



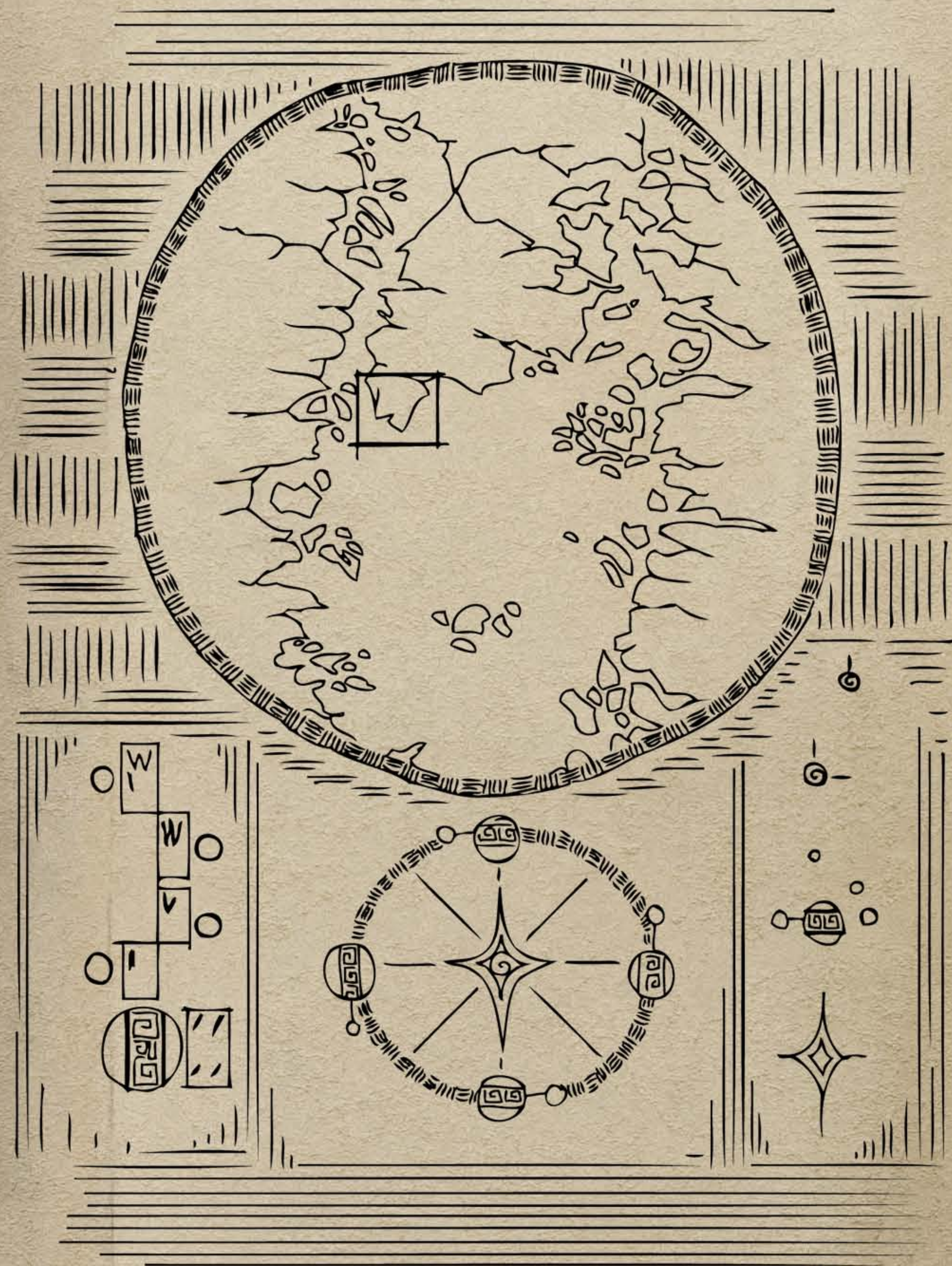
аттнв 1233

My Lord Necholai,

As my predecessors have done before me, I am compiling a guide for if you ever wish to sojourn from your moon holdings to the Staglands, that you might make the most of your visit and avoid some of our nastier oddities.

As my service to my lord does not often lead me outside the temple walls, I am obliged to rely on the wanderings and tales of those who visit the temple, and thus my advice will inevitably have a few holes. For this I am sure you will forgive me, benevolent master that you are.

*Your vigilant and unwavering servant,
Erlein*



State of the Staglands

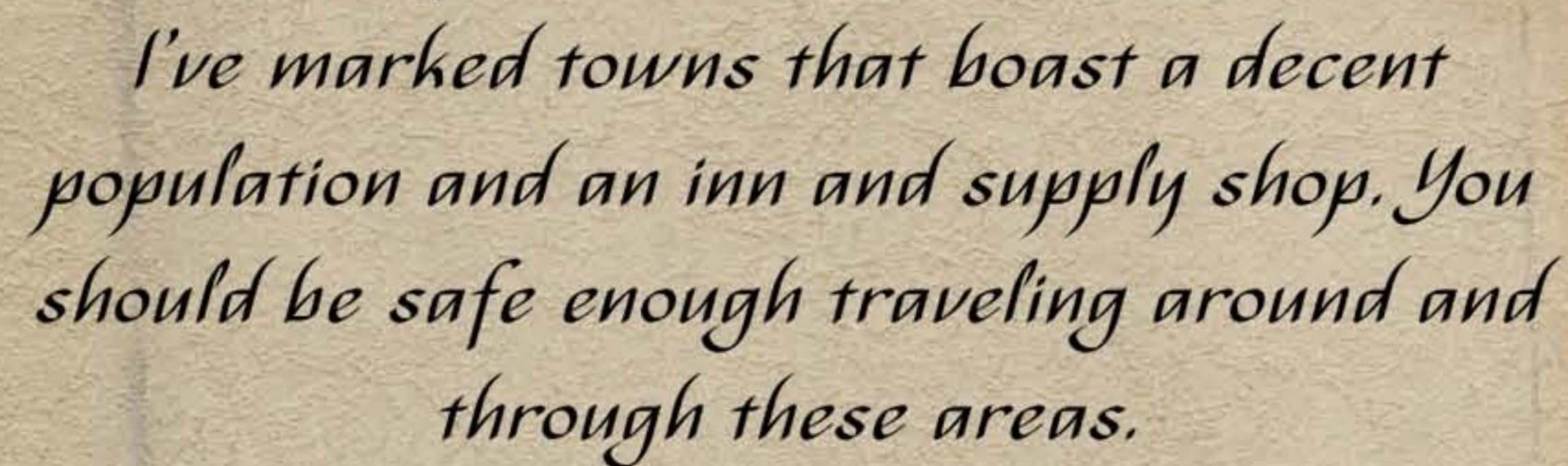


As you rarely grace our frigid lands outside of the Solstice Celebrations, I feel obligated to tell you that outside those festivities, the standards of living in the Staglands are rather grim. While Corem and Rumin markets are bustling with trade, and the lumber rafters of Fuldea Mare manage to stay afloat, the smaller villages see little of this easy commerce. Brutal winters, low food supplies, and savaging monsters plague the countryside and keep morale low.

This is just the arable southern and eastern districts, the northern and western districts are nigh unlivable; what early colonists built, the wilderness has largely reclaimed. There are a few towns, filled with brave or stupid souls, but they are becoming increasingly scarce.

And did I mention the spirit chasms in the densest forests have re-opened? Mayhap you would have insight on that matter though, deity that you are.

In the political realm, which I avoid as I would a diseased rat, counselor selections have becoming extremely competitive, especially in Corem, where it is common knowledge that political leaders skim a few emeralds off the top of all taxes and tariffs. I keep the affairs of the temple out of local politics, as I do not want any government busybodies looking into our books.

[illegible]

I do not know why you'd head north into the snowy forests, but if you do you will find yourself in a siege at best, and enslaved at worst. You may not know much of the people of the Spire Lands, or the Spire Folk as they are often named, but they are formerly criminals sent away in exile, and proceeded to architect a landscape of tall towers in the mainland. That is old gossip, but as of late they have taken to raiding the border towns of Lev, undoubtedly aware of the low morale of the Staglands, and how few Arbiters we have to secure the northern districts.

In short, Lev does not have much in the way of amusement, and you'd do as well to venture through safer areas.

Dangers of Emerald Metalis



Also adding to the troubles of the Staglands are the Natives, who once enjoyed being the dominant race on the peninsula, but were slaughtered and driven to the eastern coast with the arrival of the Ameythevians colonists (who, as you may remember, would have floundered at sea, if your well-timed moon beam hadn't lit their way to the shore and safety). The Natives have begun to regroup and are stirring up trouble in Emerald Metalis, although their motives for violence, besides revenge and general hatred, are unclear.

You'll know the Natives by their long, bat-like ears and glowing eyes. They do not speak our language, but a skilled linguist can translate for you. My brother, Augustin, keeps a library in the Emerald Metalis Consil, and although he is usually a pompous bore, would likely know a translator.



Based off
tales of their
appearance: bat-
like ears, pointy
face, glowing
eyes.

Local Law

For more local dangers, most towns you might travel to will have a constable and a company of Arbiters, who you will know by their, dare I admit, fabulous golden cloaks. Do not mock me until you have seen one yourself. If perchance you find yourself in trouble, you can rely on them, unless of course you have caused the trouble.

Being privy to your past exploits in the Staglands, I feel obligated to mention this.



Exploring the woods



If you do leave the roads (please take a caravan with mercenaries for your safety) be on the lookout for a circle of purple flowers, for it marks a fairy trapped by woodland forces. If you can shatter the magical barrier (I believe a certain spell can do this, but can't recall which at the moment), these fairies have been known to bestow great gifts. If you can't speak to it, I recommend eating it so its magic can mingle with your blood stream. You might pick their wings off first, as they contain neither magical nor nutritional value, and I find they stick in my teeth for days afterward.

If you run across any rats, do not trust them. They are pathological liars, and will tell you untruths from dawn to dusk. I've heard they can be bribed into honesty with food, but I have no doubt this rumor was begun by a rat, and I do not credit it.

Areas of Interest



Enough of dangers and enemies for now, I'm sure you are more curious about sites worth seeing on the peninsula. I pride myself that I'd list my lord's temple as one of the beauties of the Staglands, but if you've the itch to travel, these destinations might entertain my lord:

- The exotic shops of Rumin
- Corem's Pleasure District
- Spelunking in the glittering caves below the town nearest the temple, Lumen Targ
- ~~The gambling hall in Tratis Saltis Consil~~ Poison bog took district
- The Larking Duke and other taverns of Corem

Enjoy a cup of spiced cafera at the Duke of Whales in Corem.



Recommended merchants



- There is an armorer in the Orf's Bridge Consil that makes the finest plate mail in the Staglands. The prices are outrageous, but the quality is unmatched.
- Another amorer, just as good, but with... eccentric...methods, will create armor out of exotic materials in Rumin.
- Also in Rumin is a renowned wand maker, if you have an interest in sorcery.
- In Corem, you'll find a cloakmaker with wools of the finest blend and every color you could wish for. I've commissioned several cloaks for our acolytes from this shop and can vouch for the quality.

Languages and Uncommon Tongues



The Natives

Despite the general dislike of Natives throughout the Staglands, linguists are still studying their unique glyph-based written language, very unlike the alphabets of the nearby races, and a few scholars have penetrated under the cloak of friendship to return with notes and drawings.

The Padurii

Little is known of the Padurii language, for what the witches take they keep. Common lore says they find power in names, and will chant their coven mother's name while on the hunt.

Names are often short, only one syllable, like "Isk," "Kro" or "Ska."

While my brother was visiting the temple, I made a quick chalk rubbing of one of their artifacts that he was carrying with him. He said he believes the top two glyphs are numbers.



Ameythevian Runic Code

An ancient alphabet with the capacity for descriptive language beyond our common tongue. Apparently the language holds over 30 variations of the word "purple" alone (shocking).

Though it is named for the Ameythevians, it was used by many ancient races, and can be seen carved on the ruins from the time of the first races.

									
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Incantations

If you happen upon a linguistics book, you might find it useful in your travels. I'm afraid my acolytes mostly use theirs for pickpocketing temple guests when my back is turned, but you might find it handy for transforming objects, especially if you've lost all of your money to the excitements of Corem.

To incant, remember that proper names matter, and in the case of transforming items, you must be sure to include the name of the object you wish to alter. We received a scroll from a scholar of Rumin that details the correct way to use the incantation book that could be found for you, if you are interested.

*Bone to Marrow (to consume for vitality and to
cure any aches and pains)*

Incant: "Davi Bone" or "Davi Bones"



Gem to Greater Gem

Incant: "Shoar Onyx Chip"



Refill vials or arrows or bolts

*Incant: "Grafitus Elixir Vials" or "Grafitus Pack of
Bolts +1", you get the idea*



Translating Ameythevian Rune Carvings

*Traditionally, names on ancient tombs were written
in Ameythevian runes. If you translate the name
carved into the stone and then incant it, you can
supposedly see the tomb's contents.*

Incant: "Nufri [name here]"

Races You'll Encounter



*Racism is as much a hotbed of discontent as ever,
as the Ameythevians hoard their wealth and amass
power in the guilds while maintaining a tight leash
on Corem trade. I suppose they founded the city,
so they can do as they wish, but it does not lend
itself to good will amongst others, Varchovs
especially, who have never been able to forgive the
Ameythevians for claiming their ancestral lands
while they remained underground.*

*You can imagine that after centuries below ground,
to finally emerge and find your lands overrun by a
bunch of purples, well, I'm sure you'd be upset too.*

*At any rate, take care to maintain a disguise
in Varchov-ruled Emerald Metalis, as they will
not take kindly to the savior of the original
Ameythevian colonists.*

There are many Lachovinians, Pasaarens and Taratoriths on the trading roads these days, and you'll find they make excellent brutes if you need protection in your mortal disguise. They are not bad spellcasters either, which is sometimes as important as having a sword arm nearby. You never know when you'll need a reviving healing spell or to flee as a fast-traveling bat.

The Taratoriths are a shrewd, money-pinching lot, and I personally am convinced they strike such unfair bargains simply because their slithering gaze is so disturbing. Like swallowing a vat of shroomer fat whole.

The Lachovinians are feisty; don't try to shortchange them. They take their vows to the Carrion God as seriously as my acolytes do not take theirs. Just a tip, don't ask about the markings on their face. It seems to upset them.

The Pasaarens are a recent addition to our peninsula. They're not easy companions, and prone to a brooding silence. Do not try to seduce the females. A wooden plank has more humor and emotions than a tavern of Pasaaren maids.

I had the good fortune to meet a roaming band of Bloodless Hunters (Pasaarens tasked by their god Quaniteva to destroy the Bloodless demigods, more on them later) as they were traveling through Orf's Bridge.

Over a few cups of cafera, they told me of their travels and of the more exotic creatures they had encountered. I thought you might find their descriptions interesting and have penned a few for you.

The Padurii and their little ones



In the most dreadful woods you'll find the Padurii and their...children. Most monstrous of creatures, they prey on children that wander too far from home, and enslave them under the foulest of magic.

We've heard the possessed ones chanting "mother", through the night, with unblinking blood red eyes. Sounds quite unnerving, poor little things.

These mothers take the shape of women, but old, unnaturally tall with gangly appendages and stretched, gruesome faces. Not unlike a Spirit, these creatures seem to be made of a body that isn't quite theirs.

When encountered deep underground or in the woods, their numbers and slaves are their strength. The sorcery they have is quite strong, and they favor flesh magic that cripples, slows, or all together disables an attacker, including our common "Festering Ooze" spell.

The Pasaarens said they only succeeded through volleys from a distance, while those best at hand-to-hand combat kept the possessed children at bay.

I do not know if this is intentional, or just a delightful side effect, but they also say the smell of the Padurii is enough to cloud the senses of the strongest warrior and impair their abilities, if not cause whole parties to faint.

Imps



The winged imps and their riddling counterparts have some natural resistance to magical abuse, so it's best to attack directly. They sound like they can be quite difficult to hit due to their erratic flying, so it's advised to use your sorcerer to enhance the aim of your fighters, instead of wasting their efforts trying to bring down the imps with arcane power.

Talking with them seems a futile effort, and I can attest to that. I encountered a group at night near the courtyard entrance. They were so enthusiastic to talk I obliged and stopped, but they did nothing but spew riddles and crude words out.

The hunters did say Western Ice Imps can be more difficult to deal with, both alone and in groups.

Their bodies are veiled in mist and glittery ice shards, and are completely impervious to any magical attacks. Not only that, they thrive under any darkness, using it to hide in shadows, and your normal weapons will hit nothing but the cold air, less you light the area with a torch to scan their true forms.

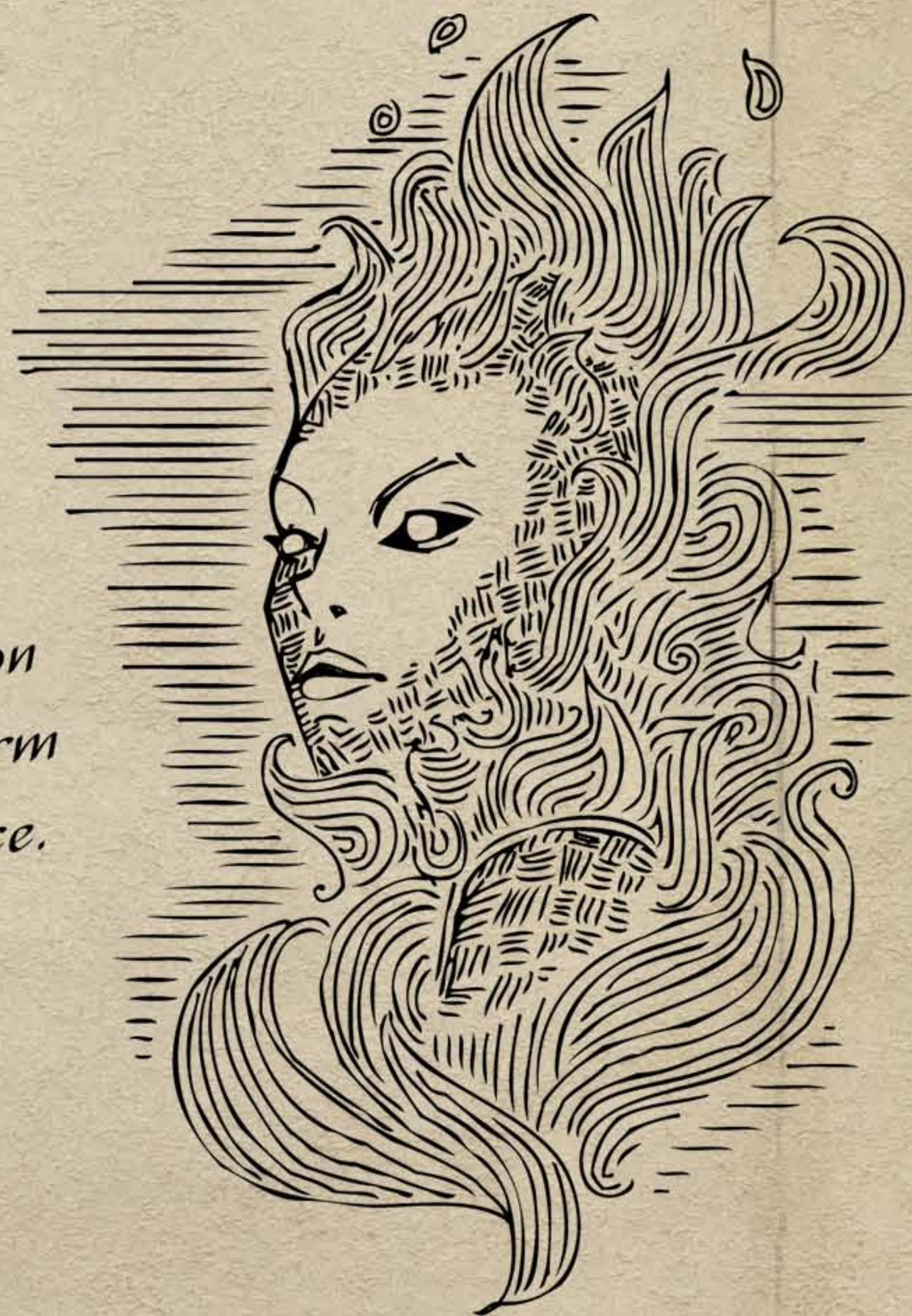
lele



The lele are fire dancers and their calling cards are fire traps left behind as they travel. Naked and majestic, they gyrate through the wilderness, luring men young and old to stumble blindly, adoringly, in their wake, never to be seen by their loved ones again. When angered, they form a ring of fire around themselves, and fling it with a devastating grace.

A widow of Lebez visiting the temple recently told me that her son had been captured by the Padurii and her husband ensnared with the lele, and now

The
definition
of a warm
embrace.



she is an empty shell, alone in the world with nary an emerald in her purse. Sometimes I curse my great grandfather for leaving the Varuchov caverns, where the worst he faced was boredom, for if I was still below I would not have the burden of hearing such sad tales as these.

The Bloodless



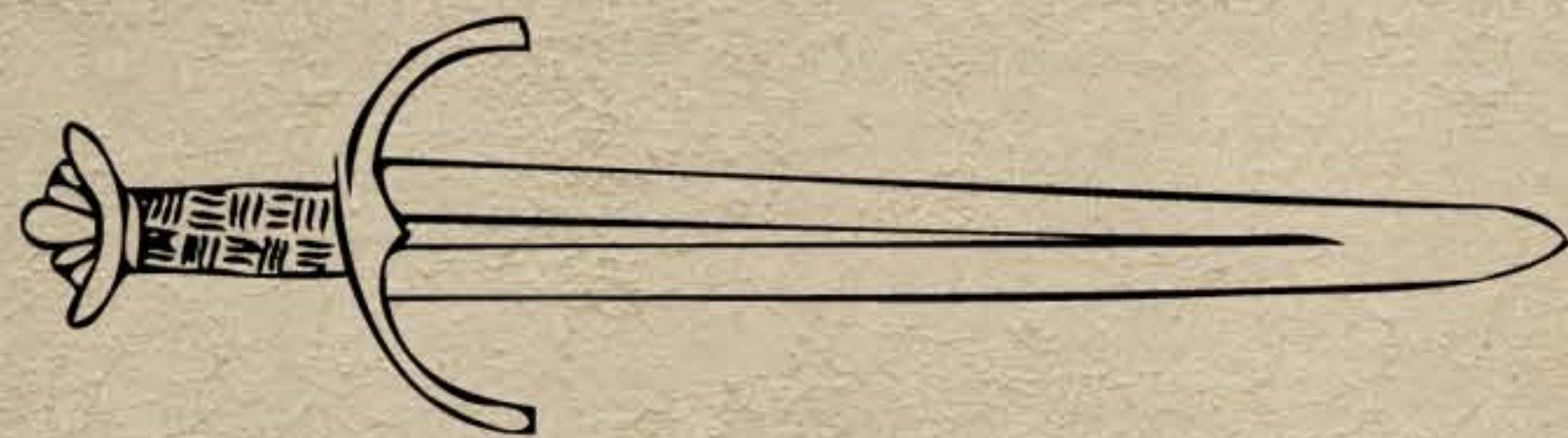
The Hunters surprisingly said little of these demigods. Silver is the only alloy that can sear their flesh and kill them, all other attack are futile. They'll often take the form of other animals if provoked, usually dire wolves with red and black fur, and are terribly lethal.

Even with the right equipment you'll have to get through their unnaturally fast reflexes, for they seem to move like a vapor, between the shadows and you until it's too late.

They are creatures of the dark, only seen at their desire, and I imagine you'll not come across them anytime in your travels. Their servants, or slaves, can be recognized with a tint of blood in their eyes, and are under complete control by their Bloodless lord.

They can be found anywhere, amongst us, and can be formidable enemies when attacked, as they feed on the power of their masters and are stronger, faster and wilder than a normal mortal.

Slaves of the Bloodless do not require a silver sword to die, as they are not demigods themselves. Any weapon may make the killing blow, if you are lucky enough to land it.



The silver sword carried by one of the Bloodless Hunters. He would not allow me to hold it, only sketch it, but it appeared quite heavy.



This is an interpretation based off the tales of the Bloodless Hunters. Pale faces, white as a sheet, long, silken hair and deep circles below the eyes. These are the marks of a Bloodless.

Mist Wolves



The favored companions of the Bloodless, mist wolves are a vicious, though beautiful, breed that thrive in sunless caverns. Given their name because of the clouds of vapor that surround their translucent form, the Mist Wolves that haunt the northern districts are rarely seen.



These wolves are at their best in darkness, as they have no trouble seeing at night. A light source will reveal them and open them to attacks.

Spirits



For something that is so deeply ingrained in the woes of Vol, it is odd how little we know of Spirits. Common lore says that the chasms to the Spirit Realm were first created and opened by the gods as a means to create a balance on Vol, and scholars have noted that in times of war, genocide or violence, the Spirits have risen from the chasms in greater forces, as if they were drawn to the evils around.

If this is so, then I must assume that the balance spoken of is to balance us mortals out, and that when our ill nature overpowers good intentions, the Spirits wipe out a number of us, mayhap a whole race or colony, and we're forced to make a fresh start. You are the god here, though, so you will undoubtedly have wisdom that I do not.

Although I do not know much of the nature of Spirits, I can relate to you what tactics the Bloodless Hunters used to survive them. Apparently in Rumin you can buy vials of "Holy Elixirs," which contain potions that shatter the Spirit's defenses.

(Even while the Pasaarens spoke of these, I couldn't help thinking this sounds like an old wives' tale to me. Holy Elixirs, really? That's all you need to be safe from Spirits? I could bottle up a "Holy Moon Lotion" and sell that on streets too, but you don't see me conning innocent folks out of their hard-earned emeralds.)

"Holy Elixirs" are
brewed in Rumin
and Fuldea Mare.



Crawlers



Stumbling upon a Spirit Chasm in Ista Cale, the Pasaarens met these lesser demons, which they called Crawlers. Fortunately, they do not require silver weapons or "Holy Elixirs" to break down their barriers, just nimble feet. You see, they squirm forward quite slowly, but one bite is all it needs to inject it's deadly ethereal poison. You may say that's avoidable, and indeed, just one Crawler might be, but they move in packs, like a sick mockery of wolves, and it is not so easy to quick step away from a horde.

They never attack alone, but align themselves with a Spirit Master, a Spirit with powers beyond their own that has the power to wield shields and set up defenses.

It should go without saying, but If the Master is out of the way you'll have a better chance to manage these creatures.

The Pasaarens explained that they would not have escaped had they not been traveling with a former Arbiter who still carried his judgment horn. Between his summoned aid and our stash of speed potions, we were able to bait and flee from them, and eventually took them down one at a time. Other tactics might have been effective, as long as they allowed you to dance out of harm's way at a moment's notice. Standing your ground and relying on good armor to protect you is simply not an option.



A summoning horn, as described by the Bloodless Hunters. Used to call small monsters to your aid.

The Thing



The Bloodless Hunters didn't encounter this type of creature, merely heard tell of its existence. Not one for naming these entities, apparently some locals just called it "the thing that should not be".

They described it as a creature that walks on it's hands, and has two spindly legs with eyeballs propelled upward. Sounds quite gruesome. The locals had no answers as to the best way to dispose of it; mayhap none had lived to give tactical advice.

I apologize for not being able to provide more information. Mayhap carrying about a pack of "Holy Elixirs" might not be such a bad idea, even if they turn out to be nothing but bottled ox piss.

Zana



Zana, the fey, shifting forest nymphs, are known to flit about our forests, usually on their way to their gardens in the Lachovinian islands. Staglands records first noted their existence when early colonists talked of sightings in Emerald Metalis. At the time, it was suggested the Natives in particular were entranced by the delicate creatures, following one or two around as a servant would.

If you are privileged to meet a Zana, they will not be hostile until provoked, and even then they are terribly fragile creatures in both heart and body. If you wish or speak in anger, it would be as bad as taking arms. In their distress they are very conniving and will not hesitate to cast powerful curses to their enemies.

Goblins and their Riders



Goblins, often called Crop Goblins for their habits of hiding in farmland, are pesky creatures that plague farmers and settlers in the middle districts, where the land is arable. (These creatures are forever plaguing my courtyard. I've had to start taking on a few brutish acolytes for the sole purpose of protecting my gardens.)

Not as threatening as a wolf, they should not be underestimated, for even though the chickens they ride give them a comical air, they are mindlessly violent, and will knife at your legs and cut you down if they can.

A few swings should kill their ride, and they will be more vulnerable on their own two feet.

Pack Animals



Westerling wolves, wild dogs and copper foxes dominate the local wilds. You'll find the most trouble with the larger packs, which seem to increase in ferocity and size in the western and northern areas. These southern breeds have thick pelts and a strong, fast bite. Wolves are more dangerous than foxes and wild dogs, and you might find it to your advantage to lure them away from the their pack one at a time, or use traps to slow or cripple them.

It is easy to become overwhelmed if you find yourself surrounded by a pack of any of these creatures, and I fear you'll find it difficult to flee once entangled. A spell like "Fearful Light," one of my lord's own, is effective in dispelling a pack on your heels.

Dopplegangers



Locally named as Skin Stealers, the dopplegangers are amorphous creatures that survive by mimicking their enemy, as they have no natural weapons and defenses of their own.

If you encounter one, don't be alarmed to see a mirror image of yourself: your clothes, armor, weapons, and even facial features and hair color. They can also read your strengths, and they will imitate those as well, and if you are not quick to act you will find yourself a victim of your own powers.

At these times it is best to have a friend with you, especially a sorcerer, who might bolster your weaknesses to fight your own strengths.

Shroomer-kind



The Western realm's giant funghi seems to house some truly odd creatures. No one knows quite what to make of the Shroomers, as the locals have named them, but these creatures seem to thrive in the cold lands amongst caverns of the mushrooms. It sounds as though the oversized funghi sustains them, and despite their largely vegetarian diet, their innards are quite fatty and make excellent lard.

The typical Shroomer, covered in a thick plated shell, attacks by hitting hard and fleeing to a pre-dug underground passage (if you're near one of their nesting areas) and burrows to safety. It's claws won't penetrate good armor, so make sure you're well equipped and you'll survive their attacks.

Shroomers often travel with mushroom-shaped companions, who instinctually charge on sight and explode into a corruption of toxins and vapors. They never survive this mad burst, so you can rest peacefully knowing that the crazed mushroom bee-lining toward you can only hurt you once. That said, best to kill them from arm's length if you can.

You'll also see Shroomer larvae and winged-kind, which don't seem to pose a threat from the ones I've encountered, but do us all a favor and squish them with your boot as you walk past, before they grow into their hard shells.

To kill the carnivorous Harvesters is the real trick, but seems well known to the Eastern settlers: if forced onto the ground, they expose their squishy organs hiding under the thick plates of their exoskeleton.

If you encounter a harvester, you've found the most lethal of the Shroomer-kind. Their lashing appendages on their back are like talons, mainly used for digging through rock. You may as well be wearing parchment for armor, for nothing stops them when they lunge for you.

The hunters reported that Harvester's natural armor is near impervious to iron and bronze alike and they hunt their prey from underground, burrowing below the rocks with their sharp appendages, out of sight until they spring up from the rocks. No, the only method for removing these beasts is to get them on the ground and taking quick aim at their vulnerable underbellies.

Mortals



According to the Bloodless Hunters, the Staglands has evaded notice from the threats of Lachovinian warlords, northern Taratorith riders and any eastern god's reach only because the colonists are so new. The greatest threat anywhere on Vol are other mortals, and it's only a matter of time before other races take notice of the bustling trade happening here.

That doesn't mean there aren't rotten men and women at home. Witch covens, bandits, and thieves run rampant outside the law's watch, and skilled sorcerers have learned to weave the ethereal magic from the Spirit Realm. These have been seasons of powerful magic in Vol, it's going to be a relief for a lot of our struggles when it wanes again.



Notes



Notes



Notes



*A map to mark
your favorite
destinations on
your trip!*

