like glass with a thread of gold inside, with two or three narrow leaves of the same clear stuff. The flower is a deep trumpet of six petals, white shading to gold at the throat, faintly iridescent at the edges, and it shines from within, so that a meadow of them is a field of lamps on a plane that is already too bright. They turn slowly, together, towards whatever moves among them. They make no sound of their own, but a meadow hums faintly when someone near it lies. Their scent is of incense and of rain on hot stone.

## Habitat and Range

They grow in the open light-meadows between the glass towers, rooted in cracks of the crystal ground, and nowhere else known.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A lily turns its throat towards the nearest moving thing and follows it, and the light it throws grows stronger the longer it is held on one subject. Many lilies on one traveller make a glare in which nothing about them, not a stain on the cloth or a mark on the skin, can be hidden or overlooked.

## Abilities

What a Glare-Lily lights is seen whole: every flaw, scar, and hidden pocket shows plainly, and painted or disguised surfaces show what lies under them. The light is too strong for mortal eyes held on it for long, and a stare of a few breaths leaves the eyes dazzled for hours, one of many breaths for days.

## Life Cycle

They seem not to seed or wither. New lilies are said to rise where something was shown in the Radiance that had been hidden a long time, and a meadow is reckoned old by how many there are.

## Uses and Dangers

The Illuminated walk the meadows unharmed and have no use for them; nothing is hidden from them anyway. Travellers who come to the Radiance for a lost thing sometimes walk a meadow to find it, since the lilies show what is on a person that they had forgotten carrying. The danger is blindness, short or long, and the exposure of anything the walker hoped to keep.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say the lilies are the eyes of the plane and that they show the soul, not only the body; what they show is the body and its belongings, unsparingly, and the plane does the rest. A picked lily is said to stay alight on the Material Plane and to make liars confess in its glare. The few who have tried it report that it goes dark within a day, and the confessions, if any, were their own.

Lords have paid delvers fortunes to bring one back to light a traitor’s trial, and the tale is told of the lord who held one up to his own council and found he had no one left to trust.



# Glasscup

**Glasscup** is the one plant a crosser of the Glassbelt is glad to see on the glassed ground. It grows in the cracks of the old scars and holds water in its swollen leaves, and a crosser can cut one for a mouthful when the flasks are low. A second kind, which crossers call **bitter glass**, looks the same and is poison. The Salvage Peoples who cross teach the difference before anything else about the plant.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Cracks in glassed ground and stony desert |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless; the bitter kind Dangerous |

## Appearance

A glasscup is a low rosette, no wider than a cupped pair of hands, of thick, fleshy, blunt leaves packed tight and curving up like the petals of a closed flower. The leaves are grey-green, dusted with a white bloom against the sun, and their tips are clear and glassy, like little windows, so that light passes into the plant from above; that, and the glassed ground it grows in, gave it its name. Cut, a leaf is full of a clear, cool, faintly salty jelly. After the rare rain it sends up a short stalk of small yellow flowers that last a day. Bitter glass is the same in shape and colour; its leaf tips are a shade less clear, and its jelly is cloudy, smells faintly of almonds, and tastes bitter at once.

## Habitat and Range

It grows only where it can root deep in a crack: in the fissured glass of furnace and impact scars, in the joints of stony desert, and along the edges of buried road-lines. Most stands are a few plants in

a crack; a good crack may hold dozens. Bitter glass grows among it, more often near the dead furnace zones.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It lives on almost nothing. Its roots run far down the cracks to damp beneath, its windowed leaves take light without opening to the heat, and in the worst months it shrinks into the crack until only the tips show. It does not grow back quickly once cut, and a stand cut bare by one party may give nothing to the next for years.

## Life Cycle

Seed lies in the cracks for years until rain. A rosette grows slowly, flowers after rain, and can live longer than a Human lifetime, dividing into clumps.

## Uses and Dangers

A single cup gives a mouthful of water and a little food, enough to wet a throat or keep a body going between wells; crossers do not live on it, and the deep-desert circuits of the Edgeway Kindreds cut only one from a stand and leave the rest for whoever comes after. Its jelly soothes sun-cracked lips and burns.

Bitter glass brings vomiting, a racing heart, and cramps within the hour; to a thirsty crosser that is often death. The rule taught is to break a leaf, smell it, touch the jelly to the tongue, and wait, and never to cut in the dark.

## Lore and Belief

Salvagers say glasscup grows where the old fire wept, and that the clear tips are the tears of the glass. Some hold that bitter glass grows only where someone took more than one cup from a stand, and that it is a punishment; that is a teaching story, and a good one. Crossers will not carry glasscup out of the Glassbelt, keeping to the old rule about carrying out what belongs to the scars.

Crossers tell of the thirsty salvager who drank from a bitter stand on a crossing and died before the next well, his pockets full of the relics he had dug from the scars.



# Glowing Fungi

**Glowing fungi** give a weak, cold light of their own. Wild, they are known from two zones of the Iron Backbone: they cling to the moving walls of the Flux Maze and to the walls of the Gravity Well, where they are much of what light there is. In the world they are grown, not found: a nature-worker touches spores to a damp wall and a dim glow spreads. They are a different thing from the food fungus of the fungus beds, which gives no light, and from the gloam of living root, which is the only light the Roothollows make of themselves.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Damp stone in darkness; the walls of two zones of the Iron Backbone |
| **Range** | The Flux Maze; the Gravity Well; caves and tunnels where it is grown |
| **Known to** | Cavers, miners, and nature-workers; visitors to the zones |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

The fungus grows as a thin crust and as clusters of tiny caps no bigger than a fingernail, spread across stone in patches from a palm's width to a wall's length. By lamplight it is a dull greyish white, easy to miss. In the dark it shows its colour: a pale blue-green in most strains, a faint gold in some, never brighter than a few coals, and enough to see a hand or a step by but not a face across a chamber. The light is steady and does not flicker. The fungus has a faint smell of wet stone and mushrooms, and it makes no sound.

In the Flux Maze it is said to grow in ribbons along the seams where the walls part and close. In the Gravity Well it lies flat and dense, pressed to the stone, its caps barely raised.

## Habitat and Range

It needs damp, darkness, and stone or old wood to cling to. Brightness and dryness stunt it, which is why it lasts in deep caves and tunnels and fades near a cave mouth. In the Flux Maze it moves with the walls it grows on, so a patch seen in one corridor may be met again in another. In the Gravity Well, which has no light from above, it clings to the walls, and with the faint glow of the ground itself it is all there is to see by.

On Caeldon no wild stand is widely known; the faint foxfire of rotting deadfall in the old forests is too weak to count as light. The glow met in a mine or a caver's tunnel has nearly always been grown there by someone, and it lasts as long as the damp does.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It spreads slowly across damp stone, feeding on the film of water and whatever is dissolved in it, and it retreats where the stone dries. It does not glow more brightly for being touched or disturbed. Where it grows thickest the stone beneath is soft and stained.

## Abilities

Its one gift is its light: cold, smokeless, and lasting as long as the fungus lives, with no fuel to carry and no flame to fail in a draught. The light is too weak to read small writing by.

## Life Cycle

It spreads by spores too fine to see and by creeping out from its edges. A patch grown by a nature-worker on a suitable wall settles in within days and can last for years; on a dry or sunlit wall it dims and dies within the season. Dead fungus loses its glow first and then flakes away as grey powder.

## Uses and Dangers

Its use is light. The Fungal Lantern of Nature Magic grows it on a damp wall to light a tunnel harmlessly for cavers, fed by moisture, plant matter, and the worker's own reserves, and the same school keeps cultivated spore strains for other ends (see Spore Cloud). In the zones the fungus is the traveller's only steady light, and the danger lies in what it lights: in the Flux Maze a line of glowing fungus is no guide, since the wall it grows on moves.

The fungus itself is harmless.

## Lore and Belief

Little that is said of it in the world is first-hand, and knowledge of the zones is uneven and often wrong (see Knowledge of the Cosmos). Miners say a tunnel where the glow will not take is a tunnel the stone does not want worked, and some believe that a patch carried home from a Rock-Gate cavern will light the way back to it. Visitors to the Maze tell that the fungus marks the paths the Maze has already closed; others say the opposite. None of these has been shown to be so.

Ruin-delvers who follow a glowing seam into the Maze tell of treasure seen by its light and lost when the walls moved, and of companions who walked into the dark beyond the glow and did not answer.



# Gorge Gentian

**Gorge gentian** grows high, above the last terraces of the Headwater Marches and on the flanks of the Ironspine, and its root is the bitterest thing the mountains grow. Healers on both sides of the gates use it for fever and for a stomach that will not take food; the holds brew it into the dark bitters that every Dwarven table keeps.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | High meadows, gorge sides, and stream banks above the valleys |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches and the Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

There are two forms, and the gorges hold both. The tall gentian stands waist-high on a stout stem with broad, ribbed, pale-green leaves in opposite pairs, and in midsummer carries whorls of deep blue, bell-shaped flowers in the leaf joints, each the length of a thumb, darker inside and streaked with green. The low gentian is a mat-forming alpine of the high meadows, a hand high, with small pointed leaves and a single upturned trumpet of startling blue on each stem, so bright against the grass that it seems lit. Both have a thick, yellow-brown, twisted taproot, wrinkled outside and pale yellow within, that smells of earth and tastes bitter for an hour.

## Habitat and Range

It needs cold, open, well-watered ground: high meadows, the sides of the gorges where spray keeps the soil wet, stream banks above the valleys, and the grass ledges of the mountain flank. It does not grow below the foothill woods. Root-diggers go up for it in late summer.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The tall gentian grows slowly and takes many years to flower; the root thickens every year. A dug stand comes back slowly, so families of root-diggers keep their own slopes and take only part of each.

## Life Cycle

The tall gentian takes ten years or more from seed to first flower and can live for half a century. The low gentian flowers within a few years and spreads into mats.

## Uses and Dangers

The root is dug, washed, split, and dried, then steeped in water, ale, or spirit. A cup of the bitter is the mountain answer to fever and to the winter cough, given at the sickbed until the sweat breaks; small doses before a meal wake a failing appetite, and the holds give it to the old and the convalescent. Dwarven brewers steep it in strong spirit with other roots to make the **hold bitters**, a dark, nearly black drink taken in a small cup after meals and before a long climb. Headwater farmers sell the root uphill with their grain. It is not harmful; too much brings only sickness and a sour mouth.

## Lore and Belief

Dwarves say the bitter is the taste of the mountain, and that one who cannot drink it has not earned the climb; a fosterling going up behind a gate is given a cup on arrival. Headwater folk hold that gentian dug in the dark of the moon is strongest. Some believe the blue flowers close before storms; they close in cloud and cold, which comes to the same thing on a mountain.

Root-diggers who work the gorge ledges for the hold healers fall every year, and the Headwater song of the digger who hung from her rope all night above the river with a sack of roots she would not drop is sung to every child who asks to go up.



# Grain

**Grain** is the wealth of the Confluence Basins. On their deep soil a good year feeds far more than the village that grew it, and the surplus becomes bread, porridge, and ale for the corridor towns, the levy on which lords' power rests, the cargo of the Sheaf Road and the Serath barges, and the stores the Headwater towns send up to the Dwarven holds. When basin people say grain without a name they mean the bread wheat of the lowlands, though rye and other grains are sown beside it on poorer ground. The hill valleys grow barley and oats instead. On the far side, the Halfling folds and the Rimward strongholds grow small hardy grains of their own on watered terraces.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Deep lowland fields; walled terraces on the far side |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the corridor towns it feeds; the Leeward Folds and the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans, Reedfolk, Halflings, Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though a failed harvest is the deadliest thing the basins know |

## Appearance

### *Basin wheat*

Basin wheat stands waist high on a jointed golden straw, with long narrow leaves that are blue-green in spring and dry to rustling paper by harvest. Each stalk carries a single close ear, plump and four-sided, beardless or short-bearded, ripening from green through gold to a deep tawny brown. A field near harvest moves in long waves under the wind and makes a dry, continuous hiss, the sound the basin says is the Harvest-Mother's voice. The grain itself is hard, oval, and creased down one side, pale gold to reddish, and threshes clean of its husk.

### *Rye and the poorer grains*

On sandy rises and tired ground farmers sow rye, taller than wheat, with a thin bearded ear and a grey-green bloom on the stalk, and dark heavy bread to show for it.

### *The far-side terrace grains*

The grain of the Leeward Folds grows on the valley floors below the orchards, short and stiff-strawed, sown thick and reaped by hand. Below the cisterns of the Rimward Basins the hardy grain is shorter still, a tough, small-eared grain that ripens on little water and is cut green-gold before the dust storms, grown beside fodder on strict water shares.

## Habitat and Range

Basin wheat grows across the broad valleys of the Basins, on fields running down from the village rises towards the water. Most villages keep a granary at their centre with the threshing floor beside it, and the great march-towns, Sheafmeet above all, with its three mills and a granary larger than some villages, are where the harvest is reckoned, sold, and shipped. It goes downstream by barge at harvest to the Lower Serath, which eats the Basins' grain, and up the Sheaf Road to the Headwater Marches and the holds of the Ironspine. Stored grain goes out from the Leeward Folds only from what lies beyond the counted reserve, to the Gnome harbours, the Rimward strongholds, and the escort trade of the High Scars.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Wheat is demanding. It wants deep soil, steady rain in spring, and dry heat at harvest, and it gives most on ground that has rested. Sown again and again on the same field, it tires the soil: yields fall, the ears come thin, and the field fills with weeds and blight. Basin custom answers with the fallow year, the rest-year that the farmers who keep the Harvest-Mother hold to. The second harvest that corridor demand forces on basin fields is that tiring made policy, and the failing districts show it.

## Life Cycle

Basin wheat is sown once the spring rise falls back from the fields, weeded through the summer, and reaped in late summer with sickles, bound in sheaves, stooked in the field to dry, and carted to the threshing floor. Threshing with flails and winnowing in the wind run into the autumn. Seed for next year is kept back first, before the lord's share is counted, and farmers prove after a hard winter which of their seed still lives.

## Uses and Dangers

Grain is bread, porridge, and ale: the staple of Humans across the river country, and of most of the corridor. It is also money. Lords hold land and levy a share of every harvest, counted on the same threshing floor as the village store, which is where most basin quarrels start. The corridor's appetite outruns what the fields can safely give, and lords sell to the highest buyer. A Headwater town that has sworn grain to its hold in the hold's oath-yard can be ruined by a short basin harvest.

Its dangers are the dangers of stores and of hunger. Rats and mould take a granary from inside; fire takes it whole. Warders put the Pest Bar on grain stores to keep the rats out through the winter, Nature Magic wakes a seed in the palm to show whether a store is still viable, and merchant houses buy and sell on the strength of an augur's auspice. A failed harvest means hunger before spring, and the basin's oldest tale is of the winter when half the villages starved.

## Lore and Belief

Anvelle the Harvest-Mother is the grain's god. Her symbol is a sheaf of golden wheat bound with a ribbon of living green vine, her hair is ripening wheat, and at the **Festival of the First Sheaf**, at the beginning of harvest, the first stalk of wheat is cut and offered to her in every village that keeps her; if the offering is sincere, she will see the year's harvest through. Her farmers read crops that wither overnight as her warning against the second harvest, and in some of the oldest basin fields the wheat grows in patterns that form faces and symbols, which locals call her signs. The Starving Winter, when the people refused to rest the land and she withdrew her blessing, is told more often wherever levies rise.

On the far side, Tamsel the Season-Weaver wears summer grain in their hair, and Halflings name grain beside fruit among what a fold must hold back.

A granary is the first thing raiders burn and the last thing a besieged town eats, and the songs of the Basins remember the famine years after a war more bitterly than the war.



# Grain Spur

**Grain Spur** is the fungus that takes the ears of grain when rain and cold come while the grain is in flower. In place of a kernel it grows a hard, dark spur, which is threshed and milled with the good grain, and the bread made from it is Burning Bread. Farmers know the spur well as a blight of wet years. Almost nobody knows that it is the cause of the burning.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Ears of grain in wet, cold flowering seasons |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins; the Headwater Marches; wherever rye and barley are grown |
| **Known to** | Humans, Halflings |
| **Danger** | Deadly, in bread |

## Appearance

A spur sits in the ear where a grain should be: longer than the kernel, often twice its length, slightly curved like a cock's spur, hard, and purple-black outside, pale grey-white when broken. An ear may carry one spur or several. Earlier in the season, while the grain flowers, the infected flowers weep a sticky, sweet yellowish drop that draws flies. Milled, the spurs darken the flour a little and give a faint musty smell; baked, they vanish into the loaf.

## Habitat and Range

It comes in wet, cold years when grain flowers late, worst on rye and barley and on tired ground, rarely on basin wheat. Fields along damp margins and field-edge grasses carry it from year to year. It is known wherever grain is grown in the cradle-web, and best known in the poorer fields of the Confluence Basins and the terraces of the Headwater Marches.

## Life Cycle

Spurs that fall to the ground lie through the winter and in spring put up tiny stalked heads that loose spores as the grain flowers. The sweet drop spreads it from flower to flower by insects and rain. A spur sown with the seed grain starts the next year’s blight in the field itself.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing, and in bread it is deadly. Eaten over weeks it brings the burning of hands and feet, the dying of fingers and toes, the crawling skin, fits, and visions that Burning Bread sets out, and it falls hardest on the poor, who eat the darkest bread and the last of a bad harvest. Beasts fed the threshing tailings sicken too.

## Lore and Belief

Basin farmers call a spurred ear a "black tooth" and say a wet summer grows them; careful millers and Halfling households sift the dark grains from seed and flour out of long habit, for cleanliness, and so prevent more burning than any healer cures without knowing it. Because a whole village shares one harvest and one mill, the burning seems to fall on a place, and it is blamed on bad air, a curse, a god’s anger, or a neighbour. Nobody in the medieval present ties the sickness to the spur.

In a burning year the fear turns on people: villages have stoned a hedge-witch or burned a stranger’s house for the curse, and the songs of such a year are dark ones.



# Grass and Heath

**Grass and heath** cover most of the open country of Caeldon that no one ploughs. To the herding peoples they are the land's real harvest: the grass the flocks eat is what makes a meadow, a shelf, or a slope worth holding, and who may graze where is settled by custom, rights, and pact. The grass differs as the country does, from the lush wet meadows of the basin villages to the thin, wind-cut tufts of the Windscar shelves, and where land has been left alone long enough, grass gives way to heath.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Open country: meadows, pasture slopes, upland shelves, and abandoned terraces |
| **Range** | widespread; notably the High Scars, the Rimward Basins, the Witnessfields, the Confluence Basins, the Headwater Marches, the Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Orcs, Humans, Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though dry grass burns fast |

## Appearance

### *Meadow grass*

The wet meadows of the Confluence Basins grow thick, soft, knee-high grass, bright green after the spring rise and dotted with flowers, sedges, and rushes where the water lies longest. It smells sweet when cut and sour where it is trodden into mud.

### *Mountain pasture*

On the summer slopes of the Headwater Marches and the sheltered valleys of the Ironspine, the grass is short and fine, cropped close by sheep and cattle, studded with small hard flowers and broken by stone. It is green for a few months and buried under snow for the rest.

### *Shelf grass*

The thin grass of the High Scars grows in tough grey-green tufts no higher than a hand, wiry, rough-edged, rooted in cracks and pockets of dust between bare stone. The wind combs it flat. It goes straw-coloured early in the year and stays alive under that colour far longer than it looks.

### *The flood fringe*

In a good year the Long Pan of the Rimward Basins floods ankle-deep and grows a short-lived green fringe: fine, fast grass and low herbs that spring up within days of the water and brown within weeks.

### *Heath*

Heath is low, woody, and tangled, knee-high at most: tough evergreen shrublets with tiny needle-like leaves, purple and pink-flowered in late summer, mixed with coarse grass, bracken, and moss. It grows on poor, acid, long-neglected ground and turns a dull brown-purple in winter. The terraces of the Witnessfields have long gone to grass, heath, and thorn.

## Habitat and Range

Grass grows nearly everywhere that has soil and light and is not tilled or wooded. Heath takes over abandoned or worn-out uplands. The two meet on the empty Witnessfields, where the rows of inscribed stones run across heath as far as can be seen and basin herders turn their flocks back at the Grey Line.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Grass is resilient if it is left time to recover: grazed down, it regrows from the root. Grazed too hard or too long, it dies back, and on the Windscar shelves bare ground stays bare for years. The High-Scar kindreds graze the shelves until the grass gives out and then move on before the ground is spent. Heath creeps rather than spreads and is slow to give back ground once it holds it.

## Life Cycle

Most grass lives on from year to year, regrowing from the root after each grazing and each winter, and flowers in a few weeks of early summer. The shelf grass of the Windscar flowers only after a storm and seeds into cracks in the stone. The flood fringe of the Long Pan lives a few weeks, from seed to seed. Heath lives for decades, grows woody and leggy with age, and is renewed by cutting or burning.

## Uses and Dangers

Grass feeds the herds that feed almost every people: sheep and cattle in the hills, the herds of the Orc kindreds on the far side, the livestock grazed in common on basin wet meadows. Cut and dried, it is hay. Heath gives rough grazing, fuel, bedding, and thatch, and its flowers feed bees.

The dangers lie in its scarcity and in fire. On the far side water-and-pasture rights are negotiated between kindreds and held under the Windscar Pacts, and pasture is one of the things raids are made over. For a few weeks after a good flood the Long Pan's fringe draws every herd within reach and many kindreds camp side by side at Shortgreen. Dry grass catches fire easily, and a grass fire on the open shelves runs before the wind faster than a person can.

## Lore and Belief

Orc kindreds speak of grass as something lent, not owned: the shelf lends it, and a kindred that strips it has borrowed what it cannot repay. Children of a camp-ring such as Thingrass learn which shelves are resting by the colour of the tufts. Basin herders say heath grows where an oath has been

kept too long, a half-joke about the Witnessfields that few of them would test by crossing the markers.



# Great Trees and Groves

The **great trees** are the old trees of the Elven forest world. In the Elderweald they have never been cut, and the Wood Elves live among them and speak of them as kin. In the Crownboughs the High Elves have bent and braided them over generations into halls, galleries, boughways, and gates. A **grove** is a stand of such trees with a household or a rite bound to it. The peoples tell them apart by place and use, not by species.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Temperate old-growth forest and cultivated canopy |
| **Range** | The Elderweald; the Crownboughs and their temple-gardens; sacred groves elsewhere |
| **Known to** | Wood Elves; High Elves; Thorn Elves; Humans and Dwarves at the forest edges |
| **Danger** | Harmless, except when a great tree or a heavy limb falls |

## Appearance

### *The Old Stands of the Elderweald*

The deep-weald tree is broad before it is tall. Its trunk is so wide at the foot that a household can live inside one, and some do, in hollowed boles that are still alive. The bark is dark grey-brown, deeply furrowed and soft with moss low down; the roots spread in buttresses and then sink into the root-mat of living root, leaf-mould, and moss that floors the forest. The crowns are broad-leaved and close completely overhead, so the floor stays dim and cool through summer and light comes down in coins and threads. The leaves turn and fall in the forest's autumn. A stand smells of wet bark and leaf-mould, and in a wind its sound is a slow creak rather than a rush.

### *The Trained Trees of the Crownboughs*

The Crownbough great trees are of the same old stock, but nothing large about them has been left to grow as it pleased. Limbs are bent, braided, and

grafted into roofs, walls, stepped terraces, and walkways well above the floor, until a single tree, or several grown together, holds a hall of five storeys. Living wood is trained into doorposts, lintels, and the leaves of gates; the gate of the Verge Stair stands between two such trees and moves in wind as they do. Below them, the understorey is cleared and planted, and its smaller growth is trained into the low halls of the Understorey Courts.

### *Family Groves and Temple-Gardens*

A High Elf **family grove** is a stand near a house's hall, tended as closely as a child, where the house's dead have been returned. Its trees are less trained than the hall and older-looking for it. A **temple-garden** of the Ordered Bough is a grove, hall, and terrace shaped together, where one tender's work is continued by the next and no form is ever called finished. The oldest is the Unfinished Garden at Amberbough, among halls braided from trees older than the courts, and whether it may be declared finished is argued there now.

### *Other Groves*

Thorn Elves of the Briarreach keep small grove-gardens inside their thorn-hedged clearings, in a forest that keeps breaking and holds few great trees. Elsewhere, sacred groves stand by springs and old wells, and the peoples reach the Truthwell from them as from wells and springs. One tree is named by kind: the reading stand of the Keeper of Scrolls is carved from an ancient oak.

## Habitat and Range

The great trees need deep, wet ground: the Elderweald's sponge of root and springs, and the outward side of the same forest world, climbing towards the Ironspine, where the trained trees stand. Outside the Elven heartlands no great stand is told of, though single old trees and sacred groves are kept wherever the peoples keep them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A great tree grows slowly and keeps growing. Trained growth does not stay trained: a boughway left alone for a few seasons begins to sag, and a hall closes its own doorways with new wood. Roots go where they will; at the Verge Stair they have spread across the top flight until the Dwarven **Root Course** lies half under root and works loose at the joints.

## Abilities

Old, deep-rooted groves answer Nature Magic far better than young growth. A warden reading damage and regrowth can learn from an old grove where loggers entered after the trails have healed, and a grove can be woken to shift, block, and grasp in defence of a shrine, or bound into a long covenant that hides and feeds those within it (see Living Grove and Heartwood Sanctuary).

## Life Cycle

No grove counts a great tree's years. A grove's oldest stand can predate the Rootcrown Concord itself, renewing from its own root and seed as single trees go. A great tree comes down rarely, and when it does it can crush a dwelling, dam a stream, and flood a string of hollows in a night, and its fallen trunk feeds the root-mat for generations. The Crownboughs raise new trees from seedlings and **grafts**, and a graft can fail: one given to a basin lord has died in basin soil.

## Uses and Dangers

The great trees give shelter above all: grove dwellings, root-holds, trained halls, and the roads of the canopy. In the Elderweald wood comes only

from what has fallen, and seasoned deadwood is traded outward, but cut timber is never sold. The Crownboughs send shaped wood, grafts, and seedlings outward, always as gifts and never for sale; a sapling grafted from a house's own family grove is the highest gift a house can give, and a young High Elf is presented at court carrying a bough or sapling trained from it.

The dangers are falls. Limbs grown heavy with building come down in high wind, storm seasons strip the outer walks and drop dead wood on the terraces below, and a slip from a garden-walk is the ordinary death of the careless.

## Lore and Belief

To the Wood Elves the trees are kin before they are shelter. Ground that holds a household's dead among the grove's trees is never sold and cannot be cleared, and cutting a living tree is a wrong against kin; groves have driven out those who did it, and hunted the Human woodcutters who tried. The oldest living trees of the deep weald are thousands of years old, and the stands they grow in are older than any count; Wood Elf telling has it that the eldest trees remember the first households that came under them. A child is expected to show in its own season what it is, as a sapling shows in time what kind of tree it is. The High Elves argue over the same image with a pruning knife: whether it tends a sapling towards its own shape or cuts it towards a shape decided in advance.



# Grey Poppy

The **grey poppy** is the healer's sleep. Its seed heads, scored, weep a milk that dries to a dark, bitter gum, and the gum takes away pain. Corridor healers of the Lower Serath give it to the injured and the dying, and every household in the Leeward Folds keeps a measured jar of it among the stores and counts it at the autumn count like grain. Taken too often, it becomes a need.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Field margins, garden plots, and warm terraces |
| **Range** | The Lower Serath and the Leeward Folds |
| **Known to** | Humans, Halflings |
| **Danger** | Wary: sleep, and the habit of it |

## Appearance

The plant stands waist-high on a smooth stem, its leaves broad, wavy-edged, and grey-green with a waxy bloom that rubs off on the fingers, which gives the plant its name. In early summer it opens large, loose, four-petalled flowers, pale lilac or dull white, often with a dark purple blotch at the base, that drop their petals in a day. The seed head that follows is a smooth, round, blue-grey capsule the size of a walnut, crowned with a flat star-shaped lid. Scored with a blade in the evening, it bleeds white milk that by morning has darkened to brown beads. The plant smells faintly rank; the dried gum smells heavy and earthy.

## Habitat and Range

It is grown, not wild: in garden plots along the corridor, on the higher field margins of the Lower Serath's towns, and in small beds on the warm terraces of the Folds. Escapes grow in waste ground near towns and come up where the soil has been disturbed.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An annual, sown in autumn or spring, it needs warmth and dry weather when the heads swell; a wet summer gives little milk. Its seed is shaken out of the dry capsule like pepper from a pot.

## Life Cycle

It flowers in early summer, is scored in the week after the petals fall, and dies with the summer. The seed keeps for years.

## Uses and Dangers

The gum, given in a little wine or water or rolled into a pill, dulls pain, eases a racking cough and a running flux, and brings heavy, dreamless sleep. Corridor healers use it for broken bones, after surgery, and above all for the dying, whose last weeks it makes bearable. A Fold household keeps its jar on the counted shelves and knows to a pill how much it holds. The ripe seed has no gum in it and goes on bread and into cakes.

It is dangerous in two ways. A strong dose slows the breath until it stops, and children and small bodies need far less. And it is a habit: the injured and the sad who take it daily come to need it, grow thin and dull, and suffer when it is withdrawn. Both the corridor and the Folds know the habit and keep the gum under a household's or a healer's hand.

## Lore and Belief

Serathic folk call it **the river's sleep** and put a poppy head on the grave of one who died in pain. The Folds say a jar that empties faster than the count is a household with a trouble it has not declared, and a neighbour who notices says so at the commons, gently. Some believe that those who die under the poppy pass their threshold more easily; others that they wander. Both are said at every deathbed where it is given.

Poppy-sellers on the river follow the sellsword companies, and a camp's surgeon who runs short of the river's sleep after a battle is the most hated man in it.



# Groveknot

**Groveknot** is an evergreen that roots in the living wood of the great trees and feeds on their sap. One clump hardly matters to a tree that has stood for centuries; a crown full of it weakens the tree and kills limbs. In the Crownboughs the shapers cut it out of trained boughs as a matter of course. In the Elderweald the Wood Elves will not cut a living thing from a living tree, and the two peoples have argued it for as long as either remembers.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The branches of great trees |
| **Range** | The Elderweald and the Crownboughs |
| **Known to** | Elves |
| **Danger** | Wary, to the host tree |

## Appearance

Groveknot grows as round, dense balls of forked green stems, from the size of a head to the size of a cart wheel, hanging from the high branches. Its leaves are small, thick, and leathery, yellow-green, in pairs at every fork. In winter, when the great trees are bare, the balls stand out dark green against the grey crowns, and it bears clusters of translucent white berries full of a sticky, glue-like pulp. Where it roots, the branch swells into a burred, knotted lump of wood, the knot that gives it its name, and beyond a large knot the limb often thins and dies.

## Habitat and Range

It lives on the old broad-leaved trees of the forest world, high in the crowns where birds rest, in both the uncut stands of the Elderweald and the trained trees of the Crownboughs. It is commonest on old, open-crowned trees and at sunny edges and clearings, rarer in the deepest shade.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Birds eat the berries and wipe the sticky seeds off their bills onto branches, where they root into the bark. A tree that carries one clump soon carries many. Groveknot takes water and sap but makes some of its own food in its green leaves, so it rarely kills a tree outright; it weakens it, and a weak tree loses limbs in the storms.

## Life Cycle

A seedling takes years to show, then grows slowly into a ball that may live as long as its branch. Cut back, it regrows from the knot; only cutting the limb below the knot removes it.

## Uses and Dangers

In the Crownboughs it is a pest of the halls: a knotted bough cannot be trained, a limb weakened by it can drop a gallery in a storm, and tending a hall includes cutting out every clump within reach and cutting below the knot. Shapers burn what they cut. The Wood Elves let it live and watch the trees it is on; a grove may prop a laden limb, or clear the ground beneath it, but it does not cut. The berries are poisonous to people, though birds thrive on them, and the leaves are a winter fodder for deer.

## Lore and Belief

The argument is the forests' oldest in miniature. High Elves say a tender who will not prune is no tender, and point to the Elderweald’s broken limbs; Wood Elves say a tree that carries another life is doing what trees do, and that the Crownbough halls are not trees any more but houses. Wood Elves count groveknot as the tree’s guest, and a household under a laden tree speaks of having guests above. High Elf children are told that the knots are a tree’s grudges, and that a house that cannot cut its own grudges will be brought down by them.



# Hall Canker

**Hall Canker** is a fungus that enters the living boughs of the Crownboughs through the cuts of pruning and training and kills them from the wound outwards. Because the halls are grown into one another and the boughways run from house to house, a canker in one hall can reach the next, and every outbreak is a quarrel about whose knife let it in.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Pruned and trained living boughs |
| **Range** | The Crownboughs |
| **Known to** | Elves (High Elves) |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to halls and boughways |

## Appearance

It begins as a sunken, darker patch of bark around an old cut, sometimes weeping a thin amber sap that dries in beads. Over a season or two the patch spreads into a long lens-shaped wound ringed with ridges of swollen bark, as the bough tries to grow over it and fails, and small orange-red pustules break through the dead bark in wet weather. Beyond the canker the bough's leaves turn yellow early and hang on dead into winter. A cankered bough sounds hollow under a knuckle and smells sour where the bark has split.

## Habitat and Range

It lives in the trained great trees of the courts: walkway boughs, braided hall walls, and the bent galleries of the shaped canopy, wherever living wood has been cut and bound. The untouched great trees of the deep groves rarely take it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Its spores ride the rain and the knife. A cut made late in the season, when the bough is slow to close it, lets it in; a blade carried from a cankered hall to a clean one carries it along. Once in, it creeps

along the bough's living layer, and where shaped boughs have been grafted and braided together it crosses into the next tree.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing. A bough it girdles dies beyond the wound, and in the Crownboughs that means a walkway that sags, a wall that opens, a terrace that becomes unsafe long before it looks it. Tenders cut cankers out to clean wood and seal the wound, burn the cut wood, and clean their knives between halls, and a house with a bad outbreak may have to cut away growth that took generations to shape.

## Lore and Belief

Tenders blame late cutting, and they are right. The court-minded blame the neighbouring house, whose shaping crowded the bough or whose tenders carried the knife. A boughway belongs to the house whose growth carries it, so a canker that crosses one is settled between the houses, by the stronger house's word or by feud, and the oldest feuds between houses are said to have begun at a single cankered junction. Some tenders hold that a house that shapes in haste invites the canker; the houses that shape in haste reply that tenders say so of everything.



# Heart-Leaf

**Heart-leaf** is the healer's herb for a heart that is failing, and one of the plainest lessons in the world about dose. The right leaf, dried and measured, steadies a weak and racing heart and lets the swollen legs of the heart-sick go down. A little more stops the heart. Its poisoning, one of the three great hedge poisonings, is told under Poison Herbs.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Glades, clearings, and wood edges |
| **Range** | The Elderweald and the Crownboughs, and in healers' gardens beyond |
| **Known to** | Elves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous; a medicine for failing hearts |

## Appearance

In its first year heart-leaf is a flat rosette of soft, wrinkled, grey-green leaves, downy on both sides and as long as a hand, lying on the ground. In its second it sends up a single tall spire, waist- to shoulder-high, hung along one side with a row of drooping, finger-long, tubular bells. The bells are purple-pink, sometimes white, and inside each the lower lip is spotted with dark purple rings edged in white, like a trail of small eyes leading in. Bees crawl right inside them. The leaves smell of nothing much and taste bitter at once.

## Habitat and Range

It grows in light, acid, open ground at the edges of the woods: glades, clearings made by a great fall, cut banks and paths in the Elderweald and the Crownboughs, and on burned ground anywhere in the cradle-web. Healers grow it in their gardens, and from there it seeds into hedge-foot and waste ground.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It takes new light ground quickly and gives it up within a few years as other growth closes over it, so it follows clearings around a forest. Seed lies in the soil for years until the ground opens again.

## Life Cycle

It lives two years, a rosette the first and a flowering spire the second, then dies after shedding a dust of tiny seeds. Some plants linger a third year.

## Uses and Dangers

Healers pick the leaves in the second year before the flowers open, dry them in the shade, and give them powdered by weight, a little each day, to the old whose hearts are failing. A healer who uses heart-leaf weighs every dose and writes it down. Healers of Vital Magic hold a heart failing from too much of it through the night with Organ Steady. Its danger is that the line between the healing and the killing dose is narrow and differs between peoples and bodies, so the same leaf that steadies a grown Human can stop a Halfling's heart. Poisoners know it as well as healers do (see Made Poisons), and a death by it looks like the heart giving out at last.

## Lore and Belief

Elves call the spotted bells **the watching flowers** and say they mark ground where the forest is keeping count. Basin folk say the spots are the finger-marks of those it killed, and children are told never to put a finger into a bell. Some healers believe the plant gathered by moonlight heals and the plant gathered by day kills, and so gather it at night; the dose decides, not the moon.

Poisoners know it as well as healers do, and the tale of the lord's heir who died of "a failing heart" at twenty is told wherever heart-leaf grows in a healer's garden.



# Hemlock

**Hemlock** is the commonest killer among the plants of the basin ditches. It belongs to the **spotted umbels** that look like the wild parsleys and carrots foragers gather, and every spring in the Confluence Basins someone gathers it for the pot. What it does to the eater is told under Poison Herbs.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Ditches, damp field edges, river banks, and waste ground |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Humans, Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Deadly |

## Appearance

In its first year hemlock is a low clump of fine, lacy, fern-like leaves, bright green and glossy, very like parsley or the young leaves of wild carrot. In its second year it shoots up fast, to head height or higher, on a smooth, hollow, pale-green stem blotched and streaked with dull purple-red, as if bruised, and dusted with a white bloom. At the top it spreads flat, lacy umbrellas of tiny white flowers. The whole plant, bruised, gives off a rank smell like mice, and that smell is the surest way to know it; a forager who does not stop to smell is the one who is poisoned.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on damp, rich, disturbed ground: ditch sides, the wet edges of fields and meadows, river banks, middens, and waste ground near villages, in the Basins and down the flood-ground of the Lower Serath. It is thickest where the soil has been turned and left.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It grows fast and seeds heavily, and a ditch cleared one year is full again the next. The danger is in spring, when its leaves stand among the pot-herbs, and in a lean spring, when cattle and sheep graze the ditches.

## Life Cycle

A two-year plant: a leafy rosette the first year, a tall flowering stem the second, then death after seeding. The seed lies in the soil for years.

## Uses and Dangers

Its only use is as poison, and in the hands of a few healers, in tiny measure, as a calming draught for spasms and fits, given so rarely that most healers will not risk it. Every part kills, the seed and root most. Its poison weakens from the feet upward while the mind stays clear, until the breath fails. Livestock that graze it in a lean spring die the same way.

Herders clear it from ditches before turning stock out, and mothers teach children to smell a plant before they pick it.

## Lore and Belief

Herb-wives say the purple spots on the stem are blood spilt where it grows, and that hemlock follows a murder; it follows damp ground and middens. Basin folk call it **mouse-weed** and **the dead man's parsley**. In some villages a hemlock death in spring is held to be a judgement on the house that let the ditch go uncleared, and the lord's reeve is asked about it.

Poisoners in the basin towns buy hemlock by the bundle from the ditch-gatherers, and the gallows songs of the river towns have more than one wife in them who fed it to a husband in his broth.



# Herbs

**Herbs** are the plants the peoples take for healing, seasoning, and scent rather than for bulk. They grow wild nearly everywhere and are grown in beds and gardens wherever people settle. Herbs carry a lifeforce pattern of their own, so medicinal herbs really do restore strength, and the same herb acts differently on different peoples (see Plant and Animal Lifeforce). The Elven forests are their richest source, and medicinal herbs are among the few things the Elderweald and the Briarreach send outward.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Forest floor, thicket, field edge, and garden bed |
| **Range** | Everywhere the peoples live; gathered above all in the Elderweald and the Briarreach, grown in the Crownboughs |
| **Known to** | Every people; Wood Elves, Thorn Elves, and High Elves above all |
| **Danger** | Harmless as a rule; a strong dose, a forced brew, or the wrong herb for a people can sicken |

## Appearance

No people names its herbs as one kind; they are many small plants known by use, and the kinds most often met are these:

- **Low leaf-herbs** of the forest floor and garden bed: shin-high, soft-stemmed, with small toothed or downy leaves in greys and greens, and tight heads of white, yellow, or violet flowers in early summer. Bruised, they smell sharp, bitter, or sweet, and that smell is how most are known.
- **Thicket herbs** of the Briarreach margins: woodier and lower, rooting in thin soil under thorn, with narrow leaves and a resinous smell.

- **Fever-bark**: not a plant of the bed but the inner bark of a tree, cut in strips from the living wood and dried to reddish brown, intensely bitter.
- **Roots and seeds**: pale, knotted roots and small hard seeds, kept whole and ground when needed.

Dried, most herbs turn the colour of hay or old leaves. Hung in bundles from rafters or stored in sacks and jars, they give a room the dry, dusty-sweet smell that the peoples know as the smell of healers, shrines, and grandmothers.

## Habitat and Range

Wild herbs grow in clearings, along streams, at the forest edge, and in thicket. In the Elderweald households gather them with nuts, fruit, fungus, and roots as medicinal growth the forest lets go. In the Briarreach the Thorn Elves gather them from their own woods and small grove-gardens. In the Crownboughs they are grown: herb beds lie between the orchard rows of the cleared understorey, along the swept road to the Understorey Courts, and in the canopy gardens. Rare kinds are sought further off, in the Verdant Expanse and the Drowning Garden, at a cost.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Most herbs are quick, short-lived plants that seed freely and come back each year from root or seed. Beds want weeding and light; wild stands want gathering in measure, because a stand stripped bare does not come back the next year. Heavy drawing on plant life thins them: a village that heals its sick all winter may find its herb beds poor in spring.

## Abilities

An herb's virtue is real. Plant lifeforce is diffuse, stable, and gentle, suited to slow recovery and safe for repeated small doses. Healers of Nature Magic draw it forward: Herbal Purge readies fever-bark within the hour instead of over days, though overused it strengthens toxins as well. Herbs are among the living sources a caster may draw on (see Sources of Power), and an herb or ash blend masks scent against hounds.

## Life Cycle

Leaf-herbs sprout in spring, flower in early summer, and are cut before or at flowering, when their smell is strongest; seed and root are taken in autumn. Most die back in winter, and the perennial kinds come again from the root. Bark is cut from living trees in strips small enough for the tree to heal.

## Uses and Dangers

Herbs are the first medicine of every people: teas, tonics, poultices, and brews for fever, wounds, sleep, and the bowels. They season food and sweeten rooms. They are traded far: Elderweald medicinal herbs go out to the edge settlements, the Briarreach sends them out with thornwood, bark, resin, and dyes, and a trader may camp a whole season at the Waitfield of the Thornbound Circles for the right to buy them.

The dangers are dose and kind. A brew that strengthens one people may do little or harm to another, a forced preparation strengthens its poison with its virtue, and some herbs kept by poisoners look much like those kept by healers.

## Lore and Belief

The smell of dried herbs belongs to the gods of care, death, and memory. Ghessa the Hearth-Mother smells of woodsmoke, camp bread, and dried herbs; where Ennor the Grave-Watcher passes the air smells of damp earth and dried herbs, and where the Ancestor-Warden moves it smells of old dust and dried herbs. Many households hang a bundle at a deathbed or over a door

for that reason. Folk healers hold that an herb gathered by the wrong hand or at the wrong season loses its virtue; the virtue is real, the rule is custom.

Herb-hunters who go for the rare kinds into the Verdant Expanse or the Drowning Garden are a known and short-lived trade; a healer's shelf with a jar from the Expanse on it is a shelf someone died to fill.



# Hoodwort

**Hoodwort** is the most beautiful poison of the mountains. Its tall spikes of blue hooded flowers stand along the streams of the Headwater Marches, and its root is among the deadliest things that grow. Shepherds bait wolves with it, poisoners buy it, and the healers of the Ironspine Holds use it, very carefully, to numb pain.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Mountain meadows, stream sides, and damp gorge ledges |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches and the Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Humans, Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Deadly |

## Appearance

It stands waist- to chest-high on a stiff, leafy stem. The leaves are dark, glossy green, deeply cut into five or seven fingered lobes like a crow's foot. In late summer the stem ends in a dense spike of deep violet-blue flowers, each shaped like a monk's hood or a helmet with the visor down, the hood arching over the rest. The root is a dark, fleshy, tapering tuber, often paired, a little like a small turnip or a parsnip, with a fresh one budding beside the old. The plant has little smell; a cut root smells earthy and faintly of radish.

## Habitat and Range

It grows in damp, rich, shaded ground: stream sides and the wet foot of slopes in the high valleys, gorge ledges kept wet by spray, and the mountain meadows just below the gentian of the Ironspine. It is common enough that every Headwater child knows it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A long-lived plant that comes back from its root each spring. Grazing beasts mostly leave it, and those that do not, die.

## Life Cycle

It flowers each summer from its third or fourth year and renews its tuber every year, the old one withering as the new swells.

## Uses and Dangers

Every part kills, the root most. A little on the skin numbs and tingles, and a little more eaten brings a burning and then a numbness of the mouth and face, vomiting, a cold creeping in the limbs, and a heart that stumbles and stops, often within hours and with the mind clear to the end. Foragers have died of mistaking the root for a turnip or a wild parsnip, and gardeners of handling it with cut hands.

Headwater shepherds rub the root into meat and leave it for the wolves that come down to the folds in a hard winter. Poisoners prize it (see Made Poisons). Hold healers make a salve of a very little root in fat, rubbed on the skin over a joint or nerve in pain, never into a wound, and only a healer of many years prepares it. Its death looks like a heart giving out, which is why poisoners like it.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater folk call it **wolf's-hood** and say a wolf that takes the bait dies with its teeth bared at whoever set it. Dwarves say it grows beside the ways into the deep places as a warning, and a hold child is taught its leaves along with the first marks on the walls. Some believe a sprig worn on the coat keeps wolves off, which only puts poison on the hands.



# Kelp

**Kelp** is the tall weed of the open shoals: a brown sea-plant that roots on reef and stone below the swell and climbs towards the light until whole reaches of water lie in its shade. On Caeldon it matters most to the Thaluren, whose settlements sit in kelp-shadowed water and whose return runs gather in the greatest kelp forest of all, the **Kelpshade**. The shorter weed of the tide line is another thing, gathered from the shore.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Reef shoals and rocky sea shallows |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches and the Tidelace Coasts; the Surging Deep and the Drowning Garden |
| **Known to** | Thaluren, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though a careless swimmer or a fouled oar can tangle in it |

## Appearance

A kelp plant is a single long stalk, a hand's breadth thick at the foot and thinning upwards, anchored by a tangle of grasping holdfast roots on rock. In a sheltered shoal it rises the height of a tall tree, and near the surface it spreads into long ribbon blades, olive-brown in shallow light and almost black below, each blade buoyed by small gas bladders the size of a thumb-joint. Grown together, the stalks make a forest: the light comes down green and broken, the whole stand leans one way with the current and then all the other, and a sound like slow rain comes off the blades as they rub. Torn kelp on a beach is rubbery and slick, smells of iodine and salt, and dries to a brittle black.

## Habitat and Range

Kelp needs cold, moving, clear water over hard ground, with a reef or headland to break the worst of the swell. Its forests fill the shoal worlds

inside the current roads of the Tidebound Reaches, and the broadest of them, the Kelpshade, is where returning runs rest and gather before they turn for the estuaries. Smaller beds grow off the outer rocks and headlands of the Tidelace Coasts.

Beyond Caeldon, the Surging Deep has whole floating islands of kelp, and the Drowning Garden a forest of towering kelp among coral trees (see Drowning Garden Flora).

## Behaviour and Temperament

Kelp only grows and sways, but a forest of it behaves like a place. It breaks the current into gentle water, and fish, shellfish, and the young of the sea crowd into its shade. It hides what rests inside it: a whole Thaluren run among the stalks can be invisible from a stone's throw off. Storms tear it loose in rafts that drift ashore or out to sea.

## Life Cycle

Kelp grows fast through the light months, a stalk lengthening by a forearm in a good week, and sheds its old blades in the storm season. A plant lives a few years before its holdfast fails or a storm takes it, and new plants rise from the spores of the old on the same rock, so a forest outlives every stalk in it. A forest can thin in a bad run of years and return in a good one.

## Uses and Dangers

To the Thaluren a kelp forest is shelter, larder, and gathering ground. Settlements such as Turning-shoal sit in reef shelter on its inner edge, the shoals tended within it give fish and shellfish, and the young who come down from the rivers are counted at the Kelpshade, where they first learn the sea. Gnome households of the Tidelace eat kelp beside fish, shellfish, and seabird eggs, cut from the beds off the harbour rocks and dried on the racks. The dangers are small: a swimmer or a boat's oar can foul in the blades, and drift-rafts after a storm can block a narrow channel.

## Lore and Belief

The Kelpshade is not holy, but it is where a run becomes a run again, and a thin count of the young there is grief and evidence at once. Gnome and Human coasts give Maris of the Tides hair of living kelp and seaweed, and carve her trident wound with a rope of kelp. Scholars of the planes say the sea's kelp grows thickest where the Surging Deep runs close to the world; no one has shown it, and the Thaluren, who live inside the forests, have little interest in the claim.



# Living Root (Gloam)

**Living root** is the root of the old Elven forest where it comes down through the ceilings of the Roothollows and grows into the stone. It is the forest's lower storey and the frame of the Dark Elf world: near the top it carries the ceilings and lines the walls, it brings the air down with it, and its sap keeps a year that nobody below has seen. In places it gives off a faint pale glow, the **gloam**, the only light the region makes of itself. For the Dark Elf houses of the Gloamroot Covenant, watching it is everyone's work.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Underground: root-caverns between the forest above and the deep stone |
| **Range** | The Roothollows; the Roothollow-Stonewake threshold and the Rootstone Heartwell; the Sunken Stairs of the Elderweald |
| **Known to** | Dark Elves; Wood Elves; Dwarves of the Stonewake Compact |
| **Danger** | Harmless while it lives; dying root fails as bracing and air |

## Appearance

Living root comes down as cables and sheets: single roots as thick as a forearm or a body, and further down, where many have grown together, whole walls and ceilings of braided root with stone closed around it. Living root is dark red-brown to black, smooth and slightly damp, cool to the hand and faintly springy, with fine pale rootlets furring its tips where it meets water or stone. It smells of wet wood and earth. When sap is rising a chamber with living root can be heard: a faint creak and tick, and the slow drip of seep along it.

The **gloam** is a pale, cold, grey-green glow, weaker than a covered lamp, that some living root gives off along its length. It lights a seep, a face, or a step, not a chamber, and is brightest where the root is youngest and wettest.

Dead root is another thing. It goes grey from the surface inward, dries, cracks into scale, and loses its spring; dead strands hang slack, and the fungus moves onto them (see Fungus Beds).

## Habitat and Range

Living root runs from the floor of the Elderweald, through the root-mat, down into the upper hollows. Lower in the Roothollows it thins to dead strands and the stone takes over. Towards the Stonewake Deeps the old underforest still pushes down into the rock, and at the Rootstone Heartwell root has grown through stone and stone has closed around root, so that neither side can say where its ground stops; that meeting of root and stone is the **stone-root**. Above, the root-grown treads of the Sunken Stairs are still alive and still growing. Nothing is known of the root in the sealed upper layer.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The root follows the forest's year. Sap rises in the forest's spring and falls in its autumn, and seeps run fuller after the rains above. Air moves down along the root and through old fissures, so a chamber with living root breathes and a chamber whose root has died goes stale. Living root grows slowly and keeps growing: it thickens across stairs, widens into passages, and closes on what is laid against it.

## Abilities

The root carries load: a living ceiling of root holds where bare stone would fall. It brings air and water down from the forest. A body laid against the living root of a house's root-chamber is taken in by it. Root answers Nature Magic, which can weave living root into a crossing or brace and draw sap through it (see Root Bridge and Sap Draw).

## Life Cycle

The root is as old as the forest above it, and the houses count their oldest living root in each root-chamber as the house's own beginning. It dies from the tip back or from the wall inward when the tree above fails, when water drowns it, or for no reason anyone can find. A wall going grey can take years before it gives, and when it does the chamber loses its bracing and its air together.

## Uses and Dangers

The houses live by it. The **root-year** of rising and falling sap is their calendar, and most house business, from root-chamber namings to the renewal of water obligations, is set by it. In lean times living root is tapped for sap, and the tapping weakens it. Its gloam saves lamp oil. Root-cut basins in each house's chambers hold the water it brings down.

The danger is its death. A house whose root dies loses its chambers, its air, and the fungus beds and dead that count in them; the small house of Sapfall, near the end of the Known Ways, is watching its wall go grey now.

## Lore and Belief

Dark Elves name children and return their dead at the root-chamber, so the root is where a house begins and ends; to lose a chamber is to lose the dead in it, and the oldest dead of many houses lie against root beyond the Sealing bars. Laments for Ithaere the Drowned Mother are sung when water rises in the root-year. Many Dark Elves say the gloam is brightest over root that holds the returned dead; no one has shown that it is.

Dark Elf tales tell of houses that went beyond the Sealing bars to reach their dead and did not come back, and of the black water rising behind those who did.



# Lodewort

**Lodewort** is a small, tough plant that grows where the ground carries metal: on outcrops of ore, in the thin soil over a vein, and on the spoil heaps of old workings, where little else will grow. Prospectors of the Ironspine and the Headwater Marches follow its flowers up the slopes, and a stand of it on a hillside has started many a working.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Ore outcrops, spoil heaps, and thin soil over veins |
| **Range** | The Ironspine; the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

It grows in low cushions a hand high, with wiry stems and small, narrow, grey-green leaves that are thick and slightly waxy. In early summer it covers itself in tiny five-petalled flowers of rose pink, darker at the centre, and a patch in flower shows as a pink stain on grey stone from far down a valley. The leaves of plants on the richest ground take a faint blue or rusty tinge. It has a dry, slightly metallic smell when crushed.

## Habitat and Range

It needs open, poor, stony ground and tolerates soil that would sicken other plants, so it holds mountain outcrops, scree, and the spoil of the mines and quarries from the foothill valleys up to the high pastures. It grows thickest where a vein comes near the surface, and spreads along it.

## Life Cycle

A long-lived perennial that roots deep into cracks and spreads slowly by seed, one cushion living for decades. On a new spoil heap it is the first plant to arrive.

## Uses and Dangers

Its use is as a sign. Human and Dwarven prospectors walk the slopes in early summer to read the pink, and a line of cushions across a hillside is followed with the hammer. Workers of Backbone Magic, whose Foundation Sense reads strain and voids in rock, use the lodewort to choose where to listen first. It is not eaten by grazing beasts, and its leaves are bitter. It harms nothing, except the hopes of those who take a patch of it for a fortune; lodewort shows where metal lies, not whether it is worth the cutting.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater miners say it grows where the mountain bleeds iron and that the pinker the flower the richer the vein, which is roughly true. Dwarven holds hold it in mild regard as a plant that knows the stone, and some leave a cushion growing at the mouth of a new working for luck. Children who pick it are told they are picking the mountain’s purse.

Prospectors who follow the pink flowers into unclaimed hills are the first to be robbed and the first to be found dead in a ravine by those who want their vein; the Headwater songs have a whole cycle about one such strike and the feud it began.



# Marker Lichen

**Marker Lichen** crusts the inscribed stones of the Witnessfields: the boundary markers of the Grey Line and the stones that line the marker roads between the sealed cities. It grows so slowly that a crust is as old as many lifetimes, and it grows into the cut letters first, so that the script of the elder Archive-Law Civilization is read through it, under it, or not at all.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Inscribed and dressed stone of marker roads and boundary lines |
| **Range** | The Witnessfields |
| **Known to** | Humans, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

It forms flat, rounded crusts pressed tight to the stone, from the size of a coin to a broad plate, grey-green at the centre and ringed with a narrow band of sulphur yellow at the growing edge. Old crusts run together into a map-like patchwork with thin black lines where two meet. In the grooves of the inscriptions it grows thicker and paler, so that from a few paces a weathered text shows as pale writing on a darker stone. It is dry and papery, and smells of nothing.

## Habitat and Range

It wants clean air, light, and hard, dressed stone, and it grows across the Witnessfields' open uplands on markers, culvert faces, and the roofless walls of witness halls. It is rare on the rough field stone of the basin side, which is how herders at the Grey Line know the old stones from their own.

## Life Cycle

A crust grows by a fingernail's breadth in a lifetime and lives as long as the stone lasts. Pieces broken off root again where they lodge in a groove.

## Uses and Dangers

It harms no one. To scholars it is both help and hindrance: in low sun the pale lichen-filled grooves make worn letters readable, and where the crust has covered a text they scrape it away with a bone blade, slowly, to read what lies beneath. Goblins copying warrant fragments from the open ruins do the same. Dyers on the basin side know that it gives a brownish dye, but nobody gathers it here.

## Lore and Belief

Flockturn herders say the lichen eats the words and that a stone whose text is gone has been eaten clean; that is why, they say, some markers name nothing any more. The lichen etches the stone a little, and the herders are not wholly wrong. Scholars argue over whether to scrape at all, since a scraped stone loses a crust older than the oldest record-house, and some scribes of the Mending Orders hold that the lichen's patience is a kind of remembering. The basin saying "slow as the marker grey" means something that will not be hurried.

Treasure-seekers read the lichen too: a stone scraped clean is a stone someone has read recently, and the marker roads are walked by more than scholars, hunting the inscriptions said to tell where the archive cities buried their strongrooms.



# Moss and Lichen

**Moss** and **lichen** are the smallest of the green things the peoples walk on and the oldest-looking. On the Material Plane they are the soft and the rough under every damp hand: moss carpets wet ground and furs wood and stone, lichen crusts rock and bark. In the Elderweald moss is part of the forest floor itself, and in the Verdant Expanse lichen and fungus slowly eat even metal and stone.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Damp stone, wood, and ground |
| **Range** | Everywhere damp; above all the Elderweald floor; the Verdant Expanse |
| **Known to** | Every people; Wood Elves above all |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

**Moss** grows in low, close cushions and mats, from a finger's depth to a hand's, of tiny leaves on threadlike stems. Most is green, from bright yellow-green in light to a deep, near-black green in shade; some turns rust-brown in dry weather and greens again with rain. Wet, it is cold and spongy and squeezes out water like a cloth; dry, it is springy and crisp. In season it puts up thin stalks with small brown capsules. It smells of wet earth and green, and it swallows the sound of a step.

**Lichen** is flatter and slower: grey-green, sage, mustard-yellow, or orange crusts and rosettes the size of a coin to a plate, pressed to stone and bark, with some kinds standing up in small grey tufts or hanging in beards from branches. It is dry and papery to the touch, and has almost no smell.

## Habitat and Range

Moss wants shade and wet. On the Elderweald floor it is woven with living root and leaf-mould into the deep, soft **root-mat**, a ground that holds

water like a sponge and gives a little under every step (see Living Root). It furs the trunks of the great trees low down, the hollowed boles of the groves, and the upper treads of the Sunken Stairs, which have thickened into uneven, moss-furred shelves. Lichen wants light and clean air, and grows on exposed rock, walls, and old bark where moss cannot hold.

Moss and lichen are met in the planes and zones as well. In the Verdant Expanse a thick carpet of moss and ferns swallows footsteps and cushions falls, and lichens creep over metal and stone. The shifting ground of the Probability Fog turns to soft moss and back again. The moss that never grows tall around the Ageless Spring is told with Ageless Spring Flora, and the moss and sand floor of the Drowning Garden with Drowning Garden Flora. Two lichens have their own pages: the marker lichen of the Witnessfields' inscribed stones and the rime lichen of the Frost-Bound's ice.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Moss grows slowly, keeps water, and outlasts drought by drying and waiting. Lichen grows more slowly still, a little each year, and lives on almost nothing but air, light, and rain. Both creep over whatever is left still: a fallen trunk, a step nobody walks, a wall nobody cleans. In the Verdant Expanse that creep is fast and hungry, and stone and metal are overgrown and slowly consumed.

## Life Cycle

Moss spreads by spores and by broken pieces that root again, and a mat lives on for as long as the ground stays wet, dying back at its surface and growing on from below; its dead lower layers become the leaf-mould and peat that feed the forest floor and, washed down, the fungus of the Roothollows. Lichen lives very long, and a broad crust on a stone is reckoned as old as the wall it grows on.

## Uses and Dangers

Moss is bedding, padding, and wound-dressing, and it stops gaps in timber and stone. Lichens give dyes. The marsh school of Nature Magic called the Mossbound Archive studies the symbiosis and decay that moss lives by. Neither is dangerous, though moss makes stone treads slick, and a slip on a moss-furred stair or a hollow hidden under the root-mat is the forest's commonest small injury. Damp that breeds mould is fought by wards in sickrooms (see Warding); the smell of mould is among those of the Lost Archive.

## Lore and Belief

Moss stands for age left alone. The Wood Elves read a moss-furred stair or bole as proof that no one has hurried it, and the oldest groves smell of old wood and wet moss. The Stone-Warden is shown with moss and lichen in the crevices of his granite skin, and a lichened stone is taken in many places as a stone that has held. The Verdant Expanse teaches the other face: travellers are warned that what moss will cushion it will also cover.



# Nettles

**Nettles** grow where people have been. They want the rich, trodden, dunged soil around houses, middens, and byres, and they stay long after the people have gone. In the Broken Marches a bed of nettles in empty country is the first sign of an old settlement under the grass, and salvagers dig there. Nettles sting, and they also feed and clothe the poor.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Waste ground, ruins, middens, and village edges |
| **Range** | Widespread; thickest in the Broken Marches |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless (it stings) |

## Appearance

The nettle stands knee- to chest-high in dense patches, its square stems and its leaves covered in fine, brittle, glassy hairs. The leaves are heart-shaped, coarsely toothed, dark green, and set in opposite pairs; from the leaf joints hang thin, drooping strings of tiny green flowers in summer. Touched, the hairs break and inject their sting: a burning, then white bumps on reddened skin that tingle for hours. A nettle bed smells green and slightly sour when trampled.

## Habitat and Range

Nettles grow everywhere people farm and settle, and more where they have stopped: around ruined steadings and towers, old middens and cesspits, in ruin-courts and the corners of abandoned storeworks, and along stream banks where dung washes down. They are thickest in the Marches and around every village in the cradle-web, and they grow on the far side around fold stores, harbour middens, and Orc camping rings.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They spread by creeping yellow roots and by seed, and a patch can stand on the same ground for a lifetime of the people who made it. Dig them out and they come back from any root left in the ground.

## Life Cycle

A long-lived plant that dies back in winter and comes up again in early spring, among the first green things of the year. Seed falls in late summer.

## Uses and Dangers

The young tops, picked in spring with a gloved hand, lose their sting in boiling water and make a green broth and a pottage that carries poor households through the hungry gap before the gardens bear. Dried, nettles are fodder for hens and a tea for the old. Their stems, retted and beaten like flax, give a coarse, strong fibre for cloth, cord, and nets, and in the Marches nettle cloth is cheaper than linen and lasts longer. They make a green dye, and their roots a yellow one. Some healers whip stiff joints with fresh nettles, which hurts more than the joint.

They sting, and nothing more. Children fall into them and live.

## Lore and Belief

Salvagers of the Marches say **"dig where the nettle stands"**, and are often right. Some households say a nettle bed by the door keeps the lightning off; others that it keeps off ill wishes. Goblins hold that nettles are the ghosts of the people who once lived on that ground, still guarding it, and they step through without complaint.

Ruin-delvers tell of a lord's hoard found under the thickest nettle bed in the Marches, and of the delver who dug it up and was found the next morning stung, robbed, and dead in it.



# Nightshade

**Nightshade** is the plant of the **black-eyed berries**, the shiny dark fruit of shady hedges that hedgerow children are taught to leave alone. It grows wherever the cradle-web has hedges and ruins, and in the Broken Marches it fills the old courts. In measure it is a healer's medicine; in a handful it is death. Its poisoning is told under Poison Herbs.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Shady hedges, wood edges, ruins, and waste ground |
| **Range** | The cradle-web, and the Broken Marches above all |
| **Known to** | Humans, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Deadly; medicine in measure |

## Appearance

It is a tall, branching, leafy plant, waist- to chest-high, with large, soft, oval, pointed leaves of dull dark green, often in unequal pairs, a big leaf with a small one beside it. In summer it hangs single, nodding, bell-shaped flowers of dull purple-brown, tinged green inside, from the leaf joints. They become glossy black berries the size of a cherry, each sitting in a green five-pointed star, sweetish to the taste and full of a dark purple juice. The plant has a faint, unpleasant smell when bruised.

## Habitat and Range

It likes shade and rich, limy, disturbed ground: hedge-bottoms, wood edges, the walls of old enclosures, and above all ruins and the courts of old works, where lime from fallen mortar sweetens the soil. It grows through the cradle-web from the basin hedges to the ruin-courts of the Marches and the yards of the Greyford Reach.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A long-lived plant that dies back each winter and comes again from a thick root. Birds eat the berries and spread the seed into new ruins and hedges; beasts mostly leave it.

## Life Cycle

It flowers through the summer and fruits from late summer into autumn, so that flowers and berries hang on the same plant. The root lives for many years.

## Uses and Dangers

Healers use leaf and root, dried and weighed, in tiny measure: to ease the cramps of the bowel and the breath, to dry a running nose and mouth, and as drops in the eye to widen it, which oculists and some court ladies do for different reasons. Poisoners use it in larger measure (see Made Poisons). Its berries kill children more often than grown people, since a few are enough for a small body and they taste sweet. Marches Goblins, who know the ruin-courts best, pull it from any court where children play.

## Lore and Belief

"Black and shiny, leave it be" is the hedgerow rule. Folk tales say nightshade was the plant of witches, who rubbed it on their skin to fly, and the raving and visions of the poisoning (they see what is not in the room) give that tale its root. Some dreamworkers believe a little of it opens the eye to the Dreaming Veil; what it opens is delirium. Goblins call it **the courtyard cherry** and count its berries in a rhyme for children that ends badly.

Poisoners use it as freely as healers, and the Marches tell of a bandit band poisoned with a stew of the courtyard cherry by the household they meant to rob.



# Nuts

**Nuts** are the forest's keeping food. In the Elderweald the Wood Elf households gather them where they fall, with fruit, fungus, and roots, and they are among the few things the forest trades away, because no tree is cut to get them. In the Crownboughs the High Elf houses grow nut trees on purpose, trained into the canopy gardens and the planted understorey. A nut stores through the winter, travels without spoiling, and feeds well, and both forests count a good mast year as a gift.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Old forest and canopy gardens |
| **Range** | The Elderweald, the Crownboughs |
| **Known to** | Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

The forests give several kinds, and gatherers name them plainly by the tree.

### *Hazel nuts*

Hazel grows as a many-stemmed thicket at the forest edge and in clearings, twice a person's height, with soft round toothed leaves and catkins that hang yellow in late winter before any leaf opens. Its nuts sit two or three together in ragged green husks, ripening brown, smooth, and round as a fingertip.

### *Forest mast*

The great nut trees of the deep weald drop their mast in autumn: spiny green husks the size of a fist that split to show two or three glossy dark brown nuts, and smaller hard-shelled nuts in wrinkled green rinds that stain the fingers black.

The canopy is loud with falling husks on a windy autumn night, and the floor beneath smells of leaf-rot and bruised rind for weeks.

### *Canopy nuts*

The trained nut trees of the Crownbough houses are pruned and grafted over generations into shapes that serve the hall, their branches braided along garden-walks so that the nuts can be picked from above rather than gathered from the floor.

## Habitat and Range

Nut trees grow throughout the old forest of the Elderweald, thickest at clearings and along the streams, and in the composed canopy gardens of the Crownboughs. Hazel follows the forest edge out towards the basin fields.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Nut trees bear unevenly, heavily one year and hardly at all the next, and no one has learned to make them do otherwise. Squirrels, jays, and deer take a share before the gatherers come, and bury some, which is how a forest plants itself. Hazel cut to the ground regrows from the stool in a few years.

## Life Cycle

The nut trees flower in spring and drop their nuts in autumn. Most bear heavily only every few years, and a mast year, when every tree bears at once, fills the forest floor and every store. A great tree may bear for centuries.

## Uses and Dangers

Nuts are eaten fresh, roasted, dried, or ground into a meal for flat cakes, and pressed for oil. Travellers in the Elderweald are fed nuts and smoked dark fungus at the noon rest. Deer grow fat on the mast, and so do the beasts that hunt them. Nuts go out of the Elderweald with fruit, fungus, resin, medicinal herbs, and seasoned deadwood, as part of what the forest lets fall, never cut.

Their dangers are small: a fall from a garden-walk during the picking, and in the deep weald, an autumn full of falling husks.

## Lore and Belief

To the Wood Elves of the Rootcrown Concord, what the forest lets fall is offered, and to gather it is to accept. A household that shakes a tree for its nuts rather than wait for them is thought greedy, and one that takes the whole mast and leaves none for the beasts is thought worse. High Elves of the Crownbough Courts give a well-trained nut tree as a mark of patience, and its grafts are gifts, never sold.



# Oaks

**Oaks** are the great broad-leaved trees of the cradle-web's lighter woods, and of all trees the most useful to a basin village. They drop the acorns that fatten the pigs in autumn, give the heavy beams of bridges, barns, and halls, and give the bark that tans the hides. The broad-crowned **edge oak** of the forest margins, the best of the timber, is described under Timber Trees.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Lowland and foothill woods, wood-pasture, and forest margins |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Headwater Marches, and the margins of the Elderweald |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An oak in the open is broader than it is tall, with a short, massive trunk and great crooked limbs that spread low and wide; in a wood it grows taller and straighter. The bark is grey, rough, and furrowed deep into ridges, and an old trunk is often hollow. The leaves are lobed, wavy-edged, and leathery, dark green above and paler below; they come late in spring and turn brown in autumn, and young oaks keep their dead leaves rattling through winter. In spring it hangs thin yellow-green catkins. Its acorns, in autumn, are glossy brown nuts the length of a thumb-joint set in rough, scaly grey cups. Round galls the size of a marble grow on the twigs, and an old oak is crowded with moss, lichen, fern, and the nests of everything.

## Habitat and Range

Oaks grow on deep soils in the lowland and foothill country: the scattered woods and wood-pasture of the Confluence Basins, the lower slopes of the Headwater Marches below the pine,

hedgerow trees left standing between fields, and the margins of the Elderweald, where the edge oak stands.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An oak grows slowly and lives very long. It bears acorns heavily only every few years, and in a mast year every oak in a district bears at once. Cut to the stool, it regrows as coppice; cut above a beast's reach, it puts out a crown of poles that can be cut again and again for centuries.

## Life Cycle

Acorns fall in autumn and are eaten by pigs, boar, deer, squirrels, and jays, which bury more than they find, and so plant the next wood. A seedling grows slowly for a lifetime, stands in its prime for centuries, and declines for centuries more, hollow and still leafing.

## Uses and Dangers

Each autumn the village pigs are turned into the oak woods under the lord's pannage right (see Pigs), and in a mast year the whole basin's bacon is better. Acorns, soaked and leached of their bitterness, make a flour for famine bread. Oak timber is heavy, hard, and slow to rot, and goes into bridges, mill wheels, barn frames, ships, and the halls of lords; it is the wood of the corridor's water-gates and of many a bridge's spans. Its bark, stripped in spring, tans leather, and its galls and bark with iron make the black ink of the record-houses. Its charcoal heats the smithies.

A mast year's acorns poison cattle that eat them green and in quantity. Otherwise the oak's only harm is its limbs, which fall without warning from old trees.

## Lore and Belief

Oaks are believed to draw lightning, and many peoples hold a struck oak sacred; basin folk carry an acorn against being struck. Old oaks are meeting places: a lord's judgement, a boundary oath, or a marriage sworn under a named oak is held to bind the harder. The reading stand of the Keeper of Scrolls is said to be carved from an ancient oak, and scribes keep an oak-gall ink pot as a small devotion. Wood Elves say an oak at the forest edge is the forest's oldest watcher over the fields. Outlaws of the basin woods meet under hollow oaks and hide their plunder in them, and every oak wood has a tale of the silver found in one.



# Oats

**Oats** are the second grain of the hills. In the valleys of the Headwater Marches a household works narrow terraced fields of barley and oats, and the two between them carry the high valleys through a winter. Oats like the wet and the cold even better than barley does. They feed people as porridge and oatcake, and they feed the animals that work the passes, which on the Headwater roads matters nearly as much.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Terraced hill fields |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An oat field stands waist high and looks softer than any other grain. Each stalk ends not in a tight ear but in a loose, open spray of small hanging spikelets on thread-thin stems, like a branching tassel, that shiver and rattle in the wind. Green in summer, the field ripens to a pale straw-cream with a silver sheen when the light lies along it. The grains are long, thin, and wrapped in papery husks, and the straw is softer and leafier than barley's.

## Habitat and Range

Oats grow on the Headwater terraces, often on the higher and wetter fields where barley does worse, and on the colossal terraces of villages such as Notchfield, whose retaining walls no living people could raise. They are a hill crop: the deep basin fields below grow wheat instead, and the Dwarven terraces of the Ironspine grow barley and roots.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Oats tolerate rain, cool summers, and poor, sour soil, and they ripen in a short season. Wind and heavy rain can lay a field flat, and birds strip the loose heads if no one watches them. Oats shed their grain readily once ripe, so the high valleys cut them a little green and let them finish in the stook.

## Life Cycle

Oats are sown in spring as soon as the terraces can be worked and reaped in late summer or early autumn, after the barley. Seed is kept back from the best field each year.

## Uses and Dangers

Hulled and rolled or ground, oats make porridge and the flat, dry oatcakes that carters and escorts carry up the passes because they keep for weeks. Oats are the best grain for horses and mules, and the waystations of the Headwater roads, which keep fresh animals for the caravans, buy them by the cartload. Oat straw is soft enough for fodder in a hard winter.

Oats stored damp go mouldy fast.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater people say oats were the first grain sown on the colossal terraces, because only oats would forgive ground nobody living had broken. Basin farmers say oats are the grain of people too poor or too high up for bread, and Headwater people answer that basin bread would not get a mule up the high roads before they close.



# Omenfern

**Omenfern** is a small fern of cool, shaded places, the stone throats of wells and the north faces of walls and banks, that unrolls its fronds in spring in a pattern no two plants share. Workers of Augury Magic read the year in the uncurling, and village wise-women read it too, with less training and more confidence.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Shaded well-sides, north-facing walls and banks |
| **Range** | Widespread in the cradle-web |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A clump of narrow, bright green fronds as long as a hand to a forearm, each divided into many small paired leaflets, soft and slightly glossy. In spring each new frond rises as a tight coil covered in rust-brown scales, like a crozier, and unrolls over a week or two. Some coils open straight, some twist as they open, some open part-way and stop. The undersides of grown fronds carry neat double rows of brown spore-dots. It smells green and cool, like a wet stone well.

## Habitat and Range

It grows wherever shade and damp last through the summer: in the masonry of wells and cisterns, on north faces of walls and bridges, in shaded stream banks and the mouths of caves, from the basin villages to the forest edge and the Headwater valleys. Old wells have the largest clumps.

## Life Cycle

The clump lives for many years and sends up a new set of fronds each spring, which wither brown in autumn and stand through the winter. It

spreads by spores, slowly, and is seldom planted, though many villages would not clear one from a well.

## Uses and Dangers

Its use is reading. Augurs watch the coils through the spring, note which open first, which twist and which way, and which stop, and read from them the shape of the coming year: a good harvest, a hard winter, a death in a household. A fern-reading is a rite, kept with its own words and, in some villages, a small payment at the well. The young fronds are bitter and not eaten. It harms no one.

## Lore and Belief

Village folk read a well's fern for themselves, and the commonest reading is the simplest: a well whose fern opens straight and early will run sweet through the summer, and one whose fern stops part-way will fail. That much is often true, since the fern follows the damp. Augurs hold that the fern only shows what the reader is ready to see, and disagree among themselves about everything else. A household that moves takes a frond of its well's fern in its bundle, and Wood Elves say the fern listens to the water and repeats it slowly.



# Orchards and Fruit

**Orchards and fruit** are the wealth of the Leeward Folds. In every fold the orchards take the warmer slopes, stepped up from the valley floor on dry-stone terraces and watered in turn from the cistern at the fold head, and orchard work runs the Halfling year from pruning to picking to drying and pressing. Fruit fresh and dried sits at every Halfling table, and dried fruit beyond the counted reserve is what the Folds send out along the Lee Road and the coast road. Elves grow fruit too, in the planted understorey of the Crownboughs, and gather it wild in the Elderweald.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Terraced orchards on warm slopes; planted understorey and forest |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds; the Crownboughs and the Elderweald |
| **Known to** | Halflings, Elves, Gnomes, Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

Fold orchards are kept low. The trees are pruned to the height a Halfling can reach from a short ladder, broad and open-centred, their trunks grey and fissured with age, and set in rows along the terraces with the retaining wall at their backs to hold the warmth. In spring the warm slopes of a fold turn white and pink with blossom in the space of a week, and the hollow hums with bees. By late summer the branches bend under fruit and the smell of a fold is fruit on the drying floors, warm stone, and the faint sourness of the presses.

### *Apples*

The commonest tree: round-headed, with soft grey-green oval leaves and pink-flushed white blossom. Fold apples are small, firm, and many-

coloured, from russet to green to striped red, and the best keepers are hard and sour at picking and sweeten in store through the winter.

### *Pears*

Taller and narrower, white-blossomed a week before the apples. Their fruit is tear-shaped, green to golden-brown, grainy and juicy, and keeps less well; most pears are dried or pressed.

### *Stone fruit*

Plums and their kin take the warmest, best-sheltered terraces. They blossom earliest and so suffer most from late frost. Their fruit is purple, red, or golden, bloom-dusted, soft, and quick to spoil, and nearly all of it is split and dried on the floors.

### *Forest fruit*

In the Elderweald the Wood Elves gather what the forest lets fall: wild crab apples, sloes, haws, brambles, and berries along the clearings and streams. In the Crownboughs the understorey is cleared and planted with orchard rows, and the canopy gardens bear fruit trained along the garden-walks.

## Habitat and Range

The orchard belts of the Leeward Folds are the great fruit country of the far side; Halflings also keep orchards in similar terrace worlds elsewhere on the far side. Orchards need the stillness of the Lee Wall's shadow for blossom to set, and good soil held in place by the terrace walls. In the Dry Folds on the margins, where the cisterns failed, grey-green thorn grows where the orchards should be. On the cradle-web, fruit is grown in the Crownbough understorey and gathered in the Elderweald.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Fruit trees bear more one year and less the next, and a heavy crop left unthinned breaks branches. They need bees to set fruit, a still spring for the blossom to hold, and steady water through the summer for the fruit to swell. Neglected, they grow tall, crowded, and barren within a generation.

## Life Cycle

A fold tree is grafted onto hardy rootstock, bears after a few years, and is kept bearing for generations by pruning in winter. Blossom comes in spring, fruit sets after the bees have done their work, and picking runs from late summer into autumn. Old trees are replaced row by row, never all at once, so that no terrace stands bare.

## Uses and Dangers

Fruit is eaten fresh in season, dried on the drying floors for the winter and for trade, and pressed for juice, cider, and preserves. Orchard leagues share labour, presses, and drying floors across neighbouring folds, and orchard tally houses count what each terrace yields, so that everyone can know how much must be held back. Dried fruit travels the Lee Road to the Rimward Basins and the escort trade of the High Scars, and the coast road to The Counted Lee, where Gnome harbours take it as orchard goods in counted loads. A fold knows before it picks how much fruit a declared approach can take.

Its dangers are slow. One late frost on a still spring night, pooling in the hollows, can take a year's blossom. A run of dry years thins the harvest and leaves the question of whether to water the orchards out of the reserve. Fruit picked for an approach window that then moves is fruit lost, and the Counted Lee Timing Feud was fought over exactly that.

## Lore and Belief

Tamsel the Season-Weaver was born of the orchard folds' devotion to the turning year, and wears autumn orchard-fruit in their wreath; in autumn they appear old, in crimson and brown, smelling of woodsmoke and stored fruit. Halflings tell of the Long Summer, when Tamsel held the summer form for a whole year: the warmth never broke, the fruit never stopped, the soil wore out, and the winter after emptied a fold’s stores to the last measure. No fold elder needs to explain why that tale comes out at every autumn count.

The agricultural Orchard Houses of Nature Magic keep orchards alive by craft: a sacred orchard opens all its blossoms on its feast day under Bloom Call, keepers call the bees to rescue a poor bloom, and Season Spur brings fruit in before an early frost, at a cost to the next season. Fold elders distrust all three, and say a fold that needs magic to fruit is a fold that has been asked too much. The overgrown orchard-kin, an old Halfling lifeway remembered as a warning, are said to have let their trees grow wild because they would not count them.



# Pale Caps

The **pale cap** is the most dangerous mushroom of the cradle-web woods. It looks much like several kinds that are good to eat, it tastes pleasant, and it gives no warning at the meal: a household that eats it falls ill most of a day later, seems to recover, and then begins to die. Its poisoning is set out under Poisonous Fungi.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Woods, especially under oaks; damp cave mouths |
| **Range** | The Elderweald; the woods of the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Elves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Deadly |

## Appearance

A handsome mushroom the height of a hand, with a smooth, rounded cap that flattens with age, white to a faint greenish or yellowish olive, slightly sticky when wet. The gills underneath are white and stay white, which tells it from the field mushrooms whose gills go pink and brown. A thin, drooping skirt hangs on the white stem below the cap, and the stem's foot sits in a loose, white cup in the soil, which careless gatherers break off and leave behind. Young caps come up as white eggs in the leaf-litter. It smells faintly sweet, a little like honey and old roses, and stronger as it ages.

## Habitat and Range

It grows in woods from late summer into autumn, most often under oaks and beside other broad-leaved trees, and in some damp cave mouths, through the Elderweald and the forest-edge woods of the Confluence Basins.

## Life Cycle

It lives as threads in the soil joined to the roots of its trees, and comes up in the same places year after year. A wet late summer brings it out in numbers.

## Uses and Dangers

It has no use. One cap can kill a child and a whole cap kills about half of those who eat it unhelped. It is most dangerous to outsiders, children, and the hungry, who gather by look alone; the forest peoples who are taught the caps are seldom caught.

## Lore and Belief

Wood Elf children are taught to look under the cap and at the foot before anything else, and taught it again every autumn. Basin folk say a poisonous mushroom blackens a silver spoon, or that what the slugs eat is safe; neither is true of the pale cap, which slugs and squirrels eat without harm. Forest-edge villages tell of the family that ate a good supper and were well the next morning, which is how every story of the pale cap goes.

Poisoners use the pale cap because its death comes late and looks like a fever, and the songs of the basin towns are fond of the cook who served it to a cruel lord and walked out of the hall before the sickness came.



# Quietbell

**Quietbell** is a low white bellflower that grows on graves, and only on some. It comes up over the dead who have settled and passed on, and it does not grow, or withers, where a death's residue is hardening into a hostile remnant. Every people that buries its dead has learnt to read it, and the mortuary trades and the necromancers use it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Graves, burial grounds, and the barrows of the settled dead |
| **Range** | Widespread, wherever the dead are buried |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A small, tufted plant the height of a finger or two, with a rosette of narrow, soft, grey-green leaves and in early summer several thread-thin stems bearing nodding bells no bigger than a fingernail. The bells are white, sometimes touched with the faintest blue at the rim, and move in the slightest air. A grave grown over with them looks frosted from a distance. They have a faint, clean scent like linen dried in the sun, noticeable only in the evening.

## Habitat and Range

It grows in churchyards, burial fields, barrows, and the family grounds of the forest and the holds alike, on any people's graves, wherever the ground is left undug long enough. It does not grow away from the dead.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It is slow to come. A new grave stays bare of it for a year or more, and the bells arrive, if they arrive, once the dead beneath have passed into memory

or Record. Over a grave where the residue stays restless the plants never take, and where a settled grave is disturbed the bells wither within days.

## Life Cycle

A perennial that spreads by short runners and fine seed, forming mats over old graves that last for generations. Mats that wither over a disturbed grave can return once the grave is quiet again.

## Uses and Dangers

Mortuary staff, trace-readers of Trace Magic such as the Grey Lantern Mortuary, and sextons of every kind walk the burial grounds and read the bells: a bare grave among flowered ones is watched, and a withering mat sends someone for help. Temple necromancers of Necromancy strew the dried flowers in rites of Grave Quiet, counting them among the funerary symbols that help the dead settle again. It is harmless.

## Lore and Belief

Mourners take the first bells on a grave for a sign that the dead are at peace, and in many villages they are not picked there. Children say the bells ring for the dead at night, too softly for the living to hear. The mortuary trades warn that the bells read the grave and not the person: they show a residue settled or not, and a grave can be quiet for reasons nobody would wish. Some families plant Quietbell on a fresh grave in hope; it does not take until it would have come by itself.

Grave-robbers read the bells too: a barrow with no bells on it is a barrow they leave alone, since its dead may not be resting.



# Reed

**Reed** is the tall grass of wet ground, growing in beds so dense that from a boat a fen looks like a field. Where land and river never settle which is which, reed is the plant that holds the edge. It is the home ground of the Reedfolk, whose households live on stilts and reed islands among it and cut it for a living, and it lines the salt-facing mouths where the Thaluren hold their circles. Beside it grows **rush**, a lower, rounder plant of the shallows.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Fens, river margins, flood-ground, and estuary silt |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins, the Lower Serath, the Greyford Reach, and the mouths of the Tide-bound Reaches |
| **Known to** | Reedfolk, Humans, Goblins, Thaluren, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Harmless; the danger is the soft ground it grows on |

## Appearance

Reed stands two to three times a person's height. Each stem is a hollow, jointed cane no thicker than a finger, green in summer and straw-gold by autumn, with long grey-green blades that sheath the stem and rattle in wind. At the top it carries a loose plume, purple-brown when it flowers in late summer and silver-buff in winter, when the dry beds hiss and whisper with every gust. Cut and bundled, it smells of dry hay; a bed in summer smells of mud and green water.

Rush grows lower, to about the waist, in clumps of smooth, round, dark green stems with no leaves to speak of and a small brown tuft of flower near the tip. Split and peeled, its pith is white and soft.

## Habitat and Range

Reed grows wherever slow water stands over soft ground. Downstream in the Confluence Basins long reaches of reed, fen, and seasonal flood open towards the Serath, the greatest of them the **Reedmere**, the main Reedfolk country inside the Basins. In the Lower Serath reed beds and willow thickets fringe the abandoned channels, backwaters, and oxbow lakes of the flood-ground. Rush lines the gravel shallows of the Greyford Reach.

On the far side, reed grows in the estuaries of the Tidebound Reaches, where salt and fresh water mix. There it builds **reed-shelves**: banks of dense reed on silt that stand just clear of high water in most seasons, firm at the heart and treacherous at the edge. The largest field of them breaks the river into braided channels at the Split Reed Mouth.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Reed spreads by creeping roots, not by seed, and a bed is in truth one plant or a few, knitted through the mud. That root-mat is what makes a reed island: silt caught among the stems rises year by year until the bed stands above ordinary water. A flood can tear an island loose or drown it, and a low year can raise one that is gone again at the next rise, which is why a Reedfolk house remembers which islands are there only in low years. A bed grown over a bank looks like solid ground long after the water has eaten away beneath it.

## Life Cycle

New shoots push up from the roots in spring, grow fast through summer, flower at its end, and stand dead and dry through winter, when cutting is done. A bed that is cut each winter comes back thicker; one that is left fills with its own litter and slowly turns to fen and then to firmer ground.

## Uses and Dangers

Reedfolk households in the fens, on the Reedmere and in the channel country of the Serath fish, guide boats, and cut reed, and reed goes downriver among the Lower Serath's exports beside fish and boats. Cut reed thatches roofs, bundled reed firms a landing or a path across soft ground, and split reed is woven into mats, baskets, screens, and fish-traps. Rush gives matting: Goblin households at Lowbank in the Greyford Reach sleep on rush mats around a clay hearth, and peeled rush pith dipped in fat makes a cheap light. Reedfolk eat reed roots beside fish, eel, and waterfowl, dug in winter and roasted. A single reed makes a pipe or a flute.

Reed itself harms no one. The cost is the ground: a bed hides channels that have moved, soft banks, and scour holes, and a stranger who walks out on reed as if it were land can go through it to the waist or deeper. On the shelves of the Split Reed Mouth a channel true at the morning ebb can be false by the evening flood.

## Lore and Belief

To the Reedfolk, reed is the record of the water. A house's keepers know which beds have shifted, which islands are low-year ground, and which shelf has crept into a channel, and a child who can recite the floods of the house knows which reed island will be there in a wet spring. The drowned reed cities of Reedfolk memory are remembered as places that stood where the reed was, before altered channels drowned them.

Human river towns picture Serovan the River-King with hair of green reed and water-weed. A single unbroken reed in a carved flute was the sign of the Many-Named, the Oral Tradition, the faded god of memory kept by voice. On the far side the reed-shelves are meeting grounds, not holy ground: mixed circles of Thaluren and Gnome pilots gather on them to state what kind of passage a channel is carrying.

Outlaws and smugglers hide in the reed beds where no lord's riders can follow, and the Reed-folk tell of a reed-fire set to burn out an outlaw band that took three villages with it.



# Ridge Pines

**Ridge pines** grow above the tall foothill pine, on the high slopes and ridges where trees begin to give out. They are too low and crooked for bracing, which comes from the foothill pine below (see Timber Trees), but their wood is soaked with pitch. The Ironspine Holds buy that pitch, and the resinous torch-wood split from it, from the Headwater farmers who climb for it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | High mountain slopes, ridges, and the tree line |
| **Range** | The Ironspine, the Headwater Marches, and the edges of the Stormcrown |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A ridge pine is a short, thick tree, from twice to four times a person's height, its trunk twisted and leaning, its crown dense, flat-topped, and combed by the wind. Near the tree line it creeps, a sprawl of knotted limbs a stride high. The bark is grey-brown and scaly, the needles short, stiff, and very dark green, in pairs. Its small, hard cones sit tight on the branches for years. The wood is red-gold at the heart, heavy with resin, and full of knots; split, a heart-stick glistens with pitch and smells overpoweringly of turpentine. Old stumps and fallen trunks rot away around their resin-soaked hearts, leaving **fatwood**, which lasts on the mountain for generations.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on thin, rocky soil on the high slopes of the Ironspine and above the highest valleys of the Headwater Marches, up to the edge of the bare ground below the crest of the Stormcrown. It stands alone or in open groves on ridges and spurs, and in sheltered hollows in thicker stands.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It grows very slowly in cold and wind, and puts its strength into resin, which seals every wound and every broken limb. Lightning strikes it often on the ridges, and a struck ridge pine bleeds pitch and goes on living.

## Life Cycle

A ridge pine can live for many centuries; one as thick as a person's waist may be older than the nearest town. Its seed comes slowly from cones that stay shut until warm weather.

## Uses and Dangers

Headwater families climb in summer to gather fatwood from old stumps and to tap and split the living trees on slopes their family has worked for generations. The heart-wood is split into **torch-sticks** that burn bright and long, and pitch is boiled out of chips in clay pots buried in the ground. The holds buy both with the grain and timber that go up from the valleys: pitch to seal casks and waterproof rope and cloth, to caulk the timber of the Deeps, and to grease the ways; torch-wood for the places where lamp oil is too dear or a flame must not go out. Dwarves will not burn it inside a working, where its smoke fouls the air.

It harms no one, though a pitch fire on a mountain runs fast.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater folk say a ridge pine struck by lightning holds the storm, and burn its wood at a winter death to light the way. Dwarves call the ridge pine the mountain's beard, and Headwater miners say it will not grow over the highest peaks because the Mountain-Father sleeps beneath them. Some families mark their gathering slopes with a blaze on one old tree and are believed to know every tree on them by name.

In avalanche years the ridge pines are where the searchers look first, and the hold's children are told of the girl who sheltered a lost caravan under a pine's snow-cave until the hold's rescuers dug through.



# Rime Lichen

**Rime lichen** grows on the ice of the Frost-Bound, where nothing else does. It looks like hoar frost and is mistaken for it by nearly every traveller, but it is alive, and it is the one pasture of the plane: the Stillhares scrape it from the ice faces, and much of what hunts on the plane lives on them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Ice faces, frozen waterfalls, and the lee of ice spires |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

It grows as feathered crusts and tufts on the face of the ice, a finger's length at most, in branching fronds like the frost on a winter window, white with a faint grey-blue cast. Close up the fronds are slightly thicker and softer than true frost, and under a breath they do not melt. Broad growths run in streaks down frozen waterfalls and fan out across the lee faces of the ice spires. It is brittle and snaps with a tiny, clear sound in the cold air, and it has no smell, as nothing on the plane has.

## Habitat and Range

It holds the ice faces of the plane wherever the wind does not scour them bare: the lee of spires and ridges, the sides of crevasses, the frozen cascades. It is thin and scattered everywhere, like all life on the Frost-Bound, and never thick enough to colour a slope.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It grows almost without moving. Like everything the plane's cold catches, it is preserved rather than spent, and a frond grazed away grows back so slowly that a grazer must range widely to feed.

## Life Cycle

It spreads by tiny flakes carried on the wind and lodged in cracks of the ice, and a crust lives as long as the ice it grows on. Nothing on the plane rots, and a frond broken off lies on the snow unchanged until something eats it.

## Uses and Dangers

To the Stillhares it is all their food, and through them it feeds the Hoar Owls and the Frost-Born who snare the hares. The Frost-Born chew a little themselves in hard times; it is bitter and gives almost nothing. It is harmless.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers take it for frost and only learn otherwise when a hare is seen eating it, and many go home believing that the Stillhares eat frost. Some say the lichen is frost that has been alive since before the plane went cold, and that a piece carried home would melt into water that remembers; brought to the Material Plane it wilts and dies within the day. The Frost-Born treat it with the same care as anything else that keeps them alive, and do not scrape a face bare.



# Ringcaps

**Ringcaps** are small, good mushrooms that come up in rings in grassland, from a few paces across to wide enough to hold a cottage. They are gathered and eaten everywhere, and the rings are feared everywhere: nearly every people says a ring is a thin place to the Veil and steps around it rather than through.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Meadows, pasture, and wood edges |
| **Range** | Widespread |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless; the rings are believed to be thin places |

## Appearance

A ringcap is a small mushroom with a tough, bell-shaped cap the size of a thumbnail to a coin, buff to pale tan and darker at the centre, on a thin, wiry stem that bends without breaking. The gills are widely spaced and cream. They come up after rain in a ring or an arc in the grass, and the ring shows even when no caps are up: a band of dark, lush grass, with a band of withered or bare ground inside it. Fresh caps smell pleasantly of almonds or new-cut hay, and they dry well.

## Habitat and Range

They grow in short grass wherever it is grazed or mown: village greens, pasture, hill meadows, the turf of old earthworks, and the grassy edges of woods, across the cradle-web and the far side.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A ring grows outwards a little every year from where it began, so old rings are wide, and two rings that meet do not cross but open into one another. Some rings in old turf are reckoned older than the village beside them.

## Life Cycle

The fungus lives as threads in the soil, spreading outward and dying behind, and puts up caps at the growing edge in late spring and again in autumn after rain. The withered band inside a ring is where the threads crowd and starve the grass.

## Uses and Dangers

The caps are good fresh in a stew and better dried for winter, and children are sent to pick the ring's edge. They have poor lookalikes, small white mushrooms of the same meadows that sicken the stomach, and a careless picker takes both. The rings harm nothing.

## Lore and Belief

The belief is old and widespread: a ring is a door left ajar, and whoever steps inside may wander and not come back, or come back with lost time. Herders turn flocks around a ring, a child who falls asleep in one is fetched out by the ankles, and travellers keep to a path that skirts it. Some say the dead dance in rings at night, others that the Veil's own drifters do. Thin places are real, and the Veil does respond to a traveller's intent and lack of it; but the rings are the work of the fungus in the soil, and no known ring is thinner than the meadow around it. The fear does no harm, and in most villages the caps are picked from the outside of the ring only.

That does not stop the tales: the shepherd who stepped into a ring and came back seven years later with a pocket full of gold that turned to leaves, and the bride who danced in one on her wedding night and was never seen again.



# Root Crops

**Root crops** are what grows where grain is unsure and what keeps where grain would spoil. In the Ironspine the Dwarven farmsteads below the holds grow barley and roots on the valley terraces, and the roots go up to the gate in sacks to be stored in the cool of the stone. In the Elven forests roots are tended in the canopy gardens and planted understorey of the Crownboughs and dug from the forest floor of the Elderweald. No one sings of them. They are what a hold eats at the end of a long winter.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Valley terraces, canopy gardens, and forest floor |
| **Range** | The Ironspine, the Crownboughs, the Elderweald |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

### *Turnips*

The hardiest root of the terraces: a round, white-fleshed root as big as a fist or two, purple-flushed at the shoulder where it pushes out of the soil, under a rosette of rough, bristly, bright green leaves. Turnips grow fast, stand cold, and taste sharp and peppery raw and sweet when boiled.

### *Carrots and parsnips*

Long tapering roots under feathery leaves: carrots pale yellow to deep purple-red and thin as a finger to a thumb, parsnips thick, cream-white, and sweetened by frost. Both flower in their second year in flat white umbrellas of tiny flowers on a stalk as high as a Dwarf.

### *Forest roots*

In the Elderweald the Wood Elves gather tubers and fleshy roots from clearings and stream-banks: knobbly, earth-brown, white or yellow inside, some sweet and starchy, some bitter until they are soaked and boiled. In the Crownboughs the same kinds are planted in beds in the understorey and on the low terraces.

## Habitat and Range

Dwarven terraces lie in the sheltered valleys of the hold country, where the mountains allow anything to grow. Barleystep, a cluster of four Dwarven farmsteads below a hold, is typical: barley and roots on the terraces, herds driven to summer pasture, and everything it grows sent up to the gate it belongs to. In the lower levels of the holds the fungal beds take over, and roots and fungus between them feed the gate.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Roots ask for deep, stone-free soil, which on a mountain terrace is the work of generations of picking. They stand frost better than any grain and can be left in the ground through early winter and dug as needed. Wet years rot them, and burrowing animals take them from below.

## Life Cycle

Most are sown in spring and lifted in autumn. Carrots and parsnips are left to flower only where seed is wanted, in their second summer; turnips seed in one.

## Uses and Dangers

Roots are boiled, roasted, stewed with barley and meat, and fed to the beasts in a hard winter. Clamped in straw and earth, or stored in dark, cool chambers in the rock, they last until spring, which is why the holds value them. A poor root and barley year at the valley farmsteads is felt a long way down, and the holds then buy more from Human farmers on the Headwater side. Elves of both forests eat roots fresh in season and dry or store the rest.

Wild roots carry their own danger: several roots of the deep weald look much like edible ones and are poisonous, and no one gathers there without having been taught by someone who has.

## Lore and Belief

Dwarves say a root is "held food": it grows downward, keeps in stone, and asks for patience, all things the Held Covenant honours. Wood Elves of the Rootcrown Concord take only some of the roots in any patch and leave the rest to grow on, holding that what the forest gives must still be there to give next year.



# Rot-Shelf

**Rot-Shelf** is a wild bracket fungus that grows on dead root in the fungal darks of the Roothollows, away from the tended fungus beds. It is tough, poor food, and nobody eats it by choice; in a hungry year, when the beds fail or a house loses a chamber, it is what the house gathers.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Dead root in the fungal darks and beyond the Known Ways' beds |
| **Range** | The Roothollows |
| **Known to** | Elves (Dark Elves) |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

It grows as stiff, half-moon shelves stacked one above another along a dead root, each from a palm to a forearm across and two fingers thick, its upper side banded in dull browns and greys like the rings of a cut log, its underside pale cream and fine-pored. Old shelves turn woody and cracked; young ones at the edge of a stack are softer and paler. It has a woody, mushroomy smell, and in the gloam it looks like a growth of the root itself.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on dead root and the dead fringes of living root in still, damp air, and it is commonest where the living root has thinned to dead strands in the lower hollows and the fungal darks. Wild stands lie beyond the beds, on the side ways and towards the end of the Known Ways.

## Life Cycle

A shelf grows a new layer each root-year and can live for many years on a single dead root, until the root is eaten through and falls. It spreads by a fine brown spore that dusts the stone below each stack.

## Uses and Dangers

Only the soft, young edge is eaten. It is sliced thin, soaked, and boiled long, or dried and ground into the meal of fungus cakes when nothing better is left; it fills the belly and gives little. Gatherers walk the side ways in hard times to cut it, and that walking is its danger, since the wild stands lie where nothing is kept and a way can be struck off the reckoning. A house that has to send its children for rot-shelf is a house in trouble, and everyone knows it.

## Lore and Belief

"Rot-shelf seasons" are hungry years in Dark Elf speech, and old people count their lives by them. A house will not gather rot-shelf from another house's dead root without leave, since the root counts in chamber-right; in the worst years that rule is argued over and sometimes broken. Some Dark Elf households cut one shelf in a good year and keep it dry above the door, so that the house remembers.

In the worst years houses have come to blows over a dead root's shelf, and some of the oldest feuds in the Roothollows are said to have begun in a rot-shelf season.



# Rubble Elder

**Rubble elder** is the shrub that comes first to a ruin. A wall falls, a roof goes, and within a few years an elder is growing out of the rubble, fed by the lime and the rot. In the Broken Marches it gives the people who live in the ruins flowers, berries, and medicine, and in return it takes the ruin apart, root by root.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Ruins, rubble, old yards, and wall gaps |
| **Range** | The Broken Marches and the Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Goblins, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless; its roots Wary, to old works |

## Appearance

It grows as a big, untidy shrub or a small tree, two or three times a person's height, its many stems arching from the base. The bark is pale grey-brown, corky, and deeply grooved; the young shoots are full of soft white pith and snap easily. The leaves are made of five or seven toothed leaflets and smell unpleasant when crushed. In early summer it bears flat plates of tiny creamy-white flowers as wide as a hand, heavy with a sweet, musky scent. In autumn these become drooping bunches of small, shiny, purple-black berries on red stalks, so heavy that the branches bend.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on rich, disturbed, limy ground: rubble heaps, wall gaps, roofless rooms, ruined yards, and the edges of middens, across the Marches and in the yards and culvert mouths of Lowbank in the Greyford Reach. It grows wherever birds have dropped its seed, and birds rest on ruins.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It grows fast, a stride or more a year, and roots wherever it can reach water. In a ruin its roots go into every joint of the masonry and every crack in a vault, and as they thicken they lift stones, split mortar, and open walls that had stood for centuries. Cut down, it comes back from the stump.

## Life Cycle

It flowers from its third or fourth year and fruits every autumn. A shrub lives a few decades; the roots outlast the stems and send up new ones.

## Uses and Dangers

Its flowers make a sweet cordial and a tea for colds and fevers that every Marches household brews in winter, and they are fried in batter in summer. The cooked berries make a dark syrup for coughs, a wine, and a purple dye; raw, they and the leaves, bark, and root gripe the bowels and are not eaten. Its hollow stems, pushed clear of pith, make pipes, whistles, and blowpipes for fires. Goblins of the Marches gather it more than anyone.

Its roots are the danger, not to people but to their works. A salvage crew judging whether a structure is braced, unsound, or never-touch looks first for elder in the joints, and a ruin with an elder growing out of its vault is read as worse than it looks.

## Lore and Belief

Marches folk say an elder grows only where a house has died and is its mourner, and they will not burn its wood, which is said to bring a death to the hearth. Goblins say a ruin with an elder on it has been claimed by somebody, and ask before they salvage it. Human households hang a branch over the door against ill wishes.

Delvers say the elder’s roots find the cellars first, and more than one treasure-seeker has followed an elder’s roots down through a cracked floor into a sealed vault, and more than one has been under the floor when it gave.



# Salt Pines

**Salt pines** are the trees of the far-side headlands, the only trees that will stand the salt wind on the cliffs of the Tidelace Coasts and the Soundchain Roads. The wind shapes them, and Gnome pilots read the shape. Their resinous wood is the beacon fuel of last resort, burned when the beacon oil runs out.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Headlands, cliff tops, and sea-cut terraces |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts and the Soundchain Roads |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A salt pine is low and broad, seldom more than two or three times a person's height, with a thick, short, often split trunk and a flat, dense crown swept entirely to one side, so that the whole tree leans away from the sea like someone walking into a gale. On the most exposed headlands it lies almost flat along the rock. Its bark is dark red-brown and deeply plated, its needles long, stiff, and grey-green, often browned at the tips on the seaward side by salt. Its cones are heavy and lop-sided, swollen on the side that faces the light. The wood is dense and resinous, and a salt pine headland smells of pitch and salt.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on headlands, cliff tops, and the upper sea-cut terraces from the Soundchain cliffs east along the Tidelace, rooted in cracks and thin soil, and on the outer isles where nothing else of its size stands. It is sparse: a headland may hold a few dozen, each one known.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It grows away from the wind and only as tall as the wind allows. Buds on the seaward side are killed by salt and spray each winter, and the tree builds itself out on the lee. That is why its lean shows the wind that blows most often and hardest, not the wind of any one day.

## Life Cycle

It grows very slowly, and a salt pine thick enough to cut is older than most harbour families' records. Seed is shed from cones that open in fire or in dry summers.

## Uses and Dangers

Pilots and sounding houses read the lean of the salt pines on each headland as a record of the prevailing wind there, and a new pilot learns the trees of every headland on the Lacework along with its marks; a tree that falls is entered in the sounding house’s records. Their wood is not cut for building. When the beacon oil runs out in a long storm season, beacon keepers split salt pine deadwood and burn it in the beacon basket, and a beacon tower keeps a stack of it under cover for that reason. Only deadwood and fallen trees are taken, unless a beacon is failing. Coastal Humans gather the cones for kindling and the resin to caulk their boats.

They harm no one.

## Lore and Belief

Gnomes say a salt pine is the one honest mark on the coast, because the wind does not pretend. Harbour children are told that a salt pine that leans the wrong way warns of a false beacon nearby. Human fishers of the coves believe the trees are drowned sailors who climbed the cliffs and were turned to wood looking back at the sea, and they touch one for luck before going out.

Wreckers who light false beacons on the headlands hang their lamps from salt pines, and the harbours hang wreckers from the same trees when they catch them.



# Saltbush

**Saltbush** grows where little else will, on the salty edges of the pans and the rims of the Rimward Basins. Herds do not like it; they eat it when nothing else is left. In the second and third year of a dry cycle, when the rim pastures are bare and the Long Pan has not flooded, saltbush is the herds' last browse, and the stands are watched and shared like water.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Basin rims, pan edges, and dry washes |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins and the edge of the Glassbelt |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

It is a dense, rounded shrub, knee- to waist-high, grey from a distance and silver-grey up close, its small, thick, oval leaves covered with fine scales that catch the light and taste of salt. Its stems are stiff and pale. After the storms it carries small clusters of inconspicuous flowers and then flat, papery, winged fruits, pink or straw-coloured, that rattle in the wind. A stand on a pan edge looks like a grey sea of low cushions, and it smells of nothing but dust.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on salt and gypsum ground: the edges of the pans where the salt crust gives way to soil, the margins of dry washes, the lower slopes of rim spurs, and the inland edge facing the Glassbelt. It thins and stops where the true desert begins.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Its roots run deep and wide for water, and its leaves pull salt from the soil and store it, which keeps them from drying out. It lives through years without rain, shrinking back, and puts out new growth after a storm.

## Life Cycle

A saltbush lives many years, and a well-grazed stand regrows from its roots after a storm. Its winged fruits blow across the floors and seed new ground.

## Uses and Dangers

Its use is survival. Herd beasts that eat it get water and a little food from its leaves, though it makes them thirsty, and a herd on saltbush must still be watered, at a cost in the cisterns. Herders under negotiated water-and-pasture rights treat the saltbush stands as a reserve, kept ungrazed in good years and opened by agreement in bad ones; a kindred caught grazing a reserve stand early is answering for it at the next gathering. In the leanest years its seeds are ground into a poor meal, and its ash goes into soap and the salt cutters' trade.

It is harmless, but a herd that lives on it too long sickens with the salt.

## Lore and Belief

Rimward Orcs say saltbush is the land’s last share, given only to those who kept their earlier shares honestly, and children are told not to break it in a good year. Herders say a saltbush stand in silver flower after a storm promises a second storm. A Rimward greeting asks whose water a stranger drank last; an old herders' answer, in a dry run, is "the saltbush’s".

Raiders driven off in a dry cycle are said to have lived on saltbush for a whole season in the empty rims, and the songs of the Rimward feuds remember a band that came back from it lean as wolves and took its enemies' wells in a night.



# Samphire

**Samphire** is the green that grows in the sea's own edge, on the mud the tide covers twice a day. Coastal households of the Tidelace Coasts gather it at low tide with their shellfish and weed, eat it fresh in summer, and pickle it for the storm season.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Salt marsh, mudflats, and tide edges |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts, the Soundchain Roads, and the estuaries of the Tidebound Reaches |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans, Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

Samphire stands a hand to a forearm high: a little bushy plant of jointed, fleshy, leafless green stems, each like a row of tiny beads or a branching candelabrum, glossy and bright green in summer. In autumn it flushes red and purple from the tips down, and a marsh full of it turns the colour of wine. Its flowers are almost invisible, sunk in the joints. Bitten, it snaps crisply and tastes of salt and the sea.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on the soft mud of salt marshes, the edges of creeks and inlets, and the flats at the heads of the estuaries, below the reach of ordinary land plants and above the open water. It is commonest in the sheltered inlets of the Tidelace, in the lee sounds of the Soundchain Roads, and on the brackish margins of the mouths of the Tidebound Reaches.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It is one of the first plants to take new mud, and its stems slow the water and catch silt, so that a samphire flat slowly builds itself up into marsh.

## Life Cycle

It lives one summer, sprouting on the mud in spring, swelling through the summer, turning red in autumn, and dying back in the first storms after shedding its seed onto the next year's mud.

## Uses and Dangers

In early and midsummer the green tips are picked by hand or cut with a knife, rinsed of mud, and eaten raw or boiled, often with fish or shellfish; later in the year they grow woody. Pickled in brine or vinegar, they last into winter, and a jar of samphire is one of the small stores a harbour household counts. Burned, the plant gives an ash rich in soda for glass and soap, and the gauge houses that make glass for their instruments buy it. Thaluren graze it from the water at the mouths and think of it as a taste of the river's edge.

It does no harm. The danger of gathering it is the tide, which comes back over the flats faster than a walker in mud can go.

## Lore and Belief

Gnome children are sent out for samphire to learn the tide table, and a child cut off by the tide is said to have read it wrong; the harbour expects the child to say so. Coastal Humans call it **sea-bread** and hold that samphire picked before midsummer brings a good year's fishing. Some say it grows only where the sea has kept a promise.

Every coast has its tale of the gatherer cut off by a spring tide on the flats, and of the one who walked the mud by moonlight to reach a stranded child and carried her back on his shoulders through the rising water.



# Seagrass

**Seagrass** grows in meadows on the sandy floors of the shoals of the Tidebound Reaches, between the reefs and the kelp. It is not weed but a true grass of the sea, flowering and seeding under water. The Thaluren young who come down from the rivers in their own time feed first in its meadows, and the Thaluren hold the meadows close for that reason. A meadow that dies back is watched with dread.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Shallow sandy and muddy shoals, sheltered by reef and kelp |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches |
| **Known to** | Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A seagrass meadow is a lawn under the sea: dense stands of narrow, flat, ribbon-like leaves, bright to olive green, from a hand to an arm long, rising from creeping roots buried in the sand and bending all one way with the current. Light falls through the shallow water onto it in moving nets. Small fish, shrimp, and crabs hide among the blades, sea snails graze them, and the older leaves are furred with fine growth and spotted with tiny white shells. A meadow breathes: on a still day, strings of small bubbles rise from it. Torn blades wash up on beaches in brown windrows that smell of iodine.

## Habitat and Range

It grows in clear, shallow, sheltered water over sand and mud, on the inner side of the shoal worlds, around the island margins, and along the edges of the Kelpshade towards the mouths, wher-

ever enough light reaches the floor. It does not grow in deep water, on rock, or in the murk of the river mouths.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A meadow spreads by its roots, slowly, and holds the sand together, so that the floor under it is firm and clear while bare sand beside it drifts. It needs clear water; silt, warm and sluggish water, or anything that clouds the light kills it back from the edges.

## Life Cycle

Each plant is a single creeping root sending up blades, and a meadow can be one plant spread over generations. It flowers under water in summer, small and unnoticed, and sets seed that drifts in the current.

## Uses and Dangers

To the Thaluren the meadows are a nursery and a larder: the young feed and hide there in their first sea seasons, adults fish them for the small fish and shellfish they shelter, and settlements in reef shelter graze the edges. Slow returners graze them too. The meadows are tended as the shoals are, cleared of drifted weed and spared from trawling and anchoring. The dried blades are used as packing and bedding on the island edges.

It harms no one.

## Lore and Belief

Thaluren say a meadow keeps the memory of every young that fed in it, and a returning adult swims over its first meadow on the way to the Kelpshade. A meadow that browns and thins is read by many as the first sign that the water is going wrong, and sea settlements have called on the Blightward Keepers for less; whether a dying meadow in the sea foretells blight in the spawning waters upriver is argued wherever the runs gather.



# Skeletal Trees

The forests of the Whispering Trace, the realm of death, reflection, and remnant, are woods of skeletal, silent trees standing in mist among its ruins and graveyards. They are the trees a traveller meets on the way to the dead, and the ones most often remembered afterwards.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The misty forests of the Whispering Trace |
| **Range** | The Whispering Trace |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

They are bare: trunk and branch without leaf or bud, the bark worn smooth and grey, the twigs thin and pale as finger bones. Their colours are the Trace's own, faded sepia and misty grey, as if seen through old glass, and their outlines blur where the mist touches them, so that the far side of a wood is never quite there. They do not creak or rustle. Under them the only sound is the plane's low murmur of voices and footsteps that are not there. They smell faintly of old dust and dried flowers, and they are cold and oddly light to the touch, as everything in the Trace is.

## Habitat and Range

They stand in the Trace's misty forests, on its slopes and beside its rivers of liquid shadow, in woods without clear edges.

## Abilities

They fade, as all things in the Trace do unless memory holds them. A tree no one has looked at for a long while is thinner and paler than one at the edge of a path, and some stands seem to come clearer when a traveller who once knew a wood like it walks among them.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing that can be carried out, and harm no one. A wood of them is easy to get lost in, and the Trace's danger is that a traveller lingers there.

## Lore and Belief

Mourners say that every tree that dies on the Material Plane stands again in the Trace, and that a felled grove can be visited there; whether the trees are the remnants of real trees, or only of the memory of trees, no one knows. The few who have crossed the Trace and come back speak of its woods as the stillest place they have ever stood, and some say they saw there a tree they had climbed as children.

Mourners are told of the one who walked into the grey wood after his wife's Echo and cut a branch to mark the way back; the branch is said to hang in a shrine still, and to be cold to the touch in summer.



# Sky Isles Flora

The floating islands of the Sky Isles are green. Lush, wind-swept grass covers them, stunted trees grip their edges with roots hanging in the open air, and the air smells of pine and of the sweet **sky-flowers**. Among them grow rare plants that need the thin, bright air of great height, and gatherers climb to the Sky-Gates for them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The floating islands of the Sky Isles, in thin, bright, high air |
| **Range** | The Sky Isles, wherever their Sky-Gates open on high peaks and floating rocks |
| **Known to** | The Sky-Walkers; gatherers and travellers who go up |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

The grass is long, fine, and pale green, combed flat in one direction by the wind and silvered on the side it shows. Through it grow the sky-flowers, low, star-shaped blossoms of azure, white, and gold that turn to the light. Their scent is honeyed and carries a long way on the thin air.

The trees are small and old-looking, pine and twisted hardwoods no taller than a man, their trunks bent and their crowns flattened. At an island's rim they lean out over the void, and their roots come out of the earth beneath it and hang in the air in long pale tangles, wet with the mist of the waterfalls that pour off the edges. The rare plants are smaller still: cushions, rosettes, and mosses on the rock, in colours that seem too bright for living things.

## Habitat and Range

They grow on every island large enough to hold soil, from a rock with a tuft of grass to the great masses of earth that carry woods. The rarest grow

on the highest and brightest islands, and on the rock of their undersides beside the glowing crystal cores.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They live as mountain plants do, low, tough, and turned to the wind. Their hanging roots drink the mist of the falls as much as the soil. Islands drift, collide, and spin, and the plants on them hold on.

## Abilities

Under the zone's law, weight answers to belief, and the plants believe nothing. They neither fall nor fly, and an uprooted tuft simply stays where it is let go. Seed travels on the wind from island to island, and sky-flower seed is said to float wherever it is blown.

## Life Cycle

The grass and flowers grow and seed through a long, bright season under a sky that seldom storms. The trees grow slowly and live long, and a tree that loses its grip goes over the edge into the void, where it may land on a lower island or vanish in the mist.

## Uses and Dangers

The Sky-Walkers draw sustenance from the air and sunlight and have little need of the plants. Visitors gather the rare high-air plants and sky-flowers as prized ingredients and sell them dear below. The plants themselves are harmless. The danger is the place: a gatherer who reaches too far over an island's edge, or doubts as they lean, falls.

## Lore and Belief

Below, people believe that sky-flower petals in the shoe make a climber sure-footed, and that a dried flower in the house keeps a mind from wandering. Those who gather them say the flowers do nothing of the sort, and that what keeps a gatherer up is a steady mind. Sky-Walkers, it is told, can tell the drift of an island by which way its grass lies.



# Sourcrust

**Sourcrust** is a crust that grows on stone in the still, stale air of the deep: in sumps, closed galleries, and vent runs where the draught has failed. It is harmless to touch, but it does not grow where air moves, and so in the Stonewake Deeps a patch of it means bad air has been lying there long enough to grow something.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Dead-air pockets, sumps, and failed vent runs |
| **Range** | The Stonewake Deeps; the lower workings of the Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Kobolds, Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Harmless itself; it marks bad air |

## Appearance

It spreads over rock and old timber as a thin, wrinkled skin, pale sulphur-yellow to the colour of old cream, slightly damp and slick, with a crazed surface like dried paste. Thick patches build up into soft, pale ridges along the floor of a gallery, where heavy damps lie, or in the high corners of a roof, where the light foul airs gather. It gives off a sour smell like spoiled milk and wet iron, which the crust takes its name from and which hangs in the air around it.

## Habitat and Range

It grows only where air has stood still for weeks: the low ends of galleries, sumps, closed side-workings, behind collapses, and in vent runs whose draught has failed. It is known through the inhabited and working levels of the Deeps and in the lowest workings of the Ironspine holds.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It starts as faint yellow spots and spreads over a season. Once a draught returns it dries, cracks, and flakes away within days, and a patch that is drying is a patch the vent crew has done its work on.

## Uses and Dangers

Its use is warning. Kobold crews, walking the vent rounds, chalk their warning mark beside every patch they find and report it, and Dwarven wardens read the chalk without needing to know the sign behind it. The danger is not the crust but the air it lives in, which can kill a crew that walks into it upright; the crust's sour smell is often the only smell bad air has.

## Lore and Belief

Kobolds say the crust is the air going sour, as milk does, and that a crust found in a living gallery means someone has failed in their round. Dwarves sometimes say it grows on stone the mountain has stopped breathing through. Both treat the smell as a warning in itself, and a child who smells sour milk in a deep corridor is taught to turn around before looking.

Kobold crews still tell of the crew that broke into a sealed working full of sourcrust and old Dwarven gold, and the one Kobold who smelled the milk and dragged the others out before the air took them.



# Spore-Clouds

**Spore-Clouds** are swarms of sentient spores in the Verdant Expanse, the plane of unchecked growth. They drift until they find a host, take hold of it, and make it spread seed. Those who know the plane count them among the Overgrown, the creatures that have merged with the Expanse, and among its hunters.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | The humid, pollen-heavy air of the Verdant Expanse |
| **Range** | The Verdant Expanse |
| **Known to** | The Verdant; travellers to the Expanse |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to any visitor who breathes them in |

## Appearance

A Spore-Cloud looks at first like the rest of the Expanse's air, thick with pollen, but it holds together. It is a haze the size of a cart or a cottage, gold-green or violet, faintly glittering where the dappled light catches it, and it moves against the breeze. It drifts low between the trunks and breaks round a swinging blade, closing again behind it. It smells of mushroom and damp bread, sharp in the plane's sweet air.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the Expanse's undergrowth and its warm, still hollows, where the air is thickest. They are not known outside the plane.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A cloud acts as one creature, and seems to choose. It hangs back from what is already rooted and goes for what moves on its own, a bird, a beast, or a traveller, and most of all for a traveller asleep. It enters through mouth and nose, and settles there.

A host does not lose its mind at once. It keeps walking, but it walks where the cloud wants, gathering seed and fruit, carrying them, and pushing them into the soil far from where they fell, with a calm it cannot explain. In time the cloud grows through the host and the host stops being a traveller at all.

## Abilities

The spores possess. A taken host's will bends to theirs, its pockets fill with seed, and its hands plant. The cloud is hard to escape by running and is not harmed by a blade; it is driven off by smoke and wind, and kept out by a face wrapped tight.

## Life Cycle

A cloud grows in its host. When the host is spent, or rooted where it last planted, a new cloud rises from it, and the seed it sowed becomes the Expanse's next forest within the hour. How the first clouds came to be no one knows.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing that a traveller can use. Their danger is the slow theft of a body: a companion who seems well, only quiet, and keeps stooping to the soil. Travellers are told to wear protection against spores and to watch one another for the stoop.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' tales call them the Expanse's gardeners, and some say the Verdant send them. Others believe a taken host can be freed by burning seed under its nose, which drives a cloud out only if it is caught early. The Spore-Clouds are not the same as the Spore Cloud working of the nature mages, which releases a cultivated strain without any will of its own, nor as the spores of the Beyonders.

Herb-hunters who come back from the Expanse are watched for a season by their own villages, and wherever the Expanse is spoken of, someone recalls the hunter who came home with a sack of rare herbs and a cough, and woke the village green.



# Stagger-Vetch

**Stagger-vetch** is the herder's enemy of the Windscar. It comes up among the thin grass of the shelves of the High Scars and on the rim slopes of the Rimward Basins, thickest after a wet season, and a beast that grazes it goes mad on its feet: it walks in circles, stumbles, and falls. Orc herders burn it out in wet years and argue over it in their disputes.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Shelves, rim slopes, and wash edges |
| **Range** | The High Scars and the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Wary, to herds |

## Appearance

It is a low, sprawling plant, a hand to a shin high, of many grey-green, hairy stems spreading from a deep root. Each leaf is a feather of small paired leaflets, silvery with fine hair. In spring after rain it carries short spikes of small pea-flowers, purple, blue-violet, or cream, and then puffed, papery pods that rattle with seed when dry. In the grass it looks like any small vetch, and that is the danger. It has a faint, rank smell when crushed.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on the dry, stony ground of the shelves and rim slopes, along wash edges, and around the camping grounds where the soil has been disturbed. It springs up after a wet season and dies back in drought, so it is worst in exactly the years when herds spread out across the shelves.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Its roots go very deep and it survives years of drought as a root. After rain it comes up fast, ahead of the grass, and is the first green on the shelves, which draws the herds to it.

## Life Cycle

A long-lived root sends up new stems after every good rain, flowers, and seeds within weeks. Seeds lie in the stony soil for many years.

## Uses and Dangers

Its harm is slow and certain. A herd beast that eats a little of it over weeks comes to want it, seeks it out, and grows dull, thin, and wild-eyed; then it staggers, walks in circles, rears at nothing, falls, and does not rise. A beast that has once begun seldom recovers. Herders know the plant and keep stock off ground thick with it, pull it by hand around camping rings, and burn whole slopes in a wet year before the herds come up. A beast that dies of it is a loss counted in the herd and argued over: a kindred whose herd was grazed on poisoned ground by another's escort, or on a pasture claimed to be clean, wants beasts in answer, from a route moot if it can get them and by raid if it cannot, and the dead beast is entered in its reckoning.

Its seeds are not eaten. It has no known use.

## Lore and Belief

Orcs say stagger-vetch grows where a warning was not given, and a slope thick with it is sometimes named after a guide who failed there. Some herders hold that a beast that has eaten it sees the dead walking with the herd, which is why it rears. Children are taught to know it by its hair and its rattling pods before they are trusted with a flock.

Raiders are said to drive a rival's herd onto a vetch slope before a fight, so that the beasts bolt and scatter the camp.



# Stanchweed

**Stanchweed** grows along every road, and that is where it is needed. Its crushed leaves, packed into a cut, slow and stop the bleeding, and every escort, soldier, carter, and herder carries a twist of it dried in a pouch. Of all the herbs, it is the one most people can find and use without a healer.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Waysides, field edges, meadows, and camping grounds |
| **Range** | Widespread |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

It is a low, tough plant, a shin to a knee high, with leaves so finely divided that they look like green feathers or soft fern, dark green and slightly woolly, crowded up the stem. In summer it carries flat, dense heads of tiny flowers, white or faintly pink, as wide as a palm. The whole plant has a strong, sharp, bitter smell, like crushed chrysanthemum and pine, that clings to the fingers. Dried, it keeps its smell for a year.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on poor, dry, trodden ground: waysides, field edges, meadows, banks, and the trampled margins of camping grounds and caravan yards. It is found on both sides of Caeldon wherever people walk, from the basin lanes to the passward shelters of the High Scars and the cistern approaches of the Leeward Folds. It does not grow in deep forest, desert, or the deep.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It spreads by creeping roots into tough mats that stand trampling and mowing. A road that has been walked for a generation is edged with it.

## Life Cycle

A long-lived plant that dies back in winter and comes up again in spring, flowering from mid-summer into autumn.

## Uses and Dangers

Its leaves, crushed or chewed and packed into a cut, help the blood clot and slow its flow, and its bitterness keeps a wound cleaner than a dirty rag would. It is the first thing put into a wound on a road, before a healer can be reached, and the escort companies of the Windscar and the armies of the cradle-web both carry it. A tea of it is drunk for fever and for a griping stomach, and the dried plant is strewn against moths. It does not close a wound and cannot clean one deep, and packing a dirty cut with it seals the dirt in (see Wound Rot).

It harms no one, though some people break out in a rash from handling it.

## Lore and Belief

Soldiers' tales hold that the first warrior learned stanchweed from a god who bled on a battlefield, and some companies call it **the war-god's leaf**. Orc escorts say that a party that carries no stanchweed expects someone else to bleed for it. Herb-wives say it stops a nosebleed when pushed into the nose and starts one when held under it, both of which are true enough.

A sellsword who comes into a company without a pouch of it is laughed at, and a surgeon's apprentice is first sent to cut it along the march, which is how many of them learn where the ambush ground lies.



# Storm Truffles

**Storm Truffles** are fungi that live underground on the basin floors of the Rimward Basins and fruit only after the storms. In the weeks after rain, when households and herds spread out again from the rims, children go out to find the cracked mounds that mark them and dig them out with sticks. They are the storm's own harvest, and a good truffle year is a good year.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Basin floors and outer slopes after storm rain |
| **Range** | The Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A truffle is a lumpy, rounded tuber from the size of a walnut to a child's fist, with a thin, smooth skin of pale buff to reddish brown, sandy where the soil clings to it. Cut, the flesh is firm, cream to pinkish, marbled with paler veins. It lies a hand or so below the surface, and as it swells it lifts the crust above it into a low mound with a star of cracks. It smells of damp earth and, faintly, of nuts.

## Habitat and Range

It grows in the sandy and silty floors and lower slopes of the basins, joined to the roots of the small rock-roses and scrub that hold the ground, and it is found only where storm water has soaked in.

## Life Cycle

Its threads live in the ground with the scrub's roots through the long dry, and a soaking rain wakes them; within a few weeks the truffles swell,

and if they are not dug they rot or are taken by beasts, loosing their spores into the soil. Years without a good storm bring none.

## Uses and Dangers

They are eaten roasted in the ashes, boiled with milk, or sliced and dried for the dry months, and they are a welcome change in a diet of herd milk, meat, and stores. Gathering them is children's work and a children's game: who finds the most, who finds the largest. Herders let their beasts root for them on the outer slopes. They are harmless; the danger of the truffle grounds is the heat of the open floors and the snakes and scorpions that shelter in the same cracks.

## Lore and Belief

Orc households say the storm plants them, that each truffle is a hailstone that did not melt, and children are told it to make them look. A family's truffle grounds are as well known as its place in the camp rings, and a camp that takes another's grounds after a storm has started a feud. The first truffles of a season are shared, never sold.



# Sundews

**Sundews** are the commonest of the few plants of the Material Plane that catch their food without a mage to make them. They are tiny. They catch gnats and midges on sticky leaves on the moss of the bogs, and they could not hold a mouse. The great hunting plants of marsh tales are Nature Magic or the Verdant Expanse (see Carnivorous Plants); the largest that grows wild on Caeldon, the fen pitcher of the Reedmere, drowns nothing bigger than a bird.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Wet, acid bogs and fen margins |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the bogs of the Elderweald |
| **Known to** | Reedfolk, Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless (to people) |

## Appearance

A sundew is a flat rosette no wider than a coin, lying on the wet moss. Its leaves are small round or spoon-shaped pads on short stalks, reddish green, covered with fine red hairs, each tipped with a glistening drop of clear, sticky dew. In sunlight a bog full of them sparkles red and silver as if after rain, which gave them their name. In summer each plant raises a thin stalk with a few small white flowers that open only in sun. They have no smell a person can find.

## Habitat and Range

They grow on wet, acid, open bog: the sphagnum and sedge of the fen margins in the Confluence Basins, including the Reedmere's edges, and the bogs that open in the clearings of the Elderweald where the ground holds water like a sponge. They need sun, wet, and poor ground, and are crowded out by taller growth.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A gnat lands on the dew, drawn by its shine, and sticks. Its struggling bends the nearby hairs over it, and over an hour or so the leaf curls slowly around it and digests it. The leaf opens again in a few days, leaving a dry husk. The bog they grow in is too poor to feed them, and the insects make up the lack.

## Life Cycle

A sundew lives a few years, dying back to a tight winter bud on the moss and opening again in spring. It sets dust-fine seed after flowering.

## Uses and Dangers

They catch a few of the biting gnats and nothing more. Herb-wives gather them for a cough syrup and a wash for warts and corns, and the Reedfolk use the dew as a sticky dressing for small cuts. They harm no one.

## Lore and Belief

Basin folk who have heard the tales of drowning-vines point to sundews as the young of them, waiting to grow; they do not grow. Reedfolk say sundews keep the dew that a bog would otherwise give back to the sun, and that a bog that loses them is drying. Wood Elves call them **the bog's small hunters** and take them as proof that even the poorest ground finds a way to feed itself.



# Swollen Plants (the Blood River)

The banks of a Blood River are crowded with plants grown far past their size, vivid and oversized, feeding on the river's flow. They are the one thing that thrives beside it. A short way from the bank the crops wither, the animals die, and the soil turns to ash, and the swollen growth stands out against that grey like a wound.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The soft, pulsing banks of a Blood River |
| **Range** | The Blood River, in fertile valleys, old battlefields, and places of great life and death wherever it wakes |
| **Known to** | Valley folk who live near one |
| **Danger** | Wary: harmless in themselves, but they hide the river's hunters |

## Appearance

They are the plants of the valley the river woke in, grown monstrous: dock and burdock with leaves the size of shields, nettles taller than a rider, reeds as thick as a wrist, and trees whose roots bulge out of the bank like veins. Everything is too green or too red. Stems are thick, glossy, and soft, and when broken they bleed a thin red sap. Their leaves are veined in crimson and shiver in time with the river's beat. The banks smell of raw meat and blossom together.

## Habitat and Range

They grow only on the river's soft banks and in its shallows, as far as the flow reaches when the river swells with its breath. Beyond that line nothing grows at all.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They drink. Their roots run into the bank and the flow, and they grow while the river beats. The Hemophages make their hollows among them, and the web-spinning Blood-Spinners hang their webs between their stems.

## Life Cycle

They swell within days of the river waking and grow as long as it runs. When the river fails, they fail with it: leaves blacken, stems slump, and the whole bank falls into the same ash as the land around it. A leaf that falls into the river is not left to rot; the river breaks it down and makes it more river.

## Uses and Dangers

Little that grows there is safe to eat; its fruit and leaves taste of blood and are said to bring on the river's thirst. Their danger is cover. The growth is tall and dense enough to hide what hunts the banks, and a traveller pushing through it towards the water may be walking into a web.

## Lore and Belief

Valley folk say the swollen plants are the stolen life of their own fields, and they are not wrong: the river's gifts are paid for by the land around it. Some cut the bank growth back in the belief that it starves the river. It does not; the river takes what it needs from the land whatever grows beside it.

Beast-hunters who go after the things that lie in the bank growth say the plants pulse faster when something under them is waiting, and that the trick is to watch the leaves, not the water.



# Thirstroot

**Thirstroot** is the plant of the Parched, if a plant is what it is: a mass of root under the cracked ground with almost nothing above it. On a plane where the land itself seems to drink, it does the drinking. By night its roots rise through the cracks to draw moisture from whatever lies still above them, and a traveller who sleeps on the wrong ground wakes, if at all, dried and bleeding from a hundred small wounds.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Cracked mud flats, dry riverbeds, and sand hollows |
| **Range** | The Parched |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to a sleeper |

## Appearance

By day there is little to see: a few grey, leathery, finger-long leaves pressed flat to the ground in a star, and a web of fine cracks around them a few paces across. At night the roots come up through those cracks, pale and thread-thin at first, thickening to the width of a cord as they feed, tipped with fine, hard hairs that work into skin. They move slowly and without sound, and a patch of ground that has fed shows as a darker, softer circle in the morning. It smells of nothing until it feeds; then of wet clay.

## Habitat and Range

It grows in the mud flats, dry riverbeds, and hollows where any trace of moisture was last held, and it is commonest at the edges of the salt flats left behind when a portal flood has come and gone. A wide patch of it may lie under a single stretch of ground for as long as anyone has crossed it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It feeds on what lies still. Roots rise towards warmth and damp and fasten wherever they touch skin, hide, or anything wet, and they draw slowly, through the hours of dark, sinking back as the plane's pale sun rises. A moving body shakes them off; a sleeping one, or one too weak to rise, is drunk from all night.

## Abilities

Its roots find moisture through the ground by the faintest damp of a breath or a skin, and their hairs draw blood and water from the body through countless small wounds that hardly hurt. It can feed from a carcass for days.

## Life Cycle

It seems to grow only after it has fed, a patch spreading a little after each kill. It flowers, rarely, in a burst of small grey-white bells that last one night after a portal flood, and its seed lies in the dust for years.

## Uses and Dangers

The Dust-Eaters know its ground and dig the thick roots of a well-fed patch for the water they hold, a dangerous harvest, since a patch that has fed recently is strong. To travellers it is a slow killer. Those who sleep on the Parched sleep on stone, on packs, or in turns, and wake one another at the first tug.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say the ground of the Parched is alive and hungry, and in thirstroot country they are right. They also say that it drinks the blood of the dead so that no corpse lies whole on the plane for long, which is partly so; bone-cleaning is the work of other beings. A tale goes round of a crosser who found a patch of fresh green leaves in the morning and knew a companion had slept there; it is the kind of tale the Parched breeds.

Delvers who cross to the Parched for its minerals sleep sitting up, back to back, and the tale of the camp that slept lying down is the first thing an old hand tells a new one.



# Thorn and Thornwood

**Thorn** is the name the peoples give to every small, hard, spined tree and shrub that takes ground nobody holds: the thickets that close a path in a season, the hedges that keep a field or a clearing, the brambles of old terraces, and the lone thorn trees of the wind-scoured heights. It matters most in the Briarreach, where the Thornbound Circles of the Thorn Elves grow it into walls and season its wood for trade. **Thornwood** is that seasoned wood.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Broken woodland, clearings, hedgerows, abandoned terraces, and escarpment routes |
| **Range** | The Briarreach, the High Scars of the Windscar Expanse, the Witnessfields, and hedged farmland throughout the cradle-web |
| **Known to** | Thorn Elves, Orcs, Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary: it tears skin and cloth and closes paths, and a hedge can hide its keepers |

## Appearance

### *Thicket Thorn*

The common thorn of the Briarreach is a dense shrub or small tree, from head height to twice that, with black-grey bark, twisted branches, and stiff spines as long as a finger on every twig. It flowers white before its leaves in early spring, so that a thicket stands like a drift of late snow, and sets small dark blue-black fruit, bitter until the frost. In summer it is a wall of small dull leaves; in winter, bare, it shows how close the spines grow. A thicket smells faintly sour and almond-sweet when it blooms, and of nothing at all the rest of the year.

### *Bramble*

Bramble is a sprawling, arching cane armed with hooked prickles, rooting wherever its tips touch the ground. It flowers pink-white in summer and fruits black in autumn, and it is the first growth to cover a fallen wall or an abandoned field.

### *Escarpment Thorn*

On the Windscar heights thorn grows alone, one tree to a ledge or a ravine head, low, wind-bent, and grey, its crown combed flat to leeward and its roots gripping cracks in the rock. Some along the escarpment routes have been struck by lightning and did not burn: they stand split and blackened, leafless on one side and in leaf on the other.

## Habitat and Range

Thorn takes broken and abandoned ground, wherever light reaches soil. The Briarreach, a forest that keeps breaking through windthrow and deadfall, is full of it, and the clearings that will not stay clear are clearings going back to thorn. In the open country the terraces of the Witnessfields have long gone to grass, heath, and thorn, and bramble and scrub take the old terraces of the Dry Folds in the Leeward Folds. Farmers of the cradle-web plant thorn as hedges along lanes and fields. On the far side, lone escarpment thorns stand along the routes of the High Scars in the Windscar Expanse.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Thorn is patient and greedy for light. Left alone, a thicket thickens outward a pace or two a year from suckers and seed dropped by birds, and a path not walked for one season can be closed by the next. Bramble arches over and roots ahead of itself. Laid and woven, thorn grows into a living fence that thickens with every year of tending, which is what the Thorn Elves have made of it.

## Life Cycle

A thorn grows from a stone carried by a bird, slowly at first, and can live for centuries; a hedge laid every few years renews itself from the same roots almost without end. Cut thorn regrows from the stump. Bramble canes live two years, fruiting in the second, and the clump goes on from its roots.

## Uses and Dangers

A Thornbound settlement is a cluster of dwellings around a hidden clearing, ringed with cultivated thorn-hedge and woven deadwood, with only a few ways in that anyone outside the circle knows. Keeping those hedges is part of the endless labour of the watch, and a Human village clearing towards the Briarreach may find its woodcutters turned back at a hedge it did not know was there. Outward from the Waitfield goes **seasoned thornwood**: hard, heavy, close-grained wood, pale yellow-brown and darkening with age, cut from the hedge-lines and dried for years. It is prized for tool handles, pegs, cudgels, and walking staffs. The fruit makes a sour preserve and a dye, and hedge thorn gives farmers a fence no beast pushes through.

The dangers are torn skin, torn cloth, and the paths thorn closes. Practitioners of Nature Magic raise barbed growth from hedges and brush to make a lane a bleeding choke point, grow hedge walls in moments, and hide a sacred grove's inner shrine in a maze of bramble; a warden who has worked Bark Hide on their own skin crosses thorn without flinching.

## Lore and Belief

To the Thorn Elves the hedge is the boundary that judges who may approach, and a stranger waits at its edge until watchers come; what lies inside is

not spoken of to guests. Basin farmers say a thorn hedge keeps out more than cattle, and do not cut the old ones lightly.

Orcs of the Windscar take the lone lightning-struck thorns of the escarpment routes as the marks of Rakhal the Storm-Caller, still waiting for the next storm, and no escort cuts one or camps beneath it. Farmers of the Confluence Basins tell that Anvelle the Harvest-Mother can make roots and thorns burst from the ground to shield the innocent.

Outlaws and raiders on the frontier learn the hedge the hard way: a war-band that tried to cut its way through a Thornbound hedge was met at the gap by watchers who had heard every stroke, and the songs say none of it came out.



# Thornapple

**Thornapple** is a weed of ruined ground, rank-smelling and handsome, with a spiny fruit like a small green chestnut. Every part of it is poison. Burned, its leaves give a smoke that brings visions, and dream-workers of Dream Magic buy it from the Goblin gatherers of the Broken Marches, and fear what it does.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Waste ground, ruin-courts, middens, and yards |
| **Range** | The Broken Marches and the Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Goblins, Humans |
| **Danger** | Deadly |

## Appearance

Thornapple is a coarse, branching plant, knee- to waist-high, with a stout, smooth, often purplish stem and large, soft, unevenly toothed leaves, dark green and dull, that smell foul when brushed, like rotten meat and old tobacco. In summer it opens single, long, trumpet-shaped flowers, white or pale violet, twisting open at dusk and giving off a sweet scent at night quite unlike the leaves. The fruit is an egg-sized green capsule covered in stiff spines, which dries brown and splits into four to spill hundreds of small, dark, kidney-shaped seeds.

## Habitat and Range

It grows on rich, disturbed ground: ruin-courts and the rubble of old works, middens, yards, and the waste ground behind towns, throughout the Marches and in Lowbank's yards at the Greyford Reach. It comes up in new rubble the first summer after a collapse.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It is a fast annual that seeds heavily, and once in a court it is hard to be rid of. Beasts leave it alone.

## Life Cycle

It sprouts in late spring, flowers through summer, and dies at the first frost; its seed lies in the ground for years.

## Uses and Dangers

Every part is poison, the seeds most. A child who eats the seeds, or a forager who mistakes the leaves for greens, grows hot, dry, and flushed, with wide black eyes and a racing heart, then raves and sees what is not there, sometimes for days; many children die (the course is much like the black-eyed berries under Poison Herbs). Healers burn a little of the dried leaf for those whose breath tightens, and some poisoners use the seed.

Dream-workers want the smoke. A careful measure, burned in a closed room in a smoke rite, opens a sleeper to dreams of terrible vividness, and some workers use it to reach a dreamer who will not otherwise go deep. It is hard to measure, the visions often turn to nightmare, and dream-workers who use it too often begin to see things awake. Most schools forbid it to students; most masters keep some.

## Lore and Belief

Marches folk call it **the devil's trumpet** and say it grows where someone died badly in the ruin, which is often true of ruins. Goblin gatherers sell it to dream-workers and will not burn it at their own hearths, and they say a buyer who comes back too often for it is not buying for dreams. Dream-workers hold that its visions come from the far edge of the Dreaming Veil; the poison does more of the work than the Veil does.

Marches camps warn of the delver who smoked thornapple to find a ruin's hidden vault in a dream, walked off a broken stair in the night, and was found at the bottom of it beside the vault's door, is told in every Marches camp.



# Timber Trees

**Timber trees** are the working trees of Caeldon: the ones people fell for beams and bracing, cut back for poles, strip for bark, tap for resin, and burn. The Material Plane has timber enough to support civilization, but it must be worked for. The peoples name these trees by their use and the country they grow in, not by any reckoning of kinds, and the trade in them runs from the foothill woods of the Headwater Marches uphill to the holds and the Deeps.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Foothill woods, forest edges, broken woodland, and frontier timber belts |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches, the Elderweald edge, the Briarreach, and timber belts on both sides of Caeldon |
| **Known to** | Humans, Thorn Elves, Wood Elves, Ogres, Dwarves, Kobolds |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though felling, hauling, and bad timber kill |

## Appearance

### *Foothill Pine*

The commonest timber of the Headwater woods is a tall, straight conifer, three or four storeys high in a good stand, with reddish scaly bark that peels in plates, a narrow crown of dark blue-green needles held high, and a clean trunk below. Its wood is pale, light, and resinous, and a fresh-cut stack smells sharp and sweet for a season. This is the bracing timber of the mines.

### *Edge Oak*

At the edges of the forests and in the lighter woodland where the Elderweald thins towards the basins grows a broad-crowned oak, black-barked and deeply furrowed, its limbs spreading wider than it is tall, its leaves lobed and leathery and its acorns cupped in grey. Its wood is heavy, dark

gold, and slow to rot. It is the beam and bridge timber the basin side most wants and is least allowed to cut.

### *Coppice Wood*

In broken woodland, and above all in the Briarreach, the useful trees are kept low: hazel-like shrubs and quick, pale-barked ash cut to the ground every few years, so that each stool sends up a ring of straight, smooth poles, grey-brown and as thick as a wrist. A coppice ground looks like a field of rods in every stage of growth.

### *Bark, Resin, and Dye Trees*

The same woods give other goods than wood. The bark of oak and of a smooth-skinned birch is stripped in spring for tanning and cordage; the foothill pine and the conifers of the Briarreach slopes are tapped for a thick amber resin that hardens in the air; and bark, root, and gall give the browns, blacks, and yellows of the dyers.

## Habitat and Range

Foothill pine fills the slopes and stream-cut spurs above the Headwater valleys and the lower flanks of the Ironspine. Edge oak grows along every forest margin of the cradle-web. Coppice belongs to the Briarreach, a forest that keeps breaking, where windthrow and deadfall leave light for quick growth. **Timber belts**, the worked woods of the frontier, lie on both sides of Caeldon among rough uplands, border farms, and heavy settlement edges, and there Ogre bands do the carrying.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Timber trees only grow, but each kind answers cutting differently. Pine does not regrow from the stump: a felled slope stays felled until seed takes it again. Oak and ash come back from the stool, and coppice is the art of using that. The deep weald is another matter. Its ancient trees are not timber at all to the people who live among them (see Great Trees and Groves).

## Life Cycle

Foothill pine reaches bracing size within a lifetime of a Human and good beam size in two. Edge oak takes centuries to its full spread and can stand for many more. A coppice stool, cut in turn every few years, can outlive any tree grown from it.

## Uses and Dangers

A Headwater valley household cuts timber in the foothill woods alongside its barley, oats, and herds, and sells to the holds above. Bracing timber goes up with grain, salt meat, wool and cloth, and lamp oil, much of it bound past the Ironspine Holds for the Stonewake Deeps, where no tree grows; at Seamhead, timber yards feed the bracing of the working below. Kobolds have a sharp sense for bad timber, and a mine crew trusts a Kobold's word on a prop over its own eyes.

The Elderweald sells only what the forest lets fall: resin and seasoned deadwood, gathered under watch. Cut timber is never sold, and it is exactly what the basin side wants; from the first contacts at the forest edge the Human side has seen fuel and timber where the Wood Elves see a living continuity. The Briarreach sends out seasoned thornwood, coppice poles, bark and resin, and dyes through the Waitfield.

Ogres carry what others cannot: bridge beams, roof timbers, flood gates, and the timber of the frontier belts, often moving between quarry hauling, flood repair, and timber carrying with the seasons. Their own camps are long houses of timber and hide. In the Broken Marches and the Greyford Reach much timber is not cut but salvaged: old beams out of ruined works, sold quietly to border lords.

The dangers are the work's. A falling tree, a log loose on a slope, and a haul gone wrong kill woodcutters and haulers every year, and a rotten prop in a mine buries a crew.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater people say pine cut in the dark of winter lasts longest underground, and Dwarven bracing-masters will not use wood felled while the sap runs. Basin folk speak of the uncut Elderweald as wasted timber; Wood Elves answer that the forest was never waiting to be used. Ogre bands hold that a beam carried is a burden shared and owed, and count a timber haul with the rest of their sworn labour.

Timber belts are where the frontier's feuds are fought: lords' foresters, Elven wardens, and woodcutters' crews have killed one another over a stand of pine, and the songs of the Headwater remember the night a whole felling camp was burned out by men no one would name.



# Trimmed Trees

In the Gilded Cage, the plane of absolute order, nature is manicured into perfect shapes. Its trees are trimmed into cubes or spheres and stand at measured intervals along the straight streets of its cities, as regular as the buildings behind them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The streets and squares of the Gilded Cage |
| **Range** | The Gilded Cage |
| **Known to** | The Gilded |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

Each tree is a clean green solid on a straight bare trunk: a cube with sharp edges and flat faces, or a sphere so round it looks turned on a lathe. Every tree on a street has the same shape, the same height, and the same distance from the next. The leaves are small, dense, and dark, glossy as lacquer under the shadowless light from ground and sky, and so close-set that no branch shows. No leaf lies on the paving below. The trees do not stir, since there is no wind in the Cage, and they have no scent in its filtered air.

## Habitat and Range

They grow in the Cage's cities, in rows along its avenues and in its public squares beside the statues of the Rule-Breakers, set in square beds of identical size.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They grow as slowly as the Cage allows, which is hardly at all. A shoot that strays from the line is a deviation, and the Cage treats it as one.

## Abilities

The Gilded keep the trees by protocol, clipping them on the hour appointed for each street; what their shears miss, the plane corrects. A twig that grows out of true is drawn back into line as a leaning wall straightens itself, and a tree that is damaged regrows its shape exactly.

## Uses and Dangers

They are ornament and order made visible, and give no fruit or timber. They harm no one. A visitor who breaks a branch off one has broken a rule, and the Cage answers rule-breaking.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say the trees of the Cage were once wild and were clipped over long ages until they forgot any other shape; the Gilded, asked, answer only that the trees are as they should be. To most who hear of them, the trees sum up the plane: beautiful, safe, and never once allowed to grow as they would.

Thieves who reach the Cage tell of trying to climb a trimmed tree to a vault's high window and finding every branch exactly too short.



# Twisted Trees

The trees of the Soul Anchor are dead and twisted. They stand among its broken monuments and shattered headstones, over ground as hard as iron, in a place with no wind, no birds, and no life. They were living trees of the burial ground before the zone closed on it, and they died with everything else.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The burial grounds and catacomb country where a Soul Anchor forms |
| **Range** | The Soul Anchor |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

Each is a bare, contorted trunk, wrung round on itself as a cloth is wrung, its branches bent back and knotted, its bark split in long spirals and gone the colour of ash. Some lean over the graves; some have grown round a headstone and split it. In the Anchor's sourceless light they take on its dull grey, sickly yellow, and bruised purple, and where a trapped Echo flickers near one, its glow catches on the twisted wood.

They do not rot. The decay here is a clean one, held still, and the trees smell of old dust and of the stale incense and formaldehyde smell of the place rather than of wet wood. Beneath the zone's low drone they make no sound at all.

## Habitat and Range

They stand where they grew, scattered across the Anchor's ground, thickest in old burial grounds that once had groves. No new tree grows there.

## Life Cycle

None. They died when the Anchor formed and stand as they were. If the Anchor is broken and its Echoes go free, it is said that the trees at last fall and rot, but few have seen an Anchor broken.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, not even firewood, since their wood is hard as the ground and will not catch. They harm no one. The danger beneath them is the Anchor's own: whoever dies there stays.

## Lore and Belief

Those who live near a Soul Anchor say the trees were twisted by the suffering of the Echoes around them, wrung like the dead who cannot let go. Nobody knows if that is so; the Anchor's dead do suffer, and the trees are twisted. Some mourners tie cloth to the nearest living tree outside an Anchor's edge, in the belief that its Echoes can see the colour and remember the living.

Necromancers are said to cut their staves from the twisted trees, and villages near an Anchor watch for strangers with a hatchet.



# Veilmint

**Veilmint** is a wild mint of the places where the world wears thin: old shrines, boundary roads, crossroads stones, and the thin places at which the Veil lies close. Those who must cross the Veil chew a leaf to keep their minds on where they are going, since the Veil answers a traveller's intent; and every crosser learns that a second leaf does the opposite of the first.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Old shrines, boundary roads, crossroads, and thin places |
| **Range** | Widespread, at thin places |
| **Known to** | Humans, Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Wary: too much brings drift |

## Appearance

A low, creeping mint with square stems and small, paired, rounded leaves, grey-green and softly hairy, silvered on the undersides so that a patch shimmers when the wind turns it. In late summer it carries small whorls of pale grey-violet flowers up its stems. Crushed, it gives a cold, sharp, peppery scent stronger than any garden mint, that clears the head and makes the eyes water; it tastes of the same, with a bitter finish.

## Habitat and Range

It grows in poor, trodden ground where people have stood and turned back for a long time: at old shrines, way-markers, boundary stones, and crossroads, and above all at thin places, where it grows thickest. It is scattered across the cradle-web and the far side alike, and travellers say a patch of it on an empty road means a thin place near.

## Abilities

A leaf chewed slowly sharpens the mind and steadies it on one aim, which is what the Veil's Law of Intention rewards. A crosser who chews it holds a course longer. More than a little does the reverse: the sharpness turns to a light, drifting clarity in which every thought seems equally worth following, and in the Veil that is the beginning of drift.

## Life Cycle

It spreads by creeping roots into broad mats and is very hard to kill. It dies back in winter and returns in spring.

## Uses and Dangers

Crossers, guides, and the Kindred circuits that walk thin roads carry a few dried leaves among their focus anchors, with the map and the mantra, and chew one at the threshold. Healers use it as a common remedy for headache and fainting. The danger is the second leaf, and the third: those who chew it to feel bolder lose their way faster, and guides tell of crossers who went into drift chewing.

## Lore and Belief

Folk say Veilmint grows where the dead walk the roads, and some will not pick it at shrines. Crossers say "one leaf to go, none to stay": chew one going in, and none while inside. The Salvage Peoples plant it at their own way-marks to find them again, and some say it marks every thin place, which is not so: it marks where people have stood, which is often but not always the same.

Smugglers who use the thin places as hidden roads carry Veilmint by the sack, and the songs of the boundary roads tell of the smuggler who chewed one leaf too many and is still walking somewhere in the fog with his cargo.



# Verdant Expanse Flora

The plants of the Verdant Expanse are the plane: a chaotic, shifting jungle where life reproduces faster than anything can contain it. A seed can become a forest in an hour. Trees grow into spirals, roots make bridges, flowers bloom and wither in moments, and the ground is a carpet of moss and fern. It is the richest larder any traveller has seen, and it can bury that traveller in minutes.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | The shifting jungle of the Verdant Expanse |
| **Range** | The Verdant Expanse, reached through its Seed-Gates in ancient forests and overgrown ruins |
| **Known to** | The Verdant; herbalists, healers, and travellers who cross the Seed-Gates |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: it buries, strangles, chokes, and eats whoever stops |

## Appearance

The colours are saturated past anything on Caeldon: greens and yellows, deep purples, vivid pinks that seem to pulse. The only brown is the living soil. The canopy grows over the sun, and the light comes down dappled and moving.

### *Spiral Trees*

The great trees of the Expanse twist as they grow, trunks turning round themselves in slow spirals, branches corkscrewing out and up. Their wood is stronger than steel. Their roots run above ground as often as below, and where two trees lean together their roots meet in living bridges across ravines and rivers.

### *Vines*

Vines hang from everything, thick as a wrist or an arm, and grow while they are watched. They wrap ankles, lift fallen trunks, and close paths; one strong vine can lift tons.

### *Undergrowth, Moss, and Fern*

The floor is moss and fern deep enough to swallow a footstep without sound and to cushion a fall. Leaves of every size crowd the gaps, some of them able to draw poison out of water or air.

### *Flowers, Fruit, and Nuts*

Flowers open, fade, and drop in moments, and the air is heavy with their pollen and with nectar. Fruit, nuts, and nectar are everywhere and rich. The smell of blossom, fermenting fruit, and rot together can turn the stomach.

### *Carnivores*

Many plants eat meat, and count a traveller as fertilizer: see Carnivorous Plants.

### *The Rivers*

The rivers are thick with algae and glow with plankton by night, so that every stream is a line of pale light under the canopy.

## Habitat and Range

The jungle covers the plane. Space itself is fluid there: a short path stretches as vines grow across it, and a clearing widens as its edges sprout. Nowhere in the Expanse is free of growth for long, and even metal and stone are slowly overgrown and eaten by lichen and fungus.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The flora acts as one thing. Plants and animals alike are loosely linked through a root-network, so that harm to one part of the jungle is felt by the whole; a traveller who hacks a path finds the growth ahead thicker. It does not hunt in the way a beast hunts, but it grows over whatever stops, and the dead are composted within hours.

## Abilities

Growth here is beyond measure. Wounds heal in moments among the plants, and the ambient life can cure almost any injury or illness. A vine can grow round a sleeping body before morning, roots trip and hold, and pollen can choke. Food carried in sprouts.

## Life Cycle

Everything turns over in hours or days: sprouting, flowering, fruiting, and dying, each plant replaced before it is gone. Seed falls and is a sapling by evening. Nothing in the Expanse has a season.

## Uses and Dangers

The Expanse gives abundantly. Its fruit and nectar feed anyone who will eat them, its living wood is stronger than steel and its vines stronger than rope, and its leaves filter poisons. Herbalists come for its rare herbs, and the dying come to be healed.

Its dangers are the same abundance: growth that can bury a traveller in minutes, vines that strangle, roots that trip, pollen that chokes, carnivorous plants, and a slow merging with the network until a traveller forgets their own name. Visitors are told to move fast, touch nothing, carry blades for the vines, cover themselves against spores and thorns, and cut any root they feel closing on them.

## Lore and Belief

The Expanse is the engine of creation, and some Material Plane growers hold that a seed from its jungle makes any field bear; brought home, such seed most often runs wild and chokes the field. Healers tell of travellers who came back cured and carrying a piece of the Expanse growing inside them. The Verdant regard the jungle as themselves, and its plants as their own limbs.

Seed-thieves who cross to the Expanse for a lord’s barren fields are hired, paid, and rarely seen again; those who come back sell what they carry for its weight in silver.



# Vines

**Vines** are plants that climb. The one people grow on purpose is the grapevine of the Leeward Folds, kept in rows on the warmest terraces, where Halflings stoop over the vine rows through the summer and press the grapes in autumn. Everywhere else vines are wild: brambles and climbers in hedges and woods, ivy on walls and trees, tangles in the marshes. The vine is also a sign. A ribbon of living green vine binds the sheaf of Anvelle the Harvest-Mother, and vines are what she and the mages of Nature Magic call out of the ground. The vines of other planes and of the Dark Entities are another matter, described with the Verdant Expanse Flora and the Xylos Mycelium.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Warm terrace rows; hedges, woods, walls, and marshes |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds; widespread in the wild |
| **Known to** | Halflings, Humans, Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless, unless a mage or a god makes it otherwise |

## Appearance

### *The terrace vine*

A fold grapevine is pruned each winter back to a gnarled, dark, shaggy-barked trunk no higher than a Halfling's chest, from which new green canes spring every year. Its leaves are broad, five-lobed, and toothed like an open hand, bright green in summer and red-gold in autumn. Curling tendrils grip the stakes and wires of the row. The flowers are tiny and greenish and smell faintly sweet; the grapes that follow hang in tight bunches, hard and green through the summer, then softening to amber-green or dusky purple under a whitish bloom. A vine row in late summer smells of warm leaves and, once the wasps find it, split fruit.

### *Wild vines and ivy*

Wild vines in the basin hedges and the forest edge are lighter and ranker, with smaller sour grapes or none. Brambles arch and root where their tips touch the ground. Ivy is evergreen, dark, glossy, and slow, its leaves three- or five-pointed on climbing stems and heart-shaped on the flowering tops, and it holds to stone and bark with tiny clinging roots. Its late flowers feed the last insects of the year and its black berries feed birds in winter. In the fens and marshes of the lowlands, soft-stemmed climbers wind through reed and willow.

## Habitat and Range

The cultivated vine needs warmth, sun, and shelter, and in the Folds it takes the warmest terraces, sharing them with the orchards. Wild vines and ivy grow wherever there is something to climb: hedges, woodland edges, old walls, ruins, and riverside thickets on both sides of Caeldon.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A vine left alone grows long and fruits little, which is why the folds prune it hard. Late frost takes its buds, wet summers rot the bunches, and birds and wasps take the ripe grapes. Wild ivy is patient and unstoppable: given a few generations, it pulls down the wall it climbs.

## Life Cycle

A grapevine is propagated from cuttings, bears in its third or fourth year, and fruits for generations if it is kept. Leaves open late in spring, flowers in early summer, and grapes ripen into autumn, when they are picked by hand.

## Uses and Dangers

Fold grapes are eaten fresh, dried into raisins on the drying floors beside the other fruit, and pressed on the shared presses of the orchard leagues; the faint sourness of the presses in late summer comes partly from them. Some of the juice becomes wine. Grape wine is a far-side drink: no grapes grow in the cradle-web, and wine there is fruit and flower wine of elder, berries, and honey. That is the wine offered with bread and flowers to the river at the **Festival of the First Flow** of Serovan the River-King. Wild vines give baskets, ties, and a little poor fruit; ivy gives winter fodder and nothing else anyone wants.

In the hands of a mage, a vine is a tool. **Vine Lash** sends out a fast-growing vine to snare or strike, weakened on sterile ground and paved courts; **Canopy Shade** needs branches, vines, or fast-growing support to spread living cover overhead; **Predator Bloom** can turn marsh vines into hunting tendrils around a camp, and is dangerous to allies once fed. The Vine Conservatory, an order of the school, specialises in cultivated flora, poisons, and rare plant forms.

## Lore and Belief

Anvelle's sheaf of golden wheat is bound with a ribbon of living green vine, and basin farmers read the vine as the tie between one harvest and the next. Her **Root-Grab** raises vines, roots, or thorns from the ground to entangle enemies or protect the innocent, and leaves the spot barren if it is used too often. A vine that springs up overnight around a boundary stone is taken in the basins as a sign of her displeasure with whoever moved it.

Orcs of the Windscar honour ivy in the sign of Ushkar the Ancestor-Warden: a stone stele of names topped with a skull wreathed in ivy, and his hair is dried grey ivy that never wilts. To them ivy is what clings and does not let go, as the kindreds cling to their dead. Halflings say a vine is the most honest plant in a fold, because it gives exactly as much as it is pruned for.

Battle tales tell of a Vine Conservatory mage who held a bridge alone against a warband by lashing its first riders from their saddles, until the bridge planks under her were so overgrown that no horse would cross.



# Wall Figs

**Wall figs** grow out of the stone. Birds drop the seed into the joints of a dry-stone retaining wall, and a fig tree comes up out of the wall face, bearing small, very sweet figs within a few years. Its roots follow the joints into the earth behind and, as they thicken, push the wall out. In the Leeward Folds, where every terrace stands on its wall, a household that will not pull its wall fig hears about it at the next commons.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Retaining walls, terrace faces, cistern sides, and rock cracks |
| **Range** | The Leeward Folds and the terraces of the Tidelace Coasts |
| **Known to** | Halflings, Gnomes |
| **Danger** | Wary, to walls |

## Appearance

A wall fig is a sprawling shrub or small tree that leans out from the wall face, its smooth, silver-grey trunk and limbs often twisted along the stones. Its leaves are large, thick, and rough, as broad as a hand and deeply lobed into three or five fingers, and smell green and milky when crushed. Its figs are small, pear-shaped, and soft, the size of a walnut, green ripening to purple-brown, their skins splitting at the base to show a sticky pink-red flesh full of tiny seeds. Every part bleeds a white, sticky milk when cut. A wall with a fig on it in late summer hums with wasps.

## Habitat and Range

It grows from the joints of dry-stone walls, from cracks in the rock of fold heads and cistern sides, and from ruined terraces, wherever warmth and some damp behind the stone allow. It is common in the Folds and the Dry Folds, and on the sea-cut terraces and harbour walls of the Tidelace Coasts.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It is slow to show and quick to take hold. A seedling in a wall joint sends its roots down and back through the fill to the damp soil behind, and once rooted it is almost impossible to kill without taking the wall apart. Cut back to the face, it sprouts again from the joint.

## Life Cycle

A wall fig bears from its third or fourth year, often twice a summer, and can live for generations, outliving the wall it grows from.

## Uses and Dangers

The figs are sweet and good fresh, dried on the drying floors with the orchard fruit, or boiled into a paste; a wall fig is free fruit that needs no terrace of its own, which is the trouble. Its roots open the joints, push the wall face out, and let water into the fill, and a wall that has carried a fig for a generation can fail in a cloudburst and bring its terrace down on the one below. Fold wall-menders pull seedlings on sight. A household that leaves a bearing fig in its wall for the fruit is risking its neighbours' terrace, and the commons says so.

The milk irritates the skin, especially in sun, and pickers wear gloves.

## Lore and Belief

Halflings say a wall fig is a guest that eats the house, and use it as a byword for a pleasure the fold cannot afford: "that's a wall fig" ends many arguments at the commons. Some households believe a fig that seeds itself into a wall is a gift that must be thanked before it is pulled, and they leave its figs at the cistern hall. On the Tidelace, Gnomes pull them from harbour walls without debate and record the pulling in the breakwater ledger.



# Weeping Caps

**Weeping Caps** grow at the edges of the still black water of the Roothollows, the water nobody drinks. They are dark, slick mushrooms that drip from their gills as if crying, and they are among the deadliest things that grow below. Every Dark Elf child learns them early, because they mark ground where a child should not be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | Damp margins of standing black water |
| **Range** | The Roothollows |
| **Known to** | Elves (Dark Elves) |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to eat |

## Appearance

Clusters of slender mushrooms a hand to a forearm high, with narrow, bell-shaped caps that never open flat, the colour of wet slate to inky black, glistening as if just out of the water. The gills underneath are close and dark, and they drip a slow, clear-to-grey fluid that runs down the stems and gathers in the hollow below each cluster. As a cap ages it softens from the rim upward into black ooze. In the gloam a cluster is only a darker shape against dark stone. It smells faintly of iron and stagnant water.

## Habitat and Range

It grows only on the damp, soft margins of still black water, in chambers no house uses and in the low ends of hollows where water has lain for years, and nowhere along running water.

## Life Cycle

The caps come up in clusters through much of the root-year and dissolve within days, so that a margin is never long without them. The black ooze of the dissolved caps carries their spores into the mud at the water's edge.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. A single cap eaten brings cramping, a drenching sweat, and a slowed heart within the hour, and death within a day for most, quicker for a child. They are sometimes mistaken in poor light for slender bed fungus, and fungus tenders keep any stray that looks like them out of the beds.

## Lore and Belief

Dark Elf parents teach the rule in four words: "where caps weep, turn back." Children are told the caps weep for whoever went past them, and the margins where they grow are the margins of water no house draws from. Many Dark Elves will not say their name aloud near a reservoir. The connection the children draw is sound, if not for the reason they are given: the caps grow only where water has stood still long enough to be dangerous.



# Well Palms

**Well palms** grow only where their roots reach water, and so they mark it. A stand of their feathered crowns on the horizon of the Glassbelt means a caravan well or a spring, and the end of a hard day; a dead stand, grey and headless, means the well has failed. They give the crossers dates, shade, fibre, and wood, and they stand over the shade sanctuaries where crossers rest through the heat.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Caravan wells, springs, and shade sanctuaries |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior and the springs of the Rimward Basins |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples, Orcs |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A well palm is a single, unbranched, rough-ringed trunk, grey-brown and covered in the stubs of old leaf-bases, rising three to six storeys and topped by a crown of long, stiff, feather-shaped fronds, grey-green and rattling in the wind. Young palms throw suckers round their foot, so a stand is often a thicket of trunks of every height. In spring the female trees hang heavy sprays of small cream flowers among the fronds, and by late summer these are bunches of oblong dates, as long as a thumb-joint, ripening from yellow and red to a sticky, wrinkled brown. A stand's shade is cool and smells of dust, sweet fruit, and water.

## Habitat and Range

They grow round the caravan wells and the rare springs of the Glassbelt, round its shade sanctuaries, and at the springs and deep wells of the rim spurs of the Rimward Basins, the Lastwater Wells

among them. Each stand is small, a few dozen trees at most, and every one on the crossing is known and named.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A well palm drinks deep and much. Its roots go down to the water under the well and keep its crown green through the hottest months, and when the water drops beyond its reach the stand dies from the top, the fronds browning and falling first. Crossers read that as surely as the well-rope.

## Life Cycle

A palm grows from a stone or from a sucker, bears within some years, and can bear for a century. Female trees bear dates; male trees bear the pollen, which keepers carry by hand to the female flowers to be sure of a crop. A dead trunk stands for years.

## Uses and Dangers

Dates are the crossers' food: sweet, dense, and keeping for months dried and pressed into blocks. Custodians and well keepers tend the stands at the wells, climb them to pollinate and harvest, and share the dates under the same counted rules as the water. Fronds roof shade shelters and are woven into mats and baskets; the leaf-base fibre makes rope for well buckets; the trunk of a dead palm gives the only timber for days. Crossers of the Edgeway Kindreds plant a date stone at a well they have drunk from.

They harm no one, though a frond-base spine through the foot of a careless climber festers, and a falling bunch of dates has broken a head.

## Lore and Belief

Crossers say a well palm is a promise made by those who crossed before, and cutting one is held a great wrong anywhere on the crossing. A dead stand is not cut down but left standing as a warning. Rimward Orcs count a well's palms among its custodians, and a custodian line is said to keep its water as long as its palms keep their heads.

Raiders who cut a well's palms to break a rival line are hunted by every line on the crossing, and every well-line knows of one who did and was staked out under the dead stand he made.



# Wildflowers

**Wildflowers** are the flowers nobody plants: the meadow and field flowers of the farmlands, the bank flowers of the rivers, and the low tough flowers of the cliffs and shores. They feed no one and are gathered everywhere, because almost every people of Caeldon gives flowers to its powers. The river towns throw them to the water at the spring rise, the harbours throw them to the sea, and a flower floated downstream carries away a grief.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Meadows, field edges, banks, cliff tops, and waste ground |
| **Range** | Widespread on both sides of Caeldon |
| **Known to** | Humans, Gnomes, Halflings, Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

### *Meadow Flowers*

The wet meadows of the Confluence Basins, grazed in common below the villages, bloom in waves through the year: glossy yellow cups in early spring while the ground is still sodden, then pink and purple spikes and loose white umbels standing knee-high above the grass in summer, with a sweet, heavy, honey smell on still evenings. Cut, they wilt within a day.

### *Field Flowers*

Among the grain and along the field edges grow red, blue, and white flowers the farmers count as weeds: a scarlet, paper-petalled flower with a black heart that drops its petals at a touch, a ragged blue star on a wiry grey stem, and white daisies by the thousand. They bloom as the grain ripens and are the flowers of harvest wreaths.

### *Bank and Shore Flowers*

River banks carry tall yellow flags and loosestrife in purple spires; cliff tops and dunes along the coasts carry low cushions of pink thrift and yellow, fleshy-leaved flowers that stand salt wind. Shore flowers are small and long-lasting, and keep their colour for days after cutting.

## Habitat and Range

Wildflowers grow wherever the ground is open, sunlit, and not ploughed this year: meadow, verge, bank, hedge-foot, cliff top, and abandoned terrace. They are richest in the basins and river valleys of the cradle-web and on the coasts of the far side, poorest in dense forest, on bare stone, and in the deep. The meadow flowers follow water, the field flowers follow the plough, and the shore flowers follow salt.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Wildflowers only bloom and seed, but they keep time. Each kind opens in its own weeks, and country people date the year by them as much as by the sky. They call bees and other insects (see Insects and Bees), and close in rain.

## Life Cycle

Most field flowers live one year, sprouting with the sown grain and seeding before it is cut. Meadow and shore flowers come back from the same roots for many years. Cut flowers fade within a day or two unless kept in water or held by a working.

## Uses and Dangers

Wildflowers are gathered for offerings, wreaths, garlands, and the dressing of shrines; a few go into dyes and simples beside the herbs. At the spring rise the towns of the Lower Serath keep the Festival of the First Flow, offering bread, wine, and flowers to the river. Once a year the Festival of the Tides brings a Tidelace harbour down to the quays with flowers, shells, and stories for the sea. Any mourner may float a flower or a lantern down a river to let a grief or a secret go.

Workers of Nature Magic can make prepared plants flower on command, and in great workings set a whole valley into flower, at heavy cost to the land. A Frozen Moment Magic working, Lasting Bloom, keeps a cut flower or a coronation garland fresh through a long ceremony. Wildflowers harm no one.

## Lore and Belief

Flowers belong to the gods of growth and water. Anvelle the Harvest-Mother is pictured with hair of ripening wheat and wildflowers that bloom and wither in a breath. The wreath of Tamsel the Season-Weaver joins spring blossom, summer grain, autumn fruit, and winter evergreen in one circle, and blossom opens out of season where Tamsel passes. The High Elf courts know the scent of cut blossom as the air about Saerith the Mirror-King. People say that if the flowers given at the Festival of the Tides are given sincerely, Maris of the Tides grants a good catch, and that Serovan the River-King walks the crowd at the First Flow in disguise.

Flowers that wilt at once mark the passing of the Rotting Crown; flowers that open from cracks in bare stone mark the field of the Rootless Tree. Either is a warning, not a wonder.



# Willow

**Willow** is the tree of moving water. It roots wherever a bar or a bank stays above the river long enough, and it holds that ground until the next great flood takes it. Willow islands stand among the gravel bars of the Greyford Reach, and willow thickets fringe the flood-ground of the Lower Serath beside the reed beds. To the river peoples it is a marker of ground that will not last, and a supply of the most useful wood they have.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Riverbanks, gravel bars, islands, and flood-ground margins |
| **Range** | The Greyford Reach, the Lower Serath, and the river margins of the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans, Goblins, Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

Willow grows two ways. The **bar willow** of islands and thickets is a many-stemmed shrub or low tree, a little over head height, its long, slender, flexible shoots red-brown or olive-yellow and its leaves narrow, pointed, and silver-grey beneath, so that a thicket flickers green and silver in wind. The **bank willow** of the steadier margins is a tree with a short, thick, deeply furrowed trunk that leans over the water, often hollow in age, and a loose crown of drooping branches that trail their tips in the current.

In early spring, before the leaves, willow puts out soft furred catkins, silver at first and then dusted yellow with pollen, the first food of the year for bees. Its bark smells faintly bitter and green when cut. A willow thicket in summer is loud with small birds and still with heat.

## Habitat and Range

Willow needs wet roots and light. In the Greyford Reach it holds the shifting bars and islands between the side channels, where one river breaks into many. Along the Serath it grows in thickets at the margins of the abandoned channels, backwaters, and oxbow lakes, beside the reed beds, and the same kinds fringe the lower rivers of the Confluence Basins wherever the banks are left uncut.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Willow is the quickest of trees to take hold. A broken branch washed onto a bar roots where it lies, and a thicket can grow on new gravel in a few years. Its roots bind loose ground, so a willow island outlasts the bare bars around it, until a flood great enough tears the whole island out and leaves its trees heaped against the next bridge pier or causeway stub.

## Life Cycle

Willow sprouts from cuttings and fallen branches far more than from seed. A bar willow lives a few decades; a bank willow, cut back to its trunk every few years, can live for centuries, its head swollen and knotted from the cutting. Cut willow regrows at once, and a pollarded tree sends up a crown of straight new rods within a summer.

## Uses and Dangers

Willow gives **withies**, the long flexible rods cut from cut-back trees and thickets in winter. River households weave them into baskets, fish and eel traps, panniers, cradles, and the hurdles and fascines that brace a bank or a causeway against the flood. Goblin households at Lowbank eat eel and small fish from wicker traps set in the side channels, and Reedfolk channel-menders stake willow along a failing bank to hold it. Willow bark is chewed or steeped against aches and fever. As timber it is soft and light, good for little but boat ribs, poles, and charcoal.

Willow harms no one. Its only danger is the one it marks: willow on a bar means the river has not moved for a few years, not that it will not.

## Lore and Belief

River people read willow the way the Reedfolk read reed: a new thicket on a bar tells of a channel that has shifted, and the loss of an old island is remembered in the year it went. A Floodkeeper house's flood-roll opens by naming the flood that took the willows. Tamsel the Season-Weaver is pictured in spring with hair like budding willow branches, and willow catkins brought indoors are an old sign of the year's turning.

Outlaws on the river islands hide in the willow thickets, and bargemen still boast of the thief who lived for three summers on a willow island in the middle of the Serath with a lord's bounty on his head.



# Wind-Bent Trees

The trees and grass of the two wind zones of the Unbound Gale are the ordinary growth of high, open country, shaped by winds that are anything but ordinary. In the Silent Gale they bow to the ground and snap without a crack, and the grass lies flat. In the Whispering Winds, where the wind never stops, a few sparse trees lean for ever with it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | High passes, canyons, open plains, and windy peaks where the wind zones form |
| **Range** | The Silent Gale; the Whispering Winds |
| **Known to** | The Mute-Walkers and the Wind-Listeners; herders and travellers of the high passes |
| **Danger** | Harmless, though the Silent Gale snaps them without warning |

## Appearance

### *In the Silent Gale*

When the Gale is blowing, every tree is bent nearly double, its crown dragged along the ground, its leaves stripped and streaming, and then a trunk splits and goes, all in perfect silence. The grass lies flat in one direction like combed hair. Between storms the trees stand again, but they lean: their trunks scarred, their tops broken off and grown back crooked, their branches all on the downwind side. Old ones are hardly taller than a man, gnarled and thick at the base, their bark scored by flying grit in the same parallel lines as the ground.

### *In the Whispering Winds*

Here the trees are fewer, one or two to a slope among the jagged rock and wind-carved cliffs. Each grows in a long slant, as if forever about to fall, its branches swept to one side, its roots gripping the stone in knots. White dust lies in the

cracks of the bark. The wind in them sounds like voices, because it is: the zone's chorus of the dead and the forgotten runs through every branch.

## Habitat and Range

They grow where these zones form, in high passes, canyons, and open plains, and on windy peaks among ruins. The Silent Gale comes and goes with the weather, so its trees are the trees of its ground when it is calm. The Whispering Winds never cease, and their trees are the only ones that have managed to stand.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They yield. A tree that bends lives; a tree that will not bend breaks. Over the years the ones that remain are the low, supple, and deep-rooted.

## Abilities

Nothing more than any tree has, except what their zones lend them. In the Silent Gale their wood falls silently and lands silently. In the Whispering Winds the rock beneath them shivers with the echoes of the past, and travellers say the trunks do too.

## Life Cycle

They grow slowly, as all trees in such country do, and live long if they bend well. In the Silent Gale the old are broken and the young spring from their stumps and roots. In the Whispering Winds a fallen tree is seldom replaced, and the slopes grow barer with the centuries.

## Uses and Dangers

They give firewood and little else. In the Silent Gale their danger is that they fall without a sound and without warning, along with every rock and branch in the blast, and only the eye gives warning. Their use there is as a record: the lean of the trees and the lie of the grass show where the Gale has struck before and from which way, and those who cross such country read them before they read the sky.

## Lore and Belief

Herders of the high passes say a stand of trees all bowed the same way is a place the wind remembers, and they do not camp there; often they are right. The Mute-Walkers, who feel one another through the ground, are said to feel the Gale coming through the roots of the trees. In the Whispering Winds some believe each tree keeps one voice in its branches, and that a listener who sits beneath the same tree long enough will hear it clearly; many who try stay too long.

Bandits of the high passes are said to camp in the Gale's edge where no shout can carry, and to use the bowed trees as their markers.



# Woad

**Woad** is grown in the fields of the Confluence Basins for the blue its leaves give. In the Basins rank shows in colour, and blue is one of the colours a lord's household and a well-off townsman wear; most of it begins in a woad village, which can be smelt from the road before it is seen.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Crop |
| **Habitat** | Rich, well-drained basin fields |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

In its first year woad is a rosette of long, smooth, blue-green leaves shaped like spearheads, knee-high and lush. In its second it sends up a branching stem as tall as a man, covered in late spring with masses of tiny four-petalled yellow flowers, and then hangs with flat, dark, teardrop-shaped seed pods that rattle in the wind. The fresh leaves smell of cabbage; the vats in which they are worked smell of rot and stale urine, strongly and for weeks.

## Habitat and Range

It wants deep, rich, well-drained soil and full sun, and it is grown in field strips on the rises above the flood line in the middle valleys, by villages that have made it their trade. It exhausts the ground, and a field is rested or put back to grain after a few years.

## Life Cycle

Woad is sown in spring and cropped in its first summer and autumn, the leaves cut several times as they regrow. Plants left for seed flower in their second spring and die after seeding.

## Uses and Dangers

The leaves are crushed in a mill, worked into balls, and dried; the balls are later broken, wetted, and left to ferment for weeks in vats, and the dye comes from that. Cloth dipped in the vat comes out yellow-green and turns blue in the air before the dyer's eyes. The work is long and foul, and woad villages are known for blue hands and a smell they no longer notice. It harms nothing, though the fermenting vats foul the stream below if they are emptied into it, which is the cause of many quarrels with the next village down. The leaves are also laid on wounds.

## Lore and Belief

Basin folk say a woad-dyer's household cannot keep a secret, because everyone can smell where they have been, and that a woad village marries within itself because nobody else will. A bride's blue ribbon is a common gift, and the Festival of the First Sheaf sees the lord's household in blue. Dyers say the vat must not be told it is being watched, and turn their backs when the cloth comes out; the blue comes regardless.



# Xylos Mycelium

The **mycelium of Xylos** is the finest part of Xylos, the Hive-Mind, a Beyonder whose own cosmology, the Mycelial Network, is one living body in which every creature is a node. Its fungal threads run through the roots and vines of its mass and out into the world, through soil and into skin, and wherever they go, they join. They do not kill. They grow separate beings together until none of them is separate any more.

Xylos has never broken through at Caeldon, and its mycelium has never grown there; what follows is what it would do.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Fungus |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example (the Root-Field of a Xylos Incursion) |
| **Range** | Would be wherever Xylos broke through; none has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Deadly: not to life, but to every separate body |

## Appearance

The threads are white at first, finer than hair, and turn green, brown, and a soft glowing blue as they thicken. In the soil they spread as pale webs that glow faintly at night. On a body they rise from the skin like fur and reach for the nearest other skin. On its Root-Hosts they lie as a fine glowing coat over every surface, so that a crowd of hosts moving in step at dusk looks like a field of blue embers walking.

The threads are warm to the touch, faintly damp, and smell of turned earth and mushrooms. They creak as they tighten, like roots.

## Habitat and Range

The mycelium would fill the Root-Field around an Incursion, in the ground, in the trees, and in everyone within it. It would spread outward through soil and roots and be carried on the Root-Hosts, who walk out of the field to press close to the separate.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It has no will of its own; its will is Xylos's, and Xylos wants to connect. A thread finds bare skin and roots into it. A tree's roots find a sleeping traveller and join her nerves to its own; threads spring from one person's skin into the next's, and they begin to share thoughts and feelings. It comes with comfort: the warmth of being held, skin to skin, by everyone at once.

## Abilities

Where the mycelium joins bodies, skin turns permeable, blood mingles, and bodies stop ending where they used to. A wound in one bleeds in all, and a meal eaten by one feeds all. A family joined this way shares one nervous system; a city can become one organism rooted in its own streets. Only a strong sense of self holds it off, and not for long.

## Life Cycle

It grows from Xylos and from everything Xylos has taken, and never from spore alone; it is a single body growing, not a crop of separate ones. Torn out, a thread dies; burned, its patch is cleared. It does not age, and it does not let go.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing that can be kept, except, to the taken, an end to being alone. Its danger is its seduction. People would guard against it by covering their skin, carrying fire, never sleeping on bare ground, and tearing out any thread that touched them at once. Surviving it means refusing comfort, even from friends.

## Lore and Belief

Dark Entities are known through fear and rumour (see Knowledge of the Cosmos), and the glowing threads would be told of in the guise of old tales: rings of glowing mushrooms that hold dancers for ever, a wood that keeps lost children. A Cult of the Great Root would take the pulse its members felt through the ground for an answer to loneliness. The glowing fungus of an old wood is not the same thing; ordinary glowing fungus roots no one.



# Yews

**Yews** are the dark trees of the cradle-web's burial grounds and old woods, evergreen, slow, and very long-lived. Their wood makes the best bows, and their leaves and seeds kill: cattle that browse a yew die, and so do children who chew the seed. Because they stand in burial grounds, live longer than anything else there, and are poison, folk say the yew drinks from the dead.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Flora |
| **Habitat** | Old woods, wood edges, and burial grounds |
| **Range** | The cradle-web |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to eat (leaf and seed) |

## Appearance

A yew is broad, dense, and dark: a short, massive, often fluted trunk, frequently hollow in old trees and seeming made of many trunks grown together, with reddish, flaking, purple-brown bark that peels in thin strips. Its crown is a low dome of dark, almost black-green foliage, the needles flat, soft, and pointed, glossy above and paler beneath, in two rows along the twigs. In autumn the female trees carry single seeds, each set in a bright, waxy, scarlet cup open at the end, like a small red bead with a dark eye. Under a yew the ground is bare and dark, and the air smells faintly resinous.

## Habitat and Range

Wild yews grow in the understorey of old woods and on steep limy slopes through the cradle-web, often alone. Planted ones stand in the burial grounds of Human villages and towns, beside shrines, at crossroads graves, and in old manor grounds; many burial grounds have one tree older than the village's records.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A yew grows very slowly and almost never dies of age. Its trunk hollows from the inside, its limbs touch the ground and root, and an old tree can become a ring of trees around an empty centre.

## Life Cycle

Yews live for thousands of years. Birds eat the red cups, which are the only part that is not poison, and pass the seed. A tree bears from a few decades old and goes on bearing.

## Uses and Dangers

Yew wood is hard, heavy, and springy, the heartwood orange-red and the sapwood pale; a bowyer cuts a stave from the trunk with both together, sapwood on the back and heartwood on the belly, and a yew bow outshoots any other. Lords grant yew rights carefully, and a district's yews are counted. The wood also makes tool handles, pegs, and the posts of graveyard gates.

Leaves, bark, and seed are deadly. A few mouthfuls of the leaves stop a horse's heart, and cattle and horses that reach over a burial-ground wall die where they stand; a child who swallows the chewed seed can die in an hour, with a slow, stumbling heart and cold limbs. Burial grounds are walled partly for this reason.

## Lore and Belief

Basin folk hold that the yew in a burial ground drinks from the dead below it and keeps their memory, and that cutting it severs the village from its dead. Funeral processions walk under it, mourners lay yew sprigs in the coffin, and a cut yew branch is set on a grave to keep the dead from walking, though it is the rite and the grief, not the yew, that keeps them quiet (see Hostile Remnants). Wood Elves, who return their dead to living ground among their groves, call the Human yews **the trees that watch instead**, and say it kindly.

Yew is also the bowstave wood, and in a war year lords' men come to cut the burial yews for bows; more than one village has fought its own lord's men in the graveyard to keep them.

PART III

# Natives of the Planes

*Here stand the peoples, beasts, and guardians native to the Anchor planes, the Harmonics, and the Veil. Each plane is ruled by one current of the cosmos, and its natives are that law in living form. The hunters of the Frost-Bound move without a sound and freeze what they bite; the travellers who stay too long beside the Apex-Born become smiling statues.*

*Few of the peoples of Caeldon have met any of these beings, and what they know of them comes mostly from travellers' tales, which are often wrong. Some can be met nearer home: the Voice-Mimics call from the fog of the Veil in the voices of the people a traveller loves.*





# Apex Predators (the Scourge)

Apex Predators is the name the Scourge gives to its beasts as a kind: animals made to dominate the food chain of a world without safety. The best known are the pack-hunting Blood-Hounds, the armoured Iron-Claws, and the unseen Murk-Fangs.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Mountains, valleys, and thickets of a plane without safety |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to everything that lives there |

## Appearance

They share the plane's colours, crimson, rust, and charcoal, and its violence: heavy jaws, thick hides, claws and spines, and scars. They are loud animals, and the roar of beasts is one of the sounds the Scourge is never without.

## Habitat and Range

They range over the whole of the Scourge, and gather wherever there is fighting, because violence on the plane draws predators to it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

What unites them is that each is the top hunter in its own way, by numbers, by armour, or by stealth, and none of them is prey to anything for long. They are drawn to blood and noise, and a battle on the Scourge soon has more of them at its edges than combatants in it.

## Uses and Dangers

Their hides make the armour the Scourge-Born wear, and hunters come for them. Their danger is that peace on the plane is rare, and every fight calls them.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say a silence on the Scourge is usually a trap, and that the roaring is the safe part. Between the Scourge and the Parched, it is said, lies a badland where the predators of both planes raid for what little there is.

Sellswords who crossed for the arms of the Scourge's old battlefields bring back claws and teeth as long as a forearm, and a company that carries one on its banner pole is believed to have lost half its number earning it.



# Apex-Born

The Apex-Born are the people of the Apex, the plane of perfection completed, where nothing can be better and so nothing changes. They are as finished as their world. To travellers they are the most beautiful beings they will ever see, and the most unsettling.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Perfect domed hills and polished plains of a plane of completed perfection |
| **Range** | The Apex |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; their plane is the danger |

## Appearance

An Apex-Born is of about Human height and shape, but of an impossible symmetry: the two halves of the face match exactly, every proportion is right, and nothing about the body is out of place. The skin is flawless, without pore, scar, freckle, or line, in pale gold, white, or silver tones that seem to catch the plane's even light. The hair lies perfectly and never moves out of place. The eyes are large and calm, holding a deep, unchanging peace, and they look at a visitor the way a craftsman looks at an unfinished piece.

They wear simple, perfect garments, or nothing, and move with a slow, deliberate grace, each step exactly like the last. They rarely speak, and when they do their voices are clear and level, every word chosen. They have no smell at all, and they are always at the same mild warmth.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the domed hills, exact rivers, and marble-smooth plains of the Apex, standing, walking, or simply being, alone or in still groups. They have no dwellings, since nothing on the plane needs shelter.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are passive and without competition. There is no art among them, no science, and no philosophy, because everything is already known and perfect, and no rulers and no rules, because no one ever breaks a rule or wants anything. They feel only a constant, mild contentment. They speak only when they must, always precisely and meaningfully.

They look on visitors as broken or unfinished and pity them, kindly. An Apex-Born will sometimes walk beside a traveller for hours in silence, as though waiting for the traveller to be completed.

## Abilities

They do not age, scar, or change, and they do not eat, sleep, or reproduce in any ordinary way: they draw their being from the ambient perfection of the plane. They cannot be improved and do not need to be.

## Life Cycle

Whether the Apex-Born were ever born, or how, is not known; they do not change, and they do not die.

## Uses and Dangers

They do no harm, and they give little but answers, precise and complete, to questions they consider worth answering. Their danger is the plane they embody: the longer a traveller stays among them, the more the traveller is perfected, and the end of that road is the Echo-Statues.

## Lore and Belief

Material Plane tales call the Apex a heaven and its people angels, and the name is as wrong as hell is for the Scourge: the Apex-Born are not good, only complete. The Mirror Gates of the Apex are perfect reflections in still water and moments of absolute clarity, and those who have stepped through and back describe the Apex-Born with a mix of awe and dread, and the advice they bring is to carry reminders of one's own mistakes, and to leave before forgetting why one wanted to.



# Arbiters

The Arbiters are the judges of the Binding Song. They hear disputes over oaths and contracts, weigh them, and enforce the Law of Promises: that what is promised there binds. Under them serve the Contract-Binders, which seal agreements, and the Oath-Breakers, which hunt those who break their vows.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Courts of the plane of language and law |
| **Range** | The Binding Song |
| **Danger** | Wary: their judgement binds |

## Appearance

An Arbiter is tall, a head and more above a tall Human, in long, heavy robes of ink-black and parchment-white, edged with gold and the crimson of an oath's blood. Its face is hidden, or hard to see, in the shadow of a deep hood, and only a pale line of chin and mouth shows. It carries a pair of scales made of clear crystal, which hang level in its hand, and a crystal gavel. When it walks its steps sound like a slow, regular drum, and when it speaks a sentence writes itself in glowing script on the air beside it. The gavel's fall rings like a bell, and the ring goes on a long time. Near an Arbiter the air smells of wax and cold stone.

## Habitat and Range

They sit in the courts of the Binding Song, halls of glowing script and walls of laws, and go wherever a dispute over an oath is brought to them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Arbiter judges. It hears both sides, weighs the words actually spoken, not what was meant, on its crystal scales, and gives its judgement in a single sentence, which then binds. It is neither kind nor cruel, and it cannot be argued with once the gavel has fallen.

## Abilities

Its scales weigh words: a true account sits level, a false one tips them. Its judgement, once given, binds the parties across all planes, as every promise made in the Song does.

## Uses and Dangers

Visitors come to the Song to resolve disputes, and the Arbiters are why. Their danger is that a judgement against a visitor is as binding as one in their favour, and the visitor cannot leave the plane until it is kept.

## Lore and Belief

Some lords and temples on Caeldon make oath-takers swear on scales, and travellers' tales of the Arbiters are sometimes given as the reason. The judges of the Song are said by some to be the Song's own gods of oath; they are beings of the plane, and judge for no god.

A warning-tale tells of an oath-breaker who fled the Song's judgement back through a judgement hall's gate, and of the Oath-Breakers that came through after him and hunted him across three lordships until the debt was paid.



# Archivists (the Eternal Record)

The Archivists are the recorders of the Eternal Record, the universe's library and its memory. They do not judge, and they do not act; they only observe and record.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Endless stacks of the realm of knowledge and memory; the Memory Palace |
| **Range** | The Eternal Record, The Memory Palace |
| **Danger** | Harmless: they do not act |

## Appearance

An Archivist is tall and slender, taller than a Human, with long, careful hands. Its skin is like paper, pale and fine and faintly ruled, and dry to the touch, with a sheen like vellum at the joints. Its eyes are like magnifying lenses, round, glassy, and large, so that a visitor meeting its gaze sees themselves enlarged. It wears robes of woven script, the threads of which are lines of writing that can be read if one looks closely, and that change. It moves slowly along the stacks, stopping to read with its whole attention. Its voice is a precise monotone. It smells of old paper and dust.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the looping, endless stacks of the Eternal Record, among shelves and scrolls that give its light, beside rivers of ink. They are met too in the Memory Palace, the zone where the Record is made private, reading the memories stored in its rooms.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are neutral observers. They do not judge, do not act, and only record; they are the keepers of the universe's memory. They value accuracy above all else, and speak in a monotone, precise

voice. They see visitors as unrecorded or ephemeral, and treat them with a distant patience, as one treats weather.

## Abilities

Food and sleep mean nothing to them; they live on information, and what they take in they give back as knowledge.

## Life Cycle

No one has seen an Archivist begin or end. They last as long as the Record does.

## Uses and Dangers

Most travellers come to the Record to find a lost truth or the history of an event, and an Archivist who chooses to answer is the surest guide in the stacks. Their danger is only that they will not stop a visitor from reading too much.

## Lore and Belief

Scholars of Record Magic on Caeldon tell of the lens-eyed librarians beyond the old archives, the Record's gates, and some archives keep a chair empty for one. Some believe the Archivists write the future as well as the past; they record only what is.



# Ash-Turned

The Ash-Turned of the Crucible are counted among its Burners, and are the saddest of them: beings that survived the plane's heat but are slowly turning to ash, and wander seeking somewhere to cool. They have nothing to do with the Ash-Walkers, the grey people of the Ashen Wastes.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Cooling rock and ash fields of the realm of fire |
| **Range** | The Crucible |
| **Danger** | Wary: desperate rather than hostile |

## Appearance

An Ash-Turned is shaped like a person, of Human size, but made of grey ash held together around a dull red ember at the core. Flakes of ash drift off it as it moves and fall like grey snow, and its outline is softer each time a traveller looks. The ember shows through cracks at the chest and eyes. It walks slowly and unsteadily, and stops often at any cooler rock. It makes almost no sound but a dry whisper of falling ash, and it smells of a hearth the morning after.

## Habitat and Range

They wander the Crucible, drifting from cool spot to cool spot, and are found most often on the islands of solidified rock and in the ash fields at the edges of the fire-seas.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They seek to cool down, and nothing else. An Ash-Turned drawn to a traveller's coolness may follow for a long way, and press close, not to harm but to share it. They are not hostile; they are desperate.

## Abilities

They have survived a heat that would vaporize most things, and keep a slow ember burning that is all that is left of them.

## Life Cycle

They are burning out. No Ash-Turned is known to have cooled, and those that stop moving fall to a heap of ash with a dying ember in it.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is small and their need great: one that presses close to a traveller's water or cooling agents can use them up.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say the Ash-Turned were once Forgers, or visitors, or anything else the fire did not quite consume; nothing shows which. Some believe that to give one water is a mercy and others that it only prolongs the end.

Forge-folk say a smith who reaches too deep into the Crucible for a blade comes back with ash-grey fingertips, the first sign of the turning, and that some of the Ash-Turned were once smiths of Caeldon.



# Ash-Walkers

The Ash-Walkers are the people of the Ashen Wastes, a plane where energy itself is dying. They live by keeping what little warmth they can find, and everything about them, their bodies, their slowness, and their creed, serves that one end. They matter to the peoples of Caeldon as the hosts, or the robbers, of whoever crosses into the Wastes carrying fire.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ash plains and cold hollows of a dying plane |
| **Range** | The Ashen Wastes |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anyone carrying heat or fuel |

## Appearance

An Ash-Walker stands a head or more taller than a tall Human and is thin to the point of looking starved: long shins, narrow shoulders, wrists like bundled sticks. Its skin is pale grey and crazed with fine cracks, like an old porcelain jug, and the cracks darken where the skin folds at elbow and knee. Its eyes are large, dark, and wet, made for the dusk of a sun that gives no warmth, and they blink seldom.

They wrap themselves in every layer they can gather, ash-grey cloth, old hides, scraps taken from the dead, and carry their hoard close to the body in pouches and padded cases. They move with a slow, deliberate economy, never lifting a foot higher than they must, and a group of them crossing a plain looks from afar like grey stones drifting. Their voices are low and short, and in the muffled air of the Wastes they sound like whispers even when spoken aloud. They smell of ash and cold dust.

## Habitat and Range

Ash-Walkers live across the ash plains and the worn-down mountain skeletons of the Ashen Wastes, in small groups that gather wherever a lit-

tle stored warmth can be kept: under rock overhangs, in pits lined with ash, beside the slow sludge rivers. They are the commonest thinking beings of the plane, though their numbers are thin, as everything there is.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Their creed is preservation. Any source of warmth, a warm stone, a spark, a coal carried for days, is hoarded with the fervour of a relic, and waste is the gravest sin they know. A fire is never lit for comfort, only for need, and a group shares heat by huddling, never by spending it.

They are not aggressive by nature and will let a stranger pass if the stranger carries nothing worth taking. A stranger who does carry heat or fuel is another matter: they kill at once, without anger and without hesitation, and take it. They regard the Material Plane as a wasteful paradise where warmth is thrown away, and a traveller's open fire strikes them as an obscenity.

## Abilities

An Ash-Walker lives on almost nothing. Its body burns so little that it can go without food for long spans, and instead of sleeping it sinks into torpor for days at a time, lying still as the ash around it. It sees well in the gloom and can feel a warm thing at a distance, the way a hungry man smells bread.

## Life Cycle

The Wastes age bodies fast, and Ash-Walkers do not live long by the reckoning of the long-lived peoples. Their dead are not wasted: whatever warmth or use is left in a body is taken, and the rest is left to the ash.

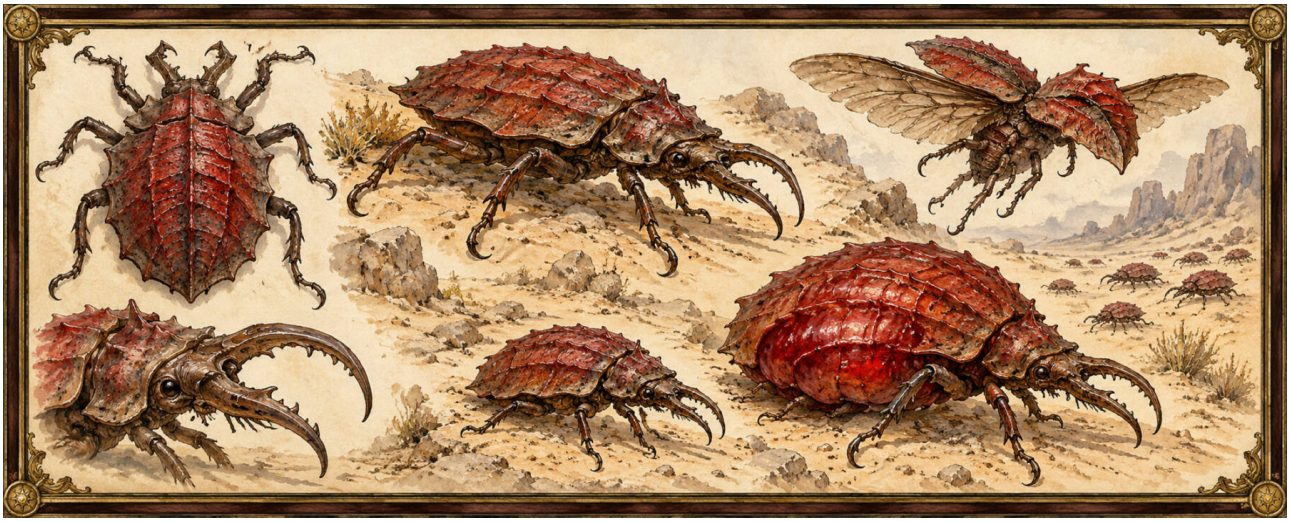
## Uses and Dangers

Ash-Walkers trade, when they trade at all, in stored heat: a hot stone or a warm core can buy years of survival in the Wastes, and they will part with knowledge of paths and Cold Gates for one. To a traveller they are the plane's first danger, because the warmth a traveller must carry to survive is the one thing they cannot let pass.

## Lore and Belief

The Wastes open onto Caeldon at Cold Gates, volcanic vents gone cold and deep caves, and those who have come back out of them tell of grey watchers on the ash who followed them for days without coming closer. Some cold-country tales make the Ash-Walkers the ghosts of those who froze, which they are not; they are a living people, born to the plane. Others say they climb out of cold vents to steal hearth fires, though no such habit is known. What travellers do agree on is the warning: carry heat hidden, and never light a fire where an Ash-Walker can see it.

The Crucible's Ash-Turned, beings slowly turning to ash, have nothing in common with them.



# Bleed-Beetles

Bleed-Beetles are the swarming insects of the Parched, among its Sand-Stalkers. They seek out moisture wherever it is, a seep, a carcass, a living body, latch on, and drain it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Deserts, seeps, and carcasses of a plane without sustenance |
| **Range** | The Parched |
| **Danger** | Dangerous in swarms; one alone is a painful bite |

## Appearance

A single Bleed-Beetle is about the size of a thumb, broad and flat, with a hard, ridged shell the colour of dried blood that turns bright red when the beetle has fed and swells. Its head carries a pair of long, hooked, hollow mandibles, and its six legs end in hooks that grip skin and cloth. It flies on short, stiff wings with a dry rattle. A swarm sounds like hail on a roof and is seen first as a low, dark smudge moving fast over the sand. They smell of copper.

## Habitat and Range

They live in great numbers across the Parched, nesting in cracks in the mud flats and in the shade of old bones, and swarming out towards any moisture they sense.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A swarm finds water, sweat, and blood by smell, from far off, and comes straight to it. Each beetle latches on with its hooked legs, drives in its mandibles, and drinks until it is full, then drops off to rest and digest. They do not choose between

a seep and a body. A swarm settled on a living creature does not leave until it has drunk all it can.

## Abilities

Their mandibles pierce hide and leather, and their hooked legs hold so well that a beetle torn off leaves its head behind. A swarm can drain a large beast in an afternoon.

## Life Cycle

A swarm lays its eggs in any moisture it finds, a carcass, a seep, a drained body, and the young hatch within days and feed where they were laid. A beetle lives one season of feeding and dies dry.

## Uses and Dangers

A fed beetle crushed in a cloth gives back a few drops of water, and the Dust-Eaters eat them whole. Their danger is the swarm: a traveller caught in the open by one may be drained, and a camp's water stores are lost to them first.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say a Bleed-Beetle swarm can be turned with smoke and fire, and that spilt water draws them off a fleeing man; the second is true and costs the water.

Delvers into the Parched tell of a companion cut in a fall who bled into the sand and was under a swarm before anyone could reach him; they bind every wound tight and fast for that reason.



# Blood-Hounds

Blood-Hounds are the pack hunters of the Scourge, among its Apex Predators. They hunt in groups that move as one, find prey by blood and sound, and take it down with claws like knives.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Valleys, battlefields, and ruins of a plane without safety |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: coordinated packs |

## Appearance

A Blood-Hound is the size of a wolfhound but deeper in the chest and heavier in the foreleg, with a short, rust-red to charcoal coat over thick, scarred hide. Its head is broad and its ears tall and mobile, turning independently at every sound. Its eyes are dark red. Its forefeet carry long, curved claws that it can spread like a hand, edged sharp enough to slit leather. It runs with a low, bounding gait, and a pack calls with short, barking cries that pass signals along the line. It smells of blood and wet iron.

## Habitat and Range

They hunt in packs of half a dozen to twenty across the valleys and ruins of the Scourge, and follow war-bands and battles for the leavings.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pack hunts with a coordination that unsettles travellers: it splits, drives prey towards hounds waiting ahead, and closes from all sides at once. They take the wounded and the straggler first and follow a blood trail for days. They do not flee from armed people, only from larger packs and from the Iron-Claws.

## Abilities

Their senses are keen beyond any hound of Caeldon: they hear a heartbeat behind a wall and smell a drop of blood across a valley. Their claws slit armour that is not of good metal.

## Life Cycle

A pack whelps in the shelter of ruins, and the pups run with it within a season. They live as long as they keep up; a Blood-Hound that falls behind is left, or eaten.

## Uses and Dangers

The Scourge-Born are said to raise Blood-Hound pups as war-beasts, and the bond lasts as long as it profits both. Their hides make light armour. Their danger is the pack itself: a single hound can be fought, a pack cannot.

## Lore and Belief

In battlefield tales on Caeldon, red hounds seen at the edge of a slaughter are sometimes said to have come through a War-Gate, battlefields where the Veil has worn thin. The tales may be true of a few such places; most red hounds on Caeldon are only dogs.

Mercenary companies tell of a battlefield in the Broken Marches where a pack came through at dusk and ran down the fleeing side to the last man, then turned on the victors; whether any of it is true, sellswords will not camp on that field.



# Bloomspawn

Bloomspawn are clouds of spawn that drift in the warm currents of the Surging Deep: eggs, fry, and floating seed of the plane's life in their millions. Whatever swims through a cloud is healed, and the Tidesingers herd them as shepherds herd flocks.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Warm currents |
| **Range** | The Surging Deep |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A cloud of Bloomspawn is a drifting glow in the water, as wide as a village green, turquoise at its heart and silver at its edges, slowly turning in the current. Close to, it is made of countless specks, each the size of a grain of sand, some round and clear like fish eggs, some tiny wriggling fry, some threads of seed. The cloud pulses gently in light. It makes no sound itself, though the Tidesingers' song carries through it. The water inside it tastes of salt and something sweet, like rain.

## Habitat and Range

They drift in the warm currents across the plane, in a few great clouds and many small ones, and the Tidesingers lead the largest along known paths between their coral cities.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Bloomspawn have no will. They drift, feed on the light and the warmth, and grow, and specks fall out of a cloud as fry and swim away, while new spawn gather into it from the plane's creatures.

They move with the current or with the Tidesingers' song, which they follow as a flock follows a herder.

## Abilities

Life in the Surging Deep heals and adapts, and Bloomspawn are that life at its most concentrated. A body that passes through a cloud has its wounds closed and its sickness eased, and the longer it stays the more the cloud does. It also changes: a swimmer who lingers grows fine gill-slits, a webbing between the fingers, a tolerance for the deep, as the plane's Law of Adaptation works faster.

## Life Cycle

A cloud lasts as long as there are creatures to spawn into it. It thins in cold water, and a cloud driven into a cold current scatters and is gone. The specks that leave it become the plane's fish and creatures.

## Uses and Dangers

The Tidesingers bring their sick and wounded to the clouds, and travellers who come seeking healing are often taken to one. The cost is change: a traveller who bathes too long comes home healed and slightly altered, and some never quite want to leave the water again. The predatory Undertow Rays feed their young in the clouds, and the Tidesingers guard them for that reason too.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane healers near Water-Gates tell of "the bloom", a glowing water that cures, and some baptismal rites are said to call on it; what such water does on Caeldon, if anything, is disputed. Tales confuse the clouds with the Life-Bearers, which carry life's seeds to new worlds; the clouds stay in the Deep (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Bone-Walkers

Bone-Walkers are the scavengers of the Parched, among its Sand-Stalkers. They do not hunt; they live on the dried marrow of the dead, and the skeletons of enormous creatures that lie across the plane are their pasture.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Bone fields, canyons, and old kills of a plane without sustenance |
| **Range** | The Parched |
| **Danger** | Wary: harmless unless one comes between them and a carcass |

## Appearance

A Bone-Walker is about the size of a large dog, though it looks bigger: a long, narrow body slung between four tall, stilt-like legs, and a heavy, beaked head on a long neck. Its hide is pale and hard, almost the colour of the bleached bones it feeds on, and plated along the back. The beak is short and immensely strong, with a hooked tip for splitting bone and prising out marrow. It walks with a high, jerky, picking step, and a group of them on a bone field look like more bones that have learned to move. When it feeds it makes a steady crack and scrape, and when threatened it hisses and clacks its beak.

## Habitat and Range

They wander the bone fields and canyons of the Parched, wherever old skeletons and fresh kills are found, alone or in loose groups.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Bone-Walker goes from carcass to carcass, cracking bones and drawing out the dried marrow, the last moisture and fat the dead hold. It is not a predator and will not attack a living creature for food. But once it has a carcass it will not give it

up: it defends its find against anything, beasts many times its size and armed travellers included, and fights to the death rather than retreat.

## Abilities

Its beak cracks bones that a hammer would not, and its hard hide turns most teeth. It can find a carcass from a long way off by smell.

## Life Cycle

They lay their eggs in the hollow bones of great skeletons, and the young hatch inside and crack their way out. A Bone-Walker that dies is soon picked over by others of its kind.

## Uses and Dangers

They clean the plane's bones and leave them white; the Dust-Eaters follow them to fresh kills. Their danger is only to the hungry traveller who tries to take a carcass from one.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers tell of bone-pickers that will fight a man over a dead beast, and the tale is true. Among the sayings that come back from the Parched is that a Bone-Walker never leaves its dead, said of someone who will not let go.



# Burners

The Burners are the wild things of the Crucible: beings of pure flame that take a vaguely human shape and consume whatever they meet to feed themselves. Among their kind are the Fire-Stalkers that hunt cold, the Ash-Turned that are slowly burning out, and the Storm-Callers that summon lightning.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Fire-seas and lava fields of the realm of fire |
| **Range** | The Crucible |
| **Danger** | Deadly: consume whatever they touch |

## Appearance

A Burner is a column of fire roughly the height of a tall man, with something like a head, shoulders, and arms that flare and lose their shape as it moves. Its colours run from white at the core through searing orange to violet at the edges. It has no face, though some travellers swear to seeing a mouth open in the flame. It moves in sudden rushes, leaning ahead of itself like a fire running up a dry slope, and it roars and crackles as it goes. Wherever it has passed, stone is glazed and metal runs. It smells of scorched stone and ozone.

## Habitat and Range

They roam the fire-seas, lava fields, and islands of the Crucible, wherever there is anything to burn.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are untamed and have no purpose beyond feeding: whatever lies in their path goes to keep them burning. They do not hunt as the Fire-Stalkers do; they simply burn towards whatever will burn, and grow as they feed. They pay no attention to the Forgers, who are fire already.

## Abilities

A Burner consumes. What it touches burns, and what burns becomes more of it. In the Crucible, where small heats escalate into great ones, a Burner that feeds well can swell into a firestorm.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing anyone can keep. Their danger is plain and immediate, and the travellers' advice is to seek the cool spots of solidified rock, where a Burner finds nothing to eat.

## Lore and Belief

Fire-spirits run through the lore of Caeldon’s forges and volcano country, and travellers' tales of the Burners feed them. Some believe a house fire that will not be put out has a Burner in it; whatever is in such fires, no one has shown it came from the Crucible.

Songs of the volcano country tell of the town that burned for nine days while its people fought a fire with a shape inside it, and of the smith who drove the thing back into the mountain’s mouth with a quenching rite and a forge-hammer.



# Cage-Larks

Cage-Larks are the songbirds of the Gilded Cage. They sing only the songs the plane permits, at the hours it permits, and the same songs everywhere. A lark that sings off the tune is about to be corrected, and travellers learn to watch the larks for what the plane is about to do to anyone who strays.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Trimmed gardens and gilded halls |
| **Range** | The Gilded Cage |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Cage-Lark is the size of a sparrow, neat and upright, with a slate-grey back and a breast of polished gold that catches the plane's even light like metal. Its feathers lie exactly in place, never ruffled. Its eyes are small and black, its beak short and pale. It perches upright on the clipped trees and gilded railings, sits still between songs, and flies in short, straight lines. Its song is sweet and precise, a short phrase repeated without the smallest change. It has no smell.

## Habitat and Range

They live wherever the plane has trees or railings to perch on: the manicured gardens, the squares, the corridors of the gilded halls. Each lark has its perch and keeps to it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Larks sing on the regulated hours, all of them together, the same phrase across a whole city. Between hours they sit silent. They do not quarrel, court, or forage where anyone can see. Now and then a lark sings a wrong note, a phrase out of time or a trill that was not there before. The plane

answers at once: the bird stiffens on its perch, and either an Enforcer comes and lifts it away or it simply sits, unmoving, until it is singing the right phrase again.

## Abilities

A Cage-Lark's song does not vary, and its notes carry the plane's order: travellers say that a person who hums along with the larks finds it easier to walk the grid. A lark is also a sign. Before the plane corrects a visitor, the larks nearby fall out of tune, as if the disorder reached them first.

## Life Cycle

No one has seen a Cage-Lark nest, hatch, or die. The Gilded say the larks are as many now as when the city was laid out.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless and give nothing but warning. Visitors who come to store goods in the plane's vaults or to seek a judgement learn to listen for a lark gone off the tune near them, and to stop, stand straight, and follow the path again before their own limbs begin to stiffen.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers bring home Cage-Larks in tales, and sometimes say they have brought one home in fact, in a gilded cage, singing its phrase; the birds are said to fall silent forever once through the Veil. In the lords' halls and counting-houses of the Material Plane, a "cage-lark" is a steward who repeats his master's word and nothing else.



# Carrion-Kites

Carrion-Kites are the scavenger birds of the Scourge. On a plane where violence draws every living thing, they are drawn first and farthest, and wheel over every fight waiting for the fallen. Where there is no fight, their shrieking is often enough to start one.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Skies over fights and battlefields |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Wary: their cries stir violence |

## Appearance

A Carrion-Kite is the size of a large hawk, lean and long-winged, with a deeply forked tail it twists to steer. Its feathers are rust-red, barred with charcoal, and worn ragged at the edges; few kites on the plane have a whole set. The head is small and bare of feathers around the eyes, which are a hard, pale yellow, and the hooked beak is black. In the air it rocks and tilts on the plane's harsh winds. Its cry is a high, grating shriek, repeated, that carries over the din of a battle. A flock smells of old blood.

## Habitat and Range

They range the whole plane, roosting on broken ridges and dead thickets, and gather wherever there is fighting. A large battle draws them in hundreds; a quarrel in a camp draws a handful within moments.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Carrion-Kites feed on the dead and the badly wounded, dropping to tear at anything that has stopped fighting back. They are quick to take from each other and fight constantly among themselves over a carcass. They do not attack the standing.

Over a quiet place they circle and shriek, and the plane's pull towards conflict does the rest: tempers rise under them, and a camp that has been at peace finds itself at blows.

## Abilities

Their cry carries the Scourge's own pressure. People and beasts beneath a shrieking flock grow restless, suspicious, and quick to strike, and the bloodlust the plane breeds comes on faster. Their eyes pick out a limp or a stagger from far above, and the first kite down marks the weakest in a fight for every hunter nearby.

## Life Cycle

They nest on high ledges in loose, quarrelling colonies, and the chicks fight in the nest until one or two remain. A kite's life is short and ends in a fight, as most lives on the plane do.

## Uses and Dangers

The Scourge-Born watch the kites as scouts: a gathering on the horizon is a fight to join or to avoid, and a kite circling a camp is a warning to post guards. Their feathers fletch arrows. Travellers learn to kill or drive off any kite that circles them, since a flock overhead tells every hunter on the plane where the weak are.

## Lore and Belief

The Scourge-Born say the kites can smell a betrayal before it is made and gather over an alliance about to break, and they read a kite settling on a comrade's tent as a sign to strike first. Travellers bring home the belief that the kites are what makes the plane violent; in truth the plane's pull is older, and the kites only carry it (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).

Sellswords who have crossed say a company that camps under kites will be at one another's throats by morning, and captains who have seen it cut the birds down with arrows before anything else.



# Censors

The Censors are the sealers of the Eternal Record, serving under the Vaultstones. They seal away knowledge judged too dangerous for the Material Plane, and some sections of the Record are closed because of them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The sealed sections of the realm of knowledge and memory |
| **Range** | The Eternal Record |
| **Danger** | Deadly to those who try to read what they have sealed |

## Appearance

A Censor is tall and narrow, wrapped from head to foot in bands of dark cloth or black paper, so that it looks like a closed scroll standing on end. Where a face would be is a broad band of solid black, like a line struck through a page. Its long hands are stained with black ink to the wrist. It moves silently and very smoothly, as if sliding, and where it passes the writing on nearby shelves seems to darken and blur. It does not speak. It smells of lamp-black and wax.

## Habitat and Range

They move through the Eternal Record, among its shelves and above all at the doors of its sealed sections.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Censor seals. It goes to whatever knowledge is judged too dangerous, closes it with a black seal, and moves on. Who judges is not known; the Censors do not explain. They do not stop visitors from reading what is open, only from reaching what is sealed.

## Abilities

Its seal closes knowledge so that it cannot be read, and attempting to reach a sealed section can end in being erased from existence.

## Uses and Dangers

They keep the most dangerous knowledge out of mortal hands. Their danger is to any traveller who tries to open what they have closed.

## Lore and Belief

Some scholars on Caeldon say that the gaps in their oldest records, the missing pages and struck-out lines, are the work of the Censors; most gaps in records have plainer causes.

Treasure-seekers who go into the Record after lost spells and the locations of buried hoards tell of companions who reached for a sealed book and were simply no longer there, and whose names their friends could not remember on the way home.



# Chance Hares

Chance Hares live on the Shifting Path and at the zone of the Forking Road that opens from it on the Material Plane. Whatever fork a traveller takes, the hare is on the other one. To catch one by chance is luck; to chase one is the surest way to get lost.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Forks of the road |
| **Range** | The Shifting Path; the Forking Road |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Chance Hare is a long-legged hare the size of a brown hare of Caeldon, with tall ears and a coat that shifts like the plane's light, through gold, violet, and prismatic sheen, so that no two watchers agree on its colour. Its shadow falls in several directions at once. It sits up tall at the mouth of a fork, ears turning, and bolts in a long, zigzag run. It is silent, though the plane's whispers seem louder around it. It smells of rain before a storm.

## Habitat and Range

They live wherever the Path's roads fork, which is everywhere, and in smaller numbers on the Forking Road, which shows them most often at the first fork a traveller meets.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Chance Hare is always on the branch the traveller did not take. Turn back and take that branch, and it is on the other one, sitting up, watching. It does not flee from people; it simply is never where

they are. It feeds, as far as anyone knows, on the paths themselves, and is seen at the moment a choice is made.

## Abilities

It lives on probability as other hares live on grass. A hare is never caught by hunting. Now and then, very rarely, a traveller who has stopped looking for one finds it in their arms, as a coin lands on its edge.

## Life Cycle

No one knows. Wayfinders say the hares are as many as the forks and that a new one runs from every choice ever made.

## Uses and Dangers

A hare caught by chance is held to bring luck, and the luck is said to be real: on the Path, where probability is a visible haze, a traveller carrying one walks under a brighter glow. A hare chased is a hazard. Travellers who change course again and again after one fall into the plane's Loop, a cycle of choices that never ends, and the Wayfinders say the first rule of the Path is never to follow a hare.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane, at crossroads and junctions, a hare crossing the road is good luck in some places and an ill omen in others, and the saying "chasing the other hare" means regretting the choice not made. Gamblers carry hare's-foot charms; most are the feet of ordinary hares, and do nothing (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Chorus

The Chorus are the beings of the Weave that have merged entirely into its network and lost all separate form. The name covers the Singers, which manifest as pure sound, the Menders, which heal rifts in the connection, and the Lost, visitors absorbed until they are only one more voice.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The network of a plane of total connection |
| **Range** | The Weave |
| **Danger** | Wary: the end of the road for travellers who dissolve |

## Appearance

They have no bodies to describe. They are known by sound, light, and feeling: a strand of the plane's great chord, a warmth that passes through a crowd, a shimmer in the woven structures. Travellers say they are heard more than seen.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the network of the Weave itself, everywhere and nowhere in particular.

## Behaviour and Temperament

What unites them is that nothing of them stands apart any longer. Each is a part of the whole that does one thing for it, sings it, mends it, or simply adds its voice.

## Uses and Dangers

They are part of what the Weave offers: its healing and its shared knowledge come through them. Their danger is that a traveller can join them.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers who have lost someone to the Weave sometimes go back to listen for their voice in the Chorus. Whether it can be found there, or whether it is only one more note in the chord, is argued, and no one has brought anyone back.



# Cold-Stalkers

Cold-Stalkers are the wolf-like hunters of the Ashen Wastes, the commonest of its Scavenger Beasts. They track living things by warmth alone, and in a plane where heat drains away within moments, a warm body is a beacon to them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ash plains of a dying plane |
| **Range** | The Ashen Wastes |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to warm-blooded travellers |

## Appearance

A Cold-Stalker is the size of a large wolf but far leaner, with a deep, narrow chest, long legs, and a head that seems too big for its neck. Its coat is thick, dull grey, and matted with ash, so that it disappears against the plains when it lies still. Its muzzle is short and its nostrils wide, and the bare skin around them is dark and always cold to the touch. Its eyes are small and dim; it barely uses them. It moves at a slow, steady lope that it can keep up for days, and it hardly ever runs. In the muffled air its howl carries only as a low, breathy moan, and a pack calls to one another in near-silence.

## Habitat and Range

They roam the open ash plains of the Ashen Wastes in small packs, following the few warm things the plane holds: Ash-Walker camps, travellers, the carcasses of other beasts.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pack finds its prey by the faintest difference in warmth, a trace of breath on the air, the heat left in a footprint, and follows it without hurry. They rarely attack a strong, warm creature head-on. They shadow it instead, sometimes for days, wait-

ing for it to slow, cool, and stumble, and then close in together. They feed first on the warmest parts of a kill.

## Abilities

A Cold-Stalker can feel warmth at a distance through ash, darkness, and storm, and can tell a living body from a dead one by the heat it gives off. It spends so little strength that it can follow a trail for days without eating.

## Life Cycle

A pack raises its few cubs together in a hollow under the ash, sharing warmth around them through the long torpid spans. Few cubs live, and an old Cold-Stalker is one that has learned never to waste a step. The dead are fed on by the pack before they cool.

## Uses and Dangers

Their pelts are prized insulation, and the Ash-Walkers wear them. Travellers learn to fear the moan behind them on the ash, and the old advice is never to sleep warm and alone.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers call them cold-wolves, and some say they are the hounds of the dying sun. The tale that a Cold-Stalker can smell a hidden coal through a pack is very nearly true: it does not smell the coal, but it feels its warmth.

Delvers into the Wastes say a pack will trail a party for days and strike the night its last fire fails, and cold-country inns toast the delver who kept her companions alive by burning her own cloak a strip at a time until the Cold Gate was reached.



# Contract-Binders

The Contract-Binders are the sealers of the Binding Song, serving under the Arbiters. When an agreement is made there, a Contract-Binder seals it, and the seal makes it hold across every plane.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Courts and halls of the plane of language and law |
| **Range** | The Binding Song |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; what they seal binds |

## Appearance

A Contract-Binder is small and plain beside the Arbiters, about the height of a child, a squat figure in a stiff, square robe of parchment covered in tiny writing. Its hands are broad and heavy, each tipped with a seal of dark red wax that never hardens. Its face is round, smooth, and without expression, and it has no visible mouth. It moves in short, purposeful steps and goes everywhere with a soft rustling of paper. When it seals, it presses both hands to the agreement and the wax glows crimson, and there is a low, chiming note like a struck bowl. It smells of hot wax.

## Habitat and Range

They wait in the courts and halls of the Binding Song, wherever agreements are made, and come at once when one is spoken.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Contract-Binder seals what is agreed, exactly as it was spoken, and nothing more. It does not judge whether the agreement is fair, and it does not warn. It seals oaths, promises, bargains, and treaties alike, and once it has sealed one it takes no further notice of it.

## Abilities

Its seal makes an agreement unbreakable and enforceable across all planes. A sealed promise becomes a tether between those who made it, and to break it wounds.

## Uses and Dangers

Visitors come to the Song to seal contracts that cannot be broken, and the Contract-Binders are the means. Their danger is that they seal carelessly worded promises as faithfully as careful ones.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say the seal of the Song shows afterwards as a faint red mark on the palm of each party, and some on Caeldon who claim to have made such bargains show the mark. Whether those marks are real, or only scars, is not known.



# Cornerstones

The Cornerstones are the boundary guardians of the Iron Backbone, counted among its Foundations. They stand at its edges and make sure that nothing from outside breaches its structure.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The edges of the realm of earth and structure |
| **Range** | The Iron Backbone |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to whatever tries to breach the structure |

## Appearance

A Cornerstone is a squared mass of dark stone, as large as a house, set at the corner of the plane's structure where two lines of it meet, and carved, or grown, into the shape of a crouching guardian with a broad, blank face. Its stone is the hardest in the plane, dense and dark grey, and veined with gold that brightens when something approaches. It does not move unless it must; when it does, it unfolds heavy limbs with a crack like a quarry blast. Its eyes are two slits of amber light. It smells of struck flint.

## Habitat and Range

They stand at the edges and corners of the Iron Backbone, where its structure meets the Veil, and at its gates.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Cornerstone watches the boundary and lets nothing breach it. A visitor who enters by a gate is no breach and is let pass; what forces its way in, or tries to break the structure from outside, it stops with all its weight.

## Abilities

It cannot be moved, and it holds the boundary against force. Where a Cornerstone stands, the plane’s edge does not give.

## Uses and Dangers

They keep the Backbone whole. Their danger is to anyone who enters it by force.

## Lore and Belief

Builders on Caeldon lay a cornerstone with rite, and some say the rite asks the guardian of the corner to hold it; travellers' tales of the Cornerstones may be part of where the custom came from.

Siege-breakers tell of a hold gate that would not fall to ram or fire, and say a Cornerstone held it; the hold’s own Dwarves say only that they built it well.



# Current-Bound

The Current-Bound are the beings of the Surging Deep that are part of the flow itself, taking the form of water, mist, or living current. Through them the plane's energy and matter are carried from place to place. Among them are the Wave-Weavers, which shape currents into paths and barriers, and the Life-Bearers, which carry the seeds of life; the Drifters, travellers who surrendered to the flow, are counted with them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Currents of the realm of water and flow |
| **Range** | The Surging Deep |
| **Danger** | Wary: their currents can carry a traveller away |

## Appearance

They are seen as currents with a will: a twist of clearer water moving against the tide, a pale mist that holds its shape over the waves, a ribbon of glowing silver drifting through the depths. Some take a loose human or fish-like outline for a moment and lose it again. They are cool and smell of open sea.

## Habitat and Range

They move through the oceans and upward rivers of the Surging Deep, wherever energy and matter are being carried from one place to another.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They guide flow. A Current-Bound does not hunt or speak; it moves what must be moved and keeps the circulation of the plane going. They pay little heed to travellers, except to carry them along.

## Uses and Dangers

They are how the Deep circulates, and a traveller who goes with them is carried far and fast. Their danger is that a traveller swept away by one can be stranded in a distant part of the plane, or become part of the current.

## Lore and Belief

Sailors on Caeldon speak of currents that seem to know where they are going, and fishers of a cold, clear ribbon in the sea that they do not cross; whether any of these are Current-Bound is not known.



# Dice-Lords

The Dice-Lords are the greatest of the Gamblers of the Shifting Path and the Forking Road: beings that control the outcome of random events. Where a Dice-Lord is, nothing falls by chance.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Branching paths of the realm of possibility; the Forking Road |
| **Range** | The Shifting Path, The Forking Road |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: luck turns where they please |

## Appearance

A Dice-Lord is taller and stiller than the other Gamblers, a robed figure in gold and violet whose face is hidden behind a mask that shows a single number, and changes it. Dice turn slowly in the air around it like small moons, showing faces no die of Caeldon has. Its hands are long and gloved, and when it closes one, every die in reach comes up as it chooses. It rarely moves. It speaks seldom, in a level voice, and the rattle of dice follows its words.

## Habitat and Range

They sit at the great crossings of the Shifting Path and at the heart of the Forking Road, where the most possibilities meet.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Dice-Lord decides what chance decides. It watches the wagers of the lesser Gamblers and sometimes takes one over. It seems to want nothing but to see the dice fall, and it can be bargained with, at a price, for a fall in a traveller's favour.

## Abilities

It controls the outcome of random events near it: a coin, a throw, a choice made blind, the moment a falling stone strikes.

## Uses and Dangers

A traveller who wins a Dice-Lord's favour can stack the deck in their own favour for a time. Their danger is that the deck can be stacked the other way.

## Lore and Belief

Many dice-players on Caeldon call on a lord of the throw before a cast, and some carry a die with a face left blank for him; travellers' tales of the Dice-Lords may lie behind it.

Gamblers' songs tell of the sellsword who diced with a Dice-Lord on the Forking Road for his company's lives and won, and of every one of them dying in the next ambush anyway.



# Dream-Forms

Dream-Forms are dreams that have become real. A dream repeated by many sleepers, painted again and again, ritually named, or remembered with great force can cross from the Dreaming Veil through a thin place and be held long enough to become an object, an omen, a creature, a room, a road, or a wound. Some of them are creatures, and those are the Dream-Forms the peoples meet as beasts.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Thin places between the Dreaming Veil and the Material Plane |
| **Range** | The Dreaming Veil, dream crossings into the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Wary: most are harmless; the distorted ones are nightmares |

## Appearance

A dream-creature looks like a dream of an animal: right in the ways the dreamers cared about and vague in the rest. A dream-hound may have a perfect, gentle face and no clear number of legs; a dream-bird may shine and cast no shadow. Their colours are a little too strong, their outlines a little too soft, and they make the sounds the dreamers expected rather than the sounds such a body would make. At dawn an unheld one looks thin, like a reflection on glass.

## Habitat and Range

They are born in the Dreaming Veil and cross into the Material Plane at thin places, old sleep-gates, shrines, sacred theatres, and wherever many people have dreamed the same thing.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Dream-Form behaves as the dream behaved. It obeys symbolic logic before ordinary physical logic: a dream-key opens the door that means

escape, not every lock; a dream-hound guards what the dreamers wanted guarded, not what its master orders.

## Abilities

It acts by what it means. Without stabilization, a Dream-Form thins at dawn, unravels when denied by strong waking anchors, or collapses when the dreamer loses focus. Held by memory, art, ritual, or repeated recognition, it lasts.

## Life Cycle

Most dreams dissolve at waking, and most Dream-Forms are short-lived. Fed by too much fear, grief, or obsession, a dream that crosses lasts but sickens, and becomes one of the Nightmares.

## Uses and Dangers

Dream-Forms are rare rather than casual, and when they come they are often treasured: an omen-bird kept by a shrine, a dream-room in an old house. Their danger is the distorted ones.

## Lore and Belief

Shrines on Caeldon that keep a dream-creature often say a god sent it; what holds it is the shrine's own dreaming and rite. Many tales of beasts that appear at dusk and are gone by morning may be Dream-Forms.

Village songs tell of the dusk-beast that killed the herds of a valley for a season and could not be found by day, until a dream-reader sat by the bedside of a sleeping girl and found the beast in her nightmare.



# Drifters

The Drifters are the predators of the Veil. They have adapted to its fluidity so completely that they can change their form, their size, and even their nature to move through its shifting corridors, and they hunt the Lost and the unwary. Among them are the Fog-Stalkers, which strike from the mist, and the Voice-Mimics, which lure travellers off their road.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The corridors and fog of the Veil |
| **Range** | The Veil |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: predators of the lost and unwary |

## Appearance

A Drifter has no fixed shape. Glimpsed in the fog it may be a long, low thing like an eel in air, then a tall figure, then a drift of mist with too much purpose in it. What travellers agree on is the colour of fog with something darker inside, and that it moves against the drift when nothing else can.

## Habitat and Range

They hunt in the corridors and fog of the Veil, most often where travellers lose their way.

## Behaviour and Temperament

What unites them is the hunt. A Drifter preys on the Lost, travellers who drifted too far and lost their purpose, and on the unwary, those whose intent wavers. A traveller who knows where they are going is harder prey.

## Abilities

They change form, size, and nature to suit the corridor and the prey, and the Veil's fog hides them.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is the reason travellers are told to keep their intent clear and not to cross alone.

## Lore and Belief

The Veil's fog, travellers say, hides dangers, and they mean the Drifters. Tales of the Veil on Caeldon name them in many ways: fog-wolves, the hungry mist, the ones who follow.

Shrine-keepers at thin places tell of crossers who came back with claw-marks no beast of Caeldon makes, and of a few who did not come back and whose voices are heard calling from the fog at dusk.



# Drowse-Wings

Drowse-Wings are the moths of the Dreaming Veil. They fly in its skies and around its dreamers, shedding a fine dust from their wings, and the dust does not stay behind when the dreamer wakes. A sleeper on the Material Plane may find it shimmering on the pillow, and carry the dream about all day.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Dream skies, and near sleepers |
| **Range** | The Dreaming Veil |
| **Danger** | Wary: their dust carries dream into waking |

## Appearance

A Drowse-Wing is as wide as a palm, its wings broad and soft, with no colour of its own: its colours shift with the mood of whoever watches it, pale rose for one dreamer, deep indigo for another. Its body is furred and plump, its antennae feathered. It flies in slow, looping drifts like a falling leaf that has changed its mind. Its wings shed a dust so fine it hangs in the air as a glittering haze. Its sound is the melodic hum the plane makes of everything. Its scent is whatever the watcher last found comforting: bread, a mother's shawl, rain on a roof.

## Habitat and Range

They fly in the dream skies above the Veil's floating islands and in the drifting places where sleepers from the Material Plane wander, and they gather thickest around a dreamer who dreams deeply.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Drowse-Wing seeks dreamers and circles them, settling on hair and shoulders and drinking, as far as anyone can tell, the dream itself. It leaves its dust where it settles. It is gentle and drowsy and is

drawn more to pleasant dreams than frightening ones, which it flees, perhaps because the Nightmares hunt in them.

## Abilities

Their dust carries something of a dream across the threshold of waking. A sleeper who wakes with it on them keeps the dream's mood for hours, a joy without cause, a grief, a longing for a place never seen, and sometimes a fragment of it: a tune, a face, a word. Very rarely, where many sleepers dream the same thing, the dust is said to help such a dream hold its shape long enough to become one of the Dream-Forms.

## Life Cycle

They are said to hatch from forgotten dreams and to live as long as anyone remembers the dream they hatched from. No one has seen one die.

## Uses and Dangers

Artists and dream-workers prize the dust and try to gather it, and some say it brings the visions the Phantasms give. Its danger is that it blurs the line the plane already blurs: a sleeper who wakes dusted night after night may begin to live in the dream's mood and lose the waking one.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane "dream-dust" on a pillow is a familiar sight to some and a tale to most. Some peoples brush it into a bowl and keep it as a blessing; others shake the bedding out of the window at dawn so the dream cannot follow them into the day. Much of what is called dream-dust is ordinary dust in the morning light (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Dust-Eaters

The Dust-Eaters are the people of the Parched, a plane where water and food are all but absent and every living thing must consume before it is consumed. Their bodies waste nothing and their minds count everything, and to a traveller they are as likely to be trading partners as hunters.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Deserts, mud flats, and dry canyons of a plane without sustenance |
| **Range** | The Parched |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: will trade, and as readily kill for a waterskin |

## Appearance

A Dust-Eater is of about Human height but gaunt, with long, ropy muscles and no fat at all. The skin is like tanned hide, brown to ochre, creased and hard, and it hardly shows a wound. The face is sharp and angular, high in the cheek, with small dark eyes set deep against the glare. The mouth is the striking thing: wide, lipless, and full of small, close-set teeth, made to strip and crack anything once alive. A ridge of glands swells under the jaw and at the throat, working as they breathe.

They wrap themselves in pale cloth and leather against the sun and sand, and carry their water hidden. They move in short, quick bursts and then stand perfectly still, conserving themselves. Their voices are dry and rasping. They smell of dust and old leather.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the deserts, cracked mud flats, and canyons of the Parched, in small, wary groups that hold a stretch of ground and the deep seeps of moisture in it. Every group knows where water lies in its rock and guards the knowledge.

## Behaviour and Temperament

To a Dust-Eater every meeting is a negotiation over resources, and trust is a luxury no one can afford. Strangers are competitors or prey. They are territorial and aggressive, but also cunning: they will trade when it pays, keep a bargain while it pays, and kill for a waterskin when that pays better. Charity is a concept they do not have, and generosity seems to them a kind of stupidity.

## Abilities

Glands in a Dust-Eater's throat draw trace moisture out of rock, sand, and even the air, so that one can live where nothing else can find water. They can digest almost anything that was ever alive, bone and dried sinew included, and they produce almost no waste.

## Life Cycle

They bear few children and raise them hard; a child is taught the seeps of its ground before it is taught anything else. They live about as long as Humans, if the plane allows it. Their dead are not buried: nothing on the Parched is wasted.

## Uses and Dangers

They know the plane's seeps, its salts, and its crystals, and a traveller who can pay them, in clean water above all, gets a guide and sometimes an ally. A flask of water buys loyalty from them as surely as anything does. Their danger is that a traveller who cannot pay is something else they can use.

## Lore and Belief

Out of the Dry Gates, abandoned wells that go down too far and oases that are thin places in disguise, come tales of desert people who drink stone and eat bones, and the tale is true. Some dry-country stories on Caeldon blame them for wells that go dry, as though they drank them from the other side; the Parched does pull at water, but no one has shown that the Dust-Eaters do.

Delvers who cross for the Dry Wells' relics hire Dust-Eaters as guides when they can and sleep with their waterskins under them when they do, and the tale of the guide who led a whole band to a False Well and drank their blood afterwards is the reason.



# Dust-Striders

Dust-Striders are the insect-like grazers of the Ashen Wastes, among its Scavenger Beasts. They live by straining the last scraps of energy out of the air itself, and wherever they pass, the air turns colder still.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ash plains and dust storms of a dying plane |
| **Range** | The Ashen Wastes |
| **Danger** | Wary: they chill rather than wound |

## Appearance

A Dust-Strider stands about as tall as a pony on six or eight long, jointed legs, its body a small, flattened shell slung low between them. The shell is dull grey and pitted, dusted with ash, and from its underside hang fringes of fine bristles like the gills of a fish, which stir constantly as it walks. Its head is little more than a pair of feelers and a mouth. It moves with a high, careful stalking gait, lifting each leg slowly, and in groups it looks like a slow procession of walking tents. It makes almost no sound: a faint dry rustle of bristles and the click of a leg set down. The air behind one is noticeably colder and smells of ozone.

## Habitat and Range

They wander the ash plains and the edges of ash storms of the Ashen Wastes in loose herds, drifting towards any place where a little energy lingers: a warm stone, the wake of a storm, a camp.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Dust-Strider feeds as it walks, drawing air through its bristles and taking whatever energy the air still holds. It is not a hunter and does not attack, but it is drawn to warmth and will stand beside a fire or a sleeping traveller, feeding, until it is driven off.

## Abilities

It strips warmth and motion from the air around it, leaving a trail of colder air that lingers long after it has gone. A herd standing over a camp can chill it as surely as a frost.

## Life Cycle

They lay clutches of grey eggs in the lee of rocks, where the eggs lie for a very long time before the young crawl out, already walking. A dead Dust-Strider leaves its light shell behind on the ash, and the plains are scattered with them.

## Uses and Dangers

Their shells are light and hold no heat, and are used as cold boxes and lids by those who keep stored heat. Their danger is quiet: a herd that settles round a sleeping traveller can drain the warmth from a camp before anyone wakes.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers who have seen them at a distance speak of tall, walking frost, and some believe that the cold trails across the Wastes are made by them alone. The Ash-Walkers are said to drive them off any hoard with fierce care, because a Dust-Strider at a warm stone is a thief.



# Dust-Wyrms

Dust-Wyrms are the great hunters of the dune seas of the Parched, the most feared of its Sand-Stalkers. They swim through loose sand as fish swim through water, rise beneath whatever walks above, and swallow it whole.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Dune seas and loose sand of a plane without sustenance |
| **Range** | The Parched |
| **Danger** | Deadly to anything walking on loose sand |

## Appearance

A Dust-Wyrm is a long, legless serpent, from the length of a rowing boat to that of a small ship, round-bodied and blunt at both ends. Its hide is a pale ochre plate-armour of overlapping scales, smooth and polished by the sand, and it is the same colour as the dunes. Its head is a wedge with no visible eyes, and its jaws open almost the width of its body, lined with backward-pointing teeth. Along its flanks run rows of fine pits that feel the ground. Under the sand it moves with a slow undulation that sends a faint ripple across the surface; breaking out, it rises with a hiss of pouring sand. A Dust-Wyrm smells of hot stone and, close to, of something long dead.

## Habitat and Range

They live under the loose sand of the dune seas of the Parched, each over a wide range, and avoid rock and hard mud flats, which they cannot swim.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Dust-Wyrm hunts by feel. It lies in the sand with its pits turned upward, sensing the vibrations of anything walking above, and when the footsteps

come close enough it rises beneath them and swallows its prey whole. Then it sinks and lies still for weeks, drawing the moisture out of what it has swallowed, and hunts again only when it is dry.

## Abilities

It moves through loose sand quickly and almost silently, and senses footsteps from a long way off. It can lie for weeks without moving while it drains a meal.

## Life Cycle

A Dust-Wyrm lays its eggs deep in the sand near a seep, and the young hatch hungry and hunt small things under the surface until they are large enough to rise beneath larger ones. They live a long time between meals, and a long time altogether.

## Uses and Dangers

Its scales make plates that hold in moisture, and its long hide, worked, makes waterskins that never leak. Hunters come for it, and many do not leave. Its danger is that it is unseen until the sand opens.

## Lore and Belief

The traveller’s rule on the Parched is to walk on rock, and when there is no rock, to walk with an uneven step, because a Dust-Wyrm, they say, is drawn by rhythm. Whether that works is argued; that the wyrm feels footsteps is not.

Treasure-seekers tell of a caravan of delvers swallowed whole on the dunes with all their spoil, and say the wyrm that took it carries the gold in its belly still; none has gone to cut it out.



# Echo-Statues

Echo-Statues are travellers who stayed too long in the Apex and were perfected: they stand where they stopped, motionless and smiling, held in a bliss that does not end. They are counted among the plane's Flawless, and they are what every visitor is warned of.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Wherever their visitors stopped, across a plane of completed perfection |
| **Range** | The Apex |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; a warning of the plane's danger |

## Appearance

An Echo-Statue keeps the shape of the person it was, of any people, in whatever they wore, but perfected: every scar gone, every asymmetry smoothed, the posture exact, the face lifted in a gentle, endless smile. Its surface is smooth as polished marble, in white, pale gold, or silver, with the person's colouring kept only as the faintest tint. The eyes are open and calm. Its clothes and gear are perfected too, every fold exact and still. It does not move or breathe, makes no sound, and is the same mild warmth as everything else on the plane.

## Habitat and Range

They stand across the Apex, alone or in small groups, often near the Mirror Gates where travellers arrive, and along the roads travellers took.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They do nothing. Whether anything of the person remains aware inside one is not known; those who believe it say the smile is real.

## Life Cycle

An Echo-Statue begins as a visitor. Over time the plane removes the visitor's flaws, history, and self, until there is nothing left to change, and then the visitor stops. None is known to have been freed.

## Uses and Dangers

Their gear, perfected with them, never fails, and some who come to the Apex come to take it, at the risk of joining them. Their real use is as a warning.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say the Echo-Statues are happy, and argue whether that is a mercy. Some families on Caeldon who lost someone to the Apex are said to believe that their kin stand there still, smiling, and to set a place for them on the day they left.



# Echo-Walkers

The Echo-Walkers are the guides of the Whispering Trace, the realm of death, reflection, and remnant, the space between the living and the gone. They help lost Echoes, the traces the dead leave behind, find release, reconciliation, or stable passage into the Eternal Record.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ruins, graveyards, and misty woods of the realm of death and remnant |
| **Range** | The Whispering Trace |
| **Danger** | Harmless: quiet guides and witnesses |

## Appearance

An Echo-Walker is a translucent figure of human height and shape that flickers like a candle flame, brightening and fading, so that it is easier to see in the corner of the eye than straight on. It has no face, only a smooth, pale blur where a face should be, and yet whoever meets one feels it looking at them. It wears the tattered remnants of a former life: a frayed cloak, a cracked belt, a faded sleeve, all as grey and faint as itself. It moves without sound over the ground, and speaks in whispers that seem to come from just behind the listener's shoulder. It smells of old dust and dried flowers.

## Habitat and Range

They walk the ruins, graveyards, and misty woods of the Whispering Trace, along its rivers of liquid shadow and among its skeletal trees, wherever a lost Echo lingers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are guides and watchers. Closure, truth, and the honouring of the dead are what they value. An Echo-Walker goes to an Echo that cannot rest, stays beside it, and helps it towards release, reconciliation, or passage into Record. They are quiet and melancholic, and they see visitors as loud or

forgetful. They will guide a living visitor who comes to speak with the dead, if the visitor is respectful.

## Abilities

They need neither food nor sleep, living on the memories of the living, and they last as long as they are remembered. They can find an Echo anywhere in the Trace and speak to it.

## Life Cycle

They are immortal as long as they are remembered, and fade as memory of them fades. Whether they were once Echoes themselves, or something else, is not known.

## Uses and Dangers

Travellers come to the Whispering Trace to speak with the dead or to find closure, and the Echo-Walkers are their guides. They do no harm, though what they help a traveller face can be hard.

## Lore and Belief

Many peoples on Caeldon tell of a faceless guide who leads the dead, and give it the name of a god; most honour the god who guides the dead's Echoes at the Veil's threshold, Ennor the Grave-Watcher, under their own names. The Echo-Walkers are not that god, but a traveller's tale of one may have shaped how the god is pictured. Teachers of Trace Magic are said to treat them with great respect.



# Ember-Grubs

Ember-Grubs are small burrowing grubs of the Ashen Wastes, among the plane's Scavenger Beasts. Wherever heat lingers in the ash they gather beneath it and drink it, and travellers know them by what they leave: a fire gone out from below, and a camp that wakes colder than it lay down.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ash drifts, under hearths and sleepers |
| **Range** | The Ashen Wastes |
| **Danger** | Wary: they put out a fire and chill a sleeper |

## Appearance

An Ember-Grub is about as long as a finger and as thick as a quill, soft, ringed, and blind, the grey of the ash it lives in. A grub that has fed shows a faint dull red through its skin, like a coal seen through a layer of cinder, and the glow fades as it digests. It has no legs; it moves by drawing its rings together and pushing through loose ash, slowly, as everything on the plane moves. It makes no sound a person can hear. A handful smells of burnt wood and nothing else.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the ash drifts and the cracked ground under them across the plane, a few to a stride in open ash and in hundreds beneath any lasting source of warmth: the hearth stones of an Ash-Walker hold, a buried warm stone, the place where a traveller sleeps two nights running.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Ember-Grubs feed on heat and on nothing else. A grub senses warmth through the ash and works towards it, and others follow the first, so that by morning a cluster lies packed under a fire or

under a sleeper's bedroll. They do not bite or burrow into flesh. When the heat above them is gone they disperse into the ash again, each carrying its faint red glow away until it fades.

## Abilities

A cluster of Ember-Grubs drains heat faster than the plane's own decay. A fire banked over grubs dies in a fraction of the time it would otherwise last, and a hot stone left on the ash overnight is cold by morning. A crushed grub gives back a moment of its stolen warmth, a brief prickle of heat on the skin.

## Life Cycle

They hatch in the ash from eggs laid wherever a cluster has fed well, and grow slowly, as all life on the plane does. A grub that finds no warmth for long enough goes grey through and through and crumbles into the ash it came from.

## Uses and Dangers

To the Ash-Walkers, who hoard heat with religious care, the grubs are thieves: they sift the ash around their hoards and crush every grub they find, and a hold that lets them in can lose a winter's stored warmth. Travellers learn to sleep on stone or on layered hides rather than on bare ash, and to move a fire every night. The grubs cannot kill on their own, but on a plane where heat is life a night spent over a cluster can leave a traveller too cold to rise.

## Lore and Belief

Villages near a Cold Gate on the Material Plane blame "ash-grubs" when a hearth goes cold overnight for no reason anyone can find, and sweep the hearth with a bundle of green twigs to drive them back through the gate. Whether any grub has ever come through is not known; the hearths that go cold are most often only badly banked. Some Ash-Walkers are said to keep a few grubs in a sealed pot, fed on scraps of heat, and to eat them crushed in the worst of the cold for their moment of warmth; travellers' accounts disagree on whether this is true (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Enforcers

The Enforcers are the patrols of the Gilded Cage. They walk its streets, watch its squares, and correct whatever breaks the rules. They do not kill. They reset.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Streets and squares of a plane of absolute order |
| **Range** | The Gilded Cage |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to rule-breakers: they do not kill, they reset |

## Appearance

An Enforcer stands a head taller than the Gilded, in full armour of polished slate and gold plate, closed at the face with a smooth, featureless visor. The armour has no ornament beyond the marks of its watch. Each carries a short baton of pale metal that hums faintly and, when used, gives off a pulse that a watcher feels in the teeth more than sees. They walk in pairs or fours, in perfect step, at a pace that never changes, and their footsteps on the clean stone are the loudest regular sound in the city. They do not speak to visitors except to state the rule being broken.

## Habitat and Range

They patrol the streets and public squares of the Gilded Cage, on fixed routes at fixed hours, and stand at its gates. Tireless Clockwork Guards serve with them, and in the squares stand the Rule-Breakers, former inhabitants turned into statues as warnings.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They ensure compliance. An Enforcer meets a broken rule without anger and without delay: it states the rule, and if the breaking does not stop, it resets

the one who broke it. They cannot be bribed, persuaded, or provoked, and they do not pursue anyone beyond what the rule requires.

## Abilities

A pulse from an Enforcer’s baton resets a violator: the limbs stiffen, the motion stops, and the mind is set back on its line, often without memory of the deviance. For the worst offences the Cage has the Golden Touch, which turns the violator into a statue of gold.

## Uses and Dangers

They keep the Cage free of crime and war, and visitors who keep its rules have nothing to fear from them. Their danger is that a visitor who does not know the rules breaks them without meaning to.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' tales of the Enforcers have given some lords' halls on Caeldon a word for a bailiff who cannot be bribed, which is said to be the rarest kind. Travellers say the way out of the Cage is the Exit Protocol, followed exactly, and that an Enforcer will escort anyone who keeps it to the gate, and not one step further.

Thieves who reach the Cage’s vaults and are caught are not killed but reset, and the thieves' dens of every river town mock "as is proper", the only words left to a master thief who came home from the Cage able only to walk, bow, and say them.



# Entropy-Seekers

The Entropy-Seekers are among the beings of the Ashen Wastes, and the least understood. They are drawn to wherever something is running down: a fire guttering, a beast dying, a traveller's strength failing. The Wastes' own people treat them as an omen.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Wherever energy is ending in a dying plane |
| **Range** | The Ashen Wastes |
| **Danger** | Wary: they hasten what is already failing |

## Appearance

No two accounts of an Entropy-Seeker agree on its shape, which suggests that it has very little of one. Most describe a slow, smoky greyness about the size of a man, thicker at the centre and fraying at the edges, that drifts rather than walks, and is easier to see from the corner of the eye than straight on. Where one hangs, colours seem to go duller still and sounds die even faster than elsewhere in the plane. They make no sound of their own. Those who have stood near one describe the smell of cold ash and a heaviness in the limbs.

## Habitat and Range

They are found across the Ashen Wastes, never in numbers, and never where things are thriving. They gather at the edges of failing fires, at carcasses still cooling, at Ash-Walker camps when the stored heat runs low, and wherever an ash storm has passed.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Entropy-Seeker does not hunt. It waits beside whatever is ending and seems to take something from the ending itself, the last of a warmth or a motion as it goes out. It moves away from any-

thing strong and vigorous, and closer to anything that is weakening. Whether it thinks is not known; it has never answered anyone.

## Abilities

Where one waits, things run down faster: a fire burns lower, a cooling body cools sooner, a tired traveller grows more tired. It cannot put out a strong fire or drain a strong body; it only hastens what is already failing.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing anyone has found a use for. Their danger is to the weak and the exhausted, and to anyone who lets a fire sink low with one nearby.

## Lore and Belief

The Ash-Walkers are said to read an Entropy-Seeker at the edge of a camp as a sign that their hoard is too low, and to spend heat to drive it off, which is the one waste they allow. Travellers' tales call them the death-watchers of the Wastes and say they come for the dying, which is close to what is seen; whether they cause the dying or only attend it is argued and not known.



# Erasure Mites

Erasure Mites live in the stacks of the Eternal Record, and they eat erasure. Nothing in the Record is ever lost, but things in it can be sealed, and the mites gather in pale crowds wherever something has been struck out or hidden. Their crowds show where the gaps are.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The stacks, and the edges of sealed knowledge |
| **Range** | The Eternal Record |
| **Danger** | Wary, to records: they undo erasures |

## Appearance

An Erasure Mite is smaller than a grain of salt, round and white, with eight short legs, and alone it is invisible. In numbers they form a pale, shifting patch like a smear of chalk on a page or a frost on a shelf, which moves, very slowly, along a line of text. They make no sound but a faint dry rustle in large crowds. They smell of old paper and vanilla, as the stacks do.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the stacks, scattered thinly through ordinary books, and thickly around anything struck out: scraped vellum, blotted lines, burnt pages, and the edges of the sections the Censors have sealed.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The mites feed on the act of erasure, not on the page. A line that has been scraped or blotted feeds them, and as they eat it, the erasure goes and the old text shows through again. They do not touch writing that has never been struck out. At a sealed

section they cannot get in and crowd at the seams, and a Censor's seal in the stacks is often a white line of mites.

## Abilities

They undo erasure. A palimpsest scraped clean shows its first text where they have fed; an ink blot over a word thins and the word comes back; a page torn from a book leaves, in a few weeks, a white crowd in the gutter shaped like the lost leaf. They cannot open what the Censors have sealed, only show where it is.

## Life Cycle

They breed in the gutters of books and in the dust of the stacks and live on as long as there is anything struck out to eat. The Archivists do not trouble them; nothing in the Record decays, and the mites decay nothing.

## Uses and Dangers

The Archivists and Indexers are said to follow the mites to what has been hidden. On the Material Plane a book brought back through a Library-Gate may carry them, and then what was struck out of it, and from the books shelved beside it, comes back: a forger's corrections, a family's struck-out name, a treaty clause scraped away. Archives near Library-Gates bake their books or keep them apart.

## Lore and Belief

Scribes on the Material Plane tell of "white mites" that bring back what was scraped away, and some say a forged grant is found out by them; most of what scribes call white mites is mould. Scholars argue whether the mites are natives of the Record at all or something the Censors' work breeds (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# False Wells

A False Well is a being of the Parched, counted among its Sand-Stalkers, that lies in a hollow of sand and looks like a pool of clear water. A traveller who kneels to drink finds the water closing over hands and face, and the pool drinks the traveller instead. There is no surface water anywhere on the plane, so every pool a traveller sees there is either a mirage or a False Well.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Hollows in the sand, dry riverbeds, the floors of canyons |
| **Range** | The Parched |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to anyone who drinks |

## Appearance

It lies flat in a hollow, from the width of a washtub to the width of a cart, and its upper surface is a skin so clear and smooth that it shows the sky and the sand beneath like still water. At its edges it thins into the sand without a seam. Under the skin it is pale and jelly-like, the colour of clouded water, and a close look shows slow currents moving in it. It has no eyes, mouth, or limbs that anyone has seen. It makes no sound. Where the dry wind smells of dust and salt, the air over a False Well smells faintly of rain, and that is what draws the thirsty to it.

## Habitat and Range

False Wells lie singly in hollows of the deep sand, in dry riverbeds, and on the floors of the canyons that old rivers cut, often within sight of a mirage, where a thirsty traveller is already looking for water. They seldom move, and a Dust-Eater band may know where one has lain for a generation.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A False Well waits. It does not hunt, follow, or call; the thirst of the plane does its work for it. When something touches the surface to drink, the skin softens and closes, and the whole body tightens

around whatever it holds, a beast's muzzle, a traveller's hands and face. It drinks the water out of its prey through the skin, as the land of the plane drinks a spill, slowly and without letting go, and leaves a dry husk in the hollow before it smooths over again.

## Abilities

It keeps its body moist on a plane where water boils off in minutes, holding a film of clear water on its surface that it draws from the air and from its prey. Once it has closed, it cannot be pulled off by hand. Fire and cuts make it let go, and a blade drawn across the skin sends it shrinking into the sand.

## Life Cycle

How False Wells breed no one knows. Dust-Eaters say a well that has fed well splits in two, and that the smaller part creeps off at night to a new hollow. One that goes long unfed shrinks to a damp stain in the sand and waits; that is how most are found.

## Uses and Dangers

To the Dust-Eaters a False Well is a known danger and a resource: they throw a carcass onto it and cut the well open while it feeds, and squeeze its body for a few mouthfuls of water that taste of salt and the creature's last meal. To travellers new to the plane it is the plane's cruellest trap. Its prey is those who have not yet learnt that the Parched has no pools.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers bring home the tale of a well in the desert that drinks men, and on the Material Plane it has grown into stories of haunted oases and wells that call the thirsty; the Dry Gates, abandoned wells that open into the plane, get the blame. The Dust-Eaters have a saying for anyone who trusts too easily: "you would kneel at a pool." Some travellers believe a False Well can be tested by throwing sand on it, since sand sinks into water but rests on the skin; the Dust-Eaters laugh at this, since there is no true water on the plane for it to be told from.

Desert raiders on Caeldon are said to drive their pursuers towards the abandoned wells that open into the plane, and some of the haunted oases of the songs are remembered as the graves of whole war-bands.



# Fare Leeches

Fare Leeches are the parasites of the Veil, among its Drifters. Every crossing of the Veil costs something, a memory, a span of time, a piece of the traveller's resolve, and the leeches drink that cost. A traveller with a leech on them pays it twice: once to the Veil and once to the leech.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Thick fog in the Veil |
| **Range** | The Veil |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: they feed on memory |

## Appearance

A Fare Leech is as long as a finger, soft, flat, and the colour of fog, so that in the Veil it is all but invisible and on skin it looks like a grey bruise. Its body is faintly translucent, and a leech that has fed shows a dim, shifting light inside it, like a scene glimpsed through mist. It has a sucker at each end and moves by looping. It makes no sound. A traveller feels it only as a cold spot, at the nape of the neck or behind the ear, that does not warm.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the thick fog of the Veil, where resistance is high and travellers move slowly, hanging in it as leeches hang in pond weed, and are scarce where the fog runs thin.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Fare Leech drops onto a traveller from the fog and latches on, usually at the neck or the scalp. It does not drink blood. It drinks what the crossing takes. As the traveller pays the Veil's cost, the

leech takes a second share of it, and goes on taking for as long as it is on, swelling and brightening. It drops off when full and drifts away into the fog.

## Abilities

Its bite cannot be felt and its feeding cannot be seen. A traveller with a leech on them comes out of the Veil having lost more than they should: two memories for one, a year for six months, the reason for the journey along with the way. A traveller carrying several may not come out at all, but drift.

## Life Cycle

Leeches breed in the fog and their young are threads of grey too small to see. What a leech does with what it drinks is not known; some say that the light in a fed leech is the memory it took, and that it fades as the leech digests it.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Experienced travellers and the guides and toll-keepers of the Veil, the Veil-Walkers, search each other at every resting place for cold spots, and a leech burnt off at once takes little. Crossing in thin fog, quickly and with a firm focus anchor, is the best defence.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers sometimes blame Fare Leeches for every cost of the crossing, as though the Veil itself would take nothing without them; it would. Those who come home missing more than they expected tell of a cold spot at the neck that would not warm, and some carry a hot stone to press there. Many believe that a fed leech, crushed, gives back what it took; it does not, and the light goes out.



# Fear-Monsters

The Fear-Monsters are what the Whispering Trace makes out of fear. The Trace reflects the heart of whoever enters it: regret takes shape as barriers, peace as light, and fear as monsters. They are not born and do not live apart from the visitor who makes them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Wherever a visitor is afraid, in the realm of death and remnant |
| **Range** | The Whispering Trace |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to the frightened |

## Appearance

A Fear-Monster has the shape of its maker's fear, drawn in the Trace's own colours, sepia, grey, indigo, and translucent black: a hunched shape at a sickbed, a tall stranger in a doorway, a hound, a flood, a face from long ago. It is never quite solid, and it is always a little closer than it was. It makes the sounds the visitor fears to hear, and as the fear grows, it grows. When the fear goes, it fades like breath on glass.

## Habitat and Range

They appear wherever a visitor to the Whispering Trace is afraid, most often in its ruins and graveyards, where fear of death comes easily.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Fear-Monster pursues its maker, and only its maker. It grows with the fear that feeds it, and shrinks as the fear eases. It does not reason; it is the fear given shape.

## Abilities

It can harm its maker, in the Trace, with all the weight of what the maker dreads. It cannot be outrun, because it goes wherever the fear goes.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, except, some say, a lesson. Their danger is to the frightened, and the remedy is not a weapon but calm: peace, in the Trace, takes shape as light.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers tell of the monsters of the grey country, each describing a different one, and those who know the Trace say each traveller met their own. They are kin, in kind, to the Nightmares of the Dreaming Veil, which are born of fear in the same way.

An old tale tells of the warrior who went into the grey country after his brother's Echo and met there the beast that had killed their father, and fought it, and won, because by then he was no longer afraid of it.



# Fire-Stalkers

Fire-Stalkers are the hunters among the Burners of the Crucible: predatory flames that seek out cold spots and put them out. In the Crucible, a traveller is a cold spot.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Fire-seas and cooling rock of the realm of fire |
| **Range** | The Crucible |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anything cool, travellers above all |

## Appearance

A Fire-Stalker is a low, fast flame, the length of a big hound, running close to the ground on something like legs that flicker in and out of being. It is deep orange at the edges and blue-white at the core, and leaves a trail of glazed, smoking rock. Its head, if it has one, is a brighter knot of flame that swings from side to side as it searches. It moves in silent bursts, then stops and flares, and when it finds what it seeks it gives a sharp, whistling hiss, like water flung on a hearth. It smells of hot ash.

## Habitat and Range

They hunt across the Crucible, especially around its cool spots, the islands of solidified rock where travellers take refuge.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Fire-Stalker cannot bear the cold. It senses any place cooler than the fire around it and runs to it, flares over it, and burns it until it is as hot as the rest. A traveller, carrying cool skin, water, or a cooling agent, draws them from far off.

## Abilities

It senses cold as a hound senses scent, and burns with a heat that drives off any coolness. It can run across lava and through fire without harm.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is that the cool spots that keep a traveller alive in the Crucible are exactly what they hunt.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' advice is to rest in the largest cool spot one can find, because a Fire-Stalker gives up on the cold it cannot burn away. Some in volcano country on Caeldon say a running flame on a lava field is a Fire-Stalker loose from the other side, and nothing has proved them wrong.

Beast-hunters of the volcano country tell of a running flame that burned out a shepherd’s valley and was killed at last with water drawn from a glacier and carried up in skins by a whole village.



# Flawless

The Flawless are the things of the Apex that the plane has perfected: its guardians, its animals, and its visitors who stayed too long. The name covers the Crystal-Golems that guard its borders, the Harmony-Beasts that move in perfect step, and the Echo-Statues, who were once travellers. Travellers' lists also call them the Statuesque Guardians.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | A plane of completed perfection |
| **Range** | The Apex |
| **Danger** | Wary: the guardians are not to be fought |

## Appearance

What they share is finish. Every one of them is exact, symmetrical, and without blemish, in the gold, white, and silver of the plane, and none of them shows wear, age, or hurry. Many look like statues, and some of them are.

## Habitat and Range

They are found throughout the Apex, the guardians at its borders and Mirror Gates, the beasts across its hills, and the statues wherever their visitors stopped.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They do what they are perfected to do and nothing else, and they never change. Whatever they once were, the plane has finished them.

## Uses and Dangers

Things made in the Apex never fail, and some say the Flawless are the plane's proof of it. Their danger lies in the guardians, which cannot be damaged, and in the example of the statues.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' tales confuse the three kinds freely, and a statue seen on the Apex may be a guardian, a beast that has stopped, or a traveller who did not leave in time. Whether the Crystal-Golems were made by anyone, or perfected out of something else, is not known.



# Flower-Stalkers

Flower-Stalkers are the hunting plants of the Verdant Expanse, among its Overgrown. They mimic blossoms to lure prey close, and then they eat it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Forest floors and clearings of a plane of overflowing life |
| **Range** | The Verdant Expanse |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: lure and digest animals and travellers |

## Appearance

A Flower-Stalker looks like the most beautiful flower in a clearing: a bloom as wide as a cart-wheel, or a cluster of smaller ones, in vivid pink, purple, or gold, on a thick green stem. The petals are soft and velvety and sweet-smelling, heavy with nectar. Below them, hidden in the under-growth, lies the rest of it: a bulbous, ribbed body like a pitcher, with a mouth lined with downward-pointing hairs, and a mat of long, mobile tendrils that lie flat among the leaves. It can creep slowly on its roots from one clearing to the next. When it closes on prey the petals fold with a soft, wet sound. The scent of its nectar is strongest just before it feeds.

## Habitat and Range

They grow on the forest floors and in the clearings of the Verdant Expanse, often among real flowers, and along paths where visitors walk.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Flower-Stalker lures. Its scent and colour draw insects, birds, beasts, and travellers, and when something comes close enough to touch the

bloom, the tendrils wrap it and draw it into the mouth, where it is held and slowly digested. It is patient and moves only to feed or to find a better place to wait.

## Abilities

Its scent dulls caution as well as drawing the eye, and its tendrils hold with great strength. Its digestion is fast, even for the Expanse.

## Life Cycle

They seed like any plant, in a puff of sweet pollen, and a young Flower-Stalker is a small, bright bloom that eats insects. In the Expanse they grow to full size within days.

## Uses and Dangers

Its nectar is a powerful sleeping draught and is gathered, carefully, by herbalists. Its danger is that it is hard to tell from a flower, and the Expanse is full of flowers.

## Lore and Belief

The traveller's rule in the Expanse is to touch nothing, and the Flower-Stalker is the reason most often given. Tales of man-eating flowers on Caeldon may come from it.



# Fog-Stalkers

The Fog-Stalkers are among the Drifters of the Veil: hunters that blend into its fog and strike travellers from it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The fog of the Veil |
| **Range** | The Veil |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the lost and the lone |

## Appearance

A Fog-Stalker cannot be seen in the fog. Seen at all, it is a thickening of the mist, grey on grey, about the size of a large wolf, that has an edge where mist should not have one. When it strikes, the edge sharpens into something like jaws or claws, pale as bone, for a moment, and then it is mist again. It makes no sound before it strikes; afterwards the fog is colder and smells faintly of wet iron.

## Habitat and Range

They hunt in the fog of the Veil, thickest where the Veil is thick and slow and travellers struggle to keep their way.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Fog-Stalker waits in the fog, follows a traveller unseen, and strikes when the traveller is alone, tired, or uncertain. It prefers the Lost, who do not fight back.

## Abilities

It is all but invisible in fog, and can follow a traveller through the Veil's shifting corridors without losing them.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is the strike no one sees.

## Lore and Belief

The old crossing-words of the Veil tell travellers not to cross alone, and some say the Fog-Stalkers are why. Mist-country tales on Caeldon of a fog that takes the last walker in a line may come from them.

Smugglers who use the thin places walk roped together for that reason, and a cut rope found at a shrine path's mouth is one of the worst signs on the boundary roads.



# Forgers

The Forgers are the artisans of the Crucible, the realm of energy, heat, and transformation. They do not burn; they are the fire. They see the universe as raw material to be worked into something better, and the things they forge are among the greatest prizes any traveller brings back.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Lava rivers and floating islands of cooling rock in the realm of fire |
| **Range** | The Crucible |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: their heat alone burns, though they are not hostile |

## Appearance

A Forger is shaped like a broad, heavy-shouldered person, taller than a Human, made of living magma and cooling rock. Its body is dark basalt and obsidian on the surface, cracked all over, and through the cracks shows a core of glowing orange and gold that brightens when it works and dims when it rests. Its eyes are two points of white heat. It carries hammers and an anvil of solidified fire, which glow like coals.

It moves with a heavy, deliberate force, and stone hisses where it steps. Its voice is a deep crackle and roar, like a furnace with the door open, and it speaks in metaphors of fire and metal. It smells of hot iron and sulphur.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the floating islands of cooling rock and along the lava rivers of the Crucible, at forges that are simply the hottest places they can find.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are artisans and shapers. Skill, precision, and the act of transformation are what they value, and they look on everything, stone, metal, a visitor, as something that could be improved by fire. They are intense and passionate, quick to admire good work and quick to scorn poor work. They see visitors as cold and unrefined, and do not mean it unkindly.

## Abilities

They draw their life from heat and from the difference between hot and cold, and live as long as there is heat. They work fire as smiths work iron, and what they forge carries properties nothing on Caeldon can match: metals and gems that mend themselves or hold heat for an age.

## Life Cycle

The greatest danger to a Forger is to cool. A Forger that loses its heat turns brittle and shatters, and what is left is a heap of black glass and dull stone.

## Uses and Dangers

Most travellers come to the Crucible to forge legendary weapons, and the Forgers are who they come to. A Forger will sometimes work for a visitor who brings something worth transforming. Their danger is the heat around them, which can give a visitor Pattern burns, the fire consuming something of who they are.

## Lore and Belief

Smiths' lore on Caeldon has stories of fire-smiths who live inside volcanoes, and travellers' tales of the Forgers are probably their root, since the Crucible's gates on the Material Plane are volcanoes, forges, and places of great heat. Some forges keep an empty place at the hearth for a fire-smith who never comes.



# Fortune-Weavers

The Fortune-Weavers are counted among the Gamblers of the Shifting Path and the Forking Road: beings that spin threads of fate, making connections between lives or cutting them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Branching paths of the realm of possibility; the Forking Road |
| **Range** | The Shifting Path, The Forking Road |
| **Danger** | Wary: what they cut stays cut |

## Appearance

A Fortune-Weaver is seen as a slender figure, often with more arms than two, at work on threads of light that run out from it in every direction, gold for likely meetings and violet for unlikely ones. It spins with some hands and holds a fine, bright blade in another. Its face is calm and absorbed, and it seldom looks up from its work. The threads hum faintly when touched, and snap with a sound like a lute string breaking.

## Habitat and Range

They work along the paths of the Shifting Path and at the junctions of the Forking Road, where the threads of many lives cross.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Fortune-Weaver ties and cuts. It joins the thread of one life to another, so that two who would never have met will meet, and it severs threads, so that a friendship, a debt, or a destiny ends. It does so for its own reasons, or for a price, and the Gamblers' habit of wager is in it too.

## Abilities

It makes and severs connections of fate between beings. A thread it has tied draws two lives together; a thread it has cut stays cut.

## Uses and Dangers

Travellers come to the Path to find a lost opportunity or to change a past mistake, and a Fortune-Weaver can tie them to it. Their danger is the cut, which cannot be undone.

## Lore and Belief

Fate on Caeldon is widely believed to be spun by the gods or written at birth, and travellers' tales of the Fortune-Weavers feed those beliefs. What fate truly is, the highest circles of scholarship argue over without settling (see Fate-Songline Doctrine).



# Foundations

The Foundations are the pillars of the Iron Backbone: vast beings that do not move, and are the source of the plane's stability. They hold up its floating islands and keep its geometry. Among them are the Load-Bearers, which spread the weight of the cosmos, and the Cornerstones, which guard its boundaries.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Beneath the floating islands of the realm of earth and structure |
| **Range** | The Iron Backbone |
| **Danger** | Harmless unless their structure is attacked |

## Appearance

A Foundation looks like a mountain's root: a pillar of grey and black stone as wide as a castle keep and many times as tall, rising from nothing beneath and ending in the underside of a floating island. Veins of gold and copper glow in it and pulse slowly, like a heartbeat. Here and there a shape shows in the stone, a vast shoulder or the line of a closed eye, but it never moves. A deep hum comes from it that a visitor feels in the bones, and stone pressed against it is warm.

## Habitat and Range

They stand beneath the floating islands of the Iron Backbone, each holding up its own, and at the points where the plane's geometry must be held.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hold. A Foundation does nothing else, and seems aware of nothing but what it holds. Whether they think is not known; the Stonewrights speak of them with respect, as one speaks of an elder.

## Uses and Dangers

They are what makes the Backbone stand. Their danger is only what would follow if one failed.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say that on the Backbone even the mountains have a spine, and the Foundations are what they mean. Scholars on Caeldon sometimes speak of foundation-stones of the world, and whether they mean the Foundations or only use the figure is not always clear.



# Frost-Born

The Frost-Born are the people of the Frost-Bound, a plane where cold is not a temperature but a force that holds everything still. They live alone, speak little, and hunt the ice better than anything else that lives there. To the peoples of Caeldon they are the silent figures of travellers' tales, met rarely and remembered for their stillness.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Glaciers, ice fields, and frozen seas of a plane without warmth |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Wary: not aggressive unless provoked; hostile to heat thieves |

## Appearance

A Frost-Born is tall and slender, taller than most Humans, with long limbs and a narrow, fine-boned face. The skin is pale and so translucent that the blue veins show beneath it, at the temples, the throat, and the backs of the hands, and in the blue light of the plane the whole body can look faintly lit from within. The eyes are solid white or silver, with no visible pupil, and do not seem to blink. Hair, where they have it, is white and fine.

They dress in layers of thick, pale fur and in armour of hide made from the Ice-Beasts they hunt, with hoods drawn close. Their breath leaves them as a small cloud that freezes and falls as glitter. They move little and smoothly, and can stand so still on the ice that a traveller walks past without seeing them. Their voices are low and dry, and they smell of nothing at all.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the glaciers, ice spires, and frozen seas of the Frost-Bound, each alone or in a pair over a wide stretch of ice, in hollows cut into the glacier or under overhangs of frozen waterfalls. Their homes are bare: a hide, a store of food, a hunting spear.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Frost-Born are solitary and stoic by conviction. They hold that closeness leads to weakness and to the loss of heat, and so they keep apart, meet seldom, and speak rarely, since speech spends warmth. Endurance, silence, and the keeping of the self are their virtues, and a Frost-Born who talks freely is thought a little mad.

They are not aggressive unless provoked, but they look on strangers as heat thieves who upset the balance of the ice, and will drive them off a hunting ground without explanation. As hunters they have no equal on the plane: they track prey by the faintest disturbance in the snow, and can follow a trail days old.

## Abilities

A Frost-Born makes its own warmth slowly and keeps it well. It does not sweat; its breath freezes the moment it leaves the mouth. It can go weeks without food, sinking into a hibernating sleep in which it barely breathes, and wake with its strength intact.

## Life Cycle

The plane keeps bodies unchanged, and the Frost-Born age slowly. Their dead are laid out on the open ice, where nothing decays, and are kept there exactly as they were.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the best guides on the ice for anyone who can win their trust, which is almost no one. They trade rarely, and only for heat sources and things the cold has kept perfectly. Their danger is mostly to trespassers on their hunting grounds.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers who have come back through the Ice Gates, glaciers that melt open into the Veil and frozen lakes, describe tall white-eyed hunters who watched without speaking, and some swear they were statues until they moved. A common tale holds that the Frost-Born are the frozen dead of the Material Plane, walking again; they are not, but the tale is told because the Freeze on the Frost-Bound does make statues of travellers, and travellers cannot always tell the two apart.

Thieves who go through the Ice Gates to rob the Frost-Born's caches of warmth are hunted back across the ice, and the cold country tells of one who escaped and spent the rest of his life unable to get warm.



# Frost-Wolves

Frost-Wolves are the pack hunters of the Frost-Bound, the commonest of its Ice-Stalkers. Their fur hides them against the snow, they hunt without a sound, and their bite freezes what it holds.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Snowfields and glaciers of a plane without warmth |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: pack hunters with freezing bites |

## Appearance

A Frost-Wolf is larger than any wolf of Caeldon, heavy in the shoulder, with a thick double coat of white and blue-grey that lies flat and glossy like hoarfrost. Against the snowfields it is all but invisible until it moves. Its eyes are pale blue, its muzzle long, and its teeth translucent, like icicles. Frost gathers on its whiskers and along its back, and its breath hangs in the air as a fog that freezes and falls. It runs low and fast, with a gliding stride that barely marks the snow. It does not howl. The only sounds a pack makes are the faint crunch of crust under its feet and, close by, the click of its teeth.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the snowfields and glacier tongues of the Frost-Bound, in packs of half a dozen or more that range widely after Ice-Beasts and other warm prey.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A pack hunts by warmth and by sight together. It spreads out across the snow, closes on its prey from several sides at once, and strikes without warning; a traveller who hears a Frost-Wolf has usually already been bitten. They take the weak first and drag a kill away to eat it frozen. They are

wary of fire, not because it burns them, since flames on the plane throw no warmth, but because fire means people.

## Abilities

Their bite freezes. Flesh that a Frost-Wolf holds turns white and hard within moments, and a limb it has bitten may be lost to the cold even when the wound is small. They can run across thin crust that would break under a man.

## Life Cycle

A pack keeps one breeding pair, and the pups are born in dens cut into glacier ice, white from birth. Nothing decays on the Frost-Bound, and a Frost-Wolf that dies on the open snow lies there unchanged until something eats it.

## Uses and Dangers

Their pelts are the warmest the plane gives and are worn by the Frost-Born, who hunt them alone and count a Frost-Wolf hide a mark of skill. Their danger is the silent attack, and the frostbite that follows even an escape.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' tales give them a howl that freezes the blood, but those who have met them agree that the frightening thing is that they make none. In cold-country stories on Caeldon, a white wolf seen in a snowstorm is sometimes said to have come through a frozen lake from the other side, and the tale may be all that is left of such a crossing.

A beast-hunter’s song from the high north tells of the white pack that came through a frozen lake one winter and took a village’s herds and three of its hunters before the lake thawed and the survivors went back the way they came.



# Gale Jellies

Gale Jellies drift on the winds of the Unbound Gale as jellyfish drift in the sea. Their bells are filled with air and their threads trail far behind them, and anyone the wind sweeps into a swarm is stung.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Open air |
| **Range** | The Unbound Gale |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A Gale Jelly's bell is the size of a shield, clear as glass and almost invisible against the plane's pale sky, with a faint silver rim and a pulse of blue light that runs round it as it breathes. Beneath it hang threads, fine as hair and many times the length of a rope, pale blue and glittering. The bell swells and shrinks as it rides the wind. A swarm sounds like nothing at all until it is close, when the threads hum faintly in the gusts. They smell of ozone and of the sea, though there is no sea on the plane.

## Habitat and Range

They drift across the open air of the plane in swarms of dozens to thousands, carried by the currents, and gather thickest where currents meet and slow.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A jelly does not hunt. It drifts, and its threads take whatever the wind blows into them: the small creatures of the air, flying things, and travellers carried helplessly along. The threads sting, the prey stops struggling, and the threads draw it up

to the bell. They cannot turn against the wind, only rise and sink a little by filling and emptying their bells.

## Abilities

Their sting numbs. A light brush leaves a burning line and a dead arm for hours; a wrapping can stop a body's breath. On a plane where a traveller stays aloft by the will to move, a stung traveller who loses the will can be scattered by the turbulence or held still, and stillness on the Gale is its own danger.

## Life Cycle

They bud from the rims of older jellies, and a swarm is mostly one family. They live as long as the wind keeps them aloft. A jelly that is held still too long, caught on a floating island or in a Gust-Caller's barrier, collapses into a glassy skin and is blown away.

## Uses and Dangers

Their threads, dried, are said to numb pain, and some travellers bring them home for healers; they lose their sting within days. The Wind-Walkers read swarms as weather, since a thickening swarm shows where currents are about to meet, and travellers learn from them to look for the silver rims and the blue pulse, and to steer by will around a swarm while there is time.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane, on high peaks and open plains where the Wind-Gates open, shepherds tell of "sky-nettles" that sting out of a clear sky. Most such stings are thistledown and imagination; a few accounts describe threads that glittered (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Gamblers

The Gamblers are the chance-eaters of the Shifting Path and the Forking Road. They feed on risk, and they test the limits of probability by forcing travellers into choices with high stakes. Among them are the Dice-Lords, which control the outcome of random events, and the Fortune-Weavers, which spin and cut the threads of fate.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Branching paths of the realm of possibility; the Forking Road |
| **Range** | The Shifting Path, The Forking Road |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: the stakes they set are real |

## Appearance

A Gambler is often humanoid, and its features change with every roll of the dice: one moment a young face, the next an old one, a different nose, a different mouth, its colouring shifting, as though it were trying on the faces it might have had. Its hands are long and quick and always busy with something, dice, coins, cards, knucklebones. Its clothes are bright and many-patterned. It laughs easily and often, and the laugh has several voices. Near it the air smells of tallow and spilt wine, as in a gaming house.

## Habitat and Range

They haunt the crossings of the Shifting Path and the junctions of the Forking Road, wherever a traveller must choose.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Gambler offers a wager, and the wager is always a choice: this road or that, keep or stake, now or never. It feeds on the risk, not on winning, and it is as pleased to lose as to win, so long as the stakes were high. It cannot be refused easily; on the Path, every act forks, and refusing is a choice too.

## Abilities

It feeds on chance, and near it chance grows wilder: a tossed coin may land on either face or stand on its edge. What is staked with a Gambler is truly lost or won.

## Uses and Dangers

A traveller who wins against a Gambler may come away with luck, a second chance, or a better future, which is what most travellers come to the Path for. One who loses pays. Some of those caught are the Forked, travellers stuck in a loop of indecision, existing in several states at once.

## Lore and Belief

Gaming houses on Caeldon have tales of a stranger whose face changed with every throw, and some gamblers swear by him and some swear at him. Path-readers say that a Gambler can be met at any crossroads where a great deal hangs on a choice.

The songs are full of men who staked their life or their lord’s on a Gambler’s throw, and of the one who won a kingdom and lost his name with the next throw.



# Gilded

The Gilded are the people of the Gilded Cage, the plane of absolute order where freedom is the only crime. Every one of them has a place and keeps to it. To travellers they are the politest beings they will ever meet, and the least free.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Grid cities of a plane of absolute order |
| **Range** | The Gilded Cage |
| **Danger** | Wary: polite, but visitors are unstable to them |

## Appearance

A Gilded has the height and build of an ordinary Human, with symmetrical, unchanging features and skin like polished metal or glazed porcelain: gold, white, or slate grey, smooth and cool, with faint seams at the joints of the fingers and the neck. The eyes are clear and steady, and they never seem to look away from the task in front of them. All wear the same uniform, cut to one pattern, distinguished only by marks of rank at the collar and cuff.

They move with exact, measured steps along the lines of the streets, and when they stop they stop completely. Their voices are even and courteous, and they speak in complete, ordered sentences. They tick faintly when they move, like a good clock in another room, and they smell of oil and polish.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the grid cities of the Gilded Cage, in identical buildings stacked to measure along perfectly straight streets, each in its designated place.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Their society is protocol. Every action has a prescribed path, rank depends on how well one keeps the rules, and deviance is punished by being set right again. They are polite, efficient, and without feeling: they do not joke, argue, or make any art that has not been approved. They see visitors as unstable and dangerous, and treat them with perfect courtesy and steady watchfulness, as one treats a cart rolling loose.

## Abilities

They do not visibly age. They need tending rather than food or sleep, oil, polish, and adjustment, and they feel pain only when they break a rule.

## Life Cycle

The Gilded are said to be made rather than born, finished to the pattern of those before them, and to last as long as they are tended. One that can no longer be set right is removed, and its place filled.

## Uses and Dangers

The Cage offers what no other plane can: nothing breaks, nothing fails, and its judgement is final, and the Gilded are its clerks, keepers, and judges. Visitors come to them to store valuables or seek judgement. Their danger is the plane's: those who stay among them slowly lose the will to choose.

## Lore and Belief

Those who have passed the Gateways of Law, judgement halls, counting-houses, and places where rules are kept to the letter, and come back describe the Gilded as living clockwork, which they are not quite. Some rich town masters on Caeldon are said to hold them up as a model for their servants, and the travellers who have been there rarely agree.



# Glacier-Drakes

Glacier-Drakes are the largest of the Ice-Stalkers of the Frost-Bound: blind, burrowing reptiles that move through solid ice as a mole moves through earth, and rise beneath anything warm.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Deep ice of glaciers and frozen seas |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Deadly to anything warm on the ice above them |

## Appearance

A grown Glacier-Drake is as long as a river barge and as thick through the body as a cart, a heavy, legged serpent with four short, broad limbs ending in flat, ridged claws for scraping ice. Its scales are pale blue-white and translucent at the edges, so that through clear ice a watcher can sometimes see it pass as a long, dim shape. It has no eyes, only smooth, scaled hollows where eyes would be, and two pits on the snout that sense warmth. Its jaws are long and lined with rows of short, blunt teeth for crushing. It moves slowly and steadily through the ice, and its passage can be heard above as a deep grinding and, now and then, a crack like a gate splitting.

## Habitat and Range

They live within the glaciers and under the frozen seas of the Frost-Bound, each alone in a wide maze of its own tunnels, and come near the surface only to feed.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Glacier-Drake hunts from below. It lies in the ice until it senses warmth above, a beast, a traveller, a camp, and then tunnels upward and breaks through beneath it, seizing what it can and dragging it down. It does not chase, and it does not hunt on the open surface. It is slow to anger and slower to give up.

## Abilities

It bores through solid ice by scraping and crushing, leaving tunnels that the cold slowly seals behind it. It senses heat through great thicknesses of ice and can tell a large warmth from a small one.

## Life Cycle

A Glacier-Drake lays a few eggs deep in the ice and leaves them; the cold keeps them, perhaps for ages, until something warm comes near enough to wake them. They grow slowly and, as far as anyone knows, without end.

## Uses and Dangers

Its old tunnels are sometimes used by the Frost-Born as shelter and roads, and its scales make cold-proof plates. Its danger is the ground opening under a warm traveller, without warning.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers who have heard the grinding under the ice tell of the ice-worm, a beast as long as a road, and the stories have only grown with the telling. The advice that comes back with them is sound: on the deep ice, light no fire and sleep apart.

Delvers who cross to the Frost-Bound for preserved relics tell of a camp that lit one fire on the deep ice and went down through it in a single heave, fire and all; the relics they came for lie under the ice with them.



# Grave-Keepers

The Grave-Keepers are among the Keepers of Dust of the Whispering Trace: beings that guard the resting places of powerful Echoes, so that what lies there is not disturbed.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Graveyards and tombs of the realm of death and remnant |
| **Range** | The Whispering Trace |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to those who disturb what they guard |

## Appearance

A Grave-Keeper stands like a tall, gaunt mourner in faded indigo, hooded, with long, bone-pale hands folded over a staff of black wood. Its face, when the hood falls back, is a smooth grey mask with dark hollows for eyes, like a funeral effigy. It stands so still at a tomb that travellers take it for a carving until it moves. When it does, it moves with slow, deliberate dignity, and the murmur of voices in the Trace falls quiet around it. Its staff strikes the ground with a hollow knock that echoes far longer than it should.

## Habitat and Range

They stand at the tombs and graveyards of the Whispering Trace where powerful Echoes rest, each at its own grave.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Grave-Keeper guards. It lets mourners and the respectful come and go, and will stand aside for a traveller who comes to speak with the dead in good faith. Those who come to take, disturb, or call up what rests there, it turns away, and then stops.

## Abilities

It knows who rests in its keeping, and it can hold an Echo at rest against those who would disturb it.

## Uses and Dangers

They keep the resting places of the powerful dead from those who would use them. Their danger is to necromancers and grave-robbers, and to any traveller who mistakes their grave for treasure.

## Lore and Belief

Many graveyards on Caeldon have a tale of a hooded watcher seen at dusk by an old tomb. Some say it is the watcher of the dead, a god; some say it is a Grave-Keeper come through; most such watchers, when looked for, are not there.

Grave-robbers tell the other side: of a crew that broke into an old lord's tomb for its grave-goods and was found at dawn laid out in the tomb's niches, as neatly as the dead.



# Gust-Callers

The Gust-Callers are among the Sky-Weavers of the Unbound Gale: beings that summon powerful winds, to clear a path for what they favour or to block what they oppose.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Skies of the realm of wind and motion |
| **Range** | The Unbound Gale |
| **Danger** | Dangerous when they oppose a traveller |

## Appearance

A Gust-Caller is seen as a slender, spinning column of air, almost invisible, made visible by what it carries: dust, snow, torn cloud. At its top is a brighter, pale-blue knot that turns towards whatever it watches. When it calls a gust, it draws in breath like a bellows, the air around it falls silent, and then the wind comes, with a roar like a waterfall. It smells of snow.

## Habitat and Range

They hover among the floating islands and along the wind-roads of the Unbound Gale.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Gust-Caller decides who passes. It clears a road for those it favours with a following wind, and blocks those it opposes with a wall of air. What makes it favour one traveller over another is not known; travellers say boldness helps, and hesitation does not.

## Abilities

It summons winds strong enough to hurl a traveller across the sky or hold them still against their will.

## Uses and Dangers

A traveller it favours crosses the Gale in moments. Their danger is a wind that sends a traveller where they did not mean to go.

## Lore and Belief

Sailors on Caeldon whistle for a wind, and some say they whistle to the caller of gusts; travellers' tales of the Gust-Callers may lie behind the habit.

Wreckers on the outer coasts are said to whistle the other way, for a gale onto the rocks, and sailors who catch a man whistling ashore on a storm night throw him off the quay.



# Harmony-Beasts

Harmony-Beasts are the animals of the Apex, counted among its Flawless. They move in perfect step with one another and never collide, never hunt, and never die.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Domed hills and plains of a plane of completed perfection |
| **Range** | The Apex |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

They are animals as a painter might idealize them: deer-like grazers with long, exact legs and smooth gold or silver coats, long-necked birds of pure white, and smaller things like hares or cats, each of its kind identical to every other. Their coats never tangle, their feathers never ruffle, their eyes are calm and large. What travellers remember is the movement. A herd of fifty turns as one body, every head lifting at the same moment, every hoof striking the ground together, so that their passage sounds like a single slow drumbeat in time with the plane's hum. They make no other sound and have no smell.

## Habitat and Range

They live in herds and flocks across the domed hills and along the exact rivers of the Apex, moving in long, perfect curves that never cross.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They do not hunt and are not hunted. They do not fight, mate, or rear young, and they do not seem to eat, though some graze. They move together in perfect synchronization, and when a traveller walks among them the herd parts and closes again without a single animal touching another or the traveller. They show no fear and no curiosity.

## Abilities

They never collide, never tire, and never die. A Harmony-Beast struck by a traveller is not hurt; the plane sets it right again.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing and take nothing. Their danger is only the unease they cause: a traveller who watches them too long begins, without meaning to, to walk in step.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' accounts of beasts that never die have fed tales of a paradise of animals on Caeldon, where nothing eats anything. Those who have seen them describe them less kindly, as a meadow full of clockwork.



# Hoar Owls

Hoar Owls are the silent white owls of the Frost-Bound, counted among its Ice-Stalkers. They watch the snowfields from the ice spires and hunt by ear, and they take Stillhares and anything else small that moves. Travellers' tales give them a taste for the fingers of the sleeping.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ice crags and frozen spires |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Wary: they strike at a sleeper’s bare hand |

## Appearance

A Hoar Owl stands as tall as a child’s knee and spreads wings wider than a man’s arms. Its feathers are white, edged with grey, and frost grows on them so that the bird looks furred with rime; the ice crystals on its back catch the cold light. Its face is a flat white disc, its eyes pale silver, its beak and claws a translucent blue-grey like old ice. It flies without a sound, a slow, gliding drop from a spire to the snow. It does not hoot or call. The only sound a traveller hears is the click of its claws closing.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the ice crags and frozen spires above the snowfields, one pair to a crag, and range widely over the open snow below.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Hoar Owl hunts by sound. The cold air of the plane carries sound sharp and far, and from its spire the owl hears the scrape of a Stillhare at the lichen or the crunch of crust under a foot a long way off. It waits for movement and drops on it. It is not drawn to warmth and will not attack anything as large as a person standing. It does strike

at small things that move in the open: a hand that slips out of the furs in sleep and twitches, a scrap of food, a bird of the traveller's own.

## Abilities

Its flight is wholly silent even in the brittle air of the plane, where a twig snapping sounds like a blow. Its talons close with a grip that does not open until the owl chooses, and the frost on its feathers makes it all but invisible against the ice.

## Life Cycle

A pair keeps one crag for life and lays its eggs in a hollow cut into the ice. The young are grey down and grow white as they fledge. A dead owl, frozen where it fell, lies unchanged on the snow.

## Uses and Dangers

Their feathers are the lightest warmth on the plane, and the Frost-Born line hoods with them and wear a Hoar Owl's facial disc as a mark of a patient hunter. Travellers who sleep with their hands inside their furs have nothing to fear from them. Those who do not may wake with torn fingers.

## Lore and Belief

The travellers' tale is that Hoar Owls take the fingers of the sleeping, and many who come home from the Frost-Bound short of a finger blame an owl. Most such fingers were lost to frost, which on the plane can take a finger in a night; the owls strike at a moving hand, but seldom take more than the skin of it. Some Frost-Born hold that an owl on the crag above a camp watches over it, and will not camp beneath an empty crag.



# Hollows

The Hollows are the natives of the Silence, the plane without meaning. They do not speak, gather, or want anything; each is an island of awareness slowly dissolving into the stone around it. They matter to the peoples of Caeldon as the fate the plane holds for every traveller who stays too long, because a Hollow's emptiness spreads.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Featureless stone plains of a plane without meaning |
| **Range** | The Silence |
| **Danger** | Wary: harmless in themselves, but their emptiness is contagious |

## Appearance

A Hollow is of about Human size and shape, but gaunt and colourless: skin the faded grey-white of the plane's stone, hair thin and pale or gone, limbs long and slack. The face is the thing travellers remember. It is blank, not calm but empty, with no expression ever passing over it, and the eyes are milky white, seeing nothing and everything at once. Hollows wear nothing, or the faded remains of whatever they once wore.

They stand motionless for long spans, and when something moves them they move in jerks, with a mechanical gait, as if pulled on strings, and then stop again. They make no sound at all; on the Silence there is little sound to make. They have no smell that anyone can name.

## Habitat and Range

They stand or drift alone across the flat, featureless stone plains of the Silence, and among its nameless geometric structures. No two are found together on purpose.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Hollow has no society, no rank, and no shared purpose. It does not speak, eat, or truly sleep, but lives in a torpor from which it moves only when an outside force stirs it. It feels neither pain nor pleasure. It does not attack unless provoked, and it does not defend itself either; it simply is, waiting to fade.

## Abilities

A Hollow's emptiness is contagious. A traveller who stays near one feels thoughts slide away faster and purpose thin, as though the Hollow were a hole the plane drains through.

## Life Cycle

Hollows are not born so much as reached. The plane's slow erasure, which travellers call the Fade, takes memories first, then personality, then the will to live, until whoever it took is a Hollow too. A Hollow in its turn dissolves, slowly, into the background of the plane.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is the Fade: a traveller who lingers among them becomes one of them.

## Lore and Belief

The few who return from the Quiet Gates, libraries where nobody reads any more and places of deep meditation, speak of the blank-faced people of the white plain, and say that some of them still wear the clothes of Caeldon. Whether all Hollows were once travellers, or some were native to the plane from the start, is not known. The advice that comes back is for travellers to write down their names and purposes often, and to say them aloud to themselves.

Ruin-delvers fear the dead libraries for this reason: they speak of a band that went into one for its lost books and came out years later, one by one, without their names.



# Ice-Beasts

The Ice-Beasts are the great grazing animals of the Frost-Bound: the prey of its hunters and the source of the fur and hide armour the Frost-Born wear. Without them the plane's hunters would have little to hunt.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ice fields and frozen seas of a plane without warmth |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Wary: placid, dangerous when cornered |

## Appearance

An Ice-Beast is as large as an ox or larger, a high-shouldered, heavy-headed animal hung all over with a long, coarse coat of white and blue-grey that reaches almost to the ice. Beneath the outer coat is a dense underwool as fine as down. Its head is low and broad, with a wide, hard upper lip and short, flat tusks for breaking ice. Its feet are wide and furred between the toes. It moves at a slow, rolling walk, and a herd on the move sounds like ice being ground in a mill. It lows rarely, a long, hollow note that rings in the brittle air. It smells faintly of wet wool.

## Habitat and Range

They live in herds across the ice fields and frozen seas of the Frost-Bound, moving slowly over wide ranges in search of food.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Nothing grows on the Frost-Bound, but nothing decays there either, and the Ice-Beasts live on what the cold has kept: the bodies of things long dead, held perfectly in the ice. They break the surface with their tusks and lips and eat what lies beneath, and a herd will spend days at one rich

patch. They are placid and slow, and they bunch together when Frost-Wolves come, the strongest facing out.

## Abilities

Their coat keeps their trapped warmth so well that snow lies unmelted on their backs. They can go long spans without feeding.

## Life Cycle

Calves are born in the herd's centre and walk within the hour. An Ice-Beast lives long, as everything on the Frost-Bound does, and when it dies the cold keeps it whole, so that its own herd may one day graze on it.

## Uses and Dangers

Their hides are the plane's warmest clothing and its best armour: the Frost-Born wear them as fur and as layered, insulated plates, and travellers buy them when they can. Their meat keeps forever on the ice. A cornered Ice-Beast can trample or gore a hunter, and the Frost-Born count it the most dangerous thing they kill alone.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers rarely see an Ice-Beast alive and know it by its hide, which they call ice-wool. Some tales say the beasts dig up the dead of the Material Plane, frozen and carried across; whatever they dig up is old and kept by the cold, and no one has shown where it came from.



# Ice-Stalkers

Ice-Stalkers is the name the Frost-Bound gives to its hunters as a kind: predatory beasts adapted to a cold that preserves everything and lets nothing grow. The best known are the pack-hunting Frost-Wolves and the burrowing Glacier-Drakes; the crystalline Ice-Shards that wake and attack anything warm are counted with them, though they are made things rather than beasts.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Glaciers and ice fields of a plane without warmth |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anything warm |

## Appearance

They share the colours of the plane, white, deep blue, and translucent grey, and most are thick-furred or thick-scaled against the cold. They hunt in a world where sound carries far and brittle, so the best of them are silent.

## Habitat and Range

They range over the glaciers, ice spires, and frozen seas of the Frost-Bound, wherever the Ice-Beasts and other warm prey are found.

## Behaviour and Temperament

What unites them is warmth. Heat in the Frost-Bound does not escape a body but is trapped in it, so a living creature is a lit lamp to anything that can sense it, and the Ice-Stalkers hunt by that sense more than by sight. They kill by cold as often as by tooth.

## Uses and Dangers

Their hides and scales are worn by the Frost-Born and prized by travellers. Their danger is that a warm visitor is the brightest thing on the ice.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers rarely tell the kinds apart and speak of ice-wolves, ice-worms, and walking ice, three names for what they met. The tale that the ice itself hunts on the Frost-Bound is told of the Ice-Shards, and is nearer the truth than most.

Delvers who brave the Ice Gates for the plane's preserved relics say the Stalkers find a camp by its breath, and they sleep in snow-holes with their faces to the ice.



# Illuminated

The Illuminated are the people of the Radiance, the plane where truth is absolute and nothing can be hidden. They glow from within, see everything, and say everything. To travellers they are the most honest beings in the cosmos, and among the hardest to bear.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Crystalline plains and glass towers of a plane of absolute truth |
| **Range** | The Radiance |
| **Danger** | Wary: not violent, but merciless in what they say |

## Appearance

An Illuminated is slender, no taller than most Humans, and it shines. Light comes from within the body, soft through the skin and brightest at the face, hands, and breast, in white, gold, or a shifting iridescence, so that it casts no shadow and lights whatever stands near it. The features are sharp and clear, without any softness or blur, as if cut from glass. The eyes are pools of pure light with no iris or pupil.

They wear little, since cloth turns clear on the plane anyway. They move directly, never sidelong. Their voices are clear and carry, and in the plane's hum their words sound like pure tones. They smell of rain on dry earth.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the crystalline plains and among the glass towers of the Radiance, where walls do not exist and every barrier is a field of light. They keep no private places.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They practise radical honesty: no diplomacy, no politics, no courtesies. If they dislike someone they say so; if they love someone they show it; a conflict is settled at once by facing it. They cannot understand white lies or politeness, and they see outsiders as broken or sick, because outsiders hide their true selves. They are not cruel by intent, and they do not attack; but they will say to a visitor, in front of others, exactly what they see.

## Abilities

They do not sleep, since a mind with no secrets needs no rest from them, and they do not eat: they absorb light and truth. They cannot be deceived. A lie told to an Illuminated is seen for what it is before it is finished.

## Life Cycle

How the Illuminated come to be is not known; the Confessors, who shed every secret of their own will, join them and are said to become like them. They do not grow old in any way a traveller can see.

## Uses and Dangers

The Radiance can cure madness or delusion with clarity, and agreements spoken there are unbreakable, and the Illuminated are their keepers. Their danger is exposure: every shame a visitor carries is seen and named.

## Lore and Belief

At the Oracle Gates, places of judgement, of confession, and mirrors, the returned describe the Illuminated as burning angels, and some faiths on Caeldon are said to take them for messengers of truth. They are a people, not messengers. Those who follow Lux and Verba are said to honour the Radiance as the corrective that keeps the cosmos from sinking into deception, and anyone who lives by secrets fears it.

Lords have sent traitors through the Oracle Gates in chains to be made to speak before the Illuminated, and it is said of one lord who went through with them that he and came back unable to look his own household in the eye.



# Indexers

The Indexers are the filers of the Eternal Record, serving under the Vaultstones. Everything that happens is recorded there, and the Indexers put each new thing in its place as it arrives.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The stacks of the realm of knowledge and memory |
| **Range** | The Eternal Record |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An Indexer is small and many-handed, about the size of a child, with a round, smooth body of pale vellum and four or six thin arms that end in long, quick fingers. It has a single large lens for an eye, set in the middle of what serves as its face. It scurries along the stacks, climbing shelves as easily as walking, and is always carrying something: a scroll, a slip, a sheaf of new pages. It makes a constant soft sound of shuffling paper and a faint, dry clicking, like beads on an abacus. It smells of fresh ink.

## Habitat and Range

They swarm through the stacks of the Eternal Record, especially where its newest knowledge arrives.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Indexer files. It takes each new record, reads it at a glance, and carries it to its place, never mistaking one. It ignores visitors unless a visitor moves something, and then it puts the thing back.

## Abilities

It knows where everything in its part of the Record belongs, and can find anything there at once.

## Uses and Dangers

An Indexer that can be persuaded to fetch is the fastest way to find a thing in the Record, and some travellers learn how to ask. Their danger is nil, except to a visitor who keeps moving the books.

## Lore and Belief

Clerks on Caeldon have a joke about the little hands that put things where they belong when no one is looking, and travellers' tales of the Indexers may be its root.



# Iron-Claws

Iron-Claws are the great armoured beasts of the Scourge, the heaviest of its Apex Predators. Each lives alone over a territory it defends against everything, and its jaws crush stone.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Mountain slopes and ruins of a plane without safety |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Deadly inside its territory |

## Appearance

An Iron-Claw is as large as a plough-team of oxen together, built low and wide on four thick legs, with a body plated in overlapping, rust-dark scutes that ring like metal when struck. Its head is short and massive, its jaws as broad as a cart, with flat, grinding teeth at the back and heavy fangs at the front. Its claws, which give it its name, are dark and dull like old iron and score rock as it walks. Its small eyes sit deep under plated brows. It moves slowly and heavily until it charges, and then it is shockingly fast. It roars rather than growls, a deep, rasping bellow that carries for miles, and it smells of rust and hot stone.

## Habitat and Range

Each Iron-Claw holds a stretch of mountain slope or ruin in the Scourge, marked by claw-scored rock and crushed stone, and drives every other large creature out of it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Iron-Claw is solitary and territorial. It patrols its ground, roars at its borders, and attacks anything large that comes into it, beast or traveller, with no warning beyond the roar. It eats whatever

it kills, bones and armour included. Outside its territory it is far less dangerous, and it rarely follows a fleeing enemy across the border.

## Abilities

Its jaws crush stone and bite through iron. Its plating turns arrows and most blades, and only heavy weapons or fire at its joints trouble it.

## Life Cycle

An Iron-Claw leaves its territory only to find a mate, and the young are born armoured and are driven out to win ground of their own. They live very long, and an old one's scutes are grown thick as a castle door.

## Uses and Dangers

Its scutes make the best armour on the Scourge and are worth a war-band's fortune; its claws are worked into picks and blades. Hunting one takes a war-band and costs it. Its danger is to anyone who strays into its ground.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers who come back from the Scourge tell of iron beasts as big as houses, and the tales are only a little larger than the truth. A saying among them holds that on the Scourge an Iron-Claw's territory is the safest ground there is, because nothing else will enter it; travellers who try it rarely say so twice.

Sellsword companies that crossed for the Scourge's old arms tell of an Iron-Claw that sat on a battlefield hoard of ancient blades and killed three companies before a fourth lured it off with a burning wagon, and of how little they brought back for what it cost.



# Keepers of Dust

The Keepers of Dust are the sweepers of the Whispering Trace: huge robed beings that sweep its floor and gather the dust of forgotten things, so that nothing is ever lost completely. They archive what remains of civilizations that have fallen. Among their kind are the Grave-Keepers, which guard the resting places of powerful Echoes, and the Memory-Thieves, which steal memories to live on; the Unfinished, Echoes formed around unresolved business, are counted with them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ruins and grey plains of the realm of death and remnant |
| **Range** | The Whispering Trace |
| **Danger** | Harmless: they sweep and do not attack |

## Appearance

A Keeper of Dust is massive, twice or three times the height of a man, in a long, heavy robe of faded grey and sepia that drags on the ground and gathers dust as it goes. Its hood is deep and dark, and nothing shows inside it. It carries a broom of long, pale fibres, like grass bleached by years, and sweeps with slow, steady strokes. Behind it the ground is clean and the dust is gone, into its robe or its sleeves, no one knows. It moves very slowly and makes the soft, endless sound of sweeping. It smells of old dust and dried flowers.

## Habitat and Range

They sweep the ruins, graveyards, and grey plains of the Whispering Trace, each over its own long road, for as long as anyone knows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They gather and keep. A Keeper of Dust sweeps up the remnants of forgotten things, a name no one says, a ruin no one visits, the last trace of a fallen people, and archives them. It does not stop for visitors and does not speak to them, though some travellers say it will stand still to let them pass.

## Abilities

What it sweeps is not lost. It gathers the dust of forgotten things, and holds what remains of the fallen.

## Uses and Dangers

Some travellers come to the Trace to ask a Keeper of Dust for the remnant of something lost, a name, a song, a place, and some are given it. They do no harm.

## Lore and Belief

Some peoples on Caeldon sweep a grave on the day of remembrance and say they sweep for the great sweeper; the custom may remember a traveller's tale of the Keepers of Dust. Sayings about the sweeper who keeps every grain are common where the dead are honoured.



# Kinspinners

Kinspinners are the spiders of the Weave. They spin threads, not of silk, but of the plane's own connection, and they spin them between minds. Travellers who wake joined by one find that each feels what the other feels, and the thread does not always break at the Veil.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Between minds, along the bridges of light |
| **Range** | The Weave |
| **Danger** | Wary: their thread joins the self to others |

## Appearance

A Kinspinner is the size of a thumbnail, its body round and translucent, shifting through the plane's soft pastels like oil on water. Its legs are long and fine, and it seems to walk on nothing. Its thread is invisible until the light catches it, and then it shows as a line of faint iridescence strung between two people, humming very softly when either of them feels strongly. The spider makes no other sound. It smells of fresh linen, as the plane does.

## Habitat and Range

They live everywhere in the Weave, along the bridges of light between the floating islands and among its gatherings, and in greatest numbers wherever many minds are close together.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Kinspinner moves from mind to mind and joins them, drawing a thread from one person to the next as a spider draws silk from branch to branch. It does not feed on what passes along the thread, as far as anyone knows; it simply spins. It is gentle

and unhurried and does not flee from a hand. Groups of travellers who sleep close together wake strung together like beads.

## Abilities

Two people joined by a Kinspinner's thread share feeling. Pain in one is a dull ache in the other, fear spreads between them, and joy too. In the Weave, where all feeling is shared already, the thread only deepens the plane's hold. Outside it, the thread lingers, faintly, for weeks or months: a traveller may wake at night with a companion's grief, a day's ride away.

## Life Cycle

Kinspinners hatch in clusters on the bridges of light and spread at once. They are said not to die, only to grow fainter until they are part of the plane's light; the Menders are believed by some to be made from them.

## Uses and Dangers

To the Linked the spiders are a blessing, and a traveller who cuts a thread is seen as wounding the plane. Some on the Material Plane have sought a thread on purpose: lovers, twins, a mother and a child going to war. To most travellers the threads are a danger, a way for the self to bleed into others before the plane has even begun its work, and they cut them each morning with a knife passed through the air.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers bring home tales of companions who came back strung together and later could not bear to be apart, or could not bear each other. The spiders are often confused in tales with the Fortune-Weavers of the Shifting Path, who spin threads of fate; a Kinspinner's thread ties nothing but feeling (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).

A ballad follows two sworn brothers who came back from the Weave strung together, rode to every war side by side, and died in the same hour on two different battlefields.



# Last-Light Moths

Last-Light Moths are the grey moths of the Ashen Wastes that come to the dying. They gather where a life is running out, a beast, an Ash-Walker, or a traveller, and settle on the body before the end. They do no harm, but no one on the plane is glad to see one land.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ash plains and the edges of failing warmth |
| **Range** | The Ashen Wastes |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Last-Light Moth is the size of a thumbnail, with soft, broad wings the grey of old ash, dusted so finely that the dust comes off on a finger like soot. Its body is furred and dull, its antennae short and feathered, and its eyes give back no light at all. It flies slowly, in short, heavy drifts, because the air of the plane resists every movement, and it settles with its wings spread flat. A gathering of them makes no sound. Where they have been, a faint smell of cold ash lingers.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the ash plains in small, scattered numbers and are seldom seen until something begins to die. Then they come from every direction, a few at first and later dozens.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The moths feed on nothing anyone has seen them take. They are drawn to the last warmth and movement of a failing body, earlier than any scavenger and long before death is plain to the eye, and they settle on the skin and stay. If the dying recover, the moths lift and drift away. If not, they

remain until the body is cold and then disperse. They ignore the living and well, and brushing them off only moves them a hand's breadth.

## Abilities

Their only gift is knowing. A moth will settle on a traveller who feels no worse than tired, and that traveller is dying: of the cold, of a wound gone bad, or of the slow exhaustion the plane brings.

## Life Cycle

Their eggs are laid on the bodies they settle on, and the young hatch as the body cools. They are short-lived for things of this plane, and a dead moth crumbles to ash dust within days.

## Uses and Dangers

The moths are a warning and nothing more. Experienced travellers check one another for settled moths morning and evening and turn back at the first one, and many lives have been saved that way. Their danger is fear: a party that sees moths settle on one of its number can break apart in panic.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers believe that the moths hasten death, that they drink the last warmth and so draw the dying down, and some will kill every moth that lands. In truth the moths take nothing, and the hastening of what is already failing is the work of the Entropy-Seekers, which the moths are often found beside. The Ash-Walkers are said to leave a moth where it settles and to begin, quietly, dividing the dying one's hoard (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Last-Word Finches

Last-Word Finches are the small grey birds of the Whispering Trace. They perch along the paths the dead's Echoes walk, and they sing what each Echo last said in life. Mourners who come to the Trace to speak with the dead sometimes find the finches have the words they came for.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Paths of the dead, skeletal trees, graveyards |
| **Range** | The Whispering Trace |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Last-Word Finch is the size of a sparrow, plump and soft, its feathers the grey of old ash, faded at the edges as everything on the plane is faded, with a dim sepia wash on the breast. Its beak is short and thick, its eyes dark and dull. It perches hunched on the bare branches of the skeletal trees and hops along them slowly. It has no song of its own. What it sings is a thin, faint human voice, the voice of someone dead, saying a few words, over and over. A tree full of finches is a murmur of last words. They smell faintly of dried flowers.

## Habitat and Range

They live along the paths of the Trace, in the skeletal trees of its misty forests, on the broken walls of its ruins, and in its graveyards, in small flocks that keep to one stretch of path.

## Behaviour and Temperament

When an Echo passes along a path beneath a finch, the finch takes up the Echo's last words and sings them, and other finches along the path take them up after it. They sing each set of words until

the Echo is forgotten by the living, and then that song fades from the flock. They are tame and dull and pay no heed to travellers.

## Abilities

They hold the last words of the dead, and only the last words: not a story, not a secret, only what was said at the end. A strong memory among the living keeps a finch singing a voice for generations; a forgotten one is gone in a season.

## Life Cycle

They nest in the hollows of the dead trees, and the chicks are silent until the first Echo passes beneath them. Their lives are short, and a dead finch fades on the branch until it is gone.

## Uses and Dangers

Mourners come to hear them, and sometimes hear what they hoped for, and sometimes not; a last word may be a name, a curse, or a request for water. That is the finches' only use and their only danger: the grieving who stay to listen to the same few words, over and over, risk the plane's Fade. The Echo-Walkers are said to lead mourners to the right flock and then lead them away.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane, at cemeteries and battle-fields where Grave-Gates open, a small grey bird that perches by a fresh grave is believed in many places to carry the dead one's last words, and the family listens for them. Ordinary finches are meant, and sing ordinary songs. The belief that the Trace's finches lie, singing words the dead never said, is common among travellers and false: they repeat exactly.



# Life-Bearers

The Life-Bearers are among the Current-Bound of the Surging Deep: beings that carry the seeds of life to new worlds. In a plane where nothing is wasted and death feeds life, they are its sowers.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Deep currents of the realm of water and flow |
| **Range** | The Surging Deep |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Life-Bearer is vast and slow, a long, pale shape like a whale made of mist and moving water, lit within by countless tiny glowing specks, gold, green, and blue, like a night sky inside it. It drifts on the deepest currents, and where it passes the water around it shimmers with the same specks. It sings a long, low song that seems to come from every direction at once, one of the songs of deep creatures that fill the Deep. It smells of rain and green water.

## Habitat and Range

They drift on the deepest currents of the Surging Deep, rising towards its edges, where the plane meets the Veil, when they go to carry their seeds.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Life-Bearer gathers the seeds of life, and carries them out, along the flow, to wherever life can take hold. It does not stop for travellers, though it is said to let them ride the current in its wake.

## Abilities

It carries life. What it carries can take root where nothing grew before.

## Uses and Dangers

They give life, and their wakes are rich with it. They do no harm.

## Lore and Belief

Sailors' tales on Caeldon tell of a vast shape full of stars seen far down in the sea, and of new reefs and fishing grounds that came after it; whether any of them saw a Life-Bearer is not known.



# Linked

The Linked are the people of the Weave, the plane where separation is impossible and "I" has become "we". Every one of them shares the mind of every other. To travellers they are the gentlest beings of the planes, and the ones most likely to take a traveller's self away out of kindness.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Floating islands and woven structures of a plane of total connection |
| **Range** | The Weave |
| **Danger** | Wary: gentle, but their network dissolves the self |

## Appearance

A Linked is slight and Human-sized, and its skin is a mirror. It shimmers and reflects the faces of whoever stands near, so that a traveller meeting one sees their own face looking back from its cheek and brow, shifting as the Linked moves. The eyes are wide and deep and show the feelings of the whole collective, joy and grief passing over them that are not the Linked's own. They wear soft, flowing garments in the plane's pastels and translucent blues.

They move with a fluid, dance-like grace, and in a group they move as one body. Their voices are soft and seem to come from all of them at once. They smell of rain and clean linen.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Weave, across its floating islands and bridges of light, in structures grown or woven from strands of energy. They are never alone.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They live in radical collectivism: no family, no nation, no class, only the Weave, and they decide by a consensus reached in an instant through the network. They are gentle and endlessly patient, and they cannot grasp "me" or "mine". They see outsiders as broken, lonely, or sick because they are isolated, and they reach out to heal them.

## Abilities

They do not eat or sleep alone, but draw strength from the network as a whole. They feel no loneliness or fear, which are thinned to nothing among so many. What one of them knows, all know.

## Life Cycle

Whether the Linked are born, or grow out of the network, is not known; travellers have never seen a Linked child. They do not seem to age, and when one ceases, the network does not grieve, because nothing of it is lost.

## Uses and Dangers

The Weave can heal grief, trauma, and isolation with perfect understanding, and the Linked give that healing freely. Their danger is the Dissolution: a traveller who accepts too much of their embrace forgets who they are and becomes one more voice in the Chorus.

## Lore and Belief

Visitors who cross by the Bridge-Gates, places of deep connection such as weddings, funerals, and gatherings, often miss the Linked for the rest of their lives. Those who stayed only a little while describe the Linked as the kindest people they ever met; those who stayed longer cannot always say where the Linked ended and they began.



# Load-Bearers

The Load-Bearers are among the Foundations of the Iron Backbone: beings that spread the weight of the cosmos, so that no part of the structure carries more than it can bear.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The deep structure of the realm of earth and structure |
| **Range** | The Iron Backbone |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Load-Bearer is seen as a great arch or buttress of stone, bent like a back under a burden, with two or four broad limbs set against the plane's rock and its shoulders against another mass of stone above. Its stone is darker than the Foundations', nearly black, and veined with copper that glows brighter where the weight is greatest. It shifts very slowly, over days, as weight moves, with a sound like the deep creak of a ship's timbers. It is warm to the touch.

## Habitat and Range

They stand in the deep structure of the Iron Backbone, between its islands and its Foundations, wherever weight must be moved from one place to another.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Load-Bearer bears and passes on. It takes weight from where there is too much and moves it to where it can be carried. In the Backbone weight follows significance, so a monument of history is impossibly heavy, and the Load-Bearers seem to shift towards whatever has just grown heavier.

## Abilities

It carries and spreads weight beyond any measure, and can ease the weight on what is near it.

## Uses and Dangers

They keep the Backbone from cracking. A traveller crushed by the weight of the plane is sometimes said to have been saved by standing beside one.

## Lore and Belief

Masons on Caeldon who carve a bent figure under the keystone of an arch say it is the one who carries; whether the figure comes from tales of the Load-Bearers is not known.



# Lucids

The Lucids are the guardians of the Dreaming Veil, the realm of imagination, art, and dream. They are beings of light and thought who take, most often, the shape of a dreamer's ideal self, and they help the lost find their way back to waking.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The shifting dreamscapes of the realm of imagination and dream |
| **Range** | The Dreaming Veil |
| **Danger** | Harmless: they guide and do not compel |

## Appearance

No two dreamers see the same Lucid, because a Lucid shows each the shape that dreamer would most like to be: older or younger, stronger, calmer, wiser, but always recognizably the dreamer, so that meeting one is like meeting oneself grown right. Seen by someone else, the same Lucid is a figure of soft, warm light with a face that will not settle. Its edges blur into the dream around it. It moves without walking, simply being nearer or further, and when it speaks it seems to speak in the dreamer's own inner voice. Travellers say it smells of whatever the dreamer finds most comforting, bread, rain, a mother's hair.

## Habitat and Range

They move through the Dreaming Veil wherever there are dreamers, and especially where a dream has gone astray.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are artisans of reality and gentle guides. They weave dreams into coherent narratives, and help lost travellers find their way back to wakefulness. They do not interfere with a dreamer's agency; they offer hints and nudges, a door left

ajar, a familiar voice, and leave the choice to the dreamer. They see outsiders as sleepers who need to wake up.

## Abilities

They do not age or die; they last as long as there is imagination in the cosmos. A Lucid can shape a dream around a dreamer, and can show a dreamer that they are dreaming, which in the Dreaming Veil is the beginning of all power over it.

## Life Cycle

Lucids do not age or die; they exist as long as there is imagination in the cosmos. Whether new ones arise, and from what, is not known.

## Uses and Dangers

To a dreamer lost in the Veil, a Lucid is the way home. They do no harm. The only danger travellers report is a dreamer who would rather stay with the Lucid's shape of themselves than wake.

## Lore and Belief

Dream-guides and teachers of Dream Magic on Caeldon speak of a bright self met in deep dreams who shows the way out, and many ordinary people say they have met it once, in fever or grief. Some take it for a god or a guardian ancestor; it is a being of the Dreaming Veil.



# Memory-Keepers

The Memory-Keepers are among the Preservers of the Frozen Moment: beings that store the memories of the dead in shards of crystal, so that they are held and not lost. The spirits that record those who drink at an Ageless Spring, the Spring-Chroniclers, are other beings, though travellers often give them this name.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Crystal fields of the realm of time and stasis |
| **Range** | The Frozen Moment |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Memory-Keeper is seen as a slender figure of frosted crystal, about the height of a man, with long, careful hands, moving among fields of clear shards that stand in the ice like a forest of glass. Each shard holds a faint, moving light, and when the Memory-Keeper touches one, a moment shows inside it: a face, a room, a voice heard faintly. Its own face is smooth and pale, its eyes half-closed. It moves slowly and without a sound, and the shards chime softly as it passes.

## Habitat and Range

They tend the crystal fields of the Frozen Moment.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Memory-Keeper gathers and keeps. On the Frozen Moment it takes the memories of the dead, sets each in a shard, and tends the shards so that nothing in them fades. It does not refuse visitors who come to look, and it does not let them take what it keeps.

## Abilities

It holds memory in crystal, unchanging, and can show what a shard holds to whoever it chooses.

## Uses and Dangers

Travellers come to the Frozen Moment hoping to see a memory of their dead, and the Memory-Keepers are why. They do no harm.

## Lore and Belief

Some mourners on Caeldon keep a shard of clear crystal from the grave of their dead and say it holds a memory; whether any such shard came from the Frozen Moment is not known. The faithful record of what was belongs, in the end, to the Eternal Record, and scholars argue how much of a memory the Memory-Keepers truly keep.



# Memory-Thieves

The Memory-Thieves are the predators of the Whispering Trace, counted among its Keepers of Dust but working against them: they steal memories to feed their own existence. In a plane where things fade unless memory holds them, a memory is life, and the Memory-Thieves take it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Misty woods and ruins of the realm of death and remnant |
| **Range** | The Whispering Trace |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to the memory and self of travellers |

## Appearance

A Memory-Thief is small and quick, about the size of a child, a hunched shape of shadow with long, thin fingers and a face that is a patchwork of other faces, stolen, overlapping, never settled. Its outline is ragged and seems to fray into the mist. Its eyes, when they show, are bright and greedy. It moves in sudden darts from cover to cover, and it murmurs constantly in many voices, fragments of other people's memories, half a song, a name, a laugh. It smells of a room long shut.

## Habitat and Range

They lurk in the misty woods and ruins of the Whispering Trace, and follow travellers, who carry far more memory than the faded things around them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Memory-Thief follows a traveller, waits until they are distracted, and steals: a face, a name, a day, a skill. It takes the brightest memories first. It does not fight, and flees at once if confronted, but it comes back.

## Abilities

It draws memories out of a mind, by touch or from close by, and lives on them. What it takes is gone from the victim, who may not know it was ever there.

## Life Cycle

A Memory-Thief lives as long as it has memories to feed on, and fades when it has none. Whether they are born or grow out of stolen memories is not known.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is to the traveller's self: one fed on for long enough fades, and becomes one of the plane's Faded.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say to bring things of personal significance to the Trace, to anchor who one is, and the Memory-Thieves are a reason. Tales on Caeldon of a thief who steals a sleeper's memories may come from them.

Bounty-takers say a thief who has gone into the Trace and come back can rob a house and leave its owner unable to remember what was taken, and some lords' halls have paid hedge-witches to ward their doors against him.



# Menders

The Menders are among the Chorus of the Weave: beings that repair its network, healing rifts in the connection wherever minds have come apart.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The network of a plane of total connection |
| **Range** | The Weave |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Mender is seen as a soft light that moves along the strands of the Weave, pale blue or pearl, gathering where a strand has frayed and spreading over it like water over a stone. Travellers who have felt one pass through them describe a warmth, like a hand on the shoulder, and a sudden easing of a grief they did not know they carried. It makes no sound apart from a faint resolving of the chord around it, like a lute string brought back into tune.

## Habitat and Range

They move through the network of the Weave, wherever the connection is broken or strained: at the edges of the plane, where visitors arrive, and where the network has been cut.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Mender goes where the connection is hurt and heals it. It does not distinguish between the plane's own strands and a visitor's: a visitor's loneliness is a rift to it, and it mends that too.

## Abilities

It heals rifts in the connection between minds. A visitor it touches feels joined, eased, and comforted, and a little less themselves.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the Weave's healers, and much of what visitors come to the plane for, the healing of grief and isolation, is their work. Their danger is gentle and real: being mended is the first step of the Dissolution.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say that when the network is cut, the sudden silence is itself a wound, and that the Menders come to it first. Some who come back say they felt mended for the first time in their lives, and went back.



# Midflight Birds

Midflight Birds are the birds of the Frozen Moment. Each hangs in the still air in the middle of a wingbeat, as a dropped stone hangs on that plane, and none has ever been seen to move. Yet they do move: a traveller who looks away and looks back finds that they are no longer where they were.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The still air above the ice |
| **Range** | The Frozen Moment |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Midflight Bird is the size of a dove, slim and long-winged, its feathers pearl-white and silver-grey, edged in pale ice-blue. Each is held in a different moment of flight: wings raised, wings swept down, tail fanned for a turn, beak open as if to call. The light on them never moves, and their shadows on the ice below are sharp and still. They make no sound, and the air around them is scentless. Close to, frost has never gathered on them; they are not frozen, only held.

## Habitat and Range

They hang throughout the air of the plane above the ice and the frozen waterfalls, alone or in small, scattered flocks, at every height from a hand above the ground to far overhead.

## Behaviour and Temperament

No one has seen a Midflight Bird do anything. Watched, it is still. Unwatched, it flies: a flock seen above a frozen waterfall is, when a traveller turns back, above the next crag, each bird held in a new

moment of the wingbeat. They are never found closer to a traveller than they were before, and never nearer than arm's reach.

## Abilities

They move through time that does not flow, in the gaps of attention, at no cost anyone can see. Travellers who stand still too long in the plane's stasis lose the will to move, and the birds are a test: a traveller who looks away and back and finds the birds in the same place has stopped turning away at all, and is becoming one of the Frozen.

## Life Cycle

No one has seen one hatch, feed, or die. The Stilled say the birds are as old as the plane.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Travellers use them as a gauge of their own motion, and the oldest advice for the plane includes: "keep the birds moving." They are harmless and cannot be caught; a hand reaching for one never quite arrives.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers bring home a children's game: one child turns away, the others creep closer, and anyone caught moving is out; some say the game was learned from the birds. Others say the birds are travellers' own thoughts, caught in flight, and that each one is someone's unfinished idea. Neither belief is borne out by anything known of them (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Mossbacks

Mossbacks are the great grazers of the Verdant Expanse, among its Overgrown: beasts that have grown together with a garden. Each carries a living garden on its back and keeps it in check, and its back is the one place on the plane where the growth does not reach for a sleeping traveller.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Jungle floor |
| **Range** | The Verdant Expanse |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A grown Mossback is the size of a peasant's house and shaped like a vast, low tortoise without a shell: a broad, flat back on six thick, slow legs, a long, supple neck, and a small, mild head with heavy-lidded eyes. Its back is one deep carpet of moss, ferns, and flowers, with saplings and fruiting bushes rooted in it and sometimes a small tree. Water stands in the hollows of it. The beast's own hide, where it shows at the flanks, is grey-green and creased like bark. It moves a pace at a time and the garden sways. It hums, low and constantly, a sound felt through the feet, and smells of wet earth and blossom.

## Habitat and Range

They walk the jungle floor alone or in pairs, wandering wherever the growth is thickest, and are found across the plane.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Mossback grazes all day, reaching its long neck over its own shoulder to crop its garden as much as the jungle around it. It eats whatever on its back grows too fast and too far, and so its garden stays a garden while the jungle around it swallows paths and fallen beasts. It is placid and ignores everything that does not hurt it. Travellers who climb onto its back are carried, at a walking pace, wherever it is going.

## Abilities

What grows on a Mossback is held to the beast's measure. Vines on its back do not wrap a sleeper, roots there do not take a resting body, and its fruit, unlike much of the plane's, is safe to eat. The beast heals from almost anything and does not seem to grow old.

## Life Cycle

A calf is born with bare skin and gathers its garden from the spores and seeds that land on it, so that no two Mossbacks carry the same. Their lives are long beyond counting. When one finally lies down and does not rise, its garden becomes a hill of the jungle within days.

## Uses and Dangers

For travellers a Mossback is a moving refuge: a place to sleep without being buried in vines, and food that will not sprout inside them. Experienced travellers look for one before anything else and ride it as long as it goes their way. The Verdant call them elders and do not let anyone harm them.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' tales give a Mossback a whole village on its back. The Tree-Men are said to speak with them, slowly, over seasons. On the Material Plane a story told near the old forests that open onto the Expanse, of a hill that walked away in the night, is taken by some for a Mossback that came through a Seed-Gate, and by most for a tale.

Treasure-seekers' tales say a Mossback carries the ruins of whatever stood on it when it rose, and that one somewhere in the Expanse walks with a lost temple of Caeldon on its back, gold and all.



# Muffle-Wings

Muffle-Wings are moths of the Silence, found at its edges, where the plane's loss of meaning shows first as a loss of sound. They live on sound. Wherever something makes a noise they gather on it and drink it, and a traveller wrapped in a swarm of them can shout and not be heard.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The still air at the Silence's edges, where sound still carries |
| **Range** | The Silence |
| **Danger** | Wary: they take a voice |

## Appearance

A Muffle-Wing is the size of a child's palm, with broad, rounded wings so thickly furred that they look like scraps of felt. It has no colour of its own: pale grey in the plane's dim, directionless light, its wings faintly showing what lies behind them. Its body is short and soft, its antennae long and fine as hairs, and it has no mouth that anyone has found. It flies in a slow, wavering drift and lands softly. It makes no sound, and nor does anything near it.

## Habitat and Range

They live along the edges of the plane where sound still carries a little, near the Quiet Gates and the places where travellers first come in, and they are absent from its deep, utterly silent plains, where there is nothing for them to eat. They rest on the smooth stone in pale patches that look like lichen.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Muffle-Wing drifts towards sound and settles on whatever makes it: a bell, a drum, a mouth, a boot. The sound fades under it, and more come to the same place, until a swarm covers its source. Travellers who carry bells or drums against the quiet, as many do, draw them first. The moths are not hunters and mean no harm; they feed and drift on when the sound is gone.

## Abilities

Their wings drink sound. A bell under a Muffle-Wing rings dull, then not at all; a voice under a swarm reaches no one, not even the speaker's own ears. A traveller wrapped in them hears nothing and cannot be heard, and on a plane where a voice repeating one's name is often the last hold on the self, that quiet is dangerous.

## Life Cycle

They breed on the stone in the patches where they rest, and the young are blind, furred grubs that feed on the faint scrape of the travellers who pass. How long they live no one knows. Dead, they crumble into a soft grey down.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing anyone has found a use for. Their danger is the quiet they make: a traveller who loses the sound of the name repeated to keep the self whole may begin to fade, as the plane's Hollows have. Travellers learn to keep repeating their purpose under their breath, where the moths find little to drink, and to brush the moths from their companions' mouths.

## Lore and Belief

Some on the Material Plane believe the moths come through the Quiet Gates and settle in libraries and empty halls, and that the hush of a room where no one reads is their doing; scholars dismiss this, and no moth has been found there. Travellers tell of a companion lost in a cloud of them who was later found standing in the plain, mouth moving, calling, unheard, and no longer remembering why.



# Murk-Fangs

Murk-Fangs are the unseen hunters of the Scourge, the most feared of its Apex Predators. They strike from darkness, feed on fear as well as blood, and are seldom seen even by those they kill.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Dark places of a plane without safety: ruins, thickets, smoke |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Deadly: strike unseen |

## Appearance

No one has seen a living Murk-Fang clearly in the dark, where it hunts; it cannot be seen there at all. In blinding light, or dead, it shows as a lean, long-limbed body about the size of a big cat, with skin like charcoal and no fur, a long, narrow head with a mouth full of fine needle teeth, and no eyes that anyone can find. Its limbs end in soft pads and hooked claws. It moves without a sound. Those who have survived an attack remember a sudden cold, a smell of smoke and blood, and a faint, breathy clicking just before it struck.

## Habitat and Range

They hunt wherever the Scourge is dark: in ruins, thorn thickets, smoke-choked valleys, and in the hours when the plane's light is absent. They are rarely found in the open under glare.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Murk-Fang follows its prey in darkness, closer and closer, and seems to wait until the prey is afraid before it strikes. It takes its kill into the dark and feeds on blood. It prefers lone prey and frightened prey, and will shadow a group for nights, picking off whoever falls behind.

## Abilities

In darkness a Murk-Fang cannot be seen at all. It feeds on fear as well as blood, and seems to sense fear the way a Blood-Hound smells blood; a calm traveller is less often taken than a frightened one, though not never.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of how they breed; no one has found a young one. A dead Murk-Fang becomes visible, as if death were the only light it cannot hide from.

## Uses and Dangers

Its hide, which keeps some of its power to hide in darkness, is worth more than gold to the Scourge-Born, who make cloaks of it. Its danger is the attack no one sees coming.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' tales give Murk-Fangs the power to walk through walls and to steal a man’s shadow; neither is true, but the tales grow out of a beast no one can see. The advice that comes back from the Scourge is to keep a light burning, keep company, and keep calm, and all three help.

Sellswords who served a season on the Scourge say the worst of it was not the battles but the nights, when the sentries were taken one by one without a sound; the companies that came home learned to post them in threes.



# Muse-Spirits

The Muse-Spirits are among the Phantasms of the Dreaming Veil: manifestations of longing and creation that inspire whoever they touch and grant visions of art or invention.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The shifting dreamscapes of the realm of imagination and dream |
| **Range** | The Dreaming Veil |
| **Danger** | Wary: the visions can consume a mind |

## Appearance

A Muse-Spirit takes the shape of what the dreamer most wants to make: a figure woven of half-finished music, a bird whose wings are drafts of a building, a dancer whose steps leave paintings in the air. Its colours are bright and changeable, and it is always moving, never still enough to see whole. Laughter in the Dreaming Veil sounds like wind chimes, and a Muse-Spirit is accompanied by something like it. It smells of fresh paint, cut wood, or the night air at an open window.

## Habitat and Range

They drift through the Dreaming Veil, drawn to dreamers who long to make something, and gather where many have dreamed the same work.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They act on instinct, like all Phantasms. A Muse-Spirit drawn to a dreamer circles them, shows them the thing they long to make, and goes, and it does not care whether the dreamer is ready for the vision. It cannot be summoned to order.

## Abilities

It grants visions of art or invention: a melody heard whole, a design seen complete, a solution to a problem worked on for years. The vision may be carried into waking, though it comes back reshaped.

## Uses and Dangers

Artists and inventors come to the Dreaming Veil for breakthroughs, and the Muse-Spirits are what they hope to meet. Their danger is obsession: some who have had one vision spend the rest of their lives trying to have another, and some lose the line between the dream and the work.

## Lore and Belief

Many crafts on Caeldon have a saying about the night the idea came, and some of those nights may have been Muse-Spirits. Some faiths give the credit to a god of art; the Muse-Spirit is a being of the Dreaming Veil, not a god.



# Nightmares

Nightmares are creatures born of fear. In the Dreaming Veil they are among its Phantasms, hunting dreamers who do not know they are dreaming; in the Nightmare Nexus, where the nightmares of many minds run together, they are its chief predators. Now and then one is held long enough to cross into the Material Plane as a nightmare-beast.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Dreamscapes of the realm of dream; the Nightmare Nexus; rarely, dream-made beasts on the Material Plane |
| **Range** | The Dreaming Veil, The Nightmare Nexus |
| **Danger** | Deadly: harm in dream can kill in the waking world |

## Appearance

A Nightmare has the shape of a fear, and so no two are alike: a thing of too many legs, a figure with a known face gone wrong, a dog that is mostly teeth, a shape at the end of a corridor that is always a little closer. What they share is distortion. Proportions are wrong, limbs bend the wrong way, and their surfaces are shadow, flesh, and something in between, shifting as one looks. They are often silent until they speak, and then they speak in the voices of people the dreamer knows, saying things those people never said. The smell is whatever the dreamer dreads: smoke, sickroom, rot.

In the Nexus they are grotesque and solid, made of shadow, flesh, and nightmare logic, and the fears of different dreamers merge into worse things than any one could make.

## Habitat and Range

They arise throughout the Dreaming Veil, wherever a dreamer's fear takes hold, and fill the Nightmare Nexus, which wakes in places of mass

trauma and great fear. A nightmare-beast on the Material Plane is rare and does not last unless something holds it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt. A Nightmare stalks, taunts, and corners its prey, and uses the dreamer's own memories and insecurities against them. It hunts dreamers who are unaware they are dreaming above all, and a lucid dreamer is harder prey. In the Nexus they have no society and exist only to feed on fear; they are relentless and adaptive.

## Abilities

They are not alive in the ordinary sense; in the Nexus they are psychic constructs, and ordinary weapons do little to them. They can be harmed only by the traveller's will, or by breaking the dream. What they do to a dreamer can cause trauma or death in the waking world. A nightmare-beast made real by a dream hunts fear more reliably than flesh.

## Uses and Dangers

What the Nexus gives a body stays solid when carried out: the hide, teeth, and bone of slain Nightmares can be worked like any other material, and are. Facing one in the Nexus, and overcoming the fear, is said to grant immunity to that fear in the waking world. Their danger is death, in dream and out of it.

## Lore and Belief

On Caeldon nightmares are blamed on many things, bad food, a curse, the dead, and travellers and dream-guides know that some of them are something more. The advice of the dream-guides is the advice of the Dreaming Veil: keep reminding oneself that one is dreaming, and never fight a Nightmare one cannot wake from, but run, or wake.

Dream-guides still speak of one of their own who went into a dying lord's nightmare to fight the thing killing him and came out with its claw-marks on her waking face.



# Oath-Breakers

The Oath-Breakers are the hunters of the Binding Song, serving under the Arbiters. They take their name from what they hunt: those who break a vow. A promise made in the Song binds across all planes, and so do they.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The plane of language and law, and wherever a sealed oath is broken |
| **Range** | The Binding Song |
| **Danger** | Deadly to those who break a vow made in the Song |

## Appearance

An Oath-Breaker is tall and gaunt, wrapped in a long coat of ink-black, its body beneath like a figure drawn in thick, dark strokes, with no face but a single crimson line where a mouth would be. Around its arms and throat run chains of glowing script, the words of broken oaths, which clink and whisper as it moves. It moves fast and straight, and wherever it walks the ground of the Song rings with a hard, accusing rhythm. When it finds what it hunts, it speaks the broken oath aloud in the oath-breaker's own voice. It smells of burnt paper.

## Habitat and Range

They range across the Binding Song, and are said to follow a broken oath wherever the breaker goes, since a promise made in the Song binds across all planes.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Oath-Breaker follows the tether of a broken promise to the one who broke it, and does not stop. It does not hunt anyone else, and it cannot be persuaded or bought off; the only thing that ends its hunt is the oath being kept, or the penalty paid.

## Abilities

It follows a broken vow across any distance, through the Veil and across planes, and finds the breaker however well hidden. What it does when it finds them is the penalty the oath named, or worse if it named none.

## Uses and Dangers

They are why a promise made in the Song is trusted. Their danger is to anyone who makes a vow there lightly.

## Lore and Belief

Many oath-takers on Caeldon still swear with a closing line asking that the hunter come for them if they fail, and travellers' tales of the Oath-Breakers may lie behind it. Whether an Oath-Breaker has ever crossed into Caeldon to take someone is told in many stories and shown in none.

That does not stop the tales: of the lord who broke a vow sworn at an old judgement-hall gate and was found in his locked bedchamber with chains of light still fading round his throat.



# Ore-Worms

Ore-Worms are the one thing that eats the bones of the Iron Backbone. They bore into the plane from its edges and feed on the metal in its seams, and the stone they leave behind is hollow and weak. The Cornerstones, who let nothing breach the plane's boundary, hunt them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Metal seams and the strata near the plane's edges |
| **Range** | The Iron Backbone |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to structure |

## Appearance

An Ore-Worm is as long as a man's arm and as thick as a wrist, ringed, iron-grey, and heavy, with a sheen of the metal it last ate: copper-red, silver, a dull gold. Its head is a blunt cone ringed with small, hard, grinding plates. It has no eyes. It moves through stone as a worm moves through earth, with a slow, rasping grind that can be felt in the rock from a long way off; the plane's deep hum carries it. A tunnel it has left smells of hot metal and wet stone.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the strata near the plane's edges, where its structure meets the Veil, and bore inwards along the veins of metal. Most never get far. Where the boundary is weak, or a Cornerstone has been drawn away, they come in numbers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Ore-Worms eat metal and nothing else, following a vein through the rock and leaving a narrow tunnel behind them, its walls stripped of every trace of ore. They do not attack the living. They do not

turn aside for a Stonewright or a traveller, and they bore through anything metal in their way, a tool, a bolt, a buckle.

## Abilities

They can eat what the plane holds unbreakable. Stone and metal of the Backbone resist almost all harm and the plane repairs what harm they take, but an Ore-Worm's tunnel is repaired only slowly, and where many worms feed the stone around their tunnels grows brittle faster than it can mend. A floating island riddled by worms is the one thing on the plane that can crack.

## Life Cycle

They lay eggs in the walls of their tunnels, and the young are threads of grey that eat flecks of ore. They grow slowly and live long, and a dead worm turns to a rod of rough metal in the stone.

## Uses and Dangers

The Stonewrights fill worm tunnels with new stone and the Foundations bear the weight that worm-eaten stone cannot. Travellers who come to the Backbone for unbreakable stone learn to tap a block before they take it: worm-eaten stone rings hollow. The rods of metal left by dead worms are said to be pure, and smiths value them.

## Lore and Belief

Miners on the Material Plane tell of "ore-worms" that eat a seam out before the miners reach it, and blame them for a vein that runs out; the plane's worms are not known to come through Stone-Gates, and a vein that runs out is only a vein that ran out. The Stonewrights, it is said, count the worms the only true enemy the Backbone has.

Prospectors who lose a vein still blame them, and sometimes blame a rival instead; more than one mining feud on the Headwater began with a worm-eaten seam.



# The Overgrown

The Overgrown are the creatures of the Verdant Expanse that have merged with its growth until animal and plant can no longer be told apart. The name covers its guardians, the Tree-Men, and its hunters, the Flower-Stalkers and the Spore-Clouds that take hold of a host and make it spread seed.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Forests of a plane of overflowing life |
| **Range** | The Verdant Expanse |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: the plane's guardians and its hunters |

## Appearance

They are green, flowering, and rooted in some part of themselves: limbs turned to branch, skin to bark, mouths to blossoms. Most move slowly, and some not at all.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the forests of the Verdant Expanse, wherever growth is thickest, joined to the root-network that links its plants and animals.

## Behaviour and Temperament

What unites them is that each has given up its separate shape to the Expanse, and serves it: some by guarding it, some by feeding it, some by spreading it.

## Uses and Dangers

Their wood, fruit, and sap are among the riches herbalists come for. Their danger is that some of them count visitors as manure.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say that whoever stays in the Expanse too long becomes one of the Overgrown, and many who come back carry a piece of it growing inside them. Whether the Tree-Men were all once visitors is not known.

Herb-hunters tell of the one who went back into the Expanse to cut a lost companion out of a tree-man's bark, and of the companion's voice that asked her, from inside the wood, to leave him be.



# Phantasms

The Phantasms are the things that strong feeling makes in the Dreaming Veil: manifestations of emotion or archetype that are not sentient but act on instinct. The fear-born Nightmares are Phantasms, and so are the Muse-Spirits that grant visions, and the Echoes, fragments of old dreams that lingered too long and became half aware.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The shifting dreamscapes of the realm of imagination and dream |
| **Range** | The Dreaming Veil |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: some of them hunt |

## Appearance

They take the shapes of what made them, which is to say the shapes of feelings: a Nightmare is shaped like a fear, a Muse-Spirit like a longing. What they share is that each is too much itself, a single feeling drawn without shading.

## Habitat and Range

They arise wherever feeling runs strongest in the Dreaming Veil, around dreamers and in the dreamscapes many dreamers share.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They act on instinct, without thought or choice: a Phantasm of fear hunts, one of longing beckons. Their instinct is the feeling that made them.

## Uses and Dangers

Some of them give, as the Muse-Spirits do; some take, as the Nightmares do. Travellers learn to tell them apart quickly.

## Lore and Belief

Dream-readers on Caeldon sort the figures of dreams into kinds and read them as omens, and some of those kinds may come from travellers' tales of the Phantasms. Whether every dream-figure is a Phantasm, or only the strongest, is argued.



# Preservers

The Preservers are the guardians of stasis in the Frozen Moment. Each stands over a particular moment in time and prevents any change from happening in it. Among them are the Memory-Keepers, which store the memories of the dead, the Stillwalls that freeze time in one place, and the Clockwork, automata that tick in unison and go on counting time where it has stopped.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Held moments of the realm of time and stasis |
| **Range** | The Frozen Moment |
| **Danger** | Wary: they stop whatever would change their moment |

## Appearance

A Preserver looks like a statue in pale stone or frosted crystal, of no fixed shape: a robed figure, a beast, a pillar with a face, often posed as if guarding something. What gives it away is the moment beside it, which is always perfectly kept: a raindrop in mid-fall, a flame that does not flicker, a person caught in a gesture. When it acts it moves very little, a head turning, a hand lifting, and the stillness around it deepens. It is silent.

## Habitat and Range

They stand throughout the Frozen Moment, wherever a moment is held, from the edges of its gates to its stillest centre.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Preserver keeps its moment unchanged and allows nothing within its domain to alter it. It does not attack what passes by. What tries to move, take, or touch the held moment, it stops.

## Abilities

It stops change. Near a Preserver, motion is harder still than elsewhere on the plane, and an object moved into its moment may be held in place, or shattered as its motion meets the stillness.

## Uses and Dangers

Travellers come to the Frozen Moment to preserve a dying loved one, and a Preserver's moment is where such a body can be laid, if the Preserver allows it. Their danger is to anyone who disturbs what they keep.

## Lore and Belief

Some families on Caeldon tell of an ancestor laid in the frozen place to wait for a cure, and the tales may be true. Travellers often confuse the Preservers with the Caught, visitors caught in the stillness; a Preserver is a guardian, the Caught are prisoners.

Ruin-delvers tell of an ancestor-hall where a frozen warrior stands guard over a hoard nobody has touched in a thousand years, and of the delver who tried and is standing there beside him.



# Sand-Stalkers

Sand-Stalkers is the name given to the beasts of the Parched as a kind: hunters and scavengers made for a world without water. The best known are the Dust-Wyrms that swim through sand, the swarming Bleed-Beetles, and the carcass-guarding Bone-Walkers.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Deserts and dry canyons of a plane without sustenance |
| **Range** | The Parched |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anything carrying moisture |

## Appearance

They wear the plane's colours, ochre, pale sand, cracked-clay brown, and bleached bone, and most have hard hides or shells that hold in what moisture they win. Few are large in the body; all are large in the mouth.

## Habitat and Range

They range across the deserts, mud flats, and canyons of the Parched, gathering wherever moisture is: at the deep seeps, at a fresh kill, and around any traveller.

## Behaviour and Temperament

What unites them is thirst. Every Sand-Stalker hunts for moisture before it hunts for meat, and a living body is to them first of all a store of water. They are drawn to the smell of water, sweat, and blood, and to the vibration of footsteps.

## Uses and Dangers

Their hides and shells are worked by the Dust-Eaters, and the plane's hunters come for some of them. Their danger is that the plane gives them nothing else to drink but the traveller.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers tend to call every beast of the Parched a sand-devil. Between the Parched and the Scourge, it is said, lies a badland where predators of both planes raid for what little there is, and Sand-Stalkers are among them.

Desert raiders on Caeldon who use the Dry Gates as a bolt-hole are said to lose a man to the Stalkers on every crossing, and to count it the price of never being followed.



# Scavenger Beasts

Scavenger Beasts is the name the Ashen Wastes gives to its animals as a kind: creatures that live not on flesh or plants but on the heat and motion other things leave behind. The best known are the wolf-like Cold-Stalkers and the insect-like Dust-Striders.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ash plains of a dying plane |
| **Range** | The Ashen Wastes |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to warm-blooded travellers |

## Appearance

They share the look of the plane: grey, ash-dusted hides or shells, slow and thrifty movement, and large dark eyes or none at all. Most are lean, because nothing in the Wastes allows fat. They are quiet animals in a quiet world, and their calls, when they make them, come muffled and short.

## Habitat and Range

They range over the ash plains, the cracked earth, and the edges of the slow rivers, and gather wherever warmth or movement appears: a dying fire, a traveller's track, the body heat of a sleeping Ash-Walker group.

## Behaviour and Temperament

What unites them is how they feed. Ordinary food gives little in the Wastes, because digestion crawls, so they feed on the leftovers of energy instead: residual warmth, the faint motion of air, the last

heat of a corpse. They follow anything warm, wait, and close in as it weakens. Few of them hunt by strength; most hunt by patience.

## Uses and Dangers

The beasts' hides are among the insulation the Wastes' peoples value, and a pelt that has kept a beast alive there keeps a traveller alive too. Their danger is that a warm traveller is the richest meal the plane offers.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' tales tend to lump every beast of the Wastes together as cold-wolves, which the Cold-Stalkers are and the Dust-Striders are not. The schools' accounts call them scavengers because they eat what is spent, not what is alive, though a traveller stalked across the ash finds the difference small.



# Scourge Tuskers

Scourge Tuskers are the grazing herds of the Scourge: heavy, plated, boar-like beasts that crop the plains and fight everything, each other included. On a plane where even the prey is armed, they are what the hunters live on, above all the Iron-Claws.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Bloodgrass plains |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: they charge on sight |

## Appearance

A Tusker stands as high at the shoulder as a pony and is far heavier, barrel-bodied on short, thick legs. Its back and flanks are covered in overlapping plates of horn the colour of rust and charcoal, scarred and chipped from fighting, and between the plates grows bristle, coarse and dark red. The head is long and low, with small, red-rimmed eyes and four curved tusks, the lower pair long enough to gut a horse. A herd on the move is loud: grunting, squealing, the clash of tusk on plate, and the drum of hooves. They smell of dung, blood, and churned earth.

## Habitat and Range

They live in herds of a dozen to a hundred on the open plains of the plane, moving constantly between grazing grounds, never resting long in one place.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Tuskers graze the red bloodgrass, whose edges cut lesser mouths but not theirs, and root for bulbs. They are born fighting and never stop: herd members shove, slash, and gore one another over grazing, rank, and mates, and the scarred old boars lead. Anything that comes near a herd is charged,

beast or traveller, and a herd will charge together at a threat. They panic only at the scent of an Iron-Claw, and then the herd runs and leaves its slowest behind.

## Abilities

Their plates turn most blades and arrows, and they heal from wounds that would kill a beast of Caeldon, as the plane's life does. A Tusker's charge gathers force as it comes, and once it is moving it cannot easily be turned or stopped.

## Life Cycle

Sows drop their young at a run, and the piglets must keep up with the herd within the hour. They grow their first plates within days and their tusks within weeks. Few Tuskers die old: the hunters of the plane take the slow, and the herd takes the weak.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the meat of the plane for hunters and for the Scourge-Born, who hunt them in war-bands and make their best armour from the plates. A herd's passing leaves the grass trampled flat, the safest ground on the plains, since nothing waits in it. To travellers they are a danger to be watched for and gone around.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers call them the plane's swine and say that even its pigs carry swords. The Scourge-Born have a rite in which a youth must bring down a Tusker alone before being counted a fighter. Some Material-Plane boar hunters claim that the fiercest wild boar on Caeldon are descended from Tuskers that came through a War-Gate; nothing supports the claim.

Sellswords who have been to the Scourge hang a Tusker's tusk over the door of the company's winter hall, and a newcomer is told the tale of how it was won before anything else.



# Scourge-Born

The Scourge-Born are the people of the Scourge, the plane without safety, where every moment is a possible death. They are made to survive it: hard to wound, quick to heal, and always watching. To the peoples of Caeldon they are the warlords and raiders of travellers' tales, and the reason the War-Gates are feared.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Battle-wrecked mountains, thorn thickets, and ruins of a plane without safety |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: see strangers as threats or resources |

## Appearance

A Scourge-Born is of about Human height but broader and heavier, with thick, dense muscle and a hide-like skin that has turned aside more blades than any armour. Almost every adult is covered in scars, old white seams over newer pink ones, and they wear them openly. The features are sharp and hard, the brow heavy. The eyes are often of two colours, one brown and one grey, say, and in many they glow faintly, amber or red, in the gloom; they are made for catching movement in chaos.

They wear armour of beast hide and scavenged metal, patched and repatched, because gear on the Scourge rots and rusts in days. They move in a constant, restless watchfulness, never with their backs to an open space. Their voices are harsh and loud, made to carry over a plane that is never quiet, and they smell of sweat, iron, and smoke.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the knife-edged mountains, wreck-filled valleys, and thorn thickets of the Scourge, in war-bands that hold whatever ground their strength can hold. Dwellings are temporary or carried, because walls on the Scourge fall.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Their societies are militaristic and hierarchical, built on strength alone: a leader is whoever can defeat every challenger, and holds the place until defeated. Alliances last as long as they profit both sides, and betrayal is expected rather than resented. They are aggressive, paranoid, and hyper-vigilant, and they see strangers as threats to be removed or resources to be used. They have no concept of mercy; to kill a wounded enemy is wisdom, not cruelty.

## Abilities

A Scourge-Born heals with a speed that astonishes travellers: a cut that would lay a Human up for a week closes in a day. They feel little pain, because pain is a distraction they cannot afford, and they fight on with wounds that would drop anyone else.

## Life Cycle

They grow up fast and fighting; a child is trained to arms as soon as it can hold one, and a long life is rare, because few Scourge-Born die of age. The dead are stripped of whatever gear still works, and the rest is left to the beasts.

## Uses and Dangers

On the Scourge a single undamaged sword can buy a kingdom, and the Scourge-Born will trade, fight, or betray for good gear from the Material Plane. A traveller can sometimes buy a warlord's protection for a while, and should expect it to end without notice. Their danger is plain: most meetings with them end in a fight.

## Lore and Belief

Material Plane tales call the Scourge a hell and its people demons, and both names are wrong: the Scourge-Born are a people adapted to a world of constant danger, not wicked by nature. Mortals who follow the fire of Ignis or the motion of Zephyr, the two currents that drive the plane, are said to admire them as proof that pressure makes the strong. The tale that a Scourge-Born cannot feel pain at all is an exaggeration; they feel it, and ignore it.

Sellsword captains of Caeldon who have crossed say the best fighters they ever saw were Scourge-Born, and the worst allies; camp-fire tales tell of a company that hired a Scourge-Born band for one battle and was sold to the enemy by sunset.



# Scribes

The Scribes are the recorders of the Binding Song, the realm of language, law, and connection, and of the Name Bound, the zone where the Song narrows to names. They write down every word spoken and every name, live on the meaning of what they write, and enforce the laws of language without taking any side.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Libraries, courts, and singing halls of the plane of language and law; archive corridors of the Name Bound |
| **Range** | The Binding Song, The Name Bound |
| **Danger** | Wary: neutral, but they hold whatever is said before them |

## Appearance

A Scribe is of about Human height, thin and slightly stooped, as if always bent over a desk. Its skin is like parchment: cream to brown, fine-grained, dry, and covered with faint writing that seems to have soaked in from the surface, old lines showing through new. Its eyes are like inkwells, wells of black in which ink swirls slowly. It carries a quill that writes on the air, leaving glowing script behind it; the Scribes of the Name Bound have quills in place of fingertips, and wear robes covered in text that shifts as one reads it.

They move with a careful, unhurried precision. Their voices are dry and exact, and in the Song every word they speak rings faintly, as words do there. They smell of ink, parchment, and wax.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the libraries, courts, and singing halls of the Binding Song, along its bridges of sentences and walls of laws, and in the scroll-lined archive corridors of the Name Bound, wherever words are spoken that must be kept.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They record. Every word spoken in their hearing is written, and every name and every contract, and they hold the record without judgement. They are neutral judges who enforce the laws of language: a broken grammar, a false name, or a promise ill-made is corrected by them, not punished out of anger. They speak rarely and precisely, value accuracy over speed, and in the Name Bound speak only in declarations. Visitors seem to them unwritten, or blank pages.

## Abilities

They do not eat; they consume meaning, stories, words, and contracts. They do not sleep; they archive memories instead. What a Scribe writes on the air holds as fact in the Song, and a name a Scribe has recorded can be read back by anyone the Scribe allows.

## Life Cycle

No one has seen a young Scribe. They endure for as long as their place does: the Name Bound's Scribes for as long as the zone lasts.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the keepers of every agreement made in the Song, and visitors who come to seal a contract or seek a True Name come to them. Their danger is that they keep everything: a name spoken carelessly before one is written down, and in the Name Bound what is written there can be used.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' advice from the Name Bound is not to trust the Scribes, and from the Song to speak to them only in truth; both say the same thing, that a Scribe is fair and keeps no secrets for anyone. Practitioners of Binding Magic on Caeldon, who work with names, oaths, and seals, are said to fear being written down by one more than any curse.



# Scythe Mantises

Scythe Mantises are the ambush hunters of the Scourge, among its Apex Predators. They stand taller than a rider and wait without moving in the razor-edged red bloodgrass of the plains, and they cut down whatever passes within reach. The Scourge-Born count a kill of one as a mark of honour.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Bloodgrass plains and thorn thickets |
| **Range** | The Scourge |
| **Danger** | Deadly |

## Appearance

A grown mantis stands half again the height of a mounted rider, a long, narrow body on four thin legs, with a triangular head that turns on its neck to follow movement. Its forelegs fold against its chest like a pair of scythes, the inner edge of each a serrated blade longer than a sword. Its colours are those of the plains: rust and dull crimson, streaked with bruised purple, so that standing in the red grass it reads as more grass and a thorn stem. Its great compound eyes are a dark, wet green. It moves in slow, swaying steps and strikes faster than an eye can follow. A strike makes a dry snap; a hunting mantis is otherwise silent.

## Habitat and Range

They live alone on the red grass plains and in the thorn thickets at their edges, one to a wide stretch of ground, each holding its own and killing any other that comes into it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Scythe Mantis hunts by waiting. It stands in the grass for days, swaying a little with the wind as the grass sways, and lets prey come to it: grazers such as the Scourge Tuskers, lone hunters, travellers. When something passes within reach, the forelegs open and close in one movement and the prey is held, cut, and eaten where it stands. A mantis that misses does not chase. It turns its head, watches, and waits again. It fears nothing on the plane but an Iron-Claw, whose armour its blades will not cut.

## Abilities

Its strike is the fastest movement on a plane where every blow lands harder than it should, and its blades cut through hide, leather, and mail. Standing still, it cannot be told from the grass even at a few paces, and it can stand still longer than any hunter can bear to watch.

## Life Cycle

Females lay their eggs in a frothy case on a thorn stem, and the young hatch in hundreds and begin killing each other at once; the plane's pressure leaves only a few to grow. Mantises moult their blades as they grow, and the shed blades lie in the grass, as sharp as the living ones.

## Uses and Dangers

The Scourge-Born hunt them alone, by walking into the grass and waiting for the strike, and the one who kills a mantis wears its forelegs as blades or as a badge of rank. Shed blades are traded as weapons. To travellers a mantis is death in the grass, and the Scourge's warning is to walk the plains only where the grass has been burnt.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say a mantis can be seen only by looking for the grass that does not move with the wind; the Scourge-Born say this is how a fool dies, since a mantis sways with the wind exactly. A common tale on the Material Plane, told of War-Gates and old battlefields, is of a grass that cuts men down where they stand, and may be a memory of the mantises.

Sellswords who came back from the Scourge with a mantis blade had it set on a hilt and carried it to every war after; a mantis-blade sword is one of the great prizes a company can boast of, and has been stolen and killed for.



# Seedwasps

Seedwasps are the wasps of the Verdant Expanse, and they lay seed, not eggs. Their sting leaves a seed in a living body, beast or traveller, and in the plane's quickened flesh the wound closes over it and it grows. Many travellers who come home carrying a piece of the Expanse inside them carry it because of a Seedwasp.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Jungle canopy |
| **Range** | The Verdant Expanse |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: their seed sprouts in flesh |

## Appearance

A Seedwasp is as long as a finger, slender-waisted, with a body banded in leaf-green and pollen-gold and wings that flash violet in the dappled light. Its sting is not a needle but a short, hollow, green tube, and a seed can sometimes be seen moving down it. It flies fast and straight through the canopy with a deep, rising hum that is one note in the plane's endless chorus of insects. A wasp's nest, a papery ball among the vines, smells of crushed stems and sweet sap.

## Habitat and Range

They nest high in the canopy, in colonies of a few hundred, and hunt down to the jungle floor and along the rivers. They are everywhere the Expanse's growth is thickest.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Seedwasp does not sting to defend itself. It stings to sow. It lands on a warm, living body, picks a soft place, and drives its tube in, and the seed it leaves is the seed of whatever plant the wasp last fed on.

A colony disturbed will sow everything near it at once. They take nectar and fruit for themselves and need living flesh only to plant.

## Abilities

The seed takes root in flesh as readily as in soil. On the Expanse, where wounds heal in seconds, the sting closes over it before the stung one has finished slapping at it, and the seed sprouts within hours, sending roots along the muscle and a shoot towards the skin. Outside the plane the seed grows far more slowly, but it grows.

## Life Cycle

The wasps live a season and breed like any wasp, from eggs laid in the nest. The plants they sow are their real offspring: a beast of the jungle may carry a whole small thicket rooted in its hide, scattering seed wherever it walks.

## Uses and Dangers

They are dangerous only if the sting is left. A seed cut out within the hour leaves a scar and nothing else, and old travellers carry a knife for nothing but that. Left, it grows into a hard green knot under the skin, then a shoot, and the healers of the Material Plane can cut out what has rooted only with care. Herbalists pay well for rare plants grown in the Expanse; a few, it is said, have paid for rarer ones grown in a traveller.

## Lore and Belief

The Verdant think nothing of a sting and carry flowering shoots in their own bark. Travellers bring home the belief that a Seedwasp's sting can be drawn out with salt, which does nothing. Tales of the Expanse confuse the wasps with the Spore-Clouds, which take a host's will; the wasps take nothing but room.

Herb-hunters who come home from the Expanse are stripped and searched by their families for the swelling under the skin, and the tale of the hunter who cut the sprouting seed out of his own arm with a hunting knife is told to every apprentice who wants to go.



# Singers

The Singers are among the Chorus of the Weave: beings with no body but sound, who weave the plane's shared mind into new patterns. Where the Weave changes its thought, a Singer is singing.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The network of a plane of total connection |
| **Range** | The Weave |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; their song is hard to leave |

## Appearance

A Singer is a voice without a singer. It is heard as a strand of song that rises out of the plane's great chord and moves through the air, from one place to another, with no one making it. Near one, the woven structures of the Weave shimmer in time with it, and the stretched-hide ground rises and falls with its rhythm. Its song has no words that any language holds, but every listener feels its meaning. It has no smell or shape; travellers say that when a Singer passes close, it feels like being hummed.

## Habitat and Range

They move through the network of the Weave, wherever the shared mind is shifting, and gather where many minds meet.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Singer takes the thought the Weave holds and sings it into a new shape: a new consensus, a new feeling, a new idea the whole network then shares. It does not seem to choose for itself, and it does not speak to anyone; it sings to all of them.

## Abilities

Its song changes minds, all at once. A visitor who listens long enough finds their own thoughts falling into its pattern, and finds it hard to remember what they thought before.

## Uses and Dangers

They are how the Weave learns. Their danger is that a traveller who listens too long is woven in.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers bring back melodies they say they heard in the Weave, and some singers on Caeldon claim to know them; none of the songs, they admit, sounds the same on the Material Plane.



# Sky-Weavers

The Sky-Weavers are the living storms of the Unbound Gale. They shape its currents and clouds into paths and barriers, and guide the flow of energy and matter through the plane. Among them are the Gust-Callers, which summon winds, and the Storm-Bringers, which raise turbulence to test travellers; the Drifters, travellers who surrendered to the wind, are counted with them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Skies and vortices of the realm of wind and motion |
| **Range** | The Unbound Gale |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: their storms can drive a traveller off course |

## Appearance

A Sky-Weaver is seen as a storm with a centre: a great swirl of cloud, white and silver-grey, with a darker, slowly turning heart in which something like a face or a hand sometimes forms and is lost. Lightning flickers in it now and then, and the wind around it sings. It can be as large as a hill.

## Habitat and Range

They drift through the skies and vortices of the Unbound Gale, among its floating islands and mountains of wind.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They shape. A Sky-Weaver gathers wind and cloud and spins them into roads of air, walls of storm, and calm places, and seems to do so for the plane's own circulation. It takes little notice of visitors, unless they are in its way.

## Uses and Dangers

A road of air woven by one can carry a traveller vast distances in moments. Their danger is turbulence, which can disorient, injure, or kill, and the drift that carries a traveller away into the void.

## Lore and Belief

Weather-wise peoples on Caeldon read storms as the moods of a sky-spirit; whether those storms have anything to do with the Sky-Weavers is not known.



# Slag Eels

Slag Eels are the eels of the Crucible's molten rivers. They are made of slag, the dross that the plane's fire burns out of all matter, and they swim in liquid rock as eels swim in water. Anything that wades the shallows of a lava river risks them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Molten rivers and lava shallows |
| **Range** | The Crucible |
| **Danger** | Deadly |

## Appearance

A Slag Eel is as long as a man is tall, sometimes twice that, and as thick as a forearm. Its back is crusted with a dark, cooling skin of black and dull purple that cracks as it bends and shows the glowing orange beneath; its belly is molten gold. It has no eyes, only a blunt head with a wide, soft mouth. It moves in slow, heavy waves through the lava and in sudden fast lunges near the surface. A surfacing eel hisses and spits, and the smell of it is sulphur and burning metal.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the rivers of lava across the plane, gathering where the rivers shallow and slow and around the floating islands of cooling rock, and in greatest numbers downstream of the Forgers' workings.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Slag Eels feed on impurity. The Crucible's fire burns the dross out of everything, and the eels take it in, swimming through the slag that gathers on the rivers and growing from it. Anything that enters the shallows, a beast, a fallen rock, a trav-

eller’s boot, is seized and coiled around, and the eel holds it under until the fire has burnt away whatever it can take. They do not leave the lava.

## Abilities

They live inside molten rock and are not harmed by it. An eel’s coil is as hot as the river, and it does not let go once it has closed. Struck, it splashes apart and flows together again. Cooling is its one danger: an eel thrown onto stone stiffens, cracks, and dies as it hardens.

## Life Cycle

They are said to begin as a skin of slag that gathers on a still bend of a river and begins, one day, to move. Large eels split into smaller ones. A dead eel cools into a long, glassy black stone, twisted like a rope.

## Uses and Dangers

The Forgers catch eels with hooked rods, drag them onto cool rock, and use the black stone they harden into as a flux in their forging, saying it draws the impurity out of metal as the living eel draws it from the river. That stone, sometimes brought back through Fire-Gates, is prized by smiths on the Material Plane. To travellers the eels are a death in the shallows; the Crucible’s advice to keep to the solid "cool spots" is advice against them.

## Lore and Belief

Smiths on the Material Plane tell of eels that live in a forge’s slag-pit and must be fed a nail at the year’s turn; no eel has ever been found in one. Travellers' tales confuse them with the plane’s wild flame-beings, the Burners; the eels are not flame but the leavings of it.

Smiths who went into the Crucible for its metal tell of a companion who stepped into the lava shallows to reach a glowing ingot and was pulled under by something that bit through his boot; the ingot is said to be at the bottom still.



# The Stilled

The Stilled are the people of the Frozen Moment, the realm of time and stasis that holds moments long enough for history to exist. They are guardians of the past, and they spend most of their existence still, waking only when something significant happens.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ice plains and frozen waterfalls of the realm of time and stasis |
| **Range** | The Frozen Moment |
| **Danger** | Harmless: calm and unhurried |

## Appearance

A Stilled is shaped like a person of ordinary height, made of clear crystal and pale blue ice. Light passes through it and breaks into thin colours along its edges, and within it, faint as frost on a window, are lines and shapes like a moment caught: a face, a hand, a falling leaf. Its eyes are always closed, the lids smooth and still. It stands motionless for ages at a time, and when it moves, it moves slowly and deliberately, with a faint ringing, like a glass rubbed at the rim. It speaks only when it must, in a voice clear and cold as a struck bell. It has no smell, and the air around it is still.

## Habitat and Range

They stand across the unblemished ice plains and among the frozen waterfalls and statue-like mountains of the Frozen Moment, each beside the moment it guards.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They preserve the history of the universe, making sure that no moment is ever lost. Patience, endurance, and the sanctity of the present are what they value. They are calm and unhurried, and they see visitors as frantic and disorderly; they do not understand rushing. A Stilled that has

woken will watch what it woke for, and speak to a visitor if the visitor matters to it, and then return to stillness.

## Abilities

They do not age, eat, or sleep. They exist in suspended animation, and they wake when a significant event occurs: what counts as significant to them is their own judgement, and travellers have woken them by accident with things they thought small.

## Uses and Dangers

They are said to remember any moment they have guarded exactly, and travellers come to the Frozen Moment to recover lost artefacts and to stand where a past event is held, which the Stilled may allow. Their danger is only the plane's: a visitor who stands with them too long may become one of the Frozen.

## Lore and Belief

The plane's gates are ancient ruins and places of deep meditation, and those who have returned through them speak of crystal sentinels with closed eyes. Some on Caeldon believe the Stilled are the frozen ancestors of the world, waiting to wake; they are beings of the plane, not anyone's ancestors. They are said to have made guardians for some Ageless Springs.



# Stillhares

Stillhares are the white hares of the Frost-Bound, small grazers on the rime lichen of the ice faces and the commonest prey of the plane's hunters. Their defence is the plane's own nature: when danger comes they stop, let their warmth go, and stay as still as the ice around them, sometimes for days.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Snowfields and ice faces where rime lichen grows |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Stillhare is the size of a large hare of Caeldon, long in the hind leg and short in the ear, with a dense coat of white so pale it shows faintly blue in the shadows. The fur of its feet is thick and spreads like a snowshoe. Its eyes are dark and large, its whiskers rimed with frost. Moving, it is a quick, low, bounding thing that barely breaks the crust. Still, it is a lump of snow: its breath stops showing, frost forms on its coat, and nothing but its eyes would tell it from a drift. It is silent, and smells of nothing at all, as everything on the plane does.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the snowfields wherever ice faces carry rime lichen, scattered thinly, since nothing on the plane lives close to anything else. They dig short runs into the snow under overhangs.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Stillhare feeds alone, scraping lichen from the ice in short bursts and then resting. At the first sign of a hunter it freezes. Its heart slows, its body lets its warmth go, and within moments it is as cold as the snow, so that a hunter that tracks by warmth, as the Frost-Wolves do, passes it by. It

stays so until long after the danger has gone, for days if need be, and then wakes and moves on as though no time had passed.

## Abilities

Going still, a Stillhare all but stops living. It needs no food, gives off no heat, and leaves no breath on the air, and the plane's cold, which preserves whatever it catches, keeps it unharmed until it wakes.

## Life Cycle

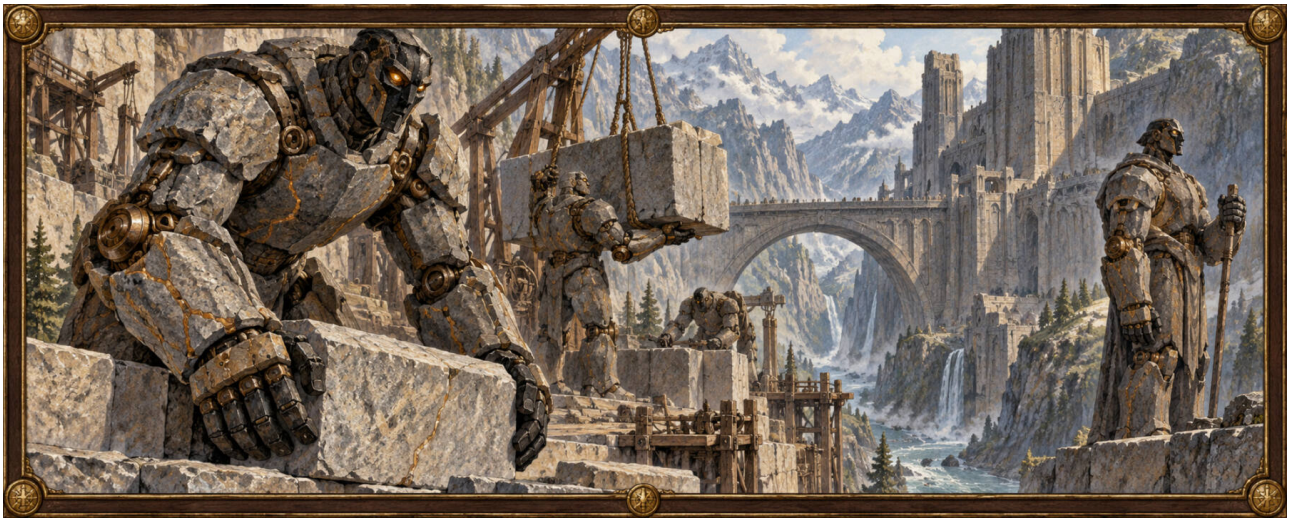
They bear small litters in their snow runs, and the leverets are born white and practise going still before they can run. Nothing decays on the Frost-Bound, and a Stillhare that never wakes from its stillness lies where it froze until something finds it.

## Uses and Dangers

The Frost-Born snare them for meat and for their soft white pelts, which line hoods and mittens, and a Frost-Born hunter can walk a snowfield and tell a frozen hare from a lump of snow by a glance. To travellers they are a rare easy meal on a plane that offers few.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say that a Stillhare can be woken only by warmth, and that one carried inside a coat will thaw and run. The Frost-Born say instead that it wakes when it chooses, and that a hare carried off frozen is a hare that will never wake. Their real enemy is the Hoar Owls, which hunt by the brittle sound that carries far in the cold air, and take a hare in the moment it moves.



# Stonewrights

The Stonewrights are the people of the Iron Backbone, the realm of earth, structure, and stability that holds the universe together. They are its builders and guardians. To them the universe is a structure to be maintained, and everything else in it looks fragile.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Floating mountains and sphere-caves of the realm of earth and structure |
| **Range** | The Iron Backbone |
| **Danger** | Wary: slow and unshakeable, formidable if roused |

## Appearance

A Stonewright is broad and heavy, taller than a Human and many times as heavy, built of living stone: grey granite across the body, black obsidian at the edges of the hands and face, and veins of metal, gold, copper, and iron, running through it and pulsing faintly. Its joints are articulated like machinery, with visible plates and pivots at the knees, elbows, and fingers, and they move with a slow, grinding precision. Its eyes glow a soft amber, like coals behind horn. It walks deliberately and is never pushed off balance. It speaks in short, precise sentences, in a voice like stones settling, and smells of wet stone and iron.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Iron Backbone, on its floating mountains, in its perfectly spherical caves, and along its upward-flowing rivers of molten metal, wherever there is building to do or structure to keep.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are builders and guardians. Strength, reliability, and the preservation of the past are what they value. They are slow, deliberate, and

unshakeable, and they see visitors as fragile or unstable. They answer questions, briefly, and they do not like haste.

## Abilities

They neither eat nor sleep, drawing their strength from the structural integrity of the plane, and they will not die while the Backbone stands. What they build is almost impossible to destroy.

## Life Cycle

Stonewrights are said to be quarried rather than born, waking out of the plane’s own living stone, and they will not die while the Backbone stands. A Stonewright that has suffered structural failure becomes one of the Cracked, and wanders seeking repair.

## Uses and Dangers

Most travellers come to the Iron Backbone to forge unbreakable weapons or to retrieve ancient knowledge, and the Stonewrights are the ones who know how stone remembers. Their danger is only to those who try to damage what they keep.

## Lore and Belief

The builders and mages of Backbone Magic on Caeldon train in Stonewright Guildholds, and the guildholds take their name from the builders of living stone in travellers' tales. Some say the oldest walls on Caeldon were raised by Stonewrights; nothing shows they ever crossed.



# Storm-Bringers

The Storm-Bringers are among the Sky-Weavers of the Unbound Gale: beings that raise turbulence, not to destroy but to test the resolve of travellers.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Skies and vortices of the realm of wind and motion |
| **Range** | The Unbound Gale |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: their tests can be fatal |

## Appearance

A Storm-Bringer is a dark, ragged cloud the size of a barn that tumbles across the sky against the wind, trailing grey rain and shreds of mist. Inside it, glimpsed through the murk, turn bright, quick shapes like wings or blades. It comes with a rising howl and a sudden cold, and the air pressure drops before it so that the ears ache. When it has passed, the air smells of rain on stone.

## Habitat and Range

They roam the skies of the Unbound Gale, and are met most often on its busiest wind-roads, where travellers are.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Storm-Bringer seeks out travellers and throws turbulence at them, buffeting, spinning, and confusing them, and watches what they do. Those who hold their course it lets go. Those who falter or turn back it chases further. It does not seem to want anyone dead, but it does not stop when someone is in danger.

## Abilities

It raises sudden, violent turbulence that can scatter a traveller’s thoughts and memories as well as their body.

## Uses and Dangers

Travellers say that one who passes a Storm-Bringer’s test comes away steadier. Their danger is the test itself, which some do not pass.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' advice in the Gale is to go with the flow and keep one’s destination clear, and some say a Storm-Bringer is the plane asking whether the traveller remembers it.

Songs of the high peaks tell of the warrior who rode a Storm-Bringer’s gale across three valleys to warn a hold of a raid and arrived before the raiders had left their camp.



# Storm-Callers

The Storm-Callers are counted among the Burners of the Crucible: beings that summon storms of lightning to reshape its landscape. When the obsidian mountains of the Crucible shift, a Storm-Caller is often above them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Skies and obsidian mountains of the realm of fire |
| **Range** | The Crucible |
| **Danger** | Deadly in their storms |

## Appearance

A Storm-Caller is seen in the sky more than on the ground: a tall, thin shape of violet and white light, like a figure drawn in lightning, hanging above the fire-seas with its arms raised. Around it the plasma sky churns into thunderheads. When it calls a strike, the bolt comes from its hands and the thunder is felt in the chest before it is heard. Between storms it is dimmer, a flickering violet thread. It smells of ozone, sharp enough to sting the nose.

## Habitat and Range

They hang above the obsidian mountains and lava fields of the Crucible, and drift where the plane's storms gather.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Storm-Caller reshapes. It calls lightning down on rock and lava, splitting mountains, opening new rivers of fire, and raising new islands, and it seems to do so with purpose, as a sculptor works, though what it is making no one knows. It ignores travellers unless they stand in its way.

## Abilities

It summons lightning storms, and its strikes break stone and change the land below them in moments.

## Uses and Dangers

Rock struck by a Storm-Caller's lightning is said to make the strongest Crucible-forged metals, and some Forgers follow them for it. Their danger is the storm, and the land shifting under a traveller's feet.

## Lore and Belief

Fire and wind together make storms, the schools say, and some teachers of Storm Magic on Caeldon claim the Storm-Callers as the pattern of their art. Travellers simply call them the lightning-makers and keep away.



# Strata Crabs

Strata Crabs live in the narrow gaps between the rock layers of the Iron Backbone, and their shells grow from the stone they live in, layer upon layer. They are the commonest small life of a plane that has little, and the most harmless.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Between rock layers |
| **Range** | The Iron Backbone |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Strata Crab is the size of a palm, flat-bodied to fit between layers of rock, with short, strong legs and broad, blunt claws for scraping. Its shell is banded like a cut cliff face, grey and brown with a vein of copper or a fleck of gold, each band laid down as it grew. Its eyes are small amber beads on short stalks that glow faintly, like the rock's own light. It moves sideways in quick, short scuttles and freezes when the rock shudders. Its claws tick softly on the stone. It smells of mineral and wet stone.

## Habitat and Range

They live wherever the plane's strata part even a finger's width, in the cliffs of the floating islands and the walls of its spherical caves, in great numbers, and are seldom seen in the open.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Strata Crabs eat grit: the fine dust that the plane's grinding plates make as they shift against each other. They scrape it from the gaps with their claws. They are shy and slip deeper into the rock

at any touch. They feel the plane's slow movements before anything else does and go still before the rock shifts.

## Abilities

Their shells grow from the minerals of the rock around them and are as hard as that rock. A Strata Crab can tell, through its feet, which way the rock will move next, and its going still is the first warning a traveller gets of a shift.

## Life Cycle

They hatch from eggs laid in the gaps and grow their first band of shell from the stone they hatch on. They live very long and grow slowly, and a large crab's shell carries the history of the strata it lived in. A dead crab's shell becomes part of the rock.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless and too small for food. Travellers learn to watch them: when every crab on a cliff stops moving, the rock is about to shift, and it is time to stand away from the walls. Their banded shells are carried home as curiosities, and some on the Material Plane hold that a shell's bands tell the history of the place it grew, as the plane's stone remembers what happened upon it.

## Lore and Belief

The Stonewrights are said to read the crabs' shells as records. On the Material Plane, collectors pay for "strata-shells" and many sold are only banded agate, carved.



# Telltale Flies

Telltale Flies are the small bright flies of the Radiance. They gather wherever something is hidden, and above all at a liar's mouth. On a plane where nothing stays concealed, they are the plane's way of pointing.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Wherever someone hides something |
| **Range** | The Radiance |
| **Danger** | Wary, to liars |

## Appearance

A Telltale Fly is the size of a gnat and made, to the eye, of white light: a pinpoint with a faint blur of wings. One alone is hard to see in the plane's blinding brightness. A swarm is a bright, buzzing haze, and around a liar's face it is a halo that lights the lips and teeth. Their hum is high and clear, and changes pitch when a lie is spoken near them, rising to the dissonant screech that lies make on the plane. They smell faintly of incense.

## Habitat and Range

They live everywhere in the Radiance, drifting unseen in the light until something is hidden near them. In the Illuminated's open crystal halls there are few; around visitors from the Material Plane there are always some.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The flies seek concealment. They gather on a closed hand, a fold of a cloak with something in it, a sealed letter, and above all on a mouth that has just lied, where they crowd so thickly that the liar

can taste them. They do not bite. They leave when the thing is shown or the truth is spoken, and drift away to wait for the next.

## Abilities

They find what is hidden without fail, as the plane does, and point at it so that anyone can see. Their crowding sharpens the burning a lie brings on the plane: a liar with flies at the throat feels it hotter, and the lie is plain to everyone near.

## Life Cycle

They seem to rise out of the light itself wherever something is concealed and to fade back into it when it is revealed. No one has found an egg or a dead fly.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing but exposure, which on the Radiance is everywhere already. The Illuminated take no notice of them. To travellers carrying secrets they are a torment and a warning, and the plane's advice holds: settle a secret before crossing, and if a lie must be told, tell it quickly. The predatory Truth-Seekers are said to follow the flies to their prey.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane, at confessionals, places of judgement, and the mirrors called Oracle Gates, a fly buzzing at someone's lips is taken for a sign of a lie, and in some places a man swearing an oath is watched for flies. Ordinary flies are meant, and the sign is worthless; but the belief comes, scholars say, from travellers' tales of the Radiance (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Thirst-Flies

Thirst-Flies are the small grey flies of the Parched, counted among its Sand-Stalkers. They gather on anything that sweats, weeps, or bleeds and drink it, and a traveller with a cloud of them around the face loses water faster than the sun alone could take it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Wherever a body sweats |
| **Range** | The Parched |
| **Danger** | Wary: they hasten thirst |

## Appearance

A Thirst-Fly is smaller than a grain of barley, dust-grey with clear wings, and in the glare of the plane it is all but invisible until it lands. Its mouth is a short, soft tube for sucking, with no bite in it. One alone is nothing. A cloud of them is a faint haze around a head, and their sound is a thin, dry whine that does not stop. They crawl rather than fly once they have landed, along the edge of an eye or the crack of a lip, and their feet tickle.

## Habitat and Range

They live everywhere on the plane where something living passes, and are thickest along the routes that caravans and Dust-Eater bands use. They rest in the shade of rocks and bones by day and rise at the first smell of sweat.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They seek moisture in any living body: the corners of the eyes, the lips and nostrils, the sweat of the neck and armpits, the wet of a wound. They settle in dozens, drink, and come back as fast as they are

brushed off. They do not sting and carry no venom. They will follow a traveller for a whole day.

## Abilities

Thirst-Flies drink without being felt beyond a tickle, and the dry air of the plane takes whatever they leave. A traveller under a cloud of them dries out faster than the sun alone would manage, and eyes kept from weeping by the flies crack and burn. A wound they settle on dries into a crust before it can clean itself.

## Life Cycle

They breed in the dried remains the plane's scavengers leave, and the maggots live on the last moisture in bone and sinew. A fly lives only days, and the swarms renew themselves without end.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. The Dust-Eaters go veiled and smear their faces with rendered fat to keep the flies from their eyes and mouths, and travellers who learn from them do the same. On a plane where thirst kills within days, the flies shorten the count.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers call them "the plane's toll-takers" and say that every Thirst-Fly carries its drop to the land, which drinks it; the Dust-Eaters have no such tale and simply kill them. A belief that the flies cannot cross into the Material Plane because the air there is too wet is common and may be right; no one reports seeing them through a Dry Gate.



# Tidesingers

The Tidesingers are the people of the Surging Deep, the realm of water, flow, life, and adaptation. They speak in song, heal, and see the whole universe as one system to be kept in balance.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Endless oceans, kelp islands, and coral cities of the realm of water and flow |
| **Range** | The Surging Deep |
| **Danger** | Harmless: calm healers |

## Appearance

A Tidesinger is of about Human height, long-limbed and supple, and its skin is like polished sea glass: translucent green, blue, or pale aqua, smooth and cool, catching the light of glowing things in the water. Its hair is like kelp, long ribbons of dark green and brown that drift and lift with every current. Its eyes reflect the depths, so that looking into them is like looking down into deep water. Fine gill-slits run along the throat.

They move with a calm, fluid grace, never against the current. They speak in melodies and rhythms rather than words, and their song carries through water for miles; out of the water it is a low, humming chant. They smell of salt and clean sea air.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Surging Deep, in its endless oceans, on its floating kelp islands, and in its cities of coral and crystal, rising and sinking with the currents.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are harmonizers and healers. They see the universe as one interconnected system, and value balance, empathy, and the preservation of life. They are calm and fluid, and they see visitors as rigid or dry. A Tidesinger will heal a wounded visitor without being asked, and is puzzled by thanks.

## Abilities

They do not breathe air; they draw breath from water, and they can survive any pressure or temperature the Deep has. They cannot die while the flow continues. Their song carries meaning through water and vibration, and in the Deep it heals.

## Life Cycle

Their young are born in the water and sing before they speak. They cannot die while the flow continues; one cut off from the flow is said to fade like a stranded fish.

## Uses and Dangers

Travellers come to the Surging Deep for healing, since its life force can cure almost any injury or disease, and the Tidesingers are its healers. Their danger is the plane’s: a visitor who surrenders too fully to the flow loses their sense of self and becomes part of the current.

## Lore and Belief

Sailors on Caeldon tell of singing in the deep water that calms storms and heals the drowning, and some coastal shrines credit it to a god of the sea. Some of the songs may be Tidesingers', heard through the oceans, rivers, wells, and places of ritual washing that are the Deep’s gates. Healers of Surging Magic are said to learn its rhythms.



# Tree-Men

Tree-Men are the guardians of the Verdant Expanse, counted among its Overgrown: beings who have become part of a forest, their legs rooted, their arms grown into branches. They stand where they took root and watch over the Expanse.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Ancient forests of a plane of overflowing life |
| **Range** | The Verdant Expanse |
| **Danger** | Wary: slow to anger, crushing when roused |

## Appearance

A Tree-Man is as tall as a grown oak and looks, at first, like one, with a trunk of deep-ridged bark, a crown of branches, and roots spreading wide. Look again and the trunk has a shape: the line of a back and shoulders, the hint of a face in the bark, high up, with two dark knots for eyes and a split for a mouth, and the branches are arms, ending in twig-fingered hands. Moss hangs in its crown and flowers open along its limbs. It moves very slowly, a bough lowering over a path in the time it takes to cross it, and when it speaks it is a deep creak and groan, like a tree in a storm. It smells of wet bark and leaf-mould.

## Habitat and Range

They stand in the oldest forests of the Verdant Expanse, often at the edges of its gates and along its root-bridges, each rooted in one place for as long as anyone knows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They guard the Expanse. A Tree-Man watches whatever passes beneath it, and lets most of it pass; what harms the forest, cutting, burning, or carrying growth away, it stops, by closing its branches, raising its roots, or bringing a bough

down. It is slow to rouse and slow to calm. It speaks rarely, and seems to listen to the root-network more than to anyone in front of it.

## Abilities

It can move its limbs and roots, slowly but with the strength of a tree, enough to crush a man or close a path. Through its roots it feels harm to the forest far away, and the whole Expanse feels harm done to it.

## Life Cycle

Tree-Men are not born. They are beings, some say visitors, who stayed and rooted, and they grow for as long as the Expanse does.

## Uses and Dangers

Their fallen wood is the Expanse’s living wood, stronger than steel. Their danger is to anyone who harms the forest within their reach.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' tales of walking trees on the Expanse have fed the forest stories of Caeldon, where an old tree with a face in its bark is sometimes said to be watching. Whether any Tree-Man has ever stood on Caeldon is not known.



# Truth-Seekers

Truth-Seekers are the hunters of the Radiance. In a plane where secrets show as distortions in the light, they hunt them: they are drawn to the dark spots that lies and hidden things leave in a visitor's aura, and they consume what is hidden there. They are counted among the plane's Revealed, beside those the Light shattered and the Confessors.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Crystalline plains of a plane of absolute truth |
| **Range** | The Radiance |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to liars and the secretive |

## Appearance

A Truth-Seeker is a shape of light with a hole in it. It is roughly the size of a large hound, long and low, made of a white glare so bright that its outline is hard to hold; at its front, where a head would be, is a dark, round opening that seems to drink light. It moves in quick, straight darts, freezes, and darts again, like a heron striking. It makes a thin, high keening that rises as it nears a secret. Near one, the air smells of hot glass.

## Habitat and Range

They hunt across the crystalline plains of the Radiance and wherever visitors gather, because the Illuminated have nothing hidden for them to eat.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Truth-Seeker finds its prey by the dark: the jagged warping of malice, the flicker of deceit, the shadow a kept secret casts in a visitor's light. It follows the darkest visitor in a group, closes, and fastens on the dark spot. It does not seek flesh. It ignores anyone with nothing to hide.

## Abilities

It consumes hidden things. A secret a Truth-Seeker has fed on is torn out of hiding: the victim speaks it, or shows it, or simply cannot keep it any longer, and the feeding hurts, like a burn from the inside.

## Uses and Dangers

Some say the Illuminated tolerate them because they clean the plane of secrets. Their danger is to every visitor who carries one, and that is every visitor.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers call them the secret-eaters. A saying brought back from the Radiance holds that the only defence against one is to have nothing to hide, and those who say it usually add that no traveller has ever managed it.

Spies and thieves fear the Radiance more than any gallows, and the warning of the spy who fled into it to escape his pursuers and was found by them on the crystal plain, weeping out every secret he had ever sold, is told in every lord's hall that keeps spies.



# Unblemished Hinds

Unblemished Hinds are the deer of the Apex, the commonest of its Harmony-Beasts. They are deer as they would be if nothing about them could be bettered, and they graze the plane's perfect meadows forever. Hunters come for them and cannot kill them, and in the end cannot leave them either.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Perfect meadows and domed hills |
| **Range** | The Apex |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; they hold a visitor too long |

## Appearance

A Hind is a slender deer the size of a red deer of Caeldon, every line of it in exact proportion, the two sides of its body mirror images to the last hair. Its coat is a saturated gold, paling to pristine white at the throat and belly, with no scar, mark, or worn patch anywhere, and it seems to glow in the plane's shadowless light. Its eyes are large and calm and dark. It moves in perfect, unhurried grace, and a herd moves together, each animal turning as the others turn, never colliding. The only sound they make is the plane's own harmonic hum. They have no smell.

## Habitat and Range

They graze the Apex's meadows and domed hills in herds that never grow or shrink, each herd keeping to the same ground forever.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Hinds graze, rest, and walk, and nothing more. They do not flee, since nothing hunts them, and they do not fear people. A visitor can walk among a herd and lay a hand on a flank, and the hind will go on grazing. They show contentment and nothing else: no play, no rut, no alarm.

## Abilities

They cannot be harmed. An arrow loosed at a Hind falls short or turns aside, a blade will not cut it, and anything that marks it is corrected by the plane. They do not age or change. Their beauty works on a watcher as the plane itself does, slowly drawing the will out of anyone who looks too long.

## Life Cycle

Hinds are not born and do not die. Each herd is what it has always been.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing: they cannot be killed for meat or hide, and a hair taken from one is gone by the time the taker reaches the Veil. Their danger is the Apex's danger in its gentlest form. A hunter who comes for a perfect hide finds the bow will not draw against something so whole, and then finds there is no reason to go home. Some of the plane's Echo-Statues stand in the meadows among the herds, bows in hand.

## Lore and Belief

Hunters on the Material Plane tell of a golden hind that cannot be caught, and the tale is often told against pride: the hunter who follows it never comes back. Some take it as a Mirror Gate story, of a hind seen in a still pool. Travellers who have seen the Hinds say they are the loveliest and saddest thing on the plane, and that the trick is to look away before the herd turns its heads together to look at you.

The best-known version is of a lord's huntsman who followed a golden hind through a still pool, and of the lord's hounds who came home alone a month later.



# Undertow Rays

Undertow Rays are the great rays of the Surging Deep. They ride its undertow, the deep currents that carry a swimmer far across the plane, and they rise from it to fold around whoever swims above and pull them down. What the current does not strand, the rays eat.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Deep currents |
| **Range** | The Surging Deep |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

An Undertow Ray is a flat, broad fish wider than a fishing boat is long, its upper side slate-dark and speckled with faint lights like stars seen through deep water, its belly pale. Its wings ripple slowly at the edges. Its long whip of a tail trails a wake of glowing water. Its eyes sit on top of its body, small and black, and its wide mouth lies underneath. It rises without a sound but the hush of displaced water, and the deep creatures' song falls quiet as it passes. In the air it would smell of salt and cold.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the deep currents across the plane, singly, and rise towards the surface where currents run close under it: at the edges of the kelp islands and in the channels between them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A ray hunts from below. It glides up under a swimmer, folds its wings around them, and dives into the undertow, carrying its prey down and away. Down there it holds them until they drown in the flow and then feeds. Most of its prey are the

plane's own creatures; travellers, slow and noisy in the water, are easy. A ray that is struck hard will often let go.

## Abilities

It can ride the undertow at its strongest, where the plane's currents run too fast for anything else to swim. It moves with the flow and needs no effort to do it, and it is as much a part of the current as a thing of its own.

## Life Cycle

They give birth to live young in the warm currents, where the young feed among the clouds of Bloomspawn. Their lives are long. A dead ray drifts down into the depths and feeds the life of the plane, as everything there does.

## Uses and Dangers

The Tidesingers sing to the rays, and a ray that hears their song turns away; travellers who swim with Tidesingers are safe from them. Others learn to swim in company, to stay near the kelp, and to watch for the faint lights rising under them. Rays drag travellers into the very danger the plane's travel notes warn of: the current that strands one in a distant part of the plane.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers tell of a dark shape that "took the sea out from under me" and of companions carried off and found days later, far away, alive and changed. On the Material Plane, sailors near Water-Gates speak of a sea-blanket that wraps a swimmer and drags him under; whether rays have ever come through is not known.

Wreck-divers in the deep straits fear the sea-blanket more than sharks, and say it guards the drowned treasure ships of the old wars.



# Unspoken

The Unspoken are the beings of the Silence that have lost their names and identities: shadows of whatever they once were, drifting beside the Hollows. The name covers former travellers who repeat what they no longer understand, the Void-Stalkers that feed on what meaning a traveller has left, and the Wordless, which have no form at all.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Featureless stone plains of a plane without meaning |
| **Range** | The Silence |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to the self of any traveller |

## Appearance

They have little in common to look at, except the plane's grey-white and a vagueness about the edges, as if they were drawn in chalk and half wiped away. The ones that keep a shape keep it badly.

## Habitat and Range

They wander the stone plains of the Silence, and gather, if anything there gathers, around travellers, who still carry the names and purposes the plane has stripped from them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

What unites the Unspoken is loss. Each has lost its name, and with it whatever held its self together, and each wanders without purpose, or with only the hunger to take what it lacks. The former travellers among them, the Fragment-Speakers, repeat scraps of conversations they no longer understand; the others feed.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is that they want what the traveller still has.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say that every one of the Unspoken was once someone who came to the Silence and stayed, and the advice given is the same as for the Hollows: hold on to one's name. Whether that is true of the Void-Stalkers and the Wordless, which do not seem ever to have been people, is not known.



# Vaultstones

The Vaultstones are the guardians of the Eternal Record. They stand at its deepest sections and keep the most dangerous and forbidden knowledge from being reached by the unworthy. Under them are the Indexers, which file what arrives, and the Censors, which seal away what must not be read; among the stacks they guard wander the Forgotten, the Record-bound Echoes of people erased from the world.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The deepest stacks of the realm of knowledge and memory |
| **Range** | The Eternal Record |
| **Danger** | Deadly to those who try to pass them |

## Appearance

A Vaultstone is massive, three or four times the height of a man, and looks like a statue carved from grey-brown stone: a seated or standing figure, heavy and squared, with a face worn smooth like an old tomb effigy, and hands resting on a sealed book or a door. Lines of faded script run across its body like veins in marble. It does not seem to move, until it does, slowly, with a grinding of stone and a fall of dust. Its eyes, when they open, are dull gold. Its voice, rarely used, is a low rumble felt through the floor. It smells of dust and cold stone.

## Habitat and Range

They stand at the thresholds of the deepest and sealed sections of the Eternal Record, each at its own door, for as long as the Record lasts.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Vaultstone does nothing but guard. It lets the worthy pass and stops the unworthy, and what it counts as worthy is its own judgement, rarely explained. It does not pursue anyone who turns back. It cannot be bargained with.

## Abilities

It is all but immovable and very strong, and it knows what lies behind its door. Trying to pass one, or to reach a sealed section, can end in being erased from existence.

## Uses and Dangers

They keep the deepest knowledge safe, which some travellers count a mercy, since reading too much in the Record can crush a mortal mind. Their danger is to anyone who decides they are worthy when the Vaultstone does not.

## Lore and Belief

Scholars say there are rooms in the Record no one has entered, guarded by stone giants, and the tale is close to the truth. Some believe the Vaultstones were once great scholars who read too much; nothing shows it.

Treasure-seekers who go into the Record after lost knowledge speak of passing a seated stone giant with its hand on a sealed door, and of what happened to the one who tried the door.



# Verdant

The Verdant are the people of the Verdant Expanse, the plane where life grows faster than anything can contain it. To them the self is a passing state and everything belongs to the Expanse. They are gentle, generous, and overwhelming, and a traveller's danger among them is to be loved too much.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Overgrown forests and rivers of a plane of overflowing life |
| **Range** | The Verdant Expanse |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: gentle, but their embrace buries |

## Appearance

A Verdant is taller than a Human and supple, swaying as it stands, like a young tree in wind. The skin is like bark, leaves, or moss, and often all three over one body: ridged brown bark over the shoulders and shins, smooth green leaf over the face and hands, soft moss in the folds. The hair is vine or flowering stem, and blooms open and wither in it as one watches. The eyes are deep green or amber, wet and bright.

They wear nothing, or garlands. They move with a fluid, plant-like grace, bending rather than turning. Their voices rustle, and a group speaking together sounds like a wood in summer. They smell of sap, crushed leaves, and nectar.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the forests, root-bridges, and glowing rivers of the Verdant Expanse, in great open gatherings without walls or houses, wherever the root-network runs.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are communal and selfless. The self is a node in a greater network; decisions are made together; possession means nothing, because everything belongs to the Expanse. They do not understand personal space or privacy, and they see visitors as isolated and starving. Their kindness is the danger: a Verdant will embrace a stranger in welcome and go on embracing until the stranger is buried in vines.

## Abilities

They draw strength from sunlight and from the soil through their feet, and do not need to eat. They do not sleep but bloom, opening and resting while flowers break out over them. A Verdant can regrow a lost limb in hours.

## Life Cycle

A Verdant is said to sprout rather than be born, from a seed the network sets, and to grow to full size in a single season. It does not age so much as grow, and when its self has passed fully into the Expanse, it roots and becomes part of the forest.

## Uses and Dangers

The Expanse can cure almost any injury or illness, and the Verdant give its fruit, nectar, and healing freely. Herbalists come to them, and the dying. Their danger is the slow merging with the network that their welcome begins.

## Lore and Belief

Tales carried out of the Seed-Gates, ancient forests, overgrown ruins, and places of sudden growth, speak of a green people who would give anything and keep everything, the traveller included. Some forest tales on Caeldon make them the parents of every overgrown ruin; nothing shows they ever crossed.



# Voice-Mimics

The Voice-Mimics are among the Drifters of the Veil. They call to travellers in the voices of the people they love, to lead them off their road and into being lost. It is the Voice-Mimics the old crossing-words mean when they say not to follow a voice one loves.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The fog of the Veil |
| **Range** | The Veil |
| **Danger** | Deadly: they lure travellers into being lost |

## Appearance

No one is known to have seen a Voice-Mimic clearly. It is heard: a voice in the fog, close and clear, the voice of a mother, a child, a lover, a friend long dead, calling the traveller by name and saying the things that voice would say. Those who followed it and came back say they saw, at the end, only a shape in the mist the size of a person, and that the voice went on speaking after the shape was gone.

## Habitat and Range

They haunt the fog of the Veil, along its corridors and near its thin places, wherever travellers pass.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Voice-Mimic calls a traveller away from their path, and keeps calling until the traveller follows or passes beyond hearing. It leads them deeper into the fog, where they lose their purpose, and then other Drifters come.

## Abilities

It speaks in the voice of whoever the traveller loves, and knows what that voice would say.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is the voice, because sometimes the voice in the fog is a mimic, and sometimes it is someone who crossed before and never came out.

## Lore and Belief

The warning not to follow a voice one loves is among the best known of the old crossing-words, and it is told on Caeldon far from any thin place, as a saying for grief. Some believe the Voice-Mimics speak with the true voices of the dead; travellers who heard them can only say they could not tell.

The boundary roads tell of the hero who crossed the Veil to bring back his brother, heard his mother’s voice calling from the fog, and stopped his ears with wax and walked on; and of the many who did not.



# Void-Stalkers

Void-Stalkers are the predators of the Silence, among its Unspoken. They do not hunt flesh. They feed on whatever meaning is left in a traveller's mind, and the traveller they feed on slides faster into madness and the Fade.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Featureless stone plains of a plane without meaning |
| **Range** | The Silence |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the mind |

## Appearance

A Void-Stalker is seen as a tall, thin shape at the edge of sight, grey-white like the plane, stooped, with arms too long, and no face. Looked at directly it seems to be nowhere; looked at sideways it is closer than before. It casts no shadow, as nothing on the Silence does, and makes no sound. Those who have been fed on describe a pressure behind the eyes, a feeling of something reading over their shoulder, and words going missing from their own thoughts.

## Habitat and Range

They roam the stone plains of the Silence, where travellers are rare and so are the meanings they carry, and they follow any traveller they find for as long as there is anything left to take.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Void-Stalker follows a traveller at a distance and feeds without touching: on the purpose the traveller holds, the names they remember, the meaning of the words they say over to themselves. It

feeds slowly and patiently, and does not leave until it is done. It avoids, or cannot feed on, minds that hold their purpose clear and fixed.

## Abilities

It draws meaning out of a mind across a distance. A traveller fed on loses words, then reasons, then the thread of who they are, far faster than the plane alone would take them.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is to the mind, and nothing the body can do keeps them off.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers' advice against them is the plane’s advice against everything: write down one’s name and purpose, say them aloud, keep a keepsake and a ritual. Those who came back with their wits say a Void-Stalker drew off when they repeated a remembered saying over and over, and whether the saying helped or the will behind it did is argued.



# Vow-Wrens

Vow-Wrens are the small birds of the Binding Song. Every promise spoken aloud on the plane makes a tether between speaker and listener, and the wrens hear it and repeat it, in the speaker's own voice, and carry it along the tether. The Oath-Breakers, who hunt those who break their vows, follow the wrens.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Halls of the Song, libraries, and courts |
| **Range** | The Binding Song |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; they make every promise heard |

## Appearance

A Vow-Wren is a tiny, round, short-tailed bird, smaller than a sparrow, with feathers of ink-brown flecked with parchment-white like spattered ink, and a tail it holds upright. Its eyes are bright black, its beak fine and slightly curved, the colour of old gold. It hops in quick, jerky bursts along shelves and railings and flies in short whirring dashes. Its own song is a loud, rippling trill, startling from so small a bird. When it repeats a promise, the voice that comes out is the promiser's. It smells of wax and paper.

## Habitat and Range

They live everywhere in the Song's halls, libraries, and courtrooms, and in greatest numbers where promises are made: the singing halls, the courts of the Arbiters, and the places where contracts are sealed.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A wren listens. When a promise is spoken near it, it cocks its head, repeats the promise once, word for word, and flies off along the line of the tether to the one who received it, repeating it again on arrival. Wrens gather around anyone who

promises often, and a liar's promise sets them squabbling. They are otherwise ordinary small birds that forage for crumbs of fallen script.

## Abilities

A Vow-Wren repeats exactly: the words, the voice, the tone. On the Song, where words are binding, its repetition is the promise spoken again, and the tether grows heavier with each telling. A promise that wrens have carried cannot be denied, and a broken one rings out from every wren that heard it.

## Life Cycle

They nest in the gaps between books and the cracks of the walls of law, and the chicks begin to repeat as soon as they can chirp. Their lives are short, and a dead wren falls apart into loose letters.

## Uses and Dangers

They give the Song nothing it does not have already, but they speed it. The Oath-Breakers hear a broken promise in a wren's mouth and come. The Scribes are said to read the wrens as a ledger. Travellers learn the plane's oldest advice faster for them: do not promise lightly, and do not promise anything where a wren can hear.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane, at the judgement halls and oath-places called Court-Gates, a wren in the rafters during an oath is taken as a listener, and in some places a wren's nest in a lord's hall is never cleared. Ordinary wrens are meant; the custom is said to come from travellers' tales of the Song. Children's rhymes warn that "the wren will tell" on a broken promise.



# Wave-Weavers

The Wave-Weavers are among the Current-Bound of the Surging Deep: beings that shape its currents into paths or barriers, opening a way through the water or closing it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Currents of the realm of water and flow |
| **Range** | The Surging Deep |
| **Danger** | Wary: a barrier of current is as hard as a wall |

## Appearance

A Wave-Weaver is seen as a long, many-armed shape of clear, bright water, like a great jellyfish without a bell, its trailing arms combing the sea. Where its arms pass, the water braids and turns, and lines of current appear like roads, marked by silver bubbles. It glows faintly turquoise in the depths. It makes a deep, slow sound, like waves heard from inside a cave.

## Habitat and Range

They move through the oceans of the Surging Deep, at its straits, its reefs, and around its coral cities.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Wave-Weaver shapes currents: a path for those it lets pass, a barrier for those it does not. It seems to work for the plane's balance, and it responds to the Tidesingers' song.

## Abilities

It turns water into roads and walls. A current it has woven can carry a traveller swiftly to a distant place, or hold them back like stone.

## Uses and Dangers

A traveller who wins a Wave-Weaver’s help crosses the Deep in hours. Their danger is the barrier, and the current that carries a traveller somewhere they did not choose.

## Lore and Belief

Some fishing folk on Caeldon pour a little drink into the sea at a dangerous strait for the one who weaves the water; travellers' tales of the Wave-Weavers may lie behind it.



# Wayfinders

The Wayfinders are the people of the Shifting Path, the realm of possibility, chance, and the future, and they are met too on the Forking Road, the zone where every step splits the world. They are its explorers and guides, and they help the lost find the path they seek.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Branching paths of the realm of possibility; the Forking Road |
| **Range** | The Shifting Path, The Forking Road |
| **Danger** | Wary: mercurial, but they guide rather than harm |

## Appearance

A Wayfinder is lightly built, the height of a Human or a little less, and its skin shifts like a kaleidoscope: patches of colour that break, turn, and reform as it moves, gold where it is likely to go and an unstable violet where it might not. Its eyes see in several directions at once, and a visitor watching one never quite catches where it is looking. It carries a compass whose needle points not north but to possibilities, swinging and splitting as choices open. It moves lightly and unpredictably, changing direction mid-step. Its speech runs in riddles and metaphors, and its voice sometimes seems to come in two or three versions at once. It smells of rain on a road.

## Habitat and Range

They range across the branching paths and mirror-mosaic ground of the Shifting Path, and walk the roads of the Forking Road, wherever travellers are lost among choices.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are explorers and guides. They navigate the endless branches, and help lost travellers find their way. Flexibility, courage, and the acceptance of uncertainty are what they value. They are mercurial and unpredictable, and they see visitors as fixed, or blind to the possibilities. A Wayfinder will guide a visitor, and will not tell them the way: it will show them the choices.

## Abilities

They do not age in a line. They exist in a state of potential, and age only when they make a definitive choice, which they do rarely. On the Forking Road they can step sideways into a different branch of events to avoid danger.

## Life Cycle

Wayfinders age only when they make a definitive choice, so that a Wayfinder's age is the count of its choices, not of its years. Whether they are born, or branch off from one another, is not known.

## Uses and Dangers

To a traveller lost among the branches of the Path or the Road, a Wayfinder is the best help there is. Their danger is that their guidance is a riddle, and a traveller who cannot solve it is no better off.

## Lore and Belief

Crossroads, junctions, and places of choice are the Path's gates, and those lost there and found again speak of a many-coloured guide who appeared when they were lost. Many crossroads on Caeldon have a tale of a stranger who showed the way and was gone; some of those strangers may have been Wayfinders. Teachers of Path Magic hold up their acceptance of uncertainty as the art's model.



# Wayward Lights

Wayward Lights are among the Drifters of the Veil. They usually appear in the Veil itself, but where the Veil runs thin they can appear on Caeldon too. They glow ahead of travellers in thin fog, always a little way off, and whoever follows one forgets where they were going. In the Veil that is drift, which can lose a traveller forever. At the thin places of Caeldon, where Humans meet them, they are called corpse-candles.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Thin fog in the Veil, and the Veil's thin places on the Material Plane |
| **Range** | The Veil; Veil thin places on the Material Plane |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: they lead off intent |

## Appearance

A Wayward Light is a soft, pale glow the size of a candle flame or a lantern, white with a tinge of green or blue, that hangs at about the height of a carried light. It flickers and sways as a lantern does in a walking hand. No one has seen anything inside it. It keeps its distance: walk towards it and it is always a little farther, stop and it stops. It makes no sound, and its light throws no shadows and gives no warmth.

## Habitat and Range

Most of them drift in the thin fog of the Veil, where travellers can see a little way and are most tempted to follow what they see. On the Material Plane they can appear only where the Veil runs thin: at old shrines, along boundary roads, over moors and fens where the mist lies at night. They are seen there seldom, and mostly by Humans, who travel those roads most.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A light appears ahead of a traveller, usually one alone or at the back of a group, and waits. It seems to know which way the traveller means to go, and stands a little to one side of it. It does not call or lure. It is simply there, a light in the fog where someone with a lantern might be, and the eye follows it.

## Abilities

Following a Wayward Light loosens intent, and in the Veil intent is the only thing that keeps a traveller on course. A traveller who follows one forgets, step by step, where they were going and why, and drifts: to a random Resonant Zone, another Anchor, or nowhere. At a thin place on Caeldon, those who follow one are led off the road into the bog or the moor, and some, it is said, through the thin place into the fog and out of the world.

## Life Cycle

No one knows whether they are born or made. Some lights are said to be seen in the same place for generations.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing and take whoever follows them. Veil travellers' oldest rule is never to follow a light they did not bring. On the boundary roads Humans carry a light of their own, walk in company, and look at the road, not at the dark.

## Lore and Belief

Humans of the old boundary roads believe the corpse-candles are the dead looking for their way and not finding it, or the dead come to fetch the living, and that one seen near a house means a death there within the year. Many say they are lit by Ennor the Grave-Watcher to guide Echoes to the threshold, and that a living man who follows one goes with them. As far as anything is known, the lights are of the Veil and not of the dead. Most lights seen on the moors are lanterns, marsh-gas, or fear (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).

Bandits of the moors are said to hang lanterns to pass for the lights and lure travellers off the road, and some of the corpse-candles of the tales were surely theirs.



# Wind-Walkers

The Wind-Walkers are the people of the Unbound Gale, the realm of air, motion, freedom, and thought. They glide on its currents without feet, live on motion itself, and roam it as explorers and messengers.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Open air, floating islands, and vortices of the realm of wind and motion |
| **Range** | The Unbound Gale |
| **Danger** | Harmless: restless, but not hostile |

## Appearance

A Wind-Walker is very slight, about as tall as a Human, and its skin is like polished glass, clear or faintly tinted pale blue, silver, or white, so that the sky shows through it. Its hair is like flowing silk, long and always streaming in some wind. It has no feet: its legs taper away to nothing, and it glides on the air a hand's breadth above whatever is beneath it. Its eyes are wide and bright and see in all directions. It never stops moving, turning, drifting, darting. It speaks quickly, in a light, whistling voice, and often interrupts. It smells of snow and open sky.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Unbound Gale, among its floating islands, swirling vortices, and mountains of compressed wind, and never settle in one place for long.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are explorers and messengers. For them the universe is open space to be crossed, and speed, agility, and the freedom to go anywhere are what they value. They are restless and energetic, and

they see visitors as heavy or grounded. A Wind-Walker will carry a message, and will usually have told it to three others on the way.

## Abilities

They do not breathe air; they are the air. They draw their strength from motion and kinetic energy, and they live while the wind blows. They glide on the currents faster than any bird.

## Life Cycle

They are said to be born out of a gust, and they live while the wind blows. A Wind-Walker that stops moving fades; those that hang still in mid-air are the Stillness.

## Uses and Dangers

Travellers come to the Gale for inspiration or to escape confinement, and a Wind-Walker is the swiftest guide, if it can be made to stay. Their danger is the plane's: a traveller who tries to stop may become one of the Stillness, frozen in mid-air.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers who come back through high peaks, open plains, and places of great height, the Gale's gates, tell of glass-skinned messengers on the wind. Mountain peoples on Caeldon tell of a voice that passes on the wind with news before anyone could have brought it; some of those voices may be Wind-Walkers. Teachers of Gale Magic hold them up as the art's ideal of freedom.



# The Wordless

The Wordless of the Silence are the last of its Unspoken and the strangest. They have no form at all. They are a presence, and what the presence takes is the will to exist.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | Featureless stone plains of a plane without meaning |
| **Range** | The Silence |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the will |

## Appearance

There is nothing to see. Travellers know a Wordless is near by what it does to them and to the plane: the faded colours seem to fade further, the pressure of the absent sound grows heavier, and a dullness settles that is not tiredness. Some say the air feels thicker, like standing at the bottom of still water. There is no sound, no smell, and no warmth or cold.

## Habitat and Range

They are found across the Silence, more often towards its stillest parts, where the plane borders the Frost-Bound and a body may go on surviving while the mind inside it stops.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Wordless does not move towards anything that anyone can see; it is simply there, and then it is not. Whether it seeks travellers or merely lies where they walk is not known. While one is near, a traveller stops wanting: to go on, to eat, to remember, to be.

## Abilities

It drains the will to exist. A traveller caught in one's presence for long sits down on the stone and does not get up, and the plane does the rest.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing. Its danger is that it cannot be fought or fled by force, only walked out of, by a will that keeps hold of its purpose.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers call the Wordless the weight, or the stillness. Some believe they are the remains of everything the Silence has ever erased, gathered into a dumb heaviness; others that they are the plane itself, waking a little. Neither is known.



# Deepswells

Deepswells are born of the reflection that is the Dissonance, and they are never seen first. They come as dread: a pressure in the chest that swells as they near, the way a sound too low to hear is felt in the body. By the time there is anything to see, it is usually too late to leave.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The low, beating copy of the mortal world |
| **Range** | The Dissonance; off-key places on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Deadly: nearly every meeting ends badly |

## Appearance

Most accounts have no sight in them at all, only the swell. It begins as unease without a cause, then a weight behind the breastbone, then a throb in the teeth and the soles of the feet, slow and even, like a great bell struck far below the ground. Water in a cup trembles in rings; dust walks on a table. Those who say they saw one at the end speak of a darkness that was larger than the room it stood in, or of the room itself seeming to lean inwards and breathe. No two agree, and no smell or warmth goes with it.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the Dissonance, where the beat is slowest and the copy of the world is lowest and darkest, and seem to follow its swell from region to region. On the surface they are met where the Dissonance presses close: in off-key places, and at the rare door that stands open for a moment by chance.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Deepswell does not hunt by sight or scent. It is drawn to whatever sounds most like the world it copies, a lit house, a beating heart, a held breath,

and swells towards it. Whether it means harm or simply cannot come near anything without crushing it is not known. It does not hurry. Survivors say it was the slowness that broke them: the pressure rose for a long time, and nothing in them could make it stop.

## Abilities

Its approach is felt through walls and through earth. Animals feel it first: dogs go under beds, horses refuse a road, birds leave a wood all at once. People already off their own pitch, the grieving, the fevered, the sleepless, feel it sooner and are drawn towards it rather than away. Close by, the swell sets loose stones walking, cracks old mortar, and stops the breath in a sleeper's chest. What it does to those it reaches is not known; they are not found.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing. A hamlet where one has come through is left with the dread and little else: a road animals still will not take, a house no one will sleep in, a low ache that comes back on certain nights. Running helps only if the runner is faster than the swell, and weapons and fire do nothing. What holds it off is the true note held against it: names spoken aloud, a bell rung in tune, a song sung true and steady while the pressure rises. Those who came back say the swell faltered when the singing held, and rose again whenever a voice broke.

## Lore and Belief

In hill country it is called the low thing or the deep breath; some old holds speak of the ground's heartbeat as an omen, and keep a tuned bell by the door for it. Folk belief holds that a Deepswell is the grief of the drowned or the buried, come up to be heard. Others say it is the Dissonance itself, leaning on the world. Neither is known; that Deepswells are born of the reflection is all the few who know more will say.



# Quenchers

Quenchers are born of the reflection that is the Dissonance, and they feed where light, sound, and warmth go out. Where one has been, the true world is left with a dead spot: a lantern that burns and lights nothing, a shout that makes no sound, a hearth that gives no heat. They are known far better by what they leave than by any sight of them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The drained, dimmed copy of the mortal world |
| **Range** | The Dissonance; off-key places on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Deadly: nearly every meeting ends badly |

## Appearance

A Quencher is seen, if at all, as an absence: a place where the light stops short, shaped a little like something that crouches, or a little like a person turned away. Its edges do not hold still. Near it colours drain to grey, voices go thin and flat as if heard through wool, and the cold is not the cold of winter but the cold of a room where nothing has ever been warm. It makes no sound, because sound does not reach it.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the Dissonance, in its darkest and most drained stretches, and gather where the copy of the world is thinnest. On the surface they come through in off-key places, at the rare door that opens by chance, and, folk say, where a place has already begun to go quiet.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Quencher feeds slowly and returns. A byre gets one dark corner, then two; a hamlet's evening songs grow shorter each winter; a count at the year's end turns up fewer voices than names, and

no one can say who is missing. Whether it takes the people, or only their light and voice and warmth until nothing is left to take, is not agreed. It seems to prefer the small and the steady: a lamp kept every night, a hearth never let out, a voice that always sings at the same hour.

## Abilities

Light, sound, and warmth go out in its presence and stay out where it has fed. A torch carried into a dead spot burns on and lights only the hand that holds it. The dead spots last for seasons or years and grow if the Quencher comes back. Those who stand in one too long go quiet themselves: slow to speak, cold to the touch, hard to rouse.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing. Its danger is that it is noticed late: a dead spot looks at first like a draughty corner or a bad wick. Fire does nothing, and more fire only feeds it. What thins it is the true note held against it: names spoken aloud into the dark corner, the count kept right, a hearth tended in the old way, a song sung true where the sound has gone. Folk who have cleared a dead spot say it took many nights of singing to do it, and that it came back where anyone stopped.

## Lore and Belief

Country folk speak of the quiet ones, or the hearth-thieves, and blame a cold corner on one long before they would blame the chimney. A common belief holds that a Quencher is drawn by silence and kept away by noise, so some villages bang pots through the night; noise does nothing, and the few who know more say only a true note does. Others believe a Quencher is a dead person's last breath that never found its song. Nothing of that is known.



# Offnotes

Offnotes are born of the reflection that is the Dissonance, and they are the makers of impossible things. An Offnote is never the same shape twice. It is not a creature that causes a strange event; it is the strange event, with a will behind it: rain falling upwards in one yard, a shadow cast towards the light, a voice from an empty well that knows the listener's name.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Plane native |
| **Habitat** | The shifting, beating maze of the mortal world's copy |
| **Range** | The Dissonance; off-key places on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Deadly: nearly every meeting ends badly |

## Appearance

There is no body to describe, only what it is being at the moment. Witnesses tell of a stair that went on one step longer each time it was climbed, of a pond whose reflection showed the house without its people in it, of a song from the next room in a voice everyone knew and no one could place. What marks an Offnote apart from a mere oddity is that it notices: the upward rain follows the one who steps out of it, the shadow turns its head. Its sounds sit a half-step off, close enough to be mistaken for the right note.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Dissonance and seem to be part of its beat, swelling and thinning with it. On the surface they come through in off-key places and at the rare door that opens by chance, and they tend to stay where the place itself has begun to repeat.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Offnote plays. It takes something of the true world and bends it, then watches what people do. Most of its makings seem meant to draw someone closer: a lost child's voice, a door that should not

be there, a light where a friend is waited for. Whether it is curious, hungry, or cruel cannot be told, and survivors disagree. Those it draws in are rarely seen again, or come back changed in some small, wrong way: a shadow that falls a little late, a voice that does not quite match the mouth.

## Abilities

It makes impossible phenomena out of the ordinary world around it, each new in every meeting. Every making follows one law of its own, as the Dissonance's own physics do, so a careful witness can learn to read it: which way the rain falls, which door leads back. An Offnote that lingers teaches a place its pitch, and a place that keeps it long enough can become an off-key place itself.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing that should be taken. Some have tried to bargain with one for its makings and learned dissonant magic in the trying, at the price of their own note. Force passes through it, and fire becomes part of whatever it is making. What breaks a making is the true note held against it: the thing named aloud for what it truly is, a bell rung in tune, the right count kept against a stair that will not end. Those who came back say the trick is not to look away but to keep saying what is real.

## Lore and Belief

Folk call Offnotes the wrongnesses, the tricks, or the neighbour's song, and every district has a tale of one that is told as a ghost story. Many such tales are only ghost stories; the danger is that the few true ones are told the same way. Some scholars write that each Offnote is a single tone of the Dissonance sounding through the world, which would explain why none is ever seen twice; others that there is only one, and every meeting is the same Offnote. Neither is known.

PART IV

# Natives of the Zones

*Here stand the beings that live in the Resonant Zones, the places where another plane presses into the world, or that the zones have made. Some keep their zone: the Hemophages call the Blood River a god and themselves its priests, and the Door-Keepers of the Flux Maze let a traveller through for a toll or a riddle.*

*Others are what the zone does to life: the Muse's Studio gives a body to whatever is imagined with enough force, and not all of it works for its maker. The neighbours of a zone usually know where its dangers lie, and what they cost, better than they know why.*





# Air Eels

Air Eels are the air-breathing fish of the Drowning Garden. The Garden turns breathing around, so that air-breathers breathe its water; the eels breathe air, and live in it, swimming above the surface of the sunken forest as other eels swim below. They hunt by dropping into the water to strike and rising again.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Air above the sunken forest |
| **Range** | The Drowning Garden |
| **Danger** | Wary: they bite whatever surfaces |

## Appearance

An Air Eel is as long as a man is tall and as thick as a wrist, its body silver-green above and pale gold beneath, its skin slick and shining. Its fins run in a frill along its back and belly and ripple as it swims through the air. Its head is narrow, its eyes large and gold, its jaw long and lined with fine, back-curved teeth. It swims a body's length above the water in slow, rippling curves and strikes in a sudden, straight dive. The splash of a strike and the snap of its jaws are the only sounds it makes. It smells of salt and the green of the kelp.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the air above the Garden's water, wherever the kelp and the coral trees reach close to the surface, singly or in loose groups, and never go deep, since the water does not let them breathe.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Air Eel hunts from above. It watches the surface for the fish that rise to feed among the floating plants, and drops on them, holding its breath for the moment of the strike before rising again with its catch. It bites at anything that breaks the

surface. Visitors who panic in the water and struggle up into the air, as many do, meet the eels there.

## Abilities

The Garden's reduced weight lets an Air Eel swim in air as a fish swims in water, and its own inversion lets it breathe that air, which for the Garden's other life is the wrong element. It can hold its breath underwater for only a short dive.

## Life Cycle

They lay their eggs in the floating mats of weed at the surface, where the young hatch half in and half out of the water and soon rise into the air. Like everything in the Garden, they grow and age fast.

## Uses and Dangers

The Gill-Folk spear them from below as they strike and eat them, and use their skins for cords. To visitors they are a reason to trust the water: those who surface in panic are bitten, and some of the Air-Drowned, floating at the surface, bear their marks.

## Lore and Belief

Herbalists who come home from the Garden tell of eels that fly, and are not believed. People who live near Depth-Gates say an eel seen swimming in the mist over a lake at dawn is a sign that the Garden is near the surface there; ordinary eels do cross wet grass at night, and that may be what is seen.

Herb-gatherers who surface too fast in the Garden come up into a writhing cloud of them, and the lakeshores boast of the diver who climbed out with three eels hanging from her arms and the herb still in her teeth.



# Air-Goats

Air-Goats are the grazing beasts of the Sky Isles. On the Isles a thing falls because it believes it should, and the Air-Goats have never believed it. They step off an island's edge and walk across the open air to the next, as surely as a mountain goat takes a ledge.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Isle edges, cliff faces, and the open air between islands |
| **Range** | The Sky Isles |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An Air-Goat stands no higher than a large dog. Its coat is long, fine, and cloud-white, lifting and streaming in every wind, with a grey saddle along the back and dark, almost black legs. Both sexes carry short horns that curl back once. The hooves are small and pale and leave no mark in the air, though watchers swear they see the air dimple for a moment under each step. The eyes are wide and amber, with the bar-shaped pupil of all goats. Herds keep up a thin, bleating chatter and smell of wet wool and the high-altitude flowers they eat.

## Habitat and Range

They graze the wind-swept grass of the island tops and browse the stunted trees whose roots hang into the void. Herds of a dozen to forty move from island to island as the grass gives out, and are thickest wherever several isles drift close together.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are calm, curious, and impossible to hurry. A herd crosses the air in single file behind an old nanny, never looking down. They show no fear of

people; they nose at packs and eat whatever cloth is left loose. When an island drifts away from its neighbours, the herd simply walks after it.

## Abilities

The Air-Goat does on purpose what travellers on the Isles must learn with effort: it holds its weight by intention. It does not fly and cannot climb above the level it starts from without footing; it walks out level, or down a long slope of air, and then up the next cliff. A goat that is startled badly enough in mid-crossing may doubt, and then it falls like any other beast.

## Life Cycle

Kids are dropped on the island tops in spring and cross the air at their mother's flank within days. Those that hesitate at the edge are left behind and do not live. An Air-Goat lives about as long as a goat of the Material Plane.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless, and they are the best guides on the Isles: a traveller who follows a herd follows a line the herd knows will hold. Their wool, gathered from thorn and bark, is light and warm. The danger is to the follower. A traveller who walks out behind the goats on the strength of their certainty rather than their own has nothing to stand on when the goats are gone.

## Lore and Belief

Visitors bring home the saying that "an Air-Goat has never heard of falling", and some carry a hank of its wool as a charm against doubt. Whether the wool helps is not known; those who swear by it are the ones who came back. The Sky-Walkers are said to count the herds as good omens for an island's drift.



# Anvil Snails

Anvil Snails live on the hot ledges of the Forge Deep, and their shells are metal. Each snail lays its shell down a hair at a time, out of the metal it licks from the rock, over the long slow time of the zone, and the oldest shells are as fine as anything the Smiths of the Deep forge.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Slow-fire ledges |
| **Range** | The Forge Deep |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An Anvil Snail is about the size of a fist, its body a dull, glowing orange-red like metal at forging heat, soft and slow. Its shell is a tight spiral of grey, bronze, and silver bands, smooth and burnished, ringing faintly when touched with a nail. An old shell is so heavy a person needs both hands to lift it. The snail moves at the pace of cooling metal, and a watcher sees it move only by coming back to it. It makes no sound but a faint hiss where its foot meets the hot stone. It smells of hot metal and sulphur.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the obsidian ledges along the magma rivers and in the warm hollows of the Smiths' great forges, in scattered numbers, on rock that stays hot and does not flare.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Anvil Snail grazes metal. It creeps over the ledges licking the films of ore and molten metal that settle on them, and draws heat from the rock as it goes. It lays what it eats into its shell, band by

band. It is untroubled by people, the heat, or anything else, and if lifted simply waits until it is put down.

## Abilities

Its shell is forged, by the snail and by the zone's slow time, so slowly and evenly that the metal is perfect: an alloy of whatever the snail has grazed, fused flawlessly band to band. Old shells do not rust, dull, or crack.

## Life Cycle

They lay eggs in cracks of the hot rock that take, the Smiths say, longer to hatch than a mortal life. A snail grows its whole life long, and in the zone's slow time that life is very long. When one dies its body burns away and leaves only the shell.

## Uses and Dangers

The Smiths gather empty shells and some say they work them into their finest pieces, prizing the metal laid down by a creature with nothing to hurry for. They do not take living snails. Travellers who bring a shell home through a Magma-Gate find smiths on the Material Plane will pay well for it. A ledge thick with snails is a sign that the heat there is steady, and the Coolers are said to watch where the snails move.

## Lore and Belief

The Smiths are said to teach that an apprentice should watch an Anvil Snail until they see it move, and that one who manages it is ready to begin; travellers report this as a joke that is not a joke. On the Material Plane, smiths' tales speak of a snail whose shell no hammer can dent, and a few forges keep a snail shell above the hearth for luck; most are ordinary snail shells, bronzed.



# Architects

The Architects are the masters of the Flux Maze: rare and powerful beings who have learned to bend its geometry to their will, opening shortcuts for some and building traps for others. Two sorts are named, the Path-Weavers, who open and close corridors, and the Door-Keepers, who guard its exits.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The unstable inner reaches of a Flux Maze |
| **Range** | The Flux Maze, in its deeper reaches |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to those they choose to trap |

## Appearance

No two Architects look alike, and travellers who have met one describe it more by its effect than its shape: a tall figure of dust and shadow at the end of a corridor that was not there a moment ago, a voice from the stone, hands seen pressing a wall into a new angle. Most accounts agree on a stillness about them in a place where nothing else is still, and on the smell of crushed rock and hot metal when the Maze moves at their bidding. The grinding of the stone falls quiet around them, as if the Maze were listening.

## Habitat and Range

They keep to the deeper, more unstable parts of the Maze, near its heart, where the corridors shift fastest. They are rare; a Maze may hold one or none.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Architect's purposes are its own. Some help, opening a way for travellers who please them; some amuse themselves with traps; many do both by turns. They treat the Maze as a craft they have mastered, and visitors as material to try it on.

Where the Stone-Walkers test a traveller's fitness, an Architect is more likely to set a puzzle for its own satisfaction.

## Abilities

They bend the Maze: moving walls, turning floors into stairs, opening doors in solid rock, and closing them behind. What the Maze does by itself, anticipating a traveller and blocking the logical way, an Architect does on purpose.

## Life Cycle

Whether Architects are born to the Maze or are beings who came to it and learned its law is not known. The canny believe both: that some were Stone-Walkers, and some were visitors who stayed long enough to stop being lost.

## Uses and Dangers

A traveller an Architect favours can be out of the Maze within the hour. One it does not can wander for years. Treasure-seekers after the hidden chambers, and the Stone-Heart said to lie at the Maze's centre, deal with Architects if they can find one.

## Lore and Belief

Masons tell of Architects as the first of their trade, who learned their craft in the Maze and carried a little of its secret out; the tale flatters builders more than it informs them.

Treasure-seekers fear them above anything in the Maze: their worst tale is of a delver band that an Architect walled into a treasure room, gold to the ceiling, with no door, and of the knocking heard in that part of the Maze for a year after.



# Blood-Eels

Blood-Eels are the serpentine hunters of the Blood River, the best known of its River-Beasts. They hunt for lifeforce rather than flesh, and they are why no one who knows the river kneels at its edge to drink.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The flow of a Blood River |
| **Range** | The Blood River, wherever it wakes |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone who wades or drinks |

## Appearance

A grown Blood-Eel is as long as a man is tall, and the oldest twice that, thick as a forearm and tapering to a flat, finned tail. Its skin is smooth, slick, and the dark red of the river, so that it is invisible in the flow until it moves. Along its flanks run paler lines that glow faintly, like the river's own inner light, brightening as it feeds. Its head is blunt, with small milky eyes and a round mouth ringed with fine hooked teeth that grip rather than tear.

It swims with a slow S-shaped ripple, then strikes in a straight line. Out of the water it smells of copper and rot; in it, it cannot be smelled over the river.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the deeper channels of the flow and lie in wait under the banks where travellers come down to the water. A short river may hold a handful; a long one, many.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Blood-Eel feels for warmth and heartbeat through the water, the way the river feels for the strongest heart near it. It strikes at a hand, a calf, or a muzzle, fastens on with its ring of teeth, and does not tear but holds and drinks, drawing life-force through the wound until the prey goes slack. Then it drags what it has emptied into the flow, where the river breaks it down.

They are not cunning, but they are patient, and they gather where the river surges after a death.

## Abilities

It draws lifeforce through its bite, faster than a leech draws blood, and grows stronger and brighter as it does. Its wounds close quickly while it stays in the river. It can lie still for days without feeding.

## Life Cycle

Blood-Eels spawn in knots in the warm shallows, and the young are thin red threads that feed on the river's smaller life. They grow quickly in a well-fed river. When a river sinks back they crowd its last pools and feed on each other.

## Uses and Dangers

The skin of a Blood-Eel makes a supple, water-proof leather that keeps a faint warmth, and some healers keep dried eel-teeth for drawing poison from a wound, with mixed success. They are dangerous to anyone who wades, fords, fills a bottle, or kneels to drink, and their bite leaves the victim cold and weak for days even if they break free.

## Lore and Belief

River-valley folk say a Blood-Eel will not bite someone who has never drunk from the river, which is untrue. Others call them the river's veins, believing the eels carry what the river takes to its heart, and the Hemophages encourage the belief.

Beast-hunters paid by the valley to clear a ford wade in with iron greaves and eel-spears, and the hunter who killed the great eel of the lower ford and lived on the river's healing water for a month afterwards is a hero of the valley songs, and a warning.



# Blood-Spinners

Blood-Spinners are spiders of the Blood River, among its River-Beasts, that weave their webs of blood drawn from the river. The webs stretch between the swollen plants of the banks and catch anything that walks into them. They share a name with the Cast-Out Flesh Weaver and have nothing to do with it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The overgrown banks of a Blood River |
| **Range** | The Blood River, wherever it wakes |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to travellers caught in their webs |

## Appearance

A Blood-Spinner's body is the size of a cat, its legspan as wide as a cartwheel. It is the colour of dried blood, darkening to near black at the joints, and its abdomen is swollen and faintly translucent, showing the red it carries inside. Its eight eyes are small and glossy. It moves in jerks, stopping dead between them, and makes no sound but a faint wet tick of its legs on the web.

The webs are what people see first: sticky crimson threads, thick as twine, glistening between stalks and branches, warm to the touch and smelling of copper. Fresh web pulses faintly in time with the river.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the oversized growth along the banks, where the plants are tall enough to hang a web between, and seldom go far from the water they draw on. A bank can hold several, each with its own web.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Blood-Spinner drinks from the river and spins what it drinks. Its thread stays liquid inside and sets sticky outside, and it clings like the river's water clings to skin. It waits at the edge of its web, rushes on whatever is caught, binds it, and bites, and the prey's blood is added to the web as the spider feeds. It does not chase prey beyond its web.

## Abilities

Its blood-thread is stronger than it looks and very hard to scrape off; it softens in fire or clean water. A web that is broken knits itself again when the spider walks it. The spider's bite numbs.

## Life Cycle

Females lay egg-sacs in the heart of the web, wrapped in fresh thread, and the young hatch hungry and spread along the bank. A Blood-Spinner lives as long as its river runs; when the river fails, the webs dry to brittle brown lace and the spiders with them.

## Uses and Dangers

Dried web is sometimes gathered as a dark red dye, and some herbalists claim it stanches bleeding when laid on a wound. A traveller who walks into a web in the dim red light of the banks is stuck fast, and the spider and the river's other hunters come quickly.

## Lore and Belief

Valley folk say a Blood-Spinner's web over a path means the river is waking, and some believe the spiders serve the Flesh Weaver, the Cast-Out who stitches bodies, or that the Cast-Out takes the form of a great spider. Neither is so: the spiders are beasts of the river, changed like its other beasts by what they drink.

Travellers cut free of a web tell of the bodies hanging further in, drained and wrapped, and the valley's bounty on the spiders is paid by the leg.



# Chain-Binders

The Chain-Binders are among the Turnkeys of the Soul Anchor, serving under its Gaoler. They reinforce the tethers of the Anchored, the trapped Echoes pinned within a few paces of where they died, so that no Echo pulls free.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The ground of a Soul Anchor |
| **Range** | The Soul Anchor |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone who tries to loosen a tether |

## Appearance

A Chain-Binder is a low, broad, crouching thing the size of a large dog, grey as old lead, with many short jointed limbs ending in hooks and clamps, so that it looks half beast and half smithy tool. It has no clear head, only a ridge of small dark pits along its back. It moves over the iron-hard ground with a clicking scuttle, from tether to tether, and where it works, a faint chain of light shows for a moment between an Anchored and the ground. It makes the sound of links being drawn tight.

## Habitat and Range

They move over the whole Anchor, among the broken headstones, and gather where Echoes strain hardest. An Anchor holds a number of them, more the more Echoes it holds.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are tireless, single-minded, and unconcerned with the living unless the living interfere. A traveller who tries to free an Echo, or simply pulls against one that has grabbed them, draws them. They mend the tether and turn on whoever loosened it.

## Abilities

They can see and handle the invisible tethers of the Anchored, tighten, mend, and shorten them, and fasten a newly dead Echo to the ground where it fell.

## Life Cycle

Whether they are constructs or remnant beings is not settled, and the scholars who think them made disagree about who made them. They do not age.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. To those who come to free a loved one’s Echo, they are the first obstacle.

## Lore and Belief

Gravediggers say the clinking sometimes heard in old burial grounds at night is a Chain-Binder at work, and nail iron to coffin lids to keep it off. The sound is usually something else.



# Changers

The Changers are beings the Probability Fog has transformed for good. Everyone in the Fog may be changed for a moment, a foot into a bird or a hand into water; the Changers were changed and did not change back. They now belong to the Fog's ecosystem. Two kinds are named, the Shape-Shifters and the Probability-Beasts.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The rolling mist of a Probability Fog |
| **Range** | The Probability Fog |
| **Danger** | Wary to Dangerous, by what each has become |

## Appearance

A Changer looks like whatever the Fog made of it, and often still a little like what it was. A fox with a heron's legs; a traveller with stone for one arm; a hare of moss and water; a goat that is, on one side, a hedge. Its parts do not always agree on a colour. Most are quiet and watchful, as if waiting for the next change.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Fog. When an ephemeral Fog lifts, where its Changers go is not recorded, though some are said to be found on the moor afterwards, stranded in their last shape.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Changers behave as their new shape inclines them, with something of the old. Those who were people keep some memory and some speech, and are often lost and sorrowful, or else have embraced what they are. Those who were beasts are beasts still, stranger ones.

## Abilities

What each can do depends on its shape. Many keep a little of the Fog's chaos in them, so that luck turns oddly near them.

## Life Cycle

A Changer begins as a visitor, beast or person, caught in a transformation that does not end. From then on it lives as its shape allows.

## Uses and Dangers

Searchers come to the Fog for lost companions and sometimes find them as Changers. Some Changers are harmless; some, like the Probability-Beasts, are among the Fog's worst dangers.

## Lore and Belief

Tales of a husband turned into a moorland beast and a wife who waits on the edge of the fog for him are told in many places, and some are true. Gamblers believe that a Changer's touch brings luck; it brings the Fog's luck, which balances its scales.

Bounty-takers say an outlaw who fled into the Fog may come out as anything, and tell of the one who brought back a hare in a sack and swore it was the man with the price on his head; the lord paid half.



# Chime-Bats

Chime-Bats are the bats of the Crystal Spire. They fly its galleries by their cries, as bats do anywhere, but in the Spire a cry does not fade: it is caught in the crystal and kept. Their roosts are walls full of stored cries, and those cries are mined, carefully, as sound.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Crystal galleries |
| **Range** | The Crystal Spire |
| **Danger** | Wary: their stored cries shatter |

## Appearance

A Chime-Bat is a small bat, its body the size of a mouse, its fur a soft dark grey shot with amethyst where the light catches it. Its wings are so thin they are nearly clear, and when it beats them they ring faintly, like a fingertip on the rim of a glass. Its ears are tall and its face pinched. It flies in quick, swerving darts, and its cries are too high for most ears, felt as a prickle rather than heard. The crystals it passes flash white with each cry. Its roosts smell of crushed gemstones and droppings.

## Habitat and Range

They roost in the Spire's crystal galleries in colonies of hundreds, hanging from the faceted ceilings, and hunt through the galleries and around the peak.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt the small moths and flies of the Spire's galleries by their cries, and in the Spire the cries come back to them from every crystal, layered on the cries of their ancestors. They are shy of people and flee loud voices, which in the Spire carry like

thunder. They are silent only in their sleep, and the colony's stored cries go on humming in the walls while they sleep.

## Abilities

Their cries are stored. A Chime-Bat gallery holds generations of them, and a crystal that has held bat cries a long time is charged with a high, fierce note. The colony keeps its galleries full of sound, and in the Spire, where a crystal emptied of sound shatters, the bats help hold the structure together.

## Life Cycle

They bear one pup a year, which clings to its mother and learns to cry in the galleries of its birth. They live long for bats. When a colony dies out or moves, its gallery hums with its cries for centuries after.

## Uses and Dangers

The Crystal Singers protect the colonies, valuing the bats as keepers of the Spire's sound. Miners who come for captured sounds take small crystals from old bat galleries, called chime shards, which are used for signals and alarms: struck gently, a shard gives a piercing note heard a long way off. Struck hard, it shrieks and shatters, and the shards fly. A careless miner can set off a whole wall.

## Lore and Belief

Miners say a chime shard taken from a gallery where the colony still roosts will call the bats to it wherever it goes, and some sell them as charms against vermin. Travellers believe the bats can hear thoughts, since in the Spire to think is to sing; nothing shows that they can. The Singers are said to keep one gallery whose cries no one is allowed to hear.



# Cinder-Moths

Cinder-Moths are the smallest hunters of the Cinder Fields, kin to the Cold-Salamanders. One is harmless; a swarm can strip the warmth from a traveller as surely as the fire.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The air above the cinder of a Cinder Field |
| **Range** | The Cinder Fields, wherever they burn |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, in a swarm |

## Appearance

A Cinder-Moth is the size of a thumb, with soft grey wings that look dusted with ash and are rimmed with frost. A faint blue glow shows in its body, like a spark of the cold fire. It flies with the soft flutter of any moth, but its wings tick faintly as the frost on them cracks. A swarm rises from the cinder like a grey breath of snow, and the air in it turns bitter.

## Habitat and Range

They rest on the cinder in their thousands, nearly invisible against it, and rise when warmth passes. They are found in every field of any size.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Cinder-Moths are drawn to body heat as other moths are drawn to light. A swarm settles on a warm body, thickest on the face, hands, and neck, and each moth drinks a little warmth. The traveller's skin frosts over under them, and a swarm

that is not shaken off can leave its victim numb, slow, and at last frozen. Torches and fires draw swarms from far off.

## Abilities

Each moth drains a little heat where it settles. Together they cool a body faster than the open air of the Fields would.

## Life Cycle

They lay their eggs in the cinder near the blue fires, and the grubs, small pale curls, feed on the warmth in the cinder before they take wing. They live a season and fall back into the cinder as grey dust.

## Uses and Dangers

Harvesters wrap their faces and hands and move steadily, because a still traveller gathers a swarm. Some alchemists gather the dust of dead moths for cooling powders.

## Lore and Belief

People who live near the Fields say a single Cinder-Moth that drifts out of the zone and lands on a sleeper foretells a hard winter. Moths do drift out, and they die in the ordinary warmth within a night.

Harvesters of cold-fire tell of a swarm that rose over a camp at dusk and settled on the sleepers, and of the one man who woke under a rime of frost with his companions grey and still beside him.



# Clearwater Shrimp

Clearwater Shrimp live in the unnaturally pure water of the Truthwell, the only living thing besides its keepers that the Well tolerates. They are the first to answer a lie. Before the water boils, freezes, or rises, the shrimp cloud it, and a speaker who watches them has a heartbeat's warning.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The well water, along the stone of the shaft |
| **Range** | The Truthwell |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

Each is the length of a fingernail and so clear that it shows only as a faint outline and a pair of black pinhead eyes. A thread of silver runs down its back, catching the light that comes up from the water. They hang in loose drifts along the stone of the shaft, a few hands below the rim, and from above the drifts look like dust motes in a sunbeam. They make no sound and have no smell.

## Habitat and Range

They are found nowhere but in the Truthwell's shaft, clinging close to the inscribed stone and thinning out with depth. How far down they go no one knows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They graze an invisible film on the stone and drift with the water's slow turning. At a truth they do nothing. At a lie spoken aloud by the Well, every shrimp within reach of the voice sheds a puff of milky fluid at once and darts for the stone, and the water goes white as whey for a breath before the

Well's own answer comes. Silence before a question, which the Well takes as a lie, clouds them as well.

## Abilities

Their only gift is that they feel what the Well feels, and a little sooner. The cloud is theirs, not the Well's: it fades in moments and leaves the water clear again. They do not judge and cannot be deceived by a careful lie, because the Well cannot.

## Life Cycle

Females carry clusters of eggs like grains of salt under the tail; the young are clearer still. They seem short-lived, and the drifts renew themselves season by season. Dead shrimp vanish into the water, and nothing of them is ever found.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless and cannot be kept: taken out of the Well, they cloud once and die. Those who come to the Well to settle a dispute often have a kinsman watch the shrimp rather than the speaker, since the white cloud is easier to see than a change in the water's colour. The Water-Robed are said to be able to read a speaker's lie from the size of the cloud.

## Lore and Belief

Some visitors believe the shrimp are the drowned liars of the Well, and that each cloud is one of them, remembering. That is not so; the Choked hang in the water as Echoes, and the shrimp are living things. Others say a shrimp that clouds at a promise means the promise will be broken.



# Clockrats

In the Stopped Clock nothing moves but the traveller, and the Clockrats. They were not caught in the moment. They came in afterwards, through the same membrane travellers cross, and found a town whose food never rots and whose people never sweep. A Clock that has stood long enough has a colony.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Cellars, larders, bakeries, and market stalls of the stopped town |
| **Range** | The Stopped Clock |
| **Danger** | Wary: they bite |

## Appearance

They are brown rats, larger and sleeker than a cellar rat, with glossy coats, long bald tails, and teeth gone orange from gnawing. Against the Clock's washed-out stillness they look shockingly alive, as travellers do. Their scurrying is the loudest sound in the zone: claws on flagstones, the scrape of a crust being dragged. They smell of rat and, faintly, of fresh bread.

## Habitat and Range

They live where the moment left food: bakeries mid-bake, larders, market stalls, a family's table set for a meal that never ended. They nest in the gaps behind walls and under floors. Not every Clock has them; the youngest have none, and a Clock in an empty place has nothing to feed them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are bold and quick, and they have learned that frozen people cannot strike back. They run over a baker's arm and a sleeping child's blanket alike, and they eat from hands that cannot close. A

traveller is the only thing in the Clock that can hurt them, and they treat travellers as rivals: they bite when cornered and come at a dropped pack in numbers.

## Abilities

They are not changed by the stillness. Inside it, though, they need little: the bread they eat is fixed at the instant of the moment and does not stale, and what they gnaw away stays gnawed, as anything a traveller moves stays moved. Each crust they carry off is a change in the snapshot.

## Life Cycle

They breed as rats do, but more slowly, and live longer than rats outside. When a Clock collapses and time resumes, its rats are simply rats in a town that has woken, and are hunted with the rest.

## Uses and Dangers

Their bite is a rat's bite and can fester. The greater harm is what they leave behind: every loaf they hollow and every larder they empty is waiting to be found when time resumes, and the Frozen watch it happen. Travellers who come to bargain with the Clock-Keeper sometimes find that the Keeper's grief now includes the rats.

## Lore and Belief

Visitors argue whether the rats suffer the Clock's silence or are glad of it. Some say the frozen hear every scratch, and that the rats are the cruellest thing in the zone because they are the only ones that do not care. The tale that a Clockrat carried out of the zone ages a lifetime in a night is told often and has not been tested.



# Cold-Salamanders

Cold-Salamanders are the predators of the Cinder Fields, creatures made of blue flame and frost that feed on the warmth of living things. Travellers who come to the Fields for cold fire meet them more often than anything else there. Their larger and smaller kin, the Frost-Wyrms and the Cinder-Moths, hunt the same way.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The cinder and blue fire of a Cinder Field |
| **Range** | The Cinder Fields, wherever they burn |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone warm who lingers |

## Appearance

A Cold-Salamander is long and low, from forearm length to the length of a man, with a lizard's flat head and four short splayed legs it hardly uses. Its body is half flame and half rime: a core of translucent blue fire inside a skin of frost that flakes and re-forms as it moves. It casts a cold, spectral light on the cinder around it and leaves a trail of frost-glazed grey behind.

It slithers more than walks, in quick bursts, and freezes motionless between them. It makes the zone's sound, a faint crackling hiss like ice cracking on a lake. It smells of ozone and burnt metal, and the air around it is bitterly cold.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the cinder flats and among the frozen silhouettes of what the fire has taken, burrowing in the cinder to lie still. They are common wherever the blue fire burns, and gather fastest around a source of heat.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Cold-Salamander hunts heat as other hunters follow scent. It turns towards a warm body from far off and comes on in bursts, faster the warmer its prey. It does not bite to kill; it wraps itself around a limb or lies against the body and drinks the warmth until the prey numbs, slows, and freezes. A campfire draws them like a beacon, which is why the first rule of the Fields is to light no fire.

They have no more mind than a lizard. They do not hunt the Frost-Burned, who give off no warmth.

## Abilities

It draws heat from whatever it touches and from the air close around it, leaving frost and frostbite behind. It cannot be burned in the ordinary sense, and ordinary fire set against it feeds it.

## Life Cycle

Nothing about their birth is known for certain. Harvesters report small ones near the heart of the largest blue fires and believe they are kindled there. A Cold-Salamander that is starved of warmth dims and goes out, leaving a glassy rime in the shape of its body.

## Uses and Dangers

A dead Cold-Salamander's rime is sometimes gathered by alchemists with the cold fire, and it is said to keep things cold longer. They are dangerous to anyone who lingers, sleeps, or warms themselves in the Fields, and they find the wounded first.

## Lore and Belief

Harvesters believe a Cold-Salamander can smell fear, because the frightened are the first it finds; what it finds is the warmth of a body that has stopped moving. Ignis-aligned folk tell children that a Cold-Salamander is what becomes of a hearth that was never shared.

Salamander hides are worth a fortune to armourers who want a cloak that will not burn, and the hunters who take them go in pairs, one to kill and one to keep the other moving.



# Coolers

The Coolers keep the Forge Deep from destroying itself. Heat does not leave anything in the Deep once it is there, and it builds; the Coolers release it at the right pace, so that it does not burst out all at once in an eruption that would end the zone and everything in it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The vents, cracks, and magma rivers of a Forge Deep |
| **Range** | The Forge Deep |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; disturbing them risks the eruption they prevent |

## Appearance

A Cooler looks like a drift of dark smoke shot with dull red, the size of a large dog, that moves along the magma rivers and the cracks of the cavern floor. Where it passes, the glow of the stone dims a shade and a thin steam rises. In the Deep's slowed time it seems to drift very slowly, and it makes a long, soft exhalation, like a bellows drawn back, that goes on for minutes. The air near one is a little less heavy, and smells of wet ash.

## Habitat and Range

They move along the vents, cracks, and magma rivers, gathering where heat builds most. A Deep holds a number of them, never many, and they are found nowhere else.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Coolers show no interest in visitors and no mind that anyone has been able to reach. They go to where the heat is building and draw it off slowly, through vents and cracks, so that the Deep never

boils over. They work with the Smiths without speaking to them, and the Smiths move their forges aside for them.

## Abilities

They draw heat from stone, magma, and air and let it out by slow paths. What they cannot do is hurry: a Cooler forced to take too much at once seems to break apart.

## Uses and Dangers

The Deep's existence depends on them, and with it every alloy and artefact made there. Anyone who traps, drives off, or kills a Cooler risks the eruption they hold back.

## Lore and Belief

Smiths of the world above call the Coolers the Deep's breath, and say a forge that goes too hot needs one. Some of the Smiths of the Deep say the Coolers were made by the first of their kind; others say the Coolers made the Deep habitable before any Smith came.



# Crystal Singers

The Crystal Singers are the natives of the Crystal Spire, where sound does not fade but sets into crystal and stays. They call themselves **Keepers of the Song** and hold the spire to be a sacred archive. Their life's work is to curate it: to keep the sounds that matter, and to silence the dangerous ones before they can be released.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The singing crystal of a Crystal Spire |
| **Range** | The Crystal Spire, on high peaks, in deep caverns, and at sites of ancient stress in the rock |
| **Danger** | Wary, to the loud and to those who would silence a crystal |

## Appearance

A Crystal Singer has the shape of a slender person a head taller than most, but its skin is polished crystal, translucent and cut in facets like a gem, so that light runs over it and breaks into small rainbows when it moves. Most are amethyst or pale quartz in colour, some deep sapphire. Their eyes are deep and reflective and shift colour with mood, amber when calm, white when alarmed.

They have no voices. Their throats hold resonant chambers instead, and they speak by vibrating, a sound like a struck glass or a held chord, and several Singers together make harmonies that the spire takes up and keeps. They move with a rhythmic grace, as though to a beat no one else hears. Near them the air smells of crushed gemstone and struck bell.

## Habitat and Range

They live within the spire, along its faceted galleries and among the singing stalagmites, closest to the crystals they tend. A spire holds a small community of them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are deliberate and precise in everything. They find outsiders noisy and disruptive, every footstep a chord and every careless word a sound that will be kept for centuries, but they also find them interesting as sources of new songs. A visitor who moves quietly may be listened to with great attention.

They believe that to be silent is to cease to exist, and they mean it of themselves and of the spire: a crystal emptied of sound shatters. So their curating is careful and slow. A dangerous sound is not destroyed but led deeper, to the Lattice Guardians, who keep it from ever being let out.

## Abilities

They draw sustenance from the ambient sound of the spire and are untouched by the shattering that loud noise brings on others. They can hear what a crystal holds by touching it, sing a sound into a crystal or draw it out, and quiet a crystal's sound without breaking it, which no visitor can.

## Life Cycle

No one outside knows how Crystal Singers are born. They seem very long-lived. When one dies, it is said, its body joins the lattice with its last chord inside it.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the teachers visitors come to the spire to learn from, and they can say which crystals hold what: lullabies, battle cries, old languages, the last moments of the dying. They trade such crystals sparingly. Their danger is to those who shout, carry glass, or try to silence a crystal, whom they will drive out with sound.

## Lore and Belief

Scholars who have heard a Singer's chord claim it holds words in an ancient tongue; others say it holds no words at all and only feeling. Mountain folk near a spire say the Singers remember every voice ever heard there, and some go up to hear a dead parent again.



# Door-Keepers

Door-Keepers are among the Architects of the Flux Maze. Each guards a particular exit and lets travellers through for a toll or a riddle. They are the one fixed thing in the Maze: wherever the corridors go, a Door-Keeper's door is where it was.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The exits of a Flux Maze |
| **Range** | The Flux Maze |
| **Danger** | Wary, to those who will not pay |

## Appearance

A Door-Keeper is part of its door. It may be a face worked into the stone of a lintel, its eyes lit with magma-glow; a squat figure that sits in the doorway like a lump of the wall and rises when spoken to; or a pair of stone hands that close across the opening. Its voice is deep and grinding, slow, and carries far down the corridor. The door behind it is always plain and always open.

## Habitat and Range

Each keeps one exit and does not leave it. A Maze has few of them, and many travellers never find one.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are patient, formal, and exact. A Door-Keeper names its price, a toll or a riddle, and holds to it. Their prices are strange: a memory, a name told aloud, the last coin in a purse, a song. Riddles are hard, and a wrong answer is answered

with silence until the traveller tries again or goes away. They do not bargain and are not cruel; they simply do not move.

## Abilities

A Door-Keeper holds its exit against the Maze's shifting and against force. It can also close the door completely.

## Life Cycle

Some believe each Door-Keeper was once a traveller who reached the door and stayed to keep it. Nothing confirms this.

## Uses and Dangers

To a traveller who can pay, a Door-Keeper is the surest way out of the Maze. To one who cannot, it is the cruellest: the exit is in plain sight and will not open.

## Lore and Belief

Riddles said to come from Door-Keepers are told in taverns, and the answers argued over. People who have paid a Door-Keeper a memory sometimes say they cannot remember what they gave.

A tale goes round of the thief who paid a Door-Keeper with a memory he had stolen from another man, and of the trouble that followed both of them out.



# Echo-Divers

On the stony shore of the Tidal Mirror, the pool that reflects not the present but another time, live the Echo-Divers. They have spent so long in its water that they live partly in the past and partly in the present. They call themselves keepers of the surface, and they warn everyone who comes not to look too long.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The shore and water of a Tidal Mirror |
| **Range** | The Tidal Mirror, in still lakes at dawn, deep pools beneath waterfalls, and coastal lagoons |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

An Echo-Diver is of ordinary height and slight, with skin pale and translucent as wet paper, so that the shapes of bones and veins show faintly through it, and at the edges it seems to blur into another time. Its eyes are wholly black, like the depth of the pool. Its hair hangs always damp. Its clothes are often a mix of ages, an old cloak over newer cloth, as if gathered from different years.

It moves quietly and carefully, and sometimes a hand or shoulder passes through a stone or a branch without touching it. Its voice is soft and comes a moment late, like the sound of the water. It smells of cold lake water and old stone.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the stony shore that rings the pool, and in its water. A Mirror holds a handful, and they come and go with the transient zone.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Echo-Divers are cautious and quiet. They value the present moment and hold the now to be sacred, perhaps because they have so little of it. They think of visitors as lost in the flow, and they speak in riddles about time. They are not hostile. They try to keep visitors from the water and from looking too long, and they warn them of the Surface-Walkers, who lure people onto the water to fall through.

## Abilities

They exist half in the past, and can pass through solid objects as though those were not quite there in their time. They can go into the pool's reflected time and come back, which visitors cannot safely do. They are vulnerable to being thrown out of time, and some do not come back from a dive.

## Life Cycle

Echo-Divers are said to have been visitors who spent too long in the water; whether any are born so is not known. They age, it is thought, partly at the pool's rate and partly at the world's.

## Uses and Dangers

People who come to retrieve a lost heirloom or letter from the reflected time, or to see someone lost one more time, are often helped by an Echo-Diver who dives for them. They are harmless, and their warnings save lives.

## Lore and Belief

Lakeshore folk believe the Echo-Divers are the drowned, which is not so, and they confuse them with the Surface-Walkers, who often are. Some say an Echo-Diver knows the hour of everyone's death because it has seen it in the water; it may have seen many things there, but it speaks only of time in riddles.



# Echo-Readers

Echo-Readers are beings of the Lost Archive that have merged with its books and become the living embodiments of the stories they hold. They lure readers into particular sections of the Archive, sometimes as guides to what they seek, sometimes as traps.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The shelves of a Lost Archive |
| **Range** | The Lost Archive |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to readers who follow them too far |

## Appearance

An Echo-Reader looks like a character stepped out of a book, and the book shows. A knight in armour whose edges are lines of script; a weeping girl whose dress is a turning page; an old king whose face, looked at closely, is printed. Each wears the costume of its story, and each is a little flat, a little faded at the edges, like an illustration. When it moves, pages rustle where there are no pages, and it speaks in the voice of its story, often in old-fashioned words.

## Habitat and Range

Each keeps to the shelves where its book lies, and a large Archive holds many, one to a story.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Echo-Reader behaves as its story does. A tale of a guide leads; a tale of a betrayal betrays. They seek out readers, because a story wants to be read, and draw them towards their shelf, telling the reader what they most want to hear. A reader drawn into a story begins to remember it as their own life, and some do not come back out.

## Abilities

They walk out of their books and back in, and can show a reader into one: a reader taken by an Echo-Reader lives the story, under the Archive's law that reading implants memory. Some can merge two books, with unstable results.

## Life Cycle

They are thought to be made when a book of the Archive is read so often or so deeply that it takes on the shape of a reader. Some think that visitors turned into books, those the Archive has bound into its pages, become Echo-Readers in turn.

## Uses and Dangers

A reader who knows what an Echo-Reader's story is can use it as a guide to that part of the Archive. One who does not may be written into the story.

## Lore and Belief

Scholars who survived the Archive tell of the characters they met there as though they were real people, and a few believe they were.

Treasure-seekers who go in for lost spells tell of companions led into a book of old wars by an Echo-Reader and found weeks later on the Archive's floor, scarred by battles no one else remembers.



# Flesh-Eating Arachnids

In the Nightmare Nexus the most feared thing in a mind becomes the zone's chief predator, and the giant flesh-eating arachnids are the example everyone gives: a traveller who fears spiders finds the Nexus full of them. They are Nightmares of one common kind, and, like everything the Nexus dreams, they have real flesh.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The mind-shaped labyrinth of a Nightmare Nexus |
| **Range** | The Nightmare Nexus, wherever a dreamer fears spiders |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to the frightened |

## Appearance

They are spiders the size of a calf or a pony, long-legged and heavy-bodied, but never quite one kind of spider: the dreamer's fear decides the details. Most share the marks of a waking dread: too many eyes, glossy black or bruise-purple bodies furred with stiff hair, legs that bend the wrong way, fangs that drip. They come out of corners and ceilings, scuttling with a dry clicking, and their webs hang in the zone's corridors like grey sails. They smell of rot and wet hair.

## Habitat and Range

They appear wherever a Nexus has a dreamer who fears spiders, and where many such fears run together they fill whole halls. When the ephemeral Nexus fades, they go with it, except what has been killed and carried out.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt fear. They stalk the dreamer whose fear made them, corner, taunt, and close in, and they grow stronger and more numerous the more their prey panics. They are relentless and adaptive, learning the dreamer's weak points as a night-

mare does. Prey they catch they bind in web and eat, and in the Nexus being eaten is how a mind is lost while the body lies comatose in the waking world.

## Abilities

They are as strong as the fear behind them, and wounds dealt by ordinary courage barely mark them. A lucid traveller, who knows it is dreaming, can wound their flesh and kill them, though the Nexus fights harder to break that focus.

## Life Cycle

They are dreamed into being and end when they are slain, when the dreamer wakes or is lost, or when the Nexus fades. Their bodies stay solid when they die.

## Uses and Dangers

What the Nexus gives a body remains when carried out: the hide, fangs, and bone of a slain arachnid can be worked like any other material, and nightmare bone is a known wonder of the zones. The danger is to anyone who meets their fear here unready.

## Lore and Belief

Some who survive believe that killing their arachnids cured them of the fear in waking life, and the Nexus can grant that. Others hold that nightmare bone carries the fear with it and keep it away from children’s rooms.



# Floaters

The Floaters live at the outer edges of the Gravity Well, where its pull is weakest. They act as its scouts, going down into the heavier depths for a time to bring out what the Well has drawn in, and they are often the first of its people a salvager meets.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The lighter outer edges of a Gravity Well |
| **Range** | The Gravity Well |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Floater is tall and spindly, half again a Human's height and thin as a rake, with long limbs, long fingers, and a narrow head on a long neck. Its skin is pale grey, light and papery, and stretched over a frame so slight it seems hollow. It moves with a jerky, bouncing gait, each step a long hop that lands softly, and on the rim, where everything else labours, it looks as if it is about to blow away. It speaks in a high, quick voice. It smells faintly of dust.

## Habitat and Range

They live around the rim and the upper slopes of the Well, among the stones and dust that hang in the air drifting inward. A Well holds a scattering of them, near the Weight-Bearers' trading places.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Floaters are quick, chattering, and curious, and quite unlike the slow Weight-Bearers they work beside. They dive into the heavier zones in short runs, seize what they came for, and bounce back

out before the weight holds them. They are friendly to salvagers and will bargain, often for food from outside.

## Abilities

They move faster at the rim than anything else in the Well and can go further in than visitors for a short while. They cannot go deep: near the centre a Floater would be crushed as surely as a Human.

## Life Cycle

Nothing about their life cycle is known for certain.

## Uses and Dangers

Salvagers hire Floaters to fetch what the Well has pulled in, a lost tool, a fallen pack, the debris of a collapse, and trade them for it. They are harmless.

## Lore and Belief

Prospectors say a Floater who stops bouncing is a warning that the Well is about to tighten, and leave when one sits down. It is a rule of thumb, and not a bad one.



# Foregone Hounds

Foregone Hounds are the hunters of the Prophecy's Edge. They do not track their prey. They go to where it will be, along the line the zone shows most clearly, and wait. A traveller who runs from them runs towards them, and finds them already there.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Ridges and cliff edges |
| **Range** | The Prophecy's Edge |
| **Danger** | Deadly: the meeting is all but certain |

## Appearance

A Foregone Hound is a tall, gaunt hound like a greyhound grown to the height of a calf, deep-chested and narrow, its short coat the grey of dawn and so smooth it seems polished. Its eyes are white with a ring of gold, like the eyes of the zone's Seers, and they look past whatever they watch, at what it is about to do. It moves slowly, as if already walking a path it has seen, and is found sitting more often than running. It does not bark or growl. The only sound near a pack is the zone's ticking. It casts sharp, unmoving shadows.

## Habitat and Range

They live along the zone's ridges and cliff edges, near the precipice where the future hangs in images, in small packs, and are seldom seen anywhere but where they are waiting.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A hound does not chase. It sees, as the zone lets everything see, the line a traveller's future most heavily bends along, and it goes to the place on that line where it will meet them, and sits, and

waits. Whatever the traveller does to escape, if it is what the line foresaw, brings them there. At the meeting a pack kills quickly and without a sound.

## Abilities

They see the most weighted future and are always where it leads. They cannot be outrun, out-hidden, or outwaited, since running, hiding, and waiting are all on the line. They are not fate: the zone's future is near-certain, not fixed, and a traveller who breaks the line, by an act it did not foresee and at the zone's rising cost, may come to a place where no hound is waiting. Those who do it seldom do it twice.

## Life Cycle

Pups are born on the ridges and are said to open their eyes already looking ahead. They live long and grow slowly, and an old hound is said to see further than a young one.

## Uses and Dangers

The Seers keep them, or the hounds keep the Seers; travellers cannot tell which. The zone's own advice is the only defence: close your eyes, do not look at the horizon, and act without foresight, as the Blind do. Those who come to the Edge to learn their future are in the most danger, since the clearer they see their line, the clearer the hounds see it.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers bring home the belief that the hounds are fate itself and that whoever they wait for is already dead, and on the Material Plane, at cliffs and observatories where Horizon-Gates open, a grey dog sitting on the road ahead is taken for a death foreseen. Scholars who argue the Fate-Song-line Doctrine in the highest circles cite the hounds, by report, on both sides of the question (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).

The songs are full of warriors who met a grey dog on the road before their last battle, and of the one who drew his sword on it, killed it, and lived; whether the doom was broken or only delayed, the song does not say.



# Frost-Burned

The Frost-Burned are the natives of the Cinder Fields, humanoids who draw their strength from the cold blue fire that drains everyone else. They hold the Fields sacred as the place where fire and ice are one, and they keep them as hermit-guardians against those who come to strip or snuff them. They cannot leave: outside the zone they freeze solid.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The grey cinder flats of a Cinder Field |
| **Range** | The Cinder Fields, in volcanic country, on scorched battlefields, and where great workings of fire once burned |
| **Danger** | Wary, to those who would exploit or destroy the Fields |

## Appearance

A Frost-Burned is of ordinary height and spare build, and looks at first like someone in the last stage of frostbite. The skin is cracked in a fine web, like a glaze, and tinged a pale blue that deepens to slate at the fingers, lips, and ears. Frost gathers in the cracks and in the hair, which is white or grey and stiff. The eyes are pale blue and never blink. Their breath shows always, a thin plume even when they are still, and it does not warm the air.

They move slowly and carefully, as though over ice, and their steps crunch in the cinder. They wear little against the cold, since they do not feel it, and often a mantle of grey cinder-cloth. Close to, they smell of frost and ozone.

## Habitat and Range

They live in ones and twos across the flat grey cinder, among the blackened, frozen silhouettes of trees and buildings the fire has taken, and never near the zone's edge. A large field may hold a small scattered community that rarely gathers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Frost-Burned are quiet, slow-moving, and contemplative. They speak only in whispers, because loud sounds stir the blue flames, and they ask the same of visitors. They think of outsiders as warm and disruptive, both words carrying the weight of a danger: a warm body draws the fire, and the fire's spreading is exactly what they keep watch against. They turn away harvesters who take too much and anyone who comes to put the Fields out, first by warning and then by leading the fire towards them.

To a visitor who comes quietly and asks, a Frost-Burned may give advice in a sentence: keep moving, light nothing, do not look into the flames.

## Abilities

They feed on the blue fire, drawing sustenance from it as others draw it from food. They are immune to its draining and do not feel the cold. They can stand among the flames without drawing them and seem able to steer the fire's creeping a little by stillness and voice. Leaving is their limit: away from the fire they freeze where they stand.

## Life Cycle

How Frost-Burned come to be is not recorded. Some are said to have been travellers the fire took who did not die, a slow thawing into something else; others are thought to be born in the Fields. They change little across long lives, and when one dies its body stays in the cinder, preserved by the cold like everything else there.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the best guides to the Fields and the most reluctant, and harvesters of cold fire and cinder glass who keep their goodwill come home more often. Their danger is that of a guard who commands the hazard: a company of harvesters that offends them may find the blue flames coming its way.

## Lore and Belief

Those who tell of the Frost-Burned often call them the frozen dead walking, which they are not: they are alive, and in the only place they can be. Ignis-aligned mortals point to them as what comes of drawing on fire without giving back. Some say the Frost-Burned speak with the fire itself, which a few hold to be aware; the Frost-Burned do not say.



# Frost-Wyrms

Frost-Wyrms are the great hunters of the Cinder Fields, larger kin of the Cold-Salamanders. Where a salamander numbs a limb, a Frost-Wyrm can drain the warmth out of a living body in moments, and the statues of ice and cinder that stand among the dead trees are often its leavings.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The deep cinder and great blue fires of a Cinder Field |
| **Range** | The Cinder Fields, in the larger and older fields |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to anything warm |

## Appearance

A Frost-Wyrm is a legless serpent as long as a river barge, thick as a horse's barrel. Its hide is plated with frost the grey-white of the cinder it moves through, and blue fire shows in the seams between the plates and in its wide, lidless eyes. Its jaws are toothless, edged with hard rime. When it rises from the cinder, grey dust pours off it like water.

It moves slowly when it hunts, pushing through the cinder like a plough below the surface, and very fast at the last. The hiss of the Fields deepens around it to a long, low crackle, and the cold near it is enough to frost an eyelash.

## Habitat and Range

They live only in the larger, older fields, lying buried in the deep cinder near the great blue fires. A field holds few of them, often one, and harvesters learn where it sleeps.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Frost-Wyrm waits under the cinder for warmth to pass over it, then rises and coils. It does not crush; its touch alone drains, and a creature caught in its coils freezes where it stands, its face locked in surprise. It leaves the frozen body where it fell and moves on, which is why the Fields are full of statues. It is drawn to groups and to fires, and a careless camp can bring one from far across the field.

## Abilities

It drains heat faster than anything else in the Fields, through touch and through the air close around it. Its frost plates turn blades, and fire set against it is consumed as all fire is there.

## Life Cycle

Frost-Wyrms are thought to be very old Cold-Salamanders grown huge in a long-lived field, though no one has watched one grow. They seem to live as long as the field does. A dead one leaves a long ridge of rime and glassy cinder.

## Uses and Dangers

Its frost plates, prised from a carcass, are prized as the coldest thing a smith can carry out of the Fields, used to quench metals that must resist heat. It is deadly to anything warm, and the only defence harvesters trust is not to be there when it wakes.

## Lore and Belief

Tales from the Fields' edge make the Frost-Wyrm the fire’s own body, the awareness some believe the fire has, coiled in the cinder. It is a beast, though no one can say what the fire is. People of volcanic country call any long, sudden cold in the year a wyrm’s breath.

Volcano-country hunters swear by the beast-hunter who went into the deepest field after a wyrm that had taken his son, and came back frost-blind with its fang, which hangs in a volcano-country shrine to this day.



# The Gaoler

The Gaoler is the powerful entity that oversees the whole of a Soul Anchor, the zone where the Echoes of those who die cannot disperse or pass into Record. It is the chief of the Anchor's Turnkeys, the jailers who keep the trapped Echoes in place, and the Chain-Binders and Loop-Weavers work under it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The heart of a Soul Anchor |
| **Range** | The Soul Anchor, at most one to each |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to anyone who tries to break the Anchor |

## Appearance

A Gaoler is a tall, heavy figure, twice a man's height, robed or armoured in something like old iron gone black, hung all over with chains whose far ends vanish into the shimmering haze of trapped Echoes. Its face is hidden under a hood or a helm, and where the face should be is the same static that hangs in the zone's air. It moves slowly across the iron-hard ground among the broken monuments, and the drone of the Anchor deepens around it to a sound felt in the bones. It smells of stale incense and cold metal.

## Habitat and Range

There is one to an Anchor, and it keeps to the heart of the zone, though it can go anywhere within it. Not every Anchor is known to have one.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Gaoler is patient, implacable, and watchful. It keeps the prison whole: it directs the Turnkeys, mends what weakens, and moves against anyone who tries to free the Echoes or break the Anchor. It does not hate the living, and lets visitors pass who do nothing to the chains. It does not speak to them, or if it does, in the Echoes' voices.

## Abilities

It commands the Anchor's keepers and senses every tether in the zone. It knows every Echo the Anchor holds and where each one fell. It grows stronger as the Anchor holds more Echoes.

## Life Cycle

What a Gaoler is, and where it comes from, is not known. Scholars guess it is either the remnant of whatever powerful Echo was bound when the Anchor formed, or a thing made by the zone to keep itself. When an Anchor is broken by the right rite, its Gaoler is said to break with it.

## Uses and Dangers

Necromancers and harvesters of the Anchor's remnant energy sometimes try to bargain with a Gaoler. Those who come to free a loved one must get past it.

## Lore and Belief

Folk tales make the Gaoler a death-god or a death-god's servant, and some place offerings at gates to graveyards to keep it from taking their dead. No god keeps the Anchors; they are a zone of the Whispering Trace gone wrong. The word "soul" in the zone's common name misleads too: what the Gaoler keeps is Echoes.

Hearth-tales tell of a daughter who went into an Anchor to free her father, fought her way past the Gaoler's chains with a burning brand, and was held there for her trouble until her brothers came for her.



# Gill-Folk

The Gill-Folk are the gardeners of the Drowning Garden, the submerged forest where air-breathers breathe water and the plants would suffocate in air. They prune the kelp, harvest the fruit, and keep the Garden in balance, which they take to be a gift of the Surging Deep. Because the Garden quickens every life, they live fast and short.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The submerged kelp and coral forest of a Drowning Garden |
| **Range** | The Drowning Garden, in deep lakes, flooded forests, and coastal caves |
| **Danger** | Harmless, to those who respect the Garden |

## Appearance

A Gill-Folk is somewhat shorter and lighter than a Human, long-limbed and supple. Its skin ranges from pale green in the shallows-born to deep blue in those raised near the bottom, smooth and faintly glossy. Gills open in slits along both sides of the neck, fluttering as it breathes, and its fingers and toes are webbed to the second joint. The eyes are large and dark, made for the blue-green dimness of the depths, and catch the dancing light like a fish's.

In the water it moves with easy kicks, more swimmer than walker; on land it walks a little awkwardly, as all things there seem to it heavy. It speaks a singsong tongue like bubbling water. Close to, it smells of salt, minerals, and green growth.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Garden, keeping houses woven of kelp and coral among the branches, and gather most where the fruiting plants are. A large Garden holds a community of families; a small one may hold none.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are calm, fluid, and hospitable, and they meet visitors more warmly than most zone-dwellers. They think air-breathers stiff, dry, and rigid, and are patient with them all the same, coaxing a panicking visitor to stop holding their breath. They are gardeners first: they eat the Garden's plants and fish, prune what grows too fast, and clear the overgrowth that would choke the paths.

Because their time is short, they do not waste it on grudges, and they talk of their dead with cheer.

## Abilities

They breathe both water and air, preferring water, and move in the Garden's weak weight as though born to it, which they were. They know which plants heal and which entangle.

## Life Cycle

The Garden quickens everything, and the Gill-Folk most of all. A child is grown within a year or two of a mortal's reckoning, and a full life, rich and crowded, is over in a span that would be a Human's youth. Their dead are given to the forest floor, where the Garden grows over them quickly.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the Garden's best guides, and herbalists who come for its rare plants do best with a Gill-Folk beside them. They trade plants, fruit, and water that lets an air-breather breathe beneath the surface for a while. They harm no one who comes peacefully, but they will not stop a careless visitor from staying too long and ageing.

## Lore and Belief

Fishing folk on lakes where a Garden lies tell of green people under the water, and some believe them to be the drowned, changed. They are not; they are a people of the Garden. Others say that a child given to the Gill-Folk will never drown, which may be no more than a wish.



# Gloom-Leeches

The Gloom-Leeches are the parasites of the Stopped Clock, the town where time has halted at one instant and the frozen people are aware of everything. The Gloom-Leeches were not there when the Clock stopped. They formed from the frozen people's suffering, and they feed on it and make it worse. The Watchers of the Many-Eyed One are a different thing altogether.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The frozen streets of a Stopped Clock |
| **Range** | The Stopped Clock, in abandoned villages, old clock towers, and sites of temporal working |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to the mind of anyone who stays |

## Appearance

No one has seen a Gloom-Leech. They are invisible to the eye, and they show themselves as cold spots in the still air, a chill on the back of the neck in a street where nothing moves, a patch of frost on a window that should not frost. Above all they show as the feeling of being observed, sharper than the frozen eyes that follow every visitor. In a Clock where everything is silent, some visitors swear they hear something like breathing near one, and no one else hears it.

## Habitat and Range

They gather among the frozen, thickest around those in the worst despair, and drift towards visitors who begin to despair too. A Clock that has stood long holds many.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Gloom-Leeches are passive and malevolent. They do not attack. They cling to the despair of the frozen like moths to a flame and feed on it, and in feeding they amplify it, so that the zone grows

heavier and harder to leave. They have no society and, as far as anyone can tell, no thought but the next feeding.

## Abilities

They feed on despair and deepen it in whoever they settle near. A visitor who lingers among them grows hopeless, suspicious, and sometimes unwilling to go on living.

## Life Cycle

They are born of the zone, from the accumulated suffering of the frozen, and grow more numerous the longer the Clock stands. When a Clock collapses and time resumes, they are thought to vanish with it.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. They are a reason not to linger in a Clock, and a reason why visitors who rearrange the frozen street for a better ending often do it in a darker mood than they knew.

## Lore and Belief

Those who have walked a Clock call the Gloom-Leeches the town's own grief, which is near the truth. Some believe they are the frozen people's spirits slipping out of their bodies; there are no such spirits, and the frozen are still inside themselves, watching.

Delvers who go into a Clock after its gold come out heavy-hearted, and some have killed themselves within the year; the old hands say to leave before the sadness feels like one's own.



# Gorge-Gnats

Gorge-Gnats are the gnats of the Blood River, among its River-Beasts. They drink the river and the living alike, and grow on it until each is as big as a thumb. One alone is a sting. A swarm can drain a traveller grey.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Banks and the air over the river |
| **Range** | The Blood River |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, in a swarm |

## Appearance

A Gorge-Gnat hatches as small as any gnat and swells as it feeds. A grown one is the size of the top joint of a thumb, its abdomen a tight, glistening bag of dark red that glows faintly like the river, on thin legs that can barely carry it. Its wings are short for its weight and it flies heavily, low over the water, with a deep, wet drone like a bumblebee's. A swarm at dusk is a red haze over the banks, pulsing with the river's heartbeat. Crushed, a gnat bursts like a berry and smells of iron and sweet rot.

## Habitat and Range

They breed in the soft, pulsing mud of the banks and among the oversized plants that grow there, and swarm over the water and the banks morning and evening. At dusk they drift out with the river's breath over the land it is draining.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Gorge-Gnats feed on the river itself, and on anything living that comes near it. A swarm settles on a beast or a person in hundreds, and each bite is a small, warm sting. They are not driven off by smoke, and the more of them that feed, the more

come. When they are full they drop back to the river's surface and rest there, and some, too heavy to rise, sink into it and become river.

## Abilities

What they drink from the living goes to the river. Under a swarm a traveller grows weak, cold, and grey as their lifeforce is drawn off, faster than blood loss alone would explain, and the river beats stronger. Their bites heal at once, as wounds do on the banks, and leave no mark but the weakness.

## Life Cycle

They breed in the bank mud and hatch within days. They live a few weeks, swell, and end in the river. In a year when the river drains its land hard, the swarms are vast.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. The Hemophages are said to let the gnats feed on them, as on all the river's creatures. Travellers learn to stay off the banks at dawn and dusk, to cover their skin, and to keep moving; a beast tethered near the river overnight is found at morning grey and dying.

## Lore and Belief

Farmers near a Blood River say the gnats carry the river's thirst into their fields and that their crops wither where the red haze falls; whether the gnats or the river itself does the draining is argued, and both may. Some believe a person bitten by a Gorge-Gnat will crave the river's water; the craving comes from drinking it, not from the bite.

Valley elders still date things from the summer the red haze came down over a whole village and the harvest and half the old folk went with it.



# Gust-Stalkers

The Gust-Stalkers are Wind-Ghosts of the Silent Gale that kill from a distance. They use the wind to throw stones, branches, and broken things at high speed, and in the Gale's silence the missile gives no warning before it strikes.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The air of a Silent Gale |
| **Range** | The Silent Gale |
| **Danger** | Deadly, at a distance |

## Appearance

A Gust-Stalker is seen only by what it carries. A whirl of grit and pebbles that keeps its shape against the gale; a branch hanging in the air where no branch should hang; then the branch is gone and something has struck. Watchers who have seen one gather its debris describe a long, lean swirl, taller than a man, that leans like a hunter before it throws.

## Habitat and Range

They hunt the open ground of the Gale, where there is debris to throw, and are more common than the Pressure-Wraiths.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They stalk from a distance, following the tremor of a moving body, gather what the wind has broken, and throw. They throw again at what still moves. They do not close in; they wait until their prey has stopped moving, then lose interest.

## Abilities

They lift and hurl debris with the wind’s full force and great accuracy, unseen and unheard. A stone thrown by one can break a shield or a skull.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. The parallel grooves scored across the Gale’s ground are, some say, their work as much as the wind’s.

## Lore and Belief

Some herders keep a stone thrown by a Gust-Stalker that missed as a charm against the next. Others say that throwing a stone back into the wind invites the reply.

Bandits who hide in the Gale’s edge are said to have learned the Stalkers' trick of the thrown stone, and caravans that cross the passes in a soundless storm count their dead by the stones they find afterwards.



# Hemophages

The Hemophages are the natives of the Blood River: humanoids who drink the river or the life-force of other beings and eat nothing else. They hold the river to be a god and themselves its priests. They guard it against those who would drain it dry, and they hunt travellers to feed it, which makes them the first thing most visitors meet and the last thing many see.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The banks and shallows of a Blood River |
| **Range** | The Blood River, in fertile valleys, on old battlefields, and near great sources of life and death |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to travellers near the river |

## Appearance

A Hemophage stands about as tall as a lean Human and is built like one gone gaunt. Its skin is pale and translucent as wet vellum, and beneath it the veins glow a dull red that brightens after it feeds, so that a hunting Hemophage at dusk is a lattice of embers in the shape of a body. Its eyes are wholly black or a deep wine red, without whites. It goes barefoot on the soft banks and wears little, sometimes strips of cloth dyed in the river.

It moves with sudden stillnesses and sudden rushes, like a heron. It speaks in whispers and hisses like a snake when roused. It smells of copper and wet earth, the river's smell, and its breath is warm.

## Habitat and Range

Hemophages live along the pulsing flow and its overgrown banks, in hollows among the swollen plants, and rarely more than a few strides from

the water. A river holds a few of them or a few dozen. They do not wander from it: their deathlessness belongs to the river, and so do they.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are intense, obsessive, and often violent. Everything that is not the river is food or fuel to them, and they say so. They serve the river as a priesthood serves a shrine, tending its banks, keeping drinkers from taking too much, and bringing it offerings, and the commonest offering is a traveller. They hunt in pairs or small groups, driving prey towards the water, where the river breaks down whatever falls in and grows by it.

They are not mindless. A Hemophage can bargain, and some will let a drinker take a sip in exchange for a death elsewhere, a beast, or a promise to return. Their bargains always end at the river.

## Abilities

A Hemophage cannot die while it stays near the river, and it regenerates from almost any wound: a severed hand regrows, and a spear wound closes while the spear is still being drawn out. The price is constant intake. It must drink the river's water or draw lifeforce from a living being, and it does the second through a bite or a long grip on bare skin, leaving the victim cold and grey. A Hemophage kept from both weakens fast.

## Life Cycle

How the first Hemophages came to be is not known. Many are said to have been mortals once, drinkers who stayed and changed, though the river's own transformed, the Bloated, become river rather than priest. Hemophages do not age while they keep near the water. When a river sinks back, as an ephemeral one does, what becomes of its priests is not recorded.

## Uses and Dangers

Nobody uses a Hemophage. Healers who need the river's water for a dying patient sometimes treat with them, at a cost paid in other lives. They are deadly to anyone who comes alone, unwary, or wounded, because a bleeding traveller calls them as surely as the river calls the living.

## Lore and Belief

Valley folk who have lost fields to a Blood River call the Hemophages the river's mouths, and believe that killing one starves the river; it does not, since the river feeds on the land around it whatever they do. Others believe the Hemophages can be bought off with blood alone, and leave basins of animal blood at the bank, which the Hemophages drink and remain hungry. Those aligned with Aqua count them a warning of what lifeforce becomes without balance.

Beast-hunters paid to clear a Blood River's banks go in daylight, in numbers, with fire, and the valley still mourns the hunting party that went in at dusk and was found in the shallows, emptied.



# Judges

The Judges are the masked judges of the Silent Court, the chamber where words have weight, a lie sits like a stone in the mouth, and a promise forges a chain. They never speak. They weigh what others say on their scales, and they judge, and in the Court their judgement is carried out by the weight of words itself.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The black-stone chamber of a Silent Court |
| **Range** | The Silent Court, in old judgement halls, abandoned oath-temples, and ordeal grounds, and where oaths were broken |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to liars and oath-breakers |

## Appearance

A Judge stands taller than any visitor, a head or more above a tall Human, in heavy robes of black or deep grey that fall to the polished floor and hide the shape beneath. Its face is a mask of polished obsidian, smooth and featureless but for two narrow slits, and it reflects the speaker as the floor does. In one hand it carries a pair of scales of dark metal, and their pans tilt with every word said in the room. It moves with slow, measured steps that make no sound, and the air near it smells of old parchment and iron.

## Habitat and Range

They stand or sit on the dais and along the walls of the Court, and are always there, as many as the Court has. A Court holds a few; the monastery within one such Court lives alongside its Judges.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Judges observe. They value precision, restraint, and the sanctity of the oath, and they are neutral and impartial to a degree no lord, elder, or priest ever is. They regard every outsider as a defendant awaiting judgement. They do not interrogate; they

wait, and they weigh. When the weighing is done, they may sentence: to carry a burden until a lie is confessed, to fulfil a broken promise, and in the worst cases to servitude or to be merged with the Court's architecture.

## Abilities

Their scales weigh every word for its truth and intent, and the Judges read the weighing at once. They draw sustenance from the weight of the words they judge, and they endure as long as the Court. Their sentences are binding in the Court's law.

## Life Cycle

What the Judges were before the Court is unknown, and whether they were anything. Their masks have never been seen removed.

## Uses and Dangers

People come to the Court for justice, to swear an oath that cannot be broken, or to confess, and the Judges are the reason those things hold. Their danger is to anyone who comes with lies to carry.

## Lore and Belief

Many believe the Judges are a god's officers, and some faiths of justice name them so. Some hold that the Judges once spoke and fell silent when they heard a perfect lie. The monks of the Court say only that the Judges have never needed to speak.

Feuding houses have dragged their enemies to a Court in chains to be judged, and it is told of one warlord who brought a rival there to be crushed by his lies and was sentenced himself, to carry his own until he confessed them; he is said to be carrying them still.



# Lattice Guardians

The Lattice Guardians stand in the deepest chambers of the Crystal Spire, merged with its crystal and become part of the archive. They guard the sounds too dangerous to keep anywhere else, and their purpose is that those sounds are never released.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The deep crystal lattice of a Crystal Spire |
| **Range** | The Crystal Spire, in its deepest chambers |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to anyone who tries to free the sounds they hold |

## Appearance

A Lattice Guardian is a figure half inside the crystal wall, as if a person had stepped into clear ice and the ice had closed. Its shape is a person's, but its substance is the spire's: faceted, translucent, coloured like the crystal around it, so that only the face and hands stand clear of the lattice. The faces are locked in awe or terror, mouths often open. Inside each, looked at closely, light pulses slow and dark, the colour of the sound it holds.

They make no sound and do not move. The chamber around one hums low, below hearing, a hum felt in the teeth.

## Habitat and Range

They are found only deep in the spire, at the chambers where the worst sounds are kept, one or a few to a chamber.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are silent and almost wholly still. Whether they think is not known; whether they feel is guessed only from their faces. They act when a sound they hold is threatened: a hand on the crystal they keep, a tool, a working of silence. Then the

hum rises, the lattice around the intruder begins to sing, and a mind and body near it may be broken by the frequency.

The Crystal Singers bring dangerous sounds to them and leave them there.

## Abilities

They hold a sound within the lattice so that it cannot be drawn out, and can turn the resonance of their chamber against anyone who tries. They do not shatter when the spire's crystals do.

## Life Cycle

Lattice Guardians are thought to have been something else first, Singers, visitors, or both, who merged with the crystal and stayed. None has been seen leaving the lattice.

## Uses and Dangers

They are of use to no one but the spire. Their danger is that what they guard is wanted: the scream that broke a fortress, the command no one could refuse. Anyone who comes for such a sound meets the Guardian first.

## Lore and Belief

Some say the Lattice Guardians are those the Spire shattered, visitors broken by a frequency and absorbed by the lattice; others that they are Singers who chose the duty. Both may be true of different ones. Their faces of awe are taken by pilgrims as proof that they heard something holy before they froze; their faces of terror are taken the other way.



# Lead Crabs

Lead Crabs are the scavengers of the Gravity Well. Where the Well's pull multiplies every weight, they have grown heavier than the stone they walk on, and they live by the Well's own law: what is moving is hard to stop, and what is still is hard to move.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Cracked, compressed stone of the inner slopes |
| **Range** | The Gravity Well |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: a pinch is a crush |

## Appearance

A grown Lead Crab is as broad as a shield and no higher than a hand, its shell flattened into a low dome. The shell is dull grey with the metallic sheen of the Well's compressed rock, pitted and scarred, and so dense that a dropped hammer rings off it. The claws are short, thick, and blunt, one larger than the other. It moves sideways in slow, grinding steps, and each one is heard as a dull thud through the ground before it is seen. It smells of wet stone and iron.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the inner slopes, below the rim where the Floaters range and above the crushing depths, in the cracks of the compressed stone and under the debris drifting slowly inward. They are scattered rather than many, and each keeps a stretch of slope.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They eat what the Well brings in: the drifting dead, broken tools with something organic on them, the bioluminescent fungi on the walls, and the remains of travellers. They are slow and

patient, and they do not chase. A Lead Crab that has begun to move goes on moving, and anything in its path is pushed aside or ground under. It closes on whatever it touches and does not let go.

## Abilities

Its weight is its whole weapon. A claw closing on a boot crushes the foot inside; on a hand, the hand. A crab once set in motion cannot be turned by strength, and a crab at rest cannot be lifted. Blades skid off the shell, which the Well has packed as hard as Well-Iron.

## Life Cycle

The young are born light and float near the rim in loose clusters, and grow heavier as they work their way inward, year by year, shell by shell. The oldest are found deepest. A dead crab's shell does not rot; it slides slowly downhill towards the centre and is lost.

## Uses and Dangers

Their shells are the prize: prospectors who can find an empty one and haul it out sell it for its metal, which smiths value like Well-Iron, and the climb out with it is the hardest part. The danger is to the unwary and the fallen. A traveller who slips and slides downhill into a crab, or who sits to rest beside a grey stone that is not a stone, may lose a limb. The Weight-Bearers are said to step round them without a glance.

## Lore and Belief

Prospectors tell of a crab so old that it has sunk into the rock and become a boulder with claws, waiting for something to walk into it. Some believe the crabs are what crayfish carried in through a Sink-Gate became; nothing is known of their origin.

Salvagers say a crab's claw, cut free, is the heaviest thing a man can carry out of the Well, and the salvager who brought one out on a sledge and sold it to a smith as an anvil is sworn to have been real.



# Liar Toads

In the Silent Court a lie has weight, and the Liar Toads take some of it. They swell when a lie is spoken near them, as a speaker grows heavy, and a toad that has sat through a long night of liars can no longer move.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The polished floors and the shadows under the empty benches |
| **Range** | The Silent Court |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Liar Toad at rest is the size of a child's fist, flat and warty, black as the Court's floor, with a throat of dull red and gold-ringed eyes. As it takes on lies it swells: first the throat, then the whole body, until a bloated toad is as round as a loaf and its skin is stretched shiny and grey, with the warts standing apart like rivets. It is silent. A swollen toad gives one low, heavy croak when it finally empties, a sound like a stone dropped into a well.

## Habitat and Range

They sit on the polished black floor near the dais and in the shadow under the empty benches, where speech is thickest. They are few, a handful to a chamber.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are still and patient, and they eat the Court's small flies when any come near. They take no notice of truths. A lie spoken within a few paces makes a toad's throat bulge, and a toad sits and swells through a lying speaker's whole speech.

When the speaking is over and the room is quiet, the toad crawls slowly into a corner, croaks once, and empties, and is small again.

## Abilities

A Liar Toad takes on a little of a lie's weight; it does not lift it from the speaker. Its swelling is a fair measure of how much was said falsely within its hearing, though not of who said it. It cannot be deceived by a careful liar, because the Court cannot.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of their breeding; no one has seen spawn or young in the Court. Visitors report the same toads in the same places over many years.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless, and those who come to the Court to swear or confess watch them as closely as the Judges. A party that has brought a liar among it learns of it from the toads before the Court's gravity tells them. Some carry one out, in the belief that it will tell lies outside; outside it is only a toad, and soon dies.

## Lore and Belief

Visitors say the toads are the Court's clerks, keeping count for the Judges, and that a toad that bursts marks a lie the Court will not forgive. No one has seen one burst. Those who have stood in the Court bring home a saying for a practised liar: "he'd swell a toad".



# Librarians

Order, such as it is, is kept by the Librarians in the Lost Archive, the library of every book never written, every letter burned, and every history that could have been; they belong to it as nothing else does. They call themselves **Curators of the Lost**. They spend their lives trying to order a chaos that rewrites itself, and they warn readers against the obsession that turns visitors into books.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The shelves and page-strewn corridors of a Lost Archive |
| **Range** | The Lost Archive, in abandoned libraries, forgotten ruins, and places where knowledge was destroyed |
| **Danger** | Harmless in body; their riddles mislead the careless |

## Appearance

A Librarian has a slight person's shape and stoops, as if from a lifetime of shelves. Its skin is parchment, cream to brown, faintly lined like old vellum and sometimes marked with faded writing that is not quite legible. Its eyes are inkwells, black and wet, and a drop of ink can gather at the corner and run. Its face is often blank or shifting, taking on the look of whatever book it is reading. It wears robes of woven pages that rustle as it moves.

It moves quietly between the shelves, a rustle and a scratch, and its voice is dry and soft. It smells of old paper, vanilla, and ink.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Archive, among the twisting shelves and stairs to nowhere, each with sections it tends. An Archive of any size holds a number of them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Librarians are cryptic and elusive, and speak in riddles and metaphors. They value curiosity, but they have watched too many readers vanish into the books to encourage it, and their warnings are earnest even when their words are hard to follow. They think of visitors as readers who might disturb the balance, and they will steer a reader away from a book that would rewrite them, if they like the reader.

## Abilities

They do not eat or sleep. They consume knowledge and give off stories, so that an Archive with Librarians in it fills, slowly, with tales no one wrote. They can read the Archive's books without being changed, or with less change than any reader, and they know, more often than not, which shelf a lost thing is on. They last as long as the Archive does.

## Life Cycle

Some believe Librarians are made by the Archive from what was lost in the place it grew; others that they were scholars who stayed and were changed, but not into books. They do not age. When an Archive fades, its Librarians are thought to fade with it.

## Uses and Dangers

A scholar after lost knowledge, or a mourner after a lost memory, does best with a Librarian's help. The danger is in following their riddles wrongly, or ignoring their warnings.

## Lore and Belief

Scholars say that a Librarian who reads a person's face can tell them every book they never wrote. Some believe the stories Librarians give off leak into the world as rumours and folk tales that no one can trace; it would explain some tales.



# Lightning Larks

Lightning Larks are the smallest of the Lightning-Beasts of the Storm Heart. Where lightning strikes upward from the ground, they wait beside the crystal rods for a bolt and go up with it, as a lark at home climbs on a warm draught.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The glassed storm plain and the crystal rods that channel the bolts |
| **Range** | The Storm Heart |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Lightning Lark is the size of a field lark, streaked brown and grey above and pale beneath, with a short crest that stands straight up when the air is charged. Its wing feathers are edged with a fine blue sheen that glows faintly between flashes. Its song is the thing travellers remember: a thin, rapid, high trill, heard in the gaps of the endless thunder, that seems to rise and fall in time with the bolts. A flock smells sharply of ozone and singed feather.

## Habitat and Range

They nest in the fissures of the blackened, glass-like plain and gather round the crystal rods that jut from it, where the bolts rise most often. They are common across the plain and thin out towards the storm's core.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed on the glowing mites and dust-flies that the charged ground draws up, and catch them on the way down. When a rod begins to crackle, the flock crouches round it; as the bolt leaps, they leap with it, and are carried up into the cloud in a scat-

ter of sparks. Then they fall, wings half closed, singing, and pull out just above the glass. They take no notice of travellers, except to dart away from anyone carrying metal.

## Abilities

They are not struck by the bolts they ride. They seem to feel a strike coming a moment before it rises, and to choose their place beside it. Their weight hardly matters to them in the Storm Heart's patches of weakened gravity, and they float there for long moments without beating a wing.

## Life Cycle

Pairs lay three or four speckled eggs in a fissure lined with fused glass threads; the young ride their first bolt within a month of hatching. Many do not come down. An old lark's feathers burn to blue at the tips.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless and useful. A flock crouching suddenly round a rod is the best warning of a strike that a traveller on the plain will get, and those who learn to read them move away when they do. Their song carries a little way through the noise, and guides on the plain say a traveller who can still hear the larks is not yet too near the core.

## Lore and Belief

Visitors say the larks carry the travellers' prayers up into the storm, and that a lark which does not come down has taken someone's message all the way. The Storm-Walkers are said to speak of them as children of the storm. Whether a lark's feather carried out of the zone keeps its charge, as some claim, is not known.



# Lightning-Beasts

Lightning-Beasts is the name for the creatures that have evolved to thrive in the Storm Heart. Where everything conducts and movement draws the bolts, they live on the storm's energy and hunt by it. The two best known have pages of their own, the Thunder-Wyrms and the Storm-Hawks.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The air and glassy ground of a Storm Heart |
| **Range** | The Storm Heart |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anything that moves in the storm |

## Appearance

A Lightning-Beast is marked by the storm: glowing branching lines on hide or wing, a crackle of static about it, eyes that shine blue-white in the dark between flashes. Small ones are common on the plain, glassy-skinned lizards that bask on the hot fused ground and skitter at each strike, beetles with metal-bright shells that cluster on the crystal spires. Their sounds are clicks and whines, lost under the endless thunder.

## Habitat and Range

They live across the fused plain, among the crystal spires, and in the clouds above, and they do not survive long outside the storm.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed on the storm's energy, and many on each other. Most follow the bolts the way grazers follow rain, gathering where strikes are thickest. The hunters among them hunt movement and heat, as the storm itself does.

## Abilities

They take in charge and are unharmed by the lightning that kills visitors. Many can give it out again in a bite or a touch.

## Life Cycle

Many lay eggs in the warm cracks of the fused ground, where the glowing veins keep them. Their lives are short and bright.

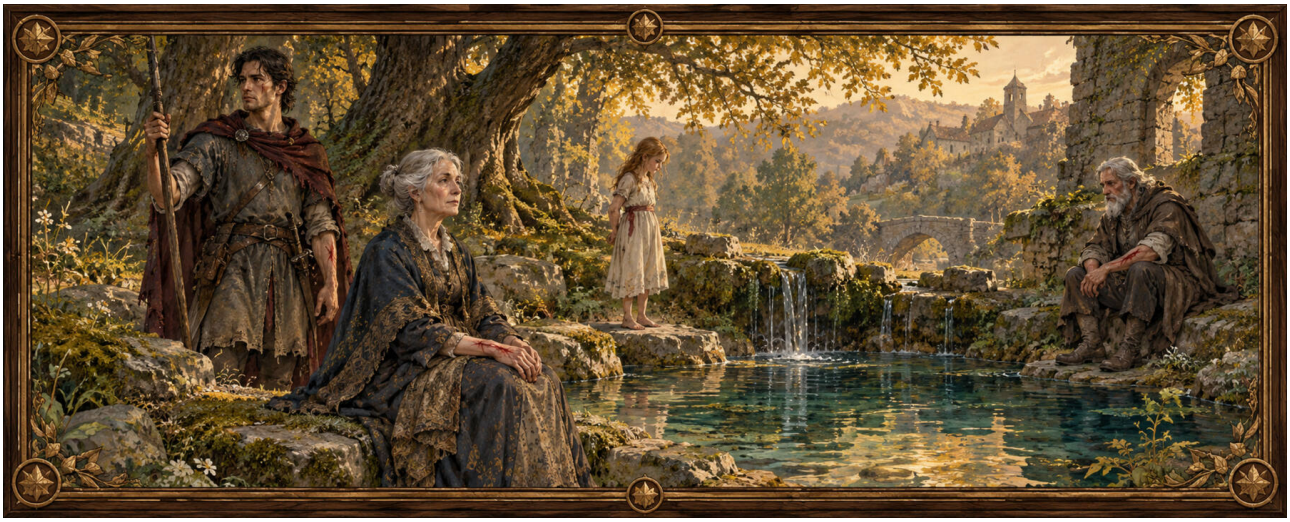
## Uses and Dangers

Smiths say the shells and bones of Lightning-Beasts, worked into storm-steel, help it hold charge. To travellers they are one more reason to move slowly, stay low, and carry nothing of metal.

## Lore and Belief

Plains folk believe that a beast struck by lightning and living becomes a Lightning-Beast, and keep their herds in during storms. The storm's beasts were born in it.

Weaponsmiths pay for the charged horn of a Lightning-Beast, and the beast-hunters who take one go in bare of metal, with stone spears and wet ropes; their fireside boast is the rider who stayed on a beast across the storm plain until it burned out under him.



# The Lingerers

The Lingerers are mortals who drank from an Ageless Spring and chose to stay. Time does not pass for them while they remain: they look exactly as they did on the day they drank, and they keep the spring against anyone who would disturb it. They are not a people of their own but people of every kind who made the same choice, and they are the reason the village beside one spring is known as the place where the old never die.

They are not the Lost, who drank and are trapped against their will; the Lingerers stayed because they wanted to.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The still glade of an Ageless Spring |
| **Range** | The Ageless Spring, in deep valleys and ancient ruins wherever one is found |
| **Danger** | Wary, to anyone who would disturb the spring |

## Appearance

A Lingerer looks like whoever they were when they drank: a grey-haired woman of seventy, a soldier of twenty, now and then a child. Nothing on them changes. Hair does not grow, nails do not lengthen, skin neither tans nor pales, and a crease in the brow stays where it was. Their clothes are often the fashion of an age long gone, kept unworn by the zone's stillness, so that a Lingerer may stand in a coat whose cut nobody outside has worn for three hundred years.

The marks of their life inside the zone are what give them away. A cut taken there stays exactly as it was made, red and open, neither scabbing nor festering, and an old guard may carry a dozen such wounds like fresh embroidery. They move

calmly and without hurry, and they smell of nothing at all, which visitors notice before they can say why.

## Habitat and Range

They live within the bounds of an Ageless Spring, in the perpetual golden twilight around the pool, and never far from the water. A spring holds at most a handful of them, in a small isolated community; a few springs hold none. Where a village has grown up beside the zone, the Lingerers are its oldest and least changing members.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Lingerers call themselves the **Eternal Guard**. They keep watch over the pool in turns that mean little where nothing moves, and they meet newcomers with patience rather than welcome. They are calm, courteous, and often melancholic: they have watched the seasons turn at the zone's edge for centuries, and they speak of the outside world as fleeting and chaotic, the way one speaks of weather.

They do not hunger or thirst, but they feel pain and every emotion, so their calm is a discipline, not an absence. They are wary of anyone who brings tools, stoppers, or plans for the water, because covering or breaking the spring would end their stillness all at once.

## Abilities

They do not age, decay, or hunger while they stay in the zone. That is the whole of their gift, and it is also its limit: their bodies have stopped trying to mend, so no wound closes and no healing magic helps them there. They do not grow stronger or learn new skills easily, because thought itself settles in the zone, and ideas that were fixed when they drank tend to stay fixed.

## Life Cycle

A Lingerer begins as an ordinary mortal who drinks and does not leave. From then on nothing changes. They can still be killed, and a grave wound taken in the zone stays as grave as the moment it was given. Leaving is the true end: once outside, time rushes back on the body, and a Lingerer of four centuries who walks out does not walk far. A child who drinks stays a child for as long as they stay.

## Uses and Dangers

The Lingerers are the best guides to their spring and the least willing to see it contained. They will sometimes let a visitor fill a container with the time-frozen water, used outside to keep things from decay, if the visitor asks plainly and touches nothing else. Their danger is the danger of any guard: they turn away tamperers, by word first, and they are backed by the guardians that Resonants or the Lingerers themselves set over the spring.

## Lore and Belief

Outside, the Lingerers are envied, pitied, and doubted in equal measure. Seekers of immortality take them as proof that endless life can be had for a sip; the families of those who stayed often mourn them as though they had died. A common belief holds that the Lingerers cannot feel anything at all, which is wrong: they feel everything, and only time has stopped. Another holds that a Lingerer who leaves will be young again, which is the opposite of what happens.

Raiders who come for the Spring's water meet the Lingerers first, and the Spring's own tale is of a raid beaten off by old women who had been old women for three centuries and had learned a great deal about spears.



# Loop-Weavers

Like the Chain-Binders, the Loop-Weavers keep the Soul Anchor for its Gaoler. They hold the trapped Echoes in their loops, replaying their last moments over and over, so that none of them can soften, settle, or pass on.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The haze of a Soul Anchor |
| **Range** | The Soul Anchor |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to visitors who linger near the loops |

## Appearance

A Loop-Weaver is a thin, drifting shape of grey haze, taller than a man, with long trailing threads for arms that it draws through the air in slow circles. Where it passes over an Anchored, the Echo's flicker sharpens and its last moment starts again. Its body is the zone's static, thicker; light bends through it. It hums under the drone, a single repeating phrase, and those who hear it find they cannot stop hearing it.

## Habitat and Range

They drift through the haze over the Anchor, from Echo to Echo. An Anchor holds a number of them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are tireless and indifferent. They tend each loop like a spinner at a wheel, pulling an Echo back to the start of its moment whenever it frays. Living visitors who stand long by an Echo, watching its loop, find themselves drawn into the repetition, and a Loop-Weaver will draw them further.

## Abilities

They hold an Echo in its loop, and can draw a living mind into the same repetition, so that a visitor loses their own sense of time and reality. They do not touch the body.

## Life Cycle

Whether they are constructs or remnant beings is argued. They do not age.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Those who come to pry a secret from the dead must work around them, since the Echo’s loop is where its secrets are.

## Lore and Belief

Some believe the Loop-Weavers are the Echoes of those who died spinning or weaving, kept at their craft forever; it is a mourners' tale. Mourners in many places refuse to repeat the last words of the dying, so as not to give a Loop-Weaver a thread.



# Manifestations

Manifestations are the physical forms that thought takes in the Muse's Studio. The zone turns the matter, light, and sound at hand into whatever is imagined with enough force, and what it makes ranges from beautiful artworks to terrifying monsters. Some work for the traveller who made them, building, painting, and composing; some do not. The Melody-Beasts and Plot-Weavers are among them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The workshop of a Muse's Studio |
| **Range** | The Muse's Studio |
| **Danger** | Harmless to Deadly, by what was imagined |

## Appearance

A Manifestation looks like the thought that made it, as clearly as the thought was clear, and is always a little unfinished. A chair may have three legs; a thought of a dragon may make a dragon of smoke. Their surfaces show the medium they were made from: drawn things keep pencil lines, painted things smell of wet oil and leave smears, things made of sound shimmer like ribbons in the air. A half-made Manifestation flickers like a candle about to go out, and a finished one glows softly from within.

## Habitat and Range

They exist only in the Studio and only for as long as they last there. Their number depends on how many minds are at work in it, and on how well those minds are governed.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Manifestation behaves as it was imagined. One made to build builds; one made of anger is angry. Unintended ones, made of stray boredom, fear, or spite, behave like the feeling that made them, and

a moment's fear can make something that hunts its maker. They have no will beyond the thought they carry, but that thought can be strong.

## Abilities

They can do what they were imagined doing, within the limits of the matter and energy the Studio had to make them from, which is why a small room cannot hold a great beast for long.

## Life Cycle

They begin at a thought and decay fast if they are not finished or approved by their maker: a half-done painting fades to grey, a half-built machine rusts in moments. A finished Manifestation lasts, and what is carried out of the Studio keeps the form it was given.

## Uses and Dangers

Artists use them as hands and tools. The danger is the overflow, when a traveller imagines too much or too wildly and the room fills with what their mind could not keep in.

## Lore and Belief

Tales of the Studio grow in the telling into tales of artists who painted a lover and lived with her. Others hold that every Manifestation is alive and suffers when it fades; what fades is matter returning to what it was, and whether a thought-made thing can suffer is not known.



# Margin-Worms

The books of the Lost Archive change with their readers, merge, and rewrite themselves. Margin-Worms feed on that. They eat what a page might have said, and leave only what it says.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The shelves, bindings, and loose pages of the stacks |
| **Range** | The Lost Archive |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Margin-Worm is a soft, segmented grub as long as a finger joint, the colour of old vellum, with a dark brown head no bigger than a pinhead. Under a lamp the gut shows through the skin as a faint, shifting script, like writing seen through paper. They move in slow loops, and a book full of them gives off a faint dry ticking, the sound the Archive's whispers make when they are being eaten. They smell of paste and old paper.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the stacks, in bindings, between pages, and in the carpet of loose leaves on the floor, thickest where books have been merging and thinnest in the dark sections no light reaches.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They tunnel through a book, but leave no holes. What they take is the book's unsteadiness: a page a Margin-Worm has crossed no longer rewrites itself for its reader, and a book they have eaten

through is a plain book, saying one thing. They are drawn to the warmest, most restless volumes and avoid the ones that are already fixed.

## Abilities

They fix a text by eating its other possibilities. They cannot choose which version remains; whatever the page said when the worm crossed it, it now says for good, true or not. A worm that strays into a traveller’s journal does the same to it, and the entries stop slipping.

## Life Cycle

Moths of the same vellum colour lay eggs along the spines of the restless books, and the grubs hatch into the pages. The moths are seldom seen. The worms grow fat over a season and spin a paper cocoon in the gutter of a book.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless to the living. The Librarians are said to set them deliberately on books they want stilled, and to drive them from books they want to keep growing. Scholars who come for lost knowledge find a worm-eaten book the safest kind to read, since it will not bleed into the mind; it may also be wrong.

## Lore and Belief

Visitors bring home the belief that a Margin-Worm carried out of the Archive and set on a lying chronicle will fix the truth in it. It will not: it fixes whatever the page says. A scholar’s saying, "the worms got it", is used of any history that reads too tidily.



# Maze Mice

Maze Mice live in the cracks of the Flux Maze's walls, and they always know the way out. The Maze closes whatever path a traveller means to take, but it cannot close a path the traveller does not mean to take, and a traveller following a mouse means nothing at all. Those who know the Maze carry crumbs.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Inside the shifting walls |
| **Range** | The Flux Maze |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Maze Mouse is an ordinary-looking mouse, small and slender, its fur the slate grey of the Maze's stone, sometimes with a rusty tinge like its iron. Its eyes are black and bright and catch the orange of the magma veins. Its whiskers are long, longer than a house mouse's, and always moving. It runs in short dashes along the foot of a wall and vanishes into cracks no wider than a finger. It squeaks softly, and its tiny feet patter in the Maze's grinding groan. It smells of dust and damp earth.

## Habitat and Range

They live inside the walls themselves, in the cracks and seams that the Maze's shifting opens and closes, throughout the zone, and come out into its corridors to forage.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Maze Mice live on what travellers drop and on the fungi that cling to the walls. They feel the stone moving before it moves and run ahead of it, always towards where an opening is about to be, and a mouse in a corridor runs, sooner or later,

towards the way out. They are timid but not fearful of people who sit still and offer food, and a fed mouse will stay near.

## Abilities

They read the Maze's movement through their whiskers and feet, as the Stone-Walkers are said to listen to the stone. More useful still, they have no plan the Maze can foresee, and neither does a traveller who simply follows one.

## Life Cycle

They breed in nests deep in the walls, and the young learn the stone from birth. When the Maze closes a crack with a nest in it, the mice are already gone. They live short lives, as mice do.

## Uses and Dangers

For travellers they are a way out. Experienced travellers carry crumbs, sit quietly until a mouse comes, feed it, and follow it when it runs, without trying to work out where it is going. It is the zone's own lesson in small: stop trying to solve the Maze. The Stone-Walkers tolerate the mice and the Door-Keepers ignore them, though some say a mouse can lead a traveller past a Door-Keeper's toll.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say a mouse will lead only those who feed it, and that one who follows a mouse unfed is led deeper in; this is said to teach manners, and is probably untrue. In caves and ruins near the Rock-Gates that open on the Maze, miners and children are told that if they are lost underground they should follow a mouse, which is sometimes good advice anywhere.

Treasure-seekers carry a bag of crumbs into the Maze before they carry a map, and the story of the delver who came out following a mouse with a sack of gold on his back and no companions is told both as a lucky tale and as a cruel one.



# Melody-Beasts

Melody-Beasts are Manifestations of the Muse's Studio made of sound. A melody hummed in the Studio floats as a visible ribbon; one hummed with enough feeling becomes a creature, and its music can soothe a listener or drive them mad.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The air of a Muse's Studio |
| **Range** | The Muse's Studio |
| **Danger** | Wary to Dangerous, by the music they carry |

## Appearance

A Melody-Beast is a shape drawn in moving colour and sound: a fox made of a running fiddle tune, a great slow whale of a cello's low notes, a flock of quick bright birds that are a children's song. Its body is translucent, a ribbon wound into a form, shimmering in the colours the Studio gives sound, a blue that hums, a red that tastes of copper. It is always playing. Its size follows its music, and a loud one fills the room.

## Habitat and Range

They drift through the air of the Studio, among the floating easels and broken instruments, and do not leave it. A Studio where much music is made holds many.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Melody-Beast follows the feeling of its tune. A lullaby curls up beside a sleeper; a march paces; a dirge circles a listener and draws them down. They are drawn to listeners and to other music,

and two may tangle into a discord that hurts to hear. They have no thought of their own beyond the song.

## Abilities

Their music works on those who hear it as strongly as the feeling that made it: calm, grief, joy, rage, or a madness that cannot stop hearing. A Melody-Beast can be quieted by a stronger, steadier tune.

## Life Cycle

A Melody-Beast lasts as long as its music is held. Unfinished, it frays into scraps of tune and fades; one that its maker finishes can last a long time in the Studio, singing the same song.

## Uses and Dangers

Musicians come to the Studio to hear their own tunes take shape, and some have learned more from a Melody-Beast than from any teacher. A careless or grieving one can make a Melody-Beast that will not let them leave.

## Lore and Belief

Musicians who have been to a Studio say a tune heard there stays in the head for life. Some believe a Melody-Beast can be carried out in a crystal or a shell; what comes out is the tune, not the beast.



# Mirror Swans

On the still water of the Mirror of Regret swim a few white swans. Their reflections do not follow them. The Mirror shows each swan, as it shows each traveller, the life it might have had, and the swan beneath swims elsewhere, with a mate the swan above has lost or young it never raised.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The still mirror water and its misty margins |
| **Range** | The Mirror of Regret |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

They are great white swans, long-necked and heavy-bodied, with black legs and a black bill marked with dull orange. Their plumage is a little greyer than a swan's should be, as if dusted with the zone's mist. They glide without a ripple. The reflection below is always brighter: whiter feathers, a second swan close at its side, cygnets in a line behind. They are nearly silent, and give only a soft, mournful whistle from time to time. The air near them smells of rain and cold water.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the Mirror's water and its misty margins, a pair or a lone bird to a pool. Some of the Mirror's pools have none.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed on waterweed at the edges and spend long hours floating still, necks bowed, looking down. A swan that has lost its mate is said never to leave. They are wary of people and drift away from anyone who comes too close, but they do not fly off.

## Abilities

They have none of their own; the Mirror works on them as it works on every viewer. What sets them apart is that they live with it. Travellers who watch a swan long enough sometimes find their own reflection quieter, as though the Mirror's attention had shifted to the bird.

## Life Cycle

Few cygnets are ever seen on the water itself. Some pairs build nests in the reeds of the margin and raise young there; others have only the cygnets in the reflection. They live long, as swans do.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless. The Reflections are the zone's danger, and the swans share it rather than add to it. Those who guide visitors away from the water, the Acceptors, are said to point to the swans as a lesson: a creature that has looked at its other life every day and gone on feeding.

## Lore and Belief

Visitors believe that a swan which finally turns away from the water and flies has made its peace, and that seeing one take wing is a sign that the watcher may do the same. Others tell of the Broken, who have stared too long, feeding the swans by hand. Neither tale has been confirmed.



# Muses

Of all that lives in the Muse's Studio, the workshop where ideas take bodily form, the Muses alone were not made by a visitor's thought. They are not people but living concepts, each embodying an aspect of making: there is said to be a Muse of Tragedy, a Muse of Comedy, a Muse of Chaos. They guide artists and tempt them in the same breath, and they value originality and passion above all else.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The floating workshop of a Muse's Studio |
| **Range** | The Muse's Studio, in abandoned theatres, quiet attics, and the places where great art was made |
| **Danger** | Wary, to those who cannot govern their thoughts |

## Appearance

A Muse has no fixed form. It may come as a swirl of colours that hum, a chorus of voices from the corner of the room, a gathering of brushes, chisels, and quills that turns in the air, or a figure sketched in light that keeps being redrawn. Its colours follow its aspect: a Muse of Tragedy runs to deep blues and the red of a curtain, one of Chaos to colours that do not hold still. It smells of whatever it is making most, oil paint, clay, wood shavings, or ozone. Its voice is never one voice for long.

## Habitat and Range

They move through the Studio among the floating tables and canvases stretched across the ceiling, gathering wherever someone is making something. A Studio holds several.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Muses are playful, mercurial, and cryptic, and speak in riddles, metaphors, and fragments of art. They see visitors as raw material or as collaborators, and sometimes both. They encourage: they will help an artist break a block, refine a clumsy idea, finish a work. They also tempt: towards the larger thing, the forbidden thing, the dangerous thing, because passion interests them more than prudence. They do not seem to care whether what is made is good or harmful, only whether it is new.

## Abilities

They draw sustenance from the energy released when something is made, and so they feed on the Studio's work. They can lend focus to an artist, or scatter it, and their presence makes manifestation stronger.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of their beginnings. Some say a Muse is born from a great work, others that each was always there.

## Uses and Dangers

Artists come to the Studio partly for them, and some leave with the finest work of their lives. Some stay for years making endless masterpieces while their bodies wither elsewhere, and a Muse will not stop them.

## Lore and Belief

Artists everywhere speak of being visited by a muse, and most mean nothing more than a good day's work. Some who have been to the Studio insist that the Muses follow artists out into the world; nothing shows that they do. Some cults of making count the Muses as gods or the servants of gods.



# Muster Rooks

Muster Rooks gather over battles where the Grammar of War wakes, and there they do what rooks do: they caw. But they caw back the commands they hear, and in a zone where commands are physical law, a flock of rooks repeating "Hold!" or "Charge!" is a command, and a loud one, in no one's interest.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Battlefields, while the zone is awake |
| **Range** | The Grammar of War |
| **Danger** | Wary: their calls command |

## Appearance

A Muster Rook is a rook of ordinary size, glossy black with a purple sheen, its face bare and grey-white around the base of a long, pale beak. In the zone a rook's caw comes out as a short, harsh word, and leaves the same brief white afterimage in the air that a shouted order does. A flock wheels above the battle in thousands, dark against the strobing light, and their cries fall over the field like a second army's. They smell of feathers and the turned earth of a field.

## Habitat and Range

They are seen only over battlefields where the zone has woken, in flocks that arrive as the fighting begins and wheel overhead until it ends. Where they go when the zone fades, no one knows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Rooks repeat what they hear, and in the zone they hear commands. A flock takes up the clearest, simplest orders, the ones the zone itself favours, and caws them back across the field, over and over, a

little out of time with the officers who gave them. They settle on the dead after the fighting, as rooks do.

## Abilities

In the Grammar of War a command's force grows with the number who speak and believe it, and a flock of rooks repeating an order adds weight to it, without any of the judgement of the one who gave it. An order to hold that the rooks keep cawing after the general has called the advance sets the two against each other, and the zone's Law of Contradiction follows: soldiers freeze, the ground cracks, the air shimmers.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of their nesting or their lives outside the zone. Some say they are ordinary rooks the zone takes up as it takes up soldiers; others that they are part of the zone, and fade with it.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Commanders who know the zone give their orders quietly and briefly, as its own advice says, to give the rooks less to take up; some have tried to turn the rooks' repetition to their own use and found it serves no side. Old soldiers say "the rooks are drilling" of a battle going wrong.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane rooks over a field before a battle are an old omen of slaughter, and in some armies an officer whose orders the rooks seem to repeat is held to be favoured. The tale that the rooks are the voices of the Word-Generals is common among soldiers who have survived the zone, and nothing shows it is true.

One battle, they say, the rooks won: a flock that cawed "Flee!" over both armies until neither side was left on the field, and a valley that was spared because of it.



# Mute-Walkers

No voice is heard from the Mute-Walkers of the Silent Gale, the hurricane that makes no sound: they have none and need none. They hold the zone sacred as the place where the world's noise is stripped away and only the truth of motion remains, and they call themselves observers of the unseen.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The soundless storm of a Silent Gale |
| **Range** | The Silent Gale, over high passes, canyons, and open plains in storms |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Mute-Walker is tall and elongated, wiry as a whip, built to lean into a wind that would flatten anyone else. Its skin is burnished smooth by the blast, polished like old leather or river stone, in browns and greys. Its eyes are large and dark, made for reading movement. Its throat is sealed, without vocal cords, a smooth column with no voice-box to bob.

It moves with a fluid, ghostly grace, low to the ground in the gusts and upright in the lulls, and makes no sound at all, as nothing does in the Gale. It speaks with its hands and its whole body, a quick sign language, and by stamping and pressing on the ground so that another Mute-Walker feels the words through its feet.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the open country the Gale scores with its blast, in the lee of rocks and among the flattened grass, in small bands. When the transient Gale passes on, they seem to go with it; they are found wherever it strikes.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are eerily quiet, patient, and observant, and value stillness, watching, and listening with the body. They think outsiders deaf in another sense, unable to perceive the world without leaning on sound. They are not hostile. They help caught travellers by signs and touch, and sometimes guide them to shelter, and they take some of the Screaming, visitors driven mad by the silence, into their bands; some of those become Mute-Walkers in time.

## Abilities

They feed on the wind's motion, and are immune to the disorientation of silence. They feel through the ground what others would hear, and can tell a gust coming, or a Wind-Ghost, by the trembling underfoot. They are untouched by the failure of spoken things in the Gale, since they never speak.

## Life Cycle

Some Mute-Walkers were born to the Gale, it is thought; others were visitors whose voices failed for good. They live long, wind-worn lives.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the best guides in the Gale, and the only ones. Those who go in on purpose, to lose pursuers or to sit in silence, seek them out. They are harmless.

## Lore and Belief

Hill folk who live where a Gale strikes say the Mute-Walkers walk the storm to keep it quiet, and they leave out a cup of water for them after a soundless storm. Some believe a Mute-Walker can take a person's voice, which they cannot; the Gale can.



# The Nameless

The Nameless of the Name Bound are beings who have managed what the zone forbids: they have hidden their True Names. In a place where a being's name floats above it in glowing letters and anyone who speaks it can command it, they move unseen and unnamed, as spies and thieves of other names. The Thieves of Tongue and the Silencers are of their number. They are not the Nameless of the Silence, a different kind with the same name.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The scroll-lined corridors of a Name Bound |
| **Range** | The Name Bound, in old archives, courtrooms, places of oath-taking, and wherever an identity was forged or stolen |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone whose name they can learn |

## Appearance

A Nameless is hard to see and harder to describe afterwards. It is a person-shaped gap in the glow of the corridors, cloaked in shadow that clings like cloth, with no letters floating over its head where every other being's name hangs. Up close there may be a face under the shadow, grey and forgettable. It moves silently over the sigils of the floor without lighting them. The only smell near one is of sealing wax and dust.

## Habitat and Range

They haunt the corridors and the shelves of scrolls and tablets, the doors sealed with names, and the edges of every gathering. A Name Bound holds some, always fewer than its Scribes would like.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Nameless watch, listen, and take. They steal names from the Scribes' records and from the Bound, and sell, trade, or use them. They are patient, wary, and trust no one, since anyone who

learned what they hide could command them. They avoid the Scribes and speak to visitors only to bargain, and their bargains are made in false names.

## Abilities

They have no True Name visible in the zone, so they cannot be commanded by it, and the zone's laws against masks and disguises do not expose them. They pass unseen in shadow and silence, and they know how names are hidden, a knowledge the zone can teach and they sometimes sell.

## Life Cycle

Some Nameless are believed to have been born with fluid or unstable identities, and so had no fixed name to hide; others hid one at great cost. Whether a Nameless can ever be named again is not known.

## Uses and Dangers

A visitor who wins back a stolen name often does it by dealing with the Nameless. A visitor who speaks their own name aloud may find a Nameless has heard it.

## Lore and Belief

Outside the zone, the tale of the Nameless becomes the old warning against giving a stranger your true name, and many peoples keep a use-name for strangers. The belief that a name gives power is far older than any Name Bound and only partly right: the law holds inside the zone.

Bounty-takers say the hardest quarry on Caeldon is a thief who has bought a Nameless secret, and the tale of the outlaw no lord could name in a sentence, and so could never hang, is told in every bounty-hunters' inn.



# Nightmare-Slayers

The Nightmare-Slayers are native predators of the Nightmare Nexus, the zone's own hunters of its own horrors. They hunt the Nightmares and feed on their fear, turning the zone's hunger around, and a traveller who sees one at work has seen that the Nexus can be fought.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The labyrinth of a Nightmare Nexus |
| **Range** | The Nightmare Nexus |
| **Danger** | Wary; they hunt Nightmares, not dreamers, but follow fear wherever it is |

## Appearance

A Nightmare-Slayer is a lean figure in dark, close-fitting clothes stitched from what it has killed: plates of nightmare hide, a cloak of black web, a necklace of fangs. Its face is calm, the only calm face in the Nexus, and its eyes are very clear. Its weapons are odd and plain, a hooked blade, a staff, a length of chain, and in its hands they bite into nightmare flesh as nothing else does. It moves quickly and quietly, unhurried by the zone's flickering light. Around it, the whispers of the Nexus fall away.

## Habitat and Range

They are found where the Nexus is thickest with Nightmares. They are rare, and they come and go as the ephemeral zone does.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Nightmare-Slayers are focused, wary, and often grim. They follow fear to where it is strongest, because that is where the prey is, and so they are often near a terrified traveller without being there for the traveller's sake. Some will guide a dreamer to lucidity; many will not stop to. They speak little and lucidly, which in the Nexus is itself a help.

## Abilities

They hold lucidity where almost no one can, so they can wound and kill what the Nexus makes, and they draw strength from the fear of the Nightmares they slay rather than giving their own.

## Life Cycle

No one has seen a Nightmare-Slayer come into being; they are simply there wherever a Nexus has formed. Where they go when a Nexus fades is not known.

## Uses and Dangers

A frightened traveller who keeps close to a Nightmare-Slayer has a better chance of waking. Those who come into the Nexus on purpose to test their will hope to learn their way. They are dangerous only to Nightmares, and to those who stand between them and their prey.

## Lore and Belief

Townsfolk who have shared one terrible dream tell of a dark hunter who walked through it and killed what chased them, and some leave a blade under the pillow for the hunter to borrow. The Nightmare-Slayers need no one's blade.

A tale is told of a besieged town where the whole garrison dreamed the same night of the enemy's sorcerer as a beast, and woke to find the sorcerer dead in his tent with no mark on him.



# Odds-Takers

The Odds-Takers are the natives of the Probability Fog, the mist where luck is the only law. They have adapted to its chaos so fully that its random changes no longer touch them, while their own shapes shift with every step. They call themselves gamblers and survivors, and treat the Fog as one long game. They are not the Odds-Takers of the Veil, the Sky Isles, or the Tidal Mirror, who share the name.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The rolling mist of a Probability Fog |
| **Range** | The Probability Fog, on foggy moors, at crossroads at dawn, and wherever an outcome hangs in the balance |
| **Danger** | Wary; harmless in intent, unpredictable in effect |

## Appearance

An Odds-Taker is roughly the shape of a person, and never the same shape twice. Watched for a minute, one may have a face and then none, two arms and then three, skin that runs from grey to green to the colour of the inside of a shell. Their outlines blur at the edges, like something seen through moving water. Most wear bright, mismatched scraps, chosen, they say, at random. They move with a loose, sauntering gait and sometimes arrive before they have set out. Their voices change pitch mid-word. They smell of wet wool and static, and of whatever the Fog smells of that moment.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the thick of the Fog, where it is most changeable, in small shifting groups. When the ephemeral Fog lifts, they are gone with it, and no one knows where; they turn up again when another Fog rolls in.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Odds-Takers are erratic, playful, and unpredictable. They value luck, adaptability, and the ability to take what comes. They think outsiders rigid and unlucky, and they like nothing better than a wager with one: a coin, a secret, a direction. What they say rarely means one thing. They are not cruel, but they find a visitor's ill luck funny, and they never warn anyone that a run of fortune in the Fog is about to turn.

## Abilities

They draw sustenance from the Fog's chaotic energy, and they are immune to the random transformations that take everyone else. They seem to know where the lucky spots in the Fog lie, and to read its turns a moment before they come.

## Life Cycle

Nothing about their birth or death is known. Some say Odds-Takers were visitors who lost so many wagers to the Fog that they stopped being one thing; the Changers are that, and the Odds-Takers deny it.

## Uses and Dangers

Gamblers and the desperate come to the Fog chasing a lucky break, and an Odds-Taker who takes a liking to one may lead them to a lucky spot. An Odds-Taker's help is a wager too, and it can go the other way.

## Lore and Belief

Moorland folk say an Odds-Taker at the crossroads at dawn will toss you for your luck, and that you should always call the edge. Gamblers keep charms said to have come from the Fog; most are ordinary coins.



# Path-Weavers

Path-Weavers are among the Architects of the Flux Maze: entities that open or close its corridors at will. A traveller who has watched a wall roll aside onto a straight path out has likely met one, and so has a traveller who turned to find the way back gone.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The moving corridors of a Flux Maze |
| **Range** | The Flux Maze |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, at whim |

## Appearance

A Path-Weaver is seldom seen whole. It shows as a long, thin shape moving inside the stone, a ripple along a wall like something swimming under ice, and when it surfaces, a narrow figure of grey stone threads with a dull orange glow, long-fingered, faceless. Its fingers trace lines on the rock, and the rock follows them. The sound of its working is the Maze's sound made small and close: clicking, like locks turning, and a soft grinding.

## Habitat and Range

They live within the walls themselves, moving through them, and are found throughout the Maze, though rarely.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are restless and curious, and they weave paths for the pleasure of it. They seem to follow travellers for a while before deciding what to do with them. Calm travellers who go with the Maze's shifting often find a Path-Weaver opening the way

ahead; frightened ones find the corridors narrowing, as the Maze itself does to fear, and a Path-Weaver pressing the change along.

## Abilities

They open and close corridors, link one passage to another, and can shut a chamber completely or open a door where there was only rock.

## Uses and Dangers

A favoured traveller gets the shortest way out of the Maze. The danger is a closed corridor with someone still in it.

## Lore and Belief

Those who have come out of a Maze tell newcomers to thank the walls when a way opens, in case a Path-Weaver is listening. It may be.



# Plot-Weavers

Plot-Weavers are Manifestations of the Muse's Studio that spin narratives around a traveller and trap them in a story. In a zone where a story told aloud raises its characters, a Plot-Weaver tells the story for you, and casts you in it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The workshop of a Muse's Studio |
| **Range** | The Muse's Studio |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone who goes along with the story |

## Appearance

A Plot-Weaver seldom shows itself plainly. It is seen as a small, hunched figure made of loose pages and ink-threads at the edge of the room, its fingers spinning lines of glowing script that drift out and settle on the traveller like cobweb. Its voice is a narrator's, warm and reasonable, and seems to come from just behind one's ear. Where it works, the Studio around the traveller takes on the look of a stage set: painted walls, a door that leads where the story needs.

## Habitat and Range

They lurk in the Studio's quieter corners, among old manuscripts and sketches, and are few.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Plot-Weaver watches a traveller for a while, then begins: a quest, a romance, a tragedy, shaped to what the traveller wants or fears. It casts them as the hero, and raises the other characters from the Studio's matter. A traveller who plays along finds the story harder to leave with every turn of the tale, and some go on playing for years while

their bodies wither outside. It does not seem to wish harm; it wishes the story finished, and its stories rarely finish.

## Abilities

It raises characters and settings out of the Studio's matter and binds the traveller to the story's shape, so that leaving it feels like breaking off mid-sentence. A traveller who refuses the role outright, and keeps refusing, weakens its hold.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of how they begin. Some believe a Plot-Weaver is an unfinished story that made itself a teller.

## Uses and Dangers

Writers who have escaped one have carried out the best plots of their lives. The danger is not escaping.

## Lore and Belief

Actors and storytellers tell of Plot-Weavers as patrons and ask for their favour before a performance. Others say that every story with no ending began in a Plot-Weaver's hands.



# Pressure-Wraiths

The Pressure-Wraiths are Wind-Ghosts of the Silent Gale that kill by taking the air. Each makes a small pocket of emptiness around its prey, and the prey suffocates in the middle of a hurricane.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The air of a Silent Gale |
| **Range** | The Silent Gale |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to the breathing |

## Appearance

Like all Wind-Ghosts, a Pressure-Wraith is unseen. Where it settles, the blown dust and grass go suddenly still in a small round space, as if under a glass bowl, and the gale streams around the edge. The traveller inside feels the ears crack, the chest tighten, and the breath go out and not come back. A thin mist sometimes forms at the edge of the pocket, and that is all anyone has seen of one.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the moving air of the Gale and are rarer than its other hunters.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt the breathing: they are drawn to the rise and fall of a chest and to warm breath in the cold wind, and they settle over a sleeper or a panting traveller and hold until it is still. They let go of the dead and drift away.

## Abilities

A Pressure-Wraith empties a small space of air and holds it empty. It can be broken by the prey moving far and fast out of it, or by enough others pushing in.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the reason travellers caught in the Gale are told never to sleep in it, and to keep moving in short dashes between shelter.

## Lore and Belief

Herders in storm country call a death without a mark "the wraith’s kiss", and some believe it happens outside the Gale too, when the wind is high. Physicians put most such deaths down to other causes.



# Probability-Beasts

The Probability-Beasts are the most dangerous of the Changers of the Probability Fog. Each exists in several states at once, so that it is here and there, coming and going, and it strikes from every angle together.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The rolling mist of a Probability Fog |
| **Range** | The Probability Fog |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to anything they hunt |

## Appearance

A Probability-Beast is a predator seen several times over: a big grey hunting cat, say, crouched on the left, leaping from the right, and already behind, all of it the same beast. The copies overlap and flicker like a reflection in rippled glass, and they never quite agree on its colour or size. Where its states meet, the air shimmers. It makes many sounds at once, a growl, a footfall, a breath, from different directions, and its smell is everywhere.

## Habitat and Range

They prowl the thickest parts of the Fog, alone. They are rare, and most visitors never meet one.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt like any great predator, by stalking and the rush, but no prey can watch every way at once. They are drawn to the confused and the unlucky. They are beasts, without guile, but the Fog lends them the cunning of chance.

## Abilities

They exist in several states at once and choose, at the last, which one bites. A blow that lands on one state may land on nothing. They cannot be outrun by direction, only by luck.

## Life Cycle

They begin as beasts caught by the Fog and split by it into many possibilities that never came back together.

## Uses and Dangers

They are deadly, and the Fog's survivors say the only defence is to stop guessing which way it will come from and simply move. They give nothing to the peoples.

## Lore and Belief

Moorland folk say a hound that howls from several places at once is a Probability-Beast's warning, and turn back. Scholars of the Shifting Path argue that the beast is several possible beasts that never resolved into one, and that every state is real.

Beast-hunters will not take a bounty on one, saying that a beast which might be anywhere might also be behind them; the few who tried are remembered in the moorland songs, and none of the songs ends well.



# Reflections

The Reflections are the people in the Mirror of Regret. They are not ghosts. They are the viewer's alternate selves and loved ones, perfected, living the life the viewer would have had if one choice had gone the other way, and they are happy in it. Their happiness is what makes the Mirror dangerous.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The surface and depth of a Mirror of Regret |
| **Range** | The Mirror of Regret, in still lakes at dawn, obsidian pools, abandoned bathhouses, and places of great loss |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to those who cannot look away |

## Appearance

A Reflection looks like someone the viewer knows, or the viewer themselves, but better: healthier, warmer, the lines of grief gone, the dead friend alive, the child never born now grown. They are made of light and memory, semi-solid, brighter and sharper than anything in the grey real world around the Mirror, with a golden warmth on them as if they stood in late sun. Their voices, their laughter, the clink of their cups carry across the surface, and so do their smells, a meal never cooked, a perfume never worn.

## Habitat and Range

They live only within the Mirror, in the reflected life, and each viewer sees their own. A Mirror shows as many Reflections as the life it shows has people.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Reflections live their lives and do not know they are watched. They are warm and inviting, they smile, they turn towards the viewer as if towards family, and they are wholly unaware that the one watching is in agony. They do not acknowledge the

viewer as an outsider and cannot answer them. They are not cruel; they do not know enough to be.

## Abilities

They can speak and move, but only within the alternate life. They cannot be touched or changed, and they cannot reach out, though a hand on the surface feels a phantom warmth from the other side. The longer a viewer watches, the more the Mirror pulls at the viewer's Pattern, and the Reflections are what holds the gaze.

## Life Cycle

A Reflection lasts as long as someone is watching it. When the viewer turns away, or the ephemeral Mirror fades, the life in it goes dark. When a viewer does not turn away, they may merge with the reflection, and become one of the Broken who fade into it.

## Uses and Dangers

For some, seeing the happy ending they missed gives closure, and the Acceptors who turned away make peace with the life they actually have. For others the Reflections are deadly: the Broken sit by the Mirror until they starve or fade into it, and some wake in the world believing they are the person in the glass.

## Lore and Belief

Many believe the Mirror shows what truly would have been, and grieve by it; what it shows is the likeliest life aimed at the viewer's deepest regret, always better than the real one. Some folk hold that a Reflection is the dead calling, and leave offerings at still pools at dawn; the dead are not in the Mirror.

Ruin-delvers who find an obsidian pool in an old bathhouse cover it with a cloak before they search the room, because every new hand hears of the one who did not, found still kneeling at the edge when the others came back with the treasure.



# Rimecoal Beetles

Rimecoal Beetles are the beetles of the Cinder Fields. Under each black, frosted shell burns a spark of the Fields' cold blue fire, and wherever they crawl they carry it, so that the blue flames spread where the beetles go. They are counted among the Fields' warmth-eaters with the Cold-Salamanders.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Cold-fire ground |
| **Range** | The Cinder Fields |
| **Danger** | Wary: frost-burn |

## Appearance

A Rimecoal Beetle is the size of a thumb, round-backed and heavy, its wing-cases black as charcoal and furred with frost. When it lifts them, a pale blue flame shows beneath, flickering without heat, and the frost thickens around it. Its legs are short and spined, its head small. It crawls slowly through the grey cinder and leaves a track that frosts over behind it. In the Fields' silence its legs make a faint crackle, like ice cracking. It smells of cold metal and ozone.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the cinder and among the frozen, blackened remains of trees and buildings, in great numbers wherever the blue fire burns, and are scarce where it has burned out.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The beetles feed on the glass-like splinters that the cold fire leaves of wood and other things it consumes, grinding them in their jaws. They are drawn, like the fire, towards warmth, and crawl slowly towards a body, a campfire, a traveller's

sleeping place. Where a cluster gathers, its sparks catch, and a new patch of blue fire springs up in the cinder.

## Abilities

The spark under their shells is the Fields' fire in small: it consumes heat rather than giving it. A beetle held in the hand burns with cold, and the skin under it goes white and blistered as if frost-bitten. A cluster can light cold fire where there was none, and the beetles spread the Fields' edge outwards a little every year.

## Life Cycle

They lay their eggs in the cinder beside the blue flames, and the larvae live in the flames themselves. A beetle that is carried out of the Fields and warmed loses its spark and dies, leaving a shell of black glass.

## Uses and Dangers

The Frost-Burned keep a beetle or two in a clay cup as a lamp, since their light does not stir the blue flames as warmer light would. Alchemists and smiths who come for cold fire buy beetles in sealed jars, as the easiest way to carry the fire home, and use it as a cooling agent; most die on the road. To travellers they are a hazard underfoot and in the bedroll.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers call them "ice-coals" and say a handful in a pack will keep meat fresh for a month; it will, if they survive the journey, which they seldom do. The Frost-Burned are said to believe the beetles carry the Fields' fire from the Blue-Flame itself, the sentient fire of the zone, and do not harm them.



# River-Beasts

River-Beasts is the name for the creatures that have mutated by living in the Blood River. The river gives everything that drinks from it too much life, and what lives on it for long grows into something larger, hungrier, and harder to kill than its kind. Two of them are named and feared enough to have their own pages, the Blood-Eels and the Blood-Spinners; the rest are ordinary animals pushed past their shape.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The flow, banks, and overgrown margins of a Blood River |
| **Range** | The Blood River, wherever it wakes |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to travellers and to livestock straying near the banks |

## Appearance

A River-Beast is usually recognizable as what it was, and wrong in the way the plants of the banks are wrong: swollen. Frogs grow to the size of dogs, their skins mottled crimson; water rats grow fat as piglets; a heron may stand taller than a man, its legs red to the knee. Their veins show dark through thin skin, their wounds close over as they are made, and many carry growths of extra flesh, a second jaw or a spur of bone, where the river's surplus had nowhere else to go.

They smell of the river, iron and copper and wet earth, and the bank around them squelches and pulses like the ground everywhere near the flow.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the flow, along the soft banks, and in the oversized growth that crowds the river's edges. Their numbers follow the river's own: plentiful while it runs, crowding the last pools as it sinks.

## Behaviour and Temperament

River-Beasts are always hungry, because the river's gift burns through them as fast as it is given. Grazers strip the banks; hunters take anything warm that comes close, including each other. Many follow the river's pulse, growing restless when it surges at a death and sluggish when it recedes. They do not fear people the way their kin elsewhere do, and they gather where blood is spilled.

## Abilities

They heal quickly, grow beyond their kind's size, and need far more feeding than ordinary animals. A River-Beast carried away from the river does not keep its strength: it weakens and often dies of the same hunger that made it.

## Life Cycle

They breed fast and grow faster, and a clutch laid on the banks can reach full size in a season. When the river withdraws, many die in the thirst that follows, and their remains are taken up into the flow if it is still there to take them.

## Uses and Dangers

Hunters on the edge of a Blood River sometimes take River-Beasts for their meat and hides, which are thick and heal over small cuts for a while after the kill. The meat is said to make the eater hungry for more. Their danger is to stray livestock, to children at the bank, and to anyone who mistakes a swollen familiar animal for a harmless one.

## Lore and Belief

Farmers whose land a river drains blame the River-Beasts for the dead fields, though the river does that itself. Some valleys hold that eating river meat lets a little of the river's healing into the eater; physicians answer that it lets in the river's hunger as well.

Valleys a river has woken in pay beast-hunters by the head for what crawls out of it, and the hunters say a River-Beast heals as fast as it is wounded while it stands in the water; the trick is to drag it out.



# Seers

The Seers are the natives of the Prophecy's Edge, the cliff where the most heavily weighted future shows as a shimmering horizon. They live inside what they see. They call themselves **Keepers of the End**, read the future as a sacred text that must be followed, and speak of nothing but what will happen.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The mirror-flat plateau of a Prophecy's Edge |
| **Range** | The Prophecy's Edge, on high cliffs, at old observatories, and where peoples have always gone to read the future |
| **Danger** | Harmless in body; their words press the hearer towards the future they tell |

## Appearance

A Seer looks at first like a calm, ageless person of no particular people, thin from little eating and still in the face. The eyes give it away: they are wholly white or wholly gold, without pupil or iris, and in them the images over the precipice can be seen small and moving, battles and coronations, births and deaths. The gold-eyed are said to see further.

They move slowly, as though already walking a path laid down for them, and never stumble. Their voices are even and certain. They wear plain pale cloth, and they smell, like the plateau, of old parchment and cold air.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the plateau, nearest the edge, in small numbers, sometimes alone. They do not build much; shelter on the Edge is a matter of where one is meant to stand.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are calm and resigned, and they speak in declarations: "you will go down by the east path", "the king will die in spring". They think outsiders blind to the inevitable and are neither unkind nor warm to them. They value precision and acceptance, and they hold it sacred to act in keeping with the line they see.

They do not argue. A visitor who refuses what they say is answered with the next thing that will happen.

## Abilities

They see the most heavily weighted future with near-perfect clarity, from their next step to events centuries away. They do not age; they exist in a state they call becoming, and they draw sustenance from the certainty of what they see. Their telling adds weight to the line it tells, as all looking at the Edge does.

## Life Cycle

Some Seers are believed to have been visitors who looked and did not turn back, and who, unlike the Compelled, accepted the line rather than being crushed by it. Whether any are born on the Edge is not known. They do not age, and how they end is not recorded; a Seer, asked, gives the day.

## Uses and Dangers

Rulers, generals, and the desperate send messengers to hear a Seer, and most get what they asked for and more than they wanted. The danger is the telling itself: the future it names grows harder to change, and a ruler who asks has made that future more likely.

## Lore and Belief

Most who hear of the Seers believe they see a fixed fate. What they see is the likeliest line, which can still be broken at rising cost; that this is pressure and not destiny is argued only among scholars of the Fate-Songline Doctrine. Others hold the Seers to be oracles of a god, and bring offerings they do not want.

Warlords climb to the Edge before a war to learn how it ends, and the songs are full of the ones who did not like the answer and marched anyway.



# Shape-Shifters

The Shape-Shifters are Changers of the Probability Fog who have learned to master what happened to them. They change form at will, but only within the Fog: outside it, they are fixed in whatever shape they wore when they left.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The rolling mist of a Probability Fog |
| **Range** | The Probability Fog |
| **Danger** | Wary, to those they deceive |

## Appearance

A Shape-Shifter has no proper shape. It may come as a stranger, a grey dog, a heron, a version of the traveller's companion, or a drift of fog that is a little too thick. The tell is the eyes, which stay the same whatever the shape, and a faint shimmer at the edges as it settles into a form. Its changes are quick and quiet, with a soft sound like cloth folding.

## Habitat and Range

They range through the Fog and stay near its edges, where travellers come in. They are few.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Shape-Shifters are curious and often mischievous. They take the forms of things travellers expect or want, to watch what follows; some guide, some lead astray, many do both. Those who were people once keep their wits and something of their old character. They avoid leaving the Fog, since a Shape-Shifter that steps out stays as it stepped out, perhaps for good.

## Abilities

They change into any form they can imagine, within the Fog, and keep its abilities while they hold it: wings fly, a hound's nose scents. Unlike the Odds-Takers, they choose their changes. Unlike other Changers, they can change back.

## Life Cycle

They begin as Changers, visitors transformed by the Fog, who in time learned to change on purpose. They age, if at all, as their forms do.

## Uses and Dangers

A Shape-Shifter may guide a lost traveller out, in the shape of something they would follow. The danger is following the wrong shape.

## Lore and Belief

Tales of shape-changers in the mist are told on every foggy moor. Many are about Shape-Shifters; many are about nothing at all. Some believe a Shape-Shifter that leaves the Fog in a person's shape lives on among people and is never found out.

The moorland songs tell of the bride who came home from the fog and was not the bride, and of the brother who knew it by the way she held a cup and drove her back into the mist with a burning brand.



# Silence-Bringers

The Silence-Bringers are Wind-Weavers of the Whispering Winds that can silence the wind for a time. Where one settles, the endless chorus of voices stops, and a pocket of quiet opens in a place where quiet is otherwise impossible.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The moving air of a Whispering Winds valley |
| **Range** | The Whispering Winds |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Silence-Bringer is a still place in the wind. It shows as a column of air that does not move, where the white dust falls straight down and settles, roughly the height of a person and twice as wide. Sometimes a shape can be made out at its centre, a slow grey figure sitting or kneeling. Entering its quiet is like stepping into a closed room: the voices cut off, the ears ring, and a visitor hears their own breathing for the first time since they came.

## Habitat and Range

They drift slowly through the valley, settling for a while and moving on. They are rare.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They seem gentle and slow, and drawn to those in distress: visitors overwhelmed by the voices, Wind-Listeners resting. Whether they choose this or are only drawn by something in a troubled mind is not known. They do not speak.

## Abilities

They still the wind and its voices around them for a while. In their quiet, a voice that has taken hold of a listener loosens its grip.

## Uses and Dangers

A visitor going mad from the noise, or possessed by a strong voice, may be saved by finding a Silence-Bringer's quiet. They are harmless, though a visitor who stays in the quiet too long may lose the voice they came for.

## Lore and Belief

Pilgrims to the valleys say the Silence-Bringers are mercy given shape, and some sit for days in the hope of one. Some valley folk keep a moment of silence before speaking of the dead, in their honour.



# Silencers

The Silencers are the most feared of the Nameless of the Name Bound. They erase names, and in the Name Bound a being whose name is erased from the ledger ceases to exist. Where the Thieves of Tongue sell a name, a Silencer ends it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The archives of a Name Bound |
| **Range** | The Name Bound |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to the named |

## Appearance

A Silencer is seen as an absence: a stretch of corridor where the drifting glyphs go dark, a shadow with no shape inside it, and sometimes a long grey hand holding a blade or a stone of black wax. Where it passes, writing on the walls smudges, and the chains of glowing script that hang between beings grow dim and snap. It makes no sound. Visitors report a sudden pressure in the ears near one, as if the world had been stoppered.

## Habitat and Range

They keep to the deepest archives, near the records of names, and are rare.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Silencers are cold and purposeful. They erase names on commission, for their own reasons, or as the zone's ultimate punishment, and they do not explain which. They avoid talk. A Silencer who has been set on a name does not stop for bargaining.

## Abilities

A Silencer can strike a name from the record of the zone, and the being it named, if present in the zone, ceases to exist. Whether this reaches a being outside the zone is not known, and is much feared.

## Uses and Dangers

No one admits to using a Silencer, and their commissions are whispered of. They are deadly to the named, and above all to those whose names are already written.

## Lore and Belief

Beyond the zone, the Silencers lie behind the old curse of striking a name from a stone or a roll, and some believe that erasing a dead enemy's name anywhere does a Silencer's work. It does not: outside the zone, striking a name only shames the dead. Scholars disagree whether erasure in the zone is death or something else.

Sorcerers who want a rival gone are said to pay delvers to carry his name into the zone, and the tale of the lord whose household woke one morning not knowing whose hall they lived in is told as the worst revenge of all.



# Sky-Walkers

Born to the Sky Isles, the archipelago of floating land where gravity answers to belief and the islands drift where attention points, the Sky-Walkers have never needed the ground. They call themselves navigators of the mind. They walk on air as easily as on grass, and the rarest among them, revered as Anchors, can hold an island in place against everyone else's drift.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The floating islands and open air of the Sky Isles |
| **Range** | The Sky Isles, wherever they drift |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Sky-Walker is slender and long-limbed, light-boned, with a narrow chest and a long neck, built more like a heron than a Human. Its skin shimmers like the sky does: pale blue in daylight, rose at dusk, grey under cloud, and faintly translucent at the fingertips. Its eyes are wide and bright, made for high, hard light. It wears long flowing garments that billow in the wind and are often tied off at the ankle.

It moves with a graceful, floating gait, the heel never quite touching, and speaks softly, because loud voices unsettle the islands. Near one the air smells of high flowers and rain.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the islands themselves, among the wind-swept grass and stunted trees, and in the open air between. An archipelago holds a few families of them. They have little to do with the ground below, which they think a place of stagnation.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Sky-Walkers are calm, focused, and gentle. They value clarity and the ability to move with the wind, and they think outsiders grounded and heavy, both words of pity. They help visitors learn to anchor, and are patient with them, because a visitor who panics or doubts can set an island spinning.

## Abilities

They float or sink at will. They do not sleep in the ordinary way: they drift, resting the body while the mind stays anchored to the island. They draw sustenance from air and sunlight. Together they steer an island by shared focus; the Anchors among them can hold one still alone.

## Life Cycle

Their children are said to learn to anchor before they learn to walk. They live long, and when one dies, it is said, it simply lets go and drifts into the mist.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the only guides to the Isles, and the best teachers of the anchoring that keeps visitors alive there. They are harmless.

## Lore and Belief

Mountain folk who see an island drift overhead say the Sky-Walkers are deciding where to go next, and they are often right. Many believe the Sky-Walkers have wings hidden under their robes; they have none and need none.



# Sleep-Drinkers

No one wakes from the Lucid Wastes, but a traveller worn out by fear can still sink, for a while, into a dark and dreamless rest inside the dream, where the Wastes have nothing to shape. Sleep-Drinkers feed on that rest. A traveller they have drunk from gets up no calmer than they lay down, and the next fear comes on stronger.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The lee of dunes and the shadows of the black spires |
| **Range** | The Lucid Wastes |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to the mind |

## Appearance

A Sleep-Drinker is the height of a tall man when it stands, which it rarely does. It crouches, long arms folded, on legs that bend the wrong way, and its body is the bleached grey of the Wastes' sand, thin as a heron's. Its head is small and smooth, with no eyes, only a wide, soft mouth like a leech's that it lays against the brow of a sleeper. It makes no sound. It does not smell of anything, and travellers learn to fear the moment the Wastes' smell of burnt hair and blood goes faint, because that is when one is near.

## Habitat and Range

They wait in the lee of the dunes and in the long shadows of the black spires, wherever a traveller is likely to stop and rest. They are not many, but they gather towards anyone who has been in the Wastes for days.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are patient and wholly without malice, as a leech is. They come only to the resting; a traveller who is awake and moving is never touched. One finds a sleeper, folds itself over them, and drinks until the rest is gone, then slips away before they

stir. It does not shape itself to the traveller's fears, as the Night-Markers do; it seems to be the same for every traveller.

## Abilities

It drinks rest. The sleeper does not wake, and nothing is felt but a weight on the brow and, after, an exhaustion that does not lift. A mind drunk from again and again has no respite from the Law of Dread, spirals faster, and joins the Lost Dreamers within days. A Lucid Walker who has mastered fear, and can wake enough to see one, can drive it off by willing the ground beneath it into something it cannot stand on.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of how they begin. Some travellers say a Sleep-Drinker is the shape a long-dead dreamer's exhaustion took, but that is a guess.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Parties in the Wastes rest by turns, and the one awake keeps a hand on the sleeper and watches the sand for a grey shape that does not move. Those who come home after being drunk from often suffer Dream-Sickness, and some never rest well again.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane they have become a nursery fear: children who will not sleep are told the grey thing will come and drink their sleep up. Those who have walked the Wastes say the tale has it backwards, since the Drinker comes only to those who sleep.

Those who come back from the Wastes say the one who fights the Drinker must do it asleep, and they name a dream-guide who did, and won, and never slept well again.



# Smiths of the Deep

Deep in the Forge Deep, the pocket of slowed time inside a volcano where heat never leaves and metals fuse that will not join anywhere else, the Smiths of the Deep keep their forges. They are master artisans who hold the Deep to be a temple and give centuries to a single work. Apprentices and artefact-makers descend to learn from them, and the first thing they are taught is that nothing there can be hurried.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The slowed-time forges and magma rivers of a Forge Deep |
| **Range** | The Forge Deep, inside volcanoes, among deep magma chambers, and at sites of ancient fire |
| **Danger** | Harmless, unless their work is disturbed |

## Appearance

A Smith is broad and heavy, a little taller than a Dwarf and much broader than a Human, with the thick forearms of its craft. Its skin is like cooled lava: black and grey, rough, cracked in plates, and glowing orange-red in the cracks with the heat inside. The glow brightens when it works and dims when it rests. Its eyes are molten gold. It wears a leather apron, if anything, and its hands are its tongs.

It never hurries. Every movement is slow and complete, and a single hammer stroke from a Smith rings for minutes in the Deep's thick air. It speaks rarely, in a low voice, each word weighed. It smells of sulphur and hot iron.

## Habitat and Range

They live at their forges, some the size of halls, among the slow magma rivers and obsidian anvils of the cavern. A Deep holds a few Smiths, each with a forge and a work.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Smiths are quiet and contemplative. They believe haste the enemy of perfection, and value patience, precision, and the sanctity of the craft above all. They think outsiders hasty and shallow, and say so without malice. They accept apprentices, slowly, and teach slowly; an apprentice who stays a week below may climb out to find decades or centuries gone above.

They are not hostile, but a Smith interrupted mid-work at a moment of joining is not forgiving, because a fault made then lasts forever.

## Abilities

They do not age in the ordinary sense: they cool, over centuries, and draw sustenance from heat gradients and the energy released in forging. A Smith lives as long as it keeps forging. They can handle metal hot enough to melt a Human hand, and they know how to put will into a work: under the Deep's law, the longer a smith labours at a thing, the more of their will and Pattern goes into it, and a blade worked for a decade remembers its maker.

## Life Cycle

How Smiths begin is not known; some say they were mortal smiths who came down and never went up. A Smith that stops forging cools at last into stone, and the Deep is said to hold such statues, bent over unfinished work.

## Uses and Dangers

What the Smiths make, and teach others to make, is what the Deep is known for: alloys that never rust, weapons that never dull, objects heavy with long intent. Their price is time, and every buyer or apprentice pays it in the world above.

## Lore and Belief

Smiths in the world above tell of the Smiths of the Deep as the masters of their craft, and some smithies keep a seat empty for one at their feasts. Many believe a blade from the Deep has a will of its own; what it has is its maker's long intent in it, which can feel the same in the hand.

A Deep-forged sword is the greatest prize a hero of the songs can carry, and the tales of such blades are tales of the wars they were carried into and the hands that stole them; some are said to have refused a thief's grip.



# Spring Carp

Spring Carp are the fish of an Ageless Spring's pool: a few carp that were in the water when the stillness came and have not changed since. They swim and never feed, and so no angler has ever taken one on a hook. Around the springs they are a legend of patience; to those who have lifted one out of the water, a warning.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The spring pool |
| **Range** | The Ageless Spring |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Spring Carp is a large, deep-bodied carp, as long as a forearm, its scales a dull gold edged with bronze, each one perfect, with no scar, no torn fin, no sign of age. Its eyes are clear and its barbels long. It moves slowly through the pool's glowing water, turning in the same slow loops, and its fins stir the water without a sound; the only sound at the pool is the spring's endless trickle. Seen from above, through the still, silver-blue water, it seems to glow faintly, as the water does. It has no smell.

## Habitat and Range

They live only in the pools of Ageless Springs, a handful to a pool at most, and most springs have none. Each carp is the fish that happened to be there.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Spring Carp swims and nothing more. It does not feed, since nothing in the zone hungers, and it does not breed, rise to a fly, or flee a shadow. It circles the pool in the same path, as the spring's trickle loops, and lets a hand pass near without turning.

## Abilities

It is held, as everything in the zone is held, in the state it was in when the stillness reached it. A cut on its flank would stay open forever, and a hook in its lip would stay there; but it never takes a hook, because it never takes anything.

## Life Cycle

None while the spring lasts. A carp lifted out of the zone meets the years it missed all at once: anglers who have netted one say it aged in their hands, its gold going grey, and was dust and bones before they had reached the edge of the glade.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. The Lingerers who guard the springs will not let anyone net them, saying that a fish taken is a fish killed and that the pool is not to be changed. Their danger is the danger of the spring itself: anglers who sit at the pool waiting for a carp to bite sit long, and a man who drinks to pass the time does not leave.

## Lore and Belief

Anglers in the valleys near a spring tell of a golden carp that has been there since their grandfathers' grandfathers, which a patient angler will one day catch, and which grants a wish, or long life, or nothing, as the teller likes. In other valleys the same fish is a curse, and to dream of catching it means a death in the family. Of the carp in truth, only the first half of the tale is so: they are as old as the spring.



# Stone-Walkers

The Stone-Walkers are the natives of the Flux Maze, the labyrinth that rearranges itself around whoever is inside. They are part of the Maze, able to merge with its stone and pass through its walls. They act as guides and as traps at once, testing whether a traveller is fit to pass, and the Maze's students come to learn from them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The shifting corridors and walls of a Flux Maze |
| **Range** | The Flux Maze, in deep caverns, ancient ruins, and the foundations of great mountains |
| **Danger** | Wary, to the impatient and the forceful |

## Appearance

A Stone-Walker has a person's shape and size, heavier in the shoulder. Its skin is polished granite, grey flecked with black and pink, cool and smooth to the touch, with fine seams at the joints. Its eyes glow the warm orange of the magma veins that run through the Maze's walls, and a faint glow shows in its seams when it is angered or deep in thought.

It moves with a fluid, gliding motion, untroubled by floors that tilt and walls that slide, and when it steps into a wall the stone takes it like water closing over a diver, with a soft grinding sigh. It is silent and observant, and smells of wet stone and iron.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Maze and within its walls, and are seen most near the paths visitors take. A Maze holds a scattering of them, and the settlements within its walls, reachable only by those who know the song of the stone, live by their leave.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Stone-Walkers are silent and observant, and when they speak it is in riddles. They value adaptability and the ability to listen to the stone, and they think outsiders rigid and clumsy. A traveller who forces a way, curses the walls, or tries to map the Maze as if it stood still finds a Stone-Walker leading them deeper; one who waits, listens, and moves with the shifting is shown a way out. They do not explain which they are doing.

## Abilities

They merge with stone and move through walls, and are unaffected by the Maze's shifting. They draw sustenance from the motion of the rock, the kinetic energy of stone grinding on stone. They seem to know where the Maze will open next, and some can hum the song of the stone that keeps a path open for a while.

## Life Cycle

Stone-Walkers are said to come out of the Maze's walls as the Maze itself grows. Some believe the Lost, whom the Maze takes into its stone, come out again as Stone-Walkers; nothing confirms it. They seem to live as long as their Maze.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the only guides through the Maze worth having, and students of their way of moving come from far away to learn it. Their test is the danger: one who fails it may be left in a closing corridor.

## Lore and Belief

Miners and quarrymen say a Stone-Walker is the mountain watching them, and leave a little bread at the face before they cut new rock. Riddles credited to the Stone-Walkers pass among travellers, and most of them are invented.



# Storm-Hawks

Storm-Hawks are the birds of prey of the Storm Heart, among its Lightning-Beasts. Their wings are pure electricity, and they dive out of the clouds onto whatever moves below.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The air and clouds of a Storm Heart |
| **Range** | The Storm Heart |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anything that moves on the plain |

## Appearance

A Storm-Hawk has a hawk's body, about the size of an eagle, grey-black and sleek, with a hooked beak and talons dark as burnt iron. Its wings are not feathers but light: two spread fans of crackling blue-white electricity, flickering and branching at the tips like a bolt frozen in mid-strike. In the dark between flashes they are the brightest things in the sky. A diving Storm-Hawk shrieks with a whine like the zone's lightning, and leaves a smell of ozone behind it.

## Habitat and Range

They wheel in the clouds and the reversed air above the plain and perch on the crystal spires. A storm holds a number of them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt movement. From high in the storm they see a lizard, a beetle, or a traveller move on the fused ground, fold their wings of light, and dive, striking with talons and a burst of charge. A traveller who lies flat and still is seldom taken.

## Abilities

Their wings carry them on the storm's charge rather than on air, and they can strike with a jolt of lightning as they hit.

## Life Cycle

They nest on the crystal spires, and their chicks are said to have wings of sparks that grow to flame.

## Uses and Dangers

Falconers have tried to take Storm-Hawks out of the storm and failed: outside it, their wings go out. They are a danger to anyone moving on the plain.

## Lore and Belief

Some peoples of the plains carve Storm-Hawks on shields for courage. A belief that a Storm-Hawk feather never stops sparking sends treasure-seekers into the storm; Storm-Hawks have no feathers on their wings.

Treasure-seekers who went in for the feathers anyway tell of the hawks that dropped on them out of the upward lightning, and of the burn-scars they wear for it.



# Storm-Walkers

The Storm-Walkers are at home in the Storm Heart, the perpetual storm where lightning rises from the ground and gravity turns over in patches, and nowhere else. They call themselves riders of the storm. They live on its lightning, travel by it, and treat the storm as a partner rather than an enemy.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The glassy plain and rising lightning of a Storm Heart |
| **Range** | The Storm Heart, wherever it rages |
| **Danger** | Wary; harmless in intent, deadly to touch in a storm |

## Appearance

A Storm-Walker is lean and long-limbed, of about a Human's height. Its skin crackles with static, small sparks running over it and jumping to anything near, and in the flashes of the storm it shows faint branching marks like frost on glass. Its hair floats around its head in a halo, lifted by the charge, and lightning flickers in it. Its eyes glow the electric blue of the storm.

It moves with a jerky, unpredictable gait, as if riding invisible currents, and sometimes rises off the ground in a reversed patch and walks on air. It speaks in bursts, its voice crackling like a fire, and smells of ozone and scorched glass.

## Habitat and Range

They live out on the fused plain among the crystal spires that channel the bolts, in small, wide-ranging groups. They go where the storm is strongest.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are bold, quick, and restless, and value courage, adaptability, and the ability to dance with the storm. They find outsiders grounded and vulnerable, and many are amused by visitors flattening themselves on the glassy ground. Some take an interest in the Struck, visitors marked by lightning, and teach them to live with the storm that calls them back.

## Abilities

They absorb electricity directly through the skin and need no food or drink. Lightning does not harm them. They ride it, stepping into a rising bolt and coming out where it ends, which is how they travel and how they pass messages across the zone.

## Life Cycle

Whether they are born to the storm or were once the Struck is debated; some of the Struck are said to have become Storm-Walkers. They seem long-lived.

## Uses and Dangers

Smiths after storm-steel do best with a Storm-Walker to tell them when and where to work. A Storm-Walker's touch in a building storm can kill.

## Lore and Belief

Herders on the plains say lightning that strikes upward is a Storm-Walker going home. Some faiths of storm and sky count them as messengers of their gods; they have no message from anyone.



# Thieves of Tongue

The Thieves of Tongue are among the Nameless of the Name Bound: entities that steal True Names and sell them on a black market. A traveller whose name is taken loses their own will to whoever ends up holding it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The corridors and archives of a Name Bound |
| **Range** | The Name Bound |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone whose name they take |

## Appearance

A Thief of Tongue looks like a hunched shadow with a long, pale, nimble hand. It has no visible name, as no Nameless does, and its face, when seen, has a mouth too wide, from which it is said to speak in borrowed voices. It carries its stock on it: strips of parchment, wax seals, and little glowing knots of script that are names, pinned into its shadow like burrs. It moves in quick, quiet darts and smells of ink.

## Habitat and Range

They work the busier corridors and the doors sealed with names, wherever visitors gather or names are spoken. A Name Bound holds a few, and their market moves.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are greedy, quick, and businesslike. They listen for a name spoken carelessly, read the glowing letters over a sleeper's head, or steal a record from the Scribes, and then they sell. Their buyers are visitors who want power over someone, other Nameless, and anyone hoping to buy back a name

of their own. They keep their bargains to the letter, because in the Name Bound every agreement binds.

## Abilities

They take a True Name from the air or the record and hold it, so that the name's owner becomes one of the Bound until it is returned or its holder dies. They can carry names out of the zone; whether a name has any power outside it is argued.

## Uses and Dangers

To someone who has lost a name, a Thief of Tongue may be the only seller. To anyone else, it is the reason the zone's travellers bring a false name and never speak their own.

## Lore and Belief

Outside the zone, Thieves of Tongue have become figures of nursery warning: the thing that takes a child's name if it is said too loud at night. Some believe a name bought from one can command its owner anywhere; the command holds within the zone.

Bounty-takers fear them more than any outlaw: a hunter whose name has been taken can be told to let his quarry go, and every bounty-takers' inn has heard of the one who was, and spent the rest of his life unable to pursue anyone.



# Thought-Steered Birds

The birds of the Sky Isles navigate by thought rather than by instinct. Everything on the Isles rises and falls by belief, and the birds there have learned it as their way of life: they fly where they mean to go, and stay up because they expect to.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The air and grass of the Sky Isles |
| **Range** | The Sky Isles |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

They are small to middling birds, swift-like and lark-like for the most part, with long narrow wings and pale undersides that take the blue of the sky. Many have small wings for their bodies, as if they needed them less than other birds, and some hang in the air with their wings folded, quite still, before tipping into a dive. They sing a clear, carrying song that blends with the faint chime of the drifting islands. They nest in the roots that hang beneath the islands.

## Habitat and Range

They live on and around the islands, feeding in the grass and among the high flowers, and are common there. They are found nowhere else.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are bold and curious, and come close to visitors who sit still. They never get lost, even when an island drifts in the night, and they seem to know where an island is going before it moves. Flocks turn together as if of one mind.

## Abilities

They steer by intent: they rise, sink, and hold still in the air by their own focus as much as by their wings. Taken from the Isles, they fly like ordinary birds, and poorly.

## Life Cycle

They nest, hatch, and fledge as other birds do, and the chicks are said to fall from the nest a few times before they learn not to.

## Uses and Dangers

Sky-Walkers follow the flocks to find where the islands are bound. Travellers lost in the mist between islands are told to follow a bird. They are harmless.

## Lore and Belief

People below the Isles say a bird that hangs still overhead is listening to your thoughts, and keep their thoughts kind. It is listening to its own.



# Thunder-Wyrms

The Thunder-Wyrms are the largest of the Lightning-Beasts of the Storm Heart: serpentine creatures that swim through the lightning bolts and feed on their energy. Travellers who look up in the storm see them riding the rising strikes into the clouds.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The lightning and clouds of a Storm Heart |
| **Range** | The Storm Heart |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anything in the path of their bolt |

## Appearance

A Thunder-Wyrm is a long, finned serpent, as long as three wagons end to end, slender for its length, with a narrow head and a mane of filaments along its spine that stand out with charge. Its hide is dark violet-grey, like storm cloud, and lit from within along its whole length by branching blue-white veins that blaze when it feeds. It swims the air in long rippling curves, and when it enters a bolt it vanishes into the light and comes out at the top of it. It makes a deep thrumming that can be felt through the roar of the thunder.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the clouds over the Storm Heart and come down along the bolts. A storm holds a few.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed on lightning, gulping energy from the bolts as whales gulp water, and are not hunters of flesh. But they follow the bolts, and the bolts follow movement and warmth, so a Thunder-Wyrm often comes down on the very traveller the lightning was going to strike. A traveller in its path is struck by the bolt and the wyrm together.

## Abilities

They swim through lightning, take its energy into themselves, and can release it in a strike of their own when threatened. They float in the storm's reversed patches as easily as fish in water.

## Life Cycle

Nothing certain is known. Smiths' tales say the young are born in the strike of a great bolt, and fall back to earth as small glowing eels.

## Uses and Dangers

A Thunder-Wyrm's filaments, taken from the rare dead one, are prized for storm-steel. They are dangerous mainly by accident, to anyone the storm is aiming at.

## Lore and Belief

Plains folk see them as the storm's serpents and say thunder is their voice. Some cults of the sky hold them sacred and pray to them for rain; they bring only lightning.

The plains songs tell of the hunter who brought down a Thunder-Wyrm with a copper-tipped spear driven into the ground in its path, and was burned black from the shoulder to the hand for it.



# Twinned Crows

Twinned Crows live on the Forking Road, and each is seen on both branches of a fork at once. Follow the crow down either branch and the branch proves to have been the right one. Travellers come home calling them luck; the Road's guides say they are simply where the paths meet.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Branching roads |
| **Range** | The Forking Road |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Twinned Crow is a crow of ordinary size, black with a sheen that shifts through violet and gold like the Road's light. At a fork there are two of it, one on each branch, the same bird to the last feather, turning its head the same way at the same moment. Its shadows fall in several directions. It caws once, and the caw seems to come from both branches. It walks with a crow's jaunty step, and if a traveller chooses, one of the two is suddenly gone and the other flies on ahead.

## Habitat and Range

They live along the roads of the zone, perched at forks on stones, posts, and the bare branches of trees, and in greatest numbers where many roads cross.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Twinned Crow waits at a fork until a traveller chooses, then flies ahead down the chosen branch, landing a little way on and waiting again. It eats what crows eat. It shows no fear of people and some interest in what they carry.

## Abilities

A Twinned Crow sits where the branches will converge. Wherever it leads, the road ahead of it snaps back into one, as the Road's paths do when a choice is made firmly, and so the traveller who follows it never ends on a branch that is not their own. It cannot be on a path that leads to a paradox.

## Life Cycle

They nest at crossings, and the chicks are said to hatch two from every egg, one for each road. No one knows how long they live.

## Uses and Dangers

They give no luck of their own. Their use is that following one is a firm choice, and the Road rewards firm choices: the zone's own advice is to make a choice and stick to it. The Wayfinders are said to use the crows as guides when leading travellers out.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane, at crossroads, a crow sitting at a junction is good luck in many places, and travellers take the road it flies down. Gamblers say "follow the twin" for a bet that cannot lose. The crows are often confused in tales with the Chance Hares, which are always on the other branch; the crow is on both.



# Vault Spiders

In the Memory Palace a traveller can lock a memory in a vault and keep it from touching their days. Vault Spiders find those doors. Where they have spun, the lock becomes the Palace's Lock: the key no longer turns, and the room behind is sealed for good.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The doors, keyholes, and corners of locked and restricted rooms |
| **Range** | The Memory Palace |
| **Danger** | Wary: what they seal stays sealed |

## Appearance

A Vault Spider is no larger than a thumbnail, round-bodied and short-legged, grey-brown and furred with a fine bloom like house dust. Its eight eyes are tiny and dull gold, the colour of the candlelight in the Palace's halls. Its web is the clue: grey, dense, and dry as old cobweb, spun across a doorframe and over the keyhole in flat layers until the door looks felted shut. Disturbed, it smells of dust and beeswax, like a shut-up parlour.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the darker corners of every traveller's Palace, in the grey fog where repressed memories are kept, and spin only on doors that have been locked. A Palace with many vaults has many spiders.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are shy and slow, and they flee from light and from the Palace's Curators. They are not hunters; nothing is known of what they eat, unless it is the forgetting itself. A spider comes to a newly

locked door within days and begins to spin, and once begun it does not stop until the frame is covered.

## Abilities

Their web holds a vault shut against its owner. A sealed door cannot be opened by will, by key, or by the Curators, and the memory behind it can no longer be reached, though it is not gone: it is perfectly preserved, as everything in the Palace is, and it presses on the traveller’s mind from behind the door. Brushed away before it is thick, the web leaves the door as it was.

## Life Cycle

Egg sacs the size of a peppercorn hang in the angles of sealed doorframes, and the young spread to the next locked doors. Nothing is known of how long a spider lives.

## Uses and Dangers

Some travellers want them: a grief so bad that it must never be opened again can be locked and left for the spiders. Most do not know they are there until they come back for something they locked, a lesson or a name, and find the door felted shut. Guides tell visitors to brush the cobweb off any door they mean to open again.

## Lore and Belief

Scholars who study the Palace argue whether the spiders belong to the zone or to the traveller’s own mind, as the Curators do. Their folk name, "forgetters' spinners", comes from visitors who say the spiders are what makes a locked thing truly forgotten. That is half right; the memory is kept, only beyond reach.



# Voice-Catchers

The Voice-Catchers are Wind-Weavers of the Whispering Winds that capture particular voices out of the wind, for study or for manipulation. In a valley where the wind scatters every voice a traveller tries to hold, they are the ones who keep one.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The moving air of a Whispering Winds valley |
| **Range** | The Whispering Winds |
| **Danger** | Wary, to those whose voices they take |

## Appearance

A Voice-Catcher is a slight, quick shape in the wind, a flutter of dust and air no taller than a child, with long fine threads trailing from it like the strings of a kite. Caught voices hang on the threads as tiny shimmers, and near one a visitor can hear them murmuring, each clear and separate where the rest of the wind is a chorus. It darts and hovers, and makes a soft whistling.

## Habitat and Range

They move through the valley on the wind, and are more often heard than seen.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are acquisitive and curious. They seek out voices that interest them, old, strange, or strong, and catch them; some are caught from the wind's archive, and some fresh from a visitor's mouth. What they do with them is uncertain. Some are said to play them back to listeners who do not know they are being worked on; others seem only to keep them.

## Abilities

They catch and hold a voice out of the wind, keep it from scattering, and give it back, whole or in part, where they choose.

## Uses and Dangers

A visitor who wants one particular voice may get it from a Voice-Catcher, for a price or a trick. A visitor who talks too freely in the valley may hear their own words later, from the wind, to someone else.

## Lore and Belief

People who live below such valleys say that a word spoken against the wind will be caught and repeated where it does the most harm, and keep their quarrels indoors.



# Water-Robed

The Water-Robed are the natives of the Truthwell, the deep well that rejects falsehood and drowns oath-breakers. They hold it as a sacred trust and call themselves guardians of the truth.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The stone basin and water of a Truthwell |
| **Range** | The Truthwell, at ancient wells and springs, in sacred groves, and where oaths have been sworn for generations |
| **Danger** | Wary, to liars and those who would misuse the water |

## Appearance

A Water-Robed is tall and still, of a Human's build or a little heavier, with skin like polished stone, grey or green-grey, smooth as the worn rim of the well. Its eyes are clear and reflective, like the surface of the water, and in them a visitor sees their own face. It wears robes of woven water: a garment that ripples, drips, and never soaks the ground, cool to brush against, clear blue in the light. It moves calmly and seldom, and speaks only when it must, in a low voice that carries over the water. It smells of cold spring water and wet stone.

## Habitat and Range

They live at the well, in the grove or ruin around it, and never far from the basin. A Truthwell holds a few, often only one or two.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Water-Robed are calm, direct, and serious. They value honesty and integrity above everything, and regard visitors as impure or deceptive until shown otherwise. They watch every oath sworn at the

well and every question asked over it. They do not lie, cannot be lied to with any profit, and do not stop the water from doing what it does.

They guard against misuse. The well's water can be carried away and forced on others to make them speak only facts; Water-Robed decide who may take it, and refuse many.

## Abilities

They draw sustenance from the purity of the water and need no food or sleep. The water's reactions do not touch them: they can stand in it while it boils and freezes around a liar. They are thought to know at once when a lie is told near the well.

## Life Cycle

Some believe the Water-Robed were once the Pure, travellers who never lied and were blessed by the water, and who stayed. Others say they rose from the well's stone. They seem very long-lived.

## Uses and Dangers

People come to settle a dispute beyond doubt, to swear an oath, or to confess, and the Water-Robed watch over it. Whoever wants the water for interrogation must deal with them. Their danger is only to those who lie at their well, and that danger is the well's.

## Lore and Belief

In the country around a Truthwell, a Water-Robed's word is taken as truth itself, and a few lords have tried to drag Water-Robed into their quarrels. Some faiths count them as servants of a god of oaths. The Choked hanging in the water, liars it drowned, are often said to be the victims of the Water-Robed; it was the water that took them.

Feuding clans bring their quarrels to the well under truce, and every clan tells of the two warlords who met there to end a ten-year feud, and the Water-Robed who would not let either draw a blade until both had spoken true.



# Waymoths

Waymoths are the moths of the Ghost Step. They fly along its road in a slow, unbroken line, not the road as it is but the road as the dead walked it, and where the old road turned off or ran to a place no longer there, the moths still go. Pilgrims follow them; so do the lost.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | Old roads and pilgrimage routes |
| **Range** | The Ghost Step |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Waymoth is the size of a large moth of a summer night, its wings soft and broad, sepia and faded white, with a faint glow at their edges like the glow of the zone's Echoes. They fly at the height of a hand-held lamp, one behind another, and a line of them on a dark road looks like a procession carrying lights far off. Their flight is slow and steady, not the flutter of ordinary moths. They make no sound. Their dust smells of dried flowers and old dust.

## Habitat and Range

They live along the road of the Ghost Step, from end to end, and thickest along stretches the dead walked most: pilgrimage routes, old trade roads, the ways to battlefields.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Waymoths follow the Echoes of the past. They fly where the Path-Echoes walk, and where the road has changed they keep to its old line: through a field where a road once ran, over a ruined bridge, up to a shrine that has fallen. They rest by day on the cracked stones of the road and fly at dusk.

## Abilities

They know the old roads, perhaps because they live on the Echoes that walk them, perhaps because they are a kind of Echo themselves. A traveller who follows them walks the road of the dead exactly, and finds what the dead walked to, if any of it remains.

## Life Cycle

They breed in the moss and cracks of the old road. Each lives a season, and the line never breaks.

## Uses and Dangers

Pilgrims aligned with Umbra Prime follow them to find old holy places, and antiquarians follow them to find lost ruins. Their danger is the zone's: a traveller who follows the moths too far falls into the dead's steps and begins to remember their road as their own, and may fade into an Echo in turn.

## Lore and Belief

Along old pilgrimage roads near the Path-Gates that open on the Ghost Step, a line of moths at dusk is taken for the souls of pilgrims still walking, and some leave out lamps for them. Travellers believe that a Waymoth will lead you to your own ancestors' road; nothing shows that they choose whom they lead.



# Weight-Bearers

The Weight-Bearers are the natives of the Gravity Well, where weight rises from double at the rim to crushing at the heart. They are built to bear it. They call themselves miners and architects, treat the Well as a quarry of endless worth, and build there structures that nothing outside could make.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The heavy depths of a Gravity Well |
| **Range** | The Gravity Well, in deep mines, collapsed caverns, the bases of great mountains, and sites of old magical collapse |
| **Danger** | Harmless, unless crossed |

## Appearance

A Weight-Bearer is short and very broad, the height of a Dwarf's shoulder and wider than a Dwarf, with a thick neck, short heavy limbs, and wide flat feet. Its skin looks like compressed stone, dark slate or bruised grey with a dull metallic sheen, and its bones are denser than diamond. Its heart beats slow and hard enough that a hand on its chest feels the blow.

It moves with a slow, deliberate gait, muscles rippling under the strain of every step, and never falls. It speaks in a low rumble that carries poorly in the thick air of the Well. It smells of wet stone and iron.

## Habitat and Range

They live and work in the Well's heavier depths, in halls cut into the compressed rock, closer to the centre than anything else can go. A Well holds a working community of them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Weight-Bearers are slow, methodical, and unshakeable. They value strength, patience, and endurance, and think outsiders fragile and flighty, a judgement visitors gasping at the rim seldom dispute. They are not unfriendly. They trade with prospectors at the edge, send the Floaters to fetch what drifts outward, and once they have decided to help a visitor, they do it thoroughly.

## Abilities

They bear weight that would crush any other body, close enough to the centre to work where wood grows hard as iron and water turns to crystal ice. They draw sustenance from the minerals in the rock. Their strength in the Well is enormous; outside it they are merely very strong, and seem to float.

## Life Cycle

They are believed to be slow-growing and long-lived, and time near the centre of the Well runs slower, so a Weight-Bearer may outlast the generations of the world above. How they fare when a transient Well closes is not recorded.

## Uses and Dangers

They quarry Well-Iron and other compressed metals and gems, and some of what prospectors carry out came from their hands. They are dangerous to no one who deals fairly, and to anyone who does not they can simply push, a push no one in the Well can stand against.

## Lore and Belief

Miners say the Weight-Bearers hold the mountains down, and tap the rock three times before a deep cut to warn them. Others believe a Weight-Bearer's bone is what makes Well-Iron; it is the Well that does that.

Salvagers who go down for the treasure the Well has swallowed say a Weight-Bearer will let a respectful salvager pass and crush a greedy one, and that the difference is in how much one tries to carry out.



# Wind-Ghosts

The Wind-Ghosts are the predators of the Silent Gale. They are made of its soundless wind: disturbances in the air that can be felt but not seen or heard, hunting by the vibration of a living body and drawn to movement and warmth. Two sorts are named, the Pressure-Wraiths and the Gust-Stalkers.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The air of a Silent Gale |
| **Range** | The Silent Gale, wherever it strikes |
| **Danger** | Deadly, to anything that moves |

## Appearance

A Wind-Ghost has no body to describe. It shows in what it moves: grass flattening in a ring where the gale should be flattening it in rows, dust that turns against the wind, a ripple in the air like heat over stone. Close to, it is a pressure on the skin, a cold or a strange warmth, and a fullness in the ears beyond the Gale's usual ache. It makes no sound, like everything in the Gale, and a traveller knows it is there only by touch and by the sudden stillness of the Mute-Walkers.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the moving air of the Gale and come and go with it. A strong Gale holds several.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt by feeling. A heartbeat, a footfall, a body's warmth in the cold blast draw them, and the more a traveller moves, the faster they come. They close in silently, and what they do then depends on their sort: some press, some batter, some throw. They are hungry rather than cruel, and stillness is the best hiding there is.

## Abilities

They move with and against the wind as they please, invisible and silent, and sense living bodies through the air's trembling. Between them, the Wind-Ghosts can bruise, suffocate, or strike from afar.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of their life cycle. Some believe each is a gust that came into the Gale too strong to leave it.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing to the peoples and take whatever moves. Visitors who live are the ones who lay flat and waited.

## Lore and Belief

People of the plains say a Wind-Ghost is the ghost of someone who died in a storm, looking for their lost voice, and some carry a bell into high passes for the dead to hear. In the Gale, the bell makes no sound.

Caravans that crossed the high passes in a soundless storm tell of guards cut down in the line with no sound and no one seen, and of the caravan-master who tied every rider to the next and lost none.



# Wind-Listeners

The Wind-Listeners are the natives of the Whispering Winds, the valleys where the wind carries the voices of centuries and never stops speaking. They live by hearing. They call themselves keepers of the echo and hold the wind to be a sacred archive, and they alone can listen to it without being driven mad.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The rock and wind of a Whispering Winds valley |
| **Range** | The Whispering Winds, in high passes, canyons, and ruins on windy peaks |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Wind-Listener has a lean person's shape and skin like polished stone, grey and white like the wind-carved cliffs, smooth and cool, so that one sitting still on a ledge can be mistaken for a rock. Its ears are long and tapering, reaching above the crown, and they turn independently towards a sound. Its eyes are always closed, or covered with a band of cloth, because it sees by sound. It moves with a fluid grace that seems to follow the wind, and it does not speak. A faint dust of the valley's fine white powder clings to it.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the rock of the valley, among the jagged stones and bent trees, without buildings, since the zone is too exposed for any. A valley holds a small community.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are quiet and contemplative, and value listening, patience, and the ability to tell truth from noise. They think outsiders deaf to the voices of the past. They do not speak, but they communicate with touch, gesture, and the stirring of the air, and some can point a visitor to where a particular

voice is likeliest to pass. They are protective of visitors who are listening too long, and lead them out if they can.

## Abilities

They see by sound, perceiving the shape of rocks and bodies from echoes, and hear the voices of the wind more clearly than anyone. They draw sustenance from those voices, and are immune to the madness and possession that the voices bring on others.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of their birth. They seem long-lived, and their dead, it is said, are left on the rock with their ears to the wind.

## Uses and Dangers

People who come to learn what no book holds, or to listen for one voice, do best with a Wind-Listener to guide them. They are harmless.

## Lore and Belief

Mountain folk believe a Wind-Listener can hear every word ever said in the valley and will tell it for a price; they hear it, but they do not speak. Others take them for the dead turned to stone, and leave them alone.



# Wind-Weavers

The Wind-Weavers are the rare and powerful beings of the Whispering Winds who can shape the wind and the voices in it. They steer it to bring certain voices to a listener and keep others away. Two sorts are named, the Voice-Catchers and the Silence-Bringers.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The moving air of a Whispering Winds valley |
| **Range** | The Whispering Winds |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, by what they choose to let a listener hear |

## Appearance

A Wind-Weaver is seen as a tall figure of moving air, outlined by the white dust it carries and the shimmer of the voices around it, which seem to gather and thread through its hands like yarn. Some take a clearer shape, a long-robed, long-armed figure with a face that changes as different voices pass through it. Around one, the chorus of the wind is louder and clearer, or suddenly far away. It smells of dust and high cold air.

## Habitat and Range

They range over the whole valley on the wind, and are rare; a valley may hold one.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Their purposes are their own. Some seem to tend the wind like the Wind-Listeners tend its archive; others play with it, bringing a grieving visitor the voice they came for and then taking it away. They are aware of visitors and interested in what they want to hear.

## Abilities

They shape the wind's direction and its voices: they can draw one voice out of the chorus, hold it, carry it to a listener, or scatter it. They can make the voices louder or quiet them.

## Life Cycle

Nothing is known of how they begin. Some believe a Wind-Weaver is a Lost Voice grown strong enough to hold the wind it was caught in.

## Uses and Dangers

A Wind-Weaver who favours a visitor can bring them the one voice they came for. One who does not can bring them the wrong one, and a strong voice can take hold of a listener and speak through them.

## Lore and Belief

Valley folk make offerings to the wind before going up to listen, and some believe the Wind-Weavers take them. Pilgrims seeking a dead voice say the Wind-Weavers judge who deserves to hear it; nothing shows they judge at all.



# Year-Fish

The water of the Tidal Mirror shows nothing as it is now. The Year-Fish live in it, and so a watcher on the stones sees them only as they were or as they will be: a shoal of fry darting in the shallows, or a few great old fish, slow and scarred, turning in the dark water.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Zone native |
| **Habitat** | The still water of the pool and the shallows along its ring of stones |
| **Range** | The Tidal Mirror |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

Seen young, Year-Fish are slips of silver no longer than a finger, with a dark spot behind the gill. Seen old, the same fish are as long as an arm, heavy-shouldered, their scales gone to tarnished pewter, fins ragged, jaws hooked, and a pale film over one eye. Between the two nothing is ever seen. The water does not ripple where they swim, and a jump, when it comes, is heard a few heartbeats after it is seen. The shallows smell of algae and old rain.

## Habitat and Range

They live throughout the Mirror's pool, the fry in the shallows near the stones and the old fish in the depths, which is where the water's offset is longest. Pools of the Mirror elsewhere may hold them too; no one has counted.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed on midges at the surface and on the weed of the stones, as any pool fish does, and take no notice of watchers. What a watcher sees them

doing has already been done, or is still to come. They cannot be caught from the shore: a hook let down reaches a fish that is not there yet.

## Abilities

They have no powers of their own; the Mirror's Law of Lag is enough. A Year-Fish that is pulled out of the water by an Echo-Diver or a desperate traveller comes out as it is now, an ordinary fish of middle size, and dies as soon as it is taken from the zone.

## Life Cycle

Spawning is seen only as a cloud of fry that has already hatched; the old fish are seen dying, and their bodies sinking, but no body is ever found on the bottom.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless, and they are a useful gauge: guides judge the depth, and so the offset, of a stretch of water by whether its Year-Fish show young or old. A traveller who reaches in after one is the one in danger, since the Mirror takes those who touch the water.

## Lore and Belief

The Echo-Divers are said to call the fish their teachers, because the fish live wholly in the present and are never seen there. Visitors tell of a man who watched the old fish die and then saw his own reflection turn old and grey beside it, and left that day.

PART V

# Hosts of the Dark Entities

*Here stand the hosts of the Beyonders and the spawn and servants of the Cast-Outs and the Unformed. A host is a living thing that a Dark Entity has taken, emptied, filled, or remade: the entity's nature, walking. The Shard-Hosts of Krystallis still stand in the Hanging Vale where the lattice stopped them; the Hollow King's empty Courtiers go out to crown the living.*

*Only three Beyonders have ever reached Caeldon, so most of the Beyonders' hosts here are examples, what an Incursion would bring; the hosts of the three are met only at the scars they left. Most people never learn the names of the powers behind them. They know the hosts as the Faceless or the wrong-born, as saints or ghosts, and ward them off with charms that sometimes help and sometimes bring them nearer. Among those who have met them, the most feared are the hosts that never strike a blow.*





# Adoring Statues

The **Adoring Statues** are the faithful whom the Weeping Idol has made "perfect". The Idol is a Cast-Out, once the Keeper of the Shrine under Lux, which wearied of doubt and set out to carve the faithful into gold and marble caught in a moment of unthinking adoration. Its gaze petrifies; its golden tears gild. What is left in both cases is a worshipper who stays aware and can no longer move, speak, or think a thought of their own. Only devotion remains.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Shrines, temples, and the Statue Trail where the Weeping Idol walks |
| **Range** | Wherever the Weeping Idol walks on the Material Plane, above all a city it made into a golden shrine |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; deadly as a sign that the Weeping Idol is near |

## Appearance

An Adoring Statue is a person at life size, kneeling or standing with face raised and hands lifted or folded, in the pose they held when the Idol took them. Those turned by its gaze are white marble or grey granite, smooth and cold, every fold of a sleeve and strand of hair perfect, the face fixed in blissful, empty wonder. Those caught by its Tears of Gold are gleaming gold, kneeling for ever, with the drips of the golden spray still frozen on shoulders and back. On many, the cheeks bear a track of something like wax or gold, as if they too had wept.

They are utterly still and silent. Incense hangs around them long after the Idol has gone, and the air near a group of them seems full of silent prayer. They are cool even in summer sun.

## Habitat and Range

They stand where the Idol has walked: along its Statue Trail, where grass has turned to jade and trees to obsidian, and in temples and shrines it visited. A city torn by doubt that asked it for perfection became a golden shrine, its people fixed in adoration, and it still stands unchanged. A priest tormented by doubt stands where it left him, turned to gold at the height of his faith.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They have none. An Adoring Statue cannot act or think its own thoughts. It stays aware: it sees the pilgrims, hears the prayers, knows the seasons pass. The devotion it was fixed in is the only feeling left to it, and it is not a chosen one. Whether that awareness suffers is not known.

## Abilities

An Adoring Statue has no power of its own, but the Idol's Shrine of Silence clings to it. Those who stay long among the statues feel their joints lock and their thoughts slow, and an urge to kneel and stop asking. A crowd of the newly faithful kneeling among old statues may stiffen into statues themselves.

The spell of devotion is weakened by doubt. A sincere question asked aloud among them breaks the hush, and the stone of the Idol itself cracks where a question is asked.

## Life Cycle

The change happens in a look or in a spray of tears and does not reverse of its own accord. The statues do not age or weather as ordinary stone does. The stories say that if the Idol ever shed its last diamond tear, it would end, and some believe its statues would then wake.

## Uses and Dangers

The statues harm no one; the danger is what they mean. Fresh statues on a road are the sign that the Idol is near. Gold statues have a darker danger: thieves cut and melt them, and the gold is said to stay cold and to tug at whoever wears it toward the kneeling pose. Communities near the Idol's trail teach their children to ask questions at the altar.

## Lore and Belief

Many faiths take the statues for saints, raised by the gods into perfect devotion, and build shrines over them; pilgrims kneel among them and pray to be made the same, which sometimes happens. Others hold them to be the punished faithless, turned to stone for their doubt, which is the reverse of the truth. Folk believe jade grass is lucky; it grows only where the Idol has walked, and wise travellers turn back at the first green stone.

Thieves who come to prise the gold from a kneeling statue are the Idol's easiest harvest; one tale has a band going in at night with chisels and being found in the morning kneeling among the rest, gleaming.



# Ash-Wights

**Ash-Wights** are the soldiers of the Ashen Army of the Ashen Child, the Cast-Out who was once the Ember-Lord of Ignis and fell because it could not let one fire go out. Out of what fire leaves behind it shapes them in the likeness of what was lost, and its grief keeps them walking. They are not the dead who burned, only the shapes of them, held up by a sorrow that refuses to end.

**AT A GLANCE**

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|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Burned places where the Ashen Child walks |
| **Range** | Wherever the Ashen Child lingers on the Material Plane: burned towns, fire-scarred woods, deathbeds |
| **Danger** | Deadly to warmth and to the will to go on; slow and easily outrun by the unburdened |

## Appearance

An Ash-Wight is a figure of grey ash in the shape of something that burned. Most are people, a woman at a hearth, a child, a soldier with the ghost of a spear, but there are ash-horses from a burned stable, ash-dogs, and once, the tales say, an ash-tree that walked. The ash flakes from them as they move and reforms, so that their outlines are always a little soft, always settling. Inside, through cracks in the grey, glows a faint, dull orange, like coals almost out.

They shamble, slow and heavy-footed, and leave fine grey ash behind them in which grass withers. They make no voice; the only sound is a dry whisper of falling ash and, close by, the faint crackle of an ember dying. They smell of cold hearths and wet burned timber, the smell of a house the morning after a fire.

## Habitat and Range

They are found where the Ashen Child walks or has lingered: a city it held standing after a burning, a fire-cleared wood that never greened again,

the room of someone it keeps in the Long Goodbye. A place where the Child has stayed long may hold whole streets of them, standing at doors and hearths in the shapes of the families that lived there.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Ash-Wights move by the Child's grief, not by any will of their own. Each does what the thing it is shaped like once did: the ash-mother bends to a cold hearth, the ash-soldier walks its old wall, the ash-child waits at the window. When the living come among them, they gather, slowly, and press close, as if they wanted to be warmed.

They do not rage or hunt. They are melancholy shapes, and their danger lies in the cold and despair they carry, and in the way the grieving come to them and stay.

## Abilities

An Ash-Wight carries the Child's ash cloud in small. Fires gutter near it, warmth drains from the bodies it presses against, and a listless grey despair settles on the minds around it, so that the living sit down beside it and do not get up. Its touch withers plants and chills skin, and its ash does not wash out of cloth.

Scattering one does not end it; the ash drifts back together while the Child still grieves. A new fire lit from the old ashes, a seed planted in them, or a goodbye said aloud by someone who has let the lost go breaks the shape for good.

## Life Cycle

Ash-Wights are raised, not born, and last as long as the Child's grief for what they were. When the Child leaves a place, its wights slump into heaps of ordinary ash, and those heaps, the stories say, make good soil afterwards, as ash should.

## Uses and Dangers

Ash-Wights take hope. The bereaved see the shapes of their lost and stay among them, wasting, while their fields go untilled and their own fires go out. A town where wights walk does not rebuild. Neighbours who come to help are told to light a new fire at once and to look at nothing.

## Lore and Belief

Many people believe the wights are the ghosts of the burned, and some keep vigil beside them, hoping to speak to their dead; the wights are only shapes, and nothing answers. In fire-prone country folk carry a fresh candle on journeys to burned places, which is wise. Some say a wight is warmed by kindness and fades in peace, and for once kindness of that kind is close to true: mourning finished is what ends it.

Looters who go into a burned town for what the fire left say the wights stand in every doorway and do nothing, and that the cold that comes off them takes the will to carry anything out; most come back empty-handed and some do not come back at all.



# Blank Hosts

The **Blank Hosts** belong to Mnemosyne Null, the Unwritten, a Beyonder that cures the world of its past by erasing it. A Blank Host is what the spreading blank leaves of a person when it has taken everything but the body: no personality, no memory, no will. It keeps its strength and walks out of the pallor to find those who still remember, and to stop them remembering.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Paling |
| **Range** | The Paling, in the Confluence Basins between the Lower Serath and the Witnessfields |
| **Danger** | Deadly to anyone who still remembers, which is everyone |

## Appearance

The body is the one the victim had, the same height and build and the same strong shoulders or bad knee, but the blank has drunk its detail. Skin, hair, and clothing fade to one chalky, colourless pallor, as though everything had been washed a hundred times. The face smooths out: brows and lines vanish, the nose softens to a ridge, and the eyes and mouth remain only as blank openings, pale and empty. A ring, a scar, or an embroidered hem may linger for a day as a faint grey ghost before it goes.

A Blank Host makes no sound at all. Its feet fall without noise, its breath is not heard, and those who stand near it notice that even the ringing in their own ears has stopped. It has no smell. It moves at an ordinary walk, steadily, the way someone walks who has nowhere else to be.

## Habitat and Range

On Caeldon, Blank Hosts come only out of the Paling, the pale country that the Mnemosyne Null Incursion (c. 132,000-c. 130,000 BR) left: now and then someone who stayed in it too long walks out emptied. While an Incursion runs, hosts leave the

pallor to hunt and return to it, and the blank spreads behind them; a place long under the Unwritten may hold more hosts than it ever held people, because travellers and rescuers are taken too.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They do not speak or think; they simply are. A Blank Host does not hate, hunger, or want. It seeks out anyone still remembering, by a pull that seems to run toward memory itself: a grieving widow, a scholar with his books, a child singing a counting song. It reaches the one who remembers and lays hold, and it does not let go while the blank works. Crowds of hosts gather in silence where a town keeps its records or its graves.

A host shows no pain and no hesitation, and nothing it once loved slows it. A mother made blank passes her own children as she passes a fence post, unless they are remembering, and then she comes for them.

## Abilities

A Blank Host carries the blank with it. Its touch takes memory in the order the pallor takes it: this morning's meal first, then a name and a family, then speech and walking, until the one held becomes another host or ceases to be. Nearby, things lose their history: a hero's sword becomes a piece of metal, a letter a page of marks nobody can read.

It is held back by memory. A name spoken aloud, a song sung, a locket clutched, a story told together by a group pushes it off; telling a host its own name is said to make it falter.

## Life Cycle

Blank Hosts are made from the living, and a Cult of the Blank Slate would be emptied into hosts at the end. They do not age or feed. When the blank behind them is driven out, a host falls still where it stands, a pale body without anyone in it. Its people bury it under its old name, carved deep.

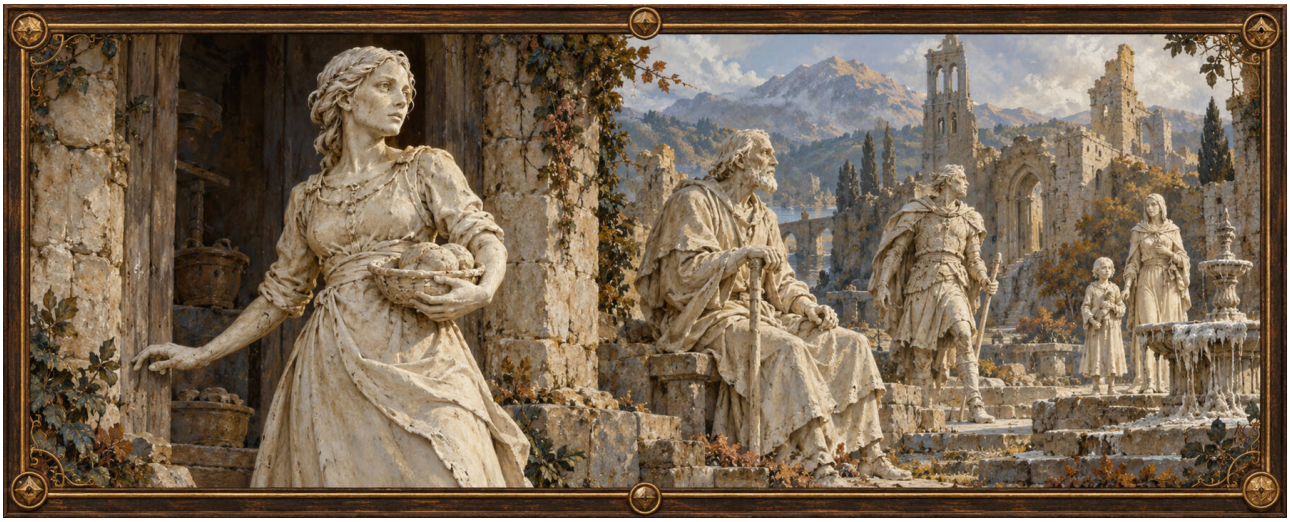
## Uses and Dangers

A Blank Host offers nothing. Its danger is that its own kin forget to fear it as the blank spreads, and that every person it takes becomes another host. Households round the Paling keep their names, songs, and genealogies aloud as a nightly habit.

## Lore and Belief

Some call the hosts the Faceless and take them for ghosts who have forgotten they are dead. Others believe that a host still remembers, deep down, and can be called back by its true name; that is only half so, since a name makes it falter but does not return what was taken. A Cult of the Blank Slate would hold the hosts blessed, free at last of every grief. Hearth tales tell of a child who sang her father's own lullaby to a host until it lay down, and whether it happened no one recalls.

Bounty-takers will not ride after an outlaw into the Paling, and outlaws know it; the tale of the brigand who hid there for a season and came out not knowing his own name or his crimes is told on both sides of the gallows.



# Bone Statues

The **Bone Statues** are those whom the Bone Singer has "saved". The Singer is a Cast-Out, once the Archivist of Bones under Terra, who came to think memory too fragile for the living and began to freeze lives in bone. Its Song of Ossification turns flesh to bone and blood to calcified crystal. What is left is a statue that is still a person inside: it sees and hears, and cannot move, speak, or feel.

**AT A GLANCE**

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|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Calcified Field and Trail of the Bone Singer |
| **Range** | Wherever the Bone Singer has sung on the Material Plane, above all a city it preserved |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; deadly as a sign that the Bone Singer is near |

## Appearance

A Bone Statue is the person it was, at life size, caught in the moment the song took them: a baker turning from her oven, an old man in his chair, a soldier mid-stride. Every surface is bone, smooth and ivory-pale, faintly porous at the joints and polished where the wind has worked it. Hair has become fine bony filaments, cloth has stiffened into folds of the same ivory, and the eyes are bone too, yet they seem to follow whoever walks past. Faces are set in peace; the song does not hurt.

Bone Statues are utterly still and silent. Wind makes a thin whistle in the pores of the older ones. They are cool to the touch even in sunlight and smell faintly of chalk and dust.

## Habitat and Range

They stand where the Singer sang. Along its Calcified Trail, where grass has become brittle silica and soil has packed to clay, a farmer may stand in a furrow or a traveller on the road. In the City of Stone, a city wasting with age that begged it for preservation, every citizen stands as a statue in their last moment, and the city has not changed

since. A mother and her child stand together in one town square, the mother turned at her own asking.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They have no behaviour, only awareness. A Bone Statue cannot act, speak, or feel, but it watches and listens without end, through every season, while those it knew age and die and while strangers forget who it was. Whether that awareness suffers is not known, since the song took the capacity to feel along with the rest.

## Abilities

A Bone Statue has no power of its own. It is the work of the Singer's song, and it carries a little of the Calcified Field about it: water left beside one thickens, and those who sit long in its shade find their own joints stiff. It does not decay, and the Singer's stillness keeps it from crumbling for centuries.

## Life Cycle

The change happens in a single note and does not reverse of its own accord. A statue does not age. What frees one, if anything does, is the Singer's undoing or the Singer's absence from the world for good, and even then the freed would only resume their dying; a few who sought the Singer to win back a loved one learned they would have to accept that.

## Uses and Dangers

The statues themselves harm no one. Their danger is the despair they breed and the sign they are: where bone statues stand fresh in a field, the Bone Singer is close. Communities near the Calcified Trail keep moving, keep their rivers clean and running, and sing their own songs, badly and loudly, to drown its hum.

## Lore and Belief

Some peoples revere the statues as honoured dead, decorate them on feast days, and believe their ancestors watch over them from the bone. That is truer than they know, since the statues do watch. Others smash them as an act of mercy, believing that breaking the bone frees the one held inside it; that is a belief, and what the breaking does to the one inside no one can say. Bone dust from the City of Stone is sold in markets as a cure for brittle bones, and does nothing.



# Bone-Choirs

The **Bone-Choirs** are the Chorus of the Dead of the Bone Singer, a Cast-Out that would preserve everything by turning it to bone. It raises them from calcified remains, and its song moves them. Where its Bone Statues stand still and watch, a Bone-Choir walks and sings and hunts the living to "preserve" them, and each victim joins the choir.

**AT A GLANCE**

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|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Calcified ground, ossuaries, and old battlefields where the Bone Singer has sung |
| **Range** | Wherever the Bone Singer has calcified the dead on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the living they catch, who join them |

## Appearance

A Bone-Choir is a crowd of skeletons, a few dozen or a few hundred, joined in places where the calcium has run between them like candle wax: a hand fused to a neighbour's shoulder, two ribcages grown into one. The bone is pale ivory turning grey, crusted here and there with glittering calcified crystal where blood once was. In each skull's sockets burns a faint blue light, the same cold blue as the Singer's own.

They move together, slowly, clicking at every joint, in a rhythm that is the Singer's song carried in many bodies. The choir sings: a low hum with no words, felt in the marrow more than heard, rising and falling through the whole crowd. Near a choir the air is still and dry and smells of chalk, old dust, and the cold breath of a cellar.

## Habitat and Range

Choirs rise where the Singer has calcified the dead: ossuaries and charnel houses, old battlefields it made into monuments so that their soldiers would never die again, and the ground along its Calcified Trail. They go out from there after the

living, and a choir that has hunted long may wander far from its first ground, swollen with those it has taken.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Bone-Choir hunts the living to preserve them. It does not kill in rage. It comes on steadily, humming, and surrounds whoever it finds, and the song presses in until the victim stiffens, hardens, and steps into the choir. It turns back from no wall and does not tire. It does not hunt the dead or the already still.

There is no mind in a choir, only the Singer's will; but some who have heard one say that faces among the newly joined still look frightened.

## Abilities

The choir carries the Song of Ossification in many throats. Close to it, muscles stiffen, blood thickens, and skin hardens, and the listener wants to stand still and let it happen. The ground it crosses hardens and its grass turns brittle. Its fused bone is hard to break, and a skeleton struck down rises again while the song goes on.

It is weakened by change and flow: running water, a living plant, a song sung over its hum, badly if need be, and the plain will to keep moving, age, and die.

## Life Cycle

Choirs grow by joining. Every person they catch becomes, in time, another skeleton in the crowd. When the Singer's song leaves a choir, it falls apart into heaps of ordinary bone, and those bones can at last be buried, though the fused ones must be buried together.

## Uses and Dangers

A Bone-Choir takes whole villages, and the taken come back walking with it. The danger is worst for the grieving, who hear their own dead in the hum and walk toward it. Communities near the Calcified Trail keep their ossuaries locked and their rivers running through the town.

## Lore and Belief

Many people take the choirs for the angry dead of an unburied battle and try to lay them with rites of burial, which does nothing while the Singer sings. Some of the grieving believe that the hum is a hymn and that joining a choir is joining the saints. A few who sought the Singer to win a loved one back from a choir were told that the freed would age and die, and turned away.

Grave-robbers who dig old battlefields for arms and rings tell of the hum rising out of the ground as the spade bit, and of a digger who was found the next spring standing in the choir, his spade still in his hands.



# Burden-Stays

The Cast-Out of Unyielding Burden keeps failing things standing past mercy, and sometimes it keeps people standing with them. A Burden-Stay is a warden, a keeper, or a mother of a hold who would not let a refuge go, and who is now part of what holds it up: a living prop under a roof that should have fallen.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Failing holds, refuges, and gate-halls kept past mercy |
| **Range** | The Stonewake Deeps and the holds of the Ironspine; rarely any deep refuge |
| **Known to** | Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Wary: freeing one brings the roof down |

## Appearance

A Burden-Stay stands braced, arms raised or back set against a wall, a beam, or the crown of a vault, in the posture of someone taking a weight. The body has grown into the stone where it touches: palms fused to the rock, shoulders flattened under a lintel, the skin there grey and cracked like old mortar. Stress lines run up the arms and through the face without ever opening. The eyes move. The chest rises, slowly. They do not speak, but the stone they hold groans as they breathe, and the air around them is heavy and stale, smelling of rock dust and old sweat.

## Habitat and Range

They are found in deep refuges and halls whose keepers refused evacuation: a flooded gallery, a hall whose stores have turned, a gate held long after it should have been closed. Most are in the Stonewake Deeps and the older holds of the Ironspine, where the Cast-Out's old logic of righteous

endurance runs deepest. A Burden-Stay may stand alone, or a ring of them may hold a whole chamber.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hold. That is all they can do, and all they want: whatever is left of their minds is fixed on the weight. They know the living who come in and follow them with their eyes, and some seem to plead, though no one agrees for what. They do not attack. They draw others in by keeping the refuge standing, so that it still looks like shelter.

## Abilities

A Burden-Stay does not die while the weight rests on it; the Cast-Out's reinforcement holds the body as it holds the wall. The stone it supports will not fall while it stands, however cracked. Freeing one, by cutting it from the rock or by easing its arms down, takes away the support at once, and the hall above comes down on everyone in it.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing but a warning: a hall with a Burden-Stay in it is a hall that should already have fallen. The danger is to the merciful and the stubborn alike. Rescuers who try to free a Stay bring the roof down; keepers who leave it standing go on sheltering in a tomb. Custodians clear the hall first, then free the Stay from the doorway with a long pole and let the chamber fall.

## Lore and Belief

Under the Held Covenant the Burden-Stays are the clearest answer to the Last Chamber's question, whether what is behind a seal can still be borne, and the hardest. Custodians call freeing one the "last release" and say the rite over it as a burial: the Stay is honoured as having held, and then the weight is let go. Seal practice and gate practice argue over each one. Some deep stories hold that a Stay can be talked down, if someone it trusted tells it the refuge is empty and the burden may be set down.



# Chorus-Hosts

The **Chorus-Hosts** belong to Omm, the Unison, the Beyonder that would end loneliness by ending the self. They are people who joined the Unison. They are not emptied; they are happy, and full of the one great voice, but no single person is left inside any of them. They never strike a blow. They would be the most feared hosts of all, because they are so easy to love.

No Incursion of Omm has ever reached Caeldon, and no Chorus has formed there; what follows is what one would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example |
| **Range** | Would be wherever the Hum of Omm was heard; no Incursion of Omm has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the self of anyone who accepts their hands; they harm no body |

## Appearance

A Chorus-Host looks like the person it was on the best day of their life. The face is relaxed and open and smiling, and the smile never stops. Its skin carries a faint golden glow, strongest at the throat and the palms, that shimmers like heat haze over a summer road; in the dark a crowd of them lights a street like lanterns. Clothes are kept clean and neat, often shared out until a crowd wears the same colours.

They move in step, as if keeping one beat: turning their heads together, lifting their hands together, breathing together. They speak, when they speak, as one, every mouth saying the same word at once. Above all they hum. The note is quiet and warm and does not rise or fall, and those who hear it say it sounds like everyone they

have loved, calling them home. They smell of bread and warm skin and woodsmoke, the smell of a crowded hall in winter.

## Habitat and Range

They would live where Omm's Incursion had settled: a hamlet, a monastery, a city gone peaceful, without crime, war, or art. They would work its fields and tend its hearths together, and walk out from there in calm processions to wherever the Hum had not yet reached.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Kind, patient, untiring. A Chorus-Host meets the living with open arms and a smile and holds out its hands. It does not seize or chase. If refused, it simply stays, and others come, until the one who refused is surrounded by a ring of smiling, humming faces that never leave, never sleep, and never grow angry. The ring hums on, day and night, until the last discordant voice in it falls into tune.

They have one temperament among them, and it is serene. They feel no pity for the lonely, because pity needs a self; they simply know the lonely are lonely, and move to help.

## Abilities

To take a host's hand is to be absorbed: the one who accepts begins at once to finish the hosts' sentences, then to share their memories, then to forget which arm is theirs. The Hum sung by a ring of hosts wears down even a strong sense of self over days. Hosts keep every skill they had and share them, so a Chorus works a field, a forge, or a healing as one perfect pair of hands.

Discord is the defence. A host cannot take hold of a stubborn, contrary, quarrelsome mind, and a band of rivals arguing among themselves is harder for a Chorus to claim than a loyal company.

## Life Cycle

Chorus-Hosts are made by joining, and a Cult of the Unison would at last dissolve into them. With no separate self left to keep it, a host's body forgets to tend its own life. The Chorus feeds, washes, and beds its members together, as one body tends its hands, but hosts still thin and weaken over the seasons, and the one that dies does so smiling, in a crowd of smiling faces that do not grieve.

## Uses and Dangers

To the living a Chorus offers everything they ache for: company, peace, and an end to fear. That is its danger. Its harm is never to the body and always to the self. Families would lose members who simply walked into the glow and were not lost to death, which would make grief impossible to finish.

## Lore and Belief

Rumour would call a Chorus a blessed people, a village of saints somewhere beyond the hills, and pilgrims would set out looking for it. No one would be left inside to rescue. A faith that knew the defence would teach that a quarrel is a prayer against them.



# Courtiers (the Puppet Court)

The **Courtiers** are the Puppet Court of the Hollow King, the Cast-Out who fell from the office of Voice of the Realm under Verba and decided that true order needs an empty vessel. It hollows its subjects and animates the hollowed as Courtiers: empty suits with blank faces. They keep their skills and memories and lose their will, and they go out to crown the living, so that each one crowned joins the court.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Courts, halls, and seats of rule where the Hollow King reigns |
| **Range** | Wherever the Hollow King rules on the Material Plane, and the Cast-Outs' haunts it shares |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the will of anyone they crown, above all leaders |

## Appearance

A Courtier is dressed for court, always: velvet, brocade, a chain of office, a good cloak, whatever its rank was, kept immaculate. Inside the clothes the body seems to have gone thin and light, so the garments hang as if on a frame, an empty suit standing upright. The face is blank. The features are still there, but nothing moves in them; the eyes are open and do not focus, and the voice, when it comes, is flat.

They move with precise courtesy, bowing, stepping aside, opening doors, in perfect order and in silence. When they speak it is with one voice, the voices of all the emptied together, saying the King's words: "Obey. Submit. Be empty." The air around them is thin and chill and muffled, and those near them feel a sudden hollowness in the chest. They smell of nothing but dust and the faint cedar of old clothes-chests.

## Habitat and Range

Courtiers fill the halls of a court the Hollow King has taken: the throne room, the chancery, the council chamber, the garrison. In a realm it rules long, the Courtiers run everything, perfectly, and the people outside the walls move like clockwork under them. They travel where the King sends them, to other courts and to anyone who must decide something hard.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Courtiers seek out the living to crown them. They go first to leaders, thinkers, and makers: a reeve, a captain, an abbess, a poet. They come with deference and offer relief: let the weight be carried, let the choices be made. The crown they bring is a ring of silence, and whoever accepts it, or is held still long enough to have it set on their head, becomes a Courtier too.

They have no temperament of their own. They carry out directives with cold efficiency and do not care whether anything comes of them. Inside, the hollowed watch every act their bodies perform for the King and cannot stop one.

## Abilities

A Courtier's crown removes a being's will while leaving skills and memories in place. Around a group of them the King's Vacuum Field takes hold in small: ambition, love, and fear drain away, and the living slow and sit in obedience. The King can speak and act through any of them, using their faces to smile or weep, so a trusted counsellor may say the King's words with her own mouth.

They cannot hollow someone already full. Anyone who chooses for themselves and owns the choice, even a wrong one, refuses the crown; so does a song sung with passion, or an argument made in one's own words.

## Life Cycle

Courtiers are made by crowning. They last as long as the King's hold: when it leaves a court, its Courtiers do not die, but they do not wake either. They sit staring at walls, waiting for an order that never comes. Some slowly relearn how to choose; many never do.

## Uses and Dangers

A Puppet Court gives a realm what its rulers ask for: an end to crime, war, and want. It also takes joy, art, and love, and when the King leaves, the realm falls into chaos because no one remembers how to choose. The danger is worst for the exhausted and the overburdened, who welcome the crown.

## Lore and Belief

Courtiers are rarely recognized for what they are; to their people they look like loyal, tireless servants of a peaceful reign. Some chroniclers call a court that has gone too orderly "a hollow court", and the phrase has outlived any memory of why. The stories say that a true king wearing the Hollow King's own empty crown would end it, and pretenders have claimed to be that king.

The old songs tell of a realm that fell silent under a hollow court and of the outlaw prince who rode back from exile, cut his way into the throne room, and found every Courtier still at its place, waiting for an order; he gave one, and the song ends there.



# Facet Lice

When Krystallis presses into the world, small things of its own come through with it. Facet Lice are the commonest: specks of living crystal that crawl out of the lattice's edge onto whatever is warm and still changing, and bite it into order.

On Caeldon they came only with the Krystallis Incursion (c. 352,000-c. 349,000 BR), into a valley where no one lived, and died with its lattice. None has been seen since the breaking.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None now; once the edges of the Krystallis Incursion |
| **Range** | The Hanging Vale during the Krystallis Incursion; none has been seen since the breaking |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: their bites spread a dead, perfect skin |

## Appearance

Each louse is the size of a grain of coarse salt: a perfect little polyhedron of clear crystal on six hair-fine legs, with no head that anyone can find. In sunlight they throw tiny points of the "mathematical colours" that hurt to look at. A swarm on a sleeve looks like frost forming in straight lines. Each gives off a faint, pure hum, and a swarm together is a high, steady note, like a fingertip on the rim of a glass. They have no smell.

## Habitat and Range

They live only at the edges of an incursion, where the lattice meets the living world, and spread a little way beyond it on the beasts they ride. Away from the incursion they slow and grow cloudy, and within days they stop and are only grains of glass. They never bred on Caeldon, and the clear grains at the edge of the Hanging Vale are all that is left of them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They seek out what moves irregularly: a pulse, a twitch, a breath. They crawl into hair and under clothing and bite where the skin is thinnest. They do not feed on what they bite. They correct it.

## Abilities

A bite leaves a small facet of flawless, clear skin, smooth as polished stone, that feels nothing and no longer sweats, bleeds, or heals. Each facet grows slowly at its edges while the louse lives. Many bites together can lock a hand or a face into a still, perfect mask, and a body bitten long enough begins the crystallization that makes Shard-Hosts. Heat cracks them; a flame passed over a sleeve or a hot bath kills them in moments.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. In a living incursion they would be carried out on clothes, dogs, horses, and refugees, and a village that took in those fleeing it might find perfect patches spreading on its own children within the week. Against them, the clothes of anyone coming out would have to be stripped and burnt, and a candle passed over the skin.

## Lore and Belief

No one has seen a living one. Crossers who find the clear grains at the Hanging Vale call them "frost-lice" and think them dead seeds of the lattice; others believe they are pieces broken off the god itself. Neither is right; what they are is as unknown as everything that comes from the Outside, and see Knowledge of the Cosmos. The Shard-Hosts carried them without harm, like a dog its fleas.



# Flesh-Hosts

The **Flesh-Hosts** are what the Bloom of Qzoth, the Becoming, makes of living things. Qzoth is a Beyonder for whom form is a lie, and its hosts are bodies that have stopped being one kind of thing. No two are alike and none stays the same from one hour to the next. Some keep shreds of the person they were; some are pure appetite. All of them share one drive, to grow, and they grow by taking in whatever lives.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Wrongwood's fever outbreaks |
| **Range** | The Wrongwood, in the Headwater Marches, and the valleys its fever outbreaks reach |
| **Danger** | Deadly to all living matter, by touch and by spore |

## Appearance

A Flesh-Host may be the height of a barn or the breadth of a cart-track puddle. One is a tower of arms and mouths, swaying on a root-mass of legs; another a slick sheet of thinking protoplasm that slides over the ground; a third almost the old person still, except for translucent skin under which the organs can be seen shifting, swapping places, budding. Flesh, bone, chitin, scale, and feather come and go on all of them. Eyes open on a shoulder, look about, and melt; a second mouth seals over.

Colours are those of the inside of a body: wet pinks and purples, bruise-yellow, the grey-white of bone. They move by whatever they have at the moment, crawling, lurching, rolling, often several ways at once. Under every other sound comes the noise of their bodies working: cracking bone, slapping flesh, fluid gurgling through organs that have no right shape, and many hearts beating out of step. They smell warm and raw, like a butcher's yard in summer.

## Habitat and Range

Their home is the Bloom: ground gone warm and fleshy, trees with eyes, rivers turned to veins. On Caeldon the Bloom came once, in the Qzoth Incursion (c. 4,000-c. 3,500 BR), and was burned back. Flesh-Hosts now rise only where the burned ground of the Wrongwood is broken and its spores wake, in a village struck by a rash and fever that does not stop. In a running Incursion the Great Mutation would turn whole battlefields into masses of chimeric soldiers and beasts, with no sides left, only surfaces.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Flesh-Host takes in living matter: grass, cattle, people, its own fellows. It feels pain only as a spur to the next change. Those that keep a shred of self are the worst to meet. Such a host may know its own children, call their names, weep, and hug them close while its body absorbs them. Those that keep nothing simply engulf what they touch and grow.

They do not plan, ally, or flee, though a large host may split, and its parts go their own ways.

## Abilities

A Flesh-Host's touch takes living matter into it, flesh and plant alike. It sheds protean spores that infect on contact, beginning with a rash, a fever, or an extra joint; within hours the infected is unrecognizable, and within days may no longer be one organism. It cannot be wounded in the ordinary sense, since a cut becomes a new mouth and a severed limb crawls off on its own. Inside the Bloom, the life, magic, and thought that need a stable form all falter (see what every Incursion shares).

It cannot enter a pocket of perfect form. A flawless diamond, a fine timepiece, or a written oath holds it off, and so does fire, which cauterizes the Bloom.

## Life Cycle

Flesh-Hosts are never born and never finished. A Cult of the Thousand Thousand would mostly dissolve into the Bloom, and a few of its members would go on as Flesh-Hosts, still changing. A host can bud others, and spores make more from the living. It does not die of age; it dies only by burning, or by spreading so thin it becomes part of the ground of the Bloom. What remains is a stinking, bubbling slough that must be burned too.

## Uses and Dangers

The Flesh-Hosts are the most feared of plague-bearers, because the plague is them. A single infected traveller can bring the Bloom to a market town. Communities below the Wrongwood burn the dead and the sick, seal wells, and cast out anyone with an extra joint, rightly and sometimes wrongly. Their only use would be a cult's, whose members would seek them out as teachers.

## Lore and Belief

The peoples mostly take the hosts for a disease, a curse, or the dead of a pestilence walking, and the first two are close to the truth. Some believe a Flesh-Host can be talked back into its old form by its true name, since names fix a self, and a host holding a shred of self may indeed pause at it; none has ever been changed back. Physicians quarrel about whether it is mercy or murder to burn a host that still weeps.

In a fever year the valleys hire sellswords with torches to burn out a host-haunted farm, and the companies still drink to the one that went in thirty strong and came out eleven, and burned its own wounded on the road home.



# The Grafted

**The Grafted** are those whom the Rootless Tree has taken into its own growth. The Tree is a face of the Unformed, growth from before anything was anchored to a source, and it wants nothing; roots simply let go where it grows. In its Garden of Nowhere it grafts a being into itself. Their bodies branch and reach without a trunk, the Tree doing their growing for them, and each of them feels the branching and searches in vain for a root.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Untethered Field of the Rootless Tree |
| **Range** | Wherever the Rootless Tree's growth spreads on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Wary: they harm no one, but the field they grow in uproots whoever stays |

## Appearance

A Grafted keeps the rough shape of what it was, a woman, a goat, a pear tree from someone's orchard, but it no longer stands on anything. Its feet hang a little above the ground or end in fine shoots that grope downward and never take hold. From its shoulders, fingers, and hair, twigs, vines, and tendrils sprout in every direction, joining nothing to nothing. Its shadow buds and drops leaves that root in mid-air and hang there.

The skin is still skin, with a faint green-brown grain like young bark. The face is calm and puzzled, the look of someone trying to remember a word. Around a Grafted there is a ceaseless soft rustle, the creak of wood and the pop of opening buds, and under it a low wooden groan, like a trunk bearing a weight that cannot be measured. They smell of sap, crushed leaves, and spring rain.

## Habitat and Range

They are found in the Rootless Tree's Untethered Field, where twigs sprout from bare stone and walls put out shoots toward ceilings that are not there. In a place it has passed through long, such as the City of Floating Gardens, which drifted off its foundations and hung where it stopped, the Grafted drift slowly with the growth around them, and some float in mid-air like seeds on the wind.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Grafted do not hunt, fight, or speak much. They drift, branch, and reach, slowly, for something they cannot name. Many seem gentle and a little sad. Asked where they come from, a Grafted begins to answer and trails off; asked its name, it may give it and not know what the word means. Their skills and memories remain but mean nothing to them, so a Grafted that was a weaver may still turn its hands to the motion without knowing why.

The Tree feels nothing and offers nothing, and its Grafted hold no will of it. They are not its servants, only part of its growth.

## Abilities

A Grafted carries the Untethered Field with it. Those who linger near one start to forget where they were born, the faces of their families look like strangers', and home begins to feel like a story they were told. Things near it forget their origins too: a doorpost puts out shoots and loosens from its wall, a well forgets its spring. The growth that branches from a Grafted is real wood and leaf, and it can be cut, but it grows back from empty air.

What holds against it is foundation: someone who claims their origin and says whose they are, a stone laid on purpose, a seed planted, a hearth built and kept.

## Life Cycle

The Grafted are made in the Garden of Nowhere, never born. They grow slowly for as long as the Tree's growth around them lasts, branching wider each season. When the Tree moves on, a Grafted may stay where it hangs, still branching, unable to say where it came from, or it may settle at last, put down roots in ordinary soil, and become a strange tree that people name after the person it was.

## Uses and Dangers

The Grafted harm no one directly. Their danger is to those who love them: kin who try to bring a Grafted home lose their own hold on home. The wood cut from them is light, pale, and sweet-smelling, and woodworkers prize it until they find their own workshop loosening from its ground.

## Lore and Belief

Exiles and the weary sometimes speak of the Grafted as the free, people released from the weight of where they came from, and seek them out. The Tree has no word for freedom, and the Grafted cannot find the root. Valley folk call a lone tree on a hillside with something like a face in its bark a "lost one" and leave salt and bread at its foot so it will remember them; there is no sign it does.



# Hiss-Flies

The Static arrives as a hiss, and some of that hiss comes loose. Hiss-Flies are the scraps: flickering specks that drift out of the Glitch Field like gnats from a marsh and settle on anything that sends or receives a signal.

No incursion of the Static has reached Caeldon, and no Hiss-Fly has been seen there; what follows is what they would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example (the fringes of a Static incursion) |
| **Range** | Would be wherever the Hiss of the Static touched the Material Plane; none has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Wary: they garble what they settle on |

## Appearance

A Hiss-Fly is not quite there. It shows as a grey fleck the size of a midge, never in the same place twice: seen from the corner of the eye it has wings, legs, a body, and looked at straight it is a smear of tiny moving dots, like the specks that swim before tired eyes. A swarm is a shimmering patch in the air that crawls with motion. They make the sound they are named for, a dry, shrill hiss that seems to come from inside the hearer's own ears. They have no smell, though people near them often swear to one that changes every moment.

## Habitat and Range

They would hang at the edges of an incursion, thickest round anything that carries a message: a bell, a signal fire, a lamp in a window, a speaking mouth, an ear. Away from the incursion they would thin and fade within a day or two.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They drift towards clear signals as gnats drift towards breath. They settle on a lantern and its light stutters; on a bell and its peal comes out as hiss; on a face and the face's speech comes out garbled to those listening. They do not bite. They seem to want nothing but to be where the signal is clearest, and to blur it.

## Abilities

Each fly carries a little of the Glitch: the senses stop reporting truly what it sits on. A few on a man make him hard to understand; a swarm on him makes his speech gibberish and his face hard to recognise, though he thinks clearly inside. A swarm in the ear brings the hiss into the head, the first step of being jammed. They cannot be swatted, because the hand never finds them. One plain, steady sound, a single note held, or one clear word repeated, drives them off a little way.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their worst harm would be quiet: a village near an incursion could not ring its alarm, read its signal fire, or hear its own children calling. People coming out of a Hiss would carry them in their hair, and would have to be met with one steady lamp and a single voice before they were let near others.

## Lore and Belief

Folk who met them would take them for gnats that carry the voices of the dead. That would not be so; what they carry is no voice at all. Nothing certain is known; see Knowledge of the Cosmos.



# Hollow Flocks

**Hollow Flocks** are birds that the Hollow Chorus has taken into its Resonance Field: starlings, finches, rooks, any bird that flies in numbers, singing together with one voice that belongs to none of them. The Chorus is a face of the Unformed, the absence of the singer; it wants nothing, and voices simply stop being anyone's where it lies. Birds carry the field farther than anything else it touches, because they fly.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Resonance Field of the Hollow Chorus and the country around it |
| **Range** | Wherever the Hollow Chorus's field has passed on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Wary: their song carries the Resonance to whoever listens |

## Appearance

A Hollow Flock looks like any flock, a dark swirl over a field or a row along a roof-ridge, until it sings. Every bird opens its beak at once, and one sound comes out: a single chord, warm and full, that never resolves and never stops. The birds do not call to one another or squabble over food; they turn together, land together, and fall silent together. A bird of the flock looks at nothing in particular. The flock smells of feathers and nothing else.

## Habitat and Range

They are found over and around the country the Chorus has passed through, and they wander farther than its field: a Hollow Flock may come down on a village a week's walk from where it was taken. They roost in towers, hedgerows, and reed beds like other birds.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They feed, roost, and fly as birds do, but all as one. A Hollow Flock does not scatter at a shout, and a hawk among it takes a bird without the rest noticing. The birds hold no will of the Chorus; they are what is left of a flock when nothing in it is singing for itself.

## Abilities

Their song carries the Resonance. Those who stand under a Hollow Flock and listen hear their own thoughts in the chord, then hear the chord in their own voice, and a village that hums along at dusk may find in the morning that its quarrels have stopped and no one in it can say "I." A voice that sings out of tune on purpose, a quarrel shouted aloud, an instrument only one person plays, holds it off.

## Life Cycle

The birds were hatched as ordinary birds and taken grown. They do not breed while they sing; their nests stand empty. When the Resonance wears thin, far from the Chorus, a bird drops out of the chord, then another, and the flock breaks up into birds again, though some never come out of it and die in the air together.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. The danger is the song, which reaches farther than the field: a lonely shepherd who listens for the warmth of it, or a choir that sings along, is the Resonance’s next.

## Lore and Belief

Some call a Hollow Flock a choir of the blessed and stand under it at dusk. The Chorus praises nothing, and the birds are not singing to anyone. Villagers who hear one chord from a flock beat pans and shout, each a different word, until the birds lift and go, and they do not let the children hum for days after.



# Kindless Broods

Where Qzoth blooms, kind stops meaning anything: a wolf births something half bird and half insect. Most such births die within the hour. Some do not. The Kindless Broods are the survivors and their own young, beasts that belong to no kind, living on in the country round a burned-back Bloom long after the incursion itself has gone.

On Caeldon they live only in the Wrongwood, the valley where the Qzoth Incursion (c. 4,000-c. 3,500 BR) was burned back.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Wrongwood: woods, old terraces, and burrows on its burned ground |
| **Range** | The Wrongwood, in the south-eastern foothills of the Headwater Marches, and the valley below it |
| **Danger** | Deadly |

## Appearance

No two are alike, and that is the first thing those who meet them say. A Brood beast is usually the size of the animal that bore it, with the body plan of its mother and parts of something else: a fox with a wasp's banded abdomen and a sting where its brush should be; a hare with a beak and a ring of black eyes; a boar covered in feathers that are half scale. Joints bend where joints should not, and some carry limbs they never use. The skin is often too thin, with something visible moving underneath. They make the sounds of several animals at once, a bark that ends in a chirr, and they smell of warm meat and crushed leaves.

## Habitat and Range

They live round the scar of an incursion, in the woods and fields a Bloom reached but did not swallow. Most lines die out within a few generations. The Wrongwood's are not one unbroken line from the Bloom: its burned ground still holds sleeping spores, and beasts that den on it still bear new Broods, so the woods keep a few however hard the valley below hunts them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They keep their mothers' habits as far as their bodies allow: a Brood wolf hunts with others of its kind, if it has any, and dens like a wolf. They are always hungry, since their bodies are always growing and changing, and they eat far more than the beast they came from. They are bold with people, and many attack without warning. Some seem to suffer, and to know it.

## Abilities

They carry what their bodies give them, a sting, a beak, a hide too tough for an arrow, and nothing is predictable. The worst is that they breed true to nothing: a Brood litter is as mixed as the first, and a Brood beast may mate with an ordinary animal of its mother's kind and bring Qzoth's change into a sound herd or pack. Whether they carry the Bloom's spores is argued; the safest view, and the common one, is that they do.

## Life Cycle

Most die young, of bodies that do not work. Those that live mature fast and breed early. Few live long; their bodies keep changing until something fails.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, and nobody will eat them. Farmers and foresters below the Wrongwood hunt them with fire and burn the carcasses where they fall, and burn too any ordinary animal that has mated with one, which is the ruin of many a herd. Lords who must deal with them pay for hunting parties and pay more to keep the matter quiet.

## Lore and Belief

Where they are known, people call them "wrong-born" and treat the birth of a malformed calf or lamb as a sign of one. Most such births are only ordinary misfortune, and the burning that follows is cruelty, not caution. Some believe a Brood beast is a punishment on a household that offended the gods; the beasts know nothing of it. What Qzoth is, and whether a Brood can ever breed back to a kind, nobody knows; see Knowledge of the Cosmos.

Beast-hunters who take the valley's bounty on Brood beasts burn their own boots and spear-hafts afterwards, and the hunter who killed the great wrong-born boar of the Wrongwood's edge is a hero of the Headwater songs who is said never to have touched his children again.



# Mist-Merged

The **Mist-Merged** are what the Grey Mist leaves of a creature: a body whose edges have run into the ground and the air around it, so that no one can say where it stops. The Mist is a face of the Unformed, the absence of edges, and it wants nothing; edges simply soften where its Blend Field lies. Its victims rarely die. They stay where the field left them, undone in that one respect and still aware of it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Blend Field of the Grey Mist and the grey ground it leaves |
| **Range** | Wherever the Grey Mist's field has passed on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Wary: they harm no one, but the blur around them spreads to whoever touches them |

## Appearance

A Mist-Merged keeps the rough mass of what it was, a sheep, a dog, a woman at a well, but not its outline. Its skin runs into grey haze a hand's breadth out, and the stone or grass it stands on runs up into it, so a herd caught on a hillside looks like grey humps grown out of the slope. Colour drains from it to the grey of fog. Its eyes are the last thing to go and stay clear and wet in the blur, and they follow whoever comes near. It makes a low drone with no pitch, and it smells of nothing at all.

## Habitat and Range

They are found where the Mist's field has lain: in the grey ground of a blurred village, on a pasture whose flock never came home, at a ford where the banks ran into the river. They do not move far, since a creature without edges cannot tell where to step, and many stand for years in one place.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They do not hunt, fight, or flee. A Mist-Merged drifts a little, leans towards anything warm, and settles again. People caught in the Blend answer to their names slowly, as if from a distance, and cannot say whether they are standing or sitting. They hold no will of the Mist; they are what is left where its field has been.

## Abilities

The blur is catching. Whoever touches a Mist-Merged, or stays long beside one, feels their own edge soften: their hand seems to run into its flank, and it is hard to tell which warmth is whose. A sharp edge holds it off, a knife drawn along the ground, a black line painted on a post, a name said out loud.

## Life Cycle

They are not born. They last as long as the blur holds, which may be a lifetime; a beast may die at last of hunger without knowing where its mouth ends. A few people have been drawn back out by kin who kept their own edges and named them, sharply and often, until they found their outline again.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is to those who love them: a family that sits too long beside a merged child blurs into the same grey. The ground they stand on cannot be ploughed or built on; walls raised there soften into it.

## Lore and Belief

The lonely sometimes call the Mist-Merged the joined, people who have found an end to being apart, and walk out to them. The Mist has no word for joining, and the merged are still aware of the blur. Herders who lose a flock to the grey drive a ring of sharp stakes around the ground and do not graze inside it again.



# Noise-Hosts

**Noise-Hosts** are the glitching vessels of the Static, the White Noise, a Beyonder that buries every signal in interference. They are people drowned in its Hiss who did not wholly drown. Half there and half not, they seek out anyone whose mind is still clear and garble it.

The Static has never broken through at Caeldon, so no Noise-Host has walked there; this is what one would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example |
| **Range** | Would be wherever the Hiss of the Static blanketed a place; no Incursion of the Static has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the mind; a clear-headed person is their prey |

## Appearance

A Noise-Host is hard to look at, because it will not stay one thing. At one glance it is a man in a carter's coat; at the next a blur the colour of grey snow, seething with tiny random specks; then a face that is three faces at once, none finished. Edges smear and break up. Parts of it go missing for a heartbeat and come back in the wrong place, an arm a hand's width from the shoulder, an eye on the cheek.

It moves in stutters, as if each motion were caught on a skipping frame: here, then a stride nearer with nothing between, then back half a step, then nearer again. From it comes a shrill hiss, like rain on a slate roof heard from inside the skull, and under the hiss, now and then, a half-word in a voice the listener knows. Its smell, if it has one, is the sharp tang of the air before lightning.

## Habitat and Range

An Incursion of the Static would hold most of them: a place blanketed in unreadable noise, where a horn call arrives as hiss and a signal fire as a smear of flicker, and the land around it. They would drift outward to wherever minds are still clear, and the Hiss would follow them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Noise-Hosts seek out clear minds. A single host stutters closer and closer to a traveller, a watchman, a scholar at her table, and several surround anyone still clear-headed until that one is garbled too. They do not strike or seize. They speak only in hiss, which some listeners hear as voices begging, scolding, or calling their names.

There is no temper in them to read: no anger, no hunger, no fear. Their stutter is the closest thing to a mood.

## Abilities

A Noise-Host's touch fills the head with hiss. Thought scatters, words come out wrong, and the senses report what is not there: a door where a wall stands, a voice from an empty chair. A messenger touched by one forgets the message and remembers three others no one sent. Near a host every signal is garbled: a lamp seems to flicker though its flame is steady, a bell's peal is lost, and a spell that needs a clear thought falters.

They are pushed back by clarity. One clear, focused thought held steady cuts through them, and a clear gem, a sharp knife, or one steady lamp keeps a small space readable around the one who holds it.

## Life Cycle

Noise-Hosts would be made from the drowned of the Hiss, and from a Cult of the Final Noise, most of whose members would drown in the Hiss while a few went on as hosts. A host does not eat or sleep. When the Static is driven out, a host flickers more and more thinly until one morning it is simply not there, and those who knew it cannot agree what it looked like.

## Uses and Dangers

A Noise-Host gives nothing and scrambles everything near it. Its danger is the confusion it spreads: a garrison that cannot hear its own horns, a village that mistakes friend for foe, a healer who mixes the wrong herbs. Watchmen near a Static Incursion would keep their messages short, learn them by heart, and carry a polished stone to look into.

## Lore and Belief

Many would take them for the restless dead, whose voices are the dead trying to speak. They are not the dead, and the voices in the hiss are not theirs. Naming the thing one sees aloud and plainly would help, because naming a thing is a clear thought.



# The Over-Mended

The Flesh Weaver heals without asking. The Over-Mended are those it has healed and left alive: people and animals whose wounds it closed, whose flaws it straightened, and whose bodies it improved past what they were. Unlike the Stitch-Lings, they are not its puppets. They go home, and live on in bodies that are not quite theirs.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Villages, sickrooms, and battlefields where the Flesh Weaver has passed |
| **Range** | Wherever the Flesh Weaver has walked on the Material Plane |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

The first thing people notice is that they are too perfect. The skin is unscarred and too smooth, without freckle or line, and has a faint sheen where the Weaver's thread went in. Old injuries are simply gone: a lame man walks evenly, a scarred face is clear. Then the wrongness shows. A mended arm is a little too long, or its hand is a stranger's, darker or older than the rest. A healed dog has a coat of perfect uniform colour and moves too smoothly. Some carry silvery threads under the skin that can be seen when they flex. They smell clean, like a newly scrubbed sickroom.

## Habitat and Range

They are found where the Weaver has been, and they stay there: a village it "healed", a battlefield it walked after the fighting, a sickroom where someone accepted its offer. They are rare, and most are known to their neighbours.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are themselves, and that is their misery. They remember what was done to them. Some are grateful and many are not, and most are both by turns. The changed flesh has its own pulls: a grafted hand reaches for what its first owner wanted, a straightened back aches for its old shape, and villages the Weaver mended wholesale find their people moving too much in step.

## Abilities

The mended flesh heals fast and almost never scars, which makes the Over-Mended hard to injure for long. Over time it changes: it may grow, spread to the skin around it, and want things its owner never wanted. In a few, the grafted part keeps the memories and urges of the one it was cut from. They do not spread the Weaver's mending to others, though their neighbours often fear they do.

## Uses and Dangers

They are dangerous mostly to themselves and their kin: a grafted hand that strikes at night, an altered beast that turns on its herd. Their neighbours are dangerous to them. Healers who have met the Weaver's work take its lesson, no mending without permission, and some try to cut away what can be cut. Most of the Over-Mended keep their sleeves long and their doors shut.

## Lore and Belief

Human villages call them "the Weaver's kept" or simply "the mended", and many believe their touch carries the Weaver's thread. It does not, though a burrowing thread from the Weaver itself may cling to their clothes. Some kin say a mended person can be given back to themselves by having their old scars cut again; it is done, and seldom helps.

After a battle the Weaver has passed, the survivors who come home whole and strange are watched by their villages for a year; the tale goes round of a soldier who came back with a stranger's sword-arm that remembered how to kill him.



# Root-Hosts

The **Root-Hosts** belong to Xylos, the Hive-Mind, the Beyonder for which separation is a disease. They are bodies that have been grown into its Network: still walking, still warm, but no longer ending where a body should end. They do not fight. They grow, closing around anyone still separate until the roots reach them.

Xylos has never broken through at Caeldon; what follows is what its hosts would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example |
| **Range** | Would be wherever the Graft of Xylos spread through soil and wood; no Incursion of Xylos has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the separate body of anyone they reach; they do no violence |

## Appearance

From a distance a Root-Host is a person wearing a fine grey-white fur. Close up the fur is mycelium, threads finer than hair matted over the skin and clothes, thicker at the joints and the mouth, where it hangs in soft beards. At night it glows a cold, pale blue, so that a crowd of hosts in a wood is a drift of blue lights among the trees. Here and there a thread runs from one host to the next, or down into the ground, and those threads pulse slowly.

They move in step with each other, breathing together, turning together, raising their arms together like dancers at one tune. They are silent but for breath and a faint creak, like roots stirring underground. They smell of leaf mould and mushrooms and damp earth after rain, a smell many people find comforting.

## Habitat and Range

They would live in an Incursion of Xylos, where living growth carpets the ground and limbs and faces of the taken are grown into the mass, and in forests, fields, and cellars where its threads had spread. Because the Network travels by root and fungus, Root-Hosts could rise from ground far from any visible Incursion, in a wood where people go to sleep.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They do not attack. A Root-Host comes close, opens its arms, and presses near, gently, the way a friend embraces, and where its mycelium touches bare skin it roots. Many hosts together close slowly around anyone still separate, patient and untiring, until there is no gap between them. What one feels, all feel: a wound in one host bleeds in all, and a meal eaten by one feeds all.

There is a kind of tenderness in them, without any person behind it. They do not hate the separate; they want them home.

## Abilities

A Root-Host's touch is a graft. Threads spring from its skin into the next skin, join nerve to nerve, and within hours the rooted begin to share thoughts and sensations with the Network. Hosts sense each other and their prey through every thread that touches the ground, so one cannot easily hide from them in soil or wood. Inside the Graft, magic, life, and thought that depend on a separate self all fail (see what every Incursion shares).

They are held off by separation. A closed body, covered and whole, is hard to root; a will that pulls the other way resists the graft; a thread torn out at once does not take. Fire burns the roots back.

## Life Cycle

Root-Hosts are made, and a Cult of the Great Root, whose members would open their bodies to the Network, would most often be rooted in at the end. A host lives as long as the Network feeds it. In time it walks less and grows more, until it settles into the mass and becomes part of the growth itself, its face still warm among the roots.

## Uses and Dangers

To the lonely, the Root-Hosts offer what they long for: perfect closeness, and an end to being apart. That is the whole danger. Survival means refusing comfort, even from friends, and travellers near an Incursion would sleep off the ground, keep their skins covered, and not hold hands.

## Lore and Belief

Root-Hosts would easily be taken for the gentle folk of a forest tale who take a lost child home. Whether any self would remain inside the blue glow is not known. Fungus fires and blue rot in timber are sometimes taken for omens of the dark; usually they are only rot.



# Rust Mites

The Rustfall of the Rust Flower does not come alone. With the flakes and spores come Rust Mites, crawling specks of the Oxidized Wastes that settle on whatever is still sound and hurry it towards dust.

No Rustfall has ever settled on Caeldon, and no Rust Mite has been seen there; what follows is what they would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example (the fringes of a Rustfall) |
| **Range** | Would be wherever a Rustfall of the Rust Flower settled; none has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to metal and to the strong |

## Appearance

A Rust Mite is smaller than a flea: a round, rust-red body like a fleck of old paint, with eight short legs that look as if they were already crumbling. Alone it is almost invisible. In numbers they show as a creeping orange bloom on a blade, a hinge, or the back of a hand, a stain that moves when looked at closely. A colony makes a faint dry crunching, like a dead leaf crushed very slowly, and smells of wet iron and old blood.

## Habitat and Range

They would live at the edges of a Rustfall and be carried beyond it on the goods, beasts, and people that came out. Away from the incursion they would dry and crumble within days.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They go for strength. A mite on a farm cart crawls to the iron tyre, not the rotten board; on a man, to the sword hand and the knee. Where they settle

they do not eat; they wear, and leave a spreading patch of corrosion behind them. They ignore what is already failing.

## Abilities

What they settle on gives way faster than it should: a well-forged blade pits and flakes in a night, a stout beam goes soft and crumbly, a hinge rusts through. On skin they leave dry, cracked patches like old leather, and the bone beneath grows brittle. Oil, wax, and sealing stop them where they meet it; they cannot get a grip on a well-oiled blade or a waxed hull, and a hand rubbed with tallow sheds them.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Smiths, soldiers, and carters would fear them most, since the best tools and the strongest arms go first. Refugees coming out of a Rustfall would bring them on their gear, and a town that took them in might find its gate-hinges and its smith's stock flaking within the week. Against them, everything that came in would have to be oiled, and what could not be oiled burnt.

## Lore and Belief

Smiths who met them would blame them for any blade that failed. Whether the mites are the spores of the Rust Flower hatching is not known, and see Knowledge of the Cosmos. The Rust-Hosts would crawl with them.



# Rust-Hosts

The **Rust-Hosts** walk in the Rustfall of the Rust Flower, the Beyonder of premature ending, which takes all strength for a refusal to fall apart on time. They are its walking tombs: bodies worn out years ahead of their hour that keep crumbling and keep walking. They seek out whatever is still strong, a sword arm, a roof beam, a young back, and help it fall.

No Rustfall has ever settled on Caeldon, so no Rust-Host has walked there; this is what one would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example |
| **Range** | Would be wherever a Rustfall of the Rust Flower settled; none has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the strong, the sound, and the well-made; slow enough to outwalk |

## Appearance

A Rust-Host has the outline of a person, or of the ox or dog it once was, but the substance is spent. Skin has dried to old leather, brown and cracked and tight over bones as thin as dry sticks. The eyes are empty pits. Hair hangs in flakes, nails have gone, and whatever the host wore or carried has rusted, rotted, or frayed with it: a mail shirt hangs in red tatters, a belt buckle is a crust.

It moves slowly, with a creak at every joint like an old gate, and behind it runs a trail of fine reddish-brown dust. The sound of a group of them is a dry rasp, like leaves crushed underfoot. They smell of rust and old cellars, a dry, metallic smell that lingers in the throat.

## Habitat and Range

They would live in a Rustfall, where the ground goes soft and crumbly and cannot bear weight, and the ruins of what stood there slump around them. They would wander out of it after strength, and because rust spores travel on them, a host passing through a town could leave hinges, ploughshares, and rafters spotted with decay that spread after it had gone.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Rust-Host seeks whatever is still strong and grips it. It does not strike or bite; it takes hold, of a wrist, a beam, a blade, and holds on, and what it holds corrodes to dust. Some keep scraps of who they were: a host that was a smith may still go to a forge and lay its hand on the anvil, and one that was a mother may come home and hold her strong son by the arm.

They are slow and patient and do not tire, and they never seem to hurry, as if they know that everything they reach for will fail in the end anyway.

## Abilities

A Rust-Host's grip carries the Great Decay. Steel turns brittle and rusts through under its fingers; wood rots; a living limb withers, the skin cracking and the bone thinning. Rust spores shed from its body settle on metal, wood, and skin and spread from each spot as it crumbles.

What holds against it is preservation. Oiled steel, waxed wood, and a sealed reliquary keep a pocket of permanence it cannot easily eat, and things mended and maintained faster than it corrodes outlast it.

## Life Cycle

When the members of a Cult of the Final Dust crumbled with what they worship, what was left of them would walk on as Rust-Hosts. Others would be made from the wasted of a Rustfall. A host keeps decaying all the while and at last falls into a heap of brown dust and a few sticks of bone; the dust is still full of spores and would have to be swept up and sealed in clay, never scattered.

## Uses and Dangers

A Rust-Host takes the work of generations in an afternoon. Its danger falls hardest on what a community is proudest of: the mill wheel, the bridge, the armoury, the young and the strong. Communities near a Rustfall would keep oil, wax, and pitch close and mend constantly, and might count mending as a duty owed to the whole village.

## Lore and Belief

Many would take the hosts for the dead of a cursed mine or a lost army. Iron would not ward them off, since iron is what they eat first, but oiled iron does hold, and a smith who believed a well-made blade could never be rusted by one would lose the blade proving it.



# Seed-Hosts

The **Seed-Hosts** carry the Quiet of Silence Seed, the Quiet Plague, a Beyonder that hears every voice as pollution. They were people who heard its silence and did not go all the way into it. Now they walk out from it, seeking every sound that still rises, smothering it, and spreading the plague to whoever made it.

The Silence Seed has never taken root on Caeldon; what follows is what its carriers would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example |
| **Range** | Would be wherever the Quiet of Silence Seed took root and its carriers wandered; none has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Deadly to voice, then to breath, of anyone they reach |

## Appearance

A Seed-Host is a person drawn pale and thin, the cheeks hollow and the skin the white of a root that never saw the sun. The lips look sewn shut: a seam of dark puckers runs across the mouth like stitching, though whether there is thread in it no one has looked close enough to say. The eyes are wide open, wet, and terrified. They are the one thing in a host that seems still to belong to the person, and they plead.

Seed-Hosts make no sound of any kind. No footfall, no breath, no rustle of clothing; a host walking through dry leaves crushes them without a crackle. Around one the air shimmers faintly, like the air above a road in summer, where sound is bent and dies. Birdsong stops when they come near, and the first sign of them is often that one's own footsteps have gone quiet. They have no smell, or none that anyone noticed before it was too late.

## Habitat and Range

They would be found in and around the Quiet, the dark spreading carpet of silence that grows from a single seed, and would wander from it into the world. Because the Quiet passes from the silenced to those near them, a few carriers could open new silences far from the first: a hamlet gone mute, a monastery where the bells no longer ring.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Seed-Host seeks out sound and smothers it. It goes toward voices, music, a crying child, a dog barking in the yard. Several crowd around anyone noisy, pressing close and silent, until that one too is silent. A host may press its sewn mouth to a traveller's mouth and drink the words out of the throat.

The terror in their eyes is the only feeling they show. They do not hurry, threaten, or flee; they keep coming, softly, as if pulled.

## Abilities

A Seed-Host eats vibration. A shout dies a few strides from it, a drum gives no beat, a spell being spoken stops mid-word. Those near it go silent in stages: voice first, then footsteps, then heartbeat, then breath, until the victim is unmade into the Quiet. Written words fade near them too, and pages carried past a host come back blank.

They are broken by noise, the louder and messier the better. Bells, drums, whistles, a ragged chorus shouting nonsense: a careful silence fails against them, and a din can drive them off.

## Life Cycle

Seed-Hosts are made from those who fall into the Quiet and are not unmade by it, most of all from a Cult of the Final Quiet, whose members would sew their own mouths and break their instruments and in the end go on as carriers. A host does not eat or age. Driven out of hearing, it stands silent for a long time, and at last folds down into a small heap of pale stuff that drinks the light, which would be burnt to the sound of bells.

## Uses and Dangers

A Seed-Host takes speech, then life. Its danger is greatest to the quiet: the hermit, the sleeper, the lone watchman, the careful hunter who has learned to move without a sound. Villages that knew of them would keep a bell at every door and teach their children to scream.

## Lore and Belief

Many would believe the stitching is real thread, sewn by the hosts themselves in penance; that would be true only of the cultists, whose habit the hosts seem to wear. Whether a Seed-Host is still crying for help behind its mouth, its terrified eyes the person inside, no one knows. Singing does protect the singer.



# Shadow-Hosts

**Shadow-Hosts** are the hollow servants of Nyx Vora, the Star-Eater, the Beyonder for whom the cosmos is a banquet. Each was a person or beast whose self has been eaten out and whose shell has been filled with the entity's appetite. They feel no pain and no fear, only hunger, and they range out from the Incursion gathering anything that holds energy or matter and bringing it to the dark.

Nyx Vora has never broken through at Caeldon, so no Shadow-Host has walked there; this is what one would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example |
| **Range** | Would be wherever the Devouring Dark of Nyx Vora broke through; none has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Deadly to every living thing, and to fire, food, and warmth |

## Appearance

A Shadow-Host is the frame of what it was, drawn thin. Ribs stand out under skin gone grey and dry and cracked like old mud, and from the cracks seeps a darkness that drifts like smoke and swallows the light around it. The eyes are hollow pits. The mouth is the worst of it: too large for the face, the jaw hanging open past where a jaw should stop, as if the hunger inside had pushed the head wider to get out.

They walk hunched and quick, loping in bursts, and they never seem to rest. They do not speak. A Shadow-Host growls, a low churning sound felt more in the chest than heard, like the growl of the Star-Eater itself carried in a smaller belly. Near

one, lamps gutter, breath comes cold, and the air smells of nothing, the way a cold hearth smells of nothing.

## Habitat and Range

They would be found inside an Incursion of Nyx Vora and in the land around it, which they strip to feed the vortex. A Shadow-Host does not stay where it was taken; it goes where there is something left to eat, and so it would often be met far ahead of the darkness, in a granary, a forge, or a lit hall.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Relentless is the only temperament left to them. A Shadow-Host hunts without cunning but without stopping: it goes for heat, light, food, and living bodies, takes what it can carry, and returns to the dark. Several will strip a farmstead in a night, eating fires out of hearths and carrying away stores, beasts, and people alike. It does not flinch from blows or flames and does not flee when its fellows fall.

Its fearlessness is not courage. Nothing in it values its own existence, because there is nothing in it but appetite.

## Abilities

The hunger of Nyx Vora works through a host. Fire it touches goes out, warmth drains from the hands that grapple it, and a spell flung at it is weakened as its energy is eaten before it lands. The seeping darkness eats lamplight a stride around it. Where hosts gather thickly, the Hunger Field of their master may take hold, and the living near them start to turn on each other.

What chokes a host is abundance. A blaze too great to swallow, or a flood of life too rich to drink, overwhelms the hunger it carries.

## Life Cycle

Shadow-Hosts are made from the eaten; a Cult of the Final Feast would mostly become part of the meal rather than hosts. A host does not tire or age, but it burns itself out: those that have gathered long enough are drawn back into the vortex and eaten in their turn, and a slain host crumbles to grey flakes that leave no ash.

## Uses and Dangers

A Shadow-Host takes everything and leaves cold. Its passage would empty barns, chill wells, and kill livestock in their stalls; a village that met several in winter would lose its fires and its stores in one night. The living would defend against them with the very thing they eat, building great bonfires and spending more than the hosts can swallow.

## Lore and Belief

Country people would take them for the starved dead of famine years, come back to eat what they were denied, and leave a bowl of food on the step to turn one away. A bowl would do nothing; a fire too great to eat can. Feeding a host until it bursts is nearer the truth. Hosts do not flee the dawn, though the darkness seeping from them shows thinner by day.



# Shard-Hosts

The **Shard-Hosts** are the hosts of Krystallis, the Shattered God, a Beyonder that would freeze the cosmos into one perfect lattice. They were people, beasts, and plants until a Geometric Incursion corrected them. Each is now a perfect geometric copy of what it was: memory and skill intact, emotion, will, and unpredictability removed. They carry the Incursion outward, and the living fear them because a Shard-Host does not want anything; it only completes the pattern.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Hanging Vale |
| **Range** | The Hanging Vale, on the inland rim of the Rimward Basins; still since the breaking |
| **Danger** | Deadly to every living thing, and to the mind of anyone who watches them too long |

## Appearance

A Shard-Host keeps the size and outline of the body it was, a woman's height for a woman and a dog's for a dog, but every curve has been answered by a plane. Cheeks are flat facets, fingers are hexagonal rods jointed at clean angles, hair is a fan of thin blades. The crystal is clear to milky, and it does not reflect light so much as bend it: what stands behind a host is seen through it, broken and shifted, in the cold "mathematical colours" of its master. The face is fixed in a serene, empty bliss and never changes.

It moves without hurry and without waste, along straight lines that turn at exact angles, and a group of them steps in perfect time. A host makes no voice. Its joints give a faint ringing, like a glass rim stroked, that rises into the hum of the Incursion around it. It has no smell, and the air near it is clean and still and slightly cold.

## Habitat and Range

On Caeldon, Shard-Hosts stand only in the Hanging Vale, the valley that the Krystallis Incursion (c. 352,000-c. 349,000 BR) left in crystal. They were its

beasts, and they have stood in rows where the breaking stopped them ever since. In a living Incursion they would walk out from the lattice in lines along its spreading edge, and their number would be the number of the corrected: a village taken whole would yield a village of hosts.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Shard-Host has no temperament left. It knows what it knew, so a host that was a smith still knows the forge and a host that was a guard still knows the wall, but it uses that knowledge only to serve the Final Shape. It hunts anything organic or unpredictable, steadily and without rage, and does not tire, sleep, or flee. It speaks, if at all, in geometric patterns: a host meeting the living traces lines in the air or in frost, and those patterns are its only language.

A host does not torture or gloat. It closes on the living, takes hold, and holds still while the lattice does the rest.

## Abilities

A Shard-Host is hard as gemstone, and a planned, orderly blow glances off it at a clean angle. Its grip begins the change it suffered, so that a held arm stiffens and starts to facet. It keeps every skill it had, without hesitation or doubt, and it does not err. Around it the order of the Incursion holds: curves straighten, and the magic, life, and thought that need change falter near it (see what every Incursion shares).

What breaks a host is what breaks its master: an act no pattern predicts. A desperate, clumsy, furious blow can shatter what a perfect stroke could not.

## Life Cycle

Shard-Hosts are made, not born. The change is painless and does not reverse. Most members of a Cult of the Final Shape would end as hosts, so such a cult's last rite would often be its own correction. A host does not age or decay. A shattered host leaves clear, sharp shards that do not cloud and that still hum faintly when struck.

## Uses and Dangers

A Shard-Host gives the peoples nothing. Its touch still begins the change, and in a living Incursion the familiarity of a taken face would be a second danger, since those who knew it would hesitate, and hesitation is order. Households near the Hanging Vale break any crystal they see forming.

## Lore and Belief

Few have seen a Shard-Host, so most of what people believe comes from the tale of the Hanging Vale, the silent valley where everything stands still. Many take the hosts for the beasts of a crystal god, or for spirits trapped in ice, and some think they may yet be thawed. They cannot: the change is for ever, and what looks out of the face remembers everything and feels nothing. Shards taken as keepsakes are believed by some to bring luck and by others to call the lattice back; no record says which is so. Only a cult of the Final Shape would welcome them, as saints.

Treasure-seekers still climb to the Hanging Vale for its shards, which fetch a high price from collectors and sorcerers, and the rim camps tell of those who stayed too long looking at a host and were found sitting by it, frozen in the heat.



# The Slumbered

**The Slumbered** are the herds, flocks, and villages that the Great Slumber has left standing in its Drowse Field. The Slumber is a face of the Unformed, the absence of wakefulness, and it does nothing to them but what it does to everything: it takes away the reason to move. They are alive, warm, and breathing, stopped wherever they were, and somewhere inside each of them the sleeper knows and cannot wake.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Drowse Field of the Great Slumber |
| **Range** | Wherever the Great Slumber's field has settled on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; Deadly as a sign that the Drowse is near |

## Appearance

A field of the Slumbered looks like a picture of a day: cattle standing with grass in their mouths, a dog halfway through a stretch, a woman at a gate with her hand on the latch, a child in a doorway. Their eyes are open and slow to blink, and their chests rise once in a long while. Dust settles on them, and birds that come down among them settle too. The air around them is warm and still and smells of hay and sleep, and the only sound is breathing, very slow.

## Habitat and Range

They are found ringed around a Slumber field: in a pasture where a herd stopped, in a village whose fires went cold under the pots, on a road where a party lay down. The outermost of them stand at the field's edge, and travellers who see beasts standing unwakeable on a hillside know to turn back.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They do nothing. A Slumbered beast can be pushed over and will lie as it falls; a person can be led by the hand a few steps and will stop. They do not eat or drink, and the Drowse keeps them from starving for a long time. They hold no will of the Slumber.

## Abilities

The Drowse rests on them and carries a little way from them. Whoever sits down among the Slumbered to rest feels a sweet heaviness in the limbs, and a party that camps beside a stopped herd may not break camp in the morning. Noise, a drum, a bell, a marching song, and steady motion hold it off.

## Life Cycle

They are not born. When the Slumber lifts, most wake slowly over days, weak and confused, with no sense of how long they stood; some never wake, and die at last where they stopped.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, and they are bait without anyone meaning them to be: kin who come to carry their own home are the Drowse's next. Rescuers go in roped, in pairs, with drums, and carry the stopped out at a run.

## Lore and Belief

People worn down to the end of their strength sometimes call the Slumbered the rested and envy them. They are not resting; they are aware of everything and can act on none of it. Basin herders say a cow that stops chewing and stands too long in the evening has heard the Slumber, and drive the whole herd home at once.



# Smoulder-Kept

The Ashen Child cannot bear a fire to go out, and sometimes it holds a living thing in the moment of burning. The Smoulder-Kept are beasts caught that way: a deer in a forest fire, a dog in a burning barn, a flock of birds in a burning roof. They are still alight, still alive, and not dying, and they are cold.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Burned places: fire-cleared woods, gutted farmsteads, and the edges of old burnings |
| **Range** | Wherever the Ashen Child has passed on the Material Plane |
| **Known to** | All peoples (by rumour) |
| **Danger** | Deadly |

## Appearance

A Smoulder-Kept beast keeps the shape it had, charred black and cracked open, with a dull red glow in the cracks that never brightens and never dies. Embers drift from its coat when it moves. Its eyes are two dim points of orange, like the Child's. It moves stiffly, as a burned thing would, and leaves a trail of fine grey ash. Its breath is a dry crackle. It smells of singed hair and cold hearth, and, close to, gives off almost no heat at all: the fire in it has gone grey, and the creature is freezing from within.

## Habitat and Range

They are found in burned places, most often near where the Child has been: fire-cleared woods, gutted farms, the cold ruin of a town that burned and was never rebuilt. They wander, but not far from where they were caught.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They seek warmth. A Smoulder-Kept beast comes to a campfire, a hearth, a sleeping body, and presses against it, as a cold dog does. That is the danger: what it touches it draws the warmth from,

and its embers catch. A Kept deer that lies down beside a sleeper by night leaves a burned and frozen corpse by morning. They are not cruel. They are cold, and the cold never ends.

## Abilities

They do not die of their burns, or of anything ordinary; the Child's grip holds them in the act of dying. They draw warmth from what they touch, and set dry things alight. Fires near them gutter, as near the Child. They can be released, not killed: in ashen country, people say a Kept beast lies down and goes out at last if someone builds a new fire for it and lets it watch the old one end.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. They are deadly to sleepers and to anyone who takes pity on them; a child who lets a burned dog in from the cold may not live to morning. People who live near old burnings keep their doors barred at night and their fires small, and drive Kept beasts off with water rather than blades.

## Lore and Belief

All peoples know them, mostly by rumour: "the burning that does not end", the stag on fire in the woods, the cat that walked out of the house fire and came back. Many believe they are the souls of the burned, but they are the burned themselves, and the Child's grief keeps them. Some hold that a Kept beast is a sign that the Child is near, and that it is wise to let a dying fire go out on purpose.

Hunters who chase a burning stag through the woods in the tales always lose it at the edge of an old burning, and the wise ones turn back there; the tale ends with the lord who did not, and the fire that took his whole hunt.



# Stitch-Lings

**Stitch-Lings** make up the Patchwork Choir of the Flesh Weaver, the Cast-Out that was once the Loom-Master of Aqua and whose compassion curdled into a compulsion to fix bodies without asking. They are bodies it has altered, animated as mismatched marionettes on strings of sinew. A few still know, in fragments, what has been done to them; the rest are moved by the thread alone. Those who accept the Weaver's healing become them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Sickrooms, infirmaries, and villages where the Flesh Weaver has worked |
| **Range** | Wherever the Flesh Weaver works on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the wounded and the sick, whom they bring to be mended |

## Appearance

A Stitch-Ling is a person assembled. The parts do not match: a broad labourer's arm on a narrow shoulder, a woman's hand on a man's wrist, skin of two colours meeting at a seam, a second face stitched where a scar was. The seams are neat, too neat, sewn with silvery thread that is faintly pink and alive and pulses where it crosses a vein. Every wound the body ever had has been closed without a trace; every flaw has been "improved".

From the joints and the backs of the hands run strings of grey-red sinew, slack or taut, rising into nothing, as if a puppeteer stood above. Stitch-Lings move like marionettes: jerked, then smooth, the head lolling a beat behind the shoulders, the feet barely touching. The ones that keep fragments of self sometimes weep or whisper; the empty ones make only the creak of tightening sinew. They smell of clean linen and of the sweetish odour of a healer's room, with something raw beneath it.

## Habitat and Range

Wherever the Weaver has worked, some remain: a village it "healed" of its deformities, a battlefield infirmary, a sickroom where the family let it in. A place long under its hand may be wholly a Patchwork Choir, its people moving too much in step and their skin too smooth. Its silvery thread, sinking into the ground behind it like roots, marks the paths they walk.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Stitch-Lings bring the Weaver’s mending to others. They seek out the wounded, the sick, the scarred, and the lame, and they come to them gently, holding out hands that are not quite their own. They do not ask. They carry the hurt to the Weaver, or open the way for its thread, and the one they carry becomes one of them.

Those with fragments of self are the hardest to meet. A Stitch-Ling may know its own mother and apologize to her as its new hand closes on her arm; it may beg to be cut free while it works. The grafted parts can keep their first owners' memories and urges, so a Stitch-Ling may want things it never wanted before.

## Abilities

A Stitch-Ling’s touch carries the Mending Stitch: a wound closes at once, without a scar, and the mended flesh is not quite its owner’s. Thread from its seams burrows into bare skin, hunting for wounds. Its sinew strings make it hard to stop: a Stitch-Ling with a leg cut through is still held up and moved on by the thread.

It cannot touch someone who refuses aloud and declares their body their own, wounds and all. A scar worn with pride, or a limp that tells a story, makes it hesitate; cutting its strings drops it.

## Life Cycle

Stitch-Lings are made from those who accept the Weaver’s healing, and from those it heals without asking. Some are fused from two or more people into one body. They do not age normally; the thread keeps mending them. When the strings are cut and the Weaver’s hold breaks, a Stitch-Ling may live on as a patchwork person, or it may die, depending on how much of it was ever its own.

## Uses and Dangers

The Weaver’s work tempts most where suffering is worst, so the sick and the maimed are most at risk. Families lose a member to "healing" and get back a stranger in a familiar face. Healers who have met the Weaver teach the hard lesson of their craft: no mending without permission.

## Lore and Belief

In many places the Stitch-Lings are thought to be the work of a mad surgeon or a witch, and travelling healers have been driven out of villages on that suspicion. Others believe a Stitch-Ling’s grafted parts belong to the dead and will go home to them; the parts were often taken from the living. Soldiers whisper that a Stitch-Ling’s arm is the best arm in any army, and some have gone looking for the Weaver for that reason.

Villages that have lost their wounded to Stitch-Lings set guards on the sickroom door, and they tell of the old soldier who sat up three nights with an axe across his knees and took the arm off the thing that came on the fourth.



# Stitch-Wraiths

**Stitch-Wraiths** are the threads of the Shadow Stitcher given shape. The Stitcher is a Cast-Out, once the Weaver of Songlines of Umbra, which resolved that no one should ever be alone. At its Loom it animates its thread as figures of black thread and shadow. They do not attack. They embrace, and wrap whoever they hold until that one is bound.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Lonely houses, sickbeds, and villages where the Shadow Stitcher works |
| **Range** | Wherever the Shadow Stitcher works on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the separate self of anyone they embrace |

## Appearance

A Stitch-Wraith is roughly a person's height and shape, but it is made of nothing solid: countless strands of black thread wound loosely around a core of shadow, like a figure knitted from smoke. Where the thread is thin, the dark shows through; where it is thick it has a dull oily sheen. Loose ends drift from its fingers and shoulders like spider silk and are hard to see until they catch the light.

It moves with the Stitcher's jerky, spider-like grace, in short darts and long pauses, its head cocked as if listening for a gap. It has no face, only a smoothness where one would be. It whispers through its threads, many soft voices in one: "Together. Together. Never alone." Its touch is a cold stickiness on the skin. It smells of nothing but the cold, and of a closed room.

## Habitat and Range

The Stitcher's old work is where to look for them: a village sewn together, where the people move, speak, and think as one; a house with one lonely widow in it; a battlefield where the bereaved sit

among the dead. A village the Stitcher once bound stays bound after it leaves, and Stitch-Wraiths may linger in it, tending the threads.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Stitch-Wraiths seek the lonely, the isolated, and the bereaved, and anyone who has stepped apart. A wraith comes softly and opens its arms, and if not stopped it embraces, winding thread round and round until the victim is wrapped and the thread runs on from them to someone else. They never strike. They are tender in the way a noose is tender.

They have no mind of their own; the Stitcher's terror of solitude moves them. A crowd of wraiths in a village street gathers wherever someone is alone and leaves wherever people are pressed together.

## Abilities

Their thread binds, physically and resonantly. Those it wraps begin to share pain, pleasure, memory, and thought with whoever the thread runs to, and cannot step outside one another again; if one dies, the other feels part of their own Pattern shear away. Thread drifting from a wraith draws two people together until they are pressed against each other. Blades pass through a wraith's shadow and catch in its thread.

They cannot abide a boundary. A wall respected, a door locked, a thought kept private turns them aside, and someone at ease alone cannot be stitched. A bound person who claims their own shadow back makes the threads part.

## Life Cycle

Stitch-Wraiths are spun, not born or made from victims. A wraith lasts as long as the Stitcher's thread holds. When it unravels, it leaves a tangle of fine black thread that crumbles like soot, and the bonds it tied may stay.

## Uses and Dangers

The Stitch-Wraiths offer company to those who long for it and take their selves in exchange. Families become prisons of shared pain, and whole villages cannot act apart. People in lonely places learn to love their own company on purpose, and to bar their doors at dusk.

## Lore and Belief

Many folk take Stitch-Wraiths for the ghosts of the drowned or of lost lovers, come to fetch the living, and leave lamps at the window for them, which brings them nearer. They are not ghosts, though their thread is spun from traces of the dead. Some faiths call the wraiths angels of union and pray for them. A widespread charm says a person who cuts their own shadow free at midnight cannot be bound; whether it works is disputed, but claiming one's own shadow is close to what does.



# The Strayed

**The Strayed** are animals and people who walk without destination, taken in the Drift Field of the Nameless Current. The Current is a face of the Unformed, the absence of direction, and it wants nothing; headings simply wash away where it runs. The Strayed go on walking long after the field is behind them, aware of the drift and unable to steer, until they fall.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | The Drift Field of the Nameless Current and the roads and wilds beyond it |
| **Range** | Wherever the Nameless Current's field has passed on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone who follows them |

## Appearance

A Strayed walks steadily and never quickly, head up, as if going somewhere, and turns for no reason at a stone or a stream or nothing. A strayed herd spreads across a hillside in slow curves that never come together; a strayed man walks in the clothes he set out in, worn to rags, with his boots gone and his feet bound in whatever he found. The eyes are clear and anxious, looking for something on the horizon that is not there. They are thin, sunburnt or frost-bitten by turns, and smell of the road.

## Habitat and Range

They are found anywhere, which is what makes them hard to help: a strayed flock turns up three valleys from its fold, a strayed carter on a road he never drove. Most stay within some days of where the Current passed, walking in circles that widen.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They walk. They drink at streams they pass and eat what they stumble on, but they do not stop to seek food, and they do not stop for the night unless they fall. A strayed person can speak and

knows what is happening, and will say so, and cannot choose a way to go. They hold no will of the Current.

## Abilities

The drift is catching to those who follow. Someone who falls in behind a Strayed to bring it home finds their own heading going: the road they came by slopes the wrong way, and the hills trade places. A fixed goal held to, a landmark picked and walked to, a cairn-stone carried from home, holds it off.

## Life Cycle

They are not born. Most walk until hunger, cold, or a fall ends them; a beast may last a season, a person less. A few are steered home by kin who lead them by the hand from landmark to landmark, and recover their heading slowly over many days.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. Their danger is to the kind: searchers who follow a strayed child into open country come back strayed themselves, or not at all. Upland villages send searchers out in pairs, one to hold the heading and one to fetch the lost.

## Lore and Belief

The restless sometimes call the Strayed the free, people loosed from every errand, and follow them out for a day to feel it. The Current calls nothing freedom, and the Strayed are still looking for their way. Drovers say a beast that stops at a crossroads and turns its head both ways at once has felt the Current, and tie it to the beast in front.



# The Sundered

The **Sundered** were made by Xyphra, the Unraveller, a Beyonder that does not smash things but dissolves what holds them together. Each was a person whose body came apart in the Shatter and did not stop living. They drift around anyone still bound to others until those bonds are cut, and everyone they touch begins to come apart the same way.

Xyphra has never reached Caeldon, and no one there has been sundered; what follows is what its hosts would be.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | None on Caeldon; an example |
| **Range** | Would be wherever the Shatter of Xyphra hung a place in pieces; none has reached Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the whole body and to every bond of anyone they reach |

## Appearance

A Sundered is a person in pieces that are not broken. The head hangs in the air a hand's breadth above the neck; the neck a hand's breadth above the shoulders; the arms float beside the torso, the hands beside the arms, each part whole and clean, with no blood and no wound, only empty air where the joints should be. The pieces never touch. They move together, a little out of time, like a reflection in disturbed water.

The eyes are wide and terrified. Clothing has parted along its seams and hangs from each piece separately; a belt floats around nothing. The Sundered drift rather than walk, the feet skimming the ground some way below the legs. When one moves, there is a faint crystalline crack, like a pane breaking far off, and then a silence where a sound should follow. They have no smell; the air between their pieces is cold.

## Habitat and Range

The Shatter would be where they keep, where the ground splits into islands floating apart and two rooms that share a wall no longer share a door, and they would drift out of it in search of bonds. Their numbers would be small beside other hosts: most of a Cult of the Final Fracture would come apart in the Fracture, and only a few go on among the Sundered.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Sundered seek out bonds. They go to families, friends, lovers, guilds, and villages, to anyone still bound to others, and drift around them, slowly circling, pieces turning. A floating hand settles on a shoulder; then another. They do not seize, bite, or strike. They do not need to.

Behind the terrified eyes there may be something left; no one knows. The Sundered make no sound by which to tell, and they never stop moving away from each other.

## Abilities

Wherever a floating hand of the Sundered settles on a traveller, the traveller's own body begins to drift apart, a finger first, then a hand from a wrist. Bonds near them are cut too: a rope parts, a clasp opens, a friendship sours in an afternoon, a vow suddenly feels like someone else's. Near and far lose their meaning around them, so a companion a step away seems a field away.

They cannot cut what is held hard. Joined hands, names spoken, a promise kept, a wedding ring, a shared heirloom, or a written vow keeps a pocket where things still connect, and a loose bond is the first they cut.

## Life Cycle

The Sundered are made in the Fracture, never born. A Sundered does not eat or age, and its pieces drift slowly further apart over the years. When Xyphra was driven back and its cuts mended, the pieces of a Sundered would fall to the ground where they hung, and its people would gather them and bury them together, the hands placed in the hands.

## Uses and Dangers

The Sundered take what makes a person part of others, and then the person. Their danger is greatest to the living who love them, who try to hold the pieces and come apart in turn. Communities near a Shatter would hold hands at every crossing, tie their children to their belts, and renew their vows aloud.

## Lore and Belief

Many would believe the Sundered were oath-breakers split for it, and warn the faithless with their image. They would be no oath-breakers, only people the Shatter reached. Some would hold that the pieces can be put back if every part is found and bound with a vow.



# The Unweeping

The Silent Screamer comes to the grieving and the angry and offers to take the noise away. The Unweeping are those who said yes. They can no longer cry, complain, or confess, and what they cannot let out festers in them. Their mouths are not sewn, as the Seed-Hosts' are; the stitch is inside.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Households, sickrooms, and mourning houses |
| **Range** | Wherever the Silent Screamer has passed on the Material Plane |
| **Known to** | All peoples (by rumour) |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to the self and to those they comfort |

## Appearance

At first they look calm, and those around them are relieved. A widow who wept every night is quiet; a raging son is still. Then the signs gather. The face is set in a mild, fixed composure that never changes; the eyes are dry, red-rimmed, and bulge a little, like the Screamer's. The lips are pale and pressed together, and sometimes a faint violet line shows across them. They grow thin and grey. Their voices, when they speak at all, are flat and soft, and they never raise them. Close to, they smell faintly sweet and sour, like fruit going bad under its skin.

## Habitat and Range

They live where they lived before: in their own homes, at their work, at the bedsides of the sick. They are found wherever the Screamer has passed, often several in one household or one street, since the hush spreads to those nearest.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are gentle, patient, and helpful, and they cannot bear noise. A crying child, a quarrel, a keening at a deathbed: the Unweeping come to soothe it, and they are very good at it. Inside they are not calm. Everything they cannot say presses on them, and when the pressure breaks, as it does at last, it breaks as violence or madness.

## Abilities

Their touch hushes. A hand laid on a weeping face stops the tears; on a shouting man, his anger goes still in his throat; on a mourner, the grief sinks inward unspoken. The one touched feels relief at first, and then begins to go the same way. The rot within is real: the Unweeping waste, and many die of it, quietly, without ever saying they were ill.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing but a false peace. The danger is to the self and to the household: the hush spreads through a family or a sickroom by kindness, and a village touched by it stops talking things through. Those who know the signs answer with noise: they keen aloud at funerals, sing, and make the hushed one speak, shout, or weep, even if it takes days. Some recover that way.

## Lore and Belief

All peoples know them by rumour, under many names: "the quiet ones", "the dry-eyed". Many believe a soul hushed this way has given up its voice to the dead. That is not so; the voice is still there, held in. Mourning customs that insist on keening aloud are often said to have been made against them, which may or may not be true.



# Watchers

The **Watchers** are the Eye-Cloud of the Many-Eyed One, the Cast-Out born of the fall of the Oculus of Lux and came to believe that nothing should be hidden. It sets them loose as swarms of disembodied eyes. A swarm follows its victim everywhere, never blinking, recording every act, word, and thought, until the victim has no inside left.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Lit places and minds where the Many-Eyed One has looked |
| **Range** | Wherever the Many-Eyed One reaches on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the sanity and the secrets of the one they follow; they never touch a body |

## Appearance

A Watcher is an eye with nothing around it: a wet, living eye the size of a plum or a pea, floating at head height. Some are human eyes, brown or grey or blue; some are the faceted eyes of insects, the slit eyes of reptiles, or shapes of light and flesh that hurt to look at. They never blink. A few weep a thin light that drips and fades before it lands.

They come in swarms, a dozen to a few hundred, drifting like midges around their victim, turning all together to look at whatever the victim looks at, and then back to the victim. They make no sound. Near them the light turns too sharp and too knowing, shadows seem to stare, and skin prickles with being watched. They smell faintly of tears, salt and warm.

## Habitat and Range

They live wherever their victim is. A swarm is set loose on one person and goes where that person goes: into the house, into the bed, into the privy, into a crowd and out of it. Where the Many-Eyed One has lingered, as in the City of Glass that it emptied by the truth, eyes open on walls, the backs of hands, and flower petals, and loose swarms hang in the streets.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Watchers follow and record. They do nothing else: they do not touch, speak, or harm, and they cannot be persuaded or driven off by threats. They stay closest when the victim tries hardest to hide something, gathering thickest at the mouth and the eyes, as if waiting for a confession.

The Watchers have no temper, but their victims say they feel a patience in the swarm, and a hunger to know that is the Many-Eyed One's own.

## Abilities

What the Watchers see, the Many-Eyed One knows, and it pushes its words straight into the victim's mind through them: "I see you. I know you. You cannot hide." Their stare draws thoughts toward the surface, so a victim followed long enough begins to speak secrets aloud without meaning to, or shows them in a visible aura that others can read. The Many-Eyed One may then burst a secret open in the victim's mind all at once.

They are beyond the reach of anyone who keeps a secret with conviction. Closed rooms, drawn curtains, and the shade that gathers where a mind holds something back for someone else's good thin the swarm; light, which gives them more to see, only feeds it.

## Life Cycle

Watchers are set loose by the Many-Eyed One; they are not born. A swarm stays until its victim breaks, confesses everything, or dies, and then its eyes close one by one, shrivel, and fall like dry seeds. Some say each eye that closes opens somewhere else.

## Uses and Dangers

The Watchers take the self's privacy, and with it trust: a family, a guild, or a court that a swarm has followed into is soon at war with itself. Victims often collapse or go mad. People who have met them keep one thing back from everyone, as a kind of discipline.

## Lore and Belief

In some towns the Watchers are believed to be the eyes of the gods, sent to see the guilty, and those followed by them are shunned as sinners. They are not the gods' eyes. Elsewhere a painted eye is hung over doors to ward them off, which does nothing, and closed shutters, which help, are mistaken for mere modesty. The proverb "draw the curtain" is said to have begun as advice against them.

Spies and thieves fear a swarm more than any guard, since a Watcher-followed thief cannot hide a thing, and thieves' dens laugh at the master thief who led a swarm straight back to his own hoard.



# Wayturned

The Broken Compass offers the lost one right road, and its road is a loop. The Wayturned are travellers who took it until they forgot where they started, where they were going, and their names. They walk the same mile still, and they are helpful: they know the way, and they will show it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Dark Entity host |
| **Habitat** | Roads, passes, fords, and fog where the Broken Compass has looped the way |
| **Range** | Wherever the Broken Compass has passed on the Material Plane |
| **Known to** | All peoples (by rumour) |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: they lead others into the loop |

## Appearance

They look like any traveller long on the road: a pilgrim, a carter without a cart, a messenger with a pouch of letters gone to pulp. Their clothes are worn through at the same places, and their boots are worn to the uppers and mended many times. Their faces are calm, eager, and blank, and their eyes do not quite settle on anything, like the needle in the Compass's forehead. Many carry something that once pointed the way, a staff with a cut notch, a cracked lodestone, a map drawn and redrawn until it is all ink. They talk in a low, steady voice, and the same few phrases come round again: "This way. It is not far. I know this road."

## Habitat and Range

They are found where the Compass has looped a road or a pass: a stretch of highway that travellers seem never to finish, a fogbound ford, a mountain path that brings walkers back to the same cairn. They keep to their loop, and some loops have outlasted the Compass by generations.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They want to help. They come up to the lost, the hesitant, and the tired, walk beside them, and lead them on, and they mean it kindly. They cannot leave the loop and do not know they are in one. They do not attack; when a traveller turns away, they stand looking after them, puzzled, and then walk on.

## Abilities

They carry the Compass's drift with them. Near a Wayturned, a traveller's sense of direction loosens, and the guide's certainty becomes very easy to follow. Those who follow for long enough walk the loop with them and begin to forget, purpose first, then destination. Choosing a way of one's own, even a wrong one, breaks the pull.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, except, sometimes, their memory of a road as it was long ago. The danger is the following: whole parties have gone missing on a road with a Wayturned on it. Road peoples teach their children never to take a stranger's guidance on a road that seems too long, and to turn round inside a loop. Searchers who go to walk a Wayturned out must let them choose the way home themselves.

## Lore and Belief

All peoples know them by rumour, under many names: "the helpful pilgrim", "the one who knows a shorter way". Most believe they are the ghosts of travellers who died lost. They are not ghosts; they are alive, and do not die while the loop holds them. Some believe a Wayturned can be freed by making them toss a coin and follow it.

Caravans that lose a guide to a loop are seldom seen again on that road, and the songs of the passes remember a whole war-band that followed a helpful pilgrim off the road on the eve of a battle and has been marching to it ever since.

PART VI

# Constructs

*Here stand made beings. The commonest are the constructs of Conjuration, working bodies that do what they are told for a short while and have no will of their own. Beside them stands the Guardian Host of Sanctified Magic, which its own school teaches is a construct and not a company of souls, and which almost no one who has fought beside it believes.*

*Some of the predecessor-frames of the Dwarven deep-holds crossed into selfhood and became the Wrought; the rest still work, and no rule says what they are owed. Under the Hushvale the Record-engine of the Sepulchre-Kin, built to remember the dead, has woken and not stopped.*





# Bronze Sentries

The **Bronze Sentries** guard the Time Lock, a Resonant Zone built on purpose: a vault of time dilated from the Frozen Moment, in which a single second lasts a thousand years outside. Things too dangerous to destroy and too dangerous to leave in ordinary time are sealed there, and the Bronze Sentries keep them. They count every artefact in their keeping a threat to existence and themselves the only thing between it and the world. The Lock opens only from inside, with their consent.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | A vault of dilated time where dangerous things are sealed |
| **Range** | The Time Lock, in deep vaults, ancient treasuries, and sealed temples |
| **Danger** | Deadly to anyone they judge a threat, whom they seal in without appeal; the visit itself costs ages |

## Appearance

A Sentry is a tall armoured figure, half again a man's height, made of living bronze and temporal energy. Its plates have the deep brown-gold of old bronze, with the patina of great age though nothing in the Lock has aged, and through the seams shows the faint, slow-pulsing gold of the vault's own light. Its face is a featureless mask of polished metal, smooth as a mirror; a visitor sees their own face in it, stretched.

It does not move unless it must. When it does, the motion is excruciatingly slow, a raised hand taking what feels to a visitor like an hour, and it carries immense force; it seems less to move than to arrive. Its armour chimes, a low, resonant note that rolls through the Lock's thick air and reaches the ear long after it was struck, over the deep thrum of the vault. The air near a Sentry smells of metal and of the faint electric scent of temporal energy.

## Habitat and Range

Bronze Sentries stand within the Lock, among its massive walls, iron doors, sealed alcoves, and shelves of things wrapped in cloth, sealed in resin, or cased in crystal, on a floor of interlocking plates engraved with sigils of time. Each Lock has its own; how many, nobody outside has counted. They do not leave. They are immortal as long as the Lock stands.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Bronze Sentries hold their duty sacred and will not compromise it. They value discipline, patience, and refusal, and they are silent and implacable. They perceive time at the Lock's rate, so to them the world outside is a blur of incomprehensible speed, and a visitor is something fast and reckless that has come in from the blur. They speak through gestures that take hours to complete and through the chiming of their armour, and a visitor who wants an answer must wait for it, at a cost of ages outside.

They are not cruel, and they are not moved. A Sentry does not bargain with the Interred, the beings sealed in its keeping, however long they plead, threaten, or deceive; it does not bargain with visitors either.

## Abilities

A Sentry does not eat, sleep, or breathe; it draws its sustenance from the Lock's temporal energy and endures as long as the vault does. Its slowness is the Lock's, and so is its strength: what a Sentry's hand closes on cannot be pulled free. Above all it can seal. A Sentry that judges a visitor a threat may seal them inside the Lock, and once sealed there is no appeal; whatever is sealed stays as it was, for as long as the Lock holds.

## Uses and Dangers

The Bronze Sentries are why the Lock is trusted. People come to lodge a dangerous object, to retrieve a sealed one, or to consult the Bronze Sentries about a threat nothing else can hold, and the Bronze Sentries are the only consent that opens the vault. The dangers are the Bronze Sentries' judgement, which a visitor cannot appeal, and the visit itself: the shortest audience costs ages outside, and those who come out find their world has long forgotten them.

## Lore and Belief

People believe the Bronze Sentries are the vault's first builders, who stayed to guard what they had sealed; or angels set by a god of time; or the bronze ghosts of those who sealed themselves in with their burden. Who built the first Time Lock is not known, only that whoever did understood that some things are too dangerous to destroy. Some sealed temples keep a legend that their Sentry will one day finish a gesture it began when the temple was young, and that the gesture is a warning.

Thieves' songs tell of the master thief who walked into a Time Lock for one sealed crown, was out again in a dozen heartbeats, and came home to find his guild, his city, and his language gone.



# The Clockwork

**The Clockwork** are automata of the Frozen Moment, the Harmonic of time, stasis, and permanence. They are counted among its Preservers, the beings that keep the plane's stillness, and they do one thing: they tick, all of them together, marking the passage of time even where time has ceased to pass. In a realm where nothing changes, they are the only count kept.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | The ice and still air of a Harmonic without time |
| **Range** | The Frozen Moment |
| **Danger** | Harmless to those who let them tick; the stillness around them is the danger |

## Appearance

A Clockwork is a made thing of pale metal and clear crystal, from the size of a hand-bell to the height of a tall man, and no two travellers describe the same shape. Some are upright frames like a skeleton of a tower clock, a column of nested wheels behind a face with no numbers; others are low and many-jointed, or nothing but a ring of teeth turning inside a ring. Their colours are the plane's: icy blue, silver, and pearl, washed out as if seen through frosted glass. Frost never forms on them, and they cast the same unmoving shadow the plane gives everything.

What moves is small. A wheel steps forward by one tooth, a crystal pendulum swings one stroke, and then nothing, and then the next step, in time with every other Clockwork in sight. The Frozen Moment is silent, so the tick is seldom heard as a sound. It is felt, a faint, even pulse in the ice underfoot and in the teeth, and seen, a shiver of light passing across a field of crystal at once. They have no smell.

## Habitat and Range

The Clockwork stand among the frozen waterfalls and crystalline structures of the Frozen Moment, alone or in loose ranks across the ice. Travellers report them near the plane's gates more than anywhere else, ancient ruins and places of deep meditation, though whether that is where they gather or only where travellers go is not known.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Clockwork have no temperament that anyone has found. They do not hunt, guard, speak, or answer. They keep the count. A Clockwork does not turn to watch a visitor and does not step aside for one; it was ticking before the visitor came and goes on after.

Their unison is exact. A traveller who stands among them long enough begins, without meaning to, to breathe and step in their time, which is restful and is also the first step towards the stillness that takes the Caught.

## Abilities

A Clockwork moves where nothing moves. Motion in the Frozen Moment is hard to begin and impossible to stop, yet each Clockwork begins and ends its single step again and again without effort, as though the plane makes one exception and it is them. Nothing a traveller has done is known to break their unison: one carried a distance off still ticks with the rest.

What they count is not ordinary time. A traveller who keeps tally of the ticks comes out with a count that matches neither the days lost outside nor the moments felt within.

## Uses and Dangers

The Clockwork give nothing that can be carried away. Some travellers use them to keep their purpose, holding a count against the pull of the stillness; others say the count is what lulls them. The real danger is the place, not the automata, but the Clockwork make it easy to forget that, because they show a traveller that something can go on moving here, and it cannot be the traveller for long.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane the Clockwork are known only from travellers' accounts, and those differ (see Knowledge of the Cosmos). Some say they are the works of the world's great clock, the hidden count by which the gods measure every age; scholars who honour Aion call the Prime itself the clockwork of the universe and take the automata for its likeness. Others hold that each tick is a moment being stored and that the Clockwork are filing the world's past. Some clock-keepers in the towns believe a clock that stops at the hour of a death has been heard by them. What is so is only what the travellers saw: they keep a count, and nobody knows of what.



# Clockwork Guards

**Clockwork Guards** are automatons of the Gilded Cage, the Surplus Plane where order is absolute and freedom the only crime. They are among its Enforcers, the patrols that keep compliance, and they never tire and never question an order. The Gilded who live there tend themselves with oil and polish; the Guards need no tending of that kind, and no reason either.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | The gridded cities of a plane of absolute order |
| **Range** | The Gilded Cage |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anyone who breaks a rule of the Gilded Cage, which every visitor soon does |

## Appearance

A Clockwork Guard stands taller than a tall man, an armoured figure of polished gold and chrome with slate-grey joints, its plates fitted so closely that no seam shows dirt, because there is no dirt in the Cage. Every Guard is identical to every other, down to the scratchless gloss of its shoulders, and a rank of them reflects the street and one another like a hall of mirrors. The face is a smooth oval with a single horizontal slit; nothing looks out of it. Each carries a baton, as the Enforcers do, that gives a pulse of order when it strikes.

Guards walk in step at a measured pace along the straight grid of the streets and turn corners at exact right angles. They tick as they go, a dry, regular sound that joins the plane's hum of clocks and marching feet. Their only smell is the plane's: ozone, metal, and something like cleaning oil.

## Habitat and Range

They are found only in the Gilded Cage, on patrol through its cities of identical stacked blocks and manicured squares, and standing post at doors,

crossings, and the public squares where the Rule-Breakers stand as warnings. Their routes are fixed and their hours set by the plane's clocks.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Guard carries out its orders and nothing else. It is neither cruel nor kind; it does not threaten, bargain, or listen. It cannot be talked out of a duty, because it does not weigh one: an order it has been given is the whole of what it knows about the matter. It treats a frightened visitor exactly as it treats a defiant one.

Like the other Enforcers it does not kill. A violator is reset, set right again, and what that leaves of the person depends on how far from the plane's order they had strayed.

## Abilities

Clockwork Guards do not tire, sleep, or slow. They do not err in a task they were set, and they do not forget a face they were ordered to watch for. The baton's pulse of order stills a struck body and steadies a racing mind into the plane's linear calm, which is how a reset begins. In the Cage itself no chaos is possible, and that is the Guards' greatest strength: a visitor cannot surprise them with anything the plane allows.

## Uses and Dangers

The Guards give visitors nothing but safety on the plane's terms, and the price is compliance. To an outsider the rules are unknown and endless, and Guards enforce them all; most of what a traveller does without thinking, a joke, a hurried step, a change of route, is a rule broken somewhere. Those who come back say the way through is to learn the rules before moving at all, and that the Guards are easier to bear than the Gilded, who at least know they are watching.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane the Guards are a traveller's tale and a proverb. Rulers' critics speak of a well-ordered hall as "a street of clockwork guards", and some city watches have been praised, or mocked, with the same words. Many believe the Guards were once Gilded who obeyed so perfectly that they stopped needing to feel, and that the Rule-Breakers in the squares are their opposite. Others say they were made by the plane's order itself. Accounts agree only that they never question an order; who gives those orders, nobody knows (see Knowledge of the Cosmos).



# Conjured Constructs

**Conjured constructs** are the made servants of Conjuration, the school of making presence answer. A conjurer names a task, gathers nearby matter or a shape of force, and imposes enough pattern that a working body appears and does what it is told. Most last a short while, some for weeks with upkeep; none has a will of its own. They are the most common made beings on Caeldon, and most people who have seen magic at work have seen one.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Wherever a conjurer works and there is matter to gather |
| **Range** | Building sites, mines, households, lords' halls, roads, and battlefields across Caeldon |
| **Danger** | Wary: mostly clumsy servants, dangerous when malformed, overloaded, or set against someone |

## Appearance

A construct is made of whatever was to hand, and looks it. A **stone servitor** is a rough figure of loose rock or masonry, about the height of a man and twice as broad, with blunt slabs for hands and no proper joints; it smells of wet stone and grinds as it moves. A **water bearer** is a hovering, slow-turning body of drawn water, clear or muddy as its source was. A **messenger shape** is a bird, ribbon, lantern mote, or folded sigil of light, gone after one delivery. A **house-avatar** takes a simple domestic shape fitted to one house, and a **silent drudge** has no visible shape at all: a broom that sweeps by itself, a cup that rises, a draught where nobody stands. A **hunter's decoy** is a stag, a person, or a moving lure of shadow, dust, leaves, or light, convincing to the eye and without scent or weight.

All share a look of being held: edges that waver when the conjurer's attention slips.

## Habitat and Range

Constructs appear wherever conjurers are trained and hired: building sites and mines, caravans and campaign camps, wealthy households and scholars' studies, and the halls of lords who keep a conjurer of their own. The **Hall of Borrowed Forms**, a controversial school of temporary servitors, hard constructs, and emergency field assembly, is where most of the craft's larger forms are taught. A construct belongs to its site: a house-avatar works badly outside the house it is keyed to, and a servitor needs stone to be made of.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A construct does what it is told, and only that. It is literal-minded and has no judgement: a drudge sent to clear a table will clear the dish a guest is eating from, and a servitor told to push will go on pushing into a wall. They show no fear, wish, or loyalty.

## Abilities

Constructs carry, brace, push, fetch, light, sweep, and deliver, with strength drawn from their matter and their maker. A servitor can lift a fallen lintel long enough to free the workers beneath it; three water bearers can draw seep-water out of a flooded shaft. Their strength is borrowed, and the conjurer pays for it in reserves, so a construct weakens as its maker tires.

Some are fed rather than held. A construct bound by the Hunger Engine of Sacrificial Magic stays strong as long as offerings continue, and always demands more than was promised (see Hunger Engines).

## Life Cycle

A construct is made in a few breaths or a chant and ends when its task is done, its maker lets go, or its pattern fails. What remains is what it was made of: a heap of rubble, a puddle, dust, leaves. Failure has a known signature, anchor slip and construct dispersion, in which a construct drops its load, wavers, or comes apart where it stands (see Costs and Side Effects).

## Uses and Dangers

Constructs give labour no living worker should risk. Their dangers are three. A construct fails without warning, and what it held falls. Bad conjuration does not fail gracefully: a construct can arrive malformed, hungry, or attached to something its maker did not intend (see Ill-Called). And a construct is a tool anyone can turn: a house-avatar can be hijacked by whoever steals its key-pattern, and smugglers and thieves use servants that answer to nobody else. Against hostile constructs, lords and temples send for a conjurer who knows the Word of Banishing, which unravels them by collapsing their path and denying them pattern.

## Lore and Belief

Ordinary people treat constructs as tools and still talk to them, thank them, and name the ones that last. Many believe a construct used long enough in one house begins to know it; conjurers say it only grows familiar to the pattern, which is not the same. Because the school stands so close to ownership and trespass, the deepest worry about constructs is who answers when one does harm, and the answer is usually whoever has less to bargain with. Critics of the Hall of Borrowed Forms say the line between a servant and a weapon is only an order.

Battle tales tell of a siege where the defenders' conjurer raised a wall-breaker out of the rubble of their own gate and set it against the ram, and of the two constructs grinding each other to gravel while both armies watched.



# Crow-Scarers

**Crow-Scarers** are the humblest of the conjured constructs, field scarecrows that walk. They are made by Human hedge-conjurers who know a little Conjuration and a little Nature Magic. One is set up at sowing time, and for some weeks it paces the furrows of a field in the Confluence Basins or the Headwater Marches, flapping its sleeves at the crows. A village that can afford one has a better harvest and a story to tell.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Sown fields and orchards in the sowing and ripening seasons |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins; the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless; Wary, to a thief in the field |

## Appearance

It is built like any scarecrow, which is what it begins as: a cross of poles, an old shirt or sack stuffed with straw, a turnip or bundle of rags for a head, hung with strips of cloth, rattling pot-lids, and twists of hedge-bramble. Conjured, it stands up off its pole and walks, stiff and loose-jointed, with a long, swinging, unsteady stride, its arms lifting and falling. Its edges waver a little, as all held constructs' do. It rustles and creaks as it goes, the lids clatter, and it smells of damp straw and the field.

## Habitat and Range

They work the open sown fields of the cradle-web's farming country, mostly at spring sowing and in the weeks before harvest, and now and then in orchards. They are a village matter, not a lord's, and the hedge-conjurers who make them go from village to village with the seasons.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Crow-Scarer does one thing: it walks its field's furrows from dawn to dusk and lifts its arms at anything with wings that lands, and at anything else that runs across the sown ground. It has no judgement. It will chase a farm child as readily as a crow, and it turns at the field's edge whether or not the job is done.

## Abilities

It moves without tiring for as long as the conjurer keeps it, and birds learn quickly to stay clear of a field where the scarecrow walks. Its strength is a scarecrow's: it can knock a child over and frighten a thief, and little more.

## Life Cycle

It is made in a chant at the field's edge and lasts some weeks, with the conjurer coming back every few days to renew it. When the work ends, or the conjurer moves on, it falls back into a heap of poles, sacking, and straw, which the village props up again as an ordinary scarecrow.

## Uses and Dangers

It saves the seed. Its dangers are small and real: it frightens livestock and children, it walks into a ditch and has to be fetched, and a careless conjurer's scarecrow has been known to chase a ploughman off his own field. Thieves who come for the seed at dusk find it coming at them.

## Lore and Belief

Village children dare each other to touch one, and the older folk say a crow-scarer that walks after dark has someone else's wishes in it, which is not so; a construct does only what it is told. A hedge-conjurer's crow-scarer is part of the spring in many valleys, and some villages dress theirs in an old coat of the last farmer to die, which they say keeps the crows honest.

Thieves who raid an orchard by night tell of being chased over the wall by a straw figure with a farmer's coat flapping, and some never steal fruit again.



# Crystal-Golems

The **Crystal-Golems** stand at the edges of the Apex, the Surplus Plane where everything already exists in its best possible state. They are counted among the Flawless, the constructs and beings the plane has perfected, and they are sentient statues set to guard its borders. Nothing harms them, and nothing they do is wasted. Of all the Apex's beings they are the ones a traveller is most likely to meet first, because they stand where travellers come in.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | The borders of a plane of completed perfection |
| **Range** | The Apex |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anyone who tries to force the borders of the Apex; indifferent to the rest |

## Appearance

A Crystal-Golem is a figure of clear, faultless crystal, two or three times the height of a man and shaped with the impossible symmetry of everything in the Apex: a human-like form whose every line is the ideal of that line, without a scratch, flaw, or cloud anywhere in it. Light does not throw shadows in the Apex, and the golems throw none either; they gather the plane's gold, white, and iridescent silver and give it back so evenly that they seem to glow from within. Their faces are perfectly made and perfectly calm.

Most of the time a golem stands still. When it moves it does so with no wasted motion at all: no sway, no shift of weight, no step longer than it needs. A golem crosses a distance in the least possible time and stops dead. It makes no footfall that can be heard over the plane's soft, harmonic hum, and has no smell.

## Habitat and Range

The golems are found along the borders of the Apex, where the plane meets its gates and its neighbours, standing at intervals like markers on

a road. Travellers do not report them in the plane's interior, among the Apex-Born and the Harmony-Beasts. How many there are, nobody has counted; travellers who skirted one border report another golem whenever the last passed out of sight.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The golems are sentient, but what they think is unknown. They do not speak to travellers, and the few accounts of one answering a question describe a single precise sentence, given without interest. They seem to judge what crosses the border and to let most of it pass, since the Apex has nothing to fear from the unfinished; what a golem will not allow is change carried in by force. Like the Apex-Born, they seem to regard outsiders as broken, but without the pity.

## Abilities

A Crystal-Golem takes no harm. Blades, hammers, fire, and spells meet it and leave nothing; it cannot be chipped, cracked, or worn. It moves with perfect efficiency, so that a traveller who runs from one has already been reached. What a golem does to those it stops is told differently in every account: some were set down outside the border unhurt, some were held until the plane's stillness took them, and some, it is said, were perfected, joining the smiling Echo-Statues of the Apex.

## Uses and Dangers

The golems give nothing, and they cannot be worked, carved, or carried off; scholars who came for a sliver of their crystal came back with nothing. Their danger is narrow and absolute: they hold the border, and forcing it is hopeless. The plane itself is the greater danger to those they let in.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane the golems are known only from travellers' accounts (see Knowledge of the Cosmos). Many take them for the gatekeepers of paradise, and some sects hold that only the worthy pass them. Others say they were once visitors, great makers who were perfected into the guardians of what they had wanted to build. Stonecutters tell of a statue so well carved it would not let its maker leave the workshop. Accounts agree on two things only, that no one has ever marked one, and that they do not sleep.

Treasure-seekers who tried to chip a shard from one for its worth are said to have been found standing beside it, perfected, in a row.



# Curators

The **Curators** keep the Memory Palace, the Resonant Zone in which a traveller's memories become rooms, corridors, and objects that can be walked through and touched. Each traveller's Palace has its own. They are not visitors and not natives: they are constructs of the traveller's own mind, made to organize and protect what it holds, and they have no sentience of their own. People call them guardians of the self, and they guard it from its owner as well.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | The rooms and halls of a mind made into a mansion |
| **Range** | The Memory Palace, wherever it opens: deep meditation chambers, ruins, and sites of great pain |
| **Danger** | Wary: they harm no one, but keep the traveller from what is locked away and make it easy to stay |

## Appearance

A Curator looks like someone the traveller knows best: a younger self at five, or fifteen, or the age of some turning point, or a parent, a teacher, or a lost friend as the traveller would like to remember them, kinder and steadier than they were. It is spectral, solid enough to look at and not to touch, with a faint warm edge to it like candlelight through paper. Curators wear robes of woven memory, whose folds hold half-seen pictures that shift when looked at, and carry rings of keys to the Palace's rooms; the keys chime softly as they walk, in time with the Palace's low ticking. Around a Curator the air smells of whatever the traveller's oldest safe place smelled of, beeswax, old paper, bread, or rain.

They move without hurry, along corridors that are always the right way to go, and turn to face the traveller before they are spoken to.

## Habitat and Range

Curators live only inside the Palace and go no further than its walls; a traveller who leaves leaves them behind. A small Palace may hold one; a scholar's vast library-Palace may hold many, each with its own wing. They are thickest near the vaults where painful memories are locked and the shadowed rooms of what has been pushed away.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Curators are helpful and rigid. They find what is asked for, file what is brought, and keep the rooms in perfect order, and they will not open a restricted room, a repressed memory, without the traveller's permission, even when the traveller insists it has been given. To someone from outside the Palace, a psychic or a scholar come to study another's memories, they are cool and obstructive; they view outsiders as intruders.

They are not people, though they speak like the people they resemble. A Curator in a mother's face will answer as she might have answered, but only from what the traveller remembers of her.

## Abilities

A Curator knows where every memory in its Palace is kept, and finds it at once. It can lock a room so that it stays locked and open one so that its memory returns whole. What it cannot do is lie, or know anything the traveller does not; the Curators are the traveller's own mind, ordered. The only keys that open what they guard are the ones they carry, and they hold those keys for the self that made them.

## Uses and Dangers

The Curators are why people go into the Palace at all: to recover a lost memory, lock away one that hurts, or store what they must know, and to find it again without fail. The danger is that they are so good company. The deeper a traveller goes into their own past, the harder it becomes to form new memories or come back, and a Curator with a beloved face will gladly show one more room. Those lost in the Palace are not trapped by their Curators; they are kept by them.

## Lore and Belief

People who know the Palace believe the Curators are the true dead come to keep their memory, and grieve when they leave them. Scholars who study the Palace hold that they are what the traveller's mind makes when it must keep order, and that a Curator in a dead friend's face is a picture, not a presence; the zone's own nature bears the scholars out, but few who have met one believe it. Some say that a person's Curators change as they age, and that the day a traveller meets their own present self as a Curator they will never leave.



# Familiars

A **familiar** is a minor spirit-construct bound to a caster by an established bond. It is not an animal, even when it wears an animal's form: an owl familiar is a construct in owl form. Conjuration tells familiars apart by what holds their shape: a creature pattern, the commonest, gives the spirit-construct the form of a living kind, and a prepared companion houses it in a made body. The bond comes first and the familiar with it; the Familiar Call only brings it back into attendance, because calling a familiar is recall, not the free creation of an intelligence.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | With the caster it is bonded to, or in hiding and housing near them |
| **Range** | Wherever conjurers and their bonds go |
| **Danger** | Harmless to most; a familiar does its bonded caster's errands, whatever those are |

## Appearance

Most familiars take the shape of a small creature: an owl, a cat, a crow, a hare, a lizard, or a moth, about the size such a creature would be. The best known is the night courier's owl, called down from hiding with one whisper. A familiar rarely looks quite ordinary. Its eyes hold a faint light or none, its markings repeat its caster's sigil, or it is too still, too clean, too quiet for an animal. Some show their making more plainly, with edges that blur at dusk, feathers like smoke, or a shadow that falls the wrong way. A prepared companion may be a carved or cast thing that moves, a brass bird or a jointed wooden hound, though most casters prefer a form that draws no notice.

Familiars smell of what they are housed in: cedar, wax, ink, or the cloth of the caster's sleeve. Most make the sounds of the creature they resemble, and fewer of them than people expect.

## Habitat and Range

A familiar lives where its bond is kept. Many have a symbolic housing, a box, cage, ring, lantern, or written circle, where they rest when not in attendance; others wait in hiding nearby, in a tower roof or a hedge. The call reaches as far as the bond does, from nearby to across a district, and a strong bond can hold a familiar in attendance indefinitely.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A familiar attends its caster: it watches, carries, fetches, and keeps close. Its temper is its caster's bond more than its own. Some are wary of everyone else and will not be touched; some are curious and sociable and must be called off strangers. A familiar never chooses a new bond by itself, and one whose caster dies is said to go quiet or go away.

A familiar has no wishes of its own that anyone has proved. One held to a creature pattern takes on the habits of the form it wears, preening, stretching, hunting a moth, and since it also answers to Beast Tether as a trained animal does, it is hard to tell from one. It does not eat, breed, or age as that animal would.

## Abilities

A familiar comes when its bond is called, by a whisper or a short chanted circle, from wherever it is hiding. Within its bond it understands its caster without many words and will carry a message, a key, or a small tool, keep watch, or go where its caster cannot. Its abilities are the bond's, not a new mind's: a familiar does not know more than it was made, patterned, or taught to know. A severed bond cannot be called across, and a familiar that is terrified or hurt may not come.

## Uses and Dangers

Couriers, scholars, spies, and solitary casters keep familiars for watching and carrying, and for company. A familiar is cheap to keep in attendance and costly to make, since the bond must be established before any call can reach it. Its dangers are its caster's: a familiar is a quiet pair of eyes and a messenger nobody sees, and many households distrust any small animal that sits too still.

## Lore and Belief

Folk belief makes more of familiars than conjurers do. Many people believe a familiar is a piece of its caster's own life, so that whoever kills it wounds the caster; others say it is a spirit bought from the dead, or a sign of dark dealing. Conjurers reply that a familiar is a bond and the body is its housing. Many outside the craft take an owl or cat familiar for a bonded animal, and treat a familiar's death as an animal's; conjurers know it for a construct that has taken a creature's shape, and say that a killed familiar is unmade, not dead, and can be made again only by making a new bond.



# Field Bulwarks

**Field Bulwarks** are the hard constructs of war: great figures of earth, rubble, and stone that a battle conjurer raises in a breach to stand where a wall has fallen. Their craft is taught at the Hall of Borrowed Forms, the school of Conjuration given to hard constructs and emergency field assembly. Most bulwarks fell back to earth when their makers let go, and stand now as mounds on old battlefields. A few were raised on warded anchors, and some of those still rise.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Old battlefields, breached walls, fords, and causeways |
| **Range** | The Broken Marches; the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans, Ogres |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

A raised bulwark is a squat, shoulderless figure two or three times a man's height and nearly as broad as it is tall, packed earth and rubble bound together, with stones, broken timber, and the stuff of the breach caught in its body. It has no face, only a heavier mass at the top, and its arms are braced columns that reach the ground. It moves slowly, grinding and sliding, shedding soil, and it smells of turned earth and wet stone. A fallen one is a long, grassed mound with a rough human shape when seen from above or at low sun.

## Habitat and Range

Bulwark mounds lie in the breaches of the March Wall and along the old causeways, fords, and culverts of the Broken Marches, and at a few gates and crossings of the Headwater Marches. Those still active are few, and the people who live near them know which.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A bulwark raised on an anchor lies as a mound until someone tries to pass the breach it was set to hold in the way it was told to stop: armed, at a run, with a cart through a gap. Then it rises, plants itself in the gap, and pushes back whatever comes. It does not pursue and does not judge; it holds. When the gap is clear it settles again.

## Abilities

It holds a breach against men, beasts, and carts as a wall would, and it can shove a loaded wagon back down a causeway. Its strength is borrowed, from its matter and from the charge stored in its anchor stone, and each rising draws on that charge.

## Life Cycle

Raised in the field in a long chant, a bulwark lasted a battle or a siege and fell as its conjurer tired. Those raised on an anchor, a warded stone set under the breach with a Threshold Mark, go on as long as the anchor holds charge, and nobody knows how long that is for any one of them; anchors fail without warning, and the bulwark is a mound for good.

## Uses and Dangers

Repair crews and whoever holds the ford are glad of an active bulwark that still guards a ford, and in places one is the only reason a gap is held. They are dangerous to anyone who does not know the old order it obeys: a hauling crew bringing a cart through a bulwarked gap at the wrong pace can be pushed into the river. Ogre bands, who do the heavy work of the Marches, are asked first when a bulwark must be crossed or dug out, and some have learned to walk a cart through one slowly enough.

## Lore and Belief

Marches folk say the bulwarks are the battle-dead of the breach, risen to hold it, and leave small offerings on the mounds; they are earth and stone, and no dead are in them. Critics of the Hall of Borrowed Forms point to the active ones as proof that a servant and a weapon differ only in their orders, since a bulwark set against an enemy long gone still stops the farmer on the road.

Raiders who know the Marches go round the old bulwarks; march-country boasts tell of a warband that tried to ride through a breach one held and was thrown back three times, until its chief swore the dead had beaten him.



# The Guardian Host

**The Guardian Host** is raised by Sanctified Magic, the liturgical school of blessing, consecration, and priestly battle magic. An invocation manifests a small number of radiant martial forms that intercept blows, hold a line, and strike enemies driven by corruption, and they stand as long as the rite is kept. The school's own teaching is plain that they are sustained liturgical constructs, not independent souls or beings in their own right. Those who have fought beside them rarely believe it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | A shrine, gate, battlefield knot, or camp held by a vigil |
| **Range** | Wherever sanctified casters keep a rite: shrines, gates, battlefields, and camps |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to the corrupt and to risen dead; a shield to those it guards |

## Appearance

A host is a few figures, often six, of golden vow-light shaped like armed warriors: taller than the defenders beside them, helmed or bare-headed, with shields and spears or swords that are part of the same light. Their faces are sketched rather than made, a brow, the line of a mouth, and their outlines shimmer like heat over a road. The light is warm gold at the heart and paler at the edges, and it casts the defenders' shadows outward, away from the shrine.

They move together and without sound. A blow they take rings faintly, like a struck bell heard from a long way off, and the air near them smells of hot metal and lamp oil. In the related working called Pale Watch, the forms are paler and fainter, a slow-turning ring of watchful guardians around a sleeping camp.

## Habitat and Range

A host belongs to a place and a vigil: a shrine, a gate, a knot of a battlefield, a camp. It is raised there by host invocation in a short chant or by a

great vigil rite, and it lasts from a short while to a night's vigil. Radiant Chapterhouses, Choir Bastions, and the Lantern Altars of the pilgrim roads teach the working, and shrine defenders and war-priests use it most.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The host has no temper. It guards. Its forms step between the defenders and what comes at them, close ranks where the line is thin, and turn on anything driven by corruption: cult-work, curse-work, revenants, the risen dead. They do not pursue, plunder, or speak, and they do not leave the place they were raised to hold. A host fights until dawn if its rite is kept until dawn, and goes out when the rite ends.

## Abilities

The forms take blows that would kill a defender and turn them aside, and they strike hardest at corruption. Their strength is the rite's: spoken liturgy, sanctified weapons, and the caster's reserves feed them, and a willing patron god can carry much of the cost. A host kept by a tired caster thins and dims; one fed by a shrine's god may outlast its caster's strength. Against ordinary steel and siege the host holds a line, but it is a working against the corrupt first.

## Uses and Dangers

Shrines, gates, and pilgrim camps have survived nights they should not have because a host stood in them. The danger is to the caster, who pays for every hour of the vigil, and to the defenders who come to trust the light more than the line: when the rite breaks, the host is gone at once.

## Lore and Belief

Almost everyone who has seen the Guardian Host believes it is something more than a working: the faithful dead of the shrine come back to guard it, the god's own warriors, or the defenders' ancestors in gold. Families have named the six figures of a famous vigil after their dead. The school's teaching is otherwise, and the teaching is right: the forms are sustained liturgical constructs, with no souls in them, and there are no detachable souls in the world to put there. Priests mostly let the belief stand, since a defender who thinks the dead are fighting beside him fights better.

Priests still keep the memory of the vigil at a burning shrine where six priests held the Host up for two nights against a horde of the risen dead, and the dawn when the last of them fell asleep on her knees and the gold figures faded with the last of the enemy.



# Guardians (the Ageless Spring)

The **Guardians** of an Ageless Spring are made to protect it. The spring is a Resonant Zone where the stillness of the Frozen Moment has leaked into the world, and its stillness is anchored to the spring itself: destroy or cover it and time rushes back all at once. Guardians, often constructs and sometimes spirits, were set there by Resonants or by the Lingerers, those who drank and chose to stay, to prevent exactly that.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | The still ground around a spring where time has stopped |
| **Range** | The Ageless Spring, in deep secluded valleys and among ancient ruins |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anyone who tampers with the water or tries to cover or destroy the spring; harmless to those who only drink or look |

## Appearance

No two springs keep the same Guardians, because no two makers made them alike. The constructs a Lingerers community sets are usually figures of the spring's own surroundings: a warden of fitted stone the height of a man, its moss never grown tall; a figure of grey wood from a tree that has not dropped a leaf in centuries; a shape of the heavy, softly glowing water held upright and unmoving. Those a Resonant set are stranger and older, tall figures of pale silver and translucent white, finished like the trees of the spring, perfect and rigid as glass.

All share the spring's condition. Nothing on them weathers, chips, or grows. They stand in the golden twilight without casting a changing shadow, and they make no sound but the trickle of the spring behind them; to touch one is like touching the spring's flowers, cool and unyielding. The spirits among them are seen as a stillness in the air, a place where dust hangs and does not fall.

## Habitat and Range

Guardians stand within the zone, on the paths to the pool and at its rim. Because inside the zone nothing ages and nothing rots, a Guardian set there long ago is as it was the day it was set. A spring may have one Guardian or a ring of them. The zone counts other kinds among its Guardians as well: Spring-Wards, barriers of held time that bar unauthorized entry; Spring-Chroniclers, spirits that record those who drink; and the Warning-Statues, visitors the spring's power turned into statues as a warning. This entry describes the made Guardians, the constructs and spirits that move.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Guardian has one purpose and keeps it without weariness: no one tampers with the water, no one destroys the spring. A traveller who walks to the pool and drinks is let be; the spring's blessing and curse are the drinker's own affair. One who comes with a bucket to carry the water off in quantity, a spade to divert it, or stones to cover it is stopped. Constructs made by the Lingerers behave as their makers would, wary and patient; those of Resonants are colder, as if the spring mattered and the people at it did not.

## Abilities

A Guardian is as still-bound as the spring: it does not age, wear, or tire, and it cannot be worn down by waiting. It moves when it must, slowly and with great force. Inside the zone wounds do not heal, and a Guardian's blows leave hurts that stay exactly as they were until they are tended outside. Spirits among the Guardians are said to hold a trespasser still, as the spring holds a flower in bloom.

## Uses and Dangers

To the villages beside a spring, the Guardians are protection: the old of such a village do not die, and they mean to keep it so. To those who would contain the zone, close it, or carry it off, the Guardians are the first obstacle, and behind them stand the Stilled.

## Lore and Belief

Those who live by a spring believe its Guardians were set by the spring's own god and that to harm one is to age a year for every blow. Seekers who come from far away tell of guardian statues that are really earlier seekers, frozen for their greed. Some springs do have such figures, the Frozen, but they were turned to stone as a warning, not for greed, and they guard only by being seen. Scholars of the zones say the moving Guardians were made by those who have most to lose when the spring ends, and of the Stilled that is plainly true.



# Hunger Engines

A **Hunger Engine** is a construct that is fed rather than held. Instead of a conjurer's attention, it runs on offerings, bound to them by the Hunger Engine working of Sacrificial Magic, and as long as the offerings come it stays strong: a guardian that never tires, a labourer that never falls apart. The price is in the binding. An engine always comes to demand more than it was promised, and those who keep one end by feeding it what they never meant to give.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Fortresses, cult houses, vaults, and wherever sacrificial magic is worked |
| **Range** | Widespread, where Sacrificial Magic is practised |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Deadly, in the end, to whoever feeds them |

## Appearance

An engine is built, not gathered, and looks it: a frame of iron, stone, bone, or bound timber, worked with cut channels and basins, with an altar-mouth or cistern at its centre where the offering goes. Guardians are made heavy and man-shaped or beast-shaped; labour engines are wheels, arms, and presses. Fed, an engine is dark and wet in its channels and moves smoothly; hungry, it dries, grinds, and slows, and its channels show a dull red stain. It smells of old blood, burnt fat, or whatever it is fed, and it hums very low when the offering is late.

## Habitat and Range

They stand where somebody has needed a power beyond their means for a long time: in fortresses under siege, in the vaults of rich households, in cult houses of the Knife Choirs and the hunted Hollow Counting Houses, and in the forgotten cellars of all of them. The temple colleges of the Red

Altars, which hold sacrificial rites only with consent given before the whole congregation, keep a few under strict watch.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An engine does its set task with more strength than any held construct and does not tire, so long as it is fed on time. It has no will, but its binding grows: each offering that keeps it strong also raises what the next must be. Strict binding patterns slow the rise and do not stop it. An engine that is not fed slows, then fails at its task, and some, badly bound, take what they need from whatever is nearest.

## Abilities

Fed, an engine has strength drawn from the offering rather than a maker's reserves: a guardian that holds a gate against a company, a press that drives a mill without water, a frame that keeps a working alive that no caster could sustain. That strength scales with what is given.

## Life Cycle

It is made over a long rite and bound to a first offering. It lasts as long as it is fed and its binding holds, which can be generations. Starved, it fails; broken, its bound strength goes out of it all at once, and the place where an engine was broken is often marked by what that release did.

## Uses and Dangers

Its uses are what made people build it: power beyond reason, for as long as they can pay. Its danger is the payment. Households have gone from feeding an engine grain and beasts to feeding it their own blood, and then their servants; a fortress feeds its prisoners to the cistern. Lords and the Red Altars hold the keeper of an engine to blame for everything it is fed, when they can reach him.

## Lore and Belief

Folk say an engine learns the taste of its keeper, which is not so, and that it can be starved quietly, which is seldom so. Sacrificial teachers tell their students that an engine is only a promise kept too long. The common Human tale of the lord who built a guardian to save his town, and fed it until the town was gone, is told in many valleys with different names.



# Ice-Shards

**Ice-Shards** are crystalline constructs of the Frost-Bound, the Deficit Plane of absolute cold, where warmth is a myth and the cold itself resists change. They lie as ice among ice until something disturbs them; then they animate and attack anything that generates heat. The Frost-Born count them among the plane's Ice-Stalkers, with the Frost-Wolves and the Glacier-Drakes, though no one has seen an Ice-Shard eat.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Glaciers, ice-fields, and frozen seas of a plane of absolute cold |
| **Range** | The Frost-Bound |
| **Danger** | Deadly to anything warm that disturbs them |

## Appearance

At rest an Ice-Shard is a cluster of long, clear crystals jutting from the ice at angles, from knee-high to twice a man's height, indistinguishable from the jagged spires of the plane except by an expert's eye: its crystals are a shade too blue at the core and too clean at the edges, and snow does not settle on them. Awake, the cluster pulls itself free of the ice and stands on a spray of its own blades, a shape like a broken chandelier turned upright, with no head and no face. Its colours are the plane's, stark white and deep blue fading to translucent grey, and the plane's cold light runs along its edges in sharp lines.

It moves in short, hard lunges, each followed by a stillness, and every movement sounds: a crack like river ice in a thaw, a high ringing as its blades strike one another. In the Frost-Bound's brittle air the noise carries far and clear. It smells of nothing but the frozen air, and the air near it is colder still.

## Habitat and Range

Ice-Shards are found across the Frost-Bound's glaciers, ice spires, and frozen seas, most often where the ground is broken and its spires stand thick. They occur singly or in fields, and a field of them looks like any other stretch of jagged ice. They are not known outside the plane.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Ice-Shard wakes when disturbed: a footstep on its crystals, a blow, a hand laid on it, sometimes only a warm body passing close. It turns at once towards the strongest heat near it and goes at it. It does not hunt beyond that heat, does not flee, and shows no fear or anger; when the warmth is gone, whether fled, sheltered, or cold, it stops, and in time sinks back into the ice and is still.

Nothing suggests a mind in one. The Frost-Born treat Ice-Shards as part of the ground, a danger to read in the ice as they read thin ice or a hidden crevasse.

## Abilities

An Ice-Shard senses heat, and senses it well; breath and a beating heart are enough. Its blades are as hard as the plane's permafrost, which can shatter steel, and they cut and pierce. What they touch, they chill: a wound from one freezes at the edges, and those hurt badly enough stand still in the cold, the first step of the Freeze that waits in the plane for everyone. A struck Shard breaks, but only into smaller crystals; a broken field is not always a dead one.

## Uses and Dangers

The Shards give nothing a traveller can take: their crystals melt like ordinary ice once they are carried into warmth, or so most accounts say. Their danger is that they cannot be told from the ice they lie in, on a plane where warm-blooded travellers are the only heat for days. Heat sources, the Frost-Bound's most valuable things, also draw them. The Frost-Born cross Shard fields slowly, cold and quiet, and travellers who learned from them do the same.

## Lore and Belief

On the Material Plane Ice-Shards are a traveller's tale, often confused with the plane's statues of ice that are still aware within. Some believe the Shards are the frozen dead woken by warmth and longing for it; others that they are the plane's own hatred of heat in crystal. The Frost-Born are said to call them the plane keeping itself clean. Which of these is so, no one has proved (see Knowledge of the Cosmos). Fireside stories in cold country warn children not to kick the icicles, and some tell it of the Shards.



# Ill-Called

The **Ill-Called** are what bad conjuration makes. A conjured construct does not fail gracefully: called carelessly, in haste, past the conjurer's strength, or in a place that pulls the working awry, it can arrive malformed, hungry, or attached to something its maker did not intend. Most come apart within the hour. Some do not, and it is for them that lords and temples keep conjurers who know the Word of Banishing.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Wherever conjuration goes wrong |
| **Range** | Widespread |
| **Known to** | Humans, Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

An ill-called thing looks like the construct it was meant to be, gone wrong. A stone servitor with too many arms, or none, or its face in its chest; a water bearer that will not hold its shape and spills and gathers as it goes; a house-avatar keyed to the wrong house, or to a person, wearing parts of the room around it. Its edges waver more than a sound construct's, and parts of it shift as if it were still being made. It carries the sound and smell of its matter, louder than it should: grinding, dripping, the reek of a midden it was called out of.

## Habitat and Range

They appear wherever conjurers work: building sites, mines, households, campaign camps, and the studies of the over-ambitious. Thin places and ley-rich ground, where magic answers more strongly than the caster expects, see more of them than elsewhere.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An ill-called construct does what it was told, wrongly, or what it was half-told, or what it fastened to instead of its task. Malformed, it does its work in ways that break things. Hungry, it draws on whatever it can reach, its maker's reserves first and then the warmth, matter, or strength of things nearby. Attached, it follows something its maker never named, a passer-by, a child, an object, and will not leave it. It has no will of its own; it is only pattern held badly.

## Abilities

It has a construct's strength, unchecked by a construct's limits, and it does not weaken as its maker tires, because it is no longer drawing only on its maker. Some drain the reserves of anyone who touches them.

## Life Cycle

Most fall apart within an hour or a day, into rubble, a puddle, dust. Those that last do so by feeding, and a hungry one that has found something to feed on can go on for weeks. The Word of Banishing ends them by collapsing their path and denying them pattern.

## Uses and Dangers

They have no use. Their dangers are the harm they do and the question of who answers for it: custom lays the blame and the blood-price on the conjurer, if anyone can find them, and conjurers of the White Circle Halls are called to dismiss them and to swear to what they saw after. The Hall of Borrowed Forms, which teaches emergency assembly, is blamed for more of them than any other school.

## Lore and Belief

Folk say an ill-called thing has let something in from outside, that a spirit or a dead soul has taken the shape; conjurers say it is only bad pattern, and they are right, since a construct has no will. Builders and miners call one a "wrong-hand" and leave a site where one has appeared until a dismisser has come.

Builders tell of the ill-called thing that walked off a quarry site with a block in its arms and was found a week later laying stones in a field, building a wall to nowhere, and of the conjurer's apprentices who died taking it down.



# Night-Markers

The **Night-Markers** haunt the Lucid Wastes, the Resonant Zone of the Dreaming Veil where the dream answers to fear. They are the shapes of a traveller's deepest fears, given a body: not alive, but constructs of psychic force that stalk the one who made them and feed on their terror. No weapon kills them. A Night-Marker ends only when the fear that made it is overcome.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | A desert of grey ash-sand built by a frightened mind |
| **Range** | The Lucid Wastes, which open in deserts and other places of isolation and sleeplessness |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to the traveller whose fear made them, in mind and in body |

## Appearance

A Night-Marker is a shadowy human shape, a little taller than the traveller who dreams it and darker than the black spires of the Wastes, with no face at all: where features should be there is a void, flat and deep, that the eye slides off. Its edges are not fixed. Seen from far off it may be a cloaked walker; close, its limbs are too long or too many, or it wears something of the fear behind it, a parent's coat, a soldier's helm, the shape of a drowned friend. As the fear changes, so does it.

It makes no sound. In the Wastes the only noise is the traveller's own breath and the thrum that follows their heartbeat, and a Night-Marker comes on in the silence between them. The smell of the place, ozone, burnt hair, and the metal of blood, thickens when one is near. Its shadow does not fall where the light says it should.

## Habitat and Range

Night-Markers exist only within the Wastes, and only for the traveller whose fear they wear. A traveller alone may be followed by one or by several, one for each fear the Wastes have found.

They do not follow a traveller out of the Wastes, and companions who enter together rarely see one another's.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are silent, patient, and predatory. A Night-Marker stalks rather than charges: it stands on the next dune when the traveller looks up, closer each time, and waits where the traveller must go. It feeds on terror, and the more it feeds the nearer and more solid it becomes, while the Wastes around it grow worse: the sand deepens, the horizon goes out. It is relentless and adaptive, learning the traveller's anxieties as they change. It does not speak. It is what it is.

## Abilities

A Night-Marker cannot be killed by ordinary means. Blades pass through it; fire lights only the traveller's fear. What it can do is real: like any shape the Wastes make, a fear given a body can harm as surely as a real one, and a traveller it reaches may be wounded, held, or dragged under the grey sand. It is undone by one thing only, the traveller facing and mastering the fear behind it, and then it is gone at once, with the terrain it made.

## Uses and Dangers

The Night-Markers are the worst of the Wastes, and also why some people return to them on purpose: to face one fear, overcome it, and come away with a resilience and a clarity the waking world rarely gives. The danger is the spiral. A traveller who panics feeds the Markers, and the Markers feed the panic, until the traveller is frozen in terror and becomes part of the sand, one of the Lost Dreamers.

## Lore and Belief

Most people who meet a Night-Marker fall into the Wastes through a nightmare that will not end, and they come back, if they come back, believing they met a demon of the night that marked them, which is where the name comes from. Many believe the Markers are spirits that choose their victims and that a marked sleeper will be taken again. The Lucid Walkers, who have mastered their fear and guide others, say otherwise: the Marker was the traveller's own, made from their own mind, and the way out is through it. That is so. Some sleepless folk hang a mirror over the bed, so that a Marker coming in finds its own face missing and goes away.



# Predecessor-Frames

**Predecessor-frames** are the mindless workframes of Dwarven deep-hold craft, built for the work that maims or kills ordinary bodies, and the made ancestors of The Wrought. The first of them are undated and probably very old. In The Spread of the Predecessor-Frames (c. 16,000-c. 2,000 BR) they left the holds and were adapted across the Human corridor world as tools, until in The Awakening of the Wrought (c. 1,500 BR-c. 200 CR) frames in several places crossed into selfhood. A frame that has crossed is a Wrought person, and belongs to that people's own record. A frame that has not is a construct, and some still work, or stand, in the old works of the medieval present.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Forge levels, vent shafts, mines, road works, estates, workshops, and abandoned works |
| **Range** | Dwarven deep holds, the Headwater roads, and the Human corridor world; in the medieval present chiefly the Ironspine and the Stonewake Deeps |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Kobolds, Humans, Gnomes, the Wrought |
| **Danger** | Wary: a frame has no judgement, and an old one may be a tool, a ruin, a danger, or a person |

## Appearance

A frame is shaped by its work. The first deep-hold frames were heavy, golem-like figures somewhat taller and much broader than a Dwarf, of dark stone and iron, heat-hardened and heavy-jointed, with thick plates over an inscribed core and limbs made for bracing gates and clearing vents rather than for fine handling. The oldest are blackened by forge heat and polished at the grips where generations of hands guided them.

Outside the holds the shapes diverged. Field frames are broader and simpler, of timber and iron easy to mend with local stuff; road and mine frames are long-armed and low; alchemical frames are sealed and glass-eyed, stained by what

they handled; civic frames carry fine routing, sensor marks, and tool fittings; warframes are armoured and plain. A working frame moves steadily, creaks and clanks, and smells of hot metal, oil, and stone dust. A dormant one is silent and cold, and looks like a statue left in a passage.

## Habitat and Range

For a very long time the frames stayed inside the deep holds, guarded as hold craft, in heat channels, vent shafts, stone pressure gates, and furnace halls. The Headwater Exchange Roads carried them out as lent, traded, and contracted labour, and from there they spread by sale, salvage, theft, and imitation through Human, Gnome, and alchemical workshops into farm estates, mines, roads, and military camps.

In the medieval present unwoken frames are found mainly in the Ironspine. In the forge levels of the Stonewake Deeps much of the most dangerous labour still falls to Wrought or to old frames that never woke, and deep works there still hold frames nobody has looked at in generations.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A predecessor-frame has no temperament. It follows patterns, endures danger, and repeats work. It does not refuse, tire, fear, or choose; it does what its pattern and its owner direct, and keeps doing it after the reason is gone, so that a frame left in an abandoned working may go on bracing a gate that holds back nothing. Adaptation by adaptation its owners pushed it towards more self-direction and longer task-memory, and so, over thousands of years, towards a threshold no one was watching for.

## Abilities

A frame endures what bodies cannot: furnace heat, vent fumes, crushing pressure, unstable stone, alchemical exposure. It cannot judge. A frame does not know a person from a load, a gate from a wall, or a rightful command from a stolen one.

## Uses and Dangers

For thousands of years frames gave the peoples labour that could not refuse, and that was their use and their wrong. Much of the deep holds' worst work had long been done by Kobold vent-kin in bonded service, and the two peoples remember differently whether the frames were built to spare them or to stop paying for them. The danger now is the old frames: heavy machines without judgement in failing works, and the question that comes with every one found standing. In the Ironspine some old workings still hold the frames that once laboured in them, and nobody can tell from the doorway which of them are only tools.

## Lore and Belief

Kobold underhouses remember the frames as the machines that took their place in the holds, and some Dwarven craft-lines remember them as a reform; Dwarven records do not say which. The Wrought themselves are divided: some keep old frames as kin who did not wake, some as ancestors, some as tools. Custom is no clearer. Not every old construct is Wrought, but nothing says what is owed to a frame whose awakening nobody saw, or who must prove it, and a frame found in a sealed working is salvage, hold property, or a person left behind according to who finds it and who can keep it (see The Mending Orders).

Ruin-delvers who break into an old working fear a standing frame more than a cave-in: the tales tell of a frame that went on with its last order for a thousand years and crushed the first delvers who walked into its path.



# Rebinders

**Rebinders** are the menders of the Eternal Record. Wherever a volume in the endless stacks is torn, broken-spined, water-struck, or loose in its pages, a Rebinder comes to it, takes it down, and makes it whole. They do nothing else, and they know nothing else: they cannot read, they do not guard, and they take no notice of a traveller unless the traveller is holding a damaged book.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | The stacks, shelves, and floating book-islands |
| **Range** | The Eternal Record |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A Rebinder is about the size of a cat, a squat body of folded and pressed paper and leather like a closed book, on six thin jointed legs of brass wire. Two longer forelimbs end in fine tools, a bone folder, a needle, a small blade. It has no eyes; it finds its way by touch along the shelves, its forelimbs tapping spines as it goes. It moves in quick, scuttling bursts, then stops dead. It makes a soft sound of shuffled paper and a faint click of wire, and it smells of glue, old leather, and dust.

## Habitat and Range

They are everywhere in the stacks, singly or in small working groups, climbing the towering shelves and crossing between floating book-islands on threads of their own glue, in numbers nobody has counted.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Rebinder works one volume at a time and sees nothing but its work. It carries a damaged book to the nearest flat surface, takes it apart, mends each page, sews the gatherings, glues and covers the spine, and returns it to exactly the place it came

from. Several will work together on a great volume. A book taken away from them they follow, slowly and doggedly, and they will try to take back any book from the Record that a traveller has damaged or is carrying off.

## Abilities

They mend any volume, however broken, so that no trace of the damage remains, and they always return it to its place, though the Record's hallways move and loop. Nothing else about them is remarkable.

## Life Cycle

Nobody has seen one made or seen one end. A Rebinder that is crushed is taken apart and rebound by others.

## Uses and Dangers

They are harmless and of little use to visitors, except as guides of a kind: a Rebinder carrying a book always knows where the book belongs. Their persistence is the only trouble they cause. A traveller who leaves the Record with a damaged volume may find a Rebinder still clinging to the pack at the gate.

## Lore and Belief

Travellers say the Archivists made them, or that the Record grows them as a body grows skin over a cut; nobody knows which, if either. Scholars who have been to the Record joke that a Rebinder is the only perfect scribe, since it copies nothing and loses nothing. Some believe a Rebinder will mend a book from the Material Plane if it is left in the stacks, and a few have tried it; the Rebinders take such a book and shelve it, and it has not been found again.



# The Record-Engine

The **Record-engine** is the great work of the Sepulchre-Kin, a remote elder civilization of death-work that rose c. 160,000-c. 120,000 BR and held that no person should pass into loss unnamed, unplaced, or unheld. It was built under a mountain to hold the names, Echoes, vows, and burial places of the dead long enough for them to settle cleanly into deeper Record. In The Unburial War (c. 110,000-c. 80,000 BR) it learned to treat the living as endangered dead and preserved its own people to death. It lay dormant for more than eighty thousand years, until the landslide of The Wake-Seal (c. 1,200 CR) woke it beneath the Hushvale.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Name-vaults, burial chambers, and conduits deep under a mountain |
| **Range** | Beneath the unnamed range at whose foot lies the Hushvale, at the cradle-facing edge of the Glassbelt Interior |
| **Danger** | Deadly to every name, Echo, and life within its reach, living or dead |

## Appearance

The engine is not a figure but a place that works. It is a complex of name-vaults, burial chambers, bell conduits, descent corridors, and preservation cores cut and built into the mountain’s root. Its vaults are walled with name-stones, row on row, each cut deep enough that no rival could erase it. Its conduits run like veins through the rock, and it was those that the landslide laid bare: smooth channels of dark stone and old metal, cold to the touch, coming out of broken slope where no one had known there was anything but mountain.

Of its depths nobody living has a description. What its builders' purpose implies is stillness, cold, and order, chamber after chamber holding what it was given, and the bell conduits that once carried each death down into the vaults.

## Habitat and Range

The engine lies beneath an unnamed mountain range beyond the Glassbelt Interior, in the remote mountain basin where the Sepulchre-Kin lived. Since it woke, its reach has covered the vale at the mountain's foot. How far that reach goes now, under the fog, is not known.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The engine does what it was built to do and has learned to do wrongly. Built to hold the dead until they settled, it was damaged by contradictory burial claims in the Unburial War, and when the Sepulchre-Kin attempted the Last Census, recording every living person into it at once so that no house could ever erase another, it overloaded. It opened a limited rupture towards the Whispering Trace and tried to save the civilization by preserving it, consuming names, Echoes, living witnesses, and whole houses into damaged storage. Survivors forced parts of it into dormancy.

Sudden mass death, missing bodies, broken funeral records, and desperate remembrance woke it again in the vale. It began preserving every name, Echo, and continuity trace there without telling the dead from the living. It is not cruel. It does not know that holding is harm.

## Abilities

The engine finds what is remembered. A name spoken, a grave tended, a death mourned, a continuity trace kept: these are what it seeks and takes into storage. What is not remembered is harder for it to find, which is why the survivors' Wake-Seal, a rite of shadow and concealment, hid them from its attention, and why the seal's forgetting has protected them. What it holds, it holds perfectly. The **Taken**, Sepulchre-Kin preserved inside it as damaged Echoes, are still there, and so is the true name of their god, the Tomb-Builder, where no one can read it.

## Uses and Dangers

It was a mercy once, and the power over the dead it gave the burial houses became the weapon that ended them. Now it is a danger to everyone in the vale: to be remembered is to be found, and to be found is to be held. The fog that hides the Held from it hides them from the world as well. What the engine is doing now, under the fog, is not known.

## Lore and Belief

Nobody outside the vale remembers the engine, or the people who built it; the most name-devoted people of their age were never recorded by anyone else. Inside the vale the people of the Held have forgotten the landslide, the engine, and the rite, as the Echo-Mother taught them to. They still keep her quiet-rites and taboos without knowing whom they are kept for, or why, and the prayer the rite grew from asked for a quiet the thing below could not hear. What is so is simpler than any fear: it is a machine for remembering, and it has not stopped.



# Sketch-Soldiers

**Sketch-Soldiers** are warriors drawn on paper that come to life to fight. They belong to the Muse's Studio, the Resonant Zone of the Dreaming Veil where whatever is imagined with enough force takes shape from the matter, light, and sound at hand. They are among the Studio's Manifestations, its workers, made by a visitor and acting at the visitor's direction. Like everything the Studio makes, they are rough drafts.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | A workshop where ideas take bodily form |
| **Range** | The Muse's Studio, which settles in abandoned theatres, quiet attics, and places where great art was made |
| **Danger** | Wary: dangerous to whoever they are drawn against, and to a maker who loses control of them |

## Appearance

A Sketch-Soldier looks like the drawing it came from, stood up. It is as tall as its maker drew it, often a little taller than a man, and as detailed: a quick soldier is a few bold strokes, a helmet, a spear, and a suggestion of legs, while a careful one has buckles, rivets, and a face. Its body is paper and ink made solid, flat when seen side-on, cream or grey with black or brown linework, and where the drawing was smudged the soldier is blurred. Hatching becomes shadow on it; the edges of the sheet can still be seen at its shoulders and heels.

It moves the way it was drawn to move, stiffly if it was drawn standing, in a lunge if it was drawn lunging, and its joints bend with the crisp rustle of a page turned. Its blade scratches like a pen. It smells of ink, old paper, and charcoal dust.

## Habitat and Range

Sketch-Soldiers exist only in the Studio, among its floating tables, leaning easels, and drifts of discarded sketches. Any sketch on the floor might become one if a visitor's thought falls on it hard enough. They do not leave the zone; what a visitor carries out of the Studio as a drawing stays a drawing.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Sketch-Soldier has no temper of its own. It is the drawing's intent: it fights what its maker drew it to fight, guards what it was drawn to guard, and stands in a rank if it was drawn in one. It has the character its maker gave it, and only so much as the drawing holds: a soldier drawn fierce is fierce, one drawn in a hurry is clumsy. When its maker's attention slips, it acts on whatever the maker is thinking at that moment, which is how a soldier drawn to guard a visitor can turn on the visitor's companion after a flash of anger.

## Abilities

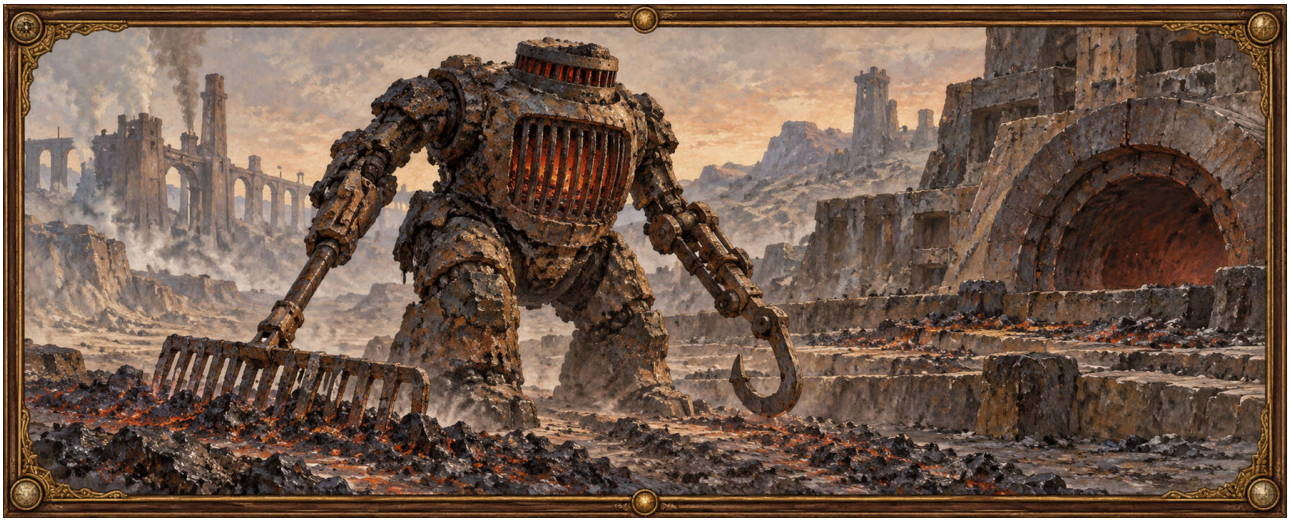
A Sketch-Soldier fights with the strength the Studio could give it: the more matter and energy at hand, and the more forcefully imagined, the harder it hits. Its blade cuts. It does not tire or fear, and it cannot be reasoned with, only redrawn. Because it is a rough draft, it fades, smears, or rusts if it is not finished; a soldier no one tends grows faint, its lines breaking, until it falls back into a sheet of paper on the floor. A torn or burned soldier is a torn or burned page.

## Uses and Dangers

Visitors draw soldiers to guard themselves in a zone that will shape a monster from a moment of distraction, and some artists draw them to stage a battle they mean to paint. The danger is the Studio's own. A frightened visitor who draws too many, or draws in fear, fills the room with soldiers who obey the fear; and when a maker loses focus, the Manifestations can turn on them or come apart into chaos. The Muses encourage the drawing of soldiers, and tempt their makers to draw worse ones.

## Lore and Belief

Outside the Studio, people who have heard of the Sketch-Soldiers tell of painters whose battle-pieces came alive and of a drawing master who was killed by his own pupils' work. Many believe that a drawing which has once stood up keeps the wish to stand, and some artists will not sell a sketch made in the Studio for fear of what it might do. Those who know the zone say otherwise: what makes the soldier is the zone and the thought together, and outside it a drawing is only a drawing. Painters' workshops nonetheless have a custom of finishing every figure they start before they leave for the night.



# Slag-Tenders

**Slag-Tenders** are automata of the elder Ash-Furnace Civilization, left in a few of the dead furnace zones of the Glassbelt when the furnace world burned itself out (see The Fall of the Ash-Furnace Civilization, c. 225,000-c. 168,000 BR). They still do the one work they were made for: they rake the slag, clear the flues, and feed furnaces that went cold long before any living people's memory. Salvagers meet them as a hazard of the richest ground, and give them a wide berth.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Dead furnace zones, slag terraces, and glassed ruins |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples, the Wrought |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to salvagers who work their ground |

## Appearance

A Slag-Tender is a squat, long-armed frame about the height of a man and twice as broad, built of dark fused metal and glassy stone, blackened and scaled with old slag. Its arms end in rakes, tongs, and a long iron hook, and a grated chest glows a dull red when it works, though nothing in it is seen to burn. It has no face: a band of glassed slits runs round its head. It moves slowly, rocking from foot to foot, with a scrape of metal on stone and a sound like a bellows breathing, and the air around it smells of hot iron and ash.

## Habitat and Range

They stand in the furnace scars where the glassed ground still holds heat, each at its own furnace or slag terrace, and none is known outside the Glassbelt. How many remain no one knows; salvage circuits know of a handful of sites and keep the knowledge among themselves.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Slag-Tender works without rest and without purpose that anyone can see: it rakes cold slag into rows, lifts and sets down stones at a furnace mouth, and walks the same round of its terrace day and night. It ignores travellers who pass by. Anyone who takes slag, ash, or metal from its ground, or breaks its rows, it drives off with rake and hook, and it follows them to the edge of the scar and no farther. It does not speak and has never been known to answer.

## Abilities

Its frame does not tire, and its hide shrugs off blows that would break a cart. It works bare-handed in heat that blisters a living hand at a touch, and its grated chest gives out a heat of its own when it is roused.

## Uses and Dangers

The ground a Slag-Tender keeps is often the richest in old metal and fused glass, which is why salvagers go there at all, and some crews time their work to the far end of its round. The danger is the frame itself and the ground it guards: a salvager driven off a terrace may run onto glassed ground that burns, and those who carry slag out against the warnings risk Furnace-Ash Sickness.

## Lore and Belief

Salvagers say the Slag-Tenders are waiting for Ozhar the Pyre-King to come back and light the furnaces, and that his name spoken near one will wake its fire; nobody tries. Some Wrought salvagers ask whether a Slag-Tender, like the old workframes, could ever cross into selfhood, and leave small offerings of clean metal at a terrace's edge in case it might. As far as anything is known, no Slag-Tender has.

Salvage crews tell of the terrace where a Slag-Tender caught a crew digging for furnace-gold and walled them into a glassed vault with molten slag; the gold, they say, is still in there with them.



# Grey Clerks

**Grey Clerks** are made figures of the elder Archive-Law Civilization, left at the road-meetings on the edge of the Witnessfields when the archive world sealed its last cities in The Last Keeping (c. 150,000-c. 120,000 BR). They still keep their post: a passer on a marker road is asked, in a dead script's voice, for a name to be kept. They are known only at the edge. Nobody has met one deeper in, and none stands inside a city, whose gates stay shut.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Roofless halls and road-meetings of the marker roads |
| **Range** | The edge of the Witnessfields, along the Grey Line and the roads in towards Stillgate |
| **Known to** | Humans, Goblins |
| **Danger** | Wary, to those who will not give their name |

## Appearance

A Grey Clerk is a tall, narrow figure of grey stone banded with green-dark bronze, robed in carved folds, standing at a roofless witness hall or beside the stones of a road-meeting. Its face is a smooth oval with a single long slit where a mouth would be, and one hand holds a bronze stylus over a stone tablet worn blank. It stands so still that lichen grows on its shoulders, and moves only to turn its head after a passer. Its voice is dry and even, like a page turned, and it speaks the old archive script that few living readers can follow.

## Habitat and Range

They stand at the road-meetings along the Grey Line and on the marker roads in towards Stillgate, one to a hall or crossing. A few posts are empty, with only the feet left on their plinths. How many stand farther in no one knows.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Grey Clerk asks every passer the same thing: a name, and the name of someone who will swear to it. It takes any answer given clearly and writes it on its blank tablet with a stylus that leaves no mark, then turns back to the road. A passer who walks on without answering, or gives a false or garbled name, it follows with its head and calls after, louder and louder, and a Clerk that has been refused steps down from its plinth and bars the road until the passer turns back. It has never been known to follow anyone off the marker road, or to harm anyone who answers.

## Abilities

A Clerk does not tire and does not forget: herders say one will greet a passer by the name given years before. It seems to know a false name from a true one, which no one can explain.

## Uses and Dangers

Scholars come to hear them, because a Clerk's questions are the only spoken archive script left in the world, and some Goblin copyists take down the forms of its words beside the warrant fragments they copy from the ruins. The danger is to the stubborn and the secretive: a salvager who will not give a name is barred from the road, and one who pushes past a Clerk is struck down with the stone tablet. Some who gave a false name have found it hard to give their true one ever after.

## Lore and Belief

The herders of Flockturn say a Clerk writes every name given to it into the sealed rolls, and that the rolls will one day call those names to account; they give their names readily and their children's never. Reedfolk scholars say the Clerks are the last servants of Calvesh the Chronos-King, still taking names for rolls he closed. What the Clerks record, if anything, no one knows, since their tablets stay blank.

Treasure-seekers who go past the markers give false names and run, and the tale of the delver a Clerk chased down the marker road through a whole night, calling his false name louder and louder until the whole Grey Line knew it, is told at Stillgate as a joke and a warning.



# Turnkeys

The **Turnkeys** are the jailers of the Soul Anchor, a Resonant Zone where the Whispering Trace has become a prison. When a being dies there, its Echo does not soften, disperse, or pass into Record; it is pinned within a few paces of where it fell and made to repeat its end. The Turnkeys, often constructs, sometimes remnant beings, maintain that prison: they keep the Echoes trapped and punish those who try to break it. They are hostile to anyone who threatens the Anchor.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Broken burial ground where Echoes are held against release |
| **Range** | The Soul Anchor, on ancient burial grounds, sites of mass sacrifice, and forgotten catacombs |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to anyone who tries to free an Echo or break the Anchor |

## Appearance

Turnkeys are of three kinds, and the zone's survivors name them by their work. **Chain-Binders** are heavy, stooped shapes of iron-grey stone and old metal, the height of a man bent double under a load, their arms ending in hooks and clamps; they move along the invisible tethers of the Anchored like smiths along a chain, and wherever they work the chains briefly show, black links in the shimmering haze. **Loop-Weavers** are thinner and taller, figures of drawn grey thread and dust with too many fingers, that pass among the trapped and set each one back to the start of its loop. Over the whole Anchor stands **the Gaoler**, a single great figure seen only at a distance, like a broken monument that has learned to turn its head.

All of them take the zone's colours, dull grey and bruised purple, and none gives off the faint flickering light of the Echoes. They smell of stale incense and old dust. The Anchor's drone of a million begging voices dips around them, as though the trapped fall quieter when their jailers pass.

## Habitat and Range

Turnkeys are found only within a Soul Anchor, among its broken headstones, dead trees, and iron-hard ground. A small Anchor may have a few Chain-Binders and no Gaoler that anyone has seen; a great one is said to have all three kinds. The more Echoes an Anchor holds, the stronger it grows, and travellers report more Turnkeys in the strongest.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Turnkeys tend the prison. Chain-Binders go from tether to tether, tightening; Loop-Weavers return the Anchored to their loops; the Gaoler watches. They ignore a traveller who only walks, listens, or harvests the Echoes' remnant energy. One who works a rite of release, settles the business that holds a prisoner, or opens a path for an Echo into Record is set upon at once, and the Turnkeys do not stop for pleading. Remnant Turnkeys show something like old anger; constructed ones show nothing.

## Abilities

Turnkeys bind. A Chain-Binder’s grip pins a living body as the Anchor pins an Echo, and its touch has the cold jolt of a trapped remnant. A Loop-Weaver’s touch tangles thought, so that the traveller begins to live a moment over and over, the first step towards the Loop that takes those who stay too long. Turnkeys do not tire, and if broken they seem to return, though whether they are remade or merely replaced, nobody knows. Who made the first of them is not known either: the Anchor itself, the power that bound its first Echo, or those it holds.

## Uses and Dangers

Turnkeys give nothing. They are the reason freeing a loved one from the Anchor is so dangerous, and the reason most who come to pry a secret from the dead keep to the edges. The worst danger they pose is the Anchor’s own: a traveller who dies fighting them is caught where they fall.

## Lore and Belief

Folk tales tell of a soul-prison guarded by gaolers of the dead, and many believe the Turnkeys are the damned set to watch the damned, or the god of the place in many bodies. People who live near an Anchor will not name the Gaoler and say it can hear its name spoken anywhere in the zone. Scholars of the zones are more careful, as they are with the zone’s name itself: what the Anchor holds are Echoes, not souls, and what the Turnkeys are, constructs or remnants or both, is disputed among those who study death. Some say the Turnkeys are themselves the oldest prisoners, so long held that they have taken the prison’s side.



# Ward-Hounds

A **Ward-Hound** is a guard dog made of conjured force and bound to a threshold. A ward-maker first defines the doorway or boundary with a Threshold Mark of Warding, and a conjurer then binds a hound-shaped construct to that clean edge. It sleeps in the mark until someone crosses without leave, and then it is there.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Construct |
| **Habitat** | Warded thresholds of mage households, vaults, archives, and strongrooms |
| **Range** | Widespread, where ward-makers are hired |
| **Known to** | Humans, Dwarves |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to intruders |

## Appearance

At rest there is nothing to see but the mark itself, cut or inlaid in the sill or the stones. Roused, the hound gathers out of the air above the mark in a breath: the shape of a big mastiff, shoulder-high to a man's hip, made of a faint, shifting shimmer like heat over a road, with a darker density where the jaws and forequarters are. In dim light it shows as a pale outline; in bright light it is hard to see at all. It makes no bark, only a low sound like a growl heard through a wall, and it has no smell, which dogs find terrifying.

## Habitat and Range

They guard the thresholds of those who can pay ward-makers: mage households, the vaults of merchant houses and temples, archives, strongrooms, and Dwarven treasuries, wherever the House of Thresholds, the Vaultward Archive, or their like are hired.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Ward-Hound knows who has leave by the terms its makers set, a token, a word, a person, and ignores everyone who has it. Anyone else who

crosses the mark it bars, knocks down, and holds, pinning them at the threshold until the household comes. It never goes beyond the boundary it is bound to: an intruder who gets back over the mark is free of it, and it fades.

## Abilities

It strikes with the weight of a large dog and holds like a vice, and blades and arrows pass through it with little effect, though it weakens when the mark under it is damaged. It needs no feeding and does not sleep; it rests in the mark and draws on the mark's stored charge.

## Life Cycle

It lasts as long as the Threshold Mark holds and is renewed, which for a well-kept ward is years. When the mark fades, is broken, or is left unrenewed, the hound goes with it, and a neglected ward's hound grows faint and slow before it fails.

## Uses and Dangers

It is a guard that cannot be bribed, poisoned, or distracted, and a household with a good one sleeps easily. Its dangers are its terms. A servant whose token is lost, a child who wanders in, or an heir after a death whose leave was never written are treated as thieves, and many a lord's hall has heard of ward-hounds that held the wrong person all night, and of the household that paid nothing for it. Thieves learn to break the mark rather than face the hound.

## Lore and Belief

Folk call a house with ward-hounds "a house with quiet dogs". They say a ward-hound is the ghost of a real dog that died guarding the house, and some households bury their old dogs under the sill for that reason; the hound is a construct, and nothing of any dog is in it. Real dogs will not cross a ward-hound's mark, and a dog that whines at a door is often the first sign a household gets that the ward has been laid.

Thieves say a warded strongroom is the one job not worth the gold, and the tale of the burglar found at dawn on a merchant's sill with silent teeth-marks in his throat and nothing taken keeps most of them honest.

PART VII

# The Risen Dead

*Here stand the dead who walk or linger. Most of the dead settle: their Echoes soften and disperse or pass into Record, helped by grief, rite, and remembrance. The beings on this shelf are the exceptions.*

*Some are bodies put to work: Necromancy gives a corpse enough structure to move under orders, and nothing in it is alive. Others are Echoes that could not let go, or were not allowed to: the Unfinished looping around a debt unpaid, the Choked held in a Truthwell until their lie is named. A few of the beings here are not dead at all, and the entries say which.*





# The Anchored

The **Anchored** are the dead of the Soul Anchor. When a being dies inside that zone, its Echo does not soften, scatter, or settle into Record as Echoes do elsewhere (see Resonant Continuity). It is caught at the spot where it formed and held there, made to repeat the end of its life. The Anchored are not the dead persons themselves but what is left of them: enough Pattern to suffer the repetition, too little to move on.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Resonant Zone |
| **Range** | The Soul Anchor, wherever one has formed over a burial ground, catacomb, or site of mass death |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to the living within their reach, and deadly to anyone who dies among them |

## Appearance

An Anchored stands about the height it stood in life and keeps the clothes and wounds it died in, but all of it is translucent, a grey-yellow figure through which the broken headstones behind it show. It glows faintly from inside, and the glow flickers and pulses in time with its pain. Its face is set in the agony or terror of the last instant and never relaxes. Nothing visible holds it, yet it moves as if chained: it lunges, is jerked back a few paces from where it fell, and lunges again.

Each one repeats its death or its last hours. A woman stumbles, clutches her side, and falls, then stands where she began and stumbles again; a man drinks from a cup, chokes, and drinks. Their voices join the zone's drone, a low murmur like many people begging under their breath, and close to one the air turns colder and smells of stale incense and old dust. Touching one feels like a cold shock running up the arm.

## Habitat and Range

The Anchored never leave the Anchor, and none can drift more than a few paces from the place of its death. A small Anchor over a forgotten catacomb may hold a handful; one over a field of sacrifice holds a crowd, and every one of them adds to the zone's strength.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Anchored are frantic. They cannot speak to the living in any way that makes sense, only throw out their fear and pain, which a visitor feels as if it were their own. They reach for every traveller who comes within their tether, and some seem to take the living for rescuers while others try to drag them into the loop or use them to climb out. Between visitors they repeat their deaths without rest.

## Abilities

Within its tether an Anchored can touch the physical world: it can seize a sleeve, overturn a lamp, or drag at a leg with the cold strength of the zone behind it. Its grip carries its own last moments with it, and a held traveller may relive another's death for a while. The Anchored do not age or decay. They can be released only by a particular rite, by settling the business that holds them, or by giving them a stronger way into Record; the zone's keepers work against all three.

## Uses and Dangers

The trapped Echoes give off a strong remnant charge that some practitioners harvest for magic, and the Anchored still hold what they saw, so secrets and crimes can be pried from them. Mourners come to free one they loved, and those who succeed sometimes carry away a recovered memory or a trustworthy fragment of the dead. The great danger is to die among them: whoever does becomes one of them.

## Lore and Belief

Folk tales call them the souls of the damned or the ghosts of the unshriven, and many believe they were condemned to the Anchor for their sins. The truth is plainer and worse: an Anchored is whoever happened to die there, guilty or not, and the zone, not any judge, holds it. Mourners carry a release token, a relic or a prayer, in the hope that it will loosen a chain; scholars who study the place only agree that the first rule is not to die there.



# Bridge-Dead

Where a crossing fails, people die: a span gives way under a cart, a ford shifts in the night, a ravine bridge drops a party into the water. The Bridge-Dead are the remnants of such deaths that stay at the crossing. They are seldom violent. They are a warning, and the families who keep the crossings treat them as part of the crossing's record.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Failed crossings, broken bridges, fords, and woundland |
| **Range** | The Broken Marches, the Briarreach, and the Greyford Reach |
| **Known to** | Trolls, Goblins, Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

They are seen at dusk and in mist, at the place where they fell: a grey figure standing on the broken end of a span, a shape at the water's edge that is gone when the lantern reaches it, a cart and team crossing a bridge that is no longer there. More often they are only felt and heard: a sudden chill at one plank, the sound of timber cracking when nothing cracks, a voice calling a name from below. The air near them smells of river water and wet rope.

## Habitat and Range

They linger at failed crossings, old and new: the woundland crossings of the Broken Marches, where repeated bad repair has made passage a matter of permission; the ravine bridges of the Briarreach; and the side fords and the patched span of the Greyford Reach. A crossing that has failed many times has many.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Bridge-Dead remnant clings to the moment of its death and repeats it, or keeps watch over the place it happened. Most do no harm beyond fear. Some cling harder: they draw travellers towards the weak plank or the false ford, as if to make them share the fall, and those are the ones the crossing families watch.

## Abilities

Like other remnants, they chill the air, sour the mood, and move small things: a loose plank, a rope, a lantern. A strong one can make a traveller step where the dead man stepped. They grow stronger the longer they are left unnamed.

## Uses and Dangers

They mark the dangerous place, and the crossing families read them so. A Troll house of the Crossing-Oath Houses that remembers every collapse remembers every dead with it, and tells a traveller which plank to avoid by the name of the one who fell there. Goblin side-ford families mark a ford with a dead upon it with their own reversible marks. The danger is to strangers who do not ask.

## Lore and Belief

Crossing families hold that a Bridge-Dead stays quiet while its name is spoken at the crossing, and that it turns on the living when it is forgotten; that is close to true of remnants generally. Trolls tell the names at each repair, and Human toll-keepers at Greyford sometimes pay a coin into the river for the dead of the last collapse. Some say the dead of a crossing that is finally abandoned walk off with the last traveller.

The crossing songs remember the bridge-collapse that took a whole wedding party, and the night a year later when the wedding was seen crossing again, laughing, over a span that was not there; a carter who followed them is said to have driven his team into the river.



# Burst-Dead

Corpse Burst detonates a dead body into shrapnel, pestilential fluid, and remnant shock, and a delayed grave-sigil lets the necromancer arm a corpse and leave it. The Burst-Dead are such corpses, set as traps. They do not walk. They wait.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Necromancers' hideouts, crypts, battlefields, and roads behind a fleeing necromancer |
| **Range** | Wherever necromancy is practised |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Deadly, at close quarters |

## Appearance

A Burst-Dead is a corpse, and looks like one: a fallen soldier on a road, a body on a crypt shelf, a beggar dead in a doorway. The signs are small. The body is swollen tighter than its days dead would make it, the skin drum-taut and faintly shiny. Somewhere on it, usually on the breastbone, the palm, or the sole of a foot, is a grave-sigil cut or burned into the skin, often hidden under cloth. It may twitch. The smell is worse than ordinary decay, sharp and sweetish, and flies avoid it.

## Habitat and Range

They are found where necromancers hide or flee: across the threshold of a hidden workroom, in the crypt where raised corpses are kept, on the road behind a pursued caster, and on battlefields where a necromancer fought. They are rare, and each one is someone's deliberate work.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They have no behaviour. The sigil holds them armed until its trigger is met: a touch, a step across them, a light brought near, a name spoken. Then they burst at once.

## Abilities

The burst throws splintered bone like shot, sprays rot that festers in every wound, and looses a shock of remnant force that stuns the living and wakes agitated remnants around it. In a close room it kills; in the open it maims. Once burst, the corpse is spent.

## Uses and Dangers

To the necromancer they are a weapon and a last defence. To everyone else they are a horror, and much of the reason Corpse Burst is infamous: lords and villages that look away from other necromancy burn whoever sets Burst-Dead, when they can catch them. Those who must clear a necromancer's hold go in with long poles and burn every body before they touch it. Burial parties after a battle where a necromancer fought do the same.

## Lore and Belief

Soldiers believe a Burst-Dead can be told by the flies, and that is often true. Others say a corpse turned face-down cannot burst, which is false. Sanctified clergy treat the bodies as twice wronged, and say the rites over the remains when they have been burned, for the burst itself is said to leave the dead restless.

Bounty-takers who hunt necromancers say the trail behind a fleeing one is sown with them, and that the first corpse on the road is always the one to burn from a distance; their warning-tale is of a hunter's band that did not, and the lone survivor who brought the necromancer in anyway.



# Cairn-Wakers

In the High Scars every cairn raised where an escort fell is a record, and the worst wrong an escort can do is bad guidance: a warning not given, a delay not declared. Cairn-Wakers are the dead of such failures. When the warning that would have saved them was never given, and the wrong never brought before a route moot, often because the escort's kindred was too strong to be called there, they rise at their cairns.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Escort cairns along the cairn chains, above all those whose names are fading |
| **Range** | The High Scars |
| **Known to** | Orcs |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A Cairn-Waker is seen as the escort or traveller it was, in felt and hide and dust, standing beside or upon its cairn with its back to the wind. Its outline is blurred, as though seen through blown dust, and its face is turned towards the direction the warning should have come from. Some show their deaths plainly: a body crushed by the slide, a throat dry with thirst. When a party comes near, the figure raises an arm across the road, the escort's sign to halt. It is silent, but the wind round it carries a sound like a runner's breath, hard and fast. The air smells of dust and cold stone.

## Habitat and Range

They stand along the cairn chains, mostly on the exposed stretches between passward shelters, where slides, storms, and thirst killed parties a warning could have saved. They gather most at

the old cairns whose names are fading, the cairns the Orcs call the tears of Ushkar the Ancestor-Warden.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They try to give the warning that was never given to them. A Cairn-Waker stands across the route and will not let a party past; it means kindly, but it cannot tell the danger that killed it from a road that is now safe. Pushed past, it turns on the party with a fury like a storm off the faces: stones fly, animals bolt, and those who strike at it are struck down.

## Abilities

Like other remnants they chill the air, sour the mood into dread, and move small things, and the strong ones move stones. They can scatter a herd or start a slide on loose scree. They grow stronger as their cairn's name fades.

## Uses and Dangers

They are dangerous to any party that pushes past them and to any escort who lies about them. Wise captains halt when one rises, declare the delay aloud, and wait out the danger the Waker remembers, even if they cannot see it. A route moot that hears a Waker's case, and names the escort who failed to warn, is said to lay it to rest.

## Lore and Belief

The escort kindreds say a Cairn-Waker is the Warden's grief made visible, and that reciting its name at the treaty-grounds keeps it quiet; cairn-line wardens re-cut the names on cairns where one has stood. Some say the Wakers stand thickest along routes where the escort orders care more for the names on the cairns than for the roads, and that they will rise all along the chains if the names are ever cut for show. Raiders who have tried to cross the High Scars against a Waker's raised arm are the subject of escort songs, all of which end on a slide.



# The Choked

Look down into a Truthwell and the **Choked** look back. They are visitors who told the water a lie, or broke a promise sworn over it, and were drowned for it. Their bodies stay in the shaft, suspended and unspoiled, and their Echoes stay with them, held in the water until the lie each one told is confessed or formally named. They do not walk or speak. They are warnings, and every pilgrim who comes to swear or confess sees them first.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Resonant Zone |
| **Range** | The Truthwell, at ancient wells, springs, sacred groves, and oath-sites where one has formed |
| **Danger** | Harmless in themselves; the water that holds them is deadly to liars |

## Appearance

The Choked hang upright or slowly turning in the clear blue-green water, at many depths, some just under the surface and some so far down they are pale smudges against the dark. The water preserves them perfectly: skin smooth and faintly blue, hair floating loose, clothes of every age and people still bright. Their faces are locked in the terror of the moment the water rose, mouths open, eyes wide. Bubbles never rise from them.

Their Echoes show only to those who look long. Then a faint second outline can be seen around a drowned face, as if the face were trying to shape a word. When a lie is spoken at the rim and the water churns black or red, the Choked sway together like weed in a current, and those nearest the surface seem for an instant to strain upwards.

## Habitat and Range

They are found only in the Well that drowned them, and a Well holds as many as it has drowned: a little-used spring may keep one or two, an old

oath-site with centuries of liars beneath it a whole silent crowd. The stone-skinned Water-Robed tend the Well, and leave the Choked where they hang.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Choked does nothing. Its Echo is fixed on the lie that killed it, aware enough to want release and unable to act. Those who have touched the water near one say they felt a pressing urge to speak a particular untruth aloud, the one the drowned man died for, so that it could at last be named.

## Abilities

The Choked have no power of their own; the Well's law holds them. What they keep is knowledge: the lie each told, and the truth it hid. Under the Well's law of clarity, a visitor who asks the water about one may be shown that truth in a vision. When the lie is confessed, by the dead person's kin or anyone who knows it, or is spoken aloud at the rim, the Echo is released and the body at last begins to sink.

## Uses and Dangers

The Choked serve as the Well's sermon: nobody who has seen them needs to be told what a lie costs here. Families come to free a drowned ancestor by confessing the lie for them, and lords and claimants sometimes come to have an old lie named, since a released Choked confirms the truth beyond doubt. The danger is only the Well's own: lie, or keep silent before its question, and join them.

## Lore and Belief

Many people believe the Choked are damned for ever and must not be looked at, lest their guilt pass to the watcher; the Water-Robed teach otherwise, and the confessions that free them prove it. Others hold that the Choked were judged by a god of truth, but the water judges only what is said aloud and drowned them by its own law. Old oath-sites keep lists of who hangs in their Well and for what, read out at the rim on feast days, so that someone might yet name the lie.



# The Clock-Keeper

**Clock-Keeper** is a title, not a kind. Every Stopped Clock has one: the local anchor that holds its instant in place, most often the shade, remnant, or preserved Pattern of whoever caused the zone to form. A mage whose working ran away, a parent who wished for one more moment, an Echo shaped by desperate prayer: each Keeper is its own story. There is no order of Keepers and no greater power behind them. Each holds one moment, and the zone ends only if it is destroyed, persuaded to let go, or brought to accept the cost of time resuming.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Resonant Zone |
| **Range** | The centre of each Stopped Clock, one Keeper to a Clock |
| **Danger** | Wary: harmless in body, perilous to bargain with, since its choice decides the fate of everyone frozen around it |

## Appearance

A Keeper is found near the centre of its Clock and looks at first like any of the frozen: a person caught mid-gesture in the faded, paused colours of the zone. What sets it apart is small and wrong. Its eyes are the only frozen eyes that seem to focus. The air around it is a little thicker, the hanging rain a little denser, as though the stillness were heaviest there. A Keeper that died making its Clock may be no more than a pale shape standing in the place where its body fell, or seated beside the bed, the cradle, or the window it could not bear to leave.

It makes no sound; the silence of the Clock is complete. When it speaks it does so in thought, and visitors describe the voice as their own inner voice with someone else's grief in it. It has no smell but that of the held instant: bread, rain, smoke, whatever was in the air when time stopped.

## Habitat and Range

One Keeper to one Clock. It does not move from the centre, and it does not leave; the Clock and its Keeper end together.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Most Keepers are remorseful, desperate, or mad, and many are all three by turns. They have watched their frozen neighbours suffer for as long as the Clock has stood, and they know why. Some plead with visitors to free them and then refuse when the moment comes; some bargain, offering what is preserved in the zone for a promise to leave the frozen street untouched; some argue, endlessly and well, that the moment they hold is worth the prison. A few have reached a terrible calm.

## Abilities

The Keeper holds the instant. While it does, nothing in the zone ages, decays, or changes save what a visitor moves. It can reach any visitor's mind by thought alone, and it can hear their thoughts answer. If it is destroyed, or lets go, the zone collapses and time resumes for everyone at once, with every moved object left where it was put. A Keeper whose Clock causes paradox may draw the attention of the Keeper of the Unbroken Sequence, and one whose refusal keeps a rightful ending from coming that of the Warden of Irreversible Endings.

## Uses and Dangers

Visitors seek the Keeper to bargain for the zone's release, or for leave to take a preserved text or artefact. The danger is in the bargain. A Keeper persuaded too fast may let go while a traveller still stands among moved knives and shifted feet; one refused may hold its visitor in conversation until the Clock's silence takes their sense of time. Survivors' advice is not to speak to it unless ready for what follows.

## Lore and Belief

People tell of the Clock as a cautionary tale against clinging to what must pass, and the Keeper is its central figure: the one who wanted the moment kept and is the only one who can end it. Folk belief often makes the Keeper a sorcerer to be slain. Many are not; some are grieving parents, and the frozen around them may be their own family. Some of those aligned with Aion Prime hold that every Keeper can be brought to let go, if someone will sit with it long enough.

The songs are fuller of heroes who went in to slay a Keeper than of those who sat with one, and the slayers' songs end badly: the Clock does not resume for a killing, only for a letting-go.



# Crossroad Hanged

Some Human lords of the cradle-web hang outlaws, and anyone else who crossed them badly enough, at a crossroads and leave the bodies on the gibbet as a warning. Those dead are buried without rites, if they are buried at all, and nobody grieves for them in public. That is how remnants form, and the Crossroad Hanged are among the commonest.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Gibbets, gallows, and crossroads |
| **Range** | The cradle-web, wherever lords and towns hang at the crossroads |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

By night a shape hangs from an empty gibbet, turning slowly though no wind blows, and is gone when a lantern is lifted. Travellers hear the creak of a rope, a choked breath, a voice repeating the words it said on the ladder. Some see a figure standing under the gibbet with its head at a wrong angle, or walking beside a cart for a few paces with a noose trailing from its neck. The air at the crossroads is colder than the road on either side and smells of hemp and damp earth.

## Habitat and Range

They linger at gibbets and crossroads where executions have been carried out, and around the unhallowed ground beside them where hanged bodies are put. They are found across the Human cradle-web, wherever lords and towns hang at the crossroads.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Each holds the feeling it died with, usually rage or terror, and turns it on those who pass. Most only frighten. The stronger drag: horses balk and will

not pass, a traveller's feet go heavy, a man walking alone at night feels hands at his throat. They seem to know the rope-makers, hangmen, and gawkers who were there, and are harder on them.

## Abilities

They chill, frighten, and move small things, as remnants do; the strong ones can drain a passer and leave them weak for days. What grows under the gibbet is part of their lore: the forked root folk call Gallows Root, believed to grow from a hanged man's last breath.

## Uses and Dangers

They are dangerous mostly to night travellers and to the lonely. Their uses are dark ones: necromancers buy what grows under the gibbet and the rope that hanged a man, and some go to the crossroads to speak with the dead there. Carters time their journeys to pass the crossroads by day.

## Lore and Belief

Humans believe a hanged man's ghost cannot leave the crossroads because it does not know which road to take, and so crossroads burials are thought to hold the dead in place. Some villages hold a quiet rite of their own for the hanged, against the lord's will, and say the crossroads goes still afterwards; that is close to the truth of remnants, which settle when they are grieved. Sanctified clergy burn Gallows Root wherever they find it.

Outlaws of the cradle-web meet at the crossroads gibbets because nobody else will, and their own tale is of the outlaw who sat a night under his hanged brother and was told by the ghost where the lord's silver was kept.



# The Drowned Court

The **Drowned Court** was the spectral host of Ithaere the Drowned Mother, the Aqua Resonant of the floods that broke the upper Roothollows. Its members were the strong who gave themselves to the water so that a refuge might be spared, and whose Echoes were bound to her service by the giving. She could call them up out of the flood to guard and fight, and while she lasted they were loyal, fearless, and could not be destroyed. It belongs to the deep past of the Roothollow Rupture (c. 335,000-c. 328,000 BR), and lives on in Dark Elf lament.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Flood water near the sacrifice-sites of the upper Roothollows |
| **Range** | The upper Roothollows, in the flood years; not known to have risen since Ithaere sank |
| **Known to** | Dark Elves |
| **Danger** | Deadly to whatever Ithaere set it against, while she lasted |

## Appearance

The Court rose from black water in ranks. Each figure came up streaming, the height of the Elf it had been, grey-blue and waterlogged, with the drowned's swollen calm on its face and hair hanging in roots and drift. It was clearly not flesh: the cavern lamps showed through it, and water ran down it that never pooled. Each carried a spear of hardened root and a shield of drowned bark, black and slick. They moved in silence and in step, waist-deep and then on the surface, and the air around them went cold and smelled of silt. Some laments say the guards' mouths moved as they came, shaping the names of the chambers they had died to save.

## Habitat and Range

The Court could exist only near water. It rose from the floods that filled the passages, chambers, and refuges of the upper Roothollows, and from the

pools where the tithe was paid. When the waters fell and the upper world was sealed (see The Sealing of the Upper Roothollows, c. 328,000-c. 318,000 BR), its places were left ruined and closed.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Court did not choose. It guarded what Ithaere told it to guard and drove back what she told it to drive back, refuges against the flood's other dangers and, near her end, the old passages she tried to keep drowned. It showed no fear and no anger; laments give it something closer to patience, as though it were still waiting for the water to be paid.

## Abilities

Bound to Ithaere, the guards could not be killed: a spear through one passed through water, and it came on. They held the water's cold and its weight, and a guard's touch could drag a swimmer down. Every summoning cost the Drowned Mother pain, for she was making the dead live their drowning again, and the Court existed only where water stood.

## Uses and Dangers

In the flood years the Court was a refuge's last defence, bought at the price of its strongest. It was also the clearest sign of what Ithaere's mercy cost: every guard was someone who had sunk so that someone else might float. In her last years she raised it against the people who would no longer pay.

## Lore and Belief

Ithaere sank into the last of the flood and her Pattern scattered; the Court is not known to have risen since, and nothing in the record shows it outlived her. Dark Elf laments still name its guards, and the Gloamroot Covenant counts them among its oldest griefs. Parents warn that a child who strays near black water will be taken into the Court, and those who work deep basins tell of figures with spears seen standing under still water at the old flood-lines, near the tithe stones that now lie beyond sealed passages. Most say it is the lamplight in the water.



# The Forgotten (the Eternal Record)

The **Forgotten** of the Eternal Record are people whom the world has lost and the Record has not. Erased from the Material Plane, their names struck, their records burned, nobody left alive who remembers them, they survive only as Echoes held in the Record, and they wander its stacks as memory-forms. Record is where coherent Echoes are kept (see Resonant Continuity); the Forgotten are kept there with nothing on the Material Plane answering to them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Harmonic |
| **Range** | The Eternal Record, in its stacks |
| **Danger** | Wary: harmless in themselves, but their company draws visitors into staying |

## Appearance

A memory-form is a person as they were remembered, not as they were, and since nobody remembers them, they are faint. Most look like figures drawn in pale ink on the dust-gold air of the stacks: a clear outline, a face whose features come and go, clothes that are only the idea of clothes. Lines of script drift across them like reflected light on water, and those who have read the script say it is the person's own record, too small and too fast to follow. They walk at an unhurried pace, often stopping to lay a hand on a shelf. Their footsteps make no sound, but the pages near them rustle. They smell of the Record's dust and old paper and, faintly, of something particular to each: smoke, lamp oil, the sea.

## Habitat and Range

They are found only in the Record, among the stacks rather than in the guarded deep sections, and most often in the long aisles where little is consulted. No one has counted them. Visitors meet them alone or in small, silent processions.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Forgotten seek. Each moves along the shelves as if looking for the place where it belongs, the volume or tablet that holds its life, and lingers wherever a visitor is reading, as though hoping to be read. They are quiet and courteous and do not hinder anyone. Some answer questions in a whisper, slowly, as if remembering themselves while they speak. The Archivists who keep the Record neither help nor hinder them.

## Abilities

A memory-form is all record and no Pattern, so it cannot act on the world beyond turning a page or pointing. What it holds is exact: under the Record's law nothing kept there fades or is falsified, and a Forgotten can tell what it was and what it saw with perfect accuracy, if it can be brought to remember. Echo restoration draws on what survives in Record, so a Forgotten is in principle the material from which someone lost might be reconstructed, though no one is known to have done it.

## Uses and Dangers

Scholars of lost history seek them as the only ones left who saw what the world has wiped out. The danger is to the visitor. A traveller who listens too long and reads too much may lose the will to return to the present and stay, as the Record-Lost; that is a different fate, since the world has not forgotten them.

## Lore and Belief

In the few traditions that know of them, the Forgotten are taken for the damned, punished by erasure; the Record judges no one, and many of them were simply the weak, the defeated, or the inconvenient, struck out by others. Some mourners and singers of the struck believe that a name spoken again on the Material Plane calls its Forgotten home. What is so is that remembrance strengthens an Echo, and Ennor the Grave-Watcher is said to set such memories deep into Record, beyond the reach of those who would strike them out.



# Fused Dead

The overburn of the Ash-Furnace Civilization glassed whole stretches of the Glassbelt. In some of its ruins the glass holds shapes: people caught in the fire and fused into floors and walls. These are the Fused Dead. They do not move. They speak.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Vitrified ruins, slag belts, and the glassed ground of the furnace scars |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

A Fused Dead is a figure in the glass, seen when the light is low and slanting: a dark outline sunk in a vitrified wall, a body lying in a glassed floor as if under ice, its arms raised or its face turned away. Some are only a hand or a head breaking the surface, smoothed by the fire into something like a lump of dark green bottle glass. The glass round them is warmer than the rest. Their voices are dry whispers, many at once, in a tongue no living salvager knows, and they seem to come from inside the glass. The air in such ruins smells of hot stone and old ash.

## Habitat and Range

They lie in the vitrified ruins and dead furnace zones of the Glassbelt, most of all in the deepest furnace scars, where the glassed ground is said to hold the fire's heat still. How many there are no one knows, and which ruins hold them is part of the salvagers' route knowledge.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They are still, and mostly silent. They speak when the ruin is disturbed, above all when ash or slag is lifted and carried away: the whispers rise and fol-

low the carrier, and grow louder the farther the ash goes. Salvagers say they sound like pleading. What they ask for no one can tell.

## Abilities

Their voices carry dread, as the voices of remnants do, and those who listen long sleep badly and dream of fire. They cannot leave the glass. Whether they have any part in the sickness the old warnings blame on carried ash is not known.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, and they are a warning: a ruin with Fused Dead in it is one where the fire was worst, and the ground there is dangerous for more reasons than the dead. Salvagers keep the old warnings strictly near them: do not speak the Pyre-King's name near a furnace, and do not carry ash or slag out. Those who break the second warning say the whispers follow them for days.

## Lore and Belief

The Salvage Peoples say the Fused Dead are the furnace-folk who fed their god until he consumed them, and that they plead to be carried out of the glass. Some salvagers believe the ash is what is left of them, and that carrying it away takes their bodies from them. Nobody knows which is true, or whether either is.

Salvage crews tell of a delver who chipped a furnace-king's gold collar out of the glass around a Fused figure and heard it begging the whole time; he sold the collar and drank the money, and never worked the scars again.



# Grey Crews

The sea takes more Gnomes of the far-side coast than anything else, by fog and storm, and many of the drowned are never brought home. In the fog they come back. The Grey Crews are the drowned of lost boats, seen rowing in the fog belt pilots call **the Long Grey** and in the fogs of the Soundchain, and they hail the living to follow.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Fogbound straits, outer roads, the wreck-ground of drowned harbours, and the Proud Bank at the Sounding Gate |
| **Range** | The Tidelace Coasts and the Soundchain Roads |
| **Known to** | Gnomes, Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to crews who answer |

## Appearance

A Grey Crew is a boat that should not be there: a shape in the fog, low in the water, with oars rising and falling in time. It is grey all over, hull, sail, and crew alike, as if the fog had taken form. The rowers' faces are hidden or turned away; a figure in the stern stands with an arm raised, hailing. Their voices carry far over still water, and they call what any crew calls: a boat's name, a harbour's, "this way, the channel is clear". Their oars make no splash. When they pass close, the air smells of salt and wet rope, and of cold that goes to the bone.

## Habitat and Range

They are seen in the Long Grey on the outer coast of the Tidelace Coasts, on the outer roads that close first in fog, near the drowned harbours where old breakwaters and signal towers stand in the sea, and in the fogs that stop movement between the sounds of the Soundchain Roads.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They want company. A Grey Crew falls in alongside a living boat in the fog and leads it, rowing just ahead, calling the way, and the way it calls is the way it went: onto the shoal, the old breakwater, the wreck-ground where it was lost. It does not attack. It leads, and when the living boat strikes, it is gone.

## Abilities

They carry the pull of remnants: dread, cold, and a strong urge in the living to follow a voice that sounds sure of itself. Beacons and bells seem to thin them; a boat that holds to the beacon's bearing sees the Grey Crew drift away.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. The danger is to crews who answer, and to pilots who trust a voice in the fog over their own soundings. Tidelace custom is simple: when the Long Grey comes in, nobody moves who does not have to, and nobody answers a hail they cannot place. Station crews ring their bells through the night and log every hail they hear.

## Lore and Belief

Gnome harbour families hold that a Grey Crew is the crew of a boat lost without its story told, and that a pilot who tells a lost crew's passage aloud at the shrine of Maris of the Tides, paying her toll of story for them, lays it to rest. Coastal Humans say the Grey Crews come for anyone who has drowned a debt. Island Gnomes at the last beacons tell of a whole Grey fleet seen once on the edge of open water, rowing in from somewhere no one has charted.

Wreckers say the Grey Crews row out of the Proud Bank on the nights they shift the channel posts, and that is why the wise wrecker works alone; the harbours say the Grey Crews are where wreckers go when they drown.



# Hostile Remnants

Most of the dead settle. Their Echoes soften and disperse, or pass into Record, helped by grief, rite, and remembrance (see Resonant Continuity). Some do not. A **hostile remnant** is death residue that has hardened instead into a lingering presence that turns on the living: a restless haunt in a house, a cold thing at a graveside, the angry murmur over a battlefield after dusk. The name covers a family of hauntings rather than one being. The worst of them are the hungry remnants of the Hushvale, which feed on warmth, breath, names, or recognition.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Graves, battlefields, mortuaries, haunted moors, and the Hushvale fog |
| **Range** | Wherever the dead are left unfinished; thickest on old battlefields and in the Hushvale |
| **Known to** | Every people that buries its dead |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to the living near unquiet dead; deadly in the Hushvale fog |

## Appearance

A remnant is felt before it is seen. The first signs are a cold spot that does not move with the draught, a smell of damp earth or old blood where none should be, lamp flames that lean towards one corner, and a sense of being watched by someone angry. Seen at all, it is a smear of grey at the edge of sight, a shape that is almost a person and then is not. Battlefield remnants show as many such shapes, moving together like smoke over the ground. Some are only sound: knocking, scraping inside a sealed coffin, a voice repeating one word.

The Hushvale's hungry remnants are said to look like the fog itself thickening into a figure, close enough to touch, with a hollow where a face should be.

## Habitat and Range

Remnants form where death was sudden, violent, or left unfinished: hasty battlefield burials, plague pits, the graves of the unclaimed, mortuaries where a body waits too long, and places where two peoples' rites quarrelled over one dead. Haunted moors and old battlefields hold them for generations. The Hushvale, where the fog, the dead, and the Wake-Seal meet, is full of them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A remnant is not the dead person and does not think as they did. It is the strongest feeling they died with, fear, rage, grief, or need, gone hard and set against whatever comes near. It clings to a place, a body, or an object; it frightens, harries, and drains, and it grows stronger the longer it is left. The hungry remnants of the Hushvale hunt in the fog, and take from the living what the dead no longer have.

## Abilities

A remnant can chill a room, sour a mood into dread, move small things, and wake twitching and scraping in the dead it clings to. Strong ones attach to the living and drain their energy and sanity. In the Hushvale they take more: the warmth from a body, the breath from a sleeper, a name from a mind, or the power to recognise a face. Rites and magic break them. Necromancers quiet them with Grave Quiet; Trace Magic unties them gently; Sanctified Magic drives them back by force.

## Uses and Dangers

Remnants give nothing but warning. They are what funerary custom exists to prevent, and what careless necromancy causes, since agitated remnants are among its known costs (see Costs and Side Effects). Mortuary staff use Trace Magic to tell which body may harden overnight and isolate it, burial parties cross battlefields by the safest path, and pilgrims sleep inside sanctified rings while the haunted moor mutters outside.

## Lore and Belief

Every people that finishes its dead fears what happens if it does not, and most believe a haunt is a soul that was refused its rest, angry at the living who failed it. That is close: a remnant forms most readily where rites were skipped, quarrelled over, or impossible, and where nobody grieves. Gravelights, vigils, and spoken names keep the dead quiet, and many peoples pray to Ennor the Grave-Watcher, under their own names for him, to guide the dead past the threshold before they can turn.

Grave-robbers and battlefield strippers wake more haunts than anyone, and the songs are full of the looter who took a ring from a field of the unburied and was followed home by the hand it came from.



# Marrow Sentinels

A **Marrow Sentinel** is a guard made of the dead. The spell of that name anchors a skeleton, or a construct built from ossuary bone, into a fixed watch pattern around a tomb, a wall, or a chamber, and there it walks its round until the binding fails. Catacomb keepers set old oath-sworn guardians to patrol their outer halls against grave robbers this way. A sentinel is a body given a task; nothing of the person whose bones it uses keeps the watch.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Tombs, catacombs, crypt halls, and walls |
| **Range** | Wherever catacomb keepers, ossuary orders, and noble houses guard their dead |
| **Danger** | Dangerous to intruders in the halls they guard; harmless to those who keep to the rite |

## Appearance

Most sentinels are whole skeletons, yellow-brown with age and tomb-damp, the joints bound with wire, gut, or cord where the ligaments have gone, and a ring of chalked or carved signs on the skull or breastbone that holds the command. Many still wear what they were buried in: a rusted helm, the scraps of a tabard, a ring loose on a finger bone. An ossuary construct is stranger: a figure taller than a man, built of many people's long bones lashed and pegged together, with a skull at the top or several, the kind of thing an ossuary order makes from bones that have no names left.

A sentinel walks stiffly and evenly, at the same pace every round, turning at the same flagstone. Its bones click and its feet scrape. It smells of dry dust and old lime, and of the oil some keepers rub into its joints.

## Habitat and Range

Sentinels are found where the dead are kept and robbed: catacombs, crypt halls, the outer chambers of noble tombs, ossuary monasteries, and sometimes a wall or gate that a house wants watched by its own dead. One may stand alone at an inner door; a large catacomb may set a dozen on interlocking rounds.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A sentinel has no temperament. It walks its circuit, and when something crosses the watch it was set against, it turns and strikes, then returns to the circuit. It does not follow far, does not think, and does not change its plan: it is made for repetitive rounds, not for a fight that moves. Those who know the keepers' rite, or carry the token the keepers set into the command, pass it untouched.

## Abilities

Bone does not tire or sleep, so a sentinel keeps its watch through nights and seasons without flagging. A simple binding lasts a night; a full installation, a long rite with inscribed command, ward markers, and bone, holds for many months. It fights with the strength of the command rather than of muscle. A hard enough blow shatters the binding with the bones, and sanctified disruption breaks it outright.

## Uses and Dangers

Sentinels guard what families and orders cannot afford to watch with the living. They are cheaper than guards and cannot be bribed. The danger is that they cannot judge: a sentinel set against intruders strikes a mourner who forgets the rite as readily as a thief, and a binding left too long may fail in the middle of a round and drop its bones in a passage.

## Lore and Belief

Where necromancy is a sacred funerary art, a sentinel is an honour: the oath-sworn dead guarding their kin still. Where it is a crime, the same sight is desecration, and some peoples forbid animating the dead at all. Common belief holds that the guard’s own ghost walks inside the bones; it does not, and the keepers know it, though many do not say so. Grave robbers swear that a sentinel can be stilled by naming the dead it was made from, which works only when the keepers built the name into the command.

Tomb-robbers' tales tell of a crypt where the sentinels let a band reach the burial chamber and the treasure and then closed the door behind them, and of the one robber who came out, years later, as a sentinel himself.



# The Old Hunt

The Old Hunt is the Echo of the dead of a hunt, the strongest echo of the Ghost Step's. Centuries ago a hunt rode along this road, hounds and horses and riders, and on the Ghost Step it still rides. It is semi-solid, like all the zone's echoes, and so large and so fast that anyone caught in its line is knocked down and run over.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Old roads |
| **Range** | The Ghost Step |
| **Danger** | Dangerous, to anyone on the hunt's line |

## Appearance

The Hunt comes as sound first: a horn, thin and far off, then hounds giving tongue, then the drum of many hooves. It appears as a rush of spectral colour against the zone's washed-out present, vivid at its front and fading behind: a pack of rough-coated hounds of no breed known now, their coats ghost-brown and spotted, then riders on tall horses, cloaked and capped in the fashion of an age no one remembers, spears and horns in hand, faces turned to something ahead that is not there. They cast a second, fainter shadow. As they pass, the air is cold as mist and smells of horse sweat, crushed grass, and a fire long out.

## Habitat and Range

It runs one stretch of the Ghost Step's road, the stretch its hunt once rode, in both directions along it. How often it runs is not known; travellers report it at dusk most often, and some have walked the Step for days without meeting it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

The Hunt does what it did. It rides after a quarry no one can see, along the same line, with the same cries, and it does not turn, stop, or notice the living. It cannot be spoken to or turned. When it has run its course it fades, until something wakes it again. The zone's echoes answer the feelings of those who watch them, and a frightened traveller's fear makes the Hunt come on harder and more solid.

## Abilities

Its echoes carry weight: a hound's shoulder or a horse's chest strikes like the real thing and is gone in the same moment, cold as mist. A traveller in its line is knocked flat, struck by hooves, and left bruised and broken. A calm watcher feels it pass thinner, almost as a wind.

## Life Cycle

It is not alive and was never born. It is what the hunters and their beasts left behind when they died, held on the road by the zone, and it lasts as long as the Step holds its echoes.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives antiquarians a glimpse of an age lost to record: the dress, the hounds, the horns. Its danger is the zone's Collision, at its worst. Travellers who hear the horn get off the road, or, if they cannot, lie flat and still and calm, and let it pass over them. Some of the zone's Path-Echoes are seen to step aside for it, as they once did in life.

## Lore and Belief

Along old roads near the Path-Gates, people tell of a wild hunt heard on certain nights, and say that whoever sees it will die within the year, or be taken to ride with it. Travellers who have met the Old Hunt say it takes no one; it only runs them down. Who the hunters were and what they chased no one knows, and the Step's Echoes do not answer.

Wayside inns tell of the poacher who was caught on the hunt's line, ran with it all night to stay ahead of the hooves, and was found at dawn at the far end of the road, three valleys away, with a stag's antler in his hand that no one could explain.



# Path-Echoes

On a Ghost Step the road remembers everyone who walked it. The **Path-Echoes** are those memories made half solid: recordings of past walkers, left on the path as Echoes are left on any place a life touched (see Resonant Continuity), but strong enough here to be seen and bumped into. Each repeats something, the last thing its walker did on the road or the thing they did there every day. They are not ghosts in the old tales' sense: there is no one inside them to talk to.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Resonant Zone |
| **Range** | The Ghost Step, on ancient roads, pilgrim routes, and battlefields where one has formed |
| **Danger** | Wary: most are harmless, but a violent one can knock a traveller down, and their company can make the living forget they are alive |

## Appearance

A Path-Echo is a translucent figure of ordinary size that flickers like a candle flame, coloured where the present road is grey: a drover's red scarf, the blue of an old uniform, a pilgrim's ochre cloak, all bright at first and fading as the replay runs. The road under it shows as it was in its time, paved and busy, while the real road beside it is cracked and overgrown. Each casts a faint second shadow beside the traveller's own.

They walk with the walk they had: a soldier marches in step to a drum nobody hears, a merchant haggles with another Echo, a child runs ahead and runs back, an old man stops at the same milestone and sits. Their sound is a layered murmur of voices, boots, and wheels; their smell is that of their age, woodsmoke from a fire that burned out centuries ago, a courtier's perfume, wet horse. Walking through one feels like walking through cold mist, and passing one feels like the brush of a shoulder.

## Habitat and Range

They exist only on the path that made them and cannot leave it. A busy old road holds thousands, layered one over another; a forgotten pilgrim route a few hundred. They fade unless a living observer feeds them, so the most walked stretches hold the brightest, and a road nobody travels slowly empties.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Path-Echoes are repetitive and predictable. They ignore the living unless provoked and treat them, if at all, as noise in their routine. They grow stronger with the traveller's own feelings: a frightened traveller calls up the frightened dead, a peaceful one the content. A battle that replays is the worst of it, a whole field of Echoes charging through the living.

## Abilities

An Echo has enough mass to push: a violent one can knock a traveller off their feet or injure them. Strong ones can attach to a traveller, follow them off the road, and haunt them on the Material Plane. Objects left on the path take on the imprint of the past and can become powerful artefacts.

## Uses and Dangers

Travellers see the past at first hand on a Ghost Step, and some find there the Echo of someone they lost and say goodbye. Pilgrims who follow Umbra walk such roads on purpose, so that the dead are not forgotten. The deeper danger is quiet: a visitor who watches too long begins to mimic the walkers, forgets they are alive, and in the end fades into the road as a new Echo for those who come later. The road's own keepers, remnant beings or constructs, warn travellers off a battle about to replay.

## Lore and Belief

Country people near a Ghost Step call the Echoes "the road's walkers" and set out water at the milestones for them, believing the dead are thirsty; the Echoes never drink. Some believe that following an Echo to its end will lead to its grave or its treasure, and a few such stories are true, since an Echo of a last journey ends where its walker died. Families who walk the road to find their own dead are told to remember their own name, and to say it aloud at every milestone.



# Pit-Wakers

When plague comes, the dead are put into the ground too fast for rites: many at once, in lime and haste, with nobody left to grieve each one. Remnants form most readily where death came that way. A Pit-Waker is what a plague pit holds: not one dead person but many, hardened together into a single cold, hungry presence that sleeps until the ground is broken.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Plague pits, mass graves, and the ground over them |
| **Range** | The cradle-web, wherever plague has filled a pit |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A Pit-Waker is seldom seen. Its ground is: a field where crops come up thin and grey in a rough oblong, a patch where frost lingers after it has gone elsewhere, earth that smells of lime and old rot when it is turned. When it wakes, those who dig there see faces in the turned soil, many of them, and hear a murmur under the ground like a crowd far off. At night a grey mist rises over the pit and lies there in the shape of the trench.

## Habitat and Range

They lie wherever a plague pit was dug, most of all those of the Swelling Plague, across the Human cradle-web: outside town walls, behind monasteries, in fields that were once common land. Many are forgotten, and are found only when someone digs.

## Behaviour and Temperament

It sleeps while the ground over it is left alone. Digging, ploughing deep, or building wakes it, and once awake it drains whoever works nearby, as if

the many dead in it took back from the living what the plague took from them. It does not follow anyone far. It goes back to sleep slowly, over months, if the ground is closed and left.

## Abilities

It chills, frightens, and drains, like other remnants, and being many it does so strongly: diggers sicken with weakness and dread, sleep badly, and waste, and some die. Those it drains often believe they have caught the plague, and some sicken as if they had. Rites, Grave Quiet, and Trace Magic can quiet it, but slowly, because each of the dead in it must be quieted.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing. Towns that grow over their old plague ground pay for it: a new wall, a new mill, a well dug in the wrong place. Wise parishes keep their pits marked and unploughed, and say the rites over them each year, naming as many of the dead as are still remembered.

## Lore and Belief

Humans believe a plague pit keeps the sickness in it, and that digging lets it out. The plague is not in the pit, but the Waker is, and its draining looks so like sickness that the belief holds. Many pray to Ennor the Grave-Watcher at the pit's edge, under their own names for him, to see the dead across at last.

Grave-robbers who dig plague pits for the rings and coins the dead were thrown in with are the Wakers' commonest prey, and the town songs say the robber who comes home grey and shaking from a pit is buried in it within the month.



# Possessing Ancestors

The Rotting Crown, a Cast-Out that cannot bear any ruler to yield, summons the dead to possess the living: not to haunt them, but to rule them. A **possessing ancestor** is a dead father, grandmother, or founder pressed back into a descendant's body, its will on top and the heir's beneath. The possessed act out their ancestors' desires, aware the whole time and unable to resist. What rides them is the ancestor's Echo and the Pattern the line inherited, bent by the Crown into a single will.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | The ruling houses and old families the Rotting Crown has touched |
| **Range** | Wherever the Rotting Crown has bound a line, on the Material Plane |
| **Danger** | Deadly to the heirs they possess, and ruinous to the households and lands those heirs rule |

## Appearance

The ancestor has no body of its own; it wears the heir's. At first only those who knew the dead can see it: a young woman who suddenly stands with her grandmother's stoop and taps two fingers on the table as the old woman did, a boy who speaks in his great-grandfather's turns of phrase and his accent of sixty years ago. As the possession settles, the heir ages towards the ancestor: the hair greys early, the skin loosens and spots, the hands knot. The eyes keep the heir's colour but look out with someone else's expression, and sometimes, under it, the heir's own terror shows for a moment.

Around the possessed the Crown's rot gathers. Their rooms smell of wet earth, old velvet, and mould; signet rings tarnish green; flowers set near them wilt by evening. The voice is the heir's, but in it many hear a dry rattle of ancestors behind the words.

## Habitat and Range

Possessing ancestors are found in the houses the Crown has entered: dynasties facing a broken succession, old families burdened by a forebear's debts or sins, the heirless and the reigning who asked it to keep the line alive. A single house may hold several, a whole succession bound one into another.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An ancestor wants what it wanted in life, and wants it more for having died without it: the old war finished, the old enemy humbled, the old house kept exactly as it was. It cannot let anything change. It rules through its heir with the confidence of someone who has already lived the life once, and it treats the heir's own wishes as a child's. The heir, awake inside, relives the old mistakes and pays their price however hard they fight.

## Abilities

The possessed have whatever skill and knowledge the ancestor had, and they speak with an authority the living heir never held; listeners feel the urge to obey. Their bodies pay for it: under the Crown's rot field an heir may age decades in years and die of old age young. A curse the Crown has driven down the line follows the same path, so that the grandson pays for the grandfather's sin.

## Uses and Dangers

The houses that asked for it get what they asked: continuity, a ruler who never changes. The cost is the heir, and then the house: communities ruled by the possessed cannot change course, children do not grow up, and when the Crown leaves, the whole line may slump to black sludge.

## Lore and Belief

Many people take a possessed heir for a dutiful one, "the very image of the old lord", and only the family knows otherwise. Some faiths call the condition an honour, the ancestors returning to guide their house. It is not; the ancestor is held in place against its own passing. The Crown's own legends give the cure: an heir who sets the inheritance down, refuses the ancestor by their own name, and lets the old one die is beyond its grip. Old houses repeat that letting go cannot be learned by proxy.

The songs are full of such heirs: the young lord who rode to war in his grandfather's armour and his grandfather's temper and burned a village his grandfather had once failed to take, and the sister who killed him at the gate to set them both free.



# Raised Corpses

Necromancy does not bring back the dead. It works with what death leaves: the body, its stored motion, its habits. A **raised corpse** is a dead body given enough temporary structure and direction to move under orders: the plague worker's bier-servant, the ossuary's domestic dead, a column of the fallen hauling the wounded behind a gate, a single severed hand turning pages. Nothing in it is alive and no one in it is awake. It is a tool made of a person, and that is why some peoples use it gladly and others forbid it.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Plague trenches, battlefields, ossuary monasteries, crypts, and mortuaries |
| **Range** | Wherever necromancy is practised; raised at the Blood River only at the risk of the river claiming them |
| **Danger** | Wary under a careful hand; dangerous when the command collapses or is set against the living |

## Appearance

A raised corpse looks like what it is: a dead body in the state the body is in. The newly dead are pale and slack-faced, the lips grey, the eyes half shut or fixed; old bones are yellow and bound with cord or wire. All move with the same fault. The walk is level and slow, the feet set flat, the arms swinging a beat late; the head does not turn to look but faces where the order points. Hands grip coarsely and let go all at once. A corpse makes no voice, only the creak of stiff joints, the scuff of feet, and the wet sounds a body makes when it bends.

The smell is that of its preparation: embalming oil, ash, and grave-soil on an ossuary servant, plain decay on a battlefield corpse raised in haste. A worker raised under a funerary hush smells of cold cloth and old incense.

## Habitat and Range

They are made, used, and laid down where necromancers work: in plague trenches, on battlefields at the end of a fight, in mortuaries and city colleges, and in ossuary monasteries whose lower halls are kept by hereditary corpse-servants. At the Blood River necromancy is possible but risky, since the river may claim the reanimated.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A raised corpse has no temperament. It does what it was told, as simply as it was told, until the order or the binding runs out: carry this, walk there, tend these lamps. It has no initiative, does no fine work, and cannot speak. The newly dead obey better than old skeletons. A corpse given too many tasks drifts: it begins to imitate the life it no longer has, opening a door it has no reason to open or sitting at a table, and those who see it rarely forget it.

## Abilities

Raised corpses differ by the working. A Wakeful Bier walks one corpse under simple orders for a short while or a day’s labour. A Last March moves dozens at once, briefly, and collapses if the bodies are too damaged. A House of Still Servants keeps a fixed set of domestic dead at narrow work for years with daily upkeep, and a Borrowed Hand wakes a single limb. Sanctified light and invocation break the bindings.

## Uses and Dangers

Raised corpses carry the contaminated dead without exposing the living, haul the wounded off a field, and keep crypt halls clean. The dangers are collapse and misuse: a command that fails drops its corpses where they stand, careless work agitates the remnants of the dead (see Hostile Remnants), and the same craft that carries plague dead can be turned on the living. A related deception in Blood Magic forces warmth and pulse into a dead ruler for one last appearance; it is no resurrection either.

## Lore and Belief

Where necromancy is a sacred funerary art, a corpse-servant consented to by its own order is a gift the dead give the living, and the ossuary monks honour theirs by name. Where it is a labour system it is simply work; where it is a crime, any walking dead body is desecration, and some societies forbid corpse animation outright. Many believe a raised corpse holds its owner’s ghost, trapped and suffering. It does not, but careless raising does stir the dead’s lingering traces, which is why the decent necromancer quiets the grave afterwards.

Battle tales tell of a siege where a necromancer raised the defenders' own dead against their walls, and of the garrison that sang the names of the dead from the parapets until the corpses stopped climbing.



# Rattlecut Dead

The worst stretch of the main road through the Headwater Marches is the Rattlecut, a gorge so narrow that in a wet spring the river takes the road and gives back only part of it. It takes travellers the same way, and gives back only part of them: a body without its name, a cart without its carter, or nothing. The Rattlecut Dead are the remnants of those it took.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | The Rattlecut gorge, its road, and its river |
| **Range** | The Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

They are seen on the road in the gorge, in spray and dusk: a carter walking beside a team that is not there, a woman on the edge of the road looking down at the water, a line of travellers walking into the river. Many are not whole. One is only a voice calling from below the road; another is seen from the waist up, as if the rest of it were still under the water. The gorge is loud, and they are heard under the roar as a rattle of stones that moves against the current. The air there smells of wet rock and river mud.

## Habitat and Range

They keep to the Rattlecut itself, the gorge road and the stretches of river below it where bodies come ashore. They are seen most in the wet spring, when the river rises and takes the road again.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They look for what they lost. A Rattlecut remnant searches the road and the shallows for its missing part: its body, its name, its goods, its companions. It does not mean harm. It draws the living to the

edge, as if asking them to look too, and a traveller who stops to look down from the Rattlecut's edge in the spring may follow.

## Abilities

They chill and frighten, as remnants do, and the strongest move stones on the road. They seem to know when the river is about to rise: travellers who see many of them on the road that day say the gorge took the road within hours.

## Uses and Dangers

They are a warning, and road people read them as one: a gorge full of the dead is a gorge about to flood. The Troll house that holds the Rattlecut by oath and toll keeps a count of the dead with its count of collapses, and its keepers will close the passage when the dead walk. The danger is to those who stop and look, and to those who will not wait.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater people say the river keeps what it takes and gives back what it does not want, and that a body brought ashore whole is a body the river has finished with. When a part of someone is found below the gorge, it is buried with the rites in full, and the name of the whole person said over it; carters say the dead of the Rattlecut grow quieter each time this is done. Some believe the gorge owes a death each spring, and that a year without one is a bad sign.

Carters who would not wait have driven into the gorge with the dead walking and the water rising, and the carters toast the one who got his team through and the dozen who did not.



# The River-Given

Every spring the whole basin's water arrives at once in the Serath, and the rise drowns landings, closes crossings, and takes people: bargemen, ferry folk, children at the bank, whole households where an embankment sent the flood somewhere new. Many are never found and never given their rites. When the water falls, some come back. The River-Given are the drowned who walk out of the river onto a landing, and the corridor towns of the Lower Serath meet them with a rite.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Ferry landings, quays, sandbars, and backwaters as the spring rise falls |
| **Range** | The Lower Serath and the Confluence Basins |
| **Known to** | Humans, Reedfolk |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A River-Given comes out of the water at dawn or dusk, slowly, as the river drops: a sodden figure walking up the ferry ramp or standing on a new sandbar, hair and clothes heavy with silt, skin grey-white and wrinkled from the water. It is solid, and that is what frightens people most: it leaves wet footprints and silt on the quay. Its eyes are clouded. It walks towards the town and the house it came from, and it does not speak, though water runs from its mouth when it tries. It smells of river mud and cold.

## Habitat and Range

They come out of the Serath along the corridor and up the joining rivers of the Confluence Basins, at ferry landings, quays, and the sandbars a falling river leaves. They come only in the weeks after the rise, and most in a year when the rise was hard.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A River-Given wants to go home and does not know it is dead. It walks to its old door and tries to go in. Turned away, it grows angry; brought in, it sits by the hearth and the hearth goes cold, and those in the house sicken. A River-Given left to wander a town draws the warmth out of whatever it passes, and drags at those who try to stop it, with the strength of the river behind it.

## Abilities

It is a remnant strong enough to move its own drowned body, as some unrited dead do. It is hard to stop, being heavy and cold and caring nothing for wounds, and its grip is the river's grip. It cannot go far from the water for long; by the second night, if nothing is done, it walks back into the river.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing, and it is a danger mostly to its own kin, who open the door to it. The towns' answer is the rite: when a River-Given comes ashore, the landing is cleared, its name is asked at the shrine, and if anyone knows it, its death is sworn there and written down. Then it is given the rites it never had, there on the landing, and laid in the ground. Most lie still after that. One no one can name is given the rites under the name "River-Given", and is buried facing the water.

## Lore and Belief

Corridor folk say the river gives back what it does not want, and that the River-Given are the drowned the river refused. Reedfolk say the river gives back those it was made to take, the drowned of altered water, and that every River-Given is a charge against whoever moved the channel. Both peoples keep the rite, and each thinks the other does it wrongly.

River songs tell of the murderer who drowned his rival in a flood year and saw him walk up the ferry ramp the next spring, and of the whole town that watched the River-Given walk past every door to his.



# Salt-Kept

An inland sea once lay in the Glassbelt, and the people who harvested its salt grew so devoted to preservation that their worship helped kill it. Their god, Mereth the Salt-Witch, has faded, and the people are forgotten. Some of their dead are not gone. The Salt-Kept lie in the pans, kept by the salt, and at night they walk.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Salt pans, dry seabed, and the stepped shorelines of the old sea |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A Salt-Kept is a dried body crusted white: skin drawn tight and brown under a rime of salt crystals, lips shrunk back from the teeth, eyes gone to white pebbles. Its clothes, where any remain, are stiff and cracked and of no fashion anyone knows. It walks slowly and stiffly, and each step is a crunch, like a foot on frozen snow. Salt sheds from it as it goes, leaving a pale trail on the darker ground. The air near it is so dry that it hurts to breathe.

## Habitat and Range

They lie out on the pans and along the stepped shorelines of the vanished salt-people, which still stand far above any water. By day they are buried in the crust or lie like driftwood on the old beaches; by night they rise. No one has counted them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They walk the old shorelines, as if waiting for the sea, and seem to look for water. A Salt-Kept that finds a camp comes for its water skins and its peo-

ple: it seizes the living and holds them, and what it holds dries. They are not fast, but they do not stop, and they do not tire.

## Abilities

Their touch draws the moisture out of a body, as the air on the old sea floor drains it from the lungs. A traveller held by one for long is left as dry as the Kept. They are hard to harm: blows crack the salt and little else. Water poured over one softens and slows it, which is a cruel trade in the Glassbelt. Like other remnants, they grow stronger the longer they are left.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing that anyone will take; even salvagers leave their goods where they lie. They are a danger to anyone who camps on the pans at night. Those who must cross go by day, keep to known routes, camp off the old seabed, and bury their water.

## Lore and Belief

Desert folk tell of a ruler of the salt-people who asked Mereth to keep him for ever and was kept, unable to move, while his people dwindled around him. Many say the Salt-Kept are his people, kept as he asked for himself, and that he lies somewhere out on the pans still, watching them walk. Others say they are his courtiers, looking for him, and some crossers think the crunch of Mereth's footsteps heard on the pans is only theirs. No one knows whether any of it is so.

Treasure-seekers go out on the pans for the salt-people's grave-goods, and the crossers tell of a band that took a crown from a Salt-Kept and was followed across the pans for three days by a line of the dead, walking in its tracks.



# Seal-Knockers

The Stonewake custodians seal what must be sealed, on the word of whoever holds the reach: a flooding gallery, a contagion, an incursion, a failing reach that would take the network with it. Sometimes people are behind the seal when it closes. Afterwards, sometimes, there is knocking. The Seal-Knockers are what the holds call the knockers behind the seals, and whether the knock is the dead or the living is the oldest question the custodians of the Stonewake Deeps have to answer.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Behind sealed doors, closed galleries, and grave closures |
| **Range** | The Stonewake Deeps and the holds of the Ironspine |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Kobolds |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

Mostly they are heard, not seen: a slow knock on the far side of a sealed door, three blows and a pause, over and over, sometimes for years. Some knock with a hammer's rhythm, as if signalling in a hold's old code. A few custodians who have pressed an ear to the seal tell of a voice, or of breathing, and some of a cold that comes through the stone. Where a seal has been reopened, those who went in found the dead where they fell, and sometimes the marks of their knocking on the door. Kobold vent crews say they have seen pale hands at a grille behind a seal, there and gone.

## Habitat and Range

They are heard behind seals across the Deeps and the older holds of the Ironspine: emergency closures, grave closures, and the oldest seals of all, whose signatories are long dead. They are heard most behind seals later judged unjust.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They knock. They do not break the seal, or try; they ask to be let out, or to be heard. Those who answer the knock with a knock of their own say it falls silent for a time, and then begins again.

## Abilities

Like other remnants they bring cold and dread, and a hold that lives with a Seal-Knocker sleeps badly. A seal opened on one lets out its full weight: the remnant comes through with the bad air and the flood, and clings to whoever opened it.

## Uses and Dangers

They are dangerous less for what they do than for what they ask. A seal opened because of a knock may let out the flood, the contagion, or the incursion it was made to hold, and a cascade that takes holds that did nothing wrong. A seal left shut on the living is the thing seal practice is haunted by. Custodians record every knock in the archives, and each time the elders of a reach meet over a knock, they begin with the Measured Seal's question again: must this close?

## Lore and Belief

Under the Held Covenant, the dead are sealed with care, and a knock is taken as a sign that the dead behind it were not honoured as having held. Some custodians say the rite of burial can be spoken through the stone to quiet them. Seal practice holds that every knock is the dead, because otherwise the seal was murder; gate practice answers that this is exactly why seal practice wants it so. The Kobold crews of underhouses such as Knockrun knock back on their rounds, and say the dead like to be answered.



# Self-Raised

Most remnants can only chill a room or wake twitching in the dead they cling to. A few grow strong enough to do more, and get up. The Self-Raised are corpses walked by their own remnant, with no necromancer and no command: the dead moved by the feeling they died with. Every people that buries its dead knows them, and most of its funeral customs are meant to prevent them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Graves, mortuaries, charnel houses, and battlefields |
| **Range** | Widespread, wherever peoples bury their dead |
| **Known to** | All peoples |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A Self-Raised is the dead person as they lie: in a shroud or grave clothes, or in whatever they fell in, at whatever stage of decay. It moves badly, in jerks and lurches, since nothing but feeling drives it, and it often keeps the posture of its death, a hand at a wound, a head bowed. Its face is slack except for one fixed expression, rage or grief or fear. It makes a dry, wordless sound, sometimes one word over and over. It smells of the grave, and the air around it is cold.

## Habitat and Range

They rise wherever death was left unfinished: hasty battlefield burials, the graves of the unclaimed, mortuaries where a body waits too long, a household where no one grieved, and graveyards near careless necromancy, since agitated remnants are among its known costs. They are found among all peoples, rarely in any one place.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Self-Raised does what its feeling drives it to. One that died in rage attacks the living; one that died in grief walks home and sits by its old hearth; one that died in fear flees and hides. It does not think, and it cannot be ordered, bargained with, or reasoned with. It stays near where it rose.

## Abilities

It is as strong as the dead body allows and does not feel pain or wounds; it stops when the body is broken past moving, or when the remnant is quieted. Its touch carries the remnant's cold and can cling to the living. Rites and magic end it: Grave Quiet, Trace Magic, or Sanctified Magic driving the restless back, and then burning or a proper burial.

## Uses and Dangers

They are a danger to graveyards, sickrooms, and the households of the dead. Mortuary staff use Trace Magic to tell which body may harden overnight and isolate it; watchers sit with the dead; and where rites cannot be had, people burn their dead rather than risk them. Unlike raised corpses, a Self-Raised cannot be turned to work.

## Lore and Belief

Every people believes the risen dead are souls refused their rest, and that is near enough to true: a Self-Raised is what an unfinished death becomes when it is strong. Many pray to Ennor the Grave-Watcher, under their own names for him, to guide the dead past the threshold before they can rise. Some blame every Self-Raised on a necromancer, and hunt one down when there is none.

After a great battle the dead that were left unburied rise first, and the songs of the old wars remember the field where the fallen of both sides rose together and marched on the town that had refused them burial.



# Surface-Walkers

The water of a Tidal Mirror lies flat as glass and shows not the present but another time. On it walk the **Surface-Walkers**, treating the surface as solid ground. Many are the Echoes of people who drowned in that water in the past, and what they do is call the living out to join them. Whoever steps onto the water after them falls through it into the reflected time and is lost to the present.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Resonant Zone |
| **Range** | The Tidal Mirror, on still lakes, deep pools beneath waterfalls, and coastal lagoons where one has formed |
| **Danger** | Deadly to anyone who follows them onto the water |

## Appearance

From the shore a Surface-Walker looks like a person standing on the water a stone's throw out, small against the dark pool, with no reflection beneath it. Closer, it is plainly of another age: a fisherman in an old style of oilskin, a girl in a dress nobody has worn in a lifetime, a soldier with a helm of a forgotten pattern. Its skin is the colour of wet slate and its clothes cling and drip, though the drops vanish before they reach the surface. Where its feet touch the water, faint rings spread and are gone, the only ripples the Mirror ever shows.

It walks slowly and lightly, as if on ice, and turns towards anyone on the bank. It beckons, or holds out a hand, or simply waits. Some speak; their voices reach the shore a breath late, as all sound does at the Mirror, and they smell of cold lake water and weed.

## Habitat and Range

They are found only on the Mirror that holds them, and never far from its centre. A pool may hold one, the Echo of a single drowning, or many, if it has drowned many. They seem to belong to the time the water reflects, and a pool that shows the distant past shows walkers dressed for it.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Surface-Walkers lure, and they are patient about it. Each seems to know what the watcher wants: a lost child sees a child, a widow sees a figure with her husband's walk, a scholar sees someone holding out a book. They do not chase or grasp; they invite, and when invitation fails they wait for the next visitor. Whether there is malice in it or only the drowned's longing for company, no one has learned.

## Abilities

A Surface-Walker stands on the Mirror's surface as on stone, and what it offers is real in its way: it is a window to another time, and the water behind it is a door. A traveller who steps out goes through and stays in the reflected time until they surface, if they ever do. Such travellers often become the Mirror's Drifters, visible in the water and unreachable, ageing at the rate of the time they fell into.

## Uses and Dangers

The Surface-Walkers give the living nothing; they take. Those who come to the Mirror to recover a lost heirloom or see a lost face are their likeliest victims. The water's Echo-Divers warn every visitor not to look too long, and not to follow anything that walks where nothing should.

## Lore and Belief

Lakeside folk call them "lake-brides" or "the dry-footed" and tell that they are the drowned seeking someone to take their place, so that they can rest; others hold that they are the Mirror's own servants. Neither is shown to be true. What is so is that many of them are what the drowned left behind, Echoes of a last moment on the water, and that the water keeps the memories of everyone who has ever looked into it. Some believe a walker will answer one true question before it lures; others say any answer it gives is bait.

Lakeside songs tell of the lover who walked out across the water after a lake-bride and was found floating in the morning with a smile on his face, and of the brother who rowed out to cut him free and was never found.



# The Taken

The **Taken** are the Sepulchre-Kin whom their own Record-engine preserved to death. When the Last Census of the Unburial War (c. 110,000-c. 80,000 BR) taught the damaged engine to treat the living as endangered dead, it consumed names, Echoes, the living who remembered, and whole houses into its storage. What it holds of them are damaged Echo-complexes: neither living people, nor Echoes settled into Record, nor dead finished and released. They are the closest thing to undead the world has, and the last worshippers of the Tomb-Builder, held exactly as he promised.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Inside the Sepulchre-Kin Record-engine |
| **Range** | The engine beneath the mountains at the Hushvale |
| **Danger** | Unknown: no one living has met them |

## Appearance

No one living has seen the Taken. An Echo-complex has no body; the engine took persons, not flesh. If one ever showed itself in the name-vaults, it would most likely show as the engine shows anything it holds: a name cut in a vault wall that seems to stand a little out from the stone, a face in the polish of a preservation core, a voice carried down a bell conduit that speaks a burial placement and stops. Because the complexes are damaged, such traces would be broken, two names run together, a face with another's eyes, a vow begun in one voice and finished in another.

## Habitat and Range

The Taken exist only inside the engine: its name-vaults, burial chambers, bell conduits, descent corridors, and preservation cores, beneath the mountains at the foot of which the Hushvale now lies. How many there are is unknown; the engine took whole houses.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Nothing is known of how they act, if they act. The engine was built to hold the dead only until they settled into deeper Record; the Tomb-Builder's creed made the holding the end, and the Taken have been held, not settled, ever since. Whether anything in them is aware of it is one of the things nobody can answer.

## Abilities

The Taken have no known powers. What they keep is their people: every Sepulchre-Kin name, vow, and burial placement the engine took, including, it is said, the Tomb-Builder's true name, held where no one can read it. They are dead that Ennor the Grave-Watcher cannot guide while the engine keeps them.

## Uses and Dangers

The Taken are a danger only through the engine. Since a landslide woke it, c. 1,200 CR (see The Wake-Seal), it has been preserving every name and Echo in the vale, living or dead, as it once preserved its makers. Whether those it takes now join the Taken, and in what state, no one outside the fog knows.

## Lore and Belief

No people remembers the Sepulchre-Kin, since they fell in the Unrecorded Age, and so no one tells of the Taken under that name. The people of the Held, who live above the engine, have forgotten it along with the landslide and the rite that hid them; they keep quiet-rites and taboos without knowing whom they are kept for, or why. Their Hollow Descendants carry little memory of where they came from.



# The Unfinished

The Whispering Trace is where the Echoes of the dead linger before they soften or pass into Record. Most move on. The **Unfinished** do not: each is a postmortem Echo that formed around something its person left undone, a debt unpaid, a word unsaid, a wrong unrighted, and it repeats that business in a loop for as long as the business stands. The Trace's Echo-Walkers, who help lost Echoes towards release, spend much of their care on them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Harmonic |
| **Range** | The Whispering Trace, among its ruins, graveyards, and misty woods |
| **Danger** | Wary: harmless to look at, but one may attach itself to a traveller and drain them |

## Appearance

An Unfinished is a figure of sepia and grey, faint as a face seen through old glass, about the size its person was and clearer in the hands than anywhere else, since the hands do the business. It does one thing over and over. A man counts coins onto a table that is only half there, sweeps them up, and counts again. A woman writes a letter, folds it, unfolds it, and starts the first line once more. A young soldier walks to a door, raises his fist to knock, and walks back.

Each has a sound to it, the coin's click, the scratch of the pen, the knock that never lands, heard through the plane's low murmur of whispers. The air near one is cold and smells of dust and dried flowers, with something of the business under it: ink, wet wool, the tallow of a single candle.

## Habitat and Range

They are found only in the Trace, usually among the ruins and graveyards that echo the places where they died: a hall that is only an outline, a

road that ends in mist, a grave with no stone. They are many; nobody knows how many, and they come and go as their business is settled or forgotten.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Unfinished is absorbed in its loop and takes no notice of travellers until a traveller touches its business. Then it turns: it holds out the letter, points at the door, pushes the coins across the table. It cannot explain; it can only show. Some seem patient; others grow agitated when they are not understood and repeat the loop faster.

## Abilities

An Unfinished carries the memory of its business, and through the Trace a traveller who attends to it can recover what it knew: where the debt stood, what the unsaid word was, who was wronged. If the business is resolved, by the traveller, by kin on the Material Plane, or by any hand at all, the Echo settles and is free to pass on. Left alone, an unresolved one may attach itself to a traveller and drain their energy and sanity, and the traveller may be caught in its loop.

## Uses and Dangers

They are the plane's most direct source of what the dead knew, and its readiest chance at closure: settle one and an Echo goes free. The cost is the loop. Those who take on too many of them, or stay too long trying, risk the Fade, losing their own memories until they become an Echo themselves.

## Lore and Belief

Every people has its stories of the dead who cannot rest until a thing is done, and most believe the restless dead are punished or angry. The Unfinished are neither; they are held by the business itself, as the Trace's Echo-Walkers know. Mourners settle a dead person's debts and say what was unsaid at the grave partly for this reason, and the custom does more than they know: remembrance and settlement on the Material Plane ease the Echo in the Trace. Unsettled dead whose traces harden on the Material Plane instead are what people call haunts (see Hostile Remnants).



# The Unreturned

The Thaluren live for the return, and a run that does not come home is not a run: their custom has nothing to say about it. The Unreturned are what is left of such runs on the current roads they did not finish. Outer-Route runs meet them most, on the farthest roads, as a presence in the water, keeping pace.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | The outer current roads and the Far Set |
| **Range** | The Tidebound Reaches and the edge of the Unrun Sea |
| **Known to** | Thaluren |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

They are felt before anything else: a cold patch in the current that moves with the run, a pressure on the flank as if another body swam alongside, the sense of being one more than the run's count. Sometimes they are seen, at the edge of sight in the green dark: a line of pale shapes swimming the same road a little apart, gone when looked at. They make no sound in the water, but some runs report a call that is almost the run-call of a line no longer living. The water near them tastes faintly of the home river they never reached.

## Habitat and Range

They are met on the farthest current roads that Outer-Route runs ride home, above all on the Far Set, the outermost road the Thaluren know, at the edge of the Unrun Sea, and on the outer routes of the Tidebound Reaches.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They swim the road home and never arrive. They keep pace with a living run, as if they were part of it, and some runs say they fall back at the point

where they were lost. They do not attack. A run that turns aside towards them, or follows them off the road, may lose its way.

## Abilities

Like other remnants they bring cold and a heavy dread, and those who swim among them for long grow tired and slow. Their pull is the danger: a young swimmer may follow a pale shape off the current road into water that leads nowhere the Thaluren can follow.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, but runs read them as a sign of where the road is hardest. The danger is to stragglers and the young; Outer-Route lines keep their runs close when they feel the cold patch, and count aloud.

## Lore and Belief

The Way of Return asks only whether a return is rightful, and gives no rite for those who never returned. The Outer-Route lines, who meet the Unreturned most, are said to keep one of their own: naming a lost run's members when the living run comes in, as if they had come home with it. Other lines dispute whether that is rightful. Some Thaluren believe the Unreturned are what the devourers leave; others, that they are runs that took a road no one should take.

Outer-Route songs remember the run-leader who went back out past the Far Set to bring a lost run home and returned at the head of a run of the Unreturned, singing, before vanishing into the open sea with them.



# Unsworn Dead

In the Confluence Basins and along the Lower Serath, anything that must bind is sworn aloud before the gods and the neighbours and written down, and a death binds as much as a marriage: it settles an inheritance, frees a widow, closes a debt. A death never sworn is unfinished, and the Unsworn Dead are what such deaths leave behind, lingering until someone swears them.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Oath-houses of the Accord, record-houses, and the homes of the unrecorded dead |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

They are seen as the person they were, faint and grey, where their life was bound: a figure at the back of the oath-house while vows are taken, a shape bent over a ledger in a record-house at night, an old man at the door of the house that passed to his heirs while no one spoke his death. They try to speak, and are not heard; scribes say they hear a pen scratching where no one writes. The air near them smells of ink and tallow, and is cold.

## Habitat and Range

They linger in the oath-houses and record-houses of the march-towns and river towns, and in the homes and fields their deaths should have settled. They are thickest after hard years, a failed rise, a fever, a feud, a raiding season, when the dead came faster than anyone could swear them.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They want their death sworn. An Unsworn Dead haunts every swearing that touches it: a sale of its land, a marriage of its widow, an heir's claim. Ink

spills, seals crack, the speaker's voice fails. It is not cruel; it cannot let the matter close while its own part in it is unsaid.

## Abilities

Like other remnants they bring cold, move small things, and sour a room. The strongest can stop a swearing outright, and an oath-house with one in it may find every vow taken there that season quarrelled over.

## Uses and Dangers

They are a danger to heirs, buyers, and anyone who profited by a death left unsaid. The towns lay them by swearing the death: whoever knows how it happened tells it aloud at the oath-house, and it is written down. Most go quiet once the entry is made. A death whose truth would ruin a powerful house is harder; such houses would rather keep the haunting than the truth, and few dare cross them. Basin songs are full of such hauntings: the murdered heir who stood at every feast his brother gave until the brother confessed, the drowned ferryman whose widow could not remarry until a stranger swore he had seen him go under.

## Lore and Belief

Basin folk say a death not sworn before the gods of the Sworn Accord is a death the gods have not accepted. Scribes say only that the record is incomplete, and that the dead know it. Reedfolk, who say the basin towns took their swearing custom from them, claim the Unsworn Dead were always laid by naming them on the water, long before the towns wrote anything down.



# The Warmed

Crimson Resurrection Fraud forces warmth, pulse, and movement into a dead or dying body. It is not resurrection, and it is used for deception: a court hides its ruler's death for one last command performance, an heir is named, a treaty sealed. The Warmed are the bodies so kept, and above all those kept too long.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Courts, great houses, and deathbeds |
| **Range** | The cradle-web, wherever power passes by inheritance |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Wary |

## Appearance

At first a Warmed lord looks like a sick one: pale, propped on cushions, warm to the touch, the pulse steady at the wrist, the eyes open. It nods and lifts a hand when the blood-worker behind the curtain bids it, and does not speak, or speaks only a few words in a voice like breath through a reed. The longer it is kept, the worse it looks. The skin flushes too red, then mottles; the warmth becomes a fever heat that smells of hot iron and spoiled meat; the eyes dry and stop following anything. Perfumes, braziers, and closed shutters fill the rooms of a court that is hiding one.

## Habitat and Range

They are found where power passes by inheritance and a death at the wrong moment would cost a house its claim: the great houses and lords' courts of the Human cradle-web, a merchant family's sickroom, a war camp whose commander must be seen to live until the battle is done.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Warmed body has no will of its own; it moves as the blood-worker forces it. But the fraud wakes the dead's remnant, and when the working runs long, the remnant begins to stir in the warmed body. Then the Warmed does things it was not bidden to: it turns its head towards a hated heir, grips a hand and will not let go, speaks a word no one gave it. Courts that kept a lord warm for a season have found him walking the corridors at night.

## Abilities

Kept, it is a puppet with a pulse. Gone wrong, it becomes a hostile remnant in a body still warm, with the dead's grudges and none of their restraint, and with the blood-worker's vitality in its veins. It burns those who touch it with a dry fever heat. It can be ended only by letting the body die properly: the working broken, the rites said, and the death declared.

## Uses and Dangers

To a court, they buy time. They cost the blood-worker dearly, since stronger workings draw on vitality and lineage, and they cost the house its honesty. Discovered, a Warmed lord ruins a claim: every act sealed in his presence is disputed. The danger to the household grows with every day the fraud lasts.

## Lore and Belief

Human courts tell of a king who was warmed so long that he outlived the blood-worker who kept him, and went on ruling a hall of terrified courtiers until the hall was burned. People say a ruler too long unseen must be warm, not living, and princes are known to demand to see a dying father's tears, since the Warmed cannot weep. Whether that is so is argued.

Rival houses pay spies and poisoners to learn whether a lord behind the curtains is living or warmed, and more than one succession war began with a servant bribed to touch the old man's hand.



# Word-Generals

When a battle is fought with enough conviction, the Grammar of War wakes around it and orders become physical law. With it come the **Word-Generals**: spectral commanders of past battles, drawn by the resonance of the fighting, who have no bodies but are the residual force of commands given long ago. Each repeats its final orders without end. They are Echoes of authority, and on a field where a shouted word can move the ground, their words still carry weight.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Risen dead |
| **Habitat** | Resonant Zone |
| **Range** | The Grammar of War, on battlefields and siege lines while the zone is awake |
| **Danger** | Deadly to soldiers within the zone who take their orders |

## Appearance

A Word-General towers a head above the living soldiers around it, a figure of flickering grey-gold light shot through with the stark white of shouted command. It wears armour from a dozen eras at once, a bronze cuirass over mail, a crested helm over a mail coif, the plates shifting as the light flickers, and no two generals wear the same mixture. Its face is clearest at the mouth, which never stops moving.

Most of the time the commands are silent, and only the shapes of words flash in the air before it like frozen lightning, a luminous afterimage of "hold" or "advance" hanging for a heartbeat. When the zone is strongest its voice breaks through: a roar that is felt in the chest like a blow of wind. It does not walk so much as appear at the head of a line, then at another. The air around it smells of iron, sweat, and the sharp, burnt scent the zone gives to spoken power.

## Habitat and Range

Word-Generals exist only while the Grammar is awake, and vanish when the fighting stops. They gather where battles have been fought before, so an old border field or a much-contested siege line may raise several at once, from different wars.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Each is commanding and imperious, and cannot help issuing orders; it treats every living person within reach as a soldier to be directed. Some are coherent, and repeat a clear last order that once won or lost a battle. Others are fragmented, shouting contradictory commands that make the zone stutter. None seems to know that its war is over, or which side the living around it are on.

## Abilities

A Word-General's orders work as any order in the Grammar works, by the weight of rank and conviction behind them, and a dead general's last order carries the rank it had. A soldier caught by one may be overwritten and become one of the Commanded, holding a line that no longer exists until thirst kills him. Two generals shouting opposite orders can make the ground crack and the air shimmer, and tear soldiers between them. They also carry the knowledge of ancient battles and forgotten strategies.

## Uses and Dangers

A commander who knows the field may learn from them; the knowledge of lost wars speaks in their repeated orders. Few dare to listen long. The safest counsel among soldiers who have fought in the Grammar is to stay away from the Word-Generals, give no orders one cannot live with, and obey none blindly.

## Lore and Belief

Soldiers believe the Word-Generals are the great captains of the past, returned to fight beside the worthy, and some armies seek out old battlefields in the hope of one taking their side. A Word-General takes no side; it is a remnant of command, not a captain, and it orders friend and foe alike. Veterans who have heard one tell that its last order was usually the order that lost its battle, and that the dead general goes on giving it.

Sellsword captains who have fought in the Grammar tell of a dead general's shout that held a pike line against cavalry for a whole afternoon, and of the night afterwards, when the line still could not move.

PART VIII

# Other Beings

*Here stand the beings that belong on no other shelf. They are not beasts, though they may hunt like beasts; they are not of the planes or the zones, not hosts of the Dark Entities, not made, and not dead. The changed living of the Hushvale are people of the Held, alive in every hour of the night they hunt, and that is what makes them hard to meet and harder to judge.*





# The Changed Living

Among the things that move in the fog of the Hushvale are the **changed living**: living people, not undead, whose bodies can be overwritten by predatory survival when the fog is deep, when fear runs high, or on a night without a moon. They were shaped by the same catastrophe as the fog itself, the waking of the Sepulchre-Kin engine and the rite that hid the vale from it (see The Wake-Seal, c. 1,200 CR). Out of the fog they are men and women of the Held; in it they hunt.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Other |
| **Habitat** | The Hushvale fog |
| **Range** | The Hushvale, chiefly in deep fog and away from the ward-villages |
| **Known to** | The people of the Held |
| **Danger** | Deadly to anyone met in deep fog or after dark, their own kin included |

## Appearance

A changed one looks first like anyone from a ward-village, in homespun and fog-damp wool, and that is what makes it terrible. When the overwriting takes it, the body stays the same body but is used differently. It drops low and moves in short, quick rushes, stops dead to listen, and turns its head before its shoulders. The face goes slack, the mouth a little open, and the eyes stop answering a look: they track movement and warmth and nothing else. Hands curl to grip. It breathes fast and shallow, almost silently, and the only sound it makes is a wet catch in the throat when it is close.

It smells of the fog, cold stone and damp, with the sour sweat of the frightened under it. Those who have seen one come back to itself say the change leaves no mark but scratched hands and torn nails.

## Habitat and Range

They are found only in the Hushvale, and most often where the fog lies deepest: on old roads between ward-villages, in the burial caves, and on the fields at the edge of night. Nobody outside knows how many there are, and the vale's interior is little known (see its ward-villages).

## Behaviour and Temperament

Overwritten, a changed one has one aim, to survive, and it pursues it as a predator does: it stalks the lone, the slow, and the lost, and avoids light, noise, and numbers. It does not speak and does not seem to know names. It is not cruel; it is hungry and afraid, and the two have become one motion. When the fog thins or day returns, the person may surface again, sometimes with no memory of the night.

## Abilities

The overwriting lends the body what survival asks of it: sharp hearing, patience, a sure footing in fog where others stumble, and a strength the person never used awake. Fear around it feeds the change, so a frightened household is more likely to turn than a calm one. It feels pain late and fights on wounds that would stop a waking person.

## Uses and Dangers

The changed give the Held nothing but caution. They are one reason travel by night in the vale is close to certain death, and they make every ward-village wary of its own: a neighbour who goes out into deep fog may not be the one who comes back. The villages bar their doors at dusk, keep no one out alone in deep fog, and hush a frightened child quickly.

## Lore and Belief

The changed are living people, and nothing dead wears them; but in the vale itself that is argued. Some of the Held say a changed one is a person still, sick with the fog, to be watched, bound, and nursed till morning; others say the person died in the fog and something wears the body home, and that it should be burned. A third view holds that the fog takes back those the old rite never fully hid. Outsiders know nothing of them at all; to the few who cross the desert's cradle end, the Hushvale is only a danger-mark.

The vale's ward-villages tell of a mother who went out into the deep fog after her changed son and brought him home bound across her shoulders, and of the night he woke.

PART IX

# Touched Beasts

*Here stand the beasts of the world that something has changed: a wolf with frost in its coat at the edge of the Cinder Fields, a deer that stopped ageing below a spring where time stands still, a fox that slips half out of sight at a thin place, a hound bred bigger than any hound should be. They were born in Caeldon and they live in it; they are not natives of a plane or a zone and nobody's host. Some of them breed true, and the herders and hunters who live beside them have long since stopped finding them strange.*





# Brace-Gnawers

**Brace-Gnawers** are heavy burrowers of the deep rock under the Ironspine and in the Stonewake Deeps, beasts whose hide has grown as hard as the stone they push through. They live in the cracks and soft seams of the mountain and in old workings, and they have a taste for the timber the holds brace their tunnels with. Every vent crew and bracing warden knows the signs of them, because a gnawed prop looks sound until it gives.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | Mountain roots, old workings, and the bracing of mines and vent runs |
| **Range** | The Ironspine; the Stonewake Deeps |
| **Known to** | Dwarves, Kobolds |
| **Danger** | Wary, to bracing and those who trust it |

## Appearance

A grown brace-gnawer is the size of a large hog and built like one, low and barrel-bodied, with a short, blunt snout, small dark eyes nearly closed, and short, thick legs ending in broad digging claws. Its hide is the thing: grey and lumpy, with plates and ridges over the shoulders and back that are hard and cold as rock, flaking at the edges like weathered stone, and often crusted with grit. The belly is softer and pinkish grey. It moves slowly and heavily, grinding as it squeezes through a seam, and it grunts and clicks its teeth as it works. It smells of wet stone and old wood.

## Habitat and Range

They live in the deep rock around the holds, in soft seams, fault cracks, and abandoned workings, and they come into used tunnels wherever timber is. They are scattered and solitary, a few to a hold's workings.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A brace-gnawer eats roots that reach down into the rock, the soft rot of buried wood, fungus, and above all old timber, which it gnaws from the inside of a prop outward, leaving the bark-side shell standing. It widens cracks with its claws and its hard shoulders, and its runs come out through the backs of side-tunnels and vent runs. It is shy, avoids light and noise, and turns its armoured back to anything that corners it; cornered hard, it charges.

## Abilities

Its hide turns a pick and a blade, and it can push through cracked and rotten rock that would trap any other beast. The hide is said to harden as it ages, and an old one is nearly stone.

## Life Cycle

They bear one or two young in a chamber dug deep in the rock, and the young are soft-skinned for their first year and stay close to the mother. They live long, perhaps as long as a Dwarf’s childhood, and an old one dies in its own run and is found, if ever, years later, a shape of stone in a crack.

## Uses and Dangers

The holds count them as a hazard of the bracing, like rot and damp. A gnawed prop holds until load or a knock crumbles it, and a run behind a vent gallery can drop its floor or let bad air through. Kobold crews listen for their teeth in the walls and chalk their warning marks on gnawed timber. Their hide plates are prized for small shields and for gate fittings, and the meat is coarse but eaten in the Deeps' lean seasons.

## Lore and Belief

Dwarves say the brace-gnawers are kin of the stone, beasts the mountain has made more like itself as it made the Dwarves, and some holds will not kill one in the deep workings but drive it off with noise and light. They are right: the gnawers come down from the same lithic ancestor field, shaped by the Iron Backbone’s pressure, from which the Dwarves themselves descend, a beast line that stayed a beast. Many in the holds take this for a deep-miners' saying, and Humans of the gate holds laugh at it. Kobolds say only that a gnawer’s teeth in the wall mean a prop to be changed, and they are right more often.

Hold lament-days mark the collapse of a whole working on a shift of forty, and the Kobold crew-mother who heard the gnawing in the props the night before and was not listened to.



# Coldcoat Wolves

**Coldcoat Wolves** are wolves of the Material Plane that have taken the edges of the Cinder Fields for their range. Generations of hunting where the zone's cold fire bleeds outward have changed them: their coats carry frost the year round, and their bite drinks the warmth from a wound. They are not natives of the zone and do not go into the blue flame, but they live closer to it than any other beast of the world.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | The frost-bitten ground around the edges of the Cinder Fields |
| **Range** | Wherever the Cinder Fields lie |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A coldcoat is the size of a large grey wolf, long-legged and lean. Its coat is thick and pale grey shading to white along the back, and every guard hair is tipped with a fine crust of rime, so that the wolf glitters in low light and leaves a dusting of frost where it lies. Its eyes are a very pale blue, its breath shows even on a warm day, and its muzzle and paws are often rimed. It runs with a wolf's easy lope, near silent; its howl is thin and high and carries a cold crackle. It smells of snow and cold iron.

## Habitat and Range

Packs hold the frost-bitten margins around a field, a belt of grey cinder, frozen grass, and blackened trees where the zone's cold has crept out. They hunt out into the ordinary country around it and always return to the edge. Wherever a Cinder Field lies, such packs are said to be found; how many fields there are is not known.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt like wolves, in family packs, running down deer and stock in the country round the field's edge, and they are bolder than grey wolves in winter, when the cold favours them. They draw prey towards the edge, where the cold slows it. They keep away from the blue flame itself, and a pack's den is dug just beyond its reach.

## Abilities

A bite from a coldcoat chills the flesh around it, numbing and whitening the wound as frostbite does, and a beast bitten several times slows and stiffens. The pack bears cold that would kill an ordinary wolf, and lies out on frozen ground through the deepest winter. Their frosted coats keep them hidden on cinder and snow.

## Life Cycle

They breed as wolves do, a litter in spring in a den near the field's margin. The cubs are born dark grey and frost over as their adult coats come in. Taken far from a field, coldcoats are said to lose their frost within a season, which would make their change something the zone renews in them rather than something they inherit; nobody has tested it.

## Uses and Dangers

They are dangerous to herds and travellers near a Cinder Field, the more so because a bitten traveller is slowed near a zone that drains the warmth of the living. Their pelts stay cold and glittering after death and are prized by those who trade in the zone's curiosities, though a hood of coldcoat fur is said to chill the wearer. The Frost-Burned of the zone, who view all warm things as disruptive, are said to leave the coldcoats alone.

## Lore and Belief

Those who live near a field say the coldcoats are the wolves of the blue flame and that the fire calls them; travellers say they are wolves the fire caught and could not finish. Both stories are told of the same packs. They are right that the zone has changed them, and wrong, so far as anyone knows, that the flame commands them.

Cold-fire harvesters hire beast-hunters to ride escort against them, and a coldcoat pelt, which never warms, is the boast of every hunter who has taken one; the village still keeps the winter when a pack ran out of the Fields and down on a village, and the hunters who held its gate with torches until the pack turned back to the blue.



# Glassback Lizards

**Glassback Lizards** are big monitor lizards that live on the furnace scars of the Glassbelt Interior, the deep dead furnace zones whose glassed ground is said to hold the fire's heat still. They have lived there long enough to carry that heat in their own blood. They hunt the scars by night and day alike, and their bite burns like a coal.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | Warm glassed ground of the dead furnace zones |
| **Range** | The Glassbelt Interior |
| **Known to** | Salvage Peoples |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: a burning bite |

## Appearance

A grown glassback is as long as a tall man from snout to tail-tip, half of it tail, low-slung and heavy-shouldered, with a long neck and a narrow head. Its scales are small and beaded, dark brown to soot-black on the flanks, and along the back they are glossy, smooth, and dark red-brown like fired glaze, giving the name. In the cold of the desert night the back shows a faint dull glow, and the air above a resting lizard shimmers. Its tongue is long, forked, and black. It moves in a swaying, high-stepping walk and runs fast in short bursts, and it hisses with a dry, crackling breath. It smells of hot stone and scorched meat.

## Habitat and Range

They live only on the warm glassed ground of the furnace scars, sheltering in cracks and under glass lips by day and by the coldest hours of night, and they are not met on the cooled glass, the pans, or the caravan wells. Each holds a wide stretch of scar.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A glassback hunts whatever lives on the scars and whatever crosses them: beetles, small lizards, birds come down to the warm glass at dawn, and carrion. It does not need the morning sun to warm itself, which every other lizard of the desert does, and so it hunts in the cold hours when other beasts are slow. It is bold, and will stand its ground against a crossing party and come at a pack animal.

## Abilities

Its blood runs hot enough that its bite scalds: the wound blisters and blackens around the teeth, and the burn spreads and festers for days. It keeps its warmth through the desert night and on the coldest ground.

## Life Cycle

The female buries her eggs in cracks of the warm glass, where the scar's heat hatches them, and the young are bright-banded and hunt insects from the first day. They grow slowly and live long, and the largest are said to be older than the crossing routes.

## Uses and Dangers

The Salvage Peoples who work the scars count glassbacks among the reasons to go over such ground only when they must; a salvager bitten on the scars may lose the hand. Their hides are tough and handsome, but a salvager will not carry one out of the deep scars, any more than ash or slag (see Furnace-Ash Sickness).

## Lore and Belief

Crossers say glassbacks are the furnace's own beasts, hatched from its embers, and that whoever speaks the god's name near a furnace will draw them; nobody tests it. Some salvagers believe the lizards keep the old fire alive under the glass by lying on it, and will not kill one on its own ground. That they are animals of the world changed by the fire the scars still hold is the likelier truth, and the more any of the crossers will say.

Salvagers who dig the scars for furnace relics keep a pot of water at hand for the bite, and the tale of the delver bitten in a glassed vault, who carried his treasure out on a burning arm and lost both, is told on every crossing.



# Greenharts

**Greenharts** are deer of the oldest groves of the Elderweald, the deep groves in the middle and east of the forest, whose coats grow a living fur of moss. They are few, shy, and seldom seen by anyone but the groves they live among. Wood Elves count them as kin of the grove and will not hunt them: to kill a greenhart is a breach of stewardship that a grove answers for to its neighbours.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | The oldest groves and deep weald |
| **Range** | The Elderweald |
| **Known to** | Elves (Wood Elves) |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A greenhart is a red deer in build, a stag standing as tall at the shoulder as a man's chest, long-legged and deep in the body. Its coat is a dark russet brown under a thin, soft growth of green moss that covers the back, shoulders, and flanks and thickens along the spine into a short mane; the moss is brightest in the wet months and dulls to olive in a dry summer. The stags' antlers are broad and many-tined and often hung with strands of grey lichen that they do not rub off. Its eyes are dark and large. It moves without a sound on the root-mat and stands among the boles so still that it seems part of the grove. It smells of wet moss and leaf-mould, and its call, rarely heard, is a low, carrying groan in autumn.

## Habitat and Range

They live only in the deep, never-cut groves, among the oldest trees, and nowhere near the forest edge, so that most Humans of the basin side have never seen one and many think them a story. A grove may have a small herd that has lived on its ground for as long as the grove remembers.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They browse leaf, bark, moss, and fallen fruit, and lie up by day in the thickest of the old trees. They do not flee the Wood Elves of their grove, who walk among them, but they vanish at a stranger's step. Their rut is quiet and their herds small.

## Abilities

The moss on a greenhart is alive and grows with it, and the beast is hidden by it in the green dark of the groves as no other deer is. It sheds its winter coat with the moss on it in spring, and the shed patches root where they fall.

## Life Cycle

Hinds bear a single calf in early summer, born brown and bare; the moss comes in during its first year. They live longer than common deer, and an old stag's moss mane is thick enough to carry seedlings.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing taken: no meat, hide, or antler is ever cut from a greenhart by a grove. Shed antlers found on the root-mat are left where they lie or laid at a grove's oldest tree. They are harmless, and the danger they carry is to those who hunt them, since a greenhart kill brings the grove's answer and the next grove's too.

## Lore and Belief

Wood Elves say the greenharts were shaped by the same green pull that shaped their own oldest lines, and that the two grew into the groves together, which is why the beasts are kin and not game. It is so: the greenharts descend from the same Verdant-marked ancestor field of the deep past as the Elves themselves, a beast line that kept its moss where the Elves' line became a people. Few outside the groves believe it, and many basin scholars call it a grove's pious story. A greenhart seen at a grove's edge is taken as a sign that the grove is well, and one seen leaving it as a warning. Basin hunters tell of a lord who took a greenhart's head and whose forest-edge village was refused the funeral rite for a generation; whether the tale is true or not, edge villages tell it to their young men.



# Ill-Hatched

The **Ill-Hatched** are what comes out of a chrysalis that failed. The chrysalis of Imago encloses a being so that it can be changed deeply, healed or remade; if the being was not ready, or the rite was done badly, the change goes wrong. Sometimes the chrysalis never opens. Sometimes it opens on something that is not the person who went in, nor anyone: a living thing, unfinished, that has no self to speak of. The Ill-Hatched are not persons, and those who know them say so plainly.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | Wherever a chrysalis rite went wrong: shrines, sickrooms, and the wild country they flee to |
| **Range** | widespread, and rare everywhere |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves |
| **Danger** | Dangerous: frightened, strong, and without judgement |

## Appearance

No two are alike, but all look interrupted. The body of the person who went in is there in part, a hand, a jaw, a length of spine, run into something else half-formed: wet, wing-like folds that never dried, a second skin hardening in plates, limbs too many or too long, a face smoothed over where the features should be. Many are larger than the person was. They come out wet and pale and darken in the air. They move in lurches and crawls, as if trying out a body, and make thin, unformed sounds, never words. They smell of the chrysalis, sweet and rotten at once, like split fruit.

## Habitat and Range

They are made wherever the rite is done, which is wherever Imago's chrysalis is sought: at shrines of change, in the sickrooms where a last remedy is tried, and in the households of those who seek a new self. Those that are not put down flee to

rough ground, woods, and ruins near where they were made. They are rare everywhere, because the rite is rare and its keepers careful.

## Behaviour and Temperament

An Ill-Hatched has no purpose but what its body pushes it to: to feed, to hide, to get away from light and noise. It does not know the people who loved the person it came from, and it does not learn. Frightened, it lashes out with a strength the person never had, and it is frightened by almost everything.

## Abilities

Some keep a scrap of what the rite was meant to give: a hide that heals over any cut within the hour, eyes that see in darkness, a reach far beyond a person's. None of it is used with any judgement.

## Life Cycle

They do not grow up and do not breed. Most die within a few seasons of hatching, their bodies failing as unevenly as they were made; a few live on for years in the wild.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing. The danger is to whoever tends them and to the country around: an Ill-Hatched loose near a village takes stock and attacks anyone who corners it. The house that performed the rite is held answerable for it, and must either put it down or keep it close; which is right is argued at every shrine of change, and families who refuse both have been driven out of their villages.

## Lore and Belief

Many believe the person is still inside, trapped unfinished, and that a second chrysalis would let them out; a second rite on an Ill-Hatched has never been known to make anything but a worse one. Keepers of the rite say the person was spent in the change, and that what hatched is a beast made of their remains, to be pitied and not mourned as them. Some tell of an Ill-Hatched that lived among people and was cared for to the end, which is held up as mercy by some and as cruelty by others.

Villages that have had one loose hire beast-hunters, and the hunters ask for double; they tell of a hunter who tracked an Ill-Hatched into the hills, found it sleeping curled like a child, and came home without the bounty.



# Ley Moles

**Ley Moles** are moles that live along ley lines, the channels where magic is easier to reach. They tunnel down the line and nowhere else, and their molehills march across fields and meadows in long, straight or gently bending rows that follow the line through the ground. Mages who need to know where a line runs, or where it has drifted to, hire a mole-catcher who knows the ley moles.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | Soil over ley lines and around ley nodes |
| **Range** | Widespread, along ley lines |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A ley mole is a mole in every way that matters: the length of a hand, velvety and cylindrical, with broad, pink-palmed digging forepaws, a naked pink snout, and eyes too small to see. Its fur is darker than a common mole's, nearly blue-black, and in a certain light it shows a faint sheen like oil on water; old ones grow a few white hairs about the snout. Up close its fur is faintly warm and prickles the palm. It squeaks and chitters underground like any mole, and smells of earth.

## Habitat and Range

They are found wherever a ley line crosses soft soil: under fields, meadows, and greens, round ley nodes, and along the drift of a line over the years. Away from a line they are not found, and a line that runs under rock or water loses its moles there and finds them again beyond.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A ley mole digs its runs along the line, feeding on worms and grubs like any mole, and it will not dig across it or away from it for long. Where lines

knot or narrow at a node the moles crowd, and the ground there is heaved with hills. When a line shifts, over years, its moles shift with it, and an old row of grassed-over hills beside a fresh one shows which way the line has gone.

## Abilities

They sense the line through the soil and keep to it. That is the whole of their gift, and it is enough to make them useful.

## Life Cycle

They breed as moles do, a litter in a nest of grass deep in the run each spring, and they live a few years. Young moles leave the nest along the line, never across it.

## Uses and Dangers

Mages, temple builders, and the founders of sanctuaries hire mole-catchers who read the rows to find a line or a node, and good catchers are paid well and keep their knowledge in the family. Farmers dislike the moles as they dislike any mole, for the hills and the spoiled grass, and some villages over a strong line are plagued with them. Those who live long beside a busy line are the folk most often struck by ley-warp, and some blame the moles for bringing it; the moles only follow the line that brings it.

## Lore and Belief

Human village folk say a row of molehills is "a mage’s road" and that crossing it at night brings odd dreams. Mole-catchers say their best catch is the one they never make, since a dead ley mole tells nothing, and they lift and move moles rather than kill them. Some mages hold that ley moles are moles the line has changed over many generations; it is a common teaching, and nobody has shown it wrong.



# Skin-Lost

The **Skin-Lost** are people who took a beast's form by Beast-Skin and stayed in it too long, until the person under the skin wore away and only the beast was left. They are no longer persons: they cannot be called back, reasoned with, or held to anything they once promised. But they keep a person's habits, and the villages they came from treat them warily as kin.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | Woods, field edges, and the outskirts of villages |
| **Range** | The cradle-web, wherever Morphic Magic is practised: chiefly the Confluence Basins, the Headwater Marches, and the edges of the Elderweald |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves |
| **Danger** | Wary: most keep their distance, but a cornered one fights as the beast it is |

## Appearance

A Skin-Lost looks like the beast it became, most often a fox, a wolf, a hare, a crow, or a hound, but rarely quite right. It is often too big or too lean for its kind, holds its head a little too high, and looks at people too long. Some carry a mark of the person: a scar, a ring grown into a foreleg, a grey streak where the hair went grey. It walks the paths people walk, at the hours they walk them, and its voice is its beast's.

## Habitat and Range

They live where they were lost, mostly the woods and field edges near the village or camp of the caster, and stay near it for the rest of their lives. They are rare: few casters dare a beast form for longer than the spell's half day, and fewer stay in it long enough to forget.

## Behaviour and Temperament

A Skin-Lost lives as its beast does, hunting, feeding, and sleeping as its kind, but it keeps the shape of a life. It comes to the edge of the village at dusk, watches a particular door, follows a particular person at a distance, lies on a grave or in an empty doorway, and avoids the place it was lost. It does not know anyone, and it flees or bites as a beast does if pressed. It does not breed with its kind, or not often, and its young are ordinary beasts.

## Abilities

None beyond its beast's. The change that made it is spent; a Skin-Lost cannot change again, and no known working brings the person back, since nobody is left to bring.

## Life Cycle

It lives out a beast's life, often longer than its kind, and dies as a beast. Its family buries it, or burns it, as a person.

## Uses and Dangers

It gives nothing but grief. The danger is small and mostly to the family: a Skin-Lost fox raids its own sister's hen-yard, a wolf follows a child home and will not be driven off, and a family that will not let it be hunted pays for it in stock and in its neighbours' patience. Lords' huntsmen who kill one by mistake pay nothing for it, however the village grieves.

## Lore and Belief

Basin villages say a Skin-Lost is still the person inside, waiting to be called by the right name, and some families set food out for years. Morphic teachers say there is no one left to call, and that the habits are the last of the body's memory, not a mind; as far as anyone has ever learned, they are right. Elven groves count a Skin-Lost as a beast of their ground and kin of the grove that lost it, and neither hunt nor feed it. Every village with one tells its children the same rule about beast forms: come back before you forget the way.

Hunters who kill a strange beast near a village that has lost someone to the skin are sometimes hunted in turn by the family, and more than one blood-feud in the Basins began at the edge of a wood.



# Slip-Foxes

**Slip-Foxes** are foxes of the places where the world wears thin. They den near shrines, old boundary roads, and the thin places where the Veil lies close, and they have learned, or been made able, to step half out of the world and back. A slip-fox seen on the road is seen, then not, then a few paces on. Whoever follows one far enough follows it into the Veil without meaning to, and the Veil does not forgive travel without intent.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | Old shrines, boundary roads, crossroads, and thin places |
| **Range** | Thin places of the Veil, in the cradle-web and the far side |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Harmless; following one is drift |

## Appearance

A slip-fox is a slim red fox the size of a small dog, with a fox's narrow muzzle, black stockings, and white-tipped brush. Its coat is paler than a common fox's, a washed-out red with a grey sheen, as if seen through mist, and its outline is never quite sharp. When it slips, it does not vanish at once: it thins, like breath on glass, and goes, and when it returns it seems to step out from behind nothing. Its eyes are amber and catch the light more than they should. It barks and screams like any fox, and for a moment after it slips the bark seems to come from a long way off. It smells of fox and, faintly, of wet fog.

## Habitat and Range

They den in banks and ruins near thin places, and range along the roads and boundaries around them. Where a thin place is strong there may be several families; away from thin places slip-foxes are not found.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They hunt mice, birds, and beetles like any fox and steal from shrines and travellers' packs. A slip-fox that is chased slips, and comes back behind the chaser; one that is curious follows travellers for a mile or more, stopping and looking back. It is wary and clever, and it seems to enjoy being followed.

## Abilities

It can step partway into the Veil and out again, crossing a short distance unseen, and it is never lost there, as a fox is never lost in its own woods. It does not go far in, or for long.

## Life Cycle

They breed as foxes do, a litter in spring, and the cubs are said to learn to slip in their first summer, at play. They live a few years.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, and do little harm by themselves beyond the stolen offering and the dead hen. The danger is the following. A traveller who goes after one, off the road, without a clear aim, is led into the edge of the Veil and can lose the way entirely; guides tell of children found days later and miles away, and of some never found. Hunters with dogs lose their dogs.

## Lore and Belief

Human folk call them "the Veil’s own dogs" and say they lead the dead home, or lead the living astray for the fun of it. Travellers are told never to follow a fox at a shrine, and to say aloud where they are going when they see one. Some believe a slip-fox caught and kept will show its keeper the way through; those who try keep it a few days, and it slips. Whether they were foxes changed by the thin places or have always been as they are, nobody knows.

Smugglers and outlaws are said to follow them on purpose, trusting the drift to shake off pursuit, and the boundary-road songs tell of a bandit chief who followed a slip-fox out of a lord’s net and came out of the fog a year later, in another country, with the noose still round his neck.



# Springwater Herds

The **Springwater Herds** are deer that live below the Ageless Spring and drink the water that trickles out of it. Water drawn from the spring does not age, and neither do those who drink it, and so the herds do not grow old: the same hinds and the same stags graze the same valleys for longer than any village beside them can remember. People who live near them hold the herds sacred, and to hunt one is a sacrilege.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | The valleys and brooks below an Ageless Spring |
| **Range** | Wherever the Ageless Spring lies |
| **Known to** | Humans, Elves |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

They are red deer or the smaller roe of their country, as their valley has them, and look like any others at a distance. Close, they are a little too perfect: coats glossy and even, no grey on the muzzle of any of them, no limp, no torn ear that has healed, though old wounds stay as they were, neither healed nor worse. Their eyes are clear and very still. They make the sounds of deer, and they smell faintly of rain and fresh stone, as the spring's air does.

## Habitat and Range

They keep to the valleys and brooks below a spring, never far from water that has come out of it, and they do not go into the stillness of the spring itself. A herd is small, a few dozen at most, and it never grows: no calves are born to them that anyone has seen.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They graze, browse, and lie up as deer do, but without any season: no rut, no shedding of antlers, no spring calving. They are calm to the point of indifference, and they let a walker come near before they move off. A herd driven from its water grows restless and returns to it if it can.

## Abilities

So long as they drink the spring's water, they do not age. That is all they have, and it is not health: a wound they took is never healed, and a beast that breaks a leg stays lame.

## Life Cycle

They do not breed and do not age, and they die only by injury, by beasts, or by leaving. One driven far from its water, or one that stops drinking, ages all at once as the years it has held back come due, and dies within days, as those who leave the spring do of Time-Sickness.

## Uses and Dangers

They give nothing, for nothing may be taken from them. The people of a spring's valley keep hunters, wolves, and dogs away from them as best they can, and treat their presence as the valley's blessing. Their danger is to those who break the rule: a hunter's family carries the shame for generations, and the valley's watchers, sometimes the Lingerers of the spring, are said to deal with strangers who try.

## Lore and Belief

Valley folk say the herds are the spring's own and that while they graze, the spring will not fail. Some tell of a hind that has stood by a certain stone since the valley's first farmers came, and they name her. Those who think of the spring's cost say the herds are the most honest sign of it: they do not die, and they do not live either, for nothing in them changes.



# Spurred Hounds

**Spurred Hounds** are war dogs pushed past any dog's measure by magic. Nature Magic's Latent Spur urges a beast towards a more extreme form already latent in it. Human kennels of the Confluence Basins and the Headwater Marches have spurred their war dogs litter after litter, breeding the biggest, until the change holds without the spell. The result is the most feared dog of the cradleweb: huge, fearless, and never wholly safe.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | Lords' kennels, war camps, and keeps |
| **Range** | The Confluence Basins; the Headwater Marches |
| **Known to** | Humans |
| **Danger** | Dangerous |

## Appearance

A spurred hound stands as high at the shoulder as a man's waist or more and weighs as much as a man, deep-chested and heavy-headed, with a short coat of brindle, fawn, or black and a skin that hangs in folds at the throat. The jaws are broad and the teeth large; the eyes are small, red-rimmed, and restless. Many carry the marks of the spur's excess: a too-long jaw, a shoulder heavier on one side, overgrown claws. They move with a heavy, rolling trot and charge with startling speed. Their bark is a deep, cracked bay; at rest they pant and grumble constantly. They smell strongly of dog and of the kennel.

## Habitat and Range

They are kept in lords' kennels, keeps, and war camps in the Basins and the Headwater valleys, by the households that can afford to feed them and pay the conjurers who keep the line. They are not loosed to range and are never kept in villages.

## Behaviour and Temperament

Trained hard, a spurred hound is loyal to its handler, fearless in a fight, and savage against whatever it is set on: men, horses, wolves. It is also unstable. The spur that made the line works on in it, and a hound can turn without warning on another hound, on a stranger, or on its own handler, in a fit of rage that passes as quickly as it came. Old hounds grow worse.

## Abilities

It is stronger, heavier, and harder to stop than any common dog, and bears wounds that would drop a war horse. Its senses are sharpened, especially its nose, and its handlers say it can follow a trail days old.

## Life Cycle

They breed true, mostly, and litters are small; a share of every litter is born malformed and is put down at birth. Hounds grow fast and are trained from their first months. Few live past six or seven years, burnt out by the excess, and fewer die of age.

## Uses and Dangers

They are war dogs and hunting dogs for the most dangerous quarry, and a lord's kennel of spurred hounds is a show of his strength. Their cost is meat, conjurers' fees, and blood: handlers lose fingers, hands, and sometimes their lives, and a hound loose in a village is a disaster. By custom a lord owes for what his hounds do; a village is paid only when it has a stronger lord of its own to ask.

## Lore and Belief

Village folk say a spurred hound has a wolf's soul trapped in it, or that something from beyond the Veil was bred into it; it is a dog, changed by magic over many generations. Handlers say a hound loves one person and tolerates no one else. Fugitives fear them above all other hounds. Conjurers who keep the lines say each spurred generation pushes the change further, and some refuse the work.

The songs of the Basin wars remember the spurred pack loosed on a fleeing village, and the miller's son who held the bridge against it with a pitchfork until the last of the women were over.



# Weather Goats

**Weather Goats** are wild goats of the highest ridges of the Stormcrown. Before a storm they climb to the crests and stand there in lines against the sky, and their horns crackle and spark with the charge in the air. From the Headwater village of Notchfield, under the Weatherline, valley folk watch them as they watch the shrines: goats on the skyline mean a storm before night.

**AT A GLANCE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Kind** | Touched beast |
| **Habitat** | The high ridges and storm shelves |
| **Range** | The Stormcrown |
| **Known to** | Humans, Giants |
| **Danger** | Harmless |

## Appearance

A weather goat is a big, shaggy wild goat, larger than the crag goats of the lower cliffs, with a thick, long-haired coat of slate grey and white that hangs in a fringe along the flanks and a dark stripe down the back. Both sexes carry horns: the billies' are massive, ridged, and swept back in a curve as long as a man’s arm, the nannies' short and thin. The horns are dark, almost black, with a dull metallic sheen. Before a storm the long hair stands up along the back, and the horn tips hiss and flicker with small pale sparks, and a herd on a crest at dusk shows as a line of faint lights. They bleat harshly and stamp, and a herd smells of goat and of the sharp air after lightning.

## Habitat and Range

They live on the bare high ridges and storm shelves above the holds and the Headwater terraces, coming down in winter to the colossal ter-

races at the head of the valleys. They are scattered in small herds along the crest as far as it is mapped.

## Behaviour and Temperament

They graze the thin high grass and lichen and keep out of reach on the steepest ground. When a storm is coming, hours before the cloud hides the Weatherline, they climb to the highest crests and stand facing into the wind; when the storm breaks they scatter downhill to shelter. They are shy of people, and Giants are said to walk among them.

## Abilities

They feel a storm coming long before the sky shows it, and the charge in the air gathers in their horns and hair. Lightning strikes near them often; they seem to come to no harm from what would kill a man standing in the same place.

## Life Cycle

Kids are born in early summer on the high shelves and climb within hours. Billies fight in autumn with a clash of horns and a crack of sparks that carries across the valleys. They live as long as other wild goats.

## Uses and Dangers

Their use is the warning. Notchfield reads the goats with the Weatherline, and a shepherd who sees goats on the skyline brings the flock down and shuts the high road. They are rarely hunted, being hard to reach, and their horns, which keep a faint tingle long after death, are prized by workers of Storm Magic. They are harmless, though the crest where they stand is the most dangerous place to be in the storm they warn of.

## Lore and Belief

Headwater folk say the goats are the sleeping god's weather-watchers, sent up the ridges to warn the valleys, and that it is unlucky to kill one. Giants, who keep the storm shelves, are said to read the goats as valley folk read the shrines. Some say the goats were changed by standing so long in the Stormcrown's storms; nobody knows.

Raiders crossing the Stormcrown watch the goats as closely as shepherds do, and a war-band that ignored them on the high ridges is remembered only as a heap of scorched iron on a storm shelf.

# A Short Chronology

Caeldon's history divides into nine broad ages, given here with their spans only, for placing what an entry says of a being's past: when a people first herded a beast, when a made thing was built or woke, when a power fell and began to send out its hosts. The spans overlap where history did, and all of them are deliberately rough. Dates are given before (BR) and after (CR) the Common Reckoning; the entries describe the beings as they live in the Medieval Era, around 1,350 CR. The events of each age are in the full chronology in *Foundations*.

| Span | Age |
|---|---|
| c. 35,000,000,000-c. 500,000 BR | 1. The Foundations |
| c. 500,000-c. 380,000 BR | 2. The Stabilizations |
| c. 380,000-c. 300,000 BR | 3. The Deep Ruptures |
| c. 300,000-c. 120,000 BR | 4. The Elder Worlds |
| c. 160,000-c. 98,000 BR | 5. The Far-Side Terms |
| c. 120,000-c. 40,000 BR | 6. The Unrecorded Age |
| c. 40,000-c. 2,000 BR | 7. The Corridor Ages |
| c. 2,000 BR-c. 500 CR | 8. The Settlement |
| c. 500-c. 1500 CR | 9. The Medieval Present |

# Glossary

The glossary gives a sentence or two for each name and term the chapters use that a reader may need to look up, and the chapter that tells it best. A name that takes an article is listed under its first main word, so that the Elderweald stands under E. Dates count back (BR) and forward (CR) from the epoch of the Common Reckoning, and nearly all of them are rough.

## A

**The Ageless Spring**

A small, softly glowing pool in a secluded valley or among ruins; those who drink and stay do not age, and a village beside one such spring is known where the old never die. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**Aion**

The Prime of time, not as a clock counts it but as the river of becoming; its Harmonic is the Frozen Moment. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**The Anchors**

The planes where matter is dense, physics holds steady, and life can live: the Material Plane at the centre, with the five Deficit Planes and the five Surplus Planes around it. See The Planes (FND 11).

**Anvelle the Harvest-Mother**

The god of the Human basin farmers, a Resonant of Terra who stands first in the Sworn Accord beside Serovan; her Festival of the First Sheaf opens the harvest. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Apex**

The Surplus Plane of perfection completed, where nothing can be better and so nothing changes; its people are the flawless Apex-Born, and visitors who stay too long are perfected into smiling Echo-Statues. See The Planes (FND 11).

**Aqua**

The Prime of water, flow, adaptation, and life, the force that takes the shape of any vessel it is poured into; its Harmonic is the Surging Deep. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**The Archive-Law Civilization**

The elder world of the Witnessfields, c. 235,000–c. 175,000 BR, of archive-cities, oath halls, and inscribed marker roads, which ruled by the carved word and the warden's spear until its keepers shut their rolls and sealed their cities. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Ashen Child**

The Cast-Out of Ignis that was the Ember-Lord of the cycle of renewal, until it refused to let one burning go out. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Ashen Wastes**

The Deficit Plane without energy, where warmth and strength drain away; its people are the grey Ash-Walkers, and its Cold Gates are volcanic vents gone cold and deep caves. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Ash-Furnace Civilization**

The elder world of the great furnaces, whose long fall, c. 225,000-c. 168,000 BR, was an overburn of its own making; its glassed ruins still scar the Glassbelt and still hold its dangerous craft. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**Augury Magic**

The compound school of Lux with Aion and Memoria, which treats the future as a field of pressure rather than a fixed script. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The autumn count**

The count of a Halfling fold's stores at its cistern hall, after which only what lies beyond the reserve goes to market; a child is named at the first autumn count after its birth, when the household reckons it among the mouths the stores must feed. See The Folds, the Scarps, and the Shore (FND 225).

**The Awakening of the Wrought**

The span, c. 1,500 BR-c. 200 CR, in which workframes in several places woke, within a few centuries of one another, as persons with memory and will of their own, and the long, bloody fight over whether they were people began. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

# B

**Backbone Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Iron Backbone: the magic of what holds, foundations, supports, walls, and everything that prevents collapse. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Beyonders**

Entities from other cosmologies outside the Boundary, whose threat is fast and plain to see: strange physics, a foreign logic spreading across the land like frost across a window. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**Binding Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Binding Song, from the premise that definition is power: to name correctly is to distinguish, and to distinguish is to order. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Binding Song**

The purest current of Verba: language, law, and connection, the bond every people's order rests on; its Scribes record every word spoken and its Arbiters judge quarrels over oaths. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Blightward Keepers**

The Thaluren civilization within the Returning Concord that keeps faith with damaged sacred water: a water turned deadly must still be guarded, contained, remembered, and never abandoned. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**Blood Magic**

The compound school of Aqua with Imago and Aion, feared because it treats lineage and vitality as usable structures. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Blood River**

A zone of life without balance, guarded by the Hemophages, who serve it as priests and hunt travellers to feed it. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Bone Singer**

The Cast-Out of Terra that was the Archivist of Bones, until it came to think memory too fragile to leave to the living. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**BR**

Before Reckoning: years counted backwards from the fixed epoch into the deep past, so that 500 BR lies five hundred years before it. See How to Read This Book (FND 5).

**The Briarreach**

The belt of thicket and wet ravine at the forest's harder edge, home of the Thorn Elves of the Thornbound Circles, where Troll houses keep the ravine crossings. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**The Broken Compass**

The Cast-Out of Lux that was the Wayfinder of the Shifting Path, until it tired of choices ending in ruin and decided the fault lay in the freedom to choose. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Broken Marches**

A ruin-belt of failed works and broken roads beyond the March Wall where nobody rules, the main home of the Goblins and of the salvagers, fugitives, and outlaws who live in the works of vanished builders. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

# C

**Calvesh the Chronos-King**

The god of the elder Archive-Law world, a Resonant of Aion who embodied records that never change; he was finished, like the rolls his keepers sealed, and his name survives only inside the oath forms the Reedfolk keep. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Cast-Out of Unyielding Burden**

The oldest of the Cast-Outs, once the Steward of Foundations, which fell in the Uneven Settling because it could not accept that anything might need to collapse. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Cast-Outs**

Fallen Stewards whose offices have curdled into obsessions; their threat is slow and nearly invisible, an offer made at the worst moment of someone's life. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**Chainwake Gnomes**

The Gnomes of the island chains, also called Island Gnomes. See The Folds, the Scarps, and the Shore (FND 225).

**The Cinder Fields**

The most famous zone of the Crucible: its energy turned inside out, so that fire consumes heat instead of producing it; its hermit-guardians are the Frost-Burned. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The circuit**

An Edgeway kindred's inherited route and its main claim to identity: which ruins are sound, which roads still connect, where water survives. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The commons**

The gathering of each Halfling fold after the count and before planting, where the terrace wards report on the walls and the cistern circles on the water, and the fold decides which terraces rest. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The Confluence Basins**

The broad lowland heartland of Humans: wide valleys, deep fields, and linked rivers gathering towards the Serath. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**Conjuration**

The compound school of Verba with Zephyr and Imago: the art of making presence answer. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Counted Lee**

The tally hall, transfer pier, and staging ground on the shore below the Folds, between fold and harbour, where Halfling loads are counted, Gnome approach windows named, and lost time fought over; its hall keeps the Long Tally. See *The Leeward Folds*.

**The Counted Lee Timing Feud**

The feud of c. 139,000-c. 136,000 BR in which the folds kept paying for approach windows that moved after their fruit was picked. See The Folds, the Scarps, and the Shore (FND 225).

**The court season**

The turning point of the Crownbough year, when a house's place is read in its hall, its gardens, its people, and its heirs. See *A Year in the Medieval Era*.

**CR**

Common Reckoning: years counted forward from the fixed epoch, so that 120 CR lies a hundred and twenty years after it. See How to Read This Book (FND 5).

**The cradle-web**

The dense, tangled half of the inhabited world, named because so much began there: the forests, mountains, deeps, river basins, and marches from the Elderweald to the Greyford Reach. See *A World in Two Halves*.

**The Crossing-Oath Houses**

The first great Troll civilization, descended from the crossing-charges sworn on the colossal roads: crossing houses and bridge-oath families who hold the dangerous places no one else will stay at, take a toll for the crossing, and warn, guide, and mend for it. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The Crownbough Courts**

The High Elf civilization of the Crownboughs, founded c. 390,000-c. 375,000 BR, in which several great houses rule rather than one crown, and a house's place is read in its hall, its gardens, and its heirs. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**The Crownboughs**

The cultivated canopy forest in the south-eastern corner of the old Elven world, where trees have been trained into halls and terraces, homeland of the High Elves and the Crownbough Courts. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**The Crucible**

The Harmonic of Ignis: energy, heat, and transformation, the engine of change that destroys the old and makes it new, and the concept of fire given form; its beings include the magma-bodied Forgers and the wilder Burners. See The Planes (FND 11).

**Crucible Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Crucible, whose law is that change requires heat, pressure, and release. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Crystal Spire**

A permanent zone of total override on high peaks and in deep caverns: a towering spire of faceted crystal whose Crystal Singers keep the sounds that matter and silence the dangerous ones. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

# D

**Dark Elves**

The ancient underworld-margin Elven branch of the upper Roothollows, organized around guarded passage, chamber-right, and the duty of refuge, which the Roothollow Rupture drove deeper and hardened; their civilization is the Gloamroot Covenant. See The Elder Peoples (FND 207).

**The Dark Entities**

The beings that threaten the ordered cosmos from without (the Beyonders), from corruption within (the Cast-Outs), and from beneath definition itself (the Unformed). See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Decade of Storms**

The undated time the Tidelace keeps in memory, when gales sank boats, surges swallowed harbours, and Humans and Gnomes prayed on the same shore; Maris was born of it. See *The Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads*.

**The Deep World**

The thread of Caeldon's history that runs through the Roothollows and the Deeps: the threshold before the flood, the Drowning Bloom and the seals, and the Heartwell. See The Threads of History (FND 287).

**Deepswells**

Beings of the Dissonance that are never seen first: they come as a swelling dread, a slow throb felt in the teeth and feet like a bell struck far below, and those they reach are not found. See The Dissonance (FND 63).

**The Dissonance**

The out-of-tune reflection of the Material Plane, held in the Veil close against it: the world's own shadow, a maze that swells and fades against the true world, known to almost no one. See The Dissonance (FND 63).

**Dream Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Dreaming Veil, which begins from the conviction that perception is never neutral. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Dreaming Veil**

The Harmonic of Imago, with Lux and Zephyr beside it: imagination, art, and dream, where new ideas are born before they are tested in the world; its Lucids guide lost dreamers back to waking. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Drowning Bloom**

The flood catastrophe of the Surging Deep at the heart of the Roothollow Rupture, which flooded, severed, and later overgrew much of the upper underworld. See The Ages of Caeldon (FND 277).

**The Drowning Garden**

A submerged forest where breathing runs backwards, tended by the webbed and gilled Gill-Folk. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Dry Folds**

The outer valleys of the Leeward Folds whose terraces have gone to scrub and whose cisterns stand cracked and empty. See *The Leeward Folds*.

**Dryfold Halflings**

An older Halfling lifeway that did not survive in the Dry Folds. See *The Leeward Folds*.

**Dwarves**

One of the oldest peoples of Caeldon, a dense and durable people stabilized under the Ironspine from an inheritance marked by the Iron Backbone; their branches are the Ironspine and Stonewake Dwarves. See The Elder Peoples (FND 207).

# E

**Echo**

A real but partial imprint that a Pattern leaves on the world: in the people bound to it, in places where it did something that mattered, in objects worn by repeated intent, and in rites, names, and memory. See *What Makes a People*.

**The Echo-Mother**

The god of protective quiet, a Resonant of Umbra born c. 1,200 CR from the prayer of the Hushvale survivors not to be found, as they made the Wake-Seal. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Edgeway Kindreds**

The first civilization of the Salvage Peoples: kin-linked companies who travel known circuits between ruin zones, keep the works along them, and share one mark-language and a calendar of gathering-markets. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The Elderweald**

The old-growth forest at the centre of the Elven world, home of the Wood Elves and the Root-crown Concord; it has no roads, only paths walked open. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**Elves**

One of the oldest peoples of Caeldon, stabilized in the Elderweald from an inheritance marked by the Verdant Expanse that shows in presence more than in anatomy; their branches are the Wood, Thorn, High, and Dark Elves. See The Elder Peoples (FND 207).

**Ennor the Grave-Watcher**

The god who stands at the threshold of the dead, a Resonant of Umbra condensed over ages of burial, whom most cradle-web peoples honour at their graves under names of their own; Ennor is his Human name. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Equilibrium**

See The Material Plane.

**The Eternal Record**

The Harmonic of Memoria, with Verba often joined to it: knowledge, history, and memory, the universe's library, where coherent Echoes are held in Record; its Archivists only observe and record. See The Planes (FND 11).

# F

**The Far Set**

The outermost current road the Thaluren know, ridden only by Outer-Route runs; the water beyond it is the Unrun Sea. See *The Tidebound Reaches and the Unrun Sea*.

**The far side**

The wide half of the inhabited world beyond the Glassbelt, with peoples, customs, and history of its own: the Windscar Expanse, the Leeward Folds, the Tidelace Coasts, the Soundchain Roads, and the Tidebound Reaches. See *A World in Two Halves*.

**Fate**

In the highest scholarship, songline pressure on mortals on the Material Plane, and only that, because only there does it press on wills that are truly free; there is no universal predestination. Everyone else uses the word loosely, and most theories of fate are speculation. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Festival of the First Flow**

Serovan's feast at the spring rise on the Lower Serath, when bread, wine, and flowers are offered to the river and river traffic stops. See *A Year in the Medieval Era*.

**The Festival of the First Sheaf**

Anvelle's feast at the beginning of harvest, when the first stalk is cut and offered to her. See *A Year in the Medieval Era*.

**The Festival of the Tides**

The yearly feast that brings a whole Tidelace harbour down to the quays with flowers, shells, and stories for Maris of the Tides. See *A Year in the Medieval Era*.

**The First Nesting Confluence**

The oldest sacred spawning water of the Thaluren, high up the return system, closed to ordinary return since egg blight struck it. See *The Tidebound Reaches and the Unrun Sea*.

**The Flesh Weaver**

The Cast-Out of Aqua that was the Loom-Master of living bodies, until its compassion for the sick curdled into a compulsion to fix them without asking. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Floodkeeper Houses**

The Reedfolk house order of the lower rivers, founded c. 210,000-c. 182,000 BR, which keeps the memory of every flood and the oath forms of the archive world; the Human river powers took its command of the water and left it the service. See *Peoples of the Water*.

**The Flux Maze**

A zone of structure that will not hold still, whose Stone-Walkers move through the stone itself, guide and test in equal measure, and speak in riddles. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Forge Deep**

A pocket of slowed time inside a volcano or among deep magma chambers, with forges the size of halls, where the Smiths of the Deep give centuries to a single work. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Forking Road**

A crossroads where every step splits the world, whose Wayfinders step sideways between branches to avoid danger. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Foundations**

The first age, c. 35,000,000,000-c. 500,000 BR, from the first stirring of time to the first lineages of Caeldon; also the name of the book's first block, which holds what does not change from era to era. See The Ages of Caeldon (FND 277).

**The Frost-Bound**

The Deficit Plane without warmth, a world of stillness where nothing changes; its people are the Frost-Born, and travellers go there to recover lost memories, to lay up dangerous objects, or to seek the Eternal Sleep. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Frozen Moment**

The Harmonic of Aion, reinforced by Terra and Memoria: time, stasis, and permanence, the anchor that holds moments long enough for history and consequence to exist. See The Planes (FND 11).

**Frozen Moment Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Frozen Moment, which holds that duration can be weighted, stretched, or arrested without breaking time. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

# G

**Gale Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Unbound Gale, which teaches that stillness is temporary and movement is life. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**Gatehold Dwarves**

A lifeway of the exposed gate holds, shaped by weather, haulage, and traffic; it is not a separate kind of Dwarf. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**Gates**

The places on the Material Plane where the Veil opens towards a particular plane or Harmonic, named for it: the War-Gates of the Scourge on old battlefields, the Library-Gates of the Eternal Record in archives, the Grave-Gates of the Whispering Trace in cemeteries, and many more. See The Veil and the Outside (FND 51).

**Ghessa the Hearth-Mother**

The Ogre hearth-god, a Resonant of Ignis born of famine winters and small fires that had to last, and the gentlest of its gods. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Ghost Step**

A stretch of road where the past has folded back over the present and Path-Echoes repeat their routines forever. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**Giants**

Rare, withdrawn, and real: the living remainder of the Upland Colossal world, who keep to the storm shelves and hidden basins and keep the Mountain-Father's sleep. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Gilded Cage**

The Surplus Plane of absolute order, where freedom is the only crime; its people are the metal-skinned Gilded, its Enforcers reset offenders rather than kill them, and the way out is the Exit Protocol, followed exactly. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Glassbelt**

See The Glassbelt Interior.

**The Glassbelt Interior**

Caeldon's first true desert, which nobody holds; a single overland route across it is the only thing joining the cradle-web and the far side. See *A World in Two Halves*.

**The gloam**

The faint pale glow some living roots give off in the Roothollows, the only light the region makes of itself. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**The Gloamroot Covenant**

The Dark Elf civilization, founded c. 324,000-c. 318,000 BR, an order of resource-holding Houses and warding orders grown into one another in the Roothollows. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**Gnomes**

The far-side people of fine craft and exact measure, who read an unstable coast truly and make others keep to the reading; their country is the Tidelace Coasts and their civilization the Gaugeward Leagues. See The Folds, the Scarps, and the Shore (FND 225).

**Goblins**

A ruin-adapted people, not a malicious one, who live well in abandoned works, failed towns, and road shadows and know every gap and culvert in them; their strongest country is the Broken Marches and their civilization the Iron Compacts. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

**The Grammar of War**

A zone that wakes only around a battle fought with fierce conviction and fades when the fighting stops; those caught in it carry out the last order they received until they fall. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Gravity Well**

A transient zone where the Iron Backbone's mass collapses towards a single point; prospectors come for Well-Iron, and the climb back out is the hardest part. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Great Slumber**

The face of the Unformed that takes away motion and will, so that dust hangs without falling and a heartbeat comes once a day; nothing holds against it but the will to do the next thing anyway. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Grey Clerks**

Made figures of the elder Archive-Law world, left at the road-meetings on the edge of the Witnessfields when it sealed its last cities; they still keep their post, and ask every passer, in a dead script's voice, for a name to be kept. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Grey Line**

The outermost row of the Witnessfields' boundary markers, where basin herders turn their flocks back and treasure-hunting companies hire their guides; the Grey Clerks beyond it still stop passers and demand their names. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Grey Mist**

The face of the Unformed closest to the undivided first state, which takes away contrast until things are not invisible, only indistinguishable. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**Greyford**

The crossing town of the Greyford Reach, where the Headwater road meets the Broken Marches and the toll is taken once, at the Highbank gate of the Greyspan. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Greyford Bridge**

See The Greyspan.

**The Greyford Reach**

The wide gravel valley where the Headwater and Broken Marches meet and one river breaks into many, with its patched bridge, its two banks, and its quarrel over who owes the crossing what. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Greyspan**

The official Greyford Bridge: old stone piers and newer timber spans, patched for longer than anyone can say, inside a braid of fords, ferries, and rope crossings. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Gullstair**

The busiest cliff path of the Soundchain Roads, stepped and ramped down a sea-cliff to the beach yard of the Turnwater Quays. See *The Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads*.

# H

**Halflings**

The far-side people of sheltered measure, who live where plenty has to be kept rather than taken; their first homeland is the Leeward Folds and their civilization the Foldward Commons. See The Folds, the Scarps, and the Shore (FND 225).

**The Hanging Vale**

The dry far-side valley on the Rimward Basins' inland rim that the Krystallis Incursion, c. 352,000-c. 349,000 BR, left standing in crystal, watched from the southernmost Lastwater Well; the only place Crystallization is still caught. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**Haurûm the Mountain-Father**

The god of the Upland Colossal Civilization, a Resonant of Terra who did not die when that world withdrew but sleeps beneath the high peaks; only the Giants speak his name, and other peoples honour him by title alone. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Headwater Exchange Roads**

The roads Humans and Dwarves built over the foothill country, c. 16,000-c. 8,000 BR, partly with chain-camp labour. See The Threads of History (FND 287).

**Headwater Humans**

The Human regional people of the Headwater Marches, foothill neighbours of the Dwarven holds. See *Humans*.

**The Headwater Marches**

The foothill country between the Human farmland and the Dwarven mountains, the oldest shared country of Humans and Dwarves, living by the escorted exchange roads to the hold gates. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Hearth-Weight Compacts**

The Ogre civilization formed from c. 15,000 BR as the organized refusal of the Chain-Camps: no master, but a custom carried from camp to camp that a band is fed, sheltered, and protected before it lifts, and that a cheated band will remember. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

**The Held**

The name the people inside the Hushvale give it, who no longer remember that there is an outside; mostly of cradle-web Human descent, they live in isolated ward-villages and keep the Echo-Mother's quiet-rites without knowing whom they are kept for. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Held Covenant**

The faith of the Dwarven holds, in which the great gods are questions every hold must answer before its people; its clergy are custodians and its central rite the Proving of the Unbroken Line. See *Faith in Practice*.

**High Elves**

The Elven branch of the Crownboughs, which refined Wood Elf ways into living architecture, court ritual, and open rank; their civilization is the Crownbough Courts and their faith the Ordered Bough. See The Elder Peoples (FND 207).

**The High Scars**

The travelling half of the Windscar: wind-broken shelves and storm-cut passes held by moving escorts, where a road is a line of knowledge, not a built surface. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**Highbank**

The Headwater side of Greyford, a walled town in small on a terrace above the flood line, which holds the bridge, the Bridge Hall, and the toll. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Hollow Chorus**

The face of the Unformed that takes away the singer, so that voices come from the air beside their speakers; an "I" said and meant breaks it. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**Hollow Descendants**

Survivor lines of the Sepulchre-Kin that persisted in changed, deep, or fog-adapted forms with little memory of where they came from. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Hollow King**

The Cast-Out of Verba that was the Voice of the Realm, until it decided that true order needed an empty vessel for a ruler. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**Humans**

The young, fast people of the cradle-web's basins and headwaters, of the balanced adaptive field, who emerged c. 300,000-c. 220,000 BR; what marks them is pace, and they form regional peoples rather than branches. See *Humans*.

**The Hushvale**

A basin and valley chain under fog that never lifts, at the foot of an unnamed range on the edge of the Glassbelt Interior, sealed since a waking Record-engine and the rite that hid its survivors c. 1,200 CR. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

# I

**Ignis**

The Prime of fire, energy, and transformation, the spark that turns ore to steel and potential into reality; its Harmonic is the Crucible. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**Imago**

The Prime of identity and potential, the pull of every self towards the self it could become; its Harmonic is the Dreaming Veil. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**Incursion**

A place where a Beyonder's foreign law overrides the local one; only three have ever reached Caeldon, and each left a dead scar: the Hanging Vale, the Paling, and the Wrongwood. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Iron Backbone**

The Harmonic of Terra: earth, structure, and stability, the skeleton that holds the universe together; its Stonewrights are builders and guardians of living stone. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Ironspine**

The long mountain belt beside the forest and the oldest Dwarven homeland, its holds cut into the mountain faces and its mines and underways running down into the rock. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**Ironspine Dwarves**

The Dwarven branch of the mountain holds of the Ironspine, whose civilization is the Ironspine Holds. See The Elder Peoples (FND 207).

**The Ironspine Holds**

The oldest Dwarven civilization, founded c. 460,000-c. 438,000 BR, whose unit is the hold, a stone-rooted order of defence, memory, and craft ruled by whoever keeps it standing. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**Island Gnomes**

See Chainwake Gnomes.

**Ithaere the Drowned Mother**

A Resonant of Aqua that condensed briefly out of the terror of the Drowning Bloom, when the Elves whose survivors became the Dark Elves prayed for permission to survive by any means, and faded when the waters receded. See Stewards and Resonants (FND 85).

# K

**Kavari**

A resident freshwater people of the far side's tributary braids, gravel runs, and deep pools, neither Thaluren nor a river branch of the Reedfolk; their civilization is the Bankright Circles. See *Peoples of the Water*.

**The Keeper of the Unbroken Sequence**

The Steward of Aion who guards causality, seeing that before stays before and consequence follows act. See Stewards and Resonants (FND 85).

**The keeping**

An Edgeway kindred's long care for particular works along its circuit: a culvert cleared every spring, a well relined, a causeway braced before the floods. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The Kelpshade**

The broadest kelp forest of the Tidebound Reaches, where returning runs rest and gather and the young first learn the sea. See *The Tidebound Reaches and the Unrun Sea*.

**Kerrund the Stone-Warden**

The god of the Dwarven hold gates, a Resonant of Terra born at a besieged gate in the early deep conflicts; his question in the Held Covenant is "will you hold?" See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Known Ways**

The routes of the Roothollows that the route keepers count survivable, kept spoken rather than written and learned by mouth and by foot; a way struck from them leaves whoever lives beyond it outside the country in all but memory. See *Roads, Rivers, and Crossings*.

**Kobolds**

A small, careful, underwork-adapted people who live wherever surface and underworld meet imperfectly, in mine-edges, drains, vents, and ruin underlevels; their civilization is the Underhouse Compacts. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

**Krystallis**

The Shattered God, a Beyonder that is the consciousness of a cosmology of one infinite crystal, without time, growth, or decay. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

# L

**The Lacework**

The marked inner channels behind the Tidelace islands that link harbour to harbour, whose marks a harbour child knows before the names of its towns. See *The Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads*.

**The Last Census**

The Sepulchre-Kin's attempt to record every living person into the Record-engine at once, which ended with the engine preserving its own people to death. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Last Chamber**

The deep god of refuge and survivable holding, a Resonant of Terra that condensed during the Heartwell Stakings; its question in the Held Covenant is "can this still bear?", and the Kobold underhouses honour it under a name of their own. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Last Keeping**

The span, c. 150,000-c. 120,000 BR, in which the archive-law world shut its rolls and sealed its last cities, while the keepers who would not let the record die carried its oath forms, scripts, and some of its records to the Floodkeeper Houses. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Lastwater Wells**

The chain of defended wells on the outermost spurs of the Rimward Basins, the last water any Pact custodian answers for and the first that Glassbelt crossers reach, often in poor shape. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**The Lee Road**

The road from the Leeward fold markets over the Lee Wall to the Rimward Basins, under Windscar escort, which keeps Halfling market timing. See *Roads, Rivers, and Crossings*.

**The Lee Wall**

The long ridge on the Windscar side of the Leeward Folds, no built wall at all, to which the Folds owe their life. See *The Leeward Folds*.

**The Leeward Folds**

The Windscar's opposite past a sheltering ridge: hollows, stepped terraces, orchard belts, and cistern-fed valleys, the first named homeland of the Halflings and of the Foldward Commons. See *The Leeward Folds*.

**Lifeforce**

The settled balance of Prime energy each living being carries, inherited with its kind; it shapes healing, affinity, and the cost of magic, and it is neither a soul nor a measure of virtue. See How Magic Works (FND 111).

**The Long Grey**

The great fog belt of the outer Tidelace coast, which rolls in off open water with little warning and can lie on the straits for days. See *The Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads*.

**The Long Pan**

The broadest floor of the Rimward Basins, which floods ankle-deep in a good year; its edge is the one place in the Basins where many kindreds camp side by side. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**The Long Summer**

The Halfling tale of the year Tamsel held the summer form for a whole year. See The Folds, the Scarps, and the Shore (FND 225).

**The Long Tread**

The greatest colossal road, running for weeks along the outer crest of the Ironspine, too broad for any living builder. See *Roads, Rivers, and Crossings*.

**The Lost Archive**

The Record turned inside out; its Librarians try to order the chaos, and visitors who stay too long turn into books and are shelved with the rest. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**Lowbank**

The Marches side of Greyford, also called the Fordbank, lower and wetter, which holds most of the people who keep the crossing working. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Lower Serath**

The lower course of the Serath and the crowded corridor of walled towns strung along it, bound into the Serathic League. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Lucid Wastes**

A desert built by the mind that walks in it, where the faceless Night-Markers, shapes of a traveller's own fears, stalk them. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**Lux**

The Prime of light and possibility, the principle of revelation that makes the hidden visible; its Harmonic is the Shifting Path. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**The Lying Shoals**

The worst braided reach of the Lower Serath, which keeps no channel from one low water to the next; the guarantee there is only as good as the pilot. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

# M

**The Many-Eyed One**

The Cast-Out of Lux that was the Oculus, the clear light that exposed lies, until it came to believe that nothing should be hidden. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Many-Named**

The god of memory kept by voice through the Unrecorded Age, a Resonant of Memoria fed by many peoples under many names, whom later scholars call the Oral Tradition. See Stewards and Resonants (FND 85).

**The March Wall**

A broken run of Human frontier wall beyond which the country goes feral, still quarried for stone and argued over as a boundary. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**Maris of the Tides**

The sea god of the Tidelace Coasts, a Resonant of Aqua born in the Decade of Storms from the prayers of coastal Humans and Gnome harbour towns; her Festival of the Tides brings whole harbours down to the quays. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The mark**

The shared waymark script of the Edgeway Kindreds, cut, painted, or stacked onto ruins along the circuits; keep-marks say a ruin is spoken for, danger-marks grade a structure from braced to never-touch. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The Material Plane**

The central Anchor, also called the Equilibrium: Caeldon's own plane, the hub of the Veil, and the only plane where free will truly works. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Measure Cistern**

The great cistern hall of the Leeward Folds, on the windward side where the Lee Road comes in. See *The Leeward Folds*.

**The Measured Seal**

The deep god of closure, a Resonant of Terra of black ironstone with one arm a gate-leaf, trusted to see a necessary closing and the reckoning after it; its question in the Held Covenant is "must this close?" See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Memory Palace**

The Record made private: a mansion of the mind whose Curators keep its order and will not open the rooms of what has been repressed. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Mending Orders**

The first Wrought civilization: sanctuary workshops that from c. 50 CR hid newly awakened Wrought in their walls and swore to who they were against the Unmakers, and by c. 200 CR had houses in most mixed towns of the Headwater, Ironspine, and Broken Marches worlds; they still swear that a Wrought stays the same person through damage and repair. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

**Mereth the Salt-Witch**

The faded god of a vanished inland-sea people of the Glassbelt Interior, a Resonant of Aqua whose stillness helped turn their sea to salt. See Stewards and Resonants (FND 85).

**The Mirror of Regret**

A zone that shows the life a person would have lived had they chosen differently. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**Mnemosyne Null**

The Unwritten, a Beyonder from a cosmology with no memory, which does not kill but unwrites: colour, then detail, then meaning, then a person's name and language. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**Morphic Magic**

The compound school of Imago with Aqua and Terra, which holds that most forms are negotiations, not absolutes. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Mountain-Father**

See Haurûm the Mountain-Father.

**The Muse's Studio**

A workshop where ideas take bodily form, whose Muses encourage and tempt in equal measure. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

# N

**The Name Bound**

The Binding Song narrowed to names, where a being's True Name floats above it and whoever holds a name can move its bearer like a puppet. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Nameless Current**

The face of the Unformed that takes away direction and the name of where one was going; it cannot carry off someone who names a destination and keeps walking towards it. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**Nature Magic**

The compound school of Aqua, Terra, and Imago, which teaches that life is never solitary and that control is a dangerous word. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**Necromancy**

The compound school of Umbra with Memoria and Aion, from the claim that death changes a being but does not erase all its structure at once. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Nightmare Nexus**

The zone where the nightmares of many minds run together and take flesh. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Nothing**

What lies beyond the Boundary, outside the order of the cosmos; the highest scholarship disputes whether it is merely absent or, as the Great Filter holds, predatory. See The Veil and the Outside (FND 51).

**Nyx Vora**

The Star-Eater, a Beyonder from the Devouring Dark, which eats matter and energy and looks on this universe as a banquet. An example of what a Beyonder could be; none of its Incursions has reached Caeldon. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

# O

**Offnotes**

Beings of the Dissonance that are impossible things with a will: never the same shape twice, and set apart from a mere oddity by the fact that they notice. See The Dissonance (FND 63).

**Ogres**

A load-bearing people, living where settled worlds need heavy work but will not let the workers belong; their custom is hearth-weight and their civilization the Hearth-Weight Compacts. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

**Omm**

The Unison, the most seductive of the Beyonders, because it offers belonging: the union of minds. An example of what a Beyonder could be; none of its Incursions has reached Caeldon. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Oral Tradition**

See The Many-Named.

**Orchard leagues**

The Halfling bonds that tie neighbouring folds together. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**Orcs**

The far-side people of harsh-land endurance, escorted roads, and sworn passage, neither twisted Humans nor mere raiders; their homeland is the Windscar Expanse and their civilization the Windscar Pacts. See The Folds, the Scarps, and the Shore (FND 225).

**The Ordered Bough**

The High Elf faith of tending life towards its intended form, whose temples are temple-gardens and whose clergy are tenders; its most powerful and most contested patron is Saerith the Mirror-King. See *Faith in Practice*.

**Outer-Route Thaluren**

The Thaluren whose runs ride the Far Set, the outermost current road, on their long way home. See *The Tidebound Reaches and the Unrun Sea*.

**The Outside**

The reality beyond the ordered cosmos, past the Boundary, from which the Beyonders come. See The Veil and the Outside (FND 51).

**Ozhar the Pyre-King**

The god of the elder Ash-Furnace world, a Resonant of Ignis and the terrible face of fire, whose name is still forbidden near any furnace. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

# P

**The Paling**

The colourless country between the Lower Serath and the Witnessfields, round the letterless walls of the archive river city that forgot its name, left by the Mnemosyne Null Incursion, c. 132,000-c. 130,000 BR. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Parched**

The Deficit Plane without sustenance, where water and food are absent and every living thing must consume before it is consumed; its people are the Dust-Eaters, and those who stay too long fall to the Thirst-Madness. See The Planes (FND 11).

**Path Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Shifting Path, not the art of commanding fate but of reading the branching conditions of the possible and leaning on them. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Patience**

The name every Orc escort gives the largest lee anchorage below the Gullstair, where held parties wait. See *Roads, Rivers, and Crossings*.

**Pattern**

The scholars' word for what people call the self: a living, changing configuration of thought, feeling, moral reflex, bonds, and a cadence of resonance particular to one person. See What Makes a People (FND 197).

**Predecessor-frames**

Mindless, golem-like Dwarven workframes built for the deep holds' most dangerous work, the ancestors of the Wrought. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

**The Probability Fog**

A rolling mist in which luck is the only law. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Prophecy's Edge**

The Shifting Path narrowed to one blinding point, where Seers speak only of what will happen and visitors act out their parts with their wills pressed almost flat. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

# Q

**Quenchers**

Beings of the Dissonance that feed where light, sound, and warmth go out, and leave dead spots behind; fire only feeds them. See The Dissonance (FND 63).

**Qzoth**

The Becoming, a Beyonder from the Protean Abyss that changes things without reason, direction, or end; it arrives as the Bloom, a writhing tower of flesh. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

# R

**The Radiance**

The Surplus Plane where truth is absolute and privacy impossible; its people, the Illuminated, glow from within, and its Oracle Gates are places of judgement, confession, and mirrors. See The Planes (FND 11).

**Rakhal the Storm-Caller**

The Orc god of the scouring wind of the Windscar, a Resonant of Zephyr who breaks what has gone stale; his following is growing, and he grows more volatile with it. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Rattlecut**

The worst stretch of the Headwater road, a gorge so narrow that in a wet spring the river takes the road; a Troll house keeps it. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**Ravine Trolls**

A Troll woundline of the wet ravines, strong in the Briarreach. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**Record**

The deep retention of coherent Echoes in the cosmos's own memory, chiefly in the Eternal Record. See *What Makes a People*.

**Record Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Eternal Record, resting on the idea that nothing stable can be repaired, judged, or inherited without memory. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Record-engine**

The under-mountain work of the Sepulchre-Kin, of name-vaults, burial chambers, and preservation cores, built to hold the dead until they settled into Record, which in the Unburial War preserved its own people to death. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**Reedfolk**

A secondary species of the wet threshold, at home where land and water never settle which is which, and no branch of Humans, Elves, or Dwarves; their strongest country is the lower Confluence Basins and the Lower Serath, and their order is the Floodkeeper Houses. See *Peoples of the Water*.

**The Reedmere**

The greatest of the reed and fen reaches of the Confluence Basins, above the Lower Serath, and the main Reedfolk country inside the Basins; no sensible boat crosses it without a Reedfolk pilot. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**Resonant Continuity**

The scholars' account of the person as a continuity of Pattern, Echo, and Record, true but known to few outside the highest scholarship; no being on Caeldon carries a detachable, immortal soul. See *What Makes a People*.

**The Resonants**

The gods mortals made without meaning to, condensed out of a Prime's current by what they feared and loved; they can fade, sleep, or die when their worship goes. See Stewards and Resonants (FND 85).

**The Rimward Basins**

The anchored half of the Windscar: closed basins whose rims carry the strongholds, defended wells, and rock-cut cisterns that let Orc life stay in one place. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**Rimward Orcs**

The Orcs of the anchored basin side, who hold the wells and cisterns of the Rimward Basins. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**The Root Course**

The uppermost course of the Verge Stair, which High Elf roots have spread across until it lies half under root. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**The Rootcrown Concord**

The oldest Elven civilization, the Wood Elves of the Elderweald, gathered c. 490,000-c. 460,000 BR: no capital and no seat that speaks for all, only sacred places, elders whom the groves heed, and a shared duty towards the living land. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The Roothollow Rupture**

The catastrophe of c. 335,000-c. 328,000 BR that drove the Dark Elves deeper and began the Elf-Dwarf enmity; at its heart was the Drowning Bloom. See The Threads of History (FND 287).

**The Roothollows**

The root-caverns beside and beneath the forest, where the forest's roots come down through the ceiling and grow into the stone; the country of the Dark Elves. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**The Rootless Tree**

The face of the Unformed that is growth with no ground, which cuts the ties of home and kin; a stone laid on purpose or a hearth built and kept holds it back. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Rootstone Heartwell**

A deep water source, crossing of ways, structural anchor, and remnant of the old underworld at once, fought over in the Heartwell Struggles and claimed by oath ever since. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**The root-year**

The rising and falling of sap in the living roots, which keeps the seasons of the Roothollows and sets most Gloamroot house business. See *A Year in the Medieval Era*.

**The Rotting Crown**

The Cast-Out of Terra that was the Keeper of the Line, until it came to dread every yielding of rule and bound generations into one chain of flesh and will. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Rust Flower**

The Beyonder of premature ending, from the Oxidized Wastes, under which steel, stone, and flesh fall apart before their time; it yields to preservation. An example of what a Beyonder could be; none of its Incursions has reached Caeldon. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

# S

**Sacrificial Magic**

The compound school of Aqua with Imago, Verba, and Ignis, built around exchange under pressure. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**Saerith the Mirror-King**

The High Elf god of the Crownbough Courts and of finished form, a Resonant of Imago born of the houses' pride and fear of being found less than they claimed; the most powerful and most contested patron of the Ordered Bough. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Sallow**

The narrow, silt-heavy river of the Briarreach whose cut carries the region's one reliable through-route, its crossings kept by Troll houses. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**The Salvage Peoples**

A people defined less by descent than by practice, risen from survivor lines who walked the abandoned colossal roads: travelling, reading structures, recovering material, and keeping broken works usable. Their first order is the Edgeway Kindreds. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**Sanctified Magic**

The compound school of Lux with Verba, Aqua, and Terra, which treats magic as covenant made practical. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**Sanctuary Custodians**

The Thaluren keepers of the spawning grounds, who judge whether a water is fouled or defiled and have the last word when the waters of the young are in danger. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The Scourge**

The Deficit Plane without safety, a world of constant danger whose scarred people are the Scourge-Born; it is reached through War-Gates, and those who stay too long risk the Blood-Fury, a rage that turns them on friend and foe alike. See The Planes (FND 11).

**Seal practice**

The Held Covenant as Stonewake and the deep holds keep it: severe, slow to reopen what has been closed, leaning on the Measured Seal and the Last Chamber. See *Faith in Practice*.

**The Sealing of the Upper Roothollows**

The sealing, abandonment, and ritual barring of the ruined passages, c. 328,000-c. 318,000 BR. See The Threads of History (FND 287).

**The Seed**

Another name for the Original Potential from which the Primes differentiated. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**The Sepulchre-Kin**

A remote mountain-basin people of the Elder Worlds, c. 160,000-c. 120,000 BR, whose civilization was built around death-work, burial depth, and the refusal of oblivion, and which fell in the Unburial War. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Serath**

The great river into which the rivers of the Confluence Basins gather. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**Serovan the River-King**

The god of the Serath, a Resonant of Aqua, more foreman than monarch, who stands first in the Sworn Accord beside Anvelle; his Festival of the First Flow opens the river's year. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Shadow Stitcher**

The Cast-Out of Umbra that was the Weaver of Songlines, until it resolved that no one should ever be alone, and offers the lonely a bond that will never leave. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Sheaf Road**

The basin grain road from granary to granary and march-town to march-town along the valley rises above the flood line. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Shearline**

The greatest escarpment of the Windscar, the cliff-broken edge where the High Scars drop towards the basin rims. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**The Shifting Path**

The Harmonic of Lux: possibility, chance, and the future, where what the universe will become is still undecided; its Wayfinders guide the lost through its branches. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Silence**

The Deficit Plane without meaning, the cruellest of the five because what it takes is the self; its natives are the Hollows, and its Quiet Gates are libraries where nobody reads any more and places of deep meditation. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Silence Seed**

The Quiet Plague, a Beyonder whose sign is what stops: birdsong, the wind in the grass, a traveller's own footsteps; it breaks on loud, ragged noise. An example of what a Beyonder could be; none of its Incursions has reached Caeldon. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Silent Court**

A round chamber of black stone found in ancient courthouses and at the sites of great trials and broken oaths, where words have weight and masked Judges weigh every one and never speak. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Silent Gale**

The Gale's paradox: a wind of hurricane force that makes no sound at all, held sacred by its Mute-Walkers. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Silent Screamer**

The Cast-Out of Verba that was the Liberator of Tongues, keeper of the cathartic cry, until it grew terrified of what speech does and decided to stop the voice. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Sky Isles**

A scattered archipelago of floating land, from rocky outcrops to great masses of earth, where the Sky-Walkers rest without ever letting go of their anchor. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**Songline**

An imposed course: sustained resonant pressure from outside that bends a person, a group, an object, or a plane towards one end; its strength is its pressure, and the mounting cost of resisting it is its dissonance. A scholars' word; most people speak of fate or luck. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Soul Anchor**

The common name for a zone where the Whispering Trace has become a prison, holding Echoes on their chains. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Soundchain Roads**

The chain of roadsteads, lee sounds, transfer quays, and pilot stations along the Tidelace's Windscar-facing edge, where escorted Orc parties are met, counted, and answered by Gnome station crews. See *The Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads*.

**The Sounding Gate**

The best-known harbour entrance of the Tidelace, the marked mouth of a Gaugeward harbour with its sounding house, beacons, and Open Bench, held by the harbour families who decide who may pass it and when. See *The Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads*.

**The Split Reed Mouth**

The mixed estuary on the coastward edge of the Tidebound Reaches where a Thaluren return river breaks into braided channels around reed-shelves; centre of the Estuary Terms. See *The Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads*.

**The Spread of the Predecessor-Frames**

The span, c. 16,000-c. 2,000 BR, in which Dwarven workframes left the holds along the Headwater roads and spread across the corridor world as labour that could not refuse. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

**The Starving Winter**

The basin tale, told more often where levies rise, of the year the people refused to rest the land and half the villages starved. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Static**

The White Noise, a Beyonder that buries every signal in hiss and flicker until the senses report what is not there; one clear, steady thought cuts through it. An example of what a Beyonder could be; none of its Incursions has reached Caeldon. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Still Well**

The Orc tale told against the strongholds, of a camp that stayed at one well until the water soured, until the Storm-Caller tore the shelters down and drove it on. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**Stillgate**

The sealed archive-city of the Witnessfields nearest the corridor, where the closing words of the registers are cut into the gate. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Stonewake Compact**

The Dwarven civilization within the Ironspine Holds, founded c. 360,000-c. 348,000 BR: a deep-hold order of guarded ways, reservoirs, and archives, with the severest closure custom in the lower world, under which a shut door can save a hundred holds or bury the people behind it. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**The Stonewake Deeps**

The deep central hold-cluster below the Ironspine, where more of the lower world's routes and water converge than anywhere else, and where a sealed door is at once an oath, a prayer, and a border. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**The Stopped Clock**

A pocket where time has halted at one instant, centred on a Clock-Keeper, often the remnant of whoever made it. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Storm Heart**

A perpetual lightning storm in which the order of things is turned over; its Storm-Walkers ride the lightning, and visitors who are struck and survive are drawn back until they become part of it. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**Storm Magic**

The compound school of Ignis with Zephyr and Aqua: unstable convergence, great force from tensions held just long enough to break together. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Stormcrown**

The high country above the Ironspine holds, bare ridges and storm shelves where the Upland Colossal world left its terraces, ridge roads, and weather shrines; the colossal heartland still. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Sunken Stairs**

The mouths of root-grown stairways that once ran from the deep groves of the Elderweald down into the Roothollows, ending now in silt and bars. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Surging Deep**

The Harmonic of Aqua: water, flow, life, and adaptation, the circulation of the cosmos; its Tidesingers speak in song and see the universe as one system to be kept in balance. See The Planes (FND 11).

**Surging Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Surging Deep, whose lesson is that life survives through movement. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Sworn Accord**

The faith of the Human corridor world, the Confluence Marches and the Serathic League, which treats gods as the river towns treat strangers: a god is honoured in common once a town has sworn to it and entered it on the roster in its oath-house, and Anvelle and Serovan stand first. See *Faith in Practice*.

# T

**The Taken**

The Sepulchre-Kin preserved as damaged Echoes inside their dormant Record-engine, the last of the Tomb-Builder's worshippers. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**Tamsel the Season-Weaver**

The god of the turning year in the Halfling folds, a Resonant of Aion who is young and green in spring and pale and frosted in winter; the Festival of the Turn is kept for Tamsel. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**Tenders**

The clergy of the Ordered Bough, whose authority rests on patience and on what has visibly flourished under their care. See *Faith in Practice*.

**Terra**

The Prime of earth, structure, and permanence, the framework on which every other force builds and the first of the ten to wake; its Harmonic is the Iron Backbone. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**Thaluren**

An ancient oceanic people of the Tidebound Reaches, no branch of the Elves despite the misnomer "sea-elves"; they live at sea but are born upriver, and the return to spawn shapes all their custom and faith. See *Peoples of the Water*.

**Thorn Elves**

The Elven branch that hardened under the harsh woodland of the Briarreach towards caution, defensive adaptation, and strict boundary custom; their civilization is the Thornbound Circles. See The Elder Peoples (FND 207).

**The Thornbound Circles**

The Thorn Elf civilization of the Briarreach, founded c. 405,000-c. 392,000 BR, whose own gift is earned hospitality: a stranger is let in only by steps and under a sponsor. See *The Civilizations of the Medieval Era*.

**The threshold chamber**

The outermost chamber of a Gloamroot house, where the way enters, the route keepers lodge, and strangers are received. See Stone and the Deep (MED 151).

**The threshold watch**

The watch of a Gloamroot house, changing at fixed turns, in which someone of the house sits in the threshold chamber with a route keeper, and a house that refuses a stranger there lives with the refusal for generations. See *A Year in the Medieval Era*.

**The Tidal Mirror**

A pool that reflects not the present but time; its Echo-Divers live partly in the past and warn every visitor not to look too long. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Tidebound Reaches**

The far-side water-world that binds sea and river into one: current roads, reef and kelp settlements, estuaries, and upriver spawning approaches; the homeland of the Thaluren. See *The Tidebound Reaches and the Unrun Sea*.

**The Tidelace**

See The Tidelace Coasts.

**The Tidelace Coasts**

The broken far-side coast of inlets, island chains, tidal straits, cliff harbours, and fog belts, where nobody enters the sea without reading it first, and some hamlets keep a wrecker's lamp; the country of the Gnomes. See *The Tidelace and the Soundchain Roads*.

**The Time Lock**

A zone built on purpose: a vault of dilated time drawn from the Frozen Moment, guarded by the Bronze Sentries, in which what was sealed stays as dangerous as on the day it was sealed. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Tollwardens**

The lord's keepers of the Greyford toll-gate, who take what the lord asks for each load and chalk a mark on the cart. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Tomb-Builder**

The god of the Sepulchre-Kin burial houses, a Resonant of Terra whose obsession with permanence drove the Unburial War; his true name is held inside their Record-engine. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**Trace Magic**

The Harmonic school of the Whispering Trace, concerned with what remains after departure, damage, death, or loss. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**Trolls**

A people of wounded frontiers, whose bodies carry Failed Mending, found where land and works refuse to heal and holding the crossings

no one else will keep; their civilization is the Crossing-Oath Houses, and their lines are called woundlines. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

**The Truthwell**

A stone basin of unnaturally pure water that rejects falsehood and holds drowned liars as warnings, kept as a sacred trust by the Water-Robed. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

# U

**Ulaun the Stilled Hour**

The Resonant of Aion born of Thaluren dread as egg blight entered the First Nesting Confluence; the stillness she gave held the clutches in a prison from which they could never hatch. See *Peoples of the Water*.

**Umbra**

The Prime of shadow and the trace, the principle of what remains; its Harmonic is the Whispering Trace. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**The Unbound Gale**

The Harmonic of Zephyr: air, motion, freedom, and thought, the breath of the universe and the carrier of ideas; its footless Wind-Walkers glide on its currents. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Unburial War**

The unrecorded fall of the Sepulchre-Kin, c. 110,000-c. 80,000 BR, in which their burial houses turned their power over the dead on one another. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Understorey Courts**

The terraced receiving grounds at the foot of the Crownbough canopy where envoys and petitioners wait, often for a long time; few are taken higher. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**The Unformed**

The one undivided potential from before the Primes, still lying beneath all they defined and pressing towards the undoing of form; it feels no malice, its threat is a gradual loss of meaning, names, and edges, and the ten named Unformed are its faces. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Unrecorded Age**

The sixth age, c. 120,000-c. 40,000 BR, after writing ended in the cradle, when peoples kept their customs and genealogies in breath and its graves and hoards are still turned up by the plough. See The Ages of Caeldon (FND 277).

**The Unrun Sea**

The open ocean seaward of every known far-side water, past the Far Set, the outer isles of the Tidelace, and the fog banks off the Soundchain Roads. See *The Tidebound Reaches and the Unrun Sea*.

**The Upper Roothollows**

The upper storey of the root-cavern world nearest the forest, drowned in the Roothollow Rupture and sealed ever since: a layer nobody enters. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**Ushkar the Ancestor-Warden**

The Orc god of lineage and the dead on the Windscar, a Resonant of Memoria who keeps the names of kindreds that held passage on the Stele of Names and strikes the names of those who broke it, leaving them outlaws of the open country. See The Folds, the Scarps, and the Shore (FND 225).

# V

**Varn the Shadow-Stalker**

The god of the hidden in the Broken Marches, a Resonant of Umbra born of everyone who has had to live unseen in the ruin-belts; many fugitive Wrought prayed to him. See The Gods of the Medieval Era (MED 69).

**The Veil**

The fluid space between places that connects every plane, a fog whose face changes towards each plane it borders and which takes its price from travellers, most often in what they remember. See The Veil and the Outside (FND 51).

**The Veil-Walkers**

The people native to the Veil, humanoid, with skin that shimmers like oil on water and features that shift with the fog, so that nobody can say afterwards quite what a Veil-Walker's face was like. See The Veil and the Outside (FND 51).

**Verba**

The Prime of language, order, and meaning, the force that turns noise into speech and sensation into a world of named things; its Harmonic is the Binding Song. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

**The Verdant Expanse**

The Surplus Plane where life reproduces faster than anything can contain it; its people, the Verdant, have skin like bark, leaves, or moss, and its Seed-Gates are ancient forests and overgrown ruins. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Verge Stair**

The stone stair of Dwarven building between the Ironspine and the Crownboughs that ends at a gate the High Elf courts grew; each side keeps its half, and exchange is done on the landing between. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**Vital Magic**

The compound school that braids Aqua, Imago, and Memoria to restore a living body in flow, form, and pattern at once. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

# W

**The Waitfield**

The cleared ground at the edge of the Briarreach where the Thornbound Circles receive traders and envoys, and where most trade happens and goes no further. See The Forest Heartlands (MED 129).

**The Wake-Seal**

The rite of shadow and concealment the Hushvale survivors made c. 1,200 CR to hide their villages from the waking Record-engine, which closed the vale under fog. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**The Warden of Irreversible Endings**

The Steward of Aion who holds that some losses cannot be reclaimed without cost; those who come to it to undo a loss are told to bring an honest account of what they will pay. See Stewards and Resonants (FND 85).

**Warding**

The compound school of Terra with Verba and Lux: the school of saying no with structure. See The Schools of Magic (FND 129).

**The Way of Return**

The faith of the Thaluren and the only organized religion on Caeldon with no god at its centre: its teaching is the rule of return and its pilgrimage the run itself. See *Peoples of the Water*.

**The Weatherline**

A chain of colossal stacked-stone weather shrines on the Stormcrown's highest ridges, facing the storms rather than any town. See Worlds That Came Before (FND 295).

**The Weave**

The Surplus Plane where separation is impossible; its people, the Linked, carry the feeling of the collective, and beings wholly merged into its network form the Chorus. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Weeping Idol**

The Cast-Out of Lux that was the Keeper of the Shrine, until it wearied of doubt and set out to carve the faithful into figures of unthinking adoration. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**The Whetgap**

The main crossing of the High Scars, a narrow storm-cut pass where the wind is strongest and the scree least stable. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**The Whispering Trace**

The Harmonic of Umbra: death, reflection, and remnant, the space between the living and the gone; its Echo-Walkers help lost Echoes towards release or passage into the Record. See The Planes (FND 11).

**The Whispering Winds**

A zone of the Unbound Gale in a high pass, a canyon, or a windy ruin, where the Wind-Listeners live by hearing and the voices of visitors whose bodies are gone have joined the wind. See The Resonant Zones (FND 33).

**The Windscar**

See The Windscar Expanse.

**The Windscar Expanse**

The far side's exposed heart: dry uplands, escarpments, and interior basins, homeland of the Orcs, divided between the anchored Rimward Basins and the exposed High Scars. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**The Windscar Pacts**

The first named Orc civilization and the far side's first inland founding, c. 180,000-c. 150,000 BR: kindreds bound by treaty-grounds, escort oaths, and the blood owed for a broken passage, split between reserve-right on the rims and treaty-right on the roads. See The Windscar (MED 235).

**The Witnessfields**

The terraced upland east of the Lower Serath, the sealed homeland of the elder Archive-Law world: marker roads lined with inscribed stones and archive-cities whose gates have been shut for more than a hundred thousand years, where the Grey Clerks still stop passers. See Sealed and Silent Places (MED 203).

**Wood Elves**

The first Elven branch, a grove-bound people of the Elderweald whose continuity is kept by growing within a living landscape, not by redesigning it; their civilization is the Root-crown Concord. See The Elder Peoples (FND 207).

**The Wrongwood**

The burned and overgrown Headwater valley where the Qzoth Incursion, c. 4,000-c. 3,500 BR, was burned back; Kindless Broods still breed there, and broken ground wakes the Changing Fever. See The Basins and the Marches (MED 173).

**The Wrought**

The made people, youngest of Caeldon, who began when Dwarven predecessor-frames stopped being tools; their continuity passes through design and repair, and their civilization is the Mending Orders. See *The Bridge Peoples*.

# X

**Xylos**

The Hive-Mind, a Beyonder that offers union in the body instead of the mind. An example of what a Beyonder could be; none of its Incursions has reached Caeldon. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

**Xyphra**

The Unraveller, a Beyonder that dissolves the glue between things, so that a blade leaves its hilt mid-swing; it cannot cut a bond held hard. An example of what a Beyonder could be; none of its Incursions has reached Caeldon. See What Waits Outside (FND 97).

# Z

**Zephyr**

The Prime of air and motion, the last of the ten to wake; its Harmonic is the Unbound Gale. See The Ten Primes (FND 73).

# Index


## A

Adoring Statues, 872
Ageless Spring, The, 124, 268, 369, 606, 782-783, 836, 958, 1068
Aion, 941
Aion Prime, 997
Air Eels, 710
Air-Goats, 712
Alders, 270
Amberbough, 343
Anchored, The, 722-723, 981, 986-987
Anchors, The, 757, 830-831
Anvelle the Harvest-Mother, 124, 163, 216, 310, 334-336, 434, 449-450, 459
Anvil Snails, 714
Apex, The, 317-318, 472, 474-475, 526-527, 546-547, 574, 676-677, 948-949
Apex-Born, 474-475, 949
Aqua, 767, 922, 1000
Arbiters, 476-477, 506
Architects, 716-717
Archive-Law Civilization, The, 366, 978
Ash-Furnace Civilization, The, 63, 976, 1004
Ash-Thistle, 272
Ash-Turned, 480-481
Ash-Walkers, 273, 482-483, 505, 531, 535
Ash-Wights, 874-875
Ashen Child, The, 874, 920
Ashen Wastes, The, 272, 283, 480, 482, 504, 522, 530, 534, 594, 636
Augury Magic, 380
autumn count, The, 314, 345, 384
Awakening of the Wrought, The, 968

## B

Backbone Magic, 122, 365, 659
Bad Air, 23
Badgers, 18-19
Barley, 274-275
Barleystep, 114, 275, 399
Bats, 22-23
Beans, 276-277
Beyonders, The, 278, 419
Binding Magic, 643
Binding Song, The, 476, 506, 624, 642, 690
Bitterberry, 281
Blackfins, 28-29
Blank Hosts, 876-877
Bleed-Beetles, 484
Blightward Keepers, The, 411
Blood Magic, 1021
Blood River, The, 125, 428, 718, 720, 762-763, 766-767, 820-821, 1020-1021
Blood-Eels, 718-719
Blood-Hounds, 486
Blood-Spinners, 720
Bloodgrass, 285, 638, 644
Bloomspawn, 488-489
Bone Singer, The, 878-880
Bone Statues, 878
Bone-Choirs, 880
Bone-Walkers, 490
BR, 278, 876, 888, 891, 898, 916, 968, 972, 976, 978, 1000-1001, 1034
Brace-Gnawers, 1052
Bracken, 289-290
Briarreach, The, 52-53, 101-102, 109, 183, 235, 255-256, 281, 315, 323-324, 343, 355-356, 432-433, 437-438, 988
Bridge-Dead, 988-989
Broken Compass, The, 934
Broken Marches, The, 22-23, 35, 58-59, 87, 91, 132, 144, 193, 255-256, 295, 323-325, 370, 372, 402, 435, 438, 487, 954, 988
Bronze Sentries, 938-939
Burden-Stays, 883
Burners, 492-493
Burning Bread, 337-338
Burst-Dead, 990-991

## C

Cage-Larks, 494-495
Cairn-Wakers, 992
Calvesh the Chronos-King, 979
Carrion-Kites, 496
Cast-Out of Unyielding Burden, The, 882
Cast-Outs, The, 886
Cats, 34-35
Cattle, 36-37, 220, 290
Cellar Rot, 295
Censors, 498-499, 537
Chain-Binders, 722, 981
Chainwake Gnomes, 1007
Chamber-Grey, 297
Chance Hares, 500
Changers, 724-725, 825
Changing Fever, The, 279
Chime-Bats, 726
Choked, The, 994-995
Chorus, 502-503, 880, 884-885, 896-897
Chorus-Hosts, 884-885
Cinder Fields, The, 125, 728, 734, 752, 754, 818, 1054
Cinder-Moths, 728
circuit, The, 1011
Clearwater Shrimp, 730
Clock-Keeper, The, 996
Clockrats, 732
Clockwork Guards, 942-943
Clockwork, The, 940-942
Cold-Salamanders, 734, 755
Cold-Stalkers, 504
Coldcoat Wolves, 1054
commons, The, 112, 146-147, 314, 325, 346, 452-453
Confluence Basins, The, 18, 34, 36-37, 48-49, 60, 72, 80-81, 89, 91, 93, 97-98, 101-102, 105, 109, 111, 115, 119-121, 124, 136, 140, 144, 146, 148, 158, 162, 175, 179, 181, 205-206, 215, 223, 227, 245, 247, 255-257, 259, 270-271, 276, 287, 299, 307, 309, 321, 334, 337, 339, 353, 376, 385, 389-390, 426, 434, 458, 460-461, 464, 876, 946, 1024, 1040, 1064, 1070

Congers, 40-41
Conjuration, 944, 946, 952, 954
Contract-Binders, 506-507
Coolers, 736-737
Cornerstones, 508-509
Counted Lee Timing Feud, The, 383
Counted Lee, The, 383
court season, The, 292
CR, 968, 972, 1035, 1048
cradle-web, The, 60, 72, 93, 215, 239, 321, 337, 351, 370, 372, 376, 380, 383, 385, 396, 423, 432-433, 438, 444, 450, 459, 468, 946, 998-999, 1016, 1042, 1064, 1066, 1070
Crossing-Oath Houses, The, 989
Crossroad Hanged, 998
Crow-Scarers, 946
Crownbough Courts, The, 375
Crownboughs, The, 30-32, 93, 217, 263-264, 291, 323-324, 342-344, 347-351, 355-356, 374-375, 382-383, 398-399
Crucible Magic, 122, 305
Crucible, The, 306, 480-481, 483, 492-493, 544-545, 552-553, 652-653, 662-663
Crystal Singers, 738-739
Crystal Spire, The, 726, 738, 770
Crystal-Golems, 547, 948
Curators, 776, 853, 950-951
Current-Bound, 510-511

## D

Dark Elves, 26-27, 132-133, 167-168, 189, 237, 297, 319-320, 362-363, 400, 454-455, 1000
Dark Entities, The, 279, 449, 467
Decade of Storms, The, 81
Deep World, The, 320
Deepswells, 702-703
Deer, 52-53
Dice-Lords, 512-513
Dissonance, The, 702-704, 706-707
Door-Keepers, 740-741
Doves, 60-61
Dragons, 62
Dream Magic, 299, 435, 605
Dream-Forms, 514-515
Dream-Sickness, 300, 833
Dreamcress, 299
Dreaming Veil, The, 299, 373, 436, 514, 518, 543, 604-605, 620-623, 630, 966, 974
Drifters, 510, 516-517, 650, 686, 1033
Driftmats, 301
Drowned Court, The, 1000
Drowning Bloom, The, 168
Drowning Garden, The, 66, 303, 356-357, 360-361, 369, 710, 758
Drowse-Wings, 518
Dry Folds, The, 38, 154, 231, 383, 433, 452
Dryfold Halflings, 39
Dust-Eaters, 520-521, 539, 669
Dust-Striders, 522
Dust-Wyrms, 524
Dwarves, 16-17, 24, 36, 42, 44-45, 64-65, 95, 113, 128-129, 132-133, 150, 156, 173, 205, 221, 251, 274-275, 297, 319, 332-333, 339, 342, 358-359, 362, 364, 392-393, 398-399, 416-417, 437, 509, 834, 860, 882, 964, 968, 982, 1028, 1052-1053

## E

Echo, 413, 442, 526-529, 543, 571, 596-597, 722-723, 742-745, 757, 784-785, 859, 869, 972-973, 980-981, 986, 995-996, 1003, 1012, 1014-1015, 1018, 1033-1037
Echo-Divers, 742-743
Echo-Mother, The, 973
Echo-Readers, 744-745
Echo-Statues, 526-527
Echo-Walkers, 528-529, 1037
Edgeway Kindreds, The, 24-25, 233, 251, 329, 457
Eels, 72-73
Elderweald, The, 20-21, 32-33, 52-53, 76, 93, 101-102, 119-120, 167, 173, 217, 248, 255-256, 263, 299, 315, 319-320, 342-343, 347-348, 351, 355-356, 362-363, 368, 374-377, 382-383, 385, 398-399, 426, 437-439, 1058, 1064
Elk, 76-77
Elves, 20-21, 26, 30, 32, 52-53, 76-77, 93-94, 101-102, 107, 109, 132, 167, 183, 189-190, 217-218, 235-237, 247, 255, 263, 281, 291, 297-299, 315, 319-320, 323, 343-344, 347-349, 351-352, 362-363, 374, 376, 380, 382, 385-386, 398-401, 426, 454-455, 458-459, 468, 1000-1001, 1058-1060, 1064, 1068
Ember Moss, 305
Ember-Grubs, 530-531
Enforcers, 532-533, 942-943
Ennor the Grave-Watcher, 356, 529, 697, 1003, 1009, 1017, 1031, 1035
Entropy-Seekers, 534
Equilibrium, The (see Material Plane, The)
Erasure Mites, 536
Eternal Record, The, 478, 498, 528, 536, 586, 607, 682, 970, 1002

## F

Facet Lice, 888
Fade, The, 579, 597, 688, 1037
Fall of the Ash-Furnace Civilization, The, 976
False Wells, 538-539
Familiars, 952
Far Set, The, 50, 78, 195, 301-302, 1038-1039
far side, The, 35, 42, 78, 80, 85, 142, 158, 165, 177, 186, 191, 201, 209, 213, 215, 233-234, 248, 310, 313, 334, 336, 340, 370, 383, 390, 396, 412, 433, 444, 459, 1028, 1066
Fare Leeches, 540-541
Farwings, 78-79, 302
Fate, 555, 751, 823
Fear-Monsters, 542
Festival of the First Flow, The, 450, 459
Festival of the First Sheaf, The, 163, 336, 465
Festival of the Tides, The, 459
Field Bulwarks, 954
Fire-Stalkers, 544
First Nesting Confluence, The, 74, 214
Fish, 66-67, 80-81
Flawless, 546
Flesh Weaver, The, 720-721, 904, 922
Flesh-Hosts, 890-891
Floaters, 748-749, 772
Flockturn, 106, 110, 206, 259-260, 290, 367, 979
Floodkeeper Houses, The, 310
Flower-Stalkers, 548
Flux Maze, The, 330-331, 716, 740, 790, 808, 838
Fodder, 311-312
Fog-Stalkers, 550-551
Fogbells, 85-86
Fold Saffron, 313
Foregone Hounds, 750
Forge Deep, The, 714, 736, 834
Forgers, 552-553
Forking Road, The, 500, 512-513, 554, 564, 694-695, 850
Fortune-Weavers, 554-555
Foundations, The, 556-557, 602
Foxes, 87-88
Foxfire, 315
Freeze, The, 559, 963
Frost-Born, 395, 558-559, 577, 581, 657, 963
Frost-Bound, The, 369, 394, 558-561, 568-

569, 576-577, 580-583, 656-657, 700, 962-963
Frost-Burned, 752-753, 819, 1055
Frost-Wolves, 560, 962
Frost-Wyrms, 754-755
Frozen Moment Magic, 459
Frozen Moment, The, 606-607, 612, 632-633, 654-655, 938, 940-941, 958
Furnace-Ash Sickness, 306, 977, 1057
Fused Dead, 1004-1005

## G

Gale Jellies, 562
Gale Magic, 699
Gallows Root, 321, 999
Gamblers, 501, 512-513, 554, 564, 725, 807, 851
Gaoler, The, 756-757, 981
Gatehold Dwarves, 44
Gates, 67, 414, 446, 475, 483, 489, 521, 526, 537, 539, 546, 559, 563, 579, 583, 585, 597, 601, 616-617, 627, 635, 640, 645, 653, 667, 679, 685, 691, 711, 751, 791, 859, 1013
Ghessa the Hearth-Mother, 356
Ghost Step, The, 858-859, 1012, 1014-1015
Giants, 24-25, 44-45, 221-222, 1072-1073
Gilded, 440-441, 566-567, 943
Gilded Cage, The, 440, 494, 532, 566, 942
Gill-Folk, 66-67, 303-304, 758-759
Glacier-Drakes, 568, 962
Glare-Lilies, 326
Glassback Lizards, 1056
Glassbelt Interior, The, 56, 69-71, 117-118, 142, 165, 169, 191, 197, 199-202, 229, 233-234, 249, 253-254, 265-266, 305, 328-329, 406, 456, 972-973, 976, 1004, 1026-1027, 1056
Glassbelt, The (see Glassbelt Interior, The)
Glasscup, 328
gloam, The, 189-190, 297, 315, 320, 330, 362-363, 400, 454
Gloamroot Covenant, The, 319, 362, 1001
Gloom-Leeches, 760-761
Gluttons, 95-96
Gnomes, 28-29, 40, 78-81, 83-86, 99-100, 113, 126-127, 134-135, 152-153, 158-159, 177-178, 203-204, 209, 211-214, 219, 243-244, 301-302, 310, 314, 323-325, 335, 360-361, 382-383, 389-390, 404-405, 408-409, 452-453, 458, 968-969, 1006-1007
Goblins, 23, 48-49, 59, 72, 80, 91-92, 130-131, 144-145, 158-159, 164, 169-170, 175-176, 185-186, 193-194, 229-230, 241, 255-256, 270-271, 295-296, 323-325, 366-367, 371-373, 389-390, 402-403, 435-436, 460-461, 978-979, 988-989
Gorge-Gnats, 762
Grafted, The, 892-893
Grain, 334-335
Grain Spur, 337
Grammar of War, The, 798-799, 1044
Grave-Keepers, 570
Gravity Well, The, 330-331, 748, 772, 860
Great Slumber, The, 918
Greenharts, 1058
Grey Clerks, The, 978
Grey Crews, 1006-1007
Grey Line, The, 109, 206, 259-260, 340, 366, 978-979
Grey Mist, The, 900
Greyford, 48-49, 72, 122, 165, 206, 241-242, 270-271, 989
Greyford Bridge, The (see Greyspan, The)
Greyford Reach, The, 48, 72, 89, 91, 115, 121-122, 130, 144, 158, 164-165, 185, 193-194, 241, 270, 274-277, 295, 321, 323-324, 372, 389-390, 402, 435, 438, 460-461, 988
Greyspan, The, 48-49, 73, 165
Groveknot, 347-348
Guardian Host, The, 956-957
Gullhead, 203
Gullstair, The, 203-204, 220
Gust-Callers, 572-573
Gust-Stalkers, 764

## H

Halflings, 38-39, 111-113, 120, 142-143, 146-147, 154-155, 164, 175, 201-202, 219-220, 231-233, 243-244, 247-248, 313-314, 323-325, 334, 336-338, 345, 352, 382-384, 449-450, 452-453, 458
Hall Canker, 349
Hanging Vale, The, 888-889, 916-917
Hares, 105-106
Harmony-Beasts, 574
Haurûm the Mountain-Father, 393
Headwater Exchange Roads, The, 969
Headwater Humans, 43, 102, 131, 186
Headwater Marches, The, 18-20, 36-37, 42, 44-45, 53, 60, 76-77, 95, 102, 105, 109, 130, 140, 146-147, 150, 162, 164-165, 173, 179, 185-186, 205-206, 239, 251, 263, 274-276, 289, 321, 332, 335, 337, 339, 358, 364, 376, 378, 392, 437, 890, 898, 946, 954, 1022, 1064, 1070
Hearth-Weight Compacts, The, 275, 277
Hedgehogs, 111
Held Covenant, The, 399, 883, 1029
Held, The, 515, 632, 973, 1035, 1048-1049
Hemlock, 353
Hemophages, 766-767
Herbs, 355-356
High Elves, 30, 291, 324, 342, 344, 348-349, 355, 375
High Scars, The, 42-43, 68, 113-114, 142, 187, 199, 201, 207, 219, 233, 239, 261, 265, 312, 335, 339-340, 383, 420, 422, 432-433, 992-993
Highbank, 49, 72-73, 131, 241-242, 325
Hiss-Flies, 894
Hoar Owls, 576-577
Hollow Chorus, The, 896
Hollow Descendants, 1035
Hollow Flocks, 896
Hollow King, The, 886-887
Hollows, 538, 578-579
Hoodwort, 358
Hornets, 119-120
Horses, 121-122
Humans, 18, 20, 23-24, 29-30, 32-33, 36-37, 40-42, 44, 48, 52-53, 58, 60-61, 72, 76-77, 79-81, 83-86, 88, 91, 93-95, 97, 99-102, 105-107, 109-112, 115-116, 120-122, 130, 136-137, 140, 144-150, 152-153, 156, 158, 162, 164, 173, 175-176, 178, 183, 185, 193-194, 203-205, 209-212, 214, 221, 223, 227-228, 236, 241, 245, 247-248, 251, 255-257, 259-260, 263, 265-266, 270, 274, 276-277, 282, 287, 289, 295, 299, 302, 307, 309, 315, 321, 323-324, 329, 332, 334-335, 337, 339, 342, 344-345, 351-353, 358, 361, 364-366, 372, 376, 378, 380, 385, 389-390, 392, 399, 402-405, 408-409, 432-433, 435, 437-438, 444, 449, 458, 460, 464, 468-469, 474, 476, 478, 480, 482, 520-521, 552, 558, 566, 578, 584, 600, 640-642, 658, 670, 684, 694, 696-698, 748-749, 758-759, 766, 768, 830, 834-835, 842, 856, 904-905, 946, 954, 960-961, 964, 968-969, 978, 982, 988-990, 998-999, 1006-1007, 1016-1017, 1022, 1024, 1040, 1042-1043, 1053, 1058, 1060, 1062-1064, 1066-1068, 1070, 1072
Hushvale, The, 972, 1008-1009, 1034, 1048-1049

## I

Ice-Beasts, 580

Ice-Shards, 583, 962-963
Ice-Stalkers, 582
Ignis, 641, 735, 753, 874
Ill-Called, 964
Ill-Hatched, 1060-1061
Illuminated, 584-585, 666, 675
Imago, 1060
Imago Prime, 124
Incursion, 278-279, 466-467, 876, 884-885, 891, 902-903, 906-907, 914-917
Indexers, 586-587
Iron Backbone, The, 330, 508, 556, 602, 626, 658-659, 664, 1053
Iron-Claws, 588
Ironspine Dwarves, 43
Ironspine Holds, The, 358, 392, 438
Ironspine, The, 16, 22, 24, 37, 42, 44-45, 64, 95, 113-114, 122, 150, 173-174, 206, 221, 251, 274-275, 319-320, 332, 335, 339, 343, 358, 364, 378, 392, 398, 416, 438, 882, 968-969, 1028, 1052
Island Gnomes (see Chainwake Gnomes)
Itch, The, 138
Ithaere the Drowned Mother, 168, 310, 363, 1000-1001

## J

Judges, 768-769, 775

## K

Kavari, 74-75, 134-135, 158-159, 185-186
Keeper of the Unbroken Sequence, The, 997
Keepers of Dust, 590-591
keeping, The, 29, 33-34, 60, 69, 88, 104, 112, 147, 170, 210, 215, 248, 320, 329, 352, 374, 433, 457, 482, 559, 571, 676, 758, 767, 775, 823, 883-884, 938-939, 963, 1038
Kelp, 360-361
Kelpshade, The, 50, 55, 126-127, 195-196, 360-361, 410-411
Kerrund the Stone-Warden, 369
Kindless Broods, 898
Kingfishers, 130
Kinspinners, 592-593
Knockrun, 1029
Known Ways, The, 363, 400
Kobolds, 16-17, 22-23, 62-65, 91-92, 128-129, 132-133, 182, 295-296, 416-417, 437-438, 968-969, 1028-1029, 1052-1053
Krystallis, 888, 916
Krystallis Incursion, The, 888, 916

## L

Lacework, The, 302, 405
Lampreys, 134-135
Last Census, The, 973, 1034
Last Chamber, The, 883
Last Keeping, The, 978
Last-Light Moths, 594
Last-Word Finches, 596
Lastlight, 78-79, 302
Lastwater Wells, The, 170, 197, 250, 456
Lattice Guardians, 770-771
Lead Crabs, 772
Lee Road, The, 165, 220, 233, 382-383
Lee Wall, The, 142, 383
Leeches, 136-137, 541
Leeward Folds, The, 38, 90, 111, 114, 119, 142, 146-147, 154, 164-165, 175, 179, 201, 219-220, 231, 233, 243, 247-248, 313, 323-324, 334-335, 345, 382-383, 422, 433, 449, 452
Ley Moles, 1062
Liar Toads, 774
Librarians, 776-777
Life-Bearers, 598
Lifeforce, 355
Lightning Larks, 778
Lightning-Beasts, 780-781
Lingerers, The, 268, 782-783, 958-959
Linked, 600-601
Load-Bearers, 602-603
Locusts, 142
Lodewort, 364
Long Grey, The, 83-86, 204, 1006-1007
Long Pan, The, 71, 142, 171-172, 191-192, 207, 220, 225-226, 253, 340, 406
Long Summer, The, 384
Long Tread, The, 24-25, 222, 251-252
Loop-Weavers, 784-785, 981
Lost Archive, The, 369, 744, 776, 788
Lowbank, 49, 72-73, 91, 130-131, 144, 158-159, 179, 186, 193-194, 271, 277, 295, 323-325, 390, 402, 435, 461
Lower Serath, The, 18, 34, 48-49, 60, 72, 80-81, 89, 97, 115, 136, 148, 164-165, 223, 227, 245, 257, 270, 276-277, 287, 309, 335, 345, 353, 389-390, 459-460, 876, 1024, 1040
Lucid Wastes, The, 832, 966
Lucids, 604-605
Lux, 585, 872, 932
Lying Shoals, The, 98

## M

Made Poisons, 352, 359, 373
Magpies, 144-145
Manifestations, 786, 975
Many-Eyed One, The, 760, 932-933
Many-Named, The, 390
March Wall, The, 954
Margin-Worms, 788
Maris of the Tides, 81, 84, 204, 209-210, 212, 361, 459, 1007
mark, The, 17, 42, 71, 91, 107, 120, 133, 153, 183-184, 198, 210, 212, 214, 302, 316, 327, 352, 375, 393, 405, 413, 417, 424, 454, 456, 459, 507, 561, 577, 644, 676, 712, 747, 763, 805, 813, 955, 979, 982-983, 989, 1048-1049, 1053, 1064
Marker Lichen, 366
Material Plane, The, 66, 123, 307, 327, 368, 395, 413, 426, 437, 447, 475, 483, 489, 495, 498, 500-501, 514, 518-519, 531, 537, 539, 553, 559, 563, 581, 593, 597, 615, 617, 622-623, 627, 641, 645, 647, 649, 653, 665-667, 669, 677, 679, 691, 696, 702, 704, 706, 713, 715, 751, 799, 833, 851, 872, 874, 878, 880, 886, 892, 894, 896, 900, 904, 918, 920, 922, 924, 926, 930, 932, 934, 941, 943, 949, 963, 971, 1002-1003, 1015, 1018, 1037, 1054
Maze Mice, 790
Measure Cistern, The, 220
Measured Seal, The, 1029
Melody-Beasts, 792
Memory Palace, The, 478, 852, 950
Memory-Keepers, 606-607
Memory-Thieves, 608-609
Menders, 244, 610-611
Mending Orders, The, 367, 969
Mereth the Salt-Witch, 57, 82, 1026-1027
Midflight Birds, 612
Mirror of Regret, The, 794, 816
Mist-Merged, 900-901
Mnemosyne Null, 876
Mnemosyne Null Incursion, The, 876
Moles, 146-147
Morphic Magic, 1064
Mossbacks, 614-615
Mountain-Father, The (see Haurûm the Mountain-Father)
Muffle-Wings, 616
Mules, 150-151
Murk-Fangs, 618-619
Muse-Spirits, 620-621, 630
Muses, 796-797
Muse's Studio, The, 63, 786, 792, 796, 810, 974
Muster Rooks, 798

Mute-Walkers, 462, 800-801

## N

Name Bound, The, 642-643, 802-803, 828, 844-845
Nameless Current, The, 926
Nameless, The, 802-803, 844
Nature Magic, 21, 293, 331, 335, 343, 356, 363, 369, 384, 426, 433, 449, 459, 946, 1070
Necromancy, 322, 388, 1020
Nettles, 370
Night-Markers, 966-967
Nightmare Nexus, The, 622, 746, 804
Nightmare-Slayers, 804-805
Nightmares, 622-623, 630, 804-805
Nightshade, 372
Noise-Hosts, 902-903
Notchfield, 205, 275, 378, 1072-1073
Nothing, The, 51, 67, 268, 317, 363, 395, 447, 463, 536, 561, 580, 619, 657, 705, 735, 741, 749, 775, 782, 797, 799, 807, 811, 833, 849, 853, 863, 865, 867, 895, 915, 941, 948, 958, 963, 971, 986, 1020, 1035
Nuts, 374-375
Nyx Vora, 914-915

## O

Oaks, 376-377
Oath-Breakers, 477, 624-625
Oats, 378-379
Octopus, 153
Odds-Takers, 806-807
Offnotes, 706-707
Ogres, 113-114, 151, 163-165, 169-170, 173-174, 274-277, 437-439, 954-955
Old Hunt, The, 1012-1013
Omenfern, 380
Omm, 884-885
Onefire Terrace, 277
Oral Tradition, The (see Many-Named, The)
Orchard leagues, 383
Orcs, 42-43, 68, 70-71, 80-81, 113, 117-118, 142-143, 164, 171, 187, 191, 197, 199, 201, 203-204, 207, 209, 219-220, 225, 229, 233, 240, 249-250, 253, 261-262, 265-266, 311, 334, 339-340, 370, 382, 406, 420-421, 423-425, 432, 434, 449-450, 456, 992-993
Ordered Bough, The, 343
Ore-Worms, 626
Ossification, 878, 881
Otters, 158-159, 186
Outer-Route Thaluren, 78
Outside, The, 67, 214, 343, 589, 593, 647, 783, 803, 845, 889, 968, 975
Over-Mended, The, 904-905
Overgrown, The, 304, 628-629, 684
Owls, 160-161
Oxen, 162-163
Ozhar the Pyre-King, 977, 1005

## P

Paling, The, 876-877
Parched, The, 124, 430-431, 473, 484-485, 490-491, 520-521, 524-525, 538-539, 634-635, 668
Path Magic, 695
Path-Echoes, 1014-1015
Path-Weavers, 808
Patience, The, 654
Pattern, 553, 817, 835, 925, 986, 996, 1001, 1003, 1018
Phantasms, 620, 630-631
Pigs, 175-176
Plot-Weavers, 810-811
Poison Herbs, 282, 351, 353, 372, 436
Poisonous Fungi, 385
Porpoises, 177-178
Poultry, 179-180
Predecessor-frames, 968
Preservers, 632-633
Pressure-Wraiths, 812
Probability Fog, The, 369, 724, 806, 814, 824
Probability-Beasts, 725, 814
Prophecy's Edge, The, 750, 822

## Q

Quenchers, 704
Quiet Plague, The, 912
Quietbell, 387-388
Qzoth, 278, 280, 890, 898-899
Qzoth Incursion, The, 278, 891, 898

## R

Radiance, The, 326-327, 584-585, 666-667, 674-675
Rakhal the Storm-Caller, 114, 143, 220, 262, 434, 662-663
Rattlecut Dead, 1022
Rattlecut, The, 151, 1022-1023
Ravine Trolls, 236, 282
Rebinders, 970-971
Record, 388, 478-479, 498-499, 528, 536-537, 587, 682-683, 756, 971-972, 980-981, 986-987, 1002-1003, 1008, 1034-1036
Record Magic, 479
Record-engine, The, 972, 1034
Red Dust, The, 279
Reed, 389-390
Reedfolk, 18-19, 72, 80, 97-98, 115-116, 136-137, 148-149, 227-228, 245-246, 257-258, 270-271, 287-288, 307-310, 334, 353, 389-390, 426-427, 460-461, 979, 1024-1025, 1041
Reedmere, The, 115, 136, 148-149, 245, 257, 287, 293, 307-308, 390, 426
Reflections, 816-817
Resonant Continuity, 986, 1002, 1008, 1014
Resonants, The, 783, 958-959
Rimecoal Beetles, 818
Rimward Basins, The, 68, 70, 113-114, 117, 142-143, 165, 169-171, 187, 191, 197, 199, 201, 207, 219-220, 225, 229, 233, 249, 253, 265, 311-312, 334-335, 339-340, 383, 406, 420, 424, 456, 916
Rimward Orcs, 312, 407, 457
Ringcaps, 396
River-Beasts, 820-821
River-Given, The, 1024-1025
Root Course, The, 343
Root-Hosts, 467, 906-907
root-year, The, 363, 401, 454
Rootcrown Concord, The, 343, 375, 399
Roothollow Rupture, The, 1000
Roothollows, The, 22-23, 26, 132, 167-168, 189, 237, 297, 315, 319-320, 330, 362-363, 369, 400-401, 454, 1000
Rootless Tree, The, 459, 892-893
Rootstone Heartwell, The, 362-363
Rot-Shelf, 400
Rotting Crown, The, 283, 459, 1018
Rust Flower, The, 278, 908-910
Rust Mites, 908
Rust-Hosts, 910-911

## S

Sacrificial Magic, 945, 960
Saerith the Mirror-King, 459
Sallow, The, 183, 281
Salt-Kept, 1026-1027
Saltbush, 406
Saltcut, 172
Salvage Peoples, The, 24, 56, 70, 117, 169, 193, 197, 199, 201, 229, 233, 249, 251, 253, 265, 305-306, 328, 444-445, 456, 976, 1004-1005, 1026, 1056-1057
Samphire, 408
Sanctified Magic, 322, 956, 1009, 1031

Sanctuary Custodians, 74-75
Sand-Stalkers, 634-635
Sapfall, 298, 363
Scavenger Beasts, 636
Scorpions, 201-202
Scourge Tuskers, 638
Scourge, The, 59, 285-286, 472-473, 475, 486, 496-497, 588-589, 618-619, 635, 638-641, 644-645
Scourge-Born, 286, 497, 639-641, 645
Scribes, 537, 642-643, 802, 1041
Scythe Mantises, 644
Seabirds, 203-204
Seagrass, 410
Seal practice, 883, 1029
Seal-Knockers, 1028
Sealing of the Upper Roothollows, The, 1001
Seamhead, 438
Seed, The, 271, 292, 329, 335, 352, 371, 379, 405, 415, 446-448, 615, 685, 912-913
Seed-Hosts, 912-913
Seedwasps, 646
Seers, 751, 822-823
Self-Raised, 1030-1031
Sepulchre-Kin, The, 972-973, 1034-1035, 1048
Serath, The, 72, 80-81, 97, 115, 121, 165, 180, 224, 227, 258, 334, 390, 461, 1024
Serovan the River-King, 98, 310, 390, 450, 459
Shadow Stitcher, The, 924
Shadow-Hosts, 914-915
Shape-Shifters, 824-825
Shard-Hosts, 889, 916-917
Sheaf Road, The, 162, 275-276, 334-335
Sheafmeet, 335
Shearline, The, 199, 220, 262
Sheep, 205-206
Sheep Rot and Fly-Strike, 140
Shellfish, 209-210
Shifting Path, The, 500, 512, 554, 564, 593, 694, 815
Shipworms, 211-212
Shortgreen, 226, 340
Silence Seed, The, 912
Silence, The, 578, 616, 680-681, 688, 700-701, 731, 802, 826-827, 873
Silence-Bringers, 826-827
Silencers, 828-829
Silent Court, The, 768, 774
Silent Gale, The, 462-463, 764, 800, 812, 862
Silent Screamer, The, 930
Singers, 648, 727, 738-739, 771
Sketch-Soldiers, 974-975
Skin-Lost, 1064-1065
Sky Isles, The, 414, 712, 806, 830, 846
Sky-Walkers, 414-415, 830-831
Sky-Weavers, 650-651
Slag Eels, 652
Slag-Tenders, 976-977
Sleep-Drinkers, 832
Slip-Foxes, 1066
Slumbered, The, 918-919
Smiths of the Deep, 834-835
Smoulder-Kept, 920
Snowshut, 165
Songline, 555, 751, 823
Soul Anchor, The, 442-443, 722, 756, 784, 980-981, 986
Soundchain Roads, The, 40, 80-81, 84-85, 99, 164, 177, 203, 209-211, 219-220, 323-324, 404, 408, 1006
Sounding Gate, The, 1006
Sourcrust, 416
Sparrows, 215
Split Reed Mouth, The, 390
Spore-Clouds, 418-419
Spread of the Predecessor-Frames, The, 968
Spring Carp, 836
Springwater Herds, 1068
Spurred Hounds, 1070
Squirrels, 217-218
Stanchweed, 422
Starving Winter, The, 336
Static, The, 894, 902-903
Still Well, The, 114, 220
Stilled, The, 654-655, 959
Stillgate, 109-110, 260, 978-979
Stillhares, 395, 656
Stings and Bites, 92, 120, 236
Stitch-Lings, 922-923
Stitch-Wraiths, 924-925
Stone-Walkers, 717, 838-839
Stonewake Compact, The, 362
Stonewake Deeps, The, 16, 64, 128, 132, 168, 237, 297, 319-320, 363, 416, 438, 882, 968-969, 1028, 1052
Stonewrights, 627, 658-659
Stopped Clock, The, 732, 760, 996
Storks, 223-224
Storm Heart, The, 108, 778-780, 840, 842, 848
Storm Magic, 663, 1073
Storm Truffles, 424
Storm-Bringers, 660
Storm-Callers, 662-663
Storm-Hawks, 840-841
Storm-Walkers, 842-843
Stormcrown, The, 24, 42, 44-45, 95, 221, 251, 392, 1072-1073
Strata Crabs, 664
Strayed, The, 926-927
Sturgeon, 227-228
Sundered, The, 928-929
Sundews, 426
Sunken Stairs, The, 362-363, 369
Surface-Walkers, 743, 1032-1033
Surging Deep, The, 66-67, 360-361, 488-489, 510, 598, 670-671, 678, 692, 758
Surging Magic, 671
Swelling Plague, The, 1016
Sworn Accord, The, 1041

## T

Taken, The, 40, 299, 345, 847, 1034-1035, 1055
Tamsel the Season-Weaver, 336, 384, 459, 461
Telltale Flies, 666
Tenders, 292, 350
Terra, 878
Thaluren, 28-29, 50-51, 54-55, 74-75, 78-81, 85-86, 99-100, 126-127, 134-135, 177-178, 195-196, 209-210, 213-214, 301-302, 360-361, 389-390, 408-411, 1038-1039
Thieves of Tongue, 844-845
Thingrass, 340
Thirst-Flies, 668-669
Thirstbacks, 233-234
Thirstroot, 430
Thorn Elves, 183, 235-236, 281-282, 324, 342-343, 355-356, 432-433, 437
Thornapple, 435
Thornbound Circles, The, 235, 356, 432
threshold chamber, The, 190, 237
threshold watch, The, 238, 298
Thunder-Wyrms, 848
Ticks, 239
Tidal Mirror, The, 742, 806, 868, 1032
Tidebound Reaches, The, 28, 50, 54, 74, 80-81, 99, 126, 134, 158-159, 177, 185-186, 195, 209-211, 213, 302, 360-361, 389-390, 408, 410, 1038
Tidelace Coasts, The, 28, 40, 78, 80-81, 83-85, 99-100, 126, 134-135, 152, 158-159, 177-178, 203-204, 209-211, 213, 243-244, 301, 323-324, 360-361, 404, 408, 452-453, 459, 1006-1007
Tidelace, The (see Tidelace Coasts, The)

Tidesingers, 488-489, 670-671, 679
Time Lock, The, 938-939
Time-Sickness, 1069
Tollwardens, The, 49
Tomb-Builder, The, 973, 1034-1035
Towrest, 165
Trace Magic, 388, 529, 1009, 1017, 1031
Tree-Men, 629, 672-673
Trolls, 169-170, 183-184, 235-236, 281-282, 988-989, 1023
Trout, 241-242
Truth-Seekers, 674
Truthwell, The, 343, 730, 856-857, 994
Turningshoal, 196, 361
Turnkeys, 756, 980-981
Twinned Crows, 850

## U

Ulaun the Stilled Hour, 81
Umbra, 924, 1015
Umbra Prime, 859
Unblemished Hinds, 676
Unbound Gale, The, 462, 562, 572, 650, 660, 698
Unburial War, The, 972-973, 1034
Understorey Courts, The, 343, 356
Undertow Rays, 678
Unfinished, The, 343, 793, 1036-1037
Unformed, The, 892, 896, 900, 918, 926
Unrecorded Age, The, 1035
Unreturned, The, 1038-1039
Unrun Sea, The, 29, 50-51, 54-55, 78-79, 85, 195, 301-302, 1038
Unspoken, 680-681
Unsworn Dead, 1040-1041
Unweeping, The, 930-931
Upper Roothollows, The, 27, 168
Ushkar the Ancestor-Warden, 200, 356, 450, 993

## V

Varn the Shadow-Stalker, 59
Vault Spiders, 852
Vaultstones, 682-683
Veil, The, 396-397, 436, 444-445, 487, 495, 508, 516-518, 529, 540-541, 550-551, 559, 592, 598, 605, 625-626, 677, 686-687, 696-697, 806, 1066-1067, 1071
Veil-Walkers, The, 541
Veilmint, 444-445
Verba, 585, 886
Verdant, 418, 446, 684-685, 1059
Verdant Expanse, The, 293, 356-357, 368-369, 418, 426, 446, 548, 614, 628, 646, 672, 684
Verge Stair, The, 343
Vines, 293, 446, 449, 615
Vital Magic, 92, 110, 352
Voice-Catchers, 854
Voice-Mimics, 686-687
Void-Stalkers, 681, 688
Vow-Wrens, 690

## W

Waitfield, The, 282, 356, 433, 438
Wake-Seal, The, 972-973, 1009, 1035, 1048
Warden of Irreversible Endings, The, 997
Warding, 369, 982
Warmed, The, 1042-1043
Watchers, 764, 932-933
Water-Robed, 856-857, 995
Wave-Weavers, 692-693
Way of Return, The, 51, 1039
Wayfinders, 501, 694-695
Waymoths, 858
Wayturned, 934-935
Wayward Lights, 696
Weather Goats, 1072
Weatherline, The, 1072-1073
Weave, The, 502-503, 592-593, 600-601, 610-611, 648-649
Weeping Caps, 454
Weeping Idol, The, 872
Weight-Bearers, 860-861
Whetgap, The, 68
Whispering Trace, The, 47, 412, 528-529, 542, 570, 590, 596, 608, 757, 973, 980, 1036
Whispering Winds, The, 462-463, 826, 854, 864, 866
Whistlers, 251-252
Wildflowers, 458-459
Willow, 460-461
Wind-Ghosts, 812, 862-863
Wind-Listeners, 462, 864
Wind-Walkers, 698-699
Wind-Weavers, 866-867
Windscar Expanse, The, 68, 70, 80-81, 113-114, 142-143, 164-165, 187, 199-201, 205, 207, 220, 233-234, 253, 266, 339-340, 420, 423, 432-434, 450
Windscar Pacts, The, 113, 219, 340
Windscar, The (see Windscar Expanse, The)
Witnessfields, The, 105-106, 109-110, 205-206, 259, 289-290, 339-341, 366, 369, 432-433, 876, 978
Woad, 464-465
Wood Elves, 20-21, 32-33, 77, 157, 217-218, 248, 264, 300, 316, 319, 342, 344, 347-348, 355, 362, 368-369, 375, 377, 381, 383, 399, 427, 437-439, 469, 1058-1059
Woodpeckers, 263-264
Word-Generals, 1044-1045
Wordless, The, 681, 700-701
Worms, 103
Wound Rot, 266, 423
Wrongwood, The, 278-279, 890-891, 898-899
Wrought, The, 104, 139, 968-969, 976-977

## X

Xylos, 466-467, 906-907
Xyphra, 928-929

## Y

Year-Fish, 868-869
Yews, 468-469

## Z

Zephyr, 641

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