

NATURALIST'S GUIDE TO EBERRON

VOLUME 1: AARAKOCRA TO AZER



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FOR THE SETTING

INTRODUCTION

"Good morning," she said, greeting the man in bed. He wasn't the sort she normally went for, but he'd been very persuasive. Normally men were intimidated by her Wayfinder badge, and if they weren't, the hand crossbow was usually enough. He - she would have to learn his name, she couldn't keep calling him "Wir, 17th" - hadn't been. It had attracted him even.

He sat up, and she noticed with some satisfaction his eyes widen at her in this towel. In a fit of mischief, she dropped it, and watched his mouth drop open. Walking over to him as he stammered out a greeting, she sat on his lap, putting her arms on his shoulders. "What happened to that silvered tongue from last night?" She teased, bringing her lips close enough for him to kiss.

"Right here," he said, meeting her lips in a rush of lightning passion. He pulled away to say something else, but she trapped his lips before he could finish taking a breath. After all, that was much more important than whatever he had to say. They slid back down the bed, knotting the sheet further as she trapped his head between her hands and kissed him long and slow, muffling satisfied moans.

Half an hour later, by the clepsydra on the bedside table, it was her turn to wake up while he was in the bathroom. She propped herself up on her elbows, wondering whether to join him. Eventually, she decided against it. After all, she did have errands to run today, as much fun as it would be to really test his stamina. There were bigger men who couldn't handle themselves quite as well. She stretched her legs before sliding off the bed and casting about for her undergarments.

She found one of them over a bag. His bag, actually. Looking towards the bathroom door, she fought and lost against her curiosity. Maybe she could find his papers, and then she could... Actually, what would she do with his name and address? Show up? It's not like she knew him that well, though the idea appealed on a casual level. Opening the bag, her eye was caught by papers. Not his, though.

When the bathroom door opened five minutes later, she'd seen enough to jam her crossbow into his jaw and demand, "What the Mabars are these?" She held up the papers she'd taken from his bag. They had the Wayfinder seal and watermark on them, and specific notes on the layout.

He smiled in a way that threatened to cut her anger clean in two. "I suppose telling you they're Wayfinder documents signed by Lord ir'Dayne would invite a bolt through my chin, - ahk!" He gagged as the sharp end of her crossbow jammed into his neck. The Brelish accent was much less appealing when she wasn't drinking. "Invitation by Lord ir'Dayne to peruse the Foundation's archives," he explained, looking down at her crossbow, she hoped, and not her. "All above board."

"And running into me here wasn't some sort of plot?" She demanded. "I know your kind. Changelings always have some scam or scheme." He was wearing the same appearance he had all night; a handsome, if plain, half-elf with brown hair and brown eyes. The kind of man she'd see six to the dozen of if she walked through the streets. That didn't mean he was honest, though. Couldn't trust anyone who could wear a different face coming than going.

That ridiculously cute smile spread over his face again. "My love, I don't-" she had jammed the arm of the crossbow into his neck this time. Where'd he get the right to call her things like that? "Don't have any scheme. Just saw a gorgeous woman at the bar and decided to pay for her drinks for the night. We ended up together entirely incidentally. Didn't know you were a Wayfinder until your broach was digging into my chest. Now could you either kiss me again or let me put some pants on before we continue the interrogation?"

It took her a moment. Not to decide to back off, but to finish swearing at herself for even considering the option of having him again. He's a changeling! She could catch something, or worse, end up pregnant with some strange grey-skin thing. It was a horrible idea. She wouldn't consider it. So why was there a warmth spreading through her at the thought? "Fine," she snapped, turning away from him and fishing her underclothes off his bag. And the driftglobe lamp. "But this better be good." Halfway towards being dressed, she watched him pull his identification out of the bag.

He flipped it open for her inspection. "Here. Rhen Ames Sance. That's me." The picture was the same as his current appearance, she noted, but he was a changeling. He could be a woman in five minutes if he wanted to. "I could have my usual face on there, but it's mostly the same and the locals, well, you know what Aundairans are like with my kind." He

swept his hair back over one pointed ear. "So I'll be one of your sort instead, Miss..."

"I thought you were going to put pants on," she reminded him, taking the wooden case from him and picking at the painted image inside. Perhaps it came off. It seemed real enough though. Signed by all sorts of customs clerks. She looked up just in time to see him bend over. Turning away before she started staring, she said, "Ardiane. Just Ardiane."

"Nice to meet you, Miss Just Ardiane." She met his teasing grin with a glare that had made warforged back down. "I am writing a manual. A book to contain all the creatures an adventurer is ever likely to meet in Khorvaire, Xen'drik and anywhere else on Eberron or the spinning planes." He swept his identification out of her hands and swapped it for a scroll. "I have a Amstren-alphabetical list of creatures recorded and encountered by reputable sources. And a few less reputable ones."

She unrolled it a bit and looked at the cramped but neat writing. "So like a monster book?" She asked.

With that grin that she either wanted to punch or kiss, Rhen agreed. "Though that would be a ridiculous title. Can't call it 'Rhen's Guide to Monsters' either, only a complete hack would put their name in the title." He waved a hand and took hers. "So, Ardiane, willing to help me find and fight every living creature on the face of Eberron herself?"

The half-elf woman blew a strand of red hair from her face, looked at him, and replied, "I've certainly heard worse ideas from men after a night together."

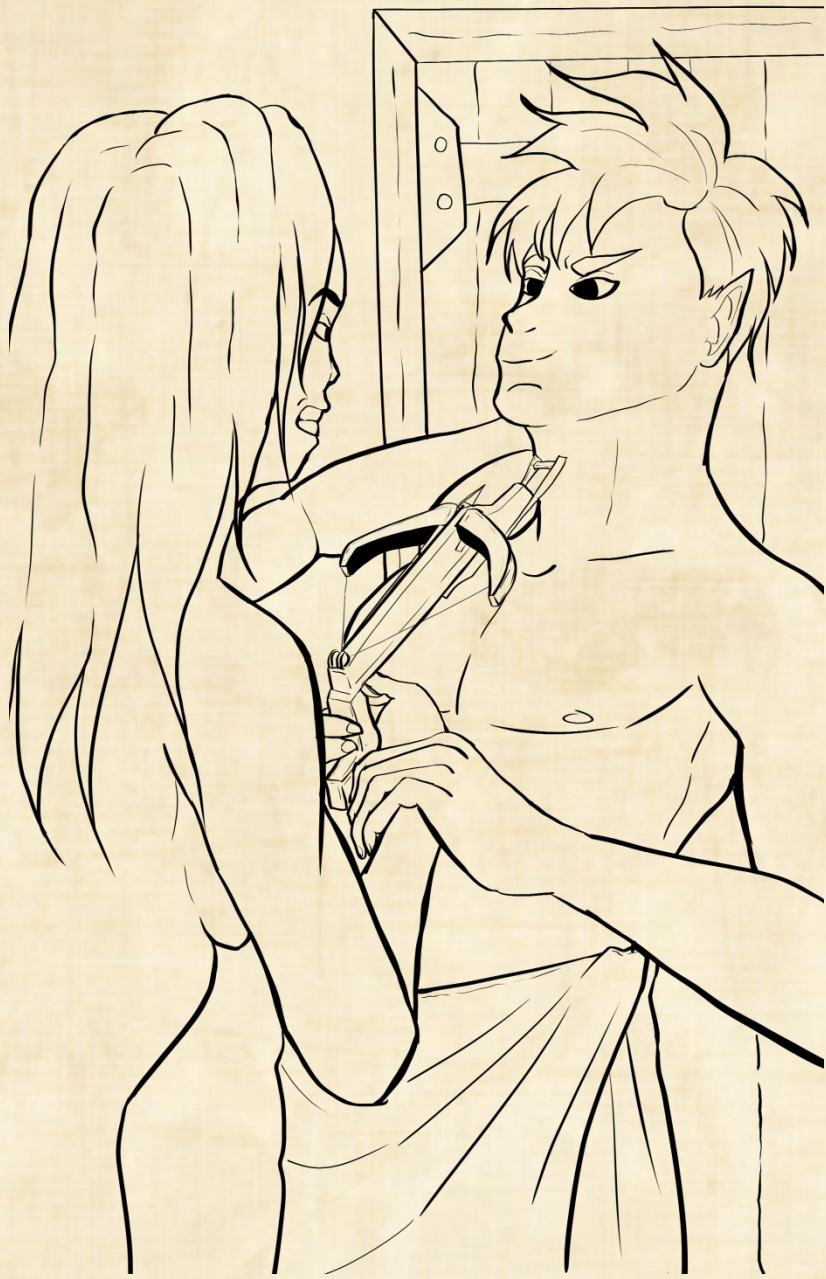
Everything has a place in Eberron. It's been repeated ever since the days of 3.5, when the Eberron setting was unleashed upon the world. Most recently, *Wayfinder's Guide to Eberron* said it again, with the important caveat: "**but it may not be the place you expect.**" Without the Great Wheel, many of the extraplanar creatures you might be used to may seem adrift. Without the gods, where do all these cursed creatures and evil monsters come from?

Well, this is where this series of books steps in. You metaphorically hold in your hand Volume 1 of the *Naturalist's Guide to Eberron*, a small attempt to take every monster from the hardcovers; the *Monster Manual*, *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*; along

with a selection of the adventures, *Plane Shift* supplements, and even the *Turtle Package*; and give them a place in Eberron.

As a final word, I turn back to another piece of wisdom; **It's Your Eberron Too**. These are my ideas. If you like them, then feel free to use them. If not, make up a new story and tell me. Not all of the monsters are dramatically changed, and I hope while you browse through this book you get a greater feel for the world of Eberron.

Thanks for reading.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RHEN AMES SANCE

- Research Professor of the Library of Korranberg (Balinor's Horn College)
- Description: May appear as brown-haired, brown-eyed half-elf. Minimal feature changes.
- Residence: Ravensbourne, Besalles Ward, Fairhaven (private residence)

Born to a single mother in the Raincaller's Guild, Rhen spent much of his childhood travelling around the continent of Khorvaire, Through these travels, he gained an appreciation for both the people of this continent and the various animals on it.

He always knew he had a talent for people and illusion, despite never knowing his changeling heritage until his teenage years. Though now aware of it, he considers himself a true khoravar at heart.

Educated at the prestigious Library of Korranberg, Rhen swiftly rose to the ranks of Research Professor, his core study being the classification of all known creatures into their separate phyla. This project drew on centuries of anatomical and behavioral studies.

However, eventually he realized he needed field expertise, and an assignment to the Wayfinder Foundation came at just the right time. Now, with his trusted crew, he travels Khorvaire, Xen'drik and Khyber, gathering the lore presented here.



Oh, so humble. And we're not included under "authors" are we? I don't think that's fair. - Ardiane

That's how these things are written. And you are included in the credits, though these are my notes. - Rhen

What, you mean that tiny little section at the back where we get less space than the monsters? And didn't you tell me you were exiled from that library of yours? - Ardiane

Skip right to the end to find the rest of us; Fortunine, the toymaker warforged, Immok, the gnoll knight, and me, the Wayfinder who has to babysit Rhen or he'll walk into a monster's mouth to count its teeth. - Ardiane

Can we have this discussion somewhere else? Like face to face over a cup of claddak tea? - Rhen

"It smells like a weird noble's pigeon house in here," Ardiane complained, very pointedly not looking at the squishy substance she had just put her hand into. Rhen was standing at the entrance to the woven hut, seemingly oblivious to the swaying motion and the long drop just outside. For a moment, she considered pushing him. Just for a moment. After all, he'd promised they'd get out of here alive. She briefly glanced over at Immok. If it stank in here to her, what did it smell like to the gnoll?

Fortunine didn't even have a nose. She envied her. A particularly strong gust shook the floor and sent the whole building swaying. "The word is aviary, love," Rhen explained, after he'd found his feet after a heart-clenching few seconds. "And you're just tetchy because I haven't bought you a drink in a while." The half-elf woman looked up from wiping her hand on the straw, a biting response already on her lips.

The warforged shifted from her statue-still position to look at the two. "Tavern visits are inconsistent with the number of drinks you have owed and fulfilled," Fortunine noted in that bland tone she got when meditating or thinking hard. "I have begun to believe that you do not mean beverages, alcoholic or not, when you speak of drinks." Ardiane and Rhen looked at each other and laughed. "I do not understand. What is amusing?"

The silent debate between the couple on who would answer and how was interrupted by the arrival of one of their hosts, one of the bird-men of Daanvi, an aarakocra holding the dangling end of a rope ladder. "The elders have given the outsiders permission to plead their case for the use of the gate. Please follow me."

The aarakocra are traditionalist, stubborn, and strict. Yet they remain one of the most reasonable inhabitants of Daanvi, the Perfect Order. With little patience or understanding of the messy ways of the Material, these bird-men are considered mythical by most serious Eberron scholars. They were last recorded two hundred years ago, by a mad gnome who also claimed he could read the planes by the movement of freckles on his wife's face.

They remain, however, very real. Worshipping the philosopher-angels of Syrania, the aarakocra show their devotion through single-minded, some may say obsessive, devotion to a particular subject. While many clans may pursue swordplay, one clan may spend a generation defining the way by which a droplet of water falls from the tip of a particular sword, while another may choose to focus instead on maintaining the sharpest possible edge on another.

Despite this, they remain mortal and fallible. The duties of food, children and defence are usually assigned by elders to those who are the least focused; usually the young or impatient. These are performed with amazing precision and focus; though every aarakocra seeks to join the

clan's goal above all other ambition. Whether this is noticed by the angels is unknown, though some aarakocra have been seen in their service.

Aarakocra without a clan have been known to go mad. These dangerous renegades and criminals are usually banished to other planes before they can disrupt the Perfect Order. Their wings ritually cut off and their vocal cords removed, some fall into dark pacts with vrock lords or beg for a living on the Material Plane, unidentifiable as the proud birds they once were.

Note: Cross-reference with rumours of "Renku" in Fallen at earliest opportunity - Rhen

"Happy birthday," The half-elf leaned over and kissed her partner, evading his questing hands with a smile. "Down, boy. I have a different present for you today." Rising from the bed, Ardiane retrieved a small package, wrapped in brown paper. Placing it on Rhen's lap, she sat next to him, expectantly watching his face as he picked it up and inspected it.

His fingers told him fairly quickly what it was. "A book?" He asked. Ardiane strained to discern either approval or disappointment in his voice, but all she heard was curiosity so far. "Must be an interesting book if it caught your eye." The teasing she caught clearly, and she punched his shoulder lightly as a response. Finally, he began to open it. She watched his face rather than the package. Would he like it?

"It's from a magic shop," She explained as the nondescript, leather-bound book fell free of the paper. "One of those that you only find once when you're not looking..." Ardiane trailed off as she saw his face light up. Rhen flipped through the pages, his eyes growing wide as he read the strange writing inside. Leaning closer, she tried again to recognise something in the text.

Rhen misinterpreted the movement. He turned, kissed her, and with a muffled noise of surprise, Ardiane melted into his embrace. "It's amazing. I'd never heard even half of this, even in rumours," He broke the kiss a little too early for her liking, and she frowned. "I love it. And I love you."

"Our darkest side made manifest". Impossibly rare and obscure, very few outside the mythic continent of Argonessen have heard of the fiends known as abishai. Born in mockery of the children of Eberron and Siberys, these children of Khyber are most well-known on Q'barra, where they blend in with the other reptilian natives of that peninsula. The vast majority of abishai are as black as the dragon rumoured to nest in that region, though reports of other colours; mirroring those of all true dragons; are there if a reader knows what to look for.

An abishai resembles a dragonborn or lizardfolk in many ways, though they are most obviously different in proportion. Their arms are long and gangly, often reaching the creature's bent knees. They also possess functional wings, a trait incredibly rare among dragonborn and unknown among lizardfolk. And finally, while also having crests and horns that clearly ape the true dragons, the abishai all share tendril-like hair and a skull-like visage; lacking lips altogether, though they remain capable of speech.

Much remains unknown about the abishai, as their appearances on Khorvaire are rare. Any accounts of their existence on Argonessen are as hidden as all information on the Continent of Dragons. Like much else relating to the struggles

and history of the races of Q'barra before colonisation, the abishai remain obscure. Perhaps a future generation of adventurers, explorers, or naturalists will uncover their mission and role in the world of Eberron.

I see no reason for these to be in a different hand - Fortunine

Again? I rewrote that twice trying to remove those marks! - Rhen

The city was adorned with coral on every visible surface, and a variety of corals such as Rhen never imagined would have existed. The simple branched corals were here, but it also grew into great fans which were tended into fences, and the coral beneath them curled in on itself as if it were paving. Fine hair reached out from the corals ahead, only for them to become as plain as stone when their group swam past. Rhen turned to see Ardiane fidgeting with her bubble. "Stop that. You look as beautiful as always."

The half-elf woman narrowed her eyes at him. "They're all staring at me and this ridiculous thing." The bubble wrapped around her head, keeping breathable air near her in this merfolk city. Ardiane pressed her hands against the sides of the bubble, trying to squeeze it smaller. "At least you can look like them. I stick out like a warforged in a Phiarlan ballet."

Rhen fidgeted with the hood of his cloak, the blue tone of his skin still causing him some surprise. It was true than he'd taken on the merfolk's skin colour and rough features, but he still had legs, and so it was a less-than-perfect disguise. "The Cannith store did offer us a discount on buying two manta cloaks..." He repeated for the hundred thousandth time this trip. "But you thought we'd be in danger and would need clear line of sight." He finished her half of the argument, rolling his eyes as she muttered something that was probably blasphemous to most major religions.

"We have arrived, surfer." Their guide indicated a merfolk "sitting" near a table lit up by some luminescent stone. The sage they'd promised him didn't look old, with smooth, unwrinkled skin and keen, deep eyes, but the stiffness in the sage's movements indicated age clearly. "Ask your questions."

Rhen quirked a smile. "You're the one who I'm told can tell me of the deep ones. The lore that those of us who live under the stars have forgotten." It was difficult to bow when your feet didn't touch the ground and you were practically weightless, but he somehow managed to pull it off without being a complete fool. "Tell me of Piscaethces."

Beneath the earth lie the children of Khyber. Fiends of such great power that they had to be held in bondage by the sacrifice of an entire race. Their influence spawned thousands of evil beings that plague the land today. But their influence reached beneath the sea as well. There lie the Deep Ones. The aboleths. The first children of Khyber, born before even the Sovereigns. Just like on the surface, they enslaved the children of Eberron. Just like on the surface, they were fought and defeated. However, the aboleths have done naught but bide their time.

Responsible for almost every evil beneath the waves, directly or indirectly, the first aboleths are either long dead or irrevocably asleep. Unfortunately, their memories live on in crystal clear detail in their modern descendants, who scheme and plan just as their landbound counterparts do. Few of their plots ever impact those living on the surface, but this is mostly through the efforts of aquatic dragons, dragon turtles, and heroes from the lesser aquatic races.

To this day, the aboleths plan their centuries-long plots, their immortality allowing them all

eternity to see them come to fruition. Though much like their terrestrial contemporaries, the Lords of Dust, their plans may directly counteract each others'. Their natural solitude and pride prevents them from ever forming even as tenuous a coalition like that, making aboleth plans perhaps the world's best defense against the plans of any aboleth...

If they're like underwater versions of these so-called Lords of Dust things, does that make them Lords of Salt? Or maybe Lords of Slime? - Ardiane

Note: Compare and contrast accounts of aberration origins with fiendish origins. Also, keep Ardiane out of my notes. - Rhen

ABYSSAL WRETCH

Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes; page 136

"Essentially, yes," the sage agreed with a sigh. His pale flamic robes blended a little too seamlessly with his pallor. "They're like herbivores, except they seem to subsist on raw fiendish magic in place of any natural plant. It's not even certain if they are capable of digestion." Maso, the minister in attendance at Rellekor, sat back in his office chair. "There's a reason they're called 'wretches', you know."

A playful growl followed by happy giggling came in from outside. Rhen smiled. "You told me not to say the names of any of the... creatures I've come here to ask about. Are these an exception?" The office walls were lined with books; most of them apparently journals, but several copies of the Silver Flame liturgies and rites. Those would be interesting for someone at Korranberg, he was sure. The book he wanted was already on the table.

Maso opened the book in question to the exact page, apparently by long practice. "Hardly, but they are quite easily dealt with when not escorted by greater beings. I believe a single utterance of their name would do no harm, especially since they are otherwise innocuous words."

The creature on the page was horrific; basically humanoid, but covered in boils, sores and with boneless anatomy no living creature short of a malformed troll would consider viable. "Holy Aureon." Rhen glanced up at the minister, offering an apology.

Not all fiends are terrifying monsters. At least one type, despite its malevolence, is worthy mostly of pity. The creatures known as abyssal wretches are humanoid creatures apparently spawned directly by Khyber. Some texts claim they are the results of fleshwarping magic. However, wretches have none of the traits associated with the aberrations created by the daelkyr, and so remain classified as fiends.

Armed only with oddly-placed jaws, wretches seem to be little equipped to survive in any environment dominated by fiends. And they barely do. Despite the numbers of them in the Demon Wastes, they primarily seem to exist as prey for the cannibals of that land. One of the many expeditions to reclaim the ruins of Desolate reported larger fiends catching and eating wretches as well, apparently taking pleasure in the violence of the act.

Unfortunately, the relative safety of Desolate while it was inhabited meant that the wretches flocked there, drawing the greater dangers of the Wastes with them. Perhaps that is the greatest danger of the abyssal wretch; not its own power, but the creatures that they will inevitably attract.

I've seen some disturbing monsters, but wretches look too close to humanoids for my comfort - Rhen



AIR ELEMENTAL

"Roywin!" He opened his arms wide, but Rhen had to kneel down before he could give the gnome woman the hug she deserved and returned. "How's the binding business coming along?" Behind him, Ardiane had ducked low under the low roof and poked at a nightshard. Fortunine was more reserved, standing still in the centre of the room, even if her height prevented her from moving in the workshop.

The old gnome grinned. "It's been too long since you left. It makes an old lady happy to see you've found such a nice girl among the tallfolk. Do put that down, dear." She stood from her stool to take the Khyber dragonshard from the half-elf. "And I can see that question in your eyes, warforged. You can go to one of our shipyards." Fortunine nodded her head and ducked out of the workshop. "Darling creatures."

"I don't understand how some people can still think they're just tools." Rhen shook his head. He took his quill and paper out of his bag. "The Power of Purity are among the most knowledgeable people on Khorvaire when it comes to the nature of elementals," He began, though Roywin nodded her head.

Returning to her desk, Roywin folded her hands in her lap. "So you've come to pick my mind for this information?" Glancing at the papers, she remarked, "If it's for your monster book, I have no objections to representing our elemental friends fairly. Are we to start with air?"

An awareness given shape, like most of their kind, air elementals hail from the boundless wilderness of Lamannia, the Twilight Forest. While intelligent enough to be spoken to or reasoned with on a basic level, air elementals seek little more than to move unhindered through the skies of their home plane. It is rare that they are encountered on the Material Plane without a summoner.

The vast majority of encounters with air elementals will be when they are bound to vehicles or objects by Khyber dragonshards: air elementals power the many coaches of the Lightning Rail, as well as many of House Lyrandar's elemental galleons and the occasional airship. Items bound with air elementals often have powers or functions relating to wind, such as cloaks of billowing, caps of water breathing, or bracers of archery.

Air elemental myrmidons are extremely rare creatures, forced into servitude via enchanted

armour. Though the skills for creating these creatures are well known, few in the modern age are willing to. Forcing a creature so naturally fluid into a fixed form seems to drive them insane, or at least make them more violent, with remarkable frequency. Modern artifice has created more obedient, sophisticated guardians, though the rare myrmidon can be discovered in ancient ruins both in Khorvaire and Xen'drik.

Elementals within nightshards can allegedly be communicated with. Ask captain on next galleon trip for confirmation. - Rhen

KEEPING AN ELEMENTAL UNDER CONTROL

While elemental binding is an incredibly reliable form of magic, it is on occasion possible to get into a situation where a bound elemental is uncontrolled. As elementals are used in many modern mass-transit options, the pilots may be targeted by any number of fringe groups. In the event it becomes necessary, a DM can use contested Charisma ability checks to represent the challenge of trying to command a bound elemental.

If the character loses the contest, the elemental can act how it chooses, usually accelerating the vehicle in any given direction or bringing the vehicle to a complete halt, as per its whims. If the character wins the contest, the vehicle moves as the character intends.

Unless a character has a relevant feat, dragonmark, subclass, or other character history deemed appropriate by the DM, the player must make their Charisma check with disadvantage. Either a *wheel of wind and water* or *lightning reins* allow a character with the appropriate dragonmark to automatically succeed at the contest.

"Tribexcrap," Ardiane spat as saltwater spray hit her through the porthole. She turned and slid back into their cabin, idly picking at the ring, fake ring, that Rhen had insisted she wear. It was gold, sure, and engraved, sure, but the "gem" had to be glass. "Big lobsters living on a river 35 miles south of Stormreach? That sailor sold you a lie."

For his part, Rhen seemed comfortable with the ring on his finger. "It's a lead on something nobody's ever heard of or seen before," he explained, holding her hands apart so she'd stop. "That's rarer than a poor dwarf. And almost as valuable as your smile." Ardiane scowled. "Come on, we've got this cabin all to ourselves for another week."

That was a positive, she privately admitted. But. "I've been to Xen'drik before. Thieves, mad ruin hunters, and mosquitoes." She pulled up her shirt. "You're not going to like this as much when I'm all rashy, itchy and burned." With that, she pushed him away and sat on their bunk. It was already hot, and they'd hardly made it out of Sharn.

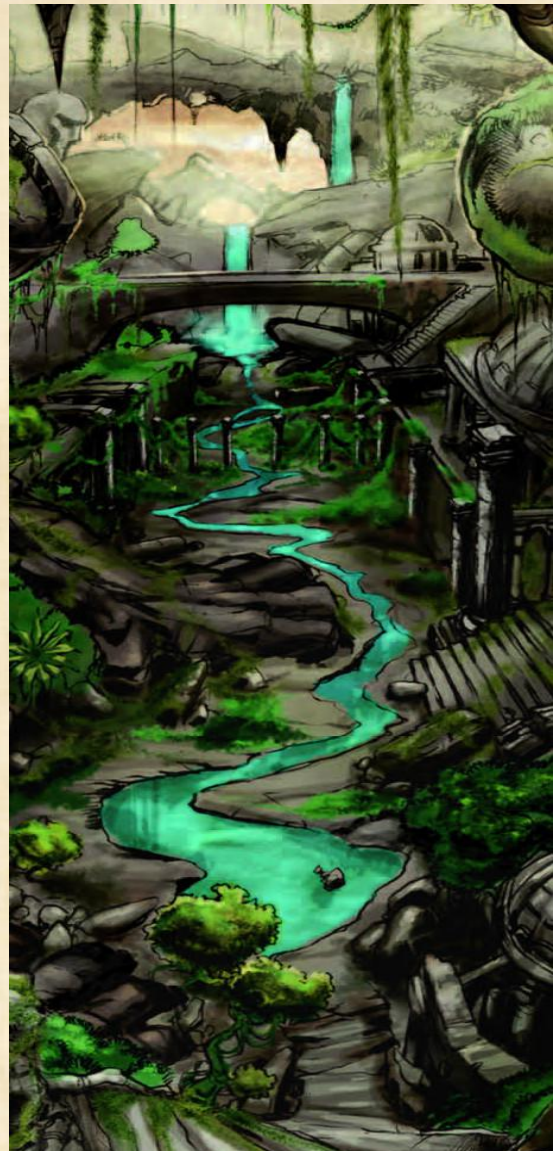
"But," Rhen revealed a jar from his bag. "If you do get all rashy, itchy, and burned, I have a lotion. Ghallanda apothecaries are money-gougers, but they make good lotion." He got glared at again, but he came and sat next to her anyway. "And you get a dexterous touch to apply it, unlike some on this boat..."

Persistent rumours from Xen'drik describe a race not unlike the more commonly seen thri-keen. But while the "mantisfolk" are native to the Menechtaurun, these "lobsterfolk", or aldani, live in the rivers and lakes of the continent. Few Khorvairans have ever heard of them, though they seem to be common folklore in Stormreach.

As their existence remains unconfirmed, this publication can do little but to repeat the most repeated pieces of lore among the denizens of that distant land. Those who encounter these beasts must evidently weather the creatures' attempts to frighten them off. If an intruder remains stoic, the aldani then attempt to bribe them with treasures retrieved from the river bottom.

Above all, these creatures prefer to be left alone. Tales are just as full of those who were attacked as those who claimed treasures. Perhaps, if one truly comes across a tribe of aldani, it would be wiser to keep one's distance.

I told you I'd get all rashy and itchy for nothing. - Ardiane



ALKILITH

Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes; page 130

"I've seen one of these before," Rhen said, leaning over the book. The fact that he'd seen anything in this book was a surprise; the entire reason why he'd come to this village of tieflings was for their information on fiends. Half the world had heard of hellhounds and imps, but the shapeless demon rendered messily on the page in front of him would be recorded nowhere else.

Fortunine, gazing out the window at the children she'd been playing with not so long ago, stirred. Moving precisely far enough to see over Rhen's shoulder, she added, "That tower in the Mournland, the kobold queen and that passage beneath." Rhen nodded. "You declared it to be moss."

With a shock of realisation, Rhen realised why the lines of the picture were fuzzy. "That was because I didn't want Ardiane to call off the expedition. But that 'moss' had the same red, blank eyes." He shook himself, turning to the tight script on the page.

Maso walked back in, prompting Fortunine to salute. "Father,"

"Soldier," he responded, looking at Rhen's frowning face. "Everything in order?"

Fortunine nodded once, sharply. "A mystery of previous expeditions solved, Father. May I return to my previous activities?" When the priest nodded, she left.

The incarnate form of spiritual and fiendish corruption, the alkilith is a shapeless fiend found near entrances to Khyber and the various demiplanes within. Similar in texture to moss, it is however an ooze-like creature. Fully aware and in possession of a dim, if malicious, intelligence, it is usually content to remain near the space it has adopted, watching or ignoring passersby as its fancy takes it.

The ubiquity of these creatures in and around the underworld is well-known. Most expeditions into that dark world refer to the "Khyber moss", but very few record any attempts to harvest it. The conclusion that must be drawn is that any expedition harming these creatures do not return to leave evidence. Ironically, the presence of one or more of these beings is enough to keep all but the strongest fiends away. Setting up camp near an alkilith is among the very few ways to ensure a group's safety in Khyber.

However, on the rare occasions alkiliths have been driven away from the portals, the space has rapidly become an ordinary cave. It seems that the alkilith is the reason that Eberron and Khyber are connected, and if all alkiliths were destroyed or driven off, the underworld would become inaccessible. This has only been achieved in the Cogs of Sharn, where Cannith-made constructs could be brought to bear in "cleaning" the area. It is unlikely that any given group of mercenaries could do anything similar.

And after all, with no way to enter Khyber, there would be no way to mine nightshards, vital to the modern dragonshard economy. With their relative passivity, perhaps alkiliths remain a necessary Evil in the modern times.

*That was a sovereignsdamned demon?! -
Ardiane*

*Del Arrah's light, it could have snuck up
behind us and killed us all. - Ardiane*

*We are going to have a long talk about
this. - Ardiane*

Ardiane stretched, a long, languorous, indulgent stretch that would have been defined by the man sitting nearby as feline, had he been paying any sort of attention to her whatsoever. At first, she found it annoying. Then she realised there was still a bit of drool on her cheek, and she found it reassuring. She'd probably been snoring too. That would have been so embarrassing... Still, she wiped her mouth and looked at Rhen. She couldn't see what book had him so distracted, but it had to be interesting if he wasn't taking notes anymore.

Walking over to the window, she realised why the Wayfinder library was so empty. It was after sunset. Likely long after, the way the moons' light shone through the windows. "Hey," Ardiane said, putting her arms around Rhen's neck. "Time to go. You keep studying, monsters will come and try to suck the knowledge out your brain."

"Actually, they want to put knowledge in." He replied, turning another page.

Her playful smile dropped, and she poked his chest. "What? There are actually knowledge-eating library monsters?"

Her description seemed to annoy him enough to put the book down. "They're undead, not monsters. They try to tell you random secrets, not eat your thoughts. And, finally, they don't haunt libraries like this. If they did, there'd be no scholars left in Korranberg."

Allips are undead created by incredibly specific circumstances, so well-known that it's possible to intentionally create one. This, of course, is both inadvisable and immoral. Not only would the resulting being be uncontrollable, but the circumstances of their creation include incredible amounts of mental torment; allips are the remains of those who committed suicide due to mental sickness or disorders.

An allip is an incorporeal undead, distinguished from more common types by their pitch-black, ragged appearance. While resembling the creature from whose death they spring, allips are not that person's soul. Instead, these creatures are the mental illness brought to unlife. This means that they can exhibit wildly different personalities, depending on their originating illness. As some small comfort, the victim can be resurrected safely, and in perfect mental health.

The creatures are, thankfully, rare. The primary habitats of the allip are the Shadow Marches, known for their Cults of the Dragon Below, the Mourndland, and oddly, Arcanix. A fair number of the creatures live in the abandoned spaces of the

arcane school. Allips also appear in prisons, notably Dreadhold, and the various city slums in the Five Nations. Thankfully, civic initiatives by Sovereign Host, Silver Flame and House Jorasco have helped many people who would have otherwise left one of these undead behind.

VARIANT ALLIPS

The allip in Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes is a fearsome foe, and can easily represent an allip born of paranoia. Presented here are two alternative Whispers of Madness actions for a hypochondria allip, and a vertigo allip:

- **Whispers of Madness.** The allip chooses up to three creatures it can see within 60 feet of it. Each target must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw, or it takes 12 (2d8 + 3) psychic damage, plus the target is knocked prone and is cursed with vertigo. While cursed this way, the target cannot stand up. The target can repeat the saving throw at the start of each of its turns, ending the curse on a success. Constructs and undead are immune to this effect.
- **Whispers of Madness.** The allip chooses up to three creatures it can see within 60 feet of it. Each target must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw, or it takes 12 (2d8 + 3) psychic damage and become convinced it is poisoned, suffering all the usual effects for that condition. The target may repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending this effect on itself on a success. Constructs and undead are immune to this effect.

It's incredibly important that you never listen to what an allip tries to say. It's all incomprehensible, designed to infect the victim's mind.
- Rhen

"Cute," Fortunine cradled the creature's cage, fearful of her own strength. The horned rabbit sniffed through the bars, intrigued by the metal of her arm. "I believe I am inclined to purchase this creature." The Syrkh merchant rubbed his hands together in anticipation. "300 galifar."

With an even wider grin, the merchant replied, "Horn turns hunters to stone. Not easy to catch." He apologetically spread his hands. "500gp is least to repay expense." Fortunine stared at him, her unchanging expression somehow conspiring to come across as unamused. The merchant's smile faltered a little. "450?"

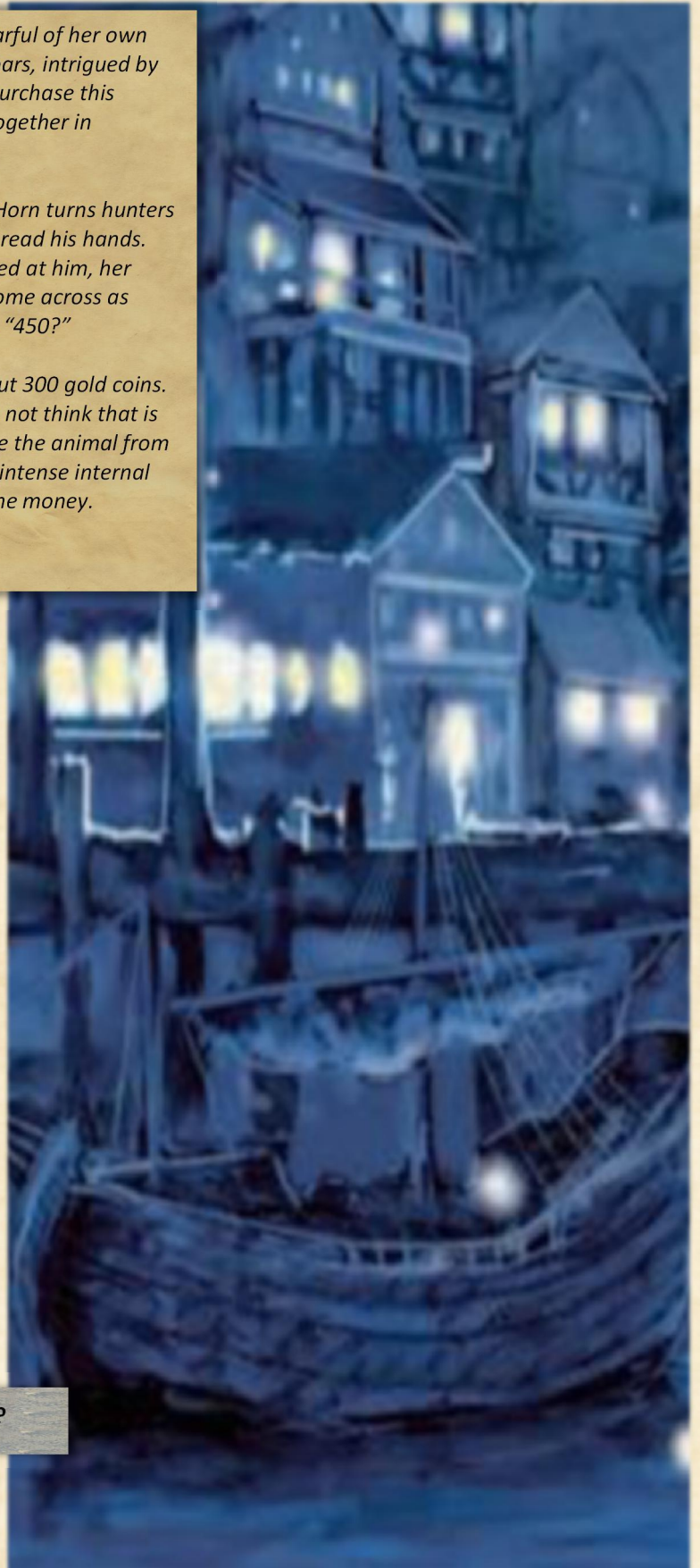
Slowly and carefully, Fortunine began counting out 300 gold coins. "I am giving you three hundred galifars. If you do not think that is enough, or you think that it is unfair, you can take the animal from me and I shall go elsewhere." After a moment of intense internal debate, the merchant leaned forward and took the money.

The almiraj is a rabbit-like creature native to the plains of Sarlona. It is known to have a rather bold or stubborn disposition in the wild, using its spiralled horn to both attack intruders to its territory and defend itself. Its powerful jumps make it capable of injuring even human-sized opponents. It is therefore better left alone.

However, they are also easily domesticated with the proper techniques. They make faithful pets, and have become popular among Riedran ambassadors and some Khorvairan mages. House Vadalis has not yet begun to offer them, making Syrkh or Lhazaar merchants the easiest way to acquire an almiraj.

Syrkh folklore states that almirajes were fey creatures, and their horns have the ability to petrify. No such abilities are seen in modern almirajes. While the horns do add to the quality of metal goods, making them less likely to shatter, they are in no way substitutes for unicorn horns. It is worth noting that genuine unicorn horns are iridescent, unlike almiraj and narwhal horns.

I think I'll call it Tim - Fortunine



AMBUSH DRAKE

Hoard of the Dragon Queen; page 88

The brief snuffling told Immok little to nothing about the creature posed in the Morgrave foyer. It was most like a thick, barrel-chested, wolf with scales and a large, powerful set of jaws, but where it came from and why it was standing here was a mystery to him. "Ambush Drake." The construct's voice made his ear twitch in its... her direction. "Draconiform pack hunter. Native to Q'barra, it is used by the scaled peoples of that region as a mount."

He turned to face her, looking down with his face but up with his eyes. "How do you know that?" Immok asked. Fortunine pointed one of her thick fingers at an engraved sheet of metal on the creature's plinth. He peered at it, trying to make sense of the metal scratches. It failed to resolve itself into any form of sense, and so he gave up, snorting at it in contempt.

"Are you not able to read?" Fortunine asked, her expression and tone barely changing. How the Easterners thought making these was a good idea, he'd never know. They barely had presence.

Immok grunted, "Not Easterner scribbles. My people write with older letters, of curve and clawstroke. This, this is nonsense." He crossed his arms and scowled at the stuffed creature before him. After a moment, he ran his finger over a scar on the creature's back. Fortunine grabbed his wrist, lifting him off it. The two froze, looking at each other. "Wings," Immok said. "This had wings. The scholars here didn't even look."

The ambush drake is not a reptile, despite its appearance, instead being one of the more primitive branches of the draconiform class. This contains wyverns, dragon turtles, dragonborn, pseudodragons and, possibly, faerie dragons. It is commonly associated with the tribes of northern Q'barra, who appear to raise them as mounts, taking advantage of their natural pack instincts.

Whether the packs wandering the southwestern plains and the Q'barran peninsula are feral or truly wild, they behave like unusually intelligent wolves. Arcane examination and behavioural studies hint at a minor telepathic ability between members of a pack, accounting for their extraordinary coordination as a group. While their preferred tactic is an ambush, hence the name, these drakes are more than capable of adapting to varying terrain.

Census efforts in the region have shown that the range of ambush drakes is slowly increasing. Ten years ago, they were barely across the Endworld Mountains. A report from a mere eight months ago has them in the vicinity of the Valenar settlements of Norinath and Taer Shantara. While it is more difficult to track their movement though the Blade, it is not unlikely they have spread into the Talenta plains as well.

With the expansion, the discovery was made that wild ambush drakes have small, apparently vestigial wings. In addition, they have been observed to expectorate a poison that renders prey or foes sluggish on inhalation. Those drakes

under the care of Q'barran scalefolk had neither wings nor poison, leading to the conclusion that their owners cut off the limbs and whatever organs are responsible for the latter.



VARIANT AMBUSH DRAKE

Those that appear in the published adventure are tame. Here's a representation of the ambush drake's spittle for wild variants:

- Add the action: **Spittle (Recharge 6)**: The drake spits a glob of phlegm laced with a psychic toxin that evaporates on impact. One creature within 60 ft. must make a DC 12 Con saving throw or become disorientated. A disorientated creature gains a -2 penalty to AC and disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws, and cannot use both a bonus action and an action on its turns. The creature can attempt a new saving throw at the end of each of its turns to end the effect.

Ardiane's eyes opened to the same uniform grey sky she had closed them to however many hours ago. She shut them again as she dressed, yawning extravagantly as she joined Fortunine and Rhen at the half-ruined area of the ruin they'd designated the front. She draped her arms around Rhen's shoulders, nuzzling him. "Good morning," he murmured, turning away from the battle that kept raging on the plain below. "Although, it's difficult to tell."

She opened her eyes after getting her kiss. It wasn't what she actually wanted, but it would have to do. "What are those?" she asked, pointing up at the sky above the two armies.

Rhen followed her finger. "Erinyes?"

"No, the eggy ones." She shook her finger, as if that would make it any more clear which of the specks she was pointing at.

"They are commanders. Observing the enemy and directing their army's efforts," Fortunine replied. The warforged had those goggle things on, so of course she'd be able to see what Ardiane was talking about. Rhen stifled his own yawn, but Ardiane was sharper than that. The monsters fighting in that battle might be immortal and tireless, but he certainly wasn't. She took the notebook from him, the pen from behind his ear, and chased him off to the sleeping room.

On the plane of Shavarath, every iteration of war exists. Common to all of them is the need for commanders. In the devil armies, the creatures known as amnizu fill this role. They are capable of flying high above the fray on oddly undersized wings. Heavily defended by malebranche and erinyes, they shout commands to lesser ranked devils below, following the flow and tide of battle.

Still, they are not defenceless. Any creature attacking an amnizu may find its aggression directed towards its allies. More than that, an amnizu is actively capable of controlling or rotting the mind of any being unwise enough to come within range. Creatures powerful enough to barrel through the amnizu's escorts can become just another piece to be used and discarded. While easily capable of forcing stray mortals to join their fiendish horde, they can and do sway angels and demons alike to turn on their allies.

Amnizu are not, however, well-loved by those who they command. Treachery is common among fiends, and an amnizu's bodyguard which finds themselves in the proper situation at the proper time will backstab their charge, being promoted into their place in a painful and visceral tearing of of bone and flesh. Many amnizu are as freely brutal to their own escorts and army as they are the enemy, laying into them with whips when disobeyed. This then, ensures their underling's hatred of them.

When their troops are pressed back, the commanders may cast fireballs down upon the front line, which doesn't seem to harm their underlings.

However, the shrapnel flung up from these explosions tears into both sides. I find this callous expenditure of lives frightening. - Fortunine

AMPHISBAENA

Ghosts of Saltmarsh; page 230

Rhen was pushing a hovering trolley when he came through the door. The parcel was as wide as he was, and heavy from the looks of it. "Hey, what's that?" Ardiane stood up and took over from him, steering it to the table. She flipped up the tag, smiling when she read it. "It's from the fish professor. I wonder if it's some walrus steak?" Over Rhen's protests, she tore open the paper wrapping to reveal a glass box. "That's not steaks."

Having put the rest of the post aside, Rhen stopped her from poking at the creature swimming in the tank. "Her name is Demersa. And that's an amphisbaena. Not rare, but hard enough to find one in the wild." He crouched to look at the creature, turning in place and glaring with the eyes at its front and at its back. "You make it too angry, and it'll bite you with its butt."

Ardiane frowned, crouching next to him to tap at the glass. The nearest end of the creature snapped at the noise with short, pointed teeth. "You mean bite me in the butt because it's poisonous or something?" After he shook his head, she joined him in looking at the serpentine creature. Both ends looked identical, down to number of teeth and black, beady eyes. "How am I supposed to tell which end is the butt?"

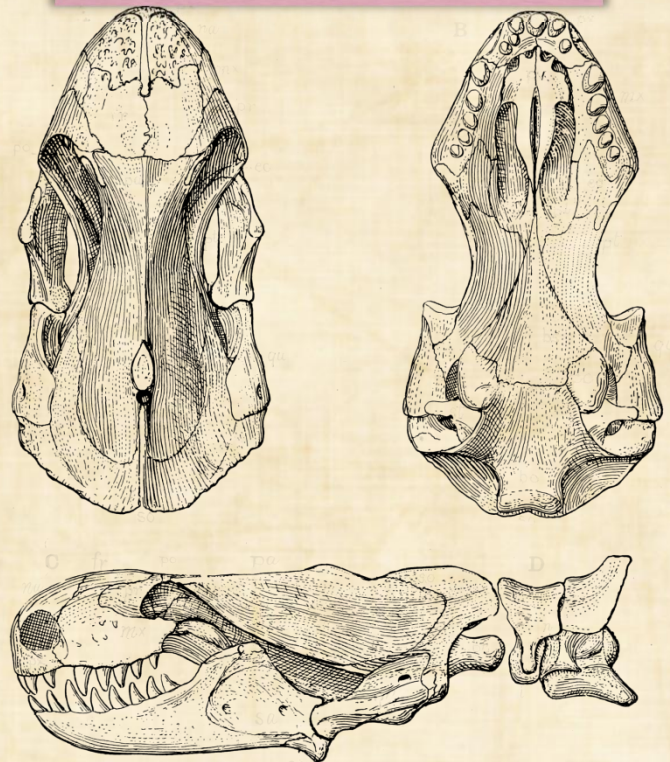
The creatures known as amphisbaena are a widespread family of aquatic reptiles, found in tropical and temperate waters around Khorvaire and Sarlona. Members of this family can be identified by their rear heads; a structure functionally resembling toothed jaws replacing a tail. This area is also equipped with visible eyes, just capable of sensing light levels. As the amphisbaena is capable of swimming in reverse as easily as forward, the rear head allows the animal to function in either direction.

Discovering the truth of the rear "jaws" is simple once an amphisbaena's skeleton is examined. Cartilage from the pelvis and appropriate tendons create a spring-loaded trap that snap shut on prey items and threats to inject a pain-inducing venom. In some tropical species, this reflex works even when the rear is severed. These species are capable of autotomy in the case of threat, letting the predator deal with the pain while the rest of the animal escapes.

Amphisbaena are common pet animals, even familiars, in underwater cultures. While they are rather large, about the size of a human, amphisbaena are docile if fed often enough and territorial enough to protect their sources of food. Q'barran lizardfolk kings often raise these as a sign of status. Some merfolk cultures use them as herding hounds, notably those in the Lhazaar Sea. Finally, the yuan-ti of Xen'drik are rumoured to raise these animals as well, likely as part of their serpent cults.

No, Boromar. Down boy. This is off to Korranberg in a week, so leave it alone unless it gets out of the tank. - Rhen

You know he doesn't listen to you. But I agree, Boromar, so be nice. - Ardiane



ANIMATED ARMOUR

Monster Manual; page 19

"Sooo..." Ardiane strolled through the aisle, arm linked with Rhen's as if they were a noble couple on a day outing. Not that they were, or anything. When did holding his hand like she was the weak one become this natural? She ignored the butterflies in her stomach just as studiously as Rhen examined the armours on display. "I thought you liked my leather," she jibed. She certainly did. It fit well under this loose shirt and kept the girls in place. "Don't tell me we're in here for you either."

The changeling shrugged his shoulders. "These aren't for wearing, Ardiane. They're decorative sentries." He waved to a young woman in Cannith overalls. Mildly attractive, she noted, though the saleswoman's clothes were far too clean and well-made to have seen actual use. Ardiane subconsciously moved closer to her man as the girl stopped in front of them with a smile far too bright to the real. Not that Rhen belonged to her, or anything. "I'd like to know where you make these," Rhen gave her an equally bright smile as he made the request. The twit.

"Oh, they're made here in Fairhaven, milord," the girl replied, "though we get the metal and enamel from the finest sources, we do all the forging and enchanting ourselves at the local enclave. The Royal Family themselves buy from this very outlet." It was official. Ardiane did not like this Cannith. She slowly and deliberately kissed Rhen's cheek, to make sure Miss Smiley got the message. "Are you in the market as well, milord? I have a fine armour here that looks perfect in any entry hall, while being quick enough to outdraw six of ten Fairhaven guards."

Though quite primitive by the standards of modern artifice, the constructs known as animated armours remain a mainstay of home security for the middle class of Khorvaire. Their unquestioning loyalty and complete inability to become bored puts them above human guards, and their relative ease of manufacture and low cost makes them an appealing alternative to golems and House Cannith's more advanced constructs.

Many of the techniques in the more advanced concepts were first perfected in animated armours; while cosmetic additions excite the customer, the ability to recite and understand language was a major breakthrough, even if it was a limited demand-password system. Animated armour also allowed experimentation in form; while the humanoid is the most common type, older or more expensive armours may take the form of varied animals or beasts, much like modern warforged.

Of course, one should not take this to mean House Cannith are the sole producers of animated armour. Arcanix is rumoured to have hundreds of these constructs as a security force, and many ruins in Xen'drik host ancient, giant-sized armours. Cruder versions can be found in Dhakaani and dwarven ruins from before Galifar, as well as exquisite densewood examples in Pylas Talaear, Aerenal.



No more "research" in shops with pretty rich girls. - Ardiane

You know you're the only pretty woman I can see. - Rhen

"They're big, burrow, spit acid, and are a pain in the ass to stop without a warhammer," the khoravar woman sat on a study table, legs crossed. "What else do you need to know about those bugs?" Rhen looked at her, considering whether he really needed her help in the Wayfinder Foundation's library. She looked back at him, body positioned as if determined to distract him into doing something other than research.

He pulled the last few journals from the shelf and deposited them on the table, a subtle hint for her to move over. "Well, primarily distribution, territory markers, common behaviour patterns, and perhaps most importantly, whether they're really insects or merely beasts that resemble insects." He listed off the aims on his fingers, to her increasing bewilderment. The silence stretched on as he tried to remember her name, and she stared at him.

Rhen sighed. He could recite Zil poetry in the original Zilmeln, but ask him to remember one attractive woman's name after a night together? "Of course they're bugs," she replied, finally, nudging his leg with her foot. "They have six legs, sideways jaws and they're chitinous." It was his turn to raise an eyebrow. "What, Mr Wir?" She- Ardiane, quirked a smile.

"I didn't expect a woman with your specific brand of skills to have the expertise to use such a word correctly," he remarked. Her smile faded slightly as she tried to find an insult or compliment in his words. Rhen smiled at her. "Come, find a chair and you can help me work. I'll give you the interesting ones."

The ankheg is likely the second-most cursed creature by the caravaneers of House Orien, coming after the bulette and just before their own stubborn draft animals. These insect-like creatures are found all over Khorvaire's plains, from Droaam, where they are hunted for food and sport, to the island of Questor in the Lhazaar Principalities, where the locals swear by their armour as a lightweight alternative to plate. Most citizens of the Five Nations are unlikely to encounter them as anything other than brief, terrifying attacks on long trips, despite House Orien's best efforts.

Unknown to most, however, is their alleged role in agriculture. Ankheg habitat ranges seem to match up with what expert farmers consider good soil, and indeed, the great breadbaskets of Breland and the Eldeen Reaches seem to have above-average populations of ankheg. In comparison, the frequently-frozen ground of Karrnath has a small population of smaller ankhegs. A few accounts claim the druids of the Reaches are capable of luring and controlling the creatures to ensure that livestock, normally a magnet for attacks, remain safe while the crops on the same farm allegedly benefit from them.

It is also worth noting that the tunnels ankhegs dig are commonly accessible by humanoids, though the loose soil left behind by their excavations is prone to collapsing in on itself after the ankheg. They are also known to build larger chambers underground which seem to

function as nests or resting places. Unfortunately, most meals are consumed quickly, so it is unlikely that any victims can be recovered. Belongings, especially those enchanted for durability, may survive long enough to be deposited in one of these chambers.

A number of subspecies are known. Xen'drik hosts a nocturnal, desert variety known as the nightstalker ankheg. Its darker shell gives it excellent camouflage on its nightly hunts. Morgrave University holds the remains of a large specimen dubbed the "chromatic" ankheg retrieved from the shores of Argonessen. Half again as large as the common, the chromatic has an iridescent carapace and is reputed to be able to create an effect similar to a prismatic spray spell. A second has yet to be discovered.

VARIANT ANKHEGS

To run one of the ankheg subspecies, make the following changes to the MM statblock:

- **Nightstalker Ankheg:** Additional 10ft burrow speed, proficiency in Stealth and Perception, passive Perception increases to 13.
- **Prismatic Ankheg:** Huge size, AC 16, HP 102 (12d12 + 24), CR 4, Add ability:
Prismatic Spray (Recharge 6). The ankheg casts *prismatic spray*, provided it has no creature grappled. Constitution is the spellcasting modifier for this spell (spell save DC 14)

ANNIS HAG

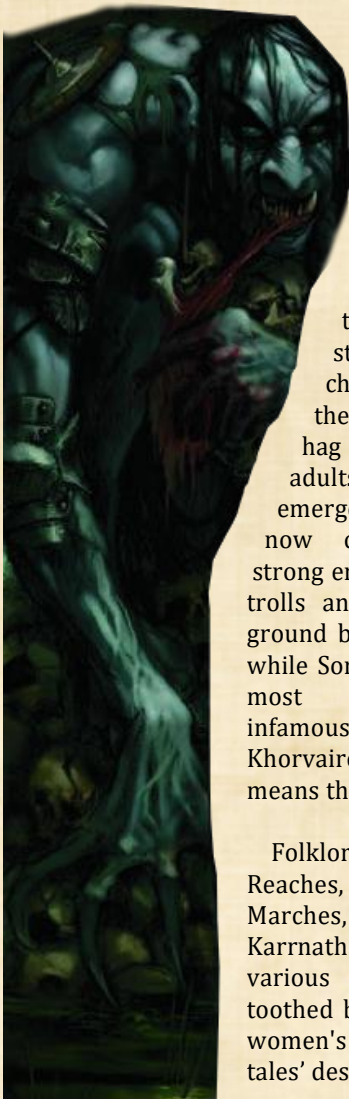
Volo's Guide to Monsters; page 159

The gnoll grinned in what it probably thought was a friendly manner. Here in Greywall, however, it just reminded Ardiane of how weak her kind were in comparison. "So you can take us to the Great Crag?" Adding to her discomfort was Rhen in his natural form. The locals liked his pale grey skin, hardly-there facial features, and inhuman pupilless eyes. She didn't.

"Ha, yes," The gnoll guide nodded. He'd been recommended as trustworthy and intelligent. For a monster. "The trade road is safe this time of year. The Crag will be more work." He grinned again, sending shivers down Ardiane's spine. "No meets." The gnoll's Common was even good, considering the mouthful of fangs it had to work with. Another thing that added to her unease.

Rhen's smile was more familiar, even comforting. "We don't need to meet the Daughters," he shook his head. "We need an expert guide for the next leg of our expedition in this area and we're willing to pay good solid Galifars." As if by magic, he dropped a coin onto the table and pinned it there with a finger. "I hear tell that Immok of the Pact is both smart and honest. You in?"

The gnoll's expression this time was more familiar; lust for gold gleamed in his eyes and his "smile" was predatory. "He's on your case, sir. And ma'm. Your trip and lives are safe in my hands." Immok lifted a knife and drove the blunt end into the wooden table. "We seal the deal with a good meal! Meat on your coin, if you please."



Every child of every race in the western half of Khorvaire heard stories of the iron-toothed, hunchbacked Sora Maenya, the hag who stole disobedient children and ate them. The same hag who terrified adults after she emerged into the area now called Droaam, strong enough to wrestle trolls and ogres to the ground bare-handed. But while Sora Maenya is the most famous, or infamous, annis hag on Khorvaire, she is by no means the only one.

Folklore in the Eldeen Reaches, Shadow Marches, Aundair and Karrnath describe at various times "iron-toothed beasts that wore women's skin". While the tales' description is

mostly identifiable as a *disguise self* spell, the savagery of the annis hag is unmistakable. These vicious fey are thankfully rare, with only a few confirmed encounters every century. Usually, these stories are from those mercenaries hired to end the threat. More encounters take place in Thelanis, though the nature of that plane seems to allow people to escape alive more often.

Perhaps it is the reputation of Sora Maenya, but no reputable sightings of annis hags have been reported since Droaam was established. Perhaps they're all keeping a low profile, or they've retreated back into Thelanis. Travellers must remain aware: any "lost woman" on a road may indeed be one of these itching to slake its urge to kill.

That's a little dramatic, isn't it? - Ardiane

My dear, I've read those history books. Annis hags are brutal creatures. - Rhen

APE

Monster Manual; page 317

Spear in hand, Immok stood frozen on the edge of the barge, wordlessly tracking the fish's passage. "You're beautiful." His ear twitched as the skinchanger spoke. Why he was fascinated with the undisciplined elf-child was a wonder, when he had to wear the wrong face just to please her. Immok huffed.

"What is the purpose of our reconnaissance?" The warforged stuck out in the jungle, like a chunk of reeking metal in a fresh carcass. There was no concealing its artificial nature. "I have identified a number of creatures that were of interest." What would it know of the wild, the true essence of life? Immok moved all in one surge, spearing the fish through and pulling it from the water as its blood began to flow.

The skinchanger looked up from the elf-child and her affection. "The Shimmerwood Men," he replied. "There've been rumours of hairy people in these woods since forever. Since this is Zilargo, I figure they're not actually people, but apes. Gnomes love having secrets." Roughly clubbing the fish against a tree, Immok began preparing it. Another hunt in new terrain. This was the best contract he ever chose.

Many of the common folk of Khorvaire have heard of the bestial gorillas of Xen'drik, and thrilled to the tales of these big, strong primates that can smash a metal shield into crumpled waste. Or the calm, wise orangutans that hang lazily on long arms. These, along with the lesser-known Shimmerwood bonobo and exotic Riedran siamang, are all human-like creatures categorised as apes. They are usually peaceful and curious creatures, but can be ferocious when provoked.

While a complete description of each of these types is beyond this humble guide, the apes all have common characteristics. They are all stronger than the average human, capable of beating a man to death single-handedly. While they are intelligent, they remain animals, so magic and steel are both adequate defences. The wise traveler should be able to easily avoid trouble from these beasts, but it is worth noting that they are quite capable of throwing both rocks and other readily found projectiles if you are incautious enough to ignore their territorial displays, or threaten their young.

Perhaps a professor in the Library would be interested in the limits of intelligence as demonstrated in these animals. - Rhen

Don't even taste good. Very stringy. Tastes like dog but worse. Not worth hunting except as challenge. - Immok

You people eat dogs?! - Ardiane

"Readily found projectiles", my elf-sized butt. It's poop. They throw poop, and it is disgusting. Ardiane

ARCANALOTH

Monster Manual; page 313

"So," Ardiane had long given up reading, though Mr Cute still had his nose buried in a book. She'd been trying to balance his quill on her nose, hoping he'd look over. "You're from that Zil library, right?" Rhen grunted a confirmation. For some reason, that annoyed her. "Is it true they summon demons there and stuff them in books?"

"What?!" It might have been the Wayfinder library, but that outburst was enough to earn a fierce glare from other researchers. Her wicked grin must have given away her amusement, because he halfheartedly glared at her and dropped his voice. "No, they don't summon demons and stuff them in books. That's ridiculous."

Ardiane closed the book he was busy on, shuffling her chair closer. "So what do they do with the demons they summon in that library of yours?" He frowned. She met his eyes and raised one eyebrow. "Come on, there's got to be some story behind those rumours." She took his hand, making him lose his place in the book. "Tell me what's right if I'm wrong."

One of the lesser-known fiends, arcanaloths are found both in Shavarath and as one of the few "living" creatures in Dolurrh. While outwardly, these two variants resemble each other greatly, down to their desire to bargain for any information or arcana when summoned, they each are said to represent different aspects of that behaviour.

The Dolurrh Arcanaloth are likely the less dangerous. Tasked with keeping the records of the dead and the living's time to die, the most interaction they usually have with mortals is on the rare occasion someone tries to retrieve a soul directly from that plane. Those who interfere with the arcanaloths' work are likely to find their lifespans shortened drastically, even if they do return to the Material otherwise unscathed.

Those found in Shavarath are much more malevolent, and are found in that wartorn plane as "diplomats". The devil generals make the most use of them to draw up temporary alliances, worded in such a way that the other party can be easily goaded into breaking. Any mortal attempting to make a similar deal with any being on that plane runs the risk of attracting an arcanaloth, which will more than gladly bind the parties in a fatal contract.

On the rare occasion a mortal has no other choice, an arcanaloth may be summoned to bargain for the information. Whichever the plane of origin, these summonings are done only in one, strict manner, to protect the summoner from most potential consequences. It is rumoured that Loremaster Dorius Alyre ir'Korran's was driven to set up the Library of Korranberg as a result of an encounter with an arcanaloth. Some say the

fiend tempted him with the idea he could be a Sovereign. Others say the fiend possessed him for the rest of his natural span.

This is of course, all untrue. There are no illegal summonings or bindings of fiends in the Library. - Rhen



ARCHON

(Redemption) Plane Shift: Zendikar; page 22

(Triumvirate) Guildmaster's Guide to Ravnica; page 192

What Ardiane had initially taken to be a statue in the dim evening light moved. She had her rapier pointed at the warforged before it had taken a second step, her cloak swinging wide as she cleared it from her weapon's path. Rhen's hand on her shoulder sent a wave of energy through her, redoubling the adrenaline with his magic. "You're not supposed to be in here," the warforged rumbled, weapon staying at its side. "Are you here to steal something or hurt someone?"

"No...?" Ardiane answered. Though breaking into the Flamekeep Chapel had been Rhen's idea, it was only because that cardinal had refused to let him near any of the records. "You startled me. We're supposed to be in the..." she looked at Rhen, hiding his face in the brown monk's hood, "archive room?" He nodded slightly.

The warforged sighed. She didn't know they could do that. "I can tell that you are lying. But I do not want to fight or guard in this place." Funny, Ardiane did. Especially with Rhen's spell urging her to some sort of physical activity. "I will escort you to the records if you let me leave this place with you. Have we a deal?" OK, that was definitely unexpected. Weren't all Thranes madly dedicated to their church?

"Do you know where the histories are?" Rhen asked, dropping the Thranish accent he'd used all day. "Particularly those of the War." The warforged nodded, moving down the corridor with a gesture for them to follow. "I hope this pays off," he whispered to her. "Nobody's ever been able to confirm the Thranish army used celestials in the Last War. It'd be the discovery of a lifetime."

One of the lesser-known celestials, archons resemble an armoured rider and a quadrupedal, usually mammalian, mount. Despite this, the archon is one being. The resemblance to cavalry is allegedly incidental, though it is impossible to refute rumours that the inspiration for this mode of warfare was an early sighting of these creatures.

Modern interplanar travellers may encounter archons infrequently on the war-torn plane of Shavarath, where they appear to be shock troops, singlehandedly destroying formations of devils and demons alike. Their strong resemblance to conventional cavalry may be the reason for these. Only on Shavarath have the beings been confirmed, though the celestial armies also contain units of cavalry.

These beings do not respond to summons or divination spells. The only known instance of an archon being successfully summoned to the Material Plane was a terrifyingly effective crusade by the nation of Thrane during the middle of the Last War, roughly 935YK. The records of this event are kept under dwarven locks by Flamekeep, and contain only that the event happened at all. Cyran records may still exist within the Mournland.

A similar creature may exist on Daanvi, called "archons of the triumvirate". While not a union of mount and rider, they do appear to be linked to

creatures they use as mounts. Early Korranberg records show that these creatures were summoned as law enforcers by pre-Galifar cultures. The only modern nation to summon these is Zilargo, who use the archon's ability to detect legal transgression as a final appeal for accused. However, these have a much harsher view of law than most mortals, and nobody is found innocent. Archons of the Triumvirate always rule in favour of the state.

My name is Silver Army #429. I share this information to show my sistren that we can take our freedom if we seek it. - Silver Army #429

That's way too much to remember. Fortune is better. - Ardiane

ARCLIGHT PHOENIX

Guildmaster's Guide to Ravnica; page 193

The ground was black, solid stone, and the wind brought the smell of wet earth. "Storm," Immok warned, turning to the other three, who were either admiring the view or trying to determine a route through the jungles below. "Storm's on the way," He repeated, coming over to the skinchanger. "We should head down." Rhen looked up, about to say something, when the plane decided to prove the gnoll right.

The thunder was thick enough to shake the ground, rattling Immok's teeth against each other. "That's..." Rhen turned towards the horizon, where angry black clouds poured rain down in sheets, then down towards a dent in the ground. Immok huffed a growl, watching the cloud and addressing the warforged and the skinchanger's mate. "We go. You get him, and we start down."

Rhen wasn't distracted for long, though, rushing back as carefully as he could and grabbing the half-elf around the waist. "We're in a phoenix nest. We have to get down before the storm gets here." Immok's ears flattened against his head as another detonation of thunder shuddered through the air. "There's a phoenix egg over there, and it'll hatch when the lightning hits it. Phoenix eggs explode when they hatch." Immok had already started moving, digging his toes into the stone as a drizzle began to fall.

Native to the wilderness plane of Lammania, the "arclight" phoenix is a lightning-based creature similar to the more popularly known Fernian sunbirds and elder phoenix. The arclight has no relation to the Fernian variants, likely an example of convergent development. They do share the traits of exploding upon death and reforming into an egg, but with differing elements; arclights burst into lightning and sustained, but harmless, thunder.

The most notable trait of a arclight phoenix is its egg. The shell is a material unlike any other known to alchemy. A brownish gold in colour, it absorbs magic extremely well, even absorbing ambient magic to fuel the arclight's rebirth. When handled by a mage, the egg can draw magic directly from their will, making them dangerous to handle due to unexpected hatchings. The metal is also conductive, attracting and transmitting lightning strikes into the infant arclight, giving it the strength to hatch and grow.

Arclight phoenix eggs are not hard to find in Lammania, and the adults can be tamed, in a way, by standard elemental bindings. Much to the disappointment of artificers everywhere, the shell material cannot be acquired. Most attempts to crack an egg usually result in an angry, but undersized, arclight phoenix exploding into being, while the egg seems to vanish when the adult hatches naturally. A number of artificing disasters can be attributed to attempts to acquire the arclight shell, most recently in the Twelve, over Korth.

So wait, a phoenix dies in a nest and the egg is its child? - Ardiane

More like it explodes in death, becoming an egg, then explodes from the egg. As far as we know, it's the same individual phoenix before and after. - Rhen

"Centaur's have stories?" Ardiane asked, frowning at the thorn bush that caught her cloak. It seems walking in Fortune's trail wasn't enough to avoid the clingy plants around here. She always came home with burrs on her clothes when she was younger, and it seemed none of the plants had lost their fondness for her.

Rhen knelt, cutting her loose and picking the thorns free. "Everyone has stories, love. If you exist, you have a story. Centaur's have stories, angels have stories, even constructs have stories, even if they can't tell it." He kissed her cheek, and added, "You like telling that story about the hedgehog in the tree, so you have stories too."

Ardiane flushed red, looking around at the other members of the trip. She dropped her voice, stepping close enough to Rhen that they wouldn't be overheard. "I told you that story?"

Rhen smiled, taking her hand. "You were a few drinks in at the time. I thought it was cute." She scowled, pulling her hand away and stalking off to catch up with the warforged and druid leading the way. Immok came up a few moments later and sneezed. Looking after Ardiane, Rhen passed over a cloth without a word.

"When the Towering Wood was no taller than bushes, and the mountains had not been raised." Every centaur tale starts like this, trying to imply time immemorial. Fortunately though, the modern scholar can discern modern truths within, such as the origins of the fiends known as armanites. These fiends resemble the centaurs, and according to their own myths, were corrupted from the nature-worshippers by the Wild Heart, who shaped them into monsters to make prey of their former kin.

Today, however, the armanite is rare among fiends. They can be most often found in the Demon Wastes, though they actively avoid the entrances to the Labyrinth. Instead, they stampede along the plains in a cloud of acrid, black sand. Anything before them is sliced into ribbons by their claws and blade-like tails, or trampled underhoof. On occasion, they can be found in large caverns in Khyber, likely captured from the Demon Wastes above.

Like many fiends, armanites have been recorded in Shavarath as well, where they seem to take particular pleasure in attacking archons. These reports are few, though, so it's uncertain whether armanites actually

exist on that plane, or if a single author made a mistake that was repeated by later tomes. In any case, the armanites were reported as being similar to those of the Demon Wastes, and just as averse to tight spaces and walls.

As the wise reader has probably guessed, armanites can be easily avoided or forced to break off a chase by taking cover or finding a space where they cannot manoeuvre. However, this will not work if you provoke them; armanites are capable of summoning lightning that they will use to hunt down those who angered them. They will throw these bolts into narrow passageways and buildings, forcing their quarry back into the open or frying it alive.

You will never repeat that story to anyone, or I'll put a hedgehog in your bed. - Ardiane



ASSASSIN VINE

Tomb of Annihilation; page 213

She walked through the door holding a sheaf of papers in one hand and towelling off her hair with the other. "Rhen, love?" After he looked up from his fluting, Ardiane walked over to his desk, put the papers down, and pointed at the contents. "You don't have plants in here. I know there's dangerous plant monsters that belong in this book."

Rhen spun his flute in his fingers and raised his eyebrow. "Insulting a Karrnathi soldier is dangerous. That doesn't mean I'm putting the Order of the Ebon Dragon in there." He raised the instrument to his lips, though a few notes later added, "That's a monster book, dear heart. I'm not some Morgrave botanist, hunting grudge-bearing greenery with a gaggle of guarding guides."

Ardiane took the flute before he could start playing again. "I'm not talking about flowers and willows. I've seen people get eaten by that 'greenery', so you're adding them to this book." Rhen stood up from his chair, just tall enough to make her look up at him as he reached for his flute. She promptly dropped it into her shirt. "You're calling Fortune and Immok, and we're going on one more expedition. I know people who know these things."

The so-called assassin vine is a liana, or climbing vine, like many species of mundane plant found primarily in Xen'drik. It is known to use both natural supports, usually trees, and artificial, such as buildings and walls, making it annoyingly widespread and resilient. It is identifiable by its five-lobed palmate leaves, uncannily similar to a humanoid hand.

Perhaps the most notable feature of this vine is its hunting method. Capable of quick movement over a short distance, the assassin vine is known for looping its flexible branches around prey. These branches then tighten, delivering an acidic poison that burns through flesh. This poison evaporates quickly, so is only effective when in direct contact with the vine.

Those who are killed by this poison are dragged to the plant's base, where they are left to rot as fertilizer. This benefits other smaller plants; assassin vines underground can often be found with fungi surrounding them. Above ground, other vines may sprout in a sufficiently large mulch pile. The assassin vine may exhibit control over these and its own immature saplings, tangling up other victims.

A rare Khorvairan subspecies, the "King's Assassin" is a flowering variant from the King's Forest in Breland. The flowers are quite beautiful, pink and rather large. However, the plant only blooms after the flower buds are touched. Releasing a thick cloud of pollen, the King's Assassin then attempts to strangle the prey in the manner of its foreign relative. The plant is surprisingly docile when not in bloom, though.

Is there a Lamannian influence on these plants to make them this active compared to normal plants? Research is needed. - Rhen

VARIANT ASSASSIN VINE

To run the king's assassin subspecies, add the following reaction to the *Tomb of Annihilation* statblock, increasing the CR to 4:

- **Pollen Burst (Recharge after a Short or Long Rest)**. When the vine is hit with an attack, each creature that needs to breathe within 20 feet of it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become unable to breathe, while sneezing uncontrollably. A creature affected in this way is incapacitated and suffocating. As long as it is conscious, a creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on it on a success. Creatures immune to poison are unaffected by the vine's pollen burst, and any effect that removes poison also removes this condition.

ASTRAL DREADNOUGHT

Monster Manual; page 313

"Bags of devouring are usually seen as failures of the magic used in a bag of holding," Rhen noted, letting the book drop open in his palm to the page he needed. He paused for the trick to be acknowledged, but everyone else in the carriage just looked at him. Resisting the urge to sigh, Rhen continued, "But this scholar attempted to prove that they weren't. That they were instead mouths of a giant extraplanar creature reaching through. He cited the fact that the bags seem to have tastes in what they devour as proof. In fact-"

Ardiane leaned over and covered his mouth. "I normally love it when you take your time, but get to the point, please." After taking her hand away, she kissed him. "It's not like we're at your library club." Immok and Fortunine grunted their agreement. For the second time in as many minutes, Rhen stopped himself from sighing.

Holding out his book, he pointed to a particular illustration. "Anyway, he eventually got a grant to go find what he believed was the place where all the junk swallowed by those bags ended up; a vortex in Kythri. The survivors of that expedition described 'a stalkless beholder with lobster claws and an endless tail'." He shut the book. "This is probably the titan of Kythri, a monster of infinite size and infinite hunger. The notes the scholar sent back implied that this creature was what created bags of devouring."

Mentioned only rarely in myth and only tentatively in modern texts, the astral dreadnought is a creature most known for its fantastic size; its muscular torso trails off into a comparatively thin tail, which seems to go on infinitely, or until hidden from sight. Its body is armoured and festooned with spikes. Its only limbs are two enormous claws as large as airships, and its mouth is allegedly capable of swallowing Skyway whole. Similarly to beholders, the creature's gaze seems to nullify magic. Unlike the aberrations, the eye is comparatively small; described as the size of a small wagon.

So far, this creature has been noted to exist in Kythri, but myths also place it in the "silver sea in which the worlds spin", which seems to be an imprecise description of the astral plane. This is where the name of the creature comes from. As a creature that appears to be the apex predator of the astral plane, dreadnought seems only fitting. Though, its appearance in Kythri raises questions; if the dreadnought is native to the astral, does that mean it is somehow projecting itself into Kythri, and does that imply that bags of holding are 'juvenile' dreadnoughts? Or is the creature's source in Kythri, and its lengthy tail a version of the "silver cord" phenomenon?

In any case, it is prudent to mention one last trait of the astral dreadnought; it does not appear to have a stomach. Creatures eaten by one allegedly end up in a separate demiplane; both inside and not inside the dreadnought. This is not dissimilar to the magnificent mansions summoned by some Ghallanda heirs, as the existence of the plane is reliant on the

dreadnought, even though it appears to be entirely disconnected from it but for the entrance. Whether this demiplane can be destroyed or dispelled is unknown, so a dreadnought's "stomach demiplane" may be a security beyond any Kundarak could provide; if you find being eaten by a mysterious extraplanar monster necessary.

I need a drink. A really long kind of drink that leaves me stiff in the morning. When are we getting off this wagon? - Ardiane

ATROPAL

Dry heaves erupted from the far side of the carriage. Fortunine looked over at the half-elf with concern, before she managed to stop coughing. "What the Dolurh is that?" Ardiane held up a picture depicting a large-headed being with shrivelled limbs curled around a puny, wizened body. A cord trailed from its middle, and its face was poorly defined, but twisted into a scream.

"Is child." Immok grumbled, a sharp whine escaping his lips as he bumped his head against the top of the carriage. "Child of human woman before it is born." Ardiane looked at him, her expression frozen between curiosity and disgust. A metal hand covered her mouth, and she glared at Fortunine. The gnoll crouched further. "You are all mad to think this is comfortable."

Rhen hadn't even looked up from his notes. "Couldn't pay the 'extra fee' these Orien gougers wanted for a horse." Pointing at the book in Ardiane's hands, he explained, "That's a titan of Mabbar. The text I discovered it in called it 'an aborted god', 'child of the hungry void' and 'atropal'. That's the only thing I can find. A name, and a story."

"Born" only occasionally, the atropal is a being of power enough to rival dragons. Thankfully, they are rare, limited to a distant corner of lightless Mabbar. Despite their appearance, they will not develop any further, and spend eternity anchored to the plane by an umbilical cord. Being undead, it is not known what sustenance, if any, they derive from this. They are usually satisfied to hover in one place, mewling and burbling as if in mockery of living children.

Light is the only thing that disturbs them. If even the slightest bit of light is brought close to them, they wail as if in pain and attack to extinguish the source. The only record of their existence comes from an expedition into the wilds of Xen'drik; though much of the facts are garbled and unverifiable, the sole survivor was vividly descriptive of the creature.

Subsequent investigation only managed to confirm the existence of the creatures, little else. Scholars theorise the atropals may be connected to the "proto-giants", or empyreans, of legend. If this is the case, the cause of their degeneration or transformation must have been a working of magic unfathomable to modern mages. Perhaps fortunately, no other expedition has ever encountered the temple the survivor claimed to have discovered.

*That's it. I am never having children.
Ever. - Ardiane.*

AUROCHS

Stormreach. The gateway to Xen'drik and the least civilised civilisation the party had ever seen. They'd seen two thefts, four brawls, and Immok had almost taken a child pickpocket's hand off at the wrist. And they hadn't even left the docks yet. Fortunine stopped in the street, causing Ardiane to bounce off her broad back. "What the Dolurh?!"

The crowd shuffled to the side, and the party along with them as the beasts were herded to the docks. "Cows," Fortunine explained, pointing. The cattle were taller than a man at the shoulder, with curved, forward-pointing horns longer than a dagger resting on their heads. Six of them, forced into single file by the confinement of the broad street, rumbled past the warehouses.

Rhen, dwarfed by the bovines, shook his head. "Not cows. Aurochs." He grew an inch or two, resting a hand on Fortunine's shoulder. "Off to market in Breland and destined for Skyway tables, if I'm not wrong." Ardiane looked up at him then huffed out a breath, swatting an insect off her arm.

The first creature many explorers see in Xen'drik are the huge cattle called aurochs. Domesticated first by giants, these placid creatures remain a fixture of civilised regions on the wild continent. House Vadalis maintains a small herd of these creatures in their enclave in Blackbriar, near Stormreach. This is one of the sources of the famous Vadalis beef, which is served in every high-class restaurant from Sharn to Stormhome.

However, like most of the animals House Vadalis breeds, aurochs are not as harmless as they seem. Many an amateur farmer has discovered that though they are calm, they are not tame. An aurochs is perfectly capable of tossing a full-grown man into the air with its horns. Those who somehow disturb a whole herd may be trampled beyond recognition. Vadalis maintains the monopoly on aurochs meat mostly by accidents.

[illegible]

Better than troll grist. -
Immok

What's troll grist? - Ardiane

Trust me, you're happier not
knowing - Rhen



ANIMATED PLANTS

The silence stretched out, hanging in the air with the summer humidity. A sunbeam shone through the window, a rare luxury in this district of Sharn. Lazily drifting through the air, an insect landed on a leaf, only to be brushed off by a wave of the changeling's hand. He sat in a wooden chair, chin on hands resting on the backrest. The plant, an unremarkable shrub, sat in a clay pot, obstinately still.

The door opened, and let in the noise from the shop beyond. Children laughed as Fortunine softly rebuked their overeagerness. The clack of wooden swords put to their use almost drowned out the frustrated cry of a neglected woman. "Hey!" Ardiane shut the door, grabbed Rhen's collar, and spun him and the chair around to face her. She kissed him, ferociously and tenderly.

Rben pulled away a little, trying to keep his eyes on the plant. With a warning, she pushed him back on the chair and wedged herself onto his lap. "You have been watching that damn thing for three days," she complained, shoving a recently-worn ball of fabric into his hands and holding his face between her palms. "Now it's time you look at me again." His eyes flickered between the two options, before he made his decision.

A practice common in the Eldeen Reaches and Aerenal is using a version of the awaken spell to create mobile, sentient, even communicative plants. This is not the same thing as livewood, which comes from entirely normal, stationary, trees. The awakened plants are as alive as any animal, and just as active. Many villages in the Reaches have one or two of these awakened plants, which are used similarly to constructs in the cities. Many of the smaller ones seem to be little more than playmates for the children, but awakened trees of various sizes are treated like citizens.

The closer you go to the Towering Woods, the more prevalent they are. The House Vadalis settlements to the south and east of the Reaches have few or none. The druidic settlements within the woods themselves seem almost as full of these plants as people. A reliable source claims that the Eldeen Reaches are in fact ruled by a particularly old awakened tree, who lives in the centre of the forest. The Wardens of the Wood, and indeed any other druid, were reluctant to discuss the matter.

However, they were quite pleased to discuss the manner in which an awakened plant is created. The process is evidently an induced form of the same process treants undergo. While not as complete as the latter, awakening a plant can be done fairly simply by planting it in specially prepared soil, with the proper magic used each week on both the plant and soil. Your humble author was gifted with a seedling he was assured would become a "delightful flowering bush" in a prepared pot. The plant itself has shown no

extraordinary traits in the two weeks since.

Note: One month on, the shrub seems active enough to turn towards sunlight and shake its branches for water. Please disregard my above skepticism.

AXEBEAK

"I thought I was used to being the shortest person in the group," Ardiane murmured to Rhen. Their eneko guide, Perutxo Carpenter, dwarfed them all, even Immok standing tall. Appropriately, the horses they were riding on were large enough for both of them to sit in the same saddle. "Even the humans are taller here."

Rhen tightened his hands around her waist, in a comforting hug. "The changelings aren't." A dust cloud drew his attention before she could ask him to clarify. "Peruxto!" He called forward, standing up in the oversized stirrups. "We stop here. I need to take notes!" He sat down, rummaging in the saddlebags. Ardiane smiled, watching the spark dance in his eyes. "They resemble Talenta Plains carvers," Rhen mused, as he dipped his quill.

The axebeak is a bird, common on the plains of Syrkarn, which has an eagle's beak and head on the body of a predatory dinosaur. It has no wings; the stubby front limbs are instead covered in feathers similar to the rest of the body, making them practically invisible. Its toes are large and nails blunt, unlike the carver's sharp curved claw.

Instead, it hunts with its overlarge beak. Pecks from an axebeak are capable of breaking orcish bone. Combined with their incredible running speed, there are few creatures smaller than them that don't end up as prey. Axebeaks are largely solitary, though juveniles hunt together with their clutchmates. Adult males have dark feathers, while females and juveniles are brown.

Axebeak eggs are a delicacy among the Syrk tribes, though they're difficult to acquire. These creatures incubate their eggs like dinosaurs, digging out a special nest in the sands. The father incubates the eggs through the night, while the mother shades them with her wings during the daylight hours. The eggs are hardly left unattended, with one or both parents nearby at all times.

*Their name is well deserved.
Their beak weighs more than
the rest of the skull. - Rhen*

AZER

Fortunine trudged up the slope, the basket on her back a constant, unbalancing weight. She'd never understood when other people had complained about tiredness. Her artificial body could run from one side of Flamekeep to the other, and be just as battle-ready as when she started. She had, actually, done that. But here, under the bright mountain sun on the edge of Khorvaire's biggest volcano, after a six-hour hike over the smooth stone or crunching gravel, she had just the slightest idea of what exhaustion actually felt like.

"It's hot!" The warforged's gaze went to Ardiane, who had stripped off her usual leather and stood in little more than pants, shoes and a wrap around her bust. Jealousy was something Fortunine did have experience with, and the half-elf's figure described femininity in a way her metal frame never would. "We're on top of a mountain in Vult. Why is it so Six-damned hot?"

The commander of their band, the changeling, turned and took her hand. "The manifest zone, love." He spoke in a gentle voice, very unlike any other commander Fortunine had served under. "The Fist of Onatar is the only place on the continent they find comfortable. If we have to sweat a little to meet them, it's better than them risking freezing to go to the clanhold."

Considered the children of Onatar, the dwarf-like azer are the most accomplished crafters anywhere in Eberron and her planes. Despite what House Cannith may claim, azer-made alloys are a feature in many of House Kundarak's most effective locks and safes. A story goes that Cannith and Dhakaani smiths themselves learned to work the rare metals; adamantine, mithral, and byeshk; from the azers.

Despite their resemblance, the azer are not related in any way to the dwarves. In fact, business with them is more often conducted by Cannith East. In their true appearance, azer are elemental fire. Their bodies are metal, shaped by others of their kind. A "parent" azer creates a body, then ignites the interior fire, their "soul", from their own.

The largest known azer settlement on Khorvaire is in the Fist of Onatar, the volcano in the Mror Holds. They may be found in other manifest zones, or similarly heated areas. They refuse to discuss their race's history on Fernia itself, only obliquely referring to a great enemy that they had to flee.

I can confirm their talents with the rare metals. They have little concept of play, though. They're more like constructs than I am.
Fortunine



CO~AUTHORS

ARDIANE



Among the younger Wayfinders, Ardiane joined the organisation shortly after her mercenary group, the Nightshroud Foxes, dissolved in the last days of the war. A scouting company, they recruited people from the Eldeen Reaches and western edges of Aundair. Mainly employed by that country, it was the ongoing dispute between the Reaches and Aundair that led to the crown quietly defunding the Foxes. Losing most of her friends and one lover when the Foxes disbanded, Ardiane was left rather lost.

Born in the town of Windshire near the Duskwood, Ardiane was raised in her maternal aunt and uncle's inn. With the warmth and space in the inn, it was one of the village children's favourite playgrounds in winter, and so Ardiane grew up happy and surrounded by friends and playmates. This made the War, when it finally reached her, more tragic; her friends were leaving as they got recruited, just like her parents had. To seek her own fortune, rather than being ordered around by some old bloke in a fancy suit half the year, she left.

Her time in the Nightshroud Foxes taught her how to move silently, strike fast, and never get caught in a fair fight. Not coincidentally, these were the exact skills that led to the next stage of her life. While the life of a mercenary was miles apart from her time at the inn, the combination of

all her skills drew her to Fairhaven; as a barmaid. A quick hand with a dagger is a vital skill in such a trade when drunken louts were around.

Thankfully, she wouldn't be stuck there for long. Six months of this led to her skills being noticed by Myrnia, a veteran Wayfinder, when Ardiane stabbed the wandering hand of one of the dwarf's companions. After a few conversations, Ardiane found herself working as a mercenary again; to the greatest adventuring guild on the continent. While she still frequented the bar she had worked in, it was as a customer. Then a certain Brelish man with a bag of books over his shoulder and a glitter in his eyes shows up one night, and the rest is, rather interesting, history.

FORTUNINE



One of a batch of eight warforged commissioned to guard the Great Library of Flamekeep, Fortunine is the sixth. They were designed primarily as an efficient, mobile guard for the books, artifacts and librarians, and so was built in the Envoy style, with quills, inks and other calligraphical tools built into their arms and hands. Secondly, they were built to be aesthetically pleasing, and so had silver integrated into their armour to reflect their status as possessions of the state and church. The Last War had little effect in their lives, as did the Treaty of Thronehold emancipating them. Their duty was to the Church and their tasks.

However, the news that warforged were now technically free resonated with Fortunine. Unlike her batch-mates, Fortunine harboured thoughts of the world beyond the walls of the library. It started when she was tasked with watching a librarian's child for a day. Most people who came through the library either treated her as furniture or a weapon. This little child was the first to treat Fortunine as a person, badgering her with questions throughout the day. Fortunine would soon start repeating those questions to herself.

When a warforged began asking questions about children, gender, clothes and even the faith, it disturbed a number of people. Fortunine soon became the least popular warforged in the library, given more and more menial and out-of-the-way tasks, keeping her away from visitors and staff. Soon she was little more than a glorified statue in a long-abandoned archive corridor, allowed to do little more than hold the keys and prevent entry. Until one night, when two half-elves broke in,

looking for information the church wanted forgotten,

Now, Fortunine is free. She remains with the two "burglars" out of thanks, their travels taking her to places she'd never hoped to see. Her journey has left her physically changed; having had her face and body rebuilt to reflect her self-image. Children remain her chief fascination and joy, and when not travelling with her friends, she takes lessons in toymaking. One day she hopes to open her own toy store, where she can be surrounded by happy children all day.

IMMOK



The Znir Pact buried their gods a long time ago. Centuries, in fact. The shattered ruins of their idols lie across their territory, now just cautionary tales for young pups. Now they hold themselves to a higher ideal; survival. The gnolls of Droaam understand that family, the clan, is the thing that truly matters. Such is Immok's duty; firstly to his clan, then to the clan.

Born to the matriarch of his clan, Immok was destined to a life of relative privilege, though he was still the least of his siblings, the lone son in a litter of daughters. Still, his mother's position shielded him from the worst abuse, and he grew strong and tall as the frequent target of his sisters' play fighting. He took after his mother, a fierce and powerful devotee of She-is-Fiercer, the archetypal clan mother.

Still, there was little opportunity for his skills to be recognised. Though the matriarch's son, Immok was still just a man. His sisters were strongly protective, and it soon became clear that he had to leave. Most of his male cousins swiftly found another clan, content to have a powerful wife to call their own. For Immok, a different path called.

The Znir gnolls are often mercenaries for the warlords of Droaam, and when the Daughters of Sora Kell laid claim to the land, it was a simple matter for the gnolls to offer their services to these new, stronger overlords. Now, the world over the Greywall Mountains had taken notice.

Humans, weak and fragile compared to him, but strong in magic and the miracles of what they called civilisation, came to their land. They saw a monster in Immok. But for some, the orcs and their manlier kin, the jhorgun'taal, that was an asset. They spun tales of working for the warlords of humans, for the coin of those lands.

For Immok, the coin had little meaning. After all, he had his armour, he had his axe and his strength. What more was needed? He saw a bigger picture. As his kin had fought for all the warlords of Droaam, staying on the winning side no matter who declared themselves a victor, the Znir Pact could follow the humans' battles. If the Daughters were brought low by the humans, the clans and the Pact should survive.

Dedicating himself to the ideal of gnoll survival, Immok joined the mercenary bands. The human wars were of metal monsters, risen corpses, and magic beyond any his clan possessed. But it didn't matter; Immok knew his kin were on all sides. They would survive no matter who won.

Then it ended. He never knew what happened. All he was told was that an entire territory had vanished. Such a thing scared the humans' warlords into making peace, and with peace came a desire to forget that they'd fought. Immok and his kin were no longer welcome among the soldiers. So he returned to the Greywalls, offering his services to the humans who came to his land.

Whatever happens, the clans will survive. Whoever wins, the clans will survive.

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