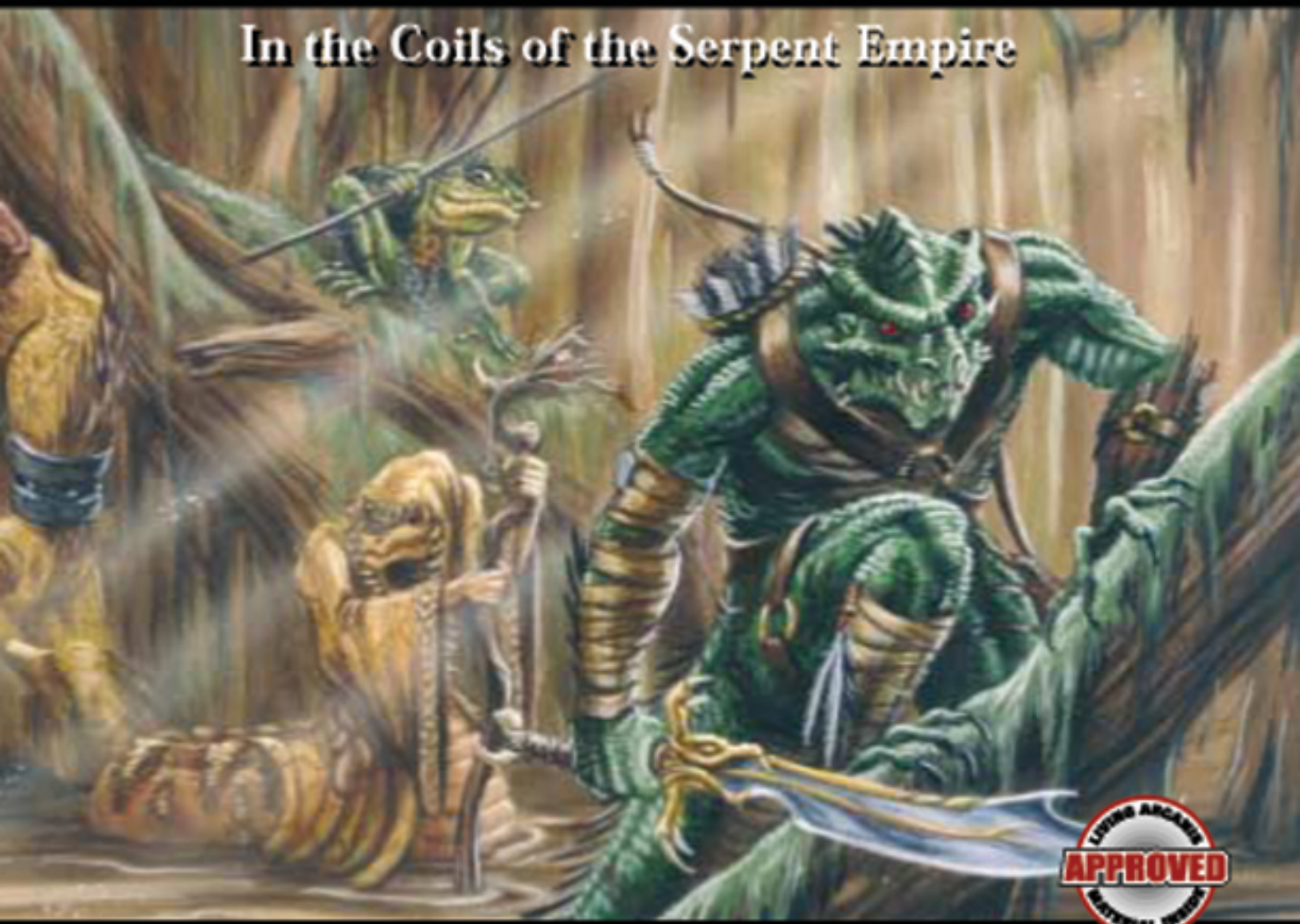


Arcanis

THE WORLD OF
SHATTERED EMPIRES™

Ssethregore

In the Coils of the Serpent Empire



Duane M Choquette





Ssethregore

In the Coils of the Serpent Empire

Cover: Paul (Prof) Herbert

Author: Duane M Choquette

Artists: Reece Ambrose, Dave Bezzina, Anthony Grabski, David Griffeth, Craig Henderson, Paul "Prof" Herbert, Eric Lofgren, Bradley K. McDevitt, Hian Rodriguez, Richard Pace, Jason Walton, and Roel Wielinga

Cartographer: Richard Pace

Editors: Adrian Estergaard, David Hernandez, M. Sean Molley, Derrel Weaver

Layout: Philip J. Reed and Gene Seabolt

Art Direction: Nelson Rodriguez

Additional Material: Rene Alfonso, David Lopez, Henry Lopez

Team Paradigm: Henry Lopez, Nelson Rodriguez, Eric Wiener, Peter Barrenechea, Matt Blank, Jim Beck

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INTRODUCTION

Lizardmen. Snakemen. Scalyfolk. Ssethrics.

Regardless of what they are named, these ancient reptilian horrors haunt the dim, dark jungles of the mind, representing primal fears stretching back to the forgotten origins of man. Prowling on taloned feet, hunting the newer races with cold, calculating precision, these cold-blooded reavers possess an emotionless consciousness that is completely alien to the mindset of the civilized human. They are races of a timeless terror, possessing eldritch magic from when the world was young, and an insatiable appetite for the warm flesh of sentient beings; the ideal nemeses for any campaign.

Within these pages we present a complete picture of the Empire of Ssethregore, the glorious jewel of the shining south, an ancient Empire of Scalykind, which experienced the heights of civilization when primitive humans still crawled about in the mud. It is an Empire bound by adventure and intrigue, dangerous creatures and deadly adversaries, decadent cities and ghost haunted ruins, all hidden beneath the leafy boughs of a lush jungle canopy. Within its borders players may find deadly foes or staunch allies, as they explore an alien culture unlike any they have seen before.

What This Book Is

Ssethregore: In the Coils of the Serpent Empire is a comprehensive guide to all things reptilian. It describes the rise and fall of a reptilian empire in great detail, highlighting the biology, society, culture, and mindset of the various reptilian races that reside within. It is meant to be a tool for gamemasters, players, and anyone who would like to evolve their Lizardmen from the standard swamp-dwelling barbarous foes, to deadly and powerful adversaries with a rich heritage and alien culture.

This product is set in the world of Arcanis, a vibrant and varied world of adventure and deception. If you do not play within the Arcanis world, do not worry, for the secular nature of the Empire makes it easy to supplant it somewhere in your own campaign world. A game master needs only to locate a large tropical forest or jungle and voila, the Empire of Ssethregore is born.

About the Author

Duane Choquette grew up in a small county town in Massachusetts, where he developed a love for the outdoors at an early age. As he went through high school, the author became fascinated with reptiles and immersed himself in their study. In college, he pursued a career in Herpetology, the study of reptiles and amphibians and has gone on to receive a Bachelor's degree in Evolutionary and Organismic Biology and a Master's Degree in Evolutionary Biology. Turning his creative energies to the realm of fantasy, he has woven his expertise in reptiles into an unparalleled product of depth and detail. Appearance, physiology, ecology, and biology have all been taken into consideration, molding not just a carbon copy of other fantasy products, but breathing life and authenticity into an empire of reptilian beings in a way no other author could.

Glossary Of Terms

Infidel: Any sentient creature that worships a god (or gods) that do not belong to the same pantheon or faith that you believe in.

Known Lands: This refers to the section of the continent of Onara in which the Ssethregoran Empire, Coryani Empire, Khitani Empire, the Vastwoods, and the other various human lands now exist. It stretches from the Godwall in the north to Ssethregore in the south, the Pale Sea in the east and the Sea of Lanterns in the west.

Sahuagin: These Fish-like beings live in the deep waters of Arcanis.

Old Empire: Referring to the ancient Empire of Yahssremore, from whose ruins rose current day Ssethregore.

Onara: This is the main continent on the world of Arcanis.

Pinkskins: A derogatory term used to describe humans (coined by the Ssethregoran in reference to their appearance as "Hairless Apes".)

Pleisaurians: A shallow-water aquatic Ssethric race that resembles a cross between a fish, a crocodile, and a Ss'ressen.

Rhamphorike: A small Ssethric race that possesses pterodactyl-like wings instead of front limbs

Ssanu: Often referred to as "Snakemen" by humans, the Ssanu sport a humanoid torso, a snake-like head, and lower coils.

Ssethric: A term referring to all humanoid reptilian races including, but not limited to, Kobolds, Nagas, Ssanu, Ss'ressen, Troglodytes, and Pleisaurans.

Ssethregore, Empire of: The Ssethregoran Empire is the present day realm of Ssethric beings that rule over the jungles of the south.

Ssethregoran: Any race belonging to the Ssethregoran Empire.

Ss'ressen: Called Lizardmen or "Lizardfolk" by humans, the Ss'ressen are reptilian humanoids akin in appearance to lizards. There are several subspecies of Ss'ressen divided into "egg clutches." All Ss'ressen are bipedal and sport a tail.

Warmbloods: A Ssethric term for all mammalian creatures. Sentient warmbloods are the preferred food of many Ssethrics.

Yahssremore, Empire of: See "Old Empire."

TIMELINE



-10,000	Great Migration begins
-9500-9473	First contact with the Gar Ormal, Issori War
-9474	Gar Ormal enslaved
	Foundation of the Old Empire of Yahssremore
	Capitol city of Yahssremore built upon the ruins of the Issori Capitol
-9200	Ssanu develop Technomancy
	1 st Tower of Gettulus raised in Yahssremore
-9000-7000	Era of Expansion
-8702	Creation of servitor races: Rhamphorikes, Koblds, etc
-8535-8520	Locanth War
	Yahssremore allies with the Sahuagin
-7945-7915	Psi-War
	Extermination of Halflings
	Psionic potential discovered and nurtured in the Naga and Ssanu
-7000	Yahssremore is at the apex of its power
-6804	Il'huan War begins
-6700	Elorii are created and become servants of Yahssremore
-6321	Pleisaurans discovered and brought into the Empire
-6202	Il'huan War ends
-5863	Hylis annexed into the Empire
-5738	Slave revolt results in the crumbling of the Empire
-5710	Elorii City of Belestor founded on the ruins of Yahssremore
-5700	Under the leadership of Sseth, the Ssethregoran Empire is founded
-5690	City of Sseth raised on shores of Lake Quesselan
-5630	2 nd tower of Gettulus raised in city of Sseth
-5612	Dark Nagas of House Kahss make first contact with the Varn
-5480	Kasseгоре and Yig inexplicably disappear
	Return of Ssethric forces to Belestor and subsequent defeat
	Naga lead coup against the Ssanu and Emperor Sseth
-5478-3440	Age of Decadence
-5000	Kasseгоре and Yig re-establish contact with their loyal followers;
	Cult of Hromu and Daughters of the Hidden Adder are founded
-3800	Arrival of the Other and His followers to the shores of Onara
-3056	First contact with Voiceless Ones
-2100	Dragon War begins
-1810	Celestial Giants make a pact with the Human Gods; The Valinor enter the war
-1776	Jeggag Sag falls and the last of the dragons are defeated
-100	Altherians arrive upon peninsula
-35	Time of Terror begins
0	Rising of the Wall of the Gods
39	Expansion into Southern Continent
620	High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus takes control of the Black Talon Egg Clutch
625	Black Talon exodus from Ssethregore
640	Black Talon renegades find sanctuary under Old Coryan and rename themselves the Ghost Scales
651	Black Talons settle in Sulphur Marsh under watchful eye of nearby Humans
804	Black Talons ratify treaty with newly formed country of Milandir
916	Under the leadership of a young priestess named Crespsis, Black Talon dissidents leave the Sulphur marsh and migrate to Nier's Spine, forming the Ashen Hide
1025	Ssethric forces test the defenses of the human city of Semar
1027	Current Year

Chapter One

THE RISE AND FALL OF AN EMPIRE

The aged Matriarch leaned heavily upon her unshod staff as she made her way towards the basalt edifice before her. She was ancient in terms of her species; the luster of her scales had been lost long ago to the ravages of time, the verdant green of youth now replaced with the dull gray of age. Her hide was adorned with bits of unshed skin that clung to the edges of her scales. Her talons were brittle and cracked. Yet, within the slitted golden orbs of her eyes shone a deep ambition and clarity of purpose as deadly as the day she inherited her position. Her eyes rose to greet the ten Emerald Scale Ss'ressen guarding the great bronze doors, their battle-scarred forms resplendent in bright steel breastplates. Upon seeing her approach, the ten dropped to one knee and saluted. Ss'itana, Matriarch Mother to the Emerald Scale Ss'ressen Egg Clutch, gazed upon the bas-relief brazen doors and with a tiny imperious gesture ordered the portals opened. The guards stirred to the grate of metal, the massive portals swinging outward, revealing the warm dull red interior within. Without pausing, Matriarch Ss'itana patiently strode into the open archway as the doors ground ominously shut behind her.

The inside of the chamber was sweltering. A vast furnace positioned in the center of the ashen chamber was being stoked periodically by a wretched goblin chained to an iron post. The remainder of the room was barren, with the exception of a large round dais covered in straw. An iron latticework, forged in the shapes of fantastic draconic creatures, enclosed the rostrum, shielding the small bodies kept within. As Ss'itana entered the chamber, her eyes immediately found the infant forms, their young scales glistening with an emerald sheen as the last rays of the setting sun filtered through the thick crystal skylight far overhead. Quickly, she counted the young Ss'ressen, fifteen there were in total. Momentarily alarmed, she counted again, searching for the sixteenth youngling, a small and weak male. Her eyes fell upon a gore-soaked patch of straw, then across the other youngsters, and finally came to rest upon the largest female, for a tiny bit of dried blood clung to her jaw line. Ss'itana stared into the youngster's eyes and was met with a defiant stare. A toothy grin split the old lizard's maw; this one would bear watching for the priesthood. Leaning her staff against the wall, the Matriarch settled down on a warm iron bench and turned to address the hatchlings.

"Gather round, for it is time your education began," said Ss'itana. "Today you learn about our proud race and our beginnings upon the face of this world." Obediently, the fifteen small hatchlings crowded over to the metal lattice and settled down into the straw. They had heard many stories before, but this was the first time the revered Matriarch herself had come to address them. With the ruddy light of the furnace reflecting off her patchy scales, the Matriarch began. "In the beginning there was nothing. The stars were nonexistent, planets were absent, and where our universe now thrives, only a vast void existed. Yet, if one looked closely, striating the void were motes of color swirling in chaotic patterns. It was from this muddled fabric of the universe that our Lord Kassegore was formed, bringing order to the chaos and existing where there was once nothing. Looking out upon the vast emptiness, Kassegore reached out his scaled claws. At his com-

mand, the swirling motes of color coalesced, forming the first world, this world, our world, Arcanis. The Great Lord created the stars and sun, providing life-giving warmth to his new world. Kassegore moved out amongst the nothingness, creating countless worlds, stars, and entire galaxies, leaving behind him a wake of existence where there had been only emptiness. Once the Great Lord deemed that enough had been created, he returned to his first world and slept, recuperating from his great labors. For time uncounted the Great Lord slumbered, his divine presence bringing life to the world around him." The Matriarch paused for a moment, watching the hatchlings, making certain that their undivided attention was focused wholly on her. With a gleam in her eye and a remembrance of better times long past, she continued.

"Once Lord Kassegore had concluded his respite, he awoke upon this world. His first act was to look into the heavens and the other worlds he had created. Those that were distasteful to him were devoured, returning to the essence of the Great Lord. Still others were created to replace the ones destroyed and the cycle began anew. Lord Kassegore's attention fell upon the world around him. During his great slumber life had sprung, small crawling things, scaled things, furred things, and all types of green things that loved the sun, but it was the Ssethric shapes that pleased him most, for they were alike to his true form. The Great Lord traveled across our world, observing all things of his creation. From mountain peaks, to jungle valleys, and over the dry deserts he strode, reveling in what his powers of creation had brought to this world. It was during these travels, in the lands we call Yahssremore, that the Great Lord's gaze first fell upon her – Yig the Life Bringer. Her sinuous coils looped across the fertile planes, as she lounged languidly in the sun. Upon viewing Yig's divine form, Lord Kassegore was filled with an incredible lust for this scaled splendor locked within his gaze. Our Lord moved toward Yig, but she was fast and devious. With a flick of her tail she sent a cloud of earth high into the sky and then dashed over the horizon. Kassegore was not to be misled, however. Her scent was thick and cloying in the Lord's nostrils; a great chase ensued. The two raced over the world, circling it thrice before Kassegore finally caught Yig. Their lust and passion were great, for alike they were, but also opposites, one the embodiment of destruction, the other creation. It is from this first union that the true dragons sprang, the immortal children of our Lord Kassegore and his consort Yig.

"The dragons spread across Onara, and under the tutelage of the Great Lord became powerful in their own right. Blessed were the first children of Kassegore, for through their loins new races were spawned. Of all their spawn, only the true dragons and their great drake descendants rose to the heights of majesty and influence, for the dragons are the most potent living beings on all of Onara. On mountain peaks and forest valleys they dwelt, their rule extending from the steamy swamplands of the south to the frigid regions of the north. They were the children of Kassegore and knew no weakness. The dragons were the true rulers of their domains, encountering little resistance for time uncounted, until the appearance of the Jotuns... but that story is for another day.



"Lord Kassegore watched his children grow and spread. Proud he was of their grace and power, yet their minds were sharp, complete from the moment of their inception. He looked upon the dragons once more and though they were in part his creation and Yig's as well, a longing came over the Great Lord. A longing to teach, to be worshipped, to create a form wholly his own in body and soul. To that end Lord Kassegore gathered his energies and exerted his will. From the earth itself Kassegore crafted these new forms, models of his own image. These new vessels were the progenitors of our race, the first Ss'ressen. Kassegore took from his own essence and for each body crafted a soul that was bound to him for all time. The Great Lord set these vessels down upon the earth, whereupon onto each of these bodies Yig breathed mortal life. The Ss'ressen stood atop the world, eyes blinking upon their creator. Kassegore looked down at these creations and named them "Viridiss," the Ss'ressen of the Emerald Scale. Motioning with one expansive limb he gestured out over the horizon and proclaimed that the world was theirs. He spoke of how his divine will created them and that upon their deaths their bodies would crumble, but their souls would return to him where they would be devoured. From these souls he would forge those of the next generation and Yig would provide mortal life to each body, for she was the essence of fertility and reproduction. Henceforth, Kassegore was known as our Lord, the Great Devourer, and his Consort Yig, the Life Bringer.

"From that moment on our ancestors toiled upon Onara, hunting freely across the land, for there were no others to challenge their supremacy. The Great Lord watched over his creations, guiding, but rarely taking a personal hand. Upon our creation The Great Lord grants each one of us our

strength and wits, and expects us to face any challenges of this world with tooth and claw. For if we are not worthy of existence, then we will be destroyed, but if we are strong and unwavering in our faith, then we will be granted a good long life full of pleasures and virtue. Time uncounted passed, and our people grew strong. Only the dragons held a higher position in the eyes of our Lord, yet many of these great wyrms became allies of our growing civilization. Our ancestors basked in the luxurious warmth of the primeval sun, bloated on the great pleasures and bounty we had. Unfortunately this would not last forever.

"Yig watched our people grow and develop, studying our rites of devotion to our Great Lord and growing jealous of our loyalty and faith. She questioned why she did not deserve worship and attention as well? Try as she might, none of our ancestors would venerate her higher than Kassegore, for even though we acknowledged her divine presence and invoked her in times of breeding, it was the great Kassegore who held our souls. Yig's devious mind began to hatch a plan. Afraid to incur the wrath of our Lord, in secret she worked, attempting to craft ss'ressen of her own. She molded these creatures in her own image, pouring a fraction of her divine essence into their being, but Yig was unskilled at the task, and when the creatures awoke, they were foul and twisted. As they looked up at her perfect form and gleaming coils, they fell to their knees, simpering pathetically. Yig was disgusted at these failures and quickly cast them out of her presence. As they spread upon the world, the Great Lord spied them. Looking upon these miserable creatures, he deduced what had happened. Smiling, he pondered a way to turn Yig's mistake to his own advantage. Kassegore reached out with godly talons and captured the pathetic beings. They huddled together, unable to look at his holy form. Kassegore spoke to them, promising to

change their wretched bodies and give them purpose if they swore themselves wholly to him. The creatures fell to their faces and groveled in the dirt, supplicating to the Great Lord, surrendering themselves to his will. With a gesture, excruciating pain washed over the creatures as Kassegore rebuilt them. Through the haze of pain the creatures watched as limbs lengthened, bones thickened, and their repulsive incomplete forms were replaced with one more pleasing to the Great Lord. Lastly, he tore out their souls, devouring them, mixed the pieces with one another, and finally reformed them, tempering each with his essence. The pain ceased and the creatures marveled at their new forms. Alike unto us they were, but not as strong or as powerful, for they were lesser creations to begin with. Kassegore then named his newest children Troglodytes and set them loose upon the world.

"Soon after our races met, it became apparent that we were superior, both mentally and physically. An alliance was forged between our two races, the troglodytes taking positions in society that we deemed less important or distasteful. Yet, the troglodytes bred more rapidly than our own race, most likely due to the influences of Yig, and within a few generations approached our numbers. They began to form colonies of their own, spreading across the landscape. Our two races would probably have continued as mutual allies from that point on, if it were not for the influence of the ssanu."

"After Yig's failure, Kassegore brooded over his mate. Perfect in form she was, striking and desirable and her cool, devious mind was delightful. With her recent disappointment and the subsequent triumph of our Lord, she fled from him and lay far from his grace, not yearning for his presence, or perhaps unwilling to face him. Desiring to heal the wound between them, (for soon the breeding seasons would arrive and with it his lust) The Great Lord hatched a scheme to close the rift. For the third time he crafted, creating a third race. This race was different than us or the trogs, for this race was crafted in the image of Yig, as a gift to court her once again. To this end the serpentine creatures called Ssanu were created. Kassegore traveled to the east to present his new creations to Yig and she was pleased, for the ssanu were alike to her, devious and cunning, and strong in the arcane arts. Both Kassegore and Yig nurtured this new race, and it was many generations before our expanding population encountered them. Thus began our greatest struggle, a struggle that continues to this day. The ssanu are highly intelligent and sly, and even though our races met under a flag of peace, it soon became apparent that the ss'ressen received the sour end of every deal. Still we persevered and continually fought against the laws set down by the ssanu. The trogs, however, found that they were no match for the ssanu, and became quite willing to do their bidding.

"Our Ssethric populations continued to expand, and our cultures blended, despite our differences, for it became apparent that Kassegore had created each race with certain advantages. The foundations of a coalition were formed, with representatives of each race at its head. Allied as we were with the other two races, we expanded across our part of the world, learning metallurgy and other skills. The troglodytes were the most devout, dedicating themselves body and soul to the Great Lord in every thought and action. The ssanu were less religious, worshipping both Kassegore and Yig. They found themselves more interested in this new craft they had discovered – magic. It was the ssanu that first discovered the art of the arcane from their dealings with the dragons. Our race spent time equally between both the religious and arcane arts, but true masters we were at combat and the creation of weapons. Eventually our population grew to the point where expansion was needed and the fateful order came."

"Time uncounted passed and we basked in our own achievements. We expanded and grew, and though there were skirmishes between our race and the other two, somehow we held together, united in these times of relative peace. Then came the day when Kassegore summoned all the races together in one place and appeared before us. He said the time had come for us to claim our destiny as the rulers of this world. We were to gather up our weapons of war and migrate to the east, where fertile hunting grounds and the promised lands awaited. There we would come across hardship and pain, but if we remained strong in our faith, then great rewards would be ours. A great cheer erupted from the assembled masses, for our priests had predicted this day for many centuries. Scattering to our settlements, the Ssethric peoples gathered their belongings and began the long trek to the east... but that is a story for another night."

The aged ss'ressen stood and stretched her old bones. Gathering up her staff, she turned to the hatchlings: "Remember, young ones, the Great Lord watches over us even now, and though the road may be hard, if our faith in the Great Lord remains strong, we shall eventually triumph."

As she turned to depart, a small voice piped up, "But I thought Kassegore was dead?"

The Matriarch froze in her tracks. Slowly she turned to face the hatchlings. Her gaze, smoldering with a dangerous gleam, fell upon the large female. The young ss'ressen cringed and fell back under the Matriarch's cold, fury-filled gaze. The old ss'ressen spoke softly, but the tone of her words cut like a knife's edge. *"Who spoke such lies to you?"*

Trembling in fear, the young female raised a finger and pointed at the goblin slave stoking the fire across the room. The Matriarch whirled on the goblin, as it shrieked in fear and tugged at its chain. Like lightning, the Matriarch hurtled across the room, her taloned hand picking up the hapless creature by the throat. Her fingers squeezed and bit deep into the goblin's struggling body, its tongue forced from its mouth as it gagged on its own blood. The goblin's tongue had been removed as was customary, but the job had been done hastily and a small remnant remained. Frowning, the Matriarch squeezed. The sound of bones breaking was audible across the chamber. With one wrench, she broke the chain and tore the corpse free. Turning back to the hatchlings, her steely gaze settled upon them. In a threatening undertone she spoke: "Never believe the lies of your enemy, for all seek our downfall. *Kassegore is alive!* Never forget that."

The hatchlings cowered under the straw as the Matriarch strode from the chamber. She tossed the dead goblin at the feet of one of the guards. "Replace this one – and make sure the next one cannot speak, or your existence is forfeit." Pointing to the corpse, she added: "Feed that one to the kobolds. It is unworthy of our consumption."

The Matriarch turned once more to the open archway and strode away into the night without looking back.

The Great Migration

In ages past, farther back than even the oldest Ssanu can remember, there was a golden age upon the world; an age so long buried under the weight of time that even the ancient dusty grimoires of power preserved in the Tower of Gettulus barely hint at its existence. In this forgotten age, the various Ssethric races clawed their way out from the primordial ooze. There, in a fabled land far to the south, they were nurtured; they evolved at the feet of their very Gods. They existed in



a warm, lush land where game was plentiful and one could bask all day in the warm bright sun. The Great Lord Kassegore and his mate Yig lived among their creations, teaching them, fostering them, and bringing the various races out of their infancy. Time had no meaning in this golden age of the Gods, and none can tell how long those early ssanu, ss'ressen, and troglodytes basked in that primordial sun, under the watchful gaze of their deities. In their paradise, time immemorial passed, but it was not to last, for even paradise is not eternal.

Though the land was fruitful, slowly, almost imperceptibly, it began to grow cooler. Lakes began to dry up, jungles became forests, and lush plains grew cold with winds issuing from the south. The Ssethric races became worried and turned to their gods, begging them to banish the cold. Their cries fell upon unresponsive ears, for Kassegore would not be swayed by their pleas. The Great Lord told his creations that a new era had begun and that they must move to the north, to the warmer climes. Kassegore promised his children that there they would find a new paradise better than the old – but only if they were strong enough to conquer it. Kassegore blessed his creations one last time and took a step to the north, his vast bulk depressing the ground where he strode. With that, Kassegore and Yig left their people to prepare the north for their coming, but at the last instant Yig turned and addressed them. The Goddess informed the peoples that to follow in their wake was the path to life, and to stray was to die. Seeing no alternative and encouraged by their Gods' words, the ssanu, troglodytes, and ss'ressen gathered their belongings and began the grueling trek to the north. Their way was perilous, but the path was easy to follow, for it had been marked by the very footsteps of Kassegore, in the form of smoking craters upon the earth. Along the journey many of the Ssethrics strayed from the path, growing tired of the constant toil, settling in tiny pockets across the land. What became of these lost souls has been forgotten in the fog of time. The main body remained strong, however, and through a joint coalition of leaders from all three races, the Ssethric peoples persevered and arrived at their destination. Rounding an inland sea and striking north along a majestic river, the footsteps finally ceased and the last leg of their journey was complete. The Ssethric peoples had arrived upon a fertile plain that stretched in all directions for as far as the eye could see. Here was to be the heart of their new kingdom, a warm and luxuriant land ripe with possibilities. The Gods had not deceived them; they had arrived upon paradise on earth. But, there was a fly in the ointment, for someone was already there.

The Gar Ormal and the Issori War

The various Ssethric races soon set up encampments and built settlements along the southern edge of this vast and mysterious expanse, its waves of undulating grass stretching for untold miles in all directions. Their settlement did not go unnoticed, nor were they unchallenged. Numerous times were they drawn into battles, small skirmishes upon the outskirts of their new domain, and in these struggles the Ssethrics held their own.

The various Ssethric races had barely been settled in their new home for more than a generation or two when the native inhabitants of the northern half of the plains were first encountered. They came under a flag of truce and made offerings of game to the Ssethrics. These warm-blooded humanoids with thick muscles, gray skin, bestial faces and jutting lower tusks were looked upon as brutes by the Ssethric peoples. Calling themselves the Gar Ormal, these new neighbors came with offers of peace and alliance, claiming that a greater threat loomed on the

horizon. The Gar Ormal were a nomadic people with a proud shamanistic heritage; they worshipped primal nature spirits and were one with the world around them. Their kingdom was vast, stretching across the plains. The Gar Ormal had watched the arrival of the Ssethric peoples from afar, studied their hunting practices, and judged their use of the world around them as fair and good. The Ssethrics accepted their neighbors with more curiosity than fear, and welcomed their offering of peace.

The Gar Ormal chieftain, a giant specimen named Rul Marrowdrinker, explained that a growing threat had appeared upon the plain over a century ago. At first the interlopers had established only a minor colony on the outer edge, but over time these beings had expanded with alarming speed and soon struck out from their strange city to ravage the Gar Ormal with surprising ferocity. The Chieftain referred to these invaders as the Issori, a race of strange insect-like beings akin to common ants and wasps, but larger in size and incredibly strong. The Ssethrics heard the Chieftain's words and indeed knew of the threat, for they had run across the bizarre insect beings themselves, and had been forced to do battle with them. The Ssethric leaders listened late into the night as the Gar Ormal Chieftain's story unfolded. By the light of the dawning sun, the Ssethric leaders were resolute in their decision to ally themselves with the Gar Ormal in order to dispose of this mutual threat.

For twenty-six years, the combined forces of the Ssethrics and the Gar Ormal battled the Issori. Slowly, the alliance drove their enemy from their lands, causing the Issori main force to retreat into its massive hive city of Dar'algha. The Ssethrics and the Gar Ormal plotted and planned, scouting the enemy's defenses, preparing a final assault. It was decided that the Gar Ormal would attack from the east, with the rising sun at their backs. The Gar Ormal shamans would call upon earth spirits to weaken the eastern walls of the city, for that would force the Issori to meet the allied force upon the plains or risk having their weakened eastern walls overrun. When the Issori had committed themselves, the Ssethrics would attack en masse from the south and attempt to cut their force off from the city. The plan was simple and straightforward, for the Gar Ormal believed that the simplest tactics work best.

On that fabled morning nine thousand and seventy-three years ago, the fate of an empire was decided. A race would die and from its ashes a new dominion would rise, a dominion that would reign for untold millennia. As the sun rose to the east, the horns of the Gar Ormal sounded with songs of war, as ten thousand Gar Ormal set forth upon their riding beasts – the fearsome wargs – and charged the outer walls. Chief Marrowdrinker, mounted upon Scal, the greatest of the black wargs, gave the command and the shamans released their magic. The eastern escarpment rumbled, began to crack, and slowly crumbled. The Issori, realizing the threat, came boiling out of their city like a horde of termites. They poured onto the plain of battle, thousands upon thousands armed to the teeth with exotic weapons that glistened in the morning light. Chief Marrowdrinker looked upon their numbers and despaired, for the Gar Ormal and the Ssethrics had vastly miscalculated the Issori' numbers. The horde of Issori threatened to surround and engulf the entire Gar Ormal force. Still, the plan had worked. The Issori were out in the open and the Ssethrics were safely hidden to the south. With a loud cry and a blast of his war horn, Chief Marrowdrinker ordered his people to charge. Straight into the oncoming horde did the Gar Ormal rush and the two great forces smashed together upon the grassy plain. Heavy war clubs cracked open ruddy exoskeletons, while tearing claws and sharp mandibles dragged down warg and rider alike. The carnage was appalling. Both blood and limb were spilt upon the ground, as the sounds of war provided a final requiem for a dying people.



The Issori were relentless, swarming around the smaller forces of the Gar Ormal and tearing at them without mercy. Chief Marrowdrinker raised his horn once more and gave the second signal. Looking to the south, he listened for the answering cry that would herald the arrival of the Ssethrics and a hope for victory. No reply came. In vain he blew the signal again, and again, and again, but no answer was to come. The Ssethrics were nowhere to be seen, and only the morning fog lay upon the plain. The Chieftain quailed, for without reinforcements, the sheer numbers of the enemy would slowly overpower his valiant warriors. There was no retreat. The Issori had completely surrounded the Gar Ormal with their unyielding force. As a final defiant act, the Chieftain took up his mystic broadsword *Heart eater*, bellowed forth a stalwart war cry, and led his people into the teeth of the waiting fray. For an hour, the forces of the Gar Ormal were unmercifully ground into the dirt, until only a few hundred remained, for no matter how many Issori they slew, more would arrive, until it seemed as if the entire Issori population had poured onto these plains of blood. All Chief Marrowdrinker could do was watch as the last death throes of his once-numerous people echoed mournfully in the breeze. Leaning upon his sword, he took a moment to wipe the blood and gore from his face, only to pause an instant later. The morning air to the south had brought an unexpected gift, the deep resonant note of bronze horns.

The fog to the south, which had been steadily encroaching upon the field, suddenly vanished and in its place stood tens of thousands of Ssethric warriors. Troglodytes, ss'ressen, and ssanu stood in massive formations that stretched off as far as the eye could see, threatening to touch the horizon itself. Chief

Marrowdrinker was taken aback by the sheer numbers of Ssethrics that had arrived upon the battlefield. With a singular united roar of anger, the massive force banged their weapons upon their shields and charged the horde of Issori. The insectoid creatures disregarded the Gar Ormal for a moment, and attempted to array their forces against the charge. The great wedge of reptilian might, spearheaded by a group of fearsome ss'ressen that stood over ten feet tall, shattered the enemy line. Chief Marrowdrinker watched for an instant, for an instant was all it took to change the battle completely. Green-scaled, ebony-clawed ss'ressen mixed with rust-hide troglodytes and the rest of the inexorable force, crashing through the Issori ranks, leaving only carnage in their wake. The reinforcements had most definitely arrived! Raising his battered war horn, Chief Marrowdrinker rang forth a mighty call and his troop of ragged, blood-soaked warriors once again entered the fray. It was time to pay the butcher's bill...

Leaning upon a spear shaft to support his broken leg, Chief Marrowdrinker stood alone, breathing the scented air of victory. His gaze gently passed over the carnage wrought forth that day. Mountains of Gar Ormal corpses mingled with Issori bodies and scaly reptilian cadavers to form a potent memorial to the dead. Victory had been achieved, but at what price? Behind him, the few hundred remaining Gar Ormal warriors were helping the wounded into litters for the trip home and burning the bodies of those who would never ride again. Before him, the Ssethrics, having annihilated the Issori army, swept into the city like a green flood, killing all they found there. Under the direction of the ssanu, the massive Issori queen (her bloated body fully fifty feet long) was dragged from her palace and hurled down onto the battlefield, where she was slowly roasted over a massive bonfire and feasted on by the surviving Ssethrics. Chief Marrowdrinker gazed upon the scene a final time before hobbling back to his trusty warg. "What horrors have I unleashed," he muttered to himself. Unbeknownst to him, his people would not be long in finding out.

The Great Betrayal

Barely one year had passed since the Issori War. The Gar Ormal had returned to their villages, dressed their wounds, and attempted to rebuild from the ravages of war. The surviving Ssethric horde had usurped the ruins of the Issori city of Dar'alguh, claiming it as their own and renaming it Yahssremore. Yass, the leading ssanu General, had led the Ssethric peoples to victory with his flawlessly executed plan combining magic and subterfuge. In response, the Ssethrics had chosen Yass to serve as temporary Governor. His first task was to oversee the construction of a new city atop the ruins of the old. This position eventually led to Yass becoming the first Ssethric Emperor of Yahssremore nearly two centuries later.

The Gar Ormal did not have to wait long for the prophetic words of the aging Chief Marrowdrinker to come to pass. The Ssethric peoples of Yahssremore, under the leadership of Governor Yass, broke the truce and struck out in the night, simultaneously raiding all the Gar Ormal encampments at once. The Gar Ormal, their numbers reduced horribly during the Issori War, were no match



for the innumerable Ssethric troops. One by one the villages were ravaged. The weak were killed; the strong were placed in chains and carted away to Yahssremore, for slaves were needed. Governor Yass had a grand vision, and to implement it, he needed a labor force much larger than that of his current population. Inevitably, the Ssethrics captured or killed the vast majority of the Gar Ormal, forming a pool of slaves that still exists in one form or another to this day.

Under the leadership of Chief Marrowdrinker, a contingent of a few hundred Gar Ormal broke away from the plains and fled to the southwest. Their kind would not be seen again upon Onara for many millennia to come.

As for the pitiful Gar Ormal who were enslaved, millennia of selective breeding and experimentation were inflicted upon that original stock. Over time, they become unrecognizable, their travails changing and twisting these once-noble people into the wretched form they have today: Goblinoids.

Technomancy

Under the leadership of Yass, the newly founded Empire of Yahssremore slowly began to take shape. As the warrior-inclined ss'ressen pushed for expansion, the inquisitive ssanu delved deep into the ruins of the Issori city. Within the city's deep, shadow-filled structures, the ssanu discovered highly advanced forms of eldritch magic, including the first Portal. The magically-inclined ssanu banded together under the direction of Gettulus of Pit Crotalus, and manipulated raw elemental magic to raise the first Black Tower of Gettulus, an imposing structure of black marble with three spires designed to resemble coiled serpents reaching up toward the stars. In this early era, the mage guild, known as the Black Coil, first took shape. Headed by the wise Gettulus, the sorcerous ssanu, along with a few magic-wielding ss'ressen and troglodytes, began to establish the tenets of their guild. Unlike all other Ssethric organizations, the Black Tower of Gettulus is not race-specific; the entire organization is united under the auspices of magic. All who wield such power are allowed within those onyx walls.

The Black Coil slowly built its power base. The mages held themselves separate, though they were allied with the current government of the Empire. The members of the Tower bent all their energies into unlocking the arcane secrets of the Issori technology, and in the process, learned how to build portals of their own, as well as discovering the field of Technomancy. Under the dexterous fingers of the inquisitive yet emotionless mages, thousands of creatures of all sorts were put under the knife. Magic was combined with science and over the centuries the Technomancers perfected their craft. Their early experiments birthed onto the world all manner of horrid aberrations, as well as many of the lesser sentient races of the Empire, including the Rhamphorikes and the Kobolds.

To this day, the only native creatures of Onara with the knowledge of Technomancy are the members of the Black Coil. However, in the modern era, the Empire of Ssethregore has discovered that its current adversaries from within the Lavender Way, the dreaded Voiceless Ones, also possess advanced technologies that rival their own.

The Era of Expansion

For the next two thousand years, the Empire of Yahssremore flourished, advancing its forces the length and breadth of the Known Lands. The Ssethric legions spearheaded north and encountered the ancient boreal forest known as the Vastwood. To the west, they came upon dual mountain ranges, which they exploited for precious minerals and ores that fuel the Ssethric economy to this day. Beyond these mountains, the expansion

took them to a broad flood plain that led to the shores of a shallow sea, rich with fish and other marine life. To the east, the Ssethric troops left the fertile expanse of the plains and followed a river course that ultimately led them to the sea. To the south, the land-hungry Ssethrics soon discovered a broad humid jungle stretching along the primordial shores of the very sea their ancestors had passed in their northward trek two thousand years before.

Meticulously, the Empire of Yahssremore expanded its borders, forming other cities and settlements in these newly discovered areas. In the jungles to the south, the Naga were first encountered and very quickly subsumed into Ssethric society as regional governors of that vast jungle they call the Kraldjur Morass. Centuries later, the ocean to the east yielded the SAHUAGIN, fish-like humanoids that rule over their own empire beneath the sea. Diplomatic relationships with these similarly-minded beings led to a mutual defense treaty that is still in effect today.

The other races encountered by Ssethric forces, however, were not so fortunate. The first to feel the brunt of Ssethric might were the peaceful Merucks and the philosophical Derleth. Both of these races were ground into powder beneath the Ssethric war machine and lost to the ages. The cities of the mountain-dwelling Merucks were broken apart, the finely-shaped blocks of stone carted away by goblinoid slaves to build Ssethric bases in other parts of the world. As for the Derleth, all that remains of them are the various strange green stone ruins that crop up from time to time in the remote areas of the world.

In the year -8375 I.C., the Empire of Yahssremore threw its weight behind its aquatic allies in their ongoing war against the Locanth. The Empire called upon the Black Coil to solve the problem of aquatic combat. Within two years, the first cephalopodic gills and other water-breathing devices were developed and ready for mass construction. The Technomancers had also been experimenting with captured locanth females, and soon created the Lophilus, a brutishly strong servitor race that could breathe underwater and could also exist for short periods on the surface. The lophilus were given to the SAHUAGIN as a gift. Along with hordes of bioengineered troglodytes, the combined force made short work of the locanth, exterminating all their colonies in the Pale Sea.

The Empire of Yahssremore now had complete control of the Known Lands from the Pale Sea in the East, to the Vastwoods in the north, the jungles of Kraldjur Morass in the south, and the Glowing Sea (now known as the Sea of Lanterns) in the west. Ssethric settlements seeded the land, from small military outposts on strategic rivers and mountain passes, to the largest cities on the Nardau, Harakhty, and Corvis rivers. The capitol of Yahssremore was resplendent upon its plateau, its high-spired tower glinting in the sun for a hundred miles in all directions. The Corlathian Mountains to the south were heavily mined, goblin slaves constantly delving deeper and deeper into the mountains in search of rare ores and iron to fuel the Ssethric war machine. There were pockets of resistance from time to time, from the native peoples of different lands, but many of these were destroyed utterly, subjugated for slaves, or existed in such small remote regions that Yahssremore paid them little heed. There was one group that drew the interest of Yahssremore, especially that of the scientists and Technomancers: the almost completely hairless brutish humanoids living in barbaric primitive squalor. Their apparent nakedness to the elements earned them the contemptuous Ssethric nickname "Pinkskins." They were found in the Pricklespur Forest in the dry steppes to the northeast. These creatures called themselves the "Pengik" in their own rude tongue.

Through this Age of Expansion, the Ssethric peoples continued to advance with all the vigor and energy of a new civilization. They reached the heights of technology, mastering both science and engineering, while delving into the secrets of both arcane and divine magics. Their selective breeding programs flourished and all manner of beasts were developed for various purposes. The original Gar Ormal strain had totally vanished, leaving only the various

twisted races of goblinoids as proof their noble race had ever existed. Eventually the gaze of the Ssethric peoples would reach skyward – and not even the other planes of existence would be safe from their voracious appetite for conquest.

The Discovery of Psionics

Not all the races encountered were as easily tractable as the Gar Ormal or as weak as the Meruks. Almost nine thousand years ago, the Empire of Yahsremore made a concerted push to the northwest. Traveling over the Aqtau Mountains they encountered a race like none they had ever seen before. They were small vicious brutes; hairy savages with elongated skulls living in a state of barbarism. Their short stature and uncanny resemblance to the Pinkskins (a fact that Ssethric scholars are still debating to this day) quickly earned them the nickname of “Halflings.” Considered a minor inconvenience, the first patrols that encountered these halflings were ordered to exterminate them utterly. As that first column of ss’ressen advanced, they were met with a malicious surprise, for the halflings were psionic, possessing incredible mental powers. Of that first column of a thousand warriors, only thirty returned to camp that day to report the encounter. This was the start of the Psi-War, a short period in Ssethric history where the Empire of Yahsremore stumbled against the unknown.

The halflings proved to be incredibly resourceful, combining barbaric ferocity with potent mental attacks. Though they took their toll upon the Ssethric military, the halflings were vastly outnumbered. Slowly the Ssethric legions gained the upper hand. Missile weapons proved to be highly effective against the tiny creatures, for their mental powers did not have the range of a good ash bow. As the war progressed, numerous halflings were captured and brought under close guard to the capitol, as gifts for the Tower.

The Technomancers meticulously took these prisoners apart, their cruel knives and scalpels flashing in the torch-lit depths, vivisecting dozens of halflings, searching for the source of their powers. For ten years the war crawled along, as the Ssanu studied the halflings. Rapid experimentation showed that ssanu eggs could be modified so that the resulting offspring would be born with psionic power. Since no more could be learned from the dangerous halflings, the Emperor finally ordered the wholesale extermination of the race. Ninety percent of all Ssethric forces were sent north and within six months every last halfling had been hunted down and destroyed. A throne of halfling skulls was crafted for the Emperor and given to him in celebration of the victory over the little savages.

Though the Psi-War was a mere blip in the overall course of Ssethric history – just another race being driven to extinction – it is important to note that the knowledge gained by the Technomancers from their study of the halflings allowed for the integration of psionics into the Ssethric peoples. This secret was jealously guarded by the ssanu Technomancers and never shared with the other (in their opinion) lesser races. Through this process the ssanu were modified, and though the secret of permanent psionic implantation was lost with the fall of Yahsremore, to this day a small percentage of ssanu are still born with psionic capacity.

The Beginning of the End: The Il’huan War and the Creation of the Elorii

Not much more than a century after the halflings were eliminated, the Empire of Yahsremore reached the pinnacle of its power. Nothing was beyond the scaly grasp of its citizens. The Empire’s might stretched from horizon to horizon and there were none left to challenge its authority. The Ssethric peoples had the run of the land, their gleaming cities scattered far and wide across the earth. The militarily-inclined ss’ressen held sway over the combined Ssethric forces, training troglodytes and specially engineered goblinoids alike in the brutal art of war. The ssanu aristocracy controlled all levels of trade and commerce in the Empire, doling out supplies to the various forces and requisitioning new raw materials. The clerics and priests catered to the masses, preaching prophecies of victory and conquest to the battle-hungry public. The mages delved deep into the arcane arts, mastering the summoning of twisted eldritch creatures from beyond the Material Plane and creating items of immense power unparalleled even today. Deeper and deeper they delved into the world, searching for new discoveries: new creatures to experiment on, new sources of magic, new minerals and ores for the forges. In this frenzy of exploration, the Ssethric peoples uncovered a new source of expansion in the Corlathian Mountains. The mineshafts dug by bugbear slaves reached far beyond the rocky outcroppings, down into the core of Onara. The miners had uncovered regions never before touched by the warm light of the sun.

Breaking through a wall in the deepest tunnel, the hapless miners and their troglodyte overseers stumbled into a vast underground region unlike anything they had ever seen. For hundreds of miles it stretched in all directions, passages carved into the very bedrock, twisted tunnels echoing with only the sounds of dripping water and the eerie cries of the denizens of dark places. The region came to be

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known as the Lavender Way, due to the phosphorescent glow of the moss that grew there in profusion. This vast network of caverns and tunnels stretched underground for untold distances to all corners of Onara. The Ssethrics had found a new domain to colonize, and once again the drive for expansion gripped the Empire. This time however, the Ssethrics would discover that things would be different, for the depths were already owned; owned and ruled by inhabitants more powerful and terrible than anything the Empire had ever encountered before.

It was not long after the first Ssethric battalions were dispatched to explore this new region that they ran across the true terror of these depths. From out of the perpetual blackness came the Il'huan — Hulking, insectoid monstrosities that stretched twelve feet tall. Their iridescent purple exoskeletons glinting in the feeble phosphorescent light, the Il'huan came hurtling out of the tunnels to fall upon the Ssethric columns. Four large multifaceted eyes reflected the surprise and fear in the Ssethric faces as massive arms crushed scaled hides and scissor-like mandibles snipped away armored limbs as if they were made of paper. Worst of all, these creatures had a sort of hive mind that connected each individual to the race as a whole though highly advanced psionics. The Ssethrics fought like mad, for they refused to die alone. Vicious crippling wounds were delivered to the Il'huan, but their hive mentality kept even the most grievously injured individual from dying until his entire unit was effectively slain. In a rush, the Ssethric column retreated, the few surviving stragglers reaching the surface to report their discovery to the Emperor. With that defeat, a new chapter in Ssethric history had begun.

The Empire was not to be denied its new home. Never before had it suffered a defeat on this scale, nor did it intend to let this offense go without retaliation. In short order, the Il'huan War began and the bloodiest period in all of Ssethric history was ushered in. For centuries the two sides fought one another, each gaining ground only to lose it again. The Empire of Yahsremore consolidated its substantial resources; troops, technology, and magic were all focused on the conquest of the Lavender Way. However, the Il'huan proved to be a highly intelligent and resourceful people with a rich heritage and advanced technology that rivaled even that of the ssanu in some areas. Early on it was found that the Il'huan had highly advanced psionic abilities, relying on the powers of their hive mind much as the Empire did magic, but they had relatively weak arcane capabilities. The Il'huan seemed to be the polar opposite of the Ssethrics, who had arcane might, but had only recently gained any ability at all in the realms of the mind. The two sides battled constantly, neither gaining any lasting advantage. The Yahsremorians, looking for any advancement that could break the stalemate, began experimentation on the powerful Singarthan Trolls of the Vastwood, seeking to create an easily-controlled trooper that still had the regenerative capabilities of the strong-willed Singarthans. In the end, these resulting troll troopers proved to be of no great advantage (though the degenerate byproducts of the ssanu's manipulation still stalk the wastes of Onara to this day).

Further experimentation led to an unexpected epiphany. Elemental beings summoned from beyond the Material Plane by the Ssethric mages proved to be highly resistant to the psionic abilities of the Il'huan. Unfortunately, the vast amounts of magical energies needed to summon and sustain these beings upon the Material Plane made using them in battle problematic at best. About three hundred years into the Il'huan war, the Emperor Sahktess ordered the Black Coil to bend all its powers to the creation of a servitor race that blended the psionic-resistant qualities of the

elementals with a more permanent form that could exist indefinitely upon Onara. The leader of the Circle, the legendary Ss'koreth, argued vehemently against this route, claiming that the Circle's efforts should instead be focused on a way to counter the Il'huan's psionic powers and in defeating their hive mentality. In the end, though, his words fell upon deaf ears, for the Emperor would not be swayed. With the threat of execution hanging above their heads, the members of the Black Coil strived to birth a new race. The Tower failed several times along the way, accidentally creating misshapen abominations so terrible that they were destroyed mere instants after their birthing. Through it all, the mages of the Black Coil forged onward, crafting flesh and weaving magic in an attempt to bind elemental energy to the essence of life. In the end, the breakthrough came with the discovery of an ancient stone tablet in a crypt deep below Yahsremore, which detailed the summoning of the most powerful of elementals. The key had been found and the door was about to be opened.

Forced on the Emperor's impatient urgings, the ten most powerful mages of the Black Coil combined their abilities and summoned elemental beings of such immense power that the mortals were awed at what they had unleashed. The ancient rituals of the tablet had been correct. The Elemental Lords, as they were soon to be called, were bound within intricate circles drawn upon the floor, unable to vent their wrath upon the mortals that had summoned them. No living being knows the precise deal that was struck that fateful night, but the Elemental Lords agreed to assist the Ssethrics in their endeavor. The Technomancers were called forth to craft new bodies for the power which these elemental spirits deigned to expend in the creation of the new servitor race. The early experiments proved that reptilian bodies were resistant to the process, but those of Gar Ormal stock proved to be susceptible to the magic (possibly due to their ancient affinity with natural and elemental spirits). However, each time the body was infused with the energy of an Elemental Lord, it survived only moments before the raw power tore through it like a knife through wet cheesecloth. The mages of the Black Coil began to fear that the effort to create a new servitor race infused with the power of the Elemental Lords was doomed to failure, and indeed our history would end here, save for the fateful efforts of one wizard.

One final ingredient was necessary to complete the ritual that would bind a soul to the potent force of the Elemental Lords — and only Ss'koreth knew where to find it.

While scrying an unexplored area, the archmage came across a vista that was wracked by uncontrollable winds one moment, a shattering earthquake soon after, and then torrential rain the next. These bizarre environmental conditions pulsed with an undercurrent of pain, from which Ss'koreth drank deeply even from a distance. The aged Ssanu sensed unbridled power surging within that region; wild, untamed, agonizing power, laced with madness. And if that power held madness, Ss'koreth reasoned, it must be sentient.

Calling the greatest heroes of the Empire to his side, Ss'koreth set off to bind this being. The odyssey upon which they embarked has been chronicled endlessly throughout the millennia and has been used to inspire the soldiers of the Ssethregoran Empire to unimagined acts of heroism. Vulpina the Cunning, Cergris the Bold, Opakum of the Keen Eye, Torgund the Massive, Selindris the Cold, and even the insipid troglodyte Noc have become as legendary as Ss'koreth himself through the countless retellings of their tale.

After many a harrowing encounter with creatures and beings both wondrous and horrific, the group entered the endless corridors of the labyrinthine Lavender Way. Once below ground, the being they sought proved exceptionally easy to find, as Her moans of anguish echoed incessantly throughout the vast grottoes and caverns.

Rounding a turn, the group beheld a sight that not even Ss'koreth could have anticipated. A being, nominally in the physical pattern of a mammalian female, writhed upon the floor; each cry of anguish was answered by an equally tortured groan from the very earth itself. The creature spasmed and changed in form in an endless cycle; one moment she appeared as a humanoid female, then the body would shift violently, sprouting tree limbs from the torso, the flesh condensing into a hundred folds and darkening like bark. This shape did not hold long, for it appeared as if the trunk then cracked, and crashing to the floor became a multitude of flapping fish, gasping for air, until they were also transformed into glistening drops of water which seeped into the ground, only to resurface as a rippling pool of magma.

Ss'koreth and his companions stared at the spectacle, but whereas the others with him were at a loss as to how to confront such a creature, the archmage had already begun to formulate a plan. The moon circling high above them cycled through its phases more than once while Ss'koreth studied his prey and began to realize that what he first thought was a powerful unbound nature spirit, proved to be the essence of the planet itself. This Life godling – for so great was its power that it could only be classified as a divine being – was exactly what was needed to complete Ss'koreth's greatest work. By enhancing a mortal shell with the essence of this godling, the body would be able to withstand the pulsating force of the Elemental Lords.

Ss'koreth's exact ritual has since been lost, but the struggle to bind this strange godling cost the lives of the Black Talon Cegris and the Dark Crest Opakum. And yet, it was their deaths that gave Ss'koreth the final key that he needed to bind the godling. The archmage had attempted to trap the spirit within flawless gems, an arcanelly reinforced soul jar, and even within the eldritch blade *Korguse*, said to have been forged in the fiery breath of Kassegore himself, yet nothing could hold the godling's essence for more than a matter of minutes before it was utterly destroyed.

With two of his champions dead and the rest barely able to fend off the entity's unfocused attacks, Ss'koreth's mind raced. In a final act of desperation, he grabbed the luckless Noc and tore the troglodyte's beating heart out. Gore-covered fingers traced complex runes and symbols frantically over the still-twitching body as the vengeful spirit, already having dealt with

his champions, turned Her attention to Her tormentor. Ss'koreth could feel the breath being sucked out of his aged lungs. With black dots swimming before his vision, the ancient ssanu spat out the final words of his most potent incantation.

The effect was instantaneous. The roaring wind and bellying of the being died to a low growl as it was sucked through the chest wound of the troglodyte. With a final gesture, Ss'koreth scraped a yellowed and cracked talon across the open wound, sealing it and the godling within. Peeling back a torpid eyelid, Ss'koreth saw the wailing spirit reflected in the cold dead eyes of Noc.

The archmage grunted. "You have finally served a purpose worthy of the life given to you, even if it was in your last moments. What better way to trap a godling of life than within the cold embrace of death?"

Turning to tend to his champions, Ss'koreth heard the Life Spirit's wailings, even though they were muffled to a whimper. "Taken from me! How could He have taken it from me?" What that meant, the Ssanu had no idea, and he cared even less.

Back at the capitol city, Ss'koreth recounted his tale to the Emperor and the four Elemental Lords (who were now treated as honored guests).

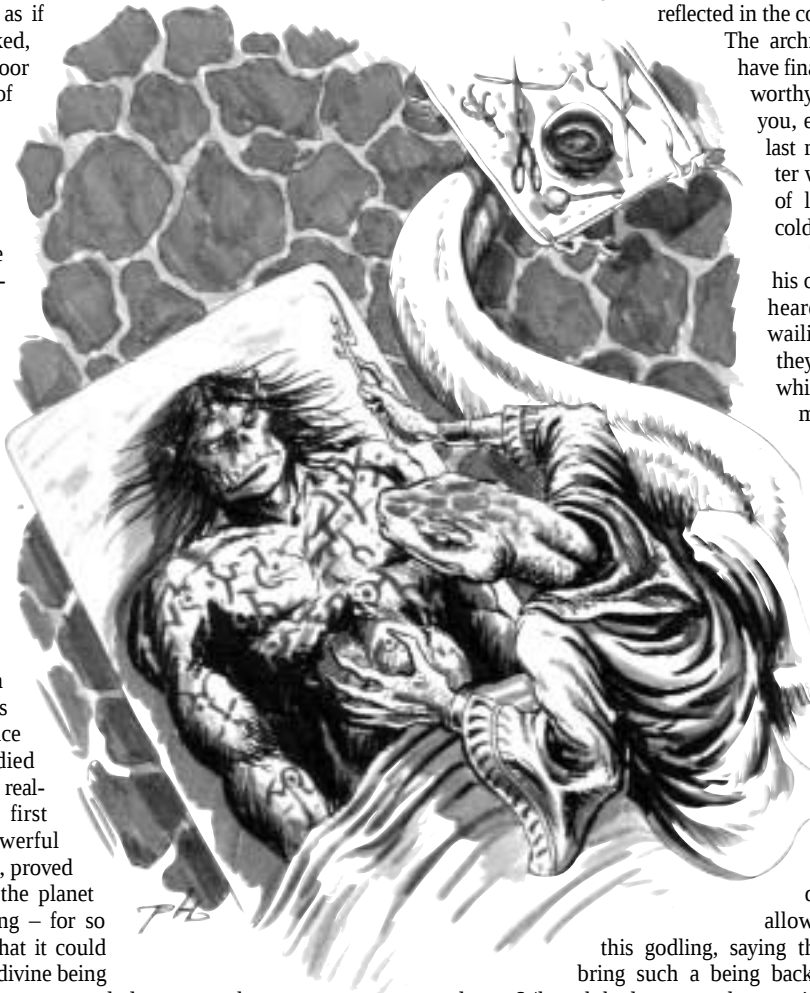
These Lords demanded to be

allowed to speak with this godling, saying that only they could bring such a being back from the brink of

madness. Ss'koreth had attempted many times to communicate with this creature throughout the journey back and had failed. The great ssanu sorcerer advised the Emperor that he should grant the foreign lords their wish.

For an entire year, the four great Elemental Lords retired to a colossal chamber and did not emerge once during that time. The Emperor grew more and more impatient with every passing day, cursing Ss'koreth and bemoaning the fact that these Lords had probably left with their prize, but the archmage assured his liege that he could still sense the elemental energy pulsing within the room and counseled patience.

Finally, one year and one day later, the four Elemental Lords appeared before the Emperor with a subdued and seemingly lucid female spirit at their side. In a booming voice, the one known as Keleos explained, "We have succeeded in gaining Her trust and assistance in our mutual goal. She calls Herself Belisarda, and wishes only one thing in exchange for mating with us; she



wishes to create a fifth breed from her essence alone. I suggest you agree to this, Sahktess."

The Emperor readily agreed to the bargain, seeing the ranks of his as-yet uncreated servitor race increasing in size and versatility, and quickly set Ss'koreth to the task at hand. The black sorcerer set himself to the task, his Technomancers wasting no time in crafting vessels from the freshest, purest stocks of orcish tissue that could be found. On that infamous night, as the new millennium arose, the planets aligned, and the planes overlapped, the ssanu bent all their skill into infusing these empty bodies with the spark of life. Raw energies from the Elemental Lords were merged with Belisarda's energy of life, and the strands of power were bound into the fleshy orc-stitched corpses of the ancient Gar Ormal. In that instant the Elorii were born.

At first glance the Elorii were perfect. They were long-lived, durable, intelligent, and malleable. The various types of Elorii could survive and in fact thrive in a great variety of habitats, proving to be perfect troops in many adverse areas. More importantly, Elorii also proved to be highly resistant to mind-affecting influences and quickly found their way into the front-line ranks of the invasion force against the Il'huan. Emperor Sahktess was elated over the success of the Black Coil and immediately ordered the creation of thousands of these new creatures through an accelerated breeding program. Once again the Black Coil voiced caution, for the new race was far from perfected and had barely been tested. Ss'koreth suggested that the Circle should instead pursue the development of the Hussuma, another elemental race created as a byproduct of the Elorii experiment. At least the Hussuma were partly reptilian, cautioned Ss'koreth, whereas these new Elorii were more closely related to the warm-blooded orcs than their reptilian masters. Still, the Emperor's orders stood, and over the next two centuries one hundred thousand of the Elorii were created.

The Elorii troopers proved to be as bloodthirsty as their creators. Their infusion of raw elemental energy gave them a savagery in battle unprecedented in the other Yahssremorian slave races. The Elorii showed themselves to be superb fighters and were the catalyst for the increasing supremacy of Ssethric forces. Over the next century the tide of the war slowly shifted in favor of the Ssethrics as the Yahssremorian forces began to push the Il'huan back toward their strongholds. The war itself was a dark era of history upon Onara, for all the races of that ancient time were embroiled in war upon all fronts. The Chull were the first to be destroyed, for these servants of the mighty Il'huan race were soon overrun and slaughtered by the ever-increasing numbers of Elorii warriors. The bat-like Plecotus were the next to feel the cold uncaring hands of extinction, as their aerial superiority was no match for the keen ears and sharp eyes of the Elorii bowmen. One by one, the Elorii helped hunt down and destroy the various enemies of the Yahssremorian Empire, slaying foes indiscriminately both on the surface and deep in the dark pits of the earth. Twelve races in all felt the permanence of total extinction at the hands of the Elorii, while countless others were driven into hiding by their relentless pursuit. The Ssethrics were delighted as they watched their enemies fall back before this new and powerful weapon they had created. Five hundred years after their creation, the Elorii forces and their Ssethric overlords had managed to drive the Il'huan back into their ancient capitol. At last the Empire was ready to deliver the final blow, a blow that would echo throughout eternity.

Not much is known about the final days of the Il'huan War, for the records were destroyed in the Great Slave Revolt.

What little is known of this tumultuous time has been gleaned from the crumbling papyrus Scrolls of Ss'koreth, penned by the great wizard's hand over six millennia ago. The following fragment gives one of the only written accounts of the last great battle of the Il'huan War, where the forces of Yahssremore poured into the Il'huan capitol of Anax and destroyed the power base of their ancient enemy, eventually leading to the total extinction of the most philosophically advanced race to ever walk upon the face of Arcanis.

"So it was that the forces of Yahssremore lined up rank and file in that cavern of elephantine proportions. The goblin hordes were foremost, whipped and cowed into place by the unfeeling hands of their troglodyte and Elorii masters. Next came the endless waves of Elorii infantry, armed with both bow and sword. Behind them rode the elite Thulluss ss'ressen cavalry, each mounted upon a highly-trained mor'let, their spurs glistening in that phosphorescent twilight beneath the earth. In the rear, protected by the crack Agamassi berserkers, high upon their war wyrms, sat the ssanu Elementalists where their arcane arts could rain death down upon their foes. Ss'ressen clerics of Kassegore strode the ranks, giving blessings and chanting prophecies of victory. In the cold depths of the dark lake that separated the cavern swam the Sahuagin levies, as well as the Pleisaurans and Berokene Elorii. The entire force sat poised, looking across the vast hollow to the fine minarets of the Il'huan capitol and the massive force arrayed to defend it.

"Tens of thousands of Il'huan infantry stood ready, their shiny carapaces glowing dully in that subterranean witch-light. Before them were the final survivors of the Chull race which had escaped the genocide which had taken their brethren. Also among the defenders were some number of captured Ssethrics, and other enslaved races, their minds wiped of all fear, replaced with only undying devotion to their Il'huan overlords. To the rear were entrenched the Il'huan Mindtamers, riding atop the gargantuan oniscus or commanding units of the lumbering but deadly scissor-grubs. Overlooking it all were the Queen and her advisors, known as the Hive, the singularly most powerful group of psionic minds of that day. Perched in one of the tall towers, they were poised to oversee the battle, giving telepathic commands to the entire army. Every member of the Il'huan race was linked in a psychic net, enabling instant communication throughout the species.

"The two armies stood poised for what would surely be the final confrontation of the war, for whoever lost the battle here would be powerless to avoid utter annihilation at the hands of the victors. Never before had the world seen a battle of these epic proportions. In the strange calm before the storm, the Warlord Salta lifted his bronze horn. A clear blast issued from that trumpet, a blast echoed by the exultant cry of a million Ssethric throats. The Ssethric army began the last march. Not to be outdone, the hisses and clicks of the Il'huan rose to a frenzied pitch, and as one the twelve-foot-tall behemoths began to scuttle forward. First a walk, then a trot, and finally a charge, as the two forces hurtled towards each other. Arrows fell from the sky, a rain of feathered death, and psionic blasts mingled with arcane flux, leaving rivers of corpses in their wake. Like titanic waves, the two armies crashed together, bringing blood and ruin down upon all.

"The slaves were the first to die. Vicious goblins tore away at the Il'huan thralls, each force shoved inexorably forward by the press of the units behind it. Within the blink of an eye, the first ranks were completely decimated, leaving the true combatants to do battle. Troglodytes, ss'ressen, and Elorii fought back-to-back, bringing sharp steel against the rending talons and cutting mandibles of their hated Il'huan foes. Blood ran like water, the cavern echoing with the feeble cries of the dying. The floor became slick with the offal and entrails of the dead. Grim-faced attackers peered above their shields into the alien visages of the defenders.

"As the battle raged, a thousand miles away in a chamber deep within the bowels of Yahssremore, sat a curious assembly. Ssanu and naga, twenty-one in all, sat inside circles of powdered silver interconnected within an intricate eye-bending geometric pattern of lines and curves. The individuals in that chamber represented the most powerful of all the Ssethric psions, the result of centuries of genetic manipulation and selective breeding. Unbeknownst to the Il'huan, this specific day of battle had been planned for decades, for on this day the planets were in alignment and the boundaries between planes were weakened. Together the Ssethric psions pooled their power. Leaving their bodies, they ascended to the Astral Plane, where distance has no meaning, and in this fashion the troop of psions was able to race through the ether to the city of Anax. While upon the Astral Plane, they spied the dark tower that held the Hive, shimmering with energy and surrounded by a protective bubble of psionic power. There lay the heart of the enemy, the link that coordinated the masses and held them all together. With the speed of thought the Ssethrics struck. Too late did the Hive see them coming, for in a great wedge of psionic energy all twenty Ssethrics struck the shield as one. The shock of their impact was cataclysmic. Nine of the ssanu were killed instantly, their silver cords shattered by the reverberations. But their attack had an even greater effect upon the Il'huan, for the Hive had been wounded. The telepathic blanket that united all Il'huan had wavered. The Ssethrics had done well in hiding their psionic potential from the Il'huan, who were taken completely by surprise. The Hive turned its attention to these new attackers from the Astral, but it was too little, too late. The remaining Ssethrics attacked once more. This time their wedge cut deep, shattering the shield and temporarily collapsing the Hive-Mind of the Il'huan.

"As I watched, the Il'huan wavered and suddenly fell into confusion. Realizing that the psionic attack had succeeded and the Hive was momentarily neutralized, I struck. Immediately, I ordered the slaying of seven ssanu spawned from my own loins, their blood running upon the stones at my feet, for no blood holds more power than that of one's own kin. In that moment, I, Ss'koreth, greatest of all mages, cast for the first and last time my most devastating spell and directed it towards the now unprotected tower where the Hive was located. I succeeded in casting the spell, though it drained me terribly. As I lay there, collapsed on the cold stone, I watched as part of the city began to waver and distort. Like a magnet, the very fabric of the city was drawn inward, structures and beings alike, all collapsing into one point, everything forever and utterly wiped from existence. An instant later it was done. A sphere fully five miles in diameter, that had once been a city, was excised, the sides of the resulting crater perfectly smooth. Nothing remained at all, except a black mote of pure annihilation roughly six inches across at the exact center point of the spell.

"The Hive was destroyed, and with it the mindlink of the Il'huan. For the first time in their existence, the Il'huan found themselves alone, cut off from their peers. Demoralized and terrified, their lines began to waver, and then broke. The Il'huan fell back. Their confused retreat became a rout. The Ssethric forces cheered and pushed forward; sure that victory was ours. But then the tide of battle looked to be changed once more, as a figure emerged at the rear of the Il'huan ranks. The Il'huan general, huge and repugnant, strode forward. In one hand he held high the helpless grub of an Il'huan child, in the other he brandished a massive sword. In the high-pitched whine of his race, he screamed, entreating his people to turn and fight for their very existence. Holding the child aloft, he strode forward, charging the Ssethric lines. The Il'huan, though still dazed, rallied behind the familiar visage of their General and the thought of their unprotected offspring. With ferocity born of desperation, the Il'huan turned once more upon the Ssethrics. This time it was the Ssethric line that threatened to break.

"Warlord Salta watched from his position in the rear, as our hope for victory was snatched away by the Il'huan general. He witnessed those of his clutch die and with them the hope of his people's continuation upon this sphere. This he could not allow. Mounting his mor'let and setting his shield, he gave the final order. Nodding once to his Matriarch and mate, his black talons closed about the hilt of Skullreaver. Drawing the eldritch sword and waving it high above his head, he charged. Warlord Salta hurtled forward into the fray, his personal bodyguards forming a wedge about him. Hacking and cleaving through the Il'huan, they fought their way toward the enemy General, brazen horns blasting the challenge. The Il'huan general heard and responded, bellowing with a roar that shook the very foundations of the earth. Like a scythe through grain the Il'huan general charged, cutting down Elorii, troglodyte, and ss'ressen alike without slowing. Warlord Salta lowered his visor and set his feet into his stirrups. Only once did an Il'huan soldier break through his guards, aiming a killing blow at Salta himself, but one of Salta's bodyguards threw himself into the strike and was granted a gurgling death by decapitation. Salta nodded once for the fallen warrior that had saved his life and then focused his steely gaze upon the Il'huan general.

"The two titans came together with a resounding crash; two beings that had seen a century or more of battle and risen high in the ranks by their prowess. The Il'huan general stood a full fifteen feet tall and with his greatsword demanded a modicum of respect. General Salta was no coward, either, having been a veteran of war before most of the troops here had been hatched. The two warriors born and bred to the battlefield clashed and for a moment the battle paused, awaiting the outcome. Warlord Salta charged low, his mor'let throwing up clods of blood-encrusted offal behind it as it charged on sharp talons. As the Warlord closed, the Il'huan commander struck. For all his speed and riding skill, General Salta was no match for the uncanny strength and reach of the Il'huan. The Il'huan's sword ripped deep into the Warlord's body, severing his left arm and burying itself with a meaty thunk into the Warlord's side. This wound, a wound that would have killed any lesser being, had no effect on the grim determination of Salta. His charging drake continued full bore, plowing into the body of the Il'huan general. With crimson blood spurting from severed arteries, the Warlord stood in his stirrups and looked down into faceted insectoid eyes. There he saw reflected fear and amazement, and with his breath rattling in a dying throat, the Warlord thrust Skullreaver into one of those great eyes. With that final blow, Salta gurgled once on his own life's blood, and collapsed from his saddle, stone dead. The Il'huan general stumbled back slowly, head upturned, the hilt of Skullreaver protruding from his head. The blade had lodged deep in his brain, living up to its name, and with a brilliant flash of blue energy Skullreaver released its powers. With a blast that reverberated off the stalactites above, the Il'huan general exploded, pieces of his smoking carapace raining down on the surviving Il'huan fighters.

"The general was the last straw holding the Il'huan together. With his death, the lines of insectoid warriors broke and were routed. The Ssethric forces hunted them all down, and those that crawled away into the darkness were leisurely tracked and slaughtered with great pleasure by the Elorii rangers. No Il'huan was left standing, and over the course of the next two decades, all small pockets of that race were totally destroyed.

"As for me, I stood there, leaning for support on my war wyrm. I watched as the Elorii scampered about the field, slaying the fallen, and reveling in their prowess. Though we had carried the day, to my eyes, these slaves had too much pride and held themselves too high, thinking themselves the equals of their Ssethric masters. I must remember to speak to the Emperor about them once more, for I still believe they are a danger and one day could lead to great problems within the Empire."



The Elorii Slave Revolt and the Fall of an Empire

With the destruction of the Il'huan and the opening of the Lavender Way for colonization, the Empire of Yahssremore enjoyed a few hundred years of relative peace. Once again the Ssethric peoples spread out into these uncharted areas, forming new outposts and colonizing the depths of the earth. In the southern swamps the Hylis were discovered, and upon seeing these frog-like beings' reverence for the goddess Yig, they were quickly subsumed into the Empire. The leash on the Elorii was getting lighter by the day, and some of the Elorii were even granted a type of citizenship, gaining a parcel of land and even governance over their own people. The bulk of the Elorii spread far and wide. They were used as valuable troops for the expansion, especially in the hostile underground environments. During this time, many races fell to the bloody swords of the Elorii, including the Grimlocks, who were completely annihilated, and the powerful Singarthan Trolls, who were decimated, the survivors driven out of the Vastwood.

This era of plenty was not to last, however, for during these influential years, the Ssethric overlords made their biggest mistake: they taught their slaves too much. The Elorii proved to be so skilled in a multitude of varied tasks that many were taken as personal household slaves. These Elorii watched and learned, gleaning the secrets of their masters, for though some were treated as pampered servants, the atrocities that were being brought to bear upon the rest of their people had begun to plant the seeds of revolution. No longer could the Elorii stand by and watch as their children were hauled away to the slaughterhouses and their friends were dragged down into the wretched Tower of Gettulus for perverse rites of power and experimentation. Whispers traveled in the dark and the Elorii began to plot. Some escaped, hiding deep in the Vastwood. From their woody sanctuary they planned and plotted. Under the leadership of Elthoras, the newly-founded rebel army struck the small logging town of Miles. As the escapees hit the town, the enslaved Elorii rose up against their chains and the entire town was thrown into turmoil as shackle-wielding slaves dragged down the reptilian masters of that place. The seeds of revolution had come to fruition and the Empire teetered on the brink of civil war.

Word raced across the length and breadth of the land, carried on swift Elorii feet. Revolts broke out across the Empire, for the Elorii had waited long and were ready when this spark lit the fires of rebellion. Troglodyte and ss'ressen legions were called out to quash the pockets of rebellion, and succeeded to some degree, but the revolt had gained too much momentum. Still, the Yahssremorians might have stemmed the tide, if not for the events which happened in the capitol city itself.

Upon the news of rebellion, the Ssethrics still within the city began the purge of the now-dangerous Elorii. Household slaves were put to the knife and orders came down from the Emperor to exterminate all Elorii in the slave pens. However, this did not have the desired effect, for the Elorii – seeing their imminent doom – fought back. Breaking out of the slave pens, many Elorii found themselves free. As the mass of Elorii swept out of the pens, behind them the enslaved goblinoid races watched. Deep in their primitive tortured brains, a spark was lit. A mere thought of something lost long ago, a concept believed inconceivable by their degenerate state, permeated the darkness of their minds. Freedom, a feeling long forgotten, gripped the masses. With a crude cry, erupting from ten thousand throats, the goblins boiled forward. The Elorii revolutionaries suddenly found their meager force bolstered by thousands of goblins, hobgoblins, and bugbears. Screaming for the death of the tyrannical overlords, the slaves swept through the city, killing and slaying the Ssethric peoples, razing buildings and constantly

bolstering their number with the freeing of additional thousands of Elorii and ten times their number of berserk goblin-kind. The mob surged through the greatest city upon Onara, destroying and burning and laying waste to everything. The Ssethric military forces, vastly outnumbered by the slaves of the populace, were forced into a defensive posture, trying to hold strategic locations. It was too late, as the slave revolt became unstoppable. The Emperor himself was killed on the steps of his palace; his head was put on a pike and paraded around by the mob as a grisly trophy. The remainder of the Emperor's bodyguard retreated before the mob and saw to the safe escape of the young ssanu named Sseth, for in their eyes he was destined to inherit the now-vacant Serpent Throne.

The famed Archwizard Ss'koreth was slain at the threshold to the Tower of Gettulus. Watching the revolution spread through the capitol, the wise old snake realized the city was doomed. After slaying his own treacherous slave Salos and all the other Elorii within the tower, Ss'koreth ordered all the other mages to evacuate the tower through secret tunnels in the basement. Picking up the body of Salos, considered by the Elorii to be a great idealist and icon, the venerable mage prepared his last spell and calmly strode through the main gate to confront the raging mob. Holding their beloved Salos high overhead, the ssanu archmage threw the Elorii's broken form into the crowd. The body of Salos landed with a sickening thud upon the bricks, quite dead and cold, at the feet of the assembled Elorii. Enraged, the mob streamed forward, the sword of the Elorii commander Auros cutting the ssanu wizard to pieces. As the blood of the greatest Ssethric mage of all time rained down upon the flagstones of the magnificent Tower of Gettulus, he spoke a final phrase. From the dying Ss'koreth's throat rattled a death curse. Fueled by his own blood, Ss'koreth brought about a hideous change in the Tower. The blood of the sorcerer leached into the stones themselves, and before the mob's eyes, the entire tower changed from jet black to a dull crimson. The doors closed and then vanished. To this day, the death curse of Ss'koreth keeps the Tower of Gettulus in the ruins of Yahssremore perfectly preserved and sealed, awaiting the return of the ssanu to lift the curse.

The rest of the city fell in short order. The Ssethric forces retreated to the plains outside the city. Word had come that the rebellion was sweeping its way across the Empire, except for the swamps to the south, where the word had been slow in coming and most of the Elorii were slain before word of rebellion reached their pointed ears. With a great shudder, the surviving Ssethrics marched south, intent on gaining a stronghold in the southern swamps of their Empire. Along the way, their numbers were bolstered by other contingents of troops and civilians leaving the other major cities. The Black Talon and the Dark Crest ss'ressen volunteered for rearguard and fought the pursuing Elorii all the way to Kraldjur Morass. In the safety of the swamp, they turned upon their Elorii pursuers, slaying many of them, but the remainder fell back into the nearby woods. The once-great Empire of Yahssremore had fallen, and a new chapter of Ssethric history had begun.

The Formation of Ssethregore

Within the relative safety of the fetid swamps and leafy jungles of the Kraldjur Morass, the remnants of the Old Empire of Yahssremore licked their collective wounds. The young ssanu Sseth quickly took command, forming a new coalition of Ssethric forces and setting himself as head of a new dynasty. Under his leadership, the enterprising Ssethric people founded a new city on the shores of



Lake Quesselan, naming it Sseth after their new Emperor. Within these solemn swamps the Empire of Ssethregore was formed. Still cold and calculating as ever, the Ssethregorans set about rebuilding what they had lost and securing a new power base in this vast peninsula. For two hundred years the Ssethregorans worked, building a new Empire from the ruins of the old. The various ss'ressen Egg Clutches spread out, each founding a military citadel of its own and protecting the fledgling Empire's tentative borders from Elorii insurgents. Slowly the shattered peoples of a once-great empire rebuilt, preparing for the day they would retake what was theirs. The city of Sseth became a shining jewel upon the warm waters of the lake; a center of military power and growing commerce. A new Tower of Gettulus was raised and the Black Coil once again began to grow in prestige and authority. The armies expanded, new generations of Ssethregoran warriors were born, and the most powerful and wily Ssethrics consolidated their power. During these formative years, the Empire of Ssethregore relied heavily upon the nagas who had historically controlled this outlying region of the Empire, bringing them into the highest levels of the government. This was a decision the sly Emperor Sseth would eventually come to regret.

The Battle for Belestor and the Naga Coup

After two hundred years of preparation, the Ssethregorans were ready to strike back at the Elorii. The freed slaves had been busy; in the last two centuries they had erected a city on top of the ruins of Yahssremore, building from those jewel-encrusted ruins the Elorii city of Belestor. The goblinoids had departed shortly after the revolution, migrating southwest and eventually settling in the vast plains of Uggur. The Elorii sat on the laurels of a newly built kingdom stretching from the fertile plains around Belestor to the vaulted hardwood forests of the Vastwood. From their stronghold in the south, the Ssethregorans watched and waited, until Emperor Sseth deemed his people ready. With the bronze gongs of war heralding the approaching storm, the Ssethregorans prepared for war. A large host was mustered, the first of three waves scheduled to attack the Elorii. The first wave consisted of a horde of troglodytes bolstered by three different ss'ressen Egg Clutches: the Dark Crest, Barbed Tail, and Venomous Scale. A cadre of ssanu sorcerers mounted upon their infamous war wyrms supported the entire force. In total this expeditionary force numbered two hundred thousand strong, twice the size of the force of Elorii inhabiting Belestor. With grand words of victory upon his lips, the Emperor ordered the first wave to invade. The second and third battalions of equal size were to be held back to protect against possible interception by Elorii forces hailing from the Vastwood. By order of Emperor Sseth, the forces marched, under the capable command of Warlord Haldane of the Dark Crest ss'ressen (though not all the members of the other Egg Clutches were happy about this).

The best record for the strange occurrences of the battle of Belestor exists in the journal of Warlord Haldane, which was thought lost at the time, but was found centuries later when a group of Barbed Tails exterminated the Dark Crest Egg Clutch.

"As the morning light graces these pages I reflect upon the coming battle. I have positioned our forces on the western shore of the Ferilos River and now wait for the coming dawn to launch the attack. The Elorii forces stand ready on the far side of the river, readying for our onslaught. I have to give them credit; we trained them well.

Their lines are neat and crisp, and though we outnumber them two to one they show no fear. This day's dance should be glorious. I do have some trepidation about the battle. Last night, the clerics of the Lord of Destruction, our esteemed Lord Kassegore, reported to me a disturbing fact. They seem to have lost contact with our God. I have withheld this information from the troops for obvious reasons. Our potential to render medical assistance to the wounded has been severely reduced and I fear many who fall in this battle will die for lack of magic to tend their injuries. Now, I put down my pen, for the battle will commence soon....

"... By Yig's blessed fangs, how could things have gone so wrong? I find myself leading a ragtag force nearly one-third its original size back to the refuge of the Morass. Let me try to convey my thoughts upon this paper for perhaps in later days I can look back and analyze my mistakes.

"The battle started smoothly. With the coming dawn, our brazen horns rang clear, and the first wave charged. The troglodytes rushed forward through the shallow waters of the river to engage the Elorii encamped upon the far side. A great grinding could be heard as our two forces slammed together, serrated blades cutting soft Elorii flesh and keen poniards punching through scaled bodies. The Elorii fought valiantly, but the weight of the trogs slowly forced them back away from the river. As a space was opened I ordered the drake riders into the fray. They were met with a withering hail of arrows from Elorii bows. In response I gave them a taste of their own, for we are still the masters of the bow and they are but our pupils. The Elorii army shuddered at the impact, for now the Dark Crests had entered the battle, bringing their massive drakes to bear on the hapless Elorii infantry. I could see the Elorii General Relios, a pupil of mine, standing amidst a ring of tightly packed Elorii, waving his flag in a vain attempt to rally the troops. In the course of less than an hour, victory seemed certain. I ordered the Barbed Tail ss'ressen to remain in reserve and committed the rest of the Dark Crest and Venomous Scale into the fray. The added forces soon whittled down the Elorii, who were vainly fighting for their very existence. However, the outcome was inevitable, and the Elorii lines began to waver and break.

"Just then, a figure appeared to the east, riding hard from the city. It was the famed warrior Auros, and in his hands he wielded the dread sword Kelsiar. At the sight of its green fire, the Elorii rallied, and the accursed power of the dread sword began to consume the front ranks of troglodytes. However, I had known about the sword and was prepared. Signaling the ssanu, I ordered them to unleash a blast of arcane fire down upon the insolent Auros, annihilating him where he stood. But to my utmost horror, the blast never came. I looked back to see the ssanu of Pit Aspis, the Emperor's strongest rivals, standing unmoved. Immediately I saw their treachery, using the battle as a political statement. Without hesitation, I ordered the vicious Barbed Tails to flank the Elorii force and drive a wedge through the army. With a great cry the Barbed Tails charged into the fray, but to my astonishment, I watched them fall not upon the Elorii but upon the Venomous Scales! Without support, and facing the terrible consuming fire of Kelsiar, the troglodytes broke. As they turned to flee, I saw that the battle was lost. I ordered a retreat and our forces fell back. The Barbed Tails broke off their attack and separated from our force, marching home with the treacherous ssanu of Pit Aspis.

"As I sit here in camp, I look back upon the battle, one in which we should have regained our former glory. Instead, I find that once again our own nature betrays us. Now I must hurry back and report to Emperor Sseth, for I fear he is in imminent danger. If that great ssanu of revolutionary ideals was to be overthrown by the treacherous bastards I saw today, I fear for the stability of our newly formed Empire. If they were willing to lose the most important battle of the last two centuries for the petty purpose of weakening the Emperor's allies, I fear for us all. I have gathered the two reserve forces and now we march home.

— High Warlord Haldane of the Dark Crests"

Falling Stars

During the Battle for Belestor, another battle was being waged in Ssethregore. The naga, who had been consorting with the evil Varn demipowers, had been biding their time, plotting and planning. As the bulk of the Empire's troops left Ssethregore for the Elorii war, the naga struck, timing their attack with the fortuitous (for them) disappearance of the Gods Kassegore and Yig. The battle was horrid and bloody, with ss'ressen and trog anarchists fighting against the Emperor's loyalists. The naga were the most terrible, for they were supported by their new Gods, the Varn, and brought death swiftly upon their foes. The Royal Dynasty was overthrown. The Emperor was captured and imprisoned in a magically-sealed coffin filled with flesh grubs. Every day the grubs eat his flesh, driving him mad, and every night the magic of the coffin restores him. To this day, the coffin stands in the throne room, echoes of the mad Sseth's screams drifting as sweet music to the nagas' ears.

Swiftly did the Nagas perform their coup, and in the end they gained supreme power over the Empire. The returning forces saw there had been a shift in power, but the majority of the ss'ressen and troglodytes didn't care who was on top, for they nursed a racial hatred against their own kin well above and beyond any loyalty they felt toward the old Emperor. To most, one Emperor was as good as another. For their part in the battle, the Barbed Tail ss'ressen were granted positions of prestige within the Empire, basing themselves in the city of Sseth. The other supporters of the naga were quick to adopt the new Varn Gods. With the continued absence of Kassegore and Yig, their worship waned. The nagas had taken over, Varn worship became standard, and a dark era for the Ssethregorans had begun.

The Age of Decadence

The Age of Decadence encompassed nearly five thousand years of Ssethregoran history. During this time, the naga solidified their control of Ssethric society and established the socio-political systems that govern the Empire to this day. Under the stringent rule of the naga, Ssethregore has become a military machine. Virtually every aspect of Ssethric culture is ruled through an authoritarian system of rank that places the current Emperor and the nagas at the highest echelons of power, followed by the various ssanu pits, then the ss'ressen warlords and Matriarchs, the

ss'ressen Egg Clutches, the troglodytes, and finally all the lesser races of Ssethregore.

Varn worship became the standard during the Age of Decadence, with only a few pockets of dissidents that still worship Kassegore. Most notable are the Emerald Scale ss'ressen, who never lost their faith in their deity, and the cult of Hromu, which mainly consists of the fanatical troglodytes. Magic has become regulated, strictly controlled by the powerful Black Coil. The Cult makes it their practice to test each generation of Ssethrics for the spark of sorcery, admitting any who show a talent for learning the intricate rituals of the arcane.

During this period, the Ssethregorans sought to protect their borders and rarely tried to expand their holdings. The naga rested on the past achievements of others and encouraged very little change in Ssethric society, for they believed that stagnation was the way to maintain power. Any individual with revolutionary ideas or who chose to speak out against the ruling Naga was quickly and quietly silenced. The naga went to great pains to avoid creating martyrs. The entire Ssethregoran society fell into a period of sloth, reveling in decay, corruption, and debauchery. In this way they remained, until a single event brought them out of their reptilian stupor and made them look out upon the world once more.

The Arrival of Humans

The singular event that drove the Ssethregorans out of their stupor and into the wartime fervor they enjoy today was the arrival of foreign gods upon the shores of Onara.

These gods were soon followed by advanced Pinkskins that called themselves "Humans."

These so-called humans proved to be highly adaptable, and in short order they threw down the mighty kingdom the Elorii had erected. At the time of the humans' arrival, the throne of Ssethregore was occupied by a Water Naga named Spliss.

Emperor Spliss, unlike his Dark Naga predecessors, was considered a revolutionary thinker and immediately identified the threat these humans posed to the Empire. He immediately mobilized the Empire's troops and over the next two centuries managed to kick-start the crumbling Ssethregoran war machine. His efforts were not in vain, for very soon the Pinkskins began to enter the jungle from the north. The Ssethregorans found themselves fighting once again, this time to protect their borders from the ever-encroaching humans of the north and the Elorii of Malfelen to the west. The constant state of border warfare sharpened the minds of the Ssethregorans and once again they started to feel the pull towards greatness. For six more centuries they perfected their strategies and tactics, pressing more and more strange beasts into service, experimenting with new forms of Technomancy, and increasing their growing knowledge of sciences that had fallen out of memory since the collapse of the Old Empire.



War Upon all Fronts

The Ssethregoran buildup came just in time for a series of wars, which have raged on and off to the present day. The first war came with the re-opening of the Lavender Way. The Ssethregorans, once again falling into an expansionist mindset, began to colonize the dark ways deep beneath the swamp. For centuries they dug, raising cities in strategic locations and creating highways in the vaulted passageways. These underground roads enabled them to move troops to any part of the Empire without having to fight through the thick jungle on the surface. Once these passages were formed, the Ssethregorans let the jungle consume their surface roads, for without them the surface-dwelling humans had no easy way of invading Ssethregore. The Empire stretched its borders, extending deeper into the uncharted regions of the Lavender Way, taking over the entire cavern system under the peninsula and even tunneling under some of the human lands. It was during these explorations that the Ssethregorans first encountered the Voiceless Ones. The Voiceless Ones were hideous gaunt humanoid with no vocal form of communication. Much like the ancient Il'huan had been, the Voiceless Ones were another psionic race, and much like the Il'huan the Voiceless Ones proved to be a powerful opponent for the ascendant Ssethregorans. Small wars have been fought between the two groups on and off now for millennia.

The infamous Dragon War began roughly three thousand years ago, and lasted for four centuries. This war affected the Ssethregorans only lightly, for though they revered the dragons, most of the battles were fought far away from the current Ssethregoran borders in the lofty mountain peaks of the world. It wasn't until the end of that war, when the human gods became involved, that the battle came to Ssethregore. The Ssethregorans offered refuge to all the remaining dragons and drakes of the world. Many tried to reach this sanctuary, but few succeeded. The war itself ended in the eastern jungles, where the immortal Jeggal Sag was laid low by the foul murderous human deities; there is said to be a sacred place where this great dragon's body supposedly lies to this day.

Most recently, a new threat arrived upon the peninsula in the form of a floating human city, which crashed in the mountains of the northern peninsula. The Ssethregorans suddenly found themselves hemmed in on all sides, with the humans to the north, the Elorii to the west, and the Voiceless Ones below. Immediately, skirmishes broke out against the new human threat, but total eradication of these new interlopers was impossible, for before Ssethregore had a chance to mobilize, the Time of Terror began.

The Time of Terror

The Time of Terror was a dark and hopeless period in the history of Onara. Due to an ancient curse laid upon the Sorcerer-King of Ymandragore by the Myrantians, a rift was opened to the Infernal planes. Through that rift poured thousands upon thousands of fiends and demons. Hellish beings of fire and destruction, the demonic hordes spread across the continent, bringing death to all the races of the Known Lands. The Ssethregorans weathered the storm better than most, for their intimate knowledge of the summoning, binding, and controlling of Elemental beings allowed them to banish, capture, or destroy any fiends that dared to invade their swamplands. The word spread quickly, and soon the Infernal hordes shunned the southern jungles, turning their

attention to the softer, easier human prey to be found elsewhere. Still, many demons managed to slip into the deep, black, fetid recesses of the Morass, and some of them are still lurking there today, in forgotten ruins and grottos. Thanks to the efforts of the humans, the majority of the invading Infernals were imprisoned far to the north, in the frigid countries that the Ssethregorans never explored, and there passed out of history.

Expansion and Exodus

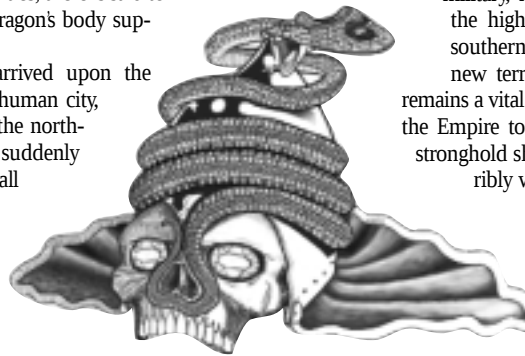
With the end of the Time of Terror, the Ssethregorans began to look afield for new regions to conquer, for the Known Lands had become too crowded. In the next few centuries, increasing pressure from the newly formed human Empire of Coryan and from Altherian raids would constantly test the Ssethregorans' mettle. What these humans did not know was that by that time, the Ssethregorans had already expanded their borders, more than doubling the size of their territory.

In their quest for resources, the Ssethregorans had learned of a new land from their aquatic allies beneath the waves. The Ssethric war machine turned its attention away from its current borders, and focused on the lush forests and jungles to the south, across the Lauriol Sea. For three hundred years, while humanity fought over their so-called "Blessed Lands," the Ssethregorans spread and conquered the land to the south. Great ships pulled by dragon turtles crossed the sea, delivering massive numbers of troops and supplies to the newly-formed outposts there. The twin port cities of Anuliss and Th'lathis were founded to act as a bridge between the two realms. The southward expansion was an immediate success, though the natives of that land proved to be quite tenacious. They appeared to be related to the Gar Ormal of ancient times, though they were much larger and far more savage. The tribal society of these creatures proved to be no match for the massive Ssethregoran military, however, and they were forced back into the high cold mountain peaks that marked the southern edge of the Ssethregoran Empire in this new territory. To this day, the southern expanse remains a vital source of food, minerals, and supplies for the Empire to the north and also serves as a strategic stronghold should things on the mainland ever go terribly wrong again.

The last great upheaval to occur in Ssethregore was the exodus of the Black Talon Egg Clutch four hundred and one years ago. The members of this ss'ressen egg clutch became disenchanted with the bloodthirsty and murderous ways of their kin. When ordered to exterminate the dishonored Dark Crest Egg Clutch, the Black Talons rebelled against Ssethregoran society as a whole. The Emperor, the dark naga Kahss IVX, ordered their wholesale destruction. Under the leadership of the clever Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus, the Black Talons escaped and began their march north, led by visions from their patron deity, the Fire Dragon. Eventually the renegades shook off their Ssethric pursuers and settled in the warm confines of the Sulphur Marsh. Though this was but a small event in the overall history of the Empire, it led to the formation of the ss'ressen stronghold of Lanpeltis and the re-colonization of the Sulphur Marsh, a region that had not seen any form of Ssethric control for over six millennia. More significantly, for the first time in the history of the Ssethric races, one of its peoples made peace with the mammals.

The Modern Era

In the last century, the Ssethregoran Empire has shown an amazing amount of growth and a push toward increased military preparedness. The ringing of hammers can be heard echoing from the city of Sseth, where the smiths are forging stockpiles of weapons



Emperor Kahss

Male Dark Naga Sorcerer 9/Elementalist 10: CR: 29 Huge Aberration, HD: 14d8+84 plus 19d4+114; hp: 315, Init +10, Speed: 50ft. AC: 39 (-2 size, +6 Dex, +8 natural, +6 *mage armor, +6 *shield, +5 ring of protection +5), touch: 19, flat-footed: 33; Base Attack +19; Grp +33; Atk +23 melee (2d6+6 plus poison, sting); Full Atk +23/+18 melee (2d6+6 plus poison, sting) and +18 melee (1d6+3, bite); Space/Reach: 15 ft./10 ft.; SA poison, spells; SQ: Darkvision 120ft, detect thoughts, guarded thoughts, immunity to acid and poison, resistance to charm; AL LE; SV Fort +16, Ref +18, Will +28; Str 22, Dex 22, Con 22, Int 23, Wis 24, Cha 32.

Skill and Feats: Bluff +47, Concentration +31 (+35 to cast defensively), Craft (Biotechnology) +8, Diplomacy +27, Disguise +13 (+15 acting), Gather Information +13, Heal +13, Intimidate +23, Knowledge (Arcana) +30, Knowledge (Bioengineering) +16, Knowledge (History) +17, Knowledge (Local - Ssethregore) +14, Knowledge (Nobility & Royalty) +11, Knowledge (Planar) +16, Knowledge (Religion) +16, Listen +29, Profession (Torturer) +36, Sense Motive +27, Sleight of Hand +8, Spellcraft +42, Spot +29; Alertness, Arcane Tutor, Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Elemental Amplification, Elemental Expertise, Elemental Maximization, Elemental Taint, Empower Elements, Eschew Materials^B, Improved Initiative, Leadership, Lightning Reflexes, Silent Spell, Still Spell, Unholy Spell.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 23 or lapse into a nightmare haunted sleep for 2d4 minutes. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Resistance to Charm (Ex): Dark Naga have a +2 racial bonus on saving throws against all *charm* effects.

Detect Thoughts (Su): A Dark Naga can continuously detect thoughts as the spell (caster level 9th, Will DC 23 negatives). This ability is always active. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Guarded Thoughts (Ex): Dark naga are immune to any form of mind reading.

Mage Hand (Su): Dark naga in the world of Arcanis gain *mage hand* at will, caster level 9th.

Spells: Dark naga cast spells as 7th-level sorcerers.

Naga Sorcerer Spells Known (6/7/7/5; save DC 21+ spell level): 0-acid splash, daze, detect magic, light, open/close, ray of enfeeblement, shield, silent image; 2nd-cat's grace, invisibility, scorching ray; 3rd- displacement, lightning bolt.

Emperor Kahss Sorcerer Spells Known (6/9/9/8/8/8/7/5; save DC: 21 + spell level, 23 + spell level for acid spells): 0-arcane mark, dancing lights, flare, ghost sound, mending, message, prestidigitation, resistance, touch of fatigue; 1st-charm person, feather

fall, hydroblast, ray of enfeeblement, magic missile; 2nd-blindness/deafness, glitterdust, mirror image, acid fang, web; 3rd-acid burn, stinking cloud, suggestion, vampiric touch; 4th-charm monster, enervation, solid fog, stone skin; 5th-acid fang, greater, cone of cold, dominate person, permanency; 6th-chain lightning, dispel magic, greater, suggestion, mass; 7th-greater teleport, prismatic spray, spell turning; 8th- deathroar, polar ray, trap the soul; 9th-annihilate, power word kill.

Possessions: Emperor Kahss, as the ruler of one on the eldest and most powerful civilizations upon Onara, has access to virtually any magic item in existence. The following list of magic items is the one that Kahss usually carries upon his person: Hand of Glory, Ring of Freedom of Movement, Ring of Protection +5, Crown of a Thousand Serpents.

* These spells have been empowered and made permanent on Kahss.

Emperor Kahss is the supreme ruler of the Ssethregoran Empire. His word is law, and rules his subjects with an iron fist; displeasing the great Overlord results in one's instant demise. Kahss has risen to power through assassination, intrigue, plotting and his superb intelligence. His person is constantly being threatened by assassination attempts, staged mostly by his own kin. Through it all Kahss has persevered, sharpening his already impressive magical talents, and equipping himself with a multitude of powerful magical devices. Kahss is perhaps one of the most powerful mortal beings upon Onara.

Crown of a Thousand Serpents

After Naja Haje was lost during the Elorii revolt, a crown was designed to fit the new ruler of the Ssethregoran Empire. Thus the Crown of a thousand Serpents was created. This platinum crown is sculpted to resemble a mass of writhing serpents, with ten reaching up, mouths agape, to clutch various precious gems. When this crown is worn upon the head, the gems animate and begin to whirl about the head of the wearer, resembling tiny snakes of rainbow hues. The gems mimic the abilities of following ioun stones:

Deep Red: +2 enhancement to Dex, **Incandescent Blue:** +2 enhancement to Wis, **Pale Blue:** +2 enhancement to Str, **Pink:** +2 enhancement to Con, **Scarlet and Blue:** +2 enhancement Int, **Pink and Green:** +2 enhancement to Cha, **Iridescent:** Sustains Creature without air, **Orange:** +1 to caster levels, **Lavender and Green:** Absorbs spells of 8th level or lower, (without burning out), **Silver:** Discern lies as 18th level caster (Will save DC 24 for target to negate).

for an upcoming war. The southern reaches of the Empire have been secured and now resources flow across the Lauriol Sea in abundance, feeding the war machine. As the Ssethregorans see it, the humans and Elorii along their borders have grown complacent and weak, writing them off as a minor threat. That is all about to change. Secretly, in the dark bowels of their realm, the Ssethregorans have begun their mobilization. Troops are being levied and trained, industry is booming, and the drake rookeries are in full production. Massive storehouses of supplies have been stockpiled to provide the support train for the moving army. And just last year, the Empire of Ssethregore, considered by the humans to be dormant for generations, made its first foray.

A small expeditionary force, designed to test the humans' defenses, was thrust up into the Altherian Peninsula, attacking the border city of Semar. The battle was intense, lasting for two days. The Ssethregoran forces were repelled – but just barely – by the combined forces of the native Altherians, volunteers from the multi-

national Shining Patrol, and groups of stalwart mercenaries and adventurers. In the end, two singular events saved Semar. The first was an ancient ritual of binding invoked by a ring of Encali dwarves that drove away the great Dragon Astiniax. The second was a brave group of heroes who piloted a lone airship, known as *The Damned*, over the besieged walls of Semar. This airship was a decoy, and the ruse succeeded, drawing the Ssethregoran forces away from the true threat, a second invisible airship carrying a full load of precious blast powder to the outnumbered defenders of the Citadel of Semar. That group of stalwart heroes died in their attempt, as they had known they would, but their lives bought the second ship the time it needed to deliver the blast powder and thereby turn the tide of battle in the defenders' favor.



N



Forsaken Wastes

Forgotten Arcozha

Solentis River

Fellglade

Bay of Laran

Lost City of the Golems

Lauriol Sea

The Ssethregora

Taconis Mountains

Magdara's Maw

Th'lathis

Volcanic River

Great City of Pegasus

Great City of Hesperus

Solentis River

Cloudmire Island

Sulpeco

Abessada

S'lessuth & S'less

Gulf of Yarris

The Altherian Peninsula



an Peninsula

Chapter Two

GEOGRAPHY

The Ssethregoran Empire spans most of the lush tropical peninsula on the northeastern half of the Lauriol Sea, though its influence extends well across the sea into the vaulted rain forests of the south. The Ssethregoran Empire's main power base is located deep within the northern peninsula. From the capital city of Sseth along the shores of Lake Quesselan, the Empire's control extends north to the foot of the Altherian Plateau, and west to the Bay of Melan. The well-guarded border swings south along the Kuthre River to Lake Khess, then southwest through Fellglade to the Bay of Laran. The Southern reaches of the Empire expand south and west into the thick rainforests uncharted by humankind. The Empire extends from the Toural Mountains in the south, to the Pale Sea in the east, and the Taconic mountains in the west.

The Northern Steppes

The Northern Steppes encompasses a region spanning from the southernmost foot of the Luriane Mountains to the west, extending along the fertile valleys of the Kraldjur River, to the eastern shore of the Kuthre River in the north. Rolling hills and crags, forested with a mixture of deciduous trees and dark conifers, characterize this region. Tall proud oaks and maples grace the valleys, while half starved firs and hemlock eek out a living amongst the rocky heights. Dense layers of scrub bushes and briars coat the forest floor, with thickets extending for miles along the banks of the Kraldjur River. Animals and beasts of all types roam throughout these hills, from wild deer and hogs, to rogue owlbears or hungry drakes stalking the forested valleys. Escapees of the Empire's cruel machinations populate this area, especially creatures aligned to the elemental plane of earth. More than one explorer of this region has met a slow death at the inexorable fists of an enraged earth elemental or deformed hill giant. The entire area is under the jurisdiction of Pit Aspis and their rule is enforced by the Emerald Scale Ss'ressen who call this region home. The other Ss'ressen, Troglodytes, and lesser Ssethric races answer to the swift justice of the Emerald Scales while in this region. The Northern Steppes are also the main front in the war with Altheria and are therefore, constantly patrolled. It is said that no one walks a foot in the Northern Steppes without the unblinking eyes of Ssethregoran firmly locked upon them.

Major Geographical Features

Luriane Mountains

The most prominent feature of this region is the foothills of the Luriane Mountains that spill off onto the Altherian Plateau. These hills are rife with mineral deposits, prompting the Altherians and Ssethregorans to constantly battle over the richest veins of ore. From this region alone Ssethregore garners more than half of its iron and silver ore, most of which is sent to the Ss'ressen forges or the Naga coffers. Battles over this region are bitter, with both sides sending excursions into the other's territory in search of new deposits or a chance to raid enemy supplies.

Thellis Hills

These rolling hills are situated on the east-

ern shores of the Kuthre River. They are prized for their deposits of copper ore, readily available in the soft loamy hillsides. The Kuthre River weaves through the western edge of the knolls, its fast flowing waters releasing precious gold and the rare gems from the earth's grasp. The Thellis Hills are the northernmost point controlled by the Ssethregoran Empire and consequently the most heavily targeted by human raids and the dastardly Shining Patrol of Altheria. For a region so deeply engulfed in conflict, the Ssethregoran hold is remarkably strong, due to the subterranean connections, which allows them to re-supply the region quickly, efficiently, and most importantly, in secret.

Lake Khess

Lake Khess is the ending point for the mighty Kuthre River as it pours off of the Altherian Plateau. Its cool clear waters are said to be bottomless, for the lake extends deep into the bedrock of the earth. Acting as a massive natural drain, the waters of Lake Khess pour deep into the earth, where they form the headwaters of the Kusarnth River. The Kusarnth River, an entirely subterranean extension of the Kuthre River, flows due southwest and empties into the Bay of Laran through subsurface vents. The Lake itself acts as a conduit, allowing the aquatic Pleisaurans to travel from the warm costal waters to the lake without crossing overland. Deep within the lake, the Pleisauran population farm huge kelp beds and raise a myriad of cool water delicacies, such as pike, catfish and a unique species of monstrous crab. The giant catfish of Lake Khess are a prized delicacy within the Empire and the Ss'ressen will go to great lengths to attain them.

Important Sites

Veriss: (population 60, 000) Located on the junction between the Kraldjur and Sakress rivers, Veriss retains the honor of being the second largest city in Ssethregore. From its position on the river, it controls the gateway into the Northern Steppes and regulates all traffic flowing into that region from the more southerly locales in the Empire. The city is a massive fortress built from granite blocks dug from the nearby Luriane Mountains and dragged into place by thousands of toiling slaves. Veriss is separated into three massive rings by well-fortified circular walls that segregate the city's population. The outer ring houses the Troglodytes, slave pits, food markets, and entertainment districts (fighting pits, gambling dens, etc) while the second ring contains all the military structures, guilds, offices and businesses run within the city. The innermost ring is home to the Emerald Scale Egg Clutch as well as the palatial dwellings of Ssanu and Naga nobility.

Veriss is controlled by the Ssanu of Pit Elapis, but is maintained by the Emerald Scale Egg Clutch. The Emerald Scales consider Veriss their ancestral home, having started the city as a military fortress five thousand years ago. Though they bow and scrape at the feet of their Ssanu lords, the Emerald Scales are the true rulers of Veriss, managing every aspect of the mighty city's existence. The current High Matriarch Mother, Xantusia (Emerald Scale Ss'ressen Cleric of Kassegore 16) governs the city proper, while her Warlord, Overlord Dracaena (Fighter 6, Ranger 4, Marauder 3, Expert 3), maintains the defense of the city and marshals the military force within its walls. Currently, Dracaena is the only Ss'ressen to hold the rank of Overlord, a position he earned through conquest and his exceptional tactical skills. Overlord Dracaena's position is one coveted by many Ssanu rivals, an

appointment they see as an affront to their virtual monopoly over the highest ranks within the Ssethregoran military. His position also draws undisguised hatred from warlords of other egg clutches, especially the Barbed Tail generals, who are required to take orders from their higher ranking counterpart. From the high towers of Veriss, the High Matriarch Mother carefully watches the human city of Semar, secretly plotting its eventual downfall.

Telith: (population 11,500) The small military outpost of Telith is located on the Mighty Kraldjur River approximately half way between Lake Khess and the Altherian City of Semar, and currently acts as the home of the Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen Egg Clutch. The Flaming Tongue used to make their home in the fertile jungles north of Sseth, but the aggressive Horned Jowl Egg Clutch drove them out of their ancestral home one hundred and fifty years ago and the Flaming Tongue have been unsuccessful in reclaiming it.

Chelydra: The military outpost of Chelydra that resides along the shore of Lake Khess is one of the oldest settlements in the Empire. Completely under the influence of Pit Maliss, Chelydra acts as the gateway for human goods to pass into the Empire. The imposing reddish marble structures of Chelydra were constructed using blocks dug from the nearby Thellis Hills. The fortress is squat, blocky and massive, its thick walls extending deep into the earth. Garrisoned at all times by a mixed force of Ss'ressen, Troglodytes, and their Ssanu officers, the fortress has repelled every assault thrown against it in the last five centuries. One of the most unique features of Chelydra is the bazaar held in a tent city outside its walls where human smugglers and slave traders are allowed to present their wares to the throngs of reptilian buyers that flock there every few weeks. Remarkably, the human scum allowed to conduct business in the area are allowed to leave Ssethregore unmolested, carrying amber and other rare treasures coveted in the highest human courts. Chelydra is perhaps one of the only places in the entire empire where free humans are tolerated.

Duriss Tower: A relic of an older age, the ruins of Duriss tower stands atop the highest peak of the Thellis Hills. Legend states the Ssanu Elemental Ss'kang constructed the tower three thousand years ago, as a location where the old snake could practice his dark arts and summon creatures from the very bones of the earth. One night, as his experiments neared fruition, something occurred within the tower. Whether it was a mistake of Ss'kang or the interference of a rival remains a mystery to this day, but it is said that late one night, as the stars clouded in the sky, Duriss tower exploded in a great gout of green flame visible from the walls of Veriss far to the south. Whatever the reason, the explosion unleashed all manner of creatures from the elemental plane of earth upon the region, where they reside to this day drawn inexorably toward the ruined husk of the old tower.

The Western Forests

The Western Forests are the most contested zone of the Ssethregoran Empire. Constantly at war with the Malfelan Elorii, the Ssethregorans have been pushing their way deeper and deeper into the Fellglade with each passing year. The Empire currently controls a section of the Fellglade extending from the eastern edges of the forest to the border region: a 20 mile wide strip of disputed terrain stretching from the western shore of Lake Khess to the Bay of Laran.

The Fellglade is a boreal cloud forest. Warm ocean breezes blowing north off the bay collide with cooler air over the continent, plunging the forest into a perpetual fog. Giant teak, mahogany, and eucalyptus bury their roots in a rich peaty loam and stretch their branches heavenward to touch the sky where they are wrapped in a soft white blanket of clouds. Abundant ferns and cycads dominate the forest floor and form a thick leafy under story impenetrable to all but the savviest woodsmen. Delicate

orchids and colorful lichens grow upon the trunks of the trees, while bromeliads hang in the branches, drawing moisture from the air itself. Large bison and great hunting cats call this forest home, as well as the bird-like Sc'math and an assortment of ravenous Saurians that trickle in from Kraldjur Morass to the east.

Major Geographical Features

Sa'kress River: This southern branch of the mighty Kraldjur River flows into the northeastern edge of the Fellglade. Its muddy waters are stained brown from the heavy tannins imparted by the detritus of the surrounding soils. The Sa'kress River is the gateway for overland travel into the Fellglade. Its obscure waters have acted as the avenue for more than one Ssethric invasion force into the forest.

Fellglade Forest: The second largest hardwood forest in the Known Lands, the Fellglade Forest represents one of the most important sources of quality lumber for the Ssethregoran Empire. The Malfelan Elorii control the western half of the forest and both sides are constantly warring over the rich resources of this area. Treants, Dryads and other woodland beings abound Fellglade Forest and the great green drakes that prowl under its shaded canopy probably gave rise to its ominous name.

Important Features:

The Boneyards: The Boneyards is a thirty-mile wide strip of forest that extends from Sunken Myrantis northeast into the Fellglade. As one travels through the forest, a proliferation of strange white rocks covered in a thick layer of bright green moss is noticeable. A closer examination reveals untold thousands of moldering corpses, their remains slowly absorbed into the surrounding forest. The Boneyards has been the sight of hundreds of conflicts between Ssethregoran and Malfelan forces and the unburied dead of both sides litter the forest floor. All manner of undead stalk this unholy region, and the Ssethregorans and Elorii only enter this area when bolstered by large numbers or due to great necessity.

Sunken Myrantis: West of the Sa'kress River lay the ruins of the ancient human city of Myrantis, the initial capital of the Myrantian Hegemony. Under the vaulted city's twisted catacombs, the humans began the worship of Tzizzit of the Many Limbs, a practice that survives today in the alleys of its sister city Asbessios. Myrantis, the jewel of the south, fell to the ever-encroaching swamplands not long after their country succumbed to a strange curse. It is said that deep beneath the crumbling ruins, the virtually limitless catacombs house a secret cabal of Yig worshippers who seek to subvert both human and Ssethric worshippers alike to their dread cult. The surface ruins are now overgrown with thick jungle vegetation, and all manner of monsters have taken residence including: drakes, behirs, ettercaps and choasbeasts just to name a few.

S'lissuth: (population 5,000): S'lissuth, sister city to S'lis, holds the distinction of being the large subterranean city home of the Razor Claw Egg Clutch. Where S'lis exists within the depths of the Lavender way, S'lissuth resides as a small surface settlement, acting as a gateway to the city below. S'lissuth is the only large scale access point to the Lavender Way within the Fellglade and operates as a staging point for most of the attacks upon the Malfelan Elorii. As a consequence, S'lissuth is more of a fortress than a place of commerce. Thick granite walls are precisely stacked to form the 20' high ramparts that defend this outpost. Even if an invader were to take S'lissuth, they would not only have to worry counterattacks from the surrounding forests, but would also have to defend against counterassaults from below.

Eastern Rainforest

The Eastern Rainforest represents the core of Ssethregore, encompassing an area spanning from the Fellglades in the west, the Pale Sea in the East, Kraldjur Morass in the south, and the Altherian Penninsula in the north. The entire delta of the Kraldjur River permeates this swampland, flooding the region each spring with its rejuvenating waters. The position of the Eastern Rainforest assures that it will always be inundated with rain, as warm moisture laden clouds collide with cooler northern breezes directly over the swamp and drop their watery payloads daily. The entire region is crisscrossed with a watery maze of rivers and streams, all tributaries or offshoots of the mighty Kraldjur River.

The entire rainforest is teeming with life seen nowhere else on Onara. The foliage is thick, as to be almost impenetrable. Tropical hardwoods mix with palms and broadleaf trees, incredible vines twist their springy lengths through the trees, while cycad, ferns and thick palm undergrowth coats the soggy rainforest soil. Incredibly delicate flowers and orchids grow in abundance, feasted upon by an unbelievable assortment of insect life. Fat nectar-laden fruits hang from every bough or lie rotting upon the leafy detritus of the rainforest floor. The canopy is lush and teeming with wildlife. Monkeys and colorful birds flit about the upper boughs of the trees, blissfully unaware of the winged serpents and dragonnells that stalked them in their leafy home. Large sauropods trample through the forests, their long necks lifting their tiny heads high into the air in order to pluck the juiciest fruit from its perches. Huge semi-aquatic herbivores, such as the furry hydrochoreus, obese hippopotami, and beaked hadrasaurs confine themselves to the relative safety of the river courses, venturing out under the trees by night to graze on the lush undergrowth. In the shadows of the palm fronds, cunning predators lie in wait: fast Mor'lets, hulking Carnasaurs, and wily Swamp Drakes. In the waterways, crocodiles of titanic proportions lie in ambush, while serpents that could swallow a horse whole, glide silently through the shallows. Despite all this the Ssethregoran Empire has managed to carve itself a place in this wonderful diverse wilderness and bring it under their tyrannical control.

Major Geographical Features

Kraldjur River: The mighty Kraldjur River and its tributaries wend their way through eight hundred miles of steamy jungle to end their journey in the brackish waters of Lake Quesselan. The slow meandering waterways are full of silt and debris, giving the river a dark muddy appearance with low visibility. The deep channels it has cut into the rainforest are home to thousands of different plants and animals, from tiny fish and crustaceans to gargantuan reptilian carnivores. Undercut banks hide predators at every bend, and intrepid explorers can dive down a hundred feet or more in the deepest pools. With the coming of the spring rains, the river swells and overflows its banks, flooding the Eastern Rainforest with one to three feet of water. During these times, it becomes impossible for any but the most experienced Ss'ressen or Pleisauran river men to navigate the channels. The river provides a bounty of food in the form of fish and herbivorous mammals, which are harvested every year by Troglodytes for the Ssethric population. The twisting waterways of the Kraldjur River also provide a means of overland travel throughout the Empire.

Heavy barges ply the river, piloted by skilled Troglodyte boatmen or led by the aquatic Pleisaurans.

Lake Quesselan: Lake Quesselan is the largest standing body of water in all of Ssethregore and one of the largest lakes in the Known Lands. The lake is the endpoint of the Kraldjur River and the channels on the eastern edge pour freshwater into the sea.

The lake itself is slightly brackish, due to

backflow from the Pale Sea. At the great delta on the western edge of the lake, the capitol city of Sseth stands like a glittering jewel, its tall spires reflected in the cool dark waters of the lake. Sseth regulates all traffic upon the lake; a fleet of strange subsurface crafts are moored in the lake ready to travel out to the sea and to the southern reaches of the Empire. Lavish taverns and inns dot the waterfront, ready to cater to visiting Sahuagin allies or the rare human smuggler willing to chance a visit to a city where he is considered a culinary delicacy. Pleisaurans call the lake home; their settlements built upon the lake bottom, where they farm huge kelp beds and raise hundreds of tons of shellfish every year.

The lake is also the legendary resting place of the God Kassegore, who supposedly threw himself from the heavens and landed in what is now Ssethregore; the crater created from his impact forming the lake. This legend has yet to be proven, for the lake is so deep that there are regions that even the pleisaurans have yet to explore.



Important Features

Sseth (population 1.6 million): Sseth is the capital city of the Ssethregoran Empire. Founded by the great Ssanu Sseth, the city is a relic of a forgotten age, demonstrating the magnificence of reptilian architecture, and home to technology and wonders undreamt of by the younger races. From its impossibly high towers stretched to the heavens, to the twisting tunnels burrowed deep into the roots of the earth, Sseth is an immense city without rival. Not even the fabled Belestor or the marbled facades of Grand Coryan approach the perfect curves and architectural wonders that make up this wondrous city. The city extends far below the surface of the earth, its foundations taking root in the Lavender Way. Mighty armies utilize the city to assemble and march into the perpetual gloom, traveling for hundreds of leagues on immense subterranean roads. These routes are the lifeblood of Sseth, for they allow troops and goods to be shipped from the capital to outlying provinces without worry of attack or the bother of having to cut and maintain surface roads in an environment that floods every spring. The tunnels themselves are kept quite dry, for they are

sealed through alchemical means or pumped free by massive screw pumps turned by tireless golems.

The city itself is based upon the strict caste system of Ssethregoran society, and its architectural layout reflects this mindset. The city is a set of 5 concentric rings in the form of great black basalt walls, each ring housing one caste. The more important the Ssethregoran, the nearer to the innermost ring he is allowed to reside. The innermost ring is reserved solely for the opulent palace of Sseth, the Emperor's extended family, and visiting dignitaries. The second ring protects the various Naga household and Ssanu pits, along with the fabled Tower of Gettulus and various military centers. The third ring is home to the Ss'ressen who chose to take up residence in Sseth, mainly the Barbed Tail egg clutch, and the Blood Pit, an inverted arena twice the size of the coliseum of Grand Coryan. The fourth ring houses the Troglodytes and the mercantile district for the city, while the outermost ring holds the slave pens, warehouse district, cattle pens, and other less savory aspects of Ssethric life.

Sites of Interest in Sseth

Grand Palace of Sseth, Seat of the Coiled Throne

The Grand Palace of Sseth is perhaps one of the greatest edifices still standing upon Onara. Modeled after the Grand Seat of Yahresemore, the sprawling palace dwarfs all other known structures. Its size is enormous and the population of the staff alone is enough to call the palace a city in itself. The true magnificence of the palace however, is in its architecture. Massive fluted columns sweep gracefully upwards to support the ceiling in intricate carved latticework archways and delicate statuary support seemingly impossible structural loads.

The true beauty of the Palace resides in the throne room, where the vaulted ceilings could easily accommodate a fleet of ships, their masts never touching the mother of pearl inlaid roof. The floors are inlaid with intricate murals of lapis and turquoise, polished to a mirror's shine by the hand of countless slaves. The spiraling columns seem to reach up and embrace the ceiling, their cylindrical turnings carved to resemble the greatest heroes and Emperors of Ssethric lore. Placed in the middle of the chamber is a fixture of pure opulence, for centered in a beam of sunlight, forever resides the Coiled Throne. A reconstruction of the original, the Coiled Throne is a dais intended for the serpentine extremities of the Ssanu (or Naga). The entire structure is meticulously carved out of a white gold to resemble a serpent lounging on its own coils, but each and every scale of the great beast is in actuality a separate flawless gem. Rubies, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and all forms of precious stones wink from their honored places on the throne. When bathed in the light of the sun, the multifaceted brilliance of the throne is demonstrated as it reflects thousands of rays of multihued light around the chamber, magnified by the reflective concave surfaces of the roof and the floor, creating a surreal image of lavish splendor. It is said the gems alone from the gold throne would be worth more than all the riches in Milandir combined.

Tower of Gettulus

The Tower of Gettulus is an imposing structure situated in the second ring of the city. This thirty-story tower was built to resemble three titanic serpents rising up from the ground, intertwined with each other. The bases of the three serpent's skulls meet at the top of the tower so the heads stare out in opposite directions, their gaze capturing all of Ssethregore. The Tower of Gettulus is home to the Black Coil, a cabal of Ssethric mages whose goal is nothing less than the total mastery of magic. None who practice sorcery in all of Ssethregore escape the notice of the Black Coil and those found worthy are brought to the Tower of Gettulus to be trained in the arcane arts. The Tower is also responsible for supplying battle mages to the Ssethregoran military, though the mages are loyal

to the Tower first and foremost, a fact that makes the current Emperor uneasy.

The surface levels of the Tower are reserved for arcane study, and the teaching of recruits. The upper floors are home to those of the Black Coil who wish to reside within the tower. The uppermost floor is divided into thirds, each section built into one of the great serpent heads of the Tower itself. Here, in these chambers do the Mage's council deliberate, a triad comprised of the three most powerful members of the Black Coil. Currently two members reside full time in the triad's chambers; The'ssoth (wizard 18/rogue 5) and Ssremit (sorcerer 20), both Ssanu from pit Sseth. The third member is rarely seen outside his laboratory deep in the bowels of Pit Crotalus, as the esteemed archmage Sengal only ventures forth in person in times of great need or great peril. Sengal, The'ssoth, and Ssremit are all bitter rivals, as likely to kill each other as not, but are able to put their differences aside to keep the unity of the Black Coil intact, for they see the power of the guild as more important than their own personal squabbles.

The Blood Pit

An innocuous name for so vile a place, the Blood Pit is the main arena for gladiatorial games in the Empire. Able to seat over one million howling Ssethregorans, the Blood Pit is a wonder to behold when full. The Blood Pit is actually built down into the ground, in a tiered style, each level being slightly smaller than the one above, descending until they reach the arena floor far below. Here, on the warm sands of the stadium, professional gladiators, pit fighters, and slaves are pitted against one another in the cruelest bloodbaths imaginable. Some participants are made to fight, while others are drawn and quartered for the sheer entertainment value. Fighters who perform extremely well can look forward to a pampered life and a quick death, for once a gladiator reaches a certain level of prestige, he is worth more on the Ssethric meat market as a delicacy, than as a fighter in the pit.

All types of spectacles are created in the arena. Hapless unarmed slaves are purposely pitted against hopeless match ups, their flesh to be flayed by the serrated edges of their opponent's blades or to be torn apart mercilessly by the jaws of some titanic beast. The Blood Pit can also be flooded by an subterranean canal, allowing for naval battles and the importation of exotic sea creatures into the arena for the enjoyment of the bloodthirsty masses.

The Catacombs

Deep below even the lowest levels of the city lay the catacombs, a sprawling expanse of tombs from a bygone age. Before the collapse of the Old Empire, it was common practice for the rich Ssanu or Naga to entomb the dead in lavish crypts rather than being devoured by the deceased's kin. With the formation of the Ssethregoran Empire proper, it was soon discovered that human necromancers would rob Ssethric tombs and violate the peacefully resting corpses of their ancestors by animating the husks and commanding them to perform degrading acts. Because of this, the practice of interring bodies was soon abolished in the Empire and all who died were consumed in some fashion. Even so, for a short time after the formation of the city, the richest families still entombed their dead and a catacomb long forgotten by the living still exists, sealed off in the bowels of the city. A Naga -lich resides there and ensures that the sanctity of the tombs.

The Sacrosanct Gateway

The Sacrosanct Gateway is the largest temple in Sseth, dwarfing the now abandoned temples to Kassegore and Yig. Dedicated to the Varn deities, the Sacrosanct Gateway is more than a place of worship; it is a conduit unto the Varn themselves, for in the hallowed halls, one may

call upon these powerful entities and draw one forth from their own realm and onto the world of Arcanis. Inside the temple, as nowhere else in Onara, the power of the Varn can be felt, radiating from the air itself. Within this most holy place the power of the Varn is strongest upon this plane and woe to all who enter the temple with thought of sacrilege upon their minds.

Snosretep's Tavern

Perhaps the oddest place within the walled city of Sseth is Snosretep's Tavern. It is one of the few places within the Empire where warm-bloods can come and go freely without ending up as an item on a menu or at the end of a slave chain. Run by an obese Trog by the same name, Snosretep's Tavern caters to the human riff-raff and other scum that wash into the port of Sseth, carrying Illegal contraband for sale. Located directly on the Waterfront, Snosretep's Tavern is considered a safe haven for pirates and smugglers that are looking to turn a profit in the reptilian city, for certain common commodities in human lands are considered treasures in Ssethregoran society. For merchants brave and unscrupulous enough to deal with their Ssethric clientele, the profits can be astronomical. Any ship wishing to trade in Ssethregore raises certain multihued flags when approaching Ssethregoran waters. There it is boarded and escorted into harbor by Pleisauran patrols. Their human, dwarven or Elorii crews are allowed to stay on their ship or proceed to Snosretep's; either location is considered safe from persecution. Snosretep's is a retched hideout for pirates wanted in human lands and a meeting place for slave traders and seedy merchants alike. It is said anything can be bought or sold over the scratched wooden tables of Snosretep's and more than one life has changed hands there over a mere bag of coins. It is understood that as long as one remains within the confines of the tavern, one is safe. If a warm blood chooses to leave the tavern they are free to do so, but are now considered fair game by the populace.

Kraldjur Morass

The Kraldjur Morass has often been considered the most dark, vile, and sinister landscape within the Ssethregoran Empire. Encompassing an area of roughly 250 miles long and 100 miles wide, the Morass is a twisted festering cesspool of disease and decay, which paradoxically is home to some of the most beautiful landscapes on all of Onara. Though the ground level of the Morass is a worm-ridden bog, the canopy high above it is lush and vibrant with life. To understand the

Morass one has to look at the plants that make their home in this area. Primordial hardwoods stretch up toward the heavens towering three hundred feet or more above the marshy soil. These herbaceous behemoths were ancient before the discovery of the swamp by the Ssethregorans and are perhaps the oldest living creatures on Onara. The canopy of the Morass is so dense that mosses and vines have woven through the titanic trunks, forming a layer of living vegetation more than 50 feet thick. This layer is so dense, that it traps all sunlight falling upon the Morass, keeping the earth below in perpetual darkness.

The upper canopy of the Morass is vibrant and green. Sunlight bathes this surreal landscape in life giving energy and the clouds wrap the treetops in a perpetual fog. Rain falling upon the canopy is trapped in the thick moss layers, forming huge ponds and lakes in the sky. Much of this water is absorbed by the vines, orchids, and mosses, while the rest trickles through the vegetation system to fall on the cold dank marsh far below. The arboreal lakes are home to a myriad of creatures found nowhere else on

Onara: rare orchids and lotus blooms are abundant in the cloudy mists. Pterosaurs swoop between the branches, while insects of all kinds abound. Odonatas dart between ponds catching unwary monkeys, while the Hylis make their homes on the shores of these lakes, fishing for the strange insect larvae that live in the surrounding areas. Their position is so isolated, that unless the explorer can fly, it is almost impossible to contact the denizens of this miniature world.

The land below the canopy is an entirely different matter, for the lack of sunlight leaves the terrain locked in shadows. Only the eerie phosphorescent glow from rotting vegetation provides any light to this dark world. Strange twisted beasts roam beneath the blanket of darkness, feeding upon the weak or unwary. Everything in this dark world is in decay, from the plants to the animals themselves. Rot grubs pervade everything and hideous slimes, molds, and fungoid creatures slither through the tepid oily waters looking for their next meal. Warped mockeries of animals live here and being cut off from the light, they are blind, hunting by

sense of smell, hearing, or touch alone. In the depths of this swamp, not even the Ssethregorans tread, for only the Black Drakes dare call themselves masters here.

Major Geographical Features:

Lake Uleuth

Lake Uleuth is the largest of the treetop lakes in Kraldjur Morass, located about thirty miles south-southwest of Lake Quesselan, as the crow flies. The Lake is home to two large settlements of Hylis and it is here that dignitaries from the capital travel when dealing with their batrachian allies. Lake Uleuth boasts an amazing array of plants, flowers and herbs along its sun dappled



shores while its shallow waters are home to a myriad of aquatic delicacies, including a singular fish species called *Sphyraena*. The Hylis protect and manage this lake, for its life giving waters act as a hatchery for its next generation. The Hylis also make quite a profit in harvesting small quantities of *Sphyraena* for sale in Sseth, for the Ssanu considers the rare fish a delicacy.

Important Features

Taxidum Grove

Taxidum grove stands at the heart of Kraldjur Morass and is home to the oldest living sentient creature upon Onara, the worm-ridden Treant *Taxispilota*. This Treant considers itself to be the guardian of Kraldjur Morass, having personally watched every tree in the Morass germinate, take root, and grow into the giants of today. The Treant has kept to his own devices, never becoming involved in the happenings of the races outside of his precious swamp. Over the ages, *Taxispilota* has watched as the swamp grew and changed; observing as the canopy filled in and the area below succumbed to darkness. All this was accepted as part of the natural cycle, but living in the unending mire has begun to unhinge the old Treant's mind. Now ancient beyond compare, it is said that *Taxispilota* has become dark and worm-ridden, his thoughts anchored in the doldrums of the eternal darkness, no longer able to comprehend the hope brought about by the warm rays of the sun. *Taxispilota* patrols the Morass, driving out all those who enter his domain, rarely asking for the reason for the intrusion. The Ssethregorans tolerate his presence for they rarely enter the darkness under the trees unless they absolutely must and they are not entirely sure they could kill the elder Treant if they tried. *Taxispilota* will continue to guard his homeland, as his core grows more rotten with each passing day.

Ruins of Kal'thess

The ruins of Kal'thess are a jumbled pile of stones, half submerged in the swamp on the western edge of the Morass. Originally a small settlement with a temple dedicated to Kassegor, Kal'thess was abandoned four thousand years ago as it was swallowed by the ever-encroaching mire of the Morass. Recently there have been whispers floating through Ssethregoran society that a new group has taken up residence in these ruins, a group still believing in the Old Ways, but all attempts to find such a group have met with failure.

The Coastal Swamplands

The coastal swamplands encompass a region of brackish mangrove swamps and pampas grasslands stretching from Lake Quesselan in the east to the Bay of Laran in the west. Here the large dregs of water flow off the end of the peninsula, mingling the peat effluent with the warm shallow waters of the coast. The result is a nutrient rich bounty where fish and all types of sea life thrive. The Brackish marshes are home to a calliope of creatures: from marching Rhinoceros and browsing Ceratopsians, to immense serpents, crocodiles, and Salt Drakes; even the occasional Brass Drake has even been seen from time to time in the warm coastal waters. The Venom Scale Egg clutch call this region home. The port city of Anuliss sits upon the edge of the sea, catering to both the fanged denizens of the land and their nearby aquatic relations in the sea. Pleisauran villages dot the offshore coral reefs, managing huge underwater aquaculture facilities that provide, fish, crustaceans, and shellfish for the Empire. Though it may look abandoned to all but the Ssethregorans, this shore is entirely hostile. For decades pirates have attempted to hide in the many backwater coves that dot this region, but captains that follow that route swiftly meet their demise at the rending claws of the scaled inhabitants.

Major Geographical Features

Mangrove Swamps

The Mangrove swamps stretch for hundreds of miles along the coastlines, giving way to endless seas of flooded grass as one works their way inland. These marshes provide a first line of defense from any who may choose to attack by sea, for no sooner than they make landfall than they would have to deal with the swarms of salt water mosquitoes that inhabit this marshland. Furthermore, the thick scaly hides of the Ssethregorans protect them from the worst of the attacks; the Ssanu have engineered acute viruses and introduced them into the mosquito populations of this region as a biological defense system. These virulent strains have spread and now can be found working their way into the southern borders of Malfelen. Strangely these viruses only seem to affect sentient creatures and some speculate that the infectious agent targets the frontal lobe of the creature causing insanity in higher life forms.



Important Features

Anuliss (population 25,000) Anuliss is a large port city situated along the Ssethregoran coastline where the Fellglade and the Morass meet. Here the Venomous Scale Ssethregorans worship the God Caimeth, holding vigils late into the night, feeding humans and Elorri to His sacred crocodiles in a futile attempt to satiate the gluttonous God. Anuliss is responsible for receiving shipments of goods from her sister city of Th'lathis across the Lauriol Sea. It is said that the population of Anuliss lives not in fear of their Naga governors, but of an organization of assassins known as the Order of the Dripping Blades, who rule Anuliss from the shadows.

The Southern Reaches

Wrapped in a shroud of mystery, the southern reaches of the Empire lie across the Lauriol Sea in a wild and fell land untouched by the humans and Elorii that plague Onara. This pristine jungle is not as dense as its northern counterpart, but contains just as much variety in the flora and fauna that call the region home. The Southern Reaches of the Empire extend for five hundred miles along the coast of the Lauriol Sea and widen for hundreds of miles inland, to the base of the Taconis Mountains. The entire region is comprised of primordial hardwood rainforest and broadleaf succulents, but with the distinctive lack of palms and cycads that dominate the understory of Kraldjur Morass. This area is characterized by the vast variety of tall trees, devoid of branches for the greater part of their height and with their spreading crowns forming a luxuriant evergreen canopy at a height of 100 feet or more above the forest floor. The understory reaches a height of 30 feet, its thick foliage intertwined with vines and bryophytes. The forest floor is left relatively clear, populated by a thick layer of fallen leaves and detritus, interspersed with the occasional rotting trunk. Between the boles of the forest giants are patches of shrubs and bushes overhanging secluded streams meandering their way through the forest.

This pristine forest is botanically rich in tree species and biological productivity, housing thousands of species of birds, reptiles, mammals, amphibians, and plant life. Brightly colored hornbills flit through the forest preying upon secretive frogs, which in turn fall prey to the crushing coils of emerald boas, or other scaly predators. Okapi and tapir root through the debris, feeding on fallen fruits and dodging the toothy maws of the drakes that roam this wilderness. Over the entire Southern Reach, the umbrella of Ssethregoran rule holds mastery.

Major Geographical Features

Heldurii River System: Actually comprised of two rivers, the Heldurii River system is a large triangular expanse of shallow flooded timberlands created where the Heldurii and Sonorii rivers descend from the Taconis Mountains and cut across the jungles to plunge into the sea just west of Th'lathis. These two behemoths supply the city's population with water and the Ssethregorians use it as a highway for the shipment of ores and timber from the mountains to the south.

Taconis Mountains: The Taconis Mountains are not truly part of the Ssethregoran Empire, though the Empire currently holds the northern slopes of these ancient cones. Partially volcanic, the entire range is rich in iron ore and seeded with dozens of other important mineral deposits, including magnesium, copper, wolf iron, and zinc. The Curled Tail Ss'ressen control the slave camps that work these fields. The dangerous vapors of the area, combined with the shifting earth, make tunnel mining in the Taconis Range hazardous, but slaves are relatively cheap and plentiful.

Lately the Ssethregorans have met with opposition in their mining efforts, as a new species of goblinoids have gathered in mass under a charismatic Shaman named Akito Ichanti. They have

begun making forays across the border in the west, harrying Ssethregoran outposts and attacking supply trains.

If this continues, the
S s e t h r e g o r a n
E m p i r e

might be forced to take extreme action and invade, pushing their borders farther west, but that remains to be seen.

Tapui: The Tapuis are plateaus of incredible size that seemingly thrust up out of the jungle floor to extend their sheer walled height hundreds of feet into the air. Almost impregnable, the Tapuis remain impossible for most beings to climb and can only be assaulted successfully by aerial means. Currently they are home to the Curled Tail Ss'ressen, who have no trouble negotiating the steep sides.

Important Features

Th'lathis (population 35,000) Th'lathis is the largest city in the Southern Reaches of the Ssethregoran Empire. Located at the mouth of the Heldurii River, the city of Th'lathis turns its gaze across the Lauriol Sea to its sister city of Veriss to the north. The great southern city is responsible for the shipping of raw ore and lumber across the ocean to the main factory cities in the northern part of the Empire. Ruled by the Ssanu of Pit Aspis, the city controls one of the most strategic points in the Empire, for its location guards the entrance to the Lauriol Sea. None pass into that body of water without falling under the gaze of these Ssanu overlords.

The Lavender Way

The Lavender way is the best-kept secret of the Empire, for deep underground are a series of tunnels, grottos and caves which criss-cross the continent of Onara. This underground realm is known as the Lavender way. The industrious Il'huan who lived deep within the bowels of the earth built the system long ago. As they expanded their empire, the Il'huan excavated an extensive network of tunnels stretching to all the corners of Onara, cutting under mountains and sending tendrils under every major city of the surface world. This expansive network of twisting tunnels and underground rivers fell into the hands of the Ssethregoran Empire through bloodshed and conquest.

Much of the Lavender way remains unexplored, unknown to the surface dwellers who have no notion of its existence. The Ssethregorans only control a portion of the entire network that runs under the Fellglade, Kraldjur Morass, and the Altherian Peninsula. They use this massive system as a clandestine underground highway, able to ship troops and goods anywhere in the Empire without having to clear paths through the thick jungle overhead. This system works perfectly for the scaly denizens of the swamp, for as long as they control the Lavender Way, they can easily move throughout their entire Empire, but anyone trying to invade overland would have to spend an unimaginable amount of time and resources cutting trails through the impenetrable jungles of Ssethregore. All of the Ssethreic cities descend deep into the earth, and have their lower reaches in the Lavender Way. As a matter of fact, one could live within the confines of Ssethregore and travel to all its major cities and never once have the sun touch one's skin. The Lavender Way remains the most important and strategic secret of the Empire.

The knowledge of the Lavender Way's existence is not a secret to everyone. An ancient enemy still roams its depths, beings of hate and destruction known to the Ssethregorans as the Sil'hais or the Voiceless Ones. These beings have managed to spread through the lightless depths of the Lavender Way, taking control of much of

the old tunnel system and creating new byways of their own. The Ssethregorans are currently at war with this race, fighting for the possession of the Lavender Way. It is this war, which has spanned nearly nine hundred years, that has reduced the Ssethregoran Empire's control of the Lavender way to its current, minor holdings.

Other Areas of Ssethric Influence

The Sulphur Marsh

The Sulphur marsh is a forested wetland in northern Milandir, roughly 150 miles long and 40 miles wide. Cradled in the north by the Tares River and giving way to the rolling plains of Milandir in the south, the Sulphur Marsh was considered to be wasted land by the Milandesians who colonized the area. The Sulphur Marsh's namesakes are the steaming geothermal springs and geysers, which dot the swamp, spewing noxious vapors into the air. The area itself is almost uninhabitable by humans. The constant assault of toxic fumes was enough to keep the Milandesians from attempting to drain the entire region centuries ago. The area is a mixture of hardwood cypress swamps, peat bogs, and flooded grasslands. Home to crocodiles, serpents, swamp drakes, and the fearsome Cholepus (the dread Iron Sloths), this area is considered a dangerous wilderness region, explored only by the insane or fool-hardy.

This all changed three hundred years ago with the emigration of the Black Talon Ss'ressen out of Ssethregore. The Ss'ressen found the noxious vapors and warm mineral laden waters a boon. In fact, it was the perfect place to settle and rebuild their clutch. The rich jungle that was so inhospitable to their human neighbors cradled the Ss'ressen and provided a physical barrier to attack while the clutch concentrated on rebuilding their culture. As the Ss'ressen explored the marshlands, they discovered Ssethric ruins of another age, dating back to the early days of the Old Empire, even predating the construction of Yahssremore. It seems that their newfound God had led them to the Promised Land; a warm protected region that was once controlled by Ssethrics not unlike themselves, for both cultures, old and new seemed to worship the Fire Dragon. The Black Talons

quickly settled into their new lifestyle, spreading through the swamp, rebuilding where they could, and creating their capital city of Lanpeltis from the largest ruin. Now they have thirty-nine settlements throughout the marsh and have become a major power in the local politics of the region.

Major Geographical Features

Ss'chan Geyser: Lying almost thirty miles inside the western border, the Ss'chan Geyser is the largest water-spout in the region. The Ss'ressen use this geyser and the incredibly hot water in its surrounding pools as a therapeutic site of healing; entire clutches often stop here after returning from battle abroad to sew wounds and relax sore muscles. The geyser is overseen by a small temple to the Fire Dragon, where an elderly priestess tends to the wounds of any who pay homage to the Fiery One.

Important Features

Fortress of Chi'gon: This small outpost in the rolling hills west of the human city of Ashvan overlooks the eastern border of the Sulphur Marsh. Its silent walls are home to the eclectic monks of the Iridescent Scale, a monastic organization of Ss'ressen that adopted their strange ways after contact with humans from the region. Built into a shallow cave system of the region and harboring just over 50 monks, the fortress is a highly defensive structure as well as a bastion of learning.

Lanpeltis: (population 15,000) Lanpeltis is the home of the Black Talon Egg Clutch. Acting as the capital for their small, but powerful society, Lanpeltis is the military and religious center for the entire Black Talon Egg Clutch. Ruled over by the High Matriarch Mother, Lanpeltis remains a bastion of strength and a symbol of hope for the Ss'ressen who call it home. The city was built from the ruins of an older Ssethric city, its great basalt blocks reshaped and stacked to create structures of phenomenal strength and eerie beauty. The most prominent feature of the city is the stepped ziggurat temple dedicated to The Fire Dragon. Untouched by the ravages of time, the temple was the only edifice found intact in the ruined city. It was seen as a good omen for the Black Talons, representing the strength and tenacity of their newfound God.

Chapter Three

RACES OF SSETHREGORE

The Empire of Ssethregore consists of a vast array of different species and cultures, all co-existing in a single epic hegemony. From the lowliest slave to the highest ranked nobility, everyone in the Empire knows his particular station in life. Nobles scheme in back alley taverns, assassins pad silently down opulent palatial corridors, and generals along the border plot against rivals in the capital itself. For all its apparent stability, it is the constant struggle between the diverse and varied Ssethric races that keep the Empire's great war machine from organizing and overrunning the warm-blooded races of the world.

Ssanu

Ss'ameth slowly wormed his way down the dank passageway, his serpentine body gliding easily over the sandstone floor worn smooth by uncounted scaly coils. The cold moist air reeked with strange and repellent odors wafting up from the dark depths below. The only sound at this depth was the slow, dry rustle of his scales sliding across the silent floor. Ss'ameth was in no hurry this day, for what is time to a race that has seen mountains crumble under the force of rain.

The ruddy torchlight illuminated the lone figure as he descended into the chamber deep below the surface, well away from prying eyes and the warm gaze of the sun. The chamber before Ss'ameth was vast; sandstone blocks the size of oxen were meticulously stacked and shaped to form the chamber's interior. Large fluted columns rose gracefully to support the domed roof high overhead. Carvings and frescoes of serpent men engaged in all manner of ungodly dark acts adorned the antiquated architecture. The sputtering light of the torches and the red glow of the furnace gave the chamber a resonating feeling of palpable evil. Before him rose the chamber's guardian, a serpent of elephantine proportions, with a head the size of a horse and glistening fangs like sabers. The monster's saucer sized orbs regarded Sskoreth with an unblinking, unfeeling stare. A steely glance from Ss'ameth's golden, reptilian eyes set the great serpent back to its timeless vigilance. Ss'ameth's cold calculating gaze swept the room, his eyes falling upon the instruments of his trade: various and assorted scalpels, razors, prods, hooks and hundreds of unnamed serrated tools whose only purpose could be the causing of precision pain and torment.

As the great Ssanu entered the chamber, the moans of the pitiful wretches, naked and chained, arose to greet him from the alter-like slabs of sandstone they were affixed to. Between them, moved the keeper of this place, an enormous brutal Ss'ressen named Koth, whose scaled arms lashed out with a cruel barbed black whip administering pain; harsh guttural curses escaped between the razor sharp teeth of his crocodilian maw as he plodded among the rows of the damned upon taloned feet.

Ss'ameth's gaze stopped upon the newest guest of this unholy palace. It appeared to be a strange new animal, the first of its kind encountered by his people. A scouting party investigating a recent earthquake to the north had captured the brute and brought it here.

Ss'ameth discarded his ceremonial robe; it would be a hindrance for this sort of work. With his flexible torso garbed only in a

tool harness, he glided forward on his coils to the specimen's table. Long slender arms snaked out and delicate fingers that had never seen manual labor lifted a thin scalpel from the tray proffered by a kneeling Koth. Ss'ameth's forked tongue could taste the sweat and fear emanating from his subject. Looking over the creature, now howling and cursing at him in an unknown tongue, Ss'ameth couldn't help but notice its similarities with the goblins, orcs, and even apes he had encountered before. Then again, its mostly hairless form, lack of claws, fangs, or other natural weaponry, and exceptionally large braincase definitely classified it as something new and exciting. Still, glancing at the pile of discarded raiment nearby where an amulet in the shape of an open book lay, these creatures seemed to be rather intelligent, perhaps even cultured. No matter, he would get to the bottom of this eventually. As the razor descended to the prone form, and the pain began once more, a scream of infinite anguish and loss rose to a crescendo, and for the first time that day Ss'ameth smiled.

Ssanu or "Serpent Men" as they are referred to in the human tongue, represent the pinnacle of reptilian evolution in the Ssethregoran Empire, (or at least that's how they see themselves). As a race they are devious and cunning, preferring to strike for the shadows than to confront an enemy face to face. There is a saying amongst the Ss'ressen, 'Never trust the forked tongued speech of the Ssanu'. More foes have fallen to the soft sibilant whispers of the serpent men, than their swords could ever take. Yet, if one is foolish enough to confront one directly, they will discover, quite painfully, that they are not to be trifled with. They possess potent venom, paralyzing supernatural abilities, and are most often armed to the fang with the deadliest of arcane might. A Ssanu's ability to trap the weak minded in their gaze is legendary.

Ssanu are cold hearted and stoic, rarely displaying any emotion, except for the strongest, most base ones. Concepts such as love or compassion are unknown to them. Feelings of lust, passion, hate, jealousy and anger are the fuel of their cruel society. Ssanu delight in the pain and suffering of others, for this is an emotion they can understand and relate to. Within the Empire's glare, the Ssanu openly obey the laws set down, but once in the darkness, these creatures of shadows will do everything in their power to undermine those above them in power or station, in order to increase their own standing. For all their infighting and backstabbing, the Ssanu are ruthless opponents, having no problem allying with others to overcome a common foe, so long as their own interests are advanced in the process.

Ssanu appear as tall serpentine humanoids standing from 5 1/2 to 6 1/2 feet tall. The lower half of their bodies is the writhing coil of a serpent, and their upper bodies are flexible as well. They sport two long lithe arms, which end in thin agile fingers, more adept at casting a spell than holding a weapon. A Ssanu's head is that of a serpent, lidless eyes cold and emotionless. The exact shape of the head and overall coloration of Ssanu are dependent on breeding, and vary between the various clutches. The most powerful of the egg clutch, Pit Sseth, sport collapsible hoods, which can be extended like that of a cobra. This exclusive characteristic is unique to Pit Sseth. Ssanu coloration varies as much as the serpents which haunt their dark jungles, ranging from dark brown to black or gray,

with many having bands or stripes of brighter color, such as red or yellow, running along their bodies. All Ssanu sport two large folding fangs, which are not visible unless the Ssanu has opened his jaw; most that have seen the gruesome sight do not live long enough to speak about it. Ssanu take full advantage of their dexterous forms and wear minimal garments, preferring easily shed robes and specially made leather harnesses to hold tools and important items. They prefer light armor, but Ssanu holding military rank or taking part in a military campaign often orders suits of custom-made plate armor. Lastly, Ssanu are vain creatures, always attempting to look their utmost whenever in public view where they are always as polite as possible; their honeyed words hiding the true venom of their conversations.

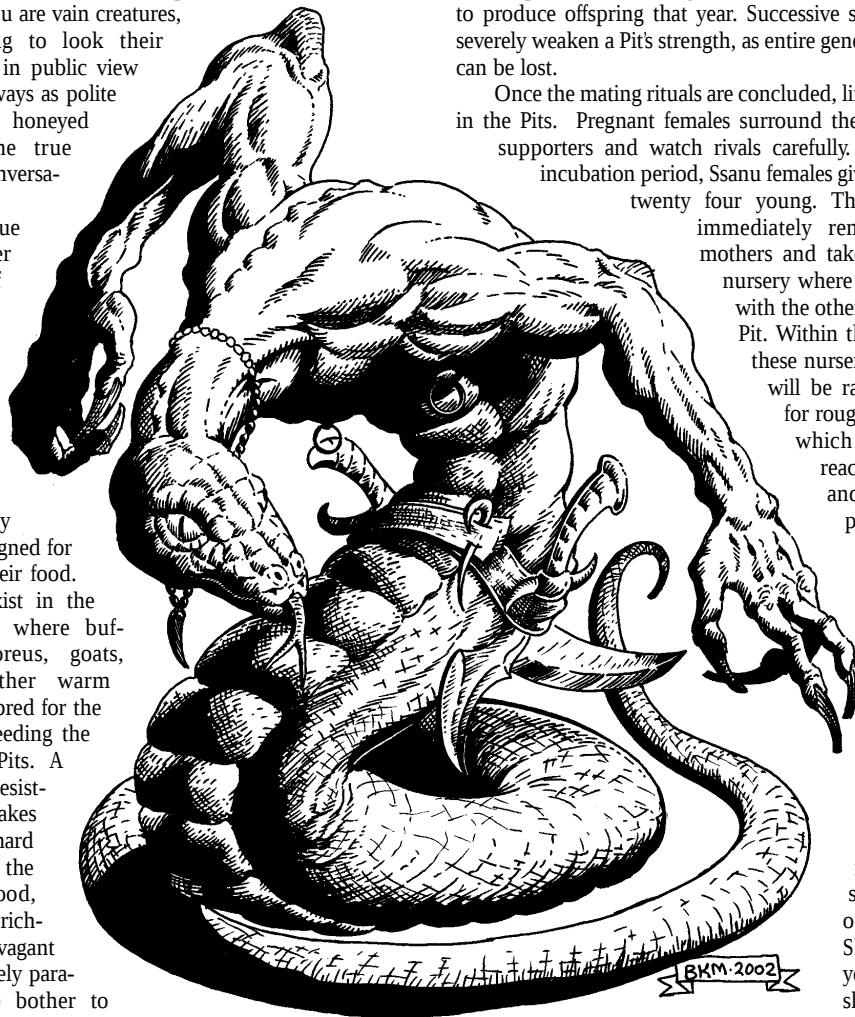
Ssanu are true carnivores, never eating any sort of vegetable matter, unless to induce some drug filled haze. They cut their prey into large chunks, which are swallowed whole, for they have no teeth designed for the chewing of their food. Entire ranches exist in the Ssethric swamps where buffaloes, hydrochoreus, goats, goblins, and other warm blooded prey are bred for the sole purpose of feeding the various serpent Pits. A Ssanu's natural resistance to poison makes them extremely hard to murder through the use of their food, therefore only the richest and most extravagant houses (or extremely paranoid individuals) bother to employ taste testers. Some of their favorite delicacies are Struom Eels, a rare open water fish, and of course, they revel in the quaint and delicate flavors of the different human races across Onara. Slaves sold into Ssethregore are usually destined for breeding pits to provide premium fare for a Ssanu's table.

For all their powers and abilities, Ssanu's have one general weakness when compared to the other Ssethric races; they breed slowly. An individual Ssanu may live as long as four hundred years (although few manage to avoid the assassins knife that long) and consequently their race are slow to develop and breed infrequently. Ssanu females only become fertile during one to two weeks a year and most will go for years before becoming fertile again. All females in a clutch will usually reach fertility upon the same 4 to 5 day period each year. Thus, during the first few weeks of Libidine, most work in the Ssanu pits grinds to a halt, as all Ssanu of age take part in massive breeding orgies. These opulent affairs consist of twisting, writhing balls of coupling ser-

pents, and are considered to be the most important event of the year. No expense is spared: rare delicacies are imported from across Onara, and the participants fall into a crazed stupor where all rational thought is lost. The breeding parties commonly last for a few days, concluding when females are no longer fertile. During this time of revelry, each Pit enters a state of heightened alert, and all Ssanu not participating, take up guard duty to repel raids from rival Pits. It is not uncommon during this crucial time for Pits with only a few fertile females to raid another in attempt to disrupt the ritual mating and hence ruin the target Pit's chance to produce offspring that year. Successive successful raids can severely weaken a Pit's strength, as entire generations of offspring can be lost.

Once the mating rituals are concluded, life returns to normal in the Pits. Pregnant females surround themselves with loyal supporters and watch rivals carefully. After a six-month incubation period, Ssanu females give birth to twelve to twenty four young. These hatchlings are immediately removed from their mothers and taken to a communal nursery where they are combined with the other hatchlings of their Pit. Within the relative safety of these nurseries, the younglings will be raised and educated for roughly ten years, upon which they will have reached full maturity and allowed to participate in the internal machinations of their Pit. The young are apprenticed to an adult Ssanu in the Pit for a position most suited to the talents they have displayed.

The most vulnerable time in any serpent man's life occurs during the Shed. Once each year a Ssanu must shed his old skin in order to make way for new, stronger scales. The Shed takes three days to complete, leaving the Ssanu vulnerable, for during this time he is left completely blind. In the weeks leading up to the Shed, the average Ssanu becomes very agitated and paranoid, and for good reason. Throughout the history of the race, more Ssanu have died during their shedding cycle than any other time. Rivals perceive this as a golden opportunity to send assassins and the like to settle bitter feuds and underlings recognize it as an occasion to advance above their current station. In order to protect themselves from betrayal or attack, most Ssanu attempt to hide the fact that their shedding period is approaching, sometimes barricading themselves far away from enemies. Most Ssanu do not trust anyone during these difficult times, no even their own aides or family, preferring to rely on magic, summoned Outsiders or Constructs to protect them.





Ssanu segregate themselves into Pits, each "Pit" consists of an entire clan of related individuals. An individual Ssanu is tied to his Pit through blood and politics; most remain loyal to their Pit for life. The secular nature of the Pits has led to massive inbreeding troubles. Established Pits are so genetically distinct from one another that if Ssanu from different Pits were to breed, it would rarely produce viable offspring.

A healthy Ssanu Pit consists of hundreds of individuals, while the most powerful Pits number in the thousands. The Ssanu are a patriarchal society and are governed by one male Ssanu, called the Ss'hok, who oversees all the machinations of their individual Pit. This position is not hereditary and only the most skilled and powerful Ssanu manage to take and hold the position for any length of time. Assassinations of the Ss'hok are infrequent; if the individual is powerful enough to keep his "allies" from killing him on the way to the top, he probably has the resources to hold the position once it's achieved. Ruling Ss'hok have a tendency to remove rivals who are growing in power before they have the chance to try and stage a coup.

At the height of their power, the Ssanu sat on the throne of the Empire, but now have been displaced by the Naga, due mainly to the Varn support of the current ruling caste. All the major Pits of any influence in Ssethregore have their power base in the capital of Sseth. The Pits each have their own complex, which exerts control over a region of the city, possessing a virtual stranglehold on each sector, except the innermost circle and the Royal palace. The Ssanu complexes extend from the surface deep underground, extending for miles in some cases. Most pits have a myriad of tunnels connecting them with allied Pits and the Pits of rivals as well. The Ssanu themselves hold power over practically all aspects of life in the Empire. They rule over all other Ssethric races, except the Nagas, with an iron fist. The Ssanu are universally feared and loathed by the other races, and even the Naga keep a close eye on them out of fear of an uprising.

The Ssanu act as generals and politicians, often dictating foreign policy. They act as the overseers of the day-to-day activities of the Empire, monitoring food shipments and keeping the wheels of the great Ssethregoran war machine well oiled. The Nagas may create the rules, but it is the Ssanu that administer the law and run the government.

The Ssanu hold positions of power as scholars and sorcerers as well, forming the institutes of science and sorcery, from where the wonders and abominations of millennia have taken shape. Their mastery over the elements is legendary and many of these adepts excel in the creation and control of elemental beings. The rampant magical experimentation of the Ssanu have led to the creation of many of the slave races that are present in the empire today, as well as the amazing biotechnology that graces the halls of the richest individuals in all of Ssethregore.

The Ssanu themselves possess several faults. For one, they are not a very religious race, more interested in pursuing the arcane arts than following the tenants of a God. It was this that led to their downfall as the ruling caste of the Empire, for when the great God Kassegore fell into His slumber, the Ssanu clerics were denied their power for a short time. During this period the powerful Nagas, who had been conspiring with an immortal race, known as the Varn, made their move to seize the Serpent Throne. The Varn granted their worshippers divine abilities and the Naga, already experts in the arcane arts, were able to wrest the throne from the Emperor Sseth.

Since this defeat, the Ssanu have turned from the worship of Kassegore and embraced the new religion of the Varn. They

execute any they may find who do not worship their new Gods, making gruesome examples of any heretics with cold efficiency. Though practicing priests among the ranks of the Ssanu are few, the Ssanu do take great pleasure in attending the blood rites and dark rituals associated with the worship of the Varn. They revel in the pain and suffering the victims endure and the Varn priests go to great lengths to procure the healthiest sacrifices to be put to the knife. A strong healthy human or Ellorri slave fetches a hefty price on the Ssethregoran slave market, for these individuals last a good, long time under the knife of a skilled torturer.

Ssanu enjoy many vices, most of which would kill any other race. Their natural resistance to toxins makes them immune to the effects of alcohol, a drink which the lesser races seem to revel in. This leads the Ssanu to experiment with powerful hallucinogenic drugs and salves, at dosage levels that would kill a human in seconds.

The richest, most elaborate Pits have massive underground arboretums, supplied with sunlight by a cunning system of polished mirrors and lenses. In these well-lit chambers Ssanu retire to bask in the noonday sun. It is in these chambers that many of the strongest opiates and lotuses are grown and consumed. Poor Pits must make due with purchasing these drugs from other Pits, or sending expeditions into the jungles to collect wild samples, but the true majesty of this system exists only in the most powerful of all the Pits: Malas, Crotalus, and Sseth. The individuals within these Pits have their own private atriums, where they grow all their rare and exotic plants, and conduct many of their darkest experiments; twisting organisms and creating the strange living technology they are famous for. It is in these lush chambers in the bowels of the earth that horrors such as the Tendriculos and Witherweed were born. These atriums are heavily warded and guarded, for it is said that only the master of each may enter safely. Shed Golems, created from the sloughed skin of their masters, patrol the chambers, destroying any intruders. Only the most daring or most foolish of thieves would enter such a place.

PITS

Pit Crotalus

The Ssanu of Pit Crotalus trace their origins back to the time of Yahssremore, where the mere mention of the name Crotalus would send shivers down the spine of the listener. The ssanu of this Pit appear as brown scaled serpents, with lighter cream colored areas running along the underside of their body. Dark swirls of color run along their backs and across their faces in a geometric pattern. Their scales are rough and keeled, each having a small ridge running down the center, giving their scales the feel of sandpaper. Their heads are broad and arrow shaped a marked difference from the other powerful clutches.

Pit Crotalus is currently the second most powerful Pit in all of Ssethregore. Their power lies in the virtual stranglehold it possesses over the harbor district and shipping lanes within Ssethregore. It was the ancestors of Pit Crotalus that first discovered the Pleisaurans and allied them with the Old Empire. Since that ancient time they have made every attempt to maintain their strong connections to this aquatic race, for it is the Pleisaurans who control the harbors. The current fortune and political power of the Pit are due to the large volume of slaves and exotic materials that the agents of Crotalus routinely import into the Empire. There is always a market for Khitani silk and Cafelan jewelry in the streets of Sseth and the Yissena agents of the Pit arrange such transfers. Only the most greedy or foolhardy captains dare to sail to the Serpent Coast, but for some, the rewards outweigh the risks. As long as Pit Crotalus controls the Pleisaurans, the Pit can control the influx of foreign goods by sea.

Sengal the Ancient

Male Ssanu Wizard 9/ Elementalist (creationist) 10 cleric 3 Cr 27; Medium Sized Humanoid (ssethric); HD 9d4 +9 plus 10d4 +10 plus 3d8 + 3 plus 7d8+7; Hp 107; Init +7; Spd 40ft/30ft swim; AC 25 (+3 Dex, +4 Natural, +4 Black Robe of the Archmagi, +4 Ring of protection); Base attack/Grapple +9/+9 Atk: +9 melee (Dagger of Slaying 1d4+5) or +9 melee (Bite 1d10+2 plus poison); Full Attack +9/+4 melee (Dagger of Slaying 1d4+5) and +7melee Bite (1d10+2 plus poison); SA: Poisonous Bite, Hypnotic Gaze, Spell-like Abilities SQ: Summon Familiar, Elemental Mastery (fire), Elemental Resistance: Total (Fire)AL CE; SV Fort +15, Ref +11, Will +24, Str 12, Dex, 16, Con 12, Int 24, Wis 18, Cha 18.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +11, Concentration +20, Craft (cartographer) +6, Craft (biotechnology) +20 Diplomacy +14, Knowledge (Arcane) +33, Knowledge (Religion), +6, Knowledge (The Planes) +30, Knowledge (Bioengineering) +28, Knowledge (Elementals)+28, Knowledge (Ssethric History) +25, Listen +5, Medicine And Surgery +20, Sense Motive +9, Spot +5, Spellcraft +20.

Feats: Improved Initiative, Alertness, Scribe Scroll, Quicken Spell, Arcane Tutor, Still Spell, Craft Wondrous Items, Brew Potion, Craft Staff, Forge Ring, Elemental Expertise, Elemental Maximization, Empower Elements, Elemental Amplification, Elemental taint, and Might of the Elements

Poison (ex): A Ssanu's bite paralyzes an opponent before killing it. The bite's Fortitude Save is DC 16, initial damage 2d6 Dexterity, secondary damage 1d6 Constitution.

Poison Immunity (Ex): Ssanu are immune to all natural poisons.

Hypnotic Gaze (Su): Gaze attack with a 30' range, Will Save (DC 14) or be affected as if by the spell Hypnotism.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day: *Entrhall*, *Charm Person*, *Cause Fear*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a seventh level sorcerer. (Save DC 13 + Spell Level)

Lordship and Domination (Su): As the first Children of Kassegore, Ssanu have supernatural powers over all of Kassegore's other creations. A Ssanu gain a +2 inherent bonus to the DC's of all spells, spell like abilities, and supernatural abilities when using them against any type of reptile.

Wizard Spells per day 4/6/6/6/5/5/5/3/3. Sengal's spellbook contains virtually every arcane spell known upon Onara and dozens that he has created himself over the years. The sheer value of his collection of Grimorums is incalculable to the arcane world.

Cleric spells per day 4/3+1/2+1 (Domains: Fire and Destruction)

Equipment: Sengal has hundreds of lesser magic items at his beck and call, but he keeps his most powerful with him at all times. Sengal always carries the following items: Staff of Power, Ring of Elemental Control (Earth), Ring of protection +4, Black Robe of the Archmagi, and a Dagger of slaying (Ssanu) +4.

The current leader of Pit Crotalus is a wily old serpent named Sengal. Sengal is ancient by Ssanu standards, having seen over twelve hundred years of the Empire's history. It is said that Old Sengal employs a cadre of expert torturers who specialize in causing excruciating agony in Elorri; for it is the tears of these Elorri that are the main ingredient for the elixirs of longevity that account for the serpent's extraordinary age. Sengal may be ancient, but his mind is still sharp as a razor and his arcane might is unrivaled in all of Ssethregore.

Sengal used to be the Ss'hok of Pit Crotalus, but retired from the position three centuries ago to pursue his dark arts. He is the only Ssanu that has ever held the position of Ss'hok and survived long enough to retire. The skulls of hundreds of rivals decorate the long hall that leads to his private palace deep in the bowels of the Pit. His palace is ringed with deadly traps and horrid spells and never has a thief penetrated his inner sanctum and survived. Sengal never leaves his palace anymore, but uses an army of constructs and mindless slaves to attend to the mundane daily routine. Sengal sends messages through the use of his homunculus familiar Xeneret and there is little doubt that the cunning little creature has spied on thousands of "secret" meetings over the centuries.

Even though he is no longer Ss'hok, his position in the house is one of great power and commands unfailing respect from his lessers. To the dismay of many new Ss'hoks, upon attaining the position they discover that the Pit is truly ruled by the ancient Sengal and their title is merely meant to turn the assassin's blade away from the old serpent. Sengal has held his position for over six centuries and unless there is some catastrophe, he may well live to see his seventh.

Pit Sseth

The Ssanu of Pit Sseth are the most powerful serpent men in the Ssethregoran Empire. The Pit can trace its bloodline back to the great Sseth himself.

Led by Sseth, the Pit took control of the ruined remnants of the Old Empire after the great slave revolt of 5738 and led the combined forces south to their last stronghold in the swamps of Kradljur Morass. There, the charismatic leader took the Serpent Crown and proclaimed himself Emperor of the newly founded Ssethregoran Empire.

After surviving dozens of assassination attempts, Sseth used bribery and murder to entrench himself into his new position. With power firmly in his coils, Emperor Sseth went about rebuilding the shattered forces of the Empire, determined to regain what had been lost. The capital city of Sseth was raised and the outlying city of Dagor was formed in the Northern Hills.

Sseth needed supporters in his current position; powerful allies that stood to lose as much as he would should his position be jeopardized. To this end Sseth elevated the Nagas to stations of power within the Empire and in return for their support. The villages of Spirit and Water Naga native to the Morass came to Sseth's call, united under the elite Dark Naga. During the time of the Old Empire, the Naga held minor positions such as regional governors, never gaining the political power they desired. The promise of power from Emperor Sseth gave them what they wished for most; greater dominance over the Ssethric races.

The Ssethregoran Empire was slowly rebuilt, the war machine readied and after 220 years of planning the Empire was prepared to retake the lands they had lost. A large host was raised and under the banner of Sseth, they marched to destroy the reviled Elorri. As fate would have it, the ensuing battle was lost, as rival generals



took the battle as an opportunity to dispose of each other instead of the Ellori. On the day of the defeat the power of Pit Seth was smashed.

It is said that Kassegore, disgusted at the comportment of His troops, threw Himself for the heavens and into Lake Quesselan. The Clerics of Kassegore lost their powers and the general populace was thrown into chaos. This was just the opportunity the Nagas patiently awaited. They had made pacts with an advanced Ssethric race called the Varn. These immortal creatures were able to grant their followers divine magics. The Naga's use of foreign divine magic, combined with the chaos caused by Kassegore's fall, allowed them to stage a coup. The highest-ranking members of Pit Sseth were destroyed, their bodies' torn limb from limb and feasted upon by the Nagas. Emperor Sseth himself was sacrificed to these new gods, his mortal body kept alive by arcane means, while his soul was taken by the Varn to be tortured for eternity. Sseth still exists to this day, deep inside the Royal palace, his body is set on display in the Throne Room, where it constantly writhes in eternal torment; a reminder to all those who dare to oppose the Naga.

Four thousand years have passed since a serpent man has sat upon the serpent throne, yet the Ssanu of Pit Sseth can not help but stare at their ancestral seat of power, coveting the position they believe is rightfully theirs.

There have been multiple coups staged over the millennia, but each has failed, for it seems the Naga have some way of predicting each uprising and thwarting it before it can begin. Pit Sseth has become overly paranoid, believing that their Pit is riddled with spies. This has driven them to barely trust each other and view all outsiders as potential traitors. This xenophobia has led to the isolation of Pit Sseth and their list of allies has grown thin over the ages.

Even having suffered these political setbacks, Pit Sseth continues to wield enormous power and influence with the Empire. They continue to sponsor the mages guild known as the Black Coil. For thousands of years, the guild has been controlled by a council of three Ssanu and never has there been a time when Pit Sseth did not hold the majority of its seats. Currently, Pit Sseth has two members on the Mage's Council, crafty old serpents that have held their positions for almost two hundred years. The'ssoth and Ssremit have distanced themselves from the day-to-day politics of the Pit, preferring to spend their time exerting their influence over the other members of the Guild. Yet, the two remain loyal to Pit Sseth, lending their arcane might where necessary and willingly joining any attempt to overthrow Pit Crotalus. Pit Sseth's control of the Black Coil has cemented their position of power within the Empire and not even the Naga dare confront it and its allies directly.

The current head of Pit Sseth is a middle aged Ss'hok named Ssalis. Ssalis has attempted to strengthen the family ties between his Pit and the current ruling Naga of House Kahss and has declared that an open alliance with the Naga is the only way to protect their Pit for another generation. Secretly, the wily Ss'hok, along with The'ssoth and Ssremit have devised a plan for the overthrow of the Naga. For millennia, the Dark Naga's natural abilities have shielded their minds, keeping anyone from discerning what their thoughts might be. Under supreme secrecy, the heads of the Black Coil have created a device called the Mind Thorn. Disguised as Ssalis's badge of office, it allows the Ss'hok to read the minds of the Dark Naga. This device has granted Pit Sseth the edge it has been trying to gain for centuries. To the delight of Ssalis, the Naga seem blissfully unaware of the mind probe and it is only a matter of time before the serpent men of Pit Sseth try once again to break the power of their serpentine

"allies."

Pit Maliss

Although Pit Maliss is an ancient Pit by most standards, it has only recently come into political power. The Pit's recent surge of influence is due to a policy set down five hundred years ago by the late Ss'hik Carphophis, who recognized the advantages of a stable trade route connecting the Empire with the lands of the warm-bloods. Through the use of adventuring parties of disguised Ssanu and Yissera, the serpent men of Pit Maliss have managed to not only establish secure shipping lanes, but have also recovered dozens of ancient Ssethric items, lost in the ruins of the Old Empire. The Pit has even managed to infiltrate the human organization known as the Emerald Society, by placing polymorphed Ssanu in positions of influence within it.

Carphophis' policies established a thriving trade route into Ssethregore coming down the Vekthy River in Abessios and another more secretive route along the Altherian border. Nearly ten percent of the trade goods protected by the Altherian Shining Patrol are actually destined for secret rendezvous with the agents of Pit Maliss. Unscrupulous human merchants float entire shipments of slaves to Lake Khess then march them overland to the northern portions of the Kraldjur River. The Ssethric outpost of Chelydra, an imposing structure of granite, built on the river's edge and totally controlled by Pit Maliss is one of the few areas in the Empire that warm-bloods are allowed to visit. They are not permitted within the fort, as all transactions take place outside the walls in a specially constructed square designed for the displaying of slaves. This constant influx of human cattle and exotic human goods has allowed Pit Maliss to amass a substantial fortune in a relatively short time.

The current leader of Pit Maliss is an imposing serpent named Ssuun, who rose to power quickly through guile, murder and the amassment of wealth. With the vast majority of his rivals "dealt with," the cunning serpent has set his eyes upon the Emperor's throne. Knowing that any open display of defiance would result in his termination, Ssuun has begun a calculated and secretive campaign designed to undermine the Naga's choke-hold on the Empire. To this end, the serpent has secretly allied his Pit with the great dragon Astiniax, in hopes of gaining the Wyrms' support in his thrust for power.

Pit Elapis

Pit Elapis was once one of the greatest Pits of the old Empire, yet it has now been reduced to a mere shadow of its former glory. At one time Pit Elapis contained a dynasty of Emperors stretching back for two thousand years, but their era crumbled and slipped through their fingers with the Elorii slave revolt. Pit Elapis had enjoyed wealth and power as its agents moved across the Empire, subjugating all those it encountered or destroying them if they did not suit its purposes. It was the sorcerers of Pit Elapis that created the famed Serpent Crown, Naja Haje and used its immense power to quell uprisings and force their rivals into submission. Their power was broken on the day when their last Emperor, Sskathra, was beheaded and the Serpent Crown was lost to history.

Today the Pit maintains some of its former glory, but does not have anywhere near the political and military power it once possessed. Pit Elapis expends most of its energy and wealth in maintaining the army and cementing their hold over the various Ss'ressen generals. Their current Ss'hok, Sstrak, was once a general himself, amassing a great military backing before claiming the position as head of his Pit. Sstrak's interests lie mainly in the development of new beasts of war, for he is an adamant supporter of the Jeggal Sag Cult and their rookeries.



Venomous Scale

Flame Tongue

Emerald Scale

Barbed Tail

Ss'ressen

The scaled shapes passed swiftly in the night, their bodies making scarcely a rustle in the thick forest foliage. Fifty they numbered, armed to the teeth with wicked curved blades and barbed spears. Their leader, a great hulking shadow, raised a fist in the air signaling a halt. The troops immediately fell to the forest floor, taking cover behind stump, bramble, and bush. Their quarry was in sight; the smell of their prey was on the wind. Ahead in a clearing stood a large complex of wooden buildings, an outpost of their enemy. Approaching downwind, the invaders circled the camp and slowly stole to the heart of the compound. Sentries were met with a feathered shaft in the darkness, their bodies left to lie in their own gore. With the skill of forest ghosts, the intruders glided into the village and as one attacked.

Clawed heels kicked open locked doors and gray-scaled bodies rushed to slaughter the sleeping victims inside. No quarter was given as warriors, females, and the young all fell to the sword or axe that night. Taloned hands slashed the throats of the sleeping, burning brands were thrust into the thatch, and wicked barbed blades tore at the flesh of their hated enemies. As the shouts and screams of the dying filled the air, the remaining defenders shook off the night's peaceful embrace and rushed the attackers. Under the cold moonlight, raider met defender. Grey scaled Ss'ressen, their hides covered in long spines and weapons dripping clots of gore, faced off against deep black Ss'ressen, their large purple crests erect in the heat and

confusion of battle. The two lines held for a moment, then the large Barbed Tail leader raised his axe to the sky yelled, "Death to the weak!" With guttural cries the two lines fell upon each other hacking and slashing, tails smashing bone, and talons tearing flesh. A frenzied orgy of blood and death engulfed the camp and when it was over the invading Barbed Tail Ss'ressen stood over the fallen village of Dark Crests, their homes burning behind them with lurid light. Turning to his troops, the large Barb Tail grinned evilly, showing his serrated teeth and pointed to the nearby hatchery and said, "Let's eat".

Ss'ressen, known as lizardfolk in the human tongue, represent an ancient lineage of beings that can trace their history back to the primeval origins of the world. As a race they are strong and arrogant, taking great pride in physical achievements and victories in battle. Ss'ressen are cold and dispassionate, showing little emotion. They are a military minded people, delighting in the intricacies of the battlefield and the strategy of war. They are creatures of rank and station; a natural respect for authority has been bred into them throughout their existence. Though they may chafe under a hated superior, most Ss'ressen never question their position in life, carrying out orders without a thought as to their righteousness or morality. The



perfect soldiers, bred for war and conflict, Ss'ressen are the backbone of the great Ssethregoran war machine.

Ss'ressen appear in dozens of different shapes, sizes, and colors, but a few characteristics remain constant. Ss'ressen appear as reptilian humanoids covered in thick scales. Their faces are elongated akin to that of a lizard, with enlarged jaws and flaring nostrils. Some Clutches sport intricate cranial ridges or spikes along the tops of their heads, on thick brow ridges or along jaw lines. Ss'ressen do not have external ears, only a small round hole above and behind their great cold eyes. All Ss'ressen have tails; some sport a type of sagittal crest which runs from the base of their skulls, along their spine, and out to the tip of their tail. Their hands and feet are adorned with reinforced talons, able to rend and tear through the thickest armor. These claws constantly grow and are slowly replaced if torn out. Thick scales cover their backs and chest, giving way to small, finer scales on their abdomen and along the underside of their tails. Their hides range in color from bright greens and purples, to sandy browns, grays or even black. Many Ss'ressen are dual tone in color, having a dark patterning along their back and a lighter shade of the same pattern along their chest and stomach. Some of the more exotic clutches, like the Flaming Tongue, have bright clashing colors on their sagittal crests, using these as displays when agitated or angry. Due to the controlled breeding of the Ss'ressen by their ssanu masters, the original Ss'ressen archetype may have been lost to time, giving way to a dozen or more modern clutches, each having its own unique qualities and abilities.

Ss'ressen are an omnivorous race, but prefer meat to other food sources. Eighty percent of a Ss'ressen's diet is comprised of fresh red meat or fish. Ss'ressen prefer their food raw and only cook it for preservation purposes. Ss'ressen will eat almost any creature; through most prefer warm-blooded mammalian prey to birds, reptiles, or fish. This fact often makes negotiations between Ss'ressen and humans almost impossible, considering the Ss'ressen view humans as just another tasty morsel for their plate. Situations where Ss'ressen and humans have reached some sort of agreement are strained at best, and the Ss'ressen prefer to remain among their own kind than to walk among "cattle". The Black Talons however, have managed to overcome this mindset by pure necessity, but they still prefer to remain in their own swamp communities than to dally with the lesser races. It is the rare individual indeed that strikes out into the human lands without orders from the Matriarch.

The average Ss'ressen reaches sexual maturity at age ten and lives for fifty to sixty years. Each year the Ss'ressen must go through a sloughing period where their outer layer of skin is shed off, revealing new lustrous scales beneath. Sloughing usually lasts for a week or more, and during this time Ss'ressen are extremely itchy, agitated, and surly. Many Ss'ressen take to heavy drinking during this time, preferring alcoholic oblivion to the constant itching. Consequently, sloughing Ss'ressen are shunned by their clutchmates. Troglodytes refer to their taskmasters slough as "the flaying time," for during these periods more Troggs feel the lash of their masters than any other time.

Ss'ressen females become fertile once each year and may produce roughly a dozen eggs. Each egg is nearly the size of a newborn human's head and is covered by a tough leathery shell. These eggs are laid in a communal hatchery that is heated by an open furnace or a fire pit in the more barbaric clutches.

Proximity to the heat source during the first three weeks of development determines the sex of the hatchling, while over-all exposure to

heat over the entire two-month development period results in intelligence level. Setting freshly laid eggs closer to the heat source produces females and eggs destined to be males are placed in the cooler regions. After the first three weeks, if more intelligent males are needed for leadership positions, some of the male eggs are moved closer to the fire to promote greater intelligence capabilities. Consequently, females are invariably smarter than their male counterparts due to the longer exposure to the higher temperatures. This arrangement suits the ruling Matriarchy just fine. After hatching, the newborn Ss'ressen are raised together in communal areas deep inside a nursery complex. They are fed minimally and siblicide is not uncommon, nor is it frowned upon, for only the strongest individuals in Ss'ressen society are granted the privilege to mate and carry on the species. Eggs from any non-condoned mating or matings between clutches are routinely destroyed to preserve the purity and quality of the overall clutch. Males often participate in gladiatorial games or fights of supremacy to gain the right to mate. The same general who proved himself physically and mentally superior to all other members of a clutch may have sired entire generations of Ss'ressen. The ruling Matriarchy has the final say in which males may breed.

Each egg clutch is controlled by a matriarchal oligarchy; a group of elder females that also act as the High Priestesses of the clutch. All Ss'ressen are highly religious, as it meshes perfectly with their lawful and organized society. The females, who are intellectually superior to the males, establish all the laws and policies for the clutch. Only females are allowed to be Priests, though highly religious males often become Paladins or Druids. The ruling matriarchy of each clutch is comprised of a group of elder females, steeped in the lore of their religion and secure in their seat of power. This ruling matriarchy is headed by a single female known as the Matriarch Mother, who holds final say in any matter and possesses the true power over the clutch. Each clutch has a central community that the ruling matriarchy controls, usually a large town or small city somewhere within Ssethregore. Outlying settlements are governed by their own Matriarch; a lesser priestess that answers to the main ruling body. The laws of the Matriarchy are absolute and their word is law in Ss'ressen society. Those that displease the Matriarchy are summarily executed by the merest gesture of a taloned claw. Touching a priestess of any level without her permission is cause for punishment and in the rigid society of the Ss'ressen, the punishment for any crime is minimally dismemberment and most often death.

Ss'ressen society is divided into two main factions: religious and military, as slaves overseen by retired males handle most civilian roles. The priesthood of any Ss'ressen society functions as a hierarchy. The lowest levels are comprised of acolytes charged with caring for the hatchlings and attending public functions. As a Ss'ressen priestess increases in power, she is brought into higher levels of secrecy and intrigue. Only the highest levels in the matriarchy are trusted with the secrets of the clutch and are given the power of managing the temperature of each new generation in the hatcheries. Females that attain the rank of High Priestess or higher are automatically granted the right to mate. All other females are denied this right unless, like the males, they earn it through combative trials. Priestesses act as the spokesperson of their God, rallying the masses to greater glory in their God's name. There is no specialized rank of priestess for war, for all females are trained with marital skills and may fight alongside the troops in any given encounter. These females, usually belonging to the lower ranks of the Matriarchy, are pivotal in preserving morale in the troops and healing battlefield wounds. In this way, the Matriarchy of any given clutch is essential to the Ssethregoran war machine.

Ss'ressen are the elite of the Ssethregoran military. Almost the entire officer caste of Ssethric society is made up of Ss'ressen. Although Ssanu still hold the highest positions of power, as overlords of the military forces, acting as generals or taskmasters, Ss'ressen comprise the majority of the generals and lesser officers of the war machine. Ss'ressen officers are placed as overseers of Troglodyte battalions or as commanders of Ss'ressen troops. A Ss'ressen officer is always placed commanding members of his own egg clutch. So intense is the rivalry between the egg clutches, that an officer of a different egg clutch would be torn to pieces by his own troops within seconds of his appointment.

Ss'ressen warriors are incredible fighters and indeed may be unmatched, warrior-to-warrior, in all of the Known Lands. The Ss'ressen military is steeped in tradition and all warriors live by an inbred code of honor and duty. It is their right to fight and lay down their life for the greater good of the clutch and a warrior would rather die than to fail in his mission.

The officer class is rather more intelligent than their foot soldier counterparts and will order retreats instead of risking the loss of an entire battalion. Yet, if the loss of that battalion will give the Ss'ressen some strategic advantage over their foes, then the officer will not hesitate in sending the entire regiment to their doom (for obvious suicidal missions the Ss'ressen officers prefer to use goblinoid slaves or Troglodytes). A Ss'ressen may grumble under his breath over obvious suicidal orders, but will follow the orders to the letter for the greater good of the Empire. The Ss'ressen mentality dictates that a warrior is an asset to the war machine and it would not be logical to waste such a resource, therefore, an order for an impossible mission must have some greater purpose in the schemes of war that the individual warrior cannot see.

The working class in Ssethric society is almost non-existent. All foodstuffs and supplies are grown and harvested by slaves, overseen by their master's cruel whip. Goblins and Kobolds make up the majority of slaves found inside the living fortifications of the clutches, while Troglodytes act as farmers and overseers on the large plantations that provide meat and forage for the various Ss'ressen egg clutches. Armor and weapons are constructed by a special order of smiths known as the "declawed". These are Ss'ressen warriors who were so crippled or maimed in battle that they would be a hindrance to their own troops in the battlefields. These Ss'ressen are a rarity, considering most would rather die than have to face life as a cripple, but some through unforeseeable circumstances survive to become "declawed". The declawed are treated with respect and are taken under the wing of a veteran declawed to learn the ways of smithing. For all their handicaps, the declawed create some fantastic and highly prized pieces. They are attended to by a host of personal slaves, but most shun them and learn to move about and function without any assistance. Lastly, a declawed Ss'ressen is never allowed to breed.

Ss'ressen life isn't composed entirely of rigid military doctrine, for most possess a surprisingly lusty attitude toward leisure time. Ss'ressen spend their "down time" (when not on military duty) drinking, gaming, and participating in religious observances or gladiatorial games. All types of Ss'ressen have developed a taste for exotic liquors and beers, the alcohol having a stimulating effect on their system. Unlike in humans, alcohol of any type raises a Ss'ressen metabolism far above its normally low levels. This results in a euphoric state similar to hallucinogenic condition caused by certain plant compounds, therefore, Ss'ressen are not allowed to partake of alcohol when in active military service.

Ss'ressen also take great enjoyment from watching the various gladiatorial games held throughout the Empire. Some Ss'ressen even participate in such games to hone their combat abilities. Ssethric gladiatorial games are pit fights, held in circular amphitheaters or more often smooth walled pits cut into the earth. These combats have no rules as anything goes and the fights are always to the death. Most often slaves and prisoners of war are cast into the pits to fight for their survival while the Ssethric audience looks on, gambling on the outcome. Fallen warriors of any race are considered delicacies in the marketplace, the more victories a fallen warrior had under his belt, the more the carcass is worth.

The remainder of a Ss'ressen's leisure time is spent in religious observance. The matriarchy holds daily services to their patron deity, in which animals, slaves and captured warriors are sacrificed in the name of their God. The more brutal clutches that have embraced the Varn gods are said to hold perverse rituals deep below the surface where they conduct heinous acts in the name of the Varn. Ss'ressen are extremely religious, taking time each day to honor their deity. Ss'ressen don't expect their deity to actually help them in their daily struggles, nor in most cases would they want that help. They recognize that their gods granted them strength and courage upon their birth and that is all a warrior could ask for. Only in times of great turmoil or threats to the very existence of the clutch do the common warriors implore their gods for aid.

Ss'ressen Frenzy

Special breeding and magical manipulation by Ssethregoran Ssanu masters has created a natural animosity and aggressiveness inherent in all Ss'ressen egg clutches. The very scent of a rival Ss'ressen egg clutch may drive a Ss'ressen into a combat frenzy, known as Ss'ressen Frenzy. Whenever Ss'ressen of different egg clutches are within 30 feet of each other, the scent of the rival clutch will drive them into the this frenzy. The frenzy can be suppressed with a successful Will save (DC 13). A Ss'ressen may always voluntarily fail their save to enter a Ss'ressen Frenzy. If they choose to resist and the save is made, the Ss'ressen may act normally. If the save is failed, the Ss'ressen is driven into the frenzy and must attack the nearest rival Ss'ressen in melee combat until there are no rival Ss'ressen within 30 feet. While in the frenzied state, the Ss'ressen gains a +2 frenzy bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls, and Will saves, but suffers a -2 penalty to armor class and all skill checks. A Ss'ressen who succeeds at his save does not need to make another for the entire combat. If more rival Ss'ressen enter the area other than those he has already encountered, he must save once more.

For example: A squad Black Talons comes across a party of Barbed Tails. If either side makes their save, they do not have to make another for that combat, unless a group of different rival Ss'ressen (like Venomous Scales) shows up upon the field.

Ssanu or Naga commanders may control rival groups of Ss'ressen. Ssanu and Naga emit a pheromone that makes the urge to frenzy controllable. A Ss'ressen within 30' of a Ssanu or Naga (or exposed to one in the last hour), may chose to automatically make his save versus Ss'ressen Frenzy. Ssanu and Naga are immune to frenzy.

If the ability to smell is somehow totally blocked, then a Ss'ressen cannot smell the rival clutches, therefore cannot enter frenzy. Vice-versa, if somehow a Ss'ressen is kept from emitting any odor whatsoever (possibly through magic) then he would not set off a Ss'ressen Frenzy in his adversaries. For the purpose of ssressen frenzy Ashen Hide, Black Talon and Ghost Scales are not considered different clutches.

CLUTCHES

Emerald Scale Egg Clutch "Viridiss"

The Emerald Scale Egg Clutch believes itself to be the epitome of Ss'ressen evolution. They stand between 5 1/2 to 6 1/2 feet tall and sport a broad, sagittal crest made up of triangular plates that runs to the tip of their tail. Two more heavy ridges of triangular plates run along their brows. Emerald Scale Ss'ressen are named for the vibrant green scales that cover their shoulders, back, and arms, giving way to a lighter mottled green along their chest, abdomen, and legs. Arrogant and militaristic to the core, they are the largest egg clutch second only to the Barbed Tails.

Emerald Scale Ss'ressen can be found throughout the Empire, but they are most plentiful in the city of Veriss, which has been under their control since the formation of Ssethregore. Originally a small military outpost, the city has grown as the clutch increased in power and prestige. From Veriss the Emerald Scales have expanded their reach, spreading over the northern territories of the Empire.

Their lust for political power originated from an experiment the Matriarchs orchestrated almost three thousand years ago. At that time the clutch was already considered ancient by Ssethric terms, being able to trace its origins back to the Old Empire and Formorain Wars, but their power and influence were waning as new clutches appeared, created by the Ssanu's Technomancers. The High Mother Matriarch, Ss'nutum, descended below the surface of Veriss into the dark depths of their deity's temple. Before the altar of the Great Destroyer, she prayed, imploring the great God to advise her on how to regain their hold over the Empire's military forces. In a vision, Ss'nutum received her answer. Ascending from the temple, the High Matriarch Mother proceeded to the clutch's hatchery. In compliance with the Great Lord's vision, she stimulated the eggs proportionately closer to the sacred fires. Weaving an incantation of power over the eggs, she protected the closest ones from the imminent destruction from the deadly temperatures, then charged that three priestesses with always be on hand to renew the incantation.

Through this act Ss'nutum accomplished two things: first, she raised the overall intelligence of the clutch profoundly. Succeeding generations of Emerald Scales were more cunning and intelligent than their opposing egg clutches. Where the Barbed Tails gained position through strength and brute force, the Emerald Scales consolidated power through their own cunning and ruthlessness. In a few generations the Emerald Scales had regained their position of power within the Empire, gaining notice of the ruling Nagas.

With the Naga's monopolized power over the Empire, the worship of Kassegore had been prescribed. Even so, the Emerald Scales credited their advancement and newfound power to Kassegore and continued His worship, deep below the city of Veriss within the very same temple that Ss'nutum entered long ago. Their worship of Kassegore is no secret to the Ssethric ruling castes, but since Veriss has grown into the second most powerful city in the Empire and a strategic military post for launching assaults into Altheria, the ruling caste tends to look the other way on their religious practices. However, the Naga and the Ssanu are slowly attempting to penetrate the Emerald Scale ranks and convert them to Varn worship. Their attempts have yet to be successful. To this day the Emerald Scales remain a powerful and influential group within Ssethric society.

Barbed Tail Egg Clutch "Sspiniferous"

The Barbed Tail are the largest and most powerful egg clutch within Ssethregore. Brutal, barbaric, merciless and cruel, the Barbed Tail Ss'ressen are the hammer the Empire utilizes to grind its enemies into pulp. Barbed Tail Ss'ressen stand between 6 and 7 feet tall and sport twin rows of thick spines down their back, rather than the usual sagittal crest seen in most Ss'ressen. Their hide is a dark mottled gray, a throwback towards their Dark Crest progenitors. The Barbed Tail receive their name from the Clutch's favored weapon, a thick, heavily spiked tail. Bred to be stronger and more savage than the average Ss'ressen, members of the Barbed Tail Egg Clutch delight in brutal warfare and in tormenting their victims.

Barbed Tails can be found throughout the Empire, from the disputer frontier to their power base, within the great city of Sseth. Barbed Tails are a recent entry into the intrigue-laden folds of Ssethric society, having first appeared only after the founding of Ssethregore. Needing a heavy shock trooper to hold back the despised Elorii and to keep the rioting Troglodytes under the Empire's iron fist, the Ssanu Technomancers turned their attention to the Ss'ressen hatcheries and derived the first Barbed Tails from Dark Crest stock.

With the indoctrination of the new clutch into the new state religion, the Barbed Tails quickly embraced the Varn as their deities and have continued to pay homage to these dark gods. Untold numbers of victims have met the knife upon the sacrificial altars of the Varn and no egg clutch has been more complicit in these savage rituals than the Barbed Tails. Feverent in their beliefs, the Barbed Tails have no compunctions in killing any that they find straying from the path. Their inquisitors constantly hunt down infidels in the other egg clutches and amongst the other Ssethric races. Their current High Matriarch Mother is the infamous Chaoshammer Neoseps, whose acts of perversion and depravity would make a Larissian priestess blush.

Universally hated by all other Clutches, the Barbed Tails retain their power through fear, cruelty, and malice. The Troglodytes hate no Clutch more than the Barbed Tails and along the lesser slave races, a sentence of being sent to the Barbed Tails is considered worse than death.

The Barbed Tails harbor a special hatred for the Black Talon Ss'ressen, for their continued existence is a painful reminder of one of the Barbed Tails' greatest failures. Barbed Tail Inquisitors make it a special point to travel into the human lands to infiltrate the Black Talons and attempt to bring about their extermination. In the recent Battle of Semar, a special contingent of Barbed Tails were held in reserve to combat a group of Black Talons which had come down to join the battle.

Even with their failure in exterminating the Black Talons, the Barbed Tails more than made up for that failure with the total annihilation of the Dark Crest Egg Clutch. Currently the Barbed Tails are entrenched in the highest positions of power in the Empire, constantly vying with the more intelligent Emerald Scales for political positions and military roles. Their cruelty and malevolence have permeated through to the forces under their control, creating the perfect weapon for the plotting leaders of the Ssethregoran Empire.

Flaming Tongue Egg Clutch "Pyrolengus"

The Flaming Tongue Egg Clutch was created as ranged support for the Ssethric forces that still maintained the capability for melee combat. Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen stand between 5 and 6 feet tall; their hide is a dusky brown in coloration mottled with orange or red bars. Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen sport a crimson red sagittal crest that lies flat against their back. When agitated or in preparing to use their special attack, the crest is raised to display its vivid red coloration. The Flaming Tongues received their namesake from two specialized glands found in



Horned Jowl

Curled Tail

Dark Crest

Razor Claw

the rear of their jaws. When their facial muscles are contracted a stream of viscous oil is forcibly ejected from the glands and spurts out of its mouth in a tight stream. This oil ignites upon contact with the surrounding air, creating gout of sticky flaming napaltha. Knowledgeable opponents may gain a moment to prepare themselves by watching for the telltale crest moments prior to being immersed in liquid fire.

The Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen settlements are spread along the drier Northern Reaches of the Ssethregoran Empire. Before the appearance of the Altherians, the Flaming Tongue controlled strongholds as far north as the Kuthre River, but the humans have driven them and other Ssethric forces south, out of the highlands and into the swamp.

The Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen have managed to ally themselves with the highly respected and feared Pit Maliss, for their location at the northern edge of Ssethric territory places them in the perfect position for ambushing rich caravans moving along the Shining Way to vaulted Althre. Realizing the clutch's strategic importance, Pit Maliss long ago moved to capitalize on the Flaming Tongue's weakness, providing them with valuable foodstuffs, equipment, and political clout in return for trade goods taken from the warm bloods. The Flaming Tongue have found this relationship advantageous, as their position under Pit Maliss has provided a certain level of protection from the

more aggressive Barbed Tail Ss'ressen that have coveted the Flaming Tongue's territory for centuries.

The Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen venerate the Varn God Sipta. Sipta is the Varn embodiment of magic and the Flaming Tongues consider any born with the talent for arcane magics to be blessed with the gift of Sipta. They view Ss'ressen with sorcerous talent as tangible proof of their religious dedication. The Matriarchy of the Flaming Tongue produces a number of sorcerers each generation, who are taken to the capital to be trained in their newfound abilities as battle mages. Any male children who are born with the blessings of Sipta are instantly slain and fed to his female siblings. A few males however, manage to slip through the testing process and often become renegades, leaving the society to wander the swamps or heading to the capital hoping to be apprenticed to a Ssanu Wizard.

Venomous Scale Egg Clutch "Venaris"

The Venomous Scale Egg Clutch are truly the most despicable of all the Ss'ressen breeds. These Ss'ressen use their ability to spit forth a paralytic poison to capture prey wanted for questioning by their superiors or



for preserving food for their macabre living larder. They ruthlessly torment and torture those victims who need not be questioned and take special joy in knowing that though they inflict terrible wounds upon them, their captives can only stare back in mute horror. A Venomous Scale Ss'ressen stands between 5 1/2 to 6 feet tall and contains a speckled hide in hues of light gray and black, with a slightly yellow underside. Their hide fades as they age; venerable members of the Clutch often have coats that look like ashes upon a snowy background. Their sagittal crest is short with minimal webbing between the individual spines. Their claws are not as advanced as other egg clutches, but they make up for it with a razor sharp bite and extra thick hide.

The Venomous Scales are one of the least numerous of the Ssethric Egg Clutches. They trace their heritage to the Old Empire, long before the appearance of the Elorii, and possibly even back to the great migration over 10,000 years ago. Though their numbers wane, they are still some of the finest scouts and spies in the Empire. Bred specifically for stealth, members of the Venomous Scale Egg Clutch occupy the same position they have had for a millennia, spying upon enemy forces and taking captives for interrogation. Their mottled hide is ideal for blending into the night's shadows and their own improved vision allows them to move in total darkness. Venomous Scale Ss'ressen are often teamed with Hylis commandos for reconnaissance missions across the Malfelen or Altherian borders and have even been known to slip as far north as the Coryani Empire and Milandir without detection.

The Venomous Scales have left behind their ancestral worship of Kassegore (though there still are a few throwbacks that still follow the Old Religion) and venerate the Varn God Caimeth, their deity of Murder. The Matriarchy and clutch have come to venerate this foul god in an attempt to curry favor with the ruling caste and to enhance their own already formidable authority. Abominations produced by this clutch tend to be entirely uncontrollable, reveling in hunting other sentient creatures by night and rending them limb from limb. All abominations produced by this clutch are kept deep within the Venomous Scale's main temple of Caimeth, in the city of Anuliss along the southern coastline. The Venomous Scales have been biding their time, watching the hostilities between the Barbed Tail and the Emerald Scale come to a head, waiting for their chance to make a bid for power.

Horned Jowl Egg Clutch "Agamassi"

The Horned Jowl or Agamassi as they are called in the Empire, represent a highly specialized egg clutch. The average Horned Jowl stands between 9 1/2 to 10 1/2 feet tall and weighs in at an incredible 500 pounds. Testaments to the controlled breeding experiments of their Ssanu creators, the Horned Jowl are huge brutish Ss'ressen, designed as heavy shock troopers. They are massive hulking brutes with a short snout and wide jaws. An Agamassi's head is covered with numerous long spines running along its jaw line, brow ridges, and cranium. Horned Jowl Ss'ressen have overly long arms and wide splayed feet. Their tails are shorter than that of an average Ss'ressen and their thick horny hide offers superior protection from all but the most Herculean of blows. Their claws are short and Agamassi prefer to strike with their horny fists rather than slash at their opponents.

The Horned Jowl Egg Clutch has never been numerous, being the slowest Ss'ressen to reach sexual maturity. The average Horned Jowl requires 20 years to attain full growth and arrive at full sexual development; twice as long as most Ss'ressen.

Yet, the Horned Jowl are not to be

taken lightly as armored regiments of these massive brutes can carve through opponents like a warm knife through butter. The most stalwart and brave fighters quail when they see a wedge of Horned Jowl Ss'ressen carving their way across the battlefield, spattering brains, entrails, and innards across the theatre of war like rice at a wedding. Horned Jowls most often find themselves in important positions as bodyguards to the Ssethric elite and scores make it to the position of Emperor's personal bodyguard. Those not guarding important personages find themselves in the army as shock troopers or heavy assault squadrons, designed to scatter enemy formations; a job that the Horned Jowl accomplish surprisingly well.

The Agamassi worship the Varn God Haulis, the embodiment of rage and destruction, a towering force deemed to destroy all that is before him. The Horned Jowl Matriarchy embraces these views and breed berserkers among its ranks. Nothing on the battlefield is more intimidating than an Agamassi berserker wading through the fray, bloody crowsbeak in hand, dangling globs of an opponent's flesh from blood-smeared spines. Though the Matriarchy worships the Varn tenants, it does not create abominations like the other Ss'ressen egg clutches. The Agamassi are too proud a race to taint their blood, believing they are already the perfect embodiment of strength and rage. To taint the next generation with the essence of their god would be to lose themselves as a race.

The Ssanu and Nagas heavily experiment upon the Horned Jowl Ss'ressen. Emperor Kahass has even created a draconic offshoot of the Horned Jowl, where the perverse Naga has crossed great black drakes with them to create winged horrors that are reported to be able to spit a stream of caustic acid and fly on great bat-like wings.

The Agamassi are notorious for a peculiar trait: The clutch has a rich oral tradition and pass along much of what they know through songs and stories. Virtually nothing in their culture is written down or recorded. Consequently, a warrior bard heritage has sprung into existence within the Horned Jowl Egg Clutch. Usually derived from the priestesses, but not limited to them, the warrior bards entertain the masses and the hatchlings by regaling to them tales of lust, battle, and courage. These tellers of tales and recorders of history often become Plethorax and accompany their comrades into battle singing hymns in a rich baritone or keeping beat with huge copper kettledrums.

Dark Crest Egg Clutch "Acerbuss":

The Dark Crest Egg Clutch, now long extinct, was a ruthless and potent force for much of the Ssethric History. Tracing their origins back to the Old Empire and the Il'huan war, the Dark Crests were at one time the most powerful of all the Ssethric clutches. With the fall of Yahssremore and the subsequent migration of Ssethric forces to the region of what is now present day Ssethregore, the Dark Crest fell from their position of power to become a periphery egg clutch. Upon migration to Ssethregore, the Dark Crests tried to once again rebuild their broken clutch in the new capital of Sseth. Political intrigue and pressure from rival clutches, forced the Dark Crests to head risky military ventures, foremost of which was the attempt to retake Yahssremore (now the city of Belestor,) from the despised Elorii. The result of that disastrous campaign as well as a string of defeats over the next dozen centuries has caused the Dark Crests to fall into low favor amongst the Empire's ruling caste.

The Dark Crests hung onto the shreds of their former glory, remaining loyal to their patron deity Kassegore. With the Naga revolution and transfer of power to their caste, the worship of Kassegore was banned in favor of the Varn gods who had granted the Nagas victory over the Ssanu. The Dark Crest were ordered to recant and worship these new gods, but in an act of defiance the clutch refused to do so, spouting some nonsense

about the return of the Great Destroyer. As an example of their newfound power and as a warning to those who rebel against the new order, the Emperor, a Dark Naga named Narthsslik, ordered the elite Black Talon Ss'ressen to eliminate the failed clutch. The Matriarch Mother of the Black Talons refused to carry out the order, claiming she had been granted a holy vision. The Naga took their refusal as a sign of weakness and ordered the Barbed Tail Egg Clutch to exterminate both groups. While the Black Talons escaped, the Dark Crests were not so lucky. The Barbed Tail exterminated them to the last, feasting upon their eggs and stamping any evidence of the Dark Crests and their city of Cognatus into the cold black mud of the Swamp.

It is rumored in human lands, that in far away Toranesta a group of Ss'ressen have been spotted from time to time deep in the swamp. Believed to be a scouting patrol for the Empire, these Ss'ressen are often written off, except for the fact their scales are jet black and they sport an obsidian crest.

Razor Claw Egg Clutch "Sulsellous"

Ss'ressen of the Razor Claw Egg Clutch are the melee machines of the Sssethregoran Empire. Bred for close combat engagements, the Razor Claws sport an impressive array of spines and ridges along their bodies, used primarily for the tearing of an opponents flesh. Razor Claws are the shortest of the Ss'ressen, standing between 4 1/2 to 5 1/2 feet tall. They sport dark green bars of color running from their snout to the tip of their tail atop a sandy tan to muddy brown background and a single row of cranial spines that leads into a sagittal crest devoid of webbing between spines. Their most prominent feature is their extremely long talons, thick and sharp, sprouting from each hand. Their arms are short and bulky, built to absorb the shock from the tremendous blows these claws can deliver. Each scale on their bodies tapers into a sharp point, the edge like a razor. A favorite tactic of a Razor Claw is to close in and grapple with a foe, using his claws to eviscerate the opponent while his scales tear at the foe's flesh.

Razor Claw Ss'ressen can be found throughout Sssethregore, but are concentrated within the Western Frontier near Malfelen. They call the underground city of S'lis their home, spreading out through the Lavender Way. Woe to any Elorii fortifications built upon the ground, for such places awake all too frequently to the screams of the dying and hordes of Razor Talons boiling from the ground through a newly excavated tunnel.

The Razor Claws venerate the Varn pantheon, in particular the God Zedok. This dark deity best personifies the chaos that grips them in battle. Razor Claws hold a special hatred for the Elorii and any captives can look forward to a long torturous flaying by shed lengths of Razor Claw skin upon the altar of Zedok. The Razor Claws find Elorii to be a special delicacy, having never lost the taste since acquiring it under the Old Empire. They often keep Marokene slaves in pits deep underground, feeding off them like some perverted cattle. The Razor Talons are the least political of all the Ss'ressen, preferring to vent their frustration and rage upon the field of battle. Squadrons of Razor Claws are constantly patrolling the borders of Sssethregore, itching for a chance to wet their talons in the warm blood of the dying.

Curled Tail Egg Clutch "Barbatus"

The Curled Tail Egg Clutch is an unfamiliar site to most travelers of the Known Lands. Hailing from the Southern Marshlands across the Lauriol Sea, the Curled Tail Ss'ressen call the grand port city of Th'lathis home. Raised to fight in the vaulted coastal rain forests of the Southern Continent, their bodies are lithe and wiry, a mottled green in coloration. Standing between 5 to 6 feet tall, Curled Tail Ss'ressen are aptly

named for their impressively long tail that they tend to keep curled behind them. This tail is prehensile and capable of supporting the Ss'ressen, lifting objects, or even wielding a weapon. The hands of a Curled Tail do not sport the long talons seen in other Ss'ressen; instead their digits are short, thick, and covered with adhesive pads made from millions of tiny hair-like protrusions. These pads allow them to climb any surface at a surprising rate. These Ss'ressen lack any sagittal crest, sporting instead a very small ridge of skin, which runs along their backbone and out to the tip of their tail.

The Curled Tail Ss'ressen are allied with Pit Aspis, the true rulers of Th'lathis. Paying lip service to the Naga overlords, the Barbatus and the Aspis govern the city and surrounding region, controlling the mining colonies in the mountains to the south and the shipping across the Lauriol Sea to the capital city of Sseth. Both groups worship the Varn deities in general, with no specific divine being venerated above the rest. It is highly suspected, but unproven, that in the more remote southern regions Curled Tail Ss'ressen still worship Kassegore and possibly even Yig. The ruling Naga caste however, suffers far greater problems than who the Curled Tails worship, for the constant battles along the southern frontier and recent push by the goblinoids occupy their minds and bodies. The Curled Tail Ss'ressen are the most familiar with this area of the Empire and are often asked to advise the Ssanu on regional matters. They specialize in guerilla warfare, often conducting attacks from the trees above the opponents force, dropping down into their midst before the enemy has realized what has hit them.

There are a few outlying clutches of Curled Tail Ss'ressen in the Northern Reaches of the empire, but the drier terrain along the Altherian frontier is ill suited to this rainforest dwelling race.

Black Talon Egg Clutch "Thulluss"

The flames abruptly died as if doused by an unseen blast of icy wind. Where a moment before the proud Ss'ressen had stood, now only a charred oily mass of blackened unrecognizable flesh lay before the pristine altar. The assorted company, priestesses and friends alike, stared in revulsion as the macabre spectacle crumbled to ashes, forever destroyed. The Aged Matriarch Mother Ssvesh Mastyx gazed upon the grim scene. The pile of greasy soot had once been the strong and proud Ss'ressen Ven val'Sosi, an oddity among her people. One of the younger, new generation of Ss'ressen that ventured out into the realms of the warm-bloods in an attempt to learn more about their ways and to spread the word of the Holy Fire Dragon. Always faithful, the young Ss'ressen had beaten the odds of the hostile human realm and fallen in with a group of just adventurers. Their exploits ranged the known world, traveling from lofty peaks, to sun parched desert, and into the foul recesses of the darkest dungeons. Yet, throughout his travels in the Know Lands, Ven proved himself an exemplary member of his clutch, frequently proving his loyalty to the Matriarchy and his God, though recent adventures had changed him.

Ven was one of a few courageous souls who had ventured into the dreaded Isle of Ymandragore, to prevent one of the Sorcerer King's crazed minions from attaining unimaginable power. Consequently, the encounter left Ven tainted with the essence of a god the humans called Beltine, Guardian of Souls. Changed in body and sporting the gray eyes of the strange humans identified as Vals, the Ss'ressen then christened Ven val'Sosi, returned to the Sulphur Marsh to prove his faith to the Fiery Wyrm by attempting the breeding trials.

The trial by combat had been brutal, but Ven reigned supreme, defeating Velis Ss'tang and earning his right to breed, but the Matriarchy could not finalize his claim until the Great Fire Dragon had tested his mettle. The solemn



Black Talon

Ashen Hide

Ghost Scale

procession of the High Matriarchs, Ven and his comrades filled into the temple, wending their way deep down far below the surface. In the innermost nadir stood a chamber of awe-inspiring presence, a natural grotto, carved from the living stone ages ago by a long forgotten water source. Crystalline stalactites hung from the ceiling attempting to gracefully meet their twin counterparts rising up from the cavern floor. The cavity was surprisingly dry and warm; a large geothermal vent on the far side of the hall filled the grotto with its warm sulphurous breeze. The natural magnificence of this site was enhanced by the myriad of holy runes carved into every available surface.

Centermost in the chamber, upon a floor polished by centuries of faithful claws, waited the altar. Ornate, massive, and imposing, the altar stood 30 feet high. It was crafted of an unknown silvery metal and carved to resemble a rearing dragon, haunches resting upon its long coiled tail. The eyes of the Great Wyrm flickered with immortal fire, the body so exquisitely crafted; the watchers could swear it was a living thing. Surrounding the idol at a distance of five paces was the more familiar symbol of a flaming circle, the contemporary mark of the all-mighty Fire Dragon.

To that magnificent altar Ven val'Sosi had traveled, to place his talons upon the great coiled tail that made up its flat surface. The Matriarch Mother had spoken the proper benedictions and watched as his body began to smoke and write under a supernatural heat. Ven's body jerked in pain, as the scent of smolder-

ing flesh reached his nostrils. His talons sizzled like fat on a griddle. Through it all Ven stood firm. Svesh Mastyx smiled.

Ven's body erupted into flames. The blaze whirled about the Ssethric form, flesh blackening as screams erupted. Ten thousand iron needles seem to pierce his flesh as he withered in the heat. The holy fire wrapped Ven's body like a mantle, the roaring of the flames suffocating his screams. Through the blurring pain Ven had stood firm, draining every ounce of his will and overriding his very instincts for survival. The Matriarch Mother watched as the flamed wracked the Ss'ressen body, bones crashing, scales falling to the floor like a deadly rain. In the recesses of her mind she felt the presence of another divine being reaching out to the Ss'ressen before the altar. But the ravaged form of Ven, blackened from the heat, turned away from it and fixed his attention on the great fiery eyes far above him. With a feeling of profound sadness the other entity departed. With that departure, the fires of her Lord rose in one great gout, destroying flesh, bone and sinew. What was left crumpled before the altar, unrecognizable and destroyed.

The High Matriarch mother looked upon the pile of ash, and turned to the crowd. Evidentially she had been wrong about the young warrior; his soul had not been truly faithful. "His choice was made, and he was found unworthy; a brave warrior has left us this day, may his soul find solace in the white hot crucible of the Fiery Wyrm." The High Matriarch Mother moved away from the altar as she spoke. As she turned a murmur ran through the assembled priestesses. Spinning around, The High Matriarch Mother watched the miracle unfold before her aged eyes. The ashes had begun to stir, as if lifted by an unfelt breeze. Faster and faster they swirled, then

suddenly with a deafening roar a column of crimson fire erupted from the huge holy symbol encircling the Altar. Through that mass of whirling flames, a figure could be seen taking shape. With one last burst, the flames died, leaving a lone figure standing there before them. Ven val'Sosi had returned.

Astonished the priestesses rushed forward, but an upraised talon from the High Matriarch Mother stopped them. Slowly, Ssvesh Mastyx approached the figure. He was Ven, yet a change had been wrought in his form. Drawing near, she noticed he retained his gray eyes, but had gained infinitely more. Reaching out, the tip of her claw traced the holy symbol of the Fire Dragon, emblazoned on the left side of his face, around his eye. Looking into his eyes, the Matriarch Mother stared deep into the soul of the Ss'ressen before her. In a low voice she addressed him "You who were once Ven val'Sosi, have seen the truth and have survived. A blessing granted to only to matriarch mothers. We have much to discuss, for you have fulfilled a prophecy three hundred years old".

She then turned and led the assembly from the temple. There upon the front steps she addressed the assembled masses of Black Talons. "My children, blessed are we today, for our Great Lord has given us a sign". Indicating for Ven to step forward she continued "Our oldest legend has come to pass, for the one who was destroyed and born again by our Lord's Holy Fire has appeared. Pyros Morellia has been born, and though his loins shall a new generation of Ss'ressen be born that will lead our clutch to a new era!!!"

Like wildfire the word spread, whispered from one forked tongue to another. From seasoned veterans in the barracks to hatchlings in the most remote communities the story grew, whispers became rumors, rumors became shouts, and a legend was born. Pyros Morellia had finally come and a new age for the Black Talons had begun.

History

The Black Talons are one of the oldest Ss'ressen Egg Clutches or so they believe. Their lineage stretches back to the glory days of the Old Empire, where serpentine masters had ruled over all of the Known Lands from the great city of Yahressemore. The Black Talons were a major military and political power of the Old Empire, always having at least one general on the Ji'hass council to the Emperor. The Black Talons were an elite fighting force, bred for especially tough missions that required stealth and cunning as well as marital prowess. They demonstrated their exemplary skills during the Terkas and Locanth campaigns and displayed unparalleled bravery during the great Il'huan war, where entire battalions of Black Talons fearlessly descended into the Lavender Way to hunt down and destroy the hated Il'huan.

The Black Talons were an extremely proud and arrogant clutch who deemed themselves to be the epitome of the warrior caste. Those Matriarchs and high-ranking generals hailing from the Black Talons vehemently opposed the creation of the Elorii and their use as warriors, arguing that it demeaned the proud Ssethric peoples to rely on a lesser race to fight for them. The ruling council and the Emperor did not agree and used the newly created Elorii as expendable troops to be thrown at the enemy before the more valuable forces, such as the Black Talons themselves, would be committed to the fray. The Black Talons shunned Elorii as slaves, but did keep kobolds and the various goblin races to perform menial tasks inside within their fortifications.

With the Elorii revolt and subsequent fall of the Old Empire, the Black Talons migrated with the rest of the Ssethric forces to what is now Ssethregore. The Black Talons along with the Horned Jowl and Emerald Scale Egg Clutches formed the bulk of the rearguard to the army, fighting the Elorii until finally reaching the swamplands. The Black Talons formed their new stronghold along the northwestern edge of the newly formed Empire. The Black Talons held this post with honor,

proving time and again that the Ssanu created Elorii warriors were no match for the Ss'ressen.

The Black Talons remained in this post for three millennia, gaining power and prestige. Under the rule of the Naga Emperors, the Black Talons once again became an elite fighting force and were chosen for the most dangerous missions into enemy territory; honors were heaped upon them. Their prestigious position and curried favor with the Nagas made them enemies within the other clutches, especially in the newly created Barbed Tails.

As a consequence of their often-hazardous missions, the Black Talons had an alarmingly high death rate and the clutch never became as numerous as some of the others. They were forced time and again to see their comrades die and their numbers dwindle. They watched the cruel and unspeakable acts that the other Ssethric races committed and were often ordered to commit genocide against captured enemy forces for the viewing pleasure of the ruling caste. The Black Talons foundered under the dark rites to the new Varn gods, watching other's revel in the blood and agony caused in those rituals. Through four thousand years of Naga rule the Black Talons watched and waited. What had once been a glorious empire of courage and honor become an opulent decadent society that was only entertained by the bloodiest and brutal forms of cruelty. They began to witness the fallibility of the ruling castes and started to question their wasteful methods and disregard for troops. As they watched over the millennia something occurred to the elite Black Talons, something unprecedented in the reptilian ranks. The Black Talons developed a conscious.

Four hundred years ago there appeared a new High Matriarch Mother of the Black Talons. A young Ss'ressen named Scaphiopus had recently gained the position after the passing of the previous High Mother Matriarch. At the time of her ascension, the Black Talons were in a state of turmoil. They felt lost, without guidance. The Varn Deities were perverse and corrupted and the old gods Kassegore and Yig had left them in their greatest moment of need. The Black Talons were balanced on the edge of a knife, their numbers dwindling under wasteful military excursions; they questioned their very existence and purpose within the Ssethregoran Empire.

The High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus retired deep into the heart of the clutch's territory, a great fortress called Al'malyss. She avoided any of the old altars and wended her way deep into the core of the fortress, through the hatcheries, to the great furnaces that granted life to each new generation of Black Talons. For an entire year, Scaphiopus fasted and meditated, growing gaunt and thin, her reptilian body barely able to maintain life. Before the roiling furnaces, the High Matriarch Mother felt her life force gently slipping away. In her final moments all became hazed, then clear, as a single vision sprang into existence whole in her mind. Empowered by this vision, the Matriarch Mother rose and left the furnaces. As she walked her body was restored, and she arrived on the surface hale and whole. The other Matriarchs were astonished at her transformation. She summoned the ranks of Black Talons to assemble in front of the hatcheries. That evening, with the setting sun glowing at her back, Scaphiopus spoke of the vision, a flaming spirit she called the Fire Dragon. Within the sacred flame that nurtured the eggs of her people, the Matriarch had seen a burning Wurm, small in stature, yet wielding great power. It whispered to her of a different life for her children, of the tyranny of the loathsome Ssanu and Nagas and of the ideals of compassion. The Matriarch also warned that if she and her people followed the words of this Fire Dragon, great sacrifices would be

required before deliverance would be granted. Yet, should they be worthy, a new and better life would be the birthright of all those who would follow.

Scaphiopus began to teach the words she had heard and a change slowly rippled through their ranks. Ss'ressen flocked to the hatcheries to gaze into the sacred flames and left with a new feeling of spirituality. It was as if a veil had been lifted from their eyes. Though still as aggressive and menacing as ever, the Black Talons began to take a more thoughtful approach to tasks rather than blindly following orders.

For eighty years Scaphiopus taught the words of the Fire Dragon to her people and to the new generations born in the heat of their Fiery Lord's sacred flames. Their new attitude did not go unnoticed by the Ssanu and Nagas. The current possessor of the Serpent Throne, the dreaded Emperor NARTHSSLIK, saw the Black Talon's new spirituality as an affront to the Naga imposed Varn religious practices and their growing insubordination as a threat to the reign of House Khass. To test their loyalty, Emperor NARTHSSLIK ordered the Black Talons to exterminate a rival egg clutch, the Dark Crests. The Dark Crests had recently suffered a string of defeats from the warm-bloods and were old and bitter rivals of the Black Talons. The elite Black Talons were ordered to exterminate the Dark Crests, feast upon their eggs and bring the head of the Dark Crest High Mother Matriarch before the Emperor as proof of their commitment and loyalty.

For The First time in its millennia long history, the Empire of Ssethregore was denied by one of its subjects.

In a tersely worded message sent to the Emperor, the Black Talons refused, stating that the complete extermination of a people was an act of thoughtless brutality and waste of military resources. Enraged, the Emperor sent the bloodthirsty Barbed Tail Egg Clutch to eradicate both groups. As an afterthought, the Emperor sent Venomous Scale Inquisitors to bring the matriarchs of both clutches before him.

When the Barbed Tails arrived at Al'malyss, the Black Talons were ready. They had sent word to the Dark Crests and told them of the plot, though they would never discover the ramifications of that message. Scaphiopus and an entourage of heavily armed Black Talon Elites greeted the Barbed Tails upon their arrival. Scaphiopus attempted to explain their reasons to her fellow Ss'ressen and suggested that the two clutches band together against their serpentine oppressors. Passionately she spoke the Dragon's words, promising a better life for both of their peoples.

The leader of the Barbed Tail Force, a Chaoshammer of Zedok, took just one brief instant to reply. His retort took the form of a heavy spiked tail whistling through the air. In one split second, all that remained of Sscaophiopus, High Matriarch Mother, was a headless corpse spurting out its crimson lifeblood onto the cold hard ground.

Blood frenzy gripped the Black Talons as their spiritual leader fell. They swarmed the Barbed Tail murderers and fought heroically; three Barbed Tails falling for every Black Talon lost. Yet, they were heavily outnumbered and in moments the fight was over. Not a single Black Talon remained on its feet. The fight however, was merely a diversionary tactic; the Matriarch Mother had foreseen this outcome, for she knew that refusing the Emperor was a death sentence and she would not survive the encounter. She had ordered

the majority of the Black Talons, about four thousand strong, to march north as fast as they could travel

and to take their eggs with them. The Fire Dragon had promised that the eggs would remain warm and be protected throughout the journey.

Traveling along with the exodus was

a young matriarch named Ss'lessis Tel, who had been groomed to assume the position High Matriarch Mother if Sscaophiopus did not survive. Word spread quickly of the massacre at Al'malyss and Ss'lessis Tel assumed her new position.

The Black Talons marched north, dodging some Ssethregoran patrols and while wiping out others in their headlong rush to freedom. Their great migration took then fifty years to complete, for at each suitable location they found, humans would soon appear and drive them still further north. Through sweltering Abessios, then rolling Coryan they traveled, never finding peace or respite. Hundreds of their number died, but Ss'lessis Tel led them on, for the Fire Dragon had revealed to her a place of safety and protection that lay still further north. The Vision of the Dragon led them to the frigid north and the heart of the Black Talons began to waver. Winter was approaching and they would surely perish in this hostile climate, but even as that dreaded season approached, the Fire Dragon did not forsake His people. In another vision, He appeared to all His chosen people and roused them from their lethargic state, bringing fire back into their sluggish veins. He told them only the weak and unworthy would lay on the cold ground and die, while the strong would let the passion in their hearts drive them to the Promised Land. Through sheer force of will the Ss'ressen plodded forward, foot after excruciating foot, the strong dragging or carrying the others as best they could. Unexpectedly warm slush met their next step. As they penetrated the wetland further, the air grew warmer, removing the chill from their bones. They had found a swamp, fetid, and warm, where hot springs bubbled up from deep within the earth to take the bite from the cool northern air. Further they ventured through this bog. The warm miasma of the swamp was a welcome change from the cool seaside breezes of Coryan. The Ss'ressen basked in the heat of their new homeland, reveling in the lush vegetation and soothing waters lapping about their shins. The Dragon had been true to its word, paradise had been reached; the Black Talons were home.

Centermost in the swamp, they discovered the ruins of an ancient city. The architecture was serpentine, obviously Ssethric in nature, from a time long forgotten. Dark basalt dominated the scene, the black rock drawn up from deep within the earth's core, to create dark edifices of unsurpassing beauty. All the structures were low, sprawling, and identical, lined up in neat rows. The buildings were thick-walled and heavily defensible, extending deep underground, where natural springs and geothermal vents warmed them. The marsh had reclaimed much of the city; vines and vegetation adorned every surface from the sun-dappled walls to the still flowing fountains and luxurious pools.

The Black Talons studied these marvels, for they had seen nothing like it except for the capital of Ssethregore. The masses traveled on, drawn inexplicably toward the center of the city, where there stood a vast ziggurat, its stepped sides overgrown with thriving plant life. At the foot of the ziggurat the mass stopped and High Matriarch Mother Ss'lessis Tel ascended the steps. She tore down the vines overhanging the entrance, revealing a symbol above the door. Inscribed over the massive portal, was a rearing draconic image, its long tail creating a circle on which its haunches rested; the circle was of pure roaring fire. The Black Talons had found their god and named the city in his honor, Lanpeltis, City of the Fiery Wyrms.

The Oath

It did not take the humans of Milindir long to realize they now had reptilian neighbors. Men were quickly levied and a force of humans rode out to the marsh to confront the invaders. Led by Duke Artur val'Holryn of the Order of the Phoenix, the knights descended upon the marsh, seeking to engage this new menace to the newly formed Milindir. The Duke was a thought-

ful man and did not blindly attack these beings. Instead he observed them building and caring for their young and not preparing to make war upon his lands.

Against the advice of his seconds, the Duke waded out into the marsh with just two men, forbidding the knights to show any hostile intent. After a few tense moments and the judicious application of a spell to aid in communication, the Duke and the High Matriarch Mother came to an agreement. The Duke would grant the land of the Sulphur Marsh to the Ss'ressen (a property he considered worthless at best), in exchange for their oath of fealty to him and the crown of Milandir. They would be left to their own devices, unmolested by all, but would be expected to levy warriors in times of need. Since that day over two centuries ago, the Black Talon Ss'ressen have become an invaluable source to the Kingdom of Milandir. In return, the Black Talons have gained a wealth of knowledge and new technologies from the energetic humans.

Black Talon Society

Black Talon society does not differ much from the rest of the Ss'ressen peoples. Black Talons are still a proud race with a rich warrior culture. Standing roughly 6 feet tall a Black Talon is a sight to behold, sleek and muscular limbs covered with mottled green and gray scales. Their actual claws are pitch black, a trait which led to the naming of their clutch. Along their spine runs a spiked sagittal crest devoid of webbing. This crest is reduced upon their head and terminates between their eyes. A Black Talon has a longer jaw than most other Egg Clutches, concluding at a blunt snout. These Ss'ressen take great satisfaction from personal achievements in battle or single combat, and display their scars proudly.

Unlike most Ssethric societies, Black Talons have three castes, a religious, military, and worker caste. Due to their unique outlook on life, they do not take slaves and hence have had to form their own caste for procurement of food and supplies.

The entire system is controlled though the ruling matriarchy. This is a group of females who have passed the holy tests of the Fire Dragon and are allowed to govern over an entire settlement. There are currently thirty-seven such settlements across the Sulphur Marsh, each with one High Matriarch governing the community. In turn these thirty-seven High Matriarchs are presided over by the spiritual leader of their Ss'ressen society, the High Matriarch Mother, who is based in Lanpeltis. The High Matriarchs and the Matriarch Mother make up the Ruling Oligarchy for the Black Talons, a council that is rarely called, leaving most mundane decisions to the High Matriarch of each settlement.

Under each High Matriarch are the various priestesses of the Black Talons. Only females can become priestesses; males who feel the religious inklings become holy champions or join the druidic Cult of Jeggal Sag, aiding their skills to the clutch. Venerating the Fire Dragon, the most promising females of each generation are brought into the ranks of the Matriarchy, to receive their education in the religious arts. These young priestesses are in charge of the spiritual well being of the society and wander through the barracks encouraging the warriors and healing the wounded. From these ranks the vaunted Battle Clerics are gleaned; priestesses who are as much skilled in the art of healing as they are in the art of war.

The females also have the final say in which males gain the right to breed each year and who will gain the honor of producing the next clutch. Only the most spiritual and skilled females are allowed to breed; males must pass trials by combat to even be considered worthy to procreate.

For two months each spring, males who think themselves worthy, battle one another for supremacy. These fights are usually not to the death, but it is sometimes considered honorable

to let an aging Ss'ressen die in combat. Any male may challenge an established male, requiring that male to defend his position. If established male wins he may continue to breed that year, but if he loses, the upstart gains the right to breed and may not be challenged for the remainder of the year. After all challenges have been met, the High Matriarch of the community deems which females are allowed to breed and then those females have their choice of mates from the successful males.

The right of breeding lasts two months, at the end of which participating females lay from five to ten eggs. These eggs are taken from the individual females and brought to hatching chambers. These chambers are heated with a furnace and are hatched like any other Ss'ressen egg clutch, though siblicide among Black Talons is less common than among other clutches. Priestesses guard the eggs inside the nursery, while males stand guard outside and at every major passageway. These eggs become the hope of the next Ss'ressen generation and are guarded fiercely with no quarter given to intruders.

When an old High Matriarch dies, the ruling oligarchy meets and chooses a suitable replacement from the ranks of priestesses from the High Matriarch's community. This female must then undergo the incarnation of fire, an attunement ritual designed to determine her worthiness for the position. Many females die during this test therefore, a dozen or more candidates might be chosen and tested before a survivor can be found. In this trial the chosen priestess is escorted deep into the main temple of the Fire Dragon at Lanpeltis and in an underground grotto, she is faced with a thirty-foot effigy of her Lord. Under the watchful eye of the High Matriarchs, the priestess is told to put her hands upon the altar whereupon her form bursts into flame. Within the inferno of fire and heat, the Fire Dragon speaks to the candidate, probing her very soul.

It is during this process that the deepest secret of Black Talon society is revealed. Here under the statue of the Fiery Wyrms, the candidate learns the truth of their migration of centuries before: that the Fire Dragon is indeed an old deity, the oldest upon Onara. Then as the fire sears at her soul, the blaze burns away the lies, burns away the falsehoods, leaving only pure shining truth. In that chamber deep below the temple, the candidate learns that the savior of the Black Talons is in fact an ancient incarnation of the Ssethric deity Kassegore. Many cannot stand this truth and go mad, consumed by the fire, but if the candidate is strong and able to handle the truth, the fire withers and she is elevated to a High Matriarch of her settlement.

It was learned that in bygone centuries, the great Lord Kassegore appeared to the High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopos and explained that the Black Talons were needed for some future conflict and that all of existence would hang in the balance. Kassegore would protect His children if the High Matriarch Mother brought her people to worship Him, but the High Matriarch balked, for she knew her people hated the Kassegore of old and viewed Him as evil as the Varn deities. She knew they would never accept Him. Kassegore looked upon His form and lo He changed, His dread countenance veiled by life giving fire. The Matriarch mother listened to His words realizing that before her was an incarnation of Kassegore long forgotten; an incarnation representing a different type of worship. In that life giving heat, she saw the hope and salvation of her people and the chance for a better existence.

Scaphiopos made her decision and hid the true identity of her people's savior. To this day the Black Talons have embraced the Fire Dragon and His aspects of compassion and righteousness, while at the same time venting their anger and rage against the evil worship of

Kasgeore and the Varn in the Ssethregoran Empire. The true identity of the Fire Dragon is the most closely guarded secret of the Matriarchy, known only by the High Matriarchs. If the truth was ever released into Black Talon society, the results would be disastrous in the least.

Ss'ressen males view their Matriarchs as life givers and offer deference to the wiser females, yet they do maintain power within the community, acting as protectors and providers. About the same time the females are taken from the youngling barracks, the males are signed into military duty at the age of nine, where they learn the art of war, strategy, and tactics and begin to hone their combat skills. Once they have reached the age of twelve they are considered to be adults and are granted all the privileges thereof. Near this time they chose their life aspect. Many remain soldiers, but others branch off into the other aspects of society.

All of the roles that humans would consider belonging to the civilians are under military jurisdiction in Black Talon society. A young male can choose to join the working caste as a smith, merchant, or other craftsman role. With the loss of slaves, the Black Talons had to find a new way to procure vast quantities food. Farming and hunting is organized by the military, which assigns warriors to farms for a set period of days. After this tour of duty, the roster is changed and new warriors take their place, insuring a constant flow of new personnel through the farms. Other males become druids of Jeggal Sag, a prestigious group that takes care of the livestock, various beasts of burden, and precious drakes.

Each settlement boasts a Warlord, a male counterpart to the High Matriarch Mother. The Warlord is responsible for the Ss'ressen military machine. In Black Talon Society, the Warlord also plays a special role, for their agreement with the Milindesian humans stipulates that the Warlord act as the commander of all Black Talon forces outside the borders of the Sulphur Marsh whenever Milindir calls upon levied Black Talon troops. The Warlords also do their best to disguise the actual

Black Talons as Characters

+2 Dexterity -2 Intelligence: Black Talon Ss'ressen are quick, mobile creatures with amazing agility due to their tails, but their insular society and savage heritage do not lend themselves to academic achievement.

Natural Armor: Ss'ressen gain a +2 natural armor class due to their thick scaly hides.

Medium size: As medium sized creatures, Ss'ressen have no special bonuses or abilities. Ss'ressen base speed is 30 feet.

Low light vision: Ss'ressen can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, or conditions of similar condition due to poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish color and details under these conditions.

Natural Weaponry: Ss'ressen have sharp claws with which to attack their foes. Ss'ressen can attack with two claws (dealing 1d4 + Str. Bonus points of damage). Ss'ressen using a one-handed melee weapon can attack with a claw as an off-handed attack.

Agile: Ss'ressen gain a +2 racial bonus to Balance, Jump, and Swim checks. A Ss'ressen tail provides extra strength and support when performing feats of agility.

Cold Susceptibility: All Ss'ressen suffer a -4 penalty to dexterity and dexterity based skills, as well as all combat situation (-4 to melee attack rolls and damage) when in extreme cold weather. A successful will save (DC 15) reduces the penalty to -2.

Automatic Languages: Ss'ressen and Milandesian. Bonus languages: Ss'ethric, Low Coryani, Cancerese

Favored Class: Ranger

Level Adjustment: none

number of Black Talons living in the Sulphur Marsh, though this grows harder as human loggers and settlers probe deeper into the marsh looking for resources. The ever expanding population of Black Talons is quickly spreading overt he entire marsh, taming even the most wild regions.

Ven val'Sosi, the Pyros Morelia

Male Black Talon Ss'ressen Rog 3, Ftr 2, Rngr 4, Marauder 2 : CR: 1 Medium Humanoid (Ss'ethric), HD: 3D6+6, +2D10+4, +4D8+6, +2d10+4; hp: 76, Init: +5, Speed: 30ft, AC: 27 (+5 Dex, +2 natural armor, Breastplate +2, Buckler +1, +1 ring of protection) AC: 22 Flat footed, AC: 16 touch, Base Attack/Grapple +10/+13, Melee: +15/+10 (Scimitar +2, 1d8+5 18-20x2), and +14 (Longsword of Wounding +1 1d8+2 19-20x2) and +10 (Tail 1d8+3 20x2) or Ranged +16/+11 (Composite Longbow 1d8+ 3 20x3) or rapidshot +14/+14/+9 (Composite Longbow 1d8+ 3 20x3), SQ Low Light Vision, Natural Weapon, Cold Susceptibility, Breeding Status: Great Renown, Evasion, Sneak Attack (2d6), Trapfinding, Trap sense +1, Favored Enemy (Animal), Wild Empathy, Animal Companion, Swift Tracker, Deadly Aim (+1d6) Ambush. AL: NG, SV: Fort: +13, Ref: +15, Will: +3, Stats, Str: 16, Dex: 20, Con: 14, Int: 10, Wis:12, Cha: 10, Height: 5'10, Weight: 211 lbs.

Skills and Feats: Balance +6, Climb +5, Craft (Trapmaking) +2, Disable Device +4, Hide +10, Intuit Direction +6, Jump +5, Knowledge (Black Talons) +1, Knowledge (Religion) +2. Listen +15, Move Silently +10, Open Locks +6, Search +5, Sense Motive +5, Spot +15, Swim +10, Tumble +7, Survival +15; Dodge, Endurance, Lightning Reflexes, Manyshot, Mobility, Quick Draw, Rapid Shot, Tail Attack, Track, Two Weapon Fighting.



Special Qualities: *Low-Light vision:* 60ft, *Natural Weapons* [Primary weapon: Two Claws that do 1d4+3 slashing, secondary weapon: Tail 1d6 +3 bludgeoning]. *Cold Susceptibility:* All Ss'ressen suffer -4 penalty to all Dex and Dex based skills as well as combat when in extreme cold weather. A successful will check reduces the penalty to -2. *Breeding Status:* Ven Val'Sosi has earned the right to breed. *Great Renown:* Due to his transformation into Pyros Morelia, Ven has great renown, giving him a +3 to his leadership score inside Black talon society

Possessions: Scimitar +2, Longsword of Wounding +1, Breastplate +2, Ring of Protection +1, Buckler +1, Gloves of Dexterity +2, Mighty Masterwork Composite Longbow (+3) 3 potions cure serious wounds Backpack, 1 week rations, Flint and Steel, Waterskin, 5 torches, Dagger, Thieves tools, Whetstone, 50' Silk rope.

Animal Companion: Mor'let, advanced 2 levels

"In the Years of the Smoking Cone, a dark shadow shall arise from below. Beyond all blackness it shall be, foul and tainted with the corruption of Ages. All will quail before it, for none can stand in its presence and remain unchanged. In such desperate times, look for the coming of the one I shall send. With steel grey eyes and bearing my mark upon his face shall he arise anew from the fires of his destruction. Look upon him and rejoice, for he is Pyros Morelia, the serpent born of flames. Though his appearance marks the coming of an ancient evil, within his blood lies hope. For from his loins shall a new generation of Black Talons spring, ones whose abilities will turn the tide of disaster and bring about victory to my people."

— Excerpt from the *Chronicles of the Fire Dragon*,
penned by the Prophetic Scaphiophus-

Ven val'Sosi's life began as a tumultuous rush into the world. He and his clutchmates hatched mere days before of a foul Harvester attack upon their village. The first outside sounds to touch their newborn ears were the screams of the dying and the clash of steel. On that dark day, the entire village was devastated and only through the valiant efforts of a staunch Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms was young Ven and his clutchmate Leatherback saved. The two orphaned younglings were raised in the capital of Lanpeltis, tutored at the center of Black Talon culture.

Both grew to be valiant warriors, eventually leaving the warm lands of the Sulphur Marsh for adventures abroad. Leatherback Forktongue traveled east to reap vengeance upon the Harvesters of Ymandragore, while Ven traveled south eventually falling in with a group of human and Elorii adventurers. Ven and his band survived many perils, but their greatest test would come when they partook in the invasion of a Ymandragoran fortress. There on that fated night, Ven and his companions defeated the evil Lucias Orata and stopped him from ascending to godhood. Though they stopped the arch-villain, they were unable to save the Serenity of Beltine, a human Valinor upon whom Orata was disecting. On that dread isle, Ven and his companions made a soul-shattering decision, taking the essence of this human demipower into themselves.

Ven's sacrifice was greater than that of any of his human companions, for the essence now held within him tainted his soul, confounding his beliefs in his own God, the Fire Dragon. Now known as Ven val'Sosi, tales of this Ss'ressen warrior with strange gray eyes soon traveled back to the Sulphur Marsh. Upon hearing this, Ven was summoned to Lanpeltis by High Matriarch Mother Ssvesh Mastyx, to determine the affect the human spirit had upon his soul.

In Lanpeltis Ven was put through many trials, both physical and mental. In the end, deep under the main temple to the Fire Dragon, in the sacred grotto carved with His countenance, the Fire Dragon Himself tested Ven. Wreathed in searing flames, Ven stood firm in his beliefs to the last, rejecting the human gods that tempted him and embracing his Fiery Lord. In the end the fires consumed Ven destroying his frail mortal shell before the astonished eyes of his friends.

In death, Ven's soul traveled to the world beyond and there was measured by the Fiery Lord himself. There his very essence was tested and found worthy. What words passed between the two are unknown, for Ven does not talk about his experience, but the few hints gleaned from him imply that he was shown the god's own grand plan and a menace that threatened not only the Black Talons, but all of Onara. Ven was told that the Fire Dragon would let him keep the powers granted to him by the human gods, for through him, the Fire Dragon would use those powers for the betterment of His people.

With that, there was a fiery red flash and before the astonished eyes of those present, Ven's ashes congealed; his mortal form reborn. Through his trials and tribulations, Ven has changed. His eyes are still the same gray, but around his left eye was inscribed a circle of ever-flowing flame, the living symbol of the Fire Dragon. Though is body was whole, his soul had been forever marked and never would the young warrior be the same again. From the ashes of the fallen warrior, another had risen anew.

Pyros Morelia had been born, and the Black Talon's world was about to change forever.

This entry is in tribute to Ven val'Sosi, played by Mark Fisher. Though exemplary heroics and self sacrifice shown in the Living Arcanis Special Mission: GenCon 2002 and Special Event: GenCon 2003, Mark's character has changed the world of Arcanis forever. For only in the World of Arcanis can a single player's actions change the face of an entire world.

Ashen Hide Egg Clutch "Terdiss"

The Ashen Hide Egg Clutch is the most recent of all the egg clutches and as such they have not had time to truly differentiate itself from its ancestral clutch, the Black Talons. In fact each other's scent does not provoke blood frenzy in either clutch. Ashen Hide Ss'ressen have changed physically in the short time they have been separated from the Black Talons and consider themselves an entirely independent clutch.

Ashen Hide Ss'ressen stand between 6 and 7 feet tall and do not have a cranial crest. Their scales have become thick and knobby, almost perfectly round in form. An Ashen Hide receives its name from the uniformly gray color its skin displays, but they still retain their characteristic black claws that made their predecessors famous. They are wider of shoulder than their Black Talon relations and their tails are markedly shorter, yet they retain a great deal of grace and dexterity and are a terror upon the battlefield.

Their origin is shrouded in a mystery that can be unraveled only by their current High Matriarch Mother Cres'spis. Roughly a century ago, the High Matriarch Mother of Cres'spis' settlement died and the Ruling Oligarchy named her as the possible successor. A devout worshipper of the Fire Dragon, she traveled to Lanpeltis to take the trial of the Holy Incarnation of Fire. Cres'spis was highly intelligent but manifested a trait uncommon among her people, curiosity. Wanting to be prepared for what was before her, late on the night before her test, she crept into the temple, using her potent magics to divert the guards. In the deep recesses below the earth, she ran across the High Matriarch Mother and some of the other High Matriarchs preparing for tomorrow's trials. Silently she slid behind a stalagmite, her keen ears listening to cropped bits of their conversation that floated on the sulphurous breeze. What she heard that night stunned her, rending her spirituality to the core. The Matriarchy was worshipping Kassegore in secret and forcing that ideal upon the Black Talons!

Appalled at her discovery, Cres'spis fled the temple and ran out into the night to consider what she heard. Nothing made sense now. When had the Ruling Oligarchy become corrupted? She knew in her heart that the Fire Dragon was a real Deity and that her worship was pure. On a great fountain she sat long into the morning hours digesting what she had overheard, until she finally came to a decision. It was clear to her that the human pilgrims who had visited her village years before had been right. The Deity which had saved them from Ssethregore must be the same deity the humans called "Nier". Yet, what was she to do? She couldn't confront the Ruling Oligarchy right now; within the walls of capital no one would believe her. She would be called a heretic and banished (or worse).

The next morning Lampeltis was greeted by the warm face of the sun shining down onto its dark buildings. The Ruling Oligarchy assembled, but nowhere could the candidate Cres'spis be found. It was discovered that one of the rare wyverns were purloined in the night. Scouts were sent out. A few days later, the advanced scouts reported that the entire settlement where Cres'spis was from had picked up and left the Sulphur Marsh, traveling north.

Cres'spis had a vague idea of where to go. Returning to her settlement, she convinced them of the treachery occurring in the inner ranks of the Matriarchy and that their only hope as a people would be to leave their influence and find a new home. From there they could find a way to save the other Black Talons and prove to them that the true aspect of the Fire Dragon was the god Nier. As one, the small community of two hundred had packed up and left the marsh in forced migration. The north was in the warm grip of summer and the weather allowed for long marches into the night.

Late that night, the northern sky began to glow red. Hundreds of Ss'ressen eyes gazed heavenwards as a cascade of fiery meteorites streaked through the dark night sky. Cres'spis and her people watched as the flaming shower hurtled overhead, to crash into the earth far upon the northern horizon. Taking this as a sign from their god, Cres'spis turned towards this fiery light in the sky and began to walk. Behind her, the renegade Black Talons looked back over their shoulders one last time, then turned their clawed feet away from the warm home of old.

Marching steadily north, they passed into the lands of Canceri. Moving at night they stealthily made their way across the country, traveling always towards the glowing red mountains to the north. After months of travel and close scrapes with Nishanpur patrols, the renegades reached Nier's Spine. Encamping in the foothills, Cres'spis and three bodyguards approached the human city of Lohwach. The city itself sat in the perpetual miasma of ash and smoke from the volcanic chain to the west. This warm fog wrapped around Cres'spis as she fearlessly approached the gates of the city. Boldly she announced her presence in the trade tongue of humans and after confused looks from the walls, was allowed entry.

As the red rusted iron portal closed behind Cres'spis, a strange human with gray eyes met her entourage. Introducing himself as Akali Nessrik val'Virdin, he inquired as to the presence of a few hundred warriors encamped at his gates. The wily Cres'spis quickly told of their plight and how they were loyal worshippers of Nier, fleeing the oppression of their old rulers and of how they were looking for a warm realm to settle in. Thinking back to the Milandesian accord of the Black Talons, Cres'spis offered the Akali the military service of her clutch in return for a safe haven for them. The Akali withdrew, consulting with his councilors. It was no doubt that the Black Talons of the Sulphur Marsh were valuable

Ashen Hide as Characters

+2 Dexterity -2 Wisdom -2 Charisma: Ashen Hide Ss'ressen retain their quickness and agility from their Black Talon ancestors, but the fiery temper of Nier has pervaded their blood and they show less restraint than other clutches.

Natural Armor: Ss'ressen gain a +3 natural armor class due to their thick scaly hides (this includes the +1 bonus due to the feat: *Dragon Hide*).

Bonus Feat: All Ashen Hide Ss'ressen are born with incredibly thick skin and start with the feat: *Dragon Hide*.

Medium size: As medium sized creatures, Ss'ressen have no special bonuses or abilities. Ss'ressen base speed is 30 feet.

Low light vision: Ss'ressen can see twice as far as a human in starlight moonlight, torchlight, or conditions of similar condition do to poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish color and details under these conditions.

Natural Weaponry: Ss'ressen have sharp claws with which to attack their foes. They can attack with two claws (dealing 1d4 + Str bonus points of damage). Ss'ressen using a one-handed melee weapon can attack with a claw as an off-handed attack.

Cold Susceptibility: Ashen Hide Ss'ressen are extremely vulnerable to the cold and suffer a -6 penalty to dexterity and dexterity based skills, as well as all combat situation (-6 to melee attack rolls and damage) when in extreme cold weather. A successful will save (DC 15) reduces the penalty to -3.

Automatic Languages: Ss'ressen and Cancereese.

Bonus languages: Low Coryani,

Favored Class: Barbarian

Level Adjustment: none

assents to the Milandesians and, if what the young Ss'ressen said was true, they would be the first non-human worshippers of Nier. The possibilities of spreading Nier's influence and saving the souls of a heathen race appealed to the val'Virdin.

Returning to Cres'spis, the Akali agreed to the arrangement. There was a nearby mountain, called Ash Spire, which was riddled with volcanic caves. The renegades could make their home there, in return for active military service in the defense of the city or other val'Virdin holdings. After viewing the caves, Cres'spis agreed to the terms and led her people below.

Ash Spire turned out to be an ideal place for the renegades, for under the constant heat the clutch flourished. Their hatching chambers were heated by live lava flows, blessed with almost constant high temperatures. Consequently, the clutch as a whole tends to be more intelligent than their Black Talon counterparts. The renegades flourished, preying upon the wild shaggy cattle found on the mountain and growing tasty purple ball scarabs and giant centipedes on the lichens which grew in the oppressive heat.

In the core of the mountain, on the edge of the blast cone itself, Cres'spis erected an altar to Nier. In a massive chamber overlooking the bubbling lava far below, the new High Matriarch Mother of the renegades gives her sermons to the assembled masses. The displaced Ss'ressen clung to this new religion, the first steady spiritual direction they had received since their departure from their old homeland. Perhaps it was the worship of Nier or perhaps the atmosphere they now lived in, but the first generation of Ss'ressen hatched at Ash spire were markedly different in form than their parents. They were gray of hide and thicker in build and as they grew and multiplied, the appearance of the clutch slowly changed. Nearly a

century later, with the population numbering close to one thousand, the renegades have taken up a new name, Terdiss, the Ashen Hide Egg Clutch.

The Ashen Hide remain allies to the Nierites of Lohwatch and have participated in the military excursions of that city. They still cling to the rigid military system they practiced under the Black Talons, but their system is starting to break down due to constant contact with the Nierites of the region. The younger generations are especially susceptible to the prattle of the humans and often leave the clutch as inquisitors to scour the region and convert lost souls to the proper worship of the mighty Nier.

Even more terrifying is the emergence of Ashen Hide berserkers, which have appeared among the population. Considered a deadly and uncontrollable military unit by the Nierites, the humans of the region tread lightly around these huge reptiles. Today the Ashen Hide are firmly entrenched in Nier's Spine and are even looking for another volcano for colonize. They pursue their dream of throwing off the heretical worship the Black Talons practice and bring them to the worship of Nier.

Cresspis still rules over the clutch, her body now decrepit and ancient beyond compare, yet the heat of her passion for Nier has tempered her soul and she shows no signs of her advanced age. It is said that as long as Cresspis lives the Ashen Hide are invincible.

Ghost Scale Egg Clutch "Amelanis":

In the bowels of Old Coryan, deep beneath the cobbled city streets, exists a culture alien to that human ruled land. In the warm effluvia of the sewers, a lone clutch of reptilian warriors thrives under the very feet of their warm-blooded prey. Concealed in the magical fog issuing from their sacred relic, they strike with uncanny swiftness, carrying away their victims into the dark of night.

Ss'ressen of the Ghost Scale Egg Clutch stand roughly six feet tall. Their eyes are the standard admixture of gold and red. These Ss'ressen have dark olive green scales, sleek elongated heads, and maws filled with rows of serrated teeth. Ghost Scales have long elegant tails, folding sagittal crests with long pale red spines and a thin stripe of multi-hued red scales running down their sides. They still retain the signature black talons that mark their ancestry. Their most unusual physical feature is their scaly hide, which can shift in pigmentation like that of a chameleon, allowing them to blend into almost any setting.

Not even the Black Talons know for certain, but it seems that the Ghost Scales came into existence approximately fifty years after the Black Talons left Ssethregore. While on that long death march through the cold lands of the humans, a small group of the Black Talons became disenchanted with their High Matriarch's supposed "vision". Led by an enterprising and conniving young female named Na'liss, some of the Black Talons slipped away from the main host and attempted to head back south to warmer climes.

Their wanderings led them to the Corvis River and eventually to the tepid waters and ancient sewers of Old Coryan. While prowling these sewers, which are in fact old layers of the city itself, the Ss'ressen encountered a dark triangular red stone covered in indecipherable runes. This stone emanated waves of heat, perfect for developing Ss'ressen eggs. The Ss'ressen created their new home around this stone, clearing out the ancient tunnels which were filled with the filth and grime of centuries. The Ss'ressen delved deep, opening an entire new realm for themselves under the very roots of Old Coryan.

In reality, the stone was an ancient Sarishian artifact used in ages past to summon Infernals. Long forgotten and buried in

Ghost Scale as Characters

+2 Dexterity +2 Constitution, -2 Intelligence -2

Charisma: Ghost Scale Ss'ressen retain their quickness and agility from their Black Talon ancestors and the effects of the Idol have made them hardier, but as equally terrifying.

Natural Armor: Ss'ressen gain a +2 natural armor class due to their thick scaly hide.

Medium size: As medium sized creatures, Ss'ressen have no special bonuses or abilities. Ss'ressen base speed is 30 feet.

Low light vision: Ss'ressen can see twice as far as a human in starlight moonlight, torchlight, or conditions of similar condition do to poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish color and details under these conditions.

Natural Weaponry: Ss'ressen have sharp claws with which to attack their foes. Ss'ressen can attack with two claws (dealing 1d4 + Str bonus points of damage). Ss'ressen using a one-handed melee weapon can attack with a claw as an off-handed attack.

Agile: Ss'ressen gain a +2 racial bonus to Balance, Jump and Swim checks. A Ss'ressen tail provides extra strength and support when performing feats of agility.

Camouflage Ability: Ghost Scale Ss'ressen have a chameleon-like ability that grants them a +10 racial bonus to hide checks. Note: In forests or overgrown areas, the bonus improves to +12-

Cold Susceptibility: All Ss'ressen suffer a -4 penalty to dexterity and dexterity based skills, as well as all combat situation (-4 to melee attack rolls and damage) when in extreme cold weather. A successful will save (DC 15) reduces the penalty to -2.

Automatic Languages: Ss'ressen and Myrantian.

Bonus Languages: Ssethric and Low Coryani.

Favored Class: Rogue

Level Adjustment: +1

the remains of a ruined temple, the powers within the stone were awakened once more by the appearance of the Ss'ressen.

Long did Na'liss attempt to probe the secrets of the stone, but the secrets of Sarish are not so easily revealed. Still, some knowledge was garnered and the new matriarch was able to use the stone to summon a thick fog and send it forth into the city. Under this supernatural cover the Ss'ressen hunted, prowling the ghetto and seaside wharves and taking human prey.

With food in their distended bellies, the Ss'ressen settled down and began to lay eggs. A hatchery was erected around the strange stone, its life-giving heat nurturing the next generation. The Ss'ressen however, never took into account the eldritch powers of their newfound heat source. Slowly, the magical heat corrupted the Ss'ressen eggs, changing the inhabitants.

To their surprise, the first generation born into their new home had the uncanny ability to shift the color patterns of their scales. This was considered a great boon and allowed the wily Ss'ressen to hunt with even greater stealth. With this mutation and the advent of the magical fog, the Ghost Scale Egg Clutch was born.

The Ghost Scales remained undetected for two and a half centuries. Always careful to never leave survivors, the Ghost Scales thrived on a diet of humans and reverted to the cruel lifestyles of their Ssethregoran cousins. They worship the God of the Stone, a being they call Herka, which literally means "the Secretive One". Under the very

noses of their prey, the Ghost Scales have thrived and grown, becoming complacent in their domain. All of this changed within the last year.

A group of adventurers, trying to solve a string of murders, found their way into the deep sewers and managed to penetrate the Ghost Scale's lair. After a brutal encounter, the adventurers managed to rescue the captives and escape from their scaly adversaries. Word of the Ghost Scale's existence has begun to spread throughout Old Coryan.

Soon after their discovery, the Ghost Scales were approached by a human contingent offering them a deal. The apparent leader, a diabolical looking human draped in black velvet, proposed a plan to the current High Matriarch Haaat Ma. Introducing himself as Night Nilmag, the human set forth a devious plan. In return for a constant supply of fresh humans (and a few Elorii) the Ghost Scales were to act as scouts in an upcoming war. More specific information was not given at the time, but the Matriarch agreed, as long as their existence under Old Coryan was hidden. The human assured her that the problem was already being taken care of and that the tales of their existence would soon be silenced. Since this time the rumors have faded and once again the citizens of Old Coryan go to bed wondering about the monsters that prowl the night.

Troglodytes

The Trog That Went Looking for God

Twilight settled upon the dark waters of Lake Quesselan. The myriad of stars hanging in the sky overhead painted the cool waters of the lake, leaving a

silver speckled canvass akin to the shining scaled denizens that live in that water. Centermost in the water, floated a wooden boat, the tiny abandoned craft bobbing in the waves created from a nearby splash. If one were to look hard enough under that murky surface a powerful tail could be seen propelling the owner into the depths.

Eumeces was a hatchling again, the warm security of the egg torn away by cruel sharp talons, pulling him into the world of light. His eyes opened and met their first sight: a scaled face with its twin cold pits delving mercilessly into this being. He tried to twist away from the apparition, but the talons cut him painfully. From that Ss'ressen long ago, he learned his first lesson.... obedience.

The water grew colder around the swimmer; the feeble light of the twin moons overhead barely penetrated the

warm summer waters of the lake. Still deeper the troglodyte swam....searching.

Eumeces way a youngling, in his hand was his first weapon, a short wicked barbed spear. Looking to his right he saw others like him, clutch mates, lined up in perfect formation. Along their line strode the bull Ss'ressen, his cruel lash biting into young scales wherever he found imperfections, real or imaginary. Second lesson....discipline.

It was totally dark now; the swimmer's reptilian gaze could barely penetrate the murk. Well down past the dwellings of the Pleisaurans and heading into untamed depths. Still the lone figure swam on....seeking.

Eumeces was an adult, placed in his first regiment. Other Troglodytes milled about the barracks; the Ss'ressen captain was currently out. Enjoying his few moments of respite from the gruel-

ing routine Eumeces wandered over to a group of Troggs having a quiet discussion in the corner. What he heard intrigued him, a God existed, one for his kind alone, which would rise again to lead his chosen people to victory. They would cast down their servitors and take their rightful place on top, making the Ss'ressen grovel in the dirt for their scraps. From those first few whispered words Eumeces learned hope...

The pressure was getting worse. The swimmer's lungs burned for want of oxygen. Spots swam before the swimmer's eyes, blood pounded in his head. Still further down the figure dove....seeking truth.

Eumeces was an old Troglodyte. His scales were patchy and graying. Youth had slipped through his fingers. Over the decades others like him had died, died for their beliefs, been slaughtered for their "heretical" outlook. Now he was one

of the last, one of a handful left fighting, hoping, for Eumeces held faith...

The deep waters were dark and cold; they leached life from the swimmer. Lungs strained to the bursting point, then collapsed in pain and torment. Deeper, faster, just a bit further, the figure swam on, the bottom was so close. There, that ridge, Could it? Was it? The pressure...silence.

Two kobolds skittered along the shores of Lake Quesselan in the early morning light. One turned and hooted loudly at the sight of its find. Breakfast had washed up on the shore, a bloated corpse of a Troglodyte. The two kobolds swarmed over the corpse, biting, gnawing, and tearing at the soft pulpy flesh. If they had cared to look one would have noticed that curiously the old Trog had a euphoric smile etched across its face, held motionless in death...



Troglodytes are the workhorses of the Ssethric population. The lowliest members of society, they stand in low regard, with only the slaves in a more pitiful position than themselves. The Naga, Ssanu, and the Ss'ressen lord over the Trogs, while the Trogs lord over the slaves.

Troglodytes are heavy bodied humanoids, standing about 5 feet tall and weighing about 200 pounds. Their long, heavily muscled arms and short thick legs are tipped with small claws. Troglodytes have a long whip like tail and a frill that extends from the forehead to the base of the neck. Troglodyte hides are covered in fine reddish-brown scales, contrasted with dark blue-black mottling or spots along their back and forearms. A Troglodyte's lower jaw is heavily built and juts out beyond their upper jaw, exposing canines that reach up to their nostrils.

Troglodytes are an omnivorous race, eating equal parts of meat and vegetable matter, though they prefer meat when they can acquire it. Like the Ss'ressen, Troglodytes consider the warm-bloods prey, but prefer the taste of humans to that of Elorii. Within the bounds of the Ssethregoran Empire, Troglodytes have an exceedingly short lifespan. The average Troglodyte lives about 20 years before it is killed in battle or slain by rivals. The rare individual that survives these orderals may live close to three times as long before succumbing to the rigors of old age.

Troglodytes exist as small communities within the bounds of a Ss'ressen or Ssanu controlled district. The Ss'ressen or Ssanu masters control all aspects of Troglodyte life within their communities, yet they also struggle with their own issues, leaving the everyday feeding and care of the Troglodytes to the rudimentary culture they possess.

Within the rigid confines of Ssethric culture, Troglodytes have developed a patriarchal culture, controlled by the largest and strongest bull Troglodyte of the community. These leaders termed Natrix, hold sway over all aspects of Troglodyte society: dispensing justice, granting breeding rights, ending disputes, and grudgingly reporting to their Ss'ressen superiors.

These Ss'ressen overseers rigidly control reproduction among Troglodyte communities. In the era of the Old Empire, Trogs were extremely family oriented and based their lives heavily around a patriarchal clan structure. With the ascension of the Nagas to positions of power in the Empire, the Troglodyte social structure was changed, their family units broken apart.

The Natrix picks the most skilled Troglodytes within the community and grants them the right to breed. Any resulting eggs are immediately taken from the parents and sent to special hatcheries run entirely by Ss'ressen. The Troglodyte hatcheries are areas of true cruelty and malice. These hatcheries are a special branch of the Ssethregoran military and through long standing military traditions the young Troglodytes are schooled in military discipline and combat techniques. The Ss'ressen overseers feel no kinship toward the small Troglodyte hatchlings and put them through brutal training regimes where as many as twenty-five percent die within the first year. From the first moments of emerging from the egg, Troglodytes are taught one overriding concept: obedience to their superiors and their place as mere foot soldiers and the lowest dregs of Ssethric society. The Ss'ressen do their best to eradicate any sense of unity the Troglodytes might feel as a race, instead instilling the ideal that the military apparatus is their true home and advancement in life can be achieved only through the ranks of the great military machine of Ssethregore.

When a Troglodyte reaches the age of five, it is assigned its life duty. Each successive batch of young Trogs is separated into three groups by the criterion of physical strength, mental aptitude, and technical skills. The cruelest, most blood thirsty and combat inclined Troglodytes are sent to the Military Division of Expansion and Exploration, where they are to spend their lives

as soldiers in the Ssethregoran armies. Their disciplined ranks serve the Empire as foot soldiers, their lives given in glorious combat for the greater good of the Empire.

The smallest Troglodyte units are comprised of nine Troglodytes overseen by a single Troglodyte Lieutenant. Ten such battle groups are combined into one division consisting of 100 Troglodytes and overseen by five Ss'ressen. These Ss'ressen in turn answer to the battalion general, almost always another Ss'ressen or Ssanu.

Troglodytes that show technical aptitude are sent to the Military Guild of Logistics, Requisition and Supply, where they are to spend their lives as combat engineers, in charge of siege equipment and the movement of the army's supply lines. A division commander, one Ss'ressen per 20 troglodytes, oversees troglodyte engineers. These troglodytes are the backbone of the army, directing slaves to move the enormous amounts of food and supplies necessary to fuel the massive militaristic society of Ssethregore. Troglodytes of this Guild also serve as craftsmen, many setting up permanent structures in major towns and cities to produce weaponry and other devices needed.

The best and brightest Troglodytes of each generation are rounded up and sent of the Military Guild of Procurement. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the Troglodytes' role in Ssethric society. The Guild of Procurement is responsible for the production of foodstuffs, the capture and dispersal of slaves, the raising of beasts and the collection of minerals and other necessities of society. As such they are given more freedom than most Troglodytes. They are still required to answer to Ss'ressen overseers, but are given slaves of their own to work the fields and mines in the name of the Empire.

Troglodytes of this guild act as the merchant class for the Empire, trading and selling goods between different cities, clutches, and communities. They control large farms in the swamp where food animals are raised and organize mining operations throughout the Empire. Through this guild the lifeblood of the Ssethregore flows.

As for their current place in the grand scheme of Ssethric evolution, most Troglodytes do not seem to care. Most are so ingrained into the military mindset that they do not question their lot in life and are perfectly content to die an honorable death upon the field of battle. Any dissidents that spring up in the Troglodyte ranks tend to focus their anger on the Ss'ressen overseers, instead of the higher echelons of government; a situation the Naga are most content with.

About the only other thing that holds any weight in Troglodyte society is religion. While the Naga, Ssanu, and Ss'ressen have embraced the new Varn gods, the Troglodytes have stubbornly hung onto the worship of Kassegore, who they believe saved their people millennia ago from the twisted machinations of the goddess Yig.

At first the Naga could care less over which God the lowly troglodytes worshipped, but five hundred years ago that changed. From the ranks of the Guild of Procurement there appeared a strange Troglodyte by the name of Hromu. Hromu had vanished on a slave raid into ancient ruins and emerged ten years later...changed. It was said his eyes were a stunning gold and the pupils appeared in the shape of the black serpent ring of Kassegore.

Hromu spoke and the Troglodyte masses listened, taking him for a prophet of their god. Hromu did not preach obedience but instead, an overthrow of Ssethregoran society, in particular the corrupt and perverse rulership of the Naga. For two decades Hromu spread his teachings, his words seeping into all levels of Troglodyte society. For those two decades the Dark Naga

have searched for him, but to no avail, for he was hidden among the uncounted multitudes of Troglodytes spread throughout the Empire.

In the end it was a Ssanu named Kess'leth, who had polymorphed himself into a Troglodyte, that managed to penetrate the so called Cult of Hromu and killed Hromu himself. Hromu's head was proudly displayed above the main gate to Sseth as a warning to those who opposed the Naga, but for all their efforts, the Cult of Hromu grew.

In secret its numbers swelled; for every Troglodyte killed another would be subverted to the cause. New prophets emerged, almost upon the footsteps of the death of the previous one. Only one prophet existed at any time, but all were marked with the strange eyes of Hromu. The Troglodytes of the Cult believe each prophet be a reincarnation of Hromu himself, sent back as a herald to the return of that which they hold most dear: the awakening of the Sleeping God, the Great Lord Kassegore. With his return, they believe, the Troglodytes will be raised to new heights and set as lords above the Ss'ressen, Ssanu and Nagas.

Troglodytes as Characters

-2 Dexterity +4 Constitution, -2 Intelligence: Troglodytes are extremely tough, but tend to be dull witted, slow and ponderous in movement.

Natural Armor: Troglodytes gain a +6 natural armor class due to their thick scaly hide.

Medium size: As medium sized creatures, Troglodytes have no special bonuses or abilities. A Troglodyte's base speed is 30 feet.

Darkvision: Troglodytes have darkvision out to 90 feet.

Natural Weaponry: Troglodytes have sharp claws and a large maw with which to attack their foes. Troglodytes have both clawed and bite attacks. Claw attacks deal 1d4 + Str modifier and the bite attack deals 1d6 + Str modifier.

Racial Hit Die: A Troglodyte begins with two levels of humanoid, which provide it with 2d8 HD, a Base Attack Bonus of +1 and base saving throw bonuses of Fort: +3, Ref +0, and Will +0.

Racial Skills: A Troglodyte's humanoid levels give it skill points equal to 5 x (2 + Int modifier, minimum 1). Its class skills are Hide and Listen. Troglodytes have a +4 racial bonus on hide checks (+8 in rocky or underground settings).

Racial Feats: Troglodytes start with the Feat: *Multiattack*.

Automatic Languages: Ss'ressen and Myrantian.

Bonus Languages: Ss'ethric and Low Coryani

Favored Class: Cleric

Level Adjustment: +2

Nagas

Emperor Khass, dark overlord of the Ssethric peoples and supreme dictator of Ssethregore was in an unusually sour mood this morning. Khass had been rudely awakened by a gurgling scream while lounging on his favorite divan, the one flamboyantly covered in the supple tanned skin of Elorii virgins. Instantly alert, his silver eyes snapped open and their gaze fell upon his most prized bodyguard, now a bubbling puddle of putrescence and the interlopers that had dared to enter his inner sanctum.

Four Ssanu stood before him, their yellow and

black-banded bodies marking them as members of Pit Aspis. The intruders were chanting in unison, incantations foul and dark rolled off their forked tongues, waves of power flowing out before them. With a snarl of inarticulate rage at this indignity, Khass lashed out, his lustrous purple coils instantly crushing the Ssanu on the left while a single sharp Word of Power snuffed the life force out of the pathetic Ssanu on the right. With their two compatriots summarily destroyed and their spell unraveling, the remaining two Ssanu turned tail, but not before Khass incapacitated both their wretched forms with another lightning-quick spell.

The Dark Naga sat upon the Coiled Throne and surveyed the scene before him. In the most opulent chamber of the Empire, stretched between two pristine marble columns cut in serpentine bas-relief, hung the two Ssanu. Their tortured forms were suspended from intricately carved gold chains; chains on which deadly rot grubs were slowly crawling, slick bloated larvae intent on the proffered meal. Khass's scaly countenance slowly broke into a hideous grin, as he watched the worms slowly bore their way into the helpless Ssanu, working their way toward the heart and an inexorably slow pace. As the agonizing screams of the two Ssanu being slowly eaten alive echoed through the massive mother of pearl inlaid chamber, a glint of perverse pleasure flashed in the cold emotionless eyes of the Emperor. A wide wicked grin broke Khass's stony countenance; the old serpent couldn't help but think that perhaps the day was turning out rather enjoyable after all. Whispering a sibilant prayer to Caimeth, Khass reclined and enjoyed the show.

All the while Ss'risek, the Emperor's Vizier, watched impassively from the side of the Emperor's throne, his violet eyes full of malice and evil, but as the Dark Naga whispered his prayer, the corner's of the Vizier's mouth rose to the hint of a smile.

The Naga of Ssethregore are the twisted leaders of all Ssethric society... for the time being. There exist three distinct lineages (or families) of Naga: the Dark Naga, the Spirit Naga, and the Water Naga.

Dark Nagas appear as massive bloated serpents with humanoid heads. Their hides are covered with rough keeled scales royal purple in color and their tails are tipped with a terrible poisoned stinger. Their faces are roughly humanoid, but with a distinct reptilian caste to them. Dark Naga have no hair, indeed no head ornamentation at all and their eyes are great silver orbs split by vertical pupils of the most piercing ebony.

Spirit Naga have black-scaled bodies banded with swaths of crimson red: the exact shade of fresh blood. A Spirit Naga's head is vaguely humanoid and covered with a stringy lank mass of spike-like growths, akin to human hair. Spirit Naga emit a putrescent odor remarkably similar to their favorite food, carrion.

Water Naga are emerald green in coloration and have a reticulated pattern of fiery red and orange scales that march down their lithe form. Water Naga bodies are laterally compressed, like that of an eel, allowing the dread creatures to swim with the grace and speed of a shark. Their faces are the least humanoid of all the naga, resembling a cross between a serpent and a crocodile. Water Naga possess piercing red eyes that seem to bore straight into a victim's soul.

All Naga are carnivorous, preferring a diet of living flesh to all else. Each Naga household support cruel farms where sentient humanoids are fattened like cattle before meeting their demise upon their table. Naga warrens reek of stale carrion and at meal times echo with the pain-wracked screams of the dying.

Of all three types of Naga, the Dark Naga are the worst of the lot. While the other families may dine on lesser warm-blooded prey when the slave trade slows down, the Dark Naga insist on only the most succulent and tender form of sustenance: young human or Elorii children. The Dark Nagas employ a cadre of agents for the specific mission of purchasing human orphans under the guise of "foster parents". These



Naga

Rhamphorike

Hylis

Pleisauran

unfortunate children are doomed to a shortened lifespan and their eventual demise at the hands of skilled kobold torturers, for the Naga like a show while they dine.

For all their physical prowess and political power, the various Naga families are dwindling in numbers and maintain their foothold only with the help of the Varn deities they revere. All Naga are incredibly long-lived, easily surpassing the eight-century mark. Though graced with long life, most never live to see a ripe old age, as they usually meet their demise at the fangs of younger family members intent on improving their rank and station in life. Even the emperors are not immune from these patricidal practices, for the current Emperor spends as much time worrying about the murderous instincts of his own sons, as he does worrying about foreign threats.

The Naga, though long lived, reproduce infrequently. Female Naga can expect offspring no more than once or twice a century, giving birth to 8-12 young Nagas at a time. Due to this low rate of fertility combined with the current practices within the Empire, the numbers of Naga are slowly dwindling. The Dark Nagas have decreased to the point where only about 20 individuals remain, all members of House Khass. The other lineages of Naga are better off, numbering a few thousand each. Naga are extremely difficult to kill and assassination attempts by non-Nagas are rarely successful. The penalty for killing a Naga of any House in Ssethregore is the death of five hundred members of the assassin's race including the killer's family and all blood relations.

Naga are currently the powerbase at the top of the Ssethregoran Empire, though this was not always the case. In the time of the Old Empire, under the rule of the Ssanu, Nagas were regulated to the role of regional governors, though like all the other races, they did have representatives on the Emperor's advisory council. This all changed with the fall of the Old Empire of Yahressemore and the retreat of the Ssethric forces to Kraldjur Morass. The Morass has been the ancestral home of the various Naga families for ages. With the formation of the Ssethregoran Empire based in their swamplands, the various families saw an opportunity to take control of the Empire. Conspiring with the Varn, the Nagas bided their time, watching and waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike. They infiltrated the palace, helping the Ssanu Emperor Sseth in the day to day details of running the newly created Empire. Then, with the Empire's defeat at Belestor and the subsequent fall of the god Kassegore, the Nagas struck.

Like lightning the Nagas boiled forth, striking down all the important dignitaries and assaulting Pit Sseth itself. With the disappearance of Kassegore, the Kassegorian priests had lost their magical abilities and a void in the power structure was created. Into this void the Naga spilled, for they had been worshipping the Varn for centuries and these strange demigods



granted their loyal Nagas unprecedented powers, allowing the wily serpents to sweep in and dispose of the old government, installing a Dark Naga, named Causus, as Emperor. Without the magical assistance of the Naga priests of the Varn deities, the coup probably would not have succeeded. Ex-Emperor Sseth was captured and imprisoned in a coffin of pure crystal, where he would be tormented, his body wracked with pain for all eternity. This grisly ornament is kept in the throne room, a constant reminder of the Naga's great power.

With the overthrow of Emperor Sseth, the Nagas became the supreme rulers of Ssethregore. For millennia now, the Naga have conspired to turn the various Ssethric races against one another, so they would too busy fighting among themselves for the left over scraps to remember who was sitting at the table. This constant hatred and rivalry fueled by the Naga is the primary reason why the Ssethric races have not united under a common banner and boiled out of their swampy domain to conquer the world beneath their taloned feet.

The various Naga Houses hold sway over most every aspect of the government, from military to civilian life. Their dark gods have spread throughout the populace, for almost all the Ssethric races now worship the Varn. Though seemingly in control, the Naga have been losing power over the last seven centuries or so. Fixed in their ways and sure of their authority, the Naga have grown opulent and decadent, drunk on the power they hold. No longer able to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, the Naga have turned to more and more perverse forms of entertainment, including public torture and procreation with the lesser warm-blooded races. Only the most potent and exotic drugs are powerful enough to sate their lust and addictions.

The Naga have begun to decline, lazy and complacent, allowing the Ssanu to once again control the lower levels of the government, leaving the day to day decisions of the Empire to the industrious serpent men. If the Nagas have not noticed this trend, the ever-watchful serpent men have. Forked-tongued whispers pervade the dark and secret cabals meet in ancient ruins of a forgotten age. Words crawl through the night of the old god's upcoming return and once again Pit Sseth leads the movement to overthrow the Nagas. The Ssethregoran Empire is again ripe for a turnover, a shift in power and all that is required is the smallest spark to ignite the fire. Woe to humanity if the Ssanu regain control of what they lost long ago...

Important Houses:

House Khass: House Khass is the oldest and only surviving member of the Dark Naga Houses in Ssethregore. Once a bright and promising family, they have dwindled, now reduced to a little over two-dozen individuals. House Khass still possesses immense power, with over half the Naga Emperors stemming from their noble line. The current Emperor of Ssethregore is Emperor Khass the IV, son of Thuss the Mighty, supreme ruler of Ssethregore. Emperor Khass has held the Coiled Throne for five hundred and fifty years and has ruled the Ssethric peoples with an iron coil of tyranny and brutality. His reign has been long and fruitful, but it is approaching its end. The venerable serpent spends the majority of his waking hours plotting and scheming against his various relatives, whom he is positive are bent on overthrowing him. He is correct. Khass knows he has about lived out his usefulness to his house and summarily executes underlings for crimes real and imagined. The sad fact is that if Khass was to stop plotting against his fellows, even for a moment, he would be dead within days, for any weakness shown within the Empire is a death sentence.

The three main contenders for the
Serpent

Throne are fittingly the Emperor's three surviving offspring, all princes themselves, who see the throne as their birthright. To them, the Old Serpent has outlived his usefulness and it is Khass' time to die, whether he is willing or not! Any blatant attempts at his life would cause Khass to rescind any perceived favoritism with his dying breath. This keeps his three heirs in the uncomfortable position of constantly having to work for the favor of their father, while secretly planning his assassination, at the precise moment when Khass happens to favor the son who staged the assassination. This is exactly how the wily old serpent prefers it.

Kressek, the eldest son, is responsible for the kingdom's treasury and consequently has the greatest resources at his disposal for the elimination of his hated father. Khass relies upon his son's ambitions for the throne to keep him from stealing too much from the treasury, for why would the greedy Kressek want to steal from his future wealth.

Kllahss is the middle son of the three princes, and commands the Ssethregoran war machine as Overlord of all Ssethric military forces. Kllahss is unique among his generation of Naga, for though he aspires to the Coiled Throne, he actually enjoys the intellectual art of warfare and has become a great military leader in his own right. He may be hated by his underlings, but they all hold respect for his obvious talents and skills in the art of war. Most see the military backing of Kllahss as the key to the throne, for it said that if Kllahss does not receive what he wants, then he has the force to take all he desires. Unfortunately for Kllahss, his brothers constantly work to undermine his authority and power. Both have a network of spies insidiously planted close to the Naga overlord and it is assumed that if either makes a move on the throne, Kllahss will also die the same day.

Ss'rog is the youngest of the three brothers, but perhaps the most deadly, for he is a sorcerer of immense power, having spent his youth in the eldritch halls of the Black Tower of Getulus. Ss'rog has amassed great power through his magic and is in responsible for the spellcaster brigades that augment the Ssethric war machine. Ss'rog's greatest joy is drafting the various evil wyrms and drakes to the Ssethregoran cause, to serve as they did in the golden days of Ssanu rule. The very sight of one of these terrible wyrms near the border is enough to send the most stalwart Altherian patrolmen running for their lives. Ss'rog's plan for seizing the throne has always centered on taking control of the great green Dragon Astinax and bending the creature's will to serve only Ss'rog.

Most believe he has succeeded, as he is sometimes seen riding the Dragon into battle, but the truth is far from it. In reality Astinax is the last of the true dragons on Onara and she sees Ss'rog as the means to an end. The Dragon covets the power of the Ssethregoran throne and intends to set Ss'rog upon it as her personal puppet, for Astinax long ago, imprisoned the mind of the cowardly Ss'rog and replaced his intellect with a part of her own, actively controlling the mortal shell like a demented puppet. With Ss'rog as an unwilling tool, she intends to spread her influence over all of Ssethregore and seize the throne out from under the snouts of the Naga who "protect" her. As for everyone else, Ss'rog appears as he has always been, a powerful sorcerer who covets his father's throne; exactly how Astinax wishes him to seem.

House Taricha: Second only to House Khass in power and influence is House Taricha. Old and powerful, House Taricha consists of a family of spirit Naga that can trace their lineage back to before the formation of the Old Empire. House Taricha has had its share of Emperors, though not for many centuries. Currently led by an elder female named Heruss, the House has aims of an imperial nature. With their coils wrapped around every aspect of Ssethric commerce, House Taricha has amassed a fortune over the millennia that would outweigh the treasuries

of most human kingdoms. Their power and prestige grant the House the most powerful allies and loyal servants, a luxury not often seen in Ssethregore. All the houses resources are currently fixated on a single goal: the Coiled Throne.

House Taricha has watched the numbers of the Dark Naga decline and have contributed to a large majority of those murders (though the House was careful the Dark Nagas could never prove it). With the dwindling of the line of Khass, House Taricha has decided to reclaim the throne once again. They have recruited the help of some of the lower Ssanu pits, most notably Pit Aspis. House Taricha's goal is to use the Ssanu as fodder to distract House Khass, while they swiftly and silently close in for the kill. Yet, for all their planning, House Taricha's ambitions have one major flaw: Pit Aspis is in fact actually working for Pit Sseth and the Ssanu intend to use the Naga to procure the throne for themselves.

Pleisaurans

Found in the warm shallow waters around the Kraldjur Morass, the Pleisaurans are the aquatic taskmasters of Ssethric society. Standing roughly eight feet tall, Pleisaurans are all sleek muscle wrapped around a humanoid frame. Short compact limbs ending in long webbed digits compliment a thick laterally compressed tail ideal for powering a Pleisauran through their watery domain. A Pleisaurans' head is perched atop a snake-like neck, where it darts about with lightning speed. Two forward facing eyes look down the length of its long thin snout, to the upraised nostrils at its tip. The snout is full of needle-like teeth and tapers out to four times the length of the head; ideal for slashing through the water for devastating strikes. A large fin adorns a Pleisauran's back, starting between its shoulder blades and extending down to the tip of its powerful tail. This fin lays flat against their back when on land, but below the waves it spreads to aid in the strong strokes of its powerful tail.

Pleisaurans are piscivorous, eating a diet consisting of fish and shellfish. Pleisaurans do not have gills, but have the ability to hold their breath for hours on end. This allows them to remain submerged for long periods of time, swimming up to the surface just long enough to suck in a new lungful of air through the tip of their long snout. Pleisaurans give birth to live offspring and live for eighty to one hundred years.

Pleisaurans entered Ssethric society eight thousand years ago when they were discovered by an enterprising group of Ss'ressen scouting the coastal waters near what are now the modern day Pirate Isles. It was soon discovered that their simple patriarchal society venerated Kassegore and they were soon absorbed into the expanding Empire. With the collapse of the Old Empire, the Pleisaurans retreated along with the rest of the Ssethric forces to their strongholds in the Kraldjur Morass. They have currently colonized almost all the shallow water refuge along the mangrove-studded coast and have penetrated deep into the interior by traveling up the Kraldjur River.

The Pleisaurans function as farmers and soldiers for Ssethregore, protecting the coastline of the Kraldjur Peninsula and governing the Lophius who farm the seafloor for the Empire. The entire bottom of Lake Quesselan is nothing more than one huge agricultural bonanza of kelp farms and fish hatcheries designed to feed the ravenous hordes of Ssethregorans. The Pleisaurans serve as taskmasters over the aquatic slaves of the Empire, their sheer size and majesty sowing fear in all but the strongest of hearts. They also serve as ambassadors or messengers to Ssethregore's other aquatic ally, the Sahuagin.

The Ssethregoran Empire nominally controls Pleisauran society but the aquatic Ssethric race has their own system of

regional governors to oversee day-to-day tasks. These governors, called "Li'quas", answer to specially chosen envoys of the Ssethregoran government, usually Ssanu held in high favor by Emperor Khass. Although the government does hold sway over the Pleisaurans, the aquatic nature of the Pleisaurans makes it exceedingly difficult for the Empire to police all the trafficking of the Pleisaurans. This is most evident in the inability of the Naga to stamp out Kassegore worship and convert the Pleisaurans to the worship of the Varn pantheon.

Pleisaurans build their cities on rocky outcroppings in shallow water (usually 10 to 20 feet deep). Other than the settlement in Lake Quesselan associated with Sseth, their two largest settlements are Lykuch of the Dragon Archepeliago and Fluvius near the Isle of Teeth. All pleisauran communities have large sealed buildings that serve as air chambers, so they do not have to surface as often.

Kobolds

Kobolds are the physically weakest members of Ssethric society. Standing roughly 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 feet tall, Kobolds are small reptilian humanoids with reddish hued scales and brown mottling. A Kobold's skull is taller than it is wide, giving them a distinctly narrow look. They are equipped with sharp claws and teeth, but their tails are too short to be used as weapons.

Kobolds are the lowest rung of free Ssethric society. They are considered to be little better than dogs by the troglodytes and Ss'ressen and are usually beneath the notice of the higher echelons of Ssethric life. Kobolds scratch out a living in Ssethric communities, mostly as scavengers, menial laborers, or military scouts. Kobolds can be found gracing the gutters of every Ssethric city, in that respect they may be the least restricted members of Ssethregore. It is virtually impossible to find a mess hall or barrack anywhere in the Empire where kobolds are not scurrying under the tables collecting scraps of food and coincidentally listening on a thousand conversations.

The military and the government make use of Kobolds for a variety of roles. Their small stature makes them ideal scouts or as foot soldiers in the cramped tunnels of the Lavender Way. A Kobold's ability to blend into all levels of Ssethric culture makes them the perfect candidate for espionage. Extremely intelligent or skilled kobolds may find themselves employed as spies inside Ssethric society, for who bothers to look at a kobold twice?

The Empire also makes use of a Kobold's size by forming a mining guild comprised entirely of small goblins and their Kobold overseers. These small units are better able to worm their way through tight tunnels and follow fickle veins of ore through the rock faces. There has even been a bit of dabbling over the years in using skilled Kobold miners on extra planar expeditions to retrieve rare ores and minerals.

Lastly Kobolds have one very interesting trait: they have a tendency to be born with the gift of sorcery. The Kobolds consider being born with the power a great gift of the Gods and revere any individuals in their society who possess a faculty for sorcery. Each year, when the newest generation of Kobolds is born, they bring forth their young and present them to the local Ssanu lord. There they are screened for the gift; those found possessing it are given the honor of being whisked away and trained in the Coiled Tower of Gettulus. These Kobolds are trained in the arcane arts, often reaching the rank of Laksiri, a specialized group of mage assassins in the employment of the Tower.

ALLIES OF THE EMPIRE

Sahuagin

Sahuagin are the deep-sea aquatic allies of Ssethregore. They roam the deep dark places of the oceans of Onara, imposing their cruel regime on any being unfortunate enough to cross their path. They are malicious and cruel, taking base pleasure in the torture and tormenting of captives and foes. Sahuagin emerge from the briny surf on dark moonless nights and raid coastal villages and other human settlements along waterfronts, dragging their victims down into the swirling foam. Sahuagin also make their home in the Lavender Way, colonizing ancient underground waterways that have never been graced by the warm light of Illiir's golden orb.

Sahuagin are patriarchal, each settlement overseen by a council of elder males that control all aspects of daily life. Each Sahuagin council is in turn controlled by one or more Aboleths, slimy horrid creatures that the Sahuagin venerate as gods. The Sahuagin deity, Anguillizrass, is thought to be an immense Aboleth that is as old as the seas themselves. All the Aboleths claim to answer to Anguillizrass and use their positions of power to dominate Sahuagin society. Victims captured by Sahuagin raids often find themselves dragged into the deep and tossed into a crevasse in the sea floor to be a sacrifice for the local Aboleth lord.

In the early days of the Old Empire, before the creation of the Elorii, the Ssethregorans allied with the Sahuagin to help with the Empire's conquest of the Known Lands. The combined might of the Ssethregorans and the Sahuagin overpowered the Locanth and utterly exterminated that race from the face of Onara. With the Ssethregorans' help, the Sahuagin colonized the deep places of the earth, preferring the lightless depths of the Lavender Way to the cool lighted waters of the surface world. When the Old Empire crumbled, many Sahuagin colonies in the Lavender Way were cut off from their allies and kin, yet some may still exist there today as dark perversions of their former selves.

The Sahuagin's main power base is the Laurial Sea, where they have built massive cities along the geothermal vents that dot the seabed. From there they prey on the human shipping lanes and raid into the nearby lands of the Coryani Empire and Entaris with alarming frequency. The Sahuagin, with the help of the Ssethregorans, have developed special underwater crafts that hang just below the surface of the waves, disguised as floating mats of sargassum weed. Propelled by the massive paddle tails of Dragonfish, these inverted ships sneak up to sailing vessels anchored for the night. Once the ship is reached, the Sea Devils swarm over the railing and drag all the hapless sailors into the sea for the bellies of their profane gods. The goods are either transferred to the Sahuagin sargassumship or the ship is towed and then sunk over a Sahuagin city, where the men are eaten and the cargo stolen. Anything that is not used by the Sahuagin is traded to the Pleisaurans.

Hylis

The Hylis are the most enigmatic and secretive members of the Ssethregoran Empire. Appearing as small humanoid treefrogs, the Hylis are perfectly adapted to their arboreal lifestyle high up in the forest canopy. Hylis stand about 4 feet tall, but their slouched posture and tendency to walk using their hands reduces their overall

height to roughly 3 to 3 1/2 feet tall. Their skin is a multihued mottle arrangement of splotches, bars and blotches, perfectly designed to break up their outline when creeping through the jungle. Like a chameleon the Hylis possess the ability to alter their skin tones from a bright vibrant green to almost pure black, allowing them to blend into almost any surrounding. Their skin is smooth and slick with a protective slime coating that is also deadly poison. Hylis tend to be wiry lithe figures, with long limbs and strong legs for leaping. They prefer to move through the trees with a series of short jumps as opposed to walking. The hands of a Hylis have no claws, but are instead tipped with sticky pads, allowing them to adhere and climb all natural surfaces. Their heads are short and broad, with two bulbous golden eyes perched atop its head. Hylis have existed for millennia in the canopied jungles of Onara and have evolved to perfectly compliment their environment.

Hylis females are almost twice the size of males and dominate Hylis society. They become fertile once each year and are courted by singing males. The better the performance the more likely a female will choose a specific male. It is said that Hylis bards are perhaps the best in all of Onara, for the proliferation of the next generation relies on such skills. Once the females find a mate, they proceed to a staging point high above the surface of a breeding pond, where in a massive amphibian mating ritual, hundreds of jelly-coated eggs are laid, then whipped into a froth by the kicking of the adults. This foamy mass hardens into a ball, where the developing eggs remain for 2 months. After this two-month incubation period, the mass starts to dissolve and the larval young, called "wogs", fall into the clear waters of the breeding pond. There they are fed and cared for by the females and zealously guarded by the males for another 4 months, after which they metamorphosis into young Hylis and are accepted into the community.

Totally surrounded on all sides by the massive Ssethric war machine, the Hylis have managed to retain a surprising amount of freedom. This is partially due to their low numbers and the fact they live in the Morass. In actuality they are the only sentient beings to habitually live in the dreaded Morass and do so only by the virtue of their arboreal nature. Though the lightless depths of the Morass are a festering phosphorescent mire of unspeakable horrors, the immensely thick canopy that captures the light high above is a place of uncommon beauty. Huge thick mats of moss a mile or more in diameter clog the treetops, blocking out all light from the under story, but making the canopy above rich and vibrant with life. The constant rain actually forms small lakes in the treetops. It is around these lakes that the Hylis make their homes, living in small communal villages. Their largest cultural center is Grylio, found in the trees around the floating Lake of Uleth.

A single female, bigger and stronger than all the other females rules over a particular Hylis villages, but holds very little power or allegiance to the Hylis from other villages. This lack of a centralized government make the Hylis more than happy to ally with their Ssethregoran neighbors, for the order and security gained from being part of a greater society heavily outweighs the slight loss of freedom. The Hylis are commonly recruited into the Ssethregoran army, but their low numbers limit them to special roles; there are no battalions made up entirely Hylis. The natural stealth of the Hylis make them natural commandoes and assassins, a role the Empire is more than happy to grant to them. A preferred tactic is to wipe their weapons along their poisoned skin just prior to battle, ensuring that wounded opponents will not rise to see another day.

The isolation of the Hylis has allowed them to keep their religious structure intact, despite centuries of effort by their Ssethregoran allies. Hylis worship Yig, the Life Bringer and erect shrines dedicated to her worship. It is rare to find a female Hylis queen who is not a cleric of Yig, for the Hylis are some of the last worshippers of that ancient deity, in that form, on all of Arcanis.

SLAVE RACES

Abominations

Abominations are twisted remains of Ssethric creatures created by the perverse worshippers of the Varn deities. Created through hellish rituals conducted in the dark bowels of the earth, abominations are worshipped by their creators and feared by all others. Abominations are the result of a wicked ritual where a fertilized egg of a Ss'ressen, Ssanu or other Ssethric race is infused with tissue from the extraplanar Varn. Mercifully most eggs die in the process, but the ones that don't go through hideous mutations and give birth to horrid misshapen creatures of enormous strength and power. Thankfully, abominations are rare; being created only by the most fervent and fanatical cults in Ssethregore, for even the power mad Naga realize the inherent danger in these creations.

Rhamphorikes

Rhamphorikes, or "Rhamphs" for short, are a biological creation by the Ssethregoran Empire. Wishing for greater mastery of the air, the Ssanu Technomancers of the Old Empire attempted to create an intelligent Ssethric creature with the capability of flight. In the Rhamphorike they succeeded.

Rhamphs are small Ssethric beings akin to a cross between a Kobold and a Pterosaur. Their small light bodies are covered in fine reddish hued scales and their wings are a translucent tan membrane of uncommon strength. The neck is long and supple, balanced by a whiplike-keeled tail that acts as a rudder during flight. A Rhamphorike's head is spherical with two large eyes set on the sides of its skull and a pair of nostrils on top of its head above a maw of razor sharp teeth. The front arms of a Rhamph are short, heavily muscled and anchored to a heavy breastbone providing the power for flight. The first three fingers and thumb form a claw at the apex of the wing, while the "pinkie" finger is thickened and extended to about four feet in length. This enlarged digit forms the front edge of their wings, which are a taunt membrane stretched along the surface of their arm, to the tip of their extended digit, and down to attach to the outer edge of the Rhamphorikes knee. When extended, the Rhamphs have a nine-foot wingspan, more than enough to fly through the forests of Ssethregore. When walking, their wings are folded back along their arms. Rhamphs may use their claws to hold items or to climb difficult surfaces.

Rhamphorikes were originally created for the sole purpose of forming an aerial unit to combat flying foes and to rain death down upon land bound enemies. To this task the Rhamphs have proven exemplary, becoming the deciding factor in dozens of battles over the centuries. In modern Ssethregore, they still maintain the position of aerial shock troopers, but also find themselves in scouting roles. A Rhamphorike's red tinged body reflecting the setting sun as it rises above the tree line is a common sight from the walls of Altherian outposts.

Rhamphorikes have no real society of their own and know nothing but the military lifestyle they were created for. Rhamphs are not overly religious, finding more solace in the clouds above than in philosophical debates on the merits of the different Ssethric gods. If the Rhamphs viewed anything as a God, it would be their creators, the Ssanu. Rhamphorikes are particularly fertile, an uncommon trait among the various creations of the Ssanu mages. All their eggs are hatched by the Ssanu and their offspring trained by special Ss'ressen taskmasters for the rigors of aerial combat. Squadrons of Rhamphorikes are commonly teamed up with Drakhen Dragonnel riders to form precision units for nighttime raids of surprise attacks on Altherian outposts.

Lophius

Lophius are a throwback to a bygone era, when the Ssethregoran Empire were attempting to create an aquatic race to aid the Sahuagin in their undersea conquests, long before the Old Empire made contact with the Pleisaurans. Sometimes mistaken for other aquatic humanoids, Lophius are large hulking fishy brutes. Standing well over eight feet tall, Lophius are a batrachian nightmare, with a laterally compressed head and bulbous froglike eyes with fishlike jaws and gill plates. Their bodies are covered in shimmering silver scales lathered in a slippery mucus coating produced by copious oil glands. Lophius have no tails and propel themselves through the water in a frog like fashion; using powerful kicking strokes from their webbed feet and claws. A dim witted race, they were created to be totally obedient slaves and are mostly passive in temperament. Nowadays they serve the Empire as undersea gardeners or aquaculture workers beneath the watchful eye of the superior Pleisaurans. Lophilus can also be found as slaves in Sahuagin society and it is a well-documented fact that the two can interbreed, creating horrid twisted mutants of the vilest sort.

Elorii

Elorii are the byproduct of thousands of years of Ssethric experimentation. Roughly seven thousand years ago as the Ssethregoran Empire struggled against the might of the Il'huan, Emperor Sahktess called a meeting with the Black Coil, the reigning mage guild of the Ssethric Empire, both then and now. The Emperor gathered around him the most powerful Ss'anu, ssressen, and Nagas, tasking them with the creation a servitor race. Like their other elemental slaves, the servitor race had to be able to endure the extremes in climate and retain the elemental qualities that made summoned elementals immune to many of the mind influencing psionic powers the Il'huan possessed. This servitor race had to also be a permanent fixture upon the face of Onara, immortal like other elementals, but not linked to their distant planes.

Ss'koreth, the most powerful Elementalist of his age was called forward and set in charge of this task. Around him the Archmage gathered the most highly skilled group of spellcasters and Technomancers the world had ever seen. Time and again they bent their arts in the attempt to create a race to suit the Emperor's lofty goals, and time and again they failed. In those early centuries before the Elorii, hundreds of strange and twisted beings were created, some that serve the Empire, others monsters that are now a plague upon civilized lands.

For two centuries Ss'koreth and his colleagues labored, with no marked success. On a chance discovery deep beneath Yahssremore, an ancient crypt of an alien race was unearthed and



inside was found a tablet explaining how to summon incredibly powerful elementals. Difficult negotiations with these great planar beings, an epic quest and finally, the laborious efforts of the most powerful arcanists combined in the forging a new race. In the birthing gel pods of the Technomancers, the Ssanu fused raw elemental power and the energy of a powerful Nature Godling with the rough, but elegant fleshy body perfected from the corpses of the Gar Ormal, to create a new race in the image of one of their earlier creations.

In that moment of glory the Elorii were created. Their work was presented to the Emperor and he was delighted with the results, ordering the immediate production of thousands more of these new slaves. The Emperor was said to be the savior of the Empire, providing new troops to combat the Il'huan threat. Out of the Ssethric masses, only one voice dared to disagree, for the Archmage Ss'koreth said these creatures were too unlike the Ssanu and too much like the warm-bloods they were modeled after. He called for extensive testing before the Elorii were sanctioned as a success and worthy of production. His protests fell upon deaf ears as the Elorii were immediately needed.

Seven thousand years later, the Ssethregoran Empire is still reeling from the mistakes of their forefathers, for the Elorii eventually rose in influence and sparked a slave revolt, which broke the power of the Old Empire. Not all the Elorii escaped the bonds of servitude. Entire colonies of Elorii are still raised in the Empire today, held as little better than cattle and guarded more heavily than any of the other slaves. They are invaluable to the Empire as laborers and ingredients in many dark arcane rituals.

Hussuma

The Hussuma are one of the early results of the Ssethric quest for the ultimate slave race. Virtually immortal, Hussuma appear for all intents and purposes as modern day Elorii. The flesh shell that was used in the creation of the Elorii was based on the bodies created for the Hussuma. They appear as tall lithe humanoids with long pointed ears, feral teeth and almond shaped eyes. They were originally designed off other warm-blooded templates and hence gain their humanoid body configuration from those earlier experiments. Hussuma were never infused with elemental energy like their Elorii cousins, instead they were empowered with the divine powers of Yigite clerics.

This reptilian origin manifests slowly as the Hussuma age. As one grows older, they begin to lose their Elorii features and gain a more reptilian aspect: slitted pupils, nictitating membranes, forked tongues, and rough scaly patches of skin appear on their bodies. These features become more and more pronounced as they age. Eventually they are hardly recognizable as their younger selves, taking on the countenance of serpentine humanoids similar to the Ssanu, but with legs instead of serpentine coils. Hussuma are long lived, the eldest having ruled over Elorii colonies in the days of the Old Empire. Hussuma reproduce infrequently and are only fertile for the first two centuries of their life. After that the males become impotent and the females barren, perhaps due to their changing biology.

Currently, the Hussuma act as spies for the Ssethregoran Empire, infiltrating Malfea to the west and spreading through out the human lands. Each Ssanu Pit and Naga House have cadres of Hussuma working for them, gathering rare items form outside of Ssethric lands as well as intelligence on the machinations of the Elorii political

arena. The remaining Hussuma work directly as spies for the military, gathering information on troop movement and positions and aiding the constantly grinding gears of the Ssethregoran war machine.

Yissera

Yissera are a recent addition to the Ssethric arsenal. Shortly after the arrival of humans on the continent from over the eastern sea, the Naga and Ssanu quickly saw the need for spies that could move through the new human controlled lands with impunity. Once again the arts of the Technomancers were called into action and combined with the arts of Ssanu sorcerers, created the Yissera, a race similar to the Hussuma, but markedly improved upon.

Appearing for all intents and purposes as humans, Yissera are able to move through the Coryani Empire and the rest of Arcanis with practical impunity. There, they gather information for Ssethregore about military advancements, political maneuverings and even keep watch on the renegade Black Talon Ss'ressen. Yissera also function as merchants, bringing slaves and other rare trade goods into Ssethregore and in return giving the humans red-tinged Ssethric gold. Many a caravan that was "destroyed" by Ssethregoran border raids simply took a turn south and rode off into the jungle greeted warmly by their reptilian cohorts.

Yissera are much shorter lived than Hussuma, their lifespan stretching for only about 150 years. Like the Hussuma however, they begin to show signs of serpentine influence early on in their lives and by the time they reach the age of fifty, they can no longer travel in human society with out a disguise. The Yissera mutation into Ssethric form is more ghastly and random than that of the Hussuma. Many Yissera end their lives with a human body and a head of a serpent or snakes for limbs.

Yissera breed at a rate similar to humans and surprisingly many secretly worship the goddess Yig. It is even rumored that an entire cult to Yig exists, headed by a few rogue Ssanu and its ranks filled by Yissera. Meeting in secret, they frequent the ruins deep inside the Morass or over the border deep in the jungles of Myrantia in what is now modern day Toranesta.

Goblinoids

The history of the goblinoids is one of misery, pain and sorrow. Originally allies of the fledgling Old Empire of Yahressemore, the ancestors of what are now the various goblinoid races, were once a proud race of nomadic Orc warriors with a rich cultural heritage. With their weakening at the end of the Formorian War, they were soon betrayed and became the first slaves of the Ssethregorans. Within a few centuries of selective breeding and being hosts of magical experimentations, this once proud race was no more, reduced to mere slaves of the current Ssethregoran Empire. There are currently four major groupings of goblinoids under the thumb of Ssethregore and a myriad of lesser-known species created for specific tasks that can be found under reptilian rule.

Bugbears

The largest and strongest of the goblinoid races, Bugbears are far more aggressive and far more stupid, than their smaller cousins. Bugbears represent the most chaotic and destructive impulses of their Orc ancestors magnified by eight millennia of selective breeding and experimentation. Standing over seven feet tall and covered in ropy muscle, bugbears are a sight to behold upon the battlefield. Their large bodies are hunched forward and their stubby legs seem to shuffle across the ground when they walk, giving one the impression of a

misshapen bear lumbering along; hence their name. Bugbears find a role in the Ssethregoran society as front line berserkers, hurling themselves at enemy lines or as mine workers; their massive physique making them ideal for tearing huge amounts of rock and other ores from the bosom of the earth.

Goblins

Goblins are the lowest of the low. There are no beings in the whole Empire valued less than the goblins. Small, weak and cowardly, their presence is tolerated only for their ability to squeeze into small quarters and their lack of anything resembling courage. What better slaves than ones that are too fearful to even think about the possibility of rebellion? There is no loyalty amongst the ranks of goblins, no social ties or family values. These wretched creatures live only to serve their scaled masters, doing all that is in their power to please. There is nothing more pathetic on the face of the world than a goblin simpering for its life.

Goblins are used as menial laborers of the ranches and farms of the Empire, but most commonly find themselves chained together and working deep underground in the mining operations. The goblin's ability to see in the dark and their slight body form make them the ideal workers to dig seams of coal or pursue rare ores in hazardous places. If an improperly shored tunnel should collapse on a cadre of goblin miners, the Troglodyte and Kobold overseers don't even bother to blink one cold soulless eye, for there are always more goblins available. The one favorable trait that goblins do possess is their ability to breed like rats. Whether dying in the mines, being used for arcane experimentation, prepared as a food item, or dying in a hail of Elorii arrows, the Empire can always be assured that they will have plenty of goblin replacements within the year.

Greblins

Not to be confused with their smaller cousins, Greblins are the worst of both worlds. Greblins were an experimental throwback to a time when the Ssanu Technomancers and the Elementalists were attempting to create a new elemental race. Experimentations upon normal goblins were conducted with energies from the Elemental Plane of Earth. For centuries the Ssanu labored away, discarding or destroying many of the organisms they considered failures along the way. One of the byproducts of their experimentation was the Greblin.

Standing four and a half feet tall, their gray thick warty hides wrap a heavy muscular frame and hard granite bones. A Greblin's piercing eyes are blood red in coloration and glow in the dark. Large fangs protrude from a Greblin's lower jaw reaching up past their pig-like nose. Their knotted frames are incredibly strong for their size, often catching opponents unawares. Greblins revel in causing pain; wielding barbed weapons, they sweep down upon the enemies of Ssethregore with no thought to their own pathetic lives.

Greblins are used only for warfare, their temperament making them unsuitable for any other pursuit. They breed slower than goblins, but are much tougher. Greblins are most commonly found along the borders of Ssethregore, making up the front ranks of military forces, their bodies acting as living shields for the more valuable troops moving behind them.

Hobgoblins

Hobgoblins hold an interesting history within the Ssethregoran Empire. Bred to be commanders of goblinoid forces, Hobgoblins were developed solely for the purposes of war. Larger and more intelligent than most of their brethren, Hobgoblins stand between five and a half to seven feet tall and are covered in thick reddish hued hides studded with sparse coarse hair. Hobgoblins still harbor the racial desire to cause pain and torment and amuse themselves by tormenting the weaker slave races around them. Hobgoblins are employed as specialized troops or sub-commanders of other goblinoids. They play an integral part in the Ssethregoran military, organizing the lesser races and acting as liaisons between the goblin troops and their Ssethric commanders. Though valued, Hobgoblins are still slaves and are treated as one would treat a prized horse.

Interestingly, Hobgoblins under the command of sub-commander Kang Gorebelly were responsible for rallying the goblinoid forces of the Old Empire in revolt. It was the participation of the hundreds of thousands goblinoid slaves that tipped the balance in favor of the slave revolt started by the Elorii six millennia ago. After the revolt the goblinoids and Elorii parted ways, the goblins falling into disorderly chaos and looting. Elorii records still speak of a contingent of Hobgoblins led by King Gorebelly that mobilized with military precision and marched off to the southwest and out of their recorded history.

Chapter Four

CLASSES OF THE EMPIRE

The Ssethregoran Empire is a lawful evil society, bound within the rigid structure of a militaristic dictatorship. Warriors make up the bulk of the population, for martial prowess goes hand in hand with social and economic advancement. Almost every citizen of the Empire has had some form of combat training. Rogues also comprise a major section of society; whether in the political arenas or scouting the front lines, their unique talents can be found hidden within every level of Ssethric culture. Arcanists and priests make up the next-largest section of the populace, for their skills are paramount to the success of the Empire and the invention of new technologies to fuel the machine of war. The remaining occupations are less frequently represented, but are never totally absent, for a surprising variety of individuals can exist within even the most militant and repressive system of government.

Warriors

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the various warrior classes comprise the largest percentage of any group within Ssethric society. The bulk of the Empire's military forces are composed of fighters. These versatile combat specialists can be found in all positions, from the lowliest foot soldier to the highest-ranking general. Many fighters are also employed as bodyguards, charged with protecting important politicians and individuals of note. Others can be found littering the gladiatorial fighting pits scattered throughout the Empire's various territories. All of the Ssethric races contribute fighters to help the Empire carry out its never-ending military campaigns, but they are especially prolific in the ranks of the ss'ressen egg clutches.

Barbarians are far less common than fighters, mainly appearing as troglodyte berserkers within the front ranks of the infantry, or as Agamassi brutes who act as heavy shock troops. Their fearsome appearance is designed to demoralize, as much as to destroy, enemy troops.

Rangers find their niche as professional scouts for the military forces, or as border skirmishers strategically located to repel Elorii and human incursions. The ranger ranks are heavily filled by ss'ressen and hylis troops, with a small percentage of rhamphorikes scattered through their midst.

Holy Champions and paladins are the least-represented of the warrior classes in Ssethregore, for they are found almost exclusively among the ss'ressen and troglodytes (though in both instances they are still extremely rare). The emotionally-stagnant mindset embedded within Ssethregoran culture regards concepts such as justice and righteousness as so foreign that only within the rarest of instances can an individual who values these principles be found. Ssethric divine champions are usually paladins. In the case of Black Talons and their kin, however, Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrm are found more frequently than paladins. Ssethric paladins may be Lawful Good or Lawful Neutral in alignment.

Priests

Priests play a major role in Ssethric society, especially among the lower echelons of the populace. Clerics are

the dominant religious force within the borders of Ssethregore. Each race has its own versions of the clergy. Troglodytes and pleisaurans have relatively informal organizations, usually consisting of small religious ceremonies held to venerate the God Kassegore. The Ss'ressen are the most religious of all Ssethric races, with each clutch being ruled by a matriarchal oligarchy. As a result, ss'ressen culture stipulates that only females may become clerics. Males with religious urges most commonly turn to the path of the druid. Among the ssanu, clerics are extremely rare, for the members of this race prefer the knowledge and power granted through arcane studies to the droll beliefs of faith. The naga populace, which owes its position atop Ssethric society to the support and power of the Varn Gods, holds religion as an important part of daily life. Naga clerics hold daily religious ceremonies within the opulent palaces of the various influential naga families and strictly enforce Varn worship upon the other Ssethric races.

Due to the matriarchal culture of the ss'ressen, only females may be clerics or priests of the Fire Dragon. Males can theoretically become clerics of foreign gods, but such heretics would quickly become exiles from their own communities. Most males who feel the urgings of faith become holy champions or druids.

From the multitudes of troglodyte and ss'ressen clerics comes a specialized group of battle medics, known as Riveners. These medics, equipped with the latest biotechnology, combine their divine powers with technological might to form a most important unit of the Ssethric military force.

Druids

Ssethric druids are not as common as clerics, but still play a vital role in Ssethregoran culture. The Disciples of Jeggal Sag are an ancient druidic cult that traces its origins back to the Old Empire. These druids are mostly male ss'ressen or female hylis. They are responsible for the breeding and maintenance of the vast arrays of beasts cultivated by the Ssethregoran Empire. Disciples of Jeggal Sag are responsible for maintaining colonies of riding beasts and drakes, as well as of all the herd animals that supply the Empire with its main food source. Lastly, the druids work hand in hand with the Technomancers to breed new strains of livestock and create fantastic creatures for the ever-expanding war machine.

Table 4-01 Alternative Animal Companions for Ssethric Druids

Druid Level/Companions for Ssethric Druids and Rangers *	
1st level	Toad, Wolf Lizard (tiny), Lizard (small), Jaculi (lesser), Winged Viper
4th level or higher	Giant Frog**, Mor'let, Sc'math
7th level or higher	Giant Dire Frog**, Jaculi (greater), Rock Reptile**, Bonesnapper**
10th level or higher	Arboreal Black Caimen, Cyclura, Dragonnel
13th level or higher	Daughter of Yig
16th level or higher	Dragonnel (Gargantuan)

*Ssethric rangers who have the ability to gain an animal companion may choose one from this list. For purposes of animal companion advancement, such characters are treated as if they were druids of one-half their ranger level.

** These creatures appear in *Sword and Sorcery's Tome of Horrors*.

Arcanists

All wizards and sorcerers within the Ssethregoran Empire operate under the watchful eyes of the mage's guild known as the Black Coil. From the Spiraled Tower of Getula in the capital of Sseth, the Black Coil reaches out its dark arts to any and all who have the talent. Parties of specially appointed ssanu screen each generation of ss'ressen, troglodytes, and kobolds for any who may show the spark of magic in their veins. They are not selective; there are as many sorcerers among the ranks of the Black Coil as there are wizards.

The Black Coil manages every aspect of a mage's life, from apprenticeship, to training, and finally assignment to the military. After surviving a deadly set of tests designed to cull the weak and unworthy, a prospective mage is inducted into the Black Coil. From there, the ruling council (consisting of 3 ssanu) assigns the new recruits to various tasks. These tasks range in difficulty and danger level; some apprentices assist battle mages on the front lines, while others act as researchers, hidden deep within the labyrinth below Sseth. There are few opportunities for advancement, and while slaying of rivals is banned under a penalty of death, in truth such activities are secretly encouraged. Indeed, assassination accounts for the majority of promotions within the ranks of the Black Coil. As for any wizard who defies the will of the Black Coil, he is summarily hunted down and destroyed by a special group of mage assassins known as Laksiri.

The Black Coil is drawn mostly from the ranks of the ssanu; they account for nearly 70% of all the arcanists in Ssethregore. The remaining members are nagas, with a smattering of the lesser races that show a talent for magic early on in their lives.

In addition to those normally granted by the character's class, a Ssethric wizard or sorcerer may take the following animals as familiars:

Table 4-02: Ssethric Familiars

Familiar	Special
Lizard (tiny)	Master gains a +3 bonus on Climb checks
Constrictor (medium)	Master gains a +2 bonus on Grapple Checks
Eel (small)*	Master gains a +3 bonus on Escape Artist checks
Odonata**	Master gains a +3 bonus on Spot checks
Winged Viper	Master gains a +2 bonus on Reflex saves
Treefrog (tiny)	Master gains a +3 bonus on Climb checks
Scarlet Tarantula**	Master gains a +2 bonus on Fortitude saves against poison and paralysis.

* Can only be taken by pleisaurans, lophius, or sahuagin

** Vermin taken as familiars become magical beasts and lose all qualities, drawbacks, and benefits of the vermin type

Rogues and Bards

Rogues are almost as common as warriors in the Ssethregoran Empire. They often find themselves part of a standing military force, acting as scouts alongside rangers, or being sent on covert information-gathering missions and for-

ays deep into enemy territory. Closer to the home front, cabals of thieves and smugglers run an extensive underground trade network that supplies the decadent naga and ssanu with rare and exotic objects found only in far-away human lands. With legal license to operate, assassins and assassin guides have thrived throughout Ssethregore. Both private citizens and the military call upon these assassins to eliminate hated rivals. Highly-trained assassins also act as commando units, and are sometimes sent on special missions across the Ssethregoran border. Each year, a number of high-ranking officers of the Shining Patrol fall to poisoned blades in the night.

Rogues find a home in the political arena of Ssethregore as well as they do in the military. It is said that no one lies better than the ssanu, who have elevated deception and dissembling to an art form.

Surprisingly, bards hold a vital role in Ssethregore. Though they are never common, bards are prized across the Empire for their entertainment abilities. Indeed, the ssanu and naga prize an expert performer, and pay high sums for talented bards to train cadres of human and Elorii slaves as one might teach a tamed bear to dance. Ss'ressen and troglodytes revel in tales of war and conquest, and among their ranks warrior-poets have developed. In every barracks in the Empire, one can always find at least one such individual regaling the troops with tales of war, rapine, and slaughter. Lastly, bards are also employed by the military. A special group of warrior-poets, known as Plethorax, lighten the weariness of the inevitable long marches and raise the troops' morale with their varied tales, songs, and stories.

Monks

Monks are the rarest class in Ssethric society, and indeed they are practically non-existent in the Empire. The cold, calculating Ssethric mindset that gives way to bursts of red-hot emotion is generally incapable of achieving the serenity and peace of mind necessary to become a monk. Still, the rare individual exists, and these usually find themselves as members of the Dripping Fang, a tiny group of the most skilled, cold-hearted assassins in the entire Empire. Outside the bounds of the Ssethregoran Empire, a small group of Black Talon ss'ressen have emulated their human neighbors and founded a monastic organization of their own. This monk order is known as the Monks of the Iridescent Scale, and their headquarters is located in the eastern edge of the Sulphur Marshes.

Psionicists

The only two races inside Ssethregore to possess psionic abilities are the ssanu and naga. Their psionic potential is due to experimentation conducted upon their own races, using knowledge gleaned from the dissection of psionic creatures over seven millennia ago. It is not uncommon to find a ssanu senator or naga overlord using inborn psionic talent to control and manipulate others. There are small psionic guilds that have formed within Ssethregore, but these are localized groups associated with individual ssanu Pits or naga Houses.

Interestingly, this year there were two Black Talons hatched that had gray eyes and strange psionic powers. These are the offspring of Pyros Moralia, and as they mature, they may shift the dynamics of the entire population.

Table 4-03: Holy Champion of the Fire Dragon: The Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrn

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells Per Day			
						1st	2nd	3rd	4th
1	+1	+2	+0	+0	Aura of Faith, Detect Evil	-	-	-	-
2	+2	+3	+0	+0	Defensive Stance, Divine Grace, Talons of Flame	-	-	-	-
3	+3	+3	+1	+1	Aura of Courage, Burning Blood	-	-	-	-
4	+4	+4	+1	+1	Channeling, Ssethric Enforcer	0	-	-	-
5	+5	+4	+1	+1		0	-	-	-
6	+6/+1	+5	+2	+2	Dragon Hide	1	-	-	-
7	+7/+2	+5	+2	+2		1	-	-	-
8	+8/+3	+6	+2	+2	Protective Ward	1	0	-	-
9	+9/+4	+6	+3	+3		1	0	-	-
10	+10/+5	+7	+3	+3	Sanction of the Fire Dragon	1	1	-	-
11	+11/+6/+1	+7	+3	+3		1	1	0	-
12	+12/+7/+2	+8	+4	+4	Ability Boost (Str+2)	1	1	1	-
13	+13/+8/+3	+8	+4	+4		1	1	1	-
14	+14/+9/+4	+9	+4	+4	Breath of Fire	2	1	1	0
15	+15/+10/+5	+9	+5	+5		2	1	1	1
16	+16/+11/+6/+1	+10	+5	+5	Ability Boost (Con +2)	2	2	1	1
17	+17/+12/+7/+2	+10	+5	+5		2	2	2	1
18	+18/+13/+8/+3	+11	+6	+6	Shimmering Scales	3	2	2	1
19	+19/+14/+9/+4	+11	+6	+6		3	3	3	2
20	+20/+15/+10/+5	+12	+6	+6	Dragon Apotheosis	3	3	3	3

New Core Class

Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrn

A thick, cloying miasma hung over the smoking ruin of the remote village, stinking of rot, death, and blood. The reptilian musk of the dead mingled with the fresh blood of the strange human invaders clung to the skin and the nostrils. It was not known where these strange humans appeared from, for they arrived abruptly and violently, skimming through the skies on invisible disks, rife with the smell of eons-old magic. Their attack was swift and deadly, striking the unsuspecting ss'ressen with relentless force, and delivering wanton slaughter upon the brave and noble race. A resistance was mounted, leaving scores of the strange humans to feel the sting of Ssethric arrows; dying face-down, writhing in the thick peaty mud of the Sulphur Marsh. The invaders' numbers were overwhelming, for allied with them were colossal hulking brutes with tentacles for arms and hides thicker than that of any elephant. One by one the defenders fell to whipping tentacles and eldritch spells, but for each ss'ressen felled, an invader was dragged down by the bloody claws of the dying. Inch by inch, step by step, the invaders advanced toward the hatchery, paying for their insolence in an orgy of blood and death.

Ophistranon Ss'tellus waited within the thick walls of the hatchery, facing the stone doorway, his back to the precious hatchlings, bearded axe poised in his hands. The enemy was quickly approaching. The Matriarch had sent him to defend the hatchlings, for he was the last, and would give his life for his clutch. With an earth-shattering explosion and a hail of stone chips, the portal to the vital chamber was breached. The Sentinel leapt forward into the opening, heedless of the stone shards now embedded in his lacerated hide, his axe a crescent of whirling death biting into flesh within its deadly arc. The coppery smell of blood filled his nostrils and the red haze of battle fury filled his vision, but no matter the press of enemies, Ophistranon stood firm, while the macabre wall of corpses stacked ever-higher before him. Another titanic blast rocked the chamber and the eastern wall began to cave in.

Howling in rage, the sentinel turned in time to see the roof collapse, falling down upon the helpless hatchlings still within the furnace. A desperate whistle from Ophistranon sent a red-orange flash streaking from the writhing flames of the hatching fires, to throw its scaly body over a scant handful of the hatchlings. Though the noble Fire Drake's body took the toll of the falling masonry, it was not enough, for only three of the hatchlings remained alive. Blood-fury poured through the Sentinel's veins and he once more turned to stem the overwhelming tide of invaders. Red ruin descended upon the enemy, but the Sentinel's body was already suffering the ravages of battle: scales torn away, ribs exposed from a vicious slash, and blood pouring profusely from the brave defender's mouth. The Fire Drake was in no better shape, having joined its companion in the desperate battle, shielding the hatchlings with its draconic form, and laying waste with jets of crimson fire.

The attackers broke through the last desperate defense and poured into the chamber en masse. A pink-skin scooped up the two surviving males, while another grabbed the only young female; both were rewarded with tearing claws and biting teeth, but neither invader dropped its prize. Ophistranon watched as the last vestiges of his clutch were snatched away from him. Roaring in primal ferocity, he called to the one true God, and hurled his bearded axe, just as a lightning bolt smote his bleeding form. End over end the gory weapon tumbled, as if guided by some unseen hand, to sink sickeningly into the back of the human carrying the two males, and the precious cargo fell to the stone floor, now slick with the attacker's blood. The scorched form of Ophistranon looked upon his winged friend one last time. With his dying breath rattling in his throat the Sentinel yelled, "Go!" while his blood-soaked hand pointed at the freed hatchlings. The Fire Drake looked across the carnage before him, and at the fleeing human carrying the young female. With lightning resolve, the Fire Drake pounced upon the two males, securing them in its talons then leaping skyward. The Drake's blood burned as it climbed, swooping through the enemy ranks, while dodging the spell casters on their clumsy magical disks. Up and up it flew, until the battle was lost well below it. Circling one last time and mourning the loss of its companion, the Fire Drake dipped its wings and headed toward Lanpeltis, for the High Matriarch Mother must know of this.

In the misery, death, and confusion that marked the exodus of the Black Talons from Ssethregoran society, a small group of



valiant Black Talons stood above the rest, ready to lay down their very lives for the sole purpose of buying the remainder of their clutch time to escape. This core of hardened veterans stood firm in the face of insurmountable odds, unwavering in their faith toward the old Matriarch. Seven times the full might and fury of all Ssethregore charged headlong into these unblinking defenders, and seven times the lines held. The fearless and fearsome Black Talons had piled up a ring of barbed-tail corpses hip-deep before they finally fell and were dragged down into twilight.

The Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrms are the most prestigious order of holy champions dedicated to the Fire Dragon. The Black Talon Matriarchy created the Sentinels during the grueling march out of Ssethregore to safeguard against the genocidal tendencies of their Ssethric enemies. Originally formed to honor their comrades who fell buying time for the clutch as a whole to escape, the Sentinels have risen to represent much more. Since the Black Talons' relocation into human-held

lands, the Sentinels have come to stand as a bulwark of defense against any foes who would threaten the very heart of ss'ressen society: the precious eggs from which each new generation springs.

Adventures: The Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrms represent an elite group of devout warriors inside ss'ressen society. Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrms can be found within the Black Talon society, as well as in Ashen Hide society. The Sentinels from each clutch are similar, even though the two groups of ss'ressen have different outlooks upon their shared God. In all cases, Sentinels can always be found guarding the hatcheries, or escorting important members of their clutch to

various destinations.

Adventuring

Sentinels are rare, but when encountered they are usually

using their powers to somehow further the prosperity

of their clutch, or protecting compatriots who have become like a surrogate clutch to their reptilian mindset. The trust and respect of a Sentinel is hard won, but a better friend or compatriot one could not have.

Characteristics: The revered Fire Dragon grants His divine agents upon Onara abilities far surpassing those of most mortals. Sentinels quickly learn how to channel the religious fervor that courses through their veins and manifest it as holy fire to smite down their foes. The blood burning through their veins destroys all impure agents in their system, making them virtually immune to the poisons of their enemies. Lastly, as the Sentinels become one with their Lord's will, they begin to manifest the traits of their Lord, starting with the mental control over their lesser scaled kin and ending with complete apotheosis into a draconic form of pure righteousness.

Sentinels are taught through rigorous physical training and extensive meditative trances. First and foremost, these stalwart defenders learn to place the survival of the egg clutch before their own. Sentinels must be ready to sacrifice their insignificant lives in a

heartbeat, if their death will bring about betterment for the clutch as a whole. This fearless attitude of self-sacrifice is one that can only be found in the cold-blooded races of Ssethric origin, for it is their lack of emotional output that allows for such a mindset to develop. Rare indeed is the being who puts the lives of others over the worth of his own hide.

Background: Candidates to the Sentinels are chosen through a two-step process. First, any hopeful candidate must earn the recommendation of his village's Warlord, either through exemplary valor on the field of battle, or through extraordinary martial prowess in the gladiatorial ring. Once a Warlord chooses such an individual, the candidate must then win the approval of the local Matriarch by proving himself to be as pious as he is martially inclined. Candidates that meet the approbation of both Warlord and Matriarch are then sent to the High Matriarch Mother at the capital of Lanpeltis to be further consid-



ered for membership. In Lanpeltis, the candidates are stripped of all garments and covered in ash from the hatching fires. The High Matriarch Mother then sends each candidate through seven sets of grueling rites, each rite representing one of the seven waves of barbed tails that broke against that brave wall of Black Talons so long ago. The rites are harsh and torturous, involving fasting, ritual scarring, and surviving within a sealed furnace from sunrise to sunset. Most candidates do not survive the ordeals, but the ones that do are brought out of the furnace upon the seventh day, washed in crystal clear water, and as the soot of their trials is washed away, they are inducted into the ranks of the Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrms.

Races: Black Talon and Ashen Hide ss'ressen are the only two races that are allowed to join the Sentinels and gain the favor of the Fire Dragon. Even if an individual of another race was to somehow venerate the Fire Dragon, such a creature would lack the cold-blooded reptilian mindset needed to master the discipline. More importantly, the xenophobic tendencies of the ss'ressen would never allow any warm-blood to join their most holy order.

Code of Conduct: A Sentinel must be of Lawful Good or Lawful Neutral alignment and loses all class abilities if she ever willingly commits an evil act or shifts from this alignment.

Additionally, a Sentinel's code requires that she respect legitimate authority and the laws set down by the Matriarchy above all others. She must act with honor (not lying, not cheating, not using poison, and so forth); she must help those in need (provided they do not use the help for evil or chaotic ends); and she must punish those who harm or threaten innocents. A Sentinel outside of her home region is expected to drop all duties and return home immediately whenever her egg clutch is in imminent peril.

Associates: While she may adventure with characters of any Good or Neutral alignment, a Sentinel will never knowingly associate with Evil-aligned characters, nor will she continue an association with someone who consistently offends her moral code. A Sentinel may accept only henchmen, followers, or cohorts who are Lawful in alignment.

Ex-Sentinels: A Sentinel who ceases to be Lawful Good or Lawful Neutral, who willfully commits an evil act, or who grossly violates the code of conduct loses all Sentinel spells and abilities (including the service of the Sentinel's mount, but not weapon, armor, and shield proficiencies). She may not progress any farther in levels as a Sentinel. She regains her abilities and advancement potential if she atones for her violations (see the *atonement* spell description), as appropriate.

Multiclassing: Like a member of any other class, a Sentinel may be a multiclass character, but multiclass sentinels face a special restriction. A Sentinel who gains a level in any class other than Sentinel may never again raise her Sentinel level, though she retains all her Sentinel abilities. She may also never take a level of Paladin or a level in any other Divine Champion class.

Class Requirements

Alignment: Lawful Good or Lawful Neutral.

Special: Must worship the Fire Dragon.

Hit Die: d10

Class Skills

A Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Jump (Str), Knowledge (geography: Ssethregore)

(Int), Knowledge (nature: ss'ressen) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at First Level: (2 + Int modifier) x4

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 2 + Int modifier

Class Features

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrms are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all types of armor, and with shields (including tower shields). The bearded axe is the favored weapon of this class, and many Sentinels wield this weapon with pride.

Aura of Faith (Ex): The Sentinel possesses a strong aura corresponding to his alignment (see the detect evil spell for details). Some philosophers believe that this aura is a representation of the Gods' blessings. Others believe the aura is simply a representation of a very old or devout soul.

Detect Evil (Sp): At will, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms can use *detect evil*, as the spell.

Defensive Stance (Ex): This ability mimics the unwavering defensive line of the Black Talons from so long ago. When a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms adopts a defensive stance, he gains phenomenal strength and durability, but he cannot move from the spot he is defending. He gains +2 to Strength, +4 to Constitution, a +2 resistance bonus on all saves, and a +4 dodge bonus to AC. The increase in Constitution increases the Sentinel's hit points by 2 points per level, but these hit points go away at the end of the defensive stance when his Constitution score drops back 4 points. These extra hit points are not lost first the way temporary hit points are. While in a defensive stance, a Sentinel cannot use skills or abilities that would require him to shift his position. A defensive stance lasts for a number of rounds equal to 3 plus the character's (newly improved) Constitution modifier. A Sentinel may end his defensive stance voluntarily prior to this limit. At the end of the defensive stance, the Sentinel is winded and takes a -2 penalty to Strength for the duration of that encounter. Adopting a defensive stance takes no time itself, but a Sentinel can only do so during his own turn. At 12th level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms may use this ability an additional number of times per day equal to his Charisma modifier (minimum 1).

Divine Grace (Ex): Beginning at 2nd level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms applies his Charisma modifier (if positive) as a bonus on all saving throws.

Talons of Flame (Su): Beginning at 2nd level, a Sentinel with a Charisma score of 12 or higher can cause his talons to blaze with holy fire. His touch burns the flesh of his enemies, inflicting a total number of hit points of fire damage equal to his class level times his Charisma bonus. The Sentinel may choose to divide his fire damage among multiple recipients, and he doesn't have to use it all at once. Using Talons of Flame is a standard action and requires a successful melee touch attack (this is considered an armed attack). The Sentinel decides how many of his daily allotment of points to use as damage after successfully touching the target creature.

Aura of Courage (Ex): Beginning at 3rd level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms is immune to fear (magical or otherwise). Each ally within 10 feet of him gains a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against fear effects. This ability functions constantly as long as the Sentinel is conscious, but not if he is unconscious or dead.

Burning Blood (Ex): The righteous fire of the Fire Dragon burns through each Sentinel's veins, cleansing his blood of all toxins. At 3rd level, a Sentinel gains immunity to all forms of natural poisons.

Channeling (Su): Beginning at 4th level, Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms can channel divine energy as a cleric would channel positive or negative energy. This may be used in con-

junction with other feats or class abilities as described elsewhere. A Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms may *channel* a number of times per day equal to 3 plus his Charisma modifier.

Ssethric Enforcer (Su): When a Sentinel reaches 4th level, he gains the ability to turn or rebuke Ssethric beings by *channeling*. A “Ssethric being” is any creature that has the Reptilian or Ssethric subtype (the two are interchangeable). When using this ability, the Sentinel is treated as if he were a cleric of three levels lower than the level of his Aura of Faith. (For example, a 2nd-level cleric / 5th-level Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms would turn or rebuke Ssethric beings exactly as if he were a 4th-level cleric).

Spells: Beginning at 4th level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms gains the ability to cast a small number of divine spells, which are drawn from the Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrms spell list (see below). A Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms must choose and prepare his spells in advance. To prepare or cast a spell, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms must have a Wisdom score equal to at least 10 + the spell level. The Difficulty Class for a saving throw against a Sentinel's spell is 10 + the spell level + the Sentinel's Wisdom modifier. Like other spellcasters, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms can cast only a certain number of spells of each spell level per day. His base daily spell allotment is given on Table 4-03: The Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms. In addition, he receives bonus spells per day if he has a high Wisdom score. When the table indicates that the Sentinel gets 0 spells per day of a given spell level, he gains only the bonus spells he would be entitled to based on his Wisdom score for that spell level. Sentinels of the Blazing Wyrms do not have access to any domain spells or granted powers, as a cleric does. A Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms prepares and casts spells the way a cleric does, though he cannot lose a prepared spell to spontaneously cast a *cure* spell in its place. A Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms may prepare and cast any spell on his spell list, provided that he can cast spells of that level, but he must choose which spells to prepare during his daily meditation. Through 3rd level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms has no caster level. At 4th level and higher, his caster level is one-half his Sentinel class level.

Dragon Hide (Ex): At 6th level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrm gains the Dragon Hide feat if he does not already possess it.

Protective Ward (Su): At 8th level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrm may forgo the bonus to saving throws granted by Divine Grace and instead extend that bonus to all other creatures within 10 feet. To activate this ability, the Sentinel must expend one of his daily *channeling* attempts. The ability lasts for a number of rounds equal to the Sentinel's class level, though he may end it earlier if desired.

Sanction of the Fire Dragon (Sp): Upon reaching 9th level, a Sentinel's devotion is rewarded, as he is bonded to a fire drake. Fire drakes are considered to be the holy scions of the Fire Dragon upon Onara, and are treated with awe and respect by all Black Talon and Ashen Hide ss'ressen. Actively harming one of these noble creatures is a death sentence in Black Talon and Ashen Hide society. The bonding of a Sentinel to a fire drake is considered one of the highest honors in these societies, and carries with it much prestige. The fire drake serves as a special bonded mount for the Sentinel, similar to a normal paladin's warhorse. The Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms is considered a paladin of 4 levels lower for purposes of mount advancement, which otherwise follows the rules in *Core Rulebook I* for advancement of paladin mounts. Use the fire drake base statistics (see *Chapter 9*) and add the appropriate modifiers according to the Sentinel's level. Unlike normal mounts, whenever a fire drake is entitled to bonus HD, it gains d12s instead of d8s. Also, fire drakes are native creatures of Onara, and therefore cannot be summoned like a normal paladin mount.

Should the Sentinel's fire drake die, she may attempt to raise it normally, but after 24 hours the soul has left its mortal shell and the drake cannot be raised without extraordinary means. The Sentinel may not summon another mount until she gains a Sentinel level. Even if the original fire drake is somehow returned from the dead, it no longer is bonded to the Sentinel, but remains friendly toward the Sentinel. In any case, the Sentinel must first prove her worthiness to the Matriarchy before another fire drake is granted to her. This takes the form of an *atonement* spell, which must be cast upon the Sentinel by the High Matriarch Mother. If it is proven that the fire drake died through neglect or because of purposeful and wanton intent, the Sentinel is stripped of her position and powers, and a trial is held at which the Sentinel is called upon to justify her actions. If the Sentinel is found guilty of neglecting or abusing her fire drake, she is immediately executed.

Ability Boost (Ex): At 12th level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrm gains a +2 inherent bonus to Strength. At 16th level, he gains a +2 inherent bonus to Constitution.

Breath of Fire (Su): At 14th level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms may use a *channel* attempt to turn his Talons of Flame into a 25-foot cone. This is a standard action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity. He must decide how many of his daily points he is putting into this ability before releasing the cone. This requires no attack roll but allows for a Reflex save (DC 10 plus one-half the Sentinel's class level plus the Sentinel's Charisma modifier). Half of the damage is fire, and the other half is considered holy.

Shimmering Scales (Su): At 18th level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms reaches his apotheosis as a manifestation of the Fire Dragon upon Onara. He gains damage reduction 10/magic and spell resistance equal to 10 plus his Charisma modifier.

Dragon Apotheosis (Ex): At 20th level, a Sentinel of the Blazing Wyrms takes on the half-dragon template (either red or gold). He gains +4 to Strength and +2 to Charisma. His natural armor bonus increases to +4, and he acquires a breath weapon, low-light vision, 60-foot darkvision, immunity to *sleep* and paralysis effects, and immunity to fire. See *Core Rulebook III* for full details of the half-dragon template.

Sentinels of the Blazing Wurm – Spell List

1st Level Spells

Bless: Allies gain +1 on attack rolls and +1 on saves against fear.

Bless Water (M): Makes holy water.

Bless Weapon: Weapon strikes true against evil foes.

Burning Hands: Cone of fire deals 1d4/level fire damage (max 5d4).

Create Water: Creates 2 gallons/level of pure water.

Cure Light Wounds: Cures 1d8 damage +1/level (max +5).

Detect Magic: Detects spells and magic items within 60 ft.

Detect Poison: Detects poison in one creature or small object.

Divine Favor: You gain +1 per three levels on attack and damage rolls.

Endure Elements: Exist comfortably in hot or cold environments.

Faerie Fire: Outlines subject with light, canceling *blur*, concealment, and the like.

Magic Weapon: Weapon gains +1 bonus.

Purify Food and Drink: Purifies 1 cubic ft./level of food or water.

Produce Flame: 1d6 damage +1/level, touch or thrown.

Protection from Evil: +2 to AC and saves, counter mind control, hedge out elementals and outsiders

Read Magic: Read scrolls and spellbooks.

Remove Fear: Suppresses fear or gives +4 on saves against fear for one subject, plus one per four levels.
 Resistance: Subject gains +1 on saving throws.
 Restoration, Lesser: Dispel magical ability penalty or repairs 1d4 ability damage.
 Shield of Faith: Aura grants +2 or higher deflection bonus.
 Virtue: Subject gains 1 temporary hp.

2nd Level Spells

Bear's Endurance: Subject gains +4 to Con for 1 min/level.
 Bull's Strength: Subject gains +4 to Str for 1 min/level.
 Calm Emotions: Calms creatures negating emotion effects.
 Delay Poison: Stops poison from harming subject for 1 hour/level.
 Eagle's Splendor: Subject gains +4 to Cha for 1 min/level.
 Heat Metal: Make metal so hot it damages those who touch it.
 Owl's Wisdom: Subject gains +4 to Wis for 1 min/level.
 Pyrotechnics: Turns fire into blinding light or choking smoke.
 Remove Paralysis: Frees one or more creatures from paralysis or slow effect.
 Resist Energy: Ignores 10 (or more) points of damage/attack from specified energy type.
 Shield Other (F): You take half of subject's damage.
 Status: Monitors condition, position of allies.

3rd Level Spells

Cure Moderate Wounds: Cures 2d8 damage +1/level (max +10).
 Daylight: 60-ft. radius of bright light.
 Discern Lies: Reveals deliberate falsehoods.
 Dispel Magic: Cancels spells and magical effects.
 Flaming Sphere: Creates rolling ball of fire, 2d6 damage, lasts 1 round/level.
 Heal Mount: As *heal* on warhorse or other special mount.
 Heat Metal: Make metal so hot it damages those who touch it.
 Magic Vestment: Armor or shield gains +1 enhancement per four levels.
 Magic Weapon, Greater: +1 bonus/four levels (max +5).
 † Mantle of Unassailable Flame: Cover yourself in intense flame.
 Prayer: Allies gain a +1 bonus on most rolls, enemies -1 penalty.
 Remove Blindness/Deafness: Cures normal or magical conditions.
 Remove Curse: Frees object or person from curse.
 Scorching Ray: Ranged touch attack deals 4d6 fire damage, +1 ray/four levels (max 3).

4th Level Spells

Break Enchantment: Frees subjects from enchantments, alterations, curses, and petrification.
 Cure Serious Wounds: Cures 3d8 damage +1/level (max +15).
 Death Ward: Grants immunity to death spells and negative energy effects.
 Freedom of Movement: Subject moves normally despite impediments.
 Holy Sword: Weapon becomes +5, deals +2d6 damage against evil.
 Mark of Justice: Designates action that will trigger *curse* on subject.
 Neutralize Poison: Immunizes subject against poison, detoxifies venom in or on subject.

Restoration (M): Restores level and ability score drains.

† Safeguard: Monitor those who enter and leave an area.

† Sword of Faith: Enchant a weapon to become the bane of your foes for a short time.

Tongues: Speak any language.

† Denotes a new spell from the *Player's Guide to Arcanis*.

(M) Denotes a spell with a costly material component.

(F) Denotes a spell that requires a specific focus (separate from the Sentinel's normal divine focus).

Prestige Classes

Chaoshammers ("The Followers of Zedok")

The harsh cadence of drums permeated the chamber, echoing off the hewn-stone walls deep within the earth. The furnace roared, filling the cavern with oppressive heat and smoke; strange herbs burned upon the fire, tingeing the smoke with a strange, pungent aroma. The cavern was packed to the walls with cold-eyed ss'ressen, their scaly hides reflecting the glow of the ruddy firelight. Their attention was riveted to the front of the chamber, where a hefty granite altar stood, stained black with the blood of countless sacrifices. Upon that dread altar stood a single ss'ressen egg, horribly distorted and swollen out of proportion. Its formerly white shell, now a greenish-black, was pulsating slowly with an inner energy. The drumming suddenly stopped and a lone figure entered from the back of the cavern. She was an imposing figure, the Matriarch of all the Barbed Tail ss'ressen, her form breaking seven feet and covered with the strange quills that marked her loyalty to Zedok. The High Priestess of Zedok, girded in gleaming banded mail and rich Khitani silks, raised her ceremonial staff and slowly stepped towards the grim altar.
 Her foot-



Table 4-05: The Followers of Zedok “ChaosHammers” Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1st	+0	+1	+0	+2	Smite Law (1/day)	+1 divine caster level
2nd	+1	+2	+1	+3	Varn Graft	+1 divine caster level
3rd	+1	+2	+1	+3	Smite Law (2/day)	+1 divine caster level
4th	+2	+3	+1	+4	Twist Perspective	+1 divine caster level
5th	+2	+3	+2	+4	Smite Law (3/day)	+1 divine caster level
6th	+3	+4	+2	+5	Varn Graft	+1 divine caster level
7th	+3	+4	+2	+5	Smite Law (4/day)	+1 divine caster level
8th	+4	+5	+3	+6	Varn Graft	+1 divine caster level
9th	+4	+5	+3	+6	Smite Law (5/day)	+1 divine caster level
10th	+5	+6	+3	+7	Ascendance	+1 divine caster level

steps followed the ancient path through the throng, two grooves worn into the stone floor, where the heels of countless victims of ages past had been dragged to feed the ravenous maw of their God. The Chaoshammer turned, running her steely three-eyed gaze across the assembled crowd, then knelt before the altar and began her supplication: “Oh Zedok, binder of fate, we call upon thee. Oh Zedok, ruler of reality, we ask you to look upon us with favor. Oh Zedok, master of all, bless us with your divine will.” The priestess began to chant in a tongue alien to all those present. The fervor of the watchers rose, and they started to stamp their feet in time with her chanting. The entire assemblage began to utter a low warbling call, beseeching their God and supplicating themselves to the will of Zedok.

The egg on the altar began to tremble... slowly... it began to split open. A thick talon emerged from the leathery shell, then another, and with strength unknown to mortal ss'ressen, the newly-hatched abomination tore apart its crumbling prison. The figure that emerged was ss'ressen, but only in the broadest of terms. It was thick-bodied, and covered with needle-sharp spines. Its talons flexed with the instinctive desire to rend and maim. Most disturbingly, it possessed a distinct third eye. The Chaoshammer smiled to herself and began the binding ritual. Zedok would be pleased this night, for another chaos-spawn had been born.

The Followers of Zedok, also known as “Chaoshammers,” are the predominant priestesses of the Ssethregoran Empire. More worshippers of Zedok exist within Ssethregore than the combined worship of Haulis, Caimeth, and Sipta. Only the masses of Kassegore-worshipping troglodytes and pleisaurans even approach the numbers of this fetid cult. With the departure of Kassegore eons past and the indoctrination of the Varn Gods, the worship of Zedok has spread among all the castes of Ssethregoran society. Leading the motley array of Ssethric peoples are the Chaoshammers, for they are the opiate of the masses, their clerics acting as both medics upon the fields of battle and as conduits to the very gods themselves.

Followers of Zedok embrace their Lord's creed and attempt to become the essence of chaos itself. Particularly loyal or proficient Chaoshammers are granted grafts of Varn tissue. Slowly their bodies experience a metamorphosis into the ultimate form of reptilian evolution, that of a Varn itself. Indeed, they delight in creating chaos-spawn from the eggs of ss'ressen and troglodytes; loyal additions to their lord's armies. Chaoshammers revel in the confusion they cause among others and constantly subvert worshippers of other gods to their beliefs through trickery and guile. They are experts at twisting the truth to serve their own needs. Ssanu Chaoshammers may possibly be the most proficient liars upon Onara. Chaoshammers have become the mainstay of religious culture in the Ssethregoran Empire.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Chaoshammer, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Race: Must be a member of the Ssethric Race

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Skills: Knowledge (religion) 8 ranks, Knowledge (the planes) 4 ranks

Feats: Forked Tongue, Iron Will

Special: Must be able to cast 3rd level divine spells

Class Skills

The Chaoshammer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con) Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Knowledge (the planes) (Int), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Chaoshammer prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Chaoshammer is proficient in all simple weapons, with all types of armor, and with shields (except tower shields).

Divine Spell Progression: Chaoshammers continue to advance in divine spellcasting ability. When a new Chaoshammer level is acquired, the character gains new spells per day as if she had also gained a level in the divine spellcasting class she belonged to before she added the prestige class. She does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained. This essentially means that she adds the level of Chaoshammer to the level of her other divine spellcasting class, then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly. If a character had more than one divine spellcasting class before she became a Chaoshammer, she must decide to which class she adds each new level of Chaoshammer for purposes of determining caster level and spells per day.

Smite Law (Su): Once per day, a Chaoshammer of 1st level or higher may attempt to smite a lawful being with one normal melee attack. She may add her Charisma modifier (if positive) to her attack roll. A successful attack deals 1 extra point of damage per Chaoshammer level. If the Chaoshammer accidentally smites a creature that is not lawful, the smite has no effect, but it is still used for that day. Smite Law is a supernatural ability.

Varn Graft: Loyal followers of Zedok are rewarded with organs of Varn origin that are

grafted to their bodies. A Chaoshammer gains a graft at 2nd, 6th, and 8th level. The Chaoshammer may choose any graft from Table 4-04: Varn Grafts when eligible.

Table 4-04: Varn Grafts

Flesh of the Master (Ex):	+1 natural armor and immunity to subdual damage
Varn Glands (Ex):	All enemies within 10 feet suffer a -2 morale penalty on their saving throws
Third Eye (Ex):	+3 to Spot, Search, and Sense Motive checks
Claws of Zedok (Sp):	Once per day the Chaoshammer may cast bestow curse. This spell is cast as a cleric equal to the Chaoshammer's total divine casting level
Quills (advanced) (Ex):	Must already have "Flesh of the Master" graft. The Chaoshammer may make a melee touch attack with her quills. An opponent hit by the Chaoshammer's quill attack must make a Reflex save (DC 16) or have the quill break off in his or her flesh. A lodged quill inflicts 1d6 points of damage and imposes a -1 circumstance penalty to attacks, saves, and skill checks. Removing the quill deals 1d6 additional points of damage.
Heart of Chaos (Su)	The Chaoshammer is protected as if under the effects of a permanent protection from law spell.

Twist Perspective (Sp): A Chaoshammer's words are seeded with the confusion and chaos of her lord Zedok. A few simple words are enough to confuse and possibly convert even the most pious individual to the profane rites of Zedok. A Chaoshammer may cast the spell *geas* once per day as a spell-like ability. The saving throw DC to resist this ability is equal to 16 plus the Chaoshammer's Wisdom modifier. This ability is a mind-affecting, language-dependent compulsion effect.

Ascendance: At 10th level a Chaoshammer reaches the pinnacle of Reptilian evolution. The Chaoshammer undergoes a metamorphosis, becoming a minor Varn. The Chaoshammer's type changes to Outsider, and she gains all remaining Varn Grafts from Table 4-04. All of her Hit Dice become d8s, even those gained prior to becoming a Chaoshammer. She gains a +4 bonus to her Strength score, +2 to her Constitution, and +2 to her Charisma. The ascendant Chaoshammer gains blindsight with a range of 60 feet and all the benefits and hindrances of being an Outsider (see *Core Rulebook III*).

Crocodile Lord ("Acutus")

The Altherian Patrol slowly wended its way along the west bank of the Kraldjur River, skirting Ssethregoran territory. The grizzled veteran led his patrol,

his gaze darting back and forth between the trees, the water, and the sky overhead. His soldiers, green recruits who had yet to taste the sting of battle, strolled along, much too complacent for the veteran's liking. Stopping the column, he turned to address his troops, but his intent was cut short by a dozen piercing roars issuing from the west. Like scaled ghosts, a score of reptilian warriors burst through the tree line and charged the Altherians. The new recruits retreated under the vicious onslaught, intent on putting their backs against the river behind them. Too late did the old veteran see the bubbles rising from the river. The veteran tried to shout a warning, but his voice was drowned out under the earsplitting screams and roars issuing from the combatants.

As the Altherians fell back against the river bank, the water suddenly erupted in a frenzied wave, drenching the soldiers along the shore. Large scaled forms rose from the murky water, claws flexing in cruel anticipation, sludge dripping from their ivory teeth. Like primordial river monsters, these strange distended ss'resses cut through the recruits like grain, their eerie calls sending even the most experienced soldier into a panic. The Altherian formation broke. Some ran; the rest were ground between the hammer of the charging warriors and the anvil of the Crocodile Lords. The veteran, his troops broken and demoralized, slipped into the jungle. He'd seen this before; it was not the first such ambush, and it would not be the last. With a little luck and Althares' help, perhaps he'd make it home to see his wife and children once more.

"If you really want to understand what carnage is, watch a Crocodile Lord feast."

- Altherian Sharpshooter Marcus Delimias



Table 4-06: Crocodile Lord Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Wild Empathy, Peripheral Vision
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Keeled Tail
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Aquatic Combat
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Mighty Tail
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Amphibious Lifestyle
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Thickened With Age
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Fury of the Beast
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Distended Jaw
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Unsettling Presence
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Crocodile form

The Crocodile Lords are a strange, yet impressive breed of warriors. They have taken it upon themselves to venerate the crocodile and imitate it in every way, shape, and form. To this end they undergo a brutal training regimen and fashion pacts with eldritch powers, merging their own souls with the terrifying creatures that lurk beneath the ancient waterways. Slowly their bodies change: their hides thickening, their limbs and jaws distending, until they in fact can become the very creature they idolize. Crocodile Lords are most often berserkers, taking pleasure from the carnage they cause. They act as aquatic scouts for the Ssethric armies, and contingents of Crocodile Lords have been used as shock troopers. Altherian cities have learned through years of brutal and costly experience to put down fortified grates and nets over any watercourses that enter a city's walls.

Rangers and barbarians most often become Crocodile Lords, with the occasional druid joining as well. Crocodile Lords most often venerate Jeggal Sag, the master of beasts, and from him gain their extraordinary powers, though followers of Kassegore have also been known to join the ranks of the Crocodile Lords

Hit Die: d12.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Crocodile Lord, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Race: any Ss'ressen.

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Alignment: Any non-Lawful

Abilities: Constitution 15 or higher

Skills: Handle Animal 7 ranks, Knowledge (nature) 7 ranks, Survival 7 ranks, Swim 7 ranks

Feats: Dragon Hide

Special: Must have made peaceful contact with a crocodile using the Wild Empathy class ability, or, through the use of natural weapons alone, defeated or subdued a crocodilian in its natural environment.

Class Skills

The Crocodile Lord's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Knowledge (geography) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), Swim (Str), and Survival (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Crocodile Lord prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Crocodile Lord is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, light armor, medium armor, and shields (but not tower shields).

Wild Empathy (Ex): A Crocodile Lord can use body language, vocalizations, and demeanor to improve the attitude of a reptilian creature. This ability functions exactly as the Wild Empathy class feature of a druid (see *Core Rulebook I*) but it only works on reptilian creatures. Levels of Crocodile Lord stack with levels of other classes that grant the Wild Empathy ability, but only when the ability is used to influence reptilian (including Ssethric) creatures.

Peripheral Vision (Ex): The Crocodile Lord slowly begins to manifest the physical accoutrements of the creature it worships. At 1st level the character gains the Peripheral Vision feat as a bonus feat.

Keeled Tail (Ex): Few animals glide with such lethal grace and precision through the murky depths as the crocodile. After a great deal of practice, the Crocodile Lord increases his own swimming skill. The Crocodile Lord receives a +10 circumstance bonus on all Swim checks and can ignore one-half of his normal armor check penalty for purposes of making Swim checks.

Aquatic Combat (Ex): A Crocodile Lord does not suffer penalties to attack while skirmishing in a body of water. He may ignore any penalties to his Armor Class, attack rolls, and damage rolls associated with an aquatic environment when wading through water or while fully submerged. Furthermore, the Crocodile Lord also gains a +1 circumstance bonus to hit and damage while engaged in aquatic combat.

Mighty Tail (Ex): The Ss'ressen are famous for using their tails as weapons of tremendous force, capable of crushing a man's legs like dried winter twigs. This attack becomes even more dangerously brutal when enhanced by the skill and might of the Crocodile Lord. Borrowing from the mastery of both his animal counterpart and his own heritage, the Crocodile Lord augments his natural abilities by adding a +1 bonus to attacks when using his tail, as well as dealing an additional +1d4 hp of damage. The Crocodile Lord must have the Tail Attack feat (or the ability to use his tail as a natural weapon from some other source) to gain the benefits of this ability.

Amphibious Lifestyle (Ex): After rigorous training, the Crocodile Lord aligns his metabolism to the aquatic habitat in which he resides. At 5th level the character gains the Amphibious Lifestyle feat as a bonus feat.

Thickened With Age (Ex): The leathery hide of a Crocodile Lord thickens with age. These thick scales are able to deflect even the most powerful of blows. At 6th level the character gains the Thickened With Age feat as a bonus feat.

Fury of the Beast (Ex): Due to the anatomy of their brains, crocodiles are naturally much more aggressive than most other animals. It is this aggression that fuels much of their reputation as savage predators. When the Crocodile Lord has learned to attune himself to the fighting fury of his animal brethren, he may borrow a fragment of that rage to aid him in combat. Once per day, the Crocodile Lord can manifest a lesser rage. This lesser rage grants a +2 bonus to Strength and Constitution, and a +1 morale bonus on Will saves, but the Crocodile Lord suffers a -1 penalty to his Armor Class. This rage lasts for a number of rounds equal to the Crocodile Lord's newly-improved Constitution score + 3. When the rage ends, the Crocodile Lord becomes fatigued for the remainder of the encounter. The bonuses and penalties granted by this ability stack with those granted by a barbarian's class ability to rage.

Distended Jaw (Ex): Growing closer in physical form to his patron animal, the Crocodile Lord develops a devastating bite attack. At 8th level the character gains the Distended Jaw feat as a bonus feat.

Unsettling Presence (Su): The unrelenting fury of a Crocodile Lord in battle both terrifies and awes opponents. Seizing upon the fear engendered at their presence, the Crocodile Lords often approach their enemies, making intimidating hissing and bellowing noises. To use this ability, a Crocodile Lord selects a single target (who must be within 60 feet and be able to see and hear the Crocodile Lord). The Crocodile Lord then makes an Intimidate skill check. The target must succeed on a Will save with a DC equal to the result of the Crocodile Lord's Intimidate check, or be shaken, suffering -2 penalties to hit, AC, damage, and saves versus the Crocodile Lord's attacks. Should a victim that has failed this Will Save be struck by the Crocodile Lord in melee combat, the penalties suffered by the victim increase to -3. Further strikes do not inflict additional penalties, however. This ability can be used a number of times per day equal to 1 plus the Crocodile Lord's Charisma modifier (if positive). A target that succeeds on the Will save is unaffected by the Crocodile Lord's Unsettling Presence, and remains immune for the next 24 hours. This ability is treated as a mind-affecting fear effect.

Crocodile Form (Su): The pinnacle of the Crocodile Lord's ascension to power is his ability to assume the form of either a Medium or Huge Crocodilian (e.g. Alligator, Crocodile, or Caiman). This ability is in all forms equivalent to the druidic Wild Shape ability, except that it is limited to the animal forms listed above, and can only be used once per day.

Disciple of Jeggal Sag

The old ss'ressen settled himself down before the crackling fire. Age shone on his mottled scales; his black talons were dry and cracked. The smell of wood smoke hung heavily in the air, clinging to his scaly hide in the oppressive humidity. Ringing the old ss'ressen were a group of younglings, barely past their first hunt. They crouched in the twilight, slitted orbs intent on the ancient one squatting before them. The old one's head lifted, and he addressed his youthful audience. "For time eternal our clutch has followed one god then another. First we worshiped the dreaded Kassegore, and now the benevolent Fire Dragon. Throughout all this, we have been led by the Matriarchs, which is as it should be. And yet... there is another option," claimed the old one, his unblinking gaze sweeping the young ones before continuing. "Eons ago, Kassegore created the first of us, but he was a harsh and uncaring god, and left us to fend for ourselves and toil upon the face of Onara. Times were difficult, for we constantly battled against nature. The very beasts of Arcanis revolted in an attempt to destroy us. The

males of our race were forced to become hunters, while the females beseeched Kassegore with pleas for aid. Our cries went unanswered until legend speaks of one who replied to our calling, the first son of Kassegore, the great green-scaled wyrm, Jeggal Sag. Our lord looked down upon us and took pity on our struggle. He descended from the heavens and taught all who would listen. Males, forbidden from joining the clergy of Kassegore, flocked to his words. Jeggal Sag spoke of mastery, of dominance over the natural world, and of protection from those creatures that hunted us. Those first ss'ressen became his pupils, later forming the Disciples of Jeggal Sag, and carrying his words to the outside world. For millennia uncounted, the Disciples toiled, learning at the taloned feet of our ancient master, and perfecting the techniques he taught. It is said that our spirits and those of all creatures, whether crawling, flying, or swimming, were created by Kassegore and share a common bond. It was we, the Disciples of Jeggal Sag, who first leaned to tap into this link and harness its awesome power."

The old ss'ressen concluded his dialogue and rose, making a small gesture with one ancient talon. The silent night came to life as the snapping of branches and the rustling of foliage rattled the surprised audience. The young ss'ressen reached for their weapons, but the old one stayed their hands. From the darkness, a colossal creature shambled into the firelight. Its long, sinuous body was covered in thick, scarred scales; its crocodilian head regarded the audience with an eerie gaze that chilled the bone and froze the spirit. The old ss'ressen stepped forward, his aged hand falling upon its fanged muzzle. Grinning, he hoisted himself onto the creature's broad back, and addressed the awed younglings: "If this is the power you seek, young ones, then come meet me in the Sulphur Pits three days hence, and the ceremonies shall commence."

Leaving the young ones to ponder his offer, Ssceleporous kicked his mount forward and vanished into the shadows of night.

The Disciples of Jeggal Sag represent one of the oldest cults upon the face of Onara. These masters of beasts emerged millennia ago, prior to the arrival of the ssanu or indeed any of the other Ssethric races. The cult prospered in the early centuries, as many males, disgruntled with the gender-specific clergy of Kassegore, flocked to into the cult's open ranks. With the introduction of the other Ssethric races, the cult of Jeggal Sag swelled, for many found the tutelage of the Dragon a welcome boon. The Disciples existed unchallenged for thousands of years until the Giant War, during which the giants called upon the help of the human deities. The Gods sent their Valinor down to hunt and destroy the Dragons. Most were slain, but the great and powerful, the first of Kassegore's children, overpowered the might of the Valinor and were instead forced into deep slumber. In the Kraldjur Morass lies a large and mostly untouched hill, where it is said the body of Jeggal Sag slumbers for an eternity.

In present times, the cult has spread its beliefs across Onara. Members can be found in virtually every ss'ressen clutch and hylis village. The mount where Jeggal Sag is said to lie in stasis has been deemed hallowed ground, and any Disciple may visit the site with impunity. Black Talons (that worship the Master of Beasts) often make the pilgrimage to Kraldjur Morass, and are almost certainly the only members of their clutch granted passage beyond the borders of Ssethregore. The Disciples that reside within the Empire maintain political power through their monopolized control over the territory's bestiaries and hatcheries. This political clout has granted them the exceptional right to worship a non-Varn deity, for only the Disciples of Jeggal Sag know how to control and domesticate many of the fierce drake species used by the Ssethregoran war machine.

Hit Die: d8.

Table 4-07: disciple of Jeggal Sag Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1st	+0	+1	+0	+2	Sign of Jeggal Sag	+1 divine caster level
2nd	+1	+2	+0	+3	Sign of Jeggal Sag	+1 divine caster level
3rd	+1	+2	+1	+3	Wild Shape (+1/day, Large)	+1 divine caster level
4th	+2	+3	+1	+4	Sign of Jeggal Sag	+1 divine caster level
5th	+2	+3	+1	+4	Wild Shape (+2/day), 2nd Animal Companion	+1 divine caster level
6th	+3	+4	+2	+5	Wild Shape (Magical Beast)	+1 divine caster level
7th	+3	+4	+2	+5	Sign of Jeggal Sag	+1 divine caster level
8th	+4	+5	+2	+6	Wild Shape (Huge)	+1 divine caster level
9th	+4	+5	+3	+6	Timeless Body	+1 divine caster level
10th	+5	+6	+3	+7	Sign of Jeggal Sag, 3rd Animal Companion	+1 divine caster level

Requirements

To qualify to become a Disciple of Jeggal Sag, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Race: any Ss'ressen.

Skills: Knowledge (nature) 8 ranks, Survival 8 ranks

Feats: Beastmaster, Animal Mastery

Special: Must be able to cast 2nd-level divine spells, be able to gain an animal companion, and have the Wild Shape class ability

Class Skills

The Disciple of Jeggal Sag's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Listen (Wis), Profession (Cha), Ride (Dex), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Disciples of Jeggal Sag prestige class.

Weapon and Armor

Proficiency: A Disciple of Jeggal Sag is proficient with the following weapons: club, dagger, dart, dha, quarterstaff, scimitar, sickle, shortspear, sling, long spear, scythe, and tulwar. They are also proficient in all manner of natural attacks (claw, bite, and so forth) regardless of the forms they assume. Disciples are proficient with light and medium armors, but are prohibited from wearing metal armor of any type. They are also proficient with all shields (except tower shields), but may not equip shields made out of metal. A Disciple who wears prohibited armor, or carries a metal shield, is unable to cast druidic spells or use any of his supernatural abilities for a period of 24 hours thereafter.

Divine Spell Progression: Disciples of Jeggal Sag continue to advance in divine spellcasting ability. When a new Disciple level is acquired, the character gains new spells per day as if he

had also gained a level in the divine spellcasting class he belonged to before he added the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained. This essentially means that he adds the level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag to the level of his other divine spellcasting class, then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly. If a character had more than one divine spellcasting class before he became a Disciple, he must decide to which class he adds each new level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag for purposes of determining caster level and spells per day.

Sign of Jeggal Sag: By tracing the sigil of his Lord in the air before a creature and using one or more of his daily attempts to rebuke animals (such as those gained through the Beastmaster feat), the Disciple can produce the following effects. The use of any of these abilities is a standard action, but the abilities themselves may require additional actions to use or maintain, as described below.

My Eyes are Yours (Su): Upon attaining his 1st level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the character may use this Sign. By consuming a rebuke attempt and tracing the proper sign, a Disciple links minds with a nearby animal. By concentrating, the Disciple can see through the eyes of the animal, just as if the animal's eyes were his own. This power lasts for 10 minutes plus 1 minute per Disciple class level. The viewing need not be constant; the Disciple may break the link or re-establish it at any point during the duration. Establishing the link requires one full round of concentration.

Nature's Tongue (Su): Upon reaching his 2nd level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the character may employ this Sign. By consuming a rebuke attempt and tracing the proper sign, the Disciple may communicate with a target creature as if he was under the effects of a *speak with animals* spell cast by a druid equal to his total character level.



Our Lord is the Same (Su): Upon reaching his 4th level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the character may utilize this Sign. By spending two rebuke attempts, the Disciple may cast *charm monster* on any animal. This functions exactly as the spell cast by a sorcerer of the Disciple's divine spellcaster level, but the saving throw DC is based on the Disciple's Wisdom score rather than his Charisma score.

Mastery of Beasts (Su): Upon realizing his 7th level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the character may use this Sign. The Disciple's powers now extend over magical beasts as well as normal animals. The Disciple may now use any rebuke attempt or Sign abilities against magical beasts.

Touch of Jeggal Sag (Su): Upon reaching his 10th level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the character may use this Sign. This ability requires three of the Disciple's daily rebuke attempts. By tracing this sign upon the hide of an animal or magical beast, the Disciple grants that creature the blessings of Jeggal Sag. The affected creature is subject to the following spells: *animal growth* and *greater magic fang*, as if the spells had been cast by a 16th-level druid. The Disciple may use this ability upon himself when he is in wild shape form, in which case it requires a full-round action instead of a standard action.

Wild Shape (Su): At 3rd level, the Disciple gains the ability to wild shape one extra time per day, as well as the ability to assume Large forms (this ability functions as that of an 8th-level Druid). At 5th level, the Disciple gains an additional wild shape use per day. At 6th level, the Disciple may take the form of any magical beast of Small, Medium, or Large size. Finally, at 8th level, the Disciple may wild shape into the Huge forms of animals or magical beasts.

Animal Companion (Ex): A Disciple of Jeggal Sag may add his Disciple levels to his druid and/or ranger levels in order to determine the types of animal companions he may attract, as well as for purposes of animal companion advancement. For instance a 5th-level druid / 5th level Disciple may choose an animal companion from the 10th level druid list, or from any of the lower-level lists with the appropriate druid animal companion advancement.

Upon attaining his 5th level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the Disciple begins to form a spiritual link with his animal companion. A 5th level Disciple may *awaken* his animal companion as per the spell, but the Disciple's link to all beasts allows him to keep the creature as an animal companion, even though its type has changed from animal to magical beast. A Disciple may only have one *awakened* companion at any time, no matter how many total animal companions he has.

Also upon attaining his 5th level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the character may attract a second animal companion. This companion acts in all ways as the first, but is chosen from a lower-level list. The Disciple is considered to be 5 levels lower than his normal level for purposes of determining which lists he may choose from, as well as for the advancement of this second animal companion.

Upon reaching his 10th level of Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the character gains a third animal companion. The Disciple is considered to be 10 levels lower than his normal level for purposes of determining which lists he may choose from, as well as for the advancement of this third animal companion.

Timeless Body (Ex): After attaining 9th level as a Disciple of Jeggal Sag, the character no longer suffers ability score penalties for aging, and gains immunity to magical aging effects. Any penalties the character may have already incurred remain. Ability score bonuses for age, however, still accrue, and the Disciple will die of old age when his time comes.

Drakhen

Far above the treetops glided an odd pair. A small mottled brown dot sat astride a vast winged monstrosity. The pair slowly floated on the warm thermals issuing from the jungle below. The scene was almost surreal, as the two reptilian forms seemed to dance as one high above the forest canopy. The awning stretched like a green verdant carpet as far as the rider could see, the tranquility of the scene broken only by the occasional cloud or kurpak lizard soaring from tree to tree.

S'attuas smiled, allowing a toothy grin to part her normally stoic countenance. Flying was always exhilarating, bringing warmth and expectation to her normally cold blood. S'attuas thought back to a time not so long ago, when she was confined to the ground, forced to crawl, like a slug through a marsh; now she was free! After a long and grueling process she had attained the rank of Drakhen, and been allowed to choose her place in the society. She had opted for the dangerous task of advanced scout and had chosen her winged mount. Always waiting to break free from the monotony the ground forced, S'attuas had shunned the normal earth-bound riding drakes and chosen a dragonnel. Notoriously difficult to master, these massive flying reptiles were raised exclusively by the Cult of Jeggal Sag as prized military beasts. Her persistence and ambition had won through, for she was granted the position she sought, and was introduced to her dragonnel, named Scutat.

After months of training, S'attuas found herself gliding effortlessly above the repressive earth, propelled by the strong beats of her trusted mount's leathery wings. Below her, the Elorii-controlled forest spread like a tapestry, her keen ss'ressen eyes locating the Elorii encampments without difficulty. Dutifully, she marked their positions on a map. With her aid, the advance forces would soon sweep through this region, their heavily-armored drake riders lancing into the weak Elorii forces, grinding them between the cavalry and the infantry. "It was simple," she thought to herself, "for the Elorii have stagnated as a culture; they have become predictable. With the new Ssethregoran war machine tweaked and perfected after centuries of refinement, the hated Elorii will soon fall." A sinister smile fell across her battle-scarred face, as she considered the lack of Elorii imagination and evolution. S'attuas spurred Scutat forward, the dragonnel's right wing dipping slightly as the pair spiraled around to gain a closer look at the enemy encampments far below.

The Drakhen represent an elite class of soldiery in Ssethric society. Trained to be one with their reptilian mounts, these selected warriors fulfill numerous roles, from fast-moving aerial scouts to heavily-armored cavalry units. Their sleek reptilian mounts drive fear into warm-blooded opponents wherever they are encountered. All terrestrial-based military units have some form of cavalry, derived mainly from a multitude of different Ssethric mounts, each type commissioned for a specific task. Aerial units are generally utilized for scouting and reconnaissance work, though they can also wreak havoc on any open battlefield where they can swoop down and make use of their superior mobility. A number of specialized Drakhen (usually consisting of pleisauran ranks) are trained for aquatic environs, where they launch swift and deadly raids.

Throughout the entire history of Ssethric society, the Drakhen have played a pivotal role in shaping the field of battle and turning the tides of war. No advantage is too great that it cannot be overcome by the power of the sky above.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Drakhen, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Race: Must be a member of the Ssethric Race

Base Attack Bonus: +5

Feats: Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Animal Affinity

Skills: Handle Animal 8 ranks, Ride 8 ranks

Class Skills

The Drakhen's Class Skills (and the key ability for each Skill) are: Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Jump (Str), Profession (Wis), Ride (Str), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Drakhen prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Drakhen is proficient with all simple weapons, martial weapons, and shields (including tower shields). The Drakhen is proficient with all light, medium, and heavy armors.

Reptilian Mount: Upon attaining the 1st level of Drakhen, a character may choose her preferred type of mount from *Table 8.3 Mounts and Related Gear*. Note that Black Talon Ss'ressen and derivatives thereof have an abbreviated list, also shown on *Table 8.3 Mounts and Related Gear*, and may only take mounts found outside of Ssethregore, such as the cyclura, mor'let, and sc'mat. The Drakhen must reimburse her organization for one-half the chosen mount's usual purchase price.

The Drakhen and her mount begin to form a special bond, for her attentiveness pushes her new companion to new heights, while it maintains a fierce loyalty to its master Drakhen. This initial mount becomes her preferred mount and increases in both size and potency under the Drakhen's care. The preferred mount gains bonus hit dice, natural armor, and Strength, according to the Drakhen's class level. This advancement is shown on *Table 4-08: Drakhen Mount Advancement*.

The Drakhen may only have one preferred mount at any given time. If her original mount is lost or killed in battle, the order will permit her to obtain a replacement, provided that the loss was not due to her neglect or negligence. The replacement mount slowly gains the benefits associated with the Drakhen's level, at the rate of +1 per week in each category, until the full bonuses are reached.

The Drakhen's preferred mount possesses extreme loyalty and will under no circumstance let anyone other than its chosen Drakhen ride it. The Drakhen may convince her mount to carry additional passengers, as long as she herself is riding the mount or leading it.

Table 4-08: Drakhen Mount Advancement Table

Drakhen's Level	Bonus HD	Natural Armor	Str Adjustment
1-2	+1	+1	+1
3-4	+1	+1	+2
5-6	+2	+2	+2
7-8	+2	+2	+3
9	+3	+3	+4
10	+5	+4	+6

Inertial Charge (Ex): A Drakhen quickly learns how to manipulate the weight and momentum of his mount to produce a significant advantage during battle. When a Drakhen exercises a charge action while mounted on his preferred mount, the character may add an inertial charge bonus to the damage dealt by the charge. The initial bonus at 1st level is +1 and increases by +1 for every two Drakhen levels thereafter.

Keening Wail (Ex): As a standard action, the Drakhen may coax her mount into expelling a primal scream of rage and fury. This roar affects all non-Ssethric beings within 30 feet of the Drakhen's mount. Only creatures whose HD are less than or equal to the mount's HD can be affected. Those within the area of effect must succeed on a Will save (DC 10 + one-half the

mount's HD + the mount's Charisma modifier) or suffer the full effects. Creatures with 4 or fewer Hit Dice become panicked for 4d6 rounds and those with 5 or more HD are shaken for 4d6 rounds. Creatures that successfully save are unaffected and are immune to this particular mount's Keening Wail for 24 hours. This ability is treated as a fear effect.

Spirited Charge: Upon attaining 2nd level, the Drakhen gains the Spirited Charge feat.

Their Minds are One (Su): The bonds between rider and mount are unequalled. Upon reaching 5th level the Drakhen and mount can sense each other's moods. An empathic link with a range of 50 feet forms between the Drakhen and her preferred mount. The Drakhen cannot see through her mount's eyes, but the mount can communicate empathetically with its mistress. Due to the limited nature of the link, only base emotions can be felt (such as fear, anger, and hunger.)

Reptilian Partnership (Ex): Over time, a Drakhen and her mount become so attuned to working together that they act as a second pair of eyes for each other. At 8th level, this double-alertness approach pays off, in that when the Drakhen is mounted on her preferred mount, the pair is incredibly hard to surprise. When the Drakhen is riding her preferred mount, the two gain the benefits of the Uncanny Dodge

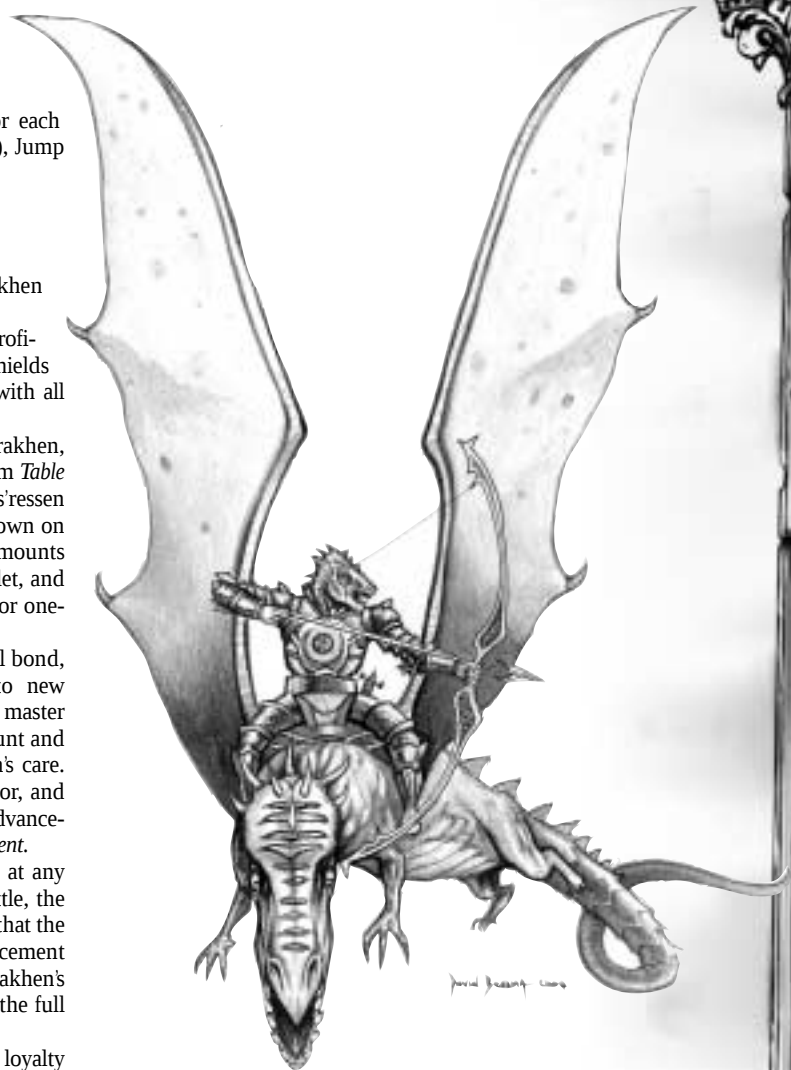


Table 4-09: Drakhen Advancement Table

Class	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Reptilian Mount, Inertial Strike +1
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Keening Wail 1/day, Spirited Charge
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Inertial Strike +2
4th	+4	+4	+4	+1	Keening Wail 2/day
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Inertial Strike +3, Their Minds are One
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Keening Wail 3/day
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Inertial Strike +4
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Keening Wail 4/day, Reptilian Partnership
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Inertial Strike +5
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Keening Wail 5/day, Matched Pair

ability. This allows them to reach to danger before their senses would normally allow them to do so. Both the Drakhen and mount retain their Dexterity modifiers to AC (if any) even if they are caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. Both members of the pair lose this bonus if either one is immobilized, killed, or knocked unconscious.

Matched Pair (Ex): At 10th level, the Draken and her preferred mount have perfected the art of fighting together. They have learned to cover each other's blind spots, in order to maximize their efficiency in battle, while eliminating any weaknesses in the process. Whenever the Drakhen is mounted upon her preferred mount, neither the rider nor the mount can be flanked; they can react to opponents on opposite sides as easily as they can to a single attacker. This defense denies a rogue the ability to sneak attack either member of the pair unless the attacker is a rogue of at least 4 levels higher than the Drakhen's class level.

Ssethric Elementalist

Deep within the twisted passageways of Pit Crotalus, an eerie spectacle was taking place. In the lowest levels of that subterranean dwelling, surrounded by a maze of tunnels, and protected by a myriad of impenetrable traps, there lies a chamber whose very existence is only a rumor. Hidden to all except its creator, the chamber has withstood the test of time and been witness to the mightiest magics since the time of Ss'koreth.

The chamber itself is carved from the living rock, in the unmistakable pattern of a pentagram. Permanent channels etched into the stone, a hand's-span deep, crisscross the room, forming the telltale five-pointed star of an extraplanar gate. Squat black candles, the tallow rendered from the fat of infants, sit in polished platinum scones precisely placed around the room, their flickering light reflecting off the polished granite walls. The walls are lined with dozens of mahogany bookcases, shelves sagging under the weight of antique tomes of knowledge and power.

Surveying this scene from inside an intricate circle of powdered silver stood the master of the chamber, a ssanu ancient beyond compare. His once-lustrous skin was drawn taut over a skeletal frame, brittle like old parchment. Long, thin fingers attached to this emaciated frame held aloft a brittle scroll, yellowed and discolored with age. Yet for all his obvious infirmities, the ssanu's outward appearance belied the truth of the matter; for the old fossil's movements were sure and precise and from his sunken eye sockets glittered two golden orbs that had lost none of the passion of youth. This ssanu was none other than Sengal of Pit Crotalus, possibly one of the oldest creatures on all of Onara, his life magically extended well beyond mortal limits. His knowledge of the arcane is said to

be unrivaled, spanning back for generations, for in his many lifetimes' worth of years he has studied all the written works in the Coiled Tower of Getulus.

That night, Sengal toiled within his inner sanctum, performing a conjuration that had not been attempted for seven thousand years. In his hands were the notes of Ss'koreth, one of the seven Elementalists who created the Elorii in a bygone age. The scrolls represented a lifetime of exploration and hunting in the scattered ruins of Onara, but to Sengal they were more than worth the eight centuries spent in their procurement, for revealed in the warped runes of those dry, cracked pages of marling skin was a ritual like no other. From those dusty pages Sengal intended to conjure an Elemental Lord from the Plane of Fire; a being so immensely powerful that it had the power to grant life itself. Seven millennia had passed since the creation of the hated Elorii, a failed experiment in the eyes of their creators. Now Sengal would summon one of those Lords once more and bring about the rise of a new age.

Full concentration was now required. Sengal pored over the ancient scrolls, words of power rolling off his forked tongue as he swayed and gestured to the points of his circle with intricate precision. With a word, the rare hellyat oils within the trench were set ablaze, the flames racing around to form a brilliant five-pointed star of flickering crimson light. The chanting grew louder and the swaying more intense. The parchment lifted from Sengal's hands to float in front of the ssanu as his dexterous fingers, trailing fire, traced the final runes in the very air itself. With one final syllable that seemed to pierce the very heavens, Sengal stopped and turned toward the pentagram in triumph.

A column of fire soared to the ceiling from within the pentagram, burning more intensely than all the fires in Hell. The flames writhed and whirled as the essence of godhood was dragged into this plane. One final time did the red tendrils of death thrash before becoming still. As Sengal watched, the flames coalesced, revealing a titanic being of terrible presence that defied all mortal abilities of description. Brilliant orbs of pure heat turned to regard the small insignificant life form that had summoned it. A crushing will stretched forward, probing, its touch instant death to any mortal mind. As it pressed forward, amazingly, it discovered... resistance. A barrier had been erected around the insolent mortal. Faster than the light emanating from the being, its mind searched the confines of its enclosure for a crack or seam, but each attempt was thwarted by the perfection of the barrier. The demigod had wasted too much time on this plane already. It turned to leave, but was suddenly filled with a white-hot emotion — curiosity. Why had this puny creature summoned it? Then, it remembered. Remembered a time, long ago, where a similar conduit had been opened and another of its kind had passed through. Intrigued, the Elemental Lord turned to the ssanu and viewed him askance. From the forked tongue of the tiny mortal, words spilled forth in the language of fire. "So, Great Lord, shall we begin? I believe I have a proposition you will find most amusing..."



The Ssethric Elemental is the backbone of the Ssethregoran Empire's arcane might. Specializing in the control of the very elements, Elementalists can incinerate their foes with eldritch blasts of fire, summon a dread creature from another plane of existence, or create an elemental of their own to do their bidding. Elementalists are drawn exclusively from the ranks of the naga and the ssanu. No other race has the inborn familiarity with magic to master such a difficult field.

All Ssethric Elementalists belong to the Black Coil, the powerful mage guild that controls all aspects of arcane magics within the bounds of the Ssethregoran Empire. The Black Coil sends small forces of Elementalists out to lend their devastating talents to military incursions of the highest priority.

Elementalists are broken down into three distinct groups, named after their founders: The Order of Ss'koreth, known as Creationists; the Order of Ophiodes, known as Conjurers; and the Order of Tantilla, known as Augmentalist. These three Orders are self-governing and only interact to combine their magic to further the goals of the Empire or to aid in the Technomancers' latest projects. The Elementalists are known to have been responsible for the creation and importation of dozens of the monsters that now roam Onara and are suspected of having their scaly claws in the origins of many, many more. Ssethric Battle Mages hailing from the Order of Tantilla have turned the tide of more than one conflict and

have been the pivotal force in more wars than can be easily counted.

Elementalists place magic above all else and (in the normal Ssethric fashion) are known for incinerating their own troops as well as the enemy if it will lead to victory.

All three Orders are under the direct control of the masters of the Black Coil and are considered one of the Coil's finest resources.

Hit Die: d4

Requirements

To qualify to become an Elementalist, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Race: Naga or Ssanu

Skills: Knowledge (arcana) 10 ranks, Knowledge (the planes) 10 ranks

Feats: Arcane Tutor

Special: Must be able to cast 3rd-level arcane spells. Must have access to the Evocation school of magic

Class Skills

The Elementalist's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Profession (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Elementalist prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Elementalists gain no additional proficiency with any type of weapons, armor, or

shields.

Arcane Spell Progression: Ssethric Elementalists continue to advance in arcane spellcasting ability. When a new Elementalist level is acquired, the character gains new spells known and/or spells per day as if he had also gained a level in the arcane spellcasting class he belonged to before he added the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (such as bonus metamagic feats). This essentially means that he adds the level of Elementalist to the level of his other arcane spellcasting class, then determines spells known, spells per day, and caster level accordingly. If a character had more than one arcane spellcasting class before he became an Elementalist, he must decide to which class he adds each new level of Elementalist for purposes of determining caster level, spells known, and spells per day. For purposes of familiar advancement, Ssethric Elementalist levels do stack with class levels of arcane spellcasting classes that gain familiars.

Elemental Mastery: An Elementalist begins her career by choosing a particular energy type from Table 4-10: *Elemental Mastery*, representing her expertise in the field. She then gains the Elemental Mastery feat in the same elemental type. The Elementalist may never change her chosen element type.

Table 4-10: Elemental Mastery

Chosen Element Type	Associated Elemental Damage Type
Air	Lightning
Earth	Acid
Fire	Fire
Water	Cold

Elemental Resistance (Su): The everyday rigors of dealing with her chosen element and her detailed knowledge of its effects have forged a natural resistance to that particular type of energy in the Elementalalist. Starting at 2nd level, the Elementalalist gains energy resistance of 10 against energy damage dealt by her chosen element type. The Elementalalist ignores the first 10 points of damage inflicted from any attack dealing damage associated with her chosen element type. For example, an Elementalalist who has chosen the element of air would ignore the first 10 points of damage inflicted from any electricity-based attack. This resistance is applied after all applicable saving throws are made.

The character's elemental resistance increases in potency as she increases in levels of Elementalalist, as shown on *Table 4-11: The Ssethric Elemental*, cumulating in a total immunity to the chosen energy type upon reaching 10th level in this class.

Bonus Elemental Feats: Elementalists represent the pinnacle of millennia of arcane research into the various elemental forces. As a consequence, three specialized groups of Elementalists have appeared: the Conjurer, the Creationist, and the Augmentalist. Upon reaching 3rd level as an Elementalalist, the student must choose one of these three tracks to continue her education and training. Each track has its own bonus feats associated with it. Once a track is chosen, the Elementalalist may choose any feat off that track's bonus feat list as long as she meets the prerequisites. Once a track is chosen, it may not be altered or switched. Any desire to do so usually results in the death of the Elementalalist, as other Elementalists of the same track jealously guard their secrets and kill any who threaten the balance.

The three tracks and their associated feats are shown below:

Conjurer: A Conjurer is the master of calling extraplanar creatures and binding them to do her bidding. Conjurers tend to be arrogant (but charismatic) individuals with a strong sense of self-importance. Conjurers often escort military excursions, summoning powerful eldritch forces from the elemental planes to fall upon the foes of the Ssethregoran Empire. A Conjurer chooses her bonus feats from the following list: Elemental Familiar, Control Elemental, Elemental Compulsion, Elemental Domination, Elemental Foothold, and Elemental Augmentation.

Creationist: A Creationist is an Elementalalist who specializes in creating elemental beings. This type of Elementalalist arose just before the Il'huan War. At that time, the Elementalists were expending huge amounts of energy in summoning extraplanar elementals to help with the expansion of the Empire. The Empire deemed that the Elementalists needed a way to create elementals that were bound to this plane and did not depart when their task was done. To this end, the Creationists were born. Since that time, along with the help of the Technomancers, they have created some of the most impressive works of arcane might, including the Hussuma and the Elorii. The greatest of their number was Ss'koreth, creator of the Elorii, who was perhaps the most powerful Elementalalist of all time. His staff is one of the most sought-after relics of the Ssethregoran Empire. Creationists select their bonus feats from the following list: Craft Minor Elemental, Craft Elemental, Craft Major Elemental, Craft Greater Elemental, and Master of Elementals.

Augmentalist: The Augmentalist are perhaps the oldest group of Elementalists, stretching their rich heritage back to the great migration and subsequent war with the formorians. Augmentalist specialize in enhancing their own elemental magic type, making their spells more powerful and deadly. Often referred to as "Sanu Battle Mages" by the warm-bloods, the Augmentalist are a primal force to be reckoned with on any battlefield. Augmentalist chose their bonus feats from the following list: Elemental Expertise, Elemental Maximization, Empower Elements, Elemental Amplification, Elemental Taint, and Might of the Elements.

Table 4-11: The Ssethric Elemental Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	Elemental Mastery	+1 arcane caster level
2nd	+1	+0	+1	+3	Elemental Resistance 10	+1 arcane caster level
3rd	+1	+1	+1	+3	Bonus Elemental Feat	+1 arcane caster level
4th	+2	+1	+1	+4	Elemental Resistance 15	+1 arcane caster level
5th	+2	+2	+2	+4	Bonus Elemental Feat	+1 arcane caster level
6th	+3	+2	+2	+5	Elemental Resistance 20	+1 arcane caster level
7th	+3	+3	+2	+5	Bonus Elemental Feat	+1 arcane caster level
8th	+4	+3	+3	+6	Elemental Resistance 30	+1 arcane caster level
9th	+4	+4	+3	+6	Bonus Elemental Feat	+1 arcane caster level
10th	+5	+4	+3	+7	Elemental Immunity	+1 arcane caster level

Harbinger

In the darkened chamber deep below the surface of the earth, there stood a lone figure partially lit by the ruddy light of a few dying embers. The corpses of a dozen stalwart defenders lay broken at his feet, while the shattered remains of the fallen clutch's future were strewn about recklessly. In the background, far off, could be heard the cries of battle, as the forces of Ssethregore assaulted the human city of Semar. Deep within the hatching chamber of the Flame Tongue ss'ressen stood Ssauromalus, triumphant, his burnished plate armor spattered with the gore and entrails of a hard-won battle. Ssauromalus raised one of the last remaining eggs, crushing it in his taloned hand and letting the rich contents drip out to flow into his toothy maw. Half-dazed, his eyes glazed over with feverish delight, Ssauromalus gorged himself upon the enemy's eggs. Slowly, like a sleeper roused from a vivid dream, the sounds of footfalls awoke him from his joyous trance. Looking over his shoulder, he spied three figures just as they burst into the room. Verdant green scales adorned their bodies, covered in a protective coat of mail. As the figures surveyed the room, a hiss of despair escaped their reptilian jaws, their eyes fixing upon Ssauromalus. Despair turned to hatred, as they watched the last egg of that generation slide down the gullet of the intruder. Talons tightened around both axe and sword, and with a roar of inarticulate fury, the three charged Ssauromalus. The Harbinger smiled,

the blood of the dead young still dripping down his cheek, before raising his weapon, a massive double-edged sword, and slowly wading into the fray.

Weapons flashed in the firelight, limbs were hacked away, and screams of pain and death filled the night. When it was all over, Ssauromalus stood atop three more dead foes, clutching his bleeding ribs. A stray axe had staved in his breastplate and shattered some of the bones below. The Harbinger was content, however, for he had completed his mission and this small branch of the Flaming Tongue ss'ressen egg clutch would bother his people no more. Crawling from the hatching chamber and stumbling out of the encampment, Ssauromalus turned to limp back to his own people. Later that night, as the sun began to redden the eastern sky, he passed into his own camp inside the camp of the human army outside Semar. The few humans who saw him pass wondered if he was the reason their Black Talon allies were celebrating so loudly that night.

Harbingers play a vital role in ss'ressen society. They are the champions of justice in the communities, leading armies against hated rival clutches. Due to millennia of selective breeding and manipulation by the ssanu, the ss'ressen egg clutches of today harbor an incredible level of hatred for one another. The mere sight or scent of a member of a different egg clutch is enough to send most ss'ressen into a blood-thirsty, berserk rage. The Harbinger represents the epitome of this rivalry. They see it as their duty to smash enemy ss'ressen, and deem the best way to do this is to destroy the problem at its root: the eggs. Whereas some humans might see this as genocide, the Harbingers see it as survival and defense of their own clutch. Good-aligned Harbingers see it as a way to destroy the danger inherent in a rival clutch before their own clutch is harmed, while Neutral Harbingers seek to maintain the balance of power between the different egg clutches. Although their primary goal is the extermination of other egg clutches and the slaughter of unborn younglings, Harbingers never see their own actions as evil; and indeed, from their society's point of view, they are doing what they do for the greater good of their clutch.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Harbinger, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Race: any Ss'ressen.

Race: Any ss'ressen

Base Attack Bonus: +6

Feats: Alertness

Special: Must possess the ability to smite evil or smite good, and must possess a class ability that grants immunity to fear effects.

Class Skills

The Harbinger's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Jump (Str), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Knowledge (local: ss'ressen society) (Int), Ride (Str), Sense Motive (Wis), Survival (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

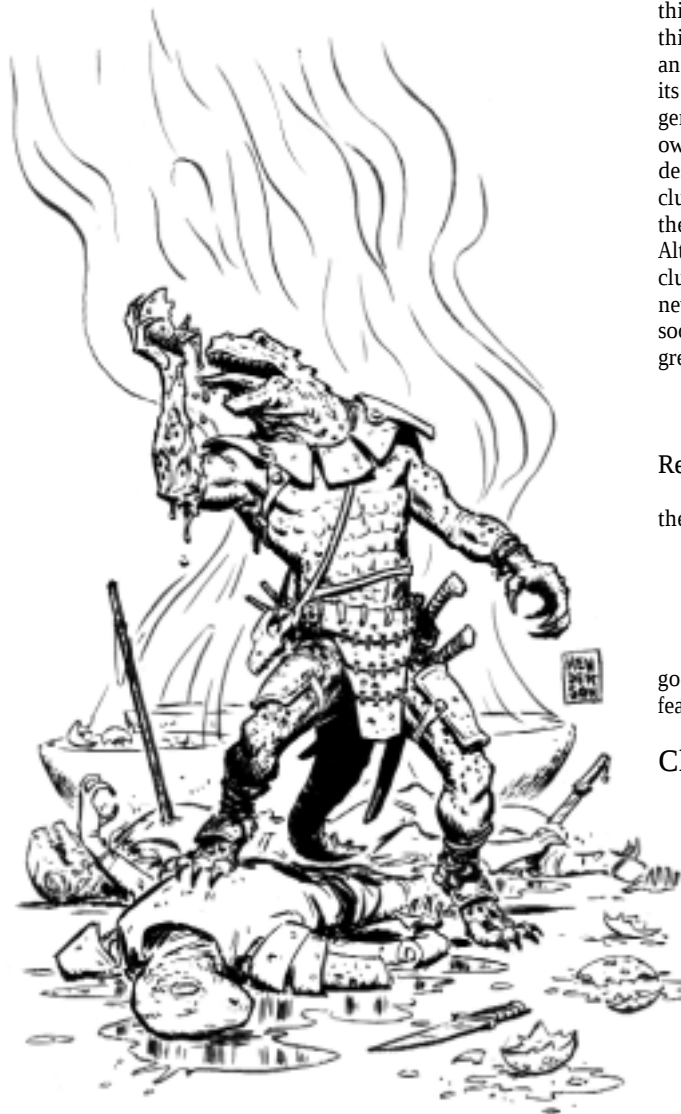


Table 4-12: Harbinger Advancement Table

Class	Base Attack	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
Level	Bonus	Save	Save	Save	
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Track, Endurance
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Focus Frenzy
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Scent
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Smite Ss'ressen
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Feast Upon the Enemy

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Harbinger:

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Harbinger is proficient with all simple weapons, marital weapons, and shields (including tower shields). The Harbinger is proficient with all light, medium, and heavy armors.

Track: The Harbinger focuses his training on following the enemy no matter where it may go. A 1st level Harbinger gains Track as a bonus feat.

Endurance: The Harbinger prides himself on the ability to run all day without becoming fatigued, smash an enemy egg clutch, and make his way back home before mess is called, all without breaking a sweat. A 1st level Harbinger gains Endurance as a bonus feat.

Focus Frenzy (Ex): A Harbinger's hatred for ss'ressen not of his own clutch is nurtured to near-fanatical levels. Whenever a Harbinger runs across a ss'ressen of a rival egg clutch (any egg clutch that would normally produce a Frenzy effect), the Harbinger flies into a fury, gaining double the normal benefits. The Harbinger may try to resist the Frenzy per the normal rules for doing so, but the DC to resist increases by 2 per Harbinger class level.

Scent: A Harbinger's olfactory sense is tuned to the odor of rival egg clutches. Upon reaching 3rd level, the Harbinger gains Scent as a bonus feat.

Smite Ss'ressen (Su): The animosity within the Harbinger towards opposing egg clutches has risen to the point of deadly ire. Upon reaching 4th level, the Harbinger may use his existing smite abilities against any ss'ressen not of his own clutch, regardless of that ss'ressen's alignment. The Harbinger also gains one additional smite per day of any one type he previously possessed. (If the Harbinger has two or more different smite abilities, he may choose only one, to which the bonus use per day is added.)

To Feast Upon The Enemy (Ex): The epitome of a Harbinger's existence is to destroy an enemy's eggs and feast upon them, thereby robbing that clutch of its next generation. When a Harbinger of 5th level destroys the eggs of a rival clutch and then immediately eats some (or all) of the eggs, the Harbinger falls into a euphoric state, gaining a boost to morale and a surge of adrenaline. As a consequence, the Harbinger gains 5d10 temporary hit points. These hit points remain until lost or until a period of time has elapsed equal to 1 hour + 10 minutes per egg destroyed. The Harbinger has to actively participate in the destruction of the rival egg clutch to gain these benefits; he cannot simply carry around an egg from a rival clutch and eat it at his whim.

With a roar of smoke and flame, the heavy lead projectile sped through the air, striking the lead troglodyte just above the heart. With the Sergeant's signal, the rest of the company opened fire, raining death down upon the slowly advancing horde. A ragged cheer erupted from the fortress's defenders, but just as quickly died away as the smoke cleared.

"It can't be!" thought the sergeant, as he regarded the scene below him in utter disbelief. "It's impossible." Below, the horde of strange troglodytes marched on, seemingly unaffected by the fusillade of flintlock fire that had just been unleashed by the Altherians. In the light of the setting sun, their strange hides glittered black. A massive Agamassi Lieutenant, resplendent in his glittering scale mail, blew upon a huge brazen horn and ordered the horde forward. The strange ironclad troglodytes reached the gate as all hell broke loose. Human blades bent and twisted upon the iron-wrapped hides and bullets ricocheted off of thick armor plating. Inexorably, the metal-clad juggernauts marched forward, grinding the soft, weak human defenders into a bloody pulp under their taloned feet.

Ironscale are strange armored servants of the Ssethregoran Empire. By undergoing twisted grafts and modifications by the Ssanu Technomancers, an aspiring member of this class is fitted with all manner of modifications designed to thwart the hated Altherian Sharpshooters.

An Ironscale can be of any Ssethric race, but this class is preferred by the battle-hungry troglodytes and ss'ressen. The Technomancers of Ssethregore have developed a strange parasitic barnacle that thrives on blood. These strange biotech creatures are grown in huge vats, nurtured in a solution that is rich in dissolved iron ore. Upon achieving a certain size, the parasites are removed and affixed to the hide of an Ironscale candidate, where they burrow into the flesh of the recipient with hundreds of tiny feelers and anchor themselves to his skeleton. Once affixed, they continue to grow, feeding off the lifeblood of the host creature, acting as a symbiotic parasite, providing incredibly power armor at the expense of blood loss and constant pain. This process creates the Ironscale.

An Ironscale's hide is covered in thick growths that form iron plates, restricting movement and making the wearing of armor impossible. Even without armor, the parasites provide unmatched protection for their host. As the parasites burrow into their host and grow, they cause excruciating pain. Eventually the Technomancers must perform exacting surgeries that cut the nerve receptors for pain from the Ironscale's brain, making him immune to pain of all sorts. At that level the Ironscale is practically invincible, making these horrific creations the perfect shock troopers for the ambitious Ssethregoran Empire.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become an Ironscale, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Race: Must be a member of the Ssethric Race

Ironscale

The Altherian raised his rifle, the sights coming to rest upon the torso of the foremost creature.

"Rest in hell, you misbegotten spawn of a snake," the Sharpshooter muttered to himself, as he pulled the trigger.

Table 4-13: Ironscale Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Iron Parasites, Natural Armor (+8)
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Damage Reduction 1/-
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Reduced Critical (-1)
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Natural Armor (+10)
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Sever Pain Receptors
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Damage Reduction 2/-
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Natural Armor (+12)
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Reduced Critical (-2)
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Damage Reduction 3/-
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Iron Body, Natural Armor (+14)

Base Attack Bonus: +6

Feats: Toughness, Endurance

Special: The character must be a subject of the Ssathregoran Empire and willingly give himself to the Technomancers for modification and experimentation.

Class Skills

The Ironscale's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Jump (Str), Profession (Wis), Ride (Str), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Ironscale prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: An Ironscale is proficient with all simple weapons, martial weapons, and shields (including tower shields). Due to the ever-changing hide of an Ironscale, they may not wear armor of any type. They do not lose any existing armor proficiencies, but there is no type of armor that can be fitted over the parasitic growths that comprise the Ironscale's new exoskeleton.

Iron Parasites: The Ironscale's body has been infested with symbiotic iron parasites, which feed off of the host's bodily fluids. These parasites grant the Ironscale a +8 natural armor bonus to Armor Class. As the parasites spread, this bonus increases to +10 at 4th level, +12 at 7th level, and +14 at 10th level. The restrictive nature of the parasites reduces the host's base movement rate by 10 feet.

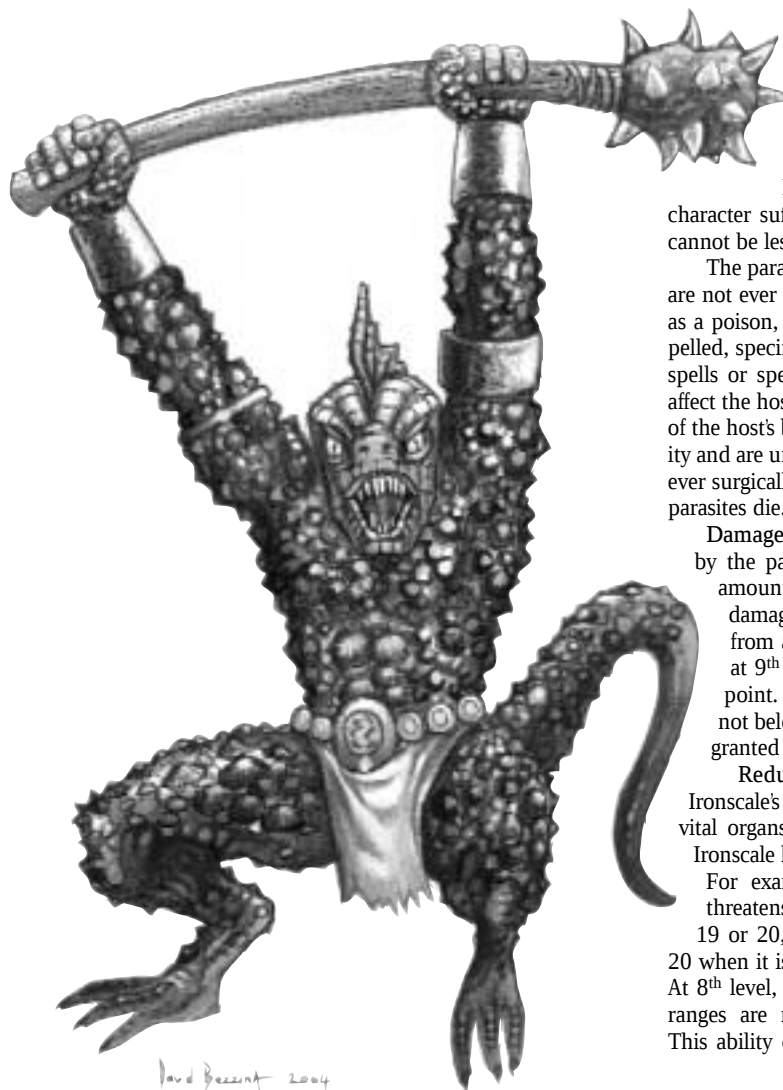
Due to the bulk of the iron-plated growths, the character suffers a permanent -4 armor check penalty, which cannot be lessened or negated in any fashion.

The parasites are considered part of the host creature. They are not ever treated as a separate creature, nor are they treated as a poison, disease, or curse. They cannot be dismissed, dispelled, specifically targeted, or otherwise separately affected by spells or spell-like abilities (other than those that target and affect the host creature). The parasites become an intrinsic part of the host's body, so they are considered an extraordinary ability and are unaffected by areas of anti-magic. If the parasites are ever surgically removed from the host organism, both host and parasites die.

Damage Reduction (Ex): The thick iron plating provided by the parasites allows the Ironscale to shrug off a small amount of damage from every blow. Subtract 1 from the damage the Ironscale takes each time he is dealt damage from a weapon or natural attack. At 6th level and again at 9th level, the Ironscale's damage reduction rises by 1 point. Damage reduction can reduce damage to zero, but not below zero. This ability stacks with damage reduction granted by other classes, such as barbarian.

Reduced Critical (Ex): The metallic nature of the Ironscale's hide makes it virtually impossible to target his vital organs. At 3rd level, any weapon used against an Ironscale has its critical threat range reduced by 1.

For example, a longsword, which normally threatens a critical hit on a natural roll of 19 or 20, only threatens on a natural 20 when it is used against an Ironscale. At 8th level, all weapons' threat ranges are reduced by 2. This ability can



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never reduce a weapon's critical range to the point where it can no longer score a critical hit; in other words, all weapons still threaten a critical threat on a natural 20.

Sever Pain Receptors (Ex): Upon reaching 5th level the parasites cause such excruciating pain to their Ironscale host that the Technomancers must perform surgery to remove pain receptors from the host's brain. This makes the Ironscale immune to pain and all pain effects, and grants the Ironscale the benefits of the Diehard feat. The surgery also permanently reduces the host's Intelligence by 2 points.

Iron Body (Ex): Upon reaching 10th level, the Ironscale is so consumed by the parasites that he becomes more similar to a machine than a living being. His Intelligence is reduced by 4 points, but he gains immunity to critical hits and nonlethal damage, plus acid resistance 20.

Laksiri

The naga reclined on its divan, scales rasping together as the old snake settled. A human slave, quite young and beautiful by warm-blood standards, knelt before it and silently turned the pages of the dusty grimoire floating before the green-scaled naga. It was the slave's eyes, though, that drew the watcher's attention; the orbs were frozen and dead, a stark look of terror permanently etched into her childlike face. The watcher stood in silence, studying the complacent old serpent as it lazily read from its arcane tome. The snake-man was powerfully built, with a humanoid head atop a massive serpentine torso. The naga's tail swished slowly across the marble floor, stirring up dust that held the musty smell of the ages past. The motes of dust filtered down through rays of light shining from the skylight high above.

The watcher chose this moment to slide into the room, easily slicing through the arcane defenses that ringed the chamber. The girl's eyes alighted on the intruder's slight form and widened in surprise. The naga, noticing her reaction, acted within a spit second, whipping its head around to state at the interloper. Before the great serpent stood a diminutive figure, barely reaching three feet, swathed head to toe in a patched harlequin cloak. Only the tip of its reddish reptilian muzzle could be seen thrust out of the hood as the intruder slowly walked across the floor.

The Spirit Naga rose to its full height, towering over the intruder's tiny form. "YOU DARE ENTER MY PRI-

VATE CHAMBERS? The penalty for this is DEATH!" roared the enraged naga. "I shall flay the flesh from your body! I shall reduce your bones to powder! I shall drink the blood from the sockets of your skull!" As the last of these polished threats escaped the serpent's tongue, the Naga began to cast its most dire incantation. It raised its head and began to sway from side to side, uttering the spidery language of magic,

determined to reduce the interloper into a bubbling puddle of unrecognizable slime.

The cloaked form regarded the naga impassively. Then, he began to smile; a thin crack escaped his lips, revealing needle-like teeth within his doglike muzzle. As the arcane energies whirled about the great naga, a tiny claw emerged from under the harlequin cloak. With a deft flick, the naga's spell began to unravel, the energies slipping through the serpent-man's grasp. The naga's eyes widened with fear as it realized what it faced: one of the dreaded Laksiri. Rapidly, the naga began to cycle through its attacks, alternating from one deadly spell to another, but each one was undone as the first had been. Grinning openly now, the tiny invader raised his arms into the air and began his own incantation. The naga fell back, seeking cover, but it was too late. Green fire swept over its sinuous body, burning through flesh and searing bone. Screaming in agony, the naga collapsed, its smoldering corpse breaking apart as it hit the floor.

Surveying the carnage, the Laksiri slipped his hands back into his cloak and turned toward the door, then suddenly stopped. It had been a long battle and he had missed a meal earlier in preparation. "Besides," the figure thought to himself, "I'm not supposed to leave any survivors." Running his forked tongue over his pointed teeth, the Laksiri spun around and began to slowly walk towards the human slave cowering in the corner...

The Laksiri represent a specialized organization within the Mages' Guild of Ssethregore. Within the convoluted passages of their eldritch tower, promising students born with the gift of sorcery are trained to become deadly mage-assassins, the Laksiri. Laksiri spend years in rigorous training, honing their arcane skills toward the purpose of countering an opponent's magic and turning it against him. The training regimen is brutal and demanding, and most often fatal, for it requires single-minded dedication to the organization. Upon attaining the rank of Laksiri, the student is elevated to a position of power, always allied with the Ssanu Pit that sponsored his or her training. Many of the Laksiri act as cold-blooded killers, eliminating a pit's rivals. Others are tasked to serve as bodyguards, protecting high-ranking ssanu from rival pits' assassination attempts.

The Laksiri are fiercely loyal to the pit that sponsored them, for the Laksiri enjoy a high social standing in Ssethregoran society, far above what their race could normally attain.

The ranks of the Laksiri are comprised mainly of kobolds, ss'ressen, and even a few troglodytes that display a penchant for sorcery early in their lives. Taken from their breeding chambers, Laksiri initiates are brainwashed from childhood to blindly follow the orders of the pit that found them and sponsored their training. Curiously, the kobold race comprises the majority of the Laksiri, for of all the lesser races they produce the most sorcerous offspring. The organization itself is not limited to sor-

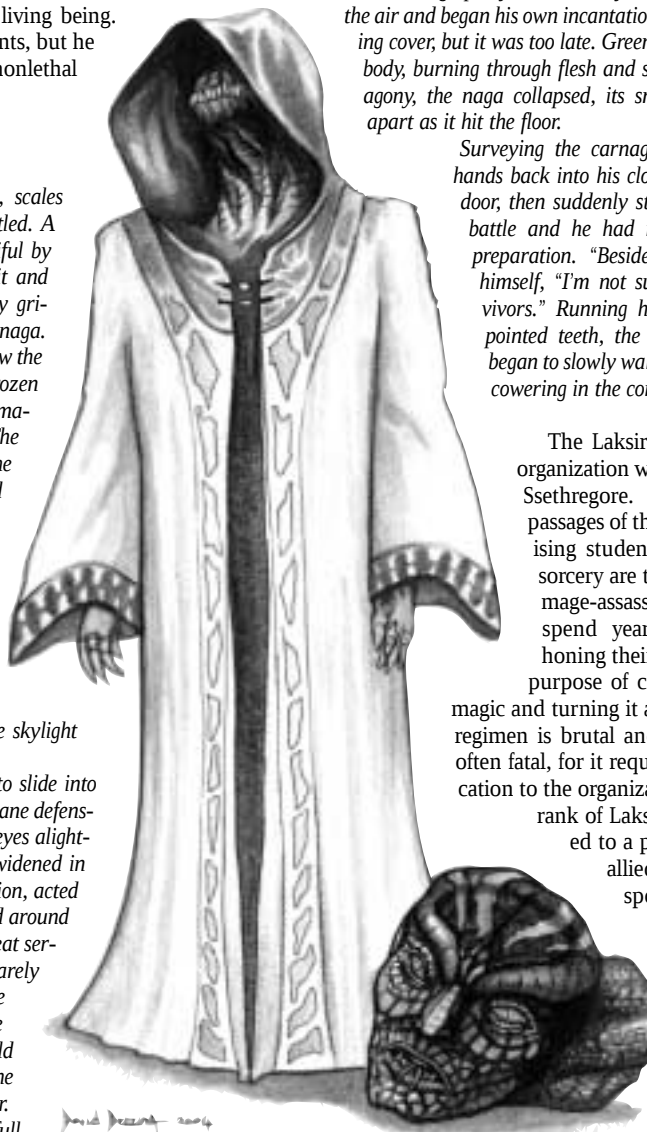


Table 4-14: Laksiri Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1st	+0	+0	+1	+2	Counterspelling Adept	+1 arcane caster Level
2nd	+0	+0	+1	+3	Spell Buffer +1	+1 arcane caster Level
3rd	+1	+1	+2	+3	Spell Penetration	+1 arcane caster Level
4th	+1	+1	+2	+4	Spell Buffer +2	+1 arcane caster Level
5th	+2	+2	+3	+4	Quickened Counterspell	+1 arcane caster Level
6th	+2	+2	+3	+5	Spell Buffer +3	+1 arcane caster Level
7th	+3	+3	+4	+5	Greater Spell Penetration	+1 arcane caster Level
8th	+3	+3	+4	+6	Spell Buffer +4	+1 arcane caster Level
9th	+4	+4	+5	+6	Arcane Spell Resistance	+1 arcane caster Level
10th	+4	+4	+5	+7	Reverse the Flow, Spell Buffer +5	+1 arcane caster Level

cerers; a few ssanu and naga wizards hold high-ranking positions within the guild, but a sorcerer's adaptability makes this class the best-suited to the rigors of Laksiri training.

The Laksiri are an integral part of society and are respected and feared by all but the most powerful mages. Any Laksiri showing signs of wavering loyalty is slain immediately by his superiors, for the Laksiri are particularly dangerous to the naga and ssanu castes. Laksiri are kept under constant surveillance, watched carefully for any sighs of free thought that could lead to rebellion. If it were ever to become uncontrolled, the Laksiri organization could well lead to the downfall of one or both of the ruling castes, and they both know it. Currently, the organization's usefulness outweighs its inherent danger to the system.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Laksiri, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Race: Kobold, Ss'ressen, Ssanu, Naga, or Troglodyte.

Skills: Concentration 9 ranks, Knowledge (arcana) 8 ranks

Special: Must be able to cast 3rd-level arcane spells. Laksiri must be sponsored by a specific Pit, and must undergo training in Gendja Tower, home of the Ssethregoran Mages' Guild.

Class Skills

The Laksiri's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Alchemy (Int), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Hide (Dex), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (assassin) (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Laksiri prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Laksiri gains no additional armor or weapon proficiencies.

Arcane Spell Progression: A Laksiri continues to advance in his chosen arcane casting tradition, albeit a bit slower than normal. See Table 4-14: *Laksiri Advancement Table* for the class levels at which the Laksiri gains an additional arcane spellcaster level. When a new caster level is acquired, the character gains new spells known and/or spells per day as if he had also gained a level in the arcane spellcasting class he belonged to before he added the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (such as bonus metamagic feats). This essentially means that he adds one to the level of his other arcane spellcasting class, then determines spells known, spells per day, and caster level accordingly. If a character had more than one arcane spellcasting class before he became a Laksiri, he must decide to which class he

adds each new level gained as a result of this prestige class for purposes of determining caster level, spells known, and spells per day. For purposes of familiar advancement, Laksiri caster levels do stack with class levels of arcane spellcasting classes that gain familiars.

Counterspelling Adept: The brutal training regime of the Laksiri has taught him how to foil all but the most powerful spellcasters. A Laksiri gains the Counterspelling Adept feat at first level.

Spell Buffer (Su): Through constant exposure to arcane energies, the Laksiri have built up a natural resistance to magic. Upon reaching 2nd level, a Laksiri gains a +1 bonus on any saving throw against spells or spell-like abilities (arcane and divine only). This bonus increases by +1 at every even-numbered class level, topping out at +5 by 10th level.

Spell Penetration: A Laksiri's knowledge of magical energies allows him to exploit the weaknesses in an enemy's magical defense. At 3rd level, a Laksiri gains the Spell Penetration feat. Upon reaching 7th level, he gains the Greater Spell Penetration feat.

Quickened Counterspell: Upon reaching 5th level, a Laksiri has become so proficient at counterspelling opponents' magics that he can do so without a second thought. The Laksiri gains the Quickened Counterspelling feat.

Arcane Spell Resistance (Ex): The Laksiri's mind and body are as one, able to resist even the most potent arcane energies used against him. Upon reaching 9th level, a Laksiri gains arcane spell resistance of 10 plus his total arcane caster level. (All class levels of classes that grant arcane spells stack for the purpose of calculating this spell resistance, even if the class levels do not normally stack with one another.) This spell resistance only works against arcane energies and does not function against divine spells or psionic powers.

Reverse the Flow (Su): The most skilled Laksiri are masters of manipulating arcane energies. Whenever a 10th-level Laksiri successfully counterspells an opponent's spell, there is a 25% chance that the spell is turned back upon the caster, just as if the spell had been successfully cast and then affected by *spell turning*.

Order of the Iridescent Scales

The young ss'ressen smiled to himself from his observation post on a rocky outcropping high above the trail. Below him, hordes of trogs, fresh from the swamps of the Empire, were marching in formation toward the battle ahead, totally oblivious of their dire predicament. One of the ss'ressen's cold eyes rolled back toward his companion, another young ss'ressen, her iridescent green

Table 4-15: Order of the Iridescent Scale Advancement Table

Class	Base Attack	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
Level	Bonus	Save	Save	Save	
1st	+0	+1	+1	+1	Monk Abilities, Long Stride +10 ft, Quick Defenses
2nd	+1	+2	+2	+2	Uncanny Dodge
3rd	+2	+2	+2	+2	Speed is My Ally, Long Stride +20 ft
4th	+3	+3	+3	+3	Induced Visions (1/day)
5th	+3	+4	+4	+4	Spring Attack, Ki Strike (Lawful), Long Stride +30 ft
6th	+4	+4	+4	+4	Improved Uncanny Dodge
7th	+5	+5	+5	+5	Talon Storm, Long Stride +40 ft
8th	+6	+6	+6	+6	Improved Evasion, Induced Visions (2/day)
9th	+6	+6	+6	+6	Rapid Charge, Long Stride +50 ft
10th	+7	+7	+7	+7	Onslaught, Long Stride +60 ft

scales shining in the setting sun. The male's ebony claws flexed in anticipation, and with an impatient flick of his tail he gestured for her to be ready. This would be their first combat mission in hostile enemy territory and his blood seethed with anticipation. With a nod, the two ss'ressen burst into action, their sinuous bodies hurtling over the cliff, long black talons digging into the side of the edifice to slow their fall. With an inarticulate cry, the two forms plunged straight into the middle of the troglodyte formation, inciting panic and confusion in the ranks. Whirling tails snapped thick trog bones and whirling claws eviscerated soft trog underbellies, leaving a bloody mess of entrails where the enemy had once stood. Like lightning the two ss'ressen struck, tearing a wide hole in the enemy ranks in the confusion of their descent.

The Barbed Tail commander began to shout orders rallying his troglodyte minions, but no matter how quickly any of the trogs could react, the two young ss'ressen were quicker. In a surreal, morbid dance, the two monks wormed and darted their way through the trog ranks, slaying all that came within reach of their whirling claws. As quick as it began, the battle was over. The two ss'ressen disappeared into the surrounding woodlands, leaving the carrion birds to finish their work. The few remaining trogs looked at the shredded corpse of their commander and lost their nerve, breaking apart into small bands and striking out into the wilderness, disorganized and vulnerable.

From their new vantage point, the two ss'ressen smiled with toothy grins and proceeded to clean their claws. They watched as the scattering force of troglodytes fled, rejoicing at the sight of their enemy's spirit broken. Looking toward the horizon, they could see the city of Semar burning in the night. Above the city proper loomed the human citadel, still standing resolute against the countless hordes of Ssethregore. Rising once more, the two ss'ressen set out to find their companions and rejoin their mission. The human city was of minimal importance; they had another, more important, objective to attend to this night.

The Order of the Iridescent Scales is a relatively new organization upon the face of Onara and a first among the reptilian cultures. The origins of the Order date back to the Black Talons' early settlement of the Sulphur Marsh and their subsequent exposure to the Milandisian culture of the warm-bloods. Intrigued by the contemplative nature of the human monks they encountered, a small group of ss'ressen under the leadership of a young priestess set out to form their own monastic organization. Based in the rolling hills on the western edge of the Sulphur Marsh, the Order of the Iridescent Scales occupies a shallow cave system extending toward the human city of Ashvan. There the monks discovered a rare herb called "Belladonna," which when ingested by a ss'ressen

induced a state of euphoria and a deep meditative trance. These herbs also engendered vivid visions during the meditative state, often revealing some portent or other image of the future. The Order began to cultivate the plant and use it in all of their meditations, gaining insight on people, places, and events that might affect the user's life in some way. The herb had the interesting side effect of giving the green scales of the ss'ressen an emerald-like sheen, making them immediately distinguishable from their Black Talon relations. Interestingly, when the new Order offered the plants to human monks, the monks refused, saying the plant was deadly poison to humans.

The Order has evolved from a few curious ss'ressen into a thriving monastic tradition. It is the only purely ss'ressen monastery, for there are no known monastic orders of any kind in the depths of Ssethregore. The Monks of the Order of the Iridescent Scales follow a strict creed. They believe that the Great Fire Dragon has gifted them with tail, talon, and tooth, and that these natural weapons should be embraced above all others. The Monks of the Order shun all weapons they were not born with and refuse to wear any armor, trusting in their natural hides to protect them. Their training builds off of their natural abilities, making them one of the deadliest groups in all of the Known Lands. They are quick, skilled, and efficient, wading into battle and leaving just as quickly, their guerrilla tactics confounding all but the most organized enemy.

Philosophy: It was the Great Fire Dragon who led us out of slavery and into the Promised Land. The Fire Dragon gifted us with the means to defend ourselves from attack. Why then, should we take up the weapons of man and trap ourselves inside of useless armor? All that we need was given to us when we were hatchlings.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Monk of the Order of the Iridescent Scales, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Alignment: Any Lawful

Race: Black Talon Ss'ressen

Skills: Balance 5 ranks, Concentration 4 ranks, Jump 5 ranks, Listen 4 ranks, Tumble 7 ranks

Feats: Tail Attack

Special: Must be a 5th level monk, and must be accepted as a member of the Order. This requires the initiate to pass a number of physical, mental, and philosophical tests, including experiencing a prophetic vision.

Class Skills

The Order of the Iridescent Scales' class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex),

Jump (Str), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Spot (Wis), and Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Order of the Iridescent Scales prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Monk of the Order of Iridescent Scales gains no armor or weapon proficiencies. Monks of this order prefer to fight with their natural weaponry and disdain all manufactured weapons, armor, and shields.

Monk Abilities: A member of the Order of the Iridescent Scales continues to advance in some of his monk abilities each time he gains a level in the prestige class. Levels in the Order stack with monk levels to determine the progression of certain class abilities and effects that are based on class level (such as the DC for the monk's Stunning Fist attack). Essentially, the character adds his level in the Order of the Iridescent Scales to his monk level, and then consults the table in Core Rulebook I to determine his flurry of blows attack bonus, monk AC bonus, and base unarmed damage. The character uses the Order's progression table (see Table 4-15: *Order of the Iridescent Scale Advancement Table*) to determine the increases in his base attack bonus, saving throw bonuses, and unarmored speed bonus, however. He also does not receive any other benefits that a monk would normally receive at increasing levels, such as bonus feats or increases to special class abilities not listed above.

Multiclassing: Monks of the Order of the Iridescent Scale may freely multiclass with the monk core class. A member of this prestige class may switch back and forth between gaining Iridescent Scale levels and gaining monk levels without penalty.

Long Stride (Ex): The Order is known for its swiftness of foot. A monk of this Order gains a 10-foot enhancement bonus to his base movement rate. This bonus increases as shown on Table 4-14 (+10 feet for every odd-numbered level and at 10th level). These bonuses stack with speed bonuses that the character has previously received from his monk levels.

Quick Defenses: The Order trains its students to react with lightning speed to any encounter. The student gains the Dodge feat at 1st level. If the student already has the Dodge feat then the dodge bonus to his AC granted by the feat increases to +2.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): Upon reaching 2nd level, a Monk of the Order gains the Uncanny Dodge ability. The Monk can react to danger before his senses would normally allow him to do so. He retains his Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) even if caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. However, the monk still loses his Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized.

Speed is My Ally: Iridescent Scale monks use their great speed with a precision never seen among the warm-blooded species of Onara. At 3rd level, the Monks of this Order gain the

Mobility feat. If the character already has the Mobility feat then the dodge bonus to his AC granted by the feat increases to +6.

Induced Visions (Sp): Due to years of ingesting strange herbs and poultices, the Iridescent Scale Monks now have dreamlike visions of the future quite regularly. As a full-round action, the monk may enter a state of euphoria where he catches glimpses of future events. This ability works exactly like the spell *augury*, with a caster level equal to the character's Order level plus his monk level. This is a spell-like ability and may be used once per day beginning at 4th level. The Monk gains this ability to use this twice per day upon reaching 8th level.

Ki Strike (Su): Through intensive spiritual training, Monks of the Order learn to empower their natural attacks with the power of Ki energy. At 5th level, the Monk's unarmed attacks are considered Lawful weapons for the purpose of dealing with creatures with damage reduction.

Spring Attack: At 5th level, the Iridescent Scale monk gains the Spring Attack feat.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): A Monk of the Order who has attained 6th level can no longer be flanked. He can react to opponents on opposite sides of him as easily as he can react to a single attacker. This defense denies a creature the ability to sneak attack the monk by flanking him. A creature can only flank the monk if it is a rogue of at least four levels higher than the total of the character's monk and Order of the Iridescent Scale levels. If the character has other classes that grant the Uncanny Dodge ability, add those to the character's monk and Order of the Iridescent Scale levels to determine the minimum rogue level required to flank the character.

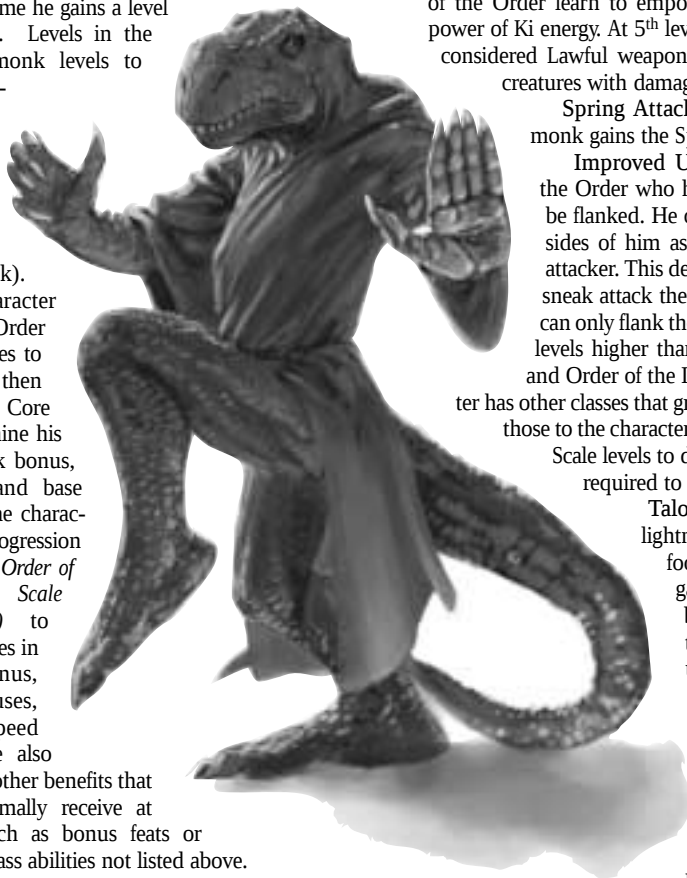
Talon Storm: To try and surround the lightning-fast Iridescent Scale Monks is foolhardy. At 7th level, the character gains the Whirlwind Attack feat as a bonus feat. The monk may only use this feat in conjunction with his unarmed strikes.

Improved Evasion (Ex): At 8th level the Iridescent Scale Monk's evasion ability improves. He takes no damage on a successful Reflex Saving Throw against attacks such as a dragon's breath weapon or a *fireball*, but henceforth takes only half damage on a failed save. A helpless monk does

not gain the benefit of Improved Evasion.

Rapid Charge (Ex): The Iridescent Scale Monk is so fast on his feet that his charges often catch the opponent unawares. At 9th level, whenever the monk uses the charge action, the target of the charge must make a Spot check against a DC equal to 10 + the monk's prestige class level + the monk's Wisdom modifier, or be considered flat-footed against the charge attack. The Monk of the Iridescent Scale also deals an extra 1d8 points of damage to such an affected foe if the attack hits.

Onslaught: Upon attaining the highest level of the Order, a Monk of the Iridescent Scale has mastered movement in combat. Masters of this Order have been seen to enter a swarm of foes, inflict devastation with their talons, and depart before their foes have time to react. The Monk may now use the Feat Whirlwind Attack as a standard action instead of a full-round action. This cannot be combined with a charge attack or the Rapid Charge ability.



Marauder

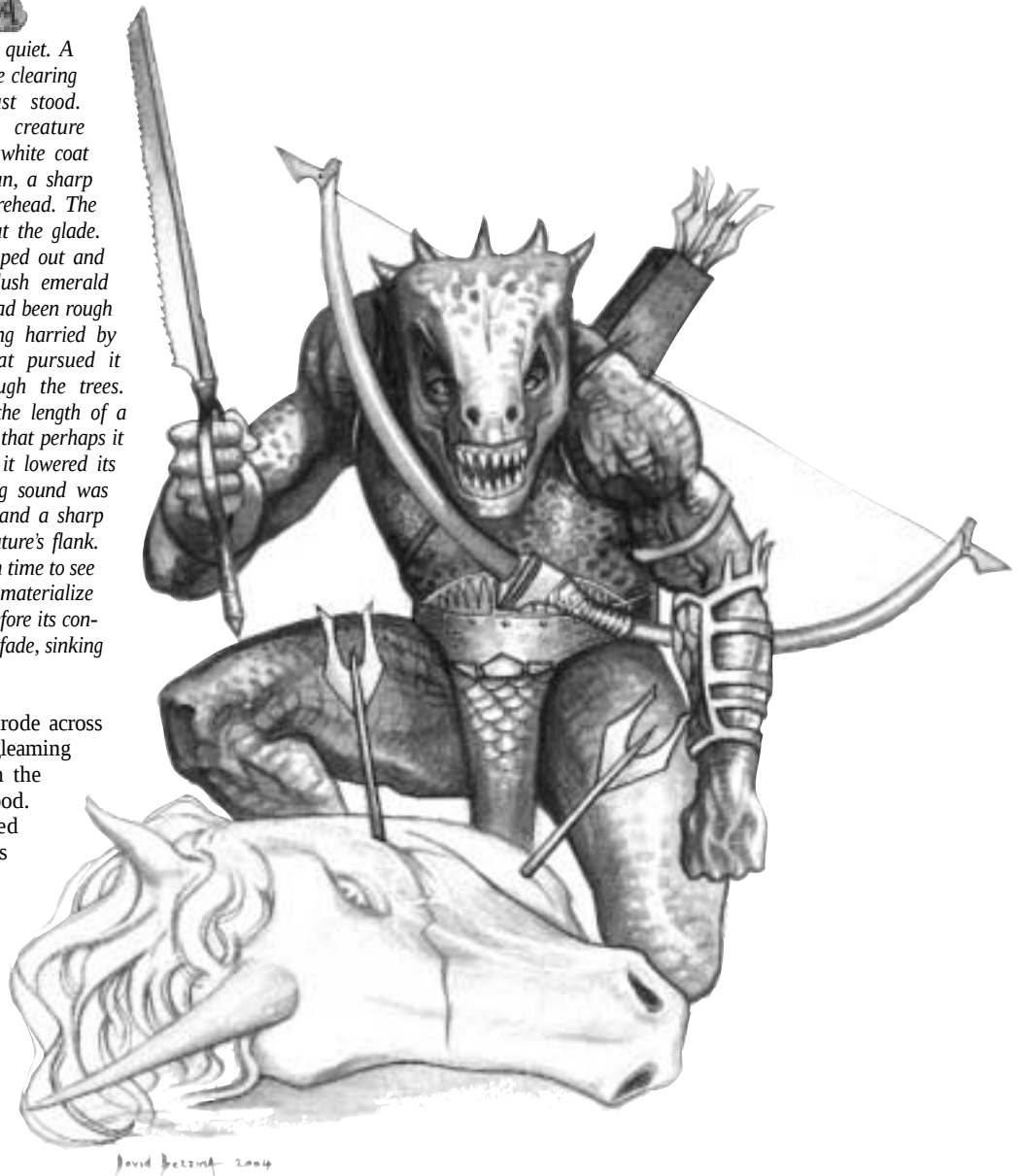
The forest was coolly quiet. A lone wren flitted across the clearing where the majestic beast stood. Proud and serene, the creature stepped into the dell, its white coat gleaming in the setting sun, a sharp spiral horn gracing its forehead. The unicorn's eyes swept about the glade. Sensing no danger, it stepped out and began to graze on the lush emerald grass. The last few days had been rough on the beast; it was being harried by strange green ghosts that pursued it relentlessly, flitting through the trees. Finally, after swimming the length of a lake, the Unicorn thought that perhaps it had lost its pursuers. As it lowered its majestic head, a whizzing sound was heard amongst the trees, and a sharp pain flared along the creature's flank. Its head whipped up just in time to see two dark green shapes materialize from the foliage nearby, before its consciousness slowly began to fade, sinking into oblivion...

The two ss'ressen strode across the dell towards the gleaming white body tainted with the reddish shade of lifeblood. Removing a silvered mithral saw from his backpack, one ss'ressen quickly cut the horn from the beast's head. Holding the long tapering horn by its root, the ss'ressen held it out for the other to see. "This should fetch a hefty price if the greed of the ssanu is with us," said the first. "A pity there aren't any more of these beasts around." The other ss'ressen looked at the speaker and replied, "This one has taken us a year to track down. I doubt there are more anywhere in this entire region."

The two hunters slid silently into the forest, leaving the corpse of the last unicorn on Onara to be serenaded to sleep by the sounds of buzzing flies.

The Marauder is the result of millennia of evolution by a carnivorous race. Thousands of generations have honed the skills and instincts of the Marauders, resulting in a group of hunters unparalleled upon the face of Arcanis. It was the Marauders who first taught their Elorii slaves the use of the bow, yet Elorii skill has not yet matched that of their teachers, for the hunt infuses the blood of all ss'ressen. It is a part of them, deep down to the very marrow of their bones.

Marauders hold an honored place in ss'ressen societies, whether they are of the cultured Emerald Scale, the barbaric Barbed Tail, or the free Black Talon egg clutch. The
M a r a u d e r s



train entire generations of ss'ressen hunters, taking the most skilled under their own tutelage to become Marauders themselves. Almost every ss'ressen has memories of an aged warrior sitting by the fire, old gnarled talons polishing a bow with an expert's care. In every egg clutch, the Marauders lead hunting parties and in times of war Marauders guide groups of scouts, coordinating deadly ambushes that devastate enemy ranks. The skills of the Marauders are so important to the egg clutch that the position itself is honored and any ss'ressen deemed worthy of the title of Marauder is granted the right to breed. Each separate egg clutch has its own form of the Marauders. Many such groups are named after fell beasts from the surrounding region. The Black Talon Marauders are known as *Jih'Cholep* or "Hunters of the Cholep," a dreaded ambush predator indigenous to the Sulphur Marshes.

Rangers or multiclass ranger/druids make up the ranks of most groups of Marauders, for they have the proper mindset and understanding of the ways of the natural world. Some fighter/rogues or fighter/barbarians have been known to take up the trade, but only after intense training do they master the techniques.

Table 4-16: Marauder Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+1	+0	Swift Tracker, Deadly Aim +1d6
2nd	+2	+3	+1	+0	Ambush
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Home Terrain +2, Deadly Aim +2d6
4th	+4	+4	+2	+1	Snapshot
5th	+5	+4	+2	+1	Deadly Aim +3d6
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Home Terrain +4
7th	+7	+5	+3	+2	Deadly Aim +4d6
8th	+8	+6	+3	+2	Shot on the Run
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Home Terrain +6, Improved Precise Shot
10th	+10	+7	+4	+3	Deadly Aim +5d6, Peerless Archer

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Marauder, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Alignment: Any

Races: Any Ssethric

Skills: Hide 5 ranks, Listen 5 ranks, Move Silently 5 ranks, Spot 5 ranks, Survival 9 ranks

Feats: Endurance, Lightning Reflexes, Manyshot, Point-Blank Shot, Quick Draw, Rapid Shot, Track, and Weapon Focus (any type of bow)

Base Attack Bonus: +6

Special: Marauders of the Black Talons must have Animal as a favored enemy before taking this class. Upon taking this class, the Marauder must choose a home terrain type (like swampland). The home terrain must match the habitat type that the Marauder was trained in (usually the region where he was raised).

Class Skills

The Marauder's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Knowledge (geography) (Int), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), Search (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Marauder prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Marauder gains no additional weapon proficiencies, but he gains proficiency with Light and Medium armor and all shields (except tower shields).

Swift Tracker (Ex): A Marauder may move at his normal speed while following tracks without taking the normal –5 penalty. He suffers a –10 penalty (instead of the normal –20) when tracking at twice normal speed.

Deadly Aim: When using a bow, whenever an opponent is denied his Dexterity bonus to AC or the opponent is caught flat-footed, the Marauder inflicts extra damage with each shot. This damage does not multiply if a critical hit is scored. This extra damage can only be applied if the opponent is within 60 feet. Beyond this range, the Marauder cannot strike with deadly accuracy.

The amount of bonus damage starts at +1d6 at first level and increases by 1d6 at most odd-numbered class levels (as shown on Table 4-16: Marauder Advancement Table), to a maximum of 5d6 extra points of damage at 10th level. If the

Marauder is using the Multishot Feat, the damage is divided as equally as possible among all the arrows. (For example, if a Marauder with +4d6 extra damage is firing two arrows with the Multishot feat, each arrow only gets +2d6 extra damage.) Deadly Aim stacks with a rogue's sneak attack ability (however, the Deadly Aim ability does not increase the 30-foot range that normally applies to rogue sneak attacks made with ranged weapons).

Except for the differences above, Deadly Aim functions identically to a rogue's sneak attack ability as described in *Core Rulebook I*.

Ambush (Ex): Due to years of training, a 2nd-level Marauder may use the full attack action during a surprise round. The Marauder may only use this action to make a full set of iterative ranged attacks with his bow. If the Marauder attempts to do anything else during the surprise round except fire his bow, then he is subject to the standard limitations on actions taken during a surprise round. If the Marauder does not have his bow in hand and his arrows at the ready when the surprise round occurs, then he cannot use this ability. When using this ability, the Marauder may not add any sneak attack or Deadly Aim damage to attacks he makes during the surprise round.

Home Terrain: Beginning at 3rd level, whenever the Marauder finds himself in his home terrain type, he gains a +2 bonus on all Hide, Move Silently, Survival, and Knowledge (nature) skill checks applying to the terrain. This bonus increases to +4 at 6th level and +6 at 9th level.

Snap Shot (Ex): The Marauder's speed with a bow is unparalleled on all of Arcanis. Whenever the Marauder has his bow out and an arrow nocked, he may make a Reflex Save (DC 20) before an encounter begins. If he succeeds on the saving throw, the Marauder may fire one single shot from his bow before initiative is rolled. A Marauder may not add any sneak attack damage to this attack.

Shot on the Run: At 8th level, the Marauder gains Shot on the Run as a bonus feat.

Improved Precise Shot (Ex): Upon reaching 9th level, the Marauder gains Improved Precise Shot as a bonus feat.

Peerless Archer (Ex): At 10th level, the marauder has reached the epitome of archery skill. The Marauder no longer suffers the normal penalties associated with the Rapid Shot feat (normally a –2 to each shot), and the penalties for firing two arrows at once with the Multishot feat are ignored as well. If more than two arrows are fired with the Multishot feat, then the penalties apply normally (–2 for each additional arrow beyond the first).

Table 4-17: Miliarius Advancement Table

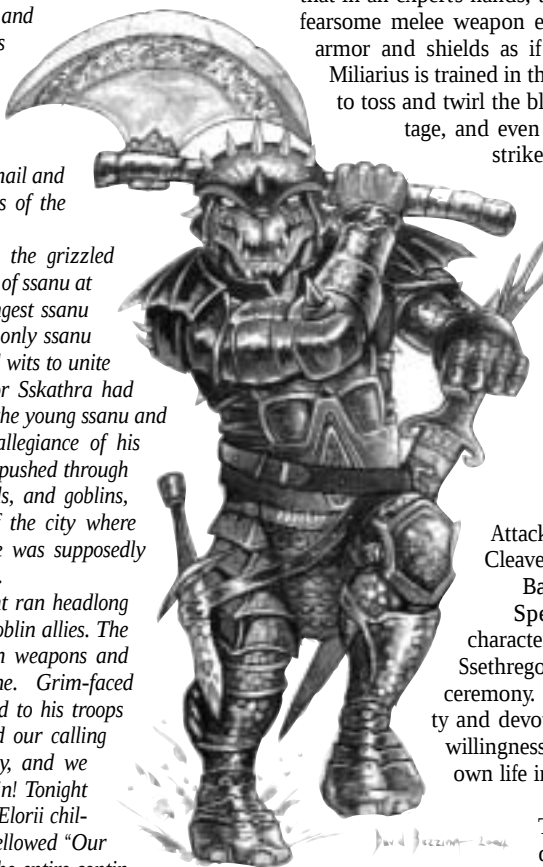
Class	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Ambidexterity, Diehard
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Weapon Specialization
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Rallying Cry +1
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Greater Weapon Focus (Bearded Axe)
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Crushing Blow
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Rallying Cry +2
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Greater Weapon Specialization
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Reverse Blow
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Rallying Cry +3
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Threshing Blade

Miliarius

The heavily-armed contingent of ss'ressen charged through the crowded streets. Everywhere they turned, the Empire's capitol was in chaos. Sparked by the Elorri insurrection, the slave races had revolted and dragged the Emperor down with their grimy, rough fingers. To their chagrin and shame, the Emperor's personal guards had arrived too late to save the old fool from his own servants. The stinking masses had paid for the crime, of course; their bright red blood now adorned the shining plate mail and congealed upon the heavy axe blades of the Miliarius.

Looking back over his shoulder, the grizzled Dark Crest ss'ressen gazed at the knot of ssanu at the center of his formation. The youngest ssanu was Sseth of Pit Elapis, probably the only ssanu left in the city with enough power and wits to unite the crumbling Empire. After Emperor Sskathra had died, the old ss'ressen had sought out the young ssanu and sworn his own allegiance and the allegiance of his troops to the serpent. Now, his troops pushed through the throngs of confused trogs, kobolds, and goblins, pressing toward the western edge of the city where General Ji'koss of the Emerald Scale was supposedly rallying the Empire's remaining forces.

Rounding a corner, the contingent ran headlong into a vast group of Elorii and their goblin allies. The mob brandished all manner of stolen weapons and outnumbered the Miliarius five to one. Grim-faced and frowning, the old ss'ressen turned to his troops and addressed them: "We have failed our calling once today! We have failed our duty, and we have failed our Emperor. Never again! Tonight we bathe in Elorii blood and feast on Elorii children!" Raising his axe to the sky he bellowed "Our lives for the Empire!" and charged. The entire contingent, weary and dripping with gore, leaped screaming upon the line of rebellious slaves. Like a wave of shining steel, they slammed into the mob, shattering it with the sheer force of their impact. Axes fell left and right, thrashing through the former slaves like a farmer through a wheat field. The Miliarius had failed once this day that much was true; but they would not do so again as long as even one still stood with breath in his lungs.



The Miliarius Shock Troops are the Emperor's private bodyguards. Heavily trained and armed to the fang, these hand-picked ss'ressen devote mind, body, and soul to the protection of the Empire through the continued existence of its Emperors. Their signature weapon is the dreaded bearded axe. It is said that in an expert's hands, the bearded axe is possibly the most fearsome melee weapon ever known, able to cleave through armor and shields as if they were paper. Each and every Miliarius is trained in the use of this heavy weapon, learning to toss and twirl the blade, to use its weight to best advantage, and even to reverse their grip on the haft to strike behind an enemy's shield. The Miliarius are the most deadly foot soldiers in all of Ssethregore.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Miliarius, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Alignment: Any Lawful

Race: Any ss'ressen

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Bearded Axe), Power Attack, Cleave, Improved Sunder, Great Cleave

Base Attack Bonus: +6

Special: To become a Miliarius the character must be allied with the Emperor of Ssethregore, and have survived the initiation ceremony. Each Miliarius swears absolute fealty and devotion to the Emperor and affirms his willingness – his eagerness – to lay down his own life in defense of the Emperor's own.

Note: An elite group of Black Talon Miliarius escaped Ssethregore during their clutch's exodus centuries ago. Pledging their loyalty to the reigning Warlord, they formed a special contingent of troops that persists to this day. Black Talon and Ashen Hide characters qualify for this class, even though they are no longer a part of the Ssethregoran Empire.

Class Skills

The Miliarius' class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Spot (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Miliarius prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The Miliarius is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, and with all types of armor and shields, including tower shields. Their preferred weapon is the bearded axe.

Ambidexterity (Ex): A Miliarius becomes adept at switching his grip on the haft, tossing the axe blade from hand to hand. A Miliarius is counted as being ambidextrous, being able to make either hand his primary weapon hand. Note: This does not have any effect on the penalties imposed by the Two-Weapon Fighting feat, nor does it grant the character that feat; it simply allows the Miliarius to use either hand as his primary hand at any time. This means, for example, that he does not suffer the standard -4 penalty for making an attack of opportunity with an off-hand weapon, because he does not have an "off hand."

Diehard: The rigorous training a Miliarius has to endure gives him the ability to shrug off wounds that would kill most other creatures. The Miliarius gains the Diehard feat at 1st level.

Weapon Specialization: At 2nd level, the Miliarius gains the Weapon Specialization feat with the bearded axe.

Rallying Cry (Su): A Miliarius gains the ability to inspire courage in his allies starting at 3rd level. As a full-round action, the Miliarius may make a rousing speech to his fellows. All allies within 30 feet and who are able to both see and hear the Miliarius gain 1d10 temporary hit points and a +1 morale bonus on attack and damage rolls. This bonus increases to +2d10 hit points and +2 on attack and damage rolls at 6th level, and again to +3d10 hit points and +3 on attack and damage rolls at 10th level. This ability may be used a number of times a day equal to 1 plus the Miliarius's Charisma bonus.

Greater Weapon Focus: At 4th level, the Miliarius gains the Greater Weapon Focus feat with the bearded axe.

Crushing Blow (Ex): At 5th level, the Miliarius has learned to use the weight of the brutal bearded axe to its full potential. The Miliarius deals double damage whenever he uses a bearded axe for a sunder attempt.

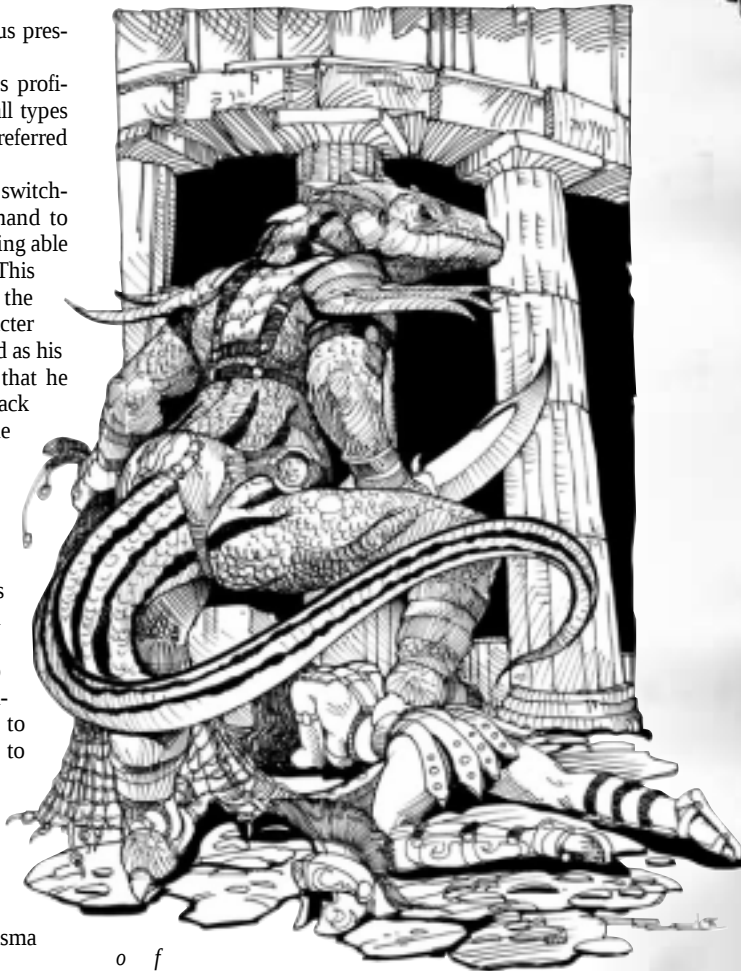
Greater Weapon Specialization: At 7th level, the Miliarius gains the Greater Weapon Specialization feat with the bearded axe.

Reverse Blow (Ex): By 8th level, the Miliarius has become so adept at reversing the blade of his axe that he can easily slip around an opponent's defenses and attack the unshielded half of his foe's body. The Miliarius may now ignore Armor Class bonuses granted by an opponent's shield.

Threshing Blade (Ex): The terrible power and skill by which a Miliarius wields his axe is terrible to behold. Opponents fall by droves to the great arcs of his flashing blade. At 10th level, whenever he uses the full attack action, the Miliarius may take a free 5-foot step before, after, or in between any attacks that he makes during that action by means of the Great Cleave feat. He may take only one free step in conjunction with each extra attack roll that he makes. These free steps do not count as part of his movement for the round and do not provoke attacks of opportunity.

Pit Fighter

The day was inordinately hot, the searing red rays of the sun beating down upon the scene. The fetid water of the swamp evaporated into a thick mist, plunging the entire area into the oppressive humidity that is so familiar to those who dwell along the coastal edge



of the swamp. An unruly crowd of assorted Ssethregorans had gathered on the outskirts of the ancient city of Sseth. The multitude of scaled creatures surrounded a crude circular pit, their bodies reflecting the light in iridescent hues of green, red, and gold. The sides of the pit were stepped; each earthen level was lined with rude wooden benches allowing the seated crowds a good view of the carnage taking place on the lowest level.

The lowest level was a simple sand-lined pit, circular in form. Its steep-sided walls were scored with the blows of hundreds of matches. Within this pit, the dregs of society were tossed to fight for the pleasure of the roaring crowds, to the music of coins sprinkling from one scaled hand to another. On one side of the pit stood the reigning champion, a huge troglodyte, his heavily-muscled form marred with the scars of countless battles. The jagged edges of the scar tissue crisscrossed his body like a morbid web. Grinning wickedly, the champion stared across the pit at his adversary: a lean, lithe-looking human female recently captured from the borderlands in the north. With practiced ease, the champion slid into the pit, his serrated scimitar raised to his waist like a profane phallus, thrusting to point at the human in a mocking gesture of scorn and contempt. The human warrior cursed the champion in rage, her foreign words lost on his reptilian ears. Without preamble she was handed back her gladius, taken from her on her capture, and hurled into the pit by a dozen scaled hands.

Landing with catlike grace, the human warrior sized up her opponent, her own sword held on guard with an expert's touch. A decorated member of the prestigious border patrol, she was

Table 4-18: Pit Fighter Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Whatever's at Hand
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	No Holds Barred (+1d4)
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	--
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Pit Fighting
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Improved Critical
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Improved Bull Rush
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Improved Grapple
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	No Holds Barred (+2d4)
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Improved Sunder
10th	+10	+7	+7	+3	Bloodsport

no stranger to combat. Deep black human eyes fixed on their slitted golden counterparts. With a rush of flying sand, the two warriors clashed. Shining steel whisked out, biting with its razored edge, tearing naked human flesh and scaled body alike. Blood and gore fell to the arena floor, mixing with the sand like a gruesome porridge, but the two fought on. There were no rules here; just skill and the roar of the reptilian crowd to edge the competitors toward victory. Abruptly, with a brilliant stroke, the champion was down, his thigh transfixed by the human's blade. Stepping back, the warrior readied her blade, waiting for her opponent to rise and continue the duel. Grinning, the troglodyte – champion of a hundred battles – rolled to a stand. Unexpectedly and swiftly his arm shot out, sand flying into the face of his attacker. The champion's tail lashed out, taking the blinded woman in the legs, knocking her to the earth. Springing up, the troglodyte landed atop of her, his taloned foot stamping onto her neck, shoving her face deep into the blood-caked sand. Arms upraised, he bellowed to the crowd, his helpless foe pinned beneath him. Chuckling to himself, the champion addressed the fallen human in broken Coryani: "Stupid human; compassion is for the weak." Then, slowly, for the benefit of the bloodthirsty crowd, he proceeded to hack through the skull of his adversary, his heavy blows landing over and over and over again... until the corpse stopped twitching.

Pit fighters are possibly the most varied group in all of Ssethregore. Warriors and slaves alike, dragged from all ranks of society, they are pitted against each other in short bloody contests for the pleasure of the crowd. Pits exist throughout the Empire, from small military encampments where captured slaves battle for survival, to back-alley fighting rings hidden deep below the surface, to the great Grand Coliseum where criminals and slaves fight for the pleasure of the nobility. Less sophisticated than the gladiatorial arenas of human society, the pits are there for the blood and quick death of the participants. There are no rules, no code of honor, and no chance of freedom. All combatants are owned, either by the pit owner or by various individuals who keep their Pit Fighters kenneled like half-starved dogs. A Pit Fighter strives against the odds to survive from one day to the next and to perhaps catch the eye of a patron, someone who will provide him with better food and arms than the owners of the fighting pits. Fighters are no better than prized pets, living their lives in chains and being sold back and forth between patrons as a mere commodity. Dead fighters are highly prized in the Ssethric marketplaces, comparable to high-quality beef in civilized lands.

Though there is no official means by which a Pit Fighter can earn his freedom, there is yet hope, for it is not uncommon for Pit Fighters to escape in transit between one city and the next. For the non-Ssethric fighters, though, a life as a

fugitive in the swamps of Ssethregore is probably a sentence worse than death.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Pit Fighter, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Base Attack Bonus: +3

Feat: Power Attack

Special: Must be or once have been a captive of the Ssethregoran Empire*.

*Note: If this is part of the character's background (decided upon creation), then it does not require special documentation.

Class Skills

The Pit Fighter's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Jump (Str), Profession (Wis), Ride (Str), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Pit Fighter prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Pit Fighter is proficient with all simple weapons, martial weapons, and shields (including tower shields). The Pit Fighter is proficient with all Light and Medium armors.

Whatever's at Hand (Ex): A Pit Fighter quickly learns to fight with whatever is readily available. A Pit Fighter may use any reasonable Small or Medium-sized object as an improvised simple weapon (GMs discretion) without suffering a non-proficiency penalty. A Small improvised weapon does 1d4 points of damage, while a Medium improvised weapon does 1d6 points of damage. Damage types depend on the object used. For example, a broken bottle would be a Small improvised weapon that deals slashing damage, while a human femur would be a Medium improvised weapon that deals bludgeoning damage.

No Holds Barred (Ex): There are no rules in the pit, and consequently warriors learn to fight dirty. When using the full attack action, a Pit Fighter may add +1d4 damage to all his successful melee attacks. This extra damage increases to +2d4 at 8th level. This extra damage does not stack with the extra damage granted through the use of the Deadly Strike feat.

Pit Fighting (Ex): A Pit Fighter quickly adapts to fighting in enclosed spaces. Whenever the Pit Fighter is involved in combat within a location where there is little room to maneuver (less than five feet of free space on either side of him, such as in a 5-foot-wide corridor or a tiny jail cell) the Pit Fighter may add a +2 dodge bonus to his Armor Class.

Improved Critical: Due to his need for a quick dispatch of his foe, upon reaching 5th level the Pit Fighter gains the Improved Critical feat with any weapon of his choice.

Improved Bull Rush: Upon reaching 6th level the Pit Fighter gains Improved Bull Rush as a bonus feat.

Improved Grapple: Upon reaching 7th level the Pit Fighter gains Improved Grapple as a bonus feat.

Improved Sunder: Upon reaching 9th level the Pit Fighter gains Improved Sunder as a bonus feat.

Bloodsport (Ex): The Pit Fighter has reached the pinnacle of his art. He does not care about anything but the fight any more; life and death are as one, and only the bloodthirsty howls of the crowd and the sight of his broken foe lying at his feet can drive him on to greater glory in the gore of the Pit. Whenever the Pit Fighter kills (not subdues) an opponent in melee combat, he gains a +1 morale bonus on his attack rolls and a +2 morale bonus on his weapon damage rolls for a number of rounds equal to 3 plus his Charisma modifier. For each successive opponent the Pit fighter kills in melee combat during that time, the bonus increases by +1 to hit and +2 to damage, and the duration restarts.

For example, a Pit Fighter with a Charisma of 14 dispatches an opponent. He now gains a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls and a +2 morale bonus on damage rolls for the next 5 rounds. In the next round, another opponent falls to the Pit Fighter's blade, increasing his morale bonuses (+2 to hit and +4 to damage) and restarting the duration at 5 rounds. If the Pit Fighter kills no other opponents for 5 rounds, his morale boost ends. If another opponent is then killed, the process begins anew. The maximum bonus that may be in effect at any one time due to this ability is +5 to hit and +10 to damage (which would result from killing a total of five foes during a single activation).

Plethorax

The defenders of the Elorii outpost gazed out over their fortifications in dismay. Moments before, there had stood pristine woodlands. Then, without warning, the earth had collapsed with a thunderous roar, revealing enormous pits leading deep into the earth. Out of these pits came boiling thousands of Ssethregorans, hell-bent on the destruction of the small, poorly-manned outpost. A horde of goblin slaves still chained together led the way, forming a living shield and absorbing the brunt of the Elorii archers' fire. Ss'ressen taskmasters whipped the slaves forward while the ranks of kobolds, troglodytes, and ss'ressen formed up in the rear. The bloodcurdling cries of the whooping trogs, the earsplitting shrieks of the Drakhen dragonnel riders far overhead, and the eerie screams from the fierce riding Mor'let marked the field of battle. The huge array of troops seemed hopelessly disorganized, with no center, no focus. Then from deep in the pits the reverberating boom-boom of bronze kettledrums could be heard. Out of those tunnels crawled the great Oniscus, thirty feet or more of armored carapace, on top of hundreds of pairs of legs. Perched atop their insectoid backs sat the Plethorax, their deep



vibrant voices cutting across the battlefield, giving the troops direction. Within moments of their appearance, the troops had organized and the general ordered the attack. The Elorii defenders paled as the sounds of thousands of feet marching in time to the deep drumbeats of the Plethorax spelled their doom.

The Plethorax is the inspirational backbone of Ssethregoran society. They are the recorders of history, remembering the details of great battles and passing them down to others through a rich oral tradition. Their poems inspire courage and bravery in all who listen; they patrol the battlefields fighting alongside the troops, urging them on to greater acts of glory in the name of the Empire. Each Ssethric race has its own form of Plethorax, each slightly different, but all fulfilling the roles of the warrior-poet. Plethorax are some of the most artistic and free-thinking members of their respective societies, often urging those around them to listen to the mistakes of the past and to learn from them. Agamasi ss'ressen are particularly fond of this class.

Hit Die: d6.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Plethorax, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Table 4-19: Plethorax Advancement Table

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Anthem Of War	+1 arcane caster level
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Inspire Courage +2	+1 arcane caster level
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Deeds of the Forefathers	--
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Inspire Courage +3	+1 arcane caster level
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Inspire Greatness	+1 arcane caster level
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Inspire Courage +4	+1 arcane caster level
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	--	+1 arcane caster level
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Inspire Courage +5	+1 arcane caster level
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Inspire Heroics	+1 arcane caster level
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Final Stand, Inspire Courage +6	--

Race: Must be a member of the Ssethric Race

Base Attack Bonus: +4

Skills: Perform (Oratory or Percussion) 9 ranks

Feats: Power Attack

Special: Must have the Bardic Music class ability and the Inspire Courage bardic music ability, and must be able to cast 1st-level arcane spells.

Class Skills

The Plethorax's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Jump (Str), Knowledge (all skills taken individually) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Cha), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Speak Language (N/A), Spellcraft (Int), Swim (Str), Tumble (Dex), and Use Magic Device (Cha).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Plethorax prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Plethorax is proficient with all simple weapons, with light armor, and with light and heavy shields (but not tower shields).

Arcane Spell Progression: Upon becoming a Plethorax, a character continues to advance in arcane spellcasting ability. When a new Plethorax level is acquired (except at 3rd and 10th level), the character gains new spells known and/or spells per day as if he had also gained a level in the arcane spellcasting class he belonged to before he added the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (such as bonus metamagic feats). This essentially means that he adds the Plethorax caster levels to the level of his other arcane spellcasting class, then determines spells known, spells per day, and caster level accordingly. If a character had more than one arcane spellcasting class before he became a Plethorax, he must decide to which class he adds each new level of Plethorax for purposes of determining caster level, spells known, and spells per day. Plethorax levels do not stack with class levels of arcane spellcasting classes that grant familiars for purposes of familiar advancement.

Bardic Music: Many of the Plethorax's class abilities function in a similar (or identical) fashion to Bardic Music abilities, as described in *Core Rulebook I*. The character combines his bard class levels and

his Plethorax class levels to determine his daily uses of Bardic Music and Plethorax supernatural abilities.

Anthem of War (Su): The Plethorax chants in a deep baritone, singing about bygone days of victory. Soon the troops find their steps lightened and their spirits lifted, encouraged by the heartening sound. A Plethorax with nine or more ranks in Perform (oratory or percussion) can use his bardic music ability to raise the morale of the troops surrounding him. To be affected, an ally must be within 60 feet of the Plethorax and must be able to hear him perform. Affected allies gain a five-foot enhancement bonus to their base movement rate for as long as the Plethorax performs, plus 5 rounds thereafter.

Inspire Courage (Su): A Plethorax's words ring out across the field of battle, telling of ancient deeds of triumph and the many victories earned in war. This ability works exactly as the Bardic Music ability of the same name. Upon reaching 2nd level as a Plethorax, the character grants a +2 bonus with his Inspire Courage ability instead of the normal +1. This bonus increases by +1 for every two Plethorax levels thereafter, to a maximum of +5 at 10th level.

Deeds of the Forefathers (Su): A Plethorax with eleven or more ranks in Perform (oratory) can use his bardic music ability to raise the morale of the troops surrounding him. To be affected, an ally must be within 60 feet and must be able to hear the Plethorax perform. Affected allies gain 1d8 temporary hit points. This effect lasts for as many rounds as the Plethorax continues to perform, plus 5 rounds thereafter.

Inspire Greatness (Su): A Plethorax's words fill the heart of a weary soldier, granting him a desire to push himself to the limits of his potential. This ability works exactly as the Bardic Music ability of the same name.

Inspire Heroics (Su): The Stories of the Plethorix tell of great heroes, fantastic deeds, and seductive females. The Plethorax is able to drive his allies to acts of glorious heroism. This ability works exactly as the Bardic Music ability of the same name.

Final Stand (Su): In the heat of battle, the brave, inspiring words of the Plethorax grant his allies amazing tenacity in the face of almost certain defeat. A Plethorax with nineteen or more ranks in Perform (oratory) can use his Bardic Music ability to inspire an unheard-of level of bravery and tenacity into his troops. To be affected, an ally must be within 60 feet and must be able to hear the Plethorax perform. Affected allies gain 2d10 temporary hit points, are immune to fear effects, and temporarily gain the benefits of the Diehard feat. This effect lasts for as many rounds as the Plethorax continues to perform, plus 5 rounds thereafter. A character may only benefit from Final Stand once per day.

Ssethric Inquisitor

Vel'ssith reclined awkwardly on the soft, strange-scented divan offered to him by his host. In his talon he grasped a ceramic container full of some heady aromatic brew the Coryani called "coffee." Sipping the foul-tasting brew out of politeness for his host, Vel'ssith placed his cup down and turned to address the Senator. "Senator Tensen-Balin, does my proposition meet with your approval?" Vel'ssith asked in a strange sibilant form of High Coryani.

"Well, Vel'ssith, your proposal of a new trade agreement between Coryan and your associates in the Sulphur Marsh is intriguing, and I could imagine it would bring profit to both of our peoples," answered the long-winded Senator.

"There are many commodities to be found here that are unavailable to my people at the present time, yet we produce many products and poultices that would be considered exotic and highly valuable to your culture. If we are in agreement, I shall get started right away," answered Vel'ssith, before sipping his coffee.

The Senator regarded Vel'ssith for a minute before speaking. "You realize your people will not be readily welcomed in the capital? Especially with the political unrest of late."

"Yes, I realize this, and I have already made arrangements to set up in the older warehouse district of Old Coryan, near the riverfront," replied Vel'ssith, "so with your leave I'll depart and begin this mutual endeavor." Upon receiving the Senator's acknowledging nod, Vel'ssith inclined his head in a sign of respect and addressed the Senator one final time: "May your soul be cleansed in the fiery crucible of our Lord Dragon." The Ss'ressen Ambassador was then led out into the city once more.

As Vel'ssith was reunited with his guards, his second-in-command slid near. "Did the human take the bait?" the lieutenant asked under his breath.

"Yes," responded Vel'ssith. "Have the scouts been sent?"

"Of course, commander. They are now patrolling the region. Those Ghost Scale infidels shall not remain hidden for much longer," whispered the lieutenant, with a hint of religious fervor glinting in his eyes.



Vel'ssith paused for a moment, regarding his companion intently. With a far-away look in his golden eyes, Vel'ssith turned and addressed his entourage: "Soon we shall capture these renegades and put them to the question. They shall be shown the errors of their ways and have cause to repent, throwing off their false gods and once again embracing the warmth of the Fiery Wyrml!"

The lieutenant spoke once more to Vel'ssith, doubt creeping into his voice. "But, sir, what if we cannot bring them back to the fold?"

Smiling, Vel'ssith addressed his lieutenant, raising his own voice to make certain all his troops hear every word. With an air of unconcerned brevity, he stated: "Then the infidels will surely die." Vel'ssith signaled a turn and, as one, the Black Talon Inquisitors slid off into the mists of Old Coryan.

Ssethric Inquisitors are some of the most respected and feared members of all Ssethregoran society. They operate with impunity, searching out those of their own people who would break faith and worship a "foreign" god. In the stagnant swamps of Ssethregore, Ssethric Inquisitors for the Varn gods patrol the masses, tracking down heretical cults of Kassegore worshippers and putting them to the question, until they reveal others like-minded individuals. On the other claw, Ssethric Inquisitors of Kassegore work behind the scenes subverting troglodytes, ss'ressen, and any others who will listen to their decrees, promising a better lot in the world as well as power and prestige.

Outside the Ssethregoran Empire, Ssethric Inquisitors hail from the Black Talon, Ghost Scale, and Ashen Hide ss'ressen egg clutches. These groups are constantly patrolling their own territories, looking for those subverting their way of life. Ssethric Inquisitors (both Ssethregoran and free clutches) commonly worm their way into other societies, using their disguise and nondetection capabilities to sneak in and convert the laymen to their preferred form of worship. No task is too daunting for the Inquisitors – and no methods of "persuasion" are too exacting.

Ssethric Inquisitors most often hail from a clerical background, with some having investigative experience as a rogue. In ss'ressen societies, Ssethric Inquisitors are often males who feel the calling for the divine, but are banned from clerical worship by the Matriarchy. Instead, they tread the path of holy champion or paladin, and the most fervent of these become Ssethric Inquisitors.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Ssethric Inquisitor, a character must fulfill the following criteria:

Race: Must be a member of the Ssethric Race

Base Attack Bonus: +4

Feats: Investigator, Forked Tongue

Skills: Diplomacy 6 ranks, Sense Motive 4 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 4 ranks, Gather Information 3 ranks

Special: Must be able to channel positive or negative energy, or cast divine spells

Class Skills

The Ssethric Inquisitor's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Knowledge (local) (Int), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (torturer) (Cha), Ride (Str), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6

+ Int modifier.

Table 4-20: The Ssethric Inquisitor Advancement Table

Class Level	Base				Special	Spells Per Day			
	Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save		1st	2nd	3rd	4th
1st	+1	+2	+0	+1	Skill Focus (Diplomacy)	0	--	--	--
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+1	Unblinking Eyes 1/day	1	--	--	--
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+2	Smite Infidel 1/day	1	0	--	--
4th	+2	+4	+1	+2	Preach to the Masses	1	1	--	--
5th	+3	+4	+1	+3	Detect Faith	1	1	0	--
6th	+3	+5	+2	+3	Smite Infidel 2/day	2	1	1	--
7th	+4	+5	+2	+4	Unblinking Eyes 2/day	2	2	1	0
8th	+4	+6	+2	+4	Heart of Stone	2	2	1	1
9th	+5	+6	+3	+5	Smite Infidel 3/day	2	2	2	1
10th	+6	+7	+3	+5	Soul Gaze	3	3	2	1

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Ssethric Inquisitor prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A Ssethric Inquisitor is proficient with all simple weapons, martial weapons, and shields (but not tower shields). The Ssethric Inquisitor is proficient with all light and medium armors.

Spells: A Ssethric Inquisitor gains the ability to cast a small number of divine spells, which are drawn from the Ssethric Inquisitor spell list (see below). The Inquisitor must choose and prepare his spells in advance. To prepare or cast a spell, a Ssethric Inquisitor must have a Wisdom score equal to at least 10 + the spell level. The Difficulty Class for a saving throw against an Inquisitor's spell is 10 + the spell level + the Inquisitor's Wisdom modifier. Like other spellcasters, a Ssethric Inquisitor can cast only a certain number of spells of each spell level per day. His base daily spell allotment is given on *Table 4-20: The Ssethric Inquisitor Advancement Table*. In addition, he receives bonus spells per day if he has a high Wisdom score. When the table indicates that the Inquisitor gets 0 spells per day of a given spell level, he gains only the bonus spells he would be entitled to based on his Wisdom score for that spell level. Ssethric Inquisitors do not have access to any domain spells or granted powers, as a cleric does. A Ssethric Inquisitor prepares and casts spells the way a cleric does, though he cannot lose a prepared spell to spontaneously cast a *cure* spell in its place. A Ssethric Inquisitor may prepare and cast any spell on his spell list, provided that he can cast spells of that level, but he must choose which spells to prepare during his daily meditation. The Ssethric Inquisitor's caster level for purposes of his class spells is equal to his level in the prestige class.

Ssethric Inquisitor spells:

1st level: *bane*, *bless*, *bless weapon*, *charm person*, *cure light wounds*, *detect poison*, *divine favor*, *doom*, *hypnotism*, *lesser restoration*, *magic weapon*, *message*, *read magic*, *sleep*

2nd level: *calm emotions*, *daze monster*, *delay poison*, *eagle's splendor*, *enthrall*, *owl's wisdom*, *touch of idiocy*, *undetectable alignment*, *zone of truth*

3rd level: *cure moderate wounds*, *discern Lies*, *dispel magic*, *hold person*, *locate object*, *magic circle against good/evil/chaos/law*, *nondetection*

4th Level: *bestow curse*, *break enchantment*, *heroism*, *holy sword*, *mark of justice*, *neutralize poison*, *restoration*, *suggestion*

Skill Focus: A Ssethric Inquisitor's skill is based upon his ability to persuade those not of his faith that his viewpoint is right and just. Through years of practice, a Ssethric Inquisitor becomes a master at double-talk and letting the audience hear exactly what they

want to. All Ssethric Inquisitors gain Skill Focus (Diplomacy) as a bonus feat.

Unblinking Eyes (Sp): The Ssethric Inquisitor's steely gaze unmans even the toughest opponents and burrows to the very core of that being's beliefs. Starting at 2nd level, once per day the Ssethric Inquisitor may cast a modified *charm person* spell. This spell mimics exactly the spell *charm person*, but the Ssethric inquisitor needs no somatic gestures. He must merely speak to the target about the tenets of the Inquisitor's religion. The Ssethric Inquisitor may use this power twice per day upon reaching 7th level.

Smite Infidel (Su): The holy wrath of the divine flows through the limbs of the Ssethric Inquisitor. Upon attaining 3rd level, once per day the Ssethric Inquisitor may attempt to smite an Infidel with a normal melee attack. An infidel is any sentient creature that worships or venerates a God different than that of the Ssethric Inquisitor. The Ssethric Inquisitor adds her charisma bonus (if any) to her attack roll and deals 1 extra point of damage per Ssethric Inquisitor level if the attack hits. If the Ssethric Inquisitor accidentally smites a creature that is of the same God or is atheistic, then the smite has no effect, but the ability is still used up. At 6th level and again at 9th level, the Ssethric Inquisitor may Smite Infidels one additional time per day.

Preach to the Masses (Sp): Upon attaining 4th level, the Ssethric Inquisitor gains the ability to sway crowds with the mere sound of his voice. This works exactly like the spell *enthrall*. The Inquisitor's caster level is equal to his prestige class level.

Detect Faith (Sp): The Ssethric Inquisitor's faith has become so strong that he can now see to the soul of his targets to where their hearts truly lie. As a standard action, the Ssethric Inquisitor may attempt to detect what God(s) a sentient creature venerates. By concentrating on a target within 60 feet, the Ssethric Inquisitor is able to tell exactly what God(s) the target worships. If the target does not believe in any God(s), then the ability fails; otherwise, the character learns what God the target worships. The Ssethric Inquisitor does not learn the alignment of the target, just where his or her faith lies. The *Detect Faith* ability can be foiled or blocked in the same manner as a *detect evil* spell (such as with *mind shielding*, *misdirection*, etc.).

Heart of Stone (Ex): A Ssethric Inquisitor becomes so set in his ways that he is immune to the preaching of others. He gains a +4 bonus on all saving throws against enchantment, charm, or compulsion effects.

Soul Gaze (Sp): The Ssethric Inquisitor has become an unstoppable zealot of his religion, embracing its tenets above all else. Once per week, the Ssethric Inquisitor may gaze into the very core of a being and lay upon that being the weight of the Inquisitor's religion. This is treated exactly as if the Ssethric Inquisitor had cast a *geas/quest* spell upon the chosen target. The *geas* laid upon the target must cause that creature to abide by the tenets of the Ssethric Inquisitor's religion in some way, shape, or form. In other words, the *geas* must be designed to forcibly convert the target, or to cause the target to further the religious goals of the Ssethric Inquisitor in some fashion.

Chapter 5

FEATS AND SKILLS

Note: All feats marked with an asterisk (*) in this chapter are considered fighter bonus feats.

General Feats

Animal Mastery [General]

Prerequisite: Beastmaster

Benefit: You can attempt to rebuke animals 2 more times per day than normal.

Normal: A character with Beastmaster may typically rebuke animals a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier.

Special: You may take this feat multiple times. Each time you take it you may rebuke animals two additional times per day.

Arcane Tutor [General]

You were inducted at an early age to the eldritch organizations of the Ssethregoran Empire and have received an education in the arcane arts.

Prerequisites: Ssanu, Ss'ressen, or Kobold; must be a native of the Ssethregoran Empire.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus on all Knowledge (arcana) and Spellcraft checks. You may add 3 additional spells (of 1st level) to your spellbook upon character creation.

Special: This feat can be taken after first level, but no extra spells are gained.

Artistic Agony [General]

Your skills with the tools of your trade are legendary. It is said you could make stone cry.

Prerequisite: Profession (torturer) 3 ranks.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus on all Intimidate, Use Rope, and Profession (torturer) checks.

Beastmaster [General]

You can hear the call of the wild and the creatures of the earth respond to you in turn.

Prerequisites: Wild Empathy class feature, Divine caster level 3rd.

Benefit: You gain the ability to rebuke animals as an evil cleric rebukes undead at an effective level equal to your caster level. You may use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Charisma modifier.

Beserker [General]

You are known to your fellows as a berserker and radiate an aura of menace to all those around you.

Prerequisite: Ability to Rage.

Benefit: You may rage 2 additional times per day. Due to your reputation and wild-eyed appearance you suffer a -2 penalty to all Charisma-related skills except Intimidate, which receives a +1 bonus.

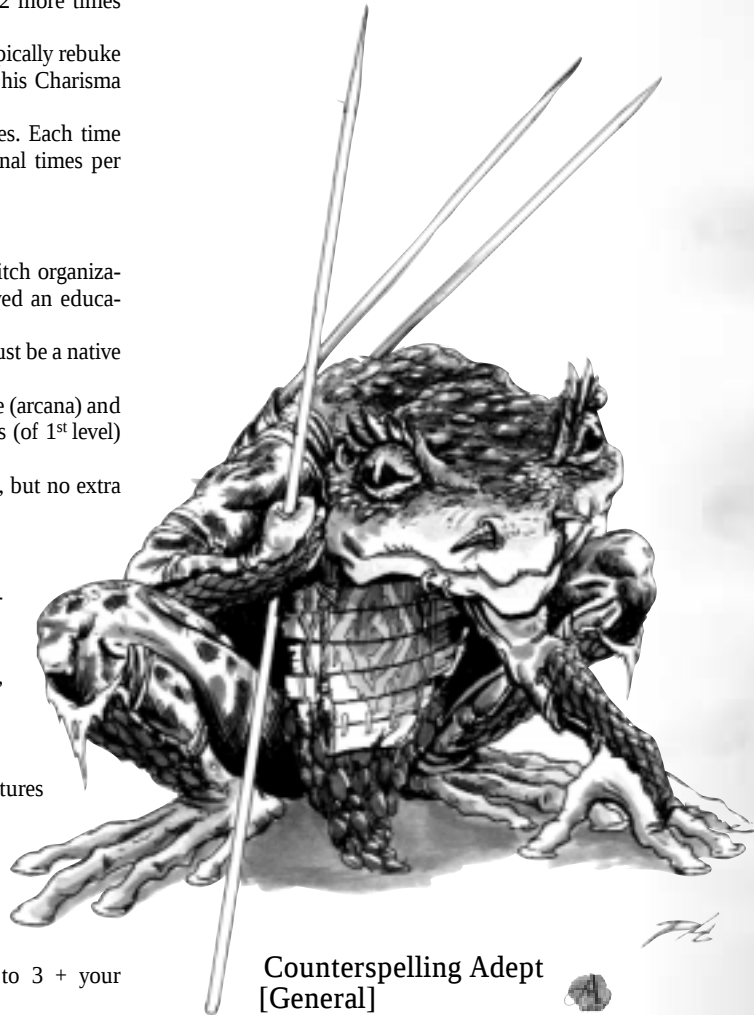
Special: This feat may be taken multiple times. Its effects stack.

Calculating Gaze [General]

Your cold and lidless eyes are unnerving to those not of your species.

Prerequisite: Any Ssethtric.

Benefit: You gain a +3 bonus on Sense Motive and Intimidate checks made against creatures of any non-Ssethtric species. But suffer a -2 to all diplomacy checks when dealing with non-Ssethtric races.



Counterspelling Adept [General]

You are skilled in the arts of foiling another's magic.

Prerequisite: Improved Counterspell, Spellcraft 6 ranks and the ability to cast 1st level or higher spells.

Benefit: When attempting a counterspell action against an opponent's spell, you may use any spell of the same school as the opponent's spell. The spell you use must be of equal or higher level than the opponent's spell.

Normal: Without this feat you may only counterspell with the same spell the opponent is using.

Crocodile Tail [General]

Your thick flattened tail gives you an advantage in the water.

Prerequisite: Str 13, Any ssethric race except Ashen Hide, Curled Tail, and Horned Jowl.

Benefit: Your movement rate increases by 5ft. while swimming.

Special: Your tail must be intact to make use of this feat.

Deadly Strike [General]*

You know where to strike an enemy to make it count.

Prerequisites: Power Attack, Base Attack Bonus +6, Intelligence 13.

Benefit: A number of times per day equal to 1+ your Intelligence modifier, when performing a full attack action, you may chose to add 1d4 points of damage to each successful hit against your opponent.

Enslaved [General]

You have spent time toiling away under harsh masters but due to a quirk of fate, the will of the gods, or perhaps your own ingenuity you have survived and find yourself free.

Prerequisite: Con 13

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to Fortitude and Will saves, but suffer a -2 penalty to all saves verses fear effects.

Special: Must have been captured or enslaved at some point in your adventuring career OR alternatively this feat can be taken at first level to represent your character's personal history.

Final Act [General]

"With my last breath I spit on thee!!" – Serec-

Prerequisite: Die Hard, Endurance

Benefit: When reduced below zero hit points and still conscious, you gain a +2 bonus to strength and a +1 morale bonus to saves verses fear for as long as you remain below zero hit points.

Forked Tongue [General]

"Never trust the honeyed words of a ssanu," as the old saying goes. Your people are known for talking out of both sides of their mouth. You are an expert at telling bits of the truth, but never truly lying... technically.

Prerequisite: Any Ssethric.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus on all Bluff and Diplomacy checks.

Furious Charge [General] *

You headlong assaults are a terror on the battlefield.

Prerequisites: Power Attack

Benefit: When performing a charge action, add 1.5 x your Strength modifier or 2 x your Strength modifier if you are using a two-handed weapon, to the damage of a successful melee attack. But due to the reckless nature of this attack the defender gains an attack of opportunity upon the character performing a furious charge, this is in addition to any attacks of opportunity provoked through moving through a threatened area.

Normal: When performing a charge action, add your Strength modifier or 1.5 x your Strength modifier if you are using a two-handed weapon,

to the damage of a successful melee attack.

Head-butt [General]*

Your broad skull and cranial ridges lend a nasty surprise to your unarmed strikes.

Prerequisite: Improved Unarmed Strike.

Benefit: Once per round, when performing an unarmed strike against a humanoid opponent up to one size larger than you, you may make a head-butt instead and add 1.5x your Strength modifier to the damage if successful.

Special: Head-butt may not be combined with a Flurry of Blows.

Quickened Counterspell [General]

Prerequisites: Counterspelling Adept or Improved Counterspell, Ability to cast 4th-level spells.

Benefit: You may make one counterspell attempt each round as a free action, instead of a standard action. You cannot use this feat if you are flat-footed, unconscious, or in any other situation where you would be denied the ability to react to your opponent. On your next action after using this feat, you may only take a single move action or attack action.

Rending Talons [General] *

Your claws shred opponents into a bloody pulp.

Prerequisites: Claws as part of your natural weaponry, Power Attack.

Benefit: When performing a full attack action, if you successfully hit an opponent with two claw attacks, you may immediately rend that opponent as a free action, inflicting an additional 1d6 + one-half your Strength modifier points of damage.

Special: This ability may be used when fighting with two weapons (claws) or in combination with a flurry of blows. You may not rend the same opponent more than once in a single round, even if you have enough claw attacks to activate this feat more than once.

Staple [General]*

You can pin opponents to a nearby surface with ranged weapons.

Prerequisites: Base Attack Bonus +5, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot.

Benefit: If an opponent is adjacent to a wall, tree, or other appropriately hard surface, you may attempt to pin him to that surface. You must succeed on a ranged attack roll with a -8 penalty. If the attack hits, the opponent takes half damage and you have pinned some extremity (such as a hand or some loose clothing) to the surface with your missile. The stapled creature may not move from that square unless it succeeds on a Strength check (DC 10 + the damage you dealt). A stapled creature may also free itself by destroying the missile that is holding it or by tearing loose the extremity or object of clothing that is pinned (which may or may not be practical depending on exactly what portion of the creature's anatomy got stapled).

A staple attempt may only be made with a projectile that deals piercing damage (such as bolts and arrows) or with thrown piercing weapons (such as a dagger, dart, or spear).

The GM has final discretion on whether or not a staple attempt will work in any given situation, as well as what, if any, options a stapled creature has to free itself.

Natural Weaponry

Natural weapons are weapons that are physically a part of a creature. A creature making a melee attack with a natural weapon is considered armed and does not provoke attacks of opportunity. Likewise, it threatens any space it can reach. Creatures do not receive additional attacks from a high base attack bonus when using natural weapons. The number of attacks a creature can make with its natural weapons depends on the type of the attack—generally, a creature can make one bite attack, one attack per claw or tentacle, one gore attack, one sting attack, or one slam attack. Refer to the individual monster descriptions. When a creature has more than one natural weapon, one of them (or sometimes a pair or set of them) is the primary weapon. All the creature's remaining natural weapons are secondary. All ss'ressen consider their claws to be their primary natural weapon. Any other natural weapons gained through feats and such are treated as secondary weapons.

The primary weapon is given in the creature's Attack entry, and the primary weapon or weapons is given first in the creature's Full Attack entry. A creature's primary natural weapon is its most effective natural attack, usually by virtue of the creature's physiology, training, or innate talent with the weapon. An attack with a primary natural weapon uses the creature's full attack bonus. Attacks with secondary natural weapons are less effective and are made with a -5 penalty on the attack roll, no matter how many there are. (Creatures with the Multiattack feat take only a -2 penalty on secondary attacks.) This penalty applies even when the creature makes a single attack with the secondary weapon as part of the attack action or as an attack of opportunity.

Natural Weaponry and Monks

Due to a monk's ability to use any part of his body as a weapon, monks may freely use any of their natural attacks to make unarmed strikes. In this special case, a monk would use his standard unarmed attack bonus, his more favorable number of attacks in the case of a flurry of blows, and his monk unarmed strike damage, but may freely substitute his natural weaponry to change the type of damage inflicted. For instance, a ss'ressen monk of the Order of the Iridescent Scale, who has the Tail Attack and Distended Jaw feats, could perform an unarmed strike with his fists (bludgeoning damage), his claws (slashing damage), his jaws (piercing damage) or his tail (bludgeoning damage with an extra +2 bonus on trip attempts).

In this special case, monks (and monks only) do not apply the -5 penalty for attacks with secondary natural weapons; their unarmed strike capabilities supersede that penalty.

Tail Attack [General]

You have trained yourself in how to attack with your tail, surprising your opponent with lightning-quick sweeps.

Prerequisite: Troglodyte or any ss'ressen except Horned Jowl and Razor Claw.

Benefit: You gain a tail attack and may use it in melee combat. The tail is considered a secondary natural weapon and cannot be disarmed. You have the same amount of reach with your tail as you do with your claws (usually 5' for creatures of Medium size).

Tail attacks inflict bludgeoning damage in accordance to your size with a base of 1d6 for Medium creatures. If you have monk levels, you may use your monk unarmed damage with your tail attacks instead of the base amount for your size category.

In addition, trip attacks made with your tail gain a +2 bonus on the initial attack roll and on the subsequent Strength check made to resolve the trip attempt. (Since you suffer a -5 penalty on attack rolls with secondary natural weapons, the +2 bonus partially offsets that penalty.)

Unlike other natural weapons, the tail attack requires a certain amount of maneuverability to use successfully. Therefore, you may not use your tail attack during a grapple.

Special: The primary natural weapons of all ss'ressen are their claws. See the Natural Weaponry sidebar for more information about natural weapons.

Technomancer [General]

You have been trained in technomancy, the skill of manipulating flesh to suit your whims and desires.

Prerequisite: Must be a member of the Black Coil and inducted into the Tower of Gettulus.

Benefit: Craft (biotechnology), Knowledge (bioengineering), and Medicine (Surgery) are considered class skills for you. You gain a +2 bonus on skill checks made with any one of the above skills of your choice, which represents advanced training.

Unholy Spell [Metamagic]

A favorite of the Ssethric clergy, this feat allows the caster to inflict horrid destruction upon infidels.

Prerequisite: Any Evil alignment.

Benefit: Any spell augmented with this feat gains the Evil descriptor. If the spell inflicts damage, then half the damage inflicted is considered to be unholy damage instead of the normal damage type. An Unholy Spell uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

Unstoppable Fury [General]

Your awe-inspiring fits of rage are a sight to behold.

Prerequisites: Ability to Rage, Base Attack Bonus +3.

Benefit: If you perform a charge action while raging, you gain an additional +2 bonus on melee attacks made as part of the charge, but you suffer an additional -2 penalty to your Armor Class until your next action.

Writhe and Coil [General]*

Your serpentine body makes you impossible to hold on to and naturally adept at squeezing through tight spaces.

Prerequisite: Any creature with a serpentine body, Rhamphorike, or Ssanu.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus on Escape Artist checks and a +2 bonus on all grapple checks.

Biological Feats

Amphibious Lifestyle [Biological]

Your hide is slightly permeable, allowing you to absorb a small amount of oxygen through your skin from the surrounding aquatic environment.

Prerequisites: Hylis, Ss'ressen, or Troglodyte; Constitution 14.

Benefit: You may hold your breath underwater for 10 minutes, plus 1 minute for each point of Constitution.

Normal: Any character can hold her breath for a number of rounds equal to twice her Constitution score.

Special: This feat may only be taken at character creation.

Blinding Spittle [Biological]

Two small holes in the front of your fangs allow you spray toxic venom from your mouth.

Prerequisites: Venom glands or natural poison ability delivered through a bite attack, base Fortitude save bonus +6.

Benefit: As one of your poison doses for the day, you may spray a 15' cone of venom from your mouth. All creatures caught in the area of effect are allowed a Reflex saving throw (DC 10 + one-half your character level or Hit Dice + your Constitution modifier) to avoid the effects. Those who fail the Reflex save must succeed on a Fortitude save (at the same DC) or be blinded for 1d4+1 rounds. Creatures immune to poison are immune to this effect.

Chameleon Skin [Biological]

You have mastered the ability to control the pigment cells found along the surface of your body. To a limited degree, you can change your color to blend in with your surroundings.

Prerequisites: Rhamphorike, Ss'ressen, or Ssanu; Hide 5 ranks

Benefit: As a full-round action, you can change your skin tone to match your surroundings. This gives you a +5 circumstance bonus on all your Hide checks as long as you remain in the same type of surroundings. You may not gain the benefits of this feat if you are wearing armor heavier than light armor.

Cold-Blooded [Biological]

Due to some primeval throwback or perhaps your own neurosis, your blood is more closely aligned to that of lesser reptiles.

Prerequisite: Any Ssethric.

Benefit: When in areas where the temperature is 100 degrees F or greater, you gain a +1 morale bonus on all attack rolls, damage rolls, and Reflex saves. Conversely, when in areas of 40 degrees F or lower, you suffer a -1 morale penalty on all attack rolls, damage rolls, and Reflex saves.

Distended Jaw [Biological]

You were born with an overly large jaw and incredible gaping mouth. You may attack opponents with a vicious bite.

Prerequisite: Troglodyte, Ss'ressen, or Rhamphorike.

Benefit: You gain a bite attack and may use it to attack in melee combat. The bite is considered a secondary natural weapon and cannot be disarmed. You have the same amount of reach with your bite as you do with your claws (usually 5' for creatures of Medium size).

Your bite attack inflicts piercing damage in accordance to your size with a base of 1d6 for Medium creatures.

Special: The primary natural weapons of all Ss'ressen are their claws. See the Natural Weaponry sidebar for more information about natural weapons.

Dragon's Hide [Biological]

Your hide is thicker and tougher than normal.

Prerequisites: Ss'ressen, Toughness, Constitution 13.

Benefit: Over the years you have seen your share of battles, or perhaps you have purposely allowed others to beat upon your scaly hide. No matter the method, the result is the same: your hide has become as strong as steel. You gain a +1 inherent increase to your existing natural armor.

Special: You may not gain this feat more than once.

Improved Scent [Biological]

You've honed your sense of smell to unparalleled levels.

Prerequisite: Scent ability (either as a special quality or from the Scent feat).

Benefit: The range of your Scent ability doubles. You receive a +2 bonus on Survival checks made to track by scent. Overpowering scents (such as troglodyte musk) may be detected at four times the normal range.

Improved Toxins [Biological]

To the dismay of your opponents, your body has begun to manufacture more powerful venom.

Prerequisite: Venom Glands or natural poison ability, base Fortitude save bonus +11.

Benefit: The save DC of your poison increases by +2.

Special: This feat may be taken more than once. Its effects stack.

Infravision [Biological]

You have honed your ability to detect body heat to perfection. You can now function in total darkness by observing the ambient heat of the environment and that left by your quarry.

Prerequisites: Ssethric, Scent, Improved Scent.

Benefit: You gain the infravision extraordinary ability (see the sidebar for details). Your infravision extends to a range of 60 feet.

Infravision

Infravision is the extraordinary ability to see with no light source at all. Infravision is based on the heat patterns emitted by all living things and the natural heat (or coolness) of the surrounding environment. Infravision is functionally the same as darkvision, but it is in color, with objects colored in relation to their relative temperature: reds and oranges for high heat, blues and greens for cooler temperatures. The range of infravision is specified in the creature's text; if no range is specified, then the default range is 60 feet.

Infravision does not allow you to see anything you would not see otherwise. Invisible objects are still invisible, illusions appear real, and you are still subject to gaze attacks. Magical darkness spoils infravision, just as it spoils darkvision.

The presence of a light source that emits heat (like a torch or lantern) spoils infravision, but magical light that emits no heat (such as that created by *continual flame*) and cold sources of light (such as the phosphorescent glow of many types of underground mosses and fungi) do not.

Peripheral Vision [Biological]

Your naturally wide-angle field of view has given you an uncanny knack for noticing things on the edge of your visual range.

Prerequisite: Hylis, Troglodyte, Ssanu, Ss'ressen, Rhamphorike, or Pleisauran.

Benefit: You gain a +4 bonus on all Spot checks made to detect a moving target or object.

Reptilian Regeneration [Biological]

The Ssethric blood coursing through your veins provides a limited degree of healing capability not seen in the warm-bloods.

Prerequisites: Any Ssethric, Endurance.

Benefit: You heal at twice the normal rate for natural healing.

Scent [Biological]

You possess an advanced olfactory system, setting you apart from the average member of your race.

Prerequisites: Any Ssethric, base Fortitude save bonus +5.

Benefit: You gain the Scent special quality (see *Core Rulebook III*.) If you already possess the Scent ability, then you instead gain +2 bonus on all Survival checks made when tracking by scent.

Serpent Blood [Biological]

The Ssethric blood flowing through your veins grants you a natural resistance to toxins and poisons.

Prerequisite: Any Ssethric.

Benefit: You gain a +4 racial bonus on saving throws made to resist poisons of any type.

Special: This feat may only be taken at character creation.

Thickened With Age [Biological]

After multiple sheddings, your scales have enlarged and matured, finally reaching their maximum potential.

Prerequisites: Dragon's Hide, base Fortitude save bonus +9.

Benefit: You gain an additional +2 inherent bonus to your existing natural armor. This bonus stacks with the bonus given by the Dragon's Hide feat (for a total bonus of +3).

Venom Glands [Biological]

You produce an extremely caustic substance in your saliva, which most creatures find highly poisonous.

Prerequisites: Bite attack as part of your natural weaponry, base Fortitude save bonus +5.

Benefit: Your bite attack now delivers a toxin on a successful hit. Any creature bitten must succeed on a Fortitude Save (DC 10 + one-half your character level or Hit Dice + your Constitution modifier) or take 1d6 points of temporary Strength damage (with no secondary effect).

This ability may be used 3 times per day. You must declare the use of this ability before you make your attack roll. If you do not hit with your bite attack, the use is wasted.

Venom Immunity [Biological]

By repeatedly dosing yourself with stronger and stronger poisons, you have increased your body's natural ability to deal with poisons and toxins.

Prerequisites: Serpent Blood, base Fortitude save bonus +9.

Benefit: Whenever you fail a saving throw against poison, you may immediately make a second save. You only receive one extra chance to save per poison exposure. This is an extraordinary ability.

Elementalist Feats

Elemental Familiar [Elementalist]

You have a more powerful or exotic familiar than most of your fellow magicians.

Prerequisite: Ability to acquire a familiar.

Benefit: When choosing a familiar, you may choose an elemental from the following table, as long as you meet the minimum level prerequisite (counting only levels in classes that are eligible to have familiars), the alignment prerequisite (no more than one step away on both the Law/Chaos and Good/Evil axis), and any special requirements described for the familiar. Familiars are advanced according to the rules for the sorcerer class in *Core Rulebook I*.

Table 5-1: Elemental Familiars

Familiar	Minimum Level	Alignment
Air Elemental (small)	5	Any
Earth Elemental (small)	5	Any
Fire Elemental (small)	5	Any
Water Elemental (small)	5	Any
Air Mephitis	7	N, NE, NG
Earth Mephitis	7	N, NE, NG
Fire Mephitis	7	N, NE, NG
Water Mephitis	7	N, NE, NG
Thoqqua	6	N, NE, NG

Elemental Mastery [Elementalist]

You have gained unparalleled knowledge of dealing with specific elemental forces.

Prerequisites: Able to cast Evocation spells of 4th level or higher.

Benefit: Choose any elemental subtype from Table 5.2. Whenever you are preparing a spell that deals damage with an elemental subtype, you may convert the spell to use the type of elemental damage associated with your chosen element. Other than the type of elemental damage inflicted, the spell remains unchanged in every way.

For example, if the caster had chosen Earth when he selected this feat, then when he prepares a fireball spell (which normally deals damage with the fire subtype) he can in its place prepare a fireball that inflicts acid damage instead of fire damage.

Table 5-2: Elemental Mastery

Chosen Elemental Type	Associated Elemental Damage Type
Air	Lightning
Earth	Acid
Fire	Fire
Water	Cold

Control Elemental [Elementalist]

You have mastered the difficult task of controlling creatures from other planes.

Prerequisite: Elementalist (Conjurist) 3rd level or higher.

Benefit: You gain the ability to rebuke elementals as an evil cleric rebukes undead. You may use this ability a number of times a day equal to 3 + your Charisma modifier. You make turning checks against elementals as a cleric of your caster level.

Craft Minor Elemental [Elementalist, Creation Feat]

Through long years of study, you have mastered the art of crafting creatures from the very fabric of the universe.

Prerequisite: Elementalist (Creationist).

Benefit: You may attempt to create any elemental up to small in size (such as a steam mephitis or a magmin). See Chapter 7: Crafting Elementals for more details.

Craft Elemental [Elementalist, Creation Feat]

Your skills in crafting are improving and you may therefore create larger elementals.

Prerequisite: Craft Minor Elemental.

Benefit: You may attempt to create any elemental of Medium or smaller size (such as a medium air elemental or a thoqqua). See Chapter 7: Crafting Elementals for more details.

Craft Major Elemental [Elementalist, Creation Feat]

Your skill in crafting elementals has improved, allowing you to create larger elementals.

Prerequisite: Craft Elemental.

Benefit: You may attempt to create any elemental of Large or smaller size (such as a large earth elemental or an elder tojanida). See Chapter 7: Crafting Elementals for more details.

Craft Greater Elemental [Elementalist, Creation Feat]

You are nearing mastery of the craft of creating elementals, enabling your creations to become truly huge in size.

Prerequisite: Craft Major Elemental.

Benefit: You may attempt to create any elemental of Huge or smaller size (such as a greater water elemental). See Chapter 7: Crafting Elementals for more details.

Master of Elementals [Elementalist, Creation Feat]

Your skills in crafting elementals have reached their pinnacle.

Prerequisite: Craft Greater Elemental.

Benefit: You may attempt to create any elemental of any size, and may create elemental-based creatures such as Elorii or Hussuma. See Chapter 7: Crafting Elementals for more details.

Elemental Compulsion [Elementalist]

You have gained greater insight into the workings of the elemental mind.

Prerequisites: Control Elemental.

Benefit: You count as being 2 caster levels higher when rebuking elementals composed of your chosen energy type.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times. Its effects stack.

Elemental Domination [Elementalist]

The alien minds of elementals are an open book to you.

Prerequisites: Control Elemental.

Benefit: You gain 3 extra rebuke attempts versus elementals per day.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times. Its effects stack.

Elemental Expertise [Elementalist]

You are a master at manipulating your element of choice

Prerequisite: Elementalist (Augmentationalist).

Benefit: Any spell you cast that deals damage of your chosen energy type has its save DC increased by 2.

Elemental Foothold [Elementalist, Metamagic]

You have gained greater insight into the workings of the elemental mind.

Prerequisites: Elementalist (Conjurist).

Benefit: You may alter any spell that summons an elemental to last longer than normal. Any summoned elemental resulting from this spell remains for an additional number of rounds equal to your primary casting attribute modifier. This modification does not increase the effective level of the spell.

Elemental Maximization [Elementalist, Metamagic]

Your elemental attacks come easier for you than to normal mages.

Prerequisite: Elemental Expertise.

Benefit: All variable, numeric effects of a spell of your chosen energy type modified by this feat are maximized. This has the same effect as the Maximize Spell feat, but a spell augmented by this feat only uses up a spell slot two levels higher than the spell's actual level.

Elemental Taint [Elementalist]

You overflow with elemental energy and it corrupts all the spells you cast.

Prerequisite: Elementalist (Augmentationalist) 8th level or higher.

Benefit: Any spell you cast that inflicts hit point damage deals an additional 2d6 points of damage of your chosen energy type. Spells that inflict damage other than hit point damage (such as ability damage or negative levels) are unaffected. This feat does not affect the spell's casting time or effective level in any way. You cannot choose to deactivate this ability; it affects every eligible spell that you cast, regardless of your wishes.

Elemental Amplification [Elementalist, Metamagic]

Elemental spells of your chosen energy type are a notch above those cast by normal spellcasters.

Prerequisites: Elemental Augmentation, any other Elementalist Metamagic Feat.

Benefit: When you amplify a spell of your chosen energy type, the damage dice it inflicts increases by one step. For example, an amplified fireball would deal 1d8 damage per level instead of 1d6. You may not exceed the spell's normal maximum dice of damage (so a fireball still caps at 10 dice). A spell augmented by this feat uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

Elemental Augmentation [Elementalist]

You have gained greater insight into the workings of the elemental mind.

Prerequisites: Elemental Foothold.

Benefit: All elementals of your chosen energy type that you summon with any summoning spell (such as summon monster or summon nature's ally) gain a +6 enhancement bonus to Strength and Constitution for the duration of the spell you summoned them with.

Empower Elements [Elementalist, Metamagic]

Your ability to manipulate your chosen energy type causes it to be more effective than normal.

Prerequisite: Elemental Expertise.

Benefit: All variable, numeric effects of a spell of your chosen energy type modified by this feat are increased by one-half. This has the same effect as the Empower Spell feat, but a spell augmented by this feat only uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

Might of the Elements [Elementalist]

Your working knowledge of the elements grants you more arcane ability than most.

Prerequisite: Elementalist (Augmentationalist) 8th level or higher.

Benefit: You gain one extra spell slot of any spell level you can currently cast. You may only use this slot to prepare or cast a spell of your chosen energy type.

Special: You may take this feat multiple times, but may only gain one extra spell slot per spell level. (You must choose a different spell level each time you take this feat.)

Skills**Craft (Biotechnology) (Int) Trained Only, Advanced Skill**

Prerequisites: 10 ranks in Knowledge (bioengineering), 6 ranks in Heal

Craft (Biotechnology) works like all craft skills. The skill allows a character to create biotechnological items with strange and diverse powers. The DC and costs for crafting a biotechnological item vary per item and are given with the descriptions of the items.

Knowledge (Bioengineering) (Int) Trained Only

This skill represents an intimate knowledge of the subject of bioengineering: the manipulation of living tissue and the creation of life. In all other ways, this works like any standard knowledge skill. Any character with 10 or more ranks in this skill gains a +2 circumstance bonus on all of his Craft (Biotechnology) checks.

Medicine (Surgery) (Int) Trained Only, Advanced Skill

Prerequisite: 8 ranks in Heal

Surgery is an advanced form of normal healing, representing unsurpassed skill in the knowledge of anatomy and the manipulation of living tissues. Medicine (Surgery) may be used whenever a Heal skill check is called for. A successful use of this skill to provide long-term care results in the patient recovering hit points or ability score points at four times the normal rate. This skill is also applicable in the creation and modification of living creatures, and with the GM's permission (and discretion) a character with enough ranks in this skill may be able to re-attach lost limbs or repair other forms of massive damage.

Special: Without a masterwork healer's kit, you suffer a -4 penalty on Medicine (Surgery) checks.

Synergy: If you have 5 ranks in Craft (Biotechnology) you receive a +2 bonus on Medicine and Surgery checks. If you have 5 ranks in Knowledge (Bioengineering) you receive a +2 bonus on Medicine and Surgery checks. These bonuses stack if you have 5 ranks in both skills.

Profession (Torturer) (Wis) Trained Only

A character with this skill may spend 10 minutes to make an Intimidate check against an individual he is torturing, using his Profession (torturer) skill in place of his Intimidate skill. A character may take 20 on this check. This forces the victim to make a single save against the torturer's final check result.

Synergy: If you have 5 ranks in Intimidate you receive a +2 bonus on Profession (torturer) checks. If you have 5 ranks in Bluff you receive a +2 bonus on Profession (torturer) checks. If you have 5 ranks in Medicine (Surgery) you receive a +2 bonus on Profession (torturer) checks. These bonuses stack.



Chapter Six

RELIGION AND MAGIC

The noonday sun spilled through the skylight high overhead down upon the cracked sandstone floor of ages past. Its warm brilliance lit the high chamber and highlighted the denizens within. At the forefront of the ancient temple there stood a figure of almost otherworldly majesty and beauty. Her lustrous yellow scales were accented by the golden light from above, which illuminated her long sinuous coils, highlighting her brilliant emerald eyes. The Ssanu was robed in the finest Khitani silk, smuggled in at the greatest expense; its flawlessly smooth surface gliding exotically over her scaled form. The priestess swayed before an altar of the finest obsidian, the only new feature in this dilapidated ruin. Prayers and hymns flowed from her forked tongue like honey, the sibilant whispers venerating the Queen of the Insidious Fang and her coiled image that hung above the altar.

The priestess' prayers were interrupted by the sudden appearance of a young Yissera hurriedly approaching through the archway at the far end of the temple. The Yissera's eyes blinked rapidly, nictitating membranes sliding across the vertical pupil, betraying her nervousness. "Your Eminence," stuttered the messenger, "I bring news from the Empire." Prostrating herself on the floor, the youthful Yissera extended her arms out offering the sealed vellum scroll. With infinite patience the priestess finished her meditations before finally turning to the grovelling form. Slithering across the sandstone block floor, she took the proffered scroll and unfurled the fresh vellum, breaking the strange metallic seal. Her eyes quickly scanned the document and as they flowed over the spidery writing a glint of anger flashed through her cold orbs. "Fools," she muttered crumpling the scroll in her hand. "Always were and still are," she said softly turning back to the altar. Forgotten, the young messenger lay prostrated upon the floor, her mind whirling. Her innards twisted until she finally worked up enough courage and in a wavering voice whispered, "Your Eminence, please pardon this unworthy messenger, but how have the Hromu displeased you?" The Priestess's neck swivelled about, fixing the lesser Yissera in her serpentine gaze. "An unfortunate flaw in your race; you inherited the human's curiosity. A pity, but you are new to the cause and cannot be expected to remember all that has transpired. You may rise, but heed well for this lesson is only given once," warned the high priest in deadly quiet tones. The Yissera jumped to her feet and stood at attention before the altar. Her thoughts turning back to the good altar of Yig before her, as the Ssanu began a tale.

"Heed me well little one, for this is a tale lost to the ages. As you well know, six thousand seven hundred and sixty eight years ago began the great slave revolt and the ensuing Elorii wars. It was a time of great turmoil, the Old Empire was crumbling, the capital of Yahssremore had fallen and our forces had retreated to our last stronghold, the swamps of Kraldjur Morass. There they regrouped under the command of Emperor Sseth and implemented a counterattack, driving the Elorii back from the swamps to lick their wounds.

Over the next century Sseth gathered his power base and with the help of the Nagas who were the regional governors for Kraldjur Morass area, formed what is today the Ssethregoran Empire.

For two more centuries the Elorii wars raged and massive casualties were taken on both sides. None upon Onara were unaffected by those battles as the war escalated into the very realm of the gods themselves.

Our Lady Yig and her mate Lord Kassegore battled against the Elorii deities, hounding them across the

cosmos. The conflict was monumental. In the end, the Elorii gods retreated, but the aftermath of their struggle left the face of the Known Lands changed forever. The mortal forces of Ssethregore were poised for one final assault upon the Elorii capital of Belestor and our Gods were with us. The peoples were set for a grand victory and began the march to retake our Empire... that is when everything changed. Inexplicably on the very eve of battle Kassegore and Yig vanished and would no longer answer the calls of the devout. This demoralizing factor, along with the political maneuverings of the greedy Naga led to the downfall of that invasion and the current state of the Empire. The Ssethric races blamed the Gods for their defeat and many lost faith. The Nagas seized power with the help of strange alien deities and rebuilt the religious face of the Empire. Worship of Yig and Kassegore was banned under penalty of death for any caught venerating the true gods. The Troglodytes believed that Kassegore, in his grief and shame over his forces loss, threw himself from the heavens and abandoned us. Many others also believe this tale. The truth of the matter though lies along a different path. After the disappearance of the Ssethric Gods, many lost faith, but a few retained their beliefs in secret. Three centuries passed, but still some remained faithful and on a moonless evening those many millennia ago the faithful were rewarded, for Kassegore and Yig returned to their people. Once again we were able to wield the powers of the gods and from our divine lords we learned this tale.

On the eve of the battle for Belestor, Kassegore, the Dreaming God and the Master of Prophecy fell into a deep slumber, his unfathomable mind searching through time and space, looking for hints as to the future of his children. Long he searched and further than ever before he stretched his divine influence, seeking answers to the questions wracking his mind. What he discovered was a great power, destined to wrap this world in a veil of darkness more pronounced and infinite than the chaos from which he formed the world. He saw the coming of the children of the sun and their heretical Godlings of chaos and unrest. He watched as the Dark One made pacts with the enemies of his creations and the breaking of the world. All this passed before his timeless gaze.

Returning from his transcendent state, Kassegore confided in his mate all that was destined to come to pass and the destruction of all they had worked to create. The two Gods contemplated this matter and decided that they would oppose this destruction with all of their formidable power. Kassegore, always direct and desiring the most expeditious annihilation of his foes counselled for a direct assault, but Yig the Cunning opposed him, devising another way.

The Queen of the Insidious Fang formulated a devious plan, one whose brilliance is of unfathomable magnitude. They would be ready for the coming troubles and they had a way to prepare their children. Unfortunately to prepare for the new era, the two would have to physically leave the face of Onara alienating their children for a short time and cutting them off from their powers. Yig pressed for immediate action, for they could waste no time. Kassegore would have none of it, wanting to finish the battle against their elemental rivals and the hated Belisarda before retreating from the world.

The argument between the two was colossal, but in the end Yig succumbed. Baring her fangs in a seductive smile, Yig sought to consummate their new agreement in a fit of excited lust. Kassegore easily fell to the wiles of his devious mate and while the two were wrapped in each other's coils Yig struck. Her treacherous fangs sunk deep into his neck, sending divine venom coursing through his veins. The results



battles ahead and we have been working toward those goals for six millennia. We will continue to do so until Yig commands otherwise."

The Ssanu priestess turned toward the young one. "So you see, our two organizations have been working toward the same end for millennia, but we do not always agree upon the methods. Hromu tend to be very...direct, while we choose to fight our battles from behind the lines. Herein lies the problem."

Pausing for a moment to discard the crumpled letter into a burning brass brazier, the Ssanu watched its yellowed ages crumble into ash. Sliding across the sun-warmed floor on her coils, the priestess moved out onto the balcony, the Yissera following her. The high-spired tower stood elevated above the tree line, its vine covered façade showing the antiquity of the place. The priestess's gaze swept east where the jungles of Ssethregore stretched toward the horizon. "As I said before little one," continued the Ssanu, "the Hromu are too direct. After all this planning and plotting, things are about to come to fruition, but the Hromu are fools for making themselves so apparent! If they listened to us, things would go much smoother. Secretive and surgical, that's how we wor. Don't you agree our machinations are sheer artwork?" Finishing her speech, the Ssanu fell silent, turning her gaze to the north where the human city of Abessios burned under the fire of rebellion.

were catastrophic, for in the blink of an eye, Kassegore had collapsed, falling into a comatose slumber.

With Kassegore's fall Yig gathered up her mate and left the mortal plane, ascending to the heavens, to begin the first steps of her plan. She hid away Kassegore's body, veiling its location with the powers of her sorcery. In mere seconds our Gods had ascended, leaving us here upon the mortal plane. Very soon the divine essence of Kassegore awoke and fathomed all that had happened. Though in a great rage, his paralyzed body kept him from destroying Yig then and there. Yig reasoned with Kassegore, her glib tongue spilling honey forth to cure the wounds in the Great Devourer's pride. They were safe, she reasoned and their plans were in full motion. Kassegore contemplated this and eventually agreed, what was done was in the past and began to forge ahead with the plan.

Yig had hidden him so well, that Kassegore decided to remain hidden away and asleep, for his slumbering physical form had no real effect on his actual divine power. Soon thereafter, Yig re-established contact with her worshippers and Kassegore, though his physical body was asleep, used his divine spirit reached out to contact his. Yig prepared us, forming our Order, while those who followed Kassegore formed the Cult of Hromu. Orders were given to prepare us for the

The Ssethric Gods

There are two separate pantheons of Ssethric Gods on Onara; those deemed the "True Gods" or "Old Gods," and those called the New Gods. Kassegore, the Fire Dragon, Yig, and Jeggal Sag comprise the old deities, for they created the Ssethric races, lending their divine essence to those proud people. Most of the Ssethric people's worship of the old deities has fallen to the wayside, with a few notable exceptions. The large majority of the Ssethric populous now worship the interlopers, the New Gods known as the Varn. The Varn hail from a distant plane and grant their followers many strange powers and abilities alien to the world of Onara. The Varn are not true deities, but are instead demipowers: incredibly powerful beings who can lend some of their own energies to grant divine capability to their followers. Both of these factions see the other as a rival and they wage perpetual war through their followers for the souls of the Ssethric people.

Kassegore, the Great Devourer, the Dreaming God, Eater of Souls, Master of Prophecy, the Fire Dragon, the Reptile God

Kassegore is the head of the Old Ssethric pantheon, being the primal force of creation in the Ssethric myths. He is a stern and unforgiving God, a God of extremes. Kassegore is graced with gigantic melancholies and great mirth, prone to be cold and calculating, but just as easily flying into destructive rages that shake the foundations of the world. His eternal mate Yig, who is the tempering force upon His mighty power and the polar opposite of the reptilian god, compliments Kassegore. He is known as the Eater of Souls, for He consumes the souls of His worshippers that have lost mortal life, forging new souls for the next generation. In this way, all worshippers of Kassegore are essentially eternal, as their souls are the foundation of the next generation. Each generation of new souls that the Reptile God creates weakens Him slightly, just as the soul of each dying worshipper strengthens Him. In recent time Kassegore's power has been reduced slightly, as the Varn have been stealing Ssethric souls.

Kassegore is also known as the Dreaming God and the Master of Prophecy. It is said that the Great Lord has the ability to see into the past, present and future through the medium of dreams and grants visions to His followers in the same way. Ssethric prophets of old sat as advisors to the Coiled Throne weaving their powers through drug enshrouded dream states and meditations. Under the control of the Naga, this practice has been abolished and Kassegorian Prophets are now a rarity upon Onara.

Worshippers of Kassegore once held sway over all the Known Lands, ruling from the old capital of Yahssremore. They extended their sway across all the sentient races, bringing the words of the Great Devourer to all who would listen, forcibly converting the rest. With the collapse of the Old Empire and subsequent formation of the Ssethregoran Empire, the worship of Kassegore has diminished. The Nagas who control the Empire have banned all open forms of Kassegore worship and many Ssethrics still think that Kassegore abandoned His people when they needed Him most.

Being caught openly worshipping the Great Devourer within the bounds of Ssethregore holds an immediate sentence of death. As a result the worshippers that remain have moved underground, forming secret societies and seeking hidden shrines lost in the depths of the jungle. Kassegore worship is still common among the lower rungs of Ssethric society, as the Troggs, Pleisaurans, and Kobolds continue to venerate their ancient deity. The Ss'ressen, Ssanu and Naga of the Ssethregoran Empire have largely abandoned the Dreaming God, though a notable exception is the Emerald Scale Egg Clutch who has never lost faith in their deity.

Priests and priestesses of Kassegore tend to be individuals from the lower rungs of society who have had prophetic visions or a similar epiphany at some point during their existence. As in any other religious group, the priesthood tends to also attract individuals looking for a quick route to power and Kassegore is not a God to quibble over giving powers to His followers. The destructive magics of Kassegorian clerics are well known, as many Elorii can attest.

There is no longer an organized clergy for Kassegore within Ssethregoran society, although many small bands of worshippers are loosely linked together in an extremely secretive chain. In these small cults both males and

females of all the various races have been known to become clerics. An organized clergy has developed in the Emerald Scale Egg Clutch. Based on the time honored Matriarchal Oligarchy of the Ss'ressen,

the clergy of the Emerald Scale is entirely female. The High Matriarch mother of the Emerald Scale has always been a high-ranking cleric of Kassegore.



Spheres of Influence: Destruction, Dream, Fire, Holy, Law, Saurian.

Holy Symbol: A ring in the form of a green serpent biting its own tail.

Position in the Pantheon: Head of the Ssethric gods, Mate of Yig, Father of Dragons.

Favored Weapon: Tulwar, "Worldthorn"

Animal: Crocodile

Color: Green

Appearance: Kassegore appears differently to his followers, seemingly to be paragon example of the follower's race of gigantic proportions.

Secret Society: The Cult of Hromu (also refereed to as the Hromu Heresy by its opposition). This secret society works behind the scenes in the Ssethregoran Empire, trying to achieve its first and foremost goal: the overthrow the Naga-based government and subsequent destabilization of Varn worship by the various races of Ssethregore. The Hromu were founded by a fanatical group of loyal Kassegorian worshippers that never lost faith after the temporary departure of their Deity. They were rewarded for their loyalty with knowledge greater than mortals were meant to know. They have applied that knowledge at Kassegore's direction into developing fantastic biotechnological items and by augmenting the psionic powers of any loyal followers of the Great Devourer that possess the power of the mind. It is even rumored that they have discovered ways to modify mundane creatures, giving them psionic powers. As a consequence there is a disproportionately large number of Psions among the ranks of the Hromu.

The Cult of Hromu has close ties with the Daughters of the Hidden Adder. Both groups have managed to locate and reactivate many old portals lost in the Elorii Wars and use these to move messengers and spies all over the lands of Onara.

Yig of the Shifting Scales, the Master of Lies, the Veiled Serpent, the Glib-Tongued God, Queen of the Insidious Fang, and the Life Bringer

Yig of the Shifting Scales is perhaps the second oldest deity upon Onara, preceded only by the venerable Kassegore. Yig compliments Kassegore's powers, being the life force of all things, bal-

ancing out the destructive powers of Her impulsive mate. Yig is known as a schemer and the master of falsehoods. Always working from the shadows, Yig hides Her true intent, content in tricking others into doing Her bidding. Yig is so skilled in the arts of deception that even Her mate Kassegore is unable to find the Veiled Serpent when She decides to spurn His advances.

Yig is known as The Life Bringer for good reason. As the consort of Kassegore and an elder god in Her own right, She resides over Ssethric life and fertility, the mother of all Ssethric beings. She is lust incarnate and when the seasons are right, Her insatiable passions are as strong as those of Her eternal mate. Where Kassegore provides the soul for each new life, Yig grants life to the mortal shell that houses the spirit.

Worshippers of Yig were never as common as worshippers of Kassegore, even in the ancient days. At the height of the Old Empire, large numbers of Yigites could be found among Her favored children, the Ssanu and more than a few Emperors venerated Her. Oddly none of the Ss'ressen egg clutches ever adopted Her as a patron deity, perhaps partially due to Her affinity with serpents that remind them too much of their serpentine rivals the Ssanu. Whatever the reason, worship of Yig never spread as far as it could have in the golden age of the serpentine empire.

Yig is all but forgotten among the peoples of Onara. After the sudden disappearance and subsequent reappearance of the Reptilian Gods, Yig never fully returned to the limelight in front of Her people, choosing instead to hide behind a veil of secrecy, seemingly content with only a small number of devoted followers. Though small in number, Her followers are highly skilled as dignitaries, political figures, assassins and spies. From behind a web of deception, Yig's followers have meticulously molded virtually every aspect of Ssethric society to their own liking, never openly challenging the current authoritative figures, but always plotting and scheming from the shadows. They have their eye on a political agenda, one dictated by the secretive high priestesses of Yig who remain hidden throughout the Empire. Worship of Yig promises personal power, material gain, extended life and everlasting fertility.

The Hylis, the arboreal frog-like denizens of the marshes, are the only group in the Empire to openly worship Yig. Their inaccessible habitat and isolationist policies have allowed them to continue to worship The Life Bringer. The Hylis venerate the fertility aspect of Yigite religion, for the Hylis religious festivals are massive mating rituals held in the treetop lakes of the Morass. The Hylis are on good terms with the various Yig worshipping groups inside Ssethregore and have hidden these groups from persecution in the past. Their influence is very limited and their low numbers make the Hylis a restricted resource at best.

Strangely, Yig worship has spread beyond the borders of the Ssethregoran Empire and can be found in some of the more remote regions of Onara. It is said that a splinter group of Ssanu, dating back to the Elorii Wars still worship the Veiled Serpent, established a stronghold among the Pirate Isles in the far Northeast. Though many of their number have been corrupted over time and now revere the Unspeakable One, there still remains a small core of faithful. Recent reports trickling into the Empire speak of holy symbols of Yig being found in what is currently the Coryani province of Toranesta.

Clerics of Yig are even rarer than those of Kassegore. They are almost always invariably female, but a few males can be found, especially among the ranks of assassin guilds or political rings. Yigite clerics tend to have an elitist attitude, seeing themselves as mentally superior to all but the most learned mages and scholars. Vain and conceited, they express the worst traits of their cold-hearted deity, enjoying the heat of the moment and deriving pleasure from watching their enemies fall into well laid traps. Nothing excites a Yigite cleric more than watching her newest plot come to fruition.



Spheres of Influence: Healing, Holy, Knowledge, Law, Pain, Poison, Saurian.

Holy Symbol: A black serpent coiled around an egg.

Position in the Pantheon: Mate of Kassegore, Mother of all Ssethric beings

Favored Weapon: Kriss Dagger, "Serpent's Fang"

Animal: Snake

Color: Gold

Appearance: Yig usually appears as an insubstantial serpent wrapped in shadows or as a tiny gold-scaled viper, though it is said She does possess a more humanoid form. It is commonly believed that the Yissera were created idolizing this form.

Secret Society: Daughters of the Hidden Adder. Like the Hromu, the Daughters of the Hidden Adder trace their order back to the formation of the Ssethregoran Empire. More enigmatic than their rash counterparts, the Daughters make it their business to know everything that occurs within the borders of Ssethregore and a good deal that goes on outside of it. Their main power base is a group of subterranean temples and old fortresses found in the jungles of ancient Myrantia. These ruins were once used by the Ssethric peoples in the days of the Old Empire, but were lost, some eventually used by degenerate human worshippers and their foul deities.

With the fall of those foul humans, the ruins lay forgotten for many centuries until agents of the Daughters located them once more and re-opened the portals to other ancient ruins. Deep beneath those temples, the rites of Yig are carried out once again and the Daughters of the Hidden Adder reach out with their foul coils to control all the lands around them. The Daughters consist mainly of renegade Ssanu, Hylis and a substantial number of Yissera. In fact it was agents of the Daughters who suggested the creation of the Yissera to the Emperor millennia ago; their insidious magic warped the resulting Yissera into the reptilian masterpiece seen today. Because they were created using the life essence of Yig, the Yissera are bound to that God, though their souls still return to Kassegore when they die. The true motives of the Daughters remain a mystery to all but the highest levels of their initiates, but one thing is certain, the Daughters of the Hidden Adder have their cold eyes looking in two directions, one toward the Coiled Throne, the other toward the soft, fat human lands to the north.

Jeggal Sag, Master of Beasts, Lord of Drakes

Jeggal Sag is an enigma in Ssethric society. Many claim He is one of the 12 children of Kassegore and Yig, while others believe that He is a demipower who chose the form of a Dragon. Either way, only the Disciples of Jeggal Sag know the truth behind the matter.

Jeggal Sag is the Master of Beasts. His followers attest that in the beginning when Kassegore and Yig created the Ssethric races for a time the gods left them alone upon the world to fend for themselves. Kassegore is a harsh master and His creations were soon to learn that only the strong survive and the many wild beasts and monsters that roamed the untamed primeval world decimated the early ranks of Ssethric races. It is said that Jeggal Sag looked down upon the creations of Hhis parents and took pity on their plight. Leaving His siblings

He descended to Onara and revealed Himself to the early Ss'ressen of the period; though the Ssanu vehemently assert that they were the ones to make first contact. The Ss'ressen were awed by His immense power and began to worship the great coppery Dragon. Jeggal Sag protested, stating that they should remain strong in the faith of His parents, for He did not want to incur the terrible wrath of His father. Still, He took a select group of wide-eyed Ss'ressen and began to teach them the ways of the earth. The students excelled at His teaching and soon began to tame the world around them. Jeggal Sag granted divine power to His students, giving them uncanny control over all natural creatures that walked, swam, flew, or crawled over the face of the world.

As the roots of the Old Empire were beginning to form and the Great Migration began, the students under Jeggal Sag finally began to master the techniques He taught them. No longer were they mere students, for they began to spread His teachings in their own right: a tightly knit organization formed around the coppery Wyrms, calling themselves the Disciples of Jeggal Sag.

For untold millennia, through the rise and fall of the Old Empire and the formation of Ssethregore, the Disciples acted as guardians against the wild places of the world, taming creatures for

use as food or beasts of burden. The Disciples are responsible for all the rookeries and hatcheries in the Empire, raising the myriads of drakes and other beasts of war for the burgeoning Ssethric war machine. As their skill and numbers grew so did their prestige and power. The Disciples were responsible for making allies of the Dragons and the great drakes. Guided by the seemingly immortal Jeggal Sag, the Disciples rose to prominent positions of power in both empires, past and present. Eighteen hundred years ago all this changed.

In that fateful time, the foul human deities allied with the Celestial Giants and made a pact to drive all Dragons from Onara. The resulting war was brutal with horrid casualties on both sides. The human deities sent their accursed Valinor to fight their war. They flew through the skies of Onara, hunting the Dragons down one by one. The numbers of great drakes were decimated by this maneuver, but the immortal Dragons, the spawn of Kassegore himself, were able to withstand the tide. Proving to be too powerful for all but the largest groups of Valinor, the Dragons wreaked havoc among the winged avengers, destroying many of them in the process. In the end, most Dragons proved to be too powerful for the Valinor to overcome, but with the eldritch spells of the Valinors of Sarish, they created a ritual to bind the Great Wyrms into perpetual slumber. Their plan worked and one by one the remaining Dragons were driven into slumber, while the weaker ones were destroyed by the now concentrated Valinor.

Early on in the conflict Jeggal Sag left his disciples in Ssethregore and took to the skies. As the only member of the true Ssethric pantheon still physically on Arcanis, He chose to become involved, though His parents could not, for if They did descend from the heavens to fight, then the human gods would also be allowed to intervene and the resulting battle would tear the world asunder.

The Coppery Wyrms left to confront the Valinor, for his power was greater than many of those winged devils combined. In the end though, only three remained on the side of the Dragons, Jeggal Sag, Thrandulurantis, eldest of the Red Dragons, and



Astinaxarathulumn, the most cunning of the Greens. The red was the first to fall to the Valinor's insidious ritual, crashing into a mountain range and buried in the rubble.

The green and Jeggal Sag retreated to the Kraldjur Morass for the final battle. The skies overhead were littered with the winged slaves of the human Gods, their terrible weapons poised for the assault, but Jeggal Sag was no mere Dragon. He was a demigod. From His fanged maw spewed an inferno hotter than the fires of Hell and swept over the Valinor's lines. The Temperance of Nier was instantly destroyed in the blast, for not even his Lord's mastery of fire was enough to save him. Many more Valinor were crippled and fell from the sky, but it was not enough. Though the Demigod and the Green fought bravely, the outcome was inevitable. The Rage of Nier and the Bravery of Hurrian rushed into the fray to seek retribution for their lost brethren. Jeggal was weakened by their ferocious onslaught and the Green was wounded from the insidious blade of the Cunning of Cadic. The Green fell from the sky and crashed into the marsh below. Jeggal Sag looked upon the last Dragon of Onara and swooped down to stand over His fallen comrade, His coppery scales gleaming in the dying light.

It was too late however; the great scaled form of Jeggal Sag was soon swarmed by the remaining Valinor, their blessed weapons carving great rents in the demigod's hide. It was the Light of Illiir who delivered the final stroke, a beam of divine righteousness stemming from the glowing sun itself. With that blow, Jeggal Sag reeled and collapsed, falling out of consciousness, His body still protecting the wounded Green. The Judgment of Nier stepped forward, his flaming greatsword poised to deliver the killing blow but as he raised his sword high, the eyes of the Valinor swept outward to an amazing sight.

Out of the surrounding swamp marched all manner of animals and beasts, followed by hundreds of Ss'ressen, Hylis, Troglodytes, and Pleisaurans. Like a great wave they swept forward, swarming over the unmoving form of their downed Lord, protecting Him with their very bodies. Nature took a stand and stared defiantly toward the invincible horde of immortal reavers in front of them, prepared to die in His defense. The Valinor gazed at these mortals, sentients and animals alike and paused for one instant.

The Fertility of Saluwe was moved to tears and the Honor of Illiir looked across the world at the carnage they caused, bowing his head at the sight. The Honor of Illiir commanded the Judgement of Nier to lower his sword and instead of killing the demigod, they all pooled their power and sent Jeggal Sag into a timeless slumber.

The war over, the Valinor took to the skies, turning back once again to the heavens. Though a victory was achieved, many Valinor tasted the bitter taste of remorse. As the last of the Valinor disappeared over the horizon, the prostrate form of the Green moved. Slowly and painfully she opened her great golden orbs, for though severely wounded she was not yet dead. Drawing a jolt of pain, the green forced a smile. The Valinor had failed and one day she would be their undoing.

In the aftermath of the Dragon Wars, the Disciples of Jeggal Sag built a massive dirt mound over the sleeping form of their demigod and designated the place as a holy site. All followers of Jeggal Sag are expected at some time in their lives to make a pilgrimage to this holy site and are allowed to travel there with impunity, even those considered renegades, such as the Black Talon Ss'ressen (though in such cases the pilgrim can expect to be "escorted" the entire way). The clergy of Jeggal Sag are widespread, for just about every Ss'ressen clutch has at least one Disciple in their ranks. Interestingly, Jeggal Sag's clergy consists almost entirely of druids with clerics being extremely rare. Clerics of Jeggal Sag may only advance to 10th level and He only grants 2nd level spells and lower to His clerical followers. Almost all Disciples continue to venerate one of the other Ssethric deities, though none who worship the Varn follow the teachings of Jeggal Sag



Spheres of Influence: Animal, Chaos

Holy Symbol: Five talons arranged in a semicircle

Position in the Pantheon: minor demigod, child of Kassegore and Yig

Favored Weapon: Claw Attacks, "Primal Fury"

Animal: Drakes and Tyrannosaurs

Color: Copper

Appearance: Jeggal Sag is only known to appear as a copper colored Dragon of immense size and power.

Secret Society: Seekers of Mogue. The Seekers of Mogue are a fanatical offshoot of the regular Disciples of Jeggal Sag. Appearing soon after the imprisonment of Jeggal Sag by the Valinor, the Society formed around a charismatic Barbed Tail Ss'ressen known as Mogue. The Seekers formed with the sole purpose of discovering a way to break the ritual enchantments laid down by the Valinor and free the Dragons to roam the skies of Onara once more. Members of the society are mostly wanderers, spreading across all of the known lands seeking an answer anywhere they deem it may lay. Upon the death of Mogue, the Society adopted a new patron, though she chooses to keep her association a secret. The venerable Green Dragon Astinax has been the driving force behind the Seekers for over millennia.

The Fire Dragon, the Blazing Wyrm, the Fiery One, Lord of the Inferno, Guardian of the Black Talons

The Fire Dragon is an ancient deity, only recently re-discovered by the renegade Black Talon Ss'ressen that left the persecution of Ssethregore centuries ago. The Fire Dragon is considered a kind, yet unwavering god. He watches over His people, but rarely intervenes; preferring that His children learn their own lessons and thereby grow stronger in the aftermath.

Followers of the Fire Dragon consider life a series of trials, where success in one's endeavors leads to the betterment of the individual and prosperity for the entire clutch. The Fire Dragon is revered by the Black Talons; they consider Him everything Kassegore is not. To them the Fire Dragon represents loyalty, honor, bravery, and compassion, sentiments absent from the majority of Ssethregoran society.

Through the teachings of their Lord, the Black Talons seek to better themselves, both physically and spiritually, determined to never again sink into the mire of hate and destruction that was their way under the Ssethric Empire. Those who follow the Fire Dragon hold the community over all else and consider protection of the hatching fires a sacred duty.

The Black Talons, and the Ashen Hide for that matter, are ruled by a matriarchal oligarchy devoted to the worship of the Fire Dragon.

Only females are allowed to become clerics, but males who feel religious urges are pressed into service as

Divine



Champions or Druids. The Matriarchy has for centuries held the Fire Dragon as the savior of the Black Talons, erecting temples and holding ceremonies to his honor. Under His divine protection the Black Talons have prospered, increasing in numbers and spreading throughout the Sulphur Marsh.

The Fire Dragon is considered to be the guardian of Ssethric souls. The soul is subjected to the infinitely hot fires of the Blazing Wyrms and all impurities are burnt away. If it is the soul of a noble warrior or devout follower that upheld the ideals of the Black Talons, then it is purified, its essence used to create the next generation of Black Talons. If the individual led an unworthy life, then the cleansing destroys most of the soul, or consumes it entirely. In either case, the essence of the next generation is pure and Black Talons are hatched with untainted souls.

Underlying all the good brought about by the support of the Fire Dragon there exists an ugly truth, one that may shatter a people. For three centuries the Matriarchy has led their people in worship of the Fire Dragon and against the teachings of their former masters. The Black Talons raise their fists to the sky and curse the Empire to the south and the God that formed it, the Great Devourer Kassegore. Here in lies the quandary, for in truth their own benevolent Fiery Lord and the terrible Lord of Destruction are one in the same. Kassegore is the Fire Dragon, or more accurately, Fire Dragon is an Aspect of Kassegore.

This terrible truth is known to the only the ruling Matriarchy. It was the first High Matriarch Mother Scaphiopus who convinced her people to accept the Fire Dragon as their God, knowing full well the true identity of the Blazing Wyrms. What needs to be understood is that she did this out of love and compassion for her people and by doing so saved them from annihilation at the hands of the Ssethregorans. The problem lies that her people hate the God Kassegore with such vehemence that it was impossible then and still impossible now, to reveal the true identity of their savior to the masses. Doing so would rip the foundations of their clutch apart at the roots. Fear and ignorance would race through the masses, destabilizing the entire culture. Scaphiopus knew this and the current ruling Matriarchy realizes this as well. To understand this situation from the eyes of the Matriarchy, it is best to start at the beginning, with Scaphiopus.

Scaphiopus knew the Ssethregorans would eventually come for them. The Black Talons had fallen in disfavor with the Emperor and their rivals were taking this opportunity to exterminate the entire lot of them in one fell swoop. They had disobeyed their superiors, refusing to take part in the bloody massacres of innocents and the vile rites of their evil brethren anymore.

Locking herself deep within the fortress of Al'malyss, she sat before the life-giving furnace and prayed. She prayed for salvation, she poured out the emotions of her heart, all the compassion and goodness that was now part of the Black Talons gushed forth, giving strength to her words. For days she remained in front of the life giving fire, praying, imploring any god that would listen for guidance and aid. In the darkness lit only by the eternal hatching fires, her prayers were finally answered.

With a sudden roar of flame a heavenly figure appeared before her. Girded in crimson scales and wreathed in white-hot fire stood a deity unlike all others. The polar opposite of the Ssethric deities that now controlled Ssethregore, the omnipotent figure before her radiated a sense of purity and goodness.

Scaphiopus had never felt in her long life. Overjoyed she prostrated herself, willing to give anything if this God could save her people.

The Draconic face turned towards her and in her mind it spoke. In that single instant Scaphiopus reeled, her hopes crashed for she had heard that commanding tome before. In her

youth she had worshipped the Dread Lord Kassegore, before forsaking his evil ways. As the being spoke, she realized that this new god and her old patron were one and the same. In hopeless agony she cried out, trying to pull her mind away from what she knew must be the end, but Kassegore was not one to be denied, and his thoughts flooded into her mortal mind. Images flashed before her, ideas flowed and in the blink of an eye she understood. The one universal truth had been revealed to her, one so fundamental, yet simple, that she was amazed that she had never thought of it herself. The truth re-energized her shrunken form and she gladly embraced the Reptile God once more. The two formulated a plan, a plan that would save the Black Talons and change the face of Onara forever. The next morning Scaphiopus emerged from the temple and the Fire Dragon was born. Less than three months later, the Black Talons left Ssethregore, harried to the very end by the ruthless Barbed Tail Ss'ressen.

What was the one truth that changed Scaphiopus's mind? It's the same truth everyone sees but no one admits: the true gods are not evil, nor are they good. It is the hearts of mortals that matter and the sanctity or perversion of ideals is based upon the individual.

In that shadow dappled hall centuries ago Scaphiopus realized that Kassegore as she knew him, a reaver and destroyer, was just one aspect of a deity. It was the dark aspect that the evil beings of Ssethregore chose to embrace and by doing so it was mortals who created the perversion that is now the worship of Kassegore. The Fiery Lord revealed to her His other face, a face representing a better time, one forgotten long ago in the Golden Age. At one time both of His aspects, one championed by light, the other by darkness, were revered in Ssethric society, but the good aspect was lost, as its worshippers were slain by rival factions who disagreed with the ideals represented by the Fire Dragon. In the end only the aspect of the Great Devourer remained in the minds of mortals.

This is the great truth behind Black Talon society. The Matriarchs are wise and realize that most of their people would not understand such a revelation and wisely keep it a secret. Only the head matriarch of each community and the High Matriarch Mother know the truth. Whenever one of these prestigious individuals die, their replacement undergoes a vigorous test deep beneath Lanpeltis in front of an ancient altar of the Fire Dragon. They are tested by fire and the truth revealed. If they cannot handle the truth, they are deemed unworthy and are consumed by the holy fire of the Blazing Wyrms. If they are rational and wise, they see that the white lie is a necessity for the society and accept their place and becoming Matriarchs themselves.

Spheres of Influence: Earth, Fire, Holy, Refuge, Saurian

Holy Symbol: A ring of fire, usually carved from brass.

Position in the Pantheon: Guardian of the Ss'ressen, Father of Dragons

Favored Weapon: Heavy Flail, "Dragon's Tail" Bearded Axe, "Riven"

Animal: Fire Drake

Color: Red

Appearance: The Fire Dragon appears as an elegant Dragon, sleek of flank, with powerful muscles rippling under his crimson-scaled hide.

Secret Society: The Inquisitors: The Inquisitors are a group of religious zealots who make it their job to know all there is to know about the strange foreign gods worshipped by the humans, Elorii, and especially the other Ssethric races. The Inquisitors perceive the humans as the greatest danger; their backward beliefs are a poison that worms its way into the young of Black Talon society. Inquisitors either remain in the homeland seeking out those who denounce the Fire Dragon in any way, or venture out into other lands trying to learn more about their enemies. To an Inquisitor, anyone not venerating the Fire Dragon is a potential enemy.

Enter the Varn

The Varn represent the foulest, most despicable corruptive force to be unleashed upon Onara. They are an alien power from another plane of existence, where they have achieved total victory over all living things. Varn consider themselves to be the epitome of reptilian evolution, using their advanced biotechnological skills to shape their bodies to the point of perfection. Over the countless eons, they have conquered other races, incorporating the best features of that race into their own forms. In this way the Varn have achieved immense godlike power and even immortality, but they are still not gods. Some may even grant lesser beings divine powers, but they are not yet true gods.

It was in their wanton quest for power that the Naga of Onara first contacted the Varn six and a half millennia ago. They viewed these beings as reptilian deities and began to worship them. The supplication of the Nagas drew the Varn's attention, their three pairs of eyes piercing the cosmos to rest upon Onara. The Varn scried upon a new world, a fat world ripe for conquest, and its races soft and weak.

The Varn saw the Naga as the key to the door, for though their powers were not able to bridge the gap between the worlds, the most cunning among them saw a way through. If the Varn could entice the beings of the world to worship them so utterly that they gave their souls in supplication, then the gap could be bridged, for each mortal that died worshipping the Varn, would have their soul stretched between the planes, creating a conduit. The more souls the Varn could gather, the wider the conduit. Eventually the bridge would be wide enough for them to invade, sweeping over the world, destroying all in their path, enslaving the rest for cattle to feed their unsavory appetites.

None of this was revealed to the power hungry Naga. The Varn whispered in the ears of the dark serpents, filling their heads with promises of wealth and power. Plotting against the current regime, the Varn waited, watching patiently for their time to strike, while the four most powerful among them acted as deities for the weak-willed races of that far away sphere. Those who called out praise to the Varn were granted divine power. Clerics of the Varn "deities" began to appear among the ranks of Naga, whispering sibilant words in greedy or gullible ears. Eventually the time was ripe and the Varn struck. Channelling their powers through their newfound worshippers, the outsiders were able to aid the Naga in overthrowing the Ssanu and in the replacement of Pit Sseth by the Dark Naga of House Kahss.

Once the Naga had control of the Empire, they fulfilled their end of the bargain, spreading the worship of the Varn through all of Ssethregore. The Varn continue to aid all Ssethregorans that worship them, for the Varn delight in the destruction, murder, and mayhem their powers cause. The Varn are patient, waiting for enough souls to be under their control, widening the bridge just a bit more. For now they are content to watch, making their puppets dance upon their strings.

Shrines to the Varn deities now stand all over the Ssethregoran Empire. It is even rumored that the Varn have moved beyond the borders of the empire, enticing worshippers from among other races as well. Humans have made the mistake of assuming the Varn are a much weaker, but better known race, and dismissed them as a mere curiosity of Ssethric religion. The worship of the Varn has spread and cults to these dread lords can be found in the dark recesses of the human lands.



Varn Deities

There are four Varn Deities worshipped upon Onara. None of these beings are a true gods, but instead are extremely powerful outsiders who grant limited spellcasting powers to their followers. There are 4 domains in the "Varn" pantheon and each individual is responsible for providing the mystic energy for each domain. All Varn also grant the Evil domain to their followers. Since they are not true gods, clerics worshipping Varn deities must choose only ONE domain, instead of the normal two granted to clerics of true gods.

Zedok, the Universal Chaos, the Lord of the Void

Zedok is the oldest of the Varn, having in his lifetime seen the creation and destruction of entire worlds. He is a random factor in the universe, using his powers to upset the balance of order and bring chaos to all he touches.

Followers of Zedok are known as "Chaoshammers" for their sole purpose is to spread mayhem and discord throughout the world. The Barbed Tail Ss'ressen have become totally enamored with the quick acquisition of power associated with the worship of Zedok and their Matriarchs have abandoned Kassegore in favor of the Universal Chaos. Among their ranks are hordes of abominations, disgusting crossbreeds between Varn and Ss'ressen. Through foul rites in the darkest pits of the earth, Ssethric eggs are subjected to the essence of Zedok, creating freakish horrors under the sole control of the Varn priestesses. Clerics of Zedok are known for their cruelty and malice, tending to be Chaotic Evil or Chaotic.

Neutral in alignment. As they grown in power, the chaotic nature of their dark deity perverts their flesh, slowly converting the cleric into a lesser Varn.

Spheres of Influence: Chaos, Evil (Clerics of Zedok may only choose one domain)

Holy Symbol: A jet-black sphere

Position in the Varn Pantheon: Eldest, Overlord of Chaos.

Favored Weapon: War Maul, "Chaoshammer"

Animal: Gibbering Moulder

Color: Black

Appearance: Zedok appears to his followers as a sheet of multihued light or a vaguely reptilian form made of utter darkness

Secret Society: Forgers of the Cosmos. The Forgers of the Cosmos are a secret order of the Chaoshammers dedicated to the creation of Varn apparitions. They work in the background, convincing the Ssethric races to give up their worldly ties and strive for ascendance. To further this goal, they conduct profane rites, where innocent Ssethric eggs are submitted to evil and twisted magics, perverting the developing embryo into something hideous and unnatural. These abominations, when born, are incredibly powerful and follow the instructions of the Varn clergy without question. The ultimate shock troops, the Forgers of the Cosmos have begun to set their creations loose upon nearby Altheria, leaving a wake of chaos wherever they pass. The Forgers of the Cosmos are sworn enemies of the Disciples of Jeggal Sag and the two groups will not miss a chance to slaughter each other.



Sipta, Lady of Mysteries, the Arcane Sovereign

Sipta is the Varn deity of Magic and Knowledge. Less bloodthirsty than her counterparts, Sipta spends her energies in seeking out lost knowledge and attempting to find a way to quicken the bridge between the worlds. She freely grants her divine energies to those who crave it, and her followers tend to be wizards, sorcerers, scholars, and mages. Her followers firmly believe knowledge is power and Sipta encourages those who worship her to push the limits of what is known.

Unfortunately all the work she touches is invariably tainted with her evil presence. As a consequence, hundreds of strange acts and perversions have been discovered, twisted creations given wretched life and hundreds of experiments

gone awry. Sipta longs for one of her followers to sit upon the Council of Three, the ruling cabal controlling the Black Tower of Gettulus, but to date her plans have been thwarted. It seems that the cabal is aware of her ambitions and the remaining council members carefully choose the successors. The only way to install her adherents would be for the entire cabal to die at once, a proposition that her followers have so far been unable to accomplish.

Spheres of Influence: Magic, Evil (Clerics of Sipta may only choose one domain)

Holy Symbol: A rune engraved skull

Position in the Varn Pantheon: Second, mate to Zedok, Overseer of the Soul Bridge.

Favored Weapon: Ray Attacks, "Deathbeam"

Animal: Unknown

Color: White and Blue

Appearance: Sipta is said to appear as a beautiful Naga-like being crisscrossed with shimmering bands of white and blue, though her true form is likely markedly different

Secret Society: Necrons of Zue. The Necrons of Zue are an extremely small guild of Ssethric Necromancers intent on aiding their Lord's cause by converting powerful members of the Ssanu and Naga elite into liches. With promises of immortality the Necrons coerce old, dying victims into trading their souls for the promise of eternal life. Their plans have been met with limited success, as Ssanu rarely live to be old and most are assassinated before the cabal can get to them. Even if they do succeed, many of their undead members are still assassinated, for while most can wait for an elderly enemy to die, the threat of your enemy outliving you is enough to send any Ssanu into action. Entire pits have moved against relatives who have chosen the route of undeath, the younger generation fearful that eternal life will rob them of their deserved positions. Younger Ssanu and Naga have fallen prey to the lure of undeath, but since most have not yet reached their full potential, the Necrons tend to aim their campaign elsewhere.



Haulis, the Bloody Maw, the Bloodstained Fury, the Howling God

Haulis is perhaps the most bloodthirsty demipower currently upon Arcanis. Haulis represents unsuppressed rage and torment, revelling in the wanton slaughter of friend, foe, or innocents; it's all the same to The Bloodstained Fury. Haulis is the god of gluttony as well; his followers are reavers, eating all they can hold and destroying the rest. Haulis is an impatient being and if not for the patience of the other Varn overlords he would have launched an attack into Onara long ago.

Haulis recruits his followers from the ranks of barbarians, berserkers, and reavers. His clerics are little better than his normal followers, staying coherent just long enough to whip the surrounding troops into a blood frenzy before throwing themselves into battle alongside the troops. Haulis is a popular deity among some groups of Troglydites and is the new patron of the Horned Jowl Ss'ressen.

Spheres of Influence: Rage, Evil (Clerics of Haulis may only choose one domain)

Holy Symbol: A silver axe smeared with blood.

Position in the Varn Pantheon: Right hand of Zedok, Overlord of Battle.

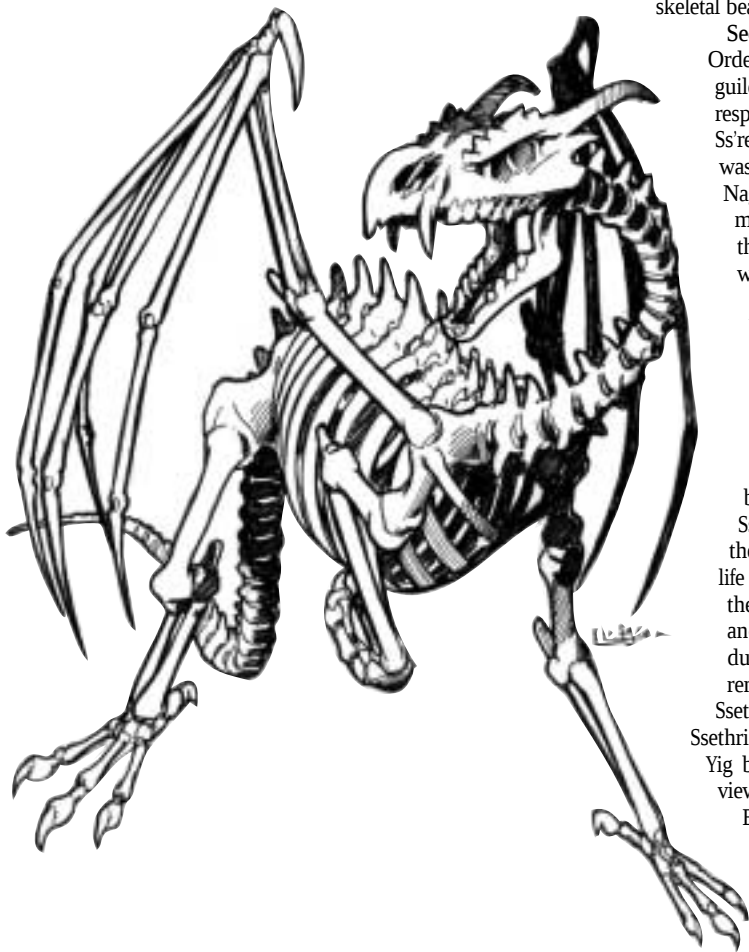
Favored Weapon: Crowsbeak Flail, "Rending Fist"

Animal: Grey Render

Color: Silver

Appearance: Haulis makes no effort to conceal his true form, appearing to his followers as a truly awe inspiring silver scaled Varn of immense size.

Secret Society: None known



Caimeth: Master of the Flesh, the Dead God, the Silent Blade

Caimeth is quite unique among all the demipowers of Arcanis, for he is in fact undead. Countless ages ago, in an attempt to increase his own power and position, he began to study the arts of Thanatology and Necromancy. Fascinated with the process of murder, it was inevitable that Caimeth would turn down the road of the Dead. Naturally immortal, it was quite a task for the powerful Varn to set up his own demise, but along with a cadre of contingency spells and triggered enchantments, Caimeth was able to break the line between life and death. He currently dwells in perpetual twilight, walking the fine edge between the two worlds. Caimeth is a god of extreme patience and stealth, often taking centuries to plan the perfect murder. He gained his incredible magical power through the assassinations of Varn of greater power than himself.

The ranks of Caimeth's followers are gathered from the rogues, murderers, and assassins of Ssethric society, with the occasional rare necromancer. They are highly skilled in their trade and dedicate their art to the Dead god. Clerics of Caimeth exist, but here is no defined clergy, except within the Venomous Scale Ss'ressen who have adopted Caimeth as their patron deity.

Spheres of Influence: Murder, Evil (Clerics of Caimeth may only choose one domain)

Holy Symbol: A double-faced copper piece scored with a blade on each face.

Position in the Varn Pantheon: Lord of the Dead

Favored Weapon: Jambiya, "Guthook"

Animal: Neleth Eviscerator

Color: Grey

Appearance: Caimeth has been known to appear as a huge skeletal beast resembling a dead Dragon.

Secret Society: The Order of the Dripping Blade; The Order of the Dripping Blade is a prominent assassin's guild based in the coastal city of Anuliss. They have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of high-ranking Ss'ressen and Naga officials, but their crowning glory was the assassination of Emperor Khe'lumn, the Dark Naga who preceded Emperor Kahss. As suspected by many, it was Kahss who paid the Order's lofty sum, though nowadays the aged Emperor keeps a close watch upon his one-time allies.

Life, Death and Undeath in a Reptilian World

Life in Ssethric world is one of hardships and conflicts. Within their militaristic society it's 'kill or be killed', a hard mentality to maintain as a people, but the Ssethregorans manage this rather well. The Ssethric people tend to be very fatalistic, believing that their life is a mere blip upon the face of the world. The life of the individual is meaningless, only the success of the race as a whole matters. Kings die, heroes are slain, and the most powerful mages are eventually reduced to dust; only by the deeds accomplished in life is one remembered.

Ssethric religions fully support this mindset. Those Ssethrics that worship the elder gods Kassegore and Yig believe in a death/rebirth cycle. In their view all Ssethrics that die return to the

Eater of Souls where their essence is consumed. The Great Devourer destroys all the impurities of their



life. What remains of the soul is irrevocably changed and is pieced together with the remainder of others, to create a new fresh spirit for the next generation. The journey from the point of death till the consumption of Kassegore takes twenty-four hours. After that period it is impossible to return a Ssethric body from the dead with anything less than a *resurrection spell*. Kassegore grants reconstituted souls to the mortal bodies of unhatched Ssethrics at the time of conception. Yig, the Life Bringer bestows mortal life to each new generation, her essence infusing each new Ssethric with their tenacity and strong will to survive.

Worshippers of Kassegore's other aspect, The Fire Dragon, hold similar beliefs. In such societies they believe that the soul travels before the Fiery One and there is judged in a crucible of holy fire. The soul is judged, the impurities of their life stripped away, leaving the spirit bare and cleansed. Souls that have led extremely evil lives are consumed utterly by the Fire Dragon's flames, permanently removed from the death/rebirth cycles.

The Varn, on the other hand, offer a much more tantalizing possibility to their worshippers. The worshippers of these gods believe that if they embrace the Varn, they will be granted an eternity of pleasure as they ascend to another realm where the trials and tribulations of life are swept away. They may stay for as long as they desire, with the option of returning to the world as newly born Varn themselves. This process however, wipes away the residual memories of the soul, but in exchange for immortality, it's a small price to pay. Compared to the abrupt ending and promise of eternal destruction granted by the old gods, the Varn beliefs are very tempting and tens of thousands of Ssethregorans now follow that vile religion.

In reality the Varn have no such powers, nor is there an eternal paradise where the worshippers of these foul beings ascend to. Those who believe the lies of the Varn are treated to an afterlife of eternal pain and torture, as their very essence is stretched like a rubber band between the worlds. Acting as a conduit between Onara and the dread plane the Varn control, the tormented souls are acting as a bridge; the more that die for the Varn, the wider the bridge becomes. Eventually when the bridge grows large enough the Varn will cross the boundary between the worlds and Onara will be swept in a wave of eternal darkness.

Undead beings are a rarity in Ssethric society. In a carnivorous culture, the raising of corpses is seen by the masses as a waste of food. All bodies in Ssethregore are recycled, used as fodder for the next generation. The dead are not buried; instead they are either consumed by the Ssethregorans themselves or are fed to the multitude of creatures raised by them. Sentient warmbloods are considered a delicacy and skilled warriors of the slave races earn a high price at the meat markets of Sseth.

Of course the sorcerers of Ssethregore look upon the matter a bit differently. They have the means to raise creatures as undead, but find the practice abhorrent and a waste of magical power. Unintelligent undead make poor servants at best and require constant supervision and upkeep. Sentient undead are too much of a liability, as it is too easy to lose control of such beings. Ssethregoran mages would rather use constructs or elementals as their servants, for such creatures are easily programmed and not a waste of food resources.

This is not to say that no undead are to be found in Ssethregore. There do exist sects of necromancers inside the Black Tower of Gettulus and Ssanu liches are not unheard of.

There is even a city of Ssethric undead far to the north, a relic of a lost age, hidden away from human eyes in the Canyon of Zhu.

Ssethric Magic

The Following section details the various divine domains and

arcane practices of the Ssethric people and provides new spells of arcane might to add to the arsenal of these scaly spellcasters.

Technomancy

Technomancy is the science of creating functional items from living flesh. The Ssethregorans are masters of this biotechnology, having perfected the process over millennia of experimentation. Ssethric technomancers are responsible for creating hundreds of wondrous items, each driven by their own power and not reliant upon magic (though the application of magic may be needed in their creation).

Technomancers create items used for all applications, from bioluminescent light sources that do not require flame or oil, to weapons of war capable of delivering death even under the blanket of antimagic zones. The technomancers hold great power inside the Ssethregoran Empire and a special branch of the military government exists for the sole purpose of development and deployment of new biotechnological items.

Portals

Shortly after the defeat of the Issori and the subsequent building of Yahssremore upon the ruins of the insectoids' capital, the Ssethric mages made an earth-shattering discovery. Deep within the bowels of the city, hidden amongst the rubble of the previous inhabitants, the Ssethrics discovered a strange and wonderful artifact. It was a ringed archway crafted of some unearthly metal, covered in deep-carved runes that glistened in the darkness. The conquerors had discovered a working portal, which the Issori had apparently used to first come to Onara. The Ssanu elite quickly fell to the task of reverse engineering this strange device, and over a period of two centuries the diligent serpent men unlocked its secrets. Over the intervening centuries the budding empire began to create its own portal network, connecting all of the Old Empire's cities and outposts with these magical gateways.

Ssethric portals are an enigma to the other races of Onara. Though many have tried, only the Ansharans have managed to unlock any of Ssethric portals' secrets and they have only scratched the surface. A working Ssethric portal is activated by an ancient ritual, designed to link one portal location with another. All the master of the ritual need know is the coordinates to the portal he wishes to link to. Then he invokes the ritual designed to align his current portal with the one he wishes to travel to.

Each portal has a system of runes encircling its rim, in three distinct rows, and all portals are identified by a specific combination of 3 runes. The caster simply has to activate one rune in each row in the correct order to along his current portal with the destination portal. The ritual is then intensified and as the mystic energies build, it's drawn into the portal. When enough energy has been gathered, a hole in the fabric of reality opens between the original portal and destination portal as well as any portals that happen to be between the origin and destination. When something enters the portals (at either end) it is immediately whisked along the mystic link, through all interlaying portals until it arrives at the other end.

This process is not instantaneous, but only takes a few seconds for intercontinental travel, perhaps a minute to reach a portal on another continent or plane. When in use, Ssethric portals flash red and traveling through Ssethric portals is extremely painful and disorientating to non-Ssethrics. Any non-Ssethric or reptilian creature that uses such a portal must make a DC14 Will save upon exiting the portal or be dazed for 1d4+1 rounds.

Elementalism

Elementalism is the oldest magical form practiced by the Ssethregorans. Their long exposure to this discipline has made them the uncontested masters of this field; their control of the elements honed to the point of perfection. Elementalism is the appli-

Due to the nature of the Varn deities and Jeggal Sag (who are not true gods, but powerful beings from another plane) they do possess access to the Evil and Chaos domains; domains that would otherwise not exist in the world of Arcanis.

Table 6.1: New Domains

Deity	Portfolio	Domains	Favored Weapon
Kassegore	Destruction, Renewal, Reptiles	Destruction, Dream, Fire, Holy, Law, Saurian	Tulwar, "Worldthorn"
Yig	Fertility, Rebirth, Serpents, Hedonism, Torture	Healing, Holy, Law, Pain, Poison, Saurian	Kriss, "Serpent's Fang"
Fire Dragon	Ss'ressen	Earth, Fire, Holy Saurian, Refuge	Heavy Flail, "Dragon's Tail" Bearded Axe, "Riven"
Jeggal Sag	Animals, Nature	Animal, Chaos	Claw Attacks, "Primal Fury"
Zedok	Chaos, Anarchy, Disorder	Chaos, Evil	War Maul, "Chaoshammer"
Haulis Fist"	Rage, Lust, Fury, War	Evil, Rage	Crowsbeak Flail, "Rending"
Sipta	Magic, Hidden Knowledge	Evil, Magic	Ray Attacks, "Deathbeam"
Caimeth	Murder, Death, Carnage	Evil, Murder	Jambiya, "Guthook"

cation of arcane energies to control the raw elemental powers of the cosmos, bending and shaping these forces to the will of the caster. Other races have delved into this field of magic (the school of evocation is a good example), but compared the Ssethregorans they are mere novices. Heroes fighting human spellcasters can look forward to fireballs that simply burn, heroes fighting elementalists can look forward to blasts of raw elemental fire so intense everything inside the blast radius is instantly incinerated. The difference between elementalism and evocation is the difference in a sword held by a warrior and a sword held by a fool; both can kill, but only one is truly deadly.

Crafting Elementals

An important aspect of elemental magic is the creation of elemental beings. Similar to the creation of a construct, skilled Elementalists can create beings from raw elemental forces, drawing power from one or more of the four elemental planes. Elementalists are able to bind these powers to the world of Arcanis, creating the perfect servants: native outsiders with all the traits of their planar cousins. These techniques have led to many of the creatures we see upon Onara today, including the thoqqua and the Elorii.

The Creation Process

Any Elementalists trained in the proper techniques can create an elemental (see the Elemental creation feats). The process of creating elemental creatures begins with the gathering of the raw materials. First and foremost, the caster must decide what type of elemental he intends to create. Then he must create a massive bronze bowl of one size category greater than the elemental he intends to create. This container is filled with the purest form of the raw element needed to create the target elemental, usually the same element that constitutes the creature, though hybrids do exist. The caster then begins a lengthy ritual in which the raw essence of the elemental planes is drawn to Arcanis and fused into the raw materials in the receptacle. Rare and exotic compounds are added, many with sources on the elemental planes themselves. Finally, the caster gives up some of his own life force to animate the elemental, binding the creature to the caster's will. The entire cost of the materials and the ritual is equal to the challenge rating of the elemental $\times$ the HD of the elemental $\times$ 1,000 gp. The caster must also expend experience equal to $1/4^{\text{th}}$ of this total. Upon completion the caster makes a Spellcraft check (DC 10 + the CR of the creature). If successful, the ritual is complete and the elemental is born. If the check fails, the ritual fails and the elemental energy escapes back to its original plane, leaving the caster to start over from scratch.

Elementals created in this manner are bound to the caster and to the world of Arcanis. They are considered native outsiders and may not be banished back to an elemental plane. The Elemental remains here for 10 days per Hit Die of the Caster who created

them, after which they dissipate as the energy used to create them escapes back to the elemental planes.

The elemental is bound to the creator and follows orders impeccably. If the creator dies, the elemental dissolves, breaking down into its constituent parts. Any type of elemental can be created with this process, including elemental creatures such as, mephits, thoqqua, and many others.

Dream Domain

Deities: Kassegore

Granted Powers: Worshipers of Kassegore are able to use their subconscious mind to reach out into the cosmos in search of answers while their body sleeps. If the cleric received a full night's rest the night before, then on the following day the cleric may attempt to interpret his dreams. Upon waking the cleric rolls 1d20. If the resulting roll is equal to or less than his Wisdom score, the cleric has succeeded (though a natural 20 always fails). If successful, once during that same day the cleric may add his unmodified Wisdom modifier to any single d20 roll. This is a free action and must be declared before the roll is attempted.

Dream Domain Spells

1. Sleep: Puts 4 HD of creatures into magical slumber.
2. Augury ^{MF}: Learn whether an action will be good or bad.
3. Deep Slumber: Puts 10 HD of creatures to sleep.
4. Divination ^M: Provides useful advice for specific proposed actions.
5. Command, Greater (Sleep): As *command*, but affects once subject/level.
6. Symbol of Sleep ^M: Triggered rune puts nearby creatures into catatonic slumber.
7. Scrying, Greater: As *scrying*, but faster and longer.
8. Mind Blank: Subject is immune to mental/emotional magic and scrying.
9. Foresight: "Sixth Sense" warns of impending danger.

Holy Domain

Deities: Kassegore, Yig, Fire Dragon

Granted Powers: Choose one from Chaos/Evil/Good/Law depending on your alignment. This choice applies to the domain spell for each level when there are different versions depending on alignment. You cast all Holy domain spells at +1 caster level.

Holy Domain Spells

1. Protection from Chaos/Evil/Good/Law*: +2 to AC and saves, counter mind control, hedge out summoned creatures.
2. Spiritual Weapon: Magical weapon attacks on its own.

3. Magic Circle against Chaos/evil/Good/Law*: As *protection* spells, but 10-ft. radius and 10 min./level.
4. Divine Smite: Damages and blinds opposing-aligned creatures.
5. Dispel Chaos/evil/Good/Law*: +4 bonus against attacks.
6. Planar Ally, Lesser ^X: Exchange services with a 6 HD extraplanar creature.
7. Word of Chaos/evil/Good/Law*: Kills, *confuses*, stuns, or deafens opposing-aligned subjects.
8. Aura of Faith ^F: +4 to AC, +4 resistance, and SR 25 against opposing-aligned spells.
9. Summon Monster IX*: Calls extraplanar creature to fight for you.

* Cast as spell of chosen descriptor only

Poison Domain

Deities: Yig

Granted Powers: You are immune to all forms of poison.

Poison Domain Spells

1. Augment Poison: Increase the DC of a poison, +1 per 4 levels
2. Delay Poison: Stops poison from harming subject for 1 hour/level.
3. Poison: Touch deals 1d10 Con damage, repeats in 1 min.
4. Giant Vermin: Turns centipedes, scorpions, or spiders into giant vermin.
5. Symbol of Pain ^M: Triggered rune wracks nearby creatures with pain.
6. Summon Nature's Ally (Child of Yig only): Calls creature to fight.
7. Yig's Kiss: Save vs. poison or die immediately
8. Symbol of Death ^M: Triggered run slays nearby creatures.
9. Energy Drain: Subject gains 2d4 negative levels.

Murder Domain

Deities: Caimeth

Granted Powers: Once per round, you may make a coup-de-grace attack on a helpless opponent as a standard action instead of a full round action

Murder Domain Spells

1. Spider Climb: Grants ability to walk on walls and ceilings.
2. Silence: Negates sound in a 15-ft. radius.
3. Keen Edge: Doubles normal weapon's threat range.
4. Poison: Touch deals 1d10 Con damage, repeats in 1 min.
5. Slay Living: Touch attack kills subject.
6. Harm: Deals 10 points/level damage to target.
7. Finger of Death: Kills one subject.
8. Destruction ^F: Kills subject and destroys remains.
9. Power Word Kill: Kills one subject with 100 hp or less.

Rage Domain

Deities: Haulis

Granted Power: The Cleric gains the ability to Rage once per day. This power is identical to the first level barbarian extraordinary ability by the same name. If the Cleric has Barbarian class levels, he gains one extra Rage use per day.

Rage Domain Spells

1. Enlarge Person: Humanoid creature doubles in size.
2. Bull's Strength: Subject gains +4 to Str for 1 min./level.
3. Blood Frenzy: Target flies into a holy rage
4. Rage: Subjects gain +2 to Str and Con, +1 on Will saves, -2 to AC.
5. Righteous Might: Your size increases, and you gain combat bonuses.

6. Bull's Strength, Mass: As *bull's strength*, affects one subject/level.
7. Destruction ^F: Kills subject and destroys remains.
8. Tenser's Transformation ^M: You gain combat bonuses.
9. Implosion: Kills one creature/round.

Refuge Domain

Deities: The Fire Dragon

Granted Power: Once per day you may cast Sanctuary upon yourself or another willing target within 30 feet as a standard action.

Refuge Domain Spells

1. Shield: Invisible disc gives +4 to AC, blocks *magic missiles*.
 2. Shield Other ^F: You take half of subject's damage.
 3. Glyph of Warding ^M: Inscription harms those who pass it.
 4. Shield Other, Improved ^F: You take 75% of subject's damage, and the subject gains a +2 deflection bonus and a +2 resistance bonus.
 5. Hallow/Unhallow* ^M: Designates location as holy/unholy.
 6. Forbiddance ^M: Blocks planar travel, damages creatures of different alignment.
 7. Shield Other, Greater ^F: You take all of a subject's damage, and the subject gains a +3 deflection bonus and a +3 resistance bonus.
 8. Safeguard: Monitor those who enter and leave an area.
 9. Symbol of Death ^M: Triggered run slays nearby creatures.
- * This spell is dependent upon the alignment of the caster, good and neutral characters receive Hallow, evil casters receive unhallow.

Saurian Domain

Deities: Kassegore, Yig, Fire Dragon

Granted Power: The cleric gains the Wild Empathy ability with reptiles of all sorts. The Cleric can use body language, vocalizations, and demeanor to improve the attitude of an animal (reptilian only). This ability functions just as a Diplomacy check made to improve the attitude of a person. The Cleric rolls 1d20 and adds her cleric level plus her Charisma modifier to determine the wild empathy check result. The typical domestic animal has a starting attitude of indifferent, while wild animals are usually unfriendly.

To use Wild Empathy, The cleric and the animal must be able to study each other, which means that they must be within 30 feet of one another under normal conditions. Generally, influencing a reptile takes 1 minute, but as with influencing people, it might take more or less time.

The cleric can also use this ability to influence a magical reptilian beast with an intelligence score of 1 or 2 (such as a basilisk,) but she receives a -4 penalty on the check.

Saurian Domain Spells

1. Magic Fang: One natural weapon of subject gains +1 on attack and damage rolls.
2. Produce Flame: 1d6 damage +1/level, touch or thrown.
3. Protection from Energy (Fire only): Absorb 12 points/level of damage from fire.
4. Greater Magic Fang: One natural weapon of subject gains +1/three levels on attack and damage rolls (max +5).
5. Wall of Fire: Deals 2d4 fire damage out to 10 ft. and 1d4 out to 20 ft. Passing through wall deals 2d6 damage +1/caster level.
6. Fire Seeds: Acorns and berries become grenades and bombs.
7. Fire Storm: Deals 1d6/level fire damage.
8. Incendiary Cloud: Cloud deals 4d6 fire damage/round.
9. Shapechange* ^F: Transforms you into any creature, and change forms once per round.

*Dragon forms only (Kassegore-Gold, Yig- Black, Fire Dragon-Red)

New Spells

Acid Burn

Evocation [Fire, Acid]

Level: Elem 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)

Area: 30-ft.-radius spread.

Duration: Instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell is a burst of two elements, acid and fire, split in near equal parts. It streaks from the caster's outstretched talon to the target and detonates for 1d6 damage per caster level (maximum 10d6) to all creatures within the area of effect. Half of the damage is fire damage; the other half is acid damage.

Material Component: A bloodstone gem and a vial of bitter tonic.

Acid Fang

Evocation [Acid, Force]

Level: Elem 2

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Area: 30-ft.-radius, centered on the caster

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

Inspired by spellcasters who associate with serpentine creatures, this spell allows you to create snake-like maws and direct them to spray targets with a vicious acid. The spell creates one snake-like maw, plus one additional maw for every four levels beyond 3rd (to a maximum of three maws at 11th level). When they appear, you are able to direct each maw to spray a corrosive mist at a separate target within the spell's range. Each spray of corrosive mist inflicts 2d6 acid damage, plus 1 additional point per caster level (maximum +10). The maws remain in existence in the square adjacent to their target that is closest to you, for 1 full round. During this round they threaten as medium creatures and are able to make one attack of opportunity per maw with their corrosive spray. The maws have an AC equal to the spell save DC and 1 hp per level of the caster.

Material Component: A drop of snake poison or a snake fang.

Acid Fang, Greater

Evocation [Acid, Force]

Level: Elem 5

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Area: 40-ft.-radius, centered on the caster

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

Inspired by spellcasters who associate with serpentine creatures, this spell allows you to create snake-like maws and direct them to spray targets with a vicious acid. The spell creates two snake-like maws, plus one additional maw for every four levels beyond 9th (to a maximum of four maws at 17th level). When they appear, you are able to direct each maw to spray a corrosive

mist at a separate target within the spell's range. Each spray of corrosive mist inflicts 4d6 acid damage, plus 1 additional point per caster level (maximum +15). The maws appear in the square adjacent to their target that is closest to you, and can make a single 5-foot step each round to continue attacking their target. Once per round, as a move action, you can direct a maw to attack a new target. Each maw threatens as a medium creature and is able to make one attack of opportunity per round with the corrosive spray. The maws have an AC equal to the spell save DC and 1 hp per level of the caster.

Material Component: A drop of snake poison or a snake fang.

Annihilate

Evocation [Acid, Cold, Electricity, Fire, Sonic]

Level: Elem 9

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)

Area: Cylinder (80-ft.-radius, 60 ft. high)

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell, the power of the mightiest elements are at your command, enabling you to bring waves of elemental energy crashing down upon everything within the area of effect. Each wave is composed of one of the following elements: acid, cold, electricity, fire, and sonic. You may choose what order the elements manifest, but all elements must be used. Each wave does 5d6 points of damage, striking in the blink of an eye, and allowing for each subsequent elemental to strike quickly thereafter (within the same round).

Failing a save against any of the energy waves has the following effect:

Acid: blinded for 1d4+1 rounds.

Cold: suffer a 1d6 penalty to Dex for 1d4+1 rounds.

Fire: burn for 2d6 damage per round for 1d4+1 rounds.

Electricity: shaken for 1d4+1 rounds.

Sonic: deafened for 1d4+1 rounds.

Material Component: A diamond, a ruby, an emerald, a sapphire and a pearl valued at 200gp each.

Augment Poison

Transmutation

Level: Clr 2, Drd 1, Poison 1

Components: V, S, m/DF

Casting Time: Instantaneous

Range: Touch

Target: Living creature touched

Duration: 10 minutes/level

Saving Throw: Will (harmless)

Spell Resistance: None

A lurid green glow envelops the subject of this spell, increasing the potency of its natural poison. This spell grants a +1 per four caster levels (maximum +5) enhancement bonus to the DC of the creature's poisons or toxins for the duration of the spell.

Alternatively, you may augment a dose of poison. This spell will affects up to one ounce of poison per four caster levels.

Material Component: A dried snake's tongue.

Blood Frenzy

Transmutation

Level: Rage 3

Components: V, S, DF

Casting Time: Instantaneous

Range: Touch

Target: One willing living creature per four levels.

Duration: 10 minutes/level or until triggered, then 1 round/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

The caster of this spell instills a seething anger in the recipients of her magic. Initially there is no effect from receiving this spell beyond a slight bloodlust. However, if a recipient of this spell draws an opponent's blood in battle within the initial duration of the spell, he flies into a murderous frenzy that lasts 1 round/level of the caster. The frenzy grants the subject a +2 unholy bonus to attack and damage rolls, immunity to fear effects and the subject can continue to act without penalty even while disabled or dying. These benefits last for the duration of the spell. A creature under the affects of *blood frenzy* dies normally when reaching -10 hp.

Bolts of Damnation

Evocation [Evil]

Level: Clr 7

Components: V, S, DF

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)

Effect: One or more rays

Duration: Instantaneous or 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell channels bolts of unholy energy that can strike down foes and empower allies. You may fire two rays, plus one additional ray for every two caster levels beyond 13th (to a maximum of five rays at 19th level). Each ray requires a ranged touch attack to hit and only a single ray may affect. The rays have one the following effects, chosen separately for each ray:

Crippling bolt: This bolt of energy deals 1d6 points of unholy damage per caster level (maximum 15d6) and causes a penalty of 1d6 to Strength and Charisma. This damage is halved against neutral creatures and negated against evil creatures. Outsiders with the good subtype receive a -2 unholy penalty to their SR and saves to resist this damage.

Empowering bolt: This bolt grants the target 1d6 temporary hit points per two caster levels (maximum 10d6) and provides a +4 unholy bonus to Strength and Charisma. These benefits are halved for neutral creatures and negated for good creatures. Evil outsiders also receive a +2 unholy bonus to their SR and saves against spells and effects with the good descriptor.

Bolts of Reckoning

Evocation [Good]

Level: Clr 7

Components: V, S, DF

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)

Effect: One or more rays

Duration: Instantaneous or 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell channels bolts of divine energy that can strike down foes and empower allies. You may fire two rays, plus one addi-

tional ray for every two caster levels beyond 13th (to a maximum of five rays at 19th level). Each ray requires a ranged touch attack to hit and only a single ray may affect. The rays have one the following effects, chosen separately for each ray:

Weakening bolt: This bolt of energy deals 1d6 points of divine damage per caster level (maximum 15d6) and causes a penalty of 1d6 to Strength and Charisma. This damage is halved against neutral creatures and negated against good creatures. Outsiders with the evil subtype receive a -2 unholy penalty to their SR and saves to resist this damage.

Blessing bolt: This bolt grants the target 1d6 temporary hit points per two caster levels (maximum 10d6) and provides a +4 holy bonus to Strength and Charisma. These benefits are halved for neutral creatures and negated for evil creatures. Good outsiders also receive a +2 holy bonus to their SR and saves against spells and effects with the evil descriptor.

Deathroar

Evocation [Sonic]

Level: Elem 8, Sor/Wiz 9

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Area: Cone-shaped burst

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude partial; see text

Spell Resistance: Yes

You release a pulverizing cone of sonic energy with your scream that deafens and damages creatures in your path. The energy released by this spell is enough to turn bones to powder, crumble the strongest stone and liquefy the flesh of those affected.

Any creatures in the area of effect who fail their save by 5 or more are instantly slain as the sonic force creates a series of sudden and uncontrolled vibrations within their body that literally shake them apart, leaving them in puddles of gelatinous flesh and bone.

Creatures and objects in the area of effect suffer 1d6 points of sonic damage per two caster levels (maximum 10d6, double to crystalline creatures) and are permanently deafened. A successful Fort save reduces the damage by half and negates the deafness. Objects damaged by this spell have their hardness ignored and do not provide cover against the spell effect if they are destroyed.

Material Component: A piece of a shrieker or the preserved tongue of any creature with a spell-like or supernatural sonic attack.

Detonating Rain

Evocation [Force]

Level: Elem 6

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)

Area of effect: A cylinder (20 ft. radius, 20 ft. high)

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell, you cause a storm of force droplets to rain down in the area of effect, exploding upon everything they strike. The rain of force deals 1d6 points of damage per caster level to everything in the area of effect (maximum 12d6). Furthermore, objects caught by the rain are treated as if subjected to a *shatter* spell due to the sheer number of force droplets that strike at once.

Spells such as *shield*, or magic items that absorb force-related spells, such as *magic missile*, grant their user a +2 circumstance bonus to their saving throws. Additionally, the wearer of a *brooch of shielding* can use it to absorb damage from this spell as per a *magic missile* spell.

Material Component: A small mallet and a vial of rainwater that the caster shatters with the mallet.

Explosive Pellet

Evocation [Force]

Level: Sor/Wiz 0

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

A pellet of explosive force shoots from your finger. You must succeed at a ranged touch attack with the pellet to deal the damage to the target. The pellet deals 1d3 points of force damage. Effects that would negate *magic missile* damage, such as *shield*, also negate the damage from this spell.

Force Whip

Evocation [Force]

Level: Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal

Effect: A whip composed of pure force

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

With this spell, you manifest a whip composed of pure force energy. Once manifested, you can use the force whip as if it were a real whip, striking with your attack bonus for 1d6 points of force damage on a successful touch attack. Any feats or skills that you possess with an actual whip carry over to the use of this spell. Strength modifiers are not taken into account for purposes of damage.

If you so desire, you may release the whip on a successful attack and order it to entangle one target of tiny to medium size. If this is done, the whip encircles the target and grapples it as a small creature that uses your caster level instead of your base attack bonus and your Intelligence modifier (if a wizard) or Charisma modifier (if a sorcerer) in place of your Strength modifier. The whip will grapple an opponent for the duration of the spell, but if it loses a grapple check it dissipates immediately. Unlike a normal rope, the force whip cannot be broken by sheer strength, but any magical force that is capable of destroying a *wall force* can destroy a *force whip*.

Material Component: An actual whip.

Gravity Bolt

Evocation [Force]

Level: Sor/Wiz 2

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)

Effect: A bolt of blue distorted air

Target: One creature with range

Duration: Instantaneous or 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Fort partial

Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell, you may launch a bolt of concentrated gravitational energy at a target within range and burdens them a magical weight. The bolt strikes for 2d4 damage, if the save is failed, the target is encumbered by a sudden increase in weight carried as the gravity surrounding the victims body increases for the duration of

the spell. The gravity increase around the victim is the equivalent of an extra 25 lbs. per caster level, to a maximum increase of 250 lbs. of simulated weight. This extra weight may place the victim beyond their carrying capacity. Furthermore, if the simulated weight plus the actual weight carried exceeds the targets push or drag weight, the excess weight becomes life-threatening, inflicting 1d2 damage per round until the spell wears off.

Material Component: A small piece of very dense metal.

Hydroblast

Evocation [Water]

Level: Clr 2, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell, you produce a powerful jet of pressurized water that erupts from the palm of your hand, striking a target with a successful ranged touch attack. The water jet strikes the target with tremendous impact, inflicting 1d8 damage, plus one per caster level (maximum +10). Creatures with the fire subtype take double damage from this spell, or regular damage on a successful save. Because of the impact of the water jet, the victim struck must also make a Strength check, DC 10 plus your caster level (maximum +10) or be knocked back 5 feet as if by a bull rush maneuver.

Lightning Armor

Evocation [Electricity]

Level: Clr 5, Elem 4

Components: V, S, M/DF

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Personal (Armor), electrical blasts – Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: A ghostly suit electrical armor

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell wreaths you in a ghostly suit of crackling electrical energy. The swirling electrical energy repels metal, giving you a +2 deflection bonus to your AC against metal weapons like swords, daggers, pole arms, etc. This is reduced to a +1 deflection bonus against weapons that are only partly metal such as arrows, spears and such. You also gain electricity resistance 10 for the duration of the spell. The electrical field does not affect your metallic belongings.

If you are struck by a melee attack you suffer damage as normal but the attacker takes 1d4 damage, plus 1 per caster level (maximum +5) or 1d8 damage plus 1 per caster level (maximum +10) if a metal weapon, from the crackling lightning.

Lastly, as a full-round action you can fire a blast of electrical energy as a ranged touch attack. A successful hit deals 4d6 electrical damage to the target and reduces the remaining duration by three rounds. You cannot use this ability if the remaining duration is three rounds or less.

Material Component: A piece of metal from a suit of armor that has been affected by electrical magic or struck by natural lightning.

Negative Energy Cascade

Evocation [Negative Energy]

Level: Cle/Sor/Wiz 0

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action
 Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)
 Duration: Instantaneous
 Saving Throw: None
 Spell Resistance: Yes

A black cascade of negative energy shoots from your fingertips. You must succeed at a ranged touch attack with the cascade to inflict damage or heal the target. All living creatures receive 1d3 points of damage from the cascade. Undead are healed for 1d3 hit points of damage on a successful hit.

Negative Energy Lance

Necromancy
 Level: Clr 5
 Components: V, S, DF
 Casting Time: 1 standard action
 Range: Personal
 Effect: A lance of pulsing negative energy
 Duration: 1 round/level
 Saving Throw: None
 Spell Resistance: Yes; see text

This spell creates an ebon lance of light or heavy size, depending upon your wishes, in your hands. You may change the size of the lance to light or heavy as a free action but if you ever release it, the energy disperses and the spell ends. You can use the energy lance to deliver destructive attacks against enemy creatures or dispel ongoing positive energy effects.

Wielding the energy lance imparts the basic knowledge of how to use it regardless of weapon proficiency. The energy lance strikes as the weapon it imitates for purposes of damage and critical multiplier. However, when used against Celestial creatures, the lance does 2d12 damage plus 1 point per caster level (maximum +15) per successful hit and you receive a +4 to your caster level checks to penetrate Celestial SR.

The energy of the lance may also be used to dispel magical effects with the good descriptor by striking them. A successful blow affects the spell as though you had cast *dispel magic* on it.

Piercing Shriek

Evocation [Sonic]
 Level: Bard 1, Clr 2, Sor/Wiz 1
 Components: V, S
 Casting Time: 1 standard action
 Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)
 Duration: Instantaneous
 Saving Throw: Fortitude half
 Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell, you utter a sharp, abrupt scream, sending forth a burst of sonic energy to the target. The burst of sonic energy strikes the target for 1d8 damage. In addition, if the victim fails their saving throw, they may only take a partial action on their next initiative. Creatures unable to hear cannot be staggered.

Raze

Evocation
 Level: Clr 8, Drd 7, Elem 7
 Components: V, S
 Casting Time: One full round
 Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)
 Area: Two 10-ft. cubes per level (S)
 Duration: Instantaneous
 Saving Throw: Reflex half
 Spell Resistance: Yes

Considered the reverse of the *fire storm* spell, this causes the area of effect to be shot through with sheets of roaring flame. The raging flame does not harm anything in the area of effect except natural vegetation and plant-based creatures. The flames are devastating against natural vegetation and ground cover, inflicting 1d6 fire damage per caster level (maximum 20d6) to all of it in the area. Unless the vegetation in the area is somehow resistant to fire, it takes an equal amount of damage and in most cases is charred away to ash.

Safeguard

Divination
 Level: Drd 8, HC (Fire Dragon) 4, Refuge 8
 Components: V, S
 Casting Time: 10 minutes
 Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
 Area: Circle, centered on you, with a radius of 100 ft./level.
 Duration: 24 hours
 Saving Throw: None
 Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell, you place an invisible wall around the chosen area. This wall helps you determine if enemies are entering or leaving. After safeguard is cast, you are given mental notification every time a creature passes the border you have laid out. The information you receive is limited. You do not know the name, race, or even type of creatures that pass the border. You do get an impression of their relative strength (Hit Dice), their alignment, at which point on the border they crossed, and whether they are coming in or going out. No other facts are forthcoming, though the use of other divination spells can provide more information. The sense of location is enough to target a scrying spell or similar spells or powers, if you have access to such.

This spell only discovers creatures that actually cross the border. Creatures that use teleport, dimension door, or similar means to gain access to the area, and creatures that were already within the area when the spell was cast, are not detected.

Scorching Frost

Evocation [Cold, Electrical]
 Level: Elem 3 Sor/Wiz 4
 Components: V, S, M
 Casting Time: 1 standard action
 Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)
 Area: 30-ft.-radius spread.
 Duration: Instantaneous.
 Saving Throw: Reflex half
 Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell is a burst of two elements, cold and electricity, split in near equal parts. It streaks from the caster's outstretched talon to the target and detonates for 1d6 damage per caster level (maximum 10d6) to all creatures within the area of effect. Half of the damage is fire damage; the other half is acid damage.

Material Component: A blue quartz gem and a vial of water melted off a piece of ice.

Shatterfrost

Evocation [Cold]
 Level: Elem 8
 Components: V, S, M
 Casting Time: Two rounds
 Range: Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)
 Area: 5 ft./level-radius burst
 Duration: Instantaneous
 Saving Throw: Fortitude partial; see text
 Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell, you invoke a devastating wave of swirling sleet so cold that it freezes creatures, objects, and creatures to the point of becoming brittle statues that shatter with the slightest touch. The sleet drains the heat energy out of creatures or objects while at the same time infusing them with the bitterest of cold.

Creatures in the area of effect who fail their saves immediately fall to -5 hit points and suffer 1d6 cold damage. If they survive the chill, they stabilize and can recover normally. Those who make their saving throws suffer 1d6 cold damage per caster level (maximum 15d6) instead and are slowed, as per the *slow* spell, for one round per caster level. If this damage would reduce a creature below 0 hit points, they instead fall to -5 hit points, suffer 1d6 cold damage and are immediately stabilized if they are not dead. Creatures resistant to cold receive their energy resistance as a bonus to their initial save and are slowed for half as long. Creatures immune to cold are unaffected by this spell and probably enjoy it. Objects exposed to the biting cold become immediately brittle, reducing their hardness and hit points by half.

The flesh of creatures slain by the intense cold of this spell turns icy blue and becomes as brittle as thin glass. Even a single point of non-lethal damage is all that is required to shatter their bodies into a thousand pieces and require a *resurrection*, *wish*, *reincarnate*, or similarly powerful magic to return them to life. A DC 15 Heal check and four hours by an open fire of medium size or larger is required to thaw the bodies so they may be returned to life with *raise dead* or similar magic.

Material Component: A claw, tooth, or scale of any creature with the cold subtype and 250 gp worth of clear quartz.

Shrapnel of Flame

Evocation [Cold]

Level: Elem 3, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)

Effect: A fire-shaped star

Area: 20-ft.-radius spread

Duration: Three rounds (D)

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates a glowing red star that you can hold in one hand until you hurl it at a creature or area. If the star is thrown at a creature, a ranged touch attack will hit and deny the victim a saving throw on the first round of the flames, after that the creature can make saving throws normally. If thrown at an area, it simply explodes, filling the area with flames for three rounds. Each round it inflicts 4d6 fire damage, plus one per caster level (maximum +10) to everyone in the area.

Material Component: A bloodstone gem worth at least 25 gp that has had a star shape engraved upon its surface.

Shield Other, Greater

Abjuration

Level: Refuge 7

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One creature

Duration: 1 min./level (D)

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

As shield other, except the subject gains a +3 deflection bonus to his armor class and a +3 resistance bonus to his saving throws. Additionally, the subject takes no hit point damage for the duration of this spell. Instead, the caster receives 100% of the hit point damage.

Focus: A pair of platinum rings (worth at least 200 gp each) worn by both you and the warder creature.

Shield Other, Improved

Abjuration

Level: Refuge 4

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One creature

Duration: 10 min./level (D)

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

As shield other, except the subject gains a +2 deflection bonus to his armor class and a +2 resistance bonus to his saving throws. Additionally, the subject takes only one-fourth of the hit point damage dealt to him during the duration of this spell. The caster suffers the other three-fourths.

Focus: A pair of platinum rings (worth at least 100 gp each) worn by both you and the warder creature.

Shrill

Evocation [Sonic]

Level: Sor/Wiz 0

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: Yes

A thin beam of yellow sonic energy fires is released upon your utterance of this spell. You must succeed at a ranged touch attack with the ray to deal damage to the target. The beam deals 1d3 points of sonic damage on a successful hit.

Static Sting

Evocation [Electricity]

Level: Clr 2, Sor/Wiz 1

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

With this spell, the caster produces a small mote of azure-colored electrical energy and launches it at a single target with a ranged touch attack. If the mote hits, it inflicts 1d8 electrical damage, plus one per caster level (maximum +10). If the target is wearing or carrying a significant amount of metal (10 lbs or more), you receive a +3 circumstance bonus to the attack roll.

Steam Blast

Evocation [Fire]

Level: Elem 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: 30 ft.

Area: Cone shaped burst of steam

Duration: Instantaneous; one round

Saving Throw: Reflex half; Fort negates

Spell Resistance: Yes; No

You are able to expel a cone roiling steam from your mouth that causes 1d6 fire

damage per caster level (maximum 10d6) to any creature in the area of effect. Water and cold-based creatures suffer double damage or regular damage on a successful save.

The steam blast lingers for a round after you exhale it, requiring any living creatures in the area to make a Fort save or become blinded for the round by the thick cloud of steam. Creatures that are naturally blind or need not breathe are immune to this effect.

Material Component: A tinder twig and a small vial of water that was once boiled.

Wall of Water

Evocation [Water]

Level: Drd 5,Clr 5

Components: V, S, M/DF

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)

Effect: Anchored plane of water, up to one 10 ft. square/level, or hemisphere of water with a radius of 3 ft. + 1 ft./level

Duration: 1 min./level

Saving Throw: Reflex negates; see text

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell creates an anchored plane of water or a hemisphere of ice, depending on the version selected. A *wall of water* cannot form in an area occupied by physical objects or creatures. Its surface must be smooth and unbroken when created. Any creature adjacent to the wall when it is created may attempt a Reflex save to disrupt the wall as it is being formed. A successful save indicates that the spell automatically fails. Fire, including *fireball* and red dragon breath, can evaporate a *wall of water* and deal full damage to the wall (rather than the normal half damage taken by objects). Suddenly boiling away a *wall of water* creates a great cloud of steamy fog that lasts for 10 minutes.

Water Plane: A solid or semi-solid (depending on the casters choice) sheet of water appears. The sheet is one inch thick per caster level. It covers up to a 10-foot-square area per caster level (so a 10th-level wizard can create a wall of water 100 feet long and 10 feet high, a wall 50 feet long and 20 feet high, etc.). The plane can be oriented in any fashion as long as it is anchored. A vertical wall need only be anchored on the floor, while a horizontal or slanting wall must be anchored on two opposite sides.

If the caster chooses to make the water plane solid, it is composed of pressurized water to allow people to walk upon it without sinking. If the caster chooses to make the water plane semi-solid, creatures moving through it are greatly slowed, as if slogging through deep mud. In the latter case, the wall is considered hindering terrain.

The wall is primarily defensive in nature. It can be used to stop pursuers from following you and the like. When the wall is made of pressurized water, it is as solid as any other object. The caster can voluntarily "soften" the wall, allowing chosen creatures to pass through it (albeit getting wet), but the wall still counts as hindering terrain. If you suddenly decide to harden the wall again, the creatures passing through it receive a Reflex save to avoid becoming stuck in it. If the target succeeds, they are ejected on either side of the wall, whichever they choose. If they fail, they are trapped inside and begin to drown (consult drowning rules) but may make a DC 10 + caster level Strength check to break free as a full-round action each round.

Each 10-foot square of the wall has 3 hit points per inch of thickness. Creatures hit the wall automatically.

A section of the wall whose hit points drop to 0 is breached, causing that section of the wall to lose structural integrity and collapse in a splash of water. If the creature tries to break through the wall with a single attack, the DC for the

Strength check is 15 + caster level. The caster can, at any time, collapse a section of the wall or the entire wall. If any open fire is in the area of the collapsing wall, it is highly probable that it will be doused (held objects receive a Reflex save to avoid being doused).

Hemisphere: The wall takes the form of a hemisphere whose maximum radius is 3 feet + 1 foot per caster level, thus a 7th-level caster can create a hemisphere 10 feet in radius. The *hemisphere* is as hard to break through as the *water plane* form can be manipulated in the same way.

The wall is made of clear water so spells that require visual targeting can be cast even if behind or encapsulated within the *wall of water*. Other aspects, such as the wall's hardness may alter or inhibit the effects of spells being cast through the wall.

Material Component: A tinder twig and a small vial of water that was once boiled.

Windshear

Evocation [Air]

Level: Elem 3

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Medium (100 feet + 10 ft./level)

Area: 30-ft.-radius burst

Duration: Instantaneous.

Saving Throw: Reflex half

Spell Resistance: Yes

This spell's original intent was to rip flying creatures from the sky but it has proven useful against ground-based opponents as well. When cast, the potency of the winds in the area increases dramatically and form compressed blades of air that slash through the area, causing 1d6 slashing damage per caster level (maximum 8d6). Airborne targets suffer an additional point of slashing damage per caster level and must make a Fort save or be hurled 100' towards the ground, taking damage as if falling half the distance if they hit the ground.

Despite the vicious shards of wind created by this spell, movement is not hampered for those in the area who make the Fort save. Additionally, this spell has no effect unless cast in an outdoor environment.

Material Component: A feather from any bird killed in mid-flight.

Yig's Kiss

Necromancy

Level: Poison 7

Components: V, S, M/DF

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Close (25 feet + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: Ray

Target: Living creature

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude Negates, see text

Spell Resistance: Yes

Casting this spell transforms the bejewelled kriss in your hand into a violet ray of sickly energy with the head of a serpent. The ray requires a ranged touch attack to hit and deals an initial 5d6 unholy damage to the victim who must then make a Fort save or die due to a massive influx of poison. If the save is successful, the target suffers 2d6 temporary Constitution damage immediately and another 2d6 temporary Constitution damage 10 rounds later.

Material Component: A jewelled masterwork kriss worth at least 500 gp, which is expended upon casting the spell.

Chapter Seven

FLORA AND FAUNA

The sun was setting. The great golden orb dimmed as it slid below the western horizon, the last remnants of its light fading, making way for the cool night air. As the last rays of warmth slid away, the jungle fell into an eerie silence; the creatures of day sank into slumber and the nocturnal denizens of the forest rose to replace them. The smell of salt tang swept in with the coastal breeze, sliding over the flickering tongue of the lone figure slithering purposely down the darkening trail. The damp black soil of the coastal forest squelched under smooth serpentine scales as the Ssanu sought its goal; the smell of rot and the buzzing of flies permeated the scene. To the north, the great city of Sseth stood, silhouetted in the ghostly sheen of the twin moons high overhead.

The Ssanu made its way deeper into the swamp and in a few moments its goal was in sight. Under its steely gaze the foliage parted, revealing a strange sight: an incredible clearing, the size of a human cathedral, stood alone in the swamp. The clearing was ringed in towering mahogany trees, the smooth bark glowing ruddy red in the moonlight. High above the forest floor the canopy closed in, creating a leafy green roof over the scene, with only one single opening in the vegetative roof allowing the moonlight to spill upon the damp earth.

Even stranger was the motley assembly waiting patiently for the Ssanu's arrival. Stretching the length and breadth of the clearing was a unique assortment of extraordinary beasts: proud drakes, winged dragonnel, ponderous oniscus, and fiery mor'let stood in neat rank and file, each with a Ss'ressen handler holding its bridle or whispering sibilantly into a draconic ear. The vast array stretched off into the night, all manner of the creatures of the Empire were present tonight.

The Ssanu entered the clearing and waited impatiently as an aging Ss'ressen trudged over; its body and crooked leg supported by a thick twisted staff. Stopping in front of the Ssanu the Ss'ressen bowed low, awkward with its bad leg. "Your Eminence," hissed the Ss'ressen, "Jeggag Sag has blessed us for this year's hatch has surpassed even our expectations."

Ignoring the blasphemous remark, General Ss'liss of Pit Crotalus fixed the head Druid in his unwavering gaze. The Ssanu's words dripped with venom. "I will be the judge of your work! Do not presume more than your position entitles you to, for even you are replaceable."

The Ssanu wheeled, his gaze falling upon the myriad of reptilian horrors and insectile behemoths gracing the field that night. "Come Beastmaster, show me your new pets. The Emperor is most interested in what you have produced this year," said the Ssanu, as he slithered off towards the waiting handlers. Ss'liphius waited a mere moment, allowing the Ssanu to precede him, before falling into his place behind the general. The two toured between the mass of creatures, their conversation falling into questions about fitness, vitality and killing power of the various beasts.

Perhaps if General Ss'liss had not been so secure in his position of authority, he might have noticed the imperceptible nod Beastmaster Ss'liphius directed toward the oniscus handler. As it was, news reached the capital the next day that General Ss'liss had been trampled the night before by an oniscus that broke free from its handler. It was also said that an Emerald Scale Ss'ressen, one General Theriuss, was the most likely candidate to replace him as High General of the Army's Calvary Divisions. These

thoughts flew on the wings of rumors and soon reached the aged ears of Beastmaster Ss'liphius. Upon hearing the news, a toothy smile creased the old veteran's face, his lustrous green scales glistening in the morning light.

The Ssethregoran Empire once stretched the length and breadth of the Known Lands. Ssethric influence stretched to all corners of the realm and as explorations commenced, all manner of strange and wonderful creatures were discovered. Some were deemed a threat and destroyed, others were captured alive and brought back to the capital as prizes or trophies. Some were intelligent and were bargained with or enslaved. Through the millennia the Ssethregorans began to domesticate many of these creatures, for everything from mundane labor to highly trained tools of war. Very quickly did the Empire absorb these beasts into their everyday lives.

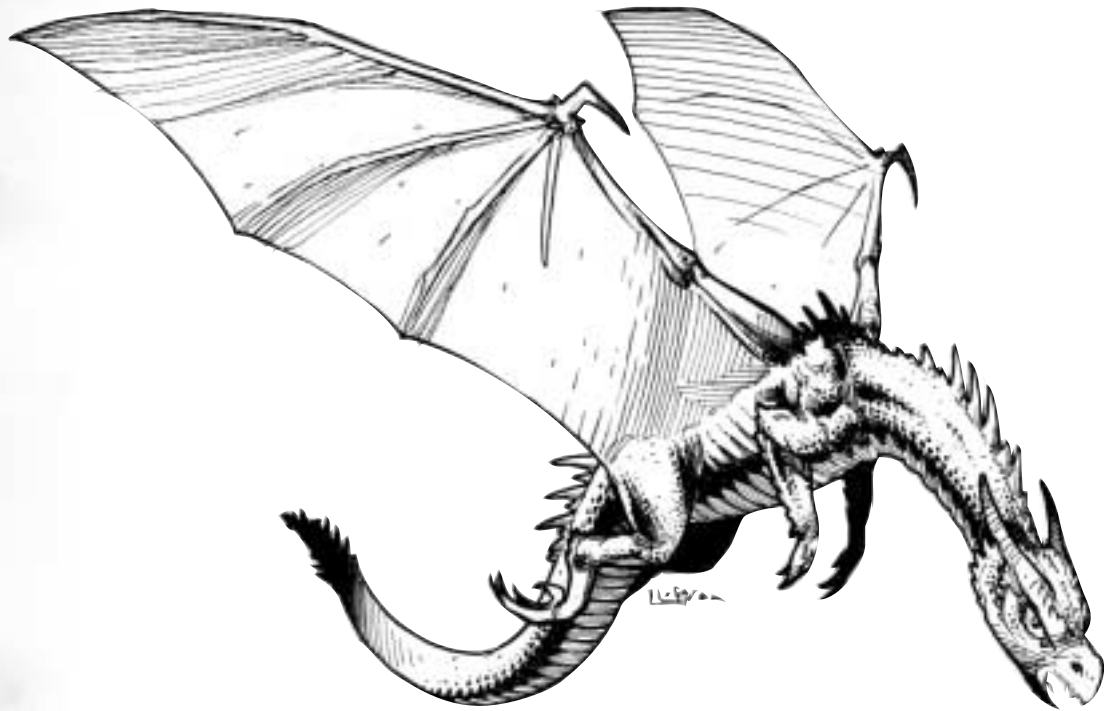
As the Ssethric people worked to tame and master the natural beasts and creatures the scouts discovered, the Technomancers turned their attention to these new discoveries. For countless centuries the Technomancers, in conjunction with the Disciples of Jeggag Sag, have twisted and warped the beasts in search of perfection. When a creature couldn't be found to suit their needs, the Disciples bred one or the Technomancers applied their arcane might to create one from existing stock. There were as many failures as successes and most of the aberrations wandering the face of Onara can trace their origins back to these experimental chambers. Creatures such as otyughs, ropers, tendrilous, and chimera all began as failed experiments that originated in dark, distorted Ssethric minds. Still, hundreds of other creatures have become a mainstay of the Empire.

Draconic Beings

Dragons

For untold millennia there have existed beings of immense power scattered throughout the universe. So far past mortals are these entities that it is impossible for mortal minds to fathom the sheer immensity of what their existence means. Only the Gods truly understand the origin of such beings, perhaps only they are meant to truly know. One of these fantastic powers are the ancient dragons of Arcanis; colossal wyrms of untold power that rivaled the Gods themselves. Some Ssanu scholars believe Dragons predate Arcanis itself, having been created by Kassegore before the great God formed this world. Whether this legend is true or not, one fact remains clear: Dragons are undisputedly the most powerful creatures upon Arcanis.

The tale of the Dragons predates the recorded history of all the races including the primordial Ssethregorans. What little is known concerning them begins during the the ill fated Dragon Wars. Of the



time before the war, little is known as Dragons are a suspicious and secretive lot. It is unclear what began the war with the Celestial Giants and their ilk, but their war lasted centuries and ravaged a vast region of Onara. Slowly but surely, the Dragons were winning the age old conflict, until the Celestial Giants made a pact with the human deities. The human gods intervened; sending their Valinor down to protect the few remaining Celestial Giants and defeat the Dragons. The results are well known, for the Dragons were hunted down and those too powerful to kill outright were placed into eternal slumber.

Though there are many great drakes upon Onara, there are only two known true Dragons left. One resides inside the boundaries of Ssethregore, plotting for the day it can return its brethren to consciousness. The other was turned into an undead horror and has passed beyond the knowledge of mortals, though every few centuries someone claims to have seen the tattered skeletal wings propelling the mighty beast far overhead.

Drakes

Great Drakes

Great Drakes, sometimes called True Drakes, are what most humans consider to be Dragons. These magnificent creatures are the more familiar metallic and chromatic wyrms found throughout Onara. Though their numbers were decimated during the Dragon Wars, their numbers have increased markedly over the last 1,500 years.

Great Drakes have allied with the Ssethregorans in large numbers. There they seek protection from persecution by humans and Elorii, while expanding their own treasure hordes through the coffers of the oldest empire upon Onara. The

Great Drakes rarely
become

involved in the Ssethregoran's daily battles, for they prefer to keep the powerful drakes as a reserve. There are a few, most notably the black and green varieties, that actively participate in the Ssethregoran's wars versus their neighbors.

Great Drakes have bred with many of the races found within Ssethregore and their promiscuous nature has led to a surprising number of strange offspring. The Ssethregorans believe that the Great Drakes are the spawn of Kassegore's children and consider any offspring of these beings to be a blessing. Each generation there are even a few Ssethric/drake hybrids produced. Such individuals are revered in Ss'ressen circles and viewed as a great resource by the upper serpentine caste.

Lindwyrms

Lindwyrms or Land Drakes are the weaker cousins of the Great Drakes. These sinuous drakes are wingless, preferring to wend their ways through the forests or the seas, their powerful legs and elongated bodies allowing them to slither through the roughest terrain with unabashed ease. Lindwyrms are more numerous than Great Drakes and are often employed by the Ssethregorans in battle (though the highly intelligent Lindwyrms are usually the ones giving the orders when it comes to the issue of their deployment). There are currently five known Lindwyrms in Ssethregore identified by color: brown, gray, yellow, oranges, and indigo.

Guivere

A possible relative of the Lindwyrms, Guivere are huge two headed draconic beings found in the wilds of the world. Like the Lindwyrms, Guivere are land bound, having no wings. Their bodies are much more robust, covered with extremely thick scales and sporting a heavily spiked tail. Its most unusual trait is the two serpentine necks, each sporting a massive draconic head. Guiveres are highly intelligent and each head possesses its own personality. They make deadly opponents, as the heads coordinate attacks, one

using its noxious breath weapon while the other accesses its large pool of spell like abilities. Guiveres commonly ally with the Ssethregorans, but usually only enter into battle if the rewards are high or if there is an opportunity to add to its horde, for if its one-headed cousins are known for their greed, guiveres are doubly so.

Lesser Drakes

Lesser drakes are the descendants of Great Drakes and the end result of thousands of years of selective breeding and magical augmentation.

Fire Drakes

Fire Drakes are small crimson colored dragons that serve as mounts or guardians of Ss'ressen egg clutches. Extremely popular among the Black Talons and Ashen Hide Egg Clutches, it is one of the few creatures they were able to escape Ssethregore with. These drakes are totally immune to fire and live in the hottest places they can find, including the hatching fires of Ss'ressen furnaces. This suits the Ss'ressen just fine, as the Fire Drakes make excellent guardians, as they are loyal beyond measure.

Fog Drakes

Fog Drakes are one of the smaller drake species, rarely reaching over six feet in length and half of that being a whiplike tail. These drakes are more secretive than their larger cousins, preferring to make their homes high in the lush tropical canopy of Kraldjur Morass. The species is the brainchild of a Hylis Technomancer named Kal'oula who sought to make the perfect support unit for Ssethregoran commando teams. Fog Drakes are employed for the sole purpose of creating cover for advancing teams, for the little drake's main breath weapon is a dense cloud of cloying fog. It is no wonder that the stalwart members of the Shining Patrol see fog in the forests as a bad omen.

Swamp Drakes

Swamp Drakes are dark muddy colored drakes that make their home in the deepest mires and darkest swamps of the Empire. They are sly and quick, but lack the intelligence of their larger cousins. Their smooth scaled bodies make them invaluable for reconnaissance missions. Swamp Drakes are usually trained and paired off with a Venomous Scale Ss'ressen to conduct covert operations across the Malfelan border, with the Ss'ressen provide the intelligence and the drake providing the brawn.

Sea Drakes

Sea Drakes are long sinuous drakes with a body more akin to an eel than the average drake. Sometimes called sea serpents by warm-bloods, Sea Drakes are covered with fine blue-green scales and sport a large fin along their spine. Sea drakes have no legs or wings and have a laterally compressed body allowing them to move through the water with an undulating motion. They are the favorite mount of the Pleisaurans and each large colony of Pleisaurans supports a stable housing scores of these majestic creatures. Sea Drakes are also used as guards or in conjunction with Telasaurs for fast moving raiding parties. Sea Drakes can breathe both water and air, making them ideal for long-range patrols and for attacks upon surface traveling vessels. Old salts from the Pirate Isles have sworn to have seen Sea Drakes and their Pleisauran riders as far north as Jappa.

Salt Drakes

Salt Drakes are a coastal dwelling draconic creature more akin to the Lindwyrms than their larger winged cousins. Salt drakes have smooth-scaled round serpentine body and no wings. They sport only front pair of legs, as their real legs have evolved into useless nubs. Salt Drakes inhabit the mangrove swamps and salt marshes along the southern coast of Kraldjur Morass, feeding upon any creature unfortunate enough to cross their path. Reaching an adult size of about 30 feet long, these draconic terrors roam the marshes with impunity, giving deference only to their larger cousins and the huge crocodiles that share its domain. Salt Drakes are a prized addition to Ssethregoran forces and are commonly caught and tamed by Ss'ressen of the Venomous Scale and Razor Claw Egg Clutches. A favorite tactic of the Ssethregorans is to lure Malfelen patrols into the coastal marshes, where submerged Salt Drakes and their riders wait in ambush. Striking from their hidden position, they wrap their enemies in their coils and drag them down under the water where their riders finish them off.

Dragonnel

Dragonnel are reputed to have been created by the crossing of a Copper Drake and a pteradon. These magnificent beasts hallmark the best qualities of both races, being powerful fliers and also highly intelligent. Dragonnel are the primary aerial mount in Ssethregore; huge aviaries dot the jungles around Sseth producing hundreds of these majestic creatures. A specialized branch of the Drakhen ride Dragonnel into battle, usually supplemented with a platoon of Rhamphorikes. Dragonnel also make perfect aerial scouts. Dragonnel with their Ss'ressen riders are a common sight high in the air over both the Altherian and Malfelen borders.

Dracolisks

Dracolisks or Stone Drakes are an abhorrent crossbreed between a Black Drake and a Basilisk. They are quite numerous in the marshes in the southern expanse of Kraldjur Morass. Dracolisks possess all the power and majesty of their draconic parent, but none of its intelligence, making for an unpredictable adversary. Considered extremely dangerous, they are hunted by the Ssethregorans and either tamed or harvested for their body parts. A poultice made from the ground bones of a Dracolisk is said to make the imbiber immune to paralysis.

Wyvern

Wyverns are the most common of the lesser drakes seen outside Ssethregore. Though they prefer mountainous terrain, there are still a large number of these beasts housed in aviaries in the northern expanses of the Ssethregoran Empire. Being able to carry more than one rider, wyverns are used as heavy assault units. Protected against aerial retaliation by the faster and more maneuverable Dragonnel, units of wyverns are used to attack ground units, employing their massive claws and deadly stinger with devastating results. A secondary tactic relies on the wyvern's exceptional size and strength. During large-scale assaults, flights of wyverns are used to drop crack teams of Agamassi berserkers behind enemy lines or over the walls of a fortress, where they wreak havoc from within.

Hydra

Hydra are the failed offshoot of experimentations with Guivere. A Technomancer experiment attempting to create a highly intelligent drake with multiple heads for increased spellcasting power, instead left them with a multi-headed brute no more intelligent than the average lizard. It seems that the multiple heads of the Hydra interfere with each other's neural synapses, resulting in a lessening of the creature's intellect. In the end, hydras were found to make loyal guardians after proper training and now grace the halls of many Ssanu pits, as a prized dog might in human society.

Creatures of Service

The Ssethregoran Empire and its ilk rely on huge numbers of animals and more powerful beasts for the everyday tasks of hauling cargo and plowing fields, to the more specialized roles as construction engines or household guardians. The Ssethregorans have tamed just about every creature they discovered and deemed useful, bending them into their service. Others were created by the eldritch powers of the Ssethric Druids or the arcane might of the Technomancers. For the remainders that were deemed to have no strategic use, they were either left alone and forgotten or raised as a food source for the Empire. For millennia the Ssethric people have bred the creatures in its service and during that process each has changed to suit their wants and needs. Enormous ranches dot the hidden glades inside Kraldjur Morass and netted aquaculture facilities are scattered along the coasts. Establishments such as these are the life blood of the huge Ssethregoran Empire, for without the sheer tonnage of food produced in these compounds, the carnivorous denizens of the Empire would surely starve.

A specialized branch of the military termed the "Herpetesul" raises all the creatures in Ssethregore. This branch, a subsidiary of the Military Guild of Logistics, Requisition and Supply, is in charge of everything from farm production and shipment logistics, to the breeding and stabling of war beasts and the importation of foodstuffs in lean years. The Herpetesul are run mainly by the Disciples of Jeggal Sag and employ a cadre of Troglodyte and Pleisauran workers beneath them. For their immense importance to the Empire, the Herpetesul in turn hold a great deal of political power in the system.

Chelone

Chelone are the workhorses of Ssethric shipping interests. These massive turtles can reach lengths of over 40 feet and with their thick impregnable shell they are almost invulnerable to attack. Ssethregoran forces attach huge cargo containers made of a neutrally buoyant steel/corralite alloy to the undersides of these great beasts. Led by Ssanu or Ss'ressen equipped with cephalapoid masks and escorted by Pleisaurain guards, these swift moving reptiles transport vast quantities of goods back and forth across the Lauriol Sea between Kraldjur Morass and the southern expanses of the Empire. These subsurface shipments continue almost unmolested, for the naïve warm bloods of the surface world have no idea of their existence.

Daughters of Yig

The Daughters of Yig are feared more by Ssethregorans than any other creature, for they rule the night and feed upon the unwary. A Daughter of Yig is an immense serpent, reaching 50 feet or more,

that constricts its prey while delivering a deadly poison. Their heads are the size of a large horse, their fangs like sabers and their hoods blot out the sun when unfurled. The Daughter's gained their name from the stylized pattern on the back of their hood that resembles the holy symbol of Yig, Goddess of Serpents. With the decline of the worship of Yig in the Empire, the Daughters are no longer considered sacred by most of the populace, but they still evoke fear in the lower castes. When the sun sets in any city in Ssethregore, a curfew takes effect. Gates beneath the Ssanu pits open and the Daughters pour forth into the streets. There they dine on anyone fool hearty enough to trod the streets against the will of the ruling castes. Of course Nagas and Ssanu have no reason to fear the Daughters, for their natural powers over reptiles allow them to slither the streets with impunity.

Holothurian

Holothurians are one of the great secrets of the Ssethregoran Empire. Stolen from the vanquished Il'huan, Holothurians have been tweaked and modified over the centuries to produce the ultimate tunneling creation. Holothurians are elongated slug-like creatures reaching lengths of eighty feet or more and anywhere from ten to twenty feet in diameter.

These creatures feed upon the bones of the planet, gorging themselves on tons of rock and debris each day. A Holothurian feeds by spraying a rock face with goutts of highly caustic acid. These acids cause the wall to crumble into rubble. It then disgorges its digestive tract, inverting its intestines and vomiting them forth from its sucker-like mouth. The intestines are covered with sticky mucus onto which the rocky debris adheres. The Holothurian then simply swallows its digestive tract once more, depositing the rocky debris in a second stomach to be broken down. Holothurians feed slowly, creating tunnels as wide as themselves as they move through the Lavender Way. As they travel, swarms of kobolds with electro-goats work alongside the great beasts, prodding them along in the right direction, all the while picking up indigestibles, like precious gems and iron-based ores, which the holothurians leave behind.

Hydrochoreus

Hydrochoreus are the main staple in the diet of most Ssethregorans. Like the beef cattle of the warmbloods, the Ssethregorans raise these large rodents in huge numbers to be slaughtered for consumption by the masses. Hydrochoreus are large water loving rodents about the size of a cow. Like true rodents, they breed at a phenomenal rate, producing litters of ten or more offspring three to four times a year. The Hydrochoreus colonies are kept by Troglodytes who manage huge herds of the beasts in the deltas of the Kraldjur River.

Jaculi

Lesser: Lesser jaculi appear as small serpents 4-6 feet in length crowned with numerous spike-like protrusions that form a collar about its neck. Lesser jaculi are used primarily in urban policing units, for the serpent's extraordinary sense of smell and small stature makes them ideal for tracking wanted felons through the twisting sprawling streets and alleyways of the Ssethric cities.

Greater: Greater jaculi are larger versions of lesser jaculi. Greater jaculi are used in military excursions as their innate tracking skills are invaluable for scouting parties. Their larger size, up to 15' long and 200 pounds, also makes them a viable addition to the combat potential of any scouting party that meets with hostile enemy forces.



Moloch

If the various Ssethric races had dogs, the moloch would be it. These small four-legged reptilian horrors are as vicious as they come, but incredibly loyal to any creature that raises them from the egg. Molochs appear to be a cross between a spike covered lizard, with the sharp beaked head of a turtle or prehistoric bird. They are totally carnivorous and eat any scraps which fall in the mess halls and devour any slow, weak or injured Ssethregorans that happen to be caught outside. And that's exactly how the Ssethregorans like it.

Pterasaurs

Pterasaurs are a common sight in Kraldjur Morass, floating along on the warm jungle breezes and fishing the coastal waterways for their favorite fishy delicacies. Spanning from the 3' wingspan of the Pteraus to the massive 30' wingspan of the Ss'quetzal, Pterasaurs come in a fascinating array of sizes and shapes. Pterasaurs find roles mainly as messengers, for the more robust drakes are preferred for aerial combat. The smaller members of this family are sometimes employed as familiars and Pteraus can even be found within the Black Talon Egg Clutch. It seems the small Pterosaur was smuggled out when the clutch abandoned Ssethregore and now has quite a burgeoning population in the Sulphur Marches.

Tendrilocious

Tendrilocious are more of a science experiment gone wrong than an integral part of Ssethric society. They were originally created as guardians for Ssanu gardens, but their use has been expanded to strategic plantings along the Altherian border to discourage raids into Ssethregoran territory.

There are also an ever-growing number of Ssanu sorcerers who prefer to tame their tendrilocious and use them as steeds. The Ssanu sits in a special harness inside the tendrilocious, protected from the powerful secretions by protective magic. The Ssanu controls the horticultural mount by dozens of wires strung from the harness to various points inside the tendrilocious's woody frame. To cast spells the Ssanu simply causes the tendrilocious to open its mouth, then by closing the creature's mouth the Ssanu is protected from retaliation by the massive vegetative monster surrounding it.

Creatures of War

The Creatures of Ssethregore play a vital role in the Ssethric military. Massive reptilian beasts stomp across the battlefields tearing their way through Ssethregore's foes or plod along behind the main force, hauling much needed supplies. Ssethregoran beasts of war differ from the usual creatures found in other sentient societies of Onara, for there are virtually no warm-blooded units. The war beasts of Ssethregore are almost entirely reptilian in nature or else derived from strange insectoid stock dating back to the Il'huan War. The various creatures serve as fast moving cavalry mounts conveying single warriors across the battlefield or huge armored juggernauts carrying howdahs loaded with entire units of troops. Other creatures are used as living siege equipment, able to batter down enemy walls or act as siege towers. A few, like the tyrannosaur, are there to inspire sheer terror among the enemy forces, for what sane creature would stand up against such a beast? For whatever the task, the Ssethregorans have a creature for the purpose.



Carnataurs: (Tyrannosaurs, Spinosaur, Allosaur, and Gorgosaurs)

The largest of the theropods that stalk Kraldjur Morass, the Carnataurs are the pride of Ssethregore and the nightmare of its enemies. Huge, devastating and vicious, the Carnataurs are the largest land roving reptilian predators upon Onara with the exceptions of the great drakes and a few of the other large draconic creatures. Notoriously hard to tame and train, they are rare among the ranks of the Ssethregoran military, partly due in fact to the large number of handlers that die every year trying to raise such blood-thirsty beasts. Still the prestige brought by taming such creatures is enough of an incentive to keep new trainers volunteering for the job each season. Most of the Carnataurs in Ssethric service are caught as infants deep inside the steamy jungles of the Kraldjur Morass, for only the most wise and experienced Disciples of Jeggal Sag attempt to tame adults. For all the trouble of attaining trained Carnataurs, it is well worth it, for once fitted with armor, they are practically unstoppable upon the field of battle.

Ceratopsia: (Chasmosaur, Styracosaur, Triceratops)

The Ceratopsia are the workhorses of the Ssethregoran military. With their large frontal facing bony crests, dangerous horns, and trundling gait, Ceratopsia find roles in all aspects of the military. From pack animals to full frontal assault mounts, their versatility makes them an asset upon any battlefield. Ceratopsia are most often employed in battle with one driver and up to four passengers seated in a special howdah designed to nestle in behind the huge protective head shield sported by these dinosaurs.

Ceratopsia are devastating upon the battlefield, for units of these brutes charging enemy lines causes the ground to thunder at their passing.

Unfortunately, it has been recently discovered that the Ceratopsia have an aversion to sudden loud noises and with the relatively recent

establishment of blast powder in the Altherian peninsula, the technomancers have been scrambling for a way to remove this trait from their steeds.

Coelurosauria: (Deinonychus, Velociraptor, Dromaeosaurus)

The Coelurosauria are the fastest and most deadly of the smaller theropod dinosaurs found on Onara. Possessing lightning speed and an upturned claw that acts as a switchblade, these creatures, tear through enemies upon the battlefield, leaving piles of eviscerated enemies in their wake. The riders of such beasts are the Drakhen elite, choosing these faster more intelligent beasts over everything else but the drakes. The Coelurosauria came in a range of sizes specially bred by the Herpetosul, from the man sized velociraptor to the giant dromaeosaur able to carry two or three riders into battle. Unlike their larger Carnataur cousins, Coelurosauria are raised in hatcheries by the Ssethregorans and are a common sight upon the field of battle.

Cyclura

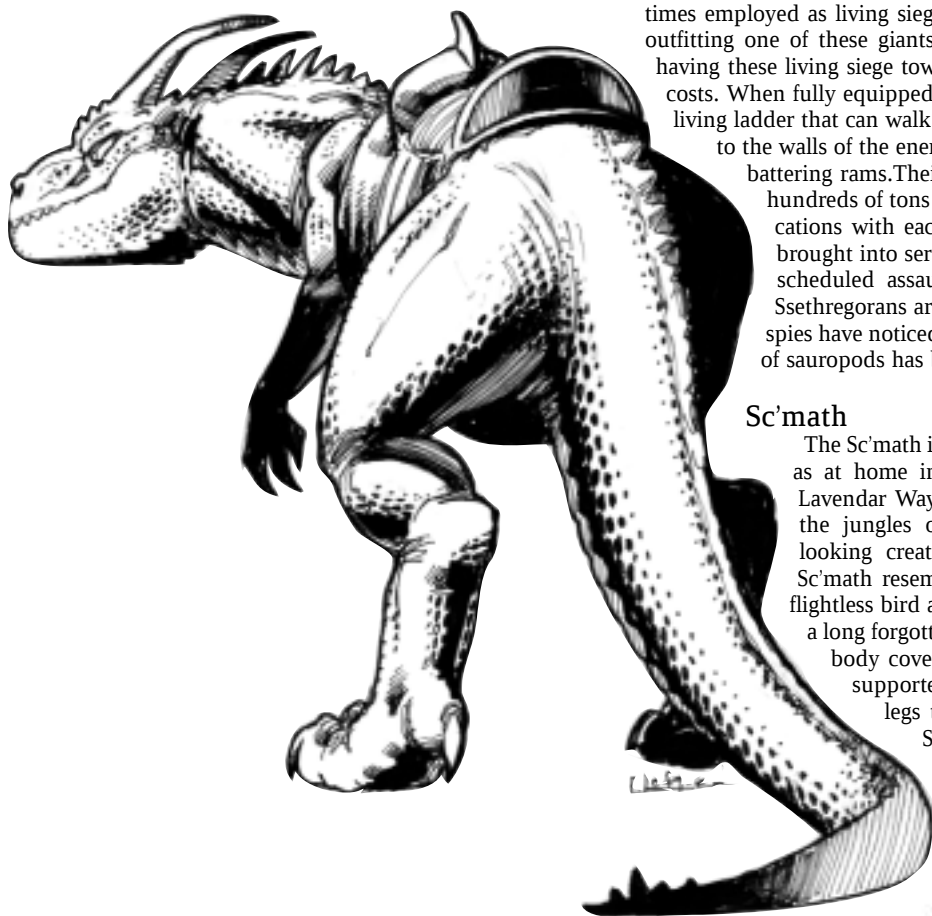
Cyclura are the tanks of the Ssethregoran cavalry. Large heavily armored and possessing an array of deadly weapons, these beasts trundle across the battlefield wreaking havoc wherever they go. A Cyclura is a six-legged reptilian brute fifteen feet long from the tip of its crocodilian nose to the end of its spike laden tail. Cyclura are usually ridden double, with a handler steering the beast along while protected by a thick armor plate passed over the front of the saddle and a passenger armed with a longspear or bow to harry foes trying to flank the team. The driver steers the mount with his knees, while laying waste with a sword/shield or axe/shield combination. The Cyclura rarely needs the encouragement of its driver though, as the beasts are trained for war and make great use of their toothy maws for crushing enemy armor, impaling opponents on its nasal horn or broad sweeps of their spiked tail to break up advancing formations. A trained team of Cyclura and riders is truly an awe-inspiring sight on any battlefield.

Dragon Turtles

Dragon turtles are the heavy artillery of Ssethregoran naval forces. Not true drakes, Dragon Turtles are an insidious creation by the Ssanu Technomancers in trying to improve upon the Chelone. The results are nothing less than spectacular. Dragon Turtles are most often used to raid enemy ships, sinking the fragile crafts in a matter of minutes, while the Ssethregoran forces remain below the waves to collect the spoils as they sink into the sea.

Mor'let

Mor'let are the preferred cavalry mount of the Ss'ressen. They are fast and agile; yet possess a stunning array of weaponry with which to rend their foes into a bloody froth. Resembling a cross between a deinonychus and a Swamp Drake, these draconic beasts are a terror when properly trained. Mor'let are bipedal and the rider sits in a specially built high cantle saddle, which shifts the rider's weight forward, centering it above the Mor'lets hips. Mor'let riders act as light cavalry, harrying opponents with their superior speed and ranged weapons, before closing to finish off the enemy with lances and the scything claws of their mounts. Mor'let also possess an uncanny ability to leap and bring their rear claws to bear, even when carrying a rider, as many of its victims could attest if one could speak to them in whatever hell they now reside.



Oniscus

Oniscus are another insectoid creature dating back to the Il'huan War. These beasts are simply massive and demand a commanding presence upon the battlefield. Resembling huge armored tanks, Oniscus are comprised of dozens of huge semicircular overlapping segments of chitinous armor that wrap entirely over the upper surface of the creature's body. These plates are so tight fitting, that the only way to truly attack an Oniscus is to flip it onto its back and attack its soft underside. Unfortunately for the enemy, Oniscus commonly reach twenty feet in length and weigh over 6 tons. Oniscus sport 14 pairs of segmented legs that allow the creature to surmount almost any terrain and are armed with a huge pair of scythe-like mouthparts that can cut any creature foolish enough to approach its head in half.

An Oniscus is usually outfitted with an armored howdah high on its domed back, where Ss'ressen archers can lay devastating fire into the enemies' flanks. The driver sits in the foremost part of the howdah, over the frontal most segment of the Oniscus' body. There, the exoskeleton has a number of knoblike protrusions. By rapping smartly on these protrusions with a weighted stick, the driver can give commands to his behemoth of a mount. Oniscus are practically invulnerable to all but close range Altherian cannon fire and unless some new technique arises with which to combat them, they will remain a strategic force upon the Ssethric battlefields for centuries to come.

Sauropods (Apatosaurs, Brachiosaurs, Diplodocus, Seismosaurs)

Not normally found upon the field of battle, the giant herbivorous sauropods of the Kraldjur River basin are sometimes employed as living siege towers. Though the cost of outfitting one of these giants is enormous, the benefit of having these living siege towers sometimes outweighs the costs. When fully equipped and armored, they provide a living ladder that can walk over any terrain and right up to the walls of the enemy fortification or act as giant battering rams. Their huge whip like tails deliver hundreds of tons of force against enemy fortifications with each titanic blow. Not normally brought into service until a few years before a scheduled assault, rumors abound that the Ssethregorans are preparing something big, as spies have noticed that the capture and training of sauropods has begun in the Morass.

Sc'math

The Sc'math is a sure-footed bipedal mount as at home in the twisted tunnels of the Lavendar Way as it is to the loamy peat of the jungles of the Morass. An awkward looking creature by human standards, a Sc'math resembles a cross between a large flightless bird and a lizard, perhaps a link to a long forgotten past. It has a large bulbous body covered in a thick warty hide, supported by two heavily muscled legs tipped in cruel claws. A Sc'math has no neck to speak of, but sports an





extremely broad triangular head armed with a brutal horny beak, counterbalanced by a thick short tail. Sc'math riders are experts of close quarter mellee, usually throwing a round of javelins before charging into enemy foot soldiers, relying on their mount's razor sharp beak and the weight of their axes to win the day.

Mosasaurs: (Mosasaurs, Telasaurs, Tylosaurs)

Mosasaurs comprise a group of huge aquatic reptiles commonly reaching lengths of 40 feet or more. All members of this group have long, slim bodies, huge jaws; sharp, cone-like teeth and flipper-like hands and feet. A savage maritime hunter, the aquatic Mosasaurs have been tamed by the Pleisaurans and are used as massive undersea troop transports or as support creatures for large-scale aquatic assault. Though the locanths were exterminated from Onara centuries ago, the Ssethregorans still find use for these huge creatures, especially in the hostile waters of the eastern shores of the southern expanses of the Empire.

War Wyrms

War wyrms is a bit of a misnomer, for in fact the war wyrms are unrelated to drakes in any way. War wyrms are a collective name for a half dozen or so species of giant serpents trained for use upon the battlefield. Usually covered with steel armor, war wyrms act as mobile attack platforms for the Ssanu spellcaster divisions assigned to each unit in the Ssethregoran army. From these high perches the Ssanu are able to rain death upon the enemy, calling forth lightning from the sky to consume all who oppose the might of the Empire. The war wyrms themselves are highly intelligent, often working spells in conjunction with their Ssanu masters. Nothing strikes fear into the hearts of mortals more than a Ssanu looped around the head of an eighty foot serpent towering over the battlefield as the two sway in conjunction releasing spells of eldritch horror upon the warm-bloods far below.

Chapter Eight

EQUIPMENT, BIOTECHNOLOGY, AND MAGIC ITEMS

The militaristic society of the Ssethregorans has had millennia to hone their martial skills and develop many strange and terrible weapons. Combined with their natural drive for conquest, the Ssethregorans have surpassed all other races in their knowledge of the physical body.

Unfortunately, they have used this knowledge almost exclusively to find ways to kill or destroy, and as a result have invented many items that history wishes could be undiscovered.

Table 8.1 Ssethric Weapons



All weapons with the exception of the *Urchinities* are approved for Living Arcanis play
Simple Weapons

Light Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Kriss ⁶	2 gp	Tiny	1d4	19-20 / x2	5'	1 lb	P

One-Handed Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Katar	8 gp	Medium	1d6	19-20/x2	-	2 lb	P

Two-Handed Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Shiv Spear ⁶	2 gp	Large	1d8	x 3	-	9lb	B

Martial Weapons

Light Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Celt	5 gp	Small	1d6	x3	-	3 lbs.	S
Dagon Blade ⁶	8 gp	Small	1d6	x2	-	1 lb.	P

One-Handed Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Dha	4gp	Medium	1d6	x3	-	3 lb	S
Khyber	15gp	Medium	1d6	18-20/ x2	-	3 lb	S
Latt	6gp	Medium	1d6	x2	-	3 lb	B
Tail Bracer	30 gp	Medium	1d8	x2	-	10lb	B/P
Spiked Pauldron	25 gp	Medium	1d8	x2	-	8 lbs	P
Yataghan ⁵	18gp	Medium	1d6	18-20/ x2	-	4 lb	S

Two-Handed Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Bearded Axe	25gp	Large	3d4	x3	-	18 lb	S
Crowsbeak Flail	20gp	Large	1d12	x3	-	11 lb	B/P
Flamberge, Ss'ressen ⁵	30gp	Large	3d4+1	19-20/x2	-	11 lb	P
Surimata ³	10gp	Large	1d8	x3	-	12 lb	S
Sode-Garami ³	12gp	Large	2d4	x3	-	10 lb	S/P
War Maul	15 gp	Large	1d10	x3	-	15 lb	B

Ranged Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Verruc Sling	3 gp	Small	By ammo	By ammo	40'	1 lb	By ammo
Lead Slug (10)	3sp	-	1d6	x2	-	8 lb	B
Urchinities (1) ⁶	200 gp	-	1d6	x2	-	1/2 lb	P

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Table 8.1 Ssethric Weapons (Continued)

Ranged Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Blowgun	7 gp	Medium	By ammo	By ammo	20'	3 lb	By ammo
Darts (10)	3sp	-	1d3	x3	-	3 lb	P
Fanged Arrow (20) ⁶	3 gp	-	-	-	-	3 lb	P
Fanged Bolt (20) ⁶	2 gp	-	-	-	-	1 lb	P

Exotic Weapons

Light Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Jambiya	8 gp	Small	1d6	18-20/ x2	-	2 lb	S

One-Handed Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Tulwar	35 gp	Medium	1d8	18-20/ x2	-	6 lb	S

Two-Handed Melee Weapons

Name	Cost	Size	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Shuang-Pian ²	50gp	Large	1d8/1d8	x3	-	13 lb	S
Kabe-Flyssa	45 gp	Large	1d10	19-20/x2	-	20 lb	S/B
Mancatcher Staff ^{3,4}	30 gp	Large	1d2	x2	-	5 lb	P
Rope Dart ³	10gp	Large	1d6	x2	-	3 lbs	P

1. Inflicts double damage when set to receive a charge
2. ‡ Double Weapon
3. † Reach Weapon
4. This weapon deals non-lethal damage rather than lethal damage.
5. This is a serrated weapon. See the Special entry for serrated weapons.
6. This is a barbed weapon. See the Special entry for barbed weapons

Weapon Descriptions

The weapons found on Table 8.1: Ssethric Weapons are described below, along with any special options the wielder has for their use.

Arrows (Fanged): An arrow used as a melee weapon is treated as a light improvised weapon (-4 penalty to attack rolls) and deals damage as a dagger of its size (critx2). An arrow that hits its target is destroyed. One that misses has a 50% chance of being destroyed or lost. Fanged arrows are barbed weapons (see entry). They are designed to lodge in a target and interfere with combat and spell casting. Fanged arrows come in a number of varieties, and are available for all types of bows. The price does not change per bow type, since the buyer is paying for the specially forged arrowhead.

Barbed Weapons: Barbed weapons are a gruesome development of the Ssethregoran Empire, designed to inflict lasting pain and suffering upon hapless victims. When any barbed weapon strikes a foe and scores a critical hit, the target must make a DC 15 Reflex save, or the tip of the weapon lodges in the target and breaks off (ruining the barbed weapon). The broken tip inflicts 1d4 points of damage each round thereafter unless the target remains totally motionless. The point can be pulled out (inflicting 2d4 damage) or removed safely with a successful DC 15 Heal check.

Bolts (Fanged): A bolt used as a melee weapon is treated as a light improvised weapon (-4 penalty to attack rolls) and deals damage as a dagger of its size (critx2). A bolt that hits its target is destroyed. One that misses has a 50%

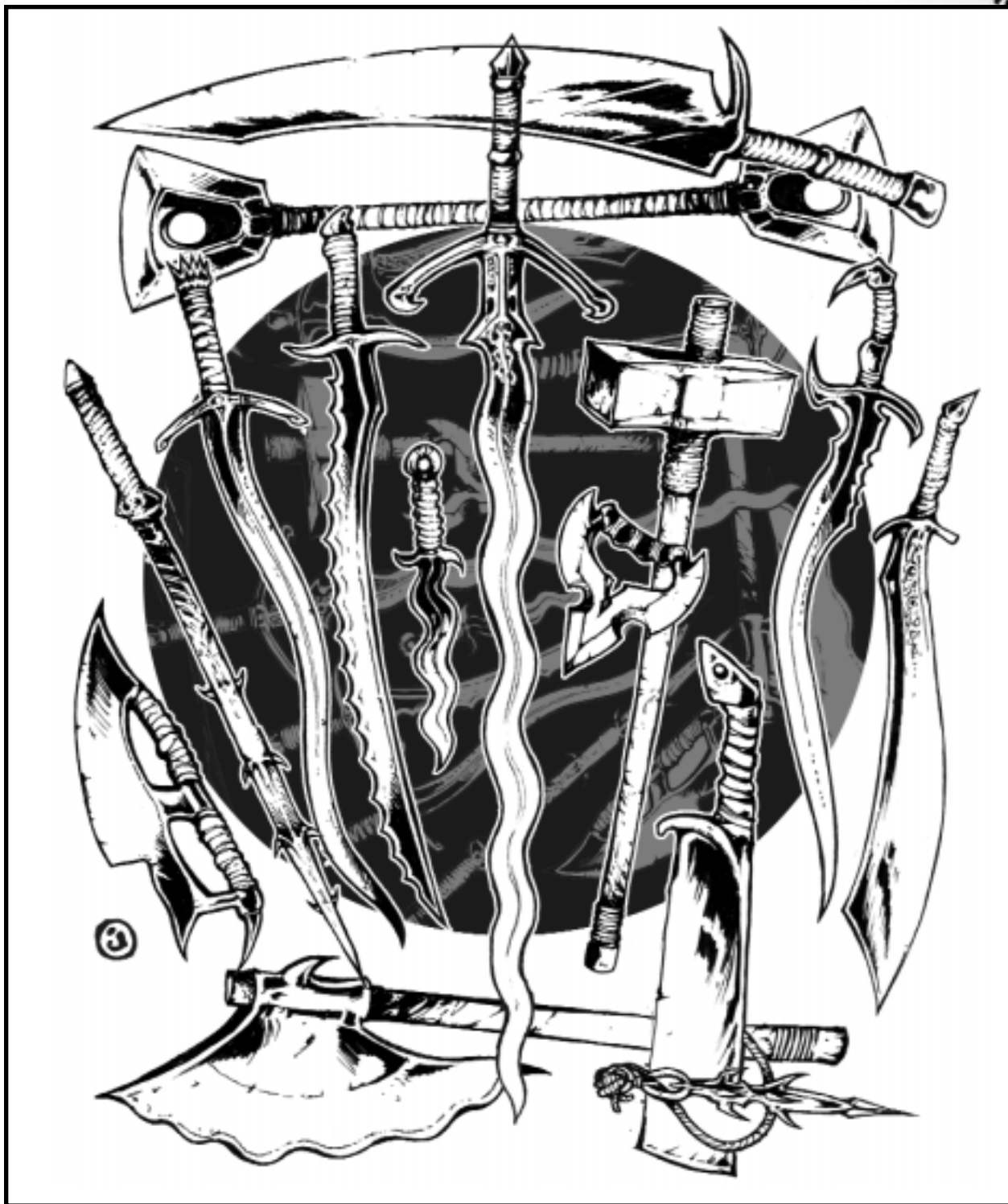
chance of being destroyed or lost. Fanged bolts are barbed weapons (see entry). They are designed to lodge in a target and interfere with combat and spell casting. Fanged bolts can be sized for use in all types of crossbows. The price does not change per crossbow type, since the buyer is paying for the specially forged tip.

Bearded Axe: The bearded axe is the epitome of axe design. A bearded axe consists of a heavy half-moon blade mounted on a 5 1/2 foot reinforced staff as thick as a man's wrist. Once swung, the blade is nigh unstoppable, plowing through flesh and bone with uncanny ease. Originally designed to stave in thick centurion armor, the bearded axe is the favored weapon of Ssethregoran heavy infantry. A bearded axe gives a +2 to all sunder attempts.

Blowgun: A blowgun is a long tube made of reeds, wood, or bamboo. The favored weapon of assassins, the blowgun relies on the strength of the user's lungs to propel a feather-tufted needle to the target. Extremely quiet, the blowgun reduces the Hide penalty for sniping from -20 to -15, due to the target's inability to pinpoint the direction of attack.

Celt: Primitive celts are hand-held axe blades made from flint or obsidian. Ssethric celts are more modern, comprised of steel or bronze. Two slots are positioned in the axe blade perpendicular to the cutting edge. To grip a celt, the wielder's fingers and thumb pass through the blade and meet on the far side, positioning the blade along the outside edge of the wielder's closed fist. The wielder's forearm replaces a normal axe handle, providing the all leverage needed.

Crowsbeak Flail: Designed by the Agamassi egg clutch, a crowsbeak flail is an overly large flail with a hooked flange or "beak" projecting from the heavy iron



head. The hook can be used to trip opponents, granting a +2 to all disarm and trip attempts.

Dagon Blade: This is a barbed weapon (see entry). Made from the iron dense wood of the dagon tree, a dagon blade is a sharp barbed poniard designed for thrusting. Experts of this weapon thrust it into an opponent's vitals and twist, snapping the blade off inside the victim. As a result, habitual users of this weapon usually carry more than one. A dagon blade also floats.

Darts (blowgun): These tiny needles are commonly constructed from bone or steel, and tufted with feathers

or plant fibers. A single dart can hold one dose of poison, and delivers it into the target with a successful hit. Blowgun darts are too tiny to be used as melee weapons.

Dha: Derived from the common machete, the dha is a short chopping blade with a flat, squared off end where the point should be. Designed for cutting through heavy jungle growth, the dha gains

a +1 equipment bonus to attack and damage rolls against plants.

Flamberge: This is a serrated weapon (see entry). A variant of the great sword, the flamberge's signature wavy blade is a deadly tribute to the cold Ssethregoran Empire that was responsible for its birth.

Jambiya: Short, quick and light, this blade is designed for disembowelling an opponent, but is notoriously difficult to master. The blade has a sharp upward curve, and is double-edged, perfect for violent upstrokes that probe deep into an opponent's vitals.

Katar: A variant of the smaller punching dagger, the katar was developed in the fighting pits of Sseth. The wielder grips the handle across his palm. Out from the sides of his now clenched fist protrude two sweeping blades that run up along his fist and meet over his knuckles, twining together and extending to a reinforced point. Katars are often highly decorated by the fighters that wield them. Some even appear as twin, stylized serpents, their heads making up the grip, while their tails snake around the wielder's hand and twist together to form the weapon's point.

Khyber: A larger cousin to the kukri, this thick bladed sword has a forward-swept curve and a heavy point.

Kriss: This is a serrated weapon (see entry). The kriss or "serpent's fang" is a long dagger with an undulating blade. The wavy edges are serrated and honed to razor sharpness. The grating sound of this weapon glancing off bone is a particularly thrilling sound to the reptilian wielders of this weapon. Ssanu often carry ornamental kriss as insignias of their ranks and station, or as ceremonial blades for perverse rites. Ssanu kriss are crafted to resemble a serpent coiled about the handle, the blade stylized as the serpent's tail.

Kabe-Flyssa: The kabe-flyssa is a long narrow blade wielded in two hands. Extending over 5 feet in length, the double curved blade tapers down into a needle sharp point. The sword has a solid reinforced spine, and is triangular in cross-section. For all its length the kabe-flyssa is extremely fast and flexible, often able to penetrate the thick mail coats worn by the enemy. A kabe-flyssa grants a +1 bonus to melee attack rolls when the target is wearing any form of mail (chain shirt, chain mail, scale mail, banded mail, splint mail, etc).

Latt: A latt is a tapered cudgel three feet in length made from strips of bamboo lashed tightly together with copper rings. The result is a flexible club that in skilled hands can be used to "motivate" individuals as well as inflict pain and suffering. Latts are the favored weapon of slavers and Ssethric taskmasters who do not want to permanently damage their merchandise, but still intend to teach it a valuable lesson. Individuals proficient in the latt can choose to strike for non-lethal damage without incurring the -4 penalty to attack rolls associated with inflicting non-lethal damage.

Lead Slugs: Larger and heavier than a normal sling bullet, lead slugs are too heavy to be thrown by a standard sling. They are specially crafted for use with a verruc sling.

Mancatcher Staff: The favored weapon of Ssethregoran slavers, a mancatcher staff is a pole arm designed to capture an opponent without killing him.

The weapon consists of a long pole with a set of spring-

loaded, sharpened jaws at one end. A mancatcher has reach, you can attack opponents 10' away, but it can't be used against adjacent opponents. A successful touch attack on an opponent of equal or smaller size than the wielder of the mancatcher means the target is caught between the jaws, which snap shut, and the attacker may immediately initiate a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. The wielder may not apply the bonus from the Improved Grapple feat while wielding a mancatcher. Grappled opponents may still use weapons of any size but suffer a -4 to all attacks and suffer 1d2 subdual damage each time they fail a grapple check.

Rope Dart: A rope dart is a heavy steel spike affixed to the end of a flexible length of rope or cord. Whirled around the body, a rope dart dazzles the eye, while hiding its deadly intent. The dart relies more on finesse and accuracy to wield than it does strength; wielders add 1 1/2 times their Dexterity modifier to damage instead of their Strength modifier. The rope dart is a favored weapon of the Dripping Blade assassins in Ssethregore, and monks hailing from Ssethregore are considered proficient in the rope dart. The rope dart is a monk weapon, may be finessed, and has a 10' reach, though you don't threaten the area into which you can make an attack.

Serrated Weapons: Serrated weapons are a fearsome sight, sending chills down the spine of the most stalwart foe. Covered in razor sharp points and protrusions, serrated weapons grate through flesh and bone, leaving horrid jagged lacerations in their wake. A serrated weapon grants the wielder a +2 bonus to Intimidate checks if the weapon is openly displayed. A serrated weapon inflicts more damage than a normal weapon of the same type, but has a tendency to snag on bone and armor. As a consequence, all serrated weapons inflict +1 damage with a successful attack, but suffer a -1 to all melee attack rolls.

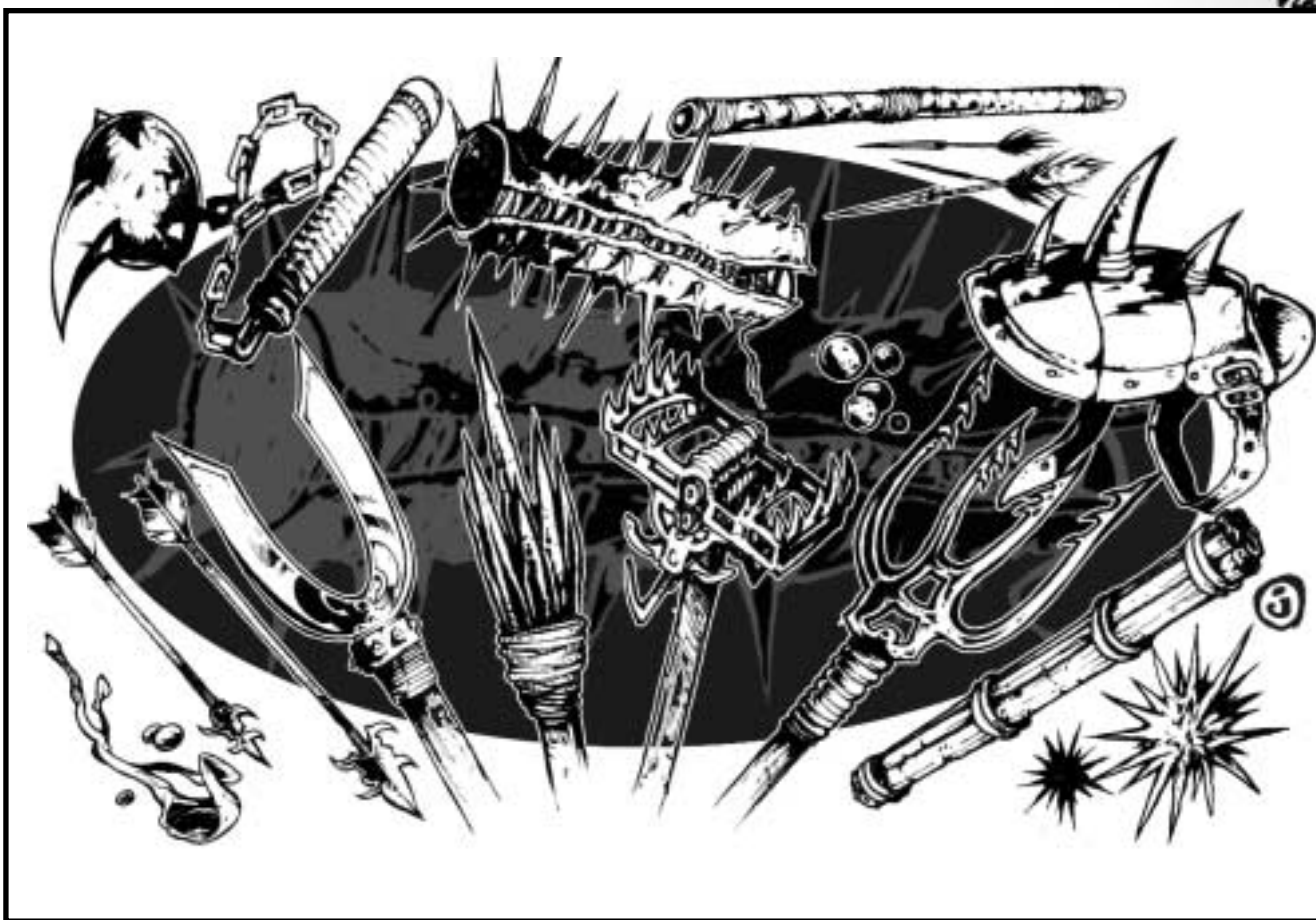
Shiv Spear: This is a barbed weapon (see entry). A shiv spear is a sturdy shaft with a group of six inch sharpened bone shards projecting where the tip of a normal spear would be. Intended as an expendable weapons, shiv spears are often given to cavalry as one-shot ranged weapons.

Shuang-pian: A shuang-pian is a double weapon. On each end of a sturdy shaft is mounted a shovel-like blade with a wide cutting edge. Whirling this weapon about their body, a proficient user can carve through enemies' ranks, leaving a swath of devastation behind him.

Sode-Garami: This strange looking trident is used by Ssethric taskmasters to goad their slaves into working harder, or to drag down escapees. The 10' shaft is tipped with 4 forklike tines. The tines and the upper third of the weapon are covered in a series of hook-like barbs, designed to snare flesh. A sode-garami may be used to trip an opponent and grants a +2 to all trip and disarm attempts.

Spiked Pauldron: A spiked pauldron is actually a piece of reinforced armor worn over the wielder's left shoulder. It may not be used as a weapon unless you are charging. During a charge attack, the wearer may make an attack with the spiked pauldron. If successful you inflict 1d8 + twice your Strength modifier in damage.

Surimata: A surimata is a 10' long pole arm with a "U" shaped blade affixed to the end of the shaft. A 2' section of the shaft directly under the blade is covered



with iron studs, allowing the wielder to block incoming attacks. A surimata has reach, you can attack opponents 10' away, but it can't be used against adjacent opponents. Anyone wielding a surimata gains a +1 to AC when performing a full defense action.

Tail Bracer: Developed by the Emerald Scale egg clutch to contend with their hated rivals, a tail bracer is a long tapered leather sleeve with a row of razor sharp spines running down its length. Affixed to a tail, the bracer provides extra weight and damage to a tail attack.

Tulwar: Strong, rugged, and deadly, these words apply to the tulwar: a wide-bladed sword as feared as the reptiles that wield them. A tulwar's signature is its curved blade, wider than a man's hand. In an expert's hands the tulwar is a one-handed exotic weapon, carving glittering arcs through wretched foes, or held two-handed to deliver massive overhand blows. Those not proficient in its use may wield the tulwar as a two-handed martial weapon.

Urchinities: Urchinities are hard round spheres covered with a myriad of sharp spikes. They are the dried husks of living organisms of the same name that are specially raised and infused with iron by technomancers. Urchinities also contain a virulent poison, which is injected into the target with a successful

ranged attack. The target must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 2d6 rounds with no secondary effect. Urchinities are highly coveted and are almost impossible to find outside the Ssethregoran Empire.

Verruc Sling: This sling is crafted from the highly elastic scrotal sac of the verruc, a tough tusked swine found in the Morass. It can throw heavier projectiles than a standard sling and can also throw urchinities.

War Maul: Originally a tool for driving posts into the ground; the war maul has been modified for the modern battlefield. Consisting of a massive steel hammer mounted on a stout oaken shaft, a maul is designed to hit with such force that it crushes the bones beneath the enemy's armor. With the proliferation of human legionnaires along Ssethregore's northern border, the war maul is becoming a common sight with Ssethric foot soldiers.

Yataghan: This is a serrated weapon (see entry). The largest member of the kukri family, this sweeping sword has a pitched-forward blade, with a curve a bit shallower than its smaller cousins. The inner surface is serrated, adding horrid rents to its already powerful chopping stroke.

Table 8.2 Ssethric Armor



Both Leather Scale and Plate Mail are available for Living Arcanis play though only Ss'ressen may buy and wear Leather Scale armor.

Name	Cost	Armor Bonus	Max. Dex	Armor Chk. Pen.	Spell Failure	Speed 30 ft	Speed 20 ft	Weight ¹
Light Armor								
Leather Scale	20 gp	+3	+5	-1	15%	30	20	17lbs
Drake Scale ²	500gp	+5	+4	-2	20%	30	20	25 lbs
Medium Armor								
Drake Plate ²	2,000gp	+7	+1	-3	30%	20	15	40 lbs
Heavy Armor								
Plate Mail	1,800gp	+7	+2	-5	35%	20'	15'	55lbs
Serpentine ²	x3	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies

1. Weight is figured for a suit of armor created form medium characters.

2. Not Manufactured (therefore unavailable) outside of Ssethregore.

Armor Descriptions

Drake Plate: Forged from overlapping layers of scales from a great drake, and soaked in the sap of the mepis tree, drake plate is more flexible, weighs less and is less restrictive than metal-based plate armors. It is a favorite of Ss'ressen generals and warlords.

Drake Scale: This armor is similar to drake plate, but forged from the smaller scales of lind-wyrms and lesser drakes.

Leather Scale: Leather scale is made from overlapping leather ovals riveted to a hardened leather breastplate. It offers a bit more protection than plain leather, but is less restrictive. Its main advantage is that it's quieter than studded leather armor.

Plate Mail: Plate mail is a suit of custom fit steel armor, consisting of a breastplate, greaves, pauldrons and gauntlets overlaying full suit of chainmail. It offers the same protection as half-plate, but with increased mobility, though at the cost of weight.

Serpentine Armor: Serpentine armor is actually a modification to an existing armor, not armor itself, designed to fit the sinuous body form of snakes and serpent men. Any suit of normal armor may be forged in the form of serpentine armor. Serpentine armor consists of overlapping back plates and chest plates held together by an expertly crafted leather harness, designed to hook underneath the belly and chest scales of Ssanu and Naga. Serpentine armor has all the same qualities as its normal counterpart, but has an armor bonus one lower than normal.

Mounts and Related Gear

All listed creatures are available for sale within Ssethregore. Only the Cyclura, Jaculi: Lesser, Moloch, Mor'let, and Sc'math are available outside Ssethregore, due to the captive breeding practices of the Black Talons and the Ashen Hide. The DC for all Handle Animal and Ride checks

with these creatures is increased by 5 if the handler/rider is not Ssethric.

Barding: Reptilian Barding is suited for all reptilian creatures, drakes, and animals with a lizard-shaped

Table 8.3 Mounts and Related Gear

Creatures Item	Cost	Weight
Carnataur (untrained) ¹	25,000 gp	-
Carnataur (trained) ¹	70,000 gp	-
Ceratopsia ¹	15,000 gp	-
Chelone ¹	5,000 gp	-
Cyclura ²	6,000 gp	-
Deinonychus ¹	1,200 gp	-
Dragonne ¹	7,500 gp	-
Jaculi: Lesser	20 gp	-
Jaculi: Greater ¹	80 gp	-
Moloch	300 gp	-
Mor'let	1,600 gp	-
Mosasaurs ¹	12,500 gp	-
Oniscus ¹	2,500 gp	-
Sc'Math	750 gp	-
Sauropod ¹	20,000 gp	-
Wyvern ¹	4,000 gp	-

Barding Item	Cost	Weight
Serpentine (small or tiny)	Armor x 1.5	x1/2
Serpentine (medium)	Armor x 3	x1
Serpentine (large)	Armor x 6	x2
Serpentine (Huge)	Armor x 12	x8
Serpentine (Gargantuan)	Armor x 20	x12
Reptilian (small or tiny)	Armor x 1	x1/2
Reptilian (medium)	Armor x 2	x1
Reptilian (Large)	Armor x 4	x2
Reptilian (Huge)	Armor x 8	x8
Reptilian (Gargantuan)	Armor x 16	x12

Equipment Item	Cost	Weight
Spired Saddle	120 gp	60 lbs
Cantled (or Ss'ressen) saddle	60 gp	40 lbs
Howdah, Large (1-4 people)	200 gp	200 lbs
Howdah, Huge (6-12 people)	400 gp	800 lbs

¹ Only available in Ssethregore

² Costs double outside of Ssethregore

body (quadruped with a tail). It is tailored to their specific locomotion pattern and unsuitable for horses and other quadrupeds. Serpentine barding is much like serpentine armor, in that it is manufactured for snakes and serpents of all types. It only fits creatures with a snake-like body.

Cantled Saddle: Sometimes called a Ss'ressen saddle, these saddles are made for use on the various riding drakes by Ss'ressen, troglodytes and other riders with tails. The saddle has a very high cantle in front, and a u-shaped section cut out in back. The rider leans forward, his stomach pressed against the high cantle, his tail comfortable and free, running out the U-shaped groove in back of the saddle. A cantled saddle is a military grade saddle and provides a +2 bonus to Ride checks on drakes.

Spired Saddle: A spired saddle consists of a saddle with raised sides and a depressed center, similar to a large bowl. A single long spire rises out of the exact center to a height of about 2'. These saddles are made for serpentine riders, who coil their body about the spire and rest comfortably in the bowl-like seat. A spired saddle is a military grade saddle and provides a +2 bonus to Ride checks on drakes.

Howdah: A howdah is a large square armored box that is affixed to the top of huge (or larger) beasts. It allows one or more people to ride in comfort, and attack from this elevated position. Being in a Howdah grants those inside it cover (or full cover if they sit down), and a +1 bonus to attack against infantry due to their height. A large howdah fits only on huge or larger creatures, while a huge howdah fits only gargantuan or larger creatures.

Biotechnology:

Ss'thregorans are unique among the races of Arcanis in that, due perhaps to the antiquity of their culture, they have advanced mightily in the realms of science and technology. Foremost among their prolific discoveries is the creation and application of biotechnology. Biotechnology is the use of living organisms in the creation and manufacture of machinery, medicines and other fantastic devices. These items, though sometimes shaped through magical means, are in no ways magical themselves nor do they rely upon magic to function. Indeed biotechnological items are self-sufficient systems based upon the realm of science, though fantastic in nature and strange in appearance they might be. The entire science is regulated and controlled by the infamous technomancers of Ss'thregore; powerful individuals who perfect their craft deep within the bowels of the Black Tower of Gettulus. There, teamed with skilled arcanists and dread priests, the technomancers twist living tissue itself, and force it to conform into the shapes they desire. It is whispered across forked tongues that being sent to the technomancers is a fate worse than death itself, for in death your body dies, but in the hands of the technomancers one may exist for eternity, locked in the perpetual agony of one of their creations. To the Technomancers souls matter not, all that is important is the creation of higher technology and the discoveries of science.

The biotechnology of Ss'thregore falls into three main categories: technological, physiological, and neurological. Technological items are machine-based, built to perform a specific task or function. Physiological items are augmentations to a living creature that increase

its physical prowess or grant it extraordinary abilities. Perhaps the most insidious of all is neurotechnology, for items of this nature are designed to act directly upon the recipient's brain and nervous system.

In game terms, all biotechnological items are created through the skills Craft (Biotechnology) and Medicine and Surgery (see Chapter 5: Feats and Skills). Some of the more highly advanced biotechnology may also require the application of magic in its creation. Biotechnological items though are not magical, do not radiate magic, and continue to work where magic would not (such as in an anti-magic field). All biotechnological items are essentially created from living tissue, and therefore can repair themselves to a limited degree. Damaged biotechnological items heal at a rate of 1 hp per day, until fully repaired, though some specific items may require additional repairs to bring them to a fully functional level (see item descriptions below).

Technological items:

Technological items are those that have a specific (usually mechanical) function and do not modify the recipient creature

Bloodbag: A bloodbag appears to be a hard-shelled oblong protrusion affixed to the wearer's back or stomach. Upon closer examination a bloodbag reveals its origins, taking on an insectile appearance. Short thick limb-like growths extend from its sides, and burrow into the flesh of the wearer, securing the bloodbag in place. A triangular barbed "head" inserts itself into the wearer, where it forms a connection with her circulatory system. A bloodbag is then able to drain blood from the wearer and store it for later use, usually to power other biotechnological items that require aliquots of blood to operate. Attaching a bloodbag inflicts one temporary point of constitution damage on the wearer, which remains for as long as the bloodbag is attached. As a full-round action, the wearer of a bloodbag may shunt blood into the bloodbag. This inflicts 1d6 points of damage to the wearer, but stores an equal quantity of hit points worth of blood into the bloodbag. The wearer may shunt as much blood as he desires into the bloodbag (killing herself in the process of she so desires), up to its maximum capacity, which is based on its size. The blood can be stored in the bloodbag indefinitely, but is most often used to power other biotech items. Whenever a biotech item needs to draw blood from the user to function, the user may instead draw blood out of the bloodbag, thus freely using her blood draining biotechnology without reducing her own effectiveness. A bloodbag had a hardness of 5 and 25, 30 or 35 hp.

Small Bloodbag: holds up to 10 hp.

Normal Bloodbag: holds up to 20 hp.

Large Bloodbag: holds up to 30 hp.

Small; Craft (Biotechnology) 3 ranks; DC 23; Price 5,600 gp; Cost 2,800 gp.

Normal; Craft (Biotechnology) 5 ranks; DC 26; Price 22,400 gp; Cost 11,200 gp.

Large; Craft (Biotechnology) 7 ranks; DC 29; Price 50,400 gp; Cost 25,200 gp.

Cephalopodic Gills: Resembling a soft, bulbous oblong of tissue, cephalopodic gills grant the user the ability to breathe while



under water. When the user hold the gill up to his snout, a series of suction cupped tentacles reach out and wrap themselves around the user's head, holding the gill in place and creating an air-tight seal. When the user submerges, 6 flaps open along the bulbous body revealing scarlet gills. These gills extract oxygen from the water and supply it to the wearer. Coincidentally, while wearing a cephalopodic gill, the user cannot eat or breathe air until the gill is removed. A cephalopodic gill has a hardness of 5 and 15 hp.

Craft (Biotechnology) 10 ranks; DC 27; Price 43,200 gp; Cost 21,600 gp.

Drakharl Cannon: Drakharl cannons were derived from small fire-breathing reptiles native to Kraldjur Morass. After centuries of modification, the original species is extinct, but what remains is an incredibly powerful bit of bioengineering. Appearing like a scaled, twisted lump of flesh covered in numerous spiky protrusions, a drakharl cannon wouldn't win any competition for aesthetics. Instead it relies on its powerful internal combustion capabilities to convert fresh blood into a pyroclastic agent that burns when exposed to air. A drakharl cannon is affixed to the wielder's arm. As a standard action the wearer may fire the drakharl cannon. The cannon emits a cone of fire 20' long, that deals 4d6 fire damage to all those caught in its area of effect (DC 16 Reflex save for half). Firing the cannon inflicts 2 points of damage to the wielder per use, due the blood drained from the wielder to power the weapon. A drakharl cannon has a hardness of 8 and 30 hp.

Craft (Biotechnology) 11 ranks; DC 32; Price 40,320 gp; Cost 20,160 gp.

Photochromatic Skin: These living jumpsuits are created from the fresh flayed skin of giant octopus or squid. Once crafted, these suits have a slick appearance and a rubbery consistency. A photochromatic skin automatically senses the environment around it and changes color to match its surroundings. This grants the wearer a +5 enhancement bonus to all Hide checks. A photochromatic skin has a hardness of 5 and 30 hp.

Craft (Biotechnology) 6 ranks; DC 23; Price 4,500 gp; Cost 2,250 gp.

Flesh Grafts: Flesh Grafts, living tissue medicines, are the first aid kit of the Ssethric battlefield. Carried by field medics, flesh grafts are patches of bioactive tissue that graft themselves to a wound and repair the some of the damage. Flesh grafts come in 4 varieties of varying effectiveness. A flesh graft is consumed when used. Flesh grafts have a hardness of 0 and 2, 4, 6 or 10 hp.

Small Flesh Graft: heals 1d10 points of damage.

Normal Flesh Graft: heals 2d10 points of damage.

Large Flesh Graft: heals 3d10 points of damage.

Organ replacement Flesh Graft: heals 4d10 points of damage and 1d4 points of ability damage.

Small; Craft (Biotechnology) 3 ranks; DC 15; Price 270 gp; Cost 135 gp.

Normal; Craft (Biotechnology) 5 ranks; DC 17; Price 675 gp; Cost 338 gp.

Large; Craft (Biotechnology) 7 ranks; DC 19; Price 1,260 gp; Cost 630 gp.

Organ replacement; Craft (Biotechnology) 9 ranks; DC 25; Price 2,430 gp; Cost 1,215 gp.

Trog Bomb: To create this item, the crafter must extract the "stench" gland from a living Troglydyte. The extraction is very painful and always kills the subject. Once extracted, the gland is subjected to a secret alchemical enhancement process that makes the gland even more potent than normal. Finally, the enhanced gland is then placed in a thin glass container similar to those used to contain alchemist's fire.

Once finished, the bomb is fairly resilient to carry, but when thrown (as a ranged touch attack) it readily breaks. When the container breaks, everyone within 5' of the square where the vessel burst must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be overcome with nausea. If an individual is actually struck by one of these items she must make a DC 17 Fortitude save or be overcome with nausea. The nausea deals 1d6 points of temporary Strength damage that wears off after 10 rounds. Creatures immune to poison are unaffected and those resistant to it receive their normal bonus to saving throws. Ssethregorans are fond of using these devices to target large concentrations of troops, and enemy spellcasters.

NOTE: This is a special "Nausea" effect and is different from the condition of "Nauseated" in Core Rule Book II or the SRD.

Craft (Biotechnology) 2 ranks; DC 23; Price 270 gp; Cost 135 gp.

Wisps: Wisps are floating glass orbs about the size of a Ss'ressen egg that emit an eerie blue bioluminescent light. Wisps can be calibrated to remain stationary, or to follow the user at a distance of three feet. Wisps are sometimes affixed to weapons or shields to provide the wielder with light. A wisp sheds light in a 30' radius, though as a free action the user may command the wisp to dim, reducing its light intensity to a 5' radius.

Craft (Biotechnology) 1 rank; DC 15; Price 1,800 gp; Cost 900 gp.

Physiological Items:

Physiological items are modifications to a subject creature that increase, enhance or grant new abilities.

Adamantine Servos: Adamantine servos are a multitude of bars of tempered adamantite that form an intricate framework that is grafted to the subject's limbs. The adamantite re-enforcements increase the subjects load bearing and lifting capacity, granting the subject an equipment bonus to her effective Strength score. Attaching the exoskeleton is incredibly complex and painful, requiring a DC 20 Medicine and Surgery check to accomplish. Failure means the subject is crippled, taking 1d6 points of permanent Strength damage from the failed procedure.

+2; Craft (Biotechnology) 6 ranks; DC 20; Price 12,800 gp; Cost 6,400 gp.

+4; Craft (Biotechnology) 8 ranks; DC 25; Price 51,200 gp; Cost 25,600 gp.

+6; Craft (Biotechnology) 10 ranks; DC 30; Price 115,200 gp; Cost 57,600 gp.

Retinal Shine: This biotech implant affects the retinal surface of the subject's eyes, allowing him to see in pitch-black conditions. The subject gains 60-foot darkvision, if he already had darkvision, then his range

increases by 30 feet. This procedure is extremely complex requiring a DC 25 Medicine and Surgery check to accomplish. Failure indicates the subject has gone permanently blind.

Craft (Biotechnology) 3 ranks; DC 20; Price 19,200 gp; Cost 9,600 gp.

Neurological Items:

Neurological Items are implants or devices designed to boost the subject's mental capacity, or to make them easier to control.

Neurological Shiv: A neurological shiv is perhaps one of the most important devices for the Ssathregorans, not in terms of power, but in terms of what it can provide to the society as a whole. A neurological shiv is a glandular implant that is placed deep inside the temporal lobe of the subject creature. This procedure is notoriously difficult and many patients die under the knife. However those who survive gain unprecedented mental abilities. The procedure is jealously guarded by the Ssanu technomancers who perfected it, and only granted to non-Ssanu individuals who have proven to be exceptionally loyal, or those that have specific missions against the Voiceless Ones. The implantation process

requires a DC 30 Medicine and Surgery check to accomplish, and a DC 20 Fortitude save by the subject. Failure of either results in the death of the subject. Success indicates the shiv has been properly installed. The subject is now considered a psionic creature, may take psionic character classes, and gains 10 inherent power points.

Craft (Biotechnology) 12 ranks; DC 40; Price 89,600 gp; Cost 44,800 gp.

Telepathic Apparatus: Appearing as a fine weave of mithral wires attached to a triangular spike, a telepathic apparatus is the ultimate in silent communications. When pressed against the side of the skull, the hardened tip burrows down and fuses to the users skull. Amazingly thin mithral wires worm their way into the user's parietal lobe, attaching directly to the speech synapses. A telepathic apparatus grants the user the telepathy supernatural ability. A creature with this ability can communicate telepathically with any other creature within 100 feet that has a language. It is possible to address multiple creatures at once telepathically, although maintaining a telepathic conversation with more than one creature at a time is just as difficult as simultaneously speaking and listening to multiple people at the same time.)

Craft (Biotechnology) 8 ranks; DC 25; Price 36,450 gp; Cost 18,225 gp.

Puppetmaster Hood: An insidious device designed to make slaves more docile, puppetmaster hoods are employed by high-ranking Ssanu, Naga, and Ss'ressen who desire complete control over their personal entourage. A puppetmaster hood looks like a dusky red triangle of knobby tissue, with a long whip-like tail protruding from one tip. The underside is covered with thousands of hook studded suction cups. When placed between the shoulder blades, the hood affixes to the victim (requiring a DC 25 Strength check or a DC 25 Heal check to remove). The long tail then pierces the skin at the base of the victim's skull and sends tendrils along the victim's arteries, permeating the brain of the victim. Once established, the puppetmaster hood forces a DC 17 Will save each round until it takes control of the victim as per the *Dominate Person* spell. A puppetmaster hood is always linked to a slaver's crown. Interestingly it is rumored, that the fabled lost crown Naja'Haje could potentially control all the puppetmaster hoods in the entire Empire.

Craft (Biotechnology) 9 ranks; DC 26; Price 72,000 gp; Cost 36,000 gp.



Table 8.4: Weapon Special Abilities

Minor	Medium	Major	Special Ability	Base Price Modifier
1-45	1-20	1-10	Corrupted	+1
46-90	21-40	11-20	Venomous	+1
91-100	41-65	21-35	Resonating	+2
-	66-90	36-60	Destabilizing	+2
-	91-100	61-90	Ssethric	+3
-	-	91-100	Sharpness	+5

Slaver's Crown: One of the crowning achievements of the Ssanu is the creation of the slaver's crowns. These devices amplify the wearer's mental prowess, enabling the wearer to use his psychic powers to control others with a mere thought. Slavers crowns are usually ostentatiously decorated crowns or tiaras, designed to display the wearer's social status to the unwashed masses. Rumors abound about the true powers of a slavers crown, and most laymen are too fearful to ever consider attacking anyone possessing such an obviously powerful artifact.

A slavers crown acts by stimulating the various glandular centers found deep within the wearer's brain, constantly pumping waves of endorphins throughout the brain. An individual wearing a slaver's crown becomes supremely confident in his own abilities, enjoying a +4 morale bonus to his Charisma score for as long as the crown is worn. The crown also magnifies the psionic powers (if any) of the wearer, generating 1 power point towards the cost of any power costing 3 power points or less, to a minimum cost of 1 power point to manifest a power. Furthermore, anyone wearing a slaver's crown may link that crown with a number of puppetmaster hoods equal to the wearers newly modified Charisma modifier. As a standard action, the wearer may break connection to any puppetmaster hood currently linked to the crown and establish it with another hood. If the hood is controlled by a different slaver's crown, then the two individuals must make opposed Charisma checks, the winner wrestling control from the loser.

Craft (Biotechnology) 11 ranks; DC 34; Price 105,300 gp; Cost 52,800 gp.

Magic Items:

The ancient knowledge of the Ssethregorans has resulted in the creation of literally thousands, if not tens of thousands, of magic items down through the millennia. Many of the more ancient items are incredibly powerful, representing the level of craftsmanship achieved during the golden age of the Old Empire, but subsequently lost with that Empire's fall. Still, the craftsmen in Ssethregore still produce some of the strangest and wicked items of power upon all of Onara. Any adventurers brave (or foolhardy) enough to venture into the vaulted jungles of Ssethregore, or to worm their way through dusty forgotten ruins of Yahssremore's past are sure to run across a myriad of magical creations. Wrestling those items from their guardians may be another story entirely... Listed here are a small number of eldritch weapons and magical devices that may be found within Ssethregore. Many more items can also be found in *Forged In Magic*, including the fabled Naja'Haje, the Viper Crown worn by the dread kings of ancient Yahssremore.

Weapons and Armor:

Weapon Special Ability Descriptions

Corrupted: A corrupted weapon is one that was forged on the black altars dedicated to the Varn deities. Upon scoring a critical hit, the victim must make a DC 16 Will save or the corrupting weapon will inflict 1d4 points of temporary Wisdom damage on them, as their soul is tainted by the touch of the corrupted item.

Moderate necromancy; CL 6th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bestow curse*; Price +1 bonus

Destabilizing: Destabilizing weapons were originally designed to combat escaped elementals or other summoned creatures run amok. They were found to be of great use during the Time of Terror, when infernals stalked the land of Onara. Any outsider struck by a destabilizing weapon in combat must make a DC 16 Will save against a *dismissal* spell cast by an 8th level sorcerer. Destabilizing weapons are often forged from a material, such as cold iron, that is harmful to outsiders for an added punch.

Moderate abjuration; CL 11th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *dismissal*; Price +2 bonus

Resonating: Resonating weapons constantly vibrate and hum in the wielders hands, droning and whistling as the wielder smashes through his opponent's defenses. A resonating weapon is supernaturally hard, and combined with its strange vibrations, is able to cut through substances much more dense than itself. When used to attack an inanimate object, golem, or other magically animated object with hardness, a resonating weapon ignores the first 10 points of hardness of said object. This stacks with any other weapon qualities that allow it to surpass an object's hardness. Resonating weapons may only be forged from adamantine, black iron or wolf iron.

Moderate Transmutation; CL 12th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *disintegrate*; Price +2 bonus

Sharpness: This enhancement is one of the most powerful that can be bestowed upon a weapon. When a critical hit is scored with a sharpness weapon, the weapon severs a random limb of the opponent. Arms, legs, tails, wings, etc. all fall prey to this enhancement. A sharpness weapon will never sever an opponent's head. The DM has final say for all effects of this enhancement. The sharpness enhancement may only be placed on slashing weapons.

Strong transmutation; CL 18th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *Keen Edge*, *Limited Wish*; Price +5 bonus

Ssethric: A weapon with the Ssethric enhancement is created for the sole purpose of arming the Ssethric military without arming its enemies. Many powerful magic weapons have the Ssethric enhancement added to them as safeguards against losing the weapon and having it turned against you. In the hands of any Ssethric race, a weapon with this enhancement inflicts an additional +1d6 points of damage

with a successful hit upon any target. Furthermore, the weapon grants the wielder a +2 to all saves vs. spells cast by non-Ssethric creatures. It bestows two negative levels upon any non-Ssethric creature attempting to wield it. This level remains as long as the weapon is in hand and disappears as soon as it is no longer wielded. Negative levels gained in this way never results in actual level loss, but cannot be overcome in any way while the weapon is wielded.

Strong enchantment; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bless*, *align weapon*; Price +3 bonus

Venomous: Like a living serpent, venomous weapons are insidious devices designed to kill with the slightest nick or cut. Any creature struck by a venomous blade must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or be dealt 1 point of temporary Constitution damage. This enhancement may be applied to a weapon multiple times. Each application raises the DC for the effect by +2 and increases the poison damage by one.

Moderate Necromancy; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *poison*; Price +1 bonus

Specific Weapons and Armor

Fang of Destiny: Fangs of destiny are special tulwars created by the Ss'ressen matriarchs to be granted to the clutch's warlord. These highly stylized blades are often silvered, with scenes of famous Ss'ressen battles meticulously etched into the blade. The blades are always forged for a specific warlord, his name engraved along the pommel, along with the number of victories he has led the egg clutch to. A Fang of Destiny functions as a +2 silvered mighty cleaving Ssethric tulwar. In the hands of any Ss'ressen the blade also grants the possessor a +4 enhancement bonus to Charisma. If the wielder of this weapon also has the Leadership feat, the number of followers normally allowed to him by that feat is doubled.

Strong enchantment; CL 15th Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *align weapon*, *bless*, *divine power*, *eagle's splendor*; Price 114,425 gp.

Guthook: This +1 keen venomous jambiya is commonly crafted for use by agents of the dripping blade, a nefarious assassin organization nestled deep within Ssethregoran society. The blade is forged to resemble a smoothly curving fang affixed to a cross guard stylized to resemble a striking serpent, maw agape. The mark of the Dripping Blades, an open lotus blossom, is stamped upon the weighted pommel. This sigil acts exactly as an *arcane mark*, allowing the guild craftsmen to keep track of the weapon's whereabouts at all times. Furthermore, the owner of a guthook may use *dimension door* once per week, as a sorcerer of 12th level.

Moderate necromancy; CL 12th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *arcane mark*, *dimension door*, *keen edge*, *poison*; Price 20,450 gp.

Harnessbreaker: Harnessbreaker appears to be an average kabe-flyssa with a strangely distinctive green-tinged bronze cross guard carved in the form of an eagle with wings spread. In all respects it functions as a +1 Kabe-Flyssa. In the hands of one who is familiar with its power, it is a tool of deadly precision. Once per day, as a free action, the wielder may cry out the name of Caimeth, Varn god of Murder. His next strike with harnessbreaker gains all the effects as if the wielder was under the effects of the spell *true strike*.

Moderate divination; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *Quickened Spell*, *true strike*; Price 16,925 gp.

Obsidian Sun: This wolf iron bearded axe is the primary weapon of the Emperor's dreaded miliarus shock troopers. Ornately decorated in the sigils of the current ruling house, the blade forged in the shape of a crescent moon, these devastating weapons represent status and a position of power amongst Ssethric society. In the hands of one of these experts, its jet-black blade carves a swath of ravaging death, leaving a crimson mist in its wake. Sword, shield, cuirass, nothing stands before its keen cutting edge and crushing blows. Obsidian Suns are +1 resonating bearded axes forged of dense wolf iron. The enchantment process renders the blades black as obsidian, perhaps emulating the hearts of their creators. Upon command an obsidian sun sheds an eerie purple light in a 30' radius illuminating like a torch. The wielder may also cast *faerie fire* and *see invisibility* once each per day.

Moderate transmutation; CL 12th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *disintegrate*, *faerie fire*, *light*, *see invisibility*; Price 32,125 gp.

Ssethregoran "Serpent" Arrow/Bolt: These +1 projectiles (choose any Bow/Crossbow ammunition) are the bane of all ophidophobes along the Ssethregoran frontier. Upon striking a target, a Serpent arrow/bolt inflicts normal damage. Additionally they become a tiny viper (core Rulebook III) with its head embedded in the target. While embedded in the target, the snake continues "striking" each round and automatically inflict 1 point of damage that requires a Fortitude Save DC 10 or the snake's poison inflicts 1D6 points of temporary Constitution damage. If an arrow is removed, the target must still make a single Fortitude save DC 10 or take 1D6 points of temporary Constitution damage (no secondary effects). A snake may be killed by normal means or may be removed as a full round action that draws an attack of opportunity. If the serpent arrow is removed, it is a live tiny viper. If the arrow misses its target, it does not revert to snake form and is destroyed.

Moderate transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *poison*, *summon natures ally 1*; Price 1,500 gp.

Potions and Salves

Elixir of Longevity: In ancient times the serpent men of Ssethregore searched for ways to extend their already extensive lifespan. Through much trial and expenditure of long forgotten magics, the wizards of ancient Ssethregore invented Elixirs of Longevity. The predominant ingredients for these potions are a mixture of potent asp venom and tears from the immortal Elorii. The torturous processes used to extract those tears are still whispered in fearful tones by Elorii the world over.

Elixirs of Longevity are always found in highly decorated ceramic flasks depicting the ancient serpent kings of old, along with the now fallen God Kassego. Anyone imbibing these potions is wracked with pain for three days as the strange brew takes effect. At the end of the three days, the imbiber must make a DC 20 Fortitude save or die from the poison coursing through his veins. If the imbiber survives the poisons burning through his body, then his natural lifespan is permanently doubled.

Strong transmutation CL 17th; Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, *Temporal Stasis*, Price 7,500 gp

Scentblocker Salve: A handy potion created by Ss'ressen egg clutches and Ssanu overlords, this salve
w h e n

smeared under the nasal openings, negates one's sense of smell. This temporarily blocks abilities, such as scent and Ssethric frenzy.

Faint Magical Aura CL 3rd; Brew Potion, Prestidigitation, Price 25gp

Rods, Staves, and Wands:

Ssethregoran "Viper" Wand (standard): Ssethregoran commanders often give these wands to important soldiers as rewards for loyal service. These wands function as a normal curative wand of the appropriate type with some interesting exceptions. First, the user need not have the curative spell on their spell list to make use of this item. Second, when the wand is activated, it sinks its teeth into its target to transfer its spell. Interestingly enough, this item may also be activated to "auto-heal" a living creature. To do so, one simply lays the wand against an appendage (arm, leg, tail, etc.) and the wand becomes a slithering pit viper that wraps itself around the appendage and sinks its fangs into the offered appendage. Once activated in this fashion, the wand automatically applies its healing spell to the target, on the target's initiative, whenever they reach 0 or less hit points. If the spell does not rouse the item owner, the wand will continue to apply a charge worth of curing per round until the owner is roused. Each use of the "Auto Heal" function uses 5 wand charges. If the wand does not have sufficient charges, this function will not work. The wand's curative effects will never bring a dead individual back to life. If the owner is slain, the wand will not apply curative spells, but instead, it will animate and uncoil from the appendage where worn and slither back into its normal snake-wand form and await a new owner. Finally, activation of this wand is completely silent per the "Silent Spell" metamagic feat. Rumors exist of more powerful versions of this wand that recharge themselves by draining Elorii. Other rumors say only the Ssanu spell casters who created these devices know of some special functions.

Faint to strong conjuration; CL Varies (see below); Craft Wand, Silent Spell, appropriate cure spell; Price: *cure light wounds* (CL 3rd) 2,250gp, *cure moderate wounds* (CL 5th) 5,625gp, *cure serious wounds* (CL 7th) 10,500gp, *cure critical wounds* (CL 9th) 16,875gp.

Staff of the Beastlord: Carved from a sapling of the Ju-lau tree, uprooted at the stroke of midnight during a waxing moon, a Staff of the Beastlord is a potent magical item intricately linked to the woodlands from which it sprang. The staff itself is about 7 feet long; the upper end terminating in the twisted root ball of the sapling, adorned with a crystalline globe nestled within the roots. The shaft is decorated with strings of carved glyphs sacred to those who follow Jeggal Sag. Bits of bone, feathers, and small skulls hang from tethers along the staff, giving it a primitive, almost savage, motif. The true powers of the staff become apparent when held in the hands of a disciple of Jeggal Sag.

When held by a divine spellcaster, who holds Jeggal Sag as his patron deity, the staff amplifies his power over nature; three times per day, all creatures summoned by a *summon nature's ally* spell cast by the wielder appear with maximum hit points for their race (instead of the standard

average hit points). For example a lizard summoned that had 2d8+2 HD normally appears with 11hp, while one summoned by the staff wielder would have 18hp.

Lesser and Greater Staves of the Beastlord: A normal staff of the beastlord functions with spells of 6th level or lower. Lesser Staves function with spells of 3rd level or lower and greater staves function with spells of up to 9th level.

Moderate conjuration; CL 12th; Craft Staff, Maximize Spell, *Summon Nature's Ally (any)*, creator must worship Jeggal Sag; Price: 9,800 gp (lesser), 37,800gp (normal), 85,050 gp (greater).

The Split Staff of Zhulass: The original split staff was created by the Elementalist Zhulass over two millennia ago, but since that time many copies have appeared. The staff resembles two serpents twining around a long staff, crawling down from the tips, their head meeting at the center of the staff. Their open mouths grip a round sphere of platinum, upon which the master rune of summoning is emblazoned. In the hands of a mage skilled in the arts of evocation and summoning the staff is a terror to behold. Three times per day (as a free action) the wielder may call upon the four elementals bound within the staff while he is casting an evocation spell of 3rd level or lower. The spell is augmented exactly as if under the effects of the Maximize spell feat. Secondly, the wielder may grip the separate ends of the staff and twist, separating the staff into two 3 1/2 foot rods. The left half acts as a Rod of the Viper, while the right half has a much more insidious power. Once per day the wielder may spill his blood upon (a drop is all that's necessary) the platinum sphere now adorning the tip of the right rod, and command one of the elementals bound within the staff to issue forth. This functions exactly like a *Summon Monster VI* spell, except that the wielder may only summon one of the four elementals within the staff, they being one each of large air, earth, fire, and water elementals. If a particular Elemental is destroyed, its essence retreats into the staff and cannot be called again for one month.

Moderate conjuration; CL 12th; Craft Staff, Craft Magical Arms and Armor, Maximize Spell, *poison*, *summon monster VI*, creator must be evil; Price 40,750 gp.

Ebon Battle-staff of Ssethregore: The Ebon staves of Ssethregore are magical devices crafted by the Black Tower of Gettulus for use by their battle mages in the Ssethregoran army. Each jet-black staff is carved from a perfectly straight, knot-free length of ironwood, and steeped in the juice of the black lotus to give it phenomenal strength and durability. Each staff is polished to mirror smoothness, their perfect surface marred only by the placement of the four elemental runes at equidistant points along the staff's surface. These staves are designed specifically for use by an augmentalist, but could be used by other mages, if they can delve its secrets. These staves have 50 charges and can be recharged. The powers are as follows:

- 0 charges: *Dancing lights*, *flare*, *light*, *Ray of frost*
- 1 charge: *Burning Hands*, *Magic Missile*, *Shocking grasp* (through the staff only)
- 2 charges: *Gust of wind*, *Scorching ray*
- 3 charges: *Fireball*, *Wind wall*
- 4 charges: *Cone of Cold*, *Chain Lightning*, *Forceful Hand*

In addition it its aforementioned powers the staff also acts as a +2 quarterstaff.

Strong evocation; CL 12th; Craft Staff, Craft Magical Arms and Armor, *dancing lights, flare, light, ray of frost, burning hands, magic missile, shocking grasp, gust of wind, scorching ray, fireball, wind wall, cone of cold, chain lightning, forceful hand*; Price 55,000 gp.

Wondrous Items

 **Drums of the Deep:** These massive bronze kettle drums are stretched with the tanned skins of purple worms, and are tuned to let out deep bass rumbles in the depths. Each drum stands about 4' high and weighs 500 lbs. They are designed to be hung from the saddle of the huge war beasts of Ssethregore and played with mallets as the Ssethric war machine marches off to battle. Once per day, when played by a individual who has at least 6 ranks in Perform (drum), all allies within 30' of the drum gain a +1 morale bonus on all attack rolls, damage rolls, and saves vs. fear effects. If the individual playing the drums has at least 9 ranks in Perform (Drum), then he can also produce a fear effect. All enemies within 30' must make a will save (the DC equal to the players perform check), or be shaken (-2 to all attack rolls, damage rolls, and AC for 2d6 minutes). Any creature that makes its save is immune to that particular drum for 24 hours. The range for all of the drum's powers is increased to 60' when the drum and its listeners are underground. Creatures that cannot hear are immune to the drum's effects.

Moderate conjuration; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *bless*; Price 5,670 gp.

Scalpel of the Vivisectionist: This insidious device is the premier tool of the technomancers of Ssethregore, for with its powers they are able to prolong the lifespan of even the most tortured subjects, delving deep into the internal workings of the body, removing organs, and even conducting surgery upon the nervous system. The scalpel is made out of pure adamantite, tempered in the fire of Great Drakes, and polished to mirror smoothness with the gravelly remains of earth elementals. The scalpel adds a +10 competence bonus to all Medicine and Surgery checks, and decreases the creation DC of all biotechnological items by 2.

Moderate transmutation; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *keen edge*; Price 10,025 gp.

Portal Key: These rare items appear as mithral rods a foot in length, covered with hundreds of runes in ancient Ssethric tongue. To one who knows that ancient tongue, it can be deciphered (decipher script DC 30) that the runes are actually coordinates, and each rod is tuned to one specific Ssethric portal location. The rods were designed in the days of Yahsremore to allow non-spellcasters to bypass the rituals necessary to open a portal. In this way, couriers could travel from city to city, delivering messages, or generals could open portals without the help of a mage or cleric. All one has to do is to hold the rod out and thrust it into the center of any portal. Arcane energy will arc out of the key and activate the portal, opening it to whatever destination portal the key is attuned. The portal will remain open for as long as the one holding the key stands on the threshold. The minute he steps through, the portal closes behind him. Each key is tuned to only one portal, and cannot be changed, though multiple keys may exist to the same portal.

Strong conjuration; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, *open portal*; Price 65,280 gp.

 **Helm of Battle's Fury:** This full helm is decorated with forward facing, downward sweeping ram's horns, issuing from above the wearers temples, curling around once and terminating in sharpened tips on level with the chin. When worn the wearer's eyes glow a dull red from deep inside the helm. It is designed to be worn by a Ss'ressen, but could fit any Ssethric race. Some few helms were also created in the days of Yahsremore for use by loyal Elorii servants, and these "warmblood" helms can be worn by any of the servitor races (humans, goblins, elorii). Once the helm is donned, it cannot be removed by any method short of a *Break Enchantment* spell, or by the hands of its creator. When worn the helm grants the wearer the ability to rage once a day as a 1st level barbarian. If the wearer is already a barbarian, or has the ability to rage, he instead gains a +2 enhancement bonus to strength for as long as the helm is worn, and may rage one additional time per day.

Moderate transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *bull's strength, rage*; Price 15,470 gp.

Chapter Nine

CREATURE CATALOG

Cyclura

Huge Animal (Ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 8d8+59 (95 hp)
 Initiative: +0
 Speed: 40 ft.
 Armor Class: 16 (-2 size, +8 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 16
 Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+24
 Attack: Gore +14 melee (3d6+15) or +14 Tail slap (3d4+15)
 Full Attack: Gore +14 melee (3d6+15) or +14 Tail Slap (3d4+15)
 Space/Reach: 15ft./10 ft.
 Special Attacks: Powerful charge, trample 1d8+15
 Special Qualities: Low-light vision
 Save: Fort +13, Ref +6, Will +3
 Abilities: Str 30, Dex 10, Con 25, Int 2, Wis 13, and Cha 2
 Skills: Listen +12, Spot +1
 Feats: Endurance, Improved Natural Attack (gore), Toughness
 Environment: Marsh environment
 Organization: Solitary or herd (2-12)
 Challenge Rating: 6
 Treasure: None
 Alignment: Always neutral
 Advancement: 9-16HD (Huge)
 Level Adjustment: -

The cyclura is a huge six-legged Ssethric beast that is used primarily as beast of war by the Ssethregoran Empire. This gigantic juggernaut trundles over the field, a cadre of reptilian warriors entrenched on the armored howdah high upon its back. The statistics for this cyclura are for a typical war beast, which is 15-25 feet long, 5 to 8 feet high at the shoulder, and weighs up to 18,000 pounds. The color of these beasts depends on their type of breeding, their scales can range from a coppery brown to a shining emerald. Their cyclopean central horn is typically 2 feet long and their barbed tails are armed with spikes a yard or more in length.

Combat

When it is harassed or annoyed, a cyclura lowers its head and charges.

Powerful Charge (Ex): A cyclura deals 6d6+20 points of damage when it makes a charge.

Trample (Ex): Reflex half DC 24. The save DC is Strength-based.

Dragonnel

Huge Dragon
 Hit Dice: 8d12+32 (80 hp)
 Initiative: +0
 Speed: 40 feet, Fly 100 ft (poor)
 Armor Class: 17(-2 size, +9 natural)
 Base Attack/Grapple: +8/+22
 Attack: Claw +14 melee (2d4 +6) or Bite +12 melee (2d6+3)
 Full Attack: 2 Claws +12 melee (2d4+6) and Bite +12 (2d6+3)
 Space/Reach: 15 ft/10ft
 Special Attacks: None
 Special Qualities: Low-Light Vision, Darkvision 60 ft
 Save: Fort: +10, Reflex: +6, Will: +6
 Abilities: Str: 22, Dex: 11, Con: 18, Int: 4, Wis: 11, Cha: 8
 Skills: Hide:+10 Jump: +16 Listen:+10 Spot:+10, Survival +8
 Feats: Multi Attack, Snatch, Wingover
 Environment: Tropical Forests, grasslands
 Organization: Solitary, Pair, or Pack (3-6)
 Challenge Rating: 6
 Treasure: None
 Alignment: Neutral
 Advancement: 9-12 HD (Huge), 13-24 (Gargantuan)

Dragonnels are the sinister result of ssethric technomancers experimentation with dragon kith. Dragonnels are the misbegotten crossbreeds of Wyvern and Pteradon, created for their size and speed; trained for combat. Dragonnels are a common site along the Altherian Border, where they can be seen floating lazily on the thermals, gliding on huge membranous wings. With riders perched between their massive shoulders, Dragonnels patrol the borders of Ssethregore, Flying high above the range of even the largest cannons, their keen eyes picking up the slightest movement. These Dragonnel mounted Calvary are so feared for their swift deadly assaults, that those who live upon the border involuntary shudder at every shadow passing overhead.

Combat

Dragonnels are not the most intelligent opponents. They usually circle their prey from high overhead, trailing potential victims for miles, before diving down upon them. Against Larger parties, a dragonnel will often snatch up the most helpless looking member, carrying him off to be eaten at the creature's leisure.

Fire Drake

Large Dragon (Reptilian, Fire)
 Hit Dice: 6d12+18 (57 hp)
 Initiative: +2
 Speed: 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (average)
 Armor Class: 17 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +6 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 15
 Base Attack/Grapple: +6 / +15
 Attack: Bite +10 melee (3d6+5)
 Full Attack: Bite +10 melee (3d6+5), 2 claws +6 melee (1d8+2)
 Space/Reach: 10ft./5ft.
 Special Attacks: Breath weapon
 Special Qualities: Burning blood, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire, vulnerability to cold
 Saves: Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +6
 Abilities: Str 20, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 12
 Skills: Balance +5, Climb +9, Hide +5, Listen +4, Jump +8, Spot +5, Survival +4
 Feats: Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Natural Attack (bite)
 Environment: Any Tropical and underground
 Organization: Solitary or gang (2-5)
 Challenge Rating: 5
 Treasure: Standard
 Alignment: Usually neutral
 Advancement: 7-10 HD (Large); 11-15 HD (Huge)
 Level Adjustment: -

Often confused for a red great wyrm, a fire drake is actually a small draconic creature found in volcanic areas or lush tropical climates. Appearing as a sinuous crimson-scaled dragon with orange-membraned wings, fire drakes enjoy soaring high overhead, floating lazily on geotherms, or swooping down upon unsuspecting cattle. Employing its breath weapon, a jet of intense flame, a fire drake prefers to cook its food before devouring it. Fire drakes are often employed as mounts in Ssethric society, and can commonly be found throughout Ssethregore and among populations of Black Talon Ss'ressen.

Breath Weapon (Su): A fire drake may emit a cone of fire 40' long, once every 1d4 rounds. This attack inflicts 1d6 points of fire damage per hit die of the fire drake: Reflex save DC 16 for half damage, the save is Constitution-based. The fire drake may use this ability 5 times/day.

Burning Blood (Ex): The blood of a fire drake is highly flammable. It seethes and burns through the creature's veins. Whenever a fire drake takes damage from a fire based attack, it heals 1 hp per 10 points of fire damage. A fire drake's favorite past time is to lie inside volcanoes, or large natural fires to nurse any wounds. If fully healed, a fire drake does not gain any more hit points until wounded once more.

Holothurian

Huge Aberration
 Hit Dice: 12d8+48 (102 hp)
 Initiative: +1
 Speed: 20 ft., burrow 20ft.
 Armor Class: 20 (-2 size, +1 Dex, +11 natural armor), touch 9, flat-footed 19
 Base Attack/Grapple: +9/+25
 Attack: Entrails +15 melee (1d6+12 plus 1d8 acid)
 Full Attack: Entrails +15 melee (1d6+12 plus 1d8 acid)
 Space/Reach: 15 ft./10 ft.
 Special Attacks: Acid spray, improved grab, swallow whole
 Special Qualities: Resistance to acid 10, tremorsense 120 ft.
 Save: Fort +10, Reflex +5, Will +10
 Abilities: Str 26, Dex 12, Con 18, Int 3, Wis 14, Cha 10
 Skills: Climb +10*, Listen +15*
 Feats: Diehard, Endurance, Great Fortitude, Improved Natural Armor, Power Attack
 Environment: Underground
 Organization: Solitary
 Challenge Rating: 7
 Treasure: -
 Alignment: Usually neutral
 Advancement: 13-21 HD (Gargantuan)

Holothurians are a great secret of the Ssethregoran Empire. Originally stolen from the Ilhuan, the holothurians are genetically engineered wormlike aberrations that feed on rock and soil. Appearing as worms 30 feet long and 10 feet in diameter, holothurians sport five long rows of tiny tube feet that run from their head down to the tip of their tail. These rows are equally spaced around the body in a radial symmetry, and allow the holothurian to move along tunnels with surprising speed.

Holothurians are blind, the only distinguishable feature on their head being an incredibly wide blubbery maw, and a tube-like protrusion above it. A holothurian sprays acid from this tube onto a rock wall, where the highly corrosive fluid causes the wall to crumble. The creature then inverts its guts out of its mouth onto the rubble pile, where the sodden mass sticks to the pulpy entrails. Retracting these entrails back into its body, it pulls the rubble along with it, quickly and efficiently gaining a meal. The Ssethregorans see these creatures as living bulldozers, using them to carve tunnels through solid rock.

Combat

Holothurians are not normally aggressive but can be coaxed to fight by their masters, and will defend themselves if attacked. They attack the same way they feed, by spraying acid on their targets, then inverting their entrails out of their mouths onto their prey. Once the prey becomes entangled in the entrails, it retracts them into its body, depositing the hapless victim in its stomach.



Acid Spray (Ex): 30-ft. line, once every 1d4 rounds; damage 4d10 acid, Reflex DC 20 half.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a holothurian must hit an opponent at least one size smaller than itself with its entrails attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can attempt to swallow the foe the following round.

Swallow Whole (Ex): A holothurian can try to swallow a grabbed opponent of a smaller size than itself by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent takes 2d8+12 points of crushing damage plus 1d8 points of acid damage per round. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by using a light slashing or piercing weapon to deal 25 points of damage to the stomach (AC 15). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out.

A Huge holothurian's interior can hold 2 Large, 8 Medium, 32 Small, 128 Tiny, or 512 Diminutive or smaller opponents.

Skills: A holothurian has a +10 racial bonus on Listen checks underground. They receive a +10 to Climb checks in tunnels sized for (or created by) another holothurian of the same size (10' wide if Huge, 20' wide if Gargantuan). In one of these tunnels, they may charge or use the run action, provided they climb in a straight line.

Hylis

Small Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 1d8 (4 hp)

Initiative: +7

Speed: 20 feet, climb 40 ft.

Armor Class: 19 (+1 size, +1 natural armor, +7 Dex), touch 18, flat-footed 12

Base Attack/Grapple: +0/-5

Attack: Kriss +0 melee (1d4-1/18-20/x2) or blowgun +7 ranged (1d3+poison)

Full Attack: Kriss +0 melee (1d4-1/18-20/x2) or blowgun +7 ranged (1d3+poison)

Space/Reach: 5ft/5ft

Special Attacks: Poison

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60ft., Chameleon Hide, Natural Climbers, Dryness Susceptibility

Save: Fort +0, Reflex +9, Will +1

Abilities: Str 8, Dex 24, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 11

Skills: Hide +21, Jump +18, Listen +5, Move Silently +11, Spot +5

Feats: Point Blank Shot

Environment: Forest, swamplands

Organization: Solitary, gang (2-3), band (6-10 plus one leader 3rd-6th level),

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful neutral

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +2

Hylis are small humanoid tree frogs who make their homes high in the jungle canopy. Hylis have smooth, brightly-colored moist skin, wide faces and bulbous eyes that project from their head. Their fingers and toes are tipped with wet adhesive suction cups, while their long legs allow for death defying leaps through the treetops. Small and fragile, hylis rely on stealth, their natural color changing capabilities and their superhuman agility to avoid enemies or stalk prey.

Combat

Known throughout the Ssethric Empire as the most covert of creatures, hylis are usually brought into the military service as spies and assassins. When in a combat situation, the hylis rely on blowguns that they infuse with a poison they secrete naturally from their body, along with their chameleon powers, to wage guerrilla warfare. If spotted, they will melt back into the jungle and disappear, regroup, then launch counterattacks when their foes least expect it. Hylis almost never attack alone, and rely on well-coordinated attacks to confuse enemies and overwhelm superior numbers of foes.

Poison: The skin of the hylis secretes a powerful neurotoxin. Before battle, a favorite tactic is for a hylis warrior to rub his weapons over the surface of his skin, coating his weapon with a single dose of poison. Anyone being hit with a poisoned weapon, or ingesting/injecting hylis venom into their bloodstreams must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or take 1d6 points of Dex damage, followed by 1d6 points of Con damage on the following round. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Chameleon Hide: The Hylis have the ability to blend in with their surroundings, literally changing color as they flex the chromatophores in their skin. Therefore, they receive a +10 racial bonus to Hide checks. This benefit is lost if they cover more than half of their exposed skin (ie when wearing concealing clothing, or any armor heavier than light armor).

Dryness Susceptibility: Whenever exposed to an extremely dry environment (i.e. a desert) the Hylis suffers a -2-morale penalty to all rolls.

Skills: Hylis are natural jumpers and receive a +15 bonus to their jump checks. Hylis have a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even if rushed or threatened.

Jaculi

Small animal
 Hit Dice: 2d8 (9hp)
 Initiative: +3
 Speed: 20 ft, 20 ft climb
 Armor Class: 17 (+2 size, +3 dex, +2 natural armor), touch 15, flat footed 14
 Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-1
 Attack: Bite +3 melee (1d6+1) or Hood Slash +1 (2d4+1)
 Full Attack: Bite +3 Meele and Hood Slash +3 meelee (2d4+1)
 Space/Reach: 2-1/2 ft/ 5ft
 Special Attacks: Pounce, Hard to Swallow
 Special Qualities: Scent
 Save: Fort: +3, Reflex: +6, Will: +1
 Abilities: Str: 12, Dex: 17, Con: 10, Int: 2, Wis: 12, Cha: 2,
 Skills: Balance +8*, Climb +11*, Hide +13*, Swim +8*
 Feats: Multiattack
 Environment: Temperate marshes
 Organization: Solitary
 Challenge Rating: 1/2
 Treasure: -
 Alignment: Always Neutral
 Advancement: -
 Level Adjustment: -

Jaculi are a Common breed of serpent found in temperate and tropical marshes. Accomplished ambush predators, they can lie in wait for days without moving, then burst forth to attack unwary prey. A jaculi appears as a 10ft long heavy bodied serpent with a triangular head. It has no fangs, but behind its head is a crown of long spines. These spines normally lay flat, but when agitated the jaculi spreads its hood causing the spines to fan out into a deadly arc.

Combat

Jaculi are ambush predators, lying in wait along game trails. Striking out from cover it surprises its target and attacks ferociously with both its bite and thorny hood.

Pounce (Ex): If a jaculi charges its prey, it may make a full attack with all its natural weapons.

Hard to Swallow: A jaculi's hood makes it extremely hard for larger predators to swallow. Whenever a creature attempts to swallow a jaculi, it must make a fortitude save DC = 10 + the jaculi's HD. If it fails it cannot swallow the jaculi and takes 2d6 points of piercing damage. The creature may attempt to swallow the jaculi again the following round.

Greater Jaculi: Greater Jaculi are a strain of jaculi altered by the Disciples of Jeggal Sag. A greater jaculi had 5 HD, its size is increased to large, and its bite attack delivers poison (DC 14: Damage 1d6 Con primary and secondary)

*Jaculi receive a +5 racial bonus to Balance and swim checks. They also receive a +10 racial bonus to Climb and Hide Checks

Lophius

Large Humanoid (Ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 2d8+4 (13 hp)
 Initiative: +2
 Speed: 20ft., swim 30 ft.
 Armor Class: 14 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural armor), touch 11, flat footed 12
 Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+9
 Attack: Shiv spear +4 melee (1d8+6) or claw +4 melee (1d6+4) or bite -1 melee (1d4+2)
 Full Attack: Shiv spear +4 melee (1d8+6) and bite -1 melee (1d4+2), or 2 claws +2 melee (1d6 +4) and bite -3 melee (1d4+2)
 Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.
 Special Attacks: -
 Special Qualities: Protective slime
 Save: Fort +5, Reflex +2, Will -1
 Abilities: Str 18, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 5, Wis 9, Cha 11
 Skills: Listen +1, Spot +1, Survival +0
 Feats: Power Attack
 Environment: Any aquatic or underground
 Organization: Gang (2-5)
 Challenge Rating: 2
 Treasure: -
 Alignment: Usually neutral
 Advancement: -
 Level Adjustment: -

Standing well over eight feet tall, Lophii are a batrachian nightmare, with a laterally compressed head and bulbous froglike eyes with fishlike jaws and gill plates. Their bodies are covered in shimmering silver scales lathered in a slippery mucus coating produced by copious oil glands. Lophii have no tails and propel their bulk through the water in a froglike fashion; using powerful kicking strokes from their webbed feet and claws. A dimwitted race, they were created to be totally obedient slaves and are mostly passive in temperament.

Combat

Lophii are poor antagonists, better suited to menial tasks and labor than they are to war. Still, what they lose in intelligence and strategy, they make up in reach and numbers.

Protective Slime: Lophii constantly exude a coat of slippery slime from pores all over their body. This slime grants them a +8 bonus to any Grapple check to break free of a grapple or to any Escape Artist check.

Moloch

Medium Animal (Ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 2d8+6 (15 hp)
 Initiative: +2
 Speed: 50 ft.
 Armor Class: 16 (+2 Dex, +4 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 14
 Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+4
 Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d6+4)
 Full Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d6+4)
 Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.
 Special Attacks: Trip
 Special Qualities: Body spikes, low-light vision, scent
 Save: Fort +6, Reflex +5, Will +1
 Abilities: Str 16, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 8,
 Skills: Hide +2, Listen +3, Move Silently +3, Spot +3, Survival +1*
 Feats: Weapon Focus (bite)
 Environment: Tropical
 Organization: Solitary, Pair, or Pack (3-6)
 Challenge Rating: 2
 Treasure: None
 Alignment: Always Neutral
 Advancement: 3 HD (Medium); 4-5 HD (Large)

If the Ssethregorans had dogs, the molochs, or spine hounds, would be them. Weighing about 150 lbs, and covered in a bristling hide of spiky quills, molochs are a fearsome sight to behold. Sporting heavy jaws in a tapering maw, and counterbalanced by a thick, ridged tail, the molochs tear through the battlefield on four clawed legs, protecting their masters from all foes. When raised from eggs, molochs are fiercely loyal, and make excellent guard animals or companions for lone scouts.

Combat

Molochs never hunt alone, but stalk their prey in large packs. They will send in a couple of advance runners to harry the prey, while the rest of the pack circles their opponents and waits for the opportune moment to strike.

Trip (Ex): A moloch that hits with its bite attack can attempt to trip the opponent (+3 check modifier) as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the moloch.

Body Spikes (Ex): Whenever a moloch is grappled, the opponent takes 1d4 points of damage each round from the sharp spikes that cover its body. The spikes also interfere with predation; lodging in the throat of would be assailants. For the purposes of being swallowed, a moloch counts as one size category larger.

Skills: *Molochs have a +4 racial bonus on Survival checks when tracking by scent.

Mor'let

Large Dragon
 Hit Dice: 4d12+12 (40 hp)
 Initiative: +3
 Speed: 60 feet
 Armor Class: 17 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 14
 Base Attack/Grapple: +4/+13
 Attack: Bite +8 melee (1d8+2) or claw +8 melee (1d6+5)
 Full Attack: 2 claws +8 melee (1d6+5) and bite +6 melee (1d8+2)
 Space/Reach: 10ft/10ft.
 Special Attacks: Pounce, guthook
 Special Qualities: Darkvision 60ft., immune to magic sleep effects and paralysis effects, low-light vision
 Save: Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +5
 Abilities: Str 20, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10,
 Skills: Hide +7*, Jump +12*, Listen +7*, Spot +7*, Survival +8*
 Feats: Multiattack, Run
 Environment: Tropical Forests, grasslands
 Organization: Solitary, Pair, or Pack (3-6)
 Challenge Rating: 4
 Treasure: None
 Alignment: Neutral
 Advancement: 5-8 HD (Large)
 Level Adjustment: -

The mor'let are the premier combat mounts of the Ssethregoran Empire. A cross between a swamp drake and a deinonychus, these creatures combine the best traits of both creatures. Swift and powerful, mor'lets carry their riders across the battlefield on two heavily muscled legs. Equipped with powerful draconic jaws, rending talons, and lightning speed, a contingent of mor'let riders bearing down on a target is a frightening sight to behold.

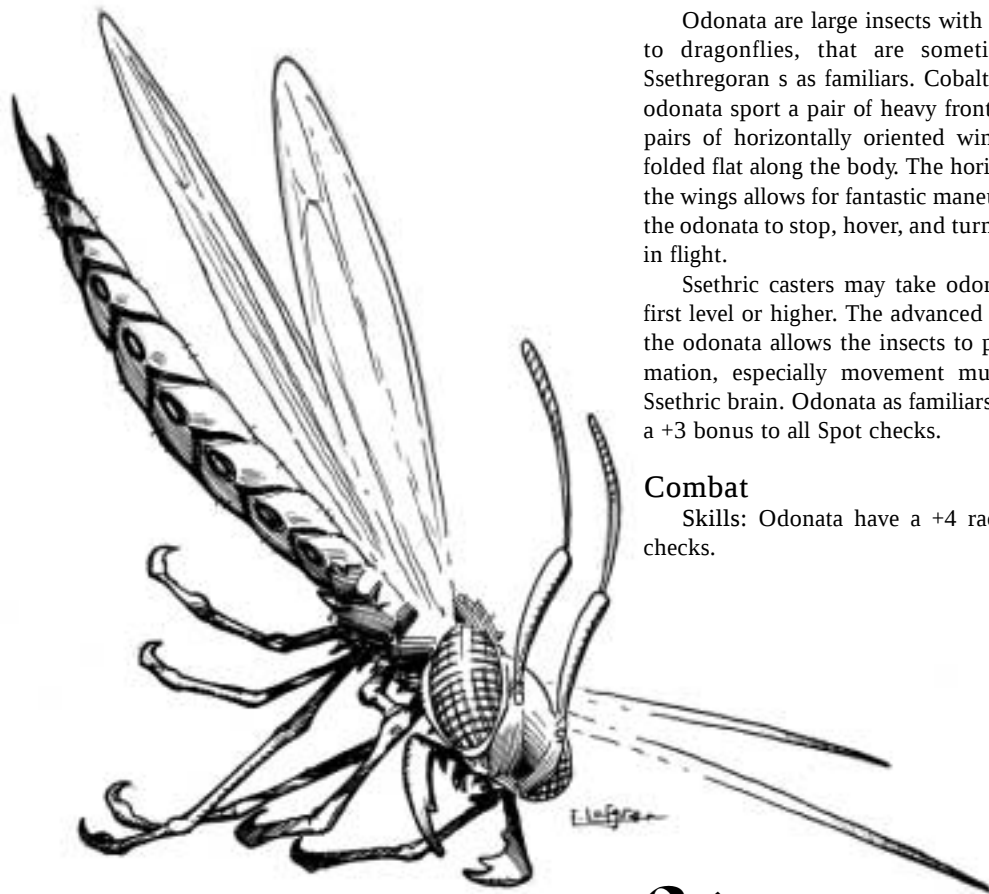
Combat

Mor'let are creatures of war bred by the Ssanu after centuries of experimentation. They can be found throughout the Ssethregoran Empire, and even beyond its boundaries; most notably in the hands of the Black Talon Ss'ressen who managed to bring a few with them in their mad dash from Ssethregore. Due to riders being killed on the battlefield, there are now many packs of wild Mor'let roaming the forests of Ssethregore. Their natural hunting instincts and ability to hide from even the most astute observers make them a danger to any who travel under the leafy domain of the Ssethregorans.

Pounce (Ex): When a mor'let charges an opponent, it may make a full attack, including a guthook attack.

Guthook (Ex): When grappling, or on a pounce, the mor'let can bring its lethal rear claws to bear, to receive two extra attacks at +8 melee doing 1d8+2 damage.

Skills: *Mor'let have a +4 racial bonus on Hide, Jump, Listen, Spot, and Survival. These bonuses rise to +8 in forested surroundings



Odonata

Tiny Vermin

Hit Dice: 1/4 d8 +1 (2 hp)

Initiative: +4

Speed: 40 ft. flight (perfect)

Armor Class: 16 (+2 size, +4 Dex), touch 16, flat-footed 12

Base Attack/Grapple: +0/-13

Attack: Bite -3 melee (1d2-5)

Full Attack: Bite -3 melee (1d2-5)

Space/Reach: 2-1/2ft./0ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., vermin traits

Save: Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +0

Abilities: Str 1, Dex 18, Con 13, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 2,

Skills: Hide +12, Spot +4

Feats: -

Environment: Tropical

Organization: Colony (8-16)

Challenge Rating: 1/8

Treasure: -

Alignment: Always Neutral

Advancement: -

Level Adjustment: -

Odonata are large insects with a 2' wingspan, akin to dragonflies, that are sometimes used by the Ssethregoran s as familiars. Cobalt blue in coloration, odonata sport a pair of heavy frontal mandibles and 2 pairs of horizontally oriented wings, that cannot be folded flat along the body. The horizontal placement of the wings allows for fantastic maneuverability, allowing the odonata to stop, hover, and turn on a dime all while in flight.

Ssethric casters may take odonata as familiars on first level or higher. The advanced oculatory system of the odonata allows the insects to process visual information, especially movement much faster than the Ssethric brain. Odonata as familiars grant their masters a +3 bonus to all Spot checks.

Combat

Skills: Odonata have a +4 racial bonus on Spot checks.

Oniscus

Gargantuan Vermin

Hit Dice: 17d8+119 (178 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 21 (-4 size, +15 natural armor), touch 6, flat-footed 21

Base Attack/Grapple: +12/+34

Attack: Bite +18 melee (3d8 +15)

Full Attack: Bite +18 melee (3d8 +15)

Space/Reach: 20 ft./15 ft.

Special Attacks: Trample (2d6+15), Vorpal bite

Special Qualities: Damage reduction 5/piercing, darkvision 60 ft.

Save: Fort +17, Ref +5, Will +6

Abilities: Str 30, Dex 10, Con 25, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 11

Skills: Climb +20, Spot +8

Feats: Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Power Attack

Environment: Underground

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 9

Treasure: -

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement: 18-24 HD (Gargantuan); 25-36 HD (Colossal)

Level Adjustment: -



Onisci are huge insectoid behemoths used by the Ssethregoran Military during massive assaults. Resembling massive millipedes or pillbugs, onisci are over 20 feet long and 10 feet wide. These armored juggernauts are covered by incredibly thick chitinous plates and propel themselves along on dozens of pairs of segmented legs. Their spherical head is protected by tight fitting armored plates, and only emerges to bring its vicious pincers-like jaws to bear. Able to trample over enemies while carrying a contingent of archers on their broad backs, Onisci are truly a terrible sight to behold on the battlefield.

Combat

Thankfully an oniscus is not a skilled combatant and is most often controlled by a rider perched high on their back who taps a goad against its shell to transmit commands to it. An oniscus without a controller is a danger to all and will often turn to the nearest edible target, friend or foe.

Trample (Ex): Reflex DC 28 half. The save DC is Strength-based.

Vorpal Bite (Ex): Upon a roll of natural 20 (followed by a successful roll to confirm the critical hit), the bite of the Oniscus severs the opponent's head (if it has one) from its body. Some creatures, such as many aberrations and all oozes, have no heads. Others, such as golems and undead creatures other than vampires, are not affected by the loss of their heads. Most other creatures, however, die when their heads are cut off.

Pleisaurans

Large Humanoid (Ssethric, Aquatic)

Hit Dice: 2d8+4 (13 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 10 ft., swim 60 ft.

Armor Class: 15 (-1 size, +3 natural armor, +3 Dex), touch 12, flat-footed 12

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/+8

Attack: Bite +3 melee (1d8+1) or large trident +3 melee (2d6+4) or large light crossbow +3 ranged (2d6)

Full Attack: large trident +3 melee (2d6+4) and bite -2 melee (1d8+1) or large light crossbow +3 ranged (2d6)

Space/Reach: 10ft./10ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: Amphibious, darkvision 60 ft., echolocation 120 ft.

Save: Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +0

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 14

Skills: Balance +4, Survival: +5, Swim: +17

Feats: Power Attack

Environment: Warm aquatic

Organization: Gang (2-3), Band (6-10 plus one leader 3rd-6th level), Tribe (30-60 plus 2 lieutenants of 3rd-6th level and 1 leader 4th-10th level)

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +2

Pleisaurans are the only truly aquatic members of the Ssethregoran Empire. Pleisaurans believe they are one of the children of Kassegore, and still venerate the Great Devourer to this day. Standing roughly 9 feet tall, pleisaurans have a robust body, complimented by a powerful, keeled tail designed to propel them through the water. Their arms and legs are short and muscular, equipped with long webbed claws designed to be used as rudders as the pleisaurans wind their way through their aquatic domain. Sporting a long powerful neck, topped with the elongated jaws of a crocodilian, the pleisaurans are at home in their environment, perfectly designed to capture fish (or deliver a nasty bite) with lightning quick slashing motions of their needle filled jaws.

Pleisaurans speak Ssethren.

Combat

Clumsy on land, Pleisaurans are full of deadly grace in the water. Powerful lateral strokes of their wide tail push them through the water with surprising speed. Pleisaurans prefer to attack opponents from below, hiding in the vegetation on the bottom then rushing up to gut unwary opponents. Pleisaurans are amphibious and are able to venture onto land as well. Woe befalls any travelers foolish enough to travel through the mangrove marshes called home by the pleisaurans. Such individuals die in an explosion of water as they are dragged down into the depths to drown in the jaws of a pleisauran.

Echolocation (Ex): Like some underwater creatures, the Pleisaurans are gifted with the ability to send out sound waves to search for creatures underwater. A creature with echolocation manoeuvres, and fights as well as a normal sighted creature. Invisibility, darkness, and most kinds of concealment are irrelevant, though the creature must have a line of effect to a creature or object to discern that creature or object. The ability's range is specified in the creature's descriptive text. The creature usually does not need to make a Spot or Listen checks to notice creatures within the range of the echolocation ability. Unless noted otherwise, echolocation is continues as long as the pleisaurans are underwater, and the creature need not do anything to use it. Some forms of echolocation, however, must be triggered as a free action. If so, this is noted in the creature's description. If a creature must trigger its echolocation ability, the creature gains the benefits of echolocation only during its turn. A Pleisauran has an echolocation range of 120 ft. They lose this ability when they leave the water.

Skills: A pleisauran receives a +10 racial bonus to Swim checks and can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Rhamphorike

Small Humanoid (Ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 1d8-1 (3 hp)
 Initiative: +4
 Speed: 15 ft., fly 90 ft. (excellent)
 Armor Class: 17 (+1 size, +4 Dex, +2 natural armor), touch 15, flat-footed 13
 Base Attack/Grapple: +0/-3
 Attack: +2 Bite (1d4+1) or Small Javelin +4 Ranged (1d4+1)
 Full Attack: +2 Bite (1d4+1) or Small Javelin +4 Ranged (1d4+1)
 Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.
 Special Attacks: -
 Special Qualities: Low-light vision
 Save: Fort -1, Ref +6, Will +0
 Abilities: Str 12, Dex 18, Con 8, Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 10
 Skills: Climb +8 Hide +10, Listen +2, Move Silently +8, Search +5, Spot +2
 Feats: Flyby Attack
 Environment: Warm forests
 Organization: Solitary, Reconnaissance Group (4-9), Aerial Squadron (25-75 plus two 3rd level sergeants and one 5th level captain)
 Challenge Rating: 1/2
 Treasure: Standard
 Alignment: Usually lawful evil
 Advancement: By character class
 Level Adjustment: +1

Rhamphorikes are small aerial reptilian creations of the Ssanu technomancers. Designed to be scouts, spies, and aerial support for larger flying units, rhamphorikes are a marvel of the Ssanu's biotechnological prowess. Appearing as 3 1/2 foot tall reddish brown humanoids, rhamphorikes have long necks attached to almost perfectly round heads. Their eyes are large and frontal facing for binocular vision, while their nostrils are overly large and placed atop its head for streamlining of oxygen directly into the lungs during flight. Rhamphorikes have modified front limbs in the form of reptilian wings. These wings are created from the elongated outer digit on each hand, creating a curved surface for skin flaps to attach to. The flaps run from the elongated digit back to the rhamphorikes ankle, creating a large flying surface reminiscent of a pteradon. These wings are folded under the arms and carried behind the body when not in flight.

Rhamphorike are small, agile and incredibly mobile, so they make the ultimate spies for the Ssethric Empire. They report valuable information to the Marauders, allowing them ample time to set up ambushes for the Altherian patrols.

Combat

Whenever engaged in a combat situation, the Rhamphorikes tend to keep to the air, using their Flyby Attack and throwing javelins at their opponents. If wounded, they will do everything in their power to escape, whether by flight or by hiding and sneaking away.

Skills: Rhamphorike receive a +4 racial bonus to Climb checks due to their needle-like claws.

Sc'Math

Large Animal (Ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 4d8+12 (30 hp)
 Initiative: +2
 Speed: 40 feet
 Armor Class: 19 (-1 size, +8 natural armor, +2 Dex), touch 11, flat-footed 17
 Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+14
 Attack: Bite +9 melee (2d10+10)
 Full Attack: Bite +9 melee (2d10+10)
 Space/Reach: 10ft./5ft.
 Special Attacks: Improved Grab
 Special Qualities: -
 Save: Fort +7 Ref +8 Will +2
 Abilities: Str 24, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 11,
 Skills: Listen +5, Spot +4
 Feats: Lightning Reflexes, Improved Natural Attack (bite)
 Environment: Tropical
 Organization: Solitary, pair, or pack (3-6)
 Challenge Rating: 3
 Treasure: None
 Alignment: Always neutral
 Advancement: 5-8 HD (Large)
 Level Adjustment: -

If the Mor'let are the light cavalry of the Ssethric war machine, the Sc'math are the heavy artillery. Thick, heavy and slow the sc'math make up for their loss of maneuverability with an extremely potent bite. Sc'math are bipedal reptilian mounts reminiscent of a flightless bird. Instead of sporting feathers, the sc'math is covered in a dense warty hide that turns all but the hardest of blows. Its long legs support the heavy body on three wide splayed talons, while the heavy jaws are counterbalanced by a short wide tail held out behind the body as the sc'math runs. The most prominent feature of the sc'math is its broad triangular head, resembling that of a grotesque turtle. Armed with a horned beak able bite through steel, and head scales like armor plating, the sc'math is a terror upon any battlefield.

Combat

These large reptilian monstrosities attacks with a ferocious bite attack. It is not uncommon to see entire limbs removed with surgical precision from the brutal bite of the sc'math. Upon successfully biting its opponent it almost always refuses to let go until the creature is dead or eaten.

Improved Grab: If a Sc'Math hits an opponent at least one size smaller than itself with its bite attack it can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Ssanu

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 7d8+7 (38 hp)
 Initiative: +7
 Speed: 40 ft., Swim 30 ft.
 AC: 17 (+3 Dex, +4 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 14
 Base Attack/Grapple: +7/+9
 Attacks: Scimitar +9 melee (1d8+3) or bite +9 melee (1d8+1 plus poison)
 Full Attack: Scimitar +9/+4 melee (1d8+3) and bite +4 melee (1d8+1 plus poison)
 Face/Reach: 5ft./5ft.
 Special Attacks: Hypnotic gaze, poisonous bite, spell-like abilities,
 Special Qualities: Darkvision, fast healing 1, lordship and domination, poison immunity, scent
 Saves: Fort +3, Ref +8, Will +6
 Abilities: Str 14, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 16
 Skills: Bluff +10, Craft (Alchemy) +5, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +5, Hide +10, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (Arcana) +10, Listen +10, Move Silently +10, Spot +10, Sense Motive +5, Sleight of Hand +5
 Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite)
 Environment: Any land and underground
 Organization: Solitary or gang (2-5)
 Challenge Rating: 4
 Treasure: Standard
 Alignment: Usually lawful evil
 Advancement: 8-10 HD (Elder); 9-15 HD (Ancient)
 Level Adjustment: -

Ssanu appear as tall serpentine humanoids with two humanoid arms and the lower body of a giant serpent. Their heads are triangular and snakelike, reminiscent of that of a massive viper. Ssanus' bodies glisten in the sunlight, the light reflecting off the myriad of fine scales that cover their forms; their eyes, like golden orbs, glow when exposed to ambient light. Ssanu have long agile fingers adept at weaving the most complicated spells, while their voices are soft and subtle. Ssanu represent the pinnacle of reptilian evolution upon the face of Onara. They are the noble elite of the Ssethregoran Empire, imposing their will upon all other subjects except for the most powerful Nagas and even those fell creatures respect the power of a Ssanu.

The average Ssanu lives two hundred years, stands about 7 feet tall and weighs around 300 pounds.

Ssanu speak Ssethren, Eloran, Golic, and Low Coryani.

Combat

Ssanu are highly intelligent and devious creatures, always preferring to attack from ambush than stand up in a fair fight. They plot and plan, studying their adversaries until they are able to exploit weakness, then they strike with lightning precision. Their soft speech and

forked tongues are legendary, and many a foe has fallen to their envenomed fangs while enthralled by a honed tongue.

Poison (ex): A Ssanu's bite paralyzes an opponent before killing it. Fortitude DC 14, initial damage 2d6 Dex, secondary damage 1d6 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Poison Immunity (Ex): Ssanu are immune to all natural poisons

Hypnotic Gaze (Su): Gaze attack with a 30' range, Will save (DC 16) or be affected as if by the spell *Hypnotism*.

Spell-Like Abilities: 1/day *Enthrall* (DC 15), *Charm Person* (DC 14), *Cause Fear* (DC 14). Elder Ssanu have the following additional spell-like abilities: *Charm Monster* (DC 17). Ancient Ssanu have all the powers of Elder Ssanu and they may use each of their spell-like abilities 3 times per day. Caster level equals the Ssanu's hit dice. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Lordship and Domination (Su): As the first Children of Kassegore, Ssanu have supernatural powers over all of Kassegore's other creations. A Ssanu gain a +2 inherent bonus to the DC's of all spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities when using them against any type of reptile.

Ss'ressen

All Ss'ressen have the following traits and abilities unless otherwise noted:

Low-Light Vision: Ss'ressen can see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, and similar conditions of poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish color and detail under these conditions.

Natural Weaponry: All Ss'ressen are armed with a pair of claws. These are their primary natural weapon. A few species have secondary natural weapons (such as tail attacks or a bite), allowing extra attacks (albeit at a -5 penalty). See Core Rulebook 3 for more information on primary and secondary natural weapons.

Cold Susceptibility: All Ss'ressen suffer a -4 penalty to all Dex and Dex-based skills when in extreme cold. A successful Will save (DC 15) reduces the penalty to -2.

Agility: Because of their tails, all Ss'ressen (except, Ashen Hide, Horned Jowl and Razor Claw) gain +2 racial bonus to Balance, Jump and Swim Checks

Ashen Hide Ss'ressen "Terdis"

Medium Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 1d8 (4 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 14 (+1 Dex, +3 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 13

Base Attack/Grapple: +0/+0

Attack: Claw +0 melee (1d6) or latt +0 melee (1d6) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6)

Full Attack: 2 claws -2 melee (1d6) or latt +0 melee (1d6) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6)
 Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.
 Special Attacks: -
 Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry
 Saves: Fort +0 Ref +3 Will +0
 Abilities: Str 11 Dex 13 Con 10 Int 8 Wis 10 Cha 9
 Skills: Climb +2, Jump +1, Swim +1
 Feats: Crocodile Hide^B, Dodge
 Environment: Geothermal vents and volcanoes
 Challenge Rating: 1
 Treasure: Standard
 Alignment: Usually lawful neutral
 Advancement: By character class
 Level Adjustment: -

A recent offshoot of the Black Talons, Ashen Hide Ss'ressen stand between 6 and 7 feet tall, and sport no cranial crest. Their scales have become thick and knobby, almost perfectly round in form. An Ashen Hide Ss'ressen receives its name from the uniformly grey color its skin displays, but they still retain their characteristic black claws that made their predecessors famous. Ashen Hide Ss'ressen are wider of shoulder than their Black Talon relations and their tails are markedly shorter, yet they retain the grace and dexterity of their relations and are a terror upon the battlefield.

Ashen Hide Ss'ressen speak either Ssethren, or Ss'ressen and Cancerese.

Combat

Cold Susceptibility: All Ashen Hide Ss'ressen are extremely vulnerable to the cold and suffer a -6 penalty to all Dex and Dex-based skills when in extreme cold. A successful Will save (DC 15) reduces the penalty to -3.

Barbed Tail Ss'ressen "Sspiniferous"

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 3d8+9 (22 hp)
 Initiative: +0
 Speed: 30 ft.
 Armor Class: 16 (+6 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 16
 Base Attack/ Grapple: +3/ +5
 Attack: Claw +5 melee (1d6+2) or tail slap +5 melee (1d10+2) or greatclub +5 melee (1d4+3) or javelin +2 ranged (1d6+2)
 Full Attack: 2 claws +3 melee (1d6+2) and tail slap +3 melee (1d10+2) or greatclub +5 melee (1d10+3) and tail slap +3 melee (1d10+2) or Javelin +3 Ranged (1d6)
 Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.
 Special Attacks: -
 Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry
 Saves: Fort +6 Ref +1 Will +1
 Abilities: Str 15 Dex 10 Con 16 Int 8 Wis 10 Cha 10
 Skills: Balance +4, Climb +6, Jump +4, Swim +4

Feats: Multiattack, Tail Attack
 Environment: Tropical marsh
 Challenge Rating: 2
 Treasure: Standard
 Alignment: Usually chaotic evil
 Advancement: By character level
 Level Adjustment: +1

The Barbed Tail are the largest and most powerful Egg Clutch within Ssethregore. Brutal, barbaric, merciless, and cruel, the Barbed Tail Ss'ressen are the hammer the Empire utilizes to grind its enemies into pulp. Barbed Tail Ss'ressen stand between 6 and 7 feet tall and sport twin rows of thick spines down their back, rather than the usual saggital crest seen in most Ss'ressen. Their hide is a dark mottled grey, a throwback towards their Dark Crest progenitors. The Barbed Tail receive their name from the Clutch's favored weapon, a thick, heavily spiked tail. Bred to be stronger and more savage than the average Ss'ressen, members of the Barbed Tail Egg Clutch delight in brutal warfare and in tormenting their victims.

Barbed Tail Ss'ressen speak Ssethren.

Black Talon Ss'ressen "Thulluss"

Medium Humanoid (Ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 1d8 (4 hp)
 Initiative: +1 (Dex)
 Speed: 30 ft.
 Armor Class: 13 (+1 Dex, +2 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 12
 Base Attack/ Grapple: +1/ +1
 Attack: Claw +0 melee (1d4) or longsword +1 melee (1d8) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6)
 Full Attack: 2 claws +0 melee (1d4) or longsword +1 melee (1d8) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6)
 Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.
 Special Attacks: -
 Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry
 Saves: Fort +0 Ref +3 Will +2
 Abilities: Str 11 Dex 13 Con 10 Int 8 Wis 11 Cha 10
 Skills: Balance +3, Climb +1, Jump +4, Swim +3
 Feats: Weapon Focus (longsword)
 Environment: Temperate marsh
 Challenge Rating: 1/2
 Treasure: Standard
 Alignment: Usually lawful neutral
 Advancement: By character class
 Level Adjustment: -

Standing roughly 6 feet tall, a Black Talon is a sight to behold, sleek and muscular limbs covered with mottled green and grey scales. Their actual claws are pitch black, a trait which led to the naming of their clutch. Along their spine runs a spiked saggital crest devoid of webbing. This crest is reduced



upon their head and terminates between their eyes. A Black Talon has a longer jaw than most other Egg Clutches, concluding at a blunt snout. Black talons take great satisfaction from personal achievements in battle or single combat and display their scars proudly.

Black Talon Ss'ressen speak either Ssethren, or Ss'ressen and Milandisian.

Curled Tail Ss'ressen "Barbatus"

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 2d8+4 (13 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

Armor Class: 15 (+2 Dex, +3 Natural), touch 13, flat-footed 12

Base Attack/ Grapple: +1/ +2

Attack: Claw +2 melee (1d4+1) or dragon blade +3 melee (1d6+1) or javelin +4 ranged (1d6+1)

Full Attack: 2 claws +0 melee (1d4+1) or dragon blade +3 melee (1d6+1) or javelin +4 ranged (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.

Special Attacks: Tongue lash

Special Qualities: All-around vision, cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry, prehensile tail

Saves: Fort + 5 Ref +2 Will +0

Abilities: Str 12 Dex 15 Con 14 Int 9 Wis 10 Cha 8

Skills: Balance +4, Climb +25, Jump +4, Spot +2, Swim +3

Feats: Weapon Finesse (dragon blade)

Environment: Tropical jungle

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually neutral

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +2

Standing between 5 and 6 feet tall, Curled Tail Ss'ressen are aptly named after their impressively long tail that they tend to keep curled behind them. This tail is prehensile and capable of supporting the Ss'ressen, lifting objects, or even wielding a weapon. The hands of a Curled Tail do not sport the long talons seen in other Ss'ressen, instead their digits are short, thick, and, covered with adhesive pads made from millions of tiny hair-like protrusions. These pads allow the Curled Tail Ss'ressen to climb any surface at a surprising rate. These Ss'ressen lack any sagittal crest, sporting instead a very small ridge of skin, which runs along their backbone and out to the tip of their tail.

Curled Tail Ss'ressen speak Ssethren.

Combat

Tongue Lash (Ex): Once every three rounds, a Curled Tail Ss'ressen, may lash out with its paralytic tongue as a ranged touch attack to a distance of up to 10 feet. Such attacks are made with a +3

a t t a c k

bonus. Those struck by this attack must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 13) or become paralyzed for 2d4 rounds.

All-Around Vision (Ex): The unique positioning of the Curled Tail Ss'ressen's eyes provides it with all-around vision. Curled Tail Ss'ressen gain a +2 racial bonus to Spot checks and may never be flanked.

Prehensile Tail (Ex): The Curled Tail Ss'ressen have evolved a prehensile tail that allows them to wield a medium size or lighter melee weapon as though it were an off-hand. Any attack made in this manner suffers a -4 penalty to attack rolls. This attack is not a natural attack.

Adhesive Pads (Ex): Curled Tail Ss'ressen have special pads on their hands and feet allowing them to climb virtually any surface as a normal Ss'ressen walks along the ground. In extreme instances where a climb check is required, Curled Tails gain a +20 racial bonus to their Climb checks.

Dark Crest Ss'ressen "Acerbuss"

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 1d8 (4 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 17 (+3 Dex, +4 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 14

Base Attack/ Grapple: +1/ +2

Attack: Claw +2 melee (1d6+1) or bite +2 melee (1d6+1) or yataghan +2 melee (1d6+1/18-20x2) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6+1)

Full Attack: 2 claws +2 melee (1d6+1) and bite -3 melee (1d6+1) or yataghan +2 melee (1d6+1/18-20x2) and bite -3 melee (1d6+1) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Natural sneak attack +1d6

Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry, veiled in shadows

Saves: Fort +0 Ref +4 Will +0

Abilities: Str 12 Dex 15 Con 11 Int 10 Wis 11 Cha 8

Skills: Balance +4, Bluff +1, Climb +5, Diplomacy +1, Hide +2(+10 in shadows), Jump +5, Swim +5

Feats: Forked Tongue

Environment: Tropical jungle

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +1

Dark Crest Ss'ressen stand between 6 and 7 feet tall. They sport an arrow-shaped head, perched atop an elongated neck. Long spines with no webbing run down their back, but end halfway down their tail. A Dark Crests scales are midnight black in hue, and the race sports a bright purple crest between the spines on the back of their head and neck.

Dark Crest Ss'ressen speak Ssethren.

Combat

Natural Sneak Attack (Ex): Dark Crest Ss'ressen possesses a natural sneak attack ability that functions just like the rogue ability. This racial sneak attack stacks with any sneak attack ability gained from any other source.

Veiled in Shadows (Ex): While attempting to hide in darkness or shadows, a Dark Crest Ss'ressen gains a +8 racial bonus to Hide checks.

Emerald Scale Egg Clutch "Viridiss"

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 1d8 (4 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 13 (+1 Dex, +2 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 12

Base Attack/ Grapple: +1/ +2

Attack: Claw +2 melee (1d6+1) or tulwar +3 melee (1d8+1) or javelin +2 ranged (1d6+1)

Full Attack: 2 claws +2 melee (1d6+1) or tulwar +3 melee (1d8+1) or javelin +2 ranged (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry

Saves: Fort +0 Ref +3 Will +2

Abilities: Str 12 Dex 13 Con 10 Int 14 Wis 11 Cha 10

Skills: Balance +5, Climb +5, Jump +6, Swim +6, Survival +4

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (tulwar)

Environment: Tropical jungle

Challenge Rating: 1/2

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful neutral

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: -

Emerald Scale Ss'ressen stand between 5 1/2 to 6 1/2 feet tall and sport a broad, sagittal crest made up of triangular plates that runs to the tip of their tail. Two more heavy ridges of triangular plates run along their brows. Emerald Scale Ss'ressen are named for the vibrant green scales that cover their shoulders, back, and arms, giving way to a lighter mottled green along their chest, abdomen, and legs. Arrogant and militaristic to the core, they are the most numerous egg clutch behind only the Barbed Tails.

Emerald Scale Ss'ressen speak Ssethren.

Flame Tongue Ss'ressen "Pyrolengus"

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 2d8+2 (11 hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 18 (+3 Dex, +5 natural), touch 13, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/ Grapple: +1/ +2

Attack: Claw +2 melee (1d6+1) or khyber +2 melee (1d6+1) or javelin +4 ranged (1d6+1)

Full Attack: 2 claws +0 melee (1d6+1) or khyber +2 melee (1d6+1) or javelin +4 ranged (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./ 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Fire Tongue

Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry

Saves: Fort +1 Ref +6 Will +3

Abilities: Str 13 Dex 16 Con 13 Int 9 Wis 10 Cha 10

Skills: Balance +5, Climb +3, Jump +6, Swim +3

Feats: Point Blank Shot

Environment: Temperate forests

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +1

Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen stand between 5 and 6 feet tall; their hide is a dusky brown in coloration mottled with orange or red bars. Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen sport a crimson red sagittal crest that lies flat against their back. When agitated or in preparing to use their special attack, the crest is raised to display its vivid red coloration. The Flaming Tongues receive their namesake from two specialized glands found in the rear of their jaws. When their facial muscles are contracted a stream of viscous oil is forcibly ejected from the glands and spurts out of the Flaming Tongue's mouth in a tight stream. This oil ignites upon contact with the surrounding air, creating gout of sticky flaming napalm. Knowledgeable opponents may gain a moment to prepare themselves by watching for the telltale crest moments prior to being immersed in liquid fire.

Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen speak Ssethren.

Combat

Fire Tongue (Ex): Once every three rounds, Flaming Tongue Ss'ressen can spit a stream of sticky fiery oil to a distance of 20 feet as a ranged touch attack with +4 to hit. Those struck by the flames suffer 2d4 points of damage, and will suffer 1d4 points of damage from burning in the subsequent two rounds unless the fire is somehow doused. A target can take a full-round action to attempt to extinguish the flames before taking this additional damage. It takes a successful Reflex saving throw (DC 15) to extinguish the flames. Rolling on the ground gives the character a +2 circumstance bonus to the save. Leaping into a body of water or magically extinguishing the flames automatically smothers the flames.

Ghost Scale Ss'ressen "Amelanis"

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 1d8+1 (5 hp)

Initiative: +2

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 14 (+1 Dex, +2 natural, +1 light shield), touch 11, flat-footed 13

Base Attack/ Grapple: +0/ +0

Attack: Claw +0 melee (1d6) or tail +0 (1d4) or shortspear +0 (1d6) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6)

Full Attack: Claw +0 melee (1d6) or tail +0 (1d4) or shortspear +0 (1d6) or javelin +1 ranged (1d6)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: Camouflage ability, cold susceptibility, enhanced balance, low-light vision, natural weaponry

Saves: Fort +1 Ref +3 Will +0

Abilities: Str 10 Dex 13 Con 12 Int 9 Wis 10 Cha 9

Skills: Balance +7, Hide +12*, Jump +3, Move Silently +3, Swim +4

Feats: Tail Attack

Environment: Subterranean

Challenge Rating: 1

Treasure: 50% Coins, 50% Goods, 50% Items

Alignment: Usually neutral evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +1

Ghost Scale Ss'ressen stand roughly 5 feet tall, and have a slightly hunched form. Appearing at first glance like subterranean albinos, in their natural coloration a ghost scale Ss'ressen has pearly white scales that shimmer in the light. Their claws retain their black coloration, pointing back towards their origin as an offshoot of the Black Talons. Their most disturbing feature is their ability to change the color of their skin, virtually blending into the surroundings like a chameleon.

Ghost Scale Ss'ressen speak either Ssethren, or Ss'ressen and Low Coryani.

Combat

Camouflage Ability (Ex): Ghost Scale Ss'ressen have chameleon like abilities that grant them a +10 racial bonus to Hide checks. * In forests or overgrown areas this bonus improves to +12.

Enhanced Balance (Ex): Generations of breeding in treacherously slimy underground caves have given the Ghost Scale Ss'ressen an uncanny sense of balance that gives them a +4 racial bonus to Balance checks.

Horned Jowl Ss'ressen "Agamassi"

Large Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 5d8+15 (37 hp)

Initiative: -1

Speed: 40 ft.,

AC: 17 (-1 Size, -1 Dex, +9 natural), touch 8, flat-footed 17

Base Attack/Grapple: +5/+16

Attacks: Slam +11 melee (1d6+7), or large crowsbeak flail +12 melee (1d10+7/x4)

Full Attack: Slam +11 melee (1d6+7), or large crowsbeak flail +12 melee (1d10+7/x4)

Face/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +3

Abilities: Str 24, Dex 8, Con 16, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 9

Skills: Climb +9, Listen +3, Spot +3

Feats: Power Attack, Weapon Focus (crowsbeak flail)

Climate/Terrain: Tropical jungle

Organization: Solitary or gang (2-5)

Challenge Rating: 4

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +2

The average Horned Jowl Ss'ressen stands between 9 1/2 to 10 1/2 feet tall and weighs in at an incredible 900 pounds. Testaments to the controlled breeding experiments of their Ssanu creators, the Horned Jowl are huge brutish Ss'ressen, designed as heavy shock troopers for the Empire. They are massive hulking brutes with a short snout and wide jaws. An Agamassi's head is covered with numerous long spines running along its jaw line, brow ridges, and cranium. Horned Jowl Ss'ressen have overly long arms and wide splayed feet. Their tails are shorter than that of an average Ss'ressen and their thick horny hide offers superior protection from all but the most Herculean of blows. Their claws are short and Agamassi prefer to strike with their horned fists rather than slash at their opponents.

Horned Jowl Ss'ressen speak Ssethren.

Combat

Agamassi prefer close combat to all other forms of warfare. Agamassi use their superior reach and heavy weaponry to pound through opponents' ranks, often using smaller enemies as living clubs. More advanced Agamassi usually wear hide armor made from giant crocodiles, and employ gillicar shields. In their huge hands, a gillicar shield functions as a large shield. Agamassi Clutch Ss'ressen's are most often employed as bodyguards or as special heavy infantry units. Due to their lack of intelligence, it is the rare Agamassi that leads troops.

Razor Claw Ss'ressen "Sulsellous"

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 3d8+6 (19 hp)

Initiative: +4

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 15 (+5 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/ Grapple: +3/+10

Attack: Claw +6 Melee (2d6+3) or javelin +3 ranged (1d6+3)

Full Attack: 2 claws +4 Melee (2d6+3); or javelin +3 ranged (1d6+3)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Improved grab

Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, improved claws, low-light vision, natural grappler, natural weaponry, razor hide

Saves: Fort +3 Ref +3 Will +3

Abilities: Str 16 Dex 11 Con 15 Int 8 Wis 10 Cha 9

Skills: Balance +5, Swim +4

Feats: Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (claw)

Environment: Subterranean

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Advancement: By character class

Level Adjustment: +2

Ss'ressen of the Razor Claw Egg Clutch are the melee machines of the Ssethregoran Empire. Bred for close combat engagements, the Razor Claws sport an impressive array of spines and ridges along their bodies, used primarily for the tearing of an opponents flesh. Razor Claws are the shortest of the Ss'ressen, standing between 4 1/2 to 5 1/2 feet tall. They sport dark green bars of color running from their snout to the tip of their tail atop a sandy tan to muddy brown background, and a single row of cranial spines that leads into a sagittal crest devoid of webbing between spines. Their most prominent feature are their extremely long talons, thick and sharp, sprouting from each hand. Their arms are short and bulky, built to absorb the shock from the tremendous blows these claws can deliver. Each scale on their bodies tapers into a sharp point, the edge like a razor. A favorite tactic of a Razor Claw is to close in and grapple with a foe, using his claws to eviscerate the opponent while his scales tear at the foe's flesh.

Razor Claw Ss'ressen speak Ssethren.

Combat

Razor Hide (Ex): A grappled opponent automatically takes 1d8+3 points of damage whenever the Razor Claw Ss'ressen makes a successful grapple check.

Improved Grab (Ex): If a Razor Claw Ss'ressen hits an opponent with both claw attacks it can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Improved Claws (Ex): A Razor Claw Ss'ressen's natural attacks are far superior to the other Ss'ressen egg clutches. A claw attack made by a Razor Claw deals 1d8 points of damage. A Razor Claw may take the Improved Natural Weapon Feat without meeting the requirements.

Racial Bonus: Razor Claw Ss'ressen gain a +4 racial bonus to all grapple checks.

Venomous Scale Ss'ressen "Venaris"

Medium Monstrous Humanoid (Ssethric)

Hit Dice: 2d8+6 (15 hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 15 (+5 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/ Grapple: +2/+3

Attack: Claw +3 melee (1d4+1) or bite +3 melee (1d6+1) or yataghan +2 melee (1d6+2/18-20x2) or javelin +2 ranged (1d6+1)

Full Attack: 2 claws +1 melee (1d4+1) and bite -2 melee (1d6+1) or yataghan +2 melee (1d6+2/18-20x2) and bite -2 melee (1d6+1) or javelin +2 ranged (1d6+1)

Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Paralytic poison

Special Qualities: Cold susceptibility, low-light vision, natural weaponry

Saves: Fort +3 Ref +3 Will +2

Abilities: Str 13 Dex 10 Con 16 Int 10 Wis 8 Cha 9

Skills: Balance +5, Jump +7, Swim +6

Feats: Serpent Blood

Challenge Rating: 2

Environment: Coastal marshland

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Usually lawful evil

Advancement: By Character Class

Level Adjustment: +1

A Venomous Scale Ss'ressen stands between 5 1/2 to 6 feet tall and contains a speckled hide in hues of light grey and black, with a slightly yellow underside. Their hide fades as they age; venerable members of the Clutch often have coats that look like ashes upon a snowy background. Their sagittal crest is short with minimal webbing between the individual spines. Their claws are not as advanced as other egg clutches, but they make up for it with a razor sharp bite and extra thick hide.

Venomous Scale Ss'ressen speak Ssethren.

Combat

Paralytic Poison (Ex): Once every three rounds, a Venomous Scale Ss'ressen can spit a paralytic poison to a distance of 20 feet as a ranged touch attack with a +2 attack bonus. Those hit by the poisonous spit, or by a Venomous Scale bite attack, must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 14) or be paralyzed for 1d6+2 minutes. The use of the bite attack has no effect on how often the poisonous spit can be used.

Winged Viper

Tiny Animal (ssethric)
 Hit Dice: 1/2 d8+1 (2 hp)
 Initiative: +3
 Speed: 15 ft., flight 30 ft. (good)
 Armor Class: 17 (+2 size, +3 dex, +2 natural armor),
 touch 15, flat-footed 14
 Base Attack/Grapple: +0/-11
 Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d2-3 plus poison)
 Full Attack: +5 melee (1d2-3 plus poison)
 Space/Reach: 2-1/2 ft./ 0ft
 Special Attacks: Poison
 Special Qualities: Scent
 Save: Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +1
 Abilities: Str 4, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2,
 Skills: Hide +12, Listen +2, Spot +2, Survival +2
 Feats: Weapon Finesse
 Environment: Temperate marshes
 Organization: Solitary
 Challenge Rating: 1/3
 Treasure: -
 Alignment: Always neutral
 Advancement: -
 Level Adjustment: -

These small jewel-like serpents are covered with shimmering iridescent scales of a myriad of rainbow hues. Their wings are thin membranes stretched bat-like over delicate bone structure. These small winged serpents range widely in size. They are not particularly aggressive, but will often lash out with a bite before attempting to retreat.

Combat

Viper snakes rely on their venomous bite to kill prey and defend themselves.

Poison (Ex): A winged tiny viper has a DC 11 poisonous bite that deals initial and secondary damage of 1d6 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Hussuma / Yissera

The dark arts of the Ssethric technomancers have crafted all manner of servants through the millennia, but none as insidious or important as the Hussuma and their more recent cousins, the Yissera. Essentially a blend of ssethric tissues with those of Elorii or humans, these twisted mockeries look like the target race when young, but gain reptilian features as they age, becoming more and more like their creators as time passes. The Hussuma were created in the early days of the Ilhuan war, when technomancers tried to fuse the souls of dead Ssanu with inanimate bodies they had crafted, in an attempt to grant life. In the end they succeeded, meshing the soul of the Ssanu with the body of what was later to become the Elorii. Eventually the Hussuma experiment was abandoned in favor of the elemental infusion process that created the Elorii. The same fleshy bodies were used for the elemental process, so in essence the physical form of the Hussuma and Elorii were built from the same mold.

Centuries later, after the Elorii revolt, the surviving Hussuma were granted a larger role in Ssethregoran life, acting as spies and informants. Further experiments were carried out, resulting in fertile Hussuma who could breed true. The arrival of humans on the continent spurred a second branch of the project, spawning a line of similar creations deemed the Yissera. The Yissera, for all intents and purposes appear human, but like the Hussuma, gain reptilian features as they age. Both races now act as spies and messengers to the human and Elorii lands; places where most Ssethric peoples could not go for fear of persecution. Employed as spymasters, slavers, and merchants, both the Hussuma and Yissera have gained a permanent place in Ssethregoran life.

Creating a Hussuma or Yissera

Hussuma or Yissera is an inherited template that can be added to any living Elorii or human. Either race uses the base creature's statistics and special abilities, except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to humanoid (ssethric). Do not recalculate the creature's Hit Dice, base attack bonus, or saves. Size is unchanged.

Speed: Same as the base creature

Armor Class: The base creature's natural armor bonus improves by +1.

Special Attacks: A Hussuma or Yissera retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the following special abilities. Saves have a DC of 10 +1/2 HD + Charisma modifier unless otherwise noted.

Serpent slumber (Su): Hussuma or Yissera can use a *lullaby* effect (as the spell) at will.

Spell-Like Abilities: A Hussuma or Yissera with an Intelligence or Wisdom score of 8 or higher has two or more spell-like abilities, depending on its Hit Dice, as indicated on the table below. The abilities are cumulative. Unless otherwise noted, an ability is usable once per day. Caster level equals the creature's HD, and the save DC is Charisma-based.

Table 9-1: Hussuma/Yissara and Appearance

HD	Abilities	Appearance
1-4	Charm Person 3/day	Pupils become slitted or gold in coloration.
5-8	Disguise Self 3/day,	Skin always appears dry and Hypnotic Pattern 1/daycracked, tongue becomes forked.
9-12	Poison 1/day	Neck broadens, fingers elongate, and hair begins to fall out in patches.
13-16	Charm Monster 1/day	Remaining hair falls out, body becomes covered in fine scales, teeth become pointed, gain the Scent feat.
17-20	Seeming 1/day	Hussuma: Legs fuse into serpentine lower body (base land speed increases to 40ft), Yissera: Head deforms into the shape of an adder. Gain the feats Distended Jaw and Venom Glands.

Special Qualities: A Hussuma or Yissera has all the special qualities of the base creature, plus the following special qualities.

- **Reptilian Taint:** As a Hussuma or Yissera ages it slowly becomes more and more like its progenitors, the Ssanu. A summary of the physical changes is noted in the above table. Note these changes are cumulative.

- **Immunity to natural poisons.**
- **Spell resistance** equal to creature's HD + 10 (maximum 35).

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +0, Dex +4, Con +2, Int +2, Wis +0, Cha +4.

Skills: Hussuma and Yissera gain skill points as a humanoid and have skill points equal to $(2 + \text{Int modifier}) \times 1/2(\text{HD} + 3)$. Do not include Hit Dice from class levels in this calculation — they gain humanoid skill points only for their racial Hit Dice, and gain the normal amount of skill points for class levels. Treat skills from the base creature's list as class skills, and other skills as cross-class.

Challenge Rating: HD 4 or less, as base creature +1; HD 5 to 8, as base creature +2; HD 11 or more, as base creature +3.

Alignment: Any.

Level Adjustment: +3.



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