

FORGOTTEN REALMS
Campaign Expansion

Elminster's
Ecologies Appendix I



The Battle of Bones
Hill of Lost Souls



Kotlas '95



The Battle of Bones

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Listen ... Listen Well

Rolanda Invenweigh is a stern, gaunt human of forty years, with stringy, gray-streaked hair, pallid skin, and skeletally thin, long hands; she appears to be in her mid-fifties. Cast out of a druidical conclave more than 25 years ago for dabbling in the arcane arts of necromancy, Rolanda disappeared into the wilderness in search of a land to call her own, and creatures to study, nourish, and protect. Little is known of her wanderings, except that she was sometimes seen at the edge of a graveyard or on the outskirts of a recent battlefield in the fading light of day's end.

Eventually she settled along the southwestern edge of the Great Desert Anauroch in the Western Realms, taking the

site of the infamous Battle of Bones to be her land. The hideous inhabitants of that desolate region became her protected subjects of study. Her fascination with undeath has led her to forsake her druidical powers and true neutral stance to become a full-fledged necromancer. Her cold, clinical attitude reveals little of her inner nature, but knowledge she has and knowledge you'll get if you listen with an open mind.

As Rolanda had no desire or inclination herself to write a treatise, I sent an able scribe, Balip, with the group of adventurers I last sent to hear her tales of the Battle of Bones. Balip dutifully recorded her every word. I present his account of her oral presentation largely in its unabridged form, with an added comment or two (or three) of my own.

— Elminster





First of all, let's lay some ground rules. This is a serious, objective exposition concerning a piece of geography, its characteristics, and its inhabitants. We're talking years of careful, painstaking research, thousands of hours of analysis and field study, lonely months of compilation, mapping, and theorizing, dozens of risky magical experiments, and ostracism by a large number of my allegedly esteemed (but woefully uninformed and bigoted) colleagues. I will not tolerate being judged by them, or by the likes of you, even if that old goody-goody fuddy-duddy, Elminster, has vouched for your behavior. One gasp, one raised eyebrow, one self-righteous diatribe about goodness and life, and this little interview is over.

I am not unmindful of the ignorant prejudices that you harbor, of course. They were instilled in you when you were young children, afraid of the dark. It was then you were misled into believing that goodness could exist without evil, that light was superior to dark, and that things undead should be banished from the face of Faerûn and abhorred above all things. These fright-filled tales were told to scare and control you, not to inform. I alone have proven to be truly neutral and objective concerning the undead and the places where they gather. My tales will inform—not frighten. No one should fear nature's way, even though it may seem grisly and primitive to the dandies who live a citified existence.

Is it unnatural for the undead to seek sustenance? To want leadership and direction? Is it unnatural that the undead gather together, to protect themselves and their land from encroachment by folk who would do them harm? Would you not do so? Will you now forswear these acts, should you ever share their fate?

Unfamiliar Familiar

Already, your eyes begin to betray your emotions. Distrust, disgust, bemusement, and misplaced pity flicker across your wide, uncomprehending eyes. They expose the naiveté of your beliefs, and the narrow-mindedness of your thoughts about the undead. You have never had a conversation with one of the undead, never considered its predicament, or the needs and desires created by its fate—have you? Has

even one of you looked the undead in the face longer than the moment it takes to swing a weapon? Yet you condemn their existence and would destroy them. You desire a familiarity with the region of the Battle of Bones. That knowledge must begin with a recognition and respect—yes, respect!—for the undead, whether humanoid, animal, monster, or even vegetable. All abound at the battlesite. Take, for example, Fez, here. He is a creature of my own creation, and a constant companion I carry in the deep pockets of my robe.

Here, Balip notes that Rolanda reached into the folds of her clothing and “in a single, sweeping movement, produced a zombie ferret to the surprise and considerable displeasure of her audience.”

I too have had the disquieting experience of a sudden introduction to Fez, and just cannot believe that Rolanda continues to keep close companionship with this undead ferret. Yes, she is lonely, and I have tried from time to time to suggest amiable companions who would understand her methodical ways and her beliefs in neutrality. There is just something indescribably off-putting about a woman who carries an undead rodent in her tunic that has foiled my humble matchmaking attempts.

—Elminster

As you can see, the necromancy of his creation has dulled his eyesight; the fluid movements of a living ferret are now jerky and spasmodic. Still, his overall sense of balance and sure-footedness on uneven, precarious terrain seems unaffected. His sense of smell is measurably keener than before, although I have been unable to determine if this is because the creature constantly salivates. This copious drooling contributes to the generally unkempt condition of his fur. He no longer spends time on grooming or other instinctive habits of cleanliness; time once spent on such activities is almost entirely given over to a constant sharpening of teeth and claws.

I have tried the same experiment with other small animals and the effects have been remarkably consistent. Small mammals—mice, voles, rats, rabbits, and foxes—are readily made zomboid. Small birds can no





longer fly; their movement is too spasmodic. They swiftly fall prey to their natural enemies and succumb to a second, more permanent death.

Reptiles and amphibians tend to be much more active as zombies than they had been in their living forms. In an undead state, some innocuous small lizards develop very potent poisons in their saliva. A zombie lizard's bite has much the same effects as the envenomed bite of a poisonous snake.

When placed together in an environment with living creatures, the usual food chain develops. Instinctive hunting patterns from life are still followed in undeath. However, undead creatures will not hunt or eat one another as long as they can find living prey.

I do not dabble in the necromancy of zombie creation lightly, nor is this an irrelevant sidelight of my work. It closely relates to your inquiries into the nature of the area. Many of the so-called "innocent creatures" of field and forest have been caught up in the necromantic transformations occurring there. Although their innocence remains, the zombie animals become loathsome in the eyes of man—hated, reviled, and hunted down for the undeath that has been visited upon them by the powers of this special—some say terrible—place.

But I get ahead of myself. You cannot understand the nature of the undead that dwell here until you understand the place itself. Barren and severe, it is a place that would bear no special remarking, nor draw the likes of you or me were it not scarred by war. As much as any city, any castle, or any field plowed straight and true, this place is a product of man. Unplanned and unwanted though it be, this place exists thus only because of men's whims.

Zombie Ferret: Int Semi; AL CN; AC 7; MV 9; HD 1+2; THAC0 20; #AT 3 (claw, claw, bite); Dmg 1-3, 1-3, 2-4; SA None; SD Zombie immunity to certain spells; SZ S; M Special zombie morale; XP 20





Lay of The Land

The region of the Battle of Bones has little to recommend it, to the living or to the undead. Located just to the southwest of the Great Desert Anauroch, the area of the Battle of Bones lies 50 miles north of the western exit of the Yellow Snake Pass (in the Sunset Mountains, crossing to Skull Gorge). The nearest village, Hill's Edge, lies almost 100 miles away. Travelers to the area must leave well-traveled roads behind, should they venture beyond.

Looking west, Soubar is the closest regular habitation. Folk coming from that area would do best to take the road southeast from Soubar to Triel, then head along the road as it curves east to Hill's Edge. Thus, travelers can avoid a ten-day trek across desolate and dangerous plains south of the Hill of Lost Souls.

The Marsh of Chelimber lies 250 miles north-northwest, with Evereska tucked in rough terrain approximately 180 miles due north of the battleground. Four hundred deadly miles east across the Great Desert Anauroch are the Desertsouth Mountains. Travelers are advised to take a better path, skirting the southern edge of Anauroch through the Goblin Marches, then north of the Farsea Marshes.

The land immediately surrounding the Battle of Bones is rocky, with thrusts of granite jutting through basalt and limestone. Freezing by night, heated by day, the exposed granite has shattered into shards of rock and angular, rough boulders. The sharp edges have seldom seen the smoothing influence of precipitation.

In the eastern regions, the rocky ground gives way to sandy soil, with an occasional sandpit or small dune. Here the rocks are not so rough, being subjected to the tempering caresses of the Great Desert's blowing sands.

The battlesite of the Battle of Bones is a high, rocky plain in the heart of a rounded triangle of mountainous spires. Eons past, the ground heaved, breaking along two fissures. The first fissure raised the southern rim wall, a broken land of granite spires extending east and west for almost 50 miles. The sec-

ond fissure (a crooked offshoot of the first) runs northeast from the western limit of the south rim wall. Thirty miles later, rough hills demark the fissure angling southeast until it once again approaches the southern wall.

The triangular plain between the fissures was forced up in the same time of upheaval. More time passed, and weathering detritus fell from the surrounding spires. The high plain is littered with boulders, rocks, gravel, and sand.

Although the jagged spires around the plain featured many gaps, high passes, and underground passages, the area remained far off the beaten track. Occasionally a nomadic tribe would pass through from the Great Desert Anauroch. On other occasions, the encircled plain was used for spell practice, as is true for many isolated places. Aspiring wizards could test their powers in seclusion, and avoid embarrassment over their lack of mastery.

The Seasons

Let me see, what next? Oh, I suppose you care about the weather. I don't really see why. It is what it is—mostly outside our control. Even Elminster, the old fop, keeps telling me I'll enjoy social gatherings more if I join in talk about the weather or other such nonsense. I just don't see the point.

A few social graces could be of great value to a plain, compulsively driven woman who spends most of her time with the undead. As if keeping an undead ferret in her tunic weren't enough to drive civilized company away, she spent her last social gathering explaining the disparate relative effects of falling damage on living and undead rat squirrels to two decidedly uncomfortable apprentice mages with good prospects.

—Elminster

Oh well, let me see. Winter's colder and summer's warmer, with a two-week rainy season late in the month of Tarsakh. With no sizable bodies of water nearby, little relative humidity, and almost no cloud cover (except in Ches and Tarsakh), there is little to ameliorate the temperature extremes between one season and the next.



Climatic Averages at The Battle of Bones

(in degrees Fahrenheit)

Spring	58° F.
Summer	94° F.
Autumn	86° F.
Winter	27° F.
Low Temperature (year)	-22° F.
High Temperature (Year)	124° F.
Annual Precipitation	5 inches
Days above 80 F.	154 days
Days of sunshine	320 days

As one gets closer to the Great Desert, temperatures range somewhat higher in the day, and lower at night. On the plains outside the perimeter wall, temperatures average about five degrees warmer. As is true in most clear, arid areas, there is a fairly abrupt temperature drop just after sunset.

My experiments and observations lead me to believe that temperature variations are of little concern to the undead. In fact, I have to think they are even less hampered by cold when undead than when they were alive. The living are distressed by extreme temperatures that pass unnoticed by the undead.

However, if chill night air is all that troubles you while visiting the Battle of Bones, you will be lucky indeed, friend. You will have to take your rest among the remains of more than 400,000 souls—none of whom received a proper burial, blessing, or consecration after a dreadful death in the fearsome battle.

What You Will Find at The Site

Given that the battleground is located at the edge of a great desert, and that there are hardly any lakes, rivers, or streams, it should be no surprise if one finds little vegetation. What grows is mostly low scrub, small bushes, and tufts of razor grass.

The bushes flourish for just a score of days during

the brief rainy season. After they drop their seedy berries, the green growth withers. Some plants aestivate, rooted firmly in the rocky, sandy soil, awaiting the next rainfall; meanwhile, the winds whistle mournfully through their desiccated stalks. The stems of other bushes quickly break once they wither, and the dead plants tumble in the wind, sometimes for hundreds of miles.

The berries of such bushes are small, waxen, and thick-skinned. All are extremely vile to the taste, and many are poisonous. After all, the plants must protect their seeds by whatever means they can, in such an unforgiving land.

Those bushes with straw-yellow berries are known as *sandberry bushes*. Though bitter and acid, the berries are not poisonous. Ground up and steeped in sufficient water, they make a passable herbal tea.

Bushes with reddish-purple berries are either *goblinberry* or *bloodberry bushes*. Goblinberry bushes have narrow, blackish-green leaves with a silvery underside. Bloodberry bushes have reddish-green, heart-shaped leaves.

The goblinberries are so astringent that, when eaten plain, cause one's throat to swell, often causing suffocation. Thus, they are considered to be poisonous by the common masses, although that is not strictly the case. In fact, diluted with water and prodigious amounts of sugar or honey, the juice of stewed goblinberries makes a fine drink.

Bloodberry bushes, on the other hand, are poisonous in every form. Death results within minutes of eating as few as three berries; even fewer are a lethal dose for small humanoids or animals. Chewing twigs or drinking brewed leaves of the bloodberry bush can be fatal. Adventurers who add the brittle stems of the dead bush to their campfire take a great risk: their eyes can swell shut from the smoke of the fire, and eating anything cooked over the open flame can be as fatal as the berries themselves. Grievous illness is the best one might hope for.

Fireberries are the greenish peppers of the red-leaved firebush. Extremely hot to the palate, the peppers provide little sustenance. Eaten in quantities, or on an empty stomach, they can cause severe stomach





Firebush Spice Paste

In a small iron fry pan, heat a quantity of oil to fill your palm. To the hot oil add the same quantity of minced onion, and a smaller amount of crushed garlic. After a few moments, add five or six crushed firebush berries. As these darken, add one small finely minced love-apple, a small amount of salt (should you have any), twice that quantity of sugar, and again as much of molasses. Move the fry pan to the coolest part of the fire and cook until you see oil coming to the top of the paste. The love-apples should be indistinguishable from the rest of the ingredients.

Firebush Spice Paste will keep for a couple of months in a sealed jar. If you have means to keep it cool, it will last much longer.

A tiny quantity (the amount that will fit on the tip of a dagger or carving knife) will season a hearty bowl of soup, stew, or rice.

Firebush Spice Paste II

Should you have access to the seasoning called soy sauce, from far Shou Lung, you may wish to mix a batch of this paste. It requires no cooking, and is therefore more appealing to adventurers whose taste buds are as adventurous as their spirits.

Mix four ounces of the soy (or sho-yu), one small clove of garlic that has been well crushed, two crushed firebush berries, and a very small amount of molasses (half a spoonful, of the kind with which you stir tea). Let the flavors marry for at least half an hour.

As you eat your meal, add a tiny amount of this seasoning to your food by dipping the tip of your knife into the sauce, then spearing the morsel of meat or what have you. Use caution, before you use so much as a spoonful.

Covered, this condiment will keep indefinitely. Moreover, storage is likely to increase its fiery potency.

— recipes collected by Bronwyn Starglade

and intestinal pain. However, some hardy adventurers chop up a few fireberries into plain cooking, or to add a spicy flavor to that pasty gruel that passes as magically-created food.

Razor grass is a sturdy growth found too often in the area. The roots tap deep beneath the rocks, to draw enough moisture to sustain its tough, long-bladed leaves. Each blade of grass is a quarter- to a half-inch wide, and may grow 14 to 16 inches long.

The leaves of razor grass can truly be called blades. The leaves have tiny sharpened serrations that can slice the hand of any greenhorn who is fool enough to try to pull up the deep-rooted grass. Any beast desperate enough to try grazing on the plant will probably slash its lips or lose its tongue. However, if one even walks too close, the resultant bloody slashes are usually enough to alert even the most unobservant.

The plant withstands many of its natural adversaries because of this characteristic. It is rumored, however, that goblins can harvest the grass and weave it into mats. Placed over pits and other traps, the grass blades of the mat slash the victim as it falls through the loose weave. Injured, the victim is less able to escape before the goblin trappers arrive.

Other vegetation near the Battle of Bones is limited to a few cacti. Occasionally one sees meadow grasses and stunted trees in nooks and declivities where plants find respite from the unrelenting glare of the sun, and a constant source of fresh water.

Living animals in the region are typical of any rocky, arid environment. Voles, desert rats, and coyotes are the most common mammals, but they are greatly outnumbered by the variety of lizards and poisonous snakes. A few small varieties of hawks share the bright, cloudless sky with larger scavenger birds. Notable among the latter is the bone vulture, a pale white cousin of the common desert vulture. The bone vulture is found only in the vicinity of the Battle of Bones.

Only common spiders and insects live outside the ring of broken land around the battleground, and none of these are worth any concern, save for certain poisonous scorpions. As one crosses onto the battle-





ground itself, insects become more numerous. Below the hot, bleached surface of the plain, millipedes, centipedes, beetles, flies, and other creeping and burrowing insects still work to complete the scavenging begun centuries before. Logic would dictate that everything would have been reduced to dust and compost long ago; yet there still remain deep layers of bone, marrow, and carrion. Some folk suppose the grisly pile has some supernatural force keeping things this way. I say only that, in places, it seems the battle took place just a few weeks ago.

Aside from occasional goblin bands and the undead creatures that dominate this place—I will discuss them separately—the population of monsters in the area is relatively sparse. A small band of mountain giants is rumored to taken up residence in the northernmost mountains encircling the Battle of Bones, and that these creatures battle with other giants living near the Hill of Lost Souls. The mountain giants are reportedly led by an undead fire giant, originally from the Great Desert Anauroch, who had an unfavorable encounter with a necromancer before joining, and, in time, coming to lead the mountain giants.

A few other creatures can be found in the area. Fire falcons are small, swooping raptors that travel in flights of two to six birds. They attack with small spheres of fire cast from their wingtips. Also, there are long-bodied, pointy-eared felines known as sand cats, which feed on rodents and other small creatures. They are not dangerous to travelers, as they only attack humanoids if cornered or threatened.

Sometimes there are greater dangers here, such as firedrakes and dragonnes. A dune stalker (a gaunt beast with a strange triangular torso) was seen here once, but that was long ago. The thing reportedly made its attacks with sound waves, and caused much death.

The natural minerals found near the Battle of Bones never excite men's greed nor encourage further exploration. Granite, basalt, and limestone are plentiful enough elsewhere in Faerûn, without going this far to get them. As for other minerals and ores—coal, silver, or gold—the upthrusts of this area seem un-

promising. The border crags are not so massive nor so high as the Thunder Peaks or the Graypeak Mountains, both of which have attracted ore-mining operations. Even the Troll Mountains beyond Iriaebor, and the Sunset Mountains far to the south are more apt to carry ore-bearing veins than the unnamed spires around the Battle of Bones site.

The *unnatural* deposits at the Battle of Bones are a different case—but I will get to that later.

Fire Falcon: Int Animal (1); AL N; AC 4; MV 3, Fl 36 (C); HD 1; THAC0 20; #AT 5; Dmg 1-3, 1-3, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2; SA Fire; SD Immune to fire-based attacks; SZ S; ML 11 (18 when guarding young); XP 270

Sand Cat: Int Animal (1); AL N; AC 4; MV 15; HD 1+1; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4, 1-3, 1-3; SA Rear claws (1-2), surprise; SD Surprise; SZ S; ML 8-10; XP 120

Dune Stalker: Int Highly (13-14); AL NE; AC 3; MV 12; HD 6; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 2-12; SA Kiss of Death; SD Can only be hit by magical weapons; MR 30%; SZ M; ML 14; XP 2,000

The Battle Itself

Ask the average dull peasant when and where the Battle of Bones took place. Likely, he will scratch his beard, squint his eyes, and adjust his trousers. He will hesitantly stammer that he reckons it was in the year 1090 Dalereckoning, and that it took place at the battleground known as the Battle of Bones.

As if great wars erupted full-blown in an instant's time! As if the places had no meaning before their enrollment in the savage carnage and waste we call war.

No, students, the Battle of Bones began much earlier, though none but the most discerning soothsayers and learned historians knew it until much later. Moreover, the war began hundreds of miles from the site of carnage you wish to visit. The official histori-





ans of the kingdoms, realms, and fiefdoms of Faerûn will join with a thousand silver-tongued bards to declare the cause of the war was something great and noble—that it was a valiant defense of hearth and home; or it was for that great love; or these great principles—for goodness, justice, and honor.

In fact, the ultimate cause of this catastrophe was neither great nor noble. The underlying reason behind the thousands of gory deaths suffered in agonizing pain, the hundred thousand lingering scars, amputations, and aching wounds was simply—the weather.

As you know, I have little regard for the weather. With scant effort, most people can easily survive average weather conditions. With just a touch of magic, one can be warm, dry, and well-fed. A little bit of preparation and a few gold pieces spent for camping gear and supplies, and the same can be true for those who lack such arcane knowledge. Even the most primitive societies know clothing, fire, and the storage of food and water.

Yet, weather's effects can be broad-scale, relentless, and disastrous, especially when the conditions are not easily prepared for. It is one thing to fight bad weather for a day or a week, or to shiver through some brief winter adventure to win a great prize. But to wither under the sun's burning rays, to hunt ever-more-elusive supplies of water and food without respite for decades: that is more than a people can take. Sooner or later they must leave the land that has turned against them—or perish.

And so it is that the Battle of Bones began, not in 1090 Dalereckoning, but in 1038 Dalereckoning. That year became known as the Year of the Spreading Spring.

For more than 700 years before that fateful time, the goblins and their inhuman allies ruled the Goblin Marches and the High Moors. (Note that I said the High Moors, not the High Moor, which is a different place altogether, located north and west of Serpent's Tail Stream and south of...)

Being the obedient and compulsively thorough fellow that he is, Balip dutifully recorded Rolanda's entire

digression into the differences between the High Moors, a strip of plain lying south of the Great Desert Anauroch and the accompanying Stonelands between the Goblin Marches to the west, Tilverton to the east, and the Farsea Marshes and Storm Horn Mountains to the south, and the High Moor—well, that other place. She further digressed into a diatribe on the pathetic laziness and lack of originality of mapmakers in particular and the world in general in being unable to come up with enough different place names that one doesn't get confused by the repetitive dreariness of it all. As I do not see any useful purpose to you, gentle reader, slogging through such simultaneously intemperate yet mind-numbingly boring drivel, I have edited it out for your reading convenience. Those feeling an overwhelming compulsion to read such material would do better to try counting sheep if they need help getting to sleep.

—Elminster

The Goblin Marches and High Moors were much wider and wetter than now. The Great Desert Anauroch's southernmost limits were 50 to 150 miles farther north than now, making the local weather cooler and moister. The Farsea Marsh was a freshwater lake ringed by forests and well-watered fields. The soil was rich, moist, and deep.

The goblins thrived in these lands, building mighty castles and citadels, particularly in the High Moors. Their numbers increased, and they built great armies and raiding parties, using dire wolves and other strange beasts as mounts. In the early centuries, they conquered the ancient kingdoms of Asram and Anauria, and fought with the city-state of Suzail, then only newly founded. Orcs and other so-called "evil" races were recruited as allied forces.

The goblins were wise enough never to attack Cormyr itself. By avoiding their strongest opponent, the goblins easily overcame the defenses of the villages, farms, and caravans bordering their expanding domain.

In 1038, however, their mighty kingdom began to suffer an encroachment of its own. The foe was larger, stronger, and more persistent than any other, yet the goblin kingdom's foe worked so subtly that its attack





was not even recognized for more than a decade.

The weather changed, and the desert began to move in.

The Year of the Spreading Spring was regarded merely as a year with a short rainy season and an unpleasantly warm summer. In fact, it was the harbinger of a trend that would alter all of Faerûn. Inexorably, the warming continued from one year to the next.

The water level of the Farsea Lake dropped until its edges were boggy and marshy, with an abundance of reeds. Swarms of insects bred in the warm, stagnant water left behind. The Great Desert Anauroch extended its boundaries southward. The soil dried and cracked, and was swept up by the increasingly common sandstorms. The topsoil vanished, and only rock and sandy silt remained on the exposed bones of the earth.

Decades passed. Many in Faerûn prospered from the increasing warmth, immigrating to Narfell, Vaasa, and Damara, now ice-free. But the goblins suffered. Water rationing became a regular practice; famine visited the northern reaches of their realm. The unrelenting sun blistered the yellow-orange skin of the goblins, which scaled off leaving weeping wounds. Given goblins' natural hatred of sunlight, the pain caused by the sun's relentless assault was even more maddening. The soil's loss of moisture even ruined long-inhabited tunnels and caves. Thousands of goblins died, and thousands of others found themselves exposed to the elements—and fighting mad.

As the desert marched south, so did the goblins. A few individuals straggled out first, but bands of refugees followed. All came in search of respite from the blistering sun and choking sand. They crowded into the villages, citadels, and castles seeking water, food, and work; they soon overwhelmed the capacities of all these. Fights broke out over food and access to water; tunnels and lairs became cramped deathtraps too foul for even goblins to tolerate; idle hungry youths formed gangs to prey on those weaker still; and everyone grumbled about those in power—those who had no shortage of good

food and clean water.

In this setting arose Izac Uthor. This ambitious, second-rate commander was, above all else, a brutish, petty demagogue seeking self-aggrandizement and power. Yet he tapped into the mood of the moment and catalyzed a war of conquest.

Izac Uthor had been a mid-level commander of combined goblin-orc forces before the exodus out of the devastated lands began in earnest. In a bid to regain his depleted powers, he raised the spectre of war as a release to goblin suffering. The disaffected refugees flocked to his banner.

Izac Uthor reveled in his new-found prestige, and recognized that the time for action had come. After all, he saw, if you cannot care for your subjects—and he could not—you must send them to fight beyond the borders of the realm. At best, you don't have to support them from your own resources, and you might win enough land and wealth to solve your problems. At worst, you will have fewer discontented subjects. In either case, many of the most capable and best-armed of them will have been eliminated by your enemies.

During the winter of 1089, Izac Uthor gathered the goblin armies near the abandoned village of Thandril, on the northwestern edge of the Goblin Marches. The host included nigh unto 200,000 goblins, tens of thousands of affiliated orcs and kobolds, and a few thousand hobgoblins leading detachments of goblins or orcs. (The kobolds' "tactics" leave little need or use for sophisticated battleplans.)

Simple-minded and grinning, the host called themselves the Thugs of Uthor. The goal of this offensive assemblage of viciousness was to capture the lands north and west of the Great Desert Anauroch. "Overrun the North" was their guttural chant in goblin. (To ensure the proper enthusiasm in the expendable kobold shock troops, this was translated into kobold as "Overrun the Gnomes.")

Of course, even a force of more than a quarter million combatants could hardly hope to conquer, much less occupy, the entire Western Realms north of the Fields of the Dead. Neither the Thugs of Uthor nor Uthor himself could grasp that they





might have achieved a more limited and realistic military objective. The host might have cut the Western Realms in two by taking the watersheds of the Marsh of Chelimber and of the Winding Water. Controlling the roads and bridges, the goblins could have demanded toll and tribute from all people going through these lands. But such an attainable strategic goal (although geographically complex) would not reduce to a monosyllabic battlecry. It became the road not taken.

The brief rainy season of the year 1090 ended in the last days of Tarsakh. The forces of imminent war, set in motion more than 50 years before, came to a head. Compelled by a change in the weather, the motley, arm-swinging, knuckle-dragging horde marched north under the banner of the Thugs of Uthor. First stop: Torgor's Triangle.

Ahem. Stop rifling through your parchments and maps. You will not find Torgor's Triangle; the name has been forgotten. Torgor's Triangle was the name of a roughly triangular high plain formed by encircling granite upthrusts. Does it sound familiar now? You know it as the Battle of Bones. Why, I doubt even Elminster knows its ancient name.

Guess again, dear one. I know many, many names, including the one your brother used to call you to make you cry. So much for your vaunted emotional detachment.

—Elminster

Of course, the gathering of the goblinoid hordes had not gone unnoticed in the settlements nearby. The people had seen the desert expanding, and the concomitant shrinkage in goblin territories. Many tense discussions were held in Cormyr, Hill's Edge, Tilverton, Soubar, Shadowdale, and other places in harm's way. Some folk, due to their selfish short-sighted dispositions, noted the goblins' degrading conditions with glee. Others talked of it in murmurs, fearing what it might portend.

It was the halfling community of Hill's Edge that first saw what was coming. As the goblins prepared to march to Torgor's Triangle and beyond, the halflings

sent out word to Tyrluk, Eveningstar, Cormyr, Arabel, Tilverton, and other villages to the south and east. The local militia gathered to inhibit the horde's advance toward their homes. Meanwhile, detachments of the regular standing armies were sent south and west along the fast trade road through Iriaebor to Hill's Edge. Regular troops and the local militias were sent to Hill's Edge to join the main battle force uniting against the goblinoid horde.

They came from Beregost, Baldur's Gate, Berdusk, Iriaebor, Elturel, Scornubel, Soubar, and the reaches of the High Moor. Although just five decades old and not as nearly as large as city as it is now, Waterdeep sent 20,000 humans to meet the evil foe. The Dwarven Halls sent a fearsome army, battle axes gleaming as they marched without rest to join the assembling troops. Though no one could remember having sent a messenger to ask, even a force of elves came to offer their services. One squad hailed from Evereska, and a larger elven army came from Silverymoon and other forest homes in the north. More than 140,000 people descended upon little Hill's Edge to join the combined army.

The prejudiced and the ignorant (and they are many) refer to the armies assembled at Hill's Edge as the "forces of good" and the opposing goblin hordes as the "forces of evil." This may even be factually true, in some sense. Still, it is unclear to my objective, unbiased view why it is "evil," *per se*, to abandon a land of death and famine. Why it is "evil" to seek food, shelter, and water; and why it is "good" to slaughter refugees rather than share thy plenty and help them resettle where their hopes for survival are less precarious.

But history tends to be written not only by the victors, but too often by academic idealists. These alleged "men of truth" live in their towers of learning, far from the front lines, and philosophize. They congratulate each other on the "goodness" of themselves and their society, and rationalize their successes achieved on the backs of other souls.

But I digress. No sooner had all the forces arrived than a leader was found: Artur Blevin, commander of the home forces of Soubar. A choice of compromise,





he ordered the combined forces north even as the halfling militia of Hill's Edge dug in near their town, lest the goblins somehow escape to the south.

Artur Blevin's forces sought to flank the goblin hordes streaming out of the western border of the Goblin Marches. The commander saw that, if his armies reached Torgor's Triangle first, they could deny the goblins access to the natural fortress, and force them eastward into the desert. There, the fierce sun and fearsome heat would take its toll among them. Without resources, the goblinoid army would be destroyed.

It did not happen that way.

Scouting ahead, the elf contingent met Artur Blevin's van yet 20 miles from Torgor's Triangle. They reported that the quick-moving Thugs of Uthor had already reached the southeastern rim of that high plain. Blevin convened a hasty conference of the military leaders and strategists. They determined to wheel westward, to set up headquarters at the Hill of Lost Souls. From there, they might steal into Torgor's Triangle from the north and west while Uthor's troops watched south for first sight of their foes.

Eventually the goblin outriders discerned the move, but by then the stage was set for the fateful confrontation. Uthor's forces held the southern perimeter of the triangle; Blevin, the northwestern edge. A thin, weak flank of elves and humans held the northeastern side of the triangle against the enemy's escape. Between them all, a wide rocky plain stretched for 30 miles. Dwarves and goblins dug trenches and redoubts while the commanders awaited the decision that would start the fighting.

Two days and two nights passed in nervous quiet—no skirmishes, no patrols engaged. Each side fretfully repositioned its men, bringing up reserves from the rear. In doing so, they adding to the length of the battleline, and adding to the slaughter to come.

In their positions, warriors polished and sharpened their implements of destruction. At the flickering fires of the human encampments, men wrote last words to loved ones or, more often, bade a cleric write the words for them. They were men with time to kill, but no time left in which to learn to read or write.

Now I come to the true tragedy of the Battle of Bones. No, it is not that the battleground became a gathering place of the undead. It is that the battle need never have occurred.

After two days, Uthor was well aware of the strength of Blevin's forces, and that they could be swiftly assembled whenever the goblins tried to break out from their dwindling homelands. Uthor knew there was little hope of defeating his opponents, little hope his armies might conquer a new homeland. He also believed his men could retreat to the Goblin Marches, and the opposing armies would little impede their withdrawal.

After two days, Artur Blevin was well aware of all of this, too. He need only hold his position to thwart the enemy's expansionist plans. He also knew that, should they retreat, he would not stop them.

Finally, each battle commander knew that the other had not attacked for two days and two nights. They both knew the land around them was empty ground of little value to the assembled humans, dwarves, and elves—but of great potential value to the land-starved and over-crowded goblins.

If ever there was an objective opportunity for compromise and diplomacy—if ever there was a common ground for neutrality and sharing—this was it. Yet at the third hour past midnight of the fifth of Mirtul, both commanders ordered their forces into a full-fledged assault across an open plain to almost certain death. If one were to ask, they would say it was for honor, or to end for all time the power of the forces aligned against them.

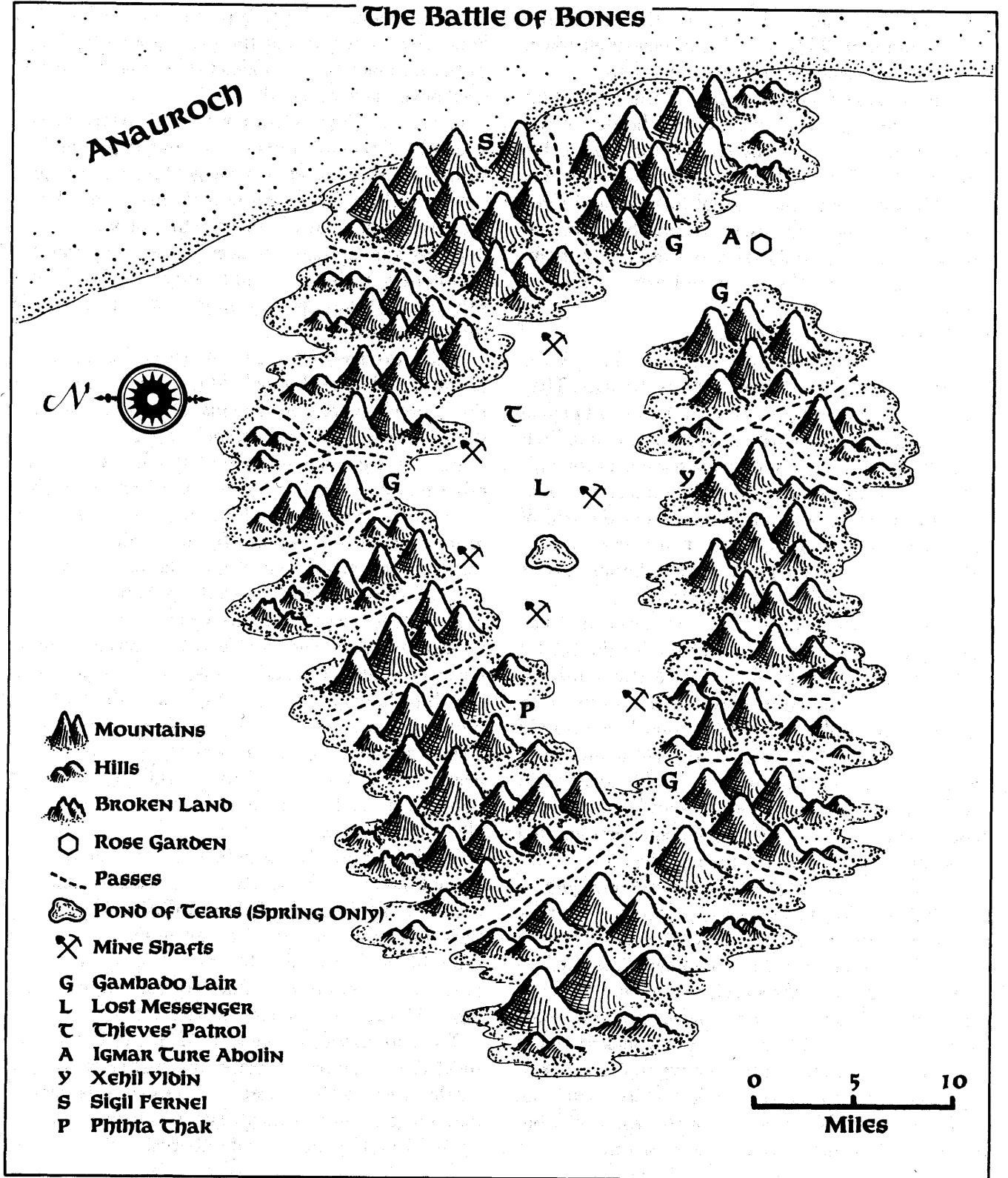
Truth be told, they fought because they did not know how not to fight. They could not tolerate the presence of those who believed differently. Worse, they could not conceive of giving away their claim to something—the land—that by any rational assessment, was uncontested. They fought because their bigoted hatred of the enemy was expected.

The natural infravision of the Thugs of Uthor gave them the initial advantage in the night's clash. The battle began with a short (and largely ineffective) long-range magical barrage. This was swiftly followed by a screaming line of kobolds rushing across the





The Battle of Bones





plain to fall upon the opposition.

Despite the dark, the combined forces leapt up to counter the kobold assault with a wave of humanity. In the vastness of the battlefield—over 60 square miles—there was no orderly battleline. All troops on both sides were ordered onto the plain before dawn; all fought wherever they found their foe. No reserves were held back, and the sophisticated earthen defenses that had been thrown up were left behind in the armies' mutual eagerness to fight. Wizards flung darkness and light, thunderbolts and ice, storms and silence across the fields of pain. Hobgoblin artillery battered friend and foe alike until silenced by a fireball of prodigious proportions.

The first rays of dawn did not much help the men in Artur Blevin's forces. In the night, almost a million feet had stirred the dust. Swirling with the smoke of a thousand fires, a thick haze hung over the battlefield and no wind dispersed that cloud.

The bellows and cries of anger, fear, and pain echoed weirdly in the vast triangle of slaughter. An eerie cacophony drowned out the leaders' orders, and no one could carry out planned maneuvers. Each man fought for himself, with perhaps some fellow villagers beside him. Goblin or human, dwarf or kobold, they were all unknowing how the tide of battle progressed, or if their individual survival had any meaning in the grand scheme of things.

After a time, the weariness and desperation of the battlers made it difficult even to identify the foe. Every warrior standing was covered in blood and dust. If it moved, you struck out. If it ran, you impaled it. If you dropped or broke your weapon, you picked up another from the dozens at your feet. Everywhere lay the remains of those who failed the test of survival.

Legends say the battle lasted two days and two-and-a-half nights. Some bards sing it as ten days and nights, but veterans I've known swear no combatants could have fought even one full day without a break to eat, rest, and regroup. Scattered as they were across the huge battlefield, perhaps exhausted opponents dropped where they stood, and were taken for dead

until they rose to fight again.

A brief shower at dawn of the third day cleared the haze. With visibility restored, the few survivors sought others of their kind and retreated to their first entrenched positions.

Among Artur Blevin's troops, none escaped unscathed. If they could, survivors made their way to the Hill of Lost Souls. Others, too wounded to move, lay trapped among the bodies of friend and foe alike, wailing for help.

Help never came. Few had the strength to save any but themselves. The bright fluttering standards atop the hill both beckoned and mocked them all, as the walking wounded struggled up the slippery, blood-slicked grass overlaying the volcanic bones of the hill.

The Aftermath of The Carnage

Some would say that the aftermath of this battle was unspeakable—but speak of it I shall. The great battle, so totally unnecessary, has stamped its influence on the place. Yet death, whether gruesome or clean, is simply a facet of life and undeath.

That brief shower on the morning of the third day was no real blessing to those who yet stood on the plain of Torgor's Triangle. Almost 400,000 dead, or soon to be dead, littered the plain. Many were indistinguishable as separate beings, scattered in limbs and pieces. The first to die wore death masks long frozen into place as more and more fell dead about them. The awful heat had caused the bodies to swell and deteriorate, adding an awful stench to the foul fog of sweat and blood and ichor that assaulted the senses. Vermin and scavengers were already arriving—yet they were nothing compared with how the scene would look for days and weeks to come.

For hundreds of miles around the battle, residents of the Western Realms shivered to see flocks of scavenger birds flying together like migrating geese. For more than a fortnight, the winged scavengers hurried to the carrion feast. It is also a fact, which I myself was first to postulate and prove, that the





dominant form of fly in all of Faerûn to this very day is the offspring of a formerly obscure desert fly. Before the Battle of Bones, this fly was found only in the western reaches of Anauroch. Its dominance today is the result of the billions, perhaps trillions, of maggots that fed off the unattended bodies on the plain...

Capable and dutiful though he is, Balip's account here breaks off "due to a sudden desire to vacate the premises and relieve [himself] of [his] lunch". One can hardly blame him; Rolanda is as casually descriptive of the scavengers' descent on a plain of rotting meat as she is when her subject is the berry bushes that may be found there.

Suffice to say that the plain was literally covered by hundreds of thousands of dead bodies. Even had they the will, the survivors of either army could do nothing for their dead—all were left to the elements. This meant a time of plenty for rot grubs, flies, worms, carrion crawlers, and the like, but the mental image is not a pretty one for the those of us with natural sensibilities and weak stomachs.

After changing clothes, Balip picks up his record with Rolanda's account of the battle's aftermath.

—Elminster

The bedraggled forces assembled at the Hill of Lost Souls numbered some 30,000, at most. Consisting entirely of walking wounded, they left two days later to travel south, then west (and upwind of the Battle of Bones) in search of the surviving goblins. For days they saw nothing except the black swarms of birds and flies hovering over the triangle of death where they had fought. Finally, they found tracks, camp detritus, and the occasional new-fallen corpse south of the rim wall. Their pace quickened, as they feared the surviving goblins planned an assault on Hill's Edge itself.

The goblins veered off into what is now known as Skull Gorge, but was then simply called the River Reaching Gorge. Here were caverns where the goblins could take cover and tend to their wounds. Some say the goblins hid great treasures in these caves during this time, and in fact some small

caches have been found. However, it is hard to imagine the goblins or their allies would have carried treasure into war in the first place. Certainly they had no chance to loot during the campaign. I give little credence to such speculations, and suggest that to risk life or limb pursuing the rumor is a fool's quest.

Perhaps in displaced revulsion over the horror that the goblins had "forced" them to take part in, the combined forces grew intent on slaughtering the goblin force to the last survivor. The combined forces pressed a final battle in the gorge.

It is believed that the goblinoid races summoned interplanar assistance for their last stand, for there are bardic tales and veterans' stories of combat against fiends and tanar'ri. All accounts also report that a huge, disembodied skull appeared in the air as the combined forces attacked, and that red flames flickered from its mouth to singe the advancing troops.

I have no doubt the exhausted warriors of the combined army believed that they battled the creatures of the lower planes, but it makes little sense for the goblins to have held such powerful assistance in reserve from the main battle. All in all, given the ultimate success of the combined forces, this interplanar assistance seems to have been peculiarly ineffective. Most likely it was a flashy illusion of no import but to terrify the battle-weary troops of the combined forces. The remaining goblinoid warriors were routed from the caverns and cliffs of Skull Gorge, and annihilated.

Thus ended the war between the goblinoid and the combined armies. Goblins continue to inhabit their ancestral territories—the Goblin Marches and High Moors—and occasionally they conduct raids from these bases. The name of Izac Uthor is still remembered, and he is said to have escaped the slaughter at Skull Gorge. Occasionally the senile elders mutter that he will one day return to lead the people, but most give this tale no credence.





Life After Death After Life

The years immediately following the bloody and pointless confrontation are not well documented. It was, after all, a place of misery and death in an inhospitable region 100 miles from anywhere. There are rumors, of course, about that period—before time, scavengers, and the elements did their work. Surely some beings visited the site: monsters attracted by the rotting flesh; ghoulish admirers of the macabre who delighted in the wreckage laid out before them; practitioners of necromancy seeking subjects on which to practice or, perhaps, to experiment unfettered by complications found in more civilized areas; and grave-robbers and plunderers drawn by the prospect of booty and treasure.

No doubt all of these came, and others too. It is even likely that they met up with one another, perhaps even kept one another in check. Consider: necromancers scare away the curious; monsters fall upon necromancers too intent on their dark spells; plunderers slay the monsters they find gorging on fresh carrion; swarms of flies drive the plunderers mad; and so on. Each kind of visitor left evidence of its presence at the Battle of Bones, but none have dominated its subsequent history.

Others came to the battleground, as I said. In the first years, these pilgrims were less greedy for what they might find: grieving widows, respectful mourners, saddened clerics, and awed students of military history. They came; a few still come even today. They aim not to steal something away, or take advantage of the misery lingering on the battlefield, but to give honor and respect to those who were lost there. They come to take knowledge or understanding or solace.

Most often these visitors do not travel on the battlefield itself. They approach through a gap in the crags that surround the plain. For an hour, or a day, they gaze in reverent or studious silence, then sigh and turn away. Sometimes they leave a me-

mento or flowers; sometimes a name or poem carved in stone.

On the fifth anniversary of the battle, it was visitors like these who remarked on the sudden and profuse emergence of wildflowers across the battlefield. After the rainy season ended, the wildflowers quickly withered. By Flamerule, the stalks had turned brown and fragile. Weeks later, a sandstorm blew in from the desert and scoured the plants from the battlefield. They never grew there again.

It was also these respectful pilgrims who first reported on the increasing activity of the undead in the region. Undead creatures attacked with such rising frequency, and in such numbers, that even the uncommon visits by the pilgrims nearly ceased altogether. Few people—few who call themselves civilized—have approached the place in the last hundred years. Only I would call this land my home, and its inhabitants, my charges.

The Rose Garden

The short-lived wildflowers are long since crumbled to dust, and visitors to the Battle of Bones have become infrequent. Yet the Rose Garden remains as a reminder of the parade of mourners who came here in centuries past.

In a gap at the southeast corner of the triangular battlefield grows a tangle of roses, of a variety of breeds and hues. Some say that this wild garden is the result of flowers and memorial plants brought to this place to honor the dead. Taking root through fissures in the granite, the plants must find moisture in the cool recesses deep below, they say. The would-be botanists further explain that roses grow so well here because of that species' hunger for bonemeal in soil. Moreover, some wild briars are well known for their hardy ability to grow under inhospitable conditions, like these.

Others who have come to investigate the phenomenon detect angled pathways through the tan-





gled growth, declaring it a carefully-disguised maze. They say such patterns could not have occurred naturally, although others dispute the “paths” are more than imagined patterns imposed on natural growth. Those who see mazes invent tales of priests or grieving widows planting the garden, ensuring its liquid nourishment by burying a *decanter of endless water* deep below.

Other tales are those told around flickering campfires by youths trying to spook one another. In these lurid yarns, the Rose Garden was planted by an evil lich to lure in the living, and the roses survive by drinking from the well of blood spilled from the thousands who died. On moonless nights, the striplings whisper, the roses are tended by zombies, wraiths, and other undead creatures.

During the many days and nights that I have spent at the Rose Garden, I have seen nothing to lend credence to one tale over any other. Clearly, however, these roses do not suffer from any lack of moisture, though drought conditions hold sway all around. The roses must therefore draw moisture or life from some unusual source. Hear what I have learned, though: even in this place of quiet beauty, the visitor may find both sensory pleasures and unexpectedly virulent dangers.

The garden itself is shaped like an octagon, with an entrance at the southwest corner. Only at this entry can the garden be entered without damaging the rose thicket, for the briars have intertwined rigidly. They create a living wall 10 to 15 feet high, curving in slightly toward the center of the garden. The paths of the garden, however they came to be, are invitingly shady after the barren rubble and bone dusting the gap. Moreover, the shifting shadows and overarching branches obscure the paths from those who would divine the garden’s secrets from the air. And lest you think to burn it down, I can only say: don’t. I saw the remains of some individuals who tried to divine the secret heart of the garden that way. No one should die like that...

The path among the roses is usually quite narrow—18 to 30 inches wide—varying according to the bushiness and vigor of the nearby plants. The ground

is covered with a thick undermat of dead petals and leaves that have fallen for decades, even centuries. In my incursions, I have found what seem to be gaps formed deliberately to lead one to other, inner paths. These seem to interconnect in a maze of passages, switchbacks, and dead ends.

The variety and beauty of the roses is quite remarkable, but the entire garden overpowers the other senses with the heavy perfume of its flowers. The scent is heady and somewhat intoxicating in its musty sweetness, especially after one has been breathing the sterile, dry, and dusty air around the Battle of Bones.

Although the heavy fragrance produces none of the side-effects of drunkenness (slurred speech, stumbling gait, and dulled senses), the rose scent is disorienting, seriously affecting one’s sense of direction and short-term memory. It is as though the secret of the garden protects itself by inhibiting clear thinking or careful mapping. I have spent many a day (and a few nights) there, but I still think that there is an area in the middle of the maze that I have not yet seen. It almost seems that the pathways move, conspiring to confuse my trip through the maze. Whatever the cause, I have thus far been robbed of success.

Nevertheless, I have cataloged several varieties of roses found in the Rose Garden. I warn you, do not ignore what I am about to say simply because I describe *plants*. Neither life nor undeath recognizes the artificial categories we sentient place on nature. Flowers, herbs, fruits, vegetables, trees, and fungi: these are no different from mammals, humanoids, amphibians, and fish in the realm of life, death, and undeath. A plant grows, lives, propagates, and defends itself like any beast—and beastly can be the plants I have seen! So listen as I speak of the green beasts that reside in the Rose Garden. Some are benign, some deadly.

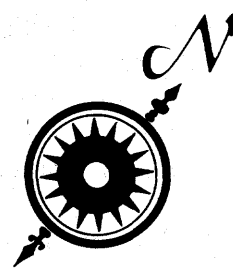
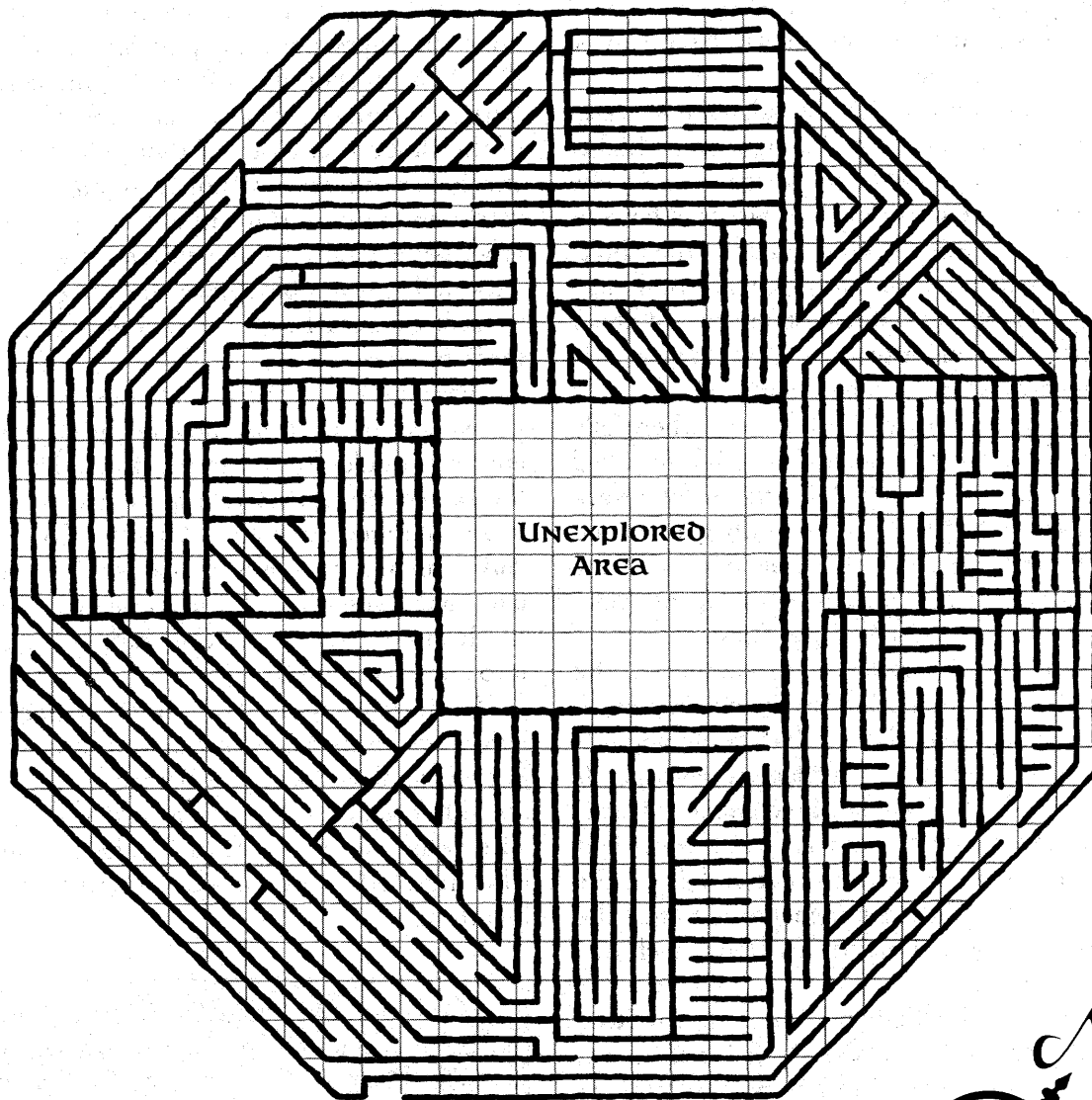
The Roll of Species

The outermost pathways of the Rose Garden are populated by the most mundane of the roses you will find there. The most common of these, the mourning rose, is a thorned variety, with a large, bright red bloom





The Rose Garden
One square = 5 feet





and large, greenish-red leaves. It is quite hardy, with the flowers maintaining their appearance and scent for as many as three days after being picked. It is often cultivated for sale to mourners, that they might decorate the graves of the deceased—hence its name. A white-flowering cousin of this rose is sometimes sold by city flowergirls in lovers' bouquets; it too can be found in the Rose Garden.

A smaller, pink variety of flower adorns the creeper rose, favored by gardeners for its vigor as a climber and creeper on fenceposts and latticework. In the Rose Garden, the stems curl around pieces of bone or broken lengths of weapons. Wrapped up in the whole, the result is to give the briar a tight horizontal bracing. The appearance of the rose stems twined about bones is disquieting and macabre to some, but entirely natural from my rational point of view.

If the flower of the creeper rose is cut when fully opened, it lasts only a few hours. If a full-formed bud is cut with a long stalk attached, it will last for a week or so. If the cut end of the stem is lightly mashed and kept in warm water with a bit of sugar added to it, the blossom can last even longer. When it opens under these conditions, its scent is overpowering.

The *daylight rose* is similar in appearance to the mourning rose, although a bit larger, with a greener leaf, and fewer but larger thorns. Both white and yellow varieties grow in the Rose Garden, with petals streaked with red veins. Given the context, superstitious people find the streaks rather eerie. The daylight rose lasts but six hours, whether cut or left on the bush. As a consequence, it is sometimes named the *morning rose* by wags and nitwits who fancy such irritating witticisms.

A fourth among the familiar varieties in the Rose Garden is the *common bloodrose*. As befits its name, its flowers are blood-red, and they grow tightly bunched and of only a medium size. The bush grows well-thorned, dark green stems, and small dark leaves.

The plant is delicate, highly susceptible to cold and frost. How this rose survives the temperature extremes around the Battle of Bones I cannot say. Certainly the Rose Garden is the only place I know where this

plant grows wild.

Although it is called the *common bloodrose*, it is quite uncommon; and its history is equally unusual. Cultivated by an obscure conclave of clerics near Teziir, the first bloodroses were presented to the Lord of Suzail. They were never found wild until they appeared, inexplicably, in a single year (1100 Dalereckoning, the tenth anniversary of the Battle of Bones), which became known as the Year of the Bloodrose. None of those plants survived to the following year, although enough were taken into controlled environments to perpetuate the type. Nobles now pay heavily for its careful cultivation. To wear a bloodrose adorning one's tunic is a mark of wealth; and it is a generous gift to a lord's favorite.

These are the mundane varieties of rose found in the garden. In addition, there are at least three varieties you would do well to recognize. The first I call the *sunset rose*, for its yellow, orange, and red-hued flower imitates the colors of sunset. This rose has a dark stem and its thorns can be painful, but they are large and easily avoided. The jagged-edged leaves are much more dangerous: razor-sharp, they easily cut into unprotected flesh.

While the cut is itself inconsequential, the leaves of the rose deliver a poison that will swiftly put one to sleep for hours. Someone ill-intentioned could harvest the leaves to mix into food or drink. The resulting concoction would poison anyone who ingested it, slowing or stopping the victim's breathing.

Effects last 1d6 hours. Each tenth of an ounce of powdered leaves ingested with food or drink reduces breathing by 10%; anyone breathing at 30% or less must make a Con check each round to remain conscious; failure of a second Con check results in suffocation.

A second danger among the roses in this place is the *ruby blushrose*, a bright red, thornless rose with an exceedingly large flower. It has a redolent, aromatic





smell that permeates the air for yards. The smell is extremely pleasant, though not too sweet, and brings a flush to the cheeks of most humans who smell it.

The variety is well known in the far reaches of the Eastern Realms, where it is used in perfumes and powders made for well-to-do ladies of that region. While seemingly harmless and a benefit to perfumers, my studies indicate that the scent that paints a blush upon the cheeks of beautiful young ladies actually debilitates them. The rose's bouquet weakens one's endurance and strength after prolonged exposure, causing light-headedness and swooning.

Wags attribute this to the effects of being in love. In fact, the lovers are experiencing the effects of a disorienting airborne poison. I believe this flower's perfume causes much of the disorientation one suffers in the garden's maze. Yet, I am unconvinced it is the sole cause of the confusion that upsets my every attempt to locate the center of the garden.

The scent from a few of these flowers, as commonly used in a social setting, causes only a minor sense of wonder and confusion, which is barely noticeable as such. The effect lasts while the scent hangs in the air, and for up to one hour after.

In concentrated numbers, such as can be found on the vine, the blossoms' perfume impairs spatial orientation at a cumulative rate of 1% per round up to a maximum 85% impairment level. The effect lasts for 1-6 hours after the scent ceases to be present.

Rolanda's abandonment of her druidical training has led her to omit other intriguing, possibly deadly, uses of the ruby blushrose and the sunset rose. It is common knowledge that when bees make honey from poisonous flowers such as nightshade, the resulting honey is similarly poisonous. There have been isolated instances of such tainted sweets appearing in the marketplaces of Thay. Some merchants have been sold crystallized honey candies, with the predictable ill-effects upon the consumer. To date, honey seems to have been made only from the flowers of the ruby blushrose.

Ruby Blushrose Potpourri

In certain lower-class festhalls of Waterdeep it is becoming common to find bowls of room fresheners set about the chambers, ostensibly to mask the effluxion of the more odoriferous visitors (and perhaps some of the employees as well). At least one of these establishments has apparently made a connection with a supplier of the ruby blushrose, and has begun mixing a custom scent placed in only the most costly suites. The intoxicating effects of the dried flowers are double those of fresh ones on the bush (2% impairment per round up to 100% impairment, lasting 2-12 hours after the scent ceases to be present). The apothecary responsible for creating this potpourri has gone to the expense of extracting the attar of the blushrose, and adding the potent oil to the dried blooms. The resulting effect is as if the victim were exposed to ten bushes (500 flowers) filled with ruby blushrose blooms.

(One dram of attar from these roses is as effective as a thousand flowers still on the bush; impairment is guaranteed within one turn, if the victim is exposed to a full dram.)

While I cannot say for certain that these are the ingredients of this heady blend, they are likely candidates for inclusion in such a scented herbal mix.

- Two handfuls of dried ruby blushrose petals
 - Four drops attar of ruby blushrose
 - One gram of orris root (fixative)
 - One handful of dried lavender flowers
 - Two whole vanilla bean pods (a very expensive spice, from the far-off land of Maztica; available through Aurora's Whole Realms Catalogue outlets)
- or —
- One scant handful of dried blue malva flowers

— recipe collected by Bronwyn Starglade





However, there is suggestive evidence for a mead brewed from honey of the sunset rose. Given that mead puts a drinker to sleep more quickly than other such beverages, it has been difficult to demonstrate a clear cause and effect. However, a particularly fast-acting quaff appeared in Chondath. No one has shown that sunset rose honey was among the ingredients, but suspicions are rising as quickly as drinkers are falling.

– Elminster

Lastly, we come to the reason I called the rare bloodrose “common,” above: to distinguish it from one even more unusual. Along the inner pathways of the maze is found a rose identical to the common bloodrose, save in one aspect. The rose is not living; more accurately, it is *undead*. The undead bloodrose roots itself in bonemeal, which is everywhere in this strange place; perhaps this accounts for the rose’s growth and continuing nourishment.



My experiments show that a flower cut from the undead bloodrose remains indefinitely fresh while pinned on the tunic, lapel, or in a nosegay carried by a living being. Slowly drawing the lifeforce from such a host, the rose inexorably weakens the wearer. After a few weeks, no life remains and the host of this undead parasite sinks into its own undeath.

The *undead bloodrose* draws 1d3 hp per day from its victim and reduces the victim’s Con by 1 point every two days.

The lifeforce of a blooded animal appears to be the rose’s preferred sustenance, but even a vegetative or fungal life will suffice for the undead flower. If cut off from close access to a lifeforce, the flower of the undead bloodrose does not wither, but darkens until

it looks almost black. Should lifeforce again become available, the flower quickly drains what it needs, and its color returns to normal blood-red fast enough to be evident to the naked eye. If sustenance is withheld from a blackened rose for at least three to four days, the deep-black rose suddenly implodes into a fine, greenish-black dust. This dust evaporates within 20 minutes if left in the open air.

If the dust of an imploded bloodrose is collected and bottled in an airtight container, it lasts for an extended period of time. (The exact length of time depends on the quality of the seal; some slow evaporation seems to occur even in the best of circumstances). So far I have not found that the dust evidences any magical, chemical, or necromantic uses—but my experiments continue.





Oh yes, by all means—feel free to pour yourself more tea as I talk. Your upcoming journey across the Battle of Bones will be quite dry enough without starting out the trip with your liquids depleted by my lack of manners.

It quite befuddles this old man whether this is what passes for humor in Rolanda's lonely existence, or whether her social sense is so stunted as not to comprehend the effect she had juxtaposing these two ideas in the preceding text.

—Elminster

Strangely enough, in my excursions among the undead here and elsewhere, I have more than once seen the bloom of a bloodrose pinned to the cape or tunic of an undead creature of considerable rank and power. In theory, it might be a common bloodrose worn for decoration, but I am convinced it is the undead bloodrose they wear. It does not seem logical that they would do so were the flower to drain the undead as it does the living. I surmise that they wear the flower knowing its effect, and sharing with it any lifeforce they gather—just as one would share a meal with one's pet ferret. It is also possible that one well-accustomed to interpreting subtle variations in the bloodrose's hue could use the flower to detect the proximity of the living.

The capacity for the undead bloodrose to steal lifeforce seems to exist even before the bloom is plucked, but not as strongly. The potential danger of camping overnight near a profusion of such undeadly flowers make it unwise to take such a risk unnecessarily. Although it seems this danger makes the Rose Garden a potentially deadly trap, I have never found a corpse or other evidence of any person who has succumbed to it.

Each unplucked undead bloodrose draws 1 hp per day and has no effect on Con. Victims must be within 20 feet of a bush for at least 8 hours for this effect to occur.

The Bone Miners

One can enter the high plain of the Battle of Bones through the southeastern gap in the crags, or through the many less-obvious passes. On a sunny day (and most are), one's first impression of the plain is its bright white glare. At dusk or dawn, or on the infrequently cloudy day, it is easier to make out features on the flat expanse. They are unremarkable: jumbled boulders and rocks; sinkholes, mounds, and drifts of white sand. Some long-discarded weapon, newly-polished by sand and wind, might catch the light for an instant.

In the spring, one sometimes sees a small pond near the middle of the plain: the Pond of Tears. Talespinners would have you believe it formed from the tears of the wounded and dying. A nice story. In fact, this shallow pond is just a puddle, really, runoff from the region's brief spring rains. The water is extremely brackish and salty—not because it comes from a flood of bitter tears, but because it filters through bone and dissolves mineral dust. The water collects in the shallow basin and rapidly evaporates, further concentrating the salts.

As one draws closer, the outlines and protuberances of bones, skulls, and weapons mar the flat perfection of the ground, and bear silent witness to the history of this place of death. While the vast majority of these skulls and bones are relics of the Battle of Bones, one must take special care approaching skulls on the ground. Some may actually demark the lairs of gambado, especially near the southeastern gap where people most often enter the battlefield. These "springing skulls of doom" have captured many a curious pilgrim or student of the macabre, and frightened many, many more. [Details about gambados can be found in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting Boxed Set.]

The surface of the plain shows evidence of having been disturbed, both in times past and in recent days—and not just by gambado. Recently-dug holes burrow into the dust, bone, and bonemeal. Other holes, evidently dug before the last sandstorm, have caved in.





While some of these features are abandoned gambado lairs, most tunnelworks mark the activities of the Bone Miners. These goblinoid scavengers mine the bones and detritus of the ancient battle for loot to be had from the thousands who died here. [Bone Miner stats are the same as for goblins.]

More than a hundred Bone Miners work, rest, and play beneath the Battle of Bones. They generally work in tightly-grouped, paranoid bands of three to six. While the average depth of bone on the plain is not thick, dust and bone chips fill every irregularity. In spots, the debris is prodigiously thick. The miners tunnel below the bone to the more stable dirt layer, then open a narrow passage to the "ore" above. By accessing that layer from below, the miners are more likely to find the heavier metal items that have shifted to the bottom of the layers over the centuries since the battle: the armor, weapons, coins, and treasure.

Although they compete jealously against one another, all the Bone Miner bands are probably descended from a single troop of goblins who fled the desiccated Goblin Marches a decade after the Battle of Bones. Learning that the increasingly dry climate was preserving the remains, they came to rob and plunder among the debris left by that calamity.

Like ore miners elsewhere, the Bone Miners endure arduous lives that make them hardy and strong. They tunnel like other miners: digging, shoring up walls (long bones are the preferred supports), and cross-bracing the ceiling to forestall cave-ins. This last is especially important, as the tunnel roof is less than cohesive, and a fall of bone dust is often the only warning of danger. To help support the roof, the miners favor rib bones wedged in on either side of the narrow, curved ceiling.

Like all miners, the goblins seek veins and deposits of "ore." For them, the so-called veins are lines of weapons and other booty that demarcates a battleline of warriors slain, or a topographic depression to which heavier items slowly gravitated over the centuries. Other deposits are of two kinds: treasure buried for safekeeping by those about to go into battle, and inedible booty shoved aside by the feeding carrion

crawlers that frequented this place after the Battle of Bones was over.

Drawn to the site by the sounds of battle three centuries ago, carrion crawlers found a feast beyond their most gluttonous dreams: thousands of corpses on which to feed; their eating frenzy uninhibited by birds, rats, worms, rot grubs, and other opportunistic scavengers stealing their own bellyful of petty gobbets.

With the enormous food supply, the overstuffed carrion crawlers mated enthusiastically, and the resultant grubs had ample food from the first. Accordingly, they did not attack one another, nor become fodder for their greedy parents; they grew and survived to multiply again. Within two years, the battlesite was a virtual beehive of carrion crawlers. Caring nothing for treasure or armament, the carrion crawlers cast unwanted items down the nearest hole. Nothing would interfere with the frenzy of feasting and mating.

As is nature's way, the overpopulation of carrion crawlers collapsed suddenly. With the carrion of the battle-fallen gone, and with no new food sources entering the food chain, starving carrion crawlers began to eat their own grubs and one another. Soon, few were left. Their underground passages collapsed, leaving little evidence of their brief ascendancy. Little, that is, but those holes filled with treasure from feasts long forgotten.

These garbage heaps of the carrion crawlers are the treasure troves the Bone Miners seek beneath the battlefield. Their day's finds and speculations about tomorrow's booty occasion secretive conversations among members of any given mining squad. The goblins are well-versed in reading the signs that represent a collapsed carrion crawler tunnel. They follow the signs assiduously to locate an old lair, and then the associated garbage (treasure) hole.

Finding an undisturbed carrion crawler tunnel has the same effect on these goblins as when a dwarf miner finds a gold nugget in a stream. Weariness falls away; all eyes turn upstream (or downtunnel) toward the imagined source of unlimited wealth. Of course, the Bone Miners have even less success finding





unlimited wealth than do itinerant prospectors. Yet for each, it is the search as much as the finding that makes life itself worth living.

Aside from the danger of cave-ins, the Bone Miners also face death should they run into the few carrion crawlers that still inhabit the Battle of Bones. The reverberations of the goblins' mining cannot be masked from the fast-digging carrion crawlers, and the Bone Miners must remain on constant alert for the subterranean threats. Sometimes goblins come upon the even more loathsome undead carrion crawler, the zombie product of experiments conducted by a powerful necromancer. While infrequently encountered, rot grubs represent another vile and deadly foe. Dug deep, the goblin tunnels sometimes collapse into a sinkhole where carrion yet remains. The rot grubs feasting there welcome fresher meat.

Surprisingly, the undead so often found on the surface do not much bother the underground Bone Miners. In turn, the goblins take few precautions against the undead, save to stay close to a bolthole whenever they venture up to the surface.

The Bone Miners never travel from the area to peddle their booty. This prompts speculation whether they do business with the powerful undead who seem to control the wandering undead in this place, or whether the goblins trade with passing Zhentarim when those folk venture by on their way from the north to the Goblin Marches and beyond. Myself, I find the goblins' financial arrangements hardly worth the effort of an investigation.

Rot Grub: Int Non; AL nil; AC 9; MV 1; HD 1 hp; THAC0 Nil; #AT 0; Dmg Nil; SA If touch bare skin (if unsure, percentage chance equal to 10 times victim's AC), automatically burrow to heart and cause death in 1d3 turns unless burned out (flame kills 1d6 rot grubs and inflicts 1d6 points of damage per application); SD Nil; SZ T; ML 5; XP 15

The Gathering Undead

Before the Battle of Bones, Torgor's Triangle was a place where apprentice or aspiring priests and mages could test their spells. Barren, desolate, yet reasonably accessible, the place attracted experimenters who could then work without fear of embarrassment (should the spell not go as intended). If the magic caused exceptional destruction (by intent or accident), they could work without fear of irredeemable damage or retribution. It is not particularly surprising, then, that the grisly conditions of the aftermath of the Battle of Bones attracted a certain element among such folk, who wanted to experiment with the resources the battle had provided.

In the decades following the Battle of Bones, the unburied remains of the fallen became fodder for games, experiments, and battles conducted by a variety of priests, wizards, necromancers, and shamans, some living and some who were themselves undead. Certainly some practiced their ability to animate the grisly remains that lay about, to improve their skills. Others built up armies of undead to do their bidding. Moreover, because many powerful priests and mages died under hideous circumstances at the battle—and remember, most of the dead were never properly buried—a significant number of “natural” undead arose.

Regardless of their genesis, the armies of zombies fought one another as sport for their creators; and later in the cycle of decay, the same indignities were visited on armies of skeletons. Many such creatures continue to roam the battlefield. Some continue to obey commands they were given centuries ago; some are the new creations of necromancers who abide in secret fastnesses nearby.

The Battle of Bones also created ghosts that continue to haunt the region. The area also attracts liches, who gather their undead forces to battle one another and discourage living intruders from entering their undeadly domain.

You should understand the forces you might meet here, and the places and times to watch out for them.





To that end, I will describe individually each type of undead you may find at the Battle of Bones.

Skeletons

These animated undead have no fear of the bright desert sun, and so they are the ones most often encountered during daylight hours. They are relatively common on the open plain of the battlefield itself. Usually, these creatures fall into one of the following four categories:

- 1. Skeleton Guards:** Bands of 15–30 warrior skeletons ambush travelers coming through the mountain passes around the Battle of Bones. These warrior skeletons are almost always led by a ju-ju zombie or ghoul, and several passes are thus guarded. Judging from the quality of their leadership, and their mission to prevent anyone passing through the defile they guard, they are surely the creation of some powerful undead creature residing in the vicinity.
- 2. Wandering Skeletons:** Encounters with one to three wandering skeletons almost always take place on the battlefield itself, rather than in the surrounding passes and crags. These skeletons are generally in very poor shape, often with cracked or missing bones, and bearing damaged weapons. It seems likely they are the remnants of the skeletal armies that have battled here over the centuries. They mindlessly attack anything, without subtlety or strategy.
- 3. Animated Bones:** These encounters most likely will occur on the plain of the battlefield, where countless bones jut out of the surface; but *these* have been animated. An unremarkable arm, hand, skull, or other bone lying on the ground suddenly moves: grabbing, biting, or piercing a living passerby. Some of these remains are of partly-destroyed skeletons raised in centuries gone by. However, some people believe their frequency suggests the animated bones are the recent creation of a present inhabitant with a perverse notion of how to use his or her powers.

Animated Bones: Int Non; AL N; AC 10; MV 1; HD 1/2; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1–2 (1–4 if clawed hand or foot; 1–3 if biting teeth); SA Nil; SD Only may be turned if portion of skeleton includes skull); ML 5; SZ S; XP 35

- 4. Animated Skeletal Animals:** Most often these undead creatures are the result of necromantic conjuring by apprentice wizards. Once the practice session is over, the wizard lets the beasts free to roam their former habitat. These skeletal rats, ground-hogs, bats, birds, rabbits, and coyotes are unnerving, but not especially dangerous. However, there have been a few reports of massed attacks by hundreds of skeletal rats. This suggests that some powerful undead being has found the rodents handy, perhaps to scare away casual intruders.

Zombies

Zombie encounters were more prevalent in the past than they are now. Still, patrols of 5–8 zombies stand guard during daylight hours, blocking the places where pilgrims and visitors most often seek ingress to the Battle of Bones. Many such patrols act as a second line of defense along those paths guarded by warrior skeletons. Each group includes a ju-ju zombie, ghoul, or ghost to lead the shambling squad. One larger zombie group, usually 10 to 18 in number, almost always guards the southeastern gap, just past the Rose Garden.

Evidently, at least one of the undead denizens of the Battle of Bones delights in capturing the occasional visitor or adventurer, and turning the hapless person into a ju-ju zombie; if the victim was not captured alive, he or she is made into a regular zombie. Then the new creation is sent to guard the path by which he or she arrived. This often results in anguish and tragedy when the zombie attacks friends come to rescue their comrade.

Zombie Monsters

Yet another fearsome aspect to any clash with zombies is that all manner of monsters may be encountered in zombie form. Any creature normally found in the sur-



rounding desert may exist, sometimes in groups, wandering the Battle of Bones. These may include sand cats, manscorpions, fire giants, dragonnes, fire drakes, fire falcons, and others.

These creatures have the same stats and abilities as the monsters in their live state, with some exceptions. Movement rates are halved, flight is impossible, and the zombie monsters always attack last in the round.

All statistics and abilities dependent on high speed or Dexterity are lost. Zombie spell immunities apply, and holy water and turning effects apply as for humanoid zombies, allowing for the undead's special conditions in the vicinity of the Battle of Bones, as discussed on page 29.

Creatures will always attack to the death. All those who encounter zombie monsters must successfully save vs. death magic or cower in fear for 1d3 rounds.

Ghouls

Ghouls were prevalent in the years following the Battle of Bones, as they gathered to feed upon the slain. In the first days after the battle, the soon-to-die wounded witnessed the horror of roving bands of ghouls feasting off the bodies of fallen comrades. Worse yet, the newly dead would often become ghouls themselves, increasing the ranks of the marauders. After a time, with the supplies diminishing that fed their craven habits, the ghouls moved on. Nevertheless, travelers may occasionally find one leading a group of lesser undead.

Shadows

These have not been reported on the plain or the surrounding region. However, Bone Miners claim the creatures are sometimes found in the abandoned tunnels of the carrion crawlers.

Wights

Detesting the light, and therefore avoiding the sun, wights infest the Battle of Bones by night. Bands 12 to

30 strong patrol the mountain passes and the open plain, ready to fall upon anyone camping there. Often the wight bands include several skeletons and a zombie or two; some have a ghast or spectre leader as well.

Given that skeletal and zomboid warriors lack serious fighting effectiveness, I have concluded that they are part of the band for their capacity to shock those who see them—rather than for any increase in the group's power.

Wights take pleasure and delight from the Battle of Bones because it is a monument of pain and death to the living. Accordingly, the wights are fiercely protective of the place, and fight with special vigor. Although sunlight does not harm these creatures, they hate its radiance. Wights will disengage from combat well before sunrise (if at all possible) and return to their underground lairs for the day.

Ghasts

These odoriferous cousins to ghouls have become less common here over the centuries. A few remain, leading bands of lesser undead.

Wraiths

More than a hundred thousand humans fought at the Battle of Bones, so it should come as no surprise that some were powerful men of evil persuasion. When slain, they took the forms of wraiths. Men yet alive become their wraith slaves in the afterdeath of the undead.

Powerless in sunlight, these creatures come out in the dark of night to seek recruits from among the living—anyone foolish enough to visit their desolate and uninviting home. At least five bands of wraiths roam the area, and there may be as many as twelve. Ranging in numbers from 8 to 24 strong, the bands guard their territories jealously. Indications of a truce or agreement among their masters keeps them from efforts to overrun each other.

Mummies

Although often found in arid areas, mummies result from certain burial practices, and the subsequent disturbance of their tombs. No such burials occurred, and no mummies are present.





Spectres

The Battle of Bones has given rise to almost a hundred spectres. Except for a few who lead bands of lesser undead, the spectres are solitary creatures who interact little with the undead around them. They are protective of the ground from which they rise each evening, and some say they are waiting for their bodies to be properly buried in consecrated ground.

Reason dictates against this romantic idea. After all, spectres regularly attack interlopers, chasing the living away. If it sought burial, a spectre should lead the living to its territory, so the corpse might be found and buried. Whatever a spectre's desires, I doubt that a consecrated burial is first on its wish list.

Vampires

No vampires have been encountered and none are likely, given the history of the Battle of Bones. An individual vampire might have migrated to this place because of the multitude of lesser undead to be dominated, but a "native-born" vampire is quite unlikely.

Ghosts

It is not surprising that the tragedy has peopled the battlefield with a number of ghosts. I know of these following, but surely there are others.

The Lost Messenger: Those who fought in the combined army at the Battle of Bones were mostly hardy and experienced soldiers. Yet, among them were some boys too young to be called men, who sought adventure and glory on the battlefield. These boys were often designated to be messengers. Scampering importantly from trench to trench so thrilled the boys, they gave little thought to the morrow.

So it was that one young messenger scrambled to deliver a message to the commander on the right flank just five minutes before the first charge would begin. The boy became disoriented in the dark and ran, not toward the right flank, but directly toward the enemy.

The goblins, kobolds, and orcs were fired up to attack when the night vision of the nearest revealed a



small, weaponless enemy running toward them. Among the goblinoid races, the first blood of a major battle is a great honor indeed. The charge began, and a thousand blades and claws and teeth sought to drink first blood as Uthor's army overran the wretch.

The boy's ghost wanders nightly on the battlefield for five brief minutes on either side of the three o'clock hour. It seems he still seeks the right flank, to deliver his message...

Ghosts in Search of a Grave: With so many dead unburied in the aftermath of the Battle of Bones, this place has more than its share of ghosts. The early years brought frightening reports of ghosts in packs, and many efforts were made to deal with the problem. Over the years, clerics (of a variety of religions) have come to look down upon the plain and speak words of burial and consecration. This has greatly reduced the number of ghosts seeking to have their remains blessed and covered. The centuries-long disintegration into dust of so many of the deceased has also contributed to the decline of this type of undead.

Nevertheless, a few such ghosts are still about. They scour the plain in search of their remains, and beseech passersby to locate and bury their bodies. (Of course, these victims suffer the aging effects of ghost fear.) Often, the ghosts carry with them various bones they have collected as possibly being their own, which only adds to the frightful aspect of their ghostly appearance.

Thieves' Patrol: On the eve of battle, one squad of men chose to turn their backs on their comrades, their homes, and their honor. They decided to hide before the battle, then return to rob the dead before escaping altogether.

Encamped in a circular depression, under cover of darkness, they cut one another superficially to suggest bloody wounds. After they slashed and dirtied their clothing to suggest a hard-fought battle, they sprawled in the dirt at the bottom of the depression, there to play dead for the duration of the battle.

When the battle came, however, no one saw them in the dark. By chance or fate, the depression became

a place taken, retaken, and taken again, by charging, running, stomping, and leaping soldiers from both sides. The cowards were trampled to death.

Each night of the new moon, their ghosts emerge from the rounded depression, seeking to enjoin the living to lead their foul caper. Each time, the ghosts of those who trampled them appear before dawn, and reenact their death—slaying likewise any living person who would have joined in the thieves' evil deeds.

Liches

Although I have no direct evidence, I believe that at least two or three liches have taken up permanent residence near the Battle of Bones. After all, the continuing genesis of animated undead suggests the presence of more powerful undead creators. If the mystery of the Rose Garden is no accident—and I scorn those who suppose it is—then it shows a level of sophistication beyond that of merely low-level undead. Moreover, the fact that the undead have been organized into patrols and bands, with leaders of some capacity, suggests that intelligent cunning directs these forces. The concerted efforts of these undead to deter the living from visiting this place suggest that something—or someone—is actively defending their territory. We are not welcome here, you and I.

Possibly, the liches vie with one another for control of this special place. I have identified two possible candidates for lich-in-residence at the Battle of Bones; there may be others.

Ignar Turc Abolin

At the time of the Battle of Bones, it was widely rumored (and much feared) that an evil mage from the realms of Kara-Tur had allied himself with the goblinoid hordes. One example of the shiversome rumors told is this:

A month before the goblins marched, there arrived in Thandril a darkly-garbed and -masked retinue accompanying a covered coach. Inside rode a man of gaunt frame, black-robed and veiled. It was whispered he was a traveler who had visited the realms of Kara-Tur to learn its secrets. At the same





time, a mysterious traveler known as Ignar Turc Abolin vanished from the known realms. It is quite possible that he was this “mage.” It is also quite possible he was really a lich.

The sparse history known about Ignar Turc Abolin suggests a fascination with flowers and plant life, particularly roses. If he is the power behind the mysteries of the Rose Garden, it would explain much. If so, the center of that confusing maze-garden might hide the entry to his underground chambers.

Ignar Turc Abolin: Int Supra-Genius; AL LE; AC 0; MV 6; HD 13; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1-10; SA Creatures of less than 5 HD must save versus spell of flee in terror for 5d4 rounds, touch causes paralysis as well as damage; SD May only be hit by +1 magical weapons or better, or by spells or monsters of more than 6 HD, Immune to charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold, electricity, insanity, or death spells; SZ M; ML Fanatic (18); XP 8,700. Mage (18th Level) with following spells in spellbook: *affect normal fires, audible glamer, burning hands, cantrip, chill touch, detect magic, feather fall, find familiar, grease, hypnotism, jump, phantasmal force, read magic, shocking grasp, unseen servant, blindness, blur, darkness (15' radius), flaming sphere, invisibility, knock, levitate, mirror image, scare, summon swarm, Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter, web, wizard lock; delude, dispel magic, explosive runes, fireball, hold undead, monster summoning I, suggestion, wraithform; charm monster, confusion, dig, enervation, illusionary wall, minor creation, monster summoning II, plant growth, solid fog, wall of fire; animate dead, conjure elemental, domination, magic jar, passwall, summon shadow, teleport; wall of stone; conjure animals, ensnarement, globe of invulnerability, guards and wards, monster summoning IV, reincarnation, stone to flesh; charm plants, finger of death, reverse gravity, spell turning.* Also carries *wand of frost, ring of free action, and ring of invisibility.*

Xehil Yldin

This ancient lich once worked with the drow who occupied the Twisted Tower of Ashaba in Shadowdale. Xehil Yldin disappeared from those realms even before the fall of Azmaer and the rise of the Lords of Shadowdale. He could easily have hidden in the desolation of Torgor's Triangle for the century that separates the time of his disappearance from the Battle of Bones. When the battle occurred virtually in his own back yard, he could have used the tragic occasion to build up his armies of undead, and to expand an underground fortress beneath the plain itself.

Xehil Yldin's ability to work with many different races, and the Bone Miners' strange unconcern for the undead around them suggest that the miners' tunnels might conceal the entrance to Xehil Yldin's underground fortress. Their activities would also provide cover for the comings and goings from such a place.

Xehil Yldin's presence (or his contact with the Zhentarim) could also explain the Bone Miners' indifference to travel—they would not need to go peddle what they find. That could be left to others, while they dug for more.

If, indeed, Xehil Yldin already had an underground fortress below Torgor's Triangle before the battle, the many zombies, ghouls, ghaunts, and other undead creatures assembled in the years following could have been taken in by the lich. This long association would make any attempt to infiltrate his domain an exceedingly risky venture.

Xehil Yldin: same stats as Ignar Turc Abolin; Mage (18th Level) with the following spells in his spellbook: *cantrip, dancing lights, detect magic, detect undead, feather fall, find familiar, gaze reflection, hold portal, magic missile, phantasmal force, read magic, spider climb, spook, taunt, ventriloquism; darkness (15' radius), flaming sphere, forget, knock, levitate, magic mouth, mirror image, ray of enfeeblement, shatter, strength, web; clairaudience, clairvoyance, dispel magic, feign death, haste,*



hold undead, lightning bolt, slow, suggestion, vampiric touch; charm monster, dig, enchanted weapon, Evard's black tentacles, hallucinatory terrain, mass-morph, phantasmal killer, shout, stonewalk; animate dead, demi-shadow monsters, domination, feeblemind, hold monster, magic jar, telekinesis, teleport; conjure animal, disintegrate, eye bite, invisible stalker, mass suggestion, programmed illusion; delayed blast fireball, limited wish, sequester, teleport without error. He also carries a ring of spell storing (teleport without error, delayed blast fireball, and hold monster), a wand of enfeeblement, and a cloak of the manta ray, along with a dagger covered with drow poison.

TURN, TURN, TURN

Given my early training as a druid and my present status as necromancer, understand that I am no expert on turning undead. During my travels in and out of the vicinity, I have witnessed many ambushes and massacres of adventuring parties, by various combinations of undead attackers. These have led me to certain conclusions about turning these creatures—particularly in this special place.

One conclusion that this impassive "observer" never reached was that a warning or intervention on behalf of the victims was warranted! But Rolanda would never interfere with nature running its course. On the other hand, I think there is nothing "natural" about the icewater running in the veins of this unimpassioned observer. Is it natural to let a forest fire burn everything in its path? Or is it more natural to use water from the stream nature provided, to put the fire out!

—Elminster

My first conclusion is that when the undead join forces into mixed parties, they are much more powerful than one might expect. Under the control of a more powerful undead leader, lesser undead turn only to the extent that the controlling creature is turned by the invocation of the cleric or paladin. For example,

skeletal warriors do not attack with the strength or damage of a ghost, but when they are under the control of such a one, they cannot be set fleeing as easily as they would if attacking on their own.

The second conclusion I have reached is that there is something incredibly powerful about the locale around the Battle of Bones. In combat, the creatures of the undead show remarkable steadfastness. Your average cleric or paladin cannot turn undead creatures whether they are led or alone, whether they are wraith, wight, ghost, or skeleton. Myself, I think it is good that the undead have a place of their own, where they have the advantage. Everyone should have a place to call home.

Like I said... icewater.

—Elminster

Within 30 miles of the Battle of Bones, lesser undead under the control of greater undead turn as the greater undead. Only a cleric of at least 9th level, or a paladin at least 11th level can turn undead. Within the battlefield plain (but not in the surrounding approaches), all undead are turned on the "Special" column.

NECROMANTICALLY INCLINED

This place has long held a special attraction for those inclined toward necromancy. The spellcasters have come, worked their magic, had their necromantic creations do battle with others of their kind, and then left—or at least disappeared. However, at least two necromancers are currently active in the area—although neither one welcomes visitors.

Sigil Fernel

As a small boy, Sigil surely pulled the wings off flies, delighted in their suffering, and experimented with bringing them back to life. He probably toyed with





their appendages, adding wings or other parts from different insects or spiders he had collected. Certainly this would explain his continuing experimentation with animal and monster zombies.

The great majority of his "surviving" undead creations are straightforward zombie forms of known animals and monsters. However, I have come across the remains of several zombie monster combination forms that never walked alive. These unnatural comminglings had returned to death after being loosed to roam the passes and plains near the Battle of Bones.

Given the places I found his experimental failures, and the number of desert creatures used in his zombie creations, Sigil probably has a subterranean workshop and home beneath the northeastern boundary mountains, or perhaps in the arid plains beyond.

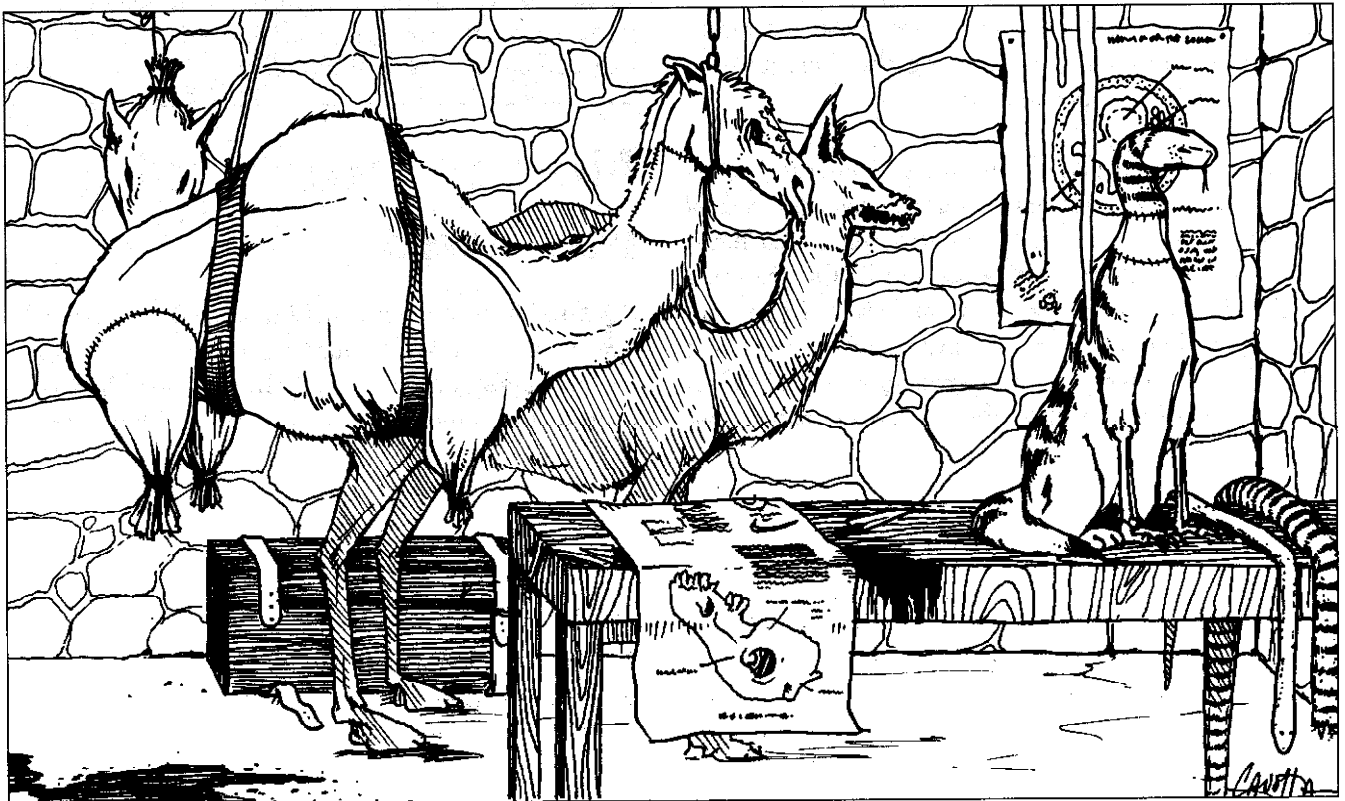
Sigil Fernel: LE hm W20 (Necromancer); Str 14, Dex 18, Con 15, Int 19, Wis 13, Cha 10; carries *wand of lightning*, *boots of speed*, *ring of monster summoning III*, *bracers of defense AC-3*.

Phthta Thak (fith-ta thak)

My fellow scientist and friend of the natural undead, Phthta does not engage in experimental cruelty toward her undead charges. She trains them to work together to better protect themselves from their natural enemies, and from the bizarre creations of Sigil Fernel.

She is a permanent resident of the Battle of Bones, with an extensive underground home in the western mountains. Numerous traps and legions of loyal undead guard the entryways to her home. She wants to be left alone to pursue her studies, and her training of ju-ju zombies and other undead leaders. Aside from her considerable necromantic skills, her magic is mostly of the protective and charming sort.

Phthta Thak: CE hf W24 (Necromancer); Str 23, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 20, Wis 16, Cha 15; carries *ring of polymorph self*, *ring of fire resistance*, *wand of animate dead*, *gem of true seeing*, and *boots of climbing*. Her familiar is a skeletal cat, which she calls "Bones."





Unified Defiled Theory

The creation and motivation of undead creatures are little understood. Why, for example, does one unfortunate come back as a ghost while another simply remains dead after death? This is a question that even I, a foremost authority on undead phenomena, can scarcely divine. However, I believe I have some insight into the special attraction and effects the Battle of Bones has for the undead.

First, Torgor's Triangle was desolate even before the battle, far removed from the hustle and bustle of the living. With its harsh climate and rocky soil, it was extremely inhospitable to any life. Add to this the experimental magic tested here, and you have a place to which powerful undead would naturally be attracted.

Secondly, the Battle of Bones was itself a thing of evil and shame. It was an unnecessary battle against a desperate foe over a piece of ground that was unused and unwanted. The two leaders proved to be incompetents who threw away their men's lives long after sanity would have decreed a halt to the fighting.

The battle and its aftermath represented more death, more pain, and more carnage than Faerûn had ever known. Furthermore, the inability of either army to remove the dead and dying from the battlefield raised a seductive beacon of decay and gluttonous excess to the scavengers and the undead feasters-on-flesh.

Was there ever a place of greater villainy, betrayal, and disregard for life? I think not.

This singularity, this unified defilement by all races and traditions in a circumscribed time and place, unraveled the tightly woven fabric of life. In this life-besmirched place, the undead achieved a special entry into the world of the living. What was torn asunder, the web of life cannot understand, much less repair.

Like any tear or wound, the effect is not limited to the hole itself. The edges tatter, and the wound swells with infection; the damage increases. Until the tear is mended, or the wound healed, things continue to deteriorate.

Thus it is with the wound that is the Battle of Bones. Although the special conditions invigorating the undead are centered on the scene of the battle itself, their influence on the region as a whole is still expanding. Expect to meet undead creatures with unusual frequency anywhere within 30 miles of the battlefield.

This effect reaches into the Great Desert Anauroch, hindering efforts to bypass the numerous undead without enduring the hardships of the desert. Their influence also extends almost halfway to Skull Gorge, threatening to close off the western approach to the Goblin Marches altogether. To the southwest, the region of influence reaches the edge of the unnamed forest northwest of Hill's Edge. To the northwest, this influence stretches toward the Hill of Lost Souls. While the hill played its own small part in the history surrounding the Battle of Bones, it deserves a more detailed discussion as a place of interest on its own right.

Tharnn Greenwinter has undertaken exactly this effort, on my request.

—Elminster

The effects generated by the Battle of Bones have altered some nearby travel routes, few as they are. As an example: one might travel from the Dalelands to Waterdeep along the south edge of the Great Desert, to the Goblin Marches, and cross-country to Soubar. It would be a tough road but passable, particularly if one had reason not to traverse Cormyr or Iriaebor.

Acceptable, that is, except that the path leads through a region influenced by the Battle of Bones—and, thus, past a gauntlet of undead.

Similarly, those seeking to travel north from Hill's Edge now swing several days' ride west to avoid lands controlled by the undead.

Myself, I cannot offer you any more advice than this. My explorations at the Battle of Bones have netted me a treasure of knowledge. May your encounters there give you equal insight, if travel there you must.

A True Record.

Balip



Rumors and Legends



place as defiled and desolate as the Battle of Bones would seem to offer little to build rumors upon. However, the very strangeness of the place excites the imagination (mostly in places far removed from the reality of the carnage and its blighted aftermath). Such tales are abundant.

Wise adventurers will consult local sages before setting out, to discover whether there is any kernel of truth behind these reports. More than the usual number of tales are ruses spread by crafty brigands, who lie in wait for gullible treasure-seekers or headstrong necromancers.

- The Lost Messenger (as recounted under “Ghosts,” p26) has begun appearing in the court of King Azoun IV. His inconvenient visits take place outside his usual tightly prescribed haunting time. The Court Wizard, Vangerdahast, has been unable to discover the reason for these visitations. The priests of Tyr feel that the ghost seeks some vengeance, perhaps upon the long-dead commander Blevin, leader of the combined forces—or whomever the ghost deems is his ethical heir.

- Despite Rolanda’s assertion that there are no vampires in the area, rumors indicate that one may be frequenting the road heading east into Hill’s Edge. Several suspicious incidents have occurred east of the crossroads from Soubar.

There are no confirmed identifications, but many whisper of a cloaked figure with marble-pale skin. At times this person is seen leading zombies, or skeletons—the stories vary.

A caravan was confirmed lost, after failing to arrive in Hill’s Edge as expected. No evidence of its fate was found save for one broken wheel, which might not even have belonged to one of the caravan’s wagons. No

one knows if this disappearance is related to the vampire’s alleged existence, but folk are growing fearful.

- The center of the Rose Garden holds more than the alleged *decanter of endless water*. One Vertimer the Virtuoso has acquired fragments of a journal, purportedly written by a traveler who visited the Battle of Bones. The pages containing the writer’s name, mission, patron, and so on are missing. Vertimer (dubiously, a self-proclaimed priest of Lathander) has made the journal’s contents widely known. (He declares it the “virtuous” thing to do.)

The journal describes nothing less than the *Hooded Crown* lying hidden beneath the garden. (This magical item is detailed in the “Ruins of Myth Drannor” *Campaign Guide to Myth Drannor*. It is summarized below for those who do not have access to that text.)

The *Hooded Crown* has the look of being a gem-encrusted diadem with a bejeweled hood that encloses the wearer’s head, leaving the face exposed. In truth, it is a plain adamantine circlet. Its powers function only when on the head of a living being. Certain powers are always active; others only work in the mythal.

Active powers include immunity for the wearer to all petrification, polymorph, and lightning attacks and effects; *levitate* or *feather fall* at will; cast the following spells at the ninth level of spell ability: *color spray*, *magic missile*, *unseen servant*, *detect invisibility*, *ESP*, *know alignment*, *locate object*, *minute meteor* (1 meteor per use, counts as the crown’s spellcasting for that round), *nondetection*, *tongues*, *water breathing*, *minor creation*, *remove curse*, *wall of iron*. The crown can cast only one spell per round. Once a spell is used, it is inaccessible for three turns.

Powers operative only within the mythal are *fly* at will, use of all magic and magical items free of normal wild magic effects (mythal-induced), and cast the following spells once per day, at 14th level of ability: *repulsion*, *delayed blast fireball*, *teleport without error*.





ELMINSTER'S ECOLOGIES

Appendix One The Hill of Lost Souls

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The Hill of Lost Souls



Tharnn introduces himself freely to any who ask, and I have asked that he first introduce himself to the reader. His response is recorded here. To this I add that he is a quiet, serious, dedicated advocate for the Hill of Lost Souls and for the prairielands surrounding it, commonly known as Pelleor's Prairie. In his words, you will find a druid consumed with his passion for the land and the creatures therein; for the protection thereof; and for educating others about his area of expertise. Beyond simple facts and practical suggestions, his account records historical and recent events that occurred in the vicinity.

If you wish to travel these plains, or visit the Hill of Lost Souls, pay close attention to his words. They reveal some of the dangers and natural wonders of this area of the Realm.

– Elminster

People call me Tharnn Greenwinter, although I have been known by other names in the past. It is not that I hide my earlier history behind an alias, but my chosen profession has altered my view of life. My changed name reflects the changes I have undergone within.

My profession is one of the most sacred taken up by humans and their brethren: the way of the druids. As a half-elf I have had time to study many areas of the Heartlands. Here I make my home, between the Marsh of Chelimber and the Sunset Mountains, close by the Hill of Lost Souls.

I have studied under the great Druid Hierophant Phezeltan and now dedicate myself to learning all there is to know about the prairielands of Pelleor, and the whole district around the Hill of Lost Souls.

I have lived in this area for 16 years now. I try to protect it as best I can, and however I find it necessary. People have called me some unprintable names for dedicating my life to this "desolate" land. Little do they know of the wonderful life I live on hill and prairie, and of the creatures that dwell here.

The Hierophant Druid Phezeltan personally taught me much. Where specialized knowledge might be better taught by others, he did not hesitate to step aside. In my case, he enlisted the assistance of the wemic, Mrowl, of whom I will write more. My love of learning has always been great, made greater by Phezeltan's example.

On a few occasions, I have assisted the Hierophant Druid Phezeltan in his researches, and when he has worked his mighty weather magic from atop the Hill of Lost Souls. In one such ceremony, he led his aides (including me) in an effort to slow down the encroachment of the Anauroch desert into this region. At the least, he hoped to learn why the desert was expanding its margins. Thus far, no one had managed to determine the cause. Sadly, we failed on both counts. However, with every hour I spend with Phezeltan, I learn much from his wisdom and skill as a druid. I look forward to future tutelage, for he always shows me how much more I have to learn.





History of The Hill of Lost Souls

In years long past, the hill was an active volcano, but the passage of many years has seen its volcanic activity cease. The weathering of time has softened its cone into a gentle peak with a shallow crater. The hill is covered with soft grass, spaced with occasional outcroppings of long-hardened lava, or a scatter of weathered obsidian to speak of the hill's true origins.

The humans and their allies camped on these slopes after the infamous Battle of Bones. Exhausted men raised their tattered standards, and the walking wounded tended the dying wounded. Today the hill is mostly abandoned by all but the spirits of the fallen.

The information above is what is usually reported in historical and educational scrolls written about the Hill of Lost Souls. These scant few lines of text would try to describe a land rich in history and abundant in life to this day. My account should give you a glimpse of how much more there is to know about this extraordinary corner of the Realms.

It is true that the hill once spouted fire as a mighty vol-

cano. Some volcanic activity beneath the surface still goes on to this day, as evidenced by occasional tremors and a mysterious geyser. I have been told volcanoes are never indisputably "dead" – that a volcano silent for centuries may unexpectedly rumble to life. Thus, the region is potentially dangerous even in its natural state.

Yet it is the artificial events of war and widespread slaughter that gave the mound the name it bears today. I refer to the epic Battle of Bones, of course. After that dreadful battle, the surviving armies of men gathered on the grassy hill, tending their injured and dying. After years passed, folk began reporting that many spirits haunted the site. These people began calling the place "the Hill of Lost Souls," for it seemed the spirits were looking for something but had no idea where to find it. I have seen these spirits firsthand, and can confirm they are aptly named: the spirits indeed seem to be seeking something.

Over the years, the significance of the battle faded, and the area has been largely abandoned. Having no readily-apparent resources to support even a small community, the land stayed wild. The closest river is a tributary of the Serpent's Tail Stream, some 40 miles from the hill. The region's near lack of water turns away even the more venturesome.





Possible Encounters

For the edification of folks out there who are entertaining ideas about traveling through the prairieland of Pelleor, here is a list of creatures you might run across. You should know what possible dangers await when you visit here, although this is certainly not a comprehensive listing. You might not see dangers at every turn, but any one of these could occur at almost any time. I want no one to think that this is a safe part of the world.

- Lava ankheg
- Band of goblins
- Band of roving orcs
- Herd of bison
- Locust swarm
- Poisonous plants
- Poisonous snakes
- Roc
- Rogue mages
- Spirits

You might add my name to that list of beings you could meet on the prairie, since I plan to be here for the rest of my life. Being born a half-elf, I hope that will be a long time.

Orc Ceremony

For some time, I have known that orc tribes and other goblinoid races have visited the Hill of Lost Souls in what almost seems to be a pilgrimage. Although I hesitate to use the term, they have a kind of “service” on the lower slope of the hill. I have mostly avoided these gatherings; the howls and less-cheery noises held no attraction to me. Also, their sentries are exceptionally alert at these times.

However, one season a whim led me to find out what they were celebrating, and how. I just had to know what they were doing, and to see if there was anything I should do about it.

To infiltrate their camp, I transformed, taking the shape of a small bird—a crow, if I remember correctly. Yes, it was a crow. Because I went in at night, a dark bird could better hide in the shadows. Perched high in a tree, I watched the orcs gather in one of the few groves on the hill.

While the ground is white with bones over much of the area, I had not noticed they were common on *this* greensward before. In some places, the orcs stood ankle deep in bone.

A circle of orcs ringed the glade, and within that circle stood two still lines of combatants. Of one rank, I could see only their backs. Curious, I risked a quick flight to the far side of the grove.

What I saw shocked me! The orcs whose backs were turned to my previous position had painted their faces so they resembled humans! Then I noticed one more thing, and it chilled me to the bone. Not a creature was moving; it was as if each one was rooted to the spot. I hopped higher in the branches to look back from where I’d come, and I could tell that the sentries were as alert as ever. It was only the orcs in the glade who were in a trance.

Then the howling began. Not from the living orcs as I had mistakenly thought, but from the bones themselves! Out of the ground came howling, whirling spirits, all of orcs, spinning faster and faster. I recognized the noises I had heard distantly in years past, but never did I imagine what truly made those horrible sounds. Fascinated, I watched the living orcs start to move, raising their weapons. The two lines of orcs clashed together in what could only be called a choreographed battle—yet I didn’t want to know who was pulling the strings.

Obviously, they were somehow re-enacting the Battle of Bones. I think the grove was, in fact, close to the place where the human armies were believed to have camped.

I had intended to watch the entire ceremony, but one nearby spirit suddenly recognized my presence. It flew at me with a glare of hatred on the orc’s misty face and I took to the skies as fast as my crow’s wings could fly me away. When I glanced back, I saw the spirits had stopped at the edge of the clearing, howling even louder than before. But I was safe.





The next day, I revisited the grove but found no trace of the bones. There was plenty of evidence orcs had been tromping around. I even came across some fresh blood, but I found no bones nor mangled bodies to mark the location of the ceremony. Since that year, I have avoided spying on the orcs when they have returned. I have a feeling that I wouldn't be so lucky a second time around.

I informed the Hierophant Druid Pheszeltan what I had seen upon my next meeting with him. He seemed only mildly curious, but the culture and traditions of orcs are not commonly a druidic interest. Pheszeltan is no exception to this. (Nor, to be honest, am I greatly enthralled by the study of orcs.) We care only how the bands of orcs might affect the land and the wildlife. Since these orcs were doing others no harm, our decision was to leave them alone. That suited me just fine.

Spirits of the Hill: Int Avg; AL Neutral; MV Fl 9 (A); HD 6+2; #AT 1; Dmg per weapon; THAC0 13; SA Fear; SZ M; ML Special; XP 200-1,500

Speaking of orcs, I will relate another encounter I had with these beasts—for so I usually think of them, although my attitude does a disservice to the wildlife that lives in this region. It has led me to believe that orcs are, for some reason, increasing their activities in this vicinity.

I was on a routine patrol of the area, taking a survey of local plant life, when I heard hoofbeats approaching me rapidly from behind. I turned to see eight orcs, all mounted on horses and clad in full armor. The one in the lead wore the large skull of a bison on its head.

My judgment of orcs varies day to day. I know they are entities of this world, and they play a natural part in its makeup. However, they are smelly, cruel, and often behave like pettish children. At these times, I see them as creatures that need to be put in their place. At this encounter, the desire to put them in their place was foremost in my mind.

Not even speaking in the common tongue, the orc wearing the skull snarled in orcish: "Tell me where the Battle of Bones was. Now!"

Now, I don't take kindly to being ordered around by anyone except my teachers, who have earned my respect. Most certainly, I did not care to take orders from some orc who didn't even have the courtesy to introduce himself. Feeling admittedly petulant, I decided not to help this creature reach his destination through any assistance I might give.

"That way," I replied in common.

"Don't think you can't fool us!" said the leader. "We know it's the other way. We just need a guide to the right spot. So try again!"

All right, so they weren't as stupid as I first thought. I could hardly fight them all at once, so I decided to lead them in the general direction of the Battle of Bones. Besides, I was interested in what they wanted there.

A few days passed. They weren't memorable, but I was able to continue my survey of the area's plants. Considering that my companions were eight orcs, the days weren't that bad. Finally, we started getting closer to the site, and I expected undead attackers at every turn. It was all I could do to keep from fleeing in the night. I pointed the way ahead and said, "There is your destination. Me, I'm leaving now."

"All right, men," snarled the leader. "Give our guide his well-earned reward."

This reaction was not unexpected. I changed into a bird and flew off even before one sword left its scabbard. A few well-worded insults about my parentage followed me into the sky, but I didn't fly too far off. I still wanted to find out what these orcs wanted at the battlesite. I expected them to return the way they came, so I waited. I'm very good at waiting.

A day later, the leader (and only the leader) came back carrying a large bag slung over his shoulder. He appeared to be injured and unsteady on his feet but, to give him due credit, he kept moving steadily along. When he camped that night, I changed into a rat and snuck into his camp for a look in the bag. As far as I could tell, it contained only bone shards and bone dust. I wonder what the orcs have up their sleeves this time.





Joining The Spirits

The orcs' ceremony was a strange, disquieting event, but I had a yet stranger encounter with spirits on the Hill of Lost Souls.

As a younger man, I was a bit more rash than now. During my first year on the plains, I decided to spend the night known as Lost Souls Eve camped out at the hill. I wanted to get as close as I could to what I thought was the main campsite of the allied armies, although now I know that the thousands of wounded must surely have been bedded down across a vast area.

I prepared myself by praying all day in the place where I intended to spend the night. I surrounded myself with mistletoe and other plants that protect one against spirits, and so I thought I'd be safe.

As I said, I was rash in those days. The night came, a starless, moonless, lightless dome whose dimness I attributed to a dense overcast. Determined to stay awake, I boiled water and soaked some dried herbs in it, a concoction that had helped me remain awake and alert over long nights in the past. After downing the mixture, I felt invigorated and prepared for anything that the hill would toss my way. With all my objects close to hand, I was feeling secure and self-assured. Little did I know...

I never noticed when I fell asleep. All I remember is opening my eyes when war trumpets bugled in the distance. Instinctively, I reached for some of the mistletoe that I had nearby. I couldn't touch it: my hand was transparent, and I was floating a few feet above my body.

Before I could recover from the shock, I saw goblin-kind everywhere. A troop of goblins charged directly at me. I knew, I *knew* I had to move, to save my ghostly shape as surely as I would have fled to save my flesh-body. I turned and saw a column of men, as ghostly as me. I ran straight toward them. They opened their ranks and let me in among them before the more numerous goblins reached the men's front line. Like the warriors about me, I turned to face the oncoming tide of creatures. A weapon was thrust into my hand, and we shouted a hideous battle cry. As naturally as if I were born to it, I swung the ghostly blade at the closest enemy.

From the beginning, this ghostly battle seemed more real to me than my natural life. Suddenly it was the outside world that appeared ghostly; *we* were the reality. Caught up in my own battle, I hardly noticed the fight behind me—three men were attacking a huge ogre. With the disparity of sizes, they practically had to climb up the nasty creature. Overbalancing it, the men sent it crashing to the ground.

Unfortunately, the ogre fell on top of me and one of its attackers. Slim padding we were. One of the other men checked to see if we were alive, pulled us free, and found us bruised but relatively unhurt. I just had the wind knocked out of me. The man smiled at me, saying, "Stay here. You will soon return to your rightful place."

With a wise smile, he returned to the battle. Time passed and no one noticed me, neither friend nor foe. The men and goblins looked like ghosts again; I, I felt more solid. The wind howled and the spirits faded in swirling mist.

I awoke still sitting where I had begun, but completely worn out. When I stood, I felt a pain at the small of my back. Running my hand over the area, I felt ridges of scar-like tissue, roughly circular. Much as I strained, I couldn't get a good look at it. Later, in my hut, I used a small mirror to see the mark: a bird in a circle. It is the mark carried on the banner of those men who died on the hill those centuries ago: those men whose spirits I fought beside on that strange night. I still bear that mark, fainter now, but still visible.





I have not been so foolhardy as to repeat that night on the hill, and I recommend that travelers avoid the area, especially around Lost Souls Eve. I may have been lucky, for I have no doubt I could have died there. I believe those men's spirits would welcome a final rest. Maybe someday I'll be able to help them. Time will tell.

The Hidden Monster

Currently, I am tracking one of the most fearsome monsters I have ever seen. Until a group of adventurers came to look for the Tomb of Thelarn, I hadn't even realized that there was a creature of this size near the Hill of Lost Souls.

Four adventurers approached the hill from the west. Obviously they had traversed the river, then trekked across the grasslands. A man in slightly rusted chain mail led the other three. One of his companions was obviously a wizard, identifiable by his blue and black robe, and his staff. Another person seemed of a priestly nature, quite different from the last: a burly fellow carrying a war axe. He looked strong enough to wield it with one hand.

I conducted some clandestine reconnaissance, and found out that they were on the trail of a rumor about a fabled treasure supposedly entombed with Thelarn. It was the usual story: they desperately wanted the gold and jewels they had heard about.

As they rested one afternoon, I approached peacefully and introduced myself. "Hail, travelers! Could I offer my assistance as a druid to see you go in safety through these parts?"

"You may offer it, but we won't have any of it," replied the man in the chain mail. "We are just passing through on our own."

"Are you sure about that? I can warn you away from some dangerous plants that could..."

"Yes, we are completely sure," interrupted the man. "Just let us be on our way, sir."

With that, the four stalked off toward the hill. All four of them sent glares of hostility at me.

I assume they didn't want to share the spoils of their efforts with me. I decided to keep an eye on them from a distance anyway. Staying hidden, I followed them.

"There's supposed to be an outcropping that looks like a lion's head," said the wizard, studying his battered scroll. "That's the first landmark..."

"Shhh, you large-mouthed mage," cautioned Chain Mail. "That snooping nature-lover may still be around somewhere! Let's keep going, and be quiet about it. And give me that scroll!"

"Keep telling me what to do, you oaf, and I'll show you just how large my mouth can be," replied the mage, with a growling undertone. He passed the scroll over to his larger companion anyway.

I remember thinking "What a cheerful group. I had better be wary." I wish I had followed my own advice. After while, the group stopped to make camp for the evening. Just as they began to lay a fire, the ground erupted at the burly man's feet, showering him in dirt and rock. Two huge mandibles thrust out of the brown earth, and fastened around the man's waist.

The Lava Ankhveg

Before I could move, the man with the axe was dragged underground by the monstrous creature. His companions wasted no time. Chain Mail immediately drew his short sword and jumped into the hole—a hole like a deep pit.

The mage tugged at the pouch at his belt to get some spell materials. Obviously he was caught completely unprepared by the attack from below. The priest ran to the pit with his mace in his left hand, and stood peering into the hole, waiting for anything.

I joined them moments later, and strained to listen at the hole. They looked me up and down, then accepted my presence without comment. A few minutes passed and no noise was heard from the darkness below.

"Should we go in?" asked the mage tentatively.

When no one answered, he continued. "What was that thing? All that I saw was those large pincer things. How could it have known exactly where we



were? Some sort of magic?"

"I'm not sure what it is," I replied, "but I can hazard a guess. It fits the description I've heard of an 'ankheg,' but since I've never seen one before, I can't be certain."

"I thought you knew everything about this place!" spouted the mage. "You were trying to warn us about plants; how come this little obstacle wasn't the first thing you mentioned?" His face got redder with every word. "I should use this on you," he threatened, waving his hands in a peculiar motion usually associated with spellcasting.

"Friend, calm down!" I said. "Believe me when I tell you that I knew nothing of this monster's existence until now. Do you have a lantern with you? We could go into the hole and investigate the fate of your comrades..." I tried to soothe the men with the tone of my voice.

It must have worked, because the hand motions stopped. The two stepped away to confer between themselves for a few minutes.

When they returned, the mage spoke. "We have a lantern. We'd better go find out what has become of Hugh and Carlus. I suppose we're obligated to do at least that."

They had me walk in front, since going down the hole was my suggestion. Holding the now-lit lantern, we entered cautiously and started off in the only direction available to us. Our heads just grazed the top of the tunnel, and the air was stifling, especially to a man like myself who thrives in the open spaces of the prairie. The mage seemed to handle the close quarters well, but the priest was sweating noticeably. He had that look on his face: the unmistakable aura of almost unmanageable fear.

As I turned to talk to him, the ground in front of us exploded again, covering us with dark brown earth. This time, however, the ankheg didn't attack immediately. It held its ground, as if daring us to proceed further into its domain.

By lantern light, I got a good look at our foe, trying to spot any visible weakness in its chitinous armor. The creature resembled a worm, albeit an enormous worm with huge mandibles and many legs. Each of its feet were sunk in the dirt, but when it moved, I could

see nasty sharp hooks at the end of the legs. It seemed to me those appendages would be excellent both for burrowing and for attacking. I suspected the thing might be softer beneath, but I never had a chance to test that. In the dim light of the lantern, the ankheg's jet eyes flickered.

Without looking away from the beast, I whispered to the mage behind me. "Start moving backwards slowly, very slowly. I don't want to give this thing any reason to come after us. No sudden movements."

Chancing a glance, I snatched a quick look to see if my companions were doing what I said. To my horror and amazement, they were nowhere to be seen. They had backed out as soon as the ankheg reared its head!

The walls seemed to close in on me. I turned and ran full tilt back down the path. I stumbled and fell a few times, but I managed to get out of the hole. There was no sign of the monster and no sign of my two less-than-brave friends. Had they gotten out of the hole safely or did they fall down some unseen pit as they ran?

After looking around, I could tell that they hadn't come out of that hole before me. That's one positive thing about long grass. You don't have to be a ranger to see if anyone has passed through it recently. The crushed stems give you an unmistakable clue. I saw none.

Lava Ankheg: Int Non; AL Nil; MV 12 (Br 6); HD 1d6+4; #AT 1; Dmg 3-18 + 1-4 (acid); THAC0 16-12; SA Squirt Acid; SZ L-H; ML Average; XP 200-1,500

INTO THE TUNNELS

So, they must have fallen down a hole that I had luckily missed in my own escape. This time, I decided to attack the problem of running around underground tunnels in my own way—as an animal. Without anyone else to worry about, I could traverse the tunnels without encumbrances. I had two questions to ask myself: what animal should I be, and whom should I try to find first? After a moment's thought, I became a gopher in search of the two fighters, who would be in





more immediate danger if still alive.

As a gopher, my senses underground were much more acute. I could smell and feel much better than in my regular form. My eyesight wasn't great, but I could see enough to get along and recognize items in the dark.

I followed our previous path and saw the hole that the mage and priest must have fallen into. It looked like another of the ankheg's tunnels. If I had run a little more to the left when I was fleeing, surely I would be down there with them.

As I crept along, I had a hunch about how the ankheg finds its prey. I thought it might sense vibrations caused by a creature's movement over the ground. I tried to move as quietly and lightly as possible. Still, I didn't worry too much about getting caught by the creature, because I suspected it already had a lot of fresh meat...

My worst fears were realized. A suit of chain mail, broken links all blood-soaked, lay on the ground next to the axe I had last seen in the possession of the burly fellow. Also on the ground were the sword and a small sack. Grasping the bag in my strong gopher teeth, I dragged it back near the entrance of the hole, and buried it in some loose dirt.

Back into the hole I went, hoping this time that I was taking the alternate passage that the other two adventurers had fallen into. The tunnel was extremely steep, forcing me to use great care almost the whole way down. Where the tunnel leveled out, I found dirt scuffed up, and a handprint in the dust. It looked like the mage and priest had fallen hard and then rolled on down the incline, still out of control.

The tunnel ahead had a much gentler slope, so I sped forward. Then, a few bounds later, the slope increased again. Puzzling. It was getting lighter and hotter too.

The tunnel abruptly ended in a T-intersection, which was obviously of a different construction than the ankheg tunnel. Its walls looked like they had melted and hardened again, and there were torches and support beams at regular intervals. Some of the beams looked slightly battered. What *had* I tumbled into?

On the floor were a few drops of dried blood amid the scuffled dirt and dust. The trail they defined led

into the right-hand corridor. *The mage and priest must be hoping for an easier way out*, I thought. I followed the marks on the ground and it didn't take long to catch up with my injured quarry. They sat on the ground, sweating and swearing at each other. Neither one of them noticed my approach.

I transformed back to my usual form. "Were I you," I said, "I'd pay attention to getting out of here instead of quarreling." This startled the two of them into silence for just a moment.

"I don't even want to know how you found us, or snuck up on us," stated the mage. "If you're so smart, just get us out of this abysmally hot place."

Now that he mentioned it, it *was* stifling in here. "I'll do my best, but we have to make a decision. Do we try to go forward or back out the way we came?" I asked.

The priest whispered, "I think that decision has been made for us. Listen."

In the distance, footsteps headed our way from up ahead. I motioned my companions back towards the ankheg's tunnel with a flip of my hand. As they passed, I whispered, "I'm going to change into a bird to find out what we're dealing with here. I'll meet you at the tunnel."

I shapechanged into a wren and found a perch high on one wall of the tunnel. Moments later, what came around the corner fascinated and repulsed me. Two lizard-like creatures, each about six feet tall, walked upright like humans. They wore chain mail shirts and brandished swords. They had curious markings on their dry skin, and white bellies. I thought a dark strip of sepia ran the length of their spines, but it was hard to tell because of their mail.

The lizard-things stopped to examine the place where we had been, then babbled to each other and pointed down the corridor. One headed back the way they had first come as the other took up a guard position where it was. Squinting its crimson eyes, it was evidently trying to see further down the corridor.

I swooped off the beam, realizing that I might be seen but convinced that, even if it followed me, facing just one of these creatures would offer our best odds of the day. When I caught up to the mage and priest, they had already started to climb back up the ankheg tunnel.





Changing back to myself, I said, "Better hurry; there are some nasty-looking lizard-type creatures back there. They have swords, and the muscles to use them. We can only hope that reinforcements won't arrive for a few more minutes."

"But what about that worm creature? Which is worse?" whined the mage.

"The ankheg is sated," I replied. "It killed both your friends. Besides, we have a better chance of escaping it than from those creatures behind us."

The rest of our trip went swiftly. To get past the incline, I shapechanged to a lizard and took a rope to the top, then returned to my own form to hold it. When we reached open air, it was night.

"Did you find anything other than the chain mail and axe in the tunnel?" asked the mage.

I disliked telling an untruth, but I wanted him and his associate off the hill and away. "No, why? What are you looking for, if I may ask?"

"Just that damned map to Thelarn's treasure," mumbled the dejected man.

I suggested they go as far from here as possible, and they went. Only then did I retrieve the sack, which did

contain a map. Later, I cast a spell over the ankheg's hole, causing brambles to grow up and cover the entrance. At least if those lizard creatures did come this far, they wouldn't easily follow us. I went home to recuperate. Who ever said living near the prairie was dull!

In the days after, I visited friends in the High Forest, to learn more about what I'd seen.

The monstrous ankheg is a threat to any living creature in its territory. My hunch about how they find their prey was right. From as much as 300 feet away, their sensitive antennae can pick up vibrations made by a man walking. The creature waits ten feet underground, then swiftly burrows up through the ground to grab its intended prey in its crushing mandibles. The ankheg can also squirt a spray of acid to incapacitate struggling or stubborn prey.

One interesting sidelight: the ankheg that took my associates was not the commonly-known creature. After consultation with scholars, we realized that it was a new type of ankheg, one slightly more powerful. In the tunnels, I had noted that the creature was burrowing through dense volcanic soil. Since ankhegs usually favor rich farm soil for easy burrowing, the





scholars surmised that this creature would necessarily have a tougher shell and more powerful pincers. We called it the *lava ankheg*.

It was harder to learn more about the lizard-like beings we'd met. Eventually a druid, Ambruin, enlightened me. He had spent time near the Lake of Steam and the volcanic isle of Arnrock, and knew of the creatures.

"Ah, what you saw was an infestation of them *salamen*," he said, then continued at length. I have tried to reproduce his manner of speaking.

"Others call 'em fire newts, but I calls 'em like I sees 'em—walkin', talkin', muscle-bound salamanders with swords. We useta have problems with 'em out near the Lake o' Steam 'cause they liked it hot. Wherever the ground was hot, you'd find 'em. That means you got some heat under that hill of yours. As long as the heat stays in the ground, tho', ya should be all right.

"These things seem t'have their own so-called society with females, priests, overlords, and such. We never got ta know too much about 'em 'cause if ya got that close ya ended up in their stew pots!

"I seen one of 'em spit fire out its mouth, but the flame missed a buddy o' mine 'twas aiming at. Singed

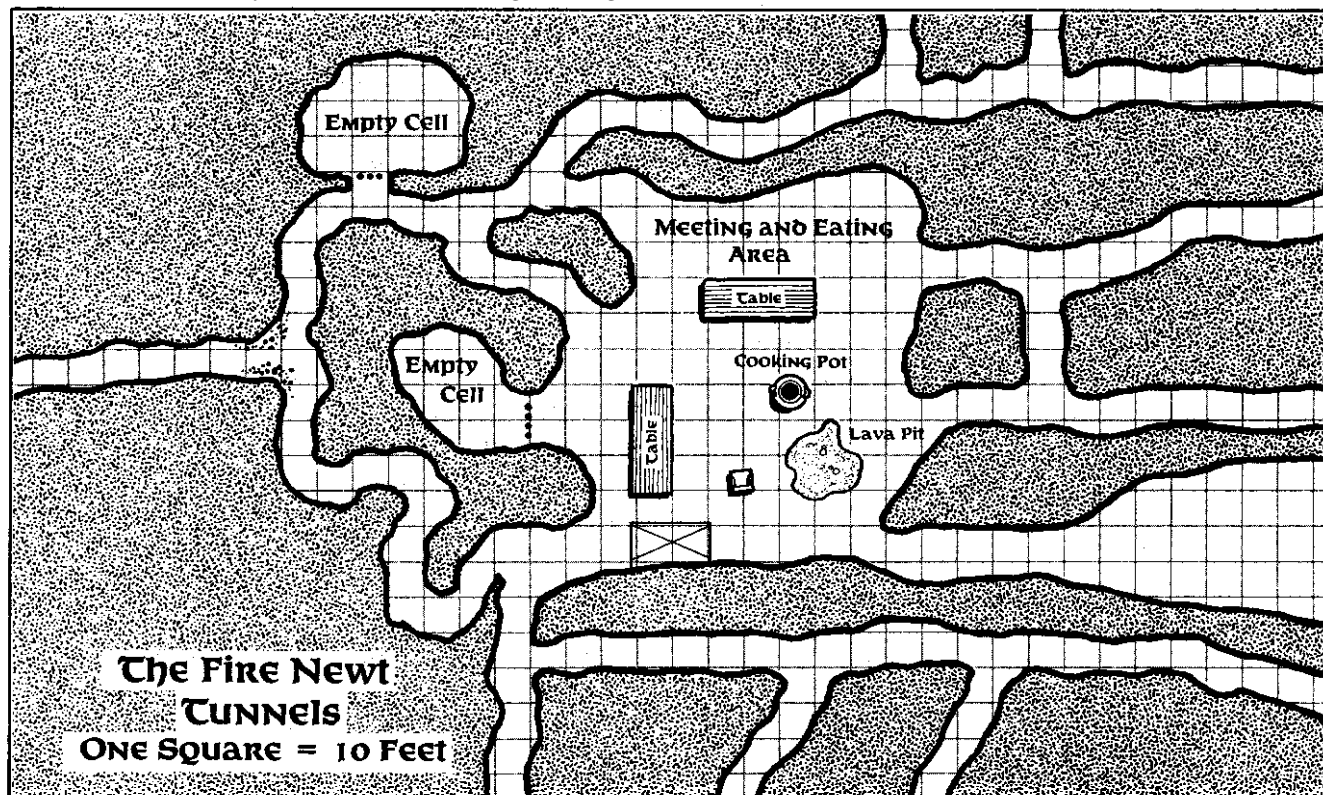
the hair off his arm an' reddened the skin a bit, but that's all. We got that one good, skewered with a bunch of crossbow bolts. Too bad the body fell back into the water afore we could get a grab on it. Mages love 'em for spell makin's.

"Now, if you ever run into 'em again, don't use any fire stuff agin 'em. They'll probably thank ya for the warming afore they killed ya."

Since I first found the fire newt tunnels, I've gone back in animal form to do more reconnoitering. I haven't been caught yet...

Everything Ambruin said about the fire newts has proven to be correct. I've even seen one work magic, but I don't know the particulars. I didn't want to stick around! If some of the newts cast magic, then they might know some detection spells. I don't want to be caught in their caverns without friends to help me get back out.

I've included a map I made, based on what I've learned underground. I suggest using extreme caution if you enter these tunnels. It's easy to lose your way in the fire newts' maze of a home, and there's a lot of them living down there that'll not be helpful to your efforts to leave.





TheLarn's Tomb

I have copied here the map I found in the dead Lman's sack (though I never did get that mage's name). The map is somewhat cryptic, but the overall depiction of the western side of the Hill of Lost Souls is surprisingly accurate. That in itself lends credibility to the map as a valid guide to Thelarn's tomb and treasure. I'm not vouching for it, though, nor do I advocate a search for the tomb. I believe the dead's wishes should be respected. If Thelarn went to all this trouble to hide his tomb, then it should remain so.

Thelarn Swifthammer, son of Mongoth, amassed quite a reputation and fortune during his time in the Realms. It is a testament to the dwarven adventurer's skill, luck, and personality that his name has survived to the present day. However, not all of these traits were entirely admirable qualities. I've pieced together a sketchy history of Thelarn, although one must remember that the tales on which I base my account may or may not be true. The bards and talespinners who told me these incidents were often folk of ques-

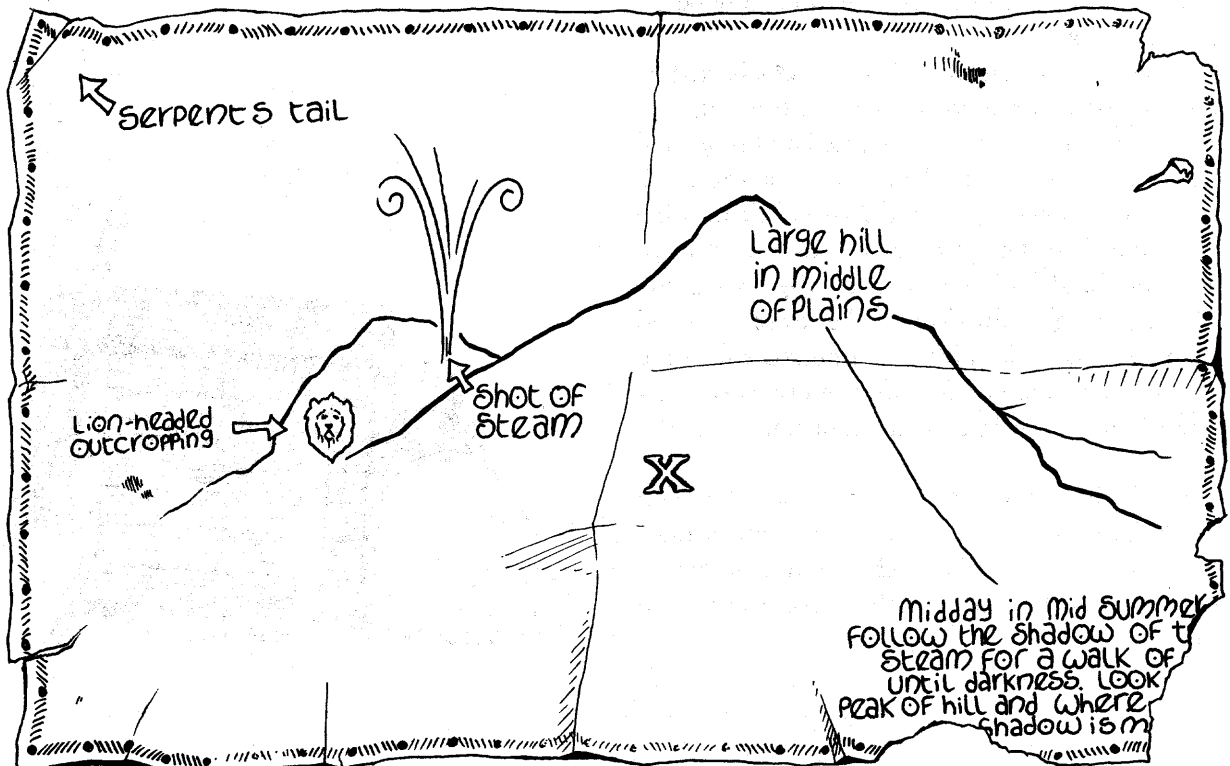
tionable character.

Thelarn Swifthammer earned his surname from fellow adventurers who saw how quickly he wielded his hammer in battle. Many times he came to the rescue of his comrades-in-arms.

Unfortunately, he retained the "Swifthammer" name for how quickly he would reach for his weapon in the heat of argument. His tendency to settle a disagreement by force of arms became more pronounced after he acquired Skysplitter, a war axe rumored to have an intelligence of its own. The "hammer" moniker stuck, even though he now used an axe exclusively. Whether *he* chose the axe to be his sole weapon or whether it chose him cannot be proven conclusively.

The axe Skysplitter could call lightning from the skies to strike the instigator of its owner's wrath, which happened often. One reported incident took place in the area now known as the Caravan City, Scornubel.

A former friend of Thelarn's told the dwarf that he thought the axe was running Thelarn's life. He said it was dictating where the dwarf would go and whom he





was going to kill. For his trouble, the friend (whose name is lost) was reduced to ash beneath a cloudless sky. Later, Thelarn rationalized the event, saying "I was angry and the axe removed the cause." Many people thought Thelarn wasn't in his right mind, but nobody spoke of it to his face again.

The lightning that struck Thelarn's ill-fated ex-friend also set fire to several nearby buildings, causing a great fire that destroyed nearly a third of the city's buildings before mages managed to bring the fire under control. Although clearly responsible, Thelarn was never brought to task for this deed. He left the area soon thereafter, and the city officials were just happy when he became someone else's problem.

The cause of Thelarn's death still remains a mystery, although I am not the only person who has sought an answer to that quandary. At least, I personally haven't found the informant who can give me a verifiable version of the story.

The theory I offer here is nothing more than a good guess, but it may be that Thelarn was slain by the undead creatures wandering so often near the Battle of Bones battlesite. No one has offered me any better suggestion, anyway.

It is known for certain that Thelarn was buried by his dwarven companions somewhere on the hill. The tomb must be extremely well concealed and protected by hidden traps and snares. Rumors about the tomb have attracted graverobbers and rogues but nothing has been found to date. Since the tomb and traps were designed and built by dwarves, the snares and deadfalls are probably dwarven trickeries of rock and earth. The war axe, Skysplitter, is interred with him, as his companions didn't want anyone else with Thelarn's fiery temperament getting their hands on the weapon.

Unfortunately, as is common with stories of hidden tombs, Thelarn is rumored to be buried with a huge quantity of gold and jewels. Such a glittering lure is almost impossible to resist for those seeking wealth and fame.

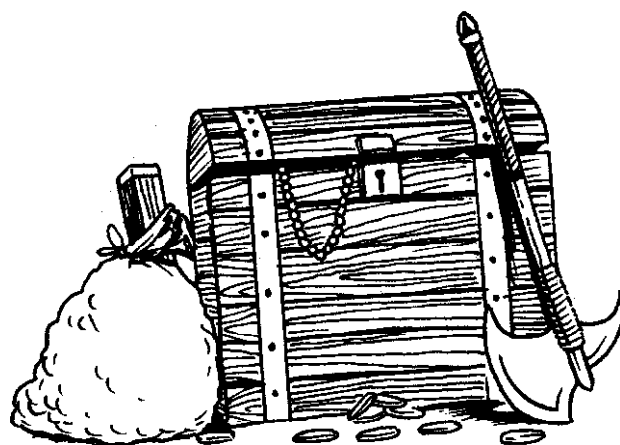
Contents of Thelarn's Tomb

The contents of the tomb are the subject of much rumor and speculation. The Tomb of Thelarn is believed to contain the following items:

- Skeleton and armor of Thelarn "Swifthammer," son of Mongoth.
- Skysplitter: a +3 magical war axe, Int: 13; AL: CN; Primary abilities: detect precious metals in 20' area, detect precious gems 20' area.
- *Bag of Holding*
- Coins and gems: 41 platinum pieces, 985 gold pieces, 8 rubies valued at 250 gp each.

Just as there are treasures to be won, there are traps and pitfalls to be avoided. Some of these are known; others only imagined in nightmares:

- Poison arrow traps with pressure plates on the floor leading up to the resting place of Thelarn.
- Two sections of spinning floor, leading to spikes of stone in a pit 15' deep.





The Mysterious Geyser

Outcroppings of volcanic rock are often visible in this region, with many flat areas of dark rock that lack a cover of soil or vegetation. A little-known feature west of the hill, among the rocks, is a geyser that vents once a week. Having once been an active volcano, the hill remains unquiet below. My special knowledge does not include much about volcanoes, but I'm confident saying that underground heat builds up steam and pressure. The geyser erupts to give that power some place to go.

Once when I was in the area, I heard shouts and calls coming from near the geyser, a commotion more in keeping with masons building a temple wall. Keeping hidden, I crept over the ridge to find a circle of men—magicians, surely—standing around the vent. A large flat rock floated near the hole. They magically maneuvered the rock, which was just about the length of two men, directly over the hole. Then it was dropped into place. I found this behavior more than unusual, and wondered what their intentions were in conducting this experiment.

I made myself comfortable by taking the shape of a toad. I squeezed into a rocky crack and waited for the spectacle. The men, all dressed in similar blue-green robes, conferred for a time, and then they too sat back to wait.

I assume the geyser went off at its appointed time, although nothing happened to the rock. It didn't move an iota.

The men looked pleased with themselves and I was even more perplexed than I had been earlier. The men showed no signs of departing; if anything, they watched the stone even more intently. I decided to stay put for as long as the blue-robed magicians did.

Although I was prepared for a week-long wait, we didn't wait nearly that long. Only an hour passed before a high-pitched hissing gradually became noticeable, then increasingly louder. All of the men glued their eyes to the rock. It started to move upward, riding a column of hissing steam. One of the men clapped ecstatically before the leader

shushed him with a swift motion. When the rock reached a certain height, the head mage pointed at one of the men, who had been silently preparing a spell.

When he waved his hands, the rock shot off the geyser with the speed of an eagle. Jubilation reigned. They jumped in the air and even the leader was clapping his hands. I returned to my own form, and walked across the rocks toward the joyous group.

"I couldn't help but hear all the commotion. Is there anything I can help you with? I saw a huge rock go flying overhead, and wondered whether I had a mage fight on my hands."

"No fighting going on here—just a successful experiment," replied the leader, smiling.

"My name is Tharnn Greenwinter," I said, introducing myself to the entire group. "I happened to be passing by. I don't mean to be nosy but I'm curious... What did you accomplish here today?"

The leader's smile widened. "I've always thought there must be a way to devise a catapult without using pulleys, levers, and all those other cumbersome, mundane things. I got the idea to somehow use steam and a *feather fall* spell together, but I never could find a sufficiently strong, concentrated eruption of steam to suit my purpose. At least, not until today. All those hours, days of research have paid off: I've shown it can be done! Wait until they hear about this back in Shadowdale!

"Now, we just have to find a way to create steam of such intensity as this geyser and make it portable," said the leader.

He started to talk with the others, and their gestures grew wild, describing contraptions I felt sure couldn't work. I almost made a joke about creating your own small, personal volcano, but decided they might have taken it too seriously. They might have tried to make such a thing. I didn't want to encourage these magicians working on their experimental spells anywhere near me. I think they spent too much time in study of theory, and not enough on possible consequences. Maybe that's why I prefer the simpler study of the outdoors, under the open sky amid a sea of grass. It seems much more real, to me.





The Giants of The Hill

If you visit the Hill of Lost Souls, I advise you to avoid the hill giants that live on the east side of the hills. Their encampment is in an exceptionally rocky area, and there they have carved out a home for themselves.

I have occasionally observed them from hiding, and deem them to be no great threat to most creatures and people passing through the area. The giants live with a specific purpose in their lives, and anything that might distract from that goal is considered an unacceptable irritant. Don't go out of your way to antagonize the giants; as I said before, my advice is to avoid them. They might consider you "distracting" and deal with you accordingly.

The giants' goal in life, as far as I've been able to discern, is to fight a second group of giants that dwell to the north near the Battle of Bones. They don't think of it in such a simple way, of course. These two groups of giants are kin, although separated for many years. Some time after that separation, an undead giant assumed rulership of the giants near the Battle of Bones. In consternation, the hill giants of the Hill of Lost Souls vowed to free their brethren from the tyranny of the undead (or kill them trying). So far, the battles have been inconclusive, but that hasn't slowed down either side. They continue to wage the war with as much energy as ever.

Curiously enough, I have observed that most, if not all, of the battles have been fought close to the Battle of Bones. I have begun to wonder if their leader is somehow linked to the area. Although I dislike traveling in that region, I think I'd better look into this idea further.

The Prairielands

The Hill of Lost Souls is entirely surrounded by miles and miles of prairieland. That may sound dull and uninviting to the uninitiated, but to me, the region I know as Pelleor's Prairie is a druidic paradise. The variety of vegetation and small animal life is stag-

gering. There's a life's work to be done just categorizing the types of *grass*. Still, it will have to be someone *else's* life, not mine. My research has been into a study of the *variety* of plants found in the area, since I am interested in more than just grass alone. I have supplied details elsewhere in this report about those plants I deem important for travelers and adventurers to know about.

There is also a rich variety of animals on the prairie. Some beasts are benign, while others are quite dangerous. Prairie dogs, ants, herds of bison and wild horses roam the area. An occasional roc passes through, adding a little exotic variety.

Weather

The weather across the prairie is what you might expect: warm and dry most of the time, and windy. But the weather isn't all sun and heat; we have our share of thundershowers and rain. When the hot desert air from the Anauroch, east of the prairie, meets the moist air off the High Moor and March of Chelimer to the west and north, awesome thunderheads build. It gives a man pause, seeing the lightning repeatedly striking from cloud to earth. It's as if the air were attacking the earth with the lightning. Such fury leads me to wonder, sometimes, which god is upset. Usually I convince myself that the display is a wholly natural occurrence...most of the time.

The spectacular thunderstorms may bring devastation or renewed life to the prairie; often it is both. The storms can deliver life-sustaining water to land often parched dry. But lightning can also ignite wild firestorms when the clouds bring only scattered rain, or none at all.

On rare occasions, we druids have tried to influence the weather to bring enough rain to sustain the prairie through a few exceptionally dry summers. Although the plant life might survive even an extended drought, the danger of widespread fire is too great to ignore. Periodic fires keep the prairie healthy, but the extreme dryness endangered more than we dared risk. The only repercussion to our intervention seems to have been some winters that lasted longer than usual, but even that could have had a more natural explanation.



SEASONS

The winters on Pelleor's Prairie are mild, with only a few weeks of snow cover each year. The winter lasts from Nightal (December) to Alturiak (February). It is rare to find snow still on the ground after early Ches (March), apart from icy spots in continual shade.

Spring brings warm winds off Anaurock, warming the ground and air until Mirtil (May). The springtime season of rebirth is breathtaking. Across miles of prairie the dead-looking ground, long covered with the sere stems of last year's growth, comes alive with vibrant hues of green and tan.

Summer, from Kythorn (June) until Eleasias (August), brings with it heat and the greatest threat of fire. It also is the season when most of the flowers bloom, creating multicolor seas across the rolling hills.

Elient (September), called the Fading Month, through Uktar (November), the Rotting, mark the return of the short cold season. Milder weather and a last, late bloom of flowers give this autumnal season its high points.

Average Weather Conditions for Pelleor's Prairie

Temperature (Spring)	71 degrees F.
Temperature (Summer)	82 degrees F.
Temperature (Autumn)	65 degrees F.
Temperature (Winter)	40 degrees F.
Low Temp. (Year)	15 degrees F.
High Temp. (Year)	103 degrees F.
Annual Precipitation	32 inches

As I said, the hill sits surrounded by grassy plains, bordered on one side by the site of the Battle of Bones. I'll concentrate on the areas away from the Battle of Bones, because I prefer to give that district a wide berth. After all, I have little protection from the undead that roam that cursed place.

Seas of tall grass sway in the gusty breeze of the plains. For miles around, herds of wild bison roam, occasionally thundering across the great open spaces. Too often have I seen the men of a caravan spook a

herd of bison—some accidentally, some just for the sport of it. I have harsh words for them all, and deal with them justly. Rare is the caravan master who would twice toy with the animals just for "fun."

Let me offer this one example. One day I was seeking a particular plant, known as Kaitlin's weed, for study. This plant is commonly confused with a weed known as dragon's breath although the one is poisonous and Kaitlin's weed is a magnificent balm for sun sickness. Upon cresting a ridge, I saw a caravan traversing the central trail through the prairie.

The burly guards had that painful-looking redness of skin that marked them as newcomers to the relentless rays of the Highsun season. I decided to follow them, just in case these oafs fell ill. Fools that they were, they even failed to cover their heads on such a hot day. Also, I thought they looked the sort to treat the journey northward (to Westbridge, I later found out), as a carefree outing across empty land that they, perhaps, felt free to abuse.

A day passed without major incident and I decided to break off watching so I might continue my search for Kaitlin's weed. I'd headed away from the caravan when I felt a familiar rumbling through my feet: the deep, resonant shaking of a herd of bison on the run, just a few hills away.

I shapechanged (truly a wondrous ability), taking the form of a hawk to fly high into the sky that I might evaluate the danger to the caravan. So far, none of the travelers seemed to have heard the rumbling that I had sensed. No doubt, it was drowned out by the sounds of their own wagon wheels. When I wheeled around to where the bison ran, I decided the situation posed little danger to the caravan. The herd had slowed, and whatever started them running had been left in the dust. They became calmer; a few had even begun to stand and graze.

I swept over the caravan for one last check before heading back. To my horror, I realized the men must have seen the herd's dust plume. Now the guards were riding toward the herd with crossbows or spears in hand.

Don't misunderstand me. I see nothing wrong with killing animals for food or for survival. But for sport, for the thrill of it? That makes my blood boil. Even worse,





by leaving the men and women on the caravan undefended, these barbarian “guards” risked endangering the very people they were hired to protect! Even knowing the prairie was empty, I knew the herd of bison itself could pose a great danger if ill luck dictated.

I screeched my anger and dove straight as an arrow at the lead rider. I was too late. The volley of projectiles was loosed before I was able to do anything about it.

Amazingly, the spearcaster missed his target. (This told me a lot about the quality of talent this caravan had hired: if you can't hit a walking bison, what can you hit?) However, all the crossbow bolts thunked into the sides of a few bull bison. With loud grunts, three wounded bulls started running, and panic swept through the rest of the herd like wind through the grass.

Luck was not entirely against the travelers: the herd stampeded *away* from the caravan. Had it been otherwise, nothing would have saved them all from certain destruction.

The men, laughing moments before, watched their targets run away over the horizon. Grim-faced, they trotted slowly back to the caravan.

I wasn't done, though. Imagine their surprise the morning they woke to find no crossbow bolts, no whole crossbow strings, and all the buttons missing from their clothes. Isn't it remarkable how strong, quiet, and sharp a ferret's teeth are? Now truly undefended, the caravan turned back for home, and I hope the guards grow wiser before they return.

Training on The Prairie

When I was new here, years ago, the Druid Hierophant Pheszeltan assigned a guide to take me around the Hill of Lost Souls. This guide was a wemic named Mrowl, and in time, he taught me much about the prairie, its seasons, cycles, animals, and plants.

The wemic are an amazing race, whose lower body resembles a lion's, with a humanoid torso. They look very much like a leonine centaur. Mrowl was about

nine feet long and six and a half feet tall—an average size for a wemic. It took some getting used to, having this huge creature beside me each day, but I'm sure I took some getting used to, as well.

We were tense partners for weeks, with Mrowl giving me information almost grudgingly. I had to ask many questions to get any scrap of information. Later, I learned that Pheszeltan had somehow coerced Mrowl to be my teacher, and the wemic didn't exactly appreciate the coercion. Consequently, he didn't much care for me either.

Then, one average day, we were on an expedition to study bison. Without warning, a dark cloud eclipsed the sun... only it wasn't a cloud. A huge red bird stooped, casting its shadow over us: a roc. It was the size of a barn, a big barn, and that doesn't even include its wingspan.

I yelled to Mrowl to duck, to hit the ground, to get away. I vaulted into the air, shapechanging into the biggest bird that I could: an eagle.

Flying straight at the roc's face, my claws dug into the gigantic bird's flesh, missing the eyes by only a few inches. With the bird's attention diverted from my companion and firmly turned on me, I did the only thing I could think of. I flew as fast as I could, relying on my agility to keep the larger bird from snapping me up. But I couldn't flee endlessly. I frantically searched for a way out of this life-threatening situation. Then, I saw my answer in the distance: a bison herd!

I kept dodging the roc until I got enough ahead to make a straight, fast line of flight towards the herd. Even so, it was close. Just as it seemed the roc would overtake me, I folded my wings and plummeted toward the ground.

Its annoyance (me) having dropped out of sight, the roc looked for something else to take the brunt of its irritation. With all the meat it could ever consume grazing on the plains below, it satiated itself by gorging on bison flesh. It was just as I had hoped.

I didn't stay to watch, but winged back to Mrowl. He never spoke of the encounter, but he has been my close friend ever since. There's nothing stronger than the bond between two beings after a life-and-death encounter. I have learned a lot under Mrowl's tutelage





and much of what I write here is traceable to him.

We never found out where the roc came from that day, and I have not had time to seek the bird since. Occasionally it is sighted, but it has committed nothing dire. I know it can't be nested on the Hill of Lost Souls, so it must have come from either the Sunset Mountains or the Greycloak Hills. Perhaps someone could find its lair there.

After befriending Mrowl, I have had the honor of spending time with him and his people. I have even been made an honorary member of his "pride," which is what the wemics call their small groups of families. Several prides will band together into tribes, and many tribes together become a nation. Currently, however, Mrowl's tribe has no larger affiliation.

The wemics are a noble but unsophisticated race, able to manufacture items and use fire. More importantly, they are eager to learn, and I have found them willing to spend time mastering new skills. I used to spend many cycles of the moon with the wemic tribes, passing onto them my knowledge of civilization (as limited as that is), and what other skills I have. They have made a marked advance in the sophistication of their technology since I first visited them years ago.

Mrowl's wemic tribe, known as Rambrowl in the common tongue, maintains a loose-knit society on the plains. Each pride has its own territory for hunting and farming, although they do little of the latter. They till the soil only for some basic staples, relying on the wildlife of the plains for sustenance. The wemics hold the bison to be a sacred animal, but they still hunt the beast for food. Each bison slain can provide enough for a family of wemics to eat well.

I still visit Mrowl once in a while. His pride lives on the northern border of Pelleor's Prairie, close to the Marsh of Chelimber. I think about him and his family from time to time, and wonder how they fare. The marsh is full of lizard men and other creatures that have no love for a wemic. Then I realize that I'm worrying about a person nine feet long with the power of a lion. I know he can take care of himself.

Currently, Mrowl's pride consists of only his own family: his mate, and three cubs (one female, two male). When they mature, the children will leave their home to stake out their own territory. Occasion-

ally, when the leader of a tribe dies young, the eldest male will take up the leadership, but that is rare. Wemics have few natural enemies, and those that do threaten the people must face surprisingly innovative defenses conceived by such apparent "primitives."

This story is sometimes told in tribe meetings, usually related by the wemic witch doctor. I shall endeavor to record it as accurately as I can.

"Many cycles of the moon past, a winged green reptile had killed a hunting party from the Growrth tribe. The brothers and sisters of the Growrth sought the monstrous creature, found a mighty adversary, and fought a battle against it. All took their death-wounds. But, in turn, the hunters wounded the huge beast in one of its slitted eyes. With a bellow vowing revenge, the creature swore to scour the plains until it destroyed the families of those that had dared injure him.

"One brave soul, Mra'ak, managed to return to his pride though mortally poisoned by the creature's foul breath. Before he died, he warned them of the oncoming danger—danger that had already overtaken two warriors' families. The surviving prides quickly banded together and, thus unified, devised a plan to trick their nemesis."

At this point, the speaker gives way to wemics in costumes, who act out the preceding scenes. The largest wemic has the honor of portraying the green dragon, with broad wings of green cloth decorated with a few authentic dragon scales. Then the story continues.

"The beast was in a rage. It flew itself near to exhaustion trying to find the wemics, the cubs, the families, before any had a chance to escape.

"Then it found the Growrth tribe and their allies. The dragon roared its anger and soared over the people, a wicked grin playing across its features. 'Now you will pay for my pain!' it roared. 'Die!' With that, the dragon let loose with its foul poisonous breath.

"Standing on the side of the dragon's bad eye, the witch doctor cast the spell he had prepared to counter the dragon's attack, an *obscurement* spell. A dense fog covered the area, and the wemics ran into its concealment. Some of the wemics couldn't make it to the fog, so they fell to the ground as if slain. Satisfied by





the destruction it wreaked, the dragon grabbed a wemic in each claw and took to the air, never to be seen again.”

Again the speaker pauses while the whole tribe lets out a growl-like wail, in respect for the brothers and sisters that died that day. The tribe believes that their sacrifice now offers protection of this tribe, and the wemics have been able to survive and grow strong.

The wemics knew they could not save everyone. Instead, they chose to sacrifice a few lives to sate the dragon’s thirst for revenge while keeping as many safe as possible. The majority of the tribe had been hiding in a wooded area a few miles from the main village. The witch doctor’s *obscurement* spell had been chosen as the best way to fool the creature into believing that all its intended victims had died. Even so, ten wemics perished from the dragon’s deadly breath, and two others died in the dragon’s claws.

I believe this plan would not have worked if the dragon wasn’t so enraged when it found the wemic tribe, but I’ve never felt the need to let my friends know that. What they accomplished that day was spectacular from all points of view.

The wemics have a wonderful capacity for thinking, and they are ingenious problem-solvers. This story became one of the motivating factors for me to teach these people things they could learn no other way.

Denizens of The Prairie

The most magnificent natural sight that I have ever seen came when I crested a small hill and came upon the grandest herd of bison I had ever seen. Breathtaking was the expanse of land over which the countless beasts slowly, lazily wandered in search of food. I stood transfixed when, for no apparent reason, the herd started to run... straight in my direction.

Quick thinking saved me. *Air walking* out of harm’s way, I could actually enjoy the thunderous rampage below me. Truly, for non-magical creatures, these are formidable beasts. Mrowl taught me to respect and

admire the bison, but to do so from a safe distance unless an avenue of escape is readily available. If not for his sagacity, I would not be here to write these words.

Bison stand as tall as six feet at the shoulder and can be as long as twelve feet from nose to tail. They are powerfully built with broad, massive heads; short thick necks; high humped shoulders; small hindquarters; and short legs. Both the male and the female have sharp curved horns and a short tasseled tail.

A bison’s horns are short and thick at the base, tapering quickly to a sharp point. The horns describe a circle outward and then turning upward from each side of the head. Horns are hollow and, as far as I’ve seen, permanent. They make excellent drinking cups.

Bison use their heads as battering rams, most often against each other during mating season. Their power is incredible. I’ve seen a bull bison take down a tree six inches in diameter without an outward sign that it encountered any resistance at all. I don’t want to think about what that blow would do to an unprotected person, or even an armored one.

The head, neck, and shoulders of bison are covered with a thick mantle of long dark fur. An adult bull bison has a long black beard as well, reaching nearly to the ground. The rest of the body is covered in shorter hair, making it look like the bison’s strength is focused in the front half of the body.

This appearance is deceptive. One of the most deceptive things about a bison is its apparent clumsiness and slowness. The beasts usually plod along, grazing or just walking slowly from one place to another. They give the impression that they can’t move quicker if they tried. Yet the bison is one of the faster land mammals around and they have exceptional endurance. The back legs are powerfully muscled, able to propel the huge beast at incredible speed over the ground. I have been outrun on horseback by these incredible animals.

A bison’s sense of hearing and smell is very acute. I move quietly, yet at times I have crept up a ridge, only to reach the top and see all eyes of the herd turned toward me. It is as if they say, “Now, what do you want?”

I must be quite clear that bison are entirely unpre-





dictable. A herd might be basking in the sun, looking very relaxed. The next moment, they stampede without any discernible provocation! Never trust the bison. When you watch a grazing herd of bison, you might find it hard to believe that these can be fierce animals, but listen to this story.

When Mrowl was still teaching me about the animals of the prairie, I decided to test one of his theories about bison not being as docile as they looked. I took a bag of fruit to where I'd recently found a small, somewhat isolated herd. I wasn't a total fool; there was a grove of trees close by. And it is a good thing I took that precaution!

Cautiously and slowly, I approached one of the bulls that stood a little away from its companions. I took deliberate care not to startle the beast. When I was within six feet of him, I offered the fruit with an open hand.

The bull sniffed the air and slowly moved closer to me. Almost gently, it took the food from my palm, and snorted with what I took to be pleasure. We repeated this process four times, when I courageously (I thought) patted the side of the bull's head. He allowed me to do it as he took another fruit from my hand.

By the time I ran out of fruit, the bison looked content. I slowly started backing up to leave. With all my attention on the bull, I stepped on a stick. The resounding snap startled the bull out of its calm, and it charged me, snorting.

I don't know why I didn't shapechange. Instead, I ran to the grove, and climbed a tree big enough that the bull couldn't knock it down, although he tried for a good five minutes. Even so, he nearly knocked me from the branches. Clinging to a limb, fumbling for my mistletoe, I promised to listen to Mrowl next time. I have followed that vow since, and it has served me well.

The wemics hunt bison, as I noted above, and ordinary travelers seem to think the beasts are a tasty addition to their diet, too. However, goblin tribes will attack a herd just to take their heads for skulls which they use as ornaments on their helmets and shields. Often as not, they leave the meat to rot. Disgusting creatures, orcs and such.

Another member of the animal community that you see everywhere is the aptly-named prairie dog, although it is no dog. This rodent digs burrows in the ground that can be a grand nuisance because the "towns" of prairie dogs cover acre after acre. Prairie dog holes pose a danger to anything large that walks. For humanoids, an accidental step into a hole hidden by grass may result in a sprained ankle. However, a broken leg will cripple a horse or ox, and the animal starves.

There are a few dangerous reptiles that make their home under the grass cover of the prairie. I know for a fact that two unusual species of snakes live in the region, but there is another that I have yet to see with my own eyes. Rather than include this creature in a separate section of Rumors and Speculation, I include the details I've heard from people I consider reputable.

The dead grass snake looks just as its name suggests: a dead blade of grass about two feet long. When a potential prey animal gets within striking distance, however, that dead blade of grass comes to life, biting with envenomed fangs. Its poison is enough to kill a rabbit, but not a humanoid creature. Oh, you'll be sick with retching and fever for a few days if you have the misfortune to be struck, but there has never been a fatality from a dead grass snakebite.

The other poisonous snake indigenous to the prairie is the "thin" or reed snake. Ranging from two to four feet long, this snake is only as thick as a small flower stem. The reptile spends most of the day below the thick grass cover, hunting at night. This snake's poison is quite strong enough to kill a human. Most deaths have occurred while the victims slept, bitten before they could be aware of the danger.

My final subject is the giant snake. While I've never seen it myself, enough people swear it exists that I feel compelled to discuss it here.

I am told the giant snake is 20 to 30 feet long, with a diameter at its thickest of 1 or 2 feet. It reportedly swallows people whole, is striped with green and brown, and lives underground most of the time. I am skeptical of its existence, but I've seen creatures more fantastic than this. Why not a large, carnivorous snake?





Dead Grass Snake: Int Animal; AL N; MV 15; HD 2+1; #AT 1; Dmg 1; THAC0 19; SA Poison; SZ Small; ML Average; XP 175

Reed Snake: Int Animal; AL N; MV 15; HD 2+1; #AT 1; Dmg 1; THAC0 19; SA; Poison; SZ Small; ML Average; XP 175

Giant Snake: Int Animal; AL N; MV 9; HD 4+2; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6; THAC0 17; SA Petrification; SZ Large; ML Steady; XP 2000

Deadly Snake Table

Onset Time Result of Failed Saving Throw

Dead Grass Snake

2d4 rounds The victim feels great pain throughout his body for 2d4 rounds. He collapses, doubled up on the ground, and cannot take any deliberate action until this condition has run its course.

Thin or Reed Snake

2d3+1 The victim feels a slight sting rounds at the bite, then a sharp pain spreads from there. Eventually the agony envelops the whole body, and the victim dies. A *neutralize poison* spell or potion will cure the effects of this snake's poison.

Giant Snake

2d4 rounds If the snake rolls 18+ on attack it will enwrap its victim unless the victim can make a saving throw vs. petrification (as in "unable to move while trapped"). If captured, there is a 90% chance the victim's arms are pinned, inhibiting most possible actions. Death occurs from suffocation (2d6 points of damage to the victim each round).

Snakebite is an all-too-common hazard for travelers and adventurers on the prairie. Should you ever find yourself bitten (even if you are not sure whether the snake is poisonous), you should know that nature has a tonic.

I've observed that bison consistently seek out a certain herb after being bitten by a snake. This plant looks like clover, except that the leaves are more diamond in shape. I've dubbed it "the diamond cure" as I know of no other name for it. Its taste reminds me of bitter oregano. If you have no better options to deal with the potential danger of a snake's bite, chew and swallow a large quantity of the diamond cure. It will help relieve the discomfort of even minor bites, and may save your life with deadly ones.

The herb is more potent eaten immediately after picking it, but it is still effective when dried. If you run across a stand of the Diamond Cure, pick a pouchful, dry it thoroughly to prevent mold, and keep it with you as you travel.

The Great White Bison

There are stories of a Great White Bison, the leader of all of the bison herds that roam the prairie. I hesitate to recount my own tale in this regard, lest you think me crazy. Still, in this land of wonder, who can say what did or didn't "really" happen.

I had finally made up my mind to dedicate the rest of my days to this area of the Realms. A week to the day later, I had an encounter, or a vision; I'm still not sure which. While setting up camp for the evening, a strange movement to my left caused me to turn in that direction. I call it "strange" because it seemed to be that trick of peripheral vision: you look around quickly, only to find there is nothing there.

Expecting to see nothing, even as I turned, before me materialized the Great White Bison. The beast must have been ten feet tall at the shoulder with horns six feet long. Not typical bison horns, mind you; these went straight out from the skull in opposite directions. His beard was long enough to reach the ground, yet didn't touch the dirt. With wise dark eyes, the creature looked me over from head to toe, and I believe, inside as well.



My first reaction was to cast a defensive spell. But upon meeting that dark brown gaze, I found it impossible to make the slightest movement. In a few moments (they seemed to last eternally), the White Bison gave an almost imperceptible nod. I sensed movement to my right and, without a thought, I looked quickly around. When I realized what I had done, I snapped my head back to where the Bison had been; all that I saw there were stars.

I don't know whether the White Bison was a dream or not. Ever since, though, I have felt an obligation to care for these lands to the best of my ability. So I have done since.

Once, I asked Mrowl if he had ever had such a vision like mine, but he said no, he never had. Then he started in about the workings of destiny, and I quickly changed the subject.

Great White Bison: Int High; AL NG; MV 12; HD 11; #AT 1; Dmg 4-24; THAC0 10; SA Fear; SZ L; ML Elite; XP 3000

Humans of The Prairie

Prairie life is harsh, as many of life's necessities are hard to come by: most importantly, a source of fresh water, and protection from the elements. However, some humans survive, living mostly in the northern and western regions, close to water sources. Human settlements become few and far between as one heads east toward the desert.

Most people settle in one-family habitations. Where resources permit, a number of families may band together to help each other survive. With all of the rest of the Realms to settle in, a person must really *want* to live here, given all its hardships. That takes a special person, one with whom I obviously feel a sort of kinship. This place is my milieu, my life, my land.

Newly-arrived settlers live in tents, and some continue to prefer such a home. Others try to set up a permanent residence. They build wooden structures where wood can be found, and of sod when it is not. Whatever the dwelling, people hope they have built a home fit to withstand the demanding conditions of plains life.



Vegetation of The Prairie

People often think the prairie is endless grass. In fact, it is a veritable cornucopia of plant life. Trees, grasses, shrubs, and moss—the prairie has them all.

One of the prairie's well-kept secrets is bison-gourd, a plant that spreads across large stretches of ground with runners dozens of feet long. It produces large yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers, that in turn produce a fruit that grows to five inches in diameter. The ripe fruit contains stringy meat and many seeds.

The seeds contain a volatile oil that is hard for us to smell, but which effectively keeps away most flying insects. Every autumn, I string myself armbands and a necklace of the seeds, and store them away for the next spring when the insects begin to multiply. My seed jewelry protects me extremely well. If you don't know how important it is to keep insects away, your first visit to the prairie will teach you.

Remember that this nostrum protects against small pesky insects, but it doesn't do much against a dangerous swarm, nor any of the giant insects. There is no added value to coating yourself with the stuff, nor should you believe you are immune to the sting of a giant wasp.

Razor grass is found in patches throughout Pelleor's Prairie. As to its effects, I bet you can guess. The blades of razor grass are thin and strong, and they can cut you like the finest steel blade available. The blades of razor grass are slightly more silvery than green, but otherwise they look much like ordinary grass. Even worse for the traveler, these plants are usually found near another deadly plant.

The squid jail plant benefits from rooting near a stand of razor grass because its major nutrient source is meat, any kind it can get its leaves on. And strange leaves they are! Tentacle-like, these flat foot-wide leaves grow below other vegetation in the area, and each leaf can be 10–15 feet long. While rootlets absorb small quantities of nutrients from the ground below, it is blood that makes the squid jail plant react so dangerously.

When blood drips on a squid jail leaf, the blood was probably shed by a blade of razor grass. All the squid jail leaves spring up from the ground, temporarily forming a "jail cell" of iron-strong leaves.

Quick-acting creatures with the ability to fly can get out the top of the "jail," as it usually takes approximately two minutes for the top to close over completely. Unlucky captives suffocate as the leaves slowly press together until the victim dies, rots, and is eventually digested.

I've seen a squid jail capture a young adult bison, and hold it against the beast's most energetic thrashing. If you think you're strong enough to tear up this plant when trapped inside... think again.

If a person doesn't get out the top of the "jail," there is little hope of freeing the captive. The leaves are strong as iron and only susceptible to fire. Of course, using fire carries the risk of killing the person inside. Nevertheless, that is perhaps a less gruesome death than being made into liquified plant food.

The only warning you can get is if you listen to the sound the wind makes as it blows through the grass. Ordinary grass rustles faintly. If you hear a low-pitched whine, that's the wind going through a patch of razor grass. Look for a patch of slightly silvery-colored blades, and then stay away from it.

Plants known as the water globes have saved many lives in the heat of summer. This vine looks much like common ivy, to which it is distantly related. Unlike ivy, the underside of these leaves are milk-white, without any green.

Where the long runner-stems of the water globe plant touch the ground, small globes grow into the soil. If you dig carefully at these places, you'll find the white water sack. Break the stem on either side of the sack, then lift out the fragile globe of water. Be careful not to break the sack, which easily falls apart, lest you lose the precious fluid. Transfer the water into a canteen (or yourself) as soon as practical.

There are many poisonous plants found throughout the prairie. Here are the most common ones a person should avoid.

The hooded monk is a brown plant that grows about a foot and a half tall. It's peculiarly-shaped, as it seems to be comprised of only one leaf. That one leaf is tubular, and folds across at the top, obscuring the inside of the tube.

Resist the temptation to open the hood, for a small



quantity of poison gas is released each time you do. One whiff and you'll pass out in seconds. I believe the poison gas is meant to kill small rodents and bugs that might damage the plant. To a creature the size of a humanoid, that puff of poison is rarely fatal, but why tempt fate?

I probably shouldn't say this, but the clever among you might wonder why rodents and insects would bother the plant in the first place. At the bottom of the hooded monk plant is a succulent fruit with a flavor like honey. If you *must* try the fruit, first harvest the plant with a sword. Cut the plant close to the ground, then get out of range for at least five minutes. The gas will dissipate and the fruit is yours. Be sure you do clear the area, because with any sudden, sharp movement, the hooded monk releases all of its gas at once, and that amount *can* be fatal even to human-sized beings. Oh, and be careful not to accidentally kick one over, for the same reason!

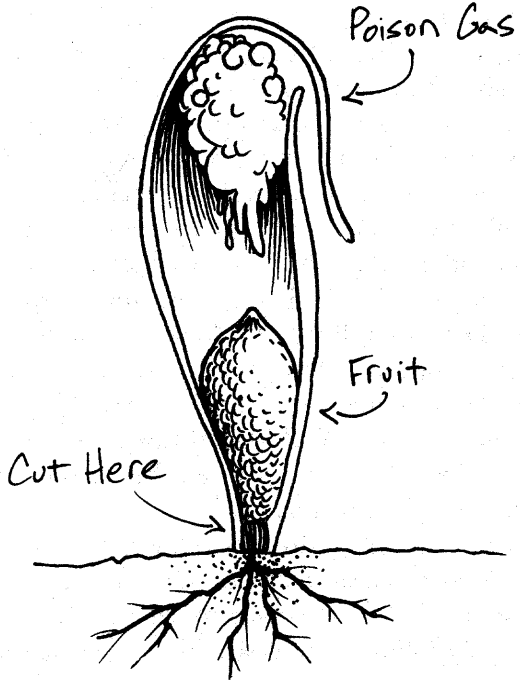
The next plant I will describe is only dangerous to folks who go barefoot, or touch things they shouldn't with their bare hands. It is called spirit moss, and is so named for two reasons. The first is because of its wispy appearance and gray color. The second is because you'll become a spirit soon after touching it!

This moss grows about a half inch high, in a soft pile like a delicate sponge. Out of the moss grow gossamer wisps that float gently in the wind. The plant needs a great deal of fresh air to survive, and the wispy puffs enable the plant to "harvest" all it needs.

If the plant is stepped on, it will die within a day and turn jet black. Pray you do not touch it with bare hand or foot! The gossamer threads carry a fast-acting and extremely deadly poison. Within 30 seconds of touching strands of spirit moss, the extremities start to go numb. Death by paralysis comes in two minutes.

The last poisonous plant I will write about here is the "four petal white flower". Other names have been suggested: "joker's kiss" and "spitting ivy" are sometimes used. My more ordinary name helps identify the plant so that even people not very herb-wise can recognize it for the dangerous growth that it is.

This plant grows as a bush that looks very similar to a closely-related but innocuous shrub known as the white heart. In both, the flowers are heart-shaped and





about two to three inches across. The difference is in the number of petals on each flower.

If you are traveling in Pelleor's Prairie, stay away from a bush that has white flowers with four petals.

Poisonous Plant Table

<i>Onset Time</i>	<i>Result of Failed Saving Throw</i>
Hooded Monk (one smell)	
1-2 rounds	The victim feel nauseous for 1-4 hours and is unable to travel or tolerate any motion.
Hooded Monk (complete plant at once)	
1 round	At the start, the victim feels nauseous, then the limbs become paralyzed. The condition leads to death within an hour, unless the poison is neutralized in that time.
Spirit Moss (one touch)	
1 round	The victim starts by feeling nauseous, then becomes more and more paralyzed, ending with the trunk muscles seizing up. Within two minutes, the victim dies of asphyxiation.
Four Petal White Flower (spray: touch)	
2-8 rounds	The victim feels a burning sensation when the liquid touches the skin. A high fever begins, and the victim dies in 1-4 hours.
Four Petal White Flower (spray: acid)	
2-8 rounds	The acid burns through a layer of cloth per round. When all layers of clothing are penetrated, the poison contacts the skin and the effects are as described above.

In the center of the flower, there is a delicate motion detector, though I don't know how it works yet. When triggered, it sets off a dozen streams of poisonous and acidic liquid toward the movement. The liquid is almost always lethal, and can kill a creature up to the size of a horse. Even if the victim is protected by clothing, the acid burns through it, delivering the deadly poison directly to the victim's skin.

The druidic community believes that this deadly species of plant is the result of a magical experiment gone wrong. The "four petal white flower" was never seen until five years ago, and it remains uncommon, fortunately. Nevertheless, we have a team working to find out where it came from and, if appropriate, bring the creating mage to justice.

There are some interesting trees in and around the prairie. Some are particularly well-suited to life in a dry climate.

The camel tree looks like a common deciduous tree, except for a decidedly large bulge about halfway up its thick-barked trunk. Like the water globe ivy, this tree stores excess water in wet times, relying on its reserves in drought. If you climb the tree and dig a hole in the bulge, sweet, refreshing water can be yours. I ask that *you* do this only in times of deadly thirst, however, and take as little as will see you through. The camel tree usually doesn't survive the experience, since you are stealing reserves it also needs to live. Furthermore, other creatures will also come, once the defensive bark is breached.

In all the world, the sliver tree is found exclusively on Pelleor's Prairie. The tree resembles an oak, until a closer inspection of bark and leaves reveals the differences. The bark is lined with long, narrow cracks that channel moisture toward the roots. The leaves look porous, like sponges with small holes. They absorb moisture from the air when moisture is available, and a waxy plug fills the pores when the air is drier than the delicate plant tissues.

If you ever find a sliver tree knocked over after a particularly fierce storm, go to the stump and pull the loosest sliver. If you manage to get the first one out, others will follow more easily. The slivers are usually 3/4" in diameter, and a foot and a half to three feet long. They make excellent material for arrow shafts,





as they are very straight and rarely break. The tip can be ground to a very fine point, although it is difficult and time-consuming. The slivers cannot easily be curved to a sharp point, because the wood has a tendency to shatter when pressure is applied from the side. (This is what makes the trees nearly impossible to chop down with an axe: the slivers break into short lengths more suitable for toothpicks than arrows.)

Weapon makers cherish slivers of this tree, and pay well for those who can deliver them. A well-made arrow shot straight on target has a chance of penetrating even the hardest substance, so tough is the wood. Thus, if nature cooperates, you might find a veritable treasure in a blown-down sliver tree.

Natural Dangers

The wide open prairielands... you'd think that danger would be easy to see coming, and easily avoided. Sometimes that's true, but not always.

Fires are a great danger to any prairie denizen. With flames 20 feet high, and a wind to urge the flames onward, these fast-moving walls of death can scare even the bravest warrior or beast. I've only seen one as bad as this and, if you'll pardon the cliché, it was enough to last a lifetime.

Most prairie fires start from a lightning strike hitting the ground and igniting the grass. Careless travelers too often let a campfire get out of control. Sometimes these start slowly, consuming the low vegetation and creeping slowly along. Such a fire might eventually burn out, or it might elevate into a fierce firestorm.

Either way, the results are devastating for a time. I say "for a time," because fire is a natural way for the prairie to be rejuvenated. There certainly is a cost to life caught in the way of the flames, but the old plants are cleared away. After a few seasons, the scorched earth is green again, with young vigorous plants that could not have grown through a heavy overburden of old growth.

However, just because fire is good for the land doesn't mean we druids don't try to stop it from going too far, or into areas we'd rather didn't burn. Working

with other druids, I have many times tried to stop a fire's advance, using many water-based spells and some fire-based spells to make firebreaks. We succeed in saving what we wish to save only about half the time.

I have observed that, on the average, about one-tenth of Pelleor's Prairie burns each year. It's sometimes more and sometimes less, but after all there is a great expanse of territory in which fire might take light. It almost seems that the fires rotate around the prairie from year to year, but nature is not so deliberate or tidy.

Fire Damage

Characters caught in a firestorm will take considerable damage until they can get out of the area. For each round a creature is within ten feet of a firestorm, it takes 5d6 points of damage.

A firestorm can have a movement rate as slow as 6 and as fast as 18, depending upon the strength of the wind and how dry conditions have been on the prairie.

Another devastating problem on the plains is the periodic plague of insects, usually locusts. These short-horned grasshoppers travel in huge swarms, so vast that they cloud the sky and block the sun. A migrating swarm can blanket an area hundreds of miles across.

When they land, they scour the area of all plant life, leaving a stripped land in their wake. When the ground is bare, the swarm flies on to the next vale, and wreaks its destruction there.

I've only experienced the devastating power of these insects once. I shapechanged into a mole and burrowed underground to wait for the swarm to leave. When I finally poked my whiskered nose above ground again, I didn't recognize the place where I had been. All that was left of yesterday's sea of green was bare ground littered with a few woody stems too thick for the insects to chew. Luckily, the swarms arise only once each five to eight years.

I fear locusts even more than fire, I think. The fire





is not guided by instinct or intelligence, whereas I almost feel something behind the insects. It is as if a group-consciousness develops, directing the actions of millions of insects. Is their landing spot arbitrary, or is there something else guiding the dangerous hordes?

Insect Swarms

If a character is caught in an insect swarm, vision is limited to ten feet, and the person incurs 2 points of damage a round from insect bites. The concentration needed for spellcasting is impossible, as insects land in eyes, mouth, nose, and ears. Furthermore, being invisible or otherwise undetectable is no protection.

If a character is unable to escape the swarm, after 10 rounds the damage increases to 4 points a round. After 20 rounds, the damage is 8 points a round due to the likelihood of suffocation, as the insect bodies completely cover the victim. Attacks last 5-45 minutes.

Rumors and Speculations

Ordinarily, I would avoid discussing unfounded rumors and speculation about a particular area. However, given my experiences and stories told by folks I trust, I would be remiss not to pass along these tales, lest you be uninformed when something I call a rumor turns out to be real. Some stories surely are less accurate than others, but I believe all have some grain of truth.

Tales of Pelleor, The Wanderer

A frequently-told tale is about Pelleor, nicknamed the Wanderer. As you might guess, the Wanderer's proper name isonymous of the entire region.

Pelleor was a foot soldier in the Battle of Bones. Wounded and trapped under the weight of many bodies, he was left behind when his companions retreated

to the eastern base of the Hill of Lost Souls. In pain, Pelleor dragged himself out from under the dead, and tried to find the encampment of his fellow soldiers.

It seems that Pelleor didn't have the sense to die as the fates dictated that he should have. Some have theorized that the concentration of death at that battle made it possible for Pelleor to stay alive solely through force of will—that so many were passing through death's door, that one spirit managed to turn aside, lost in the numbers.

However it happened, Pelleor is rumored to wander the hill and prairie, looking to rejoin his fallen comrades. I have never seen the haunt, but I believe that he exists. I also believe my destiny involves him. After the night on the hill, where I met the spirits of that ancient battle, I believe I may meet this Pelleor someday; perhaps I can put a stop to his wandering. I think this mark on my back must mean something...

The locals have taken to calling the region "the Prairie of Pelleor" or "Pelleor's Prairie," because his presence has been reported from all around the Hill of Lost Souls. I have adopted this custom in this narrative, to easily identify the area around the hill.

Pelleor is most often seen on the anniversary of the Battle of Bones, but he has never been reported in the same place twice. Each circumstance is different. During one sighting, for example, Pelleor warned a young child's parents that she was in danger from a band of marauding orc bandits. Then Pelleor joined with local authorities to hunt down the orc raiding party, saving the young human's life.

Another tale credits Pelleor with haunting a band of orcs, with such success that they all turned completely white: hair, skin, and all. The orcs crept back to their homeland in shame, and haven't been seen since.

Green Dragons

One of the more frightening rumors is that the green dragons of the Forest of Wyrms are being seen more and more often in the area. I believe they might be starting to hunt regularly among the bison herds on the prairie. If that is so, the bison have no defense whatsoever, nor can I be of help to them—not against dragons. I hope that rumor is inaccurate, but I fear it may be true.



Encroachment of Anauroch

There is a considerable catalog of observations that suggest that the Anauroch Desert is gradually encroaching further into the plains. The druid hierarchy is studying this, as I mentioned at the beginning of this report. Ideally, we would like to determine whether the effect is natural or induced. Either way, the desert could drastically change the prairie in a few years, endangering the entire life system. The dry, hot air rolling in from the encroaching desert could make survival on Pelleor's Prairie as unpleasant as crossing the Anauroch is today.

I have done a limited amount of work to research the problem, myself. I try to catalog what plants no longer thrive, and which ones are moving into the affected areas. Mostly, I am looking forward to the findings of my more skilled fellow druids, and I am prepared to act upon their recommendations. This is my territory to care for, and I would not like to see it spoiled.

Fire Newts on The Move

One rumor I can't discount is that the fire newts are working to reactivate the dormant volcano, which would expand their territory. I believe a group should go into the corridors below the hill, and find out exactly what is going on down there. I have been able to go in just so far, before I must leave or risk discovery. Alone, I lack the power to fight my way out of a tight situation.

I penetrated into their compound once, and saw some odd-shaped tools: thick and wedge-shaped they were. I thought they could have been designed to widen cracks the way a crowbar opens a wooden box. Could the fire newts be trying to open the rivers of lava underground, to activate the now-quiescent volcano?

Killer Grass

Some reliable witnesses have begun to report a new kind of "grass" cropping up on the prairie near the Anauroch Desert. They say that this grass is alive, in





the same way that people are alive, with a distinct head and thin spindly limbs. They have named it “killer grass” for reasons that will become clearer as I describe what I’ve learned from these folk.

Again, I know the story sounds far-fetched but, for this tale, I have conclusive confirmation. Spurl, a friend of mine who makes the eastern prairie his home, brought back a dead one. He refused to say how he came by the little body, but his face visibly blanched when I asked him about it. Mind you, Spurl is not a man easily scared, unlike some people I know. I was just grateful he’d delivered the thing for me to examine.

Until I held the body in my hand, I couldn’t believe the rumors were true. The small body was heavier than I would have guessed, but it still felt like the small being would be blown away by a strong wind.

Alive, the grass creature would have stood one and a half feet tall. It seems to have been of a meat-eating species, to judge by the sharp teeth in its mouth. People who have brought me rumors about the killer grass confirm that, in large numbers, the things can be quite dangerous. The entire creature was a brownish green, which I’m sure helps it blend in among the waving blades of grass on the prairie.

The thing’s legs and arms looked like thin blades of grass but seemed surprisingly strong with a bony structure inside. The feet were interesting, because they had small curved “toes” (for lack of a better word). I expect the toes help anchor the creature to the ground on blustery days, which are common on the prairie.

The little creature’s face had all the necessary features: eyes, ears, and mouth... everything except a prominent nose. Where the nose ought to be was a slight bump with two slits. All the features were sharp, tapering, and often ending in points. The ears were especially pointed and long, looking like another few blades of grass were attached to each side of the head.

Found near the edge of the expanding desert, these creatures might be an effect of the strange magic involved with the Anauroch’s expansion, or if the interest in the encroaching desert has just finally brought them to our attention.

I’m not sure the mystery of the creatures’ beginnings will ever be solved. My guess is that these grass beings have lived in the hot prairie for years, sustained by small mammals, lizards, and whatever else they eat. If they have not been reported before, it could be that no humanoids ever ran across them before—at least, no one anyone else would believe. I mean, who else but a lackwit would come back from exploring the desert’s edge telling a strange story of killer grass with razor-sharp teeth? Even I would probably have a hard time believing such a story, yet I’ve heard of some strange things in my time.

Rolling Hills

Understand that I am speaking of hills that really *move*. The people of a settlement directly south of the Battle of Bones reported that a hill about 15 feet high rolled through their village, knocking over tents, unearthing fences, and smashing down crops. The hill had been stationary for as long as anyone could remember. Certainly it was there since five years before, when the 30 villagers had taken up residence.

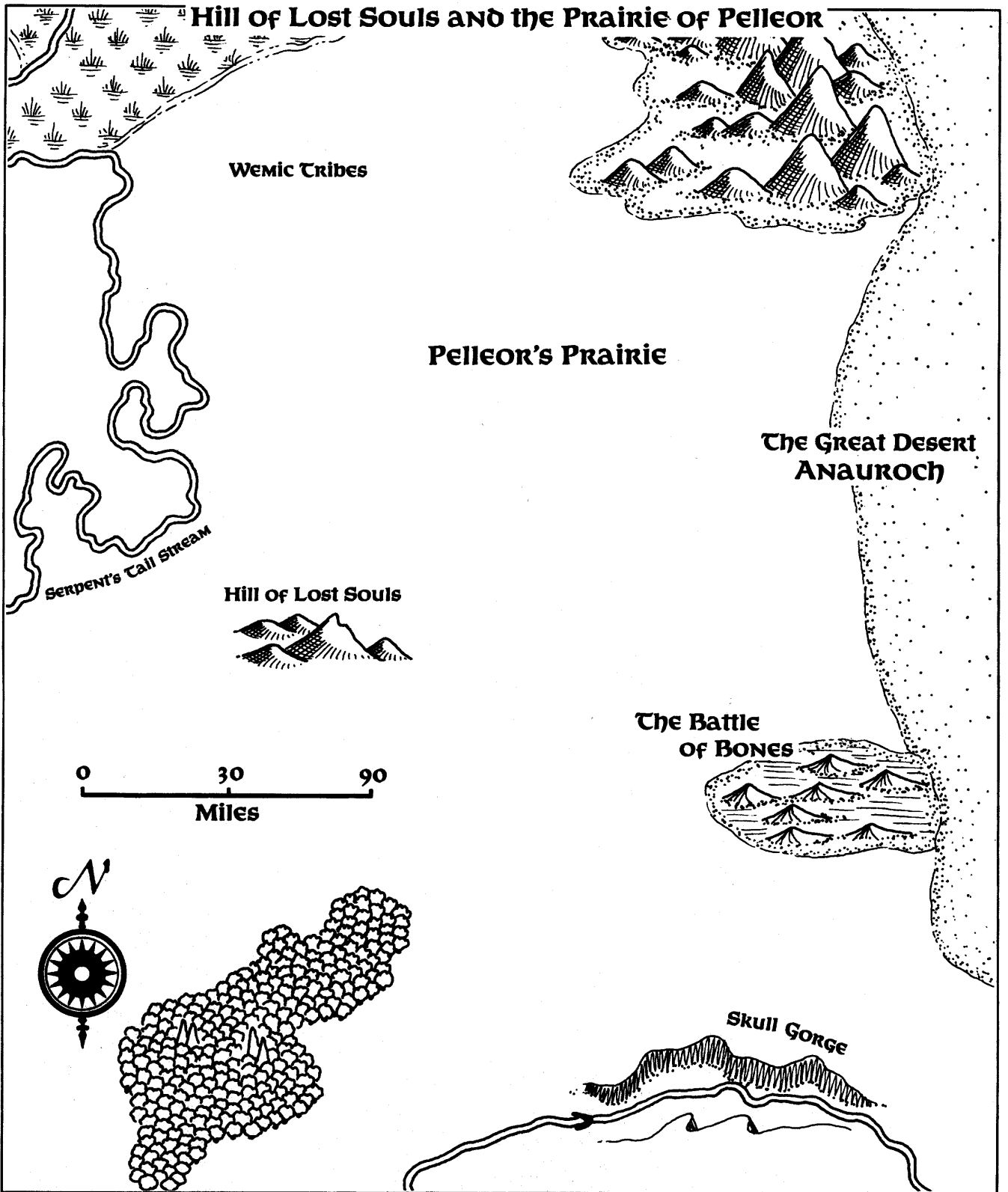
After asking many questions of the villagers, I came away perplexed. The people believed the hill had come alive and wrecked their homes. I thought first that it might have been a bulette (more commonly referred to as a land shark), but none of the villagers were reported missing and all the livestock survived.

No one knows what could have moved the earth with such speed and devastating force. The town’s leading elder wants an answer to that question before the people relocate or rebuild their town. He feels that there is no reason to rebuild if that creature could revisit at any time.

In response to the villagers’ plight, a number of mages and sages have banded together to seek an answer to the mystery of the moving hill. So far, they have theorized that the “hill” might have been a huge underground turtle of some sort, or a previously-unknown earth creature. The sages have only been able to recommend that the villagers sit tight until they learn more.



Hill of Lost Souls and the Prairie of Pelleor



Advanced Dungeons & Dragons
2nd Edition

FORGOTTEN REALMS

Elminster's

Ecologies

Appendix One

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Encounter Tables



Credits

Designers: Don Bingle and Scott Davis; **Editor:** Elizabeth T. Danforth
Project Coordinators: Thomas M. Reid and David Wise; **Graphics Coordinator:** Sarah Feggstad
Art Coordinator: Peggy Cooper; **Electronic Pre-press Coordinator:** Tim Coumbe
Typography: Nancy J. Kerkstra; **Graphic Design:** Dawn Murin

The following pages contain tables relevant to the other two books in this expansion set. The DM may use these tables to generate random encounters or to give players an idea of the diversity of species in each region. The tables are by no means complete. DMs should feel free to supplement them with appropriate species from other AD&D® products or creatures of their own design.

The MONSTROUS MANUAL™ accessory and various MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® accessories serve as the primary sources for the tables; DMs should refer to these volumes for statistics and behavioral information. Creatures' treasure, if any, is left to the DM's discretion.

Hill of Lost Souls & Pelleor's Prairie

Day Encounter Table

	Percentage
Ankheg	1-4
Bison, single	5-14
Bison herd .....	.15-34
Dead Grass Snake .....	.35-44
Giant Snake .....	.45-49
Herd Animal (other than Bison) .....	.50-64
Hill Giant .....	.65-69
Hyena .....	.70-79
NPC Party .....	.80-85
Lion .....	.86-90
Reed Snake .....	.91
Roc .....	.92
Skeletons .....	.93
Wemic .....	.94-100

Night Encounter Table

	Percentage
Ankheg	1-9
Bison, single .....	.10-14
Bison herd .....	.15-24
Dead Grass Snake .....	.25-29
Giant Snake .....	.30-34
Herd Animal (other than Bison) .....	.35-49
Hill Giant .....	.50-54
NPC Party .....	.55-59
Reed Snake .....	.60-69
Skeletons .....	.70-74
Wemic .....	.75-84
Orc Group (2-6) .....	.85-89
Wight .....	.90-94
Ogre .....	.95-100



Within 30 miles of the Battle of Bones, lesser undead under the control or leadership of greater undead turn as the greater undead. Within the area of the battlefield itself (on the high plain where the battle was fought), *all undead are turned on the Special column.*

Land Surrounding The Battle of Bones

d100

Roll	Day	Night
1-5	Sandberry Bush	Coyote
6-10	Zombie Patrol	Animated Skeletal Coyote
11-15	Fire Falcon	Wight Band
16-20	Rattlesnake	Zombie Patrol
21-25	Animated Skeletal Rat Swarm	Goblin Band
26-30	Goblin	Rattlesnake
31-35	Scorpion	Spectre
36-40	Razor Grass	Skeleton Patrol
41-45	Firebush	Wolf Pack
46-50	Firedrake	Scorpion
51-55	Skeleton Patrol	Goblin Band
56-60	Manscorpion	Wight Band
61-65	Razor Grass	Pit
66-70	Bone Vulture	Bat Swarm
71-75	Faux Faerie	Skeleton Patrol
76-80	Zombie Patrol	Goblin Band
81-85	Goblinberry Bush	Kobold Band
86-90	Sand Cat	Wraith
91-95	Animated Skeletal Coyote	Zombie Patrol
96-00	Bloodberry Bush	Wraith Patrol

Mountain Passes at the Battle of Bones

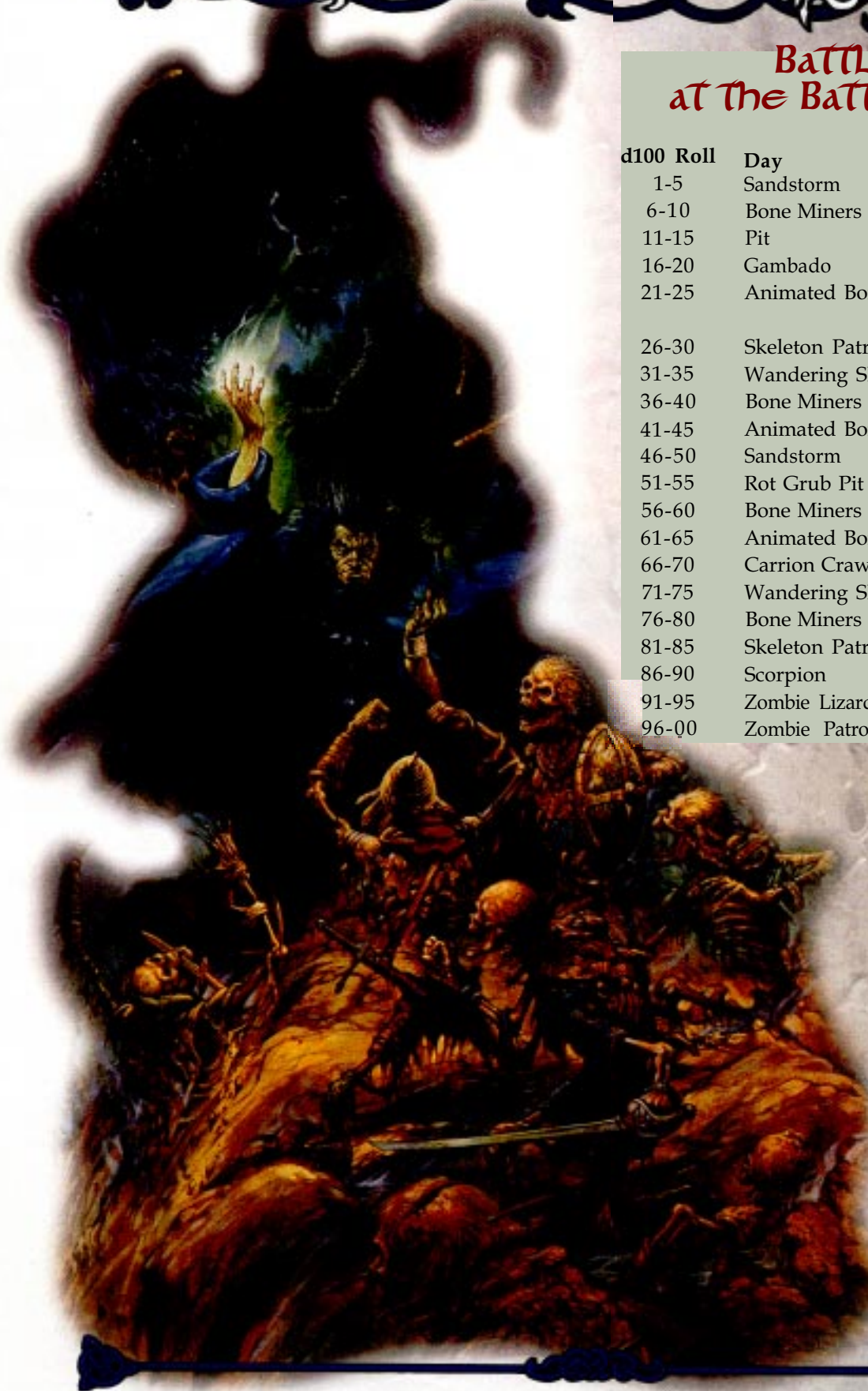
d100 Roll	Day	Night
1-5	Skeleton Patrol	Skeleton Patrol
6-10	Rockslide	Zombie Patrol
11-15	Sand Cat	Bat Swarm
16-20	Goblin	Hobgoblin Patrol
21-25	Skeleton Patrol	Skeleton Patrol
26-30	Rockslide	Zombie Patrol
31-35	Animated Skeletal	Wraith Rat Swarm
36-40	Firebush	Goblin Band
41-45	Coyote	Scorpion
46-50	Skeleton Patrol	Skeleton Patrol
51-55	Zombie Patrol	Zombie Patrol
56-60	Rattlesnake	Bat Swarm
61-65	Scorpion	Fire Giant
66-70	Dragonne	Wight
71-75	Skeleton Patrol	Skeleton Patrol
76-80	Ju-ju Zombie	Zombie Patrol
81-85	Bloodberry Bush	Wight
86-90	Animated Skeletal	Spectre Rat Swarm
91-95	Fire Falcon	Skeleton Patrol
96-00	Zombie Patrol	Wraith Patrol





Battlefield at The Battle of Bones

d100 Roll	Day	Night
1-5	Sandstorm	Skeleton Patrol
6-10	Bone Miners	Zombie Patrol
11-15	Pit	Zombie Patrol
16-20	Gambado	Wight Band
21-25	Animated Bones	Wandering Skeleton
26-30	Skeleton Patrol	Wraith Patrol
31-35	Wandering Skeleton	Wraith Patrol
36-40	Bone Miners	Spectre
41-45	Animated Bones	Pit
46-50	Sandstorm	Wraith
51-55	Rot Grub Pit	Ju-ju Zombies
56-60	Bone Miners	Zombie Fire Giant
61-65	Animated Bones	Wight Band
66-70	Carrion Crawler	Carrion Crawler
71-75	Wandering Skeleton	Bone Miners
76-80	Bone Miners	Animated Bones
81-85	Skeleton Patrol	Animated Bones
86-90	Scorpion	Spectre
91-95	Zombie Lizard	Ghost
96-00	Zombie Patrol	Ghost

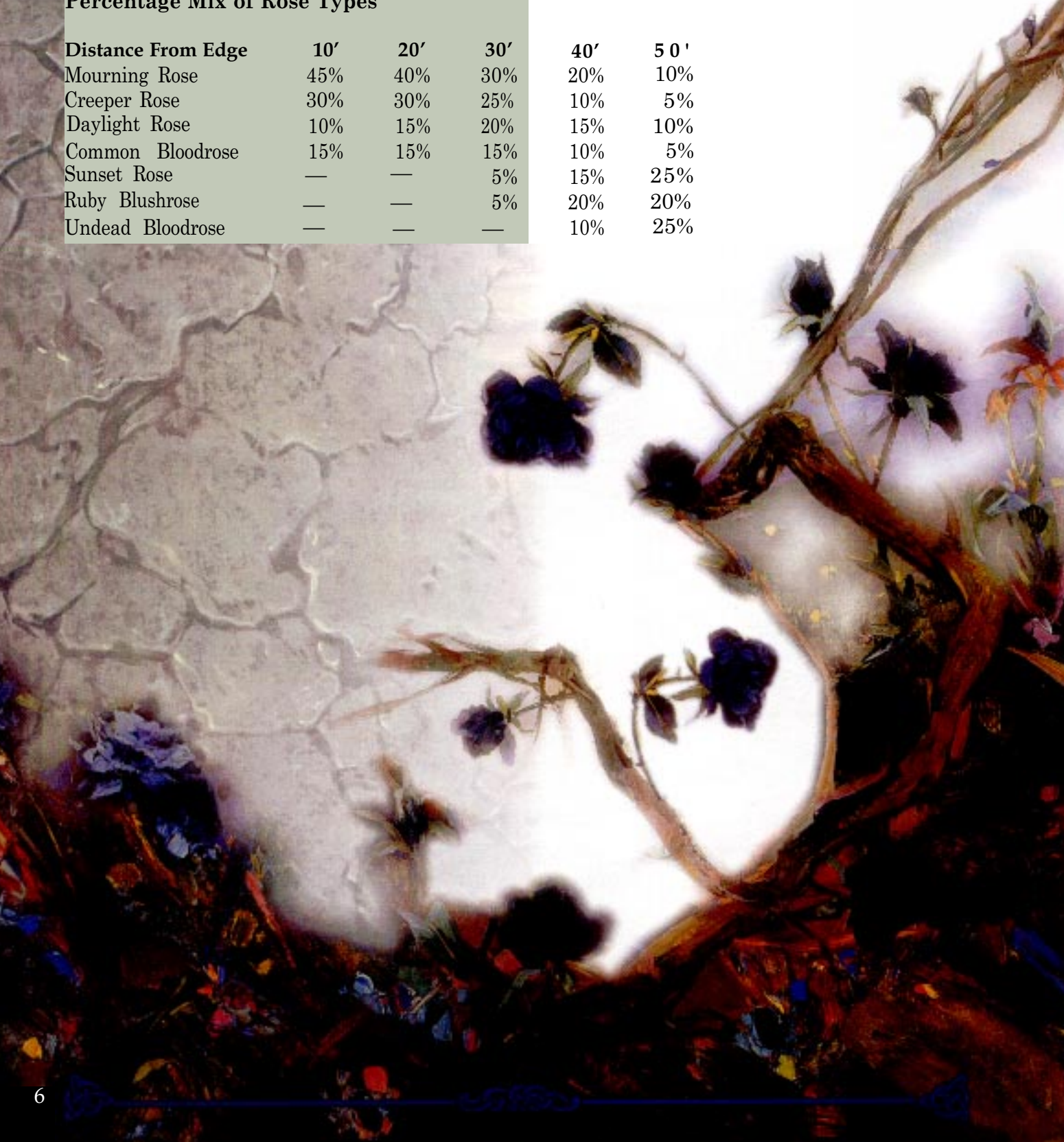




The Rose Garden

Percentage Mix of Rose Types

Distance From Edge	10'	20'	30'	40'	50'
Mourning Rose	45%	40%	30%	20%	10%
Creeper Rose	30%	30%	25%	10%	5%
Daylight Rose	10%	15%	20%	15%	10%
Common Bloodrose	15%	15%	15%	10%	5%
Sunset Rose	—	—	5%	15%	25%
Ruby Blushrose	—	—	5%	20%	20%
Undead Bloodrose	—	—	—	10%	25%



Turning Undead

Type of Undead	Level Number of Priest**											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10-11	12-13	14+
Skeleton	10	7	4	T	T	D	D	D*	D*	D*	D*	D*
Zombie	13	10	7	4	T	T	D	D	D*	D*	D*	D*
Ghoul	16	13	10	7	4	T	T	D	D	D*	D*	D*
Shadow	19	16	13	10	7	4	T	T	D	D	D*	D*
Wight	20	19	16	13	10	7	4	T	T	D	D	D*
Ghast	-	20	19	16	13	10	7	4	T	T	D	D
Wraith	-	-	20	19	16	13	10	7	4	T	T	D
Mummy	-	-	-	20	19	16	13	10	7	4	T	T
Spectre	-	-	-	-	20	19	16	13	10	7	4	T
Vampire	-	-	-	-	-	20	19	16	13	10	7	4
Ghost	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	19	16	13	10	7
Lich	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	19	16	13	10
Special	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	19	16	13

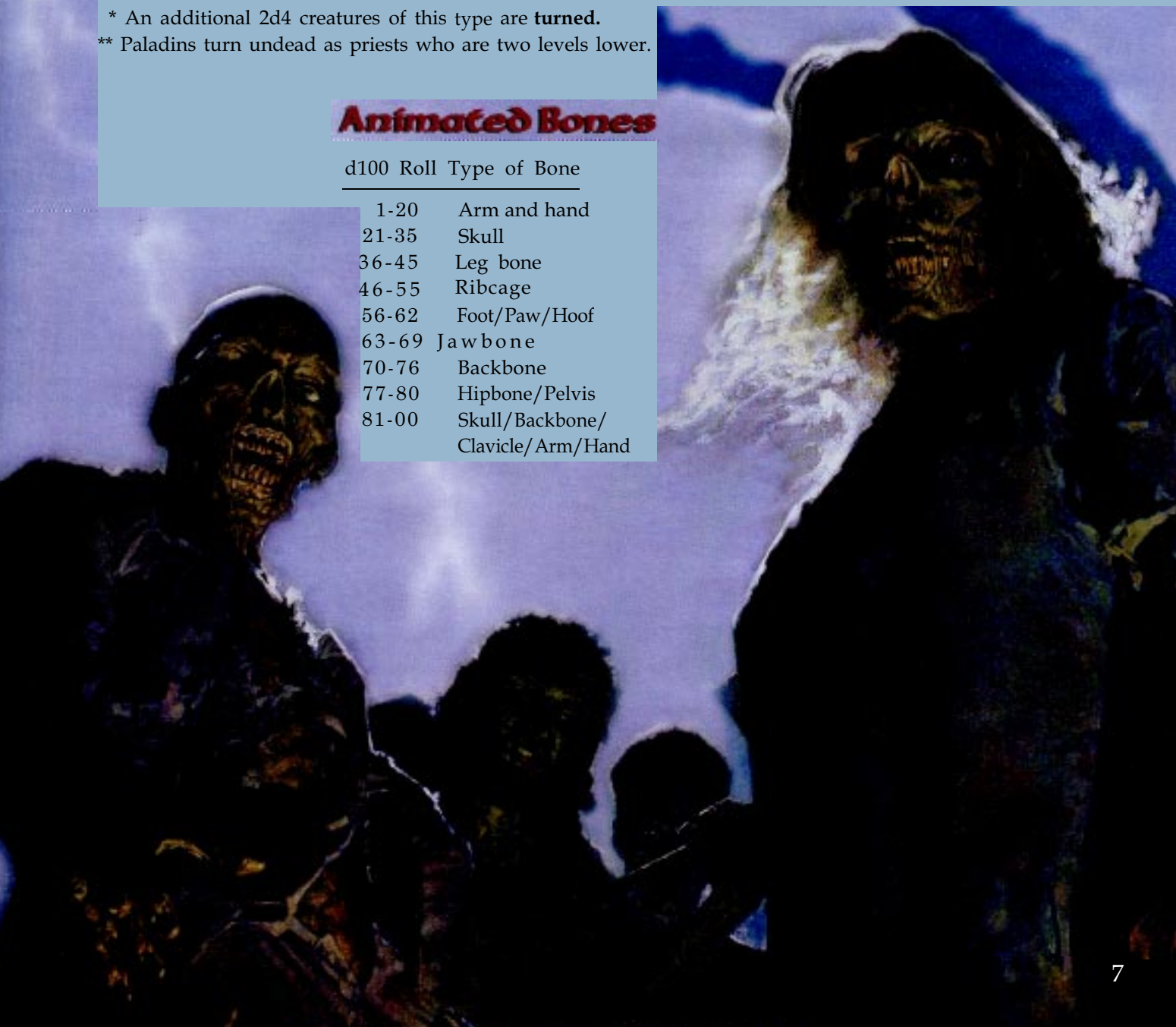
* An additional 2d4 creatures of this type are **turned**.

** Paladins turn undead as priests who are two levels lower.

Animated Bones

d100 Roll Type of Bone

1-20	Arm and hand
21-35	Skull
36-45	Leg bone
46-55	Ribcage
56-62	Foot/Paw/Hoof
63-69	Jawbone
70-76	Backbone
77-80	Hipbone/Pelvis
81-00	Skull/Backbone/ Clavicle/Arm/Hand







Elminster's

Ecologies

Appendix I

The Battle of Bones Hill of Lost Souls

Ask the average dull peasant when and where the Battle of Bones took place and likely he will scratch his head and stammer that it was in the year 1090 Dale Reckoning, at a battlefield bordering on the southwest edge of Anauroch, the Great Desert. And that afterwards, the humans and their allies camped on the slopes of the Hill of Lost Souls, which has since been abandoned to all but the spirits of the fallen.

As if great wars erupted full-blown and ceased again in an instant's time! As if the places so named had no meaning before or after their enrollment in the savage carnage and waste we call war!

So begin Rolanda Invenweigh's and Tharnn Greenwinter's treatises on the regions surrounding these two famous sites. These individuals were hand-picked by Elminster himself to share everything they know about these two places, revealing tidbits of information about the land itself and its inhabitants today—information that just might save the life of an adventurer or two.

Between these covers are expansion booklets for the Elminster's Ecologies series, containing:

- ecological features of The Battle of Bones region,
- the Hill of Lost Souls region, and
- a complete set of encounter charts

These materials follow the same format as the original *Elminster's Ecologies* boxed set and mesh with it perfectly. Elminster himself has even thrown in a few personal notes. So read on, traveler, and learn all the secrets of these mysterious locales!

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