



Dog
Soul

20
system

THE FISHERS OF THE DEAD



FOLK
LÖRIC
GEMS

THE FISHERS OF THE DEAD

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**This product utilizes updated material from the v.3.5 revision.*



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INTRODUCTION

In Norse myth, Niflheim was located beneath the third root of Yggdrasil, the World Tree. It was a land of ice and mists, thronged with the shivering and shadowy specters of those who had died ingloriously of disease or old age. It was also home to the unheroic dead: the dishonorable, the lazy, the indifferent, the cowardly and the gluttonous. The evil giantess Hel ruled Niflheim. She was Loki's daughter, and was given the once-green demiplane by the other gods as a means to trap her poisonous effects to one, small place. Niflheim suffered immeasurably, but the universe was spared Hel's cruelty.

A NEW INTERPRETATION OF AN ANCIENT PLACE

Niflheim is a demiplane of definite size. It was given to Hel, the demi-goddess of undeath, by a council of gods, and Hel has since poisoned its waters and polluted its soil with her evil. Niflheim is a beacon to all unheroic undead. It is island-shaped, barricaded on the north and east edges by snow-covered mountains and threatened on the southern and western shores by the Sea of Death: a black, roiling ocean of bobbing undead bodies and unspeakable horrors polluting its poison depths. Should any living thing fall into this sea, that creature would be tainted beyond repair.

Oddly, the ocean along the north and eastern borders of Niflheim is pure, if very cold.

There are five entrances¹ to Niflheim, and through these portals the living have managed to emigrate, whether by plan or sheer bad luck. These mortals now live either clustered together in the four central villages of Niflheim, or scattered as outlanders, living nomadically among the gray wastes of the island's outer reaches. Hel has nothing but hatred for the living, but the number of these homesteaders are so few that she leaves them untroubled for now.

The name 'Land of Fire and Ice' is used to describe Niflheim because of its unusual combination of cold rivers, ice-capped mountains, and active volcanoes that occur often in unison.

Many who have found their way to Niflheim want nothing more than to escape its dreariness, but there are those who have arrived looking to harvest its treasures (for there are many.)

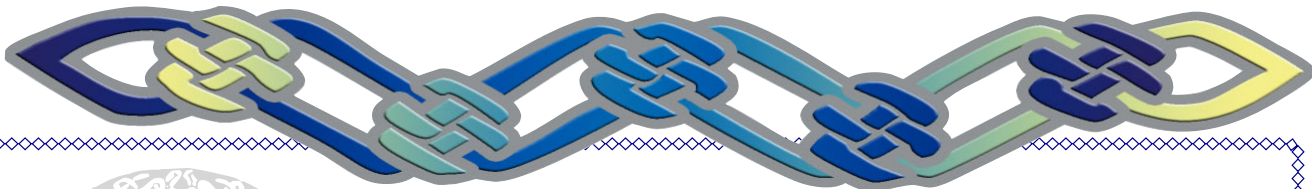
Native creatures abound in the Land of Fire and Ice. *Jotnar* trolls, vampires, swan-maidens, hidden-folk, winter toads, hardy kyhrin cows, valkyries, and ancient trolls called "living mountains" mark the bleak landscape. Strange nomads and weird societies lurk in the outer wilds of Niflheim, while the commoner huddles in his small village, in his sod home, praying to live another day in relative peace.

1 The fifth entrance is known only to the half-orc Sindri and his gang. See [map of Niflheim](#) for other entrances.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Fishers of the Dead is meant to further detail the land that *Niflheim, Land of Fire and Ice*, introduced. It presents a large cast of npc's and reveals their inner fears, desires and motives. It also offers several encounters suitable for PC's of varying levels, and presents detailed foes for GMs to incorporate in their own Niflheim campaigns.





PERILS, LEGENDS, AND ORGANIZATIONS

HEL

The goddess Hel rules Niflheim from the lonely outpost of her mountain fortress, Helgardth, located in the northwest corner of the island plane. She never strays from the protective boundaries of her domain. Instead, her hound Garm guards the lands south of her mountain, and her undead servants do her bidding. She is an apathetic ruler, neglecting the affairs of Niflheim to fixate on her need for more undead. Hel loathes life and all of its joys or pleasures. She seeks to imprison the universe within the boundaries of her dreary plane.

She can only obtain the scraps of the world's dead and this infuriates her. The other gods have forbidden any undead but the lazy, the stupid, the decrepit and the slow to wash upon Hel's black shores. She yearns for power, yearns for

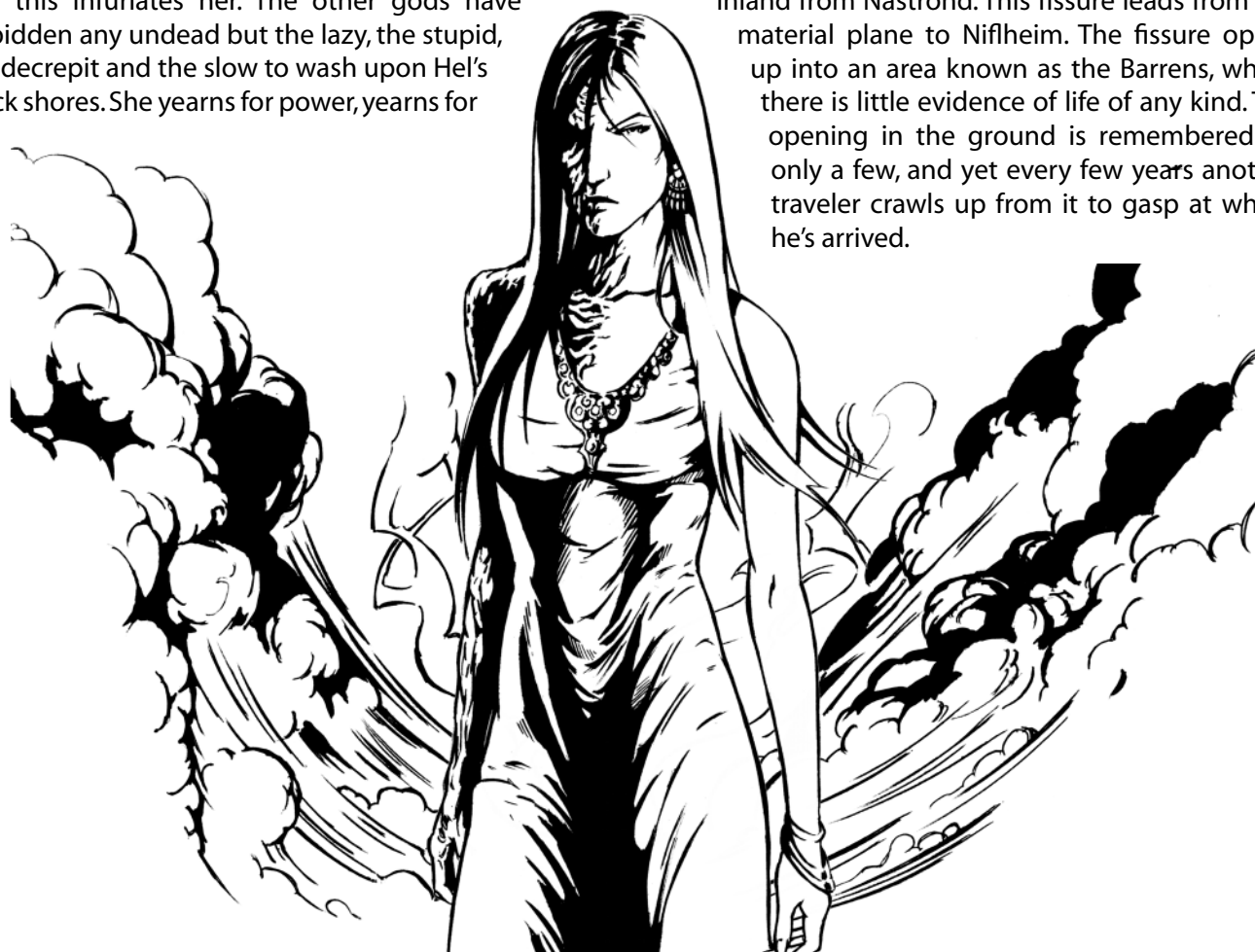
something more glorious than her gray-hued domain, and for this she needs an army. Until she can procure an army of warriors, rather than an army of misfits, Hel waits and plans.

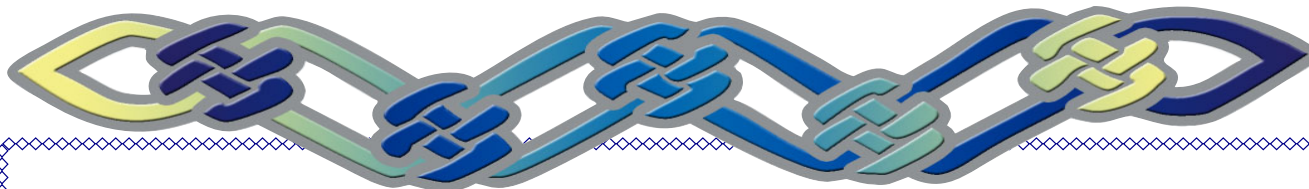
It is rumored that a great host of Hel's followers from the material plane are struggling to find entrance to their goddess' domain - once they do, they will flood Niflheim with their numbers, suicide themselves into the Sea of Death and finally give their deity an army.

NIDHOGG, YGGDRASIL, AND NASTROND - THE SHORE OF CORPSES

The western coast of Niflheim is the place where undead gather, washed to shore from other planes of existence. They are then called by a silent clarion to stumble in dread procession from the bloodied sands of Nastrond to Hel's cloistered home.

There is a small fissure in the blasted rock a mile inland from Nastrond. This fissure leads from the material plane to Niflheim. The fissure opens up into an area known as the Barrens, where there is little evidence of life of any kind. The opening in the ground is remembered by only a few, and yet every few years another traveler crawls up from it to gasp at where he's arrived.





One more mile inland stands Yggdrasil, the gargantuan petrified tree that runs through many different planes. The only section visible in Niflheim is a huge, mountain-like portion of the root structure, the top of which is obscured by the swirling, overcast sky above, and the bottom of which is buried deep within the stony ground. Yggdrasil was once a thriving center of life but now houses Nidhogg, a grotesque, serpent-like creature that serves Hel. Nidhogg's task is to guard the western quadrant of Niflheim and make sure no undead pass his watch. He reluctantly obliges but is more interested in the living that wander too close to his domain, and is even more interested in escaping Niflheim.

THE WOLFSKINS

Rumors run rampant surrounding this elusive group of Barren-dwelling barbarians. Some people say the Wolfskins are Hel's army, sent to finally take vengeance on the living who dare to build homesteads on the goddess's land. Others believe the Wolfskins are men gone mad, trapped too long in the plane of undeath, now turned upon their own kind.

The truth is the Wolfskins are nothing more than a bad reputation. The staves, being nomadic and not big on agriculture, typically dress in animal skins. The staves are thought of as wild men by some, and the legendary 'Wolskins' are blamed for most of the crimes committed against the villagers of Niflheim, regardless of the fact that these crimes have been committed by small groups of bandits and solitary brigands that dwell in the Barrens. Some residents of the Four Villages would kill a stave on sight if they could, believing the stave was a dreaded Wolfskin, rather than a protector and ally¹.

1 staves existed in Niflheim long before Hel came to reign there, and they now work in the background to defeat Hel. They will often protect a hapless villager or wandering hunter from the evil creatures that infest Niflheim.

RIDE-BY-NIGHTS

The Ride-By-Nights, or *kveld-ritha*, are wights of trolls. While their appearance is rare, kveld-ritha are particularly dreaded by the other inhabitants of Niflheim. The Ride-By-Nights are exceptionally cruel and bloodthirsty, and while not particularly intelligent

or cunning, they work well as a pack, riding on giant wolves called 'Fangs of Hel'. Those they kill become their servants and are eventually herded off to Helgardth.

STORM OF SWORDS

It is hard to keep the dead buried. The land seeks to serve its mistress, and the skies obey Hel's whim. When someone dies in Niflheim clouds begin to gather above, and within three days' time it begins to rain. The rain falls relentlessly, changing at times to hail, but then resumes to rain until the ground can no longer hold its dread cargo. The dead float to the muddy surface and are swept away in floods and swollen rivers until they are given to the Sea of Death, where they are resurrected as servants of Hel. No death goes unnoticed, and even the very young – or very old – are taken to be the goddess of undeath's minions.

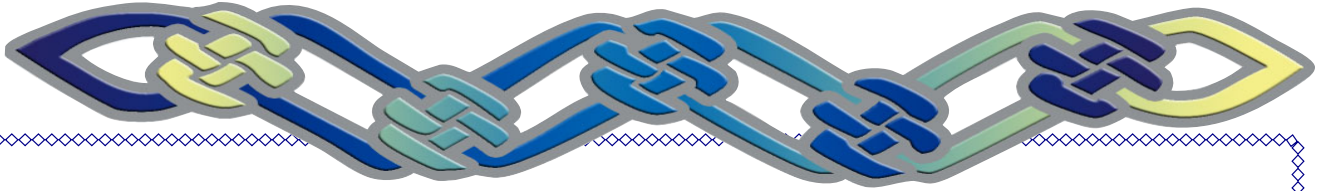
The caretaker of the only cemetery in the Four Villages, the druid Halldor, does his best to keep the Storm of Swords at bay once he buries someone in his plot. He has never failed to keep his dead, so far, and people will often travel for many miles to beg him to keep their fallen. He usually complies, provided the travelers have no taint of evil.

Flashes of lightning sizzle across the blue-black clouds above, and the wind is driving across the plains like a swarm of sharp blades, cutting at you and bending the already gnarled trees and shrubs til their frozen, bare tips scrape the roiling, muddy ground.

A Storm of Swords has a definite area of effect. It extends for a radius of 10 miles around the resting place of the deceased. Within this area the storm rages, bringing icy cold rain and hail.

It is difficult to travel out of doors during the Storm of Swords. The winds can surpass 60 mph, and speed of overland travel is reduced to 50% of normal. Once the rain begins, each PC must make a Fortitude save every ten minutes (DC 15, +1 per previous check), or else take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage from the ice-cold water for each failed save.

The raindrops are huge, freezing cold, and often turn into fist-sized balls of hail for several minutes. Every hour there is a 33% chance that hail begins to fall. The



hail will continue for 6d10 minutes. Anyone caught in the hail storm will need to make a Reflex save every 5 minutes (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or sustain 1D8 points of bludgeoning damage per failed save as they are pelted by fist-sized chunks of ice.

In addition the wind rises and turns the rain into icy, horizontal sheets. Creatures caught in the storm can otherwise act normally, but must succeed on a Concentration check (DC 15 + spell level) to cast a spell. Creatures caught in the storm take a -4 penalty to Dexterity and a -2 penalty on attack rolls. Flying creatures must take a -8 penalty to Dexterity and a -4 penalty on attack rolls when caught in the storm.

The howling wind creates a swirling cloud of fog and debris. The cloud obscures all vision, including darkvision, beyond 5 feet. Creatures 5 feet away have concealment, while those farther away have total concealment.

It is possible to abate the storm using spells such as *control weather* during the Storm of Swords, but only if the caster makes a Caster Level check DC 30.

The Storm of Swords lasts for two days. There can be several storms at the same time, scattered across the countryside and depending on the number of the dead.

THE HIDDEN FOLK

A less malevolent affliction of the inhabitants of Niflheim is *the hidden folk*. The hidden folk are fey – tiny, naturally invisible, and drawn to homes, campfires, and any place that exudes warmth or light. The problem with hidden folk is their effect on the world around them. They make things “go wrong”.

The hidden folk are friendly, but nobody wants them around. This tends to hurt their feelings. If a hidden folk gets truly distraught, its negative effect increases. For this reason homesteaders of the Four Villages like to keep dishes of honey and food outside of their doors, usually with a lantern lit beside it to appease the hidden folk and, hopefully, keep them from emoting too much bad luck upon the household.

Hidden Folk

Tiny Fey

Hit dice: 5d6 + 10 (28hp)

Initiative: +11

Speed: 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Armor Class: 19 (+2 size, +7 Dex), touch 19

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-3

Attack: Snaketooth dagger +8 melee (1d3 + poison)

Full Attack: Snaketooth dagger +8 melee (1d3 + poison)

Space/Reach: 2 ½ ft./0 ft.

Special Attacks: Poison

Special Qualities: Darkvision, Invisibility, Low-light vision, Telepathy 60 ft., Wish-granting

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +12, Will +8

Abilities: STR 4, DEX 24, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 14, CHA 16

Skills: Hide +21, Knowledge (local) +6, Listen +10, Move Silently +3, Perform (song or dance) +9, Spot +10

Feats: Alertness, Dodge^B, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse^B

Environment: Niflheim

Organization: Solitary, pair, troop (5 – 8)

Challenge Rating: 4

Treasure: none

Alignment: usually chaotic good

Advancement: 6-8 HD (small)

Level Adjustment: --

Combat

Hidden folk will more often than not run from combat, but they have great resolve to fight if there is a dire need.

Poison (Ex) – All hidden folk carry small curved daggers – called *snaketooth* daggers. These little magical daggers are always envenomed, with one of three types of poison, and many hidden folk will carry one of each. Part of the magic of the dagger is that the damage is not reduced due to the low strength of the wielder.

Sleep Poison – Injury, Fortitude DC 15, initial damage sleep for one minute, secondary damage sleep for 1d3 hours.

Slow Poison – Injury, Will DC 15, initial damage as per *slow* spell for 1 round, secondary damage as per *slow* spell for 1 minute.

Color Poison – Injury, Fortitude DC 20, initial damage turn light blue for 1 minute, secondary damage turn random color for 1 year (see table). *Remove curse, break enchantment, limited wish, miracle, or wish can remove this effect.*

D10	color
1	red
2	orange
3	yellow
4	green
5	blue
6	indigo
7	violet
8	black
9	white
10	gray

Invisibility: Hidden folk are naturally invisible, although they can always see each other. When a hidden folk attacks, however, that invisibility is dropped. For her initiative round, the hidden folk is completely visible. For the rest of the round and until her next action, the hidden folk is only partially invisible (20% miss chance). A hidden folk can always drop her invisibility should she so choose, and this counts as a free action.

Telepathy: Hidden folk have a limited form of telepathy that allows them to hone in the desires of the inhabitants of Niflheim. The effect is harmless but can be blocked with little effort if the target knows that hidden folk are about.

Hidden folk can also use this ability to scan the surface thoughts of a target. The victim can take a DC 15 Will save to keep his mind immune to the hidden folk's telepathy. The saving throw is Charisma-based and is taken whenever a hidden folk attempts to read a mind. A successful save means that the individual is immune to that particular hidden folk's telepathy for 24 hours.

Hidden folk cannot transmit their own thoughts with this ability – they can only read the thoughts of others.

Wish Granting: Hidden folk are friendly if secretive creatures. They care deeply for the inhabitants of the villages of Niflheim. By using their unique form of telepathy, the hidden folk can scan the target's mind and then give the person various material items that they desire.

This is a spell-like ability and its effects are

the same as *limited wish*. Hidden folk can use this ability once a day. However no mortal can benefit from any hidden folk's wish-granting ability more than once a year. In addition, most people tend to retreat from visible hidden folk, as they fear their *jinx* ability.

Hidden folk can not grant their own wishes nor those of other hidden folk.

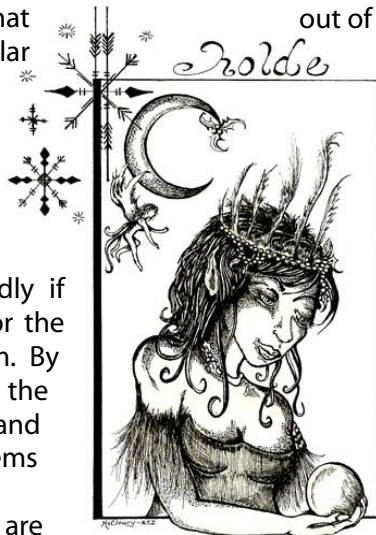
Jinx: Despite their good intentions, the hidden folk are notorious for effecting those around them (anyone other than hidden folk) with bad luck. Anyone within ten feet of a hidden folk must roll 1d10 to discover how much bad luck, if any, is being exuded by the hidden folk:

1	-10 to all rolls for one hour.
2	-2 to all rolls for one day.
3	no effect.
4	-4 to all rolls for one round.
5	-2 to all skill checks for one day.
6	-10 to all combat rolls for two hours.
7	no effect.
8	-4 to morale for four hours.
9	-1 to all rolls for five hours.
10	no effect.

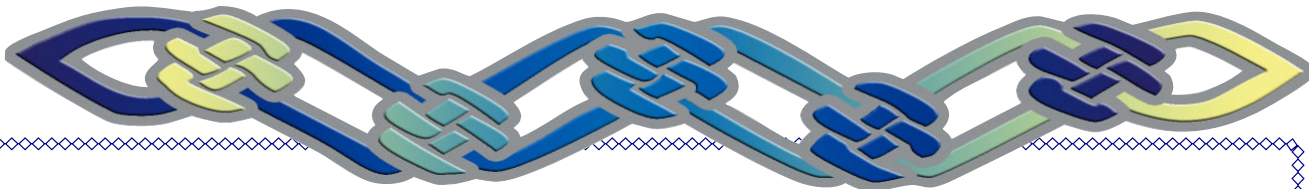
HOLDE

Holde is the leader of the Hidden Folk, and highly irritated at the situation she and her people have found themselves in. A clumsy, black-hearted sorcerer in the material plane banished Holde and her people to Niflheim

a century ago. As cheerful an outlook as the hidden folk usually have, the grim reality that their good work goes horribly, horribly wrong on the plane of undeath drives their queen to distraction. Holde yearns for an exodus out of the Niflheim.



One thing she has managed to keep going for the sake of her peoples' morale is the tradition of gift-giving on Yuletide Eve (and wish-granting year round). Holde always blessed the kindness of strangers with a gift of their heart's desire on this night. The only caveat - Holde gives the wrong gifts to everyone. The people of the Four Villages have made it a tradition to exchange gifts on Yule morning, and think nothing less of the fey queen for her errors.



"Fleinn - I think these new fish hooks are yours - I just bought a good portion from the smithy next-town a month ago so I've no need for 'em."

"Hey - thanks Heggr. Those would surely be my fishhooks, and I think I have a fine leather coat here for you, with matching hat and woolen stockings. You've been complaining fairly regularly how your wife can't sew and you've been freezing your eggs off in the field."

"Well, you know what they say, Fleinn - a man can't make breakfast with frozen eggs. Much thanks to you and Happy Yuletide."

"Merry Yuletide, Heggr."

THE DRAUGAR

The Dark daughter of Loki taints the essence of all who are borne upon The Sea of Death. The creatures who wash upon the shore of Nastrond rise from the sea as Draugar - still in the form they possessed in life, but in twisted, undead servitude in death.

The draugar are the undead of Niflheim. They are the cowards of wherever they came from: the sluggards, the lackluster souls who died and washed to Hel's shores. Thus they are not the most hardy of creatures, nor the most ferocious. They do have an advantage over the average undead, however - draugar *hate* life. They seek to destroy anything living around them. In addition, draugar can think for themselves, albeit somewhat clumsily.

Draugar is an acquired template that can be added to any corporeal humanoid creature (other than undead), that possesses a skeletal system (referred to hereafter as the 'base creature').

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to undead. It uses the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Hit Dice: Increase all hit die to d12s. It is rare for Draugar to have more than 5 hit dice, as these doomed souls were generally apathetic and sickly in life. Draugar of more than 5 hit die will hold higher positions in Hel's army.

Speed: If the base creature possessed flight as a physical or magical mode of movement, decrease speed by half, but give it perfect maneuverability. The power of its unlife is the force behind this form of locomotion.

Armor Class: A Draugar receives a +2 natural armor bonus to AC.

Attacks: Draugar retain all natural weapons, manufactured weapon attacks, and weapon proficiencies of the base creature. Due to their slightly slower reaction times, they have 1 attack per round less than the base creature (to a minimum of 1 per round.)

Special Attacks: Draugar retain none of the base creature's special attacks.

Special Qualities: The Draugar loses most of the special qualities of the base creature. It retains any extraordinary special qualities that improve its melee or ranged attacks.

Saves: Base save bonuses are the same as the base creature's. As undead, the Draugar is immune to any attack that requires a Fortitude save, unless the attack can also damage objects. Use the base creature's unaltered Charisma modifier for the Draugar's Fortitude save modifier.

Abilities: STR +2, DEX -2, CON -, INT -10, WIS changes to 10, CHA -8.

Skills: Draugar retain the skills they had in life, but with only half the skill ranks. Skills reduced to less than 1 rank count as 0 ranks.

Feats: Draugar retain half of the feats they possessed in life. If they had only 1 feat, they lose it and gain Toughness in its place.

Environment: The demiplane of Niflheim.

Organization: As suits Hel's whims and purposes.

Challenge Rating: Depends on hit die as follows:

Hit Dice	CR	Hit Dice	CR
1/2	1/4	8-11	4
1	1/2	12-14	5
2-3	1	15-17	8
4-5	2	18-20	9
6-7	3		

Treasure: none

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Level Adjustment: --

RIDE-BY-NIGHTS (Kveld-Ritha)

The ride-by-night's name (kveld-ritha) comes from the legend that troll-women would come down from the mountains to feast on the heart of a dishonorable man in his sleep.

In Niflheim, kveld-ritha are the draugar of trolls, commanded by Hel to serve the demigoddess's hateful purposes. Ride-by-nights have no trouble wreaking havoc, day or night, atop their wolf mounts, the fangs of Hel.

Kveld-Ritha

Large undead

Hit dice: 6d12 (45hp)

Initiative: +3

Speed: 30 ft.

Armor Class: 17, touch 12, flat-footed 14

Base Attack/

Grapple: +4/+15

Attack: Claw +10 melee (1d6+7+ energy drain) or Large long spear +10 melee (2d6+7)

Full attack: 2 claw +10 melee (1d6+7+energy drain) or large long spear +10 melee (2d6+7)

Space/Reach: 10ft./10ft.

Special Attacks: Rend 2d6+9, Energy Drain

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., Low light vision, Scent, DR 5/cold, iron

Saves: Fort +11, Ref + 4, Will +4

Abilities: STR 25, DEX 16, CON -, INT 6, WIS 11, CHA 10

Skills: Handle Animal +12, Ride +12, Survival +9

Feats: Combat Reflexes, Snatch, Track

Climate/Terrain: Niflheim

Organization: Solitary, Squad (3-5), Troop (6-12)

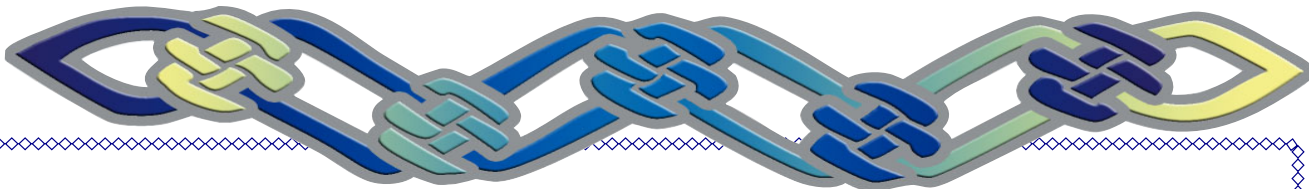
Challenge Rating: 6

Treasure: none

Alignment: Always Chaotic Evil

Advancement: -





THE FANGS OF HEL

These wolf-like creatures are servants of Hel and are the mounts of the ride-by-nights.

Huge Animal

Hit Dice: 8d8+40 (76hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 50 ft.

Armor Class: 15, touch 9, flat-footed 14

Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+17

Attack: Bite +16 melee (2d6+14)

Full Attack: Bite +16 melee (2d6+14)

Space/Reach: 20 ft./10 ft.

Special Attack: Trip

Special Qualities: Low light vision, Scent

Saves: Fort +11, Ref +7, Will +3

Abilities: STR 33, DEX 13, CON 21, INT 3, WIS 12, CHA 10

Skills: Listen +7, Move Silently +3, Spot +7, Survival +2

Feats: Alertness, Run, Track⁸, Weapon Focus (Bite)

Climate/Terrain: Niflheim

Organization: Solitary, Squad (3-5), Troop (6-12)

Challenge Rating: 5

Treasure: none

Alignment: always Chaotic Evil

Advancement: 9-12 HD

LIFE IN NIFLHEIM

A man looks up from his work as you enter the common house. Spread about him on a low worktable are coils of fishing line, dull gray like the entrails of a strange beast. He mutters a greeting, "**Godan dayin**," and stares at you. After a moment so brief you have no time to form a response, he continues, "Nice weather today. Had a bit of gentle rain the day before and haven't any hail for nearly a month now. You folks travel far? You know what I mean?" He winks at you. "I got victuals if you need to fill your stomachs. Wife's got on a good halibut stew, plus we got salted beef, and a fine lamb roast if you're willing to pay, and believe me every bite's worth it. If you need to warm your bones first I've got a fire going in the small room and I'll bring you tea – gotta warn you though of the color, as it looks like you ain't from around here. You from around here?"

You manage to answer, "No."

"Didn't think you were. Well, right – the color of tea. It's... black. And that's all account of the honey. Tea itself is grayish purple – most plants that grow here are gray, and fruit is dark purple. The color of kings, some have said! But the bees we keep, well – they put out black honey. Tastes fine, don't taste any different than what you're used to. Just don't glance at it before you take a sip. That's my advice to you." He stands up, hands on hips, grinning slightly and waiting for your money.

A surprisingly large amount of the population in Niflheim is alive. Despite the fact that the goddess of undeath can smite them on a whim, the people of Niflheim build their houses, till their fields, keep their cattle and sheep, and fish from the lakes and the rivers.

No one dares fish from the ocean – because the undead make a nasty catch.

There are a variety of animals to be hunted and eaten in the fields and woods: hare, voles, doves, non-poisonous snakes, and deer. The Four Villages keep fields of wheat and barley, potatoes, beets and other root vegetables. In the summer they grow apples and plums. They also keep bees, and tend herds of cows. Their cows wander freely, having enough sense to remain within the relative safety of the Gray Plains. Each herd is protected by a bull.

Kyhron Bull

Large animal

Hit Dice: 5d8 + 15 (37hp)

Initiative: +0

Speed: 40 ft.

Armor Class: 13 (-1 size, +4 natural) touch 9, flat-footed 13

Base Attack/Grapple +3/+13

Attack: Gore +8 melee (1d8+9)

Full Attack: Gore +8 melee (1d8+9)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./5ft.

Special Attacks: none

Special Qualities: Low-light vision, scent

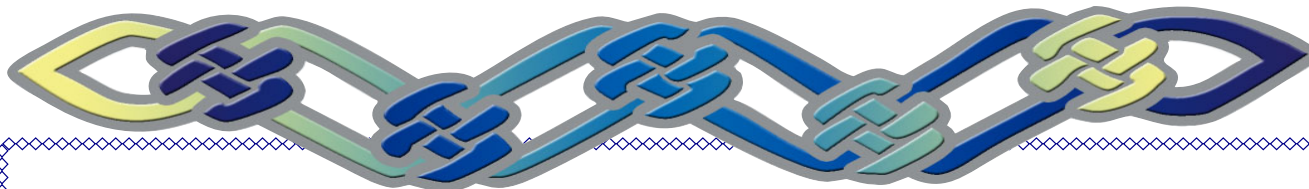
Saves: Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +1

Abilities: STR 22, DEX 10, CON 16, INT 2, WIS 11, CHA 4

Skills: Listen +7, Spot +5

Feats: Alertness, Endurance

Environment: the Gray Plains of Niflheim



Organization: Solitary (as leader of herd of cows)
Challenge Rating: 2
Advancement : 6-7 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment: -

These animals are very aggressive, and will charge most humanoids they don't recognize. Larger threats to the herd will incite both the bull and his herd to flee. A group of humanoids making enough noise and showing enough bravado can often turn aside a bull's charge.

If the bull charges and the PC's attempt to turn aside the charge, the bull must make a Will save with a DC equal to a Bluff or Intimidate check made by the PC's.

A kyhron bull stands 6 feet at the shoulder and is 10 to 12 feet long. It weighs 1,800 to 2,200 pounds.

The villagers fish from The Blue Lake, two miles away from the closest village, Porp. This mysterious body of water glows bright blue, an effect of the volcanic rock that lines its bed. Its water is always warm from steam vents below. A variety of fish and eels thrive in the lake despite its warm temperatures, and nearly all are edible. Occasionally a jet of superheated water will escape from the cracks in the lake bed, and the result can be deadly, or helpful¹. Swimmers caught unaware can be seriously harmed by the boiling vents. Fish however are boiled instantly and serve as a handy lunch for fisherman.

Between the lake and the Villages are the hundreds of fish racks the villagers use for drying their catch. Dried fish is a staple of the villagers' diet.

The keeper of the common house in Porp will tell you – nothing is a proper color in Niflheim. Fruit is such a dark purple that its flesh is nearly black. Grains yield a gray flour, and thus all bread is gray. The bees produce black honey, and tea, sweets, and meade are charcoal gray in color.

Weather is highly unpredictable in Niflheim. In the span of an hour it can rain, hail, or snow. In the summer there are only 5 hours of darkness – villagers

revel in their summer for it only lasts a month. In the winter, at Yule-time, the sun appears for six hours a day, and the day grows dark promptly after tea (approx. 3 o'clock).

Beyond the relative safety of the island's interior, the wilds of the Barrens are littered with volcanic rocks, bones, stunted, twisted birch trees, ancient cairns, and the occasional petrified troll. Strange rock carvings, called 'runic stones', appear now and then. No one but the staves know the meaning of these runes².

¹This superheated water deals 10d6 points of damage per round of exposure. Damage from the superheated water continues for 1d3 rounds after exposure ceases, but this additional damage is only half of that dealt during actual contact (that is, 1d6 or 5d6 points per round).

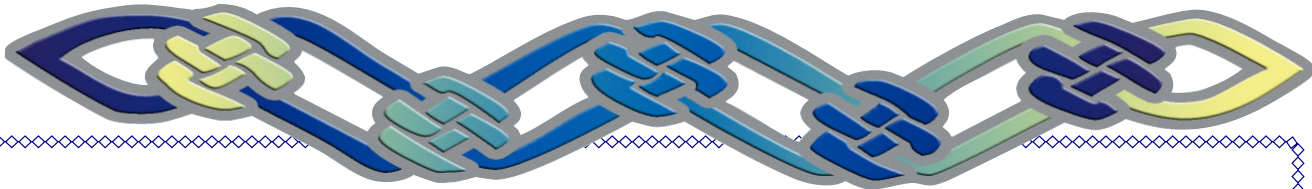
An immunity or resistance to fire serves as an immunity to the superheated water. In addition to the damage from the superheated water, the creature must make a Swim check every round with a -4 penalty.

² Runic stones are signs left for other staves. The stones are a means for different tribes to communicate with each other, or for a lone staff to leave a trail for others to follow.

STRANGERS IN NIFLHEIM

The inhabitants of the plane of undeath are accustomed to strangers, in fact – they welcome them. For the bandits that wander the Barrens, new travelers mean new loot. For the villagers, strangers mean news from the material plane, new resources and allies, and sometimes, passage out of Hel's domain. The portals of Niflheim are extremely dangerous, however, and most villagers opt to stay where they are. "The poison you know is sweeter than the meade of a stranger," is a saying of the elders. Older generations are less apt to be trusting or welcoming.





SURA 'MERRYWIDOW' HAFRSDÓTTIR

There was a heavy fog on the Blue Lake one summer morning. A fisherwoman sat in her small boat, drinking her warm tea from a wood and iron flask. She turned to look behind her suddenly – the splash of oars had broken the silence.

A woman not much younger than she rowed towards the fisherwoman, calling out a greeting,

"Hail! Morning's quite foggy, is it not?"

The stranger's accent was not of the villages. An outlander, the stranger announced by her call. "Hail to you," answered the fisherwoman. "How is it you find the Blue Lake? I know not your face."

"Dragged my boat many miles behind my horse. The sled broke as we were circumventing the lake, plus my horse was lame. I can't push the sled and thought perhaps to find folk on the other side of this strange water. Why is it blue?"

"Tis something in the rock beneath. Harmless – more fish here than you'll find in the sea, after all."

The stranger was silent at this remark. The fisherwoman continued:

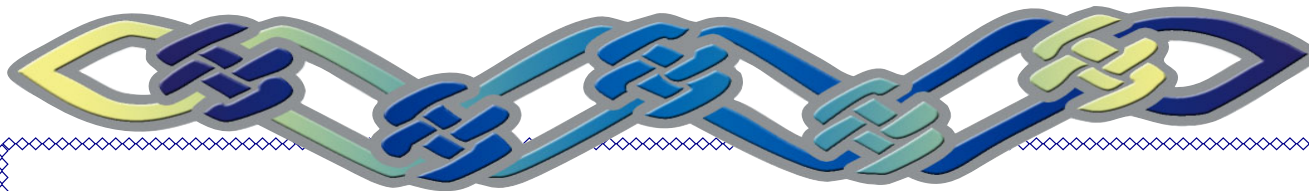
"But you won't find a settlement on the other side. Nearest is Oli's farm a mile west. Then the village Porp, a mile after that. What parts you be from then?"

"You wouldn't know it," said the stranger. "Up by the river Ledda and near the mountains my father was lord of a small village. Last winter my husband perished by an orc's hand, and this winter I decided to make out for new land."

"Really? You ain't a wildwoman, are you? I don't see animal skins on you except that fine coat you wear."

"No, not at all. Nothing wild about me. Tell me," the stranger reached out and pulled the edge of the fisherwoman's boat closer so that both boats touched. "What's your name?"





Sula Hafrsdottir – whose real name is Evuuhn Riversmith – came to Niflheim months ago, through the fissure-portal between Nastrond and Nidhogg. She clambored out of the frozen rock with her four men, determined to find the riches that so many had spoken of in Niflheim. Her disappointment at finding the plane of undeath was unspeakable. She had been given the wrong information.

Sula might not be fantastically bright, but she's clever. She also has a knack for making the best out of a bad situation. She managed to boost the morale of her gang by reminding them that even the dead hold secrets, and that there might yet be the treasure of kings in Niflheim.

Sula and her gang spent two months in the wilds of the Barrens. During that time they encountered the staves and camped with them. Sula learned of the Four Villages, and of the villagers' distrust of the staves. She also learned of the Sea of Death.

"The water is filled with corpses, as far as the eye can see," she repeated, stirring the campfire with a long stick. Her small, lean form was bent, her arms folded in the fur of her coat, her small white face half-hidden in the thickly-lined hood of her garment. The stave nodded, searching her face for a true reaction. He found he couldn't read her.

"Are you shocked, woman?" he asked.

"I have seen much pain in life. In death, pain ends. To be in this place, does not so much shock me. But it is cold here – colder than the grave should be."

"There is no end to the suffering of the dead here. Our dead are washed to the sea by the Storm of Swords. They thrash in the water, all manner of folk besides our own, still with their swords clutched in their graying hands, still with ropes of gems about their lazy necks. You see, the lesser dead arrive here from beyond Niflheim. This is their reward. However, our own dead are also trapped by Hel's curses and they cannot go on to the Great Hall¹, despite their courage in life. Our heroes must swim with the shamed."

Sula nodded, reaching out a thin hand to rest on the man's shoulder. "I see. How terrible for you. Did you say...ropes of gems?"

Before leaving their camp, Sula and her gang traded with the staves for a map of the Gray Plains.

Sula's gang made their way east to the Ledda river, then followed the icy waterway south until they came upon a fisherman and his son. The bandits overtook them and made away with the boat, fastening it behind their horses and fashioning a make-shift sledge to strap the boat to. Slowly they traveled further south until they reached the shores of the Blue Lake.

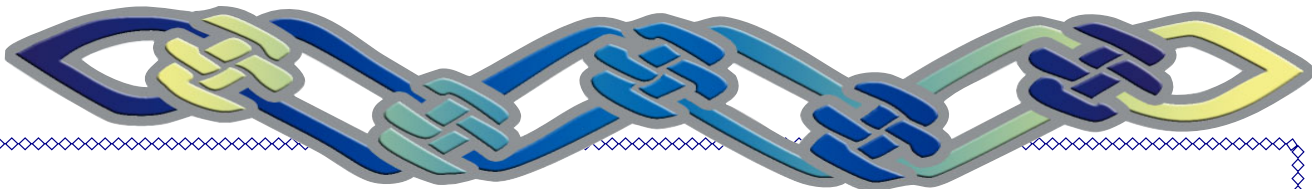
The woman Sula found on the lake that morning never returned to shore, but her boat did. The gang carved new decoration into it, and stained its wood to cover any proof of its former owner. They then began to build two sturdy sledges for the boats, and made their way to the village Porp.

Among Sula's gang is a cleric named Otkell, who had insisted on bringing along a good portion of his library of scrolls and bound books. When news of the newcomers spread to the other villages, Sula's gang was welcomed without question.

¹ The staves' beliefs in the afterlife revolve around a Great Hall, where heroes return each day from the hunt or the battlefield to revel in their victories.

DYNAMICS OF SULA'S GANG

Sula and her four men are not well-suited for each other. Their five natures frequently clash, and it seems only fate has kept them together, or luck. Sula and Otkell are old friends and seem to have the strongest relationship in the group. In a large city on the material plane, Sula and Otkell were taking their supper in a tavern when they overheard a man telling stories of a distant land dripping with jewels and riches – a place unknown to men. A man seated to the right of them muttered, "He's telling the truth, you know – and I know how to get there." That man turned out to be Hrani, and Kylan was the storyteller. The two men were down on their luck and hoped to trick wealthier criminals into parting with their gold. Hrani and Kylan managed to convince Sula and Otkell to sign on for the quest, and in three days they left to find the portal to the fantastic world Kylan had described. Karr was Sula's one night's fling who tagged along for the adventure.



Sula and the men entered Niflheim through the fissure between Nastrond and Yggdrasil, as Hrani had an old map describing the route to the Land of Riches. Hrani and Kylan had plans to lose their two clients somewhere along the dark passage of the cave, but when the party was ambushed by giant spiders the only safe direction was straight up. All five adventurers clambored out of the frozen ground of Niflheim, unable to turn back, trapped together in a foreign, dangerous place.

THE SECRET BEACH AND THE SILVER ROOSTER

During their wanderings in the Barrens, Sula's gang came upon a remarkable artifact: *silfurhani*, the silver rooster. It seemed an opulent child's toy, crowing three times when a tiny pin in its base was turned, and then three more times when the pin was turned back. When the gang had settled in to the village Porp for a time, however, Otkell found an old scroll telling a story of a tiny strip of coastline to the south which housed a cave. This magical cave was not recognizable to anyone from the outside, but it could be found by locating a verse of runes carved on its sealed door:

*Three times in the morning the cock will crow,
By Silfurhani the mountain
will open where the dead ocean flows.
Three times in the eventide Silfurhani will cry,
And close the door of the hill,
where ebbs Hel's foul tide.*

"I am certain we possess this rooster, the Silfurhani," Sula confided in Otkell.

"I, too, believe it to be true. The villagers have no desire to seek this puzzle out – they are terrified of the sea. It is for us to uncover, and perhaps gain from. We shall ride in the morning."

The gang rode south and after a week's time found the cave with the verse of runes. Their disappointment was palpable when the bandits discovered nothing but an empty chamber, the floor covered with rats' bones and sand.

Sula stood on the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea for a while and stared out at the black wave-caps, the water tinged with the ghoulish color of the undead bodies

that tossed and tumbled upon them. The morning sun rose, casting brief, bright rays against the thick, turbid waters. Something glinted in the distance as a wave crested. Then another glint, and another sparkle.

"There is our prize," the rogue hissed. "We must fetch the boats!"

They brought their ill-gotten boats by wagon to the southern coast near Silfurhani's Cave. By open threats and spat curses, Sula convinced her men to journey onto the tainted sea. A narrow gouge in the rocky shore descended from the grass down to the sea. Lined with small, round pebbles this break in the rocks presented an excellent way to launch the boats without risking anyone standing in the water: two boats were dragged by ropes through the gouge, named 'The Coffin' by the men. One person would sit inside the boat while the other pulled. When the nose of the craft was sticking out into the water, the person on land would jump down into the boat, and help push the craft out into the sea using the oars.

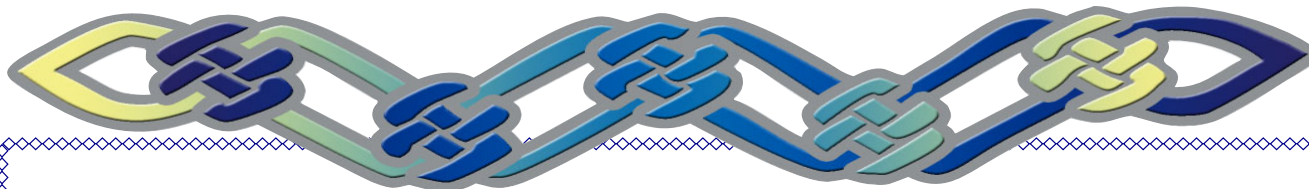
The men were sickened by the sight of so many bodies bobbing in the waves. The smell of death and putrefaction surrounded the small boats. With the aid of Otkell, however, the men were able to overcome their horror and concentrate on the task at hand: pulling the bodies up out of the water with large hooks attached to the ends of spears, looting the bodies, then dropping them back into the sea. The undead in the water were harmless, it seemed – all they could do was call out, or moan, or paw at the sides of the boat.

At the end of day's light the boats headed back to shore, using the hooks to pull the boats back through The Coffin until dry land was reached. They brought their spoils to the Silfurhani Cave, and counted the booty: forty-five gold pieces, one hundred silver, a mithral dagger, a large cabochon garnet.

Sula was ecstatic, and recounted the treasure while the men retched.

SULA'S HEART

It is difficult to notice from casual observation, but Sula's blood is as cold as ice, and she doesn't care about



any living thing but herself. Life is inconsequential to Sula. She believes that she probably won't live a long time. She also believes that the gods have given her uncanny good luck, and that most things in her life exist because she decided they should. To Sula, the rest of the world is cattle (or clay), meant to be fed upon or used as her need dictates.

A strange quirk of Sula is her enjoyment of conversation. She loves the sound of her own voice, and she loves to talk to others, not usually letting the other person get more than a few words in. She is careful not to reveal too much of herself when she rambles on – instead she recites nuggets of wisdom, parables of arrogant advice or scathing criticisms of people she's known and met.

Sula's past is a mystery to all but herself. Some have theorized she must have come from a broken home and endured rough times as a child – others fancy her a spoiled tart run away from wealthy parents to make a fine chaos of her life in the world. Regardless of which is the truth, Sula is a sociopath. She burns most bridges behind her, and kills when the moment tells her it is time to kill.

Sula (Evuuhn Riversmith); female human Rog7; CR 7; Size M (4 ft., 11 in. tall); HD 7d6; hp 23; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Attack +5 melee, or +7 ranged; SV Fort +2, Ref +7, Will +2; AL NE; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Sylvan.

Skills and feats: Bluff +6, Disable Device +6, Escape Artist +10, Forgery +11, Hide +12, Jump +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +12, Search +11, Sleight of Hand +10, Spot +11, Tumble +11; Alertness, Deft Hands, [Evasion], Far Shot, Point Blank Shot.

Possessions: type 1 bag of holding; leather armor; thieves' tools, masterwork; scimitar; sap

HRANI

This is Sula's main source of protection. Hrani is smart enough to know when he can win with force and when it's time to let the smoother-tongued gang members step in. There are few situations where his size and physical prowess are not enough to keep things civil,

however. His favorite stance is just to the left of his mistress, one hand on the hilt of his great sword, the other on the handle of his axe, feet comfortably apart, a look of quiet intention on his broad, weathered face.

Hrani has a few quirks. He can't swim. He's allergic to fish, deathly so. He is also terrified of rats. When his older brothers ran off to join the naval guard in his home port town, Hrani opted to stay home with his parents. While Niflheim unnerves him slightly, his biggest complaint so far is the food and the dearth of attractive, human women.

Hrani had been impressed with the staves, particularly for the last two reasons stated. The staves hunted deer regularly, and he found their style of cooking pleasing, as well as the potency of their wild-root liquor. The stave women were also quite striking, and could hold their own in a fight. Hrani secretly longs to end his allegiance to Sula and make his way back to a stave encampment, where at the least he could find better food, and at the most, find a wife.

Hrani's real name is Talak.

Hrani; (Talak); male human Ftr8; CR 8; Size M (6 ft., 5 in. tall); HD 8d10+32; hp 75; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10; Attack +11/+6 melee, or +8/+3 ranged; SV Fort +10, Ref +2, Will -1; AL LN; Str 16, Dex 10, Con 18, Int 7, Wis 5, Cha 11.

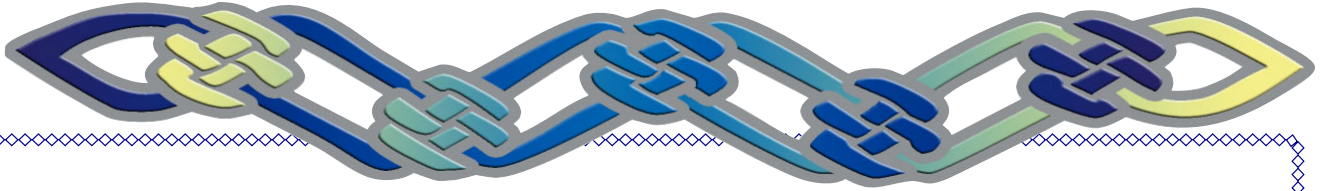
Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills and feats: Climb +9, Handle Animal +11, Hide +0, Listen -3, Move Silently +0, Ride +5, Spot -3; Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Endurance, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (flail, dire), Improved Critical (greataxe), Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (greataxe).

Possessions: greataxe; flail, dire; banded mail

KARR

Karr is a young ranger, the baby of the gang. He is also the lover of Sula. He has a terrible time keeping this fact secret, as he wishes to shout the truth of the matter from the highest mountain, but knows the minute he



does Sula will likely cut his throat. This thought always makes him smile, as dangerous women really do something for him.

Karr is reasonably good at tracking, reasonably adept at survival tasks, and knows how to throw a punch in a bar fight. He's not too bad with a sword either. Karr can't read, and he finds religion terribly dull and pointless. He is constantly at odds with Otkell, who is less concerned with Karr's lack of spirituality, and much more concerned with the young ranger's lack of self-control. Karr finds life in the Four Villages boring, and is constantly urging the group to return to the secret beach and the cave of *Silfurhani* to fill Sula's need for treasure. Karr figures eventually the thief will have her fill and consider plans for leaving Niflheim.

Karr's real name is Werrin Dapplefax.

Karr; (Werrin Dapplefax); male human Rgr2: CR 2; Size M (6 ft. tall); HD 2d8; hp 14; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Attack +3 melee, or +4 ranged; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +2; AL CN; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 14.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills and feats: Climb +6, Craft (Pottery) +2, Hide +7, Knowledge (History) +2, Knowledge (Nature) +4, Listen +2, Move Silently +7, Perform (Wind Instruments) +4, Profession (Hunter) +4, Spot +2, Survival +6; Combat Reflexes, [Rapid Shot], [Track], Weapon Focus (sword, short).

Possessions: short sword; leather armor; flute

OTKELL

The spiritual leader of the group is a cleric of the God of Trickery. The only person in the world Otkell respects is Sula. He has no physical attraction for her, but he would give his life for her, and she for him. She holds the extent of his appreciation for the material world.

Otkell is a tortured individual. He is afflicted with mental illness, and has two passions burning brightly inside his seething brain at all times. One desire is to create as much misrule and unrest he can in his brief, mortal lifetime. The other passion is the collection of

literature, to a compulsive degree. During his more lucid moments, Otkell would much prefer to live in the netherworld of myth and folklore than deal with daily life at all. Nearly everything he does is to get closer to realizing his dream of building a library for himself and spending the rest of his life cloistered within it, reading. Unfortunately, Otkell is a cleric of Loki, the god of trickery. Both a whim of his younger years and a result of his mental illness, Otkell's decision to find a life in the devotion to Loki rules him, whether he wants it or not. In the middle of the night Otkell is sometimes prone to sleepwalking, or wandering madness, when he must walk for hours in the cold - dagger in hand - looking for something to kill or cutting into his own flesh. Other times he *shapechanges* and wanders the dangerous landscape of Niflheim disguised as a wolf or a fox. He often feels that Loki's daughter, the demigoddess Hel, is calling to him, and that it's only a matter of time before Loki demands Otkell pay obeisance to her.

Otkell has divined that Loki specifically wanted him to arrive in Niflheim. When Otkell learned of the Three Portents, he guessed that his god meant for him to prevent the arrival of the champion of Niflheim, and of Hel's demise¹. Sula's greed is an excellent cover for this, and has led to remarkable things for Otkell, especially the discovery of *silfurhani*.

Otkell's feelings for Sula have darkened over the years. Due to his illness and devotion to the god of chaos, Otkell would now not hesitate to kill Sula if she stood in his path, despite his high regard for her.

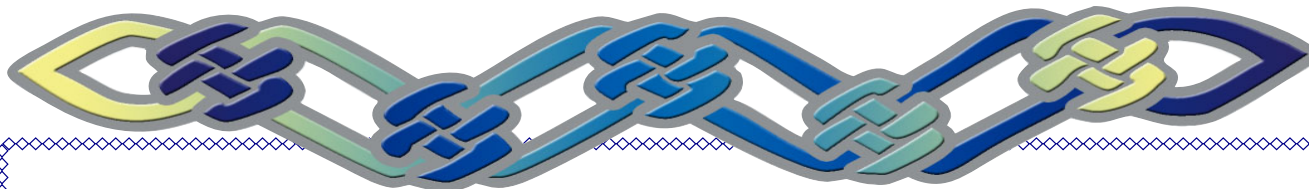
Otkell has found a kindred spirit in Kolfinna, an old woman who lives in Porp and who owns several scrolls of what she calls 'sagas'. These are long tales of heroism and conquest from her people, and Otkell finds them fascinating.

Otkell's real name is Bremedan Ipsil.

¹ see The Coming of Baldr, pg XX

Otkell; (Bremedan Ipsil); male human Clr9: CR 9; Size M (6 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 9d8+9; hp 64; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Attack +8/+3 melee, or +7/+2 ranged; SV Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +10; AL LE; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 18, Cha 15.

Languages Spoken: Common, Giant.



Skills and feats: Craft (Alchemy) +9, Craft (Bookbinding) +7, Diplomacy +6, Heal +8, Hide +1, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (Arcana) +11, Knowledge (History) +2, Listen +4, Move Silently +1, Spot +4; Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Eschew Materials, Extra Turning, Improved Turning.

Cleric Domains: Shapeshift, Trickery

Cleric Spells Per Day: 6/5+1/5+1/4+1/3+1/1+1.

Cleric Spells Commonly Selected: 0th – *Create Water, Cure Minor Wounds, Guidance, Light, Purify Food and Drink, Resistance*. 1st – *Bane, Command, Comprehend Languages, Detect Undead, Hide From Undead, Obscuring Mist, Disguise Self**. 2nd – *Calm Emotions, Cure Moderate Wounds, Enthrall, Find Traps, Status, Invisibility**. 3rd – *Bestow Curse, Locate Object, Obscure Object, Remove Disease, Polymorph**. 4th – *Cure Critical Wounds, Divination, Sending, Spell Immunity, Confusion**. 5th – *Slay Living, Meld Into Stone**.

Possessions: warhammer; two daggers; *dust of tracelessness*; *bracers of armor +1*

KYLAN

Kylan believes he deserves a better lot in life than what he has. He was adopted as a young man by his wealthy older brother after their parents succumbed to illness, and soon grew to envy his brother's good fortune. Instead of working hard to build success of his own, however, Kylan believed there was an easy way to riches for the shrewd seeker. He is always looking for the quick path to treasure, glory, and a life of privilege. Kylan loathes hard labor and will always be the first to run from a fight. His fear of Sula is the only thing that keeps him a working member of the group. He is also the only one who knows how anything about woodcrafting, being that his brother was a skilled carpenter and wheelwright.

Kylan's real name is Fern Blackhammer.

Kylan (Fern Blackhammer); male human Ftr5: CR 5; Size M (5 ft., 9 in. tall); HD 5d10+5; hp 44; Init +4 (+4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 10; Attack +6 melee, or +5 ranged; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +1; AL CN; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 13.
Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills and feats: Craft (Carpentry) +7, Handle Animal +7, Hide +0, Listen +0, Move Silently +0, Ride +7, Spot +0, Tumble +2; Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Quick Draw, Rapid Reload (crossbow, heavy), Track.

Possessions: +1 crossbow, heavy; chain mail; long sword

THE PEOPLE OF THE FOUR VILLAGES

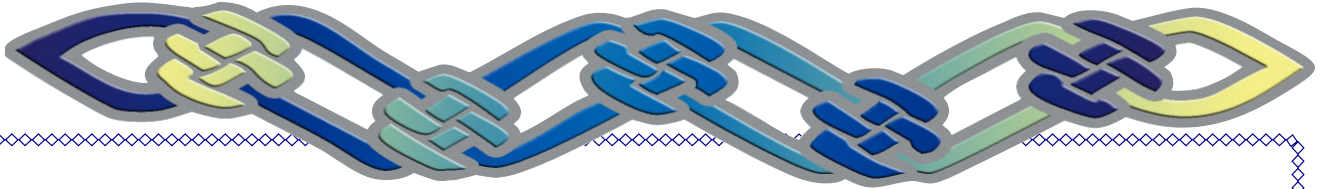
An eccentric, unlikely gathering of souls make up the population of the Four Villages of the Gray Plains. Rangers, thieves, wanderers and freelancers are the ancestors of the children of Niflheim, who had to teach themselves – or remind themselves – how to plant fields, build houses, fish, and care for herds of livestock. The feral Niflheim goat was domesticated by the first settlers, as was the hardy *kyhrin* cow.

A strong work ethic runs through the veins of the villagers, as does a dark, dry sense of humor. Nearly all of the population is literate – a strange obsession with books and stories has been passed on from generation to generation. This avid hunger for books is an important key in winning the cooperation and trust of the Four Villagers, and any stranger bringing new maps or scrolls into town will likely have folks eating from their hand.

VILLAGERS OF MIOBORG

This is the largest village, and the oldest. A majority of halflings and gnomes live here, although it's not that rare anymore to find human bumping his head on low ceilings and door frames. The residents are quick to point out that once there were plenty of humans in Mioborg, but many of them were killed years ago in a raid on their village by the necromancer Loftur¹. The necromancer hasn't bothered the villagers since, but that fact has done little to decrease Mioborg's rampant paranoia.

Mioborg consists of twenty eight sodhouses, three barns, two common houses, an inn, a winery, a smithy, a tanner, a tinker, a constable, and a wizard's tower.



Excerpt from Niflheim - The Land of Fire and Ice

LOFTUR THE NECROMANCER

This scarlet-clad man rises tall before the bent silhouettes of his undead consorts, the ring in his nose and his metal hand glowing with a mysterious eldritch light. Many things are said about Loftur but little is known about him. It is generally agreed, however, that he has a plan. A mission. His dealings in Helka volcano have become the focus of rumor across the land, and his henchmen have inspired fear in those who wander near Helka, where he is referred to as "the Bull." Loftur himself isn't too enigmatic. He is a tall dark man dressed in the most violent shades of red. His seemingly permanent grin is lined with gold teeth, betraying Loftur's most displayed passion, vainglorious body modification. Evidenced by his adamantite hand and ruby nose ring (hence his nickname "the Bull"), Loftur has a penchant for replacing natural parts of the body with artificial ones, preferably fashioned from rare or magically enhanced materials. His hand, for example, is effectively a wand of magic missile, and his nose ring is a ring of protection. But his passion isn't limited to himself. The modifications are also prominent in his other work, namely the tinkering with the life-force of others. Loftur has made a reputation for himself with his manipulation of magic for somewhat sinister purposes; the storm of swords often brings Loftur's henchmen out with their wagons to collect the dead before they're washed out to the sea. Helka, being an active volcano, occasionally covers the area in ash and lava, leaving the petrified denizens of the region available for Loftur's experiments, though he can just as easily find victims on the plains of Niflheim.

Loftur spares no effort when modifying corpses, replacing body parts with other items or simply beautifying them with rare materials.

Speculations run wild on the subject of the Bull's lair in Helka. No one actually knows what Loftur has created his army of minions for, so they do the next best thing: they make things up. Villagers suggest that Loftur is surely in the service of Hel; wandering thieves and huntsmen whisper of the arrogant necromancer's plot to overtake the undead goddess and rule the gray demiplane himself. Still others suggest that his

interests might be aimed towards the rich mineral deposits in the area, using undead as laborers because Helka's volcanic activity makes conventional mining too risky. And some suggest he is searching for something, seeking out some ancient artifact buried below the volcano or clearing out the halls of some great subterranean construction that was overrun with magma. All is speculation. No living thing knows Loftur personally, and it seems he intends to keep it that way.

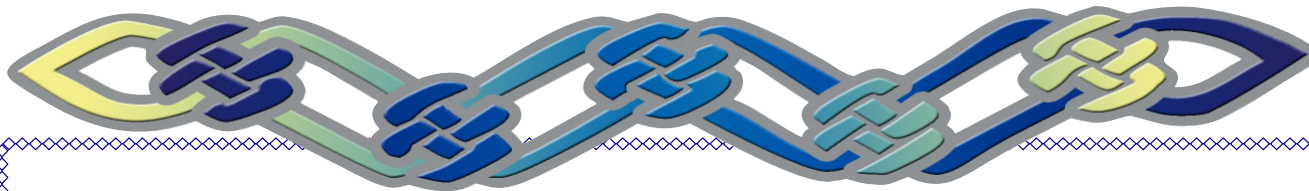
LOFTUR: Male human necromancer 10; CR 10; Medium humanoid; HD 10d4; hp 25; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13, touch 13, fl at-footed 12; BAB +5; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6-1, quarterstaff); Full Atk +4 melee (1d6-1, quarterstaff) or +6 ranged (1d8, light crossbow bolt); SA spells; SQ summon familiar (Loftur currently has no familiar); AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +9; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +13, Craft (sculpting) +16, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +16, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +16, Knowledge (the planes) +16, Spellcraft +16; Combat Casting, Iron Will^B, Spells prepared: 0th- detect magic (2), light (3); 1st- alarm, mage armor, magic missile (3), cause fear; 2nd- arcane lock, protection from arrows, summon swarm (2), blindness, command undead; 3rd- dispel magic, explosive runes, lightning bolt (2), ray of exhaustion; 4th- stonewood, black tentacles, fire shield, contagion; 5th- wall of force, symbol of pain, waves of fatigue

Spellbook: 0th- all except enchantment and illusion; 1st- alarm, cause fear, enlarge person, mage armor, magic missile; 2nd- arcane lock, protection from arrows, summon swarm, blindness, command undead; 3rd- dispel magic, explosive runes, lightning bolt, ray of exhaustion; 4th- stonewood, black tentacles, fire shield, contagion; 5th- wall of force, symbol of pain, waves of fatigue Possessions: wand of magic missile (Caster lvl 9th), ring of protection +2, clear spindle ioun stone, 4625 gp.

Spell Mastery, Improved Counterspell, Craft Wand^B, Craft Wondrous Item, Extend Spell^B, Scribe Scroll^B

Spells: Loftur is a necromancer, the schools of enchantment and illusion are prohibited to him.



HAKAN

The innkeeper of The House of the White Bull has a secret to keep. Hakan's only child, Hanna, fell in love with a stave and ran away to marry him. Hakan supported Hanna's choice but knew the other villagers would never trust him if he told the truth of Hanna's disappearance, so Hakan made up a tragic tale of his daughter dying at the hands of Ride-By-Nights, one summer evening as she walked home from the pastures.

It pains Hakan to pretend his daughter is dead, but on holidays he rides out beyond the pastures and fields of the villages, out into the Barrens where the stave tribes make their camps, and spends time with Hanna and her husband. Hakan has a new grandson, Haraldur, whom Hakan adores and spoils when he can.

During his last visit with his daughter, Hakan learned that five strangers had camped for over a month with the stave clan: a human woman and four human men. Hakan believed these five were Sula and her gang, and became immediately anxious that the five newcomers would reveal his secret to the other villagers. Hakan behaves nervously around Sula and her gang, treating them with the utmost courtesy and care. It would be very difficult to make Hakan reveal what he knows.

Hakan Grettirson; male human Com6; CR 5; Size M (5 ft., 10 in. tall); HD 6d4; hp 19; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10; Attack +5 melee, or +3 ranged; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +4; AL NG; Str 14, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 11.

Languages Spoken: Common, Halfling.

Skills and feats: Craft (Bowmaking) +4, Craft (Carpentry) +4, Craft (Woodworking) +7, Hide +0, Listen +0, Move Silently +0, Ride +10, Spot +7, Swim +10; Iron Will, Skill Focus (Ride), Toughness, Toughness.

Possessions: long bow; quiver of arrows

KOLLI

This is one of the few clerics in the Four Villages. Like the other three clerics, Kolli keeps his faith and practice as private as he can, for fear of reprisal from Hel and her minions. Kolli has not built a temple for his goddess,

but he will assist the faithful with their prayers in his home. He will also perform acts of healing for the deathly injured. Like other clerics in Niflheim, Kolli has full access to the powers of his goddess, but this troubles him to no end and he believes it is only a ploy by the goddess Hel to seduce and poison him.

Kolli is a patient, if often melancholy man, who prays for the cleansing of Niflheim and a better life for his fellow villagers.

Kolli vehemently dislikes Kolfinna, the elderly sorceress of Porp, and will avoid bumping into her at all costs. In his own words, *"She dabbles in the dark crafts of this dark land, and her very clothes reek of the grave, in which she is not long for taking a permanent rest. I only pray that she can swim."*

Kolli knows about the Three Portents (see page 44), and that Kolfinna is looking for the ancient scroll that details them. He has divined that Kolfinna delivered two mimics who work for her to Frederika the Tinker's workshop, in hopes that they will find the scroll and protect it until Kolfinna can make her way down to Frederika's basement store rooms and steal the scroll for herself.

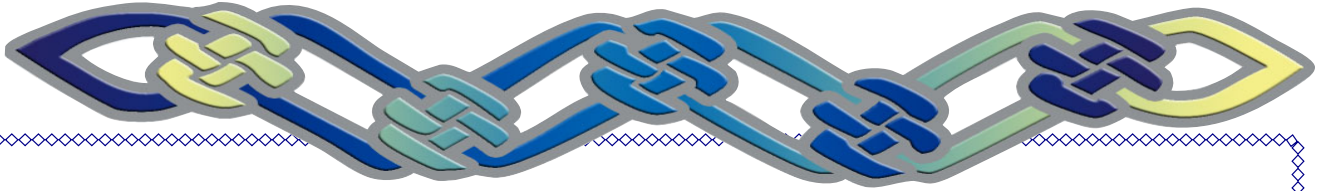
Kolli also knows that Otkell is a cleric of Loki, the God of Trickery, even though Otkell doesn't make this common knowledge.

Anyone trying to get Kolli to reveal these things must roll make both a Charisma check of 17 and a Gather Information check of 17. Kolli is terrified of Hel and of Kolfinna, and believes that anyone trying to meddle in the affairs of the demi-goddess of undeath will certainly suffer an unpleasant demise.

Kolli Galtason; male human Clr4; CR 4; Size M (5 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 4d8+8; hp 30; Init -1 (-1 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 9 (-1 Dex); Attack +4 melee, or +2 ranged; SV Fort +6, Ref +0, Will +6; AL LG; Str 13, Dex 9, Con 14, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 13.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills and feats: Craft (Bowmaking) +5, Hide -1, Knowledge (Religion) +5, Listen +2, Move Silently -1,



Spot +2; Extend Spell, Extra Turning, Improved Turning.
 Cleric Domains: Healing, Magic.
 Cleric Spells Per Day: 5/4+1/3+1.
 Cleric Spells Commonly Selected: 0th – *Create Water, Cure Minor Wounds, Guidance, Light, Mending*. 1st – *Bless, Bless Water, Detect Undead, Endure Elements, Cure Light Wounds**. 2nd – *Consecrate, Cure Moderate Wounds, Gentle Repose, Identify**.

Possessions: long bow, composite; two quivers of arrows; *bracers of armor* +1

FREDERIKA

This halfling tinker runs a large shop on the eastern edge of town. The building itself is an oddity, built into the small outcropping of rock that stands above and behind it. Spiral stone stairs lead up from a second floor balcony to the top of the rock, where a variety of inventions stand fixed to heavy iron bases. These are Frederika's 'world-looking tools', and she uses them to chart the patterns of the night sky and weather conditions.

Frederika can make almost anything if she has the right materials. She often coaxes the villagers to go on expeditions to the Kogur forest or the distant mountains for wood, ore, and gemstones.

One of the entrances to the coal mine of the Four Villages lies beneath Frederika's shop. Boxes and barrels of coal line the corridors of the small catacombs beneath the shop, as well as storerooms of strange, often magical items that villagers and travelers have brought to Frederika over the years. Even though her close friend, Svana, is a wizard, Frederika doesn't have a particular fondness for magic. She also has a terrible time discarding anything she thinks might come in handy. Procrastination and compulsion has led to one of the largest collections of items both mundane and magical in Niflheim.

Frederika Sigrunssdottir; female halfling Exp7: CR 6; Size S (2 ft., 9 in. tall); HD 7d6-7; hp 25; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 13 (+2 Dex, +1 Size); Attack +4 melee, or +8 ranged; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +6; AL LG; Str 7, Dex 15, Con 9, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Languages Spoken: Common, Elven, Gnome, Halfling, Orc.
 Skills and feats: Bluff +4.5, Climb +0, Craft (Carpentry) +9, Craft (Metalworking) +5, Decipher Script +9, Disable Device +9, Hide +6, Jump +0, Knowledge (Niflheim) +4, Listen +4, Move Silently +4, Search +9, Speak Language +3, Spot +2; Alertness, Skill Focus (Craft (Metalworking)).

Possessions: short bow; quiver of arrows; hammer, masterwork

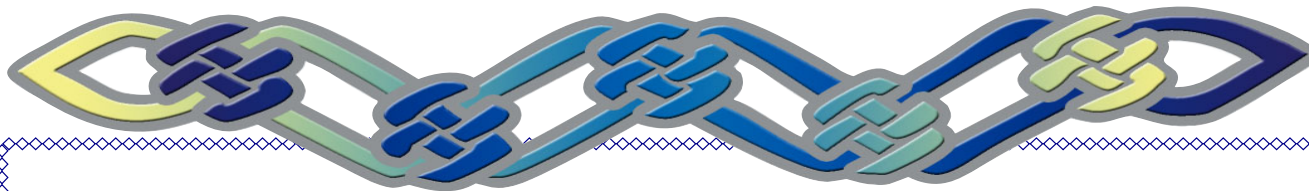
MAR THE HALF-OGRE

Mar has no surname – no one wants to consider Mar's conception, and 'the Half-Ogre' serves its purpose just fine, according to the other villagers.

Porp's only wizard, a half-elf named Svana, was traveling in the Kogur forest. The sun was setting quickly in the afternoon sky and Svana was giving thought to leaving the road in search of a dry place to camp. As she picked her way through the deepening gloom she saw one large boot protruding from a large stand of saplings and rust-colored brush. Further investigation unveiled a seriously injured half-ogre, unconscious. The half-ogre was close to death, having suffered an attack from some wild beast it seemed, and was missing his right arm at the shoulder, and his left leg at the knee.

Mar has no real memory of his past before being found in Niflheim. What he does remember is fragmentary at best. He was part of a band of mercenaries who had been hired to search for a magical treasure. What that treasure was he could not tell; the others always thought him stupid, and so they never let him in on the details of the jobs they did. All he knows is that they were looking for a metal chicken when they ended up in the Gray Lands of Niflheim.

They were almost immediately attacked by trolls riding on giant wolves. The Ride-by-Nights, as he would later learn they were called, destroyed his comrades in fairly short order. Mar lost his right arm early in the fight to the slaving jaws of one of the Fangs of Hel, the gigantic wolves. As the other mercenaries were butchered, Mar fled; he saw no reason to sell his life for those people any longer.



He was losing blood at a prodigious rate, and eventually he lost consciousness near a snow bank. Unfortunately a winter toad female and her entourage lay in wait in the snow, and they began laying eggs in a wide wound on his leg. As Mar dropped further towards death, the young toads began their work of eating the flesh of his leg.

When he was finally found by Svana, he had been laying in the snow for almost a week. The bleeding in what was left of his arm had stopped, and his left leg had been devoured by the young toads before they left. Somehow, the wizard managed to prevent his death and transport to safety.

Svana then sent for Frederika, who arrived a day later with a wagon loaded with odd metal pieces, tanks, tools, gears and wooden limbs. For four days and four nights the women toiled and fussed over Mar, until at last they realized their vision. When Mar finally awakened, he found that he was whole again, to a degree. The wizard and the halfling tinker Frederika, working together, had attached mechanical limbs to his body. Powered by a combination of magic and steam, the limbs gave him back his arm and mobility, and he was more grateful than anyone could know.

Mar has grown very fond of the two women who saved his life, and for some reason he feels shame at what he used to do in his previous life. In the time before coming to Niflheim, had he found someone in the same condition he had been in, he would have simply rooted through his pockets before leaving him to the wolves. Svana and Frederika have shown him a better way to live.

Frederika is a particular favorite companion. She often comes to check the functioning of his limbs, repair any wear and tear, and to help him swap out sets of tools. He will do anything to protect Frederika, even breaking his own vow of non-violence should his friend's safety require it. Frederika prescribed hard work and apprenticeship in order to help Mar get used to his new artificial limbs, and so the half-ogre became Porp's smithy's assistant.

When smithy Ongilsson passed away from old age, Mar

inherited the man's business. A simple soul, Mar may not be the best conversationalist, but he's excellent with a hammer and a pair of tongs. His steam-powered arm has a variety of tools at the end of it. A sturdy water tank, leg-shaped and magically enhanced to heat the water within while keeping the outer metal cool to the touch, powers the gadgets and mechanisms of Mar's arm.

Mar: male half-ogre Brn 3/ Exp 4; CR 8; Large Giant [mechanized]; HD 3d12+13 plus 4d6+16; hp 74; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 50 ft.; AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 13 (+1 Dex, -1 size, +4 Natural); BAB +6; Grp +14; Atk +12 melee (1d10/x3, cold iron maul) (+6 BAB, +7 Str, -1 size); Full Atk: +12/+7 melee (1d10/x3, cold iron maul) (+6/+1 BAB, +7 Str, -1 size) or +12/+7 melee (1d8+7, steel fist) (+6/+1 BAB, +7 Str, -1 size); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA steel fist; SQ mechanized traits, darkvision 60 ft., giant blood; AL NG; SV Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +6 (Brn F+3, R+1, W+1; Exp F+1, R+1, W+4; Con +4, Dex +1, Wis +1); Str 25, Dex 12, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +2, Climb +10, Craft (weaponsmithing) +14, Craft (armorsmithing) +11, Craft (locksmithing) +6, Disable Device +6, Intimidate +9 / +16, Jump +13, Knowledge (local) +3, Knowledge (geography) +2, Listen +4, Open Lock +7, Profession (blacksmith), Survival +8; Skill focus (Intimidate) 1st, Toughness 3rd, Skill focus (weaponsmithing) 6th.

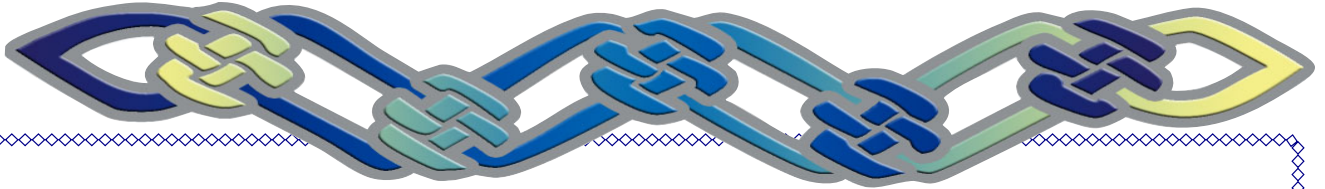
Racial Traits: Darkvision 60 ft.; Giant Blood: for any spells or magical items keyed to giants (i.e. arrow of giant slaying), half-ogres count as such

Possessions: Cold Iron maul, chain shirt +1 (hardly ever worn), blacksmithing shop and tools, 573 gp (hidden under anvil), 5,200 gp diamonds (hidden in coal heap)

MECHANIZED TEMPLATE

"Mechanized" is an acquired template that can be added to any living corporeal creature of humanoid shape that has a Constitution score of at least 18 (referred to as the base creature); attempting to bestow this template on a less hardy creature invariably results in that creature's death.

A mechanized creature uses all the base creature's



statistics and special abilities except as noted here.
Type: A mechanized creature keeps its creature type, however it gains a “mechanized” sub-type.

Armor Class: The base creature’s natural armor improves by +4

Attack: The mechanized creature can strike with its mechanical limb for 1d8 points of damage (plus Strength bonus). This attack does not provoke an attack or opportunity as the creature counts as armed.

Special Qualities: Moderate fortification; The mechanical parts of the creature allow it either shrug off particularly dangerous attacks, or to deflect them. A mechanized creature has a 75% chance to ignore the increased damage from a critical hit or from a sneak attack.

Abilities: Increase the base creature’s Str by +4

Skills: A mechanized creature gains a +4 circumstance bonus to all craft skills, as well as on all disable device, open lock, and profession (blacksmithing) checks. This is due to the nature of the integrated tools and equipment built into its mechanical frame.

Equipment: A mechanized creature always counts as having masterwork sets of thief’s tools and artisan’s tools. The bonus has not been included in the above stat block.

Challenge rating: Same as the base creature’s +1

SVANA BERADOTTIR

The only wizard in the Four Villages, Svana makes the best of where she is and the life she’s been given. Her elven grandparents came to Niflheim with a group of explorers, and then chose to stay rather than risk death by leaving. Her mother Bera married her human father, Otkell, who taught his daughter his knowledge of wizardry and helped build her tower.

Bera passed away in childbirth, giving Svana a brother who grew up to seek his fortune beyond Niflheim. Svana has no knowledge of his success – or failure

– but would savor tidings of his safe passage to the material plane.

Otkell was on a hunting trip with eight other men in the early summer. Their camp was overrun by Ride-By-Nights, and none of the hunters survived. Only a few days before this happened, Sula’s gang met up with the hunters and camped with them for a night. Neither Sula nor her men have ever spoken word of this to anyone.

Two of the men in the hunting party – Otkell, and Kylan – share names with the members of Sula’s gang.

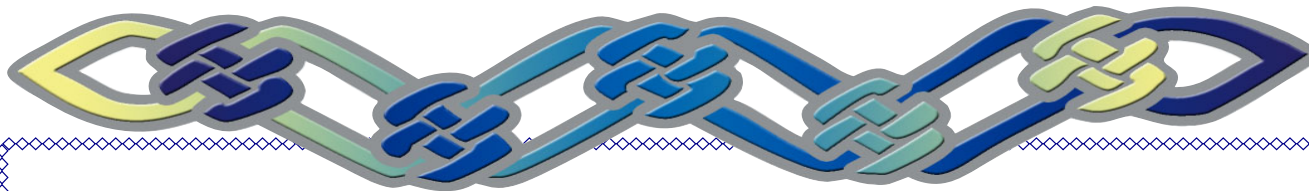
Svana Berradottir; female half-elf Wiz8: CR 8; Size M (5 ft., 8 in. tall); HD 8d4+16; hp 38; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Attack +4 melee, or +6 ranged; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +7; AL LG; Str 11, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 7.

Languages Spoken: Auran, Common, Elven, Giant.

Skills and feats: Craft (Weaponsmithing) +9, Diplomacy +0, Gather Information +0, Hide +2, Knowledge (Arcana) +14, Knowledge (Local) +13, Knowledge (Religion) +14, Knowledge (The Planes) +10, Listen +2, Move Silently +2, Search +4, Spot +2; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Empower Spell, Rapid Reload (crossbow, light), [Scribe Scroll], Spell Penetration.

Wizard Spells Known (4/5/4/4/2): 0th -- *Acid Splash, Arcane Mark, Dancing Lights, Daze, Detect Magic, Detect Poison, Disrupt Undead, Flare, Ghost Sound, Light, Mage Hand, Mending, Message, Open/Close, Prestidigitation, Ray of Frost, Read Magic, Resistance, Touch of Fatigue*. 1st -- *Alarm, Chill Touch, Detect Undead, Erase, Floating Disk, Hypnotism, Mage Armor, Shocking Grasp*. 2nd -- *Eagle’s Splendor, Hypnotic Pattern, Misdirection, Spider Climb, Web*. 3rd -- *Heroism, Keen Edge, Lightning Bolt, Sleet Storm, Slow, Tiny Hut*. 4th -- *Animate Dead, Greater Invisibility, Solid Fog*.

Possessions: crossbow, light; 86 crossbow bolts; *eyes of the eagle*; chain shirt



VILLAGERS OF PORP

This village consists of ten sodhouses, a barn, a common house, and a granary.

FRIDRIK

This dwarf makes his living by doing the laundry of most of the villagers of Porp. He has several wash bins in the rear of his sod house, as well drying racks which no longer hold fish, but clothes. He's also a very capable tailor.

Fridrik has five extra bedrooms which he lets to strangers for a reasonable price. Up before dawn, he cooks a decent breakfast but is a terrible bore in the evening, as he's usually asleep an hour after dark.

Fridrik Olason; male dwarf Com3: CR 2; Size M (4 ft., 3 in. tall); HD 3d4+3; hp 14; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 10; Attack +1 melee, or +1 ranged; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +1; AL LG; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 9.

Languages Spoken: Common, Dwarven.

Skills and feats: Climb +2, Craft (Tailor) +2, Craft (Pottery) +2, Craft (Beekeeping) +2, Craft (Carpentry) +7, Craft (Meadmaking) +2, Hide +0, Listen +6, Move Silently +0, Spot +0; Simple Weapon Proficiency (quarterstaff), Skill Focus (Craft (Tailor)).

Possessions: quarterstaff

KOLFINNA

Known by many as *the galdrakona*, she is said to be the oldest sorceress in the land of Niflheim. She lives in a small sod-covered home beside a gentle hill in the northernmost part of Porp. A small, twisted birch tree clings to the top of the hill, and upon its branches perches an unkindness of ravens.

Kolfinna was born and raised in a tribe of the staves. Never popular among her people, Kolfinna's heart was dark, and her ways often selfish. When Kolfinna reached adulthood she desired to enter training to be a Meistari – or High stave. Arndis, Gudrun's mother - was chosen, but Kolfinna was not, and the sorceress broke

from the tribe to make her own way in the world. She lived for many years in the wilds of the Barrens, and in the strange Kogur forest. Eventually she settled in Porp and has lived there since.

Kolfinna has had many entanglements throughout her colorful life. Among them was the ranger Kari, although he'd prefer it be kept a secret. Kolfinna also studied with the Norns. When they offered her a chance at longer life, she was tempted, but respectfully declined and quickly left the comfort of their hearth.

Kolfinna has a cursory knowledge of the magic of runes, and she is a weird, eccentric woman and may demand gifts, blood, or intimate favors before aiding anyone – stranger or friend.

Kolfinna: female human Stave (horse) 1st level / Sorcerer 12th level; CR 13; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8-1 plus 12d4-12; hp 29; Init -2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 8, touch 8, flat-footed 8; BAB +6/+1; Grp +4; Atk +2 melee (1d6-2, unarmed strike) or +2 melee (1d4-2, dagger); Full Atk: +4/-1 melee (1d6-2, unarmed strike) or +4/-1 melee (1d4-2, dagger) or +2/-3/+2 (1d6-2, unarmed strike) or +4/-1 ranged (1d4, dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA spells; SQ Rune magic, Runefocus; AL NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +15; Str 7, Dex 7, Con 9, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 19.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +9, Bluff K +14, Diplomacy +10, Craft (alchemy) +10, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Listen +5, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +10, Spot +5; Combat Casting, Craft Construct, Eschew Materials, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Maximize Spell, [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Spells per Day: 6/7/7/7/7/5/3

Spells Known: 0-daze, detect magic, disrupt undead, mage hand, mending, open/close, prestidigitation, read magic, touch of fatigue.

1st – charm person, hypnotism, identify, ray of enfeeblement, unseen servant.

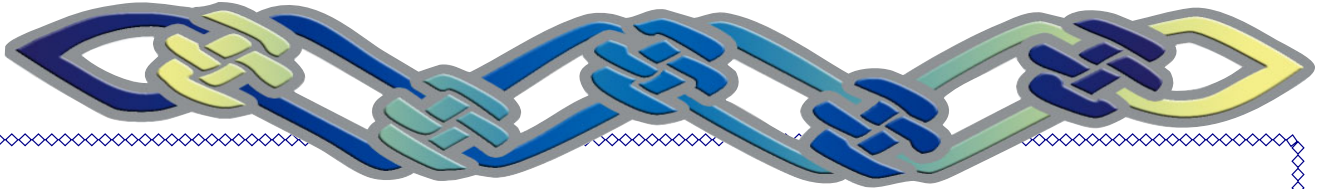
2nd – blindness/deafness, hideous laughter, resist energy, touch of idiocy, whispering wind.

3rd – clairaudience/clairvoyance, dispel magic, halt undead, magic circle against law.

4th – greater invisibility, lesser geas, remove curse.

5th – baleful polymorph, overland flight.

6th – undeath to death.



Possessions: 6 daggers hidden about her person, innumerable alchemical items, *broom of flying*, *type II bag of holding*, 2 fire elemental gems, 2,000 gp in coins, 6,000 gp in assorted valuables (stolen by her tilberi golem)

EYDIS

Hey, ho there, hi, hello. You tell what your looking for and I'll see if I've got it – got victuals: lamb, stew, mutton, salmon, halibut, beef hash, beet mash, pickled onions, root paste, fish paste, beef paste, shoe paste to keep your boots together, shoe strings, boot straps, bow straps, bow strings, arrows, bolts, an axe. . . . somewhere, think my boy's got it, chickens, ducklings, a pigeon, a crow, herbs, sweets, garments, woolens, socks, scarves, a sweater, a swine, and a spool of good thread.

Eydis loves being useful and helpful. She asks a fair price for everything she's got tucked in her larders and store rooms, and indeed, she has just about everything. Every third Freyr's Day she has a wealth of spell components, brought to her by Kari the ranger.

Eydis Haldisdottir; female halfling Com10; CR 9; Size S (3 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 10d4; hp 23; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 12 (+1 Dex, +1 Size); Attack +6 melee, or +7 ranged; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +4; AL LG; Str 11, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10.

Languages Spoken: Common, Halfling.

Skills and feats: Climb +2, Craft (Leatherworking) +11, Craft (Pottery) +9, Craft (Sculpting) +10, Hide +5, Jump +2, Listen +2, Move Silently +3, Spot +0; Run, Skill Focus (Craft (Pottery)), Skill Focus (Craft (Sculpting)), Skill Focus (Craft (Leatherworking)).

THE BOAT FIELDS

A good deal of the Four Villages' population fishes, but due to the increasing numbers of thieves in the area surrounding the Blue Lake people have taken to leaving their boats just outside of Porp, the village closest to the lake. Most boats are small rowboats meant to hold one or two people, and are strapped to flatbed wagons and pulled by a pony or horse. The larger skiffs are carried by sledges and pulled by teams of horses.

VILLAGERS OF PETTBYLI

This village has the distinction of having the cemetery located next to it. In the plane of undeath, it is often challenging to keep one's relatives buried properly - but the caretaker, Halldor, manages it somehow.

In Pettbyli there are twelve sodhouses, one common house, a granary, three barns and a stable, a glazier, a tinker, a wheelwright, a smithy, and an herbalist. This village is mostly human, with a few elves, half-elves and dwarves adding to the ranks.

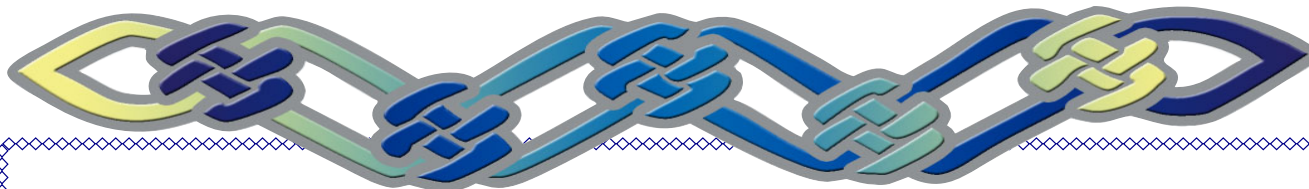
HALLDOR

I remember the smell of rain, as it was, when I was home. That was a fine smell, rich and green, and the trees would look to it. The trees would glow, in anticipation of the rain. Me and my woman would dance in the summer rain, and revel in the beauty of our grove. Those days are gone like the color's gone from the air here and the hue's gone from every, damned, living thing.

I can still smell it, just before the rain's about to come. But here it's putrid, black and foul. The rain's just as clear, just as wet, as it was so long ago – but it stinks like the grave and it's the grave that it hungers for. I hold it back. Been doing so for years, and years. What will they do when I'm gone?

Halldor isn't a particularly cheerful man, but he has an important job. He controls the weather – the Storm of Swords – which erupts whenever a new body is planted in his burial grounds. For three days and three nights Halldor sits or stands in a circle of dwarf yew trees in the middle of the cemetery and keeps the rain from falling anywhere within a half mile radius of his grove. He'll be the first to mention the irony of protecting bodies when once he protected trees – and it's best not to broach the subject with him.

Halldor came to Niflheim as a young man, after his wife was killed by soldiers. On the material plane, with nothing to lose but his own life, he volunteered to go on an expedition in the caves overlooking the nearest town. He was looking for a way to be free of his pain without having to take a blade to his own throat. Not wise in the ways of the world, Halldor thought it would



only be a matter of time before fate took him the way it had taken his wife.

The expedition found itself in Niflheim, and not long after, the druid realized death was something to be avoided at any cost. Halldor managed to survive the many raids on his group by the monsters, beasts and brigands of the Barrens, and made his way to the Four Villages. There he was accepted by the villagers of Pettbyli and given room and board, in exchange for his work in the fields.

One winter's day, a Pettbyli woman delivered a stillborn baby. Halldor helped her husband fashion a tiny coffin and dig a small grave for the infant. The druid noticed the husband watching the skies with growing anxiety, and when he asked what the man was watching for, the husband whispered, '*storm of swords.*' He would not explain further.

Three days later the rain came, rain like Halldor had not seen in his home on the material plane. Fat, cold drops of rain broke the ground and turned the hard soil into mud, breaking clots of sod off of roofs, sending cows and goats running for shelter. The poor woman who'd lost her child was inconsolable, wailing in the night that her baby should not be taken for the Greedy Queen. At last, the husband knocked on Halldor's door.

"They say you are a wizard," he said, shivering with cold by the light of Halldor's hearth.

"They'd be mistaken. I'm a master of the woods – a man of the green."

"Can you stop this storm?" asked the man.

"Why would I? Miserable as it is, it is part of the cycle of things."

The husband then quickly explained why this storm was different – that it was a ploy of Hel to rob the ground of fresh bodies for her house of undeath, and that their tiny daughter would be carried to the Sea of Death, then to the shores of Nastrond, then taken to Hel's stronghold. Halldor rushed outside, pelting up the hill even as he began chanting the words to control the storm...

Ever since that night he has kept the dead of the Four Villages buried. It is a grim purpose, but it sustains him nonetheless.

Halldor; male human Drd12: CR 12; Size M (6 ft., 5 in. tall); HD 12d8+12; hp 80; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+3 Dex); Attack +12/+7 melee, or +12/+7 ranged; SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +11; AL NG; Str 16, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 17, Cha 12.

Languages Spoken: Common, Druidic, Elven, Gnome.

Skills and feats: Concentration +16, Craft (Bowmaking) +11, Craft (Weaponsmithing) +12, Diplomacy +15, Handle Animal +16, Hide +3, Knowledge (Nature) +14, Listen +18, Move Silently +3, Ride +18, Spot +3; Endurance, Lightning Reflexes, Maximize Spell, Natural Spell, Silent Spell, Spell Penetration.
+ 2 long bow, composite; three quivers of arrows; *cloak of resistance*; *bracers of archery*, lesser
Druid Spells Per Day: 6/6/5/5/3/3/2.

OTKATLA

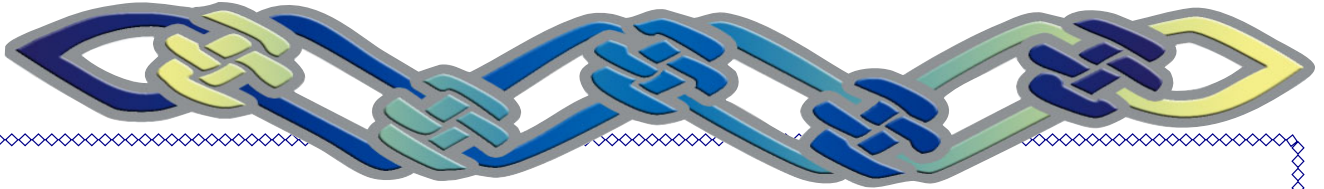
Otkatla has a way with horses. They are at ease in her presence and thrive in her care. Unfortunately, Otkatla is not as successful with men, particularly the man she most desires: Karr, of Sula's tribe.

Otkatla sold Karr and Kylan horses when they first arrived in the Four Villages, and the young woman has been smitten ever since. While not a stunning beauty, Otkatla is handsome in a healthy sort of way, and she's a great conversationalist, provided the topic involves horses, or Karr.

Otkatla Heiorsdottir; female human Com3: CR 2; Size M (5 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 3d4+3; hp 11; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+3 Dex); Attack +5 melee, or +4 ranged; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +3; AL LG; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 9.

Languages Spoken: Common.

Skills and feats: Hide +3, Handle Animal +10, Listen +2, Move Silently +3, Spot +8, Swim +Ride; Power Attack, Skill Focus (Handle Animal), Track.



HORSES OF NIFLHEIM

Otkatla's family is known for their successful husbandry of horses and ponies. They've been able to breed their own horses with native, wild Niflheim horses – which are typically stockier, shaggier, and more muscular than any of the horses that were brought through from the material plane.

While the resultant hybrid Niflheim horse remains a creature of large size, it has a thicker, shaggy coat, and has darkvision up to 60 ft.

FINNA

Finna is the wheelwright of Pettbyli. Her large workshop has 20 ft. high vaulted, sod-covered ceilings and a forge alongside it. Finna was born of a half-orc father and human mother, and at the age of five was orphaned at the outskirts of the Gray Plains. What became of her parents, no one knows – but the people of Pettbyli took her in and raised her as one of their own.

In addition to common wooden wheels, Finna makes wheels from iron and steel – if she's got the materials on hand – which prove to be highly useful navigating the bumpy land and stony ground of Niflheim's interior.

Finna; female half-orc Exp5: CR 4; Size M (5 ft., 3 in. tall); HD 5d6; hp 23; Init +4 (+4 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+4 Dex); Attack +6 melee, or +7 ranged; SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +6; AL LN; Str 17, Dex 18, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 5.

Languages Spoken: Common, halfling, gnome.

Skills and feats: Appraise +9, Climb +11, Craft (Blacksmithing) +8, Craft (Trapmaking) +9, Disable Device +9, Disguise -2, Hide +4, Profession (Wheelwright) +2, Knowledge (Geography) +8, Listen +2, Move Silently +4, Sleight of Hand +11, Spot +2; Exotic Weapon Proficiency (chain, spiked), Weapon Focus (dagger).

Possessions: chain, spiked; two daggers

VILLAGERS OF STORBAER

This village is comprised of seven large dwarven families. They are close-knit, hard-working, and not particularly fond of strangers - though their brewery and tavern is a favorite destination of the neighboring villages. Rumor has it that many of Storbaer men go on mining expeditions to the distant mountains. To see the well-crafted wooden homes, fine clothing of the wives and children, and jeweled rings on chubby fingers, one might think this rumor is true.

In Storbaer there are twelve wooden houses, two wells, a tavern, several workshops, five smithies, a school, a granary, a brewery, a smokehouse, a barn, and a stable.

OLI

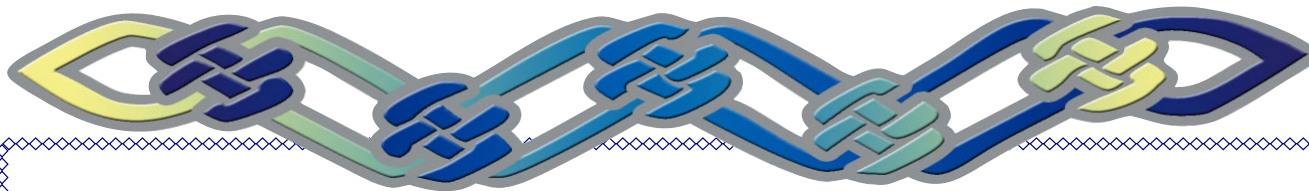
This dwarven prospector rarely stays at his home for longer than a month. His wife will tell you Oli has been stricken by a bad case of wanderlust, and he constantly travels to the mountains in the east in search of raw gems and ore.

In the summer, Oli's youngest cousin, Karr, had gone on an expedition to the Helga volcano. He never returned. Oli does not know that on the way to the mountains Karr crossed paths with Sula and Kylan, who helped him free his wayward pony from a briar thicket.

Oli Bergerson; male dwarf Exp8: CR 7; Size M (4 ft., 1 in. tall); HD 8d6+24; hp 56; Init +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft.; AC 13 (+3 Dex); Attack +6/+1 melee, or +9/+4 ranged; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +9; AL LG; Str 11, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 16, Cha 11.

Languages Spoken: Common, Dwarven, Gnome, Orc, Terran.

Skills and feats: Craft (Leatherworking) +8, Craft (Armorsmithing) +5, Craft (Blacksmithing) +10.5, Craft (Painting) +12, Craft (Sculpting) +7, Craft (Stonemasonry) +5, Craft (Trapmaking) +5, Craft (Weaponsmithing) +5, Heal +14, Hide +3, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (Geography) +5, Listen +3, Move Silently +6, Knowledge (Gemology) +12, Profession (Miner) +14, Spot +3, Survival +13, Use Rope +12; Improved Initiative, Run, Skill Focus (Survival).



KOGUR FOREST

KARI

Sitting in the crown of a birch tree that's more long than it is tall, a man is smoking a pipe, watching your progress through the underbrush with interest. Making a wide, purposeful circle around you is a sleek dire wolf, its long paws hitting the ground in quick, quiet rhythm. The sun is low as it burns the tops of the stunted Kogar forest, bathing everything in a fiery glow and casting long, twisted shadows over the pale grass and orange lichen.

'If you put your weapons down I can make your passage pleasant. I can even offer you a warm meal. Some decent water, and better-than-decent meade. You don't have to take my offer. You can keep going the way you were. But I wouldn't advise it. For instance – the direction you were headed? Straight into a den of large spiders. Wouldn't be very pleasant. Always looking for a handout, those brutes. Or a hand-off, as it were.'

Kari is a fourth generation ranger of Niflheim – his great-grandparents traveled to the plane of undeath when they were ambushed by orcs, and sought shelter in the nearby caves. Unable to leave the caves, the couple pushed deeper into the winding passageways until they heard the sound of voices ahead. They walked on until they saw light shining down from a large grate above their heads. Pulling themselves up from between the exceptionally wide bars of the grate, they found themselves in the basement of The Mountain King, a wealthy giant living in the eastern mountains of Niflheim. They escaped from his fortress and made their way to the Kogur Forest, settling there.

Kari is not quick to judge anyone, as the tradition of tolerance was passed on to him by his parents and grandparents. While he has friends in the Four Villages, he prefers the freedom and quiet of the forest, and also has alliances among the giants and fey that dwell in the woods. Kari is an honorary member of the staves, and will stand with them in battle if they call. If anyone is interested in the whereabouts of the staves, Kari can help them find the nearest tribe, provided he trusts the seeker's intentions.

Kari still mourns the loss of his good friend, Hrani, who the ranger found with his throat slit during the summer. Because of his friend's murder, Kari has stayed away from the Four Villages so that he might regain his composure and inner strength before dealing with other people again. As such, he is not the best company at the moment and is more suspicious than is usually his wont. He is also prone to bouts of rage.

Kari Korisson; male human Rgr7: CR 7; Size M (6 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 7d8+7; hp 35; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Attack +8/+3 melee, or +9/+4 ranged; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +7; AL NG; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 5.

Languages Spoken: Common, Giant.

Skills and feats: Bluff +0.5, Concentration +8, Craft (Alchemy) +7, Craft (Bowmaking) +4, Hide +9, Jump +11, Knowledge (Nature) +3, Listen +8, Move Silently +11, Ride +12, Search +7, Spot +3, Survival +11; [Evasion], [Improved Two Weapon Fighting], Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, [Track], [Two Weapon Fighting], Weapon Finesse, Widen Spell.

Ranger Spells Per Day: 2.

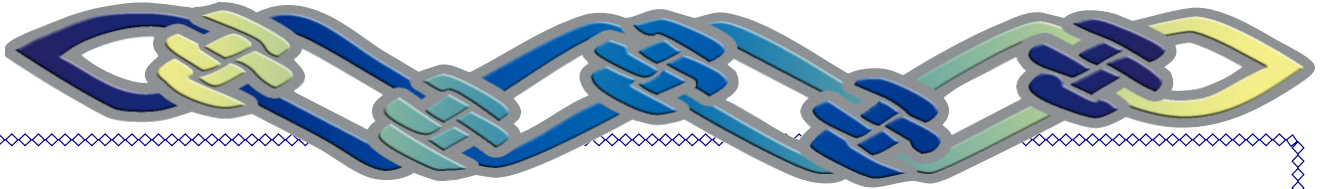
Possessions: two falchions; two daggers; *dust of tracelessness*; leather armor; chain shirt

THE BARRENS

VARICK

My spirit is spread like the gray sky over the land, and it moves like the wind across the mountains, sending snow skidding from the heights, sending birds seeking for shelter, causing giants to hulk their shoulders against it. I stretch my limbs with the sun's long shadows, and I, too, become long, reaching over the rocky land, reaching the cold sky above, reaching up to grasp the roots of the tree of the world, that I may pull myself up, and feel the sun of the gods upon my face again.

Long have we dwelt in this place, and watched it darken with Hel's purpose, and watched it fade from the memory



of all other gods, while the few surviving souls cling to the rocks and the grass and the land like bright lichen. Little do they know we protect them. They loathe us, as they loathe the shadows and the night, and the rain and the sea, and still we guard them. Perhaps our motives are secret, perhaps our ways are too strange for them to grasp, but it doesn't matter. The fox looks up and sees the snow fall – does it matter if he thinks it strange? The snow keeps falling, until the brown fox is white, and blanketed with the thing he doesn't understand.

Varick is the high chieftain of the staves, a group of nomadic warriors who live in the Barrens. No one knows how old Varick is, but it is rumored he was alive when Niflheim was covered with forests from shore to shore, and the dead did not poison the sea. Now Varick is a troubled man, burdened by the plight of his people. He is indeed of venerable age, though his age isn't physically obvious. Because of the beneficial practices of his meditation and training, his longevity has been improved.

Despite Varick's position of importance in his society he makes himself available to most who seek him. In truth, very few people outside of his tribe seek him at all. To the villagers, Varick is a devil, a warlord and a barbaric prince who's made pacts with Hel. To the criminals and thugs of the Barrens, Varick is a sorcerer, best to be avoided.

Varick is known for speaking plainly. He dislikes riddles. The surest way to impress him is to speak your peace and speak it quickly, because as the leader of the staves is wont to express, "Time runs out for every man."

Varick knows all about Sula and her gang. He knows how they arrived in Niflheim. He had several of his best men follow the gang and track their travels. He knows who they killed, and whose names they 'borrowed'. It is unfortunately against stave tradition to interfere in the affairs of others, unless directly asked, and while Varick believes that the purpose of his tribes is to care for the people of Niflheim, he will only prevent harm in the most dire of circumstances. Until a victim of Sula comes to Varick for aid, he will remain the only person in Niflheim aware of the full scope of Sula's treachery and heartlessness.

There is an additional, greater reason for Varick's somber demeanor. His people were not always nomads, and once made their home in a section of the great tree of Yggdrasil, caring for it and being cared for by it in an ancient, symbiotic relationship. Yggdrasil's boughs reach many planes, and the disease that petrified the section that pierces Niflheim is spreading. When Yggdrasil finally dies, every plane that it supports will collapse and die as well.

There is little Varick can do against Hel. Even if his people defeat Nidhogg, another monster of the goddess of undeath will be enslaved to take the serpent's place. In addition, any act against a creature of Hel might be cause for the goddess to exact revenge upon the innocents of Niflheim, and Varick believes this is too great an imbalance to risk.

The only chance Niflheim and the other planes have to survive are the Three Portents. If these three unique things happen, Hel will likely be defeated and Yggdrasil will begin to heal itself, thus preventing Ragnarok – the twilight of the gods and the death of the universe.

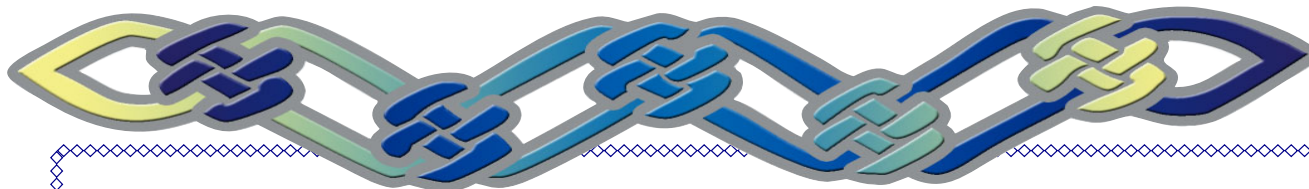
The first portent is the crowing of the silver cockerel, also known as *silfurhani*.

The second portent an eclipse that lasts for two days and two nights – also called 'The Wedding Night of Hani and Sol', the moon and the sun.

The third and final portent is a champion arriving on the shores of Niflheim. He would arrive in a great boat, and would be accompanied by his devoted wife.

Varick is unaware of *silfurhani's* existence on Niflheim, but if the artifact were brought to him, his loyalty and gratitude would be undying.

Varick: male human Stave (Wolf) 17th level; CR 17; Medium Humanoid; HD 17d8+17; hp 103; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 22, touch 11, flat-footed 21; BAB +17/+12/+7/+2; Grp +19; Atk +20 melee (1d6+1, +1/+1 quarterstaff); Full Atk: +21/+16/+11/+5 melee (1d6+1, +1/+1 quarterstaff) or +19/+14/+9/+4/+19/+14/+9 (1d6+1/1d6+1, +1/+1 quarterstaff) or +18/+13/+8/+3 ranged (1d4, dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA none; SQ Animal Form, RuneMagic; AL LN; SV Fort +11, Ref



+11, Will +10; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 20.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +13, Concentration +21, Heal +19, Intimidate^K +15, Knowledge (geography) +15, Knowledge (nature) +17, Knowledge (the planes) +8, Knowledge (Yggdrasil) K +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Listen +17, Move Silently +17, Survival +21, Sense Motive^K +13; Alertness, Athletic, Cleave, [Endurance], Great Cleave, [Greater Two-Weapon Fighting], Iron Will, Power Attack, Runic Item, Self-Sufficient, [Track], [Two-Weapon Fighting], [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Possessions: *algiz* +5 (as headband), *bracers of armor* +6, +1/+1 quarterstaff, 2 daggers

Leadership score: 26 (Followers: 135 1st-level, 13 2nd-level, 7 3rd-level, 4 4th-level, 2 5th-level, 2 6th-level. This list comprises the bulk of the local tribe of Staves in Niflheim.)

^K – Skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

WOLF FORM

Varick: male human Stave (Wolf) 17th level; CR 17; Large Humanoid [augmented]; HD 17d8+17; hp 103; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 25, touch 10, flat-footed 21; BAB +17; Grp +20; Atk +20 melee (2d6+5, bite); Full Atk: +20 melee (2d6+5, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA none; SQ Animal Form, RuneMagic; AL LN; SV Fort +11, Ref +11, Will +10; Str 16, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 20

SINDRI

This half-orc bandit is usually the first person new visitors to Niflheim encounter, provided they enter through the western portal – between the Shore of Corpses and Yggdrasil. Sindri makes his living from the wealth and weapons he can pick off of the lost and the forsaken – his band of four half-orc warriors like to ambush, divide and conquer, often leaving their victims for dead.

The secret to Sindri's success is the fact that he's found a fifth portal to and from Niflheim – located underground, its entrance to the west of the Four

Villages. The entrance leads to a network of ancient lava tubes that snake beneath the village, connect to the villagers' secret coal mine, and connect to the Cave of The Silfurhani, although the orcs have not explored all the reaches of these passageways, and are not aware of the cave. Sindri takes the booty he's lifted and sells it in towns back on the material plane, always making sure to conceal the entrance to Niflheim on his return. After all, more than one thieving gang in the plane of undeath wouldn't be profitable.

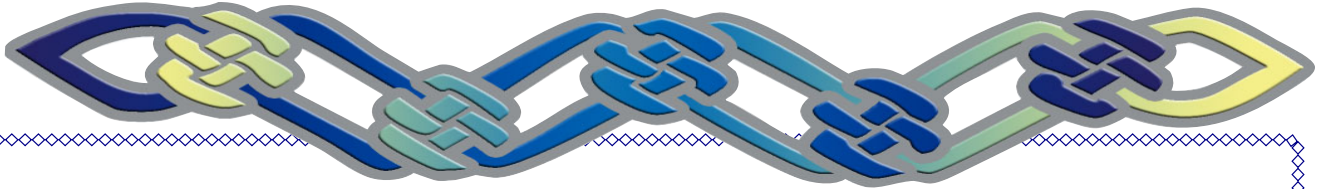
SCENES AND GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS

The following chapter contains a sampling of places and scenarios that can be found in Niflheim, including the NPC's, dialogue, monsters, encounters and items that may be found at each location.

THE PORTAL AT NASTROND

The PCs may access the lava tube portal of Niflheim via a cave system on the material plane. At some point the PCs should begin to notice a significant change in the structure and texture of the cave walls around them, as they literally pass from their world to Niflheim, and whatever sort of cave they had been in becomes a large lava tube:

The ceilings are lower here, no higher than fifteen feet, and the floors are nearly flat and very smooth. Light reflected on the walls and ceiling reveals a glassy, almost wax-like stone, semi-translucent and muddy in hue. The temperature begins to drop, and a thin brine of ice covers the walls and floor. Strange stalagtites hang from the ceiling, long and thin like worms. Some are as long as five feet, with diameters no larger than an elven woman's wrist. Stalagmites that look more like lumpen blobs rise up from the floor in groups.



The PCs should be able to make out a faint source of light in the distance. If they move towards it (the lava tube's opening), they see a desiccated sheep corpse on the cave floor, partially preserved by the cold, nothing more than a pelt and bones now.

When the PCs reach the opening to the ground above they should see a large, mouth-shaped crack in the ceiling, approximately twenty-five feet up a short, naturally-formed chimney. Piles of rounded, slippery stalagmites provide steps that the PCs can use to climb up the sides. Climb and dexterity checks should be rolled with DCs of 15 as the slick, solidified lava is coated with ice and/or water, depending on the time of year.

As they emerge from the cave's mouth, the landscape around them is bleak, wind-blown, and lit with a quickly fading sun at the edge of the world:

The landscape surrounding you is stony, colored with gray, straw-like grasses and fiery orange lichens that sprout like miniature forests amid the rocks. The soil here is silty – a fine gray powder. In the distance – a little less than a hundred feet away – a shoulder of land rises, spanning from horizon to horizon, its short crest littered with gray boulders as if giants had started to build a wall, then abandoned their work.

The sun is rapidly setting. In one direction you can see the dim silhouette of an enormous mountain range. To the west of the mountains you can hear the faint sound of waves crashing, and beneath that sound of something else – is it a mighty ship tugging at its moorings, or a thousand voices groaning in agony?

The mountain range they see is where the fortress of Hel is located – the mountains continue to the east and then down to the south, acting as Niflheim's natural northeastern border. The groaning is the sound of corpses at Nastrond, which is a mere mile away.

WAYWARD DRAUGAR (CR ½)

The silhouette of someone approaching can be seen climbing over the shelf of land. Occasionally the figure stumbles on the large boulders or loses its grip and slides a few feet down the grassy slope. When it reaches

the bottom it gets to its feet and starts to shamble towards the PCs with a fast, purposeful gait.

The sky is nearly dark at this point and any PCs without darkvision will have trouble seeing the creature.

Draugar stats can be found on page 09.

SINDRI'S GANG (EL 13)

Sindri and his gang of half-orcs will have been watching the PCs ascension from the lava tube from a distance. The half-orcs have hidden behind the boulders on the top of the shelf of land, and will strike as soon as the sun sets.

The gang will attack in a style determined by the type of group they see emerging from the portal. If the newcomers are obviously accustomed to combat, are large and/or well-armed, the gang will try to surprise them and use as much initial force as possible to subdue them. If the newcomers appear weak, the gang will try to intimidate them, and may simply knock them about the head and leave them to the wilderness.

Sindri; male half-orc Bbn6/Ftr4: CR 10; Size M (5 ft., 2 in. tall); HD 6d12+6 + 4d10+4; hp 81; Init -1 (-1 Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 9 (-1 Dex); Attack +15/+10 melee, or +9/+4 ranged; SV Fort +10, Ref +2, Will +4; AL LE; Str 21, Dex 8, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 9.

Languages Spoken: Common, Orc.

Skills and feats: Handle Animal +6, Hide -1, Jump +13, Listen +12.5, Move Silently -1, Ride +6, Spot +3, Survival +6, Swim +13; Alertness, Blind-Fight, Endurance, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Quick Draw.

Possessions: amulet of natural armor, +1 orc double axe, 1 perfectly cut emerald, chainmail shirt

Skuli; male half-orc Bbn9: CR 9; Size M (5 ft., 6 in. tall); HD 9d12; hp 69; Init +4 (+4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft.; AC 10; Attack +13/+8 melee, or +9/+4 ranged; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +4; AL NE; Str 18, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 15.

Languages Spoken: Common, Orc.

Skills and feats: Craft (Weaponsmithing) +8, Hide +0, Knowledge (Geography) +1, Listen +1, Move Silently +0, Ride +10, Spot +1; Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Run.

Possessions: breastplate, leather armor, +1 morningstar, bracers of armor +2

Sigfuss; male half-orc Rog4/Ftr3: CR 7; Size M (5 ft., 9 in. tall); HD 4d6 + 3d10; hp 33; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+3 Dex); Attack +10/+5 melee, or +9/+4 ranged; SV Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +0; AL LE; Str 18, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 9, Wis 7, Cha 6.
Languages Spoken: Common, Orc.

Skills and feats: Decipher Script +5, Hide +3, Intimidate +6, Jump +11, Knowledge (Local) +4.5, Listen +3, Move Silently +10, Search +5, Spot -2, Use Magic Device +4; Combat Reflexes, Deceitful, [Evasion], Power Attack, Quick Draw, Run.

Possessions: chain mail, +1 axe, dust of illusion, two daggers

Styrr; male half-orc Bbn8: CR 8; Size M (5 ft., 4 in. tall); HD 8d12; hp 61; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; AC 10; Attack +11/+6 melee, or +8/+3 ranged; SV Fort +8, Ref +2, Will +1; AL NE; Str 16, Dex 11, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 9.

Languages Spoken: Common, Orc.

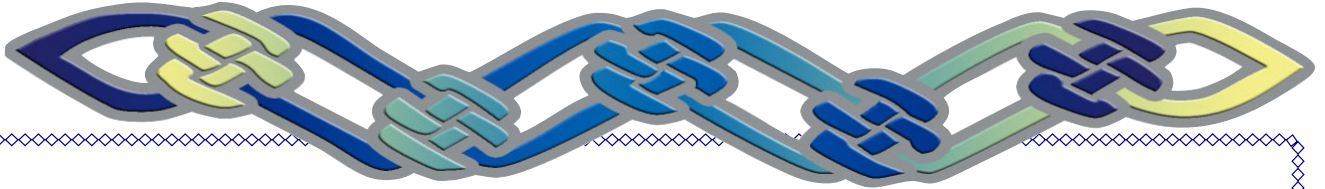
Skills and feats: Appraise +2.5, Hide +0, Intimidate +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +0, Ride +9, Spot +1, Swim +14; Alertness, Great Fortitude, Power Attack.
Possessions: scale mail, +1 warhammer

Sulki; male half-orc Sor2/Ftr5: CR 7; Size M (6 ft., 1 in. tall); HD 2d4-2 + 5d10-5; hp 22; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Attack +11/+6 melee, or +7/+2 ranged; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +3; AL LE; Str 20, Dex 13, Con 9, Int 11, Wis 8, Cha 12.

Languages Spoken: Common, Orc.

Skills and feats: Concentration +3, Hide +1, Jump +9, Knowledge (Arcana) +2.5, Knowledge (Geography)





+2, Listen -1, Move Silently +1, Spot -1, Use Rope +4; Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (flail, dire), Mobility, Track, Weapon Focus (battleaxe).

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/5): 0th -- Dancing Lights, Ghost Sound, Light, Open/Close, Read Magic. 1st -- Floating Disk, Protection from Good.

Possessions: bag of holding type 1, +1 falchion, leather armor

GRUESOME CARAVAN - WAYWARD ALLIP [EL 7]

When darkness settles firmly upon the barren landscape the PCs should hear the faint sounds of heavy wagons moving from somewhere beyond the shelf of land. If they choose to investigate the rocks on top of the shelf provide good cover.

Below, a simple road has been beaten into the land by endless caravans of large wagons. Three such wagons pass slowly by now – each one pulled by a team of four (draugar) ogres. Each wagon has a standard of a single symbol, painted in black on a red field. Each wagon has a taskmaster at its helm – once-human draugars with long bullwhips. The bullwhips glow with scarlet-hued fire, leaving sizzling trails of energy along the naked backs of the ogres. The thralls howl in agony with each lash. On the wagons are bodies of undead, most prone and staring up at the star-filled sky, moaning – others thrashing about, tied to each other with chains. Clouds of shadowy allips buzz and fret behind each wagon, gibbering mindlessly.

Suddenly a single allip breaks from the caravan and flits up the hill towards the PCs. The caravan will not stop – even if the PCs make a little noise – for it is bound for Hel's fortress and will suffer tremendously if delayed. The allip, however, will hover about the PCs and babble at them. If attacked, the allip will attack in kind.

The symbol on the standard is the rune of Hel. Knowledge (Niflheim) check, DC 16.

Draugar Ogre

Large Undead

Hit Dice: 4d12+3 (29 hp)

Initiative: -1

Speed: 30 ft. in hide armor (6 squares); base speed 40 ft.

Armor Class: 15 (-1 size, -2 Dex, +5 natural, +3 hide armor), touch 7, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+13

Attack: Greatclub +8 melee (2d8+7) or javelin +1 ranged (1d8+5)

Full Attack: Greatclub +8 melee (2d8+7) or javelin +1 ranged (1d8+5)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: -

Special Qualities: -

Saves: Fort +6, Ref -1, Will +1

Abilities: STR 23, DEX 6, CON -, INT 1, WIS 10, CHA 1

Skills: Climb +1, Listen +1, Spot +1

Feats: Toughness

Environment: The Demi-plane of Niflheim

Organization: As suits the whims of Hel

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral evil

Advancement: None

Level Adjustment: -

AN ENCOUNTER WITH NIDHOGG (CR 15)

YGGDRASIL AND NIDHOGG (with excerpts from *Niflheim – The Land of Fire and Ice*)

From more than a mile away a great tree can be seen, its massive gray roots perched upon the rocky waste as if ready to spring. Within the ancient tree's wizened trunk are many dark hollows, and from one of these two eerie red eyes glare out to meet travelers.

Near the shore of Nastrond grows a gigantic, gnarled tree in which an abomination lives – the serpent Nidhogg. Most of the time only Nidhogg's head can be seen, but this is a cruel deception, as his huge body sports twelve mighty tails, each wielding a barbed sword.

Nidhogg peers out from his abode, staring with milk-white, treacherous eyes, searching the mists for those who might facilitate his escape from the wretched plane. His many tails writhe within the tree, keeping his most gruesome aspect concealed – the twelve

poison-soaked swords of dwarven craft he wields so masterfully with each tail.

Nidhogg originates from the Outer Planes, and though he is a vastly powerful being, the art of magic has eluded him. He has tried to learn magic often throughout his existence, desperately trying to unlock the power that it might yield to him, but always without success. No one knows how he was trapped in Niflheim, but some suggest he was tricked into it, and now he struggles to escape the place. Whatever the case, he knows things few mortals know and desperately tries to trick those who seek knowledge or passage into setting him free.

Oddly, Nidhogg displays a strange sense of loyalty to his own word; more often than not he keeps his promises. Trust him to twist the wording endlessly and try to set things up so that the bargain falls into his advantage, but he abides by whatever oaths he swears.

As the PCs draw closer to Yggdrasil they will be able to see either Nidhogg's eyes or a part of his body protruding from the black, petrified tree with a Spot check of 15. They will not be able to get closer than thirty feet from the tree without Nidhogg coming out to meet them.

If the PCs try to engage Nidhogg in conversation, he will do so in kind, trying to gain some knowledge of the passageways out of Niflheim. He is aware of the portal a mile away from his tree – unfortunately he is too large to worm his way through the lava tube. If Nidhogg leaves his tree for more than an hour, Hel releases her troupe of Ride-By-Nights and Fangs of Hel – fifty of each – to drive him back to his tree with force.

Nidhogg

Gargantuan Magical Beast (Evil, Reptilian)

HD: 22d10+154 (275 hp) Init +2

Spd: 30 ft.

AC 26 (10, -4 size, +2 Dex, +18 natural)

touch 8 flat-footed 24

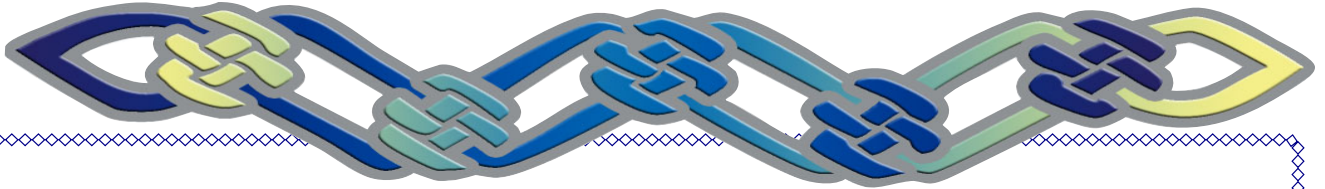
Base Attack: Grapple +18/+40

Atk: Bite +28 melee (2d6+10 Poison) or Tail +28 melee (2d8+5 Constrict)

or Longsword +33 melee (1d8+9 Poison 17-20/x2 Poison)

Full Atk: Bite +28 melee (2d6+10 Poison) and 12 Tails





+26 melee (2d8+5 Constrict)
 or Bite +28 melee and 12 Longswords +29 melee
 (1d8+9 17-20/x2 Poison)
 Space/Reach: 20 ft./15 ft.
 SA: Constrict, Improved Grab, Poison
 SQ: Damage reduction 15/good
 Saves: Fort +20; Ref +15; Will +11
 Abilities: STR 30 DEX 14 CON 24 INT 26 WIS 18
 CHA 22
 Skills: Appraise +33, Bluff +31, Concentration +32,
 Diplomacy +33, Intimidate +33, Knowledge (arcana),
 +33, Knowledge (history) +33, Knowledge (the planes)
 +33, Sense Motive +29, Use Magic Device +31
 Feats: Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Improved
 Critical (Longsword),
 Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, Multiattack,
 Multiweapon Fighting,
 Weapon Focus (Longsword)
 Environment: Niflheim
 Organization: Solitary
 CR: 15
 Advancement: -
 Level Adjustment: -
 Treasure: Quadruple standard
 Alignment: LE

SPEAKING WITH THE SERPENT

You do realize that I could eat you, digest you, and evacuate your remains in less time than it takes for the shivering sun to rise and fall on this wretched plane?

Good. I trust I have your full attention then.

But there is little need for you to tremble. If I'd deemed you worthy of a meal, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

You will tell me if I'm being unclear – the serpent's vocal mechanisms are not well suited for the clumsy speech of men, elves, dwarves. You're one of those, are you not?

I smell undead trundling towards us. They should be here shortly. My recommendation to you is to move around the other side of the tree while I do my work, especially if your stomachs are light.

Seven draugar shamle out of the mists, heading past Yggdrasil. Three of the draugar look to have been

human in life, while the other four are definitely jotnar in origin. They are all carrying large bones or sticks, and great, white ropes of viscous drool are swinging from the corners of their mouths. They stop and look in the direction of the PCs: they can smell them, and begin to quickly seek them out, unaware or unconcerned about the giant serpent coiled near them.

Suddenly Nidhogg strikes. He whips his great head at each of the draugar, using his venomous fangs to decapitating some, eviscerate the others. When all the draugar have fallen Nidhogg settles down for a horrible meal of undead flesh, leaving nothing but his victims' crude weapons behind.

Once Nidhogg is finished with the draugar, he will turn to the PCs and say the following:

Now see that? I've had my lunch and saved your miniature hides in one neat chomp. I'd say that leaves you indebted to me. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Having a giant serpent on your side can prove invaluable in this treacherous place. In addition – I'm as old as dirt, and twice as wise. I know things that'd make your toes curl. The question is now – are you going to take advantage of your new-found friend, and his wealth of knowledge?

If the PCs say yes, Nidhogg will be able to answer most of their questions regarding Niflheim, past and present. If the PCs decline Nidhogg's offer, he will grow angry and likely attack them.

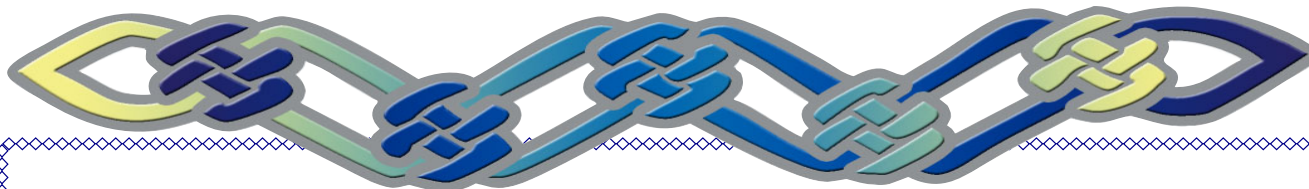
COMBAT

Nidhogg will bargain before he battles, but he does not hesitate to back his negotiations with force if it seems opportune. Capable of fighting with all twelve appendages, each wielding a sword, he charges into combat with a whirling frenzy led by the lethal bite he delivers from his razor-like fangs. He prefers to keep his swords hidden until he can use them with surprise to overwhelm his adversaries.

THE BARRENS

BRANDI BRODDRSON and ULFAR (EL 7)

The PCs discover a small herd of cows. In the distance is a bull, and he's already seen the PCs. He starts making



his way around his cows, who ignore him. The bull is black as pitch and stands six feet at the shoulder, with an impressive set of horns. He's bellowing now, working himself up into a fine froth of anger.

Suddenly the PCs hear:

Oi! Ulfar! Ease up now father – you settle down.

A sturdy dwarf dressed in leather pants and a fur-lined full length leather coat strides over and places himself directly in the bull's path. The bull comes to an abrupt halt – 2,000 lbs. of angry beef gone docile at the dwarf's stern words. The dwarf slaps the bull's leg, hard. The animal tosses its head and lows mournfully. The dwarf turns to face the PCs.

Quite sorry if Ulfar scared you, folks. He's only doin' his job after all. You're not aiming to harm my cows, are you?

If the PCs threaten Brandi or his herd, both Brandi and Ulfar will fight to protect them.

If the PCs tell Brandi that no, they're not rustlers, they're lost, the dwarf will immediately begin conversation. He'll ask where they're from, how they happened upon Niflheim, whether they actually know they're in Niflheim, what they saw when they arrived in Niflheim, where they're headed, if they know where they're headed, if they'd like to know where they're headed, if they like tea, and if they do – would they like some now? Brandi can offer them a small meal, as well as a guide back the villages. His cows had wandered off and he found them just outside of the boundary of the Gray Plains, much to his dismay. 'I gave Ulfar quite a talking to,' he'll say of his bull.

Brandi, male dwarf Com7: CR 6;
Size M (4 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 7d4+7; hp 24; Init +3 (+3 Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 13 (+3 Dex); Attack +7 melee, or +6 ranged; SV Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +4; AL LG; Str 18, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 10.

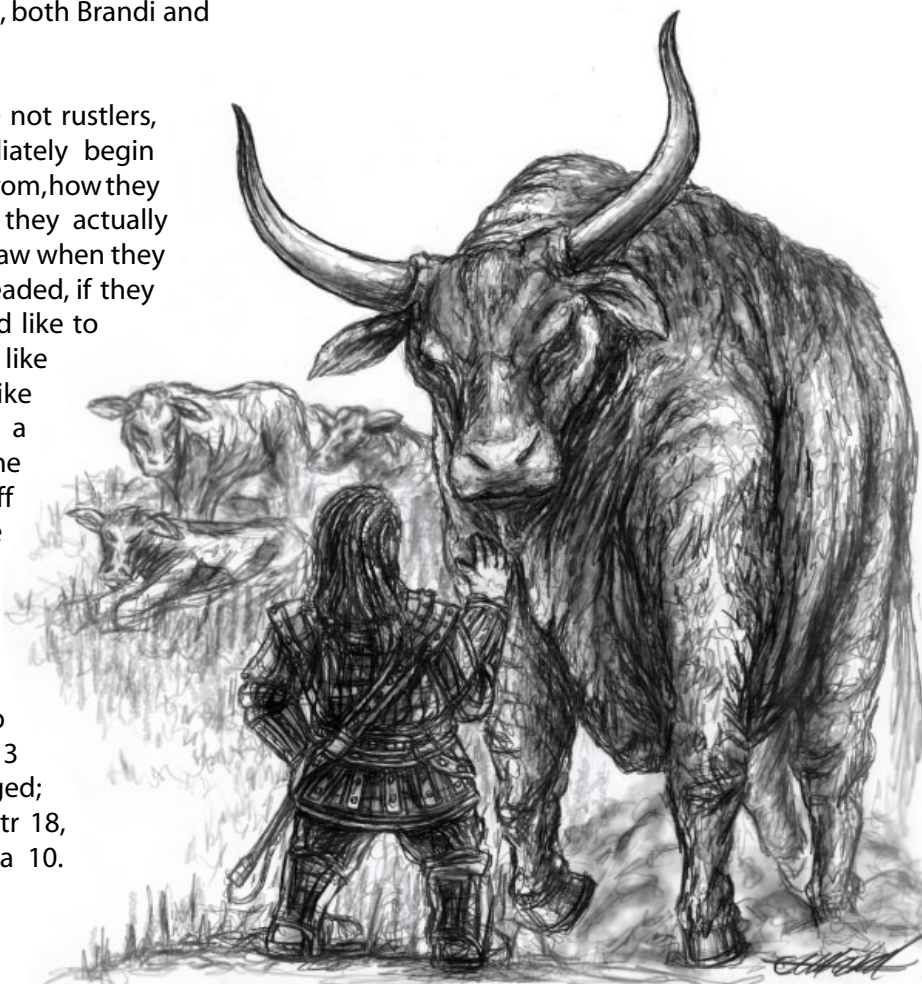
Languages Spoken: Common, Dwarven, Elven.

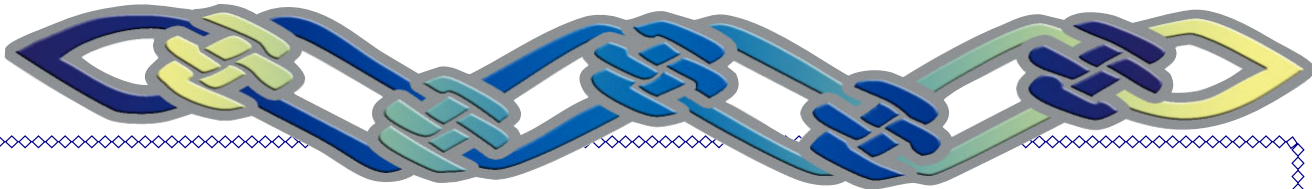
Skills and feats: Craft (Leatherworking) +3, Craft (Tanning) +3, Craft (Carpentry) +3, Craft (Trapmaking) +3, Craft (Boyer) +3, Handle Animal +10, Hide +3, Listen +7, Move Silently +3, Profession (Hunter) +9, Profession (Cattleman) +3, Spot +11; Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Spot).

Possessions: composite shortbow, 50 arrows, dagger

GUDRUN and the STORM OF SWORDS [CR 18]

Large banks of bruise-colored clouds have begun to gather and drift in from the northwest. A chilling wind has risen and pushes against you, biting at your skin. Flocks of black birds fly overhead, heading east. In the distance a small family of deer - a large doe and three older fawns - hurries past.





Rolling an appropriate Spot check, DC 15, the PCs should be able to see a thin line of smoke rising from behind several copses of birch trees. While the wind is still strengthening, this one whisp of smoke rises straight up, unaffected by the weather surrounding it.

If the PCs decide to investigate the smoke, they only need to walk fifty feet to the north, circumventing the three groups of trees.

As you come around to the other side of the trees, you see the source of the smoke. There in a gentle hollow is a campfire, with several spears thrust into the ground beside it, including a forked stick from which hangs a heavily beaded leather bag.

If the PCs investigate the campfire:

The smoke is harsh-smelling and aggravates the air. The sticks in the campfire glow and pop, unaffected by the howling wind. Surrounding the fire is a circle of small white pebbles. One pebble is larger than all the rest, and a rune is scratched into its smooth surface.

A successful Knowledge (nature) check (DC 17) reveals the wood as yew – poisonous in large doses but merely aggravating when used in a fire. It also burns long and is least affected by rain, cold or wind. If the PCs pick up the runic stone, the fire will promptly go out, extinguished by the blowing wind. If the PCs approach the spears and forked stick, a woman will appear from behind the trees.

You hear a woman's voice calling to you, "Hark, fair strangers. That be my things. If it isn't much trouble, I'd take them and be getting on – a bad storm is coming. I am a poor woman, and have very little. Kindly do not take the few things I own."

The woman is human, and very beautiful. Her long, pale blond hair hangs in two thick plaits. The

braids are fastened together by a wood and brass bar, carved with a stylized sun and moon. The woman's ice blue eyes are framed with long, dark thick lashes, and the cold weather has brought a bloom to her round cheeks. Her full lips are also reddened, matching her long leather dress and robes, which are sewn with intricate patterns of crimson beads. Her garments are lined with white rabbit fur.

If the PCs are hostile towards Gudrun, she will attempt to cast *darkness* and flee, shapeshifting into a white wolf and heading north towards her tribe, which is several miles away. She will leave her belongings behind:

Possessions: Three magical quarterstaves – a *quarterstaff of throwing and returning*, a *quarterstaff of silence*, and a *quarterstaff of silence*. A wooden bottle of *cure medium wounds*; three runic stones: a *rune of krefth*, a *rune of ash*, and a *rune of ar*. A leather bag beaded with garnet, amber and carnelian (1,052gp), waybread gp, mutton jerky, flask of meade.

If the PCs are friendly towards Gudrun, she will collect her things and her runic stone by the campfire, and talk about the storm: (a sample dialogue follows)

Gudrun: You seem like honest folk, to a natural degree. Are you aware of the storm that comes?

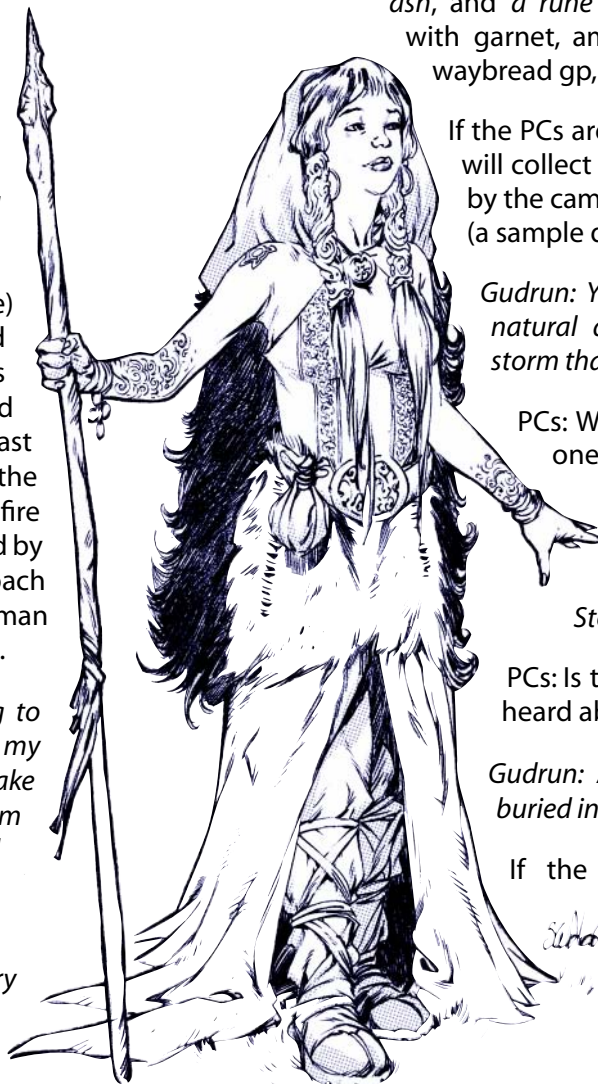
PCs: Well, sure – it seems like a bad one, doesn't it?

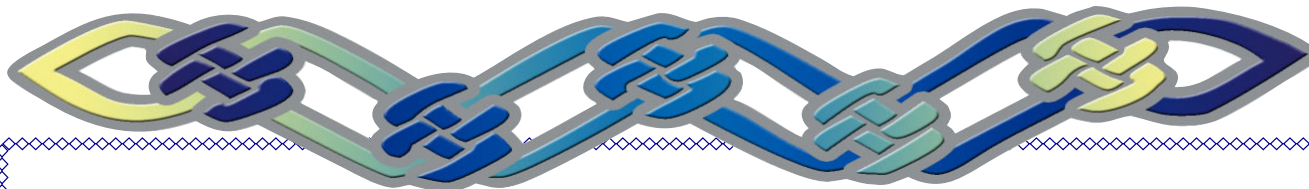
Gudrun: That's saying little. It's more than a bad storm coming. Are you aware of the Storm of Swords?

PCs: Is this the Storm of Swords we've heard about?

Gudrun: Aye that it is. Have you dead buried in Niflheim's soil?

If the PCs do have dead buried some where, Gudrun will recommend they return to the burial site and fetch their dead, then carry the body to Pettbyli, where it can





be buried in the protected cemetery. If the PCs have no dead, Gudrun will offer them shelter with her tribe, since the Storm of Swords can take a toll on the health of those caught out in its violence, and there is little shelter in the Barrens. If the PCs prefer to find the Four Villages, Gudrun will point the way and wish them well, then leave.

GUDRUN'S IDENTITY

If the PCs inquire about Gudrun's belongings, who she is and where she's headed, she will answer very simply, at first. Only if the PCs accompany her to her tribe will they learn more of the staves, and then only after the Strangers' Dinner learn about Gudrun herself.

Sample questions and answers:

1. PCs: How does your [carved rock, rune, glyph, symbol, charm] cause the wind to cease?

You've heard of magic, have you not? One of the many ways it is – one of the many ways.

2. PCs: Why do you not live in the Four Villages? (We've heard terrible things of the Barrens).

The wild is only terrible to him that's forgotten his own wildness.

3. PCs: What is your name? What is the name of your people?

My name depends on your speech – some call me galdrakona, others call me savage. Some call me witch, others call me mother. Some call me queen, others call me whore. Some call me wolf, others call me woman.

WEATHERING THE STORM IN THE STAVES' CAMP

When the PCs reach Gudrun's camp the rain has already begun to fall. The storm has not yet reached its full strength, so the rain is more bothersome than harmful. Gudrun will hurry the PCs to a large, animal-skin tent in the center of camp. Several men and women are walking in a slow circle around the tent, chanting and holding staves aloft, occasionally touching the tips of the staves to the leather of the tent.

The interior of the tent is enormous: seventy feet in

diameter, with vaulted poles reaching up to a height of one hundred feet. A carved stone hearth, circular and decorated with squat figures of giants, trolls, and wolves stands in the center of the tent. A merry fire is burning and crackling in the hearth's pit – sending smoke billowing upwards to a hole in the center of the tent. Raindrops pop and sizzle as they land in the fire, but do not seem to deter the flames at all. Men and woman are seated on low wooden benches or mats of rushes or fur, talking, smoking pipes or drinking. A long, low table begins at the hearth and ends at a large chair, where Gudrun sits.

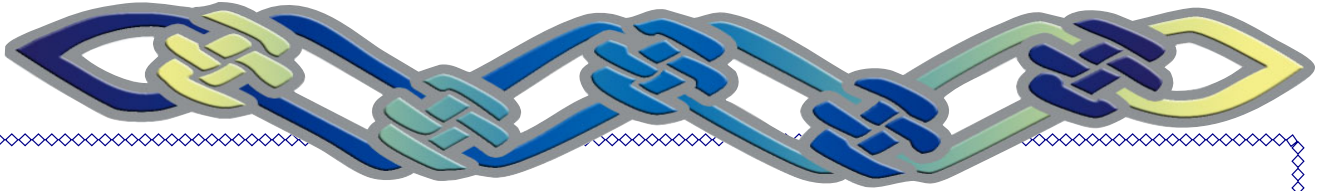
Suddenly the flapping sides of the giant tent freeze in place. The leathery look of the tent changes to something more like stone, and would feel like stone if it were touched. More pieces of wood, as well as chunks of black rock, are added to the fire. From across the room Gudrun is gesturing for you to have a seat at the long table.

The storm will continue for three days. Gudrun's tribe will remain in the large tent, taking meals informally throughout the storm, sleeping on mats or chairs, and telling stories or singing songs. Occasionally one of the staves will find an empty spot and meditate by moving through a series of stances, each stance held for several moments while a runic name is chanted. If the PCs question any stave about these exercises and runic chants, they will be told to speak to Gudrun.

Typical stave food and drink includes wildflower meade; heather, cowslip or sage tea; mutton, hare, ptarmigan, mouse, *porramatur* (rolls of moss, pickled fish, buck's head jam and blood pudding), mushrooms and mountain grass.

Gudrun: female human Stave (Wolf) 18th level; CR 18; Medium Humanoid; HD 18d8+54; hp 148; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 15; BAB +18/+13/+8/+3; Grp +20; Atk +22 melee (1d6+3, +1/+1 quarterstaff); Full Atk: +22/+17/+12/+7 melee (1d6+3, +1/+1 quarterstaff) or +20/+15/+10/+5/+20/+15/+10 (1d6+3/1d6+3, +1/+1 quarterstaff) or +22/+17/+12/+7 ranged (1d4, dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA none; SQ Animal Form, RuneMagic; AL LN; SV Fort +14, Ref +15, Will +16; Str 15, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Climb +17, Concentration +16,



Heal^K +14, Hide +16, Knowledge (geography) +18, Knowledge (nature) +20, Listen +18, Move Silently^K +25, Search +13, Spot +23, Survival^K +25, Swim +14, Use Rope +14; Alertness, Athletic, Cleave, [Endurance], Great Cleave, [Greater Two-Weapon Fighting], Iron Will, Power Attack, Runic Item, Self-Sufficient, [Track], [Two-Weapon Fighting], [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Possessions: +3 Studded leather armor, the other stuff

^K: Skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

WOLF FORM

Gudrun: female human Stave (Wolf) 18th level; CR 18; Medium Humanoid [augmented]; HD 18d8+54; hp 148; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 24, touch 15, flat-footed 19; BAB +18; Grp +21; Atk +21 melee (2d6+5, bite); Full Atk: +21 melee (2d6+5, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA none; SQ Animal Form, RuneMagic; AL LN; SV Fort +14, Ref +15, Will +16; Str 17, Dex 20, Con 16, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 12.

STRANGERS' DINNER

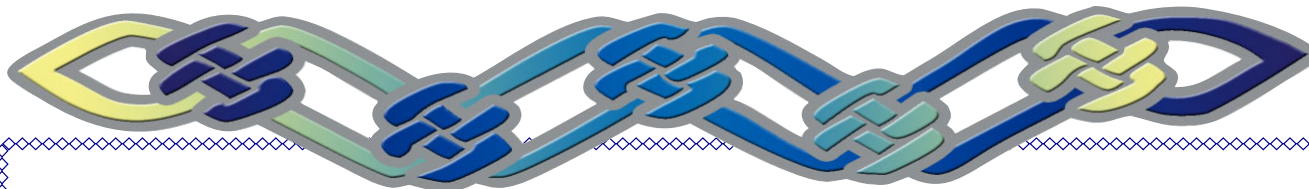
The staves will offer a generous feast to strangers, and it is during this meal that they will learn all they can about their guests. Questions are forthright and unmercifully direct and they occur often throughout the five course meal. Usually at least one of the higher-ranked staves can detect if the PCs are lying, and this results in a repeat of the question with an additional warning: *do not answer untruthfully a second time*. If the PC(s) lie again, the meal ends and the guests are forcefully escorted from the staves' camp.

In this particular situation, the leader of the camp will make it a point to recommend truthfulness, on account of the deadly storm outside.

IN THE COMPANY OF THE STAVES

While the culture of the staves is discussed in more detail on page 50, here is a brief summary of their ways and behavior. The staves appreciate candor, and will answer nearly any question that is asked of them without guile, or bias. The following are things the PCs can learn during their stay with Gudrun's tribe:

- The staves are warriors who study the magic of runes.
- The staves have no ill will towards the villagers or any other living thing in Niflheim.
- The staves have lived in Niflheim longer than Hel herself has dwelt there.
- The Sea of Death will poison any living being it touches.
- The Four Villages is a relatively safe and pleasant place for strangers to stay, provided they are of good intention.
- The leader of the staves is Varick, Gudrun's husband. He is away on a hunting trip.
- Five humans: a woman and four men, camped for several months with the staves. They were from the material plane, and revealed their names: Evhuun, Bremedan, Fern, Talak, and Werrin. Upon orders of Chieftain Varick the strangers were followed, and it is known that they killed several people during their travels.
- The Ride By Nights, deadly creatures, are to be avoided at all costs. This can be achieved by never camping in the Barrens at night.
- The mountains to the east are home to jotnar trolls, vampires, and a necromancer who enjoys capturing victims and torturing them.
- The mountains to the east have rich veins of ore, raw gems, and passageways to the Eastern Sea, which is pure and untainted by Hel's magic.
- If a horn is fashioned from an animal, such as a bull or stag, it can be used to call the Valkyries to aid in times of peril, provided the one using the horn carries no evil or chaos in their heart.
- It is best not to speak of the staves while in the villages, as the villagers hold them in ill regard.
- Hakan, an innkeeper in Mioborg, has a daughter who has married a stave.



Staves are hunters. They do not keep livestock, nor do they weave with things other than animal sinew and the occasional course plant fiber. They are lawful neutral as a culture, go to war rarely, engage in combat rarely, and exact revenge only when commanded by their leader, Varick. The staves are most interested in plumbing their own spiritual depths and living in balance with the natural world, such as it is in Niflheim.

A stave often answers a question two-fold, as there are usually at least two points of view to every situation, i.e. "Perhaps *this*, but also *that*."

THE FOUR VILLAGES

THE COMMON HOUSE AT MIOBORG

A two story sod and stone house has a crooked sign above its door: The House of the White Bull. The inn's likely namesake stands right beside the building with his bevy of seven cows, chewing on the vines that grow on the eastern wall. An iron doorknocker in the shape of a troll scowls at you from its perch on the front door. Scratched into the wood, in an odd dialect of Common, is a message which reads, "Don't trouble the knocker, just go inside."

Inside, the thick, earthy smell of sod permeates everything. Additional aromas mingle with this one: lavender, delicious stew, fresh baked bread, and the slight hint of stale liquor rising from the wooden slats of the floor. A wide spiral stairwell, carved from stone, leads to the second floor. Coming down these steps is a human, his hair silvered at the temples, his hands red and chapped from work and weather.

"Hail there. How be you folk? Looking for room, board, or both?"

If the PCs answer both, Hakan will tell them what's on the menu: mutton stew, dried fish and fish paste, bread, and dried plums. He also has a cask of meade available. As for rooms, there are two small rooms available upstairs. A bathhouse is located at the back of the building and is to be shared by the PCs and the other residents of the inn: three gnomish prospectors, an elderly dwarf, and a human just arrived from the Barrens (no affiliation with Sula or the staves).

Hakan will avoid any long conversations with the PCs.

If any mention of his affiliation with the staves, or his daughter's existence, occurs within earshot of other guests, Hakan will ask the PCs to leave, warning he'll go to the next town and fetch the constable if need be.

If the PCs make no nuisance of themselves, however, they may be able to trick Hakan into talking. Hakan loves games, and he loves to drink. Engaging him in a lively game of cards while plying him with his own meade is the best way to get him to confide in someone.

SULA AND OTKELL

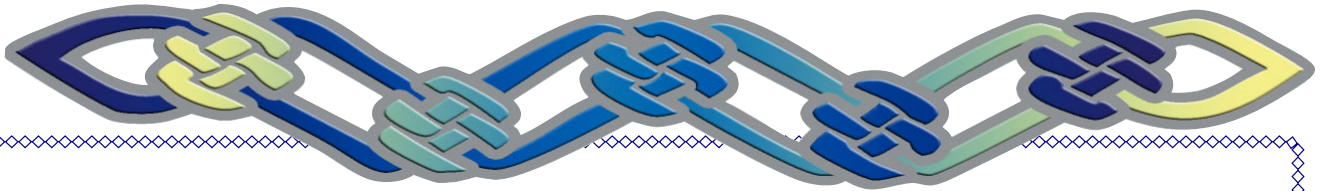
While staying at the inn, the PCs may have a chance to see Sula and Otkell. Sula enjoys tormenting Hakan. She doesn't know why he's nervous around her – but her contributing to his nervousness has become one of her favorite pastimes. She and Otkell often travel to Mioborg to have lunch or dinner at the Inn of the White Bull. Sula will fret over her food and drink, often making Hakan prepare several dishes for her. She'll find none of them satisfactory. Should the PCs be taking a meal while this is happening they may notice Hakan's knitted brow, or even a tear in his eye, as he loathes Sula and is deathly frightened of her revealing his daughter's existence.

Should the PCs rise to Hakan's defense, they'll get an icy earful from Sula:

"Who are you? You interrupt my meal with a show of confidence for this lummo? Perhaps you are related to him. The inheritance shows itself in your demeanor. I'd sit down – you don't want any trouble from me. Believe me, you don't."

A favorite pastime of Otkell is to use divination on strangers. Roll percentiles to determine if he's discovered anything:

- 1-10** Otkell has discovered nothing.
- 11-25** Otkell has discovered 1d4 names of the PCs.
- 26-35** Otkell has discovered if any of the PCs have weaknesses.
- 36-45** Otkell has discovered the names of 1d4 of the PCs living family members. He will invent stories of their peril to torment the PCs.
- 46-55** Otkell has discovered any feelings of dislike



or animosity among the party of one PC towards another. If none exists, he will lie to cause division among the PCs.

56-65 Otkell has discovered any attraction among the party of one PC towards another. If none exists, he will lie to cause division among the PCs.

66-80 Otkell has discovered the name of someone one of the PCs has killed. He will mention that this person is here in Niflheim, and has been instructed by Hel to seek the PC who killed it.

81-95 Otkell will reveal Hakan's secret.

96-100 Otkell has discovered the PCs know about any of these things: the staves, silfurhani, the Sea of Death, Nidhogg, the Storm of Swords.

Otkell will use any information he gains against the PCs, and attempt to intimidate them.

Sula and Otkell will not fight the PCs in Hakan's inn. If the interaction between Sula, Otkell and the PCs goes badly, however, Sula will likely plan to kill the PCs, one by one.

Hakan will be hysterical with worry after any interaction between Sula and the PCs. A promise to help him keep his secret will endear him to the PCs, especially if any token of the staves is shown to him. He will give as much as information about Sula and Otkell as he knows:

- Where they live.
- Who is friendly with them.
- The fact that they go on fishing trips to the south twice a month.

Hakan's daughter is unaware of Kylan's discovery that Sula and her gang killed anyone, therefore Hakan can only guess at the treachery Sula is capable of.

THE TINKER

The following section offers three different options for an encounter that can take place in the catacombs beneath Frederika's shop.

Frederika's home and shop sits a half mile outside of

town, even though the tinker is highly social. Her shop is prone to loud noises such as banging metal and the occasional explosion, and Frederika is respectful of her neighbor's need for quiet.

When the PCs arrive at her shop Frederika is in her basement, digging through her store rooms, in search of a spare part. Her assistant, a pleasant male gnome named Karli, is perched atop a high stool, scribbling on a huge piece of parchment that's been stretched across a drafting table. He looks up as the PCs enter, and stops his work. "Hey," he says good-naturedly. "Looking for Frederika, or picking something up?"

If the PCs needed something and couldn't find it at one of the common houses, most of the villagers would have pointed them towards Frederika's. Eydis of the common house in Porp would have taken the PCs money and placed the order herself, instructing the PCs to pick up their item at the shop in three days. Karli has all the records of Frederika's customers and will happily fetch the PCs' item from the store room behind his drafting table.

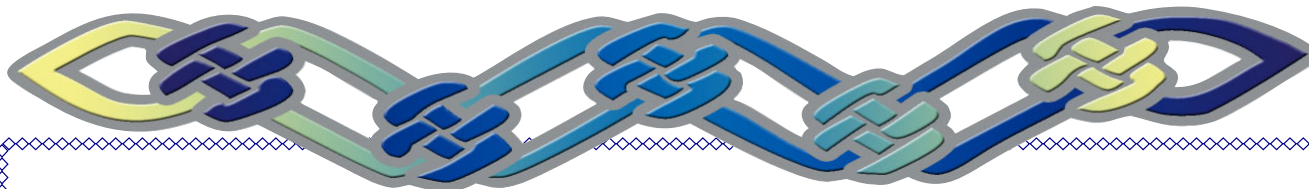
If the PCs desire an interview with Frederika, Karli will lock the door of the shop, light a lantern, and beckon them down the very narrow spiral stairwell to the shop's labyrinthine basement.

When you reach the bottom of the stairwell, the sheer size of the basement is surprising. Clearly once a lava tube, the ceiling still has its weird, thin, worm-like stalagmites intact. The floor has been covered with straw. There are three doorways here, each with a different letter painted above them: I, O, and S.

If the PCs inquire about the letters, Karli will tell them that I stands for 'interesting', O stands for 'ordinary' and S stands for 'scary'. (Although there are also mundane items down the 'S' corridor, most are magical, as magic items frighten the tinker.) These doors lead to long tunnels where Frederika stores her junk, and she categorizes them as either I, O, or S.

TUNNELS AND CENTIPEDES (EL 4)

Karli leads the PCs through the door marked 'I', and they walk about thirty feet before the tunnel makes a gentle right turn. There are boxes stacked on boxes, and some of the lids are askew to allow the PCs a glimpse of the contents: metal gleams, gems shine, gears and



wooden parts are partially revealed as Karli leads the PCs another thirty feet. Then the tube snakes to the left. At last, after fifty more feet, they see Frederika sitting atop the edge of a box, her feet dangling inside, her hands rummaging through its contents. Seven lanterns sputter and burn about her – two hung from chains on the wall and five more on the floor. She looks up. “Hey there Karli – who you got here then?”

Frederika will happily chat with the PCs while she rummages through her box. Important things the PCs can learn from her include:

- The fact that Sula and her gang commissioned special waterproof pants and boots from Frederika last summer.
- The fact that Sula and her gang ordered special, extra-long billhooks from Mar the smithy a week after they purchased the pants and boots from Frederika.
- The relative whereabouts of an ancient scroll that contains information about the Three Portents. This Frederika knows is in a barrel at the far end of her Interesting corridor, about eighty feet from where they’re sitting.

If the PCs want to investigate the corridors, Frederika will oblige them, but only if she can accompany them. She doesn’t want them to get lost, and she doesn’t want them to pass the gates that lead down to the villages’ coal mines. She will also ask the PCs if any of them can help her appraise her many magic items. For this service, she’ll allow the PCs to take any three things they can find in her store rooms.

While they’re investigating the corridors, a sound of rustling, scuttling legs can be heard with a Listen check DC 17. Frederika looks towards the darkness and frowns. “What in heaven is that?” Suddenly she’s walking backward, quickly, her hand clamped over her mouth. It’s a swarm of centipedes.

STRANGE BARRELS (EL 8)

If the PCs know about the Three Portents and ask Frederika about the scroll that contains them, she will say that she knows the scroll very well, and in fact has the scroll somewhere in her basement. She leads the PCs around for nearly half an hour, talking to herself

and touching boxes and barrels as she goes. Finally, sixty feet down the ‘S’ corridor she stops, looking up at three large barrels, each at least a foot taller than she. Frederika looks perplexed.

“I know this is the one I stuffed a good deal of old scrolls into,” she says. “But where did these two extra barrels come from? Guess I’ll have to question Karli on that one. Only question is – Karli and what team of lads moved them here, eh?” She has a good chuckle over this, then asks the PCs to help her open the barrels with the scrolls. After rummaging through it, she finds the scroll she’s looking for and hands it happily over to the PCs. Suddenly she trips and falls, crying out. One of the other two barrels has shot out a thick pseudopod and struck Frederika in the foot. She hurries to get back on her feet and backs away from the two barrels, terrified. The barrels – mimics- attack the PCs.

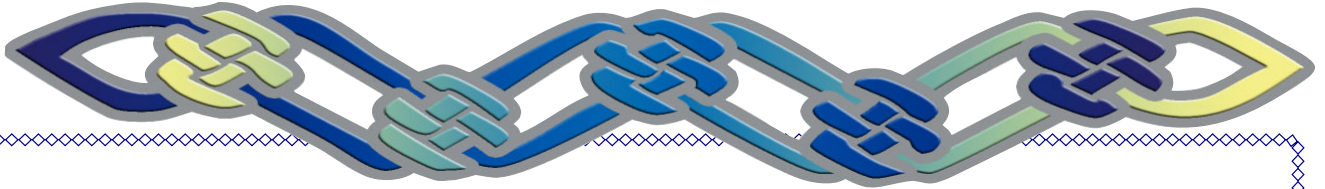
THE TRAIL OF A THIEF

Frederika leads the PCs down the corridor marked ‘N’ about seventy feet, then exclaims, “What’s going on here?” The barrel in which she kept the ancient scroll concerning The Three Portents is overturned, and a trail of tiny, slimy footprints head off into the darkness of the tunnel, away from Frederika’s shop. “This is terrible! All these years on this stupid plane and I’ve never had a thief venture down here. The boldness. The audacity!” She crouches by the footprints and touches a fingertip to them. “Ew – the sliminess.”

If the PCs offer to find the scroll, Frederika will be more than thankful and will offer any three items (or three additional items, if the PCs have already helped her appraise some of her magic items) from her store rooms. Consult the Map of the Lava Tubes (pg XX).

The thief is a monster called a *tilberi*, a type of golem made from a mixture of rotten fish, sour milk, blood, and clay. It is usually used to steal food and milk for its master, but it can carry larger items if necessary. It leaves a trail of stinking, slimy footprints. The *tilberi* in this case is owned by Kolfinna, who wants the scroll of The Three Portents to give to Otkell, whom she loves.

The *tilberi* hasn’t traveled far by the time the PCs and Frederika discover the overturned barrel. If the PCs hurry they can catch the *tilberi* in either Tube D or Tube C, at the locations marked on the map.



TILBERI GOLEM

Tiny Construct
 Hit Dice: 1d10 (6 hp)
 Initiative: +3 (+3 Dex)
 Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares)
 Armor Class: 15 (+3 Dex, +2 size), touch 15, flat-footed 12
 Base Attack
 /Grapple: +1/-2
 Attack: Bite +4 melee (1d3)
 Full Attack: Bite +4 melee (1d3) and 2 claws -1 melee (1d2)
 Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
 Special Attacks: -
 Special Qualities: Construct traits
 Saves: Fort +0, Ref +3, Will -2
 Abilities: STR 4, DEX 17, CON -, INT 1, WIS 8, CHA 8
 Skills: Hide +4
 Feats: Weapon Finesse (Bite)
 Environment: Niflheim
 Organization: Solitary
 Challenge Rating: ½
 Treasure: None
 Alignment: Always neutral
 Advancement: -
 Level Adjustment: -

THE SCROLL OF THE THREE PORTENTS

Written on brittle parchment that feels as if it might snap into pieces if mishandled, the scroll is marked by a heavy hand in thick, slashing runes across its brown service. The scroll has been magically preserved.

Reading the scroll requires a Decipher Script check DC 22. The only ones in the Four Villages who can read the scroll are Otkell and Kolfinna. Kari the ranger, as well as any stave can also read the scroll.

The scroll reads:

*No joy is mine since in battle I fought.
 Many the sorrows that o'er me lower.
 Men hold me for nought; this thought is the worst
 of all that oppresses my sorrowing heart.*

*Oft returned the watcher at night
 trembling home, but sound in limb.
 None could know the barb that had me
 Fall would fly; now I yearn for home.*

*Nanna and I were aforetime deemed
 worthy in storm of swords to bear us.*

*With one foot now I step on the ship
 towards Niflheim. The poet's day is o'er.*

*O fair winged! O black-robed hawk
 That hears my cries; take this scroll
 To the reaches of Hel where my boat
 Is bound for eternity. Give these words
 To the living, that I may live again.*

*It is the silver cockerel that draws
 My boat to Hel's shores. It is under
 Darkness of the Sun and Moon that
 I steal beneath Hel's gaze. It is by
 My own hand that I cast Hel into her
 Own dread sea, and win back the land
 Of Niflheim!*

THE COMMON HOUSE AT PORP

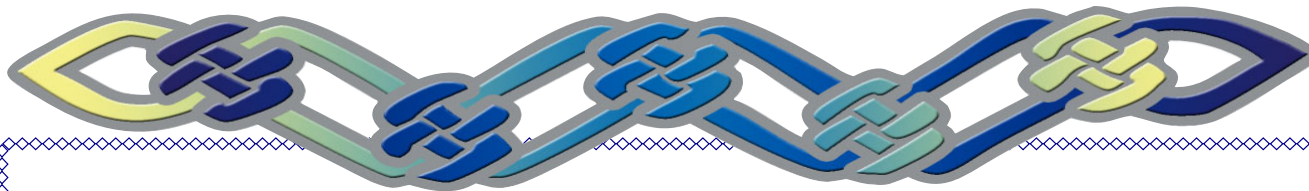
Porp's common house is a lively place, despite its keeper, Eydis. The halfling matron runs a tight ship, and is not unpleasant – she's merely very serious most of the time. She is one of the most fastidious and capable people in the Four Villages, and can manage to find a person nearly anything if given enough time. Eydis has thirteen children – seven daughters and six sons. She lost one child to the 'child-gobblers', vampiric minstrels who came to town and stole her daughter away to be their slave. It is said that ever since that day, Eydis hasn't smiled.

In truth, there are a few things that can make the halfling matron chuckle. A good story, a good (or terrible) joke, keeping busy with her other children, her business and her customers is often enough to keep Eydis' mind off her sadness. Sometimes, however, one can notice a faraway look in her eye, and during those times it's best to leave her alone.

AFTERNOON TEA AT THE COMMON HOUSE

The PCs enter to find a good percentage of the population enjoying Eydis' celebrated heather tea and honey cake.

The sun is already perched at the land's edge, brilliant in



THE CHILD GOBBLERS: GRYPPA AND LEPPALUDI
(excerpt from Niflheim – Land of Fire and Ice)

Gryppa and Leppaludi, two half-orc minstrels that once took to the road to disprove the prejudices against their race, have led a nomadic existence longer than they can remember. Their skill grew greatly while they traveled, though their lifestyle became increasingly wild and marginal, until at some point along the way they became involved with a vampire who took control of them. They were completely under his command until the vampire met a grizzly demise at the business end of a vampire hunter's stake and their free will returned to them, but their insatiable hunger remained. They continued to travel, visiting each village, but this time with a more sinister purpose. They entertained the older folks, winning their trust, and then sated their thirst with the blood of the youngest townsfolk, sometimes passing their affliction upon the youths but always leaving the villages they visited in a peculiar chaos. When those adept at destroying the undead started hunting them, they began to increase their numbers and fled to the freedom of the Barrens.

its last moments, spilling its light like the fires of a forge. The room is circular, with one hearth in the center and one more on the northern wall. You pass five halfling fishermen at one table, who are playing a card game.¹ Their sixth comrade is asleep on a bench behind them snoring softly.

Lanterns are lit throughout the room as the sun quickly fades to a brief dusk. A human at one of the tables picks up a wooden stringed instrument² and places it on the table in front of him. He then produces a spent tindertwig and begins to pluck a bright, beautiful melody from the instrument. Conversation around the room quiets, and several patrons turn around to watch the musician play. Soon most of the room is singing along with the melody:

*"Bright as gold, bright as summer light
There my brave love is the fire-bright,
Twice this night, and twice next day,
I will kiss your brazen heart.
Come what will, all will come
Round this brightly burning hearth
I'll hold them back with all of my ire
Just to stoke your flame and fire.
One more day, one more night*

*Beside your heart and hearth
burning bright."*

The song continues for a long while, and teapots are exchanged for bottles of meade, the smell of meat and fish permeates the room, and more coal and wood are thrown onto the fire. Eydis makes the rounds, clapping her hands in time with the music. When the song is finally done – because the musician needs a drink – Eydis calls out, 'Hope you all were singin' about your wives!' The room erupts in laughter.

It is dark now. The moon is lost behind thick banks of clouds, and a light wind has picked up, sending loose sand and gravel scuttling over the road in front of the common house. More villagers begin to shuffle in for supper. Several serious card games have begun and people are placing wagers.

Halla, one of Eydis' daughters, will come up to the PCs and seat them if they haven't already found a table, or take their order if they're already seated. If asked what's available, Halla – a pale, but comely, halfling maid – will say:

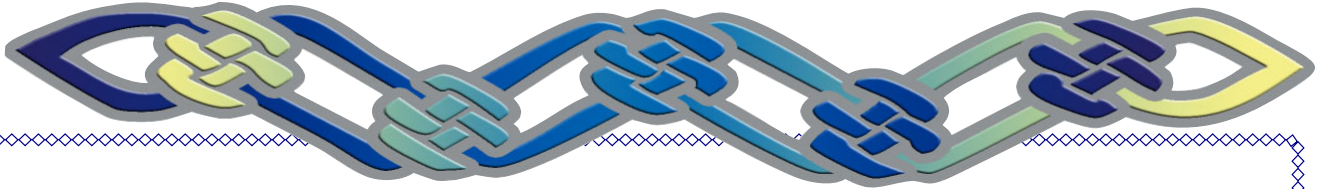
"We've got porramatur, halibut soup, blood puddin', sour milk puddin', honey and bread, goat cheese, roast hare, and to drink we got meade, we got tea, we got milk, and water."

When asked what porramatur is (because there are different varieties), Halla will cheerfully recite:

"We make it with blood pudding, cow's head jelly, sour milk, grains, and rotten shark. Some of the men brought a wealth of shark in last week – been to the eastern sea, they had."

Any display of disgust or alarm will be met with Halla's pretty, all-business stare, one eyebrow lifted, a hand on an ample hip. She'll wait for the PCs to settle down and tell her what they'd like to eat.

An hour or two may pass, with the PCs invited to join in rounds of song, or arm wrestling matches, or epic stories told by the more venerable villagers. The sounds of dishes being gathered and quiet voices speaking in confidence lends a soothing background to the more boisterous tones of gambling herdsmen and fishermen, and the clear, bell-like melodies of the musician's kantele.



Suddenly there is a sound beyond the common house, almost like the baying of hounds. Several conversations around the room stop abruptly. The musician plucks his last note for the evening. An elderly herdsman hurries to one of the windows to listen.

If one of the PCs asks someone what's the matter, they'll either be shushed to quiet or informed in a harsh whisper, "I don't know – but by the gods that sounds like the kveld-ritha!"

The sound is suddenly louder, now more like the howl and whine of wolves than mere dogs. The thundering of heavy steps can be heard, and suddenly one of Eydis' daughters shrieks with terror. Finally the room erupts into panic, as women rush the stairs, following Eydis up to the second floor. The elderly man who listened at the window calls out, "Get something to hit them with boys – we got visitors!" The men in the room, and some women as well, grab anything they have: walking

sticks, bows, knives, axes, brooms, a fire poker. A few of the villagers have swords.

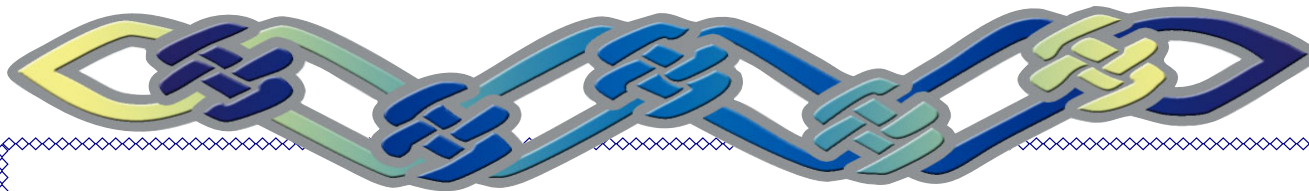
If the PCs ask what's going on they'll be told by many of the villagers, likely in unison, "Ride-By-Nights!"

The elderly man hurries up to the PCs: "They be big trolls, cold as stone, atop their wolves of Hel! You can hide with the women or help us drive 'em out – cause they'll kill us all and take our corpses to Hel's chambers if we're not quick!"

Suddenly you can hear the kveld-ritha thundering past the inn. The fear in the room is tangible, palpable, as all within freeze in expectation. The sounds of the trolls and their wolves keep going, however, and fade into the distance.

"Why would they pass through?" whispers one of the





villagers. *"That – don't make any sense." Suddenly the sound of cows lowing in terror can be heard, far away, from the fields outside of town.*

The elderly man makes for the door. "They're hungry. They don't want more souls for their mistress. They want to eat! Come on men, to the pastures!"

The villagers in the room hurry out into the street and start running for the cow pastures. If the PCs follow them they'll have to help them fight three Ride-By-Nights. If they're successful in driving the trolls away, the PCs will have the fierce devotion of the villagers.

Five Com 7 (hp 13, 7, 22, 21, 10)

Three Com 11 (hp 27, 30, 20)

Two Ftr 8 (hp 60, hp 64)

Three War 7 (hp 42, 33, 45)

Four Exp 4 (hp 20, 12, 18, 13)

Three ride-by-nights (hp 45 each)

¹ They're playing a local game known as *pukk*, which has three stages: the first is a game of chance, the second is similar to poker, and the third is where the players try to have suits of ascending or descending order in an effort to discard all of their cards.

² The musician is playing an instrument known as a *kantele*. The kantele has diatonic tuning (like the white keys of a piano). It is a common saying among the villagers that the first bard to step foot in Niflheim fashioned a kantele out of a giant pike's jawbone and the hairs of a golden wild horse. Most kanteles are fashioned from wood, though some are made of brass or copper, and others are made of the bones of animals and large fish. The kantele's music has a unique, bell-like quality, and is rumored to be able to enchant forest creatures. See page 66 for details of a magical version of the kantele.

YULETIDE EVE/YULETIDE MORNING

If the PCs are staying in the Four Villages during Yuletide, they will likely have heard about it for at least a week ahead of time. Yuletide in the winter, Merrymoon in late spring and Midsummer are the three most popular holidays in Niflheim. Even strangers receive gifts on Yule, and they are expected like everyone else to take to the streets and seek them out come Yule morning, due to the blunders of the Hidden Folk's queen, Holde, whose job it is to deliver presents on Yuletide eve.

Usually Yuletide eve is spent eating, drinking, singing and dancing with other villagers in either a common house or a private residence. Hundreds of candles

are lit throughout each household to drive away the darkness and usher in a lucky new year. Just before bed, gifts are placed beneath an ornate 'Yule tree' just outside the door of the house or inn. These wooden trees are built by Frederika to look like fine, tall fir trees, and are stained a deep green in color. They are then hung with crimson ribbons and bells, and fixed with glass globes in which more candles are placed. In addition to the presents for Holde to deliver, dishes of honey and cakes are put out to gladden the Hidden Folk.

The practical gift is all the rage in the Four Villages. Gifts of useful quality are highly appreciated, while frivolous gifts of luxury are regarded as silly and even insulting.

BEYOND THE VILLAGES

THE COFFIN AND THE SEA OF DEATH

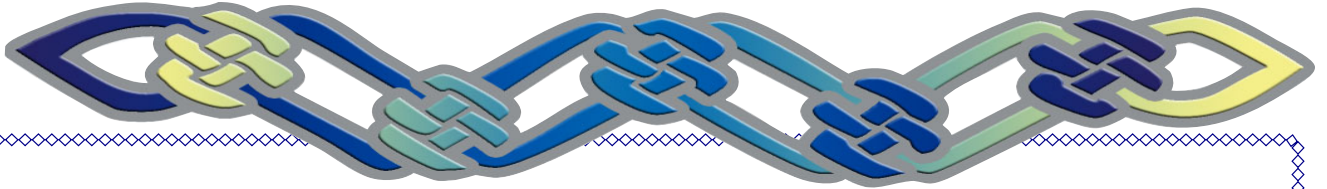
The road south from the Four Villages to the sea is a thin trail that eventually gives up forty yards north of the coast. The ground is covered with tall gray grasses, and many rocks and large pebbles lay hidden in the grass, the larger boulders rising above the hissing plants to warm their moss-bronzed heads in the pale sunlight.

You see in the distance a shelf of land jutting out from the plains – a small, sharp hill, grassy on one side, rocky and steep on the other. Just beyond the hill you can see the dark, white-capped ocean, and the shoreline of the Sea of Death.

Ahead is a crack in the rocks of the coastline that leads directly down to the sea. Pebbles line the shadowed path within the Coffin, and coils of rope sit in the grass on either side of it. There is an evil air to this place, and suddenly the wind picks up and howls through the gouge of the Coffin as if it were alive.

Standing at the edge of the cliffs it is possible to study the water and make out the bodies floating in the waves. Most are still and floating face down, but some are quite animate, thrashing and grasping for handholds in the endless torment of the currents.

It is possible to launch a boat from the Coffin, either by having party members pull the boats through with the



rope, or with billhooks and oars pushing forward, using the pebble-covered ground and cliff-sides as leverage. There are two large chains hanging over the cliffs into the water – these can be used to catch billhooks upon and tug the boats back into the narrow gouge of the Coffin.

BOATS IN THE SEA OF DEATH

Any boat that ventures into Hel's ocean must be seaworthy and have no leaks. If water from the Sea of Death touches the bare skin of a mortal, that person must make a Fortitude save DC 16 or become *sickened* for 1d4 rounds. After four rounds of being *sickened*, if the PC fails a Fortitude save he will then become *ability drained*, and will lose 1 point of Constitution per day after being exposed to the water of the Sea of Death.

Most of the undead in the water of the Sea of Death have not yet become draugar, but there is a chance the PCs will encounter some. A roll of 85 or higher on a percentile roll will result in a draugar clawing at the side of a boat, trying to climb aboard. Percentile rolls should be made once every three rounds for as long as the PCs are at sea.

THE CAVE OF SILFURHANI

The small hill the PCs passed on the way to the Coffin is the entrance to the Cave of Silfurhani. On the rocky,

southerly face of the hill, a small door approximately half a man's height is carved into the rock. Runes are carved into the door which read:

*Three times in the morning the cock will crow,
By Silfurhani will the mountain open
where the dead ocean flows.
Three times in the eventide
Silfurhani will cry,
And close the door of the hill,
where ebbs Hel's foul tide.*

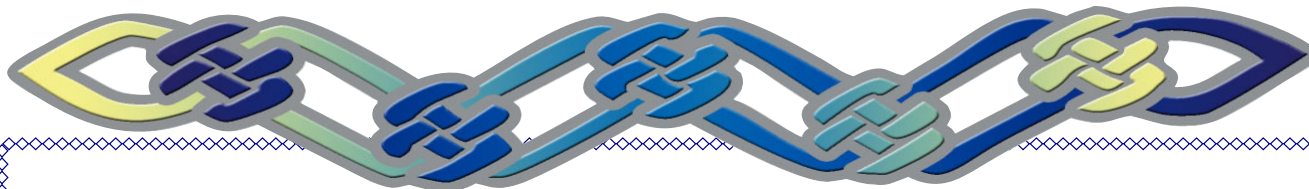
Besides the magical crowing of *silfurhani*, no magic spell or item will open the door, save for one: *hólatafur*, a runic stone.

INSIDE THE CAVE

Although the opening to the cave is quite small, once inside it seems as if the entire hill has been carved to form a giant store room. On the walls, jotnar trolls form a chain of terrifying dancers, their thick arms linked, their stocky legs bent, their lined faces scowling or frozen in the throes of a ferocious song.

The floor is sandy, littered with bones, frayed pieces of rope, and empty clay bowls. Against the northern wall is an enormous pile of accumulated treasure – a mish-mash of weaponry, household items, jewels, coins, gems, and foul-smelling but richly crafted garments.





The pile is literally six feet tall, and spreads out to cover an area five feet by seven feet.

Stolen treasures of the dead:

Gems: 7 chalcedony (50 gp each); 6 brown diamonds (1,000 gp; 1,450 gp; 3,020 gp; 4,700 gp); 25 freshwater pearls (8 gp each); 1 blue pearl (250 gp); 3 pink pearls (55 gp each); 12 hematite (8 gp each); 10 green garnets (100 gp each), 3 red cabochon garnets (100 gp each).

Jewelry: 17 gold chains (175 gp each); 12 silver chains (15 gp each); 22 gold rings (45 gp each).

Weapons: 28 scimitars (15 gp each); 7 falchions (75 gp); 45 plain daggers (2 gp each); 11 mithral daggers (510 gp each); 3 adamantite daggers (65 gp each); 6 bastard swords (30 gp each).

Armor: 52 medium chain shirts (95 gp each); 23 small chain shirts (65 gp each); 6 suits of half-plate (575 gp each), 34 gauntlets (10 gp each).

Mundane items: 8 gold holy symbols (40 gp each); 14 silver holy symbols (25 gp each); 12 masterwork thieves' toolkits (50 gp); 20 masterwork artisan toolkits (55gp); 5 sets of masterwork manacles (37 gp each).

Other objects: gold chastity belt encrusted with 7 rubies (8,000 gp); leather eye patch with golden chain and jade dragon ornament (755 gp); wooden leg set with gold and tortoise shell inlay (300 gp); 12 silver flasks (20 gp each); brass, bone and horsehair anklet (85 gp).

OPTIONS FOR THE CAVE OF SILFURHANI

While this lonely, isolated spot on the southern coast may have seemed peacefully macabre to the PCs, there are a number of things that may have occurred while they were in the cave examining the treasure.

- Sula and her gang may have arrived at the cave, to discover the door open.
- Otkell may have brought a group of thugs – including Sindri and his gang, to take the treasure hidden in the cave and spirit it away to the material plane for himself.
- If the PCs spurned Nidhogg, or refused to bargain with him and managed to escape, he is now waiting outside the cave. Any horses the PCs brought have perished, quickly, and any

wagon they may have brought is smashed to splinters by the giant serpent.

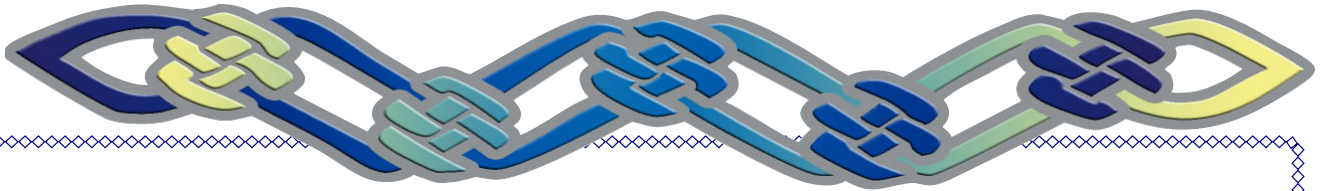
- One of the jotnar trolls in the bas relief is actually a secret door that leads to the lava tubes beneath Niflheim, including the catacombs under the Four Villages, and the fifth portal to the material plane. If the GM wishes to connect the Cave of Silfurhani to the catacombs beneath the Four Villages, he or she should assume that such an underground journey would occur in a relatively uniformly-shaped lava tube: twenty feet in height, ten feet across, and approximately 130 miles long. Occasionally the tube would enlarge to approximately fifty feet in height and twenty feet in width, and occasionally it would shrink to ten feet in height and seven feet across.

An occasional roll of 1d6 would decide the specifications of the tunnel as the adventurers travel:

- 1-2** Average size (20 ft. tall ceiling/10 ft. wide)
- 3-5** Large size (50 ft. tall ceiling/20 ft. wide)
- 6** Small size (10 ft. tall ceiling/7 ft. wide)

The average temperature would remain between 50 and 75 degrees fahrenheit (10 to 23 degrees Celsius). There would be no chance of lava or other natural threat while traveling through the tube, but there would be an occasional encounter with native fauna.

d%	
1-10	Earth Elemental, Small EL 1
11-25	Grick EL 3
26-35	Phasm EL 7
36-45	2d6 Fungus, Violet EL 3
46-55	Rust Monster EL 3
56-65	Shadow, Greater EL 8
66-80	Red Dragon, Wyrmling EL 4
81-95	Doppelganger EL 3
96-100	Spectre EL 7



APPENDICES

THE THIRD PORTENT - THE COMING OF BALDR

The GM may choose to take the game beyond a simple plot of cat-and-mouse: Sula and her gang of thieves and murderers need to be brought to justice, loved ones of the villagers need to be found or avenged, the *silfurhani* should be placed in the hands of someone who will not use it for evil purposes, etc. If the GM desires to, the first portent of the Fall of Hel may be followed by the second portent – a solar eclipse. At this point, followers of Baldr may arrive in Niflheim, hoping to find their god and gather an army against Hel; Hel may finally awaken to the fact that her rule hangs by a thin thread, and she may begin to seek out insurgents or threats to her reign; the staves may decide the time has come to defeat Nidhogg, take back Yggdrasil and try to heal the poison that eats at the World Tree's heart. The PCs can be instrumental in any of these stories as the heroes Niflheim has long waited for.

HEL THE GODDESS OF UNDEATH

Hel (Demigod)

Also known as Hela, Helia, the Dark Woman of Death, the Lady of the Ashes

Symbols of the deity: holly, black dogs, black horses, vultures, bones, infection

Alignment: chaotic evil

Attributes: death, undeath, disease, dishonor, decay, apathy

Domains: Death, Evil, Chaos, Madness

Favored weapon: thrall knife (dagger of slavery)

Hel is the daughter of Loki, god of trickery, and a giantess. Punished for her father's crimes against both gods and mortals, Hel was sent to rule Niflheim. Her decay quickly spread across the once-verdant demiplane, and her disease infected the great tree Yggdrasil. What the gods thought would be a deserving punishment for Hel and Loki evolved into a threat to the very universe, but none among the ancient and wise could

think of a way to remove the Lady of the Ashes from her appointed throne.

Hel is very short-sighted in her ways. She fusses and frets over her subjects, looking intently for a hero among the shambling, lackluster undead that are driven to her stronghold by the deity's clarion call. All that consumes Hel is greed – she wishes to assemble an army and acquire territory beyond Niflheim, using Yggdrasil as a vehicle with which to spread her torpor and madness.

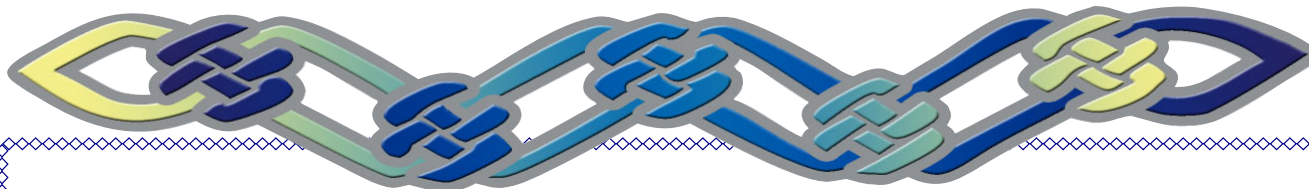
Hel has servants throughout Niflheim and the material plane. Clerics of Loki often convert to Hel when following the demands of the Trickster God prove too draining for them. Hel's instructions for the material plane are simple to follow: send as many to Niflheim as possible, and try to send warriors. So far, no warriors have arrived at the demiplane's shores.

As for the few worshippers in Niflheim itself – Hel ignores them, unless they cast themselves into the Sea of Death. So focused is the Dark Woman's thoughts that she rarely considers the living of her realm. This is frustrating to her worshippers there, and yet it is only a matter of time before the bravest of these followers seeks audience with Hel and offers an army of the living for her favor.

She has great possessions there; her walls are exceeding high and her gates great. Her hall is called Sleet-Cold; her dish, Hunger; Famine is her knife; Idler, her thrall; Sloven, her maidservant; Pit of Stumbling, her threshold, by which one enters; Disease, her bed; Gleaming Bale, her bed-hangings. She is half blue-black and half flesh-color (by which she is easily recognized), and very lowering and fierce.

- Excerpt from Gylfaginning, or The tricking of Gylfi, by Snorri Sturluson.





BALDR GOD OF THE HIGH SUMMER

Baldr

Also known as Baldur, and Baldr the Beautiful

Symbols of the deity: white plants, midsummer, pure flame

Alignment: Lawful Good

Attributes: goodness, beauty, truth, joy, honor, nobility

Domains: Sun, Strength, Protection, Good

Favored weapon: throwing axe

Baldr was a god beloved by his followers, though his existence was brief, even for a god, and thus his followers were few even during his life. Killed by a plot of Loki, the god of trickery, Baldr was placed on a pyre atop his magnificent boat with his wife, Nanna. The pyre flames were lit and the boat set adrift on the seas of the universe, cursed by Loki to arrive in the realm of the dishonored dead. Before the pyres were lit, Baldr's father whispered something in his dead son's ear – no one knows what these words were, or how they had altered the fate of the most loved of gods.

Baldr's few remaining clerics, though stripped of their power, are still devoted to their master. Many seek passage to Niflheim, in hopes of finding their fallen deity there, that they may try and save him from Hel's diseased hand.

He is best, and all praise him; he is so fair of feature, and so bright, that light shines from him. A certain herb is so white that it is likened to Baldr's brow; of all grasses it is whitest, and by it thou mayest judge his fairness, both in hair and in body.

- Excerpt from Gylfaginning, or The tricking of Gylfi, by Snorri Sturluson.

LOKI GOD OF TRICKERY

Loki (Also known as The Sly One)

Symbols of the deity: fire, foxes, serpents, wolves

Alignment: neutral evil

Attributes: trickery, manipulation, lies, shapeshifting

Domains: Trickery, Fire, Magic, Shapeshift*

Favored weapon: throwing axe

Loki has few followers, and no organized churches dedicated to him. He is extremely demanding of his faithful, as his whims change like the direction of the wind, and his plots are multi-tiered and exhausting in their execution. Loki enjoys shifting the balance of power among gods and mortals, wherever and however he can. He is a master shapeshifter and collector of arcane knowledge.

Domain abilities: The cleric has Bluff and Disguise as class skills. You also gain +4 to Disguise checks to appear as another individual you have personally slain for d12 hours.

*Shapeshift Domain:

1st Disguise Self

2nd Alter Self

3rd Polymorph

4th Tree Shape

5th Meld Into Stone

6th Baleful Polymorph

7th Wind Walk

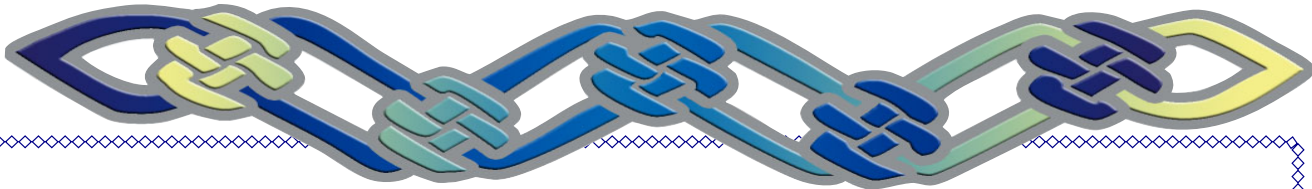
8th Clone

9th Shapechange

THE STAVE - CLASS OPTIONS

Staves regard the quarterstaff as a symbol of Yggdrassil, the World Tree. Staves train their bodies to be both a tool and a weapon, like the quarterstaffs they revere, and from which the class draws its name. In Niflheim staves live simply, focusing themselves on meditation and the study of runic lore. They are reviled by their neighbors as uncanny, barbaric shapeshifters. These slurs have some basis in fact: staves are indeed uncanny and many know the secrets of adopting the forms of animals. Yet they regard themselves as peaceful folk who use their powers only to protect themselves and others from the various threats of Niflheim.

Plain-spoken: Many staves prefer to contemplate their runes rather than work to dispel the negative stereotypes that surround them. Their speech is direct, but often cryptic. Such characters gain a +2 to



Concentration checks and, when conversing with non-staves, a -2 to Diplomacy and Bluff checks.

Stave classes: All staves share certain traits in common: they are adept in the use of quarterstaves, and they practice rune magic, which gives them the ability to shapeshift. However their abilities otherwise depend on which rune they have chosen to represent the pathway for their own personal development. Some of these paths have fallen into disuse, but three are still practiced; the path of the Wolf, associated with the rune Ash; the path of the Bear, associated with the rune Is; and the path of the Horse, associated with the rune Sol. The discipline required to follow their rune paths demand an unwavering devotion to Law; all staves are lawfully aligned.

In game terms, stave characters choose one of the following paths. Each class is a variant of a core class, where some class abilities have been swapped for stave abilities. Use the table below to add class abilities to the variant core class of the path.

1st	1st Runefocus, Ur, knack (class skill)
3rd	Runegift (ability), knack (skill tied to runegift)
5th	Animal form, Kreft (disease), runic item
7th	2nd Runefocus, knack (any skill)
9th	Runegift
11th	Fast recovery, Kreft (poison)
12th	Greater animal form
13th	3rd Runefocus, Laug (spells)
15th	Runegift, unconscious focus
17th	Youth, Kreft (death magic)
19th	4th Runefocus
20th	Laug (mind ward), perfect knack.

The Path of the Wolf

Known as **Wolfskins** in popular parlance, these staves are associated with the rune **Ash**. Treat them as rangers, with the following changes:

Lose/Disadvantages: Animal companion, favored enemy, spellcasting.

Gain: Fast movement (+10 ft.), rune magic, and Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff) at 1st level, Animal form (wolf) at 5th level. Optional: Plain-spoken.

The Path of the Bear

Known as **Bearskins**, these staves are associated with the rune **Is**. Treat them as barbarians with the following changes:

Lose/Disadvantages: Rage, greater rage, illiteracy, indomitable will, tireless rage, mighty rage, trap sense.

Gain: Rune magic and Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff) at 1st level, Animal form (bear) at 5th level. Optional: Plain-spoken.

The Path of the Horse

Known as **Horseskins**, these staves are associated with the rune **Sol**. Treat them as monks with the following changes:

Lose/Disadvantages: AC bonuses, purity of body, diamond body, diamond soul, multiclass limitations, timeless body.

Gain: Rune magic and Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff) at 1st level, Animal form (horse) at 5th level. Optional: Plain-spoken.

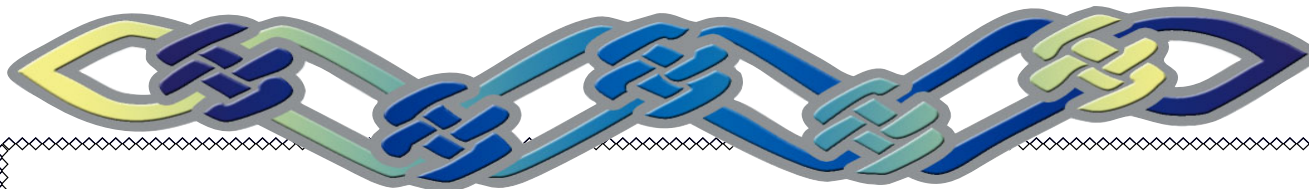
The Path of the Hare

Known as **Hareskins**, these staves are associated with the rune **Bjork**. Treat them as sorcerers with the following changes:

Lose/Disadvantages: Summon Familiar, 1 spell slot per day from each available spell level

Gain: Rune magic and Weapon Focus (Quarterstaff) at 1st level, Animal form (hare) at 5th level. Optional: Plain-spoken.

Multiclassing and Ex-staves: Except for shapeshifting, stave levels stack for the purposes of determining rune magic. A level 9/9 wolfskin/bearskin has the Youth special ability, and can shapeshift into either a Medium bear or wolf, but not into the form of a Large animal. For the purpose of determining multiclass xp penalties, all three stave classes are considered the same class; staves characters can multiclass freely with stave classes without penalties.



A character who ceases to be lawful can no longer advance in a stave class, but does not lose any class abilities. Such characters frequently take levels of fighter or wilderness rogue (*refer to the SRD Variant Class Rules*).

Rune Magic

The benefits of rune magic are supernatural unless otherwise specified. When rune magic duplicates the effect of a spell, the caster level is equal to your stave level.

Runefocus: You can meditate on a particular rune to attempt to become focused on an aspect of that rune, thereby unlocking its power. Most runes require focus to be used; see the individual rune descriptions for details. Focusing on a rune requires a DC 20 Concentration check. Focusing is a full-round action that provokes attacks of opportunity. Once you focus on a rune, you remain focused until you expend your focus, become unconscious, or go to sleep. Casting a spell requires as much concentration as maintaining runefocus. You must make a DC 20 Concentration check when you cast a spell; if you fail the check you expend your runefocus. Activating a spell-like or supernatural ability also requires a DC 30 Concentration check to avoid expending your runefocus. You may expend your runefocus voluntarily to help make a Concentration check. If you do this, determine the result of the Concentration check as if the die roll were a 15.

A 1st level stave can only focus on one rune at a time, but this number increases with experience; two runes at 7th level, three at 13th level, and four runes at 19th level. If you focus on one fewer rune than is allowed you may cast spells (or use similar abilities) without having to make a Concentration check.

Ur: The first rune mastered is Ur, whose primal power provides protection to the stave who focuses on it. This protection manifests itself in the form of a shield bonus to armor class equal to your Wisdom bonus (or +2, whichever is higher). The bonus increases by +1 every five levels; +3 at level 5, +4 at level 10, +5 at level 15, and +6 at level 20. This invisible protection is force based, and so it applies even against ethereal

or incorporeal opponents. There are no armor check penalties associated with the rune, and it does not interfere with any of your class abilities.

Knack: A knack applies the power of a rune to a single skill, chosen when the knack is acquired. The first knack you acquire applies to a class skill. The second knack applies to a skill governed by the ability to which you have a runegift. The third knack can apply to any skill, even one in which you don't have any ranks. When you focus on a knack, determine the result of any skill check with that skill as if the die roll were a 15.

RUNEGIFT RUNES

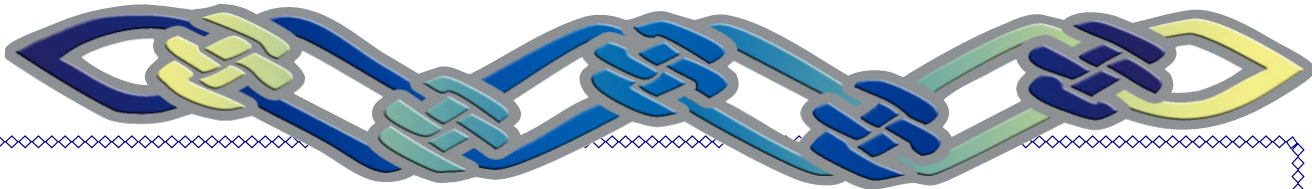
Ash: Wisdom
Ur: Strength
Sol: Charisma
Ar: Fortitude saves
Is: Intelligence
Nod: Will saves
Hagl: Dexterity
Yr: Constitution
Laug: Reflex saves

Runegift: A runegift grants a +4 insight bonus to a particular ability score or type of saving throw. The exact benefit is chosen when the runegift is acquired, except that the first runegift can only apply to an ability score. The second and third runegifts can apply either to one's Will, Reflex or Fortitude saving throws, or to one of

the six ability scores. You need to focus on the rune to enjoy the benefit of a runegift.

Animal form: At 5th level you may assume the form of your totem animal; a wolf, a young polar bear, a yearling colt, or a hare. Each type of animal is size Medium, except the hare which is size Tiny. While in animal form you gain a +10 bonus on Disguise checks when trying to pass as a normal animal of the indicated type. Up to 50 lbs. of equipment may be included in the transformation. All gear and magical items merge with your form but continue to function normally. Your natural armor increases by +2, which stacks with any natural armor you currently possess. Hares gain a size modifier to their AC. You lose the ability to speak intelligibly or to manipulate objects with your hands; they are effectively paws (or hooves).

You may change back and forth to your animal form as often as you like; each change requires a standard action and provokes an attack of opportunity. It does not require focus to assume animal form, but if you



focus on the form you gain the use of the Endurance and Run feats.

Most game statistics are unchanged in animal form, but you cannot use normal weapons or unarmed attacks – only natural attacks, as follows.

BEAR: 2 claws at $d4 + \text{Str}$ (primary), 1 bite at $d6 + \frac{1}{2} \text{Str}$ (secondary: -5 to attack rolls).

WOLF: 1 bite at $1d6 + 1.5 \times \text{Str}$ (primary)

HORSE: 2 hooves at $1d3 + \text{Str}$ (primary)

HARE: None, although while in hare form the stave gains +20 ft. to movement

Special: As a stave does not gain the physical attributes of the animal form, in animal form you may use Power Attack to trade BAB for extra Strength. Increase your Strength by twice the amount you subtract from your BAB. This applies both inside and outside of combat. Although most game statistics are unchanged in animal form, the flavor of the statistics are appropriate to your new form. If you make a Climb check in the form of a bear, interpret the result as if a bear had made that check (bears climb better than humans, even though they don't have any ranks in that skill). Food appropriate to your animal form will nourish you when you are in that form.

Runic Item: If you have five or more levels of stave you may make runic items as if you were a spellcaster of your stave level. This allows you to ignore all prerequisite item crafting feats and prerequisite spells listed for the item. If you possess this feat you may focus on a stave or bow in order to do an additional +1d6 damage to any chaotic opponent struck.

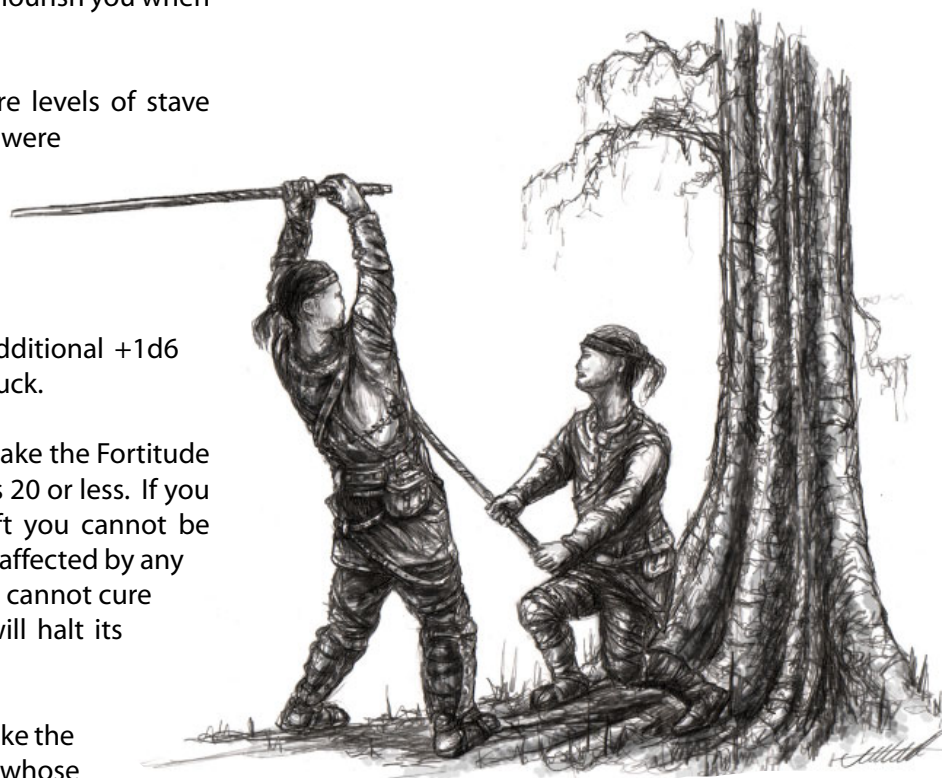
Kreft (disease): You automatically make the Fortitude save against any disease whose DC is 20 or less. If you focus on the disease aspect of Kreft you cannot be infected by a new disease, and are unaffected by any disease you already have. This ability cannot cure a disease you already have, but it will halt its progression.

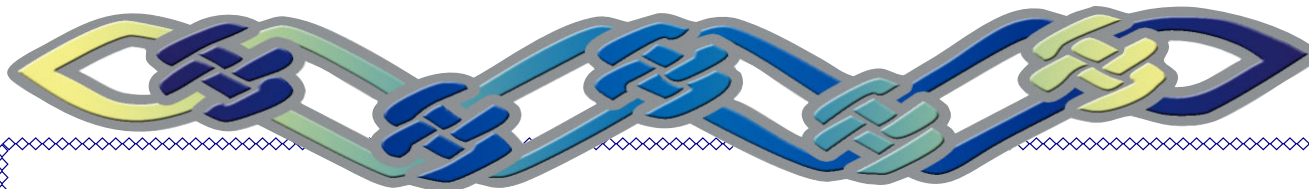
Kreft (poison): You automatically make the Fortitude save against any poison whose

DC is 20 or less. If you focus on the poison aspect of Kreft you cannot become poisoned and are unaffected by any poison already in your system. This ability does not neutralize a poison already in your system, but prevents any further damage.

Fast recovery: At 11th level you learn how to recover runic focus quickly and unobtrusively. You may perform a brief meditation as a move equivalent action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. The Concentration DC for a fast recovery of runic focus is 30.

Greater animal form (12th level): As animal form, but the size assumed is Large instead of Medium (except for the hare, which assume Medium size, instead of Tiny), and more fierce. You gain a +2 size bonus to Strength, a -2 size penalty to Dexterity (to a minimum of 1), and a -1 penalty on attack rolls and AC due to your increased size. You occupy a space of 10 feet and a natural reach of 10 feet (except for the hare). You also gain an additional +2 to natural armor. Your natural attacks default to the following:





LARGE BEAR: 2 claws at 1d8 + Str (primary), 1 bite at 2d6 + ½ Str (secondary)

LARGE WOLF: 1 bite at 2d6 + 1.5 x Str (primary)

LARGE HORSE: 2 hooves at 1d6 + Str (primary)

MEDIUM HARE: 1 bite at 1d6 + Str (primary)

Laug (spells): Meditation on the rune Laug grants you Spell Resistance 20. If you focus on Laug you gain SR equal to your class level +10.

Unconscious Focus: Once you focus on a rune, you retain focus even if asleep or unconscious.

Youth: Your study of rune magic grants you health and extraordinarily long life. Treat your age as 1/2 of its actual value (to a minimum of young adult) for the purpose of ability penalties and maximum age. This is an extraordinary ability.

Kreft (death magic): You automatically make the Fortitude save against any death effect whose DC is 20 or less. If you focus on the death aspect of Kreft you are immune to death magic, energy drain and negative energy effects, as if by protected by a death ward.

Laug (mind ward): You automatically make your saving throw against any divination or mind affecting effect whose DC is 20 or lower. If you focus on the mental aspect of Laug you gain immunity to divination and mind affecting effects as if protected by a mind blank.

Perfect knack: When focused on a knack, determine the result of the skill check as if the die roll were a 20.

Male human stave (bear) 5th level; CR 5; Medium humanoid; HD 5d12+10+3; hp 63; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14, touch 11, flat-footed 13; BAB +5; Grp +10; Atk +11 melee (1d6+6, quarterstaff); Full Atk: +11 melee (1d6+6, quarterstaff) or +7/+3 melee (1d6+6/1d6+6, quarterstaff); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA none; SQ Improved Uncanny Dodge, Runefocus, Animal Form; AL LN; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 20, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate ^K+12, Jump ^K+11, Listen +9, Survival +9; Skill Focus (Intimidate), Toughness, Combat Reflexes, [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Possessions: Studded leather armor, +1/+1 quarterstaff,

backpack, bedroll, knife, 2 daggers

^K – skills so marked have been made the stave's knacks.

Bear Form

Male human stave (bear) 5th level; CR 5; Medium humanoid [augmented]; HD 5d12+10+3; hp 63; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15; BAB +5; Grp +10; Atk +10 melee (1d4+5, claw); Full Atk: +10 melee (1d4+5, 2 claws) and +5 melee (1d6+2, bite); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA none; SQ Improved Uncanny Dodge, Runefocus, Animal Form; AL LN; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 20, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate ^K+12, Jump ^K+11, Listen +9, Survival +9; Skill Focus (Intimidate), Toughness, Combat Reflexes, [Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)]

Feats

Devoted Focus

A rune is engraved on your very being.

Prerequisite: Access to a knack, or the appropriate form of Kreft or Laug.

Benefit: Prolonged study of a rune allows you to gain the full benefit even if it is not the object of focus.

Special: The rune must be prominently tattooed on your face or hands. This rune is visible even in your animal form as a patch of contrasting fur. This feat may be taken multiple times, applying to a different rune each time. Its effects stack.

Extra Knack

You have a broad range of reliable skills.

Prerequisite: Possession of a knack.

Benefit: Choose any skill according to the rules by which you chose a knack you already possess. You gain a knack for that skill.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times. Its effects stack.

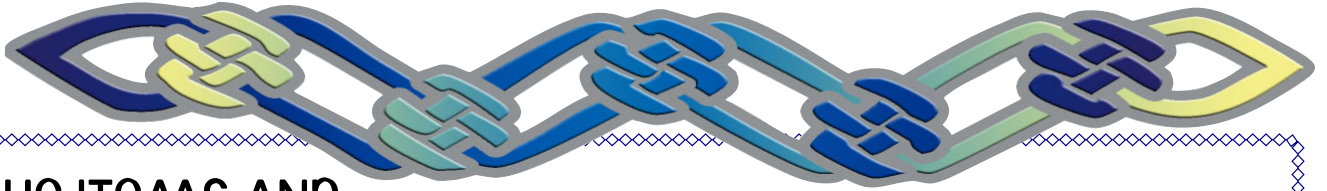
Greater Runegift

Your runegift has greater than normal effect.

Benefit: Choose a single runegift you possess.

The insight bonus for that runegift increases by +2.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times. Each time it is taken it applies to a different runegift. Its effects stack.



UNIQUE ITEMS AND TREASURE

RUNIC STONES

Hólastafur (Open Hills)

Holding this runic stone against the side of a hill, mountain, cliff, palisade, large petrified tree or large petrified creature creates both a door in that surface as well as a corridor leading from the created door to the nearest hollow or room within that formation. One hour after using hólastafur, the door will close, but the tunnel will remain open unless closed by natural or man-made actions. There must be such a chamber within 500 feet for the stone to work. If no such chamber exists when the stone is used, that month's use is expended. Hólastafur may be used once per month.

Strong Transmutation; CL 15th, Craft Wondrous Item, *limited wish*, Price 370,000 gp, Weight -

Uruz (The Migratory Rune)

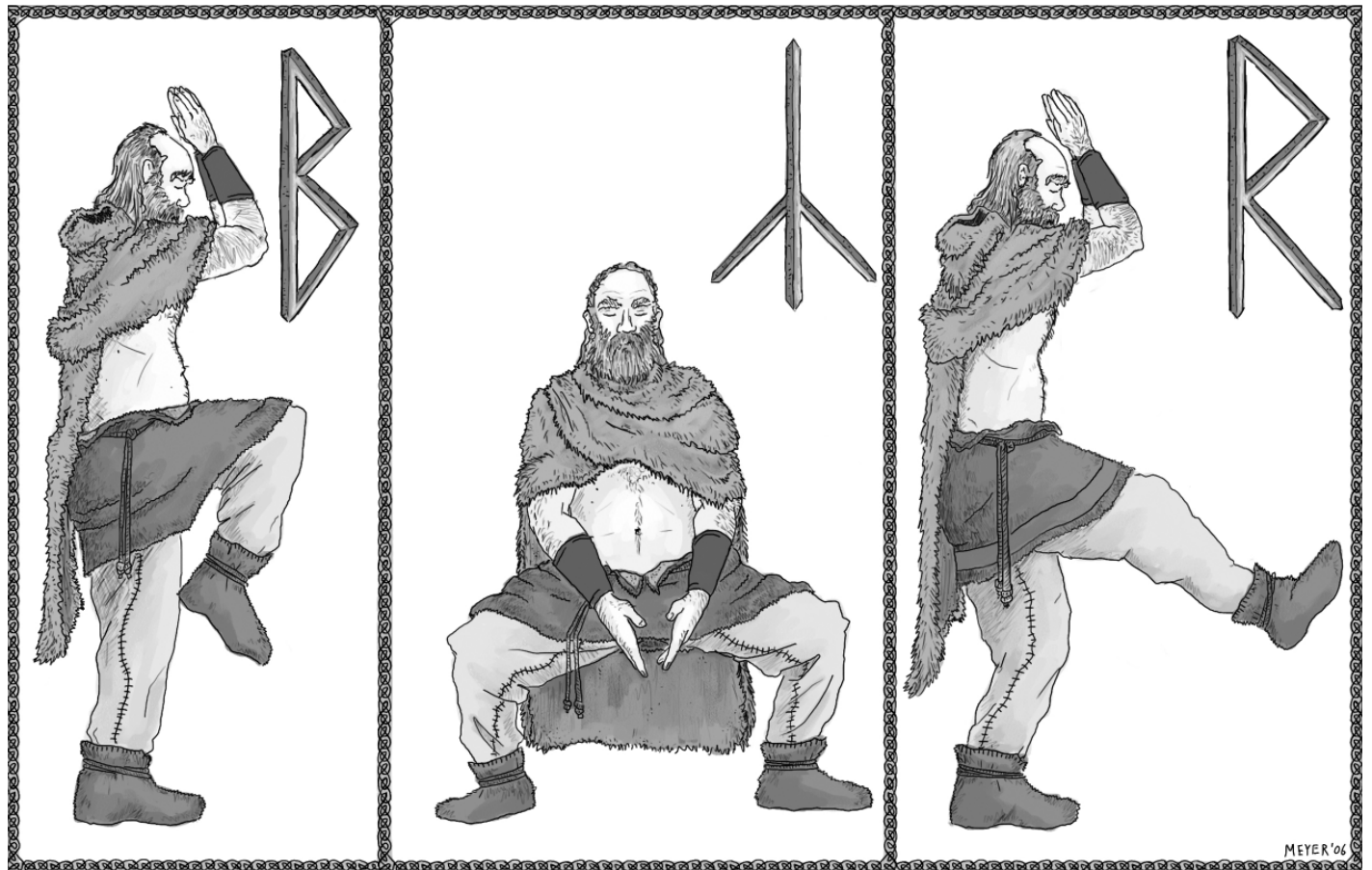
Holding this runic stone in one's hand or pocket enables that person to use the spell *find the path*. It may be used once per day.

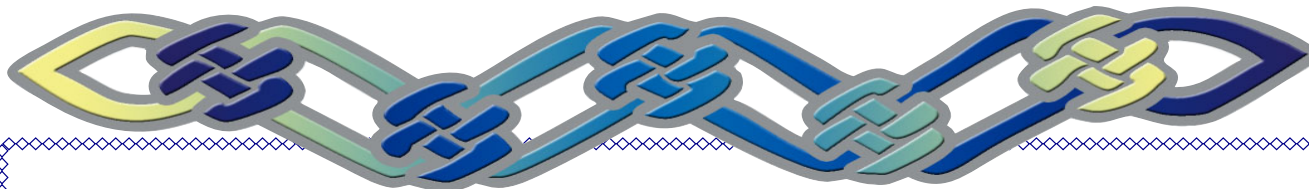
Moderate Divination; CL 11th, Craft Wondrous Items, *find the path*, Price 57,600 gp, Weight -

Thurisaz (Rune of the Giants)

Each of these four runic stones summons a giant. The giant appears where you designate and acts immediately on your turn. It attacks your opponents to the best of its ability. If you can communicate with the creature, you can direct it not to attack, to attack particular enemies, or to perform other actions. The giant will remain for a total of 10 minutes, although it may be dismissed by the holder of the stone before the duration expires.

Each stone is connected to an individual giant of the





appropriate type for that stone. During the stone's creation, a small piece of the giant must be used as the focus for the stone. This piece could be a lock of hair, a drop of blood, a toenail clipping or anything else. Only that giant will be summoned when the stone is used. The magic of the stone will prevent the death of the giant during his service, however should the giant die outside the stone's control the stone will turn glossy black and be useless thereafter. Should a blackened stone be used, it will explode in the user's hand dealing 10d6 points of damage (half fire, half piercing).

A summoned giant cannot summon or otherwise conjure another creature, nor can it use any teleportation or planar travel abilities. The giant cannot be summoned into an environment that cannot support it. A *thurisaz stone* can be used once per day. The command word to activate the stone is the name of the giant attached to the stone.

ThurisazEldur (Rune of Fire Giants): Strong Conjunction; CL 18th, Craft Wondrous Items, Maximize Spell, must have focus for specific giant, *summon monster IX*, Price 86,400 gp, Weight –

ThurisazHéla (Rune of Frost Giants): Strong Conjunction; CL 18th, Craft Wondrous Items, Maximize Spell, must have focus for specific giant, *summon monster IX*, Price 86,400 gp, Weight –

Thurisaz Steinn (Rune of Stone Giants): Strong Conjunction; CL 16th, Craft Wondrous Items, Maximize Spell, must have focus for specific giant, *summon monster VIII*, Price 68,300 gp, Weight –

Thurisaz Hight (Rune of Hill Giants): Strong Conjunction; CL 14th, Craft Wondrous Items, Maximize Spell, must have focus for specific giant, *summon monster VII*, Price 52,300 gp, Weight –

Raitho (Rune of Journeys)

This runic stone functions like the spell *dimension door* and can be used once per day.

Moderate Conjunction; CL 8th, Craft Wondrous Items, *dimension door*, Price 25,600 gp, Weight –

Kenaz (Rune of Light)

This runic stone functions like the spell *light* and can be used at will.

Moderate Evocation; CL 8th, Craft Wondrous Items, *light*, Price 9,000 gp, Weight –

Algiz (Rune of Protection)

This runic stone functions like a *ring of protection*. It must be kept on the owner's person to function. This is the only runic stone that takes up a magic item slot. The slot used depends on how it is worn: if as a necklace, it takes the amulet slot; if placed on the head, it takes the headband/hat slot; if carried in a pocket (not a pouch or a backpack), it takes a ring or glove slot. Other means of carrying the stone are left to the adjudication of the GM.

Faint Abjuration; CL 5th, Craft Wondrous Items, *shield of faith*, creator's caster level must be three times the stone's bonus; Price 2,000 gp (Algiz +1); 8,000 gp (Algiz +2); 18,000 gp (Algiz +3); 32,000 gp (Algiz +4); 50,000 gp (Algiz +5)

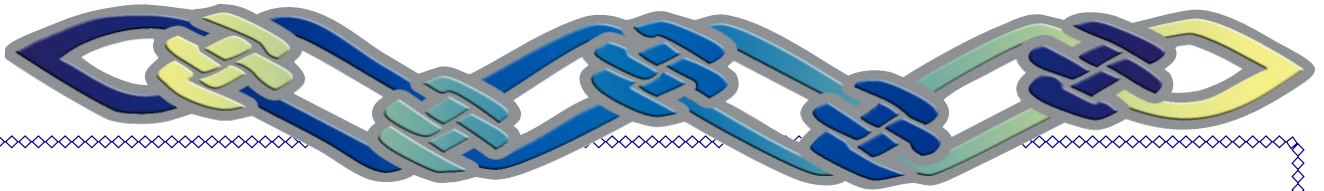
Kreft (Rune of Poison and Disease protection)

This small runestone (roughly 1 inch oval) when found will have two small holes at either end. When a lock of the owner's hair is braided through the holes and the stone worn around the right wrist, the owner gains a +4 resistance bonus to all saves versus poisons and diseases. This runestone will only work for a particular individual if that person's hair has been used for the band; wearing someone else's kreft runestone confers no benefit to the wearer. If the runestone is to be used by another person, the current hair must be removed, and the current wearer's hair braided through the holes.

Faint abjuration; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item; *resistance*; Price 500 gp

Ash (Rune of Wisdom)

This small runestone is usually made of a dark stone, the closer to black the better. When worn on a



leather cord as a necklace, it bestows either a +2 or a +4 enhancement bonus to the wearer's Wisdom score, depending on the strength of the stone.

Moderate Transmutation; CL 8th; Craft Wondrous Item; *owl's wisdom*; Price 4,000 gp (+2), 16,000 gp (+4)

Ar (Rune of Fortitude protection)

This runestone is made from a round and smooth river stone at least four inches in diameter. The rune is carved into the back of the stone, and the stone is further worked into a belt or strap buckle (in either case taking up the belt slot). The stone bestows a +2 bonus to all Fortitude saves which stacks with all other such stackable bonuses.

Faint abjuration; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item; *resistance*; Price 4,000 gp

Magic Quarterstaves

A stave usually carves a quarterstaff with a specific rune to enhance its power, and some particularly potent quarterstaves have become tales of legend.

Ehwaz – The Swift Quarterstaff

Description: This magical staff functions as a *quarterstaff of speed*. It is made of hardened yew wood and each head of the quarterstaff is crafted to resemble a horse's head.

Background: This quarterstaff is in the possession of Loftur the Necromancer. He has given it to one of his undead minions. He is not concerned with the quarterstaff and may have even forgotten he owns it.

Abilities: +1 speed/+1 speed

Caster Level: 7th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *haste*; **Market Price:** 100,600 gp; **Cost to Create:** 50,600 gp and 6000 xp.

Wunjo – The Glorious Quarterstaff

Description: This magical stave functions as an undead

bane weapon. It is crafted from mahogany and when the user accomplishes a great deed, the staff is momentarily warm and pleasing to the touch.

Background: This quarterstaff is in a heap of decaying meat and bone. A hero used it to fight the four eyed beast named Garm who lives at the base of the Helgardth mountain.

Abilities: +1 greater undead bane/+1 greater undead bane quarterstaff

Against undead, this weapon gains a +2 on to hit rolls and deals an additional +2d6 damage. This weapon can also inflict critical hits on undead, which are normally immune to them.

Caster Level: 8th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *summon monster I*; **Market Price:** 26,600 gp; **Cost to Create:** 18,600 gp and 1440 xp.

Gebo – The Loyal Quarterstaff

Description: This magical quarterstaff functions as a *stave of returning*. When thrown, this staff has one attack and a range of 50 ft. When used in melee combat, Gebo has two attacks. This quarterstaff is made from the wood of a pear tree.

Background: This quarterstaff is likely found somewhere among the islands of Fire and Ice in the river Ledda. It was last seen in the hands of a brave youth, who claimed he was going to tame one of the islands and build a fortress there. Suffice to say, he obviously failed.

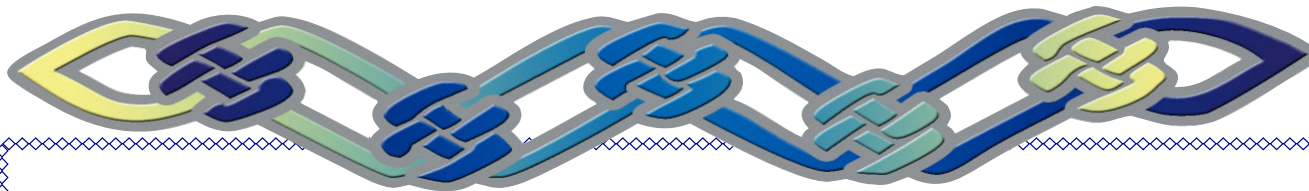
Abilities: +1 returning/+1 returning quarterstaff
This weapon returns to its user after it is thrown.

Caster Level: 7th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *telekenesis*, *haste*; **Market Price:** 16,600 gp; **Cost to Create:** 8,600 gp and 640 xp.

Kreft – The Quarterstaff of Disease

Description: Made from wormwood, this quarterstaff is always slick to the touch.

Background: This quarterstaff is in the hands of a band of ghosts that wander the Barrens. The Quarterstaff of Disease is an oddly comforting item for them.



Abilities: +1 disease/+1 disease

This weapon causes disease once per day for each head of the quarterstaff (as the spell *cause disease*, Fortitude save DC 14) upon a creature struck by the head. The wielder can decide to use the power after he has struck. Doing so is a free action, but the disease effect must be invoked in the same round that the quarterstaff strikes.

Faint necromancy; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *poison*; Price 16,600 gp; Cost 8,600 gp + 640 XP.

Ash – The Quarterstaff of Kingship

Description: The head of each quarterstaff is engraved with a stylized crown near each of the ends and it is made from the wood of an ash tree.

Background: This is a weapon of leaders. While it is not the foremost quarterstaff in combat, it is invaluable for a ruler. Simply owning this quarterstaff is a high mark of prestige.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

A +6 competence bonus to Diplomacy is granted to the bearer as long as the weapon is equipped. Additionally the wielder can create a *zone of truth* as if cast by a 5th level cleric when uttering the command “I demand the truth!” in the common tongue.

Faint Divination and Charm; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *zone of truth*; price gp; cost 6700 (5,400)

Ur – The Quarterstaff of Strength

Description: This quarterstaff is larger and thicker than most. It makes no sound when it strikes in combat and it is made of simple oak with no adornments.

Background: One of the few quarterstaffs that is currently in the hands of what might be called “good”, the Quarterstaff of Strength is being used by the heroine Skaji and her companion, the bard known as Yijoril. They are currently on an endless quest across Niflheim, their goal being to direct those in need to communities that are known to help strangers.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

This quarterstaff grants the bearer a +2 enhancement bonus to strength. It also permits the wielder to cast silence as a 5th level caster twice per day.

Faint illusion; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *silence*; price gp; cost 9,300 (8,000)

Sol – The Quarterstaff of the Peaceful Warrior

Description: This quarterstaff is made of highly polished oak. Each end is capped with bronze that is kept perpetually bright and shiny. Dirt and muck tend not to cling to the wielder.

Background: This quarterstaff is attuned to Baldr’s life, death, and resurrection. Of all the quarterstaves, this one is irrationally hated by Hel and she will reward any who see to its destruction. Its whereabouts are unknown.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

If the user drops below zero hit points for any reason, the quarterstaff will automatically heal him or her for 10 hp. This ability can be used a maximum of three times per day. Additionally, the user is able to cast light at will as if he or she were a 5th level cleric.

Faint conjuration; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *cure light wounds*, light; price gp; cost 7880 (6580)

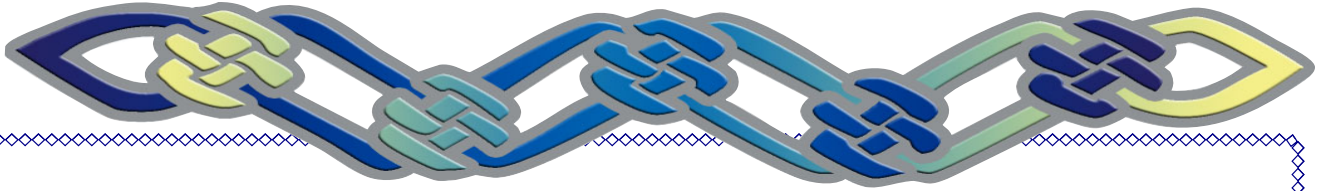
Ar – The Quarterstaff of Plenty

Description: Made from holly wood, the bearer of this quarterstaff is always sated, as if he or she had just had a filling meal.

Background: This is owned by Kari the ranger; it was given to him by Varick, chieftain of the staves. Its ability to purify food has been the difference between life and death for many people that Kari has rescued.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

The bearer of the quarterstaff can cast purify food and drink once per day as if cast by a 5th level cleric. Additionally if the wielder scores a successful critical



hit upon an opponent, the opponent must make a Fortitude save DC 14 or take an additional 2d8 hit points of damage. If this happens the user of the quarterstaff is healed 1d8 points of damage.

Faint conjuration; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *cure light wounds, inflict moderate wounds, purify food and drink*; price gp; cost 7880

Isa – The Quarterstaff of the Winter Hunt

Description: This quarterstaff is cold to the touch and made from juniper wood. Sometimes, if the quarterstaff is used in a long, desperate battle, it has been known to drip blood of its own accord.

Background: This quarterstaff is part of the hoard of the serpent Nidhogg. The snake doesn't feel the need to brandish the weapon, but will use it to grow even further in size and power if ever approached with a serious threat.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

Once per day the user can assume the aspect of a bear for 5 minutes. The user gains one size category (e.g. size medium becomes size large), a +2 enhancement bonus to Str and Con, and a 1d8 bite attack as a natural weapon. His appearance is grotesque and normal speech is impaired, inflicting a -4 penalty to Diplomacy and Bluff checks. The user's equipment and armor is altered to increase size with the user during this change.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *alter self, bear's endurance, bull's strength*; price gp; cost 7,300 (6,000)

Nod – The Quarterstaff of Need

Description: This quarterstaff is made of elm and looks like it is always about to break. It is fractured in a hundred small places and the ends of it are always chipped.

Background: This quarterstaff is in the hands of a Jotnar brigand. He has not figured out that his perpetual hunger is derived from this item and he drives his band

to loot and plunder so that he may consume and slake his appetite.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

On a successful critical hit, the target must make a Will save DC 14 or suffer a -2 penalty to CON. This is treated as temporary ability score damage and the effect stacks with itself. The wielder of this staff is perpetually hungry and must consume two times as much food and drink to avoid starvation.

Faint necromancy; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bestow curse*; price gp; cost 9,700 (8,400)

Hagl – The Quarterstaff of the Watcher

Description: This quarterstaff is slightly transparent and its beech wood is engraved with hundreds of small eyes. There are some who speculate that the transparency is because a small part of it actually exists in the future. Bearers of the quarterstaff have spoken of a feeling of confidence and bravery when they hold the weapon.

Background: This quarterstaff is held by the mayor of the dwarven village of Storbaer. He uses it when making decisions in the erroneous belief that his wisdom will be aided by visions of the future.

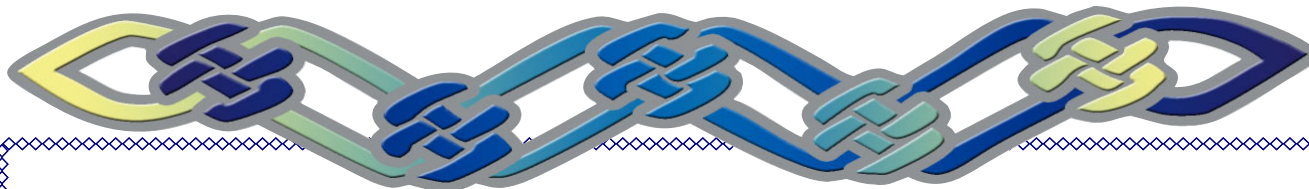
Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

The wielder gains a +1 insight bonus to Armor Class and a +4 insight bonus to initiative. However, the boldness that this quarterstaff invokes makes the user a little careless and he suffers an additional +2 hit points of damage whenever he is the target of a critical strike, as he lets his guard down.

Faint divination; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *guidance*; price gp; cost 6,300 (5,000)

Yr – The Quarterstaff of Winter

Description: This quarterstaff is made of yew wood and has a slight smell of sweat. It is engraved with unmistakably male images engaged in combat. Women who touch the quarterstaff find it to be bitterly cold.



Background: Hlokk the giantess owns this quarterstaff. She knows its nature, but she values it only because others want it. For her, this quarterstaff is nothing more than a very expensive bargaining chip.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

This quarterstaff protects the wielder from the chill and grants cold resistance 5. Women who bring it into combat feel like a very cold wind is howling in their ears in a somehow male vocal register, this lends a -2 penalty to initiative checks.

Faint divination; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *resist energy*; price gp; cost 9,100 (7,800)

Laug – The Quarterstaff of Water

Description: Just picking up this staff causes the person who touches it to break out in a cold sweat. It is made from apple wood and if it is quiet enough, the wielder can hear screaming in the distance from all the souls washing up on the shores of Niflheim.

Background: Nidhogg, one of the guardians of Niflheim seeks this quarterstaff. It correctly fears that this quarterstaff's attunement to the waters could aide in Nidhogg's downfall. Nidhogg has a reputation for sticking to the letter but not the spirit of an arrangement, he will be more lax when it comes to ensuring the destruction of this quarterstaff.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

In any other realm other than Niflheim this quarterstaff grants the bearer a +2 bonus to strength as his arm is backed with the tidal force of the oceans. However, in Hel's realm when the target is successfully hit, they are shaken for five rounds, unless the target succeeds a Will save DC 14, in which case the target is shaken for only one round.

Faint necromancy; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *cause fear, fear*; price gp; cost 6,600 (5,300)

Mann – The Quarterstaff of Mankind

Description: This quarterstaff is made with the wood from the hawthorn tree. It is engraved with hedonistic images.

Background: The Quarterstaff of Mankind is the centerpiece of an odd event deep in the Kogur Forest. The fey of the outer planes who have been luckless enough to fall into Niflheim have regressed into a parody of their former selves. They use the quarterstaff for a maypole dance in the middle of a bloody celebration that is violent and manic. The fey dance, sing, and drink, but to no purpose. Their dances are simple flailing, their songs are throaty yells, and the ale they drink is swill. Nobody is invited to dance with them, but are grabbed and forced to make merry. Anyone who stops or tries to rest is killed and their entrails are maliciously thrown about and used as ribbons.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

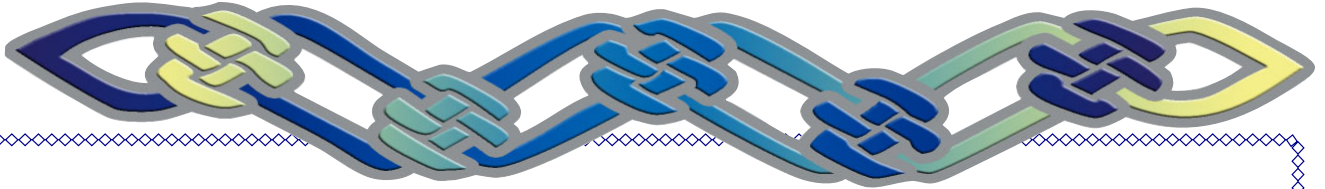
The wielder adds his Charisma modifier to damage. If the wielder critically fails a Diplomacy or Bluff check against an NPC, the NPC becomes jealous of the character and a permanent -2 circumstance penalty is applied to further Diplomacy or Bluff checks against that person.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *eagle's splendor*; price gp; cost 5,100 (3,800 – this should be applied to both heads)

Bjork – The Quarterstaff of the Female Guardian

Description: This quarterstaff is carved from birch and has engravings of women protecting their children from various threats.

Background: This quarterstaff is currently in possession of the Mountain King. He is convinced that the natural female energies that are closely associated with the magic must run deep with this quarterstaff, as such energies are linked to the rune of bijork. He is having great difficulty with his experiments however because of the quarterstaff's female attunement. He is convinced he could make great discoveries if he could enlist the aid of a female assistant.



Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

All friendly creatures within 5' of the wielder gain a +2 circumstance bonus to AC as the bearer extends it to block on their behalf. All males wielding this staff incurs a -2 circumstance penalty to initiative due to a slight, indefinable but definitely female buzzing noise in his ear.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *shield other*; price gp; cost 7,300 (6,000)

Tyr – The Quarterstaff of Victory

Description: This staff is carved from linden and is well crafted. One end is well-shod with an iron cap, while the other end is splintered.

Background: This quarterstaff is currently being fought over in the tidewaters of Nastrond. The luckless dead who are washed up on the shores of Niflhiem are mindlessly locked in endless battle over this quarterstaff, none knowing what it is, but all feeling its power. When one of them gains the quarterstaff even for a moment, he is turned upon by his comrades in death and the quarterstaff is ripped from his hands.

Abilities: This is a +1/+0 quarterstaff.

This quarterstaff can be used one handed and still be used as a double weapon. The wielder's free hand may only hold a non-magical shield, magical shield, or a non-magical item. The bearer of this quarterstaff becomes somewhat clumsy with his off-hand and suffers a -4 circumstance penalty to Disable Device and Use Rope skill checks.

Faint necromancy; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *spectral hand*; price gp; cost 5,100 (3,800)

Quarterstaff of Throwing and Returning

This +1/+1 quarterstaff can be used like any other such weapon, but it can also be thrown (range increment 10ft.). It will return to the hand of the thrower prior to his next action.

Moderate Transmutation; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *magic stone, telekinesis*, price 18,600 gp

Quarterstaff of Silence

This +1/+0 quarterstaff has two different modes of use. Its normal use has the weapon itself being silenced. It will create no sound if struck nor will anything struck by it create a sound. Thus it could not be used to sound out a hollow spot in a false wall, but at the same time, when it strikes the back of a guard's head his helmet will not ring, nor will his grunt of pain be heard.

Its second mode silences the user. While the weapon is in the hands of the wielder, she is affected as if she was the center of a silence spell, however she can hear everything as normal. Only she and her equipment make no noise whatsoever. This silencing effect can be used five times a day for up to 10 minutes each time, although the wielder can cancel the silence should she wish to. Even if used for only a single round, the daily charge is expended for the day.

Faint transmutation; CL 3rd; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *silence*, price 9,800 gp

Quarterstaff of Illusion

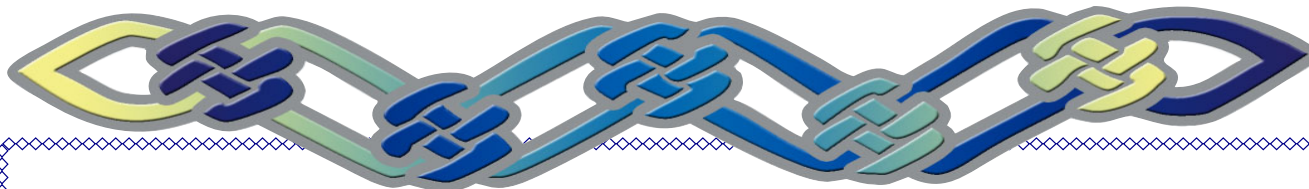
This +1/+1 quarterstaff has the ability to create illusory images at the command of the wielder. By uttering the command word for one of the staff's abilities (which are carved in the runic alphabet around the circumference of the staff on either side of the central grip) that particular illusion is brought to life.

The quarterstaff of illusion has five charges per day, and each of the abilities uses up a certain number of charges.

Ghost sound	1 charge
Silent image	2 charges
Minor image	3 charges
Major image	4 charges
Persistent image	5 charges

Each ability functions identically to the spell of the same name. Durations are determined as if cast by a 12th level spell caster.





Should the wielder so chose, he may cast a permanent image (the command word is located under the first three wraps of the central grip) spell that will use all the charges in the quarterstaff. Doing so will cause the quarterstaff to become magically inert (except for the +1/+1) for an entire month. Should permanent image be cast twice within a two month period, the quarterstaff will be permanently drained of magical properties, becoming a mere +1/+0 quarterstaff.

Moderate illusion; CL 12th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *permanent image*, *persistent image*, price 100,000 gp

Falcon's Coat

The Falcon's Coat is believed to have been created by a man who fell in love with a Valkyrie. The goddess of the wind took pity on his tears and whispered to him how he might fly and catch the Valkyrie by crafting a magical coat. Unfortunately, the coat transformed him into a falcon, and as he rose upon the thermals to seek his love, he discovered he had no voice with which to profess his adoration. In a rage he plummeted to the rocks below and ended his life – the coat survived, however, and has passed from hand to hand ever since.

The Falcon's Coat allows the wearer to *shapechange* into a falcon. Although his intellect remains his own, he has all of the physical characteristics of the falcon, including AC, and his own hit point total is used rather than that of the falcon. He cannot cast spells while in falcon form and is limited to a falcon's natural attacks.



He may change into falcon form five times a day, for no more than an hour each time and with a minimum of 25 minutes between each transformation. If the duration expires while the wearer is in flight, he will revert to his natural form and float slowly to the ground below.

Strong Transmutation; CL 17th, Craft Wondrous Item, *shapechange*, *featherfall*, must include a valkyrie's feather as part of the coat's construction, Price 900,000 gp, weight 5 lbs.

Silfurhani

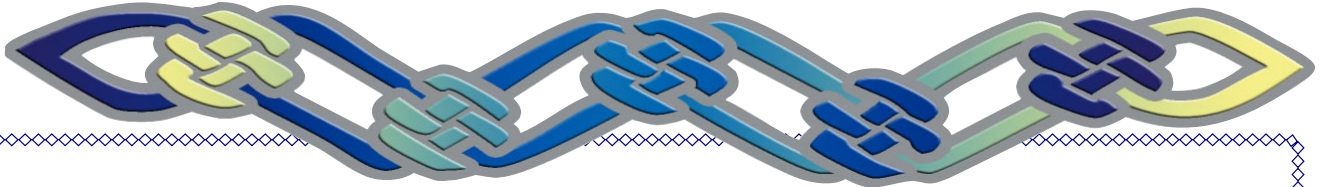
This small (4 inch high), mechanical, mithral rooster sits on a round wooden base about 1 inch tall. When a pin in its base is pushed in, the silver bird utters a lifelike crow. When the pin is pushed once more, it pops back out, and Silfurhani crows again. The device has the same effect as the runic stone *hólatafur*.

Strong Transmutation; CL 15th, Craft Wondrous Item, *limited wish*, Price 500,000 gp, Weight 3 lbs.



Freya's Tears

These tears are small drops of amber that are believed to have fallen as tears from a goddess's eyes. By holding the tear against the body of an injured person or animal, it will restore up to 100 hit points (but no



more than the creature's normal maximum hit points), cure all ability damage, and it immediately ends any and all of the following adverse conditions affecting the target: ability damage, blinded, confused, dazed, dazzled, deafened, diseased, exhausted, fatigued, feebleminded, insanity, nauseated, sickened, stunned, and poisoned.

Once used, the drop dissolves into a clear, yellow-tinged fluid that is absorbed by the body of the injured creature, thus making each tear a one-use item.

Strong Conjuraction; CL 19th, Craft Wondrous Item, *heal*, Price 14,000 gp, Weight -

Andvari's Ring [minor artifact]

Andvari was a dwarven cleric of Loki, who chose to spend a good portion of his days swimming in a pool, in the form of a pike. Andvari had a huge hoard of gold and a unique ring that could make gold at his command. One day while Andvari was sleeping beneath the water, in pike-form, thieves crept up and found his gold. Andvari woke to find himself surrounded by a net, and the thieves laughing at their good fortune. The dwarf-as-fish begged them to leave him his ring, and take the gold, but the greedy thieves paid him no heed. As they left, Andvari cursed the ring, that it would bring misfortune to all who possessed it. Loki heard the uttered curse, and added his own subtle twist to it, planning to use the ring for some nefarious scheme in the far future.

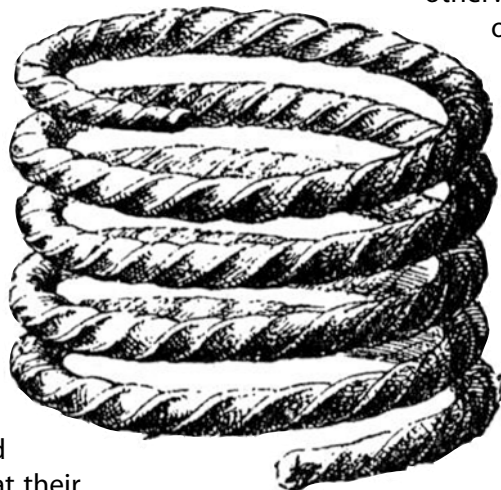
Whoever possesses the Ring of Andvari will be made to suffer painfully, whether they ever don the ring or not. Those dearest to the owner will die in freakish regularity. Calamity will befall the owner at every turn and at the worst possible moment: his horse will break a leg when the ring's owner is desperately needed elsewhere; his weapons will break in the midst of combat; the food he prepares will be inedible; his livestock will wither and die. Ill-luck will follow his wherever he goes, though it will always be worse for those around him than for himself; how better to cause the wretch suffering than

to hurt those around him, leaving him to watch the results.

The one who claims Andvari's Ring as his own will never want to part with it. He will wear the ring at all times, often caressing the twists and turns sculpted into it. He will never discard the ring, even if he becomes aware of the damage it has wrought in his life. Only a supreme force of will (Will save DC 40) will allow him to voluntarily set the ring aside, and thus break the curse. If the ring is taken from an unwilling owner, the curse will still affect him until the ring is claimed by another.

The curse of the ring varies from day to day. Unless otherwise stated all effects last for only one day. The next day the target must re-roll all rolls to see who is affected and by what. Once per day the GM should roll percentile dice to see what sort of affect the curse produces; 1-25% Personal, 26-50% Family, 51-75% Friend, 76-100% Combat. Consult the following sections for details.

Overwhelming Necromancy; CL 20th, Weight -



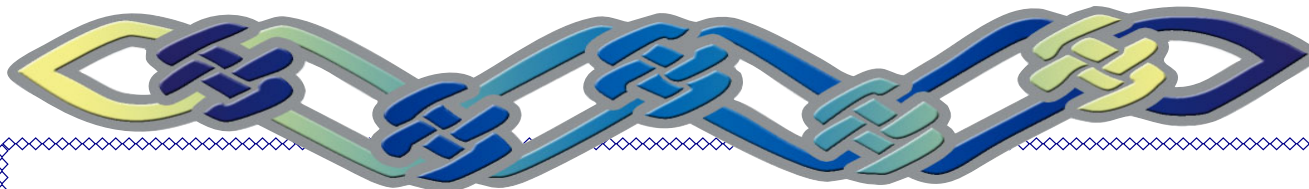
PERSONAL CURSE EFFECTS [d10 Roll; Curse; Effect]

1 -Inflicted with disease

The owner is afflicted with a random disease, even if he is immune to disease. The affliction will come upon him without warning and with no saving throw allowed. He will only suffer the secondary effects of the disease, not the initial ones. The disease will affect him for d6+1 days, and he cannot recover from it in any way except from a heal, limited wish, miracle, or wish spell. His disease is non-communicable, meaning that he cannot pass it on to anyone else. He also cannot be killed by this disease.

2 - Burnt Food

The owner cannot prepare any sort of foodstuffs without creating an inedible mess. If someone prepares food for him, there is a 50% chance that the food will either be inedible or some sort of accident will befall the



food (dropped in a privy, stolen by a passing eagle, full of worms, etc.) and the sufferer will not be able to eat it. Should this curse be rolled more than two consecutive times, the owner will be able to find enough nutrition from some source so survive... and continue to suffer.

3 - Poor Luck

The owner suffers from a -2 modifier to any and all die rolls he makes for the day.

4 - Bad Luck

The owner suffers from a -4 modifier to any and all die rolls he makes for the day.

5 - Horrible Luck

The owner suffers from a -8 modifier to any and all die rolls he makes for the day.

6 - Malaise

The owner feels terrible, with chills, shakes, and painful bowels, although there is no sign of any disease. Treat him as exhausted for the day.

7 - Confused

The owner acts as if under the similar effects of a *confusion* spell. Every hour, he must make a DC 20 Will save or suffer one of the following effects (roll d%): 1-10% The owner moves about in a daze. He will exhibit no will of his own, and must be led everywhere, fed, and made to drink. He will not engage in combat and always counts as flat-footed; 11-25% The owner will flee from any conflict, whether it be combat or social. He will move at the top speed he can, and will continue to do so until he can no longer see the opponent plus 3 rounds; 26-50% Do nothing but babble incoherently; 51-70% Attack the nearest creature (this does not include familiars); 71-100% Cannot concentrate on any task at hand and takes a -10 to any skill checks and a -5 on all to hit rolls.

8 - Blinded/ Deafened

The owner suffers from either blindness or deafness. Roll randomly to choose.

9 - Loss of Voice

The owner cannot speak, or make any kind of vocalization at all.

10 - Loss of Smell

The owner loses the sense of smell and consequently the sense of taste as well.

The more powerful the ring's owner, the more painful the curse becomes. If the owner's CR is from 1 to 10, roll for only one type of curse per day. If the CR is 11 to 15, roll twice, and if 16 to 20 roll three times. For every additional 5 to the creature's CR roll another curse.

Example: A 28th level wizard has claimed the ring, and thus would suffer four random effects per day from the ring. Should a god of CR 50 claim the ring, he would suffer 9 effects; however he would almost certainly be able to make the Will save to abandon the ring.

FAMILY CURSE EFFECTS

[d10 Roll; Curse; Effect]

1-2 - Inflicted with Disease

A random member of the owner's family is afflicted with a random disease, even if he is immune to disease. The affliction will come upon him without warning and with no saving throw allowed. He will only suffer the secondary effects of the disease, not the initial ones. The disease will affect him for d6+1 days, and he cannot recover from it in any way except from a heal, limited wish, miracle, or wish spell. This disease is non-communicable, meaning that he cannot pass it on to anyone else.

3-4 - Bizarre Death

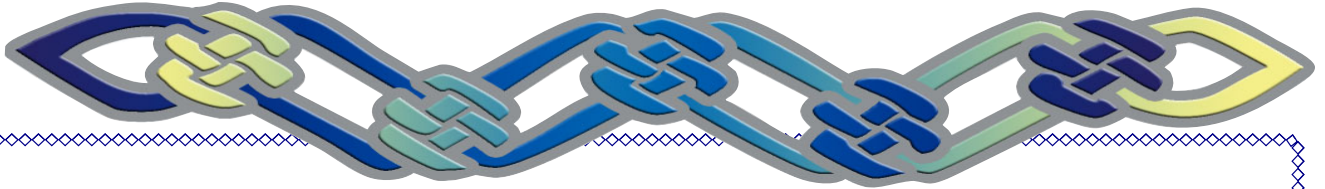
A random family member will die in a decidedly odd and horrific manner. The relationship with the owner does not need to be close for the curse to affect him; a second cousin twice removed is as viable a target as a twin sister.

5-6 - Blinded/ Deafened

A random member of the owner's family suffers from either blindness or deafness. Roll randomly to choose.

7-8 - Comatose

A random member of the owner's family falls into a comatose state. He or she cannot be roused through mundane means, although a restoration, or heal spell can wake them. The coma will last for 2d4 days. If the coma cannot be lifted within 4 days (should it



last that long) the person will die of dehydration. The relationship with the owner does not need to be close for the curse to affect him; a second cousin twice removed is as viable a target as a twin sister.

9-10 - Wasting Sickness

A random member of the owner's family will be afflicted by a terrible wasting disease. He or she must make a Fortitude save (DC 15 +1 per failed save) every day. Success means that the person is merely fatigued and lethargic for the day. Failure results in 1 point of both Constitution and Strength damage. Every second point of ability damage is actually ability drain. When the victim's constitution score reaches 0 he or she dies. This illness persists until it is rolled again at which time it is transferred to another family member. The relationship with the owner does not need to be close for the curse to affect him; a second cousin twice removed is as viable a target as a twin sister.

FRIENDS CURSE EFFECTS

[d10 Roll; Curse; Effect]

1-2 - Undiplomatic

If the owner is with a group of friends, compatriots, or traveling companions, not one of them will be able to make a successful Diplomacy, Bluff, or Intimidate check. This curse lasts only a single day.

3-4 - Stench

Anyone who stays within 30 ft of the owner for more than 10 minutes begins to exude a stench that can make others ill. Those afflicted cannot smell their own odor, not can they smell the stench of others so afflicted. Any living thing not affected must make a DC 15 Fortitude save if they approach within 30 feet of someone affected. If they fail they are sickened for 10 rounds. Creatures immune to poisons are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal saving throw bonuses. A *delay poison* or *neutralize poison* spell will relieve those overcome by the stench. Only a remove curse spell cast by a caster of at least 13th level can remove the stench from anyone afflicted. Otherwise it will last for five days before fading away. Subsequent rolls of this curse add to the duration.

5-6 - Bane

All companions within 120 ft. of the owner are affected

as if by a *bane* spell, with no saving throws allowed to avoid it. This curse lasts only a single day

7-8 - Hindered Healing

Anyone who is within 120 ft. of the owner and suffers an injury will find it difficult to heal from it. Any such individual will only ever receive half the amount of healing from any source (resting, the laying on of hands, cure spells, cure potions, etc.), until they have been healed back up to their maximum hit points. Even subsequent injuries not incurred within range of the owner will have the same effect until the injured are fully healed. This curse lasts for 1d4+1 days. Subsequent rolls of this curse add to the duration.

9-10 - Aggressive

Anyone within 60 ft. of the owner must make a Will save (DC 18) every 5 minutes. Those who fail will begin to become irritable to the point of incivility and open conflict. Fights will often spring up in the owner's wake. If anyone who has failed a save is involved in any kind of altercation for the remainder of the day, they have a (75% – Will save bonus) chance of flying into a rage identical to a barbarian's and attacking either the subject of their frustrations or the nearest individual. The attack will last until the one so afflicted falls over exhausted from the rage.

COMBAT CURSE EFFECTS

[d10 Roll; Curse; Effect]

1-2 - Cannot Critical

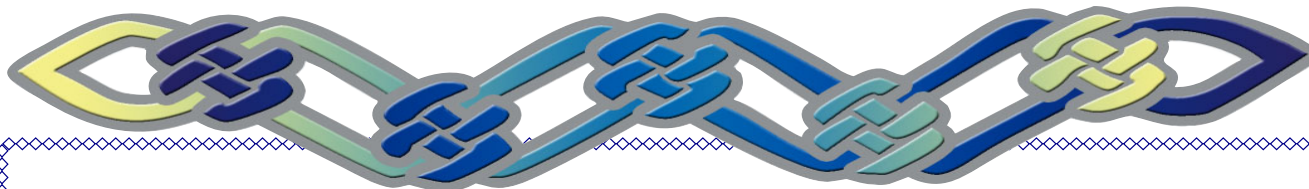
While under this curse, the owner of the ring will never be able to confirm a threatened critical hit. In addition, when rolling for damage the roll must be made twice, with the lowest of the two rolls being used.

3-4 - Critical Failure

When the owner of the ring makes an attack roll and misses by more than five, roll a d6.

1 – Injure self: Roll the weapon's damage on the owner. The weapon does not actually hit him, but he may have twisted his arm, caught his ear with the bowstring, etc.
2 – Off balance: He over extends himself and must take a -4 circumstance penalty to all to hit rolls for the next three rounds.

3 – Unaware: Blissfully unaware of his enemies' positions, he counts a flatfooted for the remainder of the encounter.



4-5 – Slow on the draw: He receives a -8 penalty on his initiative number, and it cannot be reset until the beginning of the next encounter.

6 – Weapon breaks: If the weapon is magical it gets a save (DC 10 + the weapon's hardness – the weapon's total magic bonus (as determined by the tables in Ch. 7 of the DMG)).

5-6 - Mismatch

When the owner rolls to hit during combat and misses, the amount he misses by is added to the AC of the target as a circumstance bonus. The added AC only applies to strikes from the owner; to all others there is no change. The AC bonus lasts for the duration of the encounter, and it does stack; the more he misses the higher the target's AC modifier.

7-8 - Pained

Whenever the owner takes hit point damage from any source he takes an additional 1 point per damage die rolled (minimum of 1). If the damage dealt is to an ability, then there is a 50% chance that he will take an additional point of ability damage. He also takes a -2 circumstance modifier to all Fortitude saves.

9-10 - Cannot Complete

If the owner attempts to complete any skill-based task or cast a spell during combat or other high-stress environment, then he must make a DC 20 Concentration check to maintain the necessary focus. If a Concentration check is already called for, the DC for it increases by +10. Failure means that the skill check fails with the worst possible result, or the spell does not go off and the spell slot/prepared spell is lost.

KANTELE

This stringed musical instrument (something of a cross between a lute and a balalaika), when played in forested lands, can be used to tame the most savage of animals and bend them to the player's will. When played for a minimum of 10 minutes and a successful Perform check (DC 13) is made, the kantele affects animals in a manner similar to a *charm animal* spell. Up to 30 hit dice of animals can be affected, with the magic lasting for 10 days. Animals affected are allowed a Will save (DC 25) to resist the effect. Unless the player of the instrument can communicate with the animals in some way, they will merely have

a very friendly attitude towards the player; he cannot control them in any way without communication.

Moderate Enchantment; CL 15th, Craft Wondrous Item, *charm animal*, *charm monster*, Price 20,000 gp, Weight 5 lbs.

NORDIC NAME LISTS

MALE:

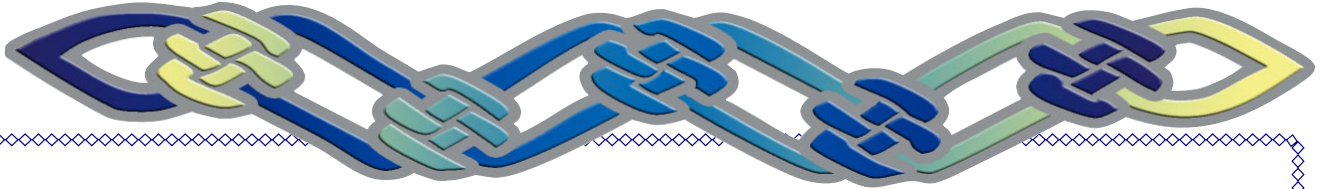
Alrekr, Arnaldr, Arnoddr, Arnríðr, Auðólf, Álfgeirr, Áli, Áni, Árni, Ási, Bárekr, Beinir, Bjartmarr, Bjólan, Dagr, Dálkr, Eiðr, Eindriði, Endriði, Erlendr, Erlingr, Erpr, Friðleifr, Fróði, Gamli, Geirleifr, Geirólf, Geirsteinn, Geirþjólf, Gísl, Glædir, Gormr, Grenjaðr, Grettir, Grímkell, Grjótgarðr, Gyrðr, Hafþórr, Haki, Hallgeirr, Hamall, Hásteinn, Hávarr, Hergils, Herrøðr, Hersteinn, Hlenni, Hreinn, Hrífla, Hrolleifr, Hrosskell, Hrói, Hrótr, Ingimundr, Ísólf, Kaðall, Kali, Kolskeggr, Kvistr, Kýlan, Lambi, Leiðólf, Ormarr, Ósvaldr, Otkatla, Páll, Sámr, Skapti, Skarpheðinn, Skefill, Skopti, Skorri, Starri, Stórolfr, Tindr, Valbrandr, Váli

FEMALE:

Aldís, Arnleif, Arnfríðr, Arngunnr, Arnþruðr, Álfdis, Álfeidr, Ása, Ásbjörg, Áshildr, Ásleif, Ásta, Bera, Bergdis, Bergljót, Birna, Bjargey, Bjollok, Bót, Bótey, Bryngerðr, Dagrún, Dalla, Dís, Dýrfinna, Eðna, Eirný, Elína, Eydis, Eyja, Fastný, Finna, Fjórleif, Fregerðr, Geirbjörg, Geirný, Gjaflaug, Gríma, Halldís, Heimlaug, Herriðr, Herþruðr, Hildigunnr, Hjálmgæðr, Hjálpr, Hrefna, Hrafnhildr, Húngerðr, Iðunn, Ingigerðr, Ingridr, Ingileif, Jódís, Kaðlín, Katla, Ketilríðr, Kolgríma, Melkorka, Móeiðr, Myrgjol, Mýrún, Oddfríðr, Oddlaug, Oddleif, Ormhildr, Ósk, Reginleif, Snælaug, Sólveig, Svana, Svanlaug, Sæhildr, Sæuðr, Tófa, Úlfeidr, Úlfhildr, Úlfrún, Védís, Vélaug, Véný, Vilgerðr, Ýrr.

Creating Surnames:

If the name ends in:	The ending will change to:	Sample name in nominative case:	Genitive +Son:	Genitive +daughter:
-i	-a	Snorri	Snorrason	Snorradóttir
-a	-u	Sturla	Sturluson	Sturladóttir
-nn	-ns	Sveinn	Sveinsson	Sveinsdóttir
-ll	-ls	Ketill	Ketilsson	Ketilsdóttir
-rr	-rs	Geirr	Geirson	Geirssdóttir



THE MARTIAL TRADITION OF STAV

The fictional stave-tribes of Niflheim are based on an actual Norse martial art and philosophical system, which uses runes and Norse Mythology in its teaching. Stav was brought to the public by Ivar Hafskjold, who claims it is based on oral tradition preserved in his family for 44 generations. The name comes from the expression *sette stav* (to set stave), which was how the training was referred to when he grew up.

Stav on some level resembles a Nordic form of Tai Chi, with the student beginning with ritualized stances resembling the sixteen runes of the Younger Futhark. Once mastery of the rune stances has been achieved, the student progresses to staff exercises. Stav is intended to be a flexible set of principles instead of techniques, focusing on finding the lines of attack and defense in any combat situation and exploiting them to the student's benefit. Stav practitioners begin by using staves or cudgels but may in time progress to use battle-axes, swords, wands or even to the bare-handed stage.

For more information on stav (pronounced "starve") here are some websites we recommend:

<http://www.stavinternational.org>

<http://www.oxfordstavclub.co.uk>

<http://www.stavacademy.co.uk>

LIST OF RUNES

Runes, also called both the Older Futhark and Younger Futhark alphabets, originate from Latin and were carved into metal, stone and wood, rather than written with ink on paper or parchment (hence their very angular form.) The following are some of the runes that are mentioned throughout this book, as well as a few additional for your interest.

Runes themselves are merely letters of an alphabet, however runes also have developed connections to concepts both spiritual and magical over the centuries.

THE MEANING OF FYLGJA

A *fylgja* (literally: she who follows; plural: fylgjur) was, according to Scandinavian mythology, a supernatural creature which accompanied a person. It usually appeared in the form of an animal, and as it was believed to correspond to a person's character or way of living, it can be conceived of as a form of a person's soul, separate from the body. Consequently, a warlike man might have had a wolf or a bear for a fylgja. The fylgjur commonly appeared during sleep, but the sagas relate that they could appear while a person was awake as well, and that seeing one's fylgja was an omen of one's impending death. However, when they appeared in the form of women, they were then supposedly guardian spirits for people or clans.



KREFT

Meaning: disease, poison
Symbolizes: malignancy, entropy
Deity: Loki
Fylgja: chimera, dragons, snakes
Tree: spruce
Plant: wormwood
Old Norse Rune Rhyme:

*Disease is the curse of children;
Evil makes a man pale (as in death).*

This is the rune of chaos, entropy and reversal. It is much like the joker card - it is wild and unpredictable, but in the right hands it can bring about fortunate results.

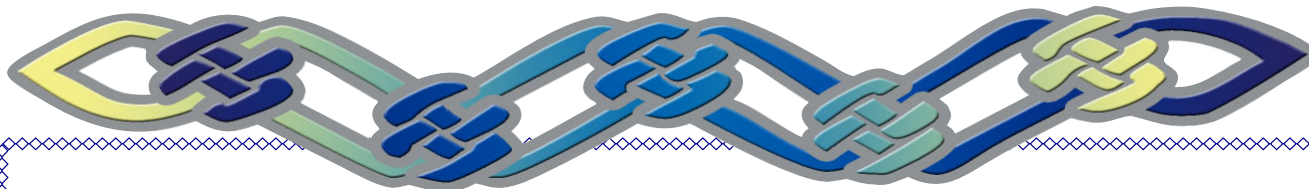
Kreft is often used as a warning of imminent danger. It is also a focal point for the apprentice, beginner or student - that without discipline, power brings destruction to its wielder.



ASH

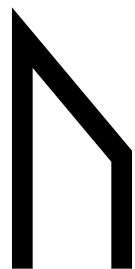
Meaning: Kingship, the God Head.
Symbolizes: knowledge, shamanism, leadership
Deities: Odin, Wotan
Fylgja: ravens, eagles, wolves, horses, snakes, dragons
Tree: ash
Plant: oats

Old Norse Rune Rhyme:
*Estuary is the way of most journeys;
But the sheath is that for swords.*



Odin is the deity of wisdom, often called "The All-Father" by his followers. Ash is his rune.

Ash represents a call to focus on one's own mastery. It demands responsibility and courage. It is often used in prayer preceding a battle or a hunt.



UR

Meaning: wild oxen
Symbolizes: primal raw force of nature - very old, very strong.
Deity: Vidar, (the silent god).
Fylgja: ox
Tree: oak
Plant: plantain

Old Norwegian Rune Rhyme:

Slag is from bad iron

Oft runs the reindeer on the hard snow.

Ur represents very subtle and complex concepts. It speaks of the raw, undeveloped, natural power in things: the unbridled chaos of the novice warrior, the impurity of unrefined metal in the smithy's hands. It is a focus for those seeking to improve themselves. It also represents the benefit that may come from mistakes, if one were to look at mistakes as refinements.



SOL

Meaning: the sun
Symbolizes: the peaceful warrior
Deity: Baldr
Fylgja: war horse or war pony
Tree: oak
Plant: chamomile
Old Norse Rune Rhyme:

The sun is the light of the lands;

I bow to the holiness.

Baldr, mentioned on page 50, is a conundrum of conflicting symbols; he is, however one the most beloved of the Norse pantheon. He represents the warrior who fights to ensure peace, the hunter who causes death that his tribe may continue and prosper. The Sol rune is the return of spring after a hard winter, and the symbol of hope - dawn after the long night.

There is a dark side to Sol. It is also a warning against complacency. The most powerful warrior's greatest

weakness is his own pride. No one is invulnerable, not even the most beloved of gods.



IS

Meaning: Ice
Symbolizes: winter, the hunt
Deities: Any deities of ice, the forest or winter
Fylgja: polar bear, arctic fox, ptarmigan
Tree: juniper
Plant: mugwort
Old Norse Rune Rhyme:

Ice we call the broad bridge;

The blind need to be led.

Is is a neutral rune, representing a period of stasis. In the absence of direction, one may become lost (as on the frozen plain). Too much time spent in reflection may cause one to lose their way.

Is is also used to indicate that something is in the wrong place; the item, person or creature does not belong in the environment in which it has been found.



MANN

Meaning: humanity, the moon
Symbolizes: physical love, witches, humanity
Deity: Freya - Twin sister to Frey, counterpoint to Odin.
Fylgja: cat, lynx, hawk.
Tree: hawthorn

Plant: lily-of-the-valley

Old Norse Rune Rhyme:

Mankind is the increase of dust;

Mighty is the talon span of the hawk.

This rune is associated with the senses and the desire to increase material wealth. While sensuality should be appreciated and enjoyed, too much stimulation of the senses is blinding, and leads to others' envy.

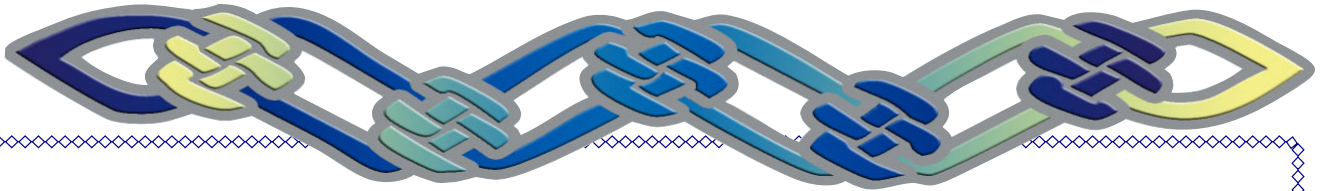
Attraction, beauty, finely-crafted things - all of this is attributed to Mann. Mann's recommendation is to practice moderation.

BJORK

Meaning: female energies

Symbolizes: magic

Deity: Frigg (wife of Odin, Queen of Heaven)



Fylgja: dove, hare
 Tree: birch
 Plant: flax
 Old Norse Rune Rhyme:
*Birch twig is the limb greenest with leaves;
 Loki brought the luck of deceit.*

Bjork represents feminine power. Mothers, wives, and children all reside under the protection of this symbol. It is a rune of birth and growth, as well as healing.

Bjork serves to remind those who focus on it that it cannot exist alone. Its power is only half of that which sustains the universe - without its masculine counterpart it will eventually spiral and collapse upon itself.

This speaks more about the balance of nature than interpersonal relationships. It asks the petitioner to look inward, and make sure that personal power is balanced: summer is to winter as day is to night; adversity is to peace as death is to rebirth.



RAITHO
 Meaning: wagon or chariot
 Symbolizes: travel
 Deity: Forseti (son of Baldr)
 Fylgja: horse, wolf, dog, raven
 Tree: holly
 Plant: lavender
 Old Norse Rune Rhyme:

*Riding is a blessed sitting
 and a swift journey,
 and the toil of the horse.*

Raitho speaks to the individual that it is time for change. Travel has two types: the casual trundling of day to day, and the life-altering travel of the adventurer. Raitho encourages the latter.



THURISAZ
 Meaning: thorn, or a giant
 Symbolizes: masculine force, destruction, catharsis
 Deity: Thor
 Fylgja: ram, bull
 Tree: pine
 Plant: mistletoe

Old Norse Rune Rhyme:
*Thurisaz is the torment of trolls,
 and the dweller in the rocks.*

Thurisaz is a twofold message. It speaks of the monsters that exist to torment humanoids. It also speaks of the talent of humanoids to wipe out said monsters with a calculated, cunning blow.

The talent to survive a foe stronger than you is exemplified in thurisaz. It speaks of masculine desire, victory despite the odds, and the force of one's will. Raitho speaks to the individual that it is time for change. Travel has two types: the casual trundling of day to day, and the life-altering travel of the adventurer. Raitho encourages the latter.



TYR
 Meaning: War, Justice.
 Symbolizes: victory, honor
 Deity: Tyr (the one handed god).
 Fylgja: dog
 Tree: linden
 Plant: comfrey
 Old Norse Rune Rhyme:

*Tyr is the one handed among the warrior gods;
 The smith has to strike often.*

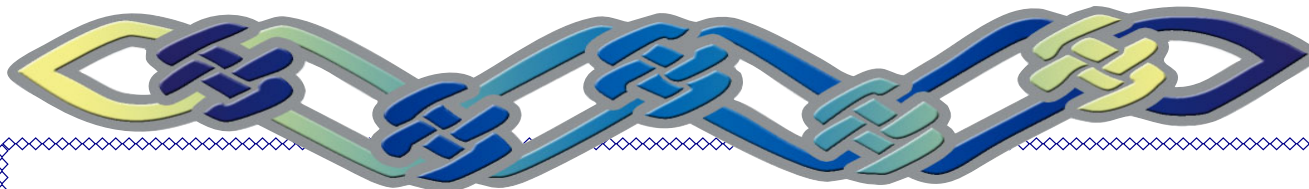
While Tyr the god was the only one brave enough to try and tame the Fenris wolf, he also lost his hand in the process.

The rune Tyr teaches us that blind courage is not a good thing - a little forethought, subtlety and even some skillfully applied cowardice can save our hides now and then.



LAUG
 Meaning: a bath, water.
 Symbolizes: washing, oceans, large bodies of fresh water.
 Deity: Niord (god of commerce and the sea)
 Fylgja: sea birds, dolphins, nyads
 Tree: apple
 Plant: leek/garlic

Old Norse Rune Rhyme:
*Water is that which falls from the mountain as a force;
 But gold objects are costly things.*



Laug has both an obvious message and a subtle one. It sings the praises of water: its nourishing power and ability to feed both man, beast and plants.

Laug also whispers about the potential in us all. If we let it flow freely, uncontrolled like a flood, it will soon be wasted and missed. If we carefully utilize the power within us, however, it will sustain us forever.



NOD

Meaning: need, crisis

Symbolizes: fate, path, obsessions

Deities/spiritual beings: the norns

Fylgja: owl, spider, crow

Tree: elm

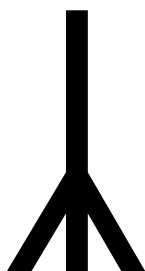
Plant: nettle, raspberry

Old Norse Rune Rhyme:

Need makes for a difficult situation;
The naked freeze in the frost.

The English parable "Necessity is the mother of invention" is somewhat more colorful when you hear the Scandinavian version: "The frost teaches a naked woman how to weave."

Nod teaches the follower that rolling with the punches is fine, but ducking first, lest one get hit, is even better.



YR

Meaning: a bow made of yew

Symbolizes: a warrior's focus

Deity: Ull

Fylgja: bear, fox

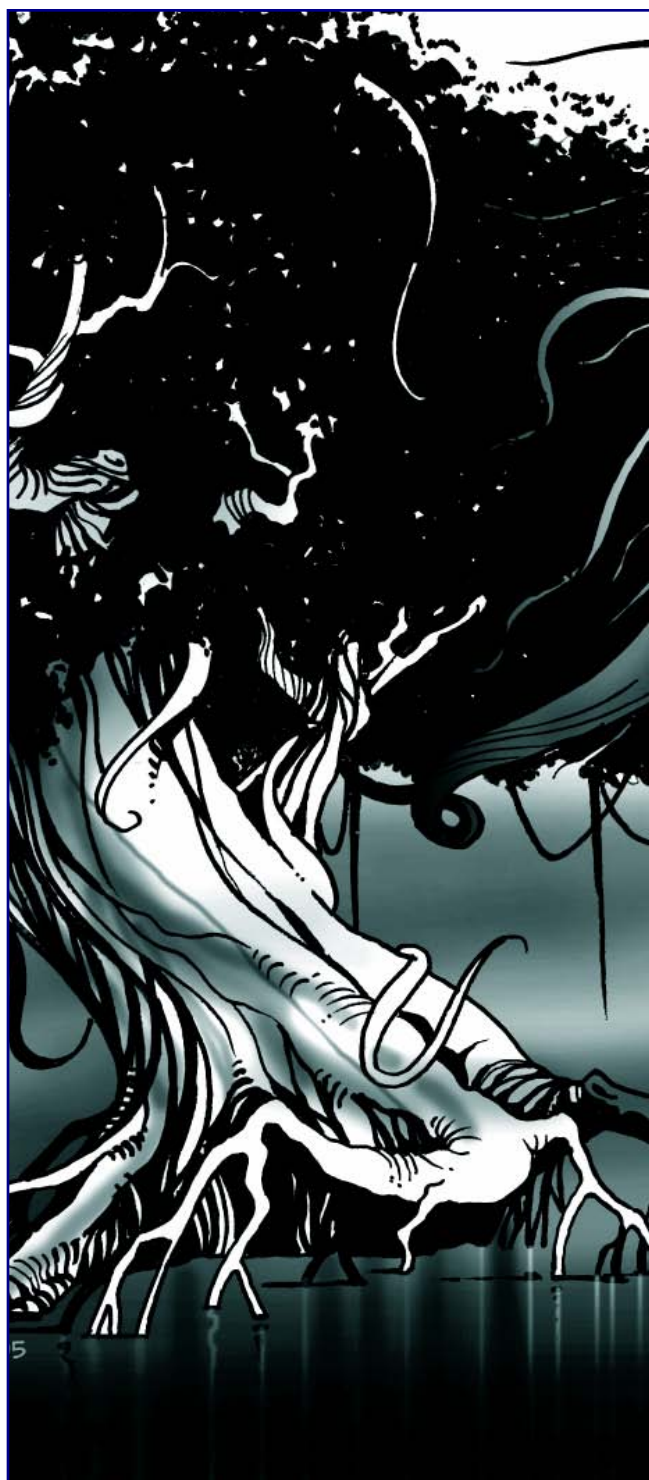
Tree: yew

Old Norse Rune Rhyme:

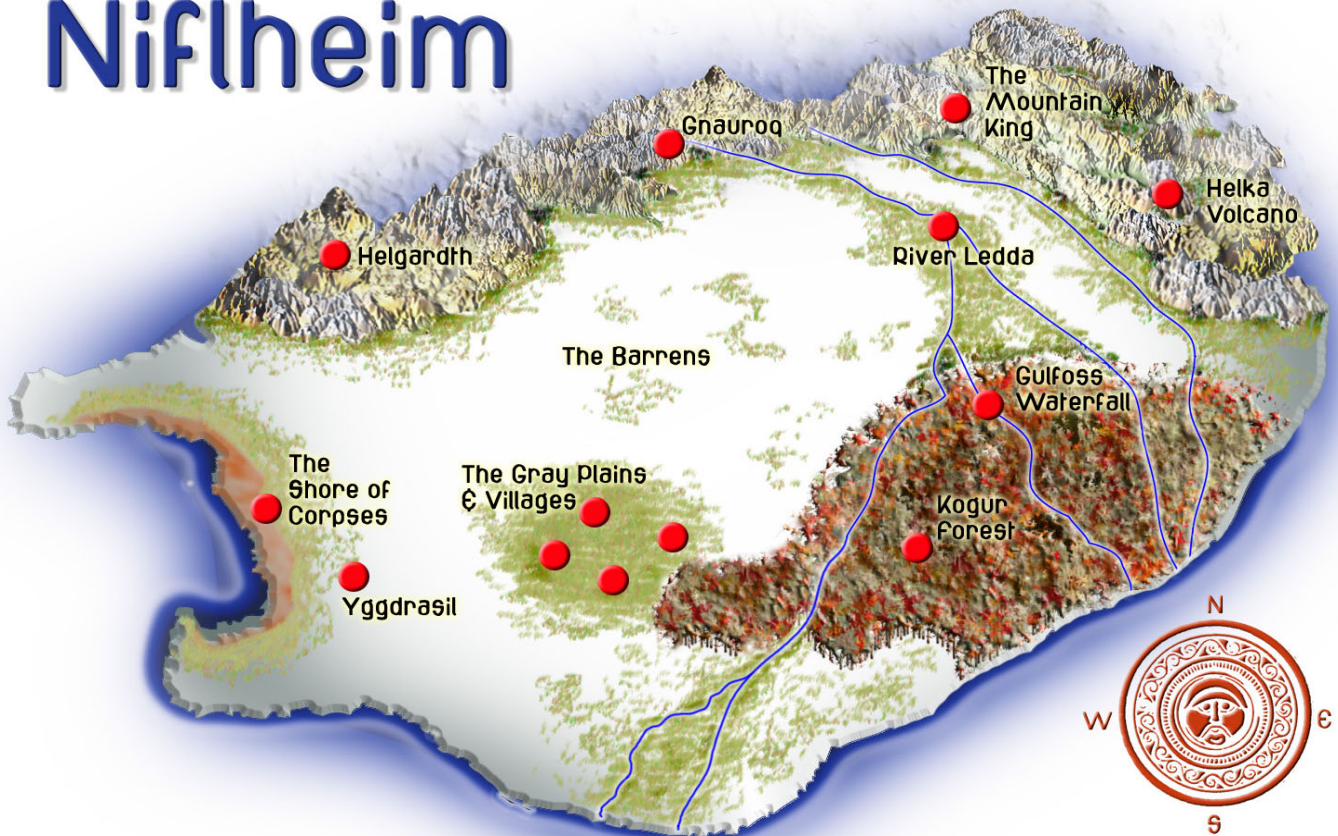
*Yew is the greenest wood in the winter;
There is usually, when it burns,
singing.*

This rune's literal meaning is the yew tree, an ancient, poisonous evergreen. The characteristics of this tree create a metaphor for the warrior entering battle. Yew is one of the few trees strong enough to withstand driving, winter storms. Its wood, though toxic, will provide needed warmth on a winter night. Its wood is also incredibly strong, but remains green and retains a remarkable flexibility; thus its value to archers.

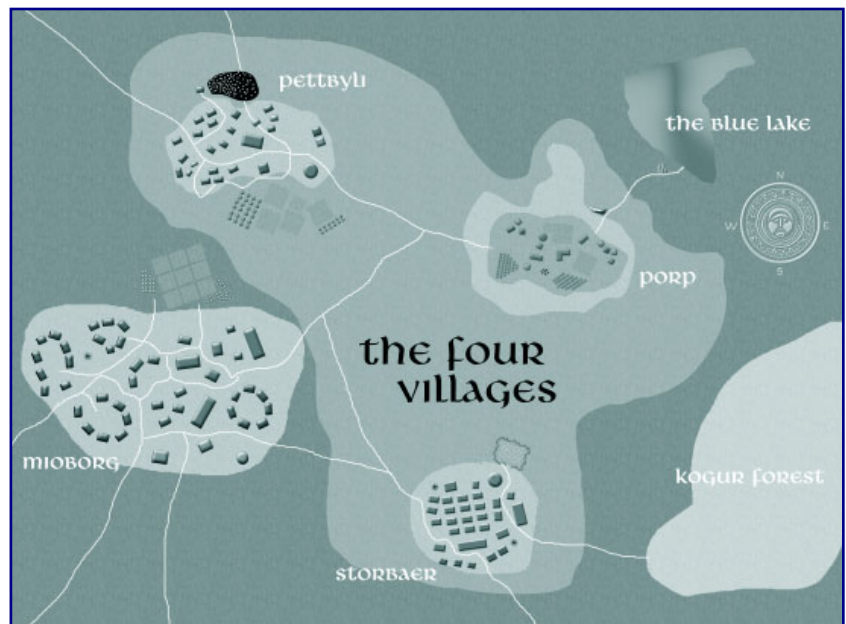
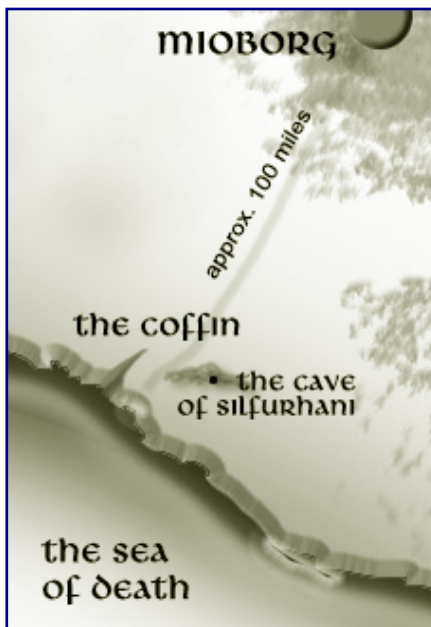
The rune Yr entwines principles of life and death. The warrior walks into battle with a strength and inner calm, even though she may die. The combination of her strength and resiliency is the very thing that may keep her alive, however.

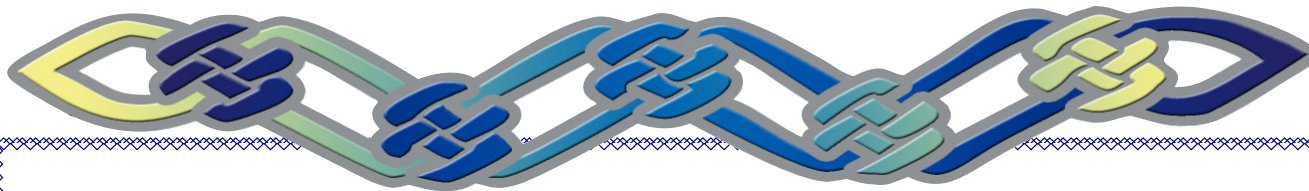


Niflheim



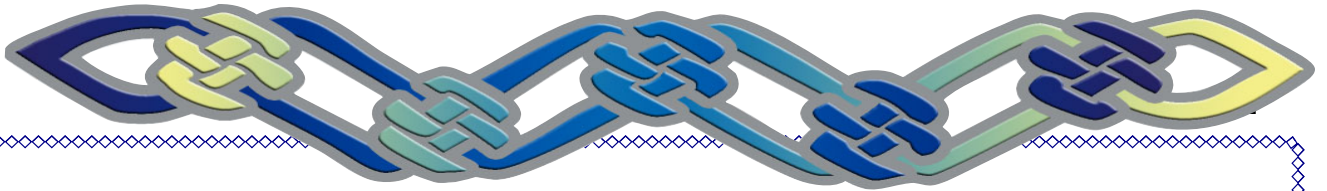
The portals of Niflheim are at each of these locations: 1. The Mountain King's home; 2. The source of the River Ledda, (guarded by Gnauroq, the giant eagle); 3. Helka Volcano, home of Loftur the Necromancer; 4. Yggdrasil (guarded by Nidhogg the serpent); 5. In the Vidigelmir cave system, beneath the Four Villages.





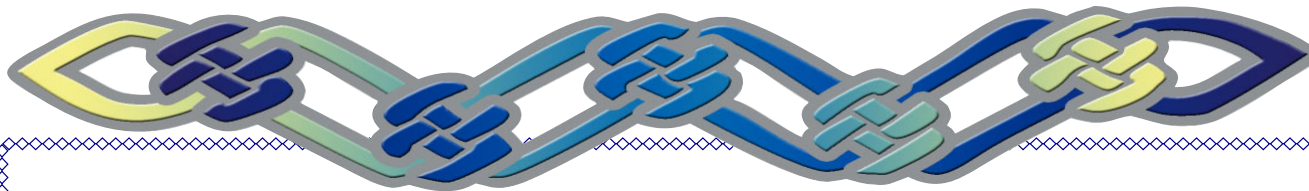
Porp rests within a gentle hollow of the land. The berm that surrounds Porp descends onto the Gray Plains and eventually turns into the shore of the Blue Lake.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. sodhouse | 10. turnips, tomatoes, carrots |
| 2. sodhouse | 11. sodhouse |
| 3. sodhouse | 12. bees |
| 4. barley, potatoes, cabbages | 13. common house |
| 5. blacksmith | 14. apple orchards |
| 6. granary | 15. hay |
| 7. sodhouse | 16. sodhouses |
| 8. sodhouse | |
| 9. barn | |



Pettbyli sits on atop a small plateau. The crop fields and burial grounds sit approximately 15 feet lower than the rest of the village.

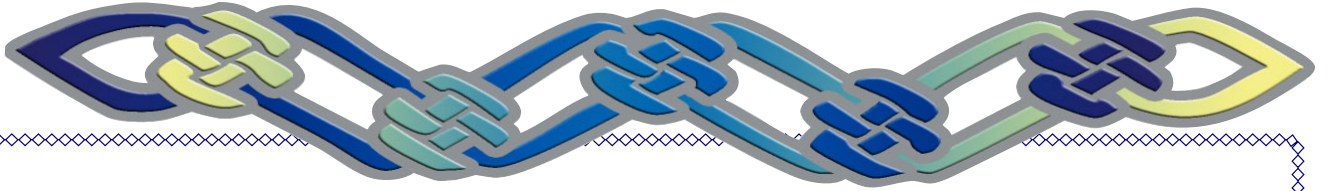
- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. common house | 10. wheelwright | 19. tinker |
| 2. granary | 11. sodhouses | 20. smithy |
| 3. sodhouse | 12. Haldur's house | 21. barn |
| 4. sodhouse | 13. burial grounds | 22. barn |
| 5. sodhouse | 14. apple orchards | 23. barn |
| 6. sodhouses | 15. hay | 24. hay |
| 7. sodhouses | 16. sodhouses | 25. barley, root vegetables, cabbage |
| 8. sodhouse | 17. herbalist | 26. yew trees |
| 9. glazier | 18. stable | |



storbaer

Storbaer rests on a small plateau, its fields of hops guarded by a high stone wall.

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. granary | 14. smithy |
| 2. community forge | 15. workshop |
| 3. stable | 16. smithy |
| 4. school | 17. smithy |
| 5. barn | 18. workshop |
| 6. smokehouse | 19. hops |
| 7. workshop | 20. turnips, beets, cabbages |
| 8. brewery | 21. hay |
| 9. smithy | 22. well |
| 10. smithy | 23. well |
| 11. smithy | |
| 12. tavern | |
| 13. wooden houses | |

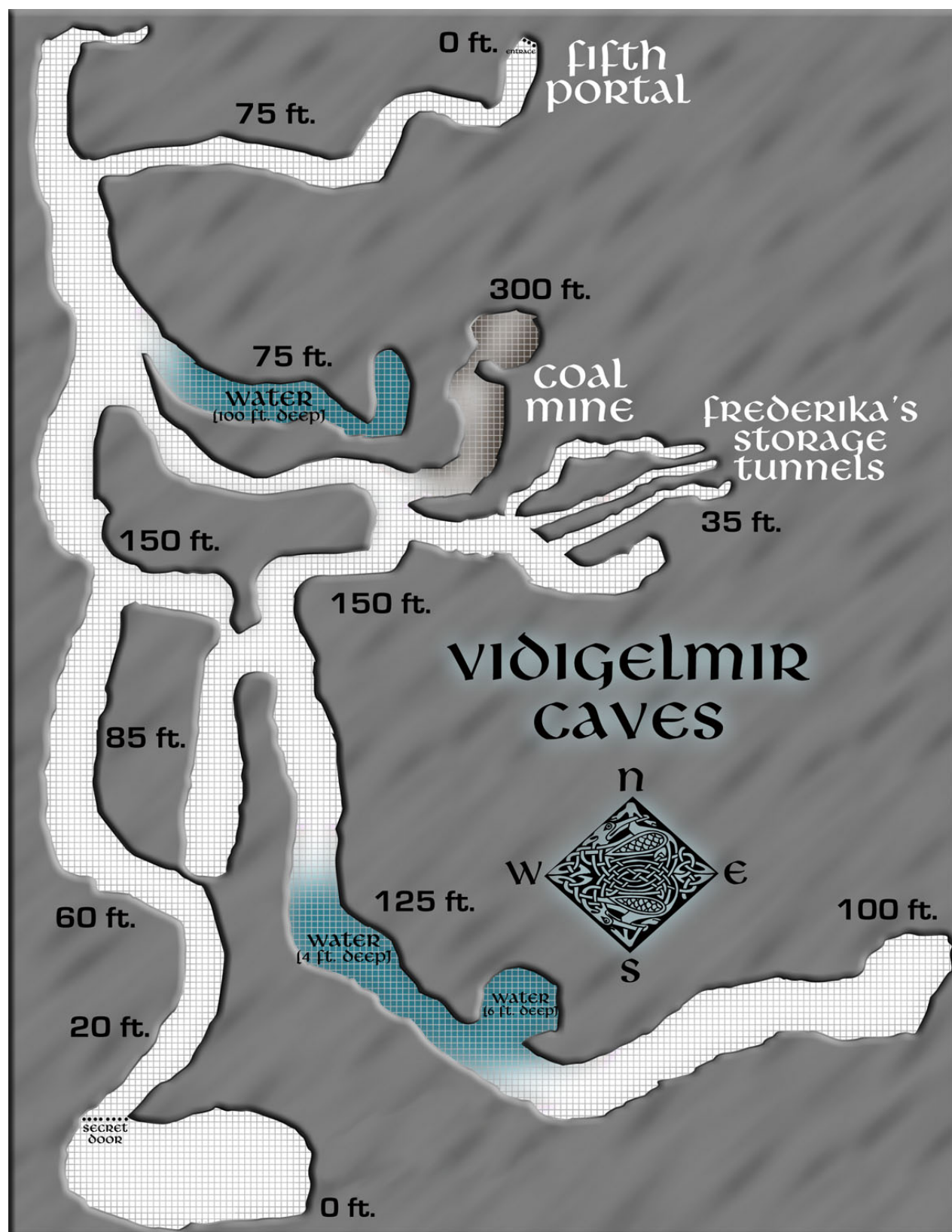
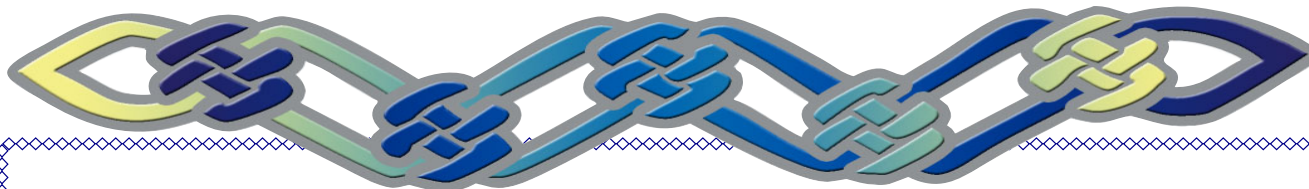


Mioborg sits on a low hill. Its fields are six feet lower than the town itself.

1. sodhouses
2. sodhouses
3. well
4. sodhouses
5. constable
6. barn
7. barn
8. winery
9. sodhouse
10. tanner
11. common house

12. tinker
13. common house
14. barn
15. smithy
16. wizard's tower
17. sodhouses
18. smithy
19. House of the White Bull (Inn)
20. sodhouse
21. granary
22. human dwelling

23. human dwelling
24. cabbages, beets, turnips
25. vineyard, plum trees
26. hay, barley
27. well
28. well
29. well
30. well
31. well



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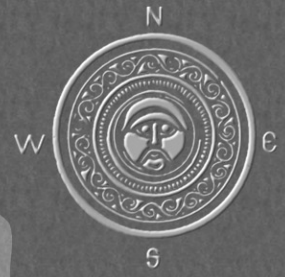


pettbyli

the blue lake

porp

the four
villages



kogur forest

mioborg

storbaer



blue lake

fish-drying
racks



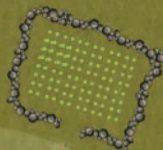
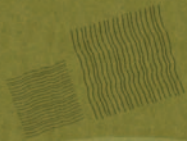
boat yards

porp



pettbyli

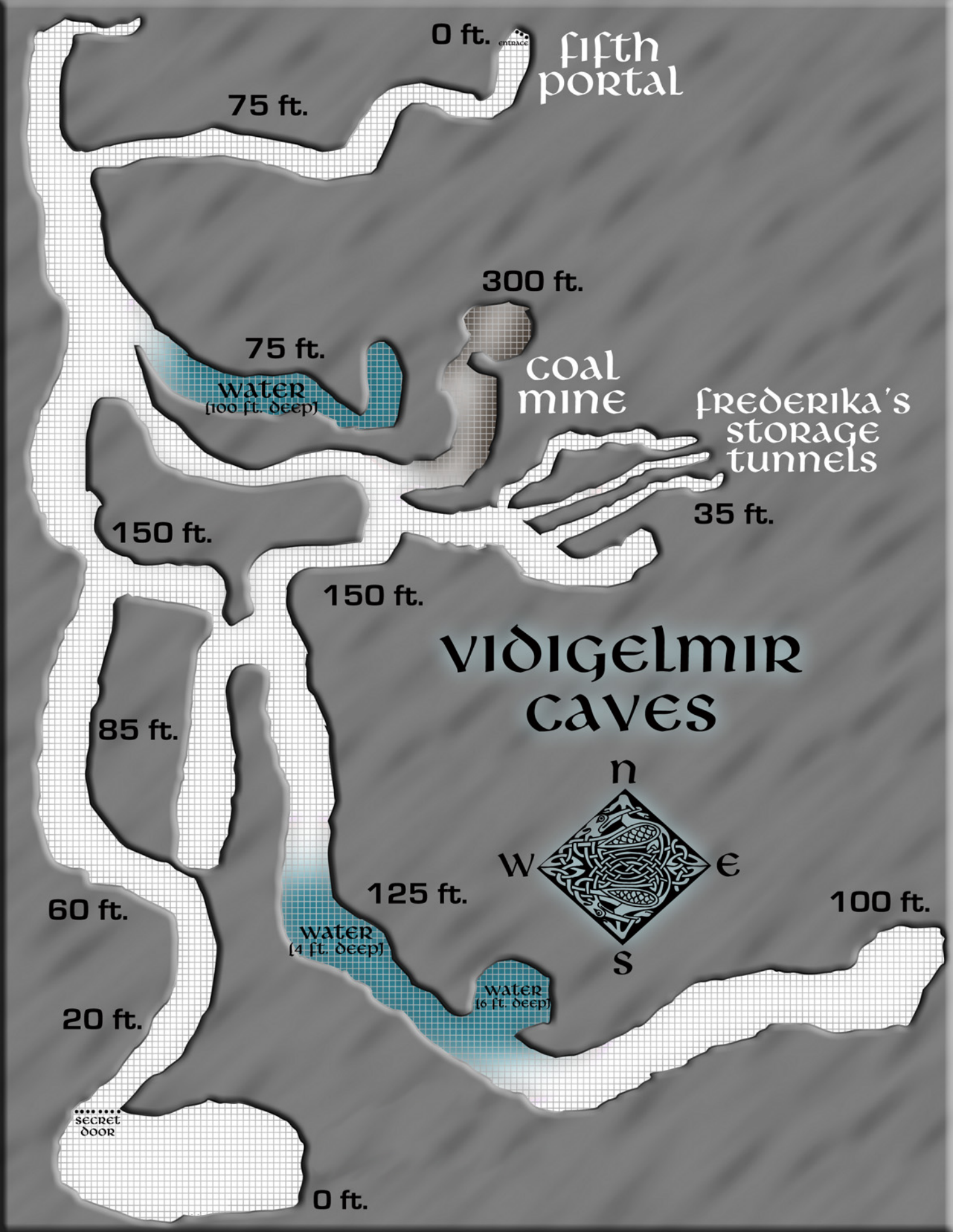




storbaer



MIOBORG



0 ft. entrance

fifth
portal

75 ft.

300 ft.

75 ft.

water
(100 ft. deep)

coal
mine

frederika's
storage
tunnels

35 ft.

150 ft.

150 ft.

vidigelmir
caves

85 ft.

60 ft.

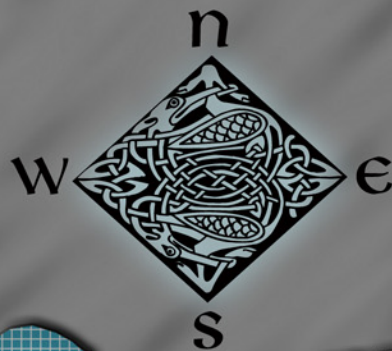
20 ft.

.....
secret
door

0 ft.

125 ft.

water
(4 ft. deep)



100 ft.

water
(6 ft. deep)

An excerpt from the upcoming finale of the Niflheim series, *The Coming of Baldr*, by Sean C. Frolich.

original painting of Baldr by Emerson Ward

*Look for the release of Niflheim,
Campaign Edition Spring 2007*

BALDR'S ARRIVAL

Karl Jurgenson stood on the edge of the Sea of Death for the fourth night in a row. The Shore of Corpses lay below him, he and the others sitting a bit higher than the sea, safe on the black sand dunes. The low moans and groans of the dead filled the air with a distasteful keening, one that set a man's teeth on edge. The bodies of those who made such noise were scattered on the beach and floating in the sea as far as the eye could see. The flesh of the dead - puckered and waterlogged - held a semblance of life, but it was unhallowed life. Those on the beach flailed and flopped like gasping fish, while those still afloat groaned all the louder when their heads came above the water.

It's this place, Karl thought to himself. It will claim us all in the end, and make us one of them. It will send the Storm of Swords to drag us from our graves, and we will all end up like them. Not for the first time, Karl remembered that he had come to hate this place. He and his friends had stumbled into this land many years ago, and they were never able to get back home again.

As he gazed out across the sea, he tried to bring their faces back from the ages old memories. Gunnar, the tallest of them all with his beard that reached to his belly; he'd been killed almost thirty years ago when they first arrived, torn to pieces by Nidhogg, Hel's serpent. Fyrlka, the young priestess of Freya; Karl had seen her fall trying to save a child from one of the terrible Ride-by-Nights, giant, undead servants of the goddess of undeath. Tomlin, the skald and the youngest of them still lived, though he was now blind and maimed, his once proud visage twisted and wrinkled from the fires that had claimed his sight.

There were others as well: the dwarf Thufar, the twin brothers Corin and Torin, and the little maiden of the Aelfheim Sheealara; but Karl could no longer remember their faces, or the sounds of their voices. He had lost all of his former comrades to this place. One by one each had been claimed, and when the Storm of Swords came for each of them, the freezing rain had pulled them from the earth and sent them down to the sea to join the others who floated there. It turned them

each in turn into one of those evil and loathsome things that should be still and weren't.

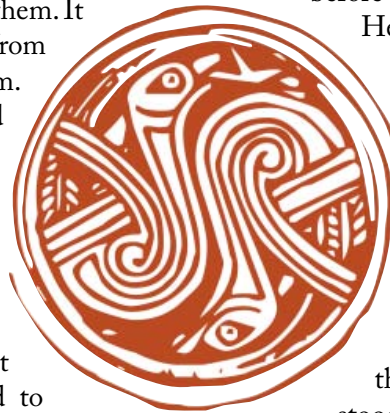
That was the way of things, though. At least that was the way of things in the domain of Hel - the lands of Niflheim. But things were going to change. Karl and the others with him could feel it. That was why they were here. Something had been stirred in the aging warrior's breast, something he had thought long dead. For almost two decades he had put away the person of Karl Jurgenson, warrior and adventurer. For almost two decades he had been simply Karl, farmer and tamer of bees. He had packed away his weapons, his armor, and his magical vestments and he had taken up the plow, the slop bucket, and his leather apron.

After watching each of his friends lose their lives in pointless and fruitless battles, Karl had endeavored to make the mistress of this land wait a goodly long time before she got her hands on his soul and body.

He had nearly forgotten the thrill of battle, the feel of his blood pumping through his veins as the joy of besting his enemies made his heart swell with pride at his own skill. He had nearly forgotten what it felt like to be a man.

This would soon change. He felt this in his bones. He stood here, arrayed for war in his armor with his sword at his hip, surrounded by others who had felt the call too. For four nights now they had stood upon the same dune and stared longingly out towards the dark horizon. For four nights they had watched as a single bright star glowed brighter. This star never left the horizon, for it did not travel across the skies with the rest of the strange constellations of this land. For it was not a star, but a beacon. It was this which had called them all there, and soon the reason for the call would be revealed. The light would reach the shore by morning at the soonest, or so said those who had once been seafarers. Before coming here that is; who would ever wish to sail on a sea full of the dead?

Over the past few nights, Karl and spoken little, but he had listened to the talk of all the others around their campfires. Many told the same stories; of how the freezing rains and painful hail of the Storms of Swords had not been seen for months; of how the Ride-by-Nights and the Fangs of Hel had not been seen in their usual numbers; of how cows and goats had been giving milk that was white instead of the usual dark gray.



He could have told them of his bees, how the honey he had collected from them had been a beautiful amber, like transparent liquid gold, instead of the normal pitch black. He could have told them, but he didn't.

He knew that something was going to change, but he did not know in what way it would change. It was this unsettling feeling of not knowing that disturbed Karl the most. For all he knew, it could be some sort of ruse by Hel to gather those prone to warfare and violence in one place to root them out once and for all. Granted, she had shone precious little interest in those few individuals who had managed to live in the land of the dead for these long years, but Hel was capricious and a god, and so what mortal could ever fathom the thoughts and wishes of such a one?

Not Karl, and so he kept his thoughts to himself. He counted all those who had gathered here on the dunes, and his tally put them at nearly a thousand strong. From across all of the wide spaces of Niflheim they had come, from the four villages, from the shores of the River Ledda, and even from the mountains ruled over by Loftur the Necromancer. Karl even noticed a few of the staves here as well, gathered into their own small groups and not speaking to the others.

As Karl made his way back to his own small tent, he noticed someone sitting by the embers of his fire. Suspicious at first, he began to draw his sword. When he realized that it was just a boy of maybe twelve summers, he relaxed and put Óvinurlækka back to sleep in his sheath. The sword, dormant for so many years, was reluctant, and Karl was keenly aware of the ancient sword's eagerness. But a few whispered words convinced the rune-sword that now was not the time, and this was not a worthy enough foe.

The aging warrior stooped to his thinning pile of wood for a couple choice logs and set about rekindling his fire. He looked at the boy only once and made it clear without speaking that the lad was welcome to share the fire but for a little while. Once the flames began to lick at the bark of the wood, Karl set his small tankard of mead near enough to be warmed and then settled himself on his sleeping furs to relax. The boy made as if to speak, but Karl only looked at him with an eyebrow raised and a stern look upon his face and the boy sat again in silence.

As the mead warmed, Karl looked at the boy. He was, as Karl had guessed less than thirteen summers old, for he wore a simple braid on the left side of his head; it was the custom of the four villages to cut the braid on a man-child's thirteenth summer so that he would then

be seen as a man rather than a child. This boy's braid was long, and looked ready to be cut soon.

"Alright, boy," Karl finally said at last. His deep rumbling voice made the youngster jump. "You are so full of questions that you can't sit still, so out with some of them, lest your innards burst with the strain of keeping them all in."

"I'm not a boy," the child said. "I will be thirteen when summer begins in three weeks."

"Ha! Not yet thirteen summers, and you want to be called a man, eh? Well than young man, what vexes you so that you sit by my fire next to a sea of the dead?"

"I don't know. It's all so strange."

"Nothing's stranger than Niflheim, lad."

"I wouldn't know."

"No, I suppose you wouldn't, would you" Karl realized that this boy...young man, had been born here in the land of the dead. He had never seen real trees, the kind that can tower over your head. He had never seen golden honey or eaten bread that wasn't the color of ash. He had never known a storm that didn't try to kill you. He had never swum in cool clear waters. And he might be dead tomorrow for all Karl knew.

"What brought you here, lad?" Karl asked.

"I'm not sure. I was in my father's fields when I heard a bell from the west. Our farm is miles from anybody, and there's nobody west of us. But I followed that bell for more than a week, and it brought me here."

"A week in the wilds of Niflheim, without even a knife on your belt? You are either foolish or very lucky. What pray-tell did you eat on your journey?"

"Nothing. I was never hungry, not once. Neither was I thirsty. I've been here for five days now, and I still have eaten nothing."

"Hmmpf. Same as everyone else, lad. Even me, and I came from farther than your little village."

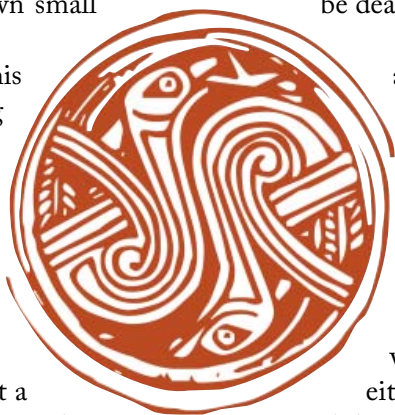
"How is this possible?"

"How? Why do you ask me? Do I look like some sort of sage, boy? I no more understand it than I understand anything about this place." He waved the boy to silence.

"I don't know what is going on, my young friend, but it is something new. And in Hel's lands, new things are things to worry about. Now be quiet while I try to get some sleep." The boy looked at Karl with surprise.

"You have been able to sleep?" he asked incredulously.

"No, boy, I have not," he sighed. "No one here has



slept, not one wink, since arriving here, and many have not done so for many days beforehand. How any of us are still moving about without our heads falling off and spittle falling from our insensate mouths is yet another of these new things that I do not understand. But I am a creature of habit, boy, and my habit is to lie down at night and sleep. If I cannot do the later than I will assuredly try the former."

With that, Karl lay himself down on his bedroll, his pack settled under his head as a pillow. He closed his eyes and tried to remember what it felt like to sleep.

The conversation obviously over, the boy sat there by the fire, his own thoughts unknown to the old fighter. At least an hour passed before Karl spoke again. The boy had not moved, and neither had Karl. He spoke with his eyes still closed.

"Boy, do not be frightened by the ramblings of an old and tired man. I have been set in my ways for longer than your own parents have been alive, most likely. If you have need of things to fear, I daresay you can come up with plenty of those on your own."

"You are welcome to my fire and the spare bedroll should you wish it. When the dawn comes I am sure that we will all see what has come to this place and disturbed all of us from our accustomed places."

The night moves slowly if one does not sleep during the darkest hours, but it moves nonetheless. Karl got up from his bedding and found that he was not tired, nor was he hungry. His body did not ache as it should have for a man of his years who had spent the night lying on the cold ground near the ocean. He stood as quickly and nimbly as did the youngster who had shared his fire.

Karl felt better than he had in a very long time. He was full of energy, the likes of which he had not felt since the lost days of his youth. He looked at the boy, and he could see a look in his eye that said he too felt the same. The boy's blue eyes were bright and he wore a grin that was part joy and part madness.

"I'll race you to the sea, old man," the boy said. Before Karl could even utter a word the boy took off at a run that Karl had never been able to match. But he saw the boy run, and he saw the joy with which he did it, and Karl too ran. He ran after the boy toward the beach. He ran faster than he had ever done before. He could feel his legs and arms pumping, the muscles pushing and pulling. He was giddy as he felt his heart beat faster and stronger, as his chest filled with air.

He caught and passed the boy, reaching the top of the last dune. He gazed down at the corpse strewn waters and he stopped running. His breath was not short, his muscles did not ache, and his heart did not pound like a smith's hammer in his chest. He did not feel fear, and that surprised him the most, for there were ships in the water, and they were coming to the shores of Niflheim.

The boy came up next to Karl and he too stared. Karl thought quickly, and he grabbed the boy by the shoulder.

"Lad, go back to the other encampments. Tell the others what you see here, and have them gird themselves for war. Go, boy, now!"

"I will. And my name is Lundergard." Karl watched as the young man ran at the same powerful pace back to the camps. He then turned around and watched the ships.

There were three of them, and they looked like the longships he had sailed on so many years ago. They looked like them, but they were huge in comparison. These ships were nearly three hundred yards long, with sails that would have made tents for twice each the number of people gathered above in the hills.

The ships were white, with bright blue paint and gold adorning the rails. They had no oars, and the sails did not billow in the wind, but still these enormous vessels moved ever closer to the shore.

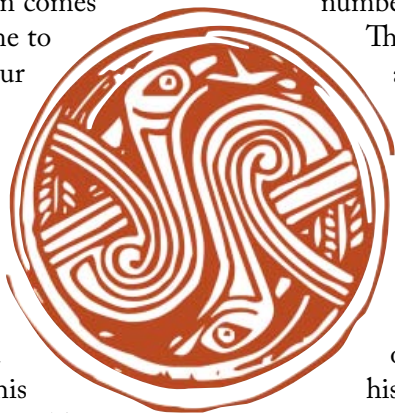
Karl was so taken by the ships that he didn't hear Lundergard return. The boy had brought Karl's armor and weapons for him, and as they both looked on, the aged warrior once again donned his raiment of war.

It was the youngster who noted it first.

"The water! The water around the ships is clear!"

"What? Where?" Karl looked down, and it was true. The water that rippled away from the prow of the largest ship, the one that had taken the head of the vanguard, had changed color. No longer was it the oily reddish black of the Sea of the Dead, but it was clean and clear. Where the clean water touched one of the corpses floating in the bay, the body burned and smoked and turned to ash, disappearing into the swirls and eddies in the ships' wake.

The others were arriving now from their encampments. They all were prepared for battle, all were girded for war. The nature of the war was unknown to them all, but they all felt in their bones that a war was coming. Karl stood among them, staring at the three great ships as they each made landfall on the Shore of Corpses.



Men could be seen now on the decks of the ships, soldiers and warriors all. Their raiment was splendid, if varied beyond recognition. As Karl watched in horror, several of them jumped from the decks of the ships into the waters below.

"No!" cried out a voice. Karl was surprised to find that it was his own voice. He ran down the dunes towards the ships. "No!" he cried again. "Get out of the water! It will make you one of them, one of the draugar, one of Hel's playthings!"

He paid no heed to the others telling him to stop. He ran recklessly towards these strangers, warning them off. It wasn't until he was face first in the grey sands did he realize that one of the dead had grabbed hold of his ankle. He was in the midst of the more able dead, and they began to crawl about to get closer to him.

These were the unworthy dead - the slothful, the suicidal, the gluttonous, collected by Hel from across all the worlds that were. Souls such as these were brought here to the Sea of the Dead to soak for a while in the diseased brine, pickled and prepared for service in Hel's name. These were the draugar, and they had a deep hatred for all things living.

They held Karl down, these multitudes of dead. One had managed to crawl upon his chest. It held a fine gold dagger in its hand, probably one of the grave goods it was buried with before it was brought here. Karl understood that he was about to die, right there on the shore, where he would later rise up as one of Hel's servants. The knife arm was raised, the blade poised to pierce his throat. Karl held the rhummey eyes of his killer, willing it back to the waters, all the while waiting for the blade to drop.

A shadow passed over the struggling corpses, and the one with the knife began a wordless, hissing scream. A gauntleted hand, a living hand, held the wrist of the draugar and the body of the dead thing began to smoke and pop. At last it exploded into a fine ash that dispersed on the wind. Karl was surprised to still be alive, and was more than a little shocked.

"Are you all right?" asked a voice. The voice had a strength to it and a solemnity and kindness that no mortal voice could hold. Karl looked at the speaker, the same one whose very touch had destroyed the undead horrors that had trapped him. This man, if he was a man, looked like his voice. He was strong and kind in appearance, and he gave everyone around him that same strength. It emanated from him like light from the sun. Karl saw the way the others from the boats moved with purpose and with a deference for this great man. He could see the love that all those had for him.

"Who are you?" Karl asked.

"I am returned at last, lost to the sea of souls, and newly reborn. I am the true ruler of this realm, and I mean to take it back from she who stole it. Will you help me?"

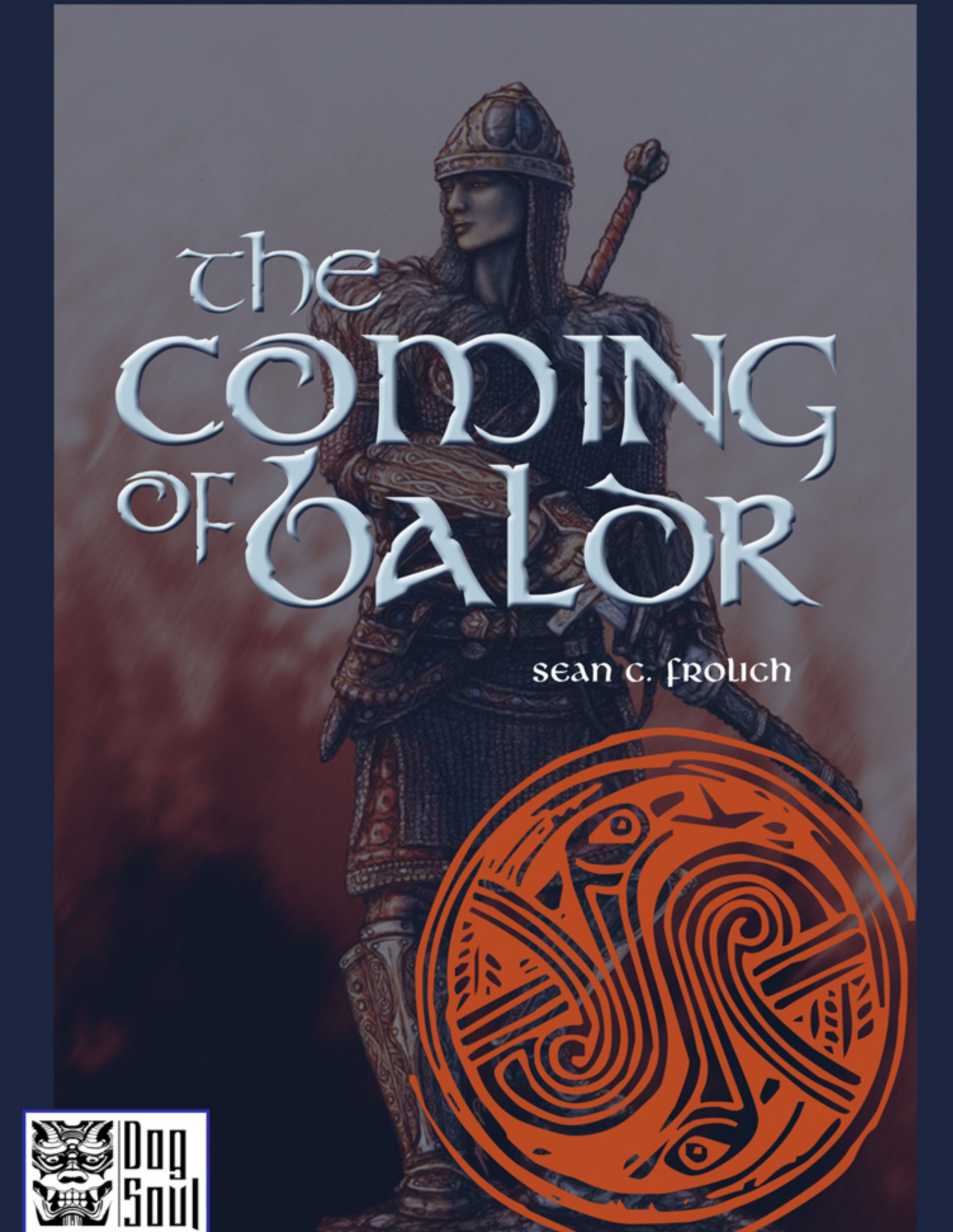
"You are Baldr, then? The dead god come to life once again?"

"Yes I am, Karl Jurgenson. I have returned."

Karl knew that he had been right all along. A war was coming, and it was one he did so want to participate in. The war to reclaim the land of Niflheim. A war of gods.

Oh the glory to be had.





the COMING of VALOR

sean c. frolich



Dog
Soul