

Nessus: City of Decay



Lands in Shadow for Shadow of the Demon Lord

Many centuries have passed since Nessus, the First City, was a place of wealth and splendor. Once one of the greatest cities in Rûl, a disastrous plague laid it low, driving out the city's people into the countryside, unwitting carriers of the foul sickness. The ravages of the disease, the emptying of the city, and its plundering by greedy opportunists taking advantage of the chaos soon reduced Nessus to a blighted and ruined place, its vastly diminished population made up of hungry, desperate people without hope of ever restoring their home to greatness again.

City of Decay details the tragedy that befell Nessus, the First City, revealing the wonders and wealth the city held before its catastrophic collapse. In these pages, you'll find details about the city as it stands now, covering the locations of import, along with notable persons, adventure ideas and more to make this strange and overgrown place the perfect backdrop for your adventures and campaigns.

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Although Nessus has fallen far and hard from its once-lofty heights, the time is at hand for a new age of prosperity and light—but only if the city can be reclaimed from the wilderness and darkness that has all but overtaken it.

A History of Riches

When the Edene invaded Rûl, they quickly found overland expansion south into the lands held by the First People fraught with peril. General Aedom, one of the God-Queen Umessa's greatest and wisest commanders, led a force of ten thousand soldiers onto boats commandeered from local fishermen in the city of Gateway and its surrounding region. The flotilla followed the coastline south, allowing the general's forces to bypass the various tribes who were staunchly opposing the Edene. Aedom landed his troops on the shores of a quiet, forest-covered land, sheltered by green mountains, and named the place Nessus. Envisioning the site as a beachhead for his forces to march up from the south and strike the hated savages from behind, he had his soldiers construct a fortress of stone and timber on a rise overlooking the bay. Looking to the long-term, he also dispatched ships north to bring back slaves to help tame the land and plant crops, in order to build a settlement large enough to feed and support his army as it worked to rid the land of the unruly First People.

While Aedom recognized the place's strategic value for bringing supplies into the heart of the continent, no one could have anticipated the settlement blossoming into a thriving city. Once the Edene crushed their enemies, Umessa set about building her fledgling kingdom. Military outposts such as Nessus became foundations for new cities and launching points for efforts to expand the Edene's holdings. Nessus, in particular, offered a route into a land rich in resources, with soil perfect for farming, crisscrossed by countless streams and rivers, dotted with lakes, and blanketed in thick forest, all just waiting for settlers to stake their claims and begin the hard work of clearing and cultivation.

The attraction of cheap land, as well as distance from the internecine political fighting and open conflict among those provinces nearest to the capital city of Rathros (later Caecras), saw people from all over the continent come to Nessus to begin new lives. The influx of thousands of people, buttressed by slaves from Dis, the Kingdom of Sails, and the Pirate Isles, saw Nessus transform from a large military encampment into a burgeoning city in just a few generations. Cobblestones soon paved over muddy streets, walls rose up to divide the various wards, estates grew on the islands in the bay and up the surrounding mountain slopes, while buildings

sprouted up along both sides of the narrow, twisting roads burrowing through Nessus's heart.

Nessus's distance from Rathros allowed the city to escape the Witch-King of Gog's invasion almost unscathed. The city's autarch, to avoid a military conflict with the dreaded dark lord, bent his knee to the new king and offered up tribute in the form of gold, timber, spices, and slaves. Staying in the Witch-King's good graces ensured Nessus a small degree of autonomy, and, using Nessus as an example, the Witch-King went on to found several other cities to bring the number of city-states in the vast coastal region up to nine—the beginning of what would become the present-day Confederacy of the Nine.

Despite Nessus's close ties to Ashrakal, the city sensed the way the wind was blowing when the Kalasans made landfall, and the First City was among the first to abandon the Men of Gog and champion the cause of the liberators. Nessus foodstuffs and other supplies helped the Kalasans beat back the Men of Gog, ridding them and their stain from the lands they conquered. Nessus remained an integral part of the Kalasans' war against the Witch-King until he was finally cast down, and his forces driven out of what was now called Caecras, fleeing for their lives underground or to other, nastier places, or back to the Desolation from whence they originally swept across Rûl.

In the years following the formation of the Empire, Nessus not only held onto its status and influence, but grew even greater. The Kalasans busied themselves rebuilding the lands destroyed in the fighting, requiring vast amounts of goods and resources to accomplish their work, which Nessus was only too happy to provide. So as the Kalasans built the Empire, Nessus grew stronger, becoming the greatest political force on Rûl by the middle of the first century after the Kalasans' arrival.

But as bright as Nessus's star burned, it would not shine for long as a dark and unexpected fate awaited it. In 128, the merchant ship *Explorer* drifted into the city's port, all hands aboard dead from the Shuddering Pox. Before the dockmaster perceived the threat and had the ship quarantined, salvagers snuck on board and then carried the plague into the city, racing through Nessus with a speed and virulence unlike anything anyone had ever seen. The warm, moist climate, combined with Nessus's crowded conditions, enabled the killer pox to spread like wildfire—in just a few short weeks, half of the city's population lay dead or dying. Most of the remaining survivors fled, thus carrying the Shuddering Pox with them, spreading it throughout Rûl in what has been chronicled as the Empire's worst pandemic, one that reduced its population by a third.

After the plague had run its course, Nessus was drastically reduced in people, resources, and reputation. Of the 120,000 people who lived in the city

before the outbreak, just under 20,000 remained, and many bore the scars from the pox, both in body and mind. Those who fled from the city carried with them everything they could, emptying Nessus of much of its wealth. Heavy losses among the lower classes meant there were all too few laborers to work the fields, cut timber, or perform the necessary services to keep the city going. Merchant ships stopped coming to port, having few buyers and nothing for which they might trade--and also out of fear that the plague might resurge. In the eyes of the Empire, Nessus was dead. And like a corpse left to rot, scavengers picked over its remains, carrying off anything of value, leaving the hollow-eyed survivors to live in wretched poverty and near-starvation.

An Overgrown Ruin

Nessus is located a few hundred miles south of Azūl, covering a peninsula that extends out into the Auroral Ocean. Inland, the ground rises sharply toward a line of densely forested mountains running roughly parallel to the coastline. A warm and sunny climate, with plenty of rain coming in from across the sea, makes the region perfect for agriculture, the only industry of any significance that remains. Grains and cotton are the primary crops grown and exported, along with a variety of vegetables and fruits.

Centuries after the plague wiped out most of the city's population and sent the afflicted fleeing across the Empire, not much remains of the wonder and splendor for which Nessus was once renowned. Positioned on the eastern edge of the peninsula, five concentric walls once encircled the city and established its districts, each wall marking a period of expansion to accommodate its ever-increasing population and industry. Towers and spires of granite, marble, and glass rose above the high walls, a blatant display of the city's incredible wealth. The Autarch's Palace rivaled that of the emperors, and the great Radiant Cathedral, an astounding work of architecture for the time, was one of the holiest sites to the Order of Light, the dominant religion.

All of this has fallen to ruin and rot, however, as the diminished population could not muster the effort or resources needed to repair damage wrought by the frequent storms, put out the fires lit by errant lightning strikes, nor preserve or rebuild the buildings, streets, and other structures from nature's bid to reclaim the lands taken from it.

In fact, Nessus is now more forest than city. Trees have taken root throughout, branches growing out from open windows and trunks high through holes in the roofs. Tall grasses have grown up between the cobblestones paving the streets until they have all but buried them. Creeping vines blanket the sides of

buildings, covering statues, and choking fountains. Wildlife once indigenous to the land before the city's rise has returned to make a home in places that once housed the city's wealthiest citizens; monsters and other horrors have also crept in to find lairs within the ruins. All of this has combined to make the ruined city an incredibly dangerous place.

An air of grief and mourning hangs in the mist over Nessus, an almost tangible sense of the death of the city centuries ago that can be palpably felt. Contributing to this melancholy atmosphere are the spirits of the dead, souls of those who succumbed to the plagues and have refused to move on, clinging to their decaying city and the dim memories they have of the place. These restless haunts spend the daylight hours in hiding, lurking wherever the shadows pool, or dwelling in the darkness of old cellars and other buried places. When night falls, they emerge, the wailing sounds of their torment and sorrow echoing in the darkness throughout the vast forested wreckage of the once-great city.

Despite the appalling ruin, however, civilization of a sort has taken root and even thrived in certain parts of the city, and new efforts are underway to reclaim Nessus from the wilderness and the dread things inhabiting it. The city as it stands today is roughly divided into three broad zones: the Verge, the Skirts, and the Decayed City, each of which is described below.

The Verge

The ruins of Nessus begin at the foot of a range of old mountains stretching north and south, parallel to the shoreline. Thick forests blanket the slopes all the way to their summits. Paths wind between the dense growth, some game trails, others the remnants of old roads rarely used except by those few people who come in search of treasure in the city's wreckage, or the supply caravans which cross over the mountains from the Confederacy. Often, fallen trees block the ways or the paths have been washed out by heavy rains, which makes traveling them tricky at best and almost always dangerous.

Locals avoid the Verge but necessity sometimes demands climbing up into the mountains, whether to hunt game or to track down a missing child. When people do go up into the mountains, they travel armed and in large numbers, for there are many strange things haunting the arboreal gloom. Griffons nest among the peaks and can be seen wheeling in the air above them, their keen eyes searching the trees for the movement of prey. In the deepest, darkest parts of the forests, fungal hulks and their mite offspring spread their deadly spores wherever they can.

And there are far worse things waiting within the wilderness to do great harm to any who dare to trespass...



The Witch

An old woman named Clasta dwells within the deep forest. Having lived there for as long as anyone can remember, some whisper she's always been in the woods, long since before the city's founding. People call her witch, an eater of children, and a seducer of men. Everyone knows to avoid her—even the bandits pay heed to the effigies of sticks and animal skins that mark the boundaries of her territory.

Clasta is, in fact, the witch that the locals' tales hold her to be. An ancient, hideous thing who bargained away her soul to the Devil long ago for near-immortality, she's lived in the Verge for centuries, feeding on the children she lures into her clutches with the promises of sweets, and upon the foolish woodcutters who fall for her beguiling form. She has left a long trail of broken lives and piles of bones in the untold years she's haunted the woods. At various times, the common folk living in the forest have tried to rid themselves of her cursed presence, but each time she's gotten the better of them, and the corpses of those she did not eat now shuffle around her hut, testifying to her magical prowess.

According to legend, Clasta's hut moves every night of the new moon, lifted up and hauled away by the spirits of all the children she has eaten, to settle someplace else in the vast forest. The witch fashions tiny effigies out of the bones and tanned skin of her

CLASTA

DIFFICULTY 50

Size 1 horrifying monster

Perception 14 (+4); **shadowsight**
Defense 11; **Health** 60; **Insanity** —; **Corruption** 6
Strength 13 (+3), **Agility** 11 (+1), **Intellect** 14 (+4), **Will** 11 (+1)
Speed 10

Immune damage from disease; charmed, diseased

Heart's Desire While not injured, Clasta appears to anyone who can see her to be a person they desire, trust, or would befriend. While appearing as such, she loses the horrifying trait.

Spell Defense Clasta takes half damage from spells and makes challenge rolls to resist spells with 1 boon. When a creature attacks her with a spell, she imposes 1 bane on its attack roll.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Claws (melee) +3 with 1 boon (2d6)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Double Attack Clasta attacks twice with her claws. She can cast a spell in place of one of these attacks.

Beguiling Lure Clasta uses an action, or a triggered action on her turn, to beguile a creature that can see her and that is within medium range. She makes an Intellect attack roll against the target's Will. On a success, the target becomes charmed. While charmed in this way, the target must get a success on a Will challenge roll when it takes a turn or be forced to use an action to rush toward Clasta, stopping only when it can reach her. If the target can already reach her, it becomes stunned until the end of the round instead. Each time the target takes damage or gains Insanity, it can make a Will challenge roll with 1 bane and removes the charmed affliction from itself on a success. A target against which Clasta got a failure on her attack roll or that removed the charmed affliction from itself cannot again be affected by her Beguiling Lure until after it completes a rest.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Call Wretched Servants Clasta uses an action to cause 1d3 + 1 **small monsters** with the horrifying trait to appear in open spaces within short range. They remain for 1 hour or until they become incapacitated, at which point they dissolve into small piles of foul-smelling jelly. The creatures take the next possible turn to attack Clasta's enemies. Once Clasta uses Call Wretched Servants, she must wait until she completes a rest before she can use it again.

MAGIC

Power 3

Curse *pox* (4), *pain* (2), *vulnerability* (1), *swine* (1)

Forbidden *harm* (4), *obedience* (2), *vision's end* (1), *desire's end* (1)

victims, hanging them in the trees surrounding her hut as a warning to any would-be trespassers. Anyone foolish enough to ignore these signs becomes fair game for her dreadful appetites, and more than one band of treasure hunters have met their end at her hands.

Clasta masks her grotesque, withered form behind magical guises that hold up to nearly any form of inspection. She changes appearance to match what people most want to see, becoming a kindly grandmother, a voluptuous maiden, or even a lost child. The only clue to her horrific nature is her bone-chilling voice, a mark of darkness she cannot hide or disguise.

The Honorable Few

Faced with starvation and destitution, many people abandoned efforts to reclaim Nessus from the wilderness and the dread creatures infesting it.

Instead, they now make ends meet by preying on the other fools who cross over the mountains to find their fortunes in the decayed city. These bandits rarely cause trouble for people living in the Skirts, though they're not above the occasional raid and taking of provisions wherever they can find them. Most bandits working the Verge disappear after a few months, having fallen afoul of better-armed and experienced travelers, or any one of the myriad monsters that roam the forests.

The most notorious band at large in the Verge is the Honorable Few. A ragtag gang of murderers, robbers, and psychopaths, they are far more willing than the other bandit gangs to threaten those living in the Skirts. While they do prey on the occasional groups and caravans that cross over the mountains, they have found more lucrative gains to be had by extorting "protection money" from those in the Skirts who aren't strong enough to fight them off.

Verity Flent

The Honorable Few are led by Verity Flent, a tough woman with a ferocious temper. She seized power a few months ago after a fight with the previous chief, Rude Pol. After a heated argument over a failed raid for which each blamed the other, she suddenly attacked him, smashing him in the head with a cask of ale, and then cut off his genitals and shoved them into his mouth. The bandits still laugh about the scene around the campfire, mocking his stunned look and muffled cries as he bled out.

Flent stands just shy of six feet. She keeps her black hair hacked short, and her body is covered in tattoos and scars, though she rarely displays these markings. A grim and humorless woman, the bandits follow her orders without question, and no one dares anger her for she is quick to use her blade, always in creative and nasty ways.

VERITY FLENT

DIFFICULTY 10

Size 1 human

Perception 12 (+2)
Defense 15 (brigandine); **Health** 30; **Insanity** 6; **Corruption** 3
Strength 12 (+2), **Agility** 11 (+1), **Intellect** 11 (+1), **Will** 13 (+3)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Long Knife (melee) +2 with 1 boon (2d6)
Longbow (long range) +1 with 1 boon (2d6 + 1)

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Vicious Command Verity Flent can use an action, or a triggered action on her turn, to issue a command to one creature that is friendly to her and can hear her. The target makes its next attack roll before the end of the round with 1 boon and, if the total of the target's attack roll is 20 or higher, the attack deals 1d6 extra damage. If the attack roll results in a failure, the target gains 1 Insanity.

Old Spite

People in the Skirts still talk about the dragon attack that happened some 243 years ago. While no one was alive to remember that time, the stories have come down through the generations and are told and retold around campfires, or whispered into the ears of naughty children who fail to finish their turnips or do their chores. Although Old Spite has not yet returned, most believe the dragon will come back one day and feed again. So whenever a person mentions the dragon by name or otherwise, everyone within earshot points their forefingers at the sun and calls upon the Radiant One to protect them.

Despite the rarity of dragons in Rûl, the legend is, in fact, true. The dragon never left after gorging itself on livestock and people all those years ago. Instead, Old Spite found a cave, cleared it out with a blast of its fiery breath, and settled inside to slowly digest the flesh and bones filling its belly. As with all dragons, Old Spite needs to eat a great deal in order to sustain itself. However, the dragon knows it took too much last time it attacked the people on the slopes below its lair, and that if it attacked in that way again, it might drive them off or invite retribution from outsiders. Rather than risk its life, for the last century or so, the dragon has been hunting in Low Country, the Patchwork Lands, and elsewhere, but always finds its way back to its lair. Hence, a few people over the years have claimed to have seen Old Spite and their stories have kept the tales of the dragon alive.

The **dragon** (Size 3) lives in a deep cave far under the Verge accessed by three wide tunnels, the entrances of which have been concealed by piled dirt, trees, and bones. The musty air carries hints of rot, excrement, and blood, and one can spot claw marks, scales, and the occasional gnawed bone left by the dragon as it makes its rounds through the depths. The dragon's main lair lies somewhere in the depths, a vast cavern with an uneven floor, pools of water fed by seepage from the ceiling bristling with stalactites. The treasure the dragon has accumulated is considerable and includes many thousands of coins, gems, sculptures, enchanted objects and, possibly, a relic or two, all of which the dragon has either plucked from the city or from those adventurers hoping to plunder it.

Aside from the dragon, numerous other creatures the dragon has no interest in eating make their home in the caves. **Fungal brutes** and their **mite** offspring roam the passages, while **rot maidens** grow in the offal the dragon leaves. **Tiny monsters**, strange things shaped from scale, bone, and tooth, scuttle in the gloom, lying in wait to snatch a dropped morsel or to drag off one of the dragon's prisoners to devour alive.

Exploring the Verge

Groups traveling through the mountains must contend with the challenging terrain and the various things lurking in the forest's shadows. Once every 1d3 hours the characters spend in the mountains, you can roll a d20 and consult the following table to see what, if anything, the group encounters.

Verge Encounters

d20	Encounter
20	The dragon flies in the skies overhead, glimpsed through the gaps in the trees.
19	The group spots a wooden shack through the trees. The shack has two floors, contains rotting furniture and the carcasses of small animals. Upstairs, behind a locked door, stands a strange idol, Size 2, made from human teeth.
17-18	Nothing.
15-16	A boggart comes screaming out of the trees.
13-14	A dread mother spots the group from the upper branches of tall trees and follows, attacking when the group is vulnerable, i.e., already in combat or most of the party is asleep.
11-12	A hungry bear roars and attacks.
9-10	A griffon drops through the canopy, tries to grab a character with its claws, and then flies away.
7-8	A group of 2d6 bandits and 1d3 hired killers spring an ambush.
3-6	The group draws close to a pair of strangle vines .
1-2	An old troll comes lumbering out of the woods. It might leave the characters in peace if they offer it food or treasure.

The Skirts

Cultivated land surrounds Nessus's ruins. Once a collection of satellite villages and farms on which the city depended for foodstuffs and other resources, the communities swelled with refugees after the plague's outbreak. These same refugees spread the sickness to these settlements, reducing their populations as well. As the city became less safe to inhabit, survivors moved into the vacant dwellings and started over as farmers, herders, and fishers. Now, the Skirts hold the descendants of Nessus's survivors, and though they call themselves Skirters and do not dwell within the city's bounds, they still consider themselves citizens of the First City.

Hardscrabble Survivors

Life has been anything but easy for the people of Nessus. Cut off from the Empire with little in the way of aid or comfort coming from the other member cities of the Confederacy, the people there have had to fend for themselves for generations. Once considered decadent and soft in the city's

heyday, the Nessans are now tough, grizzled folks who do whatever they need to do to keep their families safe, fed, and sheltered. While Nessans understand they ostensibly belong to the larger Confederacy of Nine Cities, they feel no particular loyalty to it, having been on their own for so long. It has only been in recent years, because of the efforts of the Beggar Autarch (see below) that any aid has trickled in from their neighbors. Instead, they see themselves a people apart, a tightknit community of survivors who don't give a damn about distant wars, political intrigues, or any other kind of outside trouble. They have more than enough problems of their own.

Nessans are, for the most part, human, though some halflings have made their homes here, as have runaway orcs, the rare changeling, along with a smattering of other ancestries as well. Humans show great diversity in appearance, though just about everyone has hands stained from working in the soil, tough bodies from backbreaking labor, and a smirk and sneer for anyone who comes offering a better way of doing things, believing, or living. People dress in simple, functional garments of homespun cotton, and few bother to don any kind of accessories beyond a few flowers in their hair.

When it comes to religion, Nessus stands apart. When the plague swept through the city, the Order of Light was the dominant religion throughout the Empire and Nessus was the faith's center of power, as evidenced by the Radiant Cathedral, the greatest of all the temples dedicated to that faith. Since the Shuddering Pox outbreak struck well before Astrid was born, the city was deemed a lost cause by the time the Cult of the New God took the Empire by storm, and few missionaries came to the city to lead its people into the light of their new truth.

For this reason, the Order of Light is alive and well in Nessus and in its surroundings. Its priests keep alive the "original" faith, despite more recent attempts by outsiders to make converts. Efforts to preserve the religion from outside interference have largely worked and nearly everyone living in the Skirts subscribes to its teachings. For more details on the Order of Light, see below.

Communities in the Skirts range from small farms to ramshackle villages assembled from salvaged materials and timber cut from the forests blanketing the area. The dangers posed by the Verge—bandit gangs, monsters coming down from the mountain slopes, or the various other horrors haunting the ruins of the city—encouraged builders to build their homes and other buildings close together and behind walls. When night falls, locals light giant pyres to keep the things that seek to kill them at bay.

Travelers to Nessus can usually find places to stay in taverns and inns in the larger settlements, though they're usually common rooms, poorly cooled or heated. Farmers might let a visitor spend the night in the hayloft, but often demand a service in exchange, such as labor, repair, or dealing with a more dangerous problem. The Nessans who live here might be suspicious of travelers, but they're not likely to refuse an extra hand or even a few spare coins in exchange for a place to rest.

The Ruin Watch

Growing crops, raising livestock, and fishing in the bay might be the primary pursuits of the Nessans these days, but of equal importance to these efforts is the need to protect what they have from the things that lurk in the ruined city. Everyone living in the Skirts learns how to fight with spear and shield as soon as they can hold these arms. If a village comes under attack, the people rally behind their leaders and fight as a fairly effective force. Even the young and elderly pitch in by carrying water buckets to put out fires or to drag back the injured and patch them up.

Beyond the local efforts communities undertake to protect their homes and families, people also depend on the Ruin Watch to find and destroy anyone or anything that could potentially become a significant threat. Working singly or in small groups, Ruin Watchers patrol the "no-man's land" between the Skirts and the Decayed City, and sometimes make forays into the ruins to look for signs of monsters and destroy them whenever they are found. If a sizeable force comes out of the ruins, the Watch members, noted for their long, hooded gray cloaks and facial tattoos, bring warning to nearby settlements and help them fend off the attacks.

RUIN WATCHER

DIFFICULTY 10

Size 1 human

Perception 11 (+1); Alertness

Defense 15 (hard leather); Health 24; Insanity 1d3 - 1; Corruption 0

Strength 10 (+0), Agility 13 (+3), Intellect 11 (+1), Will 11 (+1)

Speed 12

Alertness The Ruin Watcher makes Perception rolls with 1 boon and, while not unconscious, cannot be surprised.

Sneaky A Ruin Watcher makes rolls to hide or sneak with 1 boon.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Spear (melee or short range) +3 with 2 boons (2d6)

Bow (long range) +3 with 2 boon (2d6)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Skirmish The Ruin Watcher moves up to half his or her Speed without triggering free attacks. At any one point during this movement, the ruin watcher can make an attack that deals 1d6 extra damage.



Abben of the Setting Sun

The Abbey of the Setting Sun sits atop a low hill on the northern edge of the city's ruins. A stone structure surrounded by an old, crumbling brick wall, it has seen better days. Many of the gray tiles that formed the Abbey's roof have fallen to the ground, leaving behind dark pits. One of its two brick chimneys has toppled over, scattering bricks across the roof that occasionally crash to the ground without warning. Most of the windows, all covered with a mesh of iron bars inside and out, have been broken, the holes stuffed with old rags. It is a quiet, somber place, showing the same signs of decay found throughout Nessus.

The building was once a nunnery, but was repurposed after it became clear that the city was lost and that it was all but impossible to protect the Radiant Cathedral (see page 11). The surviving priests gathered what relics they could and withdrew to the smaller structure outside the city's walls, intending to stay there only a short while until aid arrived from the Empire to help recover and reclaim Nessus. The promised aid never came and any hope of return to the Cathedral was abandoned as the new reality sank in.

The priests maintained the Abbey well for many years, but over time the acolytes' quality deteriorated, and so too did the building and its grounds. Now, the Abbey teeters on the brink of collapse, with large sections of it abandoned out of safety concerns. A great many of the clergy live outside in crude huts and shelters made from materials they've scavenged.

Mortimer Habbblestone

The abbot, and, for all intents and purposes, the high priest of the entire religion in Nessus, Mortimer Habbblestone (**noncombatant**) ascended to his current position thirty years ago. A man of failed vision and failing hearing, of addled wits and an unfortunate propensity for loose bowels, he relies on the six or seven young acolytes for feeding, bathing, and communicating what other people say by shouting into his ear. In thanks, he gives them treats that he keeps in his pockets and the occasional pinch. He has no ambition beyond entertaining himself by tormenting his young attendants.

Paedon Mei

The second in line to take over the Order of Light is a young, damp man named Paedon Mei (**commoner/professional**). Always wringing his hands and flicking his eyes this way and that, he appears ever on the verge of running away in a panic. He dresses in shabby yellow robes and wears a brass amulet on the chain around his neck. He speaks in a quavering voice and vacillates whenever he's asked any question that doesn't specifically pertain to his faith.

Radiant Disciples

To meet the faith's demands for new disciples, Nessans entrust their disfigured and deranged to the Order for raising and safekeeping. These unusual and disturbing disciples carry out all the labor necessary to keep the Abbey running, from tending the gardens, pressing the grapes for wine, and wandering the Skirts to collect offerings from the people. Many disciples are true believers and take great pride in their work, but several have no idea why they are at the Abbey or what they're doing (or supposed to be doing). Many cleave to twisted interpretations of the faith's scriptures and carry out their own bizarre rituals. Since no one can stop them from doing what they do, given the tenuous hold the abbot has on the place, these erratic disciples have begun to contaminate their fellows, turning many into monstrous and dangerous fanatics. More than one itinerant disciple has had to be put down by locals after harm has come to their animals and children.

Seaside

Southeast of the ruined city on the coast sheltered by a line of high hills stands the Skirts' largest and most prosperous town of five thousand souls. Seaside's

RADIANT DISCIPLE

DIFFICULTY 10

Size 1 human

Perception 8 (-2)
Defense 11; **Health** 32; **Insanity** 1d6 + 1; **Corruption** 1d3 - 1
Strength 12 (+2), **Agility** 11 (+1), **Intellect** 8 (-2), **Will** 9 (-1)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Flail (melee) +2 with 1 boon (2d6 + 2)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Unhinged Strike The radiant disciple attacks with a melee weapon, making the attack roll with 2 boons and dealing 2d6 extra damage. The disciple then gains 1 Insanity. If this attack causes the target to become incapacitated, the radiant disciple can use Unhinged Strike again as part of the same action. Once the radiant disciple uses Unhinged Strike, it must wait 1 minute before it can use it again.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Clarity in Madness When the radiant disciple would become frightened, it can use a triggered action to remove the affliction from itself.

END OF THE ROUND

Crippling Madness Roll a d6. On a 1, the radiant disciple becomes dazed until the end of the next round.

fortunes come from the fishing industry that has managed to not only survive over the centuries, but even brings in enough to salt down for export. Nearly everyone living in Seaside makes their living dragging fish from the sea as those who have come before them for hundreds of years.

Much of Seaside consists of small wooden houses arranged in rows along twisting streets crossed with ramps that lead down to the docks and jetties. As Seaside is the principal access point to the rest of the Skirts, it has seen several inns, taverns, brothels, and the like popping up over the last century, with most coming in just the last few years after the naming of the current autarch, Urian, who also lives here.

Mixed in among the locals, one can find a variety of outsiders from the rest of the Confederacy and elsewhere, some of whom are scrambling to buy up property and invest in efforts to rebuild Nessus; their hope is that when the city does come back, they will own a profitable piece of it. Thus, Vault agents from Kem can be found rubbing elbows with merchants from Azūl, Dis, and Pruul, among others from outside of the Confederacy seeking profit and gain.

Seaside also boasts a more diverse population than elsewhere in the Skirts and one can find people of almost any ancestry on the town's streets.



Urian, the Beggar Autarch

No one remembers the last time Nessus had an autarch, so everyone was surprised when an old fisherman spent one hundred gold crowns to buy the title for himself. Urian (**commoner/professional**) has always dreamed of restoring Nessus to its former glory, a dream passed down by his ancestors through the generations, all fishers who had hoped for the same thing. From family savings that took decades to accumulate, he came forward a few years ago to purchase and claim the mantle of autarch, hoping to lead his people to a brighter and better future.

Urian still lives in a modest house in Seaside, but now spends more and more of his time away, either overseeing the Reclamation, the effort to retake and rebuild the city, or traveling to other city-states to seek aid in whatever form he can get. While away, his daughter Era rules in his stead, although, for now at least, the autarch's authority has little reach outside of Seaside and its environs.

An old man, Urian is a human of middling height with a long face, a mop of gray hair, and very bright eyes. He wears simple, but serviceable clothes. When traveling abroad to work on behalf of his city, he dons borrowed finery, which includes a gold-plated circlet resting on his brow—attire he'd never dare to wear at home as he'd be laughed out of Nessus if ever caught in them.

The Reclamation

A year ago, with help from the Confederacy of the Nine, Nessans began an organized effort to take back the city from the wilderness that had overtaken it and clear out the evil things haunting the ruins—the Reclamation. The effort's spearhead is a fortified camp also named Reclamation. Built on the city's eastern edge overlooking the bay, it boasts high walls built from stone blocks recovered from the crumbling structures, three barracks filled with slaves brought in from Dis, an officers' barrack that houses local leaders handpicked by the autarch as well as commanders from Dis, Qif, and Lij to help coordinate efforts. Soldiers from Kem patrol the walls and grounds day and night to ensure nothing gets over or under the walls, from either direction.

So far, the work of clearing, repairing, and rebuilding the city has stalled after angry spirits attacked when workers tore down a seafront theater. When darkness fell, the spirits boiled out of the theatre's ruins and slaughtered three dozen slaves and half as many more guards before they were driven off. After this setback, the slave overseers weren't about to risk losing any of their chattel unless they could be assured of additional protection. Urian went to Lij with a Vault ambassador to hire expert astromancers and theurges to bolster the military presence in Nessus with a magical one capable of destroying these haunts. Little progress has been made while waiting for these reinforcements to arrive.

Merken's Outfitters

An enterprising halfling named Merken, along with his family, set up shop on the western edge of the city to sell supplies to explorers, archaeologists, adventurers, and anyone else with a reason to pick through the wreckage. Merken has a slim body, fast hands, and a quick tongue. His two wives and four sons help run the business. One of his wives, Recen, sees to inventory and runs a regular caravan over the mountains to pick up more supplies, while his other wife, Fanin, helps with the selling. Merken also sells his sons' time to serve as guides into the ruins—halfling luck is a valuable commodity. The sons have managed to survive by taking off at the first sign of trouble, leaving their employers to face whatever nasty thing they might have disturbed.

Merken sells common and uncommon items from his shop. There's a 1-in-20 chance each month that he has an enchanted object for sale. He charges outrageous prices for his goods, usually double the list price.



Headstones

Not far from Merken's Outfitters is a small community of stone and timber buildings, surrounded by a field of stones. Originally established as a camp for people venturing into Nessus's ruins, it has become a literal graveyard for those who have succumbed to the myriad dangers of its interior. No one owns anything of significance in Headstones, and the people living there make what little coin or barter they can by offering space to explorers and travelers to rest and recoup. A member of the House of Healing, Amarice, also lives here and tends to the hurts of people wounded in the city. He does the best he can, frazzled and exhausted by his efforts as the only person in the community with any real medical training.

Jerzen, a former adventurer, became the leader of the settlement ten years ago after he limped out of the city, his team dead and his left arm ripped off and digested in the gullet of some indescribable thing that took them by surprise. Dour and cynical, he tries to warn off people who pass through, telling them "Nessus is cursed, a place damned by the gods, a place for fools to give up their lives for no fucking reason

but the promise of a few extra coins." He never presses hard, though, for he knows all too well the power of greed. He does know a few things about the ruins and might be convinced to share what he knows for a few lotus petals.

Trystan's Copse

Elm trees form a small wood a few miles west of Nessus. Within the surprisingly bucolic and peaceful grove stand several small wooden buildings that are home to a few dozen men and women, along with their children and animals. Trystan's Copse is unremarkable. Its people raise pigs, forage in the woods, and grow crops in the neighboring fields. They look, talk, and behave like everyone else, but all that is merely a front for the sinister secret they all keep.

For nearly four hundred years, the community has worshiped a foul being known as the Host. A **broodling**, this mass of sentient insects has worn many masks over the years, changing forms as its exterior wears out and sloughs away over time, as a new one forms. Throughout all the many faces it has worn, it has held its people in its terrible grip, exploiting them for their gullibility and demanding

from them a steady supply of sacrifices upon which it can feed. Its subjects make frequent raids into distant communities to snatch victims, but they prefer to prey on travelers who won't be missed. The young men and women of the Copse seduce these people, luring them in and then drugging or subduing them to present to their master.

The Decayed City

At the center of all things on this spur of land is the city of Nessus itself. It has been several centuries since people lived within its high walls, when the air rang with the noise of industry and stank of too many bodies, cooking, dung, and worse. Nessus is one giant ruin, its buildings and walls crumbling, its streets buried by the wilderness that has reclaimed nearly every inch of the place with root and vine, leaf and branch.

So much, in fact, has been lost or buried that it's only possible to describe the city in broad terms, as the divisions of wards and districts no longer have any real meaning. Tall trees and grasses choke the roads, making the going extremely slow at best, if not outright impossible—where city ends and forest begins is almost indistinguishable.

But through the overgrowth, one can still spot the occasional tower rising from the green in defiance, its tarnished bronzed dome sometimes catching the light as it did so long ago. Most of the houses might have fallen, but their foundations remain, and, if one looks hard enough, entrances to cellars and the old sewers might be uncovered—but these places are every bit as wild and dangerous as the ruins of the decaying city itself.

Interesting Locations

A few structures have managed to survive the march of years more or less intact, while other, newer structures have since appeared in the ruins, raised by squatters and settlers who brave the dangers.

The Radiant Cathedral

The Radiant Cathedral rises from the top of a high hill in the center of the ruined city. An enormous structure of steel and glass, it is an architectural achievement that has not since been reproduced. The three towers fronting the structure once held giant panes of mirrored glass that reflected the sunlight with an almost blinding intensity. The main hall, easily five hundred yards long and half as wide, had enormous stained-glass walls and a clear glass roof to afford an expansive view of the blue sky and brilliant sun above.

The Cathedral's steel frames remain, jaggedly thrust upward like the skeletal remains of some giant creature, but nearly all of the glass has been broken and a sea of glittering shards covers the grounds around and floors inside. Here and there, a few mirror panels still hang, but the interiors behind stand exposed, with trees growing out of the cracks in the floors and creeper vines twisting around the support bars and struts. Huge swaths of spiderwebs spun by **large spiders** stretch across the bars in places, which easily snare birds and other winged things.

The priests have long since carried off anything of value when they retreated to the Abbey of the Setting Sun, but some believe the catacombs dug into the hill upon which the cathedral stands still contain treasures amidst the moldering remains of the dead—though the **boneguard** who ceaselessly patrol the dark corridors will attack any who dare disturb the entombed.

The Autarch's Palace

The second largest structure in Nessus, the palace of the autarch embodied the decadence for which the city was once known. Covering a square mile area on the north side of the city, it was a veritable compound of wealth and luxury: garish, audacious, with excess as the rule of its construction rather than the exception. It's said the palace had innumerable fountains, several saunas and bathhouses, a dozen giant pools, over one hundred bedrooms, seventeen feast halls, a library that beggared the one found in Caecras, and a vast throne room filled with gem-encrusted statues, whose walls, floor, and ceiling were covered in gold and silver.

Over the centuries, looters and scavengers have largely picked the palace clean, trashing the place as they pried the gemstones from the statuary and scraped the gold and silver from the walls. What the thieves didn't destroy, fire, the elements, and time have taken care of, leaving the palace and its grounds in ruins. Still, a few structures stand here and there, and the former splendor can be found in the caryatid columns, mosaics, bas-reliefs, and in the innumerable fragments still littering the floors.

One treasure never recovered or found was the autarch's crown, a ridiculous headpiece made from solid gold and glittering with a rainbow of precious stones. Some claim the crown was melted down by the autarch's enemies during the plague's outbreak, while others whisper that it remains somewhere in the palace's ruins, hidden in some secret place long lost and forgotten. Finding the crown and giving it to the current autarch would ensure the people responsible would have the favor of Nessus forever, though keeping the crown might be a more valuable reward—assuming, of course, that it isn't cursed.

The Labyrinth

There is a mostly intact southern band of buildings in the city that the locals call the Labyrinth. Once a large slum, it has somehow escaped the overgrowth choking the rest of the city. Its structures, mostly made from clay bricks, appear as they did long ago, though graffiti and excrement now cover their walls and their interiors have long since been ransacked. Trenchers and cups still sit on tables where they were left. Sleeping pallets lay in heaps on floors, while personal effects can be found scattered throughout.

Most Nessans believe the large concentration of spirits in the Labyrinth has kept it from succumbing to the fate suffered by the rest of the city. At night, the shimmering forms of the restless dead can be seen wandering the streets, carrying out the same activities they did in life. Most of these entities are apparitions: harmless, if disturbing, figures that generally ignore the living. But among them roam more malevolent spirits, such as **phantoms** and **specters** (see *Demon Lord's Companion*), as well as **ghosts** (see *Caecras*), who are far from harmless. **Poltergeists** rage at anyone who tries to camp inside the buildings, while **shadows** creep through the gloom, draining the life from whomever they find.

APPARITION

DIFFICULTY 1

Size 1/2 or 1 horrifying spirit

Perception —
Defense 10; **Health** —; **Insanity** —; **Corruption** —
Strength —, **Agility** —, **Intellect** —, **Will** —
Speed 10

Immune damage; insanity; afflictions

Ephemeral An apparition can move through creatures and solid objects. It ignores the effects of moving across difficult terrain.

Relive the Past An apparition performs the same set of tasks it performed in life. It cannot detect the presence of other creatures other than spirits or acknowledge changes to its environment.

END OF THE ROUND

Night Bound If the apparition is in an area lit by sunlight, it ceases to exist until the area is no longer lit by sunlight.

The Sky Rocks

Nessus once boasted a great academy of magic known as the Institution. Perched atop a hill overlooking the bay, it was a complex the size of a large village, whose many towers and buildings held classrooms, dormitories, workshops, libraries, vaults, kitchens, and servants' quarters. When the plague struck, the magicians living, teaching, and working here, as well as those who supported them, were cut down by the plague like everyone else in the city, and those few who survived fled to Lij or elsewhere in the Empire.

Abandoned, with much of the wards and other magic left intact, it was only a matter of time before some mishap befell the place. Two centuries ago, some foolish band of adventurers stumbled into

a place they shouldn't have, triggering an arcane explosion that sent much of what was left of the Institution into the sky. While much of the rubble that went up came crashing down all over the city, several massive chunks remained in the air, bobbing like balloons over the crater from the explosion, in a manner quite similar to the Tower Arcane at Caecras.

These floating isles of rock still hold structures that are likely to hold many treasures and objects of interest to explorers—provided, of course, they can reach them. Naturally, these sky rocks also hold ancient guardians (**constructs** of various sizes), magical traps, and other methods of protection to ensure the secrets they hold remain secret. Birds, **drakes**, and other flying things have built nests in the sky rocks, which will doubtless be angered by whatever might disturb them or their young.

A dozen or so sky rocks remain, each one floating 3d6+10 yards above the ground. Ten years ago, an enterprising group of looters sought to drag a low-hanging rock to the ground, but they failed miserably, the chains of their attempt still hanging above their scorched bones that litter the ground below, victims of whatever wards or unknown forces that still protect what they sought to capture.

The Bone Queen

About ten years ago, local scouts noticed a white-as-bone tower that sprouted up suddenly, reaching toward the sky. As it wasn't there the day before, its appearance was cause for great alarm and distress.

A few Skirters dared navigate the dangerous city streets to approach the one-hundred-foot-tall tower, which stood on the city's western side. They found it surrounded by a dozen **animated corpses** making a shuffling circuit around the tower, bits of their bodies falling to litter the ground as they ceaselessly rounded the structure. Stealthily the Skirters withdrew, making signs and wards against all possible evil. Upon consulting with the abbot, and receiving his approval, they declared the site cursed, and a place that should be avoided at all costs.

Since the tower's appearance, visitors to the ruins have reported seeing a tall, pale, and painfully thin woman with long red hair. They report that she dresses in black silks that flutter and weave in a strange manner behind her wherever she goes. Despite her gaunt form, she appears strikingly beautiful, although she seems to radiate menace in a way that causes any who approach her to flee, keening in agony.

The Skirters call her the Bone Queen because of her skeletal appearance, determining she must be yet another horror thrown up from the past to terrorize them, and that the tower and the mangled corpses guarding it are her domain.



Their suppositions are correct. The Bone Queen fashioned the tower and created the undead thralls, but for a purpose none could yet possibly ascertain. She poses a threat beyond that of simply troubling the people of Nessus. This Bone Queen has come from the Kingdom of Skulls on behalf of the Dark Lady. Her name is Ravella, a powerful necromancer in her own right, who has enjoyed the Dark Lady's trust. Upon her dark mistress's command, she has departed that nightmarish land, along with many others, to establish footholds across Rûl to prepare for the Witch-King's eventual return. Ravella chose Nessus as her base because of its abundance of corpse bones, using her foul and twisted magic to animate the dead and bind them as her thralls.

So far, explorers, workers, and the Ruin Watch have all avoided the pale tower and the dead that continue to gather before its doors for fear of arousing the ire of whatever force might be responsible for their appearance. However, this reluctance has been met with a sharp increase in other sightings of undead in and outside of the ruins. If the Nessans would contain this threat, they must act soon, or the Bone Queen and her minions will become unstoppable, with dire implications for all of Rûl itself.

BONE QUEEN

DIFFICULTY 250

Size 1 frightening human

Perception 15 (+5); **shadowsight**
Defense 14; **Health** 75; **Insanity** 6; **Corruption** 5
Strength 11 (+1), **Agility** 12 (+2), **Intellect** 15 (+5), **Will** 14 (+4)
Speed 12
Immune Death and Necromancy attack spells
Dark Mastery When the Bone Queen attacks with a Death or Necromancy spell, the spell deals 2d6 extra damage, she makes the attack roll with 1 boon, and imposes 1 bane on challenge rolls made to resist the spell.
Spell Defense The Bone Queen takes half damage from spells. When a creature attacks the Bone Queen with a spell, she imposes 1 bane on the attack roll and makes the challenge roll to resist the spell with 1 boon.
Spawn Shadow If the Bone Queen dies, a **shadow** with double Health emerges free from her body 1 round later and takes the first available turn.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Razor (melee) +2 with 2 boons (3d6 plus Bleed)
Bleed If the target is a creature of flesh and blood, it must get a success on an Agility challenge roll or start bleeding. At the end of each round, the target takes 1d6 damage. The target can stop the bleeding by using an action to stanch the wound or by healing any amount of damage.

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Shadowy Grasp The Bone Queen gestures at a living creature within medium range and makes an Intellect attack roll against the target's Agility. A shadowy hand flies toward the target, plunging into its body on a success on the attack roll. A target struck by the hand takes 3d6 damage and must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or become fatigued for 1 minute.
Siphon Blood The Bone Queen can use an action, or a triggered action on her turn, to choose one creature bleeding from her Razor attack. The target takes 3d6 damage as blood pours from the wound and flies toward her to nourish her. The Bone Queen heals damage equal to the amount of damage taken by the target.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Undead Lucky The Bone Queen causes up to two corpses within short range to stand up and become an **animated corpse**. The corpse is friendly to her and obeys her mental commands. The Bone Queen can have up to six **animated corpses** created by this special action at a time.

MAGIC

Power 5
Death (see *Demon Lord's Companion*) *killing touch* (6), *life drain* (3), *decay* (2), *feast of souls* (2), *death fog* (4), *stop heart* (1)
Necromancy *spectral grasp* (6), *grave grasp* (3), *harvest soul* (3), *bone splinters* (2), *shrieking skull* (2), *well of dark power* (2), *seal the Underworld's gates* (1), *army of the dead* (1)

END OF THE ROUND

Deathly Presence The Bone Queen can force each living creature of her choice within short range to make a Strength challenge roll. On a failure, the creature takes 1d6 damage. A creature incapacitated by this damage dies and stands up 1 round later as an **animated corpse** that obeys the Bone Queen's commands.
Epic Recovery The Bone Queen removes one affliction from herself.
Epic Adversary Roll 1d3 + 1 to determine the number of actions the Bone Queen can use during the next round. She can use these actions during any turn and can do so before her enemies act. Each time she would use an action, she can move up to her Speed before or after the action.

NECROMANCER'S RAIMENT

Dark power flows through the Bone Queen's long, silk dress, enhancing her magical abilities. This raiment is sewn from the stolen breaths of a thousand stillborn babies, with thread spun from the dried tears of the bereft mothers. Its silk streamers writhe and wriggle as she moves.

Anyone donning the dress gains 1 Corruption and must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 1 bane or gain 1d3 Insanity. The dress confers the following properties to anyone who wears it.

Greater Control You treat your Power score as 5 higher for the purpose of determining the limits on the number of undead you can have compelled at a time.

Deathly Presence At the end of each round, each living creature you choose that is within short range of you must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or take 1d6 damage. A creature incapacitated by this damage dies and stands up 1 round later as an **animated corpse** that obeys your mental commands.

Dark Mastery When you attack with a Death or Necromancy spell, the spell deals 2d6 extra damage. In addition, when you cast such spells, you make the attack roll with 1 boon and you impose 1 bane on rolls made to resist the spell.

The Yerathi Mounds

Over the last few years, an insectoid people have come to Nessus to make the ruins their own. The yerathi (see *Demon Lord's Companion 2*, page 16) established several colonies throughout the city, excavating tunnels below and building great mounds of dirt, stone, and debris above. So far, three mounds have sprouted from the wreckage, and a fourth will soon join them not far from the fortified village of Reclamation.

The yerathi want nothing to do with the humans in the area, using brute force to drive off all envoys and representatives from the various factions in the city.

Because of this, the growing numbers of yerathi have become a point of concern for Reclamation, and certain leaders have begun arguing for a strong show of force to drive off these squatters before their numbers grow too large.

However, as the yerathi attack the living and the dead alike, they perceive any being who is not of their kind as a threat. For this reason, human leaders have yet to move against the insect people, believing the horrors within the ruins will somehow take care of the yerathi for them.

The yerathi, a people who are insects that are man-sized and bipedal, have been building mounds in the Patchwork Lands for centuries, their great rounded hills appearing as nothing more than part of the odd landscape. These mounds, however, mark the yerathi colonies, and beneath them are miles and miles of tunnels in which these reclusive, xenophobic people live and work. The yerathi adhere to a strict social hierarchy, in which everyone knows their place in service to the queen.

Yerathi communicate via their own clicking language and exuded pheromones, although there are some who have also learned the Common Tongue.

YERATHI DRONE

DIFFICULTY 1

Size 1 yerath

Perception 10 (+0)
Defense 12; **Health** 11; **Insanity** 0; **Corruption** 0
Strength 11 (+1), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 10 (+0), **Will** 10 (+0)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Club (melee) +1 (1d6)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Musk The drone can use an action, or a triggered action on its turn, to spray musk into a 1-yard cube originating from a point the drone can reach. Any creature in the space must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or become impaired for 1 round. Once the drone uses its musk, it must wait at least 1 minute before it can use it again.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Flutter The drone unfurls its wings. Until the end of the round, it can move at half Speed by flying.

YERATHI SCOUT

DIFFICULTY 1

Size 1 yerath

Perception 11 (+1)
Defense 12; **Health** 11; **Insanity** 0; **Corruption** 0
Strength 9 (-1), **Agility** 11 (+1), **Intellect** 10 (+0), **Will** 10 (+0)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Spear (melee) +1 (1d6)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Musk The scout can use an action, or a triggered action on its turn, to spray musk into a 1-yard cube originating from a point the scout can reach. Any creature in the space must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or become impaired for 1 round. Once the scout uses its musk, it must wait at least 1 minute before it can use it again.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Flutter The scout unfurls its wings. Until the end of the round, it can move at half Speed by flying.

YERATHI SOLDIER

DIFFICULTY 1

Size 1 yerath

Perception 10 (+0)
Defense 14 (small shield); **Health** 16; **Insanity** 0; **Corruption** 0
Strength 11 (+1), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 10 (+0), **Will** 10 (+0)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Sword (melee) +1 with 1 boon (1d6 + 2)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Musk The soldier can use an action, or a triggered action on its turn, to spray musk into a 1-yard cube originating from a point the soldier can reach. Any creature in the space must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or become impaired for 1 round. Once the soldier uses its musk, it must wait at least 1 minute before it can use it again.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Flutter The soldier unfurls its wings. Until the end of the round, it can move at half Speed by flying.

YERATHI CONSORT

DIFFICULTY 10

Size 1 yerath

Perception 10 (+0)
Defense 15 (large shield); **Health** 31; **Insanity** 0; **Corruption** 0
Strength 12 (+2), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 11 (+1), **Will** 11 (+1)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Sword (melee) +2 with 1 boon (2d6 + 2)
Large Shield (melee) +2 with 1 boon (1d3 plus 1d6)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Musk The consort can use an action, or a triggered action on its turn, to spray musk into a 1-yard cube originating from a point the consort can reach. Any creature in the space must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or become impaired for 1 round. Once the consort uses its musk, it must wait at least 1 minute before it can use it again.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Flutter The consort unfurls its wings. Until the end of the round, it can move at half Speed by flying.

MAGIC

Power 2
Battle *augmented attack* (3), *celerity* (3), *mighty attack* (2), *resounding attack* (2), *mountain fall* (1)

Under the City

Nessus built one of the first sewer systems in the Empire and its myriad brick tunnels still reach from one side of the city to the other. Since few have used the tunnels for their intended purpose in centuries, they are much cleaner than one would expect, their air musty but otherwise inoffensive. Water trickles down sloping passages and, here and there, brickwork has fallen in, but the passages have remained in great shape, all things considered.

Many explorers use the sewers to evade the dangers on the surface. While the tunnels are refreshingly free of dread spirits, predatory animals, and undead, they do present other dangers of their own. Packs of **ghouls** within fight each other for food and dominance, while smaller misshapen monsters drag off the weak and wounded. **Killing mists** flow through some passages, while **oozes**, **ghastly choruses**, **oculi**, and **lash crawlers** leap at any opportunity to strike and kill.

Sewer tunnels come in three varieties. Mains are rounded passages, about 5 yards wide and tall, with a drainage channel cut in the floor. Every 1d20 + 20 yards, a sewer cover appears in the main's ceiling with a ladder reaching down to the floor.

Secondary sewers resemble mains but are only 2 yards in diameter and rarely have sewer covers. Tertiary sewers are even smaller, 1 yard across and never having sewer covers above. Obstacles in the sewers might include caved-in sections, intact grates, or flooded passages, especially after heavy rains.



Exploring the City

You can generate areas for the group to explore as they make their way to described locations or places you create. To do so, take a sheet of paper and place it where everyone can see it. Then, grab a handful of six-sided dice, at least ten, and drop them from about a foot above the paper. Ignore any dice that land off the paper. The remaining dice show the relative positions of the buildings and the spaces between the dice are filled with rubble, debris, trees, and undergrowth. Compare the numbers on the dice to the results on the following table to determine what each die indicates.

Random Structure

d6	Structure
1	Burned-out shell with 1d3 intact walls and a partially intact upper floor or roof.
2	A statue, shrine, monument, well, sewer grate, or rotting carcass.
3	The foundation of a building
4	A partially intact one-story home or shop.
5	A partially intact two-story home or shop.
6	A partially intact three-story home or shop.

Discoveries

Characters exploring the ruins might find something interesting. For each structure, roll a d6 and a d20. If you roll a 6 on the d6, find the d20 result on the following table to see what it holds.

Discoveries

d20	Discovery
1	The bones of 1d6 plague victims
2	Old, stained, and tattered clothing
3	A child's toy, doll, or severed hand
4	1d6 bits
5	An interesting thing
6	Rubbish, broken pottery, furniture, or weapons
7	A nest belonging to birds, rats, or a hermit
8	An enchanted object
9	Gear from a fallen explorer that includes a backpack, a few days of rations, a waterskin, clothing, and personal effects
10	A healing potion
11	1d6 cp
12	Graffiti scrawled across a surface issuing a warning, insulting someone, or stating that someone visited
13	A rotting carcass of an explorer, beast, or undead
14	Animal spoor, musk, or fur
15	1d6 ss
16	A strange idol, altar, or grave
17	Mummified remains of a man, woman, or child
18	An enchanted object
19	A weapon, 1d6 pieces of ammunition, or a suit of light armor
20	1d6 gc

Dangers

Locations can also hold dangers: creatures seeking treasure, food, or some kind of mayhem. For each, roll a d6 and a d20. If you roll a 1 on the d6, find the number you rolled on the d20 on the following table—novice, expert, or master—to see what the group encounters.

Novice Dangers

d20	Danger	d20	Danger
1	1 muttering maw	11	1 bear
2	2d6 small monsters	12	1 large animal
3	1d3 + 2 brigands	13	2d6 animated corpses
4	1d3 organ filches	14	1d6 + 3 bandits
5	1d6 poltergeist (night only)	15	1d6 cultists plus 1 high cultist
6	1d6 medium monsters	16	1d6 + 4 small animals
7	1d6 burrowing centipedes	17	1d3 drakes or 2d6 phantoms (night only)
8	1d3 + 2 zombies	18	1d3 lurks
9	1d6 large spiders	19	1 huge monster
10	1d3 + 4 small monsters	20	1 bone machine

Expert Dangers

d20	Danger
1	1d3 ogres
2	1d3 large monsters
3	1 stone worm
4	1d3 bears
5	1 drake
6	1 living tar
7	1 chainbound and 1d3 animated corpses
8	1d3 cockatrices
9	1 fungal hulk
10	1d3 skinchangers
11	1d6 large spiders
12	2d6 zombies
13	1d6 animal swarms
14	1d6 small monsters and 1d6 tiny monsters
15	1d3 + 1 phantoms (night only)
16	2d6 tiny monsters
17	1 basilisk
18	1d3 ettins
19	1d3 manticores
20	1d3 + 1 horned ogres

Master Dangers

d20	Danger
1	1d3 catoblepases
2	1 troll
3	1d3 drakes
4	1d6 muttering maws
5	1d3 + 1 great cats
6	1d6 large animals
7	2d6 small monsters
8	1d6 + 4 hired killers
9	1d6 ghouls
10	1d3 + 5 hoods or phantoms (night only)
11	1d6 + 3 shadows (night only) or 1d6 + 6 medium monsters
12	1d3 + 1 large animals
13	3d6 burrowing centipedes
14	2d6 grave thralls
15	1d6 + 2 boneguard
16	3d6 bandits
17	1d6 wraiths (night only) or 2d6 ogres
18	1d3 horned ogres
19	1 dragon
20	1 huge demon

Nessus Returns

The sudden possibility of Nessus's return to the Confederacy caught most people in the Empire by surprise. Most saw in the First City a dire warning of what could happen to any city with an ineffectual ruler in the face of a crisis. But the emergence of a new autarch and determined efforts to reclaim and rebuild the city from ruins has proven humanity's determination to see its way through the most difficult endeavors. On a continent already facing upheaval and civil war, Nessus has become a symbol of hope for the future and a beacon to those who persevere through the trials and tribulations of the present. For those who see it, the City of Decay is both a sign of hope and a promise of opportunity.

The Beggar Autarch

The naming of an autarch returned Nessus to the political arena of the Confederacy, while also sparking new interest in the city's people to rebuild what their ancestors had lost. What Urian, mockingly referred to as the Beggar Autarch, lacks in political acumen he makes up for with earnestness, dedication, and sheer stubbornness.

Before he became autarch, Nessus's place in the Confederacy was simply an honorary one. But now that Urian holds the title, he has traveled to the other cities to plead his case and demand aid and assistance he believes is owed to his people for their membership in the nation. Kem, always looking for opportunities to enrich their coffers, immediately took up his cause as their own and has been instrumental in providing funds, materials, and supplies to the beleaguered city.

Most city-states in the Confederacy regard the old man with great amusement, but also with some incredulity, since Urian seems determined to restore Nessus to its former glory. Each autarch has invited him to their courts to entertain them with his backward ways and plainspoken manner—but also with a mind toward what his potential for their gain might be. His roughness and obvious love for Nessus, along with the aforementioned pressure from Kem, have helped win over most of the other autarchs, who would happily see the First City restored, knowing full well that a rebuilt city would be tied with strings of debt to each of them.

Outside the Confederacy, Nessus has drawn some interest. With the brewing war, however, between a post-rebellion orc-ruled Caecras and the breakaway imperial provinces, no government has the time, resources, or will to help lift the struggling city back to its feet.

Lack of outside interest, however, is seen by most in Nessus as a boon, as some believed the Empire might have moved to take the city-state for itself and use it to gain leverage over the rest of the Confederacy. Indeed, the last emperor had authorized several expeditions to the ruined city, with many believing that the imperials were assessing what it would take to reclaim the decayed city for themselves.

A Fledgling Government

Where the autarch has enjoyed some success outside Nessus in rebuilding it, Urian has had little luck in establishing any kind of effective self-rule. Nessans have long been accustomed to governing themselves, and find the notion of bending a knee to some fellow who purchased a crown to be ridiculous.

Despite their skepticism, the Beggar Autarch makes a point of visiting the various villages and settlements throughout the ruined city, where he delivers sincere speeches to build support. Slowly, he is gaining a following, particularly since he's already made good on promises to bring in aid, thanks to the influx of supplies from the other cities of the Confederacy. He's even managed to get a few local community leaders throughout the Skirts to lend him some measure of support, and he relies on them to strengthen his standing among their peers.

Undefended

Nessus has no formal military and little that passes for a constabulary, other than the Ruin Watch, whose mandate is specific and limited to preventing the spread of horror from the ruined city. People look after each other and dispense justice when they need to. Nearly everyone living in the Skirts knows how to fight and, if seriously threatened, they would come together to protect their homes and holdings. But so far they have not had to make such a move, and consider such a threat unlikely.

Mercenaries, paid for and answerable to Kem, provide some military presence, but their loyalty is always to gold. Captain Aengus (mercenary with hero role) commands a small force of five hundred soldiers, quartered in a fortified camp just outside of the fortified village of Reclamation. Aengus sees the whole effort as a gross waste of time and money and considers the people who have struggled in the ruins to be backwards yokels. His misgivings and disdain aside, he carries out the duty for which he was hired, and will continue to do so as long as he's paid enough to risk his life against the dangers spawned in the city.



Order of Light

The Kalasans brought the Order of Light to Rûl. An ancient and influential institution in their native lands, the Order of Light sent priests to look after the soldiers' souls and lend whatever council and aid they might. On making landfall, the priests found themselves drawn directly into the conflict, since the Men of Gog depended on many wicked beings to supplement their living forces.

From demons to undead, foul abominations and dread monsters, the Kalasans fought a nightmarish enemy. The Order of Light, though, possessed vital magic for combating these dreadful things. Wielding power drawn from the sun, they carved paths through the shuffling ranks of the undead, blasted demons back to the Void from whence they came, all the while safeguarding the soldiers of the Kalasan armies from the vile magical energies unleashed by the Witch-King's warlocks.

The part the Order played in liberating the continent saw many of its peoples abandon their old religions and embrace the new. The next two centuries saw the Order grow in both prominence and influence. Not content with just saving souls

and making converts, the institution saw its future in politics. Representatives of the faith insinuated themselves in almost every level of the Empire, from serving as judges to becoming advisors to the most powerful leaders in the land. As their influence increased, greed and ambition began to take its toll, leading to fractures and schisms that would ultimately prove to be the Order's undoing.

The prophet Astrid, whose teachings now underpin the Cult of the New God, was one of many who objected to what had become of their religion under the Order. As the Astridians traveled and preached against corruption and wickedness, the Order moved against them to silence their voices and remind the flock of their ultimate spiritual authority. The "heretic" preachers and prophets they imprisoned and executed became martyrs for their cause, unexpectedly offering people symbols of righteousness to follow. When Astrid was finally murdered by assassins, the people had finally had enough and rallied to the faith of the New God and the salvation it promised.

The Order of Light has largely been subsumed into the Cult of the New God, but adherents of the original faith can still be found throughout the Empire, usually in remote settlements that have, for one reason or another, escaped the Cult's dedicated missionaries. The largest body of faithful remains in Nessus, as noted above, and despite efforts by New God missionaries to bring the faithful into their fold, the Order of Light remains the dominant faith.

The Radiant One

The Order of Light teaches that the universe and everything in it appeared in a flash of light, a blazing radiance that pushed back the darkness and created room for living things. This light continues to shine from its maker, a divine being known, variously, as the Radiant One, the Lightbringer, and the Lord of Morning. As long as the Radiant One's wholesome rays reach across the universe, it holds the darkness of annihilation at bay.

Followers of the Radiant One are expected to walk in the light of goodness and virtue, to act with compassion and love for all living things, and hate those things spawned by the darkness, such as abominations created by magic, demons, and undead. Those who stray from the light risk become sullied by the darkness, pulled into becoming willing servants of the Adversary. Those who live good and decent lives, obey the tenets of the faith, and resist the temptation toward bad thoughts and actions might one day win a place at their god's side and become one with the Light Eternal.

Adventures in Nessus

The nature of Nessus as the City of Decay already suggests countless adventures, what with the promise of lost treasure to lure characters into the dangerous, overgrown, and mazelike ruins. But wicked beings gather in the darkness, and strange monsters come out from the gloom to beset explorers and looters alike.

Outside the city, characters might find themselves embroiled in the political struggles between the various powers jockeying for a stake in Nessus's future, while the Verge offers even more opportunities for danger and reward to those with the courage to take it.

If you seek help in pulling the characters in, consider the following story hooks:

- After a few people in Reclamation show signs of sickness that eventually turns into plague, panic sweeps through the ruined city once again. Has the dreaded calamity that brought Nessus to its knees returned or is there some other dread force at work?
- A ship from Dis bound for Nessus, carrying slaves and supplies to help with the rebuilding, disappears. Many blame the loss on pirates, but whispers persist that not everyone in the Confederacy is so eager to restore Nessus.
- Missionaries make the long journey from the Holy Kingdom to bring aid and enlightenment to the people of Nessus. While they have the best intentions, Nessian locals want nothing to do with them. When a missionary is found murdered, tensions rise between the newcomers and the locals, which could escalate quickly into tragedy.
- The ghost of the last autarch to rule Nessus stirs from his grave and becomes enraged by what has been done to his city. He rallies the spirits, uniting them into a terrifying army to drive out the "vultures" whom the old autarch believes to be picking over the bones of his corpse.
- After several workers die in an attack by some kind of horrifying monster, the rest go on strike, refusing to work until they can get some assurances of greater security. Some of the city's leading figures sympathize with their position and argue for better conditions, but others argue to clap them all in chains and force them to work, or worse, send a message to the recalcitrant by having the strike's ringleaders murdered.

Nessian Characters

The experiences one might have growing up and living in Nessus differ from the ones people might have elsewhere. If you create a character from Nessus, you can use the following table in place of your ancestry's

Nessian Background

d20 Background

- 1 Something came out from the ruins and snatched you when you were a child. It dragged you screaming through the ruined streets and would have made a meal of you had not some other terrifying thing attacked and killed your abductor. You ran home, but the ruins terrify you still.
- 2 A dead brother or sister wanders around the Bone Queen's Tower. You vowed to free your sibling from their accursed existence and give him or her a decent burial.
- 3 You were raised in the Abbey of the Setting Sun, where you were schooled in the tenets of the faith. Add acolyte to your list of professions.
- 4 You attended the Beggar Autarch as a servant. You polished his boots, cleaned his clothes, and prepared his meals. Add servant to your list of professions.
- 5 Sick of life in the Skirts, you took up with a gang of bandits prowling the Verge. Strange fungus creatures killed your compatriots, tearing them apart and driving them mad with their weird spores. You escaped, but not without a few scars. Add bandit to your list of professions.
- 6 You made frequent treks into Nessus's ruins and found many a strange thing and escaped death several times. Start the game with an extra interesting thing.
- 7 Your best friend was dragged off and eaten by ghouls. Start the game with 1d3 Insanity.
- 8 You fell in love with a person from Trystan's Copse. After one night of passion, you never saw your lover again.
- 9 You came to Nessus to earn a living at Reclamation. Add laborer to your list of professions.
- 10 You grew up in the Skirts, working the land as a farmer as have generations of your ancestors. Add farmer to your list of professions.
- 11 You were born and raised in Nessus. You left the first chance you got and swore you would never return.
- 12 You and your friends waylaid an injured adventurer. You killed the person with heavy stones and robbed the corpse. Gain 1 Corruption and 1 gc worth of extra equipment.
- 13 A traveling scholar took you under his or her wing shortly after coming to the Skirts. You learned to read and write from this person.
- 14 According to your mother or father, you are descended from the last autarch of Nessus. No one believes this but your parent.
- 15 Your father was a great adventurer who fell in love with your mother and sired you on her. He disappeared soon after, swallowed by the ruined city. Your small family struggled to survive. Add survivor to your list of professions.
- 16 You are an exile from another land. You came here to start your life again. Add exile to your list of professions.
- 17 You were briefly possessed by a ghost or demon. You have a strange scar on your face that many believe means you are cursed.
- 18 Monsters carried off each member of your family, one at a time, months apart. You can still hear their screams in your nightmares.
- 19 You were a missionary sent to Nessus to teach them the Four Truths. You failed. Add missionary to your list of professions.
- 20 You joined the Ruin Watch to protect your people and home. You start the game with a facial tattoo, a long gray cloak, and a sword. Also, add tracker to your list of professions.

background table. As most results work best for those of human ancestry, you might have to adjust to fit non-human characters you might play.

New Paths

Characters with backgrounds tied to Nessus or who spend a lot of time in and around the crumbling city might avail themselves of the new paths associated with the place.

Priest of the Radiant One

Once considered the dominant faith in the Empire, the Order of Light has all but vanished from Rûl, its adherents found largely in isolated communities as yet untouched by the New God's missionaries. The Order recruited acolytes heaviest from human settlements, specifically those of Kalasan descent, since the religion traces its origin back to the conquerors who crossed the Auroral Ocean.

Most land-holding families offered at least one child to serve in the faith as a position within the Order brought esteem and standing. However, as the Order's light has dimmed in the world, the last few faithful in Nessus now accept almost anyone.

Priests of the Radiant One display their faith in the vestments and symbols they wear. They wear robes of varying colors: red by acolytes, yellow by the ordained, and white by high-ranking leaders. Each tier is subdivided into various roles and responsibilities, denoted by the colorful trim added to the robes. Furthermore, all priests are expected to wear their god's symbol, an amulet wrought from polished brass resembling a fiery eye encircled by wavy sun rays. Priests of the Radiant One use this as their implement for casting spells.

Level 1 Priest of the Radiant One

Attributes Increase two by 1

Characteristics Health +4, Power +1

Languages and Professions Add disciple of the Radiant One to your list of professions.

Magic You discover the Celestial, Fire, or Theurgy tradition. Then, choose one of the following options:

- Discover two of the following traditions: Celestial, Fire, or Theurgy.
- Discover one of the following traditions: Celestial, Fire, or Theurgy. Learn one spell from either tradition you have discovered.
- Learn two spells from the tradition you discovered.

Brilliant Recovery You can use an action to heal damage equal to your healing rate. For 1 round after, you shine with brilliant light that spreads out from your space in a 5-yard radius. While illuminated in this way, you impose 2 banes on attack rolls made against you. Once you use this talent, you must complete a rest before you can use it again.

Level 2 Priest of the Radiant One

Characteristics Health +4

Magic Your religious indoctrination continues. Choose one of the following benefits:

- Discover two of the following traditions: Celestial, Fire, or Theurgy.
- Discover one of the following traditions: Celestial, Fire, or Theurgy. Learn one spell from either tradition you have discovered.
- Learn two spells from the tradition you discovered.

Prayer When a creature within short range makes an attack roll or challenge roll, you can use a triggered action to grant 1 boon on the triggering roll.

Level 5 Expert Priest of the Radiant One

Characteristics Health +4, Power +1

Magic You learn one spell from a tradition you have discovered.

Divine Strike When you use Prayer to grant 1 boon on an attack roll, the triggering attack deals 1d6 extra damage.

Level 8 Master Priest of the Radiant One

Characteristics Health +4

Magic You learn one spell from a tradition you have discovered.

Inspiring Prayer When you use Prayer on a creature other than yourself, you make attack rolls and challenge rolls with 1 boon for 1 round.

Blinding Recovery You can use Brilliant Recovery twice. In addition, when you use Brilliant Recovery, each creature within 1 yard of you that can see you must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or become blinded for 1 round.

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